

The Style Invitational

Week 555: A Tsk, A Task



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

"A grey mare trots up to the stream and drinks. Caballero pricks up his ears and looks at her, but she doesn't notice him . . ."

ERROR: Do not post content containing profanity, sexual terms, or other inappropriate content (including religion, politics, cheats, hacks, and password scams) on Neopets!

The Empress's own Little Princess had submitted the above contribution, verbatim, to her favorite Web site, in a sort of group-story-writing activity, when she was mystified to be both rejected and yelled at—and for what, she couldn't imagine. Of course, you can.

This week's contest: Come up with a super-wholesome passage of 25 words or fewer that would likely be banned by the admirable, ever-vigilant Neopets.com site. You don't actually have to send it to Neopets.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a Feb. 25, 1972, copy of Life magazine, featuring "Liz Taylor Is 40" on the cover; at the time, she was married to Richard Burton, who is quoted giving his wife's weight at "around 128." Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week.

Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312 or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. Snail-mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, May

3. 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 are 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 May 23. 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 Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

Report from Week 551, in which we asked you to feed some English text into the Google translating tool, have it translate it into any of its five foreign languages, then feed the result back in and translate it into English. Our conclusion: Linguists, you won't soon be replaced by a machine.

◆ Fourth runner-up: *The Mamas and the Papas* (From Portuguese) **The Breasts and the Pops** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

◆ Third runner-up: *I never yet met a man that I didn't like.* (From Spanish) **I never satisfied a man yet with which I did not have pleasure.** (Jeff Martin, Gaithersburg)

◆ Second runner-up: *The U.S. government is composed of three branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial.* (From French) **The government of the United States is composed of three branches: the director, the legislature and the legal one.** (Shawn Freeman, Vestavia Hills, Ala.)

◆ First runner-up, the winner of a "Today Show" baseball cap autographed by Katie Couric: *Google translates text with no errors.* (From Portuguese) **Google translates the text with nenhuns errors.** (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

◆ And the winner of the Inker: *I am the worst president elected ever.* (From French) **I am the worst president never elected.** (Kevin N. Mettinger, Warrenton)

◆ Honorable Mentions:
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? (French) **Do you swear not to say the truth, all the truth and anything but the truth?** (Ron Prishivalko, Reston)

Don't mess with Texas. (Spanish) **It does not soil with Roofing tiles.** (Rose Abril, Reston)

Some men are born great. (Portuguese) **Some men are great loaded.** (Diane Tomasky, Frederick; Jeff Martin)

Monica was a woman of loose morals. (Portuguese) **Monica was a flabby moral woman.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Be bold, and mighty forces will come to your aid. (German) **You are fat and powerful forces come to your aid.** (Beverly L. Mangold, Rockville)

I did not have sexual relations with that woman. (Spanish) **It did not have sexual relations with that woman.** (Ben Llewellyn, Rockville; Vincent Danton, Bowie; Shawn Freeman)

I'll be working my way back to you, babe, with a burning love inside. (Portuguese) **I will be working my back part to it in the way, dribble, with a burning hot love for inside.** (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

In your Easter bonnet, with all the frills upon it . . . (Spanish) **In his I castrate of Passover, with all the steering wheels on him . . .** (Larry Carnahan, Arlington)

(German) **The milk chocolate melts in your opening, not in your hands.** (Beth Cih, Silver Spring)

At Ford, quality is Job One. (German) **At Fords quality is job of one.** (Andrew Dutton, Egg Harbor Township, N.J.)

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. (Spanish) **The true mystery of the world is the visible one, not the hair net.** (Michelle Bowen-Ziecheck, Chicago)

A good man is hard to find. (German) **A good man is to be found hard.** (Jeremy Eble, Silver Spring)

Herbert wanted to leave bachelorhood with a bang by throwing a stag party. (French) **Herbert wanted to leave the celibacy with a blow by throwing part of male.** (Marjorie Bunday, Washington)

We will never surrender the fight! (French) **We will never return the combat!** (Jonathan Obee, Washington)

Hey, Jude, don't make it bad. (German) **Hey, do not form Jew, it bad.** (Jeff Martin)

After an hour of exercise, you will feel stronger. (French) **After one hour of exercise, you will smell yourselves more extremely.** (Pat Lark, Arlington)

Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him. (German) **Alas, bad Yorick, I could do him.** (Jim Pearson, Alexandria)

Picking out the man's outfit is a woman's job. (French) **The selection of the equipment of the man is the work of a woman.** (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

(From Portuguese) **You deserve a rupture today.** (Dot Yufer, Newton, W.Va.; Allen Breon, Rockville; Chris Doyle)

The well-coached Washington politician showered pork gravy on his constituents. (French) **The politician well-given of the particular lessons of Washington poured sauce with the juice of pig on his components.** (Milo Sauer)

I keep my food fresh with preservatives. (French) **I preserve my fresh food with condoms.** (Rebecca Shoaf, Minneapolis)

If nominated, I will not run. If elected, I will not serve. (French) **If named, I did not run. So elected, I will not be useful.** (John Junker, Manassas; Chris Doyle)

Batter, batter, batter, batter, batter, batter, swing! (French) **Smooth paste, smooth paste, smooth paste, smooth paste, smooth paste, ocellation!** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Bitch set me up. (Portuguese) **The dog adjusted to me above.** (Allen Breon, Clarksville; Julius Sanks, Ashburn)

Does a computer know how to tell a poop joke? (German) **Can a computer explain one poopwitz?** (Brendan Beary)

I miss the Czar. (French) **I am bored of the Czar.** (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church)

N-S vulnerable

NORTH

♥ 8 5 4 3 2

♦ A K 7

♣ K 7 3

♠ 9

WEST

♠ K 9

♥ Q 9 4 3

♦ 6 5 2

♣ K Q 10 2

EAST

♠ A Q 10 7

♥ J 10 6 5

♦ 4

♣ J 8 6 5

SOUTH (D)

♠ 6

♥ 8 2

♦ A Q J 10 9 8

♣ A 7 4 3

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	4 ♦	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	6 ♦	All Pass

Opening lead: ♣ K

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

"Do you consider yourself a modest man?" I asked Cy the Cynic. "Certainly," Cy replied, "and I'm extremely proud of myself for feeling that way."

Although modesty is a virtue not frequently found among bridge players, today's North-South could be proud of reaching six diamonds with only 11 high-card points opposite 11. Both North's leap to four diamonds and South's cue bid of five clubs were aggressive actions, but the contract was acceptable, especially when West led the king of clubs.

After the way South attacked the slam, however, he could rightfully claim to be modest about his powers of dummy play. South took the ace of clubs, ruffed a club, cashed the A-K of hearts, ruffed a heart and ruffed

another club.

South next led a spade from dummy, but East took the ace and led a trump, removing dummy's last trump. South's last club was a loser, and he went down one.

If you'd been South, how would you have played the hand?

South must try to make use of dummy's long spade suit, ragged though it may be. Suppose West's opening lead is a trump. South wins, concedes a spade at the second trick, wins the next trump in dummy, ruffs a spade, takes the ace of clubs, ruffs a club and ruffs a spade. He draws the last trump, leads a heart to dummy and ruffs another spade with his last trump. Dummy's last two spades are then good, and South can return with the remaining high heart to cash them, fulfilling the contract.

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"Greeks are famous for procrastinating as long as possible, and then rushing frantically at the last minute."

Costis Chlouverakis,
a physician and writer



As Games Loom, City's in a State; Athenians Aren't

LETTER, From D1

unscientific survey is any indication. Although warnings are not unknown (one restaurant posted a sign depicting a grimacing toilet and the admonition "Do not place Paper in the Toilette"), most establishments seem not to have considered this potential disaster, with just four months and counting before the opening ceremonies. That means millions and millions of ill-advised flushes, and untold consequences to Athens's ancient pipes, which, if not as old as the Acropolis, are still badly in need of modernization. How this will play out, especially given the frequency with which Americans and other prodigal consumers already clog more modern equipment through wasteful practices, is one big unknown.

If going is a challenge, so is coming and going. The same street name can be found in multiple places in Athens, with some incarnations no more than a couple of blocks long. Don't count on cabbies to be helpful—often they have no idea, and even if they do, very few speak another language. (On the other hand, most taxis are gleamingly new and blissfully inexpensive.) Greeks are always glad to give directions, though they pride themselves more on their willingness to help than on their willingness to admit they have no idea how to get somewhere.

Hair dryer fans might note the questionable ability of the electrical grid to handle huge numbers of gadget-happy visitors. Add to this the air-conditioning pressures of August—which, thanks to global warming, is trending even hotter and wetter than in typically unbearable summers of Athens past.

The sorts of peripheral disasters waiting to happen only compound the challenges facing the official event. Although many sporting facilities, a new airport and spacious highways have been built, a lot of effort has gone into cosmetic efforts with mainly propaganda value—exhibits, signs, depictions of the ancient games. As a result, work has been completed on fewer than half of the competition facilities, a topic of frequent discussion in the Greek media.

"Greeks are famous for procrastinating as long as possible, and then rushing frantically at the last minute," says Costis Chlouverakis, a physician and writer. "The Olympics were announced in 1997, but they didn't do anything for years. Of course they are not ready."

A favorite joke circulating on the Internet shows the Greeks half-ready for the 2004 games and the Chinese already done for 2008. Even the Athens city Web site remains "under construction."

Outside the Olympic venues, the city seems an odd mix of frenetic remodeling and indifference. A week spent walking and driving through Athens revealed the kind of chaos and lackadaisical fix-it projects that have long characterized the city. For every stylish new *boite* that has opened, one sees dozens of properties where work appears to have barely begun. Many proprietors of hotels, restaurants and the like appear to have only recently realized the profit potential of 1.4 million visitors. The city hasn't had major hotel construction in ages, though a num-



PHOTOS BY THANASSIS STAVRAKIS—ASSOCIATED PRESS

Athenians sit in Syntagma Square, above, surrounded by pieces of marble intended to refurbish it in time for the Olympics. Two puppies, top, play near the Temple of Zeus; the city's stray dog population is yet another challenge.

ber of large new hostelries are racing toward completion with good incentive: Prices for superior-quality rooms will average a little under \$1,000 a night. The lodging mainstay, hundreds of small hotels, are busy getting face- and wallet-lifts. One little pension with tiny rooms plans to raise its rates from about \$60 a night to near \$300. And to handle the massive influx, the authorities plan to enlist a number of cruise ships, creating floating hotels.

Some roads appear to be getting their first rejuvenation in 150 years—unearthing past construction indiscretions. One controversy erupted when a woman noticed the words "Dearly Beloved" on unsettled paving stones. An initial visit to an excavated 5th century street in the heart of the touristic Plaka area near the Acropolis found the pavement littered with a prodigious amount of dog droppings. Five days later, these canine contributions to the city's ambiance remained undisturbed.

Security concerns are clearly paramount, but perhaps the biggest challenge of all will be simple communication. The term "it's all Greek to me" was coined for a reason. Many signs use only the Greek alphabet. Spoken and nodded Greek can be confusing, too, for the uninitiated. For example, the word for "yes," *ne*, sounds a lot like its opposite, and the word for "no," *okhee*, sounds a lot like "okay." Lifting the head vertically, something like American culture's affirmative nod, is their "no."

Something like our wave goodbye is their "come here," and what looks like "come here" is actually goodbye. If Athens is not quite ready for the Olympics, the people of Athens cer-

tainly are—ready to evacuate, that is. Athenians, who never need much excuse to escape their overcrowded, foliage-deficient city for the beauty and tranquility of the Greek islands, may not stick around to enjoy this latest incarnation of the quadrennial sporting spectacle that their ancestors created. "We're all leaving a month before the Games, and returning a month after," says Michalis Papayiannakis, a member of the European Parliament.

Well, not everyone. When authorities announced openings for 42,000 Olympics "volunteers," 160,000 people applied—many of them Greeks. Even so, one local skeptic warned, "Check how many actually show up. Greeks are not volunteers. We have an expression, 'You can get free cheese only in the mousetrap.'"

Despite all the problems, it's too early to write off the Athens Olympics as a disaster in the making. For all their tendencies to procrastinate, the worry-bead-twirling Greeks can be resourceful in a pinch. Before the World Athletic Championship in 1997, authorities envisioned a soothing display of greenery outside the airport to welcome arriving tourists. But trucked-in pine trees did not get planted; half died in the parching heat, half were apparently taken home by airport staff. With one month remaining before the event, staff frantically began sowing flowers and watering them with great diligence. What the crowds saw on their arrival was a beautiful garden that looked as though it had been there forever.

"You see," says one typically philosophical Athenian, "we're magicians here."

Next Week: **What Kind of Foal Am I, or Go Ahead, Mate My Bay**