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Style Conversational Week 1449: All together now

The Empress of The Style Invitational discusses this week’s portmanteau contest and winning Spelling Bee poems



Loser David Genser got ink in the Czar’s 1998 portmanteau name contest with “Madonna Reed: A 1950s TV housewife who could do all the housework and still have dinner and an orgy ready when her hubby came home.” (Madonna in 2015; Donna Reed in 1958) (Wikipedia, Creative Commons)

By Pat Myers



August 12, 2021 at 5:45 p.m. EDT

Before we get going today with our new contest — [Week 1449](#) — and the [results of Week 1445](#), I want to catch you up on some news that was settled on just this morning: **The Flushies** — the Loser Community’s annual awards/potluck/songfest — are being moved by one day and a few miles: The fete will now be **Sunday afternoon, Sept. 19, in Potomac, Md.**, in the spacious backyard (or, if weather demands, the spacious rec room) of newbie Loser Steve Leifer.

The change is yet another prompted by Our Current Situation: Original host Sam Mertens has two kids who aren’t of vaccine age, and things have just gotten to be too scary again. The move from Saturday to Sunday was prompted by the work schedule of Loser of the Year honoree Jonathan Jensen; he’s a bassist for the Baltimore Symphony, which decided it’d have an afternoon concert that Saturday. The move to Sunday will also enable Loserdom’s observant Jews to attend. For obvious reasons, **everyone must be fully vaccinated**, so no young kids this time.

The Flushies are always a great way to meet new Losers and reconnect with the veterans, and to enjoy the talents of our Loserbards as we sing parodies — Jonathan himself has volunteered to play piano — almost always including one or more songs written just for the occasion. You don’t have to be an inking Loser to attend, just a fan of the Invite. And if you’ve found your way to this column, you more than qualify.



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As I've done in the past with the Flushies and the winter party, I'll send out an email invitation via Evite within the next few weeks, so that it's easier to see who's coming, and to update everyone with any important news. I'll use earlier lists to compile this one, so if you'd like to be added (or to make sure you're on it to begin with), email me at pat.myers@washpost.com.

Like all Loser events, the Flushies aren't sponsored at all by The Washington Post; it's all the work of Uber-Loser Elden Carnahan and a gang of volunteers. I just have people's emails and more of a way to get the word out. And if you'd like to help plan things (including working on a song), contact me and I'll send you their way.

Meanwhile, Sam and Laurie Mertens are still on to host the potluck **Loser Brunch on Sunday, Aug. 22**, on their big front porch in upper Silver Spring; they're good with up to 20 or so people — and they're even letting me show up — so RSVP promptly to mertenshosting@gmail.com and they'll give you further details. (Let me know as well that you're coming.)



And also:

Lim from lim: Catch the latest You're Invited podcast

Especially if you're a fan of great limericks, be sure to catch the latest episode (Season 2, Episode 3) of [You're Invited](#), the all-about-the-Invite podcast. This time, host Mike Gips Zoom-interviews Hall of Famer Brendan Beary, who in addition to shouting out his favorite entries of the past week's Invite results, looks back on a still-unique Invitational: the Week 678 Limerick Smackdown. In our 2006 Limerixicon, before I instituted the 25-entry limit, Brendan had submitted 43 excellent limericks ... and Chris Doyle had sent me an even hundred. I was so overwhelmed that four weeks later, I asked Brendan and Chris — and only Brendan and Chris — to compete against each other and write a limerick in each of 10 categories specified by the Empress. (The categories included a limerick that specified at least five body parts; one about an obscure mammal; and a note from George W. Bush to Condoleezza Rice.) The results were stellar; hear all about it from Brendan and Mike.



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Let's do the mash: This week's portmanteau name contest

Some contests you can really do just once. For example, back in 2003 we had a contest for cynical turns on inspirational platitudes, and the results — [take a look](#) — were classic (winner: “Never say die. I’ve tried, and it doesn’t actually make people die.” — Tom McCudden). But are 30 other platitudes out there that would generate different, but just as funny, snarky takes? I’m guessing no. (I am, however, open to persuasion with some great new examples.)

But there are always new names in the news — not to mention, uh, all the well-known real and fictional names of all time. And so here we are again with a contest to overlap two names — or one name and some other thing into another name, then describe the result.



For these portmanteau jokes to work, the reader will have to recognize and be superficially familiar with not only both names, but with how the description applies. To take a random example from 1998, “**Tom Daschle Hammett: Author of ‘The Maltese Donkey’**” (Stephen Dudzik): First, Sen. Tom Daschle, at the time the Senate minority (Democratic) leader; second, Dashiell Hammett, the author; third, Hammett wrote “The Maltese Falcon.” (And of course that a donkey is the symbol of Democrats.) Daschle left Congress in 2005 and isn’t a household name anymore, but I’d think that in 1998, readers would easily get everything in Steve’s joke, and laugh at the book name. If it were written for 2021, not so much. Unlike in 1998, the online Invite lets me add an explanatory link in the entry. But it’s way better not to have to explain the joke at all; it’s a humor column, not a puzzle.

We’ve had various formats and rules for the names. In Week 489 in 2003, the common element needed to be spelled the same way; late contests didn’t require that — and we don’t today, either. In 2012, the gimmick was to combine two names into a Twitter handle, but the names didn’t necessarily have to overlap. I ended up using the wording from Week 866 in 2010, “Natalie Portmanteau.”

To anticipate another question: The directions say to “start” with a name and then “append” another name or something else, but it doesn’t say whether the something-else can *begin* the result. My ruling: If it’s funny, go ahead.



If the common element has different spellings, which one to use? Normally, use the one that seems clearest and most natural, but sometimes one way will be funnier, as with Meg Sullivan’s “Rembrandt Van Rijn Tin Tin” from 1998. But that element will have to be pronounced the same, or pretty darn close, or the joke will flop.

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pronounced the same, or pretty dang close, or the joke will flop.

For Ye Olde Inspiration & Guidance, here's some assorted ink from previous Style Invitational name-mash contests, plus links to the complete results (sometimes you'll have to scroll past the week's new contest).

Report from Week 287 [1998], in which you were asked to replicate the "Before and After" game from "Wheel of Fortune," beginning with a name and adding to it a word or expression that creates a bridge of words. [[Text file of complete results here](#)]

Fifth Runner-Up: Rembrandt Van Rijn Tin Tin: The night watchdog. (Meg Sullivan, Potomac)



Fourth Runner-Up: Heimlichtenstein: A small country firmly lodged between Austria and Switzerland. (Sandra Hull, Arlington)

Third Runner-Up: Darryl F. Zanuck nyuk nyuk: A slapstick filmmaker. (Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

Second Runner-Up: Roseanne Boleyn: Queen who kept talking after being beheaded. (David Genser, Arlington) [EWWW. We would never do a beheading joke now, especially in reference to a particular person.]

First Runner-Up: Anais Nintendo Gameboy: The pocket toy you really don't want to give your kids. (Greg and Kristine Griswold, Falls Church)

And the winner of the snake wine (back in the pre-trophy day, the winner got the unique prize): Thomas Jefferson Clinton — President who penned the famous introductory lines: "We hold these half-truths to be legally accurate ..." (Douglas Riley, Reston)



Honorable Mentions:

T.S. Eliot Ness — Poet who wrote "The Love Song of J. Edgar Hoover." (Ralph Scott, Washington)

Alan Greenspandex — An ugly way to contain inflation. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

Tom Daschle Hammett — Author of the Maltese Donkey. (Stephen Dudzik, Silver Spring)

Attila the Hunchback of Notre Dame — Nobody made fun of him. (Niels Hoven, Silver Spring)

Marilyn Monroe Doctrine — Post-Clinton regulations requiring all future presidential

bimbos to be at least 30 years old. (Philip Vitale, Arlington; Susanne Lazanov, Reston)
[Bimbos! Times really have changed.]

Madonna Reed — A 1950s TV housewife who could do all the housework and still have dinner and an orgy ready when her hubby came home. (David Genser, Arlington)

Shoeless Joe Mama — The man who threw the World Series because the pitcher was so fat, when someone told him to haul butt, he had to make two trips. (Jessica Henig, Washington)



Betty Friedan Quayle — Author of “The Femanin Misteeek.” (David Genser, Arlington)

Grace Slick Willie — Lead singer for the William Jefferson Airplane. (Daniel E. Klein, McLean; Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Report from Week CLVI (actually Week 489; [complete results here](#)):

Third Runner-Up: Mr. T.S. Eliot: “I pity the fool, wanderin' around half-deserted streets, walkin' on beaches, talkin' 'bout peaches, mournin' his lost manhood. I pity the fool.” (Dan Steinberg, Bethesda)

First Runner-Up: Marion Barry Bonds: “The pitch set me up.” (Dave Zarrow, Herndon; Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

And the winner of the sugar-cookie-scented Eggbutt Horseball: Al Frankenstein’s Monster: “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and, gosh darn it, I’m a big fat idiot.” (Beverly Miller, Clarendon)

Honorable Mentions:

Ariel Sharon Stone: A political leader who promises a glimpse of the Promised Land. (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Auntie Eminem: Dorothy, git down in the cella / Cuz I ain’t no Rockefella / I cain’t take no persecutions / From you or them Lilliputians (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington; Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

Montezuma Thurman: Starring in “Poop Fiction.” (Trish Hackman, Springfield, and Maureen Langan, New York)

Raggedy Ann Coulter: She’s really cute, but we gotta be grateful her mouth is sewn shut. (Susan Reese, Arlington)

Lenny Bruce Lee: Master of Kung Fu— (Frank Mullen III, Aledo, Ill.)

Report From Week 866 (2010), in which we asked for two overlapping names, or a name overlapping with another word or expression (the spellings of the overlapping part of the names didn’t have to be identical): ([complete results here](#))

The winner of the Inker: Mike Tyson Chicken: “Mmm, tastes just like ear!” (Malcolm Fleschner, Palo Alto, Calif.)

2. the winner of the battery-operated Loser Liquor Dispenser: Edgar Allan Popeil: Quoth the Raven, “Wait, there’s more!” (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

Mal-Amalgrams: Honorable Mentions

Brigitte Bardotcom: Early Internet provider of topless pictures. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Humphrey Bogart Carney: He often played an underworld figure. (Mae Scanlan, Washington) [Art Carney played a sewer worker in “The Honeymooners.”]

J. Edgar Hooversace: Designer specializing in men’s evening gowns. (Mae Scanlan)

Emily Post-Apocalypse: She advises you which of your three new arms you should use to hold the cocktail fork at the Nuclear Winter Ball. (Leighanne Mazure, Forest Hills, N.Y, a First Offender)

Sally Field Marshal Goering: The Flying Hun. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

Sugar Ray Leonardo da Vinci: He puts guys down on canvas. (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

John Deere John: I’ve decided our neighbor’s grass is greener, so ... (Pie Snelson, Silver Spring)

T.S. Eliot Spitzer: Poet who penned the immortal lines: “In the room the women come and go/That’s how you find a high-priced ho.” (Anne Paris, Arlington)

In Week 1142 [2015], inspired by the tweets of KimKierkegaardashian, , we asked you to combine two names into a Twitter handle, and write a tweet or “bio” by the hybrid person: ([full results here](#))

4th place: @Lao-Tzuperman: A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single bound. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

3rd place: @JFKanye: Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what *you* can do for you. (Or for me.)" (Lela Martin, Midlothian, Va.)

2nd place: @Trumpelstiltskin: Of course the bimbo knew my name — everybody knows my name! And I never wanted her firstborn. Ugliest kid I ever saw. (John Glenn, Tyler, Tex.)

And the winner of the Inkin’ Memorial: @OrangeJulius: Could be well mov’d: My friends in the House are sticking knives into me. #IdesOfSeptember (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.) [this one wouldn’t work for our portmanteau contest]

Tweetin’ Low: honorable mentions

@BelaLuGehrig: Today I consider myself the suckiest man on the face of this earth. (Gary Crockett)

@JohnLewistler’sMother: Fought all my life for civil rights, but in that painting I’m a prime example of profiling. #grayandblacklivesmatter (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

@DonMcLenaDunham:* And I knew if I had my chance / That I could go take off my pants / And maybe HBO’d be happy for a while (Rivka Riss-Levinson, Washington, a First Offender)

A bee in your sonnet*: The results of Week 1445

**I would have used that as a headline but it didn’t quite fit on the print page; it’s by Sarah Walsh*

I’m not surprised in the slightest that our Loserbards — not all of whom are known for their Invite poems — supplied dozens of clever poems featuring words from this year’s Scripps National Spelling Bee. Or that this week’s Losers’ Circle was inhabited by Chris Doyle, Jesse Frankovich and Duncan Stevens, Hall of Famers all. Even the almost brand-new Coleman Glenn has made such a successful debut — he’s already gotten ink with a song parody and a limerick in just the past few weeks, and was a runner-up in his debut six weeks ago — that I think of him already as an Invite veteran. (Hang in there, Coleman!)

I couldn’t resist giving second place to Jesse Frankovich’s “argentous” (silver) poem, about how, instead of awarding him a silver medal for finishing second, “Pat sent me some lame piece of crap.” Jesse wins a lame piece of crap.

I’d said when announcing this contest that if the entrant could cite a source for an alternate

pronunciation to the one I gave, I'd accept it. Daniel Galef showed me one of those 30-second pronouncer videos that pronounced "dysphotic" to rhyme with "erotic," even though Merriam-Webster only offers the long O, as in "photo."

For obvious reasons, I needed to take the last two lines off John Hutchins's take on Medusa featuring "thanatophidia" (poisonous snakes). Here's the original (John did suggest that cut if necessary):

On the red carpet, a wardrobe malfunction:

Medusa, vamping, without much compunction,

Revealed her writhing thanatophidia.

For safety, please, don't YouTube the videa!

Having watched it, and succumbed to her powers

I've been rock hard now for much more than four hours.

—

And now that you've been reading this column for more than four hours, get up and finish those limericks.

0 Comments

Gift Article



By Pat Myers

Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. [Twitter](#)

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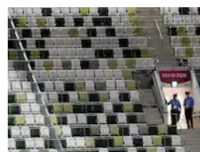
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