

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 792: Clue Us In



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36 Across: Actual clue: Raised, as cattle
New clue: Text-message exhortation sent by Communist recruiters

For the third straight year, we're going to compile a set of funny alternative clues to a crossword penned by Ace Constructor and now Rye, N.Y., City Council member Paula Gamache; this one ran in The Post on Nov. 12. It's more important for the clues to be funny than to fit crossword conventions; for instance, you certainly don't need to signal a pun by ending the clue with a question mark. Still, as for a crossword, the clue needs to match the part of speech; if the word is a singular noun, the clue can't refer to a plural verb. Offer as many clues as you like, but keep the wording concise, because otherwise we won't be able to fit a whole set on the page. Please say which word you're writing the clue for; don't just write "36 Down." Paula will help judge.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives — just in time for Christmas — one of the most annoying Christmas decorations we've ever seen inflicted upon the world: It's an electric tabletop diorama of Santa playing the piano while a cat watches. When you turn it on, it beeps out (we think) "Jingle Bells," seemingly trying to imitate the broken car horn of a Fiat. Also, Santa's and the cat's heads jerk around creepily.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fr. Stink for their First link). 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, Dec. 1. Put "Week 792" 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 Dec. 20. 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 was sent by both Stephen Dudzik and Chris Doyle; this week's Honorable Mentions headline is by Kevin Dopart.

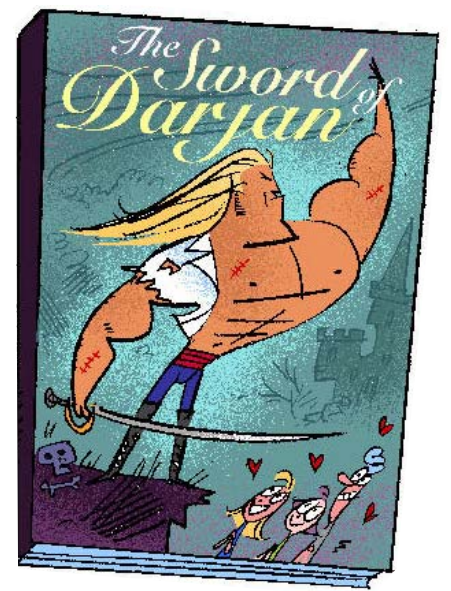
REPORT FROM WEEK 788 in which we asked for a comically badly written ending to a novel, much as the annual Bulwer-Lytton contest asks for the beginning of one. A number of the hundreds of entries we received were shaggy dog stories — anecdotes whose punch lines were groaner puns. Others offered alternative endings to existing books. Those aren't what we had in mind for this contest, but hold on to them for future ones.

4 As he left, the captain flashed a smile — a wide, satisfied grin with lips parted a quarter-inch, the right corner of the mouth raised slightly above the left, and a dry lower lip slightly stuck to the teeth — that defied description. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

3 Oh, and by the way, Chapters 3, 8, 10 and part of 16 were all dreams, in case you hadn't caught on. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

2 the winner of the Booger Boy car antenna ornament: First the infarction, then the ambulance ride, now going under the knife, he drifted away under anesthesia, humming Celine Dion's tune "My Heart Will Go On." But it didn't. (Larry Miller, Rockville)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER As the wail of the nearing sirens shook him awake, Todd rose from the charred remains of Rensfield Manor, wiped the ectoplasm from his brow and, stuffing the Amulet of Valtor inside his shirt, gazed ruefully at the venom-encrusted Sword of Darjan, realizing that this long night wasn't over yet, because he still had a heck of a lot of explaining to do. (LuAnn Bishop, West Haven, Conn.)



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE LOST WEAK ENDS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

And Washington ceased to exist in a fireball that churned skyward like the gaseous plea of a whale that had ingested a crate of habanero peppers, red and yellow — the explosion, not the peppers, though habaneros, which are the world's hottest, can in fact be red or yellow. Not that this mattered to the former residents of Washington, who were now mere dust particles; all they were was dust in the wind. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Over the years, she became for Gary a fuzzy memory, until he had trouble even making out her features, though he was still pretty sure she was female and her name started with a B or R. (Jay Shuck)

He had only 75 words to go on his contractually required novel of 50,000 words. A guy could say a lot in 75 words, like "Pudding is best when it's warm." He wondered whether to count hyphenated words as two words. Strange thoughts come to a fellow at times like these. Should he have written "50,000" as "fifty thousand"? He was close enough to count down: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2. (Art Grinath)

Not! (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Henry gazed at the depleted tube of toothpaste on the sink and thought of his life with Gertrude: you know, how the tube gets all wrinkled up and folded, and the cap gets dirty, and you're looking forward to getting a brand-new tube, but the new paste squeezes out too fast, and anyway you're bewildered by all the choices on the store shelves? (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

In the end, we realized that we didn't really own Dopey: He owned us. And now we had the restrictive spiked collars to prove it. (Beth Morgan, San Francisco)

He had been in a long, slow denouement. He rocked rhythmically on the porch, at once hesitant to turn the next page of his life, yet resolved to face his fate. With a deep sigh and exhalation, he turned the page. The page was blank. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

She slowly tied noose to rafter, and then she slowly loaded six .38-caliber bullets into her revolver, and then she slowly swallowed a bottle of sleeping

pills, and, with gas from the unlit kitchen stove slowly flooding the house, she, gun in hand, slowly mounted the creaking chair beneath the dangling noose. Finally, slowly, oh so slowly, she thought, "THIS will teach those meanies at Publishers Clearing House." (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

So, from now on, call me Isabel. (Art Grinath)

Approaching dawn's rosy fingers limned a sweat-stained border around my ponderous flesh on the wafer-thin flophouse mattress that had involuntarily witnessed a thousand loveless assignations. Worse, the tag had been removed. Still, tomorrow held the happy promise that all mankind would act like golden retrievers and I, like they, scratched my ear, chuffed contentedly and resumed my sleep. (George Vary, Bethesda)

And as he watched, the day slowly faded away like the picture on an old black-and-white TV when you turned it off, only this time, there was no little pop of light at the very end. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

Next Week: Doctrine in the House? or Hot Dogmas

In the Cellphone Era, a New Picture of Stupidity Emerges

PHONES, From Page C1

have been amputated but still itch.

In the olden days of stolen cell-phones — say, three, four years ago — the best you could do was call yourself. Dial your own number and hope that a good citizen picked up, while you imagined the phone's possible locations. On the street? Under a barstool? Wedged in a Metro seat and bleating out weak rings as the battery ... slowly ... died?

Now, a whole number of applications and services have made it possible for you to Follow That Treo, follow it straight to justice.

Martijn Van Es, a Web editor for Amnesty International in the Netherlands, had given up on his missing phone, until he started getting e-mails from friends. "They wanted to know," says Van Es, "why I was taking photographs of teenage boys."

He wasn't, actually. The kids in question had gained possession of the phone and used it to shoot themselves horsing around. They didn't know that the phone was

subscribed to ShoZu, a service that automatically uploaded any cellphone snapshots to Van Es's public Flickr account. Van Es took the photos to police, who said they couldn't help — no one knew whether the teens had stolen the phone (a crime) or merely found it (not).

So like any self-respecting web-ophile, Van Es got an idea: crowd-sourcing. He posted the teens' photos on his personal blog, and within a day his visitors shot from 250 to 28,000 as hoards of commenters mocked, forwarded, sleuthed, mocked some more. By the end of the week, he'd traced the kids to a local school and was fielding dozens of junior high-ish e-mails: *I can ask X to find out if Y knows if G stole the phone.*

Meanwhile, he was growing scared of the cybermonster he'd created. These were just kids. Comments were getting vicious, and "all of these personal details were outed about them," says Van Es, which made him concerned. He does work for Amnesty International, after all.

Eventually an exchange was arranged, and the photos were taken

The photo trails left by technologically unsavvy crooks are like the online Darwin Awards, like the schadenfreude of "Cops."

down from the site.

"But if I'd have known what I know now, I wouldn't have written anything on my blog," says Van Es. "Six months later and the phone was broken" anyway.

But that's the Internet for you — no take-backs, no do-overs.

Crowd-sourcing as mystery-solving "does more harm than good in almost every case I've seen," says Daniel Solove, a George Washington University law professor and author of "The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet," who studies this sort of thing. "The mob tries to one-up each other," the punishment doesn't fit the crime, the cybermob meets the lynch mob and one really hideous two-headed monster is born.

Which we totally, totally get. Except that ... These people. Are taking photos of themselves with stolen phones. And then unintentionally sending records of their every move. Directly to the people who are trying to catch them. Aaaaaahahahahahaaa.

The sheer idiocy is what makes it funny. What makes it compelling is the idea of anthropomorphized phones sending S.O.S. signals, se-



BY HARRY CAMPBELL FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

cret missives back to their original owners. *Find me. Find me, I am all alone with strangers. Find me!*

How tantalizing, to think that while we continue to live our lives, our phones go on entirely new adventures. Such was the fascination of Ben Clemens of San Francisco, who gained minor Internet fame two years ago when he was the first ShoZu user to discover that his phone — stolen on an Amtrak — would just keep uploading, regardless of who took the photographs.

For weeks, Clemens would log onto his computer and find a picture of a Chihuahua. A car. A wom-

an having a snack. Children. Ambiguous fragments of his phone's new life, displayed for Clemens's viewing pleasure. It was voyeuristic and intriguing, like stalking the blog of a person you barely know. "The photos did stop appearing after a while," says Clemens, as the phone's new owners either learned to disable the ShoZu function or discarded the device. "I was quite relieved at that point." Otherwise, who knows if he could have torn himself away.

David McDonald of Melbourne, Australia, was similarly more curious than angry, when he logged on to Flickr earlier this year and found that his phone, pickpocketed a few days before, had recently attended a street festival.

There it was, "having its own little field trip," cavorting with guys McDonald didn't know, in a neighborhood he'd never been. "I spent minutes and minutes blowing up the photo and analyzing it," says McDonald, a Web designer. He saw that the photograph in question was taken on a Sunday and used the date to determine which celebration the picture must depict. He scoured the photo for contextual clues, considered traveling to the scene to put himself in the mind of the phone.

"It's a bit of a detective story," he says, "like the myth where someone steals your garden gnome. ... After a while, I sort of thought it was funny."

And so technology advances, crowds become vigilantes, criminals are caught ... and David McDonald periodically checks Flickr with a mixture of obsession and excitement, wanting to see what antics his phone is up to now.

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