# CONFERENCE REPORT

## VB Goes Czech

*Helen Martin*

In the period immediately following the events of September 11th, *Virus Bulletin* received a number of inquiries as to whether VB2001 would be going ahead – particularly in light of the cancellation of numerous other conferences around that time. Despite some initial concerns *VB* remained confident that the conference should and would go ahead as planned. And we weren't to be disappointed – indeed, the turnout at VB 2001 truly demonstrated that the AV industry is not easily deterred by physical terrorists and we were delighted to welcome close to 300 delegates to the strikingly beautiful city of Prague.

Inevitably in the light of current events there were some faces missing from this year's conference, including a number of the scheduled speakers. We were grateful to David Phillips, Vincent Weafer and Eric Chien who gallantly stepped into the breach to cover for colleagues who had been unable to make the trip, enabling us to maintain the full and original programme of presentations.

Events kicked off with a Czech beer reception, at which we were treated to quite a spectrum of entertainment including a spectacular fire eating display which was enough to rattle the nerves of hotel staff and conference organisers alike.

At the conference opening a treat awaited us in the form of Eugene Kaspersky's Doc Brown and Andy Nikishin's Marty McFly in their own adaptation of *Back to the Future*. Their Delorian time machine gave the audience an overview of what has happened in the virus arena since the first computer as well as showing us an alarming future in which all the top anti-virus experts have chosen alternative career paths: Peter Ször a cover model for Men's Health, Vesselin Bontchev an Icelandic fisherman, Mikko Hyppönen having taken over the driving seat of Mikka Hakkinen's F1 car and Eugene Kaspersky having opened 'Eugene's' – his very own pub. Happily, Marty and the Doc were able to avert disaster and return us to the present day in time for coffee and the start of the first session.

Looking to the future was a strong theme at the conference. Papers by Richard Wang and Philip Hannay and by Eric Chien predicted the need for changes in AV protection with the onset of *Microsoft .NET*, while Scott Molenkamp predicted potential anti-virus problems and solutions for *Palm OS*. *Microsoft*'s Randy Abrams received a mixed reaction from AV vendors to a tentative proposal to distribute *Microsoft* security patches with their virus definition updates.

Vendors also had plenty to say when David Phillips lead a panel of members of the Anti Virus Information Exchange Network (AVIEN) in an open discussion of the aims and practices of the network. This represented a rare opportunity in AVIEN's one-year existence for AV vendors to be privy to some of the workings of this network. Some healthy debating ensued, during which the legitimacy of AVIEN's early warning alerting system (EWS) was questioned by a number of vendor representatives.

Vesselin Bontchev's fascinating look at the anatomy of a virus epidemic chronicled the spread of self-reporting W97M/Groov.A, which uploads a file to a *Frisk* ftp site. Vesselin took the opportunity to confess that his previous declaration that 95 percent of the population are idiots was misjudged. He has subsequently re-calculated that figure to stand at 97 percent of the population.

Jessica Johnston looked at the anti-virus industry from an unusual angle, though one that was of particular interest to a newcomer such as myself. She had researched the issues of trust and perceptions within the anti-virus industry, in particular relating to CARO. She exposed some opinions which provided interesting food for thought.

Graham Cluley posed the question: what qualifications does a person need to become a 'virus expert'? After revealing the opinons of well-known AV expert the Dalai Lama, Graham raised the pertinent question of the media's responsibility in virus reporting and finished with a test of his audience's attentiveness, inviting David Perry to wander around the room, representing an alluring email attachment.

Concluding the conference, this year's speakers' panel continued the theme of debate from the previous day's AVIEN panel discussion. The session drew to a close as Vesselin Bontchev and *Ford*'s Shawn Campbell had transformed the session from speakers' panel to floor show. Shawn's memorable remark, 'Vesselin you have got to get out of the business' raised a good humoured laugh from all sides of the argument.

**The Big Easy – VB2002**



Following the resounding success of VB2001, *VB* is pleased to announce the dates and location for the 12th International *Virus Bulletin* Conference. VB2002 will be held in one of the USA's most colourful and energetic cities, New Orleans, Louisiana. The conference will take place on Thursday 26 and Friday 27 September 2002 at the Hyatt Regency hotel. A call for papers will be issued early in the new year. For sponsorship opportunities please email editorial@virusbtn.com. Put the dates in your diaries now and let the good times roll!