

by The Campus League of Puzzlers

Last week we gave you some tips on how to write puzzles. Now it's your chance to put them into action! Visit our webpage (<http://puzzle.berkeley.edu>) for instructions about how to be assigned an answer and how to submit your puzzle to us. We will print the best puzzle(s) in the column for everyone to solve. The deadline for submission is Nov. 20th.

This week, we will continue to discuss the puzzle-writing process with a few specific examples from our previous hunts. The puzzles mentioned are linked from our website. We suggest you look at the puzzle, read the solution, and then read the commentary in this column.

Puzzle: **DOTS** (2013)

I started with the answer UNLEADED PETROL TANKER which did not suggest any interesting themes. So, I decided to ignore the theme of the answer completely. I had hoped to do a Weird Al Yankovic-related puzzle and never gotten assigned an answer that would fit that theme, so now was the time. I thought about how many puns I could make (polka songs, Pokemon, polka dots) and tried to tie everything together (the final connection is made using Weird Al's song "Polkamon"). Solvers have to identify 20 Pokemon and 20 songs, which is pushing the limits of how much identification is acceptable, but the puzzle was targeted at teams of 5-10 rather than individual solvers.

Puzzle: **HIDDEN IN TRANSLATION** (2014)

I've been wanting to do a language-related puzzle for a while, and knew a lot of random facts about Czech, so I claimed the answer CZECH. When brainstorming, I remembered that CZECH had some amusing false cognates (e.g. the word "host" in Czech means "guest" in English). I used a standard puzzle format where the first of two lists is ordered in

cluephrase/answer order, the second list is in neutral (here, alphabetical) order, and when you figure out how to match the items in the second column to the first column, the answer is revealed (in this case, by reading the first letter of each word from the second column). It was important to make the clue phrase short enough that it wasn't too tedious to solve the puzzle, but long enough that it was robust against not finding some of the false cognates. I also made sure to throw in things that would help people figure out how the puzzle worked, like intentionally putting in false cognates that used the Cyrillic alphabet, and leaving an amusing false cognate pair lined up between the two columns.

Puzzle: **XXXXXXXXXXXX** (2014)

I was assigned the answer STORM. This suggested either weather or the X-Men, and X-Men seemed more fun. For a 5 letter answer, I prefer not to spell it out: I want to either give a cluephrase or get the word as a whole. I saw that Storm's name was "Ororo Munroe", which had 11 letters, and immediately decided to do a pun with "X11" colors.

We still had room for a puzzle involving image identification. X-Men movie posters show the characters along with colored Xs, so I decided I wanted images reminiscent of these. This meant that I would have pairs of characters (or maybe actors) and colors, and I needed a way to get a letter from each pair. A mechanism that I had seen in other puzzles was two equal length strings where one letter is the same and in the same position. So I compiled a list of X-Men and colors and wrote a short program to show me which letters I could use. The test solvers helped me figure out which X-Men were identifiable and to make sure that I referred to them uniformly.

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