

WEBSTUFF

A mini Wiki war

One Baton Rouge man's whimsical interest in a satirical animal picture reveals Wikipedia's eclectic, oddly contentious online community.

"There are all kinds of personalities attracted to Wikipedia," says Aharon Varady, a city planner who works for the Shaw Group. Wikipedia.com is the public encyclopedia where anyone can register and begin posting articles about anything from famous people to obscure events. Varady says it's an entangled ecosystem of writers and editors, creators and destroyers who guard the gate with surprising ferocity.

Varady happened to take interest in a photo of an elephant seal clutching a blue bucket that originated on a Web site called *icanhascheezburger.com*, which features photos of animals

with silly, satirical captions. There are innumerable versions of these so-called "lolrus" photos (their name is a mash-up of the online acronym for "laugh out loud" and the word walrus, which elephant seals are often mistaken as).

"You've got weirdos like me, and then you've got anal people like Vary who take things down," Varady says. Vary is a female theater stage manager in Washington, D.C., who voluntarily serves as a Wiki gatekeeper. She started removing material soon after Varady contributed to the lolrus article.

The gatekeeper's argument: Lolrus was not notable, Varady says, even though it has shown up in *Time* magazine and on slate.com. Inexplicably, a Wikipedia article about lolcats is dedicated to—you guessed it—funny pictures of cats.

"I'm frankly tired of watching you trying to make something so completely inane sound important," Vary wrote testily during a message exchange with Varady. "You're a very silly person and I'm not going to talk to you anymore."

The lolrus issue is small even by Wiki standards, but illustrates how the public encyclopedia project has evolved.

"At one time Wikipedia seemed to be a kind of anarchist experiment," Varady says matter-of-factly. "But they have much more rigorous guidelines now."

—JEFF ROEDEL

Varady and his beloved "lolrus"