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# Style

SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2000

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## It's Back



BY MAX HIRSHFELD

*After seven months in exile, the world's weirdest weekly contest returns. Will the Czar be shot? You decide.*

**A** candid letter to the readers of The Washington Post:  
Seven months ago, we suspended The Style Invitational, the irreverent humor contest that ran each Sunday on Page F2 under the direction of an unnamed, all-powerful and highly eccentric Czar. The contest was six years old; we said its future was uncertain.

In letters and phone calls—many of them impassioned—you persuaded us to bring this feature back. It begins anew, today.

But we have a lingering doubt. For years we had sensed that there was some dissatisfaction with the tone of the Invitational; that as popular as it was, it left some readers feeling marginalized, trivialized, even offended. To some, the Czar of The Style Invitational seemed un-

necessarily confrontational and rude. We wondered if the feature needed an overhaul—a fundamental change in tone or content.

This being America, and this being a political year, we decided to do the American political thing. We are putting it to a vote. *Your* vote.

You will help decide whether to keep The Style Invitational in its familiar form or to alter it in some way. You will do this by voting for one of six possible editors: The current Czar or any of five worthy competitors.

Each candidate has been given space below to explain his version of The Invitational, and how it would work, and propose the first contest.

To vote for one of the editors, you must enter that candidate's contest. As always, you will have a week and a day to get your entries in; however, we will be making an initial cut next week, winnowing the field to two finalists. (It's sort of like the presidential primaries.) So, to

See INVITATIONAL, F2, Col. 1

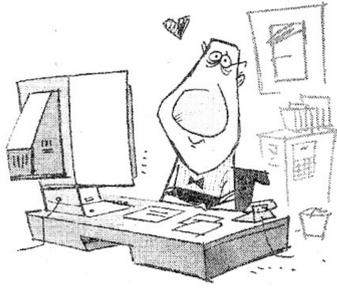
# The New Style Invitational: Six Choices for Czar

INVITATIONAL, From F1

make your initial vote count in the primary, enter on or before this Tuesday. You may enter more than one contest, and you may enter each as many times as you wish; your vote will go to the contest for which you submit the most entries.

Submit your entries via fax at 202-334-4312, or by e-mail at losers@washpost.com, or by mail to The Style Invitational, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. Final deadline is Monday, Feb. 7.

If you are less than 6 months old or for some other reason do not remember The Style Invitational, we reprise a few past contest results on this page.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## Candidate 1: The Uncle of The Style Invitational:

I would like to build on the past successes of The Style Invitational by retaining all its "fun" aspects but with a more friendly, family-style emphasis. My goal is that The Style Invitational becomes one more neighborhood in our great, large community of readers.

Here's my first contest:

Let's take some delicious "potshots" at those annoying little irritations of modern life.

For example:

*I don't really understand all those "e" terms like "e-mail" and "e-business." They make me want to scream "Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"*

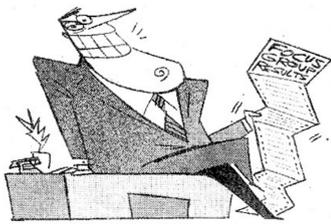
I would also always explain the winning joke, for the benefit of those who might not get it. The above joke, for example, em-

ploys juxtapositional irony in that it complains about the use of the "e" term while simultaneously utilizing the "e" term in the complaint.

But I'm betting you can do better than that!

To be completely fair, the published winners will be selected at random from all entries. First-prize winner receives a six-month subscription to Reader's Digest.

Let's get those pencils out!



## Candidate 2: The Senior Account Executive of The Style Invitational:

In order to better serve you, the reader, I believe The Style Invitational must more effectively integrate the commercial and journalistic functions of the newspaper. Accordingly, each of my contests will be carefully crafted to complement an advertisement contained elsewhere in that day's paper; the bigger the ad, the more enthusiastic the contest. This will have the dual advantage of entertaining you, the reader, while simultaneously acquainting you with a magical world of goods and services available locally at affordable prices.

For example, today we run the following contest:

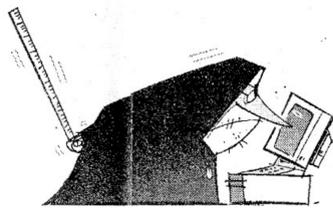
Write an amusing poem extolling the advantages of shopping at some store that heavily advertises in The Post, rather than its competitors.

Example:

*Giant is so very fine.  
Its shelves are filled with tasty stuff.  
Unlike Costco or Food Lion,  
Whose aisles don't seem wide enough.  
To this store that's just so neat  
I raise a Melba toast  
Let's buy those Giant hanks of meat  
As seen in The Washington Post.*

The winner will receive a family-size

four-pound shrink-wrapped package of sup'r fresh lo-fat chicken breasts.



## Candidate 3: The Mother Superior of The Style Invitational:

Sit up straight and listen carefully: Week after week The Style Invitational should be an opportunity, not unlike confession, to avoid the near-occasion of sin and instead cleanse our filthy, dirty souls rather than becoming the plaything of Satan, who tricks us by making us laugh at poopie jokes until we become his for all eternity. IS THAT GUM IN YOUR MOUTH? WHILE PAGAN CHILDREN ARE STARVING ALL OVER THE WORLD? PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR LIPS STAPLED SHUT? Our assignment today is: What does God look like? I happen to think He looks exactly like the old Czar doesn't. DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING FUNNY TO SAY? WHY DON'T YOU SHARE IT WITH EVERYONE?

Thank you.

The winner gets a hair shirt.



## Candidate 4: El Jefe de El Nuevo Invitacional de Estilo:

El problema principal de The Style Invitacional es la falta de diversidad. En la vida, es necesario celebrar nuestras dife-

rencias. The Style Invitational nunca crea concursos para personas que hablan español (o griego o francés o italiano), o personas que viven en iglúes, o personas de países que no tienen electricidad, o personas que usan ropa de piel de yak, o personas que viven en cárceles, o personas que sufren de reflujo ácido, o personas que prefieren la compañía de ovejas, o personas que no tienen dientes, o personas que viven en un pulmón de acero.

El primer concurso del Nuevo Invitacional de Estilo (respondan únicamente en español o griego o francés o italiano, por favor):

Invente un juego mas aburrido que el fútbol.

Por ejemplo, el juego de "codobol." En este juego, la pelota es de goma, y parece un plátano. No se permite tocar la pelota con ninguna parte del cuerpo excepto el co-do, y todos los partidos terminan en empate, cero a cero. ¡Ja ja ja ja ja!

El primer premio es un burro.



## Candidate 5: The Bubba of The Style Invitational:

El Jefe can kiss my big round red butt. First off, it's not The Invitacional anymore, it's the Jamboree. And it's not "Style," which sounds pantywaist. The American Jamboree is open to everyone, even foreigners and women.

Each week, the contest will find some way of making fun of foreigners and women.

This week's contest: Name something that a foreigner or a woman would be better at than a real American man.

Answer: Looking stupid. First-prize winner gets a boob job for his wife.



## Candidate 6: The Czar of The Style Invitational:

If I am fortunate enough to receive your vote and your trust, I will do my best to earn them. I will continue the contest pretty much the old way, with an emphasis on excretory functions, scabrous character assassinations and a general attitude of anarchy and ill will. In a sense, The Invitational will continue to be a celebration of negativity and cynicism, and I will try to retain the same smug, elitist tone. In judging the contest, I will continue to disproportionately reward the same 30 or 40 people, on the theory that they are much funnier and more talented than you are. Also, our prizes will still suck.

### Week 1: Here is this week's contest:

Come up with alternative characters to replace The Czar as head of The Style Invitational. Describe his title, his plan for how to change The Style Invitational, and propose a contest he might create, with a winning entry.

Example: Sorry, I can't think of a good example right now.

First-prize winner gets a genuine Sea Monkey circus. The Czar chose this prize after receiving one for Christmas from his children. He has spent countless hours watching the spunky little critters, who remind him that all life has dignity, even little wads of crap that look like phlegm riding bicycles.

To hear the translation of The Jefe's platform, call Post-Haste at 202-334-9000 and touch category 8184.

# The Invitational's Historic Moments

Some past Style Invitational winners:

**From Week 44, a contest to come up with "Tom Swiftly" adverbs:**

"We take stealing very seriously," Saddam Hussein said offhandedly. (Harold Kerr, Washington; J. Neil Killalea, Falls Church)

"Well, at least she didn't cut off everything," John Bobbitt said testily. (Leonard Greenberg, Herndon)

"We didn't inhale," declared Bill and Hillary jointly. (Mrs. Airey's English classes, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Bethesda)

**From Week 52, a contest to come up with inappropriate celebrity endorsements:**

Adm. Bobby Ray Inman for Chicken of the Sea (Roy Highburg, Bentonville, Va.)

The Jackson family for Chock Full O'Nuts (Nick Dierman, Potomac)

John Wayne Bobbitt for Microsoft (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**From Week 93, a contest to beg for that week's prize, a taxidermized mongoose. This was the entry that won the mongoose:**

All I really want is a runner-up T-shirt, but like women everywhere, to get what I want I have to fake it. So let me say I want that repulsive mongoose. Yes, I want it, I need it bad, I love it. Please, please give it to me. Give it to me now, baby, now, ooooooh baby. (Judith Daniel, Washington)

**From Week 151, a contest to come up with bad ideas for a new cartoon for the comics pages:**



Remember those infuriating people who used to win all the time? Here are some of them: From left, Jonathan Paul, Russell Beland, Stephen Dudzik, Sarah Gaymon, Jean Sorensen, John Kammer, Chuck Smith, Joseph Romm, Jennifer Hart, David Genser, Elden Carnahan and Tom Witte. Maybe in the contest's new life, you won't be seeing so much of these guys! (Yeah, right.)

Replace "B.C." with "P.C.," a cartoon that avoids humor that might offend women, minorities, foreigners, fat people, old people, gay people, or people with substance-abuse problems or speech impediments or congenital handicaps or any other physical condition or behavioral anomaly that might otherwise be subject to uncharitable stereotyping. The strip is as funny as an embolism. (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Replace "Peanuts" with "Prunes," a strip about doddering oldsters who think, talk and act like children. (Fred Dawson, Beltsville)

**From Week 194, a contest to come up with bad Ann Landers answers to one of several questions we provided:**

Q: My daughter and son-in-law are always asking me to baby-sit my grandchildren. How can I graciously let them know they are taking advantage of me? Signed, Grumpy.

Dear Grumpy: Say nothing. Place large dog cages in your living room, each labeled with the name of a grandchild. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

**From Week 216, a contest to mate any two Triple Crown qualifying horses and come up with a name for their foal:**

Breed Ghost Ranch with Tale of the Cat and name the foal Boo Hiss. (Kim Martin, Ebensburg, Pa.)

Breed Emailit with Imgreektoo and name the foal Imgeektoo. (Mary Lee Fox Roe, Mount Kisco, N.Y.)

Breed The Toy Man with Hail the Hero and name the foal F.A.O. Schwarzkopf. (Susan Reese, Arlington)



One of the invitational's fine prizes.

Breed Yeti with White Bronco and name the foal Abominable Slowman. (Larry Marcus, Avon, Conn.)

**From Week 243, in which you were asked to write a poem eulogizing someone who had died the previous year:**

Jacques Cousteau:  
*The knit cap lies empty on the deck,  
The once-proud ship feels like a wreck.*

*At his request, his last remains  
Will now become the ocean's gains.*

*With tear of eye and roll of drum,  
We feed the sharks. Farewell, old chum.*

(Charlie Steinhice, Chattanooga)

**And Week 310, when we asked for bad similes:**

"Oh, Jason, take me!" she panted, her breasts heaving like a college freshman on \$1-a-beer night. (Bonnie Speary Devore, Gaithersburg)

He was as lame as a duck. Not the metaphorical lame duck, either, but a real duck that was actually lame. Maybe from stepping on a land mine or something. (John Kammer, Herndon)

She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up. (Susan Reese, Arlington)

## DEAD PRESIDENTS



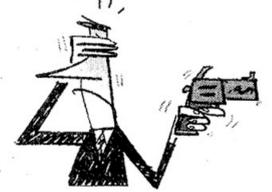
## Send Us Ideas, or We Shoot This Strip

Last year, Style Invitational contestants came up with the concept for a comic strip called "Dead Presidents." In it, the ghosts of deceased chief executives wander Washington offering insights and comments on modern America. Readers also submitted 200 proposed three- or four-panel strips, six of which were selected for publication. They will run one per week beginning today.

Will they continue? It depends on you. We have an itchy trigger

finger, but are willing to keep it running if enough good ideas come in in the next six weeks.

You don't have to draw the



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## By Chuck Smith, Woodbridge



## TONY KORNHEISER

KORNHEISER, From F1

in huge crates of Mallomars. But it chases even me from the room when he gets ripped enough to start singing along with "The Carpenters' Greatest Hits" album.)

Let's talk about Iowa. (Which one is Iowa? I always get it confused with Indiana, Illinois and Indonesia. Oh, I remember.)

To get to Iowa, just click your heels three times and think of a grain silo. Iowa is such a big producer of pork that the state bird is bacon. The largest city is Des Moines, taken from a French phrase meaning "These Moines." All you have to do to win over the voters in Iowa is not keep kosher. Steve Forbes spent so much time in Iowa, I thought he'd bought the place. I would vote for John McCain if for no other reason than the fact that he spent less time in Iowa than I do at the Hair Club for Men.

New Hampshire is so far backwoods that the state flag is a flannel shirt. New Hampshire doesn't have a state seal anymore—it beached itself on all those rocks and died. Look, people in Vermont look down on New Hampshire. It gets so cold in New Hampshire that trees explode. That's right, they explode. They're the original land mines. The liquid cores of the trees freeze and expand in the subarctic cold. The pressure mounts, and the next thing you know, someone's shouting "Incoming!" How do you explain to people that your neighbor was taking a walk to the outhouse, and he was killed by an exploding tree?

But you've got to hand it to those New Hampshireites for their flinty ingenuity. Here's how they get dinner: They sit and wait for a moose to walk by a big tree—then, blooey! The tree explodes, and bingo, moose kebab.

But these are the places that choose our presidential candidates. And to judge by the media coverage, it's not even all the state's residents—just those losers who spend all day in diners drinking coffee so toxic that it's illegal to dump in any other state.

Every four years like clockwork, schmoozers like Gore, Bradley, Bush, McCain, Forbes and Donald Trump's latest girlfriend drop by to shoot the breeze and talk about "American values." (Though surely in the case of Trump's girlfriend, they would rather talk

pictures, just send a description of what the panels should look like and what they should say to: Dead Presidents, Style, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. Winning entries will earn their creators at least a few minutes of valuable satisfaction.

Today's episode, Harry Truman Meets Hillary Clinton, wins the grand prize from Style Invitational Week 333, Jack Carmody's director's chair.

about Victoria's Secret products.) Some smug hairdo from ABC will line up a few folks in New Hampshire and introduce them with some haughty nonsense about how "these fine, hard-working people represent the pulse of the state."

Oh, please. They have no jobs. You see the same pathetic goobers sitting there at 8 a.m. on NBC, 10 a.m. on CBS, 4 p.m. on CNN and 7 p.m. on PBS. Why don't these freeloaders get jobs and produce something so we wouldn't have to import everything from Japan?

The reporters' claims that this homespun truck-stop culture in the boonies represents the soul of America is totally disingenuous. The truth is that under any other circumstances, these Ivy League snobs would rather gulp Drano than sip java with these Joes. In fact, they'd call the police if they ever sighted one of them on their cul-de-sac in Chevy Chase.

The worst part is the charade that will go on between New Hampshire and the conventions with all these dead men walking, trying to pretend it's not over. The only candidate who realized he lost already is Orrin Hatch, who entered the race with no support and left with less. Five months ago I wrote that my dog had a better chance of becoming president than Orrin Hatch, and nothing has changed. In fact, my dog has increased her lead in the polls over Hatch among female voters 18 to 45. The latest New Hampshire numbers showed Hatch at zero percent, and given that there's a plus or minus four percentage points built in, Hatch could have wound up owing votes.

Steve Forbes is another one who's deluding himself. Americans are not going to elect a man president who looks like he's made out of wax. What happens when the primaries shift to Southern states and Forbes begins to melt right before our eyes like the Wicked Witch of the West? Tell the truth: Would you want to have dinner with Steve Forbes? If you think Al Gore is stiff, Steve Forbes makes Gore look like Tommy Tune.

So forget about it. It's Gore and Bush. And my only further prediction is that staying interested in this snoozer is going to require a whole lot of Mallomars.

Author's note to the people of Iowa and New Hampshire: Come on, we kid because we love. The truth is Iowa and New Hampshire are paradise compared with Washington. You only have to put up with these clowns every four years. I LIVE here.