YOUR NEXT STEP: The Clues You Need to Make Your Case

Dear Amy,

I'm 32 and an animist — a believer in the existence of nature spirits, including the elemental forces of wind, fire and water. I'm going on a trip with my girlfriend, a scientist, who insists on the scientific evidence that these forces don't exist. How do I make my case?

Thank you,

Worried

Dear Worrying,

There is no scientific evidence that nature spirits don't exist. In fact, many people find solace in the belief that these forces have a life of their own. If you're convinced that they exist, why not share your knowledge with your girlfriend? Perhaps she'll come around.

Best wishes,

No Evidence Needed

ARTIFACTS: Creative tax returns (Caren Murphy, Chicago)  
SPLASHING: Born on an Autumn night (Jean-Leon, Paris, France)  
TIE (5): It's the cutting edge (Mary Beatley, Shrewsbury, Mass.)  
Still-running — deadline Monday night, Feb. 6. For our contest: send us an existing word. See dictionary.com/1460/10 for Evan Bernstein's actual clue for this grid.

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Note for last week's Grid:

The Washington Post is asking its crossword puzzle fans to make suggestions about any aspect of the puzzle they feel needs improvement. Suggestions may be sent to thestyle@washpost.com or online at bit.ly/inv743. 

Happy Birthday: The Washington Post's Style Invitational celebrates famous birthdays in the coming weeks with themed puzzles. This week's puzzle is themed for about Franklin Delano Roosevelt. (Feb. 6, 1882-4/12/45). Answers are due by Feb. 13.

In this week's Style Invitational: The 2016 Political Party Award

Your next step: Your guest columnist this week, Tom Witte, is the author of "Washington Reckoning" (Rivergate, 2016). He’ll be taking a look at the 2016 presidential campaign.

Witte: Another look back, another year that won't be remembered for much of anything.

The Post recently announced plans to cut 100 jobs, and with good reason. There's a bit of déjà vu to this story, but the key difference is that this is a seller's market for newspapers — there are few buyers. So the paper can pay a lower price for the employees it wants to keep. 

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