

AN: Right, it took some time, but I believe this is a display of utmost geekiness, both from the boys and from the author. I didn't just export this, I wrote the actual source file, or whatever it's called. L^AT_EX anyway, 2 ϵ version.

G R I N N I N G

A Celebration of the Geek

Danee-san

August 29, 2007

The shaded light from the plafoniere contrasted with the almost neon light emitted by the laptop screen. Heero Yuy's face was bathed more in the latter than the former. The illumination threw his features in stark relief. His fingers flitted over the keys, the mechanism hardly making a sound, despite the strength in those fingers.

Around the laptop, papers were spread out, covering the surface of the desk completely. A quick look showed they talked of things the average mortal had no hope of understanding. The customized docking station of the laptop not only connected the fairly small machine to the extensive PC underneath the desk, lending its impressive processors to the speed of the programmes, but also to two more screens, hung slightly higher up on the wall. The one on the left showed an assembly of diagrams, the one on the right had a textviewer on it, several documents were opened. Heero sighed under his breath as a pop-up flashed at him and he grabbed for one of the 'hardware' papers on the desk.

"But it says it right here!" he protested angrily. "How can my data not coincide? Was it the antibodies? The compensation?"

The war had ended six years ago. Since then, each pilot had decided to find their own way in life. For Heero that had not been, what everyone had seemed to expect, the Preventers. Nor had he fulfilled everyone's second assumption and studied some computer science or other. In fact, when Duo had mentioned his surprise at failing to answer to that idea, Heero has almost laughed in his face, if he had been the kind of person to do that. Truth was, he suspected no University could offer him a challenging program. He probably knew more than any professor on Earth or the colonies.

No, instead, Heero had decided to enroll for Biochemistry. At least it was a challenge, something new, something he knew very little about, aside from the working mechanisms of several liquid or airborne poisonous substances. His Bachelor had been fun. His Master in Immunobiochemistry was... challeng-

ing. Especially once he had left the lecture hall and entered the laboratory. Knowing and understanding was not the same as being able to reproduce. As demonstrated by his current frustrations.

It had been supposed to be easy. His supervisor had told him another intern, about half a year ago, had stumbled across some half-promising results while investigating transcription factors of a possible immunosuppressive protein. Now, all Heero had had to do, was test whether the stimulated cells actually expressed the protein. It was a simple triple staining, two antibodies identifying the cell subset, one the protein. His data did not make any sense.

Some habits were hard to break. Like in the war, he had checked and double checked everything (the one time he hadn't, he had paid dearly, though not as much as the Alliance Peace delegates and their families) but still the results did not compute. There was no way unstimulated cells could display a higher activity than stimulated ones. That just did not compute.

Angrily he turned back to his computer and started calling up programmes. A small part of his mind grinned at the memory of his new colleagues at the lab catching sight of his working on it. They had asked what kind of Operating System he used. He had told them that explaining would take too long, but that he used something that mostly resembled a command prompt and that from there he could open any program or file from any path. It meant he didn't have to use a mouse. He had written every program on that thing himself. No-one else could use it, not even Duo, and the American had tried. It also meant the state of the art machine was useless to any thief. The hard wiring was also slightly different from a standard laptop, so even replacing the harddrive was not enough to make it accessible to the average mortal.

The only downside was that he had to write his own versions of the specialised programs used in the laboratories he frequented. The data output he was pouring over, was of a format that could not be altered by any standard software on the open market. Several graphs disappeared from the left wing monitor to reappear on the main one of the laptop. A few quick taps moved the gate around the population of cells visible in the graph. He did not like the amount of debris that had snuck in. He supposed the intracellular staining was to blame for that. Punching holes in cellwalls was as bad for the cells as punching holes in suithulls for MS. Still, the antibodies had to get inside. Just staining the membrane-bound form of the protein, hardly represented the amount produced by activated cells. This particular immunosuppressant functioned mostly in a soluble form. Stored in vesicles in the cytoplasm of specific immunecells, only a certain signal, which he had carefully excluded from his culture, would lead to the release of the protein.

Grumbling, Heero sat back and stared at his results. Maybe the machine had been contaminated. Maybe the previous user hadn't flushed it properly after sending his cells through to be analysed. It had been a busy day. Heero had barely managed to reserve an hour for his own probes to be sucked in after two hours of isolation and prepping, four hours of incubation with the stimulus, three hours of antibody staining and incubation and washing and more staining.

And now it looked like he had to do everything all over again!

His supervisor would not be happy. Antibodies were expensive.

Grumbling some more, he typed in several other commands, banishing the graphs back to the left hand screen and drawing his lab log from the right hand screen down. Whether he had booked results or not, his professor back at Uni wanted to see a new entry in the log every single day. For the first two weeks his entries had not consisted of more than three sentences.

*Read (n) articles today.
See Reference list for new entries.*

His Reference list included over 200 articles. He was very glad for his speed reading abilities.

For the past few weeks though, he had excessively celebrated any successful experiment. And rued his failures. It was time to dig another hole. Cracking his knuckles he set to work.

The text was easily written. First he entered the command that would include the file of the protocol he had followed. Next he included the plots his cells had appeared on. He even added the histograms, that only showed one signal, one antibody, to prove the staining had actually worked and the antibodies were not expired or something as silly as that. The discussion section would be a little more difficult though. Perhaps he should just let a page sized question mark appear and leave it at that.

For a moment his fingers halted and he grinned. Duo was rubbing off on him.

Sighing he placed his fingers back on the keys and started typing. His frustration got the better of him though. He starting putting in inane commands to vent his anger, knowing the final document would end up looking ridiculous and his professor would be scratching his head at his student's irrational behaviour. He just **couldn't** help it. **Damn** IDIOTS who couldn't take proper care of expensive equipment, *wasting* other people's time and valuable resources. He angrily referred to several articles on proper laboratory etiquette, stating just how *delicate* FACS measurements were and that the machine should be treated with the **utmost** care.

After venting his frustration he gave the compile command and let the program run along his document. He smiled triumphantly when, once again, no errors were found, not even a warning for an overfull hbox where hyphenation patterns failed to limit the line to the average of 66 characters that kept a document pleasant to read, but his heart just wasn't in it. Morosely, he sent the compiled document, in the more commonly used portable document format, to his professor and returned to his analysis program, switching the screen outputs once more.

“Aaaaaar I just don’t get it!” He was close to pulling his hair out. Damn calculations g_h just didn’t work out!

Footsteps pounded on the stairs. The door was thrown open. “Hey man, you okay? Sounded pretty heavy there.”

Duo’s American drawl was a welcome relief for the mocking numbers on his screens and Heero turned to face his lover. “Yes, sorry. My experiment seems to have failed.”

Any other day, the widening of Duo’s eyes would have been comical. Heero felt almost sorry he couldn’t properly appreciate the sight. “Failed? You? Mr. Heero anal-retentive-is-my-middle-name Yuy produced a less than perfect result?” For a moment Duo seemed at a loss for words. Then he finally managed an intelligent, well thought-out, “Huh?”

“I rechecked everything. It should have worked. Maybe the machine was dirty. Or the analysing liquid? Or the buffer?” He swivelled his chair back to face the desk, but he stretched over the back of it, hearing some slightly worrying pops of his spine. His neck creaked as well and his shoulders were stiff. He was grateful when Duo stepped up behind him to lightly kneed the muscles while he peered at the screen.

“Well, you know I don’t understand anything of this. I’m no geek like you.” He snickered. “You’re a double geek. A comp geek and a lab geek.” The hands sliding higher up his neck so the thumbs were pressing left and right of his vertebrae, as well as Duo nuzzling his hair, took the sting from the words.

Heero shrugged slightly without dislodging Duo’s hands. “Well, maybe I’m just not seeing it. It has been a crazy week at the lab, with the grant committee inspecting. Everyone had to be on their best behaviour, wearing labcoats and protective gear. All benches and tables were clean as a whistle. I think even the non-sterile areas had been sterilized.”

Duo made a non-committal sound, his arms sliding forward to circle Heero’s chest, his chin coming to rest on the other’s shoulder. “You should take a break,” he murmured. “I’m almost done fixing the coffee machine. Maybe a cup o’ java will cheer you up. In say...fifteen minutes?”

“Sure.” He could use a break, he supposed. He could use Duo too. He had hardly seen his lover all day. In fact, he’d been working non-stop for the past seven hours. He was hungry, thirsty and in need of the bathroom. His uncooperative cells could wait. He needed some old-fashioned down-time.

“Don’t work too hard.” Duo ruffled the short brown hair just this side of annoying. Any other time, Heero would have leaned into the touch. Now, he just wanted to get this done, either by solving the mystery or discarding the results as artefact of the process. He hoped the former, but feared the latter. He hardly noticed the other left the room.

Maybe he just wasn't knowledgeable enough yet. A few taps called up several Medline searches and he waited impatiently for the program to fetch all articles concerning either FACS staining, in case something had gone wrong, and the latest publications that even so much as fleetingly mentioned the specific transcription factor and/or the immunosuppressive protein. Really, anything older than 197 AC could be discarded as out-of-date.

The search results looked disappointing. Most of the articles he had already read, one mentioned a possible crossreaction of two intracellularly signalling cascades that could be useful, but none of the others held any relevant information. Well, the search query had been a shot in the dark. Right, what else?

Perhaps there was something wrong with the cellline. No two people were alike and it was possible that either his sample, or the one from half a year ago, showed a mutation from the norm without consequences for the individual that donated the blood, a so-called gene polymorphism. Such deviating results has shown an influx shortly after mankind had moved to space en masse and it made biomedical scientists pull at their hair trying to take it into account.

Heero had feigned a minor medical condition to keep him from donating his blood to the lab. Any self-respecting scientist should earn a Nobel prize after decoding, and understanding, Heero's genome.

With renewed vigor he threw himself at this work. His fingers once again flew over the keyboard almost none stop. Pulling up older test results from the same cellline, he compared the numbers, ordering analyses to be run, calculating the significance, the list of activated programs and opened files on the left of the main screen growing as all three screens flickered between different images. Of course, if he really wanted proof for his hypothesis, he would have to send the samples in to the sequencing lab, but his supervisor would shudder at the bill the results would be attached to, so perhaps...

Still, in the back of his mind he wondered, what mutation could possibly cause such a change that the antibodies weren't doing their work anymore, but that did not influence the protein's function. In a last ditch effort he tossed a few test results out on the internet tied to the search query 'common gene polymorphism' and sat twiddling his thumbs, waiting for a result to come up.

Nothing.

W e l l w h a t w a s h e s u p p o s e d t o d o t h e n ?!

... Heero had to admit, it was a rather novel experience. He was absolutely, completely, utterly without a clue.

Which meant, time for coffee.

The last time Duo had fixed a kitchen appliance — the blender — Heero had entered the kitchen a bit too early. It had been a horrible mess. In order to repair the — in Heero's opinion deceased — blender, Duo had taken the thing completely apart right there on the kitchen table. At least he had spread the thick plastic sheet over the heavy oak to protect the wood. Heero had been just in time for Duo's victorious crowing at having found the evil, evil circuit that had decided to fry itself. He had replaced the part and put the whole thing back together again.

Though since then, the blender had been slightly different. The lid closed properly. When pressing the start button, the mixing blades gradually increased their speed to reach the setting. And somehow this did not cause any problems even when there were icecubes in there. Also, the control panel had changed. Instead of the dial and simple on/off switch, it now had a touch screen from which certain programmes could be chosen, specified to the contents of the blender. Blending a milkshake or an iced coffee required a lower temperature setting than smoothing out freshly cooked soup. And all three required a different speed setting. And this had to be the first commercial blender in the universe with adjustable temperature.

And Duo called Heero a geek.

Now though, it looked like Heero had come right in time. The kitchen was clean, the table free of any traces of appliance parts or tools, and the wonderful smell of freshly brewed coffee permeated the air.

In fact, their coffee had never smelled this good. A wonderful rich aroma that tickled his nose and nearly made his mouth water. He was in dire need of a coffee. Nicely strong with just a dash of cream and half a teaspoon of sugar. Did they still have cream? He didn't remember. It hadn't made an appearance on the grocery list — wonderfully mundane paper held in place by a magnet — on the fridge door yet, though that didn't mean anything of course. With Duo in the house, food had a habit of mysteriously disappearing.

Heero turned to enter the kitchen and froze.

... Right. Duo.

Gleaming on the countertop was another of Duo's by now infamous creations. He should have been expecting it really. Whatever appliance, mechanical or electronic, fell into his hands, was never the same again. Their coffee machine, however, went beyond the Duo-Maxwell-Makeover-Extreme.

This morning, on the counter left from the sink, the coffee machine had been flanked by the toaster, the ricecooker, the blender and the multimixer, all offset by the spoonrack attached to the wall behind them. The spoonrack had been moved to the right side of the sink. In itself not such a bad idea, as that was closer to the stove. The blender and multimixer were nowhere to be seen, probably hidden away in the cupboard above the fridge. Again, not such a bad idea, as they used neither of them daily, or even weekly really. The ricecooker had

been displaced to the other side of the stove, plugged into the corner socket. Not quite so bad either, since that was right next to the large apothecary cabinet, where they stored dry products such as, indeed, rice. The reason though, for this rearrangement of appliances and tools, was sprawling rather bold-faced in the vacated spot, limiting the space left of the sink to about a third of the original design.

Heero assumed it was the new coffee machine. He couldn't be sure though. It could also be a new oven. Or a dollhouse bunker.

It was black. It was shiny. It had a few interestingly familiar markings on the side that was visible. *It wouldn't be the first time Duo had used parts of Deathscythe's hull to plate normal, household things. His bedside table once belonged to the Gundam's arm.*

What gave away that it might be the coffee machine was the square-foot-wide-five-inches-deep cavity in front with a small ramp about halfway. It looked fit to place a coffeecup on waiting for the drink to be poured out. It also looked like it could move out of the way for a coffeepot to be placed on the counter right underneath the spout. It was the kind of thing you'd expect in an office's breakroom, not in a private kitchen. Above the cavity a rectangular surface shone like a LCD-screen. On the left upper corner of the front of the whole thing, a little green light was blinking calmly.

Down the hallway, the toilet flushed. The tap could be heard running and than a door opened.

"Duo?"

"Ah, you came down already!" Footsteps bounded up to him. "You okay?"

Heero swallowed. He didn't want to sound insulting. "Duo, what is that?"

"Hm? Oh! You mean that." With his head he indicated the huge black box squatting innocently on the counter. "That is the Ultimate Deathscythe Espresso Deluxe." Note the capitals.

Right. Heero carded a hand through his hair, then brought around his neck to end up underneath his chin, fingers curling thoughtfully. He then managed to outdo Duo in intelligence and thought. "...Huh?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Kinda went overboard a bit, perhaps." *Perhaps?* "But I took apart out old coffee machine and it was unsalvageable. Double fried so bad, I was expecting grease to drip from the circuits. So, I build us a new one. What do you think?"

The curled-up fingers rubbed his chin. "... Does it work?"

That got him a dirty look.

“How does it work?”

Much better. “It’s easy really.” Duo waltzed up to the monstrosity and tapped the LCD with a finger. Another touchscreen. Go figure. “It’s pre-programmed of course, but loggin’ in allows you to change the settings. You can choose any ready-made blend, or go for a user-defined output. Of course, coffee quality also depends on the beans. So aside from the large regular canister, I included two smaller cans for the more deluxe varieties. We’ll have to shop for some. The milk and cream supplies are cooled at a constant four degrees Celcius. It took some fumbling, but I managed to get it hooked up to the cold water supply. Just branched it off from the sink. But the best thing is yet to come.”

Heero had the urge to hold his breath in anticipation, just because Duo created such a mood. He huffed and refrained though. Duo, in meantime, had opened one of the glass-doored top cabinets and grabbed two mugs. He placed them on the tray, fiddled around on the screen for a bit and then stood back. He raised a finger to his lips and said, “Listen.”

Heero listened. For five seconds. “I don’t hear anything.”

“Exactly!” Duo crowed. “There’s beans being ground and water being heated and not a squeak!” He rapped his knuckles on the outer plating. “Cockpit insulation plates. Soundproof.”

There was a slight hiss and then only a rich coffee scent filled the air before the source of it streamed out of the two little pipes and into the mugs. Duo beamed at his creation. “It even has a cleaning program. Great huh?”

Heero simply plucked his cup from the tray and settled at the coffee table. He had to admit, he was rather impressed. Duo knew his coffee. He also knew Heero’s coffee. The fluid in his mug was dark and creamy and Heero had no doubt in his mind, Duo had just run the ‘Heero’s Favorite’ program on him. The blacker than black blend in Duo’s mug and the strong scent of espresso proved the thing could run two different programs at the same time.

Figures.

Heero took a gentle sip and nearly moaned in bliss. Perfect. Dark, strong, with a hint of cream and a slightly sweet aftertaste. He closed his eyes to Duo’s smug grin and simply enjoyed his coffee. Despite Duo’s near manic attitude to all things mechanic and electronic, it did pay off to have him around. He took his time, sipping slowly until the last mouthful was just the right side of hot to have coating your tongue.

He placed his mug down with a clink and pinned Duo with a not-quite glare.

“What?”

Heero curled his hands around the still-warm mug. “You know what this means right?”

Duo blinked in surprise. “Friggin’ good coffee in the morning without headache inducing noise?”

“That too.” Heero took a deep breath. “You are never again to call me a geek.” He raised an eyebrow. “Pot, meet kettle.”

For one single moment, Duo was frozen in surprise. Then he threw his head back and laughed. Loudly. “Takes one to know one, mister! Ha! As if you’re any better. Besides,” and he stretched languidly, “I never denied being one. Just different fields from you.” With a screech of chair against tiles, he stood. “Come on, we should celebrate.”

With raised eyebrows, still happily sipping his coffee, Heero followed his boyfriend’s — Quatre had nearly choked on his drink at that denomination — bouncing braid back to the kitchen counter. Duo raised on tiptoes and opened the cabinet above the stove’s hood. They only kept the rarely used appliances there, mostly objects that played a part in Duo’s forms of celebrating on this or another. Heero was curious to know what Duo deemed proper for this occasion. He considered the killer coffee to be plenty rewarding, but he never had a say in these matters anyway. Duo thought he lacked the necessary funny-bone for it.

“Ah, yeah. Perfect!”

Oh boy. Heero didn’t need to glance outside to know the wheather couldn’t have been fitted worse to the icecream the machine duo held in his arms was intended to make. It was November, they lived on the northern hemisphere. Oh well, at least the house was warm.

“Come on, Heero, help me mixing.”

Heero wasn’t about to be asked twice. Duo was brilliant with any machinery, but cooking was not his strongsuit. Any normal meals were fine — stirefry, pasta, omelette — but Heero refused to eat sub-standard icecream. And his standard was set high.

Not that Duo complained.

“Do we have any frozen fruit?” Duo asked, arms full with mild and cream from the fridge. He had already dug up several chocolat bars.

“I’ll go check.” The freezer was in the utility room attached to the kitchen. The second bottom drawer had a bag of frozen forest fruits. Heero hoped the makers had not been skimpy with the blackberries. He liked those best.

Back in the kitchen, Duo was almost done breaking up the chocolat bars. He’d also put a pot on the stove with water heating up. They’d melt the chocolat in a bowl above that.

“Say, Duo, where’d you put the blender?”

“Above the fridge,” he grunted, as a particularly stubborn piece of dark chocolate refused to bow to Shinigami’s might.

With a splash of juice randomly pulled from the fridge, Heero chose the ‘pre-ice’ program and let the blender do its work. He turned his back to the gently whirring machine, letting his eyes glide through the kitchen to eventually settle on his boyfriend slaving over the proverbial hot stove. Well, he was really just waiting for the chocolate to melt. Heero smiled at the young man twisting impatiently on the spot. Duo really was like a child sometimes. Perhaps because he’d had a taste of normalcy in his childhood and now that he had the time, he wanted to try it out again. And Heero had no objections to following along. After all, he’d found he rather liked icecream. And today’s accidental combination of flavours the rummage for ingredients had come up with, ranked among his favourites.

Behind him, the blender quieted down. So easy, these preprogrammed things. Perhaps he should send Duo by the lab one day. There were few machines that were capable of running a measurement on their own. Sitting at a machine feeding it sample after sample, sometimes took up hours of a workday. Hours that could be better spent, if the damn things could just work out what to do for themselves. He poured the thick, purple mixture in the icecream. Just a short run would be enough to get it started, then they could put it in the freezer to free up the machine for the chocolate icecream.

“Turn of the heat, Duo. It’s almost boiling.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Duo turned the knob and shifted the pan with bowl to the side to cool a little. He’d have to wait before adding the cream, until it wasn’t quite so hot anymore.

Heero clocked the lid in place and flicked the switch. The icecream maker was one of the few appliances still in its original state from when they got it. It had been a gift from Quatre, one of those silly housewarming gifts, when everything in the household is seen to, but you still want to present a somewhat useful gift. “It was either that, or a popcorn machine,” the blond had laughed. “And this at least still requires some work.” He’d left it to Heero to explain to Duo that throwing in random ingredients and a handful of icecubes, would not magically result in any imaginable flavour of icecream. It only managed ready-made mixtures. Duo had been quite disappointed at that. He’d perked up with Trowa’s gift though, a recipe-book for, you guessed it, icecream.

It had taken Heero and Duo two months to learn their favourites by heart. Quatre still couldn’t stop laughing at the idea that his not-so-serious gift had turned out to be such a valuable addition to the Maxwell-Yuy household.

“Sugar?”

“Yes, dear,” Duo fluttered his eyelashes.

“Idiot,” Heero murmured. “I meant sugar or honey.”

“Oh, I can never choose between nicknames either.”

“I meant in the icecream!”

Duo laughed and was already reaching for the honey. “I know, I just couldn’t resist. Think I went a little stircrazy building that hunk of a coffeemachine all on my lonesome.”

Heero merely rolled his eyes and reached for the carton of milk. Well, that was something to be added to their shopping list. There was barely enough in there for the icecream. And Duo hated eating dry breakfast cereal. The chocolat mixture was coming along nicely now though. He’d have to get the fruit out of the machine to make space for it.

Tupperware truly was an amazing invention. It was one of the longest standing generic brands plastics in the world. In a fit of efficiency, Heero had bought a standard pack at the local shopping mall, when his sometimes strange working hours at the lab forced him to take something a bit more substantial than sandwiches with him to eat. The drawer next to the fridge now held all possible shapes and sizes. They were freezer- and microwave-proof. He cleaned out the icecream maker and stuffed the box in an open slot in the freezer. They’d have to defrost the thing sometimes soon. The ice crusted to the walls was making it difficult to move the drawers.

Back in the kitchen, Duo had started loading the machine with the chocolat mixture. This one would be fully frozen when coming out of it in an hour or so. Heero settled in a chair to watch duo scrape out the bowl and lick the spoon, the machine merrily purring away at mixing and freezing their icecream. He aimlessly fiddled with his empty coffeemug.

“So, what now?” Duo grinned, licking the chocolat from his fingertips.

“I wouldn’t mind some more coffee,” and he waved the cup to emphasize his point.

Duo tilted his head in mock consideration. “Hmmm, no. I got a better idea. While waiting for this celebration to be ready to be enjoyed, why not occupy ourselves with another one?” And he grabbed Heero’s arm and pulled him out of his chair,

“Duo, I still have work to do.”

... out the kitchen down the hall,

“It’s a Saturday, you have plenty of time. Besides, don’t normal... well... *other* people do that sort of thing at the lab instead of at home?”

... up the stairs,

“We still have to do the groceries.”

... down the hall past the home-office where all screens blinked in sleep-mode,

“Shops are open till nine anyway.”

... into the bedroom with a stumble and a laugh.

“Besides, any excuse to celebrate, right?”

Well, who was Heero to protest against that?

AN: Few, I had so much fun writing that. Good test for my \LaTeX skills. And finding out I'm missing some .sty files. Couldn't use some of the fonts I wanted, like the calligraphy style. Oh well, I'll just surf around till I find the whole math suite.

For anyone who wants to know how I put this thing together, it's not so difficult. First step is googling on *short introduction to Latex*. The first hit should be Tobias Oetiker's 'The not so short Introduction to $\text{\LaTeX}2\epsilon$ '. *The manual in figuring out \LaTeX* . If you want to write actual \LaTeX files and publish them to pdf, you have to download two things. The first is a \LaTeX editor. I can recommend LEd (\LaTeX Editor), it's open source (i.e. free) and comes with a few useful function that help you along the way. The other thing you need is MikTeX (for Windows, at least, don't ask me about Linux/Unix stuff). MikTeX is a set of packages that can 'translate' the \LaTeX code to pdf. Without MikTeX, or something similar, writing in \LaTeX is useless. Any program or package can be found by Google.

I hope you enjoyed this stroll through the world of Geek. *snort*