

CONVENTION MEMORIES

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This time I was going to start writing early - I thought. Well, I didn't. Which makes it a little harder to remember what I was going to write about - the convention seems so far away now. Sigh.

Pressures at work didn't let me take more than just a day and a half off, so that I had to work that Friday until noon and then take a train directly from Kaiserslautern. Having to start traveling from such a backwater place, I had to change trains about a thousand times (at least that's what it seemed like). To my utter amazement, all the trains were on time, which made traveling a lot more relaxed. Another good thing was that Sylvia was traveling from home in her car; she had the great idea of taking my luggage in her car so that I didn't have to carry more than just my handbag on the train. That's what I call comfortable traveling.

I arrived at the convention hotel Friday evening, too late to make it to the opening ceremony. Oh well. I considered this more a family reunion than a convention with a program anyway (although the con papers kept reminding us that yes, there was a program). At that time most other con visitors had already left the hotel in search for dinner, so Sylvia and I decided to take it easy and just eat a little something in the hotel restaurant. Not such a good decision. Don't ask me how many times I read the menu... this place sure believes in weird food; I remember something containing calf cheeks (sounds nasty) or partridge with sauerkraut (what a combination), or other weird things that I don't really want to remember. Fortunately, I looked at the dessert portion of the menu and found a cheese platter, which I ordered. The cheese was really good, and after I asked for some bread to go with the cheese, I had a good enough meal. But I also learned to go outside for any future meals.

Friday night was then spent in good company after everybody else got back from dinner. I remember a panel/meeting on weird hobbies and found it interesting what people can come up with.

Saturday started with a nice long breakfast chatting with people. Then we went to explore the town. I remember it was raining so hard that I was busy holding my umbrella in place and didn't really register where I was going (that's why it was a little difficult to find back to the hotel, but we made it eventually). To get out of the downpour, we went into a clothes store where we were offered some cappuccino to warm up from inside. Very nice. We stayed there quite a while, and when we went back outside, the rain had stopped. We did some more exploring, took quite a few pictures (see two samples below) and generally enjoyed being in the Netherlands.



I checked out several bookstores, because I wanted to buy the latest Asterix in Dutch, but couldn't find it anywhere. Back in the hotel, we saw the results of a paper plane workshop, some of them in action.



Saturday evening was the time for the banquet. The company was great, but I have to say I've had better food. For whatever reason, the theme for the banquet was American barbecue, but the food didn't really live up to that and a lot of food was left over. Oh well, we had fun anyway.



After the banquet, we met for our annual DAPPER collation party. Jan had set up our own little buffet. Most noteworthy were the cheese cubes with little plastic windmills:



Cute idea!

Some worked hard at getting the new DAPPER together



Some just enjoyed the food, drink and conversation



I don't remember any of the details, just having a great time.

Sunday started again with a long breakfast, meeting people, trying to practice speaking some Dutch. I remember watching an oriental looking young lady, I'd estimate Japanese, coming in, taking pictures of everything - really everything from the coffee pot to a piece of bread, pictures on the wall and everything around. She asked one of the waiters to take some pictures of her sitting at the breakfast table, lifting a cup of coffee, etc. Then she left, apparently without even taking a bite. I'm bad about taking pictures, but I'd never seen anybody taking that many pictures in one place. Watching her helped me while away the time while I was sitting there by myself waiting for other con-goers to show up. Not that I'm normally an early riser, but I usually don't sleep well in hotels and wake up very early.

We hung around the book room for a while, talked to a few people and went downtown lunchtime. The city was getting ready for Sinterklaas with very special street lamps.



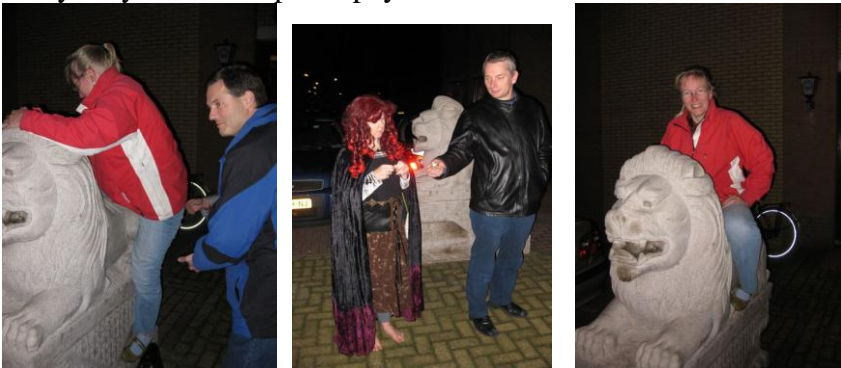
I didn't care too much what I ate as long as it wasn't in the hotel restaurant. We couldn't find any Indonesian restaurants (missed out on that rijstafel, sigh), but came across a very nice bistro with all kinds of good stuff on the menu where we ran into Frank and Pascal. The food was excellent (I didn't get the rijstafel, but the kip sate made up for it), and we talked for hours about languages switching between English, German and Dutch and throwing in some French for good measure.

We made it back to the hotel just in time for the closing ceremony. Alas, another convention over. It's amazing how quickly time passes.



For dinner we went to a Chinese restaurant with a delicious buffet. The type where you put meat, fish, veggies, whatever on the plate uncooked, take it to the counter where the cook tosses it in the wok, adds one of several sauces and gives it back to you in no time at all. Very good food. Not to mention the good company. Sorry, no pictures here, I was too busy eating.

But there are some pictures here that I took while we were waiting outside for everybody to finish up and pay:



After we returned to the hotel, the few leftovers from the convention assembled around a large table talking and generally having fun. All hell broke loose when Larry joined us

and became the unwitting victim of a photo hunt. I can't remember why, but all of a sudden everybody pulled out a camera and started shooting pictures of Larry and of each other. Must have looked like an indoor thunderstorm to anybody walking by outside.



Picture courtesy of Jim Held

The next morning after meeting some people over breakfast it was time to go back home. Fortunately, Sylvia took my luggage back home in the car and I only had to carry my shoulder bag. The train trip back was quite uneventful. I was at the Oss train station a little too early which gave me the opportunity to take an earlier train and saved me one change of train, because that one went all the way through to Arnhem. I had some time to wait for my connection there and found a bookstore that sold the newest Asterix. Yippiee. I've read better Asterix books before, but it kept me happily entertained for the remainder of the trip. And it was in Dutch.

By the time I got back to Kaiserslautern, I was pretty worn out, although all the trains had amazingly been on time and I didn't have to worry about my connections. But I had a cold coming on. The next morning it was back to work again. Sigh. And I started getting really sick. The cold was getting worse. I made it through the week and went home for the weekend. As it didn't get better, I decided to stay at home for a few days - I was off on Thursday and Friday for Thanksgiving anyway. So I didn't need to get verification from the doctor, and I was convinced I'd be well enough to go back to work after that week. By Sunday I figured that I simply couldn't go back to work. The cold had been getting somewhat better and then worse again. And the cough was really getting bad. Monday morning I went to the doctor. The swine flu scare was in full swing. When I entered the doctor's office, they had a big sign there saying that everybody who had a cough and/or fever had to put on a surgical mask and report to the reception desk. I was sure that I didn't have the swine flu, but I did have a bad cough, so I put the mask on and reported to the front desk. They took me to a separate waiting room (probably a good thing; that kept me away from all these other sick people). When

the doctor came in to see me, she was wearing gloves and a surgical mask. I told her that I'd had the cough for about two weeks by then, and she took her mask off and said that couldn't be the swine flu then. I was pretty sure I had a sinus infection and bronchitis and she confirmed my diagnosis. She gave me a prescription for antibiotics and a sick slip to stay at home for another week. I'm scared of antibiotics, because I'm allergic to penicillin, and there is always a small risk that there could be a cross-over reaction. I thought about it for a while, but the cough was so bad and nothing had helped so far that I decided to take the risk and the tablets. Fortunately they helped and I didn't have any reaction.

It took me a while, though, to fully recover and I didn't really get anything done while I was at home. Being out sick for two weeks delayed my Christmas shopping quite a bit, but I was able to get everything done on the remaining two weekends.

The Christmas holidays were great as always. I spent Christmas Eve with the family. It's very rare to have everybody together, so this is always a highlight. I'm lucky to have a rather relaxed family without any hassle to try and get everything done perfectly. The rest of the holidays I just took it easy and enjoyed not having to do anything.

BOOK REPORT

MERDE HAPPENS by Stephen Clarke

The story is obviously a sequel to "A Year in the Merde" (which I haven't read); I just picked this one up because it was on sale. But it was better than I thought. The "hero" of the story a Brit living in Paris with a French girlfriend gets a new job, which is to advertise Britain at some special events in the US. Traveling in a Mini with the Union Jack painted on the roof. He stumbles from one adventure into the next with a lot of merde happening. It's written very well and laugh-out-loud funny. Even comes close to Bill Bryson books.

CAPITAL CRIMES by Jonathan & Faye Kellerman

Two crime stories, one written by Jonathan and one by Faye. They were readable, but nothing much to write home about - or in these pages. I don't even remember much of the story. That's two authors that I don't need to go back to.

THE INTERESTING BITS by Justin Pollard

This book is about the interesting bits of history. It describes those tidbits of history that you don't normally read in history books, for example that Alexandra of Bavaria believed she had swallowed a piano, that an officer named Robert Pate hit Queen Victoria on the head with a walking stick, or that Sir Walter Raleigh's wife carried his embalmed head in her handbag. None of these had any real impact on the course of history, but it's some interesting gossip and very well written. Fun to read.

KARAOKE by Wladimir Kaminer

Kaminer is a Russian living in Berlin where he worked as a DJ and organizer of parties. He answers to every prejudice against Russians, mainly drinking lots of vodka. He is a

rather well-known author, and I thought I'd read one of his books. It was readable, but nothing I'd have to read again.

MARIBARBOLA by Maria Teresa Alvarez

The story is about a Spanish countess in the 17th century and her three children and their involvement with the dwarf depicted on a Velazquez painting. Naturally, there is a lot of misfortune and the most likable character gets killed (Spanish literature and movies thrive on tragedy and misfortune); astonishingly enough there is a happy ending for some of the family. Overall it's not too bad - for a Spanish novel - and pretty readable. I had to read something in Spanish again to keep exercising, and for that purpose it wasn't bad at all (I've ploughed my way through much worse just to practice the language).

MAILING COMMENTS

ENGEL

Wow, that was a big one this time...

I'm sorry to hear about your rollercoaster work life. We all experience those ups and downs every now and then, but yours seem to be almost permanent. I hope things work out for you soon.

I have to admit I gave up on the Harry Potter movies after I watched the first two. I thought they were pretty boring, as opposed to the books. I really enjoyed the books volume 1 through 6, but I have to say the final one was a big disappointment. All those funny little details from Hogwarts were missing (since most of the book is set somewhere else), and the way everything ends is quite a let-down really.

I read about the plans to introduce a kind of road tax in the Netherlands using a highway monitoring system (in a Dutch paper I would like to proudly add). I was shocked. I wouldn't have thought that this country would even consider anything like that. If they want people to pay their share in road maintenance based on their share of usage, all they need to do is tax the fuel (which they already do anyway). The larger the mileage, the more fuel you have to buy and the more tax to pay. And taxing the fuel would favor cars using less gas which are better for the environment. They use a similar toll system in Germany for trucks, so the system is already there, and every once in a while they start talking about expanding it to sedans. A worrying idea.

JAN

Nice pictures, all of them.

The "open door issue" is still kind of ongoing. It wasn't really revoked, but a statement came out - of course only by word of mouth - that people should keep their doors open on a voluntary basis until the issue has been resolved with the works council. Makes me wonder sometimes how much sillier they can get. The funny thing is also that the ones that cried the most about not being able to stand the draft when the door is open, are the ones that do leave the door open - just a little bit. I mean, if I wanted my door closed, I would shut it, but these miserable people only cry and then don't have the guts to do anything about it.

I haven't sold too many pictures yet (actually only three). My pictures are probably not the types that have any wide commercial use (I assume they mostly use pictures of people, which you can't publish without a model release), but I look at it as a hobby. Your book review reminded me of the latest Terry Pratchett book; I just checked on Amazon and found that the paperback is now available, I'll have to get it. The one good thing about all this traveling is that it gives me a lot of time for reading.

KIRSTI

I enjoyed your travel report and the pictures. Sounds like you had a great trip. Makes me want to pack up and go, too. Sigh. Not much else to comment on, though.

PETER

Good to hear from you again. I'm sorry to hear that you've been ill, but you seem to have adapted quite well to the changes in your diet. I hope you stay well.

I enjoyed your Montreal con report very much. Amazing how you're tracking down all kinds of beer places and then don't drink anything. That's got to be true dedication.

ANNEMARIE

As always I enjoyed your ramblings on health and domestic issues. Hope you've fully recovered from all those problems and are feeling fine again.

I never heard the expression "Dresden books" before; what are they about? Dresden?

RYCTM: I think I already gave you the website information on some of those online foto agencies; let me know if you don't have them any more and need me to resend.

Not much more to comment; it was great to meet you again in Oss.

MARTIJN

Don't worry, spending that much time with the kids won't last that much longer. Pretty soon they'll be way too busy with their own lives and won't have that much time to spend with good old dad. You might as well enjoy that time with them while it lasts.

Can't wait to read about your trip to Boston and Philadelphia. Hope you had some time for yourself while you were there.

I liked the picture, very businesslike.

That's all for now. Hope you all had a good start into the new year and to "meet" you again next time in these pages,

Irene