

The Style Invitational

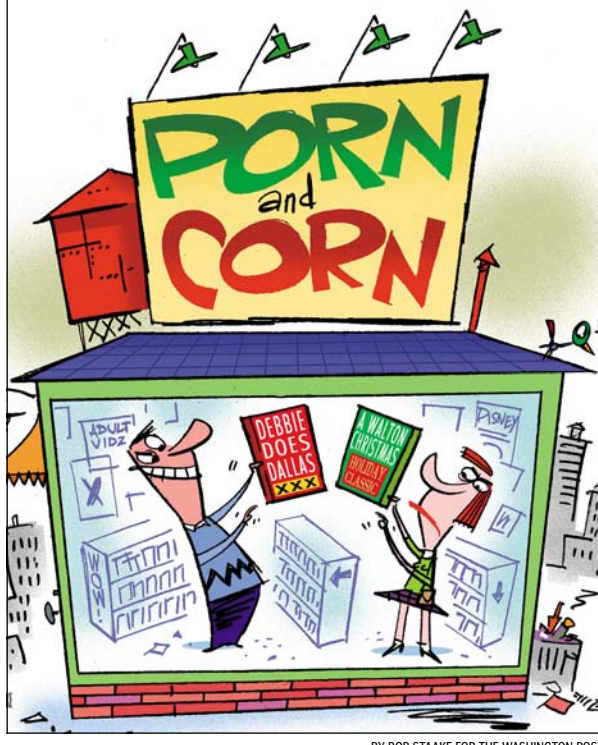
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 641: Dreck Of All Trades

On a visit to her parents in Falls Church, aspiring Loser Elizabeth Molye passed an establishment that served as both laundromat and check-cashing service. Obviously, she said, the place should call itself Money Laundering. **This week's contest: Come up with a business that combines two or more disparate products or services, and tell us its name and/or something else funny about it.**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up wins, courtesy of The Post's own shopping maven Janelle Erlichman Diamond, a CitiKitty, which is a plastic thing that you put over a toilet seat in an effort to train your cat to pee and poop in your toilet. Because, face it, your toilet is just too clean right now. What it needs is some cat excrement.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 26. Include "Week 641" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Jan. 15. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified.



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

REPORT FROM WEEK 637

In which we sought steamy scenes in novels as penned by your choice of people who aren't best known for being novelists. A whole anthology could have been compiled of Iraq-metaphor entries whose punch line was "pull out now."

4 Did you ever notice how, when a woman is seductively removing her undergarments, all you can think about is how Lois Lane might look doing the same thing?
— *Jerry Seinfeld* (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

3 With a twinkle in his eye, he beckoned her to the bedroom. "But why?" she asked. "It's too early to go to sleep." As he put his arm around her he said, "No, my dear, I've invented a wonderful new thing for two people to do together in bed. Come with me and I'll show you."
— *Al Gore* (Jonathan M. Guberman, Princeton, N.J.)

2 The winner of the hollow ceramic potato: "I like to watch," Margaret said . . .
— *Eleanor Holmes Norton* (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

The pusillanimous prattling of his advance was pathetic — bearing no resemblance to his carnal conquest of the erstwhile pristine Janelle at Notre Dame in 1968; and yet the expression in Rachel's pulchritudinous orbs supported the conclusion that in fact, he could go all-the-way!
— *Howard Cosell* (Jeff Brechlin)

On or about June 11 or 12, 2003, Person A had sex with Person B . . .
— *Patrick Fitzgerald* (Joseph Romm, Washington)

As Brad eyed Amber's assets, the old volatility in their relationship was running high, and he was hoping for a quick upturn, a good rate of growth and an eventual merger. But Amber was concerned about his performance, particularly his penchant for short-term, rather than long-term, investments, and the inevitable deflation that followed.
— *Alan Greenspan* (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

Frank stared into her eyes. Time seemed to stand still, although, as the world's foremost authority on time and space, Frank knew this was impossible, and what seemed like an eternity was in fact only a second, or 1/141,912,000,000,000th of the time since the Earth's crust had cooled.
— *Stephen Hawking* (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

The table was cleared, and he gazed adoringly into her eyes. "Issue 17," he announced. "Your place or mine?"
"I think —"

"Question: Tonight was (a) very romantic, (b) supremely enjoyable, or (c) the most wonderful night of your life? Eleanor!"
"Really, it —"

"Well, that settles it — my place. Issue 18: Your car or mine?"
— *"Date, Interrupted"* by John McLaughlin (Martin Bancroft, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

Before the engaging by John in the carnal reproductive enjoyment that occurs between a man and a woman of certain ages upon the precondition of the forthright giving of consent by both parties, he had to first be sure that Jane was going to be receptive to his linguistic and not dispassionate requests for such behavior by him.
— *Harriet Miers* (Marc Leibert, New York)

He hit the ground running, opening a gap in her already flimsy defense. Bottom line? It was crunch time. Lex left nothing on the field. He split the uprights, and they finally came together as a team.
— *From "Two-Minute Drill,"* by Joe Gibbs (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

She lay languorously on the satin sheets, misting her nude body with a special mixture of Chanel and Lysol; she tugged on the guardrails alongside the bed — one can't be too careful when romping about on slippery satin, she thought. As her man approached, she gave her throat a quick spritz of zinc gluconate. Suddenly, nostrils flaring, she demanded: "Why isn't your surgical mask in place?"
— *Sally Quinn* (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

His lovemaking was intoxicating — Ann felt like a prairie dog trapped in a moonshine still at an Amarillo tractor pull. But what she truly marveled at was Kenneth's frequency.
— *Dan Rather* (Brendan Beary)

He ran his towel up and down the sculpted legs. Then he let his fingers wander across the arms and up to the lovely shoulders. He was aching to kiss that magnificent neck, but realized he never could. A tear welled up as his gaze wandered to the hands of his beloved. The hands that could catch anything except his tongue. . . . He pressed his hand against the mirror and sighed.
— *From "I Love T.O.,"* by Terrell Owens (Steven King, Vienna)

1 AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER:

The marble rolled down the chute, striking the lever that turned on the fan. Angela looked up at him, then back at the device, breathing heavily. The dart flew in a perfect arc, as he knew it would, ultimately propelling the two catcher's mitts toward her chest. It was perfect. Embraced by the mitts, she turned her attention to the second device waiting below, and as the next marble started its journey, she moaned softly.
— *Rube Goldberg* (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Like unto 40 years had he pursued her; and when at last she graced his bed, he finally gazed upon the Promised Land. "Holy me!" he shouted.
— *Moses* (Jeff Brechlin)

Maybe it was the peyote messing with my brain, but Rosie O'Donnell looked awfully good to me right then. She winked one hooded, reptilian eye and flicked her long, bifurcated tongue at me. If only the stadium weren't full of careening vampire bats, I would have leapt out of my box seat and taken her right there at home plate.
— *Hunter S. Thompson* (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Mmmmmmm, breasts.
— *Homer Simpson* (Peter Metrinko)

"Wow, Bob, wow!" Anna murmured hungrily. "Tuna roll, or a nut?" I offered. She shook her head. "Wonton?"

"Not now!" She seemed to be getting a bit testy. "Xanax?" I suggested. "Dammit! I'm mad!" And then she was gone. "Huh?"
— *From "My Palindrome,"* by Robert Trebor (Katherine Hooper, Jacksonville)

I gazed longingly at his muscular calf, glistening with a film of manly sweat after his mountain bike ride. The tightness of his cycling shorts around that firm thigh sent shivers through my loins. I could not resist any longer — I must take the plunge and slake the thirst of my lust . . . "Hey, get off my leg!" George yelled.
— *Barney the Scottie* (Chris Parsons, Gaithersburg)

And Last: Said a lecher who leered at his guest: "With your cleavage I'm truly obsessed." "You should move," she did say, "And right there you may stay. Due south, that is where I suggest."
— *Chris Doyle* (Kevin Dopot, Washington)

Next Week: The Little Bummer Boy, or Nightmare on 34th Street

Edible Gold & Silver: Talk About Conspicuous Consumption

GOLD, From D1

gold and silver flecked on the high-end items like abalone, foie gras and truffles for those posh jet-setters who have seen all, done all. "Diners," Jake says, "are expecting more wow now than ever."

At the Bellagio in Las Vegas, the bartender may rim a moistened glass lip with pure silver flake. At Spago in Beverly Hills, they'll gold-dust a flute of sparkling wine. At Libation, a hip new bar on New York's Lower East Side, owner Dennis Keane serves up goblets of "The Ultimate Libation," with 10 Cane rum, Grand Marnier liqueur, Veuve Clicquot champagne, passion fruit nectar and 23-karat gold powder. "They're skeptical at first," says Keane. "Then they drink it right down." Of course they do. The drink costs \$16.

You are likely wondering, gosh, I really want to gobble gold — but will it make me fat?

Lynn Neuberg, whose family company, Easy Leaf Products, began selling edible metals to the retail consumer market last year, assures us that gold and silver may be rich but that in their pure form are flavorless, odorless and calorie-free.

At her home in the hills of Los Angeles overlooking the Getty Museum, Neuberg laid out samples of her wares in her spacious kitchen. There were precious metals dusted on cappuccinos and parfais — and a whole gold leaf floating on the top of a martini, like the most lovely gift wrap around the yummy goodness of chilled vodka. In fact, it was such a gilded martini that gave Neuberg the idea of selling edible gold to ordinary consumers. She and her husband were partying in Santa Fe a few years back and throwing gold leaf on their drinks at a bar (her husband inherited the family business that imports and sells gold leaf for architectural and artistic use). "Everybody was just amazed and wanted to try it," she recalls. Professional pastry chefs and confectioners have been using gold petals for some time, but Neuberg quickly realized that foodies might want the flecks and petals for home use.

When one nibbles a bit of Neuberg's edible gold or silver, for an instant, the mind preps the body for the shock of biting down on metal. But instead, the silver and gold melt in the mouth. It is not at all crunchy. It is undetectable on the palate. According to Neuberg, who imports her edible gold and silver from a facility in Italy, the metals are "totally inert."



Meaning?
"They just disappear."
Meaning?
"They just pass through."

We construct, briefly, a mental image. Just passing through? Gold passing through the stomach, intestine, colon, to its ultimate, final . . . output?

And so it, you know, would be visible?

"You'd have to eat a box," Neuberg says. "Boxes and boxes."

Nobody does that. That would be insane. So. Invisible? Neuberg wrinkles her nose, like enough already. "It's tested by the Italian FDA," she assures. "It's approved for use in Europe and for importation to America." She points to a seal in Italian on one of the boxes.

When The Washington Post calls the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, spokesman Michael Herndon puts us on the phone with an "FDA expert" in the food safety agency who says that edible gold and silver

"has not gone through pre-market safety evaluations" at the FDA. "We haven't evaluated its use," the expert says. Why? Because no one has sought pre-market approval.

So consumers should or shouldn't eat the stuff? The FDA expert is not saying. It has not been studied by the FDA expert. The expert has examined no data. It is not a priority. The FDA is very busy. It is a gray area. It is inert.

"I expect it to go right through the body," agrees the expert, who will speak only on the condition of anonymity because the agency has not taken a position on edible metals. He adds, though, "It is an expensive way to throw away gold." (This government secrecy about ingestible metals may be a trend; when we called over to the press officer at the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases, we got this e-mailed response: "I am so sorry, but I couldn't find one of our scientists to speak on the general topic



of digestion of inert substances.") Anyway, Neuberg explains that eating gold is not the culinary equivalent of lighting a Cohiba Robusto with a \$100 bill (even though her products recently were included in an issue of — we're not making this up — Rich Guy magazine). Rather the culinary metals are about "showing respect" and "honoring guests." According to her promotional materials, the practice dates from the Middle Ages and was quite common in Renaissance Italy. Did you know that Galeazzo Visconti served an entire calf wrapped in a thin layer of gold at the wedding of his daughter Violante in 1386? They were serving ostrich meat covered in gold in Venice in 1561. Gilded foods were so ubiquitous in Padua in the 16th century that authorities suggested serving no more than two courses in gold per feast.

Martha Bayless, an English professor and director of the medieval studies program at the University of

PHOTOS BY RANDI LYNN BEACH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



Though he is not really studied by economists much anymore, Thorstein Veblen might have been onto something in his 1899 treatise "The Theory of the Leisure Class," in which he coined the term "conspicuous consumption," his idea that consumers would spend freely, even wastefully, to display status items. One of his examples was the use of silver eating utensils. Veblen would likely consider edible gold right up there, says Ori Heffetz, an economics professor at Cornell University who did his own studies that found that as income increases, the wealthy spend not just more money but more money on items of highest visibility.

Jake, the chef at Pebble Beach, says that supper-time gold and silver are undeniably used for visual effect, as it adds no flavor, no texture. "It's conspicuous consumption for sure," he says. "But you first eat with your eyes and it is a beautiful product." And he suspects it will find its way onto more plates — the rosemary sprig of the new millennium — as more wealthy diners crave ever more exotic, more expensive fare to satisfy their jaded palates.

For some, there is something very fat-catty, very obvious, very Californian about feasting on gold. "It seems to me the ultimate act of arrogance," says Dave Wampler, founder of the Simple Living Network, a Web community that helps people shed stuff. "I've never heard of such a thing. It is just the height of stupidity, what a waste — and this show of incredible lack of respect for the planet and the species who share it."

Bonnie Brooling, an associate food buyer for Sur La Table, the nationwide culinary and kitchen outlet, which sells Neuberg's wares, says, "We've done very well with it in both stores and through our catalogues." She concedes that eating gold "for some people may be a little over the top," and in that case, "silver may be more approachable." If consumers are into real festive fun, they may buy it and "some people may say it's not for me."

Another consumable metal purveyor, Tobias Freccia, founder of EdibleGold.com, says the price points for these products are actually rather down-market. "Our strategy is to bring it into the home-use market," he says. He envisions not \$75 gold martinis but a sprinkle of silver at Starbucks. A book of 500 gold leaves may cost \$495, but a 100mg shaker of the precious metals sells for \$19.95. "The idea is this is a product that the wealthy can have," he says, "but you can have it, too."

The more things change, the more they stay the same?