

**Bento 17 is published August 2005
by David Levine and Kate Yule
for Interaction, the Worldcon in Glasgow, Scotland**

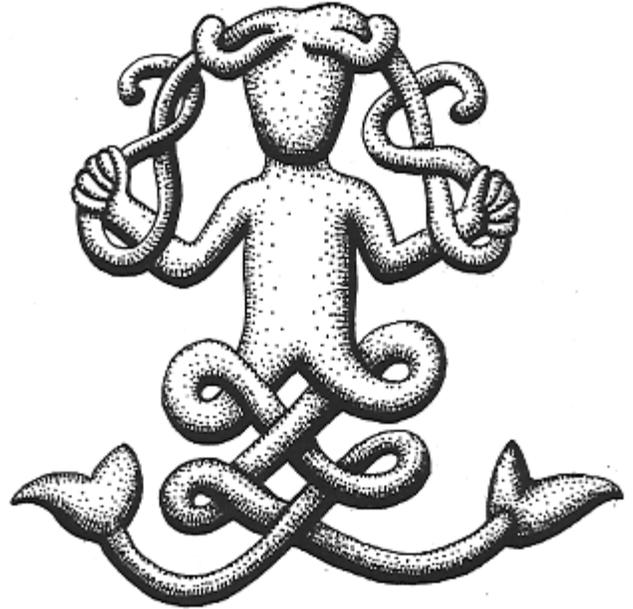
If you ask us during a science fiction (or square dance) convention “What’s new with you? What have you been up to?” the answer may well disappoint. We’re in convention space, you see! The real world is far away; home, job, and political crises all equally insubstantial. The crappy signage by the registration desk— now that’s a scandal worth discussing, that is—

So do have a chat with us at the Worldcon. Buy us a pint, or a nice cuppa. And if you’d like to know a bit more about those strange people who just slid under the table, when you get home take a look at www.LiveJournal.com. Our usernames are **kateyule** and **davidlevine** respectively. One doesn’t have to register in order to read public entries. David has lots to say about the process of novel writing, plus computer natter and smatterings of real life. Kate’s earliest posts are all about our kitchen remodel, and in February 2005 she got a CPAP machine to cope with sleep apnea. “Hey, Rusty’s in the club!” We’d love to have you drop by.

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BENTO 17



The gift shop at the San Jose Art Museum had nightlights for sale that had been part of their “blobjects” exhibit. I picked one up, curious about its heft, and said “Oh! It has a belly button!”

David said, “No, that’s its mouth. Because if that’s a belly button then those other dots are stigmata, and eeeuw.”

“Really? Naw. They could still be eyestalks and there just isn’t a mouth.”

“But a belly button implies a womb and everything.”

I said that I didn’t feel a need to posit an entire alien biology in order to believe it feasible to have both navel and eyestalks on the same organism, especially when that organism was a glow-in-the-dark plastic nightlight.

Looking on, the clerk commented happily “No one has *ever* done that before.”

“What?”

“Said, ‘what if this were a mouth’ or ‘I think they’re eyes.’”

Really? Nobody?

How very sad.

—KY



Battlestar Gray

As I write this, the second season of *Battlestar Galactica* has just begun and DVDs of Season One are available. If you haven’t been watching this series, you should. It’s the best science fiction show on television since *Firefly* was canceled.

First off, cast aside all memories of the Seventies show of the same name with Lorne Greene. Yes, the characters in this *Galactica* have some of the same names; yes, the twelve human Colonies were destroyed by the robotic Cylons in a sneak attack; yes, the space battleship *Galactica* leads an ill-assorted fleet of survivors toward the legendary planet Earth. But those implausible names (Apollo, Starbuck, Boomer) are fighter pilot call signs— these people have first and last names just like actual human beings. The Cylons are not one-dimensional killing machines, but complex and mysterious adversaries. And that “rag-tag fugitive fleet” is populated by a diverse and combative group of characters who, although they know the fate of humanity rests on their shoulders, nonetheless often work at cross-purposes, creating tension within the small and embattled survivor community.

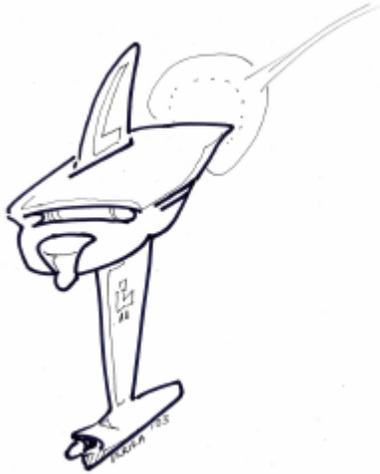
The relationship between President Roslin and Commander Adama is particularly well drawn. Laura Roslin, who was Secretary of Education before most of the government was killed in the Cylons’ initial attack, is derided by her critics as a “jumped-up ex-schoolteacher.” William Adama, the Old Man of the fleet, was about to retire along with his antiquated battlestar; he’s tired,

“Yeah, he does kind of walk like a piñata.”

estranged from his son Lee (call sign Apollo), and occasionally despairs that the gods have dumped a bigger task in his lap than he can handle. Yet of these two it's Roslin who is most frequently hard-nosed and unsentimental, while Adama is the one who argues from the heart that the men and women under his command must be respected as individuals.

The differing goals and priorities of these two, the civilian and military leaders of the fleet respectively, lead to a Constitutional crisis and an armed insurrection by the end of the first season. But it's far from clear which of them is "right." Apollo, in particular, is torn—he's both Adama's lead fighter pilot and Roslin's liaison to the military, and though he sometimes hates his father (there's backstory galore to *that* relationship) he's an army brat who can't always understand civilian politics. With friends like these, who needs Cylons?

The Cylons themselves are the most intriguing thing about this very intriguing series. For one thing, they are no longer



clumsy walking toasters—the various new models include fear-some computer-animated centurions, lethal pilots integrated with their ships, and biotech creatures indistinguishable from human on even a cellular level. Humanoid Cylons do not necessarily know they are Cylons, which makes for some interesting speculations. Randy, cigar-chomping Starbuck—might she be a Cylon? How about Adama or Roslin?

Another real difference from the old series is that the Cylons have *motives*—some, at least, are profoundly religious (and monotheistic, as contrasted with the humans' worship of the Lords of Kobol), and seem to be working toward some grand unification of humanity and its machine children under the light of God.

I'm beginning to think that—despite their apparent destruction of most of humanity at the beginning of the series—the Cylons do feel they have humans' best interests at heart. ("Apparent" destruction because in the scenes set on Cylon-occupied Caprica, there are no dead bodies *anywhere*. Isn't that a little odd?) When their full motivations are revealed I suspect we will find that some humans will agree with them. Possibly even some of the audience.

Nothing is straightforward here. Much of what we think we know about the Cylons is via Baltar, the most complex character of them all. In the old series Baltar allied with the Cylons for the sake of personal power and acted as the lead one-dimensional villain. In the new series Gaius Baltar is a vain and lazy genius, a self-sacrificing coward, a gallant and imaginative asshole of the

first water. Yes, he did help the Cylons slaughter most of humanity, but unknowingly, deceived by a beautiful female Cylon who knew exactly where his weak point lay (accent on the "lay"). Now he's half-insane with guilt. Or possibly completely insane—Baltar and only Baltar can see Evil Blondie now, and it's utterly ambiguous whether she is a Cylon mind implant, a figment of his imagination, or even a vision from God. She does give him information that only the Cylons could have. But if she really is a Cylon... why would she tell us how to defeat them?

Again, I suspect the Cylons have humanity's best interests at heart. Their repeated attacks on *Galactica* might only *appear* to be an attempt to destroy the last remnant of humanity. Might they be trying to herd them in a particular direction? And might that direction be as much spiritual as physical? Perhaps they believe that suffering strengthens the soul, or that the weakest elements of humanity must be weeded out. At this point I have no idea what the answer is, but I trust the writers enough to believe that there is one, and that it will be revealed in time.

Are you getting the idea that I really like the writing on this series? That's not all it has going for it. The acting is often impressive. The sets and special effects are top-notch. There's sound in space, but it's muted, as though the producers are embarrassed to have to include it, and most of the space battles are shown in a *cinéma vérité* style, filmed as if by hand-held cameras. The intriguing percussion-driven music doesn't sound like anything else on television. And there's plenty of sex—no "sociolators"

here, but what would you expect from a shipful of randy space fighter jocks (of both sexes) who know they are responsible for the continued existence of the human race?

The new *Battlestar Galactica* is subtle. All the characters, including the Cylons, are drawn in shades of gray. It's complex, morally ambiguous, and a great shoot-'em-up besides. It might even be good enough to drive the memory of *Galactica 1980* out of my head.

—DDL

Morning radio news: "...Canadian cattle prohibited from crossing the border."

Kate: *That's because they don't have passports.*

David: *"How long do you plan to be in the country?"*

Mooo.

That's not an answer, sir—

MOO

—ma'am.

Nerve Gas Chicken

by popular demand

What we have here is a wok recipe that calls a few pieces of dry red pepper, which you fry in hot oil “until it turns almost black.” That word “almost” there is the kicker. Kind of like “turn left at the second street before the stop light.”

Imagine a kitchen filled, not with smoke exactly, but with a fine mist of oil droplets, each one infused with the essence of hot pepper. Imagine gasping for breath—and regretting it, deeply, while trying not to breathe, deeply, as you throw open all available doors and windows.

We like it anyway.

Mix marinade:

- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 1 Tb soy sauce
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp wine
- 1/4 tsp black pepper

Debone a pound or two of chicken, remove skin. Cut into 1-in. cubes and **marinate** for at least 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, **remove** tips and seeds of 2-4 dried red peppers (depends on personal proclivities, freshness, etc.) Break up into pieces not smaller than 1 inch, the better to find them again later.

Here, Read This

I volunteer at a non-profit women’s bookstore. (I can tell I’ve been doing LiveJournal for a while; immediate impulse upon writing that sentence was to link to the web page.)

In sixth grade my dream occupation was crossword puzzle writer—working environment to include a cat and a window seat—but this is a pretty good Plan B. I get to open big boxes full of brand-new books! And it’s a socially useful outlet for obsessive sorting behavior, as in reshelving things, and alphabetizing the bumper stickers. —They don’t *sell* all jumbled up, dammit! People don’t buy what they don’t see: a basic principle, I should think.

Related principle: people don’t buy what we don’t have. Since our cash flow bites, this leads to a lot of pondering on my part about an ideal stocking algorithm. When and whether to restock a title? If your lone copy sells and you stock another, and it sells and you stock another, and *it* sells so you throw caution to the winds and stock two or three at once, where does this stop? When the book’s no longer in print? Unchecked, it seems this would lead to shelves crammed with The Last Unsold Copy of each title we ever carried (like the unwanted, untouched cup of coffee that is the only way to fend off eternal refills).

I suppose that’s where returns and clearance sales come in. Ponder, ponder. Ordering books isn’t directly my bailiwick, but I’m encouraged to make suggestions to keep the SF section healthy.

Chop up a green pepper, and a small piece of ginger. Get 1/2 cup of roasted peanuts out of the freezer.

Mix sauce:

- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 2 Tb soy sauce
- 1 Tb wine
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1/2 tsp sugar

(For extra credit, prepare sauce and marinade at the same time.)

Heat 2 Tb oil in wok and **fry** chicken until just cooked. **Buff.** (= remove to a plate). Heat 2 more Tb oil in wok. **Fry** red pepper until it turns almost black. **Gasp**, hold breath, fling open windows. **Add** ginger and green pepper, stirring and frying until the green pepper is how you like it. **Add** sauce, and the plateful of chicken—and the peanuts, especially if they were frozen—and cook until it seems ready. Serve with rice. **Don’t eat** the red things.

You made rice, right?

—KY

Timing Toast, by Piet Hein

There’s an art of knowing when.

Never try to guess.

Toast until it smokes and then

twenty seconds less.

Last year I expanded my job description to include a dealer’s table at Orycon. The store does a lot of selling at conferences and special events (let me tell you, midwives buy a *lot* of calendars!). I knew the Orycon demographic well enough to see points of overlap between it and our mission, above and beyond the obvious fantasy and SF, which other dealers have well in hand. Consider: women in science, gender issues, Wicca, polyamory, books about writing, books about reading, history, historical fiction, parenting, genre board books for toddlers...

Nobody else had *Fat! So?* or *My Gender Workbook* or *Please Don’t Bully Me*. The Rosalind Franklin biography went to someone writing a thesis about sidekicks in academia. Histories of the female astronaut corps (*Mercury 13* and *Promised the Moon*) sold



Beija, the Part-Time Shop Dog
(ears not to scale)

out, and I should have grabbed the store's entire stock of the hot-off-the-presses, this-just-in *Stitch and Bitch Nation*, with its patterns for pirate wristbands and Knit Your Own Joey Ramone Doll. Who knew!

I'd tried hard to have some good witty buttons, preferably ones whose semantic content did not boil down to "life sucks" or "you suck" or "I'm a bitch", the predominant messages available. A young girl pounced gleefully on the button that read **CAN YOU IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS?**

I thought that was pretty sophisticated for a kid. Yay her!

Everyone comes by eventually, when you're in the dealer's room. I hadn't committed anyone else to a shift, but various friends spelled me for meals etc. I kept looking down to find my eldest niece sprawled on the floor getting eye tracks all over a YA fantasy by Anna Dale whenever she got the chance, and the five-year-old hung out a little on Sunday to ask passers-by *would you like to buy a girl scout calendar please*. She's reading now, so I expect her big sister will have to shove over and make room.

But there will be room, hooray! I sold five times what the store manager hoped for, enough to knock her speechless, enough to justify a full booth instead of space for one 6' table and half a chair. Calendars! Picture books! Room to swing a cat! Orycon is opposite World Fantasy Con in Madison this year, and David is sorely torn between the two. I'll be in the dealer's room at Orycon, having fun and selling buttons that say **I WAS PUT ON EARTH TO EMBARRASS MY CHILDREN IN FRONT OF THEIR FRIENDS.** —KY

height and under multiple legged tables and chair sets. Lurking is spoiled by being seen or heard, as in the case of knocking things over. Lurking is more closely related to a Zen state of mind where the very act of Lurking becomes more important than anything one might gain through Lurking. And in its purest form the Lurker becomes totally invisible during the time of greatest concentration. (Ask me sometime about how a 25 pound yellow cat can hide behind a single blade of grass in a pool of sunshine.)

This is where we come to the distinction between the pure pursuit of Lurking as an art form and the mercenary and abysmal practice of **Lurking for Profit**. Lurking for Profit is most often noted at meal times when one sibling is desirous of more and studiously cleans between their toes waiting for another sibling to show a weakness that allows the Lurker to gobble up the rest of their food (see any Friskies Buffet commercial circa 1975).



A Letter of Clarification

by Kathryn Ice

You will never know how strange it is to see an Ice family word show up in your marvelous and twisted dictionary. I think that if you look into the etymology of the verb "to Vulch" you will discover that it infiltrated the Yule family lexicon through the nexus of "the apartment". (I haven't managed to live in enough apartments in my life to have to qualify which one. But you will remember it as the one Sue and I shared in Ballard with Dezdra of beloved memory whom no one believed existed until she sniffed Kate's eyelid one morning.)

You are using to Vulch in a slightly different sense that I am used to hearing it and I thought I would try to explain the difference between Vulching and Lurking. That is if I am able to; it is a pretty tricky concept. It helps to have cats and the more oriental the better.

You seem to be using the concept of Vulching as an aspect of nonviolent Lurking for Profit (in this instance the acquisition of a parking space by actually waiting for you to vacate it and then pulling in, a noble aim) without taking into consideration the spatial aspects and the evil kinetic potential of true Vulching.

The basics:

Lurking is done for purposes of surveillance. It is the stealthy insinuation of a feline through a series of obstructions to keep watch over something or someone. Lurking is best done at ankle

Vulching is always done for evil purposes of intimidation, theft and illicit gain. It requires a position of physical superiority over the desired victim or item and can involve taking hostages. Vulching usually happens on top of tall bookcases, curtain rods, dressers, windowsills and refrigerators. It begins with a stare meant to bore through your brain and insert commands such as "put down the salmon cutlet and go to the bathroom", culminating in the crawly feeling that you are being watched or that something wants to eat you. You turn around and look up and then you see it! A successful Vulching requires the startled realization in the victim that it is being watched, which leads to fear, clumsiness and victory for the instigator. Usually the item of desire is dropped in order to save or retrieve hostages and victory goes to the Vulture!

If that car had really been Vulching your parking place, I would have expected it to carefully and silently climb up on the roof of the car behind yours. It would have looked both ways and then in an ear-shattering and heart-stopping moment blasted its horn, waiting only long enough for you to look back in consternation and alarm, and leaped onto the roof of your car, smashing it mercilessly underneath. Then—shifting slightly to allow for maximum comfort—it would have smiled evilly and gone to sleep in your parking spot, blissfully unconcerned over your cries for help.

I think that you should now be able to see the difference.

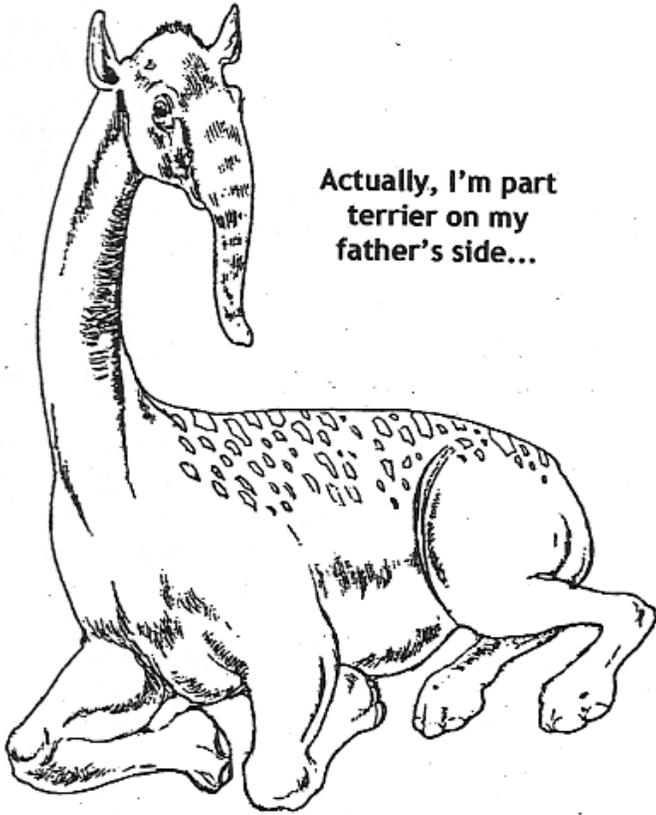
"I think the word you're looking for is 'aphasia.'"

Rocky Horror's Picture Show

Now this all started about two Halloweens ago, that is two years ago on Halloween, when Brad and Janet went up to visit Rocky at Frank N. Furter's castle. Now Rocky doesn't live in the castle... well, Rocky doesn't what you'd call *live* at all... he's in the cemetery outside the castle. In pieces...

Now, livin' at the castle like that, Frank N. Furter had a lot of room downstairs where the dungeons used to be and, havin' all that room—seein' as how he took out the dungeons—he decided that he didn't have any reason not to throw a big ol' party for all his friends from Transylvania. So that's what he did. And they was hung-down brung-down hung-up and all kinds of mean nasty ugly things, and Brad and Janet walked in and Riff Raff said "Kid... you're wet." And all the Transylvanians moved away from them in the ballroom there, and gave 'em the hairy eyeball and all kinds of mean nasty things, till Janet said "yes... it's raining."

And they all came back, shook their hands, and they had a great time in the ballroom doin' the Time Warp and talking about transvestism an' transsexuality and all kinds of groovy things until Frank N. Furter came in. He came in on the elevator he came in, and he was wearin' a cape and high heels he came in, and he said "Kids... this-castle's-got-forty-seven-rooms-thirty-seven-basements-fifty-eight-laboratories-why-don'tcha-stay-for-the-night-or-maybe-a-bite-I-could-show-you-my-favorite-obsession" for forty-five minutes and no one understood a word that he said, but



Actually, I'm part terrier on my father's side...

they had fun eatin' the hors d'oeuvres and playin' with the party favors and doin' the Time Warp again in the ballroom there, an' everything was fine until they all had to go up to the lab and see what was on the slab.

Then Frank N. Furter took beakers and retorts and implements of experimentation, and he threw open the switches on the sonic oscillator and stepped up the reactor power input three more points. Now friends, Brad and Janet were thinking there was only one or two things that Frank coulda done with the sonic oscillator and all, and the first was that he was gonna fix the flat tire on their car and send them on their way, which wasn't very likely and they didn't expect it, and the other thing was that he was gonna bawl them out and tell them never to be seen driving near his castle again, which was what they expected, but when Frank pulled the cover off the tank there was a third possibility that they hadn't even counted upon, and out of the tank jumped Rocky (remember Rocky? Picture show's about Rocky) in a gold lamé swimsuit and he said "Kids... can't you see that I'm at the start of a pretty big downer?"

Then Eddie came by, and with a few nasty words to Frank on the side he cleared out the laboratory and they all went to their separate rooms, had a Thanksgiving dinner that couldn't be beat, and didn't get up until the next morning, when they all had to go to the Floor Show. And Janet got up there and she said "Frank, I wanna be dirty. I mean, I wanna, I wanna be dirty. Dirty. Dirty! Thrill me, chill me, fulfill me! I mean touch me, Touch Me,

TOUCH ME!" And she started jumpin' up and down yelling, "TOUCH ME, TOUCH ME," and Rocky started jumpin' up and down with her and they was both jumping up and down yelling "TOUCH ME, TOUCH ME" until Riff Raff *stopped them right there* and said "Kids... we're gonna beam the entire house back to the planet Transsexual in the galaxy of Transylvania, and you'd better go. NOW, Kids."

And friends, somewhere in the galaxy of Transylvania, enshrined in some little nebula, is an old castle that used to stand outside Denton. And the only reason I'm telling you this story now is 'cause you may know somebody in a similar situation, or you may *be* in a similar situation, and if you're in a situation like that there's only one thing you can do

and that's walk into the church wherever you are, just walk in and sing "You can be anything you want at Rocky Horror's Picture Show" and walk out. You know, if one person, just one person does it they may think he's really sick and they won't let him in. And if two people do it, *in harmony*, they may think they're both faggots and they won't let either of them in. And if *three* people do



it... can you imagine, three people walking into a church, singin' a bar of Rocky Horror's Picture Show and walking out? They may think it's an organization. And can you... can you imagine fifty people a day, I said *fifty people a day* walking in, singin' a bar of Rocky Horror's Picture Show and walking out? Then, friends, they may think it's a movement. And that's what it is, the Rocky Horror Picture Show Anti-Mundanity Movement, and all you got to do to join is sing it the next time it comes around on the guitar. With feeling.

You can be anything you want, at Rocky Horror's Picture Show
You can be anything you want, at Rocky Horror's Picture Show
Crawl right in on the planet's face
Lost in time, and lost in space
You can be anything you want, at Rocky Horror's Picture Show

with abject apologies to Arlo Guthrie & Richard O'Brien —DDL

"My parents went to a planet without bilateral symmetry and all I got was this lousy F-shirt."

LoCs

WAHF: Sue Renhard, Brad Foster, Rick Simkin, Lloyd Penney, Anne Marie Merritt (startled that googling her name kicked out a fanzine review from *Littlebrook*), **Miriam Zellnik, Henry L. Welch, Carl Juarez, and Allen Baum.** Also one very polite unsub request. No problem.

Amy Thomson
23 September 2004

I found my copy of *Bento*, and consumed it in one sitting, when I should have been writing. This clever plot to waylay competing SF writers seems to be working. It's nearly as insidious as *Live Journal!* [*Mwah hah hah.*]

I do hope that you have sent your "Declaration" out for publication, to the Letters to the Editor page of your local newspaper, if nowhere else. It was brilliant, and very timely. Tom Jefferson would be proud!

And you ARE going to provide the recipe for "Nerve Gas Chicken", I hope! [*Your wish is our little squiggly key that confuses Windows users.*]

Andi Shechter <Roscoe@drizzle.com>
23 September 2004

Okay, it's come to this. I used to say that one of the joys of seeing *Ansible* arrive was knowing, just knowing, I'd soon be laughing at something. It often meant I'd just start laughing to get a

Who'll Be Mother?

In the wake of the July 7 London bombings, a flurry of LiveJournal user icons appeared around the theme "Terrorist attack? Have a cup of tea." The more I think about this, the more I like it. David even said he rather fancied getting a teacup lapel pin of some sort to wear on our Worldcon trip, as a gesture of solidarity.

Of *course* if the meme actually gathered any real-world traction it would also then gather tawdry commercialism, entrepreneurs, and cheap plastic knock-offs imported—with no awareness of irony whatsoever—from Pakistan. Ignore that for a minute.

A cup of tea provides a sharp contrast to the government-centered, military-centered, U!S!A!-centered symbolism we are drowning in, here in the States. Dozens of nations lost people in the *World Trade Center*, but noooooo, it's all about us. Quick, let's bomb somebody.

Whereas the cup of tea takes a little time, and that's a good thing. It represents—*not* inaction—a pause to reflect before taking action. It represents the importance of being rested and ready for whatever needs to be done. It represents mutual assistance.

It needn't be simplistic. That brew has taste-echoes of bitter history: worldwide colonialism, the Raj, the Opium Wars.

People talk things out over cups of tea. Understanding can be reached.

Put the kettle on, will you? We need it.

—KY

run up to it and keep going. Never fails; I *always* laugh. And granted, I've been in a very very giggly mood the past week or so, strangely enough due to Neal Stephenson, whose *Cryptonomicon* I've been reading and it has had me laughing like nothing I recall in recent years. I don't tend to laugh out loud when I read most books. This one? In vast measure. Um, is he supposed to be funny? No matter.

But it's come to this—from now on when I see *Bento* arriving, I'm gonna do what I do with *Ansible* and just start laughing, just because it's going to happen anyway. Major giggle fits today, thankee kindly. And I'm not sure what to call it when there's a Dave Langford LoC in *Bento*. My head just might explode.

Smooches,
Andi

Jerry Oltion <j.oltion@sff.net>
25 September 2004

Hey, I enjoyed the heck out of your latest *Bento*! Many thanks. I especially liked your description of the average American's reaction to the gay marriage issue: "...the low thundering sound of a million uncomfortable heterosexuals taking a tiny shuffle backward." Sad, but true.

The astronomy quote on the inside back page is also priceless. Is that original with you? [*That particular lino was heard on NPR and captured on a corner of our grocery list. Kate tried to track it down in the archives again for you, but no joy. We do love being able to re-hear missed radio stories via www.npr.org.*]

Jerry Kaufman <JAKaufman@aol.com>

26 September 2004

“Wedding Bells” asks, among other good questions, “Why do we allow infertile straight couples to marry?” That’s one of the questions I ask, too, expanding it to include fertile couples who nonetheless don’t have or intend to have children. (That would be me and Suzle.) I bridled when I read Alan Keyes quoted along these lines recently. Would he—and those who agree with him—consider us in the same category as same-sex couples? (I can’t remember the exact quote.) Would he legislate against us getting married, or legislate to force us to have children?

These are rhetorical and even hysterical questions, but they’re what come to mind.

We dream of a renovated kitchen, too, with deeper cabinets, more counter space, new flooring and a better paint job. I can’t recall if you’ve ever been here, but the previous owners painted right over pine planking without any undercoat, so that we have blue walls with knots showing through. Looks like that *Farscape* character Zhan with a bad case of ringworm.

I liked your version of the Declaration of Independence. I’m not sure I share your Teutonic food opinions, though. Too much vinegar. On the other hand, there’s France, a place in which some of my travel fantasies are set.

My name is not Bento, but I think if I had a hamster, that’s what I’d name it.

David Bratman <dbratman@earthlink.net>

26 September 2004

The riot of connections on the cover of B16 gave the impression, if one mentally stood back from it a ways, of something by James Joyce.

I do not eat potato, in salad or otherwise (“ohne Kartoffeln, bitte” was my most-used German phrase), but one food I found to be utterly different in Germany was sauerkraut. American sauerkraut is a vile, smelly thing, so I was astonished to find that in Germany it’s delicious. I see you mention sauerkraut later on in the context of Frankfurt airport food, which may not be up to the standards of the sauerkraut I had at a little place in the shadow of Köln Cathedral, but I’d still be curious if your other experience with German sauerkraut matches mine.

[Very much so. When I fix Sauerkraut, David often remarks on the way the recipe lists “jar of sauerkraut” as an ingredient, and the jar in turn does the same. As if we used the same words for Bisquick mix, baked biscuits, and peach cobbler. Bisquick-level sauerkraut is just pickled cabbage, but the finished product is another matter! As for potatoes, best of luck in Scotland.]

“It’s a sort of a mixed vegetable thing. But there are as many variations as there are grandmothers.”

Terry Jeeves <terryjeeves@ic24.net>

29 September 2004

...I don’t go a bundle on salads. As my mother used to say, “Give me something that has looked over a fence.”

As for FAQs, the one I hate is, “How are you?” when a true answer is a hypochondriac’s opening. Another is “How do you do?” which really begs a reply such as, “How do I do...what?” Me, I’m just perverse.

Gay marriages, what’s wrong with an open declaration of mutual regard rather than a hi-jacking of a marriage ceremony from a church. The latter gives a measure of legal protection and unless a gay marriage also gets this I don’t see much point.

[You’ve lost me in here somewhere...but yes, the measure of legal protection is exactly the point. It shouldn’t depend on whether one chooses a religious ceremony or not, nor on whether a religion is willing to choose you...not when it comes to questions of beneficiaries, immigration law, etc.]

[Terry also mentions that after 45 years he’s ceased publishing ERG and thus can’t trade it for Bento. No worries, mate; we’re glad for what you’ve done, and willing to keep sharing ours as long as you’re interested.]

Steve Jeffery <Stephen.Jeffery@abbott.com>

30 September 2004

Spiders don’t sit in the middle of their webs, at least not the ones in our garden. Rather, they tend to sit out of sight at the very end of a tether line, curled up hidden under a leaf or the rim of a

plant pot. Maybe, though, we have stealth ninja spiders in Kidlington. (Boris, out the back, was manfully—arachnally?—chomping through a trussed cricket some three times his size the other night.)

Loved ‘Cowboy Grammar’ (“y’all done finished moseyin’ ”). Had English been explained like this at school I’m sure I would have better remembered the difference between a gerund (which is a small flightless bird, according to Molesworth, as any fule kno) and a future conditional interrogative.

OK, I have to ask. Just what is ‘Nerve Gas Chicken’? Is there a recipe? *[see elsewhere thish.]*

I did like the sloth joke.

Mark Manning

Seattle, WA 98109

4 October 2004

I grew up in a predominantly German-American part of the country, so I occasionally find myself hankering for sauerbraten, bauernfruehstueck, and the like. But today, after dining on Morocco’s tasty tagine stews for most of September, they’re the food I’m hankering for.

It doesn’t help that tagine depends on a spice blend called ras el-hhanut, an elixir containing dozens of ingredients, that’s not available in the US. After all, one of the usual ingredients is Spanish fly. As a consequence, I doubt it’s legal to import genuine ras el-hhanut. *[Wow. I wanted to do a little fact checking here... A*

quick Google gives this: "Paula Wolfert, author of *Couscous and Other Good Foods from Morocco*, says she bought some ras el hanout in Fez years ago and had it analyzed in New York. That sample contained 26 ingredients, including ash berries, belladonna leaves, cantharides, galingale, and monk's pepper (cantharides, another name for the beetle known as Spanish fly, and monk's pepper being only two of the supposed aphrodisiacs that occasionally find their way into ras el hanout)." *Some other recipes mention hashish. I'm not going to try importing it! You gonna try importing it, Mikey? These ingredient lists are a cross between poetry and cauldron scrapings—here's one in French, calling for buttons of roses, roots of iris, lavender, and coleoptera.*

Erik V. Olson <eriko@mvp.net>

6 October 2004

This isn't really a loc—I've barely skimmed *Bento 16*, other than to agree wholeheartedly with the Declaration, and that kitchens are fractal. Of course, every room is fractal, the question is in what dimensions and space. Workshops are more fractal than most. I think that's why cats put up with us, it's the space we provide. I digress.

No, the reason I write is a picture, taken not far from here, that ends up being a very good joke, even more so if you don't know the names of certain topological features atop Mount Saint Helens. Without Further Ado, I present the image titled "Ash Collector on Shoestring". [*Use of Google's Image feature left as an exercise for the reader.*]

the obsolete oil tank in our back yard inspected, for fear of similar results.]

On your list of grievances in the "Declaration", the item starting "He has provoked and alienated our Allies..." stood out for me. I figured after the collapse of the communist system in Russia, this country was in a position to lead by example, to be the good guy for real. Then the asshole grabs the golden ring and decides to play bully in the playground. A rare, perfect opportunity of doing good, not only gone, but very hard to ever recover again.

"Chew one's biscuit" is so cool, so wonderfully evocative and simple. Love it.

So, should I send you guys some more fillos for the files? I always feel so guilty when I get a zine without a contribution involved (and these wussy locs don't qualify in my opinion.)

[Pish tush. Or possibly pish tosh. In any case, don't worry about it, but yes we'd welcome fillos. Every ish we swear we'll get organized about art Next Time, and then ignore the question utterly until T minus a day and a half, which is a wee bit late. Note to artists: think SMALL, think CLEAR BLACK AND WHITE LINES. Feel free to riff off of this year's articles; that just means you'll be on topic for the lettercol. Or not.]

"There's something just the other side of this whale that I want to show you."

Joseph Nicholas <josephn@globalnet.co.uk>

13 October 2004

Many thanks for the most recent two issues. In 16, Kate says: "Eleven years after David and I moved in here, it dawned on me that (a) those countertops were still orange and (b) they had no intention of changing on their own any time soon." Oh yes!

It must be over a year, possibly two, since I removed the naff plastic panel from the side of the bath and bought some MDF to cut to size and shape—but although the side pieces which butt up against the walls have been installed and painted, the slab for the central panel still sits in the kitchen. And the front door was last painted the autumn before we moved into our house, in December 1993. After all, it's called do-it-yourself, so why doesn't it do it itself? [*Ah! Pronoun trouble.*]

Sigh. I suppose I really must get on with these damn jobs, what? RSN, boss....

Brad W. Foster <bwfoster@juno.com>

15 October 2004

You had your kitchen fun...We got a completely new roof on! Cindy has photos of light coming in through the cracks between beams in the ceiling, since those boards were the only thing left when they literally stripped all of the old roof off before putting on new layers. [*Kew!!*] This was followed up by having about 80% of our sewer lines replaced, with some major tunnel work being dug under the foundation for a few weeks. The backyard will never be the same again! [*We are—well, Kate is—in denial about having*

Pamela Boal <pamelajboal@westfieldway.fsnet.co.uk>

16 Oct 2004

Apropos of "Where have you lived" from #14: The first three moves from London were official evacuations. I do know that I went back to London the first time because family members of the household to which I had been sent came back wounded and there was no room for me. The second time there were five or six evacuees in the house and the 'Lady' of the house was taking our rations and feeding us on scraps, which came to light when she made us all ill with some bad liver. I have no memory of why we (by then I had a baby sister) left Leicester after that it was unofficial evacuation to distant relatives. Somehow we always managed to be in London for the worst bombing raids, I have particularly vivid memories of the fire bombs and doodle bugs (as we called the V rockets). In my adult life I have hung my hat in 18 places and called them home.

In Cyprus, bar-b-que was the thing. I would provide plenty of salad, all the traditional mixed salad ingredients plus seedless grapes and tossed in lemon juice, fruit in season and home made orange and lemon squash. A demijohn each of brandy, red wine and white wine. People make a big arty crafty to do over cooking on charcoal, when if you know what you are doing (and in Cyprus you soon learn) any metal box with a few holes punched in and stood on bricks will do. We would provide half a dozen or so depending on the size of the gathering. Our guests brought meat for their own taste, and the men did the cooking. A Greek Cypriot

farmer friend generally brought enough pullets for every one. On one occasion a Canadian friend brought a roll of beef that virtually melted into slices at the sight of a knife.

I do hope your kitchen has not given you any problems. Our son and his wife have been suffering a half finished kitchen for months, wrong items delivered, bits missing, tiles suddenly gone out of stock. *[One odd rusty drip from the faucets is the ONLY bug that has surfaced. Apparently the money we threw at the project landed to good effect. We're getting a wee bit blasé about leaving dishes on the counters, but still consciously delight in the new room.]*

Well and properly said your 'Declaration'. Congratulations on speaking out.

Terry Garey <t-gare@maroon.tc.umn.edu>
27 October 2004

Got the last Bento Box and enjoyed it EXCEPT for the news that you two are getting rid of your orange formica! That probably means that I have the last kitchen in America with bright pumpkin orange formica and that's a sad, sad thing. *[Sorry. But we didn't want to get down to having our last words be "either that formica goes or... urk."]*

When we bought the house, my mother was in town so we took her to see the place before we closed. She went distinctly pale when she saw the kitchen, then looked at me with sorrowful eyes. She knew I loved it. Yet more evidence that somehow something terribly wrong had happened in the womb.

I saw the "Vampires" piece in a big magazine somewhere <g>, later. The ASL piece was thrilling. And shaming—one of the *many* languages I've "always wanted to learn", especially to communicate better with fans who need it. *[Don't feel too abashed. With disuse, our vocabulary has shrunk down to a handful of basics like Hungry, Water, Where? and I've-got-to-pee, back-in-a-jiff.]*

Answer to Kate's question: non-cooks have a frying pan and a boiling pan. The latter for rice and pasta, the former for everything else. It doesn't count as cooking because we rarely add anything ("ingredients"). More like "heating".

I long ago had the idea of making photos of mis-spelled/-punctuated signs, for a possible book or whatnot, but never did it. When you think about it, "its" and "hers", as possessives, probably should have, or once did have, apostrophes but they atrophied (and what's up with "his", where did *that* spring from, never mind such forms as "hizzen"). My own pet peeve these days is the sudden insurgency of "may" where my generation used "might" (past tenses, futures, etc.) Even on TV and in newspapers. {gloom} The rich pageant of evolution.

I have another *Bento* to read! xxx, Mog.

"Thank God for Whiffle Ball—the last decent and honest game!"

Mog Decarnin chimes in with a birthday card....

West Hollywood, California
24 June 2005

I know it's not your birthday (well, okay, I don't KNOW it's not your birthday, but ODDS are it's not), this is just a card sent me by one of several organizations in the cunning yet naïve hope of a donation. Strange, they don't seem to be sending them any more...but I digress.

I wanted to say thanks for *Bento* number mumble mumble—oh all right, 14, from 2003. It is in the nature of piles to grow from the top upward, unless like a good gardener tending compost one turns and stirs them from time to time. Thus it was only after cancelling all my subscriptions to garden mags that I have at length whittled one such pile of "black gold" down to the primordial fanzine layer. *[Sometimes one must let such piles mature and fully ripen before harvesting them.]*

Loved the back cover (fannish food groups) and interlineos, especially "Paperclip sez" (first thing I did was disable the little dancing twerp, when I got my computer) and "Coconuts are mammals" (that's a kid to watch). *[No kidding. His sister says "Why did the rooster cross the road? —Because the chicken sent him on an errand."]* Re the little survey (1) I have two versions, "inky-pinky" and "itsy-bitsy" (2) Japan, Denver, Pennsylvania, Canada, Michigan. Both parents from Pennsylvania, if that helps—Dad sang it "inky-pinky" I'm pretty sure. You *will* be receiving this by "the end of July", just, er, two years late. I think

Art Credits

- Starliner, Beanie Boy and Lardass the Cat: Ulrika O'Brien.
- Beija the shop dog: Nicole Georges
- Blobject lamps: modified from an online photo.
- Tim "Arlo" Curry: David.
- Part terrier: Prehistoric "Macrauchenia" from Dover Books' *Big Book of Animal Illustrations*.
- Front cover: "Merman from the Stone of Meigle, Perthshire", from Dover Books' *Treasury of Fantastic and Mythological Creatures*.

We welcome contributions of art; see comment p. 28.

