

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 743: Picture This



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Style Invitational Cartoonist for Life Bob Staake has been feeling unloved lately, what with being bumped off the page in favor of a crossword puzzle grid last week, and with Richard Thompson's "Richard's Poor Almanack" cartoons making rude gestures at his drawings from across the gutter on Page C3.

So we return after many, many weeks to the well-loved, no-special-twist caption contest: **Write a caption for any of these Bob Staake cartoons.**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives something so good you'll try not to place first: this Darth Vader helmet, complete with a control box with which you can make James Earl Jones intone, "You don't know the pow-ah of the DARK SIDE," and modeled here by the Empress (tiara not included). But what sets it far above any ordinary James Earl Jones-intoning Darth Vader helmet is that this one was donated by, and has enclosed the personal head of, Hank Stuever, the most stylish of Style section writers. Hank is moving desks and "going through a personal-accountment makeover. Trying to de-geekify." Hmm, what made him think of us?

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 17. Put "Week 743" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Includes 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 Jan. 5. 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 Phil Frankenfild of Washington.

REPORT FROM WEEK 739

In which we asked you to supply some fictitious revelations about current or former politicians:

4 Little Johnny Edwards's dog was killed when it ran into the back of the ambulance they were chasing. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

3 LBJ's mother used to pick him up by his ears. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

2 Winner of the Bill Clinton in Drag magnet set: John Edwards's campaign has released documents proving he now pays well below the average rate not only for his haircuts, but also for his weekly manicure, pedicure and mango-avocado-yogurt facial peel. (Larry Yungk, on vacation in Bangkok)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

The venue for JFK's visit to Germany was changed from Hamburg on the advice of his speechwriter. (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

LYING LOW: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Vice President Cheney's prolonged absences from public view reflect times he has checked into Bethesda Naval Medical Center while shedding his exoskeleton. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

In addition to fear itself, FDR was terrified of circus clowns. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Kay "Bailey" Hutchison got her nickname from her father's favorite cartoon character, Beetle Bailey. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

Hubert Humphrey named all his pet cats Bogart. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Bob Ehrlich is the secret love child of Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. (Randy Lee, Burke)

As a child, Winston Churchill once told a teacher, "Yes, m'am, I am tardy, but tomorrow I will be on time, and you will still be ugly." (Jeff Brechlin)

In 1989, to prevent voters and political opponents from associating him with America's enemies, Barack Moammar Castro had his name legally changed to Barack Hussein Obama. (Mike Fransella, Arlington)

Joe Biden once held his breath for 12 seconds. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

Though James Buchanan was the only bachelor president, he had a deep platonic relationship with rookie White House reporter Helen Thomas. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Al Gore may not have invented the Internet, but he did invent a great electronic storage application for Internet porn. (Ralph Scott, Washington)

Bill Richardson has the most cleavage of any presidential candidate. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

As a kid, Steny Hoyer was never teased about his name. (Randy Lee)

Rep. Tom Tancredo once rode in a taxi driven by an illegal immigrant — and he gave the driver a tip. (Horace Labadie, Dunnellon, Fla.)

Mitt Romney has never spent more than \$1.50 for a haircut, as he has been bald since 1958. His current "hair" is a plastic cast made from a bust of Ronald Reagan. (Steve Fahey)

Lincoln was the first president to wear briefs. (Russell Beland)

Walter Mondale made an interesting comment on Nov. 14, 1983. (Jeff Brechlin)

Newt Gingrich was named for the New Testament. (Randy Lee)

When he was living in Indonesia, Barack Obama was enrolled in Hadassah. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

Stephen Douglas used the line "I know you are but what am I?" four times in his debate with Lincoln. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Ron Paul has a secret love child, Rudolph, or "Ru." (Roy Ashley, Washington; J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.)

Dennis Kucinich only seems short because his wife is 8-foot-4. (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Because of the troubles with subprime mortgages, the Romney campaign has yet to be able to out its purchase of Iowa. However, they're close to settlement over New Hampshire. (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

Hillary Clinton has amassed a huge campaign war chest from monies freed from the accounts of Mrs. Sese Seko merely by paying administrative fees of only a few thousands of dollars US. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

Sen. Larry Craig has just announced that after leaving office he will be the national spokesman for a campaign to raise awareness of Restless Leg Syndrome. (Dale Hample, Silver Spring)

Dennis Kucinich took steroids as a third-string high school quarterback, but they were placebos. (Kevin Dopart)

Early in their marriage, Dick and Lynne Cheney decided that if they had a son, they would name him Anakin. (Dale Hample)

Hillary Clinton has submitted entries to The Style Invitational 13 times since 1996, but has never seen ink. (Chuck Koelbel, Houston)

Next Week: Give Us a Hint, or You May Already Be a Loser!

THE EMPRESS BY MARTHA WRIGHT — THE WASHINGTON POST

In ancient times, Colchian nobles were accustomed to fine goods, such as the silver drinking cup at near right, and a gold necklace composed of beads and bird pendants.



An iron figurine from the 3rd century B.C., with gold earrings, neck ring and bracelets.

'Ancient Vani,' Worth Its Weight in Gold

GOLD, From C1

orchards and farms of western Georgia. Their contents make clear just how good life (or at least death) could be for the lucky few in Colchis.

The exhibition at the Asian art gallery is a treasure show, full of gold and gorgeous objects. Scholars complain that such splashy events overshadow the kind of sober archaeology that might actually tell us more about how most ancient people lived. I'm sure they're right. But it's hard to persuade your average art lover to give up a pile of gold in favor of potsherds and midden finds.

The stunning necklaces on Vani's well-heeled dead were made of little golden beads immaculately cast as tortoises, birds, crouching gazelles or rams' heads. These same nobles' grave clothes sparkled with tiny plaques of gold hammered out to look like eagles, ducks and sphinxes. One big shot got buried with an absolutely massive silver belt (more like a cummerbund — I'd love to see the bow tie that went with it) featuring a banquet scene of someone very like himself, complete with playboy stubble, being poured a cup of wine. A few of his peers traveled to the after-life wearing golden diadems engraved with scenes of lions killing boars and bulls. Some of these treasures, aggressive and bold and ostentatious, show a heavy influence of Persian-style pomp and circumstance. (Some of the grave goods of Vani seem to have had their gold weighed according to Persian measures: multiples of 66.66 commonly occur, based on the "two-thirds-of-a-hundred" unit favored by the Persians. Pity the kid who had to learn arithmetic in ancient Persia.)

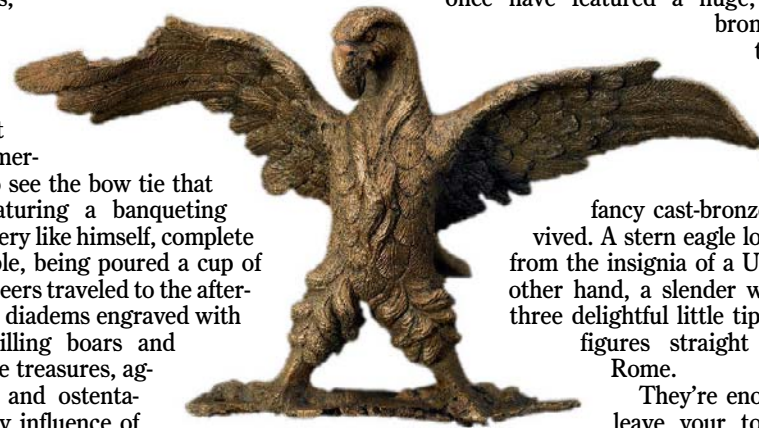
Other objects from Vani are elegantly Greek. There's a gorgeous little statuette of a satyr, cast in bronze and wearing gold circlets around his neck and wrists. (Like most bronze objects from antiquity, this one would originally have been polished to a brassy, golden sheen. Only age has turned it green.) Colchian metalworkers produced bronze and iron figures at almost exactly the same scale as the satyr, wearing precisely the same gold jewelry, but looking more like stick figures than an actual human. Same ritual object; we assume same ritual function; absolutely different look. The contrast is one of the most interesting moments in the show.

Vani was sacked and destroyed somewhere around 50 B.C. In its final century, stylish Greek influence had won out entirely, and you have to wonder whether the city's nobles hadn't also started going soft. In 1975, digging under one old farmer's chicken coop, Georgian archaeologists discovered a whole shrine dedicated to the god of wine. With a floor in genteel pink and white mosaic, its main hall would once have featured a huge, gloriously ornate bronze cauldron to contain the god's libations. The beaten-metal vessel itself has long since turned to dust, but its fancy cast-bronze fittings have survived. A stern eagle looks like something from the insignia of a U.S. Marine. On the other hand, a slender winged victory and three delightful little tipsy heads look like figures straight out of baroque Rome.

They're enough to make you leave your town's defense to someone else, while you pour another drink and toast the god of wine.

Wine, Worship & Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani, through Feb. 24 at the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, on the south side of the Mall at 1050 Independence Ave. SW. The show was organized by the Sackler in collaboration with the new Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University, where it will be the inaugural exhibition. Call 202-633-1000 or visit www.asia.si.edu, which offers extensive images and information on the finds at ancient Vani.

Bronze that cheated death, or at least destruction: An eagle dating to the 2nd century B.C., above; the head of a goat-eared satyr, at top left; and a winged Victory that once adorned a cauldron in ancient Vani.



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