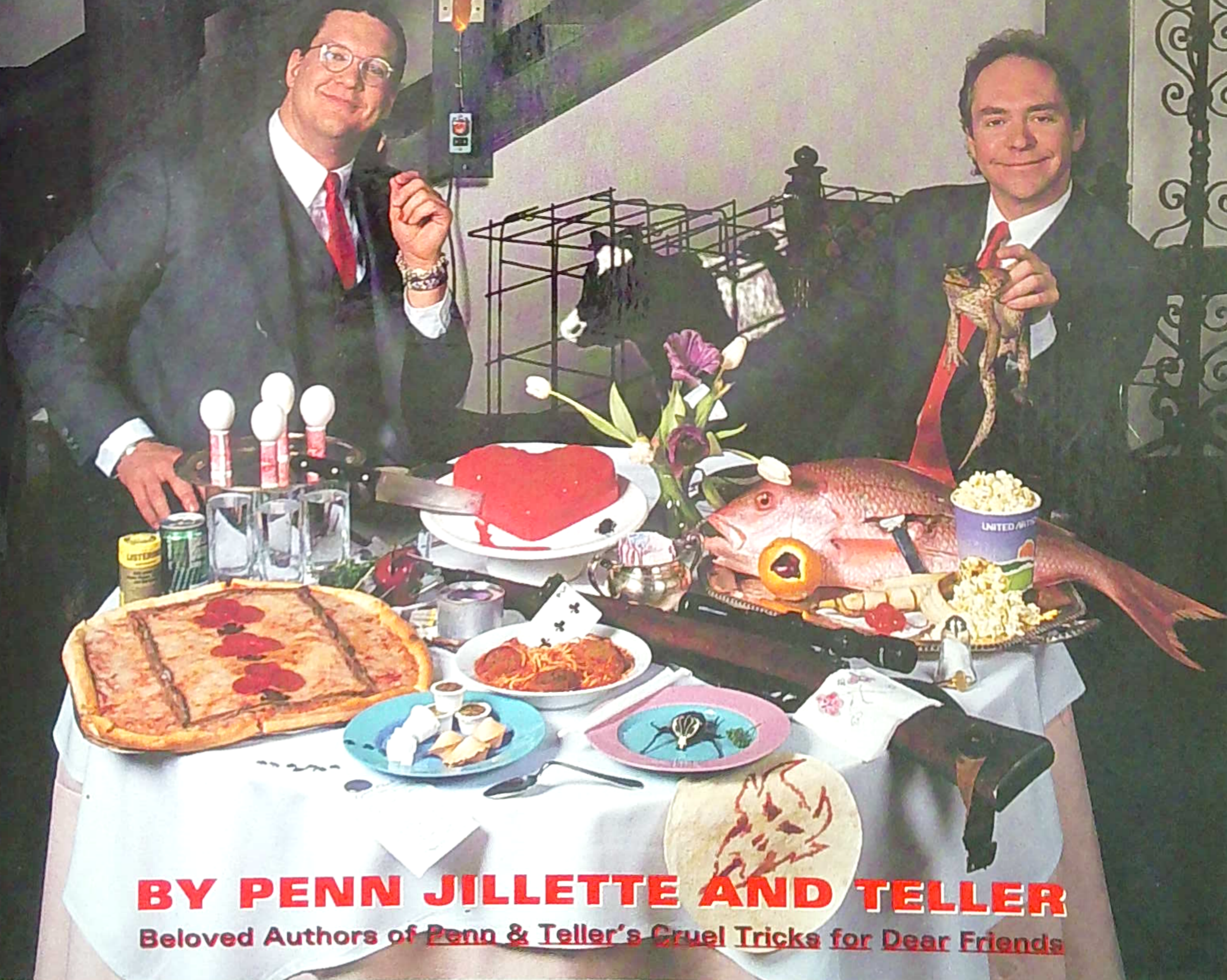


PENN & TELLER'S How To PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD



BY PENN JILLETTE AND TELLER

Beloved Authors of Penn & Teller's Cruel Tricks for Dear Friends

PIXAR'S LISTERINE HACK

To computer people, scams, practical jokes, and most anything sneaky and clever are "hacks." Our computer buddies congratulate us on our "Letterman hacks." This book could be called "Penn & Teller's Food Hacks."

Pixar is a company in Northern California that does computer animation. Their animation includes stuff like "Luxor Jr.," "Knick Knack," and the Academy Award winner, "Tin Toy." These guys kick ass and take names. I don't really remember when we first met them, but when we're playing San Francisco, we make time to hang.

Pixar does computer animation for TV commercials and they had the Listerine account. They did the groovy advertisement of the Listerine bottle boxing. It's a good-looking ad. Working on that commercial brought them in contact with the Listerine advertising agency. They got an idea for a hack.

Everybody knows that Listerine has a chemical in it that makes you vomit¹ if you swallow too much of it.² The thinking is: Because Listerine is 26.9% alcohol, they put this magic chemical in so they won't get a bad reputation from drunks swilling it down. (We like this idea. We wish Dom Perignon and Budweiser were as considerate of our civilization.)

On the day of a big Listerine meeting the Pixar guys—John, Craig, Flip, and Andrew—got two big bottles of Listerine. (They didn't have to go far. They had cases lying around for modeling purposes.) They opened one bottle and left it open in the room—allowing that distinctive Listerine smell to waft.

They took the other bottle, emptied it out, and rinsed it out a few times. Even rinsing the bottle several times, that smell still lingers. They

¹ In this story we will refer to vomiting several times. The temptation to use a different euphemism or dysphemism at every junction is overwhelming. But, since President Bush had his embarrassing incident in Japan, it seems we've heard everything from "technicolor yawn" to "calling Ralph on the porcelain phone" one too many times. We'll stick to "vomit," "barf," "throw up," and "puke."

² This is what Pixar told us; we had never heard this "fact." It turns out that like many things "everybody knows" this seems to be false. We called Nancy Fitzsimmons, who does P.R. for the Warner-Lambert Co. (they own Listerine), and she said there was no special chemical in Listerine to make you vomit. I guess it just tastes bad enough that it's easy for everybody to believe there's a chemical in it to make you puke.

mixed apple juice and water in the gaffed³ bottle to match the Listerine color in the reference bottle. They screwed the top back on tightly.⁴

That's all. They were set. When the meeting started, random-chance-in-a-godless-universe smiled on our heroes. The producer of the Listerine spot, who was *not* in on the gag, mentioned the "fact" about the anti-wino-barf-chemical (do winos even mind barfing?) in the Listerine. They pounced. Flip eyed the bottle. John pulled out a twenty-dollar bill and threw it on the table. He dared Flip to drink the mouthwash "just down to the top of the label." Andrew matched the twenty bucks.

Flip picked up the bottle and took a deep breath. Stopping to breathe between each slug, he drank down to the top of the label. He acted up a storm, the smell filling the room. The Suits were turning green. Flip was trying for his first nonanimation Academy Award. When he'd killed it to the label, Craig offered him another \$20 to polish it off. Judi, the producer from Listerine, had to leave for the rest room where she threw up from Flip drinking *apple juice*.

A perfect hack.

In the classic "that was awful—let's do it to someone else," Judi had them set it up a couple weeks later and swilled it herself to freak out her bigwigs.

³ Carny/magician slang for gimmicked, rigged, not on the up and up.

⁴ Let this be a lesson to you. Companies like Warner-Lambert put seals on their products for a reason. Always check the safety seal before an important bet.