

### MISSED MANNERS

With a low buzzing noise, the portal to the secret mountain fortress swung open. Secret Agent X19 welcomed the two Secret Agent trainees, Bob and Miranda, to his lair.

"You're just in time for dinner," he said, petting the fat iguana perched on his shoulder. X19 explained the purpose of the evening as they walked through the enormous, stainless-steel building to the dining room.

"This is a test. Your table manners will be evaluated. I have used my keen powers of observation to note that for many people, manners are important. Even when they're vanquishing bad guys, secret agents always have impeccable manners. Tonight's winner will be promoted to full Secret Agent after this dinner. You will be issued an official agency jet pack, a miniature communicator, and a decoder ring. The person with the worst manners will be flushed back to civilization through the sewage system."

"Sounds fair to me," said Bob, squinting at Miranda.

"It's a deal," said Miranda, glaring back at Bob. The three agents sat at the table.

The butler began serving dinner. X19 picked a handful of peas off the plate as the butler walked past, and popped them into his mouth. "Cooked to perfection," he said. Bob and Miranda waited until everyone had been served, and then began eating.

"What is this?" Bob asked. "It looks like day-old iguana."

The iguana on X19's shoulder hissed. "It is chicken," said X19 frostily.

Miranda took a small bite of the chicken, chewed slowly and swallowed with great difficulty. "The chicken is delicious. The sauce is completely inedible."

X19 said, "I am eager to see which one of you passes the test."

The butler served Miranda some quiche. "Thank you," she said. She planted her elbows on the table, leaned forward, and said, "I have a good idea how this will work out."

X19 smiled as he took a roll, buttered it, and wolfed it down.

Bob had some lobster stuck between his teeth, so he excused himself and removed it in the restroom. While Bob was away, Miranda observed X19. His tongue darted out and licked his lips. His reptilian eyes flicked around the room. People really do start to resemble their pets, Miranda thought.

X19 leaned close to Miranda. It was all she could do not to scream, he was so creepy. "The sewer system flush is my favorite part," he said. "I'm really looking forward to it."

"Me too," said Miranda.

When Bob returned, Miranda daintily dabbed her lips with her napkin. "It is time," she said. She motioned to the butler, who threw a net over X19 and dragged him, struggling, out of the dining room.

"How very surprising," Secret Agent Bob said. From the other end of the building came a loud flushing noise.

"Manners are important," said Secret Agent Miranda.

"Shall we try out our new jet packs?" said Secret Agent Bob.

"Yes, let's," said Miranda.