

CIAO DOWN

We overlooked the ghastly red/green/white decor at **Cocina Italiano** (which apparently means "Italian Pig") since it's Italy's culinary signature; pasta, slopped with tomato sauce, salad on the side. They even designed their flag after it. Their national anthem is probably about tortellini. The **WEEKEND WARRIOR** respects tradition, and Italian cuisine is about as traditional as it gets.

You think of Italy and what do you think of (other than irreparable cars and skinny mutant footwear)--you think of food. The great Italians of the past are all connected with eating: Ceasar, inventor of the salads that bear his name; he roman heroes, and the sandwiches that bare their buns; Galileo, populizer of the leaning tower of Pizza; Vivaldi, composer of the Four Seasonings; Mousillini, inventor of Mousse, (as well as the Lil Duce Coup). The great La Sagna. Martini, Rossi, Spumoni, the whole works. Food and history are inseperable in Italian culture. Rome was the cradle of cuisine, as well as civilization. Well, not civilization, exactly, but fascism--which is still something. Not as big a deal as civilization itself, but that particular cradle was in Mesopotamia and when was the last time you saw a Mesopotamian restaurant reviewed?

Anyway Rome, to get through this history drivel, came into being in a single day (contrary to popular myth). It was founded by Romulans and Uncle Remus, who were abandoned as youths (but then weren't we all?) and survived by drinking wolf milk. But don't worry, Italian cuisine has gotten better since then. In fact, the better places don't even have wolf tit on the menu anymore. What replaced it was mostly carbohydrate.

Which was just fine with my dining companion of the evening, who can metabolize carbohydrate like a house of burning love. The waiters and patrons did a good job of not noticing her, although everyone has seen her doing her perky co-anchor thing on Channel Nine. Or certainly in those ads for the body salon gym. The ads that told you how you could a body like hers for only several thousand bucks in dues and years of sweat, pain and malnutrition. If you'd had different parents. Well, neener neener, I get to have that very same body for the price of an Italian dinner. What she calls "carbohydrate loading", a buzzword around the aerobics slums for an activity that would be called "pigging out" if done by a person with no lycra suit or subscription to "Your Gorgeous Own

Little Self" magazine.

She and I have been lovers (if that's really the word for such a sick, demented, twisted, grasping relationship) for years off-camera (well generally, I do happen to have a couple of interesting videocassettes I'd consider renting to discriminating fans.)

Electronic media people are a weird bunch. Many are not even really people. There are several pre-programmed androids in the business--looking human above the waist and a mass of circuits and relays below. And there are several computer-generated characters, refinements on Max Headroom. My pasta date is neither and therefore, though she doesn't realize it, is on the way out. But don't tell her. (Like most television types she doesn't read print media because she is a little vague on how the reading thing works.)

As the waiter seated us, I was able to impress him with a well-turned Italian phrase or two, such as, "Vini, Vidi, Vici". Meaning, of course, "Get us some *wine* and put on a *video* of *Miami Vice*." Little Miss Local Feed, without italic visual aids to cue her in, was less impressed by my erudition, displaying the demeanor that caused her highschool classmates to vote her, "Most Likely Competitive Little Bitch To Get Slapped Down With A Veal Scallopini."

"This is the pits," she proclaimed, looking around the restaurant, "I mean, there's just the two of us, sitting here...eating."

"Well, at least you're being a sport about it," I said.

"And speaking of sports, what sort of night did the Padres have?"

"Will you quit doing that?"

"Sorry. Anyway, here's our waiter with a peek at what highly visible young media darlings are consuming these days."

"Keep it up, kid."

"Look I wouldn't even be in this dump with you if you hadn't told me it was a photo opportunity."

"I know. And you wouldn't have gone to bed with me if I hadn't convinced you I was scouting for talent in the Eastern market areas."

"That's not true. It was your camera. My therapist says it's because I've spent most of my life projecting my sex appeal into a camera lens and now that's the only kick I get. Live people bore me, really. I mean, they're just one person, you know? What kind of demographic slice is that? But just the sight of a camera pointed at me gets me horny as hell."

"Well that sure explains a lot of weird things you do in bed."

"Probably, but as long as we're explaining away weird kinky stuff, why the hell can't you fully aroused unless,,,"

"Look, let's not get into that here and now, okay? I mean, there's a lot of people reading this column and..."

"Yeah, but they can't SEE us, can they? God, it's so frustrating. I don't see how you print media people stand it."

"Well, it has it's compensations. For one thing, I can rewrite and edit, make you say anything I want to."

"You wouldn't."

"You've been sleeping with me three months and think there's something too rotten for me to do? Go ahead, say something."

"Look, she said, pulling open her dress and standing up in the Cocina wearing nothing but heels, a string of pearls and her prosthesis, "Take me...right here on the table with my ass squishing the melons and prociutto. I want you to degrade me, fill me with vile filth in front of the world."

"Maybe later," I said. The melon and prociutto were passable by the way, this is a restaurant review, after all.

"My GOD!!! What am I saying....How did you DO that?"

"Word processor. Strange, huh? Print media can warp reality any way I want."

"But....but...we're real people. I mean, more or less. You can't change what it's my mind by editing this three days from now."

"Come on, who cares what's in your mind? Or if? Admit it, your whole world is what all those people perceive. Isn't it?"

"Of course it is! I'm the token fox on a local news show in a third-rate media market, for God's sake."

"So how's your fettucini carbonara? I've gotta ask so I can write this off."

"It's just wonderful. There's plenty of sauce in the picture, and you can see how these little vortecies of olive oil are swirling in here. So it should be a pretty darn nice weekend."

"So, you approve?"

"No, it's missing something. Excuse me but...PICTURES! Meanwhile, in local news, it looks like my other boyfriend's wife is about to tumble to what we've been up to."

"Now that's breaking news."

"No, that's human interest."

"Well, what should we say about the Italian restaurant?"

"Well, we both have the same opinion. Check it out at eleven."

"That about covers it. Now, could you handle the waiter's tip while you've still got your clothes off?"

"I do?"

"You do now."