

The Style Invitational

Week 539: Dead Letters

The two of you were filthy swine,
Oinkers dressed in satin.
Qusay! Uday! Even your names
Sounded like pig Latin.



Your mother was your mother, and she was your father, too.
It worked, by golly, Dolly—you sweet, embraceable ewe.

This week's contest: Pay tribute in verse to someone who died in 2003. Lists of the recently defunct are all over the Internet; just Google "celebrity deaths 2003," or "notable deaths," "famous deaths," etc. Poems longer than four lines had better be breathtakingly brilliant. First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a tie with little West Virginia all over it (excellent for wearing with the soup course).

Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker, while supplies last (stay tuned). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312 or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, Jan. 12. 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 Judith Cottrill of New York.

Report from Week 535, in which The Czar asked you to tell us what the astonishing news was that artist Bob Staake was trying to impart in any of these five cartoons. The astonishing news, it turns out, was The Czar's final joke: On one level, each of these cartoons carried the same message: The Czar is outta here. Nobody realized this, though, before the news was announced the next Sunday. For the record:

Cartoon A: **The judge is about to undergo a sex change!**

Cartoon B: **The Creator has disappeared!**

Cartoon C: **Potty humor will be frowned upon!**

Cartoon D: **A "car" with a "z" in it is going away!**

Cartoon E: A rebus announces, **"The end of a Di-Nasty!"** (Yes, that was Princess Di and Ilie "Nasty" Nastase, the bad-boy tennis star of the early 1970s. Though the caricature was rather good, it engendered many colorful but wrong guesses, from Kurt Cobain to Michael Dukakis to Marilyn Quayle.)

A number of entries amused The Empress but failed to report any astonishing news and/or ignored the existence of Bob, like this one for Cartoon E: "I recently saw a great Swiss movie called 'Judgment at Noor and Borg.'" (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church) Or this one for B: Brad was outraged when he saw that the expensive wedding portrait he ordered had omitted the groom. (Linda Wolfe, Reston) They lose.

◆ Second runner-up: **Cartoon D: Bob announces that John Tesh albums will now carry a warning: "Not intended for use inside a motor vehicle."** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

◆ First runner-up: **Cartoon B: Bob has discovered that the new portrait of the governor just unveiled in Sacramento is actually an old painting stolen from some Italian church.** (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.; Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

◆ And the winner of the The Czar's own pen: **Cartoon A: As medical reimbursements continue to drop, struggling physicians have resorted to performing the one procedure always authorized by HMOs: a wallet extraction.** (John Shea, Lansdowne, Pa.)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

Cartoon A
Bob has learned that Afghan obstetricians have been causing birth complications because of the risky burqa-cut. (Brian Penney, Goffstown, N.H.)

Proctologists have developed an exciting new surgical procedure for reducing flatulence, borrowing its name from the aviation industry: "wind shear." (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

The poet laureate has undergone a secret operation for an enlarged prose state! (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

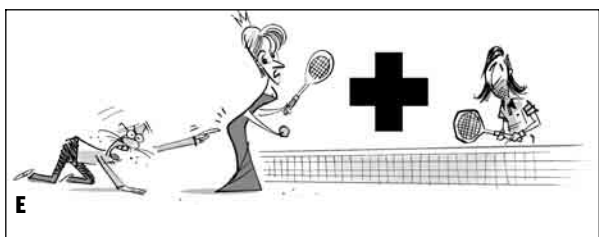
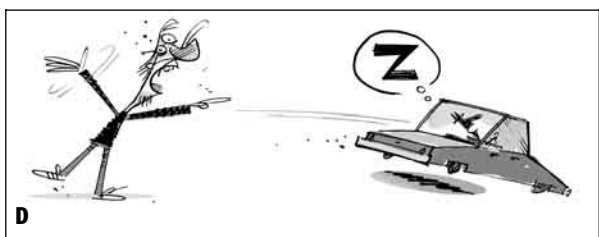
Cartoon B
Italian Attorney General Giovanni Ashcrofti has ordered a drop-panel ceiling to be installed in part of the Sistine Chapel! But Staake realizes it has been put in the wrong place! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

In this self-portrait, Bob is telling us he has nothing to hide—a fact confirmed on closer examination. (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

Bob is showing that the heat is kept distressingly low in the Sistine Chapel. (Josh Borken, Minneapolis)

And Last: Adam is destined for a fall because he is not thinking clearly. This is because he is distracted by a constant concern: "What is that danged Revised Title about? Like I'm supposed to remember what the contest was three weeks ago from these nonsensical words? Couldn't they at least give the original title along with it?" (Lyell Roedick, Springfield) [Adam gets his wish, but, alas, it is too late to save mankind.]

Cartoon D
Bob is disclosing the disastrous debut of D.C.'s new Drive-Thru Narcolepsy Diagnosis Center. (Selma Mathias, Harrisonburg, Va.)



Staake, trying his hand at editorial cartooning, shows Dennis Kucinich pointing out that the administration is asleep at the wheel. Unfortunately, neither Bob nor anyone else has any idea what Dennis Kucinich looks like. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Bob is warning that the McCain-Feingold Act will have a profound impact on the way campaigns are financed, diminishing soft-money contributions from large corporations, which may result in higher profiles for candidates backed by traditionally underrepresented demographics. Also, that guy is about to hit a tree. (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church)

"Z" and "car" can be rearranged to spell "Czar," who is depicted here as a DRIVER in deep SLEEP. We are being told anagrammatically that the Czar's work was considered DRIVEL by his PEERS. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Combinations:
(C) A just-filled potty doesn't smell!
(D) A sleeping driver lets go of the steering wheel!
(A) A surgeon is lopping off people's derrieres!
All this is astonishing news—no whiffs, hands or butts about it. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Bob is trying to explain where he picked up his infection. He isn't sure if it could have come from a toilet seat (C), but that transvestite tennis player (E) is a real possibility. Then there's that guy he slept with in the car (D) or that really good-looking guy he saw in Rome (B). But, in any case, he really needs to figure it out because, based on the treatment (A), it seems really serious. (Russell Beland, Springfield)



MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

The MBA's Main Course

Q: At what age should children be taught how to eat properly?
A: In their mid- to late twenties.
Q: What is the best venue for this instruction?

A: Graduate school in business administration. However, if they have entered the business world directly, it becomes the responsibility of their employers to teach them.

These are not Miss Manners's answers. They are society's.

At any rate, this is when and where it is being done. Distinguished business schools have instituted etiquette instruction, on the grounds that their students need it in order to be employable. And businesses that are willing to take on messy eaters are holding sessions to train them in basic etiquette. Washing, dressing and talking are also covered in these sessions, but the emphasis is on eating.

As Miss Manners recalls, this is a skill that used to be more or less mastered by the time one entered nursery school.

What changed? Has table etiquette become increasingly complicated since the heyday of specialized Victorian flatware, so that only those who can be expected to master it are those whose ability to learn has been honed on science, engineering and the minor Puritan poets? Or is eating no longer a technologically necessary activity for human survival, and therefore the practice has passed out of general use?

If society no longer deemed it important to eat in certain conventional ways, there would be no reason to teach it at all. And surely it is curious that this neglected skill is deemed essential to success in doing business. People work in order to be able to eat, but—aside from the professional taster for people who are wary of being poisoned and the modern equivalent, the food critic—they are not hired to eat.

It's the job interview over lunch, the business schools explain. And business entertaining, employers add. Important transactions and contacts are fueled by food, and it is therefore necessary to be able to get it from plate to mouth with some accuracy.

This suggests that, to important people, table manners are important. So important, they don't want to do business with people who don't have any. So important, they may even practice these themselves, although that does not necessarily follow.

If such is the case, why are parents not in on this secret?

Parents of all income levels used to teach table

manners as a matter of course. Then they no longer had time, they said. More important, neither did the children, who had too many other things to learn to prepare them for success. Who knew that it is not team sports and educational television where one learns the skills needed for professional life, but family dinner?

Somewhere down the line, parents figured, the children would pick that up. But from whom? Day-care providers barely have time to get across the rudiments, such as not to throw food. Elementary and high school teachers have to stay out of student cafeterias just to be able to digest their own lunches. Colleges are quick to point out that they are not supposed to act as parents.

So the answer is: from business school and business. Before those in charge get fed up.

Dear Miss Manners:

My husband and I enjoy entertaining. During the year, we host several large gatherings at our home. As we have two small children, we have tailored many of our parties—including our Super Bowl party—to families.

For the past couple of years, we have noticed that, in response to our invitations, we sometimes get the response, "We'll try to make it" or "Maybe."

Our Super Bowl party is certainly not elaborate, but we do offer food for the adults and the children. When several families give a "maybe" response, I have no way of knowing how much food to prepare.

For our last Super Bowl party, three families responded with "We'll try to make it" (each a family of four). None of them came. Then we had mountains of leftovers. What is the best way of handling such a situation?

First, eat the leftovers. Then chop up your guest list. Miss Manners does not advise having anything spoiled at a party.

People who say "I'll try to make it" should be told, "Oh, don't worry about it, we'll try you again next year." Those who simply don't show have been tried and found wanting.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at 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
♠ 7 2
♥ 5 4
♦ A Q 10 9 5 3
♣ J 8 3

WEST
♠ K 10 8 4 3
♥ K 9 8 6 2
♦ 4
♣ K 5

EAST
♠ J 9 5
♥ Q 10 7
♦ J 8 7 6
♣ Q 7 4

SOUTH (D)
♠ A Q 6
♥ A J 3
♦ K 2
♣ A 10 9 6 2

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♣	2 ♣ (I)	2 ♦	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass

Opening lead: ♠ 4

"If you want the bridge gods to laugh," a club player remarked to me, "just make a plan."

My friend had been declarer at today's 3NT. West's bid of two clubs was a "Michaels cue bid," a two-bids-in-one gadget many players use. West promised length in both major suits but limited high-card values. If West had more strength, he'd overcall one spade and bid hearts next.

"West led a spade," my friend said, "and I won with the queen and planned to run the diamonds and then try for club tricks. On a good day I'd have made six, but the gods laughed at me: West showed out on the second diamond."

"I took dummy's queen and ace, pitching a heart, and led the jack of clubs, trying to induce East to cover. He played low instead, and West took the king and led the king of

spades. I ducked, but West next led a heart. When East's queen forced out my ace, I was sunk. I went down two."

What would have been your plan at 3NT?

South can almost assure the contract by leading a low diamond to dummy's 10 at Trick Two. If East took the jack, South would overtake the king later, winning five diamonds, two spades, a heart and a club.

East's best defense is to let the 10 of diamonds win, and South next lets the eight of clubs ride. If West takes the king and shifts to a heart, South wins and overtakes the king of diamonds with the ace. When West discards, South takes the queen of diamonds and leads the jack of clubs to finesse, winning four clubs, three diamonds, two spades and a heart.

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Next Week: **The Horse He Rodin On, or Who's Czarry Now?**