

Air in the Paragraph Line

A Newsletter about Jon Konrath's writing and life.

Issue 3- May 1996

Why I'm bummed:

I missed the fucking earthquake! After living in the midwest for my entire life, I finally move to a city that has an occasional tremor, and every time I look at the crack in the wall left from the last minor quake, I wonder when the next one will hit. So I was in San Jose for a week, and when I got back on Thursday, I found all of my spices on top of the stove knocked over, and a big stack of paperbacks toppled on the floor. I thought maybe I knocked the stuff over during my manic last-second packing earlier in the week, and forgot about it until everyone I knew from Indiana called me asking if I was okay. It turns out I missed it by just a few hours, I was in the airport in San Jose when it happened. Fuck! Who would've thought that being near San Francisco would keep you safe from an earthquake?

So I'm late this month in publishing a newsletter, and I'll probably be even later in actually scraping the change together to mail out the copies. But a lot of stuff's happened and I had a lot of fun being down in California (more about that later). So, sorry if you've been waiting at the mailbox impatiently since May 1 looking for more mail from Seattle. I'm guessing that few of you fall in this category anyway.

Good news: the first draft of Rumored to Exist was finished March 17 (well, technically March 18) in a fit of caffeine and prose recycling. I'm currently editing it, trying to get things smooth and readable before people take a look at the whole project. It clocked in at about 60,000 words and I'm about halfway through a preliminary pass to make sure it flows smoothly. It's not going to need much rewriting or juggling, so I'm aiming to have a strong second draft by the end of May.

I've been occasionally editing my first book, Summer Rain, in my spare time. I have the strong feeling I'll be editing it for years, but I'm trying to get a decent version done someday. I'm contemplating printing 50 or 100 copies, just to give out to friends and maybe sell a few at shows or something. I got a reasonable quote, and I might do this later in the summer, if I ever get time to finish the editing.

Almost everything else has been slow, because I spent so much time finishing Rumored. There aren't any new magazine or journal deals to announce, because I've been writing instead of submitting and talking to people. But Extent should be published by the time you read this, so send \$4 to Extent c/o John LaCroix, 38 Calumet Street #3, Boston, MA 02120 or email extent@tiac.net. And if you don't have a copy of the newest Metal Curse, send \$3 to Ray Miller, POB 302, Elkhart, IN 46515-0302 or email cursed@interserv.com.

There's a free conference at WWU in Bellingham, WA on May 17th that will be pretty cool. It's called "The reality behind fantasy: the working world of the fiction writer". It includes F.M. Buzsby, Don McQuinn, Bruce Taylor, Louise Marley, me, Roby James, and R. Garcia Y Robertson. It's May 17, Friday, from 2pm to 7pm at the Fairhaven Auditorium and you can call 360-650-4489 for more info. It should be cool, so even if you have to call in sick and hitchhike, do it.

So this month's email is lame, and my journals are mostly scribbles about how close I was to finishing the book. I have a lot of books to review, but no albums - I haven't had a chance to buy a new CD in a long time. I'm going to fill you in on the latest happenings by banging out a few quick stories. Let's get

Scraping the Bucket

A Taste of March's outgoing mail

i had a dream about you las night. we were sitting on this ancient couch in some house amd we were watching some show and courtney love was on it and we were talking about heroin addiction. thats all i remember.

so here's what i made for dinner: scrambled eggs, beanie weenies, and cornbread. it isnt as bad as it sounds actually. im trying to get rid of my eggs before they turn into biological warfare weapons. umm i was gonna tell you some aesop-like advice to help you with the guy situation, but if i knew the answer i would apply it to my own fucked-out depressing life.

hey nice tan! glad to hear you had fun on the islands etc even if you didnt stow me away in your luggage or something. i could really really use a vacation and we aint talkin jersey city either. maybe i can get down to vegas some weekend and blow a paycheck on blackjack

and overpriced drinks. who knows.

so.. things have been far too busy here. someone quit, and i got a promotion by force. no, no more money or fame or glory, i just have to do way more work and i can no longer slag half of it on this other guy. so i actually have to do stuff during the day now. my ruse has failed me.

havent dyed any eggs, but i got some of those malted milk eggs. they were on sale at the safeway and i am somewhat of an impulse shopper. i have a large collection of people magazines and national enquirers that i have bought over the years at the checkout.

sorry your sister has gone insane or batty or just a bit deranged. my mother is currently making me think alzenheimers can kick in before the 50's. she is getting remarried this summer and making my life a living hell over the arrangements. im thinking of changing my phone number and not telling her.

i gotta go throw out this crap before my entire apartment smells like a chinese biological warfare piece. ill write more later...

i was reading some tattooo magazines and thinking i should get about 800 tattoos so i look like henry rollins. dont you have tattoos? do they hurt?? i have only had BarqToos from the rootbeer packages. they didnt hurt.

if i had the magical power to look at people and make them do anything in the world, no matter how immoral, i think i would be happy. okay that's asking too much maybe two rounds with a hooker in a motel 6 will work for now

anyway...nothing up here. panicky about money, panicky about my career future here, etc etc etc. the usual evening decompression is running much later than when i start writing, which is bad. ive been trying to figure out an investing scam that would let me stop working within the next decade. nothing special, i think that if i can churn up my amount of capital in the bank and squeeze down my monthly budget, i can eventually get the two to meet and be able to live off the interest. this isnt an immediate plan, but i did the numbers and i think i could do it in 10 years with some work. who knows, i might just blow it all on

star wars toys.

i also found out there is a styx tour. what's up with that? i thought those guys were all dead or something. oh well. now we'll have to endure another year of that mr roboto song on the radio again.

umm abs of steel? does that work? do you have abs of steel? can you put a photo of them on the web? do they have a head of steel video? i want to get that one. of course i dont have a tv or a vcr, i guess i could just read the box and look at the pictures.

i have been spending all week/weekend hiding from this woman. she wants me to go to some easter party with her parents. i had to lie and tell her i had other plans and then concoct this giant story about how this guy at work was having an easter party and it was his little boy's first birthday so we had to dress up and make eggs and blah blah blah. i hate lying, but when you tell the truth and say no 50 times in a row and it doesn't work, life requires drastic measures.

im back at home and i baked a pizza so it is like 400 degrees in here. i am also very very bored considering going out to do something cool or destructive or random or, um, i dunno easteresque. ive been reading tattoo magazines all day, i got them free in the mail to review a few years ago and i never did. but i read them constantly because it sure beats reading the same issue of redbook over and over and over. one of the reasons i hate the psychiatrist is that when i wait 10 years in the waiting room, i have to read time magazines that are so old they have articles about the civil war in them. plus i hate my shrink because he is a dork. hes a dork and i am paying him \$160 a half hour so he can write me prescriptions. is life abnormal or is it just mine??

there is an ad on for laser-vana and laser-NIN and Ministry. they have these midnight shows at the planetarium where they do all this laser stuff and play loud music and stuff. i guess they did the whole pink floyd thing and all the floydies came in at 12 smoked out of their gourds and dropping reds and acid and then they play the wall and dark side of the moon and do all this laser shit. so now they are doing it with nirvana for all of the heroin junkies. and now NIN and ministry. kooky.

im gonna go find something to do. maybe i will go to the bookstore and hang out near the health and wellness section and hit on all of the women reading self help books who are on the rebound from fucked up relationships or something. heh.

anyway nothing else here. spending the weekend alone, and wallowing through a depressive phase. went to the u district on fri night, shopping at the cd stores and wandering through the streets for hours. its a lot like kirkwood but on a chicago scale - instead of one discount den type store there are 20. the thing that stuck the most - ate in burger king, and two tables away were these two sorority girls. one talked about a girl in her house who was about 5'2, very girlish who always wore a ponytail. even at formals, whatever, she always had her hair pulled back in a ponytail, with one of those things around it. so she went to student teach, she was an ed major, and when she got to the high school, all of the little 15 and 16 year old boys thought that she was a new girl at the school and started hitting on her. so she then quickly lost the ponytail. its a dumb story, but for some reason it stuck in my head.

when I first started consulting at IUSB, i used to have dreams where my girlfriend would claim I was half-mumbling WP5.1 and Dbase 3 help to people. no nabakov though.

it was incredibly beautiful here today. hot outside, 70's, with all-out sunshine and a very gentle breeze. i went up to u of w and wandered a bit. made me really homesick for IU. for all the times i really wanted to blow up various buildings on that campus, it really was beautiful. so the wandering and the people lying in the open fields and frizbees and dogs and rollerblades and everything else was something i just havent seen in so long it was just incredibly nostalgic.

and being on a foreign, new college campus like that always holds some sort of unique quality to me, all of the architecture and landscaping and the mixture of 4 parts scholastic endeavor and 1 part total free laziness just feels so much better than the city's even specturm of business, noise and crime. i dont like flat-out nature, because it is either exploited into parks or it is just boring, but i like the mix of nature and academics and everything present on a campus.

so i wandered, taking photos, sitting down and writing for

about an hour. saw a troop of about 2 dozen buddhist monks - crimson robes, bare feet, shaved heads - even the women, all chinese, smiling and angeling wandering in the beautiful weather. also saw an area about as big as the arboretum at IU which is surrounded by various buildings, but the entire area is smooth red brick with some funky statues in it. it looked almost abnormal, like something out of the martian chronicles. but it was just this all-out skatefest, scores of people with boards and skates, jumping off all kinds of stairs and benches.

of course the whole thing makes me miss school and starts the whole dialogue about if i should be working or in school or what.

lots of questions and problems on both sides of the issue so i wont go into it. but i really want to save every penny so i can at least spend some time outside of the 40 hour a week death cycle.

i managed to find a disc which contains a bunch of old essays i wrote back in 1989, one of my early starts on a book. lots of historically interesting writing, including an essay i wrote the night my grandmother died. the writing isnt incredible but it is striking stuff.

They are playing a live concert with that band Bush on 1077. They should get a corporate sponsorship from a major beer company and change their name to Busch. Or they should get some indie band named Shaved to open for them.

Oh well. The new issue of Details showed up today. It is the annual sex issue, and it has Pamela Anderson-Lee on the cover, so that should keep my mind off things. No, I don't watch Baywatch, but I'm hoping that the super-model-dorky guy phenomenon will someday come to my aid. I mean, you've got Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller, Rik Ocasek and Paula whats her face, David Copperfield and Claudia Schiffer, Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee.... I think I should be able to just call up Jenny McCarthy and say "Okay, pack up your stuff - you're moving in."

I haven't been back to B-ton since I left, but I remember the feeling from when I took a year off and lived up north. I'd come down every few weeks and visit people. For me, it always felt very cool and reminiscent when I was there, but then very depressing when I had to leave and drive

back up to Elkfart to live with the old people and go to IUSB again.

im hungry and bored and cold and just woke up from a nap so my hair is all funky out on one side of my head. how are you? what color is the hair today? any plans of mass destruction this weekend? wanna go to a party tomorrow with me? there will be LIQUOR! hehe

no luck with the love life, unless you count bad luck. that woman i went out with is occasionally annoying me, calling me up and asking me out. i am trying to stay clear of her because i think she has a fairly damaging personality. also i think spending any amount of time with her would completely destroy my writing career. so i havent been answering the phone.

i want to open a bar that would be COOL but bars almost always lose money and scrape by and then vanish. but i would have a bar with a tattoo artist and piercing person on staff, and it would be a country shitkicker bar on thursday and tuesday but then it would be a punk-alterno bar on saturday friday, and it would be a drag/gay thing on wed. so that way the country western people would go on tues and think it was cool and then go on wed and see all these really tall chicks with big hands and kinda flat chests and 5-oclock shadows etc. also it would have a mechanical bull so on the fri and sat nights you would have all these sid vicious types riding on the bull. and it would have an up and a down stairs, and the up would be all rave-techno-dance stuff and the bottom would have indutrial-metal-punk stuff. and there would be a cafe to the side. and the upstairs would be called heaven, and the downstairs would be called hell, and the cafe would be purgatory. thats my idea. now i just need abotu 100 grand to do it. oh they would have computers too.

i did have a dream about henry rollins. he called me on the phone and we were talking and when i said i worked at spry, he asked me if i knew john (name changed), this guy who works there. i instantly wondered what the fuck was up, since jim is this very effeminite guy and i wondered if rollins was secretly courting this guy. i dunno. its funny cause this john guy - his office looks like a 40 year old housewife decorated it. it has plants and pictures and everything

and looks like my mom's kitchen or something. compared to most of us, who have a collection of about 10000 coke cans, a mountain of CDs, a pile of dead bodies, drug paraphanelia, and a blacklight, it is quite diverse.

whats up? wanna go to a party tonight? you hafta get up to seattle by 9. we can get you some zima before we go there. i will let you sleep at my house and i promise not to do anything to you until the amnesia drugs kick in. hmph you are probably working and stuff oh well.

yes i have seen the tonya harding photos. i have the penthouse. dont hold it against me, i bought it as a conversation piece for the house. and boy did people converse about it. mostly about how they wanted to vomit. i thought th was cute in a sort of white trash way, but not after seeing that whole thing. ick ick ick ick. luckily the centerfold in that issue was pretty hot and it partially defrayed the complete waste of five bucks.

i am really sad right now i sent a letter to my last ex and it will probably be the last time i talk to her ever. nothing bad, it is just that she is graduating and then moving away and getting married and blah blah and she will probably never contact me and i wont have a way to contact her. i really really hate losing contact with people forever like that, esp when they are like one of the top ten most pivotal people in the history of my entire life. i have not been depressed like this for a long time i guess because i have not been in any dating situations or anything. i just keep thinking about how we started dating which was three years ago now and that seems like so long ago and the next thing i know it will be thirty years ago and its so damn sad sometimes. i dont know.

i am in my office listening to bjork and ferreting away time until 5 rolls around. you know how it is. at least i have a pair of scissors and a ruler to play with. i figured that if my penis was a font, it would be about 40-some picas long. dont ask how i measured myself with a typographer's ruler, but it took a lot of persistence. color density photos dont around me as much as photos of swedish bikini bondage dyke whatever.

i think i broke my chair, rocking in it and stuff. i need to buy a new chair but i was kinda going to save up and buy a real

nice computer desk with a chair that matched. i might have to go buy an interim chair. oh well, i dont have any chairs around here anyway. of course that is a good excuse for me if i ever lure someone up here- "I dont have any chairs, we need to sit on the bed".

was reading about the masons tonight. some guys at work are babbling about the sam hulick-like thing about not paying taxes if you dont use zipcodes and do a bunch of other crap. maybe its the person who is babbling about it that annoys me and not the scheme i dont know.

i got a letter from a friend of mine who is starting a church where the main sacraments are motorcycles oral sex and hallucinogenics. i think i might join.

Father Bob:

Got your latest spiritual guide to the world in the mail. are you forming a religion based on motorcycles, oral sex and hallucination? if so i think there are at least a couple believers in the house tonight.

im on one of those microsoft keyboards, the fucked up divided in two things. ive been having some pain in the wrists so i am switching. since i dont touch type, it is awkward and weird, but not as bad as i thought it'd be. i know most of my bad typing takes place at home with the shitty keyboard shitty desk and shitty chair. i really need a new and decent desk for home, and my chair is one of those wood ones from the old place - the other 3 are probably already firewood.

I completed the first draft of book #2, Rumored to Exist tonight. It weighs in at about 60,000 words and took about 18 weeks to write, minus probably 3-4 weeks of screwing around, vacation, and other distraction. Compare that to book #1 which took about 11 months of work to hit the 100,000 word mark.... Anyway, I need to get caught up on sleep and then take a read through it before anyone else can sneak a peek. There will be a celebration party on the 6th floor of Sterling Plaza tomorrow at 4, with food and drink, so stop by.

-Jon

P.S. The celebration tomorrow is actually for the corporate billing product, but I'm taking over their party.

it is friday night and i am sitting at home no parties no angie the catholic schoolgirl not even an inflatable woman or latex fake vagina. what a drag. also i think i am getting carpal tunnel or tendonitis. i am having wrist pain but it is the left wrist so it cant be from that.

hey mc! i went to courtney cobains house today!

the one where kurt died and stuff. i did not go in i drove past it twice. 171 lake washington ave. it has a bunch bunch of bushes and trees you can barely see it but from one side you can see the little recreation room attic thing where kurt shot him self. and there is this giant gate that has all of these giant NO TRESPASSING signs all over it. i did not see courtney or that bass player that i like. or the kid.

i gotta go clean my kitchen. hamburger helper and death are everywhere.

i have a compulsive urge to buy a commodore 64 or some other ancient computer and bring it to the office and set it up on my desk. i used to have a c-64 and unless good old mom started throwing shit out, i think i still have some games for it somewhere. it would totally rule to play Tapper and Lunar Lander and all of that shit again. sorry turned into a 14 year old for a second there. my life when i was 14 years old consisted of model airplanes, the commodore 64, and jerking off. i have since eliminated two of those from my life, i will leave it an exercise to the reader to figure out which 2.

I wanted to stay in school indefinitely, but it didn't work out for me - low GPA, crappy general studies degree making grad school impossible to get into, hard to finance second bachelor's etc. I keep telling myself that someday I'll quit the corporate job thing and go back, but who knows. I have this fear that when I can afford it, all of those cute, gullible little freshman chicks will be young enough to be my children. So who knows...

did you order the rubber paint yet? is it for internal use? do you have to be careful when you paint around your naughty bits? what happens if you paint yourself up and then you are in a car in a parking lot in the summer with the windows rolled up? will you explode? well find out before you buy any.

i just saw that film with nick nolte and john malkovitch. i forget the name - it wasn't that good except you saw jennifer connely nekkid in it... i got a ticket though, I parked on a street that was permit only, so I lost \$23 there. sigh...

I AM JESUS CHRIST PLEASE PACK UP ALL YOUR BELONGINGS AND SELL THEM AND GET 11 OF YOUR FRIENDS AND FOLLOW ME THROUGH THE DESERT AND STUFF. WHEN ITS ALL OVER WE'LL HAVE A BIG LAST SUPPER AND THEN YOU GET TO WATCH THEM NAIL ME TO A CROSS. PLEASE RELPLY ASAP
BYE BYE JENNIPOSTLE ME

weird you mentioned fires - i heard that the rental office and laundry in colonial crest burned down recently. i have fond memories of those washing machines... sigh. also weird, i heard the cascades IGA closed recently. when i lived at colonial crest and didnt have a car and couldnt wait for my roommate to go shopping, i used to buy my food there. the day before i moved, i went there and it reminded me so much of when I lived there. But now it's gone and all those washing machines are gone. and morgensterns is closed now, and garcia's is gone, and the NY bagel and deli... i am glad i dont live there because i would be el depresso over all those things being gone now.

let me know what i should do about my facial hair. i haven't shaved in a few days and my current options are: a) grow a beard and look like someone from the 80's b) grow the mandatory seattle goatee and long sideburns c) grown mutton-chops d) grow a fu-manchu mustache with the sidebars that go to my chin e) grow a hitler mustache f) shave every square inch of my body and paint on the latex

The Trip

or: What I did on my work-vacation

When they landed the plane in San Jose, I saw that it was the type of airport where they wheeled a huge set of stairs next to the plane and had you walk across the tarmac, instead of clamping a huge Habitrail-like tunnel against the hull and into the terminal. Bathed in the nine-o'clock air of Northern California, the temperature change and vibrancy of the atmosphere reminded me of the first time I spent 2 days in a car and emerged in the palm trees and swimming pools of Tampa, Florida. This is California, I thought, dragging my backpack and leather jacket to the baggage claim of the small airport.

At the hotel, things felt more alone and decayed. Marketers and in-crowd people I worked with also arrived on the same flight, but quickly dissipated to bars, restaurants, and industry parties. Uninvited, and without a roommate for the first part of my stay, I was alone until the show started the next morning.

This was my first visit to California, ever. A few weeks before, someone asked me to compete in the Internet Bowl at the spring Internet World. The October before, I participated in the Jeopardy-like game show in Boston. Flying out the weekend before, I did some serious drinking with some of my Spry friends, met up with some friends who lived in Boston, and hit some bars and clubs on Halloween night. I also caught bronchitis, but the first trip to Boston proved enjoyable enough to make me say yes to the second round in San Jose.

I had no friends in San Jose. The guys in the band Pax Mortis lived about an hour away, but with no car, a visit to the Chris Crites household seemed infeasible. And I had a few friend-of-friends in the San Francisco area, but that too was 40 minutes away. And since the last round of layoffs at Spry, there were few engineers going. I had no idea what was in San Jose, since I did no prior research on the area. After arriving at our run-down hotel, things looked pretty bleak.

I checked into the room, changed out of my Spry jersey and into an Adversary shirt, and started flipping channels in an effort to break the silence. TV seems so alien of a concept after spending years not owning one, and gleaning entertainment from paper books and Usenet. The idea of having to sit through commercials without being able to skip them pissed me off, as well as the 8-channel hotel cable system. I suddenly regretted not bringing a walkman or any other music source with me. Just reading and writing felt too alone without a background of some sort.

Within an hour, I decided to see how much of San Jose I could experience on foot from the hotel. Our wonderful lodging was near the airport, an area which I later found was near pretty much nothing. I loved walking in the night without a jacket, and I strolled down 1st ave with no real goals in mind. Compared to the Seattle weather of 50s and 60s with occasional rain, the warm and fairly dry climate felt like the nicest, most tranquil summer days I met while back in Bloomington. I'm not the kind

of person who praises extremely cold or hot weather, so the May temperature felt perfect to me.

The nighttime stroll revealed a few facts about this part of San Jose. One, it had a lot of bail bond places. I must've seen at least 7 or 8 of them in the first three blocks of my walk. Two, gas really was almost two bucks a gallon. Three, even though I thought I was near stuff, I really wasn't. I saw a "Campus" liquor store and a "Campus" cleaners, but I didn't really see any college campuses nearby. Once I almost thought I was approaching one, but it was really a San Jose correctional facility. I really need to study maps before I go on these trips.

Overall, the walk gave the loneliness a chance to really hit. I was without music, without direction, without friends and in an area thousands of miles away from anything recognizable. I get enough depression when I'm in Seattle and realize I can no longer go to CD Exchange or Garcia's or Dagwood's or the IMU. At least in Washington, I've found some formidable replacements for my old favorites. In San Jose, I didn't even know which direction was North until my third day in town.

Plus there was an additional amount of depression because I didn't even have friends in the company who could shuttle me off to do cool things during the trip. When I was in Boston, we had a whole crew of engineering people who united and went to meals, bars, shops, and parties together. But the marketers were a completely separate clique, one in which I didn't fit. The deal gave me the whole one man army feel, which didn't add to the small amount of gloom I was feeling over my personal situation before the trip. Still stuck in the "why can't I find a woman" trap, I brought more baggage than just a suitcase and backpack with me. It all added up, and by the time I got ten blocks into the city, I just wished I had my car, a bunch of loud music, and someplace to go for solace.

But I didn't. So I wandered back to the hotel, bought a Coke for a dollar, and set the alarm for a far too early hour so I could get to the show on time.

I had dreams of waking up to the alarm and not being able to shut it off. I think the fear of missing the alarm scared me enough that I never fully got to sleep, and must've looked at my watch every hour. When the alarm did finally go off at 6, I was ready for another full night of sleep. But I showered, dressed, skipped breakfast, and left for the convention center.

San Jose's got a pretty cool rail system. It's a bunch of trolley cars, they look like a light version of a subway car, but they've got the little trolley bell and electric wire scraper on the roof. It runs on the semi-honor system, where you buy a ticket and there's a 1 in something chance that they'll check everyone for passes. I bought tickets every time, like a dunce. Oh well, the company paid for them.

I won't go into the trade show too much, because I barely left the booth and didn't get a feel for the whole thing. Basically, we just had a big TV where someone went through a presentation and gave out t-shirts, and then there were about 20 stations with computers, where a bunch of us stood around and answered dumb questions. We were right across from

AOL and some other smaller company, and I spent most of my time people-watching everyone who walked the aisles. Many incredible women strolled past, but it's hard to pick up on someone when you're wearing a dorky looking uniform-type jersey.

So the Internet Bowl was right after the show that night. There were three teams: us, AOL and Prodigy. We were to solve these web surfing questions while answering trivia questions about the Internet. Both AOL and Prodigy had giant cheering sections; I think only 3 or 4 people showed up from Compuserve. I felt like an idiot when I answered 6 questions in a row and got no applause, but then AOL would get one answer and the crowd would be roaring. After I tried to keep up, AOL pulled ahead and won. At least we got second place, and I got a trophy for the office. It's my second Internet Bowl trophy, and even though both don't have my name and just say "Runner Up", I cherish them. I was never in any sports or competitive clubs in school, so they are the only trophies I have. It's better than nothing.

My roommate showed up as I was eating from room service and watching the film Brewster's Millions on TBS. He wanted to go out and do something. His girlfriend was also there, and I ate and watched the film as they went back and forth over what they should do for the evening. Finally, at almost midnight, we took his rental car and drove through San Jose, looking for groceries. We ended up at a shady mini-mart and got enough Coke, donuts, chips and juice for the next few days.

The next day, I only had to work in the morning. My roommate mentioned going to San Fran that night, after he ate dinner with some old friends. But his plans were vague, and he isn't exactly known for his punctuality, so I tentatively planned on finding my own way to the bay after lunch.

The show continued. Everyone talked about how they missed the Internet Bowl, which disgusted me. Most of them had elaborate dinner plans, or met with people from other companies at hospitality suites. I felt an incredible tension at the show, being physically surrounded by people who worked with me, but emotionally being completely alone. And as the show filled and people swarmed in all directions to get free disks and free shirts and free bags and free info, I felt even more disassociated from reality. It reminded me of when I used to work in commission sales, in the height of my untreated depression. I'd be screaming within, torn apart over this complete anguish and pain, but I'd be smiling and trying to sell a set of lawn furniture to some putz. Not having to see people on a daily basis made it all seem new again.

So I took off right after lunch, and took the light rail to the hotel. As I pondered what to do for the rest of the day, I looked up and saw something that sparked an entire new battle plan in my head: there was an el-cheapo car rental place right in the hotel building! I'd never rented a car before. But I was now 25, I had a license, I had an amex gold card, and I had the day off. Would \$30 or \$40 impact my budget that much a month from now?

Within 20 minutes, I had changed from the jersey and into a t-shirt and jeans, and was in a '96 Toyota Corolla, headed north on highway 101. The sleek, dark blue four-door flew down the sunny and energetic high-

way, and I began my journey to San Francisco.

From years of horror stories, I'd expected the California highways to either be full of gun-wielding maniacs driving 100, or dozens of miles of cars at a dead stop, perpetually log-jammed. I immediately found neither to be the case. Most of the drivers seemed very "professional", and although the pace of the cars was over 70 mph, everyone seemed very well-behaved and decent mannered. Driving on 465 in Indianapolis was MUCH more horrific than driving in California.

And as I realized that I was driving in California, I got an incredible rush of energy and excitement. I thought I'd be walking or taking busses for the entire week, but instead I was behind the wheel, seeing all of the glass and steel towers of every computer giant on either side of the road, listening to the radio on 11, and heading to a city I only read about in books. The subtle differences in highway signs, the city exits for Palo Alto and Menlo Park and Mountain View were all things I'd heard about or seen for years. It was like being in a TV show, actually driving by the homes of places like Netscape and Apple.

I had to run the air conditioning in the car, the air was pretty stuffy in the car and running with the window opened deafened me. I didn't want to burn away all of the gas, especially since I had to refill the tank when the trip was over and gas was in the two buck a gallon range. The little Toyota seemed pretty economical though, it behaved a lot like my new Escort (except it didn't suck). I didn't have a tape player, but then I didn't have any tapes with me on the trip, either. After running through channels with the seek, I found the area oversaturated with hip FM programming. During a run through the band, I stopped on a station playing Obituary. They went right into Sepultura and then some Deicide. Definitely my kind of place.

With no direction, and only a rent-a-car map, I knew little about where I'd be going. I kept on 101, hauling ass and finding more cool radio stations. Within about 40 minutes, I hit South San Fran, a large urban sprawl that looked like a sterile version of Tacoma. I unfolded the map and decided to just cut through town on 101 and see what interested me.

Approaching San Francisco is strange - you don't see a line of skyscrapers from five miles back and slowly close in on them. As I jumped into the city, I couldn't see any large urban landmarks - they're all tucked away in the hillside, near the bay. But the city felt welcoming, much more than the small-time feel of San Jose. The place reminded me of Chicago in a lot of ways - the traffic, the people, the sidewalks, the mix of stores. But I couldn't compare it to any city I'd seen before. Things felt... newer than most major cities I've visited, and there wasn't as much of the urban degradation either. It almost reminded me of parts of Canada, cities like Kitchener up in Ontario, but hundreds of times bigger. Regardless, I had fun looking in the stores and driving with the taxis and busses through the streets.

I saw signs pointing to the Golden Gate bridge, and decided that's where I wanted to be. I didn't know you had to drive through the entire city to get to the bridge, but after finding this out while reading my map at a stoplight, I decided the journey would be a good way to get a quick

primer on the city. So I headed north, following the signs and chopping toward the bridge.

The road started twisting and crawling upward, the flats and storefronts on either side following the slope with awkward platforms and crooked foundations. Suddenly, the water appeared to my right, the San Francisco Bay opening behind the highway. And as I looked to the horizon, I saw an awe-inspiring stretch of rust-colored steel in the distance, more commonly known as the Golden Gate Bridge.

Driving even faster on the highway, my path twisted as the large monster drew closer. Everyone sees the Golden Gate constantly on TV, in movies, on commercials, and everywhere else in society. But actually driving on the damn thing just thunderstruck me. Those seemingly tiny cables on either side of the road were actually made from pieces of pipe much bigger than my car, and the two vertical supports jutted in the air much higher than any rollercoaster I've ever rode. As I drove on the highway across the bridge, I snapped a dozen photos and stared in awe at the giant supports and beams, trying to keep the car on the road.

At the other side of the bridge, I stopped at a lookout park-type thing, a parking lot overlooking a cliff with some coin-on telescopes and state-placed informational placards talking about some settlers who died a few hundred years ago or something. The area was overrun by tourists, entire families with camcorders, posing at the ledge and carefully reading the plaques. Whatever. I ran to the area by the coin-op telescopes and scanned the horizon.

Here's what I could see from left to right, across the bay: Berkeley, Oakland, the Bay Bridge, Alcatraz, North Beach, downtown, and the Golden Gate. All of these individually cool sights were all within 90 degrees of each other, the best panoramic view of diverse items I've ever seen in my life. I mean, from the top of Hunter Mountain in New York, I had cool mountains and scenery for 360 degrees, but it was all the same type of stuff. So I dropped a quarter in the viewer and checked out the deal. Alcatraz was my first target. It looked pretty ominous, but also pretty nondescript. I wouldn't have time or money for the tour, so this was my tribute to the Rock. I also tried to look over to Berkeley but couldn't see much. But the downtown area, the skyscrapers and bustle of smaller buildings looked pretty decent. And I took a look at some of the details of the bridge, like the service buildings below, encrusted in barbed wire. I wonder where they shuttled over the prisoners to Alcatraz?

After my time ran out, I shot a few more photos, grabbed my backpack, and headed to the bridge. There's pedestrian walkways on either side, and I was set on walking to the middle of the bridge. I didn't realize this was going to be a miles-long walk, but with my backpack on my shoulder, I kept at it.

The traffic was loud and wind overpowered me as I crept across the deck of the bridge. I kept looking up at the massive cables and catwalks to the top of the superstructure. I always thought of a bridge as a big piece of road hung over a gap in the surface, but the close-up view really made me realize that the thing was a massive engineering project, employing hundreds of people for year-round operation. Pretty serious stuff.

The only people I saw on the bridge were cyclists and power-walking types, and I couldn't hear anything with the wind and cars. I finally got to the center of the bridge, and quickly scrawled an entry in my journal after snapping the last of my film. There were crisis center phones on the bridge, something I heard were installed as the tally of bridge jumpers approached 1000. I leaned over the edge and looked down, just to check stuff out. It would've been damn easy for a person to kill themselves over the edge, or to BASE jump, for that matter. As I was leaning over, looking at the water, a large tanker slowly steamed under the bridge. I got a good look at the giant football field-sized boat, and got a better perspective of my relative altitude. Time to stop leaning, I thought, as I grabbed my bag and headed back to the car.

After the bridge, I crossed back into town and wandered. Starvation kicked through my system; I hadn't eaten anything since dinner the night before, and it was now after 5:00. I wanted to find Chinatown, and eat at a cool, beatific Chinese restaurant with authentic and cheap food. So I followed the signs, and kept an eye open for oriental storefronts. The north side of the city dissolved into taller buildings, denser structures, and a heavy concrete and steel atmosphere, sprinkled with decorative trees, businessmen in suits, joggers, tourists, and the everyday walk of life on the sidewalks and in the buildings. It was hard for me to remember that it was a Wednesday, and that I should be at work, or driving home from the office in Seattle's post-five traffic. Being in another state, another part of the world felt like hookey, like the time there was a bomb evacuation in the school and instead of going back inside after the all-clear, I drove to Chicago. It didn't really kick in that it wasn't just a Saturday until then.

After another hour of driving in circles, I found Chinatown. Seattle and Chicago both have international districts, but in both they just look like a part of the city with some oriental shops. In San Fran's Chinatown, it looked almost exactly like some part of Hong Kong. Narrow roads crept through city blocks with dozens and hundreds of shoehorned-in shops. And not just restaurants and groceries - travel agents, doctors, electronics shops, furniture stores, lawyers, every imaginable retail outlet was tightly compressed in the urban area. Large, colorful banners in Mandarin hung from windows, and every sign visible, even the city street signs, were in two languages. It looked like I somehow drove into another continent.

The idea of finding a parking spot and a friendly, cheap restaurant seemed even more remote, so I wandered aimlessly. I don't know exactly where I went, but it was someplace near North Beach, off of Market. Eventually, I saw a Cybercafe with plenty of street parking, so I ditched the car and went for some long-awaited nutrient.

The place was called Icon, and featured a bar, restaurant, and computers. The walls were covered with circuit boards, legos, broken toys, and other miscellaneous plastic, all painted various colors of gold and bronze. It looked like some sort of Mayan or Egyptian temple, but you could discern various Star Wars playsets within the designs. The place was empty, so I quickly got a spot and logged onto my mail. The waiter showed up; the place had some strange Buddhist connection and the waiters were all these shaved bald American guys in their 20s, with bright, baggy, flowery outfits, beads and sandals. I ordered a burger, but they had a pretty abnormal menu. It seemed like they got a chef from a Denny's, a chef

from an Indian restaurant, and a chef from an Irish restaurant and just had all three of them cook their entire array of food. Definitely a place you could eat at all week without boredom. I checked my mail, sent a quick line to a few people, and then wrote in my journal before the food got there. After eating a decent burger and getting about 4 rounds of refills on the Coke, I settled my bill and hit the road again. My next target was City Lights books. I looked up their address in the phone book and asked the Bhudda-waiter where the place was. He gave me vague directions, so I headed in that direction. I always wanted to check out City Lights with a ton of money, to buy all of the Beat Lit I couldn't find elsewhere. Also, I just wanted to see what it was like, see the place where Ginsberg read and Kerouac hung out and the whole deal. After venturing up Columbus, I quickly saw the pie-shaped store, and realized I must've passed it 3 or 4 times already in my random wanderings. Great.

Next came the parking. I couldn't find a place within 5 miles where I could park without paying \$5 an hour, so I circled through all of North Beach, partly looking for a spot, partly checking the sights. I hit some massive hills on one side street, stuff that made the 28% grade by my apartment in Seattle look puny. The Toyota felt more like a King's Island rollercoaster or something, jerking and tilting through the slopes.

After almost an hour of circling, I finally just parked in Chinatown, about 5 or 6 blocks away from the store. By then, it was almost 9, and the sun was quickly setting. The lights and decorations of Chinatown glowed around me, every shop ablaze with ornate and beautiful decorations. It felt like walking in a Bruce Lee film, although walking alone made me feel like it was the part in the film where 20 ninjas jump out and beat the fuck out of someone. But I continued, looking in the store windows at the interesting and bizarre trinkets. One of the stores showed a plaque with a photo that said George Bush had tea there in 1980-something. Maybe they could invite Al Gore in for tea to get it more current. I heard that he was in San Jose the day before, maybe they just didn't get the film developed yet.

I finally got to City Lights, and walked in to see copies of Howl and a sign saying the Beat Lit was upstairs. I crawled through the store and headed up the creaky steps, to find a book collection which probably contained as many or less volumes than my home library. I didn't check the poetry section, as I'm not a big poetry collector, but the Beat selection offered less volumes than were available at a standard Barnes and Noble. What a bummer. I went back downstairs and looked for Bukowski in the fiction section (he wasn't in the Beats - at least they got that right). They only had the City Lights volumes of his there, nothing from Black Sparrow or any rarities. They did have a large rack of zines, and I found the newest Cometbus there. No copy of Sure - A Charles Bukowski Newsletter was among the xeroxed small-press offerings. I rang out and asked the clerk about the Buk stuff and he had no idea what the fuck I was talking about. Sigh... The place was okay, but I think Seattle has just as many good book resources, or maybe more. I'll keep my book money in King county and save a few bucks on travel from now on.

The alley next to the store was called Jack Kerouac Ave., which was pretty hip. There was a bar next door with a bunch of Kerouac pictures and memorabilia on the front, so I thought maybe it would be a cool place to go in, get a Coke, read Cometbus and maybe meet some new age beats or writers or something. I went in, and the place was a total meat

market, people dressed in hundreds of dollars of clothes and perfectly manicured, drinking \$20 well drinks and doing the Ken and Barbie thing. With my wrinkled shirt, messed up hair, old jeans, and random looks, I didn't exactly mesh. After a quick Coke and a use of the facilities, I made like Sal Paradise and was once again on the road.

Actually, it took me a while to find the car. Like a dumbass, I didn't make a note of where I parked, and I had to reverse-engineer my way back. Once I saw the George Bush picture, I knew I was close. I had memorized that my car was in front of a Dim Sung restaurant, which didn't help much. Also, I didn't entirely remember what the car looked like. But within a few minutes, I was trying to find 101 and head south again.

Driving back at night was a lot of fun. I locked into a very hip radio station and blasted some great songs, listening to some cool alternative stuff. It wasn't 107.7, but it was close. On the way south, I swung into Palo Alto and followed the signs to the Stanford campus. I hit the place late, and it looked like they roll the streets up at 9 down there, but I did see a lot of palm trees and some of the campus. For the rest of the way back in, I had some call-in sex program going, and laughed my ass off, listening to their special guest, David Bowie's ex-wife. When I got back to the hotel, I walked into this giant argument between my roommate and his girlfriend. I won't get into it, but let's just say there are times I'm glad that I don't date anyone. I spent some time at Denny's listening to her side of the story, then tried to read while they fought for a while, then he tried to explain his entire side of the deal to me, after she left. It's difficult for me to say either one was right or wrong, and my only real concern was getting some sleep before check-out and my last day of the show.

A few hours later, I scoured the room for everything of mine while my roommate slept, and hurriedly turned in my key and checked my luggage at the front desk. I'd be flying out right after the show, so my bags would sit at the hotel until that evening. I returned the car, and as I drove it to the office, I heard about 3 minutes of the Howard Stern show with Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee. Fuck, I really wanted to hear Howard give Pam the treatment. I never get to hear Stern unless I'm out of town, but I think the guy's a pretty perverse and twisted individual, which gives him high marks in my book.

The show's last day went slower than ever, and half of our people either weren't there or left early. Within the final hour, only 4 or 5 of us were left, and the kind of people who come to the last hour of a trade show are usually asking the stupidest questions. But we fended them off, and at 4, I was back to the light rail for the trip home.

I got my luggage, and checked my flight itinerary. It was about 4:30, and most people were flying out at 6. My ticket was for 8:48. I didn't have a room anymore, and wanted to share a shuttle with the rest of the people, which would mean a long wait in the San Jose airport.

This wasn't really horrible to me. When I was in Boston, I had a two hour gap between the show and the plane, and there was almost no way to get from the convention center to the airport because of rush hour. I

almost took a water taxi, but I was pretty sick and was absolutely certain I would catch pneumonia. I finally got a shuttle bus to the airport, but the entire thing kept my heart racing at 200bpm with nervousness and trauma. A 3 hour wait would let me decompress from the show, change my clothes in the bathroom, and just enjoy the lack of worry. After the shuttle, I checked in my shit, slowly ate a meal at the airport Burger King, then went for the quietest part of the concourse and crashed. I cracked open my new copy of Cometbus and slowly read it from start to finish. The zine was one long story about Aaron's trip to Europe, how he flew over with a beat up 10 speed and almost no money, and wandered through countries, meeting bizarre people and traveling with no cash. The reading meshed well with my situation, as I sat in this airport with a backpack full of writing and a leather jacket.

After reading his zine, and a bit of On the Road, and scribbling in my journal, I went upstairs to the observation deck. The small, open-air platform overlooked the short runways and tarmac, where ground crews dragged around luggage carts and wheeled staircases against the aluminum beasts. It felt relaxing to see the California hills for one last time, to bask in the warm air and have a sense of closure instead of rushing from gate to plane in a mad frenzy.

The end of the Cometbus zine talked about this, about how Aaron felt excited and relieved at the end of his trip, how returning would be a new beginning. I felt the same way, I thought about unpacking, bringing my Internet Bowl trophy to work, doing some editing on the book, sleeping in my own bed, using my own shower. It all felt refreshing, in some dopey way. But it always feels good to be back.

The Book Pit

A quick summary of the books I tore through in April

Joseph Heller - Catch 22. This is the third time I've read this book, and I'm still wondering how the fuck Heller wrote such a twisted, humorous and incredibly flowing work and kept it so detailed and exact throughout. The story's this: Yossarian is a bombardier in World War II, but he is afraid of dying and

wants to go home. But the blind and stupid military buerocracy won't let him. When he is in the hospital for being crazy, he finds that the doctor has to ground and send home anyone who is crazy who asks to be grounded. But any sane man would want to be grounded, the insane are the ones who WANT to fly the missions, and won't ask to be sent home. And that's catch-22. The book is filled with hilarious situations and had me laughing to tears from cover to cover. The time structure is incredible and non-linear; he refers to things that haven't happened yet and moves all over the place. It's a bit complicated the first time through, but stick with it, even if you get lost. Once again, I wonder if Heller planned such a complex structure, or if he chopped and rearranged a linear novel. In either case, an incredible book worthy of a read (or three).

Tim O'Brien - If I Die in a Combat Zone. This is the first book by O'Brien about his experience in the Vietnam war, and probably the truest to the actual events happening to him during his tour of duty. The book starts with his draft orders and ends with his flight back home from Southeast Asia, covering the details of a year in the jungles, firefights, and bases of Vietnam. The prose isn't as developed or flowing as his later work, and the time structure is much simpler and more concise than it is in the incredibly nonlinear In the Lake of the Woods or The Things They Carried. It makes for a quick and easy read, but also subtracts from the content. I liked the stories and his depiction of the horrors of war brought across the strong antiwar message. Overall, the book is a decent read, and essential if you liked newer O'Brien books. But if you're a first-timer to his work, definitely pick up The Things They Carried first.

Hubert Selby, Jr. - Song of the Silent Snow.

I'd only heard of Selby through Henry Rollins (who did a spoken word tour with him about 10 years ago and also features all of Selby's stuff in the 2.13.61 mailorder catalog), but decided to give him a spin based on the association. Song is a collection of short stories about different people, places, events in the dismal and grimy reality of New York City. But to tie it together, every story has a guy named Harry, although each one is different than that last. Selby molds perfectly encapsulated environments, rich with not only detail but emotion about the beat and trodden atmosphere of the hustling metropolis life. You follow the plight of a bum who lives in the Bowery, who cherishes his third-hand coat like a wife or loved one, and almost gets killed protecting it. And the story of a man who falls in love with a woman he sees every day at the train stop, but can never approach. My favorite is a story about a boy going through puberty, experiencing the depression and confusion that life will be jobs and dating and work instead of teasing girls, playing ball and spending summers with friends. Selby packs a great rollercoaster within each story,

completely hooking you within a few paragraphs and keeping you there. This continues the great work Henry Miller did with the urban setting, and is highly recommended to anyone who likes that style of work.

Bowles/Chourki - Jean Genet in Tangier.

Mohamed Choukri, a writer from Tangiers, penned this short journal about his friendship with the French poet Jean Genet. It was later translated by Paul Bowles, and William S. Burroughs slapped a foreward on it, giving the 80 page digest a smattering of flavor from these four writers who each spent time in the Moroccan city. It's always hard to judge a translation and if the style is that of the original author or the interpreter, but it seems as if Bowles did a good job presenting this concise, flowing diary-style piece. We learn about the Genet that spent his youth in French prison, and his older years writing and living in retreat in Tangiers. Choukri and Genet exchange books and ideas about authors, while discussing the differences in culture around the world and the turmoil and corruption in some. It was good to get a second check on the Burroughs view of Tangiers, but it seems that both Genet and Choukri feel the same way about the culture, which was so repressed that corruption abounded and opened opportunities for those living on the edge. The book's pretty short, but makes me want to go out and learn more about Genet and Bowles. Definitely a required read if you're into either author.

Cometbus zine. I've heard about Cometbus for years, but never picked up a copy until last month. Call me a poseur, but I did buy it in the famous City Lights books if that counts for anything. I don't know if all issues of Cometbus are like this, but #36 is an incredible 80-some page essay about Aaron's trip to Europe. With meticulously handwritten prose, he tells the reader about how someone gave him a ticket, and how he left for Amsterdam with a junk bike, a backpack filled with supplies, and about \$140. The tales got more insane and hilarious from that point, and the writing conveys the loneliness of the situation. I read this thing while sitting in the San Jose airport, waiting alone three hours for my plane.

Gerald Locklin - Charles Bukowski: A Sure

Bet . This book just came out on Water Row Press, and after waiting a few weeks after my order, I finally got one of the signed and numbered copies. This is a collection of essays and poems by Locklin, a long-time friend of Bukowski since the sixties. Although it's a pretty thin volume, the pages flow with incredible and memorable information essential to any Buk aficionado. The story about the premiere of Barfly was pretty good, but I was most moved by Locklin's poem about Buk's death and the story about his funeral. The pages per dollar ratio is pretty bad with this book, but it's a decent addition to any

Bukowski collection.

Jack Kerouac - On the Road. Every time I re-read this book, I find some new detail I completely missed or forgot. If you haven't read the book yet, it's about Sal Paradise, a hipster in the late 1940's who meets up with the original rebel without a cause, Dean Moriarty. They take trips across the country, getting their kicks in NYC, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, LA and San Fran, and even Mexico city. It's more than just the bennies, tea, '32 Fords, port, women, and wild bop - it's a story of the emerging youth culture of the 50s, of two inseparable friends, and about the nobility of living with no food or money and hitching across the country. I re-read the book while in San Jose and San Fran, and I saw the streets, neighborhoods, beauty and loneliness of the West coast, which added a new depth to the novel. If you haven't read this book yet, DO IT - it is one of the most essential works of the 20th century and is the father and grandfather of every youth culture (i.e. hippy, punk, GenX) book in the world. And if you already have a worn and weathered copy on the shelves at home, bring it with you the next time you take a road-trip or vacation. It definitely adds a whole new edge when you're the one on the road.

William S. Burroughs - Interzone. After reading Genet's stories of Tangiers, I had to go to the master and hear a few more twisted tales of heroin, Moroccan boys and junk sickness. Interzone is a good collection of WSB's writings from the era when Naked Lunch was being mentally authored and prepared for its eventual release to the paper domain. In the first section, entitled "Stories", there are tales of a junkie on Christmas, Burroughs cutting off his pinky to impress a lover, and a long, never-published magazine article about the International Zone in Tangiers. The stories are complete, structured and an example of the basic, straightforward writing style of an earlier, contemporary voice of Burroughs. In the second book, "Lee's Journals", the voice starts to wander and grow in the world of the strange and bizarre. A slight SciFi tilt mixed with a mind of junk and perversion sculpts the sick but palatable pieces like Spare Ass Annie, a story about a colony of deformed freaks with bodies mutated like bugs and monsters. By "Word", the third episode, Burroughs is full-tilt into his true voice, launching through a random and nearly psychedelic journey that foreshadows the style which is found in Naked Lunch and later novels. The book is entertaining, and I loved reading the stories of abroad, about the relaxed but anxious times in Morocco. But it also serves as a good overview of the path Burroughs took to find his voice. Overall, Interzone is an intense and brisk read, something that many beat fans will enjoy.

And so on...

Sorry once again for the delay in this production. And sorry for the small fonts used! I'm trying to keep this below an ounce so my postage bill doesn't go through the roof.

How I do this stuff: I save my monthly mail, which I read using the vm package in emacs, and then edit it and all of the other parts, also in emacs. After everything's written and edited, it goes to FrameMaker 4 on a nasty Windows NT machine.

Send all praise, comments, information, pictures, mail, death threats, unabomber theories, trades, free stuff, food, UFO pieces, sisters' phone numbers, unused prescriptions, and Pez dispensers to:

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