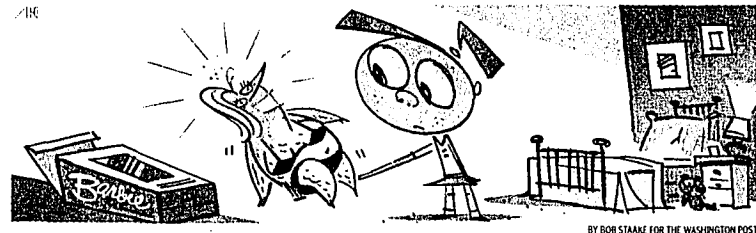


The Style Invitational

Week XCIV: Skinned

That last lifeboat from the Titanic rows into New York Harbor. Osama bin Laden signs a \$25 million book deal with Random House and announces a 30-city U.S. publicity tour.



Barbie gets reconfigured to plausible human dimensions, with a B-cup and child-bearing hips.

This Week's Contest was proposed by Chris Hill of Santa Fe, who read with amusement a giddily upbeat Washington Post sports column suggesting that the 3-5 Redskins now have hope for a terrific season. Yes, the turnaround's been sweet, Chris says, and we're all heartened, but get real. He suggests that you come up with events that have a smaller chance of happening than the Redskins winning the Super Bowl next year. First-prize winner gets a ceramic Dalmatian, man's best friend, seated forever next to your commode, a friendly sentinel concealing a toilet brush. This is worth \$25.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries have been canceled due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 19. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Tom Witte of Gaithersburg.

REPORT FROM WEEK XC,

in which you were asked to replace a character in a movie with one from another movie, and explain how the movie would change.

◆ **Fourth Runner-Up: If Ben Kingsley's Gandhi had played Darth Vader, the Empire wouldn't have struck back.** (Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ **Third Runner-Up: If Renton from "Trainspotting" had played Mary Poppins, it would have taken a spoon, a lighter, a belt and a syringe to make the medicine go down.** (Jessica Henig, Takoma Park)

◆ **Second Runner-Up: If Phil from "Groundhog Day" had played Scarlett O'Hara, tomorrow wouldn't have been another day.** (Chris Doyle, Burke)

◆ **First Runner-Up: If Marlee Matlin's character in "Children of a Lesser God" had played Travis Bickle in "Taxi Driver," it would have made a lot more sense for her to keep wondering, "Are you talking to me?"** (Mike Edens, Canoga Park, Calif.)

◆ **And the winner of the can of South Carolina Potted Possum: If Flipper, from "Flipper," had starred in "Jaws," then after eating people he could have scooted through the water backward on his tail balancing their heads on his nose. Cool.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **Honorable Mentions: If C3PO replaced Mariah Carey in "Glitter," there'd be fewer complaints about robotic acting.** (Ray Aragon and Cynthia Coe, Bethesda)

If Chewbacca the Wookiee had played Spartacus, then that scene where all the Roman slaves stand up and say "I am Spartacus" would have been far less effective. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

If John Shaft had played Hoke Colburn in "Driving Miss Daisy," that old broad is walkin'! (Drew Knoblauch, Falls Church)

If Brad Pitt had been Rick in "Casablanca," he'd have said, "Here's lookin' at me, kid." (Grady Norris, New Bern, N.C.)

If one of the "Porky's" gang had starred in "Psycho," he'd have taken the knife and just cut a little peephole in the shower curtain. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

If William Wallace of "Braveheart" had played any Woody Allen character, it would have actually made sense when he ended up with the girl. (Andrea Connell, Arlington)

If James Bond had played "The Man in the Iron Mask," he would have cut the mask away with his laser pen, escaped from jail with his exploding cuff links and floated away on his underpants-that-convert-to-a-helium-balloon. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

If the warden in "Cool Hand Luke" had played Thomas More from "A Man for All Seasons," what we would have had there was a failure to excommunicate. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

If any of Jackie Chan's characters played Christy Brown in "My Left Foot," he still would have kicked butt. (Kathye Hamilton and Jason Russo, Falls Church)

If Dumbo had played Rufus T. Firefly in "Duck Soup," he'd know very well how that elephant got in his pajamas. (Chris Doyle, Burke)

If Francis the Talking Mule had played a horse in "The Horse Whisperer," he would have asked, "Why are you whispering? What's the big secret, anyway?" (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

If Roberto Benigni's character from "Life Is Beautiful" played Travis Bickle from "Taxi Driver," he would have said: "Are you talking to me? Yes! Come and talk with me for a while! The city is beautiful and I am so much in love with you! Talk to me! Talk to me!" (Kathye Hamilton and Jason Russo, Falls Church)

If Miss Piggy had played Debbie in "Debbie Does Dallas," I, for one, would have asked for my money back. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

If John Rambo had played the lead in "Saving Private Ryan," it would have ended with Rambo and Hitler in sneering, shirtless hand-to-hand combat. (Bob Sorensen, Herndon)

If Hercule Poirot had played Ethan Hunt in "Mission: Impossible," he might have been able to figure out the plot. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

If Austin Powers were the Godfather, someone would wake up one morning and find himself in bed with a horse's ass. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

If Jackie Chan played Moses, he'd have parted the sea with one chop. (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

If Moe of the Three Stooges had played the U.S. secretary of state in "Tora! Tora! Tora!," the official U.S. response to the attack on Pearl Harbor would have been to poke the Japanese ambassador in the eyes, hop him on his head with a fist and yell, "We oughta murderize youse guys." (John Kammer, Herndon)

If Vito Corleone played "The Pawnbroker," he would have made him an offer he couldn't re-use. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

If Mary Pickford in "Pollyanna" had played the captain in "Titanic," she would've chirped to the passengers, "Great news, everyone! Free ice for your drinks!" (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

At the end of "Now, Voyager," if Bette Davis's Charlotte Vale were in a hopeless love affair with Darth Vader, she'd say, "Oh Darth, don't let's ask for the moon. We have the Death Star." (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

If Alvy Singer of "Annie Hall" played Ilsa in "Casablanca," she would have said: "Did you hear that? Here's looking at jew? Here he thinks he's fighting the Nazis, but he's as anti-Semitic as Strasser." (Dina Feivelson, New York)

If Jean-Claude Van Damme had played Rhett Butler, we wouldn't have given a damn. (John O'Byrne, Dublin, Ireland)

If James Bond were played by Jerry Lundegaard of "Fargo," we'd all be speaking Russian now. (Ranald Totten, Kill Devil Hills, N.C.)

If the bean-eating cowboys in "Blazing Saddles" replaced the women who hung out at the beauty parlor in "Steel Magnolias," then maybe more than three men in America would have seen that movie. (Michael Levy, Silver Spring)

If the shark from "Jaws" had been in "Free Willy," that would have been the only possible way the movie could look more fake. (Mark Young, Washington)

If Dumbo had played Babe, pigs would fly. (Chris Doyle, Burke)

If Dudley Moore's Arthur played Stanley Kowalski in "A Streetcar Named Desire," he would've yelled, "Look, Stella, I've ripped my shirt! I've ripped my bloody shirt off! Isn't that the funniest thing ever?!" (Mark Ross, Gaithersburg)

If Antoine Doinel from "The 400 Blows" had played Death in "The Seventh Seal," then we would have had an angst-ridden insight into the nature of life, death and humanity, and it wouldn't have made sense because Doinel speaks French and Death speaks Swedish, duh. (Daniel Fitzgerald, Coral Gables, Fla.)

If Kevin Costner had played Rosebud in "Citizen Kane," he'd have probably screwed it up. (Grady Norris, New Bern, N.C.)



Jennifer Young Brown and Barry Brown in front of their newly acquired row house on Capitol Hill. Anthrax in the neighborhood isn't scaring people away from Washington real estate.

Washing Hands, 'Killing' Letters

MOOD, From F1

activism or social-justice advocacy does—another kind of Washington work.

No surprise that work is part of how Washington is responding to the madness. The twist is, work is the most dangerous place these days. And also this: For some, work itself is a casualty.

Mike Pekula attends the meeting wearing a tie. He's been looking for a job all day. He says he was laid off as a researcher at the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition after Sept. 11, when the already slowing financial support for nonprofits flatlined.

At the mike, he's almost apologetic. He compliments the officials for the work they're doing, then regrettably reports that he filed for unemployment almost a month ago, and hasn't seen the check. His rent is due soon. "I don't know if the unemployment checks are sitting in a pile in Brentwood," the poisoned main postal center, he says, "or if they were sent to Ohio to be decontaminated."

He's planning to start with a temp agency, until he lands something permanent. "In times of crisis you return to type," he says later. "We put our head down and do our work and keep pushing forward. This is Washington. This is what we do."

'Have a Great Day'

Take the Red Line to work.

As the train pulls into Union Station, a voice comes over the public address system, stirring the drowsy commuters on six quiet Metro cars.

"Good morning, passengers," the train operator articulates slowly. "Just a word of encouragement today. Have a great day and it's not too late to tell someone good morning."

Everyone knows what he means. Like dialogue by Hemingway, everyday words float on the undertow of the scary unseen and unspoken. The headlines this morning include the FBI's second alert concerning a "credible" threat. The commuters don't say good morning, but they do smile sheepishly at one another. When they disembark, there is no recycling bin in which to deposit the headlines, because recycling bins have been redefined as good places to plant bombs.

Now walk over to the Capitol. The terrorists have created a new job for two Capitol Police officers.

They are idling in Buick LeSabres at the driveway entrance off Constitution Avenue. Without the Buicks blocking the way, there is a slim but hypothetical chance that an intruder could steer his vehicle past the barriers, guard shacks and guns and speed toward the Capitol.

So every few minutes, whenever a legitimate vehicle approaches, the officers shift into reverse, back up a little bit, then pull forward and return to their positions. If the terror threat persists for long, they will rack up many miles on the LeSabres—six feet at a time.

At the end of the day, stroll down the Capitol steps to the Mall. A tight block of Marines in shorts and T-shirts is running at a stiff pace. Work may soon become more intense for them. "C-130 rolling down the strip," they chant. "2nd Platoon's gonna take a little trip."

Park Service Ranger Lowell Fry is working the late shift at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial. He's an amateur opera singer, and he's a Method actor when it comes to giving impromptu tours. He punches the air for emphasis, contorts his body, seems possessed by the dramas inherent in the words and waterfalls of the monument.

His theme today is how so many of FDR's phrases carved in granite are as apt as ever. "We must be the great arsenal of democracy. . . . We must scrupulously guard the civil rights and civil liberties of all citizens, whatever their background. . . . I have seen war. I hate war."

Fry is standing in front of perhaps his favorite phrase these days, and he declaims it: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

The ranger continues, "If we let these terrorists scare us, or these anthrax people, if we crawl back in our holes, if we don't touch the mail. . . ."

On the Edge of Panic

An alarm sounds and the amplified rasp of a dispatcher echoes in the big garage: "Hazmat, investigation of powder, 750 First Street Northeast," and the crew scrambles.

The address is the American Psychological Association, where someone has diagnosed a threat in the mail.

This time the hazmat guys don't bother getting into their white space suits. The powder turns out to be particles from styrofoam peanuts that got stuck to the sticky part of an envelope packed with the

material.

"It feeds on itself," says Steve Kevan, a hazardous-materials technician with the D.C. Fire Department who rides a big red box on wheels known as Main Hazmat. "The more people see you come around in suits, the more paranoid they get."

"Every white powder, they're terrified of it," says Sgt. Marcus Moon.

The hazmat guys prefer the petroleum spills of yesteryear. Now the job is to visit other jobs where people are on the edge of panic. Suspicious-powder detail occupies two trucks, running from case to case, from dawn until dusk with little time to pause in the headquarters garage on Rhode Island Avenue NE. A hazmat guy has to be something of a psychologist, but he also has to be very careful, because he never knows for sure when panic might be warranted. Moon is mulling the purchase of a second washing machine at home, so his family won't be sickened if any suspicious white powder comes off his work clothes.

Every call is investigated as if it were the real thing. Pigeon dung in Dupont Circle. Jelly doughnut in a downtown office elevator. ("There was significant transfer of powder to the elevator button," says battalion chief Garland Graves.) Gold Bond medicated powder in a L'Enfant Plaza office men's room. (The hazmat team had already donned their white space suits and breathing tanks when a sheepish office worker approached and said, "I'm sorry, I had jock itch.")

Next call: Powder at Seventh and D.

Marsha Gentner, an attorney with the firm of Jacobson Holman, is in the lobby, looking both embarrassed and worried. She opened a letter at her desk. It was a mass mailing from a software company that went to all the attorneys touting legal software "for just \$249." It contained a glossy insert—and fine white powder that came off on her finger.

She did not panic. She called the mayor's command center, which referred her to the health department, which referred her to the non-emergency fire number, which alerted hazmat. Now here come two guys in white space suits and breathing tanks, and worry is starting to gain on embarrassment.

"I washed my hands a zillion times," she says.

See MOOD, F3, Col. 1



Brentwood postal worker John Phelps speaks at a special town hall meeting at the Convention Center.

Richard Thompson is away. Richard's Poor Almanac will resume when he returns.

Next Week: Foetry