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WHY BIGNESS FAILS p. 16 FICTION BY BENJAMIN PERCY p. 43  
SHOULD YOU GET AN AVATAR? p. 38 HOW TO LOVE EMPTINESS p. 56



I think even humans are living in captivity," Munchrath said. "We are bound by oceans, if not finances. We are bound by the limits of technology. We cannot really leave this Earth and most of us cannot leave our own country. How big should a cage be before the inhabitants are not considered to be captive?"

## Afterbirth, It's What's for Dinner

BY LOU BENDRICK

Eating your own afterbirth isn't unnatural—many mammals do it. But unless a Western human is really hungry (in which

case a burger will likely suffice), or trying to cover her scent from predators (a pack of hyenas in the delivery room is generally considered unlikely), the burgeoning motivation among some mothers-to-be to engage in placentophagy ("feeding on placenta") is difficult to understand. Let's face it: it takes a lot of motivation to consume something falling under a vaguely cannibalistic taboo that looks like a biohazard and tastes like God-knows-what.

Today's woman, though, can avoid the ick factor by hiring a "placenta encapsulation specialist" (certified specialists follow OSHA rules) who will transform (read: cook) an afterbirth into a benign jar of capsules. Encapsulation specialists say that ingesting your hormone-rich afterbirth can give mom a happier postpartum experience by enhancing breast milk supply, increasing energy, and balancing hormones. And while this practice might not be a bona fide trend outside of the home-birthing community, public awareness about it is growing. In 2006, during an interview with *GQ* magazine, Tom Cruise joked about eating his wife's placenta and caused a media uproar. This year, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Joel Stein wrote about his wife's placental encapsulation for mainstream audiences in *Time*. (Stein, who paid \$275 for this service, observed that "placenta-eating is really just the beginning of how gross we humans are.")

Unfortunately, the medical community seems largely to agree that there are few benefits to placenta consumption, and no compelling studies, at least in *Homo sapiens*, show that these pills do much good.

But that doesn't mean we should throw the placenta out with the birth water. Perhaps placentophagy is natural in a modern sense—one that embraces environmentalism. Eating your baby's amniotic sac is not only an exemplary form of recycling, but also about as "local" as you can get (food miles = zero). And because no creature was harmed (hey, one was even cre-

### FLY ON THE WALL



*When a fly enters a chamber in David Bowen's fly drawing device, sensors detect its movement and convey the information to a microcontroller, which activates a drawing arm. The result is a sketch based on the fly's movements in real time. Once a fly is no longer detected, the drawing is complete; the paper unscrolls and a new drawing begins with a new fly.*

