

The Style Invitational

WEEK 333: GET A LOAD OF THIS TA-TA

Diogenes Gump by Chuck Smith, Woodbridge

Diogenes Gump: He wanders the nation's capital, introducing himself to people. After he shakes your hand, you are compelled to tell the truth for 24 hours.

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BY BOB STANKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Above and elsewhere on this page are the winners of last week's contest, in which you were invited to create an episode for a new comic strip. Your next assignment is to take this concept further, and submit more episodes for any of the three winning strips: "Diogenes Gump," "Bryan Winter, Scumball" or "Dead Presidents Society."

Each gag should be contained in either three panels or four. Don't draw your entry, just describe the action and dialogue. In the first month of the new millennium, the Post will publish the results of this contest. It will be a first in American journalism: An entire comic strip, or comic strips, written by the readers. It may even become a regular feature. You must submit your entries to the usual addresses anytime before Nov. 15, but great cartoons will be identified and drawn as they arrive, so there is some advantage to speed.

Meanwhile, Next Week's Contest is ... actually, there is no next week's contest. Folks, think of this as the first day of the rest of your life, or what would be your life if you had a life, which you obviously do not if you are a regular contributor to The Style Invitational.

Beginning today, The Style Invitational goes on a six-month sabbatical, occasioned by The Washington Post's decision to herd the Czar and his family into a dank, windowless room and shoot them in the head with inefficient firearms. (Actually, The Post has dispatched the Czar on a special, secret half-year assignment; The Invitational goes on vacation

because no one else possesses the vast talents necessary to replicate the Czar's wit and judgment, and also because no one, not even the janitor with the oceanic armpit stains and teeth that look like Fig Newtons, was willing to do it.) With the arrival of the new millennium, we may return with a new, invigorated Style Invitational, in a form yet to be determined. The Post's plans at this point are still as fluid as phlegm.

The first-prize winner of the cartoon contest will win the best prize in our illustrious history. Several years ago, legendary Washington Post TV columnist John Carmody, the greatest and most eloquent curmudgeon who ever lived, received an elaborate, expensive freebie in the mail from some video production company. Carmody reacted in his typically understated fashion: He ranted and stormed and growled about the stupid sons of so-and-sos who thought he could be bought with some damned doodad, and ordered his assistant, David Jackson, to throw it out, burn it, consign the thing to the fires of Hell. Well, David could not bring himself to do this. Instead he gave it to the Czar, who hid it in his office. Months passed. The great John Carmody typed his final three dots, and died. More months passed. At last, it is Time. The winner of the cartoon contest will receive a sturdy, living-room-quality wood and canvas director's chair. On the back slat, in white paint, it says: "Carmody." This prize is priceless.

All Runners-Up get the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser pen, plus the coveted Style Invitational Loser shirt. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries by Nov. 15 to The Style Invitational, Cartoonz, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; fax them to 202-334-4312; or submit them via e-mail to this address: losers@washpost.com. E-mail users: In the subject field, please write "Cartoonz." Please include your postal address and phone number. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. The Faerie of the Fine Print is saddened to announce the death of The Ear No One Reads. The end came peacefully. The Ear's final words were: "Wait, I see something. It, it seems to be ... a light. A light at the end of ... a protoscope." Employees of The Washington Post and members of their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 330,

In which we asked for some pronouncements in NerdSpeak, which is, basically, tedious nitpicky.

◆ Third Runner-up: The expression "You can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose, but you can't pick your friend's nose" is woefully inaccurate. There is no physical barrier to picking the nose of another person. The barrier would be one of social acceptability. A more accurate statement would be "You can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose, but you may not etc." (Jamie Eckman, Springfield)

◆ Second Runner-Up: One should not say "Today is my birthday," since a person has only one birthday, the very day he was born. More properly, one should say "Today is the anniversary of my birthday." Assuming, of course, it is the anniversary of one's birthday. (Beth Baniszewski, Columbia)

◆ First Runner-Up: Whenever a woman tells me that she loves me with all her heart, I patiently explain that the heart is an autonomic blood pump incapable of emotion, and that her statement is therefore without meaning. No woman has made that mistake with me twice. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ And the winner of the Republican national convention memorabilia:

NerdSpeak? I think not. Really, you are talking about pedants, not nerds. A pedant is obsessively and needlessly precise about the smallest of details. A nerd, on the other hand, while adept technically, is often inarticulate and uncommunicative. You should distinguish clearly between the terms. (Marcia Reecer, Washington)

◆ Honorable mentions:

When you arrive with a guest and knock at the door, and the host inquires who it is, you must not respond "It's us." You must use the nominative plural of the pronoun, and you have to change both "it" and "is" to agree, whether or not you retain the contraction. Hence, you must say, "They are we." (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

Technically, one's favorite show is not "on" TV. A television is essentially a cathode-ray tube that sends a stream of electrons flying through a vacuum and hitting a phosphor-coated screen at the other end. The show is broadcast by the selective illumination of the phosphor, on the inner surface of the screen. Ergo, a show is "in" TV. (Michael Jahr, Washington)

"All-Beef" hot dogs are mislabeled. The FDA allows for 12 parts per million insect bodies, rodent hair and fecal matter in these products. Neither rodents nor insects are beef. The hot dogs should be relabeled "Ninety-Nine-Point-Nine-Nine-Eight-Eight Percent Beef." (Art Grinath, Takoma Park; Thad Humphries, Warrenton)

Those little white packets next to the NutraSweet should not be labeled "sugar." They should say "sucrose." Sugar could refer to glucose, or maltose or lactose, etc. (Beth Baniszewski, Columbia)

The best part of the Fourth of July is to bring a stopwatch to the fireworks, calibrated to the hundredth of a second, and then measure the time delay between the light flash and the sound of the explosion, and calculate distance to point of origin using 1,225 kilometers per hour as the speed of sound and then repeating the procedure from various locations. (Peter Hughes, Washington)

I just don't see the humor in the question "If nothing can stick to Teflon, how does Teflon stick to a frying pan?" After all, any densely packed short-chain polymer will form a strong covalent bond with metallic surfaces if it is applied in a thin film at high temperatures. (Malcolm Visser, Burke)

Once and for all, the chant is "Two, four, six, eight, whom do we appreciate?" (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Instead of RBIs, the baseball statistic should really be expressed RSL. (Martin Bredeck, Alexandria)

Hemingway's novel shouldn't have been titled "The Sun Also Rises," but "The Earth Also Rotates." (Martin Bredeck, Alexandria)

◆ Rookie of the Week: When Bart Simpson says "Don't have a cow, man," he is misspeaking. He should really say "Don't have a calf, man." (Bill Kabeiserman, Portland, Ore.)

Next Week: Getting a Life