Gegenschein 79

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Gegenschein rambles on about trips I've taken to conventions (where the attendees rarely actually talk about science fiction, so it helps if you already know the fans). It also mentions a bunch of science fiction books I've read or received for review of late.

The paper version is formatted using Graham Freeman's Quikscript Postscript routine that runs on my Hewlett Packard LaserJet 5MP printer, not on a computer. This means I write the entire issue on any brand or model of computer, without a word processor and without desktop publishing products. Typeface is mostly 11 point Times Roman on 1.05 line leading.

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An End to Mail?

I just tried to mail my FAPA contribution, two issues of *Geg*. "$40", they said. "I want seamail, book rate." "That is seamail. Airmail is lots more." New postal rates hikes. I took my parcel away, to rethink my mailing strategy. I probably will mail it next week, despite the new rates. But it sure does make you think about whether there are other options.

Ran out of time to mail my zines ... several times, so lots and lots accumulated. $2.40 in stamps per envelope. 254 names on my overseas mailing list. I don't like that arithmetic. If your last response was pre 1996, this was your last postal issue. Expect an announcement about the merits of web site issues Real Soon Now ... by email.

Boskone, Potlatch, Corflu 1997

When I organised this trip my choices seemed to be Boskone or Attitude. I would have really liked to have visited Attitude, but the pricing for the various places I wanted to visit just didn't seem to look all that cost effective. Why Attitude? Because the fans running it are both fanzine fans and convention fans. This dual focus one of the things I associate most favourably with many past conventions in Australia.

I was pretty badly organised in any case, as I had booked the overseas flights before the unexpected death of my mother. I thought I'd have to cancel the trip. However, it seemed pointless to waste the money already spent, just to stay home cleaning out the estate. Also, I correctly figured getting away from the entire scene would help my mood.

Thursday 13 February 1997

Jean wasn't along on this trip. She planned attending editing conferences in Canada in May. Two overseas trips a few months apart are a bit much, even for us (which doesn't really explain why I was over in November). Jean did kindly drop me, and my overburdened luggage, at the airport.

The United flight was rather late taking off, waiting for passengers from Melbourne. Left at 1:40 p.m., not 12:50. Scheduled to reach San Francisco at 7:10 a.m., but 7:30 was when it arrived. Although I was quickly off the flight, my luggage was tardy, only arriving at 8 a.m. I shuffled my feet in a customs queue for far too long, getting more and more impatient. Finally my turn at close to 8:30. Then another queue for agriculture, followed by a frantic dash to the baggage desk. With less than ten minutes left, I raced up to the domestic terminal, only to find gate 88 was about as far away as any gate could be.

I dashed onto the Boston plane with all of 30 seconds to spare, a total wreck. Luckily I had a relaxing flight to Boston, on a mostly empty plane. I was able to lay down at times, although I couldn't sleep.

My luggage didn't make it, which didn't surprise me all that much. I was considerably more laid back about the entire thing than the other person whose luggage missed the plane. Of course, I also had a change of clothes and a coat with me, and was staying relatively close to the airport for the next few days - I figured my luggage would catch up.

Spotted an obvious book fan in the queue waiting for the airport shuttle to the Sheraton Tara in Framingham, so I didn't have to decide which transport to take. The empty suitcases are always a giveaway.

Thanks to Ben Yalow's efficient handling by email, I had no room problems at the Tara, so after dumping my only bag and a quick clean up, I went seeking Boskone (www.panix.com/NESFA/Boskone) a little after 8 p.m. It had already been a long day. Nor was it helped by the pseudo-castle decor of the Tara, which seemed out of place in a hotel. Still, I wasn't there for the architecture.

Found most of the early attendees helping set up the art show, or noshing on the secret buffet. The GoHs were all there, for example.

Guest of Honor was John M Ford, author of one of the only really humourous and enjoyable *Star Trek* novels, *How Much For Just The Planet*, as well as the fine *Growing Up Weightless*. I haven't seen his alternate history, *The Dragon Waiting*.

Ron Walotsky was Official Artist, and has some wonderful material on his web site. I'd seen and liked some of his work over the past 30 years, but as usual for me had not recalled who had done it. He was also an interesting conversationalist. Tom Smith was the Featured Filker, but I somehow failed to get to the filking. Seattle fans Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins were Special Guests, but somehow it sometimes seems to me I see them frequently since the days of *The Spanish Inquisition* and *Mainstream* and Jerry's DUFF trip.

I like Boskone, as it is deliberately aimed at science fiction and fantasy literature, with plenty of interaction between fan and pro. It has a good role up of book dealers. It publishes a book devoted to the work of the GoH each year, and these are a great attraction. It does not use its limited space on masquerades, costumes and similar peripheral concerns, although it always has a fine art show, and a filk guest of honor. This year it also hosted Fanhistoricon, dedicated to recording and preserving fannish history. It did have a Regency Dance, I hear.

I handed out fanzines from my cache and said hello to one of my favourite dealers, Scott Dennis. I've been wearing T shirts Scott and Jane produce for years now, and everywhere I go, someone wants to know where to buy them. I needed to thank Ben Yalow for arranging the hotel room. Sharon Sbarsky, Valma Bowen, Rob Hansen, Dick Spellman and several others were there and able to talk briefly.

As usual, I was impressed by the organisation NESFA brought. I spent some time unpacking and putting together various simpler parts of the art show piping and lights, and talking with other fans doing the same. People like Chip Hitchcock were too busy organising everything to talk. I went off to bed around midnight, although people were still active.

Friday 14th February

Helmuth, speaking for Boskone, listed attendance for 1995 on as 902, 829 and 789, with 97 program participants. That makes Boskone about half the size I expect for Aussiecon Three. But the attendance at Aussiecon Three is deeply dependent upon the state of the US economy in 1999. I'm guessing the US market is likely to have a correction between now and 1999 since it seemed overvalued at present.

I was awake incredibly early. Went to the hotel desk and collected my lost luggage which had been delivered around 2 a.m. Read part of a book, since I couldn't get back to sleep, showered, and then decided I was hungry.

Came upon Rob Hansen near the restaurant. He said he had expected me to be the first fan up, due to jet lag. We waited a while (probably for the 6:30 opening of the restaurant), but no more fans appeared, so we attacked the buffet breakfast. Ron was the first recipient of the Fanhistoricon Fan Fund, and it is hard to imagine a better choice, given his many contributions to recording the history of UK fandom.

Later I helped hucksters unload, and talked with Larry Smith, and Scott and Jane Dennis. Once things started, I mostly attended the Fanhistorica items, or hung around in the Fanhistorica suite on the second floor.

There wasn't much incentive to leave, as light snow was dusting the cars parked outside the Tara, and nothing much appeared within walking distance.

Friday night included the con suite, Philadelphia in 2001, San Francisco in 2002, and a pretty comprehensive lack of notes. Talked with Cheryl Morgan a fair bit at the San Francisco in 2002 party. Both she and Kevin Standlee were working hard at trying to persuade people to join Aussiecon (so they would potentially have a vote for 2002). Kevin later turned up in a splendid suit, with a very bright Australian flag tie. I was vastly amused by this. I was also pleased to note how many of the PR#0 flyers I put out disappeared. I also handed out heaps of them.

Gave Martin Hoare, our UK agent, a flask of rum, in case he ran out of beer. He was over just for the con, which rather surprised me. His wife was on chemotherapy, and headed for the last few treatments, and hoping to get back to work soon. Couldn't sleep Friday night, so I partied until 3:30.

Saturday 15th February

I had incredible trouble sleeping, and kept to the room until after 10. Lunched with jan howard finder and Cheryl Morgan, at the Tara's pub. It probably surprises some people that Cheryl and I manage to talk to each other in a civil manner, given that we are always at each other's throats in Internet dialogue. Different (and almost certainly irreconcilable) views of what our part of fandom is about. I don't think it is anything personal. The Tara pub had a pretty reasonable buffet, which was just as well given the conditions outside. I also finally caught up with Rusty Hevelin and Gay Haldeman during the day.

Saturday evening was fun.

I'm told the Italian buffet banquet featured antipasto, tomatoes, red peppers and mozzarella, eggplant parmigiana, Italian sausage with roasted peppers and onions, tortellini alfredo, sweet cream cannolis, etc. I mention what was listed because I usually can't identify what is actually served (except for the fresh vegetables). It was certainly very pleasant.

I had a banquet ticket, and was at a table with a bunch of others from out of the US, including Rob Hansen. Not from overseas were Valma Bowen and Leslie Turak.

Access to the food was by random selection of the table to go next. The last table to be selected was given a bottle of wine by way of compensation. That worked well, and people at the last table later commented favourably.

The Skylark award is a Lens - do I need to explain? Jane Yolan told her story of why you needed to stick it where the sun didn't shine. Hal Clement presented Joe & Gay Haldeman with their award for 1996 (they had not attended that year). They then presented Hal Clement with the 1997 award, a very popular presentation of his second Skylark.

Rusty Hevelin was presented with a birthday cake, for his 75th birthday. I may have the only photograph of the intact cake, since it was accidentally damaged before it left the room.

John M Ford's wonderful musical "Another Part of the Trilogy" was very professionally presented by The Sudbury Savoyards, with Ford narrating. It thoroughly sent up genre fantasy, starting with "A Fantasy Tonight" (to the tune of "A Comedy Tonight"), "A Fugue for Tinheads", "The Three Orders: The Nobility, The Church, The Hoi Polloi", "The Happy Little Dwarf Song", "I Have A Bone to Pick, O", "Do 'Em Wrong" (in praise of villainy, to the tune of "Be A Clown"), "Ya Got Worries", "The Monsters' March" (Seventy Six Trombones), Epilogue.

That would be a great item to present at a convention, if you had sufficient trained singers. It could even be lots of fun with untrained singers.

After the presentations, Rusty had his birthday party in a nice suite on the fourth floor. Lots of people attended. Linda Bushyager gave him a tribolite, claimed it was his childhood companion.

Other parties I noted included Readercon, Philadelphia in 2001, Chicago in 2000, Boston in 2001, Lunacon 97.

Sunday 16th February 1997

I didn't sleep Saturday night, perhaps due to excessive partying. Was a zombie most of the day. I did stick to the Fanhistorica lounge a lot.

I missed the Punday, and had no interest in the Regency Tea.

I missed the art show cleanup, which I'd intended to visit and help. Somehow I attended the Dead Dog party, but recall little of it, except that friends were there.

Monday 17 February 1997

After an early breakfast at the Tara with Rusty Hevelin and Joe and Gay Haldeman, we travelled by van to the airport. Our attempt to dump our bags with Delta failed, and we had to take everything through security to find electronic keyed luggage lockers, with a different password on each use. That was sort of science fictional. Not as science fictional as the Los Angeles airport vending machine dispensing mobile phones, but close.

Transport from the airport is excellent, with a free shuttle to most areas around the airport. We took the train from Logan Airport to Government Center, and visited Faneuil Hall.

Named after 18th Century merchant Peter Faneuil, who built it as a central food market. The 1742 construction included a meeting space. Rebuilt in 1761 after a fire, it was the location of meetings concerning British taxation and became known as the Cradle of Liberty. The building was doubled in size in 1805.

It was still a food market, so we lunched there. Other sights were an ice sculpting competition with large figures from Toy Story. I couldn't resist visiting a Brookstones store, and gazing longingly at gadgets.

Eventually we returned to the airport for our flight to Florida, and to see Rusty off.

Tuesday 18 February

I was still having trouble sleeping, woke tired and stayed tired. Eggs for breakfast. Bill Johnson was here as a patient later in the morning, after visiting the dentist. He was in fine form, talking about everything. Spaghetti for dinner, that I remember.

Joe has a great 7" reflector, with motor controls. Provided wonderful views of the moon. Their PBS shows like Nova are really neat, but I couldn't stay awake. Joe was doing an on-line session for Wired, so he had to stay awake until real late.

Wednesday 19 February

Bicycled to the Devil's Millhopper with Joe. This is an enormous sinkhole in the shape of a funnel. Being densely forested, it was hard to get decent photos. It was also hard to walk back up the long stairway that protects the vegetation from human footsteps.

We met Gay at a nearby shopping area, and had an early lunch at a great Mexican restaurant. I had guacamole salad. I figure the eight mile bicycle ride wore off the calories. And I am sticking to that claim, regardless of any contrary evidence such as middle age spread.

After dinner, we went to the movies, and saw *Shine*. To my surprise, the cinema supplied free popcorn. *Shine* told the story of a pianist, David Helfgott, driven to a breakdown by his father's obsession that he win. The use of three different aged actors for the part allowed effective flashbacks, and the cinematography and acting was splendid.

Thursday 20th February
Joe & Gay had a meeting in the morning, so I worked on my fanzine on my larger palmtop computer.

We drove to Micanopy, about 15 miles away, to have lunch at a neat little restaurant called Mildreds. They had a whole range of spicy sauces, some of which Joe bought, including a key lime mustard. He discovered potato chips made a fine substrate on which to add Texas Sweat Jalapeno juice. It sure warmed up the potato chips.

There are antique stores at Micanopy, in fact the whole town consisted of little else. I didn't work out whether anything in my mother's house was an antique, but I sure figured some had potential. We also visited Smiley's antique mall, a super large warehouse, and a wonderful old fashioned bookshop. A very pleasant day, I thought.

On the way back we passed a lama farm, with emus and swans. I have no idea how successful that sort of stuff may be, but I don't plan on keeping any as pets. I have enough problems with cats.

We dropped into a mall, so I could check out Kinney's Easywalker shoes, and perhaps buy more. Gay set out and found curtain rods. Joe set out and found music CDs, sunglasses, multimeter, fancy teas and coffees. I set out and found Kinney's have replaced Easywalkers with a shoe that doesn't fit me!

Woody Allen's *Everyone Says I Love You* was about to disappear from Gainesville, so we drove off to see the 5:25 session. It was a very silly musical, but still with all the neurotic Woody Allen characters. I enjoyed it a lot. Gay claimed they didn't go to the movies every night, but I'm not so sure ...

Friday 21st February 1997
Joe and I set out seeking sheds for telescopes, and power cords for samovars. We saw a bunch of neat sheds in a couple of locations, but none were precisely suitable. We had no luck whatever on the power cord (the original had tested bad with the multimeter, and upon inspected proved badly burnt). Needed an IEEE version, but with a notch in the plug. I was sure I had seen one in Australia, but upon returning home, couldn't find it in the midden heap of components.

I inspected the Ford Econoline RV they used in their bicycling trip across the USA. Very roomy, with a decent kitchen area, beds above the driving space, a convertible table bed, a lounge, and complete bathroom at the rear. It theoretically could sleep six, albeit greatly crowded.

Gay told me that having three people living in it sometimes made for interesting times with a little gnashing of teeth, even though they have travelled with Rusty for twenty years. I'd been wondering how well such a small space worked on extended trips, like bicycling across the USA. It hasn't put them off; I just had a letter from Gay, partway across Texas in the RV.

It suddenly occurred to me that under Australian law, as only two seats had seat belts, only two people could occupy an equivalent RV while it travelled. On the other hand, I hardly ever see any sort of RV in Australia.

A short time after this trip, Jean and I took off a morning from work and visited the caravan and 4 wheel drive show that was being held nearby. There we saw a number of RVs, some exceedingly impressive. Alas, the prices were likewise impressive.

Another fine award nominated film, *Jerry Maguire*, was on at the mall, where we met with Bob & Patience Mason and her mother. It was about a sports agent, played by Tom Cruise, who at a high point in his energetic career, wrote a mission statement on the value of things other than money. The film was about him coming to grips with what this really meant, in his career, his relations with his clients, and his family. Afterwards Joe pointed out a few places where the continuity of the story could be improved. This is one of the delights of seeing films with Joe. I often know a film has not reached its full potential, but he mentions precisely which scene needed improving.

In the mall, we once again we sought Joe's samovar cord, without success.

Joe had a lot more luck in the parking lot, helping someone whose horn had stuck on.

Mango tea and interesting conversation at Joe & Gay's for all of us except Bob (who was shopping). We went to Maude's for the regular wine and cheese meeting that happens each friday. This was a change of venue, the regular place having been booked out on Valentine's Day. We eventually had four tables, and perhaps twenty people, many of whom I remembered (at least slightly) from a previous visit. They have a really interesting social group there. Thai at Tim's for dinner, with a group down to a mere eleven.

Saturday 22nd February 1997
We planned to set off bicycling all over as soon as Joe finished a phone interview. We cycled, looked at alligators in ponds (not a very active - or attractive - animal), but Gay pointed to a storm threatening. She headed home, while Joe & I continued through the University area.

Joe let me use his aluminium touring bicycle, and the contrast with the heavier frame three speed is amazing. Every single aspect of it was vastly better than anything I remember on any bicycle I owned. I really will have to check out a modern bicycle shop back in Australia.

We stopped for lunch at the Swamp. Five miles of cycling is about 400 calories, so we promptly had deep fried jalapeno poppers with cream cheese, a bowl of chili, chicken salad sandwiches and a couple of beers. There is nothing like a balanced diet and the proper exercise for health and fitness. Not that I'd know.

We can blame the lengthy stop on the storm. Gay drove over in the van and rescued us and the bicycles from the rain. That combination really is the best of all worlds.

Marshmallow cheeps in the microwave. This was a really sick thing to do, akin to zapping white grapes in the microwave. Gay demonstrated this to Jay Haldeman and Barb when they arrived.

IMAG8R 2 number plate seen while we drove to High Springs. Well, it amused me. At High Springs, we all attended the Theatre of Memory at the Great Outdoors Trading Company, following a great meal at the Trading Company. The Theatre was named after the Theatre of Memory in Gordon Dickson's Final Encyclopedia. We listened to Blue Druids, and Paul and Josie Davenport playing Celtic music. It worked live, but I wouldn't have listened to a record.

Sunday 23rd February 1997

Collected email, but didn't have a chance to reply. Gay drove me to the airport, and the ticket agent conveniently agreed to target my wheeled bag to Cincinnati, rather than Dayton like my ticket said. Just as well, as the flight was full, and two carry on bags would have been a problem. Changing at Atlanta involved walking down an endless row of lounges to the most distant one. At least I didn't need a different terminal.

Still don't know who will collect me in Cincinnati. Dave Locke sounded even less well than his apa zines have indicated. Perhaps Don Carter in the MR2, or Scott and Jane Dennis, who appear to have stayed over. The Cincinnati flight was also completely full, not a spare seat on board. Maybe I need to avoid weekends entirely. Left slightly late, with a maintenance door missing, causing extra noise, and a delayed landing.

Tanya Carter, Mark Linneman and Scott Dennis were all on hand at the airport, which left me a little confused. I foolishly missed my obvious chance to see Scott and Jane's new home.

Sat around talking with Don & Tanya at their place, & looking at their gadgets, something I'd never found time to do on previous visits, so that was a real treat. Tried phoning fans, but mostly got answering machines.

Dined at Amigos, a real authentic Mexican place, with Don & Tanya, two friends of theirs, Brian and Connie, borrowing a telescope to view Hale Bopp and see what they thought of that style. Pat and Roger Sims were along. Phoned those fans I could find, and made plans for the next few days.

It seemed hard to find time to visit Scott and Jane, and I really want to see their place. Seems it might be like visiting Cincinnati - three visits before I catch up with everyone.

Monday 24th February 1997

Don and Tanya took me visiting computer stores later in the morning. Micro Center was dangerous, with many CDROM to tempt me. I managed to resist disk after disk of source code, but did get best Java applets, and some PC Electronics material. I got a phone cord on a card, having left mine at home. A spare lithium battery or two. The big buy was an Automap USA on SSD for my Psion palmtop.

Visited CompUSA, but that was sparse by comparison, and I bought nothing. They did have a Compaq HPC, and that had a much better display than the early Casio on which it is based.

Did manage to contact Roger Sims by phone when we got to the mall. He was working on his FLAP zine, so we decided to meet him at dinner rather than before. I failed to locate a Kinney's shoe store, but would probably have had no luck with buying the Easywalker shoes. Showing great fortitude, I did not have a snack at the mall.

We returned to Don and Tanya's place, so the animals could be let out, and after an all too brief rest, set off for our 5 p.m. dinner meeting. Montgomery Inn Rib King, with Dave Locke, Jackie Causgrove, Don & Tanya & Roger Sims. Dave gave me *Skin Tight*, a novel by Carl Hiaasen. Joe Haldeman had earlier given me *Stormy Weather* by the same author. Dave has always had much better taste in books than I do, so it will doubtless be a better book than most I select.

I was introduced to the Rib King by Sid Altus in 1976. He drove a bunch of fans from Detroit to Cincinnati, refusing to stop for a meal. When he stopped, we were at the Rib King, where he suggested we get the slab of pork ribs. Since that first meal, I've been convinced the Rib King serves the best ribs in the known universe, and have tried to avoid eating in the day before going there. That way I sometimes manage to put away a whole rack of ribs.

At the Sims' home after dinner. Phoned Steve & Denise Parsley Leigh, who had not received my email messages via AOL. Tried to email Perry Middlemiss and Jean, but I'm not convinced it worked. Jean's "name" Compuserve address was rejected by Compuserve, which is pretty weird considering it seemed to be working when I was at the Haldemans.

Steve Leigh dropped over, so I was able to talk with him. He praised World Fantasy Con as a good place for doing business for authors, Said he would have one of his own books out next year. Mark Linneman

phoned, and will probably visit on Tuesday.

Tuesday 25th February 1997

Lazy morning reading Carl Hiaasen's mystery *Skin Tight*, and talking with Pat. Dave Rowe and his mother and Carolyn Doyle arrived at about 2 p.m., and we had a lively conversation, before they headed off to lunch. Mark Linneman arrived about the same time, and we talked about Aussiecon while the others were at lunch. Carolyn brought snacks and cider, while Pat provided a pasta dinner. Roger got back earlier than expected, and was able to join us at dinner. Dave Locke and Jackie Causgrove arrived shortly later, and we had a fine time talking. It was like a great little convention.

One amusing item was preparing a biography for Aussiecon board member Stephen Boucher. Check out our web site, before Stephen suggests changes - or kills me.

As Dave and Jackie left we heard a mystery sound which proved to be Pat's tape recorder gone crazy. I like a house that provides mystery sounds, provided we solve them.

Wednesday 26th February 1997

Roger took me to visit Office Max, while he got his FLAP zine printed. I admired the $200 Brother word processor (over $700 in Australia), and discarded any idea that Office Max might be able to print an Aussiecon progress report.

Also visited Sams Club, Goodwill and other cheap stores, the local computer store, and stuff like that. I resisted the impulse to buy.

We lunched at the Original Pancake House, where Roger persuaded me I needed pancakes, so as to try the authentic stuff. The strawberry monster was far more than I could eat. It was far more than two of me could eat, so most of it ended up in the fridge for breakfast.

Bill Bowers phoned from work, still ill. We agreed we would meet at Corflu. I sure hope he makes it.

Roger said he wanted to upgrade his computer, so I pulled it apart, and listed what it contained so he could get the correct components. Call me suspicious about the local computer stores, but I suggested he get someone who knew all about upgrading, like Tanya Carter, to comment and install.

At five we headed for Kinney's, in TriCounty mall, where I was finally able to get a pair of Easy Walkers. Perhaps the Florida store that told me they were not available was telling porky pies (lies). Shortly later we stopped to collect Pat from work. Her sinus problem by then seemed to be a cold, so she sensibly decided to rest rather than dine.

Dinner is all you can eat, at Tommys. Bill Cavin and Cookie, Mike and Carol Resnick, Roger, and the very entertaining Mark Aronsen. Dave Locke and Jackie Causgrove couldn't make it, nor could Denise Parsley Leigh.

Mike Resnick made critical comments about *Star Trek* movies, a comment of which I greatly approve. The *Star Trek* movies, and most of the episodes I've seen of late, are getting to be incredibly dumb, even in terms of their own standards. At one stage ST was distinctly superior to anything else ever presented as SF on TV (and still is better than space marine crap like *Space Above and Beyond*). No wonder the network executives think they can get away with bringing back crap like *Lost In Space*, when many fans regard the technobabble writing in *Star Trek* as an acceptable substitute for good quality scripting.

After dinner, Roger and I took his FLAP contribution over to Dave and Jackie, and chatted for a short time. Roger gave me the equivalent of a bag of material to take to Janice for DUFF. Later in the evening Janice phoned, saying she was collecting other fans at the airport, and would wait for my flight. That was really nice of her.

Thursday 27th February 1997

Roger went to collect Margaret Ford Pfiffer. A little later Bill Cavin and Cookie were over in the van to pick up the four of us, along with Mike Lalor. Bill has obviously done this before. The luggage packing was impressive! I was dropped off at the United terminal at Cincinnati airport, while the rest headed off for Concave. I didn't hear about Concave sufficiently early to even consider including it in my plans.

I finished reading Carl Hiaasen's *Skin Tight*, a violent crime novel populated by utterly immoral and screwy characters. There are some very funny scenes, and some savage satire, and action throughout. A very satisfying novel.

I fly to Seattle, via Chicago. Stopping over to try to catch Dick and Leah didn't seem plausible when I booked my flights, given their current working hours. When I was dropped off at Cincinnati airport, I was so early that they rescheduled me onto a slightly late 727 at 11:40, changing in Chicago at 12:35, and reaching Seattle at 2:50, a couple of hours earlier than expected. I'd have phoned Janice about that, had I not realised it would be early morning for her. Time enough when I reach Seattle and see if my baggage arrives on the right flight.

At Chicago, with 30 minutes between flights, I contemplated phoning Dick and Leah, but had only their home number, which didn't seem all that much use at midday. I also had my usual identity crisis with US phones, of not being able to figure how to work out which area code the airport was in. Sure didn't seem the one Dick and Leah were in. By the time I worked it out the boarding had commenced.

The flight to Seattle was packed, and I was right down the (noisy) back of the 727, where you get last choice of the food. The two rows behind me missed out, and had to make do with snacks. However we

arrived nearly ten minutes early, so I was able to surprise Janice Murray on the phone - at last, a phone call works! The other fans she was planning to rescue were late, now scheduled for after six, so I got advice on ground transport, and headed off to await the 3:40 Super Shuttle.

At the University Plaza Hotel at NE 45th Street, I phoned Clifford Wind and John D Berry, and failed to get through to Frank Denton (the curse of the US phone strikes again). Exploring the street was cut short by weather unsuited to wearing a T shirt, but I did collect a six pack of beer and a six pack of coke (the hotel machines only offer Pepsi).

Later walking (wrapped in a jacket) revealed a number of computer stores, Kabul, an Afghan restaurant, a Thai, a Chinese, and a bunch of fast food places identities and quality unknown to me.

I sat in the lobby for a while around 8 p.m., and as I expected, Alan Rosenthal and Janice Murray arrived, bringing Vicki Rosenweig and Lise Eisenberg with them. Vicki and Lise talked about their trip to Hong Kong after Potlatch. See it before it disappears seemed the idea.

Lise checked in, and immediately decided she needed to change her room for something slightly larger than the bed. We all headed off on foot for a really nice Eastern restaurant called Cedars about a half mile away. A little cold, but good company. I stuck to a small gyros salad, but the quantities would have been too much for me even if I'd been hungry. We had sufficient culture in common to have a lot of fun in conversation, and left only as the staff closed up ... or possibly sometime after they would have preferred to close up.

Friday 28th February 1997

I arose late, and took an hour and a half walk along 45th Street as far as Interlake, looking at the shops. The vista grew uninteresting after a while, so I returned to the hotel.

Chanced upon Lise also awaiting the elevator, to go out and get breakfast. She wanted a particular tea house, one she had been to at previous conventions. I knew precisely where it was. We wandered over a portion of the same territory again, but Lise had a much better idea of what they stocked. At a Food Giant I found a St Patrick's Day card to send to Martin at work. At Erotic Bakery (it was too) was a sign saying they sold Darwin fish, so I got a few as gifts. First time I'd seen them sold at a retail outlet, albeit a strange retail outlet. Lisa entered the tea house, talked at length with them, and failed to get breakfast. I thought you needed a group of fans for Lise to have problems with finding food, but obviously not.

Back at the University Plaza hotel I helped Suzle bring a trolley of ice and fresh food snacks to room 366, the con suite. Rich and Linda McAllister turned up while I was sitting in the lobby waiting for Lise, who was still protesting she intended to get breakfast (I think I was late). Interesting views, says my computer, of something we saw while walking, but views of what?

Ricochet modem on a laptop in the bar, web surfing by wireless. Now that was science fictional.

People seen included Fran Skene, Alan Baum, Donya White, Doug Faunt (who will tell me where to get flash memory and Nuts & Volts), Kevin Standlee, Cheryl Morgan, John Lorentz, Jerry Kaufman, Suzle Tompkins, Clifford Wind, Marilyn Holt, Anita Rowland (suite czarine), Art Widner, FM & Elinor Busby, George Wells, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Vonda McIntyre, Carrie Root, Lenny Bailes.

Andy Hooper, who again had a fanzine and FAAN ballots available, reported walking in the rain for various purposes. Of course, since he lives there, maybe he is more used to that.

Saturday 1st March 1997

For a small convention focusing on the discussion of written science fiction, Potlatch sure did a great imitation of a relaxacon. They do say they have a strong fannish flavor. Seemed about the right mix to me. They did have a set of formal and informal writers' workshops. Since I don't see myself as a potential writer I didn't seek to attend, but I like the idea of encouraging potential writers.

The con suite had homebrew beer supplied by Steve Swartz and Craig Steed. Homebrew something or other seems a strong influence in Seattle fandom; previous conventions had cider. I must also mention that Anita Rowland did an absolutely splendid job of running the con suite.

Spike Parsons, Stu Shiffman, Suzi Mckey Charnos, Mark Manning, David Bratman, and others were hanging around. Seemed a really good roll up of fans and pros.

Sunday 2nd March 1997

Phoned Jean's parents, in response to email from Jean. They wanted stereo advice; different!

Hung around the con suite, until the Howard Waldrop reading, and silent auction.

Very funny auction took up much of the afternoon. It included Duff beer, which went for $16. It was mostly to aid Clarion West. Lots of donations from publishers, individuals, and especially from Joanna Russ and Vonda McIntyre. Tom Whitmore donated a massage.

Most impressive item on Sunday morning, Tom Whitmore providing a ten page summary of the discussions at the panels on Saturday.

The dead dog party continued until midnight.

Monday 3rd March 1997

I turned up early to help clear the con suite. A closet full of soft drink which seemed to me to fill Vonda

McIntyre's car, however she managed to put another trolley load into it. I asked how she would react if asked about a writers workshop in Australia, and the response was favourable.

I lunched with Clifford Wind, on gingerbread waffles and eggs and bacon, and it was good. What wasn't so good was the rain, and miserable weather, which simply won't give up.

Book shopping is not really on my agenda, but Bob Brown is at 3534 Stone Way North, Seattle Book center at 3530, and Shorey's Books at 1109 N 36th St, much the same block. Popular culture is represented by Archie McPhee at 3510 Stone Way N, or phone 206-5458344 for locals. Remote access on (206)745-0711, or email mcphee@mcphee.com or www.halcyon.com/mcphee/

Alan and Janice called at the University Plaza at 7 p.m. Alan and I compared palmtop computers. It was interesting to see the Casio Aladdin, a prototype of the Cassiopia. An attempt to read an SRAM PCCard into the Casio failed utterly, as it didn't detect the existence of the card. We loaded a neat collection of DUFF auction items from the Sims into their car. We went off to a family style restaurant, for a filling and enjoyable meal. I sort of regret not getting the steak, but it probably would have been more than I could eat in any case.

Back at the hotel we sat and talked until it got far too late for people who had just got through a convention of far too late nights. I was able to loan Alan some SF novels, and also the Psion manual for Automap USA, a product he is expected to sometimes support but had never actually seen until I showed it to him.

Tuesday 4th March 1997

While it was cold and cloudy, the rain had stopped for a while. I walked over to University, and checked out various bookshops. Once again the University Bookshop computer store had the best prices for the HP200LX, which was $499 for the 2MB model. Getting bored by that, I walked back past the hotel to Stone, and then towards the bookstores there.

Sense took over and I returned to the hotel, cashed a travellers check, booked a shuttle, and headed to the airport at midday. I was able to pick up a 1:15 flight to San Francisco, and also booked my Las Vegas flight for Saturday. I figure I'd contact the Las Vegas fans to ask if the Saturday flight would work for seeing them, It will also be good to try to catch up with Alyson Abramowitz, if she isn't crazy with working on Corflu.

I'd talked with Rich and Linda McAllister and even had directions on how to bus to close to their place.

Phone system got at me once again. I couldn't figure out why it would reject 20 cents for a local call, and insist on 70 cents. I guess just because the area code is the same, it still isn't a local call. In which case, how you expected to know what is local and what isn't? Australia is moving to a similar system, and I am not impressed by that idea. It wasn't helped by the phone volume being such that I could hear only one word in three.

Lost the shuttle bus to the train station, emerged at the wrong (baggage) level, dragged bags all over the place before I found a notice, and had to hump large bags up stairs. Got to the Caltrain station and fruitlessly searched for a place to buy a ticket. Since both trains arrived within moments of each other, I had a few seconds to worry before the correct one arrived. I also misheard Menlo Park, the station prior to Palo Alto, and stood around waiting for my stop with too much baggage for a while.

Rich met me at the station, so at least I didn't have to navigate further. After dumping my bags, we walked to a shop across University. I was astonished at how wonderful a location they had. Living so close to all those good bookshops would cost me a fortune. Linda made up a soup from the vegetables and a geoduck, a clam I'd heard of but never seen. Tasted wonderful, totally unlike a chowder. We sat around and told war stories from the computer revolution over a beer.

Wednesday 5th March 1997

After separating the cats into their correct groupings, I walked to the Caltrain station, and took the 10 a.m to Lawrence. Why Lawrence? Because of a wonderful concentration of computer and electronics stores.

I'd have taken notes, but the batteries in my Psion were showing up as low, with only 27.5 hours use, 1160ma estimated consumption. I figured AA alkalines should have been good for at least 1500mA, so I'm deeply suspicious of either the Automap USA rom cartridge, or the backlight. Maybe the power use estimator doesn't take one of them into account correctly. I checked the "dead" battery levels at 1.26 volts later, which means they really were on the way out.

I walked all over on Lawrence, a street not designed for pedestrians, with five lanes each way on parts. The Caltrain station let me out just next to NCA, so rather than buy and have to carry, I walked way up, with a brief look in each store, until I could cross to reach Frys.

Frys is a giant electronic supermarket, with over twenty check out positions, reached from a single queue. They have decorated the store like a computer. The entry doors have inverted L shaped "Enter" handles, looking like those on a PC keyboard. The exit doors have small "Esc" signs. Inside, there are metre high fake capacitors and resistors embedded in the floor. Some of the tables are shaped like giant integrated circuits. It is a great looking place, and very popular with that subset of the population who enjoy buying capacitors on

sunday prior to breakfast.

I spent a lot of time wandering and looking. Unfortunately, trying to be something for everyone means they are not real competitive with real computer stores, nor with real electronics stores, nor real TV and VCR specialists. But it is a fun place, and open long hours. I bought only a cheap CD-Rom of 2000 Postscript fonts, spare AA batteries for my Psion, and a neat miniature folding tool (of dubious use, but when did that ever stop me?) I also got a chocolate on chocolate Haagen Daz ice cream. They couldn't help at all on the Intel flash memory in PLCC package that I really wanted.

I had planned to eat breakfast before getting on the train, and then while walking. Soon I was planning to have lunch instead before shopping. Somehow the quest for yet another gadget store took over from seeking lunch. I never did get to eat. If I hadn't found a couple of small candies in my bag, I'd have really been hungry.

Lots of the stores were behind Lawrence by a street or a lane, but I did fairly well in finding them. Active electronics had some SCSI connectors I needed for work, and OS/2 development software I doubted I'd find elsewhere. I spotted a scanner sale way down a side street, but there was no way I could get a flatbed scanner home. ACE were next door, and they had a wonderful selection of components. I got five of the 28F020 flash ram for $60, so I was pretty pleased. At Halted Specialties I picked up a couple of scarce connectors for work, a Disk Manager for IDE for 99 cents, and an ISA to PCMCIA converter for $20. I was pretty happy about that haul.

I didn't return until nearly six, totally foot tired from the hours of walking.

We walked to a crowded and noisy brew pub called Gordon Biesch, with German style beer, and interesting food. We dined there, rather late I must admit. The only thing I thought a shame is I was having problems hearing everything said, due to the general noise. I've been there before with fans from the area, and it always seems crowded.

Thursday 6th March 1997

Rich and Linda are wonderful hosts. Not only a bed, great conversation, good tips on shopping, but also a little stream of cats who came to visit and sit on the bed and purr. I hadn't been feeling all that active, so I wasted a lot of time reading free computer magazines, and looking for details of other chips I wanted to buy.

I decided to make a lazy shopping day out of it, rather than all that much tourist stuff. I bought some mixed fruit jelly beans, at a sweet shop I couldn't resist. I checked prices in Ross, on the way to the Caltrain. University Avenue is close to the Stanford Shopping center, so I walked over there instead of getting the Caltrain. Had a decent half salad and half sandwich, and started feeling much better. Unlikely as it seemed in the USA, I think perhaps I'd been forgetting to eat regularly.

The Nature Company provided far too many temptations. Jean had long ago decided that her totem animal was a snake, and I'd had certain success in providing snakes for presents. The Nature Company escalated that into a major enterprise. I ended up with a bag of rubber snake, and pens in snakes, and transparent juggling balls containing snakes. I ended up hoping the Australian Customs wouldn't open my bag, as I'm not sure how you explain a dozen or so rubber snakes.

I looked in Neiman Marcus, a vastly upmarket department store, where someone directed me to their sales section. It wasn't so much that I couldn't afford their shirts and whatever. It was that my whole being rebelled at spending so much for goods that came from the same third world sweatshops as the cheapest clothes.

In particular, Rich and Linda had advised me to check out Ross. It had silk shirts at $10. Not, I grant, always as well cut as those in NM, but the best were just as good (the worst were totally tasteless, something that usually doesn't prevent my buying). Alas, they were too large for me.

Then I sat in the sun to type more notes into the Psion palmtop computer. There are a wonderful range of nature, science and gadget stores in the area. The Nature Company, the Museum Company, Scientific Revolution, Sharper Image, Radio Shack. I found a complete set of Wallace and Grommit videos in Learningsmith, which I collected as a gift (it won't run in Australia, due to the different TV system).

That evening I talked with Alyson Abramowitz by phone. She worries far too much about what she is doing, and then gets others worried, which is a pity as she is perfectly competent to do the job without that much angst.

Friday 7th March 1997

Did my laundry, separated the cats into their isotopes (well, got them into the right rooms), and headed for the Caltrain. Unwisely had a Swensen's icecream for breakfast on the way.

The ticket to San Francisco return was only $6.50, which didn't seem bad for an hour ride. Being used to interurban trains in Australia, I must say the ride was a bit more bumpy and rocked more than I expected. The route along the track to San Francisco was flat, with hills always a little distant, and lots of low houses mixed with small businesses (and some not so small).

While a little cool, the sunny day (like all the others) made walking a pleasure. Leaving behind the industrial area around 4th and Townsend, I walked the several blocks towards a concentration of buildings. The most impressive was a SF like

structure I photographed. I was able to wander around the streets in an unfocused manner for a while before seeking a meal in an upmarket shopping center.

The shops I saw on most streets were too upmarket for me, so after tiring of scenery, I wandered along Market. As I had hoped, this fitted its name, with a variety of increasingly cheap camera and electronics stores offering bargains. After considerable walking, I'd located a few with a small range of Psion peripherals, and grabbed a memory card at a considerable savings over the Australian price. Most of the stores didn't seem to have much idea of what they were selling in the more obscure categories. Most seemed anxious to sell me a video camera. Not being a video person, I declined, although the prices sounded good to my uninformed ear.

While heading back to the Caltrain, I stopped at the much larger Ross, and collected four $10 silk shirts and a silk jacket. Might as well move upmarket in what I wear to work, if only to confuse them.

We dined at a fine Indian restaurant nearby, with a deadly mint sauce provided as a condiment at the table. I was most impressed, as I'm not a regular diner at Indian restaurants.

Saturday 8th March 1997
Electronic flea market at Foothills college, which we got up at 6:30 to attend. This was the first of the year, and filled a large car park. Lots of great gear, especially old test equipment at wonderful prices. Perfect for equipping your typical mad scientist's laboratory. I got a couple of $5 PCMCIA 512k flash ram cards. I deny I fit the mad scientist stereotype ... for one thing, I don't have a beautiful daughter.

On the way back we stopped for an hour to help Bill Humphries and crew load a moving van. Fannish moves are so bookish. I emailed Jean (finally) but despite that got to the airport early, since Rich and Linda set a good pace when they dropped me off.

United offered an earlier flight on standby, so I took it. I figure I can hang out at LV airport as easily as at SF airport. Tom picked me up early from Las Vegas airport anyway, and dropped me at the Katz home. He was suffering from allergies, as were many others during this season.

He and Tammy came over later to go out to dinner. I was amused to see even a small number of fans could have problems deciding where to dine. I thought I lacked sufficient local knowledge to make sensible comments, especially as I have no food allergies. Joyce and Arnie Katz were my hosts the weekend. They arranged a great get together at their home, after the eight of us dined.

Sunday 9th March 1997
Staggered out in the morning. Slugger the cat greeted me with a hiss. What a way to start the day! Skinny Dougans for breakfast, a comfortable bar with excellent booths for talking, and enormous quantities of food. Joyce and Arnie know some neat places, far more pleasant for talking than any on The Strip.

I note a B5 repeat being viewed, and a visit to Celebrity Deli for dinner. It was a nice relaxed day.

Monday 10th March 1997
Some people in Chicago tried to organise a bid for a Worldcon in Las Vegas, so Vegas fandom struck back. They formed a Chicago Science Fiction League. They meet at Chicago HotDogs for breakfast. So I also joined the Chicago Science Fiction League, and got a card that will eventually be good for a free hotdog.

Spent a relaxed morning at the Katz home, trying to keep awake before Joyce dropped me at the Hilton hotel. I'd been able to get three nights at a paltry rate, as part of my international ticket, so I'd decided to see how real tourists live.

The Hilton boasted Science Fiction Zone, a shop devoid of books, except for one *Star Trek* guide. It was however full of silly gimmick plastic toys (and a few astronomy related items). *Star Trek, the Experience*, coming Summer 1997, was just across the hall. It had some props from the series. Just what we need, a *Star Trek* related casino, designed and operated by people who have never seen the show. They could have some fun with the idea, but I bet they don't.

Wrestling was on the agenda when Joyce collected me late that afternoon. The description of plot lines in the wrestling just about had me in stitches. I almost suspected Arnie and Joyce of making it all up, except the events unfolding on the TV screen were so outrageous that I had to believe. Having it all laid out made it enormous fun. Not very believable, but great fun.

Came upon Aileen back at the hotel, busy with customers, as she was on a really strange shift. I ran some pocket change through the machines that give Las Vegas its sustenance, and half an hour later caught up to her for a chat between customers who actually know how to gamble.

Tuesday 11th March 1997
Walked along the Strip from 10:30, until I reached New York, New York. Alas, the roller coaster was not working, and apart from the appearance of this strange casino, that was my main reason for visiting. By then the temperature had reached 83 degrees, and my temper had increased to match. I was aware that I had been overdoing the walking in the sun, and all too aware that any sunburn would be entirely my own fault.

Spent a pleasant hour at La Salsa, in the Ceasar's Forum Shops, sipping 16 ounce margaritas (I wasn't game to try the 50 ounce version while walking). Got to watch the Bacchus presentation, with the animatronic figures in the Forum. Now that is really silly.

Stopped in the Hilton's Mexican bar, which even had a genuine Mexican bartender.

Wednesday 12th March 1997

Caught up with some cleaning and packing after breakfast. Took the $1.30 strip trolley from the back door of the Hilton to the Luxor. The trolley has absolutely no springs or suspension, and uncomfortable wooden benches. Took at least 40 minutes to reach the Luxor.

It took a few guesses about where the Imax cinema was hidden (there are not an unlimited number of places you can hide a 7 floor high screen, even in a Las Vegas casino. The timing was all wrong, with the L5 show not discharging until about the time I was to meet Joyce. However I like Imax, so I decided to view *Special Effects*. Seating takes too long, with a queue to enter the long ramp to the queue. The film was very educational, but not all that entertaining. Good effects, what few were to be seen.

Back to the Hilton, on a vastly overcrowded 301 bus. I did finally get a seat, but it was right over the engine. On a hot day (and winter in Vegas reached 83) it was a bit too much. Especially as it took nearly 40 minutes for the journey.

Organised Living = neat stuff (advertising sign, just before the Hilton).

I was running across the road to the Hilton, with maybe five minutes before Joyce was due, when I noticed she had already arrived. We had corn beef and cabbage, something I haven't had in ages. I realise it is probably politically incorrect, but I enjoy that sort of stuff.

I profess not to understand the baseball draft for the simulated teams, but actually Arnie and others did fully explain it. It wasn't as much fun as the plot summary of the wrestling, but at least the baseball widows talked to me.

Afterwards I got dropped off at the Luxor. Saw *L5 First City in Space* in 3D at the Imax. It was pretty impressive as special effects went. First Imax film I've seen that was actually a fictional story, albeit slightly pedestrian for SF fans. I don't know that the effects were really good enough for a screen that large and that close to the audience, but they were damn close to being good enough. I look forward to them doing more along those lines.

Thursday 13th March 1997

Taxied to Las Vegas airport, and moved my flight to San Francisco forward an hour, on the assumption it would be late (it was, 45 minutes).

Black Tie transport took me to the Walnut Creek Marriott after a sufficient wait to catch up with some notes. Corflu (www.hidden-knowledg.com/corflu) Wave was no longer close enough to sea waves, but it still held water.

After checking out my fancy room (664, the neighbour of the beast - Ted White had 666), I strode across the hall to the con suite, where socialising was already underway. Over a hundred attendees expected already, said organiser Alyson Abramowitz.

Alyson had done an incredible amount of work under difficult circumstances. She had lost her father in August, and her mother in December, both across the country. Knowing how much time I had to put into the relatively uncomplicated task of dealing with the death of my mother in January, I was most impressed with her efforts with Corflu.

I have a note. Alyson and the left turn, Alyson and the right turn, are we lost yet? I just know I'm going to be blamed. Ken Forman wrote it up on my palmtop computer, so here he is.

Ken Forman here...did Eric tell you about "The Quest"? He didn't? Alyson roped Eric and I along on a car quest to find more badge holders, and a keg of apple cider.

"It'll be easy," Alyson assured us. "I have all the directions right here." She brandished a piece of paper with some hand writing scribbled in the corner, and thrust it into my hands.

"You get to navigate." Somehow Alyson felt I knew the area better than she...foolish lass. We headed north; trying to follow her written instructions. Unfortunately her written guide read like stereo directions. "It's down here," offered Eric. "Just a little further," Alyson prompted.

After experiencing rush hour traffic in Walnut Creek California, we all agreed to ask for advice. The helpful gas station attendant directed us back to within scant blocks of our origin. That was just for the cider.

"Take the freeway north," I told Alyson. These instructions seemed to be from a more reliable source. "Take the Diamond exit." We turned, we searched, we followed the written advice; there was no sign of the office supply store the paper promised.

"We saw it from the freeway," Eric's voice floated from the back seat. "You're navigating," Alyson accused. "Go down that darkened alley, over there between that abandoned warehouse and that boarded up house."

My car companions didn't seem convinced, but we turned that way. Half a block later the Office Depot appeared through the gloom. Getting back to Corflu seemed the only way get back to normal.

Eric again. After that experience we dined at the Black Diamond brew pub across the street from the hotel, Ken Forman, Alyson Abramowitz, and myself, with Ron and Linda Bushyager. Good beer. Excellent company.

how deo9 ytou ype onm it6? I think that was Ron on my pocket computer. Ron won a pocket computer at Comdex in 1996, but it hadn't been delivered as yet.

Back at the convention, the smoking suite moved to Ted White's room, with several people looking in, including Gary Hubbard, George Flynn, Lenny Bailes, Ken Forman, Art Widner, and others.

Friday 14th March 1997

I sort of expected to see Bruce and Elayne Pelz, and maybe Dick and Nicki Lynch, however they did not attend. There were about 125 fans attending, so it was a great roll up, despite some fans being missing.

Bill Rotsler was also missing, diagnosed with cancer of the lip or various alternatives, depending upon who was reporting. He was much missed.

As mentioned, Ted White was in Room 666 (whereas I was the neighbour of the beast in 664). This was opposite the con suite, so I saw this as something other than coincidence. There was considerable activity in the alternate smoking suite, which could actually have used larger quarters. Not that I'm complaining.

The theme of Corflu wasn't waves, it was cakes. There seemed at least one new giant cake each evening, often several. All neatly iced with Corflu related material artistically depicted. It was impressive. If I liked cake it would have been even more impressive I suspect. I have all manner of photos of these numerous cakes, if only to prove they existed.

I think I should mention there was programming, organised by Alan Rosenthal; it wasn't all beer and cakes. Panels included Music and Fandom, a Corflu retrospective, Corflu and Attitude, and Strange Faniverse, on unexplained fannish phenomena (shades of the X Files). The auction, of course. Andy Hooper's play Fannotchka, seen before only at LACon III. And the traditional baseball game, which got rained on.

Saturday 15th March 1997

Dave Clark and Kevin Standlee were promoting the next San Francisco worldcon bid, in a low key way. Must admit mostly Kevin seemed to be losing at poker (maybe part of a master plan to make fans remember him and the bid). Mind you, he was playing poker with Linda Bushyager, who seemed rather familiar with the game.

Lise Eisenberg and Vicki Rosenzweig reported on Hong Kong (although not as I recall on the Mongolian Rock and Roll concert - with Cantonese translations). I've heard other reports of not seeing much in the way of electronics for sale, but maybe that is my own set of prejudices at work. Remarkably, they seemed awake despite their odd hours.

Somehow a group of us invented a Swiss army smoking knife, inspired by the Swiss Army bicycle, and the accompanying Swiss Army bicycle knife on display somewhere. I leave the bicycle knife to your fertile imagination.

Sunday 16th March 1997

The traditional banquet, much mention of fwa, then past president fwa, Ted White introduces the idea of past presidents, and dispute breaks out as to who they were. Andy Hooper and Ian Gunn sweep faan awards, after Janice Murray hassles people to vote earlier on. As usual, I'd not been sufficiently organised to think of this, despite Janice pushing people to vote.

Andy Hooper, having criticised Alyson in his fanzine earlier, leads a standing ovation for Alyson for her work on con. Special thanks to Judy Bemis for blocking rooms efficiently (she did a wonderful job). To Alan Baum for arranging T shirts, Alan Rosenthal and Janice Murray for programming. Bill Rotsler is past president 1996, Lee Hoffman for 1951.

Victor Gonzales gave a wonderful GoH speech. I'd never really thought of him as a humourous writer (a good writer, yes, but serious). Luckily he reprinted it in *Apparatchik* #76, so others can read it. One interesting point in the preface to the article is mention of lacking photocopy facilities at the hotel; I hadn't noticed it at the time, but it is a decided point to seek at a Corflu. The only mimeo I noticed was an exhibition of an ancient one, formerly owned I think by Burbee.

Ulrika O'Brien attended. I'd somehow thought of her almost exclusively as a net fan, rather than someone likely to attend Corflu, however in person she fitted in easily with the rest of the crazies.

Ian Sorensen appeared, and Corflu 1998 was awarded to Britain. Maybe I'll get to that one, despite missing Attitude. Great controversy appeared on the net after, mostly misinterpreting something Ian said about the ratio of US to UK fans he expected (it was interpreted as a ratio to be enforced).

At a party, the conversation turned to preserving fanzines. I proposed making clay tablets in Nevada, after converting a computer plotter into a machine to inscribe clay. We would copy all the fanzines onto clay tablets. The location would be an extension to Circus Circus and the Luxor, built to imitate the Library at Alexandria. It would be easy to convince a casino it was a great idea. The Las Vegrants would be employed to keep the tablets in the proper order. Ron Bushyager, Hope Leibowitz, Judy Bemis, Tony Parker aided and abetted this scheme.

Dinner with Lise, Alyson, Ken Forman, after another one of those drives that wandered all over the area. Not that I really cared, provided we found someplace with food. I was lost once we got a block or two from the hotel.

Cindy Lee Berryhill, attending the con with Paul Williams, gave an impromptu concert in the con suite late in the evening when the dead dog was even more dead than usual. I enjoy filk singing (which this wasn't) and this was a very polished performance.

Monday 17th March 1997

Late cleanup in the con suite, with Rich McAllister, Judy Lazer, Alyson, Lise Eisenberg. We should have started earlier, and worked harder, but what the hell, at least we survived the con. Everything was packed by around four ... or maybe five.

I foolishly neglected to pick up copies of the Fanthology on the Sunday, and forgot on Monday. Several people in Australia may never forgive me.

Alyson kindly offered to drive me to the airport, on her way home, and after some other deliveries. We dined at an Indian restaurant, however I wasn't feeling all that well, so I didn't enjoy it as much as I might have. The navigating afterwards was interesting. I swear some of the streets simply packed up and moved elsewhere. However we did eventually get back to an identifiable part of the freeway system.

Not that it did me much good. The flight was diverted to Los Angeles, ran three hours late, and was crowded as hell. I was really pissed off about that, as a transpacific flight is long enough to start with. Many passengers suspected a plot by United to ensure a full plane. If I ever find out that was the case, as distinct from a genuine engineering fault, United can kiss my future business goodby.

Luckily Jean met me at the airport (despite the plane being so late), took me home instead of to work, and I eventually cheered up about the flight. That's all folks.

New Books

I keep getting sent fantasy for review. Not being one to let any book go unread, I've been ploughing through them regardless. However, enough is enough. The vast majority of the fantasy I receive seems to me to have absolutely no merit, beyond that of wasting the time and money of the reader. Unless I have some good reason to suspect they are well above average, I'm not reading fantasy sent for review in future.

The mere fact that booksellers and publishers lump science fiction and fantasy onto a single shelf does not make them identical in style, aim or content. It is like lumping westerns and detective stories together because the protagonists use guns. Nor does the overlap in authorship make them identical, when many authors must look to their next advance to determine what they will write.

I review science fiction, because science fiction more often provides the "sense of wonder" I look for in my entertainment.

Encounter with Tibor by Buzz Aldrin and John Barnes

New English Library, 1996, 559pp, A$14.95
This one has a neat set of authors. Buzz Aldrin, long time space enthusiast, and pilot of the first lunar landing. John Barnes, professional and talented author of many excellent and thoughtful hard science fiction novels.

Obviously the scenes in space around our time read as if they are happening to real people using real technology. The voyage to the stars does add some speculations as to plausible technologies that would make it possible within a century.

There is a certain familiarity when we have the alien encounter in pre-history, as this is a staple of a certain style of story. However in general it is carried out pretty well. I enjoyed this novel.

Fallout by Kevin J Anderson and Doug Beason

Ace, March 1997, 303pp, US$5.99
Techno thriller SF, from a well established team, using characters from Virtual Destruction. This time an extremist militia group are setting off bombs. Have they managed to obtain access to nuclear material? If so, have they been able to make a bomb?

Well done thriller, but only marginally SF in my opinion.

Primary Inversion by Catherine Asaro

Tor, May 1997, 369pp, US$5.99
Conflict on an interstellar scale, depicted by telling the story of humans on both sides, in a rewrite of Romeo and Juliet. However the technology of this future is very well done, with some nice speculation, on both interstellar transportation, and biotech. This is an impressive first novel, and I'll follow the career of this author with interest.

Past Imperative by Dave Duncan

Corgi (Transworld), May 1997, 477pp, A$13.95
Round One of The Great Game. Two locations, one an alternate world, and one England of 1914, where a terrible murder has occurred, and an innocent young man stands accused. I rather enjoyed the scenes in England.

1945 by Newt Gingrich and William R Forstchen

Baen, August 1995, 382pp, US$24.00
Marginally interesting due to Gingrich's political position as Speaker of the House, since this may be the first US politician to write science fiction, and admit it (I'm sure lots of them write fiction, if only in budget estimates and political promises).

Pedestrian alternate history, lots of historical figures present. Seems to be first in a series, since it is incomplete, but I haven't heard of a sequel. I'd suggest Turtledove's work instead, if you want SF elements.

Competitions by Sharon Green
AvoNova (Transworld), June 1997, 422pp, A$12.95
Book two of The Blending, magic fantasy.

A Darker Geometry by Mark O Martin and Gregory Benford
Baen, Sept 1996, 419pp, US$5.99
Set in Larry Niven's Known Space, this includes part of the Man-Kzin Wars series, and has lots to say about Pak, Outsiders and much else. Nicely accurate space battle, with the conclusion well outside the Niven universe. Interesting development however.

Now You See It by Richard Matheson
Tor (Pan Macmillan), March 1997, 220pp, A$11.95
A suspense thriller narrated by a paralysed stroke victim, father of the world's greatest magician, who witnessed all the events of the novel, but was unable to speak or move.

Would his agent and wife kill off Maximilian the Great, or was it all a subtle plan by the master magician? Master plotting and a deft hand by a wonderful storyteller. Does this have the greatest number of plot twists I've seen in a book? No, but it would be close.

Hawkthorn Tower by Martin Middleton
Pan Macmillan, October 1996, 403pp, A$14.95
Book one of the Living Towers trilogy. Standard fantasy quest by Australian author, with demon invaders from another dimension gaining a portal when a human manages to control one of the towers.

Wolfsbane Tower by Martin Middleton
Pan Macmillan, May 1997, 385pp, A$14.95
Second in this fantasy trilogy by Australian author.

Myst - The Book of Atrus by Rand and Robyn Miller with David Wingrove
Bantam (Transworld), November 1996, 387pp, A$12.95
One of the better computer adventure game variants, provided as a fantasy novel. I have some trouble deciding why they bothered.

Myst - The Book of Ti'ana by Rand Miller with David Wingrove
Bantam (Transworld), 1997, 322pp
A really nice looking hardcover, complete with fold out map. They have printed all the pages with a half tone green cloud effect border around the edges. A few illustrations. Not top quality, but it is nice to see publishers making an effort.

The Duchovny Files by Paul Mitchell
Bantam (Transworld), March 1997, 284pp, A$24.95
Pretty pricey for a trade paperback unauthorised biography (113 pages) and episode guide (about 60 pages) to The X Files. About 30 pages from the Internet, plus two interviews with Duchovny (who plays Mulder in The X Files TV show). The biography seemed reasonably well written. Very large print, very wide margins, very large interline spacing. 16 full colour photos of Duchovny. Can you spell The Ripoff File?

Star Wars - Shadows of the Empire by Steve Perry
Bantam (Transworld), June 1997, 385pp, US$5.95 A$12.95
Set in the period between the capture of Han Solo and his rescue from Jabba, this novel concentrates on the conflict for Emperor Palpatine's favour between Darth Vader and the reptilian Prince Xizor.

Xizor is a cunning, diabolical, criminal genius, lord of the galaxy wide Black Sun organisation (hmm, didn't we see this in Doc Smith back in the '30's?) One of his plots, to find and kill Luke, one of his tools, to trap Leia, who is seeking to intercept Boba Fett and rescue Han before Jabba obtains him.

Some nice battles, with Wedge Antiles and Rogue Squadron taking part, plus most of the other characters from the films turning up in support. (This review from the hardcover review in Geg 76)

An Armory of Swords edited by Fred Saberhagen
Tor (Macmillan), May 1996 (May 1997), 316pp, US$6.99 A$11.95
Eight stories, about swords forged by Vulcan and a human apprentice for the other Greek Gods, and what happens when humans use them. Quality varied considerably.

Star Wars X-Wing The Bacta War by Michael Stackpole
Bantam (Transworld), April 1997, 349pp, A$11.95
More WW1 fighter tactics as Rogue squadron goes undercover, away from the Alliance, and brings the fight to Isard. I thought it was boring, but if anything with a Star Wars name on it gets your attention, go for it. At least the writing is reasonable.

Empire of the Ants by Bernard Werber
Corgi (Transworld), April 1997, 348pp, A$12.95
The French author can not be blamed for the title, however the work is derivative, and contains little to surprise anyone aware of any of the history of SF. I can ascribe its success only to a lack of knowledge on the part of those buying. Anthropomorphic ants in angst.