

HAVE BAG, WILL TRAVEL



Martin Tudor

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1996 TAFF Trip Report

Martin Tudor

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Part One: "Gimme Some Money"

After months of nail-biting tension it was finally happening – we'd got the all clear to go ahead and book our tickets! I'd been checking out various travel agencies for a few months and had an idea where to go for the best deal so I started calling people. Immediately, however, I ran into a problem – there were no seats available out of Heathrow on any of the days we needed to travel. We decided we'd have to fly from Birmingham, forking out the extra 200+ pounds each and even then we'd have to settle for a no smoking flight.

Next problem was how to pay – the money was going to take another week to clear through my account, but with the popularity of our dates I figured we couldn't wait that long; so I called my brother Keith who agreed to slap it on his credit card for a week. He also suggested trying a company called Trailfinders, which I did and miraculously they had two seats out of Heathrow (due to a cancellation that day) on United Airlines, as well as seats on all the internal flights we needed. Even better than that the all-inclusive price was several hundred pounds cheaper than anyone else. (Although, of course, they were all no smoking, gulp.)

With just six weeks to go things were getting quite hectic: I still had to produce two BSFG newsletters, the fourth Novacon 26 progress report and *Empties* #17; I needed to tie down a hotel for Novacon 27; finish printing, collating and mailing *Wave* #47; organize the auction material and get it to the USA – and time was running out. Then I was informed that the Elderly Resource Centre where I worked was being closed and that, as my job was disappearing, the Council were putting me on the redeployment list. They went on to inform me that there weren't any jobs in the pipeline. Great, by the time I came back from the USA I'd have nowhere to work.

I must admit I started to panic. I'd already been applying for jobs, and was waiting for replies from four of them, but I'd figured we had until March 1997 – the end of the financial year – to get sorted. Wrong! As I was already working a 45 hour week (to make up sufficient flex time to add two much needed days to my annual leave for the trip) and spending my usual 20 hours per week travelling to and from work there really wasn't enough time to do any more than chase for replies to existing jobs. I checked the papers for vacancies anyway, but there was nothing going.

Of course, this news meant a lot more work at the office as well. We'd started winding things up as soon as we realized that it was likely the Centre wouldn't continue, but there was still a hell of a lot to do and only a month or so to do it in.

There wasn't much more I could do about the job situation than I was already doing so I put it out of my mind and concentrated on the fanac. I finished printing and collating *Critical Wave* #47 and decided I should get out a TAFF newsletter to let people know what was happening, remind everyone in the UK that TAFF existed and plug the TAFF auctions I intended to organize. I produced *TAFFlon Tudor* #1 on 17 July and mailed it out with *Wave*, the August Birmingham SF Group newsletter, and sent bundles to everyone I thought would be willing to distribute them.

Fortunately a Novacon committee meeting was cancelled – which gave me an extra weekend to play with and I got stuck in to doing *Empties* #17. Dave Cox had lent me his laptop computer to take with me on my trip so that I could produce *Have Bag, Will Travel* more easily, but never having used a laptop before I figured producing *Empties* on it would give me a head start and if I was to run into any problems with it it would be easier to sort them out when Dave was just a trunk rather than an international phonecall away. As it happened his laptop had Word 6 loaded on it, and as I was already familiar with Word 5.5 I picked it up quite easily. I managed to produce some copies of *E*#17 for the committee meeting of Attitude: The Convention on 3 August and hand them out.

Attitude was looking in good shape, so the only work that meeting generated for me was a letter of confirmation to the Abbey Hotel in Great Malvern. Pam Wells had brought a load of fanzines for the TAFF auctions up with her to the meeting that weekend, so I spent every available moment the following week sorting through them as well as sorting my own fanzines which I had collected out of storage at my mother's and from the Evanses' at Cape Hill.

The days sped by and suddenly, on 9 August, Greg Pickersgill and Catherine McAulay arrived with another load of fanzines to be sorted.

Greg and Catherine had come up to collect seven boxes of stuff that I was donating to Memory Hole (it was impractical to auction all 16 years worth of my fanzines and we needed the space). They also wanted to attend the special MiSFiTs "Good Riddance to the Tudors" meeting/farewell party at Paul Berry's pub, the Three Tuns in Willenhall. Quite a crowd showed up

with locals such as Tony Berry, Dave Cox, Theresa Derwen, Mick and Bernie Evans and Anne and Alan Woodford being supplemented by Greg and Catherine, Pam Wells, Julian Headlong, Chris Murphy, Mike Siddall, Cat Coast and Dave Hicks (the latter bringing the first four of the *Have Bag, Will Travel* headings and swiftly drawing the final two, whilst sitting, hungover, on our sofa Saturday morning!).

After over-indulging on the Friday and Saturday nights, Greg got stuck into re-sorting the auction material for me. We had several piles of stuff by the time we'd finished: material to take/send to the USA; fanzines for the postal auction (coming to a TAFF newsletter near you in November!); stuff for the Novacon auction; material we decided wouldn't sell which went off to Memory Hole. (**PLUG.** For information regarding Memory Hole contact Greg Pickersgill, 3 Bethany Row, Narberth Road, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 2XG, UK.)

I was still waiting on several specific issues of fanzines to complete runs or part runs of material before I could mail them to the USA. Unfortunately as Britain was suffering the most disruptive series of national postal strikes since the seventies, I checked the post each day to no avail.

I'd arranged a meeting with the Britannia Hotel in Wolverhampton on 13 August. A lovely, old, worn-out "station hotel", the Britannia has suffered an unfortunate "refurbishment" which has destroyed most of the previous bar/lounge space – turning it into a plastic wine bar area and tacky looking restaurant. So, despite reasonable prices and half-way decent function space it wasn't suitable for a Novacon. (If anyone is looking for a venue for a convention of 120-180 people, however, this is your place!)

When I got home I opened the mail to find a letter about the last of the four jobs I'd applied for. I now had a full set – they'd all turned me down. Shit.

Another postal strike on the 14 August had delayed the fanzines again, but finally on Thursday 15 August they arrived. My mother-in-law and Helena's brother Pete came and collected the two hastily packaged parcels that night; and I called UPS couriers on Friday morning to collect them from their house. (With Helena and I both out at work from early morning to late evening each day, it was the only way we could dispatch the parcels.) Finally things were going right – 42kg of fanzines were on their way to Arnie and Joyce Katz, and at my redeployment interview on Thursday morning my Area Manager had confirmed that she had a post for me at Selly Oak Area

Office – whoopee!

On Friday morning, the 16 August, I stopped off to draw some cash from the ATM on my way to work. It was the BSFG meeting that night, with my illustrious ex-opponent Simo addressing the Group on the delights of working for *SFX* magazine. As usual I was heading straight to the meeting from the office and as my bus passes the Prince Hotel before it reaches the city centre and I don't pass a cashpoint, I needed to get some money on my way to work.

The machine read “Service Declined”.

Now I knew I had plenty of cash in the account – all the spending money for the trip had been paid in and while some of it may not have cleared there should have been a few hundred quid at least.

I tried for a balance enquiry – “Service Declined”.

Shit.

So when I got to the office I called Girobank who said that my account had been closed on 13 August. “WHY!?” I enquired. They told me that there had been a review of my account and, as they hadn't approved of the way in which it had been handled over the last 12 months, it had been closed, my direct debits and standing orders had been cancelled and there was a letter in the post informing me of this.

[Now, those of you who have read my article “‘All Banks Are Bastards’ (Trad.)” in Tony Berry's *Eyeballs in the Sky*, will know that I have had more than my share of problems with banks over the years. But until the Alliance & Leicester Building Society had taken them over 18 months ago, Girobank had been an exceptionally reliable bank. Last year, however, I had several run-ins with them over their annoying habit of treating cash deposits as cheques (and taking four working days to clear them) and their even more annoying habit of paying one of my direct debits twice each month and bouncing all my standing orders (charging 10-25 pounds a time in fees) which constantly put my account into the red. Eventually, after contacting the Banking Ombudsman, I received a letter of apology and a refund of over 200 pounds in charges. A brief six month period followed where they did their job and then early this year they'd started their old tricks again. I'd been keeping a dossier of all their mistakes and intended, on my return from the USA, to open an account with another bank, and then report Girobank to the Banking Ombudsman and their parent company Alliance & Leicester to the Building Societies Ombudsman (who has considerably more power).

[They'd beaten me to it. Obviously realizing that, as my account had more money in it than ever before, this was the best chance they were going to get to claw back not only the overdraft but also help themselves to as many fees and charges as they cared to invent.]

Somehow, through a superhuman effort of will, I kept my temper and enquired, politely, how I was supposed to get my money back with my account closed. They told me that they'd send me a cash cheque in "a week or two" as soon as they'd calculated and deducted outstanding charges. I pointed out that within the week I'd be flying to the USA for the best part of a month and needed *my* money back *now*. They told me it would take at *least* a week. I pointed out that I had only just received a bank statement including charges up to the 8 August and that if, as they said, they'd closed my account on the 13 August they only had five days of charges to calculate – how could it take longer than the period to be charged to calculate the charges? They replied it would take a week to ten days to calculate the charges after which they would send a cash cheque.... Having used the "broken record" trick on difficult clients myself I realized I wasn't going to get any further and told them I'd be back in touch.

Once I'd finished smashing my head against the desk and swearing profusely I called our Salaries department to stop them paying my salary into my now defunct account on the 21 August (the day before we left for the USA). Too late, said Richard at Salaries, the instructions went out yesterday. Between sobs I explained my circumstances and, kindly soul that he is, he promised to do what he could and get back to me in a few hours.

Next I took a deep breath and called Helena at her office to ask if she had any cash she could bring along that night for the BSFG meeting and to get the details of *her* Girobank account. (The only way I could think of to get our hands on the money was if we could persuade Girobank to transfer whatever money they left me with into her account – where she could draw on it from a Visa compatible ATM in the USA.) Once she'd stopped hyper-ventilating she confirmed she'd draw some cash for the evening and gave me her bank details.

Girobank agreed that if I wrote a letter of authorization they would transfer the cash.

I somehow made it through the day without slitting my wrists or leaping on a train to Bootle to deal (in a terminal manner) with "C.J. Longworth" at Girobank; at 15:30 Richard called back to confirm that if I could get into

Birmingham and report to the Council Tax office on Wednesday, there would be a cheque for my salary waiting which I'd be able to cash at the Co-Op bank around the corner. Phew, we'd have some spending money at least.

Now, if I was spending all of my salary on dollars I needed to find a way to pay my bills while I was out of the country. Intersection had promised to pay Dan Steffan's hotel room bill from the convention and there was supposed to be a cheque in the post. Dan had told me to use the cash (thus avoiding bank charges for conversion) and we'd sort out the two TAFF accounts when I got to Washington DC. So I called Alice Lawson to ask whether the cheque had been mailed yet and if not to make it payable to my wife Helena. It turned out that the cheque was in the post made out to me. I called National Westminster, where the *Wave* account is held, to confirm that I could endorse the back and clear it through them. They said this would be fine. Whew. So I could leave post-dated cheques with Helena's brother, Pete, who was house-sitting and my bills would be paid. I called all the organizations who were due payments and explained that I was changing banks and that they would be paid by cheque this month and requested new standing order/direct debit mandates.

The next day, Saturday 17 August, Helena and I rolled into the Abbey National to convert her unused account there into a joint account, so that I could arrange for my September salary to be paid in (as my Salaries department could only make one cheque payment per year). Finally we were sorted.

When we got back home I continued copying *Empties* #17 and *The Tudor Dynasty* – the latter being a collection of my fan writing that Bernie Evans had produced for my TAFF campaign. Beautifully illustrated by Daves Hicks and Mooring, these had been mailed out to fans in Britain but, thanks to the Post Office losing the US masters, it had never appeared in the USA. Having managed to dispatch all the heavy auction material I figured we could use our luggage allowance to transport fanzines to the States; so I was trying to produce 200 copies of *Empties* and *TTD* to take with us – I'd convinced Helena that non-essentials, such as clothes, could be purchased over there! (Copies of *The Tudor Dynasty* are available from me at Toner or L.A.con III for a \$5.00 – or more! – donation to TAFF.)

But, of course, with its usual impeccable sense of timing (which comes, free of charge, with the machine's built-in "critical stress analyzer") the *Wave* copier broke down on Sunday night. On Monday morning I called our service

company to arrange for an engineer to call on Wednesday – well it wasn't as if I had anything better to do the day before we travelled....

Tuesday, 20 August, was a fun-filled day. As it was my last day of work at the Billesley Resource Centre for the Elderly (when I return from the USA I'll be starting my new job at the Selly Oak Area Office), Ann Conrad, one of my colleagues, had organized a leaving lunch and a collection. A wonderful buffet had been prepared by Ann with an excellent curry and rice supplied by Sheila Parmar, a Home Care Assistant, and in the region of 50 people showed up. I was presented with an engraved tankard and over 50 pounds in cash (*very useful*) from the people at the office and a \$20.00 note from the staff at our parent office "to gamble in Vegas" – a really nice send off.

I arrived home from work shortly before 9 p.m. on Tuesday to be welcomed by a mountain of mail – we hadn't received a delivery for several days. Amongst this was a letter from the Passport Agency telling me that as my cheque from two months (!) previous had bounced, my passport would be impounded unless payment by postal order was received before it was used.

Panic.

We were due to fly on Thursday morning. There was another postal strike scheduled for Thursday – short of traveling to Peterborough and paying in cash or finding a courier to take the postal orders same day on Wednesday there was no way I could guarantee payment before I had to use my, now apparently invalid, passport....

Helena and I, given the fact we couldn't do anything about this until the following morning at 9 a.m., went to the pub and wept into our drinks.

Wednesday morning the copier engineer arrived bright and early at 8:15, fixed the copier and left by 8:40. At 9:05 I was talking to the Passport Agency – don't worry, they reassured me, it is a form letter, just send the postal orders and as long as the payment clears you'll be fine. You'll be able to leave the country no problem, but if the payment isn't made we'll impound your passport on your return. Hell, I thought, they can have it then!

I quickly copied the flyers for the September meeting of the BSFG, copied the covers of the newsletter; dashed into Birmingham, collected my salary cheque, cashed it, collected some money from Tim Stannard which Dave Holmes had arranged to be repaid to me, delivered the flyers to Andromeda for Steve Jones, the BSFG's publicity officer, to collect, hurried back to Walsall and bought the dollars from Co-Op Travel, got my haircut and went home where Helena's brother Pete, took me to Staples to collect

more paper. Then I started copying the interior pages of the September newsletter: the copier broke down again.

I sat down and cried, again.

Then I called Bernie Evans to check that it was okay to send her the masters of the newsletter for her to copy for my return. It was, and I did.

Luckily I'd finished copying *TTD*, I just needed to take the masters for *Empties #17* to the USA and get it copied there.

Despite all this, by staying up all night, Helena (who'd managed to grab a few hours sleep) and I were packed, showered and ready for 5 a.m. on Thursday 22 August when my brother, Stephen, and his wife, Tracy, were supposed to collect us and drive us down to Heathrow....

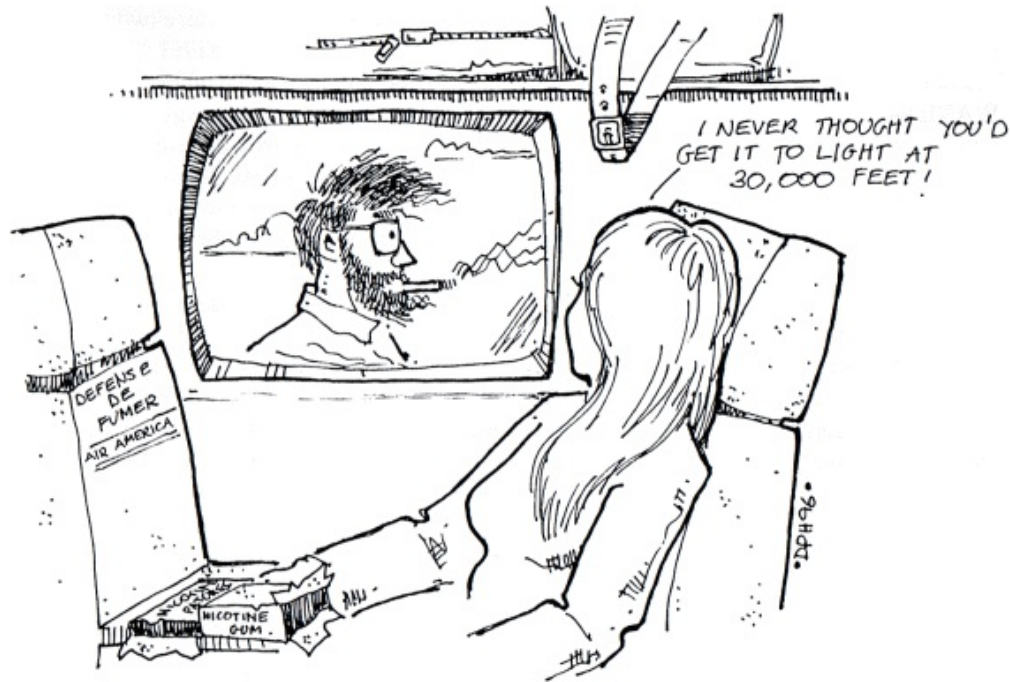
By 5:30 a.m., after several phonecalls to their house – and messages on their ansaphone, we were starting to panic. I called Wolverhampton station and checked train times: to make our flight we'd have to catch the 6:15 a.m. train to London, which meant we'd need to be in a taxi by 5:45 a.m. I was calling a second taxi company when Stephen and Tracy arrived – at 5:40 a.m....

The drive to Heathrow was uneventful (thank God) and we were soon being processed through the system at Heathrow. The officials were obviously dubious about why I should be taking a laptop computer on what I claimed was a holiday – strangely Helena's explanation about a trip report didn't satisfy them, but when she mentioned she worked for the government they let us through, doubtless deciding we were spies.

There were further problems, of course, at the x-ray machine, but eventually after loading the PC and proving it wasn't actually a bomb in disguise we got through.

After an hour or so wait in the departure lounge our Gate number was announced – it was Gate 13.

Now Helena had been very good and patient so far. She'd put up with my incredible run of bad luck through job scares, banking problems and invalid passports – but this was the final straw. But she took a deep breath, and taking her life in her hands, she headed off through Gate 13 with a man, she was now convinced, was the unluckiest man on earth. Brave? Foolhardy? Only time can tell.



“I never thought you’d get it to light at 30,000 feet!”

Well, we made it to the Dulles in Washington DC with only minor turbulence suffered and body and soul intact – and without having to resort to a single nicotine patch or piece of nicotine gum!

We had been due to wait 2 hours 45 minutes for our connecting flight, but as our flight was early arriving and our departure to Vegas was delayed, this turned into closer to five hours. But all was not lost – down by Gate D28 we found not only a Samuel Adams bar with several excellent beers but a smoking lounge! So more relaxed and happier than we’d been for several days we headed off, at 6 p.m., for our flight to Vegas – in Row 13...

Obviously, though the gods were quite obviously playing with us, they meant us no harm and an uneventful flight again followed.

As we staggered off the “mobile lounge” into the airport, at 8 p.m. Vegas time, I was feeling tired and dreading trying to find my way to the baggage claim. Having stumbled over the carpet, I glanced up and there stood a tall guy, with fair, spiky hair, holding a piece of cardboard with “Toner for Tudor” scrawled on it; I staggered over and introduced myself and Helena – we’d arrived.

Part Two: “America”

The gentleman wearing a Corflu Vegas T-shirt and holding the “Toner for Tudor” board turned out to be Ben Wilson and he, thankfully, knew his way through the labyrinthine complexities of Vegas Airport to the baggage collection point.

We’d gone no more than ten steps from the arrival gate when we saw conclusive proof that we’d arrived in Vegas – a couple of rows of bright, noisy slot machines!

It was fortunate indeed that Ben had met us because I’m sure that my jet-lagged brain could never have coped with the various buses and corridors that seemed to be involved in traversing the airport. Eventually though we arrived at the collection point, collected our bags and headed out to the Wilsons’ car. As he drove us back to their apartment, Ben explained that his wife, Cathi, was working at the moment, but he’d pick her up when her shift was finished at 10 p.m. and, if we liked, we could go out and eat. He filled us in on who was coming from out of town, what was planned for the weekend and told us that we were welcome to stay with him and Cathi when we weren’t staying at the Four Queens for Toner.

When we got to the apartment Ben apologized for the unpacked boxes – he and Cathi had only moved into the apartment two weeks ago – but I assured him that it made us feel at home: our house currently being full of boxes of TAFF auction material.



*“You don’t want **Hyphen!** – not when you can have one of these lovely fannish mementos **Steve Green** has thrown up into!*

“Do I hear Ten Dollars?”

“...no, no, I don’t think I do....”

Helena, meanwhile, was introducing herself to (and falling in love with) Ben and Cathi’s cat Nimue. A beautiful grey and peach “tortoise-shell”, Nimue was in a playful, skittish mood and being more accustomed to the sluggish, bad-tempered behaviour of our own cat, Polly, this was a delightful change.

Ben called Tom Springer and Tammy Funk, to see if Tom had collected Christina Lake okay, and Helena and I freshened up and changed our clothes. Apparently Tom hadn’t found Christina yet, so Ben went out to collect Cathi. When they returned he checked with a couple of casinos to see what time their buffets served until. It turned out that they all finished around 11 p.m. and as it was after 10 p.m. now, he suggested a local bar in their old neighbourhood. I (reluctantly of course) admitted that I could probably manage a beer, or two, and off we set.

Ben had described this as a “local bar”, but it was local in the American sense of course – about ten minutes drive, rather than walk, away. The T-Bird was a neat bar littered with 50s-style memorabilia and more recent pop culture stuff such as Galaxian arcade-game tables. I opted for a Shiner Bock (a tasty, dark beer) and Helena tried a Seagram’s Wild Berry wine cooler.

The food was good, the drinks were fine, Cathi was also a smoker, we felt comfortable and at home.

Cathi Wilson was short, dark-haired, pretty and, given the fact that she'd just finished a shift at Taco Bell (where she was Assistant Manager), amazingly bright and bubbly. After a couple of drinks we headed back to the apartment, with Ben, of course, insisting on picking up the bill. (I'd been forewarned by Pam Wells of the incredible hospitality and generosity of the Vegrants and the next week was to prove her absolutely right.)

When we got back to the apartment Cathi called the Funk/Springer household for a Lake update and we discovered that Christina had apparently missed Tom and vice versa – with each of them wandering around different parts of the airport periodically calling Tammy to find out what was happening. Ben allowed himself a (quite restrained) gloat – “I told him he should've done a sign!”

Before we'd left the UK Dave Cox had given us a sealed envelope with instructions not to open it until we were on the plane. With all the hassle prior to our departure we'd both forgotten it; but as she unpacked Helena found it and we now opened it. We'd expected it to contain nicotine patches and/or gum but instead discovered a good luck “Tabby National” greetings card with best wishes for “a great honeymoon” from Dave and \$100.00 – thanks Dave, that was really appreciated! (Why not embarrass the poor perisher across several continents, eh?)

After confirming that Tom and Christina were likely to track each other down shortly we all headed for bed – it looked like Friday was going to be a long hectic day.

Having slept on both flights Helena and I expected to have some trouble sleeping, but as it turned out we were both out like lights and awake early the next morning. After a coffee and shower I went out to the balcony with the laptop and was working on the first instalment of the trip report by 8 a.m. (Such discipline eh? Well I was impressed.) Cathi surfaced a little later with Ben, who is not a morning person, sometime later.

After we'd eaten our fill of the pancakes Cathi prepared, Ben got on the phone to Tom to sort out the plan of action for the day. Tom and Ben were the main movers and shakers for Toner, with Cathi and Tammy supplying all the food – they'd apparently been cooking and freezing food for several weeks! The plan for the day turned out to involve vast amounts of driving for Ben and Tom with yet more cooking for Tammy and Cathi – a pattern that

seemed to run throughout the weekend.

As we went downstairs and outside to the car Helena and I got our first real idea of how *hot* it was. Sitting indoors in the air conditioning or out, in the shade, on the balcony hadn't given us a clue as to how hot it was in the direct sunlight: it was like walking into a wall of heat. I swear you could feel the liquid in your body evaporating and I was surprised I couldn't see steam rising from my skin. The relief when we were sitting in the car and Ben turned on the cool air was intense.

Ben dropped Helena and me off at the Four Queens, where we met up with Tom and Christina about noon. Once Tom had booked all of us into our rooms and he and Ben had moved the first load of stuff up to the con suite they headed off to collect more out-of-towners from the airport and supplies for the con suite – arranging to pick us up from the hotel bar around 3 p.m.

Tom Springer is impressive, at 6' 2" and 285lb, dark haired, heavy-built and with a cute boyish face, he radiates enthusiasm and a zest for life that it is hard to withstand. He promised that as soon as the con was up and running we'd have plenty of time to sink a few beers – at the bar stagger that was planned for Saturday night and the following week when he'd take us to a real pub with draught Guinness – my kind of fan!

While Helena had a shower and got changed I sat down to work on the first instalment of the trip report for an hour. When Helena was ready we called Christina's room and went down to the casino. Christina was desperately hungry so we went to grab some food in the casino's restaurant. Although we all opted for what looked like a light lunch on the specials menu (bearing in mind the warnings we'd received of the vast amounts of food Joyce Katz would be preparing) it turned out to be pretty hefty and far too tasty to leave. But we managed to finish and then wandered over to the Four Queens cocktail bar.

Casino Hotels are quite an experience; rather than the funereal quiet of the lobbies in UK hotels, you walk from the heat and noise of the street into chill air-conditioned chaos. Every available corner seems to contain a slot machine. Vast ranks of them fill the lobby, spilling over into the casino proper; most of them occupied by little old men and women – with their attention totally focused on the spinning, flashing or rolling symbols. But the first thing that hits you, even before the cold air and the flashing lights, is the sheer *noise*. Bells, clangers, sirens, horns and, of course, the constant clatter of coins dropping into slots and spilling out into the trays. The cocktail bar

was at the far end of the casino from the restaurant, so we slowly negotiated our way past all the slot players, coin girls, and card tables. The bar had an enormous video wall on its back wall, with smaller video screens, beside it, all showing different sports programmes. The surface of the bar counters contained more slot machines – one for each bar stool; so I slithered in between two stools and bellowed my order to the barman, eventually finding a beer that they did stock, and then we settled down at a table as far from the video screens as we could – it wasn't exactly a peaceful place for a drink!

Around 3:15 p.m. I wandered off to find the toilet and then over to reception to see if anyone was about. It was difficult to miss the dishevelled hair, bald spot and beard which adorns the head of DUFF winner Perry Middlemiss, who'd just arrived along with Bill Rotsler and Lenny Bailes. I chatted with Perry for a bit, exchanging travel stories – Perry had been on the go for 24 hours and was ready to crash – then I fought my way through the slot machines back to the bar.

Ben had arrived by now and he drove Christina, Helena and myself over to the home of Arnie and Joyce Katz for their pre-con party.

“Cups and Cakes”

Ben started introducing us to the other early arrivals: Woody Bernardi, Ken Forman, Marcy Waldie, Dave Whitman, Richard Brandt, Michelle Lyons, Robert Lichtman – at which point Arnie interrupted to point out that it had only taken two TAFF trips for Robert and me to meet. Arnie introduced himself, accusing Ben of leaving him out, though Ben was quick to defend himself – claiming that he had been building to a Katzian climax.

Woody offered to take us on Joyce's nickel tour as Joyce was on the phone; along the way he explained that it was wise to avoid Arnie and Joyce's enormous, mean-looking ginger cat, Slugger, as it had a disposition even meaner than its looks hinted at – and was particularly fond of attacking unsuspecting ankles. (I noticed that everyone but Joyce gave Slugger a wide berth throughout the party.)

The Katzes live in a great sprawling bungalow, with bedrooms, bathrooms and small offices off to the left-hand side and a large comfortable lounge area, large office with a big Gestetner, kitchen and dining area complete with a serious, collating-size table, to the right. We grabbed some drinks from the bathtub as Woody headed out the bathroom's second door

and followed him through the covered patio by the hot tub, out to the pool.

At this point Helena woke up. A keen swimmer and a devoted sun worshipper, Helena had been eagerly anticipating a cool dip in this pool all day. She'd put her costume on under her clothes and had insisted that I wear my trunks under mine – although, being a devout non-swimmer and boozier, I had *no* intention of taking a plunge.

Just past the pool was a stone alcove with built-in bench and on the table in the middle was an ashtray – this, Woody explained, was the tobacco smokers' area.

We went back into the house and sat around the large coffee table for a while sampling the various dips and appetizers that Joyce, Marcy and Belle kept bringing in from the kitchen.

Joyce Katz was almost exactly the way I'd imagined her – short, aproned (she seemed to be cooking and/or carrying food out all evening), friendly, smiling and charming – a lovely hostess. Arnie, however, was totally different to what I'd expected, at least physically. He was taller than I'd imagined at 6' 3", with a shock of unruly black hair – somehow I'd expected a short balding guy. But as for his personality... that was spot on: we all sat and listened as Arnie told story after story about fans past and present, conventions and fanzines, with the occasional contribution from Robert Lichtman. Fascinating stuff.

As the evening progressed more and more people arrived and I gave up trying to keep track of them all. Every so often Ben and/or Tom would bring in another batch of out-of-towners from the hotel, grab a soda and shoot off again, either to the airport, back to the hotel or on another shopping expedition. As I was suffering enough from the heat just sitting around drinking, my admiration for them both was increasing by leaps and bounds.

Then Joyce announced that dinner was served – dinner?! We'd all been stuffing our faces for hours, but yes there was more to come. Helena and I had been force-fed all the way from Heathrow by airline staff, eaten an enormous meal Thursday night, a hefty breakfast Friday morning and a substantial “light” lunch. But the food wouldn't stop – and it was all too good to ignore; so we kept on nibbling away.

Dinner consisted of an enormous buffet of meats, cheeses, lasagne, meatballs and I can't remember what else. After a while both mind and stomach overloaded – Vegas fans are seriously into food!

Helena joined Christina, Belle Augusta and others for a swim, I ducked

indoors again for a beer and to avoid the risk of Helena dragging me into the pool. Eventually Helena surfaced and came out for a cigarette.

Dave Whitman, who had joined the smokers (Don Fitch, Cathi, Helena and myself) at the table earlier, had remained there most of the evening. So when Helena went over to the table and lit up Dave was still there. He was talking to, I think, Richard Brandt and launched into a spiel about how terrible nicotine addiction was, the damage it did to your health and how annoying it was that when he came outside for fresh air he ended up breathing tobacco smoke.

Now, being British, Helena just sat there through this – and refrained from asking the obvious question: if tobacco smoke bothered him so much why had he made a beeline for the only table surrounded by smokers and stayed there all evening? (As they say back home, “There’s nowt as strange as folk.”)

The party continued; yet more food was served and a small group formed around the hot tub, which was now bubbling away. By now Aileen Forman had arrived and she joined Christina, Belle, Sue Williams and others in the tub; while a group of smokers – Cathi, Don Fitch, Art Widner, Helena and myself – sat around the tub chatting (of course Dave, realizing all the smokers had moved over to the hot tub, came over to join us).

It was here that I discovered that Tom Springer and I weren’t the only ones with a pathological hatred of bugs – suddenly Aileen screamed, pointing at a beetle-like “water bug” that was scuttling around the edge of the hot tub. Sue quickly started throwing water at the bug to chase it away and it scuttled under the platform I was sitting on. Mindful of the importance of keeping cool I took several large slugs of my beer, dragged heavily on my cigarette and squashed the urge to leap up screaming myself – though I kept a wary eye on the platform in case the bug reappeared. Her mood destroyed, Aileen retired indoors – carefully, watching every step.

Gradually people started drifting to their various homes; while Ben and Tom, having had oh, almost an hour or two break, started running people back to the Four Queens. Finally I helped Tom and Tammy carry out some crock pots they were borrowing for Sunday’s soup tasting and Tom drove Helena and me back to the Four Queens.

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Saturday we were up bright and early again, I typed up another chunk of the trip report and then we wandered down to the con suite for the promised

bagels, doughnuts and, most importantly, coffee. We chatted for a while with rich brown, Cathi, Karl Kreder, Bill Rotsler, Don Fitch and others, hearing all about cans of Japanese helium beer from Karl – the thought of what the average British lager lout could get up to with cans of helium-packed beer boggled my mind. Having had several caffeine fixes, I grabbed a beer from the bathtub and headed back to our hotel room to work on the trip report some more before the opening ceremony at noon.

Geri Sullivan was, as usual, on form and, once Tom had introduced her to the audience, she read from an enormous scroll she'd brought with a description and explanation of the nature and importance of Roscoe. She then unrolled another scroll to be signed by all Toner attendees and invited Tom to be the first to sign.

Having signed Geri's scroll and drank, ate and chatted some more, we headed back to our room. Helena read various Vegas shopping and tourist magazines while I finished the first instalment.

I was working as fast as I could in order to finish it in time to attend Arnie's round table discussion "Can The Numbered Fandom Theory Be Saved?" at 2 p.m. – but I failed to do this. It was gone 3 p.m. by the time I'd completed and spell-checked it and Helena had subbed it all. So I transferred it to disk ready to print off and we wandered back to the con suite.

We arrived there just before Arnie and the crowd returned from the meeting room – Arnie announcing to the room that fanzine fandom was saved, we didn't have to worry any more, we could just party.

We did.

Piles more food, which Cathi and Tammy had been busily preparing for the last few weeks, was wheeled out, including: BBQ hot wings, Teriyaki Wings, Spicy Meatballs, Ham & Asparagus Roll-Ups, Devilled Eggs (which Tammy swore she'd never make again – but which were delicious), plus dips, vegetables, pasta salads, crackers, etc, etc. As everyone dived in Helena tried desperately to convince me to eat more, but I was determined to save SOME room for the beer on the bar stagger which was due shortly. (When I questioned Cathi about all this food later, she grudgingly admitted that Vegas conventions are really just combined food fests and cookery competitions – if only British hotels would allow this!)

Given that all the decent bars and pubs are way out of the centre of Vegas, Tom apologized for the fact that the bar stagger would have to be restricted to the casino bars on Fremont Street – he needn't have worried,

they were great.

First was the Golden Nugget – a typical casino bar with the slot machines built into the counter (we'd voted unanimously to skip the bar in the Four Queens). It had a few interesting beers which we sampled, while Geri won some money on the slot machines and Art Widner won even more. Tom squealed with delight (honest, I heard him) as he spotted that Bill Kunkel was drinking alcohol and rushed over to share a toast with him. Then we moved off, taking our drinks with us to the bar in the back of the Horseshoe Casino.

Neither Helena, nor I, could believe the number of people wandering around Fremont Street with drinks in their hands – a practice which is frowned upon in Britain, some places it's illegal. And the fact that none of the bars objected to your bringing in drinks from other bars – this simply wouldn't be allowed by any pub or bar back home.

The Horseshoe was decorated like a Wild West Saloon and the bar was fantastic. An enormous wooden counter with no slot machines on it! Thick, red, velvety curtains were draped across the walls and it had a decent selection of drinks and a friendly barman. Again we had a couple of drinks there before moving on – though I for one would happily have sat there for an hour or two chatting with Tom, as it was one of the few bars where you could hear yourself think, situated as it was beside the card tables with no slot machines near by.

As we wandered out on our way to Sassy Sally's House o' Beer, someone noticed it was almost time for the next Fremont Street Experience Light Show, so we hung around for a minute or two to watch.

Fremont Street has been covered with a tapestry of computer controlled neon tubes or cables. On the hour each night a different light show begins, lasting for about five minutes, during which they block off the traffic. The shows have different themes, the one we watched was the "Viva Las Vegas" show – with 20 foot light-pictures of cartoony Frank Sinatras; dancing girls and cabaret music – fairly impressive stuff.

On to Sassy Sally's which has got to be the noisiest, tackiest, casino in Vegas. Above every bank of slot machines there is a T-shirt and shorts clad young girl badgering you to come and play *their* machines – as you fight your way through to the bar. I'm not sure whether their air-conditioning was playing up or whether it was just the heat from the kitchen next to the bar, but it was uncomfortably hot in there. However, by way of recompense, it had

the widest range of beers that we saw in any of the bars.

But the heat was *too* much and Bill Kunkel headed back to the Four Queens, while the rest of us headed off to indulge in the dubious delights of the Shrimp Brother's ritual meal – a shrimp cocktail at the Golden Gate Shrimp Bar.

Tom was most insistent that I, as a card-carrying shrimp brother, *had* to eat a shrimp cocktail and so I did. The driest tasting seafood I have *ever* experienced, with a very strange spicy tomato-style sauce. Certainly an experience.... Geri and Christina were even less impressed – not even trying to finish theirs; though they raved about the Imitation Crab Cocktails – declaring themselves the Crab Sisters. (The imitation crab was that strange white and pink, processed unidentified shell fish meat that is packed and sold as “ocean” or “crab” sticks in the UK – urgh.)

To wash down the seafood (and remove the taste from our mouths) we finished up at the Las Vegas Club casino bar; where Helena and Tammy were delighted to discover 13 flavours of De Kuyper schnapps plus loads of bizarre flavoured liqueurs.

As they plowed through a selection of butterscotch, almond, and lord knows what else flavoured shots – washed down with \$1.50 frozen cocktails such as Mudslides and Dreamsicles; I downed a number of glasses of the best beer I'd found yet – Rhino Chase Peach Wheat Beer. This was the Vegas Club's draft beer of the month, \$1.25 a glass, and it was very cold, very tasty and wonderfully refreshing.

As people were beginning to flag (we'd lost Art Widner back at the Golden Nugget) we headed back to the Four Queens. As we left the Vegas Club we were just in time for the next Fremont Light Show – this time the sf show. An enormous hatch stretches the length of the street, slamming shut; the sound of lift off; stars rushing by; planetfall with bizarre animals bounding past; the hatch slams shut again; lift off. Again quite impressive stuff.

Helena and I popped back to our room to freshen up, but Helena discovered she couldn't and crashed instead. As I wanted to check with Tom what time he intended to set out on his errands Sunday morning, I wandered down to the con suite.

(Tom had offered to run me to his apartment to print the first instalment of the trip report off from his PC and, as he had a few errands to run, take me to a copy shop as well.)

There was no sign of Tom when I got to room 1248, figuring he was resting his knee (which had given way earlier), I joined Perry, Rotsler and Karl. They were talking about violence and how to deal with it. As I have been a casualty of many brawls Perry asked for my input and I told them what you shouldn't do. Rotsler described how to intimidate with mannerisms and expressions (which he also demonstrated) and Karl explained how to rip someone's ear off (which he fortunately didn't demonstrate). After a couple of cans of Guinness I turned in for the night.

With the first instalment finished and ready to print I enjoyed a lie in on Sunday morning – wandering down to the con suite for coffee around 10 a.m, to see if Tom had surfaced. No sign of Tom, but Cathi, Tammy, and Shelby and Suzanne Vick were there and we drank coffee and chatted for a while about the incredible energy of Geri Sullivan. Suzanne explaining this with the fact that Geri was obviously an “energy vampire” – so the next time your feeling exhausted after several hours trying to keep up with Geri as she “parties on down” you'll know why!

We discovered that neither Tom (whose knee was pretty bad now) nor Ben (who was burnt out) were likely to surface, but Tammy and Cathi were running the errands and said we were welcome to tag along.

Having stopped off along the way to pick up some mason jars to display Ben's seven different home made wines, we arrived at Tammy and Tom's apartment. I was relieved to discover Tom used a word processing package with which I was familiar so it didn't take long to run off a set of masters and paste-in Dave Hicks's illo.

We packed yet more food Tammy had prepared into the boot of the car and headed over to Kinko's – where Cathi and I discovered our brains were too dead to operate the copier, so we left the masters at the counter and popped back to – you guessed it – pick up more food that Cathi (“the Cake Mistress” as her Rotsler-badge proclaimed) had prepared. We also collected Ben's home made wines, one of which “The Toner Grape” had been produced from Joyce's first grape crop.

On the way back to the Four Queens I shot into Kinko's and collected the copied and collated first instalment, and as soon as the car was unloaded at the hotel I dashed upstairs to staple some copies. I was determined to hand some copies out in the con suite before heading over to the Royal Pavilion meeting room in the North Tower for Joyce's round table discussion at 2 p.m. – “Should Fanzine Fandom Proselytize?”. I especially didn't want to miss

this item as I'd sent a longish loc to *Wild Heirs* on the same subject recently.

It was a great buzz handing out the first instalment – the look of chagrin and venomous hatred from fellow fan fund winner Perry Middlemiss being worth all of the effort in itself!

Tom announced that the discussion would be held in the con suite as it was too much hassle to keep dragging people over to the meeting room in the North Tower. (There were armed security guards at the bases of the elevators checking keys, the keys were different colors depending on which Tower your room was in.) Unfortunately Tom took me to one side and said they hoped to start the Fanzine Auction earlier than the scheduled time of 4 p.m., as there was so much stuff to sell – so I missed most of Joyce's discussion as I had to start sorting the TAFF fanzines.

Because of the vast amount of fanzines that had been supplied by DUFF, Toner and TAFF for the auction, the TAFF stuff needed to be pruned quite severely and prioritized. Robert Lichtman offered to help with this but I lost track of him after Joyce's item. I tracked him down indulging in a sidebar in Joyce and Arnie's room (I know, I should've guessed) and I joined them there. Tom, Arnie and Robert quickly scanned through my list highlighting which should go first, whilst leaving a sizeable amount of material for L.A.con III.

The sidebar was probably a bad idea for me – I'm completely out of practice and so it hit me pretty hard. However it did have a major benefit – the auction was the first fan programme item I have taken an "on-stage" part in without a cigarette in my hand for over 13 years and I barely felt the need for a nicotine fix. (Of course, I could barely feel anything, distanced as my head was from my body, but....)

Arnie said a few words and passed it over to me, as I had the most to sell. I started with a "lighter" item to help warm things up – an autographed, hard-cover copy of *The Leaky Establishment* by Dave Langford which fetched a disappointing \$11.00 and a copy of Eric Bentcliffe's 1960 TAFF Trip Report, *EpiTAFF*, sold for just \$9.00; this was hard work! Prices began to pick up when I moved on to a Pickersgill classic, *Ritblat / Grim News* #1 and #2, fetching \$15.00 and then a run of Hansen's *Epsilons*, #7-18, picked up \$20.00, with six assorted fanzines by Owen Whiteoak fetching \$18.00. A few bits and pieces went for under \$10.00 a time and then I took a break and passed over to Arnie and Robert – while I sorted through what we had and reconsidered my strategy.

Round Two: I decided to go with a big gun but only managed \$20.00 for a copy of *Hyphen* #22 (sorry Walt), and a facsimile by Vinç Clarke of his copy of *Hyphen* #1 fetched \$10.00. I decided to try more recent stuff and got \$8.00 for a single issue of Christina Lake's *Sorgenkind* (helped by Christina trying to describe what was in it), #3-#9 of Michael Ashley's *Saliromania* went for a respectable \$13.00 and *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* from Pickersgill fetched a very respectable \$35.00; *Pulp* #1-19 fetched \$50.00; but a rare two issues of the Cretins' *Indian Scout* fetched only \$15.00, although I managed to get a further \$7.00 for just one additional copy. Time for another break – I passed back to Arnie who called on Perry to do his stuff.

All through this, of course, Helena had been fetching fanzines and keeping track of what was selling for what. (Tom was keeping the actual auction table, but I wanted an idea from my list of what was fetching what and how much “stock” I had left.)

Things were definitely slowing down when I stood up for my “Third Round”. After several fanzines went for figures that Arnie felt were too cheap, I received a bid of \$35.00 for *Empties* #1-16, but Arnie called out to save it for L.A.con III. I was glad to have a rest – being so far out of it I had already referred to the *Wild Heirs* editors as the “Weird Heirs” – hopefully everyone who noticed thought it was deliberate!

The auctions didn't do too badly with DUFF raising just short of \$50.00, TAFF \$255.00 and Toner around \$220.00.

Perry helped Helena and me carry the fanzines back to our room and then I decided to have a nap before the soup tasting started at 6 p.m.

Two hours later I woke up – an hour after the soup tasting had finished. We wandered down to the con suite but there wasn't much going on, so Helena and I decided to take a walk down Fremont and have a drink or two. We went back to the Las Vegas Club, as Helena had several more schnapps to try, and relaxed for a while.

When we got back to the con suite an hour or two later the party was going again. Helena sampled a few of the soups that were left and we both tried Ben's home made wines – the Plum being the overall favourite, though several others ran a close second.

The conversation moved on to what was happening regarding the tour of the Hoover Dam on Monday – no one was sure. So Christina, Helena and I wandered down to Joyce and Arnie's room to find Tom, Ken, Ben and other allegedly responsible bodies.

We were all horrified to discover that we needed to be ready to roll by 9 a.m. – so after sampling a few more wines to steady our nerves we headed for bed. Tomorrow the Dam Tour!

Part Three: "The Sun Never Sweats"

Having struggled out of bed at 8 a.m. on Monday morning (it's strange but Mondays are just as bad whether you're working or not), I tried calling room service to have breakfast delivered; the idea being that as we had to be ready within the hour this would save time. However it appeared that an awful lot of people had the same idea – the number was continually engaged. Giving up on the idea of breakfast we got ready as fast as we could, but we weren't quite ready when the phone rang just after 9 a.m. – it was Ben checking if we were still interested in going on the tour of Hoover Dam. After reassuring him we'd be down to the con suite RSN, I left Helena brushing her hair and popped down to the con suite to grab some coffee.

When I got there I discovered that Cathi had had a nasty shock the previous night. Having booked four days off work for the con she'd rang her manager on Sunday night to find out which shift she would be working on Tuesday – only to discover that she didn't work there anymore! Her manager wouldn't tell her any more – just saying that the Area Manager would tell her more when she met with her in the morning. Cathi was naturally a bit concerned about this – she *thought* it would be good news, because if it was bad she felt *fairly* sure her manager would've told her, but it meant that she was going to be on tenterhooks for another 24 hours. (Both Ben and Cathi were hoping it meant a promotion and that she was finally getting her own store... but it could just as easily mean a demotion or worse.)

I grabbed a coffee for Helena and took it back to our room; when I told her about Cathi's news Helena's reaction was predictable: "You've bloody jinxed her as well Tudor!" (Later that day Helena managed to persuade Cathi this was the case, and despite my protestations of innocence Cathi informed me that if she was sacked on Tuesday she'd hold me personally responsible! Whatever happened to the Age of Reason?)

Several people had set out for the dam already, when we left around 9:30; Christina joining Paul Williams and Cindy Lee Berryhill, while Ben chauffeured Helena and me.

The ride out to the dam was through some spectacular scenery. As we

sped along some breathtaking, hair-pin bends through the mountains, Ben reassuringly pointed out a recently repaired barrier where someone had taken an inadvertent shortcut off the cliff – fortunately we couldn't see the wreck from our angle!

The most stunning sight though wasn't the desert scenery, the vast horizons, the searing desert sun or the looming ranges of hills surrounding the valley – it was the startling vivid blue immensity of Lake Mead suddenly appearing in the midst of all that sand. Helena gasped that it was like driving along the biggest beach in the world!

The first view of the dam as we came up from Vegas via Boulder City is quite impressive – even though you only see a small section from that approach. Ben parked the car and we wandered along to the Visitors Centre – stopping at every water fountain to gulp cold water; absolutely vital in the searing heat, now around 110 degrees.

Strangely enough I was having far less trouble adjusting to the Nevada climate than sun-worshipper Helena. For the first time in my adult life I found I could breath! Back home in the UK I'm plagued by allergies (to dust mites, animal fur, grass – virtually everything except pollen); but here the allergies seemed to have cleared up. Apparently this is quite common: Cathi, who moved to Vegas from LA, used to be a martyr to allergies which cleared up when she moved to Vegas; but shortly after moving here she'd developed sinus problems – a common problem in the dry desert heat. However Helena, who doesn't suffer from allergies, had been congested since our arrival – I tried to be sympathetic, but the temptation to gloat was sometimes irresistible: “Now you know what it's like!”

We met up with the first party down by the Visitors Centre and, while Ben went off to find Ken Forman (who works as a guide at the dam), Helena and I wandered back to see if we could find the third party – Christina, Cindy and Paul who should've been just behind us – I also took the opportunity for a last cigarette before the tour.

There was no sign of the members of the third party so Helena and I wandered back to join Ben and the others. It turned out that Ken was in the middle of another tour at the moment but he'd be back shortly. Ben left us looking at the impressive displays (which included the boat that the surveyors for the dam had used in their original survey of the river) while he went off to try and find Paul, Cindy and Christina.

Ken arrived and announced that as the Visitors Centre was so busy he

wouldn't be able to give us a private tour – we would have to share him with around 40 others. Paul, Christina and Cindy arrived and Ken went off to find Ben, once everyone was together we joined the rest of the tour party, entered the elevator and dropped several hundred feet to the base of the dam.

Ken Forman can talk. No, I mean *really* talk, we're in hind legs off donkeys territory here, and he could probably charm the birds from the trees at the same time. (Ian Sorensen eat your heart out!) But, surprisingly for such a slick operator, he is also a really nice guy, great fun, very funny and obviously totally in love with his work.

The dam tour was without doubt the most entertaining tour I've ever been on. Not only does Ken enjoy his job, he's very good at it. Ken's routine started even before everyone had crowded into the enormous elevator, his quick fire patter kept his audience riveted as the high speed elevator dropped to the base of the dam. He continued as the group wound its way through the tunnels to the generators, the patter was funny and interesting – packed with information. When we emerged from the tunnel we found ourselves on a walkway high above the hydroelectric generators. Ken pointed out that the marbled floor was the original floor from the 1930s – the dam had been designed with tour groups in mind – and that all of the power for the dam was produced, not by the line of mind-boggling huge generators which filled the huge cavern beneath us, but by two small (around 12' long) generators one at each end of the cavern.

When we descended to the floor of the cavern, we really got an idea of just how huge the generators were – enormous! Ken enthused that the dam was built to last a thousand years, but that it is now estimated that it will last two thousand! It had been built to take everything the river, weather and earth could throw at it, and so far, in its 60+ year history, it hadn't been shook by anything.

The tour continued outside to the base of the dam. Wow. It is impossible to describe the enormity of this structure – when you stand at the bottom and look up and think about the amount of pressure from the lake that is pushing against all four hundred feet of it above your head. Ken pointed out that if it did burst we could all body-surf to Mexico.

We returned to the tunnels and into a smallish viewing chamber above one of the pipes that had originally channeled the river out of the way so that the dam could be built. Here we learnt that there had been amazingly few casualties in its construction – the most famous being the construction

workers mascot, a dog called Nigger. (In a display of stunning political correctness the dog's monument – placed there by the dam workers the day it died – had been covered with concrete and a new plaque, minus the dog's name, had been put up!)

Then it was back into the elevator up to the Visitors Centre and up again to the observation platform and an absolutely breath-taking view of the river, lake and dam. A wonderful experience.

At this point the heat was beginning to take its toll on Helena and myself so we opted to return to the hotel, rather than visit the gift shop and watch the original footage of the survey of the river in the Visitor Centre's purpose built cinema. (The idea of crowding into a small cinema with a hundred plus warm sweaty bodies, after sweltering on the observation platform, was strangely unappealing.)

Ben drove us back to the hotel, pointing out Tom Springer's "office" en route – a trailer stuck in the middle of the desert – where Tom sells real estate. By now it seemed even hotter, so Ben stopped at a gas station to buy a bottle of water which we all guzzled from greedily – you just can't satisfy your thirst in the small gulps you get from water fountains.

I loved the approach to the Four Queens, through the startling white city streets, dwarfed by the garish billboards and casino signs. I kept meaning, and forgetting, to take a picture of the Church by the Court House – around the corner from the Four Queens – with its sign proclaiming that marriage services were performed there by the "We've only just begun Churches Inc."

We had a couple of hours to kill before the final big event of the post-Toner wind down – our attendance at the Chicago Science Fiction League meeting at the Chicago Hot Dog Restaurant. So we turned the air conditioning in the room up full, started packing, showered and relaxed.

Ben and Cathi drew the short straw and got to chauffeur Helena and me again; when we got to the Chicago Hot Dog a few people had already arrived and within minutes the place was packed with fans – taking up around half of the restaurant, much to the obvious delight of the manager/proprietor. (As best I can remember this included: Arnie and Joyce Katz, Tom Springer, Tammy Funk, Ben and Cathi Wilson, Robert Lichtman, Karl Kreder, Bill Rotsler, Don Fitch, Richard Brandt, Michelle Lyons, Geri Sullivan, Perry Middlemiss, Ken Forman, Helena and myself.)

The hot dogs were absolutely superb, so good in fact that I pigged out with two: a Polish Dog (with Polish sausage and all the trimmings) and a

Kraut Dog (apparently Arnie's favourite, with tons of sauerkraut).

When everyone was stuffed we dragged Perry away from the football game on the tv and piled outside for a few group photos. Then Tom and Tammy drove Helena and me back to the hotel. The original plan had been to wander along to The Stratosphere bar, but by the time everyone had sank a few glasses of the remaining homemade wine and polished off a few beers in the con suite no one had enough energy to bother. (Not to mention the fact that there weren't enough drivers sober enough to ferry everyone.)

So we sat around chatting, while Ken and Ben tried to convince Karl that he too had lived in a "slan shack". Karl's argument was that he hadn't been a fan at the time he'd shared "The Asylum" with Ben and others; Ben insisted he had been; Karl proclaimed he hadn't realized that he'd been a fan at the time and proclaimed that obviously made him "a rebel without a clue"!

As Helena and Tammy had still got quite a few schnapps to try, a few of us wandered across the road to the Las Vegas Club, where we were lucky enough to get a line of stools. Perry was pissed off to discover that while the tv behind the bar was showing a highly unexciting skateboard competition, the tv screens elsewhere in the Casino (too far away to see clearly) were showing the All Blacks versus Australia rugby match. Perry tried to get the barman to change channels, but he was new, didn't speak very good English and indicated he wouldn't and/or couldn't. Geri and Tammy had their heads together, "talking relationships" and were giggling viciously as Geri slipped me a napkin "for my trip report". The note on the napkin read "I'm horribly wicked, aren't I? But it's fun – Tammy Funk, 8/27/96, 11:45 p.m.". Don't ask me – they wouldn't tell a mere man.

The operation of the tv screen wasn't the only thing the barman didn't understand, he wasn't too hot at serving the right drinks. Again and again Helena had to run down the bar, lean across and point out the bottles of schnapps he denied existed. At one point the guy she was leaning past assumed that she wanted him to buy her the drink and offered to get it for her – generous people, gamblers.

Bored with corrupting the impressionable Ms Funk, Geri turned her attentions to Helena – gave her a dollar in change and insisted she gambled it in the slot machine on the bar. Neither I nor Helena knew how to use the machine so I promptly gambled the lot on one roll (accidentally) and lost it. Helena was not amused and insisted on doing it herself. So I replaced the dollar I'd lost and, with advice from the worldly-wise Christina, Helena had a

go, promptly doubling her stake. Whereupon she quit. I remembered the \$20 that my colleagues from Hall Green office had given me to gamble and tried to persuade Helena to gamble it for me – she refused; declaring we should just spend it and tell them I'd lost it gambling, no one would have a problem believing that!

Finally Karl and Heather turned up, he'd forgotten which bar we'd said we were going to so they'd been working their way down Fremont Street.

Between them, Karl and Perry soon convinced the barman to change the channel and they settled down to watch the game. As Christina had joined Geri and Tammy in their fiendish plotting and Richard Brandt had wandered off, Helena and I decided to head back to the hotel for an early night.

Tuesday morning came much earlier than we would've liked, despite the fact that we'd had a good eight hours sleep apiece. After packing, Perry joined us for breakfast and then we headed upstairs to help pack away what was left of the con suite. (Tom and Ben having, of course, already shifted most of the heavy stuff.) Miraculously all of the remaining gear and our luggage fitted into Tom's Range Rover style vehicle and he drove Helena, Ben and me over to Ben and Cathi's apartment. Perry and Christina travelled with Tammy back to her and Tom's place. There had been no word from Cathi, as yet, regarding the result of her meeting.

We had a nice leisurely day at the apartment. While I started working on the second part of the Trip Report, Helena re-organized our luggage and sorted laundry. Finally Ben got a message from Cathi to say that she had been transferred to a new store because the manager was off sick and the assistant manager had left – the store was in a mess and it was unlikely she'd finish in time to join us at Paddy's Bar that evening.

As Cathi had the car, Tom came over and picked up Ben, Helena and me, driving us over to Paddy's. A sign behind the bar proclaimed "No Parking Except for Irish" and the bar boasted not only draught Guinness, but a number of other imported beers.

We dragged together a couple of tables and settled down, shortly before Tammy arrived with Perry and Christina. It was wonderful to sit down around the same table all evening; eating, drinking, smoking and chatting, without having to move on because of the noise of slot machines. (Although even here there were slot machines in the bar counter!)

Tom quizzed me about British fans and filled me in on the Vegas fan scene and we all got pleasantly plastered – except for the unfortunate drivers,

Tom and Tammy. The barman/owner's wife, who was waitressing, turned out to be from New Zealand and chatted with Perry for a while. And the evening finished off with the owner buying the last round for us all. Great fun.

We arrived home minutes after Cathi, who had put in a 14 hour day with her Area Manager trying to sort out the incredible mess at her new place of work. The accounts wouldn't balance, they were desperately short-staffed, and Wednesday looked like being just as nightmarish again! We all sympathized with her and then spoiled it by raving about what a great night we'd all had. She took her revenge though, by making Helena promise not to steal away with the cute, kittenish, Nimue.

After a morning devoted to work on the second instalment, Ben took Helena and me on a tour around the big theme casinos on Wednesday afternoon.

First off was the impressive, black glass pyramid of the Luxor. The Egyptian trappings inside are so over the top that they work. We had a quick drink in the sumptuous surrounding of the Tut's Hut bar – sinking into the enormous wicker chairs and staring up at the sloping “ceilings” that were pocked with the doors of the hotel bedrooms, a really dizzying sight. Unfortunately, as the Luxor is in the process of being extended – with two new towers being built alongside – they had drained the “River Nile” which normally flows around the casino, but it was impressive nonetheless.

Next was Excalibur with its medieval Arthurian theme. This was the casino that was responsible for Ben moving to Vegas – an avid Arthurian fan and obsessed with castles and medieval history – Ben had desperately wanted to work in the Excalibur. But as it wasn't completed when he arrived, he ended up working with the group who owned the Luxor. The Excalibur, although slightly shabbier than other newer casinos, is good fun. Lots of predictable gags such as the Italian restaurant – Lancelot of Pasta – and a medieval village with jesters, troubadours and shows for the children. As we left via the “drawbridge” Ben pointed out the section of the moat which is the stage for a nightly show featuring a robotic dragon being told off by a cranky wizard.

Onwards across a pedestrian bridge to the glitzy Tropicana and its aviary bar, which we reached through their wildlife tropical walkway. This features marmosets, snakes, all kinds of lizards and several aquariums – very impressive.

Then it was back to the car again for the drive past Caesar's Palace to

Mirage – which is famous for its white tigers and lion show. Only one of the tigers was out when we got there, though he kept the crowd entertained for quite a while pissing several gallons of urine into the pool. There was lots of oohing and aahing when he followed this by scratching piteously at the door to be let out.

We barely had time to change clothes back at the apartment before heading off to the Katzes for a Bulgarian pizza evening.

I hadn't quite finished part two of the trip report, and initially hoped to complete it that evening – I even took the laptop with me. Of course, I got carried away drinking, eating pizza and chatting and it never got done, c'est la vie.

The pizzas were impressive and very tasty (and all came with little sachets of crushed red pepper in case they weren't flavoursome enough!) – but Springer almost caused an international fannish incident. The seven pizzas divided by the number of people there should've worked out to three pieces each, so Arnie was surprised when Christina and Helena mentioned that they had only had two pieces each. After ruthless Katzian interrogation Tom broke down and admitted he'd had four; but no one would admit to having had the other piece. The mystery deepened later when it was revealed that Ben and Cathi, who arrived late straight from work, had only had two pieces each as well. So, just how many pieces did Springer really eat? I think we should be told.

Helena and I spent most of the warm, balmy evening sitting out in smokers corner by the pool chatting with Ken, Tom, Ben, Cathi, Tammy, Christina and others. The conversation turned to useful phrases in different languages and within moments Helena commented that we now all knew how to ask for “beer and nibbles” in six different languages. Her comment was received by an embarrassed silence, until both Tammy and Tom admitted they'd heard “bare your nipples” and were wondering what on earth she was talking about – accents, aren't they wondrous things.

A short time later Helena suddenly screamed, leaping out of her seat. When she caught her breath she shame-facedly admitted that she thought the noise of the sprinkler suddenly coming on was made by a killer gopher erupting from the earth behind her. Strange what damage a combination of pizza and beer can do to the mind...

The sprinklers were very welcome as the evening seemed to be getting hotter and hotter – so I leant back to let the cool, refreshing water run down

my neck. About half an hour later Helena decided it was time for a swim and as I stood to let her past I discovered that the section of the stone seat I was on was cracked and I'd been sitting in a pool of water – my trousers were drenched. Yuch. Helena gloated at the fact that I hadn't brought my trunks as I wandered around trying to dry them out.

Then it was time to go. We thanked Arnie and Joyce for their hospitality, said our farewells to everyone and arranged with Tom what time he'd be picking us up on Thursday to head to LA.

Neither Helena nor I could believe it – it had been a week since we'd arrived – the time had sped by, a third of the trip was over and tomorrow we'd arrive at the worldcon, gulp.

Part Four: "Heavy Duty"

Thursday was a day of rest and recuperation, the calm before the storm of L.A.con III. Both Ben and Cathi were working, so Helena and I had the apartment to ourselves until Ben got back from work around 3:30 p.m. As Tom was picking us up sometime around 5 p.m. to drive us to LA we had a good eight hours to kill after we struggled out of bed around 9 a.m.

After a quick caffeine and nicotine fix out on the balcony we sorted through our bags for urgent laundry and I dug out all my L.A.con material for maps, directions and phone numbers. As we weren't sure which hotel we were in, Tom and I had been calling around to try and find out – but we kept missing people. I was sure that it was either the Marriott or the Hilton and, as they were facing each other, I wasn't too worried which one it was. I left a message on Tom's machine to confirm I'd found the directions and map, then I headed out to the shops to get some supplies for LA and food for breakfast.

I was a bit nervous wandering down to the shops as it was the longest I'd been outside in the hot Nevada sun, but I needn't have worried – the dry heat was no problem. It was 20 minutes down to the 7-11 and I barely worked up a sweat, despite the fact that it was over 100 degrees. Very strange, back home it has only got to hit the 70s and I'm drenched in sweat in minutes.

I grabbed a few cold beers (to help get the creative juices flowing for the Trip Report) and a weird variety of frozen snack foods for brunch, plus essential con supplies such as instant coffee and powdered milk. The only cigarettes I could see on display were Camels and Marlboro which are a bit harsh for my tastes so I decided to leave them for the time being – the two old dears at the checkout were having enough trouble with my accent without me asking difficult questions about brands of cigarettes.

Back at the apartment Helena had finished the laundry, so we settled down to a substantial brunch, after which I set myself up with the laptop and finished off Part Two, while Helena settled down to read fanzines. (Ben had given us a spare copy of the Katz/brown 1971 edition of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, illustrated by C. Ross Chamberlain, Ken had passed us a copy of *NLE Letters* and Ben and Cathi had left their copy of Arnie's *VFD* lying around – the last coming in very useful for checking how to spell various

names in my Trip Report!)

Tom arrived just before 5 p.m. and we loaded his big American-style-Range Rover-type truck thingie (look, I know nothing about cars, it was white if that helps...) – first checking all the luggage to ensure Helena hadn't popped Nimue into a case or bag when I wasn't looking. We said our good-byes to Ben, offering crash space and lots of tours around castles when he and Cathi made it to the UK then set off.

First stop was a gas station to stock up on fuel for the car and water and cigarettes for me and Helena. Then it was a slowish crawl through the rush hour traffic and a final look out the car windows at the casinos in the centre of Vegas, and we were out onto the freeway driving through the desert.

Once we were beyond the city Tom inquired if this was our first US road trip; when we confirmed that it was he began to giggle maniacally and pointed out that we were totally at his mercy. Meanwhile the bright desert sun had been eclipsed by a single dark cloud and the already bleak landscape took on an even more ominous aspect. The freeway was suddenly empty of traffic and as the car drove deeper and deeper into the shadowy landscape Tom reached slowly beneath the dashboard and pulled out a thin grey case...

Tossing the case to Helena in the back seat, he asked, "Do you want to choose a CD?"

Tom Springer is great fun to be with, and the combination of Tom's repartee and the bizarre desert scenery made for an entertaining trip.

Helena asked if there was an airport or landing strip near by and indicated a plane which appeared to be coming in to land on top of a lonely looking casino that we were passing. Tom had no sooner said that he didn't know of one than the plane landed behind the casino and, as we passed by, we saw it taxi to a stop on a short landing strip. "*That* never used to be there!" Tom exclaimed.

Vegas was like that: brash and loud and growing too fast for even the locals to keep track of it. In many ways it is the ideal place to start an American trip – after Vegas everywhere else looks calm, cultured and quiet in comparison. The strange thing about Vegas is that even though everything is OTT (over the top), it works. I can't think of any other place where a black glass pyramid with a sphinx outside, next to a medieval castle, next to a partly constructed New York skyline would look so right! Vegas is a boom town in every way – loads of work (as long as you're not fussy about what you do), cheap food, cheaper drink and lots to do. If you can cope with the

heat it looks like a great place to live. I seriously considered moving there, but Helena selfishly prefers somewhere she can breathe! Still, it was difficult for either of us to believe that the first week of our trip was already over – the time had really flown.

Soon we were approaching the California border, past the last few casinos. Tom explained that these did a lot of business as many Californians didn't want to travel all the way to Vegas and, instead, just nipped over the border. The casinos had amusement parks, pools, restaurants, bars and hotels – so they obviously weren't suffering from being stuck in the desert.

As we passed through miles and miles of bleak desert land Helena asked what happened if you broke down out here. Resisting the obvious temptation to describe in gruesome detail the horrific number of deaths from exposure and dehydration, Tom indicated the emergency phones situated at intervals along the freeway. But he went on to say that after you've contacted the police through one of the phones it could take a while for them to connect you to a garage and several hours before anyone got out to you – not a pleasant experience in this heat. He went on to point out the town we were passing and told us that it was infamous for ripping off stranded motorists.

We pulled up at the sign welcoming us to California to take tacky touristy photos of each other posing in front of it. Nearby the world's tallest thermometer informed us that the temperature was 118 degrees – we were really glad to get back into the cool confines of the car; especially as we shot past the signs for the turn off to Death Valley.

Tom had told us we were welcome to smoke in the car if we needed to but, as we were used to traveling without smoking for a couple of hours at a stretch on buses back home, we held out as long as we could. Helena gave way first after about three hours – claiming later that she did this so I wouldn't feel uncomfortable about lighting up, true love indeed.

Tom expected the trip to take between five and six hours so after three hours we pulled in to a Coco's for a meal. (This is a restaurant chain similar to the Denny's ones that have been appearing in the UK for a while now.) As we were now in California we couldn't, of course, smoke in the restaurant so Helena and I took it in turns to pop outside. The steaks were good, although Tom couldn't get his as rare as he would've preferred.

Helena was amused by the fact that Tom called to the waitress by name (which he'd read from her badge) which led on naturally to another discussion of British reticence and the almost paranoid reluctance of many

Brits to wearing name badges at work. Both Civil Service and Post Office employees fought against this for many years in the UK. (“Badges? Badges? We don’ need no steenkin’ badges!”)

Back to the car and off again and suddenly we were in LA; well we were on the enormous network of roads, interlaced like several Spaghetti Junctions strung together around the city. Amazingly we found the Convention Center at our first attempt due, I’m sure, to my superb map reading and navigational skills (which were, I’ll admit, aided by the fact that all we had to do was aim for the enormous stadium which loomed above Anaheim with flood lights blazing).

We pulled in outside the Hilton and I shot in to check if there was a booking in my name. Caroline, a very helpful receptionist, having discovered that there wasn’t, called the Marriott for me and confirmed that we were booked in over there.

Having checked in to the Marriott and dumped our bags, Tom called Tammy to confirm we’d arrived safely and then we headed over to the Fan Lounge in the Hilton to see who was about. It was just after 10:30 p.m. when we got over to the Fan Lounge – we’d made excellent time.

Having said hello to Geri Sullivan and a few others and failed to track down Spike Parsons (who was running the Fan Programme), Helena and I grabbed a couple of beers and wandered down the corridor to find somewhere to smoke. Although there were a bunch of ashtrays at the end of the corridor they didn’t seem to be used and we hovered around hoping Don Fitch would turn up so we could check if it was okay to smoke there. Fortunately fellow addict Jack Heneghan joined us and reassured us that wherever three or more ashtrays were gathered together it was okay to smoke. (One ashtray, or two ashtrays, of course, indicated that smokers should extinguish the offensive cancer sticks.)

We were soon joined by Robert Lichtman, Frank Lunney, Christina Lake and Tom, followed shortly by the looming figure of Andy Hooper. Once all the introductions had been made (Helena commenting that Andy was exactly as she’d imagined – read into that what you will!), Frank offered to lead us away from all this to the Zagreb bid party where he promised (or threatened?) they were playing old Beach Boys tunes.

We followed Frank through a maze of corridors and fire escape stairways up to the next floor; picking up Karl Kreder and losing Andy along the way. Then we emerged onto a “rooftop” garden area, enclosed by the

towers of the Hilton. The garden area was in the centre of the hotel complex on the fifth floor, with the rest of the hotel rising to 14 stories all around us. Leading off the garden area on all sides were the party suites and rooms. As we dipped into the Zagreb and Australian bid parties it became apparent that they were all packed solid with heaving, hot, sweaty bodies – none of which was Perry Middlemiss; so we escaped back to the relative coolness and peace of the garden area. Andy had reappeared and sensibly sat down at a table with Robert, Karl and Tom, so we joined them, smoked and drank our beers. Eventually our beers were gone and, rather than try and extract a drink from the parties, we headed back to the sanity of the Fan Lounge.

After a couple more drinks I passed the spare room key to Tom (who was crashing in our room) and Helena and I turned in for the night around 2 a.m. Tom, who was only attending the con for the Friday so that he could meet James White, crashed much later – both Helena and I were out for the count – but, being several years younger, he managed to come around before us on Friday.

Tom shot off to collect his registration package and cram in as much socializing as he could in the limited time available to him. Helena and I started a bit more slowly, as I had to dig through our luggage to find the four boxed, limited edition, autographed copies of *Frontier Crossings*, which Andy Richards had agreed to sell for TAFF from his table in the dealers room. I also had to sort and count the TAFF stuff for the sales table in the Fan Lounge. Once all this was ready we dashed off to collect our registration packs from the Green Room. Once we had our badges on we headed over to the dealers room and gave Andy the books; dashed over to the Fan Lounge to set up the TAFF sales stuff; then we popped back to the cool lobby bar in the Marriott (a designated smoking area) so I could check where I had to go for my first programme item at 1 p.m., “Stop Me Before I Collect Again”. I was delighted to find that Spike had taken me off this item, which gave me enough time to eat brunch, have a drink, relax and read through the con programme schedule before the TAFF party at 6 p.m.

As we hadn't had time for breakfast we decided to try out the food in this bar – it was pretty good. Helena had a dish called “Tumbleweeds”, which consisted of egg rollwrappers filled with corn, spinach, Jalapeno Jack cheese, black beans, and seasonings, breaded with crushed tortillas and deep fried and came with an avocado cilantro cream dip. I opted for the double grill burger – double cheese, double burger and double bacon, which came with

something they called “Mega-Crunch French Fries”, these turned out to be Belgian style twice fried chips and were delicious.

The selection of beers in this bar was pretty good as well, the Marriott had agreed to lay on a wider selection of “specialty” beers (which generally means micro brews) than usual and had Anchor Steam (San Francisco), Samuel Adams (Boston), Red Tail (California), Rolling Rock (Pennsylvania), Sierra Nevada (California), Killian Red (Denver) and the hotel’s own specialty brew Champion’s Club House Classic, along with the usual selection of domestic pap. I never bothered with the Rolling Rock but the rest of them were fairly tasty, the best being Red Tail, Killian Red and of course Anchor Steam and Samuel Adams. I had so far been pleased to discover that I hadn’t had a bad beer yet in the US, (so yah boo sucks to Simo!).

The only item which had appealed to Helena from the time the L.A.con III progress report had arrived was the Regency Dance – she was disgusted to discover that it clashed with the TAFF party and my participation in the “Coming Across: Current UK Fanzines” panel. I gallantly told her that she didn’t have to attend the TAFF party, but she loyally declared she would (I’m sure the fact that she has little sense of direction and was unlikely to find the Regency Dance on her own had nothing to do with this!). With all this time spare, an entire afternoon, I decided I might as well aim to print off Part Two of the Trip Report and get it copied to distribute at the TAFF party.

After popping in to the Fan Lounge in time to miss the tail-end of James White’s “Intro to Psneerotics”, we wandered back over to the Timebinders Room which was off the same corridor as the Fan Lounge to check with Roxanne Smith-Graham if I could print from the disk on their PC. Unfortunately the PC was being monopolized by some guys working on an apa (WOOF?), so I had to hang around for an hour or so until they finished. Roxanne swiftly formatted and printed off masters for me and then Helena and I popped back to the Fan Lounge to check with Geri whether there was any where in the Convention Center where I could quickly get 100 copies run off. She convinced Jeff Schalles to take us up to the newszine room to see if they had time to run it off. But, as I’d expected, it was too hectic up there and Mark Olsen reluctantly said no – if I could come back on Saturday there would be time, but they were in the middle of running off two issues of *Stat!* with one machine out of order.

So we dashed out of the Hilton and grabbed a taxi to the nearest Kinko’s. Unfortunately it was 4:35 p.m. on Friday and we were just in time

for the rush hour traffic. As the taxi crawled past Disneyland, I kept checking my watch and started to panic. We got to Kinko's around 5 p.m. – just an hour to go before the TAFF party. They started copying extra copies of Part One and running off Part Two straight-away, while I negotiated a price for *Empties* #17 (my copier had broken down again before I could finish the print run) and arranged to collect that later Friday night. (I was really annoyed to discover that they had PCs available for use, loaded with Word 6, costing just 12 cents a minute – I could've gone straight there and finished it hours ago!)

It took longer than they had estimated to print the installments, so we dashed out of Kinko's at 5:45 p.m. to try and find a taxi – nothing in sight. Fortunately there was a Holiday Inn nearby and the receptionist there kindly called one for us. With five minutes to go before the TAFF party we were heading off in the taxi, the driver, who was from Jordan (and, he said, officially on the run from the national service there!) helpfully sped to the Hilton – making the return trip in just ten minutes! We arrived hot and sweaty in the Fan Lounge just ten minutes late. Geri and Spike (almost) forgave me when I thrust copies of Part Two into their hands.

It was disappointing, to say the least, that only half a dozen people showed up – but I *had* chosen this slot quite deliberately, I figured most people would be out eating between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. thereby making it a real easy slot to host! Still, I managed to unload lots of fanzines just after the TAFF party when Jack hosted the “Tower to the Moon” party and dozens of people crammed in to dispose of the free beer.

A couple of cigarettes down the corridor and then I was taking the stage with Christina and Andy for our discussion on British fanzines. Christina and I elected Andy as moderator and Christina dashed off to her room to grab some examples and off we went. At first we almost out-numbered the audience but people gradually drifted in and we finished up with a respectable 20+ in the audience. As the discussion turned from the fairly safe topics of Leeds fanzines, *Attitude*, Alison Freebairn, Mikes Scott and Siddall, Dave Hicks and *Empties*, to the *Plokta* crew, Andy was somewhat taken aback by the vehemence of my reaction to these technophiles – given my undeserved reputation for being fairly easy going. (My view of *Plokta* has been coloured somewhat by the jibes against the *Wave* copier – when you're desperately underwriting your fanzine activity through charging, a minimal amount, for copying services it doesn't help when people who can afford expensive equipment make snide remarks about the quality of your copying.

Especially as the worst looking issues of *Wave* have actually been the professionally copied issues! I'm happy to take any sort of criticism of the content, but knocking perfectly legible copying because it hasn't been printed by high quality laser printers gets up my nose. It isn't as if Steve Green or I *choose* to use low tech – we just do the best we can with the resources we can afford, like everyone else.)

We hung around in the Fan Lounge drinking (and out in the corridor smoking) for a few hours and then, as everyone else had been out to eat earlier, Helena and I wandered back to our room in the Marriott and ordered a midnight meal. Helena opting for the peppered red snapper and me for the safer salmon in crispy, orange sauce. I had a fairly hectic schedule on Saturday, so an early(ish) night was called for, and we crashed by 1 a.m.

My first item was at 10 a.m, so after a quick coffee courtesy of my brother Stephen's travel kettle, I shot off about 9:15. Helena, who was feeling slightly fragile, stayed in our room to sort out clothes (and, as it turned out, do all the laundry) and we agreed to meet for lunch after my first two items.

I wandered over to the Green Room for some more coffee and to see if I could spot any of my fellow panellists, but there was no sign of Lenny Bailes, Benoit Girard or Nicki Lynch, so I wandered over to the programme room. Building A was staffed by a fairly officious young one who, at first, refused to let anyone in before 10 a.m. However, after a number of people had pointed out that as items started at 10 a.m. the doors *had* to open earlier she finally gave in and allowed us entry.

The first item was "Why Do People Write For Fanzines" and the room was empty when I arrived; things evened up a bit when Berni Phillips arrived as an audience and we exchanged fanzines. (I later read Berni's fanzine with an increasing feeling of *déjà vu*, as she got married, lost her job....)

By 10 a.m. my fellow panellists had arrived and we elected Lenny as moderator (him being the Elder Statesman amongst us) and, again, we started out with a small audience which gradually grew. Considering the ungodly hour it was a fairly lively and interesting item. Lenny tried to wind it up after an hour but it just kept going until, at 11:15 a.m., I realized I had to go if I was to make it to my next item at 11:30. So I finally interrupted and announced my departure and left in style, dishing out copies of the Trip report to the audience.

Having chain smoked from Building A to Building C, I met up with Perry and Spike outside and we briefly discussed the arrangements for the

“Fan Funds” panel, deciding that Len Moffatt would make the best moderator. When we wandered into the programme room, a techie informed us that the item was going to be taped for sale to attendees later and gave us strict instructions about always talking clearly into the mikes.

Along with Perry, Len and June Moffatt and myself we had John Foyster on the panel – who had just completed his GUFF report (slightly late – he’d been the first Aussie GUFF winner). Unfortunately we didn’t have an audience – there was Spike, Roger and Pat Sims and Marty Cantor; which meant that virtually everyone in the room was a fan fund winner. A few minutes into the item an emissary arrived from the item down the corridor, “Roscoe & Ghu Want You: Preservation of Fannish History”, asking if we wanted to join them – they had an audience. However, as we were being taped Spike ruled that they should join us, which they did a few minutes later bringing their audience with them.

The item really picked up speed now with the other panellists: Dick Lynch, Bruce Pelz, Leah Zeldes Smith and John Trimble taking up their positions in the front row and grabbing a mike when they wanted to contribute. It was a really enjoyable and informative hour and a bit – and best of all I didn’t have to say much! (I really fancied a copy of the tape of this but I couldn’t find it on the list of available tapes and every time I tried to get to the audio tapes sales desk, to check whether or not it was available, the queue was a mile long and barely moving.)

After this I headed back to our room to collect Helena and we popped down to the Lounge Bar for lunch. Helena was feeling fairly rough, the after effects of the peppered red snapper, so she had the relatively light fruit and cheese platter while I got stuck into the Turkey Tortilla. Two enormous tortillas stuffed with turkey, mozzarella, muenster, tomato, onion, alfalfa sprouts, romaine lettuce with a catradish sauce – really tasty.

After this we had just enough time to dash back to the room and update the list of fanzines etc for auction, carefully pack the box so I could find everything easily and then lumber over to the Convention Center for the Fan Fund Auction at 4 p.m.

When we arrived the “Ask Ms Manners, SF Fan” item was still running, discussing “questions of fannish etiquette”. As the item used all of its potential 90 minutes it was gone 4 p.m. before we could start trying to set up. Obviously the panel hadn’t dealt with details of getting out of the way of fellow programme participants because the remaining audience dawdled in

the aisle, which meant I had to fight my way through with the box and bags of auction material and then try and set up the material whilst tripping over groups of gossiping fans. Ask Ms Manners indeed.

It was therefore around 4:15 p.m. before we were ready to start the auction. A techie guy started to give us the general spiel about talking into mikes etc because they were taping this item to sell, but I interrupted him and pointed out there was unlikely to be much demand for an audio tape of an auction. He agreed and went away to check, I don't know if they taped it or not, but it was on the sales/order sheet.

Given my paranoid fear of public speaking, Andy Hooper had kindly agreed to front the TAFF part of the joint auction with DUFF. Perry, being a "proper" fan fund winner, was doing his own auctioning, while I sorted out items and filled Andy in on the background of each of the TAFF items. Helena was keeping track of what was sold so that we could keep updating the "stocklist". Spike kept tabs on the tabs and Christina Lake, Roger and Pat Sims did the "running".

I won't go into vast amounts of detail about the auction, it was a pretty hard slog again, with both Andy and Perry doing an amazingly good job. It took a good half hour before the audience both grew to a halfway reasonable size and warmed up enough to part with their cash. At most we had around 30 people, of which the following parted with cash and receive warranted praise and thanks: Allen Baum, Richard Brandt, Marty Cantor, Kokie Cavin, Sandy Cohen, Doug Faunt, Mike Ford, Aileen Forman, John Foyster, Don Franson, Andrew P. Hooper, Robert Lichtman, Hope Leibowitz, Frank Lunney, Len & June Moffat, Janice Murray, Greg Parmentier, Spike Parsons, Alan Rosenthal, Joyce Scrivner, Roger Sims, Nick S., Art Widner, Paul Williams and Martin Wooster.

The biggest surprises of the auction, for me, was the lack of interest in the "hot" items such as the stained glass panel of an astronaut made by Bob Shaw and the full-colour painting by Arthur (Atom) Thomson. Admittedly we felt obliged to warn people that I had been instructed by Steve and Ann Green to bid up to \$300 on their behalf for the stained glass, but we only had a measly \$50 reserve price on the Atom painting – the nearest we got to a bid for that was someone saying they'd go \$35! (The sale of these and other items weren't helped by snide remarks from Moshe Feder, who turned up half way through the auction, declared he had no cash to spend, and proceeded to dispute the authenticity of both the BoSh stained glass and the

Atom picture. Given that Dave Langford, who had donated the stained glass, had supplied a letter of authenticity; Ann Green had bid against Dave Langford when he originally bought it from Bob Shaw and was \$300 certain of its authenticity; Moshe's behaviour seemed mean spirited at best.)

Other surprises included the copy of *Hyphen* #26 (with a BoSh cover) going for just \$20, while a set of Farber Day postcards and minizines fetched \$35.00. Don West will be sick to learn that my copy of *Fanzines in Theory and Practice*, which I paid him a tenner for in 1984 went for \$50.00 (of which he will see not a cent – unless he runs for TAFF!). Less surprisingly the hand-coloured D. West print of Borges went for \$100. The Cuban condom, manufactured in China and donated by Irish fan Tommy Ferguson (who has since moved to Canada) fetched just \$1 (but generated the line from Richard Brandt that such items as condoms would probably sell better as a “package deal”). A hot bidding war between Paul Williams and Frank Lunney saw several Lake/Edwards fanzines fetching \$30 for selected *TNHs* and \$26 for a set of the four *Capricians*. *Lip* #1-6 went for \$23, *Prevert* #5-15 for \$20, *Lagoon* #1-7 for \$22, *Nutz* #1-7 for \$21, a set of *Still It Moves* for \$16. But the complete set of *Empties* #1-17, which Arnie Katz wouldn't let me accept \$35 for in Vegas, went for a measly and downright insulting \$10! (Though I'm glad they went to a good home – Don Franson bought them and proceeded to start reading right there and then.) Mr Katz – you owe TAFF \$25!

At the end of the item things hadn't gone too badly. Perry raised \$376 for DUFF with a selection of DUFF beer, furry animal toys and t-shirts and Andy raised \$590 for TAFF, with \$21 to “another fund” via Perry.

Unfortunately, having started with one and half boxes of fanzines to auction for TAFF, I finished with the same amount. Ray Capella had mailed two box-fulls to the con and Dan Steffan had sent another box-full. Sheesh, doesn't this luggage ever get any lighter?

With the auction out of the way the only thing left to worry about for Perry and myself was the Hugo Award ceremony on Sunday night. Both of us were down to present two awards each and if *Attitude* or *Ansible* won best fanzine I had to collect on behalf of the editors. Going up on stage in front of several thousand people is not my idea of a good time and Perry (who is actually a pretty good and amusing public speaker) was only slightly less nervous.

The “fun” was yet to come!



“Hey... YOU!!”

Part Five: Brainhammer

We lugged the remaining boxes of TAFF auction material from room CC-C1, in the depths of the Anaheim Convention Center, to our room in the Marriott (which in this heat felt like several miles away). By the time we'd popped back to Kinko's to collect the *Empties* #17s to distribute we just had time to shower and change clothes before the next fan programme item. Eating would have to wait. Fortunately, it wasn't one I was taking part in but it was one that neither Helena nor I wanted to miss: it being the premiere of Andy Hooper's latest fannish "radio" drama, *Fanotchka* at 8:30 p.m.

I knew the original story best in the form of the Fred Astaire/Cyd Charisse musical *Silk Stockings* (1957) rather than the earlier, non-musical, *Ninotchka* starring Greta Garbo; unfortunately Andy had opted for the non-musical version – such a shame. I'm sure multi-talented globetrotter Christina Lake could've easily equalled, if not surpassed, Cyd's dance numbers. Helena and I arrived as they were still setting up, but things were quickly under way with some mikes borrowed from the filk singers down the corridor. In addition to Andy himself and Christina, the play featured a stalwart cast of fans: Neil Rest, Ken and Aileen Forman, Paul Williams, Cindy Lee Berryhill and Jack Heneghan. Andy's version told the story of a young regional convention runner who falls afoul of a big city club full of fanzine hacks and how they learn to find room for one another in fandom. The cast performed beautifully and the story gripped the audience until the end – as you can tell by the fact that despite not having eaten for nearly ten hours Helena and I stuck it out all the way through the end. Then we dashed out with Perry Middlemiss, Spike Parsons, John Foyster and Mike Ford with the intention of trying the Malaysian restaurant that everyone had been raving about.

The Malaysian restaurant which, we discovered as we arrived on its doorstep at 10:05 p.m., closed at 10 p.m. on Saturday nights.

We ate instead in a perfectly reasonable "Denny's-style" place called Tilly's. Which, eventually, found something on their extensive menu that Mike Ford could eat. Everyone commiserated with Perry on Australia winning the bid for the 1999 Worldcon, and nodded knowingly as he claimed that he was just the Treasurer and he really wouldn't be taking on too many

commitments.... Replete at last, we drifted back to the Hilton to wander around the party floor for a while before crashing out.

Sunday morning dawned a little later than usual for us as I didn't have any programme bits to do until the dreaded Hugo Awards Ceremony at 8 p.m. So we took it easy, had a decent-sized breakfast via room service and then Helena went down to the pool for a swim and sun bathe while I sorted out the remaining auction material, updated the auction list and packed the TAFF stuff as best I could. I'd still have to sort out the TAFF sales table stuff with Don Fitch on Monday and track Andy Richards down to see if he'd unloaded the Conspiracy books but, I figured, if I could just get through the Hugos the worst would be over!

I had hoped to make it over to the Fan Lounge for the DUFF Party which was on from noon until 2 p.m., but by the time I'd finished writing Part 3 of *Have Bag, Will Travel* it didn't seem worthwhile. So I opted instead for relaxing with Helena in the Marriott bar where we smoked and chatted with various people and I desperately tried to forget how soon I'd have to get on stage for the Hugos. After a fairly hefty late lunch (which the condemned man ate heartily), Helena wandered back to the pool to see if she could find a spare sun lounger and I popped over to the Fan Lounge for the end of the James White Book Party and distribute more copies of *Empties* #17.

I couldn't find Roxanne Smith-Graham but after a few of the excellent speciality beers that Geri Sullivan and Don Fitch had laid on in the Fan Lounge, even the prospect of talking to thousands of people without the aid of nicotine began to seem bearable – but I knew I'd sober up before 8 p.m....

Hell Hole

After a quick shower I changed into my wedding suit (relieved that it still fitted me five months on) and Helena and I wandered over to the Arena (an ominous but appropriate name for the Hugo venue) to find out where we were supposed to be. Eventually we found ourselves in a large waiting room with all the various Hugo nominees and the other presenters. We sat down at a table with a smart-looking chap with a tidy beard and neatly combed hair – who turned out to be an unrecognisable Perry Middlemiss. Helena called Andy Hooper over to join us because he looked merely nervous and she hoped he might calm Perry and me down before we made a break for it back to the bar.

I presume someone must have announced something or other because everyone started drifting towards a set of doors at the far end of the room. So like sheep to the slaughter we dutifully followed everyone else. We were led through a maze of corridors (well, it felt like a maze to me, but I was petrified by now) and told to sit in the first few rows. To make it even easier for Perry and me to get up and do our bits we opted for seats near the aisle, but numerous late arrivals forced us further and further towards the centre and then a couple with a toddler took the aisle seat.... Perry suggested that it would be a good idea to make a move for the aisle as the presenter before us began their spiel – I gabbled back at him that that made sense, which was more than I did by now. My hands were sweating, and I was already regretting the light suit I was wearing as I smeared the sweat down the back of my trouser legs for the “nth” time. By now, it had been well over an hour since my last cigarette and nearly two since I’d had a drink, so I was gasping for both. Still, I thought, it shouldn’t be long now – Perry was scheduled to be fifth up with his presentation of the Fanzine Hugo and I was seventh to present the Fan Writer and Fan Artist. Then we could make a break out of the back door and get a drink.

Connie Willis was Toastmistress and she was quite good, not overly intrusive and she kept things moving along at a reasonable pace. First up was Marjii Eilers presenting the First Fandom Hall of Fame to Erle Melvin Korshak and Frank K. Kelly; then Forry Ackerman presented the Big Heart Award to Dick Daniels. Next came the Seiun Awards, the Japanese National Awards presented by Masamichi Osako and Fan Guests of Honour Takumi and Sachiko Shibano. This presentation was really funny – at least the Japanese presenters seemed to think so but neither Helena nor I (nor most of the audience) could work out why. Anyway the awards went to *The Fall of Hyperion* by Dan Simmons and *Timelike Infinity* by Stephen Baxter for novels and “Robot Visions” by Isaac Asimov for short story. Next up was Stanley Schmidt to present the John W. Campbell (not a Hugo) Award for best new sf writer to David Feintuch, then Perry would be on.

Unfortunately, everything was taking a lot longer than I’d expected because they were slotting in Hugo anecdotes and bits on the history of the Hugos between each item. So by the time Perry had taken the stage I was a gibbering mess of alcohol and nicotine withdrawal. Perry, of course, was fine the moment he reached the mike. He chatted, cracked a joke or two (which I’m sure you’ll be able to read in his DUFF report any day now) and then he

announced that *Ansible* had won the Fanzine Hugo – which meant I had to go up and accept on Dave Langford’s behalf.



“I’m delighted to accept this Dave on behalf of Hugo Langford!”

It was a very long walk down the four or so rows to the vast expanse in front of the stage. An expanse which was cunningly criss-crossed with cables and wires for the various tv cameras and mountains of PA equipment and to trip unsuspecting presenters on their way to the stage. Somehow I managed to get

across to, and up on to, the stage without falling flat on my face and there was that evil Australian grin leering at me, as he passed me the enormous Hugo set in its even more enormous moonscape set in an old film reel, knowing I was going to dry up....

Fortunately the wonderful Mr Langford had supplied me with a brief acceptance speech, just in case, so I reeled it off trying to speak to the mike and not rush through it or slur the punchline:

“Hi, I’m Martin Tudor and I’m very pleased to accept the Fanzine Hugo on behalf of Dave Langford for *Ansible*. Dave sends his thanks to everyone who voted and everyone who distributes *Ansible*, especially Janice Murray, Naveed Khan, Alan Stewart and some guy called Martin Tudor. (That bastard Langford, embarrassing me in public again.)

“*Ansible*’s weird distribution system now reaches so far that microscopic copies have been found in a meteorite from Mars, containing jokes over sixteen million years old.

“Thanks again!”

Whew, I survived that bit. Just one more stint to do before I escaped. Then one of the ushers led me to one side and told me I should stay close to the stage not only for my presentation but afterwards for the photo opportunity. Aarghh, Langford I kill you deadly.

Kelly Freas announced that Bob Eggleton had won the Best Professional Artist and then I was on again. First up was the Fan Writer, which Martin Hoare collected for Langford. Then I had the great pleasure of presenting Bill Rotsler with his second Fan Artist Hugo of the weekend – he’d collected his Retro Hugo on Friday night. Rotsler was almost totally choked up at this, but managed to blink back the tears and graciously accept it. Then we wandered off to the side of the stage to wait for the photo call.

Fortunately the next few presentations sped past swiftly with Gardner Dozois picking up the Professional Editor, Dramatic Presentation going to *Babylon 5*’s “The Coming of Shadows”, Maureen F. McHugh getting the Short Story for “The Lincoln Train”, James Patrick Kelly the Novelette for “Think Like a Dinosaur” and Allen Steele the award for Novella for “The Death of Captain Future”. Then the entire ceremony ground to a halt as Neal Stephenson accepted the award for Best Novel for his *The Diamond Age*. I’m sure it wasn’t just my desperate need for nicotine and/or alcohol that made it

appear as though this speech lasted for hours. It did. Well, five minutes at least.

Eventually Connie wound up the show, announced that a special award for best utter disregard of science would go to The O.J. Simpson Jury, and then the photographers poured forward and several thousand shots were taken. It was worse than the photo shoot at my wedding, lasting forever when I was gasping for a drag. Finally it was over. With the group shots out of the way I took my chance and fled, trampling to death probably only one or two people on my way to the doors.

Once outside we regrouped and headed off to the parties on the fifth floor of the Hilton, first stopping off at the Marriott to grab my bag, dump the Hugo and pack some beers in my bag. We popped in on the Second Occasional Lone Star Con and Chilli Cook-Off in honour of the Hugo Nominees, the Hawaii 2000 Westercon and a few other parties but finished up outside Australia in 1999 again. It was strange to bump into the likes of Chris O'Shea and Henry Balen – I hadn't even realized they were at the con, but with over 6,500 actually attending that's not surprising.

We were relieved when Mike Ford agreed to take Langford's Hugo back with him as we didn't fancy carrying it on and off planes for the rest of the trip through San Francisco, Seattle and Washington DC – especially given the current state of play with the US threatening Iraq and terrorists threatening the US. ("Is that a rocket in your bag, or have you just collected a Hugo?") We arranged to see him in the Marriott bar Monday lunch time to pass it over.

Spike Parsons wandered over to join us and discovered she had a rebellion on her hands – neither Andy Hooper nor Christina Lake wanted to get up at 10 a.m. to take part in "Wild Wild D. West". With half her panel gone, Spike admitted defeat and went off to tell the other two panellists, Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, it was off. Before she left, she confirmed the time of our ride to San Francisco with Brad Lyau – early on Monday. Damn. There was no way we would be able to finish sorting things out in time – I still had to total up and break down the TAFF sales table stuff and get the Hugo to Mike Ford. Regretfully we told Spike we couldn't accept the ride and asked her to thank Brad for us. Instead we decided to fly with Perry, who was also heading off to San Francisco to stay with Tom Becker and Spike. He'd found an 11 a.m. flight on Tuesday with South West Airlines, which cost just \$79 per head. Perry agreed to book it for us and so, with the

transport of the Hugo sorted and the next leg of our trip arranged, and the comforting thought that there were no more programme items for me to do, we settled down to drink and relax. So we sat around chatting and drinking with various fans until at 5 a.m. it was just Helena, Andy Hooper and myself.

Monday morning started even later than Sunday. For some reason both of us were moving in slow motion, but eventually we made it downstairs for lunch in the hotel's brasserie. We had a drink by the pool as I started work on Part 4 of this report. Then Mike Ford turned up and announced he'd changed his mind. Having sorted through his luggage, he realized he wouldn't be able to manage the Hugo. Oh shit.

So, while Helena settled down to sunbathe, I shot off to the Hilton to see if I could find anyone who could take it for us. I failed. Then it was time for me to get over to the Dealers Room to see Andy Richards about the Conspiracy Books. Although he'd only sold one of them he was happy to buy the others off me – at least that was something less to carry back. I doubled back to the Fan Lounge and totalled up the TAFF sales stuff. When I tracked down Don Fitch I gave him the breakdown and he revealed another box of fanzines which had been donated. I asked if he could arrange for the rest of the material to go to Corflu. He agreed – no more to carry. Phew. After asking around, people suggested various names of people who might be able to transport the Hugo, I made notes of their names and decided to track them down later.

By now time was getting on, so I carried the remaining sales stuff back to the Marriott and had a much needed shower. After I'd changed, as there was no sign of Helena, I carried on working on *Have Bag*. A little later Helena returned. She was barely recognisable. Apparently, despite carefully turning herself every 15 minutes or so and swimming in the shade occasionally to cool off and avoid sunstroke, at some point she had dozed off lying on her back on the sun lounger. She eventually woke feeling rather chilly because the sun had gone down. But my surprise at her reddish brown face, arms and legs turned to horror when she undressed to take a shower and I could see the violent contrast of stark white where the bikini had been, compared to the deep, red-brown exposed parts.

When Helena had recovered a bit we went to the hotel's brasserie for dinner, and then stopped off in the Marriott bar for a drink. We were in time to watch the news of the arrest of an alleged terrorist and the announcement of increased security at airports. Great, we still had three internal flights and

an international flight left. Anyone want a large metal rocket?

When we wandered over to the Fan Lounge in the Hilton we discovered that everything was more or less closed. The Fan Lounge had been ousted from the Fan Lounge Room, Don Fitch had gone to bed, but Geri, Christina etc had “hijacked” the filkers area and were attempting to finish the left-over beers. It seemed only fair to help. Helena tried perching on my lap but discovered it was too painful and she had to stand instead. So we took a slow walk around the party floors as I tried to find someone to take the damn Hugo – no luck.

Eventually I had to admit that all the days of running around had taken their toll and I was going to have to crash early. After I’d collapsed in bed, Helena remained awake puzzling over how to pack the Hugo. The main problem was the size of the box – our bags weren’t big enough to take it. So Helena removed it from the box and carefully wrapped it in our laundry – which cushioned all the delicate bits on the base wonderfully. Sorry, Dave – but your Hugo has worn my dirty underpants, lese-majeste indeed.

After an early morning alarm call on Tuesday and a hurried room service breakfast we met Perry outside the Hilton for the shuttle bus to LAX. At the baggage check-in we had no trouble with the bag containing the Hugo, but the attendant balked at the bag containing the fanzines. Eventually he let it through. For a change there was no problem with the laptop – even though it could well have been the radio control pad for the Hugo-shaped missile! But as usual they were very concerned about the cameras. Both Helena and Perry had to present their unwrapped cameras for careful inspection. A middle-aged American woman complained vociferously about having to unpack hers and was told by the attendant that it was for her own safety. He explained that the last air disaster had been caused by a bomb concealed in a camera.

Once through check-in Helena discovered that LAX contained the only smelly, shabby toilets we had encountered so far in the US, while I bought some Starbuck coffees and Perry bought an enormous newspaper. Next stop San Francisco.

Part Six: (Listen to the) Flower People

We arrived at San Jose Airport in San Francisco just before 1 p.m. on Tuesday 3rd September after a flight of just one and a half hours and, having collected our luggage without incident, Helena and I went outside to look for Spike and to have a quick smoke. By the time we returned to Perry he had been found by Spike and off we set. First stop was Spike and Tom's house in Mountain View to drop off our luggage. As he was arriving and departing San Francisco on the same flights as us, Perry had decided to stay at Spike's as well. This simplified the transport arrangements and saved time all round – vital as we were leaving San Francisco for Seattle on Thursday morning.

After a quick coffee (and a couple of cigarettes), Spike zipped us up to Redwood Grove, grabbing some sandwiches en route. Having suitably impressed us with the splendours of the Redwoods, Spike drove us down the coast road through yet more beautiful scenery. We stopped off at a tacky gift shop in Davenport where I picked up various little treasures for UK TAFF auctions, such as the Blessed Mary frilly fridge magnet and a wonderful book of folk sayings from Mexico. After posing for pictures outside the cute Davenport Jail, we piled back into the car and managed to make it to the Tied House Brew Pub just as the others started to arrive.

After a brief contretemps with the waiter over the table booking we settled down to sample the beers and eat. Spike, Perry, Helena and I were joined by Tom Becker, Allen Baum, Donya White, Brad Lyau (finally we met), Bill Humphries (who'd sent me my first ever e-mail of comment on the earlier chapters of *Have Bag, Will Travel*), Julie Humphries, Rich & Linda McAllister, Mike Ward and Karen Schaffer.

Being deaf in my right ear is always a pain at times such as this, and now was no exception. I tried to sit myself at the end of the table so that my good ear was pointed towards the group, but Donya wanted me towards the middle so she could have Helena next to her and talk to me. Eventually I ended up sitting with the back of my head to Donya and the rest of the group for most of the evening as I had to turn almost completely around to hold an interesting conversation with Karen, who was sitting on my right. Still it was

a good evening with good food and some fascinating beers and lots of interesting conversation about, of all things, Henry Purcell and Jane Austen.

Back at Spike and Tom's I had a beer or two while everyone else sampled Perry's duty free, and Tom designed a nifty layout for Part 3 of the trip report. We then had an earlyish night as Mr Becker was threatening to get us up at 7:30 a.m. for his lightning tour of San Francisco.

Wednesday actually saw us rise at a far more civilized hour of 9 a.m. We met Brad for breakfast at 9:30 a.m. in a neat cafe/restaurant called, I think, Mini's. After a hefty meal and several gallons of coffee we set off to San Francisco proper for the lightning tour. Brad gave us his condolences and hoped we'd survive Tom's route march. As we headed down the freeway Tom was pleased to realize that with four of us in his car he could use the special lane for car-sharers – we made the trip in record time. It's a neat idea, speeding past all those car hogs with one person in each – wish they'd introduce it over here, although I doubt it would be anymore successful than the bus only lanes we already have – which are constantly jammed with cars.

Tom Becker is a walking encyclopaedia of trivia about San Francisco, and a great (if a little single-minded!) tour guide, San Francisco's answer to Rob Hansen. In no particular order: We went up Coit's Tower (which looks like the nozzle of a fire hose and was donated to the city by philanthropist Lillie Hitchcock Coit because of her admiration for the firemen who fought the 1906 earthquake fire); Fort Point at the base of the southern support of the Golden Gate bridge; had tea in the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park; the Exploratorium museum of Science, Art and Human Perception – full of wonderful “hands-on” exhibits (Helena was proud of her tone memory “score” she guessed at 142 when the actual pitch was 143); Peets Coffee shop; Kinko's to get Part Three printed; Nob Hill; City Lights Book Shop, the first paperback book shop in the country and former hang out of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac (where we managed to pick up a copy of the Jane Austen short story collection *Catherine and Other Writings* which features her amusing “The History of England” which we'd been talking about the night before). At this point both Perry and myself mutinied and dragged Tom and Helena into a bohemian looking bar for a couple of cold beers. I was amused by the sign in a shop window warning “This is an unreinforced masonry building. Unreinforced masonry buildings may be unsafe in the event of a major earthquake.” Tom reassured us by explaining that: “Earthquakes don't kill people – just poorly engineered structures!” After the

beers we just had time to collect the *Have Bags* from Kinko's and head off to the restaurant to meet the second San Francisco crowd! On the walk from the car to the restaurant we passed a couple of interesting bars – I especially liked the notice outside one “Beer: so much more than a breakfast drink”.

Tommy's Mexican restaurant was our first, and only to date, experience of Yucatan cuisine. I was impressed, but Helena wasn't – still it was the only food she didn't enjoy in the trip. The company was great, though: Tom, Perry, Helena and I were joined by Spike, Rich Coad, Terry Floyd, Art Widner and his friend Shirley, and David Bratman. It was a lively evening made perfect by Rich Coad agreeing to take the damn Hugo to London for us! A true hero of the people that man!

On the way “home” Spike popped into a supermarket to grab some food for breakfast – our first experience of late-night shopping in the US. Incredible places US supermarkets, British supermarkets still have a long way to go before they match the range of goods or low prices of the States!

Thursday was an early start made a lot easier by the lovely breakfast Spike prepared: scrambled eggs, sausages, mushrooms etc. The luggage seemed infinitely lighter without the Hugo which Spike took off our hands, to pass over to Rich Coad, before dropping us off at the airport.

This was where we discovered the lousy queue karma of our Australian shadow: we almost missed our flight because of the nasty old woman in front of Perry taking forever to check in for her flight – five hours early! When we eventually boarded, the flight was enlivened by a loud obnoxious drunk, who insisted on going to the toilet as the plane took off and wandering up and down the aisles while the seat-belt warnings were on.

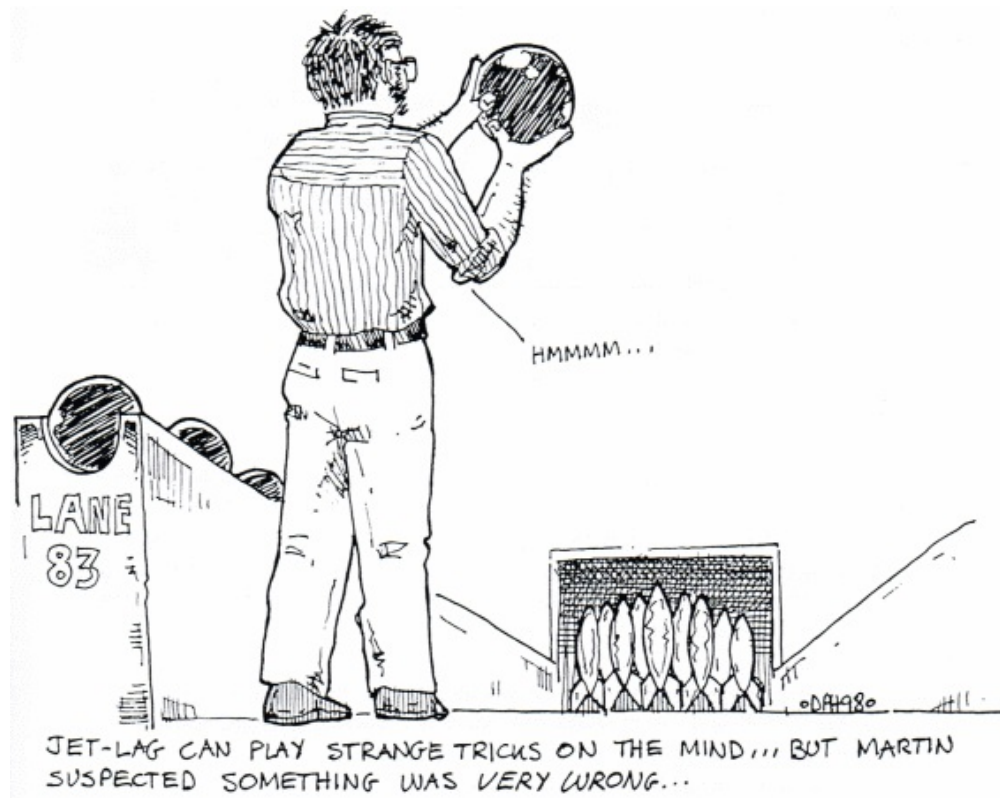
Shark Sandwich

John D. Berry met us at Sea-Tac Airport (Seattle-Tacoma) and dropped Helena and myself off at Vonda McIntyre's house where we would be staying. (Perry was staying with John.) Jane Hawkins, who lived in the basement of the house, welcomed us, showed us around and explained the household drill and Luke McGuff popped over to say hello and draw us a sketch map of the area.

They outlined the plans for the evening – Jane was going to fetch some take-away Sushi and then we were all going to go Ten-Pin Bowling – sounded good. Once we'd unpacked, Helena and I took a wander along 45th

Street checking out the shops and bars. Luke had mentioned a bar called Murphy's so we popped in there and discovered that they did Seven Sisters Pear Cider, which Helena enjoyed, and several interesting beers: Widmer Hefeweizen, Hales IPA and Alaskan Amber Ale were the best I tried. So we settled down while Helena jotted down notes on San Francisco and I continued working on Part 4.

The Sushi was delightful, we met Vonda who was charming and then we headed off to bowl. We were joined by Steve Schwartz, Andy Hooper and others, it was fun. I hadn't been bowling since I was eleven years old but I still won a game! What do you mean fluke? On the way home Luke and Jane took us to see the Fremont Troll – an enormous concrete sculpture which lurks under the bridge and has, amongst other things, a VW Beetle stuck in it. We clambered over it and took pictures, unfortunately the lighting was too dim so they failed to come out clearly enough to reproduce.



Jet-lag can play strange tricks on the mind... but Martin suspected something was VERY WRONG....

After a wonderful breakfast at Nikolos, we spent Friday shopping for gifts, souvenirs and more junk for the British TAFF auctions and had lunch in

Murphy's. I wrote up more of the trip report and posted the copies of Part 3 that I'd had printed in San Francisco. Andy Hooper and Carrie Root had a barbecue planned at their place for the evening – which was great fun. Steve Schwartz introduced me to lots of interesting local beers – Seattle has a multitude of small breweries. And we finally met the infamous Victor Gonzalez and the delightful Lesley Reece. Victor came across like a better-dressed, more intense, version of Steve Green, and Lesley was just as cool as I'd expected.

We met up with Andy on Saturday, had a few drinks and discussed potential TAFF candidates from North America. Then Helena and I decided to do some touristy things down in Pioneer Square. My brother had been to Seattle the previous year and had raved about the Underground Tour, so we headed for that. We should have known better than to take the advice of an accountant on entertainment – what a waste of time. If it hadn't have been for the tour guide cracking bad jokes it might have been interesting – as you go down a storey and explore the old street level of the original Seattle from before the great fire of 1889. The poor drainage at the old, lower level made the higher streets imperative. We should have saved our money and had a few drinks in Doc Maynard's Public House instead. Still the afternoon wasn't completely wasted as we bought lots of interesting gifts in Pioneer Square.

We got back to Vonda's as people started to arrive for the Vanguard meeting. This is an impressive affair, I lost count of the people who were there, 60+ at least. It divides up into smokers in the basement and non-smokers upstairs, so Helena and I were nipping up and down all night trying to mix with both crowds. Andy was determined to sell off as much of the remaining auction stuff as possible – and to raise more money at the Vanguard auction than was raised at the Toner auction! He did.

It was a really impressive display of showmanship – the guy can really perform! Everything from drinking a can of DUFF beer for \$10 to haranguing defenceless Seattleites into buying not one but two hardcover copies of the, not so rare, Langford-autographed *War in 2080*. He raised a total of \$294.05!

The auction was disrupted at one point by a foul smell, with everyone sidling discretely away from their neighbours, and people without shoes being viewed with extra suspicion. It took about 20 minutes to identify and eject the foul-smelling culprit – a chunk of Swiss Chard cheese!

Helena was delighted to discover that Lesley Reece was into early music

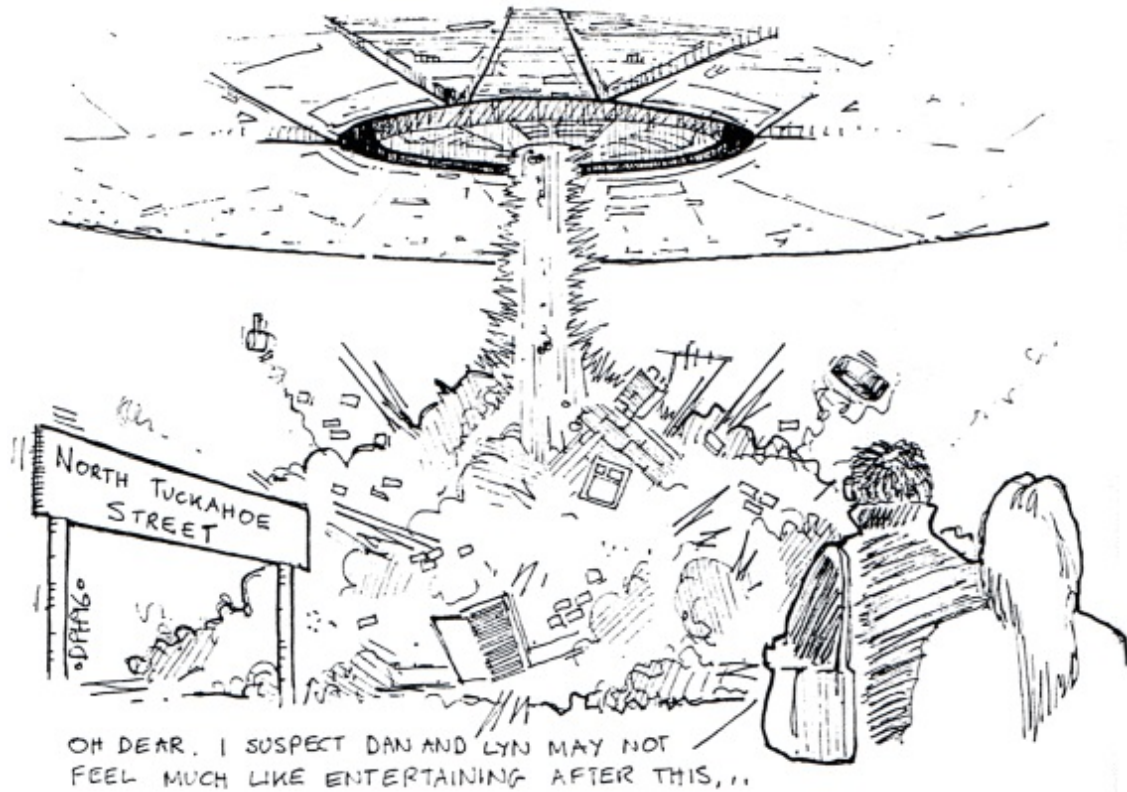
and I was delighted when Steve Schwartz suggested a beer run to the local Safeway – where we picked up our most useful purchase of the trip: a Safeway canvas shopping bag to carry the beer in! Helena stocked up on rare (in the UK) brands of shampoos and conditioners and we headed back to the party.

I was relieved to discover that Sunday's planned mountain walk was called off because most of Seattle had come down with cold/flu. So instead we wandered down to Archie McPhee's and spent far too much on rubbish.

We doubled back to Murphy's via a pharmacy as Helena wanted to pick up a pregnancy testing kit. At Murphy's I finally finished Part 4 while Helena checked the kit. It was positive! That explained why she'd been feeling so washed out for the last week or two. We decided that we'd better keep it secret until we'd had a chance to call our respective mothers with the news. In these days of swift communication via e-mail it would be too easy for someone to hear about it in Birmingham and congratulate my Mum before she'd heard from us!

So we headed back to Vonda's to meet up with the crowd to go eat, both of us bursting to tell the news. We all headed out to Ivar's Indian Salmon House, a replica of an Indian longhouse where salmon and black cod are broiled over a smoky alder fire and served with corn bread. The food was great and the atmosphere amazing. A lovely way to finish our visit in Seattle.

On Monday morning Jane dropped us off at the airport. No Perry this time as our paths finally diverged. As the plane lifted into the air, rising above the clouds, we caught our first view of Mount Rainier – breathtaking! Next stop DC.



“Oh dear. I suspect Dan and Lynn may not feel much like entertaining after this....”

None... None More

We arrived in Washington DC about 9 p.m., both of us were tired and were greatly relieved to spot Dan Steffan and his piece of cardboard. Dan took us home where we chatted with Lynn for a while and then tucked into pizza and beer. Apparently they’d had a telephone call from Nic Farey asking when we were arriving and asking us to get in touch. We called Nic back and, eventually arranged to meet on Thursday, the only night he was available.

On Tuesday the Steffans kindly let us use their phone to call our parents with the news about the baby. Then we went out sight-seeing in DC before meeting up with Lynn at the Capitol City Brewery – which had kindly arranged a beer festival for me. The range was superb: Golden Bay Kolsch, Amber Waves Ale, St Adrian’s, Bull Run Bitter, Nut Brown Ale, Blackout Ale – a wonderful evening.

Wednesday Dan took us over to his local copy shop – Allen’s Copy Center, which was even cheaper than Kinko’s! Kinko’s being a damn sight

cheaper than anywhere I've seen in the UK!

We did some more sightseeing later and were especially impressed by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of Asian Art; but were disappointed by the National Museum of Natural History.

In the evening we were joined at Dan and Lynn's by Ted White, Terry Frost, rich brown, Ben Zuhl and Alexis Gilliland and his wife. Helena discovered a taste for White Zinfandel and I continued to work my way through the surprising number of interesting local brews – so little time and so much to drink.

On Thursday we visited Dan at work and wandered through Old Alexandria, which had recently been flooded. We lunched at the Union Street Tap Room which served big salad, beer bread and lots of interesting bits and pieces. Plus, of course, some wonderful beers such as Dominion Helles, Foggy Bottom Ale and the Union Street Tap Room Ale. Later, having bought my mother a wonderfully tacky shamrock ice cube tray, we popped in to the Virginian Beverage Co. – but didn't really have time to do their range any justice before rushing off to get the train to Nic Farey's.

Nic lives in a picturesque bay-side village in Maryland – and that's about all I can remember. He cooked us some locally caught fish, took us to his in-laws to meet his son and then we went to his local bar where he plied us with vast quantities of booze. We obviously succumbed in a big way because neither of us remember much more until he dropped us back at the station on Friday.

Then it was a mad rush of dashing back to Dan and Lynn's, packing and Lynn giving us a lift to the airport, then the long flight home.

Afterword

On the afternoon of Monday 6th May 1996 I received a phone call from Abigail Frost, who was then the European TAFF Administrator, informing me that I had won the 1996 TAFF race “by a landslide”. She promised she’d be in touch with further details within the next couple of weeks.

Four weeks went by with no further word from Abigail, so I started leaving messages on her answering machine asking what was happening – but I received no reply.

On the 4th of June I wrote to Abigail expressing my concern that she hadn’t been in touch. By now a number of people were complaining that there had not been a full breakdown of the voting in the race, nor a list of the European voters. In my letter I offered to produce a newsletter for Abigail if she sent me the relevant information. I received no response to the letter.

By mid-June I wasn’t alone in my concern about the lack of communication from Abigail. The only information which had appeared concerning the 1996 race was total votes (138 for me, 9 for Simo, 2 for no preference). Nothing else had been heard from Abigail other than the fact that she’d had the ‘flu. Several people, including previous Administrators Dave Langford and Pam Wells and the current North American Administrator Dan Steffan, had also tried contacting Abigail but had received no response.

By the end of June I was leaving messages on Abigail’s machine on a regular basis – to no avail. She didn’t reply to me or to anybody else. On the 20th of June I wrote to her again explaining that unless I received some indication from her about how much money was available for my trip and when I was likely to get it I couldn’t actually plan the trip. (People were chasing me about my itinerary at this stage – asking where in North America Helena and I planned to visit in addition to Anaheim. The last I’d heard, in Abigail’s *TAFF Talk*, the European TAFF fund had £1,933.06, but without confirmation of how much there was to spend on my trip I was obviously loath to commit my wife and myself to any definite plans – we certainly couldn’t afford *two* trips out of our own pockets!) I added that having made some initial enquiries with airlines I’d discovered that as our trip would be taking place during “peak” time seats were in short supply – if we didn’t book (and pay) soon there wouldn’t be a trip!

On Saturday 22nd of June my wife Helena and I were having a drink with some friends in our local the Three Tuns (where, for once, the Landlord Paul Berry hadn't run out of mild) and, of course, the main topic of conversation was our forthcoming TAFF trip. As Abigail still hadn't been in touch we didn't know if there was going to be a trip, so we couldn't relax and didn't have the heart to spend the evening drinking and socializing. We left a door key with Tony Berry who was staying the night with us and went home early. When we got in I called Abigail, again, and once more got her answering machine, then I went upstairs to the bathroom. As I came back downstairs I could hear Helena talking and by the time I was half-way down the stairs I could see she was on the telephone and realized she was talking to Abigail's machine. When Helena came off the 'phone she told me she had pressed "last number re-dial" to call Abigail as she felt that my messages and letters had been "too polite" and she felt that Abigail needed to know, in no uncertain terms, how serious the situation was. She told me that she had informed Abigail that unless we heard immediately what was happening regarding the fund she (Helena) would contact everyone she knew who had voted in the 1996 race, explain the situation and advise them to contact Abigail regarding the voting fees they had paid and which she (Abigail) had yet to pass over. Helena had added that if Abigail didn't get in touch immediately she (Helena) would do her best, along with other concerned parties such as Greg Pickersgill and Pam Wells, to ensure that Abigail could never show her face in fandom again.

The following day, Sunday 23rd of June, I received word from Abigail – via a third party.

Roger Robinson called me around midday that Sunday. He told me that he'd received a phone call from John Clute earlier that day: John had received a phone call from Abigail on Sunday morning asking if he could lend her the money to replace the TAFF money – around £2,600. The best that John could offer, based on the fact that Abigail said she was owed £1,200 for work she'd completed, was to offer to put the air ticket on his credit card. Roger felt that we should try to make the trip anyway and give Abigail time to make good the money – I said I'd see what could be done.

My initial reaction when I came off the phone and spoke to Tony Berry and Helena, who'd heard my side of the conversation, was one of relief – at least we now knew what the situation really was and could decide how to deal with it.

Helena was convinced that we should scrap the trip and Tony was equally positive that it should go ahead – the money could be scratched together somehow. I was torn – I could envisage all sorts of difficulties inherent in trying to raise the cash and make arrangements, but I felt it would cause irreparable damage to TAFF if the trip didn't take place. I wanted to expose Abigail immediately, but felt at the same time she should be given the chance to repay the money if she was able and that if she could repay it this would be the least damaging avenue for TAFF.

I called Greg Pickersgill and Pam Wells (who had offered financial aid from the UFF Auction cash and the Mexican Hat in case of such an eventuality) and Bernie Evans (who had given Roger my 'phone number, under protest) so that she could e-mail Dave Langford and bring him up to date.

Having spoken to Greg and Pam I rang Abigail – this time she answered her 'phone. I told her that if she was willing to repay the money as soon as she was able a number of people had agreed to lend TAFF the cash to finance the trip. All she needed to do was get the voting information to me ASAP so that I could publish a newsletter; we'd sort out her repaying the money once this was done. She agreed.

Over the next week or so Pam, Greg, Dave Langford and I contacted various people and raised enough money to finance the trip through a variety of interest-free loans.

I spoke to Abigail a couple of times reminding her that I needed the voting information – she kept promising to send it but it never arrived. Then I started getting her answering machine again. On the 17th of July I gave up on getting the voting information and went to press with *TAFFlon Tudor #1* (unfortunately the title of the newsletter now had a resonance that had not been intended when it was conceived).

With the arrangements for the trip sorted I tried again to elicit some kind of repayment schedule from Abigail. I called and left several messages to no avail and finally, on the 30th of July, I wrote to Abigail again – giving her an ultimatum that if she didn't contact me immediately I would have no option but to go public with the fact that she had failed to pass over the money. The letter was sent Recorded Delivery on the 30th of July, the Post Office attempted delivery on the 1st of August, Abigail collected the letter from Bethnal Green office on the 2nd of August. I received no response, nor any money from Abigail, until Gary Farber made contact with her in November

1996 and passed over to me, at Novacon 26, the £200 she had given him. Since then I have heard nothing from Abigail, nor do I expect to hear anything, despite the fact that she still owes, by her own admission to Gary Farber, £2,500 to the fund. (That being the £2,700 she admitted stealing minus the £200 she repaid.)

After taking legal advice and soliciting further advice from previous TAFF Administrators I decided not to take legal action against Abigail. Whilst it is probable that we could “win” in court such a victory is unlikely to do anything but cost TAFF money. Abigail, the last I heard, had no money and no job – so there is little or no chance of being able to recoup any more of the stolen money from her. I see no reason in throwing good money after bad and think it best to write the entire sorry episode off to experience.

And Finally...

There was a great deal of controversy in 1996 and since over why these facts were not published before I made my Trip. The reasons I did not reveal this sordid business before the 1996 TAFF trip are:

1. Anyone can make a mistake; through circumstances outside their control anyone might “borrow” from such a fund with every intention of repaying and find they are unable to repay it in time.... I felt Abigail should be given every opportunity to make good on the cash. (However, given that Abigail apparently continued spending every penny of the TAFF money up to and including the voting fees for the 1996 race, and that she has yet to repay a single penny since the £200 she gave to Gary Farber – no sign of the monthly instalments she promised – even my goodwill and patience has been exhausted.)

2. If the 1996 TAFF trip had failed to take place because the Administrator had spent the funds, both I and everyone whose advice I sought agreed, it would’ve caused potentially irreparable damage to this, the oldest fan fund. (I hoped that by making the trip, publishing as much of my report as possible whilst in transit and completing my report comparatively early, and ensuring that there was a 1997 race, to prove TAFF was still strong and viable.)

3. The advice I received from both the previous TAFF Administrators I spoke to (Dave Langford, Greg Pickersgill and

Pam Wells) and the current North American Administrator Dan Steffan, was that if we went on the trip having revealed the situation we would spend our entire trip explaining the situation ad infinitum. (I'm sure they were right. Unfortunately the fact that my wife and I were so concerned about money, and paranoid about the "secret" leaking before we could make an announcement, detracted from our enjoyment anyway.)

However, I do apologize for taking as long as I did to publish the facts after the trip was completed. Having taken advice from a couple of people whilst in the USA, I felt the best course of action was for Dan and myself to jointly release the news when myself and my wife stayed with him and his wife at the end of our trip. Dan, however, felt that working on such a release whilst on the trip was against the spirit of TAFF and that we should concentrate on the sights of Washington DC – this seemed entirely reasonable. So it was agreed that Dan would draft a statement and send it to me after I returned home. This would still enable us to release a joint statement (*TAFFboy meets TAFFlon Tudor*) within a week or so of the end of the trip.

Unfortunately Dan didn't manage to do this until several weeks after my return, then the e-mail file couldn't be read, which delayed it for a further week. I felt that Dan's statement needed some work but unfortunately I didn't get back to him immediately to explain this. By this time I was recovering from a chest infection which had caused me to have nearly two weeks off work (not a good start to a new job – I started the week I returned from the USA) and I was knee deep in hotel negotiations for Novacon 26 and 27 and desperately trying to complete the publications for the former.

Dan decided he had to go to press with his newsletter and I told him I'd be getting mine out as soon as I could – which was at the beginning of November 1996.

Credits

This has been *Have Bag, Will Travel* – Martin Tudor’s 1996 TAFF Trip Report; the first four instalments were written and published during the trip, Part 5 was completed on the 3rd March 1998 for the Intuition Programme Book and the final section was completed 9th April 1998.

Have Bag, Will Travel is available from Martin Tudor. 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX. for £5.00 (or the equivalent of £8.00 outside the UK), inclusive of postage and packing. Sterling cheques/money orders payable to “Martin Tudor”, US dollar cheques/money orders payable to “Ulrika O’Brien”. All proceeds to TAFF.

Have Bag, Will Travel is also available on the World Wide Web, courtesy of Dave Langford, access via <http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/>.

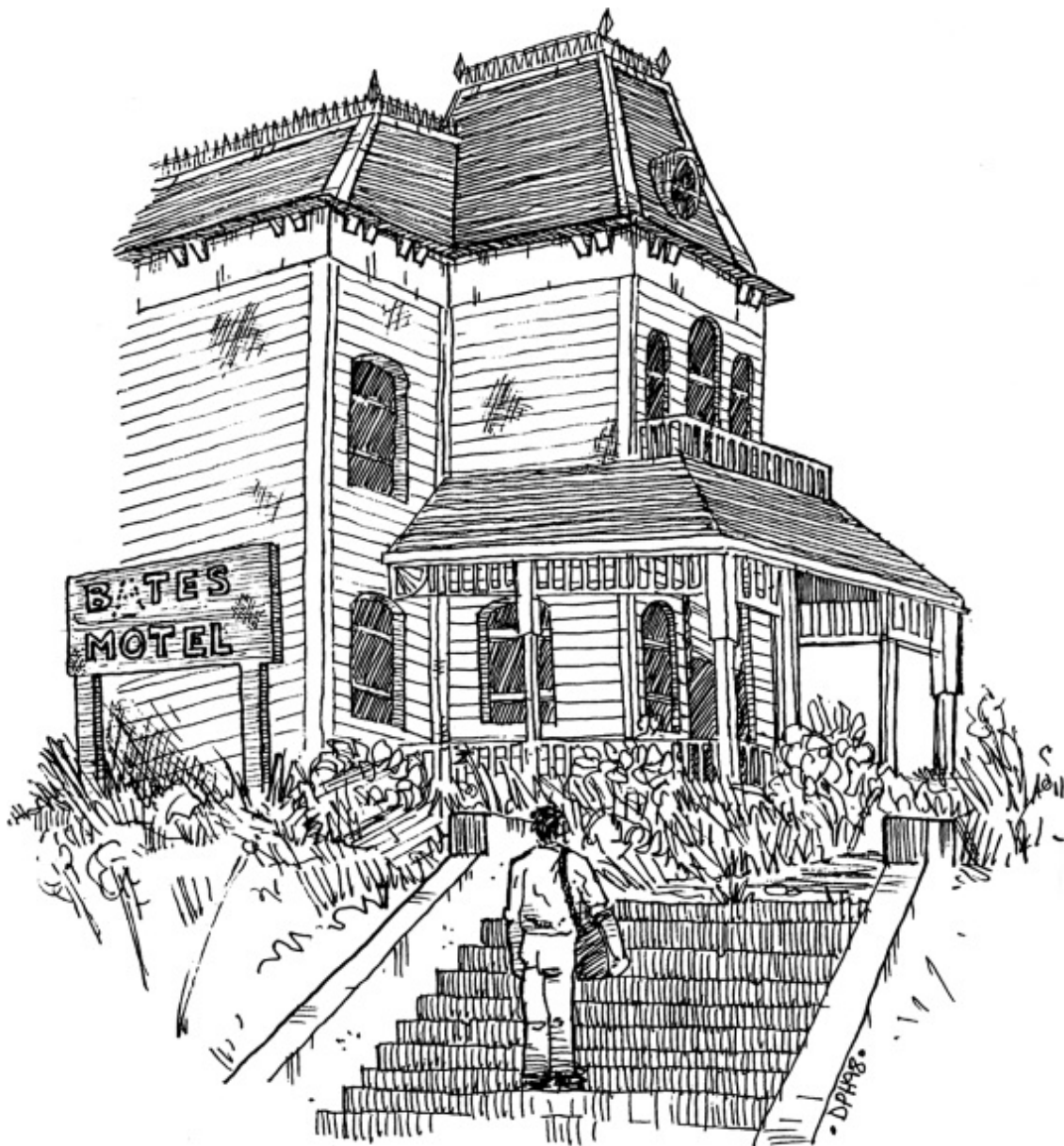
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About TAFF

The Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund was created in 1953 for the purpose of providing funds to bring well-known and popular fans familiar to those on both sides of the ocean across the Atlantic. Since that time TAFF has regularly brought North American fans to European conventions and European fans to North American conventions. TAFF exists solely through the support of fandom. The candidates are voted on by interested fans all over the world, and each vote is accompanied by a donation of not less than \$2 or £1. These votes, and the continued generosity of fandom, are what make TAFF possible. TAFF gratefully accepts your freely-given money and material for auction; such generosity has sustained the Fund for over 40

years. TAFF is fandom's oldest travel fund, and one of its worthiest causes – give early and often! Please contact your nearest administrator for details. Sterling cheques/money orders payable to “Martin Tudor”, US dollar cheques/money orders payable to “Dan Steffan” or “Ulrika O'Brien”.

Currently the North American Administrators are Dan Steffan, 800 S. Ivy Street, Arlington, VA 22204, USA (outgoing) and Ulrika O'Brien, 123 Melody Ln., #C, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, USA (incoming). Ulrika can also be contacted at uaobrien@iici.edu or ulrika@aol.com. The European Administrator is Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX, England (e-mail taffman@empties.demon.co.uk).



The trail of Abi Frost and the missing TAFF money goes cold: “I can’t understand it!” thought Martin.

Ebook Notes

Most contact information in “Credits” and elsewhere is now long superseded, and the suggested TAFF voting donation amounts have risen several times since 1998. See the current TAFF website at taff.org.uk for the latest administrators and voting details.

Many thanks to Martin Tudor for permission to reissue *Have Bag, Will Travel* in ebook form, to Dave Hicks for allowing his cover and selected interior art to be included, and to Bill Burns and Martin Tudor himself for diligent proofreading.

David Langford, March 2023

The End

This free ebook is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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