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# INSIGHT

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## The Wow Factor

Reading between the pixels  
of the Hubble's latest images

# The Wow Factor

Reading between the pixels of the Hubble's latest images

BY JOEL ACHENBACH, WASHINGTON POST, PHOTOS: EPA & NASA

**B**y this point, we've all seen so many pretty Hubble pictures that we're in danger of pretty-Hubble-picture burnout.

We've seen exploding stars galore. We've seen majestic pillars of gas that are spawning new solar systems. We've seen galaxies colliding, galaxies getting ripped apart, galaxies becoming mired in their own ennui. We've seen Mars and Jupiter and Saturn in such stark close-ups that we can detect the cosmetic surgery scars.

We've seen quasars, pulsars, brown dwarfs, exoplanets, globular clusters and assorted nebulosities. It feels as if we've seen it all. Literally. The whole cosmos, soup to nuts. It kind of makes you wonder if we'll run out of new things to discover.

Here's a real headline on a November news release from Stanford: "High-precision measurements confirm cosmologists' standard view of the universe." All figured out; everyone go home now.

So, you can just imagine the challenge that NASA's Hubble Space Telescope scientists faced earlier this year. In May, astronauts aboard the space shuttle Atlantis flew to the Hubble and, defying a stuck bolt that nearly derailed the mission, removed an old camera and replaced it with a better one.

They fixed two other instruments, even though these things were not designed for orbital maintenance. Crew members installed new gyroscopes and batteries. After five spacewalks and much derring-do, Hubble was, in effect, a brand-new space telescope.

But what to look at next? The Hubble people had to pick targets to demonstrate the revamped telescope's abilities. They would call these images the Early Release Observations, or ERO (at NASA, everything has an abbreviation). They wanted to produce pictures with lots of (their term) Wow Factor.

The rollout came in early September at NASA headquarters in Washington. Big shots showed up,

such as the new NASA administrator, Charles Bolden, and Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, the "God-mother of the Hubble," and all seven astronauts from the Atlantis mission. NASA beamed the news conference around the planet.

Two huge flat-screens flashed fancy graphics. After much hoo-ha and throat-clearing, the moment came. The ERO! The journalists pounded out their stories, which all said pretty much the same thing: "Wow."

You see the danger here: Wow can turn into Whatever. The whole enterprise can start to feel a little superficial. It's too easy to get blissed out on the eye candy. We can become a little too star-struck.

So here's our challenge: We'll go back and look once again at these new pictures, but this time we'll probe deeper, think harder and search for any messages in the light that careens into Hubble's mirror. We'll do a deep reading of the cosmic text. And we'll ask the hard question: What is space telling us?

## THE BUTTERFLY NEBULA

A photo from an STS-125 crew member aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis showing the Hubble Space Telescope as the two spacecraft begin their relative separation on 19 May 2009.



Let's start with the **Butterfly Nebula**, technically known as Planetary Nebula NGC 6302. It's so delicate, so sublime. You can see it fluttering through space. It's such a gorgeous image that we will refrain from dwelling on the extreme color enhancement that NASA uses to make these photographs so seductive.

The Butterfly Nebula is the product of a star in its death throes. It's a star much like the one we see rising in the east every morning. This will happen to us. This is our future. The star is about 3,800 light-years away, in the constellation Scorpius. Those wings are actually hot streams of particles being ejected by the star into interstellar space.

As the star starts to run out of hydrogen and helium fuel, its core contracts, and, simultaneously, the intense radiation of the star blows the outer layers into space. It's not an explosion but more of a spewing. Here, the star itself is unseen, obscured by dust. The dust and slower-moving gas form a torus, like a napkin ring, which forces the spew to be conical rather than spherical.

Our knowledge about star mechanics comes largely from models, equations, number-crunching. But this Hubble image of the butterfly lets the models spring to life. Before the rise of scientific astronomy, stars were boring. No one knew that a star and our sun were the same thing.

This ancient universe was a two-dimensional

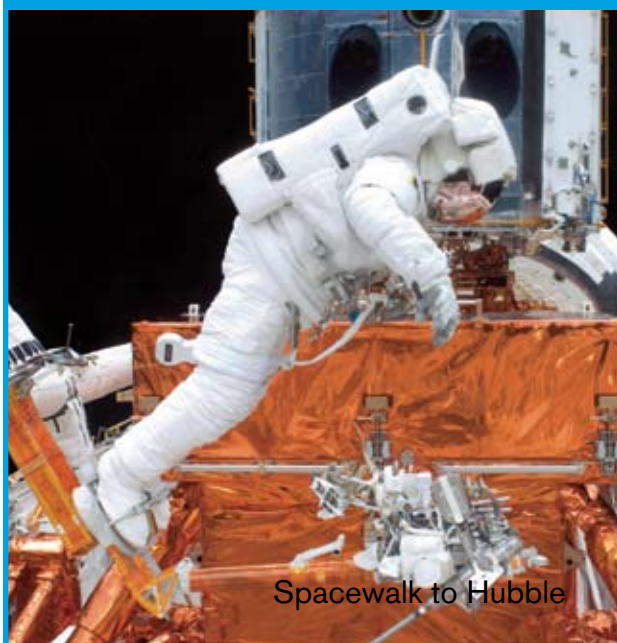
backdrop for human actions, like the painted sets in "The Wizard of Oz." And yet the butterfly tells us the truth: The universe is wild. The universe evolves, and change is the norm. There's something of a cosmic ecosystem out there -- the cosmosphere, if you wish. And the death of a star is cosmic fertilizer.

If you go back to the primordial universe, you find only the simplest elements, primarily hydrogen and helium. The heavier stuff, such as carbon and nitrogen, is cooked up inside stars. The Butterfly Nebula is a freeze frame of the seeding of the universe with the material for future stars, planets and life.

The universe, to be chemically interesting, and to give rise to life, has to have stars. And stars have to die. Carl Sagan was right: We are star stuff. Life as we know it is constructed around four of the five most common elements in the universe: carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen.

Only the inert element helium is left out of the recipe (unless you inhale it, which can make you the life of the party). Life is opportunistic and pragmatic: It uses the most mundane materials butterflyflying through space.

Maybe life could, in theory, be based on exotic, harder-to-get elements. But life throughout the universe probably uses the stuff we use -- because any other strategy would mean going at things the hard way.



Spacewalk to Hubble



Next up, **the stellar jet in the Carina Nebula**. This is a double image that tells us that there's no single way that the universe "looks." The top image shows a star-forming gas and dust cloud as seen in visible light (the pillar glows from being irradiated by the golden light of out-of-frame stars). The bottom image shows the same structure as seen in infrared light.

Visible light is, obviously, the wavelengths we pick up with our eyeballs. Infrared is what you'd see with night-vision goggles; infrared light is given off by any hot object, and it passes through intervening dust. In the infrared photo, the dusty cloud all but vanishes, and we see stars that had been hidden in the upper image. One star is firing jets of material in opposite directions.

If Earth were directly in the path of a relatively nearby stellar jet, it would be lights out for all of us. Ditto if we were close to a supernova or to two super-dense neutron stars colliding and emitting a burst of gamma rays.

The universe is violent. Almost every galaxy has a black hole at its core. At the center of our galaxy,

which we call the Milky Way, there's a black hole with the mass of millions of stars. Fortunately, that's about 26,000 light-years away. We're in Sleepyville.

"We're in a very lucky, quiescent place in the universe," says Matt Mountain, the director of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore.

A light-year is about 6 trillion miles. The cloud we're looking at in the Carina Nebula is about three light-years from top to bottom. Earth has a diameter of about 8,000 miles, so if Earth were in this picture, it would be imperceptibly tiny. Other than some dust here and there, the universe is fundamentally transparent. This is why astronomy is possible. You can see stuff far away. But it was not always so.

"The early universe was very foggy," says physicist Brian Greene, author of "The Elegant Universe," among other best-sellers. For thousands of years after the origin of our universe in what is known as the big bang, the elementary particles such as protons and electrons sloshed around in a hot, chaotic soup. Light couldn't penetrate the stuff.

It was only when the particles finally organized

themselves in the form of atoms that light could suddenly zip through space freely. That transition toward transparency -- the cosmic Let There Be Light Moment -- happened about 400,000 years after the big bang. Cosmology, the study of the largest thing we know (the universe), is intimately connected to particle physics, the study of things that are vanishingly small.

Now we come to the globular star cluster **Omega Centauri**. And gosh, that's a lot of stars. This single image shows a region containing about 100,000 stars, out of roughly 10 million in the globular cluster.

The stars are different colors because they have different masses or are at different stages of their lives, which affect their temperature and brilliance. In a sense, this image of the Omega Centauri cluster is a chart of star life. Until the late 1800s, scientists doubted that Earth had been around for billions of years because they couldn't see how the sun could be on fire for such a long time.

But it's not on fire. A star is a fusion reactor. Life on

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## CENTAURI



Earth can evolve for a long time because stars are fairly efficient at transforming matter into sunshine.

Size matters. If a star has more than about eight times the mass of our sun, at some point, gravity will overwhelm the dying force of its fusion reaction, and the core will collapse to a point of unfathomable density. When that happens, a shock wave forms, and all the outer layers of the star are exploded into space at 10,000 miles per second. That's your supernova.

When the red supergiant star Betelgeuse blows -- and it will someday, erupting on Orion's shoulder, 640 light-years from Earth -- it'll be so bright, we'll be able to see it in the daytime. All that will be left will be a tiny neutron star. A teaspoon of a neutron star would weigh about a billion tons.

Very, very large stars, bigger than Betelgeuse, collapse into something even denser than a neutron star: a black hole. The matter is so dense that nothing, not even light, can escape its gravity.

The Omega Centauri cluster is hardly representative of the universe as a whole. Much of the universe consists of great gulfs of intergalactic void. We don't see images of the holes, the gaps, the great realms of nothing much. Moreover, if you want to get really technical about it, most of the matter in the universe isn't lighted up in the form of stars. It's dark.

We're not sure what it is, exactly, but we can tell it's there from its gravitational effect on galaxies. And even ordinary matter is mostly dispersed in "empty" space. So stars are special features of space. It's a shame that "stars" is already taken as a metaphor, because otherwise we could say that stars are the stars of the universe.

It's hard to look at the Omega Centauri image without thinking, We are not alone. How could we be? The universe is so flamboyantly abundant and huge and awesome.

J. William Schopf, a legendary UCLA professor who studies the origin of life, says: "I find it really, really difficult to imagine that the universe is not teeming with life. I don't know about intelligent life, but I think there must be a bunch of that out there, too.

## STEPHAN'S QUINTET



"Our star is a normal, main-sequence star, so there's nothing special about it. We live on a rocky planet that has a lot of liquid water, but the Earth is 98 percent just like Venus, except Venus is closer to the sun. And I think such planets must be very common. There's nothing special about us, as far as I can tell."

This is a common sentiment among scientists. But there's a counterargument: There are a lot more ways to be dead than to be alive in this universe. In fact, when you look at all those stars in this globular cluster, you're looking at a patch of sky where life may never have taken hold. The stars are so close together that they would create a gravitational maelstrom that would prevent planet formation. Moreover, exploding stars would sterilize everything nearby.

"When you've gone to a globular cluster, you've gone to a not terribly good neighborhood," says Mario Livio, an astrophysicist with the Space Telescope Science Institute.

Earths aren't exactly a dime a dozen. Space all but screams at us: Take care of your planet, because you aren't likely to have a second chance. Our own solar system appears to be chockablock with dead worlds. Schopf's point about Venus can be turned

around: This virtual twin of Earth is a furnace with temperatures at the surface of 800 degrees Fahrenheit. Mars may have had life once, but if there's any left, it's hanging by its alien fingernails.

Schopf's recitation of the Copernican Principle -- the realization that the universe doesn't revolve around Earth, that we're not in a special position -- can be extended even further: Not only is the universe not about us, the universe isn't necessarily about the thing we love most, which is life.

Sure, the universe is filled with "vital dust" -- complex molecules that prime the pump for the possible emergence of living things. But the universe is also saturated with lethal radiation. Space is a harsh environment, in general. It would be wrong to see the place as preferentially biased toward habitability. There's lots of ice out there. Amazing rocks.

The final picture is called **Stephan's Quintet**. At first glance, it looks like four galaxies, but then you see that the central object is two merging galaxies, with two galactic cores, like a double-yolk egg. The four orange-yellow galaxies will probably merge into a single galaxy; the blue-white galaxy is much closer to us and just happens to be in the line of sight of the other four.

But wait: There aren't just five galaxies here. There

are hundreds of them. Only the round objects with X-shaped spikes are stars. Most of the other dots, streaks and smudges are distant galaxies.

This is, in a sense, a four-dimensional scene. With this two-dimensional image, we're looking at three-dimensional structures, but we're also looking back in time -- the fourth dimension. Each layer of the image represents a different epoch of cosmic history. We see the faintest galaxies as they were billions of years ago. "To me, it's like a geologist's core sample," astronomer Eric Chaisson of Tufts University says of the image.

Physicists will argue that we should not give any preferential status to what we call the "present." To a physicist, "now" is a subjective concept that just doesn't show up in the equations of nature. This defies common sense, of course, but no amount of protestation, arm-waving and spluttering will conjure from the physical laws any evidence that any one point in time exists differently than any other.

"The way I'd like to think about it is, there's this big block," Brian Greene says. "Physicists call it the block universe. It's all things in all time. It's a 4-D block."

We perceive ourselves in one thin slice of the block. But other observers -- say, in one of those very distant galaxies in the background of Stephan's Quintet -- will perceive themselves to be in their own slice. No one's slice is more "present" than anyone else's.

At least that's what scientists say now.

Each of these four images shows a universe that is obeying laws of physics that can be expressed mathematically. The gravitational attraction that is making our galaxy head toward a possible collision with the Andromeda galaxy is governed by the same equation that describes an egg falling and splattering on the kitchen floor.

This is Newton's great achievement. Physicists will profess humility about what they don't know, but theirs is an audacious science, one that presumes that we can discover truths that are universal. If we make contact with aliens, physicists will leap in as the initial translators -- because in this cosmos, everyone speaks physics.

So why do these laws exist? Who wrote them? Why are they just so? The universe appears to be finely tuned to foster the rise of complex structures such as stars, galaxies, planets, living things and, eventually, theoretical physicists. Change, even fractionally, a few of the basic constants of nature -- the ratio of the gravitational force to the binding force within the atom, for example -- and no star would ever ignite.

So what does it all mean? That we're small, is one very obvious message.

This has been humbling, this investigation of space. The Copernican Principle keeps hammering flat our presumptions of specialness. Even the matter we're made of, the ordinary protons and neutrons and electrons, is trivial, compared with the much more abundant dark matter that we've yet to detect directly but are certain is out there.

But wait: Perhaps we're just getting started. We'll star-trek across the cosmos! We'll seed the universe with human intelligence and meet fascinating alien races and, occasionally, you know, mate with the ones with nice tentacles. The problem with this scenario is that NASA has put the Buck Rogers stuff on hold for the moment. Costs too much. Nowhere to go that's worth the trip.

We could fly to the moon, but we already did that. We could head to a near-Earth asteroid, but that would be exciting only if NASA promised to blow it up on live TV. Mars is enticing, but a Mars mission is almost as much of a budget buster as the Wall Street bailout. So, it doesn't look as if we're going to be visiting Stephan's Quintet anytime soon.

Where does that leave us with regard to outer space? It leaves us with a job: to gaze. It is our duty to look at the universe.

Let Eric Chaisson explain it: "If we weren't here, the galaxies would twirl, the stars would shine, and the universe would go on being its magnificent self. It's almost like we're animated conduits for the universe's self-reflection. If life did not occur in the universe, then the universe in all its awesomeness and magnificent beauty would not be appreciated. The universe would not come to know itself."

So, keep looking at those pretty Hubble pictures. Or, better yet, go outside on a clear night. Get away from city lights. Look up and stare into the firmament.

And then say: "Wow." ●

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# WHO LOSES THE IRAN GAME

BY DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST

**H**ow will the confrontation over Iran's nuclear program evolve during the next year?

If a simulation game played at Harvard last week is any guide, the situation won't look pretty: Iran will be closer to having the bomb, and America will fail to obtain tough U.N. sanctions; diplomatic relations with Russia, China and Europe will be strained; and Israel will be threatening unilateral military action.

My scorecard had Team Iran as the winner and Team America as the loser. The U.S. team -- unable to stop the Iranian nuclear program and unwilling to go to war -- concluded the game by embracing a strategy of containment and deterrence. The Iranian team wound up with Russia and China as its diplomatic protectors. And the Israeli team ended in a sharp break with Washington.

Mind you, this was just an exercise. But it revealed some important real-life dynamics -- and the inability of any diplomatic strategy, so far, to stop the Iranian nuclear push.

The simulation was organized by Graham Allison, the head of the Belfer Center at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. It was animated by the key players: Nicholas Burns, former undersecretary of state, as President Obama; and Dore Gold, Israel's former ambassador to the United Nations, as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. They agreed to let me use their names in this summary.

The gamers framed their strategies realistically: Obama's America wants to avoid war, which means restraining Israel; Iran wants to continue its nuclear program, even as it dickers over a deal to enrich uranium outside its borders, such as the one floated in Geneva in October; Israel doesn't trust America to stop Iran and is looking for help from the Gulf Arab countries and Europe.

The Obama team was confounded by congressional demands for unilateral U.S. sanctions against companies involved in Iran's energy sector. This shot at Iran ended up backfiring, since some of the key companies were from Russia and China -- the very nations whose support the United States needs for strong U.N. sanctions. The Russians and Chinese



A file photograph showing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad delivering a speech during a ceremony to celebrate 'National Nuclear Day', at the Nuclear plant of Natanz in Iran.

were so offended that they began negotiating with Tehran behind America's back.

"We started out thinking we were playing a weak hand, but by the end, everyone was negotiating for us," said the leader of the Iranian team, Columbia University professor Gary Sick. By the December 2010 hypothetical endpoint, Iran had doubled its supply of low-enriched uranium and was pushing ahead with weaponization.

The trickiest problem for our imaginary Obama was his relationship with the fictive Netanyahu. As Burns and Gold played these roles, they had two sharp exchanges in which America asked for assurances that Israel wouldn't attack Iran without U.S. permission.

The Israeli prime minister, as played by Gold, refused to make that pledge, insisting that Israel alone must decide how to protect its security. Whereupon Burns's president warned that if Israel did strike, contrary to U.S. interests, Washington might publicly denounce the attack -- producing an open break as in the 1956 Suez crisis.

The two key players agreed later that the simulation highlighted real tensions that the two countries need to understand better. "The most difficult problem we have is how to restrain Israel," said Burns. "My own view is that we need to play for a long-term

solution, avoid a third war in the Greater Middle East and wear down the Iranians over time."

Gold said the game clarified for him a worrying difference of opinion between U.S. and Israeli leaders: "The U.S. is moving away from preventing a nuclear Iran to containing a nuclear Iran -- with deterrence based on the Cold War experience. That became clear in the simulation. Israel, in contrast, still believes a nuclear Iran must be prevented."

The game showed that diplomacy will become much harder next year. As Burns explains: "The U.S. probably will get no help from Russia and China, Iran will be divided and immobile, Europe will be weak, and the U.S. may have to restrain Israel."

What worried me most about this game is what worries me in real life: There is a "fog of diplomacy," comparable to Clausewitz's famous fog of war. Players aren't always clear on what's really happening; they misread or ignore signals sent by others; they take actions that have unintended and sometimes devastating consequences.

The simulated world of December 2010 looks ragged and dangerous. If the real players truly mean to contain Iran and stop it from getting the bomb, they need to avoid the snares that were so evident in the Harvard game. ●

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BY JIM HOAGLAND, WASHINGTON POST

# PRISONER OF CONTEXT

**P**resident Obama's expansion of the war in Afghanistan meets the tests of strategic necessity abroad and political equilibrium at home. He can reasonably hope that his surge will buy time for things to improve, particularly in Pakistan, the war's vital theater.

But even the dispatch of 30,000 new U.S. troops to Afghanistan does not buy the president the power to change things there on his own. He is still the prisoner of context, an area he neglected in explaining his revised Afghan strategy last week.

Obama fights the invisible enemies of time and distance as well as the fanatics of al-Qaeda. Polls show falling support for the war, which can only reflect a lessening of the grip that the memory of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, exerts on Americans.

Many of us experience this lessening, I suspect, even if we resist it. As I walked along the Potomac on a sparkling recent morning, a familiar double-edged thought occurred to me: The sky is as clear as it was Sept. 11. Will a new horror befall us on another such day? Then I realized I had been walking for 10 minutes before that chilling specter arrived.

For a long time, the first glimpse or two of a pristine cloudless sky over the Federal City would take me instantly back to the day that shaped the rest of the decade. Now, memory takes its own time to appear, becoming more a matter of reflection than reflex. We adjust even to this, I think unhappily.

Einstein suggested that the splitting of the atom changed everything except the way we think. Perhaps the same will be true of Sept. 11. In his speech, the president recognized the challenge presented to his policies by the passage of time:

"It's easy to forget that when this war began, we were united -- bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack. . . . I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again."

But his speech did not immediately have that unifying effect. Most members of Congress quickly found points on which to disagree and, while not attacking Obama, take self-protective distance from the president's surge. Politically, Obama got away with selling a new strategy that deserves to be tried -- for a while.

He also received modest support from NATO, led by Italy's contribution of 1,000 new soldiers and new Polish and British deployments. But Germany stalled, and France said that it could not spare any more of its overstretched forces.

Left unsaid was the fact that President Nicolas Sarkozy is in no mood to do Obama favors after a series of ill-advised rebuffs by the U.S. leader to the Frenchman, who went out of his way to help Obama during the 2008 U.S. campaign.

More significantly, Sarkozy is increasingly concerned about the "Americanization" of the war in Afghanistan. The new influx of GIs will compound command-and-control problems for the other foreign units and make them even more dependent on American tactics and strategy.

That is part of the context that Obama's new strategy does not directly address. An even more striking omission was any in-depth discussion of the civilian surge that is supposed to accompany the military buildup and provide improved living conditions and better governance.

The subject was minimized, I suspect, because there is not yet agreement among the president's advisers or NATO members on how the present ineffective flow of financial aid and technical support from abroad for President Hamid Karzai's government should be reorganized.

Progress has been made on establishing an international watchdog agency in Kabul to fight corruption. But there are strong head winds from Europe against administration suggestions that one strong U.S.-led authority should now take charge of and coordinate civilian programs, including those of the United Nations, in Afghanistan.

Finally, the president's new strategy fails to emphasize that the context of the events of Sept. 11 endures, and constrains his actions, even as the force of that day's events fades.

It is a context of Islamic extremism nurtured not only in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan but also in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt and other countries that the United States finds impossible to invade or strike.

We are condemned to fight al-Qaeda on the ground in Afghanistan with greater and greater force because we cannot fight it directly on the battlefield elsewhere. Welcome to Obama's Catch-22. ●





BY JOSHUA E. KEATING  
WASHINGTON POST

# The missing stories OF 2009

Sometimes it's those news stories that don't feel the love from cable talk shows that reveal the most about what really happened in a given year. 2009 had plenty of them. From a naval alliance that could shift the balance of power on two continents to a new "hotline" intended to prevent a possible nuclear exchange, these are the stories that got less attention they deserved this year — but could dominate the conversation in 2010.

## The Northeast Passage opens for business

The mythic Northwest Passage still captures the imagination, but in September, two German vessels made history by becoming the first commercial ships to travel from East Asia to Western Europe via the Northeast Passage from Russia through the Arctic. Ice previously made the route impassable, but thanks to rising global temperatures, it's now a cakewalk. "There was virtually no ice on most of the route," Captain Valeriy Durov told the BBC. "Twenty years ago, when I worked in the eastern part of the Arctic, I couldn't even imagine something like this."

The significance depends on your perspective. The passage could be a gold mine for the commercial shipping industry, as a shorter and cheaper route from Asia to Europe. But the news is also a sign that climate change may be reaching a dangerous tipping point.

In addition, the thaw opens possibilities for geopolitical competition. Russia has literally planted its flag beneath the Arctic ice, staking a claim to newly accessible natural resources, much to the consternation of the other northern states. With the scramble for the Arctic's riches heating up, even peaceful Canada has been holding military training exercises in the area.

## Iraq's new flash point

With attention riveted on President Obama's review of Afghanistan strategy, almost any news from Baghdad got short shrift this year. But the Iraq war is far from over. From a persistent insurgency to a dis-

trepping lack of political reconciliation in Baghdad, Iraq has any number of potential flash points. Most troubling may be the growing fears of a new conflict between Iraq's Arab and Kurdish populations.

The attention this subject has gotten has focused on the Kurdish claims to oil-rich Kirkuk, but analysts say developments in nearby Nineveh province might be more dangerous. The area is south of the Kurdish border but contains a large Kurdish population eager to incorporate the territory into Kurdistan. After the U.S. invasion, the Kurds became politically dominant in Nineveh and stationed pesh merga militia troops there.

That changed in January, when Sunnis rallied around the hard-line Arab nationalist party al-Hadba-a — which campaigned on a platform of countering Kurdish influence — and handed it a narrow majority in Nineveh's provincial elections. The Kurdish Fraternal List, the region's main Kurdish party, walked out of the provincial council, vowing not to return unless it was given several senior leadership positions.

With both sides threatening violence to resolve the dispute and insurgent attacks continuing, Iraqi and U.S. authorities increasingly view Nineveh's conflict as a key threat to Iraq's stability.

## A 'hot line' for China and India

"Hot lines" between world leaders, such as the legendary Moscow-Washington "red telephone," are designed to prevent misunderstandings from escalating into nuclear confrontations. China and the United States have one. So do India and Pakistan. This year, the leaders of India and China agreed to set one up, highlighting concerns that a worsening border dispute could deteriorate into a major confrontation.

Asia's emerging superpowers are at odds over the Himalayan region of Tawang, a district of India's Arunachal Pradesh state that China claims is historically part of Tibet and therefore within China's borders. The countries fought a war over the territory in 1962 that killed more than 2,000 soldiers.

The area has been increasingly militarized, and the Indian military documented 270 border violations and almost 2,300 cases of "aggressive border patrolling" by the Chinese in 2008. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the area in October, drawing official protests from Beijing.

## The "civilian surge" fizzles

In November 2007, Defense Secretary Robert Gates delivered a now-famous speech at Kansas State University in which he acknowledged that "military success is not sufficient to win" counterinsurgency wars such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, and called for a larger role and increased funding for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In its Afghan strategy announcement in March, the Obama administration called for a "civilian surge" of State and USAID personnel to complement the increased number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Just one month later, however, the administration asked Gates to identify 300 military personnel to fill jobs in Afghanistan intended for civilian experts, as not enough civilians were available. Undersecretary of Defense Michele Flournoy acknowledged in a speech that the government was "playing a game of catch-up" after years of not developing civilian expertise.

The State Department may yet live up to the initial vision of Gates and Obama — a "civilian response

corps" that would be able to deploy as many as 400 people to conflict areas seems promising — but for now, the dream of a civilian surge seems far off.

## The Beijing-Brazil naval axis

Ever since China bought several aging Soviet aircraft carriers in the 1990s, Beijing's ambitious naval plans have been the subject of fevered speculation by military analysts. The Pentagon has estimated that China could have multiple carriers by 2020, with construction costs likely to run into the billions of dollars. With little in the way of naval aviation experience, China would need to get its sailors and pilots up to speed in a hurry — and that means finding an already operational carrier to train on.

The trouble is, few countries still operate carriers capable of launching conventional aircraft. The United States has little interest in helping the Chinese military; France is prohibited from doing so by a European Union embargo; and Russia has recently grown more wary about military cooperation with its southern neighbor.

That leaves Brazil, which was only too happy to let Chinese officers train aboard its 52-year-old carrier, the Sao Paulo. Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim revealed the program in an interview with a Brazilian defense Web site in May. Although the exact terms are unknown, it is widely thought that the Chinese might be funding a restoration of the Sao Paulo in exchange for the training. Jobim said he hoped the program would lead to further military cooperation.

The United States has long been the dominant naval power in East Asia, but Chinese ships have recently been growing bolder about shadowing U.S. vessels and launching legal challenges to what Beijing views as intrusions into Chinese waters. With China and India undertaking massive military buildups, U.S. naval supremacy may be slipping.

## America joins Uganda's civil war

In February, the New York Times' Jeffrey Gettleman and Eric Schmitt broke the story that the U.S. military had helped plan and fund a Ugandan military attack against an infamous rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army, in eastern Congo. The attack was poorly executed, allowing the rebel leaders to escape and kill 900 civilians in retaliation.

It was the first time the United States had directly participated in actions against the LRA, which Washington has designated a terrorist group. The LRA's leader, Joseph Kony, has abducted tens of thousands of children to serve as fighters and sex slaves in his decades-long guerrilla war against the Ugandan government, and has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

The United States' new Africa Command defended its role, saying that the Ugandan attack would have happened anyway and that it was "too early to bring a final judgment" about U.S. support. If some members of Congress get their way, Africom's role may expand. A bill co-authored by Sens. Russ Feingold, D-Wis. and Sam Brownback, R-Kan. and enjoying bipartisan support would commit the United States to "eliminating the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army ... through political, economic, military, and intelligence support." ●

*This essay is adapted from Foreign Policy's special year-end issue.*

# Consultants gone wild

**O**ur story on Page 1 of this issue on the incredible sums of money paid by the City of Vero Beach to Sue Hersey and her legal colleagues from Boston raises so many more questions than it answers that we hardly know where to start.

Some of them are big questions, and some of them are small questions. But given that they all involve our money – money we paid out monthly over the past few years as electricity bills were soaring out of sight – we think we are entitled to some answers.



"My standard consulting fee is \$1000, but I can give you some harebrained ideas for \$250."

For starters, a big question we would like answered is who favored hiring Hersey to lead the search for a new electricity supplier for Vero Beach after the battle she led against the Florida Municipal Power Authority ended in an extremely costly failure.

Did it not occur to anyone after this expensive adventure to say: 'Hey, we lost one we thought we were going to win. Think we ought to explore hiring a different consultant?'

Then even if every decision-maker in Vero Beach was totally persuaded that we needed to retain consultant Sue Hersey, how did we decide that we also needed to stick with the lawyers she likes to use from

two Boston law firms – lawyers, we might note, who are not admitted to the Florida Bar?

The three lawyers we used from this law firm during the past two years billed \$470 per hour, \$535 per hour, and \$550 per hour. We understand that when you are dealing with specialized subjects, you need lawyers with expertise in these areas.

But these are big time rates. Did we need big time lawyers? Did we need Boston lawyers? And what did we get for it?

The other thing that is totally amazing is we never received any time sheets from any of these lawyers, explaining what they did on an hour-by-hour basis. All we got were lump sum monthly statements from Hersey. March 2008: Dewey & LeBeouf: \$8,373.81. Pay here.

Then there are the small questions, which in some ways are even more annoying and offensive.

Sue Hersey lives in West Newbury, Massachusetts – a pleasant town near the New Hampshire border, approximately 40 miles from Logan Airport. She apparently has an office in her home, since the address of her firm, Energy Advantage Consulting, and her residence are one and the same.

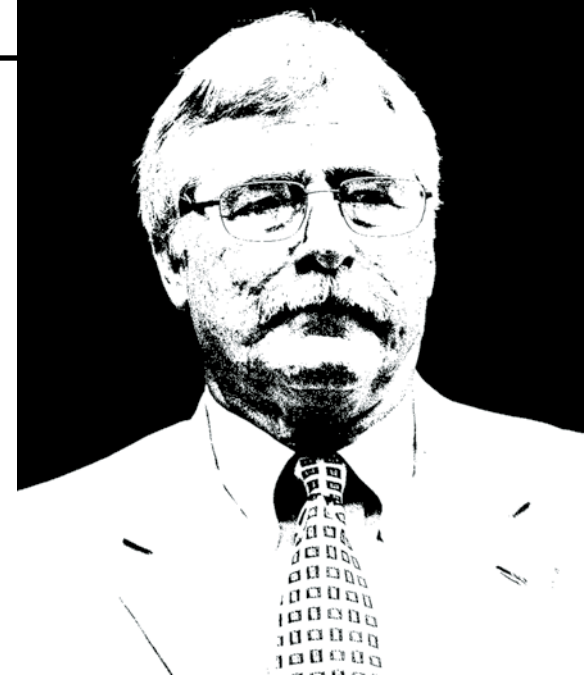
And if she wants to live out in the distant suburbs, that's fine. But not only does she charge us for mileage to Logan Airport and parking; we also get to pay for the time it takes her to drive to the airport at her hourly billing rate. Hopefully, she is mulling over our electricity problems as she drives, and not listening (at \$5 per minute) to NPR's Morning Edition.

We then get to pay her nearly \$300 per hour for her time in the air (hey, no one likes to fly), and also pay for the time it takes her to drive here from the Orlando Airport – in addition to the rental car charge, tolls on the Beach Line Expressway, and hotels and meals here in Vero.

Fair enough. A person has to eat. But on some of these vouchers, she generously invited City of Vero Beach employees along to the restaurant – and then billed us for their meals as well.

Given that in total, Sue Hersey billed Vero Beach utility customers some \$1.5 million over the past six-years, there is absolutely nothing about how we got into this – or what we got out of this – that makes us feel good.

There may be some good explanations for all of this, but we would like to hear them – and we would feel a lot better if it was not so darn tough to get straight answers. ●



## Charlie, we hardly knew ye

**J**udge Paul Kanarek's ruling tossing Charlie Wilson off the Vero Beach City Council one month after his election has dimmed hopes that "change" will be coming to Vero Beach this year.

While Wilson was the top vote getter in the Nov. 3 election, Kanarek ruled on Monday that Wilson did not meet the spirit of the city's ambiguously worded one-year residency requirement for office-seekers.

Well, it's hard to disagree. In our hearts, we all really know what was intended. This was a thoughtful ruling by a respected jurist, and while we wish Kanarek's decision had gone the other way, we understand why it didn't.

But his ruling means that of the two bombthrowers elected to the City Council a month ago by angry voters, only one – Brian Heady – remains. And some are worried that after a lifetime on the outside, Brian is already "going native," wearing a tie, and thinking about how he comes across as a responsible Council member and gets re-elected as a statesman in 2011. Sheesh!

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Wilson, in his month on the Council, never tried to play the role of statesman. Instead, clearly fearful that his time might be cut short, he continued to roll grenades across the City Hall floor as he feverishly sought to get the city to focus on the outrages involving our electric utility.

Now, he is gone. And at least some of the pressure is off Council Members Sabe Abell and Tom White, who show no interest in changing how the city operates.

With Wilson seated, you had the two newcomers who ran on platforms of change, and the two oldtimers in Abell and White, with Mayor Kevin Sawnick as the vote in the middle who could go either way.

Now, after only one month, the impetus for change has been seriously diminished.

So did Charlie Wilson accomplish anything by running for the City Council? Actually, the answer is yes.

If Wilson had not run, Ken Daige – who finished third in the seven-person field -- almost certainly would have been elected. In retrospect, we think Daige's return to the Council would not have been a positive development, so chalk up one point for Wilson there.

Then at his first Council meeting, Wilson voted with Heady and Sawnick to deny the old guard its hope of keeping Abell on for another term as Mayor. Chalk up another point for Wilson there.

Then he was instrumental in getting the Council to hold a special meeting to air out (well, at least partly air out) the new electric contract with the Orlando Utilities Commission.

Full details of that contract, how we got into it, and what the chances are – if any -- of getting out of it are still far from clear. But would any of the incredible details – such as the \$50 million penalty provision – have seen the light of day if Wilson had not brought them to the public's attention? Doubt it.

Against those pluses, Wilson really wasn't on the Council long enough to rack up many minuses. But we keep hearing about issues in his past, some involving residency, that hopefully will be cleared up before he again runs for city or county office.

Wilson would probably be the first to admit (well, maybe not the first) that he is not the perfect public servant. But based on performance on the Vero Beach City Council during November, who would you say did better? ●



**I**f Congress doesn't act before the end of the year, the heirs of people who die in 2010 won't have to pay any estate taxes.

That may sound like good news, but if the Congress doesn't act by the end of next year, estate taxes will come back with a vengeance. In 2011 and beyond, the estate tax goes back to where it was before the Bush tax cuts -- a tax rate of 55 percent on any estate of \$1 million or more.

When the current law was passed during the Bush administration, dark humor abounded about how families would not report deaths until 2010 while others would take actions to encourage sick family members to die during the coming year.

Now the day of reckoning is at hand. Will Congress act? At this point, it appears by no means certain that the House and Senate will be able to agree on an approach before the end of the year.

The House last week passed a bill to prevent this impending train wreck from happening. It would exempt the first \$3.5 million of an estate (the first \$7 million for married couples) and anything above that would be taxed at a rate of 45 percent, continuing the same rate as in 2009.

But it would appear that neither this approach nor any other has enough support to reach the 60-vote hurdle that will likely be needed in the Senate. Plus, the Senate floor is tied up with health care legislation and other bills that take priority over the estate tax.

The perspective of a majority of Congressional Democrats on what to do about the estate tax appears to be reflected in this viewpoint published last week in the Washington Post.

"Sometimes, if you're a member of Congress, you just have to hold your nose and vote for it," the Post said. "Unless something is done, 2010 will be the year to throw Mama from the train, tax-free. This would be terrible policy, not to mention unkind to Mama."

The least bad, hold-your-nose alternative, the Post concluded, would be to set the tax permanently at its 2009 level, exempting the first \$3.5 million of any individual estate — \$7 million for a married couple — from taxation. That's what the House approved Thursday. At this level, 99.8 percent of estates are not subject to the tax.

Claims of "death tax" foes notwithstanding, a tax at the 2009 level would have scant impact on family farms or family-owned businesses. In 2011, according to estimates from the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center, only 100 such entities would have to pay any estate tax, and virtually none would have to be liquidated to pay the tax.

Nonetheless, the estate tax would continue to bring in badly needed revenue even at this level: \$266 billion over the next 10 years.

The difficulty is that the ordinary legislative inclination — do nothing and let the tax expire in 2011 — is also unsustainable. People are entitled to some stability for purposes of estate planning. ●

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100 Stingaree Point .....	\$2,600,000
13 Sea Court.....	\$3,775,000
60 Gem Island Drive.....	\$4,150,000
1 Sea Court.....	\$4,350,000
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600 Beach Road #331, 2BR/2BA.....	\$775,000
450 Beach Road #322, 2BR/2BA.....	\$795,000
500 Beach Road #210, 2BR/2BA.....	\$795,000
100 Ocean Road #111, 2BR/2BA.....	\$825,000
700 Beach Road #158, 3BR/2BA.....	\$975,000
1000 Beach Road #297, 2BR/2BA.....	\$995,000
950 Beach Road #193, 3BR/2BA.....	\$1,000,000
900 Beach Road #285, 2BR/2BA.....	\$1,260,000
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# You just got a great

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on't let the salesman scam you into buying overpriced cables

Flat-screen televisions are a hot gift this year. Despite the economy, sales are up over last season, mostly because high-definition televisions, once prohibitively priced, are so much more affordable than they used to be. On Black Friday, thousands of people drove away from big-box stores with their first HDTV in the back seat.

Maybe you were one of those people. Or maybe an HDTV is on your shopping list. If so, congrats; use it in good health. No matter where you shopped, the helpful salesman probably told you that to get the clearest, cleanest high-definition picture

out of your shiny new screen, you'll want to run an HDMI cable from your cable box or DVD player to the TV.

He's right. HDMI—High Definition Multimedia Interface—is a great technology capable of carrying both the crisp digital HD picture and audio signal between devices in one cable. And since a lot of satellite and cable-television programming is now available in high def, you'll see a big difference over old-style analog connections.

But you probably gasped when you saw how much HDMI cables cost: \$75 or \$100 or even \$125, for a few feet of cable?

The salesman almost certainly explained that digital signals need expensive conductors to transmit the best picture. He told you that cheaper cables simply aren't able to handle a full-blast digital signal, so some of the data is lost along the way. But since you were saving so much money on the television itself, he reassured you, you could afford the expensive cables and still come out ahead.

If you still balked at the price tag of the deluxe cables, he probably showed you some cheaper ones, price at about 50 bucks, but lamented that you weren't going to be happy with the results.

You'll be relieved to know that the nice salesman was lying his face off.

Yes, you should definitely invest in an HDMI cable. But you should definitely not spend \$100 to get one. Or \$50. Or \$25.

First of all, contrary to what the salesman told you, for the most part digital signals don't give a damn about the price of cable they're traveling through. We're talking about a stream of ones and zeroes. They either arrive at their destination or they don't.

# new flat screen TV

Ones and zeroes that travel through an expensive cable don't arrive at your television in better condition than those traveling through a cable that cost less. And the signal won't get lost or stuck along the way.

The reason is that when it comes to HDMI cables, you don't always get what you pay for, because price is not a reliable indicator of quality. Just because a cable is inexpensive doesn't necessarily mean that it is manufactured poorly or made of cheap materials. Expensive cables aren't always made better; a lot of them are just marked up to the point of absurdity and marketed with lots of hype to make it seem like they're worth it.

With profit margins on televisions shrinking, many stores rely on overpriced accessories to make up the difference. HDMI cables command some of the highest margins in the store, and managers push their sales staff to push them on you.

Don't fall for it. As long as you buy a sturdy, certified HDMI cable from a reputable seller, the TV signal doesn't care if has gold-plated connectors; or if it's triple wrapped with flux-capacitated unobtainium fibers. The picture will look the same.

The exception to this is if you're running very long expanses of cable, in which case the signal can degrade and sometimes the picture and sound can get out of sync. But if you're fishing yards and yards of wires through your walls, chances are you're into a sophisticated high-end system and have moved way beyond the scope of this article.

Most people won't need an HDMI cable longer than four to six feet—long enough to cover the distance between the TV and cable box or home-theater receiver.

So how much do you need to spend to get a high-quality HDMI cable that will work every bit as well as the platinum-priced variety?

## \$7.01....

That's how much the good folks at Monoprice.com charge for a six-foot-long certified HDMI cable, including shipping. As far as your television signal is concerned, this bargain cable is indistinguishable from the one at the store that costs 15 times as much. Heck, it even has gold-plated connectors. If you need a longer one, it's a few bucks more.

Another popular online seller, Blue Jeans Cable, has similar prices. Both sites stock an astonishing selection of quality cables of all kinds, ship items quickly, and get high marks for customer service. (I once called Monoprice to ask about the difference between two of their cables and they talked me out of buying the more expensive one.)

As for those bejeweled cables the salesman pressured you into thinking you needed—there's still plenty of time to run them back to the store before the holidays.

- *Washington Post*



# Supreme Court hears Florida

**A** lawyer for oceanfront landowners encountered both skepticism and support at the US Supreme Court last week while urging the justices to wade into a long-running dispute over the effect of erosion-control efforts on seaside property rights in Florida.

At issue in the hour-long oral argument was whether a ruling by the Florida Supreme Court had so significantly changed the substance of Florida property law as to amount to a public taking of private property without payment of just compensation.

Tallahassee lawyer D. Kent Safriet told the justices that Florida's highest court "redefined" the essence of littoral property rights in the state. The court, he said, ruled for the first time that owners of waterfront property enjoy no constitutionally protected right to have their waterfront property actually be in contact with water.

Traditionally, littoral rights in Florida included the right to own land up to the edge of the rising tide. This boundary is the place where the high tide meets dry sand. Lawyers and land surveyors call it the mean high water line.

The problem with beachfront property is that beaches are constantly either eroding or accreting. As a result, the mean high water line is always moving landward or seaward. That means beachfront

land is always either shrinking or expanding.

The Florida Supreme Court determined that the essential right for waterfront property owners was access to the water, not physical contact with it, explained Florida Solicitor General Scott Makar.

The position prompted a response from Justice Antonin Scalia. "It would be very strange to have a principle that all a littoral owner gets is a right to access the water, not a right to be on the water," he said.

The US Supreme Court has never recognized a so-called judicial taking of private property. But the court has ruled that when the legislative or executive branch of government engages in such a taking, the Constitution's Fifth Amendment requires payment of fair compensation to the landowner.

The current case arose in 2003 when Florida officials proposed a beach nourishment program to pump new sand onto 6.9-miles of beach in and near the city of Destin in Florida's Panhandle region. State officials said the beach had been hit hard by a string of hurricanes and tropical storms. Landowners disagreed. They said the beach had not eroded to critical levels.

Amid the dispute, Florida officials invoked the state Beach and Shore Preservation Act, which allows state officials under certain circumstances to change the boundary between submerged public lands and private waterfront property.

Instead of using the mean high water line as the property line, the state established a new boundary called the Erosion Control Line (ECL). Unlike the shifting mean high water line, the ECL is a fixed boundary based on beach measurements made immediately prior to pumping tons of new sand onto the beach.

Once the ECL is established, all sand pumped on the seaward side of the line comprises state-owned land under the Florida law. In the process, beachfront landowners lose their right to claim any accreted land seaward and their property is no longer in direct contact with the sea.

While some beachfront property owners hard hit by storms welcomed the restoration project, others opposed it, saying they were well protected behind an existing 200-foot-wide beach.

Rather than focus on the most eroded sections, the state designated nearly seven miles of beach for more sand – including the beaches of some objecting owners.

This is a good deal for property owners, Justice Stephen Breyer suggested. Seaside landowners retain their view of the Gulf of Mexico, they are guaranteed access to the beach and sea, and they have a state-constructed buffer protecting them from future hurricanes.

"All you lost was the right [for your property] to touch the water," he told Mr. Safriet.



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# beach property case

BY WARREN RICHY  
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Chief Justice John Roberts seemed particularly sympathetic to Safriet's argument. "If somebody put up a hot-dog stand on this new land, would you have the right to tell them they can't?" he asked.

"Absolutely not," Safriet said.

Justice Scalia added that people pay a lot more for beachfront homes.

"The value of beachfront property is a premium," Safriet agreed. What property owners want, he added, is to have their day in court to prove how

the Florida Supreme Court's ruling devalued their land – and then for the state to pay fair compensation.

The state action offered property owners a number of benefits, including ongoing erosion control, Scalia noted. "So, who knows, maybe that's sufficient compensation," he said.

Solicitor General Makar told the justices that the Florida high court's ruling was not a taking of property. Waterfront property owners in Florida

have no constitutionally protected right to have the tides lap upon their lands, he said. Instead, the key right is access to the water.

"It is very beneficial," he said of the state project and associated statutory guarantees. "This is basically a beachfront property protection act."

Justice John Paul Stevens was not present at the argument. It was not clear whether he has recused himself from the case or whether he was absent for another reason. ●



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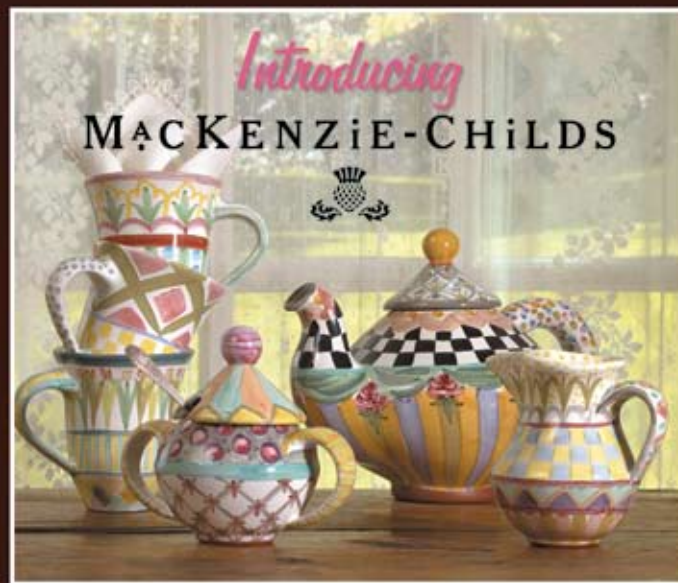


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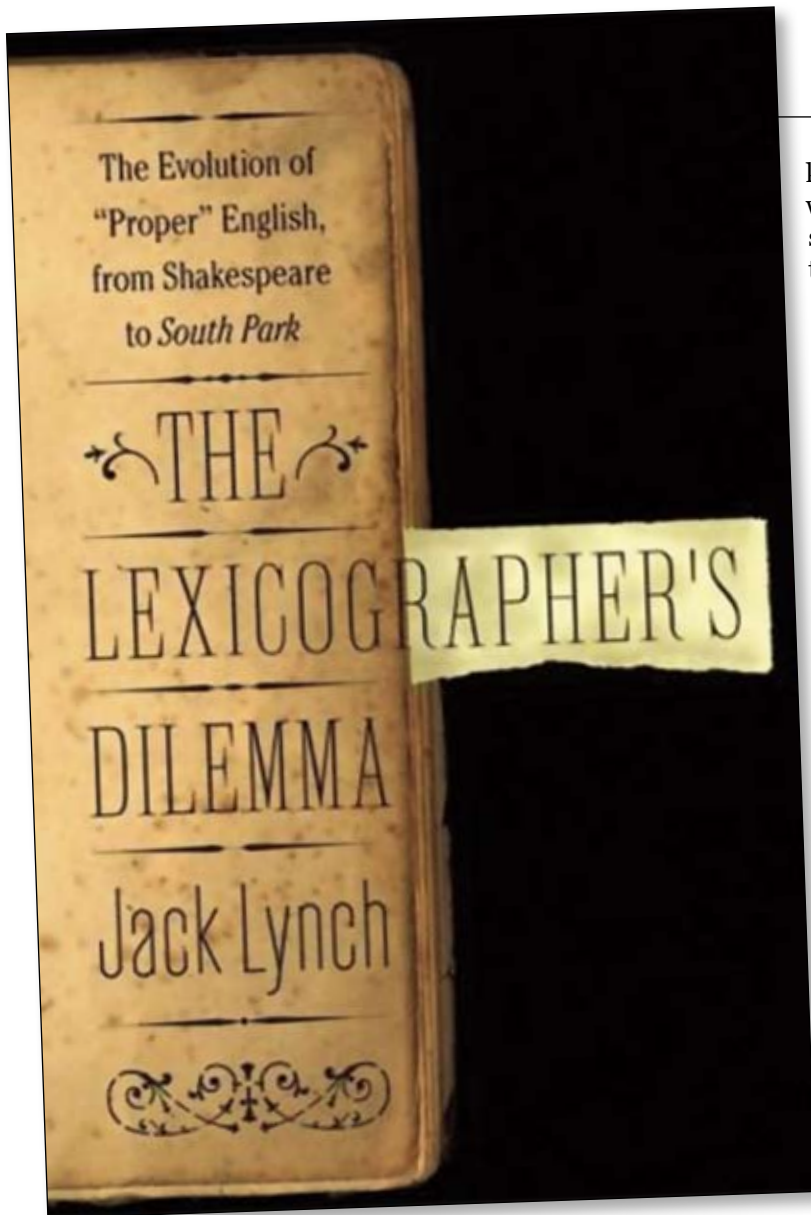


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know pronounces “forte” as “fortay,” or when a close relative of mine, when she descended (with enthusiasm!) into the life of the underworld, began to say, “He don’t.”

I wanted to tell her, “Commit any crime you like. Just don’t murder the language while you’re at it!”

Many of us are irritable most of the time (unless we’re in love or just bought a motorcycle), and our language continually offers up imperfections and anomalies for us to be irritable about. In the words of a waiter who once brought me a menu in a way-too-authentic Chinese restaurant, there’s always “something in there you’re not going to like!”

Jack Lynch, who also has written on Shakespeare and edited Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary, gives us not a history of the English language but a history of those who have tried to make sense of it.

He divides them into “prescriptive” and “descriptive” linguists: The former try with all their might to purge the language of undesirable words and constructions; the latter, acting on the theory that the language is untamable, simply try to describe its current use. (That, too, seems futile often enough -- like describing a tidal wave as it booms by.)

After an amusing and very interesting introduction, Lynch begins with John Dryden. (Don’t worry: Lynch dutifully goes back later to 1066, the Norman Conquest and the “marriage” of Anglo-Saxon and French.) But Dryden -- famous, esteemed by all (or most, anyway) -- was one of the first English writers to revisit his work and revise it in accordance with certain rules of Latin grammar.

One of the reasons this book is so much fun is that you get to see how relatively new and recent and lively modern English is.

At the end of the 17th century, Latin grammarians were just becoming influential in English society. The English language itself didn’t have a formal grammar, but Latin did, and it seemed sensible to think that the rules of this revered dead language might easily be applied to bumptious, wildly growing, very-much-alive English.

Dryden set about lopping *prepositions* off the ends of his sentences (they’re not called prepositions for nothing!) and spent time sticking his split infinitives back together.

The idea of “good” English as opposed to “bad” was coming into play. This, Lynch says, had to do with the rise of the middle class -- a set of inter-

lopers who had had the luck and nerve to earn some money, and thus aspired to fake their way into the outer realms of the ruling elite. One of the necessary tools for this was knowledge of how the language was spoken and written by those who lived at the top.

For those who have taken their share of English classes, all this material might seem familiar, but that doesn’t diminish the pleasure of seeing Jonathan Swift, in the 18th century, being driven ape-crazy by the use of contractions like “wouldn’t” and trendy abbreviations like “mob” for the Latin “mobile vulgus” (fickle crowd).

“Mob” had the effect of “very unique” on Swift, and years after he first wrote a screed on the topic, he still flung himself into a rage when a woman he knew used the word in conversation: “Why do you say that?” he railed, “never let me hear you say that word again.” When the woman asked what she should say instead, he answered, “The rabble, to be sure.”

People are crazy, that’s the long and the short of it, and even with one of the biggest, most imaginative and attractive languages on the planet, they will discover ways to fiddle with it. After Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary, which, although certainly opinionated, was largely descriptive, there arose those pesky, prescriptive Latin grammarians who did everything they could to hammer English into a Latin mold.

Then, when the American Revolution came along, a patriot named Noah Webster compiled a uniquely American dictionary, taking the opportunity to thumb his nose at Johnson in the process.

Then came the long decades in which a group of dedicated scholars labored to put together the Oxford English Dictionary. The first installment appeared in 1884, the last in 1928. A lot of very learned people got sick and died during the execution of this valiant project, and as soon as it was finished -- sooner, even -- it required extensive revision. And more revision.

And then came the hordes of people with nothing better to do with their lives than to carp about the differences between “who” and “whom” and a mountain of split infinitives, because the language, besides providing a convenient subject to be enraged at, also offered a refuge for otherwise unemployable cranks.

The unseemly squabbling never lets up, actually. The author revisits the tempest in a teapot that recently surrounded the teaching of ebonics in the Oakland, Calif., school system. (The critics went out of their way to be both racist and smug.)

And before that, there was the scorn heaped upon the editor of Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, a man who thought it helpful to include words that people were using by the dawn of the ‘60s, like “hipster” and “drip-dry.”

Scholars went berserk, of course. And that’s what this book is about: humans going berserk. In the end, this language mania is probably preferable to sitting on the couch watching television, enduring an angst-attack over how Kate Hudson lets her jaw go slack when she smiles. That’s *truly* crazy, which is why we’re fortunate to have a language over which to pitch our fits. ●

*The Lexicographer’s Dilemma*  
Jack Lynch, Walker, 326 pp., \$26  
Reviewed by Carolyn See  
Book World

**T**his delightful look at efforts through the centuries to define and control the English language turns out to be a history of human exasperation, frustration and free-floating angst.

People tend to go nuts around the English language. Of course, most of us are nuts anyway, but the language is always there, in the ether, or staring at us from a page, and if we’re feeling particularly cranky, it never fails to provide a ready excuse for us to fly off the handle.

I get afflicted with that crankiness when a television anchor describes a Chihuahua rescued from drowning as “very unique,” or a woman I scarcely

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Americans know little about lethal infectious diseases. With the exception of AIDS, which targets specific population groups, we haven't experienced a nationwide epidemic since the 1960s, when the so-called Hong Kong Flu sickened millions of children and older adults, though killing relatively few.

In 1900, infectious disease was the leading cause of death in the United States; today, with life-saving vaccines and antibiotics, this is no longer the case.

When health officials talk about current "epidemics," they more likely are referring to chronic illnesses like cancer and heart disease. Aside from the post-9/11 threat of bioterrorism, infectious disease is more of a seasonal annoyance to most Americans than a major threat to their lives.

Until now, that is. Almost overnight we are discovering that microbes can be deadly and that the current influenza virus known as H1N1, or something uncomfortably close, has visited us before. In the fall of 1918, a strain of the swine flu triggered the worst seasonal pandemic in world history. Estimates range as high as 100 million deaths, and the United States was hardly immune.

Indeed, 10 times as many Americans died in that year of influenza as were killed on the battlefields of World War I. The good news is that the current H1N1 strain has proved far less lethal than the one that circulated in 1918.

The bad news, says Alan Sipress in his superb and sobering book about the shadowy progression of a virulent avian flu now moving across Asia, is that the worst is yet to come.

Sipress is uniquely positioned to tell this story. He's intimately familiar with the region, having served as a correspondent in South Asia during the devastating recent tsunami.

And his grasp of virology, as well as of the ins and outs of the world health bureaucracy, serves him well in explaining why medical practices that appear so obvious to Western experts in containing a deadly epidemic are largely irrelevant to "the backyard chicken farmers, cockfighters, witch doctors, political bosses, and poultry smugglers" who control the terrain where this battle must be fought.

We may be "closer to a global epidemic than [we've] been in a generation," says Sipress, who adds:

"The pandemic [is] coming."

The culprit will not be H1N1, Sipress notes, but rather H5N1, an avian influenza that has killed millions of birds throughout East Asia since the 1990s and has now turned up in places as distant as Egypt and Azerbaijan.

Flu viruses are defined by two types of protein: hemagglutinin, which the virus uses to break into the victim's host cells; and neuraminidase, which the virus needs to break out again in search of new cells to infect. What makes H5N1 so virulent is its ability to penetrate deep into lung tissue, unlike seasonal influenza, which targets the nose, throat and upper respiratory system.

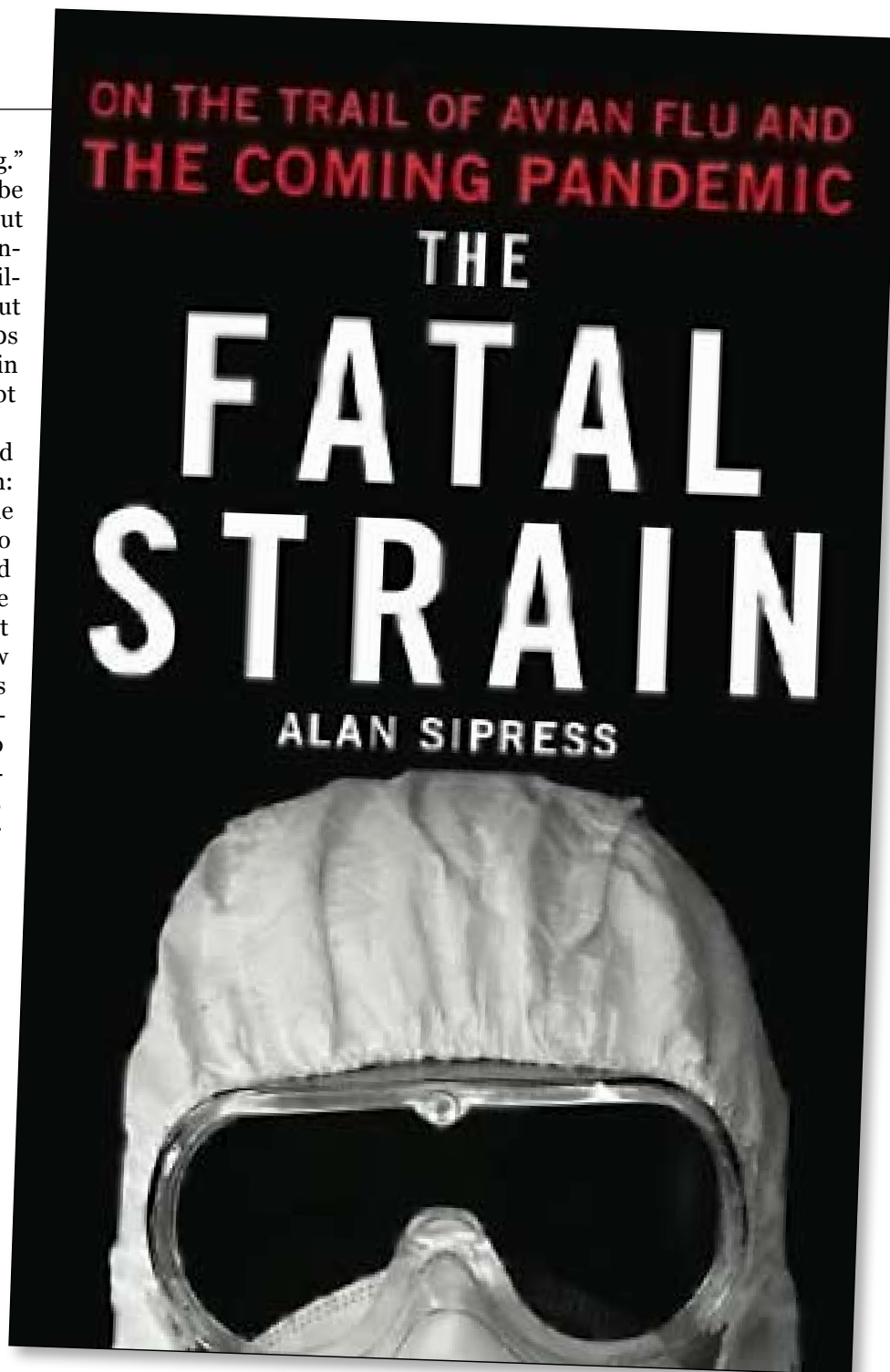
Particularly troubling is the fact that it has already jumped the species barrier from animals to humans. Though few people have been infected so far -- all in Asia and the vast majority in close contact with diseased poultry -- the mortality rate has been a staggering 60 percent.

Sipress sees H5N1 as the product of numerous factors, including a livestock revolution gone wild. Countries like Indonesia and Vietnam have become world leaders in poultry production without changing the primitive ways they go about tending their flocks.

Chickens and ducks are rarely segregated from other farm animals, allowing all sorts of viruses

to mix and spread. The birds are packed together in astonishing density; slaughtering takes place in open markets or private homes.

Epidemics are ignored or covered up by public officials. Why risk the sort of publicity that could



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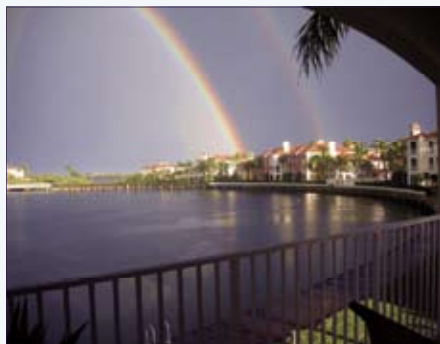
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cost hundred of millions of dollars in poultry sales and tourism? "The fatal strain's progress across East Asia," writes Sipress, "had been a journey veiled in secrecy and blessed with neglect."

The blame does not rest solely in this part of the world, however. Western governments have been slow to grasp the resentments of Asian nations, which are both starved for antiviral drugs like Tamiflu and reluctant to provide influenza strains without receiving compensation from the pharmaceutical giants that will profit from them.

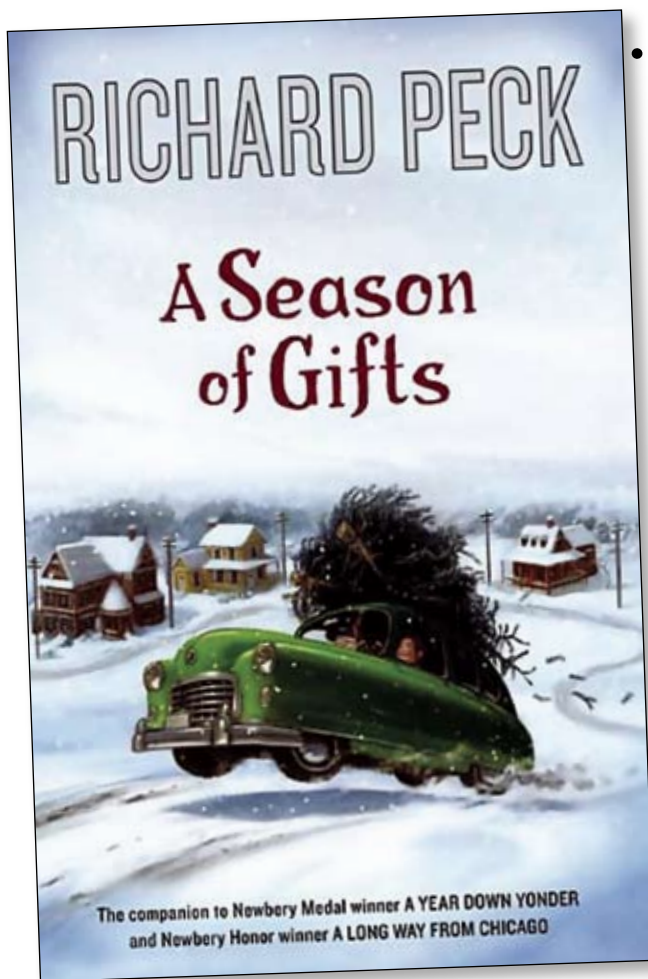
This "fracture between haves and have-nots," as Sipress calls it, may well derail the coordinated effort needed to battle a pandemic.

It must be noted that many infectious disease experts are skeptical of H5N1's catastrophic potential. They note that this influenza strain, which jumped from animals to humans more than a decade ago, has still shown almost no ability to move from one human to another -- the key factor in triggering a pandemic.

If it hasn't happened by now, they argue, the potential for person-to-person transmission appears

low. What does worry these experts, however, is the sort of mutation, common to influenza viruses, that could produce an H5N1 variant that is transmissible and to which there is no current human immunity. That, indeed, may be the next fatal strain. ●

*The Fatal Strain*  
 Alan Sipress, Viking, 386 pp., \$27.95  
 Reviewed by David Oshinsky  
 Book World



Grandma Dowdel should replace Superman as national hero for the duration.

Her Depression-era exploits – as narrated by her awed grandkids in "A Long Way From Chicago" and "A Year Down Yonder" – won her creator, Richard Peck, a Newbery Honor and a Newbery Medal. (He also picked up a National Humanities Medal – making him the only children's writer ever to receive that honor.)

Now, just in time for the holidays, Peck gives us **A Season of Gifts**.

It's 1958, and a new family has moved in next to the last house in town. Grandma, nearing 90, still eschews indoor plumbing and makes her own soap in a caldron over an open fire. Bob and Ruth Ann Barnhart are convinced she's a witch – because she couldn't possibly be a ghost.

"So we Barnharts had moved in next door to a haunted house, if a house can be haunted by a living being," 11-year-old Bob says. "She looked older than the town. But she was way too solid to be a ghost. You sure couldn't see through her. You could barely see around her."

Bob meets Grandma when the town boys tie him up and leave him – naked – dangling from a spider's web of rope in her privy. Grandma famously has little patience for bullies, and she takes the Barnharts under her copious wing.

Little sister Ruth Ann follows Grandma around like a puppy, while teenaged Phyllis moons over Elvis and Bob tries to lay low at school and help his minister father. Their church lacks a few basic amenities – such as windows and a congregation. Grand-

ma aims to fix that, in her own inimitable fashion.

Phyllis, it must be said, is something of a drip. And there are no episodes in "A Season of Gifts" quite as uproarious as in "A Year Down Yonder," when Grandma has the DAR over to her house for tea, or takes in a boarder who likes to paint in her attic. Nor is there anything that can equal the pathos of the Armistice Day turkey shoot.

That may stem from the fact that Peck is trying something new here: Grandma's grandkids were privy to her schemes (even when they didn't know what was going on), while Bob and his family are the recipients of her generosity. Also, the 1950s just aren't as desperate a time as the Depression.

There is, however, plenty of Peck's wry humor and classic Midwestern sensibility, which reminds me of memoirist Jean Shepherd. For example, here's Bob's mom on her new home in Piatt County: "I take back every bad thing I ever thought about Terre Haute."

And if Grandma Dowdel has mellowed a touch since "A Long Way From Chicago," she's still got her own unorthodox way of getting things done.

"As everybody knew, she didn't neighbor and went to no known church. She was not only real cranky, but well-armed." And she will turn out to be the best friend the Barnharts could ask for. ●

*A Season of Gifts*  
 Richard Peck, Dial, 176 pp., \$16.99  
 Reviewed by Yvonne Zipp  
 Christian Science Monitor

**I**f ever there were a character whose time has come, it is Grandma Dowdel. Able to bamboozle a banker into forgiving a widow's mortgage and feed a train's worth of hungry men from one day's fishing,

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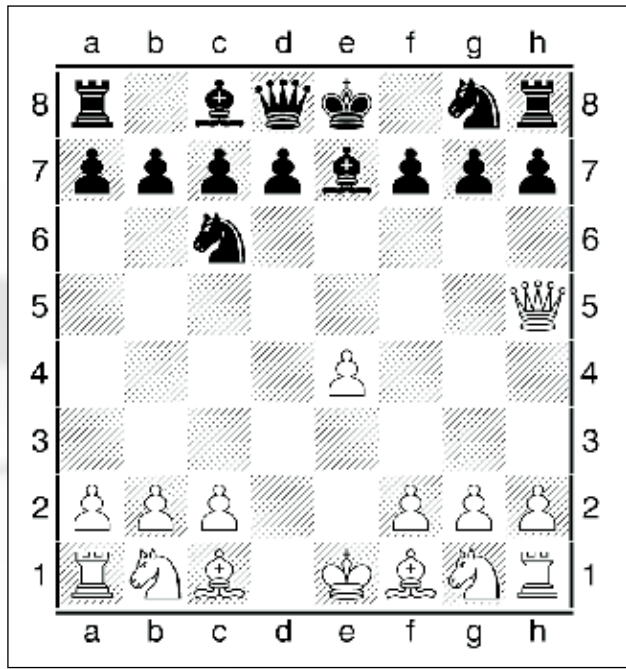
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## FOR THE LOVE OF CHESS BY HUMBERTO CRUZ - CHESS COLUMNIST



White's Queen on h5 may look menacing but it's actually vulnerable and misplaced.

### Getting Queen out too early typical beginner mistake

Many beginning chess players, particularly children, find the idea irresistible. They move the Queen as soon as possible far into enemy territory, where they hope to use it to checkmate the enemy King.

The Queen, after all, is the most powerful piece on the chessboard, able to move any number of squares and in any direction. But when the Queen ventures out too far, too soon, it becomes vulnerable to attack and can be lost.

That's the lesson the students at the Beachland Elementary School Chess Club in Vero Beach taught their counterparts at Laurel Ridge Elementary in Fairfax, Va. The two schools began playing a "correspondence" chess game this fall. By majority vote, the students decide on each move at their weekly club meetings and notify the other team by e-mail. The first four moves, with Laurel Ridge playing White, were: 1. e4 e5. 2. d4 exd4 3. Qxd4 Nc6 4. Qd1 Be7 and then Laurel Ridge couldn't resist playing 5. Qh5 (see diagram on left).

The Queen move is at best a time waster. By itself the Queen threatens nothing, since no other White pieces are developed.

(Rather than move the Queen, Laurel Ridge should have developed a Bishop or a Knight). Beachland answered with 5...Nf6, developing the Knight and attacking the White Queen. And then Laurel Ridge just plain blundered with 6. Qd5??. Beachland, of course, quickly snapped off the Queen with 6...Nxd5, grabbing a huge advantage in the ongoing game.

Humberto Cruz is a United States Chess Federation correspondence chess master and certified tournament director. He can be reached at askhumberto@aol.com.

## THE BRIDGE COLUMN BY PIETER VANBENNEKOM - BRIDGE COLUMNIST

Flustered Flo wasn't in a very good mood when she got the hand diagrammed at right dealt to her on the first board of her weekly bridge tournament. She was in an even worse mood after this hand.

South Dealer; East-West vulnerable. Flustered Flo was East and her usual partner, Loyal Larry, was West. Flo's nemesis, Smug Sam, played the South hand and his partner, Shy Shem, was North.

The bidding: South West North East  
1 No-Trump Pass 3 No-Trump All pass

Opening lead: 3 of Hearts.

Sam just about had a coronary when he saw the opening lead and the dummy came down. He could understand why his partner had raised straight to game in 3 NT. He had minimum point support, hoped his two long minor suits would be usable, and was afraid of revealing too much information if he tried to bid Diamonds, either via Jacoby transfers or naturally.

But, whatever the rationale, Sam realized he stood to lose five tricks right off the bat in Hearts and be down one before he could even get started.

Before he played any card on the opening trick, he asked Flo, sitting on his right: "Are your leads standard?"

"Yes," she replied, whereupon Sam, with his smug poker face, ordered the 4 of Hearts to be played from dummy.

Flo thought for some time before she played ... the 6. She just didn't feel like putting up her Ace and catching nothing with it.

The rest of the hand was fairly uneventful - except for the fireworks that came later. Sam won the trick in his hand with the Queen, took 5 Diamond tricks and five Club tricks when the finesse on the King worked, and even took the 13th trick with the Spade 10 when the King and the Jack of Spades fell under his Ace.

Sam had pulled off another coup - instead of going down one, as he should have, he'd actually made four overtricks!

"Why didn't you put up the Ace of Hearts on the first trick?" Larry asked Flo afterward.

"I took your lead of the 3 as discouraging - it was such a low card," said Flo.

"But it was a standard lead, next-to-lowest from length," Larry defended himself.

"It was standard - and poor," Flo said. "When you have a hand like that, you should lead the highest of your interior sequence, the Jack. That tells me you have some power there. Then I put up the Ace, come back in the suit and we set them."

### A classic end play

WEST		NORTH		EAST	
♠ K Q 9 2	♥ K J 10 3 2	♠ 6 4	♥ 8 4	♠ J 8 3	♥ A 9 7 6
♦ 6 4 2	♣ 2	♦ A Q J 9 5	♣ J 10 6 5	♦ 10 8 7	♣ 10 8 7
		♠ A 10 7 5	♥ Q 5	♦ K 3	♣ A Q 9 8 7

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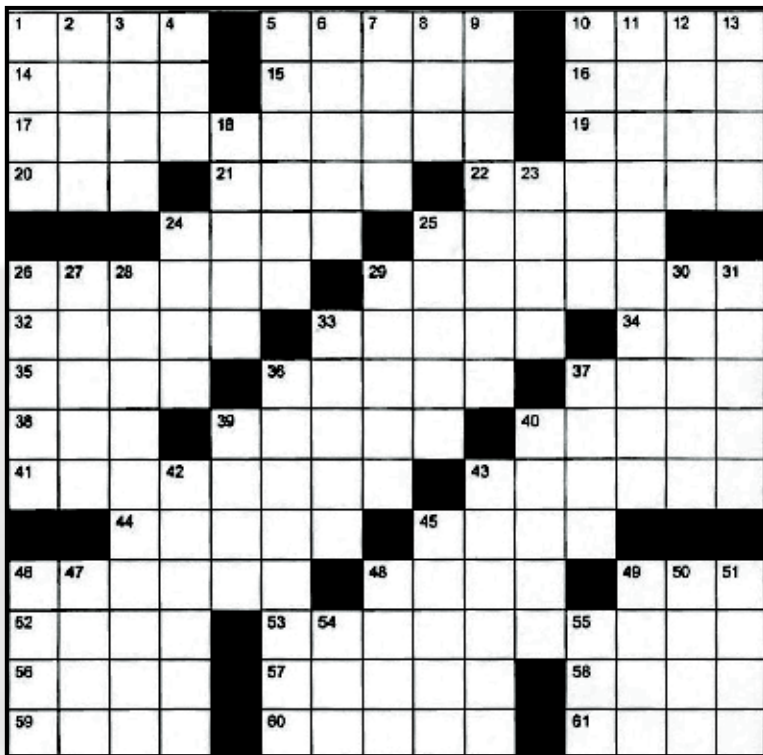
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# Crossword

SOLUTIONS TO LAST ISSUE ON PAGE 75

## AFTER THE FACT



The Christian Science Monitor | By Marjorie Pederson | Edited by Charles Preston

### ACROSS

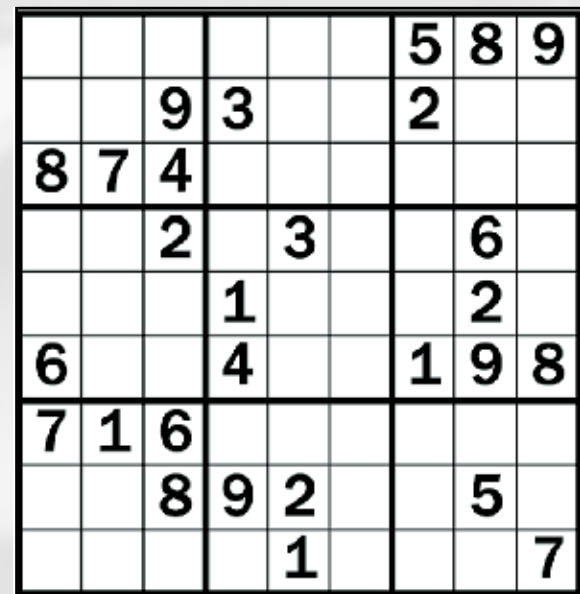
- 1 British peer
- 5 WWII French traitor
- 10 Church area
- 14 Slip sideways
- 15 FL horse country town
- 16 Debatable
- 17 Analysis of an event
- 19 Scandinavian capital
- 20 Still
- 21 British literary family
- 22 Red Cross founder
- 24 Committed perjury
- 25 Abraham's wife
- 26 Tack on
- 29 Organist's finale
- 32 Glistened
- 33 Sings, a la Merman
- 34 Chess pieces
- 35 Price
- 36 Yearn for
- 37 Baptismal basin
- 38 LLB holder
- 39 Rough of surface
- 40 Motivation
- 41 Check action
- 43 Small rodent's nemesis
- 44 Sure thing
- 45 Intend

- 46 Temple of Amon site
- 48 Spacecraft compartments
- 49 Commercial come-ons
- 52 Goddess of discord
- 53 Following Hiroshima
- 56 Ready
- 57 Bay window
- 58 Vishnu incarnation
- 59 Of a country: abbr.
- 60 Examines
- 61 At that point

### DOWN

- 1 Catch sight of
- 2 Medicinal herb
- 3 Become corroded
- 4 Allow
- 5 Impended
- 6 Bitter
- 7 Cisterns
- 8 Ginger \_\_\_\_
- 9 Pitch into
- 10 Ethically indifferent
- 11 Like some publications
- 12 Unaccompanied
- 13 English college
- 18 Down East
- 23 Part of B.A.
- 24 Christian fasting period
- 25 Unravel the obscure
- 26 Assocs for 46 Down
- 27 Camera print
- 28 Epistolary afterthought
- 29 "\_\_\_\_ porridge hot"
- 30 Thick
- 31 Stage direction
- 33 Soup stock
- 36 Eccentric
- 37 Greek country deity
- 39 Dame Everage
- 40 Slide
- 42 Glittery material
- 43 Commemorative awards
- 45 Vocal composition
- 46 "Showboat" composer
- 47 Opera staple
- 48 Greek letters
- 49 Indian nurse
- 50 Store or novel, now history
- 51 Glance over
- 54 Metallic rock
- 55 Scrap

# Sudoku



By Ben Arnoldy, The Christian Science Monitor

★☆☆☆☆

### How to do Sudoku:

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row and three-by-three square. See example (right).

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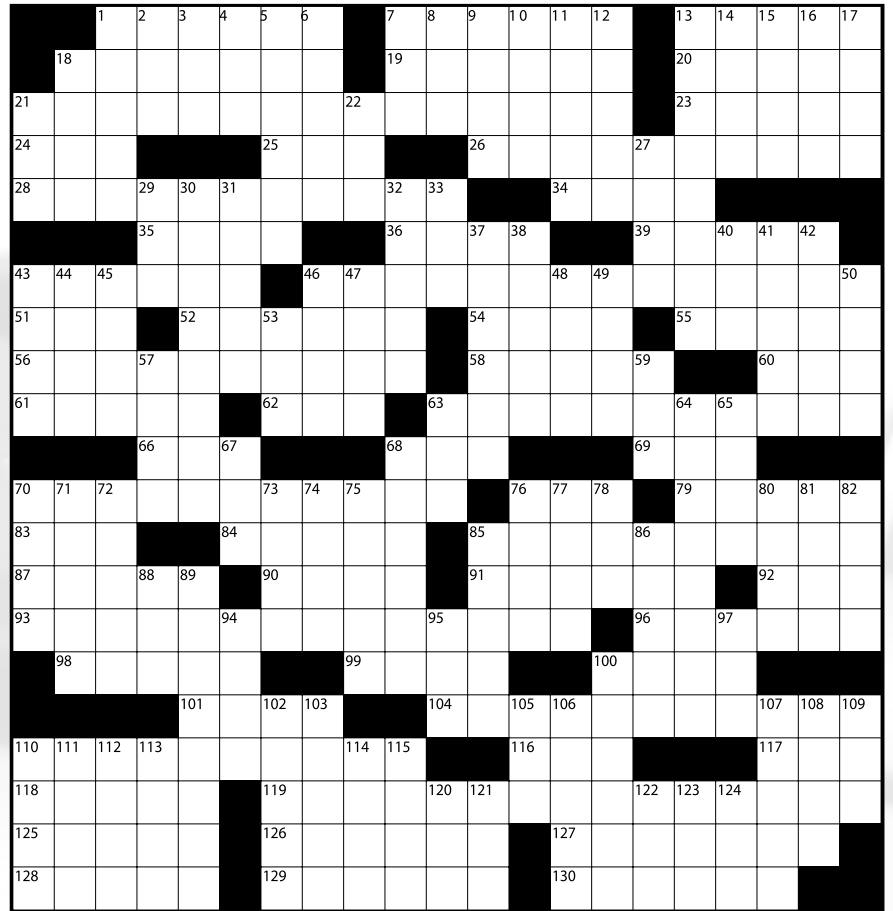
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**ACROSS**

- 1 Mini-racer
- 7 Strike caller
- 13 Pilgrim in a Longfellow poem
- 18 Petroleum company role
- 19 Prepared (for action)
- 20 Prepared
- 21 Fashionable veggies?
- 23 Great Dane by the piano
- 24 Harem room
- 25 Hotel freebie
- 26 Fashionable brand of bread spread?
- 28 Fashionable sandwich alternatives?
- 34 Smelting refuse
- 35 Michael's dad
- 36 "I \_\_\_ fool..."
- 39 Medina resident
- 43 Bathhouse
- 46 Fashionable condiment?
- 51 Palindromic name
- 52 New York city where Twain is buried
- 54 Charlie's Angels, e.g.
- 55 Past condition?
- 56 Fashionable meat?
- 58 Stockades
- 60 J. Pershing, for ex.
- 61 Moving
- 62 Crafty
- 63 Fashionable Italian dish?
- 66 Intro to politics
- 68 "\_\_\_ Town"
- 69 45s and LPs, to DJs
- 70 Fashionable cookies?
- 76 Site of Cross Creek: abbr.
- 79 Scrabble equipment
- 83 Vit. suggestion
- 84 Bard's theatre
- 85 Fashionable pie?
- 87 Girls' names
- 90 In line (with)
- 91 Sound for the "Car Talk" guys
- 92 Mr. Whitney
- 93 Fashionable meat?
- 96 Piano works
- 98 Factoid
- 99 Like some TV shows: abbr.
- 100 Increase
- 101 Nobelist André
- 104 Fashionable sweet?
- 110 Fashionable side dish?
- 116 Orinoco zapper
- 117 999 follower, perhaps
- 118 Canal boat
- 119 Fashionable advice to diners in a fancy restaurant?
- 125 Crusade targets
- 126 Type option
- 127 Echo
- 128 Good news for proposers
- 129 The Grand \_\_\_
- 130 "What's My Line?" panelist Francis
- 9 Math. exercise
- 10 Jewel-encrusted movie prop
- 11 Literary uncle
- 12 Detroit dud
- 13 The detective in "Psycho"
- 14 Author Uris
- 15 Fix holes, in a way
- 16 Move sideways
- 17 Nope, in Novgorod
- 18 Topless bathing suit designer Gernreich
- 21 Hit on the head
- 22 "Understand?"
- 27 Word in an Abbott and Costello routine
- 29 Alias letters
- 30 State symbol of Maine
- 31 Ph.D. hurdles
- 32 Adjust a bit
- 33 European airline
- 37 Took, as an exam
- 38 Pointer
- 40 Mileage, in a way
- 41 Car blemishes
- 42 Atlas blow-up
- 43 Home, *por favor*
- 44 Queries
- 45 Worms, e.g.
- 46 Sky, in Paris
- 47 \_\_\_ of hope
- 48 Digger's pile
- 49 Roast, to a French chef
- 50 Actress Rowlands
- 53 High pts.?
- 57 She succeeded Price as host of PBS's "Mystery!"
- 59 Baste, e.g.
- 63 Airport vehicle
- 64 Pitiful
- 65 Geometric line
- 67 Assn.
- 68 Not behind closed doors
- 70 Snatch
- 71 Laid off
- 72 "To \_\_\_ few"
- 73 Downhill racer
- 74 Science series
- 75 Explorer Tasman et al.
- 76 Ollie's pal
- 77 Permits
- 78 Crumb carrier
- 80 German song
- 81 Fashion magazine
- 82 Downhill racers
- 85 Bilbo's adoptee
- 86 G-rated
- 88 Toward the tail
- 89 Complacency
- 94 Sheik's pal
- 95 Business abbr.
- 97 Ackress Merkel
- 100 Mickelson, e.g.
- 102 "I \_\_\_ my way"
- 103 Part of a C major chord
- 105 Herbal preparation
- 106 Latin land
- 107 Zero people
- 108 Columnist Maureen
- 109 Over there, old-style
- 110 Passé marriage-vow word
- 111 Church section
- 112 Pupil's place
- 113 Watch closely?
- 114 Little buzzer
- 115 Normandy invasion town
- 120 Pulpit topic
- 121 Hypo units
- 122 Haw. is one
- 123 "Piggy"
- 124 Press for payment

**DOWN**

- 1 Imply
- 2 Repeatedly
- 3 Union that joined a union?
- 4 Rule of crime writing
- 5 "A Face in the Crowd" was her first film (1957)
- 6 Part of a fleet
- 7 Putrefaction reaction
- 8 Fallen space station



**FASHION PLATE**

By Merl Reagle

Puzzle by telegraph.co.uk

	5				3	2	
6	1					7	
			9	3			4
			4	2			
2			5		6		1
			1	8			
5			7	4			
							3
3	7	8					5

★★★★☆

Row →  
Three-by-three square →

4	3	2	8	1	6	7	5	9
5	6	9	3	7	4	8	1	2
1	7	8	9	5	2	4	6	3
3	4	7	2	8	5	6	9	1
2	1	6	7	4	9	3	8	5
9	8	5	1	6	3	2	7	4
7	9	1	4	3	8	5	2	6
8	5	3	6	2	1	9	4	7
6	2	4	5	9	7	1	3	8

Column

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## Damaged Goods by Jay McNamara

Brands of all stripes have reputations upon which their franchises rest. This is true of mundane items such as soaps whose images are based on product claims, encompasses brands represented by people, and includes people who have become brands of their own. All reputations are based on perceptions that may or may not be grounded in fact.

All brands have two aspects: the first deals with what the brand is, a soap or a car or a golfer; the second deals with matters of characterization. The latter evolve from answers to this question: What does my use and/or association with this brand say about me, to myself and to others?

There are endless examples of famous brands that have achieved enhanced images derived from the use of people, famous or otherwise. For example, the Marlboro man. Research if not common sense shows that smokers of the Marlboro brand see themselves through a cowboy persona, often far fetched in relation to the smoker's real identity.

The Beetle car said to the owner and to the world at large that its driver was a person of cents and sensibility, someone that saw a value when it was presented to them. One commercial showed a long line of limousines in a funeral procession accompanied by the voice-over reading of the will by the deceased. All of the assets were to be given to his smart grandson, shown in the commercial at the rear of the fancy car lineup. He was driving a Beetle.

The use of famous people to enhance brand reputations goes back to the beginning of advertising. Until the law forbade it, doctors endorsed Camels because they were good for your T-zone, a fictitious part of the anatomy.

When identifiable individuals are hired to represent products there are inherent risks. Ivory Soap learned to its dismay that the lady on their package front was a porn star. Hertz learned what can happen when you link your brand to a famous football player named O.J. The dustbins of Madison Avenue are filled with soiled images.

It is for this reason that many marketers use cartoon characters to represent their brands since they do not lose their looks or their reputations, not being disposed to the temptations of their human brethren. These campaigns are known as anthropomorphic because the characters act like humans.

I was there when the idea of Snoopy becoming the spokesperson for Metropolitan Life was proposed. Some of the company's executives were aghast that a cartoon dog might represent their esteemed company.

But, the chairman accepted the idea that Snoopy would take the sting out of the prospect of betting on your own death. At the same time, it would "humanize" the sales force. History was made. Today, the Aflac duck and the Geico gecko patrol the footlights for their respective insurance companies.

In the world of golf, there is one outstanding example of a singular image, the one belonging to John Daly, beginning with his implausible arrival, in which he drove all night in an old car, drinking beer and smoking throughout, to arrive on the first tee as the last alternate in the PGA Championship. And then winning it!

Daly was, and is, the contra image of golf, which is accustomed to country club associations. Besides the beer and smokes, there are the gambling and the women, lots of them. And the crazy dress code, the opposite of preppy.

Recently, I saw a video of Daly with a beer and cigarette strolling down the fairway with no shirt on. Millions of people identify with his blue collar personality. Although he has had a rocky relationship with sponsors, he has never been on a pedestal from which he might fall.

With any brand, there is an unwritten contract between the "product" and its user. It says that I, the user, will support the brand with loyalty and funding if you, the brand, will act consistently within your image.

If you improve your image, you will be improving my image and I will pay even more for our relationship. If, however, you damage your image, you are hurting my image. I will think twice about our contract and the price I pay for the relationship. I might even sever the contract without notice.

Such is the risk of famous brands and the potential results from damaged merchandise and fallen idols. Sic transit gloria mundi.