

Snufkin Goes West...

The 1998 TAFF Travels of Maureen Kincaid Speller

Issue 1: 31 July 1998

"Three months," said Mark, "is a long time to be away. Are you going to do your TAFF report as you go?"

"No," I said firmly. "Much as I love Martin, I think he was insane. I don't want to spend every waking hour tapping away at a trip report. I want to write that when I get back."

"You could," said Mark, "send back bulletins along the way. E-mail them to Claire, I'll format them and we can copy them and hand them out at the Jubilee and send a few out to people. That way, people know what's going on and it won't seem as though you've disappeared off the face of the earth for three months."

The man is a genius. He even came up with the title and the format... so you know who to blame.

"Of course," he said then, "we'll need to get the first one done for the August Jubilee..." Given the time constraints, just imagine that as you hold this in your hot sweaty hand in the Jubilee circa 7 PM., I hope I'll be somewhere in the fully air-conditioned Baltimore Convention Centre, sorry Center, at about 2 PM, hopefully not going "ohmigod" as the full enormity of an American Worldcon hits me. Oh, and given the baroque licensing laws in Baltimore, would you have a drink for me? In fact, would you make it several? I probably need them.

Everything You Wanted to Know About Winning TAFF And Were Afraid To Ask

HANDY TIP #1: Do not let your cat campaign on your behalf by diving into Ulrika O'Brien's dinner.

Sunday April 25th dawns rather too bright, rather too early, and I settle down to wait for the results of the TAFF ballot. I could be killing time at Unconvention in London, but have eschewed the delights of a day with R. Lionel Fanthorpe, David V. Barrett *et al*, partly because of a lack of spare initials, partly because it's the first weekend Paul and I have had to ourselves in months, and mostly because I already know I am going to be a bag of nerves all day and it doesn't seem kind to inflict myself on the world. Tolerance is at a low ebb. As the day goes on, it recedes so far I conclude someone's pulled the plug out in the Atlantic. At this rate, I'd be able to walk to Baltimore. I spend hours poring over small maps with illegible lines denoting time zones. What time's midnight in Arlington?

The phone melts as I download e-mail at increasingly regular intervals, waiting for news. In between, people phone to wish me luck and to ask if I've heard anything yet. Paul fields the phonecalls to protect people from me. Nothing much is happening on rec.arts.sf.fandom. There may be quicker, more effective ways of going mad, but I can't think of one off-hand.

Around 9 PM I go to bed, but just lie there, muttering and being comforted by Snufkin. At 10 PM, Paul phones Martin, who says he hasn't heard from Dan yet, and he's not answering the phone. Paul mutters a lot, too. I've finally fallen asleep when the phone rings an hour later. Paul miraculously shoots across the room to answer it while I'm still waking up, listens intently, thanks the speaker. He leans over me and says, "Congratulations, you've won." "Oh," I say helpfully. "Can I have a cup of tea?" While he's doing this, I ring Croydon to let Claire know the result. I retrieve my shattered cardrum from several hundred yards down the road the next morning.

Finding the Trail

I need, I say to the guy on the other end of the phone, two flights to Washington, two flights from New York to Chicago, one flight from Chicago to Heathrow in August, and one flight from New York to Heathrow in October. Ah, he says, your husband is flying home later. No, I say, I am flying home later. There is a long pause. Feminism is obviously late arriving in Kensington High Street.

Later, when I ring to confirm the bookings, a different person informs me that Paul is booked on the midday flight from New York to Chicago; I am booked on the 1 PM flight from New York to Chicago. The first guy has obviously taken this separation very much to heart.

HANDY TIP #2: Do not try to buy traveller's cheques on the day the entire Barclays Bank computer network decides to take an all-day siesta.

Sparkly Frocks 'R' Us

Dave Langford discreetly emails me, one day, and hypothesises that in an alternative universe, where he can quote the e-mail he's not quoting to me right now, I might like to be his representative, should he unaccountably happen to be nominated for and win the Hugo for Best Fanzine. I unaccountably accept.

At Eastercon, everyone is seized with sparkly frock fever. John Dallman accosts me in the bar, and asks if I'd like to be *Attitude's* representative at the Hugo Ceremony, if I win TAFF; that way I can wear a sparkly frock and go to the Hugo Losers' Party. I say yes; not sure about the sparkly frock but the Hugo Losers' Party sounds fun. A couple of days later, Mike Abbott asks me precisely the same thing, in practically the same words. Cool ... synchronised inviting.

I've never been to a Hugo ceremony so I haven't a clue what's expected. Sartorial opinion suggests that it's a dressing-up sort of occasion, which is even more worrying as I am not very good at girly stuff, and I'm led to believe that Americans are really into dressing up for Hugos. Talking to Patrick Nielsen Hayden about various things, I perhaps unwisely ask him about this; he opines that it's fine to pick up a Hugo in jeans and sneakers. I wonder whether to buy some sequins to stick on my trainers. Popular opinion, however, favours a purple frock, with sparkles. As it turns out, Croydon yields something completely different that I realise is exactly what I wanted in the first place.

And for Dave Langford and for *Attitude*, I spend several toe-crushing weeks learning to wear high heels again, gritting my teeth and persevering with the blisters. After a day or two, I feel in sympathy with the Ugly Sister who cut off her toe so the glass slipper fitted. I think longingly of sneakers, sequinned or not.

HANDY TIP #3: Do not drive your car for at least three days after winning TAFF, do not use automatic supermarket doors, do not go out without telling anyone where you are going, do not pass Go, do not mislay £200... Remember to get dressed, brush your teeth and eat.

At Eastercon, Tony Cullen gives me a ten dollar bill left over from his trip to the States, telling me to have a drink from him when I get there. Later, he gives me a guidebook he used when he was in the States. He really thinks I'm going to win.

I still have that ten dollar bill tucked away safely, ready to have a drink in San Francisco.

I shall be back for Novacon this year, so start saving your hard-earned pennies for the United Fan Fund auction and the exciting things I'll be bringing back. If you're seized with a sudden whim to donate money to TAFF (and I feel that people should be seized with this sort of whim every now and then), feel free to send me a cheque, made out to 'Maureen Speller' and specifying its destination clearly. Or press cash (sterling or dollars) into my hand as I pass by.

My Trip Report will be written up during the Christmas holiday. Fanzine editors may like to book their chunk now; Steve Green and *Banana Wings* are commended for their forward planning. The complete report will be available at next year's Eastercon.

Snufkin Goes West... was written by Maureen Kincaid Speller in the build-up to her 1998 TAFF trip. Editing, layout, printing and non-US distribution by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer/Fishlifter Press. Further copies are available at various London pub meetings or from 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE (SAE appreciated). Maureen left Croydon for Heathrow on 2 August, having ensured we'd remember her departure vividly by bringing Folkestone-style flooding with her the day before. So much for the farewell barbeque. She's currently somewhere in the map on the back.

Next issue: early September...

The Grand Plan

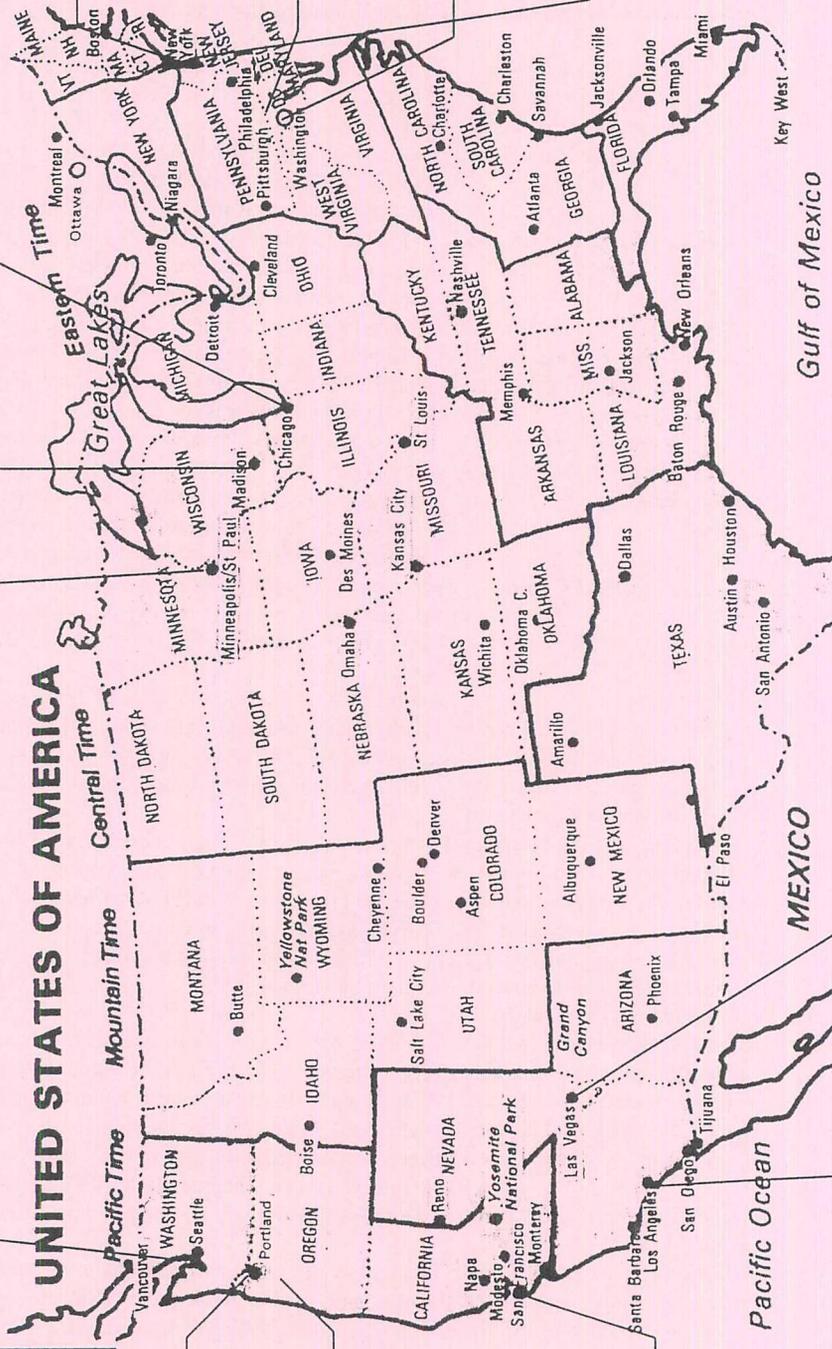
Seattle: Kate Schaeffer
10 September

Minneapolis:
Geri Sullivan
2 September

Madison:
Jeanne Gomoll
26 August

Chicago: Nigel Rowe
22 August

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Portland:
18 September

Eugene:
the Macgregors
20 September

San Francisco:
Allyn Cadogan,
Allen Baum &
Donya Hazard
White, and Doug
Faunt
24 September

New York: the
Nielsen Haydens
11 August

Baltimore:
Worldcon
5-9 August

Washington:
Marilee Layman
2 August

New York again:
Moshe Feder,
25 October

Los Angeles:
Ulrika O'Brien,
12 October

Las Vegas: the
Katzes and the
Vegrants,
19 October

Back to London Heathrow
and Folkestone,
28 October

