

# The Style Invitational

Week CXXXVIII: Excuses, Excuses



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**This week's back-to-school contest** was suggested by Kelli Midgley-Biggs of Columbia. Kelli, a creative-writing teacher, challenges you to come up with creative new excuses for not turning in homework. We're expanding it to three other categories, too: not filing your taxes on time, missing church or forgetting your spouse's birthday. First-prize winner gets Tea Boy, a mechanical penguin that automatically dunks your tea bag into your tea for as long as you preset him to. This fine item was donated to the Style Invitational by Judith Greig of Arlington.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com). U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, Sept. 23. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and

telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Thos. Witte of Gaithersburg.

**Report from Week CXXXIV**, in which we asked you to fill in the blanks: (Some News Event) is (some quality) but (some other quality) like (some funny analogy).

But first, an astonishing bit of news. This week marks the entry of not one but two people into the Style Invitational Hall of Fame. Locked for years in a ferocious, seesaw battle for ink, Invitational Goliaths Tom Witte of Gaithersburg and Russell Beland of Springfield wound up—like so much of America brought together in the past year by events beyond our control—metaphorically holding hands as they crossed the finish line together. Both receive their 500th career published entries today, joining Jennifer Hart of Arlington and Chuck Smith of Woodbridge in the world's most exclusive club. Statisticians have calculated that the actual odds of a simultaneous two-person Hall of Fame entry, using a standard deviation of 0.5, is precisely the same as that of a chicken, pecking at a piano, playing "Für Elise" all the way through on its first attempt.

◆ **Third Runner-Up: President Bush's focusing on Iraq to distract attention from domestic corporate scandals is understandable but foolhardy, like distracting attention from your open fly by setting your hair on fire.** (Christopher J. Pote, Naples, Italy)

◆ **Second Runner-Up: The revelation that Yasser Arafat's personal fortune may have been accumulated from money designated for aid is disappointing but unsurprising, like the "Sorry, Try Again" printed on the underside of a soda bottle cap.** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

◆ **First Runner-Up: Martha Stewart's congressional testimony will be distasteful but also tasteful, like an al Qaeda hideout filled with wall sconces and lavender sachets.** (Sarah Elan, Baltimore)

◆ **And the winner of "The Menace of Darwinism": Listening to President Bush describe his philosophy of governance is entertaining but unnerving, like watching the Three Stooges juggle vials of smallpox virus.** (Elden Camahan, Laurel)

◆ **Honorable Mentions: The idea that there is an epidemic of child kidnappings is frightening but entirely created by the media, like the music career of John Tesh.** (Mark Young, Washington)

◆ **An underfunded prescription drug plan would be well designed but nearly useless, like a two-cylinder Corvette.** (Kenneth Stuart Gallant, Little Rock)

◆ **The administration's tough talk on Iraq is getting tons of media attention without really having done anything yet, like Anna Kournikova.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **President Bush's speech promoting corporate integrity seemed heartening at first but was suspect, like an ecology sticker on an SUV.** (Mike Russell, Norfolk)

◆ **A coverup may help a politician look good, but there's always danger of a leak, just like with breast implants.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **Jim Traficant's claim that he was framed in an FBI conspiracy is preposterous yet strangely credible, like the notion of J. Edgar Hoover in lingerie.** (Fred S. Souk, Reston)

◆ **Joe Lieberman's presidential aspirations seem ardent but lacking momentum, like rollerblading on gravel.** (Mitch Mularz, Aberdeen, Wash.)

◆ **Statehood for D.C. remains a vaguely possible but unlikely dream, like major league baseball for D.C., only not as important.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **Hearing about Charlton Heston's condition is sad but repetitive, like listening to an old nut raving against gun control ad nauseum.** (Gary Patishnock, Laurel)

◆ **Ending sentences with prepositions is increasingly accepted but still troublesome, like fashion models controlling their weight by throwing up.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **Going after Saddam is perfectly understandable, but it leaves you no graceful exit, like realizing you've entered the wrong restroom only after the stall door closes behind you.** (Kelly Morgan, Boise, Idaho)

◆ **Weight loss on a fad diet seems successful at first, but the final result is often disappointing, like flirting with a transvestite.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **Decaf coffee is better than nothing but just not quite right, like safe sex.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **John Ashcroft's rabid patriotism is well intentioned but scary and destructive, like a hug from Lennie in "Of Mice and Men."** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

◆ **Having an entry printed in the Style Invitational is exciting but embarrassing, like getting locked out of the house in your underwear.** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

◆ **And Last: This contest is easy to mock but difficult to do, like Anna Nicole Smith these days.** (Mark Young, Washington)

Next Week: Depends on What Your Definition of Ism Is

## BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

Both sides vulnerable

- |                  |              |             |            |           |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>NORTH</b>     | ♠ K Q 7 3    | ♥ J 10 7 4  | ♦ 8        | ♣ J 8 4 3 |
| <b>WEST</b>      | ♠ 10 8 5 4 2 | ♥ 6 5       | ♦ J 10 7 2 | ♣ A K     |
| <b>EAST</b>      | ♠ A J 6      | ♥ 8 3       | ♦ 9 6 5 4  | ♣ Q 9 6 2 |
| <b>SOUTH (D)</b> | ♠ 9          | ♥ A K Q 9 2 | ♦ A K Q 3  | ♣ 10 7 5  |

The bidding:  
 South West North East  
 1♥ Pass 2♥ Pass  
 4♥ All Pass

Opening lead — ♣ A

**W**hen I was a professional player, I sometimes met opponents—they were inexperienced and didn't know better—who signaled loud and soft as well as high and low. An encouraging high card would hit the table with a thump that would all but buckle the legs. A discouraging low card would flutter down and land as gently as a dandelion seed.

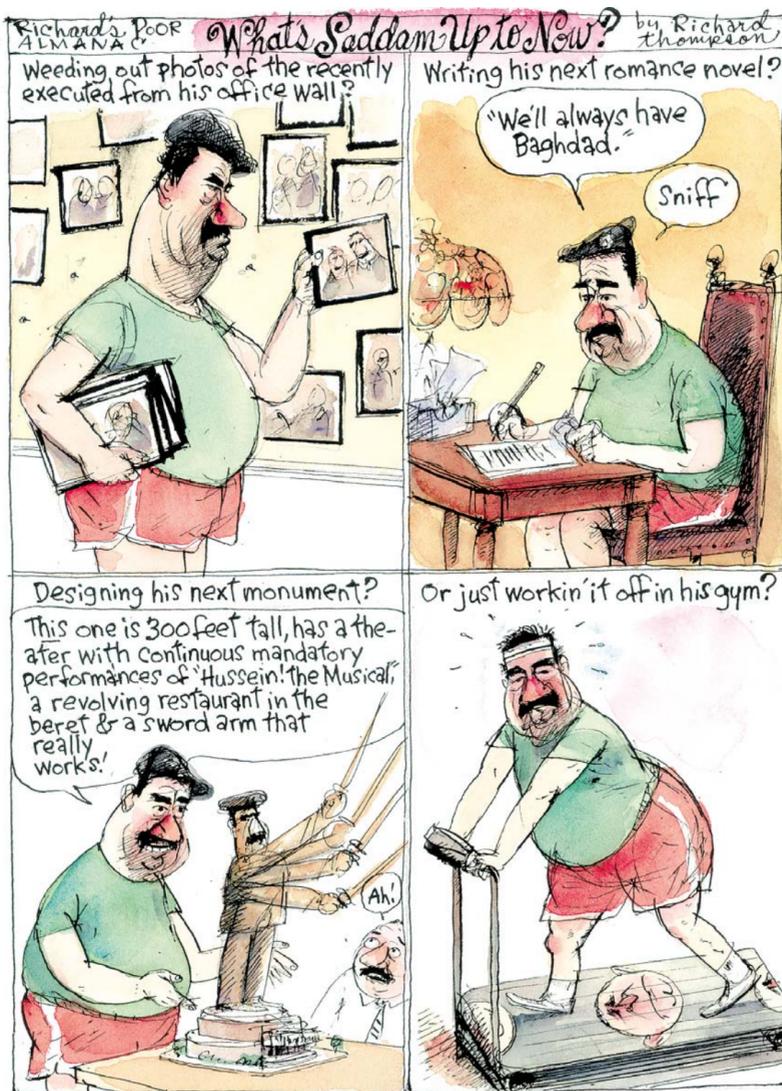
It's proper to signal with the card you play but not by the way you play it, and in tournaments, players must adhere to a high standard of ethics. Still, some signals are louder than others.

West leads the ace of clubs against South's game, and as East you discourage with the deuce. If West has led a club from A-x, you'd prefer a switch. But West continues with the king of clubs, and since he'd have led

the king from A-K-x, you know he had the doubleton A-K. You'll beat the contract if you can get partner to lead a spade next. Take no chances and signal loudly with the QUEEN of clubs. This "suit-preference" play—a strikingly high club to suggest strength in the highest-ranking suit—will prevent your partner from going wrong. You can take the ace of spades and give him a club ruff for down one.

At the table, East hated to spend his queen of clubs since he thought he might cost himself a second under-trick. He followed softly with the nine, and that play proved expensive. West misguessed by shifting to a diamond, and South won, drew trumps, threw dummy's last two clubs on high diamonds, and lost in all two clubs and a spade.

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## TELL ME ABOUT IT



BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

TELL ME, From F1

**excitement around the sister's wedding while feeling like the afterthought.**

**When I try to talk to my fiancé about this, I feel I'm putting him in an awkward situation with his family. Is there any way to let them know I'm very angry, without ruining a relationship with my future in-laws?**

—Bride No. 2

How old are you?  
 Rhetorical question.

So the sister upstaged you. (Or, she also found a place with a great date available, which happened to come before yours.)

So your fiancé's family will miss your wedding. (Or, hers. Or they will make a representative showing at both.)

So her wedding is bigger news to his family. (Or, as the bride's family, they're more involved and therefore talk about it more.)

So you opened your lunchbox and found that your cookies were gone. We've all been

there. Whether they were stolen or your mom just forgot to buy more, you get the same two choices: shrug or cry. Your choice so far doesn't become you.

If you decide this is bigger than the cookies, then stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something. Either talk to the sister yourself, or drop it. Either forfeit the deposit and reschedule for full attendance, or drop it.

And regardless of what you decide, find a way to accept that you got out-princessed. Priorities are always your friend. It's the marriage that matters, not how bad you can make your groom feel because the wedding's not going your way.

**Dear Carolyn:**

**I have a modern-day dilemma. I met my fiancé on an Internet match service. At the time, I was mortified by the thought of admitting my online adventures, so I made up a story about how we met.**

**Then I screwed up by telling some of my nearest and dearest the truth. Less connected**

**friends and family are still in the dark.**

**Our wedding is in October, and the potential for the public outing on MY special day is terrifying me. What should I do?**

—A Flummoxed Fibber

No, you screwed up by telling a whopper.

And it's not YOUR special day, it's a day.

And it's not a modern-day dilemma, it's a gas.

Assuming, of course, you choose to see it that way—which I strongly suggest you do. Tell remaining nearest and dearests. Let people talk. Make liberal use of the word "busted." Declare you got the "meeting" story off the Internet, too.

People can't laugh at you—your real fear—if they laugh with you, because you've already laughed at yourself.

*Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071 or [tellme@washpost.com](mailto:tellme@washpost.com), and join Carolyn's live discussion at noon Fridays at [www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline](http://www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline)*