

Gone, But Not Forgotten

The website www.hometownfavorites.com is run by a company that finds sources of local, obscure and/or near-obsolete food products. Major customer demographic groups include retirees to the Sun Belt in search of brands they left behind, and Boomers, in search of brands left behind somewhat differently.

From their “Boy They Were Good But...” page, we offer the following In Memoriam.

A & W Root Beer Gum
Banana Flavored Quik
Betty Crocker Pudding Cake Mix
Bonomo Turkish Taffy
Fan Tan Gum
Grape Tang
Jello 1-2-3
Jello Pudding Pops
Jiffy Spice Cake Mix
Mr. Salty Pretzels
Quake Cereal
Regal Crown Sours
Space Food Sticks
Sugar Jets Cereal
Tangerine Lifesavers
Whip 'n Chill



Yeah, OK, fine, we give in. Here is a *Bento* in time for the Worldcon. When we didn't have one for you in Chicago last year, jeeze, the whining! “But you *always*...” Actually, no. Of eleven previous issues over eleven years, only half were done for Worldcons. Maybe you get desperate for something to read in line?

And hey, we *had* something for you in Chicago. What did we hear? “This isn't *Bento*!” Uh-duh. It's only a cool “Ace Double” with photos & maps & all the dirt about David's stint at Clarion West & what Kate got up to while he was away. That's all. We didn't mail a lot of them out, so if you haven't seen *Sex, Violence and Peripeteia / Moose Next 3800 Miles*, a.k.a. *What We Did on Our Summer Vacation*, just drop us a note and ask for one. (This isn't the same as David's online Clarion diary.)

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<http://www.spiritone.com/~dlevine>

Cover model: Isambard the Iguana.

Books About Stuff

Lately I've been reading really keen books about stuff.

Aren't all books about stuff? Alas, no. Mod Fic tends to be about non-stuff, such as mortality, adultery, ennui and angst. There's the eternal stream of transitory books about actors, scandals, and royalty...sorry, that's just crap. There's entire libraries written on the subject of, say, WW2, but no wonder! WW2 is reams and *reams* of stuff. No, I mean simple, concrete, common nouns—chocolate, pencils, cod—which you would think nobody could get an entire book out of just that one thing.

But they do. And you read it. Whereupon you find out that “just that one thing” encompasses the world.

The story of aspirin, in *The Aspirin Wars*, is a tale of century-old German dye manufacturers, WWI profiteering, the Versailles Treaty, Nazi propaganda, travelling salesmen in Brazil, trademark law, turf wars, advertising strategies and brand differentiation, consumer fraud, patent medicines, heart research, and why not to feed sweet clover to cows.

This is what I meant about finding the world in the story of one simple thing.

Books about Stuff are full of everyday things we never think about (why pencils are yellow) and questions you never knew you had. (Andes Mints were made by a guy named Andy.) I love the way they make connections with things I already knew about,

fleshing out the simplified, “Liar-to-Children” versions we learn in school. We’re taught that (drum roll) COLUMBUS DISCOVERED AMERICA. Adults realize that the Vikings probably beat him to it and the “Indians” certainly did. Reading *Cod*, I found out the Basques were over here too, fishing off Newfoundland! Basque salt cod was served on Fridays and fast days throughout medieval Europe. (Why does Columbus still get all the press?) Apparently cod also belongs solidly in the 16th-century trade cycle of molasses–rum–slaves.



There’s lots more good stuff that somehow never came up in history class, like Sir Francis Bacon dying of pneumonia because he got out of his carriage to stuff snow in a dead chicken. Yes that Sir Francis Bacon, no I am not making this up! I don’t have to! It’s a wonderfully weird world all on its own, I’m telling you! (He was conducting experiments in food preservation. They *say*.)

A short booklist follows. As you can see, in 1967 they had not yet invented the colon.

They *did* have frozen orange juice concentrate, and were quite chuffed about this, it being far less straightforward than you might think. McPhee also talks about why it is they could plant all the seeds from tens of thousands of pulped limes, get a couple hundred citrus seedlings, and count themselves lucky that *two* were lime trees! Who knew citrus fruit was so tricky?

Not everything on the non-fiction shelves has the magic touch, though there seem to be more good Books about Stuff in recent years since the success of *Longitude*. *Time Lord*, for one, tries and misses. I’ve come across many worthwhile titles via the Common Reader catalog, available online at www.commonreader.com. I’d like to hear about your finds. —KY

- *Oranges*, John McPhee, 1967
- *The Pencil: a history of design and circumstance*, Henry Petroski, 1989
- *The Aspirin Wars: money, medicine and 100 years of rampant competition*, Charles C. Mann and Mark L. Plummer, 1991
- *A Fez of the Heart: travels around Turkey in search of a hat*, Jeremy Seal, 1996
- *Longitude: the true story of a lone genius who solved the greatest scientific problem of his time*, Dava Sobel, 1997
- *Cod: a biography of the fish that changed the world*, Mark Kurlansky, 1997
- *The Victorian Internet: the remarkable story of the telegraph and the nineteenth century’s on-line pioneers*, Tom Standage, 1998
- *The Emperors of Chocolate: inside the secret world of Hershey and Mars*, Joel Glenn Brenner, 1999

Fractal Storytelling

I have often been amused that Victor Hugo’s massive book *Les Miserables* can be boiled down to a three-hour musical, which can be summarized in the program book, which can be squeezed into a CD booklet—and somehow these are all the same story. It’s like a fractal; it can be rendered at any level of detail, but always it is itself.

Similarly, the concept “fanzine” encompasses tomes as large as *Warhoon* 28 and confections as small as *Bento*, and the concept “fanzine article” includes everything from a weighty piece by Claire Brialey to an essay as short as this. —DDL

“It looks pretty grim for Team Plokta... Alison’s swearing like a stevedore, they’ve already used two of their three lifelines, and they’ve blindfolded the cow.”

Survivors

an extended metaphor

PFC Ross Teague and Sergeant Julie Bennett stood on the hull of the *USS Timothy Yiu*, peering into the churning grayness, searching for the drifting survivor who had barely registered on the ship’s detectors. Their space suits and safety tethers seemed a slim defense against the roiling gray hell of Redeployment.

Redeployment was a phenomenon that had never been encountered before the first attack of the Ek’zeks. Nobody knew if it was an Ek’zek weapon, a side effect of the Ek’zek stardrive, or a natural part of the Ek’zek environment. Whatever it was, anything that stayed out in it too long... disappeared. Theory said the vanished objects went into an alternate universe, or maybe a separate space-time continuum. But nothing that had disappeared into Redeployment had ever returned.

After the first devastating Ek’zek strikes, Fleet scientists had developed the Sustainer, which enabled ships to pass through the spreading fields of Redeployment, seek out the Ek’zeks, and destroy them. But far too often it was the Fleet ships that were destroyed.

“There he is,” Bennett said at last. Teague’s eyes followed her pointing finger, saw the tiny suited figure lost in the swirling gray fog. It was not moving, and would have been nearly invisible if not for the blue glow of its personal Sustainer. Teague whirled the magnetic grapple over his head, snagged the survivor on the third try.

As they hauled the cable in, Teague could see the survivor’s suit was blackened and pitted, the helmet too scarred to see the face inside. But the way the limbs flexed with each tug on the cable showed the inhabitant was alive. Teague had hauled in too many corpses, stiff from dehydration or bloated from decompression, not to know the difference.

They got the survivor into the airlock, closed the door. As the pressure rose, Bennett's eyes widened, and she pointed to the Sustainer on the survivor's chest. The blue digits read 00 00:07.

"Lucky seven," Teague said, but even as he said it the 7 changed to a 6. He hoped it wasn't an omen.

Finally the pressure equalized and Teague and Bennett opened their helmets. The inner door opened and Nunes-Ueno, Dunnahoo, and Rutten tumbled through while Bennett twisted the survivor's helmet off. Teague's nose wrinkled from the stench that came out. But it was the smell of an unwashed body, not a dead one.

The face was pale, the cheeks black with weeks of beard. As the helmet came off, the survivor's eyes snapped open, red-veined and staring. "Aah!" he cried, and fumbled for his resume gun.

"Don't fire that thing in here!" shouted Bennett, grabbing for the gun.

"I'm a Senior Software Engineer!" the survivor yelled as he struggled with her. "Seven years experience! Windows! UNIX!



"I shot resumes at anything that moved. I played a lot of solitaire. If I hadn't made a couple of fiction sales I probably would've cracked."

Teague's eyes met Bennett's over the survivor's head. Bennett shrugged, but said nothing.

"So what happened to the *Teckman*?" said Nunes-Ueno.

Levine's eyes focused on something the rest of them couldn't see. "We were making good time, no sign of any trouble, and then... *pow!* They hit the *Aymar* first. Practically blew her in half. Two thousand crew, all the latest technology, she was the envy of the Fleet, and then... *pow*, she was a floating scrap heap.

"The carnage was incredible. Bodies everywhere, guts spilling out... and the screams, my God the screams... I wanted to turn off the radio, but we needed it to help find the survivors."

"And you just hung around picking them up?" asked Nunes-Ueno. "I would've been out of there like *that*."

"Actually, Sergeant Mackenzie gave us a choice. Shashi and Jerry took a lifeboat, but the rest of us stayed." He took another long drink. "I can't speak for anyone else, but frankly I thought my chances were better on the *Teckman*."

"Looks like I was wrong.

"Anyway. We thought that was the end of the attack. We started to take on survivors. I was just running out the grapple to bring in one of the *Aymar*'s lifeboats when the Ek'zeks came back. The first salvo took out our Sustainer; the second blew the hull. I

C++! Java! I'll even program in COBOL! For Christ's sake just hire me!"

Finally Bennett got the gun away from him. "It's okay," she said gently. "You're safe now." She handed the gun to Teague while she and Nunes-Ueno carried the survivor to the *Yiu*'s tiny sickbay.

Teague looked at the gun. It had seven resumes left in the magazine. Lucky seven again.

Then he did the math. *Jesus*, he thought. *The poor bastard fired off ninety-three resumes before we came along.*

•

The survivor—his name was David Levine—clutched his coffee mug as though it were the only thing keeping him from floating off into Redeployment again. The rest of the crew gathered closely around, desperate for news that hadn't been filtered through Fleet Morale.

"I was on the *Teckman*," he said. "We were escorting the *Aymar* to a rendezvous with Main Command, but then the Ek'zeks attacked in quadrant 2-01."

"You're in quadrant 3-01 now," Bennett said. "You drifted quite a ways."

"I was out there for almost two months," he said, and took a huge gulp of coffee.

"Two months?" said Rutten. "How'd you stay sane?"

saw that lifeboat spinning away, back toward the wreck of the *Aymar*. I have no idea what became of them.

"So there we all were, clinging to the hull of the *Teckman*. We had just enough time to count noses before the Ek'zeks came back for one last hurrah. Blew the *Teckman* to smithereens and left us scrambling for whatever was left.

"Tony and Jonathan made it onto the Captain's personal launch, but there wasn't room for me. Ling got onto Jerry's lifeboat—I thought I would too, but Jerry took off as soon as Ling got on board. I must've fired five resumes right at him. He never even looked at me. I saw Monte get picked up by one of the *Aymar*'s boats.

"Most of the rest... Andy, John, Eric, Valerie... Marty... Sarge... they took Voluntary Separation." He tipped back his head, but the mug was empty.

There was a long silence at that. "Voluntary Separation" was what Morale called it when you turned off your Sustainer on purpose.

"Why so many?" Rutten asked.

"I wish I knew. I wondered that for the longest time. Sometimes I wondered why I didn't do it myself. Once or twice in the last two months I had my hand right on the knob, but I just couldn't twist it."

"Maybe they wondered what was on the other side," said Nunes-Ueno.

“Or maybe they’d seen too much death and destruction. Or maybe they just couldn’t bear the waiting for the next attack.

“But the next attack never came. I drifted, polished my resume gun, played solitaire, worked on my fiction.”

“And then we came along,” said Teague.

“And then you came along. I had damn near given up.”

Then the ship jerked and all the lights went out. Corporal Womack’s voice came from the command deck: “Battle stations! We are under attack!”

Sergeant Bennett’s flashlight clicked on, swept around. “All right, people!” she called, “You know the drill! Suits! Damage control! Hustle!” They hustled. Bennett ran off to her station at the weapons console.

Teague’s flashlight found Levine under the table, clinging to a leg, trembling. “Can you do Information Architecture?” Teague asked him.

“I think so. I’ve designed user interfaces.”

“Good. We can use you at the starboard Web portal.”

Dim red lighting came on as they scrambled into their suits; Levine took an emergency suit, since his own was shot. They raced to the starboard Web node, where they found Nunes-Ueno staring slack-jawed out the portal.

Outside, in the gray hell of Redeployment, a huge swarm of Ek’zek ships was engaged in battle... with the *Aymar*! The great Fleet ship was half-smashed, its Sustainers visibly flickering, but it was still moving, and still putting up a fight.

“Sounds like our Sustainer’s hit. We’ve got to get out of here fast.” They hustled to the command deck.

They found Bennett at the weapons console, pounding her dead board in frustration. “Where’s Nunes-Ueno?” she shouted as Teague entered.

“He took Voluntary Separation.”

“Damn it!” she said. “Womack got knocked out in that last impact.”

Hope dropped out of Teague’s belly. Womack was the pilot, and Nunes-Ueno was her backup. Then he remembered something. “Levine,” he said, “didn’t you say you could program in Java?”

“Yes... well, I wrote one program.”

“That’ll have to do. Get on that console and code us out of here.”

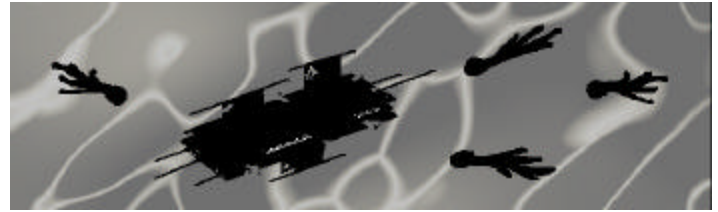
“I’ll try.” Tentatively at first, then with more and more confidence, his fingers moved over the controls. Finally the ship began to move. “It’s sluggish.”

“No wonder,” said Bennett, pointing to a readout. “The Sustainer’s just about packed in.”

Just then the radio crackled to life, on the Fleet secure channel. “*USS Yiu*, do you read? This is Dado, commanding *Aymar*.”

Bennett grabbed the mike. “Go ahead, *Aymar*.”

“We see your situation and are prepared to offer assistance.” Through the glass they could see the *Aymar*, its Sustainers stuttering, extending a docking probe in their direction.



“Snap out of it, you two!” Teague said. “We need to do damage control! This portal’s way over budget, and the schedule’s about to give way!”

The three of them started coding, trying to hold the damaged portal together. Levine was good... damn good. It looked like they were going to make it.

Then a crippled Fleet fighter came spiraling away from the battle to crash into the side of the *Yiu*.

The portal ripped open. Roiling gray fog spilled into the node. Teague and Levine ran for the airlock, but Nunes-Ueno stayed where he was.

“Come on, Marcos!” Teague shouted, but a strange smile crept across Nunes-Ueno’s face as the first gray tendrils reached him.

“Sorry, Ross,” he said, “but I’ve seen enough. I’m going home now.” And he twisted his Sustainer and vanished.

Teague swore, but kept moving. He and Levine made it to the airlock, slammed the door. There was a shuddering groan as the node began to disintegrate.

Teague covered the mike with his hand. “What the hell do they think they’re doing? They can barely Sustain themselves!”

“It’s the only chance we’ve got,” said Bennett, and gently pushed Teague’s hand off the mike. “Roger, *Aymar*, stand by to receive us.”

“The retros aren’t responding!” shouted Levine. “We’re going to hit!”

He was right. The docking probe was getting much too big, much too fast.

Then another voice came over the Fleet channel. “PFC Levine, this is Yen-Cheng Wen of the *McLaurin*. We have received your resume and may have need of your skills. Prepare to be beamed aboard for an interview.”

Relief and anguish warred on Levine’s face. “What about the *Yiu*?”

“Go on,” said Bennett. “Save yourself.”

“But...”

The *Aymar*’s scarred docking probe was huge outside the glass. Collision seemed inevitable.

To Be Continued...

—DDL

“How many bigfeet do you have working in Dupont?”
“They prefer to be called Sasquatch.”

Short Takes

A writers' workshop is the opposite of an APA—you show up with 7 different stories and leave with 7 copies of your own.

* * *

The rules for tiddlywinks go a long way towards explaining Quidditch in the Harry Potter books. "Each player has a squidger and several winks.... A player cannot squidge a squopped wink...."

* * *

We went to our local art-movie house for the restored print of *Hard Day's Night* (Beatles, 1964.) *Gorgeous!* The cinematography had the same lush black-and-white beauty as my old book of Paris photographs, or that Jim Jarmusch film with the Indians—*Dead Man*. I sat there with my mouth open sometimes just marveling at the look of what was on the screen.

And laughing at the funny bits, and struck silent over and over again gazing at John. "Someone killed this person. Someone took a gun and fired it into this body. Someone deliberately stopped this life." I couldn't wrap my brain around it.

Maybe that's just as well. I mean that I can't understand such a thing. —KY

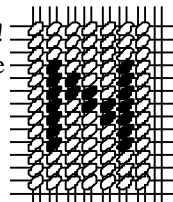
"I honestly know more transsexuals than I do accordion players." — Kate S.

Knitting used to have a hugely intimidating "don't go there" factor for me. It was so nebulous! Wagging sticks around in thin air! I demanded the security of a needlepoint canvas, with my own design perhaps but still bounded, finite, explicit. Either there was a stitch in that hole yet or there wasn't. (I hated essay questions, too.) With fill-in-the-blank, you always know when you're done.

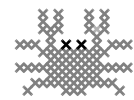
It turns out that knitting is actually quite grid-like at heart. In the plainest knitting, each stitch in one row has one corresponding stitch in the next, right up the line. Any time you tweak that grid by changing the total number of loops on the needle, it makes the piece narrower or wider, as well as (depending on the method) making an extra bump, or a hole, or slanting the stitches left or right.... Really just about anything is allowable in knitting—even dropping stitches—as long as you want the particular effect that creates.

You can knit a tube, then cut the material into flat pieces. You can knit a flat piece and join the edges for a tube. Clifford Stoll sells hand-knit Klein bottles. In her *Knitter's Almanac* Elizabeth Zimmerman explains how to make a piece with one yarn, in one pass, one layer thick around all four edges and two separate layers in the middle. Dave Howell looked at my sample and said "You've knit a ravioli.... That's impossible."

Doing impossible things is fun!



Needlepoint



Cross Stitch

"You Made Cloth!"

At the Portland Potlatch in 1996, the Year it Froze (*and thawed, and wasn't that a time!*) I looked around during a panel. I saw one person tatting, another embroidering, Miriam Volpin braiding beads into someone's hair, Elise doing a hair wrap for Miriam—oh, the fiber arts were in full bloom in that room! And I said "I want to play too."

So I did. I started knitting.

Let's distinguish briefly between various handcrafts. If someone has just one needle-thingy with a hook on one end, they're doing crochet. Crochet involves pulling a new loop of yarn through the loop you just made. Knitting takes two needles, or else one long needle with two points *pretending* to be two needles and sharing the middle part between them like two kids on a tin-can phone. In knitting, you draw the new loop of yarn with one needle through a previous loop that's been waiting around for you on the *other* needle, and stash this new loop on the *first* needle for when you come back in the other direction for the next row. Got that?

Other crafts use sewing-type needles, with eyes. Needlepoint is done with woolly yarn on a starched-stiff canvas grid, while embroidery is freeform, done with glossy threads, or floss, on whatever cloth you like. Cross-stitch is anal-retentive embroidery. Our cover for Bento 9 was faux cross-stitch.

Tatting involves teeny-tiny knots and I don't go there.

Even the simplest knitting impresses the heck out of people, for some reason. Throw in a few cables (those braid things on heavy fishermen's sweaters, quite simple really) and they swoon at your feet. As with anything, you can get into it as deeply as you like. Some of the impossible things take practice, and experience. Others are more a question of finding the right instructions.

Just now I'm wallowing around quite happily trying techniques from a collection of shawl patterns from *Knitter's Magazine*. Can you imagine knitting a whole big square from just three cast on stitches, and not having anything to bind off either? Trust me, this is magic! Good magic! The shawl book also gives specifics for how to *attach* the lacy borders, unlike my other books. There's a lamentable tendency to shrug off the finishing stages with the knitting equivalent of "Season to taste; bake until done."

Knitting can be social. I haven't really gotten into that aspect, although many yarn shops have walk-in "stitch & bitch" sessions each week. There's Internet chat groups, of course, Web links and mailing lists in staggering profusion. Got a life, thanks!

I like the way my projects can be carried along as I go about living it. Knitting co-exists well with television, lectures, airports, long car trips. At a party, if I'm knitting, a momentary dearth of interesting conversational partners isn't a problem. I'm self-sufficient and at the same time open to interaction. *And* it keeps me away from the cookies!

My first projects have all been lap rugs and baby blankets. (Yes, I'm still intimidated by knitting complex shapes to a particular size, a.k.a. sweaters.) There's a group called Project Linus that organizes donations of handmade blankies to kids in hospitals, foster care, etc.—what a wonderful thing—I've passed some on to them. Thanks to that shawl book I'm going to branch out into frillier, more complex flat rectangles. I'm thinking of some sophisticated evening shawls for the fannish auction circuit.

Maybe I needn't worry about "sophisticated". An item at Wiscon one year brought in a couple hundred dollars and was chosen, by acclaim, as a wedding present for Pat Murphy and Officer Dave. (Teach her to miss a year!)

It was a hand-knit uterus. —KY

"Damn it, I'm not Triplicate Girl!"

The Persistent Rat Gets Published

It's been a little more than a year since I graduated from Clarion West, and what a year it's been.

Clarion, for me, was one of those life-changing experiences. I learned a lot about writing, to be sure. But more important, I learned a lot about myself as a person. Unfortunately, it was rather like looking under a rock.

I worked with a counselor to help me deal with the situation. Over a lot of months and a lot of Kleenex, she helped me to under-

was in the finals for the second quarter of 2001. Fingernail-biting time!

On that same day the mail brought a check from Candas Jane Dorsey, one of my Clarion instructors, for *Land/Space*, an anthology of "prairie science fiction." They didn't have a publisher yet, and the check was not quite as much as I'd been expecting, but what the hell. Another sale!

Three days later I got another call from Hollywood. I'd won Second Prize!

Even second place in the Writers of the Future contest is a very big deal. My second-place finish nets me a cash prize, publication in the annual Writers of the Future anthology (with payment, on top of the prize), an all-expense-paid trip to next year's awards ceremony, a one-week writing workshop with a big-name instructor, and enormous prestige and recognition. Local writer and Clarion West alum Eric Witchey won this year and he tells me "the doors just slam open" for him. And just for the record—yes, it is the *L. Ron Hubbard* Writers of the Future contest, but everyone I have talked to says the Scientologists do not influence the contest or the awards in any way.

Despite the excitement, I continued work on my story for *Apprentice Fantastic*. I finished the first draft and sent it to a few of my writer friends for a quick critique. They gave me a lot of good feedback, and I rewrote the first half, cut the anticlimax,



stand what had happened and what I could do about it. I'm still a work in progress, of course, but I've learned to be more process-oriented rather than task-oriented, to be more sensitive to my own feelings as well as others', and to remember that sometimes it's better to be liked than to be right

And I've started selling my fiction.

I don't think it's the counseling that did it, though my counselor did help me with some of my characters. But counseling, practice, and most importantly *time* have let me integrate the things I learned at Clarion—the painful, personal lessons as well as the writing tools and techniques—to the point that my stories, some of them at least, really work.

My first professional sale came in March, to the anthology *Bones of the World* edited by Bruce Holland Rogers. I was chuffed for weeks.

Then in July the dam burst.

On July 12 I got an email from Russell Davis, co-editor (with the ubiquitous Martin H. Greenberg) of *Apprentice Fantastic*. I had read in *Locus* that this anthology had been sold to DAW, and had asked him right after the Westercon if I could contribute, only to be told that it was already full. But now someone had dropped out, and if I could write a 3–5000 word fantasy story about an apprentice by August 1 he would be willing to consider it. No problem, I said, I've been to Clarion, I don't need sleep...

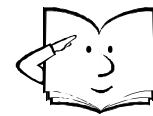
The very next day I got a call from Hollywood. It was Rachel, the administrator of the Writers of the Future contest, telling me I

killed off two characters, and emailed it in. Two days later I got a call from the editor saying he wanted to buy it, but would I please make the climactic chase scene longer and more intense? In one long evening I wrote 900 more words, killed off another character (beware: critique me, and someone dies!), and emailed it in again. On August 4, a little more than a month after I'd first heard of the anthology, it was accepted!

So I've sold four short stories, three in the last month. Not bad for the first year after Clarion. And I keep writing, keep submitting. Just got another rejection today, and I'll put that story back in the mail tomorrow. Another story, which was on its way to Writers of the Future for the following quarter but is no longer eligible (only one prize to a customer) is, I think, even better than the one that won. That one's at *Asimov's* now, and even if Gardner doesn't buy it maybe Gordon Van Gelder will.

I wonder what the next year will bring?

—DDL



P.S. *Bones of the World* should be available from www.sff.net by the time you see this issue of *Bento*. *Land/Space* is seeking a publisher and will probably not see print until 2002 at the earliest. The Writers of the Future award ceremony and publication of the collection will be some time in 2002, probably in August or September. *Apprentice Fantastic* is scheduled for Spring 2002.

Letters, we get letters

We didn't expect many people to actually puzzle out the Chinese Menu Algebra, but I suppose we should have known. First off the starting block...

Teresa Nielsen Hayden

March 20, 2000

Good puzzle, and the typos were perfect. Thanks!

Answers:

...3) Marci has no tolerance whatsoever for spices. Which of the specials should she avoid? Marci should probably avoid all the specials. In fact, she should probably avoid this restaurant altogether, and should think twice before travelling through Qa (wherever that is).

...5) What would you order? I'd order #16, 'oysters "mo" style (alive!)'. There's only so much you can do to an oyster and have it still be alive, and I like raw oysters; so for me it's the safest bet on the menu.

6) Come to think of it, doesn't Italian sound better after all? Italian, definitely. Save the Golden Dingbat for the next time Singer's in town.

Note: Addresses are withheld not to be miserly with the mailing list, but because they go stale faster than we pub.

Lloyd Penney

Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada

March 24, 2000

Let's do a Looney Tunes cast list for Star Wars!

[We started one once. Let's see... Foghorn Leghorn as Obi-wan Kenobi: "Ah say, boy, ah say use, ah say use the Force, boy!" Tasmanian Devil as Chewbacca. Who else?]

Zathras had a friend once but the wheels fell off...friends tell me they saw this little quote on the web several months ago!

[Um, well, yeah, that's where we got it.... All our linos are things actually seen or overheard as we go through this crazy world, "found art" you might say. Sometimes David or I are the creators of the phrase, but it's always something said for communication purposes the first time. Should we be crediting our sources? Do you prefer journalistic completeness, or concise, hit-and-run non sequiturs?]

Terry Garey

March 24, 2000

Kate's musings reminded me of the horrible old days when I worked for a benighted, hellish year for the Pacific Stock Exchange in San Francisco. A delicately reared poet/ child of the sixties has no business accepting a job like that and all I can say now is that I was very naive, poor, and tired of temping.

I learned all sorts of stuff I didn't want to know, like how management gets really pissed when the new white employee lets the Filipino employees know that they can use comp time for med-

Dave Langford

26 March 2000

Like everyone else, I'm sure, we loved the Dingbat Menu feature in the new *Bento*. On her return from work that day, Hazel immediately took a sheet of paper and wrote the alphabet down the left-hand edge. When she'd finished, I showed her the almost identical sheet of paper I'd drawn up earlier, and we marvelled at the synchronicity of it all.

[Of course she did. And you did. You're another of those fan-nish couples that deserve each other (more below).]

Some private language snippets: "Flurgy", meaning sort of sticky and rubbery and maybe gooey, is an import from Hazel's family—those sticky plastic toys that cling to walls and windows are quintessentially flurgy. "Kevinated", used of butter too fridge-cold to be spread, has rather fallen out of use in the many years since the vanishing from the UK fan scene of Kevin Smith, who invariably complained about our butter and was not best pleased when he became an adjective. "Martinique" is still occasionally in use, though, meaning unpunctual to the point of madness, with appointments missed by hours or even days thanks to the intervention of some important pint in a pub, as exemplified by the life and works of Martin Hoare. *[Reminds me of "mexicocity", the quality of being extremely polluted....]*

Reverting to Yog in #10, there's a regular item on my supermarket receipts which looks healthily veggie: Australian Chard. Unfortunately Hazel has realized that this is a wine.

ical and dental appointments, and that it's stupid to drink too much coffee when the nearest clean bathroom is 7 floors away.

Other stuff I didn't want to know seemed to be contained in annual reports from the various companies. The one that finally turned my stomach was that of a major tobacco company, which sweetly and genteelly informed its stockholders that research had shown that there were many young males and females in Africa these days who had sophisticated tastes and disposable income and that the Company was planning on expanding their market into selected areas of Africa that had large cities, in order to saturate this new market before the other tobacco companies thought of it. Isn't that great and hurrah for us!

Pencil cups in the bathrooms. Why didn't I think of that before?

[And a pad of Post-Its. If there's something that has to be addressed first thing tomorrow when you know you'll be bleary, a sticky note left on the bathroom mirror works great.]

Amanda Baker

March 25, 2000

I am listening to BBC Radio 4 as I type, and the twanging title music to John Peel's 'Home Truths', the best fanzine in the mainstream media. He's currently wurduling happily about grandmothers being frogmarched to egg-sucking seminars, and legitimate alternative pronunciations of the plural of the word 'truth'. You might be able to down-load it via www.bbc.co.uk as an audio file, and they're on email (home.truths@bbc.co.uk).

You do realise, I'm going to have to make some Scotchies now. I'm not sure I can get butterscotch morsels, though. I'm sure that butterscotch is a 'hard candy' in the UK, but I get the feeling that you're alluding to a soft, fudgy sweet? [US "butterscotch morsels" are like the chocolate chips we use in Toll House cookies—fingernail-sized, round, flat on the bottom with a little point on the top, and slightly waxy.]

Time for me to go and have half of one, six dozen of the other, and longingly gaze at the left-over curry from last night, which I must save until lunch, to avert the need for numerous trips to purgatory. I've taking up horse-riding lessons instead of purgatory, actually. An hour of rising trot and canter is a damn fine workout, and good sex practise to boot!

Karen Babich

April 24, 2000

My favorite reminder of comparative age in families came when I was talking with my niece, who is seven. My brother is six years older than I am, so that made a huge difference until my mid-twenties. Then he married a woman who was younger than me, and the difference in status pretty much went away. Anyway, my brother (her dad) had been mad at me a few days earlier, and I mentioned to Alicia that he and I needed to pretend we were grownups and try to sort out the problem. "But you *are* grownups," she said. "Well..." "You're grownups." She was polite but firm. "Well, yeah, but I'm still his little sister." She understood that because she has a little brother, who is two.

To make things a bit weirder, we can add in things like uncertainty. My particular favorite is the Schrodinger's Cat paradox. I apply this to aging as follows: imagine a man in a box with no mirror. At some point in time a mirror may or may not appear. If it does, he will notice that he is now bald (and hence a major time event will occur). However, if the mirror doesn't appear, then he continues to be a young man. Using Schrodinger's stuff, the man is really in two different states at the same time *and* the act of determining which state the man is in could actually force the man into a particular state.... The man might physically see that he has no hair, but mentally refuse to process such. In which case he remains "young". Alternatively, he could see hair, but mentally process that as "thinning" and become "old". Until someone outside makes an observation about his hair, the man is in an indeterminate state—but which came first? Was the man old before the comment or did the comment cause him to age?

"We have always been at war with Apatosaurus."

Joseph Nicholas

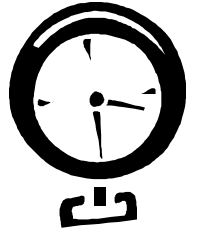
March 17, 2000

I was mordantly amused by your read-across of recent developments in the internet in terms of Old West pioneers complaining about the influx of greenhorns from back east onto the open rangelands where once herds of buffalo thundered majestically, etc. etc., and perhaps US internet pioneers do see it in very similar terms.

Tim Learmont

June 22, 2000

My notion of age is more of an Einsteinian/Relativistic/Quantum Mechanics kind of thing rather than the "Newtonian" age David talked about. People age at different rates, similar to time being different between someone in an inertial reference, and someone accelerating. To make things worse, sometimes your body is in one time rate and your mind is in another! This, I think, explains old people who act like kids, etc. I think that the number of "time events" you experience does much to explain how "old" you are (think of a "time event" as a time unit—minute/hour/day/year—floating someplace in the time dimension.) Some people seem to use curved time/space and just avoid "time events". Other people seem to use curved time/space to hit many "time events", and so age at a greater rate. I also think that this somewhat explains why women in general "age" at a faster rate than men—women in general have kids or biological clocks which impose "time events". This means that they are more likely to feel "old". Men, on the other hand, can avoid some of these time events by being physically or mentally absent from them. Thus the 50 year old man completely missed the "time events" such as the birth of his kids, their graduating from high school, etc., and so he thinks of himself as just being 25 or 30.



Here, however, the complaints of whatever pioneers there may have been have not been heard at all—doubtless because, internet usage having lagged so far behind the US, there were never very many of them in the first place, and their voices have simply been swamped by the recent explosion in usage which has seen the world and his dog sign up for bigger phone bills and more time in front of another tube.

[Hmmm. If Gaia had a dog, what kind would it be?]

The result of this rapid expansion, here in the UK, is that the internet seems to have changed in very short order from the promise of something that was supposed to be liberating and empowering to a mere electronic shopping mall, with no intervening period of anarchy and play....

I do rather agree with your suggestion that we have a mental image of our appearance which is several years younger than our actual age.... Perhaps this helps explain why I now wear skirts about as often as trousers: because if I can flaunt my shapely legs at all and sundry, it will help me feel younger.

Jerry Kaufman

Seattle, Washington

March 8, 2000

The puzzle was just a little too much work for me, since I'm not really a puzzle fan. Perhaps if I'd solved it, Suzle and I could have avoided that food poisoning....

At Corflu Kate mentioned that part of the Scotchies recipe was ambiguous. It had something to do with the phrase "Add to

wet.” I’ll agree—what’s wet? If you melt the butter and butter-scotch, then add brown sugar and let it cool, wouldn’t it harden up again? I don’t see any other wet ingredients to add the eggs and vanilla to.

[Might harden if you’d simmered it for a while, but we’re not making candy here, at least not deliberately. It also doesn’t have to cool completely—just enough to avoid cooking the egg.]

The ambiguity that someone else caught was reading that phrase as “Add in order to moisten,” which makes just enough sense to confuse things entirely.]

“That cow needs body jewelry.”

Janna Silverstein

Seattle, Washington

March 20, 2000

I especially enjoyed Kate’s essay, “Just Like Mom Used to Make—Revisited.” What a shock of recognition and understanding I had when I read “...the affirmations I found ’round every corner of how much I am my parents’ daughter...” and the lines that follow! When my brother and I went to Las Vegas together last year I suddenly realized that we were speaking in a sort of family shorthand.... We did the silly walk that Mom taught us.... One morning he woke me up by loudly singing the song our dad used to sing on Sunday mornings, the Silverstein signature version of reveille. The teachings of childhood are indelible.

[Heeding the note that Bento is available by editorial whim or for The Unusual, Janna also enclosed squashed pennies from the Pacific Science Center and from Disney’s Tomorrowland. Too cool.]

Brad Foster

Irving, Texas

March 16, 2000

[We asked Brad what “Cow!” means in his and Cindy’s household vocabulary, apropos of his letter last issue.]

That goes back to when we first got together and were dating, getting to know each other. We were driving up the highway and approaching an overpass a little further down the road. There was a truck crossing over, pulling a horse trailer with a cow inside.

Now, this is not that odd of a thing to see when you are driving in the country. We were both adults, we’d certainly seen cows in trailers before. On the other hand, it did catch the eye on a boring stretch of road. So, at the exact same moment, we both raised our hands to point, looked toward the other, and said “cow”.

Talk about knowing in a single instant that you had found the person you were meant to spend the rest of your life with!

Ever since then we have used the expression whenever we see something interesting or unusual that we want to point out to the other. (A corollary would be when we first visited San Francisco and after a few moments decided to simply point out the uninteresting sights, since that would take up much less energy. But San Fran is a special exception.)

Lynne Ann Morse

20 March 2000

If I don’t do this today, I won’t get it done. I’ll start thinking about how to write about my life as entertainingly as you write about yours in Bento, & I get very, very intimidated. (Silly bunny that I am, forgetting the power of voyeurism, conferring a glamor on mostly mundane stuff—but it’s not mundane; I saw it in Bento!)

[Silly bunny indeed! You’re intimidated by us? You with the Irish return address, the gorgeous Dutch husband, and so many wonderful stories of your own to tell? Sigh. We’re all so quick to see others’ strengths and our own weaknesses.]

“I’ve been a Yankers fan since I was a kitten!”

Judith Hanna

March 29, 2000

On private languages, Joseph recalls overhearing a conversation at the New York Corflu in 1990, where Lucy Huntzinger was sharing our room. Jerry Kaufman was asking her what the experience was like, was our conversation intimidatingly intellectual? “Well, no,” said Lucy. “I can’t understand it. Joseph will say something like ‘I am going to do the booping now, dear’, and I think: ‘Do the booping?’ This could mean *anything!*” Jerry later said to Joseph, “You and Judith have the most elaborate private language of any couple I know.” Far too elaborate to provide a glossary.

Brad Foster Illo 2.9” x 4.1”

A little alien having a good hair day

R. Wayne Schmittberger
Editor in Chief, Games Magazine
April 13, 2000

Thank you for sending your “Dinner at the Dingbat Café” puzzle. Unfortunately, I don’t think it’s quite right for us. Even though it’s amusing to read, the puzzle is too straight-forward to solve, simply being a matter of scanning through the menu to find matching words....

*“But I had Indian *last* night!” — Mary Kay Kare,
declining to bid the curry-flavored condoms any higher*

Steve Jeffery
April 27, 2000

Noticed in the piece on Ellison’s *Demon With a Glass Hand* the name Kyben, which jogged a brain cell into synchronic association, having just come across this same name as a fanzine title by Jeff Smith which contained a number of travel articles from James Tiptree Jr. Smith is probably more famous from the 70s as the editor of *Khatru* (which I assume takes its title from a track by Yes, “Siberian Khatru” on the album *Close to the Edge*).

The sayings on the back are, over here, known as Colmanballs, after a column in the magazine *Private Eye* which takes its name from sports commentator David Colman. These are collected in a number of little booklets (I think they’re up to 11 or 12,

Steve Green
August 22, 2000

Note from *Bento* #11’s loccol that Karen Stephenson, like Ann, is in the habit of baptising the family car. Our old Ford (“Elsie the Escort”) departed for the scrapyard last summer, after nine years of fine fannish service, to be replaced by “Cromwell” (a Cavalier; well, we thought it was funny). The best one I’ve heard is John Welling’s old transit “Jean Claude” (as in “Jean Claude Damned Van”).

[The habit of naming cars is widespread, especially among fans, but not universal. Kate’s current car is named Babe, for a melange of reasons; David’s previous car was Cherie (a Mitsubishi Cordia model L—“Cherie Cordia-L,” get it?) and the one before that was Darth Vega. At the time David got Darth there was a spate of Star Wars car names in his area, including R2-VW and The Millennium Hatchback.]

We also heard from

Keith Lofstrom, Susan James, Jae Leslie Adams via a zine review in *nichevo*, **Ian Stockdale, Bill Higgins, Tom Whitmore, Chuq Von Rospach, Jeremy Wilkins** (“quintuple heart bypass surgery”—!), **Cheryl Morgan, Mog Decarnin, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Pamela Boal** (“A stitch in time... makes an SF story”), **Eric Lindsay, Shandra Lynn Bauer, Bob Pownall** (“Doesn’t it have to be your *enemy’s* pancreas for it to qualify as a warrior’s pizza topping?”), **Trinlay Khadro, Lauri-Ann Raymus, and Lynn Corrigan.**

maybe more). One of my favourites of these delightfully tangled metaphors is “the window of opportunity has been blown completely out of the water.” Or how about, “Whether it was a penalty or not, the referee obviously thought otherwise” or “Make or break situations—such as we have here—can sometimes make as well as break” and “the carrot at the end of the rainbow”.

The classic has to be UK motor racing commentator Murray Walker, who manages at least one every time he opens his mouth, and gets an entire chapter to himself in Colmanballs. “And there’s no damage to the car except to the car itself.”

Karen Stephenson
Corvallis, Oregon
May 1, 2000

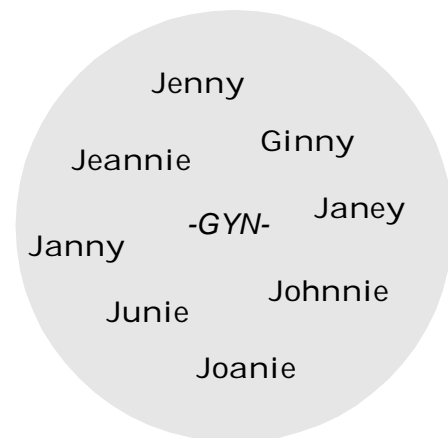
Fiona and I went right out and bought a package of butter-scotch morsels to make Scotchies. They were delightful. Definitely a keeper. Thirty years from now, Fiona or Gillian will probably come home to dig through our cookbook cupboard for the battered and stained copy of *Bento 11* with the recipe for “Scotchies”.... *[That would be the best honor I can think of. Not that this should stop anyone from remembering Bento at Hugo nomination time, if the spirit so moves. Karen also sent a one-page, ingeniously folded “Zeen” with a “Fiona Stephenson original drawing” and some more proverbs:]*

A bird in the hand is one man’s meat.

The road to hell is the spice of life!

A woman’s work gets the grease.

A curious circle of names...



How interesting that for just about any vowel sound you choose, this root (from the Greek for “woman”) yields a valid woman’s name in English. —KY

“I find Jane Austen the most terrifying author in the world.” — K.W. Jeter
