

Style Invitational

by Pat Myers

Report from Week 968

in which we asked you for stupidly funny research grant proposals: We figured that this contest would draw lots off unny observational humor. But mostly we got unfunny, painfully old observational humor: toilet seat position, number of items in the express lane, raining after you wash the car. And, as always, alas, a joke about global warming being caused by politicians' hot air. We did, however, find a few imaginative proposals to fund with our shamefully generous prizes.

THE
WINNER
OF THE
INKIN'
MEMORIAL

Proposal: A study to determine whether Murphy's Law is true. Hypothesis: Although Murphy Law teaches that "if anything can go wrong, it will," the successful completion of this study, fraught it is with potential pitfalls, will expose that "law" as a fallacy. (Robert Schechter, Dix Hills, N.Y.)

2 Winner of the Redneck Wine Glass, made from a Mason jar: **2** Proposal: To examine the link between the obesity epidemic and global warming. Hypothesis: Since the Earth must work harder to spin with all those overweight people on it, the planet is overheating from all the exertion. (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)

3 Ice cream is stored optimally at minus-25 degrees Celsius, while human body temperature is a far higher 37 degrees Celsius. Since the body must burn calories to raise the temperature of the ice cream to body temperature, it stands to reason that consuming ice cream leads to weight loss. Perhaps such a diet will help combat our nation's obesity epidemic. (Luke Currano, Columbia)

4 In light of the difficulty in shutting down the Fukushima reactors, we seek a Nuclear Regulatory Commission grant to examine whether the on-offswitches on the nation's nuclear power plants should be changed to the sound-activated variety, such as The Clapper™. (David Genser, Poway, Calif.)

Thesis the rest: honorable mentions

Proposal: A study to determine the gregariousness of cockroaches. Hypothesis: Since the species *Blattella germanica* is well known to emerge from hiding shortly after a home is visited by dinner guests... (Beverly Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

Proposal: A study to determine the exothermic properties of U.S. currency. Hypothesis: It has been observed that the application of dollar bills to the thighs of professional ecdyasiasts causes the subjects to shed excess clothing. Further study suggests that higher-denomination bills accelerate this effect. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

Objective: Measure the safety benefits of text messaging in high-risk environments. Background: Annual highway fatalities have dropped by 10,000 during the past five years, while extensive texting by

drivers has increased exponentially. The research team proposes examining whether similar benefits could be found in hospital operating rooms and nuclear power plants. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Background: While many psychologists have studied the effect of money on happiness in the general population, there has been a lack of research of its effect directly on the population of scientists. Proposal: ... (Mark Pearson, Washington, a First Offender)

Proposal: A study to determine whether biologists are inadvertently causing species to become endangered. Hypothesis: Since many species on the endangered list have been given names such as "Furbish lousewort," "shiny pigtoe" and "sensitive joint-vetch," various plants and animals might be dying out from sheer embarrassment. (Megan Durham, Reston)



Surfed with a (grisly) smile: Our No. 2 prize.

In our team's preliminary studies, we have noticed that as ice cream sales increase at seaside resorts, so do shark attacks. We propose to examine why sharks are so attracted to ice cream ingested by humans, and determine how to reformulate the product to deter this effect. (Samuel Enriquez, Annapolis; Gregory Koch, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

Still running — deadline Monday night — is our book-pairing contest: See wapo.st/inv971.



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST: WEEK 972

Trends and neighbors

A jellyfish is like John Edwards: Even when it's washed up and dead in the water, people don't want to get anywhere near it.

Howard Stern
Desperate Housewives
Michael Phelps
Yemen
Jellyfish
Robert Pattinson
John Edwards
Same-sex marriage

Bristol Palin
Mark Zuckerberg
iPod
Beethoven
JPMorgan Chase
Game of Thrones
Mother's Day
Serena Williams

Here's a type of contest we've done lots of times: Choose any two items on the list above and explain how they are alike or different. But the twist this week, suggested by Loser Christopher Lamora, is that the items on the list were all listed as "trending" or "hot" topics last Sunday on washingtonpost.com, Twitter, Google News, etc. Given the briefer-than-a-thong half-lives of some trending topics, the Empress did choose the ones that at least would be recognizable four weeks from now, when we run the results.

Winner gets the Inkin' Memorial, the Style Invitational trophy. Second place wins this fine foot-tall papier-mache sculpture of a screaming human skeleton riding a surfboard. Donated by big-deal Washington Post editors and honorary Losers Lynn Medford and JeffLeen.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt, a yearned-for Loser Mug or the new, ardently desired Grossery Bag. Honorable mentions get a lusted-after Loser magnet. First Offenders get a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, May 28; results published June 17 (online June 15). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week. Include "Week 972" 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 wapo.st/StyleInv. The subhead for this week's honorable mentions is by Dave Prevar. Join the Style Invitational Devotees on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev.

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

POP CD REVIEW

Tank This Is How I Feel



There has been an R. Kelly-size hole in R&B ever since the great man went off the rails sometime in the mid-2000s. Singer-songwriter Tank, born Durrell Babbs and raised in Clinton, has long been positioned as a replacement, and he's a worthy, if slightly flavorless, heir, one of the genre's better belters but one of its least distinctive personalities.

He attempts to rectify this on

his new disc, "This Is How I Feel," a collection of modulated jams and bedroom ballads with superfluous outer space noises. Tank spends most of the disc convincing the listener that he feels feelings. Most of these feelings involve how much he misses you, the listener, and is sorry about that thing he did. On the disc's cover, he poses shirtless (Tank, who named one of his biggest hits "Sex Music," isn't here to waste time) and somber, like he's really thinking hard about your feelings.

It's too bad, then, that he kicks things off with "Lonely," a slightly electro-fied tale of smarmy woe, in which Tank explains that he's already replaced you with a

new girl, but he feels bad because she won't do Those Things to him, the ones that You Did. It's the least sympathetic miss-you song since "Stan," and that's before Chris Brown shows up.

Tank shifts between a sure-footed falsetto and a Seal-like tenor, all in the service of songs that should be better, songs whose relentless martial drums and synth-y blurps will one day inexorably evoke the late winter of 2011. He's better at the ballads, and he likes them sticky: The last track, "Lost It All," is one of those extravagantly self-pitying, "Heaven, I know you hear me" ballads that, it will surprise no one, brings R. Kelly to mind.

— Allison Stewart

SENSITIVE MAN: Singer-songwriter Tank wishes to let you, the listener, know that he feels feelings.



PATRICK HOELCK