

# The Style Invitational

Week 538: Try, Try Again



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

It's what being a Loser is all about, really.

**This Week's Contest:** For those of you whose superb contributions to previous Style Invitational contests were so unjustly ignored by the Former Regime (and for those whose contributions *would have been* unjustly ignored, had you bothered to submit them), The Empress invites you to give it another shot: Enter any previous Invitational (there's a link to the past 100 contests on the Style Invitational Web page on washingtonpost.com). Your entry must be substantially different from the original winners. It may refer to events that occurred after the original contest appeared.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a salt-and-pepper set consisting of a ceramic man in a thong, labeled "Hollywood, Ca." His butt cheeks are Salt and Pepper. (It is not clear, from his position, whether he is wearing a condom.) It was sent in by Elden Carnahan of Laurel, who wins "The Ground Meat Cookbook" from 1954. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. One prize per entrant per week. 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 not

accepted. Deadline is Monday, Jan. 6. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or you risk being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. 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 Stephen Dudzik of Olney.

**Report from Week 534,** in which The Czar (remember him? from way back?) invited descriptions of how various institutions would change if they were dominated by women. Remember how he assured you that you didn't have to worry about a little sexist humor, since, after all, remember who'd be judging the contest?

Oh hahahaha. BWAhahahaha. Such suckers you are. Actually, this contest drew very few entries: Most 21st-century humans with any sense of shame would be mortified to see their names appended to women-can't-drive jokes, or women-can't-make-decisions jokes. (Then again, The Style Invitational is not generally associated with "any sense of shame.") Still, entrants tended to focus on the very few areas in which women have made no real contribution, such as football, the papacy, child molestation, etc.

To those among the shameless who—thinking they were writing for a male judge—sent oh-so-clever time-of-the-month jokes, alas, none of your entries get ink. The Empress does not know why, exactly. Perhaps she is just feeling a little crabby right now, for some reason.

♦ **Third runner-up: If a woman ran the United States, we would never declare war. We would just attack, and when the country asked us why, we'd say, "Oh, I think you know why."** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

♦ **Second runner-up: Any player left on base in one inning gets to start at that base on her next up. It's only fair.** (Judith Cottrill, New York)

♦ **First runner-up: Homeland security: "The threat level was upgraded today from Mojave Rose to Persimmon Sunset."** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **And the winner of the Painted Potties decal set: If women ran the porn industry, the climax of the movie would be when the man shouts, "I was wrong!"** (Tom McCudden, Durham, N.C.)

♦ **Honorable mentions: Truck drivers' mud flaps would lose their buxom, big-haired silhouettes in favor of semiabstract representations of a Saturn V rocket at the moment of liftoff.** (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

♦ **Plumbers would go to fix bathrooms in groups.** (Kristina Sherry, Annandale)

♦ **Construction workers: "Hey, look at that cutie boy—I'd like to take HIM shopping for lamps..."** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **Prostate exams would involve stirrups and an ice-cold speculum.** (Bill Spencer, Exeter, N.H.)

♦ **If women controlled politics, men wouldn't have elections every time you turn around, and when they did have one, their elections would last much longer.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **Pfizer Corp. would produce little blue pills that make men better listeners.** (Josh Borken, Bloomington, Minn.)

♦ **The FBI: As long as they're collecting all that information on everyone's private life, why not run it through a matchmaking program?** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **Porno movies: What now matters is a man's sighs: how long, how deep, how passionate.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **For Internet porn, it would take 45 minutes to pull up the Web site.** (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

♦ **Hockey players would get extra points for axels and toe loops while scoring.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **Wrestlers and NASCAR drivers would have nicknames like "The Accommodator."** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

♦ **If women ran the health care system, they would devote the proper level of resources to women's health issues so that women would, on average, live as long as men.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **Playground bullies: "Oh, yeah? Well, my mom is JUST as nice as your mom, don't you think?"** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ **Pro tennis coverage: Nice knowing you, Anna Kournikova.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **If women ran Burning Tree Club, they wouldn't let men play golf there, and that means no one would get to play, 'cause women just aren't allowed at Burning Tree.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

♦ **Mafia donnas: No cement shoes after Labor Day.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **If women took over the Republican Party, we would elect one of the pigs that would be flying.** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

♦ **If the Three Wise Men were Three Wise Women, nothing would have been different: Already, they asked for directions; their Christmas gifts were jewelry, scent and moisturizer; and they changed routes on the way home after hearing a news report.** (Bob Wallace, Reston)

♦ **Football: All uniforms would be a more slimming black, and you can be sure there wouldn't be padded hips.** (Milo Sauer, Fairfax; Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

♦ **Making a pass would be penalized the first three times, then totally allowed.** (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

♦ **Holding would no longer be a penalty; in fact, it would be mandatory after each play.** (David Lang, Olney)

♦ **If the New York Giants' starting lineup consisted of 11 women, no one would notice any difference.** (Marc Leibert, New York)

♦ **Baseball: All teams would take turns going to the World Series, which would consist of three exhibition games to be won by each league.** (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

♦ **Players would illegally silicone their bats.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

♦ **If a woman ran The Style Invitational: Prizes would be something useful, like recipes and tea cozies.** (Joe Cackler, Falls Church) [Joe wins a doily.]

♦ **This contest would be won entirely by entries like "If women took over the presidency, there would be no war."** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.) [Seth wins a nyah-nyah raspberry.]

♦ **No one would win more than once a year so everyone would get a chance. Perennial winners would be required to help those less skilled. Consolation T-shirts would be given for people who enter every week but never get printed all year. And Honorable Mentions would actually receive their bumper stickers they won in July 2001, not that I'm bitter or anything...** (Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg) [Sheesh. Oh, give her the stupid sticker.]

Richard's Almanac Your Personalized 2003 Quiz BY RICHARD THOMPSON

**1. MY MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT IN 2003 WAS —**

A. Achieving a permanent state of spiritual/sexual/financial Nirvana.  
B. Keeping that goldfish alive for almost six months.  
C. Wait, I still got 3 more days—

**2. THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON I LEARNED IN 2003 WAS —**

A. A little grit, spunk, elbow grease & some gumption are all you need.  
B. Goldfish are boring.  
C. In real life, that Moe Howard trick with the pliers is a bad idea.

**3. THIS YEAR I READ —**

A. Glowing reviews of my first novel.  
B. Just "Goodnight Moon," but 547 times.  
C. Three-fourths of this stupid quiz.

**4. IF 2003 WERE A WINE, IT WOULD BE —**

A. Dom Perignon. Ahh!  
B. That stuff that comes in a box and costs like 4 bucks with a Safeway card.  
C. I dunno, I spilled it all down my pants.

**HOW'D YOU DO? A. Splendid, thanks! B. Eh, O.K. C. I'm still stuck on #2.**

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Ungrateful Recipients? Cut 'Em Off

Okay, Jolly Season's over. Before we enter into the short Season of Wild Abandonment, followed by the even shorter Morning of Reform, Miss Manners would like to put in a cruel word.

Next year, give them lumps of coal. Not your entire holiday list. Only those on it who have indicated that they would prefer not to receive what you have bestowed upon them.

The way to tell if a present had the happy effect that you intended is to pay attention to the recipient's reaction. Did opening it bring on an exclamation of pleasure and gratitude? Were additional appreciative references to it made on subsequent occasions? If you could not hand it over in person, did it inspire an immediate letter of thanks, brimming with enthusiasm?

These responses indicate that you have succeeded. That should be ample incentive to continue, on future occasions, to think of what would be pleasing, to take the time to track it down, to undergo the expense of buying it and to suffer the nuisance of sending it.

Less gratifying are impersonal responses—those that are late, mechanically rendered and formulaic. A Gentle Reader who chastises Miss Manners for refusing to dumb down the requirement for letters declares that "Thanks for the present" e-mails are "indeed new, modern and acceptable"—and then pathetically adds, "when you consider the alternative: nothing!"

Whether only-just-better-than-nothing responses are enough to sustain generosity probably depends on the relationship of giver to recipient. When there are family ties, notoriously those of grandparents to their minimally responsive descendants, disappointment is tempered by the fear that in the absence of presents, there will be no bond left. The response, therefore, is often to resort to that most impersonal and formulaic of presents—a check.

Checks, however welcome to those who prefer cash to signs of thoughtfulness, at least produce the response of an actual live signature. Unless, of course, your bank has switched to sending you only reproductions of your checks, with the signed back not shown.

Miss Manners' gentle critic is certainly right that a widespread response to receiving presents is silence. A cashed check or a delivery receipt may be the only evidence that the present has been received. How it has been received remains unknown.

An alternative that may be even worse is the consumer complaint. Bestowers of presents are told that

what they offered was not to the taste of the recipient, who asks for a receipt or gives it back to be exchanged.

These actions have the virtue of being honest. The beneficiaries of your generosity honestly don't care that you put yourself out for them, and they frankly dislike what you gave. Those who complain that effusive thanks may be faked—and those who probe to test if they are—don't know what they are risking.

Miss Manners has been told of numerous methods of stimulating more palatable reactions to the burden of being given presents. The conventional method is to inquire whether the package was lost, but this can no longer be counted upon to prompt shame and apologies in miscreants. Gentle Readers are reporting that they are being told, "Oh, yes, it arrived." Others have tried giving presents of writing paper and stamps, or sending self-addressed envelopes, sometimes with fill-in-the-blanks or complete letters merely to be signed.

This is silly. The whole concept of exchanging presents rather than doing our own shopping is to give others pleasure. If there is no sign of this having worked, one ought to quit doing it.

But Miss Manners is not completely heartless. Give them one more week.

Dear Miss Manners:

What is the difference between white tie and black tie? When are each of these called for?

In simpler times, going out socially at night called for white tie (black tailcoat with satin lapels; black trousers with one stripe of satin braid; white waistcoat; starched shirt with winged collar; and white pique bow tie), while a casual evening at home required only black tie (black suit with satin or gros-grain faille lapels and—classically—double braid on the trousers; pleated shirt; black silk or satin bow tie).

These days, it is the hosts or organizers of the social occasion who make the call. Often, Miss Manners notes, in vain.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at [MissManners@unitedmedia.com](mailto:MissManners@unitedmedia.com) or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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## BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

N-S vulnerable

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

The Bidding:

North	East	South	West
1 ♣	1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥
Dbl	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
Pass	Pass	3 ♠	All Pass

Opening lead: ♥ Q

In the past 30 years, bidding gadgets have sprung up like crabgrass in June. In today's deal, North's second call was a "support double," showing three-card support for South's spades. If North had four-card support, he'd raise.

The idea is that North will seldom want to double West's bid for penalty but will often want to clarify his degree of support for South's suit. When East-West went to three hearts, South tried three spades—a good decision since nine tricks looked likely at either major.

South ruffed the second heart and led the queen of trumps, and West took the king and forced South to ruff another heart. South then finessed in diamonds, losing to the king.

East returned a trump; he had no better lead. If West played low,

South would abandon trumps, losing a diamond, two trumps and a heart. If instead West took the ace of trumps, no return—not even a heart—would help him since South could draw trumps and lose only four tricks in all.

To prevail, West must refuse the first trump! If South leads another trump, West takes the A-K and leads a heart, forcing out South's last trump, and East cashes a heart when in with the king of diamonds. Nor will it help South to finesse in diamonds at Trick Four.

Few conventions survive, but "support doubles" are here to stay. It's a sign of progress, I guess, that players now double to say they'd like to bid. What is scary is that I suspect players will someday refer to 2003 as bidding's "good old days."

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