

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

*Week 755:
Take Another 'Whack*



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Lusted-after Style Invitational arugula: What we're considering for an alternative Honorable Mention prize.

Back in 2004 — so far back that the Empress didn't even have a case of tiara-hair yet — we ran a contest asking for Googlewhacks: two-word phrases that produced one and only one Google hit. Of course, the realm of Google has expanded so enormously in the past four years that it's going to be a wayyyy tougher challenge (and vastly harder than last year's Googlenope contest to send in something that *didn't* get a hit), but so be it. **This week: Send us a phrase of two or more words that produces exactly one Web page on the Google search engine — you may either use quotation marks around the phrase or omit them — and describe the phrase.** You may disregard those Web pages that consist of nothing but lists of words, though if one of those produces your Googlewhack, that's fine. Please include, along with each entry, the address of the Web page where you found the Googlewhack; the page must be dated earlier than March 7, 2008, so don't go posting your own phrase and then just happen to find it.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives the double-life-size inflatable Chihuahua, right, donated by Loser Russ Taylor and currently sitting guard on the Empress's desk in the Style section newsroom. Squeeze its leg and it makes a sound only slightly less horrible than the sound an actual Chihuahua would make if you squeezed its actual leg.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. 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 by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, March 17. Put "Week 755" 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 April 5. 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 contest was suggested by Kevin Dopart, who, despite his astonishing 300-plus inks, didn't start entering the Invitational until Week 626 and didn't know we'd done this contest in Week 566. The revised title for next week's results is by Drew Bennett. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Russell Beland.

REPORT FROM WEEK 752

In which we asked for takes on the old "you just might be a . . ." joke form in various categories we supplied. Many parents offered that you just might be an embarrassment to your child "if you exist."

4 You just might be from Georgetown . . . if your basketball team can beat up your football team. (Randy Lee, Burke)

3 You just might need a new car soon . . . if every 3,000 miles, you change the duct tape. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

2 The winner of the J.S. Bach action figure: You just might not be an animal rights enthusiast . . . if you had your dog put down for chewing on your fur coat. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

You just might not be an animal rights enthusiast . . . if your favorite animal is "wherever baby back ribs come from." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

YOU JUST MIGHT DESERVE A MAGNET FOR . . .

You just might be an embarrassment to your child . . .

. . . if you insist on taking your son's temperature with a rectal thermometer, despite his wife's protestations. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

. . . if you send text messages letting your daughter's friends know that "she's a woman now." (Jeff Brechlin)

. . . if you decide to join in the fun and dress up as a wizard for the school parade — and it's the Black History Month parade. (Anne Paris, Arlington)

. . . if on your sonogram, the fetus makes a "no pictures!" gesture with his hand. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

. . . if the seat of your size 3X sweat pants says "Juicy." (Judith Cottrill, New York)

. . . if, when driving your 13-year-old and his girlfriend to the movies, you give them a lecture about unprotected sex. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

You just might be from Georgetown . . .

. . . if you find yourself instinctively grabbing a free parking place nowhere near your destination, because God knows when you'll find another one. And you're in Wichita. (Anne Paris)

. . . if the only Metro you've been on was in Paris. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

. . . if the art in your house is worth more than the house. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

. . . if you have an orthopedist, an allergist, a urologist, a gastroenterologist and an ophthalmologist on retainer. And that's for your cat. (Tom Murphy, Bowie)

You just might not be an animal rights enthusiast . . .

. . . if you consistently bowl over 200 when using armadillos. (Jeff Brechlin)

. . . if you test all your cosmetics on your pets anyway. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

. . . if your favorite toy as a child was a magnifying glass. (Horace LaBadie, Dunnellon, Fla.)

. . . if your parrot will speak only its name, rank and serial number. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

. . . if you wonder why anyone would pay more to take a cat to the vet than it costs to buy a new cat. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)



"Blow up a Chihuahua": It's a Googlewhack!

You just might have a substance abuse problem . . .

. . . if Amy Winehouse tells you to go to rehab. (Pam Sweeney)

. . . if you order the coq au vin and tell the waiter to hold the coq. (Gregory Dunn, Alexandria, not a First Offender but last heard from in 1997)

. . . if you go to the altar railing five times in a row at Mass, wearing various

disguises, to partake of the chalice. (Paul Kocak, Syracuse, N.Y.)

. . . if each morning you need some hair of the horse tranquilizer that bit you. (Chuck Smith)

. . . if your chest X-ray comes out in sepsia. (Chuck Smith)

. . . if you believe God gave you two livers for a purpose. (Jacob Aldridge, Gaythorne, Australia)

. . . if you called in sick to work three times in one morning. (Kurt Riefner, Fairbanks, Alaska)

You just might need a new car soon . . .

. . . if your current one is worth less than the bribe you have to pay to get an inspection sticker. (Chris Doyle, on vacation in Aswan, Egypt)

. . . if it is your father's Oldsmobile. (Ira Allen)

. . . if your mechanic is storing part of his CD collection in your glove box. (Mike Pool, Vienna)

. . . if hitting potholes is the only way to make the headlights come on. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

. . . if your mechanic has to use his connections in Havana to get parts. (Jim McClellan, Alexandria; Russ Taylor, Vienna)

. . . if the panhandlers at red lights slip dollar bills in your window. (Tom Murphy)

. . . if the OnStar lady keeps directing you toward a ravine. (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)

. . . if the fuzzy dice are the only original parts. The left one, anyway. (Jay Shuck)

. . . if the ashtrays in the back seat are full. — P. Hilton, Los Angeles (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Next Week: Hit Us With Your Best Shot, or The F-Stops Here

Looking Beyond the Finish Line of the Human Race

AFTERMATH, From C1

The family dog comes pad-pad-paddling into the bedroom when the alarm clock goes off one morning, but — bark! — the bed is empty! The coffeepot is perking, but mom's not there to pick it up! It's the Earth as a planetary Mary Celeste: The ship is sailing, but the crew is gone and nobody knows where it went. (Least of all the dog, which is not in for a very good time once the lions in the zoo get loose.)

The idea of these shows is not the post-apocalyptic, last few people on Earth. Instead they focus on what would happen to all we have wrought — our houses, our monuments, our carbon dioxide emissions — if we were no longer here to keep them going. What would happen if human beings, around for about 200,000 years in our current form, were simply beamed up into space or died off in an afternoon? How long would the planet bear our love marks, our scars, our scratches, as Faulkner put it, on the blank face of oblivion?

An environmental engine stokes these imaginings. The writers and producers derive narrative from the forces of entropy and decay upon our physical handiwork: the Empire State Building as an arrowhead, left behind by primitive toolmakers.

"I didn't write the book because I wanted the human race to disappear," Weisman says. "I wrote the book because I wanted humans to look around and think about what we're doing. . . It's a way of looking at the environment by theoretically removing us, and seeing what stuff we'd leave behind. It's looking at our impact by extraction."

The other shows work on a similar premise — "We wanted to hold up a mirror and say, 'Here's our actions, and here's how they impacted the planet,'" says Howard Swartz, executive producer of the National Geographic show.

But then there's the unstated human ego at work here, navel-gazing and overstating our importance.

One wonders if dolphins — one of the few animals that can recognize their reflection in the mirror, and are thus capable of narcissism — daydream about an end to their species: "So, like, this ginormous tuna boat comes through with this huge net . . ." and then wonder what would happen to the ocean without them.

Without us, it'll certainly be quieter. No lawn mowers, no jet skis. Because, at the moment, there are no other animals capable of producing fire, the night will revert to what it was thousands and then millions and tens of millions and then hundreds of millions and then billions of years ago — primordial ink.

There will be a lovely view of the stars. Of course, none of this is exactly plausible, at least as shown here.

Rick Potts, director of the human origins program at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, points out that



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL

The casinos of Las Vegas don't have clocks, but time still runs out on humans there, and everywhere, in "Aftermath." Below, the book that started everyone thinking about a peopleless planet.

no global species of animal dies out in a flash. True, scientists believe that there was some sort of "DNA crash" in our species about 50,000 to 80,000 years ago, with the number of breeding-age humans thought to have dwindled to about 10,000 people, almost all of them in Africa.

But that "crash" occurred over thousands of years, and we seemed to have bounced back. A dramatic event — say, a meteor strike capable of killing off the world's most adaptable animal — would also have a disastrous effect on the rest of life on Earth, and would kill off far more species than just us.

That said, these daydreams are terrific at showing exactly how and why our creations would collapse without our constant tending.

Lights would start going off within hours (power plants run out of fuel), most subway systems would fill with water within days (the New York City system pumps out 13 million gallons of water every day) and dogs would quickly go feral (an assertion backed by how dogs in New Orleans responded after the evacuation in Hurricane Katrina).

Grass and weeds would grow through



cracks in asphalt and on sidewalks and roadways, producing the seeds that will eventually overrun them. The power gener-

ators at the Hoover Dam will keep the lights on in Las Vegas perhaps the longest of anywhere in the United States. But those automated systems will eventually be undone, a dam operator explains in "Life After People," because of tiny mollusks that will eventually grow so numerous that they will block cooling pipes, and an automated system will shut down one of the world's engineering marvels. Most of our monuments — the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty — will collapse in 300 years or less, undone by rust and rot.

What will be the last of us? Probably the things we jettison from the planet.

The National Geographic Channel says that our footprints, flag and television cameras on the moon will last millenniums. For Weisman, there are the 1970s-launched Voyager capsules with their sounds and sights of humanity etched onto a "12-inch gold-plated copper analog disk" contained in a "gold-anodized aluminum box." It holds diagrams of DNA and the solar system, pictures of children and cities, and 26 musical recordings, including Chuck Berry and an aria from Mozart's "The Magic Flute."

Scientists expect it to last at least a billion years but probably a lot longer, Weisman writes.

"By then, tectonic upheavals or an expanded sun might well have rendered any signs of us left on Earth down to their molecular essence. It might be the closest that any human artifact would get to eternity."

There are also, Weisman notes, our radio and television signals, beaming into space forever because radio waves just keep expanding until, at some theoretical point, they get so dispersed in the ongoing noise of the universe that they couldn't be distinguished anymore: "To the limits of our universe and our knowledge, they are immortal, and broadcast images of our world and our times and memory are there with them."

So, long after our lovely little blue planet is reduced to a lifeless rock, somewhere in interstellar space billions of years from now, there will be "Gunsmoke" and "The Twilight Zone" and "Gilligan's Island" and "Aftermath." Little specks of energy-bearing witness that once, in a small corner of the universe, we stood upright, looked at the stars and contemplated the day of our own demise.