

NON-CON REPORT

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I hate writing reports. So no con-report from me. But I've got a few pictures (hopefully, if Jan is nice enough to squeeze them into these pages somehow) and I thought I might ramble a little about my memories of CozyCon 4.

Moni and I decided to take the train to Den Haag, since it's more comfortable than driving all the way in the car (not to mention having to find a place to park there), and it wouldn't take much longer. We thought. In the end the train from Nuernberg/Frankfurt to Koeln was much too late so that we missed our connection in Koeln and had to wait almost two hours there. But other than that the trip was rather uneventful. After some running around in the wrong direction in front of the Centraal Station we found the tram and after that finding the Youth Hostel was a piece of cake. Right when we got in we already ran into some old friends (somebody said it was more like a family reunion than a con, and I think that's very nicely put), and some more arriving right behind us. The first evening was spent at the hostel talking to all kinds of people, exchanging memories and just being glad to be there.

Saturday morning Moni and I walked into Den Haag doing some sightseeing and looking around the shopping areas. I took lots of pictures. The weather was pretty nasty - it never really stopped drizzling - but that made for a special atmosphere on the pictures. I had been to Den Haag in summer of 1990 (for ConFiction), and taken lots of pictures in town before, but the light in November was completely different from the summer, so I was happily snapping away. We got back on time for the DAPPER collation party (where I took some rare pictures of people at work) and some program items. In the evening we had a partial DAPPER dinner with the two Peters, Martijn and some other folks (maybe some candidates); unfortunately some members already had some other commitments and our by now almost traditional DAPPER dinner didn't make it. We went all across town squeezed into two taxis to a famous Indonesian restaurant, where we had Rijstafel (hope I spelled it correctly). The food was delicious, but as expected more than we could handle. In places like that I always wish I had a spare stomach somewhere that I could use after I'm full.

On Sunday Moni and I took the tram to Scheveningen. I simply have to go to the beach when I'm that close. We took a nice long walk along the beach. I took some more pictures and after a while got suspicious, when I thought that I had to have taken more than the 36 pictures that are on the roll of film (the counter on my camera had stopped functioning a while before). I took out the film and rewinding it, I noticed that there was practically nothing to rewind, which was more than just suspicious. I was pretty certain that for whatever reason that film hadn't transported and all the pictures I thought I had taken the previous day didn't exist. (When I got home I had the film developed, just in case, but as expected it was all blank, sigh). I loaded a new roll of film and that time made sure it was turning before I started taking any pictures. It was pretty cold that day, so after walking for a while, we turned to the shopping mall at the beach that opens on Sundays. My memory is normally pretty bad, but I remember the really important things, so it was easy to find the chocolate shop that sells those wonderful Dutch chocolates that I can never resist. We looked around some more, and then we went to one of the restaurants at the beach for some hot chocolate and a pan cake.

We returned to the hostel in time for the Masquerade, just to find out there was no Masquerade due to lack of participation. Oh well.

In the evening we went to the traditional not-a-banquet. The food was excellent, not what I would have expected to find in a youth hostel. They had various fish, Indonesian dishes, pasta, meat. Everything I tasted was delicious (same problem here: not enough space to taste everything and put all that food away).

Monday morning we spent some time over breakfast with most of our fellow-DAPPERites and maybe some possible candidates (hello Nadja, James). And as always time was much too short, and we had to check out and get to the train station. The homeward journey was uneventful, no problems with missed connections this time. Unfortunately my memories are pretty sporadic, but I do remember that I had a great time. I enjoyed seeing all the old friends again; I remember some jigsaw puzzles (the round ones that are so hard to do). I think there is a sequel being made about Gustav who seems to have had a run in with the FBI. I don't know what the movie is about and how many victims Gustav killed this time, but I'm sure it's going to be a blockbuster, and I have to see it as soon as it comes out (hint to all you con-organizers out there). I even remember a few program items (opening ceremony, Chris Priest's not-guest-of-honor talk, the beer quiz). Too bad some of you couldn't be there. But other than that I had a great time, and now I'm waiting for the next Dutch con.

The last few years I'd been dreaming of a "White Christmas", and this year it came true, in fact, it became pretty much of a nightmare. Ever since Christmas we had so much snow more than we've had in a long time. Sunday I had to literally shovel my car out of the snow. I had parked it on the side-walk and when people clear that side-walks from snow had piled up big heaps of snow so that I couldn't get out. It took me quite a while to move enough snow to let me squeeze the car through. After that I parked it at another place with not so much snow around. I'm glad I did that Sunday afternoon; it would have been a real bitch trying to do it early Monday morning when I had to get to work. And the streets in town are extremely slippery. You can't go any faster than a crawl. But walking isn't much better. I don't mind a little snow in winter, but this is definitely more than I feel comfortable with. And after going through all this misery, I received a Christmas card from Martijn and his kids (thanks, Martijn, I really appreciate it, even if I don't sound like it :-)) yesterday (31 Dec 01; I don't know why it took them 2 weeks to deliver the card (postmarked on 19 Dec 01), probably because of the road conditions). I was happy about getting a card, I opened it, and I couldn't believe what I read there. There card said (besides best wishes etc.) "Let it snow, and snow, and snow, and snow, and snow, and..." So if I find out it was you, Martijn, that caused me all that misery, I'll have to come up with something much worse than the piggy-bank to pay you back for it ;-). Other than the snow and the cold, Christmas was nice. I was with all the family, just the type of Christmas I love. And I got a new camera. I'm still experimenting, and I don't know all it's features yet, but the first roll of film came out pretty good. I meant to test it some more last night and try to take some pictures of the fire works. But then I fell asleep and didn't wake up until 2 o'clock. Sigh. I missed the New Year. I don't like going out on New Year's Eve anyway, but I do like to watch the fireworks, as I get a good view from my 4th floor balcony. I hope I'll do better next time.

Anyway, I hope you all had a good start into the New Year, and I wish you all the best for 2002.

BOOK REPORT

SMOKE AND MIRRORS by Neil Gaiman

Only one book this time. It took me forever to read it. I had to force myself to read on in a way. I like the way Neil Gaiman writes, he has a way with words that I find pleasing. Having said that I didn't like his short stories at all. They were all pretty sinister, most of them created a dark, almost scary atmosphere; at best they were weird, and some of them I didn't understand at all. It's hard to describe; there was one story about a stray cat that he picked up and that had bad wounds every morning; one night he hides and watches the cat on the porch and it turns out that the devil comes to the house and the cat fights it off, being badly wounded in the process. And the other stories are even weirder than this one.

I've been reading some comic books lately, some Calvin and Hobbes collections and some Baby Blues collections. I don't think I need to explain who Calvin and Hobbes are. Moni had been telling me long time ago how funny they were, but I only knew them from episodes in the newspaper in their German translation. I couldn't see anything funny there. But then I started seeing them in the original, and Moni was right (sometimes she is). They were extremely funny, and I have to admit I'm a fan now.

Baby Blues is about two little kids and their stressed-out parents. The strips are so true to life (they are done by two fathers who brought in lots of their own experiences), and they are absolutely hilarious. I can recommend them very much, and not just to the parents among us.

MAILING COMMENTS

ANNETTE

I hope you're doing okay. I wish you all the best for the new year, especially an improvement in your health. I hope you keep your spirit and never give up.

OE

I read that eventually (I think by 2003) bank transfers between the Euro countries are supposed to cost the same as in-country transfers, so that should make things a little easier for us also.

PAUL

Too bad we couldn't see you personally at CozyCon.

I'm sure I would have big problems trying to drive on the left side of the road (with the steering wheel on the wrong side, too) - I have problems walking across a street there; but why didn't you just do without the rental car and use buses and trains instead? I would hate missing out on a vacation just because of driving problems.

ELISE

I hope you're doing much better now and the concussion didn't leave you with any bad headaches. I hope the heartache is getting better, too.

Too bad you couldn't stay longer at CozyCon; I missed talking to you more than just a few words.

LYNNE ANN

Too bad you couldn't make it to CozyCon; I missed you there.

Yes, last year was in some respects not a very good year. I lost my father and my grandmother last summer, and I can relate to how you feel. But there is always hope that the next year is going to be better. It's "funny" these things always seem to come in droves; for a while everything is fine, but when it hits you, it hits you real bad. But the good thing is, after you've been hit enough, you normally get some good times.

I wish I could get myself to do some exercise, too. I didn't make a New Year's resolution, because I'm pretty sure I wouldn't keep it anyway - this year. But I haven't given up completely yet.

How is your new practice going? What are you actually doing? Are you treating people, or is it more of a store where you sell different fragrances?

By the way, we had another conference in December (only here in Germany, no big trip involved), and I'm proud to say that I was much better prepared (grin); sometimes I learn from my mistakes; I made myself a list of what to take to this type of conference putting down all the things I didn't have with me at the Turkish conference and I kept the list as a word file that I looked up before this conference. And the calculator was on top of the list.

RICK

Re: Phobias. For me the best way to overcome fear of something is when I really want to. Like for example flying. I had to get over that fear eventually, because I really wanted to go places I can only reach by flying. I'm still scared of heights, but I can handle them if it's to go to a place where I really want to go, like for example taking a lift up a mountain. I don't think I'll ever get over my arachnophobia. I know there are treatments to gradually make people lose their fear of spiders by letting them look at pictures, then letting them watch spiders in a glass case and eventually touching them. I don't mind looking at spiders from a safe distance or with a solid glass between myself and them, but I draw the line when it comes to touching them, and I don't want to be cured of arachnophobia because then I would touch them. Yuck. Does that make sense? Probably not.

I read The Lord of the Rings years ago, and I have to out myself as one of the probably few people that find it boring. I loved the appendices that showed how much effort and imagination Tolkien put into creating languages and cultures. I found that truly amazing. But the story itself I found much too drawn out and as you said, Tolkien's writing was not bad, but nothing really fascinating.

JAN

That renovation project sounds like quite a nightmare. I hope it's mostly over now, at least inside the apartment.

CHRIS

I agree with your views on the internet as a source of information, although I'm not as pessimistic about it. I think books will continue to be there with the more reliable, better researched information - at least for those that still have the ability to read.

That guy taking your name sounds pretty scary, he seems to be a very disturbed person trying to take on your identity - or was it only to boost his book sales?

I'm very sorry to see you go - for now. Who knows... You said you looked at DAPPER as a happy resort; I'm sure I'm not the only one who would gladly welcome you any time for a visit.

At least we'll keep seeing you at Dutch cons.

Wishing you all the best.

MARTIJN

I am kind of excited about the Euro. I picked up some Euros from the ATM on 1 January. I regret losing the Mark, but I think it's just great to have the same currencies in most European countries. Reading the reports in the newspaper, it seems the transition was pretty smooth in Germany so far. Like in the Netherlands, retailers are supposed to take the brunt of the transition accepting DMs and giving change in Euros, but so far this seems to work.

How important is your annual appraisal for your job? We have to do them for our American colleagues, but to be honest, they are all pretty much inflated.

How is the reorganization going? I hope everything works out fine for you.

I didn't know Karl May was known in the Netherlands. I used to read all the books I could get my hands on when I was in my teens, and I also liked Winnetou a lot (Old Shatterhand got on my nerves sometimes, because he always knew everything and everything always happened exactly as he predicted it).

MONI

No comments, really, since we've been talking on the phone. Anything yet about a new job?

PETER D. W.

I'm very sorry to hear about your father being in such a bad condition. I wish you and your family lots of strength to deal with the situation, and I hope you'll have some good times left.

I enjoyed to read your con report after I'd already seen your pictures. It still gives me the creeps thinking about the pictures you took on the roof of the WTC just the day before.

I'm glad you made it back safely.

DWIGHT

It was great to see you again at CozyCon. I enjoyed the videos you gave me. Thanks, that was really nice.

I'm sorry to hear about your losses. It's always sad when somebody we know and care about isn't there any more. What can I say...

Harry Potter books came out in German very soon after the original was published. What was really amazing was that when the Goblet of Fire was published in England (a couple of months before the German version came out), they sold the English version here at a

grand scale, which is really amazing. Most big book stores have one or two shelves with English language books, but then of course there is only one or two copies of each book. But this book was everywhere and in big heaps. I guess people were so hot to read it that they were willing to read it in English rather than wait a few months. I've seen the books about Quidditch and the Magical Beasts in the stores (in both English and German), but I haven't read them yet.

NICO

Great to have you back!

An 80-minute drive one way every day sounds real bad. My drive is half of that, and it's more than I care for. I bet you're happy in your new place (it looks nice). All the best!

PETER M.

It was nice to meet you again at CozyCon. I have to admit, though, that I have difficulties reading your handwritten contribs.

That's all for now. Till next time,

Irene