

DOUBLE ENTENDRE HEADLINES

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While I was calmly reading the newspaper the other day, this headline near the bottom of the page caught my eye: JOHNNY, JUNE CASH ARE HIT IN HUNGARY. Had they been pelted with rotten tomatoes by a restive audience, or with bricks by protestors in the streets? (A modern civilized population has various ways of expressing its feelings.) Or had they been bashed by a car on the highway, or beaned by a meteorite? When I read the article, it was a surprise (and no small relief) to learn that their concerts in Hungary had been a big success.

Like an optical illusion which can give different impressions at different times, this particular headline (unwittingly) conveys more than one message. I began to wonder if other possibilities existed, or if they could be fabricated. A little experimentation produced the following:

REAGAN SEES RED OVER ARMS CONTROL TREATY Did the President fume over the issue, or simply discuss it with a Russian?

THIEVES GET CHAIR Did they steal it or were they electrocuted in it?

BAWDY HOUSE, COLLEGES CLOSE Did they mutually cease operations for the summer, or is someone alarmed that they are neighbors?

KU KLUX KLAN LEADER LOVES BLACK Is he infatuated with a person of African descent, or is it his favorite color?

MANY YOUNGSTERS WOLF FOOD Is some nutritionist alerting us to the fact that kids eat too fast, or has some aberrant individual been feeding them to his pet wolf?

JUSTICE NOT BLIND Has a Supreme Court member regained his sight, or is this simply another exposé of what some say is rampant in legal-circles?

FELT LADIES UNDERWEAR: HIT! Was someone bopped for inspecting female undergarments too closely, or are felt undies the latest fashion fad?

WETS ON FLOOR OF CONGRESS Did someone lose bladder control at the Capitol, or did the liquor lobby come en masse to make a pitch to legislators?

PROFESSIONAL BOWLERS DON'T WANT STRIKES Don't they try to knock down all the pins with one ball, or do they eschew union action for higher wages?

BUGS CREEP IN GARDEN STEALTHILY Is this a garden column reminder of subtle insect attacks, or has someone secretly microphoned an obnoxious spy in his lettuce patch?

REAGAN SHOWS BOMB ON TV Did Reagan give the media a good look at one of our weapons, or have his old movies been rerun failures on the tube?

EDITOR FIGHTS FOR LIFE Is he about to die, or is he crusading for the magazine?

CASH ENDS UP IN HOSPITAL Did Johnny have to be taken to sick bay, or does much money end up in medical coffers?

YOUNG NUDE IN PARK Was it a youthful streaker, or Mr. Young barefoot in Central Park all the way up to his chin?

SHORT BOSSES CHASE SECRETARIES Has a recent survey demonstrated that undersized executives pursue secretaries, or is Mr. Short the person placed in charge of office help at Chase National Bank?

Come to think of it, here is an actual headline from a few years ago in our local paper: **LIONS HAVE CHRISTIANS FOR DINNER**. Was this an account of painstaking efforts on the part of nostalgia buffs to recreate the traditions of ancient Rome? Well, in fact no - it seems that the local Lions Club had invited some members of a Christian church group to share a meal with them!

If you run across or fabricate any ambiguous headlines I would be happy to hear about them.

Editor's Note: In the May 1978 Kickshaws, Ralph Beaman asked **Word Ways** readers to send in real-life headlines with more than one interpretation. Several responded with such zingers as **AGGRAVATED BATTERY CHARGE**, **RAIN CLOUDS WELCOME AT AIRPORT**, **ZONING REGULATIONS TO CURB PORNOGRAPHY SUBMITTED BY BEAME**, **JUDGE REFUSES TO PRESS PANTS SUIT**, and **SMOKING DOWN IN FRANCE, BRITAIN**. It's sometimes hard to draw the line between the unintentional and the intentional ambiguous headline, as in **IRON BARS MIGHT SOON HOLD BRASS**.