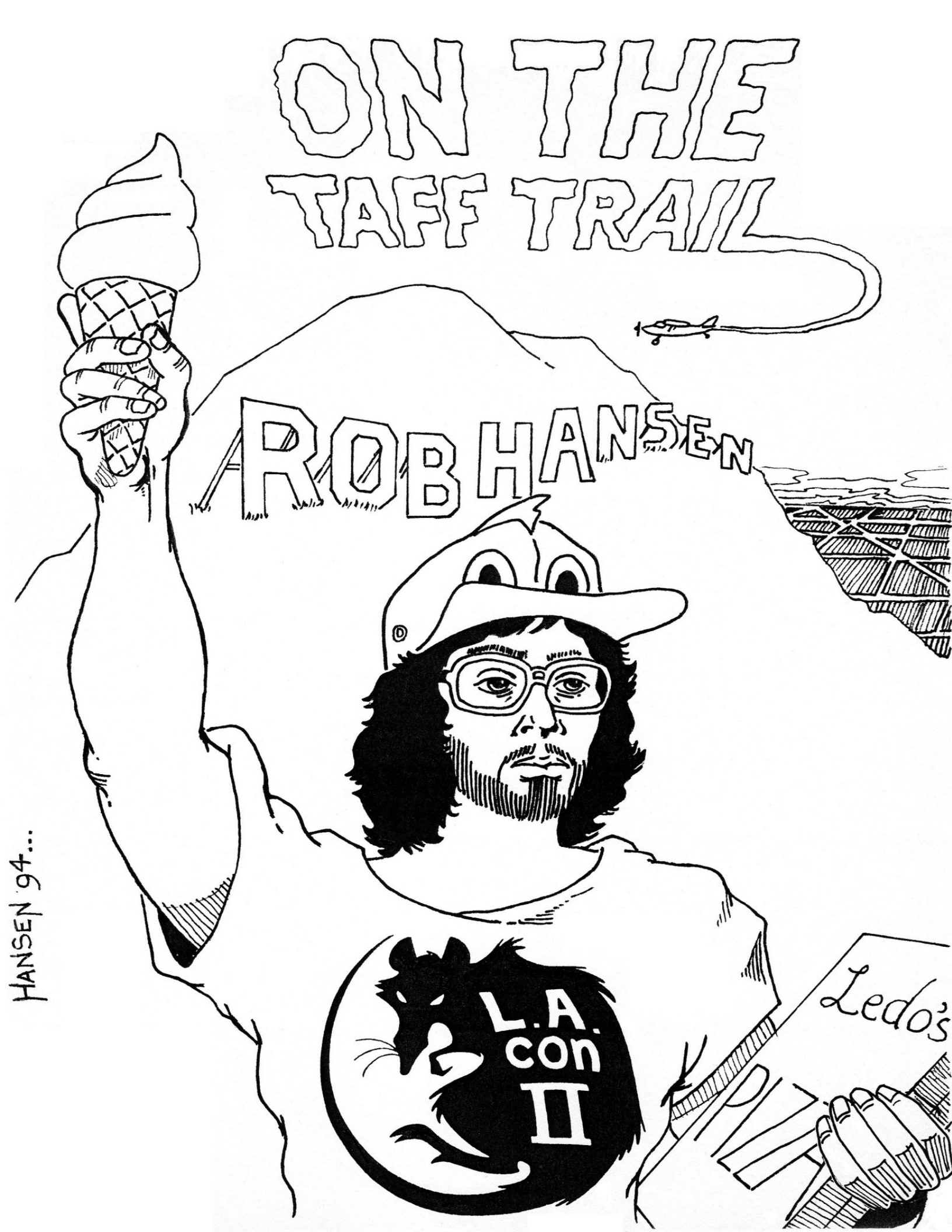
ON THE
TAFF TRAIL
ROB HANSEN
L.A. con II
Ledo's
HANSEN '94...

On the TAFF Trail

1984 TAFF Report

Rob Hansen

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Introduction

Since it's just conceivable that someone reading this may not know what TAFF is, I suppose a few words of explanation are in order. TAFF (the **T**rans-**A**tlantic **F**an **F**und) exists to send European fans to American conventions, and vice versa, as "cultural ambassadors" in order to strengthen the links of friendship between our fandoms. TAFF is supported entirely by donations from individuals and conventions and by proceeds from the sale of occasional special publications such as this one. (The current administrators may have slipped flyers between these pages giving further details.) It was the special fund organised by American fans to bring Walt Willis to the US in 1952 that provided the inspiration for the birth, a year later, of the continuing fund that is TAFF. As for me....

I got into fandom in 1975 and put out my first fanzine, *Epsilon*, in 1976. (It won the Nova Award for Best British Fanzine in 1982, the same year I won the Nova Award for Best British Fan Artist.) In 1981, Harry Bell suggested I stand for TAFF, but I didn't think I was then well-enough known in the US. In 1982, Ted White suggested it again, and kept suggesting it – as did others – until they'd convinced me to stand. The next east-west TAFF race was for a trip to the US in 1984, so I set about securing the necessary nominations, including these two:

> "I, HARRY BELL, fan of this parish, do hereby nominate and endorse as candidate for the forthcoming TAFF race to the USA the ever-lovely ROB HANSEN. I disagree that being Welsh should be an impediment. Well, hardly at all."
>
> "I, DAVE LANGFORD, being of soundish mind and in receipt of the usual vague bribes and threats, hereby nominate ROB HANSEN as a deserving (ie. Welsh) TAFF candidate for the 1983-4 TAFF race, in the full and frank understanding that in the event of his victory I am free to ask to publish a bit of his TAFF report and Rob is free to say 'Piss off!'"

And just like that I was a contender. I fought off a very strong challenge from D West to win the race, and the following pages tell the story of the trip that followed, in a mere 33,000 words.

It's expected that the TAFF winner will write a report on their trip when they return, a tradition that's fallen somewhat by the wayside in recent years. Indeed, Dave Langford's report on his 1980 trip, *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid* (1985), is the only other completed report to be published in the past 18 years. Traditionally, the various chapters of the report are first published in various fanzines, as many in this report were. With the tenth anniversary of my trip coming up and three years having elapsed since I last wrote a chapter, I decided to get the remaining 40% or so of the report written so that it could finally be published as a whole. As to why it's taken ten years to complete.... Well, as soon as the trip was over I became deeply embroiled in a feud, the TAFF Wars/Bergeron Affair, which was probably my most unpleasant experience in fandom. Since this was already making itself felt while I was on my trip it was impossible to write about that trip without covering this (particularly in the latter stages), and it's taken until now for me to overcome my aversion to the subject enough to be able to do this project justice. A synopsis of the TAFF Wars, adapted from a brief history of UK fandom I wrote in 1987, has been included in an appendix in order to provide the necessary background for those unfamiliar with it.

Finally, I'd just like to thank all those who put me up during my trip (a complimentary copy of this report will be going to them by way of thanks), Steve Stiles for his prompt response to my request for a particular piece of background information, and last, but far from least, Avedon Carol for more than can be listed here but in particular for copy-editing and formatting.

 Ten years ago, as I write, I was on my TAFF trip.

Rob Hansen, London
August/November 1994.

LOS ANGELES
30th August - 3rd September 1984

Chapter 1: HELLO AMERICA

The biggest problem I'd have to face was jet-lag ... or so seasoned fannish travellers had informed me. It could ruin my whole convention, they had said, and I was courting disaster with my insane decision to fly directly to Los Angeles for the first night of the Worldcon rather than arrive a few days early so as to acclimatise to the time and temperature difference in Southern California. The thing to do, it seemed, was not to have jet-lag hit you when you arrived at your destination – so I didn't. No, I set out from *home* suffering from the effects of jet-lag. What with SILICON up in Newcastle the previous weekend and all the sleep I'd lost due to the unnaturally high temperatures and feverish humidity of the past few days, I was pretty certain I knew *exactly* what jet-lag felt like. Thursday 30th August was the big day and I woke up yawning. I did a lot more yawning on my trip to the airport, and it was while yawning that I made my first contact with the scientifictional meta-reality I was to slip into more than once in the weeks to come....

It's the proud boast of British Rail that their Victoria to Gatwick shuttle train will get you to that far-flung airport in 30 minutes. After 45 minutes I began to doubt this. We had stopped on the line no more than 150 yards or so from Gatwick station and the train showed little inclination to travel any further. It was a lovely day, the sun streaming in through the windows suppressing any discontent the passengers might have felt at this turn of events. Apart from the monotonous clicking of my jaw as I yawned the only noise in the carriage was the conversation of the two young Australians discussing the recently postponed flight of the US Space Shuttle. Seated opposite them was a middle-aged Texan who listened to them for some minutes before deciding to join in. I sensed some fun in the making and pricked up my ears. The Texan revealed that he was "in communications" and had "worked for NASA for 15 years before moving on in the late-70s". The Aussies listened politely to this before putting the all-important question.

"What about toilets?" asked one.

"Pardon?"

"How d'you take a leak up there, sport?" asked the other.

The Texan was clearly flustered by this and I couldn't help chuckling at his discomfit. He recovered quickly, however, and explained that his 15 years

in communications with NASA hadn't brought him into contact with the problems of waste disposal in orbit all that often. Gosh, I hadn't even reached the airport yet and already I'd encountered talk of space travel and bodily functions! It was going to be a good convention.

We got into Gatwick 20 minutes later than advertised but the long lead-times demanded by airlines made this no more than a minor annoyance. I was still able to check my baggage in and make my way in the general direction of the departure lounge at a leisurely pace. This was only the second time I'd ever been to Gatwick. Such was the impression my visit of five years earlier had made on me that the airport seemed totally strange and unfamiliar. Fortunately I am a fan, so I was able to find my way to the departure lounge by means of my cosmic mind, broad mental horizons, and the many signposts.

The departure lounge for transatlantic flights from Gatwick is in a circular building called by the reassuringly stefnal name of "the Satellite" and has aircraft radiating from its gates like poles from a capstan. You reach this unique structure from the main terminal building by means of a totally automated shuttle, a high-speed and high-level train that whisks you along a gently curving track and deposits you in the Satellite with a whoosh of automatic doors and the sound of a loop-taped voice telling you to alight. Since the distance it covers is little more than a hundred yards a simple tunnel would have provided an adequate link, but what do I know? As the shuttle whooshed off on its return journey I looked around and got the distinct impression I'd been dumped inside the head of a giant mushroom. Only it wasn't a mushroom at all, but a doughnut. The entire departure lounge was a torus that fit snugly over the duty-free shop at its centre, a very smart and comfortably furnished torus that I tried very hard to relax in, but couldn't. I was too nervous. It was beginning to slowly dawn on me just what was about to happen. Everything had seemed unreal so far, but soon I'd be on a plane headed for Los Angeles and an American Worldcon, the duly elected TAFF delegate and the 25th to cross the Atlantic under the auspices of the fund. Would I live up to the expectations of those in the US who had voted for me? I'd soon find out.

My flight, Northwest Orient NW45, was scheduled to leave at 1.30pm. Fifteen minutes before this we began boarding and soon we were in the air. This being my first time across the Atlantic I requested a window seat and got one – over the wing. I silently grumped and bitched about this

particularly as a 747's wing isn't a terribly reassuring sight. Quite apart from the pop-riveted patches randomly dotted about its surface, both the fully extended ailerons and the wing itself flapped up and down in an alarming manner. Visions of a watery grave swam before my eyes and I sank down in my seat feeling helpless in the face of a cruel and uncaring fate. My misery was compounded by the ferocious air-conditioning and the failure of the blanket covering my legs to resist the wind-chill factor. Having given up on trying to understand the gibberish being spouted by the Belgian couple occupying the seats between me and the aisle I tried to catch some sleep. This proved a vain effort. I tossed, I turned, I fidgeted, I draped the blanket across me in every conceivable way and a few inconceivable ones as well, and all to no avail. Resigning myself to sleeplessness I sighed, opened my eyes, glanced up at the screen on which the in-flight movie was being shown, and focused blearily on the words:

"I have a twelve-inch penis"

The film in question was *Splash!*, and the subtitle apparently because the characters were speaking Swedish at that point. Despite these provocative words at no time did the name "Robert Holdstock" cross my mind. I hadn't bothered with headphones since I had a feeling the film might contain offensive depictions of women and because I was too cheap to pay the three buck hire-charge.

I have the ability to slip into a semi-comatose state when travelling alone, one that while not particularly restful does at least make the hours fly by. Thus, having checked that the small view of the Earth's surface visible behind the wing was obscured by clouds, I slipped into this state and the hours flew by.

Not long after we'd taken off, the pilot had informed us that we were leaving the UK high over northern Scotland and would soon pass within two hundred miles of the tip of Iceland. Hours later he piped in again to let us know we were approaching the coast of northern Canada, so I craned my neck to look out of my window and saw what I took to be icebergs floating in the Atlantic far below . What I was actually viewing, however, was a very fragmented chunk of the northern Canadian coastline, as a ribbon of road zig-zagging across the "icebergs" proved. I was above a whole other continent for the first time in my life and for some reason all I could think to ask myself was:

"Shouldn't those who call themselves 'Canadians' be natives of a place

called ‘Canadia’, and shouldn’t people from Canada be ‘Canadans’?”

It was an odd thought, irrelevant yet indicative of my somewhat contradictory and confused state of mind at this point. Not that there weren’t good reasons for some degree of confusion on my part....

Justin Ackroyd, that year’s GUFF winner and a well-seasoned traveller, had suggested to me at SILICON that I set my watch to Los Angeles time as soon as I boarded the plane. He himself swore by it, claiming it helped him adjust more quickly. Having no reason to doubt him I took his advice. This was a mistake. What no-one had seen fit to inform me of beforehand was that my direct flight to Los Angeles was direct via Minneapolis where I’d have to switch planes. And since Minneapolis is in a different time zone to Los Angeles all the captain’s announcements as to e.t.a’s and the like were given in Central Standard Time. Desperately trying to juggle three different times I soon became totally lost and thoroughly confused. Many were the curses I heaped on Justin-bloody-Ackroyd and his damned useless “good advice”. On the positive side, this meant we arrived in Minneapolis a couple of hours before I’d calculated we would.

The jumbo began its gradual descent over a vast body of water I knew must be one of the Great Lakes and took to be Lake Michigan, but which a later perusal of the atlas shows to have been Lake Superior. As we continued to descend through the clear Minnesotan skies I stared entranced at the view below, my first ever of an American city. The houses were arranged in lots on a grid-system that, while perfectly logical, looked totally alien to me. And so much land to each house! At first I was confused by the large number of turquoise specks scattered across the city but as we got lower these resolved themselves into the swimming pools of the wealthy. Or maybe, given their number, of the not-so-wealthy in American terms. Yes, I was definitely entering a foreign land.

Shortly before landing, the other non-American passengers and I were given copies of form I-94 W to fill out. This form, which is probably the end result of millions of dollars and years of development by the US Immigration Service, requires you to answer yes or no to a series of questions. It is a truly remarkable document. These were my favourites:

> Have you ever been arrested or convicted for an offense or crime involving moral turpitude or a violation related to a controlled substance; or been arrested or convicted for two or more offenses for which the aggregate sentence to confinement was five years or

> more; or are you seeking entry to engage in criminal or immoral activities?

What's the point of a holiday without a little moral turpitude, I always say. The next question was even better.

> Have you ever been or are you now involved in espionage or sabotage; or in terrorist activities; or genocide; or between 1933 and 1945 were you involved, in any way, in persecutions associated with Nazi Germany or its allies?

Bearing in mind that we'd never seen this document until a few minutes ago, the final line provided the perfect ending:

> **IMPORTANT**: If you have answered **"YES"** to any of the above, please contact the American embassy **BEFORE** you travel to the U.S.

Assuming this were possible, anyone who does so is then informed by the embassy that they're too stupid to be allowed into the US. What a bunch of jokers those guys at Immigration must be, I thought, blissfully unaware of the treat the US Customs Service had in store for me.

I think of myself as a relatively ordinary chap of fairly normal appearance (good-looking, of course, but only averagely so) and not in any way unusual or disreputable. This view was not shared by American customs. After the plane had landed, I'd collected my suitcase and casually struggled over to the foreign arrivals' desk with it, where my fellow passengers appeared to be having to answer only the most cursory of questions before having their passports stamped and being ushered into the land of the free. When I reached the desk, however, a stern-faced customs officer ordered me to open my case and began rummaging through my effects, asking me questions all the while:

Whereya going? Los Angeles. Why do you have a Washington address listed as the place where you'll be staying? Uh ... there was only room for one address on the form and that's where I'll be staying longest while I'm over here. What is the purpose of your visit? To ... ah ... attend the World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles and then to visit friends in various parts of the US.

And so on and so forth. The customs officer called in a second to go through my hand-baggage and a third to run a computer-check on my

passport. I began to feel paranoid and racked my brain trying to remember if I'd done anything particularly subversive. I was fairly certain I hadn't overthrown the state recently, and also knew that I hadn't used my highly trusted position as a draughtsman for a major grocery chain to spy for the Russians (though possibly GUM might be interested in a little commercial espionage – must find out what they pay). Then I remembered. I had been on a couple of anti-nuclear marches in London during the previous year and in the second I marched with a group of American students under a banner that proclaimed them to be EMBARRASSED AMERICANS AGAINST REAGAN. Could that be it? The banner *had* attracted a lot of media attention and I'd marched at the front of the group. Such an action was sure to get me branded a dangerous pinko in Ronald Reagan's Amerika, I realised, as visions of my passport being stamped "undesirable alien" swam before my eyes. What would Avedon think of me being officially described as both alien and undesirable, I wondered? I started to sweat and began to consider how far I was prepared to compromise my principles to gain entry to America. If pressed could I bring myself to say "Ronald Reagan is a great President and a wonderful human being" without choking on the words, or would I be forced to return to the UK, a fannish martyr? We shall never know because eventually the customs officer gave my passport an entry stamp (somewhat reluctantly I thought) that allowed me to stay in the US until March 1985, and told me to re-pack my bags. It had been an unpleasant few minutes but I'd passed the inspection and now I was in. I had entered America!

Outside a shuttle bus waited to take us from "International Arrivals" to the "Domestic Flight Terminal". During the short drive between the two I got my first brief look at the US at ground level – a stretch of road with a few cars on it (which surprised me by being fairly small rather than the enormous gas-guzzlers of myth and media) and some low industrial buildings. As fodder for first impressions the scene left something to be desired.

The fact that we weren't given the number and time of our connecting flight to L.A., coupled with my discovery that Americans place less emphasis on adequate signposting than do the British, led to my spending a panic-stricken five minutes dashing about the corridors of Minneapolis/St.Paul airport trying to find out where the hell I was supposed to go and when I was supposed to be there. During these tribulations I had my first encounter with American plumbing. As I'd discover in the weeks to come, the public toilets

in the airport were fairly typical even though they seemed strange and alien to me. I mean, urinals with individual hand-operated flushes?! And perhaps American guys reading this can explain why all the cubicles contained a pack of paper toilet seat covers yet totally lacked such commonplace British amenities as scrotum adjusters and anal picks? Still, my experiences with US signs and sanitation, and the eventual two-hour wait for the connecting flight, were more than compensated for by the view from the window of the DC10 taking us to Los Angeles. It was awesome.

We must have been thousands of feet up but the plains extended as far as the eye could see, vanishing over the horizon in all directions, yet the mark of man was everywhere. I'd seen large stretches of flatlands in the north of England but they paled into insignificance next to this. I stared out of the window entranced, fascinated by the country below, by the plains and how they gradually gave way to desert high over Wyoming. The landscape was – that word again – alien; totally beyond my experience yet stirring my sense of wonder in a way that no SF has ever done. It was at once humbling and exhilarating, awe-inspiring and just a little frightening. Maybe it was the call of the genes, the pagan affinity with the land of my Celtic ancestors echoing down the years, or maybe not, but I hadn't realised the dead and arid wastes of our planet could possess so strange and terrible a beauty. Transfixed by the view I only turned from the window during that transcontinental flight to eat and tend to other bodily functions, and so saw the shadows that brought the desert canyons into such sharp relief lengthen into dusk with the dying afternoon as we neared the West Coast. I was almost sorry when we left the desert behind and descended into night as Los Angeles appeared before us, spread across the blackness like a monstrous neon quilt.

Since I'd already entered the US at Minneapolis/St.Paul there were no tedious formalities to be endured at LAX (not a name to inspire confidence in the efficiency of the airport), so I headed straight for the baggage area. On the way, I was delighted to spot the familiar figure of Lucy Huntzinger heading towards me. We greeted each other, laughed, hugged, and turned to her companion, a big bespectacled black man.

"Hi, I'm Ken Porter," he said, pumping my hand.

After retrieving my suitcase Ken drove us onto the freeway (via an airport road where they drove on the left, for some bizarre reason) and we headed for Anaheim. As Ken talked about the convention I looked about me at the giant neon signs, the large cars, the road signs to exotic places like

Santa Monica and Ventura, letting the John Lennon album being played on the local station and the warm air coming through the open windows wash over me. So this was Southern California. Goshwowoboyoboy!!

The Hotel seemed to be miles from the airport, but driving along chatting to Ken about blues music and trading fannish gossip with Lucy I didn't mind a bit. Everything was right with the world and I was feeling great.

As we entered Anaheim and pulled onto Harbor Boulevard the skies over Disneyland filled with exploding fireworks in a colourful display that lasted for some minutes and grew more impressive the closer we got.

"That was amazing," I said, "but they really didn't have to go to all that trouble to make me feel welcome."

The Anaheim Hilton and Towers was the main convention hotel for L.A.CON II and is right next door to Disneyland, on Harbor Boulevard. When Ken dropped us off in front of it I breathed a little sigh of relief. I'd spent 15 hours in transit, lived through a day with 21 hours of light – the longest I'd ever known, and had covered 6000 miles. Now, at last, my journey was over.

I had arrived.

Chapter 2: FIRST CONTACT

Glass and marble were everywhere. Fountains and cascades flowed in orderly fashion over the centrepiece of a vast chamber fully fifty feet from floor to ceiling, around which milled large numbers of stern-faced people in strange attire. This being Los Angeles it would have been easy to believe we'd stumbled onto the set of some strange new fantasy film, but this was in fact merely the reception area for the main convention hotel of L.A.CON II, the 1984 Worldcon.

On checking in, I had my particulars entered on a computer, an imprint of my credit card left on a dummy bill (despite all my protestations that I'd be paying in cash), and an individual card key punched out for me – the electronic combination of the lock on my room's door being altered automatically as the key was being made. It was all very impressive. As I left the desk, with my trusty native-bearer, Lucy Huntzinger, struggling under the weight of the baggage I'd smiled and assured the pretty receptionist we could manage on our own so she needn't trouble herself with calling a porter, I reflected on how technological accomplishments that would have been cause for wonderment to earlier generations of SF fans were now commonplace. The future had arrived, I decided, and all that was missing were the rocket back-packs. With appropriate synchronicity someone dressed as the title character from Dave Stevens' *Rocketeer* comic-book chose that moment to walk by, dummy rocket-pack strapped firmly to his back. I sighed contentedly and told Lucy to hurry up.

At the lifts (or elevators – I had to get into the habit of speaking American) we ran into a thin, dark-haired girl who looked about 17 years old but turned out to be 26. Lucy introduced her as Stacy Scott, wife of Rich Coad, and I was pleased to make her acquaintance, particularly as I'd be staying with her and Rich when I visited San Francisco. Stacy explained that Rich would be arriving the next day, and decided to help us with the luggage. Not that there was any great urgency about this, as it turned out. We seemed to wait days for a lift – though it was probably no more than a few hours – and such long waits were to be one of the hallmarks of the weekend.

If you're one of those who feel that by flying from one coast to the other, as I'd done, it's not possible to gain a true impression of the sheer size

of the US, then you are mistaken. Struggling down those endless hotel corridors with a fully-overloaded suitcase and watching them vanish over the distant horizon with my room still nowhere to be seen, I soon began to appreciate how easy it is to be awed by the vastness of America without ever leaving the confines of the Anaheim Hilton and Towers. On finally reaching the room. I collapsed over my suitcase, blowing softly at the livid serrations on my fingers and thanking the gods that I wouldn't have to carry the case all that way again until I checked out. I was wrong. Sliding my wondrous card-key into the slot above the door handle I was rewarded not by the green light the instructions on the back of the card had led to expect, but by a red one. Three times the card was re-inserted, and three times the red light came on. Puzzled, I hammered on the door only to have an indignant female voice within demand to know what the hell was going on.

"You're double-booked, Rob," said Lucy, infringing my copyright on stating the totally obvious.

Dragging the baggage back to the lift, we returned to the reception desk, received profuse apologies and a new key, travelled up to the plush 14th floor, found the new room, inserted the new card-key ... and got a red light. Three times. I was beginning to despair of ever getting a room when, on my fourth attempt, the green light came on and the door opened. We were in! The first thing I wanted to do was change out of my sweaty T-shirt, but no sooner had I dropped my case and collapsed on the bed than the phone rang. It was Allyn Cadogan, asking for Lucy and inviting us to a party in Marty Cantor's room.

"Hey, Luce," I yelled, "put your clothes back on and get over here!"

The fully-clothed Ms. Huntzinger stuck her tongue out at me and got the necessary directions from Allyn.

Up to this point everyone I'd encountered I'd either met before (Lucy) or had little previous knowledge of (Ken Porter and Stacy) but now I'd be meeting a bunch of people I'd never met before but whom I felt I knew well, having exchanged letters and fanzines with them. Thus, I approached the party with a certain amount of trepidation, though as it turned out it was a very enjoyable experience.

In their room, Marty introduced me to wife Robbie, Larry Carmody, Alina Chu, Lenny Bailes, Ted White and, surprisingly, Chris Atkinson who I'd last seen a few days earlier and half a world away. With the exception of Chris, these people had all previously been only words on paper to me, and I

studied them with interest. Ted White was large and bullish, with an incredibly deep voice that Avedon's devastating impression had prepared me for, an infectious laugh, and an engaging sense of humour. In short, he was everything I'd imagined he would be and I took to him immediately. Larry Carmody was quieter than I'd expected, Alina Chu sharper, and Marty Cantor ... well I don't know what I'd expected of Marty Cantor, but whatever it was he came as a total surprise. In print he comes across as somewhat tetchy and obstinate, but in person he's the very model of courtesy and friendliness. For those of you who remember *Hill Street Blues* on TV, Marty somewhat resembled, in both appearance and speech, S.W.A.T. team leader Howard Hunter, only with shoulder-length black hair cut in a page-boy style. Whenever I encountered him during the course of the weekend, his teeth were clamped around the stem of an enormous pipe that looked like a hollowed-out shillelagh, while a shoulder bag containing still more pipes was never far from his side. It was Robbie Cantor, however, who saved my life. After fifteen hours of travel I was in dire need of a drink and, noticing the dismay with which I regarded the few cans of undrinkable American beer lost among the sea of soft-drink provided for their guests, she produced a can of Canadian beer for me. As the cold nectar caressed the sides of my parched throat I thought that, truly, there could be no finer person in the world at that moment than this veritable Florence Nightingale of fandom.

I circulated, chatting to most of those present before getting into a lengthy conversation with Ted White who, on learning that I had a new issue of *Epsilon* with me, insisted that we go to his room there and then to exchange fanzines. I'd intended handing *Epsilon* out the next day, but who was I to argue with such unexpected enthusiasm? On the way we picked up Malcolm Edwards and, once in his room, Ted showed us a thick folder containing his correspondence with Richard Bergeron over the latter's allegations concerning the TAFF race I'd won. Since Bergeron had become something of a figure of fun in British fandom by this point, both Malcolm and I gave the letters no more than a cursory glance. D.West had written me a rather amusing letter about this affair shortly before I left, so I showed a copy to Ted. It read, in part:

> "I don't know what you're making of all this folderol of Bergeron's, but I gather it's setting the American fans in something of a turmoil. Anyway, as Official TAFF Loser my position is that I have absolutely no complaints about either the result or any part of

the administration, and that I am in no way responsible for statements, claims, or allegations made by anyone else. In other words, Bergeron is out there on his own.

"Nobody around here seems to be taking it very seriously – the consensus being that R.B. is completely bananas – but I shouldn't think either you or I can ignore it entirely, since some of the US fans probably *will* give it the heavy treatment. Anyway, feel free to point out that I myself (as chief victim of Avedon's searing attack on dominoes etc., etc.) don't see what all the fuss is about. (Though I shall expect to see a more favourable verdict on the game after her victory at MEXICON.)

"Must admit, though, I'm curious to see Ted White's response. Snappy rejoinders, here we come. (I figure not less than six pages. Or is that too terse?)"

Ted laughed, and handed me a copy of *Egoscan* containing his response.

"Actually, it was *eight* pages," he chuckled, and I laughed too. Ah, if only we'd known how matters would develop from there in the months to come! "All fandom plunged into war!", as they used to say. Still, all that lay in the future and in the meantime there was much to enjoy on that late-August night in Ted's room....

Some years ago, Greg Pickersgill commented on the way fans seem to be drawn towards certain BNFs no matter where they chose to hang out in a convention hotel, and as if to prove his contention people began arriving at Ted's room within minutes of us reaching it. The first to join us was Bob Lichtman. He was soon followed by Gary Farber, Steve and Elaine Stiles, Jerry Kaufman, Alan Bostick and, eventually, by Lucy, Stacy, and Allyn. In no time at all, and totally without planning, we had a pretty damn good room party going. Not surprisingly, most of the conversation centred on the Bergeron affair but at one point, or so my notes assure me, I overheard Lucy say of the diminutive Mr Farber:

"It's huge and it's pink!"

Tearing myself away from such merry banter, I left briefly to get copies of *Epsilon* ... and made a horrifying discovery in the lift lobby. As I rounded the corner, I was stopped dead in my tracks by the sight that greeted me. There, in front of the lift doors, stood a tall, dishevelled, and overweight figure with untidy hair and greying stubble, whose shirt-tails hung over sagging trousers and who radiated an air of shambolic seediness. For a

moment, reality took on the shifting and unreal quality it has in a Philip K.Dick novel, and I staggered back in shock before this vision of unloveliness. I couldn't believe it! What the hell was Brian Burgess doing in Los Angeles!?!

Back at the room party, I told everyone about my encounter. Most were no more than mildly amused by the story, but Farber and Kaufman got very excited indeed and tried to talk me into finding Burgess again and bringing him back to the room for them.

"The guy's a legend," they explained. "We've been reading about this mysterious figure for years in reports of conventions and of evenings at the One Tun, and now ... to have the chance to actually meet him!"

Their faces took on a beatific glow as they savoured the prospect of – dare I say it – *touching* the shirt-tails of the Blessed Brian while I, faced with such clear evidence of mental imbalance, took out my notebook and wondered whether I ought to write "loonies" to remind me of the incident. I decided instead to jot down a few brief impressions of Farber and Kaufman....

Gary Farber is a short neat person with a short neat beard and Jerry Kaufman isn't. In fact, Jerry didn't even look like the guy in the photos people had shown me immediately prior to saying:

"This is Jerry Kaufman."

No, *that* Jerry Kaufman had had a rakish moustache that gave him a distinctly devil-may-care appearance, while this one not only didn't have a moustache but, or so he claimed, had also dyed his hair black.

(Later, when I reached New York, I reported this transformation to a mortified Patrick Nielsen Hayden.

("Oh no," he said, "he didn't ... he *can't* have! how could he have let you see him without a moustache!?! This is terrible! Jerry has the sort of face that *demands* a moustache! On behalf of American fandom, I apologise to you."

(I accepted his apology on behalf of British fandom and told him to make sure it didn't happen again.)

With the time fast approaching midnight, I was still surprisingly alert and feeling pretty good, buoyed up on the elation I felt at being in L.A., but common sense told me that I really had to go to bed if I didn't want to feel lousy for the rest of the convention. I checked my watch, saw that I'd been awake 24 hours, and decided to call it a day. (I'd always called 24 hours "a

day” and saw no reason to change the habit of a lifetime.) Back home in Britain, it was 8am and most of those I worked with would be on their way to their jobs and another hard day at the office. It was a nice thought to fall asleep on, a reassuringly familiar note on which to bring to close my first night in this strange new land....

Chapter 3: A LIMEY AT L.A.CON

Having only arrived in the US the night before, I was eager to be up and about and starting out on my first full day in America. Not so eager, however, that I leapt out of bed when my internal clock – still patriotically following British time – woke me at 4.20 am. No, eager though I was I forced myself to grab a few hours more. Nonetheless, I still rose before 9am, and not surprisingly the only familiar faces I encountered were those belonging to Malcolm Edwards and Chris Atkinson. My fellow Brits, it seemed, were having just as much trouble adjusting to the time difference in spite of the extra days they'd had to get accustomed to it.

The Los Angeles sun was fierce, the glare off the bone-white buildings in this neatly manicured area almost blinding, and I immediately decided to make trips between the hotel and the Anaheim Convention Center – where most of L.A.CON II's programming was taking place – as brief and infrequent as possible. My first priority was to locate the registration desk, no easy task amid the labyrinthine hangars of the convention center, and to pick up my registration pack. My convention badge, when I eventually acquired it, had a strip of yellow ribbon stuck to it that identified me as a "program participant" and a label that gave my address as "East Hampshire, London". Hmmn. The advantage of the ribbon, as I soon discovered, was that it gave me access to a special "Green Room" where platters of cold food and beer (American, unfortunately) were freely available. Since breakfast wasn't included in the cost of the hotel room I was delighted to have a means of correcting that grievous oversight. In no time at all I'd nibbled my way through a desultory dozen or so sandwiches while watching comics pros such as Julius Schwartz, Len Wein and Marv Wolfman as they wandered through. Clearly this was the place to be if you wanted to hang out with the pros, but it was the fans I expected to hold my interest.

The Fan Lounge was located on the first floor of the hotel and was actually four large, adjacent rooms. One of these, the smallest, contained typewriters, duplicators, and groups of fans busily fanning their ac (as we old fans say). It was here that the convention newsletter, *Thought Police Gazette*, was put together and where its editor, Mike Glyer, seemed to spend most of the convention. Of the other three rooms two – called Palo Verdes A and B –

were put aside for fan programming, while the other was a fanzine room that both offered current fanzines for sale and hosted a display of old ones. I wasn't terribly taken with this display, which occupied well over three-quarters of the available space, since it consisted of rows of tables laden with old fanzines covered by transparent sheets. You could look at the covers but not the contents, and who cares about that? Fanzines are not artifacts to be put on display and looked at with reverence but collections of writing meant to be read and enjoyed. What this exhibition came down to, in essence, was a display of fanzine cover art, something that could have been better handled by hanging xeroxes of the originals on the walls of the room, thus liberating space in the room for a more useful purpose. I understand that the owner of these particular zines – Gary Farber, I believe – had not wanted his precious collection mishandled and possibly damaged, any more than I'd want mine to be, but the protective measures made the display pointless and I never bothered studying it.

My first visit to the Fan Lounge was that afternoon when I was to appear as part of a "Meet the TAFF/DUFF/GUFF Winners" item. Inexplicably, this had been programmed opposite a Ted White fanhistory panel which Jack Herman, Justin Ackroyd and I would all like to have seen, and we were a bit put out about the clash. I'm not exactly sure how the meet-the-winners item was originally intended to work but in the event it ended up with those who'd come to meet us, around 20 to 30 people, milling about while we three chatted to those not too shy to talk up and rambled on about the fandoms in our respective countries. It was a badly prepared and ill-structured item and it petered out untidily. Soon after this I met Greg Benford in the fanroom and he told me he was thinking of coming over to Britain for the next Eastercon (where he was GoH) on Concorde.

"Nice plane," I agreed, "the only civilian airliner built to the same specifications as a military aircraft."

Stung by the thought of anyone being technologically ahead of America in any field (you know what these right-wing, hard SF writers are like) Benford snapped back that the US was working on an airliner ...

"... that will go faster than light."

"Uh, don't you mean faster than *sound*?" I asked, incredulously.

"Yeah, of course, an FTL airplane ... "

It took Benford a few seconds to realise why those around him had collapsed in helpless mirth.

Since there were no more items on the fan programme that interested me I decided to go for a walk around the convention and to take a few notes on the differences between US and UK cons.

Most everything about L.A.CON was familiar enough only bigger, and there was so much more of it. Nonetheless I was totally unprepared for the news that "SPOCK DIED FOR YOUR SINS", emblazoned as it was across the more than ample chest of a Junoesque Trekkie. I was even more totally unprepared for the vast numbers of fans, and numbers of vast fans, milling around in costume. I'm used to people walking around in costume at British cons, of course, and recognised that unsmiling seriousness and those po-faced expressions, but the phenomenon known as "jackboot fandom" was new to me. Some costume fans have the wit and imagination to put together costumes of their own design – often their visualisation of how a character from a particular novel might look – but most merely turn out slavish imitations of those worn by the actors on some dreadful TV sci-fi show or other. However, it appears there is a newer breed of costume fan, one even more po-faced and serious, and into parading around in paramilitary drag, festooned with toy guns. De rigueur, of course, are those all important jackboots. TV, in the form of the dreadful *"V"*, had provided the "inspiration" for more than one of the groups determinedly trooping up and down, but most appeared to have decked themselves out in the uniform of armies existing nowhere beyond the fevered confines of their own fascistic fantasies. Hard SF fans to a man (or woman), I decided, and (as later confirmed by Lisanne Norman in her report on her own experiences at the con, that appeared in Linda Krawecke Pickersgill's *Tiger Tea* #2) neo-Nazi. This was an influence I prayed would not cross the Atlantic to pollute British conventions.

One glaringly obvious difference between our fandom that I couldn't help but notice lay in the number of American fans at L.A.CON II who were not merely fat but enormously overweight. I had never in my life before (or in the ten years since) seen such huge human beings, and though I tried very hard not to stare I'm afraid I didn't always succeed. On one occasion, Jerry Kaufman caught me in the act:

"Hey, Rob," he chuckled, "if your jaw drops any further it'll be in your lap!"

In reporting this, I'm in no way trying to mock these people but rather to point out a genuine cultural difference that it would have been dishonest of

me to ignore.

Not even I could free-load on the Green Room food all day, so that evening I found myself walking down Harbor Boulevard in the glow of what my notes refer to as its “strange neon” with Stu Shiffman, Rich Coad, Stacy Scott, Gary Farber, Jerry Kaufman, Suzanne Tompkins, Ron Saloman, and Steve & Elaine Stiles, in search of chinese restaurants. Stu had assured us that these were to be found within walking distance of the hotel but, after marching for what seemed like miles without a jackboot between us, we were beginning to have our doubts. To a foreigner, however, the endless trek was not without interest, and I was much taken with the fact that the bright green sward on the strip of land between sidewalk and road was not grass, as it would be over here, but astroturf. Stu walked right past the first chinese restaurant we came to – “Never trust a chinese restaurant that offers a breakfast special” – and went into the one next door. On the window of this restaurant, in bright red letters, it said: “TRY OUR BREAKFAST SPECIAL”.

Back at the hotel after our repast, I accidentally stumbled into an *Elfquest* party and briefly took in the appallingly twee folk music and all those people with their plastic pointy ears nailed on, before I staggered out, shaking, my hand over my mouth. *Elfquest*, for those who don’t know, is a comic-book produced by Wendy Pini and has spawned yet another of those ever-proliferating sub-fandoms. When I got to New York I told Tom Weber, one of the shortest and most elfin fans around, about this and he recalled the time when he had stumbled into one of these things at an earlier con, only to find those present descending on him with glee.

“They wanted to draft me!” he whispered, a look of horror in his eyes.

I was way too tall to have been in any danger myself, and once outside the room I leant against a wall, jotting down a few fevered impressions in my note book. Within seconds, Jerry Kaufman had popped up (as he did all weekend, doubtless desperate to be immortalised in this report) along with Robert Lichtman, so we went off together looking for parties.

Perhaps inevitably, partying at large American conventions has developed along different lines than at British conventions. Whereas most parties over here are now held in the fan room and, while not widely advertised, are open to most anyone who turns up, partying at US cons still takes the form of get togethers in private rooms and knowledge of these is passed along the grapevine by word of mouth. Even bidding parties are

different in our two countries because while both have a certain amount of free booze on hand (with America, where fewer fans drink, having the most booze available ironically enough) there is not usually dance music at US parties and most fans just stand around in small groups talking.

The first party we dropped in on was the CRAPA party (it says here) where a number of fans were sat around talking including Seattle fan Amy Thomson who, I couldn't help but notice, was clad in arm-length black gloves with jewelled bracelets at the wrist and a long black dress with a mesh top.

"One of Amy's special dresses" announced Jerry, unnecessarily. I was starting to feel the jet-lag again, but I was far from blind. Having been handed various bits of paper earlier in the day with room numbers scribbled on them, it was easy to skip from one party to another and the next we hit was in Jim Frenkel and Joan D. Vinge's room.

"Two Fanoclasts and their guests," Jerry airily announced as he, Lenny Bailes, Robert Lichtman and I sailed past Jim Frenkel and into the room. Stu knocked on the door later and tried the same routine, but he was stopped by Frenkel.

"But I *run* Fanoclast meetings!" Stu protested indignantly, failing totally to notice the mischievous twinkle in Jim's eyes.

"Hey, I was only *joking*!" laughed Frenkel, and ushered him in.

On the bed was a large amount of publicity material for the forthcoming film version of *Dune*, which really impressed the waiter who brought up a tray of soft drinks for us. He wanted to know if any of us had met one of the film's stars, Sting, and being British I was half-tempted to spin him a yarn about being Sting's life-long buddy. I wonder what he made of the film? I was at a press showing of the film prior to its UK premiere a few months later and thought it was dreadful.

At the party in Ted's room the smell of marijuana hung heavy on the air. I didn't recognise most of those present at first, but the company was soon swelled by such familiar faces as those of Allyn Cadogan, Lucy Huntzinger, and Chris Atkinson. Lucy's friend, Sharee Carton turned up with her, and her entrance caused something of a stir, no doubt because she's tall, striking, and sported a mohawk. On this occasion she was also sporting Vegemite earrings and a Vegemite T-shirt, presumably to show her solidarity with the Melbourne in '85 people over for the con from her native Australia.

Fading fast, I settled into the space between the wall and the bed with a

similarly jet-lagged Chris Atkinson looming down at me from the bed along with Sharee, while Allyn was propped against the wall by my feet. This struck me as a very agreeable set-up, and we were all chatting away pleasantly when Norman Spinrad came in. I was the only one in a position to see him enter and I watched with great amusement as he caught sight of Sharee, and began edging around the room towards her. Various people engaged him in conversation but he barely took his eyes off Sharee, disengaging himself as soon as possible and continuing to slither along the wall. He edged closer and closer until he almost tripped over my feet, at which point Sharee and Lucy, totally oblivious of Spinrad, got up and left for the Australian bidding party. Norm looked more than a little put out, and I was still chuckling at this little drama of frustrated lust that I alone had witnessed when I crashed out shortly afterwards. It had been a good day and I could hardly wait for the joys tomorrow would doubtless bring.

Chapter 4: SPIKED

On Saturday I awoke at 7.30am – I was finally acclimatising! – and stayed in bed another hour reading fanzines before getting up and heading downstairs. Mooching around for a while, I ended up in the hotel shop. While at the counter, buying a copy of the second book in Jack Chalker's "Soul Rider" series (yeah, yeah, I know), I bumped into Larry Carmody and Alina Chu. Feisty, intelligent and good-looking, Alina is easy to like and my appreciation of her has only deepened over the years with each occasion we've met since. Larry, however, is harder to pin down. At the time he was co-editor with Stu Shiffman of *Raffles*, a fanzine I then wrote a column for, and was never less than friendly to me. Larry may have left fandom under a cloud a few years after this, but my main memory of him is of an amiable guy who was good company.

We talked for a few minutes before being joined by a tall, athletic-looking woman in a track-suit who introduced herself as Spike Parsons. She was just off for her morning jog (jogging? ... at a convention?) but was meeting Stu for breakfast at 10.30am and invited me along. I accepted, particularly as she also offered me the loan of a badly needed hair-dryer. Spike, I later learned, is probably the only person ever to come into fandom via weight-lifting and one of the many formidable woman at the core of Madison, Wisconsin's feminist-oriented SF group. I would get to know her much better over the next few years.

Breakfast was in a Hawaiian restaurant just down the road from the hotel, one with as tasteless an exterior as all the other places on Harbor Boulevard, and the food was good, if expensive. I chatted to Spike and Stu over hash and eggs, a breakfast that seemed suitably American, inconsequential stuff about absent friends that was punctuated by Spike's frequent, infectious laughter. At one point she berated me about the photo of me in the Programme Book (which I'd got at a photo-booth and mailed in just under deadline) complaining that she'd hardly recognised me from it and that I was better-looking in real life. But then *everyone* is better-looking in real life. On the way back we stopped in the hotel car park so that I could take a photo of my companions next to Terl the Psychlo who stood a good thirty five feet tall, his head brushing the fronds of the adjacent palm trees.

This amazing figure was actually a large inflatable, one connected by umbilical cord to a van-mounted compressor. The van and compressor were manned throughout the weekend by a cadre of scientologists/ Bridge Publications employees who were there to ensure that this character from their mentor L.Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth* didn't suffer any undignified sagging due to gradual deflation. I laughed at this ludicrous spectacle, secure in the knowledge that the Hubbardites were unlikely ever to get involved in any British conventions.

The early afternoon round-table discussion of fanzine standards, a perennial subject that was causing a lot of fuss in the fanzines of the day, started well but soon got bogged down in such irrelevancies as the different pronunciations of various words in the UK and the US. Making most of the running were Terry Carr, Ted White, Malcolm Edwards, and Jack Herman. Old-fans-and-tired around them admitted to reading very few fanzines all the way through; some seemed almost proud of the fact. Terry Carr was having none of this.

"*I* read them all the way through," he admonished them, and some looked duly chastened. A little later, Terry lamented the lack of scurrilous humour in current fanzines.

"What about Leroy Kettle?" asked Malcolm.

"I've never read any Kettle," he replied.

"Then you don't read *Epsilon* all the way through," I said, since Kettle had had pieces in more than one recent issue. All laughed, and Terry had the good grace to look suitably embarrassed.

In the light of his subsequent and highly untimely death I wish I could report that Terry Carr made a strong impression on me, but I'm afraid he didn't. I first saw Terry at a party that Chris Priest threw at his London flat, shortly after the 1979 British Worldcon, but he was taken ill and I never got to speak to him. This programme item at L.A.CON II was our second meeting. For whatever reason – mutual hesitation or a certain shyness, perhaps – we exchanged only a few words, and I never bumped into him again during the con. Our final meeting occurred in February 1986 when I travelled to the US again, this time for CORFLU, a fannish convention whose tiny attendance should have made getting acquainted with him a lot easier. Alas, it never happened. Once again we chatted for no more than a minute or two, somehow never getting it together for a more substantial conversation. A few months later he was gone, but he left behind him a body of fanwriting

whose quality has seldom been matched, and the memory of one of those rare people who are respected by almost everyone who knows them. It's too late now, but I wish I'd gotten to know him better when I had the chance.

The fanroom item finally broke up when Marty Cantor brought in Charles Burbee, living legend and editor of LASFS clubzine *Shangri L&Rsquo;Affaires* during what many consider to be its finest period, whose name was mysteriously absent from the history of LASFS that appeared in the programme book. The new generation of LASFans may not know who he is but we did, and we honoured him in our way.

A little later I took time out to view the art show and was as unimpressed as I usually am by these things. It may have been the biggest I'd seen at a con but the works on show displayed the same combination of technical excellence and imaginative sterility to be found over here. The only novelty, if that's what you can call it, was the profusion of paintings of unbearably cute creatures. Cute dragons, cute elves, cute cats, cute unicorns. It was so calculatedly sweet that it set my teeth to aching. No, by far the most beautiful objet d'art in the whole room was the shapely young woman clad in an improbable black rubber ensemble who was among those viewing the pictures. Judging by the stares she was attracting I wasn't alone in my assessment.

Early in the evening, after arranging to visit Disneyland with Sharee Carton and Allyn Cadogan the next day, I made my way to the Masquerade where I met up with Stu and Spike. The Masquerade is one of the two big production numbers at a Worldcon – the other being the Hugo Awards ceremony, of course – and, having come across photographs of earlier Masquerades in *Locus*, I was really eager to see this one. We stayed about two and a half hours, mocking some entries but being genuinely impressed by others such as the dramatic stagings of scenes from *Metropolis* and *Fantasia'*s "Night on Bald Mountain". One of the lesser entries was a transvestite Darth Vader.

"Hah!" said Spike, slapping my back, "I'll bet he's English!"

"Sure to be," I replied, smug in my Welshness.

At some point we were joined by Ted White and Victor Gonzalez, a promising if depressingly Reaganite young fan from Seattle, who added to the snide and cynical asides we'd been making about some costumes. Ted however, was rather louder than the rest of us and succeeded in arousing the ire of a woman sitting in the next row. While she was giving him a severe

verballing the rest of us cracked up, and had to make a hasty exit, stifling chortles all the while.

For me the evening's partying started at 10.30pm, at the Britain In '87 bash. This was hosted by bidding committee members Chris Atkinson and Malcolm Edwards and was where most of the British contingent at L.A.CON II were to be found. More importantly, this was the first time on my trip that I encountered drinkable beer (all imported, of course) and I fell on it with glee. Spike and Stu seemed only marginally less gleeful as they grabbed up bottles of Pope's and Bass respectively. Hearing my accent as they and I argued the merits of the beers on offer, a strange Scots-American fan patriotically informed me that McEwan's Export was the finest beer brewed in Britain.

"I know, because I'm Scotch myself," he proclaimed proudly.

Refraining from pointing out that Scotch is a drink, I asked him what part of Scotland he was from. This was mere mischief on my part, of course, but I never cease to be surprised by the number of people who claim to be Irish or Italian or whatever, yet who were born in America of parents themselves born in America and so must clearly *be* American. Strange.

When the beer ran out we grabbed Rich Coad and, moving on to the Australia in '85 party, we were deeply disappointed to discover that only Lite beer – which turned out to be unutterably foul – was available. What had the Australians come to I wondered, shaking my head sadly. Leaving Spike and Stu to the tender mercies of our Antipodean cousins, Rich Coad and I set off for the SFWA suite. We breezed in, soon to be joined by Jerry Kaufman, and chatted for a while to Joe and Gay Haldeman, who seemed pleasant enough. Once upon a time, when I was a young and wet-behind-the-ears SF reader, to have found myself in the SFWA suite at a World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles, surrounded by famous SF authors, would have been my idea of Heaven. But I was no longer that young reader and no longer capable of feeling a sense of wonder simply by being in the presence of writers whose works I'd read and admired. Sad, perhaps, but time continues to play its little jokes on us.

One of the beers I'd been hearing about since arriving in the US was Coors, a beer seemingly regarded as a premier brew, so when I came across a six-pack of them cooling in the suite's ice-filled bath I naturally tried one. This was a mistake. Coors was without doubt the most undrinkable beer I sampled during my entire trip, and after a single gag-inducing swig I decided to cut out the middle-man ... by pouring the rest straight down the toilet.

Resigned to being teetotal for the rest of my TAFF trip, I wandered out into the corridor ... only to have Justin Ackroyd thrust a bottle of Irish Mist into my hand. I'm not normally a spirit-drinker but this was wonderful stuff and I swigged at the bottle gratefully, putting my arm around Justin and telling him what a truly exemplary human being he was. There was some sort of party going on in the corridor so I joined it, drinking more of Justin's Irish Mist and loosening up so much that I was soon incapable of any movement at all. It was 2.30am the last time I looked at my watch, and after that all else is blank. Somewhere in there I slipped into oblivion, little guessing that tomorrow, Sunday, would be the most exciting and eventful day of the whole convention.

Chapter 5: FEAR AND LOATHING IN DISNEYLAND

Sunday 2nd September 1984, and after breakfasting alone in the hotel buffet and checking out the fanroom, I wandered down to the huckster room and over to the tables provided at one end for the use of various convention bidding groups. Britain was bidding for the 1987 Worldcon, so throughout L.A.CON II the Britain In ’87 table was manned by various of the British fans over for the con. This naturally included me, and so I relieved Peter Wareham, who must have risen very early that morning to have covered the first shift. No sooner had Peter left than I was joined by fellow-Brit Chris Atkinson and Australian fan Justin Ackroyd. Chris, impressed by Justin’s selflessness in helping us, declared:

“I’ve never met an Australian fan I didn’t like.”

“I could introduce you to a few you’d hate.” replied Justin, helpful as ever.

We sold a few memberships but business was slow, so at noon I wandered over to room Pacific 3B and to a panel titled “SF and Comics – The Mutual Influence”. This was chaired by Len Wein and featured Marv Wolfman, Marty Pasko, Gerry Conway, Mark Evanier, and Sharman DiVono, the last pair doing most of the talking. DiVono was very beautiful, and presumably reasonably bright if she was making a living as a writer, but this last was a little hard to believe given some of the nonsense she came out with. I found myself muttering quiet retorts to some of what was being said, but not quietly enough that they didn’t get an amused response from some of those near me, that response in turn drawing irritated looks from the stage. At one point the various writers were talking about what influenced their writing, which were the sorts of things that influence everybody’s writing, but DiVono was having none of this and claimed that she wasn’t “... influenced by anything except what’s inside of me” (her words).

“I’m a writer, and I write with my heart!” she explained.

“A typewriter would be less messy.” I commented, much to the amusement of the guy next to me.

“I wish you were up there instead of some of them,” he said.

When people start confusing low sarcasm with high wit it's time to leave. So I did. I'd had enough of the panel anyway. If all this sounds a little ill-tempered, well it was. I *still* hadn't recovered properly from jet-lag and so was grumpier than I should have been.

The TAFF/DUFF Auction held in the fan lounge at 2pm was a bit of an eye-opener. A few items were sold for TAFF but their number paled into insignificance against the vast amount of material being auctioned off for DUFF. This was due mainly to the indefatigable Joyce Scrivner who seemed to regard DUFF as some sort of pet project and had brought along piles of stuff. However, what little TAFF material there was fetched decent prices. My stick of CHANNELCON '82 rock was bought for some ludicrous amount by Jane Hawkins (possibly my description of it as "this big pink thing" helped the sale) as was my Welsh-English phrasebook, which was knocked down to Amy Thomson. Some months earlier, Graham Charnock had given me six assorted issues of *Wrinkled Shrew* (none of them the issue I was then missing myself, unfortunately) and these too went for gratifyingly large amounts with the most being paid, not surprisingly, for issue #7, which I regard as quite possibly the best single issue of any fanzine produced in the 1970s. Larry Carmody had deputised Stu Shiffman to go as high as $15 to get it for him, and in the end he secured it for $14. Larry later explained that he in turn had been agenting for Alina Chu, a curious arrangement. I wonder if he got an agenting fee?

With all the TAFF material having sold I left the auction early in the company of Rich Coad, Stacy Scott, Sharee Carton, Allyn Cadogan, and Carissa Enzenbacher – the 15 year-old daughter of Allyn's huckster friend, Dale Enzenbacher. It was time for us to head over to the Magic Kingdom.

Although Disneyland was on the next lot to the hotel it was not as short a trip from one to the other as I'd have liked since the Disneyland car park lay between them. Bearing in mind the custom such a place attracts, and the fact that *everyone* in Los Angeles travels by car, you can imagine just how big it was. The heat reflecting off that black asphalt plain was murderous, and as we trekked across those endless acres I thought I was going to die. Nor were matters helped by the fact that I was wearing black shirt and trousers and hefting a heavy tweed jacket. I always wear much the same clothes regardless of the weather (which doesn't really vary vastly in the UK) but I was beginning to think that maybe this wasn't such a sensible policy after all. Disneyland was visible all the while, shimmering through the heat-haze

ahead, and – eventually – we reached it. We had an unpleasant surprise waiting for us, however.

At the gate Sharee was refused admission because her mohawk haircut violated Disneyland's "dress code". We were all outraged by this and decided that if Sharee wasn't good enough for Disneyland then maybe we weren't either. Sharee would have none of this however, and insisted we go ahead and have a good time since she had been half expecting this reaction anyway. As I watched her set off back across the parking lot, I reflected on how odd it was that a style which wouldn't attract a second glance in London (if not for the fact that Sharee was an attractive woman) should be deemed so outrageous in California of all places, and particularly in Disneyland. Walt may have been a visionary, but it seemed that his heirs were the product of small-minded middle America. (Some years after this, Disney bought the Queen Mary and announced that henceforth all of her crew must be clean-shaven since this too was required by the corporate dress-code. I have nothing but admiration for those of the crew, many of whom who had been with her more than twenty years, who resigned rather than knuckle under to this infringement of their rights. I wonder what the moustachioed Walt would have made of it all?)

While the attitude of Disneyland may have left a bad taste in the mouth, the place itself was incredible. The entrance booths opened out onto "Main St., USA", a highly picturesque representation of homey Americana that featured a series of shops carrying a wide variety of Disney merchandise and other goodies. The extreme heat made ice-cream our first buy. Croggled by the huge queues for most every ride (well it *was* Labor Day weekend after all, the busiest of the year), we decided to wait in line first for the monorail, all the while watching the submarines on the adjacent ride that travelled on tracks below the water. Actually, the monorail turned out to be a good first choice since its two-and-a-half mile ride out to the Disneyland hotel took in a fair bit of the park itself. From our elevated vantage I was particularly impressed to note how the various rides interacted with one another, a feature which added to the illusion of the park as an organic whole, part of one ride being an element of the scenery for the next.

For our second ride we chose "Flight to Mars" not, as you might think, because of its obvious SF connection, but because it was close to the monorail exit and didn't have a large queue outside. On entering we were ushered into a room overlooking a full-size replica of NASA's flight control

room at Houston where an automaton called “Mr Smith” led us through the background to our “flight”. This was my first look at one of Disney’s automata, and I was impressed. “Mr Smith” was obviously not a real human being, but he was still a lot more lifelike than most of Margaret Thatcher’s cabinet. The “flight” itself involved us being led into a circular room, supposedly the interior of a spacecraft, and taking our places in the banks of seats that receded, amphitheatre-style, into its upper reaches. With the aid of a voice-over and images flashed on various screens, we were taken on a short “flight” to Mars, one given a certain added verisimilitude by the way our seats vibrated on “take-off” and “landing”.

“This ride is just an air-conditioned, audio-visual bum-massage!” I commented to Allyn after we’d “landed”. While entertaining, “Flight to Mars” was more in the way of an “educational experience” than a proper ride, an accusation that couldn’t be levelled at the next attraction we visited.

Back in Britain, both Alun Harries and Linda Krawecke Pickersgill had recommended I visit Disney’s “Pirates of the Caribbean” and when I saw the sign outside (“See fun-loving Pirates sack and burn a Caribbean Seaport”) I knew that this was the ride for me. And Jophan found that it was so. We climbed into one of the cars and the ride started with a couple of water-chutes before we floated (actually, our car rode underwater rails) into the area where the pirates were sacking the port. The effect was total, a large galleon manned by pirate automata “sailed” over to to the seaport to engage its automata defenders, cannons firing and explosions sending water shooting into the air around us. Overhead, stars appeared to twinkle in a night sky and it would not have been too difficult to imagine that you really *were* in the middle of a ferocious sea-battle. Amazing.

Still a little stunned after the last ride, we wandered along one of the paths bordering the circular “river” around which a full-sized galleon and paddle-steamer rode majestically, even such large craft as these riding on underwater rails. Disneyland is divided into a number of smaller theme-parks called “Tomorrowland”, “Frontierland”, “Adventureland”, and “Fantasyland” with smaller areas called “Bear Country”, “Main Street”, and “New Orleans Square” in between. “Flight to Mars” had been in “Tomorrowland” and “Pirates of the Caribbean” off “New Orleans Square”, but now our wanderings took us into “Bear Country” and specifically to something called the “Indian Trader Shop”. We stopped to stock up on souvenir junk and I made sure to pick up enough postcards showing views of Disneyland to both

send to people in the UK and to augment the photos I was taking. Allyn came up and began looking at the cards on an adjacent rack that featured early photographs taken of various American Indian tribes. She chose one and went over to the counter to pay for it. Watching her had made something click into place in my mind, and I turned to Rich.

"Is Allyn part-Indian?" I asked him, contemplating her striking features.

"No, she's French-Canadian," he assured me.

Seconds later Allyn returned and showed us her purchase: a photo of a Hunkpapa Sioux.

"Look," she said, "a genuine picture of one of my ancestors!"

Chortling, I jotted down this exchange in my notebook. Rich looked disgusted.

"Are you really gonna write about something that makes me look real dumb?" he asked.

"Yep." I replied, smugly.

After a round of cheeseburgers (called "Lumberjacks") at the Hungry Bear Restaurant we started to tire of the relentless backwoods-style of Bear Country and so wandered back towards New Orleans Square. On the way we stopped at "Haunted Mansion" and, after waiting in another huge queue, took a fascinating ride. It wasn't in the least frightening – nor intended to be, I imagine, given the number of infants who visit it – but some of the effects were very impressive, particularly the hologram ghost that materialized between you and the person next to you at one point, or at so it appeared in your reflection in the mirror.

By the time we emerged it was close to 8pm and we had to decide whether to rush back to the hotel to catch the Hugo Awards ceremony or to stay on in Disneyland. Being trufans all we had no real choice of course ... we stayed at Disneyland.

After riding the Mark Twain Riverboat, we realised that the moment of truth had arrived. It was time to ride one of the two rollercoasters, "Space Mountain" or "The Matterhorn", even though these had the biggest queues of any of the rides. We chose The Matterhorn, mainly so that we'd be in a good position to watch the firework display that went off over the "Sleeping Beauty Castle" at 9pm every night, the same display that had greeted me on my way in from the airport three days earlier. This was even more spectacular up close than it had been from Harbor Boulevard, and in the middle of it all "Tinkerbell" flew overhead, about 60-80 feet above us, riding down a wire

stretched between the tip of the Matterhorn and the top of the castle.

The rollercoaster ride, when we eventually made it to the front of the queue, was exhilarating if – ah – violent. I came out with a headache, Rich with a dislodged contact lens, and Allyn with a sore mouth where Carrissa's head had been thrown backwards and butted her. A great ride! Nursing our wounds, we wandered back to Main Street and joined a queue for food.

"This is just like Soviet Russia," grumbled Rich, voicing a criticism seldom if ever made of Disneyland. I asked him to explain.

"You have to queue for *everything*!" he wailed.

It was getting late, so Rich and I decided to return to the hotel for some serious partying. Carrissa was already in line for the Matterhorn again so Stacy and Allyn elected to stay with her. As we left the Magic Kingdom, Rich and I bought Donald Duck hats, baseball-style caps with Donald's bill forming the peak, his eyes peering over it, and a "tuft" on top.

"Hey, these are really cool!" Rich enthused, looking as ridiculous in his hat as I probably looked in mine. I'd enjoyed Disneyland, but I couldn't forget the way Sharee had been refused entry. In its way Disneyland, for all its high-tech gadgetry, is a temple to the values of 1950s America and to that period's vision of the perfect family. Given such a rigid and conservative mindset, I was not surprised when, some months after I returned to the UK, those who make the fantasy work, the staff of Disneyland, went on strike citing such real-world concerns as low pay and lousy conditions. "Mickey Mouse is a Republican!" Roy Disney declared during the 1988 Presidential election. I rather fear he may be right.

Rich and I parted in the hotel lobby and, having been in Disneyland when "the word" was passed along the grapevine, I then spent ages wandering corridors in search of a party. Noticing movement on the fourth floor I investigated and bumped into Larry Carmody, who furnished me with a list of the night's parties. Thus armed, I dropped in briefly at the Australian party before settling in at the Britain In '87 soiree. Collapsing into a chair, I decided to let people come to me (and they did, too).

After a while a sizeable contingent of those present moved off to Ted White's room, and soon after we got there Allyn and Stacy returned from Disneyland. They insisted on telling me how much better a rollercoaster than the "Matterhorn" "Space Mountain" was. Yeah, sure.

This was the end of L.A.CON II. Tomorrow everyone would be going home and some of them, I realised in an uncharacteristic moment of misty-

eyed sentimentality, I was unlikely ever to see again. This trip, and this convention, would almost certainly be one of the high points of my life, one of those memories that looms large for the rest of your days. Standing back, I gazed about the room drinking it all in, taking a mental photograph of an event that was all too fleeting. Already it was breaking up, and I found myself saying my goodbyes to those who were flying out early the next day, including Larry and Alina who wouldn't be returning to New York until after my visit to that city.

I stayed up as long as I could, taking in as much as I could, but the party like the convention was drawing inexorably to its close. At 2.30am, wistful but content, I retired to my room for the final time.

PALO ALTO/SAN FRANCISCO
3rd-6th September 1984

Chapter 6: ON THE ROAD

The battered Ford Econoline van lurched into the powerful Southern California sunlight from the carpark of the Anaheim Hilton & Towers and pulled out onto Harbor Boulevard. Inside, on the two front seats and sprawled across the mattresses and blankets in the back, it carried its precious human cargo of Allan Baum, Donya White, Spike, and – most precious of all – me. It was Monday 3rd September, shortly after one in the afternoon, and we were just starting out on a journey that would take us along the 420 miles of highway that lies between Los Angeles and the fabled city of San Francisco.

On Sunday, I'd mentioned to Spike that I was hoping to pick up a lift to San Francisco, and since she intended visiting the city herself after the con to look up John Bartelt (whose convention membership she'd been using), she proceeded to arrange a ride for both of us as far as Palo Alto with Allan and Donya. And so here we were, Anaheim swiftly slipping into the distance and into the past as we barrelled down Highway 5, the Santa Ana Freeway, heading for the centre of town – if Los Angeles can truly be said to have a centre, that is. Raymond Chandler once said of Los Angeles that it had all the personality of a paper cup, and I recalled Lucy Huntzinger saying of it that "... this place shouldn't be called a city – it's just an endless suburban sprawl ... ". I decided that she was probably right, blissfully unaware as yet of the rivalry between Angelenos and San Franciscans that might inspire such a comment. Even so, one part of L.A. *did* look much like any other and apart from such occasional oddities as the tyre factory built to resemble a castle, the most interesting thing about the drive through town was the road signs. These pointed the way to locations with such wonderfully evocative names as San Bernardino and Santa Monica, Pasadena and Sacramento and, yes, Hollywood. To be cruising past turnoffs to such places seemed no less fantastic than would discovering roads that led to Barsoom, Arrakis, or Middle-Earth, because I'd only really encountered these places previously through TV and they seemed to belong to the realms of fantasy every bit as much as the creations in any book. For a time it was almost like traversing a fictional landscape, as if all of greater L.A. were in some strange fashion an adjunct of Disneyland, one that extended deep into the heart of those dreams that spring from the popular culture it's so much a part of. Lost in such neo-

Ballardian reveries I almost missed seeing the famous Hollywood sign – emblem of a force that has helped shape the dreams of us all – as it came into view high on a hill up to my right, and I cursed myself for having packed my camera away.

At length we hit North U.S. 101, the Ventura Freeway, and as we turned onto it I chuckled at a sign that advertising local cultural delights: FEMALE MUD-WRESTLERS – NITELY 7PM-2AM. Pretty soon the housing around us began to thin out, with the hills becoming more pronounced as we approached the outskirts of L.A. Crossing a bridge above one of those concreted-over rivers that will forever evoke images of THEM for any SF fan, I spotted a turn-off to Sherman Oaks, home of that famous short colossus of science fiction Harlan Ellison, and reflected for a moment on how different his lifestyle must be from those of the aspiring young British SF authors I counted among my friends. The final suburbs we passed through as we cleared the city seemed to be composed entirely of houses built on stilts that clung to the sides of impossibly steep hills and canyons. Over one of these – Topanga Canyon – sky-writing planes spelled out the need for fire vigilance.

"When there's a fire around here a lot of million dollar homes go up in flames," observed Allan, celebrating our escape from the city by putting his foot down on the gas pedal (as our American cousins call the accelerator).

With Los Angeles fading away behind, the land around us resolved itself into a thin coastal strip, one rendered sporadically green by the efforts of the occasional farmer, flanked by parched and rolling hills overlaid by a mottled mantle of hardy desert scrub. And it stayed thus most of the way to San Francisco. Route 101 wound along the coastal strip of course, and as well as drinking in the strange beauty of all this foreign scenery I continued to jot down those names we passed that took my fancy. "Rancho Conejo Blvd" declared one sign, while another pointed to "Solvang – Danish Capital of America". "A Danish village transplanted to Southern California," explained Allan, never taking his eyes off the road before him, "big tourist attraction."

Now that we were on the open road I felt that I recognised it from a hundred Hollywood movies, and it was easy to regard it with the intimate familiarity one would an old friend. Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild", a track that seemed an inseparable part of the landscape around us, was playing in my head, but a few miles further on it would be replaced by Beach Boys numbers....

Just beyond a place called Oxnard – a name familiar to me from Los

Brothers Hernandez' *Love and Rockets* (who says you can't pick up anything but illiteracy from comics?) – U.S. 101 finally reached the sea, and I got to take my first look at the Pacific Ocean.

"Look, the ocean!" said Spike, late.

"Yeah, I know."

"We don't see that in Wisconsin."

"Well you wouldn't – Wisconsin is conspicuously free of ocean."

"Maybe we could stop and take a swim."

"But I don't have any trunks!" I protested, though the idea *was* appealing.

"You could fake it."

"Oh sure. I'd just draw a strap around my waist and claim I was wearing a codpiece ... and if anyone asked I'd tell them I couldn't afford a bigger one."

This particular piece of ocean was in fact the Santa Barbara channel and the road followed the broad sweep of coastline that looked out over the channel for most of its length. Watching the lazily inviting way the mid-afternoon sun glinted off the calm waters I was genuinely sorry we didn't have time to take a dip, but the Pacific was, I decided, pretty triff. Then, of course, there were the oil wells.

The *Dallas*-watchers among you will remember the beam-engine oil derricks that featured in the opening credits of that famous melodrama, and those same people would understand my delight when the first of these beasts hove into view. Penned in by wooden enclosures at the side of the road they appeared singly at first, but as we continued on they quickly began to appear in twos and threes until it seemed we were passing through herds of them, all grazing away contentedly. With the bulbous counterweights at one end of their beams, they reminded me of nothing so much as giant ants and, inevitably, evoked further images from *Them*. One group, as if having gained in confidence and become more ambitious than the rest, was see-sawing away on a chain of wooden piers that jutted out into the channel by maybe as much as a half-mile or so, and on seeing these sucking up their black nectar we knew we could go no further. We had to have drink!

The small roadside store we stopped at had clearly been set up mainly to slake the thirsts of dehydrated travellers, and stocked all manner of drink, both soft and not-quite-so-soft. My companions, predictably, stocked up on Coke and other fizzy fluids designed to keep the dentists of America in

lucrative employment while I checked out the “beer”. Since the store carried no imported ales I settled on Michelob dark as being, potentially, the least offensive of the American brands, and carried a six-pack of deep-frozen bottles back to the van with me. To my great surprise this brew, when thawed-out, differed from most American beers in a very significant way – it had a taste. Not a particularly wonderful taste, I’ll grant you, but by this point any beer that was drinkable was savoured as if it were the finest wine. Donya cautioned me about making it too obvious that I was drinking in the back of the van since the consumption of alcohol in a moving vehicle was, she informed me, an offence. Guzzling down my third bottle I promised to be discreet and succeeded in changing the subject by pointing out the full size oil platforms now visible some miles out to sea, and by telling her how Walt Willis’ shoes had drifted out to sea when he went paddling in the Pacific back in 1952.

“There’s an American Walt Willis, y’know,” Donya told me.

“There’s always someone being hailed as that,” I told her, surreptitiously cracking open another Michelob.

“No, I mean there really *is* an American Walt Willis – Walter K. Willis, brother of Seattle fan Anna Vargo.”

“That’s a shame. We’ve had enough trouble with there being two Bob Shaws, two John Berrys, and one-and-a-half Michael Ashleys. Another ringer we don’t need.”

Though it was cool by local standards the temperature (somewhere around the mid-90s) was still enough to make several such pit-stops necessary, including one occasioned by an alarming amount of steam coming out of the radiator, but we nonetheless made good time, eating up the miles as we passed such places as San Luis Obispo, Los Alamos, and Vandenburg Air Force Base.

“Where they’re building the second shuttle pad,” said Allan, “the one for military use.”

So much for those dreamers who thought that space would never be militarised.

With the lengthening of the late afternoon shadows into the twilight of evening, we passed Gilroy (“Garlic Capital of the World”), and, as darkness descended, pulled into a gas station called “Rotten Robbie’s” for fuel. Spike was so amused by the name of the place that she insisted on taking a photograph of me standing next to the brightly lit sign. My TAFF photo-

album now contains a picture of that sign with a greyish blob just discernible in the blackness around it.

Finally, and with great sighs of relief all round, we reached Palo Alto and a neighbourhood whose obvious affluence was totally at odds with the ramshackle vehicle Allan and Donya had driven us here in. Still, food was the order of the day now and after some prompting from me it was decided that we would buy a meal at Ramona's, Allan and Donya's local pizza parlour. After years of American visitors complaining long and loud about the "Disgusting" things sold as pizza in Britain, I was determined to sample a real American pizza and see for myself if they were all they were cracked up to be. When the pizza arrived it certainly looked good, what with the masses of tomato and ham, the melted cheese in great profusion – but could it live up to its reputation? At their house Donya cut me a slice, revealing in the process that in the U.S. the "deep" in deep-pan pizza refers to the topping rather than the base, as is generally the case in Britain. With great ceremony (I think I mumbled something about "one small bite for man ... a giant mouthful for mankind") I sank my teeth into my first ever genuine, honest-to-god, authentically ethnic American pizza – and it was delicious! I had discovered the perfect food. Compared to this, every pizza I'd eaten previously was like a polystyrene frisbee, thinly spread with a pre-masticated mulch.

After washing the pizza down with a few drinks (more Michelob Dark in my case), we fell to chatting about this and that for a while, interrupted only by Rich Coad phoning from San Francisco and arranging to pick Spike and me up at the bus terminal the next day. It was only a short bus ride into the city from Palo Alto, but it had been a long ride from Los Angeles, and all present decided that it was time for bed. Another day was over but tomorrow we would travel to the beautiful Bay Area proper, and the City of Love. I could hardly wait.

Chapter 7: THE CITY OF LOVE

Tuesday 4th September and as usual on this trip I arose early – 7.20am, the earliest yet. I looked out the window at that glorious California sunshine and once again I marvelled at my good fortune in being here, at the fact that my picking up a copy of *Science Fiction Monthly* in 1974 could lead, ten years later, to what must be the trip of a lifetime. Isn't fandom wonderful? I felt good – hell, I felt GREAT – but I was the only one awake as yet, so I pottered about quietly, reading some of Allan's comics and thinking deep thoughts about The Meaning Of It All.

Spike was the next to wake and, being the athletic type (how many other fans do *you* know who found fandom through weightlifting?), was keen to go jogging before breakfast.

"Why don't you join me, Rob?" she suggested looking fit and tanned, a picture of well-fed Midwestern wholesomeness (I didn't know her as well then as I do now).

I may have been feeling great but I was also someone whose main form of exercise was farting, so I said I didn't think I should.

"But Rob, jogging is the quintessential Californian experience. How can you visit here and *not* jog?"

Damn! She had me there. I protested feebly that the only trousers I had with me were a couple of pairs of jeans, and I could barely move in one of those.

"I remember," she grinned, reminding me that she'd seen me in them at the convention and had commented "cute ass" in that disarmingly casual way American women have. She offered me a spare pair of running shorts she had with her and I bowed gracefully to the inevitable. I added my own T-shirt and brand-new pair of trainers to the shorts and soon we were off.

With the glare of the sun off the pavement dazzling me I began to think that maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all and hoped I wouldn't fall too far behind Spike. To my surprise just the opposite happened. I shot ahead of her and had to slow down a number of times for her to catch up. This left me feeling understandably smug but that smugness was soon wiped away. First, my feet started to hurt. The brand-new, unbroken-in trainers were pinching my toes and raising painful blisters. Second, we got lost. Since our

plan to keep taking left turns should have prevented this we were puzzled. Also a little worried since neither of us could remember the name of the street Allan and Donya's house was on, nor knew their phone number, nor even had any money on us to ring them if we had known it. To add insult to injury the road we got lost on was Hansen Way. Since there was no other choice we stumbled around trying to find our way back, Spike offering to carry me piggy-back to relieve my feet and me being macho and refusing, eventually giving cries of joy as we came upon a familiar Ford Econoline van parked outside one of many identical houses. We rang the bell and the door was opened by Allan Baum, who looked deeply alarmed by the piteous cries of relief with which we greeted him.

After we had showered and breakfasted, Allan drove us to the bus stop where we caught the 7F to San Francisco. Shortly after pulling away we passed the British Bankers Club ("The BBC!" – Spike). As always the roadsigns pointing to such exotically named places as San Mateo and Burlingame exerted a powerful fascination, though they probably seem totally ordinary to those who live in the area. Soon we were back on US 101, the highway that we'd followed from Los Angeles to Palo Alto yesterday, but from here it was right on the edge of the Pacific, following a bay that was apparently *the* bay that gave the Bay Area its name. High up on a hill was a sign that advertised the area we were passing through as SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO – THE INDUSTRIAL CITY. As we followed the curving bay road many of the groups of houses we passed were disturbingly reminiscent of those that can be seen in most any Victorian seaside town in Britain.

The bus journey took maybe an hour, and eventually we pulled into a bus terminal on the corner of Mission and Fremont in San Francisco proper. We put in a phone call to Rich Coad and in no time at all he'd shown up in his VW Beetle and had driven us back to the apartment he shared with Stacy Scott at 251 Ashbury Street (yes, the Ashbury of Haight-Ashbury fame in the '60s). The apartment was quite a decent size, certainly larger than my own flat back in London, and was – ah – interestingly decorated. On one wall the framed drawing of a leather-jacketed, mirror-shade wearing rat loomed over a red plastic Felix the Cat clock while on another there was the poster for a film called *Astro-Zombies* ("See Brutal Mutants Menace Beautiful Girls ... See Crazed Corpse Stealers ... See Berserk Human Transplants!") We pondered the artistic experience offered by *Astro-Zombies* while Rich reached up for the Walkman sat on the mantle next to the propellor-beanie wearing china

bulldog – only it wasn't a Walkman. Chuckling, Rich showed how it converted into a robot, my first experience of the Transformer-type Japanese toys that were to flood the market a year or so later. Another poster read "We don't care because we don't have to – The Phone Company". I asked Rich who he worked for.

"The Phone Company," he replied, "And we don't."

The journey from Palo Alto had hardly been arduous so after drinking a few beers, fairly palatable beers I might add, we went out and walked along Ashbury up to Haight Street, where I converted most of the money I was carrying to travellers checks, and felt a lot better for having done so. We ate at a cafe on Haight called "All You Knead" (groan), chatting inconsequentially about this and that, then returned to the apartment. Rich drove Spike over to John Bartelt's place – she was staying with him while in SF – and on his return he and Stacy took me for a drive around the city.

One thing I couldn't help noticing was the diamond-shaped roadsigns all over the place that read "Ped Xing". Given San Francisco's large Chinese population it made sense for there to be signs in that language, though I thought that making the signs yellow was a little tasteless. I mentioned this to Rich and asked him what "Ped Xing" translated as. Rich stared at me in amazement and then burst out laughing.

"You dickhead!" he said. "It isn't Chinese at all. It's an abbreviation for 'pedestrian crossing'!" Rich had had his revenge for Disneyland.

As with those of most American cities, the streets of San Francisco are laid out on a grid pattern, but these grids can get disrupted when they hit the coast or if the city has many hills. San Francisco has *lots* of hills, due mainly to the fact that rising up from the middle of the city is a low, twin-peaked mountain called – logically enough – Twin Peaks. It was to Twin Peaks that we drove first, the highest point in the city.

"A conceptual artist once constructed a giant bra over the peaks" said Rich, as we approached them, a boggling concept indeed.

The view from the top of Twin Peaks was breathtaking. Out on my left was Golden Gate Bridge, the Pacific flowing under it, while further along Alcatraz could be clearly seen, unlike the Bay Bridge which was partially obscured by the high buildings of the business district. On the far side of the bridge lay Oakland, and the bay itself swept away off to the right and was lost in the haze.

"One of the islands the Bay Bridge stands on, Treasure Island, is man-

made," Rich explained, "while the bay itself is about 25 miles long and the biggest natural harbour in the world. You're lucky to have such a fine view. It's rarely this clear and often shrouded in fog."

I was glad of my luck as I wouldn't have missed that view for the world. It's one of those sights you carry with you forever. I took photographs, but there was no real way they could capture the scale and grandeur of the bay.

Other touristy parts of the trip were the drive down Lombard Street – that crooked and winding street that has featured in innumerable car chases filmed in San Francisco – and Castro Street.

"Gay capital of the world," explained Rich, putting his foot down as we pulled onto the top of Castro. We tore along the street at high speed, only slowing when we reached the end. I rubbed my neck, suspecting whiplash.

After visiting the Sutro bath ruins (don't ask) we parked the car and walked up Columbus Avenue and past Washington Square Park ("As written about by Richard Brautigan" – Coad). We passed a strip joint called The Condor where Rich decided to get me some postcards from the doorman/bouncer by telling him I was Welsh.

"You're Welsh?" he said in feigned astonishment, thrusting a dozen or so postcards into my hand, "then come in and take a free look, no obligation."

Before I knew it I'd been ushered inside where a couple were engaging in simulated sex on a grubby stage. A barman hurried over and tried to hustle me into a seat at the bar, but I side-stepped him, made hurried excuses, and left. It was a close shave. A bit further along the road was the famous City Lights bookshop whose owner, Ferlinghetti, was the first to publish Ginsberg's *Howl*. All this culture was making us thirsty so we ducked into the next bar we came to, a picturesque little place over whose door was the legend "We're itchy to get away from Portland, Oregon" – Lord knows why. Inside, a sign on the wall announced that "MODERN DANCING and IMMODEST DRESS STIR SEX DESIRES leading to Lustful Flirting, Fornication, Adultery, Divorce, Destruction and Judgement". So *that's* what I was doing wrong. "Immodest Dress" here I come! The only sane response to this sort of thing was a few bottles of Dos Equis, and I've always been a firm believer in sanity. I also took this opportunity to update my notes, and am now disturbed to discover that at this point in my notebook there appears the impenetrably cryptic "Naaru – island in Pacific – airline to anywhere – Giant turd". What can it mean?

With early evening already upon us we took in Chinatown, Rich

pointing out the spot where Brigid O'Shaughnessy shot Miles Archer in *The Maltese Falcon*. Had I seen the film I would have been suitably impressed but that experience, alas, still lay a couple of years in the future. Where London's Chinatown consists of no more than a couple of streets behind Leicester Square, San Francisco's is an entire district and is a whole lot more impressive. Here was a richness and – well – *authenticity* that put the twee pretensions of Gerrard Street, with its pagoda-style phone-boxes and disappointingly limited selection of restaurants, to shame.

We ate at a Hunan restaurant at 853 Kearny (it says here), a Chinese restaurant in the heart of Chinatown, before returning at last to Ashbury Street. It had been a day full of new sights, sounds, and experiences, one that needed to be sorted out and meditated upon, but it was not over yet.

We had not been back long when Lucy Huntzinger turned up with Paul Williams and Robert Lichtman in tow (known to then me as "Glen Ellen fandom", but perhaps better known to you as the editor of the PKDick Society Newsletter and 1989 TAFF winner, respectively). In the short time we had been back I'd been playing a tape of Leroy Kettle's Fan Guest of Honour interview from the 1978 Eastercon, a classic of fan humour that had Rich rolling about with laughter, tears running down his cheeks, so I ran it for them. Their laughter was somewhat more restrained, not having had the experience of living in London and hanging out with Leroy and co, as Rich had done in the early-1970s. Facing a physics test in college the next day Rich crashed early, but the rest of us stayed up late talking. This was one of those freewheeling sessions that are so much fun at the time that you don't take notes and so can't reconstruct them afterwards. However, from notes I made later I see that apart from learning that Rich and Stacy's budgies were called Molar and Bicuspid there was the fascinating revelation that Stacy's parents were Beats and she got to meet Ginsberg when she was ten. Then there was her maternal grandfather, who'd been a member of Al Capone's gang. My own claim to fame, a maternal great-uncle who'd once been Mayor of Kidwelly, paled in comparison. So it goes.

I was awoken the next morning at 7.45am by the phone ringing. It was someone called Kent responding to the RSVP on the invitation to tonight's party in my honour.

"Let them know I rang, OK?"

"Uh-huh."

"Are you Rob?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then I'll see you tonight."

"Uh-huh."

Having impressed Kent with my witty ripostes I fumbled the phone back on to its cradle and tried in vain to get back to sleep. It was no use so I got up, once again the only one awake, and caught up on my note-taking and postcard-writing.

Things didn't actually come to life until the early afternoon when local fans Sharee Carton, Allyn Cadogan, Lucy Huntzinger, and DUFF winner Jack Herman turned up and the five of us went for a walk up the Haight. I got Lucy to take a shot of me standing on the corner with the Haight-Ashbury street sign behind me. Back in 1967 this had been the Hippies' Mecca, but the summer of love lay almost 20 years in the past now and most of the Hippies were long gone. I imagine that the majority of them cut their hair, traded in their love-beads for filofaxes, and became advertising executives, realtors, and the like. Still, vestiges of that long-ago summer, that long-lost innocence, still remained and could be detected in the dress of the buskers and derelicts, and in shops on the Haight that bore names such as "The Anxious Asp" and "Mommie Fortuna's".

Haight Street is one of those long, straight, and seemingly endless thoroughfares that are a natural and inevitable consequence of grid-pattern planning, but like most things it has its end, and where it ends is at Golden Gate Park. We spent a few hours here, taking many silly photos of each other, marvelling at the detail on the horses on the closed carousel and marvelling even more at what looked like a three-masted ship floating in the clouds. This was in fact the Sutro Tower, some sort of communications mast, which produces this remarkable effect when its lower portions are wreathed in mist. Weird. With afternoon rapidly giving way to early evening we headed back via the California Academy of Sciences. It was time to party!

How to capture a party? How indeed? Well first a listing of those present, which according to my notebook included Rich and Stacy, Allan and Donya, Spike, Lucy, Allyn, Grant Canfield, Gary Farber, Steve and Elaine Stiles, Bill Breiding, Gary Mattingley, John Bartelt, Jack Herman and doubtless many others besides including, presumably, the mysterious Kent. Dancing started when Spike discovered an album in Coad's collection consisting of nothing but cover versions of "Louie, Louie" and I, displaying my usual good taste, put the Kingsmen's version on and took to the floor (I'm

used to being the one who gets the dancing going). In one of those strange silences that happen occasionally when everyone finishes talking simultaneously I heard Spike say "... cucumbers, wrapped in aluminum foil." I never did get to ask what she'd been discussing.

At one point Allyn Cadogan decided to reveal her dark secret to me:

"Before I changed it my name used to be Laverne, but don't tell anyone, OK?"

I promised that I wouldn't. Rich, who was standing in the next TAFF race, complained to me about the way his rivals in that race, Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, were conducting their campaign.

"P and T are using dirty tactics – they're publishing wonderful fanzines."

We then got talking about this and that – a very popular topic, I usually find – and I decided to ask him about the rivalry I had noticed between San Franciscans and Los Angelenos.

"We hate 'em," he explained. "Their uncool mellowspeak and laid back image gets Californians a bad name. I mean, San Franciscans are *sharp*!"

He then went on to tell the doubtless apocryphal tale of a fellow citizen who had tried to buy a compass while visiting the City of the Angels. The owner of the first shop the man asked at sneered at him and said:

"Why would I sell something which only points north?"

So now, explained Rich, most San Franciscans carried a compass with them when they visited L.A., so they'd always know where home and sanity lay.

Jerry Kaufman rang, to assure his place in this report, and the party wound down in a haze of dancing, drinking, talking, and good times had. With all the people staying over I had to share a bed with Gary Farber but I was too tired to care. With a cheerily tasteless comment to Gary, I climbed under the covers and was soon dead to the world. I'd enjoyed San Francisco, one of the most beautiful cities I've ever been in, but tomorrow I was setting off for the Big Apple itself – New York.

NEW YORK
6th-10th September 1984

Chapter 8: A FIRST TASTE OF THE BIG APPLE

It's a matter of great regret to me that I didn't think to ask for a window seat on the DC-10 taking me to New York. Because of this I missed taking a last, lingering look at San Francisco, that beautiful city on the bay. No, my final glimpse of SF came as Rich Coad drove me to Oakland Airport by way of the Bay Bridge, a magnificent structure destined to suffer a partial collapse during the big earthquake five years later. Once over the bridge I'd made a few desultory notes, jotting down names from various road-signs (I added "Yerba Buena", "San Jose" and "Alameda" to my collection) and also been amused to discover that on the airport approach road, Hegenberger Road, was a fast-food joint selling something called, inevitably, "Hegen Burgers". Rich and I had said goodbye to each other at the airport in manly fashion and now here I was, soaring into those clear blue Californian skies bound for the self-proclaimed "greatest city in the world!"

The distance from San Francisco to New York isn't too short of that from New York to London, so I must have been in the air for a long time. Quite how long I'm unsure, thanks to the time zones we crossed and to the fact that a great fatigue was settling over me, a spaced out feeling that I'm now sure was a combination of delayed culture shock and a jet-lag still lingering thanks to the late nights I'd enjoyed at L.A.CON II. This was only my third ever time in a plane but I was already a little jaded with air-travel. Even had I had a window seat I suspect I would have ignored the view this time. Lost in reverie, I spent most of the flight staring into space.

It was early evening when we landed at New Jersey's Newark Airport, then the entry point for most Britons visiting America, and after collecting my luggage I went in search of my native guide. Arrangements had been made for Tom Weber to meet me, but as we'd never met before I had to rely on descriptions I'd been given. In the event this wasn't a problem since not only is Tom considerably shorter than most people but he was wearing a "Forbidden Planet" T-shirt (from the store, not the film). We shook hands and then Tom led me outside to the bus stop, where we caught a bus to New York. It was while on the bus that I discovered I'd left my camera on the

plane. I'd only shot a third of a roll, but it contained all the photos I'd taken at the party Rich and Stacy had thrown for me in San Francisco. A call to the airport some time later proved futile, as I thought it would. It's the loss of the pictures I regret more than that of the camera, which was only a cheap 110 anyway. I didn't know it yet, but this was to be only the beginning of my problems with cameras in New York.

The road between Newark and New York skirted some fairly uninteresting swampland and even more uninteresting industrial buildings. I couldn't help but think that, given the huge numbers of visitors whose first view of the state this is, New Jersey's administrators could do a lot to help their state's unfortunate image by sprucing up the view along that road. My heartbeat quickened when we were afforded a brief glimpse of Manhattan as the twin towers of the World Trade Center came into view over the tall grass. (New York! I would soon be in New York!) Tom quizzed me about L.A.CON II as we travelled over the New Jersey turnpike and, shortly after the turn-off to the George Washington Bridge, I caught my first sight of the Empire State Building and other skyscrapers over the tops of some trees. There was a sign on the right pointing to Hoboken, and then we were barrelling through the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River. Almost before I knew it, we'd emerged in Manhattan, traversed various nondescript streets, and arrived at our destination, the Port Authority terminal on 42nd and 8th.

The Port Authority was a bleak, unpleasant and threatening place peopled by derelicts and a number of suspicious-looking characters. I was glad that we didn't hang around there but proceeded directly to the nearest subway station.

This, too, was a vaguely menacing place, since the New York Subway Authority takes a minimalist approach to decoration. The station was all bare steelwork and exposed I-beams, neo-primitive brutalism made even more unbearable by the teeth-rattling cacophony produced every time a train thundered through. And those trains!

Like most people, I'd seen news items and the like about New York graffiti, usually with various critics and poseurs waxing lyrical about how wonderfully creative it all was and how New York was the only city in the world that gets a fresh coat of art every night. This is bullshit. Given the brutal impersonality of the subway I can understand the urge humanise it with something like graffiti, but the graffiti on the subway only added to the

dehumanising effect. It was not so much an artistic outlet as a howl of rage, a chillingly nihilistic expression of despair and the death of hope. Or so it seemed to me on that long ago day. The train we boarded was both unbelievable and typical. Not only was it spray-painted on the outside but also on the inside. The walls, the ceiling, the floor and the windows were all concealed beneath multi-coloured swirls of paint – as were the hard plastic seats and the subway maps! Not only could you not see out of many of the windows, but you couldn't tell where you were heading from the maps either. Going down into the subway was like descending into Hell, and I was glad when we arrived at our destination.

Thus far my first impressions of New York had not been very positive, so I was pleased by the familiarity of the surroundings we encountered on emerging from the subway in Greenwich Village. Oh, the buildings were different and the billboards trumpeted brand names I'd never heard of, but for all that I was obviously in an alien environment the *ambience* of the area was remarkably like that of the theatre district around London's Covent Garden. The hustle and bustle, the busy little cafes and the arty-types on the street were all very reassuring. It was with my spirits thus lifted that we arrived at the Chinese restaurant where some of the city's most active fanzine fans awaited me.

Moshe Feder and Lise Eisenberg I'd met at L.A.CON II, and Stu Shiffman I'd known for a couple of years, but this was my first meeting with the others. They were John Carl (about whom my notes say nothing, and of whom I'm afraid I now recall very little), and Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden, whose writing and fanzines I'd admired since first encountering them two or three years earlier. Patrick was short and dapper, bespectacled and moustached, and moved in a way that reminded me curiously of Groucho Marx. Teresa was also short and bespectacled, with broad, attractive features and had her hair styled in short, tight curls that (I hope she won't mind me saying) were the least attractive of the many ways I've seen her hair styled since. Still, these were merely superficial details and in what counted, in their personalities and conversation, they were as sharp and delightful as their fanwriting had promised they would be. As usual my notes fail totally to give any clue as to what it was we discussed, but then I hardly need notes for that. Apart from the sort of stuff any group of fans with a TAFF winner in their midst would talk about, the main topic was what it was during most of my trip: the Bergeron Affair. At this point most everyone still thought he could

be reasoned with and the conversation centred on speculation as to just why he appeared to have gone crazy, and just what could be done to bring him to his senses. No-one then realised that over the next few months the affair would develop into the most damaging feud to hit fandom in twenty years, or that many of us at that table would find ourselves deeply embroiled in it. Much of fanzine fandom would be plunged into war, with effects that persist to this day.

Chinese food is to US fans what Indian food is to British fans, and also better than the Chinese food generally available in the UK. (This was largely due to a difference in cuisine, I later learned, Cantonese being the dominant style over here and Sichuan in America.) After eating we returned to the subway station by way of a slight detour that took us past the building that once housed Towner Hall, the famous early-60s home of *Void* boys Ted White, Terry Carr, Pete Graham, and Greg Benford. Located on the corner of West 10th Street and 7th Avenue at number 163A, the address was now – appropriately enough – a Chinese restaurant. It was called the "China Taste Restaurant" and Patrick got me a copy of their menu as a souvenir.

"We bring lots of visitors here," said Patrick, as we moved off, "and I often wonder what the current owner makes of these groups of people that turn up periodically to stare at his restaurant. OK everyone," he announced, pointing to the left, "we bear right here."

At this point Teresa started laughing and fell down on the sidewalk. This was my first direct experience of Teresa's unique neurological problem, the result of a condition associated with her narcolepsy that makes it impossible for her to stay upright when something makes her laugh. We've all heard the expression about people falling down laughing, but I never imagined I'd ever witness this phenomenon myself. Though it shames me to admit it, I realised there and then that before my visit to New York was over I had to say something myself that was funny enough to make Teresa fall over. It's hell being competitive.

Somehow night had crept over the city and I began to feel just how tired I was. I was grateful, therefore, when we decided to take the subway to Washington Heights, the district at the far northern end of Manhattan island where Stu and the Nielsen Haydens lived. We got off at the relevant station, 190 Street, and Stu pointed out the "Taki 183" graffito on a column, explaining that these first started appearing in 1969-70 and sparked off the graffiti explosion that had buried the subway. Historic graffiti! Whatever

next?

I was staying at with Stu at his famed 19 Broadway Terrace apartment while in New York, and I was quite curious to see this fabled fannish address. As we entered, Stu explained that he had earlier set off a “bug-bomb” which, he assured me, should have cleared the apartment of cockroaches. I almost wish he hadn’t since, having never seen a cockroach before (and having been assured by other New York fans that Stu’s was *the* place to observe them), I’d rather been looking forward to finally coming face to face with one of the hideous brutes. Oh well, that was one famous New York sight to save for a future visit.

Stu’s place was as cluttered with mounds of old magazines and dangerously unstable piles of books as my own flat, and I felt instantly at home. I admired the fannish memorabilia about the place, chuckling at the image of Roscoe on the wall with the light-switch protruding from what Dave Langford once described as a “theologically debatable part of his anatomy”.

The apartment was small – four rooms – but serviceable and, after a brief chat with Stu, I settled down on the sofa that was serving as my bed. I was soon asleep. Tomorrow I’d be refreshed, and able to get out and explore this strangely compelling city called New York.

Chapter 9: THREE DAYS IN MANHATTAN

My most vivid dreams come to me when I'm particularly tired, hot, and sleeping in a strange bed, so it was no surprise I started having them in New York. I dreamed Richard Bergeron was at a convention and everyone there was ignoring him, me included. I woke up then, staring at the ceiling of Stu Shiffman's Washington Heights apartment. Jesus! If I was dreaming about him now then this Bergeron business was really starting to get out of hand. Ah, if I'd only known!

Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Tom Weber called for me at 10am, and the three of us set off into that bright September morning to explore Manhattan. Over and above the sightseeing, I wanted to buy a cheap replacement for the camera I'd left on the plane (which I did at the first shop we came to) and to come up with something funny enough to make Teresa fall over. As a foreigner, I was worried that I might have a problem achieving this. Humour, after all, is very culture-dependent and I was in a country where men managed to keep a straight face while answering to a name like Randy and, for all I knew, Horny.

We started at Columbus Circle ("Guess who's statue is on top of the column?" – Patrick) and from there walked up the Avenue of the Americas. Traversing Park Avenue, we went through the Pan Am building and down the escalators to Grand Central Station, with its impressive main hall. The ceiling features the constellations of the zodiac – painted in mirror-image by mistake – and skylights that were blacked out during World War II and have been that way ever since. Seems that it's not only in Britain that a "temporary measure" can become pretty permanent. We moved out onto 42nd Street and what, according to my notes, was "the good end", whatever that means, and then across Madison Avenue to meet up with Stu Shiffman.

"I'm very comfortable in women's underwear," explained Stu, over lunch.

The four of were eating at a Japanese restaurant called Larmen Dasanko (which was part of a fast-food chain, apparently) where, having resisted all attempts to get me to try sushi – raw fish is a disgusting concept – I'd settled

instead for a salad, noodles, and what my notes refer to as “strange dumplings”. Stu had joined us on his lunch break, his striking statement being a comment on which part of New York’s extensive garment industry he worked in, of course.

After the meal, Stu took us to see a rundown hotel that had been the first *Life* building, and then pointed out the “temple to Roscoe” opposite. This was a fur trade building with a lobby containing ornate Assyrian decoration and, honest to Roscoe, a gold lift door inlaid with the figures of beavers. Amazing. (And having encountered Grand Central Station and a fur trade building on a single day in New York, it was all I could do to stop myself naming this chapter MANHATTAN, TRAINS, FUR.)

With Stu’s lunch hour over, Patrick, Tom and I re-entered the subway system at Penn Street and travelled to South Ferry, on the southernmost part of Manhattan Island, to catch the Staten Island Ferry. At twenty five cents a time a trip on the ferry was, according to Patrick, “the best tourist bargain in New York”. And so it proved to be. It was a gloriously sunny day, but very windy, so while we stood on the deck for a fair part of both the journey out to Staten Island and the journey back, we also spent much of the time inside, sitting on the long rows of wooden benches that seat thousands of commuters every day. At one point I glanced up and saw a pigeon casually perched on the back of a bench. Patrick, as deeply erudite as ever, knew why.

“It’s following its ancient migratory route between Manhattan and Staten Island,” he explained.

I was disappointed with the Statue of Liberty, which was obscured by scaffolding (in revenge, no doubt, for the unconscionably long time Big Ben had been similarly sheathed), but the view of Manhattan was priceless. This was the view of the island’s skyscrapers that we’re all familiar with, the one of Manhattan sitting low on the water that’s been seen in a thousand films and TV shows. Magnificent.

“New York is big on landfill,” explained Patrick, gesturing expansively at Manhattan Island, “and the FDR Expressway is built on bombing rubble from London and Bristol that was shipped over as ballast in returning merchant ships during World War Two.”

There was something deeply symbolic in this, but for the life of me I couldn’t figure out what it was.

Late in the afternoon, we arrived at the New York branch of Forbidden Planet, which had more floor space than its London counterpart (then still

located on Denmark Street) but not, so far as I could tell, a larger variety of stock. I felt a moment of nostalgia for L.A.CON II when I looked up and saw the now-familiar figure of an inflatable Terl the Psychlo hanging from the ceiling.

Moshe Feder, Lise Eisenberg, and Teresa Nielsen Hayden were joining us at Forbidden Planet, which they duly did, for a foray into the East Village, a part of Manhattan in many ways reminiscent of London's Camden Town. The plan was for more touristing, so with Moshe getting into the role of tour guide with great enthusiasm and demonstrating his encyclopedic knowledge of New York, we set off.

I was happily snapping away with my instamatic, capturing such delights as a moving van whose lettering revealed it as being operated by "Van Gogh Movers" and the "Think Big" shop whose stock consisted entirely of gigantic versions of everyday objects ("Holy elephantiasis, Batman!") when I somehow lost my grip and it fell to the sidewalk, popping open and ejecting the film. This was not my day it seemed, particularly as Teresa fell to the ground soon afterwards and I had nothing to do with it. We'd just turned onto Canal Street ("Formerly a canal!" – M. Feder) when it happened. Teresa took one look at a shop called "Three Roses" – a shop with a neon sign outside that featured *two* roses – and down she went. Poot.

Canal Street soon merged with Chinatown and it was near there, in the depressingly scuzzy Columbus Park, that we sat down to decide on what we were going to do for dinner. While Moshe and Lise got into their traditional heated argument with the Nielsen Haydens over where exactly we were going to eat, an inevitable ritual when eating out with New York fandom, I glanced around at the various crazies wandering around the park and either muttering to themselves or talking loudly to no-one in particular in a remarkable reenactment of a Worldcon Business Meeting. Parked just outside the park were a pair of blue and white buses which, according to the writing on their sides, belonged to the "Department of Correction". I was deeply impressed by this evidence of American open-mindedness. In Britain, the taste for "correction" among Conservative politicians usually leads to them quitting in shame amid ribald comments from press and public. How much more enlightened they must be about such matters in the US, I thought; instead of persecuting such hard working public servants they'd set up a whole department to minister to their needs.

Having finished fighting naked in the mud, arm-wrestling, or in some

other way solved their dispute while I was contemplating correction in America, the New York fans had finally decided that we should eat at a pizzeria near Andy Porter's apartment. Then, not only would I get to sample real New York pizza for the first time but, since Andy lived in Brooklyn, I'd also get to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. On foot. Which suited me just fine. Of course I had sore feet by the time we got to the other side (it's a *big* bridge), but I wouldn't have missed that view of Manhattan after dark for anything.

"For a flat stomach eat flatfish" advised the sign in a shop near Andy's apartment, a dubious piece of advice I had no intention of following. Andy was tall, stout, bespectacled and bearded and had no sooner ushered us into his apartment than he was showing us a detailed breakdown of the voting in the fan Hugos. Since Patrick & Teresa's *Izzard* had been among those fanzines nominated they examined this with no little interest. *Izzard* had placed behind the filking fanzine *The Philk Fee-Nom-Ee-Non*, and the figures revealed some surprising information.

"There were twenty people who voted for us in first place and *Philk Fee-Nom-Ee-Non* in second," said Patrick, clearly appalled that such perverts were allowed out without supervision. "Who would do that?"

Who indeed? Patrick was still marvelling at this when we got back to their place a few hours later, and fretted about it as we all sat around talking and winding down. I had a feeling Patrick would lie awake trying to square this particular circle but me, I intended sleeping as soundly as I could.

Well, it wasn't *that* sound a sleep but I was refreshed enough the next morning to get into a long and involved discussion with Stu about the Jewish influence in comics (which, as those of you at all familiar with American comics will know, has been huge). We breakfasted at a nearby diner with Bill Wagner, a neighbour of Stu's and yet another member of the fannish enclave that then existed in northern Manhattan. Bill was large and droll and, though not active in fanzines, was probably the funniest person I met during my whole TAFF trip.

Like Friday, Saturday was given over to sightseeing, but the pace was much more leisurely and included Washington Heights itself. The area has now been taken over by drug dealers, but in 1984, though grubby and rundown, it still had a certain charm. It also had a pretty good little park, reached by way of a lift at the 190th Street station, that looked out over the Bronx on one side, and the Jersey Palisades and Hudson River on the other. We spent a couple of hours here, a welcome change of pace, before joining

up with the others and getting into some serious touristing downtown in the afternoon and early evening. But, really, as enjoyable as all this was, the best bit was back at Stu's apartment that evening when I finally achieved my burning ambition. All through the afternoon, Teresa had been falling over as Bill and Patrick made various wry remarks, but none of my own seemed to make it. During a conversation at Stu's she asked me what had happened in North America in 1812. I knew the answer.

"The US invaded Canada," I replied.

Laughing, Teresa collapsed in a heap on the carpet. At last I had succeeded. The only thing is, I still don't know what was so funny.

The following morning, Stu, Bill, and I set off for my final day's sightseeing in New York soon after 11am, and I manfully resisted the urge to sing "Feelin' Groovy" as we drove under the 59th St Bridge. We stopped off in Chinatown for a dim sum breakfast at the Nom Wah Bakery before continuing, by way of a stop off at the South St Seaport – another area oddly reminiscent of London's Covent Garden – on our journey to Manhattan's southernmost tip. I shouted for Bill to stop the car when we got near the base of the World Trade Center, leaping out, whipping my glasses off, and craning my neck to get a good photo of the twin towers. We drove for another block after this before I realised that I'd left my glasses on the roof. Amazingly, when Bill slowly brought the car to a halt they were still there. This was an enormous relief. As wonderful as I was finding America, I doubt I'd have appreciated spending the rest of my trip seeing it as if it was underwater.

"You needn't have worried," said Stu, airily, "my cousin the optometrist would've only charged you a couple of fortunes for a new pair."

Having allowed ourselves to be seduced by the charms of Barnes & Noble ("World's Largest Bookstore") we were late meeting Patrick at the Empire State Building, not that he seemed to mind. Despite it no longer being the tallest building in New York there was never any doubt in my mind that it was the Empire State Building I wanted to gaze across New York from and not some newer pretender such as the World Trade Center. There's something *mythic* about the Empire State Building, something somehow a whole lot more *real*. The view from the observation deck was terrific, a 360 degree panorama that took in the five boroughs of New York and, closer to home, the Pan Am Building, Central Park, Liberty Island, Macy's, the art deco splendour of the Chrysler Building, and a billboard that read: "BP – America's Newest Gas". Hey, hang on a minute....

On the way back to Stu's we drove along the road that ran alongside Central Park, leading Stu to wax lyrical about the park.

"It's a wonderful place," he enthused, "really neat. Inside, you can't hear the traffic."

"Only the screams of the mugged," agreed Bill.

"That's an exaggeration!" Stu protested.

"True," said Bill, "but I swear the first time a guy came up to me there and said 'loose joints?' I thought he was talking about his medical condition."

That evening, my final one in New York, I went out for dinner at the Dyckman House Restaurant with Stu, Bill, the Nielsen Haydens, Stu's fannish neighbours, Sue-Rae Rosenfeld and Frank Balazs, and a guy whose name I didn't catch. It was probably Horny. We ate, we drank, we talked, and I'm sure we all had a good time, but on this my notes are silent. New York had been fascinating and overwhelming. I'd seen more of it than of anywhere else in America I'd so far been, but I'd barely tasted what it had to offer. At once ugly and beautiful, grubby and exhilarating, New York was somewhere I promised myself I'd visit again one day. Until then there was still tomorrow to look forward to, and my journey to the nation's capital – Washington DC.

WASHINGTON DC
10th-19th September 1984

Chapter 10: THROBBIN' 'HOOD

Monday 10th September 1984, and having dreamed I'd had to interrupt my TAFF trip with a quick visit back to Britain I woke in a panic, wondering how I was going to explain my trip expenses including *two* round trip flights to the US. It took a while before the adrenal rush subsided and I was able to shake my head and chuckle at this. I was particularly happy, anyway, because today was the day I finally got to see my sweetie again. The anticipation was delicious.

Stu Shiffman had already left for work by the time I awoke, so I finished packing, closed his apartment behind me, and took the A-train down to 34th Street and Penn Station. My camera had seized up yesterday so I planned to drop off my baggage and find the shop where I'd bought it a few days earlier. However, while Penn Station turned out to have row after row and rank upon rank of lockers in its main hall, every last one of them seemed to be in use. I did try walking the streets but, what with the lunchtime crowds and the amount of luggage I was carrying, this proved futile. So it was that I boarded my Amtrak train – one of those great silver streaks so familiar from TV and movies – and, at 1.30pm, we pulled out of New York and headed for Washington DC.

The train passed through Newark and into the wilds of New Jersey proper, stopping at Trenton for some time before continuing south. Beyond the window vistas of suburban and rural America unfolded before my eyes, surprising me only by being so *un*surprising. There was an occasional house whose architecture was uniquely American, particularly those with wooden slat facades, but most everything else – particularly the industrial buildings – seemed pretty much indistinguishable from what you'd see on a train journey between London and Newcastle. This was not true of the railroad carriage itself, however. On InterCity trains in Britain, pairs of seats face each other across a table; in America, train seats are not dissimilar to airline seats, but with more leg room and a leg flap. Like airline seats, they had reclining backs and individual tables that folded down from the back of the seat in front.

Our only stop in Pennsylvania was the 30th Street Station, then it was on to Wilmington (the train passes through the tip of Delaware – blink and you'd miss it). Beyond the town of Perryville we crossed the Susquehanna River,

just above the point where it flowed into Chesapeake Bay, the bridge the train crossed running parallel to twin lines of pylons, jutting from the water like rows of tombstones. Once, they had supported a bridge of their own but all they now supported was seagull nests. Below us, flotillas of yachts were sailing out into the river from brightly coloured marinas.

As we pulled through the outskirts of Baltimore, I noticed for the first time that the roofs of American houses have shallower slopes than in Britain, where they don't just slope front-to-back only, that is. I wonder why? The final stop before mine was BWI (Baltimore-Washington International) Airport.

Having racked up ten hours of sleep, my first reasonable night's sleep since arriving in the US, I was feeling alert again, much more so than I had at any time during my stay in New York, when it seemed as if the late nights and the travelling all finally caught up with me and I was less than scintillating. For much of the time I felt as if my brain was wrapped in cotton wool, and I apologise to New York fandom for not being my usual sparkling self. A measure of how much more alert I now was is that the notes I took were complete enough that, apart from a little editing, everything preceding this sentence in this chapter is mostly as I wrote it down in my notebook on that train journey back in 1984.

It was early evening when I finally alighted at New Carrollton, staggering off the train with my baggage and taking the escalator down from the platform. Waiting for me at the bottom was the familiar figure of Avedon Carol, my sweetie. I dropped my bags and we hugged and kissed. Avedon had stayed with me in London for two months in the spring and I was delighted to see her again. This was early in our romance and it had been eight weeks since we'd last seen each other. Stowing my stuff in the trunk of her Datsun 210, we took off for her parents' house, where I'd be staying the remainder of my trip.

We took the Beltway, a highway that circles Washington DC much as the M25 does London, and were barrelling along when Avedon suddenly started zig-zagging all over the road. Calmly, I enquired why she was driving in this fashion.

"What the *fuck* are you doing!" I bellowed.

"Making it difficult for snipers."

"*What*?!"

"A few months ago," she explained, rather nonchalantly, "someone was

taking pot shots at drivers along this very stretch."

(Avedon later claimed she was just having fun with me by playing on the belief all foreigners have that America is a violent and lawless place. A likely story!)

A few miles further on, as the road swooped down under a bridge adorned with painted-out graffiti, a hideously tacky structure sprang into view among the trees beyond, appearing to be underlined by the bridge. It was white with five, gold-flecked, conical spires, and what appeared to be an enormous, Christmas tree fairy atop the tallest spire.

"Actually, it's the angel Maroni," said Avedon, "and that's the world's largest Mormon temple. The graffiti on the bridge has been painted out by them, restored, and painted out again. Guess what it said?"

I had no idea.

"It said: SURRENDER DOROTHY!" she laughed, "Isn't that *great*?"

It certainly was. What a shame the Mormons hadn't seen the joke.

Avedon's parents, Gary and Queenie Avedikian, lived in Kensington, Maryland, in the house on Woodfield Road where she'd been raised, and this turned out to be a beautiful, leafy district of clean streets and manicured lawns that was American suburbia as I'd always pictured it. The house was detached, as all the houses in the area were, and appeared to be a bungalow, but it actually had a second floor, a full-scale basement. However, it wasn't the house which caught my attention when we got out of the car; it was the cicadas. The trees must have been packed with these cricket-like insects, and the sheer noise they made was incredible. The very air itself seemed to be throbbing, and the cicadas kept this up day and night. It was like being in a film of a Tennessee Williams play. Only later, when Avedon revealed that the cicadas show up at seven-year intervals, did I realise how lucky I'd been to catch them.

We were greeted by Avedon's mother, who I'd met in London when she'd passed through town a few weeks earlier, dropped off my bags, and then drove over to her brother's house to pick up her father. Avedon's brother, Rick, is a carpenter, and their father was helping him build a new workshop. This was the first time I'd ever met either. Gary came over first and shook my hand. Tall and thin with shaggy white hair and beard, an ear-to-ear smile, and piercing eyes, Gary was then 70 years old and is without doubt one of the most striking looking people I've ever met. Where his dad's hair and beard were snowy white, Rick's were jet black giving him a strongly

middle-eastern appearance. He was also the possessor of the deepest voice I've ever encountered. When he spoke, I could feel my sternum vibrate. We shook hands, agreed to get better acquainted over the next few days, and then Avedon and I whisked Gary back to Woodfield Road for the meal Queenie had cooked for us all.

We'd arranged to drive over to Ted White's place that evening, but discovered the lights on Avedon's Datsun weren't working, so Ted drove over to Kensington instead. He arrived at the same time as Gary and Queenie got back from an early evening social engagement, so I hopped in his car and we headed for Falls Church with Avedon following in her parents' car so that she could drive us back later.

Ted's house at 1014 N. Tuckahoe Street, Falls Church, Virginia, is one of the most famous addresses in fandom and many fine fanzines had been produced there over the years, such as *Pong* and, most recently, Ted's small personalzine, *Egoscan* ('The Fanzine That Talks About Fans'). Waiting for us at 1014 were rich brown and Linda Blanchard, then in the throes of a short-lived romance; Matthew Moore, a non-fan friend and business associate of Ted; and the man I was beginning to think of as my shadow, Jack Herman. This would be absolutely, positively the last time I would encounter him on my TAFF trip. Linda and rich left after about ten minutes but were replaced a little later by Ted's recent neighbours, Dan and Lynn Steffan. I'd been particularly looking forward to meeting Dan, Ted's co-editor on *Pong* and one of my favourite fanartists, and he did not disappoint me. Large, tall, bespectacled and sparsely bearded, Dan proved to be as funny and entertaining as I'd been told he was. (Though I thought the mauve shirt with the monogrammed pocket was a bit much, Dan.) As usual, conversation centred on Richard Bergeron and the feud that was building. Few of us could have guessed that it would develop into the biggest and most damaging to fandom in twenty years. The particular topic on this occasion was a fanzine called *Tedscan* ('The Fanzine That Talks About Ted White') from Eric Mayer, a fan based in Rochester, New York State. Eric had his own beef with Ted but, on the principle that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" he would soon be co-opted by Bergeron, who was happy for any ally he could find. We shook our heads and chuckled at *Tedscan*, still not fully appreciating the scale of the storm that was brewing.

Avedon and I said our farewells after watching the David Letterman Show. Thus ended my first day in Washington.

Chapter 11: I SEE DC

We're near the nation's capital, but we're not stuck up-at-all;
So take a stand and shake the hand of every crab in Maryland.
We touch four states, and several bays, the highways mostly run two ways;
We hope you come and say hello and maybe stop and spend some dough.

I didn't care whether he spent any dough or not, but I certainly hoped M. Anders "Andy" Beekan was going to drop by Kensington, Maryland, and say hello sometime soon. Apart from a short trip to "Barbarian Books" in nearby Wheaton to pick up some comics, we'd been waiting all day for Andy to come over and fix the lights on Avedon's car so that she could use it to get to her evening class.

Andy eventually turned up at 5.30 pm and had the lights fixed in no time. I was impressed. So was Avedon, who leapt right into the car when he was done and took off for her class, leaving Andy and me to our own devices. Andy was about my height, though stockier, had thinning blond hair and spoke with a slow, soft drawl. He'd been a friend of Avedon's since the days of her misspent pre-fannish youth. We decided to get acquainted over a few games of pinball.

In the basement of the Avedikian house is a full-size, arcade-standard pinball machine on which was then taped a note proclaiming a record score of 1,251,250 by "The Fabulous Avedon Carol". I sniffed dismissively, knowing this was exactly the same score that had been there four years earlier when Dave Langford visited, as recorded in *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid*. Clearly, Avedon hadn't improved in the meantime. I'd've been less dismissive if I'd had any idea of how hard it is to get scores that high.

Andy wiped me out. In the very first game he scored 707,000 – with 354,000 of that from *one* ball (as an indication of how impressive this is, I should tell you that it would be another *ten* years before I equalled this feat on that machine). Only once did he score less than 400,000, and only then did I beat him. Andy insisted this was all a fluke but I know when I'm being hustled.

Avedon finally returned at 9.15 pm, about half an hour after Andy left,

and we took off for pizza at a place called Ledo's which, quite simply, serves the best pizza I've ever tasted. Every trip I've made to DC since then has included at least one visit to Ledo's. Stocking up on enough pizza to provide breakfast as well, we then set off for the house of Bob Weiler and Applesusan (aka Susan Applegate), a lapsed-fannish friend of Avedon. Bob is a lecturer and they had a visiting professor from Europe staying with them. The prof, a guy of uncertain age and nationality (uncertain because my notes record neither), was delighted to meet someone else from Europe (or "Yurp", as Americans call it) and decided to tell an appropriate joke.

"What's the difference between heaven and hell?"

None of us knew the correct answer.

"Heaven is where they have they have Italian cooks, German bureaucrats, and British policemen. Hell is where they have British cooks, Italian bureaucrats, and German policemen."

The faith foreigners have in our police force is really quite touching. I wish I could share it.

Something surprising that came up during conversation is that the state song, "Maryland, My Maryland", is sung to the tune of "The Red Flag". Dating back to the Civil War, it was written originally to encourage Maryland to secede from the Union. It includes such splendid lines as:

> The despot's heel is on thy shore, his torch is at thy temple door,
> Avenge the patriotic gore, that flecked the streets of
> Baltimore.

The "despot" referred to is generally assumed to be Abraham Lincoln and the song further asks Maryland to "spurn the Northern scum". Anyway, Maryland Delegate Howard A. Dennis had recently suggested it was about time the song's anti-Union sentiment was eliminated, and this had been picked up by Public Radio's Larry Massett, who came up with new lyrics of his own. Here's another of his verses (copyright Larry Massett c 1983):

> I have a dog whose name is Jack, I threw a stick, he brought it back
> My sister had a cat, I think, my mother had a kitchen sink.
> My father was a decent man and we all lived in Maryland,
> Oh Maryland, my Maryland; oh Maryland, my Maryland.

The next day, Wednesday 12th September, we were up and showered early so that Avedon could fulfil a medical appointment and I could meet up with

Dolly and Alexis Gilliland, who were going to take me around the tourist sights of Washington.

Dolly provided most of the commentary, with Alexis contributing the occasional laconic observation, drawled in that improbable accent of his. Our first stop was the statue of Albert Einstein outside the National Academy of Sciences. I dutifully took a snapshot of Dolly and Alexis in front of this while Alexis explained that the star-map cast in its base was originally going to be set at Einstein's date of birth but was ultimately set at the date of the statue's erection since it was felt the former smacked of astrology. Quite right, too.

I hadn't known what to expect of the Vietnam Memorial and at first sight it wasn't very impressive, sunk as it is into a gash in Constitution Gardens, near the Lincoln Memorial. But as you slowly walk along its polished black granite walls, eyes taking in only some of the more than 58,000 names of fallen servicemen and women inscribed on them, it becomes powerfully affecting by virtue of its stark simplicity. The Vietnam War was not my war, and in common with many of my generation I thought it was a stupid and unnecessary war, but those who gave their lives in its execution were not responsible for the actions of their government, and it's right that their sacrifice should be remembered. The judges of the competition were unanimous in choosing Maya Ying Lin's from the 1,421 designs for the memorial that were submitted. They chose well.

We viewed the Lincoln Memorial from below (it was a blazingly hot day and none of us fancied climbing all those steps) before turning and casting our eyes up past the reflecting pool and the soaring obelisk of the Washington Memorial, ("Our national penis" – Avedon) and along The Mall to where the Capitol Building perched on the hill beyond. It was as impressive as all get out and, as in London, all of the most famous sights proved to be within easy walking distance of each other. However, this being America we drove to the White House, Alexis pointing out that, like Buckingham Palace, the face of the White House the public is most familiar with is actually the rear. When we drove round to the front we came across an anti-nuclear protest, one that took the form of large numbers of banners planted in the grass directly across from the White House. I'd been on a couple of anti-nuclear demonstrations in London in recent months and, if I hadn't been unsure of the politics of my hosts, I would've cheered.

We drove on down Pennsylvania Avenue towards Congress, passing between the FBI building on the left and the Justice Department on the right,

on past the National Archive Building ("Where the government keeps its fanzine collection" – Alexis), and on to our destination: the National Air and Space Museum. This is directly across the road from the NASA building and, according to Alexis, is often referred to as "NASA's attic". The reason for this became obvious as soon as we entered the museum.

The V-1 and V-2, the Skylab you could walk through, and the huge variety of aircraft in the museum were impressive enough, but it was the stuff in the lobby as you first enter that really got to me. Hanging from the ceiling was the Spirit of St.Louis, the Wright brothers' flyer, the X-1 craft with which Chuck Yeager was the first man to break the sound barrier, and the X-15, the last in the famed series that, if not for the political urgencies of the space race, might well have continued and eventually provided craft capable of getting us into space more efficiently than anything we've come up with since. On the floor of the lobby was the Gemini capsule from which Ed White made the first US spacewalk, and the Apollo-11 command module. As a science fiction fan I was in heaven, yet the item in that lobby that moved me more than anything was a piece of moonrock, mounted so that the public could touch it. On that long-ago night in 1969, when I'd stayed up into the early hours with my father and brother to watch the grainy live transmission of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon, I'd felt a sense of wonder at the magnitude of the event I was witnessing such as only a fourteen year-old could feel. Fifteen years later, in 1984, I touched a piece of the moon, something I never imagined I would ever do. In that moment I was fourteen years-old again.

Feeling hungry, we ate at a Cuban restaurant called "La Cantinata", where Dolly and I had Rapa Vieja ("old rags"), which was shredded beef in tomato and wine sauce with all the black beans and rice we could eat – a considerable amount in my case. Immediately prior to this we'd made our final visit of the day, to the National Gallery of Art. It was here, in the west building, that I got to see my first ever Dali original. It was "The Last Supper" and it was *huge*. I asked Alexis if he'd ever tried to do anything as big.

"I did once," he admitted, "but they took my spray can away from me."

We spent some time back at Dolly and Alexis' home, where I chatted to Alexis in his study and admired his Hugo Awards (he only had three at the time) while trying to avoid the attentions of their grumpy cat, before I was driven back to Kensington, Maryland. We got there before 10pm but not

before Avedon, who turned up later. It had been a good day.

Our nights are dark, our days are fair, we’re right next door to Delaware

Our song before was full of gore but we heard the Union won the war.

We’re sorry if it made you mad, it was the only song we had,

Oh Maryland, my Maryland; oh Maryland, my Maryland.

Chapter 12: FEUDS, FOODS, & CERTITUDES

Yesterday, a letter had arrived in the post from Dave Locke. Locke, a Cincinnatti fan, had decided to leap into the fray of the fast developing feud (that I thought of as “the Bergeron Affair”, and American fans then referred to as “Topic A”, but which would ultimately be labelled “the Taff Wars”) through the interesting gambit of a letter professing impartiality while clearly supporting Richard Bergeron, a ploy that fooled no-one. This had arrived while Avedon and I were out so we didn’t get to see it until we got back, late that evening. We had plenty of time to brood about it during the night, however, and neither of us slept too well. I awoke after a fitful night’s sleep, worrying about the effect all this was going to have on TAFF, only to find Avedon already up and storming around, invoking Locke’s name in connection with all manner of inventive if anatomically improbable procedures.

“Grab your jacket,” said Avedon, abruptly, “we’re going to Safeways.”

“It’s over ninety out there,” I protested, “what the hell do I need my jacket for?”

“You’ll soon find out.”

And I did, too. American supermarkets are equipped with the same vicious air-conditioning as their airliners, and even with my jacket on I actually started shivering in Safeways. In Britain we keep food fresh by means of freezer cabinets; in America they refuse to have any truck with such effete half-measures and freeze the whole store instead. We eventually emerged with supplies for tomorrow night’s party, momentarily stunned by thermal shock as we stepped out of the arctic conditions of Safeways into the blistering heat.

That evening, two old friends of Queenie’s, Avedon’s brother Rick, and Rick’s wife, Maryanne Murillo, came over and the eight of us ate a superb meal of ethnic Armenian food. Avedon had always boasted about her mother’s cooking, and it lived up its billing. Afterwards, with Rick on guitar, he and Avedon sang songs from the late-1960s and early-1970s. Since they (and their sister, Sally) had been professional musicians earlier in their lives

this was no simple family singalong but a pretty high-quality performance. Rick called for requests, so I suggested Led Zeppelin's "Communication Breakdown".

"Oh, *sure*!" he laughed, while Avedon gave me a black look.

Rick and Maryanne had brought along their dog, Coda (so called because he has a tail), a large and very friendly beast who decided I was going to play with him and wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Oh well, at least he didn't want sex with my leg.

My sleep cycle still skewed, I didn't wake 'til 11am the next morning. This left me just enough time to shower and dress before we had to climb in the car and shoot over to Ledo's, where we were meeting an old pal of Avedon's for lunch.

Jane Noll, described by Avedon as "my radical feminist friend" turned out to be a tall, thin, heavy-smoker, with a high-pitched voice. Though blonde and less manic, she reminded me strangely of Abi Frost. She ate sparingly, settling for a toasted cheese sandwich while Avedon and I got stuck into another huge tray of that delicious Ledo's pizza. Jane belonged to a group called WOW (Women On Walls) which spray-painted political slogans on walls. One of their recent actions had involved painting "FEED THE POOR, NOT THE PENTAGON!" in three foot high letters opposite that august institution.

"It'll last for a coupla days until some general orders its removal,"said Jane, "and since they take almost all our tax money they don't have to worry about the expense."

But then the Pentagon, like the Mormon Church, is not an institution known for its sense of humour. Back in the 1960s, the Yippies announced that the Pentagon, having five sides, was obviously Satanic and that they were going to exorcise the evil by levitating it. And since they loved twitting the authorities, they applied for formal permission to do this. The authorities duly announced that "permission to levitate the Pentagon is denied".

Despite Jane not being a fan, she and Avedon also got into an argument over how modern day fans should respond to the homophobia in the writings of Francis Towner Laney, something that raised a laugh when I related the tale at the party of sorts we threw that evening in Avedon's folks' basement.

The people at the party were a mix of fans and non-fans, but they got on together pretty well. The former consisted of rich brown, Linda Blanchard, Dave Bischoff, Ted White, Steve & Elaine Stiles and us, while the latter

included Bob and Applesusan, and their friends Wayne and Walter. As usual, Topic A dominated the fannish conversation and, in a moment of inspiration, I suggested a new fan fund.

"It would be called BiFFF – the Big Fist Fan Fund," I enthused, "and would send a fan to Puerto Rico to punch Bergeron on the nose." All laughed at this, particularly Ted.

"It would never work, though," he said, "because there'd be too many people wanting to stand."

"Certainly would," I chuckled, "in fact we'd better not mention BiFFF in print, even in jest, or people will start sending us money."

In more serious vein, we also talked about setting up a special fund to bring D West to the US, an idea that got lost in the turmoil of the following months, unfortunately.

During a brief interlude when we weren't discussing the Bergeron Affair, Ted reminisced about meeting Doctor Daniel D. Light at the 1974 DISCON.

"He was the guy who wrote out all Lenny Bruce's false prescriptions," Ted explained, "and while we were talking he rolled a perfect joint one-handed, one *that looked as if it had been machine-rolled*!"

There was awe in Ted's voice as he related this anecdote, and wonder in his eyes. Forget your football stars and your olympic athletes, *this* was the feat of supreme physical achievement that had made the deepest impression on him. In fact it wouldn't surprise me if, purely from a desire to attain the same level of manual dexterity, Ted was practicing that very skill right now.

Chapter 13: ARMENIAN RHAPSODY

Yet another weird dream! This time I dreamt I'd won a competition in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper for a trip to the moon in the space shuttle. Not only that, but the flight occurred during my TAFF trip, and I was delighted that I'd be able to begin a section CHAPTER 13: THE MOON. Then I started to worry that no-one would believe I'd actually made the trip and I awoke, still wondering how I was going to convince them. Only slowly did full wakefulness and the realisation it was just a dream creep over me.

We were up by 8.15am, and looking forward to the long drive ahead of us. Ever since I'd first arrived at the Avedikian household there'd been a note about today stuck to the refrigerator door, a note now in my possession:

Ourganian - Baranian Reunion
Saturday - Sept 15th, 1984
2:00 pm
Tommy's Restaurant
53 Main Street
Toms River, NJ

Ourganian is apparently the Turkish form of Baranian, which was Queenie's maiden name. When the family came to America some of them changed their name back to its Armenian form while others retained the Turkish version. At one point Avedon's sister, Sally (who I wouldn't get to meet for another eight years) used her mother's maiden name in a renaming sequence stretching over many years that went from Sally Avedikian, to Sirani Avedis, Sara Embree, Sally Piano, and Sara Baranian. Of course, Avedon started life as Ruth Carol Avedikian and became Carol Avedikian, then Carol Kaufman, before finally settling on Avedon Carol. Their brother Rick, so far as I'm aware, has always been Rick.

After a brief sidetrip to a gas station for Avedon to fuel up (and me to pick up some maps) we set off for New Jersey, following her parents' car. Gary had a sticker in the back window that read: "We Remember April 24th, 1915", a reference to the Armenian Genocide when the Turks slaughtered a

million Armenians. Answering the doubts of his lieutenants when planning the final fate of Europe's Jews, Hitler is reputed to have said "Who now remembers the Armenians?", hence Gary's sticker.

The journey through Maryland was picturesque but uneventful, and I fell into my usual habit on this trip of jotting down names that caught my fancy: Patuxent River, Ellicott City, Pulaski Highway, Big Gunpowder Falls (followed soon after by Little Gunpowder Falls), Magnolia, Aberdeen, Bynum Run, Havre de Grace, Susquehanna State Park, Millard E. Tydings Memorial Bridge, Rising Sun, etc. As soon as we crossed from Maryland to Delaware, the roadside sprouted a forest of billboards, a change I pointed out to Avedon.

"Delaware has always been a notoriously tacky state," she sniffed.

Maybe so, but it was in Delaware that we stopped for brunch. The '295 Diner & Truck Stop" was the American equivalent of our transport cafes, and a typical example of its type. Rows of huge rigs were parked outside, while inside beefy truckers demolished plates piled high with pancakes and eggs. We all had smaller portions of the same, and I was much taken with the individual jukebox selectors fixed to every table and arranged at intervals along the main counter. We stayed maybe half-an-hour before setting off again.

"Y'know," said Avedon as I was adding Mantua and Bellmawr to my collection of names, "you're lucky you're riding with me and not with Gary. His driving is legendary, and so are his crashes. According to Queenie, he compensates for his poor driving skills by going faster. Even so, he's very proud of the fact that he's been driving since he was fourteen."

"Fourteen? That means he would've started in ... 1928! Hah! Weren't you required to have a guy walking in front of the car waving a red light back then?"

"The roads would be a lot safer if Gary was required to have one now."

As it turned out, I never got to ride in a car with Gary during my TAFF trip. It would be a few more years before I was treated to that particular white-knuckle experience.

Soon after entering New Jersey we passed a car whose numberplate, improbably, read: DUFF. I immediately suspected an elaborate prank, but Jack Herman was nowhere to be seen. Voorhees, Mount Misery, and Leisuretowne were some of the places we passed before finally pulling into Tom's River, NJ, a little after 2pm. We may have been late as far as the

invitation was concerned, but we were fairly early in reality since few Ourganians or Baranians were actually yet inside Tommy's Restaurant.

I wish I could tell you what Tommy's Restaurant – or indeed Tom's River itself – was like, but knowing I'd be writing my TAFF report up in the next few months I figured I could rely on my memory for the descriptive stuff. Ten years on, and I have no clear memory of the place at all. What I *do* remember, and what my notes confirm, is that I was complimented on my "lovely accent" for what may well be the first time in my entire life.

"No, no," said Avedon, quickly leaping in, "it's actually very low-rent."

She thoughtfully provided an instant correction whenever anyone made this same terrible mistake. Truly, she was tireless in her efforts and exemplary in her diligence. It still chokes me up whenever I think of it.

One of the most delightful aspects of cultural diversity is the range of cuisines there are out there. Queenie was an excellent cook and I got to sample the pleasures of Armenian food over the course of my stay at Woodfield Road, feasting on stuff such as beoreg (a sort of cheese and filo dough samosa), cheoreg (Easter bread), yalanchi (pine nuts, rice, currants, and spices, wrapped in grape leaves), lachmajeun (a savoury Armenian pizza), keufta (spicy meatballs), and pilaf (rice and noodles). I'd half expected the food at the reunion to be more of the same but instead we had a simple but tasty buffet of turkey, roast beef, ham, cheese, fried chicken, and moussaka. I ate my fill, and more.

Once again, Avedon and Rick sang a duet and Queenie, determined to have a singalong, started handing out the songbooks she'd brought along with her. She was still trying to get people to sing right up to and including the family photograph taken in the final few minutes before we had to vacate the premises, but there weren't enough people who shared her enthusiasm. Immediately prior to this, the various Ourganian and Baranian families had been introduced by one of their number. Just as this was finishing, Gary leapt up and, with a big grin, said: "Let's hear it for the Avedikians!" He then proceeded to introduce the family (and me as "Avedon's friend from England"), concluding:

"I think that's all ... oh yeah, there's my other daughter, Sally, who can't be here because I didn't send her the air fare." He grinned his huge grin again.

On the drive back to Maryland, Avedon filled me in about Gary and the New Jersey part of the family.

“Unlike my folks, they’re all Republicans and were big fans of Nixon. During Watergate, Gary used to drive up to New Jersey to rub it in: ‘So whaddaya thinka ya Nixon now?’”

“What a guy!” I laughed.

“Really. My father was a Nixon-hater from way back. Hell, I was *raised* to hate Richard Nixon! When Nixon was elected, Gary decided to grow his hair in protest. Or, as he put it: ‘I ain’t cuttin’ my hair ’til that bum goes!’. This may’ve been the sixties, but he was then in his mid-fifties. Eventually, he had this long pony-tail down his back, brown at the tip and greyer as you went up. The day Nixon resigned, six years later, all our friends came around to see the ceremonial hair-cutting. Gary had his favourite chair parked right in front of the TV and the rest of us were sitting all around him. As soon as Nixon announced his resignation, Gary said: ‘Cut my hair!’, and Sally cut his pony-tail off. We had it mounted on a board for years.”

What a guy, indeed! Truly, Gary was one of the most unforgettable people I would meet during my whole TAFF trip.

Chapter 14: HANGING WITH THE PONG BOYS

Early on Sunday afternoon, we drove over to Falls Church to link up with Dan and Lynn Steffan. They were in the process of moving the last of their belongings out of 1010 N. Tuckahoe, the house next door to Ted White's place and their home for the past few years. To readers of the focal point fanzine of early-1980s transatlantic fandom, the two houses had a collective identity that Dan's departure was now ending forever. Being the fan that he is, Dan appreciated the significance of the occasion.

"You realise," he intoned, "that you're among the last to see World *Pong* Headquarters as it was?"

Indeed we did, and we observed a moment's silence at its passing as a mark of respect.

Dan and Lynn had moved to the Adams-Morgan district of DC proper, which is *not* one of the more salubrious areas of the city. However, when we followed them over to it, their new apartment proved to be surprisingly pleasant. Reached by steep stairs, it was the upper floor of a converted two-storey Victorian house. The high-ceilings added to the feeling of spaciousness while Dan and Lynn's, ah, eclectic taste in decor gave it a quirky feel. Dan handed me a copy of *The Washington Weekly*, the magazine he was then art editor of, and chuckled as he demonstrated his battery-powered toy chainsaw. It truly is a wonderful country that would make such a thing. Meanwhile, Lynn had put on a record album by Captain Kirk himself, William Shatner, so that we could all marvel at his unique interpretation of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds", which he delivered in a style that can best be described as over-emoted declamation.

"God, that was *awful*!" I said with great feeling when it was over.

"Sure is," laughed Lynn, "but I intend to sell it to a rich Trekkie eventually and to retire on the proceeds."

Dan & Lynn later treated us to dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant called "The Red Sun". This was the first time I'd encountered this particular cuisine and I needed directions from the Steffans before I could figure out how you're supposed to eat it. Basically, you're each given a plate of small,

bready pancakes and you use these to pick up mouthfuls of the various dishes provided on a large tray in the middle of the table. The food was delicious, though since it bore little resemblance to any other cuisine I knew, I can't really describe it to you. To my delight, the restaurant carried imported British beers, and it was with immense pleasure that I drank my bottle of Theakston's Old Peculier. It was inevitable we'd discuss the Bergeron Affair at some point, and it proved to be the main topic of conversation during our meal. Fortunately, that was the only time it was mentioned all day.

Back at the new apartment we watched TV and I got to see an episode of *Monty Python* for the first time in a decade, the BBC having never re-run it in that time. I also got to see my first ever televangelist, and was fascinated by him. The Reverend Ike was a wiry, fast-talking, black man, and while not as glitzy as others of his ilk was no less a salesman. I watched in fascination as snippets from the Bible were interspersed with exhortations to send money, phone numbers flashing as a host of operators readied themselves to fleece the gullible in what was obviously a well-practiced operation. Reverend Ike was less subtle in his appeals for money than more celebrated televangelists, but he was slick enough to pull in the rubes.

"Send money for the 'Secret of Good Luck' package," urged the Rev, "straight from the Bible. You'll learn how you can get what you want – success, good luck, and *more money*!"

The Bible must've changed considerably in the years since I was given religious instruction in school as I don't recall material success and the secret of making more money being a big part of Jesus' teachings. But then, I never understood what the world's last great absolute monarch, the Pope ("Vicar of Christ, Successor of the Apostles, Pontifex Maximus of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Province of Rome, State Sovereign of the Vatican City"), with all his pomp and splendour, has to do with them either, so what do I know? For entirely non-religious reasons, Dan was a big fan of the Reverend Ike and regularly sent off a couple of bucks for the various religious artefacts the Rev plugged on his show. Dan thought these things were hilarious, and when he showed me some of them I could see why. They included cheap plastic crosses, "holy" oil (in a bottle the size of a thumb-tip), prayer rope (a four-inch piece of string), a "holy" shower cap (indistinguishable from those supplied for free in hotel rooms), a "holy" prayer mat (being a material sample swatch), and a prayer fish (which was one of those cellophane fishes

that curl up when laid on your palm).

"Holy shit!!" I laughed, shaking my head at this junk.

"Not yet," said Dan, "but I'm sure they'll offer that soon."

Avedon and I had greatly enjoyed our day with Dan and Lynn, and left them that night feeling pretty good. Alas, this mood was rudely disrupted the next morning when we received a bumper crop of mail from Bergeron, Locke, and Mayer, which depressed the hell out of Avedon. In the hope of finding something to cheer her up I turned on the TV ... right in the middle of a news report from the Vietnam Memorial I'd visited a few days earlier, about a Vietnam veteran who'd committed suicide in front of it during the night. It looked like it was going to be one of those days, and so it proved to be.

In the afternoon, Avedon and I drove to her bank to deposit $180 of TAFF money I had on me but was unlikely to need in the few days remaining of my trip. Though she'd been banking there for 15 years, the bank staff were unable to find her account. In the aeons that passed while they searched for it, I ambled across the road to the small local track rail station, a wooden building all cream and brown, bearing the legend "KENSINGTON, 1891, B&O". I suspect this would've meant more to me had I been any sort of railway enthusiast, my appreciation of the building being purely aesthetic. When, finally, the bank had located Avedon's account and the money had been deposited, we drove up to Barbarian Books which, of course, was shut.

However, the day picked up considerably that evening when Ted White treated us to dinner at a Mexican restaurant. I tucked in to beans, rice, and chile rochas – washed down with liberal amounts of Dos Equis beer – and felt considerably mellower afterwards. Later, back at 1014 N. Tuckahoe – the other part of World *Pong* HQ – we sat around drinking cola, calling Dave Locke names, and generally chewing the fat. I played Ted the tape of the Kettle interview and also the three Astral Leauge tapes I'd brought over with me. Ted was greatly taken with these, and offered to release them on vinyl.

"Since when are you a record executive?" I asked, skeptically.

"You can put out short-run vinyl recordings quite cheaply these days," he replied, taking a couple of record singles off a shelf, "and here are some we've already put out."

Ted gave me one of these, by a band called "The Young Proffessionals", whose sleeve notes listed its Executive Producer as Ted's buddy Matthew Moore. Inevitably, Matthew arrived at 1014 just as I was reading them. I told

Ted he'd have to contact Graham Charnock about the Astral Leauge tapes. Whether or not he ever took this any further I don't know but, sadly, no Astral Leauge albums ever appeared.

We phoned Patrick Nielsen Hayden on a three-way line shortly after 11pm to get the latest report on the Bergeron Affair and, as usual, he had a few choice tidbits to impart. Looking back, I can see that even at this early point we were beginning to get obsessed by the affair. In his autobiography, Isaac Asimov – as big a Nixon-hater as Avedon's father – talked of needing his regular "Watergate-fix". As much as we deplored the snowballing feud that Richard Bergeron had set in motion, the horrible fascination it had for us meant that we, too, needed our regular "fix".

Chapter 15: THE MAN WHO LAUGHED AT DEATH

We've got some hills, we've got some trees,
We sing in four-part harmonies;
And now I live in Baltimore,
'Cause that's what Maryland is for.

Having time to kill on this, the penultimate morning of my TAFF trip, I decided to pen a reply to Dave Locke's letter of a few days ago. This kept me occupied until midday, when Avedon drove us the mile or so to Grosvenor Metro Station, the nearest connection to Washington's big new mass-transit system, to pick up her friend Ken Josenhans, a local fan. We were heading for Baltimore (known to its natives as "Bollmer"), and took Highway 95 rather than the more scenic parkway.

"I don't use the parkway any more," said Avedon, "not since a sniper decided to start taking pot-shots at passing cars. On 95 there are four lanes. Gives more room to take evasive action."

Another sniper? I thought Avedon might be pulling my leg but, this being America, who knew?

"On the way to Baltimore," said Avedon, some time later, "is the road to the future." I assumed she was waxing uncharacteristically poetic, until I saw the turn-off indicated by the roadsign ahead: Future. Good grief!

We were meeting Dave Ettlin, another old friend of Avedon's, outside the offices of *The Baltimore Sun*, the newspaper he worked for. When we got there, Dave was waiting for us with his wife, Bonnie Schupp, and a couple of kids (their daughter and a friend, I think), ready to act as a native guide on our tour of central Baltimore. First, we ambled down to the recently rebuilt harbour area where a magnificent old sailing ship, The Constellation, was berthed. As well as giving its name to Baltimore's 1983 Worldcon, which Avedon had worked on, The Constellation also had a colourful history.

"This baby was a real thorn in you guys' side during the Revolutionary War back in 1812," Dave told me, with great relish.

I was then shown the conference centre, Hilton, and Hyatt Regency that had been the venues for CONSTELLATION, which were of just as much

interest to this fanhistorian as more conventionally historical sights. The harbour development reminded me strongly of New York's similar South Street seaport and also of London's Docklands, reflecting a particular architectural vogue, I suppose. This impression was reinforced when we sought somewhere to eat in one of the harbourside pavilions, which were essentially small malls. We ate in a balcony area that allowed you to buy from a number of stalls offering different cuisines and varieties of fast food, the first time I'd encountered this particular arrangement. I had a calzone. The food was good, but equally important was the opportunity for conversation. It turned out that Dave worked on the City Desk at *The Baltimore Sun* (founded 1837) and so got to report many of the city's high-profile murder cases.

"Dave just *loves* grisly murders," explained Avedon, "and the gorier they are the more he relishes them."

"We had a great one a while back," he laughed, "a real classic which the cops called 'The Chinese Takeaway Murder'. Don't you just love the names those guys give these things?"

"So why," I asked, taking the bait, "was it called 'The Chinese Takeaway Murder'?"

"Because the victim's body was chopped up and packed into the type of takeaway cartons they give you in Chinese restaurants, of course," he replied, "which were then dumped all over Baltimore. Isn't that great?"

"Once, back when I worked at the Sun," said Avedon, over Dave's chuckles, "I walked past when some of the other reporters were arguing over who'd get to write a particular obituary. I heard one say he was going to call it 'The Man Who Laughed at Death', so I said: 'You're talking about Ettlin, aren't you?'. Dave laughed when I told him, and said they were out of luck as he'd already written it and had it safely stored away."

Dave Ettlin had also been a founder member of the Baltimore Science Fiction Society. BSFS was the third flowering of organised fandom in Baltimore, the others having occurred in the early-1940s and late-1950s, and it was born during a bus journey on 1st January 1963 when, returning from the Washington Science Fiction Association's New Year's party, the Baltimore fans who'd attended decided to form their own group. These were Jack Chalker, Dave Ettlin, Mark Owings, Enid Jacobs, and David Katz (who disappeared from fandom soon afterwards). Jerry Jacks – invited by Jacobs, and a student of Chalker's – attended the first meeting a week later. BSFS

lasted until October 1968. Dave was later part of a slan shack known as Toad Hall (no relation to Geri Sullivan's later Toad Hall) along with his then-wife Vol, their infant daughter Jenny, and Jack C. Haldeman. Among those who hung out there were George Alec Effinger (or "Piglet", as he was known) and Roger Zelazny.

Dave started work late afternoon/early evening, so before we went he showed us around the Baltimore Sun building. We started in the newsroom, walked through the composition room, and finally came to the huge room housing the printing presses and a sight to gladden the heart of any fanzine fan.

"This is it," said Dave, gesturing expansively, "the twenty-six million dollar mimeograph! That's how I've always thought of it."

Ah, the fannish spirit! It endured despite Dave having little to do with fandom anymore. A little later, puzzled by his question about that year's Hugo Awards, Avedon queried why he'd only asked about the pro nominations.

"I don't get sent fanzines anymore," he replied, a little sadly I thought.

Dave may not have any involvement with fandom anymore but his daughter Jenny, now known as "F.L.", is active in the BaltiWash fandom of the '90s and a regular congoer.

Later, as we drove back to Kensington, the overpass carrying us out of Baltimore passed over a Coors depot, prompting Avedon to launch into a tirade about what a "fascist scumbag" she thought was its owner, the allegedly aptly-named Adolf Coors. I knew nothing of that, but I *can* personally confirm his beer is a crime against humanity.

That evening, Avedon had a computer class at the University of Maryland, so Ken Josenhans and I decided to go along with her and to hang out on the campus. With Avedon installed in her class in the Millard E. Tydings building, Ken (who my notes describe as "big, broad, and bespectacled") and I wandered across the spacious campus to the student union, stopping first at its record store (cash register sign: "no credit, no checks, no receipts, no exceptions"), where he bought expensive imports from exotic England – y'know, by bands like the Cocteau Twins – before settling down in the Roy Rogers, a burger chain franchise. I had the R&R burger (cheeseburger with ham), which I piled high with tomato, lettuce, and ketchup at the relish bar. Ken showed no such restraint, and I watched in amazement as pickles, onions, cucumber, lettuce, tomato, rutabaga, zucchini,

peas, carrots, corn, beetroot, asparagus, taco chips, apple slices, artichoke hearts, pumpkin, ketchup, mustard, sour cream, thousand island dressing, chili sauce, castor oil, and many other things besides flew from the relish bar as Ken swiftly and skilfully constructed a dangerously unstable tower of a burger that he carried back to his seat with great care and proceeded to chow down on. It's just possible I may have got one or two ingredients of Ken's burger wrong – it has been ten years, after all – but one thing I've never forgotten is the taste of my own, which was the best I had during my whole trip. Roy Rogers has been a must-visit on every trip I've made to the US since then, which is one in the eye for the surprising number of people who think I wouldn't know good food if it bit me in the ass.

This being my final night in America, it was perhaps appropriate that when Avedon and I got back to Woodfield Road the final thing we did before retiring for the night was watch the final hour or so of the final episode of *M*A*S*H*. The tearful goodbyes of the characters as one-by-one they set off for home were also the genuine happy-but-tearful goodbyes of the actors to each other at the end of what many admitted was one of the best experiences of their lives.

I knew just how they felt.

Chapter 16: HOMEWARD BOUND

I awoke late on Wednesday 19th September, my last day in America. Not so Avedon, who had risen hours earlier and bashed out a letter to Dave Locke, which I read while eating breakfast. While agreeing the necessity of some sort of response to Locke's letter, this seemed a bit too intemperate, so I suggested we should stick to the letter I'd written yesterday. Since we'd arranged to see Ted White one last time before I left, we decided to get his opinion. Queenie wasn't pleased when Avedon told her we were going over to Ted's:

"But he's *seen* Ted White already! Why don't you take him to see the amphitheatre, or something interesting like that?"

"He doesn't want to see something interesting; he wants to see Ted White."

Soon after midday, I finished packing, said my farewells to Queenie and Gary, loaded my baggage in the trunk of Avedon's car, and we headed over to Falls Church. By the time we got there we were feeling hungry so, at Avedon's suggestion, she, Ted, and I ate at the local International House of Pancakes. Taking full advantage of my last chance to indulge in American excess, I ordered chocolate chip pancakes with whipped cream and sugar. The others watched me eat this with looks of horror on their faces, but I didn't care.

"I have a high tolerance level for overly sweet and gloppy food," I explained.

"Then America's where you ought to live," said Ted. "It seems unfair that you live three thousand miles away because I enjoy hanging out with you."

The feeling was certainly mutual but, much as I'd enjoyed my visit to the US, I found it difficult to imagine living somewhere that doesn't have universal health care but *does* allow anyone to own a gun.

Back at Ted's house, we showed him the letters we'd written to Dave Locke. He agreed that mine was the more tactically useful, so that was the one that got sent. We talked some more after that, but all too soon it was time to set out for National Airport. Ted drove, and we made good time, but even with Avedon's invalid plates (she's arthritic) we couldn't find anywhere to

park. Never one for long goodbyes in any case, Ted decided to drop us off at the entrance, saying he'd be back for Avedon in 45 minutes.

My bags checked, Avedon and I said our farewells, a long process with much hugging and kissing. With a final wave, I headed for the departure lounge and sank into a chair for the long wait before my flight. I was sitting there, thinking of all that had happened on my TAFF trip, the three most memorable weeks of my life, and wondering when I'd get to see Avedon again, when a female voice said: "Hi, Rob." It was Avedon. Using her considerable powers of persuasion she'd talked the airport staff into letting her into the departure lounge. It seemed our farewells were going to be even more protracted, which was fine by me.

My plane was late in boarding and take-off, but none of this really mattered to me. I'd enjoyed myself immensely over the past three weeks and I was deeply reluctant to have my trip end. Nevertheless, take-off was a joy (I *love* flying) and the view of the Pentagon out of my window was spectacular. As we banked away onto our correct heading, I got my first aerial view of the DC area and realised why Washington is sometimes called the city of trees. At ground level you can hardly fail to noticed how well-endowed with trees Washington is, but only from the air do you grasp their extent. Apart from the downtown area, the city seems to be built in a wood. From the low, flat angle I viewed much of the suburbs were invisible beneath the tree cover and you could be forgiven for assuming most of it was still virgin forest.

It was a late afternoon in late summer and there was only haze, no clouds, above which the curvature of the Earth became obvious. Below, Washington thinned out and the outlying districts became clear. Was that Falls Church? Or Kensington? I had no way of telling. Before I knew it, we were over Baltimore, with no perceptible break between it and Washington. Suddenly the concept of a future BaltiWash Metroplex became even more real and I chuckled as I recalled Ted and Avedon joking about Baltimore. By 6.10pm we were flying over New York; half-hidden by the haze, but unmistakable. Down there the Brooklyn Bridge, over there the twin towers of the World Trade Center. That Manhattan truly was an island could be clearly seen from this height, and for the first time I noticed the strange spits of land that are part and parcel of the Long Island coastline. (A later check of the map reveals these to be Long Beach, Ocean Parkway, and Fire Island.) By the time we reached Boston, 25 minutes later, the haze had thickened into cloud that looked like dense fog from our altitude, but as we dropped through

it Boston came into focus. We swung low (*very* low) over the bay, crossing narrow spits of land encrusted with brightly painted wooden houses. And then we were down and it was 6.49pm and we were 16 minutes late.

This was my first ever visit to Boston's Logan airport but the hassle and aggravation were depressingly familiar. After being assured that my luggage would be transferred automatically (there was some confusion on this point) I got my seat allocation and boarded the 747. It took off at 8.10pm a half-hour late – and my great adventure, at last, was over. I'd made new friends, put faces to others I'd known only through print, and expanded my horizons in ways that might seem obvious but which only became so in retrospect. In the course of three weeks my love for America and her people had only deepened, and there was one thing I was sure of above all else: I would return.

And I did, too.

Chapter 17: TAFFMAN'S RETURN

When I took off from Washington DC it was a hot summer's day, but by the time I reached Gatwick winter had arrived. It was a good twenty degrees colder than it had been in DC, and whereas DC had been sunny and pleasant, London was experiencing torrential rain and was thoroughly miserable. What made it even more miserable was that it was 7am in the morning, I'd had no sleep, and – thanks to using all but half a day of my annual vacation time on my TAFF trip – I had only two hours to get to work. I made it, though not without dropping my Donald Duck hat in a puddle, and spent the next few hours concentrating on fairly mindless tasks such as filing (just about all I could manage). When I left work, shortly after 1pm, the rain hadn't let up at all and neither had the general unpleasantness the day was subjecting me to. As I struggled over Blackfriars Bridge, pulling my suitcase along on its trolley with one hand and holding my umbrella into the wind with the other, I failed to notice when the flat document bag wedged between the suitcase and the trolley straps slipped out. When I *did* notice I retraced my steps, getting thoroughly soaked in the process (wringing the water out of my socks when I got home was a real barrel of laughs), but there was no sign of it. Fortunately my trip notes (the one wholly irreplaceable item on me) were in my jacket pocket, as were my house keys, which I'd removed from the bag shortly before leaving the office and without which I'd've been in real trouble. However, there were things in there I was pissed off at having lost, things like my Friends In Space badge, fanzines, photos given to me by Avedon, various high-priced comics, and like that. Back home I fell asleep at 4pm, woke 3am, had a lie-in 'til 4am, bathed, wrote a letter, had breakfast, and set off for work at 8.20am.

Actually, I was unwise in the way I handled jet-lag on my return, and I suffered for it. That same evening, a Friday, I hit the sack at 11pm and woke at 1.25pm. I woke exactly the same time the next day – having retired at midnight – and that 27 hours sleep in two nights totally messed me up for the rest of the week.

I had a pleasant surprise the Wednesday after my return when I received a call from the local police station. My lost bag had been handed in and they wanted me to call round and collect it. I whooped with joy, collected the bag,

and was surprised at how many items I hadn't even realised I was missing. These included my L.A.CON II Programme Book, postcards of San Francisco, two copies of a *Journal of Do-It-Yourself Mental Health*, a copy of the invitation Rich Coad and Stacy Scott printed up for the party they threw for me in San Francisco, and a weirdly wonderful postcard given to me by Stu Shiffman that showed the Brooklyn Bridge as it is now and as it looked while being built a century ago, depending which angle you looked at it. Getting all this stuff back cheered me up no end and by that point I needed cheering up having come down with a bug then doing the rounds whose symptoms included diarrhoea and strange pains in the stomach and groin. And no sooner had I shaken this off than I came down with a real bastard of a cold that led to me having a few days off work that were spent in no more productive activity than lying in bed feeling ill. Then of course there were the horrors of the TAFF Wars (see Appendix for an account of that particular nightmare), which I got embroiled in immediately my trip was over and which were to occupy my full attention for the rest of the year and beyond.

In May 1985, Avedon moved to the UK and we were married. A number of those I'd met on my TAFF trip were there too, including Rick & Maryanne, Dolly and Alexis Gilliland, and Ted White. Avedon and I have been back to the US many times since then, and if we could afford to we'd visit it even more often.

My love affair with American fanzine fandom continues.

Appendix: THE TAFF WARS

As it had been in the late-1950s, TAFF was the focus of a lot of acrimony in 1984. The race that year was between D West and me. We drew in the UK, but I won the North American vote. The North American administrator at that time was Avedon Carol and during her TAFF trip to the UK in 1983 (she was Fan Guest of Honour at ALBACON) we'd developed a close personal relationship, one which was far from being secret. Over in Puerto Rico, Richard Bergeron – a fervent supporter of West during the race – chose to believe that Avedon had unduly influenced people to vote on my behalf and, taking an offhand comment about him in one of her fanzines as a jumping off point, launched into a series of attacks on her in both fanzines and in private correspondence. Americans such as Ted White and Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden, and Britons such as Chuck Harris and Dave Langford (a group including some of West's nominators), wrote letters arguing that he was mistaken but were unable to move him. A feud was brewing and it started to come to the boil as I was beginning my TAFF trip across the US. Seeing this, Dave Locke and Jackie Causgrove of Cincinnatti, fans who had had grievances of their own with the administration of the fund during previous races, entered the fray in support of Bergeron. D West, Avedon's supposed victim, thought Bergeron's charges against her groundless and wrote an open letter dismissing them out of hand, but it did nothing to stop the feud. By this point it had taken on a life of its own. Even so the feud, though the cause of much stress among those caught up in it, aroused little interest among British fans as a whole since most of the action was occurring in the pages of private correspondence. That all changed when the 1985 TAFF race was drawn into the conflict.

Usually those wanting to run in a TAFF race make their intentions known long before the nomination period opens and there are rarely eleventh hour entries, but in the 1985 race there was one. As the nomination period was drawing to a close, the administrators began to receive nominations for Martha Beck. Since one of her nominators missed the deadline date by a week, Beck failed to make the ballot, but that was not the end of the matter. In early November '84, copies of a "Martha Beck for TAFF" flyer that was being circulated in the American Midwest by Jackie Causgrove were

“leaked” to Linda Krawecke Pickersgill. This document urged local fans to vote for Beck by writing in her name on their TAFF ballots, and called her “the Midwestern candidate”. (Of the other candidates, Rich Coad lived on the West Coast and the Nielsen Haydens on the East Coast, though none of them were actually from these areas originally.) TAFF has never operated on the basis of the candidates representing any particular region of the sending country but there were reasons why Midwestern fans were peculiarly susceptible to such an appeal. During the business session of the 1984 Worldcon, Ben Yalow, an East Coast fan, had suggested that for the purposes of Worldcon rotation the US in future be split into two zones rather than the current three “... in order to eliminate wimpy bids”. This quote got somewhat garbled on the grapevine and word went round that an attempt was being made by East and West Coast fans to squeeze out “the Wimpy Zone”, ie ... the Midwest. Much was made of “the Wimpy Zone” in literature for the Martha Beck write-in campaign, as if a Beck victory would somehow show fans from the coastal regions that the Midwest was still a force to be reckoned with and not so wimpy after all. Needless to say, this appeal to US regional chauvinism didn’t go down at all well in the UK since British fans didn’t give a damn about such matters. Indeed, they viewed the attempt to swamp the ballot with a massive Midwestern vote as an attempt to disenfranchise them, to render their vote and their voice in this race irrelevant, particularly since no-one involved in the Beck campaign ever directly informed British fandom at large about it. Beck was completely unknown in the UK and there was no attempt made to start a campaign over here or even to make copies of the flyer available. Noting that candidates Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden had strongly supported administrator Avedon Carol in the still-raging feud, and that Jackie Causgrove had supported Richard Bergeron, many found it impossible to believe that Causgrove’s campaign was unconnected with the feud. A British response to all this was inevitable, and it soon materialised.

Linda Krawecke Pickersgill was appalled by the campaign and determined to do something about it. With then-husband Greg, she put together a petition that spelled out what was happening and the importance of taking a stand against it. “It is vital that we make our voices heard even though our votes may now seem to count for nothing”, read the petition, “... we must register our protests with the TAFF administration over the way our vote is being disregarded”. The petition argued its case eloquently enough,

but it was reading the copy of the “Martha Beck for TAFF” flyer attached to it that convinced many to sign. “If the majority of British TAFF voters protest the use of British TAFF funds to support candidates who have no contact or interest in British fandom”, concluded the petition, “there will be a mandate for the freezing of such funds until a more acceptable solution is reached”. Such was the offense the Beck campaign had caused that copies of the petition rolled in from all parts of the UK, the signatories including most of the best-known fans of the day ... and 57% of those who had voted in the TAFF race over here. What with feelings running so high, and all the talk of withdrawing from TAFF and setting up an alternative fund, it was beginning to look as if TAFF couldn’t survive a Beck victory. As TAFF administrator, I was faced with a serious quandary. I hadn’t been elected to preside over the dissolution of the fund, the destruction of a worthy cause that had endured more than three decades, but could the wishes of a British fandom that had so unequivocally stated its position in this matter be ignored? Whoever won, this was going to be the most crucial race in TAFF’s history.

The voting deadline was midnight on 31st December 1984, and the next day the votes were tallied. The final count said it all. In North America, Martha Beck received 183 votes and the Nielsen Haydens 144, while over here the figures were 6 and 117 respectively, which meant the Nielsen Haydens defeated Beck by 261 votes to 189 (both the largest TAFF vote in the UK ever, and the largest overall). It also spelt an end to the feud as far as most of the antagonists were concerned. However, that one half of TAFF thought it was possible to be disenfranchised by a group in the other, and that such acrimony could be generated by something intended to improve the links of friendship between our two fandoms, showed that the TAFF rules were in serious need of another overhaul. Ironically, I’d seen the danger of something like this happening and had proposed a couple of changes shortly after assuming office. Unfortunately, Avedon vetoed these because Bergeron had just begun his attacks on her and she thought that any tinkering with the rules at that point would have just given him another excuse to pillory her. I’d proposed introducing a requirement that in order to win a candidate must secure 25% of the vote in the host country, and was in favour of dropping the write-in vote option, an American electoral tradition rather than a British one which, in the context of TAFF, had always seemed merely a way of avoiding the nomination requirements. Both Avedon and the Nielsen Haydens thought the latter would be too difficult to sell to US fandom but a version of the

former, modified to the requirement that a winning candidate must secure 20% of the vote on both sides of the Atlantic, was accepted. This proposal was incorporated into the TAFF rules after being ratified at a meeting of current administrators, previous administrators, and founding fathers of TAFF that took place in Leeds at the 1985 Eastercon, the UK National Convention. Greg Pickersgill won the next UK to US race (defeating Judith Hanna and Simon Ounsley) and he too suffered attacks from certain US fans both during and after the race. The pretext usually given for these attacks was that he had written a piece in 1981 in *Stop Breaking Down* #7 criticising the contemporary state of TAFF. However, since most of the attacks came from those he'd opposed by helping to organise the protest petition during the 1985 race, people thoroughly discredited in the eyes of most British fans, they were largely ignored over here. And so the TAFF Wars came, finally, to an end.

... from *The Story So Far* (1987) by Rob Hansen

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- Chapter 6: ON THE ROAD first published in *I-94* #2 (1988) edited by Spike Parsons
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- Appendix: THE TAFF WARS excerpted from *The Story So Far* (1987) by Rob Hansen

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The End

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