

DIVERSIONS

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

The book stops here: Bad novel ends

BY PAT MYERS

In Week 1411 the Empress asked for a **bad final sentence or two to a novel**, a counterpart to the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest for bad opening sentences. Dave Airozo's parody of the opening of "1984" was too good for a magnet: "It was high noon on a bright, cold January 20, 2021, and the clocks were once again striking twelve."

4th place:

I gave her a kiss on the cheek and turned to leave, not in a full 180-degree turn but about 150 degrees, since that's where my car was parked. (Sarah Walsh, Rockville)

3rd place:

And now it can be revealed: This is NOT my real autobiography. I made it all up — GOTCHA! (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

2nd place and the adorable dragon hat:

And I only am escaped alone to tell thee . . . but I will tell thee not until thou callest me Ishmael, dammit! I asked thee to do that many, many pages ago. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

The last thing I saw before the prison bars clanged shut was my mother's face, weeping for her lost child, though after the prison bars clanged shut I could still see her face, just with big stripes of bars through it, and I felt tears run down my own cheeks too, leaving trails like bars down my face. (Hannah Seidel, Alexandria)

Rear endings: Honorable mentions

And in the end, Rupert never answered the question to his own satisfaction — was it really the sweet smell of success, or had he just eaten asparagus? (Larry Rifkin, Glastonbury, Conn.)

And in the next instant, the duke's head rolled away from the chopping block like a bowling ball that happened to have nose- and ear-shaped lumps on it. (Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

And then it hit him. It should have been obvious from the start: They were never worn because the kid had a second pair in the same size! (Seth Tucker, Washington)

And thus America perished, by the evil actions of a few, by the inaction of the many, and by the worldwide conspiracy of the giant squid. (David Young, Falmouth, Mass.)

"Ah, as a child on the farm, I lost my hand — and my brother — in a horrible thresher accident . . . but the doctors were able to attach his undamaged hand to my mangled arm, so now I have TWO left hands, so, yes, in fact I am the Foggy Bottom Stabber!" (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

So as it turned out it was neither the best of times nor the worst of times. I'd say the times were about average, maybe a 6 if I'm feeling generous? (Gary Crockett)

And with this final sentence, I have completed the Great American Novel, of which I am as proud of writing as you are no doubt grateful for having had the opportunity of reading. You are most welcome. (Tom Witte)

As Inspector Katz spoke, tension in the room rose like the mercury in a rectal thermometer. "The butler did it," Katz revealed. "Case closed." And, like what will now happen with the book you are holding, dear reader, it was. (Bob Kruger, Rockville)

As the plane sputtered its final sputter, Amelia turned to an ashen Noonan and chuckled, "The real devil of it, Freddy, is that everyone's gonna wonder what happen to Amelia Earhart but nobody's gonna give a hoot about you." (Jon Ketzner, Cumberland, Md.)

At the final stop, Santa sat back and looked at the single lump in the stocking. "Well, he did promise to bring back the coal industry." (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

But my end will not be my beginning, as I think I explained at some length in Chapters 3-10. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Feeling empty as bowels after a pre-colonoscopy prep, Mariah cried out, "No, that's NOT all I want!" And with a pout, she admitted that Eartha had been right all along. (Dave Airozo, Silver Spring)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

New contest for Week 1415: The Year in Redo, Part 1

From Week 1371, new words from ScrabbleGrams "racks": AAAJMPS > PAJASM: The "ohhh" moment that comes from getting out of your work clothes and putting on your warmest PJs on a cold evening. (Jeff Hazle)

From Week 1360, fake facts about winter: Due to climate change, mushers at the 2020 Iditarod must provide their own snow. (Stephen Dudzik)

From Week 1385, puns on place names: Belchum: Famed for its deeply satisfying beer. (Dave Shombert)

Wouldn't you like to call a do-over on 2020? Go back to February, have the president put on a mask and implore everyone to wear one and stay away from other people for three straight weeks, screen every person coming in on a plane, and then get on with the year?

Even the Empress can't do that, but she *can* give you a do-over on The Style Invitational of 2020. In Part 1 of our annual retrospective, we'll cover 25 Invite contests from last December to early June, a period that includes new-word contests, song parodies, Amazon reviews for everyday products, cartoon captions, and "foal breeding" between two Kentucky Derby winners, plus some one-offs like pickup lines for various professions, and stupid questions in These Challenging Times.

This week: Enter (or reenter) any Style Invitational contest from Week 1360 through 1387, except for Weeks 1361-1363, which are last year's retrospectives plus the 2019 Year in Preview. You may enter multiple contests as long as you don't submit more than 25 entries in all.

See descriptions and links for all the old contests, plus more important details, in this week's Style Conversational column at wapo.st/conv1415.

Please begin each entry with "Week [XXXX]" plus a brief ID of the contest your entry is for (e.g., "Week 1377, quarantine activities"). **If you don't subscribe to The Post,** email me at pat.myers@washpost.com and, after I ask you why the heck not, I'll give you alternative directions.

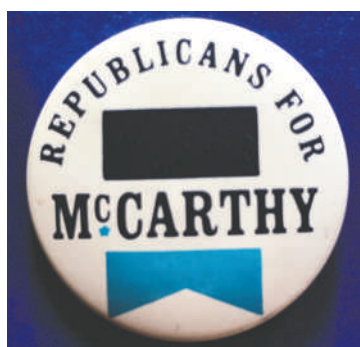
Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1415 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday, Dec. 28;** results appear Jan. 17 in print, Jan. 14 online.

Winner gets the Clowning Achievement, our new Style Invitational trophy. Second place wins a genuine "Republicans for McCarthy" button from the ultraliberal Democrat's 1968 presidential campaign, an effort to get Wisconsin GOPers to switch primaries. Donated by Loser Steve Smith in a fit of crazed altruism.

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 lusted-after Loser magnets, "No Bility" or "Punderachiever." 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 "The Book Stops Here" is by Tom Witte; Kevin Dopart 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/inkoftheday](https://www.facebook.com/bit.ly/inkoftheday); and follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.

The Style Conversational: The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. See this week's at wapo.st/conv1415.

The "You're Invited" podcast: Seven half-hour episodes, including dish from the Empress and the Czar, and tips from top Losers. See bit.ly/invite-podcast.



But they ended up with Nixon in 1968. This week's 2nd prize.

"I love you," she said lovingly. "Thank you," he said thankfully. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

I'll never forget that summer, partaking in her wonders but foolishly taking her for granted until one day she was gone as suddenly as she had arrived, like the McRib from McDonald's menu. (Bill Dörner, Indianapolis)

He could not lie: He loved Big Butts. (Dave Airozo)

Lucky Jim's watch, so befittingly, was still ticking — and as he crawled from the smoking wreckage of the 747, he noted with a grin that he might yet be able to catch his 1:30 connection to Dallas. (Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore)

Steve envisioned the road

ahead and saw a never-ending parade of challenges, potholes, confusing road signs, and squashed possums. (Larry McClemons, Annandale)

It was as if he'd sleepwalked into someone else's dream about a person who was dreaming, until that person awoke and discovered that the second person was still asleep but was now dreaming he'd woken up. (Frank Osen, Pasadena)

While the gullible masses have fallen for this version of events, only the truly astute reader will have determined the true killer's identity. If you believe you are among the select few, send your guess, along with \$29.99, to Box 2782 . . . (Eric Nelkin, Silver Spring)

"Do you think this ending is too meta?" I asked my editor. As she nodded her head to signify yes, I said, "Thanks for your input, but it's my book." (Mark Raffman, Reston)

And Last: He tapped "Send," fearing he'd embarked on yet another pointless journey, until a wave of optimism hit him, and he realized, "Heck, the Empress has always thought my entries were hilariously bad." (Frank Osen)

Still running — deadline Monday night, Dec. 20: Help build our Year in Preview timeline for 2021. See wapo.st/invite1414.

L.A. TIMES SUNDAY PUZZLE

EDITED BY RICH NORRIS AND JOYCE NICHOLS LEWIS

"POP QUIZ" By ROSS TRUDEAU	79 See 48-Across	110 "Biggest Little City in the World"	13 Got stood up at the café, say	49 Prefix with pod or scope	74 Dumas' Count de la Fère
	81 In the past	111 Brewery units	14 Words while checking one's calendar	50 Accumulated	78 Nocturnal hunters
	82 "Pearly Shells" singer	112 Walked proudly	15 Jack London classic, with "To"	51 Military camps	79 Radius, for one
ACROSS	84 Victoria's Secret spec	113 What many players shoot for	16 Fashion monthly	52 Crossword title, often	80 Galápagos Islands' country
1 Broody genre	85 Question 5 (Justin Bieber, 2015)	114 Common doo-wop solo instrument	17 Hardy heroine	55 "Interpreter of Maladies" Pulitzer author	82 Time for action
4 Bothersome sort	89 Contests that take seconds?		19 Springy	56 Jhumpa —	83 Katey of "Sons of Anarchy"
8 Writ word	90 Lassos	DOWN	24 Spot	57 Spruces (up)	86 Spruces (up)
14 "Yeah, right!"	91 "The Communist Manifesto" co-author	1 "Ick"	25 Two-sport	87 Asked for a tuna treat, maybe	88 Whole
18 Traveler's app that can use crowdsourced data	94 "O, ___ fortune's fool!": Romeo	2 Half a menu fish	30 Bread in a skillet	89 Pickle flavoring	92 High-end camera
20 Creep (along)	95 Beatnik address	3 Stratospheric shield	34 Vermont ski resort	93 Cavalry blade	95 Like grim humor
21 "Little Miss Dynamite" Lee	97 Little bit	4 Brad of "12 Monkeys"	35 Scary beasts	96 Sheltered, at sea	97 Chinese leader?
22 Gold rush animal	98 Noble realm	5 Formal "Door's open"	36 Handled	99 Chianti and Bordeaux	100 Actress Suvari
23 Question 1 (Baha Men, 2000)	101 Et ___	6 Unstressed vowel sound	37 Blood of the Greek gods	103 Worked (up)	104 Canal site
26 Gainsborough's "The Blue Boy" et al.	102 Question 6 (Linda Ronstadt, 1975)	7 Not just any	39 Madrid's peninsula	105 Cozy cat seat	106 Publish identifying material about on the Web
27 Flustered	107 Philosopher	8 Netflix competitor	40 Portends		
28 Book of Mormon prophet	108 Chief	9 Gases in some bulbs	41 Subjects of split decisions?		
29 iPod and iPad	109 Zipped through	11 Musician Brian	43 Disagreeable necessities		
31 Ability of Marvel's Professor X		12 Ghanian-born soccer great	44 Being litigated		
32 Use sparingly			45 Poetic contraction		
34 Did an aria, say					
36 Like some river bottoms					
38 Question 2 (Third Eye Blind, 1997)					
42 Smoothie berry					
43 Like Cheerios					
46 Shouldered					
47 Crafty sort					
48 With 79-Across, Question 3 (War, 1975)					
50 Hall of Famer Reese					
52 Get behind something, maybe					
53 Golf club part					
54 Goldberg who drew complex "machines"					
55 Petrol measures					
56 Buenos ___					
57 Bobby on ice					
58 Romanov title					
59 End of a ball game?					
60 "Despicable Me" orphan					
61 Question 4 (Jagged Edge featuring Nelly, 2001)					
65 Thunders					
67 Assistant					
68 Electrical units					
69 ___ es Salaam					
72 Housing choice					
73 Sign of spring					
75 Pod contents					
76 Legal org.					
77 Activity centers					
78 Temptation for a gambler					

Answers to last week's puzzle below.

HOROSCOPE

BY MADALYN ASLAN

HAPPY BIRTHDAY | Dec. 20: Quick, productive and impulsive, you are successful in influencing others. This year, you succeed in a project where you work with those closest to you. Finances in 2021 are excellent. If single, you enjoy a partner who poses a challenge and should not make hasty commitment decisions this year. If attached, you have a truly pleasurable relationship with your partner — whose secret comes out this year. Scorpio does not reveal.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) There is much brewing within you that companions can't quite perceive. You will recognize the wisdom of keeping your own counsel. Be especially patient and subtle regarding love. Replenish your vitality by taking time to rest and recoup.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Today favors a fresh start and finding answers. Suddenly it will be easier to solve problems. Travel, especially by water, would be healing. A new perspective regarding challenging situations develops. You feel bright and productive.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) Adventure and a new assertiveness will characterize your approach toward life today. But events create a complicated sensation of applying the gas and the brakes at the same time. Keep impatience in check, be flexible, and it will be memorable.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Today brings opportunities for travel, perhaps to visit a historic site. This is a wonderful time to write prose or poetry. It might become the outline for a great novel. Relationships with in-laws or grandchildren will improve.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) It is a strange day. A nurturing and meaningful relationship is highlighted. Heed subtle omens and synchronicities. Messages arrive from outer dimensions, delivered by spirit guardians. Others tend to be verbose and generous.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Others seem more assertive. Offer affirmations for harmony and justice. A contentious matter might require a touch of magical attention. A lighthearted attitude in tense situations is essential. You will be very aware of companions' limitations.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) Focus on keeping your residence safe and comfortable. Understanding health history is a factor in maintaining wellness. Examine your family's profile and review your own health patterns in earlier years.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) You are cherished and admired today. It's a marvelous time to study music or plant an indoor garden. Pursue a creative project. A child expresses love and devotion. It is also an excellent day for welcoming new family members.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) A residential change may be considered, and family members are experiencing some changes. You might feel that you're being swept along by the ideas of another. Adapt. Back away from confrontations.

Answers to last week's puzzle.

V	E	R	N	A	L	E	G	A	L	I	T	E	M	A	R	R	E	D		
A	V	E	E	N	O	M	E	L	A	N	I	A	I	C	E	A	X	E		
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E	V	E	S		I	O	S	H	I	T	C	H	I	N	G	P	O	S		
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12/13/20