

The Pastapocalypse

Lisa A. Koosis

The world ended not with nuclear missiles, nor rising floodwaters, but with pasta. There was no Judgment Day, no Second Coming, no aliens with cold, metal probes. There was only rigatoni and fusilli, golden strands of linguini and striated tubes of penne.

Zeb clucked. He'd known that the low-carb craze had been the beginning of the end. What good could come of a life without rice and bagels, without buttery pound cake and the whipped goodness of mashed potatoes?

Through the window he watched the chaos. Carl from next-door attempted to mow his way through a lawn of orzo, raking at his arms and face as if stung by a swarm of Africanized bees. Apparently uncooked, the orzo pierced his skin. His blood looked like tomato sauce.

Zeb shuddered. What if it had been pastina's sharp, star-shaped profile rather than the missile-like orzo? He envisioned millions of pastina saw-blades zinging through the air, weapons-grade macaroni slicing everything in its path, down to the tiniest gnat. He backed away from the window.

So far his own house hadn't been breached. He wondered if it had anything to do with the shrine in the pantry; votive candles flickering in glasses as red as marinara sauce, offerings to the idols that surrounded them: cans of spaghetti-o's, boxes of individually-wrapped snack cakes, jars of pancake mix.

On television, the news brought images of the end. In China, wontons slapped wetly against frantic cyclists. In seashore towns it rained batter, terrified fisherman fleeing from the prospect of being served up with chips. In one elementary school, carb-deprived children and hair-netted lunch ladies suffocated beneath an onslaught of cupcakes.

In some places, Armageddon had completed its savaging. All that remained of once lively Main streets were lumps of congealed leftovers.

One anchorwoman spoke of the potato uprising in Idaho. Behind her, diabolical, lumpy-brown forms tumbled and rolled toward townsfolk. Many there, the anchor reported, had died not from concussive potato attacks but rather from sleep deprivation.

One bleary-eyed eyewitness spoke haltingly. "How could I sleep with all those eyes watching me?" she sobbed to the camera.

Zeb flipped off the television with shaking hands. Outside, screams continued as people tried to make their way to stores for low-fat cottage cheese and tubes of squeeze-yogurt. In the silence he heard the slither of noodles in the second floor hallway.

The lump in his throat felt like undigested French fries. This wasn't fair. He'd never turned his back on carbs. He took seconds of sticky white rice every time he went to the Asian buffet and sometimes even thirds (though only when he thought nobody was looking).

He peered out into the hallway. The first wave of apocalyptic starches struggled through the old shag carpeting. With an overcooked squelch, ravioli tripped over tortellini as they came toward him.

"I've been on your side!" Zeb shouted. "I drew devil's horns and a moustache on the picture of the woman eating the Atkins special on the steakhouse menu. I did."

Still the pasta advanced, joined by what looked like Rice-a-roni. The San Francisco treat squiggled like golden maggots through the shag.

"But I love you. Look. You and I are joined." He lifted the hem of his food-stained tee-shirt to reveal a pale expanse of paunch. "Only carbs could do that to me, right?"

They kept coming, a menace of starches intent on world domination. And the only way out was through them. But out to where? This was pasta's world now. They'd reclaimed it. He ran anyway, slipping on tangles of fettuccini and mounds of gnocchi.

"You made me!" he sobbed to the foods that once formed the foundation of his nutritional food pyramid.

He made it to the kitchen and looked longingly at the stovetop where water once boiled, where pans of garlic and oil once steamed aromatically.

Behind him, the invaders continued their steady progression. He smelled dinner in their every movement. Anger flooded through him like hot gravy through mashed potatoes.

"You made me," he said again, but this time the sorrow was gone. Yes, they'd made him. They'd made him strong. Years of complex carbs had given him boundless energy and the wherewithal to fight.

Outside the house, screams continued. He tuned them out. Unlike the dying dieters—because after all, what is diet but die with a T at the end—he had the tools to defeat this invasion, and he was prepared to use them.

Surrounded now, Zeb dashed for his utensil draw and yanked it open. Tossing aside apple corers and egg slicers, he grabbed instead the stainless steel spaghetti tongs.

Zeb faced the deadly ranks. "So you think you're al dente, huh?"

It might have been his imagination, but did they slide backwards just a bite? The thought fueled his courage like a well-balanced meal. Zeb opened the refrigerator and rummaged around, pushing aside bottles of balsamic vinaigrette and ketchup until he found what he wanted.

Then, kicking aside the encroaching noodles, he pulled open the front door and looked out at the pasta-ravaged world.

Spaghetti spoon in one hand and shaker of grated cheese in the other, he headed outside.

Standing before the traitorous ranks, he licked his lips. "I have only one thing to say to you. Dinner is served."

And Zeb, prepared to save the world from this Pastapocalypse, began to eat his way to victory.

Lisa refuses to participate in the low carb revolution. She lives in New York with her husband, cats, and lots of spaghetti. Her work has appeared in numerous small press venues including *Not One of Us*, and MeadowHawk Press's *Touched By Wonder* anthology.