

THE DRINK TANK PRESENTS



Rockets Across The Waters

Christopher J. Garcia's

2008 TAFF Trip Report

How's it going?

This TAFF Report was largely created on the fly during my trip to the UK as the delegate for the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund between March 14th and March 31st, 2008. The report is really long and features photos from The Lovely and Talented Linda Wenzleburger, Jimmy Jam James Bacon, Dr. Plokta Mike Scott, The Steve that is Max and others. There's also some art from various folks, including Brianna Flynt and Frank Wu, who made the trip out and to whom I owe a ton for making it possible for me to win TAFF and to have such a great time.

The places where this report was created are as strange as the report itself. As far as I can remember, it was written in parts in the SuperShuttle Bus taking me from Sunnyvale to the San Francisco International Airport, the Waiting Area at Gate A8 at SFO, on Virgin Atlantic Flight 20 between SFO and London Heathrow, at Fishlifter Palace on Shirley Road in Croydon in the uppermost bedroom with the Fanzine Library, at PLOKTA Central in Walthamstow in the uppermost bedroom, at the London Science Museum in the area over-looking the Making of the Modern World exhibit, in the Natural Science Museum, in various galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in the cafe at the V&A, at Victoria Station, at the Radisson Edwardian at Heathrow room 3022 and at various spots throughout the convention centre area, at the British Museum largely in the Egyptian and Roman areas, but also in the Clock and Making of the Museum exhibits and in the cafe area, at Westminster Abbey, including in Poet's Corner and on top of the crypt of Henry the VII, at Green Acres In Solihull, at the Radisson Edwardian in the single room whose number I've forgotten, at Heathrow Airport's waiting area at Gate 1, on the train between Solihull and London, in Maryleborn station, on the train between Cardiff and London Paddington Station, in room 3127 of the Radisson Edwardian at Heathrow, at the EAT eating area of the Food Court at Heathrow, at Gate 40 at Terminal 3 in Heathrow, on flight 19 between London and San Francisco in seat 64H and on the World's Most Uncomfortable Couch, located at the foot of my bed in Sunnyvale, CA. It was never proofread, but that should be obvious before too long.

Some of the players in this piece:

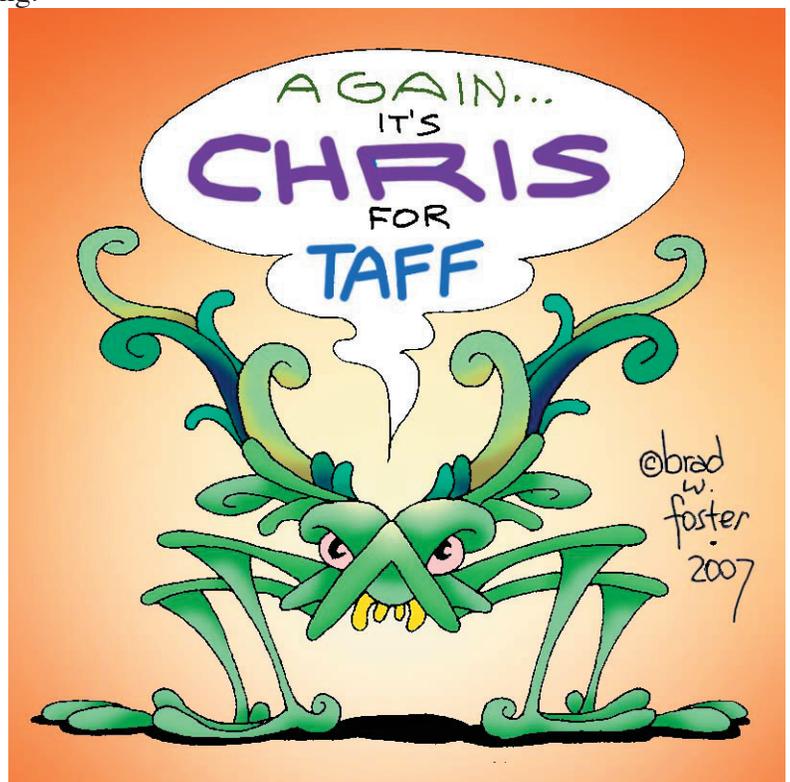
Claire and Mark- Claire Brailey and Mark Plummer, editors of Banana Wings and two incredibly nice people. Mark was one of my TAFF Nominators and they pushed me hard in their pages. They put me up first.

Alison and Steve- Alison Scott and Steve Cain, members of the PLOKTA Cabal and owners of two kids: Marianne and Johnathan.

James- James Bacon, a former TAFF winner, one of my nominators, a big supporter and a mad man.

Linda- The Lovely and Talented Linda Wenzleburger, my delightful girlfriend.

John The Rock Coxon- He's a young dude and a talented and terribly young guy. A good drinker



and a ton of fun.

Niall- Niall Harrison. Sometimes referred to as Tuttlles.

Liz- Liz Batty, a great writer and a major part of the fan programming for Eastercon.

Ben Yalow- American who lives in New York but I always thought was from Boston. You will know him by his bow tie.

Steve and Ann- Steve and Ann Green, a wonderful couple who live in Solihull who I went out and visited.

Stef- Stef Lancaster, a man who there is little to say about that's not worth shouting.

Max- Steve.

Lillian Edwards- Former TAFF winner who I first met at CorFlu in Austin.

Pete Young- A guy I only got to chat with for a few minutes who also edits one of the great zines of the last decade, Zoo Nation.

Bridget- Bug Bradshaw, the former TAFF winner from the UK who also ended up buying an issue of The Drink Tank.

Graham Charnock- a great guy and a brilliant wit.

Ravin' Dave Langford- Former TAFF winner, Multi-dozen Hugo Winner (Including 20 in a row for Best Fan Writer) and a basically all around good guy.

Other TAFF Winners I met or Re-encountered on my trip- Avedon Carol, James Bacon, Lillian Edwards & Christina Lake, Martin Tudor, Peter Weston, Greg Pickersgill, Tobes Valois, Patrick Neilsen-Hayden, Bridget Bradshaw, Rob Hansen, Dave Langford (Also Ang Rosin, winner of GUFF as well as Chris O'Shea, the winner of JETS)

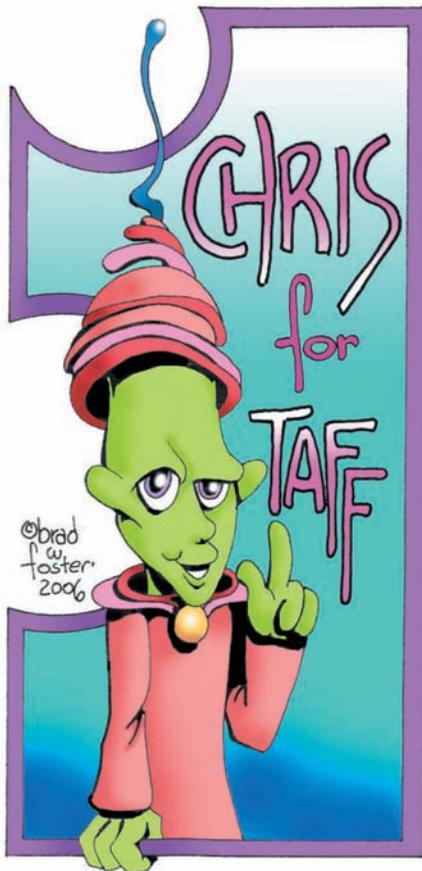
900 Pounds was raised from the League of Fan Funds Auction. That's a lot of money. To put that in perspective, it's more than the Fund paid for my trip (which came out to about 1500.00 dollars)

Fast Food Places Eaten at: McDonald's (Bacon Roll is amazing, otherwise, US version is better), Burger King (slight edge to the UK version), Pizza Hut (far better in UK). West Cornwall Pastie Company (not in US, but should be), The Pastie Shoppe (not bad at all).

Favourite Quote for the Entire Trip: Mike Scott: Well, this is slowly spiraling out of control. Me: What do you mean slowly?

OK, enough foreplay, let's get into the slightly more relevant foreplay.





Chapter Negative I: What's The Buzz, Tell Me What's a-happening'

What you're looking at is a trip report of the worst kind. It's long, rambling, formatted for screen reading and mostly just a bunch of stuff that happened captured and put into the form of a long thing for reading on the computer. That's probably going to be why no one will ever read the entire thing. It's far too long to ask someone to wade through it on the computer screen, but I am. Why? Because that's what I do.

Now, Graham Charnock made mention of the fact that the CorFLU Report I did in 2007 was a good piece of review not because it said what was going on, but because it gave it meaning beyond just the where and when. There's some of that in here, but not nearly enough, and since I recognized that was the case, I figured that doing an intro that gave all the meaning that one could suck out of this thing if you tried would be a good idea.

There is no meaning.

That's right. This trip report is meaningless. It's just a way to record what happened and make it obvious that there's nothing I love more than fandom. It was amazing, but there's no way I can put how it affected me and my outlook into words that would be easily readable. In fact, my report could probably be put into a few words.

"I looked into the face of Fandom, and in return, it smiled at me."

That was what it felt like. I'm a phony, pretty much everybody

knows that. I'm not much for anything, but I've got a sorta spirit that allows me to make people see where I'm going with things. I'm not talented, I'm merely charismatic. I don't try, I merely do. I produce without considering what it means, why I do it, whether or not it's any good. There's no need for any of that. The only need is to do it. Everything else is philosophy that I just don't have time for. I got stuff to do that requires the complete absence of philosophy, or any sort of thought at all.

Everyone in the UK treated me wonderfully. Perhaps too nicely. I might never get treatment like that again...even if I were to pay for it! I was so pleased to get to meet people and learn about what it is that they do that makes them fans. I shared in an experience that was familiar yet strange. It's the one time that I'll probably ever be able to make this connection, be able to go to the UK and see what there is here and I was given the fan-nish equivalent of a tickertape parade over and over again. It was amazing.

But it was also completely without meaning.

There's no need for meaning, really. The important thing isn't what it all means, or even how it made me a different person, the entire thing has one thing at its heart: fans. The most important thing in fandom, and I've always believed this, is people, fans. It's not the zines, the Hugos, blogs, FAAn Awards, paneling, art or Fan Funds. It's the people who create the zines, manage the Hugos, write the blogs, vote in the FAAn Awards, sit on the panels, create the art and support the Fan Funds. It's the people who think about what fandom means and those who don't care as long as there's a good time to be had. The meaning of fandom, to me anyway, is fans. And as I've often been told by people who are far smarter than me, people can't be meaning. And thus, there is no meaning. It's probably a good thing that I don't get in for philosophy, eh?

This fact hides my shame. I don't go out there looking for truth or understanding in fandom. I simply come for friends and fun and once in a while, something will hit me and there's a glowing moment that makes everything right, or at least makes it seem right. There is some of that in here, but that's mixed in with the reporting.

This is dedicated to everyone in fandom: great and small.

Chapter Zero: You May Ask Yourself, How Did I get Here?

How did it all start? How did I end up going on this TAFF trip? What led to my being elected? I'm only partially understanding of the situation myself. I know that it started with an e-mail from a guy going by the name of Peter Sullivan. He gave the message the title I thought it would be fun to run for TAFF, a brilliant reference to Citizen Kane. I have to admit that I had thought about it before: less with the idea of winning, but more for the race. You see, I have a thing for campaigning.

Now, I know it's not fashionable to campaign, I completely understand that (and I even wrote a thing for Banana Wings all about it) but really, I didn't so much campaign to win as I did campaign to have fun. I love the political process, the signs, the speeches and so on, but I'm not the kind to be able to run. Such is the price of having a colorful past. It was a weird thing that I did, coming up with the Chris for TAFF concept. I know other folks have done it before, come up with slogans like Snog in the Fog and so on. My idea was pretty simple: make an ass out of myself in a way that allows me to get my name out there. You see, I was not the kind of guy who runs for TAFF and wins. I was not a Big Name Fan. I'm simply a guy who does what he can and writes zines and stuff. That's my way. I also have a diabolical need for attention. These things can make it difficult. I might become a BNF someday, but I don't think I matter enough to earn those particular stripes soon.

While Chris for TAFF did show up first in a series of zines called PrintZine, mostly it was the 2006 WorldCon in Anaheim that made things all sorts of fun. I put together a few signs to use at the con. They were literally pieces of cardboard taped to a fence picket. That's all. I then drew out the saying Chris for TAFF on each board and paraded around with them. There are photos of me with my signs. Frank Wu took one sign and put it up with his stuff on his Art Show panel (which is the closest I'll ever get to appearing in a WorldCon Art Show) and some other folks carried them around for me. Catherine Crockett had the best line: Nice sign, Chris. Very subtle.

And of course, it was the opposite of subtle. I'm pretty much the opposite of subtle. I'm loud, and could even be described as brassy. Or maybe even annoying. Ok, almost certainly annoying, but that's all part of my charm. I'm trying to say that I try too hard. I try because I love. Yes, I know it bothered some folks who have traditional TAFF values, but the truth is, that was sorta the point. I was working on a different game at the same time as playing at TAFF. I'm always sorta trying to push things in different directions. Why? Because I'm different, I guess. Because things can be too stuffy, too normal. Working towards bringing stuff out of the deadly serious into the lighter side is something I do pretty well, but what's weird is that by doing that, more folks start to talkie things seriously. A good hoax can be wonderfully effective in the act of getting folks to take a WorldCon vote with more than just a passing interest. The Hollister in 2008 vote brought more interest to the election. In 2006, I was running against Mary Kay Kare. She lives in Seattle. That was a bad thing. You see, Seattle has a long tradition of TAFF winners. Victor Gonzales, Ulrike O'Brien, Randy Byers, Suzle, they were all from Seattle and they represent four of the last five winners. I really thought I had no chance. Folks told me that I had nothing to worry about, but I thought I was beyond help.

WorldCon was great. I loved getting to chat folks up, explaining exactly what TAFF was, and basically wandering around and making my way into the minds of as many people as I could figure. I met a lot of folks I had only heard of, and I had an instant icebreaker. I met a couple of folks from Israel, one of which was a tall slim girl who was kinda funny. I didn't catch her name. There was my man Rusty Hevelin. There was that Forry



Ackerman guy. Jack 'The Fear' Speer. I talked to Art Widner, one of my fannish heroes, and he'd been rumored to be in the race, but he said he wasn't going to run and that he wanted me to win. I thought that was the greatest thing anyone ever said to me. Seriously, if I ever wanted things to be made certain, that was the moment. Later, looking back, I think that was the moment that really made it all real. I met all the folks I really needed to met. I had a blast chatting folks up with some fun chatting with James Bacon, Stef Lancaster and folks. Yvonne and Lloyd Penney were big supporters and they bought me a wonderful TAFF shirt too at the Fan Funds auction. That was another of the nicest things anyone's ever done for me. I basically made folks take notice of me...and TAFF. I really think we'd have done big numbers of voters if we'd have had the full race time for it.

The official start of the TAFF race was in September. I'd been talking it up since August. I took my ballots to Silicon. A lot of folks were very excited. I had planned on getting folks at Loscon in November. I was very excited. At Silicon, I ran into Mark Bode. He's the son of Vaughn Bode, the legendary artist who also knew my Dad a bit. Mark took my sign and drew a woman on it. It was amazing. I've still got it, and I'm thinking that I'll auction it off at the Denver WorldCon. I was ready to make a go for it.

Then the problem happened. You see, there was a trouble with the Eastercon. The deal was the TAFF winner would have been the Fan Guest of Honor, so there really was no way to say that we'd be sending someone to another con on the other side. Well, that's not true, but many folks thought that it had to be Eastercon. The problem was the hotel had problems that were well-known and the numbers were very low for membership and hotel bookings. That led to the cancellation of the con and that led to the cancellation of the TAFF race.

The next few months were different. I tried to make myself busy and keep myself busy. Stuff happened. I got nominated for a couple of Hugos and went all over the place chatting people up and doing stuff to support TAFF. I worked BayCon and held a TAFF auction. I worked Westercon and the DrunkZine Lounge was born and TAFF had some good support. There was a lot of talk about who'd be standing for TAFF starting with Westercon. Frank Wu, my man, wanted Tadao Tomamatsu to run. I totally would have supported him. I talked to Christian McGuire about who would be standing. Chaz Boston-Baden was on people's lips, but he wasn't going to run apparently. He had done pretty well in the US last time against Suzle, but he did poorly in Europe. There were a couple of others, one who even called to see if I was really standing, but nothing solid until late July. Christian McGuire, Chris Barnes and Linda Deneroff all got the right number of nominators. I had a great

bunch too. In 2006, I had Arnie and Joyce Katz, John Purcell and Frank Wu on the American side and John Neilsen-Hall and Peter Sullivan on the UK side. The funny thing was when Bug visited on her TAFF trip, she asked who my nominators were. I told her and she asked who my UK nominators were. I still think they were perfect, John being a long-standing fan who put out a great fanzine called Motorway Dreamer, and Peter being a hot shot LetterHack and one of the best guys in the world. It was all his fault. This time, I had Arnie and Ted White and John Purcell for North America. I was thinking that Frank Wu would be far more useful as a guy who could verify if someone was really a fan. In the UK, it was Mark Plummer, one of the best folks in fanzines, and James Bacon. Pete Sullivan had been one of them, but he said that I should take James instead. The guy's just so great.

And let me here and now say that Peter Sullivan is the reason I ran, the reason I kept on running, and the reason I won. He believed in me and ran the ChrisForTaff.org website. I owe him



huge. I got him back at Eastercon though, but that's not until later.

It turns out that I won. I managed to get the most votes, something like 61% of the total vote. I have no idea how it happened. A ton of folks from the UK voted for me. That was totally unexpected. Frankly, the whole winning thing was a shock because there was Christian McGuire. Christian ran a great WorldCon in Anaheim in 2006. He's a great guy. He's well-known among the LA crowd. In 2006, the only tiny reason I thought that I might be able to win it was because I had Vegas and LA voters along with a fair number of BArea voters on my side. Christian is a guy I really think is a great fit, but oddly, he ran third. Shows what I know.



After I found out I won, a couple of days later, I went to LosCon and did a bit of fundraising (178 bucks) and talked up the Fund. It was a good start.

And that's what it took to get me to the point where I could fly across the country and go to visit the good people of the UK. And my dear God, for the one trip I'll probably ever be able to make across the sea, I have to say that it could only have been better if I had more time!

Chapter One- The Wind Blew Through Ivan Like Icy Daggers

I know nothing. I have no idea how to deal with the many aspects of international travel that I've never had any exposure to. I grew up in a family that couldn't afford for everyone to travel, all three of us, so my Uncle and my Mom had made the trip across the Pond and I never had. I never even went to the airport with them. They'd go early and I'd be on my own for a few days while they enjoyed themselves. These things happen. Americans don't travel enough, many people on my trip told me, but for the most part, people would rather be able to pay their rent than see the world. Go figure.

I called SuperShuttle. That's the blue van that drives suckers willing to pay 35 bucks for the honor of not having to owe family or friends a ride in return. What we'll pay to remain out of those sorts of debts. They got to my place almost exactly on time. Another amazing first. I checked my mail right as I left and there, gleaming and alone in the mailbox, was my Wrestling Observer Newsletter. It's a weekly newsletter of about 30 thousand words covering every aspect of Pro Wrestling. I had something to read now! Well, I actually had two other things to read that I had only half-planned on. One was a book Dave Clark had brought to the last BASFA meeting I had made it to and I just threw it into my Further Confusion messenger bag, the greatest gift a con could give to its staff. Study with tons of pockets and lots of places to put things along with the laptop. I also had Tim Powers' book *The Drawing of the Dark*. I put it in there half-heartedly. I love Tim Powers, but this book I'd once started and set down. There wasn't another book in my collection that I was at all interested in reading on the flight. Well, that's not true. I'd have loved to have brought *Our Dumb Century* or *This Dumn World*, books from the Onion, that fine newspaper of awesome awesomeness, but both were far too big and packing space had been an important thing.

You see, I needed to travel light. I put together one big traveling bag, a wheely thingee that would allow me to move it from place to place without much difficulty. I packed ten shirts, fourteen pairs of underwear, 7 pairs of socks, six pairs of pants, four pairs of pajamas, an extra pair of stylin' shoes, and chocolate. Six different kinds of chocolate. Several pounds. I wasn't sure how much one could bring in legally. Just another thing I had no idea about.

With no idea of what to do, I went to the Virgin Atlantic stand. The guy there was guff. Not mean or rude, but that sort of direct-to-the-pointness that you only find in people who have been beaten down in the same job for decades but don't feel like they should completely stop caring. He asked if I had any electronics. I said yes and was about to start listing them when he asked 'Got any of them repaired within the last month?' I

said 'No' and he put a sticker on my passport and I was on to the counter. The bag I checked weighed 18.3 kg. Another thing I have no clue about: the metric system.

And here's the perfect spot for the rant I need to make. Metric sucks. The kilo is a little large to make sense as an everyday measure. A pound is just perfect, it weighs just enough to be slightly annoying. A kilo is significantly annoying. The gram is way too small to be meaningful. The real shame is the metre. What the hell is that? Yes, it's almost a yard, but the foot, the foot makes sense. It's just big enough that it's manageable and it's easy to get an idea for. A metre is too big to easily and naturally relate



to. I'm sure those who have had metric all their lives understand, but there's no way a system actually based on science could ever be useful in real life.

I headed into the airport and was blown away by the amount of museum space they have. Two really long cases full of ballet costumes from the San Francisco Ballet company that were beautiful. I spent about 20 minutes looking at it, which was fine since SuperShuttle got me there with 3 hours to spare. I then headed deeper in and found a full-fledged museum. That's right, an actual museum. I can't pass up the chance to go through a museum. It's a requirement that all museum people spend every moment they can surrounded by Museum-y stuff. That's what I do. I headed in and it was a great little place. There was a spread of classic flying toys, some of which came from the various World's Fairs of the 1930s through the 60s. There was a little exhibit about how the airport itself had changed in the 80 years it'd been around. I knew that Lucky Lindy had stopped here on flight in the old days, but there was a lot more going on for that. There was even a scholarly library that a traveler could stop in and read. I have to say that it's still not as cool as being able to gamble in the Las Vegas airport, but you can't fault culture!

I was still early when I walked down the hall to the security check area. I kinda knew what to expect: take off your shoes, take out your laptop, no belt, no keys, no sex, no drugs, no wine, no women...wait, that was Turning Japanese by The Vapors. Anyhow, I walked up and I saw that there was this booth. It looked like a shower booth. I saw someone walk in and after a second, a blast of air hit her. It was kinda creepy that they make people do that, but had she been hot it would have been kinda sexy! I managed to go through without needing to be screened on the air blower. I feel very grateful for that fact.

I made my way to the waiting area. It was nearly empty at 4 for my 6:25 flight, but there was hardly an outlet to be found. In fact, there were only three in the entire waiting area. I futzed around using battery power, headed up to the restroom and when I came back, one of the fools had vacated their spot. Fool! Muahahahah! I plugged in and got my charge up. I was told by the airline that they did not have plugs in the plane, so I would have about 3 hours of time on the beast before I ran out of juice. I was hoping that I'd have enough power to do a full issue of The Drink Tank, since nothing calms me more than putting together a zine. I'm told I'm alone in that fact, that most folks get more stressed doing zines, but for me, it's a golden and calming thing. Damn, I sound almost zen.

Waiting at the airport, I figured I'd work on something near and dear to my heart: my FAPA zine. Claims Department is nearly as old as The Drink Tank, founded in March of 2005, just two months after I did my first issue of The Drink Tank. I've always loved it and I've always kept the same gimmick: review 1 book, 1 film and one thing of music along with the story of some sort of trip. It's a fun zine, one that I keep doing. The latest issue was all about Cinequest and what I saw and who I talked with.

And then I started seeing it.

Science fiction was everywhere in that waiting area. The slightly pudgy guy sitting with the earbud headphones on was reading Iann Banks and completely ignoring the fact that I kept trying to figure out what he was reading. The young girl who was obviously trying to attract interest from well-heeled business guys by ploping down in the middle of them in that top, was carrying a backpack with an Ewok patch on it. The guys with the accent sitting in a huddle across the way were all talking about Dune. Dune with accents thick like Ar-

rakean coffee. The Alchemist over that way. Bradbury shorts off to the left. The goth girl with the nose ring that most men probably never got around to noticing was sitting right behind me and listening to Ziggy Stardust with her headphones turned up so high that I could hear it myself. There was a guy with a guitar and a pile of books next to him. All of them were Tor, and one of them was Jay Lake. I love Jay Lake. I was about to ask him about it when it was time to board.

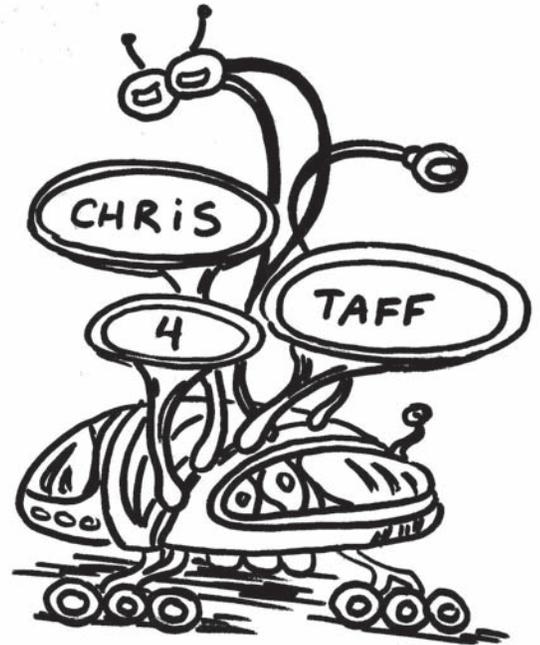
Here's the sad thing. I think I was far more interested in the in-flight entertainment than I should have been. I was chompin' at the bit to get into the seat so that I could use the thing that allowed you a world of entertainment. I'd heard stories about the hundreds of hours of entertainment on the little screen in front of me. As soon as I got on, I made my way to the seat pocket and grabbed the listing of all the entertainment. This airline has got to be run by ADD-suffering entertainment addicts. There were episodes of The Simpsons, Family Guy and King of Queens (A show I hate!). There were some good movies, like Stardust, No Country for Old Men, and even Hot Rod starring the immaculate Andy Samberg. The big plus were all in the television sections. First was the documentary Airt Guitar Nation. That was about the World Air Guitar championships in Finland. That's right, the World Air Guitar Championships are held in Finland. Another reason I really wanna go to Finland I kinda wish I could take a second TAFF trip to Turku or some such for Fincon. That'd be sweet. Anywho, I loved it. It was the story of a guy who is an actor and turns out to be the world's greatest air guitarist. C-Diddy is brilliantly comic and at the same time amazingly intense. The music made me bang my head in the seat. The people next to me, two good people from the UK whose names I didn't get, must have thought I was weird. They knew I was American, so I'm assuming that they thought that from the beginning. C-Diddy, a Korean-American dude name of David Jung, is a real talent and he had a great competitor named Bjorn Turoque. That's the kind of name I could get behind. In a lot of ways, he reminded me of me. He's crazy, he thinks he's weird, and people seem to love him for it even when he doesn't think he's altogether there. I could write an entire 100+ plus trip report about that very subject. Wait...

Anyhow, I'm glad to say that the film was a lot of fun. It did remind me of the classic King of Kong; a film from 2007 that was just about the most awesome. There was a rivalry and there was a great set of performances. At one point, at a volume that I could hear even wearing my headphones I said 'Was that dude just playing his cock?'. The answer from the guy sitting next to me looked over and said 'Yeah, I think he is.'

Such things.

I have never been on a plane for more than 8 hours. My ass hurt. If ever there was a reason to lose a little weight, it was so that I could sit in a plane for a TransAtlantic flight. Yeah, it's hard to be a frequent flier fat guy. I'm no frequent flier, that's true, but I have to say, I wouldn't mind flying if I had the money and the time. I just traveled through the air at several hundred miles per hour while enjoying the comedy stylings that were available on the little screen. I followed up with The Simpsons. They had a very old episode and a pretty recent one that really wasn't one of my favourites. Still, it was good to see The Simpsons instead of having to watch a single film with every other simp on the flight. I followed it up with a truly lovely episode of Dr. Who. That's right, I watched Who. The best part was the fact that I think it'll probably win the Hugo. Blink was, without question, the best episode I'd ever seen. The entire Sally Sparrow story of time-travel and funky happenings just had me rapt. I didn't notice the guy next to me tapping to get out for nearly a minute. I was that deep. I love David Tennant, and though he wasn't in the episode much, he was hugely awesome. And of course, Sally Sparrow was hotter than shepard's pie.

By the way, I am filling a request to have Shepard's Pie renamed because, technically, it's a cobbler. You see, no bottom crust, that makes it a cobbler, right? I'm going to have to have words with Mr. and Mrs.



Webster about that one.

I followed that up with two episodes of Family Guy while writing. That's right, I was working on my TAFF report while I was flying out to take my trip and I had already started to write my report. I worked on the intro on the flight, but I didn't get nearly as far as I would have liked. I got about three paragraphs in before I had to stop typing because the laptop ran out of power. Curse you iTunes, sucking the extra power from my machine. The Virgin Atlantic headphones worked really well with my machine. I love when things like that happen. I put her away in my bag and then ended up trying to sleep.

And trying was exactly as far as I got.

I'm not very good to sleeping on planes, unless I can spread out and lay across three or four different seats. I wish I had borrowed Linda's copy of Jeeves & Wooster. That would have been awesome to watch on my way over, but I didn't. Sometimes, it's the paths not taken...

Wow, there've sure been a lot of asides in this report. I'm wondering exactly how long you, the person who donated to TAFF, will put up with it? I mean, this things freakin' huge! How can I, a bastard American expect you to sit there and read this off your screen. I'm not sure I should even be taking this time to make these questions public. Maybe it's my position as a Post-Modernist. Or maybe I'm just a jerk who only half-understands the art of writing and so does these things to take the pressure of f of himself. History will decide.

Somewhere over Northern Canada, I hit the wall. I could sit no more. The pain was shooting up my back, into my ribs. It was like I imagine the weight distribution of a Cathedral works when you've got buttresses. My arms eventually began to ache, the pain was pretty solid, though as a guy who has had some serious lock-ups in his life, this was almost nothing. I knew I would not be sleeping on this flight. I would be awake for for 17 hours when I got into London. The time there would be Noon, more or less, and that meant I likely had another 12 hours before sleep. This was nothing new for me and cons. I stayed up more than 36 hours before going to WorldCon in LA. I was out on my feet when I was working on the Hollister in 2008 Casa De World-Con party. I figured that Mark and Claire would give me all the time I needed for rest, but I also knew that the moment I saw them at the airport, I would have no possible option for sleeping. I always get up for conversation with folks who I don't see often, meaning that I would not be sleeping. I'd be a living wreck when it got around to Sunday, but it would be worth it. Or so I told myself. I am a master justifier.

The flight slowly came to an end. I watched Hot Rod again, a film which is not good, but is funny enough to keep me watching and far better than average plane fare. In fact, of all the films I've watched on a plane, it was almost exactly in the middle. The best, by the way, was Hitchcock's Spellbound. The Worst: The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas. The highs and lows of air travel are sincere.

I was also most glad that there was no turbulence almost the entire way. I was much happier that way. Of course, had I written these words while I was flying, I would instantly have had a massive bottom-falling out drop and have had to pick my laptop off the floor. Alas, I did not.

The sun came up and I was happy to know that I was only a couple of hours away from landing. The power of flight is to get from one place to another without having to devote so much time. I was glad to discover that I was not the only one who had to deal with overly painful sitting. One guy, right behind me, stood from the time we crossed the Canadian border until we were well over Greenland. That was his thing. At one point he must have bent down to pick something up and I was reaching back for something and I ended up elbowing him in the head. Right on the top. I think it would have been illegal in the UFC, but he took it like a champ.

"No worries." he said. He did a number on my elbow too.

After a few minutes of thinking about it, I noticed I wasn't in pain any more. I wasn't numb



either. I was beyond pain. I could have sat all day, until the bedsores gathered, and not felt a thing. The liquor probably helped. I had a glass of wine and a Ginger Ale with something. It wasn't bourbon, and I don't think it was Gin either, because I hate gin and I didn't hat this thing. I didn't drink enough to get a buzz, because there was good food and I always lose interest in eating when I've had a few. The meal was Beef Stew, perfect for Friday Lenten travelers. I had a glass of red with it, a bottle of water, a lovely piece of bread and most of a salad. Those who know me well know that me having a salad is not the usual. In fact, it's very much the unusual. No, it's downright not me. They gave me cheese and very nice sesame crackers. I love those little touches. I ate it fast, and it was so very tasty. So very very tasty. I needed something liek that to make me less nervous. I don't fly well, and here I was less figity and far more comfortable, minus the pained ass of the first half of the flight. It was music time and I looked through their collection of albums for the flight. There were some great choices. my favourite band in the world right now, The Arcade Fire. was on there. So was Amy Winehouse, who I've wanloved since the Frank album a few years ago. There were the Arctic Monkeys, a weird band that I enjoy For some reason, their's was named the Greatest Briticsh Album ever. I can not agree, as I can thnk of five off the top of my head that got it beat (The Special's album The Specials, Last Year's Model from Elvis Costello, The Beatles WHite Album, Exile on Main Street and, of course, King of America by Elvis Costello). but it's a good album. I ended up listening to Arcade Fire while watching the plane location on the little screen. Nice way to



go about it so you can listen as long as something doesn't have any sound. We were somewhere near Nuuk (Godthab acroding to the alternate English name thingee) and I was glad to see that we were closer to the UK than to America at that point. In fact, we were closer to The arctic circle than I've ever beenI was most interested when I saw the speed and times. We were less than 3:15 minutes away. We were cruising at 500 MPH or so. I was so excited to see all of this, but I had a terrible fear: what do I do when I get there? I mean, I'd planned it all out to a degree, but I really didn't know anything. Yes, it's become a theme. I had no clue what was or wasn't appropriate in conversation. I know what not to say in the US, but I usu-

ally cross the line anyhow. Like, could I make an Islam joke? It was frowned on in the US to make one, but with the Muslim friends I've got at work, it's a classic way to get good comedy. Also, is Gerry approprikate? Again, we get a lot Germans around the museum and we just picked up[saying it (along with calling Nazis Nazis, the Churchillian way with the short A sound). Did I have to watch my mouth more ofr less? I had no clue. I don't think I'd get a clue even by staying for a year. I just don't seem to have that whole learning thing down. Yes, I know, I know, but what can I say?

I knew that Greenland was technically part of Denmark, but it didn't really register. I love Danish movies. I mean I really love them. I watched Italian for Beginners about a dozen times, sat through all the Von Trier films I could and have a giant thing for Dogme films (and Paprika Steen, the actress from films such as The Substitute and Festen). I wondered how Danes looked at Greenlanders? I mean they could be the Southernns of Denmark, the ones that they make fun of. Of course, I think there are about 50 people on that giant island, all of them Eskimos (or is it eskimaux?) and the perenial subject of Documentary filmmakers. I don't think I'd ever want to visit Greenland, but Iceland on the other hand, that's a different story. I've seen several Icelandic films, most recently Rattlesnake, a short about a guy who wears a pair of rattlesnake boots to work and the way it effects his co-workers. It's one of the funniest most subtle shorts you'll ever see. I'd totally go to Iceland, try Fermented Shark, go to the saunas, watch strange TV (and they have real strange tvf) and talk endlessly about how Bjork was so much better as a member o fThe Sugarcubes. I was also saddened to discover that we'd be flying nowhere near Iceland. Well, I mean in the grand scheme of things, we'd be close, but not flying right over



it, which would have been cool. If this is actually my one trip to the UK, and it certainly will be for the foreseeable future, I'd want to be able to say that I flew over a cool country like Iceland. Man, that would have been cool.

So tired. My spelling is slipping. I'm hooping someone will proofread this for me. It'll be unreadable if they don't.

I had just finished my last sentence when I realised that it was time for me to close my eyes and sleep. I woke up just a few minutes later. I fell again and then I slept again. And then again. I then awoke to hear that we were making our descent into Heathrow. The real TAFF trip was about to begin. The business was about to get done. You gotta love it when the world is at your feet.

Chapter 2: Saturday- Keep Feeling Fascination

We arrived and were told that there were no gates for the plane to stop at, so we'd have to wait to find out when one was coming available. It turned out to be only a couple of minutes. Still, we had to drive all over the place to get there. We must have logged half-a-rally getting into the slip. I was happy when we managed to stop and get up, the hurting had returned to my ass, and I started the long wait until the moment I could get off the plane. Luckily, I did get off pretty quick after they let our class go through. One of the nice things was they helped me with my bag, which was neither heavy nor bulky, but the thought was nice.

I got off the plane and made my way through customs. Easy as pie. There was no hold up except I didn't know what the address of the place I was staying was. I just put Heathrow Radisson and they bought it. I was down to get my bag. The funny thing about that was I had no idea what the color of my bag was. I knew it had the Mervyn's price tag still on it and that was going to be how I got a hold on it. It came with the second batch from my plane. That was good enough. I would never survive without my bag since I had my CPAP, a most important thing, in there.

I found Mark Plummer, Claire Brialey and Mr. James Bacon waiting for me with a sign declaring me a Cultural Ambassador. That may be the scariest concept in the history of Man. I mean think about it: my way of Americanism representing the way of Americanism for everyone. TERROR. It was good to see them, as they were three of the few Brits I actually knew by face. I half-imagined that I wouldn't recognize anyone and just keep going on. Handshakes and hugs were exchanged. That's what people do when TAFF delegates arrive. They shake hands and they hug. Or drink. One of those things. We headed into James' waiting car and headed off. Well, first we got to the wrong floor on the elevator, but who hasn't had that happen once in a while. Then we went to get gas, petrol as they call it in those parts, and the station that James was thinking of had closed. That was a bad thing. We made another circuit of the airport with James explaining the history of the place. For some reason, there was a sign stretched across the two lanes of the highway. The first part was The Future, spelt correctly in forwards fashion. The second part was The Past, only written backwards. That was kinda cool because we always went into The Future, which was proven because they had it painted on both sides of the sign. Sic Semper transitus.

Driving back, it struck me that the highway could have been one of the roads between Boston and New York or Atlanta and Greenville, even. Highways look alike. Mark kept pointing out these things that were small areas that he identified as Wales, a hill with sheep, and Scotland, an old garage. The funny thing was after about 20 minutes in the car, we came across a strange sight. On one of the overhead pedestrian walkways a horse,

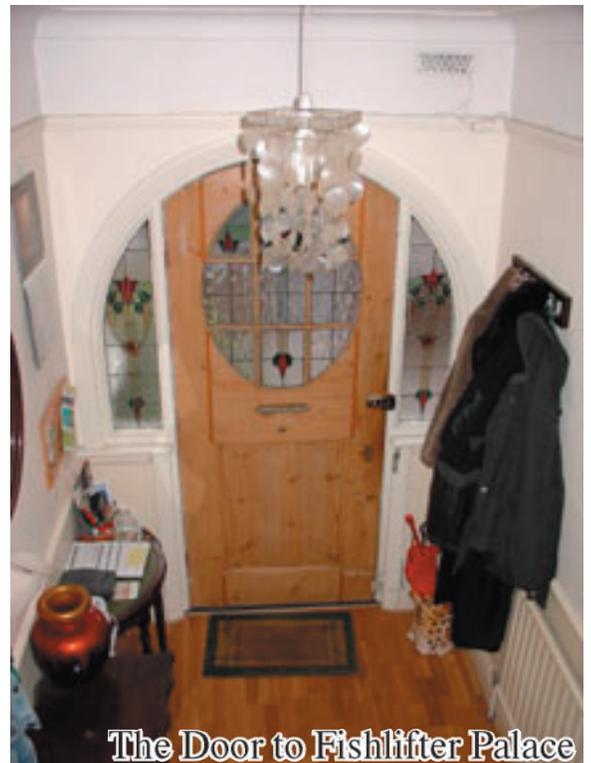
giant in my estimation, the kind of thing you'd see outlined in chalk on the top of ancient hills, made his way across. I was telling a story and then I broke it off and simply let things go on. This whole thing was weird.

I wanted honest-to-Ghods English Pub food and Mark and Claire knew a little place. We headed there and parked. I realized I didn't know the proper UK crossing technique. It's easy to miss these things and end up flattened dead. We got in and the place didn't do food on Saturdays. These things happen. I liked the look of the place and in the minute between the time we arrived and the time we discovered that they didn't do food on Saturdays, James had managed to disappear himself. It was quite a trick. I wonder if that's the kind of thing you learn on your TAFF trip; how to disappear within the blink of an eye. I really could use that skill in my arsenal. I had to remember to ask him. The guy at that Pub sent us down the road to another pub, where I got my fish and chips. The fish was sole, I believe, light and very tasty. The chips were exactly what I suspected, some crispy and some softer. You really can't go wrong either way. I mixed up Mayonnaise and ketchup for dipping. Those who just drizzle ketchup on fries, you're barbarians. Get with it! Dipping is the one true way...like Militant Islam.

We headed back to Mark and Claire's after that. James had wanted to watch a Rugby game, and I was interested too. I've watched Rugby, but I'm more of an Aussie Rules fan. This was a good game between England and Ireland. You might not know this, but Mr. Bacon is Irish. I almost wrote French. Can you believe that? I almost said James Bacon was from France. I'm glad I pulled back because I'm afraid he'd kill me. When we tuned in, Mark brought coffee and tea and the Irish were up 10 to 3. That didn't last. The English powered up and ended up ahead by half-time with a 17 to 10 lead. That's all they needed, but they added twenty more to make it a thrashing. The first half was very good rugby, fun to watch and easily understood. After that, it got to be a blowout. James went from understandably full of bravado to a bit sunken, as if he was being swallowed up by the couch. It was fun to watch a full sporting event on a different country's tv though. I have to admit I didn't expect to be watching Rugby, but I was quite entertained.

At the same time as that, we had random fannish small talk. Now, there's a lot of variety in what counts as random fannish small talk, ranging from simply talking about cons and what everyone did over the last few years to straight-up gossip. While there was some gossiping in our talking, mostly it was a stream of consciousness flow of ideas between an ebbing and flowing quadrangle of talkers. It was nice, because my body was in a form of rebellion. It refused to get tired and at the same time it refused to pump whatever I could use as energy. The odd thing was that no matter what I did, I was in the state where I wasn't going to get any worse nor any better, so being on couch chatting was the perfect activity. Mark and James and Claire were darn nice hosts. After James' terrible loss, he headed off and Mark and Claire and I chatted more. I love their house. I love any house that qualifies as much nicer than mine. They got all sorts of Nova awards, small and terribly cute little rockets, and they haven't put them into a scene where the awards are fighting one another. I'm hoping that my telling them to do so will result in some sort of mini-rocket space battle coming over Croydon, but who knows?

What's funny is that it felt no different than if I'd popped over to have an afternoon at Frank Wu's place. The universal activity of fandom is conversation and we're really good at it. It was strange how similar all the conversations were to the ones I'd have back home, though why I was surprised is a mystery. I mean, I guess it's that I'd expected it to be so more different than home, so much more...well, that's that's thing. I had no idea what to expect. I couldn't tell you how I thought things would be different, but I thought they would be. Isn't that how things go? I realize that this is more of a sign of the way I think than the way things are, but in the end, can't you say that about everything. Marshall McLuhan would say so...but then again, look where it got him.



Mark, Claire and I enjoyed a lovely home cooked pasta dinner. Mark's a helluva cook and there were just enough peppers of the red and yellow variety to make me smile. And big ole meatballs to make the angry puma that lives in my stomach purr like a cerval. It was pleasant. We had some fine conversation where I introduced one of my great concepts: the stolen story. I pointed out that one of the great ideas I had years ago that I never managed was to start a website called And The Story Goes. The site would be full of stories that a person could claim as their own at a party and a board saying who was going to what party to tell which stories from the site so that you wouldn't get crosstalk on them. I have lots of fun ideas like that. I then, perhaps unwisely, uncorked a couple of stories of things that obviously had happened to me in the US recently, like the time Dave Kyle said I couldn't sit there or how I was the one that tried to build a tower of bheer cans to the sky. Acting comically like a thought thief will usually get you a laugh. I simply wonder what would happen if we allowed people to do that for their own comical gains. Interesting.



I was tired. It was hitting me that I'd been awake with the exception of maybe 15 minutes over the last 26 hours. I was a very animated corpse of a husk of a shell of a man at the moment, but the couch was slowly swallowing me and it was getting to the point where I no longer needed to tell it to stop. Believe me, that sentence will make sense if you ask Mark or Claire about it. Go ahead, send them an eMail now.

And of course, I wrote a couple of thousand words of this report while I was waiting for my body to accept it's inevitable slumber. The light of the iBook was all the light I needed to function by. How in the hell had I ever lived before I got it?

Off to bed I went, to sleep, perchance to dream. Would visions of Fanzines unborn dance around me in England as they did in America as I set myself down on my favorite possession: my highly uncomfortable couch? Only the night would tell me that.

Chapter 3: Sunday- I Wish I was in Tiajuana, Eating Barbecued Iguana

This was the day of Mexican food. It's as simple as that. i'd often heard stories from the returning wounded of Mexican food as it existed in the UK, but seldom did I believe. In fact, I largely did not believe the tales I was told. Tacos made of meat that had been stewed with beer. The use of pancakes instead of tortillas. The failure to recognize that the Enchilada and the burrito are significantly different sorts of beasts. This was an important day, my friend. This was the day when I found out if the truth was THE TRUTH.

Before any of that, there was waking up. I found myself unable to return to sleep around 3 Croydon Standard Time. It was not a bad thing, I had deeply slept for at least 5 and maybe as many as six. That's rare. Even with my miracle machine, the CPAP, I seldom sleep more than 4 hours straight. This was wonderful sleep. Deep sleep. If Cthulhu and I slumbered in Ryleth, I'm fairly certain he'd be the one tiptoeing around to avoid waking me when the stars were right. I knew sleep wouldn't be coming so I threw open the window to make sure I saw at least some of the lightening of the sky as dawn arrived, and I pulled out my book. If'n you've ever heard the song LA Woman by The Doors, you've probably got an image of what the woman Jim Morrison was singing about. Here's the thing, with all due respect, but whatever you're thinking is wrong. He was singing about Christa Faust, a writer who was not yet born when he wrote it. She's amazing. If you cracked open every possible button you could press on me and put them all in one frame of a shape that would call me like a siren, that would be Christa Faust. She's a former Times Square Peep Show girl. She's a former domme, and even though that would normally make me completely queasy, she pulls it off with an attitude that says Yeah it's strange, but there are folks that like that sorta thing. She is a corset and foot training enthusiast. She watches wrestling, reads and writes noir and porn and comics. When I was single, before I met the Lovely and Talented Linda and before she took my breath away in a way that is so cinematic-sappy as to be a cliché that even I would not deny it, I had a giant crush on the girl on the dustjacket. It didn't help that she was a sweetheart who

actually answered my eMails.

Her previous book was called Hoodtown, and it was written for me. Well, not exclusively, but when you hear of a crime novel written with a masked woman wrestler as the main character for a story that takes place in a fictional LA and Raphael Navarro of Sonambulo fame does the art, you start to wonder how they saw into your dreams. Her latest book was called Money Shot and it was from the Hard Case Crime series of books. IT's gritty as they come. A slightly-aging porn star called Angel Dare is raped, shot and left in a trunk, but manages to escape and then has to rebuild herself and take her revenge. Yeah, it's that kind of book. The writing is rough, tough, tangled. There's no sun that shines in it, and that's the perfect thing. It smells of Elmore Leonard novels, of Charles Bronson films, of Earl Kemp-edited fantasies. There's a strange sense that this is a writer who stopped for a moment in her writing and then went back and made it even more chunky, more labored, dark of the sake of darkness. There's comedy that would make the gallowsman half-smile, and there's action that makes you feel like those two extra hubcaps from Bullitt. I read slow, but with all this extra time I simply read and read and powered until the action-packed, gut-wrenching, holy-oh-my-dear-Mary-mother-of-fuck conclusion. It was good stuff and I could think of nothing better than sitting in England, seeing the raindrops racing down the window as the sky turned this lovely blueberry daiquiri purple and reading Christa Faust. The most LA of books in the least LA of all possible locations...outside of the Middle East, I'd wager.

After a while I had to start typing my report again. If I did not, I would wither and die. Writing makes me calm, keeps me happy when I'm already happy, keeps the stress from eating me, keeps the pain from sinking in too deep, makes me ready for bed or for action or for pudding. I was glad that I had my little iBook. Even though she couldn't hook up with the web, she was my delightful companion.



No, there's no porn on it. I know that's what James Bacon was thinking when he read that last sentence and you're flat wrong, you silly bastard!

OK, so after a few hours, I heard Mark and Claire stirring somewhat, so I figured it was OK to head downstairs and start the day. Mark was up and he made me some coffee. There was a moment, right after Claire woke up, where I had a Sanka moment and asked for a second cup. That's not me, folks, and I think there are people who wouldn't believe you if you told them that happened. We chatted and I looked over the London A to Z. There was a place called Elephant and Circus. I was sure it was a rib on the new American who was coming over, but later I saw a bus with it as an end point. There was also a place called Haunch of Venison Lane. I really wanted to make up a story about how it was founded, probably by some dude named Sven, come to London in the sepia-toned days of yore with only a haunch of venison, a poorly proofread traveler's brochure and a dream. He was hassled by some locals and threw the mighty haunch of venison at them, but missed and the building that had been standing there was knocked down by the mighty throw and the path it traveled was now Haunch of Venison Lane. I thought of saying this out loud, but there are some workings of my mind that just don't translate to the speaking of them. Or the writing of them. I'd go so far as to say most of my thoughts fall into the category. Doesn't stop me from trying, though!

The time came near for us to make our way to the Mexican joint. Mark had wanted to take me to El Sombrero, a place with a great name, but alas, they were not open on Sunday. Go figure. The place we did come

to had a real TGIFridays vibe, which made me think I was in for a real disaster that would make for good storytelling when I got back to lunch at work in a couple of weeks. Mark had made sure that a good slash of people were there. Noel and Diana (last names excluded due to a recent ruling), Mr. and Mrs. Flick, James and Syn, and Tanya Brown, my favorite British fan writer. Well, her and Niall Harrison. It's a close race too. There are days when it's Niall and other days when it's Tanya. Oh, and I gotta throw John The Rock Coxon in there too. Some days it's him, but those days are usually when I've just read something from him. Let's say it's twelve days a year on that matter. So it'd be Niall for the summer



and winter, with a spattering of John for a few days, and Tanya in the spring and fall. And once in a while James Bacon, but don't tell him that or I'll never hear the end of it.

The place had some real-looking memorabilia on the walls, including several sombreros. Maybe not enough, but it was a start. There was no Virgin Mary altar, which is a good way to judge where to eat in California. Find the Mary and you've found authentic. We sat and looked through the menu. The drinks menu first since they left it on the table. The drinks all had little comedic write-ups, save for one up in the corner, the Uranus of the bunch. Sad, unmoving and uncommitted upon; so much like an issue of The Drink Tank as to make me say so. Folks ordered drinks and I looked over the regular menu. This was a strange place. They put a hyphen in chimichangas. Chimi-changas. Strange. They described tollias as tortilla pancakes. Very strange. They had no burrito on the menu. That one got me the most. We went around and picked our appetizers and mains and that was good stuff. I had a nacho and beer meat Chili (though they spelled it Chilli, which was weird) for starters followed by the chicken enchilada. We sat and chat, with Mike and Flick right across from me. Flick got best intro by making a callback to an article I'd written for PLOKTA about having been at the YAFA panel at Intersection when I was not. Sometimes I'm hit with better callback, and this was one of those moments. Well met!

There became a sort of game that folks played, one that is sometimes popular in The States as well. It was called Candid Chris. The idea was simple, try and get a non-posed Chris Garcia photo. Now, this is not always easy for me to win since I try and talk to people and am not always attentive. Here, you can see some of the ones they managed that were less-posed. Flick and Tanya did well, and Mike got me at least once because he has this freakin' rad camera that I want want want. We talked and I used another few bits I'd had on my dance card at the table. I couldn't use them once Americans started hanging around because they've heard them. Linda especially would kill me if she had to hear about the New York Subway Handrail Challenge. That's where you have to lick a New York Subway train's vertical handrail in one long stroke to win a metric assload of money. There have been attempts and theories, but the ability to find a way to do it without catching some strange form of death as well as the gymnastics involved in actually licking a rail from top to bottom in one go have all stifled anyone as long as the challenge has been there. Linda would kill me if I told it again, though her facial reaction the first time I told her of it still rings as my favorite of all time, though Claire's from breakfast was good too.

The drinks came (and as far as I know, Tanya and Flick were only served empty glasses with traces of strawberry margaritas in them) and we enjoyed. We talked of many things and at one point someone asked if I worked in IT. Mike laughed.

"He works in old IT," he said. I talked about work. No one ever told me that Flick was studying paper conservation. I hereby chastise all of you who knew and didn't think to mention it to me. I have so many things I need to ask her and no one thought they should tell me? Shame on you all!!!



Anyhoo, there I was, enjoying a fine set of conversations when the first food arrived. The chips with cheese and Chili weren't bad, but the chips, you call them crisps, were oddly flavored. It may well be that tortilla chips flat out don't come plain in the UK, but it was strange. I do have to admit that the chili was pretty darn good, and I'm a man who likes his chili. The main course came and it was time for me to enjoy my enchilada. I actually got what we'd call a wet burrito but they sold as an enchilada. The difference is subtle but huge. Still, I ate it and I have to admit that it was pretty darn tasty. The conversation was exceptional as well. Somehow, and don't ask me how, we got onto the matter of technologies which changed the world and led me to think about Scrubbing Bubbles as the greatest thing mankind has ever done. There was debate and I pointed out that sticks were pretty good two. Somehow, we ended up back on Scrubbing Bubbles for part of the table and sticks on the other. Tanya then asked if they came in tins, to which Claire said something about sticks in a tin.

Let me take an aside here. That's brilliant. It's got a Snakes on a Plane thing going on that it just about perfect. I really can't think of anything better. If you're gonna have Sticks in a Tin, you need to hire Samuel L. Jackson to play the inspector or some such who sees the tin of snakes.

And let me take an aside from the aside: what's with the word tin? While I understand that tin hasn't been used for making tins in years, they're still called tins, and it seems to respond strictly to the technology not the actual substance of which the technology is comprised. That could mean that you'd have a plastic tin as a possibility. That'd be an interesting notion. The whole thing is weird to me.

So, back to my first aside. Why is it only me that ever sees the need to make these things known? I mean, it's gotta happen and folks don't see that. Maybe I'll be appreciated after I've passed from this twisted world, or maybe I'm just a freak. History will decide...and I think deify.

We went on to talk about Scrubbing Bubbles. Apparently they don't have it out this way. It's just amazing that when I described it, they grabbed their iPhones and dropped text messages to their friends in the US to bring them back. I still think it's the greatest invention of all-time. The food was good and the conversation better. I enjoyed a White Russian, thinking of The Big Lebowski, which got me thinking about bowling, which reminded me that I had to ask folks about bowling, but not here, not now. Instead we finished our food, enjoyed some dessert and headed back to Mark and Claire's with James and folks.

James and I were working on our Fanzine in an hour and that took up some time. His wife noted that this was what happened: he'd go into the computer realm and be oblivious to the rest of the world. My theory is that it all gathered on the outside of an invisible bubble and then hit him the moment he stopped, but since he is only human he can not process them and that would indeed leave him seeming like he was ignorant instead of merely having been poorly designed.

I needed a nap. That's a rare thing for me to say because it's hard for me to sleep. I retired for a couple of hours, wrote a little and then slapped on my CPAP and headed off to a limited dreamland. A couple of hours later I awoke and that meant that it was time for more TAFF Reporting. True, it is not easy to right a TAFF Report real-time, but damn if I wasn't going to try. Flick asked if I had a terrific memory because usually TAFF delegates are furiously scribbling notes throughout the trip. There's no need for me to do that: I'll not have time to forget the truth



and even if I forget what really happened I can still make it up. That's the joy of having no personal standards: malleable are the boundaries of reaction to reality or lack thereof.

Mark and Claire were going to the pub for their weekly Sunday night and I joined them. A funny moment happened while we were waiting for the bus. A Green bus was sitting in front of us, idling and using more fuel. Claire didn't understand this and I got to dust off another chestnut: 'The answer is two words: irony'. It worked well on the road and I crossed that one off my list as having been used. There was a gentleman there when we started and I was introduced. I completely did not catch his name. I have no idea who he was or if I'd ever see him again, but he was a nice guy and chatted along for a bit. I was a bit struck by the place, largely because there was a slot machine. I can't gamble in a bar back home, and if I could there would probably be grave consequences. I stared at it, a Deal or No Deal machine, and was convinced that every bar in the States



now needed one. My downfall will be self-plotted. I stared and got the feel of the room as more folks started to arrive. James joined us as did Noel from earlier in the day. I was quite glad to meet that Liam character, who was an amazingly entertaining speaker who also read the Classic Comp news-group which features a lot of folks I know from the museum. These things happen. We got into various conversations that I could follow and hang various relationships between names of people and their activities, but having no clue what they referred to, that's pointless. It's like being on LJ and having a fake screen name (a sin I am guilty of only because CGarcia174 didn't appeal to me) and then realizing that someone you're talking to is relating stories from their LJ that you read and had no idea who they were.



Let me pause for a moment and ask you to go back and reread that sentence. I'll wait here. Go on. OK, did I get that right? I really don't know. I'm terribly afraid that this will be unreadable due to lack of sleep, poor proofreading and a terrible case of typing. It could also become a masterpiece in the way that those elephants in zoos make incredible art. Even animals with no business being creators can sometimes get it right. I'm not sure I'm as smart as an elephant. I'm certainly not as much of a draw if I'm put into a zoo. Let's move on, shall we?

The conversation flew about, with only a bit of surrealism about animals living in Mark and Claire's flat. She wanted them to live in harmony and not eat each other. I think that would require some sort of hypnotism, which is strictly taboo. Go and figure.

The evening ran on and I was slowly sinking. I needed more sleep, but the pub was fun. I only had a single cider, but I could feel myself starting to drowse. These things happen. Thankfully, James offered to drive us home, planted us on the curb and we headed into to the house, where I soon retired to the bedroom, brushed my teeth and headed up to the bedroom they'd let me use to write these very words you're reading. Right now, I'm not sure there's a tense to describe what I'm writing. Present-past-pluperfect? How does one make sure it's understood that you're writing in the present about the present with the knowledge that the text is in the past with the knowledge that this will all happen in the future? I might call it the ironic tense. Yes, that'll do nicely.

Chapter 4- Monday- Fix the Operator with My Pocket Calculator...

(typed in the Science Museum London above the Making the Modern World gallery on March 17th, 2008)

Woke up ready for London proper. I finished a little reading (old issues of MAYA that Mark gave to me) and showered and headed downstairs around 8 or so. Claire was up and we drank coffee. You see, there...it's a theme! OK, after coffee, toast and fucking good jam, we headed out the door to take the tram. I've got a thing for trams. I love them. We don't have them in the BArea, but they're fun and Claire was kind enough to take me on the tour of the city of Croydon on the tram. What magic, love and light and joy this seems. Really, Croydon seems like any of a hundred other American cities I've been to, but it also has a certain something that makes it seem like the England that makes its way over to America via PBS TV series. We did a pass and ended up at the station where I would catch the train to Victoria Station. By the way, that's a great stripper name.

Nothing happened on the train. In fact, there were five total people in the car I was riding on. So little happened that I couldn't even bring myself to take out my laptop and start typing because I thought it might ruin the vibe of nothing going on. It was a shame because trains with action, yammering people on cell phones, arguing couples at leisure, people talking about the invisible radios in their fingernails, they make trips very interesting. This had none of that. Perhaps I'm too American. I expect hassle and strangeness and the bizarre. This says more about what I think is normal than what is or is not reality. Go figure.

At Victoria Station, I checked my bag. There were about a hundred other people in front of me checking their bags. They all seemed to be yammering in German. Three different times three different people said 'Klaus. Stille!'. That's how I knew it was German. I had to take out my CPAP and my camera and then repack and replace the bag. Once I was free of that bag, I headed to make my day.

I knew I had to experience food. I chose a pasty shop. They had a wide selection of things in dough. You can seldom go wrong with things in dough. I chose Roast Pork. Noit kosher, but it turned out to very very tasty. It was better than any meat pie of any sort I'd had in the US...save for pirogi in a few restaurants whose names I can not pronounce. I made the mistake of ordering a Coke with it. Sadly, sugar is not nearly as sweet as corn syrup and I much prefer the latter. Go figure. I ate it while watching celebrity news on the big TV screen above the entryway into the train station. It just seemed like the right thing to do.

Now, I had mapped out my way on the Tube to the Science Museum. I would take the Circle line to South Kensington. Now, I'm still not sure why, but I decided to go outside and try and walk instead. There is a magical disconnect between the reality of a map of streets and the reality of a map like London A to Z and the reality of a bunch of streets. For some reason, I chose the last of those. The first thing I did was walk out the door and try to find a garbage can. Not an easy thing, it turns out. I have heard that many garbage cans disappeared during the time when it was fashionable to leave bombs in enclosed spaces like bins, so I wasn't too surprised, but still, you gotta have somewhere to dump your junk. I finally found one about three blocks down towards Hyde Park.

Now, I'd heard of Hyde Park, but I knew not where it was in relation to where I wanted to be. I figured



a walk along the edge wouldn't hurt. And in fact it did not, but I had to go across and try to make my way to where I thought the Science Museum might be. I crossed the street and saw something odd: Ben. Ben McAllen Is a friend of mine. I've known him since 1990 or so. He used to date Judith and was a friend of Jay's back in the day. I hadn't seen him since about 2000, when he came out after getting a messy divorce. He was a nice guy, six three and full of the gangly. He had arms that seemed to dangle from unattached sockets. I knew him immediately, and hardly remembering that he lived in London, I questioned whether or not to yell out 'Ben, you grimy fucker!'.

Of course, I did just that.

He turned around and stared for a moment before pulling out the right card in his memory.

“Garcia? What the hell are you doin’ in London, eh?” The voice was nearly impossible to understand, but he rushed over and gave me a traditional man-hug.

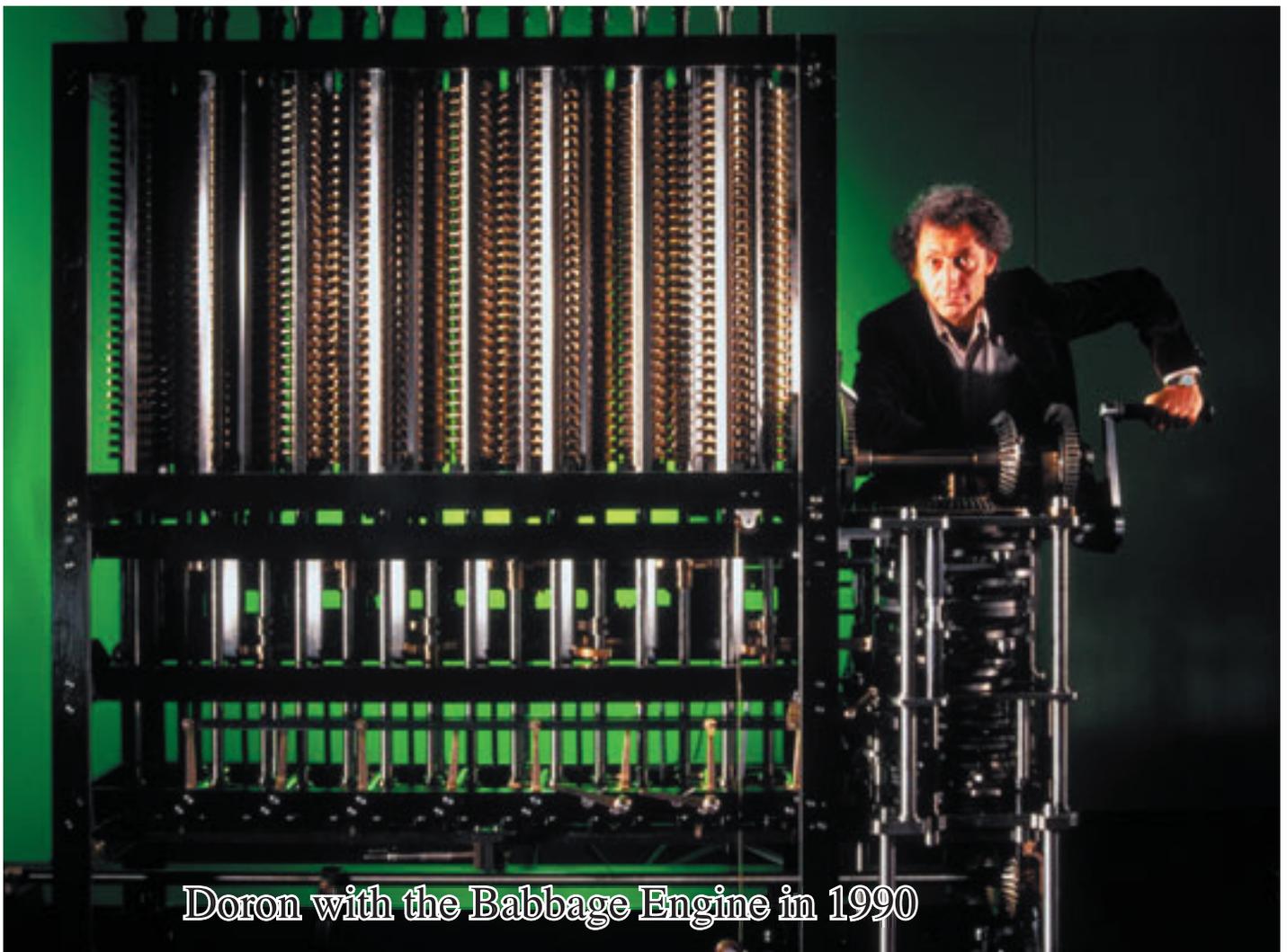
The art of the man-hug is seldom practiced outside of bars and sports playing fields. It requires attention and a stern resolve to not hold on too tight or long. We had it down right. We chatted for a few minutes. He was dating a new girl name of Jesse Crawley who had appeared in a couple of films. He was the kind of guy who could boil down ten years into a minute and a half, and he did just that.

“You want to go and get a drink?” he asked.

“Nah, I gotta get across to the Science Museum.” I answered.

“Fuck all! I’m heading over that way. Jesse’s over at the cafe at the Natural History Museum!” he said and we walked over together while talking about M and SaBean and Judith and Jay and so on. They were all up in Finland entertaining Manny and CJ. I had wanted to go and visit, but the timing was bad. We walked and we talked and he said he couldn’t believe he had run into me. I asked him if his plan to build the first ignorance-powered railroad had come to fruition and he said no, but he’d never truly give up on it. We laughed and talked and made inappropriate jokes. That was so what we all did. He dropped me his phone number and he was off to the Natural History Museum and I just around the way to the Science Museum.

I had made a date to chat with one of the curators and get up-close with the Babbage Engine. I showed up and introduced myself and was told that the curator I had arranged with was out for the day. I was bummed. I thought about leaving, but I was there so I may as well get a look at the exhibit I had come to see. I headed up-stairs to where the Computing Exhibit was, fully ready to see the Babbage Engine fully behind glass like every other patron, and I would have, had there not been a camera crew.



Doron with the Babbage Engine in 1990

First off, I'm a camera junky. I saw that it was a high-quality camera crew the likes of which we use to shoot footage of significant computing stuff for the museum. The Engine's glass case was off and pushed over to the side. The Original Babbage Engine, reconstructed from plans that Babbage did by a group led by my colleague and pal Doron Swade, sat exposed to the world. There were a few folks milling about and I stepped up to one of the guys in the lab coats.

"Excuse, me, are you with the museum?" I asked.

"Aye." he said.

"Hi, I'm Chris Garcia. I work at the Computer History Museum in Silicon Valley. I was just hoping that I could get an up-close look at the Babbage Engine."

"I don't think I can let ya. The crew is shooting the footage for the Computer Museum in San Francisco." The dude said.

"Wait, that's my museum."

"Really? Then you must know Doron." he said.

"Of course I do."

"Well, let me get him for ya." and the guy went behind a little thing and called out 'Hey, Doron! You got a visitor.'

That's when I noticed the other Babbage Engine, the one that's coming to our museum in three weeks, sitting on the other side of the divide. There, right next it was my pal from the museum, Doron Swade. Two times in one day.

"Chris, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"On vacation, Doron." I answered, shaking his hand. He led me behind and gave me a demo.

"That look on your face is the exact right reaction to the thing" he said as I grogged at the massive mechanical calculator. He turned the crank, using a lot of force. One of the newest units of measure is the Crick. It's the amount of force required to do one turn of the handle to operate the Babbage Engine. The crick for this one was much greater than for the older one. Doron pointed out that this would lead my developing bigger arms and a smaller gut.

"Don't worry. I'll take the arms, but I'll just make sure to eat more to keep the universe in order."

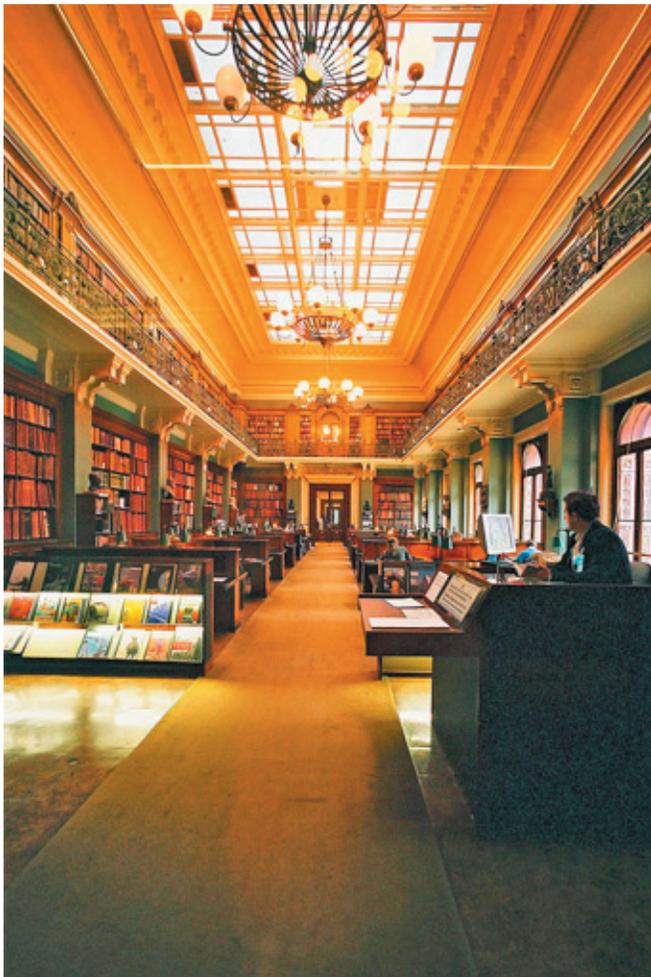


He showed me around and then we went and had lunch. The museum's cafe was a good one and I was most pleased. Doron showed me around and we talked Exhibit philosophy a little and work stuff. It's what we do. I was most impressed with the place, though Doron says that they gutted it from when it was at it's peak when he was running the joint. They had a Differential Analyzer from Cambridge which was most interesting. They had a water-based Analogue Economic Calculator that was really neat. The Ferranti Pegasus, tons of calculators, a recreation Punched Card room, the works. Our exhibit, when

it's done, will kick this place's ass, but for what they had, especially the Babbage and Scheutz Engines, they're the best I've ever seen.

I said goodbye to Doron and made my way to the Making the Modern World Exhibit. Trains, Cars, Planes, stuff. The layout was weird, but there were things. Old steam engines from the late 18th and early/mid-19th centuries. There were all sorts of engines and cars and models of engines and cars, and a few calculators. There was an awesome speedboat from the 1920s that Wooster would have looked just smashing in. There were three things that really hit me. The first was the Pilot Ace. That was the computer designed by Alan Turing, one of the first and most important early laboratory computers in the world. I believe it used to be in the Computing Exhibit that Doron put together and moved when they decided to wipe the mark of Swade from the place. The computer was simple, a wooden box, very nicely made, and a metal rack with tubes which some bozo labeled as valves. What the crap was that? I enjoyed looking at it far longer than anyone else who wandered by. The second was one of the first VCRs from AMPEX, a company from my neck of the woods. I've seen them before, but this one was earlier than any of the others I had seen. The final one was the Cray-1A Supercomputer. I've seen, and even played on, these beasts and this one seemed smaller than the ones I'm used to. Much not get as much sun out in the UK as the ones we have back at home. The Clock of the Long Now was there too. Designed to keep time for 10,000 years, I didn't know that they had one. We thought of getting one, but only because it would be cool and not because it has anything to do with computers save for the designer, Danny Hillis, who designed the Connection Machine for Thinking Machines Inc.

At this point, I'm betting you're wishing what I was wishing, that I hadn't left Linda's digital camera in my checked bag. I'd love to have all sorts of photos to show, but sadly, the ones I've included here are from my museum. Now, I'm writing this no more than ten minutes after I finished looking at the Making of the Modern World exhibit, so how do I know that I'm going to use images from my Museum? Well, it just seems like the right thing to do, but I could always surprise myself. Only Future History will decide!



(This part started while sitting on a bench in front of the Nation Art Library in the Victoria -Y- Albert Museum, March 17th, 2008 at 4:14 PM)

Museum day (without a camera) continued. I headed next door to the Science Museum and discovered the Natural History Museum. They checked my bag and then I headed in, only to stop and stare at the preserved Woolly Rhino that was in a niche above the security check area. It was very cool and it got my hopes up.

Sadly the rest of the museum didn't do anything for me.

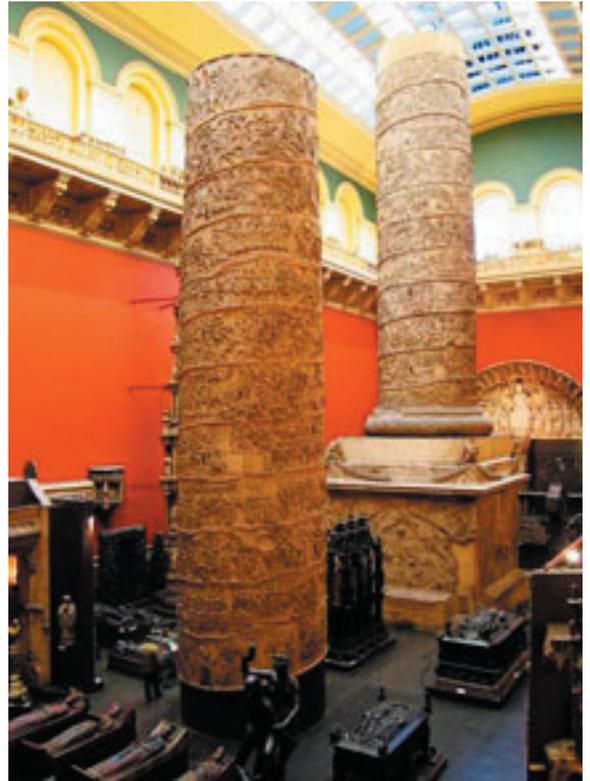
It was a science museum with a few fossils and a bunch of stuff that I'd seen at other museums. The Volcano exhibit was cool, but it would have been a little nicer if it had actually had some real artifacts and not just staged mock-ups. Still, being in the Japanese grocery store during a simulated quake was kinda cool. And by cool, I mean totally sweet.

I only stayed a half hour or so before I headed out and across the street to the Victoria & Albert Museum. It's a design museum and the first turn I made brought me into the Chinese section. That flowed into the Japanese section and then into the Korean section. OK, let's talk about that arrangement. The Chinese section gets the best position because it's China, everybody's favorite right now. Then there's Japan, the second best though the artifacts they had

were very cool, much cooler than the ones that they had for China. Then there was poor Korea, stuck out in a hallway with no room of it's own. It's always been the one that China and Japan have looked down on. Apparently the V+A go along with that thinking.

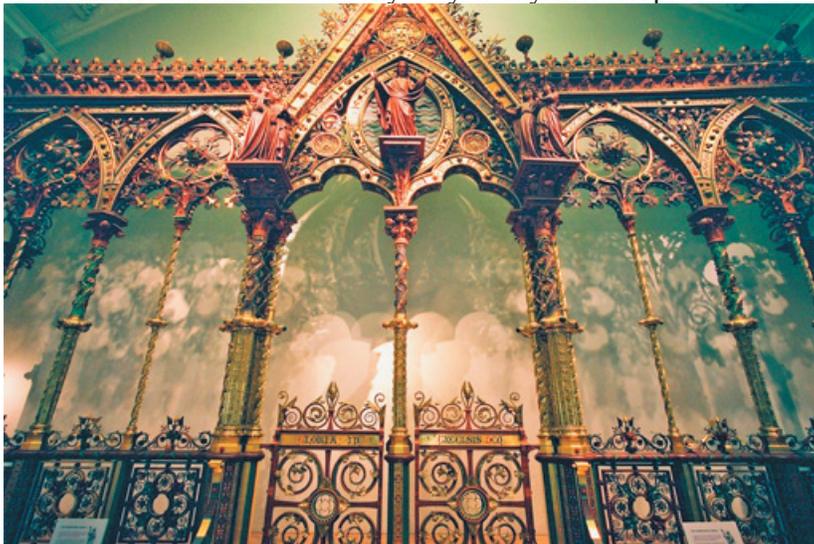
I then headed down to the Medieval Rooms. These featured dozens of effigies and the fronts of Cathedrals...all redone in Plaster Casts. Now, while I'll give it up to people who display the plaster casts of rock star units, I'm not one to go to a museum and only see castings. Yes, they're impressive and the stories of the techniques they used to make such incredible casts would have been great, I go to Museums to see real stuff. In one room, there was only one artifact of any real value. It was a cross from the 1200s which was totally sweet, but otherwise, the room of stuff was as false as anything you'd find at Disneyland!

Wandering around, I did come across what I hoped was real statuary and some beautiful museum-quality real stuff living in one hall that was closed for reinstallation but you could look down on from the gallery. That would have been cool enough for me. Then I saw Michaelangelo's Dave and realized that I'd been



duped again. The bastards!

I headed away and found myself standing in front of the Hereford Screen. It was incredible. A piece of magnificent metalwork that I think might be the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. It was magnificent and had wonderful elements of metal and wood, paint and gleam. I could barely control myself. I plopped down on a bench nearby and wrote this section hoping that I could make it clear that this was significant, that this screen was somehow effecting me. The screen was a masterpiece that hit me far harder than almost any art exhibit I've ever seen. I've been within inches of DaVinchis and Sergeants, Cassats and even owned pieces by Rothko and Motherwell, but nothing put me in my place like that Hereford Screen. The story of how it went from Hereford Cathedral to the Vic and AI was great stuff. I love a good museum story, but that's a part of the whole Museum Lifestyle. While the trip itself was a significant part of my life story, the screen, the experience of a twenty foot high metal screen, was incredible. I wasn't going to come to the V et A, but I'm so glad I did. I stared for several minutes and then made my way to my next stop.



I then moved on past Ironwork, including many many iron chests and an awesome Coffin from the 16th Century. I like coffers, what can I say? I headed down a flight of stairs to the musical instruments. That's my scene. There was a serpent, a wind instrument that winds back and forth a few times with a series of fingerholes. There were cellos, harpsichords, pianos, hurdy-gurdies, viols and music boxes.

I saw over the edge to the next floor down where all the clothes were. I'm pretty sure that Linda is going to want to spend some time there when we have to come back on Tuesday or Wednesday. I found myself a place to sit, on a table surrounded with clear plastic

chairs in the middle of the gallery. To my left was a case containing bras, slips, dressing gowns, girdles, a bustle and, of course, a corset. Nothing made me happier than seeing these. The words just kept coming as I typed my

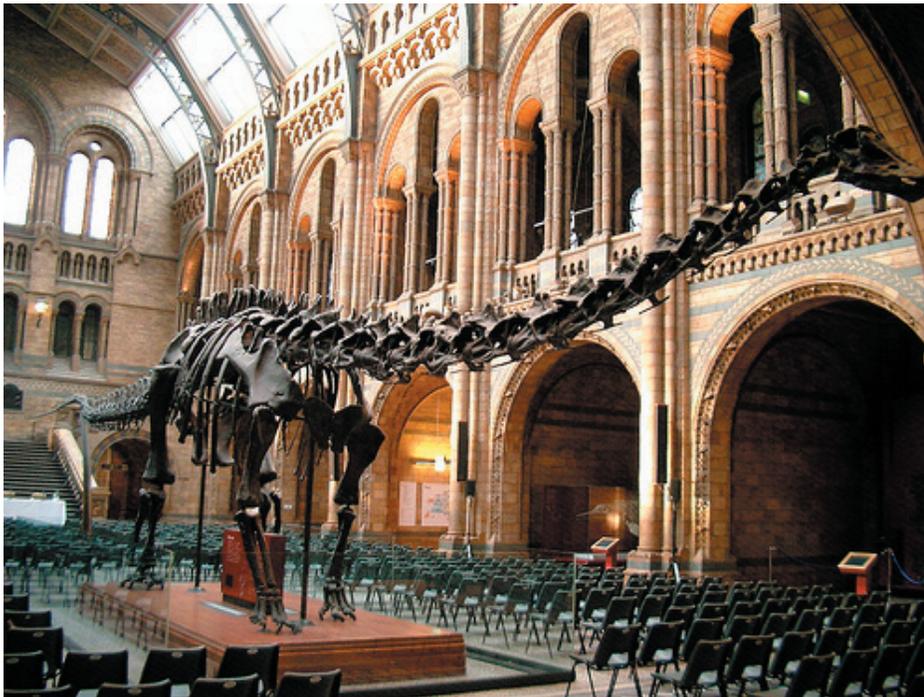
real-time report, looking at the clock and knowing that I didn't have long before I had to run to South Kensington and catch the Tube to Allison Scott's, my next home away from home.

I couldn't go quite yet. I had to look at the stuff from 1600 to 1800. There were tapestries and beautiful works of wood. One room had swords and guns. You gotta love those things. While the Flintlock Rifle was very cool, I thought the stiletto was cooler. I stopped and typed this section in the Jones Collection of ceramics. A ceramic vulture, white as Bogota's finest, sits in the middle, completely ignoring the Yank typing on the iBook that is every bit as colorless as he.

The day had to end and it was off to Alison and Steve's place. I had been given very good directions to their place and was off. It was easy going through Victoria to the end of the line, but I was also overconfident. I ended up lost. Not irreversibly so, but enough that it could have ended up very badly. I missed the street that sort of materialized out of the train station. How I missed it I'm not sure. Actually, I am sure. I'm an idiot. I got to their place and Alison was madly Photoshopping away on the cover for the next PLOKTA. I can only say that this met with huge admiration from me. She was doing a Facebook takeoff that was really really funny. It had a lovely bite of snark to it. I was very glad to be one of the first or see it.

While she was working on that, Steve was chatting with me and managing the kids, Marianne and Jonathan. They're good kids who made me miss Evelyn quite a bit. I've seen energy like it in kids before, but never to this level. The little guy was cool, he jumped on me quite a bit and Marianne made some very snide remarks at him. She had me laughing quite a bit. After Alison finished it off, we walked out to get some food, only to find that Eat 17 was having bread training. That's right, they were teaching bread to kneel and obey its mistress...or maybe they were trying to corset down its waist to 13 inches. We turned around and ordered Pizza Hut, which was a good thing. We got sides and everything! It was a good deal better than the Pizza Hut back home. Totally happy with it I was. The kids eventually went to bed, which lowered the energy a bit and meant that I could relax. Too much of that and I was flat tired. Steve had showed me his collection of Melodeons, which are way cool. We talked for an hour and a half or so and then I had to sleep. These things happen. I retired to the room at the highest room and immediately picked up the computer to record these tales as well as prepare myself for sleep: the best use of my writing time!

Chapter 5- Tuesday- I'll Do Graffiti if You Sing to Me in French.



I started out the day waking up and taking a bath. Not a shower, but a bath. There's nothing more relaxing than a bath, plus it's easier to deal with me hair as such. I charged my laptop and started a little reading before I made my way downstairs, said good-bye to Steve and Jonathan, and then headed to the Underground Station.

It's funny that I really started to feel the differences between home and England on the fifth day. I hate UK soda. It's not nearly sweet enough. I know they use real sugar, but I find it disturbingly striking. Even regular tastes a little bit like diet. I did have a bottled orange juice that made me happy. It was better than Minute Maid

back home. I also had a muffin that turned out to be banana nut and was most pleased. Good things do happen.

I made my way to the Natural History Museum. Monday night, I was talking with Steve and Alison and mentioned that I wasn't impressed with the museum. I told them I thought it was too science centre-ish. Steve mentioned that there weren't enough real fossils and I mentioned the one I enjoyed. I was confused by his de-

scription and I told them what I saw. I only saw one zone of the museum, the space that used to be the Geology museum. Ah, that made sense, I thought, and headed out early on Tuesday to find the real deal.

And I did.

Once inside, I discovered the place was crawling with fossils. Lots of ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs and so on. There were a bunch of Ice Age Mammals and so on too. I love that stuff. I went to get a drink and to start typing. I found a Pepsi (my dear, I dislike it even more than the Coke) and took a seat right in front of a stuff panda. Not a stuffed animal panda, but a taxidermic one that looked like it had seen better days. I guess I would look like that too if I had been stuff and put on exhibit for a few decades. In fact, it reminded me of the panda in Balls of Fury the one that Dietrich Bader goes back save, only to return to the scene telling everyone that the panda was dead. You should see the movie if you don't mind stupid comedy written by really smart people.

I will say that museums like the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park and the National Museum of Natural History must have way better conservation and maintenance staffs. These taxidermic animals were looking way bad. They need serious work. True, some of these things have been around for a century or so, but that's no excuse to not have kept them up. True, it would be difficult to get a new Panda to stuff, but really, they could have at least tried!

This brings up the concept of eating pandas as the way to save them. I've written of it before, of the way that we must make it lucrative to the business world to breed them and sell them as food stuffs. That way, we'll have business behind us, a way to get rid of all that damn bamboo that's sitting around, and the world's cuddliest agribusiness holdings!

I went and had a look at the red panda, which also looked like hell. I kinda like Red Pandas better. They're more racoony and comical looking. Plus, color almost always replaces Black and White if you look at the history of things. I got up and headed for the next floor. I was hoping for better upkeep, but I might have been asking for too much. It's the Musicological way: we pick at other people's problems so that we feel better when we hear about them picking at ours. I was sitting right next to the entrance to the offices and I heard people using museum speak. I wanted to say that I totally understood what they meant when they were saying that they found a cuss under the back (meaning a kid had managed to weasel behind one of the cases and gotten himself stuck in the area on the bottom.), but I thought better of it. I had work to do.

I wandered about working and enjoyed the exhibits. This is what old museums used to be like back home. The faded and tattered animals in one hall had notes saying that since they didn't collect animals for Taxidermy any longer, they had to keep the ratty ones out. They could fix them up, but I understand the theory. I walked through the Dinosaur room and was pretty impressed. There was something for hard core Dino fans

(and I'm not talking about Pete Weston here) and there was something for kids to play with and take away. Since I play more on the Dino Fan team, I went through it much faster than I would if I had a kid or something.

After that, I kinda needed to head over to the V and A again. It was a lovely day for it, slightly less crowded than it had been the day before, but it was a wonderful day. I started in the Islamic room. Glory. I love Islamic art and the tapestries were incredible and there were Swords. You gotta love Swords. The clothing was very interesting, and I was shocked to see that there was a robe with an image of Christ on the Cross. I read the label, because the last thing anyone who works at a museum wants to do is read a label, and discovered that it was Armenian, the hardest of the hard core Christians. I also discovered that it was a Middle Eastern room and not merely an Islamic room. I stuck around for a while, enjoying the art. I blitz through a lot of rooms in museums, only pausing when there's a single magnificent piece. Then, after I've sucked the marrow from it, I continue on my way.

I got Roast Pork and Potatoes and Veg. The veg equaled car-



rots and cooked leeks which were beautiful. Yes, it was pricey, a little over twenty bucks after conversation, but it was tasty and filling. There was also a girl who made for good theater. I had seen her in the Renaissance gallery as I was walking to the cafe, and she was deeply involved in the pieces there. She had hair as wild as mine, but stark black. She was maybe 23. I got my lunch and took a seat. She came along a little later and took a seat in the center of the dining room, all by herself. There were a number of mural pieces on the upper portions of the walls at 360 degrees. She was trying to eat, but people kept coming up to her. First, it was a woman looking for brown sugarcubes. She didn't understand what she was saying. The guy asking was Italian and he used a form of English that was not recognizable as such without the lucky chance that he used the word Tupperware. After that, a woman came wandering in staring at the murals. She tapped the poor girl on the shoulder and started asking her questions. She was speaking in very rapid English and the poor girl obviously wasn't catching much. She looked over at me and I gave her the 'I'm so sorry' smile. She was then descended upon by a mob of jabbering English woman who took the rest of her table. That led to her getting up and moving elsewhere. These things happen.



Say what you will about Christianity, but they I love early Christian art stuffs. The VeeAndAy had a bunch of things that I fell in love with. A wooden Christ on an Ass that was once dragged through the streets of some German village on Feast days caught me harder than most. There was a great four dial table clock that I enjoyed. There was a lot of carved wood from Germany and The Netherlands and so on. Something odd happened. I felt sleepy. Far too sleepy. I didn't know what to do about it, since I was way out and didn't have a way to hook up my CPAP anyhow. Sleep wouldn't happen, so I figured a trip to the Tate Museum. That was a way off, it would give me a chance to rest my feet while I was on the train and it's an art museum with free admission. I took the train and then when I got off, I was right at the base of Big Ben.

My ghod...I'd become a tourist.

I started walking and I came across Westminster Abbey. It's the most famous church in the world that's not in Rome. I figured what the hell, I might as well take a look and see what they've got. I paid up and walked in and realized that there was a lot to see. I saw the tombs of four of my fave Monarchs: Liz 1, Mary Queen of Scots, Hank VII, and King Edward the Confessor. Sadly, I didn't get up close into the Shrine of Edward the Confessor, my second favorite English King (after Alfred the Great), but you could see the tomb and a few pieces from the floor below it. I walked around and found many others who I was interested in. I went through Poets Corner, which had a lot of awesome names attached to it. Gerard Manley Hopkins. TS Elliot. Longfellow. Handel. Dylan motherfuckin' Thomas! You name a big British poet and they were there, either in body or simply in recognition. And there was Olivier. I love his work.

I went

to the Abbey Museum which was kinda cool and I saw the other Coronation Chair (the regular one I had already seen) and I enjoyed the story of who they fixed things



£ 10.00

up and the work they were doing to keeping things running. I love that kind of content. At one point, I remembered that I had yet to add that story about the Scrubbing Bubbles. I was in the middle of Westminster Abbey and I knew if I waited, I would forget. I ducked into one of the side chapels just as a Russian Tour Group was leaving a massive vacuum as they had managed to fit about 40 people in the space. In the Cena was the tomb of King Henry the Seventh (His friends called him Hank7) and that was also the only place where I could set my iBook to be able to type it out was on top of the tomb. Yes, I know, I know. I'm supposed to be the cultural ambassador and all, but in the end, I'm still just a stupid American. A member of the Cloth passed by and said for me to get off the thing, and I did, since I was done. I believe, though I am not sure, that this will be the first TAFF report in which a part was created directly over the remains of a British Monarch.

I spent about an hour and I figured that it was time to go and see the Tate.

I started typing this at that Tate surrounded by the paintings of JMW Turner. He's a big name round these parts. I always thought his stuff was really stuffy and dull. What do I know? I came across town by the Circle Line. I actually sorta lucked into it as I had no idea that I was on the wrong line at first, but they made us detrain and the next train that showed up was the right one in the right direction with the most direct service because I had moved in that way. Win!

Tate Britain isn't bad. It's all English painters so there's no Motherwell, Rothko, Klee, Picasso, Warhol, Dali, Miro or Basquiat. There was a David Hockney, which is good, but I wish he'd had more. There was this great Pop Art piece of a slot machine that I really enjoyed. Nothing will get my vote faster for fine art than a reference to gambling. I took a seat in the Reading Area and heard two curators (or it may have been one curator and a prospective curator) talking museum theory. They claimed that the integration of live object and web content is the most massively important thing there is, but that at some point it will all but completely replace the live interaction experience. I am thinking that is not the case and was about to go over and say something, but I thought better of it and went along my way to see the rest of the museum.

That's when I ended up in the Turner room, staring at the piece with a deer that looked like it would have been in a paint along PBS series, typing on this iBook, a piece of design that rivals almost any other consumer product. I typed up this section and stopped. The guard came around and had a look at me.

"What that?" he asked, pushing his chin at my iBook.

"It's my laptop." I said.

"Why you got it here?" he responded.

"I'm typing up a report." I said.

"Oh, you work for the museum then. I'll leave you at it." He said, wandering across the room.

Oh, what I could have done if I weren't so tired.

Yes, and I'm supposed to run a test on the lickability of this painting.

I'm supposed to write about the darkest portions of the warehouse. Take me there now!

Yes, I'm supposed to have a group coming to take this one away. Will you help me get it down?

Those are all things I could have said. I wish I had that much clarity. Then again, if I had that sort of wit, I'd have come up with a much different career path.

After the Tate, I walked down to Victoria Station. It didn't take nearly as long as I thought it might, so I just wanted to grab a seat and rest my feet a while. I was sitting there, watching the giant screen and the news-



crawl when I saw what I thought was Mark Plummer. I was sure I was mistaken, all Britons looking alike as they do, and went back to the screen. Then I caught a glimpse of another fan from the BArea who I knew was staying with them. I was right! I caught up with them and we chatted. The point was made that there were only 20 people in all of London, so I had to run into them sooner or later. They headed off and I headed off to Steve and Alison's.

I got on the train and my head was lolling. I was beat. I got to their house and headed upstairs to just get off my feet. After that, we went to Eat 17 for Waffles. Dinner Waffles. I was very happy. I had Chicken and Mushroom Waffles that were amaz-

ing. The chicken was well-cooked, the mushrooms were great and the wine sauce was without failure. Another boffo meal from the Brits. We chatted and Jonathan was a bit rambunctious. He had to go out a couple of times, but he settled a little once he got the food in him. Marianne was snarky and hilarious. She so reminded me of Evelyn. I started to miss her very badly. I got an eMail from my Mom saying that Evelyn wanted to call to make sure I was OK. I wish my cell phone actually worked, or that I could at least send a text to her. The Open sign was turned so that the Closed part was facing us. Jonathan quite rightly noted that meant that the Outside was closed. That was a good laugh. They closed the restaurant a little later so we could leave now that the Outside was open.

After that, we walked home, talking about Video Game theory and the need for evangelists. Alison would do that well. I would make a great host for a show that basically said 'Man, gaming is awesome!' And so it goes.

Chapter 6- Wednesday- With These Pictures of You



There aren't nearly enough water fountains in this country. In the US, you see a bathroom, you're pretty sure there's a water fountain (or bubbler) nearby. Here, they seem to be scarce. I'm not sure why. I noticed this as I took my first trip to the British Museum.

On the Tube ride over, I took a seat on a train at Walthamstow and sitting across from me was an obviously homeless guy splayed out across two seats. I can't say I'd seen any homeless folks on my travels, which made me feel like I was finally in a big city. There are supposed to be people like that wandering around, making one feel slightly too privileged. This whole trip has kinda made me feel that way. I don't deserve

the great treatment I've had from the wonderful people of British fandom. It's just too great. Claire and Mark started things out making me feel excellently well taken care of and then Alison and Mike kept the ball rolling. By Wednesday morning, I was felling like the world was being too good to me. There's my constant saying: ebb and flow. Good comes and goes, just like the bad. About the only thing that doesn't seem to follow that rule is the presence of water fountains in Great Britain. Go figure.

I made it to the Brit about 20 minutes after they opened the Great Gallery (which is, by the way, great) and before the individual exhibits opened. I took in all of the opened areas before the exhibit galleries opened up. There were obelisks and statues and two big ol' totem poles. In the center was a special exhibit on the First Emperor, China's Terra-cotta Army. It was a very cool exhibit, but there was no way I'd be able to get a visitor ticket. Luckily, I'd be going to another cool special exhibit tomorrow...but that's later in this report.

I took a look at the Living and Dying exhibit, which looked at how various groups lived and died. There was this big table with a woven thing featuring thousands of pills of various kinds surrounded by photos and stories and objects. It was a powerful story of the way pharmaceuticals have changed the world and transformed life. The look at the ways of traditional groups, including various North American tribes, was very cool. There was an awesome little section on Tarot and divination. They had a cheaply produced Ryder-Waitte deck as the main example, but there was a nice divination book made of bark. I thought that was awesome.

I brought my camera this time. I started into the Egyptian gallery as soon as the door opened and moved beyond the Rosetta Stone. I'd be back. I headed to the right and looked over all their funky Egyptian thingees. I couldn't find Bast. I was looking because I know that Linda would love it, but there was none. I am fail. The various tomb pieces and the recreations of tombs and such were great, but I actually think that the Rosecrucian Museum's collection on display is more fun. Of course, I didn't see the Mummy section at that time, so I was

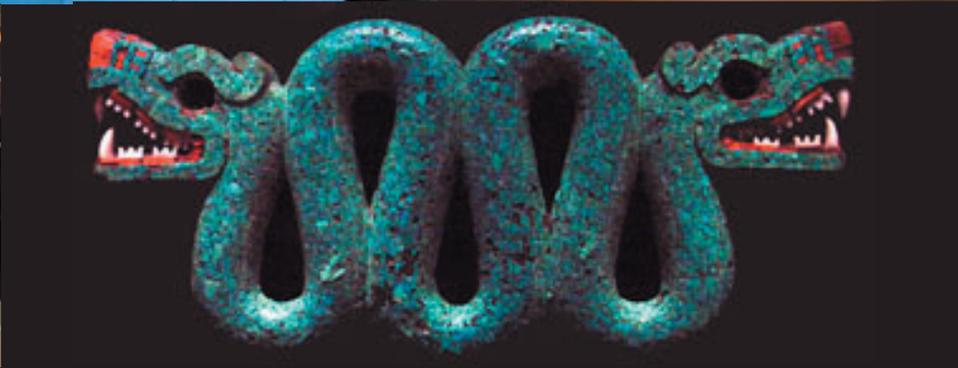
slightly underinformed. That seems to be another theme now, doesn't it?

The Parthenon and Assyrian stuff was good too. Lots of photos from those two rooms. Lots of Cuneiform. We had a thing in elementary school where we used weeds to do some cuneiform stuff on tables. It was awesome to see the real deal so close. I didn't touch. I wanted to, but I held back.

Wandering around, I took a lot of the photos you're seeing around these pages. There was a great exhibit where they showed what museology was like in the pre-1900 era. The place was built to resemble those cabinet and view box studies of people like King George III. In fact, they had his collection of Greek coins and showed his methods for cataloging. Honestly, this wouldn't have been interesting to anyone who wasn't a museum geek. There were pieces, including some important ones from Greece, the Middle East and MesoAmerica, but largely it was an exhibit about the art of exhibitry. Talk about right up my alley. It also dealt with many of the important names in the history of archeology, museology, paleontology and so on. This kind of exhibit works on a couple of levels, but mostly the place was full of passthrough people and kids looking to fill out portions of the school scavenger hunt sheets.

There were clocks and Christian Icons in the next room. I love clocks. I love old Christian iconography. Two great tastes that taste great together. Took lots of photos here. The room to photo ration for that part of the museum was extremely high. Back through the recreation room and to the Mayan room. This is stuff I know, but it was incredible to see objects that I knew from the cover of High School Spanish text books (like the blue serpenty thing) from popular Mexican tattoo designs (the wall pieces) and even one that was used as a part of a Robert Rauschenberg picture from the 1960s (That funny faced guy). I spent a fair deal of time in that room.

I had a date at the Cartoon Museum, so I stopped and got some museum food (the Chicken BLT was really good, as was the Strawberry Banana Innocent Pure Fruit



Smoothie) and then typed for a bit to make sure I caught the first part of this tour. Off to Cartoonia!

The Cartoon Museum of London is kinda new and kinda old. They've been around since 1988 and they moved into the current building, just around the corner from the British Museum. I couldn't find it at first, but I found something that would certainly point me in the right direction: the Comic Book Shop. I walked in and asked if they could point me to the Museum, which they did. Then I figured that I should buy a small press comic, which I did and was quite impressed. I also failed to notice it was



from an artist who writes out of San Francisco. Weird.

I headed over to the Museum and was greeted by the Assistant Curator. Since I'm an Assistant Curator, it was nice to be able to talk to someone on my level. She started by walking me around and getting me a few stories of how they were founded. They had a lovely mural done by British artists, in including Steve Bell, a guy I have to admit that I'm a big fan of. The place is kinda small and it's not chock full like the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, but that's a good thing as you get a better feel for each piece in a less packed space. The Cartoon Museum focuses on British comic and cartoon artists from the last 300 or so years. There's a lot of great stuff from the very start of cartooning from folks like Gilroy that turned out to be even more interesting than the other cartoons. As soon as you enter the first floor gallery, you find a small setup room with two Heath Robinson machines. Heath Robinson, the English cartoonist whose drawings of strange and funky machines were some of the most fun for the first half of the 20th Century, was the English equivalent of Rube Goldberg. His stuff is fun and someone actually built working models of two of his machines, one of which is a feeding machine which they've got a video playing. It's a great little piece and one of the few objects in the museum that's not on paper.



The pieces in the main exhibit that interested me the most were by Charles Addams and Heath Robinson. There was also a brilliant satirical piece about the Great Victorian Exhibition that had some hilarious illustrations. I love that kind of stuff.

We walked around and found more stuff that really caught my eye. We looked into the library and they had a small section of American books to explain the connection with British cartooning. I was getting the full tour, so I even got to see the main storage rooms. While there wasn't a lot of storage space, and most museums don't keep every-

thing in the one location, the stuff they had in stores was amazing. She took me into the safe where they keep the most pricey pieces and the ones with serious environmental needs. There was a box labeled Fantastic Fours issues 1-186 plus Annuals. You Can't argue that those deserve some extra protection. There were some amazing pieces in there, and I only got to see some of them. We talked museum talk, which is only interesting to museum people, and we ended up finding out that our two museums have a lot in common. They do a solid education program, and even manage to hold drawing classes along with doing some gallery talks. That sort of thing is exactly what a good Assistant Curator should do.

The comic book stuff was upstairs. She explained that they were weakest in comics, which is kind of understandable considering they were founded as a cartoon museum. but they still have some lovely pieces. A large sheet of 2000ad was my favorite, but they also had some significant pieces of things like Judge Dredd. They had a few pieces from issues of things I've seen before, but it was small. In one of their larger storage area, they were busy reboxing a bequest of comics that she said almost doubled their collection of comics. That's a good thing to hear. I have to remember to ask James Bacon is he's been there since I know he's a comic nut and lives 'round these parts.

The tour ended with me wandering around. I got a few snapshots, which the Assistant Curator reminded me was not allowed, except for a general shot of the museum space that she said I could run. There was a piece that I did shoot, and I know that makes me evil, of Future Facial Hairstyles that I just had to remember. I always need to have a reference to what my hair could be turned into.

My favorite piece happened to be in the window and I first saw it was walking by. It's a red vinyl chair. It's shaped like Mao Tze-tung. It's called Manchair Mao. I nearly plotzed it was so funny.

The Cartoon Museum is small but well worth the trip. I'd say have lunch at the place right around the corner and then head in and plan on spending about an hour. If you can, buy stuff in the gift shop because they've got so much great stuff, it's not even funny.

After the Cartoon Museum, the best museum in the world!, I headed back to the Brit. This time, there were Mummies to be seen. I love Mummies, though I'm often creeped out by the fact that they're dead people wanted to see the Islamic room first, then take the Elevator to the top, which the elevator legend said was Japan, and then work my way down. The Islamic room was full of beautiful designs and calligraphy. There was a gorgeous Qaran in the entry, but there were German tourists right in front of it.



And that's another thing: the Germans! They're everywhere. I've run into probably fifty different groups of Germans. They're very polite, speak better English than I do and they always have trouble with figuring out how much something costs. I got into a lovely conversation with a German woman at the Brit. She was quite fetching, which is a nice way of saying she'd be pretty if she didn't have such a long nose. Still, she was very nice and we spent a lot of time talking about the fact that the Museum hadn't done much to make sure that people didn't touch the artifacts. They're right there with some signs saying no touching, but really, there's nothing stopping you from touching many of the most important artifacts in Egyptology and elsewhere. She works for the Auto museum in Bremen. I think her name was Karla, but it might have been Klara. I'm just not sure.

After a while, I found myself in the elevator to Japan. The Gallery was pretty damn cool, especially the part of it that featured an old Clock. I just love clocks. I headed through it and found that it was very good, but lacked a few of the nice pieces that make places like the Freer (or maybe it's the Sackler) in Washington DC so awesome.

The next floor had the prints and drawings. There was a big Michaelangelo and a bunch of Durer etching and prints. I was



most impressed and spent a lot of time studying the woodcuts and etchings. They were all themed around the Passion, about Christ's trip to the cross. Some were very early, 1400s from Germany. I was thrilled. Around the corner there were several pieces of anti-Abolitionist propaganda with anti-slavery pieces as well. There kind of pieces might not get seen together usually, but they were quite effective in referring to one another. I thought they were powerful pieces. I remember a film from Cinequest, a Danish film, where the kid who was supersmart had to correct the teacher to remember that it was the English and not the Danes that first freed the Slaves. I believe that movie was called *We Shall Overcome*.

After that, I made my way to the Egyptian room. It was amazing. Mummies and coffins and funerary pieces all over the place. I was happy to see them all. I've seen several of the most important mummies from the various kingdoms when they've toured, but there were some here that were in amazing shape. The description of how they were treated and cared for won me over. There's a lot of 'This is How We Do It' stuff in the UK. I think American museum need to do more of that. The other funny was that there was much more light on objects in the UK than back home. I'm not sure why that is. We talked about it at the Cartoon Museum and the answer might just be that the English want people to get a look at it and understand what they're seeing while we Americans simply want to hide the dirt. That could be it.

How could anything else compete? I headed into the Great Gallery (Still great, by the way) and then headed out to the Tube so that I could get to the Whiskey Shoppe that Mark Plummer had told me about. As I got to the Tottenham Court Road stop, there was a busker playing an electric guitar. It was so very cool that he was playing *Thriller*. A couple TAFF people were doing the *Thriller* dance. It was very funny. I made my way to Leicester Square and walked around. I finally found the Whiskey place and was pleased to see their selection, but I certainly didn't want to buy any of it. They did have an *Isle of Jura*, but they wanted 45 pounds for it. Too much. I headed across the road to *Forbidden Planet* and I saw something in the window...

In Memory of Sir Arthur C. Clark- 1917-2008

Oh my. I had no idea he had died the night before. He was never one of my favorites, but he was one of the few authors that ever returned my eMails personally within an hour of my sending it to him. That puts him

in the company of Jay Lake and Howard Hendrix. I went inside and tried to find a Shaun the Sheep thingee for Evelyn, but the ones they had were very expensive. I went downstairs and nearly bought John Barrowman's book. Sadly, I did not and I head out in to the regular day, headed back to Alison and Steve's for the last night there. As I was riding the train, I found out that Oscar winning director Anthony Minghella had also passes away. That wa sad, though he was the one that forced the English Patient on the world. Still, I liked the Talented Mr. Ripley.

I got there and checked my mail. Hundreds of messages have come through, which is impressive. I got mails out to all the woman in my life: Linda, my Mom, Evelyn, Gen, Jean Martin, all of them. I told them how much fun I'm having and how it'll all be incredibly sad when it's over...except for the part where I get some solid sleep. That'll be kinda nice. I spent some time hangin out and watching Jonathan play Mario Galaxy on the Wii. I love that system. Nintendo really hit it right on the head this time.

After that it was dinner and then sleep. I had to get to Heathrow early in the morning and That was going to be tricky! The dinner that Steve made was really good. It was pasta with a ragout of ham, artichokes, red peppers and onions. It was delicious, which is odd since I don't normally enjoy artichokes that much. This round was really good stuff. I actually made a couple of wraps with the lettuce they put out and that was even better. Darn good cook, that Steve.



Chapter 7- Thursday- Girlfriend in a Corva, I know, I know, It's Serious

The Pickadilly line goes a long way. From Cockfosters to Heathrow. I got up real early so that I could make it to Heathrow to meet Frank and Brianna around 9. That meant I had to get on the train out of Walthamstow station about 7:15. I didn't get up quite in time. I was out by 7:20. I changed and managed to get a seat on both the Victoria Line and the Pickadilly Line, which was good because I wouldn't want to be standing for all that time. I learned that one could get any number of different papers just by sitting on the Tube. I found a copy of the London Paper, which is one of those free papers that are all over the trains when they stop. I got myself a copy and read the paper. There was a celebrity section that made me happy because it felt like America. I read about Lindsay Lohan, LiLo they call her in the London mags, and her unhappy run-in with Paris Hilton. I was happy to read these great pieces of trash writing. There was also real news like the fact that Britain is probably going to be hit harder by the housing drops than even the Americans. Once again, we ruin it for everyone!

I had to pick up Linda, so I made it to Heathrow and stopped by the Hotel, The Radisson Edwardian. First off, I had to find Frank, which turned out to be much easier than I expected. He was in the lobby right as I walked in. Imagine my surprise. We hugged and chatted and I actually managed to check in at 9:30 in the morning. They were quite nice to me right off. Can't argue with that. Frank and I headed up to my room on the third floor. We got there and we found our room: the Marlborough. That's right, my room had a name. The Marlborough. It sounded like the kind of room where a murder would happen and everyone was a suspect. Yes, I liked the sound of that. The Marlborough. I dropped off my stuff and went downstairs looking for food. The hotel restaurant's prices were nuts. They had the unmitigated gall to ask for 11 pounds fifty for a burger. That's not cool. I understand that hotel prices are always high, but that was just flat out evil. I ended up going next door to the McDonalds and buying a Bacon Sandwich meal. It was really good with all sorts of brown sauce. I like Brown Sauce. After that, we headed back to pick up Brianna, Frank's girlfriend. She was getting ready and we waited talking about the plans to make the Guidolon movie a feature film over the next year and a half or so. It's a fun idea and as the voice of the lead character, I can't argue. We headed out and caught the bus, though the first one ran off before we got there, even though we were running towards it and were within 20 yards or so when it pulled away. Weird.

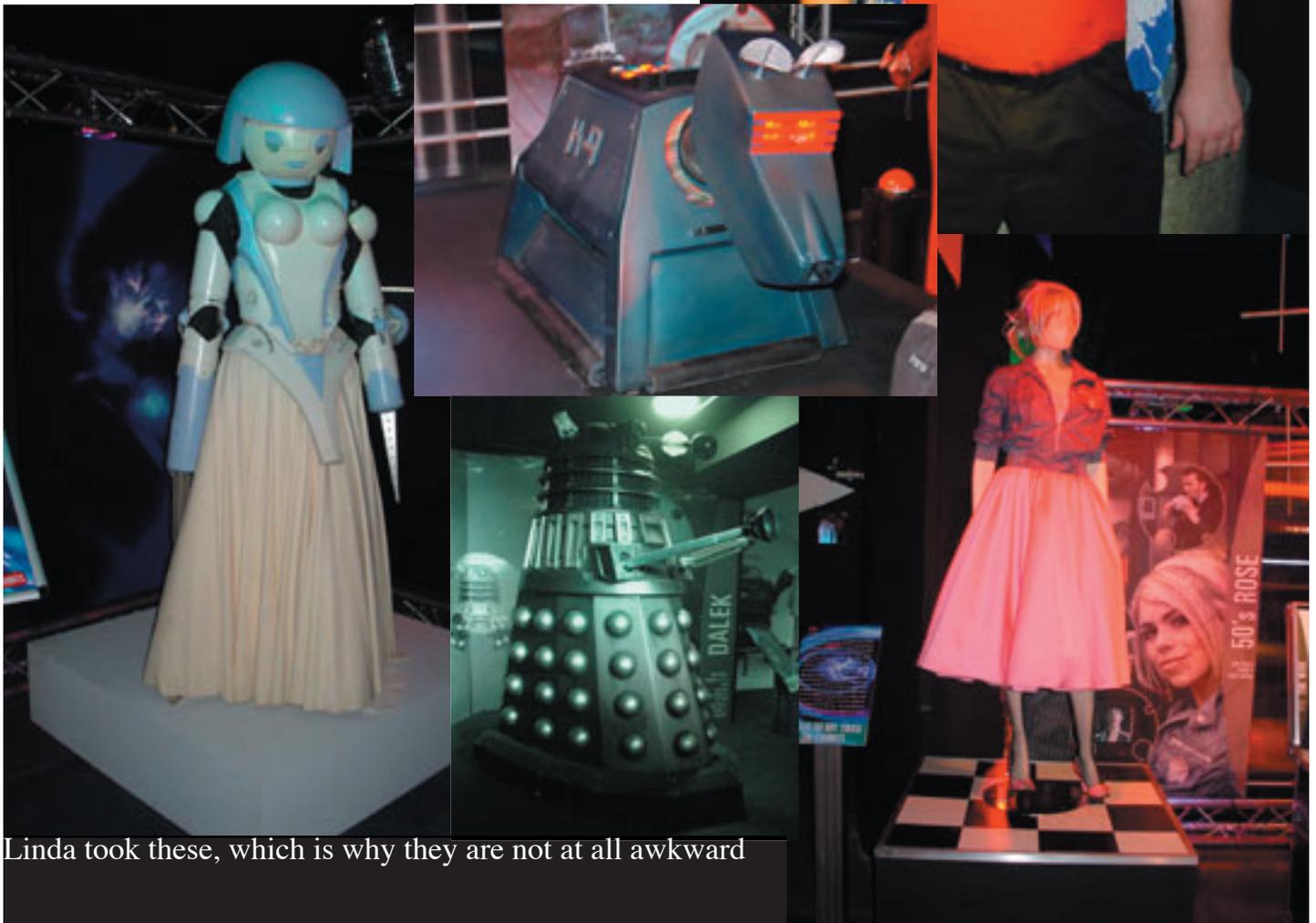
Getting to Heathrow, I explained how Frank and Brianna could get to Tottenham Court Road so they

could go to the British Museum. I can't believe I had picked it up so quickly. Frank and Brianna went to the Pickadilly line and I headed into the airport to meet Linda. It took a while, but Linda arrived a little behind schedule along with Jerry and Ken Patterson. They were the couple who I had married a couple of weeks before I left. The two of them were on their honeymoon, but we had made plans to get together on the one night they were gonna be in London. We broke off and Linda and I went to the room and dropped off her stuff and got some rest. I have to admit, this trip is tiring. Is every tourist's visit this rough? Does every visitor manage to get only 5 hours of sleep and then head into town and walk mile after mile? Is this normal? I wanna know. No...I demand to know!

Anyhow, after a while, Linda and I were ready for fun. We get up and took the Pickadilly line into London, meeting Frank, Brianna, Ken and Jerry at Earl's Court. For the Dr. Who Exhibit.

That's right. Dr. Who.

This was the opening day of the exhibit and it was a good one. It was a wonderful time. There were awesome costumes, props and...well, let us just let the pictures speak from themselves.



Linda took these, which is why they are not at all awkward

After that, we headed over for some dinner. Brianna was in a short dress and HUGE heels, so the walk was hard. Frank kept saying that we should just go to the closest place, but Ken and Jerry led us on and we arrived at Mr. Wing's, a Chinese place with a Lounge that was supposed to be quirky. We set ourselves down and they took our coats. We were the only ones in the place. We found ourselves a lot of stuff on the menu that sounded good, so we all picked a dish. The dishes weren't big, but they were packed full of wonderful sauce. I loved the Fillet with Lemongrass and Ground Black Pepper and the sauce was great just served on the rice. The Ants Climbing Up A Log was also topnotch. We talked and ate and laughed and sang along with the Carole King classic You're So Vain. We all thought of what it would be like if it was done by Carol Kane. The singing was great, and Ken provided a beautiful counterpoint. It was a great time. Mr. Wing himself commented on my big ole belly on the way out. It was an exceptional thing. Wait...I think that You're So Vain was Carly Simon.

After that, we headed to the shops to get a few things. Me and Linda got a pair of Strawberry Tarts. They were so wonderful. I mean, I waited outside in the deep cold while the others went in to another shop so I could finish mine. It was so good, I barely noticed my nose freezing off. We walked to the Tube and headed back home. Linda and I somehow got separated from Frank and Brianna. They caught a Heathrow train that went to Terminal 4 first while we ended up in Terminal 3. It was perfect that we managed to meet up at the bus back to the Hotel. After that, it was time to go and get some sleep. I walked by the restaurant and the bar. There was Vince Docherty and Ben Yalow in the restaurant and Charlie Stross and a bunch of others in the bar. Linda and I were tired so we went to the room and watched some comedy on the TV and she fell asleep while I was typing the days events. She's so cute when she's sleeping. It was a good image to end the day on.



Chapter 8: Friday- Talk, Talk

The first day of Eastercon happens like this: I wake up at 6 and we get ready for an hour and head to McDonalds. The restaurant here is just too damn expensive. That's the sad part: the cost of this country. I'm constantly shocked at how much things cost. Often the prices are the same in pounds as they would be in dollars back home...and in some cases more. At least McDonalds is about the same as home, but the menu has a couple of things that we'd never see on the menu back home, like the Bacon Breakfast (pronounced bref-ist in the proper Cuban way) sammich. Bacon, bread, brown sauce. Nothing better than that. After I finished inhaling the deliciousness, Linda was still eating. I was wearing my Casa de WorldCon: Hollister in 2008 shirt and drinking my orange juice. A guy sitting at the next table said 'Y'all from Hollister?' I said 'No, San Jose. You?' 'Me? I'm from Hollister.'

Now, this may not sound like a miracle, but there are only about 20,000 people in Hollister, Ca, and it's not the kind of place you'd expect to send a guy out to the UK. Turned out he was a plane flying fan and told us all about the P51 Mustang he flew.

He even showed up the photos from his flight. He had a video that he made with his digital camera and it was really cool as he took a long shot of him from a barrel roll. He flew in the Ridge Runner, and it had 20 kills in WWII (or The Deuce, as we kids call it) It was awesome. Turns out that the dude was a entomologist and was a specialist in the study of vector control and elimination. He basically developed a way to keep mosquitos from breeding in the pools that collect under large stacks of logs. I never thought that having such large piles of wood would cause tremendous amounts of heat from their compression, and they need to have water poured on them and under the piles it stays a perfect 92 degrees. He developed a way to use a system to eliminate the mosquitos from those pools. It was actually really interesting and a bigger amount of information on vector control than I even expected. We had to go to the con, so we headed home and then checked our mail in the Internet Lounge for an hour. No one else was there, which is good as we both complained loudly at the mails that we

were getting. Linda was very funny because she was dealing with Costume-Con matters and that meant that bozos who were asking for various membership things were annoying her. These things happen.

We finally had to register for the con. Registration was a long process. They had two lines: those that know their number and those that don't. I didn't. We got into line and as we trudged ever-slower towards the Reg Desk, we struck up conversations. The guy behind us, after he heard us talking about the Registration Process and how it will be handled for COSTUMEcon 26, started asking us questions about how to handle the matter of Fan Names. The guy turned out to be Martin Easterbrook, a dude whose name I've seen here and there. We chatted off and on for a while and I was most happy to have met more folks. We ran into a few other folks I knew via name: There was Liz Baty, who I had failed to meet the day before and I owed her chocolate. There was Mark and Claire again, who introduced us to Ang Rosin, the winner of the last GUFF race. There was Bill Burns, the man responsible of my FANAC by starting and running eFanzines.com.

And let me say here that no one is more responsible for the changing state of fandom. In fifty years, people will be talking about the explosion of FANAC between 2000 and 2010 and Bill Burns will be the one that is to blame. There'd be no Vegas Fandom Weekly, no eI, no Drink Tank, no nothin' without Bill coming up with eFanzines being set up (originally to host No Award, Marty Cantor's zine). So, here's to Bill Burns!

Anyhoo, after we got our stuff, we headed into a panel. It was on Dr. Who. Sadly, Wombat, Mr. Jay Howard Finder, was holding a conversation right at the doorway. Linda thought that it was just like being the one who gets off an escalator and stands at the bottom talking with someone. I kinda agreed. This was a decent panel because it dealt with things in the British perspective. The look at Who as being something that has been bastardized for American syndication (which is weird) and that it also may be what really saves the BBC overall. It's a hit, that's for sure, but it's not the media explosion that something like The Office was for a while, or Footballer's Wives turned into. There was someone on the panel that worked for the BBC. That's a good get. I think that US Con Media fans are slightly more detail oriented, which kinda made it more interesting to see fans who aren't super-memoratic. Their take on Torchwood wasn't too positive. I like Torchwood a lot, largely because they do some weird stuff with the obvious bravado of a team of writers who know that no matter what they do it's gonna make it.

I headed out of the room and downstairs in search of Frank Wu. I found him not. Instead, I ran into Peter Weston. He's a good guy who I enjoy chatting with whenever I see him. Plus, he also happens to do the best fanzine in the whole wide world, Prolapse, and I told him so. Ben Yalow was there and totally agreed with me. I was glad to hear that. Ben and I talked for a while. He's a good guy, and I don't get to talk to him often. He used to come to BayCon once in a while and though he wasn't at the last one, he usually shows up at the Westercons. We've done about a dozen panels together over the years, mostly on Buffy and the like. We talked about Americans at Eastercon, about the regulars and about Boston fandom. I always considered him a Boston fan, though I was once very sternly reminded that he's actually a New York fan. Go figure.

James Bacon has been doing his part to make this a powerful trip. This time, he had 107 issues of The Drink Tank printed up and stapled. That's a goodly number, about 1 for every 10 attendees and probably 3 times as many as people who would potentially find it interesting. I was then surprised that he handed me a small baggy of TAFF pins. That's a good thing too. I was chatting with Ang and Liz, who happens to have an iBook exactly like mine, and I offered them both one. Liz gladly took one and that was that. Ang, the GUFF winner, decided that she didn't want to cross-promote and pull for the other fund. I totally understand that as it's a dog-eat-dog world for the Fan Funds. I thought that



From Bottom to Less bottom: Sue Mason, Bebbel-Bear, Langford and Neil, Chris O'Shea, Ian Sorensen and bearded guy from the Pub Quiz



I should challenge her to Thunderdome: Two Delegates Enter, One Delegate Leaves, but I let that one go before I said anything about it.

After dropping things off at the room, Linda headed for the big panel on Perdido Street Station which I would have gone to but I needed to mingle. I ended up finding Alison Scott who was chatting with Patrick Neilsen-Hayden. I'd never met Patrick and he was chatting with Charles Stross and Ben again. We chatted and were eventually joined by Mr. Dave Langford. That made 3 TAFF winners all chatting away happily. I gave out issues of The Drink Tank to people, which made them curiously look at me. I know, I know, it's not supposed to be on paper, but what can I do? Christopher Priest came by

and I shook his hand. I've never read any of his stuff, but he's a guy who I really respect. Dave gave me a CD with an article for the zine with James Bacon on Saturday, which made me happy. Getting Best Fanwriters on a Fanzine in an Hour is a big deal.

I should mention that this was the day after they put forward the Hugo nominations to the public. I was on there, as was Dave Langford. For the Best Fanzine, PLOKTA and The Drink Tank were on there. There were many other noms, but I don't want to bore you with that. You can always go to hugosawardwatch.com. I had a few folks dropping me thanks, including Guy Lillian who sent me a note. It's always good to be around people when you can talk about good news. Sadly, no nom for Banana Wings. That's a sin.

After a while, I was pulled away by Claire. She had an introduction to do. I walked out with her and was shown to Mr. John The Rock Coxon. Man, he's young. He has this whole Harry Potter thing going on. He's the greatest living under 20...and quite possibly the only.



Hey! This is Mr Coxon himself typing at the moment! Chris just ate a baked potato and we're talking about keyboards. As well as that, we're discussing me coming to visit in California this summer, and drinking at SF cons (BlimpCon will have Chris as its second GoH - just wait for me to be rich enough to get myself a blimp!). Anyway, there is toot to be talked and beer to be drunk so I'll hand you back to the master now. High five!

OK, that's enough of that. Can't have these up-starts dropping in and taking over these reports. I kept on chatting with guys like Dave Biggs, Niall Harrison, Liz Baty (who had great brownies available) and Mark and Claire. We talked about everything and it's a weird thing that John Coxon is a mad man. You can't argue that this guy is amazing and he'll be a big deal for as long as he decides to be a part of fandom. In addition, if he were to come over to the States for a con, he'd clean up with the chicks. There's no question about that. He's visiting briefly in the Summer, so I have to try and introduce him around a bit.

Anyhoo, I was on a panel at 3 with Niall Harrison, Christopher Priest, John Jarrold and Caroline Mullan. We gathered in the Green Room half an hour ahead of time and Linda was with me. I let Linda fill out my tent card and she did a lovely job. So lovely, in fact, that she was asked to do the rest for the day. She did a beautiful job. She earned three groats, which she could use to buy bheer and so make living cheaper. Can't argue with that. While we were talking, John Jarrold mentioned something about Rockets Across the Waters. I instantly grabbed my iBook and wrote that down as the title for the TAFF report, especially after John said that it would make a great TAFF report title. It's always good to hear that smart people think alike.

The panel went on really well. It was all about folks who write Science Fiction and are determined to be seen as mainstream authors. Names like Michael Chabon, who admits to writing Science Fiction though he is always published in mainstream situations. We went back and forth with Niall coming up with some great quotes including one about Chabon and one from JG Ballard. I was shocked to hear that Ballard was considered a mainstream writer when he's thought of as only a Science Fiction author in the US and not at all considered mainstream. The talk was solid and I teamed with Chris Priest to get a good laugh using the fact that I once found *The Guide to the Slide Rule* by Isaac Asimov in the Science Fiction. I did get a couple of laughs, which means I did my job. It was a good time and everyone seemed to think it went damn well.

After that, I went to find Linda and I ended up finding her continuing to make the name cards. She's good people. I love her to death, you know. After that, I ended up chatting with a few folks. Briefly with Rene Walling, the man who is the chair of Montreal's WorldCon. I ran into Guilia De Cesare, my favorite writer in PLOKTA. I told her this and she was quite pleased. At that moment, Sue Mason showed up. I should say that I often said that one of the best reasons to send me to the UK was because I didn't know what Sue Mason looked like. James said she looked like Geri Sullivan. He also said that Linda looked like Geri. Neither one of them do. On the other hand, my Mother is a dead ringer for Geri.



After a while, I ran into John The Rock Coxon again and we started talking, for more than an hour. Folks floated in and out, including Lunatic, a BArea fan who is a really good guy. After a while, Tobes Valois showed up. He's a great guy and we chatted about various things, including his TAFF trip to Con Jose, the virtues, or lack thereof, of my hometown of San Jose (and Milton-Keynes) and drinking at John's 18th Birthday party. John would do very well with the ladies in the States. He should get out there, he should.

More talking occurred, which is always a good thing. We eventually had to go off to dinner and we did. I love buffets, but since I had eaten a Jacket Potato the size of my head, I didn't eat as much as I might have. We talked about a few things, but mostly we ate and watched folks. I pointed out who was who that I knew. I didn't know many folks, but there were enough that I could make strong conversation. After we were done, we headed to the room for a bit and then watched some TV. I love English TV. So, there was a question on *The Weakest Link* where they asked what was the name of the guy who was in both *Quantum Leap* and *Star Trek: Enterprise* was Scott _____. The woman answered Baio. The answer was Backula, but I'd have loved to have seen Scott Baio as the captain of the first Enterprise starship. One also missed that *The Voyage of the Beagle* was by Charles Darwin. She said that it was Stephen Hawking. Weird, huh?

After that, we went to the panel about Webcomics that John Coxon was on. They didn't talk much about *Girl Genius* (Which led to Phil Foglio getting his Hugo Nomination this year), but they did say a lot of good stuff. I was most happy to get to listen to a couple of folks chatting on a stage. The room was big. Huge in fact. Right afterwards, they set up for the Opening Ceremonies. This was a good thing. They introduced the Committee, which we call the Board in the States) and then they even said my name. They didn't put up the lights, so only a few people saw me, but that was fine. At least my name got out there. I talked with a few folks in the mixer portion. A couple from France, one or two from Sweden. One of them needed someone to fill out the portion of someone who agreed to buy them a drink. I said I'd buy her a drink and filled out her spot. That was that.

After that, I found my way to Charlie Stross. I told him that he had to come to the museum at some point and he said that when he was next around, he'd do it. He then noted a couple of computers that he had that we might be interested in. I said I'd get a hold of him and we'd see about accepting them into the collection. They were machines that were weird enough in the 1980s that I'm certain we'll seriously consider, but I don't know if we'll be able to pay for them. He was a really nice guy. After that, we wandered around a bit and then we headed in for the Pub Quiz.

Now, I used to do Pub Quizzes in the US with a regular team (we were originally called Chris Garcia

and Pals) and so the chance to do a Pub Quiz in a country that is known for Pub Quizzes. Linda and I ended up with a few other fans, and all put one of us were on the Blue Martian team, part of the entire con concept where we try to gather points for various things. The best way to consider it would be like the House vs. House competition in Harry Potter. It's a great idea. We chatted and the quiz went on. There was a lot of stuff I had no idea about because it was hella British. On the other hand, we got some of the fun ones that never would have come to us. We got a lot of laughs. We were stuck on a question about three movies whose titles added up to a Tanith Lee novel title. As it happened, a little later, Tanith herself came by and we pulled her into our team. She gave us the answer and actually stuck around playing with us for the rest of the questions. I love it when the GoHs get in on the regular fun. It's like when all the GoHs at BayCon in 2005 ended up playing Blackjack together at the charity casino. That was so much fun. She was a really sweet women and I was really happy that she came. We didn't win, but we did pretty good at a lot of it. When they read the answer, we cheered and Rog Peyton said that it was no surprise that we got that one. I pointed out that she had to think about it, which was true, but once she had her brain around it, she got it. I gotta say I may end up reading at least one of the books that I have bought over the years at BASFA auctions.

After that, Linda went off to bed and I went around to the bars. I ran into Greg Pickersgill when I noticed him chatting with Peter Weston and Bill Burns. I noted that there were three TAFF winners in the spot. I also mentioned that he was my Dad's favorite writer and the Voice of Reason for Fandom. Even Greg seemed to think that was a stretch, but Dad often said that. He was a strange man, but he was often right. They ran off to the Rog Peyton roast and I headed into the Real Ale space, which was interesting. I ran into Niall Harrison, and since I had my laptop with me, I found Niall Harrison and then I plopped my laptop on his lap and said "Type". And this is what he did



Niall Harrison

My Eastercon so far, in less than 500 words: no slapfights. I thought for sure that there would at least be a slapfight in the "With Friends Like These" panel that I had to moderate -- after all, this was a panel all about outsider sf, and How Others See Us, and whether fandom is unnecessarily homogenizing or unnecessarily scornful of works not published by "approved" genre publishers, and along with me (member of a Clarke jury recently accused of effacing genre publishers in an attempt to curry favor with the mainstream) the panel included John Jarrold (accuser in the aforementioned case). But in the end, it was all terribly civilised and reasonable. Then, on the "state of the UK short fiction market" panel, one of the editorial team of Interzone agreed with my characterization of British short fiction as in a mind-numbing creative slump. (I exaggerate a little.) I find myself actually a little disappointed by the surfeit of agreement, and I wonder what it says about British fandom -- are we really all so firmly of one mind? Are we just too nice to argue with each other? Or will I be ambushed in the bar later by some drunken fan, demanding to know exactly what I think I'm talking about. Only time will tell. I'm going to give this laptop back to Chris now, because he just looked over at me and I'm a little scared of the wild gleam in his eye.

As he was typing that, I was chatting with Liz Batty and Mattia, whose name I would never remember so I decided I'd call him Steve. That's how I roll. We talked about weird stuff for a while. I mentioned that it was a pain in the ass to have hair like mine. I mean, how easy can it be to have a beard and hair that gets caught in things. In fact, after Niall finished his writing, I grabbed the laptop and handed it over to Liz to do her thing as Mattia and I continued our conversation. Here's what she wrote:

Liz Bally

We're in the real ale bar, where I'm starting my second (or is it third?) pint after a curry in which we may have outed ourselves as fans after one member of our party did an impression of Emperor Palpatine complaining about the Clarke award shortlist. Hence this may not be the most coherent thing I've ever written.

Chris is pontificating about beard and hair maintenance techniques (VO5 hot oil treatment is his top tip), and how for 250GBP you can pay him to shave the whole thing right off. I'm picking up snippets of half a dozen conversations, about laptops and help desks and how to make opera more popular, while there are men in kilts and cloaks and ruffled shirts wandering around in search of real ale or a ceilidh.

So far everything goes well despite this strange foreign keyboard, , including the two panels I managed to attend, and Tobes has been successfully persuaded not to feel my arse. I'm going back to my pint

So, after returning to the room to spend a little time with Linda, I headed back out to find folks so I could get info on what was going on in the morning. I ran into John The Rock Coxon (doesn't it just flow off the tongue) who was holding court with Max. I had met Max at LACon and in my wild stupor, gave her a hug, freaking her out. Well, that's how I remember it. So this time...I hugged her again in my Chris Garcia way.

Which has freaked out more than one fan out here. Niall's reaction was hilarious. You gotta love that. I mean, the guy's 6 foot 23 inches of gangly limbs so he could probably have destroyed me from across the room!

I chatted with Max and John and we were joined by everyone from James Bacon to the inimitable Stef. Stef, by sheer force of will, had made himself Blue Team leader, and frankly he was the right man for the job. He's mad in the best way possible. Jason and I met him at LACon and he was one of the most fun folks we met. Here, he was a little drunk. As was The Rock. I think Simone was also a bit hammered, though certainly not completely. For some reason, we started talking about Fleetwood Mac and that brought up Samantha Fox. I love Samantha Fox, having grown up sneaking looks at her in Dirty US mags and having met her in San Francisco in the early 1990s. We talked about her songs, Touch Me (I Want to Feel Your Body) and Naughty Girls (Need Love Too) and I was also asked to sing the songs. I did that badly. It's my way.

James, remembering he was a bit drunk, was given permission to bugger James by Simone. Now, that's a weird thing, but the first thing I had to ask was 'Does John have to be the top, or can they go switch?'. I have no idea why I had to ask that, I was sober so I have no excuse. It's always better to be able to say that you were at least one and a half sheets to the wind when you ask questions to which you really don't wanna know the answer. And I was given it. I love drunk talk. I really do.

I went to bed after that. It's always hard to remember to take care of yourself at a con, but I was going to be sure that I got some sleep. I figured I'd be waking up early because I had a lot of work to do on Saturday and none of it was gonna be easy.



Chapter 9: Saturday- Do You Ever Get The Feeling That The Story's Too Darn Real...

The morning started with a stuffed up nose. This is particularly troubling because I had my CPAP on and that can make it very hard to breathe. It could kill me, in theory. I figured that I'd get a little bit of a cold, but this was turning into some sort of massive nasal blockading with extreme snotacular pluggage. It's not cool. It effects my speech, which is bad.

We headed over to McDonalds where I made it a threepeat of Bacon Sandwich meals. Max, during the various bouts of chatting we did Friday night, was assigned a nickname. I have a tendency to give nicknames, and so Max was given the moniker Steve. I often turn to the name Steve as the fallback for any nickname. She also made me eat a bacon sandwich, which was very tasty. Anyhow, I believe that I've eaten more bacon in a week than I have in the last year. I really love bacon.

Linda wanted to go to a panel on Mythology and stuff. Neil Gaimen was on it, along with an Irish writer

or two and Liz Williams, who is a writer I haven't found anything that I enjoy from. The panel was pretty much a Neil Gaimen fest. Now, he's a star, a great big shining star, and everything he said was giantly funny. Or so the reaction was. And really, it was deserved. He's a funny dude. I had to leave and find James so we could work out what we were doing for the Fanzine.

Sadly, there was a problem with the files and I couldn't read them. I was minorly panicking. These things happen, and while I was internally flipping out, a lifeline was thrown from a fellow BAren and I got my files fixed. Sometimes, it's amazing when things work out. I went about doing the prep work and hanging out with Linda. We went to China Mieville's panel on difficult writing and how to deal with it. I'm firmly of the position that if it ain't on the page then it ain't a part of the story, so I differ from China there. Then again, I'm one of those guys who can never really understand things like writing. I'm just too dumb to get stuff...and I'm OK with that!

After that panel (during which I wrote a few lines of this report, but nothing else), I got ready for the panel with James creating the Fanzine. It was, without question, the most nutso thing I've done since I've been out here. I mean, a fanzine in an hour isn't that difficult: you write a few things, you maybe recycle some art and you put it up on eFanzines.com. That's not what we were doing. We had a bunch of stuff from folks like John Coxon, Dave Langford, Niall Harrison, Ang Rosin, Flick and more, plus art from Neil Gaimen. That was something of a battle. We had the art that had once run in Gerold, a fanzine from the 1990s, and we had permission from the editor to use them, but we wanted to get Neil himself to let us use them. So, my mission: find Neil, get a moment and ask him. I was smart, instead of trying to hijack him, I waited in the Green Room for him to show up to make his drink order. Like clockwork, he came and I waited for a couple of other folks to ask him questions, and then I got in.

"Hi, I've got a semi-official-type question. I'm doing the Fanzine in an Hour and we were given some of your old drawings and we were hoping that you'd let us use them." I said.

Neil sorta looked at me like I was crazy.

"Which drawings are they?"

"They're from Gerold."

"Well, I can't see why not."

And with that, we got to use Neil Gaimen's artwork.

I headed over to the Green Room and waited for James.

Apparently, he was busy getting James deLisgard to do an interview with him that we ended up using in the zine. I ate Twix. Never let anyone say that Twix isn't the greatest candy bar in the world. It could create World Peace if given half a chance.

I figured that James might just show up at the room and when I got there, there they were, ready to go. The room had been stripped and there wasn't anything to set stuff on but chairs. The was the perfect setup for me. I often do my zines while half-sitting/half-laying on the World's Most Uncomfortable Couch with the laptop on my belly. That elevates it a good two, three feet. I set myself up, but then they brought in a screen. I had no idea there was gonna be a screen, but it sounded like a good idea. I lent them the laptop to hook up, but alas, there was no appropriate cord for the thing. These things happen. John Coxon's then became the one that folks could see while people were typing.

And what a bunch of folks were working hard on the beast.

There was James Bacon cracking the whip on all of us and John Coxon prodding folks along. Lillian Edwards and Christina Lake, two former TAFF winners, did a great article together where they just riffed. Flick gave us a piece and Mike Scott gave us photos enough for the zine! There was Ang, Max (who I sometimes call Steve), Yvonne Rowse, Ian Sorensen and a bunch of others. I was most happy to see that the results were great. This was an all-star lineup of articles. It also meant that we wouldn't be finishing on time. One of the things that





a Fanzine in an Hour does is limit the amount of material you can get. If you just insist on having material created during the hour, then you have a really good chance of getting it finished within an hour and a half. If you have a mass of material ahead of time, then you've got no chance of finishing it in a timely manner.

And we had such great material ahead of time that it was not going to happen.

There was a piece, 6000+ words, from a GeekGrrl who called herself Tubewhore. Her stuff was really good and I thought that her photos were really good. It was long, taking up a lot of space, but it worked. In the end, the zine was 36 very strong pages. I was happy to see it happen, but it wasn't finished when the hour was done and I had a panel to do right after.



Greg Pickersgill, Alison Scott, Mark Plummer and I were on a panel about Fannish Awards. I like them, but don't think they should be the center of a person's FANAC. Alison Scott was more up on them, but still wouldn't say that she was against them. Mark took the middle road and Greg, who as I wrote these words was staring at me as I sat on an Oriental bench outside the Neil Gaimen reading, believed that they were totally pointless. While the panel was going on, I was working on the zine. The panel had a Hug winner (Alison), and the winners of several Novas and FAAn Awards. Everyone seemed to think that no one really did FANAC to win awards, but then I told them the story about Earl Kemp and Who Killed Science Fiction? and

people were shocked. I always thought everyone knew that story. The panel was a bit contentious, especially between Alison and Greg, but it was very entertaining from the point of view of the audience.

After that was done. I had to recharge my laptop. The problem with the iBook was that it can't run plugged into the US-UK adaptor. It just won't work. I'd draw a diagram to show why, but it probably wouldn't help. You all know why, so why should I explain it?

We went to get dinner while it was charging. It was slowly eating away at me that I wasn't working on it. I really wanted to get it finished and get it printed. It went slow. Whenever you're waiting for machines to be ready to become useful tools, you've got a fair wait. After dinner, we went back to the room and picked it up and I started pounding away at it. There was a total charge of 71%. That would be the total that I had to finish the issue. There were problems. Images needed resizing. The text needed minor snips and snaps. I had to make sure that I used every piece I got. I was most pleased with what was coming out, but nothing was perfect. Then again, would could be?

Linda wanted to go to the Masquerade, and I can't blame her, she's a costumer after all. I'm not a big Masq-goer, but I don't mind attending them as long as they're at least slightly entertaining and not too long. The Wondercon Masq went way long and the entertainment value was about a 6 on a scale of 1 to 12. Why not just use a 1 to 10 and give it a 5? Well, the difference is subtle, but important. Trust me on that one. I was furiously editing the thing together and watching the costumes and stuff in the moments between. Sue Mason was the MC and she was pretty good. She'd never work in the US because she had a casual style that sorta relied upon the audience being familiar with her technique. It was entertaining though, and her little side comments were awesome. I thought that there were some very good costumes and the ones that stuck out to me the most were Frank and Brianna's Barbarella Costumes. Sue was hilarious when she said "Is it just me or did it just get a lot hotter in here? I mean, all the men are looking at her and all the women are looking at him!" and someone from the audience called out "Not all of us!" That made me laugh.



Linda and I headed out and I sat down to furiously edit. We sat down and John Coxon joined us. We joked and I put things in, Photo-shopped images, played with what I could. It was really fun, but I noticed the sweat dripping down my back, my hair was getting in my eyes at every moment, my mouth was constantly dry. I think those are all signs of stress. I'm the TAFF Delegate, I'm not supposed to be stressed, am I? I'm supposed to be taken around in sedan chairs and have bheer upon bheer forced on me, right?

No. Not at all. And this was the first time I thought about it. I'd much rather be the guy running up against deadline and having that bead

of sweat gathering in the crook of my neck than the guy paraded around as a conquering hero. I'd much rather throw my weight behind a zine than sit around having grapes fed to me. I'd much rather be another person working than the one person having it all handed to him. I guess that means I'd make the worst Guest of Honor ever, but I'd be happy to test that out!

Still working when 10pm rolled around. Linda went to bed and I went out and worked. I work best when I'm in something of isolation. That's not to say that I'm a guy who wants to have a hundred yards every direction so I can work, but if there are three or four people around who I can talk to and stuff, that's the ideal. In this case, John helped me out and stuck around while I finished it. HE and I talked while I was working and we laughed and I realize now that he's going to be so much better than out there now that it's scary. I mean really, he's just the bomb. There's no other way to put it. We stole Liz's power supply which was the UK version of the official one for my computer. That worked perfectly. I could plug it in directly and work on the thing without having to worry about things. Once again, John The Rock Coxon comes to the rescue.

I finished at 11:23. I turned to John and said "well, I her done, now I gotta lay there and cuddle." John didn't seem to get the reference but what can I say, he's young.

After that, the tiredness started to creep in. James had already told me I looked like hell, but what do you expect? I'm not a great sleeper, I'm in a hotel room, I'm sharing a bed (which is never easy for me) and I've got stuff to work on. It's a basic sleep-deprivation nightmare! Still, I was glad to see that I wasn't dragging around as I ran into the mass that included Ang and Liz Batty along with the Steve that is Mattia. We started talking and I did a couple of bits. Then, for some reason Ang brought up Chicken Fisting.

And from there, I lost it.

I mean, how does one react to Chicken Fisting as a concept? I mean, it would require either large chickens or very small fists. I mentioned that I had the Fanzine in an Hour on the USB drive I was carrying, and they said it wasn't a fanzine because you couldn't turn the pages. I said you could if you had small hands, small enough to fist a chicken. At that, Ang took off in search of someone who could verify that Chicken Fisting was not only possible, but had happened before.

On the other side of the walkway, Claire and Mark were chatting with Greg Pickersgill, Peter Weston and a bunch of other older UK fans, including Peter Maebly. I remarked that someday, the group of chatters that were over on the other side would be replaced by the group that was chatting now. At that point, Ang returned with the Steve that was Max and she described Chicken Fisting. I still think she was lying. She claimed that it was much like the Michael Jackson video for Beat It, where two contestants put whole chicken carcasses on their fists and taped them down with the goal being to knock the chicken off the other contestant's fist. I'm not making that up. Max might have been making it up, but I'm not sure. When it was explained to me that this was a thing created by Stef and James Bacon, it all made a terribly scary sort of sense.

After that, it was time for bed. The day was rough on me, aged a year it might have, but I think that it really let me know just what kind of fan I am and would most like to be!

Chapter 10: Sunday- What Happens When You Lose Everything? You Just Start Again.



The day started off early. I had set aside the morning for me and Linda, but the Zine still needed printing. We woke up late and took our time. We weren't out of the room until at least 11, which was late for me. I had gotten a decent night's sleep, though someone had rang our doorbell between 2:30 and 3am. We woke up, but then fell right back into the sleep. That was the way to go. We went to get some food at the Bar, each having a Jacket Potato.

Now, the US needs these because they make baked potatoes look like a three poo omelet. Potato, beans, cheese, butter, what could be better (or worse for you?). I was most excited to see them because I've only once seen them back in the States and that was at a real grotsky pub in Monterey. This was one of the best things I've ever eaten. I must try and make it myself when I'm at home.

OK, I started working on my report again because I had to get ready for a panel at 5. I started writing about things that happened the day before. It was all around the strange ways that happened making the zine. That was my way. Linda wanted to hear Neil Gaimen read and I sent her in to save me a seat. I started writing and found a nice little seat. I started typing and was blazing away, doing three or four thousand words while I was waiting and Greg, Peter Weston and folks were talking with Bill Burns around one of the tables at the bar. I went in to find Linda and the place was packed beyond belief and I didn't see her. I went back to typing. I did most of the day before and was started on the way to starting working earlier in Sunday when I heard my name come up from Bill Burns. I kept typing and folks were talking about me in a form or two.

After a moment, Peter Weston came over and we had a little bit of a chat. I like Peter a lot and he's from another generation which is very different. We talked about Iann Banks and why he isn't a bigger star in the US. He's a great writer, and while I haven't read everything he's done, has to be considered one of the real stars. I really do think that he'll become something more than he is in the States when he gets a cheap paperback deal that'll put out a lot of copies with almost 0 margin. Greg Pickersgill joined us and we chatted more, including bringing up the Mario Bosnyak TAFF trip. It's good that Greg and Peter are around because they really do show that fandom can change for the better and the worst and both views are right when taken as a whole, but they are violently at odds with each other on the simpler level. I really like Greg, I find his writings excellent, and Peter is one of those guys who I enjoy chatting with. Every time I see him at a con, we chat a little bit about Science Fiction. That's not too rare, but I know I can count on Peter to talk SF with me. There's nothing better than that! He's a guy who keeps up too, which a lot of fans from former generations haven't done. Even at CorFlu last year we talked about a couple of books. These things happen.

The panel I did was Who You Calling Obsolete? about young folks doing fanzines. It was Abi Brown, who is very nice, John The Rock Coxon and Flick and Pete Sullivan. We just went around and talked about

the weird things that it is that we do. I said that we are in an age that fanzines are only one thing in the realm of fun that is fandom. Some thought that Fanzines are obsolete, but I think that they're still relevant. Abi made a reference to people fifty years ago using photocopiers to make their zines. That was funny. Abi made a few other comments that were hilarious. The panel was unfocussed but a lot of fun to be on. I was so tired. It wasn't the perfect situation.



After that, Graham Charnock and I headed off to the Real Ale Bar and did a little interview. Graham has it all right. I hate to admit this, but if I could choose to be one fan in history, it would probably be Graham and not Art Widner or Forry Ackerman. He has such a view, and even though he's a generation removed from my way, he is so terribly current...and has been for twenty years! It takes a while to get Graham. His humor is of a kind that we just don't see in the States. It's dry, dark, funny, and biting. He's a powerhouse and I hope that I get to chat with him more at CorFlus in the future. We chatted and it was a simple interview. Max came along while we were shooting it and I felt really bad sorta not recognizing her speaking. I love Max, she's good people, and I'm hoping that I can make it up to her with a pint or something or another

After that, a Swedish fan came around and we chatted a bit. I have only met one other Swedish fan, a dude by the name of John Henri Holmberg. He had a heavy accent, but I fought through it and we had a lovely conversation. Graham asked him if he knew anything about Swedish Motorbiking, and he had no idea. That's a fannish way of things, Graham claimed. I can see this as being a good point. It was a very funny moment and Graham, who has no idea what I did for a living, asked what I did for a living. I told him and he was annoyed and afraid that I'd dump all my Computer History stories on him. I held off. I was too close to my next panel to stick around, but I'd have stayed and talked with Graham for hours and hours. I ended up heading up to the Green Room and placing my order for a pint of Cider. I love that they give us booze. Gotta love booze.

I headed up to the most surreal panel I had this entire weekend. I had a chance to prepare and I chose not to. Why? When I have a chance to improv, I panic. When I panic, I come up with the easiest thing possible. In this case, it was the wild flailing that I'm very good at. The first question was What's Wrong With Science Fiction? Oh man, they guys on the panel, Ian Snell, Tony Keen, Michael Abbot and myself. Tony, Ian and Michael were ultra prepared. They talked good and they made real points. Michael's first piece was perfect and was obviously at least somewhat scripted. Ian's was very good too. I simply said 'Nothing.: Questions?'" and folks were stunned. No one came up with anything, so I stood up and flailed a bit. I made a couple of points about science fiction no longer being fiction and that it was the vision of massive failure that led to us to make the reality that we live. I made a couple of good points, though no one really noticed. I was too busy making an ass of myself. It got laughs.

After that, the second question was SF Films or Movies? This was a classic argument and I actually used a bit about the first problem between these two worlds was when Thog complained about Og's portrayal of him in the cave painting version of Animals I Have Fucked and Killed. I thought that was a good line. I flailed some more. It worked. I liked it. The rest of the folks did serious and constructive theory stuff. I was simply here for comic effect. It kinda worked. I also mussed Ian's hair a bit which got a laugh, probably for the look on his face which I didn't get to see.

I did the smartest thing for the entire panel. I started walking around and doing the interplay with the audience trying to make comments on why Criticism is Bollocks. I walked over to a random fangirl and asked what she thought of the panel. Then I headed over to Greg Pickersgill and I asked him what he thought of the art of criticism and that he'd done some criticism in his time and that I enjoyed his fanzine critiques in the old

days and that I thought that he understood that the point was to share the experience of a piece with the rest of the world. I then headed over to James Bacon and hugged him for like ten seconds. I then said “that wasn’t for the panel, that was just a thing.” I then headed over to Linda and then to Claire. She said something preemptively funny and I headed over to Geoff, a guy over to the side and said “I’m going to tell Geoff the secret of the whole thing, but it’s just for him.” I then went about the fake business of whispering something in his ear. What was it? I can’t tell right now. You’ll have to ask Geoff.

The next part was weird. It was the question of Dr. Who vs. Torchwood. I wasn’t very good, but Ian Snell more than made up for it. His part opened with “The other day, I bought a new pair of shoes” and went from there to tell about the shoes, his foot health and his opinions on Torchwood as background. I was blown away by exactly how coherent and wonderful it was. I could never be that good.

The final part was The Two Minute Award For _____ Goes To _____

Tony was great, actually saying that the award went to me for my bizarre performance. I liked that a fair bit. Michael gave an award to Space Oddity which is one of the greatest songs ever written. I have to say that I totally agree and think that the second best would be Major Tom, the retelling by Peter Schilling in the 1980s. It’s a powerful version. The sequel, Ashes to Ashes, is good, but not the same. It just doesn’t feel right.

Ian gave an award to something I didn’t catch. He’s a talented guy and was a great choice for the panel. I’ve gotta remember to hijack him for an article, I do. It was my turn last, which is a good position to be in since it means that I can riff off of the stuff before me. I gave Tony the award for Best Comedy block because he totally took all the comic possibilities away. I then had Liz Batty stand up and had the audience applaud her. I then said that she was the third best audience member and to sit down. Then I had Rich Coad stand up and take him bow as the second. I then said that Geoff, the guy who got the secret, was number 1. And that was that. Really fun time doing the panel and following the rules of exactly two minutes per thing. I didn’t get to do the bit I was hoping to where I type up something and would then have a member of the audience read it, but my typing was not fast enough. It would have been very good to do that with the Torchwood vs. Dr. Who question.

After that, it was time to rest. This whole trip has been exhausting. It’s up early, out late, and wild activity all the way through. Linda and I were pooped and thus headed into the bedroom to nap for an hour or so. It turned out to be very refreshing and I grabbed a quick bath before heading up to the League of Fan Funds auction.

I should mention that I almost always take baths, were available. Showers just don’t relax nearly as well as a good long hot bath. Also, with the way my hair is at the moment, it’s important that I can bathe and get at least some of the knots out of my hair.

And my hair would be important for the auction. Alison and Steve were both doing a great job when I got back from making the announcement following some guy’s concert in the main programing room. I got the feeling that this guy was kinda like the Heather Alexander or Alexander James for English Fandom. It went really long and when it was over, I ran in and yelled “TAFF Auction starting now in the Winchester Room! Free Chocolate!” and a great many folks came up. It was a good way to announce it.

While I was waiting for the performance to end, I ran into Pete Young. He wasn’t expecting to be there, but he showed up and I managed to catch him for a minute or two. I asked him when Zoo Nation, his fantastic Nova-Award winning zine, would be coming out. He said ‘Someday’ and we chatted for a few minutes before I had to run and make the announcement. I love it when things like that happen, but I always wish I had more time to get to talk.

The auction itself was pretty good. We raised almost 900 pounds. That’s split between the TAFF-DUFF-GUFF funds, but that’s still nearly 600 bucks for TAFF. There was chocolate, there were Tim-Tams, there was joy, there was fun. I bought a Firefly cast autograph, figuring I could find someone to give it to. I also



at one point issued a challenge that for every pound collected, I'd hang a koala off my beard. They raised 20 pounds. Now, each koala, the clip-on kind to promote Australia in 2010, weigh roughly 2 oz. each. That means that 20 weighed about two pounds. The hard part was finding out where they would all fit. I managed to get 21 on there, including the one koala I got for buying the photo. It didn't hurt much, but I was uncomfortable, which I guess was the point. We sold stuff, we gave away stuff and we promoted Oz. It was a very fun time.

After that, it was beddy-bye time. I found myself asleep before I was ready, but luckily I woke up just a bit into my rest and put on the mask for the CPAP, falling off to sleep through the cold, dark night.



Chapter II: Monday- Turn out the Lights, The Party's Over

The final day of Eastercon and I had only one panel and the Dead Dog to go to. That meant that I could sleep in a little extra (which I did) and then I could spend some time having a proper lunch and walking around while waiting for the Dead Dog to start.

I had the What I Did on my Holiday panel about the very trip I am writing about right now. It's a weird thing to do this report in nearly real time because it makes tense problems very real. I think I've managed to make it work the right way around.

The panel featured Bug Bradshaw (TAFF 2006), Chris O'Shea (JETS 2007 to Japan), Ang (GUFF 2007) and Me. That's a good bunch of folks. I wrote the intro portion while on the panel, which was an interesting thing. I had to think of what the deal would be where I could come up the entire meaning of things. I didn't, and I wrote that. It was an interesting panel and I was very happy with the way that it turned out. The funny thing is the trips of everyone else on the panel were very different than mine. I don't think mine will be remembered as a remarkable trip. I certainly had a great time, but what TAFF delegate doesn't? I just think that my trip will be simply remembered as the time I made it

out. On the other hand, I figure I may have been the first TAFF delegate in a good while I mostly hang with the younger crowd. Most of the time I was hanging with folks like James, Stef, Ang, Max, John The Rock Coxon, Niall, Liz and so on. That's probably a much younger crowd than most TAFF delegates have found themselves hanging with. The UK had Ang winning GUFF, so there's a youth movement in Fan Funds, which is a good thing. I'd love to see John Coxon run for GUFF, but who knows if that'll happen.

And now, a little James Bacon

Poor Chris

I know what it's like bring the TAFF person. It's a real mission, one has to become the TAFF person, as you want to please everyone and not let anyone down, or ignore anyone or walk away or run away. The one person who surely suffers is your significant other. I remember as does my wife the strange phone calls at odd times, cursing the quarters as they drop into the phone and wonder what the hell time it is on the other continent and why this is no longer working and why she is shouting that she's just gotten to sleep and do I realize I haven't phoned now in about sixty hours, and why didn't I call sooner and what the hell time is it where I am anyway, who's that girl's voice and are you drunk, 'cause your shllluring your words a bit and sound a bit like Stephen Hawking on pcp.

Yes. I thought I was in contact quite frequently, but its a time food processor type of thing where I am pretty sure it was only a few minutes ago that I last spoke to her and surely not that much has happened in between and wasn't it only a few minutes ago i had this exact damn same fecking problem with these damn feckless phones work and how many zeroes do i actually fecking need. Oh, is that the time?

So the TAFF person has all the amazing benefits of being a guest, they are on great panel items, have access to most areas due to high workload, usually self-inflicted levels of volunteerism for the panels and the green room no longer even ask you if you are a panelist, they greet you with your favorite odd food and offer various forms of sustenance and vitamin C. This recognition is also reflected in the attitude of the gopher hole or ops or staff lounge, where the various Moms all know you and tend to treat you like a well-oiled piece of war machinery that's needs brief quick high level maintenance and tuning, So its the various anti-flu remedies and the best of food and even a nice hot oil rub, if she's a cute mom who likes SF.

The status of the TAFFdude is great, the committee will no doubt want to meet you and other helpful types will throw parties specifically for you, bring you gifts, buy you dinner and provide you with free booze. Just like a guest but you haven't done the amazing imaginative fiction thing and therefore its a bigger gift of generosity.

One is treated so well, it's amazingly wonderful.

Yet the fear is there, you cannot let ANYONE down, no one at all. There are hundreds of people who want to speak to you and are so nice and you MUST speak to them, its hard, this is not a duty or a task, no this IS TAFF! One is the cultural representative and its important that one enjoys this wonderful moment with fellow fans who want to chat and really so does the TAFFDUDE this is the essence of TAFF. but then so is volunteering to do something mad, maybe like producing a fanzine in an hour, which doesn't fit as an hour is nowhere enough and next it's two hours, before dinner in between the two panels, on the panel and then before bed and then the printers are painful like a kick in the shin and it's wow the next day.

Yup, but this is the fuel that adrenaline junkied mothers like me live off, but er, well poor Linda.

Poor Linda. I know how she must feel, because when I am not giving enough attention to my wife she mentions it, and that's painful, so I know her pain, but I also know her heart and her stoic silence, smiles and support to the TAFF winner is priceless, totally unmeasureable and quite impressive, just like the wife who only gives out to me for, well its not give out, its quietly mentions, that I ignored her, disappeared for three hours, when I said I was going to the toilet, but she knows I was waylaid by many people and, of course, the strange itch to have a good time, she says gently and reminds me that perhaps I should have suggested she go to the bar and that she would be a while, and maybe I could have suggested she goes to the bar instead of holding my drink minding my bag and of course expecting me, and wondering if my bladder has burst and maybe I have been eaten by a rabbit rat that came up the u-bend.

Yes, I know the pain, but I know the good woman she is and that she makes Chris a better winner and I love her being here. She doesn't know this, but as I type at the cool party table, I know that her standing by her man is very important to Chris, to me and to fandom as we all benefit from the craziness that is Chris Garcia: Taffdude 2008. Hardest working taffdude I have ever seen.



Thank You, James! You're damn right too. It's impossible to say how important it was for Linda to be in the UK with me. I often feel very bad when I go to a Con with her and I run all over the place and sometimes abandon her for those long periods. She's wonderful about it, and I always try and make it up to her with one thing or another. Maybe I should buy her some jewelry. That'd forgive at least some of my sins, if films and television is to be believed.

I took some nap/bath time and then headed up to see the Short films from the London Science Fiction & Fantasy Film Festival. It was a nice selection of shorts. When I first walked in, they were play-

ing Netherbeast Incorporated, a hilarious office comedy that was the introduction to the feature film version that I saw at the Sonoma Valley Film Festival. It's a very funny film about a manager and a vampire. There was a great short about Angels and Death made by Paul Hough, a guy who made a great documentary about wrestling called The Backyard. The shorts were good, and many of them I hadn't seen. I like shorts, I used to program them for Cinequest, and seeing what plays on this side of the Pond was cool.

After that, it was time for dinner. We ran into John and Stef and were joined by Assaf and Tamar, two Israelis living in the UK. I had briefly met Tamar at LACon and she's really fun. We headed to the restaurant and got the buffet.

We put a hurt on that thing.

I think everyone at the table had at least two plates of food. It was good stuff, chicken, lamb, rice, some pasta-y thing. John, Stef and Assaf polished off a big pile of plates. We had the strange kinds of conversation that only a group of folks who are both fans and high energy can do. We talked about dinosaurs fighting penguins and the biological weapons that dinosaurs would use to fight them. It was a strange, strange conversation. I then took to asking strange questions of the Steve that is Max and Mr. Coxon. One of them involved being stuck in a forest, surrounded by trees and having only a can opener, a thing of fruit cocktail, a soda and a can of cheap Canadian beer. Max's answer was brilliant. The entire situation reminded me a lot of dinners at cons with Jason Schachat, Espana, Linda, and various others. It was loud, funny, off-color (to the point of being transparent at times) and just plain fun. Tamar was really funny. After she ate, she started stacking things. She started with the glasses and after a while of building glass towers, one collapsed and a glass broke. She'll deny it, say it was Steve's fault, but I'm telling you the truth! She then started making sculptures with her silverware and napkins. It was fun, and afterwards we headed out to the bar area, took over a table and just sat and drank and talked and such.

And here was another fun area. We started off with a pint each. I owed John one and he enjoyed it. It's hard for me to remember that the guy's only 19. He probably has the liver of a 59 year old by now! We continued our strange conversations and Tamar continued to build strange devices out of whatever was handy. I noted that around that table, we non-Brits outnumbered Brits, with Simone, James, Me, Linda, and The Anders! all being from elsewhere. Max seemed to find reason for fear in that fact, though John seemed ready to defend the honor of his country. Someone brought out a pen and a bunch of Orbital mugs and we started signing them. I had every one around the table sign a mug for me and Linda. It started with John and carried on with all the folks. Charlie Stross came and Stef said that I should get him to sign it. I said no, because it was the guys I hung with who were far more important than having Charlie's sig on it. Go figure. He did sign some that we'll be selling for TAFF later.



Hours grew late, I drank about three pints of cider, and folks started to leave, head home from the long con. It was kinda sad, I'd grown happily aware that English fandom when they gather has just as much fun as my familiar US fandom. I also enjoyed that we never had any problem. We all said goodnight and goodbye and I sorta realized that there are people who were around that table who I might not see again. I know I'll run into James, Stef, Max, John and probably Assaf and Tamar again, but how many folks just don't get overseas? When will I ever get to see Dave Langford again, as an example. You never know what's going to happen, but I sorta thought about these things as I went off to sleep.



Chapter 12: Tuesday- London's Drowning and I Live By The River

Back into London for the day after we checked out and checked back in to the room. Linda had gotten us a very good rate for two more nights in the same room, so that meant we only had to virtually check-out and then we could return to the room. That was pleasant. Sadly, when I got up there, I was told the room was being charged to my credit card. Now, there was a moment or two of massive panic, but then I headed off to find Vince Docherty. Luckily, he was at breakfast and that made him easy to spot. As soon as I found him, he knew that there was a problem and he came with me to fix it. He's a helluva guy. The room, comped by the con, was wonderful and I'll never have anything but good things to say about the way they treated me. I only hope every TAFF delegate gets treatment this good.

We headed out the door into the cold to make our way to the V+A again. This time, Linda brought her camera to take photos of the fashion section and the textile sections. She did a single pass to scope out what she'd take pictures of, then she made her way to taking photos. She's a costuming fiend, so I can't blame her. She has her things, and I have mine. I spent much of the time at the Victoria & Albert writing this section you're reading now. And the last 10 paragraphs or so. I'm also wondering why the section that Mattia wrote has disappeared off this machine. I guess I'll never know.



We went to an All-You-Can-Eat Chinese place and it was basically what you'd expect for 5 pounds a person. It was edible and the coke was cold. I was happy with that. We went back to the V&A and this time we went up to the Theatre design exhibit. This was wonderful as it showed all the different aspect of theatre design; from sound to set, costume to lighting. They told the various stories through miniatures and models as well as recreations and full-scale pieces. All the stuff was from the period of 2002-2006, which made it even better. This got me thinking about the one true callign I had more than a decade ago. I've always wanted to start a theatre company called the Royal California Theatre Company and have

the first presentation be a stage version of Kurt Vonnegut's Bluebeard. That would be so very cool. I started sketching it out in my mind on the trip to the textiles room. I'm not much for textiles, but it did give me time to think. While I'm flying home, I wouldn't be shocked if I designed a good deal of it and maybe even started writing the script for it. That would make for a good flight, actually.

We stayed at the Museum a while longer. It was really a much better time, though Linda and I have much different wandering times. I'm much faster, but that's OK because it gives me a chance to finish a gallery and then sit around and type while she's still wandering and taking photos. Gotta love that plan!

After that we went to Forbidden Planet. It was my second trip and it was a good time. This time, I bought a Torchwood book and a Dr. Who book for Evelyn's Grandma who watched her extra while I was gone. I discovered that I was getting pain in the heel, which is a bad thing. I have bad feet to begin with, which is not happy.

After that, we ate at a lovely pub. Fish and Chips, and not the best I've ever had, but the food was good and the place was slow.

And I discovered that I missed everyone and everything about Eastercon. It's never easy to go through the day after a big con, and this was worse. I felt like this after the 2006 WorldCon, but honestly, it's never been a problem for me like this. It's not only coming down, it's realizing that you've been unleashed on a world you'll almost surely never get a chance to dip into like this again. It was a lot like LACon in that the last night was so fantastic and I was expected to head back into the real-ish world again. How can anybody do that? East-

ercon might have been the best con-going experience I've ever had. It's certainly right up there with LACon, BayCon 2005, Westercon '07 and the classic TimeCon where I got to hang out with George Takei and Brink Stevens. Heck, it was even better than the best Cinequests and Sonoma Valley Film Festivals I've been to. In short, it was freakin' awesome.

And then it was over.

As we made our way through London, I slowly felt my energy fading away. I could barely keep my eyes open as we took the train back to Heathrow, then the bus to the Radisson where I slept deep and hard for 8 hours.

Chapter 13: Wednesday- You Spin Me Right Round, Baby, Right Round



We woke up at 8 and got ready for another day of London. That was going to be a bigger deal than I expected. Linda wanted a cup of coffee, but decided that it would take too long to make one and that she would just wait.

We headed in and went to see the Tower of London. I have a thing for old fortifications. The Tower of London had more history leaking out of it than any other building I had visited. Of course, I've never been to Athens or Rome or Tokyo, and they all could have some that would give the Tower a run for it's money. We took the train and there was a mess on the Circle Line. Trains were canceled and the entire thing was messed up for several other lines. That meant that it took us extra long to get to the Tower. We got there, alright. Got there and got in line for

tickets.

Sixteen pounds, fifty for a ticket.

Now, I'm one of those folks who think that if you give a proper show, you show pay a proper price, but I didn't have nearly as much money left as I would have liked, so I could not justify spending more than 30 dollars on a ticket to the Tower. Linda and I walked around it, saw the Traitor's Gate and several of the towers that comprised the whole thing. They were very cool, but it wasn't the whole tour or thing. The Tower Bridge was right next door, so we got a good look at it and it was very cool. I thought that we could walk across it, but then I figured that it would just mean that we'd have to walk back, so we kept going around the Tower. As we came to the bottom of the steps leading up to the Tube station, I pointed out a sign to Linda. It was for the Coffee & Tea Museum.

"You wanna go there?" I asked.

"No, I think I'll be OK." She answered.

After that, we headed to the British Museum. Even though I had seen it all before, I still enjoyed much of it. Linda's an Egypt nut and spent a lot of time there. I was kinda done that that particular section, so I found a bench and typed more of my report. You have to do things like that once in a while if you're gonna keep up with the real time situation. In fact, I had turned in a little early and was a bit behind where I'd have liked to have been. I should have been typing the piece that happened at the Tower of London at the British Museum, but it had to wait for our return to the room, which in the order of this report happened after what you're reading, in the order of events as I experienced happened before I typed this but after what I'm describing here. That's the kind of problem only I have with a TAFF report. I'm sure no one will ever make it this far into this report, so I should be OK. Just in case, if any of you have made it to this point, drop me a line (garcia@computerhistory.org) and lemme know by typing in the subject line Hidey-Hidey-Hidey-Ho, Sir. . I

mean, this is 34k+ words into the report and it's on-screen! How could I expect anyone to go this deep?

You know, Dave Langford said when I told him I was 25k+ words into the report that it was too much and that I should 'Kill (my) darlings'. I've heard that a lot over the course of my time writing stuff, and I still

don't believe it. Why? Glad you asked. You see, if you're like me and you write largely for yourself, why on Earth would you kill off the writing that means the most to you? Hell, why would you change a single word? Yeah, I'm putting it out there for all to see, but what difference does it make if I insist on putting in these strange asides, details that no one in their right mind would ever want to know and use fifteen interesting word usements when I could simply say it with two little bits? I'm happy writing it and I don't know who will possibly read it, but I know that nothing has been more fun than writing this beast. I



dunno, maybe it's the act of writing itself that does it for me. This has been so much fun and I can't wait to lay it all out.

Which, by the time you read this, I'll have done...unless you're reading this on Scribd.com or the pieces that are in various zines. Then maybe I'm not finished. Maybe I'm just slacking off, waiting until the last minute to put together the report before I have it posted to TAFF.org.uk. Who knows.

OK, back to the story. We walked around the Brit again and we went deeper into the Chinese/South Asian area than I had the last time. Then I saw an opening for a Chris Garcia kind of hoax. The British Museum is always changing things, often on the fly. They had cases empty of everything except the labels, cases with objects but no labels, stuff pulled left and right, and even some empty pillars and stands. One stand was empty and all the remarking labels and so on had been removed. It was the perfect moment. I pulled out my laptop

and opened up my TAFF Report and made it full-screen. I then set it on the stand and walked a few steps away so that i could still see it but no one would know it was mine. Linda took a picture and a few tourists muttering in Yiddish (or maybe just a weird German I only half-understood) came by and took a look. I had, in fact, made a new display, surrounded by Buddahs and such from Sri Lanka and Malaysia. It was brilliant. After about ten minutes, I went and picked it up, put it back into my bag and walked off as the first TAFF Winner ever to have his report displayed in a major international museum. You may call me Dr. Awesome!



After we went for a walk to find a Pastie shoppe. We had seen one at Charing Cross when we got off on Tuesday, so we headed back there to see what we could see. We got to Charing Cross alright, mostly because I saw a Whiskey shop and could remember that it was close-by, but we had to walk all the way around the place until we found the shop. I had a large traditional while Miss Linda had herself a Steak and Stilton. We both had Strongbows. It was delicious! I love pies. We have them in the States but they suffer in comparison. That's a minor problem again. I was perfectly happy with American versions of British pub eating, and now that I will be stuck in the States without the real thing, that'll be a killer. I'll deal, though. I always do. We went back to the hotel, getting in around 6pm, much earlier than any other night of my trip. I set up charging the laptop and we watched some TV. I introduced The Lovely and Talented Linda to the Lovely and Talented women of Wisteria Lane by showing her the Channel 4 broadcast of Desperate Housewives. I've rarely watched any episodes, but this was the season opener for the current US season, so I figured it'd be a good view.

And it was.

Linda was so mad because she says she doesn't have time for another series. I disagree because she won't have to deal with me for the next couple of weeks and that's plenty of time to watch a season or two. The episode was the one that introduced Nathan Fillion, familiar to viewers as Mal from Firefly and from Two Guys & A Girl (& a Pizza Place in its first season). It also introduced the beautiful Dana Delaney to the show. I first fell for her watching the show China Beach back in the early 1990s. She's still got it too. The episode was good and I thought that it was well worth watching. I'll have to catch the reruns on my TV at home.

Oh yeah, I've got TV at home. I go away to England and while my Mom is watching my place, gets an antenna and manages to set it up to get 8 channels, including all four of the major networks and the Simpsons Channel. This is me happy.

Anyhoo, we went to sleep right after Desperate Housewives with a slight bit of sadness as it would be the last night I had with Linda for a while.

Chapter 14: Thursday- Ain't Got Time To Take a Fast Train

We woke up at 6:30 to get Linda to the Airport for her flight. This was really early, but it was worth it. Linda gets really nervous because she's traveled enough to know what can go wrong and how much time that can take. I, on the other hand, never have any idea what to do and always get places really early. It's the same reaction to a completely different dataset. Go figure. We got her there with plenty of time and checked her in. This was the longest period of time we'd ever spent together. Since she lives a full hour to the north in Oakland, we pretty much only see each other on the weekends and this was so nice. I felt kinda bad being pulled in so many directions and not having the full time to devote to her as I would like, but still, it was nice to know that I'd be cuddling up to her at the end of the day. I kissed her goodbye and she went up to her flight. I took the bus back to the hotel and checked on getting a room for the weekend. I discovered that they'd give me a very fair rate (less than half what they put as their regular rate) for the two night stay. I was perfectly happy with that. I then packed up what was left in the room and headed off to the train station so I could make my way up to Solihull and visit Mr. Steve Green.

Steve's been writing for the Drink Tank since 2007 and his regular column, Fannish Memory Syndrome, is usually a highlight. I would be spending two nights with him and we'd be getting to meet a bunch of folks



for a meeting on Friday. I realize that outside Of Eastercon, I had only met a few fans. A terrible failure once again, but what was I to do? These things happen. I headed to the Underground and managed to hop on a Pickadilly Train, heading into London. The train was more crowded than usual and it turned out that there had been a signaling error and that had stacked up the trains. The trip was slow. At 1/2 the stations we had to take long stops instead of simply going-through to the next station, we had to wait for Green Lights. Then they canceled the train altogether at Hammersmith, which meant that I had to transfer to the District line. This was terrifying because I had all my luggage with me. Luckily, I got on first and managed to get a seat on the District, which I took to the Bakerloo, where I also managed to get a seat. Luck was on my side, even though the entire trip to Maryleborn Station took me more than an hour and a half.

Once I got there, I went and got an actual ticket to the train and that allowed me to travel with comfort to Solihull and on to the home of Steve Green.

And wow, was what whizzed by my window very freakin' English. All of the movies I've seen of the countryside looked like what blurred by and it all felt like one of those transitional pieces in an American travel show about the UK. I thought it was so cool to see cows and sheep and horses all out there to see the world. In fact, I saw what must have been the largest horse ever produced. It was at



least ten feet tall! It was amazing. I spent a lot of the time when the view was obscured reading my latest book: The Drawing of the Dark by Mr. Tim Powers. It was a fan fine book, though it did take its sweet time setting up properly. I didn't have but two hours to dig into both it and the countryside before we arrived at Solihull station. I also realized that I had a chance to do something on Saturday that I've always wanted to do, so I made a plan in my head to make it happen!

I got there so early that I didn't want to bother Steve for at least another hour. I decided a walk was in order and I dragged my suitcase with me and took a leisurely tour of Solihull by foot. I made a large circle of the Town Centre and found that it was a lovely time. I managed to get myself nice and tired and then I called Steve to come and grab me. He did and we took off to Green Acres, the home of Steve and Ann. It was a lovely little place and my room was at the top of the stairs. That's been a theme so far on this trip. I was happy to say that it was a small, clean and perfect room for what I was looking for. I happily set my stuff down there and Steve and I chatted while Ann made dinner. The smell of the place was amazing. I knew from the moment I entered the house that this was going to be one of those great home meals that I so seldom get my mouth around. Steve and I talked movies and fanzines and so on for a good while. until dinner was served.

And Dear Jesus, let me eat like this again in my lifetime.

The meal started with French Onion Soup. I love soup and I love French Onion Soup. This was, without question, the best I've ever had. Sweet and tangy and a lovely piece of bread with cheese and just so flavorful that I had no idea how I'd ever manage to eat the regular stuff ever again. I gulped it down and was amazed. The onions were the magic. They were perfectly prepared and more than I could ever have expected. I was happy to have had it. It was already the best thing I'd eaten in the UK.

And then more conversation over a decent bit of wine. The second course arrived and it was simplicity itself. Chicken with Roast Vegetables. The chicken was great, slightly tastier than the specialty ones we get at

Whole Foods in the States, and the meat was perfectly done. The vegetables included a wonderful cherry tomato vine, roasted whole, sweet onions, brilliant red and yellow peppers and mushrooms. It was heaven. This was easily the best meal I'd had in England and probably among the three or four best homemade meals I've ever eaten. In fact, it ranks higher than Thanksgiving with the Menzie family in Belmont, MA in 1998, Higher than Roast Garlic and 40 Clove Chicken we did while watching Iron Chef in 1997, and just about even with Linda's amazing Beef Stew. It was incredible, and it was followed, about an hour later, by a cheese course that was equally exceptional. The first thing was a bleu cheese. I usually am not a fan of bleus, but I tried it on a cracker and found it perfect. A bit of tang, a lovely flavor, but not overpowering at all. That was enough to make me take notice. The brie was nice too, as was the other cheese, some sort of manchego I think, and I was wholly impressed with the entire meal. I almost dreaded the fact that we were going out the next night. Still, I have to say that if I could eat that well every day, I sure as hell would.

After watching a few short films (including one with a murderous Tickle Me Elmo), I retired for the night so that I could be bright in the morning.

Chapter 15: Friday-Don't Stop Thinkin' About Tomorrow

I woke up and my back was none too pleased. I think it was the position in which I slept. The bed was harder than the one I'm used to at the hotel, so I had to get used to it. I did sleep heavy

though, which is a good thing. After a shower it was breakfast. Bacon Buddies were delightful. I've fallen for English Bacon. How will I ever go back to American again? They were wonderful and I was glad to have a homemade version after so many of the McDonald's next to the hotel.

This was the day of the tour. The English Countryside had yet to be hit by Hurricane Garcia and this was my one real chance. We sat around and chatted as it rained outside. We were waiting for a break, though I think my own personal sloth may have played a part. When the sun peaked out, we headed for the car and made our way into the various posh parts of Solihull. It's a nice town that felt kinda like the places in Massachusetts like Watertown and Belmont. We got into some proper countryside and then I felt like I was in England. There were hills and there were sheep and there were cows and horses and there were even some people milling about in the light rain. In California, rain can knock a school shooting off the lead of the 11pm news, but here it just sorta happens. Go figure.

After a while, we ended up in Stratford-Upon-Avon: Willy Shakes' hometown. This was a nice little place with some truly classic buildings. Steve pointed out that unlike many towns in the region, Stratford wasn't bombed into oblivion in WWII and therefore had a lot of its old buildings still intact. There were old taverns and hotels that had once been upper crust homes. The house where The Bard was born was quite nice and bigger than I'd have thought. I would have liked to have stopped, but there were more impressive parts to see and there were just too many tourists. One Japanese Tourist was standing in the middle of the street while her friend took a photo of her across from one of the old houses. We would have hit her if she didn't get smart and move up onto the curb. I did get to see some of the awesome buildings along with the location of the Royal Shakespeare Company's theatre and the lovely bridge over the Avon river. It was even cooler to see the shitload of swans, complete with baby swans, which Ann reminded me were called Cygnets. They were quite cute.

We headed up the county like Canned Heat and found ourselves in a little village called Tanworth. It was really small and quite a bit like the town in Hot Fuzz. I avoided saying this. One of the things that Steve and Ann liked about it was the Bell pub. It was a nice place, though I understood that they had made it a bit upscale over the last little while. We stopped and had a pint. the cider I had was reasonably good. I have terrible taste in cider, preferring Strongbow and Hornsby to just about anything. I drank and we headed across the street to the graveyard around the church. It was an old one, though most of the stones that were up dated from the 1800s. The singer Nick Drake was buried there and I was quite shocked to see that he died a month and a few days after I was born at the tender age of 26. That's a shame as I've always enjoyed his stuff. In fact, I think he could





have been huge. He was never big in America, but he found a fan base well after his death. We walked the graveyard a bit more and then headed into the Church.

St. Mary Magdalen was a gorgeous church with incredible late 19th Century windows. They were painted glass rather than stained, but they were Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces in themselves. We marveled at them and I felt like I was seeing that part of Britain that us Americans kid ourselves into thinking that the whole of Britain is like. The church really had an impressive build and the art theme inside really did heighten the sense of worship that came from it. Go into any American church that came about in the 1980s or 90s during the Mega-Church explosion and you'll find something that really doesn't feel like a place worthy of worshipping. There, it is the preacher and the congregation that makes it worth being a part of. At St. Mary Magdalen's, it's the Church itself that sets the worship, the surroundings and the feeling of something beyond yourself. I thought it was glori-

ous and if I ever get back this way again. I have to go back.

More driving and we headed back home. I was tired, but there was an episode of Torchwood on-demand that needed watching. I was most impressed as it was a Gwen-focused episode and I thought that it was genuinely emotional and presented with a great power. There were a couple of great Captain Jack and Ianto moments, which I always like. It's weird, but video shot and shown in PAL looks much more like video shown on NTSC. There's a glow to it that you don't get in the US. I remember watching *Italians for Beginners*, also shot PAL, and thinking that it looked less video-y on the television than it did on the computer. Shows what I know.

I took a bit of a nap afterwards and was interrupted by James Bacon. He'd gotten an idea that he wanted to run by me and I thought it was a good one. I have to say that this trip to England may make me even busier than I thought I would be after I got back. It's looking like I'll be doing another something with the folks from out here, and that's going to be interesting.

After I got myself up and out of the bedroom, we got ourselves ready for dinner. We were heading into Birmingham, which is a good hour and a half out of town. I was most happy to go because I'd been promised fine Chinese food. I love Chinese food and I was happy to be heading there. I was also promised the chance to meet another TAFF winner, Mr. Martin Tudor. We headed over in a taxi, which was good driving. There's something to be said for seeing a country in a taxicab. This was the first one I'd ridden in on my trip. I'd taken a messload of busses, but no taxis. The driver was good, not the mad dashers you find in LA, New York or especially Boston. We got to the Fox, a pub right down from the Chinese place. It was comfy and folks started arriving. There was Martin and his daughter Heloise. After that it was Dave Cox, then Tony something-or-other, followed by Helena and her husband Rick (Rich? Ryan? I don't remember) plus their two kids, and then this tall guy who looked like the English version of Nick Cage. It was uncanny. If you asked me to have someone who could draw me a picture of what Nicholas Coppola would look like if he was English and incredibly tall, this is what I'd accept from the artist as having done a good job. Folks had drinks and we talked history for a while. The story of the Computer Museum not being in Boston anymore was told as the Nick Cage-looking fellow tried to go and visit it when he was out there.

After about an hour, we headed off to the restaurant. We gathered a few more: someone named Liz who was very fun, a guy named Ray who was late. We sat down and almost instantly we were greeted with our first set of dishes: sweet & sour ribs. They were great with this sauce that made me wish I had a vat of it. Even be-

fore a half-dozen of the ribs had gone, they dropped off a plate of wings, then spring rolls and calamari. All of it was very good, with the wings and the ribs being truly top notch. After that, there was a pause where we started having strong conversation. That's always good with a meal and this was as good conversing as I had all trip. While nothing will beat the final meal at Eastercon (because it really was one of those 'Hey, you remember that night...' kinds of meals), it was great fun.

The food got better.

We were then given 6 different main courses, including a lovely sizzling beef dish and a Sweet 'n Sour Fish plate that I enjoyed, though I'm usually not much for that kind of fish. I lovely the Kung Pao, which is much different than the kind that I'm used to. There were lovely mushrooms in it that gave me a sense of happy. I enjoyed the best set of dishes for the night and even the combo fried rice was fantastic. After that barrage of dishes, we were presented with options for dessert. I chose the Banana Fritters with Ice Cream. It took forever for us to get it, but once it came, it was worth the wait. The fritters were crunchy and the banana was almost creamy on the inside. The Ice Cream blew me away too. It was the perfect end to the meal and The English Nicholas Cage said that they were the best he ever had. I might have to agree.

After that, we chatted for a while until the bill came: 346 pounds. To give you an idea of how strange and expensive this country is, in the closing exchange rate for March the 28th, 2008, that works out to a fuck-load of cash. Pert near 700 bucks. I had no problem dropping 60 bucks (30 pounds) on the meal, but if you asked me to pay even 40 for the same thing in San Jose, I'd have a massive cow. It's amazing the distortion field that exists when it comes to the UK and money. I really don't understand how the dollar can be worth so much less than the pound, but actually buy as much if not more. It's bizarre.

We left around 11 and headed into Solihull where we shared a bit of Glenmorangie and then I had to fall asleep and I did in fast order.

Chapter 16: Saturday- In A Big Country, Dreams Stay With You...



I got up around 7:30 after a good, but short, sleep. It was one of those five hours but at least they counted. I dreamt fast and furious, which is a fun one about Linda and I running through a convention avoiding creditors who were coming to collect.

Dreams like that are kinda rare for me, but they are interesting. I woke up and started to get myself packed. There was a scale in the room, so I weighed my bags and realized that with a couple of drops, I could certainly make weight for the flight. I had 23kg for the big bag (it looked like I was about 20) and the carry-on was limited to 6kg (it looked like 5kg, but I will be giving Claire and Mark back the London A-to-Z which weighs at least a kilo.

Ann had offered to wash some of my things, so I got enough clothes out to make it through the rest of my trip. I admit it, I was starting to smell a little funky because I had to recycle a few pieces of clothing a few times. Luckily, I brought enough underwear with me. After my shower, I finished packing and with the way I packed it, I thought I would be fine for only having to access the front pocket of my suitcase. It was a good thought, until I realized that I had to get my CPAP for the next night and then the camera for tonight's fun. That meant two trips into the bag and that meant that no matter what, I'd have to deal with repacking it. Any other thought really represented a form of hubris, didn't it?

We watched another episode of Torchwood and that was very cool. It was an origins episode and while not as emotionally impactful as the earlier Gwen-centred episode, it was still quite a bit of fun. There was a lot of talk of Torchwood being crap, and compared to the best of Dr. Who, I would agree, but the show itself, on its own merits, isn't half-bad. I loved the way they presented Torchwood as a historically homosexual safe-haven.

At least that's the way they presented it starting with Victorian Torchwood. We followed that with Time Team, an archeology show that was fun. It was a good way to end my time in Solihull as I was out the door and off to the train by 11, catching the 11:05 off to London Marylebone.

The area between Birmingham and London was just as lovely, even bathed in the light that poked through the heavy, rain-spitting clouds. There were old churches which were a part of tiny hamlets and towns and villages. There were cities that reminded me of the ones that you'd see on the train between New York and Boston. There were sheep and cows and horses and chickens again. This time, I paid slightly more attention to the trees. Yeah, the fields are green and awesome, but the trees are old, sometimes gnarled and even a touch wicked. There were some oaks that looked like they'd been around long enough to be worried about being turned into the heavy doors to those ancient churches that whipped by. There was one church, or at least what looked like a church, that had this frontispiece gazebo that was quite lovely and Roman-inspired. I wish I could have gotten out and taken a look. I don't think that I'll get a chance to come back this way, but there's something that I'd certainly want to look at if I got half the chance.

What was I doing? I was typing up my report and being constantly distracted by the girl across the way who was obviously enjoying staring into the curls and ripples of my beard. She kept jabbering away to her friend and that let on that she was Australian. I didn't talk to her, mostly because when I was done listening to the little telltales that she was Aussie and then catching her on her beard examinations, I started to type again.

We got into London a minute ahead of schedule and I was off to the races to make it to the end of the



Pickadilly Line to drop off my bag at the hotel, then head onto Heathrow again, hop the Pickadilly and take that to the Victoria and then walk off at Seven Sisters and head to the Tottenham Leisure Centre.

You see, I picked up a flier when I was at Forbidden Planet about becoming a London Roller Girl. I figured I'd give it to Gen as a present, but I only looked at one side. I was supposed to go to Peter Sullivan's, but it ended up that my flight was moved up (more on that later) and I had to stay closer to Heathrow. When I started reading the book, I had put the flier into the book. I looked it over and realized that there was a Roller Derby match in London on Saturday the 29th! I figured it would be great to see Roller Derby live for the first time while I was in London. This was a magical piece of timing that happened and I couldn't pass it up.



Sadly, timing was also the angry bitch lover of the day.

I got into the station at around 1:00pm or so. I knew it would take me about 2 hours to get to the hotel, so I had given myself plenty of time to make the trip. I got on the Bakerloo Train that was just right there. It was a good thing to be there right then, but I missed a portion of the announcements which gave info on closures. I didn't hear it again until I was in Heathrow. I got to the Pickadilly train quickly and

that meant I had to wait. And wait. And wait.

It was nearly 15 minutes before a train for Heathrow finally came. I was feeling a bit panicked for time. I got into Heathrow about 2:40. I got the bus, the 111 and I know I had taken it to the Radisson before, but this time it went nowhere near where I was going. I managed to get off at the place that was closest to the hotel, but it was still three or four blocks away. I didn't know what direction, so I had to go and ask the guy in the Hotel Hoppa bus. I was hoping I could get a ride.

“Sorry man, I'm going the other direction and then out of service”

Strike one.

I followed that with going into the Holiday Inn, the closest hotel.

“Which way to the Radisson?” I asked

“Well, it's a few blocks towards the airport.” she said.

Now, here's the thing, I'm a terrible traveler. I love traveling, but I'm terrible at it. I should apologize to Linda for dragging her along with me while I went through with this sham of travel. Once I'm out of my comfort zone, I'm in a terrible way. I never get the right choice. I have no sense of direction. I make mistake after mistake after mistake. I never get used to it. Even after two weeks I felt no more comfortable in non-fan-nish England than I did the minute I walked off the plane. It's a terrible thing and I doubt I'll ever get better. So much sorrow, I guess.

I made the wrong choice and ended up further from the hotel. It also started raining. I made it towards the hotel after seeing the Marriott which I knew was next door to the Radisson from the distance. I turned and made it back. I got to the hotel and checked in at 3-something. They checked me in and then I headed to the room and dropped off the bag, emptied some things and headed out again, being passed by three different buses (at least one of which was supposed to stop there) I got onto the bus and made it to the Tube station.

And there I waited for another ten minutes.

The show started at 5, with doors opening at 4. I could still make it and it wouldn't be much of a problem. Except that the entire Victoria line was shut for upgrades. That was not a good thing as there was no other train that would take me to Seven Sisters, where I'd have to walk to the Tottenham Leisure Centre. The problem was the nearest thing that I could get to was a mile and a half from the Seven Sisters top and then there was the walk of 1/3 of a mile to the place.

And it was raining.

When I go to the Acton City stop, I was looking through my bag and noticed that my cell phone was gone. I was terribly upset by that because once I got home I'd not be able to call anyone because I wouldn't have any way of calling, nor their numbers. I started reading James Bacon's TAFF report (WorldConNomiCon) to keep my head on straight. After that, it got a little late. It was pushing 4:30 and I was nowhere near the Finsbury Park station which was the closest one, and while I looked at the route I'd be traveling, it was likely a 20 minute walk. In the rain. And I was at least 40 minutes away from arriving at the Finsbury Park station. That was awful. Then the train stopped. They were sitting on a red light.



At 4:45, and still not beyond Hammersmith, I had to call it in my brain. When I got to Earl's Court, I got out and I walked around. I wasn't going to get to see Roller Derby. I was bummed. I walked around and got some Burger King. It's an interesting thing to see that the Whopper is exactly like the one we get in the US, while the Chicken Sandwich is far better in the US. The fries were a little better in the UK. Go figure.

I headed back to the hotel and got on the Tube. More delays. I got to the station and hopped on a bus. That was a mistake. It was the 285, which I know stopped at the stop I usually got off with Linda. This time

it did not. I ended up going to the Haddon Cross Tube Station, which meant I got out and took the Pickadilly line into town again. That meant that I was retracing the route. And I had to wait another 8 minutes for the next train. Then I got to the buses and I caught the same one that I had caught earlier that didn't make it to the stop I needed. I would get off where I did earlier and then head the way I had been earlier.

Except this time, it went where I thought it would go and I got off at the stop I wanted the last time. That was terrible. I walked into the room and then I ended up slipping on the marble in the hotel lobby. In front of the Indian wedding party that was celebrating there. It was very sad. I went to my room, got out the laptop and started typing while watching the Psychics on the Weakest Link. It was kinda fun, but I was fuming underneath. I am hereby never getting excited about anything...well, that's a stretch.

Continuing through my Torchwood theme, I ended up watching something hosted by Graham Norton where they were trying to choose a new Nancy for Oliver on the West End. It had John Borrowman on the panel...along with Andrew Lloyd Webber, some chick I didn't know and Barry Humphries (aka Dame Edna). It was a fun show. One of the girls was a Welsh soap actress who was the daughter of El Bandito, the English wrestler. They showed a photo of her being held by the late, great Giant Haystacks. I was amazed at the weird timing stuff that was happening.

I ended up falling asleep around 10pm, which was actually 11pm since I had set my clocks forward already in advance of the arrival of British Summer Time. That meant that I had twice lost an hour of sleep to the plans of those damn farmers!

And I should note that at Steve and Ann Green's place, we listened to the longest running radio drama in the world, which was kinda cool. I should say that farmers are valuable to the world itself as long as they are only radio-based and not in reality. Just sayin' is all!

Chapter 17: Sunday- Every Day is Like Sunday. Every Day is Silent and Grey



There's a fascinating book waiting to be written about the different kind of Men's Room Stall locking mechanisms in use in the UK. I'm sure I'm the only one who would find it fascinating, but I would. There was this one that was a post with a slot in it and you had to turn the hidden key-thing in the door to lock it. It was weird. I'm just thinking about that since I've just used that one at the Paddington Station while waiting for my train to Cardiff to leave.

I woke up at 3:31, which is when my room told me I was supposed to wake up. I had put in a wake-up call for 6am, but it didn't happen. It went off at 3:31 instead. No bother, since it was already 4:31 according to the official time. I sorta dozed for

another half-hour, then got up, took my shower, checked my mail and then it was off to Paddington. Since I was supposed to be flying on Sunday on British Airways (I had to get back early and that meant that a BA ticket was bought for me for Sunday), I kept an eye open. It just so happens that this was the weekend of the opening of Terminal 5 at Heathrow, which meant that BA moved all their services there. That was not a great move because they weren't fully trained on the stuff yet and that meant that there were delays and flight cancellations. Right up until Sunday, which was when I was flying. My flight for the afternoon was canceled on Saturday morning, with me getting a standby ticket for a flight to LA. That never happened as that flight was also filled. Luckily, I still had my ticket to SFO for Monday morning. When I hadn't heard from the airline by Sunday morning, I canceled my ticket, wrote to work telling them what had happened and that I would be in on Tuesday, and then went into town to catch the 8:03 train from Paddington to Cardiff.

Cardiff is the setting for Torchwood. I love that I get to wrap up my unofficial, accidental Torchwood

tribute trip with a trip to Cardiff. I just want to be able to say that I went to Wales and since I had the extra time now (and sadly if I had known that this all would be happening, I'd have headed off to Peter Sullivan's place yesterday and would be enjoying being licked by his new puppy. I hate the way things work sometimes... like when life kicks you in the crotch and forces you to miss Roller Derby!!!

I got on the train and saw that they had a First Class area. I had bought a First Class BritRail pass just in case, and now I got to use it on my first (and likely only) trip to Wales! The space was comfortable, a big table with power outlets, and the chairs were comfy leather. I felt like this made it worthwhile getting the First Class pass since I'd be on here for more than six hours while I toddled back and forth. The train was late, which sucked, but it was also a good thing as it gave me a chance to type in peace before heading off with the first stop being at Reading. We were half-an-hour late, but it was OK, I was really just going there to be ready to come right back. I just had to set foot in the city, maybe get a couple of photos and then run back to London, to Heathrow, to the Radisson, where sleep and a flight home waited for me.

I spent a fair deal of time thinking about the TAFF trip overall. There's a lot to think about, and now with me on a train, delayed to Cardiff, I've got the time to do it. The rest of the trip, I was far too busy having fun and running around. St. Linda was around and when she's around, I can't think because she's too wonderful to take my mind off of. It's this time, this trip to Bountiful as it were, that's leading me to giving it serious thought.

I love life. That should be obvious. I've always known that I've had it easy, had a special and fairly charmed life. Even when terrible things happen...like not getting to see Roller Derby, I know that I'm blessed to have the options to worry about stupid things like that. I know that fandom has treated me like something magnificent and I've tried to live up to the hype, but I seldom have, I know. I am, at best, a strangely interesting curiosity who lives his life with the hope that I might make a few other folks smile. I guess I'm an entertainer in



the end. The guy who lives for the applause. Only I don't live for the applause. I live to set up the applause. I guess I'm a character actor in fandom. Only I'm far too whacky to be that guy either. I sometimes get the feeling that no matter what I do, I'll be filled with self-doubt. Wait, I KNOW that no matter what I do I'll be filled with self-doubt, but too often it's come out that what I most fear will happen happens, even when I'm not looking for it to happen. It's weird that I can pull off minor miracles, but it's the little stuff that I never seem to get right. Go figure.

Wow, this might be why Kevin Standlee loves trains so much. It's a great place to take out your emotional baggage and really give it a serious

inspection.

The trip was gorgeous once we got out of Reading. There was green and gold and orange and brown. There were manor houses, some obviously older than the idea of the Modern City. There was water, rivers and a couple of lakes. One had a pair of rowers about to start a friendly, I think. An old church passed by. Really old. The whole thing looked more like a Roman fort than an Anglican Church. More farms and horses. No sheep though. I imagine that entering into Wales is like descending from Cruising altitude through the clouds...only with sheep playing the part of the clouds.

We stopped and I made sure to take photos to prove that I had been to Cardiff. I mean who would be-



lieve that a fool would do all that in one day when they were leaving in less than 24 hours? No one in their right mind, I can tell you that. I hardly took any pictures this trip. I managed to get a few of the British museum and some of the Dr. Who exhibit, but not much of anything else. Linda got more of the Science Museum and the V and the A, but I didn't take many of those. I did get a few good ones of stuff that really caught my eyes.

We passed a series of wind-power generating windmills. These were the kind we have in Palmdale or the Altamont Pass. No, Altamont isn't just for Hells Angels and the Rolling Stones. They were far off, but when there are windmills, you know that's a place that gets fast winds often. I might have to look into where we were at the time we passed them. It was about 9:40 in the am after we left at 8:32. I'm better I can nail it with GoogleMaps or Earthview. Modern Life wins again!

The train ride was very fast. We went through Didcot Parkway, Swindon, Kemble, Stroud, and Stonehouse before we got to Gloucester. That was a city I had heard of. I got photos of every station. That was my goal. I had to think of the future and nothing is more permanent than a digital photo taken with your girlfriend's camera! That, like the pieces in the British Museum, will far outlive anyone looking on them today...unless life extension gets really good. Man, that'd be sweet! Watching our possessions decay and fade away before we do. Never in the history of man has that happened.

We stopped at Swindon for a while. There was some sort of problem. This trip was getting terribly long.

Longer by the minute. I was determined though. I was going to Wales and I don't care what it takes to make it happen. The stopping and delays were getting me down though. I was looking at a noon arrival at this point and that's not too late. I figured an hour in Cardiff would give me time to get photos, but I would like to have lunch there and maybe walk around and get a little lost. I'll end up doing that anyway, even if I just stayed in the station.

I would be at the airport 24 hours from the moment the train left Swindon Station. I'd be getting ready to get on that plane and come back home to my little apartment and the World's Most Uncomfortable Couch and Linda and picking up Evelyn and watching DVDs and playing Nintendo 64 while listening to MP3s on my iBook and my little kitchen and the fuses that keep blowing when I try to make toast. I miss all of that, you know. Two weeks away from what I call my life is the longest I've ever gone without it. I really think I will enjoy getting back to the grind. It's something that I never thought I'd miss, but I do. I really do. This trip was wonderful and it might just turn out to be the same thing as Billy Crystal's trip to the Cattle Drive in City Slickers. I guess you can just call me Chrissy the Kid.



I wonder what will happen with this report? Am I typing it merely for the sake of my typing it? Am I simply putting words on the screen in a form of masturbation hitherto for unknown? TAFFsturbation, perhaps? I'm not sure. I know it's overly long and too detailed and not even funny, but it's the best document I could think of to make mark of my trip. I think that performing the report while I was on the trip was the best idea. With the laptop, it allowed me to write in situations where it wasn't possible even just a few TAFF trips ago. It also allowed me to record everything without having to rely on notes.

It also reeks of freshness, I imagine. That's a bad thing in a way. It has no depth of field of memory. It's hard to know what's really important until there's been time for folks to let it stew, but on the other hand, this report isn't the last I'll ever write about this trip. This isn't the final word. This is the authoritative word. This is the starting point, the piece that all others will hang off of. While I might have forgotten a number of things great and small, this is the record of my movements with the most clarity. I plan on filling the pages of many zines with stories that either happened on the trip or have a significant part of their origin in it. This may become a lifelong hobby, writing about this one two-week trip. Who knows? I do know that y'all gonna be sick of it.

Funny thing. That delay turned into a cancellation. I had to detrain and change to another train since all trains heading to Swansea were canceled. That was well and truly suck, but it was OK since I was only going for a short visit anyhow. I got off and sadly the first class cabin on this train was overrun with passengers. There must have been a dozen or so. I'd had a cabin all to myself last time and now here I was sharing with chumps who had either woken up later than I did or decided that First Class was their reward for having to wait for this train to come to get them to wherever they were going. We waited a bit and then headed out to parts Welsh.

I was getting tired of Transport. Back home, I had a car waiting for me, waiting to take me wherever it was I wanted to go. I could get behind the wheel and drive. I was still an hour and forty-five minutes from Cardiff and about an hour and a half from entering Wales. I had a mission and I wasn't going to let anything stop me. Slow me down, sure, but not stop me. I was going to set foot in Wales.

The train moved through towns and such built into the side of hills. These looked old old old and the buildings showed ages of change. One of them was right before Stroud and it was amazing. I also passed by a genuine bog. I'd always wanted to see a real bog. It looks a lot like a swamp. I love swamps. I've been to a few of those, especially the ones in and around Dunwoody, Georgia. These were particularly English swamps, and thus, bogs. Go figure.

We passed through Gloucester and I saw several old churches. They were nice. Then Gloucester Cathedral came into sight. It was magnificent. It was huge, sprawling, and even with Churches that looked a century older, it was was the piece that took the eye. I only got to stare at it for a minute or so, and there were ruins that looked like they were either once a part of the cathedral grounds or Roman in nature, but it's impossible to tell. Another reason I wish I'd had more time. I wish I could come back. Still, I dipped my toe into waters I thought I'd never get a chance to play in.

The countryside was beautiful again. There were sheep. We must be getting closer and closer to Wales. There were big sheep and baby sheep and all sorts of sizes in-between happily munching and crunching on grasses and such. We ran alongside a wide river, or maybe it was an inlet or a bay. I have no idea. I'll consult a map of England when I get back home. Then a big ass suspension bridge came into sight. No idea which one it was, but it was cool looking. Sadly, photos from the train look like hell and the bridge didn't look right. We entered a tunnel, no clue where, and I was hungry, so I went and got a delightful Roast Chicken and Stuffing sandwich, a Coke and a Kit Kat. The sandwich was great. Good food has followed me from place to place and I am so glad of that.

I knew we entered Wales because I saw a sign that was in English and then there were all these consonants that only vaguely differed from what a kid would spell with letter blocks. That was obviously Welsh and I knew that all signs in Wales had to have both on them. Sweet. I'd entered a new Principality. That's important to remember because for all the talk of Wales being it's own country, it is, in fact, merely a principality. We had a battle over that fact for ages at The Britannia Arms Trivia night in 2000 or so. I really should start going back someday. I'm sure they've forgotten



me by now.

I guess I expected the farms that swung by view to be different than the ones we have back on the roads between San Jose and Yosemite. but they all look the same. I guess I was expecting dignity or something. Instead, there were the same rusting cars, twig-looking children's playsets and standing puddles of water that seemed browner than dirt. The small towns and the beautiful churches and such were so different, so much more interesting than the gas station towns you drive pass in the hills, and the farms weren't like I had expected. I guess it was my problem.

The trip was slowly coming to an end. I was looking forward to seeing a bit of Cardiff and then jumping right back on the train and heading back to the hotel. First we stopped at Newport in South Wales. It was a city like many others I've seen, only they had ruins right as you pulled into the train station. How cool is that? I wanted to get out, but I never know how long these trains are gonna stop, so I stay near my seat, only making sure that I get the photo to prove that I had been there. That's the important part (and you can tell from the way I put together the photos for this one, can't you?). I was again on my own in the couch after Newport and I put on some quiet music (I didn't have any headphones) and watched the train yards and the thick trees and shrubs roll by. I was in Wales, dammit! This is freakin' awesome, no matter what the view happened to be. After a bit, it opened up and there were cows and horses in sweaters and sheep. Always sheep. I got the feeling that the countryside wouldn't be with me much longer. That was OK, I didn't need it. I was in Wales and That was enough. That and there were more bogs. I'm getting to like bogs. The swans I passed on the way were huge. They sure grow 'em big out here. I saw my first pigs on this whole trip, eating comfortably by the side of the water, a rusting Ford Anglia sitting door handles deep in the drink. I could have been in Alabama for that view!

The bathrooms on this train had one of my favorite long-gone pieces of technology: the roller towel. I love those things. There used to be a bathroom at Ken's Family Restaurant that had one in the 1997 period, but that ended by the Millennium. I was made sad by that fact. The bathrooms on trains are usually pretty grotsky, but these were quite nice. It might have been the First Class thing working in my favor. I hope so, because putting up the money for the First Class upgrade (after the Fund paid for the basic portion) was a risky proposition. I'm so recommending BritRail First Class to anyone traveling to Wales from London. It's not ultra-plush, but it's comfy and right.

I got off at Cardiff Central and walked out of the building. It turns out that Cardiff Central isn't in the center of everything, but it's in a good enough location to make an hour and a half visit worth it. It's right next to Millennium Stadium, which is on the river. Which river, you might ask?

The River Taff.

That's right. The River Taff. I have been guaranteed that the river was named before the fund was founded, I'm not so sure. I headed to the river and walked along the banks for a while before turning and coming upon an industrial area. Then it got kinda iffy. I stuck with it and then came to a part that was moderately OK. It was obviously a former Rave district that was prior to that a warehousing area. There were signs for parties and former nightclubs that covered over signs for old foundries and breweries that were from at least fifty years ago. After that it was new gated communities which were trying to attract new buyers with promises of Waterfront Living and Wide Views. It was the same thing you'd see in any number of California cities...only the signs were copied right after in Cymru. It was kinda cool. Once I found those apartments, I knew I was on the right track and headed towards the water, eventually getting back to the path and walking back around to the Millennium Stadium again. I walked through a small outdoor farmer's market which smelled like heaven. Fresh fish and beef and grilled onions and cooking burgers and fennel and cumin and the ever present twinge of pepper-covered steaks filling the air. I could hardly resist buying everything in sight, but I didn't.





I simply just walked along the path right to Cardiff Castle. The castle is huge, but I didn't really feel like going on a tour of it. I took some photos and then headed into the Holiday Inn to use the restroom (the stall used a simple bar and bracket design for it's lock) and then I grabbed as many pamphlets as I thought i might need to prove that I had, in fact, gone to Cardiff.

I walked out and got some more photos of the Castle. It had cleared up a great deal and the sky was lovely. There was a factory that had a giant smokestack. I thought I had read it wrong, but indeed my fears were confirmed. There must be millions of zombies descending on Cardiff because they have a Brains factory right on the water. They practically call to them across the Taff. Come here, get Brains. I took photos of that stack, wondering how long it would be before Cardiff fell to the shambling horde and then how long it would take before anyone else noticed.
(Spell Xchecked to here)

I walked towards the train station again. Now, I know what you're thinking. Why the hell go nearly 4 hours out just to walk around the city a little and then head home? Your point is well-taken, but here's the thing: I love trains. I'm not a nut about them, but there's not much better than to travel via a train. That and I don't think I could have fit it in (and still kept my budget for the trip. I would have liked to have seen that shot from the opening of Torchwood of those three cool buildings right on the water, but it was not meant to be. I did get to see enough to know that it's an awesome city and that Welsh is spoken as a part of the everyday speech, but there was no one I heard talking who spoke only in Welsh. Mostly it was Welsh, that strange combination of Welsh and English where you might use regular verbs in English and pepper it with Welsh idiom and the like. It was fun to hear. I'd only heard snips of Welsh spoken before, but I got an earful when the announcements at the station were done first in Welsh and then in English. That was sweet.

I made my way back to the station and found that I had 15 minutes until the train. I bought the traditional quick meal of Wales: a Corned Beef Pastie. OK, maybe it's not authentic, but it's what I got. Along with a bottle of water. I ran into the restroom at the station and the stall locks were twist-and-catch hooks. I expected more.

I got back onto the train and started my trip back into London. The ticket guy came through and hassled a bunch of folks. He looked at my pass for about a 1/10 of a second and moved on. Membership has its privileges. The trip was even more beautiful going this direction. There were people out in the fields doin' stuff like walking the dogs or hunting. There were people out on the water boating or fishing. That felt right. It was a lazy Sunday out in Wales.

I read the in-train magazine, Go To..., and it was ultra-fluffy. Almost nothing worth reading, but still impossible to put down. It was like reading a newscast full of human interest stories. There was a piece about a band called Goldfrapp that I liked. I have to look into what they do. Comparisons to Madonna and Sissor Sisters are relevant to my interests.

I sat and thought some more as I watched the countryside roll away. I was waiting for Gloucester Cathedral again. I knew we would come to it right before we pulled into the station. I wanted to get the best look possible from the train. I was sitting and thinking about what I'd do when I got home. I figured I'd go to BASFA and review England and Wales. I could open it up with the line 'So, I was in Cardiff yesterday' and work from there. Or I could jsut give a quick review of Eastercon. I guess it doesn't really matter how I review it because I'm probably going to give tons of reports over the next few months that'll make the whole thing shine!

I got my glimpse of Gloucester Cathedral and it was just as magnificent. I really should come back someday and see the entire city. There were so many little peeks of things that looked as if they'd make for a good day visit. Perhaps it's a great for an hour, OK for a day cities that I've seen around the US. Like Dover. Or Hartford. Or Providence. Or Sacramento. Or Fresno.

OK, not Fresno. That's not even OK for an hour.

The train got more crowded at Gloucester. There were at least 20 new people in the first class section. They announced that you had to be in certain sections of the train to get off at certain stations. No matter what



station it was, First Class could use any door to get out. Once again, smart move for the upgrade. More scenery, which I'm sure you're getting tired of, but if you put up with this much, I'm sure you can deal with a little more. I'm bringing this in at 50k words, not a nickle over if I can help it, and the current count

is closer to 46 and I've got a day and a flight into California to cover. I could just give up here, but why waste good material that's just waiting to be created?

I took some time to work on the final version of Journey Planet, the Eastercon Fanzine in an Hour. James and I thought that it would be nice to do a special polished version, which is a good idea. I worked on it a bit and then went back to typing up my time in Cardiff. I never thought I'd get to write words like that and not have it be some fantasy hoax piece. The train was slow out of Stroud station because there were reports of sheep on the tracks. That's a wild one. Sheep holding up a train. It's simply 19th century! We did go slow through some very old, very posh hillside village. We must have gone through it on the way to Cardiff, but to get a good look at it was very nice. It was another place that I'm sure I wouldn't ever want to stay at, but I do give it high marks for enticement with the drive-through look. We passed the sheep (I saw one of them standing in a ditch on the other side of the tracks) and we stayed slow for awhile. It might have been the grade of the hill that was keeping us slow, but it caused a rocking motion that made me sleepy. I was glad to be getting back early enough to get a nap and then watch a little TV before it was right off to bed and then the flight.

I was really looking forward to taking that flight. It wasn't the getting home, though that was a draw as well, but the in-flight entertainment. Torchwood, the Sarah Jane Adventures, The Simpsons, Family Guy, Enchanted, Stardust, and who knows, maybe they even updated their selections a day early and I'd get all new stuff to watch on my way. I'm sure I'll fall asleep on the flight, but I'm also sure that no matter how tired or out of it I am, I will be watching a fair deal of the entertainment available to me. I hear that they do the same kind of entertainment on Virgin America. I wonder if they fly to Montreal? Or even Denver, though you wouldn't get that much time for it.

There were some places that were like hiccups in the trip between Cardiff and London. A thick wood that gave just one momentary blip of an old stone house with a crumbling wall and a long drive up to it. A cemetery that seems to have been a part of a church where only a small set of steps survived. A large House with a slack roof that popped from between the weeds on the side of the tracks. These were almost ghosts, nearly impossible to try and see. I wonder how many of these I missed. How many more run-down abbeys and highway inns were buried behind thickets and trees. What was just on the other side of the rise that seemed to turn the tracks into an open-topped tunnel. Were there old baths? Maybe a warehouse that dated back to the times of Edward the Confessor. There could be anything beyond this and I would have no idea. I'm only passing through. That's the perfect metaphor for the entire trip, actually. It's just poignant enough to work on the whole while still making it seem like I had wasted the entire trip on nothing more than simple foolishness. I think I did pretty well. I could have done more, but almost every trip has that factor. I met the masses, played the fool and then hit out on my own enough to not feel trapped. I don't think I played the tourist too much. Like the delegate to America who can only make the WorldCon and the East Coast, I did what I could and made every moment count. I'm shocked I can say that and actually mean it.

What will this all look like when it's all done? I've gotta admit, I've got no idea. I sometimes wonder about the transition from idea to event to record. This is the record part of the experience. I really can only say that it'll be designed for viewing on the screen, will have photos and some drawings, and it will be longer than I would have ever thought. I'll try and print out five copies to get the bounties and then have one each to Auction at WorldCon and at CorFlu. That's going to be it unless you print your own paper copy. It's not that I don't like paper, I kinda do, but this is meant for the web and nothing else will do.

We stopped at Swindon for a bit, not sure why, and then it was off to Reading and then Paddington. I was almost sad to see the trip come to an end. The pulling into Paddington was the literal end to my one day adventure, and the symbolic end to my total trip. Symbols always piss me off. Always there to ruin your good time and make things seem all gloomy or shiny. Why can't signs just let the signified do the talking? And guess what? The clouds started returning, right on cue. Well done, Universe. Make it harder. Class act, pal!

I started to recognise houses, farms, places that we sped through on the way to the other stations on my up, so I knew things were starting to wind down. Once we got to Reading, it was straight through to Paddington. One thing I missed on my way out were the three giant cooling towers that were obviously a part of a nuclear (properly pronounced Nuke-U-Ler) power station. I'm not sure how I missed that. It was right beyond Didcot Parkway, which is a station I remember well from my trip up. I guess it's never the tree you hit that you noticed the first time around. I sat at the platform of the station waiting to move and just kept writing and writing. It's what Chris Garcia does. I thought about getting a sandwich, but I was gonna wait for the stuff they had at Paddington. It all looked really, really good. I was gonna take it back to the room and eat and watch TV and listen to my iBook's MP3 collection and maybe even use my CPAP just to have everything going at once. I wanted information overload of every sort for my last few hours. I wanted to be experiencing the entire range of human senses being poked and prodded the entire evening. It was going to be my going-away present to myself. I was going to throw it all at the wall that is my human interface and then turn it all off and fall asleep in utter still silence.

One of the more interesting things we passed was the Moog Components factory. I had no idea it was in Reading, but in fact it was. I should have stopped, if I had known it was there. Too many things like that skip my view until it's too late.

I sat in my seat and thought about who I thought were the writers that I most hope will end up giving their views of my trip. I know John The Rock Coxon, Steve Green, Liz Batty, James Bacon, Abi Brown, The Lovely and Talented Linda and Niall. I'd love to get some stuff from Ian Snell, Michael Abbot and Tony Keen about Eastercon. Add Guilia DeCaesere and Tania Brown to that



list. If I can get half those names to give me something, I'll consider this trip worth it. They'd make the Drink Tank sing if they showed up in there.

We got to Paddington and I trudged off towards the Circle Line. It was time to call it a trip and sleep (and the joys of technology were to follow).

I got back from the Tube with a little energy and a bag with chocolate, bottled water, a smoothy and a pastie. I wasn't going back home without one last over-indulgence. I turned on the TV and fired up iTunes to listen to some good old fashioned music. I started a new playlist figuring that one, it was better than listening in order and two, the next time I get into the mood where everything was better when, I'll have something to bring

me back a bit. Mostly, life is about expectation management. I've come up with my little idea of how to deal with that probable piece of disappointment.

Man, that was deep. I mean really deep. I'm not supposed to come up with stuff like that. I'm the shallow fun guy, not the deep thinker. You don't read Chris Garcia for life theories. you read him for the fannish version of fart jokes!

I watched the results show for I'd Do Anything, that show where they're choosing the Nancy for Oliver. My choices were the Irish girl with the curly brown hair and the Scottish Redhead and the black girl who Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber said was a young Shirley Bassey. There's no doubting that she's got the chops and was absolutely gorgeous to boot. Still, I want the Scottish girl to win. They had a lovely segment where the girls went to a market at Walthamstow, right near where Alison and Steve put me up! It was a typical segment, but the best part was the Irish girl (Jessie) was easily the best of them! The group song they did was from Girls Aloud, which was weird. It was so very not Nancy. Now, the group was pretty good. I could easily see myself getting hooked on this. Good thing I'm not sticking around this country. The Olivers are pretty good, but the first of their semi-finalists was a Welsh kid who had a name I couldn't pronounce. Damn Welsh!

OK, I was watching the TV with mute on so I could have my music and there was a shot of the Titanic Drawing Room. I must find out where that is and get someone out there for photos or mayhaps I'll find a way to con a large group into pooling their money and sending me over under the pretense of visiting other members of that group. Anyone know what the Mystery Fandom version of TAFF is called? I've read some Mickey Spillane! I also wish I had time to see the Uffington White Horse, Chillingham Castle (and the White Cattle), Gloucester Cathedral, Bath, all of Scotland and the birthplace of Elvis Costello. I don't even have a clue where that is, but I wanna see it and I want to worship there.

That's all stuff that'll have to wait. Someday? Not likely, but I'll hope and pray and play the lottery more often. You can't win if you don't play...

Chapter 19: Monday- And Now I Face The Final Curtain



Thank you, London. I'm going back to San Francisco and then to the SuperShuttle and then to the city of Sunnyvale. That would be the end of it. I was ready. It was like ripping off a Band-Aid. You fret about it and then just go for it to get it over with. I woke up at 6:30. The Television time was still set to the time frame before British Summertime started, so I had to do some mental math and set it for the proper time. It worked and I was up at the exact right moment.

The next time I set an alarm, it would be to Pacific Standard Time.

I don't know if I've ever been away from where I'm living

for more than two weeks. I think I went for a 10 day trip once, but that would be the longest I can think of. It would probably take some readjustment to the old way. I'd have to see. I know the time thingee will mess with me, so I'm planning on staying up long enough to go to the BASFA meeting. I started to write TAFF meeting instead of BASFA. I guess you can see where my mind is at the moment.

I went down and checked out of the room and then headed into the Internet Lounge and checked my mail. I sent off early pieces of the TAFF Report to folks who were my nominators and those that had been big supporters, like Guy Lillian and Steven Silver. I couldn't find John Coxon's eMail or he'd have gotten one too. I wasn't the first guy to do my report while on the road (Martin Tudor did parts of his report while he was on the trip!), but I will certainly be the first to significantly write my report on the road and publish it within 30 days. I'm kinda proud of this thing. I know I've bad mouthed it a bit, but I really think this is one of those things that you know is bad but you can't help but be in love with it. Yeah, YOU can hate on it all you want. I know all the problems and I agree with you, but that doesn't make me love it any less and it doesn't make me want to change a thing. It's either egotism or just plain not understanding the point of writing. I'm going for the latter.

I walked over to the bus and took my last ride on a London bus. It was a double-decker, and though I had not yet ridden on the top of one of those buses, but since I had heavy luggage, I could not. Another opportunity lost. Poor me. We got to the station and I hopped off, walking what seemed to be a quarter mile to the check-in. I did the thing and weighed my bags: 4.6 kg for the carry-on (1.4 to spare) and 21.3 for the Checked Bag (1.7 to spare), Pretty exceptionally close if you ask me. I went and checked through security and that led me right to the Duty Free Shop which had the whiskeys right in front. Tempting, but this trip had already cost enough. I then walked on a bit and saw they had a cigar room. They had Cuban cigars. I have only smoked Cubans a few times in my life. Once was in the Olympic Village at Atlanta (which was considered International Land for the Games and sold Cubans like mad!) and another was when friends smuggled some back from Mexico. I couldn't bring myself to do it. I walked on to the food court, bought a lovely Chicken sandwich, a pair of Innocent Smoothies and a piece of Banana Bread. That was enough to keep me going until the meal service on the plane. I sat down at the Food Court and watched people walk by, talking in weird languages, all wearing heavy coats over Saris or birkas or Simpsons T-shirts or batangs or whatever. It was amazing to see. I sat and typed these words while I was waiting for my plane to board, maybe a ten minute walk from where I sat. These things happen.

I looked around and saw various terminals. I was there way too early. I don't understand why they tell you to get there 2 hours early and then you have to sit and wait around. I guess there's always the chance of major cock-ups all over the place and better early than sorry I guess. Still, it must be a scam that the Food Courts are running. I sat and typed and read a little and waited for them to announce what gate I was supposed to go to. They kept saying that the gate opened at 9:45, but they never said which gate. I'd very much like to be seated at gate for an hour even if the other flight was still boarding. I needed to recharge this beast!

I've started wondering what the best way to finish this report is, and I guess it's to write a few top 5 lists. Here's one



Top Five Meals I Ate During My Trip

5) Steve's Pasta Sauce at Alison and Steve's Place- It was a chunky ragout featuring artichokes. It went very well on the lettuce leaves they'd cut up.

4) The Mexican Meal with Folks- Flick, Mike Scott, Claire, Mark, James, Simone, Nolly and His Wife were all great company and the food was quite tasty. I have to say that the Enchilada was top-notch
3) Chinese in Birmingham- Steve Green and Co. and delicious Chinese. How could that go wrong?

2) Last Night at the Newbury Room at Eastercon- the Buffet was very good, the Gattau was tasty, and the conversation was bizarre and lovely.

1) Ann's delightful meal in Solihull- French Onion Soup, Chicken, Cheese plate, how could anything be better than that!

5) James- How you doin' old man? Chris- Fine, save for the numb ass

4) John The Rock Coxon- This woman keeps sending me locs saying how much she hates Procrastinations. C

OK, I'll stop there for a moment. I was religiously watching the board update with gate info and San Francisco still isn't up there. I wanted to get there and settle for a few minutes before we head off. I also want to get my laptop plugged in for at least twenty minutes or so. I resist buying a Coke. It'd only have made me logey I tell myself. I really miss Linda. I don't get to see her enough. I miss Evelyn. I see her a lot, but since 2003, I don't think I've gone from than a week without seeing her and this makes 2.5. I miss my couch. I miss watching DVDs over and over because I don't have cable. I miss working on The Drink Tank. These are the thoughts that go through my head when I'm waiting with nothin' but typing to do. I could read, but I'd just get into it and miss the second they update the board. They still hadn't updated it as I wrote these words. Still nothing. What

were they waiting for? I don't understand!

They finally put up where I was supposed to go (Gate 40) and I walked over. It was a long hike, even with all the moving sidewalks. I hate huge airports like this especially when they could stack gates (there was a great design for just such an airport in a Disney Cartoon. Walt Disney Studios: designing the future since whenever it was they started). I went through the check-in procedure for the waiting area and then I headed in, found a plug and started. It was a good thing because my battery was running low. I plugged in and then started to recharge while still typing away. I only got a couple of percent full when they announced that they were boarding. I pulled the plug and then lined up.

Ten minutes later, they made an announcement. There was a technical problem with the plane and they were delaying us up to 90 minutes. It was an air-conditioning thing. I can appreciate them wanting to prevent us from leaving without full air. Steve Green told me that when they stopped allowing smoking on flights, they stopped bringing in air from the outside to replenish the air in teh cabin. I can think of how much of a problem that would be if you're dealing with maximizing speed and minimizing feul costs. I went and replugged in and started typing again. II was going to have a fully-operational laptop when I got on that plane.

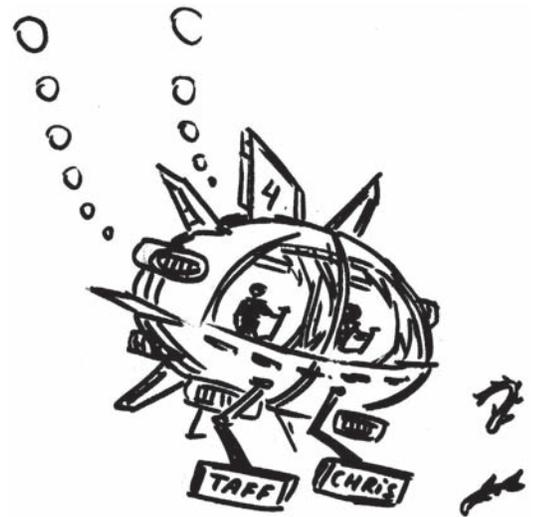
I was thinking about the trip some more, figuring out how I would talk about it in the future. I had a great time to those not in fandom. it was amazing to those in fandom. I meet a lot to those folks at work. I can think og more, I'm sure. The next few Drink Tanks will be full of stuff from the trip, but more full of friends and such. I'm slowly starting to limit my own words in The Drink Tank. I'm far from the best writer I've got and I think it's time I let those that are better do the talking.

Anyhow, the delay was ninety minutes, but they boarded us an hour early since it was all work up top. We got comfortable and the seat I had was perfect. It was in the last row in the 2 seat section on the left hand side where there was extra room between the window seat and the wall, so that left me with extra space for mmy shoes and my bag. That was a positive. The location was slightly rouder than being in the front, but I was going to be buried in the headphones anyhow, so it didn't really matter. We sat and then they got up fast and it wasn't more than half an hour before they started the in-flight. They changed things a day early, so I got to see some new entertainment. They added Walk Hard! One of my favorite films of last year. They added Sweeny Todd, whcih was the best film of 2007. They still had Stardust, whcih I was planning on finishing after I started it earlier. I also had Simpsons, Family Guy, Sarah Janes and Torchwood to watch, though I understand that Torchwood featured episodes I'd seen.

I watched and did not sleep a wink. I walked a little. I used the restroom, whcih had th esame turny lock thingee as every other plane I've ever been on. This flight back was kinda dull and v ery long. The lady next to me jsut slept through the entire flight and left on her Flight Progress chart that you can watch, so I always knew where we were and how long it was going to be before we landed. The best of all worlds, it was. I typed and read some more Drawing of the Dark, which might have replaced The Anubis Gates as my favorite book of Tim Powers. I just let the flight pass beneath my notice, I guess. I enjoyed the movies and the food was great. I ate every single bire of the first lunch, a chicken and mushroom thing with green beans and potato wedges. I couldn't believe how good this stuff was. I love Virgin Atlantic and I hope I can fly with them again someday.

And thus, did my trip end without anything worth writing about. It seems odd that a trip where I recorded so many things all the time that the end was so simple, so typical for people who go through this so often. It just sorted ended.

Just like this report.



Some notes from Steve Green that correct several of my mistakes and also give you a better idea of what actually happened on my visit to Solihull and environs.

Hi Chris,

We headed out from Olton (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olton>) through Shirley (both of which are in Solihull), then over the border into Warwickshire through Henley-in-Arden (the old coaching inns, replete with slots to drive through and park the coaches, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henley_in_Arden) towards Stratford-upon-Avon (the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, huge swans, the Garrick Inn and its macabre mynah bird, etc). On the return, we passed through Danzey Green (no major landmarks, but muddy/steep roads) into Tanworth-in-Arden (the Bell Inn; St Mary Magdalene Church, est. 1207, plus windows designed by pre-Raphaelite artist Burne-Jones, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burne-Jones>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanworth_in_arden).

FYI: that radio show on Friday night was The Archers, the planet's longest-running drama series (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Archers). The two Torchwood episodes you watched were "Adrift" (missing folk) and "Fragments" (flashbacks). The puppet movie you watched on Thursday was Eddie Loves You, written and directed by Karl Holt (winner of the 2006 Delta Film Award -- see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delta_Film_Award). You also watched the Pink Five series, directed by Trey Stokes, The whisky we drank was 10-year-old Glenmorangie single malt, brewed in Ross-shire, Scotland.

Just figured all this would help if you had any queries about your time with us.

All best

-- Steve

