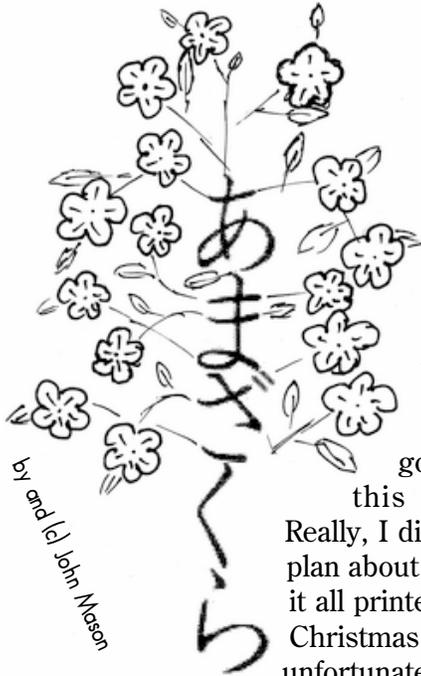


Rain on Cherry-Blossoms, Issue 2

March, 2002



rain-wet grass
beneath the cherry tree
scattered blossoms

- Sue Mill, as posted on <http://www.worldhaikureview.org/>

Drizzlings: missed deadlines, unexpected joys

I thought I was going to be finished with this issue in December. Really, I did. I had this wonderful plan about how I was going to get it all printed up in time to take to Christmas family events with me; unfortunately, it didn't happen that way. Between one thing and another, I got about half the issue firmly in the can, and then lost steam. Ahhwell, I thought, no harm done. As it turned out, it's a good thing I didn't finalize this in time for Christmas, because then I'd have had to completely redo the front page. Why? My dear, darling John, live-in partner of 8 years as of this coming May, gave me something rather unusual for Christmas.

It was a fairly heavy box, well-wrapped and sealed neatly with packing tape under the paper. Knowing my family tradition (and how well he follows it), I didn't for a moment trust what was printed on the box. Inside I found a red-and-white funfur Christmas stocking, of the quintessential shape, full of little wrapped packages. *What fun!* I thought, and proceeded to make him open my present to him first. I had given him a quite innovative little multitool, which unfolded into a hammer, and (as I expected), he loved it. Full of the warmth that comes with giving a good gift, I started to unwrap my little stocking-stuffers.

Right on top was a squishy one that proved, upon opening, to be a pair of black chenille stretchy gloves - practical, pretty, and fuzzy, all at once; then there were some accessories for my Game Boy handheld videogame player. Next, however, were a whole bunch of little hard items, all the same. I unwrapped one, and found it to be an individually-wrapped charcoal briquette. Apparently, in these diminished days, it's perishingly hard to get your hands on real coal, even in a state (such as Illinois) which produces it for export.

I began simply checking the bits by feel, since unwrapping all the briquettes would be unnecessarily messy and tedious, as I worked my way down through the stocking. John assured me, with a manic gleam in his eye, that there were indeed non-charcoal presents remaining, so like a good little trouper I sorted through for them.

Right in the toe was a present that felt different. It was smaller than a briquette, and harder, and cylindrical. I unwrapped it, and found a diamond sparkling back at me from its protective foam-filled box.

I should digress here, briefly, to give some history on the subject of The M Word between us. On our third anniversary, poor dear clueless John faked me out rather badly, if completely by accident. He gave me a silk blouse for our anniversary, and as I was about to bustle off and put it on, he told me to feel about in the tissue paper, as there was another present as well. It was a small velvet box ... which contained earrings. It took me over a year to even be able to talk to him about what I had *thought* was in the box, and the letdown afterwards when I realized that wasn't anywhere on his mind.

You can see why I didn't make any running jumps towards conclusions this Christmas, then. After a brief, half-joking conversation while I admired my New Sparklie, John said "I'm sorry there isn't a ring," half-diffidently, "But I thought that, well, if you're going to be wearing it the rest of your life, you should have some say in what it looks like."

We are now officially affianced. Betrothed. Promised. I still almost can't believe it, and it's months later. I get giddy just thinking about having a fiancée ... a promised husband. It makes me want to write weirdly bubbly Victorian love poetry, for goodness' sake! But I'll enjoy it while the urge remains, and hold him close, and smile. A lot.

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From the Sketchbook:

A blast from my artistic past. The perspective's definitely off in spots (the chair was NOT that deep!), and any unflattering implication about John's nose is entirely due to my own lack of skill! I did much of this sketch without looking at the paper, as an exercise.



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Web Archive:

<http://www.efanzines.com/Rain/index.html>

Email:

eloise@ripco.com

Snailmail Address:

Eloise Beltz-Decker
1519 W. Taylor St., #2
Chicago, IL 60607-4015

Editor's Websites:

<http://www.ripco.com/~eloise> & <http://www.fishdragon.com/>

Personal History: Sex and Death

For those of you just joining our subscription list, I should note that the goal of the Personal History column is to look at how some events have affected the importance of issues and mental attitudes for people my age, versus people older or younger. It's just what it says it is - history, made personal, because at root, all history is stories, and people.

My kid sisters (and others of their age - the cohort entering high school soon) will probably have a different view of sex than I did, once they get there. I was brought up with an inquiring turn of mind, with a mom, dad, and stepmom who'd answer any question I asked, honestly, and at any level of detail I was willing to investigate. I also read an awful lot of Robert Heinlein's books at an earlyish age, which gave me rather tolerant views of sexuality. This is my baseline; and for all I know Kids Today (if you'll permit me to be curmudgeonly) may have a similar one.

However, there's one major influence on my early sex life that they're not going to have, or at least, not the same way. AIDS. Not AIDS as it is today (a treatable but bad disease, easily prevented with condoms, whose victims are ordinary folk of the sort you meet every day). I mean AIDS in the mid-eighties: a sudden, out-of-nowhere unknown killer that at first seemed to pick on prostitutes, addicts, and gay men, and therefore was a disease of the immoral. I'm not saying it's true, I'm just saying this is what an eight-year-old heard. AIDS wasn't really real for me, or a lot of other folks my age, until Ryan White got it. Remember Ryan White? Middle-class suburban kid, about my age, who suddenly (because he was hemophiliac and the blood was tainted) got AIDS. If *he* could get it, anyone was at risk. You never knew what could be behind a bush, around the next corner - it might be a madman who put dirty needles on public toilet seats to try to give the disease to as many people as possible.

Gradually more information got out - good information - on how transmission could really be prevented or avoided, but it still retained that horrible, urban-legendy terror for many of us. Suddenly you were expected to interrogate potential sex partners. How do you ask a high school boy how many girls - or boys! - he's slept with? How do you get a straight answer out of him? But if you don't, you might DIE, horribly and in great pain. And looking really rocky, too, while we're on the subject. Big brown blotches and all skinny and old-looking. So a lot of kids didn't ask, and a lot of girls didn't ask their boyfriends to use condoms, because they couldn't handle it, didn't know how to say, "Look,

I don't know if you know, but there's this disease out there and we need to be safe." A lot of them got sick.

The parish priest at my grade school ministered to AIDS victims. It was a wonderful cause, we all supported him, even the conservative members of the congregation. "He's ministering to the sick, at risk of his own health," they said, back when some people still thought you could catch AIDS from doorknobs. "How saintly." Then the word got around better that only blood contact or sex could pass it, and they relaxed, still supporting him. And then he got it - I don't know how, probably a mishap with a needle or something - but about half the older members of our congregation couldn't handle it, because the 'AIDS = Gay Sex' thing was so prevalent in everyone's mind at the time. A priest with AIDS ... he MUST have been doing something wrong, to DESERVE getting sick, mustn't he? And so he convalesced and died in our rectory, with many of his oldest friends deserting him. We couldn't handle it. We didn't know how to cope. If it happened now, the reaction would be very different - but it didn't.

This is something I don't think kids coming of age in the late 90s and early 2000s are going to 'get,' in a visceral way, the same way I don't really understand how terrifying tuberculosis, polio, and influenza were to my grandfather (he lost a sibling each to TB and the early-1900s flu epidemic, and had a brother who limped all his life). Nowadays, AIDS is bad, but treatable, and we all know how to do our best to avoid it. Sure, condoms aren't 100%, and sometimes they break, but at least you have something constructive to do. Sex can be wholesome again, instead of furtive and terrified, full of illicit passion. Ok, so we've still got illicit passion, it's just different illicit passion ... Sometimes I wonder what the next big Terror Disease is going to be. Cancer is still almost as scary as it was when I was little, but somehow it's not the same. If the Taliban goings-on are our modern Cuban Missile Crisis, I wonder what's the next TB, the next AIDS?

It's not that I want to scare the shit out of Kids Today - in some ways, it's good that they missed the mid-eighties AIDS confusion, its immediate effect on the gay movement, and all the neuroses that sprang from it. Still, their outlook on sex will be as different from mine, as alien, as that of the characters in the movie 'Fast Times at Ridgemont High,' which is set in the mini-generation just prior to mine: the ones who were already grown up and screwing when we found out about Ryan White.

Creative Cookery: Right-Brained Meatloaf

Someone recently made appreciative noises when I shared an outline of a dinner I'd made, and asked how I got to be such a 'good cook.' I don't consider myself a gourmet, but looking at it objectively, part of the reason I make good food is that I was taught that experimentation with food is not only not wrong, but quite fun, and given free rein in my mom's kitchen for years. She did reserve veto rights in the interests of keeping it edible. I think a concrete example will help; here's the meatloaf recipe I use. More discussion of theory and method follow it.

Right-Brain Meatloaf

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit

Ingredients:

- About a pound and a half of ground meat
- Bread (WonderTM or equiv. is perfect, but anything you have will work. Stale is, by the way, ideal.)
- Milk
- Eggs
- one or more from List A (liquid flavors)
- one or more from List B (powders and spices)
- chopped onions/chopped garlic/minced ginger
- A 9-inch loaf pan
- 1/2 cup boiling water

List A: wine, worchestershire, vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, barbecue sauce, jelly or preserves, honey, other liquid condiments.

List B: garlic powder, ginger, pepper, salt, cumin, curry, celery seed, Mrs. Dash, fresh herbs, other powdered spices or condiments.

I find that about four slices of bread and two eggs per two pounds of meat works well, but the proportions can vary. The volume of Bread Gook should be slightly less than the volume of ground meat for the texture I prefer; less bread gives you a more crumbly, meaty meatloaf, while more bread makes it more loafy and a little lighter, though nicely dense.

Cut bread into cubes about the size of a US quarter (exactness doesn't matter - shredding works too). Oatmeal or bread crumbs can also be substituted for cut-up bread. Place in bowl (make it a biggish one - all mixing occurs in this bowl) with milk and eggs. You want about an equal volume of bread and milk/egg gook; if in doubt, use less milk and add it later if it needs it. Also at this time, you can put the liquid flavors and powders and spices into the mixture. Knead it around, making sure the bread gets thoroughly wet on all sides; leave to soak until gook is absorbed. It should squish satisfyingly when you grab a handful, but not be standing in liquid.

Add meat, onions, and/or garlic. Knead around with fingers until it all holds together, mostly, and has a nice even texture (about five minutes, but don't rush it - this is the fun part. Edible mudpies!) Put mixture into loaf pan; press down evenly all around to remove bubbles. Use fingertips to make a small moat around the outside edge of the pan, and a furrow down the center, parallel with the long dimension (like the slice on the top of fancy loaves of bread). Put a line of ketchup or chili sauce in the top slit, and pour the 1/2 cup boiling

water over the surface of the loaf, letting it settle in the moat. Cover with a snug tinfoil hat; bake at 350 degrees for 1-2 hours (about an hour for 2 pounds, more for more), till done. It's done when a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.

Serves 3-5 per two pounds of meat.

Yes, that's really how I cook. Spicing choices are often made by sniffing bottles, and pondering what I feel like today, or what smells nice together. Some that work particularly well get entered in a mental database (for example - strawberry jam and soy sauce do something quite nicely as a chicken marinade when mixed in proportions that give a consistency about like milk). As long as what I'm making includes the ingredients above, I consider it meat loaf. You can have curried eastern lamb loaf, or down-home american Twin Meat Loaves from the Better Homes Cookbook (the original inspiration, and where I learned to make meatloaf from), or nouvelle turkey-pork-cilantro loaf. But it's still all meatloaf, and I still use this recipe.

Lots of medieval recipes look somewhat like this (note that there are no quantities?). This of course makes the lives of historians and medieval reenactors something of a living hell at times, but it also strikes me as wonderful and true. Cooking has long been a living art - an oral tradition, as it were, something you learned by watching your grandmother make her favorite biscuit recipe over and over until some subconscious part of you just *knew* how much lard, flour, and baking powder to use for eight servings.

Modern cooking is, of course, quite different, and many people nowadays are learning to cook from books, without any in-person practice. Most cookbooks are written to suit this kind of cook's needs very poorly, although they claim to be aimed right at them. They give a lot of individual, specific recipes, with precise amounts and sometimes highly-specialized ingredients. But what they don't teach, and don't even acknowledge, is how to play with your food. How to learn what can be substituted for what and when (don't ever, ever add anything wet to a baked-dough recipe, for instance, unless you know what you're doing). How to choose spices. How to experiment without making an inedible dinner. I had to teach myself how to cook with wine over a long period, with several train-wrecks along the way.

So, what are my rules? These are not completely hard and fast, but I do live by them in the main. Firstly: every main dish should have a Hot, a Sweet, a Sour,

and a Savory flavor in them. Hots are things that taste hot or spicy, and include pepper, cayenne, chili powder, some curry powders, some mustards. Sweets include, well, sweet things. Honey, corn syrup, maple syrup, jellies, jams, preserves, soda (don't laugh, Coca-Cola makes a great marinade, and lemon-lime pops are nice on chicken). Sours are usually things that are acidic: lemon juice, vinegar, soy sauce, worchestershire sauce or wine (both of which are also Savories), orange juice (which is also a Sweet). Savories include things with a warm, mouth-filling kind of flavor: garlic, ginger, ketchup (don't laugh), poultry seasoning, vanilla extract (esp. good on beef, though you should go easy if you don't want your dinner smelling like Christmas cookies), sage, cumin. Sometimes I use more than one of each of these, but if you start putting too many different flavors in, it can get muddy. For simple cooking, I try to stick to the formula, and it works very well. Obviously you have to pay attention to exactly what you're using, make sure it meshes well, and don't use so much that any one thing becomes overpowering. When in doubt, use less, and when you taste the final dish decide if more needs to be used next time.

I think everyone should be taught to cook by the seat of their pants before being allowed to rely upon recipe books; they're just so darn limiting. Some people never learn to cook WITHOUT a recipe, and that's just a crying shame. Sure, experiments can flop, but you can also find really interesting combinations that you would never have thought of before. Learning what things work the same way in recipes is a great place to start. Cut-up bread, bread crumbs, oatmeal, leftover rice, and cooked potatoes are all starches that absorb liquid and help thicken things - and any of those can be used in my meatloaf recipe. Things you like to eat or drink can be used as condiments or flavorings in marinades or casseroles; soda pop is a great example of this. Heck, people cook with wine today because some innovative cook applied this principle long ago. "Gee, Titus, I think I'll try slopping some of this new Ostian vintage into my fish stew tonight. Mmmmm. That tastes nice!" Crumbled potato chips can make an interesting topping for casseroles, or crusty top layer for broiled meats. Don't dismiss an ingredient just because it's modern or strikes you as funny - it could be your new Secret Weapon!

This isn't to say I dislike cookbooks. They're useful for ideas - for things that other people have experimented to find. Broadening one's research tree is always a good idea. Besides, they're great for finding the answers to questions like "How long do I cook this turkey if it weighs 7 pounds?" and "What kinds of flavors are usually used in Italian cooking?" Just, please, don't handcuff yourself to your cookbooks and fear to tread outside their familiar borders. Come take a walk in the woods with me. We'll Get Messy, and we'll probably Make Mistakes, but you won't go home hungry.

What I'm Reading: Shrinking the Cat

I was feeding my quirky-nonfiction addiction in my last order from Amazon.com when Sue Hubbell's Shrinking the Cat: Genetic Engineering Before We Knew About Genes bubbled to the top of the 'buy it' queue. I read an excerpt from it the previous month in Natural History magazine about apple genetics (which, by the way, are *hellishly* complex - you thought mouse coat colors were bad? Ok, so you probably didn't, but I sure did. Worst grade-school science-fair project topic I ever picked, though the teacher gave me points for unintentional ambition), and it looked interesting.

Wow, was it. It's exactly the kind of science writing we need more of - an impassioned amateur, using nice plain language and *explaining* things with concrete examples. Actually, some of her explanations got rather more basic than I, as a long-time biogeek, needed or wanted, but I could skim until she got back to the interesting stuff (and I acknowledge that many people would need those explanations).

So what is it about? It's about the fact that humanity as a whole has been modifying animals and plants, and creating new, unnatural species since sometime around the dawn of agriculture. Genetic engineering isn't a new, frightening, doomsday technology - it's just a faster, more flexible way to do the same things we've been doing all along. Corn (maize, for the Brits) and silkworms are both sufficiently modified from their wild ancestors that they can no longer breed and grow without human intervention. Apples are something of a special case, since most of the human interventions are to try to KEEP them from recombining genes (the seeds of that apple you just ate, if planted, would likely turn into trees that made apples nothing like the apple you just ate. I told you apples were complicated). Cats, though not completely dependent on humans, are radically different from their wild ancestors, in ways that make them more convenient, pretty, and fun to have around - from our point of view.

This book is really a foreword, four essays, and an afterword, but they do refer to one another here and there, tying it all together. Her examples and anecdotes are charming and quite instructive, and her writing is both appealing and easy to read (I finished the book in two sessions of riding the train to work). Go ye forth and seek it, my loyal minions!

[Ooh, I always wanted minions ...]

To Your Scattered Petals Go: letters to the editrix

So I sent out Issue #1, and lo and behold, about a week later the letters started trickling in. My Master Plan is working! Soon, I shall take over the- ... ahem. Where were we? Letters, yes. Below you will find a smattering of what's fallen into my mailbox since then, edited for content and to run in the time allotted, as the big TV networks always say. I'm exercising Editorial Whim in just what gets printed and what gets cut; I got a lot of good letters. To summarize some of what a *lot* of people wrote, that got cut from them all: I made a lot of really stupid little typos, and some biggish errors. I'll fix them in the online, Adobe Acrobat format archive on <http://efanzines.org/> (no, I'm not telling you what they were - consider it both an ish and a treasure hunt, if you like). Everybody liked it! Or, at least, the folks who thought it stunk on ice didn't write to me. For the record, if you did, feel free to write anyway. The article several people thought was really weak was the one I liked least, so I'm on the right wavelength. I got an awful lot of positive, helpful comments from people who've been doing this considerably longer than I have, which I'll share below for those of you who might want to do something like this in future. The *[bracketed, italicized]* comments are mine.

Because of privacy concerns, I have deleted specific addresses from the electronic edition.

Deirdre nan Dàmh, mka Cairlí Schwilk Norridge, IL 60706

[Entitled: I've Been Rained On By Cherry Blossoms!]

Miss So-and-So Cherry Blossom: out of all the pictures - one of the most important ones you left out was the one with *you* in it, sporting your short 'do!!!! How could you possibly tell us all the goings-on in your life without mentioning (in passing at the very least) the haircut? I have my spies, you know. They tell me things. You owe your fan-base an updated photo of yourself for those of us who can't bask in your warm glow.

[Ok, Deirdre, just for you ... here is an illustration of my current hairstyle. Those of you who don't know me well won't understand the vehemence of her comment until I tell you that before this recent trim - Summer 2001, but that feels recent to me - it was just about down to my tailbone. Currently, it fluctuates between this length and about two inches shorter - and much curlier!]



Don Fitch Covina, CA 91722-3810

[I'm leaving in just this one of the 'oh wow, how neat!' egoboo backpatting sections. I greatly appreciate them, guys! I just think it verges on egomania, or superciliousness, to print them all, so I'm just doing his, especially since it was so helpful and constructive.]

I like the format, & consider it especially appropriate and practical for a perzine such as yours - simple, direct, legible, and skillful in getting as many words as possible into a limited amount of space, without looking *_too_* crowded. (Ted White might suggest using more White

Space - as might I, if this were a genzine - but I think you have your priorities about right. Well, I seem to feel that five sheets of paper calls for two staples, which would mean slightly larger left/center margins, but it's a close call & I'm not fanatical about it.) *[Believe it or not, I intended to use two staples, but Kinko's was going to charge me through the nose for putting them in. Now that I have my very own electric stapler, I can do it myself! Mmm, the joy of office supplies and proper tools. I'm a font slut, too, as will be clear in this issue.]*

I'll try not to comment too closely & exhaustively on everything you say that I find interesting - there's not time for that, and I do get embarrassed when I churn out a LoC longer than the fanzine it's covering. You seem not to be giving free rein to your vaunted Opinionation - which is quite appropriate for a first issue in which the readers are better served by getting a more neutral and general picture of you. Having a Black Belt (inadvertent) in Byzantinely complex style, myself, I greatly enjoy and appreciate your deceptively simple/plain & direct writing style... in which you manage to communicate an astonishingly realistic-seeming & complex (I don't know, yet, how accurate) impression of yourself.

Yup, "just shy of one ounce" is the way to go - especially for a perzine, and I'd suggest not trying for "just shy of two ounces"; ten pages, without much in the way of space-eating Typographic Design or fillos, is just about right to read comfortably at one sitting, and leaves the reader (ideally) wanting just a little bit more... which is much better than having had just a little bit too much. It's best to keep a perzine short, and publish more frequently (even though it's slightly more costly to mail two 1-ounce fanzines than one 2-ounce one).

Arthur D. Hlavaty Yonkers, NY 10704

[Stationery: 'American Psychopathic Association,

Hannibal Lecter, MD, PhD, President. Support Mental Health Or We'll Kill You] I enjoyed your zine, which arrived today, somewhat chewed up. (Envelopes are probably a necessary investment.) *[If I used envelopes I'd have to cut a sheet of actual content, and I'm highly averse to doing so. However, yours was not the only copy of Ish #1 to be mangled by the Paste Orifice, so I am going to be trying a modified strategy this time.]*

Interesting list of kisses of death, and I notice you recognize it as your taste, rather than the laws of the universe. (One person's masturbatory writing is another's handjob.) I am old enough to remember when woman-from-matrilineal-culture-converts-big-buy-from-macho-culture was a delightfully transgressive reversal, rather than its own cliché.

The Challenger memoir was excellent, and reminds me that you should offer to trade with Guy Lillian's zine of that name, if you have not already done so. I was shocked by the crash, but I didn't realize for a while what it had done to the space program. The first dumb reaction was, "That shows we shouldn't send civilians," and without civilians, the program seemed less interesting, and it withered. And we are still all trapped together in an environment at the bottom of a gravity well, with much less will to get out.

R.S. Silverman
Somerville, MA 02143

My favorite bit was the 'Literary Kisses of Death' part. I freely admit that I love the sort of fiction you call 'masturbatory', particularly for the same reason I like reading long descriptive journal entries (when in the right mood) - it gives me insight into the way the author thinks. Oh sure, sometimes it does feel as if the author dropped a huge boring essay into the story, but not always. And sometimes those essays are really neat to read all by themselves. In my opinion, of course. I completely agree about 'angst from nowhere,' though, and I have a good idea as to which Atwood book ticked you off - did the same for me. There's 'in medias res' and then there's lack of context, and one should not be confused for the other! Want to know what I love about books? Character development, specifically, character development that works with the plot, for the plot, and is worked by the plot. I find that children's novels (well, YA novels) are frequently better at this than contemporary adult mainstream fiction, which is sad.

Chris 'Keris' Croughton
Aylesbury, Bucks HP21 7EB
England

[in re my careful trimming of length to cater to postal rates] Ah, but did you add in the weight of the ink? I'm reminded of David Gerrold's When Harlie Was One, where the computer writes letters and puts them

through the company's automated metering system having calculated the theoretical weight and from that the postage, and the designer wonders "Did he round the numbers or did he meter it with a fractional number of cents?" We aren't told in the book.

What wonderful names of your teachers. Mr. Nekrosius sounds as though he came from Neil Gaiman, or perhaps from Hogwarts. (Yes, I have seen the movie. No, I haven't read the books. Yet ...) Your *grandma* had copies of "Analog"? Boy, now I do feel old <g> *[Several of my readers made comments about Grandma's Analog collection, just for the record. The tendency amuses me, but I won't quote all of them in this column.]*

Generic Tropes - On the other hand, David Eddings' Belgariad (5 books) also uses every cliché under the sun, but it works. He's a good storyteller when he tries. The only problem is, he then wrote the same thing all over again in the Malloreon (another 5 books), and then wrote it again from the point of view of the main 'sorceror' figure - and yet again from his daughter's point of view! Oh, and in case the reader still hadn't got the plot, he did another book explaining it. Even worse, he wrote a couple of unrelated series which effectively used the same characters yet again (OK, he filed off the ~~serial numbers~~ names and swapped a few attributes around, but that's about all). Somehow, he managed to get paid for this!

Challenger - I remember that (I was off work that day, for some reason). I watched every repeat that evening, convinced that if I watched it enough times it wouldn't happen. (I know, not logical, but who is at a time like that). It wasn't my first disaster with the space programme, though, I remember waiting for Apollo 13 to come out from behind the moon, and again during re-entry. Much the same as Challenger though with the WTC, it was like a disaster movie, and it was repeated through the evening. Surely this was a film in Orson Welles' style? Sadly, no.

Jerry Kaufman
Seattle, WA 98125

It's great to see new fanzines popping up, especially with the verve yours shows. I look forward to the range of subject matter you propose to cover. I'm glad you wrote a bio of yourself so I can picture who you are as I read. (If you go to Worldcons, Suzle and I will be able to meet you at ConJose.) *[I go to WorldCons - some WorldCons, anyway. But ConJose won't be one of them. See you at TorCon!]*

I don't agree with some of your kisses of death; in some cases they are kisses of life. For instance, from some authors I love what you call "masturbatory

writing," if I understand what you mean. For instance, Nabokov's full of "paradiddles and loops and swirls," as is Gene Wolfe. ("Book of the New Sun" is one of my favorite books.) *[There are reasons I don't like Nabokov and Wolfe. It's a good thing there's such a varied set of tastes, though, when it comes to books. After all, if we all liked the same thing, just think of the haggis shortage!]*

I've recently re-read Tolkien (as have a few other folks I know - preparing for the movie version), and I found that I didn't appreciate his work in the same way I did as a much younger reader. For one thing, I found myself much more aware of the class and race attitudes Tolkien exhibited. For another, I found the dialog much more stilted than I had. I wasn't as able to get into some of the writing as before, because I was much more aware of his attempt to imitate epic works of centuries before. (The tropes are definitely generic, and Tolkien borrowed them from sagas and eddas before him.) Yet I still read on and on, compelled by a power in the books that overrode the flaws and difficulties. I'm also very excited about the upcoming LoTR movies.

Bit Rot: the ghosts of identities past

I don't usually think of myself as an 'old-timer' when it comes to the internet, simply because I'm aware of how very much history and community existed there before I ever learned what 'telnet' was. More and more, though, I realize just how many people have joined up since I did, making me almost by default a curmudgeonly ancient.

I got on the 'net right at the beginning of what my predecessors came to call the Endless September. You see, up till late 1993/early 1994 or so, most people's internet access was via a university-supplied account, leading to a surge in clueless freshmen every September, and a disruption of normal use and conversation until all the kids were properly socialized and taught the rules. In the Endless September, however, the user populations of private providers like Delphi, AOL, Prodigy, and others began to take off exponentially fast. Since private providers don't have the built-in seasonality of university accounts, suddenly it was always September, with continual crops of clueless newbies turning up with the same ignorant mistakes over and over again.

We Also Heard From: Pat Allen, Elizabeth Decker (who thoughtfully also enclosed a school picture and a lovely poem, burgeoning writer that she is, as well as passing her ish around her school), Steve Green, Garrett & Kathy Hampel, Paul Haynie, Erika Lacey, Eric Lindsay, Nyani-Iisha Martin, Margaret Middleton, Lloyd Penney, Cally Soukup (who also bribed me with a brick of really nice sharp cheddar. Mmmm. And to think, in last month's colophon I'd only meant 'tasty' figuratively!), and sundry others who checked in by phone or chatroom without sending a formal letter. Thanks to John Foyster for his unstintingly positive review in eFNAC! Hearing that he was *that* eager to read my next ish was a big spur towards getting it out in a timely fashion.

In Trade: Argentus #1, Bento #1, the Contact! Fanthology, The Cosmic Hairdryer #1 (complete with collectible playing card!) and #2, Derogatory Reference 97, eFNAC 18, Gogenschein 91, Sardine Tin Gods #1, Mimosa 26, Peregrine Nations #1, Plokta 25, Vojo de Vivo 2.

I must say, sending out a fanzine is the best way in the world to get more back - what The Cosmic Hairdryer's Max describes as the 'Get Fanzines Fast!' pyramid scheme. I include fanzines I whose electronic versions I've read and enjoyed, and which spurred me to send a copy of RoCB to their producers, as 'in trade,' even though formally no paper changed hands.

I like to think I socialized fairly fast, as such things go, but the recently-expanded Google archive of older Usenet posts shows otherwise! Luckily, most of my first six online months is still not accessible there (the archive-providers probably weren't archiving the groups I was posting to, or some such), but there are still great swaths of cluelessness available. I was, after all, 17 and perky. Also well-read, talkative, and outspoken. I was made for Usenet, really.

Until I searched on my old email address, I'd forgotten just how many groups I'd explored back then that I don't read now. I remembered, for example, that I was one of a tight-knit clique of friends on alt.alt for over two years (spawning a brief movement to start alt.fan.podgirl in my honor - Eloise the Podgirl was how I signed myself at the time, long story - but my school's news administrator refused to add the group, and, well, if the subject of an alt.fan.* group can't get to it, there's no real point, is there?), but my active participation in rec.puzzles, rec.arts.comics.xbooks (including a play-by-email roleplaying fanfic!), and alt.fan.monty-python (before I got bored with the endless quote cascades)

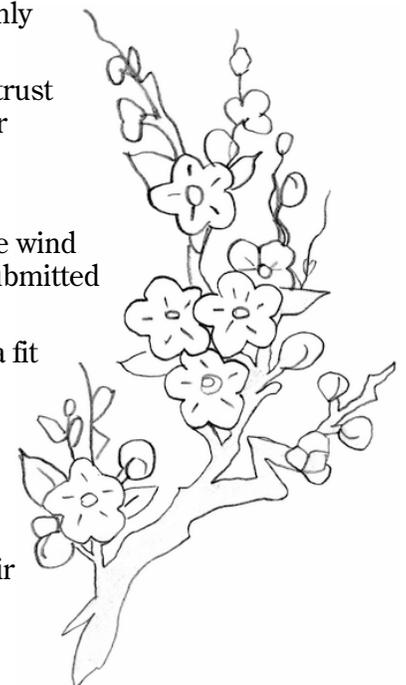
had slipped into the pale mists of the mind where lost thoughts go.

I found the first idiot to ever start a cross-newsgroup, stalkerish flamewar against me (complete with the absolutely classic elements of 'personal, sexual insults,' 'utter refusal to allow anyone to answer the charges,' and 'vehemence to the point of incoherence'). I found lots of rotten puns. I found posts where I showed the angry zeal of a convert against people breaking rules I'd only just learned myself a few months before (nobody slaps down offtopic posts like the newest person on the group). I found things that engender fond nostalgia, and things that make me cringe at what an utter, callow, ignorant KID I was back then.

Humility's a good thing, of course. It keeps us from repeating the mistakes of pride we started out with. Still, I'm kind of glad that the archive is as spotty as it is. Although Eloise's First Usenet Post would be interesting from an archival point of view, I'm somewhat relieved that I won't have to find out it was stupid.

Meanwhile, something else I found in Google's expanded archive was some of my old .signature file quotes. A .signature file (or .sig for short) is appended to each message posted or emailed. I've stripped out the formatting (you don't *really* need to see the ASCII-art boxes made out of asterisks and ampersands that originally surrounded them), and listed some below, oldest first.

-
- Any opinions expressed above should not be construed as being the opinions of my school, employers, or anyone else; they're those of my bird, who gets out at night to hack into my email account. Don't tell anyone, though; I owe her money. :->
 - Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, / And sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all / And sweetest in the gale is heard; and sore must be the storm / That could awash the little bird that kept so many warm. / I've heard it in the chilliest land, and on the strangest sea; / Yet, never, in extremity, it asked a crumb of me. - Emily Dickinson // Build a little birdhouse in your soul ... - They Might Be Giants
 - Aristotle was famous for knowing everything. He taught that the brain exists merely to cool the blood and is not involved in the process of thinking. This is true only of certain persons. - Will Cuppy
 - Beware dragons, for you are crunchy and good with ketchup
 - Oops, my karma seems to have run over your dogma. I'm sorry, were you terribly fond of it?
 - Aunt Em: Hate you, hate Kansas. Taking the dog. Dorothy.
 - "I know what I am, and Betty Ford doesn't take vampires." - Nick Knight
 - ERROR #666: HARD DRIVE POSSESSED. LOAD EXOR.SYS? (Y/N)
 - "I think so; but then, I think that rain is wet, so who am I to judge?" -The Ruler of the Universe
 - Jackdaws love my big sphinx of quartz.
 - If I was the moon, I'd feel bad. We never write. We never call. And we certainly don't come for a visit anymore. - James Lileks
 - "Ginny! Haven't I taught you anything? What have I always told you? Never trust anything that thinks for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain!" - Arthur Weasley to his daughter
 - I'm depressive by nature, but a Pollyanna by choice.
 - "As Maria walked along the beach, the clouds grew angry, the sea raged, the wind howled, and the sand was just plain irritated." - Jeff Kruse of Van Nuys, CA; submitted to the Bulwer-Lytton Contest.
 - "He's having a cheezure! Quick, get the de-fromagulator!" - John Mason, in a fit of silliness in the airport on the way home from FilKONtario 11.
 - "No `Dear,' no `Love, Mom.' Just a new toothbrush, new tube of toothpaste, new bottle of cologne. Sometimes, he thought, real love is silent as well as blind. He began brushing his teeth, wondering if there might not be a song in that someplace." - Stephen King, The Stand
 - Vespasian's banquets were extremely old-fashioned: the waitresses kept their clothes on and he never poisoned the food. - Lindsey Davis, Silver Pigs



Eloise Beltz-Decker, Editor
Rain on Cherry-Blossoms
1519 W. Taylor St., #2
Chicago, IL 60607-4015



Fun with Fillos!

John and I got to sketching on the theme of cherry-blossoms last night, and these were some of the result (along with the sprig on page 9 and new masthead graphic, on the inside). What do you think?

(note for my less-jargon-savvy readers: a fillo is a Filler Illustration)



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