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*From the menu of Tom Bombadil's Food & Drink, written and designed by Todd Ellison.*

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This sample was conceived as a sort of brand-building entertainment for the patrons of Tom Bombadil's Food & Drink in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.

The original idea was that the story (printed on the back of the menu) would give patrons something to do while while waiting for their meal. But the tale became so popular that souvenir copies were printed that customers could take home.

They did. And they showed their friends in Ohio and Vermont and Hong Kong, who then made it a point to visit Bombadil's when they were in Kailua-Kona.

Seems like good marketing to me. Who says business is too serious for fiction?



Adverse to the common wisdom, the food preparation called pizza was not invented in recent centuries by an Italian baker named Pizzarelli who too often stinted on the yeast. Recent findings indicate a quite different and dramatic origin in the almost forgotten past, in a portion of a broad land known as Middle Earth.

Some readers may be acquainted with fragments of the history of this land from the chronicles of the One Ring of Power, documented by a certain J.R.R. Tolkien. If so, you may encounter the occasional reference to a familiar place.

This brief history takes place in the region around the Shire, legendary habitat of hobbitfolk. In those times, the formerly peaceful land of the Shire was in turmoil. An influx of foreign creatures was in progress: men, grimmits, yelches and even an occasional gollabog in the throes of wine-rage. The voracious grimmits glather in from the dreaded Old Forest, raiding orchards and vegetable patches, while the ground-hugging, eight-legged yelches stalk barn-fowl, pets and ham-houses with fierce carnivorousness. No foodstuff is safe from their combined predations.

At Nippo's Inn and Out House, a popular dive on the Eastern Verge near the River Brandywine, four stout hearties nurture schemes every bit as frothy as their mugs of dark ale. Outside, the night is dark as cask-dregs; inside, a lively hearth-blaze inflames the mood and bubbles a cauldron of stewed wild hare, onions and herbs. To the vast annoyance of patrons, the customary chicken and turnips are unavailable and grimmits and yelches are held responsible.

"I hark for purging the good Shire of these shameless trespassers," says one with vehemence. "Drub 'em to pulp."

"Perhaps in daylight, whilst they be napping," expounds another, more tentatively.

"Their lairs be not unknown," offers a third under his breath while staring at the rafters.

"Such thirsty work calls for at least a small-keg," says the ever-practical fourth.

A few rounds later the issue is decided. True to their oaths, the four doughy halflings depart at sunup. All bear drubs of stout oak with which to administer proper drubbings. The Old Forest seems older than usual on this morning, its ancient bones creaking and ornery, and the tendrils of mist that tickle hobbit lip-whiskers lurch rather than flow, as

if drawn by a palsied hand. Such poignant observations occupy their attentions until midmorning when a sharp nose detects the bitter spoor of a full glommet of yelches.

Spirits rekindled, the four energetically flail and jab their drubs by way of honing their somewhat rusty battle skills. With freshened vigor and brave flourishes, they proceed. Two-score paces later, a well-worn grimmit trail crosses their own path: it is dotted with copious splats of fresh grimmit-droppings. Phew! Stealth is now the watchword. Fitting grimmit-plugs into their wide nostrils, they creep forward hunched and tense, hearts thumping. Presently, they reach the edge of a small, dark clearing, still enshadowed by tall, surly boughs.

Nudging their courage to new heights, the four creep forward on silent feet, drubs at ready.

Suddenly, a raucous screlch is raised up from all around them. A hail of fist-sized bunion nuts descends from the surrounding trees at high velocity. Well-aimed missiles raise both welts and bellows of unbecoming anguish. Defenseless against this cowardly aerial onslaught, drubs are cast aside and the four flee across the clearing and deeper into the gloomy forest on the far side.

Sol is straight overhead when the intrepid four, winded, worn, scratched, bruised and bumped, rein in their furry feet at the banks of a small stream. They convince themselves that they are now out of range of their attackers and decide upon a proper course of action: rest, lunch and enough ale to soothe the partch and swamp the gullet. Then, properly fortified, they will reconnoiter.

They do all the above, but find no familiar landmark. They decide to test the truism that down-flowing streams lead to rivers, more often than not. Clouds of skitters and dense clots of nettle, prickwort and firefern slow their progress and provoke a steady dribble of curses. After a time the stream flattens, the annoyances dissipate and the way becomes easier.

A little later their ears detect a remarkable sound. Well, not just a sound, but a tune. Very nearly musical. Some creature is bellowing a song, and it's not far off if their ears can be trusted. Old tales are remembered and a possibility presents itself simultaneously to all four.

"Aha!" exclaims the first.

"Quite possible!" intones the second.

"Could it be old Bombadil?" wonders the third.

"Yup," affirms the fourth.

They wait. Tom Bombadil appears bearing a bouquet of mist-blossoms wrung from the hair of river sprites. He is wearing yellow boots, that much is noticed right away. The hobbits hail him down and, after some spirited blabber of lips and waving of limbs, succeed in describing their quest and their plight.

Tom guffaws indelicately. "Yelch and grimmit? Hardly problems in my neighborhood.

Why, with a dash of cleverness and the proper fixings they verily deal with themselves! Mayhap you'd care to observe my method?"

The hobbits are puzzled but not foolish. They nod. Tom breaks into verse:

"Grimmits love grains, roots and vegetable greens

Whilst the meats are the food of the yelches.

If you mix all this fare like the way I prepare

They'll dismantle each other to belches.

"Come," directs Tom, heading eastward with a good stride and a broad grin. After a few minutes, Tom stops, waits while the hobbits catch up. He points toward the ground. There lays a strange, round, flat cake piled high with assorted scraps of victual. Comprehension erupts like a blast from Mount Doom.

"They'll slash, mash and clobber each other over this," announces the first.

"As long as it's not raining tonight," cautions the second.

"The Shire is saved!" exults the third.

"What do you make it of?" inquires the fourth.

"Oh," quoth Tom offhandedly, "just a pizza this and a pizza that."

And so it came to pass that the grimmits and yelches committed horrendous and remarkably thorough acts of co-destruction, at least in the vicinity of the Shire. Normalcy resettled like prodigal sons, and pizza — for so it came to be called — became a culinary fashion in Middle Earth.