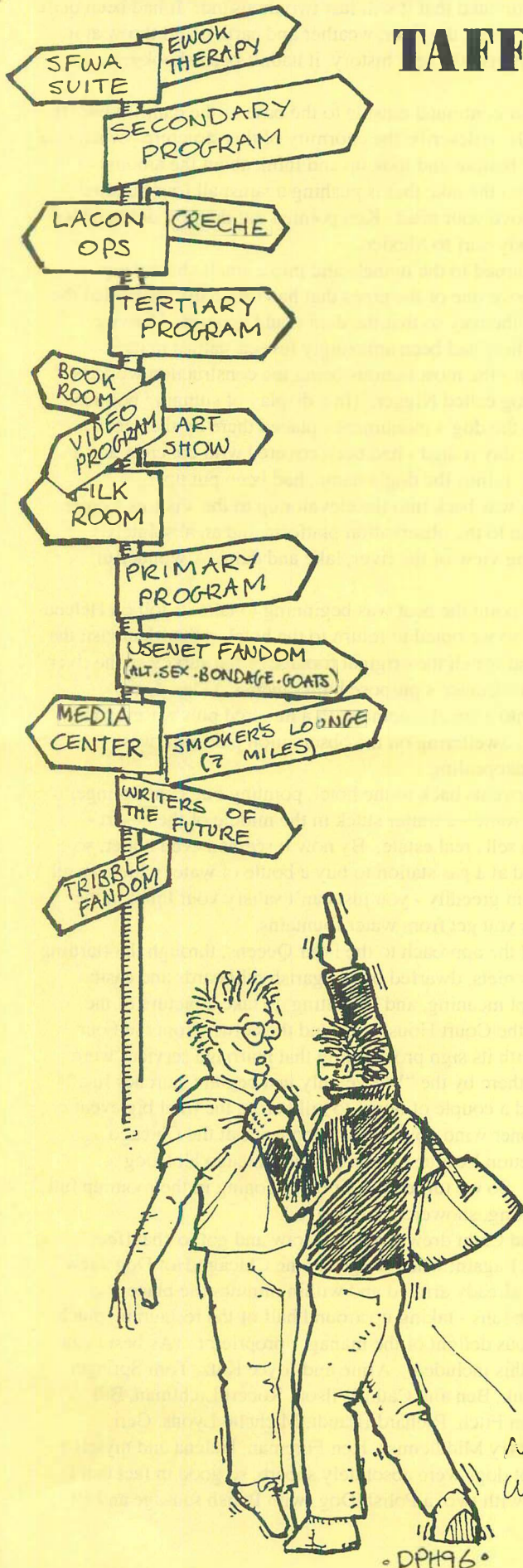


HAVE BAG WILL TRAVEL

TAFF BULLETIN 3



Part Three: "The Sun Never Sweats"

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

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

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

Several people had set out for the dam already, when we left around 9.30; Christina joining Paul Williams and Cindy Lee Berryhill, while Ben chauffeured Helena and me.

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

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

NEVER MIND THAT @!#@!!
WHERE'S THE *##@% BAR!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When we descended to the floor of the cavern, we really got

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

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

We returned to the tunnels and into a smallish viewing chamber above one of the pipes that had originally channeled the river out of the way so that the dam could be built. Here we learnt that there had been amazingly few casualties in its construction - the most famous being the construction workers mascot, a dog called N-----. (In a display of stunning political correctness the dog's monument - placed there by the dam workers the day it died - had been covered with concrete and a new plaque, minus the dog's name, had been put up!)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the trimmings) and a Kraut Dog (apparently Arnie's favourite, with tons of sauerkraut).

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

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

As Helena and Tammy had still got quite a few schnapps to try, a few of us wandered across the road to the Las Vegas Club, where we were lucky enough to get a line of stools. Perry was pissed off to discover that while the tv behind the bar was showing a highly unexciting skateboard competition, the tv screens elsewhere in the Casino (too far away to see clearly) were showing the All Blacks versus Australia rugby match. Perry tried to get the barman to change channels, but he was new, didn't speak very good English and indicated he wouldn't and/or couldn't. Geri and Tammy had their heads together, "talking relationships" and were giggling viciously as Geri slipped me a napkin "for my trip report". The note on the napkin read "I'm horrible wicked, aren't I? But it's fun - Tammy Funk, 8/27/96, 11.45pm". Don't ask me - they wouldn't tell a mere man.

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

Bored with corrupting the impressionable Ms Funk, Geri turned her attentions to Helena - gave her a dollar in change and insisted she gambled it in the slot machine on the bar. Neither I nor Helena knew how to use the machine so I promptly gambled the lot on one roll (accidentally) and lost it. Helena was not amused and insisted on doing it herself. So I replaced the dollar I'd lost and, with advice from the worldly-wise Christina, Helena had a go, promptly doubling her stake. Whereupon she quit. I remembered the \$20 that my colleagues from Hall Green office had given me to gamble and tried to persuade Helena to gamble it for me - she refused; declaring we should just spend it and tell them I'd lost it gambling, no one would have a problem believing that!

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

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

Tuesday morning came much earlier than we would've liked,

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

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

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

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

Tom quizzed me about British fans and filled me in on the Vegas fan scene and we all got pleasantly inebriated - except for the unfortunate drivers, Tom and Tammy. Perry stunned us all by launching into a description of the wonders of Australian poetry - once I had stopped choking on my beer (having cruelly laughed), the stuff he was talking about sounded quite interesting. The barman/owner's wife, who was waitressing, overheard the conversation (and Perry's accent) announced that she was be from New Zealand and chatted with us for a while. The evening finished off with the owner buying the last round for us all. Great fun.

We arrived home minutes after Cathi, who had put in a 14 hour day with her Area Manager trying to sort out the incredible mess at her new place of work. The accounts wouldn't balance, they were desperately short-staffed, and Wednesday looked like being just as nightmarish again! We all sympathized with her and then spoiled it

by raving about what a great night we'd all had. She took her revenge though, by making Helena promise not to steal away with the cute, kittenish, Nimue.

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

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

impressive nonetheless.

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

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

Then it was back to the car again for the drive past Caesar's Palace to Mirage - which is famous for its white tigers and lion show. Only one of the tigers was out when we got there, though he kept the crowd entertained for quite a while pissing several gallons of urine into the pool. There was lots of oohing and aahing when he followed this by scratching piteously at the door to be let out.

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

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

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

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

I was surprised when I wandered back into the house to grab a beer (no surprise there) to receive a phonecall: it was Woody calling from work to say that he'd just read EMPTIES #17 - or at least my piece about meeting Helena and wanted to say how much he'd enjoyed it. Nice guy Woody.

A short time later Helena suddenly screamed, leaping out of her seat. When she caught her breath she shame-facedly admitted

that she thought the noise of the sprinkler suddenly coming on was made by a killer gopher erupting from the earth behind her. Strange what damage a combination of pizza and beer can do to the mind....

The sprinklers were very welcome as the evening seemed to be getting hotter and hotter - so I leant back to let the cool, refreshing water run down my neck. About half an hour later Helena decided it was time for a swim and as I stood to let her past I discovered that the section of the stone seat I was on was cracked and I'd been sitting in a pool of water - my trousers were drenched. Yuch. Helena gloated at the fact that I hadn't brought my trunks as I wandered around trying to dry them out.

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

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

[This has been the third of six installments of HAVE BAG, WILL TRAVEL - Martin Tudor's 1996 TAFF Trip Report; written on the 1 September 1996.

[Parts One and Two will be reappearing in WILD HEIRS #16. Future installments will be available, as they appear, from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH, England (send three self-addressed, stamped envelopes or six IRCs). In the USA copies can be received in person from Martin Tudor or by passing him stamped, self-addressed envelopes for future installments (donations to TAFF, however, are always appreciated). Copying and distribution of this and future installments (verbatim) is encouraged (and appreciated).

[The completed report (with an introduction, lots of splendid illustrations and conclusion) will be available in November 1996 from Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX, for a mere (minimum) three pounds donation to TAFF (or the equivalent of five pounds outside the UK), inclusive of postage and packing. Sterling cheques/money orders payable to "Martin Tudor", US dollar cheques/money orders payable to "Dan Steffan". If any fan artists reading these installments feel inspired to portray scenes described please do so, all contributions for the complete report will be gratefully received!

[Errors so far spotted in Part Two: page 1, third paragraph, end fourth line - "Tom" should read "Ben"; page 7, last paragraph, lines 6 and 7 should read "but a rare two issues of the Cretin's INDIAN SCOUT". Sorry Ben, Tom and Geri! Many thanks to Geri Sullivan and Jack Heneghan for pointing out the mistakes. All corrections to past and future installments gratefully accepted by Martin Tudor.

[Many thanks to DAVE HICKS for the illustrated headings; STEVE STILES for the issue numbers; BERNIE EVANS and DAVE LANGFORD for British production and distribution; DAVE COX for the loan of his laptop (and camera); SPINAL TAP for the sub-headings; HELENA TUDOR for sub-editing this when she'd much rather have been sitting by the pool with a long, cool STRONG bacardi and coke; ROXANNE SMITH-GRAHAM for printing off the US masters for Part Two; and, of course, Kinko's for the copying in the US.]