

Picture Puzzles

by Hot

Like some flat types, our picture puzzles were inspired by classical Italian puzzling. I introduced them to the NPL in the late 90's, and for a while I was the picture puzzle editor for the NPL. Dragonfly succeeded me in that role, and was not succeeded by anyone. The idea did not really catch on: picture puzzles are few and far between in *The Enigma*, and not a lot of space is dedicated to them in the *Guide* or on the website. This article is adapted from a document I once wrote for inclusion in the *Guide*. I hope it can serve as a reference for any members who want to learn more about this puzzle form.

There are two types of picture puzzles: illustrated flats, and picture rebuses.

ILLUSTRATED FLATS

Most flat types can be illustrated: the picture simply replaces the verse, and the rules about what bases are acceptable are the usual ones. Usually there are no cue words, though in some cases they might appear in dialog balloons, or on a poster or sign within the illustration.

The following example was originally a normal versified letter bank, but the concrete nature of the keywords makes it suitable for illustration:

1. LETTER BANK (5 5, 6 9, *7 *7 *7)



=TREESONG

(drawing by RANDD)

Solution: larch pines, pencil sharpener, Charles Spencer Chaplin

However, a clever illustrator can find ways to illustrate more abstract keywords, and moreover those need not be limited to nouns.

2. PHONETIC BEHEADMENT (7, *5)



=HOT

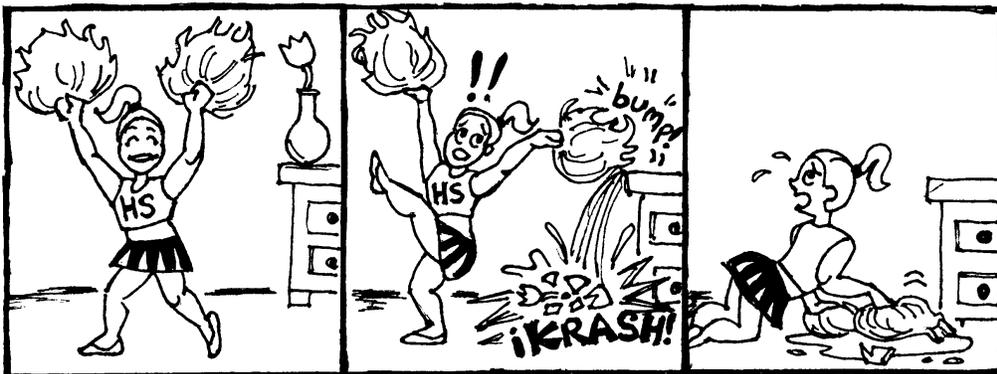
(drawing by ZEBRA BOY)

Solution: hatless Atlas

Discovering illustratable bases is more difficult than finding versifiable bases, but most of the artistry is in conceiving and drawing the illustration. It is best to use a coherent scene rather than an arbitrary collection of objects. This is similar to the preference for a meaningful story in a flat, rather than a meaningless juxtaposition of unrelated bits.

It is also possible to use the comic strip format:

3. LETTER BANK (enumeration withheld)



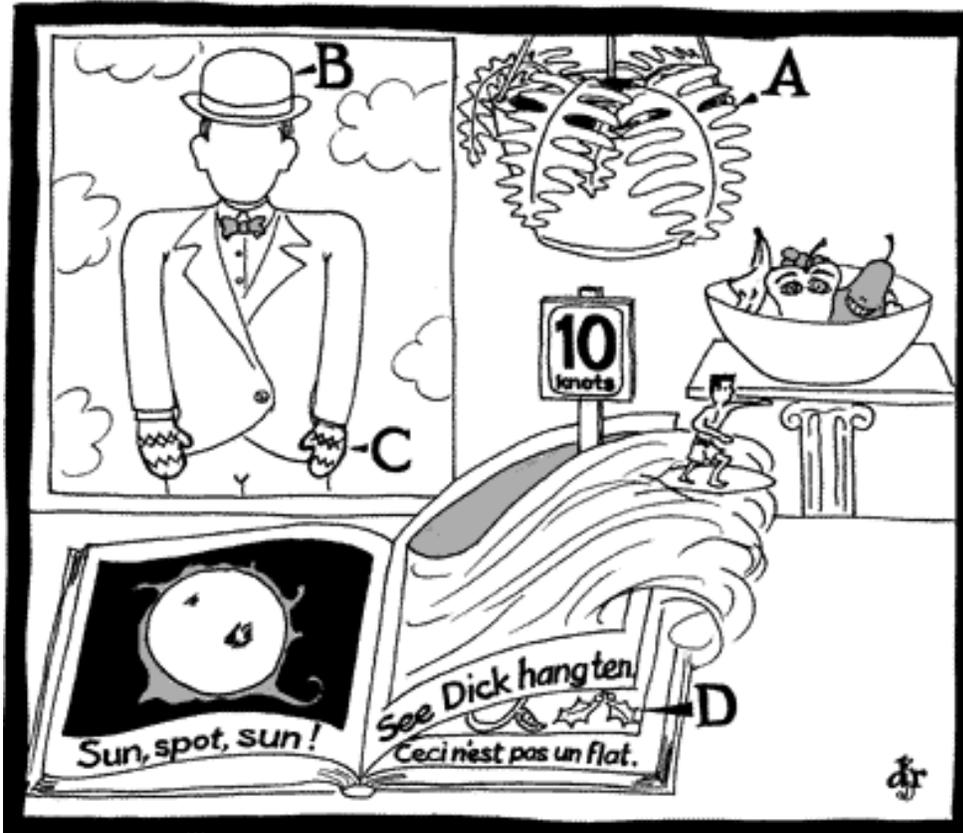
=ALICE

(drawing by RANDD)

Solution: mop, pom-pom

Finally, the illustrated acrostical enigma (invented by Dandr) has its own rules. The letters (A, B, C...) in the illustration point to clues to words whose beginnings are the end of words clued elsewhere in the figure (but with no labels). For example, there may be an A on an elephant, and a B on an osteopath. Somewhere else in the figure there may be a TOWel, and ERos. So the first part of the final solution would be TOW and the last would be ER. Here is an example:

4. ACROSTICAL ENIGMA (10)



=G. NATURAL

(drawing by DART)

Solution: SURfer(n), REAder(by), LLimit(ten), SMile(x)

PICTURE REBUSES

Picture rebuses differ significantly from standard rebuses. The figure, with letters, bigrams, and/or trigrams (rarely other typographical characters) added, is the rubric, and there is no verse. If there are no typographical characters added to the figure, the rebus is “silent”, and is of course more elegant. In a silent rebus, a star may be used to focus the solver’s attention on a part of the figure, though the artist may prefer subtler ways to reveal what is important. The figure is “read” from left to right, and the solution may or may not be clued in it.

A good rebus must satisfy “Briga's triangle”: plausible picture, clever reading, and meaningful solution. (Briga is a leading Italian puzzler.) In general, the picture should represent one single scene, not a random collection of objects. The reading should preferably be a reasonably coherent description of what is in the picture, and heteronymic to the solution (in the sense that word breaks should not be the same — in fact, etymological overlap between reading and solution should be avoided.) The answer should be a word or a meaningful phrase, preferably with “dictionary nature”. It does not necessarily have to be an entry, but it cannot be an arbitrary sequence of words that one has to labor to justify (unlike standard rebuses, where this is not a problem, because of the context presented by the verse.)

If the picture does not include a clue to the solution, two enumerations are given: one for the reading, and one for the solution. Here is an example:

5. PICTURE REBUS (*3, *3, 3 4 → *5 2 *6)



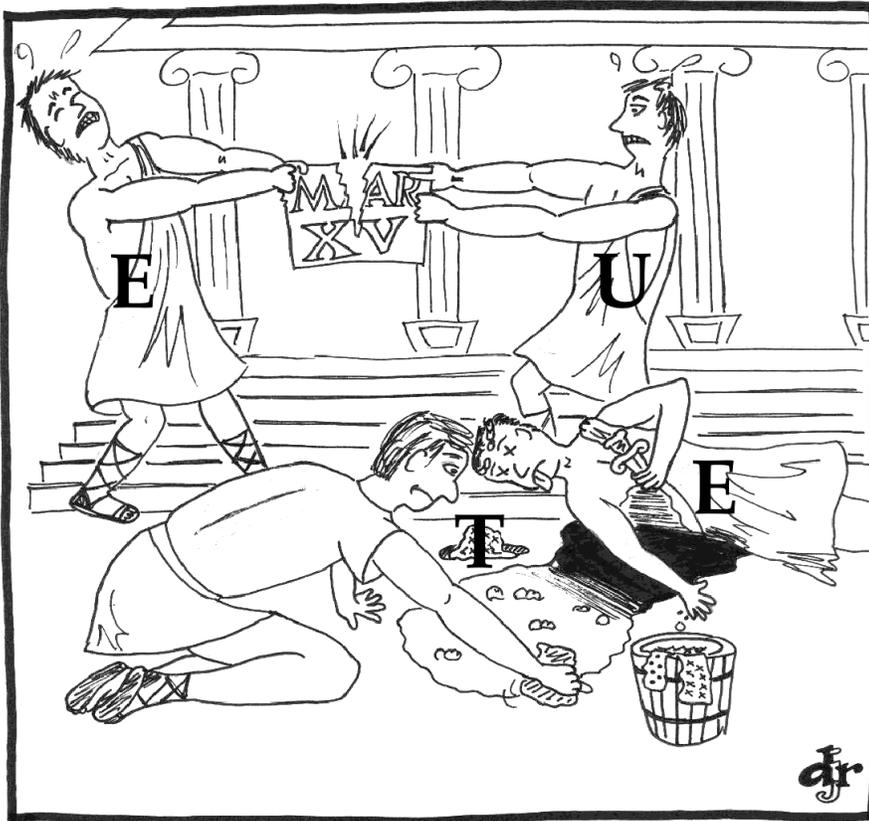
=XEMU

(drawing by T MCAAY)

Solution: Tim, Ono, fat hens → Timon of Athens

If there are letters in the figure, they are shown without asterisks in the first enumeration.

6. PICTURE REBUS (1, 1 3 4; 1 3; 1 4 → 9' 9)



=HOT

(drawing by DART)

Solution: E, U rip ides; T rag; E dies → Euripides' tragedies

7. PICTURE REBUS (1 4 1; 4 → 4 6)



=DANDR

(drawing by RANDD)

Solution: O pens E; same → open sesame

There are many rebus variations, including the reversed picture rebus, or picture suber. In the deletion rebus, the letters shown are removed rather than added in constructing the reading. In the addition rebus, the letters are inserted into words, as in the following example:

8. ADDITION REBUS (7 4)



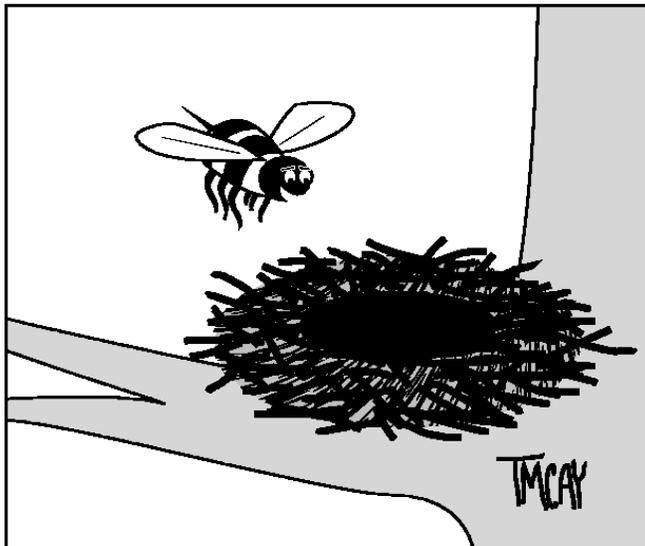
=FEDERICO

(drawing by T MCAAY)

Solution: (B)eating ti(M)e

In a letter change rebus, the letters in the picture replace letters in the words:

9. LETTER CHANGE REBUS (3 4 4 → 2 2 7)



=FEDERICO

(drawing by T MCAAY)

Solution: bee near nest → be in earnest