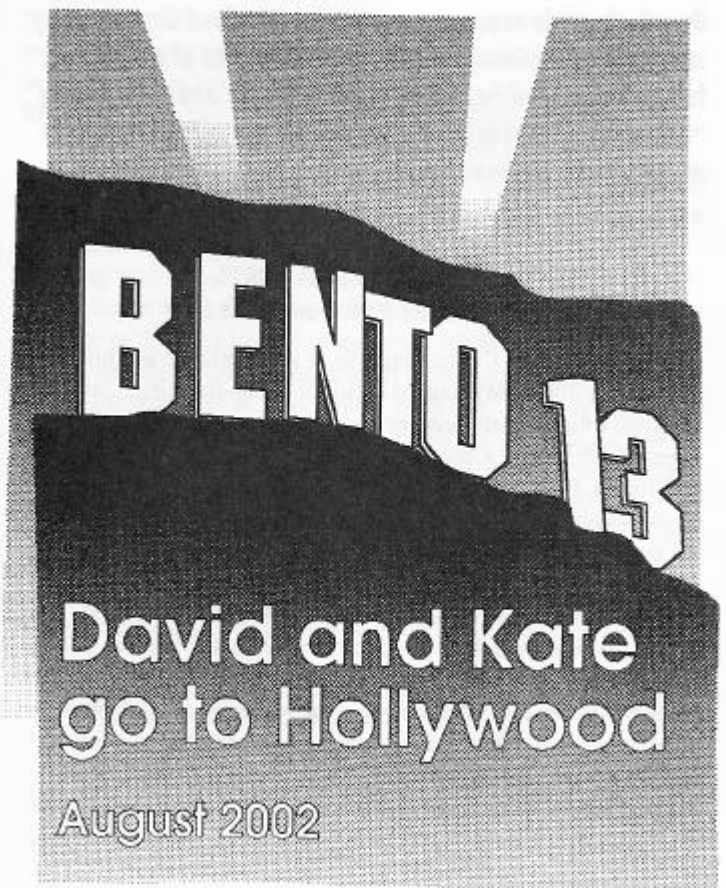


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The glyptodon cartoon is by **Julia Morgan-Scott**. Thanks!! David did the cover. Kate has dibs on the next one.

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— at Sony Television Studios

It's not who you know, It's whether you need bifocals

As I write this, I'm just back from the Worldcon in Philly (September 2001). My journal is full of name-dropping.... all weekend I met British fans previously encountered only in the pages of *Plokta* and *Ansible*, and could put faces to the names: Pat McMurray, Pat Cadigan, Jo Walton and Emmet of the infamous Hay-on-Wye wedding. (Yes, of course there are photos in *Plokta*, but one can't actually trust any of them!)

The most croggling moment came in the cavernous exhibit hall, which was large enough to swallow Art Show, Dealers' Room, historical exhibits, and Junkyard Wars, the latter as only a distant object on the horizon (clang clatter crash). I spotted Teresa Nielsen Hayden and hustled over—she was rumored to have a Sharpie, an item much in demand for after-market modifications of the truly hopeless con badges. (David begged "Do me!" and Teresa dropped to her knees before him....He liked that part.) She

had not yet wielded it on behalf of her companion, quite a small woman, so I was peering at 9-point type dangling somewhere below my waist level—Janis, it said, Janis Ian—when a voice said "Yes, that Janis Ian." What? Oh. Oh! OH! Blink, blink. "Hi."

There is in fandom a phenomenon named Jon Singer. Jon seemingly knows everyone. He pooh-poohs this, but hell, I've had a cab driver who knew Singer. (The joke goes: "The Pope is on the Vatican balcony blessing the crowd, see, and there's somebody standing with him. So a Bulgarian nun looks up and says 'Hey—who's that in the funny hat next to Singer?'")

So we're at the Hugo Losers party (this is late, after they started letting in some of the riffraff) when Amy Thomson says "Ooh, guess who I had lunch with....Janis Ian." Jon's eyes go wide and he says "Janis Ian Fink? Here? In *this building? Right now?!*" and looks like he's about to dive for the door and go trade childhood reminiscences. Amy says "What—you know her?" "No," says Jon. (We exchange looks of "aha! There are limits!") "—just her father and brother—"

Amy hit him. I let out an inelegant whoop and buried my head in the curtains until I could stop laughing. It was so bloody typical.

—KY

*The ducks are now a collective mind.
Occasionally we have to count, to make sure
they haven't assimilated a chicken.*

My Moment in the Sun

David's adventures with the Writers of the Future

The Big Donut

As our plane descended into Los Angeles, a vast plain of houses glittering with swimming pools and overlaid with a thin brownish haze, the first thing I recognized was the Big Donut. The Big Donut is a classic example of what architects call the “big duck” school of architecture, in which the form of a building is a straightforward, literal, and *large* representation of its purpose—in this case, a donut stand. From the air it looked like a Cheerio, a lumpy light-brown toroid twice as tall as the gas stations and strip malls around it. A huge empty construction of concrete and chicken wire, a form without function, that does nothing more than take up space and serve as a gigantic, perpetual advertisement for itself.

A perfect symbol of L.A.

I had come here to collect my prize for winning second place in the Writers of the Future contest: a one-week writers’ workshop with the 16 other winners, taught by respected fantasy novelist Tim Powers, culminating in a gala awards ceremony and the official release of the annual anthology. Fancy hotel. Catered dinners. Swimming pools. Movie stars. All on L. Ron Hubbard’s dime.

The Curse of El Ron

We were met at the airport by Markus, an accountant for Bridge Publications. The WotF event (they pronounce it “woof”) is

the biggest event the Hubbard publishing empire throws each year, and *everyone* in the company pitches in to make it happen. Markus, like many of the Hubbard employees I would meet this week, was a foreigner—he was Swiss, others were Dutch, German, Austrian, Québécois, and Australian.

Markus was also representative in that he was upbeat, cheerful, and unflappable. I’ve been behind the scenes at a lot of SF conventions and suchlike, and I am amazed how well the organizers of this very complex event managed to keep their cool, and how consistently nice they were. It wasn’t a creepy kind of nice, either—it’s something I only noticed in retrospect. I have no idea which of them were Scientologists (I didn’t ask and they didn’t tell), but Markus did mention that his favorite SF novels were *Fear* and *Typewriter in the Sky* by Guess Who. To his credit, he apologized for the *Battlefield Earth* movie.

There’s a lot of controversy in fandom about the Scientologists and their relationship to the contest. It’s true that many of the texts for the workshop were essays by Hubbard, but though they were written in a breathless, sexist, purple prose that made them hard to take seriously, they were still worthwhile. And Tim Powers used the essays mostly as a jumping-off point; he managed to bring out the truths in them, leaving the rip-roaring adventure focus and formulaic plots quietly on the table.

There were a few mechanics of the workshop that I gather are also used in Scientology training, such as the assignment of “twins” to each student and the use of a “checksheet” to track our

progress during the week. And the class was held in a library stocked with all of Hubbard’s works in every known language. And we were asked to thank The Man in our acceptance speeches. But I wouldn’t class any of these as indoctrination.

The one aspect of the week that I found disquieting was our tour of the L. Ron Hubbard Life Exhibition at the end of the week. This was a museum of Hubbard’s life and work, dramatized with slide shows, videos, movies, maps, life-size dioramas, artifacts (L. Ron’s actual Boy Scout merit badge sash, gosh wow!), paintings, hundreds of pulp magazines, and a hands-on demonstration of the E-Meter, “the first device to accurately measure human thought.” The truly amazing thing about Hubbard, as presented in this museum, is that he did it all single-handed—he had no family, no co-inventors, and no assistants, and nobody is continuing his researches (nor do they ever mention his death). He was the first, the youngest, the most, the only. It’s Hubbard all the way down.

Idolization I can understand. The thing that makes no sense at all to me is that, as presented in the museum, Scientology is focused on self-empowerment: the idea that if you truly understand yourself, you can break free of the forces within you that hold you back from what you wish to become. That’s an admirable concept, really, but how can it be reconciled with the slavish adulation of the Almighty LRH? It is a puzzlement.

How to Write a Novel, the Tim Powers Way

Enough about L. Ron. The real star of this show was Tim Powers, a charming and energetic speaker who knows a hell of a

lot about writing and is happy to share it. He was joined by guest instructors Kevin J. Anderson, Rebecca Moesta, and Hal Clement, who each spoke for an hour or two.

Tim explained that SF has to do everything a “normal” story does, *plus* give you a feeling of dislocation or vertigo, a sudden glimpse of something at a 90° angle to reality. In Tim’s opinion, what is glimpsed is not as important as the experience of glimpsing. The goal of the SF writer is to deliver that experience: to make the reader forget the book, forget the writer, forget even himself, and simply *be* in the experience of wonder.

This takes research. One of the primary themes of the week was the concept that you should write what you know—but always strive to know more. A solid grounding in facts is absolutely necessary, to build up a “bank of plausibility” from which you can then draw to convince your reader that the fantastic elements of the story are just as real.

We discussed several different forms of research, including talking with random strangers, talking with experts in various fields, and reading non-fiction. “It is essential to waste most of your life on pointless reading.”

Once your brain is full of weird stuff, sit down and brainstorm some characters, repeatedly asking yourself “why?” or “why not?” to get beyond the “default” character you think of at first. “Do it at the keyboard, not in your head—some of the stuff you throw out on the way is worth returning to.” Do the same for settings and situations. If they don’t work, throw them out or “lamine” them

together with other ones (“hey, what if the dope fiend and the hero’s girlfriend were the *same person*?”).

Now that you have come up with some interesting characters, situations, and settings, write them down on 3x5 cards and spread the cards on the floor. Push them around, tear them up, and write new cards, until the mess starts suggesting a plot. Make up a big paper calendar and note the incidents that happen on each day.

Then write it all down, and you have a novel.

OK, it’s not quite that easy. The key, I think, lies in the words Tim repeated several times throughout the week: “Picture it!” If you have done your research, and asked hard questions about your characters, settings, and situations, you will be able to firmly picture them, their environment, and their reactions to each other and the prose will flow. Then you go back and edit that shitty first draft, tighten the sentences, rearrange the incidents into an order that makes more sense. Simmer, covered, for one to three years or until done.

Hands-On Exercise

Of course, we had more than readings and lectures....

On Monday we were each given an “inspirational object” which we were to use as a jumping-off point for a story we would write later in the week. They were all pretty mundane—a pack of cigarettes, a twenty-dollar bill, a magnifying glass, and other objects just lying around the library—but I had just read “Natural Order” by Michael Jasper in the July *Asimov*’s, the first draft of which was sparked at this very workshop two years ago by a cheap

And then, promptly at 5pm Wednesday, the rubber hit the road: we started writing. We had until 5pm Thursday to write a complete short story draft. We didn’t *have* to incorporate the object, the random stranger, and the research, but that was the idea.

I started with a series of questions I got from Pat Murphy at Clarion, which I have found useful to focus my attention on the characters and their relationships. By 9pm I had 3600 words of character sketches, research notes, and outline. I went to bed at 1am, with a couple thousand words of actual story written, and woke with a head buzzing with ideas. I typed and typed all that day. By 2pm I had about 4000 words and the story felt about half-done. I know how fast I can draft, and I knew I couldn’t write 4000 more words by the deadline, so I folded a few incidents together, and the story reached a fairly satisfactory conclusion by 3:30pm. I knew the end felt rushed (and, in contrast, the beginning was too slow). Oh well, it’s only a first draft.

A laser printer was warmed up and ready for us in the hotel’s business center, and the last of the stories was printed by 5:00. Then it was time for tux fitting, and one last (brief) lecture by Tim, before falling over.

On Friday morning we critiqued three of the stories (what, you think we had time to read 17 stories overnight?). I was incredibly impressed with the quality of the work. Keep in mind that, though we had been hanging out together for most of a week, the anthology had not yet been released, and until now none of us had read anything the others had written. All of the stories I read were

red cigarette lighter, and I knew some interesting stories could grow from these objects.

On Tuesday I sat on a bus bench on Hollywood Boulevard and talked with B.D., a random stranger, for an hour and a half. His fiftieth birthday was tomorrow, he’d come to L.A. from Virginia Beach in 1978 (and encountered two very interesting women on that bus trip), and he had no front teeth. “I’m not brave... one time I did stop a guy from beating up his wife... he looked at me and he thought I was this mean guy.” He’d been homeless for a time, making money taking Polaroid photos of people in clubs and restaurants. “You’ve got to make your own job in this town.” He praised the matzo ball soup at Canter’s Deli. “Once I thanked Gary, the owner’s son, for not hassling me when I was sleeping on the curved bench there. Tears ran down his face... he said no one had ever thanked him.” We talked about palm trees and coconuts, and I found myself telling him things about myself, things I hadn’t shared with anyone else, things I hadn’t thought about in years. “It’s just so great to be sitting here in the sun,” he said. “The blue sky, the palm trees... most people never look up.”

Wednesday morning we spent at the Glendale Public Library. Nnedi had a lot of books on African masks. Pat had *Beowulf* and other myths and legends. Me, I had two piles: addictive drugs, and nineteenth-century letters. I wanted data from one, and style from the other. It’s frustrating to visit a library where you can’t check anything out, though. We all put a lot of dimes in the copiers.

very good—better, on average, than the ones written at Clarion, and *much* better than ones I have read in other, less-selective critique groups. And these stories had been written in just twenty-four hours! I was in *very* good company here.

Friday afternoon we met with the Illustrators of the Future, with whom we had had only limited contact so far, for the official presentation of the illustrations to our stories. The artists waited for us in a conference room, and we were ushered in (with some trepidation) to find seventeen framed illustrations sitting on tables and chairs. None of us had any problem recognizing our own stories. My own illustration is not at all the way I had pictured the characters, but at the same time they look exactly like themselves. And we got to keep the framed, signed prints. Way cool.

Running with the Big Dogs

The big-name authors and artists began to arrive at the hotel on Thursday. Tim Powers, Hal Clement and Kevin J. Anderson were joined by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Kelly Freas, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Fred Pohl, among others. All these people were judges in the contests and were here for the big awards shindig on Saturday night, but on Friday there was a more casual “Welcoming Buffet” in the hotel restaurant.

In 25 years of fandom (!!!) I had met most of these people before, but many of my fellow writers—especially Lee, from Australia—were reduced to a state of *homina-homina-homina* by the presence of so many big names. “My God! That’s Larry

Niven!” Thank goodness we got that out of the way on Friday. I got a contact high from the neo-pros’ sensawunda.

Things only got weirder on Saturday, when we got all dolled up in our gender-appropriate formalwear and were asked to report for make-up before dinner. “Make-up? Even the blokes?” Yes, even the blokes. Didn’t want to look all pasty in the photographs, did we? I got off easy—she just powdered my nose, and my forehead, and my bald spot (sigh). Then we had a delicious catered dinner and were shuttled by stretch limo to the awards ceremony at Author Services. Kate and I shared a limo with Hal Clement, and we had a nice conversation on the way about rocket propulsion and whether the guidance system on the V-2 was any good.

I am told that there were crowds when the limo pulled up on Hollywood Boulevard and we stepped out onto the red carpet to the dazzle of flashbulbs. I didn’t notice—I was too busy trying to keep from falling full-length on the sidewalk. Stretch limos are *not* easy to get out of. Once inside we mingled with the other guests, who included actors, producers, and (surprisingly) two of the nominees for this year’s Best Fan Writer Hugo. Then we took our seats for the big awards show.

Was it long? Not so long as the Oscars, nor as wide as the Emmys, but ’twill serve, ’twill serve. There was an opening “space opera,” sung with great emotion in some unknown language, and speeches by Hubbard people about the wonderfulness of the awards, and a presentation by *Starlog* magazine to commend the contests for all the good they’d done for science fiction. And then

The next day Kate and I spent the morning packing—it wasn’t easy, with a dozen paperbacks, the framed illustration and even larger framed certificate, and a large box containing publicity materials to promote ourselves in the coming year, in addition to the formalwear and laptop we’d brought with us—then went to Grauman’s Chinese Theatre for an afternoon show of *Signs*. Which was not the strangest thing we’d seen all week by any means. And then to the airport, and home, and to sleep at last.

Apart From That, Mrs. Lincoln...

As I write this it is one week later, and I find myself still in shock (also still sleep-deprived). Was that really me, in the tux, receiving a framed certificate from the bimbo in the nine-inch high heels and the feathered hat the size of a laundry basket? Did I really talk with a near-homeless man, a complete stranger, for an hour and a half? Was I really one of that gang—that group of keen people who could also, in all modesty, be called some of this year’s hottest new writers?

Yes, I think maybe that *was* me.

Cool.

The Writers of the Future week felt to me like the first five days of the first week of Clarion, plus the last two days of the last week of Clarion, plus the senior prom I didn’t go to. My brain is full. My heart is full. I’m proud. I’m stunned. I’m overwhelmed.

I also have a whole bunch of stories to write. So if you’ll excuse me...

—DDL

came the awards themselves, presented by the judges with a smattering of actors and actresses. My own award was presented by to me by Jerry Pournelle and one Julie Michaels, a stunt woman and actress who has “graced several Batman pictures” and who was spilling out of a white dress with an *astounding* feathered hat that strongly reminded me of Bjork at the Oscars. At least she pronounced my name right.

They tell me I gave a very nice acceptance speech.

At the end of the ceremony came the formal unveiling of the cover to this year’s anthology. It’s by Frank Frazetta, and when I saw it I commented to Kate “tits and lizards... without the lizards.” I liked last year’s cover, by Kelly Freas, much better. Oh well, can’t have everything.

After the awards we went upstairs for a big reception. Each of the writers and illustrators was presented with a dozen copies of the anthology and a substantial check—payment for our story’s appearance in the anthology, in addition to the prize money we’d gotten earlier for winning the contest. All the other guests also got a copy of the anthology, and we all spent the next several hours madly signing autographs for them and for each other. I even had Sean Astin—who played Samwise Gamgee in this summer’s *Lord of the Rings* movie—ask for *my* autograph.

We were ferried back to the hotel some time after midnight, and most of us sat around on the pool deck, decompressing, after that. I think I got to sleep around 3am.

*Anne Marie Merritt is a former co-worker of David’s.
She came across another Anne Marie on the Web,
and had this response in her web log:*

08/07/2002 “Annoying Escort”

Here’s a twist on an old service; “Anne Marie”, of Educated Escort, pitches herself as the perfect rent-a-girlfriend. She’s beautiful and nice, and puts out too—for a price.

I can do better than that.

I can be the *hellspawn* girlfriend, the one your parents can’t wait for you to be rid of so that you can date or marry someone else, **ANYONE** else, without fear of judgment.

I’ll take the blame for every single thing you do that incurs your parents’ strong disapproval. I’ll throw tantrums at holiday parties so you can leave early (nothing like avoiding six hours with Auntie Alzheimer or Uncle Dementia). Naturally I’ll dress inappropriately and wear too much makeup. (Moms just love the ol’ 10 pounds of flour in a 5 pound bag!)

I’ll laugh too loudly, at the wrong time, and at all the wrong things. I’ll tell your Mom about how much better this or that old boyfriend was, and complain bitterly about all your various faults, especially if they’re similar to any of her own behavior patterns. I’ll compare her to the mothers of other boyfriends, and to my own superior Mom.

I'll criticize your siblings in front of everyone. (This will unite the whole family against me and therefore in favor of your chosen successor.)

For an extra fee, I'll even make a total drunken fool of myself and hit on all your married friends.

By the time I'm through, even a gay lover will seem a better match to your Mom. In short, after me, any girl (or guy!) you bring home will have it *made*.

The next girl you bring home—your *REAL* girlfriend—will seem recently descended from heaven, a divine cherubic angel by comparison, all wings, harp and halo as opposed to my bell, book and candle. Your Mom will beg you to take back your previous “ex” or wildly welcome whoever you drag home next. If you get married, you can remind your Mom regularly that you could have married *ME*, and still might if she doesn't shut up and quit bitching about the daughter-in-law she has now.

Your Dad, of course, will adore me; I will be like the girlfriend he wanted to keep but couldn't—*because his Mom hated her*. This will make *your* Mom rabidly jealous.

Interestingly, Dads don't usually get involved in the special mother-in-law to daughter-in-law relationship that drives most women insane. Dads would rather shut up and stay married than risk disrupting the delicate, fragile facade of marital harmony by defending an easily replaceable girlfriend.

Privately I will be fun to be around and a regular well-mannered person. You won't actually have to dread being anywhere

with me, and can just sit back and watch the show. Any time we have together “offstage” can be spent planning and rehearsing our next “scene”. The success of this depends a great deal on your performance as well, as you must appear innocent and blameless, a poor unsuspecting pawn of my evil, grasping, manipulative, heartless ways.

We can even stage a fabulous public break-up scene just to make sure everyone is sufficiently traumatized.

Unless your true love is a foul mouthed chain-smoking drug dealing broken toothed blonde felon with neck tattoos and a nose ring (some things I just can't help you compensate for), she'll seem to your Mom for all the world like the perfect match—by comparison.

Optional deluxe “post break-up” services include stalking and crank phone calls made while your family is visiting. I won't damage any of your property without your explicit written permission, and you agree not to get a restraining order.

Most of all, I won't put out. Your friends will love to hate me too.

Wanted: a ride in the Goodyear Blimp.

Really.

It was humming around in the skies over Portland last month. Couldn't take my eyes off it. Something about the pace...airplanes are always in such a hurry. The blimp seems more ponderous, more thoughtful. More connected with the ground beneath it.

Anybody have any contacts in the rubber business?

— Kate

**Big Ball of Fire in Sky—
Gods Must be Angry**

Jesus, it's bright down here.

Let's just get that out of the way straight off. The SoCal sun is hot, bright, and relentless. Those animals in the La Brea tar pits probably went there to get cool, like pigs in a mud wallow, or maybe a prehistoric attempt at sunscreen. I'm using Coppertone Water Babies SPF 30, and sunglasses, and a hat, *and* a red silk parasol I spotted at an interior design place in Beverly Hills. They may have considered it decor; I'm thinking survival. I am a red-head, I am from Western Oregon dammit, and after 5 days in LA my eyeballs are as scorched as my driving arm. Summer's been nice & sunny back home, but it's not like this.

Nothing is quite like this. LA is utterly itself—a self that has been presented to us over and over. I wrote in *Bento* #6 about the importance of “being there”, how the first time I went to NYC I could look around and know that this, *this* was the source & inspiration & truth behind vast swathes of our common culture—books, plays, movies. Stories that didn't even know they were set in New York, were set in New York. (Trantor, the city/planet in *Foundation*, is Asimov's Manhattan writ large.)

Well, the iconic Madison Avenue organization man in the gray flannel suit has long since been supplanted by the LA lawyer or Hollywood wheeler-dealer. We are getting our cultural images more from TV and movies than from Broadway and NY publishing houses. In all its multiple personalities, we *know* this town. One of the Writers of the Future, Lee Battersby from Perth, says that Melbourne felt more foreign to him than LA does.

I'm delighted that I had the chance to know Lee, and Tim Myers, and Jae from Ithaca and the rest of the WotF gang. I made a point of seeing David and the other kids off on the school bus each morning, shared their breakfast and dinner at the weekend, sat around at the pool until 3am decompressing from Saturday's awards hoo-ha. They're a grand bunch of people—attendees at the award ceremony commented on the obvious camaraderie. I got to explain what the Worldcon is and is not, and watch them turn into

wobbly jello at the sight of Larry Niven and Fred Pohl. (Alas, I missed Carl singing Welsh folk songs with Hal Clement.)

By day, I was on my own. Rachel-the-hotel-mom kept saying “You have to tell us what you see! I want a full report!” She was too busy herding everyone to actually hear the answer, but I appreciate that she asked.

This is what I saw:

Water stores—water stores!—in minimalls or as freestanding automats like ATM kiosks.

At Du-Par’s restaurant in the Farmer’s Market, coffee filters the size of a Dutch oven. Across the street: the Farmer’s Daughter Motel.

FAO Schwarz—which my brain persistently read as a typo for FAQ!

On a dumpster at a TV studio: 1-800-LOONEY BINS.

At the tables of an expensive French bistro before it opened for lunch, the staff having their employee meal, all dark skins and white coats.

Public art at the Central Library, including an elevator—car and shaft—lined with leftover catalog-cards.

In Pasadena, a plaque marking “Original Site of Throop University”, now known as Cal Tech. Throop Throop!

Signs for “Coin Wash” (do they also hire telephone sanitizers?) and “16 Minute Smog”. John Hertz spotted “Brian’s Smog” and cried “Don’t settle for no-name smog! Demand the best!”

Maybe THE BEST is the cinnamon-sugar old-fashioned at someplace called Do-Nut Whirled in an otherwise all-Korean strip mall off Pico, and who’d *know*?? I mean, LA has donut shops like Portland has bookstores. Any meaningfully comprehensive research would be life-threatening.

Stan’s is tiny, a few dozen square feet of stainless-steel equipment and one display case that holds fifty or a hundred different varieties of yumminess. It shares two bar stools and a little folding table with another equally eclectic establishment: “Lollicup Tea Zone.” Lollicup’s menu board goes on and on, offering orange juice, mango juice, Honey Egg Juice, Lemon Jelly Juice, Taro Smoothies, Hot Pudding Milk Tea, Tomato Snow.... The truly indecisive can order a “Coffee Milk Tea”—surely the perfect accompaniment to an assorted dozen from Stan.

LA has everything—somewhere.

The thing is, for whatever you’re after, there are a dozen half-assed rundown suppliers of it that flunked their health inspection (if shoe stores *had* health inspections), and three places so upscale the likes of you and I need to bring oxygen.

And two donut shops.

It’s hard to know where to start.

Stan’s chocolate glazed, by the way, is pretty darn good. (There has to be someplace besides Krispy Kreme that makes a donut worth worshipping.) Not quite as ethereal as a fresh KK, but then it *had* cooled down to room temperature. The icing was aggressively chocolate, thick and dark. I’d go back. — KY

More shopping centers than I care to think about. You’re familiar with the idea of gated communities? Pretending to look like normal streets but with private policing, nothing unplanned, nothing undesirable, the ability to say to the outside world “la la la I can’t hear you”? Well, the new mall next to the Farmer’s Market, “The Grove,” is a gated retail district with faux town square. It’s Disneyland’s Main Street, complete with trolley.... Outdoors, under the aforementioned sun, it managed to resemble Las Vegas’ indoor imitations of Italy.

Speaking of which—a pleasant walk at Venice Beach, nice canals. Probably hellishly crowded at weekends. In the ocean, surfers. How do they *do* that??

Most of these, of course, are not things I set out to see. Deliberate destinations included the Gamble House—a gorgeous, *gorgeous* Arts & Crafts bungalow in Pasadena, oh mommy I want one.

John Hertz suggested the Watts Towers—40 years in LA and he’d never yet been there—what’s worse, most of the people I mention it to have never heard of them! The Watts Towers rise nearly a hundred feet high. They were built single-handedly, over the course of thirty years, out of scrap, by one man. They are more beautiful and more thoughtful than I imagined. Do go see.

On Friday, breakfast at Stan’s Donuts, near UCLA. Stan’s is said by many to be the best donut in LA, but who really knows?

Lucky Rocketship Underpants

No one who works in high tech need ever go naked above the waist. I count eleven Intel T-shirts in my dresser right now, plus seven polo and dress shirts with Intel logos hanging in my closet, and there’s a large box of retired shirts in the attic.

Why do I keep them? They were given to me for free, I should be willing to part with them as easily. Many of them are—let’s face it—ugly. Nine times out of ten I wear them only under a button-down shirt. I don’t even like to wear them at the gym. I should pitch them all and wear clothing unbesmirched by incomprehensible product code names, like a normal grown-up person.

But I can’t. They mean too much to me.

The Intel shirts are only a part of the collection, though they’re the largest part. Almost all of my T-shirts bear the names of science fiction conventions, gay square dances, non-profit organizations, and various other events and clubs. Some of these were given to me for volunteering (true fact: in American Sign Language, *shirt* and *volunteer* are the same sign), but I paid good money for a lot of them.

T-shirts as souvenirs are a big thing in this culture. Wherever you go, the tourists are the ones wearing the shirts with the name of *this* place—the ones with names of *other* places are natives, who at one time were tourists in those other places. Take a trip, buy the T-shirt. Go to a concert, buy the T-shirt. Join a gym, get

the T-shirt. They tell everyone who sees you that *I was there*, that *I participated*, that *I was one of the gang*.

But to me, these shirts are not significant because of what they say to other people. I have a drawer crammed so full of shirts that for half a week after laundry day I can barely open and close it because of what they say to *me*. On a day when I am planning to do some writing, I wear the *Asimov's* shirt I got from Gardner Dozois when I subscribed at the last Worldcon. When I feel that the mundane world is too big to fight, I wear my Intel Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Employees shirt to remind me that I'm not just one of the herd and that I do have allies. When I haven't budged from my cubicle all day in weeks, I wear my Portland Bridge Stride shirt to remind me of the one day a year when the bicyclists and pedestrians take over all the city's bridges and how good it feels to walk in the sun. It's a decision I make in the morning, when I'm getting dressed, and it has an unconscious effect all day long. And when I'm packing for a trip, I spend a lot more time thinking about what my clothing means than what it looks like. (This is probably obvious from looking at me.)

You may scoff. But consider this: more often than not, the logo on a T-shirt is on the left chest.

Close to the heart.

—DDL

"I still have a Xerox copy of that Twinkie somewhere..."

Hollywood Forever

While David was off rehearsing spurious acceptance speeches with his fellow writers ("I'd like to thank the King of Sweden...") I spent an hour or two at the Hollywood Forever Memorial Cemetery. It's much smaller than the famous Forest Lawn, more run down, just behind Paramount Studios in the middle of town. I like cemeteries. There are always interesting things to see there, stories to be read between the lines carved into stone.

There was a cluster of veterans of the Confederate Army, a long way from their battlefields. The marker that read "ALBERT BELOVED"—a name, or a description? One headstone memorialized P. R. KENDRICK 1857–1904, S. P. KENDRICK 1863– . We've got to figure SP isn't 139 years old and still above ground, but what happened?

It was oddly disturbing to see inscriptions entirely in Cyrillic lettering—or in Armenian, which resembles Thai. (I confirmed this the next day, when we spotted an Armenian insurance office next to a Thai restaurant. We thought the restaurant was a good find, full of Asians—nooo, they were all Hispanic. Pollo con jengibre y bambú! Yum!) The Armenians favor shiny black marble, crosses with an extra crosspiece or two, and halftone photos of the deceased etched into the gravestone.

Valentino, Peter Lorre, and Mel Blanc are there somewhere. As it turned out, the only star whose marker I came across was Hattie McDaniel, unless perhaps that towering obelisk marked

GRIFFITH was D.W.'s. (And Hattie isn't even there. She wanted to be buried amongst her peers, but the cemetery management wouldn't have her. A new owner gave her a monument by the lake in 1998.) I chose to amble about at random. And so I saw the names of Bessie L. Meeker, Fred Bhend, Willie Gensterblum, Tillie Gilford, Maria Teresa del Rosario Ramirez Battalan, and many other people we've never heard of who nonetheless mattered very much to someone at the time.

One particularly large monument stopped me in my tracks.

"THIS IMPOSING PILE, REARED BY THE *LOS ANGELES TIMES*, STANDS HERE TO PERPETUATE THE NAMES, THE VIRTUES AND THE MEMORIES OF THOSE HONORED DEAD WHO IN LIFE TOILED IN THE RANKS OF THE JOURNAL WHICH THEY SERVED SO LONG AND SO WELL, AND WHO FELL AT THEIR POSTS IN THE TIMES BUILDING ON THE AWFUL MORNING OF OCTOBER FIRST, 1910—VICTIMS OF CONSPIRACY, DYNAMITE AND FIRE:—THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY."

You remember that, right? Crime of the Century? Yeah, me neither. It goes on to talk about their HIGH PRINCIPLES, their COMMON SEPULTURE and their CONSECRATED DUST, MOISTENED BY TEARS OF MEASURELESS COMPASSION, and ends:

"PEACE TO THEIR ASHES! FOREVER GREEN BE THE TURF WHICH CALIFORNIA, THROUGH ALL HER PERENNIAL SUMMERTIME, WILL GRACIOUSLY TEND ABOVE THEIR CHERISHED GRAVES! SWEET BE THEIR ETERNAL REST, SUBLIME THEIR SOLACE!"

Lest we forget.

—KY

Adopt Me!

Here we trot out one of Kate's Pet Peeves which is hoping to go home with *you!* Unlike a puppy, kitten, or tarantula, we can all adopt a Peeve at the *same time*. And don't worry about expense—random strangers will constantly feed it for you!! Our featured Peeve this month: Apostrophe Abuse.

This year two Portlanders called Albertson's Supermarkets on the fact that their outdoor signage (but not nametags, ads, etc.) lacked the appropriate apostrophe. The grocery chain, which once used the slogan "It's Joe Albertson's supermarket", has ~~changed that to "Its Joe Albertsons"~~ decided that ignorance is the better part of valor and will omit the apostrophe entirely from its corporate name.

Now, it's their business and they can determine what it's called. If they wanted to be AlbErt'Sons, that would be *stupid*, but not technically *wrong*.

For those of us who are attempting to communicate in English, however, there are a few basic premises....

- The apostrophe is used to indicate a contraction—where letters have been left out.
- It curls this way: ’
- It is used in possessives because they're a contraction of something that long long ago involved "es". You can

think of it as “grandpa-HIS-book” becoming “grandpa’s book.”

- ’ We make most possessives by adding ’s to the end of the word.
- ’ A plural noun that already ends in s (cats, dogs, photos) becomes possessive by adding an apostrophe at the very end, after the plural. Remember the apostrophe stands for letters left out—well, we’re leaving out a second S.

Things get fuzzy when it’s a singular noun that already ends in s. You’d probably write “the princess’s reign” but is it Tess’s book? Moses’ reputation? Don’t fret about it. (It’s hardly a question of abuse. At this point, I’d say that apostrophe is asking for trouble.)

So there you are. You know your grocer is not really selling plum’s and the airline doesn’t fly to Las Vega’s or Palm Spring’s. You know to write his tentacles, her tentacles, its tentacles, whose tentacles?—uniformly apostrophe-free. You know it isn’t a Dealer’s Room unless you’re at a *very* small convention.

You’re ready to take this Peeve home for your very own!

Watch out for identity theft. The apostrophe ’ and the single-close-quote ’ are twins, each maintaining a distinct career and lifestyle but willing to help each other out. The bullying single-open-quote ‘ appears only at the beginning of words, thus often insists (egged on by Microsoft Word) that it has the *exclusive* right to appear there. It will forcibly shove out the apostrophe in abbreviations such as ’90s or ’zine. MS Word is a bad influence

Joseph T. Major

Louisville, Kentucky
September 19, 2001

For the downside of Stuff, try *The Psychology of Everyday Things* by Donald A. Norman. [Later: *Design of Everyday Things*.] He discusses the disjointure between stylishness and usability, or how a radio with a dozen identical buttons, each for a different function, can be heralded as “user-friendly”.

The titles themselves are a monument to the problems of selling things. Bookstore people kept on putting *P.o.e.T.* in the Psychology section. (Probably after putting Saint Augustine’s *The City of God* under Urban Planning.) Hence the retitling.

[Yes, and what is one to do with Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*? Meanwhile, if you like Norman, see also Ralph Caplan’s *By Design: Why There Are No Locks on the Bathroom Doors in the Hotel Louis XIV and Other Object Lessons*.]

Looney Toons Star Wars: Well, Bugs Bunny has to be Luke, of course. Which means Daffy as Han Solo. “I’ve got a bad feeling about thith.” *BLAM*

“My week started with getting on a plane with a bunch of WWF wrestlers, and it hasn’t gotten any less weird since.”

and should be allowed around the impressionable only with *close* adult supervision.

Thank you for dropping by. To learn more about your new pet, visit www.apostrophe.fsnet.co.uk.

Next issue, *The Decline of the Ha’penny, or Nothing Really Costs .99¢*. — KY

You do realize you’re defending the artistic integrity of Dexy’s Midnight Runners...

Letters about Stuff

Comments are mostly by Kate. Addresses are withheld not to be miserly with the mailing list, but because they go stale faster than we pub.

Erik V. Olson

8 Sep 2001

Wonderful stuff, as always (well, where “always” = “the last two issues”.) I can believe David would program in COBOL—he used awk to generate grids on the onsite Chicon webserver. I can understand the wonder of knitting—klutz that I am, I’d think the biggest problem would be avoiding bloodstains. Surely you’ve heard of the charity that knits jackets for penguins that have been cleaned up after oil spills, and therefore don’t have the insulation needed to survive? [Yep.]

Brad W. Foster

Irving, Texas
September 20, 2001

Greetings oh Bento-meisters—

I was a member of the Paperback Book Club for the past year. Couldn’t afford much, but their catalogues were great sources of information.... Books built totally around the number zero, or the screw, etc. etc. sounded like fun. I haunt the used bookstores hoping someone else has let theirs go.

Congrats on the pubbing success, David. Not to take anything away from the quality of your writing, which has to be there, but a lot of would-be authors seem to miss the point that no matter how good they might be, unless they actually *write it down* and *send it out*, it ain’t gonna be read by too many others. “Persistent” is the key, all right. I’ve let my own efforts at getting my artwork published languish the last few years, concentrating on printing and selling it on my own. I need to get back out there and push it a bit, see if I can get a few new clients.

Henry L. Welch

26 Sep 2001

...You might like the magazine *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*. Lots of good articles on major inventions and large-scale public works like the Panama Canal, the Eads Bridge in St. Louis, Edison’s concrete houses, etc.

My wife will be pleased to hear that you think cross-stitch is anal-retentive (see <http://www.fantasycrafts.com>). Personally I find quilting to be more incomprehensible. You cut up perfectly good fabric into little pieces just for the sake of sewing it all together.

[I feel somewhat the same way about recipes based on bread-crumbs, or about most casseroles. As for the cross-stitch, whether "anal-retentive" is necessarily derogatory is left as an exercise for the reader.]

Sue Jones

Shrewsbury, England

24 Oct 2001

Books about Stuff: Yes, yes, yes! I too enjoy the fascinating history of inventions and fledgling industries. *[By gum, that is a common theme of most of the books I cited—I hadn't realized that.]* I must try some of the books on your list if I can find them over here. My father has a book somewhere (but can't put his hands on the title)...full of wonderful bits of gossip about Stuff. A collection of essays, with chapters on such taken-for-granted things as the development of the zip fastener, the (somewhat well-known) history of the Post-It Note, and all about paperclips. Paperclips are great Stuff. You'd be delighted with some of the early attempts before the usual bit of bent wire got established. Most of them more like the plastic triangular ones you sometimes

Since Enki won't allow me to carry out the classical Shrodinger's experiment, we have devised an alternative version based on the uncertain location of a worming pill immediately after being given to the cat, and which can only be resolved when you step on it as a small squidgy mess on the carpet some days later.

"Tearfully eye and deep sadness in the heartiboles". One of the best exponents of a private language, English comedian Stanley Unwin, died earlier this week.

[Alas, we knew him not. Clearly to our detriment.]

Jon deCles

Rhinoceros Lodge; California

23 Jan 2002

I am pleased to see David's success as a writer; and of short stories, no less, in a time when that is about the most difficult thing to sell. Congratulations!

Kate's tales of knitting were very pleasant. My boy Jonathon crochets. I remember years ago watching Karen Anderson tatting. My lady Diana oftentimes embroiders.

All of this stuff strikes awe into my feeble frame. For New Year's I stitched two small oak leaf applique machine embroideries onto a pair of sweats, one on the top, one on the bottom. It took me ten hours! And it looked like...Well, I'm sure you have seen the South Park Christmas Special.

The space opera was charming, and denotes just the sort of talent that one finds in the magazines these days. David, you have

find holding greeting cards to their envelopes in the better class of stationer's shop.

I've just been re-reading Neville Shute's autobiographical *Slide Rule* (1954), about his adventures in the aircraft industry, from his early days working with an air show, to the perils of air-ship design and of running a small aeroplane manufacturing company.... (And writing a string of successful novels, of course.)

[I've read Shute's Trustee From the Toolroom, very much an engineer's novel. It was a major bestseller in 1960 and quite unknown today. I found only one of those two points surprising.]

Steve Jeffrey

Oxfordshire, England

20 Jan 2002

Oh dear. Well, you did ask for it. Here's some more Books About Stuff you never thought you needed.

[Steve cites books such as The Athenian Sun in an African Sky: Modern African Adaptations of Classical Greek Tragedy. I'm afraid this misses my point, which was the delight in finding Life, the Universe and Everything discussed in a book as tersely titled as Longitude or The Pencil. Though if Mystery of the Masked Man's Music: A Search for the Music Used on "The Lone Ranger" Radio Program managed to tie together elements ranging from WWI reparations to patent medicines, I might be charmed by that too.]

the magic technique.

I have been reading some non-fiction myself; mainly stuff about Ancient Greece. Oh, and the obligatory sauce bottles. I think it might have been Walt Willis, in the Fifties, who established Sauce Bottle Fandom for those of us who cannot sit down in a cafe or pub without addictively reading everything available, including the labels on the sauce bottles.

Please do keep sending me Bento. I really appreciate it. It brightens my year. And I will try and think of something unusual to send you, though in fact that may be difficult as I lead such a tediously normal life these days. Do you have a CD of "Ethel Merman, Queen of Disco?"

[Erm, nooooh, and we like it fine that way, she says, backing away slowly.... Perhaps you know how to lay hands on a video of the 1940 MGM film of Busman's Honeymoon, with Robert Montgomery as Lord Peter Wimsey?]

Eric Lindsay

Airlie Beach, Queensland, Australia

24 Jan 2002

Having heard of so many people having job problems in the computer industry, I was amazed you could write such an amusing account of survivors. I expected the industry to crash years ago. Of course, in the meanwhile it was wonderful for fans, as so many of us managed to find well paying niches where 30 years ago we would have been struggling to find a job peripheral to the publish-

ing industry, or in some uninteresting book-keeping task. I'm certainly indebted to the computer industry for many interesting years of work.

You know, knitting always seemed a mystic art (like one of those tricks magicians do) until you explained about the loops going through loops.

[Ooh cool! So tickled that it made sense. I volunteered to teach my sister's Girl Scout troop how to knit—an educational experience all around—I never dreamed there were so many possible ways to misunderstand the process.]

Lloyd Penney

Etobicoke, Ontario

February 4, 2002

Books About Stuff tell you the real thing, not the garbage you get fed in childhood. And I have always rolled my eyes over the Columbus Discovering America stuff. Not even Americans believe it any more, so why is it even promoted?I guess the Irish monks and Vikings and others who landed on these shores before Columbus didn't officially register their discoveries, or something like that. Please, more books that debunk The Official Line. Those books contain the education we should be getting.

[Amen. To that end, I commend to all of you The Lies My Teacher Told Me, a critique of American history textbooks by James Loewen. I'm only up to the First Thanksgiving and it's blowing my mind. I hope to say more about it next issue.]

could have sent tiny little locs—"Read. Enjoyed. Thanks." *[Sure! We get those.]*

But here I am, enjobbed and everything, 35,000 feet in the air on my way home from a professional conference, and I am writing a LoC—so much for leaving fanzines behind me.

[As they say at LASFS, "Death will not release you"—and that club's been around long enough to know.]

I've been reading a lot of books on cooking, kitchen science, and chefs—loads of fun. I especially recommend Jeffrey Steingarten's *The Man Who Ate Everything*, Ruth Reichl's *Tender at the Bone*, & Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential*.

Interestingly, an issue of *Gourmet* had a kitchen science article that featured Professor Kurti, who also appeared in David Langford's *Platen Stories*. Garth Danielson has it right. "The More You Know, the More Jokes You Get."

[Beware the corollary: The more you know, the fewer people get your jokes. Oh my goodness yes.]

We also heard from

Peter Motte, who translated David's "Survivors" into Dutch for inclusion in his zine *De Tijdljn*, **Pamela Boal**, **Terry Jeeves**, **Teddy Harvia**, **Arthur Hlavaty** ("I see *The Aspirin Wars* is not by Robert Bug"), **Jerry Kaufman**, **Kurt Erichsen** (who sent illos we want to use next issue), **Eloise Beltz-Decker**, **David Shalcross**, **Debbi Kerr**, **Jeremy Wilkins** ("There is a fine line between

To David...congratulations on getting published in a big way! Late last year, I was a minor voice performer on a spoken-word CD containing short stories written by Canadian horror writers.... Also, this very night, I taped my first session for VoicePrint, the national news-reading service for the blind. This will be broadcast nationally on channels set aside for it. And finally, the screenplay based on Robert J. Sawyer's novel *Illegal Alien* is completed, and is being shopped around. The character of Dr. Lloyd Penney is in that final screenplay, and if my luck holds out, I might even get to play the character, which would raise being Tuckerized to the next level.

Your linos...if we were doing this professionally, I'd say quote your sources. However, we're all having fun with this, so I'd say quote and run. I'm surprised more people don't draw on Nancy Leibowitz's button-saying website for lots of great interlinos.

[Farm-raised linos just don't have the same delicate flavor as those caught in the wild.]

Peter Larson

Austin, Texas

17 June 2002

I have recently emerged from library school and thus have time to respond to people. Thanks for the vote of confidence inherent in sending me issues of Bento despite my long silence. They were read, I assure you, in the tiny spaces between work, school, sleep, and the tattered scraps of my personal life, and I suppose I

swooning and barfing"), **Jeanne Mealy**, **Steve Green** (who recommends a short film titled *Schroedinger's Cat*, "possibly the first quantum mechanics comedy), **Jerry Oltion**, and **Lynne Ann Morse**.

"Don't run over little Johnny till I know him."

— *Tim Powers on first paragraphs*
