



**Claims Department**

**55**



# Claims Department

## *The 23rd Coffee Issue*

Well, once again, I've got a new computer and I'm doing the best I can to figure it out! This time, it's an Apple, and I'm using Pages and there's a lot to like, and some really annoying things that I am gonna figure out.

And this one has Burgers...

# Armenian Food Festival

Do I really need to go into how much I love Armenian food?

I've said it before, but honestly, I'll say it again - I love Armenian food. It's a part of what got me the job a Forever Saroyan!

There's an Armenian church in the beautiful town of Cupertino called St. Gregory's. I drive by it every time I get lost coming home from work. I love the building, and I'd never been inside, so when I saw that there was a Food Festival, I jumped at the chance!

And I had the kids with me!!!

Now, the kids aren't always happy to go eating, but I've managed to introduce them to some deliciousness that ain't exactly what you'd experience on a Santa Cruz kids' menu. I managed to introduce them to Armenian food a bit, and specifically to the two best things in my eyes - Lamejun and Lamb.

Bella doesn't like lamb. In all reality, JP doesn't like Lamejun as an entirety, but really enjoys the meat topping.

So, we get to the festival, and JP runs, as best as he can in his braces, following the sign that pointed towards 'Food and Desserts'

He was on a mission.





They had a cafeteria line-like system set up with each food at a different station with someone there to scoop it out! They had Rice Pilaf, bulgar wheat, kebab, Byoreks (phyllo dough stuffed with spinach or cheese), and various other delights.

JP is predictable - if he sees something steak-like it's what is gonna go in his belly. Thus, lamb chops, fresh off the grill...like twenty minutes before we got there, but still great!

Bella and I went for Lamejun. It was so much better than the stuff I make at home!

We followed up with comic shopping, JP bought Showcase collections, and then Boba Tea and Library time in Saratoga!!!







# On the Matter of Burgers

“Pops, how do you know what goes on a burger?”

JP asks these kinds of questions all the time. It’s clear he gets his curiosity from his mother, and his love of things from his Papa. We hadn’t had the talk yet, so I sat down and laid it out.

“To be a burger, you need a container, substance, flavor-aids, and lubrication.”

He looked at me understandingly, and I gave him enough of an outline for him to settle down and eat his damn muffin.

“The container is usually some sort of bread. The substance is the burger patty, the meat or sometimes mushroom or whatever. The Flavor-Aids are things like bacon, onions, pickles, barbecue sauce and cheese. Cheese is also an important lubricant, along with mayo, most of the sauces, tomato, and so on. Anything moist.”

At that point, he ate his damn muffin.

Though no, fair reader, you get to hear the entire thing over one, extremely drawn-out cup of coffee.



Whatever the origins of the burger are, the idea of meat and stuff on bread is pretty old. The flat form, pizza, is probably older, but two slices of bread to hold a filling can't be too far behind.

Me, I've loved burgers since I was a kid, but all I wanted was bread and meat. No cheese, no veg, just meat and cheese. Sometimes, I might add a few fries or onion rings on top of it. The one exception was the McDonald's basic hamburger with the diced onions and ketchup. I liked that a lot.

Then I discovered White Castle.





We don't have White Castle in California, but there was a time when a HUGE truck would arrive at the local park and sell boxes of frozen tiny burgers. They carry them in supermarkets these days, but then they were an annual tradition. Mom would buy one box for eating that night, one for the Fridge's freezer, and two for the chest freezer we had.

This is also why my little family in Boulder Creek has a chest freezer today.



So, White Castle burgers, even when heated in the microwave, had that amazing spongy bread, and that combination of taste and mouthfeel set my mind in slightly different direction.

Carl's Jr., on the other hand, changed everything. At least as far as my burger-eating went.

In the mid-1980s, they introduced the Western Bacon Cheeseburger. Now, I ate a lot of bacon as a kid, but I was still questioning of cheese on a burger. Still, I liked BBQ sauce and there was a lot of advertising for the burger and I fell for it!

I remember that I first got it at the Carl's Jr. on Saratoga and Pruneridge. I would later live right across the street from it and eat there at least twice a week. It was the site of what is, most likely, the last Double Western Bacon Cheeseburger I will ever eat, as I had one a couple of days before I found out about my blood pressure and diabetes.

Also, that first time, I ordered it without cheese. With the exception of a period in the 1990s, this has been my way. Too much cheese means too much grease. Also, it's not kosher.

With topping now a thing, I could move on to the other chains, and specifically the Whopper at Burger King (no pickles, no tomatoes) and the Sourdough Jack at Jack-in-the-Box. These were great, and they both influenced my future Burger philosophy.

And yes, I have a solid burger philosophy that is completely unsupported by science.



# The Container

The bun. Slices of bread. Tortillas. Cookies. All applicable containers. The key to the container is that it allows for everything to hold together, but also plays a crucial role in cohesion, appearance, and overall experience.

The first thing, and the often over-looked thing, is that the container prevents, or at least should prevent, massive messes. Burgers, in many of their myriad forms, are



messy things, and the buns are there to contain (through sopping up) the various juices.

There are endless varieties of buns, but I have three favorites. The first is the classic Sesame Seed Bun. Simple, timeless. The second, a small sourdough round. While I wrote about the large sourdough round pizza last issue, the smaller ones make fine hamburger buns. The third? An entire Portobello Mushroom cap. It's the perfect size, adds a nice flavor hit without overpowering. This one Vanessa introduced me to and I think it's genius.



## The Substance

Typically, this is the meat, but honestly, it's way more than that. It's the key toppings and the thing that delivers the flavors.

The meat, or mushroom, or chicken, or pork, or pressed veggie patty, or what have you, is there to provide the base for everything to ride on. The meatiness does provide a good deal of texture, lubrication, and flavor, but it's really there to set the entire thing into the world of fillingness.

It's into this category that I place lettuce, proper tomatoes (*More later*), mushrooms, if added to a meat





burger, avocado, and most cheeses. Yes, some do double-duty, but this is where the satiation comes from.

Personally, I like my patties to be medium-well to well. I know, I'm a heretic, but if you can do a good medium-well, you get a pronounced flavor with less extra juices. I've done medium-rare burgers, and they're good, but you really need to amp-up the toppings. It's the one kind of burger I enjoy with ketchup, for example. These need

Because I always add a lot of juice.

## The Lubricant

This is the one area where I've had so many different thoughts, and the one that I often disagree with so many others on,

First off, if your meat juices are running down your arms, you've failed.



The lubrication of the entire meal is done three ways. Yes, the meat is one, but then there are sauces, and there are moist things. Sauces are easiest to understand, and the most over-used as I see it. There are a few kinds of sauces that serve slightly different purposes by spraying into one of the other categories to varying amount.

Tangy sauces, BBQ, Ketchup, Mustard, Bleu Cheese sauces, they provide something to punch through the meaty flavors. That difference is important because without the tang, you can become cornered into that meat flavor and thus, you may as well just eat a steak with a side of toast. Though, there's nothing wrong with that...





Anyhoo, The next is the sweet sauce, which can be any number of sauces, and honestly, one of the rare, but delightful, sauces that ended up on a burger served to me was orange marmalade. It worked with the bacon and strong cheese on it. That tends to play more in the counter-point area of Flavor-Aids, and I'll have more on that later.

The richness 'sauce' has three forms - cheeses, butters, and spreads. Spreads and butters may seem synonyms, but there is a difference. Spreads, hummus or toum or aioli or mayonnaise or the like adds flavor, of course, but the primary thing it does is make the burger more unctuous. The butter realm, your peanut or almond or cashew butter, or just plain butter, adds density as well. Cheese is interesting, because cheese sauce on a burger is a thing, a dumb thing in my eyes, but I know folks who swear by it. Cheese itself can serve more of a sauce role, specifically for cheeses that thoroughly melt. These actually and eating lubrication and that is for the best!



Now, heat is a popular thing to add to burgers, especially these days. Hot salsas, jalapeños, ginger, Ghost peppers, you name it, some chucklehead has added them to their burgers and called the pain a delight.

It's easy to over-do it on these things. A burger can become overly greasy with one addition, but it can also move between realms of the fantastic. The dryness of the bun needs to be off-set, and the meatiness enhanced.



## Flavor Aids

This is the taste portion, and while it does intersect with the other parts, it's really about playing with and counterpoint to the other parts to form a union.

Now, onions and pickles are traditionally the big two in this arena, with tomato playing a significant role as well. These flavors are key to playing off of the meat, but they're also in the substance portion of the diagram. They provide a bit of bulk, and aid in easing digestion to a degree, but they also give some moisture to the entire thing. They are the height of versatility.

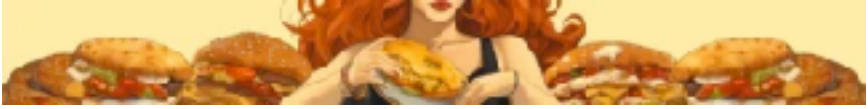


In recent years, there's been something of a movement for injections. Injects the patty with flavors is the purest form, though I've never had a burger that was injected with garlic or any other thing that didn't overpower the actual meat-lovin' goodness of the entire burger.



Now, what do I do with those thoughts?

Well, here are real examples of things I've done for the family in the burger realm.



### **Crabby Patty**

*JP wanted to make SpongeBob SquarePants' famed Crabby Patties, though since he's not a fan of seafood, we used more typical burger fixin's. Pretty much it was just a name.*

Container - *Gluten-Free Hamburger Bun*

Substance - *Costco Frozen Chicken Patty*  
*portobello mushroom cap*  
*Bacon*

Lubrication - *Mayonnaise*  
*Ketchup*

Flavor-Aid - *Pickles*  
*Tomatoes*  
*Lettuce*  
*White Onion*

*This is fairly traditional, and I cooked the mushroom cap for just a couple of minutes, brushed with olive oil, with a little salt and pepper. The result, according to JP, was very good, and only a little messy.*



## **Bingo Burger**

*We played online bingo during the pandemic with the other families at what was our new school. The other families seemed at least a little jealous.*

Container - *Gluten-Free Sliced bread (Franz's)*

Substance - *Patty of 1/3 Pork, 1/3 Bison, and 1/3 Ground Beef (94% lean)*

*Bacon*

*Ricotta cheese*

Lubrication - *Tomato Sauce*

*Olive Oil (spread on bread)*

Flavor-Aid - *Italian Seasoning*

*Tomato (sliced an hour prior, salted, allowed to drain)*

*Shredded Lettuce (peppered)*

*Basil leaves*

*This overly Italian-inspired burger was really good, and allowing that tomato to drain was a really good idea, as you got the flavor and not the mess! Ricotta was an inspired choice, and as we've found very good non-dairy ricotta, it's game-on!*

## **Bella's Bob's Burger Burger**

*We love Bob's Burgers and Bella really wanted to make one of the pun burgers, but we couldn't find anything to make one that had been on the show. So we did this.*

Container - *Gluten-Free Hamburger Bun*

*Substance - Patty of 80-20 Ground beef mixed with a little fresh chopped parsley, tomato paste, and a squeeze of lemon*  
*Pepperoni*

*Lubrication - Mayo (a tad)*  
*Shredded Mexican Blend Cheese*

*Flavor-Aid - A pile of Pea Shoots*  
*A drizzle of good Balsamic*  
*Grilled onions*

*I wish I had been able to eat this one.*



## **The Vanessa Burger**

*I think she watched a lot of Scooby-Doo when she was a kid.*

Container - *Gluten-Free English Muffin (brushed with Olive Oil)*

Substance - *Costco Chicken Patty (sprinkled with Green Goddess seasoning)*

*Portobello Mushroom cap*

*Two slices of Dairy-free Pepper Jack*

*One slice of Dairy-free Cheddar*

Lubrication - *Mayo (a tad)*

*Ketchup (a slightly smaller tad)*

*Fancy Mustard*

Flavor-Aid - *A pile of Sprouts*

*Romaine lettuce*

*Rocket*

*Spinach*

*Heirloom Tomato slice*

*Grilled White Onion Slice*

*Pink salt*

*TONS of black pepper*

*More Green Goddess seasoning*

*She had to unhinge her jaw to make it into her mouth.*

## **My Burger**

*If I don't have to cook it, I ask for this one. Sadly, I'm almost always the one cooking, which is probably for the best with my heart issues.*

Container - *Gluten-Free Hamburger bun*





*Substance - Ground Beef Costco patty  
One small pile of Chopped Brisket  
1 slice of Halloumi*

*Lubrication - Mayo*

*Flavor-Aid - Sauted Shiitake mushrooms*

*A few shavings of Vella Dry Jack cheese*

*If it's not obvious, I like to eat, and this one goes into all the areas, but especially the mushrooms. Chanterelles would work too, I bet.*



# Ben Kissel, Re-hab & LPotL



I had to tell JP that Ben Kissel was off Last Podcast on the Left for the time being.

This won't mean much to y'all, most likely, but to me, and to him, it means a lot,

*Last Podcast on the Left* I've talked about a lot, but it's a comedy true crime-high strangeness-paranormal-weird stuff podcast hosted by Marcus Parks, Henry Zebrowski, and Ben Kissel. They're all great, in their own way, and as I described them in the Podcasts issue several years ago

now, Marcus is the Brains, Henry is the balls, and Ben, well, he's the heart.

And he's been having a rough go of it lately.

Now, for background, Ben's been very open about his alcohol and drug use for ages. He's almost certainly a high-functioning alcoholic. It happens. He's turned it into a bit that he uses on his podcasts, and apparently he leans into it at times. He's had trouble with women, and one led to immense heartbreak was a woman named Brooke. They were together for a good long while, and I think it was in 2019 that they broke up, though might have been a little earlier.

And the folks that knew him started noticing that Ben was drinking more and not taking care of himself.

Ben's a big guy - 6'7 and 3 bills and change. He's usually portrayed as a gentle giant, and kinda awkward. When the Billy Jensen mess happened a little over a year ago (I'll write it up again, someday...) he had a brief mention as he followed a woman back to her room to get some edibles, and he sorta freaked her out. Nothing overt, but certainly there was something unspoken that she didn't like.

Ben was dating a woman who went by @boo-boobirdie on Instagram. She's gorgeous, cuts hair, and they seemed happy.

Seemed.

Now, I believe they started dating in 2021, but during the pandemic, and slightly before, Ben had been showing signs of serious issues. Trapped in the house during the Lockdown, he was drinking more and basically stopped taking care of himself. Supposedly, he didn't even own a towel and would just get out of the shower and walk



around all wet. There were moments when you could tell his co-host on the LPotL-spinoff *Side Stories*, Henry Zebrowski, was legitimately concerned for him.

The few folks I know who saw him in recent months at events all had similar things to say. But...he showed up, he did his job, and people loved him because he was the heart of the show.

Booobirdie, though, made a post. She said that 'everyone's favorite podcaster' had abused her, specifically mentioning that he'd held her down on the bed and screamed at her. This rang abuse alarms all over the place, and coupled with Ben's known drinking problems, that's a recipe for disaster.

There was a wave of commentary, both saying Ben would never do such a thing and that Ben was clearly an abuser who needs to be run out of town on a rail.

A lot of folks, myself included, just wanted him to get help.

That one incident is terrible and sad, and of course, we don't know what surrounded it on either side, but Ben did not look good, and she had no reason to lie.

Could this be a relationship between two toxic people? Absolutely. Could Ben's alcohol have made him abusive? No, though it can certainly loosen the structures that keep most people from acting on their darkest impulses. Could every factor interact to cause a perfect storm that led him there? Yes.

On *Side Stories*, they announced Ben was going to rehab.

Henry, who he works with a lot, basically said that he had been making jokes about the situation as his coping mechanism, and at the same time, that they'd been kinda enabling him. They'd been worried about him for a while, and between the lines was the fact they seemed to dance around is the fact that they likely encouraged him, quite possibly stiffly, to go into rehab.

Now, there are several matters here. The first one is the argument that people go to rehab when they're dodging actual accountability for things like abuse claims. The Billy Jensen situation shows that exactly. There's also the argument that they're messing with their formula, which is interesting, but honestly, they're gonna do fine. *Side Stories* will likely be handled by Henry and Marcus, though I'd love for Amber Nelson, of *Some Place Under Neith*, would make a nice partner to Henry. They'll likely have guest hosts on the main show from time to time, and the Network they've built has a lot of folks who could do admirably. It might be telling that *Some Place Under Neith*, also in the network, did no episode last week, and is a podcast based around missing and exploited women.


The thing is we don't know what was going on in the relationship, and at the same time, we're seeing sides forming within the Last Podcast community. It's hard to read some of the absolute refusal to accept that Ben could be an abuser, but you can't argue that is a very typical argument in every scenario like this. There are those who say that Ben should be absolutely cancelled. We don't know enough. Me? I dunno.

JP and Bella love Ben. They're both massive fans of his, and though often the topics they cover are not age-appropriate, they love it (they started with the Manhattan Project series) and Ben was the one that they attached to. JP was sad, but when I told him about Ben going to rehab, he said "good for him."

I agree, little guy. Totally agree.







# Concrete by Sara Sackner

As I mentioned in the [Poetry issue of The Drink Tank](#), I really love Concrete Poetry.

It combines my love of poetry and language and my love of visual arts. I love the idea, and I've found so many works that speak to me in big ways. Ian Hamilton Finley being one of those that I love so damn much. I was trolling through [ubu.com](#) and found so many things in the Film & Videos section, including a piece called Concrete by Sara Sackner.



I'm so glad I gave it a watch.

It's a fairly straight-ahead documentary. It was perhaps shot on an iPhone back when that was still a bit of a change. The doc looks at the art collection amassed by Ruth and Marvin Sackner. They started collecting constructivist art work from the Soviet era, and that led them to collecting graphic design pieces which led to Concrete Poetry.

As you do.

Anyhoo, they amassed the largest private archive of Concrete Poetry in the world, and this doc was about how they view that archive and what it all means.

Now, this isn't at all experimental, it's very traditional. A lot of talking heads with the Sackners, but the soundtrack is full of minimalist compositions, including the opening number which gets repeated at the end of the doc - Terry Riley's *In C*. To me, it's about the contrast between the repetitive pulse of much of the music and the freewheeling lack of traditional form for the works themselves. It's a beautiful feeling it produces, and that alone makes this a doc worth watching.

The quietly obsessed collector and his wife concept is one that will be familiar to a lot of SF fans...myself included. There were certainly images of myself I found watching it.

You can see it at <https://ubu.com/film/sackner.html>







# UFO News

SO, Aliens showed up in Mexican congress.

This is weirder than you're thinking.

So, on the 12th of September, Mexico held its first official hearings about OVNI (objetos voladores no identificados) or UFOs. Their big name in UFOlogy, Jaime Maussan, brought two crates, and in them were two weird looks, stone-like things that looked like petrified grey aliens.

Well, kinda looked like.

The things looked like paper mache, or maybe that they were some sort of carving out of concrete. They had

testimony from a scientist who tested them and said they weren't human, but that doesn't mean they're biologics from off-planet now, does it?

The claim was that these were found near the Nasca lines in Peru and carbon-testing showed that they were more than thousand years old.

Now, I'm skeptical about these. Yes, there's something fascinating about them, but they just look so fake. Of course, I don't have any experience with actual Greys, dead or otherwise, so what do I know? Still, these LOOK fake.

Now, apparently finds like this have happened before, and in the past they've turned out to be...mummified children. Dark, right? These would require active modification to achieve this look. The heads have a conical shape that does somewhat remind me of images in the Babylonian section of the British Museum. The pelvises seem strange, and they do have a general carved look to them.

So, who knows? All I know is that there were supposed Aliens presented to the Mexican Congress!





Walter T. Hill



# Terry Riley's *In C*

I've been writing music again.

If you've listened to any of my podcasts, you'll have heard my music. I do things in the minimalist vein; repetitive and not dissimilar to a repeated stabbing. I like to play around with how sounds morph, but I also don't have the knowledge, or desire to learn, how music actually works.

And part of it is that I love Terry Riley's piece *In C*, and have discovered that it's a trickier piece conceptually than musically.

In other words, it's a piece of Minimalist art masquerading as a musical composition.

So the idea behind *In C* is that there are a series of 53 short musical phrases. They're numbered, 1 to 53. Each musician can play each one of them as many times as they like, in or out of concert with others playing the same phrase. There's a pulsing C, usually played on a piano (and Riley said it should be played by a Beautiful Woman, for some reason) that just goes on and on and on. This piece usually takes 45 minutes to an hour or so, but there've been performances that have gone on for several hours. Since there's no limit, I'd imagine there could be day-long pieces

I'm currently working on a take on it using Noteflight that tries to explore not only the repetitiveness, but how melody can be developed within it by treating distributed segments of the orchestra as a single instrument.

I think that the piece is more an exercise for the players than for the audience. They get to make decisions in a way that no other piece of traditional music would let them. This means they are as much composing it as Riley did...though don't tell him that. The audience can only appreciate what they hear, and then apply what they either know or think they know to what they hear. The players may, in the best of all possible orchestras, choose what the piece is, the form it takes. This makes *In C* the musical equivalent of a Sol LeWitt description of a work to be drawn on a museum wall.

And that is beautiful.

Now, this also has an unexpected financial benefit - every recording is going to be significantly different. That's a crazy idea, if you think about it. If you listen to

Beethoven's 5th, it's always gonna feel roughly the same, even the recent strong re-imagining which sped things up and gave the entire piece a certain frantic drive. But it's still the 5th. With *In C*, it ain't like that, and that means buying six or seven versions is like buying 6 or 7 thematically similar pieces, but not the same piece.

My faves? There's an incredible version by Piano Circus that is the one that I have based all my thoughts on *In C* upon. It's crisp, and far more playful than any of the others I've heard. The Styrenes make it into a Noise Rock piece, and it works.

The best is by The Young Gods. This is an Industrial Rock version with electronics, guitars, voice and all sorts of witty things. It's an incredible performance by the French rockers, and I can not tell you how engrossing it is. The power of the piece is that it takes the open concept and opens it up just a bit further.

I love *In C*, and while it's not fun listening, it's the kind of listening I need once in a while.





OK, that's enough for this issue!

Next one might be a focused issue (there are two things - one about fashion and one about Crime/Paranormal happenings) that deserve a longer issue to explore kinda like the REM/LISK did.

Either way, I've got *Journey Planet* stuff I gotta get to doin' (we're working on a Vietnam issue, and the Jack the Ripper in Fiction one) and there's a *Drink Tank* we're nearly done with.



