

## MODERN SATOR SQUARES

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SATOR  
AREPO  
TENET  
OPERA  
ROTAS

Many word-lovers are familiar with the famous Latin square shown above. It probably dates from Roman times and has been the subject of much discussion over the years. The main problem with interpretation is the word AREPO, which is supposedly unknown to Latin scholars. As a result, it is usually treated as a coined personal name. According to master logologist Dmitri Borgmann in *Language On Vacation* (1965), the palindromic message, 'Sator Arepo tenet opera rotas', can be rendered as: 'Arepo, the sower, holds the wheels at work', or more elaborately: 'The reaper shall cease from his toil as the mower works his wheel'.

Until recently, no modern equivalent of the SATOR square existed, but there have been exciting developments. Early in 2007 the *New York Times* carried the story of Mr Tilan Astor, a tax evasion fugitive, who had been apprehended by police using tasers. While fleeing, he was apparently hit in the rear end by several barbs and subsequently ended up in a nearby hospital suffering from shock. After a short time complications arose when it was found that Mr Astor also had severe constipation. A rather hot enema was eventually administered, but it initially proved unsuccessful, so the patient had to undergo a second, more unpleasant procedure. The next day Mr Astor disappeared from the hospital without trace. Well, almost without trace. On the wall of a cubicle in the ward's toilets a strange little word-square was found:

RESAT  
ENEMA  
SERES  
AMENE  
TASER

What does it mean? And who is the mysterious Tilan Astor? All attempts to find him have been fruitless. Perhaps there is a clue in the square with the use of the old terms SERES (burns) and AMENE (pleasant) - notice the homophonic opposite 'a mean'. Surely it is just too much of a coincidence that Mr Astor's first name transposes to LATIN and his last to SATOR. Incidentally, his full name paratransposes to 'IT IS NOT REAL', but that's probably a red herring. Despite all this, the message in the word-square seems clear enough: 'Resat enema seres amene taser' - a repeated red-hot enema is more unpleasant than being tasered in the backside! It may not be quite as inspiring as the Latin square, but you can feel for the author nonetheless.

A couple of months later a similar square came to light further south. On 1 April 2007, a newspaper in Redan, Georgia, reported the visit of consumer advocate Ralph Nader to the city. While there, he was apparently admitted to hospital where he underwent minor bowel surgery, preceded by an enema. Interviewed after the operation, Nader was remarkably upbeat, reportedly quipping, "I must have been full of it. After the flush-out I was on a high, floating. It feels like they gave me dexies [dextroamphetamine pills]."

The article, attributed to one Suna McManus, carried the palindromic headline: 'Redan Enema Dexed Amene Nader', which can fortuitously be arranged to form the word-square below.

REDAN  
ENEMA  
DEXED  
AMENE  
NADER