

The Style Invitational

WEEK 182: CAN YOU STOP THIS?

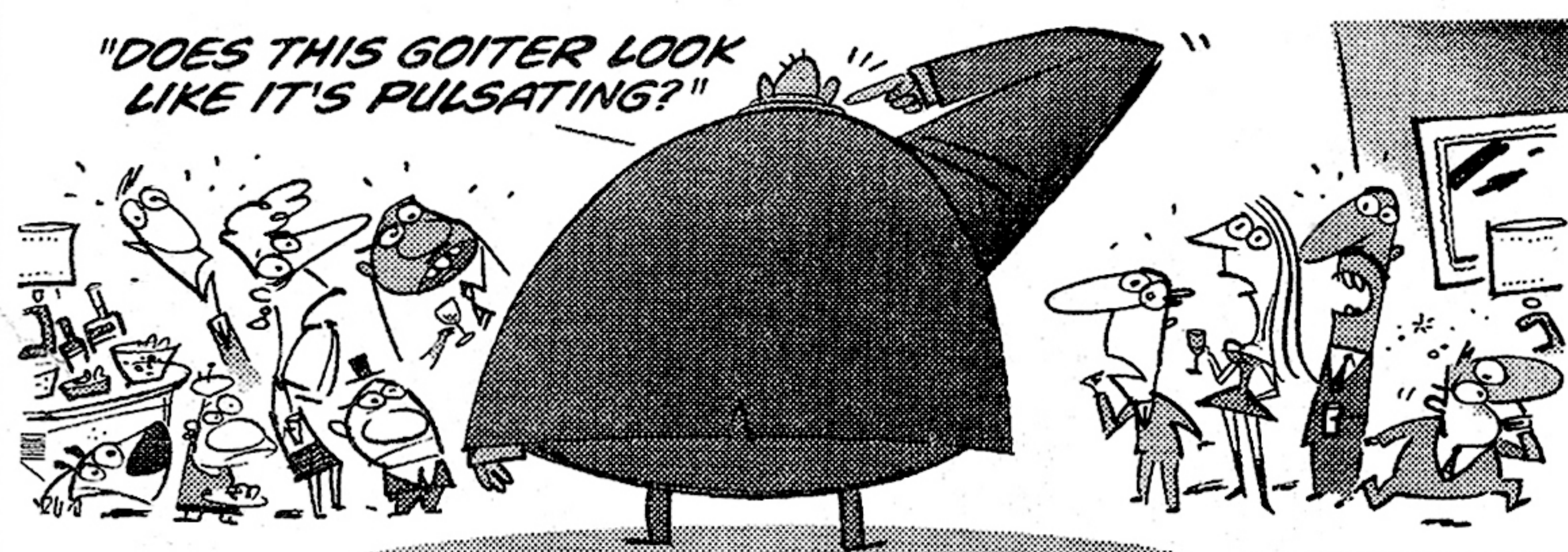
"You're not going to believe what I had to do to upgrade to 6.0."

"Don't you realize that what you're chewing right now had parents?"

"I don't believe in owning a television set."

**"Whatever you do, don't make me laugh too hard.
My underpants are rented."**

**"Tonight, I will amuse you with examples of cockney rhyming slang.
'Ello, 'ello, blimey, mate ..."**



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This Week's Contest was suggested by Sarah Worcester of Bowie, who wins a Masters of the Universe lunch box. Sarah suggests that you come up with a conversation stopper, a line likely to end all further discourse, perhaps even empty a room. First-prize winner gets a box containing more than a hundred vintage thumb-size Smurf dolls and Smurf paraphernalia, including but not limited to an official Smurf

mushroom home and what appears to be a Smurf athletic supporter, all mailed to us by Gail Rogers of Falls Church. Gail collected these items painstakingly through her childhood, each small plastic item a link to an idyllic time of innocence and creative fantasy, the magic of which poets through the millennia have tried and failed to capture. Gail traded them for a bumper sticker.

Runners-up, as always, receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser's T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to The Style Invitational, Week 182, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, fax them to 202-334-4312 or submit them via the Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Internet users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Sept. 16. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced in three weeks. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. The Faerie of the Fine Print & the Ear No One Reads wishes to thank Stephen Dudzik of Silver Spring for today's Ear No One Reads. Employees of The Washington Post and their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 179,

in which we asked you to come up with cockney rhyming slang, that devilishly droll manner of speaking that inspired an avalanche of humorous mail, mostly about what a stupid idea the contest was. It is rare that the Czar will admit to error, but the results of this contest leave him no choice. The entries were astonishingly bad, even submissions from the cleverest of our regular contributors. The entries were so strained and unfunny that none is remotely publishable, leading to the rather humiliating admission that we erred, and erred badly. There are times in life when one must simply admit one's mistakes, assume the blame entirely and move onward with humility. Accordingly, we hereby promise to never again inflict upon you a contest that is beyond your intellectual capacities.

Fortunately, we have unfinished business that will take up a lot of column space.

Some time ago, in the fine print, we challenged you to complete this knock-knock joke:

"Knock." / "You mean knock-knock, don't you?" / "No, just knock." / "Okay, who's there?" / "Boutros." / "You mean Boutros-Boutros, don't you?" / "No, just Boutros." / "Okay, Boutros who?"

Nearly 100 people tried for a last line, but only one wins the duck. The final line:

"Boutros. Boutros-Boutros's half brother." (Richard DeMello, Alexandria)

And last, we solicited questions for the Czar, promising he would answer them honestly.

◆ *Here are the winning questions and his answers.*

1. Why do you use the first person plural, as though you were the Queen of England or something?

(Stephen Dudzik, Silver Spring)

Because we like to create the impression that our column is some gigantic enterprise, a clattering factory of researchers, fact-checkers and copy editors, overseen by a team of professional humor experts answering to the command of a single uber-journalist of such stature and renown that among his retinue of bootlicking sycophants are Bob Woodward and Ben Bradlee ... as opposed to a single foul cubicle in the newsroom containing, um, us.

2. What happens to us after we die? (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

We go to a place where everything is funny and divine retribution is the rule. Pompous people are compelled to dress like Donald Duck, with a shirt but no pants. The streets are festooned with renowned works of art by LeRoy Neiman and \$300 designer shoes by Bruno Magli and ostentatious Rolex watches and priceless Faberge eggs, but dogs walk around peeing on them. This all lasts about an hour. Then a fat guy with a clipboard shows up and starts taking names. We're not sure what comes after that, but we think it is bad.

3. Is the kazoo a legitimate woodwind instrument? (Tommy Litz, Bowie)

Yes, because it collects saliva. A spittoon is a legitimate brass instrument. A better question is why toilet paper is divided into squares so small it is impossible for anyone to use just one. That puzzles us.

4. Just who do you think you are? (Russell Beland, Springfield)

We cannot be sure, but we think we might be the reincarnation of Giuseppe Zangara, the rabid anarchist assassin who shot and killed the mayor of Chicago in 1932 because he thought it would relieve his stomachache. He is our spiritual forebear.

5. If the winner of a contest dies in the week after they won, does the first runner-up automatically assume the crown? Basically, if there is a mass murder of contestants, is there any chance Newt Gingrich will win the Style Invitational? (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)

The U.S. Constitution does provide for an official order of succession for winners of the Style Invitational, and it is theoretically possible, in the event of, say, an Ebola outbreak, that we would get to Newt. But it is unlikely. He is right below Vanilla Ice.

6. Has the Czar ever caved in to evil superiors on matters of taste? (Stephen Dudzik, Silver Spring)

Yes. It is an amazing and true fact that the Executive Editor of the Washington Post—a man of global power and prestige whom presidents and captains of industry and foreign potentates must cozy up to, a man whose routine daily decisions can launch careers, destroy reputations and influence world financial markets—spends an inordinate percentage of his time ruling on questions such as whether The Style Invitational can say "poopy-hole." Sometimes he says no. There exists in The Washington Post database a file containing censored Style Invitational entries. It is side-splittingly funny. You will never, ever see it in print unless the Czar one day elects to seek other employment via an astounding act of corporate sabotage.

7. How much editing of entries do you do? (Mark Greenblatt, Potomac)

To achieve maximum humor, we will occasionally make small changes in the precise wording of an entry. For example, the original question No. 7, as it came in, read: "Why do you make so many mistakes, misspelling names and misattributing entries such as when I finally won a contest after two years of trying but you credited my answer to someone else?" We thought it was funnier this way.

8. Did you know that Mike Royko recently picked up from the Internet and printed in his nationally syndicated column, verbatim, without attribution, the results of the Style Invitational bad-analogies contest? Shouldn't he be ashamed of himself? Is there any way we can make him pay? (Tom Green, Cabin John)

Mike Royko is a giant of journalism, and if he chooses to rip you off, even inadvertently, you shouldn't be petty about it. You should take it as a compliment. Hey, what are you going to do, inundate him with endless legal threats and taunts and insults and idiotic knock-knock jokes—basically the cyberspace equivalent of a filibuster—through incessant entries to his secret personal private Internet address, MikeRoyko@aol.com?

9. Do women ever send you underpants as an inducement to let them win? (Stephen Dudzik, Silver Spring)

Not until approximately three days from now.

10. Could the results of the cockney rhyming slang contest possibly have been so bad that this stupid interview is better?

Yes. The single finest entry we received, by Roy Ashley of Washington, is "Take this corn cob and shove it." It wins the LBJ clock, which is, to our certainty, the greatest example of something for nothing since Janet Cooke won the Pulitzer Prize.

Next Week: **When In Doubt, Pun**