

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Lazarus for Bulova Snooze Alarm Clocks: "Sometimes, you just want to sleep a little longer."
Sen. Ted Stevens for renovations by Home Depot: "You can do it, we can help (wink, wink)."

Week 783: The Shill Game

Here's a contest we haven't done since the Invitational was still in diapers: **Name a celebrity or fictional character to endorse a real product or company.** Back in Week 52, in 1994, the entries were mostly puns, such as the Jackson Family for Chock Full o' Nuts (by Nick Dierman), Jack Kevoorkian for Curtains Unlimited (Elden Carnahan) and the classic John Wayne Bobbitt for Microsoft, by the already famous Chuck Smith of Woodbridge. You can find the whole set of Week 52 results at www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational. It's optional to include a description or slogan, as in the examples above from Kevin Dopart, who suggested this contest in blissful ignorance of its earlier existence.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives two fine books: "Yiddish With Dick and Jane," donated by Brendan Beary, and "Yiddish With George and Laura," which we had lying around ("Oh yeah, Jeb and Marvin?" George says. "You can kush mir in tuchas").

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt, classic or current version. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fir Stink for their First Ink). 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, Sept. 29. Put "Week 783" 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 Oct. 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. The revised title for next week's results is by Brad Alexander of Wameroo, Australia. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Russell Beland.

REPORT FROM WEEK 779

in which we asked basically for idiotic rants. While reading the many hundreds of entries submitted, however, the Empress couldn't help notice that some of the rants seemed awfully sincere about certain peeves they sent, such as the gripe by Steve Fahey of Kensington about most publications' policy of placing a comma inside, rather than outside, a closing quotation mark. Yes, of course, Steve is a 158-time Loser.

4 It is outrageous that Grover Cleveland, our 22nd and 24th president, gets two different dollar coins in his honor. This does nothing but reward failure, because if he'd won in 1888 and had three consecutive terms, he'd have only one coin. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

3 How can Americans willingly abide with farcical rules of succession that place the secretary of energy seven rungs below secretary of the interior? Ask any citizen: If tragedy were to strike, whom would we rather see in the Oval Office: Sam Bodman or Dirk Kempthorne? (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

2 The winner of the Liberace calendar: I am disgusted at the excessive and obscene "nipple shots" that for several weeks have plastered the front page of what should be a respectable family paper. Just because some fellow won a gold medal in swimming... (Zak Kemenosh, Washington, a First Offender)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

What really burns me up is women who breast-feed their babies in public when I'm out with my family. I can't very well say, "Yeah, baby" or "How about a little lunch for me?" with my wife and kids standing there! (Chris Rollins, Cumberland, Md.)

HOW COULD THESE BE WORTH ONLY A MAGNET: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Our judicial system is such a mess! I reported for jury duty and they sent me home for no good reason: "Just 'cause" is what they said! And that was after I told them I already knew for a fact that the defendant was guilty, guilty, guilty! (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

I hate when people repeatedly say "you know." Like my former boss — he'd say, "You know you can't download porn in the office." "You know you can't embezzle funds from the pension account." "You know you're going to jail." It drove me crazy! (John Bunyan, Cincinnati)

What's with octagonal stop signs? They could be hexagonal, still have a distinctive shape, and it would save two sides! (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)

The name "Washington Redskins" is offensive to me. I live near FedEx Field and think they rightly should call themselves the Prince George's Redskins. When I sing "Hail to the Redskins," I always exhort them to "fight for old P.G.!" (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

I was very disappointed by the recent Edward Hopper show at the National Gallery. For example, I had no idea what was happening in "Office at Night." It would have helped a lot if Hopper had painted word balloons, like in cartoons. Woman: "I'm pregnant." Man: "Huh?" That would have added a little nuance. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

The stores at the mall have obviously sold out to the "War on Independence" agenda: They all have signs about "the Fourth of July," instead of "Independence Day"! Remember, Independence is the Reason for the Season. (Jon Graft, Centreville)

I hate it when people confuse the letter O with

the number 0. If you give out your area code as "two-oh-two," well, don't be surprised if someone dials 262, because on the telephone pad, 6 is the key for the letter O. (William E. Bradford, Washington)

It's positively indecent that men will walk down the street with that thing of theirs flapping in the breeze right in front of them! Gentlemen, I beg you to stick it back where it belongs — through the loop on the back of the tie. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

I'm appalled that Maryland designates as its state flower the black-eyed Susan, thus tacitly condoning domestic violence... (Brendan Beary)

People are such idiots. First they make the Walk and the Don't Walk lights both gray! Then, no matter how good you are at running, they can forget, like, five times in a row to let go of the ball they're trying to throw. Idiots, I tell you. — Rex (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Why does Hershey's continue to print "Open Here" on its wrappers? Please, Hershey's, tell me exactly what I'm risking if I open the candy from the other end. It's freakin' chocolate, not a bomb with a timer detonator. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

Why are elections always on Tuesdays? I haven't been able to vote in 20 years because Tuesday is my bowling night. (Jon Graft)

No matter how many times I tell my local grocers that a tomato is a fruit, not a vegetable, they keep putting them between the potatoes and the onions. What's next, putting the asparagus beside the blueberries? (Marjorie Streeter, Reston)

"Objects in Mirror . . ." — How can an object be in a mirror? Is it inside the plastic housing that sticks out of the car door? Why is our government mandating this absurd perversion of our language? (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

I have been sending out thank-you cards for years upon receiving gifts or favors, and NOT ONCE has someone been kind enough to thank me for sending what I think are very nice thank-you cards. A simple card would be nice. What are we, animals? (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Why is the little figure in all crosswalk lights so obviously male? Doesn't the government realize that women outnumber men, and as a result more actually cross the street? (Jeff Brechlin)

As The Post's Metro editor I've spent all these months soliciting Washingtonians' rants for a recurring feature on Page B3, and then some anonymous worker in the Style section goes and rips off the contest without even a credit. — Robert McCartney (N.G. Andrews, Portsmouth, Va.)

What has happened to The Style Invitational? Some say it's a difference in tone, a shift from funny to clever. I feel that a good bodily function joke will always be appreciated by men and a few undiscriminating women. When people ask, "Didn't you use to be big in The Style Invitational?" I always answer that it's The Style Invitational that got small. And then I poke them in the eyes with two fingers. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Next Week: Location, Location, Location or A Plague of Locust

JONATHAN YARDLEY

Hunter S. Thompson's 'Fear and Loathing': The Mood-Altering Magic Remains

YARDLEY, From C1

some fatback *grossero* named Del Webb, who owns the luxurious Mint Hotel in the heart of downtown Las Vegas," but it turned out to be a suffocating bore, Sports Illustrated rejected what little Thompson had written, and he turned his attentions elsewhere, thanks to a sudden assignment from the still youthful and still irreverent counterculture magazine Rolling Stone.

A bunch of lawyers and cops were about to descend on Las Vegas, and the magazine wanted Thompson to write about them. At first he thought the idea was insane, but gradually the possibilities dawned on him: "It was treacherous, stupid and demented in every way — but there was no avoiding the stench of twisted humor that hovered around the idea of a gonzo journalist in the grip of a potentially terminal drug episode being invited to cover the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs." So Thompson said yes, and with that two seeds were planted: one for the legend of Hunter S. Thompson, gonzo journalist, and one for the most successful and famous of his books, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream."

The pieces for Rolling Stone were published in two installments in November 1971, the book by Random House the following year. My copy is actually the later (undated) Popular Library paperback, which confirms me in the suspicion that I first read "Fear and Loathing" in Rolling Stone. I was in my early 30s and no particular fan of the counterculture, but I liked some of the things the magazine was doing and had been a subscriber for a couple of years. I knew about Thompson because a good friend of mine had grown up with him in Louisville, so I read the Vegas pieces with anticipation and curiosity — and, as it turned out, with great pleasure and excitement.

By the time of his suicide three years ago Thompson had become such a familiar presence in American journalism that there is no need, now, to describe in detail his volcanic, obscenity-laced, extravagantly self-mocking prose style, but in 1971 it was something almost entirely new, and it hit readers — especially Thompson's fellow journalists — right between the eyes. The "new" journalism by then was well established, with newspaper and magazine hacks all over the country trying to imitate the excesses of Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer, but Thompson was something completely different. This was journalism utterly without rules, holding no cows even remotely sacred, giving the finger to orthodoxy and convention in every form, and frequently unquotable — today as then — in a family newspaper.

Reread now, after a 27-year breather, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" holds up remarkably well. Its shock value is gone, of course, but its entertainment value remains surprisingly high. It's probably considerably more fiction than fact, yet there's a great deal of truth in it. Thompson never gets close to finding the American dream in Las Vegas, but from the beginning that merely seems a conceit tacked on in hopes of giving the book a thematic



BY FRANK MARTIN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hunter S. Thompson in 1990. His countercultural romp helped immortalize the Cadillac Coupe de Ville, below.

Coming Up

The next book in this series is "Dale Loves Sophie to Death," by Robb Forman Dew (Back Bay paperback, \$13.95).

vener. What really matters is Thompson's over-the-top self-portrait, his depiction of Vegas and the people he finds there, the incredible drawings by Ralph Steadman that accompany the narrative, and the narrative itself.

As many readers already know, Thompson is not for the faint of heart. Though his behavior probably was not quite as insane as the image he so carefully crafted would have us believe — no one gets as much work done as he did if he's on drugs and booze all the time — it remains that plenty of people would heartily disapprove of what he ate, what he drank, what he said and what he did. Four paragraphs into the book, he writes:

"The sporting editors had . . . given me \$300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab. We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker full full of

cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers . . . and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls."

Odds are that you find that either horrifying or hilarious; there's no in-between. Me, I find it hilarious. The only mood-altering substances to which I'm partial come in liquid form and are sold legally, but I still am hugely amused by the insouciance with which Thompson describes his stash, much of which may well have existed only in the exceedingly fertile territory of his imagination. Portraying himself as Raoul Duke, "doctor of journalism," and accompanied by his 300-pound Samoan lawyer, Doctor Gonzo — an exceedingly fanciful portrait of Oscar Zeta Acosta, a prominent Mexican American attorney whom Thompson had befriended — he takes the reader on a ride more bizarre, and much more fun, than anything previously dreamed up by Jack Kerouac or Ken Kesey.

The first vehicle in which we travel is an immense Chevrolet convertible christened "the Great Red Shark" by Thompson, but about halfway through the book — once Thompson quits the Mint 400 and goes on the Rolling Stone expense account to cover the district attorneys' conference — he junks that and rents "the Whale," a Cadillac Coupe de Ville, a model that went out of production a decade and a half ago but remains fixed in American legend, a distinction that must owe at least a tiny bit to Thompson:

"Everything was automatic. I could sit in the red-leather driver's seat and make every inch of the car jump, by touching the proper buttons. It was a wonderful machine: Ten grand worth of gimmicks and high-priced Special Effects. The rear-windows leaped up with a touch, like frogs in a dynamite pond. The white canvas top ran up and down like a roller-coaster. The dashboard was full of esoteric lights & dials & meters that I would never understand — but there was no doubt in my mind that I was into a superior machine."

That's echt Thompson, from the carefully placed italics, to "like frogs in a dynamite pond," to the boyish delight in mechanical gimmickry, to the mixture of disdain and delight with which he viewed this rolling symbol of American vulgarity. Thompson was no H.L. Mencken, but the two shared a view of this country that fell somewhere between exasperated affection and utter revulsion. It was Mencken, after all, who coined the delicious word "booboisie" and famously said (or is reputed to have said) that "no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people," a sentiment with which Thompson would have heartily agreed, especially with regard to Las Vegas, of which he writes: "No, this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted."

It isn't just the vulgarity of Vegas that strikes Thompson,

though there's plenty of that to go around, but also the thuggishness. Caesars Palace and other hotel/casinos "pay a lot of muscle to make sure the high rollers don't have even momentary hassles with 'undesirables,'" i.e., "public drunks and known pickpockets" or just people who don't look as if they belong.

"The 'high side' of Vegas is probably the most closed society west of Sicily — and it makes no difference, in terms of the day-to-day life-style of the place, whether the Man at the Top is Lucky Luciano or Howard Hughes. In an economy where Tom Jones can make \$75,000 a week for two shows a night at Caesar's, the palace guard is indispensable, and they don't care who signs their paychecks. A gold mine like Vegas breeds its own army, like any other gold mine. Hired muscle tends to accumulate in fast layers around money/power poles . . . and big money, in Vegas, is synonymous with the Power to protect it."

It will be argued that today, nearly four decades later, Vegas has changed, has softened itself up for the family trade. That may be so, but there are more hotel/casinos than ever, and more people to be separated from their money, and Thompson nailed the scene for all eternity, as did John Gregory Dunne in his own "Vegas," published three years later. Still, the real star of this particular show isn't the city but the "doctor of journalism" who careers around it, "a relatively respectable citizen — a multiple felon, perhaps, but certainly not dangerous" by contrast with others in the vicinity. "Is there a priest in this tavern?" he asks. "I want to confess! I'm a [expletive] sinner! Venal, mortal, carnal, major, minor — however you want to call it, Lord . . . I'm guilty."

This is lovely stuff, as funny as it is calculatedly outrageous. Yes, like the words of the rest of us who toil in the evanescent precincts of journalism, Thompson's work will fade away in time. At the moment, though, an impressive number of his books remain in print, happy evidence that he'll be around for a good while longer.

"Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" is available in a Vintage paperback (\$13.95).

Jonathan Yardley's e-mail address is yardleyj@washpost.com.

