SOUNDING OF THE PUN: THE OFFICIAL SPOONERISM GAME

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In my semi-definitive but now tragically out-of-print spoonerism book Cruel and Unusual Puns, I spoke somewhat disparagingly of a familiar type of children’s riddle. Example: What's the difference between a church bell and a burglar? One peals from the steeple; the other steals from the people.

My objection was that jests of this variety are invariably contrived. The paired phrases spoonerize but they are otherwise arbitrary and unrelated. In contrast, transposition wordplay that is equipped with a context—a story or other setup, preferably one that is natural and logical—qualify as esthetically and morally superior.

I still hold this view, but my position has evolved. I am reluctant to reject the "arbitrary" spoonerism genre in toto, in part because my archive contains lots of original specimens that aren't suited to a story or joke format. Fortunately, I realized that they might be appropriate for a brain-teasing quiz. At last, I reasoned, these orphans would find a good home.

Here's the drill: I supply a set of "definitions." From those clues, you must decipher the two intended spoonerized phrases. Sample problem: Antique thread-making device/Oration that receives accolades. Answer: Spinning wheel/Winning spiel.

Get the idea? Then sigh these on for tries! The openers are easiest, then the challenge becomes progressively tougher. Warning: some clues are tricky and unfair. When ready to surrender, please turn to Answers and Solutions.

1. Billiard equipment/Best seat in church
2. Scottish lair of legendary monster/What homeowners wish Jehovah's Witnesses would do
3. Popular ablation option/What occurred in Babel
4. Ethical system/À capella
5. 1996 presidential ticket/Sparkly center of a geode
6. Evil spell cast by sorceress/Why art critics dislike tacky pop culture
7. Parasitic passenger's aim/Mexican bean's fate
8. Epicurean mutton dish/Common computer problem
9. In-box alert/Cetacean sex
10. Make it easier for someone to follow/Pro bono
11. Plasterer's task/Clergyman's task
12. All-nighter/What to do if you distrust your butcher
13. Secretary of State/Method used to evaluate *American Idol* contestants
14. Poker player's bad luck/Destination of religious pilgrims
15. Brown-bagging/End of script falls flat
16. Quiet combat/Function of gold
17. Trendy casual shoe/Soap opera star's assistant
18. Anti-monarchists' plot/Insensitive bear
19. Mail-order clothing catalog/When very small children go to sleep
20. Intern's routine/Scavenger's unpleasant work
21. Pressure is on/Podiatrist's objective
22. Informal survey/Walk the dog
23. They struggle to make ends meet/Incipient hostilities
24. Leave it to chance/Rationing in China
25. Equitable outcome/Stock swindle
26. What restaurateurs encourage/Lack of self-confidence
27. Ecstatically happy/Why Peter Pan won't serve alcohol
28. Hesitant pace/Unoriginal management of subordinates
29. Classy café at NYC's Plaza Hotel/Sailor's favored destination
30. Exoneration for jealous murderer/Why women hate clunky designer styles