

The Sad History of the Tearless Onion

by Ann Leckie

Matthias Fenstermacher loved onions, but hated slicing them, and so he labored to produce a tearless variety. His first attempt was indeed tearless--instead of weeping, the slicer was overcome by fits of uncontrollable giggles. The potential hazard was obvious.

Fenstermacher's next onion, the product of ten more years of careful work, gave cooks a gentle regret for past pleasures--a good deal more manageable than hilarity armed with a knife. Fenstermacher sent these to market, with great success. He became a very wealthy man.

The first sign of trouble came when a preacher discovered that Fenstermacher's onion grown in a very acid soil produced violent repentance for past sins. By the time the congregation realized that the local spiritual revival was the product of *Allium* and not The Almighty, the preacher had disappeared along with the generous donations of his former flock.

The result was hysteria. Whole crops were plowed under. Produce sellers were attacked in the street. Any onion was suspect. Could onions induce murderous rages? Topple governments? Lead nations to war? Well-bred maidens shuddered to think their virtue might be threatened by the rumored Onion D'Amore. Then the injuries from adolescent onion slicing parties began appearing in emergency rooms--Fenstermacher's first onion had escaped.

By popular acclaim, onions were declared illegal and (except for a

few surreptitious sprouts tended by devoted onion fanatics) eradicated. Garlic, shallots, and scallions narrowly escaped, but were no longer entirely trustworthy. Every one of Fenstermacher's onions was rooted out and burned, his notes and greenhouse destroyed, and Fenstermacher himself, whose only intention had been to spare humanity the stinging tears of *Allium cepa*, died of grief.

