

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 766: Think to Shudder



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

When you take your little girl to the circus and the Human Cannonball gives her an unexpected souvenir.

That guy in the dorm who is so tall that he sees over shower stalls without even trying.

Having dinner with your new girlfriend when your ex-girlfriend and her new girlfriend show up at the same restaurant (you, in this instance, are a he).

You are about to hook up with someone when you discover that he or she is the opposite sex than you thought.

A recent Washington Post investigation has revealed a term that today's students use all the time to describe awkward situations. The word is: "awkward." Though young people have broadened the term to refer to just about anything unpleasant or unlikable, the examples above (offered by University of Maryland students, except for the cartoon by the never-awkward Bob Staake) hew to the classic connotation of embarrassment. This week: Come up with scenarios that are even more awkward (and more imaginative) than the winners mentioned above.

The winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a prize brought back from France by the Empress herself: an empty bottle of a carbonated lemon drink made by Perrier whose name is clearly meant to sound effervescent: "Pschitt!" Fill it with whatever you like.

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, June 2. Put "Week 766" 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 June 21. 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 avid Washington Post reader John O'Byrne of Dublin, Ireland. The revised title for next week's results is by Tom Witte. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Brad Alexander of Wanneroo, Australia, which is a pretty long way from his native Alabama.

REPORT FROM WEEK 762

in which we asked readers to take a two-term heading from the top of any page of any print dictionary (or the terms in reverse order) and define it as a compound word: As we predicted, hardly anyone cited a dictionary printed in the 21st century. We thought Marian Carlsson would win the Olde

English prize, using a *Winston Dictionary, College Edition, from 1949*. But then we got Chris Doyle's entry citing *Merriam-Webster's New International Dictionary of . . . 1909*. Another clue that people are used to relying to electronic vocabulary assistance: A remarkable number of the words submitted were misspelled.

4 Gate-gavotte: The peculiar dance airplane travelers do while rushing out of the security checkpoint while putting their shoes back on and holding their pants up until they can get their belts fastened. (Stephen Litterst, Newark, Del.)

3 Urinalysis-Usherette: The absolute lowest rung of the medical profession. (Will Cramer, Herndon)

2 the winner of the book "Toilets of the World": Viridian-Visine: Gets the whatever-the-hell-color-that-is out. (J. Calvin Smith, Greenbelt)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER
Bird of paradise-bison: Where buffalo wings come from. (Roger and Pam Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

WANNABE-WEBSTER: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Aft-affliction: A pain in the butt. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

Amorous-Ammeter: New device issued to Date Lab couples to measure the quantity of sparks flying. (John Kupiec, Fairfax)

Apostrophe-appetite: A craving for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, hors d'oeuvres, Mrs. Paul's fish sticks and Uncle Ben's rice. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Backward-bake: A new feature on expensive ovens that allows you to uncook overdone food. (Julie Thomas, Herndon)

Bank-barbarian: Sub-primate. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Calvinism-camp: The Depravity of Mankind — The Musical! (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Dirty tricks-dip: Salsa con Saliva. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

Dry mop-duel: Two janitors enter; one janitor leaves! (Laurie Brink, Cleveland, Mo.)

Egress-elbow: Technique for getting out of a subway car. (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

Ellipsoid-embezzling: How Howard Cosell would describe an interception. (Elwood Fitzner)

Eunuch-etiquette: Rule 1: Don't ask, "How's it hanging?" (Steve Langer, Chevy Chase)

Fast-talk-faux pas: A gaffe a minute. (Beverly Sharp)

Finnish-fireplug: Where a spitz, um, spits. (Tom Jabine, Silver Spring, a First Offender)

Flake-flap: The Nader-Keyes presidential debate. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Foster-four: The number of lagers after which anyone starts to look pretty good. (Peter Metrinko)

Fragrance-frank: "You stink." (J. Calvin Smith)

Funeral-fork: On some Pacific islands, the proper utensil to use at a lying-in-state dinner. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Ganja-gargle: To drink bong water. (Loren Bolstridge, Minneapolis, a First Offender)

Genital-geography: G marks the spot. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

Goths-government: Butch and Chainy. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

Grating-gram: A birthday card with a chip that plays "It's a Small World." (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Honest-hominy: True grits. (Marian Carlsson, Lexington, Va.)

Honor-hopscotch: The first kindergarten AP class. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Huddle-hump: THIS is in the Macmillan children's dictionary? (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park)

Kidney-keno: One alternative to the organ waiting list. (Kevin Dopart)

Listless-lizard: A gecko that doesn't give a damn about your car insurance. (Pam Sweeney)

Meantime-mausoleum: The freezer at the morgue. (Michael Turniansky, Pikesville, Md.)

Methuselah-metric: Rare measure by which John McCain can claim youthfulness. (Dan Ramish, Vienna)

Monsterlike-Monty: Those in the front row probably want to move back a bit . . . (J. Calvin Smith)

Non-nonnessential: Gotta have it! (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

Nose-no-man's-land: Area inside the nostril where you just can't get that

booger. (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo., the Ozarks)

Nothingness-novice: Jean-Paul Starter. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Placebo-plan: The new budget health insurance option. (Bob Kurlantzick, Potomac)

Possum-Porterhouse: Don't ask too many questions about the steak at the Roadkill Cafe. (Pam Sweeney)

Prayer-princinct: Obama campaign term for a voting district populated by bitter people with guns. (Kathleen DeBold, Burtonsville)

Prune-pseudonymity: Non de plum. (Donna Justice, Ashburn, a First Offender)

Scalp-scatterbrain: You need the first to prevent the second. (Anne Paris, Arlington)

Scanty-scat: What a cub does in the woods. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

Sound-South American: Something you don't want to do in Prince William County. (Brendan Beary)

Southern-spackling: Grits. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville; Seth Walton, Hillsboro, Va., a First Offender)

Topiary-torment: Beating around the bush. (Jennifer Rubio, Oakton)

Until-up: The interval before the Viagra kicks in. (Jerrie Olson, Frederick)

Wedgy-weight: One class below featherweight. (Michael Crow, Takoma Park, a First Offender)

With-wobbly: Designated driver. (Will Cramer)

Y chromosome-yes: The first box to check off on the Chippendale's application. (Andrew Hoenig)

And Last: Exquisite-excrement: With "Since 1993," the motto of The Style Invitational. (Kevin Dopart)

Next Week: Another Time Around the Track, or Multiplication Stables



The Inker knows from awkwardness.

A Question for HBO: How About a Recount of the Facts?

MEDIA NOTES, From C1

There's an obvious need for compression — there were two Supreme Court hearings, not one — in telling the tangled tale of the 36-day Florida court battle that gave the 2000 election to George W. Bush. And dialogue can't be verbatim when there's no way of knowing everything that was said in back rooms. But while dramatic license might support exaggeration, it can hardly justify some of the wholesale creation in which the movie indulges.

The makers of "Recount" tout their reliance on several books about the crisis, and hired as consultants CNN's Jeffrey Toobin, ABC's Jake Tapper, Time's Mark Halperin and David Von Drehle and Newsweek's David Kaplan.

In an interview airing tomorrow on CNN's "Reliable Sources," director Jay Roach tells me of the invented Klain dialogue: "We wanted, as with a lot of moments in the film, to capture the essence of a certain attitude in the Gore team." The movie, he said, "wasn't 100 percent accurate, but it was very true to what went on. . . . That's what dramatizations do: stitch together the big ideas with, sometimes, constructs that have to stand for a larger truth." He cites as an example "All the President's Men," in which Hal Holbrook's Deep Throat tells Robert Redford's Bob Woodward to "follow the money," although the real Throat never used those words.

Fair enough — screenwriters have been taking such liberties forever. A film that attempts a certain fidelity to the historical record deserves praise for making the attempt, rather than using the money to make another flick about horny teenagers.

But "Recount" is being marketed as an honest re-creation of events. In a promotional interview released by the cable channel, Kevin Spacey, who plays Klain, declares: "Our sort of motto has been, get the story right, get the facts right, tell it honestly and tell the truth." Careful viewers might notice the disclaimer that the film is "based on certain facts," while some events and characters are "fictionalized for dramatic purposes." How convenient.

A film, by its nature, must have a point of view, must settle on characters around which to build the plot. But in depicting history, there's also the question of fairness. The movie portrays Baker



John Hurt, left, as Warren Christopher in "Recount," and the real deal, right. The former secretary of state calls HBO's depiction of him in the 2000 election "drama masquerading as history." A colleague says the show makes him look naive, even idiotic. But HBO did take pains to get his suit right, Christopher says.

(Tom Wilkinson), the former secretary of state leading Bush's team, as canny and ruthless, while Christopher (John Hurt), the former secretary of state heading the Gore operation, is played as a naive fool.

"I was just flabbergasted," Christopher said in an interview. "They invented a character, put my name on it and put words in my mouth that I had never spoken. . . . It's drama masquerading as history. This is how many people will perceive it, and you can never catch up with that."

Christopher, who is depicted as counseling against a court battle to force a Florida recount that could give Gore the election, reviewed a partial script provided by the New York Times. "It's absurd to say I thought it could be done through diplomacy and compromise," he told me. Christopher said he heard about the movie from his tailor — "They went out of their way to get my suit right" — and that by the time screenwriter Danny Strong called him, they were already

shooting the scenes that involved him.

Klain, who liked the film overall, said: "Secretary Christopher comes across as kind of naive and out of touch, and he wasn't. It makes Christopher look like an idiot, and he wasn't. It's just not right."

Klain and Baker were among those given a chance to review the script and request changes, some of which were accepted. Christopher was not. Baker, by contrast, was so pleased with the product that he is hosting a screening next week at his public policy institute in Houston.

Tapper, one of the consultants, says the film is "a fictional version of what happened" and "tilts to the



BY TAMI CHAPPELL — REUTERS

left because it's generally told from the point of view of the Democrats." But, he says, while some scenes and language are manufactured, "a lot of dialogue is not invented, a lot of dialogue is taken from my book, other books and real life."

Similar issues surfaced in the widely praised HBO series "John Adams," where the screenwriters didn't have the luxury of interviewing the principals. There was a wonderful moment when Adams, having just learned that he has won the presidency in 1796, passes George Washington, who says: "I am fairly out and you are fairly in. See which of us will be the happiest!" Upon further examination, it turns out Adams had written his

wife, Abigail, that he imagined Washington was thinking that.

That was just a minor example. The screenwriter, Kirk Ellis, in a New Republic article, recalls a scene in which Vice President Adams is shown breaking a Senate tie over ratification of the Jay Treaty with Britain. In reality, the treaty passed by a two-thirds majority, so Adams had no role. Adams did cast many tie-breaking votes, Ellis says, but "in retrospect, the scene now seems too much of a stretch, the one example of 'manufactured drama' in the miniseries."

It seems fair for Ellis to ponder how often John and Abigail should hop into bed based on the sexual innuendo in their letters. But, he admits, "some of the signature speeches in the show — notably Adams's oration for independence — are largely invented." Ellis's rationale: "The line between 'history' and 'drama' is a fine one."

Adams and company aren't around to complain, but Bill Clinton and members of his administration went ballistic in 2006 as

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Warren Christopher
Former secretary of state, on his "Recount" depiction