

# Futures

## Five courses on Ganymede

A local feast. By PH Lee



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

**"G**ood evening, Ma'am. Welcome to *Cupbearer*."

"Prix Fixe for one please."

"So I know you're supposed to be anonymous, but you're the only food critic in the outpost. I read your blog every week."

"Of course. That's why the head chef came out to greet me —"

"Oh, no. That's just because we're short-staffed."

"Oh?"

"We're not getting a lot of business. You're our first customer tonight."

"Oh."

"A review would help."

"I just want to be clear that although I appreciate what you're doing — our food on Ganymede is appallingly dehydrated, and locavorism is aesthetically important —"

"You have to be objective, right?"

"Right."

"And, objectively, this menu is a lot of invertebrates in algae sauce?"

"— right."

"It's that we keep seeing Ganymede as an *object we're studying* and not as a *place we live* —"

"Please stop explaining the food to me and let me eat it."

"Sorry. I'll get your appetizer."

### **Appetizer course: Triskelion crepe**

"You're actually serving me *triskelion*?"

"It's got a great texture, similar to *escargot* but —"

"That's fine, but: you're serving me the most poisonous known life-form as an appetizer?"

"Venomous."

"What?"

"Lanham's triskelion the most *venomous* known life-form. The most *poisonous* is still the poison dart fr —"

"I don't see how that matters."

"Triskelion venom is too toxic for them to retain. Instead, it's formed by a reaction after they sting."

"And this matters why?"

"Because we don't use the venom precursors in the dish — just the inner-arm meat — it's perfectly safe."

"..."

"Should I take a bite for you?"

"No, I'm sure it's fine — that *is* like *escargot*. And the crepe is unexpected. Crisp and salty. More of a cracker."

"Well, the Ganymedian ecology has no yeast analogues —"

"It wasn't a complaint."

### **Salad course: Thrice-cooked saltweed**

"This is a pile of irregular grey shapes."

"Because it's made with all Ganymedian ingredients. Without photosynthesis or vision, it's almost all greys."

# Futures

“Unappetizing greys.”

“With an attractive geometric presentation!”

“It’s like eating a brutalist apartment block.”

“You still –”

“I’m just saying that I would normally send this back and get a Caesar.”

“Fair.”

“Huh. That texture is ...”

“Hard to place?”

“Something like a chewy crunch? The edge of a lasagne, but inside out.”

“Right!”

“Too much acid in the dressing, though.”

“It has to be acidic. Without an acid, salt-weed is dangerously caustic.”

“Is that so?”

“Want to see my burn scars?”

## Pasta course: Soft tubeworm shell with nellite cheese

“This is unsettling.”

“It isn’t actually eating worms, only the shell-like –”

“It’s not that. Worms can be delicious. But this texture is uncannily like fettuccine.”

“Right? It goes through five acid baths and it turns out al dente.”

“And this nellite cheese – aren’t nellites invertebrates?”

“Everything on Ganymede is an invertebrate.”

“Without milk, how do you make cheese?”

“When the nellites migrate upwards, what do they eat?”

“I don’t know. Hadn’t thought about it.”

“Neither had anyone else. We assumed that they had some fat-analogue. So we put together a field expedition.”

“For one menu item?”

“Cheese is important! Anyway, nellites keep internal stores of core-algae, which compress and ferment over time. They even feed it to their hatchlings.”

“Strange flavour. Very pungent. Strongly

umami. Miso gone mouldy?”

“A little bit does go a long way. So we pair it with tubeworm shells, which are honestly a little bland.”

## Main course: Smoked wallplant with circleworm egg

“Just when I’ve got used to the grey.”

“It’s striking!”

“‘Striking’ covers it. Where does the colour come from?”

“No one knows.”

“No one knows?”

“Wallplants are brightly coloured – red, violet, green. And no one knows why. It’s not chlorophyll. It’s not a visual signal. But here we are: bright red wallplant steak.”

“The flavour is unexpected. No mesquite.”

“Smoked with compressed core-algae.”

“Texture’s dry, though.”

“Break the egg.”

“Oh, it’s completely liquid! That’s much better – no egg-like richness, though. Refreshing and bitter, like a sencha or oolong. It goes much better with the burnt smokiness. Can I get another one?”

## Aperitif: Tubemite honey-wine

“I’ve never seen a drink quite that –”

“Grey?”

“Yes.”

“Smell it.”

“Oh, that’s lovely. Intensely floral. Maybe too perfumey?”

“Try it.”

“This is alcoholic!”

“Oh no! Do you not drink? On your blog –”

“It’s not that. But there aren’t any yeast-analogues on Ganymede.”

“True.”

“Then how –”

“It’s a wild yeast strain from the outpost.”

“So much for locavorism!”

“But that’s the point! It is locavorism. Just because this yeast came from Earth, like us,

doesn’t mean we aren’t local to Gan –”

“Fine, just let me try it – strange aftertaste. I need another sip – I still can’t get a handle on it.”

“Another glass?”

“No, no. Not very wine-like. The salt cuts the floral, but the sweetness – it’s quite refreshing.”

“The floral flavour is from exotic salts formed at high pressures inside the tubeworm’s –”

“No more biology lessons.”

“Sorry.”

“But some more wine? There, yes. I need to think about it.”

## Epilogue

“Good evening, Ma’am. Welcome back to *Cupbearer*.”

“Oh, you recognized me?”

“Of course. You’re *still* the only food critic in the outpost.”

“I thought, after the review –”

“I won’t lie, I was upset at first. But it was fair. Objective. And look around: it brought in customers!”

“Really? Even after ‘the presentation, in the end, is nothing more than a dismal arrangement of unappetizing greys?’”

“Can’t argue with results. I think it was probably: ‘For better or for worse, *Cupbearer* offers a true taste of Ganymede and we owe it to ourselves, and this world, to try it.’”

“Well. Surprising! Is there a table free?”

“Unfortunately, it’s at least half an hour for a table, but there’s space at the bar.”

“The bar is fine. Perhaps a glass of –”

“The tube-mite wine! Of course.”

**PH Lee** lives atop an old walnut tree behind a rose-flower hedge at the edge of town. They have appeared in *ClarksWorld*, *Uncanny Magazine* and *Visions Magazine*.