

BY PAT MYERS

Report from Week 960

in which we invited you to write complimentary but goofy “reviews” for any of five household products sold through Amazon.com. More honorable mentions appear on the online Invite at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational (click on “Week 964”).



“Coats & Clark Dual Duty Thread 400 Yards – White”:

As a Mormon Republican, I wear a lot of white shirts. And because I’m “just folks,” when one of them gets a hole I never throw it out, or hand it to an assistant to fix, or have my personal tailor, Alessandro, weave me a new shirt immediately from the hair of an albino yak. Gosh, no. I mend it myself, using this humble thread and . . . some sort of thread-attaching device. By golly, I do. (*Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.*)

2 Winner of the pair of owl-vomit boluses:

Clipper-mate Pocket Comb 5” All Fine Teeth”:

O Sacred Tines! How rigid teeth delight To forge from chaos rows of ordered haire, Still plow the furrows, scourge of louse and mite, To render e’en the Gorgon passing faire. ’Tis sure the Bard of Avon oft didst tuck Like implement across the seething mane; A steal at 88 more than two buck: Dare bid anon, or cowering abstain? But hark! Take action ere this offer’s lost: If mate be bought, the shipping hath no cost. (*Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.*)

3 “Morton Iodized Salt, 26oz.”:

Yum! This tastes just like McDonald’s french fries, but it’s not fried and has no fat at all! (*Gregory Koch, Storrs, Conn.*)

4 “World’s Best Dish Cloths – Set of 12 – Assorted Colors”:

Sure, you can purchase other dish cloths, but you’ll need to buy these in the end anyway — just so you can wipe up your salty tears of regret from having bought the World’s Second Best Dish Cloth first. (*Art Grinath, Takoma Park*)

Sub-blurbs: honorable mentions

Dual Duty Thread 400 Yards:

What a bargain — I measured this out and found that you actually get 402.56 yards of thread! (*Julia*

Shawhan, Silver Spring, a First Offender)

I found this thread especially good for playing Hostage with your child’s Barbie dolls. It’s strong enough to keep them tied to the Barbie Dream

House Chandelier by the wrists and ankles, but also versatile enough to give way if the child starts ripping at it in panic . . . (*Daniel Rosen, Washington, who last got ink nine years ago*)

Morton Iodized Salt, 26oz:

Nothing coats the rim of a blue-rim margarita glass like Morton’s. The 26-ounce size is just about right for a Jimmy Buffett concert weekend. And when’s the last time you saw a Parrothead with a goiter? (*John McCooey, Rehoboth Beach, Del.*)

This product works great for killing the slugs in my garden. I just roll the cylinder between the rows and it smushes them really good. Please send me the next size up so I can deal with the gophers. (*David Genser, Poway, Calif.*)

I’m not sure if it’s the grain size or the iodine, but this salt is much better than kosher or sea salt. Just sprinkle on any open wound and oh, oooooh YES! (*Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.*)

World’s Best Dish Cloths:

In this candidate’s opinion, a set of these makes the ideal high school graduation gift. Not only are they good for drying dishes, they’re also just right for shining shoes, buffing hubcaps and many other jobs you can attain without attending some elitist college like the ones I’ll be sending my kids to. (*Melissa Balmain*)

Clipper-mate Pocket Comb 5”

For guys like me with unruly back hair, the fine teeth of the Clipper-mate pocket comb are a godsend. Now I never go on a date without one of these in my back pocket. I only wish that finding women who are into social grooming were so simple. (*Kevin Dopart, Washington*)

Next week: The End of Our Rhops, or Sub-blurbs



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THIS WEEK’S CONTEST: WEEK 964

The Grocery Bag?

We’re always trying to think of new ways to lose. Now we’ve decided to add to our choice of runner-up prizes — currently the coveted Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug — a featherweight but spacious (20-by-16-by-6-inch) non-woven polypropylene tote bag, that pseudo-fabric kind that’s often used as reusable grocery bags or as totes for convention swag. We’re going to order 100 of them. The Empress is especially jazzed about this plan because (a) she doesn’t have to stock them in different sizes, like T-shirts; (b) she doesn’t have to worry that they’ll shatter in shipping, like mugs; and (c) they cost less than either of those options — The Post doesn’t exactly have wads of money to toss around these days.

What’s the bag going to look like? That’s where you come in! This week: **Suggest a design and/or slogan to go on the side of the ardently desired Style Invitational Loser Bag;** our big-whoop-artist-who-slums-for-the-Invite Bob Staake will do the actual artwork. We’ll be including, for sure, The Washington Post logo, the words “Style Invitational” and our Web address; fortunately we have a nice big 12-by-8-inch space to work with. We can use two colors plus the color of the bag itself (which will depend on what design we use). The design will be on one side of the bag. It’s fine if you just describe your design to us in words, but if you’d like to make a graphic depiction, you may include it as an attachment to your e-mail.

This week, the winner may choose between the bag and the usual Inker, the Style Invitational trophy. All runners-up, however, each get one of these bags. Because how better to really lose — to get second, third or fourth place — than to get a prize plastered with the entry that beat you?

Honorable mentions, as usual, get a lusted-after Loser magnet. First Offenders get a tree-shaped air “freshener” (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, April 2; results published April 22 (online April 20). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week. Include “Week 964” in your e-mail subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational. The revised title for next week and the subhead for this week’s honorable mentions are both by Mae Scanlan. Join the Style Invitational Devotees on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev.



STYLE CONVERSATIONAL Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join us at washingtonpost.com/stylconversational.



ELIOT LEE HAZEL/WARNER BROS.

PLUGGING AWAY: “Noctourniquet” is a complex, somber technical marvel by a band that’s been together for more than a decade.

POP CD REVIEW

Mars Volta NOCTOURNIQUET



It’s surely a total and unhappy coincidence that the Mars Volta will release their latest disc, “Noctourniquet,” mere weeks before their mothership band, beloved prog-punkers At the Drive-In, reunite for a paycheck show at Coachella.

ATDI are mythical partly (mostly?) because they broke up before they had a chance to go downhill. The less fabled, if more

accomplished, Mars Volta (assembled by two former ATDI members, singer Cedric Bixler-Zavala and composer/guitarist Omar Rodríguez-López) have been grimly plugging away for more than a decade. These days, their proggy post-rock is just as likely to evoke Mastodon, a band with harder-hitting riffs but an equally dense mythology, as it is ATDI.

Early reports suggested “Noctourniquet” was influenced by superhero myths, but it doesn’t seem to be about anything in particular: It’s really about everything, about how many notes, ideas, guitar solos, genres and sounds can be crammed into one song, into one verse, without

overloading its circuits.

The answer: A lot. “Noctourniquet” is a monument to its own excess. It’s a technical marvel, though one with little joy in it. It’s somber and brilliant, horribly pretentious and unnecessarily complex. Perhaps inevitably, it includes forays into electro-prog (on the busy, visceral “Lapochka”) alongside the band’s usual dystopian retro-jazz (“Dyslexicon,” awesome and unfathomable) and dolorous ballads like the gloomy, gorgeous “Empty Vessels Make the Loudest Sound,” which is simultaneously one of the most and least accessible songs the band has ever done.

— Allison Stewart