

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 701: Untitlement



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Official Style Invitational Cartoonist Bob Staake is just getting hoitier and tottier on us. First his artwork gets on the cover of the New Yorker, and now his "The Red Lemon" has been listed as one of Some Other Newspaper Book Review's 10 best illustrated children's books of 2006. Yeah, yeah. But he'll never win an Inker. **This week: Here are the covers for what just might be Bob's next four books. What are they called and what are they about?**

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets, courtesy of Ben Aronin of Washington, a CD from Thepartyparty.com consisting of remixes of politicians' voices in which they're seeming to sing rock songs, such as President Bush doing "Sunday Bloody Sunday." It's pretty well done, actually.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) 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 by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 20. Put "Week 701" 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 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 March 18. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Dave Prevar of Annapolis. The revised title for next week's contest is by Bruce Alter.

REPORT FROM WEEK 697

Our recurring contest in which we asked you to explain how any two of 15 items we listed were alike or different: Of course, some intrepid Losers tried all 105 combinations; just about everyone pointed out that the difference between Shakira's hips and a prescription for Levitra was that with the hips, you don't need the prescription.

4 The difference between 24 cents plus tax and a teacup Chihuahua: In the United States, one is just about two bits; in China, the other is just about two bites. (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

3 The difference between the Washington Nationals and a Cheez Whiz souffle: If you want runs, go with the souffle. (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

2 winner of the CD of the Tulsa radio guy being obnoxious: How 24 cents plus tax is like a Mini Cooper convertible: These will be 50 Cent's new name and hooty after the IRS gets done with him. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

The difference between a prescription for Levitra and a Mini Cooper convertible: You hope the prescription will keep women from saying, "Ooh, that little thing is sooo cute." (David Komornik, Danville, Va.)

INDIFFERENCES

The difference between a urine sample and a Cheez Whiz souffle: The souffle contains many unneeded carbs. — M. Gandhi, Delhi (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

How a drunken kangaroo is like a prescription for Levitra: They both will make a big stir Down Under. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.; Kathleen DeBold, Burtonsville)

A drunken kangaroo and the new speaker of the House: Both make Bush men nervous. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

A drunken kangaroo and a urine sample: Each was a runner-up mascot for the Sydney Olympics. (Kevin Dopart)

A drunken kangaroo should not have hit the bottle. A urine sample should have. (Thomas J. Murphy, Bowie)

A prescription for Levitra and the new speaker of the House: Both work on uncooperative members. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Each is tasked with pushing through acts of congress successfully. (Ross Elliffe, Picton, New Zealand)

One works to thwart the Honorable Mr. Boehner . . . (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

It's the difference between lay and lie. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

A prescription for Levitra and a Mini Cooper convertible: Trust me, neither one will get you lucky until you lose those 40 pounds you gained since the divorce. (Jerry Ewing, Orlando)

A prescription for Levitra and Kim Jong Il's pompadour: One cures erectile dysfunction; the other is one. (Arlee C. Green, Newington)

A prescription for Levitra and a Style Invitational Loser Magnet: You get the magnet for your pee-pee joke; you get the prescription for your joke of a pee-pee. (Andrea Kelly, Brookville)

The new speaker of the House and a

teacup Chihuahua: The speaker has bigger cojones. (Bob Kopac, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

The new speaker of the House and a Mini Cooper convertible: Both are stylish, petite media darlings, but only one should be experienced topless. (Michele Puzanchera, Pittsburgh)

The new speaker of the House and a urine sample: The speaker is Number Three. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown; Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

One also has vinegar. (Gordon Arsenoff, Laurel)

The new speaker of the House and the Washington Nationals: Only one will get regular cable coverage in D.C. (Kevin Dopart)

The Nationals plan to hit-and-run, while the speaker plans to cut and run. — G.W.B., Washington (Chris Doyle, from Panaji, India)

The new speaker of the House and Kim Jong Il's pompadour: Each sits atop an impenetrable mass of peculiar opinions. (Elwood Fitzner)

The new speaker of the House and a Style Invitational Loser Magnet: They are both lusted after. — Name Withheld, Plains, Ga. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

A teacup Chihuahua and a urine sample: They are both wee specimens. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

They are two things that might be found in a celebrity's purse. (Dennis Lindsay, Seabrook)

Staying the course and the Washington Nationals: Both are associated with the phrase "errors were made." (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Staying the course and a urine sample: The sample can get you fired from an important government job. (Ezra Deutsch-Feldman, Chicago)

Staying the course and Shakira's hips:

They are both public demonstrations of morass. (John Bauer, Gaithersburg)

A Mini Cooper convertible and the Washington Nationals: Neither is very comfortable on a long road trip. (Russell Beland)

A Mini Cooper convertible and 11 pipers piping: Paris Hilton might take either for a quick spin. (Kevin Dopart)

A urine sample and the Washington Nationals: You can be sure the Nationals won't be standing between Barry Bonds and the Hall of Fame. (Elwood Fitzner)

A urine sample and Shakira's hips: It's hard for men to give the first if they're thinking about the second. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

A urine sample and a Style Invitational Loser Magnet: The Washington Post isn't willing to pay all the postage to mail out urine samples every week. (Russell Beland)

11 pipers piping and the Washington Nationals: One is 11 guys blowing. The other is 9 guys sucking. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park; Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

The Washington Nationals and a Style Invitational Loser Magnet: The magnet is supposed to be a joke. (Kevin Dopart)

Shakira's hips and a Cheez Whiz souffle: The former is the real thing; the latter is artificial dairy air. (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

The Poincaré Conjecture and Shakira's hips: One is all about topology, while the other is all about bottomology. (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn)

24 cents plus tax and a Style Invitational Loser Magnet: Neither one is fully appreciated when you give them out to your staff as Christmas bonuses. Well, I'm just guessing about the 24 cents. (Russell Beland)

Next Week: Let's Get Personnel, or Inhuman Resources

560,000 Words, 70 Hours, 51 CDs and One Voice

WAR AND PEACE, From D1

whittled down "Remembrance of Things Past" that filled 39 CDs, and he split narrator duties on "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" (about 15 hours, in total). His abridged readings of "Lives of the Artists" (seven hours long) and "Gulliver's Travels" (a mere four) seem like sprints by comparison.

Given that pop culture is forever trending toward the condensed and the vapid, a 70-hour audiobook might sound like commercial folly — a Mensa product for an Us Weekly world. And maybe it is. Naxos won't say how many copies have been downloaded directly from its site or sold in stores, where it retails for about \$280.

But if the world has ever been ready for nearly three straight days of recorded Tolstoy it's ready now. A few years ago, publishers had to beg retailers to stock audiobooks longer than three CDs. Now, that's considered an ear snack. Unabridged is king. And abridged isn't just on the wane. It's basically stigmatized.

"We have readers who will get in touch with an author and express outrage if they see an abridged audio version of their book," says Ana Maria Alessi, who heads Harper Collins's audiobook division. "That drives authors insane."

Downloadable books make it possible to store a spoken-word rendering of a big fat tome on an iPod, eliminating the need to stuff 25 CDs in a glove compartment. Plus, pub-

lishers and retailers figured out that audiobook fans aren't semiliterates taking a break from "Two and a Half Men"; they are hardcore readers who consider abridgment a kind of cheating.

It was a revelation, too, how much these listeners were willing to spend. For a long time, it was assumed that \$30 or so was the ceiling for an audiobook. But if an author is popular enough, and the book long enough, you can move a lot of product with far higher price tags.

Naxos caters to the Rolls-Royce end of the audiobook market, specializing in giants of the Western canon. Because works like "War and Peace" are in the public domain, the company doesn't have to pay for rights. The tricky part is finding someone who can tell a story as rich and densely populated as, for instance, "War and Peace," and narrate it in a way that isn't distracting.

"Audiobooks are a peculiar beast," says Nicolas Soames, Naxos's publisher. "You've got narration and you've got dialogue, and some readers are good at one and not good at the other. Only the best, like Neville, are wonderful at both."

Jason, who lives in London, recently visited New York, and one Friday afternoon, he sat in a cousin's law offices and explained the art of endurance reading. The hard part, he says, isn't keeping your voice in good shape — it's keeping focused.

"People call these readings. They're not readings. They're performances. You're acting and you're not just doing one part, you're doing dozens of parts. And you have to know what is coming up. If the sentence reads, 'Get out of here, he said angrily,' you need to know that, or you won't sound angry."

To prepare for "War and Peace," he read the text for weeks. To keep his throat clear on days he recorded, he'd avoid dairy products and, for reasons that he can't fully explain, anything containing wheat. He'd



BY ARTHUR KA WAI JENKINS — NAXOS AUDIOBOOKS

Neville Jason spent 23 days in the studio recording Tolstoy's "War and Peace." "You get into it and you think, 'What have I let myself in for?'"

start at 10 a.m. and knock off at 6, with plenty of breaks.

Did he ever get bored? Did he ever think, "Hey Leo, pick up the pace?"

"Not really. Sometimes he'll get on a hobbyhorse, as he does when he discusses the reasons that men go to war, but for the most part I was bowled over by the wisdom of Tolstoy. He's such a huge genius, such a great understander of human beings and the human condition. And he writes about uni-

versal things. Birth, marriage, sex, death. And whatever he writes on those subjects is a revelation. When one of my children was having a hard time a while back, I read her some passages of Tolstoy. I thought, there is nothing I can say that is as wise as the things I've read."

Jason, who is a married father of two, started out as a theater actor, though his first job was in an American movie called "Flesh and Fantasy," released in 1943 and

starring Edward G. Robinson. Jason was 9 years old and living with his mother in Beverly Hills, where the family had moved to avoid the German bombing of London.

"My best friend's father was a British actor who was working in the movies, so I used to go to the studio all the time," he says. "One day they needed an English boy's voice for a scene they were overdubbing. So I did it."

His line, "Why doesn't he jump? Is he afraid?" was the first of a million, give or take a few. Jason studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and early in his career won a part in "Titus Andronicus" starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. He turned up in a James Bond film, "From Russia With Love," playing the son of a Turkish official.

"Spent a whole month in Istanbul," Jason recalls. "Luxurious circumstances."

Most of his subsequent work was in TV and radio. Soames heard about Jason through a friend and recruited him for "The Life and Works of Beethoven." The Proust books, which he began recording in 1996, turned him into a bit of a cult figure in England. "[I] have been recommending you to everyone," gushed one fan in a letter, "but every middle-aged woman I know seems to be listening to you anyway."

Exactly how many people have made it all the way through Jason's "War and Peace" is unknown. No one has contacted Naxos and claimed to have scaled the whole mountain, and the Sunday Times critic said in her (favorable) review that she had merely sampled five hours of the performance. Even Soames has yet to finish the entire production, though he says he's working on it.

"I went on holiday to Australia recently and I spent a lot of time with Tolstoy clamped on my ears," he says. "My wife said, 'Damn "War and Peace," come and talk to me.'"