

DIVERSIONS

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

What on Earth? How ETs see us.

BY PAT MYERS

In **Week 1450** the Empress asked for observations by either visiting space aliens or anthropologists from the future. Numerous Losers reported the humanoid slaves of cats or dogs, not to mention the little rectangle-idols that the Earthlings hold in their hands at all times.

4th place:

Oddly, many of the largest human dwellings had fewer occupants than the smaller ones. Perhaps this is because their inhabitants lacked the proximity that leads to mating. (Terri Berg Smith, Rockville)

3rd place:

Humans are incredibly fast readers. In seconds, they absorb pages of incomprehensible technical data and legal disclaimers before declaring, "I accept the terms and conditions." (Frank Mann, Washington)

2nd place and the bendy Bigfoot figure:

The most powerful figure in their society is the Dentist, who is so revered that when she makes a patient bleed, the patient apologizes to her. (Coleman Glenn, Huntingdon Valley, Pa.)

And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

Once a year every human must recommit to the familial cult by lighting a cake on fire while clan members chant a mournful dirge. (Scott Richards, Hollywood, Md.)

Lose encounters: Honorable mentions

Humans waste irrational amounts of energy disparaging groups of strangers from cities they know nothing about who get paid to hit spheres with wooden clubs when they could be disparaging the Yankees. (Coleman Glenn)

In addition to the small containers we have identified as jewelry boxes, many homes featured large boxes on floors. The adornments inside, displayed on sand, must have once been beautiful and highly prized; Sadly, they have now deteriorated into randomly shaped brown lumps. (Robin Rowland, Potomac)

In American culture, references to excrement are taboo unless they also include a smiley face. (Mark Raffman, Reston)

The inhabitants' language, English, probably died out because of excessive complexity: for example, the terms "antihistamine," "antipasto," "Antietam" and "Auntie Em" had nothing to do with each other. (Kristin Braly, Baltimore)

These humans go about having the most awful thoughts — I'm embarrassed even to hear them. I can't believe how few of them know about tinfoil caps! (Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.; Beverly Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

While excavating some 21st-century female graves, our archaeologists uncovered a curious practice of burying the deceased with two plastic bags of salt water. (Frank Mann)

As an act of supplication to the gods of safe travel, airline passengers visit a small shrine within the communal building and, upon making an appropriate donation, are presented with a religious tome labeled "John Grisham." (Todd DeLap, Fairfax)

As they place themselves before their computing devices, humans type brief prayers for success. Translators still have not discerned their meanings, but they appear to address deities whose symbols include at least one capital letter, at least one number and at least one symbol such as !@#%&^*~. (Marli Melton, Carmel Valley, Calif.)

According to video evidence, pizza deliveryman was apparently once a high-status occupation that made males instantly desirable to females. (Terri Berg Smith)

Every 10 years, a government agency sends representatives to every house in the country to determine whether its doorbells work. (Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

As they travel about in their wheeled vehicles, humans often greet other drivers with loud bursts of sound. These drivers respond with similar bursts, or a friendly



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

New contest for Week 1454: Punku 3 — haiku with a pun

The #MeToo movement Has had it up to here with Male pattin' boldness. (Chris Doyle, Punku 2, 2019)

For those for whom limericks are too long-form, the Empress brings you the third installment of our Loserly version of haiku:

This week: **Create a haiku containing a pun or similar wordplay,** as in the Week 1317 runner-up above, one of the few inking entries that week that weren't (alas) out of date. You may add a title if you like.

By "haiku" we mean — **Purists, please chill a minute — Just 5-7-5.** (As in syllables per line.)

Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1454 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday, Sept. 27;** results appear Oct. 17 in print, Oct. 14 online.

Winner gets the Clowning Achievement, our Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives, in yet more "homage" to an ancient and revered Japanese tradition, **Thumb Sumo,** a pair of rubber fat guys whom you fit over your fingertips and who give a new meaning to "thumb wrestling." You don't even have to feed them 7,000 calories a day. Complete with a mini-book about sumo and its culture. Donated by Dave Prevar.

Other runners-up win their choice of our "For Best Results, Pour Into Top End" Loser Mug or our "Whole Fools" Grossery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our new lusted-after Loser magnets, "A Small Jester of Appreciation" or "Close, but Ceci N'est Pas un Cigare." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline "What on Earth?" was submitted by both Roy Ashley and Jesse Frankovich; Chris Doyle wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at [on.fb.me/invdev](https://www.facebook.com/on.fb.me/invdev); "like" the Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at [bit.ly/inkofday](https://www.facebook.com/bit.ly/inkofday); and follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.

The Style Conversational: The Empress's online column, published Thursdays, will return next week.

enjoys denying it. (Coleman Glenn)

Few artifacts from that era remain except for billions of narrow tubes that archaeologists have determined were used for siphoning liquid from drinking vessels. (Hildy Zampella, Alexandria)

Humans are forbidden to drive past a herd of bovines without trying to communicate with them. (Kevin Dopart, sojourning in Naxos, Greece)

Humans and cats apparently lived together peacefully, before felines evolved thumbs. (Hannah Seidel, Alexandria)

I saw two Earthlings cleaning each other in the park, but only around the mouth, neck, and ears. The rest of their bodies appears to be self-cleaning, as each of them was secreting a liquid through the skin pores — especially the big, hairy one. (Jon Gearhart)

Office workers wear short lengths of cloth trailing from their necks as a sort of leash to be yanked by in case their boss needs them. (Daniel Galef, Tallahassee)

On pilgrimage to the southern and western parts of their country, disciples of giant rodents promenade wearing artificial ears in tribute to cult leaders. (Jeff Rackow, on a work assignment in Abidjan, Ivory Coast)

On the open road, speed limit signs appear to correlate to the speed of the slowest vehicles. In busy areas, speed limit signs correlate to nothing in particular. Conclusion: more funding is needed to study this phenomenon. (Lee Graham, Rockville)

And Last: In one of the time capsules were newspaper collections of jokes (?), seemingly to appease a minor goddess of some sort to win worthless junk. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

More honorable mentions in the online Invite at wapo.st/invite1454.

Still running — deadline Monday night, Sept. 20: our contest to misinterpret a book title by adding a subtitle. See wapo.st/invite1453.

L.A. TIMES SUNDAY PUZZLE

EDITED BY RICH NORRIS AND JOYCE NICHOLS LEWIS

"SUPPORT GROUPS" By PAUL COULTER

ACROSS

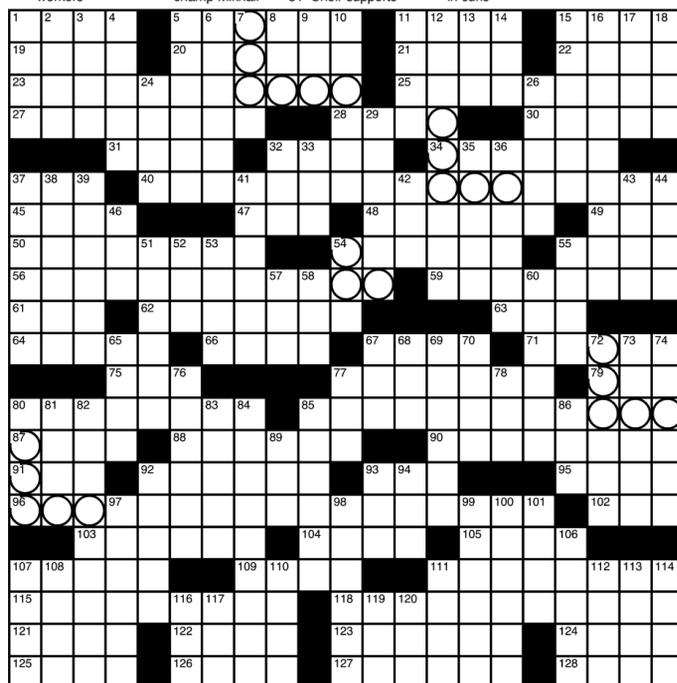
- 1 Part of a sea urchin's diet
- 5 Rest of the afternoon
- 11 "Beat it!"
- 15 Big first for babies
- 19 Welisian race
- 20 "Life of Pi" director
- 21 "Boo'd Up" singer
- 22 Mani mate
- 23 "Hotel convenience
- 25 Manicurist's assortment
- 27 Beholden
- 28 George who plays Stokes on "CSI"
- 30 Minneapolis' Target Center, e.g.
- 31 Roger of "Cheers"
- 32 Stand
- 34 Hotel offerings
- 37 Cat's attention-getter, maybe
- 40 "Address essential details
- 45 Caspian feeder
- 47 Novelist Rita Brown
- 48 Pitcher John on three different MLB championship teams
- 49 Bonanza find
- 50 Scholars
- 54 Roofing support
- 55 Really cool
- 56 "Wannabe lawyer's milestone
- 59 Most clever
- 61 Brian of rock
- 62 Evening affairs
- 63 NYC congresswoman, in headlines
- 64 Saint-Saëns's "Macabre"
- 66 Paid informer
- 67 EPA-banned chemicals
- 71 Swing site
- 75 RN workplaces
- 77 Nantucket arrivals
- 79 "... he drove out of sight": Moore
- 80 Board game bonus
- 85 "Keep one's identity secret, say
- 87 Big name in chips
- 88 Enmity
- 90 Place for an

- 91 Denver-to-Omaha dir.
- 92 Eyeplece
- 93 Reverence
- 95 Kid's retort
- 96 "Prepare emotionally for, as something unpleasant
- 102 What "I" may mean
- 103 Prepared for cooking, as corn
- 104 Consort of Psyche
- 105 Yours, to Yvette
- 107 Carry away
- 109 Biblical scribe
- 111 Exhibits unease, maybe
- 115 Harbormaster's chart
- 118 Miami Sound Machine and others, and a hint to this puzzle's circled letters
- 121 On deck, perhaps
- 122 High-tech workers

- 123 Words from behind a door, maybe
- 124 Blue hue
- 125 Go on
- 126 Acronym on a protective vest
- 127 Battery terminals
- 128 Back talk

DOWN

- 1 Visored French cap
- 2 Brio
- 3 Byron's title
- 4 Slingy sort
- 5 Important coastal drainage river in South Carolina
- 6 Swallow
- 7 "Good grief!"
- 8 35mm camera type
- 9 Leaves in a cup
- 10 Sea at one end of the Dardanelles
- 11 Texter's button
- 12 Stand-up types
- 13 "Aladdin" prince
- 14 1960s chess champ Mikhail
- 15 Ornamental shrub
- 16 Astronomer's tool
- 17 Fall place
- 18 Galileo's birthplace
- 24 "... your pardon"
- 26 Like many rich foods
- 29 School room encouraging creativity
- 32 Fancy neckwear
- 33 Dolly, for one
- 35 "Family Matters" nerd
- 36 Spain's peninsula
- 37 Mashed, as oranges
- 38 Grande dame of pop
- 39 Doyle's narrator
- 41 Composer Shostakovich
- 42 Big galoot
- 43 Singer Kristofferson
- 44 Breakaway group
- 46 Arles article
- 51 Choir supports
- 52 Mayo is in it
- 53 "Hooray, the weekend!"
- 54 Dorm figs.
- 55 Big name in kitchenware
- 57 Chick magnet?
- 58 Distressed cry
- 60 Thickets
- 65 Goes out with
- 67 One in a pod
- 68 Call out
- 69 Asian sultanate
- 70 Coscant's reciprocal
- 72 Overhaul
- 73 Game stick with a net
- 74 Jamie of "Bosch"
- 76 "In the Bedroom" Oscar nominee
- 77 Some mil. bases
- 78 One of eight Eng. kings
- 80 Beat it
- 81 Carry on
- 82 Antiglare wear
- 83 Occupied
- 84 Alexandria's area
- 85 One often seen in curls
- 86 TV pioneer
- 89 ... de mer
- 92 Attack
- 93 Back
- 94 Is no longer
- 97 Best at putting things away?
- 98 World's largest peninsula
- 99 Mother of note
- 100 Middle ear bone
- 101 Archaeological find
- 106 Apple varieties
- 107 List-ending abbr.
- 108 Three-time WNBA MVP
- 110 Gusto
- 111 List of appts.
- 112 "Only Time" songwriter
- 113 Old food label nos.
- 114 IRS IDs
- 116 Sit-up targets
- 117 Fiddle stick
- 119 Taylor of fashion
- 120 Sulu portrayer John



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Answers to last week's puzzle below.

HOROSCOPE

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY | Sept. 19: You have a charming, charismatic personality. You are also confident and forthright, especially with your ideas. You are observant, alert and quite precise about whatever you do. This year you will be helpful to others, especially family members. Therefore, take care of yourself, because you are an important resource for others. People will turn to you for guidance and comfort; therefore, stay grounded.

Moon Alert: There are no restrictions to shopping or important decisions today. The Moon is in Pisces.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) This is an excellent day for financial dealings, shopping or making decisions about inheritances, insurance matters or shared property.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) It's a great day to schmooze with loved ones. Enjoy the company of partners and close friends. Prepare for delays and silly mistakes at work.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) Today you make a wonderful impression on bosses, parents and VIPs. You might develop a crush on a boss. Your ruler Mercury is slowing down before it goes retrograde at the end of the week. Expect delays and goofy mistakes.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Travel for pleasure will delight you today. Appreciate the arts and crafts of other cultures. Expand your world. Family reunions and a focus on parents and your domestic world will begin.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) Double-check details with banking and shared property today. When it comes to money and assets, don't be in the dark. Prepare for transportation delays, car breakdowns and bike problems. Check this stuff out. Expect to hear from a sibling.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) A conversation with a partner and close friend will be rewarding today. You might learn something new or meet someone new. Checks might be late in the mail and financial matters could be delayed. If looking for work, go back to where you worked or applied before.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) It's a good money day for you. News about your health or a pet might surprise you. Be alert. (The world

needs more alert people.) By the end of the week, Mercury is retrograde in your sign. Expect delays and silly errors. Contact with old friends and ex-partners is likely. It's a good time for introspection.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) This is a lovely day for you. Party, have fun and socialize! Do something different. Research will go very well for you this week and for several weeks ahead. You might find solutions to old problems. Some will resurrect a secret love affair.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) This is a perfect day to relax and cocoon at home and enjoy familiar surroundings. Family discussions will go well. Nevertheless, something unexpected might change your daily routine at home. Old friends are back in your world again. It's good to have history with others.

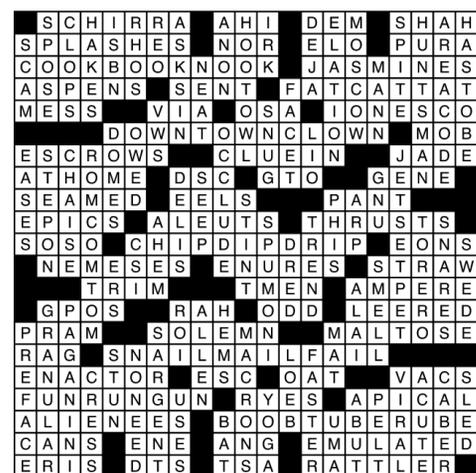
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) This is a great day to socialize with

artistic, creative people. Short trips, visits and errands will make this a busy and unpredictable day. Stay light on your feet. You will hear from parents or old bosses you have not seen for a while. This could be an opportunity.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) You make a great impression on bosses and important people today. Possibly, this will translate into a favorable financial situation for you or perhaps a raise today. You might make a spontaneous purchase. Travel plans will be delayed; ditto for school projects and political issues.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) An unexpected chance to travel might drop in your lap today. Or perhaps you will be attracted to someone who is "different." Things will go your way. Expect a few surprises. Checks from the government might be late. Financial transactions will be delayed.

Answers to last week's puzzle.



9/12/21