

## The Style Invitational

Week 583: Mess With Our Heads



BY BOB STAAQUE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

### Surprising Ally Joins Landfill Quest

Diminutive attorney Ally McBeal made an unannounced visit yesterday to the Boston dump, where she helped search for the remains of her TV stardom . . .

Intrepid Loser Roy Ashley wrote to marvel at a recent Washington Post headline: "With Affection's Kick Leaves Field Behind." Roy eventually figured out that With Affection was the name of a racehorse. Which reminds the Empress that it's time again for a contest we've run several times with great success.

**This Week's Contest:** Take any headline, verbatim, from The Washington Post or its Web site from today through next Sunday, and reinterpret it by writing either a "bank headline" or subtitle—or the first sentence of an article that changes the original meaning entirely. Please include the date and page number of the headline you're citing from the paper; for Web articles, give the date and copy a sentence or two of the story so it's clear what the original was about. Headlines in advertisements can be used, too; photo captions can't, nor can subheads within an article. The headline reinterpreted in the cartoon is from the Nov. 1 Metro section; the actual bank head that accompanied it read, "Thwarted Developer Would Make Indian Tribe Owner of Arundel Site."

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a gaudily painted genuine large coconut, complete with sloshing milk inside. It is promoting some TV show set in some tropical locale, for which some network spent untold amounts of money and effort to ship to The Washington Post in an effort to gain publicity. So everybody make sure to watch that show, whatever it is.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 15. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are

judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Dec. 5. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Tom Witte of Montgomery Village.

**Report from Week 579**, in which we asked for sentences whose words began with consecutive letters of the alphabet. A huge percentage of the contestants decided to include at least one entry featuring words beginning with all 26 letters (and some going around the alphabet a second time). Though many of these were amusing, reading them en masse felt like, well, a long sentence. (The Empress never wants to see the word "xenophobic" again.) So she will, for the most part, grant readers parole. Note: These entries were written, and judged, before the election. No points were deducted for inaccurate predictions or for simply backing the losing side.

◆ **Third runner-up:** Mellow, nonchalant, oblivious, Pompeii quietly rests, satisfied; totally unheeded, Vesuvius waits. (Marvin Solberg, Edgewater)

◆ **Second runner-up:** Bill Clinton did everyone: Frenchwomen, Golda, Hillary, Ingemar Johansson, Kofi, Lorena, Monica, Nomar, Oprah, poor Quayle, Rambo, Schenectady Township, Uma, Vladimir, Wenceslas X, Young Zionists and . . . (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

◆ **First runner-up, winner of the Aqua Frame fake aquarium:** A badly coiffed Donald egomaniacally fired God. (Mary Lou French, Eveleth, Minn.)

◆ **And the winner of the Inker:** John Kerry loves money—new, old, printed, quartered, recounted, stacked . . . Teresa's. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

#### Honorable Mentions:

◆ "Look, my naughty ol' pal's quickly revived," said Tom upstandingly. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

After bombing cities daily, especially Fallujah, George hastens Iraqi jihad, killing lamentably many, needlessly obstructing peace, quashing rebellion stingingly, trivializing unfamiliar values with xenophobic yahooism. (Ted Einstein, Silver Spring)

John Kerry leaves me no optimism—persistent questioning really stymies that underdog: Vote W! (Teri Chism, Winchester, Va.)

No one of presidential quality running, sadly. (Shirley Grossman, McLean)

Condoleezza didn't even flinch giving her Iraq justifications; kept listing mysterious nuclear objects, particularly quoting "really scary tubes"—ultimate violent weapons. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

Acromegally biometricians conclusively demonstrated excessive foreign growth hormone in John Kerry's Leno-esque mandible. (Steve Fahey, MD, Kensington)

Osama promises Qaeda recruits seventy-two tantalizing, undulating virgins. (Chris Doyle)

Reverend Spooner's vocabulary's unusually vaxing. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Jim's kind lover may notice open pants, quickly requiring subtlety, tact; Ursula virtuously whispers, "XYZ." (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Redskins should take up volleyball. (Elliott Schiff, Allentown, Pa.)

Breasts can distract excitable fellows: Great hooters, impressive jugs, knockers like melons, "noble orbs" promote questionable reasoning. (Deb Parrish, Fairfax Station)

Reluctant, señor, to unshoe voluntarily? We'll X-ray your zapatos, amigo. (Stephen Ettinger, Chevy Chase)

Is John Kerry looking more neutral, or pulling quietly right so the undecided voters will "X"? (Karl Reed, Fairfax)

Art Buchwald's columns don't excite feelings; gentle humor is just kinda lame—makes nodding off plausible; quite revered, sure, though ultimately vapid wasteland. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Another Bush-Cheney dictatorship eventually fosters good, high-income jobs: killing liberals. (Joe Neff, Orelana, Pa.)

Awesomely beautiful Cameron Diaz. Exceedingly fabulous, gleefully has

Insatiability: Jubilant, kinky, libidinous, multiple Naughty orgas . . . (Chris Doyle)

◆ **And Last:** A bygone Czar didn't ever flub giving humor ink.\*

\*Just kidding! Like most nabobs, Old Poopy-head quite regularly screwed things up very well. (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Next Week: **United Nations, or Sovereign Succotash**

### BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

N-S vulnerable

**NORTH**  
 ♠ A J 10 9 5  
 ♥ K J 8 6 4  
 ♦ 3  
 ♣ A 8

**WEST**  
 ♠ Q 6  
 ♥ 10 3  
 ♦ A 10 7 5 4  
 ♣ K 10 9 2

**EAST (D)**  
 ♠ K 8 4 3 2  
 ♥ 9  
 ♦ K 8 6  
 ♣ Q J 7 4

**SOUTH**  
 ♠ 7  
 ♥ A Q 7 5 2  
 ♦ Q J 9 2  
 ♣ 6 5 3

The bidding:

East	South	West	North
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	6♥
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♦ A

In one semifinal of the Spingold Knockout Teams, the premier event at the ACBL Summer Championships, one of history's great teams had its back to the wall.

After three quarters, Nick Nickell's sextet trailed a squad that included former world champions from Italy by 71 IMPs—like being down three touchdowns to the New England Patriots. But Nickell, the team's founder and sponsor, and his five paladins, Richard Freeman, Bob Hamman-Paul Soloway, and Jeff Meckstroth-Eric Rodwell, possess a fighting spirit.

In today's deal, Meckstroth-Rodwell, North-South, bashed into an unlikely slam. A club lead would have beaten it, and since West needed two tricks, he might have tried to find East with the queen of clubs. But West led the ace of diamonds and switched to

a trump.

Rodwell won with the ace and led a spade. West played the queen, trying to look like a man with the K-Q, and Rodwell took the ace and ruffed a spade. He ruffed a diamond, led a trump to dummy, ruffed a spade—West discarded—and ruffed a diamond.

When East's king fell, Rodwell ruffed out East's king of spades, threw dummy's low club on his good queen of diamonds, and won the last three tricks with a trump in dummy, the ace of clubs and a good spade. In the replay North-South stopped at game, and NICKELL gained 13 IMPs.

That was part of an extraordinary rally: NICKELL won the fourth quarter 84 to 2 and the match by 11. In the final they easily dispatched a team led by Warren Spector.

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# Robert Lanham, Defining The World Around Us

LANHAM, From D1

on Election Day. Like Penney's commercial slogan says, "It's all inside": office cubicles, malls, chain restaurants—the heavenly aura of the banal. Lanham, who was raised in suburban Richmond, sees beyond his smarty-pants New York trappings to describe the definitions fully:

"Food Court Druids" are those Goth-dressed gamers who play Magic: The Gathering, turn out for Harry Potter book releases, and always hang around the Panda Express. "Cherohonkees" are white people who wear too much Native American-themed garb. And on goes the book, sassing out more examples, such as the "Kristen Kringles," women obsessed year-round by Christmas.

In our world, we see people who vaguely annoy us or make us wonder what the deal is. In Lanham's world, he sees "Stretchibitionists," those peculiar gymgoers who never seem to actually work out but simply claim a high-traffic spot to do a stretch routine with no aim or reason. And "Perpendiculoids," "people who maintain an abnormally erect posture to look confident, healthy and fashionable."

He sees "Asphalt Rangers," those people who overcompensate for city living by wearing backpacking gear and hiking shoes every day. And what about all those "WBs," adults who own and wear too much clothing featuring Warner Bros. cartoon characters? (And you can further classify those, Lanham correctly notes: "Foghorn Leghorn" are generally Republicans; "Road Runners" take pride in being jerks.)

Using a satirical sociological method he calls "idiosyncrology"—"the study and classification of individuals and groups of individuals based on their distinguishing behaviors and idiosyncrasies"—Lanham first shot a trunk dart into the "hipster" trend in early 2003 with "The Hipster Handbook." It was a group he'd been closely watching (and, frankly, had been part of) since he moved to the then-barely-chic Williamsburg part of Brooklyn in 1996.

"The Hipster Handbook" unleashed a minor identity crisis from New York to Austin to the Silver Lake section of Los Angeles, as credible hipsters sought to distance themselves from Salvation Army-shopping poseurs. True hipsters derided Lanham for his insistence on defining hipster vocabulary words ("deck" meant cool, and "fin" meant lame—"Whether this argot is real or made up, who knows?" asked a book review in the New York Times).

The upshot of all that, the *real* victory?

Ashton Kutcher eventually stopped wearing trucker hats.

But the hipster wars quickly grew unbearable to those of us who fought (or reported) them. A rival hipster guide came out at the same time. (And just released is yet another examination,

"Hip: The History," a more academic version by former Details magazine editor John Leland.) By out-hipping the hip, Lanham had accidentally bordered on uncool, and worse, media fatigue. Attention shifted that spring to the unrelated "metrosexual" craze, which quickly suffered a similar fate of overexposure.

"Food Court Druids, Cherohonkees and Other Creatures Unique to the Republic" is a much broader and more ambitious work. Whereas hipsters tended to dwell in specific urban habitats, who among us has not encountered in the workplace "Happy Mondays," those eerily cheerful women who have candy dishes on their desks and a passive-aggressive maternal instinct?

Idiosyncrology is not terribly new and sometimes produces a bestseller; publishers are always looking to replicate the success of "The Official Preppy Handbook," which came out in 1980 and sold millions of copies. Since then, there have been stacks of socio-humor books filled with drawings or photos of people dressed up as "types," with helpful lines and diagrams pointing out their distinguishing features. It has become a graphic cliché.

But somewhere along the way, idiosyncrology became more of a criminal act. No sooner does a term surface (metrosexual, security moms) than it is debunked, derided or lambasted by an army of op-ed writers, VH1 commentators or those master idiosyncrologists—bloggers. Just try making a sweeping generalization about



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JEFF BECHTEL

In Robert Lanham's new book, observations on the Food Court Druids, above, and the Cherohonkees, below, who take shape in the accompanying illustrations by Jeff Bechtel. Bechtel's rendering of the author is at bottom.



class or race or even wardrobe in America now. You'll get acid e-mail in reply for weeks. (Example: Instead of doing *this* story for the Style section, the reporter is dying to peg and typify people who wear those insipidly righteous yellow Lance Armstrong cancer bracelets. But some interior warning system says: Don't dare.)

"I think it's playful," Lanham says of tossing out labels and poking at people for the way they act, dress, talk. "I'm the first person to make fun of myself. It just seems like there ought to be more ways to describe people, rather than just 'Hey, he's black, he's white, he's Republican, he's Democrat.'"

In describing himself, Lanham

another book on hipsters, and I facetiously said the next book would be about white baby boomers who dress like Native Americans. After reading it back, I was like, hmm, it would be a good idea, a nice progression to start identifying and classifying a broader array of people."

The book wouldn't be as funny or eerily accurate were it not for Lanham's chief collaborator—artist Jeff Bechtel, whose sketches bring to life the "Safeway Sages" (who all speak the clichés of "the unconscious collection"—"Working hard or hardly working?"), "G-Wasps" (white intellectuals obsessed with black culture, be it Rasta or a house filled with African art), "Jock Teases" (loud women in bars who fake sports fandom to attract men) and "Ammosexuals" (i.e., Ted Nugent, Hunter S. Thompson and all men whose professional or personal machoness is inextricably linked to firearms).

"Jeff is the pervert in the process and helps me bring out some of the tastelessness. We have the same sense of humor, and he illustrates perfectly what I'm trying to work on. People come to the book as much for the art," Lanham says.

Lanham's wife, Amy Brown, a documentary filmmaker, is "my conscience," he says. "She studies people in a more earnest way." Add to those two a circle of hipster friends who are continually feeding Lanham ideas and improving on types he has already half-defined.

Then there are the types who cannot be defined. They stand alone as "CATSCANS" ("Cannot Attempt to Socially Categorize, Anthropologically Noteworthy"). "Entertainment Tonight" host Mary Hart is a CATSCAN. So is Johanna Pieterman, a Dutch woman who specializes in drawing pictures of Stevie Nicks (see [www.johannas-art.com](http://www.johannas-art.com)). So is Randy Constan, a Florida man who became Web-famous circa 2000, when most of the world clicked on pictures of him dressed as Peter Pan or Little Lord Fauntleroy ([www.pixyland.org](http://www.pixyland.org)).

Who's next? "I'm trying to come up with something about women who hate pretty girls," Lanham says. "They're out there, but a name hasn't quite come to me."



"Jeff [Bechtel] . . . illustrates perfectly what I'm trying to work on. People come to the book as much for the art."

Robert Lanham, on the artist