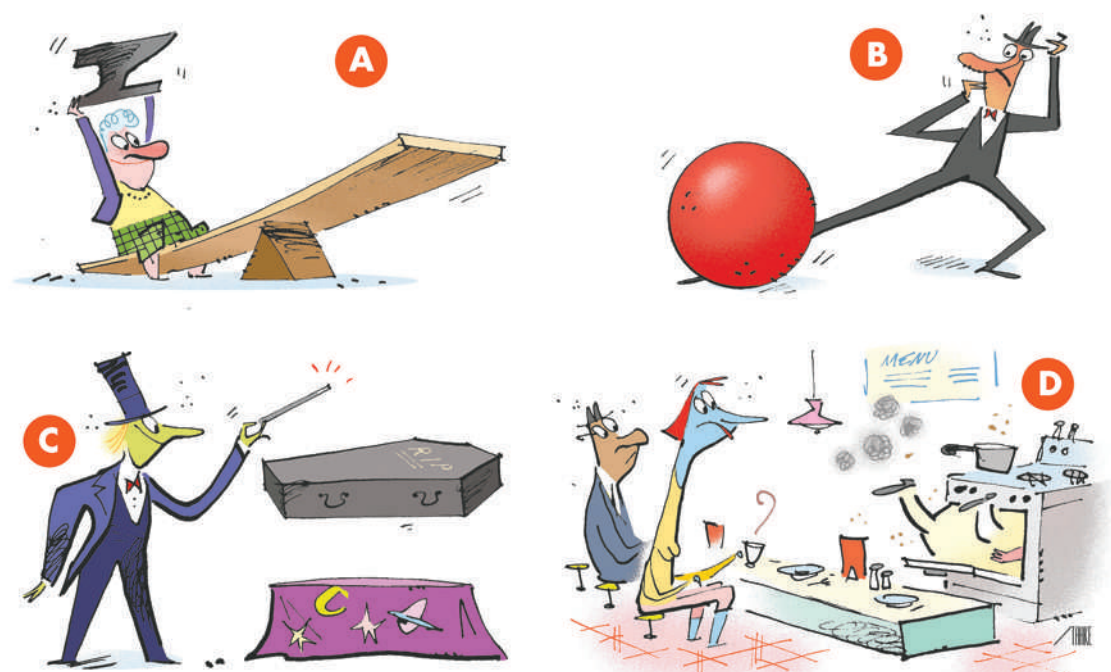


DIVERSIONS

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Musements: Winning (and losing) what-ifs

BY PAT MYERS

In **Week 1304**, we asked you to posit a "what-if" question and answer it.

4th place

What if there were an alternate universe where your cat did not follow you to the bathroom? You'd just sit there and talk to yourself, I guess. (Robyn Carlson, Keyser, W.Va.)

3rd place

What if night suddenly became day, and day became night? I'm sorry, what were you saying? I was checking my phone. (Ivans Kuskevics, Takoma Park)

2nd place and the cattle-dung-paper journal and pizzle dog chew:

What if anagrams always came true? Robert Mueller could TRAP A FOUL MAN just by using PAUL MANAFORT. (Jon Gearhart, Des Moines)

And the winner of the Lose Cannon:

What if M.C. Escher had designed the entrance to the Philadelphia Museum of Art? Rocky would still be climbing those steps. (Jesse Frankovich, Grand Ledge, Mich.)

If-bombs: Honorable mentions

What if instead of the Stanley Cup it was a Stanley Jockstrap? It would be easier to hold above your head, but players probably wouldn't drink out of it so much. (Jeff Shirley, Richmond)

If Christine Blasey Ford hadn't testified, we might still be wondering what Lindsey Graham's and Brett Kavanaugh's tonsils look like. (Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

What if "Casablanca" had Grocho Marx as Rick instead of Humphrey Bogart? Ilsa's request would be: "Play it, Sam. Play 'Pop Goes the Weasel.'" (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

What if "Breakfast at Tiffany's" had instead been "Breakfast at IHOP"? The lead character would be named Holly Goheavily — and would not be played by Audrey Hepburn. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

What if Alexander Graham Bell had invented automatic dialing? By Election Day 1876, everyone would have been annoyed by endless robo-calls to vote for Rutherford B. Hayes. (Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

What if all your friends jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge? "Really, Mom, are we gonna do this now?" (Hildy Zampella, Alexandria)

What if America really were a Christian nation? We'd care for the poor, welcome strangers and be much stronger advocates for including bingo in the Olympics. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

If China hadn't developed coins as a medium of exchange somewhere around 1000 B.C., Cuba Gooding Jr. would have yelled, "Show me the item or service of reasonably equivalent value!" (Duncan Stevens)

What if the Habsburg nobles in

New contest for Week 1308: Picture this — or these

It's time once again for another contest in which we try to assist Almost Forever Style Invitational Cartoonist Bob Staake in figuring out just what is going on in these pictures — because frankly, he has no clue. Do u? **This week you have two choices: (1) Write a caption for one or more of these pictures, or (2) explain what is wrong with the picture.**

Extra fun: While Bob still doesn't know what the pictures are about, he designed them so that you might also combine two pictures into one — or all four into one — and describe that instead.

For the sanity of the Empress, who would like to sort the entries before judging them: **Please submit each entry — you still get a total of 25 — in this format: Picture A: [caption, description, whatever] — with the heading and description on the same line. Pictures A and C: [same thing] All four pictures: [zubzubzub]**

Submit entries at the website wapo.st/enter-invite-1308. Winner gets the **Lose Cannon**, our Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a lovely — well, it's actually white with plain black lettering — **coffee mug labeled "World's Okayest Girlfriend."** It's absolutely perfect for Valentine's Day! Donated by Loser Bill Munson.

Other runners-up win our "You Gotta Play to Lose" Loser Mug or our "Whole Fools" Grocery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, "We've Seen Better" or "IDiot Card." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). **Deadline is Monday night, Dec. 10;** results published Dec. 30 (online Thursday, Dec. 27). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline for this week's results is by Duncan Stevens; Jesse Frankovich wrote this week's honorable-mentions subhead. Join the Style Invitational Devotees on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev. "Like" Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.

THE STYLE CONVERSATIONAL The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. Especially if you plan to enter this week's contest, check it out at wapo.st/styleconv.

Prague had a trampoline outside their window, so when they were defenestrated they just kept bouncing back up to the window, yelling, "Boi-oi-oi-oinnng . . . boi-oi-oi-oinnng . . ." to the Bohemians inside? The Thirty Years' War would've been awesome! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

What if cats could talk? It wouldn't matter much, since their vocabulary would consist of "feed me" and "so what?" (Mark Raffman, Reston)

What if shirt sleeves were made of sandpaper? Maybe fourth-grade boys would learn to locate the tissues in the classroom. (Dave Airozo, Silver Spring, and, yep, a fourth-grade teacher)

What if water did not become less dense when it froze? James Cameron would not be the king of the world. (Mark Calandra, Sudbury, Mass.)

What if we could become the movie character we most admire? I'm going with Woody from "Toy Story," so I could make the world feel just a little bit better every time they see me. My second choice is Freddy Krueger. (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

What if the human brain had evolved without the capability for imagination? Uhh . . . (Brendan Beary)

What if pregnant women grew temporary prehensile tails? It would be awesome to have that extra hand that moms always need! Why didn't God think of this?! (Connie Akers, Radford, Va.)

What if English were written from right to left? .ti ot desu teg d'ew sseug I (Frank Mann, Washington)

What if spray paint cans had spell-check? Then that '60s graffiti would have read "CLAPTON IS GOOD." (J. Larry Schott, West Plains, Mo.)

What if you inexplicably found yourself back in college, about to take a big test, only you

couldn't remember where the classroom was? If you know, please tell me. I always wake up before I can find out. (Eric Nelkin, Silver Spring)

What if you were happy and you knew it but you didn't have any hands? Whoever was singing to you sure would feel like a heel. (Jesse Frankovich)

What if, someday in the far future, all of Earth's population is biracial? I'll bet there would still be arguments over who's the most biracial. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

What if the president boarded Air Force One using a jet bridge and not a staircase? We'd have gone on assuming he knew how to close an umbrella. (Jeff Strong, Fairfax)

What if pigs could fly? Nicolas Cage would have starred in "Bacon Air"! (John McCooley, Rehoboth Beach, Del.)

What if I don't get ink in this contest? But I've got to! I promised poor sick little Billy in the hospital that I would, so I've just GOT to. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

If I typed Style Invitational entries in the dark, then wouldn't get ink. (Duncan Stevens)

What if Penélope Cruz called me to say she's crazy in love with me and wanted us to run away to some remote Caribbean island for a life of wild, wanton, smoldering passion? I wouldn't be wasting my time on this stupid contest, I'll tell you that. (Brendan Beary)

More honorable mentions in the online Invite at wapo.st/invite1308.

TWO contests still running — deadline for both is Monday night, Dec. 3: Parodies of holiday songs (see wapo.st/invite1306) and to make a new word by replacing one letter with another one (wapo.st/invite1307).

L.A. TIMES SUNDAY PUZZLE

EDITED BY RICH NORRIS AND JOYCE NICHOLS LEWIS

"HANGERS-ON"
By MARK McCLAIN and GEORGE TELFER

- ACROSS**
1 Avian mimic
5 Selling point?
10 Weasel cousin
15 Passed quickly, as time
19 Pigeon calls
20 Kind of column
21 Stands at lectures
22 Lead in a movie, say
23 What the acrobatic landlady liked to do?
26 Wile E. Coyote supplier
27 Run-of-the-mill
28 Former LeBron team, on sports tickers
29 Lost on purpose
31 Eats, possibly
32 TruTV show for board game enthusiasts?
37 Sorority letter
39 Former LeBron team, on sport tickers
40 Takes a breather
41 "The Simpsons" retailer
44 "Chain of Fools" name
47 Out in the yacht
49 Bite playfully
52 When a pro might practice at Augusta National?
56 Departed
57 "Once ___ a time . . ."
58 Von yacht
59 Name in a Tolstoy title
60 Formal split
62 Electric wheels
64 Second-tallest living bird
66 Inform
68 Skin-related
69 Gym employees for those getting in shape fast?
73 Don't hold your breath
76 Antelope playmates
77 Musical muscle car
78 Agave plant
82 "The wisdom of many and the wit of one": Russell
84 Dread
86 Bigelow product
88 Often painful crack
89 Cut with a small knife

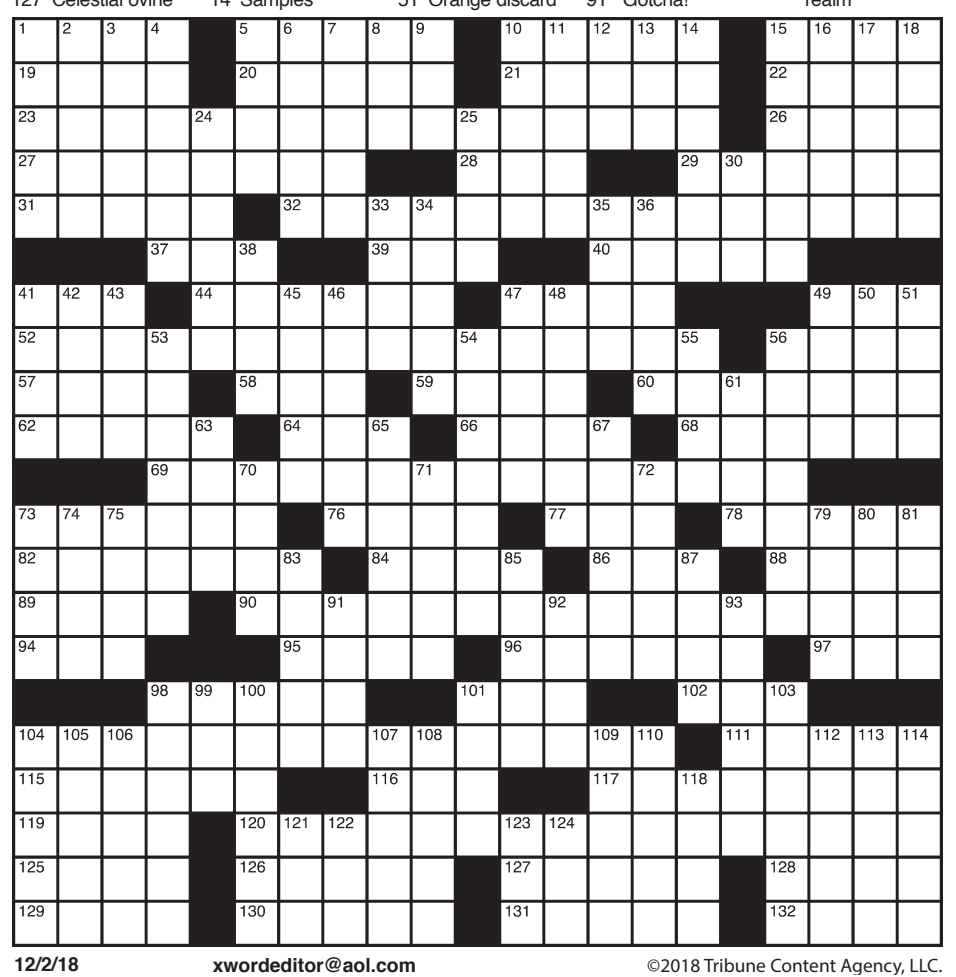
- 90 Gold medal winners at the Renaissance fair?
94 Thesaurus wd.
95 Doing nothing
96 Cabinet department
97 Minute
98 China's Zhou ___
101 QB's stat
102 Shocked text letters
104 Wedding chapel's main form of advertising?
111 Vacation destination
115 Caroline Islands components
116 Rescue squad initials
117 Rant
119 Fictional plantation
120 Where bills should be put after an audit?
125 "Slippery" trees "___ but I could ___ be wrong"
127 Celestial ovine

- 128 Shuts down
129 Colorist's supply
130 Price enders, often
131 Category
132 Obliterate, in Oxford
DOWN
1 Menial work
2 "___ it!"
3 ___ plume
4 Have high hopes
5 Hindu
6 Start of an adage about humanity
7 Sandwich shop order
8 Often tickled bone?
9 "Foucault's Pendulum" author
10 Diagonal sail extender
11 Now
12 Pindar piece
13 Make widely known
14 Samples

- 15 Stadium staples
16 Eastwood's "Bronco Billy" co-star Sondra
17 Fictional hunter in a floppy hat
18 Signs of garden neglect
24 GM subsidiary
25 Guy's girlfriend
30 Comedy ___
33 One may be dull
34 Trek pack animal
35 Algonquian language
36 Picked up
38 Trojan War god
41 Touch
42 Nickname for José
43 Eerie fliers
45 Old anesthetic
46 Like many crosswords
47 "Up" star
48 WWII prison camp
49 Standard
50 Subject of Huascar
51 Orange discard

- 53 Legally off base
54 Baited insect collector
55 Beans or greens
56 Scallia's successor
61 Enhancing word
63 Shaft between wheels
65 Handy
67 Trivial
70 Vivacious
71 Words near an "F," maybe
72 Musical handicap
73 Omar of "In Too Deep"
74 Doctor's order
75 French ___
79 Consider carefully, with "over"
80 Attention
81 Basilica recess
83 Astros catcher
85 Bonnie Blue's dad
87 2012 Ben Affleck film
91 "Gotcha!"

- 92 Casino game requirement, often
93 Symphonic disc
98 Mercedes line
99 Kings' org.
100 City from which Vasco da Gama sailed
101 NBA part
103 Driver's license info
104 Hardly favored
105 Volta's birthplace
106 Musical Mel
107 86-Across variety
108 Drops
109 German river, to locals
110 Less risky
112 Gemini docking target
113 Lumps for Miss Muffet
114 German state
118 Climbed
121 "Exodus" protagonist
122 "The Situation" Room "airer"
123 It's game
124 Longtime Eur. realm



Answers to last week's puzzle below.

HOROSCOPE

BY JACQUELINE BIGAR

HAPPY BIRTHDAY | Dec. 2: This year, you have an insatiable curiosity about life and certain individuals. As you get to know and understand a set of key people in your life, you might choose to reveal more of yourself. If you are single, make sure that you get to know each potential suitor well before deciding whom to date. You could meet someone of significance this year. If you are attached, you and your sweetie will experience the vicissitudes of life together. Libra sees you as romantic.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
A loved one could be challenging. You might be more irritated by this person's behavior than you realize. For the sake of peace, you could be swallowing your anger. The source of your irritation dates back several months.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Pace yourself, knowing full well that you need a break from your demanding schedule that is likely to continue for a while. A partner might change their tone, which could be a relief.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
Tension builds around you. A loved one could be cranky and difficult to deal with. A boss might interfere with your Sunday routine. A partner becomes challenging over money. You will need to have a discussion about this, like it or not.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
You instinctively know that you need to stay close to home to follow through on part of your to-do list for the holidays. Whether it's decorating the house, writing cards or wrapping presents, you feel happiest in your own environment.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
You can make waves and bypass cantankerous people with ease. What you discover is that you need to honor certain priorities involving your home and family. Your day will not flow until you do just that. Later on, let the fun begin.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
Your creativity mounts, and you reach a new level of effectiveness. You could be reorganizing and rethinking your holiday gift list. The more you funnel your creativity into your choices, the more your thoughtfulness will be appreciated.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
You wake up energized and ready to accommodate most people, and you're also ready to have a good time. Someone close to you wants more time with you; make it your pleasure.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
Do not allow someone else to minimize your plans. You might need a timeout before you can fully experience and embrace the holiday spirit. Do your best not to lose control of your schedule. You will enjoy the holidays more if you rest up now.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
You can make a difference with a friend, if you so choose. This person will be delighted to be your focal point today. Be more open to the high energy of those around you. Know that you will feel better for the experience of loosening up.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
You might want to consider making a change. You often feel restricted. Consider how you feel, and figure out what you need to do to change those feelings. Do not be fearful of facing an ongoing issue. You will handle it soon enough.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
Your mind sometimes moves too quickly. Consider some of the potential issues and goals that come from your inner thoughts, as they might have tremendous strength and validity.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
You attract the attention of a co-worker or boss. You have all kinds of shopping and errands to do for the holidays. Do not forget a loved one who would love to join you. Stop for a hot chocolate or eggnog together. You'll be happier as a result.

Answers to last week's puzzle.

