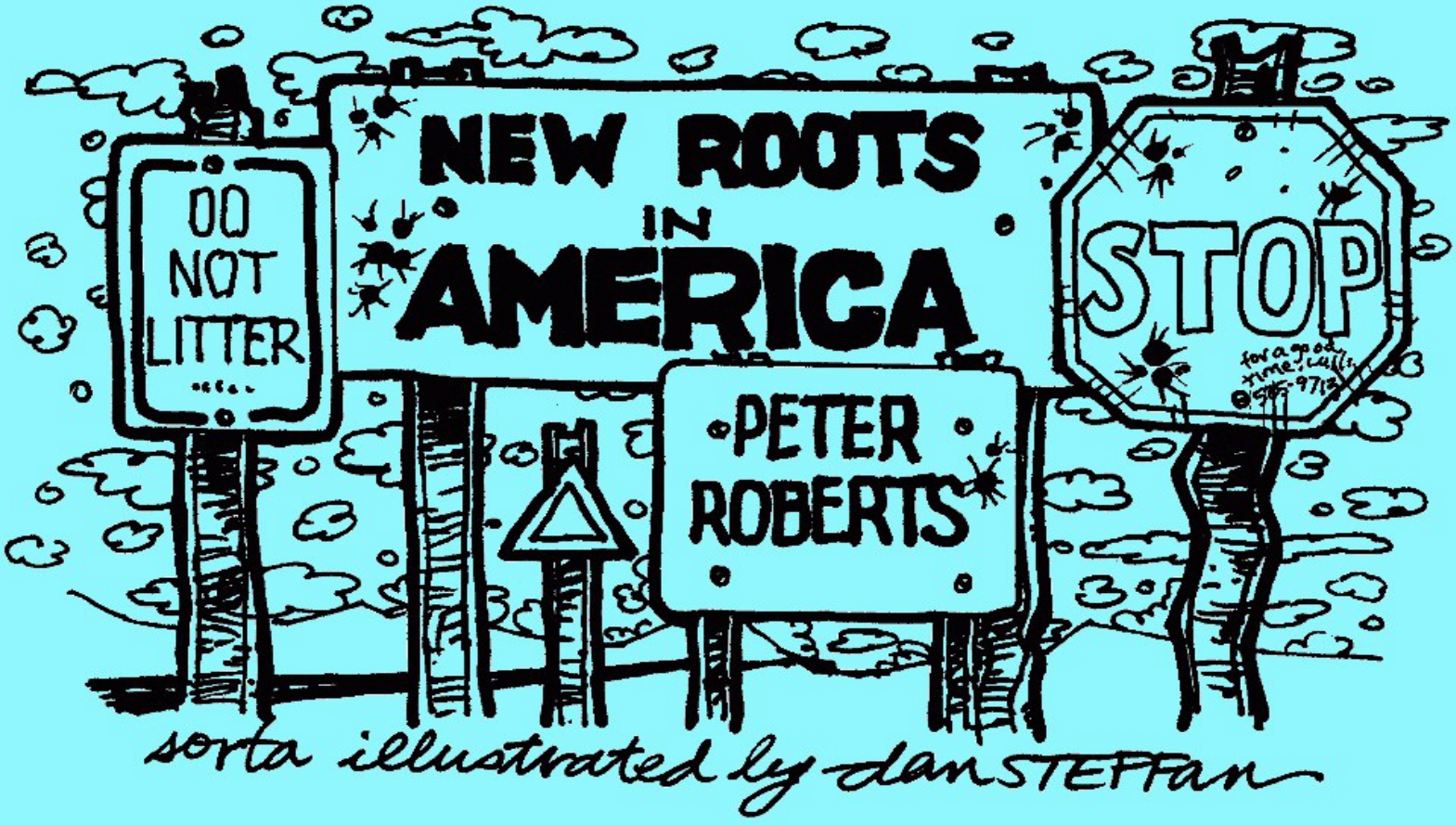
New Routes in America



1977 TAFF Trip Report

Peter Roberts

New Routes in America

1977 TransAtlantic Fan Fund Trip Report

Peter Roberts

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Peter Roberts writes: “Very many thanks to all who made the TAFF trip possible. Thanks also to those latter day saints who helped turn this trip report into a reality. Good on you all.” Peter Roberts

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Acknowledgements

1 • Getting There is Half the Fun

A handful of chanterelles simmered gently in cream is a pleasant and unusual way to start a day. The ordinary Roberts breakfast is a cup of black coffee and a cigarette, followed, as soon as I realize that I'm alive, by clumsily prepared toast, invariably eaten in such a manner as to get marmalade in my hair. That's always puzzled me actually. One day I'm going to stay awake all night and find out about that. Maybe I spread the marmalade with my comb? No matter; this is not the time to ponder on the darker secrets of life. The fact is that on this particular morning I was eating an unusual breakfast because it was an unusual day, one on which I was setting off for America and a two month TAFF trip. It seemed like I ought to make it a special occasion and besides I'd suffered to pick those chanterelles the previous afternoon, battling through nettles and brambles in an heroic effort to find the damn things. I couldn't take the fungi with me to the States and nobody else would touch them with a bargepole ("But Peter, they're bright orange...."), so I had to eat them for breakfast or feed them to the neighbour's cat. I ate them slowly and deliberately, therefore, and used the time to ruminate on TAFF, America, the Worldcon, great aeroplane disasters, Gatwick, New York, Kojak, fans, easily lost tickets, airport strikes, the Atlantic Ocean, Terry Hughes, and Disneyworld. Damn near missed my train, chewing away like a zombie. But I

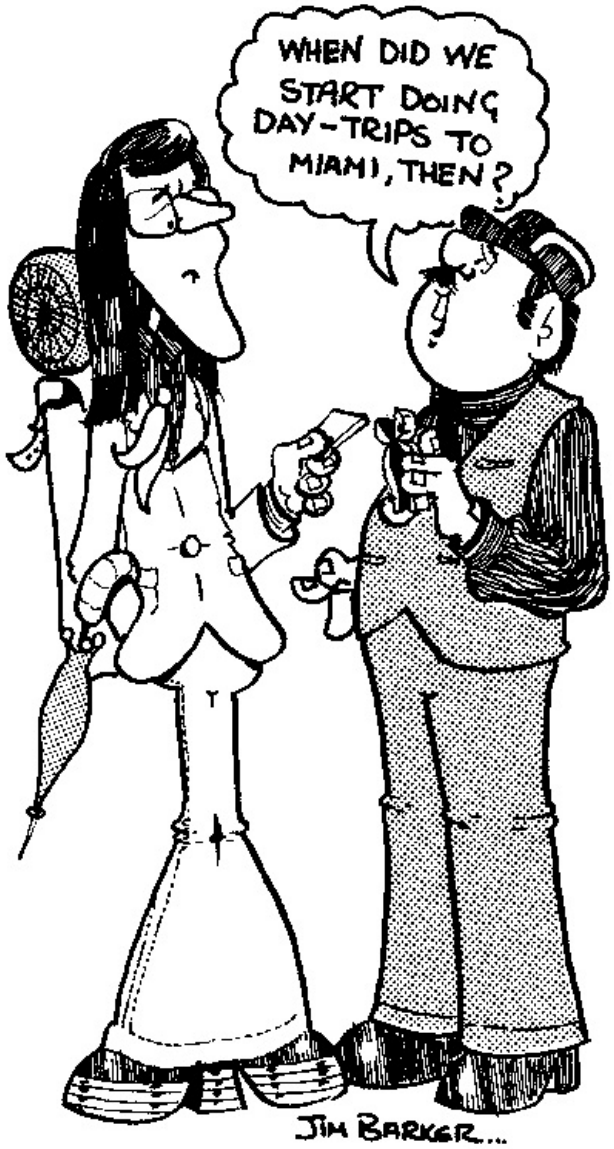
managed to wake up in time, picked the pieces of chanterelle out of my hair, hoisted my bought the day before suitable for the younger camper lightweight orange rucksack onto my back, and strode purposefully off toward Dawlish railway station. It was 8.30am on a fine and pleasant day: Saturday, August 23rd, 1977.

To get to New York from my house you've got to turn right at the end of Oakland Drive, cross the main road, and follow the path down the cliff and along the beach, past the bus shelter, till you come to the railway station. There you've got to convince the bloke in the ticket office that you don't want your regular day-return to Exeter because you're going to America. He hopes you have a nice journey, you buy your single to Paddington, and then, humming the Star-Spangled Banner, you go up the steps, onto the platform, and stare out across the English Channel until the train appears. You get in, find that it's absolutely packed, and remember it's August Bank Holiday and that everybody is taking the opportunity to go somewhere else for the weekend. You find that the only empty seat is in the bar, decide that this isn't so bad a situation after all, and spend an uneventful few hours drinking, smoking, looking out of the window, and listening to a tableful of not-very-sober Cornishmen playing euchre for small change.

By midday I was in London. I'd made as few advance arrangements as possible for the trip, but one thing that was organized was the flight to New York. At one time a whole bunch of British fans had planned to go over to Suncon and a charter flight had been arranged. In the event only Rob Jackson and myself ended up on the flight: Peter Mabey, who'd also booked, got put on another plane, the other travelling fans made separate plans, and a large number had just abandoned the trip altogether as dreams and designs crumbled in the face of a mercenary and mundane world. All this didn't unfortunately mean that Rob and I would have the plane to ourselves; the flight was a regular charter, the kind that has to be booked long in advance, and it was bound to be packed. That is, if it ever left the airport. The assistant air traffic controllers had decided to go on strike the previous Thursday. The weekend before they'd already caused long delays by working to rule; this weekend they'd walked out altogether and the tv and newspapers had been prophesying complete chaos. Rob had checked with our airline, British Caledonian, and they'd told travellers to arrive on time. This, then, was what we were intending to do, though neither of us were feeling at all confident about the outcome. Check-in time was 4.00 pm; I was to meet Rob at the

Victoria terminal above the railway station at 2.00 pm. I settled down in a nearby pub, bought myself a farewell Guinness, and waited. The skies clouded over and it began to drizzle.

Rob turned up grunting and groaning under the weight of two suitcases. "*Maya*s?" I asked. He nodded and collapsed in a chair, arms hanging limply by his side. He'd been at the start of the Newcastle Silicon the previous night and had travelled down to London that morning; he didn't look too fresh and bouncy as a result, though doubtless an inner fannish gleam lurked somewhere beneath the exhaustion. We dragged the cases over to the check-in desk and were told that our flight was delayed ten hours; it might have been even worse, I suppose, and at least we were still in central London and not marooned out at Gatwick.



We decided to kill time till midnight; Rob scanned an evening paper and we settled on a cinema over in Baker Street which was showing a strange double-bill of *Blazing Saddles* and *All the President's Men*. That was ok, but didn't dispose of a great deal of time. We went off, therefore, into the side streets, found ourselves an Indian restaurant, and after that moved on to a nearby pub. That's where I started feeling pretty despondent. When you're keyed-up, bright-eyed, and ready to be off, any kind of wait is depressing; and besides, the pub we'd found wasn't exactly a palace of mirth. A bloke played an organ in a corner and was totally ignored for his trouble, the Guinness was flat and disgusting, and some wretch lurched into the table and knocked mine into my lap. Rob was responding to the mood of the place and

sat reading computer printouts of Seacon 79 members. We should've been in New York by then. It was grim all round.

Round about closing-time we went back to the station and took the train out to Gatwick. The airport itself is compact, modern, and a reasonable place to start a journey. The strike meant that a lot of people were hanging around or attempting to sleep in corners; but they seemed happy enough – something to do with the bar still being open – and there was more of a what-the-hell atmosphere rather than a pall of gloom and bad temper. Rob and I were given a couple of £1 meal vouchers as a token apology for the delay and we queued up to spend them on coffee and buns. We were mean enough to want our exact money's worth, though the bill only came to 89p. "Right, what can I get for 11p?" I demanded of the cashier. "A peach," she said. So a peach we had.

We wandered around a bit and bought a whole flood of duty-free drink for the Suncon bidding party (ever seen a six-pack of whisky before?) and played a little cribbage till our flight was called. Somewhere around 3.30am we crawled on to the plane.

I don't know what kind of plane it was. A jet, I suppose. Things like that don't fascinate me very much, though once upon a time I used to be interested in World War Two American fighter aircraft. The plane we went on definitely wasn't a Mustang or a Thunderbolt; you could tell by the markings.

The inside of the plane was basically a large tube crammed with seats. I wedged myself between Rob, who had his very own window, a woman who was reading Barthelme's *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, and the six-pack of whisky. It wasn't very comfortable. Lights flashed, intercoms went on, the plane shuddered, and at some stage we were in the air.

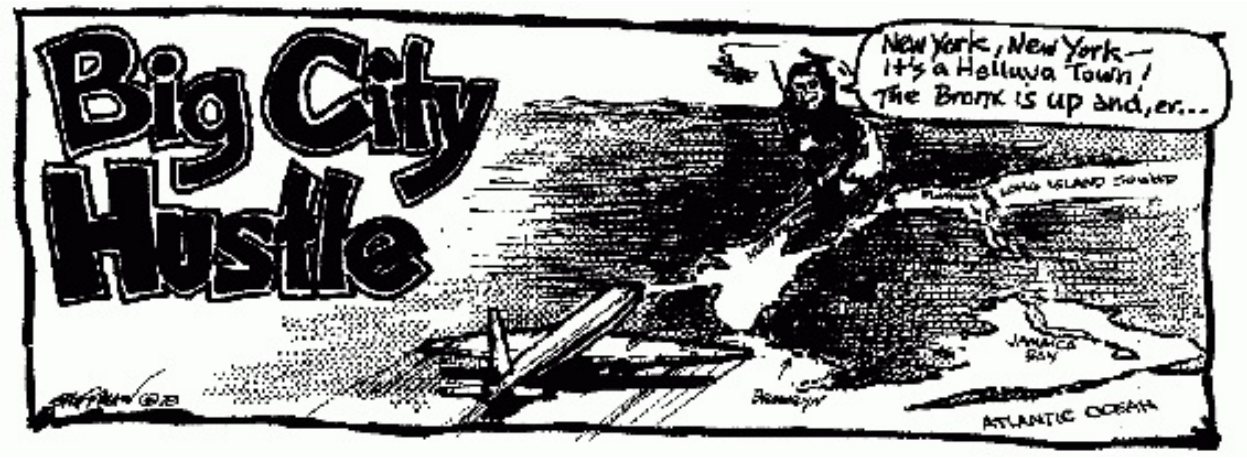
To the best of my knowledge, this was the first time I'd ever been in an aeroplane. It didn't worry me at all. For a start I was glad to be going, after all the delay; but the main reason was a sense of resigned security. Strapped in my seat along with a load of other people, it seemed utterly pointless worrying about endless expanses of empty air under my feet. There wasn't anything that I had to do. Nothing depended on me. If all the passengers had been required to press buttons simultaneously in order to take off, I'd have been terrified. But all I had to do was choose between whisky and brandy when the free drinks came round.

Rob and I had planned on getting some sleep during the flight. After all, we could do with a few hours' kip after more than a full day's travelling and

waiting around. British Caledonian, however, were in a state of some confusion. Basically, they were unsure whether to pretend that the evening flight was just a little late or whether to admit that it was four o'clock in the morning. The transatlantic time zone changes only complicated matters. In the end they did the usual thing and compromised. As a result we were served "dinner" after two hours flying. Though I'm accustomed to eating at odd hours, I couldn't face an evening meal at 6.00 am, so I just stuck to coffee and whisky. Most other people went along with the idea that it was 8.00 pm and tucked into their "dinners" like sheep. They, of course, then got caught out by the compromise, which consisted of serving "breakfast" three hours later. Mine looked suspiciously like a swiftly re-named supper, so I stuck once again to the coffee. In between these curious meals were three hours of evening, night, or early morning, depending on what you'd chosen to believe. The sun had been rising when we left Britain and was continuing to rise, without much progress, as we crossed the Atlantic. It's the longest sunrise I've ever seen in my life. Ignoring the struggling sun, British Caledonian decided to put on a film for the evening entertainment. Most of the passengers, however, felt that it was about time they had some night and accordingly went into attitudes of sleep. This seemed both reasonable and intelligent, so I tried to do the same. However, wedged into my seat in an extraordinarily cramped position, sleep was impossible. I shifted into a more comfortable attitude – left elbow propped up on the seat, right arm around my neck, one knee above my head and jammed against the seat in front, and the other leg jutting out into some clear space to one side, then twisting, below the knee, into a small hole between the seat and the whisky bottles. I shut my eyes and attempted to doze off. Sometime later I gave up and reopened my eyes. A train on the cinema screen was entering a station; it didn't stop. There was a series of slow motion shots of the train smashing through buffers, platforms, walls, tea stands, waiting-rooms, and hysterical travellers. Unconnected to the ear phones, the mayhem went on in eerie silence. Weird film to watch in the middle of the night on an aeroplane in the evening over the Atlantic in the early morning.

We reached New York at dawn.

2 • Big City Hustle



Airports are not distinctive places and John F. Kennedy airport in New York is no exception. If the pilot had told us that we'd been forced to turn back and make a landing at Manchester, Milan, or Moscow, we would probably have believed him. Anyway I was glad to be off the plane and delighted to be in America. 6.00am Eastern time, 11.00am British Summer Time: 27 hours away from Dawlish. It had been something of a long journey.

Anyway we shuffled through queues to the immigration desk. Dr. Jackson sailed through fairly swiftly; but a dishevelled Mr Roberts obviously looked far more suspicious. "Purpose of visit?" "To attend a convention in Florida." "A two month long convention?" "Ah, well, I'm intending to do some travelling and things afterwards." I forget the rest of the interrogation, but I didn't sound at all convincing. It would've been hell if they'd shaken their heads and put me on the next plane back: shortest TAFF trip on record. However, they let me through and Rob and I went off to find our luggage.

Once again Dr Jackson cut swiftly through the red tape, partly, I suspect, because the customs official wasn't about to manhandle cases weighing several tons. They gave me a more quizzical look, however, and started rummaging through my Sainsbury's shopping-bag. Inside were bits and pieces for the journey and also several hundred British Worldcon buttons. The bloke picked one out and stared at it. "What are these for?" "To give away at a convention." Pause. Further examination of badge. "Who are you giving them to?" "Anyone who asks for one." Further pause. Delves into bag

and examines second badge. Looks up at me. Yet another pause. Nervous tension on the part of Mr Roberts. Customs official smiles: “Can I have one for myself and one for the other guy over there, please?” Childlike look on official’s face. “Yeah, sure, go ahead, fine,” says kindly Uncle Peter, and is waved through the gates. Through the gates and into a real, live, no more documents needed, United States of America.

At this point I should mention that we’d arranged to meet Jerry Kaufman and assorted Fanoclasts at the airport and they’d conduct us back to Washington Heights for a Welcome to America party. This, of course, had been planned before the strike and was based on our original arrival time of 8.00 pm, Saturday evening. It was now 6.00 am, Sunday morning. Neither of us had Jerry’s phone number, so we’d only been able to hope that he’d heard about the strike and hadn’t made a fruitless journey out to the airport. Our new, revised plans were to get a cup of coffee at the airport, find the phone number, and then ring through at some more civilized time and appeal for help. We followed the signs out of customs, therefore, with Rob dragging behind with his lead weights. I eventually turned a corner into the main concourse and took the opportunity to get out of the stream of passengers so that I could sort out my own baggage. As I did so, I heard a shout of “Peter!” Looking up I saw parallel rows of people waiting for exiting passengers on either side of a roped-off section. Somewhere amongst them frantic wavings and gesticulations were in progress and placards were visible. Fans. Real American fans at six o’clock in the bloody morning. I was stunned.

The meeting was made. I don’t know anything about it; people were rushing around, asking questions, making arrangements, making quips, listening to Rob talking about *Maya*, and generally acting excitedly and chaotically. I just stood there like a cabbage with an inane grin on my face, taking in nothing whatsoever except a continuous thought: “Goshwow, here I am.” It wasn’t until I was let out of the airport, a vegetable on a leash, into the early morning sun that my brain started working and I made some effort to find out who was there and say hello to them.

This is where I run into trouble. Ideally all fans should look thoroughly remarkable so that it would be simple and straightforward to introduce them; I could then say, example, that Suzanne Tompkins was eight foot tall with green hair, or Gary Farber was the furry bloke with purple ears and a gold lamé eyepatch. No problems then. Everyone would know exactly whom I was talking about and would have a clear and precise picture of the person in

question. In fact, of course, apart from a faintly luminous fannish aura, most fans look almost human.

Anyway, Jerry Kaufman was there: curly-haired, Zapata moustached, gleaming eyes – a great bloke for energetically following whims and sudden notions to their illogical conclusions. Occasionally this involves singing, but I suppose nobody's perfect. Suzanne Tompkins, in comparison, is a model of quietness, wearing a long dress and a wide smile. I bet she sings nicely, too. Gary Farber, slender, short, hair tied back, indulges in frantic bursts of energy interspersed with quiet periods of gazing unfocused into the middle distance. Never known to sing, but may do so mentally. Moshe Feder, thin, angular, and clean-shaven, talks rather than sings; fortunately his constant stream of

chatter is enthusiastic, or New York fans would long ago have fled to the hills. By contrast, Stu Shiffman, last of the group that I now found myself with, is neither lean nor angular, and his speech is extremely exact and purposeful. He has a look of high decadence about him and probably possesses a secret collection of paisley cravats and velvet smoking-jackets. Too urbane to sing.

Meanwhile, the car outside the airport was all that I could've wished for: an all-American limousine of vast dimensions, air-conditioned and padded. This monster was on loan to Stu Shiffman – I didn't ask too closely about his connexions. Doesn't do to get too involved with people who drive cars like that. I ought to have worn a raincoat and a fedora to get into that car, and with a violin case instead of a rucksack. Studs Shiffman and the mob.

We left the airport. Cruising in an American car with American fans in America – bloody hell. The American fans chatted amongst themselves in American accents. I was grinning till I ached. This is Brooklyn, said a back seat voice. Bloody hell. American trees, American grass, American concrete. This is Manhattan Island, said another voice. Bloody hell.

And so we reached Washington Heights and I stood around grinning like a fool and probably forgot to say thank you or anything else except bloody hell, and we went up in an *elevator* to an *apartment* in a *block* and I felt like yelling out something about America, but I couldn't think what, and Rob who'd gone in Joyce Scrivner's car, and Joyce is a large, long-haired young woman in a constant fluster, was already unpacking *Mayas* and things, and

Dennis Somebody was there from Philadelphia and didn't say much, and everyone swarmed about and tried to show us things and told us how good the party which we'd missed the previous night was and had we seen the FAAn Awards on the shelves and this was the kitchen and sorry for the lack of typical New York cockroaches but it was very unusual for them to disappear and everyone looked desperately for cockroaches and Stu gave me some Flushing in 80 stuff and Jerry gave me a *Spanish Inquisition* and Gary gave me a *Tweek* and Moshe gave me a *Placebo* and everyone got *Mayas* and we all found out the secret of flushing the toilet which was playing up and we admired the nudes on the shower curtain and you could see the Hudson River from the balcony and everyone was thinking of breakfast and we all bundled out again into the sunshine and someone shouted "You eight get into Stu's car!" and Dennis and I went into Joyce's car for a change and we all set out to eat.

We arrived at IHOP, the International House of Pancakes, and commandeered two tables. I opened the menu and it was full of all those things that you've always heard about Americans eating and more besides. The waitress came up and said "Hi, I'm Jean," and I didn't know whether to introduce myself or just smile vaguely. And we all got ice-water which turns out to be solid ice that's melted a bit around the edges and is extremely American and I was getting all excited again and grinning so much I couldn't focus on the menu. I took a deep breath and calmed down slightly. Then we all ordered a confusing assortment of odds and ends and it turns out that Americans eat some disgusting things for breakfast, which I'd always suspected. I joined in and ordered coffee, and an English muffin, which I've always wanted to try, and some cheese blintzes which Jerry Kaufman recommended; they sounded an absolutely repulsive way to start the day, but since I was confused by the travel and time zones and everything, it wasn't really a proper, waking-up, empty stomach sort of breakfast, and the blintzes turned out to be really nice. The English muffin was just a sad-looking crumpet which nobody felt like eating.

Outside again the heat almost bowled me over. I gasped my way to Stu's air-conditioned car and Rob, Jerry, Suzle, Gary, Moshe, and Stu followed swiftly. We were intending to drive back to the apartment where Rob and I would get the briefest of rests before heading straight off south to Washington. I hadn't made any such plans actually, but Joyce, Rob, and Gary were driving down to Suncon and there was room for me, so I said why not.

This was roughly the level of my planning for the whole trip. I like to think of it as seizing opportunities, rather than simple drifting; but looked at objectively, the latter is probably more correct. Basically I get into a strange mood when travelling and live in a perpetual, unhindered "now". Plans, routes, and timetables I can't abide; note-taking, souvenir buying, thoughts of back home, thoughts of the future – all get brushed aside as if they were irritating strings restricting my flow with the present. If I could have dumped my luggage and other such responsibilities, I would have done so gladly. I actually enjoy being free of a sense of security when I'm travelling. I revel in the fact that I haven't a clue what's going to happen next.

So anyway, we didn't have much time. I suppose it was about ten o'clock then and Joyce was planning to set off at midday. The New York fans, however, are proud of their city and we'd hardly left IHOP's before someone suggested that if we took such-and-such a route Rob and Peter would be able to see a famous landmark. So we started back via a scenic route and the detours and side-trips became longer and longer till everyone stopped pretending we were heading back to the apartment and we all sat back for a Sunday morning tour of Manhattan.

I don't know what we saw altogether. Moshe knew the name of every building we passed, plus its history, the name of the architect, and several interesting facts about its construction and design. We passed several thousand buildings. Moshe kept up with them all. He was sitting behind me to the right, and Stu, languidly driving, was sitting on my left. Stu was also calmly pointing out the various buildings, but never quite managed to beat Moshe to it. I'd watch Stu open his mouth and then hear Moshe speak first. It was fascinating and rather weird, like listening to some mildly out of phase stereo. Every so often we'd reach a traffic light and the car and Moshe would slow down and stop. There was a brief silence, then Rob, also in the front seat (it was that big a car) and edgy as ever, would shout out "Green!" and Stu would look at him, look out at the lights, and, sighing resignedly, would start off again. Somehow we negotiated the maze of downtown New York City.

The tour, though brief and hectic, was fantastic. Remember that I wasn't just taking my first glimpse of the city itself, but also my first look at America. It wasn't just the buildings and the landmarks, therefore, that caught my eye; it was the people, the cars, the streets, the adverts, the whole atmosphere of mundane American life – right down to those street corner

fire-hydrants that you see in cop films. And as for New York itself, there were the skyscrapers. My god, those buildings are tall to the point of silliness. You have to get out of the car just to look at them – and staring at those strange, unsettling objects and standing in their shadows is like being in some peculiar dreamworld or some half-understood fantasy film.

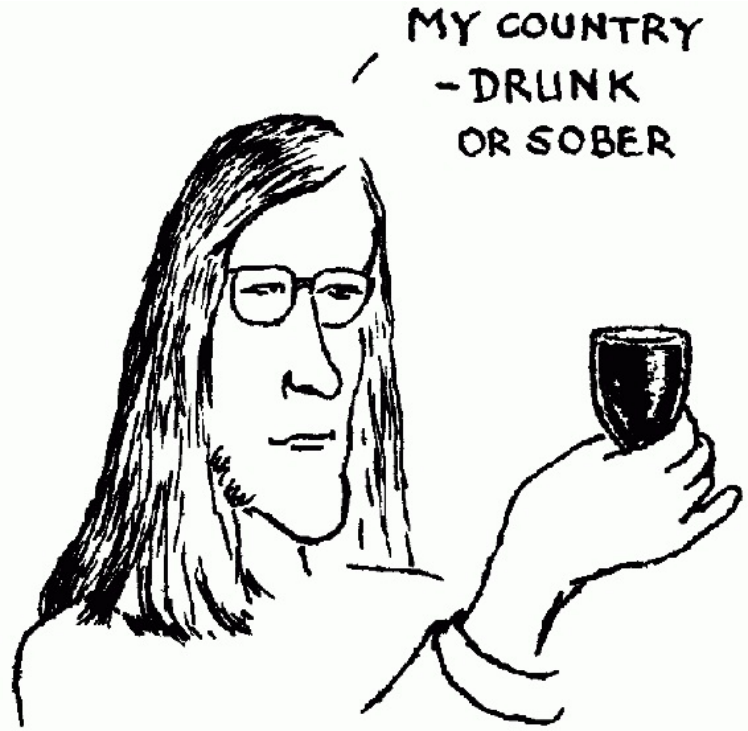
Eventually we returned to the apartment and made hurried arrangements to leave. Joyce's car was packed full of luggage, God knows how, and Jerry, Stu, and Moshe came out to see us off. As my official American agent, Jerry demonstrated a creditable attacking budgie dance and, to gratify Rob's photographic whims, also displayed a secret Fanoclast handshake which is complex and requires some acrobatic ability. We stood around in the sun and said farewell. It had been an incredible day so far, all 33 hours of it, and I was now about to head for Washington, Terry Hughes, and rumours of a party.

3 • Toasted in Virginia

We left New York on the New Jersey Turnpike heading south for Washington. There's something attractive about the name of the road, something better than a simple route number, something that makes you feel like it leads somewhere. In fact, of course, it's totally uninspiring. The New Jersey Turnpike is flat, monotonous, and barren, carving an uncompromisingly straight way through wastelands of drear industrial scenery. Chemical reeks filled the car as we rolled down the windows to allow the heat to swirl round a bit. Thus we sat, Joyce Scrivner, Gary Farber, Rob Jackson, and myself, choking, sweating, and becoming steadily grimier as mile succeeded mile.

Somewhere in mid-afternoon we stopped near a turnpike toll-gate and Joyce phoned to book a table at a Chinese restaurant she'd heard about on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Gary and Rob, croaking something about water, staggered straight for a grubby-looking tap. I meanwhile plunged off into the grass towards a nearby stream in search of American wildlife – moose, buffalo, mountain lions, or whatever else might be around. Luckily the animals were all hiding quietly in the bushes; only a gigantic monarch butterfly flapped by, its vast orange wings creating a stir of air. (The distant beating of the dull Triassic sun pulls me towards a terminal Miami Beach. Miasmic images of the ruined Fontainebleau hotel and the mesmeric baying of the fans pursued me. It was getting hotter and the urge to drive south was strong. But meanwhile ...)

Sometime later we found the restaurant. The waitresses were pleased to see people from Britain – hell, since it was 4.00 pm and the place was deserted, they were pleased to see anyone. But they were mildly concerned about my vegetarianism and made sober references to my "condition". I'd been awake now for 36 hours and probably looked suitably haggard and pale. The meal was fine, as I recall, and we washed it down with water and American beer (there's little difference). I think that it was here that I started going native, and asked for more ice.



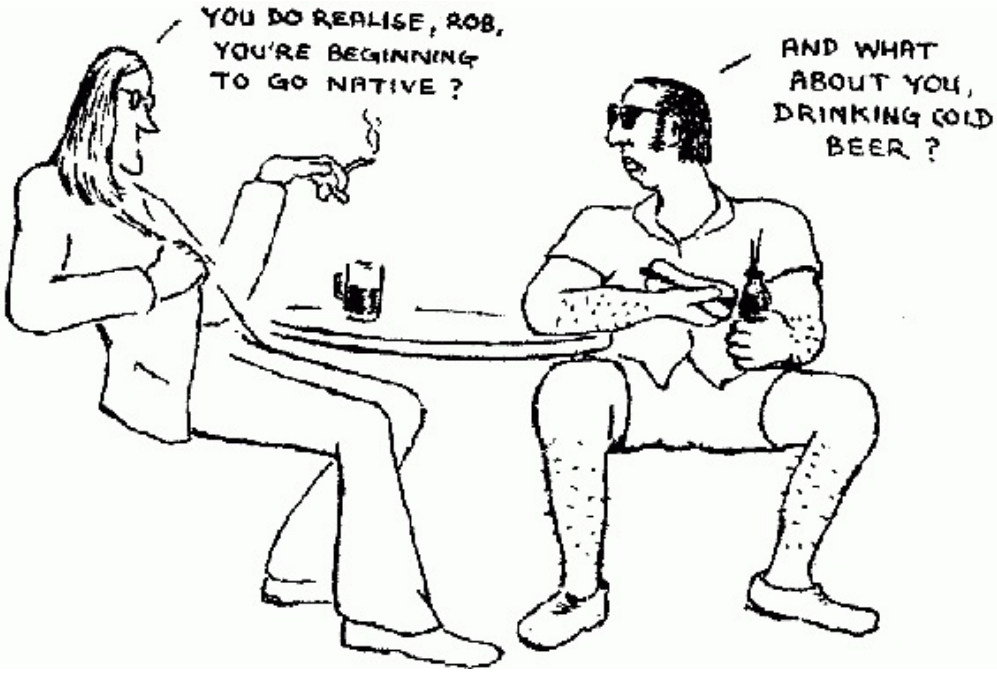
We continued on to Washington, the road straight and flat as ever. Sometime around six we reached Falls Church on the outskirts of the city. It's a pleasant, leafy, suburban area – what little I saw of it – with large, standard American, timber houses, widely spaced on wide roads. After some mild confusion we found Terry Hughes's house in Arlington and decided he wasn't rich enough to live in such a middle-class suburban mansion. He does, though, albeit in a semi-basement flat. He's even got a garden, full of squirrels and odd whistling black birds. And a screen door – something I'd always wanted to see. They're not mind-spinningly exciting objects: just bits of mesh designed to keep out flies and coyotes and things.

As our small yellow car drew up, I heard the screen door slam, and there was Terry himself, long-haired, blonde, and a less than successful dieter, standing outside. We tumbled out to greet him. Colleen Brown was inside, attractive, Chinese, and cheerful, together with Colleen's cooking (a bad influence on Terry) and, wonder of wonders, several bottles of ice-cold Guinness. Just as in New York there was a confused period of rushing around, chatter, and general clamour, except that we were all that much more sluggish thanks to the heat (so thick by now that you could see it billowing around you) and exhaustion. Rob had the puffy look, glazed eyes, and slurred speech of someone who's been drunk for a fortnight. He handed out the

*Maya*s with solemn incoherence. Gary scampered about, Joyce swished around, Terry had a look of mild wonderment as if he'd just met Father Christmas's reindeers, and Colleen moved calmly around looking fresh, relaxed, and far from frantic. I collapsed in a convenient armchair, clutching a Guinness, and beaming in a less than intelligent manner at everyone and everything.

Visitors were anticipated later. Meanwhile Rob was easily persuaded to lie down in a bedroom till their arrival whilst the rest of us continued to chat. At some point Terry's leaner brother, Craig, came quietly in, followed by rich brown and daughter. Rich is bearded, affable, in his mid-thirties, and looks in fact just like Joe Staton's cartoons of him in *Focal Point* (with such a likeness it made the thought of meeting Arnie Katz rather worrying). Avedon Carol also arrived – slim, Armenian, extrovert, and publisher of a fanzine called *Macho*. Rob had appeared again by now and was propped up in a corner, the tides of fannish conversation washing happily over him. I was disappearing deeper into my chair, Avedon resting on one arm, the Guinness on the other. Ted White and Dan Steffan came in later, having enjoyed themselves at a day-long party elsewhere. My stored memories of antique Atom cartoons let me down, since Ted has long since forsaken a crewcut and beard for long hair and mutton-chops. Still has a fine and distinguished drawl, though. Dan Steffan, eyes agleam, hair tied back, is a John-Berry-sized fan; it occurred to me in a haze of heat that Gary Farber's big brother had turned up. We talked for a good while, but I no longer remember what about; in fact, I probably didn't entirely know at the time. It had been something of a long day.

But it was certainly a fine evening. We packed it in about two o'clock (7.00am back in Dawlish). I collapsed on the couch before I'd even got my shoes off. A quick 48 hours from home, and here I was – asleep at Terry Hughes's and already replete with memories of Fanoclasts, Fabulous Falls Church Fandom, and the fantasy world of America itself. In a very hot Virginia night, a giant fan hummed me to sleep.

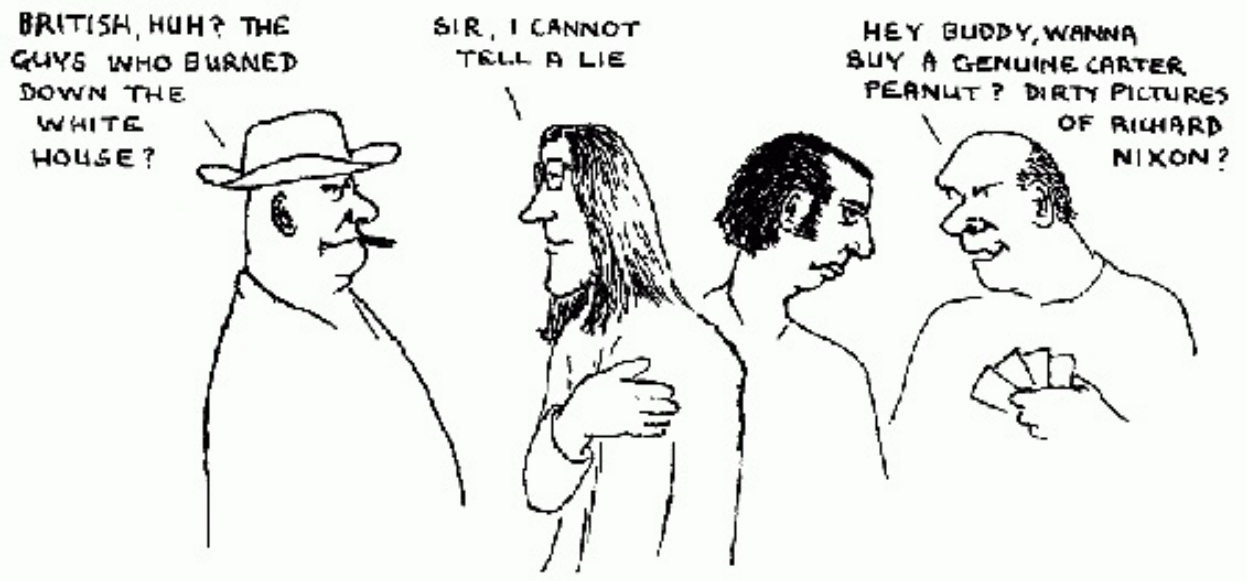

YOU DO REALISE, ROB, YOU'RE BEGINNING TO GO NATIVE ?
AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, DRINKING COLD BEER ?

4 • Capital Tour

Next morning we were up bright and early, just this side of midday, and made plans to take a quick afternoon tour of Washington, it being the capital of the United States and all that. We said farewell to Terry, since he was off to SunCon that afternoon, travelling by Greyhound Bus (of which much more later), and we all piled into Joyce's car and headed into Washington itself.

I never really got my bearings in Washington as I did in other cities that I explored as a solitary pedestrian. Joyce Scrivner had lived there and knew her way around. Or so she said, though we seemed to find an abnormal number of cul-de-sacs and rarely-seen backyards in our travels. As a result I'm confused as to where exactly we got to and how. We did find the White House, however: a comparatively small building and easily overlooked. Someone said that the British had burnt down the original place during the war of 1812. This seemed rather caddish of us, so Rob and I apologized.

Actually, several Americans mentioned this piece of ancestral arson to me later in the trip ("Say, are you British? The folks that burnt down our White House?" etc.). Despite my background as a student of American history, I'd completely forgotten the incident. This only goes to show, I suppose, the different emphasis each country puts on its history. The war of 1812 doesn't exactly have a high place in British education – in fact it probably ranks somewhere in between the Conquest of Zanzibar and the War of Jenkins's Ear. But the Americans remember it well enough. Still, as I recall, they won and that always helps. Anyway, they've got round to building a new White House which we inspected briefly from the road. Nobody was overly impressed.



Most of the other sights of Washington are dotted around a large area of parkland, flanked by the Potomac River. We cruised round – even took a look at Watergate, though it's of no intrinsic interest as a building – and finally stopped off at the Space Museum, one of several vast block-like buildings that sit on the ground looking as heavy as sin.

Inside I discovered the pleasant American custom of public drinking-fountains (in Britain we only have municipal horse-troughs) and the wonders of air-conditioning. The Space Museum is full of astronautical objects and displays of obscure technology; I have little or no interest in machines, but some of the stuff there was bizarre enough to appeal to any Luddite. Amidst a miniature forest of potted palms and trees lurked several genuine space-capsules, pitted and blasted with scars of re-entry. I ran my hands over them and peered inside, impelled by a childlike sense of wonder as flashlights flickered over the surface like an echo of meteorites (dozens of bemused Japanese parents will by now have been shown snapshots of an unknown idiot fondling exhibits). I then of course lost everyone else. Most of the time in the Space Museum was taken up with this pastime. Joyce and I would wonder where Gary was; I would wonder where everyone else was; Gary and I would wonder whether everyone else was wondering where we were; and periodically we all wondered where the hell Rob was.

At some stage we went for lunch and were confronted with the strangest piece of technology yet: a cafeteria with a huge revolving counter, three-quarters of it visible and open, the hidden quarter in some unseen kitchen or factory. We all stood around this marvel and observed the food swinging into

view, passing in front of us, and disappearing out of sight and into the wall. Other customers, including Gary and Joyce, grabbed the food as it passed and made off with it to a waiting cashier. Rob and I were hypnotized. After a while the others came back to help us and we shook ourselves out of the trance and attempted to seize food. The pre-packaged goods were confusing, however. Everything we seemed to pick turned out on closer inspection to be a freshly-wrapped tribute to American bad taste. Rob had discovered a bag of chips somewhere; but all I seemed to be getting were elk and banana yoghurts or Mr Spock's Home-Fried Pumpkin Rinds. We eventually walked off with a trayful of items which proved to consist mostly of plastic, cellophane, and tinfoil.

Back in the museum proper, we pushed the little kids off a design-an-alien machine (consisting of slides by New England fan Bonnie Dalzell, and a series of tempting buttons), sneered at the original model of the *Star Trek* Enterprise, and got ourselves mutually lost again.

After wandering around for several hours we went out into the stunning heat of Washington in August and walked over to the Capitol, another solid block of a building though modelled in mock-classical rather than utilitarian style. We found our way inside and discovered that the place was full of junk. I have a fetish about domes and am unnaturally fond of them; but the main dome of the Capitol is the drabbest I can recall and is encircled by large and dismal pictures of colonists cheating the Indians. The rest of the building contains unhistoric scrap, armed guards, squealing children, and statues of forgotten capitalists. We went out.

Walking back to the car we passed several roadside stalls whose owners broke into commercials as we passed – a smoother and distinctly American form of the barking and crying in British market-places. Joyce, maddened by the sun, bought some cold drinks. I bravely tried a sip of "Dr Pepper's", a noxious and extraordinarily sweet liquid tasting of creosote. As Joyce cooled her heels in a nearby pond, the rest of us examined the tawdry items on the stalls, mostly photos of the President's unphotogenic children and large plastic peanuts with toothy smiles. So much for politics.

Evening was coming on and we decided to head for somewhere to eat. Firstly, however, we drove to a local sf bookshop, Moonstone, which hides in a basement somewhere. Rob, as anticipated, bought an armful of books; I pretended to be fascinated in sf, but couldn't keep it up and came out empty-handed, also as anticipated. More interestingly we then went into a nearby

bar, an event I'd been looking forward to.

Unexpectedly the place looked like an average pub. I don't really know what else I was expecting – something a bit more alien I think. We went up to the bar to get drinks and Joyce simply asked for "four beers". Astoundingly the barman seemed quite happy with such an abbreviated order and served us up four halves of lager without further question. No messing with brand, type, or quantity of beer – you had a choice of half a pint of lager, half a pint of lager, or half a pint of lager. That was ok, as it happened, because an ice-cold lager was just about what I wanted. Luckily.

This was all pleasant enough and we had a couple of rounds before moving on to a Swiss restaurant a few yards away. This proved to be a more expensive place than we'd anticipated and Gary (who'd got the vast sum of $30 to last him for the entire trip and the Worldcon) was reduced to eating a frugal meal of bread dipped in cheese. We let him lick our plates, though. I also made the interesting discovery that imported Swiss lager costs £2 a pint – I didn't dare let Gary even look at such a precious liquid, lest the sight of such conspicuous consumption made him ill. The final bill certainly didn't leave me feeling too good. Cow bells tinkled mockingly as we left the place.

We started off on the first of many fruitless expeditions to find me some cigarette papers to go with my duty-free tobacco and somehow ended up at the Lincoln Memorial after dark.

Another solid great slab of a building with a flight of steps leading up to it,

the place nonetheless had a pleasanter feel to it than most of the monuments I'd seen in Washington. Probably it was just the floodlights against the night which always makes the most mundane structures seem unusual and attractive. One side of the Memorial is open and the vast statue of Lincoln gazes out into the distance: very paternal, very reassuring – a proper and distinctive sort of monument somehow, and in complete contrast to – say – the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens which just looks ludicrous and inspires not a single thought about poor old Albert himself. We ambled over to the Potomac and looked out over the river and the parklands at the lights in the night. Flying saucers buzzed and winked at us overhead, pretending to be aeroplanes; a pleasant way to end a day's sightseeing.

Ted White had invited us out to his home that evening and it was getting pretty late. We headed back to Falls Church, therefore, passing the vague hulk of the Pentagon on the way.

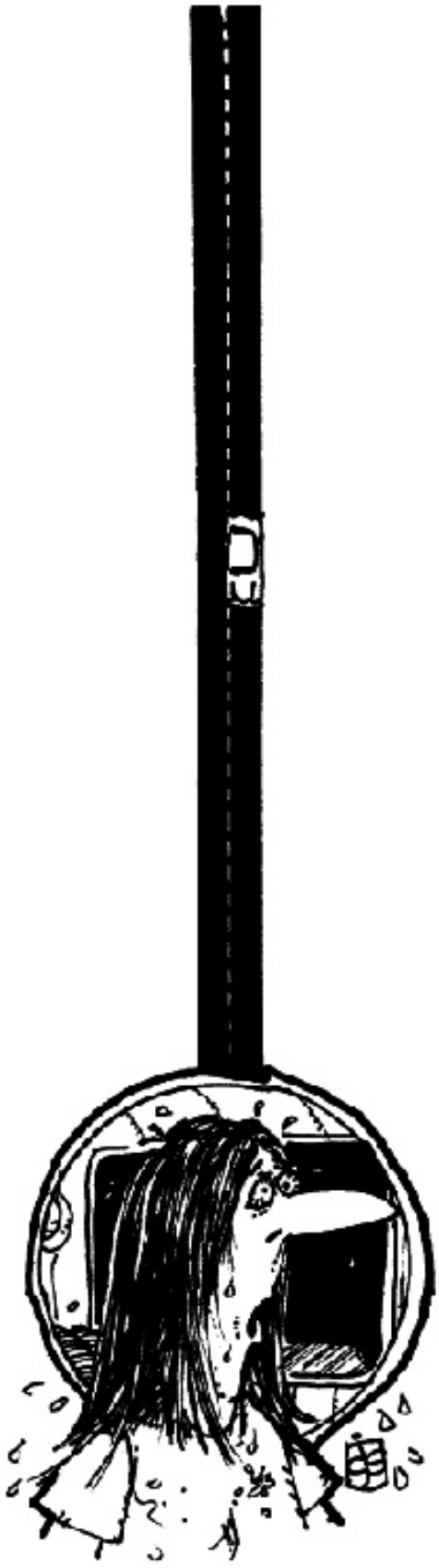
Dan Steffan, Jay Kinney, and others were waiting for us when we arrived, sitting around quite happily on a couch of bedlike proportions, listening to music and watching Ted finish off some magazine work. We joined them, admired Ted's enormous record collection, settled down on the couch, and spent the last couple of hours of the evening, chatting, talking, listening, and feeling at ease with the world. I shall never forget the sight of Rob with a soda bottle jammed in his mouth, trying, I suppose, to inhale the elysian essence of the place. It certainly seemed the fannish thing to do. And why not? We eased ourselves off the couch at some fairly sane hour in order to be awake the next day, returned to Arlington, slept some, and round about eleven in the morning left Washington and headed for the Suncon.

5 • Freeways and Turnpikes

The Middle Ages were a big non-event as far as America was concerned. You can tell by the roads. They just don't come up to good mediaeval standards – no twists, no turns, no halts at country villages, no fords, no cobbles, no hump-backed bridges, no curves, no bends to avoid cottages, no detours around fields, no following forgotten paths through vanished forests and long-drained marshes. American roads go straight ahead, oblivious of the landscape around them. Even a modern British motorway looks like a meandering folly beside a US highway. The Americans must have taken small maps and big rulers and drawn bloody great lines connecting the cities. Then they simply went out and built roads where the lines were marked. It didn't matter to them what was there: valleys, hills, forests, rivers – they ignored the lot.

I know I live in Devon where the roads are little more than tangled mazes of high-hedged lanes; but I reckon any European takes it for granted that no road is straight for long and that even the ill-natured motorways will do a little bit of twisting and curving and disappearing into hollows. A proper road is part of the countryside – it follows a natural course; it blends in with the landscape. But in America the roads are startling asphalt slashes cutting straight through the land and the result is thoroughly unnatural.

For one thing they emphasize the emptiness of the land. Cresting a hill, you can see the highway stretching straight in front of you till it's lost in the blur of the distance. And on either side of you there are tracts of land. Not countryside – just empty land. Great belts of forest, desert, grassland, or swamp, without fields or hedges or cottages or anything. Mile after mile of empty land and ahead there's always the same damn road heading straight for the horizon. It's unnervingly desolate and unchanging. After a while you start wondering whether you're actually getting anywhere at all or whether you've driven into some strange limbo state where the landscape repeats itself like a cheap cartoon and the road never ends.



Certainly the roads weren't made for human beings. There's no chance of a US highway stopping at a village inn for tea or taking you the pretty way around a lake. They're just made for machines, mechanically cruising along straight lines. The lines don't even lead anywhere after a while – they just head North or South or wherever. The whole thing becomes quite dream-like: the traffic flows steadily at 55 miles per hour and your mind becomes detached and blank. After a while hardly anyone seems to speed or even overtake. All individuality is lost in this weird constant cruising on highways without an end or a beginning.

As a passenger, whether in a coach or a car, I found myself hypnotized by the roads. I'd just sit there blank-eyed and slack-mouthed, brain completely vacant. Only rare and remarkable events like a change of gear or a hint of a curve would rouse me from this zombie-like state. I noticed it was the same with other people – there'd be some sort of unusual movement and everyone would suddenly snap awake, look around, shift in their seats, start a conversation, blow their noses, or yawn.

Still, there were breaks in the flow. Every three or four hours we'd stop off for a coffee and a bite to eat. On the Greyhound this meant grubby little bus stations; but travelling down the East Coast by car we stopped off at the restaurants that clustered round the freeway and turnpike exits. In Britain the motorway services are doled out to single companies under licence; but in America, as might be expected, it's all free enterprise and a batch of restaurants, motels, and garages tout for trade at each exit point. These service complexes form strange little villages, leeching on the traffic for their existence. They're all virtually identical – the big companies favouring similar styles for all their buildings, so that mind-numbed travellers can recognize them at a glance. The brand dictates the architecture so the architecture reflects the brand. For the less sensitive there are enormous signs identifying each motel, garage, and restaurant in giant letters and garish colours. For the illiterate, the signs are grotesquely shaped, each to its own distortion. These vast totem poles rising high above the complexes are visible for miles along the road. And at night they're a riot of neon; flashing, winking, electronically whirling, calling the entranced from the roads and into the brash little villages with no names.

Back on the road again you can stave off boredom for a while by looking at the billboards. These aren't the stunted little hoardings occasionally seen in Britain, but tremendous great things erected all along the

freeways in desert, forest, or farmland. Most are illuminated, some have moving parts, and all are designed to catch the eye, either by violent colours and vast lettering or by jokes, jingles, odd pictures, and strange shapes. Most of the billboards are concerned not with products but with services or roadside attractions. On the tedious eastern highways where the scenery consists of a 2000 mile row of trees, the billboards provided reading matter and occasional light relief. But elsewhere, in the desert and the hills, these cheap and nasty hoardings with their cheap and nasty messages were a profound irritation and an ugly curse on the landscape.

If you get tired of billboards, and that's easily done, you can always stare at the traffic. Most of it is as tedious as you'd expect, except for the trucks; I never tired of marvelling at these massive machines steaming past in groups and convoys. I know we're supposed to call them "lorries" in Britain and not "trucks"; but "lorry" is somehow too ineffectual and weak-kneed a word. These American trucks are solid and big; British lorries are tinny and frail in comparison – even the giant articulated things, the juggernauts that cross over into the European mainland, are somehow too slender and elongated. American trucks are heavyweights. Seen from a car, a truck overtaking you is like Armageddon approaching – the sky darkens, reeks and stenches pour in, smokes and fogs fill the air, and there's a roar and rumble like hell opening its gates. Somewhere up in the iron and steel above the clouds there might be a driver. And at night the trucks are outlined with patterns of dull red lights on front, rear, and sides – mechanically steaming on like the never-ending highways themselves.

6 • A Way Down South

Anyway, we travelled on south from Washington, Joyce Scrivner and Rob Jackson taking turns with the driving whilst Gary Farber and I dozed or stared at the billboards. Or maybe Gary was thinking great thoughts – unlikely, however, in that heat. And it was getting steadily hotter, though Washington had been bad enough. We had to have the car windows fully open, which meant a constant flutter of wind and hair flying everywhere. Occasionally this produced a brief diversion when Rob was driving. he'd mutter something that was lost in the wind, Joyce would lean over to hear better, and suddenly there'd be a frantic swirl of long hair and a moment's panic as Rob spluttered and lashed out, fighting off the strands like a swarm of gnats.

This relieved some of the monotony of east coast highway 95 which was notable for its featureless, tree-lined flatness. The heat, the clatter of the wind, and the everlasting road didn't stimulate much conversation; I'd exhausted my fund of interesting and seldom-heard facts about trees after the first hundred miles or so and there wasn't anything else to be seen except American cars, which look like American cars, and asphalt.

The first day out of Washington we stopped at a nameless exit somewhere in Virginia and pulled into a Howard Johnson's for lunch. We seemed to attract some slight attention whenever we stopped and I suppose we were a wild-haired and improbable bunch. Our restaurant entrances were probably worth a look. There was Joyce, by no means slender but with a quick and potentially dainty step that was spoiled by the toe-hold sandals; Rob was a stolid but indecisive mover; Gary a rapid, mouse-footed lightweight; and myself, a slug among men. Joyce would get through the door first and would advance rapidly on a table in a sort of flopping skip; Rob would reach the door, pause to let Gary through, and then himself stalk uprightly in before halting as if totally mystified by his surroundings and quite unable to detect any sign of Joyce, or even Gary, who'd furtively managed to reach the table unseen. They'd all seated themselves, read the menus, examined the sauce bottles, and been served iced-water before I'd reached the door and begun my long, stately slouch towards them. Anyway if we seemed peculiar to Howard Johnson's that afternoon, the feeling was

mutual. Here we were in the thick heat of Virginia and there was this restaurant, looking like a cross between a church and a Swiss chalet with a brilliant orange roof, steeply angled to keep off the snow. I've a suspicion it might have had a bell-tower as well. I don't know what restaurants are supposed to look like, but it's certainly nothing like a Howard Johnson's.

Still, the food was good (or at least, a hell of a lot better than a comparable place in Britain), though I was distracted from the main meal by overpowering thoughts of ice-cream. When the time came for dessert, however, I got into difficulties. The items labelled as ice-creams in the menu bore tempting, but incomprehensible names, so the waitress patiently described each one, with Gary and Joyce giving secondary descriptions of the equally incomprehensible ingredients. Whenever I said yes, great, I'll have one of those, the waitress said she was right out of them and we'd all move on to the next one. We played this game for some while till eventually somebody asked what she *did* have and she said Butterscotch and I said yes, great, I'll have one of those, and we actually got somewhere. Very nice too. I asked for cigarette papers, but they didn't have any, so we ambled and flapped out and were soon back on the road again.

At some stage in the afternoon we crossed into North Carolina and stopped at the information centre on the border. The others went off to look for free maps and water fountains, whilst I chased a couple of magnificent butterflies into a woodland area, neatly laid out for picnickers. I made a vague search for poison ivy, an all-American plant which for no very good reason I'd become anxious to find. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, I didn't know what it looked like and Joyce and Gary's descriptions dwelt more on the gruesome results of touching the plant than the actual appearance of the thing. Anyway I hopefully picked a posy of assorted undergrowth (which turned out to be harmless) and peered into a slovenly little brook where something had audibly but invisibly splashed – undoubtedly an alligator.

Having satisfied my curiosity, I thought I'd take a leak. This may not seem quite the sort of momentous event which TAFF reports normally dwell on; but, hell, fans are human too – even me – and I've always had a firm belief that serious works of literature shouldn't shy away from these things. That's why I gave up reading Enid Blyton. The Famous Five never went to the toilet once during adventures that lasted several days or more. As a kid I used to get really worried about that. It seemed like I wouldn't stand a chance

of being an adventurer myself, should the day ever come.

Anyway, I looked around for a toilet. Most of the places I'd been to previously had handy little silhouettes on the door, for the benefit of illiterates and foreigners. However, I'd had a look at the Howard Johnson's earlier and hadn't found anything – just a door marked "Private" and another marked "Rest Rooms" (presumably for long-distance truck drivers). This place was just the same – "Private", "Rest Rooms", "Information Office", and that was all. So I asked at the information desk and the woman said that the rest rooms were next door. This wasn't very helpful, so I asked again, only to get exactly the same answer. I gave her a dirty look and went out. Now, if the toilets were inside the rest rooms, it'd be a question of disturbing the truckers and whoever else was trying to sleep there; the alternative was to find a few bushes out of sight of the picnickers. I walked off with this in mind, till I noticed that gangs of kids were playing hide and seek amongst the poison ivy and alligators. So I gave that up and went back to face the wrath of the dozing truckers. And of course it was then that I found out that "Rest Room" is no more than a misleading euphemism for toilet. All of which should go to prove something – either about the occasional unexpected prudishness of Americans, or the gullibility of Cornishmen, or the strangeness of the world in general. I don't know.

Before heading off again, I picked up a pamphlet which proudly stated that North Carolina was famous for its Virginia peanuts, which seemed pretty daft. I also tried to get some cigarette papers, but they didn't have any.

I entertained the others for a while by reading out the pamphlet's unlikely and disgusting recipes for peanuts, until I made myself and everyone else slightly nauseous, then lapsed into silence and stared out at North Carolina. North Carolina looked much the same as Virginia, which in turn

had looked much the same as Maryland, which hadn't looked a lot different from Delaware, and so on. We looked at the trees and the billboards.

Somewhere in South Carolina we started passing a series of vulgar and fatuous hoardings advertising a place called Pedro's. They must have subliminally influenced Rob, since, after a couple of hours' driving, when the place eventually came in sight, he unexpectedly pulled over and we found ourselves parked in a mess of mock-Hispanic buildings dominated by a gigantic statue of a comic-book Mexican, presumably Pedro himself. We all looked at Rob; he was in a state of severe billboard shock and was still mumbling jingles to himself. Anyway, we accepted this unseen twist of fate and walked up to the first building. The first building was too cheap – an ultra-fast food bar that stank of disinfectant. We left it and walked on to the second building. The second building was too small – just a confectioner's. I asked for cigarette papers, but they didn't have any, so we walked on to the third building. The third building (this is beginning to sound like a fairy story) was almost just right – a restaurant in fact, though it looked rather bilious and bright. Indeed after a glance at the menu (which contained such well-known Mexican dishes as Southern Fried Chicken and cheeseburgers) we were inclined to give Pedro's a miss. Rob, however, was still suffering from jingles and, moreover, had worked out that we had to be in Georgia that night in order to reach the Suncon by Wednesday. I forget why that meant we had to eat in Pedro's, but Rob was in one of his no-nonsense doctorial moods, so we all did as we were told and made our usual ragged entrance. We sat down under a canopy of authentic signed sombreros from Pittsburgh, Detroit, and other Mexican cities and were briefly surveyed by a tv camera that was keeping an eye on the knives and forks. After a mere half-hour or so a female wrestler disguised as a waitress lumbered over to us and barked out some trite litany in a remarkable, thick Southern drawl, just like something out of a Civil War melodrama. I'd always thought it was a bogus accent invented by Yankee novelists, but here we were in South Carolina and the "you-alls" were tumbling out after every other word, despite the fact that we were supposed to be pretending we were in Mexico. Anyway, she moved on from the ritual greeting and asked Joyce for her order. Joyce *ordered* (Big City Americans can be stunningly blunt in restaurants) and the waitress grimaced visibly and glowered at Rob. Rob, not noticing any of this, started asking questions about the menu (the Anglo-American language gap is at its worst in menus). The waitress, already irritated and now confronted with an obvious

illiterate, snapped back answers – inasmuch as it's possible to snap and drawl at the same time. Rob, of course, not being a dialect enthusiast, didn't understand a bloody word she said. Things got rather strained. In the end Gary and I ordered the simplest meals in fear of our lives and we all ended up eating something vaguely unpleasant before clearing out as rapidly as we could. So much for the pernicious effects of billboards on tired doctors.

Sometime after dark we had a real adventure (even though I'd been to the toilet at Pedro's). Joyce, entranced by the flow of fascinating fannish conversation ("What do you think of X?" "He's ok." "What do you think of Y?" "She's all right."), managed to run out of petrol in the middle of nowhere much at all. The car spluttered to a halt.

There was supposed to be an exit some five miles ahead, so, leaving Rob to guard the car, the rest of us got out and started walking. It was pleasant enough: a warm South Carolina night, with the moon hanging low over the trees and the insects buzzing and chirping in the dense tangles of vegetation alongside the road. The walk had a strange dream-like quality – I mean apart from the fact that we now seemed to be heading for the Suncon on foot. Here we were in this deep rural landscape, miles from anywhere, and yet a few feet to the left of us strange, disembodied lights purred past and disappeared, whilst occasionally, on our right, vast hell-bright placards rose mysteriously

out of the undergrowth, offering us good eats, prime building lots, and happy retirement homes. The hoardings hummed electrically to themselves, flickering with the rapid shadows of night-flying moths.

And then a police car appeared. We wouldn't have panicked much more if a herd of buffalos had suddenly charged out of the shadows. American cop cars are intrinsically evil things – low, sleek, and menacing, bathed in their revolving blue lights. This one passed close by us. There was a sharp red flash of rear-lights, and the thing stopped.

Well, I don't know. Two long-haired Yankees and a long-haired foreigner in the middle of the night well south of the Mason-Dixon line found walking along a freeway. Obviously hippies. Obviously full of any old drugs you could care to mention. Christ. I had my *Easy Rider* sunglasses on as well. I could see it coming: a big fat Southern Sheriff in a cowboy hat, sweat-stained and looking for trouble. Joyce had already reached the car and was talking through the window. It was a brief exchange and she looked up and beckoned us on. "He says to get in," said Joyce. We got in. And it was just about as bad as it could be: he was a sheriff, and he was wearing a cowboy hat, and he had a shotgun strapped to his seat, and it was a hot, humid, South Carolina night. Great.

Anyway, the sheriff said he'd drop us folks off at the gas station along aways and then take us right on back to the car. And the sighs of evaporating tension damn near blew his hat off. So I sat back and enjoyed the ride in the cop car and the sheriff chatted away and we admired his shotgun and he said, hell, he'd got two rifles in the back as well and they weren't gonna catch him with his pants down. We got to the garage where an evil-looking extra out of *Bad Day At Black Rock* lurked around staring at us and spraying bat-sized bugs with an aerosol can; a second cop appeared and asked who was out on the road now and our sheriff said no one, they can do what they damn well please, and we looked at the cop cars, and found out we were in Florence, South Carolina, which has a municipal badge consisting of a palm tree with a couple of dates on it (1776 and 1828, actually), and shortly after we were driven back to find a worried-looking Rob who'd apparently been visited by truckers and had got himself on CB radio. We asked him if he was ok. Ten

four, said Rob. Let's roll.

And that was just about all the excitement for that night. We stopped at a motel somewhere north of Statesboro (Statesboro, Georgia, that is) and all sneaked guiltily into a double room, since Gary was as broke as ever and the rest of us didn't exactly have money coming out of our ears.

Next morning I had grits for breakfast. Outside again the sun was fierce and the Spanish moss hung in thick strands from the trees. I asked for cigarette papers, but they didn't have any, so we drove off.

Sometime during the day the main highway petered out and we went off onto some sideroads with buildings and fields and people alongside them, instead of the endless rows of trees that had stretched all the way from New Jersey. I saw peanut fields and real, genuine, white-flecked cottonfields, and began to sing Leadbelly songs about boll-weevils and suchlike, to the annoyance of everyone else. The south, however, was listless and dusty in the heat of August and the buildings and hamlets looked ramshackle and uncared for. No Gothic mansions lurked in lush plantations; just sheds, shacks, and low little houses.

One interesting thing about the Deep South is that it stinks. I reckon it's probably natural – it certainly stank like a hundred dead possums when we passed the Okefenokee Swamp. There you are; that's an interesting fact to throw into any conversation. Did you know that Dixieland smells, vicar? Fascinating, Mr. Roberts.

After lunch we crossed into Florida and stopped at the border for our free glass of grapefruit juice. People in Florida take their grapefruits very seriously. Some of them were hovering around the juice-drinkers, smiling a lot and looking very earnest, like grapefruit missionaries. While the others were given pamphlets about grapefruits and why they're so good for you, I disappeared and plunged off into the swamp, alarming the picnickers eating grapefruits in their neat little glade. The swamp stank and gurgled contentedly to itself. The plants were looking strange; I stared at a bright scarlet lily growing in the ooze and thought of jungles.

Back on the road the long line of trees had eventually broken; they'd decayed under the weight of the hanging moss somewhere back in Georgia and had given way to long vistas of grassland, dotted with shallow lakes and steaming wetlands. As we moved deeper into Florida, the landscape changed again, clumps of palms and pines breaking the flat expanse of grass and scrub. You could see vast distances just from the car, which didn't seem at all

right. I mean, it's fair enough if you're up on top of a hill; but we were down at sea level and weren't supposed to see that far away. I fell to wondering whether the earth mightn't be flat after all, just like Herbert W. Haydon once told me. Herbert W. Haydon (1 Back Street, Weston-super-Mare) is a Professor of the Cosmos and knows about these things. He once claimed that the Americans faked all the moon-shot pictures in their Hollywood studios. He also gave me a signed photo of himself and Miss Solarian (1964) clad in silver gravity suits.

The air was thick and humid, and sometime in the early evening lightning forked down around us and it began to rain. Not ordinary rain, but a subtropical downpour descending on us like a mass attack of waterfalls. I've never thought of rain as frightening before, but this stuff hammered on the roof of the car, thundered against the windscreen, and cut out all vision, even through the open windows. One step outside and I reckon I would've drowned just trying to breathe. It seemed a bit dangerous to shut off the engine, so we steered blindly through the cataract at a walking pace.

The rain belts only came in patches, so we still made quite good time, and around about eight in the evening we reached Miami. The road turned into a ten-lane freeway and rose up over the darkening city, carrying a great band of traffic in from the suburbs. This was an American vision I'd dreamed about since childhood – a strange dream of entering some futuristic city on high raised roads at dusk – and I felt nervous and ill at ease. It had been a fearsome vision as a child, and as the vision came to life, so did the old forgotten nightmares. But someone spoke, it passed off, and we cruised over the bridge and on to the island of Miami Beach. And there squatted the hulk of the Fontainebleau Hotel, and the beginning of the Suncon.

7 • SunCon and the Sea Off Miami

Rob Jackson, Joyce Scrivner, Gary Farber and I arrived at the Suncon on Wednesday evening after a day on the road, and unloaded in front of a disapproving audience of functionaries. Rob entrusted his caseful of *Maya*s to an elderly porter who disappeared for some heavy lifting gear whilst we went off and registered. I had to pay a $100 deposit, which was a bit thick (after all, they were the ones who were bankrupt); Rob, however, pulled out a credit card and they smiled and tugged their forelocks, just like in the adverts. Flash bugger.

We went up to our rooms. Mine turned out to be a single – the only one in the hotel, the porter claimed – charmingly hidden among the broom cupboards at the end of a corridor. The room itself was alarming. I've never seen an abandoned Guatemalan opera house, but that's the sort of decor the Fontainebleau favoured – jungle *fin de siècle*, only in plastic and plywood. The matching bed and dressing table were sickly enough, but the giant rococo TV set was almost beyond belief: the screen was menaced by gilded cherubs clutching grapes and to find the knobs you had to negotiate thickets of ormolu acanthus leaves and glittering vines.

I managed to turn it on nonetheless and eventually got a flickering picture in strange acid colours. Various unclad starlets shrieked across the screen before disappearing in a crackle of interference. It was a commercial for the allegedly pornographic films available to residents for a few dollars on the bill. "In the privacy of your own room ..." said the announcer, lasciviously.

Gosh. I began to wonder what sort of place I'd booked into. I mean, porno movies and nineteen fifties rococo. Corruption and decadence already – and the convention hadn't even started.

Rob and I met up again, went downstairs, and headed for the bar. We'd heard, of course, that American fans didn't use hotel bars, but we were sceptical and in any event, even if they didn't, we reckoned we could wreck that tradition fairly swiftly.

We came across Ted White and Dan Steffan on our way in – they'd

beaten us down from Washington, probably by ignoring Pedros and the lure of free grapefruits. We all went inside and found the bar in darkness. I thought at first it was closed, but my eyes adjusted gradually and I caught up with the others as they groped their way to a table. Apart from the sepulchral lighting, it seemed ok and we chatted quite happily for a while. Dan bought me a couple of drinks and, since they sold tobacco at the bar, I went over and asked if they had any cigarette papers. They didn't, but by this time I'd taken to smoking Camels and the question was becoming more of a ritual than a genuine enquiry.

Then came a sort of double-shock. First, with a flash of lights and a roll of drums, a cabaret started up in some unseen corner. Discouraged by the noise and the fact that Ted White disapproved of the music, we decided to leave and were presented with our bills. That's when Dan Steffan discovered he'd paid about £2.50 for the privilege of buying me two halves of lager.

Enough said. I told Dan I'd buy a return round if he ever visited Britain. In fact I offered him three or four rounds. Promises are cheap. And as for the Suncon, I resigned myself to American hotel tradition and subsisted on coffee, smuggled tins of beer, and room parties.

There seemed to be few fans in evidence elsewhere, so we went off together for some further exploration of the hotel. Somewhere in the basement, at the end of a corridor of locked shops, we found an opening to the outside, and decided to go for a walk on the beach. We threaded our way through gardens, fountains, terraces, and tennis courts. The place was deserted and there was only that strange humming silence and electric half-light that you get in city centres late at night. After some searching, we found ourselves effectively imprisoned. The Fontainebleau was that sort of hotel; it had locked up the Atlantic Ocean for the night.

Still, Ted found a coke machine in the tennis courts and that, as far as he was concerned, vindicated the entire expedition.

He'd set up some stereo equipment in his room and we spent the rest of the evening there. Rob and I knocked off fairly early to prepare for the first full day of the con.

The next morning, I explored the hotel in more detail. First impressions seemed about right. The architect had apparently conceived the place as a synthesis of bus station and barracks, but the decorator had eschewed such utilitarianism and had done the whole thing up like a backwoods brothel.

My favourite monstrosity was a chair outside the lifts near my room. It

was massive, high-backed, covered in red plush, and winged with two elderly nymphs whose sharply-pointed breasts jutted out so far that they snagged the clothes of passers-by. I've never seen a chair with dangerous nipples before. I wouldn't have minded that as a souvenir.

With the bar out of bounds, the convention lacked a focal point. There was a large open lobby in front of the main con halls which served as a gathering area, though it was little better than a cherub-encrusted waiting-room. It looked like the sort of place you'd pass through on the way to somewhere interesting. Apart from this, there was really just the entrance lobby and the hotel lounge. This had a Liberace piano and a vast electrolier, surrounded by secretive clumps of high-backed chairs. Drapes and carpets deadened any noise, so that you felt compelled to lower your voice. Unwanted lackeys lurked in dim recesses, peering out from amongst the statues. Elderly residents, hidden deep within the furniture, whispered and coughed at each other. The whole thing looked like a cheap remake of *Last Year at Marienbad*.

After this quick tour round, I met Rob again for breakfast. I didn't investigate the hotel's restaurants – with names like "Boob's Steak Room", "Club Gigi", and "The Poodle Lounge", I wasn't much tempted – but the coffee shop was the Fontainebleau's one excellence. It had a menu full of all sorts of interesting things; it wasn't expensive; the service was good; and it was open virtually all the time. I wouldn't have minded that as a souvenir as well.

We breakfasted with a couple of strange fantasy fans who invited us to their wedding, a costume affair that was to take place over the weekend and was actually down as a programme item. British conventions suddenly seemed staid and rather old-fashioned. They also complained about their eggs, which caused us a fit of embarrassment, though the waitress seemed to consider this perfectly reasonable. Which, of course, it is – except in the UK, where it would create a scene equivalent to tap-dancing on the table whilst exposing yourself and shouting bad things about dogs.

After breakfast I bumped into Terry Hughes, fresh from Ordeal by Greyhound, who with all the composure of a fannish master held out to me no less a thing than a packet of cigarette papers.

What could I say? I whipped out my Old Holborn and immediately rolled a fag. When the moment came to lick the thing into completion, however, I discovered a certain unlooked-for problem – the papers had no

gum. The small, anxious audience of fans who'd gathered to witness this event seemed perplexed. Terry suggested that a sufficiency of saliva might weld the thing together. I slobbered delicately and lit up. There was a spluttering noise and the cigarette went out; the paper uncurled and deposited a neat pile of half-burnt tobacco on my lap.

I eventually mastered the technique by tying small knots in the cigarettes, though Joyce Scrivner later found me some giant gummed papers ("... in Strawberry, Wheat, and other gourmet flavors ...") that were big enough to blow your nose on and were presumably made for rolling substances other than tobacco.

Actually, this presented a genuine problem. Despite British adverts featuring sun-burnt cowboys rolling in their saddles, few if any Americans actually indulge in this habit. The sight of me flaunting my papers in public, therefore, often produced shocked silences and accusing stares. "It's only tobacco," I'd say guiltily; but nobody seemed convinced. One hotel security man actually came up to me and asked barefaced if I was rolling a joint. "British!" I said desperately, waving my Old Holborn pouch like a passport. "Rats," said the security man. "I thought you might sell me some stuff...."

After that unnerving incident I settled for the quiet life and carried on with the Camels for the rest of my time in America. So it goes.

Meanwhile, back at Thursday, I was discovering that the daytime sobriety of American fans was not a myth and that whole roomfuls of fans were capable of not clutching drinks for minutes – even hours – at a time.

Looking around the lobby I could only see one fan with a drink. And that, of course, was Pete Weston, veteran of previous US conventions, who'd thoughtfully provided himself with a small stock of daytime lager. I helped him diminish the stock and we both strolled round a bit, looking for action though nothing much seemed to be going on.

The con didn't officially start until the evening and, since we were both

at a loose end, we decided to abandon the Fontainebleau and go and see *Star Wars* at a local cinema. In these latter days this may seem somewhat surprising: but the film hadn't opened then in Britain and neither of us knew our jawas from our droids – in fact, we were missing out on the references and witticisms that were going around and were likely to be mystified by half the masquerade costumes. Besides, we thought we'd get one up on Rob Jackson....

Despite warnings about long queues and the need to book well in advance, we decided to chance our luck and try to get in anyway. In the event, the cinema was deserted – almost literally. We found out why when we left – it was raining and we'd missed the forecast.

Not every reader may understand the term "rain" when applied to Miami Beach in August. A couple of months' worth of good Devon drizzle fell out of the sky in as many minutes. The road and much of the pavement was under water; no one was attempting to walk through it, and most of the traffic was at a standstill. A couple of pointless dashes to nearby shelters got us both thoroughly soaked – it was like leaping into a river. My cigarette didn't even have time to splutter before it disintegrated into a dripping mess of sodden tobacco. I was impressed by the whole business, even if we didn't look like getting back to the hotel.

Eventually a taxi cruised by and docked on the other side of the street. We waded across to it and started back. It was more like riding in a boat than a cab: the road was awash and invisible; rain thundered on the roof; the driver peered through the downpour, gripping the wheel like some old sea dog. We two sat in the back, keeping an eye open for sharks. "This is ok," growled the cabman. "I've seen worse."

We got back ok, though, and dried out at the official opening party. And after that I don't rightly recall what happened, unless this was the night of the Dirty Film.

I'd met Frank Lunney at some stage – a large and amiable bloke with Harry Bell eyes and a marvellously slow crazed-hippie sort of drawl. He's actually a successful businessman and invited me out to his dude ranch in the outback of Pennsylvania. Anyway, I met up with Frank, Dan Steffan, Ted White, and some others on their way to see the reportedly lustful *Cinderella 2000*. We sat down and listened to feminist heckling and male chauvinist jeering before the film began.

It wasn't too good. Either there are two films with the same name or we

saw the Bible Belt version. Whenever something decadent and pornographic seemed on the verge of occurring and Ted White leaned over and said, “This is it....” the actors began to sing – forgetting in the meantime whatever it was they’d almost planned to do. We stared slack-mouthed at this fiasco for some considerable time, unwilling to believe that any film could be quite so bad. It wasn’t until the orgy scene, when Cinderella and co inexplicably and at the last moment donned pink rabbit suits and started dancing, that we left.

I don’t remember doing anything much on Friday morning, so I probably spent the time looking for fun, action and excitement – the usual quests at cons. Though the Fontainebleau was full of fans, the hotel’s layout meant that most of them remained hidden for much of the time. I seemed to spend hours at the Suncon wandering around, trying to find out where everyone had got to. You know how paranoid you can get on those occasions: when you start suspecting that people are Having Fun somewhere else – only you don’t know where. Occasionally as I shuffled around peering into rooms and dimly lit corridors, I’d make a fantastic discovery, like an explorer finding a legendary lost world. It was thus, working only on rumours and native folklore, that I discovered the Hucksters’ Room (a vast subterranean cavern filled with strange life of its own) after two days at the con. The entrance was hidden in a cupboard under the stairs, heavily overgrown with ormolu cherubs.

Other discoveries included the Fan Room, interestingly situated in an alternative universe somewhere upstairs whose gateway shifted constantly. At times it was only approachable through a secret balcony behind the Liberace piano and thence through an oddly-shaped room where elderly tourists played silent card games.

It turned out that I was on a panel that afternoon in the Fan Room. In fact I was on four panels throughout the con, though no one had mentioned this until I arrived. That, I believe, is called Last Minute Programming. Anyway, the first one was on fannish writing and a few hardy souls spurned the main events and made their way up to the fan room to listen. Terry Hughes and part-time British fan Tom Perry were on the panel, as well as Dave Emerson who looks like a Minneapolis version of Tom Jones (the singer, that is) and was then editor of the fanzine *Rune*.

We were doubtless wise, articulate, and fannish on the panel, but I don’t remember a thing, except that there was another panel in one of the main halls immediately after and I was supposed to be on that too. I rushed

downstairs and eventually located the event, just about to start in the East Ballroom. It was on International Fandom and so I joined Jan Howard Finder, who was already up and speaking to the half dozen or so people who'd thus far come in; he'd managed to find a couple of Italians, one a monoglot, and had persuaded them to get up on the platform too. I sat down and waited for the other five panelists and the audience. The East Ballroom seats 2000 and is big. Jan kept on talking. I exchanged pleasantries with Roy Tackett in the front row, and we all sat and waited. That, in essence, was the International Fan Panel.

Sometime later there was a Meet the Pros party in the depths of the hotel lounge. Since I'd discovered that the con committee weren't about to fête a mere TAFF delegate, I thought I'd go along and see if I could at least get a free drink out of them by pretending to be a pro. I don't think it worked, but Ginjer Buchanan was kind enough to give me a ticket and a special professional hat anyway. I like Ginjer Buchanan.

The special professional hat was a garish orange bowler, which was fine by me. There were plenty of other fake professionals there, lured by the free drink. Naturally enough these included Mike Glicksohn who'd just come from the Mooncon – a pre-Worldcon get-together in the Florida Keys (I'd been hoping I could've got down there, but you can't have everything). Mike was wearing a strange outfit, reminiscent of nothing much at all, except perhaps a Hawaiian sheep-shearer. Much of it was obscured by hair, anyway. I only found out what Mike Glicksohn *really* looks like a few weeks later when Jerry Jacks showed me a photo of a smooth-skinned and rather podgy kid. Gosh.

Whilst Mike and I can probably wear orange bowlers without looking a great deal stranger than we already do, the headgear certainly gave Pete Weston and the rather remote figure of Andy Porter a particularly daft air, rather like carnival bouncers. The three of us, still behatted, had a meal together; I rather think the others had forgotten about the bowlers. Anyway, our professional status wasn't impressing anyone, since the rest of the clientele were all chatting in Spanish. Andy ate several things that made Pete sick.

A Britain in Seventy-Nine bidding party was planned for later that evening, Suncon being the place where the winning bid was to be chosen. During the day, in fact, I'd helped man the voting desk along with a representative from the New Orleans opposition. Several of the visiting

British fans lent a hand and between us we had a bunch of publicity – badges, T-shirts, and so on – since that seemed the thing to do. The bona fide New Orleans fans were actively helping us, leaving the 1979 bidders a little at a loss. They were certainly out on the fringe – one of the blokes standing next to me struck up a conversation by asking, "What is this 'fandom' thing, anyway?"

Thanks to Gary Farber, we had a committee room for the party, which wasn't too bad even though the Fontainebleau had thoughtfully provided free cockroaches in the bathroom (I was quite pleased about that – first time in my life I'd ever seen a cockroach). Rob, Pete, Tom Perry and others had clinked in guiltily with several cases of drinks, much of it soft as a concession to our electorate, and we'd got a few items planned – just so's the party-goers would remember why they were there. We had some slides to show; Vera Johnson was going to sing the Seacon song; and we'd arranged a knurdling contest, with the help of several beer tins and Bill Burns (Champion Knurdler of 1971). Pete was also anxious to stage the mystical Hum & Sway, but it turned out that nobody had ever witnessed the event. He finally decided to bluff his way through with the aid of much alcohol.

Anyway, the party seemed to go off pretty well. A startling number of people packed their way in, sang lustily, competed at knurdling, drank all the fizzy pop, and generally had a good time. We awarded the Champion Knurdler a bottle of whisky (which I generously helped finish) and, since Pete turned off the lights, the mysteries of the Hum & Sway remained mysteries.

By the end of the party (and the whisky) I was no longer in a state of clear-minded sobriety. I think I may have been enticed away by wicked hippies and forced, entirely against my will, to indulge in certain substances; at any rate I can only vaguely recall talking to someone at a party and suddenly, in the middle of the conversation, accusing him of being well over seven feet tall. Actually he agreed with me and was only surprised I hadn't noticed earlier. I have my doubts about that incident.

There was a policeman, though. I don't think I made him up. He was shorter than me and was trying to quieten down a room party I was at, or near, or about to go to.

There was also Jon Singer, an ebullient, long-haired bloke with his own personal fan club and more knowledge about moose than most people have ever needed. I met him in a corridor and we had a long conversation before I

found out it wasn't him.

I think I wisely decided to go to bed at this point. Jon told me the next day that there was someone at Suncon who looked exactly like him, but I think he was just trying to comfort me. Anyway, I enjoyed myself and didn't piss on anyone's shoes.

The weather brightened on Saturday, though it was still so humid that whenever I left the hotel my glasses steamed up. Not finding anything better to do, I rather nervously changed into a pair of shorts (orange, of course) and attempted to act nonchalantly as I made my way downstairs and out into the sun. Nobody, I hope, recognized me.

Now that the locks were off, it was possible to reach the Atlantic by way of a tunnel and a viewing screen into the depths of a swimming pool infested by Cuban kids. In fact, there were a lot of people about; the hotel had a small section of beach surrounded by huts that, taken together, was rather grandly termed the Cabana Club. Club members paid $2,000 per year for the privilege of using the facilities, so there were plenty of people about, all eager to get their money's worth and to be seen doing so. Cliques of fat businessman jogged up and down the beach whilst scantily clad young women toasted in rows beneath their feet. The ocean itself was pretty quiet and didn't look much like the Atlantic as seen from Cornwall. A plane went by with a streamer advertising somebody's "deli". I parked myself down and waited for the sharks to eat the swimmers. There didn't seem to be any other fans on the beach; maybe the hucksters' room was giving away free wookies, or something.

Using the back corridors, I crept back in before lunch and changed into something more civilized. I must have met up with Tom and Alix Perry because a bunch of us, including Pete Weston, Terry Hughes, and Lee Hoffman (a charming and ladylike figure with the sort of half-moon glasses that always give people a quizzically humorous look), packed into Tom's car and went off in search of somewhere cheap to eat. In fact, we went cruising for burgers. I've always wanted to go cruising for burgers since Frank Zappa waved to me once in Liverpool. Anyway, we eventually found a McDonalds opposite a derelict striptease palace. It was the first time I'd encountered a McDonalds and, God willing, it'll also be the last.

There wasn't much choice, but I ordered french fries, which came in a cardboard funnel, apple pie, which came in a cardboard tube, and a milk-shake, which probably also came in cardboard, though I don't remember

how. The others gathered together their packages and we all sat down, looking for all the world as if we'd just come out of Father Christmas's bargain grotto. Everyone seemed quite content, tearing along dotted lines and pulling flaps to get at the food. Even Lee Hoffman seemed quite happy, though she looked magnificently out of place.

I unpacked my chips and found that they were actually potato sticks of the kind served up at parties. Moreover, some miserable bugger had covered them in salt – a substance I'm not greatly fond of. I moved on to the apple pie tube and extracted something resembling a sausage, or worse, in batter. Biting tentatively into this I unwittingly released a scalding cataract of green slime which dribbled down my chin and burnt holes in my T-shirt. I gave the milk-shake to Tom Perry – I know when I'm beaten.

Despite the food, it was an enjoyable outing. I left hungrier, but wiser.

Saturday evening was quieter than I anticipated. The Masquerade was on in the main hall and included several pretty costumes and a wookie. It was during this event that I was accosted by a local journalist who was impressed out of his mind at actually being inside the Fontainebleau. "Isn't this something?" he kept saying, gazing around like a schoolboy in a toy shop. I told him there were more cherubs in the hotel than in the whole of Cornwall and he wrote that down in his notebook and looked quite pleased with the comment. I then told him that Cornwall was an independent nation on the western border of England, and he wrote that down too. I wished I'd found out what paper he was writing for.

Anyway, there were parties later on – I had a whole matchbox covered with room numbers – and I started off with the best of intentions of doing the rounds. As luck would have it, however, the very first one I went into was the wicked hippie party of the evening, even if it was full of eminently respectable fans and authors. I sat down to chat for awhile before realizing that I was now part of a chain of mysteriously smouldering objects. Fully half of these were so mysterious that, with all my decadent wisdom, I couldn't for the life of me figure out quite what one was supposed to do with them. Several had bells on, so help me.

Whilst trying to strike a balance between sociability and sobriety, I miscalculated by several miles – as usual – and swiftly ended up with a faraway look in my eyes and no conversational ability beyond an abstracted nod. Part of the gathering got up to investigate the Gay Lib party, so I stumbled after them and decided to take a detour to my room to plunge my

head in cold water and generally recover.

Five hours later, when I awoke, I felt considerably more lively. So it goes. Anyway, I continued on to the party which, amazingly, still contained some half dozen or so fans – though whether they were organizers, committed radicals, or just late-night wanderers, I never found out. We decided to have a meal downstairs, but found the coffee shop shut. We were just about to go away when the manager bounced out, apologized for the inconvenience, and said he'd be open again in a few minutes' time.

Good place, America. After McDonalds, my confidence had needed a little restoring. But here we were at 5.15 am, sitting comfortably in the coffee shop, and ordering a disgusting mixture of breakfast, supper, and snacks without anyone turning a hair. The only order that dismayed the waitress was mine – cold beetroot soup with sour cream. "But that's Jewish," she kept saying, looking worried. I'm still not sure what she meant by that.

On Sunday morning, Brighton officially won the 1979 bid and Rob Jackson, our Official Worrier, was at last able to relax and enjoy himself. We decided to go down to the beach with Pete Weston. This may not be everyone's idea of a treat, but it was a nice day and the sun was shining.

We sat on the beach. "Isn't it good just to sit down and not work on the bid," said Rob, luxuriating. Pete and I nodded guiltily, as if we'd never dreamt of leaving the registration desk before now. I tried to hide my sunburnt legs in some convenient sand. Seacon seemed a long way off.

Anyway, I got the rare chance of seeing Rob floundering in the waves and the even rarer chance of seeing Pete Weston doing the doggie-paddle (a feat of which he's inordinately proud).

Come the afternoon and I was on a newszine editors' panel, where I met the rotund and affable Charlie Brown for the first time. We talked about whatever newszine editors talk about. Looking at the programme sheet, I now see that's why I missed the Amber Style Wedding. Pity about that – I imagine it was pretty strange.

Not finding much to do after the panel, I allowed myself (for the third, final and most foolish time) to be lured away by the ever-present wicked hippies. As usual, I ended up pleasantly happy but almost totally speechless and, since I'd agreed to make some sort of tape-recording for an archivist at six o'clock, I decided to have a quiet period of recovery in my room. When I awoke it was 7.30 pm exactly – the time the banquet was due to start. That's what I call lucky timing. I've heard of other TAFF delegates getting nerves

and wishing they could miss the banquet; but I've never heard of a TAFF delegate who slept blissfully through the entire proceedings.

Anyway, I changed into my day-glo orange suit, tailor-made for the occasion, and got downstairs in fairly good time. One way and another, I felt pretty ill-at-ease: I'd given myself a fright by waking at the eleventh hour, I still hadn't woken up properly and felt pretty dopey, and it suddenly occurred to me that I might be asked to say something. It was a trembling and befuddled Roberts, therefore, who sat down at the table in between Messrs Weston and Jackson.

The banquet was a bit of a mess, as banquets usually are. John Millard, Seacon's Canadian agent and a solid old-time fan, had individually invited the three of us onto his table at the beginning of the con and we'd accepted. Now that we were sitting there we were feeling a bit conspicuous – British fans sticking together, and all that. Apart from John and Jan Howard Finder (who supplied most of the conversation), we didn't know the rest of the people at the table, though I recognized one as the monoglot Italian I'd seen earlier. Poor old Pete had a couple of mutes sitting on his left and a less than sparkling Roberts on his left. It was a bit grim.

I was just toying with my main course, which consisted – without a word of a lie – of eight carrots and a spoonful of beans (have you ever tried eating eight carrots?) served long after everyone else had had theirs, when someone squeezed past me clutching a pile of books, and knelt beside Roger Zelazny's chair immediately behind me, demanding autographs – which he got, too. In the middle of a banquet. Gosh. It's all go being an author.

The meal over, Bob Silverberg got up and started toast-mastering – a thing he does very well. He called upon the first speaker – a visiting fan from England....

It still makes me nervous just to think about it. I enjoy public speaking, but not on formal occasions when I'm given an introduction and have to start talking on cue. It induces a crescendo of nerves that makes me physically speechless for 30 seconds or so – and 30 seconds is a long time to stand silently in front of a microphone.

Fortunately our table was some way off, so my nervousness (and consequent silence) peaked and ebbed whilst I was clambering shakily up the steps onto the platform. It looked worse from up there – a sea of after-dinner faces and flash guns. I was only intending to say a few words of thanks (I'd rather leave speeches to those who are good at them), but I thought I'd start

off with a quip about needing special filters to get a photo of my suit.

Well, I started off in a sort of high-pitched mumble which had all the clarity of an Albanian liturgical chant. Bob Silverberg, smirking evially, was playing with the switch controlling the movement of the mike and lectern. It wasn't a good speech, or even really an adequate one. But I survived, and that seemed the important thing at the time.

Still, the advantage of going first is that you can sit down and relax for the rest of the speeches. This, of course, is when an amazing number of witty and worthwhile things you might have said suddenly occur to you. Meanwhile, Bob Silverberg was going well and several of the Hugo winners were comforting me by sounding possibly more foolish, maudlin or nervous than I might have been. And then the wookie was on stage again and I suddenly felt a lot brighter, and ready for the Seacon celebration party.

Pete was particularly looking forward to this since he'd found a professional belly-dancer to give an authentic British flavour to the party. "Noice girl," he told me confidentially.

Anyway, she turned up at the party, as did several hundred other people, and I reckon we enjoyed ourselves. I probably went to bed after. I certainly should have done, even if I didn't. Let's say I did and move onto Monday.

Monday was notable for several things. Firstly, there was a panel in the morning at which a handful of wide-awake Americans were treated to the sight of several bedraggled and hung-over British fans who were ludicrously expected to discourse learnedly and wittily on the subject of British fandom. Few of the panelists could remember anything at all about British fandom. Most of us couldn't remember each other's names. Several thought they were still in bed.

After this nonsense, I stayed on to hear one of the few programme items I managed to catch at Suncon – a panel, or more nearly a dialogue, on fandom in the sixties with Terry Carr and Ted White. Joined later by Lee Hoffman, the panel strayed into the fifties as well and produced a fund of entertaining anecdotes and little-known facts. Though some of the American fans seemed dismayed at the outburst, my favourite moment came when, during an explanation of the arguments between fannish and sercon elements in the fifties, Ed Wood (who looks like a large American, and is) suddenly bellowed out a defence of the hardline sercon stance and incited Ted White into a fannish counter-attack. The result was a spontaneous re-enactment of fannish history – a dramatic interlude illustrating an ancient feud, with full

audience participation. (Ed Wood: *I used to trash every issue of* Hyphen *unread and unopened!* Audience: *anguish, smiting of foreheads, general uproar!*)

This seemed to be virtually the last hurrah of the Suncon programme, and it was evident that the con was coming to an end. From early morning, evil-tempered congregations of black southern Baptists had been gathering for some vast evangelical conference. Though they addressed each other (always as "Sister" or "Reverend Doctor") in splendidly rich and friendly Southern Baptist accents, they addressed the hotel staff otherwise, since the Fontainebleau had gone in for a bonanza of double-booking and general incompetence.

The hotel in fact was casting its greedy eyes on Suncon rooms – mine included. I was paged and curtly told to get out. This was pushing their luck, since I'd kept their original chit confirming my booking; I clung onto it tightly and eventually convinced them of my right to stay. Others weren't so lucky; Gordon Dickson told me he went up to his room to find a couple of particularly elderly black Baptists sitting bewildered on his bed, staring at his collection of SF and alcohol. He'd had a long and curious conversation with them, whilst the hotel tried to unscramble matters.

At some stage I went swimming and met with Terry Hughes, Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, and a couple of other Madison fans. There isn't a great deal to do when swimming, but inasmuch as we were doing anything we were body-surfing. This is a rather tame pursuit, especially to someone brought up on Jan & Dean and the delights of Surf City, USA. However, one of the unknown fans was big enough to generate his own excitement, as waves thundered and crashed against him, mistaking his massive girth for a barrier reef. He looked quite impressive, battling against the tides in a passive sort of way, so I decided to be more active and plunged headlong into each incoming wave, scattering spray all over the place just like a tingling fresh toothpaste advert. It was a sort of reverse surfing – guaranteed wipe-out every time.

Tiring of this unusual burst of activity, I took to swimming about a bit. The others had left, except for Terry who was paddling about somewhere.

Now, I'm hardly an ace swimmer. The last time I'd gone into the sea before Miami was some fifteen years earlier when I was a kid, so I was sort of breast-stroking and splashing about at around shoulder depth. Rapidly tiring of this unaccustomed exercise, I put in a couple of fairly powerful strokes to reach the end of a wooden breakwater where I could rest for a bit. The couple of strokes, however, didn't advance me at all, so I gave up and decided to wade there. That's when I found my feet weren't touching the bottom. Panic.

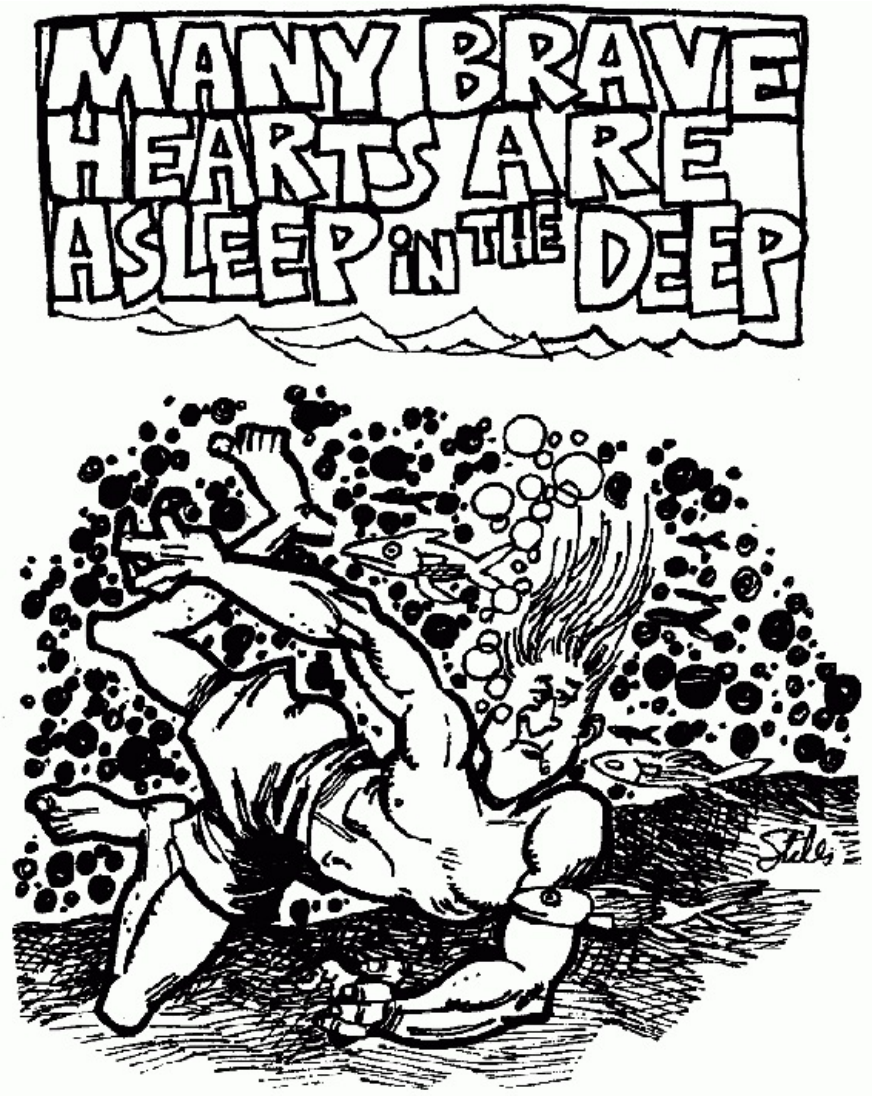
Terry was paddling about contentedly. I looked wildly over to him. He waved and I gave a confident and nonchalant wave back and promptly sank. By now, I was feeling more than apprehensive. The ability (at age twelve) to swim two lengths of a five foot deep pool wasn't proving much of an advantage in this situation. In any event, I'd already swum that much without gaining an inch and my arms were giving out. More panic.

Then I noticed the end of the breakwater was now three foot away and I was actually drifting out to sea. Huge panic.

My life didn't unwind before me: I just sort of saw headlines – "TAFF delegate drowned at Suncon!" – and felt more embarrassed than anything else. The people on the beach were all sunning themselves. Kids were splashing around in the shallows. Terry was paddling about quietly. I couldn't bring myself to shout out, "Help!" to save my life. Typical British reserve, I suppose. Meanwhile, the breaststroke had become an intermittent floundering and I was gulping down huge quantities of Atlantic Ocean whilst moving hopelessly backwards. It all seemed so bloody silly.

I spent some time, both above and below water, trying to think of something both witty and urgent to say to Terry, but couldn't concentrate well enough. I eventually settled for something like, "Can you give me a hand, boss? I think I'm drowning."

This had a marked effect on Terry, especially since I was by now disappearing under the water at uncomfortably frequent intervals. I've rarely seen anyone so dismayed. He began edging crablike towards me. It occurred to me he couldn't swim either. Two at once – it might even make the front page of *Locus*.



But you can all ease back into your chairs now, since an attack of common sense came over me and I realized that if Terry was as far out as I was, yet still only shoulder-deep, I must be in some kind of well or trough.

Accordingly I told the bravely advancing Mr Hughes to hold still, swam sideways, and touched bottom.

I felt quite elated actually. For a few moments back there I really thought I'd done myself in. Terry was still looking somewhat wan, but I felt great. Nothing like escaping death for cheering yourself up – not that I fancied making a habit of it.

Meanwhile, back at the Suncon, hucksters were still selling pulps as if nothing had happened. The evening came on and with it some final parties. I met up with Charlie Brown, who in turn met up with some affluent-looking people who seemed inclined to hold a party somewhere. We all went up to the penthouse suite – the only place in the whole hotel decorated with any taste or restraint – and, with our own private bar, began to hold a party.

Apart from Charlie, the only other person I recognized was Poul Anderson and, as introductions were made, it slowly dawned on me that this must be a secret pro party, full of publishers, agents, and Hollywood sci-fi people. Goshwow.

They started talking about *Star Wars*. The publishers seemed rather earnest and nodded their heads a lot, in between mouthfuls of peanuts. After a while it wasn't too fascinating. Charlie drew me a comprehensive map of American fandom on the back of a matchbox and also gave me an official Fanzine Control Number on a serviette. Our cosmic minds weren't paying too much attention to the characterisation and cultural significance of wookies.

I was thinking that at least I could casually impress Rob Jackson and Pete Weston, when the two of them walked in, together with a lot of other riff-raff. The party livened up considerably and in fact turned out to be very pleasant, especially since the penthouse suite had a balcony with a fine panoramic view of Miami at night. Whilst gazing out, I chatted to someone about the virtues of growing Swiss chard and other vegetables. Swiss chard is less often discussed than *Star Wars* and also tastes better.

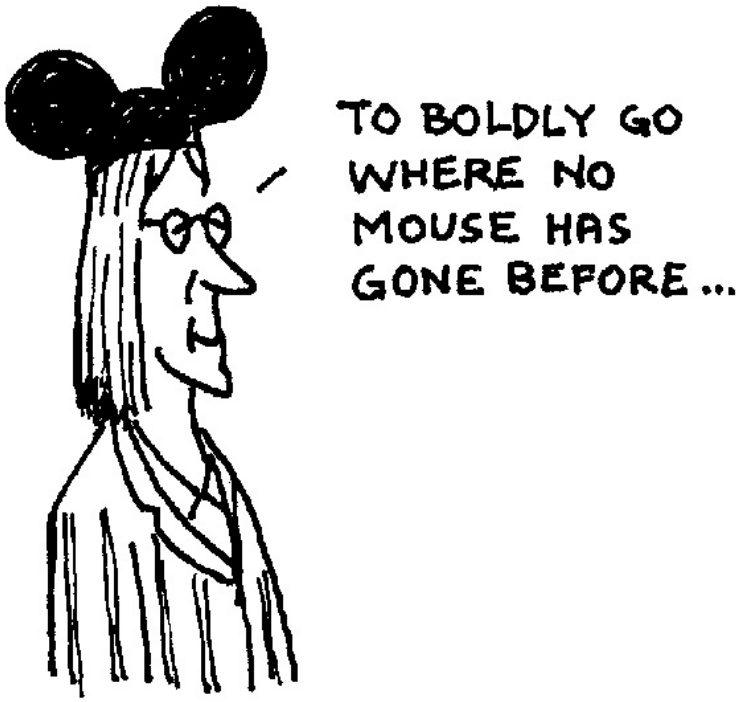
I must have wandered around a bit. I remember getting even higher by going out onto the roof where there was a really spectacular view, even if the lead was soft underfoot – a weird sensation. Terry was up there too – I suspect he was glad I didn't fall off the parapet or sink out of my depth in lead.

I finally ended up down on the beach again, circumventing the Fontainebleau's locks and bolts by going through a neighbouring hotel. I

chatted on the shore with Tim Marion, a nice bloke with amazingly long hair and an equally amazing Southern accent. I’m easily amazed by Southern accents.

And so to bed. The next day I visited Disneyworld, but we’ll leave that for the next chapter....

8 • Pirates, Parrots and Pizzas



Tuesday morning, as the throngs of Baptists milled and grimaced in the Fontainebleau lobbies, Rob Jackson, Joyce Scrivner and I made our departure from Suncon and the tinsel wonders of Miami Beach.

It had been touch and go. Not having planned anything as sensible as an itinerary, I'd been humming and hawing and changing my mind about what I was going to do next. However, my own display of indecision was completely overshadowed by Rob's, who was out-dithering me at every step. Was he flying north to Ohio or travelling south with the Mearas to the Everglades? The Mearas and the Ohio fans said yes, and so did Rob. So, was he catching a lift to Cincinnati or visiting Disneyworld? Yes, said Rob, *definitely* yes, though *maybe* ... or possibly ... or ...

In the end we just grabbed him and bundled him into the car. Weighed down with the last of the *Mayas*, he didn't put up much of a fight.

After that, we hit the road and sped off into the morning sunshine, singing happily and heading for the distant delights of Disneyworld.

We were still singing when a pleasantly flashing patrol car stopped us and

Joyce got booked for speeding.

We took it philosophically. Life is full of little surprises....

Anyway, Joyce didn't seem too worried since she wasn't planning on returning to Florida, and that meant she could safely ignore any speeding tickets that might come her way. So she claimed. Apparently this is known as using State Rights to your own advantage and is an interesting side-effect of the federal system that I don't remember being taught at school (we only did Washington, and the Civil War, and things like that).

All this excitement left us feeling hungry, so after the patrolman had replaced his sunglasses and left, we drove slowly off the main road and stopped at Frank and Margie's Sub and Pizza Take-Out for breakfast.

Frank and Margie's Sub and Pizza Take-Out was a smashing place, just like the cafes you see in 1940s Hollywood films where you sit up at a counter and ask for malts and doughnuts and mysterious things like that.

We talked to Frank and Margie who were impressed that we'd come all the way from Miami (we knew you were from out of town, said Margie, looking pleased). Joyce said that Rob and I were from England, but that didn't seem to ring any bells. Anyway, wherever we were from, Frank and Margie invited us back real soon, and since Margie had gigantic subs, we said ok.

Before leaving I tried a root beer which is something I'd been looking forward to. It tasted of tarmac-flavoured saccharine and, according to the label, contained no real ingredients at all – just water and an assortment of chemicals, all painstakingly listed. Not even Joyce, who was brought up on noxious drinks, would touch it. We also bought a Sunday paper – just in case the Suncon had got a mention – but after the first twelve supplements we got tired looking. I tried to find some overseas news, but apparently the world outside Florida had ceased to exist over the weekend, though "America" was referred to once or twice. On page 212, I think.

With loose sheets of paper billowing round the seats, we headed north, admiring the pale scrub and the swamps steaming gently in the heat. At some stage, being fannish, we stopped for a drink and I found a beer that no-one had ever heard of – and, indeed, never will, since it tasted of little but tin and claimed to be made out of Florida rice. Whilst drinking it I admired the local wildlife which consisted of American blackbirds which don't look at all like real blackbirds and bounced around in an unnatural and unfamiliar way, as if secretly powered by clockwork.

Musing on such wonders of nature, we continued north and, somewhere near Orlando, round about mid-afternoon, started seeing road signs to Disneyworld.

Road signs to Disneyworld are queer things, especially when mixed up with mundane places on big official notice boards – rather like driving up the M6 and seeing a turn-off to Wolverhampton, Stafford, Never-Neverland, and Stoke-on-Trent. My tenuous grip on reality began to fade.

Disneyworld, when we got there, was huge and appeared to consist of a vast highway in a wilderness of parkland. More odd-looking signs advised us to tune our car radios to a certain waveband – which we did, discovering neatly broadcast messages of welcome, plus instructions on where to go and what to see. Amazing. They should try that with real cities.

After several miles of this steady cruising the empty parkland turned into a gigantic carpark, roughly the size of Wales, in which we found a space. Getting out of the car, there was nothing to see but more cars and distant trees. No sign of Donald Duck or fairy castles or anything.

Rob and I looked around bewildered and close to tears, until Joyce maternally led us to a space between the cars and pointed to an approaching train that was weaving and snaking around the carpark picking up passengers.

Memorizing our block of cars (which a cartoon said was Dumbo Row 8, or something similar) we boarded the open seat runabout train and chuff-chuffed towards our destination wearing smug smiles of anticipation.

The perimeter of Disneyworld proper appeared, looking like a fortified border crossing. Whilst Rob and I jigged up and down in excitement, Joyce used her special vouchers and Magic Kingdom Club membership to get us tickets entitling us to Fun.

Disneyworld itself was still hidden in the haze of distance and, having made it through the gates along with streams of other tourists, we had to select a Mississippi paddlesteamer or a 21st century monorail to take us right into the heart of things. Our first agonizing choice. Close to tears again.

Controlling ourselves with difficulty, we remembered we were sci-fi fans and climbed the ramps leading up to the monorail.

The monorail, when it arrived, was streamlined, smooth, and just what the future was always supposed to be like. Reclining in our 21st century seats we glided off and whizzed high above the parkland, the thin ribbon of rail curving cleanly in front of us, skirting the edge of a lake on which giant toy

paddlesteamers floated like drowning bees.

Bouncing out at the other end, we climbed down from the future and found ourselves in the hot bustling clamour of Main Street, USA – a treacly cute scaled down replica of an imaginary nineteenth century high street. It was crowded, and neat, and stank of popcorn. My lips curled into a sneer.

Joyce took us both in hand and led us off to our first ride, which was something to do with pirates and looked pretty stupid and yo-ho-ho-y and not a lot of fun.

Having lost Rob (see previous chapters), we handed in our tickets and embarked on a sort of floating train, whose open boats or shuttle carriages were gliding automatically over a shallow underwater track. Our shuttle steered itself off and we began our programmed pirate adventure, disappearing into an underground maze of plastic caverns.

Slumped cynically in my seat, I was totally unprepared for what followed. As we oozed casually round the first corner, there was a rush of noise and bright lights and the whole incredible subterranean fantasy world roared into life.

Giant automatons cavorted and chortled around us, moving about, talking, singing – animals pranced around – pirates attacked us – cannonballs splashed in the water – buccaneers waved and scowled and scratched their beards.... And there was I, wide-eyed and gaping.... And by the time it was all over, I was stunned and amazed and wanted to go on the ride all over again.

Rob emerged from the boat behind ours, grinning like a five year old.

Gosh.

So this was the real secret of Disneyworld. This was what lured millions of sane adults to a remote and swampy amusement park.

Bloody hell.

Rob and I now became quite genuinely childlike and demanded more rides quickly. It was only beginning to dawn on us that Disneyworld really was big and that we didn’t have much time, since Rob was due to pick up a lift to Ohio (that had been the ultimate compromise back at Suncon) early in the evening. Joyce and I promptly decided to return to Disneyworld the following day, which relaxed our appetites somewhat but still left Rob in a state of what-to-see-next anxiety.

I think, therefore, we must have scurried around for a while before making it to the Haunted Mansion – an authentic Hitchcockian edifice looming in its own corner of the park.

After queuing for some considerable while, we managed to enter as part of a batch of expectant tourists and were communally herded into a locked room which promptly began to sink into the bowels of the earth.

That seemed a good way to start.

Down below we trooped forward under dim lights and were crisply strapped into giant armchairs – no, I'm not making this up – which then started off in pairs down a dark corridor.

Engulfed in gloom, we creaked along the passageway like lunatics till, without any warning, our deeply padded chairs picked up speed and lurched headlong into a series of ghoul-infested rooms.

Automatons howled and gibbered – wailing apparitions floated around – a holographic ghost sat beaming on the arm of my chair – disembodied heads chatted away – doors slammed – skeletons rattled – and the pre-programmed armchairs whirled and plunged in an astonishing imitation of utter chaos.

I flinched and ducked with the rest of them, and came out into the sunshine beaming like an idiot.

If it hadn't been for the queues, we'd all have gone back for more, but after a couple of less memorable trips and a bit of mooching around dusk was upon us, and it was getting time to mount the monorail and whiz off into the sunset for a meeting with Brad Balfour – Rob's Cincinnati chauffeur.

After some waiting around, Brad duly turned up in an MG, demonstrating a peculiar slap-cum-handshake which he assured us was the in-thing amongst urban blacks – which indeed it probably was. We attempted to learn this, without much success, whilst speeding off in convoy for a farewell supper.

Brad was an ebullient bloke – I'd met him briefly at Suncon – dedicated to a certain degree of trendiness which had Rob looking mildly apprehensive. We all seemed to get on happily enough nonetheless, and chatted away contentedly till evening came on and it was time to separate.

We shuffled about, saying goodbye and nodding and waving a lot till the MG roared off into the night, carrying Rob (and the last of the *Mayas*) to separate encounters in the Mid-West (which he'll probably tell you about if you buy him a drink sometime).

Meanwhile, Joyce and I found a convenient motel with a swimming pool and splashed about in the dark for a while before retiring in anticipation of a full day in Disneyworld.

Next morning, after a breakfast of eggs and grits, we sped back to the Magic

Kingdom and the popcorn stench of Main Street, USA.

Plunging into the crowds, we immediately bumped into Peter Mabey looking vaguely bemused by his eccentric surroundings. Since Suncon was a couple of hundred miles and subjectively several hundred years in the past, we exchanged mutual surprise and made several remarks about the strange vagaries of coincidence and things like that.

Leaving Peter, we turned a corner and collided with Eddie and Marsha Jones. So it goes. You look for Mickey Mouse and you find British fans....

Anyway, perhaps the strangeness of these meetings affected my sense of judgement, because I happily agreed to Joyce's innocent suggestion that we visit the Tropical Serenade. Since this was in the sector known as Adventureland and was the attraction closest to the Pirates of the Caribbean, this seemed to be an ace idea.

We queued up and stared at some unpleasantly garish flowers, plastic fountains, and mock-Polynesian statues. Ahead of us lurked an unauthentic native longhouse. Gazing idly at the South Sea flummery, I noticed a small door opening above the tinkling fountain. A plastic parrot popped out and cheerily began to chat to us about the delights of the Tropical Serenade and the wonders of grapefruit juice.

Something about this last sentiment prompted vague pre-Suncon memories. I looked at the Disneyworld guide: "TROPICAL SERENADE (Enchanted Tiki Birds) Sing along with birds, flowers and tikis in a musical luau. Presented by

Florida Citrus Growers."

Shit. How had I let myself in for this nonsense? I glowered at Joyce, who was smiling sweetly at the plastic parrot, and then looked for the way out.

There wasn't any. Crowds had formed behind us and, attracted by the parrot, were crushing forward, blocking the path. Steel barriers prevented escape from the side.

Like a lost soul in a Lovecraft saga, I peered ahead and saw the great carved doors of the longhouse swinging horribly open.

My forlorn cries drowned by the eldritch singing of plastic parrots, I was swept forward into the dreadful and interminable horrors of the Tropical Serenade....

Not all of Disneyworld is fun.

Joyce bought me a fruit slush after the ordeal was over, and we looked around some of the Adventureland shops which were selling all sorts of curious items, supposedly imported from Polynesia and Hawaii and also – for no apparent reason, except a vague hope of being "ethnic" – from Spain, Africa, the Middle and Far East as well. The fruit slush tasted like a fruit slush. Americans drink some curious things.

Anyway, we had a tour on the old-fashioned railway and a ride on the paddlesteamers (where we met some more fans that Joyce recognized) and generally soaked in the Disneyworld atmosphere which, in a word, is *bogus*.

Everything in Disneyworld – from the artificially blue coloured lakes to the buildings, the transport, the animals, and the flowers – is a fake. A sub-authentic reproduction. Wandering around is like being in a Phil Dick novel – so much so that after a while you begin fingering things and looking at people intently and searching through your stock of memories of the real world for half-remembered references.

At one point, up in a scenic ski-lift, I pointed to a spectacular cloud formation hanging low in the sky. "That's well done," I said, and then, after a moment's thought, banged my head lightly against the safety rail in an attempt to re-enter reality.

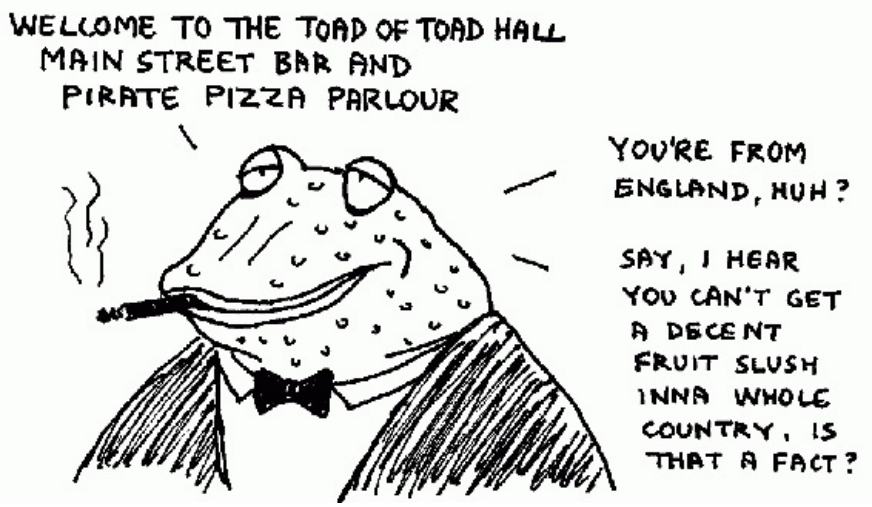
Similarly, paddle-steaming around Tom Sawyer's artificial island, waving at the automaton "Indians" and admiring the tail-flicking, ear-twitching, furtively drinking electric "deer", I heard cries of amazement at some strange event in the blue dyed water below. Turning my attention from the sham "paddle-wheel" churning at the back of the "steam" boat, I peered

over the side and saw a bewildered duck splashing through the shallows. Dozens of cameras clicked and whirred.... Was it real? We all stared at it speculatively, waiting to see if the cycle of splashing was repeated.

That's the way things are in Disneyworld. It wasn't till several days later that I finally shook off the feeling that everything around me was a complete fake, and stopped eyeing things quizzically.

Meanwhile, despite – or partly because of – the eeriness of the place, we were bouncing around in some amazement and generally having fun.

We sampled the attractions of Fantasyland – Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, Peter Pan's Flight (which broke down, leaving us hanging for several minutes over "moonlit London" whilst a stentorian voice boomed out, telling us not to worry), and Captain Nemo's Submarine World (which Captain Nemo is welcome to).



The Mission to Mars in Tomorrowland was authentically boring – rather like a 1950s sci-fi film – but the Space Mountain was something else. By coincidence, I think, we met up with Eddie, Marsha, and Peter once again as we were going in, so we took the trip together, though Eddie said he didn't fancy it and sat in the sun outside.

Eddie's disappearance made me check the booklet. Once again, I'd left it too late. The Space Mountain was nothing more nor less than a giant roller-coaster – a form of entertainment that utterly terrifies me.

Arriving all too soon at the front of the queue, we were manhandled and crammed into cramped shuttles – rather like those manned torpedoes they had in World War II – and shoved off into the long and perilously steep slope upwards. Just as we were leaving, one of the wedgers told me to take off my glasses or risk losing them, which really boosted my confidence.

I don't remember much of what happened after that, but we certainly travelled at an absurd speed and at ludicrous angles through what I'm told was an outer space environment. With my newly limited vision, this meant it was pitch black and I didn't see any of the plummeting drops and vertiginous heights, for which I'm eternally grateful. When it was all over and the squealing and shrieking was at an end, everyone looked pretty stunned and shaken, except me, I was looking blind and puzzled. Fun comes in strange forms.

Anyway, Joyce and I wandered off again and I bought a Mickey Mouse hat, which is something I've always wanted since I was a kid, and we met yet more fans that Joyce recognized, and we saw America the Beautiful – which is an incredible 360 degree all-around-you film – and tried a few minor trips,

and poked our noses into a variety of places, and finally ended up in the Hall of Presidents, sometime towards evening.

This all-American entertainment started off with an amazingly inept patriotic film which had me laughing despite nudges from Joyce and revolutionary glares from nearby members of the audience. As this died down, with flags waving, eagles flying, and several people standing up clutching their hearts, the screen lifted to reveal a vast theatre stage on which were assembled all the American presidents, some seated, some standing. I was stunned for a moment, and then did another Disneyworld double-take as I realized that these too were automatons.

Washington introduced everybody, and they waved, bowed, or nodded, according to their presidential whims, and then Lincoln got up and made a speech whilst the other automatons gazed vaguely into the audience, picked their fingernails, swayed on the balls of their feet, jingled their keys, and whispered to each other rather covertly. President Harding kept looking straight at me and winking....

Anyway, when it was all over, I was still sitting in my seat, gasping in awe and astonishment. A complete set of automaton presidents. Good grief. Makes you wonder about Nixon, Carter, and the rest....

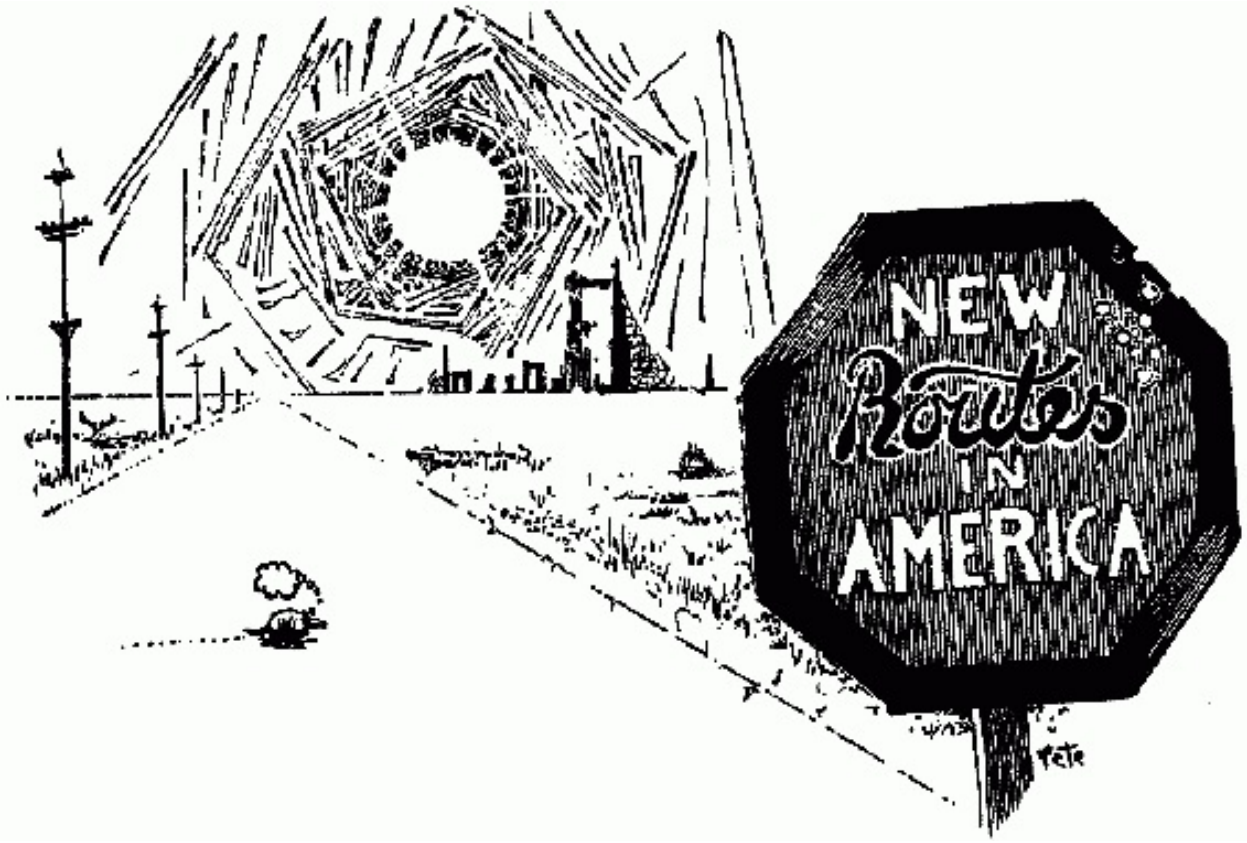
And that just about completed our day. We took the monorail to the Disney Contemporary Hotel for a meal in the Grand Canyon Concourse, just to put a finishing touch of weirdness to the whole fantasy. The Contemporary Hotel is

shaped like an open book with the spine uppermost and the rooms – 1046 of them – tiered in the inward sloping walls. The middle section is entirely open – the Grand Canyon Concourse, in fact – and the monorail (wait for it) goes right through the centre, over the heads of restaurant diners on the Concourse floor.

The Disney Contemporary Hotel is a very, very strange place. We stayed there most of the evening, chatting and eating and staring at the sights. Eventually we took a final nighttime ride on the monorail and left Disneyworld for good.

The next day we got our feet firmly back on the ground and took a trip to the Kennedy Space Centre.

9 • Spaceports and Bus Stations



Kennedy Space Centre is not an easy place to find on Thursday mornings. At least, that's what Joyce Scrivner and I discovered when we tried looking for it. Maybe it was the heat that led us astray, or maybe they shift the place around on Wednesday nights. I dunno. Anyway, driving out towards the East Coast all we could discover was mile upon mile of steaming swampland criss-crossed with featureless roads, every one of which led to Daytona Beach.

We got very hot and very lost. Somewhere in the middle of nowhere I saw an armadillo shamble across the road like an armoured pig. Civilization had obviously broken down. Alligators, elk, bears, and wild Indians lurked in the swamps. Was there really such a place as the Kennedy Space Centre? Probably not.

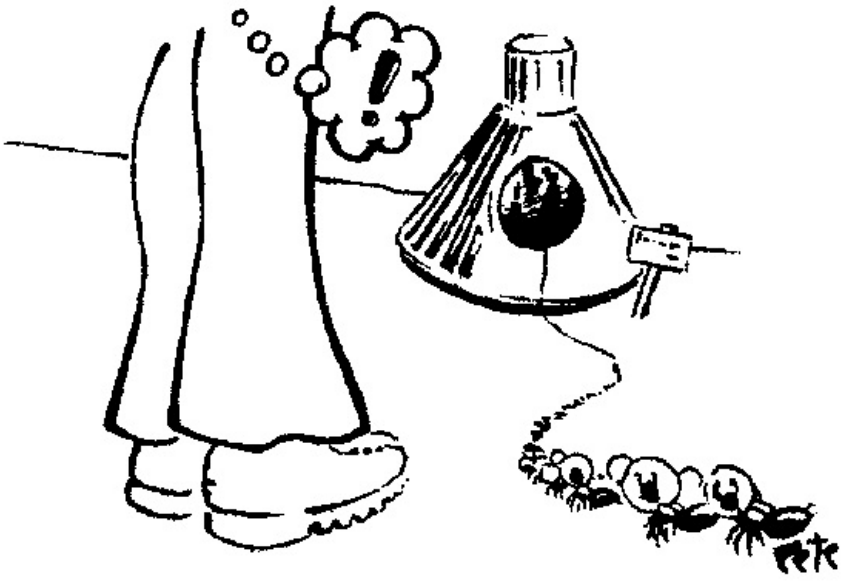
But eventually we found it. Something concrete drifted briefly through the heat haze and we made a lunge through the gates, diving in before the

swamps closed up again.

For a Space Centre it was kind of disappointing. Where were the gleaming towers, the great ramps, the sleek star cruisers, the lean figures of space-tanned battle pilots?

Gee whiz. None to be seen. Just a fat cop chewing gum, a bunch of tourists, and kids running around.

Still we booked in for a coach tour and had a quick look round, though there wasn't much to be seen. We visited the shop and I bought some postcards of the moon. We also had a look at the second-hand space capsules which were lying around on the lawns outside. One contained a swarm of little red ants. I stared at them for awhile and felt sort of philosophical. It didn't last long.



Back in the building we examined the space shuttle exhibits and had a go in the booths where you could hear commercials for the US space programme. Each booth had a different tape and a different label – "shopkeeper", "serviceman", "student", and so on. I went into the "executive" booth and sat in there solemnly, giving Joyce a violent fit of the giggles. I told her to shut up and sit in the "housewife" booth. I don't see what's so damn funny about me being an executive....

The coach eventually turned up and we drove off towards the main buildings, somewhere in the distance. Much of the trip was taken up with a tour of exhibits – capsules and space gear, control rooms and stuff like that – all complete with information and sound tracks and winking lights. However,

I was still suffering the aftermath of Disneyworld – the persistent belief that everything was a fake, the constant fear that plastic parrots would pop out of nowhere and start chatting to me. As a result, I couldn't shake off the feeling that the Space Centre was just a continuation of the previous day's programmed trips.

Even the giant Titan shed looked less impressive than the Disneyworld Contemporary Hotel. When we went inside, our guide leaped in front of us, spread out his arms like a born-again Christian, and told us we were standing in the largest room in the world.

Well ... yeah ... maybe we were. But despite our guide's earnest cavortings, nobody really believed him. I guess we were looking for a space age cathedral – not an outsize barn.

Still, things got better when we drove off again and cruised past a monstrous rocket-carrying crawler before circling a genuine launch pad. This was more like it. This was honest-to-god spaceport stuff. Staring at the gigantic metal hulks, black scorch marks, vast concrete blocks, and oddly angled pits, you could lean back and let your imagination take off.

Mine, predictably, went off all wrong. Out there in the Florida wastelands, I got the feeling we were visiting some kind of temple – a concrete and metal Stonehenge, rather than a monument to modern technology. In fact, the more I looked at the place, the more it looked like a relic of some Atlantean age.

Ho hum. Guess I'll never make a proper sci-fi fan.

Anyway, we got back, and I had a close encounter with Mike Meara outside the gents.

We exchanged surprises, and Mike and Pat showed Joyce and me their impressive collection of mosquito bites gathered during a trip to the Everglades. Disneyworld has a cordon of insect-traps (no kidding), so Joyce and I had nothing to show them in exchange: but we swapped travel notes and left the Mearas – who'd already done the Space Centre tour – en route for the Magic Kingdom.

So that was that. Back in the car, Joyce and I compared plans and decided to head north – Joyce back home, her Suncon holiday over, and me up to Jacksonville ... and the beginnings of a long trans-continental pilgrimage to the mythical home of West Coast fandom.

Jacksonville, when we got there, looked like a lot of other non-descript American towns, and was hot and humid and less than attractive. Joyce, acting on expert instincts, headed for the seediest part of the city and immediately found the Greyhound bus station.

Plucking up courage, we parked nearby, locked and manacled the car, and hurried off to the bus depot, dodging through a dismal picket line of drunks, derelicts, and shuffling down-and-outs, all drawn to the station like muddled moths to a flame.

A bus was leaving at 9.30pm, bound for San Francisco via the Gulf Coast and Texas. I studied the timetable in astonishment, adding up the hours. Twelve to New Orleans, twelve to Houston, another twelve to El Paso, twelve more to Phoenix, twelve again to Los Angeles, and a final twelve to San Francisco (give or take a few hours either way).

So I booked up and picked on El Paso as a nice-sounding name. Since I had a two month go-anywhere ticket, bought with some excitement back in Exeter, it didn't matter too much where I went, though I wanted to get to Albuquerque by the weekend.

Anyway, it was only about six o'clock, so we had a few hours to wait. Finding the car still in one piece, we did a quick tour of Jacksonville and ended up in a bar somewhere, where I bought a pitcher of beer in a large lemonade jug and met a Birmingham barmaid. "Have a noice day, duck," she said.

Back in the station, saying farewell and thank you to Joyce – who should come sidling in but Mike and Pat Meara? Bloody hell, we said, mutually. Is there no escaping British fans?

Apparently they'd been obliged to give Disneyworld a miss through pressure of time and had come up by bus from Orlando. They were about to continue northwards, but this unexpected encounter meant they could now travel with Joyce, who in any event hadn't been much looking forward to a lonely drive into the night.

So that was that. We said farewell again, with me half-nervous, half-excited. The night and the heat and the milling people, the revving engines and the petrol fumes gave the dismal old depot that charged feeling of long late-night journeys about to begin.

Shivering slightly, I clambered aboard the San Francisco coach, found a seat at the back, gave a final few waves, and in the electric half-light started on the long haul west.

Every Greyhound carries regulation passengers ... a compulsory nun, for example, plus a standard issue serviceman – at least two lonely young mothers with wriggling infants, a batch of solitary old ladies, one cowboy, several dubious-looking blacks, a couple of students, a bored Indian, and a twitching loony.

The coaches themselves are built like insulated battle-tanks with tinted

windows and a perpetual chemical reek from the toilet at the back. After a few thousand miles, that pale blue light and antiseptic stench eat permanently into the mind.... Become, in fact, the essence of Travel ... so much so that I reckon I'd get a Pavlovian reaction if they were recreated, and start rocking slightly to a non-existent rhythm, leaning back and staring blankly out of blackened windows.

Locked into a Greyhound, you're completely cut off from the outside world. The body adapts to the steady cruising, the eyes become accustomed to the passing landscape projected on the inside of the coach. Every three hours, day or night, you're released for a disoriented twenty minutes at an identikit station or some godforsaken truckstop. Two or three times a day there are meal breaks – the same meals, coast to coast – and a chance, perhaps, to readjust to reality ... even go Outside, to inspect a nameless roadside town or the devastated centre of some sprawling city.

Anyway, back in the Florida darkness, with the bus almost empty and nothing to be seen outside, I settled down for a night of intermittent dozing. One of the dubious blacks eyed me from a deeply shadowed seat; somewhere just in front the regulation loony muttered and rustled, and the bus cruised into the limbo-world of night roads and timeless travelling.

Periodically the bus would lurch or whine, or a murky shape would brush past the seat, and I'd groggily come awake and peer into the darkness. Outside the Okefenokee oozed and dribbled ... Live Oak flashed by ... the Suwanee River rolled down to the sea....

Sometime past midnight we rode into Tallahassee and a quick stop for a hastily swilled coffee and a soggy doughnut. All night Greyhound stations can be eerily desolate – cold lights, the echoing clatter of games machines, a bored cop talking to the station staff, the sudden guffaws of a clique of bus-drivers, the dead shapes of passengers waiting for distant connexions, sleepless faces staring at torn notices and grimy schedules, mindless foot-rappings and nail inspections, yawns and tired shiftings ... a strange borderland waiting-room world, deep in the centres of darkly sleeping towns.

Leaving the coffee dregs, I got back onto the bus. We switched from Eastern to Central Time, and rolled off again into the night....

Dawn brought in a new day, a new state, and the long long road to the desert, El Paso, and Mexico.

Wish you
were here!
Pete

10 • Texas, El Paso, and Mexico

Round about 6.30am on Friday September 9th, 1977, I was in Mobile, Alabama, guzzling breakfast in a Greyhound station and beginning to feel ok. Florida and the Suncon were far behind. El Paso was somewhere in the future.

Breakfast was always the best part of the Greyhound day, with the strange long night of travelling over, the sun bubbling up into the sky, and a trayful of eggs, coffee, toast, juice, and hash browns to aid the return of life.

But weird things can happen at breakfasts. And that particular morning it was a visit from the friendly neighborhood dope pedlar.

I was getting into my third cup of coffee and wondering whether to keep the sachet of grape jelly as a souvenir, when he came bouncing over, asked if he could sit down, and started chatting happily about Alabama, Greyhound stations, sunshiny mornings, and the pleasures of long-distance travelling.

He asked me where I was from, where I was going. Expressed his lifelong regard for England and the English. Told me several interesting facts about Mobile, Texas, the desert, and El Paso. And then asked me if I wanted to buy any dope.

I sprayed coffee gently over the table and managed to shake my head.

“That’s ok,” said the dope pedlar, beaming. “Have a nice day!” And he bounced off to look for more potential customers.

When I reboarded the bus, I eyed the other passengers warily. The regulation nun smiled, the twitching loony twitched. I knew what was going on....

An hour or so later, we crossed into Mississippi, cruised along the Gulf

Coast, rolled through Biloxi, and then headed somewhere that sent me asleep.

When I awoke, the coach was entirely surrounded by water. Had we taken a wrong turning? I rose up out of my seat and peered round. No land to be seen in any direction, just a thin strip of road running across a flat expanse of water. Someone said confidently that it was the Mississippi River.

Impressive. It was just as if we were crossing a large and placid lake, a fact I've proudly recounted to awed listeners ever since. Trouble is, it *was* a lake. I just found out a couple of minutes ago when I checked up the spelling of Missipissi in an atlas. The real Mississippi was somewhere the other side of New Orleans. Bang goes another traveller's tale.

Louisiana was a disappointment. One day, real soon now, I promise I'll get back there, but the coach just sped on through. New Orleans consisted of twenty minutes in a downtown Greyhound station. Not a bayou or a jolie blonde in sight.

After that it was Texas. And then Texas. And Texas, and Texas, and Texas.

When people tell you that Texas is big, they aren't kidding. We travelled through Texas all afternoon, all evening, and all night. And in the morning, when the sun came up, there was Texas, still rolling past at a steady 55 miles per hour.

Texas is full of desert. Not the Sahara stuff with sand dunes and camels and oases, but a dry, stony wasteland with pick-up trucks and gas stations.

First time I had ever seen anything like it and I was dying to get out and have a quick look round. Especially when I saw some cactus. Runty little things, I must admit, but still – it's more than you get in Devon.

When we did stop, of course, I got to see yet another distinctive and exciting Greyhound station.

The only thing that makes Texas Greyhound stations different from a thousand others across the continent is pink grapefruit juice. Texas is terrifically famous for pink grapefruit juice. I bought a tin and looked at the contents. It contained grapefruit juice and colouring (pink).

Everyone on the bus got very excited on Saturday morning because bits of Mexico could be seen on the horizon. We all peered vaguely into the hills.

Then we rolled down into El Paso, a sprawling desert town surrounded by giant graffiti cut into the hillsides in a bizarre act of municipal vandalism. If there were any fans in town, I didn't know them or their addresses. I was basically visiting El Paso on whim – partly because it's a romantic sort of

name, useful for dropping into conversations at the local pub ("That reminds me, when I was in *El Paso* ...") and because it was right on the border and I might be able to take a peek across.

Only thing was, I couldn't find a motel anywhere – at least, not in the centre of town, which wasn't surprising. And the Hiltons and whatnot looked a bit pricy. So, after a tour of inspection, I ended up back at the Greyhound station, where I accosted a cowboy-hatted businessman about to depart and asked him if he could recommend an hotel at a reasonable price.

"Seen me on tv, huh?" he said, and gripped me in a bone-crushing handshake.

Oh no. Trust me to pick the standard-issue loony about to check in.

But he was on the level. He'd been in some tv ads and was proud as punch about them, refusing to believe that I had somehow missed them. When I told him I came from Britain, he got really happy. He hadn't known his ads were showing Over There.

Anyway, he was a good guy and recommended the Hotel Grande El Norte with several emphatic jabs of his finger. So to the Hotel Grande El Norte I went and it was smashing: a comparatively aged hotel with a splendid entrance lobby featuring a domed and frescoed ceiling, with full accoutrements. The desk clerk, having written down my address as Dawlish, Devon, OK, totally disoriented me by asking how things were going in Oklahoma, and then ushered me up to a fine room with a colour tv, a comfortable bed, a shower and a bath, promises of breakfast, and everything.

I then faced an agonizing decision. Should I explore Mexico or have a bath? It seems kind of rotten now, but I decided on the bath and a quiet evening in – the first simple-minded rest I'd given myself since landing in America.

I did go out for a short stroll – just long enough to bump into the friendly neighborhood dope pedlar, who stopped me in the street and asked, with uncanny accuracy, whether I was from Florida.

"Wow, I've just come from there," I said.

"Do you want to buy any dope?" he replied.

Alarmed by this death-defying non sequitur, I returned hurriedly to the hotel, wondering why I looked like a Floridan. Grapefruit stains on my t-shirt? Stains that *weren't pink*?

To wipe my mind clean, I spent the rest of the evening exploring the world of American television – a world dominated by the kind of adverts we used to get in the early 1960s, where loud voices boomed out of nowhere, cartons were thrust in front of cameras, and people with hangovers sang

“plop, plop, fizz, fizz – oh what a relief it is!” and smiled a lot. There were three commercial breaks during the weather forecast.

The next morning, I decided to catch a local bus into Mexico but couldn’t find one and ended up on a coach tour, which was a mistake.

We seemed to go in by the back way, via marshalling yards, vacant lots, and anonymous warehouses – a thoroughly unlikely setting for Mexico, at least the Mexico of my dreams. It’s as if someone told you the forbidden city of Lhasa was next left after the gasworks. Still, there was the excitement of crossing the legendary Rio Grande – a mighty obstacle to hundreds of Hollywood desperadoes fleeing across the border.

Not any more. The Rio Grande was a mighty three feet across at its widest point. It’s cruel to have illusions shattered like this.

And then we were in Mexico – and I hardly dared look. But, goddam it, it was ok.

Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican side of the border was the original El Paso del Norte and is still twice the size of its US twin on the north bank of the Rio Grande. Most of the day-to-day population of El Paso is Mexican or of Mexican descent, but it still looks like a run-of-the-mill office block and straight streets US town.

Juarez looked anything but. As soon as we crossed the border there was complete anarchy and chaos. Cars drove on both sides of the road – oncoming cars took to the pavements. Police whistles shrilled. Dogs and children ran through the traffic. People ambled amiably about or sat on chairs at streetcorners. A band and a troop of uniformed kids wove their way through the melee – and everybody leaned out of their cars and shouted.

Triffic. But I can’t think why I ever took that coach tour. Whilst I was still gazing happily out of the window, the coach nipped through the traffic, did a couple of sharp turns, whizzed through a tumbledown area of adobe hovels – at which everyone on the coach tut-tutted – and drove to a brand new race-course on the outskirts of town.

We were invited to get out and look round.

Why? A race-course is a race-course. This one was ultra-new, badly built, and very large. It was thoroughly uninteresting.

We were told the times of the races and urged to be sure to come along and enjoy ourselves and bet on the horses.

Humbug. After that came a cruise around the upper-class suburbs of Juarez. Lots of big ugly bungalows. Prime real estate. Good place to retire.

The coach passengers nodded and pointed.

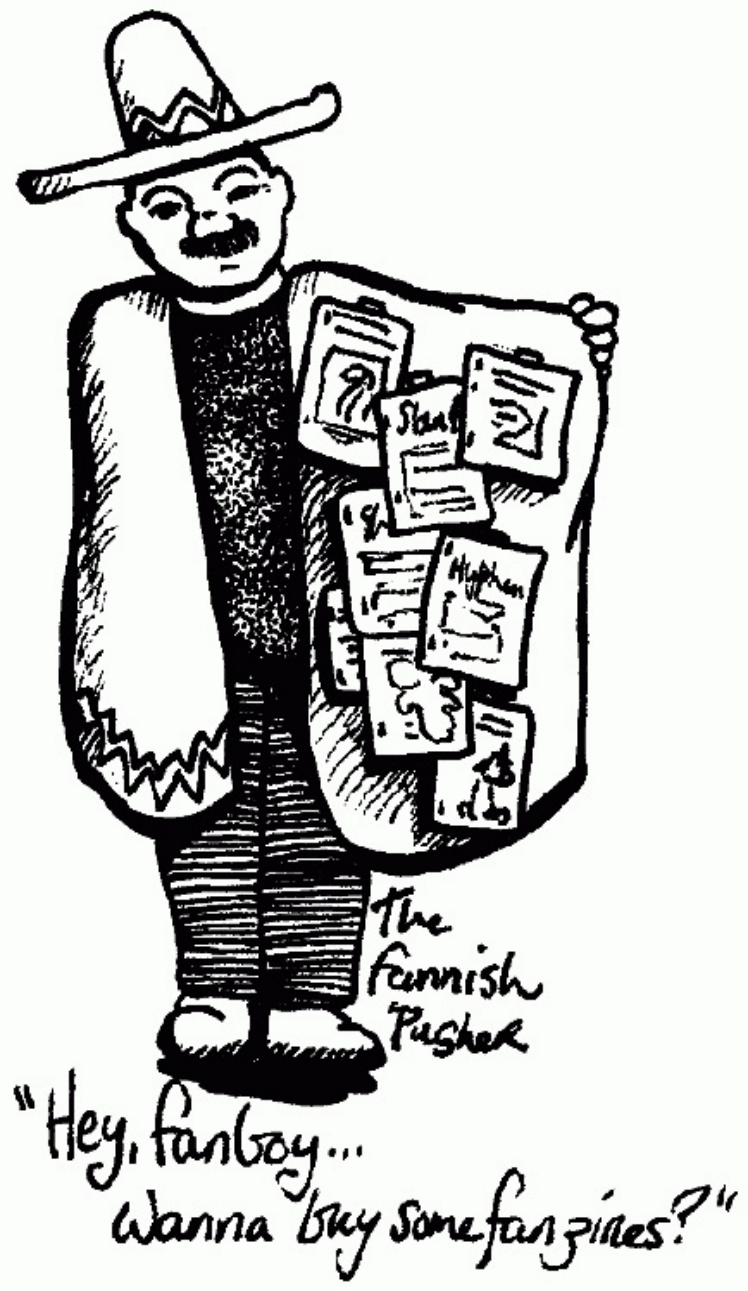
Shit, I said, quite audibly.

The courier said if I didn't like it, I needn't have come. I said it was a bit late for that and he shrugged.

After that we stopped at a dollar-only store for souvenirs of our Mexican visit, followed by a trip to a souvenir factory to see the tourist industry at work. I wandered around outside and, not looking very Mexican at all, got accosted by balloon-sellers, cigarette sellers, trinket-sellers, and someone offering me the services of his sister.

We went back to the States. I had at least been to Mexico, but it's not something I boast about much.

Next time, I'll walk.

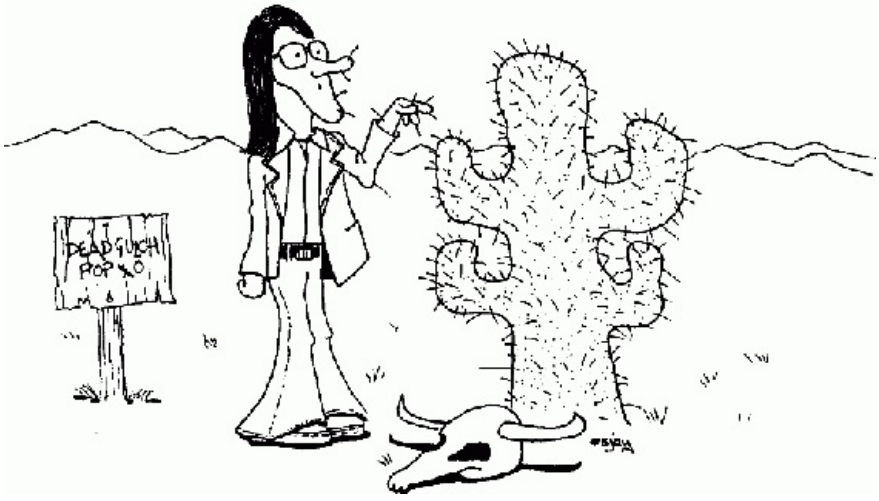

The Fannish Pusher
"Hey, fanboy...
Wanna buy some fanzines?"

11 • Motion Recollected in Senility

Over twenty years pass by. Brain cells gutter and flicker. Sometimes at night, I find myself back on the Greyhound ... never quite remembering where I'm going.

Back in September 1977, a sign said "Albuquerque, New Mexico, 600 miles", which suddenly seemed quite close. I arrived unannounced, like a latterday Claude Degler, to be rescued by Roy and Chrystal Tackett, who treated me to some home comforts which I doubt I deserved. Clean clothes, a shower, good food. There were hummingbirds in the garden. Flash flood signs on the city streets. "We get eight inches of rain a year," said Roy. "You don't want to be around that day."

Too much space in Albuquerque. The city sprawls into the desert, eating it away lot by dusty lot. Bob Vardeman took me way out beyond the city limits and let me run around, pricking my fingers on cacti, smelling the purple sage, gazing out into the cowboy-haunted wilderness of a thousand childhood westerns. I could have put on my red cap and walked all the way to Paris ... but Bob drove me to Madrid.



Pronounced Mad Rid. A ghost town of ruined mineshafts covered in morning glory. We had a Mexican meal in Santa Fe. Bob had long hair then. So did I. Long, long time ago....

On the road again. Somewhere in the middle of nowhere the Greyhound

stopped at a roadside cafe and pick-up point. Could have been called Baghdad. But the memory is of tumbleweed, rustling and bouncing along an empty highway, piling up against fenceposts and telegraph poles. A few months ago, I found my suitable for the younger camper orange rucksack gathering dust in the back of a cupboard. I cleaned it before taking it to the charity shop. Inside, a small dead sprig.

Eating something nasty in Flagstaff, Arizona, I encountered two nervous Welshmen who emerged from the night claiming to have been attacked by Indians and forced to flee from bears. Some people gather a better sort of anecdote, even if the attack was more of a mugging and the bears largely embroidery. The next day I passed their fled-from camp site on the way to the Grand Canyon. An impressive amount of forest. Maybe, just maybe, the bears were real.

When I arrived, it was Disneyworld all over again and nothing was real. Canopied choo-choo trains, plastic flummery, and fat people in shorts. I grimaced my way through the souvenir stalls, found myself a beer, and wondered why on earth I had given up a whole day of potential fannish fun to visit as tacky a place as the Grand Canyon.

Before catching the bus back, I thought I might as well take a look at the canyon, having made the effort to get there. So I wended my way past the day-glo chipmunks out onto the viewing ledge....

And suddenly, unexpectedly, all the tawdry tourist trivia just melted away.

The planet had split open. Far below me, eagles soared.

I walked along the edge and down onto the Angel Trail for an hour or two until I came to my senses and remembered that I suffered from vertigo. Back against the canyon wall, it took me three hours to inch my way up to the rim. Then of course, I wanted to stay. Sod the fannish fun, I wanted to see sunset in the Grand Canyon, moonrise in the Grand Canyon, dawn in the Grand Canyon.

But the suddenly enticing tourist lodge was unfeasibly expensive ... cheaper places could only be reached by a car I didn't have ... camping sites needed camping gear ... and in the end I heaved a sigh and boarded the Greyhound for Los Angeles.

Did I say Albuquerque sprawled? Los Angeles seemed like endless suburbs without an urb. Somewhere amongst them the Greyhound stopped and disgorged its passengers, me included, into nowhere very much at all. I had

six hours to kill before meeting up with Bruce Pelz (having vowed not to surprise any more fans by my unexpected appearance), so I wandered around fairly aimlessly in fairly seedy places, drinking the occasional beer and trying to discover the Spanish for rest room. Later, this innocent rambling around downtown LA achieved heroic status among awed local fans who had never, ever, in their entire lives, gone anywhere near the place ... let alone on foot. And unarmed.

In those days, I was a librarian. Bruce and Elayne Pelz were also librarians. They had a nice bungalow, a patio, a garden, a swimming pool, a jacuzzi, one or two cars, and were working on a wine cellar. I had an old bike and some threatening letters from the bank. So it goes. When I got back to England, I resigned my job and never worked in a library again.

So what happened in Los Angeles? Let's see ... there was an LASFAS meeting which appears to be the sum of that memory ... Bill Rotsler took me to visit Forry Ackerman, who as everyone knows has more books and sci-fi ephemera than is reasonable, including some original dinosaurs from King Kong (which were nice, but surprisingly small) ... I neglected to drink salty margaritas in the Hollywood Hawaiian Hotel, which I now regret ... I spent a pleasant day on my own splashing in the swimming pool pretending to be an LA librarian ... we drove through Pasadena which is a wonderfully romantic name for yet more suburbs ... I got lost somewhere and had to be rescued ... Bruce and Elayne treated me to the Pomona County Fair, where I failed to win a bigger dinosaur than Forry Ackerman's ... we went to a supermarket where the till receipt told me how many grapefruit I'd bought, which was very science fictional and a Sign of Things to Come ... I used a phone with push buttons instead of a dial (far out!) ... we hosted a Petards party with Bob Tucker, Walt Liebscher, and Jim Beam ... I had a ride in Milt Stevens' futuristic car ... we met lots more people (who will be annoyed I haven't mentioned them, if still alive) ... and in general had a fine fannish time.

Then the bus came and carried me off to San Francisco.

San Francisco is a real city with bridges and hills and pyramids and things, all piled on top of each other in a comfortable sort of way. This old hippy was getting excited as the bus got nearer.

At the Greyhound station, the friendly neighborhood dope pedlars ambushed the bus en masse. Through the throng I could see Rich Coad, blending in nicely. A few years earlier, Rich had fallen on such hard times in London that he'd slept on the floor of my palatial Westbourne Park Villas bedsit, along with the mice. Now it was my turn.

I think Rich lived on the steepest street in San Francisco, one of the ones which has a staircase instead of a pavement. Or maybe we just went that way to get to his apartment. Anyway, there weren't any mice and there was so much space you could swing several cats around at once, if you had a mind to.

I'm not sure what we did in San Francisco. I remember riding up and down on the trolleys a lot. On the best rides you could see Alcatraz. We wandered through Chinatown, of course. Also Haight-Ashbury, which had seen better days even then. Fisherman's Wharf too. I know we visited Earthquake McGoon's Magic Cellar because I still have the matchbox. "Live magic" it says. There were fans there, but I've forgotten who they were and they have

presumably forgotten too. That I was there, that is ... not who they were. They are presumably still who they were then now.

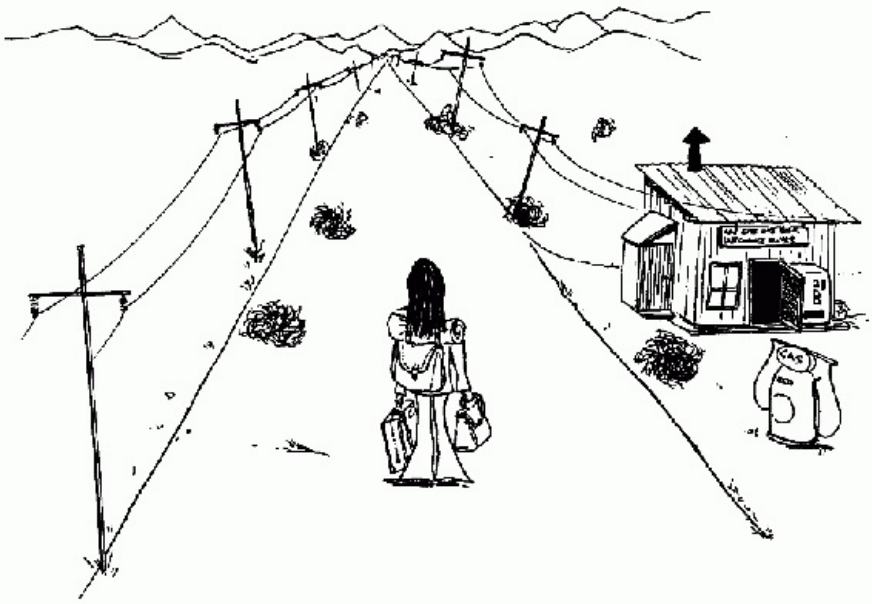
I also don't remember the chicken on the buffalo, but I have a photo of it. Where in San Francisco can you take a snapshot of a chicken standing on a buffalo? Strange place.

At some stage I expressed a desire to paddle in the Pacific Ocean, a wish which was kindly granted. This is the only time I have paddled in the Pacific. Mindful of the events in Miami Beach, I refused to venture more than a toe's length from the safety of the shore.

I do remember a party at Jerry Jacks where I wasn't allowed to smoke (tobacco, that is) and had to stand outside the door. Pretty soon there were three or four of us sad addicts puffing away outside. Soon we were joined by non-smokers crying "so this is where you've all got to!" More non-smokers came out to chat to the other non-smokers. After a while, I noticed Jerry was outside too. Score one to the nicotine boys.

There were lots of fans at the party, but that's about all I can say. All a blur, all a blur. Good times, though.

One day, real soon now, I'll be back.



12 • Cabbages and Cowboys

It’s a cruel journey from San Francisco to Seattle. Too many signs saying Big Sur, Pacific Coast, Crater Lake, Mount Rainier that you’re just passing by. Too many glimpses of ocean and rivers, mountains and forests that you aren’t going to visit.

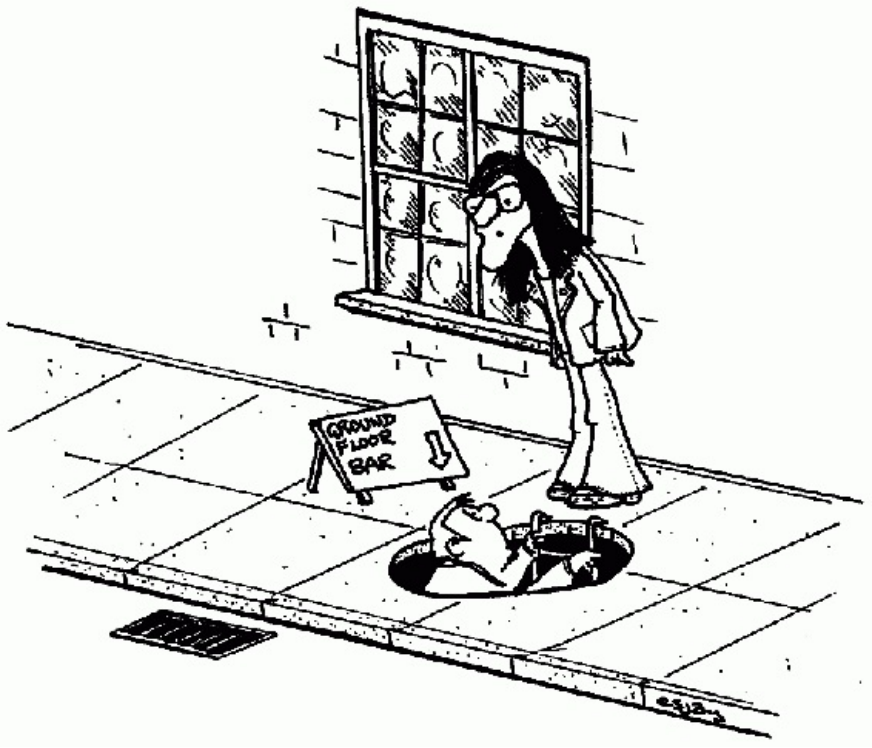
But Seattle was nice. Capital of the Pacific Northwest ... and heading north from California, into the early autumn, it felt like you were entering into some other country, if not quite a separate kingdom.

I stayed with John Berry and remember Seattle as a city of bars and bookshop cafes, so I guess we talked and drank beer, read a little and drank some more beer. At Pike Place Market I bought a badge with a carrot on it and we relaxed in a pavement cafe. The street was decorated with pink and purple cabbages in flowerpots. Nowadays you can hardly move for decorative cabbages, but let it be known that Seattle got there first. I told John that when I got round to writing up the Seattle leg of the TAFF report, I’d mention cabbages in the title. Kept one promise, at least.

Before going to the States, I’d watched an American tv movie called *The Night Strangler* set, improbably, in a subterranean city beneath the streets of Seattle, populated by something nasty with a taste for blood. I mentioned this to John, who calmly offered to take me underground for a visit.

I pointed out that the film was a fantasy, not a documentary ... but John insisted there was such a place, so with some trepidation I allowed myself to be led into the older part of town around Pioneer Square, into a brassy Victorian bar, and down into the cellar....

It seems that turn-of-the-century Seattle had suffered from so much flooding that the city fathers decided to raise the streets by around 12 feet. This was hardly convenient for pedestrians on the pavements below, especially in the days of horse-drawn traffic, so they raised the pavements too. This now meant that no one could get into their houses or shops, so they converted all the original first floors into new ground floors. The subterranean city, therefore, is what little is left of the buried streets and original shop fronts down below. More musty than scary, but still reasonably bizarre.



Naturally, at some stage we met up with, visited, or otherwise encountered fans. The photographs show a quizzical Frank Denton wearing a square-cut pioneer beard, a grinning Loren MacGregor, a startled Jeff Frane ... but anyone else, I'm afraid, has vanished with the brain cells.

Susan Wood had invited me to stay in Vancouver, but she wasn't well and I missed my chance to visit Canada. Instead, I innocently got on a bus to Minneapolis, without really looking at the map or the Greyhound schedule....

Open an atlas. Take a look for yourself. Minneapolis is not very near Seattle.

Over the next 36 hours, the Greyhound ate my soul.

At 3.00am on the first night I woke, looked at the map, and discovered we were rolling into Idaho and a small town sweetly named Coeur d'Alene. But the Greyhound driver barked out "Corr Dulleen, Corr Dulleen!" and it was just another zombie stop at a half-deserted night-time station. This is all I know about Idaho.

We were in Butte, Montana, for breakfast and it was snowing. Snow had not figured in any of my plans. Florida sunshine, yes. Montana snow, no. I was probably wearing sandals. I was certainly wearing a tee-shirt. The place to get breakfast could dimly be seen through the blizzard. It looked like the truck stop out of *Duel*. When I staggered in, all I could see was a row of backs lined along a counter, each with a cowboy hat on top and a big pair of

boots below. Welcome to Montana, boy.

I squeezed onto a vacant stool and tried to order something manly and gruff. The cowboy next to me spat out a couple of cow bones and stared at me, chewing slowly. I just knew I was sitting on his favourite stool.

"Where you from?" he asked.

"England," I squeaked. He sat back and looked me up and down....

"England," he said. "A god-damn Englishman here in Butte, Montana. Lawks-a-mercy, let me shake you by the hand!"

So that was ok.

Back on the bus, the passengers kept changing. A discalced Carmelite sat next to me. I know that because he gave me his card and invited me to San Diego, should I ever pass that way. Unfortunately I didn't know what "discalced" meant till much later, so I never looked to see if he was.

Then there was another cowboy who was amazed I was going to Minneapolis. "My grandpa went there once," he confided, "and now you are too!"

Somewhere in North Dakota, heading for Fargo, it certainly seemed like his grandpa and me were two crazy people.

13 • The Bozo Bus and the Gateway to El

Perhaps it was Dave Emerson who invited me to Minneapolis? Someone must have done, otherwise I would never have found the Bozo Bus Building – an entire apartment block overrun by fans, engaged in a perpetual series of room parties. Good place.

Scott Imes installed me in a spare apartment with a water bed, on which I sloshed and wobbled around happily each night, and racks of vegetable dryers, which Scott assured me were for carrots and the like.

Now I'm not much of a botanist, but I'd bought my carrot badge in Pike Place Market and I know you're supposed to eat the orange rooty bits, not the green leafy bits. And those carrots had pretty strange leaves and a not-very-carroty smell. But I slept soundly and always woke up happy.

I'm not sure what we did in between the room parties. My only recollection of the rest of Minneapolis is that it consisted of one vast shopping mall. Disconcertingly, a just-refound guidebook suggests this is substantially true. "The Magnificent Mall ..." it proclaims "was one of the initial major malls in the United States. Statistically it contains: 100 trees, 80 flower pots, 67 benches, 16 bus shelters as well as many interesting innovations."

67 benches plus interesting innovations? No wonder I remember it.

I also remember being invited to visit Clifford D. Simak, which was slightly embarrassing. I have never been one for actively seeking out pros, largely thanks to my notorious lack of knowledge about science fiction and frequent remarks about how badly she is wrote. "I once read a book of yours and it was pitiful," is hardly a pleasant way to start a conversation even when you are being introduced to Robert Heinlein and it's true. Pros as fans were just fine, but here I was being taken out to meet a rather remote author whose whimsical works about robots retiring to rustic homesteads made my teeth fall out.

Minnesota in the fall, however, was as rustic and homesteady a place as I'd ever seen. Real Simak country. Acres of rolling forests and farmland with big red barns and a chokingly beautiful display of autumn colours.

And, of course, Clifford Simak himself turned out to be a charming host. We drank a bit, talked about rural life, American history and the civil war, and never once mentioned science fiction or retiring robots.

Leaving Minneapolis with a bag full of carrot tops as a parting gift, I boarded the Greyhound for Chicago which, after a day's rural drive, loomed out of the night like Gotham City. The bus, unerringly, headed for the worst part of town....

Chicago Greyhound station at 11 pm on a Saturday night is not a place I would commend to anyone. One of my fellow passengers suggested I should get a taxi out of there quickly, but I was supposed to meet up with Rob Petrick at the concourse desk. The main concourse was packed and noisy, but an audible hush fell when I entered. Looking around, I realized I would have made pretty much the same impact if I'd sauntered in wearing a white sheet and waving a confederate flag. I slunk into a corner where an old guy was playing blues on a steel guitar ... just the kind of Chicago I'd hoped to enjoy, but this wasn't exactly the best time for it. A posse of police was frogmarching people off in a routine sort of way. I counted four arrests, out of the corner of my eye.

Just in case anyone hadn't noticed me, I got paged with a message. Rob couldn't make it. I should get on the Elevated Railway and meet him in a bar somewhere. I asked the way and was shown two massive swing doors which opened onto the night.

I sat back down and looked at the doors. Periodically, someone would stumble in from outside. Several of them were bleeding. Nobody much seemed to be going out.

Eventually I noticed two policemen heading for the doors and swiftly followed them. The street outside was silent, deserted, and black as the pit. The cops had driven off. I started to walk towards the El station and then noticed shadows in the doorways. The largest shadow detached itself, matched step, and came alongside me....

"Crack," muttered the shadow, keeping pace. "Girls," muttered the shadow, talking to no one in particular. "Any damn thing you want," muttered the shadow, and lit a cigarette.

I just wanted to reach the station in one piece. Smaller shadows started out of their doorways, saw the size of the big shadow, and retreated. The muttering continued.

It was a long walk.

When I eventually met up with a cheerful and welcoming Rob Petrick in a bar a million miles away, I figured he owed me a drink. In fact, I figured he owed me several.

14 • Largely Forgotten Loganberries ...

By now it was 6th October, the Chicago breezes were gathering strength, and it was time to head off to Windycon. Rob Petrick and I boarded a surreal double-decker train bound for Arlington Park, which turned out to be another racetrack, but this time surrounding a soon-to-be-fan-filled hotel. The badges claimed we were attending the 137th Annual Loganberry Festival, presumably to confuse fans and non-fans alike. It certainly worked for me, since I can remember almost nothing about the entire event.

Must have been fun.

Gary Farber had got there somehow, and here too was moose-loving Jon Singer, Jerry Kaufman, Lesleigh Luttrell, Mike Glicksohn ... creating a strange extension of Suncon, as if I'd just got lost for a little while before finding my way back to the party. No cherubs, though. This hotel wasn't a patch on the Fontainebleau.

I met Bill Bowers and have the photos to prove it. Also Midge Reitan, who I suspect was also in Minneapolis, Alex Eisenstein, Leigh Couch, Ben Solon, Brian Earl Brown. Fondling a vast glass of ouzo are Mike Harper and Debbie Stopa, looking as chic and sophisticated as any couple could in the 1970s. Waving at the camera is Joni Stopa, who shared my fondness for obscure and difficult-to-grow vegetables. We happily exchanged weird seeds for several years afterwards. None of them grew.

Here's a wild-eyed Bill Rotsler in a psychedelic shirt about to present me with my own unique Rotsler name badge involving a dragon and so many colours that you can't actually read my name on it ... but it's still a smashing thing. And here he is again, pen in hand, probably winning a cartoon war with Derek Carter and Randy Bathurst.

What I don't have a photo of is me being punched in the stomach by a Las Vegas stripper. Or maybe that was just a dream? A striking woman, anyway. I think the punch was just by way of saying hello.

We played poker together, along with Mike Glicksohn and others. I'm sure Mike will vouch that this much was real, or at least lie convincingly. To add to the excitement, it turned out that gambling was illegal in Chicago, so

that we all had to hide our money and pretend to play for coloured chips. The house detective came in and stood behind us. Nobody told me he was the house detective, so each time I innocently mentioned dollars, I got kicked under the table by the Las Vegas stripper. I was bruised but happy. We seemed to be getting along just fine.

I don't know what happened after that. The next thing I remember, the Windycon was over and I was heading for Annie Hall.

Fannish epicentre of East Lansing and Michigan State University, Annie Hall was home to a bunch of people including Patrick Hayden, Ken Josenhans, Pat Mueller, Stuart Stinson, and Anne-Laurie Logan.

Gary Farber had got there somehow ... probably in the same bits of car as me, come to think of it. I remember there wasn't any floor where I was sitting, which was handy for guessing the speed we were travelling at, given the lack of any dashboard instrumentation. Happily, the police only stopped us once and hardly anybody was injured.

The bear-like Seth McEvoy, hero of *Amoeboid Scunge*, was also at Annie Hall. I guess we sat around and talked and drank a few beers and looked at Oasis mailings. Periodically all the residents would disappear for some covert house meeting. It was a pretty studenty sort of place. Having left university at least three years earlier, I felt like an old fan and tired.

Now, of course, I am just inconceivably old.

After Annie Hall, it was back on the Greyhound and off to Detroit. Jerry Kaufman was there and holds the key to this part of the trip, since he can still remember the names of the people we stayed with. Embarrassingly, I no longer can.

All that's left is a pleasant welcoming party at which I was served Guinness so precious it came in a liqueur glass ... a vision of helmeted, sunglassed, armed, and leathered cops riding horses through the city streets ... a pre-war art deco shopping mall which I admired and wasn't at all my idea of what Detroit ought to look like (damn, I forgot to count the benches) ... Candice Massey, of whom I have a nice picture with "Candice Massey" written on the back ... several other fans, of whom I have nice pictures with nothing written on the back ... and the fact that the only coffee in the house I stayed in was mint-flavoured.

15 • Wild Borzois Ate My Auntie's Jigsaw

No tears were shed as I boarded the Greyhound for the last time and headed back to New York. But the expiry of my month-long bus pass meant that I had to find some other way to meet up with Don D'Ammassa in New England, so I went by train.

The Pennsylvania Station was fun, but the train itself was a bit of a disappointment. No smokestack, no cow-catcher, no mention of Chattanooga ... just something that looked like a long aeroplane without any wings. We sped off at an exciting 20 mph. At this rate we would never reach Hadleyville by noon.

But they did clang the bell when we came into a station, and they did have a guard coming through saying "Mystic, mystic, all mystic passengers next stop!", and the New England names and the New England scenery were nice, and I was looking for signs to Arkham and Innsmouth when we finally arrived in Providence, Rhode Island, which was the next best thing.

Don & Sheila D'Ammassa had a fine house with almost as many books as Forry Ackerman's and I got treated to some acorn squash – a rare vegetable I'd not seen in Britain – so that was good. However, my appetite was somewhat diminished by the size and quantity of bones scattered casually across the living room floor.

Then Sheila released the borzois. All nine of them....

I guess as nine big dogs go, the borzois weren't too bad and I was only slightly terrified. They did however eat my auntie's jigsaw, featuring Washington Crossing the Potomac, or at least enough of it to have left auntie wondering whether Washington ever made it across.

We went out to replace it and also took the opportunity to visit H.P. Lovecraft's grave, which is the sort of thing you can do when shopping in Rhode Island. Nice place.

And that's almost that. Back in New York, I was finally shown the missing Washington Heights cockroaches ... got the grand city tour including an ascent of the Empire State ... bought a ridiculously large number of obscure second-hand books at Barnes & Nobles, including *Miss Ravenel's*

Conversion from Succession to Loyalty, which I still haven't read ... went on the Staten Island ferry ... visited an amazing house, probably in Brooklyn, probably sf illustrators Leo and Diane Dillon's, the interior of which, several floors high, had been entirely gutted and replaced with an open structure of wood and terraces and living spaces ... saw The Watchtower, where the Jehovah's Witnesses hang out ... got lost on the subway several times ... ate with a party of fans at the Village Indian Restaurant, which wasn't in a village and didn't seem very Indian, but who cares ... was accosted in Washington Heights late one night by a resident who'd been driving around for two hours looking for a space to park (he was hoping I was walking back to my car) ... got lost some more ... walked along naughty 42nd Street without seeing a single tapdancer ... and generally had fun.

There was at least one big fannish party at Andy Porter's where, for the benefit of some downstairs neighbour, we had to take our shoes off, giving the whole affair a slightly sacred touch. Caught on camera are Moshe Feder and Stu Shiffman, Fred Haskell who was also staying in Washington Heights, Elliott Shorter, Ross Chamberlain, Ed Meskys, D. Potter, David Romm, Suzanne Tompkins, Larry Carmody, and many others who hopefully won't remember they were there, so won't feel aggrieved if they're not named. People I've misidentified and who were never there at all will hopefully think that they were there and find themselves pleasantly surprised at being remembered.

After that, I guess I went home.

Acknowledgements

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The End

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