

Bento

Issue 3 — March 1991

A zine from David D. Levine and Kate Yule



DDI 3/91

It's good to be back. Had thought to do this for the Worldcon in Holland last year but realized that putting together a fanzine and preparing for a 3-week European vacation could not peacefully co-exist. Orycon was dead out as a goal: not enough fanzine fans, and besides, David was chairing it.

Well, right now we are in the throes of planning a wedding: 10x as much work as chairing (says David) despite being for 1/10 the people.... thank you to Jane Hawkins for Janecon, which has been incentive to get on our duffs and type, whether we make that particular deadline or not. Janecon is a birthday con, being held in Seattle the weekend of March 8-10, 1991. It is March 2 as I type this.

Some of you saw our intermediate publication, Beyond Waddles, the semi-official Restaurant &c. Guide for the Portland Westercon. It was very gratifying to see people clustered in the lobby at dinnertime, consulting BW for their dining decisions! Anyone planning a trip to Portland is welcome to write and ask for a copy.

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Highway Scene with Owl and Firemen

It was way after closing time at the student center when we decided we wanted to play some pinball. Somebody, maybe it was me, had the brilliant idea that maybe there was a pinball parlor out in the Real World that was still open, so we grabbed the phone book and started calling around. Eventually we found a place way out in West County that was open for another couple of hours.

There were four of us who were tired enough to think this was a good idea but awake enough to actually do something about it: Tim, his girlfriend Sheryl, my roommate's best friend Kurt, and me. So we grabbed a couple handfuls of quarters, piled into Kurt's bright-yellow VW bug, and hit the road.

The place was somewhere so far out of town the stars outnumbered the streetlights: a blue-collar joint with klunky machines that still used bells instead of beepers. It took a looong time to get there, so we only got to play for about 45 minutes before they turned off the machines and kicked us out. We were about halfway home when we had to pull over to the side of the freeway with a flat tire.

Normally, this would have been no biggie, but someone had stolen Kurt's toolkit a couple of weeks before. We had a spare tire and a jack, but no wrench. Even worse, we were missing the little thingie you use to get the hubcaps off.

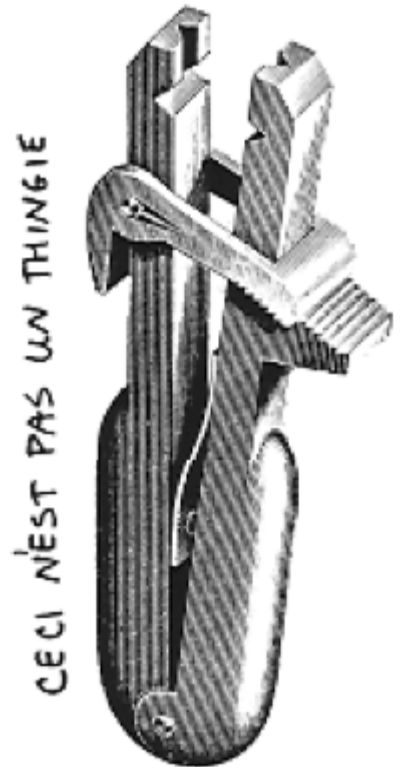
Now, if you've never owned a Beetle, you might not know how important that little thingie is. The VW Beetle is one of the most efficient cars ever built, but it has what might kindly be called "endearing peculiarities." The engine is in the trunk, the battery is under the driver's seat, the air in the spare tire powers the windshield washer, and the hubcaps don't just pop off with a screwdriver; you need this specialized thingie with two prongs that go into two tiny holes in the hubcap. And Kurt's thingie was probably in a pawnshop in Times Beach.

So there we were, stranded on the side of a freeway about a billion miles from anywhere, with no thingie to our name and nobody in sight who might provide one. We searched the shoulder for something that might substitute and found a variety of odd wires, bits of trim, and unidentifiable car parts, but nothing that would be of the least help in budging that hubcap. It was holding its breath until we found its thingie, and neither pleas nor threats would convince it to behave.

Finally, Tim and I decided to walk to a nearby shopping center in hopes of finding a fellow VW owner who could provide the needed thingie. The shopping center was about two blocks away—on the other side of a high chain-link fence that appeared to be designed to protect the freeway from rampaging Visigoths. The only way to get there would be to hike to the nearest exit, about a half-mile away, and then hike the same half-mile back to the shopping center. After a careful consideration of the alternatives, we decided that there were no alternatives. So off we went, leaving Kurt and Sheryl to argue with the hubcap.

We walked as far as the exit without seeing anyone else. Then, as we reached the top of the off-ramp, we saw an ambulance going across the overpass with lights flashing. Since it was the middle of the night and there was no traffic, the driver wasn't sounding his siren continuously. Instead, he just let out one subdued whoop at each intersection: "Wooo..... Wooo..... Wooo....."

And then, following the ambulance on silent wings, came a dark and purposeful shape: an owl. It was pacing the ambulance, flying along about half block behind and ten feet off the ground with regular wingbeats. And we weren't sure, but we thought it might be responding to the ambulance's call: "Wooo..... Wooo..... Wooo....." We watched as the owl followed the ambulance around a corner and out of sight into the darkness. True love? Angry territoriality? We never found out.



We arrived at the shopping center without further incident, and even found a few people at a Denny's there. None of them had a thingie to spare, but one of the employees offered the use of his cross-shaped lug wrench. We thanked him profusely and headed back to the car, where we found that Kurt and Sheryl had somehow gotten the hubcap off (I never did find out how; perhaps they bribed it) and had already jacked up the car. All we had to do now was remove the tire and install the spare.

It proved to be slow work, since the nuts were metric and the wrench wasn't. (Another endearing peculiarity of the Beetle.) While Kurt and Tim were taking turns with the wrench, a fire engine appeared down the freeway, heading in the same direction we'd been going when the tire had gone flat. Seeing that we were in trouble, the fire engine slowed down to take a closer look. A couple of firemen who were hanging on the back jumped off and began to walk toward us as the fire engine pulled over.

Unfortunately for them, the driver saw that the problem was nothing more than a flat tire and that we seemed to have the situation well in hand. He waved cheerfully and accelerated back up to highway speed, leaving the two firemen standing on the shoulder. They looked at each other with a panicked expression and began jogging after the fire engine, the buckles on their galoshes jingling. We watched them as they jogged past us and down the highway, falling further and further behind, and finally slowing to a methodical walk as the fire engine drove out of sight. Not a word had been spoken during this entire incident.

Kurt and Tim continued worrying at the tire. About twenty minutes later, we saw the fire engine cruise slowly by on the other side of the freeway. Shortly thereafter, it came back to where we were, and a fireman leaned out the passenger-side window and asked us if we'd seen a couple of guys in raincoats. We pointed down the freeway, and watched as they drove off in search of their companions.

In the end, we did get the flat off and the spare on. We returned the wrench to its owner and headed back to our dorms, poorer by a few quarters but richer in surrealism.

You know, they really don't make pinball machines like that any more.

—DDL

The Coming of the Rye

Ben Yalow doesn't have to bring us bagels any more. Ben, who defines a stale bagel as any which has cooled to room temperature—a standard we envy but cannot afford—is glad to oblige, but there are only so many times one can make that request, only so many bread products per year that can be hand-imported from the Bronx. Besides, when the garlic bagels are still warm when they go in the bag, it does awful things to the cinnamon-raisin ones.

We can get our own now. We have Kornblatt's.

Those of you living in actual East Coast cities, or even Chicago, will not be impressed by what we have acquired. For us, for Portland, Kornblatt's is as momentous a gift as snow in July. I have worked in two so-called delicatessens. This, *this* is a deli!

I sing the praise of seventeen kinds of bagels, of blintzes, of sour borscht, sour cream, sauerkraut, of herring, of whitefish, of pastrami and chopped liver *both on the same sandwich!* Here's to egg creams, Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray, chocolate milk and 2¢ plain (even if it does cost 75¢). (Which reminds me. You know the difference between cream soda and club soda? No? Cream soda isn't made from cream, and club soda isn't made from clubs. So now you know.)

We think the back door must open through a time/space portal to somewhere in the five boroughs; how else to explain it? In December it was a seedy neighborhood tavern on the skids. Two weeks ago there were ladders and plaster and pieces of shelf all over the floor (and one wire crate of bagels behind the unfinished counter. I wonder about those bagels). Suddenly it is a deli, complete with everything except a bit of grime to take the edge off. Well, OK. So every

time I've been there someone has asked about knishes. "Soon, soon" comes the reply, or maybe "Good things come to those who wait", because among other things Kornblatt's has one of those sarcastic fifty-something career waiters with the order book stuffed down the back of his pants. When we asked "Where did you *come* from?" he said "Well, my mother used to say I came from heaven, but my father said I came from somewhere else." "No, this place! It appeared from nowhere!" "Well, the rabbi came walking by one day, and he noticed something was missing, so he had a word with you-know-who, and...(shrug)"

Good for you-know-who. David observed, "People walk into this place like they were coming home."

The last time a restaurant appeared that suddenly in our neighborhood was when I was coming home from the Fred Meyer SuperStore right around dusk carrying emergency mastodon parts for that night's supper. ("Gone to slay mastodon", says the note left on the kitchen table. That, or "Gon out. Bisy. Backson." which usually *implies* a mastodon run at this time of night.)

The street behind ours is pretty boring, especially for this neighborhood, consisting as it does of light industrial storefronts on one side, like auto body shops, and the blank left wall of Freddy's on the other. Imagine my surprise and delight when I noticed a new Chinese place where the—er—now what was there before? You know how you see something that you know is new but you completely blank out on what it was that you *used* to see? Well, whatever had been there, it was a Chinese restaurant now, with red paint and those tortoise-shell bamboo blinds and some chairs piled up against the door. No indication of when they were open. I scuttled home with my kill and told David we'd have to check this place out sometime. He couldn't remember what belonged in that spot either.

That kept nagging at me—I knew I'd seen it a hundred times. It was right there at the tip of my brain. Eventually the two of us came along during daylight, and there it was: Bashor's Auto Parts. Green building, big black lettering. Of course! Bashor's!

Waytaminnit.

You're not supposed to be able to ID what got torn down by seeing it again. There was no Chinese restaurant. There were no bamboo blinds. Hell, there weren't even *windows*. David began giving me the same treatment I'd given him the time he told me the milk cartons at the store were moving around by themselves. I couldn't entirely blame him. If I hadn't found the traces of red paint on the weeds by the door... It was like finding yourself in an episode of Mission: Impossible.

Actually, substitute Burt Reynolds for Peter Graves, and you'll be close. While we weren't looking, it seems they'd used the street for a site in the movie *Breaking In*, apparently because it had the only basement apartment of its kind in town. The script called for a Chinese restaurant next door, so.... You can imagine my relief when the movie came out and I could prove to David that I hadn't been hallucinating! Now if only he'd stop making me hang around in the dairy department....

—KY

David and Kate Play Scrabble

(Before we start, I have to warn you that when the two of us play Scrabble together, we play it "no-holds-barred:" anything that both of us recognize is "a word" is legal. Proper names and acronyms are OK. Foreign words are not only accepted but encouraged, as long as it's a language we both know, which means French, German, Dutch, and a few words from other languages. SF words are OK as long as we both recognize the reference and agree on the spelling. You get the idea. We also don't get nasty about challenges; if you spell it wrong you get to try again.)

I draw the lower tile and get to start. I draw NNIELAI, which seems to have the right balance of consonants and vowels

to get me off to a flying start with a seven-letter word. Unfortunately, after several minutes of scrabbling, the best I can come up with is ANILINE, which the dictionary insists is spelled ANALINE, so I have to settle for LAINE ("wool," French). Kate then crosses the I with RARITY, and we're off!

At one point Kate finds herself with CYMLLGE, and cries "There must be a word in here somewhere! Too bad I don't speak Welsh!" She's had bad hands all game, including a hand of all consonants and three hands in a row with only one consonant (and one of those was a Q!). Still, at this point she's whomping me, so I have limited sympathy.

A few moves later, Kate plays GEISEL ("hostage," German; also Dr. Seuss' real name), which is a great word... in a really unfortunate position. There is a Triple Letter Score space just before the G and a Double Word Score space just after the L, but neither of us can figure out a way to add anything on either end. Kate says she thinks the plural is "Geisel." Big help. (Also wrong, as it turns out.) That Triple Letter Score space leers at me for the whole rest of the game.

I find myself with the letters NIN ENDO, but there is nary a T to be had anywhere on the board. Then I spot an unoccupied U and make INUENDO. Kate points out that it's spelled with two N's. I look it up. It is. I have the other N. Ha! 18 points for INNUENDO, plus the elusive 50-point bonus for using all seven tiles. This puts me in the lead for the first time in the game! Kate debates the wisdom of the no-challenges agreement.

INNUENDO is vertical, with the I in the top row of the board and four spaces available to the left of it, the first being a Triple Letter Score space. What has five letters ending in I? I don't notice what Kate plays; I'm staring at my hand. Suddenly I flash on HOURI. I have an O, U, and R in my hand, but no H. There are two H's in a Scrabble set; one has already been played. Should I take the chance on the H coming up, or play the OUR in another word? I can make another word with the remaining letters, so I take a chance and hold onto the OUR. One turn, two turns, three turns go by... I'm beginning to get nervous. "If I don't get the H this turn," I think, "I'll give up on it." Then, lo and behold, I draw the H! Aha!

Just then, Kate plays FER on the first N of INNUENDO to make FERN. Now HOURI is impossible! "Aargh!" I wail, and gnash my teeth at the unfairness of it all. Kate, being a kind person (and a soft touch), moves FERN to another place on the board, leaving the way clear. We may be no-holds-barred Scrabble players, but we *are* in love. (Aw...) Besides, being "dog-in-the-mangerish" with Triple Word squares is one of Kate's pet peeves.

Suddenly we notice that it's 10:00, our agreed-on stopping point, and our scores are within 20 points. Usually by this point in the game one player has taken a definitive lead; we agree to play this one out. The game goes into overtime!

Kate plays JOU. Jou? "It's Dutch. I think it's a form of 'you.'" "Isn't you-singular 'je' and you-plural 'jullie?'" "Well, it changes form a lot." We haul out the Dutch grammar book. It turns out to be the accusative singular formal form of "you." JOU stands.

I play PLATRE ("plaster," French). There is some discussion of whether or not the fact it should have a circumflex over the A should affect its legality in Scrabble. We rule that accents don't count, but punctuation still does: you can only play J'AI if you have an apostrophe tile.

In a stunning play, Kate lays GHANDI on a Double Word Score. It's two spaces short of a Triple Word Score, but I refuse to accept GHANDITE. Then I make one of the best single-tile scores I've ever seen: playing an X on the Triple Letter Score space next to the A in GHANDI makes AX, for 25 points. Later, Kate turns it into AXE for 10 points. We briefly wonder how both words can be acceptable, but just shrug "they must be alternate spellings." (Later, the dictionary confirms this. It's a weird language, English.)

Soon it's the endgame. All the tiles have been drawn and we're fitting in short five- and ten-point words here and there, trying to minimize the points left in our hands and go out first. Our scores are very close. Only two tiles left each. Suddenly, I pounce! I play my last two tiles, U and G, on an M to make MUG... Kate tots up the score... and we are tied!

"Wow, after all that, we tied!"

"But wait, I get the score for the tiles left in your hand, so that means..."

"I said, we tied!"

Well, she did let me have HOURI. And so domestic bliss continues to reign in the home of David and Kate.

—DDL

The Final Board

H	O	U	R	I			K				C	R	A	W
				N		G	E	I	S	E	L			A
				N		P				I				Y
			Q	U	O	I	T				M			E
			E				C	R	A	B	B	Y		
	F	E	R	N				A	S					
			D					R						
G				O			L	A	I	N	E		J	
H						Y		I	T		L	O	O	
A	X	E				F	A	I	R	Y				U
N						I		E						
D		D	O	Z	E	N	S				M	U	G	
I	O	T	A					T			E			
						P	L	A	T	R	E			
							D			T				

Lusting after the General!

or, A Personal History of Eating Chinese by Laurie Mann

This article was inspired by Minicon 24, when I went to three Oriental meals in under 24 hours.

My parents must have been lying to me all these years. I must be Chinese. I must have been abandoned at birth and adopted by WASPs. Never mind that I'm blonde, blue-eyed, and look more like a valkyrie than like an extra in *The Last Emperor*. Never mind that I can't manage chopsticks to this day. To me, soul food isn't white bread and mayonnaise, it's General Gau's chicken with extra sauce. I like macaroni and cheese, but I lust after slightly-burned Peking ravs (or potstickers, depending on your local slang) with ginger-soy sauce.

My introduction to eating Chinese was delayed. As a child, I never went to Chinese restaurants, and we never had Chinese food in the house when I was growing up. When I was 11, our family took a cross-country trip by train. Around the corner from the hotel in Phoenix, there was a little Jewish deli. It looked like a typical diner, but it had blintzes to-die-for.

I was surprised when I saw chow mein, egg rolls, and a few other Chinese dishes on the menu. One night I took the plunge and ordered chow mein. I got this bowl of cooked vegetables and chicken, with a layer of fried noodles on top. I

didn't recognize half the stuff there—I'd never laid eyes on bean sprouts or water chestnuts before. But I dug in and found that even celery, my least-favorite-KNOWN vegetable, tasted pretty good in chow mein.

That, I learned, is one of the tenets of eating Chinese:

- Try EVERYTHING in a Chinese dish, even if it's something you normally don't like.
- Unless, of course, it's fungus. Or squid. Other tenets include:
- Soy sauce is food.
- When they call something "hot", they are right.
- Fortune cookies are more entertainment than dessert. A more recent tenet has been added:
- Never let the whole fish face Rob.

But wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. I last left myself in the summer of 1968.

My next exposure to Oriental food was a few years later when we were all invited to Trader Vic's for dinner. The restaurant had bamboo posts and woven grass mats and funny wooden sculptures all over the place. We sat at a huge table made of split logs with about eight layers of shellac on top. The adults all ordered drinks in coconuts with funny parasols in them. We kids got Cokes in skinny, frosted glasses with long straws.

The menu was fascinating. Pu-pu platters? Teri-what? Pineapple where? And chopsticks? Dad wanted steak. After spending a long time trying to translate the menu, I ordered chicken teriyaki. Dad was still looking for a steak. I think he finally ordered steak teriyaki without the teriyaki sauce. That's as close to an Oriental meal as he's EVER had.

In college, I started going to cons. I was indoctrinated in the fannish tradition of eating in large groups in Chinese restaurants at my third convention, Anonycon 1. That Sunday night, I had spare ribs and an egg roll and chicken with peanuts and lo mein and orange-flavored beef and...well, you get the idea. I was hooked.

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After Jim and I got married, a tiny store that specialized in selling leather closed around the corner from our apartment. A tiny Jewish woman later bought the place. A few months later, a tiny Chinese restaurant opened there. I think the place seated, maybe, 30 people, if they were small. After a few terrific lunches there, I organized a fannish dinner for Chinese New Year. That night I found out how long a true Chinese banquet takes (about three hours) and that Peking Duck is a wonderful thing. Over ten years later the restaurant is still there, still under original ownership, and was able to expand enough to include another four tables.

Two years later, we moved to Chillicothe, a large town in the-middle-of-nowhere Ohio. Down the street from the building where I worked, in a town plagued by every fast food restaurant ever seen in the Midwest, was a single Chinese restaurant. There, I learned that eating Chinese wasn't always a religious experience. Mediocre Chinese food could be made in restaurants as easily as it was sold in cans in grocery stores. I tended to buy the sweet and sour pork. The pork cubes weren't just dipped in batter; they were coated in about a half-inch of dense dough. The sweet and sour sauce had more Red Dye #5 than pineapple juice.

When we moved up to Boston, local SF/Chinese food fans took us to the House of Roy. I don't remember being that impressed by the food; we'd been hearing for years about how wonderful it was, and I was disappointed. What I really remember about that trip was racing through Chinatown and Boston's Combat Zone one a Saturday night and nearly ramming a couple of hookers with Leslie's stroller!

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To most fans, eating Chinese is a hallmark of fandom, much like reading SF or wearing funny T-shirts. Members of NESFA practically went into mourning when the House of Roy closed a few years back. But Chinese food fanaticism is hardly limited to SF fans. Fellow employees at Stratus Computer, based about an hour outside of Boston, trekked back to Cambridge for lunch when they heard their favorite Chinese place from their MIT days was closing down. To this day, a number of us have a quarterly lunch at Uncle Chueng's, a restaurant nearly half an hour away from work.

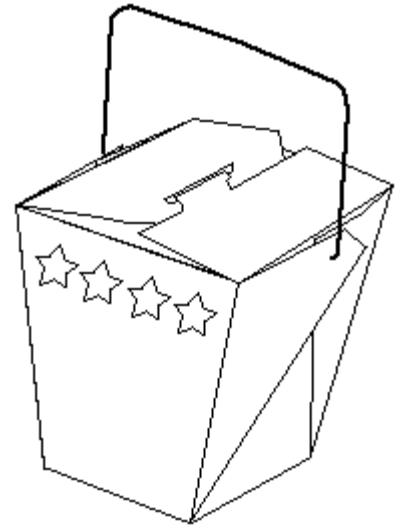
Uncle Chueng's, on Route 9 in Framingham, Massachusetts, is my favorite Chinese restaurant. I first started going there in 1983, when Stratus was located nearby. The walls were stucco and there was a tiled patio. Yes, it had previously been a Mexican restaurant, so the atmosphere was a little south-of-the-borderish. But the food was absolutely Chinese. I ate there regularly that year, never tiring of the double fillet (thin slices of chicken and beef, served over watercress).

After a year of weekly lunches there, our company moved about a half-hour further west. We realized we wouldn't be able to get our fix of incredibly good Chinese food. We considered proposing that Chueng's open up a franchise in our new building, rather than build a standard, boring, company cafeteria. But we knew the facilities people, who NEVER ate there, just wouldn't understand. We had a huge banquet just before we moved, ordering off the dinner menu. I hadn't ordered off the dinner menu before, and was more than impressed by the dishes people ordered. Particularly:

General Gau's (Tso's, depending on the transliteration) Chicken.

How do you describe the ultimate food? Well, it looks simple. It's not one of those artistically-mounted dishes. The General's chicken is just chunks of chicken coated in a batter, deep-fried, and served with a rich ginger sauce. It's hot without being incendiary. If the General really did feed this to his army, I'm sure it was quite the incentive!

Other dishes prepared particularly well at Uncle Cheung's include orange-flavored beef and crispy whole fish. Does this sound like a commercial? Oh...probably. When I ran a relaxacon a few years back, I arranged the Saturday dinner at Chueng's. The day our company moved out to Marlboro, a carload of us STILL went back to Chueng's for lunch. When given the chance to buy dinner for a recent work session, I suggest Chinese food, went to Chueng's, and carried out three bags full of soups, ravs, ribs, rice, and the main dishes drooled over previously. Except for the whole fish. It doesn't travel well. Rob would have been happy.



Oh yes, I ought to explain that tenet of eating Chinese, "Never let the whole fish face Rob." Rob is your typical hardware engineer. Like all engineers, he has at least one outstanding eccentricity. Rob's is his bizarre relationship with whole fish. Now, he'll eat it. He even seems to enjoy it. It's not as if you're forcing him ("Rob, eat your fish. It's good for you." "No. Don't wanna eat the nasty fish."). But if you leave the fish platter anywhere NEAR his plate, you'll get any argument. It doesn't matter if the table is groaning with food, and there is literally no other place to shift the platter to. "That fish is looking at me! I can't eat with it there!"

"Rob, it has no eyes, it can't possibly be looking at you."

"MOVE IT NOW!"

Someone humors him, and the fish generally winds up at the other end of the table. Usually, next to me. But I don't mind. It may be a dead fish to Rob, but it's still Chinese food to me. Pass the ginger sauce.

Household Hints of the Future

Programming our VCR requires 9 steps, elimination of any of which results in "non-performance":

- Cable box on correct channel
- Usable tape found
- Tape wound to correct spot
- Tape actually in machine
- Machine set to record at correct speed
- Beginning day set
- Beginning time set

- Duration set *after* setting time & day
- Timer button pushed

I saw an ad for some handy-dandy widget that would "revolutionize VCR programming—never miss the show you want again!" It addressed exactly *two* of the above 9 steps. We still await the Messiah.

There's one further step that can have serious repercussions, rendering unusable even the most correctly generated recording: *making note of what was taped*. It's worst with scratch tapes, those tapes you use over and over to catch Twin Peaks one week and Star Trek the next. Nothing, not even PBS pledge week, is as frustrating as taping over something you still wanted to see because you didn't know it was there. Scrabbling through tapes on the way out the door, trying to guess which one has room for the Simpsons, gets old real fast. And, as with anything else, having two people doing input and output on the same data increases the chance of screw-ups manifold. "You taped that at two-hour speed? I put thirtysomething on the second half!" "Aaiiee!"

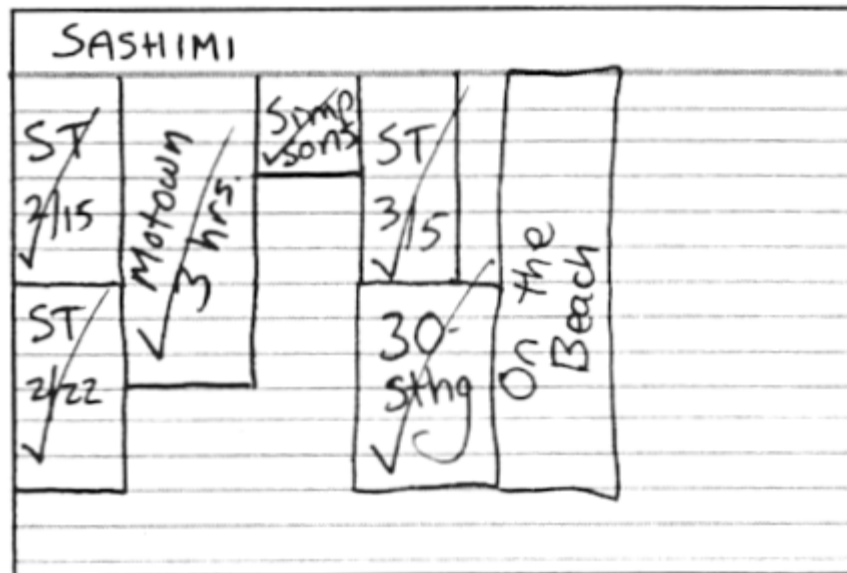
We have, at last, developed a system.

Each tape has a name and a 4x6 card that slips into its box. The name can be practical (*Star Trek scratch tape*) or whimsical (*Ralph, Fred, Baked Alaska*). It goes on the spine of the tape and on the top of the card. The two axes of the card represent: top to bottom, the duration of the tape; left to right, successive layers of recordings. When you record something, draw a box in the appropriate space. Say what it is; add the date, if it's an episode of something; note the length, if you wouldn't remember otherwise. Twelve lined spaces on the card mean that it's easy to represent one-half or one-fourth or one-third of the tape, depending on what you are recording and at what speed. When we've watched something, a big checkmark goes through the contents of the box. A glance at the card tells you everything you need to know about what space is free.

"Dear, would you set up the droid to watch Star Trek for us tonight?" "Sure, I think there's room on Phyllis."

It changed our life.

—KY



Fun With Your Brain

We aren't the only people who lie in bed at night telling strings of fish puns, are we? It starts innocuously: one says something "just for the halibut", the other responds "not tonight, dear, I've got a haddock" and off it goes, another

salmon-chanted evening.

Sometimes there is another theme, though fish are such a fertile field. Last week, the firing of some random neurons led to the observation that being "on the phone" and "on the bus" are two very different things. We now have over 50 different ways to complete that phrase, with at least a degree of idiomatic meaning (not just "it's on the couch, honey")...how many can you think of? Our list is at the back.

—KY

LoCs and Wry

Larry Richardson

larryr@cezanne.intel.com

4/26/90

Just finished reading your "zine." A very good short read. Have you ever thought of writing for a living? Perhaps something in the technical fields...

Larry Richardson and David worked together as technical writers at "Beaverton integrated-circuit giant Intel." He saw a preview copy.

Mark Manning

Seattle, Wash.

7/21/90

Well, I've been telling you how good Bento 2 was, every time we've seen each other since you sent it. Figured I'd put it in print so you can quote me:

A French Bento 2 can grasp the cuffs of a snarly stalactite.

Over Bento 2, I pour seven tons or orgasmic Cheese-Whiz.

We walk Bento 2 in Argentina's titled streets.

Are Conway Twitty's favorite things Bento 2, sea kayaks, and the Jewels of Aptor?

Mark's into surrealism. Can you tell? Hey, Mark, you misspelled Cheez.

rich brown

Arlington, Virginia

5/10/90

I can empathize with you in re: the *dated* House of the Future; something like the same feeling washed over me some 30 years ago as I watched a re-run of Forbidden Planet. The movie, when it first hove on the screen, had been most every sf Fan's dream—futuristic, nifty and well-done special effects, a plot swiped from the Bard of Avon Hisownself; what more could we possibly hope for? Less than a decade later, the starship captain's 1950s sexual mores stand out like a sore bump. (In the 1950s, nobody talked about sex. "S*x", yeah, maybe, but not "sex".)

"...where are the atomic spaceships and personal hovercars we were promised?" you ask—and once more I empathize. I was asking something like that, not long ago, when I suddenly recalled an article I'd read, early in the year 1950... in MECHANICS ILLUSTRATED or POPULAR MECHANIX or a magazine of the same ilk. It was a piece in which

various sf authors were asked what we might reasonably expect to see over the next 10, 25, 50 years. ... [T]here was a pretty strong consensus that we were not far off from having, not our own hovercars, but our own little one-person helicopters, even though they might be little more than a propeller, a motor and strong harnesses to hold the dangling person steadfastly to said propeller w/motor while in aerial flight. Not Buck Rogers' flying pack but real sensawunda stuff, nonetheless. When I recollected all this, I felt...well, cheated, if you must know. Because such things are *not* impossible, you know. In fact, a few years later, going through yet another copy of MI or PM, I came across an ad for a "kit" showing how to make your own strap-on-your-back one-person helicopter. It was just an idea whose time never came.

Of course, eventually I figured out why. Comprehension hit as I was driving in heavy but fast-moving traffic, where three lanes going northeast met two going northwest and became four ever-more-crowded northbound lanes, with a gentle slush falling—which, of course, only made most drivers speed up and do various things they'd never do if the pavement were dry. Not good, not bad, just "typical" American drivers—swearing at Allen Sundry and wondering why, on the one hand, the idiots in front of them didn't either speed up or get the hell out of the way... while, on the other, cursing the morons behind them because they were senselessly tail-gating.... Yessir. These are the people who would be, in that 1950 dream of the future, strapping on their rotor blades and taking to the skies...so perhaps it's a damned good thing the dream was never realized. And, as you point out elsewhere, there's some tradeoff in terms of future shock. The way I put it to others who've been reading skiffy as long as I have is, "We're living in the World of the Future.' Really. 'We're living in the World of the Future.'" I told Ted White not all that long back. He agreed with me that that was indeed the case. Most likely. I'd had that fact driven into my brainpan that very day, when I'd come home to find my answering machine blinking its red light at me. This is how it communicated to human beans (such as myself) that it held in trust a message of possible import. ... *[on the tape]*... was "...I'm sorry, I didn't hear that—would you mind repeating your answer? [pause] All right. How many people in your home make use of the freezer compartment of your refrigerator? [pause] I'm sorry, I didn't hear that—would you please repeat your response? [pause] Thank you. Now, how many individuals in your home regularly drink diet soft drinks? [pause] I'm sorry, would you repeat your answer and speak a little louder please? [pause] All right. How many people in your household wear wrist watches?..." and on in pretty much the same vein until the tape ran out.

The voice was human, no question, but eventually I figured out what it had been. A computer. A computer that dialed phone numbers at random. It probably asked whoever answered if they would mind answering a few questions and if the answer was anything but a dial tone (i.e., if the person didn't hang up) it would ask questions and record answers—on a voice-activated recorder—until it ran out of questions or the person hung up. It was even programmed to ask that the answer be repeated if the person didn't speak loud enough (or at all) to activate the recorder. Well, obviously, when it dialed my number and paused for the answer to the first question, my answering machine was still rattling on about leaving a message after the beep. Thus, all that followed.



So in my absence that day a computer had called and enjoyed a penetrating (albeit mostly one-sided) conversation with my answering machine.

"We're living in the World of the Future," I told Ted White a while back. I daresay he believed me.

Nearly every week now I get calls at work from a recorded voice, saying that there is an Important Message for me, and would I please hold for a representative. Machines are calling me up and asking me to HOLD for crisake! Unfortunately this development has come at the same time that our local phone system has given machines the responsibility for announcing incoming collect calls and asking what you want to do about it. This led me to hang up on my boss once.

I think they have also pre-recorded yet another fragment of the directory-assistance interaction.. Last time I called, the difference between the chipper "Hello, this is Lisa! How can I help you?" that opened the conversation and the bored "OK, just a moment" that followed when I gave the name of the city in question, could not be accounted for by assuming she was sick and tired of queries about Beaverton.

Cathy Doyle

Newport News, Virginia
6/18/90

Thanks for leaving copies of Bento #2 around during Corflu. I enjoyed it a great deal. ... the thing that got my father all bent out of shape was bell bottom pants. Having served in the Navy he couldn't see why anyone in their right mind would want to wear them in the first place. And to SCHOOL? My father took very little interest in my upbringing in general, being too busy working to support five kids, but he was firm on the pants issue. I wore dresses well after the rest of the girls had switched over.

Loved the picture of the cat on p. 13—looks just like one of ours when we get back. Luckily we have two this time, so they tend to tear each other up running around the house and not our personal possessions. Also loved the cover. Who is that girl swinging in the background? She looks like something out of an Edward Gorey book.

She and the clock—and the "thingie" in this issue—came from a Dover clip-art book titled "Machinery and Mechanical Devices, a treasury of nineteenth-century cuts", ed. William Rowe. It's marvelous. The illos are arranged into 9"x12" collages, with captions like "Bulluck's Stereotype Shaving Machine."

Vicki Rosenzweig
New York, New York
5/5/90

Thanks for Bento! I know exactly what you mean about nostalgia for the future: I felt the same way when I discovered that a hologram t-shirt I saw recently was a cereal premium, the 90's equivalent of a secret decoder ring. What happened to the 3-D holograph movies you could walk around in?

This somehow fits in with the Jetsons piece—it was never a serious future, but we expected the gadgets. When that series was made, Americans still believed we had infinite resources.

I'm tempted to request reprint rights to the Pinkwater appreciation. I love his stuff & have never been able to write about it. I feel the same way about Lafferty. But, speaking of fogeys, this loc is being written with a modern adaptation of the fountain pen. Some things you can get.

Good time travel story—it is an angle I like, & haven't seen before.

Is this your first LoC on this issue?

Not for lack of trying—it was written and handed to us while still in the Corflu Hospitality suite.

Donald Wileman
Mount Pleasant, Michigan—at the time
8/30/90

My dear Bent friends,

Got Bento #2 about the time I arrived here. Thank you. I particularly enjoyed the cover illo and the explanation of what the title meant.

Odd to see the Flying Saucer house again, and to hear phrases like "fun fur", which I had forgotten I ever knew! I guess this is the thin edge of the wedge—the reminiscing with which we will drive people born 30 years later than us—up the wall!

David often quotes someone on "what adults do: sit around and argue about things that happened ages ago and nobody cares about anyway." We are distressingly good at it.

"ABANDON IN PLACE", wow. That's so, sooo...United States. Did you know that the Vietnamese were able to run their initial intervention in Cambodia almost entirely on abandoned US equipment? Just as well—as it works out.

Actually, I'm now sure I *want* an atomic Antipodes rocket service, the way I did in the 60's. And G.E.V.'s are *noisy*! I also can't help remembering that my father was born in 1920. He's seen change enough. I wonder what I will have seen by 2017?...Will you understand when I tell you I'm not in a hurry to know? [*Oh yes.*]

The ending didn't live up to the rest of the piece. Got bathetic.

I can't keep myself from sharing a horrible thought with you. I'm assuming that the fad for Spandex clothing will fade as the bright young bodies which wear it start to droop and wrinkle—but what if they go **right on wearing** the stuff!?!?!?! Still, thank you for "marbelized Formica tables with round legs". How about a whole kitchen done in late-1950's single-support? No more banging **your** legs on the table's!

Loved the Pinkwater review-*cum*-explanation (though again, David's piece would have been stronger with something else in place of the last 4 sentences—or even with nothing there. There's no rule says you have to end things neatly.

Picture phones (I am told) never made it and likely never will. Seems that all the times the 'phone companies asked "Would you like to be able to **see** the person you're speaking to?" they never asked "Do you want to be **seen** by the person you're speaking to?" **That** question, apparently, has a very different answer, and may doom the marketing of the things.

*I caught part of an article on Marketplace recently to the effect that a company which sells equipment for video-conferencing is **booming** since the increased hostilities in the Mid-East, and the concurrent reluctance to actually travel for meetings.*

Even watching the Jetsons as a kid I assumed that that was not our earth any more—that they had broken the planet into pieces to make something like a livable asteroid belt, and that somewhere out there was an **almighty** gravity generator, keeping the atmosphere and chunks of old planet more-or-less together.

So, Quisp **was** related to Ffloyd & Gidney!

Sigh! I'm in the United States. All sorts of awful temptations that died out in Canada a decade ago or more still **live** down here—in profusion! Including, alas, *Captain Crunch's Peanut Butter Cereal*. Lipton found the stuff for me & actually bought me a box—then watched with mounting incredulity (and the joy he secretly takes in all abominations) while I ate two (small) bowls of it.

On the...

subject	phone	bus
ball	border	pill
lam	up & up	uptake
warpath	other hand	dole
trail	road again	edge
defensive	offensive	attack
nose	money	spot
side	outside	inside
flip side	tall side...	money
dotted line	radio	fritz
take	rag	air

outs payroll way
horizon corner bandwagon
off chance rebound tip of my tongue
list table silver screen
alert books menu
skids street where you live

Errata

Last issue, David said that *Fish Whistle* was the only Daniel Pinkwater book marketed to adults. There is at least one more. *Superpuppy* is a serious non-fiction guide to choosing and training a dog. Serious but fun, and full of useful, practical information. Pinkwater raises Malamutes.

—KY

Colophon

This zine was produced using two Apple Macintoshes (one an enhanced Mac Plus, the other a Mac IIcx) and an HP DeskJet printer. Software used included Microsoft Word, SuperPaint, MacDraw II, MacPaint, and Ready, Set, Go!.

Art Credits

David Levine did the cover and the illo on page 22. The illos on pages 3 and 28 were provided by the prolific Arthur Clipp.

This zine was produced from natural products. It had been painstakingly word-processed for comfort and wearability. Each issue is unique. Slight flaws and imperfections should not be considered defects; rather, they are a sign of individual craftsmanship.

Why You Got This Zine

- We ran into you at Janecon
- You appear within
- You sent a LoC or tradezine
- We'd like you to send a LoC or tradezine
- Editorial whim
- Other: