



**Bento 19** is published **August 2007**  
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 for Nippon 2007, the Worldcon in Yokohama, Japan  
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**David and Kate's Amazing Race**

In early December, David got the email. "You have been selected... top 6% of engineering staff... recognition of outstanding achievements... this year's Club Geek... Phuket, Thailand." It would be sometime in February. Kate could come too.

Omigod!

*The Amazing Race* is a "reality show" Kate watches avidly, and has even gotten David interested in. We discuss at length what we would have done better, or differently, or never on this earth so help me, were we in the racers' shoes. The Phuket news came just a few days after a season finale. This colored our perception of the trip....

*The Amazing Race* theme plays (on David's phone) as Team Bento walks through Portland International Airport. Their first instructions: fly 8,150 miles to Changi Airport, Singapore. They've booked a flight via Tokyo that leaves at noon and arrives in Singapore at midnight. Although that's 24 hours body time, David and Kate aren't worried: they know other teams have itineraries connecting from Israel, Santa Clara, Bangalore, Ireland.

At the gate, Team Bento meets Sandra and Joshua, married McAfee employees from Beaverton. The two teams get acquainted, swap sudoku strategies.

On arriving at Changi, Sandra and Joshua go for the Fast Forward. If successful, this will bring them to the Pit Stop in Phuket long before David and Kate. "We don't have to be first on every leg," says Kate. "There's a lot more Race to come."

Taxi to the hotel we'd booked in Little India. "Perak Lodge please, in Perak Road." "Perak Lodge?" "Yes, in Perak Road." "I do not know it." We wrote it down. "Oh! you mean Perak Road!!" At the hotel we crashed until 7am. (Were we on local time now? Ha.)

Singapore was clean and polite, but we saw little sign of the police-state discipline that is said to enforce that. We found the place amazingly cosmopolitan. We heard and saw many languages, a strangely-accented English among them (relic of its

colonial past). It was a smorgasbord of Asian cultures with the subtitles turned on—an Asia Land theme park, but real! Smells of anise, sandalwood, incense, diesel, garbage, grilled meats, sesame oil, and other things less identifiable filled the air. Our room overlooked a computer-parts shop and a mosque in the neighboring Arab quarter.

*In Singapore, teams make their way on foot through the Arts District to historic Raffles Hotel. Raffles, a sprawling relic of Empire, looks like the sort of place James Bond would stay, in a scene early in the film before things start exploding. Parked in the pebbled drive are Jaguars, BMWs, Lexuses... David and Kate look in vain for the Aston Martin. But the cars are just another distraction; the clue envelope is actually held by the fierce Sikh door-man nearby.*

Raffles was completely out of our league as a place to stay. However, we could explore their small museum, and we could lunch in the Tiffin Room, an Indian buffet with at least fifty or sixty different dishes laid out, every one delicious. Even the papadums were perfection! Service was attentive to the point of being oppressive—one waiter dedicated to keeping your water glass brim-full, another to pull out your chair when you rise for another trip to the buffet, and when you return you find a fresh napkin neatly folded on the chair with yet another waiter to unfold it, present it to you, and push in your chair. We paid about fifty

like carousel animals. There was also a large metal box, into which one of the worshippers hurled with great force a coconut which smashed open on the bottom—BOOM!

We made our way to the Maxwell Street hawker centre for lunch. These outdoor food courts are some of the best places to eat in Singapore, with dozens of booths offering Hainanese rice chicken, Indonesian curries, noodle dishes, on and on. A staff of hunchbacks (well okay, two hunchbacks) kept busy clearing the tables. As we left we noticed a large, industrial-looking metal shrine stocked with oranges and incense. No muss no fuss with the gods here.

A brochure we'd picked up indicated that there was a bookstore not far from Maxwell Street. The search led through a hilly neighborhood, quiet and residential, and the serendipitous discovery of Ann Siang Hill Park, basically a series of staircases winding through the back alleys with a few trees between. In crowded Singapore, this is a national park! But it was a bit cooler than the sweltering streets. We did eventually find the bookstore, a tidy little room with collections of typewriters and cameras as well as a fine selection of new books in English, and had a nice chat with the proprietor. Also an antique store—read that with the emphasis on the second word—so crammed with dusty stuff that you literally couldn't walk more than halfway to the back of it.

*The clue envelope is jammed in between a copy of Introduction to Malay and a painted tiffin box. "Proceed by subway to HarbourFront, then board the junk Cheng Ho*

dollars American, each, for the best Indian food we'd ever put in our mouths. Balanced the cost a little by dining that night at a joint with tasty Hong Kong noodles and all the ambiance of a freshly-sheetrocked two-car garage.

Next morning, the escalator from the Chinatown subway station deposited us smack into the middle of a street market, red and gold lanterns everywhere and dozens of booths selling sweets, decorations, and food. Multicultural Singapore calls it "Lunar," not "Chinese," New Year, but still all over town we saw figures of Confucius, boat-shapes which we later learned represent gold ingots, and many many cute pigs (welcome to the Year of the Boar!). It was remarkably like Christmas, right down to the cheesy carols and the guy with the beard.

It says a lot about Singapore that the city's most amazing Hindu temple is located in Chinatown. The Sri Mariamman temple is surrounded by a fence topped with near-life-size ceramic Brahmin bulls, and its gate is at least three stories high and covered with hundreds of brightly-painted figures representing Hindu gods and goddesses. We shucked our shoes and went inside, "ooch-ooch-ooch"ing across the sun-baked paving with as much dignity and respect as possible. David knew just enough about Hinduism to know we should circumambulate in a clockwise direction, so we did that. Inside we found more figures of gods and goddesses, some dressed up in fancy clothes and most surrounded by offerings of money and incense. Several large animal figures on wheels—a horse, a tiger, and a giant rat—looked for all the world

*to Kusu Island. There you must find a tortoise with 'good luck' written on its shell." It includes a ticket for the 3:00 sailing.*

*It is now 1:30.*

*HarbourFront proves to be a gigantic multi-level shopping mall, bustling with holiday shoppers and still more cute New Year pigs. If there's a sailing junk here it's well hidden. David and Kate head in the general direction of the water and keep a sharp eye out.*

*They find the Cheng Ho ticket desk with ten minutes to spare. Team Bento splits up to buy postcards and badly needed cold liquids, but when boarding is called... David's not there!*

*[Zoom in on Kate's panicked face. Cut to commercial.]*

*At the very last moment, David appears. The boat is a floating pagoda festooned with hundreds of golden dragons. They are the last to board.*

*Kusu in Chinese means "tortoise." Legend has it that a tortoise turned itself into an island to save two shipwrecked sailors. On arrival at Kusu Island, David spots a sign for "marble tortoises" and they hurry there. They find two six-foot stone tortoises. Their shells are unadorned, but another sign visible from that point leads to "tortoise sanctuary."*

*The sanctuary is a large oval pit with a pond in the middle. Around the edges are a half-dozen openings, like storm drains, labeled “Tortoise Shelter.” (Storm shelter, fallout shelter, air raid shelter... tortoise shelter??)*

*The pit teems with tortoises. David and Kate circle it, peering at each one. They are of several species, in sizes ranging from saucer to tureen, some stacked like Yertles. Their shells are all plain. Then Kate spots one swimming deep in the pool with red Chinese characters on its shell. Success! They receive the next clue envelope from a saffron-robed monk. “Take a taxi to the Night Safari and see the slow loris. Hours of operation: 6pm to midnight.”*

We got back from our harbor tour with a couple of hours before dark. Surely the mall—actually three huge interconnected ones, they say shopping is Singapore’s national sport—could yield up dinner. At first the selection seemed disappointing: Brotzeit German Bier Bar & Restaurant, Carnivore Brazilian Churrascaria, Ben & Jerry’s...until we spotted “Food Republic, 3rd floor” on the mall map.

3F was in fact the roof, with whimsical sculptures and a large reflecting pool, beyond which stood a distant structure the size of an American supermarket labeled Food Republic. Inside we found an veritable indoor museum of Singapore street food: a collection of clones of some of Singapore’s finest little food shops, determinedly authentic. David had nasi lemak, a selection of power-

fully tasty Indonesian thingies on a pile of rice on a banana leaf. It was one of the best meals of the trip and cost about six bucks American! Kate’s “scissors curry rice” was nearly as good. We headed for the mall’s taxi stand.

The Night Safari at the Singapore zoo was yet another “just like Disneyland, but real!” experience. In this case it was the Jungle Cruise—with real animals. The whole zoo is illuminated by artificial moonlight, bright enough to see the animals and dim enough that they don’t mind. An extra-quiet electric tram took us past many kinds of deer (some close enough to touch), Indian wolves, rhinos, hyenas, giraffes, zebras, elephants, and a capybara, all bopping around their enclosures like business people at lunchtime. Definitely preferable to trying to spy them lying in the shade during the heat of day. We also walked through the flying mammal enclosure, where we spotted a giant flying squirrel (two meters from nose to tail-tip!) and a fruit bat the size of a deflated football, which stared back from an arm’s length away with glittering black eyes and eerily mobile ears. Nearby, sugar gliders—incredibly cute tiny flying squirrels—swarmed all over a keeper, crawling into his shirt as he fed them from a plastic bucket (one fell into the bucket), and a leopard stalked past just six inches from David’s nose. Those were both behind glass, but still. Way cool.

All good things must come to an end, and the actual Club Geek beckoned. The next day, after a brief tour through Little India and the purchase of a few cheap pirated CDs, we took a taxi to the airport for the next leg of our trip.

*Team Bento jogs through Changi airport, tickets in hand. When they get to the check-in counter in good time for their 1:20pm flight, there’s trouble: Kate can’t be located in the system. It turns out that, due to a booking error, Kate and David have tickets for different flights—and hers departed at 8:50am!*

*Tense negotiations with the ticket agent [her face digitally blurred due to refusal to sign the release form] follow. Any seats left on David’s flight? No. Will missing this flight cancel the rest of Kate’s itinerary? Maybe—need to check with the other airline (by phone, they have no office here). The ticket agent books Team Bento on the 4pm flight to Thailand. Could be worse, but they’ve lost three precious hours, and might be delayed still further if they miss their connection in Phuket.*

*David and Kate consider their options. Could they do better at another airline, or should they go through into the secure area, committing to this itinerary? Finally they pass through security into one of the world’s cushiest airports—but all they want is a place to sit and a phone. [Series of shots of David picking up the phone again and again, trying to get through.] Finally, limited success: they reconfirm Kate’s remaining flights, but are unable to contact the hotel in Phuket to arrange pickup from the new flight.*

*Then inspiration strikes. Other racers will no doubt be passing through the airport while Team Bento is waiting. David puts on his McAfee hat and hangs out by their original gate. Just before the flight departs, one of the other racers recognizes him and agrees to pass the word along. But will the message get through, and could this delay result in Team Bento’s elimination?*

Changi wasn’t a bad place to be stuck for half a day. We had lunch at a place specializing in hand-pulled noodles, and Indian sweets for dessert. Then we lay down in chaises longues at “The Oasis” near gate 11. They’ve thought of everything; the seats even have built-in alarm clocks.

Aboard Silkair, in-flight entertainment consisted of silent comedies—clever choice for this multi-lingual crowd—including the Japanese game show *Masquerade*, in which contestants dress up as such things as “nails being hammered into a board” and “television static.” Very creative, very bizarre.

Thai immigration involved looking into the camera and much stamping of papers, but no questions. We were met after customs by the local event coordinator, equipped with cool towels and water. We had long since decided that the *Amazing Race* drinking game is to drink water whenever *anything* happens. After a short sweltering wait for another group of Geeks, we piled into an air-conditioned bus for the hour or so drive to the resort, with a brief intro to the area and Thai culture on the way. (“Please

haggle! If you pay the asking price, it drives up prices for the locals.”) Someone asked what the local currency was. Kate bogged at this. She still does.

The Sheraton Grande at Laguna Phuket is one of five resorts nestled between an artificial lagoon and the Indian Ocean. It is unlike anywhere we have ever imagined staying. There are no walls to the lobby. The porte-cochère at the entrance just... continues... teak benches and bowls of floating orchids scattered about, plants and reflecting pools dividing the space into virtual “rooms”, and suddenly a phalanx of silk-clad front desk clerks welcoming Sir and Madam.

Our room did have walls. Also a sunken bath, a massive fruit basket with spiky red things that we kept meaning to try, honest, and a discreet notice that leaving the patio doors open for any length of time with the AC on would result in condensation on the marble floor and we’d probably slip and die so please don’t.

*Team Bento’s first assignment in Phuket: find Thai food. Trivially easy in Portland; will it be as easy in Thailand? Papers in the room tell them of the existence of the hotel’s Gecko Grill. Is there a map? This is a 4-star resort sprawling over 70 acres. Of course there’s no map. They head out into the tropical night.*

*[Shots of David and Kate jogging over, then under, arched bridges. “Isn’t this the way we came?” “There’s a sign by that tree.” “It says it’s a tree.” “We are so*

omelets, baked beans, pancakes, waffles, breads, jams, honey gravity-fed from the comb, Vegemite, peanut butter, croissants, yogurt, congee (and its fiddly bits), somen (and its fiddly bits), muesli (and its fiddly bits), Cocoa Puffs, cold cuts, smoked salmon, fresh fruit, fried rice, fried noodles, and probably more I’m forgetting. We hit the ground running...

*A Detour is a choice between two tasks, each with its own pros and cons. In “By Hook,” teams must hook, land, and stun a 20-kg. sailfish. In “By Cook,” teams must shop for, prepare, and eat a gourmet Thai dinner.*

*Naturally, Team Bento goes for “By Cook.”*

*It starts with a trip to a bustling local market. The camera pans across huge mounds of fresh curry paste (ground that morning, to be purchased and used that same day), piles of colorful unfamiliar vegetables, and the carcasses of chickens, fish, squids, and other things less recognizable. “Amazingly,” says David as he pauses at a display of fresh fish laid out on a tile counter sans refrigeration, “it doesn’t smell at all.”*

*Four teams return from the market to the resort’s high-end Thai restaurant in a dead heat. There two top chefs and two local guides conduct them through the preparation of a four-course meal. Unfortunately, the guides know nothing about cooking, the chefs know*

*lost.” ] Suddenly, they meet Sandra and Joshua, returning from dinner.*

*“Go that way to the beach, take a right, the 4th restaurant, the Lotus. Listen for the VP of Marketing yelling about the service.” This is both encouraging and dismaying. They walk on. Kate is stupid with fatigue and hunger. “Is this sand?” she asks.*

*It is, and it’s soft and deep, but they persist, passing massage huts and rows of beach chairs. At the Lotus, their heavy wooden chairs sink into the sand. Kate passes the waiter a piece of paper with their order. Food comes quickly: red curry duck, larb moo, local vegetable with dried shrimp, 4 grilled tiger prawns in tamarind sauce. “Oh. My. God. It’s an eating challenge.” These are not large shrimp; they are small lobsters! Each one has nearly half a pound of meat. They hang over the ends of the platter. Team Bento tucks in. The prawns are priced per 100g; Kate makes calculations on a napkin and wonders if they will be short of cash for the next leg. The food is fantastic.*

The next morning we had better luck finding food, thanks to fellow racers Greg and Jana who told us that breakfast was included with the room and where to go to get it. The buffet was designed to provide whatever the guest desired for breakfast, no matter where they’d come from: bacon, eggs, sausages, Thai

*almost no English, and “oyster sauce” and “hoisin sauce” sound identical: “oi-sa saas.”*

*Close-up shots of Kate trying to wrap noodles around a jumbo shrimp, slippery with marinade, and get the bundle into hot oil without letting it unwrap or deep-frying her fingers. Meanwhile, David keeps the tom ka gai simmering. It’s not that hard when all the ingredients are prepped for you, but it’s time-consuming and painstaking work and David wonders aloud at one point if stunning a sailfish might not have been quicker.*

*But at last they sit down to a meal they’ve prepared themselves, at the end of which the chefs present them with the next clue envelope.*

After our cooking class we registered with the conference (another tote bag, whee! Also a very nice tropical shirt for David, a sarong for Kate, and a cute little stuffed elephant we named Phil for TAR’s host). We caught a shuttle boat to the resort’s captive shopping area for more souvenirs. Seeing the surly clerks at the 7-11 eating pineapple out of a plastic bag with a bamboo skewer made us want to see some of the real Thailand. After that there was some question if we really had time for a swim before dinner, but when we saw Monika, the VP’s secretary, still in the pool we knew we’d be OK. After a nice swim and chat, we joined the other McAfee folks for cocktails and “international buffet,” followed by round 1 of an interminable over-loud bad karaoke contest called

“Geek Idol.” Did we mention bad? And interminable? And loud? We escaped as soon as we could.

The next day we were off on a group tour to See The Elephants. How many forms of transportation can you use in one day?

**1. Via Song Taew** (an open bus with two rows of facing benches) down the West coast of Phuket, past intriguing sights and ocean views to a scenic viewpoint with a view of three different gorgeous beaches. We then continued down the coast to Cape Phromthep (Sunset Viewpoint), with a shrine to Siva surrounded by hundreds of elephant figurines, most in pairs, some quite old.

*A Roadblock is a task that can be performed by only one team member. In this task, Kate must find the one elephant figurine with only one tusk...*

**2. Via Land Rover** up the hill, past water buffaloes, monkeys, and rubber trees. Continuing our earlier theme, this felt and sounded very very much like the Indiana Jones ride. We saw a demo of rubber tapping and processing and got a lecture on the economics of Phuket. Tourism has replaced rubber as the island’s primary source of income—our dollars keep both the locals and the elephants alive even as they drive real estate prices up out of reach. This was followed by a show with three baby elephants golfing, playing soccer, painting, playing harmonica, etc. One McAfee employee from the Bangalore office showed us the proper way to feed them: by placing the basket of fruit on top of his head

because even in Thai there is no mistaking The Font That Drips Blood. We were the last ones back to the bus, which then took us to a marvelous eleven-course lunch at a hilltop restaurant where signs warned BE WARE OF MONKEY (MAY BITE Ü), and finally (finally!) back to the hotel. Swimsuit time!

*...Kate spots the clue box: on an artificial island, surrounded by water, behind a gate, in the most exclusive part of the resort. There’s no way to reach it from here. Or is there?...*

**5. Paddled** the length of the hotel’s pool: 3 to 5 city blocks, winding a narrow course under bridges and between palm trees from the bustling family pool at one end to the secluded adults-only pool at the other, where the most expensive rooms have balconies from which one can slip directly into the water. In between we passed two whirlpool baths, numerous fountains, a volleyball net, a sandy artificial beach, and a swim-up bar.

**6. On foot** along the public beach to the massage huts we’d passed on the first night, where for about twelve bucks each we got a foot massage that went all the way to the top of the head. Beyond the bamboo walls and palm-frond roof (Akbar & Jeff’s Luau Hut! but real!), the sun sank into the ocean. Bliss. “Aroy ma’ak,” Kate said to her masseuse. “That was delicious.”

**7. Via cute little shuttle bus** to another hotel on the lagoon, for a healthy dinner of “spa cuisine”.

And so to bed.

and kneeling down in front of them! From there we proceeded to the elephant boarding area, where we were given a brief safety lecture and introduced to our elephant and her mahout. Two people per elephant please, keep hands and feet inside the elephant at all times, place all carry-on items securely in the compartment under your seat... just like Disneyland. But real, oh so very real.

**3. Via elephant** through the woods.

*Marvelous views, colorful butterflies, forget the Amazing Race schtick oh wow we are on a freaking ELEPHANT! We ride in a lightweight aluminum lawn chair strapped to her back atop piles of blankets. Her hide is warm and flexible underfoot, bristly with occasional stiff hairs. We calculate that we, the chair, and the mahout together weigh about 6% as much as the elephant—equivalent to an 8-pound pack on David. Even so, just her own weight means that every step must be carefully placed. David can feel her gait change as she ascends and descends even a very gentle hill, like changing gears.*

**4. Via air-conditioned bus** to Wat Chalong temple, where a New Year festival was in progress. David checked out the many golden buddhas inside the temple, and the view of the temple grounds, while Kate browsed the festival booths. It was just like a country fair, with fried things on sticks, knockoff Harley T-shirts, a Ferris wheel and a carousel, even a haunted house next to one outlying chapel. We could tell it was a haunted house by the signs,

The next day we both woke before dawn. Kate encouraged David to go out with her and walk in the coolth, hear the birds, see the sunrise.

*Clue envelope in hand, Team Bento heads for the beach. In the elevator are racers Johnny and Mick. “Going up?” Johnny asks. David and Kate look at each other—they thought they were on the top floor. “The gate was locked until about ten minutes ago,” Mick says. “Good luck!” Johnny and Mick depart, leaving Team Bento wondering if they had perhaps misread the clue about watching the sunrise. They take the elevator up one flight, where there’s nothing but an open gate and a set of stairs leading up.*

*They find themselves in the hotel’s bell tower, which they had thought was only ornamental. From here they can see the rising sun, the hills, the sea, the lush tropical vegetation, the gi-normous air conditioning units on the hotel roof... and the clue box. Thanks, Johnny and Mick!*

After our adventure in the bell tower, we did continue down to the beach. We walked past an enormous tent being set up for that night’s McAfee luau, and on as far as the tsunami warning siren. These towers, erected at intervals along the beach, were one of the very few visible reminders of the disaster that had hit this shore a little more than two years ago. Also on the beach we encountered scraps of motion, almost impossible to see, that turned out to be

tiny translucent crabs. Ranging from pinky-fingernail-sized to half-dollar-sized, they scuttled from their holes in the sand, as fast as wind-blown dust bunnies, on missions of their own.

We saw Johnny and Mick at breakfast. Thanked them for their help, explaining our TAR overlay on the experience. “So, you involve other people in your delusions,” Johnny mused...

There’s no such thing as a free lunch, or a free trip to Thailand. That morning David had to attend a McAfee business meeting in a thoroughly pre-chilled hotel conference room. It started with really humorous videos, produced by teams from each worldwide site, about getting to Phuket despite travel budget cuts. The Irish hitch-hiked. The final one involved shipping the VP of Engineering from Oregon by parcel post... and then the lights came up, revealing the very box from the video (David had seen the huge thing in the break room at work and wondered what it was for), out of which the VP burst. Kate amused herself during his speech by writing down jargon as it went by, page after page: eyeballs, loyalty matrix, threat profile deck, storage migration, kill-pill, “we suck less.”

The resort laid on a very nice spread for the morning break. David finally tried a spiky red rambutan, and a co-worker’s Chinese wife demonstrated how to eat a mangosteen—so good! They look like garlic cloves inside, and taste a bit like blueberries or strawberries. Afterwards, more speechifying and awards and the McAfee group photo. Over lunch with Josh and Sandra, we all decided to get out into the real world.

*banana leaves for tonight’s big New Year feast; Kate gives them a respectful bow. David enters the temple, its interior walls black with smoke and stapled with what looks like very mundane announcements, to make a small donation. A woman hands him incense sticks and the next clue: “Make your way back to Laguna Phuket, pit stop for this leg of the Race.”*

*Departing via the alley, they spot cooks on break from the restaurant next door burning little papers in a trash can. Messages to the ancestors?*

*Now to find a cab. But there is no helpful bellman here. The merged teams find an open 7-11, with strange snacks and Hello Kitty underwear on the shelves. David uses his phrasebook Thai to ask the clerk to phone for a cab. What eventually shows up is a motorbike. This is useless for four, even if Racers weren’t barred from taking these “hang on and pray” cycle-taxis.*

*Down the street, they spot a couple of tuk-tuks, filthy red vehicles looking like a cross between a Cushman and a motorbike, waiting at a corner. The driver asks 500 baht. Sandra offers 400, but the driver makes a stamping motion on something that looks like a bingo card and says she’ll take 400 if they agree to stop at a shop. (This is a formalized kickback scheme: get a stamp from the shop for bringing in tourists, redeem the full card of*

*An Intersection is a task that two teams must perform together. In this task, the merged teams will proceed by taxi to Phuket Town [high-speed shot zooming down a road past water buffalo to a small bustling city], where they must find this temple [shot of the Shrine of Serene Light] and make a donation to receive their next clue.*

*Team Bento and Team Pippin have no difficulty getting a taxi from the bellman. But on the way to town, frustratingly, the cabbie stops for two liters of gas. Apparently taxis here are so undercapitalized that the cash provided by each fare will be used to tank up for that trip.*

*Dropped off in Phuket Town, they are pursued for blocks by another cabbie, who insists that they don’t want to be here, walking’s no good, they want to hire him for a tour of the town! he’ll take them to all the best shopping spots! Eventually they shake him. It’s true that much of the town is closed for the New Year holiday.*

*The merged teams walk along what passes for sidewalks, past shuttered shops and vacant lots overgrown with banana trees, until they spot a tiny ornate gate marking the entrance to the alley they seek.*

*The Shrine of Serene Light is a working people’s temple hidden away in a miniature courtyard in the middle of the block. Old women smoke and chat, rolling something in*

*stamps for a tank of gas.) David offers 500 baht for no stops, and the driver accepts. The ride is slow and the little two-stroke engine deafening, which doesn’t deter David and Joshua from singing the score to Pippin the whole way. They are welcomed warmly at the resort.*

We went for a swim after that, made up Buzzword Bingo cards from the morning’s notes to pass around at dinner, then put on our tropical outfits for cocktails on the lawn. Dinner was another “international buffet”—at this point it was starting to look like David might come all the way to Thailand and never have satay or pad thai—followed by the evening’s big entertainment spectacle, Polynesian dancers. (Why Polynesians, in Thailand? We have absolutely no idea.) The voiceover and music, pre-recorded in English, were so bloody sincere it had to be a parody, but no, it was dead serious. It was the Enchanted Tiki Room with fire dancers. Eventually it ended.

Drums stop. Very bad. Now comes karaoke.

Freshly-arrived McAfee CEO Dale Fuller worked the room with a mike encouraging people to sing. Apparently “Geek Idol” had scared people off so thoroughly that not even the winners of round 1 were willing to come back for round 2. But when one of the Indian guys got a PlayStation for singing a raga, Kate nudged David. Vigorously. He sang Monty Python’s “Philosophers Song,” broad Aussie accent and all, and sat down with thready pulse and weak knees. He got an iPod Nano for his trouble, plus much bemused attention from his superiors and peers.

We actually slept until 8am the next day—finally adapted to local time, must be time to go home!—and met a baby elephant (the hotel has two on staff) on the way to breakfast. The difference between “inside” and “outside” is vague in a hotel without walls, but it was still very strange to see an elephant walking between the restaurant tables and the buffet. Then we packed up and left our bags with the concierge. Our plane didn’t depart until evening.

We spent the rest of the morning in the hotel’s day spa, where we spent about ten times what we’d spent for foot massages on the beach. Kate got slathered with aromatherapy oil; David chose an Ayurvedic massage with hot rocks. It was relaxing, but never ten times better than the beach hut—in fact, the beach hut was probably better.

We emerged from the spa to find water bucketing down. Verily, the skies had opened! So much for lunch on the beach. We borrowed an umbrella and headed for the poolside bar. We wound up sharing a table with Dale the CEO, for a while at least. (All this schmoozing with the mighty was quite moot in the long run, as he was replaced a few months later. That’s life in business these days.) This was David’s last chance for pad thai or satay, but neither was on the menu; he settled for Thai pizza with satay sauce on it. Alas, it was wretched. The sun came out

grew, travelers placing their contributions like mourners at some bizarre memorial. David felt very rushed and nervous, worried about something going wrong with the ticket or being late or something, but once we took off, he slept for most of the first three and a half hours. Only three more hours to go until Tokyo, and another eight and a half hours from there to home....

*Team Bento arrives at the mat—the doormat of their own front door—back where they’d started, their Amazing Race complete. Have they won, or lost? They didn’t make it all the way around the world, but on the other hand Phil never met them at the mat and said “I’m sorry to tell you that you have been eliminated from the race.” And they certainly aren’t the last ones to arrive—poor Mick won’t get to Cincinnati until tomorrow.*

*So they must have won.*

*The camera swirls around them as they hug and kiss.  
Blackout. —DDL/KY*

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beside the ice tray  
ziploc’d berries, pesto cubes  
door into summer

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before we were finished eating and tried to pretend it had never left.

After lunch there were walks on the gently steaming beach, more swimming, and chats with the remaining McAfee people until it was time to leave. As the afternoon progressed the crowd at the hotel gradually shifted from mostly Americans to Japanese. We shared a van to the airport with Sandra and Josh, and Mick, who was looking forward to a 31-hour trip home (Singapore-Frankfurt-NYC-Cincinnati).

Security at Phuket International ~~Bus Station~~ Airport consisted of slapping an INSPECTED sticker on each bag as we waited in line. David had a very bad moment when he found his boarding pass had vanished somewhere between the ticket desk and Customs, but he backtracked and the ticket agent had it. We slept most of the way to Singapore.

We had an awkward layover, but Kate had discovered (research! rah!) that there’s a hotel *inside* Changi Airport and booked ahead. The Ambassador Transit Hotel is sterile but functional. They know their customers’ needs: no closet, big clock on the wall, arrow pointing to Mecca. Bed. “Don’t think of it as an awful hotel stay,” said Kate, “think of it as an *excellent* six-hour layover.”

After our 4am wake-up call it was weird to walk straight from our hotel room into the nearly-silent airport. Here we had to pass through four layers of security, even though we’d never left the secure zone. A clutter of plastic water bottles on the floor slowly

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Tofu Almandine  
will be no consolation  
should rainbows end

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## Speaking of Bento

Lately we’ve had extreme examples of our namesake lunches pointed out to us online. Bunny-shaped carrots and cocktail-wiener octopuses and are the least of it. We’re talking the Powerpuff Girls rendered in seaweed. Hello Kitty rice balls. Spam-and-*daikon* flower gardens, snow-capped Mt. Fuji!

These are not, for the most part, commercial products. These are the work of individual moms who make Cher’s cookie-cutter-wielding character in *Mermaids* look like a piker. (Some are professional instances of the genre, for example Animage’s “Anime Bento of the Month”.)

Go have a look at [cookingcute.com](http://cookingcute.com), or [bentocorner.com](http://bentocorner.com), or just do a Google image search on “bento”. For practical tips there’s [Lunchinabox.net](http://Lunchinabox.net). It even has a chart on the interrelationship between box capacity and calorie count, given the general rule “3 parts grain, one part protein, two parts vegetable.”

Next issue, a discussion of Attention Surplus Disorder. —KY

## Laying Down the Lance

(a sequel to "Survivors" from Bento #12)

David, Baron of Levine, leaned on the window sill, enjoying the breeze. The worst heat of summer had passed, and the nights were growing cooler; soon it would be harvest time again. Golden fields of wheat rippled like waves toward the horizon, where a fat red sun descended slowly to its rest.

What lay beyond that horizon, on the other side of this world? No one here knew.

David drew a tapestry across the unglazed window to keep out the evening chill, fine hand-knotted embroidery catching slightly on the rough stone of the window surround. A scarred and tattered space suit, much patched and repaired, stood beside the window, and he touched it absently on the shoulder as he passed. The embroidered patch on that shoulder was still legible, barely, beneath ground-in dirt and old burn marks: PFC DAVID D LEVINE, it read, and USS McLAURIN. He closed the door behind himself and walked down the hall, heading for his final appointment with Lord Ell.

Sometimes David wondered whether any of his shipmates from the *McLaurin* had survived. But only in the abstract; he couldn't remember a single one of their names. It shamed him, a bit, to have forgotten so much in only five years. But he'd only served with them for a short time, and a lot had happened since then.

Voluntary Separation. Twisted the knob that turned off his personal Sustainer, welcoming oblivion.

And found himself stumbling, then falling, then tumbling downhill. Bright sun and blue sky alternated in his faceplate with vibrant green grass, until he fetched up with a thump against a tree at the bottom of the hill.

Sun. Sky. Gravity?

He staggered upright—and saw that he was in a meadow, rolling hills extending in one direction, a dark forest in the other. His helmet display told him the air was breathable. He wasn't sure he believed it.

And then a girl, about thirteen, ran by, shrieking.

It wasn't a happy shriek. Her blouse and skirt were black with char, her hair smoldering. One sleeve was burned away, the skin beneath reddened and weeping—a serious burn. Wide-eyed and terrified she stared behind herself as she ran.

Levine turned, his suit awkward in gravity, to see what she was running from.

He beheld a nightmare.

A dragon.

A black saurian, tall as a gantry. Poisonous yellow flames licked about its muzzle, and black smoke rose from the houses crushed beneath its claws. Each leg was the size of a Fleet shuttle, and wings big as meteor shields darkened the sky.

Impossible. But then it breathed, a huge gout of black and yellow flame spilling down on the fleeing people beneath it, and

He remembered the final battle, though. That day was burned into his brain.

The Ek'zeks had struck *McLaurin* without warning, in overwhelming numbers, as they had been doing with greater and greater frequency over the last year. Wherever those silent black ships passed, the horrific destruction dealt by their weapons paled by comparison with the roiling gray hell of Redeployment that followed in their wake. Redeployment was not well understood by human scientists, but everyone knew this: anyone or anything that drifted into Redeployment without a working Sustainer... vanished.

PFC Levine had only been on board *McLaurin* for a few months. He'd been beamed direct to the ship from the USS *Yiu*, which was under attack at the time, in response to a shot from his resume gun. The *Yiu*, in turn, had picked him up after he'd drifted in Redeployment for two months following the destruction of the *Teckman*. The only thing that kept him from feeling like a Jonah, a bad-luck sailor who brought destruction down on any ship he joined, was the fact that the whole Fleet was suffering the same depredations. Despite the best efforts of Fleet Morale, everyone knew they were losing.

And so, when the *McLaurin*'s hull had burst open and he'd found himself drifting out into Redeployment, contemplating another interminable period of pointless loneliness, ending in either suffocation or another doomed rescue... he'd taken

Levine felt the heat even through his suit. Danger signals blinked on his helmet display.

PFC David Levine was a warrior. His specialty was C++ code and information architecture, but he'd been through Basic and he knew how to address a threat. He drew his blaster and fired.

Bolts of energy crackled and fizzed, burning through atmosphere they'd never been designed for, and struck the great beast square in the chest. It roared and lunged in his direction, swatting at the source of the pain. He fired again and again, heedless of the gun's limited charge, until one lucky shot caught the dragon square in the muzzle and blew its head right off. The great body crashed down yards from his feet, the impact rumbling through the ground.

A long silence followed, Levine's breath rasping loudly in his helmet. He still wasn't convinced this could really be happening, but it was hard to deny the evidence of all his senses.

And then a man, a tall fellow with a coat that would have been handsome and a face that would have been friendly if they hadn't been so smeared with ash and blood, came striding from the wreckage of the village and clapped a hand on Levine's arm. "Thank you for your service, good knight," he said. "For though your armor be strange, it is clear you must be a good knight indeed. I am Andrew, Earl of Woodruff. And you are?"

That had been five years, and many dragons, ago. The gun's charge had given out during the first year, but by the time it



sputtered its last he had other techniques, reliable and sustainable dragon-fighting tactics that made good use of local resources. Despite their primitive technologies, these people had skill and bravery and formidable weapons of their own.

All they needed was a strategy, one based on historical combat techniques that had been standard stuff in Fleet military college. It was something anyone could have done. But David was here, and he did it. He proved to be a formidable dragon slayer, sometimes dispatching as many as five in a single day.

Lord Woodruff elevated PFC David Levine to a knight, *de jure* as well as *de facto*, for his service to the King. And then, after three years of successful fighting under first Lord Woodruff, then Mark, Duke of Wyman, David had been summoned to the court of the Marquess of Ell. "I have been ordered by King George," he had said, "to raise up an army of Davids, for the plague of dragons is exceedingly great. What think you of this?"

"I will do what I can, Lord Ell," he'd said, and bowed.

"Call me Jason," the Marquess had said, with a wink. "Corporal Jason Ell of the USS *Gelsinger*." And he'd saluted.

Jason too was a veteran of the Fleet, another one who'd taken Voluntary Separation when his ship had been destroyed. He'd come to this world at about the same time as David, but while David had been fighting dragons, Jason had been practicing politics. There were others here too—a few dozen, a tiny fraction of those who had been lost. No one knew why they had landed here, or what had become of the rest.

Levine," he said, "I see you have brought much mana with you from the other world."

David had told very few of his origins. "I do not know this other world of which you speak."

Cole peered intently at David's face. "Surely you have not forgotten." He closed his eyes. "A world of airless space, sailed by great machines. Silent black enemies fiercer than dragons. The gray fog that devours all." He opened his eyes again, and in them David thought he saw a blue flickering light. "You were touched by that fog. But the mana in you prevented it from destroying you. Instead it brought you here. Where you were needed."

The light in Cole's eyes strengthened. It was not just David's imagination—it was really there, and it was familiar, though he hadn't seen it in five years.

The blue glow of an active Sustainer.

They talked long into that night, and many days and nights thereafter. Cole taught him to see and understand the energy he called *mana*. It was a lot like programming in Java. Much of what he said seemed to align with what David remembered of Sustainer field theory, though couched in terms of mysticism and metaphor rather than mathematics.

"Without mana, human life would be impossible," Cole explained. "Worthy deeds, noble ideas, and great works create it, while all human activities—building castles, raising armies, even simply living and breathing—consume it. Everyone is creating and using mana all the time, whether they understand it or not."

It didn't matter. There were dragons to slay.

Together they'd assembled a select team of knights, choosing from among the smartest and most adaptable in the land. Even as they did so, David kept fighting. Jason provided the money to train and equip the knights; David taught them what he could, but mostly tried to lead by example. After a while Jason made him a baron. He kept fighting. Some knights were lost in battle; new ones joined. David kept fighting.

All this time, something was troubling him. A strange feeling of lightness and pressure, as though his head were a balloon that might float away at any time. The sensation wasn't painful, and it didn't interfere with anything he did—in fact, it was quite pleasant. But it was unusual and inexplicable, and year by year it grew harder to ignore.

Finally he sought advice. But the kingdom's doctors barely deserved the name—he counted himself fortunate to be in good health despite his hazardous occupation—and none of them could shine any light on this strange feeling. So he cast his net further.

There were men in the kingdom who called themselves wizards. Most of them were charlatans, or self-deluded, or insane. But one, Cole of Mills, was said to be different. David obtained an appointment, and met with him in his drafty tower.

When David entered Cole's study, the wizard immediately stood, staring at him with hungry eyes. David wondered if what he'd heard of the man had been wishful thinking, if he was as mad as the worst of the others. But then Cole bowed his head. "My lord

"But aren't worthy deeds and great works human activities? Why do some activities create mana and some consume it?"

"All activities consume it, but some produce more than they consume." Cole gave a wry grin. "The proportions defy human understanding. Oh, there are theories. But sometimes an apparently stupid notion creates huge quantities of mana, while brilliant ideas merely drain the thinker's resources. Many have been driven mad by the attempt to comprehend the difference."

Once David had learned to see and control mana, he understood much that had been unclear. Powerful people and kingdoms flowed with great quantities of mana. Mana attracted more of itself, while those with little of it struggled even to hold on to what they had.

And David himself possessed an enormous quantity of it—more than some Dukes. More than some entire kingdoms. And though he could now see that slaying dragons produced much mana, that wasn't the whole explanation. For though David's store of mana was growing even now, the greatest portion of it had come with him from the other world.

Mana, he now understood, had powered the Sustainers, and it was his large personal store of mana that had allowed him to survive two months in Redeployment. Mana drove the ships of both the humans and the Ek'zeks, though they called it by other names. Lack of mana explained the destructive power of Redeployment. And it was lust for mana that had driven the Ek'zeks to attack the Fleet.

Cole couldn't explain what David had done in the world of the Fleet to build up such a quantity of mana, but he guessed that it had something to do with slow, steady accumulation. "Many others have tried to do quickly what you have done slowly and unconsciously," he said. "Most were destroyed in the process."

"Get rich slowly," David mused. "The miracle of compound interest."

He didn't bother trying to explain the reference.

That had been six months ago. Now, once again, he stood in the office of Jason, Marquess of Ell—his liege, his friend, his secret countryman.

"We need you here," Jason said. "The dragons will never cease to breed. You know this."

"I do," David acknowledged. "But even without me, you will not be defenseless. We have raised up and trained an army of fine dragon fighters."

"But not an army of Davids."

"No. Though we did try, you and I." He turned and stared out Jason's window for a time. The sun was nearly gone now, its rosy glow bathing the clouds. The harvest moon would be rising soon.

"Please stay," Jason said behind him. "For me. As a friend."

David took a deep breath. Jason was, indeed, a friend. And he would miss the camaraderie of the team they'd built together. He would even miss the dragons—the struggle and the danger and the thrill of victory. But he wasn't getting any younger. His beard was

already shot with gray, his pate nearly bare. There was so much to do with his new knowledge, so much more to learn. And fighting dragons, exhilarating though it was, took all the time he had. If he was to make any progress in understanding this new world of mana, his third world, he must lay down the lance.

He turned back to Jason. "I'm sorry," he said.

Jason closed his eyes and inclined his head.

David returned to his own office and donned his trusty space suit. He checked and rechecked each fitting, made sure the airpack had recharged itself, and strapped on his best sword.

He clomped down the stairs and out the sally port, walking through fields of wheat into the gathering dusk. It was a route he'd taken many, many times before, though rarely alone. He didn't want anyone to see him go. He didn't completely understand the process, and he feared hurting them.

When he'd walked a few hundred yards he turned back to face the castle, Lord Ell's castle, his home and workplace for the past two years. The last light of the setting sun gleamed on the pennants at the roof peaks, and the rising harvest moon cast its silvery beams on the countryside.

It had been a good life. Now new adventures awaited.

He closed his helmet, placed his hand on the long-dead Sustainer, and concentrated.

And, in a blue glow, he vanished.

*To be continued...*

—DDL

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*"We'll be as famous as the Cajun Sushi Hamsters! Famouser!"*

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## Now what?

So. As you may have gleaned from the above, David's retirement is imminent. The trusty blue Tom Corbett lunch box will no longer be making its daily commute. People keep asking what this is going to mean for me—"am I worried about having him underfoot?"

Naah. We're good at companionably co-existing. Many evenings are spent in parallel, each silent in front of a screen. We know how to split up and live our own lives, and we've also spent weeks at a time joined at the hip, from Scotland to Singapore.

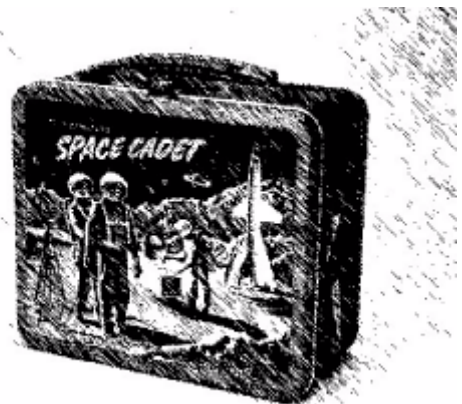
Really, I'm looking forward to having him around more during the day. It's too easy for me just to go back to bed after breakfast, too easy to lose track of the hours one by one, then say "well I'm not going out *now*, it's nearly five!" I'm hoping having David around will add just a tad bit of accountability to the day. We've already promised to make the gym a firm routine.

It means we can travel more. Vacation days vanish mighty fast when divvied among multiple SF conventions and square dance events each year. Venice! Vienna! Wall Drug! Not having to check out of convention hotels in the middle of Sunday programming! Whee!

And I think we shall spend more time at home, together, away from the flickering electrons. I can suggest a walk, or a game of Scrabble—or cleaning out the attic—without feeling that I'm cutting into precious writing time.

Underfoot? I can't wait.

—KY



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"Olde Worlde interface"  
no obvious Help, only  
cryptic gnome icon

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## Locs received re. Bento 18 (mostly)

One of our correspondents said “Well, this is a pleasant surprise! I disappeared off your mailing list so long ago... I assumed at the time you had your reasons.” Ouch. Quite probably not. One of my mottoes is, “Be slow to attribute to malice, that which can sufficiently be accounted for by stupidity.”

If you ever suspect you’ve missed an issue, do feel free to ask. Really. If you want Bento, we want to send it to you.

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*“I’m listening with one ear and talking with the other.”*

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### E. B. Frohvet

Ellicott City, MD  
September 24, 2006

A traditional Maryland story: Every day of summer, a farmer got his teenage kids up early to pick corn for their roadside stand. Whatever was not sold, was fed to the hogs. One day, the son suggested they keep the leftovers for the next day. “Those city folks will never know the difference.” The farmer scolded the boy: “People don’t eat day-old corn in Maryland!”

Around here we take our sweet corn seriously.

*[Recent acquisitions here at Chez Bento include a gas BBQ. Among the first things we cooked on it was corn on the cob, fresh-picked and grilled right in the husk. Scrumptious.]*

others yet) but can’t for the life of me see what it’s a picture of. Abstract? A robot? Maybe a cultural icon I don’t know.

*[Oh well. It’s meant to be a rocket ship taking off into a dark sky, with moon and a couple of stars. Er, did you turn it upside-down like the other two solutions?]*

There was also a Chinese institute that same summer in St. Louis’ Washington U., and we had a mock rivalry going using the most-repeated drill phrase from our lessons as battle cries. Theirs was “*Chau bai tsai!*” (fried cabbage); ours was “*Eki no mai!*” (in front of the station). Ghod that was a good summer—work, work, work, but a bit of fun too. For some reason, “fox-colored rice” (*kitsune* something-or-other) also loomed large in our legend. I feel like a dolt for letting the language all slip away, especially since I was *born* in Japan. There are books out that teach Japanese through manga, did you know? Greatest good luck with your endeavors.

*[In Japanese class Monday I was asked “Where is the bus stop?” and I swear the only words that came to mind were “Da hinten, links” from David’s (not even my own!) German lessons twenty years ago. My own German mantra is the ever-useful “Gisela mietet einen Strandkorb.”]*

### Flick sends a “Quickie” postcard, pockmarked 3 Oct 2006:

We’re learning Japanese, too. Well, we put some “Learn Japanese when you’re lazy and bad at languages” books on the wedding list....

### Brad Foster <bwfoster@juno.com>

Irving, TX  
Sep 26, 2006

Bento #18—legal to vote at last!

Loved the short discussions on the values of few/some/couple/ etc. That’s the kind of thing that makes having a brain worthwhile!

Also appreciated your efforts at planning out your Disneyland trip for maximum enjoyment time. Cindy did the same kind of research for our trip to DisneyWorld a few years back. ... the big thing she learned was the beauty of wearing TWO pairs of socks for all that walking. Actually, since that trip, I do the two-pair every day. Aaahhhhhhhhhh, nice.....

### Davey Snyder <dnms@comcast.net>

Sep 26, 2006

Mike Ford was a dear friend. Bento 18 is giving me reasons to smile anyway.

You mean the “bucconeer” isn’t one of those grand “swing your partner off the fence rail / wagon end / tree stump” moves that Howard Keel et al perform in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and movies of that ilk? How disappointing.

### Mog Decarnin

28 September 2006

Having studied Japanese at a summer institute once (a year’s worth, in theory) and promptly forgotten it all, I was very charmed by Kate’s efforts. And I worked the Picture Grid puzzle (not the

Claire’s loc made first Mike then me laugh out loud then, in response to the other’s raised eyebrows, explain “Cardinal Wolsey!” The phrase has already been used several times today, and may well replace “Look, the Pope!” when stealing someone’s chips.

### John Purcell <j\_purcell54@yahoo.com>

Oct 19, 2006

Okay, so what I did first was image google “Cardinal Wolsey”. And there’s this one pencil sketch of the good Cardinal from [www.mothershipionscave.com](http://www.mothershipionscave.com) where he really does, in fact, resemble a silverback gorilla, although not sitting on a tree stump.

With this out of the way, I wish to thank you two for sending me *Bento #18*. It has a nice chatty, friendly style, and the size reminds me of the various little shirt-pocket-sized zines that Garth Danielson used to produce back in the 1970s and 1980s, like *Nick Boxtop Mystery Magazine*, *Klarn Rays*, itty-bitty little *Boowatts*, and so forth. Opening an envelope from Garth was always an adventure because you really didn’t know what its contents would be. No matter what they were, it was always something fun to read.

Sorry for the diversion here, but I wonder if Garth is still pubbing any zines? Last I knew he was still in Minneapolis. This may require a bit of Internet research.

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*“He fights way out of his weight class in unicycle sumo.”*

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Sharyn November <snovember@earthlink.net>

29 Oct 2006

i have never written a loc before. this is momentous.

i like bento because it is bite-sized. i read about your produce deliveries (issue 18) and suddenly wanted to eat snow peas for an entire day.

**Roger Waddington**

Norton, Malton

North Yorkshire, England

3 November 2006

I've yet to see *Battlestar Galactica* in either incarnation, but David's comment "it's all there was at the time" made start thinking, is this where nostalgia is born? One childhood Christmas, I was given a Roy Rogers Annual. It was the first and last; we didn't have a tv at the time, and I've only seen snippets of his film and tv appearances since; yet both then and now, he remains my King of the Cowboys. I'd love to be able to tell a tale of Monty Python-style deprivation, but the truth is I was perfectly happy with what little there was. Which really amounted to *Journey Into Space* and its sequels, the most popular sf radio serial ever with an audience in the millions; plus the (very) occasional Eagle comic with its main feature of *Dan Dare—Pilot of the Future*. How I ever became such an sf addict on such flimsy foundations, I'll never know. But in these years of plenty, where's nostalgia going to grow?

はじめまして!

ケイト・ユール と  
デイヴィッド・レヴァン  
ともうしますー。  
これは わたしたちの ファンジン  
です。

デイヴィッドはさっかで、  
ファンです。  
ケイトはよみます。  
あみものが好きです。  
わしよくがだいすきです!

ふつうのにほんごをはなして、  
おねがいします。  
ゆっくり。おねがいします!

(Very glad to meet you! We are Kate Yule and David Levine. This is our fanzine. David is a writer and fan. Kate reads. She likes to knit. We love Japanese food! Speak simple Japanese, please. Slowly, please!)

Steve Green <steve@planetworks.co.uk>

May 15, 2007

Subject: Re: Bento #8 (yes, #8)

I appear to be in one of those back/forwards timeslips Vonnegut imagined from his Tralfamadorian vacations. On the earphones: Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*, recorded 1973 and remastered 2000 before becoming the 2007 giveaway CD I'm listening to right now.

Lying in sight: *Bento #8*, dated August 1997, exactly two years after Ann & I joined you two at the Pakora Palace, Glasgow (amazing what you stumble across when tidying).

Front of my mind: Kate's short piece "Why I Burned a Flag on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July", which—nearly a decade later—has more resonance now than ever.

Time moves on. Not everything joins the journey.

**WAHF:** Terry Karney, Mark Richards, William A Yule, William D Yule, Murray Moore ("Congrats on *Bento* placing so high in the most prestigious Hugo Award category, Best Fanzine"), Tristan Fin ("Bento is a happy memory that happens to be in my mail box from time to time"), R-Laurraine Tutihasi, Ed Meskys, Terry Jeeves, Pamela Boal, Lloyd Penney, Allen Baum, Kathryn Ice, Joseph Nicholas, Karen Stephenson ("*watashi wa neko desu*"), Chris Garcia, Andrew Klossner, Rick Simkin, Hope Leibowitz.

**Subject: An apology from Little MOO**

To: david@bentopress.com

Hello,

I'm Little MOO. We've spoken before, I'm the piece of software that manages your order with MOO.

I've done a Very Bad Thing.

Don't worry—your StickerBook will be fine, but I might've lost the information that tells the real life people at MOO what colour cover you ordered for your StickerBook.

I might only be a piece of software but I am embarrassed and I do feel like a bit of an idiot. If you do get the wrong cover for your book, please accept my apologies and know that someone has fiddled with my insides and fixed them, and it won't happen again.

In the meantime, I hope you love the Stickers you ordered.

Very best wishes,  
and sorry again,  
Little MOO

