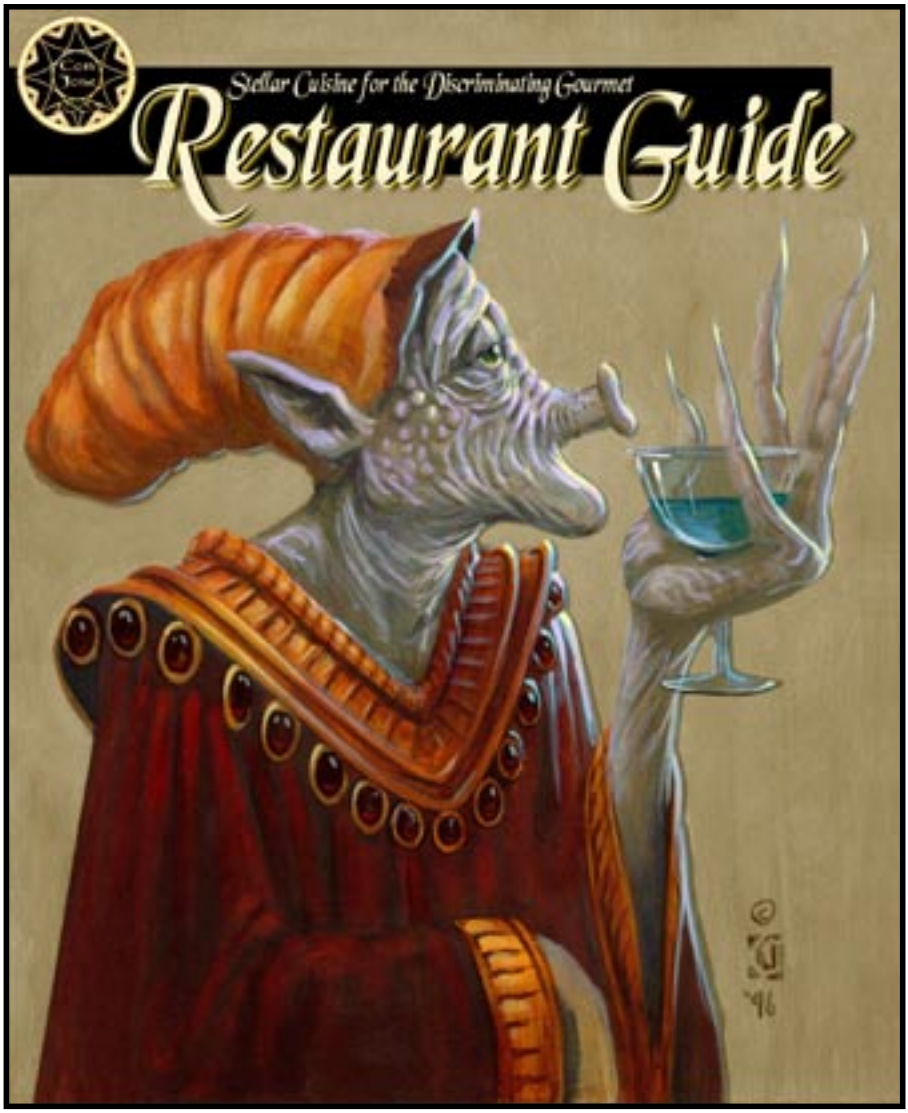

ConJosé Restaurant Guide

The 60th World Science Fiction Convention

McEnery Convention Center
San José, California

Codes Used in this Guide

Distance:

	Short walk
	Walking distance
	Car required
	Long car ride
	In another city

Amounts:

$	Cheap
$$	Reasonable
$$$	Expensive
$$$$	Very expensive

Codes:

B	Breakfast
BW	Beer & Wine Only
D	Dinner
DL	Delivers
FB	Full Bar
FP	Free Parking
GG	Good for Groups
IWL	Impressive Wine List
KF	Kid Friendly
L	Lunch
LL	Open Late (11:00 PM)
LLL	Open Very Late (12:30 AM)
LM	Live Music
NCC	No Credit Cards
NR	No Reservations
OS	Outdoor Seating
PP	Pay Parking
R	Romantic
RE	Reservations Essential
RL	Reservations Recommended for Large Parties
RR	Reservations Recommended
SF	Smoke Free
TO	Take Out
TOO	Take Out Only
VP	Valet Parking

ConJosé Restaurant Guide

The 60th World Science Fiction Convention

29 August through 2 September 2002

McEnery Convention Center
San José, California

Karen Cooper & Bruce Schneier

Restaurant Guide Reviews by Karen Cooper and Bruce Schneier

Cover Art: David Cherry
Copyediting & Proofreading: Beth Friedman
Layout & Design: Mary Cooper

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Welcome

Especially welcome to all you folks who are making your first trip to San Jose. There's so much to see and do in the Bay Area that you don't need us to make recommendations; many good books have been written to instruct you, the tourists. Our little piece of this action is helping you get some really good meals during the raison d'être: ConJosé.

Using the Guide

We did our best to make this guide both useful and entertaining. There are useful indices in the back to help you find a decent hamburger after 1 AM, or the closest place for veal *parmigiana*. And we've collected for your amusement a whole lot of food stories and remembrances from fans and writers. ConJosé's guests have given us art and stories for your enjoyment. Expect a fun read.

Hours

When we were new to reviewing restaurants, we always noted their hours. Opening and closing times were mission-critical data, we figured. Our readers will want to know. Quickly, we stopped bothering…for several reasons:

Hours change. Maybe we reviewed a restaurant in March. Come August, things are different. Maybe they're open later. Maybe they close earlier. Maybe they've started serving breakfast. There's no way we can offer real-time information, so anything we provide is necessarily inaccurate.

Restaurants lie. Just because the hours posted on the door say that the restaurant is open until 2:00 AM doesn't mean that the staff isn't going to go home early if there's no one around at midnight. This happens more often than it should, as anyone trying to find food late at night can attest.

It's a holiday weekend. The Worldcon is over Labor Day weekend. Who knows what special holiday hours the restaurants will be keeping? Who knows if the weekday-only restaurants have heard about the Worldcon and are going to try to get some weekend business? Certainly the restaurants themselves don't know two months in advance, which is when we would have to call them.

We have included some general hours—which meals they serve, and if they're open very late—but the single most important advice we can offer you is to call first. Just pick up the phone, call the restaurant, and ask if they're open. And while you're on the phone, make yourself a reservation. That way there'll be a table waiting for you when you get there, or maybe you won't have to wait as long.

Why Us?

You might be curious why we, two people living 2100 miles away from San Jose, are writing a restaurant guide for ConJosé. The reason is simple: we asked if we could, and Tom said "sure."

We volunteered because we enjoy writing about food and restaurants. We eat out a lot, and we like to think we have an appreciative yet critical eye for what's happening in the restaurant around us and on the plates before us.

What We Missed

We want to tell you a story. A few years ago, we wrote the restaurant guide for Minicon. It was a book like this, filled with listings for restaurants both near to and far from the hotel. While researching which restaurants to include, we walked the streets around the hotel with a map, noting every restaurant. We spent a lot of time at this, and we did a thorough job. Or so we thought.

Come the convention, and someone asks why the guide doesn't mention a particular breakfast place. We don't know where it is, we said. So that someone walked us down to the lobby, and out the front door. Where we learned that we missed a restaurant around the corner from the hotel. We missed a restaurant that has a large sign on a building across the street, directly in front of the hotel entrance, a large sign that reads "Restaurant" with an arrow. We completely missed it.

We guarantee that something similar will happen with this guide. We tried to be thorough, but there will be things we miss. We know, for example, that we didn't talk at all about Japan Town. We're sure that there are things in the Pavilion that we didn't get to. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that we don't live in San Jose; we live in Minneapolis.

If you find something that isn't in the guide, consider yourself lucky. With 6000+ (estimated) people at the convention, it might be nice knowing about something that isn't listed anywhere.

Tipping

Yes. You have to. Your server counts on tips to pay his rent, and he pays taxes on a percentage of what you spent, whether you tip or not. You don't have to like it, and we don't either.

Yes, it's a stupid system. We much prefer the European way of doing things, which is to pay the waitstaff a decent wage and to include the cost in the bill. But that's not how it's done here. Here, we leave a tip.

A standard tip is 15% of the check, excluding tax but including alcohol. This is easy to calculate: look at the amount, move the decimal place over one, and then add half again. So if the amount is $17.42, the tip would be $1.70 + .85 = $2.50, more or less. If the amount is $8.00, that's $0.80 + $0.40 = $1.25, more or less. You get the idea. (You can also calculate the tip off the tax. In San Jose, double the 8.5% sales tax and subtract a little. But the tax changes in different

cities and states.) Rounding is perfectly reasonable, but try to round up more often than down.

If you're feeling cheap, remember that the tip is calculated off the pre-tax total; the taxes are not part of the server's sales. Look at the new, pre-tax total… you've saved a bundle right there, haven't you?

If you're with a group of people, don't round down. You're just making your dinner companions either 1) pay more than their share, or 2) cheat the waitstaff out of money they have earned. It is unacceptable to go to dinner with a group and think something like: "I only have $8.00 for dinner, so I'll order a $7.50 sandwich and then stiff the waitress." Go to a fast food restaurant where no one tips, or eat alone.

The tendency for larger parties to undertip (everyone throws what they think they owe into the middle, and if it comes too low they just short the waitstaff) leads many restaurants to calculate a standard tip (sometimes 15%, sometimes as high as 20%) and add it to the check. Look for it so you don't inadvertently tip twice.

Stiffing the server is a big deal, and should only be done in response to actually awful service. We will not leave a tip when our server does not bring something we've asked for, or if he takes the order of people seated after us while we wait to order. We've stiffed servers who delivered the meal and disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again. These are rare occurrences. Neither of us can remember the last time we stiffed the server. And naturally, we'll take an apology and explanation at face value.

Like commissions to publishing agents, tip percentages have been creeping up over the last decade or so. At the best restaurants in San Francisco, people whisper that an 18%, or even a 20% tip, is more reasonable.

Whatever you do, don't think you won't be remembered. Whether you overtip or undertip, the next time you walk into the restaurant you're likely to be recognized. We're sure your imagination can suggest various outcomes from that point.

Plane Fare/Plain Fare/Plane Fair?

(can be sung to the tune of "I'm Looking for Something in Red," as sung by Lori Morgan)

I'm looking at something that's green,
It's slimy and sticky and faintly obscene,
Speckled with purple, and dotted with white,
Daring me even to take one small bite;
The Flight Steward says that it's Nouvelle Cuisine…
I'm looking at something that's green.

I'm looking at something that's red,
I'm not even sure that it's totally dead;
Something concocted 'way down in the South,
One bite, and flames shoot right out of your mouth,
And out of your ears and the top of your head,
I'm looking at something that's red.

I'm looking at something that's pink,
It looks like it's scraped off the back of the sink;
Quivering gently as if it's been hurt,
I ask "What is that?" and they say, "It's dessert."
I'm not going to eat it, I'll raise a big stink,
I'm looking at something that's pink.

Why can't I get something to eat?
A small recognizable piece of cooked meat?
A couple of veggies, a small hint of spice?
A roll and some butter would also be nice,
And a big chocolate cake with a dollop of cream?
And don't serve me anything green!

— *Roberta N Rogow*

(Lyric by Roberta Rogow. Originally published in *Rec-Room Rhymes* #10, 1993)

Restaurant Reviews

Agenda

Agenda has, well, an agenda: to propel a bit of nightlife into notoriously dull San Jose evenings. It seems to be working out just fine. There's a DJ-driven danceteria in the basement, there's a swank pool hall upstairs, and there's a pretty-good-and-not-too-expensive restaurant in between. Unfortunately, house music and three-corner shots have as much to do with the fannish lifestyle as designer clothes and fast cars.

The menu is that inescapable California/French hybrid cuisine, and they do a nice job of it. Salmon roulade with mandarin-orange-mint *beurre blanc* will run you $18; pan-seared peppered *ahi* tuna with brown rice and miso teriyaki will set you back $23. Appetizers and salads are in the $6 to $12 range. The wine list is small, and moderately priced at $20 to $40.

Agenda's dining room is noisy, and the whole scene is mundane, but perhaps you'd like to try their Kobe beef burger. At $12, it's likely to be the cheapest portion of Kobe beef you'll ever run across. Or go just to see the enormous soft-sculptured angel in the dining room.

Agenda
399 S First St, San Jose
408-287-3991

Californian
D, RR, FB, KF, LM, OS, $$
http://www.agendalounge.com

I was in Philadelphia to deliver a speech, and of course Carol was with me. As always when we're in town, we stopped to visit Gardner Dozois and Susan Casper. Finally Gardner suggested we all go out to his favorite Philadelphia restaurant. We did. They seated us. We ordered. And—so help me—the restaurant burned down before the appetizers arrived. (I resisted the urge to walk to the nearest Greyhound station and scribble "For a hot time, call Gardner" on the wall.)

— *Mike Resnick*

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A.P. Stump's

Downtown San Jose has a handful of "impress your guests" restaurants. Our favorite is A.P. Stump's. It impresses the minute you enter the dining room. Think Edwardian, think pre-War supper club. The main room is filled with dark, high-gloss wood. Rich tapestries cover the chairs and banquettes. Long, curved, etched-glass panels separate the sections. Tortoiseshell blown-glass chandeliers and a tin ceiling complement the look. This has to be one of the best-looking dining rooms in the state. If you want to make an entrance, this is the place to do it in.

When chef Jim Stump opened this restaurant with his partner Andrew Pavicich Jr. (that's the "A.P." in the name), he wanted to serve his food his way. Reviews call what he does "New American" cuisine. There are elements of California cuisine, elements of French cooking, and the occasional Hispanic or Asian accent. Some of the dishes cross so many borders there's no way to classify them. Think of New American as the classic melting pot of American culture, and you have it about right.

Here's one example: Maine lobster and corn pudding soufflé. The lobster comes cradled in its own shell. The corn pudding is topped with a spoonful of osetra caviar. Around all of this is a *beurre blanc* swirled with a lobster reduction, and bits of basil are sprinkled about. It's almost too pretty to eat, but once you do you find that the corn and lobster complement each other perfectly.

We've been here many times: alone, with guests, on business dinners. Bruce's company once hosted a banquet here. We're generally pleased with what we order, although there are the occasional disappointments.

A good light starter is the baby beet salad, served with baby carrots, toasted walnuts, and *caciotta dei boschi*, which is a sheep's milk and black truffle cheese. Kumomoto oysters, when they have them, are always worth getting. A more involved appetizer is the cold smoked salmon and hot smoked sturgeon and marble potatoes, with whole-grain mustard oil/vinegar dressing called citronette. The salmon is shaped like a rose and surrounded by the potatoes. This sits on a thin slice of sturgeon, sprinkled with caviar and the citronette.

There are many good entrées to choose from, too. We like the duck. It comes with both grilled duck breast and duck-leg confit, and is served with hedgehog mushrooms, a whipped potato galette, and huckleberry sauce. The roasted halibut is served atop couscous and peas, with a rock-shrimp reduction. These preparations change regularly. Once we ordered the grilled rib-eye of Colorado Rosen lamb, and it came with steamed spinach, whipped potatoes, eggplant-stuffed cannelloni, and a thyme-scented zinfandel reduction. When we last looked at the menu, the same lamb was listed with vegetable *tagine*, eggplant caviar, bulgar pilaf, and rosemary jus.

Much of what you get is good, if uninspired. Take the filet mignon. It was a piece of meat served with the kind of things you'd expect: mashed potatoes, greens, a rich A1-esque sauce. Nothing wrong with it, but where's the inspiration? A.P. Stump's is too often like this.

Sesame-crusted *ahi* tuna is starting to become a cliché in fine restaurants, but Stump's version is worth ordering. It's served with bok choy, lemon-infused

basmati rice, black trumpet mushrooms, and a carrot-ginger emulsion. Just enough Asian flavors to make it interesting, without becoming too much.

A.P. Stump's has an excellent, though expensive, wine list. Not only does it have a wide variety of interesting wines, but it's organized by grape varietal, not by country or state. And there is a good selection of splits, which means we can order two half bottles instead of one full-sized bottle. Good wines are available by the glass, too.

Desserts are worth saving room for, difficult as that may seem. The Dutch chocolate cake is a sinful Valrhona dark chocolate and hazelnut creation served with crème Anglaise. The pear beignets are delicious, as are the apple tarts (served with vanilla ice cream, crème Anglaise, and caramel). If you're full, have lemon granita or any of the sorbets.

The building sits on what was formerly the Paul Masson-Charles Le Franc Champagne Cellar, and the restaurant's wine cellar once stored Paul Masson's private stock. Those downstairs rooms are available for private parties. And if you're nice and ask politely, you can get yourself a tour of the cellar.

A.P. Stump's
163 W Santa Clara St, San Jose
408-292-9928

American
L, D, RR, VP, FB, IWL, R, $$$
http://www.apstumps.com/

I smoked for thirty-five years, first cigarettes, then a pipe. Jerry Pournelle got me onto the pipe: "It's healthier." Then he quit. "My sense of taste is coming back," he'd tell me. "I can actually taste the grape in wine."

I quit on August 6, 1987, at 6:30 PM.

He wasn't kidding. My sense of taste started coming back. How do I know? All my characters started turning into chefs!

In low gravity (*The Integral Trees*) I gave my characters a big cookpot kept almost empty, so dinner won't just boil out, and twigs picked from the vegetation of the tuft for chopsticks. In free fall (*The Smoke Ring*), meat is set rotating alongside a fire. In *Crashlander*, Beowulf Shaeffer, trying to shake up a man holding him prisoner, orders a "crew snapper", the ugliest thing he's ever seen offered as food. In *Destiny's Road*, Jemmy Bloocher spends the whole book as a gradually more knowledgeable traveling chef.

I don't think the process has stopped. I do my share of the cooking at my house. Marilyn has a wonderful collection of cookbooks, and it would be fun to browse them. You don't have a fully fleshed character until you know what he eats.

— *Larry Niven*

Armadillo Willy's

Real barbecue is cooked over a hardwood fire. Gas or electricity is cheating. Or, as the saying goes, "baking it is faking it."

Armadillo Willy's doesn't fake it. The woodpile out back is proof. And the smell: you can smell the barbeque from blocks away when the wind is right. You just can't buy that kind of advertising. And the cops seem to eat there constantly. In our book, that's a pretty sizable recommendation.

Their beef brisket and pork shoulder—both chopped, and served in sandwiches and platters—are cooked the old-fashioned way, just like the famed armadillos of Texas have done since the state was a country unto itself…or something like that. We don't really like the buns that well, as they're a little too soft to stand up to the serious barbeque within. But the barbeque is just wonderful.

They also serve ribs—regular pork ribs and baby-back pork ribs; both are tasty. They use good meat, and the sauce is delicious. You can order the meat hot or mild; we suggest ordering mild and getting a dish of hot sauce on the side. You can also buy the sauce in local grocery stores, and they often have the empty five-gallon buckets to give away, should you need a five-gallon bucket that still smells slightly of barbecue sauce.

The sides are the disappointment of the place. "Willy's beans," standard on all platters and optional with sandwiches, are mediocre. The potato salad is your best bet. Their cornbread is tasteless. Their coleslaw is downright strange; it's made with peanuts. At least the french fries are good.

Armadillo Willy's is informal. You order at the counter and are handed an electronic coaster with your drinks. When it starts blinking and vibrating, your order is up. Oddly high tech, in a backwards kind of way. (And no, it doesn't vibrate enough to spill your Coke.)

Oh, they also serve things like chicken sandwiches and hamburgers. There's even a salad or two on the menu. We have no idea how they taste; we've never even seen someone in the restaurant eating one so we could ask. You can't walk to Armadillo Willy's from the con hotels; you'll need to splurge for a cab. We recommend doing so.

Armadillo Willy's
995 Saratoga Ave, San Jose
408-255-7427

Barbeque
L, D, NR, TO, BW, $
http://www.armadillowillys.com

When it comes to writing about food, I find that the *Larousse Gastronomique* is a great help. It can provide an accurate and realistic menu for a banquet in a fantasy tale, and offer some exotic culinary items that can be adapted to fit into a science fiction background. It's also great for browsing. You never know what you might come upon. Just don't read it when you're hungry.

— *John Morressy*

Artisanal

Open the door, and the first thing that hits you is the smell. Artisanal smells like cheese. "Perfect," you think, and walk in. Artisanal's reason for existing is cheese. It's a university of cheese. It's a temple of cheese. If it didn't smell like cheese, you'd be wondering what was wrong.

Picholine is one of New York's finest restaurants. There, chef Terrance Brennan and resident cheesemonger Max McCalman embarked on a mission to educate diners on the world of cheese. They put together the best cheese course in New York, at a time when New Yorkers weren't all that interested in cheese. Luckily, Max is a genius. He knows more about cheese than anyone else in the United States. He can not only wax eloquent on different styles of cheese and different types of cheese, he can also wax eloquent on the particular *affineurs* that make the best cheese, the particular months in the year that a particular cheese is at its best, and even differences between the same cheeses from the same *affineur* during different years. We dined at Picholine once, and watched in awe as Max orchestrated our cheese course. He's hypnotic, mesmeric, unearthly, supernatural, and looks like he couldn't possibly manage his own life. But put him in front of a cheese course, and he is a master. It was the best cheese course we've had in North America.

So you can imagine our delight when we learned that Brennan and McCalman (dubbed the "*maître de fromage*") were going to open a bistro modeled after the cheese restaurants in France. And you can imagine how we felt when the smell of cheese hit us at the front door.

Artisanal looks like a classic French bistro. It's high-ceilinged and well-lighted. The walls are white, with framed cheese posters. The small bistro tables are covered in white linens, and the accents are of dark wood. There's a large bar on one wall, and a cheese cave in the back.

The menu has both classic and contemporary bistro fare. Think soups, salads, and sandwiches on the lighter side. Think of chicken, beef, and fish dishes for the entrees. They serve onion, bacon, and Beaufort cheese tart. They serve *coq au vin*. They serve filet mignon with *frites*. They have a food-friendly wine list, with a large selection of reasonably priced wines, and everything available by the glass.

And the various reviewers that have paraded through Artisanal before us have reviewed these fine foods. Some reviews declare the food as good, some as less good. Honestly, though, we didn't see the point. We were here for the cheese.

It is possible to put together a five-course feast entirely of cheese dishes: French onion soup, followed by a goat cheese salad, then a cheese fondue course and one of their grilled cheese sandwiches, finishing up with a cheese plate for dessert.

We didn't order the fondue, but our intelligence tells us that the Artisanal blend is the best. It's a mixture of Beaufort, Emmenthaler, and Chimay cheeses, some white wine, and various seasonings. They offer a 100-cheese fondue, which we hear is just too much cheese to be anything interesting.

The onion soup was excellent. Onion soup is easy to make, but hard to make well. This one was made well. It was intensely flavored, all of it. They use three kinds of onions and three kinds of cheese, and a very dense stock. It was almost like eating a liquefied sandwich.

Then we skipped the appetizers and entrees altogether and headed straight for the cheese. Cheese at Artisanal gets its own menu. It's a daunting menu, even for people who know their cheese. It's about 200 cheeses long, arranged in categories depending on whether they're made with cow's, sheep's, or goat's milk. Each cheese is individually named, and given a country (or state) of origin and a little description. To give some examples, under "goat" we found this entry, among others: "Monte Enebro, Spain, assertive, dense, and creamy." Under sheep: "Stanser Schafchäs, Switzerland, aromatic, semi-soft, challenging."

The whole menu is challenging.

But at least they're written down. We're used to having cheese courses in France, and occasionally in the U.S. The protocol is simple: the cheese sommelier, or fromager, or whatever you call him, wheels a cheese cart to your table. Then he tells you the names of the couple of dozen cheeses on the cart, in English if you're lucky, and awaits your choice. Our usual tactic is to order a small piece of everything. By the time he's sliced the cheeses and arranged them on the plate, you've forgotten—assuming you ever remembered—what their names are. We've had wonderful cheese courses in France, but remember very little about what cheeses they were.

Artisanal has a better solution. Our advice is to put yourself in the restaurant's hands. Tell the waiter to call the cheese sommelier over. Tell the cheese sommelier what you like in cheese, what you're interested in trying, and anything on the menu that caught your eye. (Personally, we make a beeline towards any cheese that is described as "challenging.") Let him, or her in our case, make the selection. Let him provide you with a written menu of the different cheeses and their names. Let him teach you something.

You can order Artisanal's cheeses individually, or in plates of varying numbers. We ordered a plate of eight, instructing our sommelier that we liked stinky, smelly, ripe, challenging, interesting cheeses.

They arrived on a single plate, arranged in a circle from mild to strong. (This is how you're supposed to eat cheese, otherwise the strong flavors stomp all over the mild cheeses.) In order:

"Taleggio, Italy, soft, smelly, and rich." We know and like Tagellio, and often buy it at our local cheese counter for parties. This one was different. It was much richer than we were used to. It still tasted like the floor of a barn—we mean this in the nicest possible way—but it was much more intense. The taste grew on us as we ate it, but we were impatient for the rest…

"Livarot, France, soft, smelly, and complex." Complex is right. This one had a long aftertaste. And it was very creamy; you could almost taste the butter. Every bite was a delight, and we quickly finished this piece.

"Robiola Wuerfcino, Italy, very soft, smelly, and rich." Subtle. Tasty. But we had five more in front of us.

"Munster, France, soft, stinky, and rich." This was the clunker of the bunch. It tasted like Munster; nothing special. A bit salty, even.

"Introbiola, Italy, soft, stinky, and earthy." This one, on the other hand, was good. It was mildly flavored, but intense. It reminded us of Pont l'Évêque, only a little more stinky. We gobbled this one up, too.

"Stanser Schafchäs, Switzerland, aromatic semi-soft, challenging." This one was a bit of a relief. It was the challenging cheese, and there were two dangerous-looking ones beyond. Really, it wasn't that challenging. It was tasty, but we've had better. And there were still two to go.

These last two demanded attention, right from the start. They were hard to miss on the plate; they were dark. Most cheese is white, maybe a little yellow, sometimes more yellow with a bit of blue mold. These two cheese were brown, tan, covered in mold. They looked like something you would throw away without a second thought if you found it in your refrigerator, or in your cheese cave. They looked like rare mutant cheeses. They looked deadly. We soldiered on.

"Blue Vinnay, England, assertive, spicy, rare." Oh my god! How do you eat this cheese! It was an intensely flavored blue, the strongest we've ever eaten. There was so much mold it crunched slightly. The aftertaste lasted for weeks. We were sweating after taking just a small bite. But it was good, really good. Wow.

"Cabrales, Spain, firm, assertive, bordering on mean." This was a nice finishing cheese. We didn't find it mean, and certainly not as intense as the previous one. It was earthy. It was flavorful. It was rich. Still, there was something we weren't getting in the cheese. "What is that taste? The meanness, I mean," said Karen. We didn't know. We didn't finish this cheese either; maybe it was a bit too mean after all.

And we were full. Our waiter wrapped up the remaining bits of four of the cheeses and we were on our way.

None of this comes cheap. Entrées hover around $20. A plate of six cheeses costs $21. Throw in a bottle of water and a glass of wine and you're easily at $75 a person. Even just soup, cheese, and a glass of wine easily pegs $40. But it's worth it for the cheese.

We've read a lot about the horrible service at Artisanal. The stories sounded terrible, but we had excellent service. We weren't looked at askance when we didn't order a traditional meal. We weren't treated rudely when we wanted to talk to the cheese sommelier. She had a nice conversation with us about cheese, and we even talked to her after the meal at her cheese counter (all the cheeses at Artisanal are available for retail sale). Either we had a rare good experience, or the restaurant is exhibiting learning behavior.

And we learned something, too. We have the names of the eight cheeses we tried, and our impressions of them. We have a copy of the entire cheese menu (it comes with the cheese course) that we can use to check off cheeses we've tried, much as birders check off birds they've seen on their life list. And we've learned where to get the best cheese course anywhere, France included.

Artisanal ✈
2 Park Avenue, New York
212-725-8585

Cheese
L, D, RE, FB, TO, $$$

Bella Mia

The menu here is impressively large. If your dinner companions eat Italian, they'll find something they like at Bella Mia. They offer all the basic meats: chicken, beef, pork chops, even duck. Plus you can choose from many pasta options, lots of salads, flat pizzas, and the mysterious menu category "From The Pans." The dessert menu lists "Bill's Almond Croissant Pudding," which Karen thinks would be really good, and Bruce would run screaming from.

This split typifies why we don't wholeheartedly endorse Bella Mia. The building is an old historic one, and features pictures from old San Jose: just the sort of thing Karen swoons for. And Bruce is seriously thrilled with a menu that calls its calamari appetizer "tubes and tentacles." But the service can be, um, iffy, and while the food is generally good, it's never great. You don't save more than a buck or so by visiting at lunch instead of dinner. And it's expensive: sandwiches run about $10, pasta dinners are $15 and up. "From the grill" dinners are even pricier. Desserts are all around $8. For those prices, we expect a little more serenity and a little less "WE ARE NOT FINE DINING…HAVE FUN!" attitude. We suggest they ditch the white linen service and bring the prices down a notch. But the regular customers, and there are many, love this place; it's a local institution. Perhaps the Bella tolls for thee, and we just didn't hear it.

Bella Mia
58 S First St, San Jose
408-280-1993

Italian
L, D, RR, FB, KF, LM, OS, R, $$
http://www.bellamia.com

Chez Colette is not overly busy on Sunday evenings. That Easter evening it was close to empty. Having paid some dues in the restaurant biz, I recognized the $ signs lighting up in staff's eyes as the 12 of us were seated. Problem was that they were not quite prepared for this group of convention burnouts. The mood quickly deteriorated from slight awe at our surroundings to, "this place was put here for us to goof on."

Our waiter (trainee) made it through the appetizer course before calling for help. You see, we knew we wouldn't get out of control, but they didn't. He was faced with Ed Sunden ordering two dinners. Ed claimed no knowledge of French food and wanted two meals in case he didn't like the first one.

As the salad was served, our new waitress (supervisor) arrived with a 30-inch pepper mill and startled Ed, who leapt to his feet brandishing a baguette with a cry of "En garde." I knew we were gonna be okay when the waitress parried the bread with the pepper mill.

— *Jack Targonski*

Ben & Jerry's Scoop Shop

Ice cream and social responsibility. It's so Twentieth Century.

Ben & Jerry's Scoop Shop
115 East San Carlos, San Jose
408-275-8827

Ice Cream
L, D, NR, TO, GG, KF, $
http://www.benjerry.com/

Big Lil's Barbary Coast Dinner Theater

Big Lil's is the local spot where stand-up comedians work on their material before moving on to bigger markets and maybe bigger opportunities. This isn't open-mike comedy; the performers are vetted by management. And they can be quite funny. But the amusement is a little more certain on Friday and Saturday nights, when the house players put on an original vaudeville revue. Best not go as unsuspecting audience: there's lots of audience participation. It's all melodrama at its most ut, and if you like that sort of thing, why, here's plenty.

You wouldn't go to Big Lil's for the food. It's catered in from Tony Roma's, which means it was pretty average to start with, then was trucked across town. We recommend the Show-Only seating, which is $23. Dinner and dessert and show is double that.

Big Lil's Barbary Coast Dinner Theater
157 West San Fernando St., San Jose
408-295-7469

American
D, LL, $$$
http://www.biglils.com/

Back in '96 at LA Con III, Mike Moscoe and I were scouting the hot conversation spots in the bar on Wednesday night. Our barmaid saw our name badges and stopped to chat a moment. I guess we looked "safe." In an almost conspiratorial whisper said she had heard that some of the costumed fans actually believed they were aliens and vampires and such. We reassured her that staying in character was just part of the role-playing game people play at cons. Then Mike added, "If a Klingon orders a drink in Klingon, serve him prune juice."

We later heard through the grapevine that the bar had served only one glass of prune juice the entire con.

Klingons just do not seem to have the fortitude of years past.

— *Irene Radford*

Blake's Steakhouse & Bar

If you want some dead cow, this is the place to go in San Jose.

They have them all, from a 7-ounce filet mignon to a 22-ounce porterhouse. Tender, lean, and juicy. Everything comes with fresh vegetables (this is California, after all) and garlic mashed potatoes. (Figure these dinners will run somewhere between $20 and $30 each.) They also have the standard steakhouse foods: an iceberg lettuce wedge with blue cheese, bacon, and tomato; oysters Rockefeller; shrimp cocktail; creamed spinach; surf and turf. The meat is good, and the kitchen listens when you tell them how you want it cooked.

The menu isn't all steakhouse cliché. They serve stir fry, pork chops, rack of lamb, and a really nice side of steamed fresh asparagus. For lunch, you can get a steak or one of several sandwiches and salads.

The wine list is built for a steak restaurant, with prices to match. Otherwise, this is a fine restaurant. It's light and airy, there's a large bar in the center area, and it has a friendly feel. Quite a counterpoint to the serious meat at your table.

Blake's Steakhouse and Bar
17 N San Pedro Sq, San Jose
408-298-9221

Steak
L, D, RR, TO, FB, KF, LM, OS, $$$
http://www.blakessteakhouse.com

Bo Town Chinese Restaurant

They've got a friendly staff, and a large menu in three languages: Chinese, Vietnamese, and English. The weekday lunch specials are a limited menu, including Chinese standards like bean curd with vegetable and chicken with broccoli; these cost just $4.50. Look under the "Vietnamese Food" section of the menu for the curried frog. We know you don't want to miss that.

Bo Town Chinese Restaurant
409 S Second St, San Jose
408-295-2125

Chinese
L, D, NR, TO, $

Britannia Arms

So, it's the end of June and Bruce is driving around downtown San Jose. Out of the corner of his eye, he notices this restaurant that he's never seen before, one that's he's never even heard about. Open, serving food even, in the middle of the day. Amazing.

It turns out the Britannia Arms appeared just a month earlier. We haven't eaten there, but we were able to snag a menu. Looks like traditional British pub food: fish and chips, various meat pies, bangers and mash, Ploughman's lunch, cider…that sort of thing. There are also various soups, salads, burgers, and sandwiches that are not normally considered British.

When Bruce poked his head in, World Cup Soccer was on the big screen. That doesn't bode well for a quiet meal. And it didn't look much like a British pub: too light and airy. We did check on the Web, and there's a Britannia Arms in Almaden that makes "Best Singles Bar" sorts of list. Locals tell us that the various Britannia Arms all have a unique character, though.

But who knows? If you go there, let us know how it is.

Britannia Arms British Pub and Restaurant **British Pub**
173 W Santa Clara St, San Jose L, D, NR, FB, LL, $$
408-278-1400 http://www.britanniaarms.com

Café Matisse

Get a look at San Jose's coffeehouse culture while sipping that triple espresso you hope can pull you through another night at the con. Get it when you need it: they're open 'til 2 AM. Also on offer is the usual soup and salad coffeehouse fare, but beware the rumor that they don't take plastic.

Café Matisse **Sandwiches**
371 S First St, San Jose B, L, D, LL, LLL, $$
408-298-7788

Cafe Primavera

We're going to let you in on a secret. The best close place to have lunch near the convention center is across the street from the Hilton, in the Ernst & Young building. It's a little sandwich place called Cafe Primavera. Unfortunately, it's not open for dinner, and only open on workdays. Not as useful as we would like, but useful nonetheless.

Primavera is almost as fast as fast food, and a whole lot better. Think sandwiches—cold and hot—salads, soups, and pastas. Bruce generally gets the mushroom and Gruyère quiche, which comes with a nice spinach salad. The turkey Cobb focaccia sandwich is also good, served with gorgonzola, bacon, tomato, and (this is California, after all) avocado. Lunches run from $6 to $8, which makes it a bit more expensive than fast food.

But it's closer, and therefore faster.

Unfortunately, Primavera closes at 4:00 PM on Friday, and won't reopen until the convention is over. But it is open for breakfast on Friday morning: muffins, scones, bagels, and stuff…not eggs.

Cafe Primavera **Italian**
303 Almaden Blvd, San Jose L, D, $$
408-795-1200

California Sushi

Generic Japanese sushi bar and restaurant. The menu is standard, with a fair selection of sushi and some of the more American-friendly Japanese main dishes. The fish varies in quality, so ask the chef what's best before you order. The only thing we'd recommend staying away from is the *gyoza*. This place buys them frozen, and you can tell.

There are two seating areas. Downstairs is a small, stark seating area, with a sushi bar and a couple of cafe tables. Kind of looks like a Japanese industrial lunch-room. Upstairs is a carpeted, darker, more isolated seating area with larger tables. Kind of looks like a semi-abandoned Japanese restaurant when you first walk in. Persevere, and you'll get yourself a reasonable Japanese meal at a reasonable price. Without a doubt, it's the best sushi within walking distance of the convention.

California Sushi **Japanese**
1 E San Fernando St, San Jose L, D, $$
415-908-3463

Casa Castillo

Mexican-American food is one of our favorite quick meals. Sad but true, Taco Bell is the flat-line example, and the chart goes straight up from there. More than halfway up that ascent is Casa Castillo. The food is just reliably good, with (best of cuisine) tamales, burritos, enchiladas…you all know the stuff. The service is pleasant, the atmosphere is friendly, they have a full bar. And you won't have to wait forever to get your meal. Quick! Back to the hotel; you might miss something!

Note: While looking at reviews of this restaurant on the Web, we chanced upon this comment: "Thanks Tio Ron! Your San Jose Redevelopment Agency has run yet another fine establishment out of town. Only this time Casa Castillo sued the city and walked away with 1 million dollars. I'm tired of paying for your mistakes, and you don't have my vote." We're sure there's a really good story here.

Casa Castillo
200 S First St, San Jose
408-971-8130

Mexican
B, L, D weekdays, RR, FB, OS, SF, TO, $$

Chacho's Mexican Restaurant

Try Chacho's if if you wonder what they mean when they (whoever they are) talk about the local innovation called Cal-Mex. This is Mexican food for California diners. It's good, too. Try the *sopes* or the *chiles rellenos*. The murals are utterly wonderful, the plants are healthy, and the service is fast.

Chacho's Mexican Restaurant
18 S Almaden Ave, San Jose
408-293-1387

Mexican
L, D, NR, TO, PP, BW, KF, SF, $

We were discussing how there were so many weird cocktails that no bartender could know how to make them all. So we sent a representative to order a spayed gerbil. After some discussion, the bartender asked how to make it. I forget whether it was Joe Haldeman or Andy Offutt who made up the recipe, but it was a fairly horrible mixture. Despite this, for the rest of the con, Mike Glicksohn or one of the others would go and order another one, just to impress it into the memory of the bartender. I hear that next year, the tradition was continued. So somewhere in the Midwest there is a bartender who knows how to make a drink that shouldn't exist.

— *Eric Lindsay*

China Chen

"We usually bring you new choices and best taste everyday." A low-rent greasy spoon of a place that serves mostly soups. They're handy in that they're open for breakfast, if the idea of rice stick soup for breakfast appeals to you. They call themselves "China Chen" and there are a few Chinese dishes on the menu (those wide soft noodles called chow fun, standards like fried rice and—heavens—chow mein), but the emphasis here is on soup, soup, soup, three meals a day. The owners are from Cambodia, so dig into any of the Cambodian soups; that cuisine tends toward light flavors and complex combinations with an accent on both sour and salt, and lots of fresh veggies. They serve egg noodle soups, rice noodle soups, stews and more.... Nearly everything on the menu is under $5, though getting the large size costs another dollar. And when she walked in the door, Karen Schaffer said, "It smells good in here."

China Chen
400 S Third St, San Jose
408-294-2525

Chinese, Noodles
B, L, D, NR, TO, KF, SF, $

I smoked for thirty-five years, first cigarettes, then a pipe. Jerry Pournelle got me onto the pipe: "It's healthier." Then he quit. "My sense of taste is coming back," he'd tell me. "I can actually taste the grape in wine."

I quit on August 6, 1987, at 6:30 PM.

He wasn't kidding. My sense of taste started coming back. How do I know? All my characters started turning into chefs!

In low gravity (*The Integral Trees*) I gave my characters a big cookpot kept almost empty, so dinner won't just boil out, and twigs picked from the vegetation of the tuft for chopsticks. In free fall (*The Smoke Ring*) meat is set rotating alongside a fire. In *Crashlander*, Beowulf Shaeffer, trying to shake up a man holding him prisoner, orders a "crew snapper", the ugliest thing he's ever seen offered as food. In *Destiny's Road*, Jemmy Bloocher spends the whole book as a gradually more knowledgeable traveling chef.

I don't think the process has stopped. I do my share of the cooking at my house. Marilyn has a wonderful collection of cookbooks, and it would be fun to browse them. You don't have a fully fleshed character until you know what he eats.

— *Larry Niven*

China Wok

What can we say about this generic Chinese restaurant? Hmmm…. The sizzling platters are good. The clay pot dishes are interesting. There are a lot of vegetarian items on the menu. There are better options close by.

China Wok
9 N Market St, San Jose
408-280-6688

Chinese
L, D, TO, $

Chinese Gourmet Express

You've seen this sort of Chinese food in mall food courts and airports all over North America. It's a steam table counter, where you pick two or three entrées and get a choice of steamed or fried rice. Orange chicken is the most popular dish, being a renamed and more citrusy General Tzo's chicken, because people who eat in mall food court Chinese restaurants can't pronounce "Tzo." A combination plate will run you five or six dollars. The food is unspectacular, but inoffensive, and it's certainly cheap enough.

Chinese Gourmet Express
150 S First St #111, San Jose
408-998-4878

Chinese
L, D, TO, $

Eric, the Spayed Gerbil incident was at a Chambanacon in the mid-seventies. During his toastmaster speech, Andy Offutt remarked that the way to find out whether a bartender is honest is to ask him for a fictional drink, like a Spayed Gerbil. A bad bartender will just make up any old thing, and if you complain, say "Well, that's the way we make them here."

That afternoon, about fifteen of us showed up at the downstairs bar. The waitress asked Mike Glicksohn what he wanted, and he requested a Spayed Gerbil. She went to check with the bartender and came back saying he'd never heard of it—how was it made? Mike pointed down the table to me and said, "He knows."

I made up a drink on the spot, of course, based on a Negroni. Two shots of Beefeater gin, a shot of Campari, a squirt of bitters, and the juice of half a lime, if I remember correctly. Shaken and served in a tall glass on the rocks. All fifteen people ordered one, and must have liked it, because it became the official drink of the convention. We drank them out of Campari; the bartender had to go to the liquor store across the street and buy a couple of bottles retail.

— *Joe Haldeman*

Authorial meals with editors have various subtle social functions that took me a while to figure out. They are not, as I had somehow expected in dithering anticipation of my first official editorial meal—a breakfast at the '86 Atlanta Worldcon with my then-new publisher Jim Baen and editor Toni Weisskopf—to work out the details of book contracts. Those are done by telephone, with lots of long, thoughtful pauses between calls. What these meals are for is to make the next phone call easier. When you've never met face to face, the lack of visual cues and the presence of unrestrained writerly imagination can create confusion and misunderstanding when talking over the phone. When you can picture the real person, with their actual tics and tones and grimaces and grins, those phone calls somehow go more smoothly ever after. Still, it's a bit startling in the convention green room to witness the fannish cry of "We're hungry—let's go find a restaurant," transmute into the writerly version of, "We're hungry—let's go find an editor!"

The other charm of editorial dining, of course, is the chance to venture into upscale restaurants the like of which neither writer nor editor, in our scruffy at-home personas and income levels, would ever get within whiffing distance. An editorial dinner was the first time I ever had a waiter come around between courses and rake the tablecloth free of detritus (the area around my plate always seems to have lots) with one of those cute little brass scrapers. At such a dinner with a friend's editor at a hotel restaurant in Dallas, we were all charmed and boggled when we were each brought, between courses to clear our palates, a small scoop of sorbet—perched on half a lime—sitting in an individual sculptured ice swan about a foot high with a tiny white Christmas light in the base. I swear we hadn't even ordered lighted swans; they just swanned in, as if naturally.

That wasn't quite as surreal, however, as the editorial dinner at Chicon V in Chicago, when Jim and Toni took me and Elizabeth Moon out to some tower of power reached only by marble-lined elevators. The vegetable course, a mounded puree of what I dimly remember as featuring mainly turnips, arrived—decorated with a microscopically thin layer of gold foil about five inches square. As a science fiction writer, I take it as my duty to try any food once, a dubious rule that once led me to eat a witchety grub, but that's another story. Elizabeth, however, was quietly horrified by the gold, and carefully ate around it and under it, cautiously excavating with her spoon. "Elizabeth!" I murmured in maternal reproval, "You're not eating your gold!" We let her have her dessert anyway.

— *Lois McMaster Bujold*

Citronelle

Citronelle is much more than dinner, it's dinner and a show…for a few well-placed diners.

The kitchen is next to the dining room, separated by a large glass wall. It's laid bare, for everyone to see. There are three tables directly in front of the glass wall: two four-tops, and a single table for two. Half of those ten chairs face the kitchen, the other half away. So each night five people—twice that if half eat real early and the other half eat real late—get front row seats to watch the kitchen. We love to eat here. Bruce loves to eat here when he comes to DC alone. The food is delicious, but it's almost beside the point. We love to watch a top restaurant kitchen work.

But first, we have to look at the menu. Citronelle only has set menus. Diners can either choose an appetizer, entrée, and dessert (with an optional cheese course); or one of two tasting menus: five or seven courses. One of the nicest things about the Citronelle menus is that, unlike so many other similar restaurants, it's not too much food.

The kitchen is so clean it sparkles. The walls are white. The appliances, tables, and shelves are all aluminum. It's well-lighted. In front, just on the other side of the wall, is a kitchen table set for ten. This table gets an even more special set menu, and is booked months in advance. Behind them is a long aluminum table covered with rectangular serving trays. This is the DMZ between the cooks and the waiters: waiters in front, and chefs behind. Each tray corresponds to a table. Behind the table is the kitchen area: rows of prep areas, and various stoves and cooktops in the back.

The *amuse bouche* comes soon after you order. Once it was cauliflower mousse, shallots, and osetra caviar, served in an eggshell held aloft by a silver penguin. (You have to see it.) Delicious. Another time it was a slice of tuna mousse, served with a lobster sauce, diced potato pieces, and bits of parsley.

About eight cooks, all dressed in white, prepare the food. It's hard to count, actually. They're always moving around, and there are parts of the kitchen to the right that are out of view. It's also hard to see what they're doing; the only time you get a real good look at what's going on is when they arrange food on the plates on the trays on the long table.

The food here is uniformly delicious. One of the tasting menus started with a porcini, chestnut, and foie gras soup, accented with roasted chestnuts and a piece of duck confit. The soup was rich and flavorful, and served piping hot. On another visit, we started with a layer-cake stack of crispy potato cakes separated by slices of tuna tartare and diced haricots verts, surrounded by ginger and basil sauces. Tuna tartare dishes are often like this, and are best mixed together immediately before eating. This one was marvelous, a mixture of tastes and textures that kept their separate identities yet melded together well.

On the right-hand wall are rows of paper slips. These come on and off throughout the night, and seem to correspond to tables. Who ordered what and when, is our guess. Copies of these tickets hang by each station, so that everyone knows who ordered what and when it needs to be ready. Other copies are on the trays on the long table.

Michel Richard rules his kitchen. On the glass wall, over to the side, you can see the words "Michel's Kitchen." He's often in the kitchen earlier in the evening, usually on the waiters' side of the long table, chatting with the cooks and staff or watching the show with the rest of us. He has confidence in his cooks, and it shows. He comes into the dining room to talk with the guests. Sometimes he's upstairs in the bar area.

The kitchen is a sea of calm. The cooks are professional with each other, sometimes even jovial. Everyone knows his own job, and what is expected of everyone else. It's like watching a dance, as everything comes together on a plate and on a tray and is taken into the dining room.

Some of Richard's creations fall a bit short. Usually it's when they try too hard. His "fois gras brûlée" is an example. Think of a savory brûlée. Pureed fois gras on the bottom, a hard caramel top, and embedded dried fruits. Sounded interesting, but it didn't work—the fruits were too bitter, too overpowering. Likewise his fanciful "osso bucco." It isn't traditional osso bucco; it's lamb cheek meat, with a "bone" made of potato and filled with a "marrow" of mashed potatoes. Clever, amusing even, but not nearly as good as we hoped.

Those were the only two downers we've ever had there, and we've tasted our way through much of the menu. The roast lobster, served with a ginger emulsion, onions, and beet sprouts, was delicious. The dish had everything: taste, texture, and—via the red sprouts—color. The roast duck breast, served with aiguillette, Araciba, and a touch of maple syrup, was just as good. That dish came with something called "baked rice beans," which are small beans and matched the flavors perfectly.

Sometimes you can see stress in the kitchen. Words exchanged between the cooks and the waiters, or between the different waiters. We can't figure out what they're conferring about. Maybe something's not ready on time, or maybe something isn't done right. The cooks are in charge of arranging things on the plates. They regularly pull things out of pots and pans and bowls with long tweezers and arrange them on plates. Someone is in charge of wiping bits of stray sauce off the plates before they get sent into the dining room. Sometimes someone comes in from the right—is he a dishwasher?—with an empty saucepan or plate.

Then, the basil-breaded lamb loin comes out of the kitchen. This was a fascinating dish: a slice of lamb roll with a green rim of crushed basil. It was served with what was called black bean sauce on the menu, but was the lightest bean sauce we've ever had. Together with peeled, cooked tomatoes, pearl onions, and polenta squares, it was a perfect mixture of tastes.

Parts of the kitchen work are surprisingly pedestrian. Who knew that they would use so many different squirt bottles, for example. Near the end of the evening, you see more varied tasks in the kitchen. One of the cooks has a loose-leaf album on a table, and he is putting pages in. Another cook is sharpening his knives. Or cleaning his station.

Citronelle offers a cheese course, but it's not worth the bother. It's a selection of three cheeses, no choice, from the kitchen. Once it was a Camembert, a blue, and a goat cheese. They could do better than that.

Dessert *is* better than that. Everything we've had is good, but we'll mention two in particular. The crème caramel cheesecake, served with raspberry sauce, is delicious. (It came with a glass of Juracon wine, late-harvest and slightly fortified, that

matched perfectly.) And once they had a special dessert, a poached pear with chocolate sauce, shavings of dried raspberries, and a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Perfection.

At the end of the evening, the kitchen slows down. The cooks talk more and cook less. The dining room, too, is slowing down. And that's when you realize that the room is beautiful, the service was invisible, and that it's three hours since you first sat down. Maybe someday we'll sit at a table in another part of the restaurant and simply have dinner. But the kitchen show is just too interesting.

Citronelle ✈
3000 M Street, NW, Washington, DC
202-625-2150

French
L, D, RE, PP, FB, R, $$$$
http://www.citronelledc.com/

The most…interesting editorial lunch I ever had was with Richard Evans of Arrow Books (UK; later he moved to Gollancz). My contract for an unwritten SF novel to be called *The Space Eater* obviously needed celebrating: Richard selected a tiny Greek restaurant where they knew him well. You could tell this by the way that two bottles of retsina and two plates of hummous materialized before he said a word. These were silently replenished as we chattered, until around mid-afternoon it seemed wise to stop. We never did order the intended main course.

Since Richard's untimely death in 1996, the most alarmingly generous SF editor in London has been John Jarrold of Simon & Schuster's Earthlight imprint. A few years ago I met my agent, who shall be known only as Chris Priest, in a London pub with John and another author, Richard Calder. They had been, as it were, lunching all afternoon in readiness for another publisher's party, my own destination that evening. I remember subsequently steering Richard Calder to a tube station. Later, I heard he'd fallen into a profound swoon a few hundred yards from home, waking to find himself with three broken teeth. As for Chris Priest, he will hit me if I allude to such episodes as lying on his back giggling in the gutters of Leicester Square. Let us draw a veil.

The cautionary tale of John Brosnan should also be noted. This author still has no memory of what happened between the free flow of wine at a Jarrold lunch and his painful awakening in hospital with new and interesting bruises. I myself have returned wounded from such a meal, admittedly thanks to the mad taxi driver who mounted the pavement in a barely thwarted effort to kill me before I could lunch with John Jarrold. Take heed, aspiring authors, and beware this man's lethal largesse!

— *David Langford*

City Bar and Grill (Hilton Hotel)

The absolutely closest restaurant to the San Jose Convention Center has one thing, and only one thing, going for it: it's the closest restaurant to the San Jose Convention Center. It's not terribly good, and there's nothing really interesting on the menu. The restaurant can be noisy, and service crawls to a halt when the restaurant fills up. But it is close. And for that reason alone you will find yourself eating there.

Don't despair; it's possible to get in and out with minimal damage. The key is to set your expectations correctly.

The City is a hotel restaurant at a convention hotel. This means that it is used to people wanting all sorts of meals at all sorts of times. Not that this is a "breakfast anytime" kind of restaurant—that would be beneath the Hilton's station—but you can find all sorts of large and small plates on the menu: soups, salads, pastas, sandwiches at lunch, and larger entrées. And one of the most boring wine lists in the area. We surmise that business-convention goers want to drink wine but don't know a thing about what to order.

You can get pretty much anything you would expect from a standard "American" menu, albeit at inflated hotel-restaurant prices, of course. The pastas and salads aren't bad, and neither is the blackened chicken breast sandwich. (Don't bother ordering the charbroiled chicken breast sandwich.) The meatloaf and the pot pies are also okay.

Dinner entrées are uniformly mediocre, and we recommend you walk a couple of blocks to almost anyplace else if you can spare the time. If you're stuck at The City, order one of the chicken dishes or something with fish. But steer clear of the crab cakes, especially if you know what they're supposed to taste like.

If you're staying at the Hilton, you can get any of this food in your room at an additional charge. Good luck.

City Bar and Grill (Hilton Hotel)
300 Almaden Blvd, San Jose
408-947-4444

American
B, L, D, FP, FB, OS, SF, $$

Once when Michael A. Burstein came to visit the Analog offices and we went out for lunch, I suggested an Argentinian restaurant I'd been wanting to try. Since I had walked past it many times, I didn't bother to look up its address before we left; and when we got to where I thought it was, it wasn't. It eventually turned out that my memory was off by one block, but it took a while and a good deal of walking to figure that out. By the time we got to the restaurant, our uncertainty about its location had led to the plot of a "Probability Zero" story ("Heisenberg's Magazine," March 1997).

— *Stanley Schmidt*

Club Miami

Club Miami is a loud bar with Mexican food. It's counter service: you order, then find a seat. Your food will find you. It's fast, tasty, and the portions are immense. Help yourself at the salsa bar if you want to add spiciness to your chow, otherwise take a moment to congratulate yourself on getting so much food for so little money, and dig in. We like the burritos here. It's a whole lot better than the various faux Mexican restaurants in the area: Chacho's, La Victoria, or Iguanas Taqueria.

This place was once called Señor Emma's, or Emma's Express, or something like that. Near as we can tell, nothing changed except ownership and the name of the restaurant.

Club Miami
177 W Santa Clara St, San Jose
408-279-3662

Mexican
L, D, LL, LLL, NR, TO, FB, OS, $

Dai Thanh Supermarket

If your idea of a good room party involves inscrutable canned food, fresh pig feet (40 cents a pound more for the front feet) and frozen tropical fruit like sops, this is the place to shop. We've been to street markets and open air butcheries in Third World countries from China and Burma to Guatemala and Peru, and we have never seen some of this stuff before. From downtown San Jose, this is the most convenient location to stock up on crottled greeps.

Dai Thanh Supermarket
418-420 Second St, San Jose

Asian Market
L, D, TO, HWQ, $

Miami, June, 2001. Writing this, I'm in the restaurant at the "Don Shula Hotel" where the airline lodged me. The menu, get this, is written on a football. Steak, steak, and steak. Shula was coach of the Dolphins football team, it seems. For seafood they had an actually quite good seared "dolphin" which is what they like to call mahi-mahi here. I'm seated, because I requested non-smoking, on the outer edge of the restaurant halfway in a mall hallway with a woman running a floor waxer. When I eat, I right away have this choked-up, full feeling.

— *Rudy Rucker*

Dakao Restaurant

Interesting things are happening here. First, there's a Vietnamese restaurant, which has one of the most extensive and authentic menus we've seen (if "authentic" means "serves steamed pork blood": #26 on the menu). But they also serve common, ordinary *pho*—beef noodle soup—which is a wondrous and perfect meal. Not spicy, it's rice stick noodles, slices of beef, and a slightly anise-flavored broth. On the side you'll get some sprigs of basil, a handful of mung bean sprouts, a wedge of lime, and some jalapeños. Add these to taste. *Pho* is pronounced "fah," sort of; you have work a very slight "r" sound into it. Or just ask for #119. Or try the *bun* ("boon," but not so long on the vowel), a sort of noodle salad with crisp fresh veggies, rice stick noodles, and some meats on top. We like #64, with grilled shrimp and pork. Just pour the fish sauce over the whole bowl. And if these old standbys are no news to you, branch out on the menu and explore. And don't forget the soursop shake, #192. Soursop is a weird tropical fruit that's slightly lemony but is not citrus; it's unbelievably good. Watch ou for the big black seeds.

Dakao is also a takeout place. They've got a hot table of entrées ready to go, as well as a lot of pre-made and pre-wrapped packets of stuff like spring rolls, and mysterious things we can't tell what they are. And they have, for a mere $1.25, the best fast food around: *bahn mi* sandwiches. *Bahn mi* is just Vietnamese for French roll; you'll have a choice of fillings. Get the roast pork. Some of the other choices are more anatomy lesson than food, but the roast pork is delicious. You might as well get two; this is the best sandwich in town. Cold, with veggies, and some kind of fabulous sauce. It's amazingly, astonishingly good.

Dakao is also a Vietnamese grocery, with pre-portioned containers of… stuff…that's food…we're pretty sure. And more identifiably, cans of mangosteens and chilled cans of grass jelly drink. Somebody tell Guy Wicker they've got plenty of squid jerky.

Nobody spoke English when we dropped by, but don't let that stop you. Excepting the untranslated "Family Dinner" at $19, the most expensive menu items are the hot pots at $12, or one of the rice plates at $8. That bowl of *pho* will set you back $3.75. Add tax and tip, and you'll spend just over five bucks. We say that's the best meal deal in town, after the *bahn mi* sandwiches.

Dakao Restaurant
98 E San Salvador St, San Jose
408-286-7260

Vietnamese
B, L, D, TO, BW, HWQ, $

Emile's

Emile's is one of San Jose's "good" restaurants. It is one of San Jose's classic restaurants. Even after the computer revolution dies, and San Jose once again becomes a fruit-tree-laden backwater farming and tourist town, Emile's will remain a gourmand's oasis. Sure, the menu might change a little, but its essence will remain.

Emile Moser has been running this kitchen, and the rest of the restaurant, since 1972. And he has been receiving awards for almost that long. Emile's has been a DiRoNA (Distinguished Restaurants of North America) award winner ever year since 1976. *Wine Spectator* has given it an award of excellence since 1985. Probably every food and restaurant magazine has given this restaurant some award or another. It deserves them all.

Emile's is a classic Old World restaurant that has been slowly moving into the modern era. The room is pretty and romantic. Imagine white linen tablecloths, flowers everywhere, beige walls, and muted lighting coming from hand-blown lamps. Maybe the room is a bit too boxy, a bit too muted. But no one in the restaurant ever seems to mind. They like it just the way it is. And they're too busy enjoying the food, which is uniformly very good.

Think of Emile's as a fine French-Swiss restaurant with California and Mediterranean influences. They serve fresh fish, and game in season. If you've been going there for the past two and a half decades, your old favorites will still be available. If you're a 21st century diner, you won't be disappointed either. The lobster Thermidor and rack of lamb are presented happily alongside the beef with garlic risotto and grilled swordfish with a pineapple cilantro salsa.

Emile's is a fun restaurant to eat at. The waitstaff is surprisingly approachable. They're happy to explain dishes; they're happy to discuss the menu. Emile himself is likely to come out from the kitchen and chat about the menu. Sometimes it seems like he knows half the people in the dining room. Maybe we were just there on atypical nights, or maybe every San Jose native has been coming here to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and everything else for decades. Whatever the reason, the dining room can feel a little bit like a party. For a restaurant as fine as this one, the informality is incongruous but welcoming.

They have a private room you can reserve for large parties, and a large private room you can reserve for even larger parties.

The full name of this place is Emile's Restaurant and Cooking School. And yes, there is a school attached to this restaurant. Emile and others give classes in various cooking techniques. We don't know the schedule. Or the admission requirements. We do know that a few years ago, in the middle of the dot-com boom, someone with the bright idea for a company name of eMiles.com wanted to buy Emile's domain name and turn it into a Web site that made money from frequent-flyer miles. It's a great example of the dot-com nonsense that went on in San Jose, and Emile never sold. Pity, really. He probably could have cashed out before the bust if he did.

Emile's Restaurant and Cooking School
545 S Second St, San Jose
408-289-1960

Continental
D, RR, VP, FB, R, $$$$
http://www.emiles.com

Back in 1979, I was attending my first Worldcon in Brighton, UK. (Favourite memory: GOH Fritz Leiber saying that he'd spent the morning watching the tide go in and out. "At my age, that's exciting.") I was sitting in a greasy spoon, eating a plate of grease and something, when four Vikings walked in the door. They had the lot; a fur rug with a hole in the middle for the head to go through, horned helmets, swords and axes et al. And they were big fellows, with muscles in places you and I haven't even got places.

The rest of the patrons went very quiet as they selected a table and sat down. A little waitress came quivering up to them, obviously wondering whether they were going to read the menu or eat it. The biggest and hairiest Viking turned to her and said "Pot of tea for four, dear, and have you any scones?"

Only in England.

— *Simon R. Green*

E&O Trading Company

It's a story as old as the restaurant business. A new restaurant comes to town and wows locals with its fresh ideas and breezy attitude. The critics rave, and people come in droves. Then the chef leaves and the food declines in quality. And no one notices. This is the story of the E&O Trading Company.

It's certainly a pretty restaurant. The interior retains some of the character of the 1895 building it occupies. The 17-foot ceilings are festooned with Burmese fabric hangings and the corners with Asian geegaws: wind chimes, a gilded bookcase, animal heads representing the Chinese zodiac, open bird cages. The wooden furniture completes the look, spilling out onto the sidewalk when it is warm enough. Someone invoked some serious feng shui here. Or maybe the ghost of Marco Polo

The E&O Trading Company—E is for elephant and O is for ocean, by the way; we find this about as conceptually illustrative as a Pottery Barn catalogue—serves food from all over southeast Asia: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. One of the current hot new restaurant trends is Asian fusion. Take flavors from a variety of Asian countries, shuffle them in a variety of ways—not homogenized in taste but keeping their individual characters—and serve them in smallish plates designed for sharing. The E&O Trading Company didn't invent this kind of cuisine, but they do a decent job with it. The dishes can be uneven, but you can have a good meal here. The menu is interesting, and when the dishes work they're very good. Our favorites are the Thai crab cakes (served with lemon grass and chilis), the Imperial duck rolls, the crispy squid, and the Indonesian corn fritters. Most things come with their own dipping sauce; try to keep the pairings straight. We also like the pork chops with Filipino *adobo* sauce. And the ginger mushroom tower is always a hit: six mushroom skewers leaning up against a pile of fried rice noodles with a sweet soy dipping sauce.

On the flip side, pass on the Thai crepe. Ignore the beef satay on sugar cane: it's too sweet and the peanut sauce doesn't rescue it.

The trick here is to order dishes for the table, and share everything. Four people is ideal for dinner: fewer and you can't try as many dishes, more and dividing the results starts getting complicated. The waitstaff suggests this protocol when you first sit down.

The restaurant has a brewery in the basement (you can visit it if you like), and its own line of beers. We're not qualified to judge, but friends who are recommend the India Pale Ale (a hoppy full-bodied ale), the Eastern Golden Ale (not hoppy or bitter at all), and the Gecko Bay Wheat (an unfiltered, yeasty beer). We are amused by the large cube with a different beer on each face sitting on every table; you can roll this "beer die" if you can't decide. Lucky for us, the wine list is pretty good, fairly inexpensive, and they serve a nice selection of wines by the glass.

Two other minuses. One, the restaurant can be very noisy. That's the ambiance they're looking for, so you just have to go with it. And two, the desserts can be disappointing. Don't order the crème brûlée. Actually, just go somewhere else for dessert.

We're not sure what, if anything, the E&O Trading company trades in. But nearly every time we talk about the place, Karen calls it Eando Binder's. Help yourselves to the meme.

E&O Trading Company Restaurant **Pan-Asian**
96 S First St, San Jose L, D, LL, RR, FP, FB, GG, $$$
408-938-4100

Eulipia

Some call this New American food, and some call it California cuisine, or contemporary cuisine. It's the staple offering of perfectly pleasant restaurants with competent and talented, but not brilliantly gifted, chefs.

Roasted Baby Beets with chevre? Check. And look: it's Mixed Greens with Maytag Blue Cheese. The same sort of salads you get at Auriga in Minneapolis, or at Nora's in Washington, DC. Dependable and delicious, very much the expected menu items.

Eulipia offers these, and moves into the entrée course with *ahi* tuna seared rare, with shiitake mushrooms and a soy ginger glaze. And grilled lamb T-bones, with natural jus, couscous, and spring vegetables. There's more, but it all starts to sound so…familiar. If you eat a lot of this sort of food, Eulipia has nothing new to offer you. But if this cuisine is a novelty or an occasional treat for you, Eulipia's friendly staff and nicely appointed dining room will delight you. It's a dressy, expensive place, where dinner can easily top $75 for the two of you; more if you investigate their wonderful selection of what we call "foofy cocktails." (You know, umbrella drinks.) Just enjoy, and don't mind us. We're jaded.

Eulipia **Californian**
374 S First St, San Jose D, RR, FB, R, $$$
408-280-6161 http://www.eulipia.com/

Express Deli Cafe

A storefront cubby of a place, good for a quick tuna fish sandwich, Caesar salad, or breakfast burrito. There's lots of choices: falafel burgers, bowls of chili or soup, or a Reuben. The coffee's not bad, and there's plenty of cold drinks on offer. It's take-away only, unless you want to eat standing up.

Express Deli Cafe
325 S First St, San Jose
408-279-0970

Sandwiches
TO, $

Fanny & Alexander

We are hopelessly old. Bring us our walkers, our housecoats, and our slippers, because we just cannot get excited about an evening's entertainment that includes "hip-hop music with no house/techno." We barely know what that means, but we're certain it's too loud. So, maybe the ambiance isn't what we like best. The food isn't all that expensive and the oyster sandwich is pretty good.

The kitchen is open until eleven Monday through Saturday, which is nice for harried con-goers. Skip the weekends at the nightclub, though. The cover charge is ten bucks; too steep for our idea of fun. You kids go on; we won't wait up.

Fanny & Alexander
72 N Almaden Ave, San Jose
408-287-1737

Californian
L, D, FP, FB, LM, $$
http://www.fannyalexander.com/

Flying Pig Pub

Looking for some real food at 1:30 AM? Attractive, conventional, under 30, and desperate for the best pick-up bar in San Jose? Then head on over to this fascinating little watering hole: the Flying Pig. The kitchen's open until 2 AM, and they'll make you quesadillas, a burger, or a fish or chicken sandwich. It's that sort of menu. But they also serve Cincinnati 5-way chili, and you've probably never had it. It's one of the reasons people keep going back to Midwestcon. 'Nuff said.

Flying Pig Pub
78 S First St, San Jose
408-298-6710

American
L, D, LL, LLL, NR, TO, FP, FB, LM, OS, $
http://www.flyingpigpub.com/

Fountain Restaurant at the Fairmont

A casual place and handy for those who have no reason to leave the main party hotel. They've got an ice cream parlor, which is always a good idea. Downside is that isn't cheap. $12 bucks for a hamburger is ridiculous. Upside is that they're right there.

Fountain Restaurant (Fairmont Hotel) **American**
170 S Market St, San Jose B, L, FB, KF, $$
408-998-1900

Fuji Sushi

Fuji Sushi looks like a perfectly generic Japanese restaurant. They might be a good choice if half of your party doesn't want sushi, though. Their menu is filled with other Japanese entrées: *udon*, *soba*, beef and chicken teriyaki, *katsu don* (breaded pork cutlet), tempura, etc. Entrées hover around $10; sushi is more, of course. We've never been, but we've driven by it many times. Let us know if you go.

Fuji Sushi **Japanese**
56 W Santa Clara St, San Jose L, D, TO, BW, $
408-298-2854

The first time I met Jim Macdonald, Debra Doyle, and Bruce Coville in the flesh—all members of my APA—was at Boston Worldcon. Jim became our peerless and fearless leader on a trip outside the hotel to find a particular restaurant. As he was in the navy at the time and had studied engineering, orienteering, racketeering and (as we were to find out) careering, off we went at a forced march pace.

I think the technical term for what we did was "tacking." Anyway, we corkscrewed our way around and about Newbury Street. ("To think that I lost it on Newbury Street" became an unofficial anthem.) We never did find the particular restaurant but settled on an approximate one. The food? That is not what I remember.

However, I decided then that I would never voluntarily get on a boat with Jim if that trip was any indication of his ability to steer.

— *Jane Yolen*

While doing promotional interviews for our novel *Dune: House Harkonnen*, Brian Herbert and I appeared on a live talk show in Vancouver, British Columbia. We talked about Frank Herbert's life work on conservation, finding new energy and food sources, protecting the environment, and how those ideas were reflected in his science fiction.

What we didn't know, however, was that the show's previous guest was the author of *Really Gross Food*. At the end of the interview, the host reminded us of the ecological message in our books and then with a wicked smile, brought out a platter of pan-fried locusts, fat mealworms dipped in white chocolate, and sweetened crickets. On live TV, he offered us the feast. Go ahead.

Brian and I looked at each other for just an instant as the cameras continued to roll. After writing several thousand pages together, we could guess each other's thoughts. Obviously, with the audience watching, we felt that patent hypocrisy was worse than a bit of nausea. So, we each took a sample of the bugs and crunched away. When I consumed a second helping with a (hopefully convincing) forced smile on my face, I explained, I used to eat school cafeteria lunch every day, so I'm sure these aren't the first insects I've ever swallowed. Maybe just the first voluntary ones.

— *Kevin J. Anderson*

Ginza Sushi-Ko

How do you even begin to explain Ginza Sushi-Ko to someone? You might start by saying that the restaurant only serves thirteen people per night. Or you might start by saying that Ginza Sushi-Ko is the most expensive restaurant in America, with dinner averaging $300 per person. Or maybe you start by describing the food. However you go about it, words will defy you. Ginza is like no other restaurant in the country.

It's a private restaurant, upstairs on a very-LA faux European avenue just off Rodeo Drive. Nearby stores include Tiffany, Louis Vuitton, and other similarly posh retailers. The only sign is a brass nameplate on a door. Inside you'll find an elevator, and upstairs you'll find an unmarked door covered with an unmistakable Japanese-restaurant door-cloth. Inside there is the restaurant, the perfection of intimacy in a public place.

The room itself is aesthetically pure. An L-shaped sushi bar seats nine, and a nearby table seats another four. It's blonde, unfinished maple, at least four inches thick. Every morning it's sanded down to a smooth finish. The chairs are simple, and tall enough to watch sushi master Masa Takayama work his magic. He has a thick wood cutting board in front of him, and ingredients all around. There's a wicker basket of rice at his side. Close to us is a small handmade raku hibachi with a few coals in it; it's replenished throughout the evening. In front is a glass box of fresh fish: a tentacle here, a crab there. On one side are a set of the most beautiful knives I've ever seen. There are some simple hangings on the walls, and a splash

of dried flowers in a ancient and lovely vase behind the chef. A kimono-clad woman works the front of the house, seating people and pouring tea and sake. But this is all backdrop. Think of it as a dinner symphony: the chef is the conductor, and we're about to witness a performance.

There's no menu; you're fed dishes you've never seen before and are never likely to see again, and then you're handed a check. The menu is what it is, and the price is what it is. That's the bargain you make when you sit down. And much to my amazement, I thought it was a bargain well made.

Dinner started with a dish of hirome sashimi, served with wasabe, scallions, and tobiko. I doubt there is another restaurant outside Japan that serves fish of this quality; Takayama has his flown in from Japan every other day, buying just what he needs each time.

Next came tuna tartare, mixed with caviar and scallion and served with toast squares. Delicious. We had watched the toast on the hibachi, and had been wondering what it was for. Each dish was like that. We watched Takayama, perfect in his movements, make each course. There were four groups eating that night, and we were the second. First, we would see a course being made for someone else, then for us, and then while we were eating we could watch it being made again. When Takayama or his assistant set the food down in front of us, he would explain to us the ingredients and how to eat it.

Hairy crabmeat came next, mixed with cucumber shreds and a little lemon zest and served in a crabshell. Fresh and perfect. None of these dishes was large. Three or four perfect bites, and then they were done. We could have always asked for a second helping of something, but that would mean missing the delicacy that came next. And since we always saw someone else get what would come next, we always wanted it.

Uni risotto came next. This was our first hot dish, and we saw Takayama's assistant poke his head out of a back room. It was rich and flavorful, made even more perfect by the little bits of orange tobiko and green onion mixed with the risotto. Clearly, this is not entirely traditional Japanese food.

Three *fugu* dishes followed. The first was *fugu* sashimi over shredded cabbage: both red and white. It was the meat, skin, and a piece of the liver, with some scallion and gold leaf on the top. Honestly, we were disappointed with the gold leaf. It's a silly and pretentious affectation, and the food didn't require it. The next dish was a piece of fried *fugu*, hot and a bit spicy. We didn't feel any numbness from the toxin in the first preparation, but did in the second.

This was followed by *fugu*-skin soup with a piece of sweet-rice cake. Some time ago, in Kyoto, we visited a *fugu* restaurant and had these dishes. Here it was better, much better. The flavors were subtler and more intense. The tastes blended together more. We watched Takayama wield his chef's knife like a master, cutting paper-thin slices of fish.

The next course was sushi, and we knew we were reaching the end of our meal. Toro—the fattiest toro I had ever seen—red snapper, shrimp, *ika* with coarse salt, all accompanied by freshly grated wasabe and wonderfully strong pickled ginger. Not done yet: wild mushroom, pickled herring, red clam—wow, was that a good one—slightly warmed scallop with salt and lemon. The citrus was a perfect

counterpoint to the wasabe. Did we want more? Anago, uni, toro maki, raw shrimp, fugu-liver maki. Enough?

Enough, but over the course of the meal we noticed some unique specialties going to a couple to our right. Did they know the chef? Was there an even more exclusive menu? Can we try that uni roll you did for them?

And that was the last bite: a sashimi dish of uni rolled in sweet shrimp. A perfectly made, visually perfect, and perfectly delicious end to our meal…

…that cost $300 per person.

Three hundred dollars is a ridiculous price to pay for dinner. Even so, we met regulars at the restaurant: people who ate there weekly. Some of their names were engraved in little plaques on the chairs. Clearly, there is a demographic that is happy to pay that kind of money for dinner.

It's not really conspicuous consumption, because there's nothing conspicuous about the restaurant. It's nothing more than an ultimate luxury item and the reality of diminishing returns. A $60 Japanese dinner is a lot better than a $30 Japanese dinner. A $120 Japanese dinner, like an *omakase* (chef's choice) meal at Nobu, is better still. But even here, you're getting a smaller quality increase per dollar. The waiters at Nobu tell customers not to bother ordering *omakase* at anything more than $160 a person; there just isn't any more quality to be had. Ginza Sushi-ko costs about twice that. Sure, it's better than the best that Nobu can offer, but is it worth two-and-a-half Nobu meals? Is it worth five $60 Japanese dinners? If you don't care about $300, then it is. If you do, then it isn't.

Ginza Sushi-Ko **Japanese**
218 N Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills D, RE, PP, FB, $$$$
310-247-8939

Gordon Biersch

If you're the sort of person who finds comfort rather than banality in corporate chain restaurants, you might enjoy Gordon Biersch Brewery. You'll enjoy it even more if you don't mind a loud, rowdy crowd who are there for the beer and music (both of which are pretty good). And if you like taking chances on surly, unpleasant service, then run, don't walk. You're in for a real treat.

Was that too subtle?

Gordon Biersch Brewery and Restaurant **American**
33 E San Fernando St, San Jose L, D, LL, LLL, RR, FP, FB, GG, KF, LM, OS, $$
408-294-6785 http://www.gordonbiersch.com/restaurants/san_jose.html

Grande Pizzeria

A recommended hangout if you simply must have a whisky sour with your two-topping large pizza. It looked none too clean, and seems to attract a weird mix of desultory barflies and ravenous college kids. We confess to not having tried the food here, but they've been around a while, and how badly wrong could pizza go, anyway? They also offer a lot of Italian dishes, including such a number of veal dishes as to increase our unease with the place.

Grande Pizzeria and Italian Restaurant **Pizza**
150 E San Carlos St, San Jose L, D, NR, TO, $
408-292-2840

My parents ran a café frequented by cowmen and rodeo riders in Houston. It shared a parking lot with a stable and a nightclub called the Congo Jungle. Dozens of unlikely things happened there, as in all restaurants. Most of ours involved animals.

A white-faced waitress told my father the biggest rat she had ever seen was caught, still alive, in a trap in our storeroom. He went to investigate and found a possum.

A drunken patron rode a horse up to the counter. He was demanding service when the horse slipped and fell.

The stable had a big yellow watchdog named Soup. A new customer saw my mother put the remains of his pork chops on a place heaped with similar items and asked what she was doing. She said she was saving them for Soup. We never saw him again.

One of our regulars was a blind man who had a lovely guide dog named Lilian. The café was busy, and Lilian was lying by his stool when a customer tripped over her and started to kick her. Every cow punch in the place jumped to his feet—the customer froze. His foot was drawn back to kick Lilian, and he was afraid to put it down. For half a minute he stood there with one foot in the air, staring from fist to fist to fist. I thought we'd have a riot, and didn't laugh.

Late one night the kitchen erupted in shouts, screams, and truly frightening inhuman snarls. The doorman from the Congo Jungle was siccing the club's tame lion on our cook while she defended herself with boiling water.

— *Gene Wolfe*

Hamasushi

This is the best sushi restaurant in Silicon Valley. If you have a car, go here. Order anything on the menu; it's all authentic and delicious. Not to put too fine a point on it, Jon Singer's favorite sushi chef in Northern California works here. Just be sure to clear out of the club portion of the restaurant before karaoke starts at 9:00.

Hamasushi 🚗
20030 Stevens Creek Blvd, Cupertino
408-446-4262

Japanese
L, D, RR, TO, DL, FP, FB, GG, KF, R, SF, $$$
http://www.hamasushi.com/

The monkeys gave me typhus.

I was living in a little village in northern Costa Rica, just a few kilometers from the Nicaraguan border. I'd finished Clarion the year before and joined up with a sustainable development organization, who sent me to Costa Rica with a gange of international volunteers to provide semi-skilled labor in the village of Caño Rito de San Jorge de Upala.

Once a week, a pair of us would draw shopping duty and slog a good ten kilometers through the swamp out to the main road and catch the bus into Upala, the nearest big town.

That morning, I left camp with another volunteer at 5 AM, just as the howler monkeys were setting up their morning hoot. Howler monkeys are the raccoons of Northern Costa Rica: ubiquitous, devious, loud and unsanitary. We kept very little food in the kitchen, locking almost everything in the toolshed, but the monkeys had still discovered our little cookhouse and begun to raid it by night. A few days previous, we'd woken up to discover our precious 20-kilo tub of bulk peanut butter, dragged into the middle of the soccer-field and licked clean, nothing left except for big, greasy, simian paw-prints.

As we walked the trail through the swamp, I noticed a strange lightness in my step, as though the sticky red mud had been vulcanized. The loamy, wet smell of the dense bush seemed somehow sharper and spiked with whiffs of woodsmoke and effervescent citrus from the nearby orange-grove. Leaves stood out sharply, and the morning sounds of livestock and people had the false crispness of a high-end stereo demonstration.

By the time we boarded the bus, my ears were ringing. When the bus pulled into Upala, I was shivering uncontrollably, guzzling gallons of water, and the ringing was so loud I couldn't make out a word anyone said. I drank five Cokes at the bus-station, but the sixth shattered when it slipped from my shaking hand. We walked to the local clinic.

continued…

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My fever was over 104°. We were barely into the clinic before my guts started running, explosively and uncontrollably. Coke, water, last night's supper of beans, rice, and plantain—whatever wasn't coming up the front end was leaving on the express train at the back. I staggered out of the toilet and slurred my way through a lengthy check-in, stripped down to my boxers, and let them draw blood. By the end of the day, the verdict was in: typhus. The local villagers often came down with it; marauding howler monkeys contaminated the food supply and brought on horrible illness.

I lost 40 pounds in six weeks. The fever left and returned, painting my sensoria with phantom sounds, heavenly choirs of angels, visions of infinite circuitry screaming by below me. They med-evaced me to the capital from the village that night, a multi-part trip on horseback, bus, jeep, and finally a little sportscar that took me the rest of the way.

Damned monkeys.

— *Cory Doctorow*

Hawg's Seafood Bar

Dear Hawg's: We're not sure how to break it to you, but there's no fish on your menu. Yes, yes, we know: Hawg's is a "seafood" bar, and there's all sorts of seafood on the menu. We see the shrimp, scallops, crab, and squid. We even see the raw oysters. But when someone walks into a seafood bar, they kind of expect to see fish on the menu. Where's the fish?

The best thing we can say about Hawg's is that it's better than Red Lobster. Not much better, mind you, but better. Many of the seafood dishes are sort-of Italian: seafood sauté with pasta, grilled shrimp with risotto, fettuccine and rock shrimp…that sort of thing. It's not terrible, but it's entirely uninteresting. And we would much rather eat elsewhere.

Admittedly, we've only been here once. The complete lack of inspiration in any of the dishes we tried, and our complete lack of interest in any of the dishes we didn't try, make it hard for us to go back. We can tell you not to order the quesadilla under any circumstances. If you go, please let us know how your meal was.

And there is a single fish dish on the menu: grilled salmon with vegetable risotto and a red pepper sauce. We know; it hardly counts.

Hawgs Seafood Bar
105 S Second St, San Jose
408-287-9955

Seafood
L, D, BW, $$

Henry's World Famous Hi-life

Henry's operates by one basic rule, and understanding that rule is key to understanding Henry's. The rule is perplexing. It is simple. It is ridiculous. The rule is this: customers may not see their salads placed on the table. Once you've internalized Henry's guiding principle, everything else makes sense.

Henry's is both a bar and barbeque restaurant. It's in what looks like a house, on the corner of St. John and North Almaden Boulevard. The San Jose Sharks play in a stadium a couple of blocks away, but Henry's has been in San Jose far longer than professional hockey. It's one of those places that's called an "institution" by the locals, which in this case means they've forgiven the bit about the salad. And that the food is really good.

Your first impression of Henry's is that of a neighborhood bar. It was decorated when it first opened in 1960—much expense was spared—and not touched since. There's a long bar and some tables. We counted fifteen beers on tap. (The wine list is useless.) Through a small archway ahead of you is the restaurant—there's nowhere else it could be—but don't go there yet. If you do, you'll be immediately spotted as a first-timer and ushered out. Worse, you might see a salad placement.

You have to order in the bar. There's a large menu on one wall, listing different steaks and chops. There's chicken. There's pork chops. There are a couple of optional sides. But honestly, if you're not here for the ribs you should be elsewhere. You don't want the teriyaki chicken. You don't want the New York strip steak. You want the ribs.

In the end, it's mostly about good times with friends. There are many, many, delightful meals, fabulous dishes, great wines, and it's all made better by the company you keep. Many meals where I don't remember exactly what good things we had, but the company is not forgotten. Sometimes it all comes together in one particularly classic evening, to wit:

Worldcon 1990, at Den Haag, The Netherlands. The wonderful Deborah Beale, then of Legend Books, took Greg and me out to dinner in Scheveningen, the coastal town nearby famous for seafood restaurants, with lobster as a specialty. Accompanying us were our children, Erik, then almost four, and Alexandra, then nine months old. They behaved beautifully and later fell asleep, which helped the evening be even better. We had appetizers, we had wine, we had lovely lobster. This particular restaurant served whole lobsters several ways: steamed with butter, with wine sauce, or with an Asian ginger sauce, which is what I had. Everything was delicious. We talked, laughed, relaxed. Dinner was over. Deborah, with the energy and metabolism of a hummingbird, looked around brightly. "I'm still feeling a bit peckish," she said. "Shall we have another round of lobsters?" And we did.

— *Astrid Bear*

To be precise, you want the baby back ribs. (The menu claims that they're only available on weekends, but they've always had them whenever we've walked in.)

Once you order, you'll be told that you'll be called when your table is ready. When you're called—it only takes a minute or two—you'll be ushered into the dining room, where your table is ready with your salads already in place. Like magic, it is! Who would have imagined? The waiter will helpfully point out the different dressings, so you know where to sit. That's right, you're supposed to seat in salad-dressing order. (It's not that bad; we bleu-cheese people need to stick together.)

The ribs arrive. They're all served with a baked potato and Henry's homemade garlic-and-chive butter. Tasty stuff, but they put way too much of it on. You'll also get a side of warm barbeque sauce. Also homemade, it has a strong taste of hickory and is not sweet at all. It's good for dipping the toasted garlic bread into. The ribs are the fall-off-the-bone variety, and they're delicious. Don't forget the sauce.

If you can tear yourself away from your food, look around. You'll see tables of happy diners—some not ordering the ribs—and occasionally an empty table with waiting salads. It's actually hard to catch someone setting the salads up. Again and again we've watched an empty table, only to turn our heads for a second and miss the salad placement. It's the immaculate conception salad. (On one visit Bruce did actually see some salads being set down on a table. He won't spoil the magic, though.)

So all you people who rave about Montgomery Inn in Cincinnati, listen up. That's right, Glicksohn, we're talking to you. We want you to get down to Henry's and give it a try. We want to know what you think. It's a different sauce, but the wait isn't nearly as long.

Henry's World Famous Hi-life 🚗 **Barbeque**
301 W Saint John St, San Jose L, D, NR, TO, FP, FB, GG, KF, SF, $$
408-295-5414

When, during WWII, I was taking weather courses at Chanute Field, Illinois, I used my occasional pass to hitchhike around the nearby small towns. When in one of them, I was astonished to find a Chinese restaurant. Like any New Yorker, I'd been used to Chinese food since early childhood, and I suddenly realized I was suffering from chow mein deprivation.

That was what I wanted. What I got was something else. After I took the first bits I looked around more carefully. I realized that the waitress was Irish. The cashier was Italian. And when I got a look through the kitchen door I was pretty sure the cook was Greek. And as far as I could tell, no Oriental of any nationality had ever been within ten miles of the place.

And the food? Let me put it this way. I had never before been so astonished by a meal set before me, and wasn't again until, years later, I ordered a pizza at what was described as an Italian restaurant in Moscow.

— *Frederik Pohl*

House of Siam

House of Siam is easily the best Thai restaurant in San Jose. It's a traditional Thai restaurant, run by a pair of Thai sisters. And the food is authentic and yummy.

Everything is good here. We can recommend the "waterfall beef salad," which is more of an entrée than a salad. It's chunks of charbroiled meat, iceberg lettuce, cucumbers, mint, roasted rice powder, lime juice, garlic, and chilis. Like all good Thai food, it's a fusion of flavors and textures. Their *tom ka gai* soup is also delicious, chunks of white-meat chicken in a coconut broth with lemon grass, cilantro, chili, Thai bay leaves, lime juice, and the gingery flavor of galanga root.

Curries are hot, medium, and mild. Remember, in this place "hot" means hot. Don't order it hot unless you want it that way. One of the best mild curries is their yellow curry vegetables: tofu, pea pods, bamboo shoots, broccoli, carrots, potatoes, all in coconut milk and yellow curry.

The restaurant has been lively every time we've been there. Actually, there are two locations. The one on South Market is older, a homey sort of restaurant with traditional Thai weavings on the wall. The South Second location is newer: more plush and modern, with some traditional Thai seating (think Japanese).

Two sisters control the kitchen at these restaurants. We have no idea if one works at one, and the other at the other, but that seems like a logical supposition.

House of Siam
55 S Market St, San Jose
408-279-5668

Thai, Vegetarian
L, D, TO, FP, BW, GG, R, SF, $$

Iguanas Taqueria

Like its rival around the corner, La Victoria, Iguanas serves Mexican food to Americans. And like La Vic, Iguanas has built their menu around burritos "as big as your head," although they are careful to disclaim that actual head size may vary. You can get tacos, quesadillas, nachos, and all the usual suspects. It's not as fabulous as Mexican food in a Mexican neighborhood, but it's just fine. And the most expensive menu item is the Super Iguana Burrito, which is just $7.25. Everything else is much cheaper.

Iguanas Taqueria
330 S Third St, San Jose
408-995-6023

Mexican
L, D, LL, LLL, NR, TO, GG, KF, PW, $

Il Fornaio

Il Fornaio is a victim of the dot.com bubble. Once, it was an excellent Italian restaurant. Bruce remembers regularly eating at the one in Palo Alto, ten or twelve years ago. It was one of *the* places to meet for dinner. It was one of *the* places to plan a company, cut a deal, take over the world. At the height of the frenzy, Il Fornaio was planning an IPO.

And now there are a dozen or so Il Fornaios. They run all up and down the Pacific Coast, as far north as Seattle. The menu is cookie cutter. Il Fornaio's own corporate Web site says that "the menus are developed collectively by the company's two-dozen Italian chef-partners and are based on authentic Italian recipes." That sums the place up. If you want a centrally developed, marketing-tested, Italian-based food, this is the place to go. If you want authentic, walk a few more blocks to Paolo's.

This is not to say that Il Fornaio is bad. It's a good restaurant. If you have a large group, the menu is going to have something for everyone. The food will be consistent, whether you eat at the Il Fornaio in the Sainte Claire Hotel or you eat in the one in Portland, OR. The kitchen can handle groups with ease.

While writing this review, we printed the menus—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—from the restaurant's Web site. We looked the menu over, trying to remember a meal or a dish that stood out. Nothing came to mind. We've both eaten there repeatedly, and while we both remember the meals as good, we can't point to any one dish as being either particularly wonderful or particularly horrible.

But we found lots of things on the menu that we'd be happy to order, and we're planning on having one meal here during the convention.

The San Jose Il Fornaio has a particular place in Bruce's professional history. It was there, on 28 April 1999, that Bruce and Tom Rowley (along with Karen, and Tom's wife) officially agreed to form Counterpane Internet Security, Inc. The rest may not be history, but it certainly is biography.

Il Fornaio (Hyatt St. Claire) **Italian**
302 S Market St, San Jose B, L, D, RR, FB, $$$
408-271-3366 http://www.ilfornaio.com

In rural Wyoming, you have to learn to make do with what's on hand. One night Kathy and I and some friends decided homemade ice cream would be good, but we didn't have any cream, nor enough ice. We did, however, have grapefruit juice, honey, and some liquid nitrogen.

Sorbet is just sweetened, frozen fruit juice, so we decided to give it a try. At first we thought about using the liquid nitrogen in place of ice in a regular ice-cream maker, but we were afraid of what it would do to the plastic parts. Then we thought about pouring it directly into the batter. Nitrogen is all around us in the air, after all; there's nothing toxic about it.

continued…

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So after some discussion of which ingredient to pour into the other (Is it acid into water, or water into acid, and does it work the same with supercold liquids?), we decided to stir the nitrogen into the batter. The bowl looked like the witches' cauldron from *MacBeth*, and after about thirty seconds the spoon froze in place. We let the excess nitrogen boil off, then cautiously took a bite as the sorbet began to thaw. Ambrosia! The boiling nitrogen had aerated it perfectly. Now this is the only way we make sorbet.

—Jerry Oltion

Inca Gardens

Our first conversation with the proprietor at Inca Gardens convinced us that something was not quite right.

"Do you have *cuy al horno*?" we asked.

"No."

"Do you serve *pisco* sours?"

"We only have a beer and wine license."

"What about *sopa de criolla*?"

"No. Sorry."

"Do you sell Inca Cola?"

"That, we have."

One out of four wasn't great, but we ate there anyway.

Actually, one out of four was what we expected, but not that particular one. We didn't think they would actually inflict roasted guinea pig on an American clientele, even in cosmopolitan Silicon Valley. We certainly didn't expect them to ship Inca Cola—more on that later—all the way from Peru. We knew they didn't have a liquor license. But we were disappointed that they didn't serve *sopa de criolla*. This soup is made with beef stock, milk, noodles, bread, a fried egg, garlic, onions, hot peppers, and other seasonings. Yes: we know how weird that sounds. But we ate it everywhere, every chance we got, in Peru. Made right, it is delicious: fresh, flavorful, filling.

Actually, that's pretty much how you can describe any Peruvian dish. Made right, Peruvian food is better than anything else in South America.

Inca Gardens serves mediocre Peruvian food. Nothing we had was terrible; some of it was pretty good. But none of it was inspiring, and we knew how inspiring the stuff could be. Maybe our expectations were too high? We don't know. Still, this is the best Peruvian restaurant in San Jose, and the only place we know to get Inca Cola. And you need to try Inca Cola at least once in your life.

Peruvian cuisine is a melting pot of cultures. Even before the Spanish showed up, the country had an interesting and varied cuisine (where do you think that guniea pig crept in?). The Spanish brought their own flavors, and a large immi-

gration from China in the 1800s mixed things up even more. (It's very common to find restaurants serving a weird Cantonese/Peruvian hybrid cuisine called *chifa*.) The traditional Peruvian chili pepper is an *aji*. Not as hot as a habanero, it is very flavorful and adds warmth to many Peruvian (and *chifa*) dishes. The other common spice is garlic: *ajo*. *Aji* and *ajo*: the yin and yang of Peruvian cooking. And a zillion different kinds of indigenous potatoes.

We tried the *ceviche* appetizer. Inca Gardens serves two *ceviches*: a fish *ceviche* (red snapper) and a seafood combination *ceviche*. We had the fish. It was fresh and tasty; the aji peppers gave the dish an impressive bite, and it came with a small piece of corn on the cob and a slice of sweet potato. We also tried the *anticuchos*—spicy grilled pieces of beef heart served as a shish-kabob—and the *empanadas*. Both were okay, but not great. (We have memories of this one *anticuchos* dish we had in Lima….) And in all fairness, *empanadas*, in every country we've tried then in, are always okay but not great.

There are several fish soups on the menu. We ordered the *chupe de camarones*, a thick cream soup with shrimp, potatoes, cilantro, scallions, and a generous amount of chili peppers. This was a disappointment. *Chupe de camarones* is a perfect example of the complexity of Peruvian cuisine, and this rendition didn't do the concept justice.

Lomo saltado was on the menu. If Peru has a national dish, this is it: sautéed beef and tomatoes with onions, garlic, and chilis, served over rice or (more recently) french fries. Inca Gardens served it with both, and we'd go back for it.

Arroz chaufa is another traditional Peruvian dish. This is a Peruvian rendition of traditional Chinese fried rice. The rice is fried with egg, cilantro, ham, and other spices, and Inca Gardens serves it either with or without shrimp. We found this dish okay but bland, and it helped considerably when we poured the remaining sauce from our *ceviche* dish over the top.

There are a bunch of other things on the menu: salads, other seafood entrées, several chicken soups, pork and beef dishes. The restaurant served several traditional desserts, none of which we tried (sorry).

Inca Gardens has a lunch buffet on weekdays. It's the basics: *lomo saltado*, *arroz con pollo*, *seco* (a beef stew with cilantro sauce and some really interesting beans), *arroz chaufa*; all you can eat for $9. Dinners are more. Entrées hover around $10, with appetizers starting at $5.

A bottle of Inca Cola is $1.50. You will only need one bottle. Peru is one of the few countries where, for whatever reason, Coca-Cola has not been able to significantly penetrate the market. (Myanmar is another such, but there the People's Soft Drink Company has a military-sponsored monopoly.) Peruvians drink Inca Cola by the bucketful. We have no idea why; it tastes like bubblegum soda. Knowing that, on your way over to the restaurant, ask everyone in your party to consider what color Inca Cola might be. Keep your guesses secret. Order the stuff, and when it arrives: surprise!

Inca Gardens Peruvian Restaurant
87 E San Fernando St., San Jose
408-977-0816

Peruvian
L, D, FP, BW, $
http://www.incagardens.com

Inn at Little Washington

European restaurants have a different feel than American restaurants. The staff treats the diners differently, and the diners treat the staff differently. Service is more personal and, at the same time, more invisible. There's no "the customer is always right," yet the diner always leaves pleased. Waiters are there to solve problems, but customers aren't there to create them. A European restaurant simply flows differently.

There are a few American restaurants that are run more along the European model than the American model. French Laundry, in Napa Valley, is one. The Inn at Little Washington is another. Both of these restaurants are hours away from the closest big city. Coincidence? We don't know.

Washington, VA, is a two-hour drive from Washington, DC. It was platted by a teen-aged George Washington in 1749, and is the first and oldest town named "Washington" in the country. Owner/chef/hotel proprietor Patrick O'Connell opened the Inn in 1978, and has been wowing everyone who comes through his doors ever since. It's a quick vacation, a single day trip if you can afford the limo and chauffeur, the perfect place to propose marriage. It's one of the best dining experiences in the United States.

We went this year for Valentine's Day. According to the restaurant, over 1000 people tried to reserve one of their 100 places. By the time we called, the available reservations were at 5:30 or 9:30. And all they were serving, we were told, was a seven-course tasting menu at $180 a person.

The *amuse bouche* arrived while we considered the menu. Four different ones, actually. A rabbit-filled pastry, smoked salmon *en couche*, an onion tart, and a little ham sandwich. Rather than a single nibble, we were invited to take as many as we liked of each kind. The tasting menu wasn't a single menu; we could choose each of three courses plus dessert, with everything else fixed.

The first course was a small teacup of red bell pepper soup. Bell peppers can be the bullies of the produce department. This wasn't strong or bitter, but rich, creamy, and flavorful. Next came a heap of osetra caviar, topped with a bit of crème fraîche, in a steamed wonton wrapper, resting on a slice of lime. The whole bundle picked up a nicely acidic zing from the lime, and the crème fraîche tempered the salty caviar. A perfect combination.

For the third course—the first one we ordered—Bruce had a black truffle pizza. It was a perfect dish: a crisped-crust pizza with thick slices of truffle, bits of Virginia ham, asparagus, and fontina cheese. The flavors all blended beautifully, and every bite was a delight. Karen ordered the baby lamb carpaccio: a delicious and lively dish of thinly sliced raw meat and rosemary-flavored mustard.

The next course brought another pair of delicious dishes. One was a small white sausage (*boudin blanc*), served with the most delicious sauerkraut, a piece of chicken liver, a date wrapped in bacon, and some apple coulis. The sausage was cooked in Riesling, and you could taste the sweetness in the juices. The second dish was actually two: hot and cold foie gras. One piece was sautéed and served with baby endive; the other had a bit of Sauterne jelly on the side. Both were delicious.

A palate cleanser came next: a scoop of lemon verbena sorbet with a drizzle of Lemoncello on top. And it was served in a startlingly frank dish. (Think Judy Chicago.)

The main course—if there wasn't enough food already—came next. Karen ordered pot-au-feu. It was a beautiful dish: beef, chicken, and vegetables in a light and flavorful broth. Bruce's rabbit came braised in apple cider, accompanied by deliciously flavored spaetzle and wild mushrooms. Both dishes were perfect; the flavors blended together beautifully, and if we weren't already stuffed we would have devoured every bite. This is probably our only complaint: we wished the portions were smaller.

And then came dessert. Our eyes rolled at the thought of white chocolate ice cream with dark-chocolate hot sauce, panna cotta in a passion fruit sauce with raspberries, white chocolate mousse rolled in dark cake, and a good dozen other creations. When we were told that we could get small portions of seven different desserts, the choice was easy.

We could have substituted an after-dinner drink for the dessert course. This is a thoughtful option we've never seen before, but it wasn't tempting enough to skip the work of the dessert chef who made that wonderful lemon sorbet.

We could also have had a cheese course. The cheese cart was a wooden Guernsey cow with wheels, bearing a tray of cheeses on its back. We listened intently as the table next to us heard about the various offerings, made a few suggestions, and got a spoonful of Epoisses for our efforts.

And we had wine, of course. The Inn has a 14,000-bottle diverse cellar: lots of expensive wines if that's what you're looking for, as well as a hearty selection of bottles under $50. And they had a good selection of *demi boutelles*. Half a bottle of white and half a bottle of red is perfect for the two of us.

If there's one thing that stands out from the meal, it's how well the flavors went together. So many chefs in so many restaurants put dishes together from wild combinations of ingredients. Sometimes it's hard to remember what it's like when the combinations work; when all the flavors intermingle just so.

Our favorite subtlety of O'Connell's cooking is his deft understanding of salt. Food that tastes salty is one of the current poisons in today's food culture. We're not great fans of salty food. Half the time, we can't even find our salt shaker at home. But like fats, salt makes food taste good. At the Inn the dishes were never salty, but carried a light and subtle taste of salt.

A three-hour meal, bracketed by a pair of two-hour drives, is simply too much for a night's entertainment. If you go, you have to spend the night. There are only nine rooms and five suites at the Inn, so a small cottage industry of B&Bs has sprung up nearby to handle the overflow. The town's few streets are lined with galleries and antique shops, catering to the morning-after crowd. It's a lovely little mini-vacation from DC, and a perfect way to spend Valentine's Day.

Inn at Little Washington ✈
Main and Middle St, Washington, VA
540-675-3800

French
L, D, RE, FP, FB, R, $$$$

Jack in the Box

Karen collects PEZ. A couple of years ago, Jack in the Box had a PEZ promotion. She managed to snag a couple dozen of them without having a single meal there. We didn't want to break the record for this guide.

Jack in the Box
148 E San Carlos St, San Jose
408-287-7520

Fast Food
B, L, D, TO, KF, $
http://www.jackinthebox.com

Johnny Rockets

This is a theme restaurant found all over the country, and this won't be your only chance to go back to the fifties for hamburgers and cherry cokes. There's nothing wrong with it, but you might prefer Peggy Sue's, since that is a California original.

Johnny Rockets Restaurant
150 S First St, San Jose
408-977-1414

American
L, D, NR, $
http://www.johnnyrockets.com/

Some years ago, a lot of the Minneapolis crowd used to go south to Chicago every year for Windycon, in part for the con—which was fun—but, mainly, to go out on Saturday night to The Bakery, a prix fixe continental-style restaurant, owned and operated by chef Louis Szathmary, where the food was invariably wonderful and the service perfect.

One of the many virtues of the Bakery was the wine list, which was not overly large, but remarkably fairly priced, and it wasn't unusual for the wine bill to be larger than the food bill, and the company fairly well toasty by the end of the evening, as it was on this particular night, the first time Felicia and I had gone along.

And it was about the end of dessert that Steve Brust asked our sixtyish waiter about his accent, and he very politely replied, "I am Swiss," and I heard somebody whisper, sotto voce, "Well, that's what they all say," and realized that it was my voice.

Oops.

— *Joel Rosenberg*

Kabul

Kabul is the best Afghan restaurant in the South Bay. It's obvious from the moment you get out of your car. Despite its lackluster location on El Camino behind an Oriental rug store, the aroma hits you immediately. Brothers Najib and Adib Naimi run the place, the former in the dining room and the latter in the kitchen. The inspiration, and some of the recipes, comes from their mother.

Order anything you want, but make sure you taste one of their kabobs and one of their stews. We like the lamb and salmon kabobs best, but often order the lamb/chicken combination. They are all served with *pallaw*, seasoned rice. There are four stews on the menu, and often another as a sometimes special. The *badenjan challaw* is a beef, eggplant, and tomato stew. The *sabsi challaw* is a lamb and spinach stew. The *gulpi challaw* is a beef, cauliflower, and tomato stew. (*Challaw* is white, unseasoned rice, and comes with all of the stews.) Everything comes with a salad—there's powdered mint sprinkled on top—and Afghan flatbread.

Desserts are also delicious. Their baklava is wonderful. Or try the *firnee*, a cornstarch pudding with pistachios on top. There is a traditional cold drink called *dough*, which is made with yogurt; this was the only thing on the menu we did not like.

Kabul is on the fancy end of immigrant-run restaurants, with white tablecloths, carved wood, and healthy plants. Dinner will run you a little more, but we think it's a more pleasant meal.

Kabul 🚗
833 W El Camino Real, Sunnyvale
408-245-4350

Afghan
L, D, RR, FP, BW, KF, SF, $$

Traveling on a Honeymoon budget in 1975, my wife and I were riding the train second-class from Taipei to Taijung (Taiwan). It felt like a hundred twenty in our overcrowded, unair-conditioned car. About four hours into the trip, a vendor came wandering through carrying a large galvanized steel washtub filled with ice, atop which rode drinks in plastic bottles. Knowing none of the local language, I desperately pointed to one fruity-looking concoction, paid the vendor, uncapped the bottle, and hastily downed a long swig of the warmest, most vile-tasting liquid it has to this day been my misfortune to have imbibed.

Inquiring later of a passenger who spoke some English, I learned that what I had launched on my innocent, unsuspecting digestive system was a local taste treat comprised of two-thirds warm buttermilk and one-third tepid orange juice.

— *Alan Dean Foster*

Katie Bloom's

Even at noon it's dark in Katie Bloom's, which makes it a great make-out bar, if that's your thing. The bathrooms are notoriously horrid, it's noisy, can be crowded, and the whole place is Irish like $2 Budweisers at Happy Hour is Irish. We can't think of a single reason for fans to want to go here.

They serve food, though.

Katie Bloom's
150 S First St, San Jose
408-294-4408

Irish (sort of)
L, D, NR, FB, $$

Kukar's House of Pizza

The most important thing you need to know about the House of Pizza is that it's close, just a long block away from the convention center. The next most important thing you need to know about the House of Pizza is that they can easily serve parties of a dozen or more. The fact that the pizza is actually pretty good is almost irrelevant.

The House of Pizza is both a bar and a restaurant. Not a pretty Californian fern bar, but an old funky neighborhood bar. There's a jukebox. There's weird bar art on the wall. There's a video game room in one corner. And there's a kitchen in the back.

Walk to the back and order your pizza. They come in four sizes, all large. Even the "very small" is 11 inches in diameter. Toppings are oddly priced: a single price for 0–1 toppings, another single price for 2–5 toppings, and an additional charge for each topping over five. What this means is that if you want two toppings, you might as well get five. There's other stuff on the menu too: a couple of pastas, Italianesque sandwiches, burgers, etc. There's a tired-looking salad bar at one end. Our advice is to order the pizza. If you want a sandwich or a burger, go somewhere else.

After ordering, you'll get an upside-down cup with a number written on it. Take that beacon, find a table, and sit down. Your pizza will find you when it's done.

Expect to wait. Everything is made to order. On the plus side, your pizza is going to be fresh. On the minus side, it's going to be a 20-minute wait.

Traveling the world, we've had some weird pizza. We've seen Japanese pizza with shrimp and kiwi fruit. We've eaten pizza in Poland with BBQ sauce. We've eaten pizza in Naples with water buffalo cheese (better than you might think). This pizza is nothing like that; it's New York–style thin crust pizza. No, it's not New York pizza, it's New York style. (Actually, we're not interested in your "only in New York" story.)

House of Pizza makes a good thin crust. It's chewy, with a nice texture. The toppings are generous, and the sauce is thick and strong. The cheese is flavorful, and there's a lot of it. The cheese covers the entire pizza, up to the edges.

Unfortunately, it's not very easy to eat. For some reason, the kitchen cuts their pizzas in a checkerboard pattern. Middle pieces are very difficult to hold. And because the pizza was cut up immediately after coming out of the oven, the cheese was still liquid. Those first pieces are difficult to separate from the rest of the pie. All you get are paper plates and plastic forks, which makes the whole operation even more difficult. All we can suggest is to persevere. It's good pizza.

Since House of Pizza is also a bar, various beers are available. Nothing exciting. And there are no free refills on the sodas. We don't think there's anything wrong with that; we just wanted to warn you.

House of Pizza doesn't accept credit cards or checks. They do offer carry-out, and you can call ahead with your order. There's no delivery, but Karen and I have worked out a special delivery deal with the convention. First, call your order in to the House of Pizza. Then, walk the halls of the convention and look for a hungry teenager, one of the many who spent his last dollars on a hotel room and has no money left for food. Offer to feed him some of your pizza if he will just go to the House of Pizza and pick your order up. Hand over the money, and wait. You'll get your pizza delivered at a very reasonable charge, and you'll make a new friend. Sounds like a deal.

Kukar's House of Pizza **Pizza**
527 Almaden Ave, San Jose L, D, LL, NR, TO, FB, GG, $
408-292-6886

La Pastaia

La Pastaia is the sort of place you linger at, and come back to. This is Italian cooking, happily influenced by what's fresh and in season. The flavors here are complex but perfectly chosen. Have some wine, order *primi* and *secondi*, make sure to order dessert. If you've never had *osso buco*, try that. You can expect to spend $50 or more per person for a couple of courses, depending on the wine.

Or stop by for a quicker but highly civilized meal. Try a pizza or *insalate*; at lunch they have panini sandwiches. This idea will set you back about $15 with tax and tip. A nice way to enjoy one of San Jose's finest restaurants without breaking the bank. There's no dress code, but you're fairly expected to look nice.

La Pastaia (Hotel de Anza) **Italian**
233 W Santa Clara St, San Jose L, D, RR, TO, DL, PP, VP, FB, OS, R, SF, $$$
408-286-8686 http://www.lapastaia.com/

La Victoria Taqueria

Once you get past the inevitable disappointment you get when you translate a Mexican menu for an American's palate, you'll find everything's good here. The burritos are the star of the menu. Big but not overwhelming, and the meat fillings always taste fresh. Top that with the incredible secret recipe known locally as "RED SAUCE!!"; it's the stuff student legends are made of. If your palate doesn't go too far up the Scoville scale, you'll want to give it a miss. Likewise if you consider mayonnaise and its kin to be toxic substances.

La Vic offers vegetarian choices, too of course: it's Mexican. And they're open until 2 AM, which is perfect for those hard-partying evenings when you suddenly realize that you cannot make it until dawn on consuite potato chips. They open at 7 AM, too. All-Night Fandom, your bases are covered.

La Victoria Taqueria
140 W San Carlos St, San Jose
408-298-5335

Mexican
B, L, D, LL, LLL, GG, KF, PW, $

Le Boulanger

A family-owned California original, this bakery chain has 19 locations in the Bay Area. They bake a wide range of breads, pastries, and cookies, and also offer soups, salads, and sandwiches. Lunch here should set you back about $7. They also bake edible cornucopias for the holidays; maybe they could whomp up something fabulous for your room party. May as well ask.

Le Boulanger
95 S Market St, San Jose
408-286-6780

Bakery/Cafe
L, D, TO, $$
http://www.leboulanger.com

Le Papillon

When Bruce founded Counterpane Internet Security, its corporate offices were in San Jose (at the intersection of 280 and 880), but our home was, and still is, in Minneapolis. We had no desire to move, and that was that. Several months later, we decided to rent an apartment in San Jose—near the office—to make the commute easier. Our apartment was in Oakwood.

Oakwood is a powerhouse in the long-term corporate housing industry. They have rental units all over the country; indeed, they have rental units all over the world. We can't speak to any locations other than the one we stayed in, but friends agree with our experiences. Which are ick, bleck, and yuk. Oakwood manages to combine the worst aspects of a hotel with the worst aspects of an apartment. The apartments are furnished with low-grade furniture. The weekly cleaning is cursory, but manages to leave an industrial smell. The front office closes at night, so if something goes wrong—you're locked out, for example—it can take hours to fix the problem. We shudder at the memory.

The only thing to recommend the Oakwood on Saratoga Avenue is that you can walk to Le Papillon.

Le Papillon is an anomaly: a fine French restaurant in a strip mall. It's a separate building and looks kind of like a house on the corner. Across the street you can get laser eye surgery. Busy Stevens Creek Boulevard is just up the block. But inside is a pretty restaurant, with attentive service and excellent food.

We've been there a bunch of times: sometimes just the two of us, sometimes with another couple, and sometimes Bruce with a table of business associates. We've never been disappointed. The menu changes regularly (and is available online), so it's difficult to recommend specific dishes. But here are some highlights from the last meal we had there.

To start, we tried the sugar snap pea soup with roasted shiitake mushrooms. It was warm, smooth, and subtle, the few slices of red bell pepper on top adding welcome color and flavor. The pan-seared foie gras with Madeira and truffles was delicious. The waiter offered a glass of sauternes with the dish. And the sautéed abalone with grapefruit *beurre blanc* and watercress salad was a delightful surprise, the grapefruit giving a citrusy punch to the abalone.

The main courses were just as good. The braised breast of duck with gingered orange glaze and wild rice crépe was crispy and not too fatty, and the ginger-orange sauce worked well with the dish. The pan-seared *ahi* tuna topped with foie gras in pinot noir and black currant glaze was unexpected; we figured the foie gras and pinot noir would be too much for the *ahi*. Nope. The last dish was the noisettes of red deer with cabernet-thyme reduction, which wasn't anything special.

We were too stuffed for dessert, but from previous visits we know that the Grand Marnier soufflé is worth ordering. (You'll be asked at the start of the meal if you want it, since it requires a head start.) The orange and bittersweet chocolate tart is delicious, and they always have interesting sorbets.

Le Papillon's wine list is notable. They have an extensive selection of West Coast and French wines. We are particularly enamored of their pinot noir selection, and have found excellent wines at reasonable (for a restaurant) prices.

The dining room is better suited for a romantic dinner than a business meeting, although they get some of both. The several rooms give the restaurant a cozier atmosphere than its size indicates. The tables are not crowded together, and the room doesn't buzz with the constant din of conversation. The décor is similarly muted: pretty walls and floral decorations.

The waitstaff is blessedly unobtrusive. They are pleasant and efficient, explaining ingredients or preparations, taking orders, serving food. All the way through, everything here professional and delightful.

But not cheap. Dinner can easily cost $60, wine extra. The same menu is available for lunch; figure about $15 less per person. We think it's worth it, though, either way.

Le Papillon
410 Saratoga Ave, San Jose
408-296-3730

French
L, D, RR, FP, R, $$$
http://www.lepapillon.com

Lou's Living Donut Museum

You all know your line: "Mmmmmm…" And we hope you can get your donut-loving self to a printer, because Lou's Web site offers a 10% off coupon. Use it early; they'll sell out of all the good stuff by noon. These donuts are so lovingly made, they're practically good for you. Specially ground flour, free-range chicken eggs, their own house-cultivated yeast, and secret recipes. They'll let you visit the kitchen, too. And get this…they deliver.

Some of your obvious and wonderful options: Apple Fritter, Honey Whole Wheat, Vanilla-glazed, Chocolate-glazed, Maple-glazed, Blueberry Cake, Chocolate Bar, and more and more. Just go. But go early.

Lou's Living Donut Museum
387 Delmas, San Jose
408-295-5887

Donuts
B, L, D, NR, TO, DL, $
http://heartsdelight.com/lous

McDonald's

No two countries with McDonald's have ever gone to war with each other. If they served whirled peas, it would be too perfect.

McDonald's
90 E San Carlos St, San Jose
408-279-9180

Fast Food
B, L, D, TO, KF, $
http://www.mcdonalds.com

Miro's (Crowne Plaza Hotel)

Miro's is a short step better than a typical business-hotel restaurant. Nothing's actively horrible, but nothing is very good, either. If you want a quick meal and are happy to pay hotel-restaurant prices, Miro's will work. If you're looking for something that you will savor, try someplace else.

The menu is Mediterranean-ish, which only means that you see Mediterranean accents on many of the dishes. Like any good hotel restaurant, you can choose from salads, pastas, meat, and fish. During the day there are sandwiches. The dinner appetizers look like they do in any hotel restaurant in the country. There's a lunch-time buffet, but it has never looked appetizing enough to try out.

The menu tries to be more than it is. Instead of a simple steak sandwich, you can order a "steak sandwich with grilled aged ribeye steak, grilled onions, peppers, and Boursin cheese on a sesame roll or a hoagie." Or you can try a dinner of "herb crusted sea bass with lobster ravioli fritter, bok choy, and spicy Asian sauce." That's the obligatory Asian-influenced fish dish, by the way, and it wasn't very good.

At least Miro's is fast. Hotel restaurants know from people in a hurry, and the food comes out quickly. And the restaurant is clean and well-lighted. When Bruce comes out for conferences, he always sees people having meetings at Miro's, their laptops buzzing amongst the dishes and glasses.

And he sometimes goes there on purpose, even. Generally he orders the club sandwich which, this being California, comes with avocado.

Miro's (Crowne Plaza) **Mediterranean**
282 Almaden Blvd, San Jose B, L, D, $$
408-998-0400

Museum Café

There's no admission fee at the San Jose Museum of Art, so enjoy their 20th century art collection before you head for the cafe. If you just want to see the collection's highlights, you can get a guided tour. Those run daily at 12:30 PM and 2:30 PM. You can even round up some friends and get yourselves a group tour. More on that at (408) 271-6875.

The cafe is good. It's one of those operations run by a catering company, this one with the obvious name Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme Caterers. We find these arrangements are common in museums and theaters, and generally, like this one, work well. The homemade soups are great, and the salads are fresh and crisp. Try any of the chichi sandwiches; we liked the Asian beef. Grab a seat on the patio if the weather's nice. And check out the gift shop before you leave.

Museum Café (San Jose Museum of Art) **American**
110 S Market St, San Jose L, NR, $
408-993-0765

A Dry Martini

A short story by Vernor Vinge

Did I guess that Ferret Fowler would be famous? No way. And sometimes I think the galaxy would be a better place if the little guy had stood just a bit closer to his first experiment. We might not have so many successful colonies, but we also wouldn't have bad guys armed with hypernovas.

Back in '78, Ferret was my science officer aboard the *Nelson Bond*. Those were the days. The teleport drive was only a couple of decades old. The human race had finally realized its awesome uniqueness: life is common in the universe, but off Mother Earth, there's nothing smarter than algae mats.

You know all that and it doesn't bother you; Ferret has made remodeling planets so easy for you. But in '78, out by the Orion Nebula, things didn't look easy at all.

Planet 3 of Survey Star 34920029 was an earthlike world with a near-circular orbit, right in the middle of the system's temperate zone. Maybe one in a million solar systems is so nice. The place was a regular paradise. Of course, there were a few glitches. In fact, they were what the Advanced Projects Agency had hired us to fix. See, Planet 3 was about a billion years older than Earth. Once upon a time, there might have been life there. But then—as eventually happens—the oceans dissociated into space or were soaked up by the planetary crust, and we were left with endless bone-dry seabeds. But the system's comet cloud was still in place. APA wanted us to rebuild the oceans with comet water and then import the beginnings of a terrestrial ecology.

This made Ferret Fowler a key player. His techs were flitting around the local Oort cloud, prepping a couple of thousand comets for teleportation. But was Ferret out there with his people? No, he spent the whole time down at our base camp on Planet 3, on a mountain that long ago had been the Mauna Kea of this world's lost oceans. When I complained to him about this, he was full of explanations. "Just measuring the seabeds, Madam Captain."

"That's 'Captain Lee,' Lieutenant Fowler."

"Um, yes, ma'am." Ferret seemed to be searching for something in the sky. I had caught up with him well outside of the camp work area, after sunset. Here at SS34920029, we were just fifty light-years from the wisps of the Orion Nebula. The view wasn't the colorful fireworks of astronomical photography. Instead, there was a great sweep of barely seen mists and swirls; imagine Orion's sword fifteen degrees across and half the sky above that the dark eminence of the Orion Molecular Cloud.

Ferret waved his hands at the sky. "We've only got two recon-sats, ma'am, and I want to map the oceanbeds to one-centimeter accuracy. We, we need that to make sure that the comets are all spot on."

"One-hundred-meter accuracy should be enough, Fowler. Who cares if dead

real-estate gets thumped?"

"Um, well..." Aha. He was watching a light that moved slowly across the northern sky. The bright little spark wasn't one of our recon-sats. It was APA's contract compliance ship, the *Winston P. Sanders*.

I know Ferret says in his memoirs that he conceived his Great Idea before the *Nelson Bond* ever left Earth. But that's baloney. Certainly, a hi-res topographic map was necessary for the stunt that he eventually pulled. But I know that wasn't yet in his head. You see, whatever he says in his memoirs, Ferret was hanging around the base camp for a much simpler reason:

He pointed at the *Winston P. Sanders*, the tiny light dimming toward the horizon. "Do you think Sheila will visit us again?"

Sheila. APA's contract manager. Ferret was in love.

"Damn it, Ferret! You've been goldbricking just to get a date?"

"But I know she'd like me if she would just give me a chance! I invited her groundside, you know. For a drink. I have special skill with very dry martinis. I was sure if I waited long enough, she would show."

Lord. I grabbed Fowler by the scruff of his respirator. "Listen up, Lieutenant. Sheila Mbabe is an APA officer. A professional. She might show for a final signoff on this job, not for a date with one of my crewfolk." And professional ethics aside, I couldn't imagine her having any interest in Ferret.

"Yes, ma'am." There was despair in his voice. So even then, he hadn't got his Great Idea. I remember how he turned away and stared up at the glow of Orion. He was thinking about Sheila Mbabe, and his dry martini and retreating into the depths of interstellar space to avoid the futility of it all. "Have you ever thought, ma'am, what's up there in the molecular clouds?"

I shrugged, still pissed as hell to have this jerk in my crew. "Gas. Dust. Lots of little stars trying to get born."

He laughed, kind of a wondering giggle. "Yes, and the bigger siblings blowing away what the smaller ones need. The gasses are mostly hydrogen—molecular, atomic, ionized. But there are also vast lots of water and organics. That nearest lobe, the Butt of Orion, that's four light-years across. A molecule here, a molecule there, there's a million times more water than in all the oceans we've ever seen."

"Yes, and it's totally inaccessible. If wishes were fishes, Mr. Fowler, you'd be a rich man. Your tech people have their hands full just landing a few thousand comets from near space."

"But maybe it would be easier to... Oh my." Fowler's gaze came down from the heavens. I wasn't sure in the darkness, but I think his eyes were wide.

He didn't say anything more, but I swear, that's the true moment when the Great Idea came together in the little guy's head. God help me, maybe if I hadn't pushed him, it wouldn't have happened.

Sheila Mbabe ran her contracts by the book. If the comets didn't teleport

onto Planet 3's seabeds by milestone date thus-and-so, she was gonna sock us with big penalties.

I had her convinced we were on schedule. On paper, we were on schedule. Ferret had his crew reports: a few hundred judiciously placed nukes had tailored the comets so they could be teleported by our equipment. But I had serious doubts he was doing due diligence. I noticed that Ferret was pounding the ship's computers day and night—"Just certifying the comets' configuration," he said, though his programs were from no standard library. He disassembled and modified the *Nelson Bond*'s remote teleport system. "Just checking that the teleport can handle all the comets per the contract schedule," was his excuse on that. But Jim Russell—my systems chief—told me that in fact the teleport had been defocused.

I was giving Ferret all the rope he needed to hang himself. Come the big day, our teleport wouldn't be grabbing anything, and Ferret would preside over a grand non-event. We'd be assessed penalties and have to start over again—only now I'd have cause to boot Ferret's ass all the way back to Sol, and we could do things right.

So it was all Ferret's show the day the comets were to rain upon Planet 3. Sheila Mbabe stayed in orbit. The little guy had failed to get her down for a drink, but for once he had her full attention.

My ship and crew hadn't moved from our mountain on Planet 3. I figured ground zero was the safest place to be considering how badly Ferret had messed up the teleport. All that was fine with Lieutenant Fowler; I think he truly had everything planned out by now. Well, almost everything. It turned out he was overlooking one small and nearly fatal detail.

Ferret had set up a grandstand for me, himself, a few crewfolk, and the conspicuously absent Sheila Mbabe. He'd even stolen a half liter of vermouth from the ship's cook. It sat on a linen tablecloth in front of the cameras. The scene was seriously pathetic. Fowler had a speech prepared. "Good afternoon, Sheila. I promised you we'd make the contract milestone, and today you will see that we have. Behold the 'before' picture." He gestured at billion-year-dead seabeds under a dry blue sky. "Today you will have oceans, Sheila!"

Mbabe's face was visible on a display flat. I suppose she is a looker; I grant that Fowler's baser instincts are conventional enough. Mbabe gave a strained smile; she knew she was dealing with a loon. "We don't need instant oceans, Lieutenant. Give us two thousand on-target, soft-impact comets." So she didn't know what Ferret was planning, either. Back then, APA and everyone else thought that making oceans—even the dinky things specified in their contracts—was something that took comets and a few decades of meltdown time.

Ferret's eyes lit up. "No! I can do much better than that. Have you ever thought—" he waved a hand at the blue sky "—that more than we'll ever need is in the interstellar medium? Water and oxygen and hydrogen. Organics up through the beginnings of complex carbo—"

A look of blue-black annoyance was beginning to show on Mbabe's beautiful

face. "Lieutenant, what are you talking about? You're dreaming of teleporting cubic light-years of interstellar medium? That will never be possible. How could you possibly balance the energies?

"Not to mention matching momenta," I put in. I figured it was time to show some appropriate professional suspicion. "What you've supposedly spent weeks preparing the comets for, Lieutenant."

"That's just it!" Ferret replied. "Porting two thousand comets is a discrete problem! That's always harder than the continuous case. Out in the Butt of Orion, we've got Yotta-tonnes of very thin gasses. I can use the *Bond*'s teleport system almost like a radio tuner. Now our teleport is something radically new—a translurponator, I call it. I can tune for the compounds, for the position and velocity vectors we want. Only the tiniest fraction of Orion will satisfy all the criteria, but that's far more than we need!"

"I...see." Sheila Mbabe might look like sweet sixteen but contract managers see enough crazy snowjobs not to put up with them overly long. Her gaze shifted; she was looking around...for me. "Captain Lee, I think it's clear that the *Nelson Bond* has failed to meet Milestone Requirement 37a, 'delivery of proto-oceanic payloads to seabed of target'—to wit, Planet 3 of SS34920029. Don't you agree that it would be best to skip the formalities and proceed to the penalty phase?"

She seemed to understand there was only one screwball here. I could recover most of the fines—with a new science officer.

But Ferret wasn't finished: "No, no, no, no! Sheila, I can do everything I say! And if you were here now, we could celebrate with the driest martini in the universe. Watch this!" He twitched some kind of white hanky off the table top, uncovering a big red button. The little guy was in a panicky rush now; he had obviously intended more of a buildup. He reached out and pounded the red button....

You may have guessed that I'm not one of Ferret's maximum admirers. He has his failings, astronomical ones, not the least being his lying memoirs. But I'll give him this. Ferret had done his math. This was humanity's first taste of the "Fowler Translurponator." Ferret had measured the seabeds to the centimeter and he had matched the translurponated matter exactly. Nowadays, that's easy to do, but except for one small detail Ferret got everything exactly right, on the first try. (Need I mention that if he had done less, we all would have died?)

It was so perfect that Mbabe's gaze hardened into frank anger. "Captain Lee, I don't like jokes. Turn off the digital animation."

"Wha—?" I said, and then I looked up from her face, across the grandstand, out over the...ocean that spread to the horizon. One second there had been deep canyons and seabed. The next second, placid waves.

"It's real, Sheila!" Ferret said, all but dancing. "A perfect slurp." He grabbed his vermouth and jogged off toward the—what else can I call it?—the beach. "And now for the symbolic toast, Sheila. The drink I promised you."

We stared as Fowler ran toward the gentle surf. Something in the back of

my mind was saying that this was all special effects. No matter how perfect the velocity match, no matter how completely he'd dumped the excess energy, there must still be side effects. He had just set millions of Gigatonnes of water on this world. The relevant term here was "isostatic equilibrium"—or the lack thereof. "Fowler! Get your ass back here! There'll be earthquakes. All that water."

And the ground bounced against our feet, the tiniest preview.

Ferret laughed—but he stopped short of the surf. "We've got at least ten minutes before the first tsunami hits," he shouted. "And it's not water, Captain!"

I looked at my system chief. He shrugged. I lifted the hood of my respirator and took a sniff. "God Almighty."

Fowler balanced on the shifting rock, trying to pour a jigger of vermouth, and laughing like the maniac he is. "The ocean is pure ethanol. See, Sheila? A drink as big as the world. And now just one ounce of vermouth for—"

Yeah, yeah, for the Driest Martini in the Universe. But only if Ferret was quick about it: Jim Russell grabbed my arm and pointed out to sea. The air had been clear a moment ago, even after the arrival of the ethanol. Now—there was glowing haze out on the horizon. Violet and bright, it grew into the sky. Ferret had accounted for all the cosmically large dangers but—

"Ferret! It's not a martini, it's Planet 3 flambé!"

Fowler looked up, gave a muffled squeak of terror. He tossed his vermouth into the sea, and then we were all racing up the hill toward the Nelson Bond, doing our best to beat the Mach 1 explosion front that was rolling in behind us.

That ethanol fire was worldwide, but the plate tectonics effects were still more energetic, throwing junk kilometers into the air. The *Nelson Bond* and the *Winston P. Sanders* spent the next weeks in orbit. Dense clouds of very bizarre content obscured The Driest Martini in the Universe. Lightning and other explosive gleams leaked through, even after the free oxygen had been consumed.

The military and various science and news services showed up almost immediately. In his memoirs, Fowler says they were struck dumb by his achievement. Maybe. I know the Nelson Bond was under orbital arrest, while the Advanced Projects Agency tried to decide if we had:

a) screwed up terraforming beyond all human imagination,

b) opened a new era of planetary engineering,

c) both of the preceding.

Ferret put on a brave front, but it was clear he was very nervous. He claimed that he could have slurped water even more easily than ethanol—and he seemed to realize that maybe that would have been the happier alternative.

I kept the little guy in the dark, and meantime did my best to convince APA that our accomplishment was a kindly version of (c): "a revolutionary advance, proof of a principle that could easily terraform new worlds, once the bugs are ironed out." I know Ferret claims I used this time to try to grab credit for myself.

That is not so! Though I do confess, I was happy to see him squirm. After all, he had come within seconds of truly toasting us all.

The day I got word that APA was declaring Ferret's Translurponator "a revolutionary advance," I went down to his cabin and had a final chat with him. I was going to tell him the news, but first I wanted see him take one more slow turn in the wind.

Now his cabin was decorated with plans for his invention: Planets coreward of Giant Molecular Clouds would be easy to terraform. The waste heat could be dumped into the clouds themselves. And "fun" new weapons were possible. You could slurp a good part of the hydrogen in a GMC into a single superstellar mass. The potential energy release would be hypernova-sized.

Ferret was fully fretful. "I don't understand why Sheila hasn't come by. I did all this for her."

I looked at his galaxy-spanning engineering schemes. It was scary to think that this little jerk, sixty Kilograms of rogue hormones and worse judgment, could literally turn the universe inside out. I opened my mouth to tell him APA's decision, but Ferret wasn't listening. "There must be something more I can show her. It would be easy to tune for multiple chemical species. I bet I could slurp higher saccharides and aliphatics, anything that exists in gas state or on interstellar grains in the Giant Molecular Clouds. Maybe I could even select for chirality." His eyes glazed over. "Yes!"

And that's why I say I've been present at all Ferret's great moments, and even had a hand in making them happen. If I hadn't kept Fowler ignorant about APA's findings, there's at least one more thing he might never have imagined. I think you know what I'm talking about.

The Chocolate Sundae Incident.

Blue Plate Special

BjoTrimble

Drell Barph surveyed the wreckage of his Dahgi Bahgg Diner, once the finest (well, possibly not truly the finest, but certainly the most popular) café in Terra Nova's lower east end of the mining satellite. Well, not a diner as one might interpret that word, but certainly the best damned eatery that allowed a homogeneous assortment of extragalactic aliens to rub elbows (or what passed for elbows).

The décor, carefully crafted after ancient records of old Earth diners, was even more of a mess than usual, due to the sudden impact of several violently dissatisfied customers. That big wrinkled-brow warrior alien and his large ugly friends had, in a fit of gourmet pique, seen to it that nothing in the building remained in its original form, including much of the plumbing and wiring.

Barph sighed, and kicked a badly damaged "There are things man was never meant to know" sign out of his path. He'd done a great deal of research on getting the right ambiance, including the required grease-and-blood-smeared walls and casually roach-checkered floors. Barph had hired the requisite tattooed surly chef—and not one of those 'hey-I've seen-you-on-TeeVid' cuisine wimps, but a good, cheap, fast-order cook whose customers didn't usually drop dead before they'd left the building. He'd found overly cheerful waitresses to wear well-starched hankies (a truly odd Earth custom) spread like flowers across at least one of their multitudinous breasts. He'd gone to a lot of trouble to obtain an expensive galaxy-wide collection of authentic knee-slapping diner signs to hang on the walls: "Trust your mother, but count your tentacles," "I'll be back—hasta la vista, baby," "He's dead, Jim," "Never trust a µH¬Q'l with your favorite wife," and his prize sign: "Never tell me the odds!"

Barph sighed again. It was a hard-earned lesson, but now he needed to add another sign to the crumbling walls: "Never serve crottled greeps to a Klingon."

NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO
THERE YOU ARE!
LET the WOOKIE WIN!
WHY I IS A LOUSE

Through Thyme and Spice with Ferdinand Feghoot

Barry Gehm and Bill Higgins (with apologies to Grendel Briarton)

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Changing spaceliners on his way back from a sightseeing expedition to the Orion Nebula, Ferdinand Feghoot was obliged to lay over briefly at an out-of-the-way orbital transfer station near Bellatrix. Lunchtime found him on the station's food service level, standing before a shuttered restaurant and mourning a missed opportunity to sample crottled greeps à la Rigel IX. His gustatory regrets were interrupted by the sound of raised voices. Three humans were engaged in an angry discussion with the station manager and each other, and the group was approaching the closed Rigellian restaurant. As they drew near, they of course recognized the galactically renowned adventurer, bon vivant, epicure, and sage, and presented their dispute to him.

"These gentlebeings," said the station manager, waving a blue tendril, "are the owners of the three Terran restaurants on this station. Peng Fu owns the China Garden, Emmanuel Schwartz owns Manny's Deli, and Juan Garcia owns the Jalapeño Hut." Indicating the defunct Rigellian establishment with another tendril, he continued, "As you can see, this cafe has recently gone out of business, and each of these humans wishes to take over the newly available space. The rents are fixed by our charter, so I cannot simply allocate it to the highest bidder. I am at a loss what to do. Perhaps if you hear their reasons for wanting the space, you can come to a decision."

Garcia spoke first: "I want to use the extra space to install more equipment. At present, my establishment is little more than a taqueria, but with a bigger kitchen I could serve gourmet dinners, and offer travelers serious Mexican cuisine."

Then Peng explained his reasons. "I already have a full menu, but I want to add more seating. After all, Chinese cooking is the most widespread cuisine on Earth, and therefore the most representative of our planet."

Finally, Schwartz spoke: "I keep a kosher deli, both for myself and my customers. But the limited space makes it difficult to maintain the required separation of meat and dairy items. Working in such a small kitchen, it's difficult to keep all the utensils properly segregated, and I often have to shut down, throw food away, and rigorously clean everything because of possible cross-contamination. If I can set up a separate kitchen in the new space, I can completely separate the fleishig and milchig operations, and make sure everything stays kosher."

Feghoot pondered a while, and then rendered his decision. "While all of these gentlemen want to serve their customers better, mere business considerations do not have the force of religious obligation. Mr. Schwartz should have the extra space, since he needs it to better obey the rules of his faith. To put it more simply," he explained, "the needs of Manny outweigh the needs of Fu, or Juan."

Old Spaghetti Factory

We have nothing but a warm and fuzzy fondness for you, dear reader. There is nearly nothing we won't do for you. We'll eat the weird food, try the strange new restaurant, dutifully take notes when we should be enjoying ourselves. And we'll write up these reviews and pass them out to you, free of charge, because we care.

We really do.

But we refuse to eat at the Old Spaghetti Factory. Nope. We won't do it, and you can't make us.

We've both eaten there, somewhere in the country, when we couldn't otherwise avoid it. It reminded us of Chef Boyardee. But we lived through it. We know it's not fatal. If we were a pair of anal-retentive compleatist types, we could eat there again. But what's the point? We know what it will be like: crowded and terrible.

Karen doesn't even like their font.

There are enough interesting Italian restaurants close to the convention that there's no need to consider eating here, unless the Old Spaghetti Factory chain product is something you already know and like. Or you have children. In either case, you don't need us to tell you about it.

Old Spaghetti Factory
51 N San Pedro St, San Jose
408-288-5241

Italian-American
L, D, RR, GG, KF, $
http://www.osf.com/

Original Joe's

The 1960s were a simpler time in American dining. Steak ruled the menu, and dinner meant a huge slab of meat. Salads meant iceberg lettuce. People ordered shrimp cocktail if they wanted to be fancy. Fish was an afterthought, and no one ordered it anyway. This restaurant is a time machine. It's been sitting in this spot, unchanged, since 1956. That whole California Cuisine thing, the final quarter of the twentieth century: Original Joe's never noticed.

The time machine turns on as soon as you walk into the restaurant. It's dark, with a décor somewhere between a supper club and a 1960s diner. Bow-tied waiters scurry here and there with plates overflowing with meat. There's a counter to your left, for you kitchen junkies who like to watch, and there's rows of Naugahyde-covered booths in front of you. A hostess is happy to take you to your table.

The menu looks like it was designed in the 1960s. "Italian food excellently prepared by our trained chefs," it says at the top. Actually, the menu is only Italian-esque. You can get spaghetti as a side dish, and some of the dishes come with tomato sauce on top. But think meat: steak, prime rib, veal. There's chicken and there are some seafood dishes. There's a section for sandwiches (if you want something smaller) and salads (if you want something lighter). They also serve breakfast (although they don't open until lunchtime).

The entrées all come with a choice of sides. You can get French fries, baked

potato, vegetables, or ravioli or spaghetti (the aforementioned Italian selections). And the portions are enormous. The veal *parmigiana* completely covers the plate. The mound of deep-fried scallops is a vast pile. The steaks are sold by weight, and they're huge. The pot roast looks as if it would serve a family of four.

Almost makes you wish it all tasted good.

Not that the food tastes actively bad; it's just uninspired to the 21st century palate. The restaurant is full during mealtimes; this is obviously what their clientele wants. But we have nothing to recommend, nothing we can point to and say: "they do that well." What they do well is remind you how far the restaurant industry has come in the United States since 1956.

Original Joe's has kept up with the times in one area: prices. Most entrées run in the $15–$18 range, with steaks slightly higher and sandwiches less than $10. When you get your bill from the waiter, remember to check his math. There's no computerized system here; the waiters total the bills by hand.

Original Joe's
301 S First St, San Jose
408-292-7030

Italian
B, L, D, LL, LLL, NR, TO, FP, FB, KF, OS, R, $$
http://www.originaljoes.com/

The Pagoda (Fairmont Hotel)

Pagoda is the "good" restaurant in the Fairmont Hotel. The Fairmont is the premier hotel in downtown San Jose, so we expected good things out of their premier restaurant. And San Jose is filled with Chinese, so we expected good things out of their Chinese restaurant. On top of all this, Pagoda has received some good reviews in the past.

Oh, well.

It's a dramatic room, filled with Chinese antiques and original art. The table is beautiful, decked with fine china and a linen tablecloth. The service is attentive and efficient; the bow-tied waiters move with grace and charm, and there are never any language problems. The menus are large; the dozens of dishes are nicely described. Clearly this is not your typical neighborhood Chinese restaurant.

But it was relatively empty. And there wasn't an Asian face to be seen, aside from the servers.

If we were to describe the food in one word, it would be "weak." Everything we were served, while aesthetically interesting, was culinarily boring. On the appetizers menu, the pot stickers and fried prawns were both tasteless. The hot and sour soup was neither hot nor sour, although brimming with ingredients. Even the jasmine tea was weak.

Our entrées were no better. The beef with ginger scallion sauce was bland, nothing like what we've come to expect from good Chinese restaurants. The honey walnut prawns were worse than bland; with its sickeningly sweet mayonnaise-like sauce, it pandered to the palate. The Kung Pao shrimp tasted like generic Chinese

food. The best thing we ordered was the spicy scallops, but only because the hot chili oil gave the otherwise boring dish some interest.

And the portions were small.

And lukewarm. If there's one thing about Chinese cooking, it's that the food comes out of the kitchen hot. We can't remember another Chinese restaurant that couldn't manage to serve the food hot. Given how good the servers are, only sheer incompetence in the kitchen could explain food served less than piping hot. And yet two of our four dishes were served lukewarm.

And the fortune cookies were stale.

The service, on the other hand, was up to par with the rest of the Fairmont Hotel. Our food came quickly. We got all the rice we wanted. We always had tea and water. Our lukewarm dishes were promptly removed, and returned a few minutes later piping hot. But good service cannot mask lousy food. There are dozens of Chinese restaurants in Silicon Valley where you can get a far better meal at a third of the price. Unless you've barricaded yourself in the Fairmont, go elsewhere.

Pagoda (Fairmont Hotel) **Chinese**
170 S Market St, San Jose D, RR, FP, FB, GG, R, $$$
408-998-3937

Palermo Ristorante Italiano

Sicilian food, Italian waiters, four huge dining rooms. What's not to like? Well, eating here is going to take all evening. Expect long waits between courses, slow service, and a feeling of being ignored a lot of the time. It's such a big place that there'll be room for you with a big group, which will be fun if you plan to make an evening of it. But it'll drive you crazy if you have that Fear Of Missing Something that makes you rush back to the con.

Entrées here are generally under the $20 mark, but some of the appetizers are as expensive as the entrées. The antipasto cart is a nice touch; so is the house-made tiramisu. The ladyfingers in it reminded us how that dessert is supposed to be made.

Palermo Ristorante Italiano **Italian**
394 S Second St, San Jose L, D, RR, PP, FB, GG, $$
408-297-0607 http://www.palermoristorante.com/

The weird thing about SF conventions is that no matter how fat you are, you're sure to see someone bigger (not taller: wider) and bulgier than you are. So you can delude yourself into thinking, "Gee, I'm not that fat…" Having been a large boned person much of my life, coming down with type 2 Diabetes was very much a wake-up call for me. Definitely time to stop and smell the napalm.

And having lost so much weight at the start of this rest of my life—and more to the point, managing to keep off the 25 to 30 pounds for nearly two years now—I go out to restaurants a lot less. I want to know exactly how much fat, how much sugar, how many carbohydrates are in those meals I'm ingesting. I'm happy that my weight, my blood pressure and blood sugar, my cholesterol are all normal now. For the first time in decades, I'm happier with the way I look. I can look down and see my belt buckle, and I've spent a lot of money on new clothing.

Conventions are a real challenge. Like so many people, I'd never been aware of how food-centered our society really was. (I was aware of how sex-saturated we were: the ads, the covers of magazines, the teenagers, so many facets of our lives.) Convention hotels are a major part of this underlying empire of food. Many hotel restaurants have an all-you-can-eat buffet, and the restaurants near the hotel do likewise (because it's easier, in a strong economy, to serve food that way than try to hire waiters to work on Labor Day weekend).

Most conventions have a Meet-the-Pros ice cream social, or the Hugo Awards pre-gathering for nominees has a dessert party. There's sugar everywhere, even at the parties, where death-by-chocolate is a common theme. Lately, we've even been getting sugar parties, with tons of candy and junk-food laden tables set for the undiscriminating attendees. I tend to look for pretzels or a plate of rabbit food, and I'm grateful for the invention of diet soda pop, though the number of parties that cater to those of us who like what we look like—and want to continue to fit into our clothing—is a preciously small number

In the last two years, I have met an impressive number of fans and professionals who are now diabetic: enough for a large, Hugo- and Nebula-award winning convention attendance. I like being complimented on the amount of weight I've lost. I groan when I get seated in hotel restaurants next to the buffet table, when people with way too much of their bellies hanging over their belts complain that piles of pancakes higher than a dozen or so tend to flop off their plates.

I guess you can say that like fandom, watching what I eat has become a way of life. For me, there's no alternative.

— *Andrew Porter*

Paolo's

Paolo's is the best classical Italian restaurant in the South Bay. Better yet, it's a block and a half from the convention center. If you're looking for a quiet and classy meal within walking distance, this is your restaurant. If you're looking for good Italian food, and not the American-Italian that is served much too often, then this is your restaurant.

Everything is delicious. The simple plates—like the pasta with tomato-basil sauce—are sublime. The complex dishes—like the veal roll stuffed with proscuitto, cheese, sage, roasted mushrooms, kale, and marsala sauce—are interesting and tasty. The kitchen serves a wide selection of seafood, pasta, game, and other Italian specialties. And they do it with consistency and flair. Desserts are excellent, too. You can easily have a four-course meal here.

There's a good wine list, and Paolo's has a full bar with some interesting items: fine ports, cognac, grappa, and single malts. Pity the restaurant closes between lunch and dinner (2:30–5:30); otherwise it would be a nice place to hide for the afternoon.

Service is old-world: a bit stuffy, but fine once you get used to it. It's not the kind of restaurant where you rush in, grab yourself a plate of pasta and a steak, and then rush back to the con. Dinner in Italy can last four hours. Service is quicker here, but the kitchen runs on European time.

It's not cheap, though. Entrées are generally north of $20; pastas something less. Even lunches are between $10 and $20. Put a couple of courses together with a glass of wine, and you've spent a $50 bill before you know it.

Paolo's has been around since 1958, and has been a San Jose favorite even before anyone had ever heard of San Jose. It consistently gets all sorts of awards. We have always had an excellent meal here, and everyone we've taken here has been pleased. This is one of the good ones.

Paolo's
333 W San Carlos St, San Jose
408-294-2558

Italian
L, D, RR, TO, FP, FB, GG, IWL, R,
SF (except on patio), $$$
http://www.paolosrestaurant.com

Peggy Sue's

Painted on the outside wall of the restaurant, in large block letters, are the words: "Burgers Fries Shakes." That pretty much sums up Peggy Sue's. The burger joint first opened its doors in 1958, and has been serving pretty much the same food ever since.

What's changed is the presentation. In 1958, there was no such thing as California cuisine, and burgers were pretty much just plain burgers, maybe with cheese. Those old-style burgers are still on Peggy Sue's menu, but you'll have to search for them. Today's burgers come with a creative, even dismaying, variety of toppings, and all have silly names. The "Rocky Marciano" comes with black olives and mozzarella. The "Blue Hawaii" comes with bacon and pineapple. The "Karate Burger" comes with mushrooms, teriyaki sauce, and American cheese. You get the idea.

They're pretty good, actually. And you can get any toppings you want, without having to find the cute name on the menu. If you want mushrooms, grilled onions, and tomatoes on your burger, just ask. They'll make it, and it will cost what any of the other burgers cost.

If you don't want a hamburger, there are the odd turkey, chicken, tuna, and other sandwiches to round out the menu. And assorted hot dogs, and Polish and Italian sausages.

This *is* 2002 California, so you can have a turkey burger or a veggie burger if you want. This is a traditional burger joint, so you can also have french fries and onion rings. (The onion rings are good.) And there are malts, floats, sundaes, and ice cream creations for dessert.

Not much else to say. It's not great—ignore their "just possibly the BEST hamburger in the world" sign—but it's worlds better than fast food. They're quick, and there's outside seating when the weather warrants. Sometimes the music is a bit too loud, but hey—it's a burger joint. And, no, they don't serve anything called a California burger.

Peggy Sue's
29 N San Pedro St, San Jose
408-298-6750

American
B, L, D, NR, $
http://peg456.addr.com/

Peking House

A Chinese restaurant with a so-so menu of standard Chinese entrées in the not-spicy Cantonese style. (They do have some spicy dishes, too.) On the other hand, they're close, they deliver, and their Web site lists a whole lot of lunch specials (11:30 AM to 2:30 PM). You can get Kung Pao chicken for about $9.00, including tax and tip. It might not be the best Kung Pao chicken you've ever had, but there won't be a lot wrong with it, either. And they'll deliver to your hotel room for free.

Peking House Restaurant
45 Post St, San Jose
408-298-7768

Chinese
B, L, D, TO, DL, $$
http://www.sanjosepekinghouse.com/

Penang Village

While it's closer to the airport than to the convention center, we're including Penang Village for a couple of reasons. We think you should try Malaysian food if you aren't familiar with it. And local San Joseans Mike Ward and Karen Schaffer discovered this place and were quick to point out that the food is really good, not to mention that the family who runs the place are very nice.

They took a failed restaurant called "Country Affair" with its unbearably rustic board floors and uneven wood walls, and, with no budget, turned it into a Malaysian village house. It works just fine, and what might elsewhere be kitschy here is a nice third-world sort of décor.

The waitstaff are happy to answer questions about the food, which is useful as not every menu item is accompanied by a written explanation. But you won't go wrong ordering what sounds interesting or tasty; we liked everything we tried. Malaysian food is light, with heavy emphasis on seafood, much savory coconut and some of the world's greatest flavors and spices. They're masters of curry, and while the food need not be spicy-hot, it will have layers and depth of flavor that will surprise you.

We tried the *nasi lemak*, a large dish of little piles of curried chicken, hard-cooked egg, and chili anchovy paste (no, really, it's good!). This is served with a coconut rice flavored with cloves and screw pine leaves. The Wonton Noodles Dried is an odd dish. It's a soup, where the liquid and solids are served in separate bowls. We've encountered this on Vietnamese menus as well, and consider it a SE Asia staple. ("Some people like it that way," we were told when we asked about it.) And the *mee goreng* is a dish reminiscent of *pad thai*: a noodle stir fry with egg and shrimp and such. Our advice at Penang Village is to go for the most flavorsome sounding dishes you can find. We'll be trying the papaya salad on our next visit.

Penang Village
1290 Coleman Ave, Santa Clara
408-980-0668

Malaysian
L, D, GG, $

Picasso

We like to show up at six, when the restaurant first opens. The vast dining room is empty. You can see the Mediterranean colors on the floors, column, and chairs (which are ugly, to tell the truth), the blonde wood on the walls, the huge windows covered with gossamer drapes and the brickwork and exposed beams on the high ceiling. This is Las Vegas, so it's all fake of course, but the Picassos covering the walls are as real as the huge sprays of flowers. The room is calm, quiet, serene. It's worlds away from the hullabaloo of the Bellagio's casino upstairs.

Slowly, diners trickle in. Mostly twos, threes, and fours, with the occasional large party. The din rises; conversations drift around the room, and the sounds of mixing drinks can be heard from the bar. An occasional flashbulb pops. The waitstaff glides silently through it all, taking orders and bringing food, more part of the background than the activity. The room never gets noisy, but the restaurant is still a stark counterpoint to the bustling casino.

And that's why we like it. Of course, the food is fantastic. Julian Serrano didn't leave Masa's in San Francisco to serve anything else. But Las Vegas is a cacophony of fakery: the promise of a pleasure planet and the reality of a homogeneous entertainment machine under a veneer of anything you can think of. There are about a dozen fine restaurants in Las Vegas today, most of them desert outposts of the best restaurants in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Picasso is different. The experience is real, assuming you can ignore the choreographed fountain show every half-hour outside the restaurant's windows.

We first tasted Serrano's cooking at Masa's. The food was excellent, but the most interesting aspect of the meal was that it wasn't too much food. We don't need to be stuffed to have a good meal, and Serrano appreciates that. The set dinners had many interesting courses, all smaller than the American norm. At Picasso, he does the same thing.

The menu is Mediterranean, a blend of French and Spanish mostly. Everything is delicious. The "Menu Degustation" seems to be generally the same: a crustacean (either lobster or crab), roasted sea scallops in some interesting preparation, a foie gras dish, fish, meat (lamb, whenever we've been there), and then dessert.

The menu changes, but only slightly. On one visit, the first course was a roasted lobster with a corn soufflé, and the sautéed foie gras came with dried sour cherries. On a third visit, the roasted lobster salad was served with crispy leeks and truffle vinaigrette and the foie gras came with a Madeira sauce. We can wholeheartedly recommend the menu, whatever it is, but we wish there were more options. As good as it is, we'd like to try other dishes.

And other dishes means the "Prix Fixe" menu. This is a four-course menu, with lots of choices and no set wine pairings. On one visit—alone—Bruce started with the poached oysters in a vermouth *beurre blanc* sauce and osetra caviar. This was a typically delicious dish, four perfectly balanced bites. The langoustines followed, two tails accented with lemon balsamic vinaigrette and served with diced bell peppers, zucchini, squash, and onions, drizzled with truffle oil—pop. For a main course, Bruce had the slow-roasted short ribs, with mashed yams and a Pinot Noir sauce. Another perfect dish. And the tarte tatin that followed came with warm apple coulis and apple-pie ice cream. Delicious.

What else can we recommend? The filet of St. Pierre (the fish, not the saint) with roasted artichokes and tomato coulis, the veal tenderloin with mushrooms and vegetables, the sautéed deer medallions with caramelized green apples and Zinfandel sauce, and just about anything else on the menu.

Veterans of high-end restaurants might find the Picasso menu a bit boring, but honestly we are tired of weird just for the sake of weird. Serrano has a keen sense of balance in his cooking, and that's exactly what we want out of a meal like this.

Picasso **French**
Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas L, D, RE, FP, FB, R, $$$$
702-693-7223 http://www.bellagiolasvegas.com/pages/din_picasso.asp

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Pizza a GO GO

The surfer motif, whatever that has to do with pizza, makes us want to call this place Ron Jon's. And we aren't sure at all how much actual Go Go is involved in the making of these pizzas. But their delivery menu (which you can, and should, ask for the moment you walk in the door) has several coupons attached. You'll save as much as $8 on two "X-Large" pizzas, which is a pretty good deal. They sell slices as well as whole pizzas, and there's plenty of space to sit. There's even a small private dining room called the Boardroom (surfboards; get it?) that features big comfy chairs and a huge conference table to gather a dozen or so folks around. You can reserve this for your crowd.

Unfortunately, the pizza didn't impress us, though, to be fair, Geri Sullivan likes it. It's better than those horrible national chains, but just barely. Like places selling slices back east, these guys warm the slice up in the oven. One can get good pizza this way, but not if the pizza's been sitting around for a while, and often these pies look sort of tired. Go early for the lunch rush to improve your odds, or get the whole pizza. With those coupons, maybe it's worth it.

Pizza a GO GO **Pizza**
117 E San Carlos St, San Jose L, D, LL, NR, TO, DL, BW, GG, KF, OS, PW, $
408-280-0707

pizz'a chicago

Everybody but Chicagoans loves this place. Useful in the same manner as kosher-style restaurants, pizz'a chicago can introduce the cuisine to the curious without providing the actual and authentic experience. And they play up the Chicago theme, so if you're a little homesick for the Windy City, you might enjoy the pizzas with names like the Air Jordan (fresh Roma tomatoes, basil and garlic) or the Rush Street (pepperoni, Canadian bacon, sausage, linguiça and meatballs). The pizzas come in three sizes, and the largest will run you about $18 or $20. They also serve pasta dishes (with equally silly names), and calzones and salads, and it's all just fine. Not fabulous, but fine.

Chicago hotdogs are on the menu, which is good. But they are not served in the One True Style, and include—oh horrors—ketchup. As goes the hot dog, so goes the rest of the pizz'a chicago menu. It's nearly right. Like we said, true Chicagoans scoff. But we like that they'll deliver for a small fee. They'll even deliver wine and beer if you've got proper ID.

If you go, ask them to explain that apostrophe nonsense. We forgot to, and we're curious.

pizz'a chicago
155 W San Fernando St, San Jose
408-283-9400

Pizza
L, D, NR, TO, DL, FP, BW, KF, $
http://www.pizzachicago.com/

Quizno's Sandwich Shop

A sub place with all the right ingredients, where they toast the sandwiches in some sort of oveny appliance. Karen had one once and thought it was weird and not very good, but Your Mileage May Vary, and if you already like Quizno's, you're all set, then.

Quizno's Sandwich Shop
150 S Second St, San Jose
408-286-4782

Sandwiches
L, D, NR, TO, KF, $
http://www.quiznos.com

Ravioli's

A good choice if you're on a budget and best for those feeding kids whose diet this week consists of "sketti." They serve uninspired corporate Italian for people who just can't face Old Spaghetti Factory.

Ravioli's Restaurant
185 Park Ave. Ste 189, San Jose
408-287-8194

Italian-American
L, D, KF, $

Rock'N Tacos

A random Mexican restaurant that caters more to Anglos than Hispanics. Walk up, order, and then find a table to eat at. They serve pretty good fish tacos, which we think of as a California regional treat. They also have a wide selection of vegetarian options, some decent quesadillas, and various New Age wraps.

Rock'N Tacos
131 W Santa Clara St, San Jose
408-993-8230

Mexican
L, D, NR, $

What could be more fantastic than a birthday dinner with Batman? Especially when that dinner was held—or should we say celebrated—or should we say barely contained by the big, noisy, hard-shelled confines of Joe's Crab Shack, during a ConFusion weekend a few years ago? Our host was legendary fan-about-town Mike Glicksohn (otherwise known as the Man Who Danced with His Wife), and the melted butter flowed like, well, melted butter, as the mound of empty shells threatened to overcome the trash can obligingly built into the tabletop, as we fifteen (sixteen? seventeen? It was hard to keep track) noshed and nibbled.

In the midst of this gustatory revel who should appear but Batman, cleverly disguised as Louisville fan Joel Zakem—who, in a spasm of midlife birthday madness, donned a Batman mask and a cape only five sizes too small, and proceeded to boogie his way around both the dining rooms, accompanied by the theme from "Batman" and the cute young Crab Shack staff. What the other patrons thought, we can only speculate, but the noise level in the room rose accordingly as Joel galloped around the tables, and I myself almost choked up a corn cob.

Amazing photos were taken, by noted artist Rick Lieder, of this wacky tarantelle, but not for blackmail purposes, no matter what Joel tells you. Hey, it's not every day—even at a convention—that you have dinner with a masked man.

—Rick Lieder and Kathe Koja

Rue de Paris

We first ate at Rue de Paris by accident, on one of our early visits to San Jose. Bruce had been taken to 71 Saint Peter, and wanted to return. He couldn't remember the name of the restaurant, and resorted to driving around the neighborhood. When he found Rue de Paris, he thought it was the one, and by the time we parked the car and went inside, it was too late to admit our mistake and keep looking. But despite the nagging feeling that we really wanted to be somewhere else, Rue de Paris was a lovely experience.

We didn't know it at the time, but Rue de Paris is a San Jose landmark, and it aims to stay that way. Longtime chef Patrick Storme left a few years ago, and his sous-chef Fernando Meza took over. This, combined with a change of ownership, has resulted in some changes to this 18-year-old restaurant.

This explains the menu, the majority of which is classically French, most of the time. Snails sautéed in garlic butter, duck paté, and paté de foie gras lead the dinner menu as traditional appetizers, but you can also have alligator in tomato sauce or a caviar plate. For a main course you can have the usual French meats—lamb, veal, duck, beef, etc.—but sometimes you can find ostrich or emu on the menu. Lunch tends to be more traditional: you can have a *salade Niçoise*, Coquille St. Jacques, salmon *en croute*, and other standards.

We started with the duck sausage, served in a brandy *demi glace* with apricots. Very tasty. We also ordered the escargots; as long as you have enough French bread to sop up the garlic butter, you can't go wrong. For a main course Bruce had the veal *escallops* with sherry, shallots, and white asparagus. Karen ordered the *scalone doré piccata*, scallops and abalone sautéed with lemon, butter, and capers. This was the hit of the table.

Worth perusing is the restaurant's 28-page wine list. The prices are high, but the selection is good. A nice selection of wines is available by the glass, but again the prices can be unreasonably high. For no reason we know of, Rue de Paris has one of the largest selection of ports around; hundreds of bottles are arrayed behind the bar.

We didn't order dessert—we were too full—but others have raved about the chocolate almond torte, the crème brûlée (often fruit-flavored), and the Grand Marnier soufflé.

Overall, it was a pleasant meal. The restaurant is quiet and feels intimate. The small dining alcoves are decorated with floral wallpaper and murals of Parisian landmarks: the Seine here, the Arc de Triomphe there. Service is discreet and professional. We read somewhere that San Joseans have voted this place the city's most romantic restaurant. We're not surprised.

Rue de Paris
19 N Market St, San Jose
408-298-0704

French
L, D, RR, TO, FB, IWL, R, SF, $$$
http://www.frenchfood.com

Sam's Log Cabin

At $35, it's the most expensive sandwich you'll ever eat.

Abalone is particularly hard to find. Between the repopulated otters eating all they can get their paws on, and state regulations limiting the human harvest, few restaurants can get abalone often enough or in quantity enough to put it on the menu. Sam's serves the aforementioned abalone sandwich, and also an abalone steak for $40. But they're not always on the menu, so it's best to call and ask.

Sam's Log Cabin is something of an anachronism in San Jose. It's in one of the seedier parts of town, down Vine on the other side of 280. We would recommend going for lunch; dinner's a bit riskier. There's a parking lot in the back, and an entrance there that goes through the kitchen. This is the spiritual front entrance of Sam's, and is worth going through, especially if you, like us, enjoy getting a glimpse of the kitchen. It's nothing much. Say hello to the one cook working there as you pass through, since he'll be making your food.

The restaurant opened in 1933, during the Great Depression, back when San Jose was a sleepy little hamlet. The building has all that character. And it's almost always crowded. TVs show sporting events—we were last there on baseball's opening day. The interior walls are covered with memorabilia from its 70-year history: mostly sports stuff. But you can find Sam Gibino Sr.'s original liquor license framed in a showcase.

The food is about what you'd expect out of one lone guy in a small kitchen: burgers, sandwiches, salads. They come with your choice of fries, onion rings, macaroni salad, or potato salad, and they're all under $10. It's good diner fare: tasty, but nothing special. There's a calamari steak sandwich on the menu; kind of a poor man's abalone. And, of course, there's the rich man's abalone if you want to shell out the $35. If you've eaten abalone, though, there's no comparison.

The only two waitresses we've ever seen at Sam's act like they've been there forever, but only one looks it. They seem to be on a first-name basis with most of their customers, and are happy to get to know you as well. We had only one bizarre service-related experience at Sam's. Bruce paid for our meal with a credit card. Coincidentally, someone else in the restaurant paid for his meal with the exact same make and model of credit card at the same time. Our waitress accidentally swapped cards; we paid for his meal and he paid for ours. Bruce didn't notice the switch until he tried to check into the hotel that night. We presume this isn't a chronic problem at Sam's, but relate the story as a general warning.

We like Sam's. We like what it is. We like that it doesn't try to be something it isn't. And we really like the abalone sandwiches. Don't forget to thank the cook on your way out. And double check your credit card before you put it back in your wallet.

Sam's Log Cabin
245 Willow St, San Jose
408-298-3066

American
L, D, $

Scott's Seafood

Scott's is by far the best seafood restaurant you can walk to from the convention. We're not trying to damn the restaurant with faint praise: it's actually pretty good.

The restaurant is on the sixth floor of an office building. It's a pretty room: soft lighting, subdued colors, and a glass wall looking out on downtown San Jose. You can have a panoramic view of the roof of the convention center, the Crowne Plaza, and the Hilton. And when the Marriott construction gets high enough, you'll be able to see that too.

The menu is unexceptional for a good fish restaurant: various kinds of fresh fish in several expected preparations. Nothing is off-the-charts wonderful here, and mediocre is about as bad as it gets.

For a starter, the tuna and avocado tartare is probably the best. It's a mixture of *ahi* tuna, avocado, cucumbers, bell peppers, and mango, all served on a pair of crisp wafers. It's a standard dish, and best when the ingredients are fresh. Also good is the scallop and pear salad; the flavors meld well. The clam chowder is quite good. Scott's crab cakes are perfectly serviceable, and are served over a salad. The fried calamari is probably not worth getting, and they've never managed to have any interesting raw oysters any time we were there.

For entrées, our suggestion is to order what sounds good. The salmon in roasted red pepper sauce is good. The sole in a lemon-shallot butter sauce is also good. The ginger glazed mahi-mahi, served with coconut rice and a grilled pineapple, is too sweet for our tastes, but we know people who would love it. There are a few meat dishes on the menu, but neither we nor anyone we know has ever tried one.

Pay attention to the specials. One night we were there, the special was a parmesan-crusted halibut with sautéed asparagus, potatoes, trumpet mushrooms, peas, and shallots in a herb wine sauce. This was easily the best dish we ever had at Scott's.

Desserts are standard, too. Again, nothing is actively bad. Our suggestion is to skip the heavy desserts—you just had a light fish meal, after all—and order the trio of sorbets. They've always been interesting—on our most recent visit they were lemon citrus, mango, and plum/pomegranate—and end the meal nicely.

Scott's Seafood San Jose
185 Park Ave, 6th Fl, San Jose
408-971-1700

Seafood
L, D, RR, $$
http://www.scottsseafood.com

Sent Sovi

Sent Sovi is a small, romantic restaurant in the picture-perfect town of Saratoga. The intimate dining room looks somewhat like a French country inn, and only has about a dozen tables. The food is uniformly competent, and occasionally brilliant. If it were a little quieter, it would be a perfect date restaurant.

The food is hearty French, with a few lighter options thrown in. Chef David Kinch is known for his soups and more complicated dishes, which is what we recommend you order.

Appetizers run the gamut. On our most recent visit, the best was a sauté of scallops and black trumpet mushrooms, which tasted both earthy and oceany at the same time. A lighter option was a small piece of raw tuna with marinated cucumbers and a wasabe-laced lemon vinaigrette. Heavier was the seared foie gras, served with rhubarb terrine flavored with lime and white pepper. All three of these were delicious. Less successful was the "Dungeness crab beggar's purses." These were three balls of crab wrapped in wonton paper; not bad, just uninteresting.

There are always several salads on the menu. We liked the hearts of palm salad, served with bacon, baby arugula, and Parmesan cheese.

The entreés tended to that classic dinner format: a protein served with interesting vegetables and sides. We loved the braised oxtails, which came with green lentils and wild mushrooms. This was a hearty dish, and exactly the sort of thing Kinch does best. Less successful was the pork tenderloin. It didn't mesh well with the braised red cabbage and potato pancake it came with.

On the seafood side, the broiled John Dory was delicious, as was the skate. The latter came with braised mushrooms and leeks, which balanced the taste of the fish wonderfully. Most everything we have ordered here has been good; it's rare that we go away disappointed.

Sent Sovi has an extensive wine list, mostly Californians and many at reasonable prices. Our advice is to stay away from the overpriced cabernets, chardonnays, and merlots—good advice anywhere, really—and order some of the more food-friendly wines. We saw some great Pinot Gris, Rhone-style wines, and Barberas; ask your waiter for suggestions.

If we have any serious complaint, it's too few entrée choices. On our last visit, there were five: fish, lobster, pork, beef, or squab. Generally we don't mind a limited menu, or leaving our dinner in the hands of the chef. At this restaurant, though, the limited menu feels confining. There is a six-course, $76, tasting menu if you don't want to worry about deciding.

Sent Sovi
14583 Big Basin Way, Saratoga
408-867-3110

French
D, RR, FP, BW, IWL, OS, R, $$$
(add $ for tasting menu)

71 Saint Peter

If we were going on a first date in downtown San Jose, we would take our date to 71 Saint Peter. We might find a prettier dining room at Emile's, but that would be over the top. We might find better food at A.P. Stump's—and we might not—but that's not so romantic. We might go to Rue du Paris, but we just wouldn't. We would go to 71 Saint Peter. And we would have a delightful time.

The restaurant is culinarily schizophrenic. The ambiance is like a European bistro. The food is Italian with California accents, or maybe New American with French accents. Fresh seasonal cooking with a European flair? The restaurant sidesteps all this by claiming to be a Mediterranean grill, which is either an amazingly clever categorization or a completely oblivious assignation.

The food is seafood-heavy and intensely flavored. The shrimp risotto, with asparagus and fresh basil is delicious. So is the capellini: fresh pasta, served with grilled Italian sausage with garlic, gorgonzola, mushrooms, and olive oil. Chef (and co-owner) Mark Tabak does interesting things with sauces, and you're likely to see that in anything you order.

Entrées are equally interesting. The grilled halibut comes with artichoke hearts, olives and caper relish, vinegar and oil, and roasted red peppers. The grilled lamb sirloin is fresh and tasty, as are the maple-glazed top sirloin and the filet mignon. For a restaurant that specializes in fish, the meat is excellent.

Salads and appetizers are also uniformly good. If we had to mention one thing, it would be the wild mushroom polenta, served with tomato fondue and Parmesan cheese. And, of course, the grilled portobello mushroom with garlic, Parmesan, and arugula pesto. Okay, maybe two things. Don't forget about the scallops.

The lunch menu has a bunch of lower-cost options. Even if you're not a vegetarian, the baked eggplant sandwich, with fresh tomato, artichoke hearts, provolone, and basil pesto will knock your socks off. And Bruce loves the pork tenderloin sandwich, served with tomato, arugula, sprouts, and garlic on foccacia. Any of the lunch salads are more than enough for the meal. We like the grilled chicken salad, served with jicima, mango, couscous, red onion, and pomegranate vinaigrette.

Service is consistently good. We really do like this place.

Prices are surprisingly reasonable. Lunch sandwiches hover just around $10—entrées more, of course—and dinner can easily be less than $30. You can spend more, and 71 Saint Peter has an interesting wine list to splurge on, but you don't have to.

71 Saint Peter is a small restaurant. It's not a large room to begin with, and the kitchen takes up a non-trivial amount of space even if it is tiny. The walls are weathered bricks and the ceiling beams are exposed. This all makes the space feel lived-in and adds to the cozy feel, until you're stuck waiting without a reservation. There is an overflow room around the corner and in the back—the ambiance-meter drops about six notches there—but do yourself a favor and make a reservation. If you want a banquet for 15 or more, they can do that, too.

71 Saint Peter
71 N San Pedro St, San Jose
408-971-8523

Mediterranean
L, D, RR, BW, R, $$$
http://www.71saintpeter.com/

Shalimar Indian Cuisine

Shalimar is a nice restaurant. It's clean, bright, and pretty. Service is fast and pleasant. Entrees, generally between $10 and $15, are a little expensive but not unreasonable. They can handle large parties easily. All in all, an enjoyable meal.

And the food is pretty good. If you don't know your way around real Indian cuisine, it's definitely good enough. If you're a connoisseur (or a native Indian), you're going to find details to complain about.

This is Northern Indian cuisine—curries, *kofta*, *panir*, *saag*, *tikka*, *rogan josh*, *biryani*, *vindaloo*—the standard stuff Americans are used to when they think of Indian food. Portions are large, so consider ordering one fewer dish than you have people, especially if you start with appetizers. The *vindaloo* is very good, and the kitchen will make it authentically hot if you ask. We can also recommend a dish called "seafood lovers," which is three kinds of fish served with three kinds of sauces. And expect leftovers to take back to your hotel room.

Shalimar Indian Cuisine
167 W San Fernando St, San Jose
408-971-2200

Indian
L, D, BW, $$

I once wrote a novel all about food. As long as human beings have to kill to eat, the definition of human being has to include the semantic feature [+VIOLENT]. In the novel, a group of characters taught humans worldwide to get their nourishment from music, a process called audiosynthesis. It worked well in terms of calories, but even people who understood intellectually that they were being nourished adequately by music missed mouthfood very much. They missed the taste and feeling of food in their mouths; they missed food rituals as smokers who've quit miss smoking rituals. They collected pebbles with different textures, to put in their mouths to ease the yearning.

It saddens me to think how we'd react to such a development in the real world. Every worthwhile human being, learning that with audiosynthesis no one would ever again have to go hungry, would know that he or she should rejoice. But think what it would mean if every industry that involved mouthfood—and every industry that depends on violence—suddenly became obsolete! We have no idea what kind of world that would be. So there would be the awful guilt of knowing that even if it means people all over the world have to suffer hunger you would rather not have a way to give up food. I'm certain that if someone discovered a practical way to bring about audiosynthesis, it would be ruthlessly suppressed.

— *Suzette Haden Elgin*

The Slanted Door

Nouveau Vietnamese? You bet. We visit the Slanted Door whenever we can.

Buried in San Francisco's Mission District, Slanted Door is easily one of the best Vietnamese restaurants in the U.S. Although it's not really a fair comparison; your average neighborhood Vietnamese restaurant serves *pho* and *bun* and other cultural staples and nothing much fancier. At the Slanted Door, chef/owner Charles Phan uses Vietnamese flavors and ingredients to concoct culinary wonders. Sure, many of the dishes are inspired by traditional Vietnamese street food, but Phan's genius is what he does with that inspiration.

The best way to dine here is to order a variety of dishes and share them. Just pick what interests you; we haven't tasted a single clunker, or read about one in a review. The dinner menu changes weekly, but there are some staples. The shaking beef, cubes of tenderloin served over lettuce and black pepper, with salt dipping sauce, is delicious and almost always available. There are usually several spring rolls; the crispy Imperial rolls—pork, shrimp, glass noodles, tree-ear mushrooms, and vegetables, served with lettuce, mint, and rice noodles—are the best we've had anywhere.

Uniformly good are the claypot dishes—one we had, a chicken claypot with caramel sauce, chili, and fresh ginger was simply terrific—and the Vietnamese crepes. We also liked the daikon rice cakes with shiitake mushrooms and shallots, the grapefruit and jicama salad, and the baby spinach with garlic and shallots. Other reviewers have raved about the rack of lamb with tamarind sauce, and the sea bass

Ten years ago, I was in D.C. with a close friend, George Tindle. We set up a night to have dinner together. During the course of the meal, the tone in the restaurant changed in some indefinable way. It had grown quiet, and whispers were passing around the room.

We're at war, someone was saying. We're bombing the Iraqis. And I thought, memorable moment, having dinner with an old friend, and a war breaks out. Why, we'll be talking about this for years to come. And then a second thought: Let's say there are these two guys, old friends for forty years, living on opposite coasts. (Not quite the case for George and me.) And every few years, when they get together, there's a disaster. Earthquake kills 10,000 in the South Pacific; the Challenger explodes; tidal wave rolls into Bangladesh; the 757 goes down in Scotland. Can't be a coincidence. Although there seems to be one exception. But maybe not. (This would be the detail that makes the story.) Maybe the disaster is simply a bit less obvious.

Anyhow the story acquired the desperate title "Auld Lang Boom," instead of, probably, "We Should Stop Meeting Like This." It showed up several months later in *Asimov's* and was reprinted in *Standard Candles*.

— *Jack McDevitt*

with lily buds, shiitake mushrooms, and fresh ginger. Honestly, we've never been able to divert our attention long enough from the appetizers to order one of these.

Slanted Door has a wine list. Matching wine to this kind of food—complex and spicy—is very difficult, but the restaurant has as interesting a list as we've seen anywhere. Think acidic, steely, minerally, searing! Their selection of spicy reds and dry whites works well with the food and is not overpriced. And the waitstaff knows the list and is willing to assist. There's also a selection of interesting teas, and a delicious French pear cider.

Desserts are good, although not at all Vietnamese. There's crème brûlée, apple tart, and poached pear. But the Valrhona Manjari chocolate cake trumps them all.

The restaurant itself is kind of funky. Phan was once an architecture student, and he clearly had fun designing the restaurant. It's airy, with two levels of seating, high ceilings, and an open kitchen. Giant paintings cover the walls; the chairs are dark wood, the tables dark green, and the velvet banquettes red. The lighting is hued celadon.

Service can be uneven, and the waits—even with a reservation—can be long. Parking is very difficult, although the restaurant sometimes—call ahead to find out—has valet parking. And reservations can be impossible; you may have to dial and redial just to talk with someone. But the food is more than worth it.

The Slanted Door 🚗🚗 **Vietnamese**
584 Valencia St, San Francisco, CA L, D, RE, $$$
415-861-8032

Smile House Korean Food

This is a quickie Korean lunch counter, and they close just as the dinner hour is revving up. They've got *bi bim bop*, they've got *bul go gee*, they've got some vegetarian options. Nearly the entire menu costs five or six dollars, so give them a try instead of yet-another-pizza.

Smile House Korean Food 🚶 **Korean**
86 S First St, San Jose L, NR, TO, $
408-293-1640

South First Billiards

"Pockets that mark the difference between a gentleman and a bum—With a capital 'B' and that rhymes with 'P' and that stands for 'pool.'" So, maybe for some reason you've just got to shoot a little pool during the Worldcon. It could happen. If the urge for a little Trouble should overcome you, hie yourself down to South First Billiards where you can play good level tables with straight cues (if you brought your own cue to the con, you are certainly already there, and not sitting around reading this). They've got $2 drinks during weekday "happy hour," which is 4 to 7 generally, though they stretch all the way to 10 PM on Mondays. You can get something to eat from the "bar food" category of gustatory revelation—pizzas, sandwiches, appetizers, that sort of thing—and perhaps South First's greatest asset to fandom is that the kitchen is open until 2 AM. "Jever take an' try an' give an iron clad leave to yourself from a three-rail billiard shot?"

South First Billiards
420 S First St, San Jose
408-294-7800

American
D, LL, LLL, FB, $
http://www.sofapool.com/

In building a fantasy world, I think it's a good idea to start with the food and work backward from there. There are a couple of reasons for this: In the first place, it'll remind you as the author that, however intricate your world, it is full of people, and people eat. It will establish a connection to the reader, who almost certainly eats as well. Second, it's a pretty good method of worldbuilding just by itself. Here's how it works: You start with a meal. What's for supper? Maybe some beef? Well, okay. What are they feeding the cattle. Maize? Fine, then you know this region has a soil reaction of between pH 5.5 and 8.0, probably a prairie soil, or, at any rate, some well-drained loam soil. You know that this region has at least 140 frost-free days per year, a mean summer temperature between 21 and 27 degrees (C), and probably 24–40 inches of rain a year.

How do you know this? Because you've looked it up in your handy copy of *Principles of Field Crop Production*, Third Edition, by Martin, Leonard, and Stamp, (MacMillan, 1976). Then you repeat the process for something else you're eating, maybe rice (I won't go into the specifics this time), and you can triangulate. Where can both of these things grow? What conditions does it imply? What sort of world has a place like that? All sort of fun stuff flows naturally out of the food. Besides, it will encourage you to write about food; and that's good, because I like reading about it.

— *Steve Brust*

Spiedo

Spiedo is yet another in San Jose's repertoire of Italian restaurants where the kindest thing anyone says about the service is that it "can be uneven." There's got to be some reason for this, but darned if we know what it is. We can't explain just why there are so many Italian restaurants in San Jose, either. We've even asked around and no one's got a good answer.

The food is uneven, but can be pretty good. The foccacia is homemade. The Spiedo salad is a good mix of greens, walnuts and Gorgonzola cheese, and it's huge; the *polenta al funghi* has black truffle mushroom sauce and is wonderful. They've got the requisite wood-burning pizza oven, and turn out tasty thin crust pizza, properly crispy yet foldable. They have the standard rotisserie, with choices like duck and rabbit. Their pastas are homemade, and they do a nice Bolognese sauce. Try some fish over other meats.

The wine list is mediocre. There are some interesting choices, but they're all too expensive.

In a happy surprise, nearly everyone raves about the homemade desserts at Speido. The sorbets are especially good. But honestly, it's more of a restaurant to be seen at than a restaurant to enjoy a meal at. The room is large and pretty. It sparkles. It feels as if everyone is having so much fun. So make sure you get a seat by the large windows, so everyone can see how fabulous you are.

It all adds up to Spiedo being a good, but not great restaurant, where you're likely to have pleasant though unexceptional meal. The entrées all clock in under $20 at dinner, and under $16 at lunch, with pizza hovering one side or the other of the $10 mark.

Spiedo
151 W Santa Clara St, San Jose
408-971-6096

Italian
L, D, RR, FB, LM, OS, R, $$
http://www.spiedo.com

Starbucks

Neither of us understand this place, and are unqualified to write about it. Bruce doesn't drink coffee, and Karen doesn't drink designer coffee. Bruce regularly overpays for an orange juice and a muffin at random airport Starbucks, though.

Starbucks
150 South 1st St, Suite #A137-B, San Jose
(408) 293-9945

Coffee
FF, $$
http://www.starbucks.com

St. John

St. John is an unassuming restaurant. Its décor isn't anything special. The floors are wooden and easy to hose down. The walls are brick, painted white, and about twenty feet high. Pegs for coats line the walls. In one corner is the kitchen, open to the rest of the room. This former smokehouse (ham, not cigars) looks like a school lunchroom or a military barracks, or maybe the dining hall at a reform school for naughty meat.

The ambiance also underwhelms. The tables are covered with white paper and the chairs are not very comfortable. The cooks—you can watch them from the dining room—look like a bunch of prison inmates on a work furlough. Even the maître d', in his ill-fitting suit and sloppy tie, is so unassuming you don't think he actually works there.

The service is no big deal, either. The waitstaff is perfunctory and efficient, but there's no overbearing service or crisp attention to detail. The dishes look as if they were slopped out at a lunch counter: simple white plates with food on them. Presentation is nothing here.

So why would we, with all of London's restaurants to choose from, eat here? Because the food is so good. It's basic food, done well. There's no basil-encrusted lobster-infused polenta here, nothing with half a dozen ingredients and a complex sauce. The menu lists dishes like "oxtail and fennel broth," "langoustines and mayonnaise," "ox heart, beetroot, and horseradish," and "roast bone marrow and parsley salad." If you're looking for crispy pig's tails or a stuffed duck's neck, you've come to the right place.

The ingredients stand out. First came the appetizers. The "foie gras and turnips" was simply that: sautéed foie gras served with boiled turnips. But the turnips were some of the tastiest we've ever had. The pickled herring was served warm with a mildly spicy marinade and a small salad of pickled vegetables, and was delicious. The smoked eel and potato salad was also served warm. It was a delicious piece of eel, served with a simple and delicious potato salad. The only disappointment was the "potted pig head"—with a name like that, we simply had to order it, but it was a slice of not-very-interesting terrine.

The main courses were just as simple, and just as delicious. "Rabbit and prunes" was a piece of broiled rabbit served with prunes. The "pigeon and radishes" was a piece of broiled pigeon with radishes. (The radishes were served steamed, with the stems and leaves attached, and a flavorful wine vinegar drizzled on top. It was a complete surprise, and a delight.) We also liked the "roast leg of lamb and aioli," a tasty cut of lamb served with a mound of aioli. Weaker was the "boiled ham and parsley sauce." The meat were good, but there's just less interesting about boiled ham. And the parsley sauce was really a while bean stew with parsley: fresh and interesting.

Side dishes are available separately. We ordered the potatoes (boiled) and the greens (kale). St. John also serves desserts; we were unimpressed with either of the ones we tried. Nothing bad, but nothing special. If you're a large group and are planning ahead, you can order a roast suckling pig a week in advance. And there's a bar attached to the restaurant, with a similar lack of ambiance.

Chef Fergus Henderson's motto is "nose to tail eating," and it's printed right on the menu. This kind of thinking will get our business every time, even if it did feel as if we were eating in an institution. We certainly won't bring our vegetarian friends, though.

St. John
26 St John St, London
+44-20-7251-848

Stark
L, D, RE, FB, $$$
http://www.stjohnrestaurant.co.uk/

Stratta Grill and Bar

This is a new restaurant from Mark Tabak of 71 Saint Peter. We have to admit, we haven't been. The menus are similar enough that we haven't divined how conceptually different Stratta is from 71 Saint Peter. But, 71 Saint Peter may well be our favorite restaurant in San Jose, so how bad can it be? On the other hand, we saw a sign on their door recently which read: "We will no longer be serving lunch." This can't be a good sign.

Peering through the closed window, it looked like a nice place.

If it's still around at the end of August, we're going to try it.

Stratta Grill and Bar
71 E San Fernando, San Jose
408-293-1121

Euro-Californian
L, D, RR, FB, $$$
http://www.strattagrillandbar.com

Subway

There are more than 16,000 of these in 73 countries. You already know what you're getting into here.

But you might want something new. So we asked the guy working here: "What's the worst sandwich you ever made for a customer?" The answer: "seafood salad and meatballs." No kidding. The guy comes back every three weeks for one.

Subway
165 W San Fernando St, San Jose
408-297-8090

Sandwiches
L, D, KF, NR, TO, $
http://www.subway.com/

Tapestry in Talent

Right outside the convention is another, even larger, gathering. Tapestry in Talent is a huge Labor Day street festival. It lasts three days: Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. And while it's primarily an arts festival, there's a whole lot of eating going on.

More than 250,000 visitors view the works of 300 artists from around the country. Five stages keep the music lively. Local artists teach children to make art in the Creativity Zone. Ethnic food booths are everywhere. And it's all open to the public, and the entertainment is free.

We've never been to the festival, but we've talked to several people who have. They all remember lots of different food booths, selling various types of street food at reasonable prices, but nobody could remember any one single thing that stood out in their mind.

This is almost certainly the fastest and easiest way for you to get yourself a meal during the convention, and may well be one of the cheapest. If you're walking to lunch and find yourself drawn to some street food, dive in.

Tapestry in Talent (Street Fair)
Outside the Convention Center, San Jose

Multi-Ethnic
B, L, D, NR, $
http://www.tapestryintalent.org

For some of us, myself included, there is a particular joy in finding some new dish or ingredient and trying it, almost regardless of whether one ends up liking it. Having been something of a food fanatic for several decades, I have encountered a certain number of odd things. Some, jackfruit for example, are simply wonderful. Some, on the other hand, are decidedly peculiar. One of the weirdest things I ever ate, something I'd love to bring to an "Alien Food" party, is a marinated raw sea-cucumber that I first encountered at a sushi bar in Bellevue, Washington. (I don't recall the Japanese name, unfortunately, but I think it's something on the order of *namako nanban*.) This item has a texture not unlike that of soft felt, and a flavor so jarring that I am almost entirely at a loss to describe it. I can only suggest that if you get the chance, you should try it for yourself. Bring a couple friends, though, so you'll have a fighting chance of making a visible dent in the portion. I must confess that I can only eat a very small quantity of it myself—it's not something I particularly like. (Hey, you win some, you lose some. I think I've won more than my share; but then, I'm easily amused. Also, I'm always on the lookout: if you don't notice it, or if you put it out of your mind without really thinking about it, you've lost another opportunity.)

— *Jon Singer*

Teske's Germania

Teske's is a perfect rendition of a hearty German restaurant. It's all there: the food, the beers, the menu, the waitresses, the solid Teutonic building. You may enter the restaurant from the corner of First and Devine, but once inside you're transported to a *Gaststätte* maybe in Swabia or surely somewhere in the Black Forest. And it's the old Black Forest, where hearty laughter can be heard from the bar and *die Rechnung* must be settled in deutschmarks.

Germany probably has a haute cuisine somewhere in its history, but primarily the food is what's known as *gutbürgerliche Küche*: good home cooking. It's a piece of meat, some starch, a vegetable—simple food. This is what you can get at Teske's, and it's one of the best examples of the art we've found outside of Germany.

The first hint that you're not leaving the restaurant hungry is this statement on the menu: "All dinners include bread and butter, soup, salad with house dressing, and a slice of strudel." And they expect you to eat it all, too. On one visit a waitress admonished Bruce's companion for not finishing his salad: "You won't get dessert if you don't eat all your food." She was joking, of course. We think.

The menu is long, and has all the German favorites. The Wiener schnitzel is tender and tasty. Their sauerbraten is delicious. One of our favorite dishes is the paprika goulash, a beef stew made with hot paprika. You'll find lots of beef dishes, pork, veal, and chicken.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

There is one soup each day, and everyone gets a cup. Ask the waitress about substitutions, and you're likely to be told: "You will have the soup, and you will like it." (Noticing a pattern here?) Generally the soup is some kind of vegetable beef soup, although once we had a chicken soup. The salad is, amazingly enough, European in appearance. The lettuce is American, but the rest of the ingredients look as if they were bought in some European market somewhere. Nothing stellar here, but tasty.

You can order an appetizer, but honestly we can't imagine why you'd want to. It's even more food. (Sample appetizer: a pair of knackwurst, one Polish sausage, one bratwurst. That's *one* appetizer.)

Dinners are generous, and served with at least one side: red cabbage, spätzle, sauerkraut, or potato salad. We think the red cabbage and the sauerkraut are so wonderful that we'll actually ask for side orders if these don't come with whatever we've ordered. Sometimes we've managed to accomplish a substitution, but find that really depends on whether we've made friends with our waitress.

There are always specials, and they are usually game. We've had venison, wild boar, turkey, and pheasant. One dinner we were amazed to find buffalo *osso buco* on the menu. (And we still kick ourselves for not ordering it.) The key here is to order a meat you like. And we mean meat. There is one token fish dish, and two token vegetarian dishes—mushroom and vegetable crepes and a vegetarian plate—but honestly, if you don't want meat, you'd be happier elsewhere. They do have a children's menu, so look that over if you're eating with kids.

Teske's has a good selection of interesting German beers, including a bunch of them on tap. Their selection of German wines is pitiful, which is our primary complaint whenever we go there.

It's a lively, fun restaurant. There is a large dining room inside past the bar, and additional seating outside in the backyard. For all their German detail, the waitstaff are friendly and helpful. Prices are good, and it's a great place to take a party of twelve. (They claim they can handle banquets up to 250 people; maybe there's another room upstairs.) And it's close to the Convention Center.

How can you go wrong with that?

Teske's Germania Restaurant & Beer Garden **German**
255 N First St, San Jose L, D, RR, TO, FB, OS, $$
408-292-0291 http://www.teskes-germania.com

Thepthai Thai Cuisine

Random decent Thai food. Nothing fantastic, but perfectly reasonable. Dinners can be crowded—especially on the weekend—but the lunch buffet is an inexpensive way to sample some interesting curries, as well as steamed mussels and their version of pad thai, which has more vegetables that most. We'd go to the House of Siam; it's closer to the convention, and the food is better. But they have a $8 all-you-can-eat lunch buffet, if quantity is more important to you than quality.

Thepthai Thai Cuisine **Thai**
23 N Market St, San Jose L, D, RR, TO, FP, BW, R, $$
408-292-7515

There were boiled lobsters for everyone on the weekend when Guy Wicker held a feast for the General Technics crowd on his family's farm near Calumet, Michigan. Guy had flown a batch of live lobsters in from New England.

As we sat in the yard dissecting arthropods, our host circulated with an unusual request: He really likes the eggs…would those of us with female lobsters allow him to remove the egg sac? Some of my companions expressed surprise at Guy's fondness for lobster eggs.

"That's nothing," I told my companions. "Guy once lived for six months on Squid Roe!"

— *Bill Higgins*

Tied House

It's a clever and obscure name for a pub. In 19th century England, a "tied house" was a pub selling beer from the brewery that owned it, and none other. The "free houses" could sell anyone's beer. And in 1987, Redwood Coast Brewing Company brought the tied house concept to Northern California. In typically Californian melting-pot fashion, the first and original Master Brewer for Redwood Coast was a Hong Kong Chinese named Cheuck Tom. This is award-winning beer from a guy with nearly 40 years' experience in brewing.

The menu features good simple food, pub grub that doesn't ask much of the kitchen. Anything that sounds complicated is likely too complicated, which suggests to Karen's jaded view that some of that award-winning brew is making it to the line. No worries if you stick to the burgers and fries end of the menu. Pretty much anything on the menu will cost you under $15, and the burgers are under $7, though with a few beers the tab will add up.

There's generally seasonal specialty beers worth considering, but if you can't decide or are an occasional beer drinker, the cascade amber is their most popular brew. Between us we probably put away two or three beers in a good year, and so we don't have much else to suggest, but the Tied House is a bit of a local destination for serious beer drinkers, and surely someone seated near you can offer suggestions.

Tied House Café and Brewery Company **British Pub**
65 N San Pedro, San Jose L, D, LL, RR, FP, OS, SF (except on patio), $$
408-295-2739 http://www.tiedhouse.com/

In 1986, we made a date with Roger Zelazny and his wife Judy, and George R.R. Martin and Parris to meet for dinner at the Coyote Grill in Santa Fe. Unfortunately we Californians neglected to reset our watches to MST when we landed—well ahead of dinner time—in Albuquerque. So we took our time about getting to the restaurant and sauntered in an hour late, finding our dinner companions gamely if a bit perplexedly waiting. We all laughed about it and had a terrific spicy meal.

Then we did it again, same place, same cast of characters, two years later.

This time, the plane was an hour late in landing. Chagrined, we hurried to the restaurant, but of course had no way of making up the lost hour. Our faithful friends were still waiting—and seemed to have taken it for granted that we'd be late. Once again, we shared a good laugh and a better meal. But our reputation for punctuality has been forever destroyed—at least in New Mexico.

— *Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber*

Trials Pub

Claims to be an authentic British Pub. We have no idea. Their menu is very encouraging, though. Much more authentic-looking than Tied House's. And they have Strongbow cider on tap. That's always a good sign.

Trials Pub
265 N First St, San Jose
408-947-0497

British Pub
D, LL, FB, GG, $
http://www.trialspub.com

When I was first having a secret affair with Steven (no, really, it was a secret affair, honest. I used to introduce him to people as my secret lover and they'd think I was joking. But I digress) I used to visit London every couple of months, and we'd have jolly weekends that started (nearly every time) with Friday night with the City Illiterates at the Cock Tavern or the City Lit SF class, depending on the time of year, and had in the middle (nearly every time) a string of asterisks and ended (nearly every time) with *satay* at Sate Ria on Westbourne Grove, at that time the favourite restaurant of Steven and his flatmate Andy Darnborough.

At Sate Ria, the sticky rice was not merely sticky but cubical. You got nine large sticks of *satay*, and a bowl of the best peanut sauce I have ever had, and various vegetables, and a couple of dozen cubes of smooth, solid rice. With no white space whatsoever between what would once have been grains. And we suffered from *satay* inflation as, on successive visits, we ordered increasingly more food. More delicious cubical rice, and more perfect sauce. And later, more *satay*. I tried to cook the cubical rice at home once, with no success, and it's not been served in any of the many other Malaysian or Indonesian restaurants I've been to. It was unique, and besides, it was ritual. One of those ordinary, everyday rituals that define the road maps for your way of life.

But the City Lit SF class, and the Cock, and Andy, and Sate Ria are now all gone, remaining only in that space of nostalgia that is evoked, in me at least, by songs like "Verdi Cries." It was all very clear and prosaic and normal then; when did it become odd and dreamlike and disjointed and strange? I just have flashes of imagery from all of those weekends; what was once vivid and solid is now the odd memory surrounded by white space. And I have never eaten cubical rice since.

— *Alison Scott*

Trieu Chau Restaurant

The best things at Trieu Chau aren't on the menu. The menu is primarily Chinese, and the best things at Trieu Chau are Cambodian.

Trieu Chau looks like an ordinary American Chinese restaurant: the tables and chairs, the decorations, the lighting. Nothing about it gives any indication as to whether you're in for an ordinary American Chinese–restaurant meal, or something special. The menu, too, is ordinary. Almost all the dishes are standard American Chinese–restaurant fare: hot and sour soup, pot stickers, kung pao chicken, sweet and sour pork, beef with broccoli, shrimp fried rice. You start wondering if you're in that ever-mediocre Chinese restaurant in Everytown, USA. You shift a bit in your seat, wondering if you can go somewhere else.

Relax, put the menu down, and talk to Ms. Tan. Fun Tan—no really, that's her name—runs Trieu Chau. She's Cambodian, and she's going to put a good meal together for you. It's not on the menu, but that's okay. Just tell her that you want a Cambodian meal. She'll ask you what you like, and then she'll take care of it.

On our most recent visit, she told us to have chicken Cambodian style. It was fresh and light, and covered in Thai basil. She also ordered pork in plum sauce, a surprisingly subtle dish with scallions. We also had the sizzling seafood combination (on the menu). Tan told us what order to eat the dishes in to get the best flavors.

The Cambodian skewers are the good appetizer. These are barbecued beef, served with a papaya and carrot salad. We've had similar food in Vietnamese and Singapore restaurants; these were good. We also, because we knew we were writing this review, tried the hot and sour soup and the pot stickers. Eh and pretty good, respectively.

If you look more carefully at Trieu Chau, you realize that it's not your ordinary American Chinese restaurant. The art on the wall depicts Cambodian scenes. A footnote under the seafood says: "All fish served Asian style unless you would prefer us to remove the head before serving." And the menu's cover, in small print, says: "Trieu-Chau Chinese Food with a Cambodian Accent." Forget the accents—ignore the token Cambodian dishes hidden amongst the Chinese food in the menu—and ask Fun Tan to make a real Cambodian dinner for you.

You won't be disappointed.

Trieu Chau Restaurant
325 S First St, San Jose
408-998-3306

Cambodian
B, L, D, LL, LLL, TO, BW, $

Waves Smokehouse

Waves uses what they call a state-of-the-art smoker oven, which isn't traditional but does assure them a consistent product. Their stuff is pretty good, but not great. We found the barbecued chicken bland and boring, the marinated tri-tip dry but well smoked, the hot links tasty (classic spicy preparation), and the barbecued pork ribs decent. They have three homemade sauces: the "Sweet N Sassy" is good, the "Jalapeno Jack" is hot and delicious, and the "Madness Habenero" is very hot and otherwise tasteless. The baked beans are only okay, but the pineapple coleslaw is wonderful.

Waves also sells hamburgers. We've never tried one, but we've watched them served to other tables and they look pretty good. You can order the various barbecue items as sandwiches for lunch.

They have an upstairs rooftop patio. You can also eat downstairs in their bar area. A historic, and very stylish, mahogany and stained-glass bar fills one entire wall. Don't fret about smoke; California outlawed smoking in bars. But they haven't outlawed loud annoying pop music blaring from the speakers. Waves sometimes has a DJ spinning even louder tunes, and karaoke nights in case you need even more annoying music.

On the other hand, if you have a party of 20 or so, they'll do a great buffet for you if you call and set it up in advance. And they'll cater your room party, too.

Waves Smokehouse and Saloon **Barbeque**
65 Post St, San Jose L, D, FB, OS, $$
408-885-9283 http://www.waves-smokehouse.com/

I have eaten in a good many restaurants in many parts of the world, including some great Chinese meals in Beijing, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Taipei, and Singapore; and great Japanese meals in Tokyo and San Francisco; and editor luncheons in such places as the Esplanade in New York and several great French restaurants there, including one where the puréed vegetables were laid out like a work of art. I also should mention the American Restaurant in Kansas City, and a wonderful lunch that my wife and I wandered into in a restaurant called La Mediterranee. But the place that stands out above all these is a little hamburger joint called Boydston's, maybe three or four little tables and a counter, on Independence Avenue next to the old Vista Theater, where my family used to stop after playing duplicate bridge nearby. Boydston's made a great chili—rather dry and mild, without tomatoes, and placed on top of pinto beans, not cooked together—but its specialty was hamburgers such as I haven't eaten anywhere since. Boydston's must have ground its own beef, because it was very lean. It was shaped into a ball and slapped down onto the old, black grill

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and topped with onions cut into long, thin strips, then pressed down flat and, just before it was removed, topped with the bun so that the bun was steamed. I can taste them now—and I wish I could taste them again, but Boydston's is long gone, the Vista Theater has been converted into some commercial use, and Independence Avenue has deteriorated into a hang-out for streetwalkers.

— *James Gunn*

Shopping

Whether you're doing the con on the cheap, or you're getting ready to throw the mother of all room parties, you may want to go shopping. Here is a brief listing of some grocery stores, drug stores, and a shopping mall. Have the concierge staff print out the map and directions for you.

The very closest grocery store to the convention is Zanotto's Family Market, at 40 South Second (408-977-1333). It's an upmarket place, the sort of grocery you go to because you're suddenly overcome with a desire to make *coq au vin*. It's not where you'd shop if you're putting dinner on the table six or seven nights a week. There's a hot-food take-away counter, a deli that'll make you a sandwich, a beautiful produce department, and what is possibly the largest array of drinkables we have ever seen. They're pretty light on the sort of pre-packaged stuff that makes putting together a room party a snap, but shop around and you'll do okay. Just a few loaves of good bread and some imported cheeses have a lot of foodie cachet, and that's just the sort of thing that Zanotto's excels at. And, this being California, you can buy beer, wine, and spirits at the grocery store.

Also pretty close is Albertson's Grocery (408-297-3710). There you'll find a bakery, ATM, copy machine, deli, floral department, public fax, carpet shampooer rentals (nice if your hotel room is trashed), lottery tickets, money orders, liquor, postage, and so forth. It's on East Santa Clara, just outside the downtown core. Close, but not so downtown that you'll pay those upmarket prices you see at Zanotto's. It's kind of grubby, unfortunately.

Another option is the closest Safeway, at 1300 West San Carlos (408-882-0999). It's less than a mile and a half from downtown. Or the closest Asian markets are Daiko and Dai Thanh; see the reviews in the restaurant section.

You can find a shopping mall, anchored by Nordstrom, at Stevens Creek and Winchester, just a few blocks from the Winchester Mystery House. The mall has the usual run of cookie-cutter stores, but there's another Safeway grocery store and a Long's Drugstore all right there; you can maximize your shopping time.

The closest drugstore to the con is a Walgreens. There are several around town, but this one is downtown: Walgreens, at 5 South First (408-283-0801). Further afield, but open 24/7, is a Walgreens at 1399 W. San Carlos (408-971-3090).

If you have more complicated needs, the concierge is your new best friend.

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