

Rain on Cherry-Blossoms, Issue #3

Drizzlings: Mixed Moss, or, a Lick and a Promise

If all goes well, you will be getting Issue 4 of RoCB not too long after this one; hopefully, a month or two. Why? Because John and I went to Scotland for a week, and boy do I have lots of things to talk about now!

I had most of this issue ready to go before the Scotland trip. I had even planned, originally, to get it out beforehand, so I could have three-issue packets handy to give to members of John's overseas family that I hadn't met yet. However, in the final cut, I decided to err upon the side of sanity and not bother. I'm kind of glad I didn't; it was a nice, relaxed vacation. It was just, in retrospect, what we'd both been needing for months.

So, you might ask, *why* did we go to Scotland? Because John's cousin Helen (hi, Helen!) was getting married, and she was doing it in Edinburgh. Why was she doing it in Edinburgh, when she lives in St. Albans? Well, because the groom's family is largely from there, and the bride's family, in this case, is scattered all over a large part of creation (from Canada to China, and elsewhere), so the largest contiguous chunk was his folks in Edinburgh. That's what I gather, anyway. And it turned out to be quite fun.

This was the first time I'd met most of John's extended family. His mother, father, sister, brother, two grandmothers, one grandfather, and a pair of uncles (one from each side of the family) were the sum total of my experience with them until this recent trip. All the above-mentioned live in North America, probably not by coincidence. There had been two family get-togethers since John and I began being An Item, but I'd managed to miss them both for complex reasons. Helen, in fact, began to call me the Invisible Girlfriend, unswayed in her (facetious) opinion even by

photographic evidence. Well, with that up against me, I *had* to go, didn't I? Besides, it was a great excuse for a vacation. I'd never been off North America before, y'see.

So, that's what you're getting next issue. I'm an awful tease, aren't I? In this issue, you'll find a few nuggets of Interesting Stuff I've Written Since Issue 2 (or, before Issue 2 in some cases, but pulled together, edited, and polished since then). Decidedly mixed moss, but hopefully not an utter waste of time. These pieces are also (by request) examples of some more 'opinionated' writing than I've printed in RoCB before.

Also between my covers (not that RoCB has covers, but when have I ever let facts stand in the way of a lovely metaphor?) this issue are some simply *lovely* illustrations by Sue Mason, a member of the Plokta cabal and celebrated artist from England. She has a pyrography business, so if you like what you see and would like to see more of it burnt onto wooden objects, check out her website at <http://www.plokta.com/woodlore/>. No relation, by the way, so far as I know, to John's Masons.

There has been some talk that I should perhaps begin editing another one of these little newsletters, to showcase the writings of folks I know. An anthology zine, as opposed to this personal effort. Being the PageMaker slut that I have become over the last few years, the prospect of being able to just *edit* without having to create all the content myself from scratch is, I admit, appealing. If you would be interested in (a) subscribing to or (b) contributing to such an effort, or have ideas for its theme, thrust, genre, or format, please do drop me a line at the usual editorial addresses (found, for new subscribers, in the colophon on the next page).



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From the Sketchbook:



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Volume 2, Issue 2

July, 2002

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Subscription Policy:

Issues available in trade, for a tasty bribe, or in exchange for a letter of comment on a previous issue. Back issues \$1 (including postage).

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Here we have a sketch made about this time last year, in John's office. That's the back of his head, his office chair, and some of his workspace (magically de-cluttered through use of the magical incantation, 'I can't draw THAT!!'). I'm actually reasonably pleased with it, all things considered. The perspective isn't too strange, and his pants really did look like that that day: military-surplus fatigues, drawstring-tied shut above athletic socks and sandals. We were probably hiding at his office on a hot weekend day, because his office has both an internet connection and air conditioning.

This Day in History: July 20th, 1969

33 years and a few days ago, a human being set foot on the surface of a planetary body not of his birth for the very first time. Only 12 men (and they were all men) have ever done it. They were all from the United States of America. They did it in six batches of three, with one staying topside, over the course of three and a half years, and since then, no humans have ventured further from Earth than high orbit. I'm not the only one wondering why.

Some claim that we never really landed on the moon at all, that it was all an elaborate hoax. This is, admittedly, a minority opinion; there are considerably fewer moon-landing detractors than holocaust deniers. Most folks agree with me on at least the basic facts: twelve men walked on our moon. But if so many people realize that we did it once, with technology that was so much less advanced than the current state of the art, why haven't we done it again? We have regular space launches, from several countries ... so many that it's almost routine to young children. They don't remember a time when we *didn't* have a space presence, but they also don't remember a time when we actually *went* places up there, did things besides shoot up satellites and neglect space stations. Heck, I don't, not really, though Skylab was still a going concern in my space-mad younger days.

I've had some thoughts on the subject, scattered here and there throughout my life. I'm going to take the opportunity today's date offers to try to pull them all together into a coherent whole, both pros and cons. My question for today: why did we turn our backs on space?

The emotional answer, of course, is a single word: Challenger. When Challenger exploded shortly after launch, taking a civilian with it, all on live TV, the emotional blow led to an immediate (and, ultimately, understandable) 'Space is Dangerous!' reaction. The US government is very sensitive to fears relating to risks to the lives of its citizens. Perhaps too sensitive. The same impulse that leads to neglecting our peacekeeping duties through the UN has also made administrators paranoid about the risks of space travel. Never you mind that the successful missions have greatly outweighed the disasters; the Apollo 1 fire that led to the immolation of astronauts Grissom, White, and Chaffee, and Challenger's midair explosion on live TV have etched themselves on the history of spaceflight in infamy.

Another argument goes, if I might paraphrase from many sources, "Why should we waste money in space when we've got so many starving people down

here?" At first glance, this is not an unreasonable goal, considering just how much space launch vehicles cost, and how much of that cost goes into components (like the Shuttle's boosters) that are not reused. The same argument applies to the brainpower and research time, that could, say, be applied to cancer cures or AIDS drugs or earth-based technologies.

A third answer runs, "Why should we bother? We've got everything we need down here, and there's no point in shooting folks up there just to have little media events and feel all warm and fuzzy that we're Big Explorers conquering the galaxy." I admit freely that this is the argument I can empathize with least; I've never held it, and never really known anyone well who did, so I can only outline it in the sketchiest way.

I'm in the minority, I suppose. I'm a science fiction fan. I was raised by fannish parents. I never had to be convinced that going to space was a good idea; it was a basic assumption of my life as long as I can remember. Perhaps that is why it's taken me so long to get my head around the other side of the argument, to articulate the answers to a completely different question: why on Earth (so to speak), *should* we be in space in the first place?

This one has an emotional answer, too, though it's harder to sum up in one word. Why space? Dreams. Frontiers. Possibilities. The sheer wonder and glory of imagining yourself making a home, living a life, raising *children*, in a gravity that is not Earth's, in a buried colony on Luna or Mars, in a long-haul spaceship whose voyage will last generations. It's really not an answer that appeals to everyone, I suppose, though it's always been my best fantasy. People wouldn't keep writing books about it — and buying the books! — if they didn't agree with me. There's also the wonder of the explorer, as opposed to the colonist: the bold adventurer, or perhaps scientist, pushing the borders of what Man has done and seen and known, wresting truth from the universe, putting footprints on the Moon. I figure there've got to be lots of people who can sympathize with that goal, too, given how well the movie of astronaut Jim Lovett's Apollo 13 experiences did in theatres.

A more pragmatic run of answers (admittedly, often called upon by people who believe fervently in the more emotional argument to sway those who don't) also exists. To an extent, they're really rebuttals of the answers to the question above, but the logic is nonetheless compelling.

First: Money. Yes, research is expensive. So is

making a few Really Big pieces of equipment, some of which are intended to be dropped in the ocean or left in orbit. That money is not, however, being put into suitcases, packed into rockets and shot into space, never to be seen again — it's spent on salaries and materials for people right here on earth, recycled throughout the economy. Additionally, every single solitary expenditure on space research has been repaid many times over through spinoff technologies used for folks here on Earth. Microwave ovens, high-temperature ceramics for bakeware or engines, and self-focusing lenses for cameras all came out of the space program, along with hundreds of other good, basic, useful technologies. Nobody expected we'd end up with autofocus point-and-shoot cameras because we built space probes that had to be able to take lots of pictures without any human intervention on the focus, but we do. Who knows what is yet to spin out of the space program, and the challenges of ramping up for true colonization (which I define as long-term living outside our gravity well)? Certainly communications will experience multiple breakthroughs ... and if you doubt the ability of communications technologies to make a major impact on the everyday American's life, just look at the changes wrought by the recent ubiquity of the internet and cell phones.

Second: why bother? Because we really don't have many frontiers left, except space. There are the oceans, true, but careers in deep-sea oceanography are currently limited to a few thousand folks at a time by practical considerations. Psychologically and socially, frontiers provide us with a safety valve. On a frontier, young folks with big dreams and something to prove can go out and make their fortune, carve out a life separate from their parents and all that came before. Depression's on the rise nowadays (as I know from personal experience). If we had a new frontier, with big ideas to fire the mind, perhaps my little sisters and their generation will have something to fix their eyes on, as they grow, instead of despairing that the world's overcrowded and we're all doomed. We'd also have something to point at, as a country, and say, "Rah, rah, go America!" again, a factor not to be sneered at in our current 'post-nationalistic' society.

Third: the "don't keep all your eggs in one basket" principle. Let's face it, we're starting to have serious worries about the ability of Lots of Human Beings to coexist nicely with the ecosystems of our planet. We're worried about air pollution, about running out of oil, about running out of land to build houses on and land for wild things. There are lots of resources in space. True, none of them are as easy to get to or simple to exploit with minimal equipment as landbound ones, but

the landbound ones are surely getting scarce. Remember those 'asteroid hits the earth' disaster movies that went through a couple summers ago? News flash: if that were to happen, right now, there's very little we could do other than bend over and kiss our asses (as a species) goodbye. The Earth would survive, but dimes get you dollars, humans wouldn't be on it. If we spread our settlement, we spread our risks, of collision, disease, nuclear war, and so on.

Fourth: cool new lifestyles! We have the technology to build a stable, long-term base on the moon right now. We can airproof it, and build the recycling system for air and water and waste, and ship up raw materials every few months to replace the stuff we can't recycle. It's doable. There are scientific things that could be explored in such an environment (mostly related to gravity, stars, and vacuum, for obvious reasons), but there are also completely civilian pastimes — dancers, painters, writers, could all find new inspirations there, easily. Imagine a pas de deux performed by two skilled ballet dancers in an auditorium carved from lunar rock, a sphere fifty feet across, with grablines strung here and there for quick directional changes? Or, dear God, a circus, with trapeze artists, acrobats on trampolines, and clowns? Cirque de la Lune, if you will, in the mold of Cirque du Soleil down here? I'd certainly pay good money for that DVD, and I bet lots of other folks would, too. Of course, I'd also pay for the ticket to watch it live, but I'm in love with the whole concept, and so am perhaps not the most objective consumer. The lunar base would also provide a wonderful jumping-off-point for the rest of the solar system, a place to test and do dry runs and explore concepts for later use.

But really, it all boils down to a willingness to do it. Technology's not the issue. We did it before, with computers that would make a kid raised on Pentiums laugh in stunned disbelief and rocket engines that *hadn't* had the benefit of thirty years of development and use. Money's not the issue. Looked at honestly and with a long enough view, space (and all other basic research, really) turns a profit every time. What's really the issue is the politics, the psychology, and the will. I would like to see a politician run for high office on a space platform. Nearly forty years ago, one did. His name was Kennedy, and he didn't live to see it done, but his speeches (and, truth be told, the martyr effect after his death) helped make it happen. I'd like to see "Men on the moon again within four years!" be a rallying cry in future elections. I don't think I will, somehow, but I'd like to. I think the guy even has a good chance of getting elected, with proper spin-doctors and good research to take the wind out of his detractors' sails. It all comes down to making the commitment ... just like last time.

The Story of My Life (abridged): Brave and Bloody Birth-Giving

I was reading through some web-based news links, and found a story about a high school in Colorado. Apparently, the administration pulled a picture of two girls kissing from the yearbook, with the pretext that if the parents of the girls in question did not know about the relationship beforehand, finding a picture in the yearbook was a poor way to do it. A large number of the students at the school rightly saw this as discrimination against homosexuals (since they wouldn't have, and didn't, pull pictures of boys kissing girls), and staged an enormous same-sex kiss-in — straight kids as well as gay ones. I find this so incredibly hopeful, that we're raising our kids so that they feel safe, and secure enough in their beliefs to do something like this, standing up for what they feel to be The Right Thing.

It also reminded me, when I started thinking about why I was so touched, that no true revolution or rights-giving has ever succeeded if the only people campaigning for it are the ones with no rights. Black folks didn't get the vote (and as much equality as they have now) without white folks standing by their side, taking risks, and believing. Women have never really gotten anything without sympathetic men pointing out to the rest of the herd that those uppity chicks have a real POINT. And it's these sympathizers, I feel, who get short-shafted by history, often, in retrospect.

I was at a women's winter solstice event in Toronto five or six years ago, accompanying John's sister Jo, who wasn't allowed out past midnight by herself downtown at the time, but really wanted to go, when I noticed this tendency for the first time. It was a lovely event, really, full of music and dance and community. But as the night went on, I grew uneasy, and I started to figure out why when we got to the affirmations at midnight. Women stood up, as the spirit moved them, to mention and thank people who helped them become truly alive people: those who generally who helped them feel their power as women, their ability to Do and Be on their own, apart from men or any externally-given framework.

So what was my problem? The whole event was so pro-female as to be effectively (and sometimes, explicitly) anti-male. They were thanking feminist writers, grade school teachers, librarians, mothers, aunts, Sally Ride, movie stars ... but absolutely no men, not even one. I got more and more uncomfortable, and finally thought out a mini-speech of my own, waited for a speaker to sit, and said something about like this:

"I agree with what many of you have said tonight, but I'm not going to repeat the points you've raised

you said it better than I could, anyway. I'd like to thank some people nobody else has mentioned yet. I'd like to thank my best friend in third grade, Raul Silva, who stuck by me on the playground and imagined wondrous worlds of make-believe, even when the other boys called him 'sissy' and 'fag,' who beat him up for committing such treason against his gender as hanging out with a GIRL. I'd like to thank my partner John, for sticking by me through thick and thin, and always reminding me, in ways great and tiny, that someone values me, even when I find it hard to do myself. I'd like to thank my high school biology teacher, Mr. Reliford, for kicking my ass when I didn't do the homework, or slacked off because I was smarter than a lot of the other kids in the class, and thought that somehow meant I was entitled to better grades. He inspired me with a great example of someone I'd like to be when I grew up. I'd like to thank my dad, for never once thinking for a minute that what I could be was limited by my gender — and never letting me think it, either. I'd like to thank all the men who have stood up for women, who have helped us get where we are today, because without them, we'd still be barefoot and pregnant, unable to vote or hold property. I want to thank all the men who believed what we believe, and fought to achieve the things we have today."

There was a kind of uneasy silence for a while; I think a lot of the people in the room didn't know what to make of it. Then someone stood up and thanked Starhawk and Susan Sontag and Molly Ivins, and the event went on. I can only hope, quietly, that what I said meant something to at least one or two of the women who heard it, that perhaps they tried to become inclusionary, instead of exclusionary. Y'see, I'm not really for women's rights, or gay rights, or black rights. I'm for people's rights — for everybody. And I think that particular cause gets lost in the smoke a lot, lately.

I still want to thank all those men, throughout history. And the straights who work for gay rights, and the whites who work for the rights of the pigment-enhanced. And all the people who get ignored for their daily acts of bravery or justice. Big shout-out, folks. Without you, we wouldn't get anything done.

This article's subtitle is a quote from Lois McMaster Bujold's novel Barravar. The main character is remarking that, in the aftermath of the civil war that takes up most of the book, the soldiers who shot and killed will get medals, while the people who tried to save their families, or just keep living, while the madness went on, will probably get entirely ignored by the history books.

Creative Cookery: Wharf Rat

Don't worry, no matter how catholic my tastes in food, I'm not about to send you on a quest for a butcher that carries rodent meat! It's only called Wharf Rat (rather as Welsh Rabbit contains no meat at all, let alone lapine flesh).

The name of this recipe is inspired by an anecdote recounted by Kate Yale in Bento, attributed by her to Andrew Mershon of The Oregonian (confused yet?). To paraphrase, a father became somewhat annoyed with his children's constant "Daddy, what's for dinner?" queries, so one night, he glowered and said meaningfully, "Wharf Rat." They eew!-ed and were sure he wasn't serious, so he added, "Over spaghetti!" and shooed them all out of the kitchen. The dish created that evening became a family tradition, to the point that one of his sons called home from college for the recipe. There is nothing more specific about its contents in the version of the story I have than "chicken thighs simmered in tomato sauce," so when I set out to come up with a dish worthy of the name, I was completely free to improvise. Here's what I came up with.

Needed Equipment:

- one large pot, of suitable size for making spaghetti sauce (multiple quarts)
- length of aluminum foil suitable for lining broiler

Marinade Ingredients:

- 1-2 cups dark, musty red wine (I used burgundy)
- copious amounts of cracked pepper, to taste
- 1-2 teaspoons ground cumin
- small dollop (about 1 tsp) honey
- 1.5 - 2 pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs

Other Ingredients:

- diced onions
- several cans of tomato products [I used one large can of crushed, another large of diced, a medium one of sauce, and a large of stewed, which to added nicely to the Anonymous Chunks factor]
- more cracked pepper (~1 tbsp? to taste)

Personal History: Sex, Gender and Politics

One of the interesting trends I see in modern American history is the increasing fluidity of gender in the 'alternative' or 'tolerant' demographic, coupled with the rigidity of the backlash in more 'mainstream' outlets. As time goes by, and the social system opens up a bit, we seem to be becoming more aware that gender is not a binary, either-or thing ... and that it really never has been. But meanwhile, that very uncertainty triggers a lot of fear on the part of more 'traditional' folks.

- more cumin (~1 tbsp)
- ground ginger (~.75 tbsp)
- powdered garlic (~1.5 tbsp)
- healthy dollop of chili powder (1 tbsp? - to taste)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- about a .75"x.75" cube of fresh ginger, cut into matchsticks
- approx. 1/2 can of Canfield's 50/50 soda (grapefruit-lime; lemon-lime works too)
- quartered button mushrooms, about two generous double-handfuls

Mix all the marinade ingredients (except the chicken thighs) in a plastic bag; add the chicken, and remove as much air as possible before twist-tying or zipping shut. Leave to steep 1-2 hours or overnight, as you choose; rotate and massage several times during this interval. I picked the spices I did to add a gamey flavor and darker color to the chicken thighs (thereby increasing the 'rat' illusion).

About an hour before serving, sautee onions until clear (or however long you have patience for); put in The Big Pot. Add all remaining ingredients, and bring to a simmer, stirring and poking as desired.

40 minutes to an hour before serving, put the chicken thighs on sheet of tinfoil, and broil for 12 minutes on the first side, then flip and broil another 10-15 minutes, or until GOOD and done. No salmonella is allowed in any of *my* recipes, even given the irregular thickness of chicken thighs. Meanwhile, dump the remaining marinade in the Big Pot, and continue to simmer. When the meat is done, cut it up into anonymous bite-sized chunks, and add to the pot. Simmer and thicken until you like the consistency. If you feel particularly diabolical, you can add a quantity of cauliflower florets (frozen works fine) and let them simmer just enough to begin to fall apart - teeny pale rat brains!

Serve over pasta. Feeds about 1 person per half-pound of meat.

Even more interesting is the double or triple standard involved with displaying gender cues in hairstyle, clothes, and the like. Women, for example, are allowed to dress 'male' far more than men are allowed to dress 'female.' In some cases, it doesn't even make them 'unfeminine.' A woman with short hair, no makeup, and wearing a work shirt and jeans can still be considered to be very womanly, whereas a guy with

long, permed, highlighted hair, makeup, and a frilly dress would probably NOT be considered manly by most American viewers. This means that women feel freer to explore their masculine sides, to experiment with power roles and gender ambiguity, at the same time that many men feel trapped into having to act butch to avoid being ostracised (even if they might feel a lot more comfortable being relaxed, sensitive, and yes, perhaps a bit 'feminine').

All this is aside from transgendering and sex-change, though that's just a 'moreso' kind of expression of the same urges. I have several friends in the process of transitioning, one way or the other. In the interests of full disclosure I suppose I should note that I've always felt maleish, inside my head, though I enjoy experimenting with the baggage of femininity. I think perhaps if I had been born into a male body I could quite happily be a flamboyantly gay man, but I have no intention of getting surgery to change the situation. Throughout my childhood, I acted rather tomboyish, and despite my Grandma Beltz here and there trying to teach me more about Being A Lady, my behavior was quite acceptable within the range of 'little girl normal.' I shudder to think what would have happened to a boy my age who wanted to wear dresses and play with dolls and paint and sing and giggle with the girls.

Ostracism so doesn't even cover it, especially in preschool. Therefore, any boys with such tendencies (or even who might explore that side and then come back towards the 'norm' in later life) feel overwhelming pressure to conform, leading to interesting therapist bills later if they find they can't live with the role their anatomy dealt them. There's an amazing amount of inbuilt homophobia and macho-consciousness in what American males have to deal with every single day, and I will say I don't envy them that.

So how do we change this? Well, I think that (as with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and Israel) the only real answer is to raise our children in such a way that they won't grow up to see it as a problem. There are hopeful signs that this is already happening — the acceptance of homosexuality and alternative genders in high schools across the country, for example. It's a slow answer, but it's the only real one. And meanwhile, those of us who are adult now can act to try to challenge those roles, pushing back the boundaries so that there's more safe space for those who come after us. It's a Sisyphean task, and often one that brings scorn from the more conservative elements, but life's all about reshaping the world to better fit the version of it you want to see come about, isn't it?

To Your Scattered Petals Go: Letters to the Editrix

Welcome to the letter column for issue 3. I made an unfortunate typo in the header to this column last time; the online Acrobat-format archive is, in fact, at <http://www.efanzines.com/> and not, as I mistakenly said, .org. There were lots of anecdotes of cooking I had to cut for reasons of space; suffice to say I have a lot of right-brained readers when it comes to food and recipes. If this is your first issue of RoCB, do feel free to drop me a line and let me know what you thought of it. Heck, a large part of why I started doing this was to get neat mail. Not all letters need be for publication, of course. If you wish to send me something else, and that something else is vulnerable to (let's just say for the sake of argument ... hypothetically) heat, please either ship it such that it arrives overnight, or include some method of keeping it cool in the packaging. Really. Non-letter Cool Things are very welcome, but some sense needs to be used in their delivery.

Erika Maria Lacey
Queensland, Australia

I thought that I'd best get cracking onto writing you a letter of comment before I accidentally lost your fanzine behind the couch and not find it until a few months from now. [*Ahh, behind the couch – my proper*

place! Well, I suppose that's better than hearing from a friend that she enjoyed RoCB so much she put it in the bathroom, for reading while indisposed!] Aww, your description of how you got the ring is so cute! Different to how you put it in your online journal; I somehow missed the part where he only gave you a diamond and you went to get the ring designed yourself. [*Yet another update, for those keeping score: the Big Hunk of Carbon is still unset into anything, because when we went to a jewelry store I fell in love with a ring there, and we bought it, and I'm wearing it. The nice jeweler could have drilled out one of the settings bigger, but it would have changed what I adore about the design.*]

I remember back when I was in high school, when I first came to Australia and encountered knowledge of STDs. Of course, they didn't give us proper sex education, so everything I knew for a "fact" was generally wrong, and I was told so many ridiculous things I didn't know what was right and what not. For a period of a few months I covered the seats in public toilets with paper so that I wouldn't catch anything from people. I knew one girl who was so paranoid about catching things she had soap on slivers of paper she'd use to wash her hands, and tried convincing me to do the same. I probably would have except for that it cost money, something that was very scarce at the time. It

wasn't until I began teaching myself over the internet about all sorts of STDs that I realised that half of the things they taught us at school was rather silly, and that the rest is fact with fiction liberally sprinkled in it. No wonder people run around being afraid, if they don't know what is fact and what isn't.

Lloyd Penney
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CANADA

I've printed up issue 2 of Rain on Cherry Blossoms to leisurely read and enjoy with the minimum of eye strain, and the maximum of understanding. *[I recently was informed some of you prefer to receive RoCB in electronic format, instead of on paper; if this is true of you, dear reader, let me know and I'll notate the mailing list accordingly.]* I have a right-brained way of making chili, but then, chili is usually a right-brained food. There's no set recipe, and even if there was, it probably wouldn't work right, anyway. I won't detail the exact way I make it, but I used lean ground beef, fried, well-drained and spiced, canned tomatoes, commercially prepared chili spice mixes, and any or all of the following ingredients ... fresh ground pepper, chopped jalapeno slices, steak spice, poultry seasoning, cocoa, honey, garlic, powdered onion, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, a little mustard, chili powder, and any of another dozen or so sauces, powders or other preparations.

Thank you for the picture of yourself. At most of the times I've been at Worldcon, if it hadn't been for names printed large on name badges, I could walk past most of those active in fanzine fandom, and not know them. Sometimes, a thumbnail photo beside the loc would help pin a face to the name. You'll be at Torcon 3? Great! So will I, free and clear of responsibilities, and ready to party all five. *[Yup, Worldcon 2003, here I come. Between now and then my planned cons are: ConChord, OVFF, Windycon, GAFilk, CapriCon, - they made me filk head again! - Consonance, perhaps Corflu, and DucKon. Also, next year May, John and I are getting married. I keep telling him not to dub it WeddingCon, since that's been done, but the urge is strong.]* To "prepare" myself for the Lord of the Rings movie, I re-read Fellowship of the Ring. It had been more than ten years since I'd last read it, and about seventeen since I'd first read it. While I didn't get into it as much as before, I still found myself immersed in the vistas of the journey, the nuances of the characters and the thrill of the adventure. This return to a little goshwow was quite enjoyable. And then came the movie, which added even more. The movie rushed me back through the movie, and while there were some things not in the movie that I missed, like the stays at the homes of Farmer Maggot and Tom Bombadil, what they did put in the movie was well done. I am awaiting the second movie, and I shall read The Two Towers in preparation.

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Airlie Beach, QLD
Australia

Thanks for the copy of your fanzine. You certainly started well with the description of your reactions to the multiple, mystery Christmas presents. Congratulations. Views on AIDS seem to vary greatly from country to country. Given there is neither vaccine nor cure, and that extensive (and expensive) multiple drug treatment only slows it down, I think it remains a considerable threat in developed countries. In places like Africa, where it is now widespread among the general population in many areas, the death toll is out of control. Likewise, TB is on the way back. Antibiotic resistant strains are common, and there are already examples resistant to last ditch varieties of antibiotics. TB could come back with a vengeance. On cooking, Jean has just found us a diet that consists of bread and water, minus the bread. One day of trying it, and I'm ready to bite the head off whippets. What is worse, she has a whole week of it planned, and the food choices tomorrow are even worse than today. On the other hand, I really should make an effort not to read cooking columns when I'm hungry. Wonder what I can make of fresh fruit, which is all I'm allowed today. The weather has stopped any of the stone fruits being available, and I'm not allowed bananas. I've had apples, grapes and watermelon, and that is real boring. I should have bought some strawberries and oranges. Those old archives on the internet probably will prove a bad move. All our faults revealed, to anyone with a search engine. On the other hand, who cares? "Privacy is dead", as Bill Joy pointed out.

Fred Lerner
White River Junction, VT

Thank you for Rain on Cherry Blossoms. I've enjoyed the first two issues, and hope to see more. I've put you on my Lofgeornost mailing list. I agree with your comments on cooking, but I'm not sure about your proposal that "everyone should be taught to cook by the seat of their pants before being allowed to rely upon recipe books." I think that a beginning cook needs the confidence that mastering a few simple recipes provides; and it's only after a few successes in the kitchen that one can begin to appreciate the art of culinary improvisation. At least that was my experience. Once I had learned what The College Cookbook had to teach me, I was receptive to more imaginative lessons.

For me the two great inspirations have been Edward Espe Brown and Robert Farrar Capon. Brown's Tassajara Cooking calls itself "a vegetarian cooking book" and offers a Zen approach to food preparation as well it should, originating in a Zen monastery. I say "food preparation" deliberately, for one thing I have learned from Brown is the importance of cutting and shaping the ingredients to be used. Father Capon's

magnum opus is The Supper of the Lamb, which is subtitled "a culinary reflection." It purports to offer a single recipe "lamb for eight persons four times" but it is really an extended meditation on the purposes and methods of cooking and eating. As you might expect from an Anglican priest, Father Capon looks upon the preparation and consumption of food as a sacrament, and as such not something to be performed sloppily. As a Jew accustomed to the notion that all the acts of mundane life partake of the sacred, I find myself in complete agreement with him. The Supper of the Lamb is a beautiful book, and a witty one, and from it I have learned a little bit of how to think of myself as a cook and how to approach the process of cookery. That being said, I must tell you that I still use conventional cookbooks, though I often modify the recipes. I have to: we keep a kosher kitchen.

Jerry Kaufman
Seattle, WA

Interesting comments on AIDS. Feel free to scare any Kids Today you want to - they still need to be careful. AIDS, as you say, is "treatable," but the treatment is still not a cure, and involves a complicated regimen and great expense. And the treatment itself might be poisonous in the long run. There are lots of other sexually transmitted diseases, too, and I understand they're on the increase as people relax about the dangers of AIDS. I think that AIDS had an unexpected and ultimately positive effect on gay culture - it made gay people come out more, be more upfront about what sexual practices involved, feel like more of a community. Though it gave fuel to the people who thought homosexuality is a sin and should be a crime, it also showed more people that gays are just other people with different practices and customs. I think that the education about being gay that resulted from combating both AIDS and the fears around it, has led to more general acceptance of gay men and women. I skipped over the recipe, but read your comments afterward. I don't cook very much, and am lucky that Suzle does. She learned from her mother, who was born in Northern Italy, to make some wonderful dishes, and to be able to improvise interestingly from pantry ingredients and leftovers.

Better make your comment to me, "See you at Torcon?" I'm not yet sure we'll be there - in fact, based on past performance, we're more likely to get to Corflu, in Madison next year, than Torcon. Oh, dear - I think I need to swear off comments on Lord of the Rings. I just wrote similar remarks on the book in a letter to Plokta. Very similar remarks, with new comments on the movie. (I've been to see it twice now.) Perhaps by the next issue, I'll have something in your "In Trade" listing. By the way, it's very unlikely that you received Bento #1, as David and Kate have gone into double digits. (That makes Bento eligible for a Hugo, and I hope my nomination put them on the ballot.) *[I often consider*

electronic editions I have read and enjoyed, and that cause me to strike up a subscription with a given fanziner, to be 'in trade', even though they weren't sent to me on paper.]

Dave Weingart
Farmingdale, NY

Hmm..do you really cook that way? I mean, milk in meatloaf? *grin* *[Y'know, Dave, some of us don't need to worry about kashrut, you know. *grin* I'm kind of baffled, myself, by how one would make meatloaf without milk; use some other liquid, I presume. One could also substitute ground turkey quite handily for the beef in my recipe.]*

David Shallcross
Randolph, NJ

Dear Editrix: Thanks for Rain on Cherry-Blossoms #1 and 2. I have enjoyed them. With respect to the literary kisses of death — I've been working my way through this year's Hugo Award (TM) novel nominees. The Connie Willis entry, Passages I think it is, files under "way too long". I didn't have a problem with American Gods, but I enjoy the tension of temporarily unresolved obscure references. *[Connie Willis ... I have a love/hate relationship with her work. I adored the first few, and then started to realize just how overblown the 'Willisness' can get in certain individual cases (Passage, in my opinion, being one of them). I've been having to read it in half-hour chunks.]* W.R.T. the Challenger disaster, I was at graduate school at the time, and heard about it sometime in the afternoon. Classic denial; this couldn't have happened. It did seem like the death of a dream. Nothing really hit like it until the World Trade Center, which had many more people, and which I did not believe, even though I could see the smoke plume on my way to work. On a happier note, congratulations on your engagement. Go ahead, write bubbly Victorian love poetry. I would have thought one could get anthracite at a rock shop, but perhaps not. Or maybe only in Pennsylvania. *[You can get very pretty 'specimens' of it - but not just plain chunks of workmanlike coal, and not for a reasonable price.]* Keep up the good work.

WAHF: Margaret Middleton, Betty Jean Harper (who also included a lovely black-on-green portrait of Abe Lincoln, in the interests of encouraging me to keep her on the mailing list, I suppose. Never let it be said I'm immune to bribery!), and D. Sherwood from Swansea in Wales, who sent me some lovely sheep's cheese and a box of biscuits.. The LoCs were pretty thin this time. How can I possibly give you warm fuzzies by mentioning your name in print if you don't write me? I ask you!

In Trade: Peregrine Nations #4, Bitterman 1, East Village Inky #15, Bento #12, Gonzo History Project #2, A Bijou Ploktette, S'ngac 1-3, Xenofilkia.

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