

The Style Invitational

Week 500: Ergo-Nomics



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

1. A hack writer uses cliches.
 2. A cliché is an expression you hear all the time, such as "dead as a doornail."
 3. Shakespeare's works contain many expressions people use all the time, such as "dead as a doornail."
- Ergo:
4. Shakespeare was a hack writer.

This week's contest was suggested by the Czarevich, who is studying symbolic logic and syllogisms. A syllogism is a series of statements ending with a conclusion that logically follows from them. Your challenge is to create a syllogism—a syllogism that doesn't quite work, like the example above. (Real syllogisms have only three elements. Yours can have as many as you wish.) First-prize winner gets an invitation to attend the screening of the new Warner Bros. movie "The In-Laws." The invitation is etched on a large slab of milk chocolate. Yes, this is another lavish movie promotional item sent to us in the hope of garnering good pub. We haven't seen the film yet, so we can't trash it, except by quoting the card that appears with the chocolate: "Steve's a rogue agent, a volatile man. / When Jerry first saw him, he ought to have ran / Now he's run out of luck / His new in-law's a schmuck / Better duck when the cake hits the fan." So, ahem, you judge.

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. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted. Deadline is Monday, April 14. 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 Peter Jenkins of Bethesda.*

Report from Week 496, in which we asked you to top the entries in past contests that were celebrated in our 10th Anniversary issue.

◆ **Fifth Runner-Up**—*Bad first drafts of famous lines: Call me Ishmael the sailor man, toot toot.* (Brad Suter, Charlottesville)

◆ **Fourth Runner-Up**—*Bad first drafts of famous lines: Iran, Iraq and North Korea are wheels in the tricycle of evil.* (Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ **Third Runner-Up**—*What Neil Armstrong should have said: "Wow. This is, like, so totally NOT a movie set in the Nevada desert."* (Evan Golub, College Park)

◆ **Second Runner-Up**—*Put a portion of a word in "air quotes," and redefine: Ses "quip" edalian: "Good evening, ladies and microorganisms."* (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

◆ **Honorable Mentions:** *Bad first drafts of famous lines: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that if anything needs sugar on it, it's grapefruit.* (Brad Suter, Charlottesville)

Five score minus thirteen years ago . . . I Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

Men never make passes at girls who have been blinded by knitting needles. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes and that little pink thingle in the inside corner. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

Bad Valentine's Day sentiments: The rejection of my advances by your sister, your cousin and your roommate has made my affection for you grow stronger, as I come to a more realistic assessment of my romantic options. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

Change a famous quote by one letter: Marquis de Sade: "No pain, no grin." (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Put a portion of a word in quotes and redefine: "Pub"erty: When you can legally drink in Ireland. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Mo"narc'h: The drug czar. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Ho"mopho"ne: Word that sounds like an obscene phrase. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

"Bar"d: Someone who gets more eloquent as he drinks. (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Super"intend"ent: Building manager who never gets around to fixing anything. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

F"ran"ce: Self-explanatory. (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Bad ideas for Christmas toys: Frothy, the Raccoon Who Will Come Right Up to You. (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

Lil' Vet Fix-a-Pet Surgical Kit (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Sign of a problem, then a sign of further deterioration: Problem: France won't support you. Worse problem: Cameroon won't support you. (Joe Cackler, Falls Church)

Names for football teams in real cities: The Schenectady (N.Y.) Dots (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

The Derry (N.H.) Air Blasts (William Verkuilen, Minnetonka, Minn.)

Bad campaign slogans: Vote for me and feel intellectually superior to the most powerful man on Earth. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Small, nonsequential bills only. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

◆ **First Runner-Up**—*An elegy for someone who died in the past year: Sydney Omarr, born a Leo, 'Cause of him I lost my Keogh, Wed an Aries (Omarr forced me), Six months later, she divorced me. Dot-com start up, Fen-Phen diet? Taurus rising! Buy it! Try it! Lost no weight but both my cars, Thanks to my unlucky stars. On the streets now, been evicted, All from things that Syd predicted.* (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

◆ **And the winner of the dented tin cup imprinted with Bob Staake's cartoon: Cinquains, which are five-line poems of two, four, six, eight, and two beats: Saddam, You vex a world By terror made edgy; Please accept this regime-changing Wedgie. (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)**

◆ **My juvenile records are sealed.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Ruin a famous line by adding to it: Et tu, Brute? Thou whacketh me? (Arun Rajagopalan, Gaithersburg)

I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes You Betcha. (Greg Lynch, Arlington)

Phrases from a foreign-language English phrase book that would be of no help to persons visiting America: Where is the closest flammable landmark? (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Slogans for the backs of quarters: Delaware: We Put the Del in Delmarva. (Bird Waring, New York)

Things you will never hear an 8-year-old say: "I really ought to write Grandma a long thank-you note for that Series EE savings bond she sent me." (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

Revised, upbeat endings to classic films: It turns out Old Yeller isn't rabid after all, he just got into the Barbados. (Bird Waring, New York)

Bad product ideas: Hospital specimen dribble cups. (Bird Waring, New York)

New, improved duct tape that "breathes." (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Old and new concerns for baby boomers: Old: Hoping for success in the bedroom. New: Hoping for success in the bathroom. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

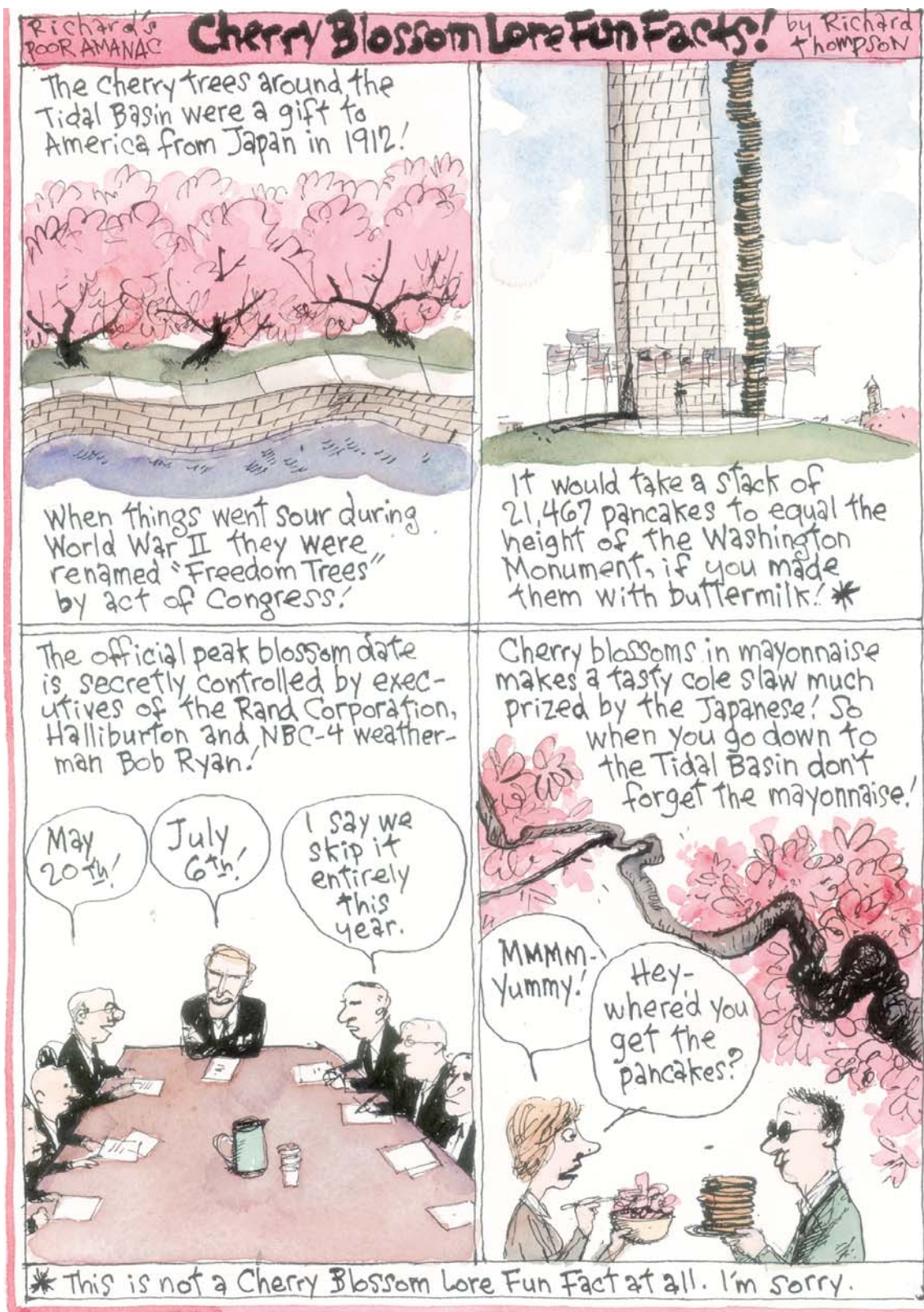
Annoying nerdspeak: It makes no sense to ask someone: "May I ask you a question?" You could say, "May I ask you two questions?" so that after first gaining permission, you have one question left, but if the respondent answers the first one with "No," then you are stuck. What I always say is, "Barring objections, I intend to ask you a question. Lack of protestation in the next five seconds implies consent for me to proceed." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Children's books you will never see: How to Help Strangers Find Lost Puppies. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

Lines you don't want to hear after getting married: "I'm so glad you'll finally get to meet my twin sister! She's exactly like me, except she has bigger breasts and owns the Green Bay Packers." (Joe Morse, Charlottesville)

"Just don't ever go into the padlocked room at the end of the hall." (Colette Zanin, Greenbelt)

Next Week: **Sdrawkcab Ksa**



TELL ME ABOUT IT

TELL ME, *From F1*

tional dependence." (Loud choking sobs.) (Nose-blowing.) (Shaky exhale.) Thank you.

Every rejection has wiggle room (except "I don't love you anymore," which pretty much quashes debate). Your ex, for example, offered a specific complaint—thereby leaving the door open for you to rebut the complaint, and replay every moment of the last five years in your head, and nurture little sprouts of hope, and argue to her in anguished midnight phone calls that you really can change even though you're technically not any more of an emotional burden than any other boyfriend would be because boyfriends are (muffled wail) supposed to be an emotional burden.

But here's the unspoken "something else at work" beyond a rejection like hers: You may want to fix the problem, but *she doesn't*. For whatever reason, she decided there was too much bad to make the "awesome" worth saving, no matter how awesome it was.

My guess is, this decision wasn't sudden so much as your introduction to it was. But that's moot speculation. Regardless of how quickly she came to it, it is simply her opinion, and an opinion is not "rectifiable" unless she wants it to be—not by logic, not by history, not by proximity, and not by attempted coercion, which never works, even

when it works. Let fate have this one, and let go.

Dear Carolyn: Does absence really make the heart grow fonder? My boyfriend and I have been dating a year and a half—almost a year of it apart. We finally made what I think is a mature decision to break up until we can be together permanently in three months. We had a really difficult time communicating over the phone and often took the slightest sigh the wrong way. If we can't communicate on the phone, will it really be any different when we're in the same city?

—Richmond

Absence does make the heart grow fonder, except when it doesn't—see above—which suggests absence itself isn't germane.

Contentment, however, consistently warms the heart—just as excess maintenance cools it. Forcing a relationship to last (i.e., being so afraid it won't last that each sigh has a seismic effect) is hard work and therefore, ironically, a great way to kill a relationship. Near or far, your best chance to stay together is to make peace with the odds that you won't.

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



MY HEART IS VOTING FOR ABSENCE.

BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST