Playing All the Angles

By MAUREEN DOWD

LAS VEGAS

As I sat above the Hoover Dam under the broiling sun, I was getting jittery.

There was Gov. Jan Brewer of Arizona, speaking at the dedication of a bridge linking Arizona and Nevada 890 feet above the Colorado River.

As the politicians droned on and my Irish skin turned toasty brown, I worried that Governor Brewer might make a citizen’s arrest and I would have to run for my life across the desert. She has, after all, declared open season on anyone with a suspicious skin tone in her state.

We are in the era of Republican Mean Girls, grown-up versions of those teenage tormentors who would steal your boyfriend, spray-paint your locker and, just for good measure, spread rumors that you were pregnant.

These women — Jan, Meg, Carly, Sharron, Linda, Michele, Queen Bee Sarah and sweet wannabe Christine — have co-opted and ratcheted up the disgust with the status quo that originally buoyed Barack Obama. Whether they’re mistreating the help or belittling the president’s manhood, making snide comments about a rival’s hair or ripping an opponent for spending money on a men’s fashion
show, the Mean Girls have replaced Hope with Spite and Cool with Cold. They are the ideal nihilistic cheerleaders for an angry electorate.

Seated next to Brewer at the bridge dedication was Harry Reid, the slight, mild-mannered, 70-year-old Senate majority leader who has wandered into the surprise fight of his career — a race where the fur is flying.

“Man up, Harry Reid,” Sharron Angle taunted him at their Las Vegas debate here Thursday night. That’s not an idle insult, coming from a woman who campaigns at times with a .44 Magnum revolver in her 1989 GMC pickup.

With casino red suit and lipstick, Angle played the Red Queen of the Mad Hatter tea party, denouncing career politicians and ordering “Off with your head!” and “Down with government benefits!” Even sober and smiling beneath her girlish bangs, the 61-year-old Angle had the slightly threatening air of the inebriated lady in a country club bar, tossing off outrageous statements and daring anyone to call her on them.

The debate between the former boxer and the former competitive weight lifter, the soft-spoken Mormon and the outspoken Christian, was a source of fascination because the rivals perfectly represent the two caricatures of the midterms: The Washington incumbent and master of back-room deals who’s been around forever and lost touch with people versus the wacky new-breed Tea Party challenger who’s hiding from and hating on the press, spouting a lot of weird stuff and vowing to do what Barack Obama didn’t: Shake up Washington.

The senator began the debate with a gentle reminiscence about his mother, who took in wash from the brothels in scruffy Searchlight, Nev.

Angle could have told the poignant story of her German immigrant great-grandmother who died trying to save laundry hanging on the clothesline in a South Dakota prairie fire, which Angle wrote about in her self-published book, “Prairie Fire.” But instead the former teacher and assemblywoman began

Reid did not man up enough to mock Angle’s nutty assertion that Shariah law exists in Dearborn, Mich., and Frankford, Tex. (a town that hasn’t existed since 1975). But he did rebut Angle’s inane contention that health insurers should not have to cover anything, talking about how important it was to be covered on mammograms and colonoscopies.

“If you do colonoscopies,” he said, “colon cancer does not come ’cause you snip off the things they find when they go up and — no more.”

“Well,” Angle replied tartly, “pink ribbons are not going to make people have a better insurance plan.”

Angle has been pressing the case, underwritten by Karl Rove’s operation and other conservative groups that have made the majority leader their No. 1 target, that Reid must be punished for being in a socialist triumvirate with Nancy Pelosi and President Obama. In the debate, she went for the jugular, asking him how he became “one of the richest men in the Senate” after coming from Searchlight “with very little.”

Reid, who cloaks his ambition and brass knuckles under a mousy facade, looked as if she had slapped him. He called her “my friend,” but clearly did not think of her as his “pet,” as he unfortunately dubbed Chris Coons, the Delaware opponent of the bewitching Christine O’Donnell.

He said that was “really kind of a low blow,” adding that he had been a successful lawyer before becoming a pol, and “did a very good job in investing.”

After the debate was over, Angle scurried away and so did I — in a different direction. I was feeling jittery again. If she saw me, she might take away my health insurance and spray-paint my locker.
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EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE (all three angles are equal): Everyone loves everyone. Jules and Jim 1961. (Below) The classic French triangle: Jules, Jim and Catherine live and love together. RIGHT TRIANGLE (one angle is a strong 90-degree corner): One strong character and two weaker angles. “Body Heat,” 1981. (At right) An 80's twist in film noir triangles; Kathleen Turner persuades a lawyer (William Hurt) to kill her rich husband. Playing All the Angles, Copyright © 2014 by Nicole Lane. All Rights Reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without prior written permission of the publisher. Omnific Publishing. 1901 Avenue of the Stars, 2nd Floor. Los Angeles, California 90067. www.omnificpublishing.com. First Omnific eBook edition, June 2014. First Omnific trade paperback edition, June 2014. The characters and events in this book are fict