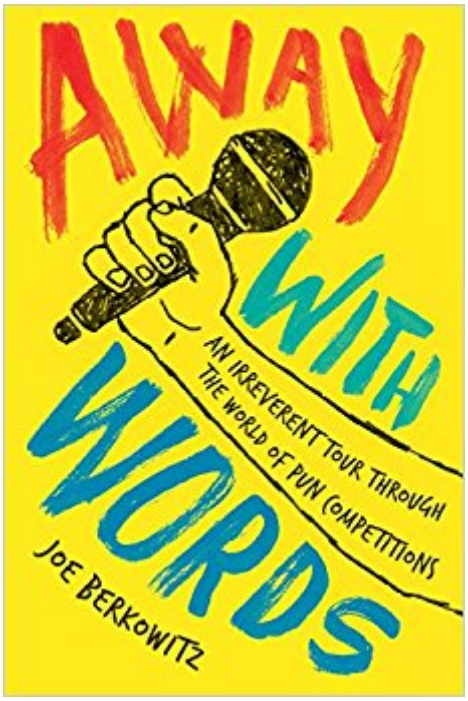
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Away With Words: An Irreverent Tour Through The World Of Pun Competitions



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Synopsis

Fast Company reporter Joe Berkowitz investigates the bizarre and hilarious world of pun competitions from the Punderdome 3000 in Brooklyn to the World competition in Austin.When Joe Berkowitz witnessed his first Punderdome competition, it felt wrong in the best way. Something impossible seemed to be happening. The kinds of jokes we learn to repress through social conditioning were not only being aired out in publicÃ¢â ¬â •they were being applauded. As it turned out, this monthly show was part of a subculture thatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s been around in one form or another since at least the late Ã¢â ¬Ëœ70s. Its pinnacle is the O. Henry Pun Off World Championship, an annual tournament in Austin, Texas. As someone who is terminally self-conscious, Joe was both awed and jealous of these people who confidently killed with the most maligned form of humor. In this immersive ride into the subversive world of pun competitions, we meet punsters weird and wonderful and Berkowitz is our tour guide. Puns may show up in life in subtle ways sometimes, but once you start thinking in puns you discover theyÃ¢â ¬â„¢re everywhere. BerkowitzÃ¢â ¬â„¢s search to discover who makes them the most, and why, leads him to the professional comedian competitors on @Midnight, a TV show with a pun competition built into it, the writing staff of BobÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Burgers, the punniest show on TV, and even a humor research conference. With his new unlikely band of punster brothers, he finally heads to Austin to compete in the World Championship. Of course, in befriending these comic misfits he also ended up learning that when you embrace puns you become a more authentic version of yourself.

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Customer Reviews

Relentlessly hilarious, mercilessly self-aware, and consistently compassionate,Away with Words isnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t just a chronicle of competitive punning but alsoa story about discovering where you belong and claiming your destiny. (Josh Gondelman, coauthor of You Blew It)People often dismiss puns and punsters out of hand, but Joe Berkowitz reveals the best for who they really are - quirky, creative and often truly brilliant. (John Pollack, former Presidential Speechwriter for Bill Clinton and author of The Pun Also Rises: How the Humble Pun Revolutionized Language, Changed History, and Made Wordplay More Than Some Antics)If competitive pun-makers can be heroes, Away with Words tells the taleof a heroÃ¢â ¬â„¢s journey. (Jo Firestone, cocreator of Punderdome 3000)I love Joe BerkowitzÃ¢â ¬â„¢s writing. He combines a down-to-earth, sometimes skeptical eye with a fantastic sense of humor and a true joy in creativity. HeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a cool dude because heÃ¢â ¬â„¢s also a nerd par excellence. Of course he became obsessed with puns. Get into his wordy weird brain and enjoy yourself (Sara Benincasa, author of Real Artists Have Day Jobs)This funny little book results from BerkowitzÃ¢â ¬â„¢s yearlong dive into the subculture of pun competitions. Of most fun is Berkowitz sharing in detail his own nerve-wracking performance at the World Championships, as well those of his competitors. Recommended for passionate readers of books about words and wordplay. (Library Journal)[Away with Words is] low wit in its highest formÃ¢â ¬Â¦Mr.Berkowitz is sensitive throughout to the evanescence and contingency of punning and to the fleeting chemistry of a live pun-on-pun matchup crackling with energy. (Wall Street Journal)

In this immersive ride into the subversive world of pun competitions, we meet punsters weird and wonderful, and Joe is our tour guide. His search to discover just who is making all this wordplay, and why, leads him to the professional comedians on @Midnight, a TV show with a pun competition built into it, the writing staff of BobÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Burgers, the punniest show on TV, and even a humor research conference. With his new unlikely band of Brooklyn punsters, he finally heads to Austin to compete in the World Championships. Of course, in befriending these comic misfits he ends up learning that once you start thinking in puns, you discover them everywhereÃ¢â ¬â •and once you embrace words with multiple meanings, you become a more authentic version of yourself.

Puns are bottomless. Comedian Steve Allen used to collect the so-called best and publish them in books, but he knew he could never have the definitive collection, because they just kept coming. At the Algonquin Round Table in the 1920s, the best and the brightest vied to outdo each other, for about ten years. Given a word, they had to employ it in a sentence. From this came such deathless

utterances as: We wish you a meretricious and a happy new year. Now, there is a small non-chain of pun events all over the USA, where people pay to be tortured by contestants who fly in from around the world. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s the new millennium.Away With Words follows the punning of a cadre of New Yorkers on this non-circuit. They work out locally, and make the road trip to Austin where the oldest US event is their World Series of punning. The book reads like a television reality show. It progresses chronologically, episode after episode, has the same setbacks and euphoric moments, the same angst and second-guessing, and culminates in Oz. It is mostly background, mostly detail, mostly description, with several bouts of thick action interspersed. You get to know the contestants, possibly more than you wanted to, just like reality tv, and you get to read endless puns.Two things about the puns. Because these are performance contests, they are intense personal efforts, not simply tossed off, unexpected witticisms in conversation. Sometimes they are too intense. Be prepared to read a pun and not get it. (A lot of it has to do with delivery and timing, and books are not the best medium for that.) Sometimes the contestants actually have to explain the pun to the judges or the audience, which is a real buzz-kill. The other thing is what Joe Berkowitz correctly calls pun fatigue. Twenty puns in a row on the same topic can be, can I say ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ punishing.Berkowitz learns the ins and outs, eventually moving up a notch in the hierarchy of winners. He has entered a tiny universe unknown to most mortals, and like its television equivalents, this show is an education in how this microuniverse works, warts and all. The bottom line appears to be that standup comics or people who use mental dexterity in what they do and how they live make for naturally performing punsters. They are more observant, and quicker with associations. They have honed attitudes and timing that can lift a bad pun into a shriek of laughter. So itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not necessarily something just anyone can take up and succeed with. Fortunately.David Wineberg

Just finished "Away With Words" and really enjoyed it. I was a little skeptical because I’ve long been of the mindset that a pun is the lowest form of humor (don’t worry - that perspective is absolutely addressed). This isn’t a pun book - it’s a look into a world. Learning about people who are fascinated by something that I’m not is often fun, and the author does a great job of introducing the personalities on the scene and helping a doubtful reader understand (and value, even) the challenge that these characters take on at pun competitions. I’m even sold on attending (although not competing in) a future punderdome.I also really enjoyed the peripheral stories - the author’s experience at a humor research conference, the headline process at the New York Post, a behind the scenes look at the Bob’s Burgers writer’s room.tldr - this is worth it even if you hate puns.

Who knew that there pun competitions, but once you get your head around the idea, it makes sense that they’re a kind of step-child of improv. It’s a tricky premise for a book, since much of what he’s reporting was funny in the moment and yesterday’s mashed potatoes later on.Like many of journalists, he puts a lot of himself into the story. Are you interested in puns or Joe Berkowitz? It’s up to the reader, but I would rather have the author be an unseen observer. He makes the pun champions come to life in all their quirkiness, and it’s an interesting glimpse into a wacky world. The profiles are the best part of the book. Finding out whether Berkowitz did or didn’t make the list of contestants at one of the events isn’t fascinating.It would make a great documentary film, since it would capture the humor of the competitions. Some clever filmmaker who can sit through hours of punning without the need of Pepto-Bismol should hook up with Berkowitz for what would be a terrific film.

Disappointing. Hoped for character, depth, wit ... not really here. If you want a superficial light summer read, have at it. Otherwise, buy Word Freak by Stephan Fatsis instead - it has depth, wit, craziness, compassion ... it’s fascinating. Away With Words is a shallow read, never drawing you into that world, and barely eliciting a laugh. I give it 3 stars because the writing is fine ... the content falls short.

I just started reading this book and I can’t put it down. Having been an audience member at Punderdome in Brooklyn a couple of times, I can vouch for the author’s spot-on accuracy in describing what it’s like. I’m flying through this book ... it’s a real page tern-er!

What an absolute hoot. Loved it.

Very fun read.

Super interesting look into a niche world of word wizards. Makes me want to check out some of the live performances showcased in the book. A real Pun-Tastic adventure.

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