

The Antipodal Route



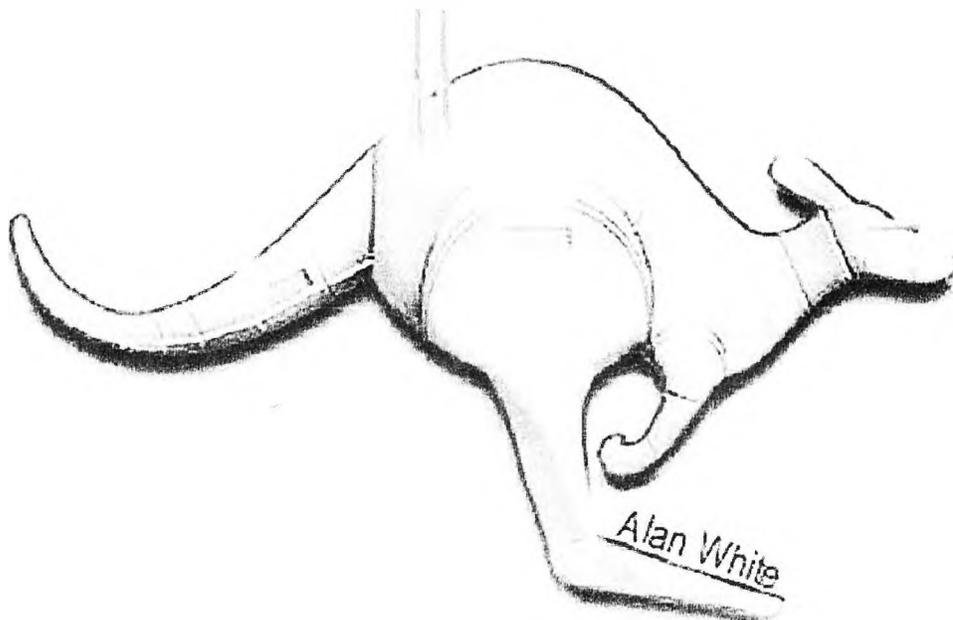
GUY & ROSY
the DUFF STUFF DOWNUNDER

THE ANTIPODAL ROUTE

A report on the adventures of
GUY and ROSE-MARIE LILLIAN
in the wondrous and magical land of
OZ

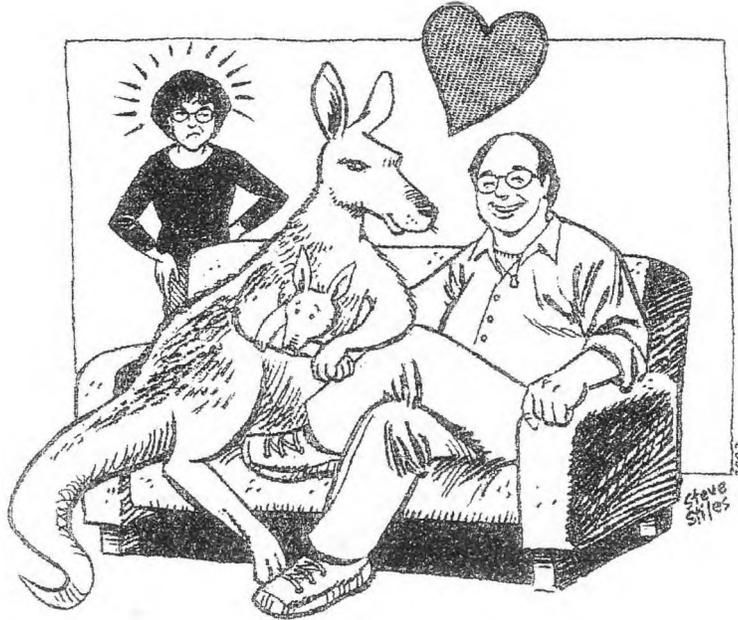
a.k.a AUSTRALIA
in April, 2003
as delegates for science fiction fandom's
DOWN UNDER FAN FUND

illustrated by many
cover by ALAN WHITE
brought forth upon an amazed and astonished fandom
in the summer of 2006
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GHLIII Press Publication #995



Introduction

The IS of OZ



Many times
since our trip downunder
– as the 2003 North
American delegates of

science fiction’s Down Under Fan Fund – I’ve dreamed Rosy and I were going back. Usually, in these dreams, we’re boarding an airplane, high with anticipation – or in my case, flight-o-phobic anxiety. But on a recent occasion my dream was different. It began as we arrived in Australia. We carried Jesse, our yorkie terrier, and this time hustled right from the plane onto the streets of Melbourne.

In my dream I passed a sick sheep (I love my Cordwainer Smith) and workmen toting the head of a monstrous hammerhead shark. I was so excited – I kept exulting to Rosy that everything was *new* to us there, things as mundane as the names of stores (did I see a FCUK sign?) – that we could wonder in amazement at things Australians took for granted. Like the stars. Like the Moon.

Very true, awake or asleep. *The Moon itself* is different in the land downunder. When you’re south of the equator, when you’re in the wonderful magical land of Oz, the Man in the Moon doesn’t peer down and to his right as he does in our hemisphere. He looks *right at you*. It’s a little disconcerting!

It’s also wondrous. You gaze into that alien sky and you never forget it. Awake, asleep, the thought absolutely immolates your mind:

We’re in Australia.

Welcome, dear readers, to **The Antipodal Route**, the tale of the DUFF delegacy of Guy & Rose-Marie Lillian as recollected and written by the former and lesser of the two. Though much has happened since, the days of our journey have never left us.

For a long time, after Rosy and I returned from Oz, reminders of Australia would pop up ... everywhere. A neon map of the continent touted Foster’s Beer from a bar’s window – we never saw a can while we were there. **Finding Nemo** brought a high of recognition from its scenes in magnificent Sydney Harbor. On **The Simpsons**, what should Lisa build but a sand castle of the Opera House, and in another episode, that was Canberra’s Parliament House where they gave “the Boot” to Bart. (To answer his curiosity about Aussie toilets, they really *are* different – two buttons, one to flush half the tank, the other the full load – but we never saw any spiral, clockwise or counter-. And that’s plenty of information on that topic, I’m sure.) An

Australian film I saw 30 years before had put me on the road to Hanging Rock. Back home, we kept watching movies from downunder – **Rabbit-Proof Fence, Heat Wave, Muriel’s Wedding, Sirens** – smiling over places we’d been, lamenting sites we’d missed.

I wished I’d toted a tape recorder, because I found I missed the *sounds* of Australia. Not only natural noises like the *tink* of the Bell Bird in the valley below Mt. Solitude, or the *coo-loo-loo* of the unknown avian outside Cathy Cupitt’s window – but human and even mechanical sounds, the “Row-row-row” anthem of Hawthorn’s “footy” team; the rat-a-tat-tat of the walkway signals in Perth, and again and again, the open, friendly, voices of the open, friendly, people.

Our experience was so splendid that alas, it all but hurt to return to the United States. The grass may always be greener on the other side of the ocean, but for a long while after we returned, the comparison between one Pacific shore and the other seemed almost ludicrous – a garden vs. a desert, clean cities vs. slums, open, funny people vs. paranoid, aggressive ones.

Thanks to family, thanks to friends, thanks to the passage of time, balance was restored, but for me, if not for Rosy, the immediate prospect was dicey. We left on our trip in April, 2003. America was just invading Iraq. As profoundly as this disturbed us, we were well aware of the fun fannish frivolity of our mission, and feared that politics would plant a divide between us and the people we were supposed to engage. No worries, as they say. Australia’s friendliness and generosity assured us that we were among friends, not only as fans but as Americans. So our DUFF trip granted us not only delight, but hope. No matter what horrors may devastate and schism the world of the present, belief in the future overcomes all. That’s the hallmark of science fiction fandom, and the point, we found, to DUFF.

Since we’ve returned, Rosy and I have done our best to keep DUFF’s purpose and promise before fandom’s eye – giving parties and running auctions at Torcon, Noreascon and regional events, even preceding a Hugo presentation with a pitch for the fund. In 2004 we hosted ANZ delegate Norman Cates in New Orleans and at the Worldcon in Boston. In 2005 we passed the torch of DUFF delegacy to our friend, Joe Siclari. Now, we offer this zine as a small gesture to help him rebuild the fund for the future ... and to say *THANKS* to a lot of people.

THANKS to our predecessors, Naomi Fisher and Pat Molloy – to our nominators, Greg Benford, Steven Silver, Teddy Harvia & Diana Thayer, Pat & Roger Sims, Craig Hilton, Bruce Gillespie and Alan Stewart – to John Guidry, who dropped us off and picked us up – and to all of the DUFF voters, who sent us on our merry way.

THANKS to Alan Stewart (again), Bill Wright, Lucy Sussex, Julian Warner, Craig Stephenson, to all the staff and attendees at Swancon, to Robin Johnson, Dave Cake, Cathy Cupitt, Julia Hilton, Craig Hilton, Donna Hanson, Tony Civello, Pat Gibbs, Nick Stathopoulos, Marilyn Pride, Sue Batho, to the Gillespies and Ditmar and Paula McGrath and Rose Mitchell, to Danny Heap and Justin Ackroyd and Emilly McLeay and the rest of MSFC – *THANKS* for being such tolerant and energetic and open hosts. See you all in 2010 at the next Melbourne worldcon!

THANKS also to Alan White and Steve Stiles and Charlie Williams and Randy Cleary and Kurt Erichsen and all the other artists whose illustrative genius graces these pages. *Why* hasn’t each and every one of these brilliant wits won Hugos?

And speaking for myself, *THANKS* to *la belle* Rose-Marie for making DUFF conceivable, winnable, and wonderful.

So what’s it all about? Let’s quote what is to come:

Hellooooooooo? Hellooooooooo!

YEHHHHHHHH? YEHHHHHHHH!

RUNNING to AUSTRALIA: The DUFF campaign

Though I couldn't know it at the time, the campaign that took Rose-Marie and me to the other side of the Earth began several years before – with a *lunar eclipse*.

I was then a bachelor in New Orleans, and then as now, I was publishing **Challenger**, a fanzine distributed hither and yon throughout science fiction fandom. Often fans responded to my dubious gift with amateur journals of their own. Among these was a zine of movie reviews from Mike McInerney, a fan from San Francisco, near upon my collegiate stompin' grounds. I hadn't known Mike back in the day, but when he and his wife Linda announced that they would be visiting New Orleans, my eyes still lit up. Being another fan editor established Mike as practically family, and escorting fannish *turistas* around the Big Easy was one of the absolute delights of living there. (*Was*. How hideous to be forced to cast those words in the past tense.)

Exercising my substantial swack with the Almighty, I arranged for twin 180 degree rainbows to greet my visitors upon their arrival. The McI's presence repaid my efforts (and God's) a dozenfold, for I really enjoyed Mike and was completely gassed by Linda. There's a photo of us taken at Bruning's Restaurant on Lake Pontchartrain, facing literal mountains of succulent fried seafood

(Bruning's is now naught more than shattered pilings), and another I published in **Challenger**, my two guests posing with Cindy Snowden, my very special neighbor (an eternal curse on Katrina.). All are smiling.

During their visit, I remember stopping on Napoleon Avenue so Mike and Linda and I could watch another bit of celestial hijinks, again arranged just for their visit. A lunar eclipse ... blood on the moon ... always a harbinger of incredible times to come.

I'm sure the McI's enjoyed their journey; New Orleans had magic on its side. Their host certainly had a good time. Next I heard of the McInerneys, much time had passed, I was married to Rose-Marie, and – because when I mentioned the idea to her, my wife said, “That would be *fun!*” – we were running against them for DUFF.



I considered a DUFF campaign in 1999, but bowed out in favor of Janice Gelb. Two years later, when Pat Molloy and Naomi Fisher sought DUFF, I contributed to a special fanzine published by Rich and Nicki Lynch in promotion of their candidacy. So now, Rosy and I were candidates. We had secured superb nominators with surprising, to me, ease. Now for the campaign. With thirty years in apas, editorship of a Worldcon program book and Hugo nominations for Best Fanzine in my resume, naturally I began working up a campaign zine for us.

“No!”

With horror the commandment came down from Olympus, in the voice of a former DUFFie.

“*You can’t do your campaign zine yourself! You can’t look like you want to win! Wait for friends to campaign for you!*”

I had smacked headlong into what I came to call the Unwritten DUFF Rules – and not for the last time. But this would be the first time I ignored them. *Wait?* Suicidal! The McInerneys were already out there, with their own campaign zine, **Quokka Quest**.

I had no idea what a “quokka” was (though I learned; see “The Far Side of the Earth”, *infra*), but I knew trouble when I saw it. **QQ** as a fanzine met all the standards of DUFF etiquette. It was fannish to the core, featuring praiseful paragraphs about Mike and Linda by excellent big name people: Dick Lupoff, rich brown, Bill Wright, John Straede. Furthermore, it was entertaining, featuring righteously silly filk to the tunes of “Davy Crockett” and “Waltzing Matilda”. *Wait?* My left ... ear!

So as November, '02 waned, I sat myself down before the computer screen, cracked my knuckles, flexed my fingers, and let'er rip. Our one-sheet zine had a rather prosaic, but to-the-point, title: **Guy & Rosy for DUFF!** The brilliant Vegas artist, Alan White (check out our cover) contributed a splendid logo: a robot kangaroo (that's it on our title page). I had the seed of the text ready – the 100-word paragraph of self-promotion Pat and Naomi had requested for the DUFF ballot. Easy enough to take that kernel, bury it in the compost of my ego, and let it grow, grow, grow, right? Not right.

It was easy to pen praise for Rose-Marie – literally a child of SF fandom, via Joe Green and Nita Green, she was and remains sweet, beautiful, bright, and beloved. Being none of those things, *I* had to tout my ridiculous fannish career. Difficult – I never realized that my past was such a jumbled mess. My youth in the comics lettercols, the Bay Area's Little Men, and the Big Easy's NOSFA flowed into a 32-year spree in the Southern Fandom Press Alliance (first among my several apas), a three-year presidency of the Southern Fandom Confederation, the editorship of a Worldcon program book and Hugo nominations for **Challenger**. Hardly a linear resume.

Somehow I packed it all together. I closed by admitting that neither Rosy nor myself had been downunder before. Another one of the unwritten rules – earlier visits were considered practically *de rigeur* for DUFF. I tried to turn this negative into a positive, by stressing how fresh we'd find the experience.

And just as I'd done in the hundred-word blurb, I closed with a reference to the movie that had first excited my desire to visit Australia. Sure, few would get the reference from **Picnic at Hanging Rock**, but those that did would support a kindred spirit. Wouldn't they? I promised to “climb Hanging Rock, and bring you back a scrap of calico.”

Out went the one-sheet zine – to apas, to conventions, to clubs, to every zine editor on my review list, to every fan for whom I could find an address. And the waiting began ...

Paranoid by nature, I was utterly certain we'd lose. So sure was I that the MCI's sweetness and their impressive lineup of BNF supporters would carry them through that I formulated plans to cushion Rose-Marie's disappointment, once the Bad News came in, with a trip to Carlsbad Caverns, a place I loved and which she'd never visited. So fierce was my growing tension that I almost welcomed getting rear-ended by a truck on January 24th. Well, not

really – the accident wrecked my car, hurt my back and smashed up my face, Not Good Things. But it did distract me during the last week of voting.

And then it was February 1st, 2003. We, and the rest of the world, awoke to the fragmented contrails of *Columbia*, vanishing into the morning sun.

In our species-wide anguish, the suspense of the DUFF race was, of course, utterly forgotten. Until late that evening, that is, when Naomi Fisher and Pat Molloy called. Remember that Pat works for NASA. What a kindness that – on what must have been the worst day of his professional life – he should think of others.

“Well, Guy,” asked Naomi, “are you ready to go to Australia?”

Huh!

Our win was substantial, 101 votes to 57. My paranoia was revealed as ridiculous. In his note of congratulation, McInenery blew my mind. Said he, “I doubt I would have ever decided to run in the first place if I thought that you would be the other candidates!” Color me moved, delighted ... and abashed.

Our lives shifted into overdrive.

To acquaint ourselves with our duties, we studied past DUFF reports (Gelb’s was magnificent). To acquaint ourselves with our destination, we rented Australian movies and studied books on Australian travel. Rosy wanted to see the Outback. *I* wanted to see the Sydney Opera House and Hanging Rock, and made the mistake of saying so. This set up another mini-battle with the arbiters of DUFF etiquette. Who *says* you can’t look at scenery – at least if you have a local fan along to share the experience?!

We made trip arrangements with our employment. No problem for me – my boss and my judges (I was then, as I am now, a public defender) agreed that no one should let a mere job get in the way of a free trip to Australia – but it forced Rosy out of her reporting position at the Thibodeaux *Daily Comet*. She didn’t mind – her editor had wanted us to move to that tiny south Louisiana city, and that was patently ridiculous: people move *out* of Thibodeaux, not *to* it.

The weekend before Mardi Gras, 2003, Pat and Naomi brought us four leaden boxes of old fanzines to peddle, and plenty of welcome advice. They named Aussie fans we should contact. Once Mardi Gras was past, we burned the internet with e-correspondence. We arranged crash space in Melbourne with Julian Warner, the reigning DUFF delegate from downunder. We talked with Bill Wright, one of the country’s senior faneds, who sent us a book of useful facts about Australia. (*Somewhat* useful facts. Did you know that *Foxzami* won the Melbourne Cup the year I was born? *Toparoa* was the winning horse in Rosy’s year. Fascinating, but ...) We found Robin Johnson, onetime Worldcon chair, whom I’d met at the 1974 DeepSouthCon. **Challenger** had brought me into contact with Alan Stewart, the Hugo-nominated editor of **Thyme**, the Melbourne SF Club’s club- and newszine – who agreed to meet our plane. We corresponded with the Perth fans putting on 2003’s Australian National Convention, where we’d *really* be on display. With them we set up space for a convention party, and at home, bought mix for hurricanes and cyclones (New Orleans cocktails, as if I had to tell you) for the same.

In keeping with our Mardi Gras theme, we took advantage of post-Carnival sales at Accent Annex, the local Mardi Gras emporium, and stripped their shelves, buying decorations for our convention party and fancy-schmancy beads to wear and give out as presents.

We had pets to worry about – two cats and Jesse, our yorkie terrier. We arranged with the wondrous Annie Winston to visit our pad twice a week to feed the felines, and, through Rosy’s veterinarian stepsister, found a lovely young lady across Lake Pontchartrain to doggy-sit. Turning over her woobie dawg to a stranger was a toughie for *la belle*, but once done, she was just about ready to go.

So was I. Just about.

FLIGHT FRIGHT

Rosy and I had won DUFF. *In a bit more than five weeks, we would be in Australia.*

We had already begun preparations – applying for visas, securing passports. This last task was a nightmarish proposition. For a long time I couldn't find my birth certificate, and thought I'd need to get my cousin Roger to fetch me another from the Kern county seat. But my individual concerns went beyond such mundanity.

For one thing, I had to finish recovering from my car wreck, with twice-weekly visits to my lithesome tattooed chiropractor and her devices of lamentably non-sexual torture. For another ... well, step inside my head on a normal work day. The courthouse in St. John Parish, where I then worked, was located on the opposite side of the Mississippi River from our office. We had to take an antiquated ferry across the Mighty Muddy, a sometimes bouncy but always entertaining ride. But my mind began to wander during these crossings. *Soon, I told myself, I'll be bouncing across another famous body of water. And it won't take 15 minutes. It'll take 15 hours.*

Cue Erica Jong, with whom I shared fear of a-zipless ... *Fear of flying.*

I am the world's worst air passenger. My fear of flying is *awesome*. Born in whatever infantile niche in my brain where resides the love of security and the need for control, my terror has often forced me to endure days of slow, grueling travel in trains, cars, and buses in lieu of a few quick hours aloft. Diverting trips, sometimes, and definitely educational, but let's be truthful: the real reason I took them was to avoid the nightmare of air travel.

That wouldn't work for DUFF. Unless I wanted to spend a month and a million getting there, Australia was inaccessible by boat. Fly we must. In addition, since the Australian National Convention was to be held in Perth, on Oz's west coast, and Melbourne and Sydney are on its

south and southeast coasts, respectively, we'd also have to fly within the country. I figured it out. On this trip we'd spend 42 hours in the air.

How could I do it?

As a child of the '60s, my first thought was *drugs – lots of drugs*. But I suppose fear of flying is like any other obsession – people who don't share it can't understand it. Certainly my doctor didn't. I asked for medicinal assistance in dealing with my multiple hours aloft



The Shortest Day of Our Lives

April 12-14, 2003

I don't remember much of the flight to Los Angeles, which is good – that bespeaks a smooth experience. Though I was undoubtedly terrified, I managed to scribble some artsy-fartsy notes – “spreading fingers of arroyos” ... “Clouds milling about like fat white cows” – as I ogled the turf below, watching the landscape change from subtropical green to desert brown. I know it was a relief when the United pilot turned on a wing and dove us into the vast bowl of the Los Angeles basin, full to the brim with cottony fog.

It was *la belle's* first descent into the City of Angels, and I wished ours was a night flight, like I'd taken before Iguanacon in 1977. My terror of air travel was just as fierce then as 26 years later, but in '77 *aesthetics* overwhelmed all. *Lights*. The vastness and variant textures of all the wonderful light below awed me with its galactic breadth and beauty. On this Saturday, there was only ugly fog above gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous solid ground.

Our Australia flight – with Qantas, and bless you, *Rain Man*, for the reminder that “Qantas never crashed” – wasn't due to skidoo until midnight, which gave us several hours to kill. I'd imagined, en route, that we'd rent wheels and spend the time as tourists, boogying out to see L.A. sights like the Watts Towers and *Hah-lee-wood*. Or perhaps we could get Ruth Judkowitz or one of my other Angeleno comrades to come say hello. But in reality, once back on terra firma, our sole issue became lunch.

The International Terminal at LAX has a pretty good restaurant, generous with its portions. Rosy had a chicken pot pie bigger than some Louisiana towns. After noshing, we bought inflatable “necklace” pillows to support our necks during the long haul ahead, and loafed at the terminal's terminals – computer, that is. The day took off like our aircraft. My e-mails told me that **Challenger** had again been nominated for the Fanzine Hugo. I was surprised and rack pleased. A high to carry us over the ocean!

Well, we also needed a plane to convey us downunderwards. As evening wore on, we trekked down the terminal concourse and got our first look at it – a 747, providentially parked adjacent to a relatively puny DC-8 – a third its size.

I am awed by enormity, and that 747 was *big*. What was the strange emotion dancing rampant over my fear of flying? *Excitement?* *Anticipation?* Must have been, because I found myself anxious to *get going*.

I rushed to the bank window and traded our greenbacks for Australian money. Which was pretty! Blue – red – yellow – orange – like Trix! Elastic to the feel, like Tyvek – and how about the transparent window in one corner? Not to mention the unfamiliar people depicted on the bills ... It must have been pre-flight hysteria, but I stifled a giggle. Other people's icons ... another people's history ... another people's stars.

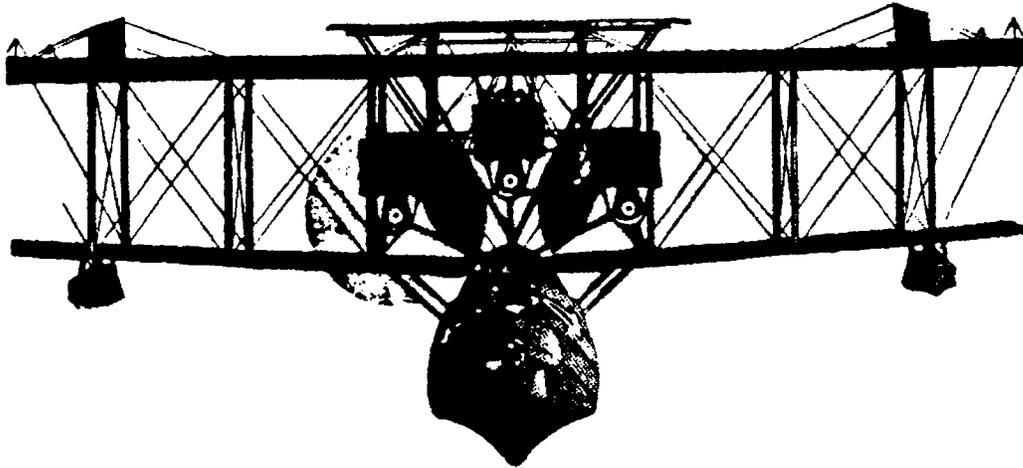
At a few minutes to midnight we were herded onto the plane. All illusion of size vanished as we took our seats. They were literal cocoons. Mine was called a window seat, but the only window visible was a sliver of darkness past the edge of the seat in front of me. *Atoms* separated our faces from that row. Furthermore, we were just ahead of the emergency door, the same portal that had blown open on an African flight the week before, sucking a passenger into the blue yonder. I tried not to think about that, or that I wouldn't be able to leave this plane for the next fourteen and a half hours. 14 ½ hours! Rosy, shoehorned into the center seat, picked up my vibes. “Do your breathing,” she reminded me.

Innnnnnnnnnn. Ouuuuuuuuut. Innnnnnnnnnn. Ouuuuuuuuut.

VROOM!

InOutInOutINOUTINOUTINOUTINOUT

We soared into the blackness above the boundless Pacific.



April 13, 2003

Qantas supplied us with small zipped pouches containing items designed to make our trip comfy. Slippers – a collapsible toothbrush – an eyemask. Feeling like Bennett Cerf on *What's My Line?* – who reading this is old enough to remember *What's My Line?* – I put mine on, inflated my pillow, and slipped Dr. Beard's relaxation tape into my portable player. I went to sleep and awoke in Melbourne.

Ha! I can't even *write* that with a straight face! Though I never removed the pillow from about my neck, and rose only once from the cocoon of my seat, I didn't sleep a wink.

When I couldn't tolerate the itchy mask any more, I checked out the tiny screen affixed to the back of the seat before me. It offered a cineplex's worth of movies and a satellite map of the Pacific, a drawing of our plane centered within it. While the flicks were distracting – I suppose, I remember none of them – the map was nothing less than a sanity-saver. It not only showed the position of various islands on our route – minor rocks like Tahiti and Hawaii – but weather systems. Turbulence could be anticipated – and the blessed *end* of turbulence, foretold. What makes bouncy flights horrible for aerophobes like me is the seeming endlessness of the experience. Through the map I could gauge how long the lurches would last. That, and Dr. Beard's tape, and the breathing exercises, and the grip of Rose-Marie's comforting palm – and a couple of my other doctor's teeny little pills -- got me through the hours and hours and hours of flying. Somehow. Rosy told me later that my palm never stopped sweating through 14 hours of flight.

Without fanfare, we crossed the International Date Line. April 13, 2003 had lasted no more than six hours. I was a bit disappointed when, later, we passed over the equator. Wasn't a stewardess supposed to come along and paint my face blue?

April 14, 2003

Thus, the hours passed. I *didn't* sleep.

Eventually, the blackness outside of my sliver of window began to lighten. Eventually, we could see ... sea. And eventually, we could see ... *land*.

For the 10,000,000th time, I consulted the map on the screen. This time it showed something I liked.

"Rosy!" I croaked in wonder. "That's *New Zealand!*"

From then on, the flight was untrammelled joy.

I remember sweeping in over a bay. It was cloudy but we could see forested hills beyond the water. The plane descended. Our ears went pop. There came the incredible moment of anticipation that precedes any landing, as you sense the growing proximity of Mother Earth – and then the squeal of the great tires on Australian asphalt.

We should have been thrilled, but instead, we were rack exhausted. I hadn't slept, and Rosy had been squashed so fiercely in her toothpaste tube of a seat that she couldn't relax at all. Having a nervous Nellie of a husband next to her couldn't have helped.

We lurched onto the concourse. "*Welcome to Australia!*" a loudspeaker brayed. Grasping a microphone in both mitts, smiling around it like a bilious piranha, a chubby salesman gesticulated hysterically in front of a display of some sort. "*Do step by our duty-free shop and sample our fantastic buys!*" We stumbled stupefied past him towards customs. I remember a moment of worry when we declared the bags of cocktail mix we'd packed for our party – would we have to pay duty? – but then we were bursting through a door, luggage hanging from every appendage, and a voice was saying, with some weariness, "I'm here, Guy."

Tall young fella with a beard. Alan Stewart.

I can't speak for Rosy, but I was a zombie. My eyesight was blurry and my brain went *zztztz!* and *przzxt!* when I tried to think. I didn't notice that Alan sat on the wrong, which is to say the right, side of the seat when he drove us away, nor did I pay attention to the wrong, which is to say left, lane upon which he drove his car. In fact, the next thing I recall was driving down an extremely pleasant street of extremely pleasant houses bedecked with delightful trim in the district of Melbourne called Brunswick. From the front of one nifty home a tall white-haired gent smiled as we passed. "Friendly fella," I thought.

It wasn't till we stopped that we met the man, who would be one of our greatest friends while we stood on Australian soil: Bill Wright.

Says the man about himself:

Bill Wright joined the Melbourne Science Fiction club in 1955 at age 18, when SF fans were an isolate minority. Books and magazines were hard to come by and the club's library was a veritable treasure trove. It still is.

With the revival of Australian fandom in 1968 under the benevolent dictatorship of the late, great John Foyster, Bill involvement in general fannish activities increased culminating in his becoming secretary of the Melbourne bid for the first Aussiecon held in Melbourne in August 1975. Accompanied by Robin Johnson (who chaired Aussiecon 1975) he attended the first of the really big worldcons, LA Con, in 1972. There, in a poolside cabana, he ran endless re-runs of the Antifan vs Aussiefan movie produced by John Litchen and starring just about anybody who was somebody in Melbourne fandom at the time.

Bill is remembered as an entertaining social gadabout and panelist at many conventions during the 1970s; but he gafiated in the 1980s resurfacing briefly in 1990 to donate his fanzine collection to the MSFC library. It now forms the centre of what is known as the Bill Wright Collection, a literary repository that has the rare distinction of being recognised officially by the Australian Science Fiction Foundation.

Bill's own fanzine *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop - the journal for inquisitive readers* - named, if the truth be known, for its acronym IRS in a calculated ploy to annoy Americans - first appeared in ANZAPA (and, briefly, in FAPA) as a Roneo production for almost the entire decade of the 1970s. It was revived as a printed zine in December 1996 when he rejoined fandom. Each bi-monthly issue has absolutely stunning computer generated cover graphic by award-winning fan artist Ditmar whose textual interpretations

can exasperate or delight IRS readers depending on their degree of tolerance for ironic fantasy.

I loved the look of the neighborhood, the gingerbread trim on the neat, close houses – but the beauty of the street and Alan and Bill’s happy chatter couldn’t penetrate the electric haze of our exhaustion. We excused ourselves and withdrew into the home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner.

We wouldn’t meet Lucy for several days, but from the Ditmar Awards displayed on the mantle, we should have known that Ms. Sussex was a lady of substance. I invite readers to eye her website at <http://lsussex.customer.netspace.net.au>. You’ll find a pretty New Zealander backed by a shelfload of novels and collections – **The Peace Garden**, **Black Ice**, **Deersnake**, **The Scarlet Rider**, **A Tour Guide of Utopia**, and since our visit, **Absolute Uncertainty**. Perhaps most nifty is Lucy’s fascination with the 19th Century crime writer, Mary Fortune, described by Lucy as **A Woman of Mystery**. In time we’d meet her, and Julian, the DUFF delegate who would make our trip so comfortable.

These were our hosts – as yet unmet. We had their place to ourselves – Lucy and Julian had already jetted out to Perth for the NatCon. But they had left us a key – and our first dose of Australian astonishment. Imagine people so trusting, so generous, as to open their home to complete strangers. We were wowed – or we would be, once we woke up.

The common wisdom regarding trans-oceanic flight and jet lag in a radically new time zone is to avoid sleep until one’s usual hour of retirement. All Both We Zombies agreed this was horse patootie. But! we compromised, and vowed to restrict our repose to two mere hours. We hit the bed like falling trees.

And slept for the first time in Australia.

On our feet again, reasonably humanized, we explored the pad. It was a charmer of a place, full of light, floored with polished hardwood and generously endowed with cats, Musk and Lily by name. In the sunny back room, opposite the magnet- and notice-strewn refrigerator, we found a pair of buttons left on the table. A gift from Julian, they depicted a wombat – in a spacesuit – giving a peace sign – before the letters: DUFF.

During those hours of rest we discovered some of the small evidence that we were in another world – or another part of this one. Take the phone. You had to dial eight numbers instead of seven, instead of a raucous *ring-ring-ring* the phone made a steady buzz when someone called, and instead of a drone the dial tone was (as Bruce Gillespie puts it) “one long brrp followed by a slightly shorter brrrp – DAH dah.” I continued my discovery of the vagaries of the money when I wandered up the street to buy a notebook. Cost was eighty cents AU. I tried to cover the tax with a small, heavy coin, the size and color of an American penny, but heavier and thicker, the Queen on one side and an aborigine – and a large “2” – on the other. Two-cent piece, right? The cashier sighed. Stupid American. “That little coin is worth *two dollars*?” I squawked. Didn’t



take me long to scope it out: the Aussie coins for 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents were light and silver; the dollar and two dollar coins were thick, heavy, and copper-colored. As for the Tyvek bills with the cellophane window – an anti-counterfeiting device – they didn't come in denominations smaller than five.

And the toilet ... well, we'll get to that.

Darkness had fallen on our first day in Australia when a knock came on the door: Alan, there to escort us to our first social engagement, dinner with Bill, Rose Mitchell and Paula McGrath. The ladies were bound for New Zealand the next morning, on a Hobbit tour, and this would be our only chance to see them. Standing in the vestibule, waiting for *la belle*, I mentioned to the **Thyme** editor, "I want to see the Southern Cross!" I said, "My mother used to sing that song all the time," meaning Richard Rodgers' "No Other Love Have I", a.k.a. "Beneath the Southern Cross" from *Victory at Sea*, "and I've got to see it."

"Shouldn't be a problem," Alan replied.

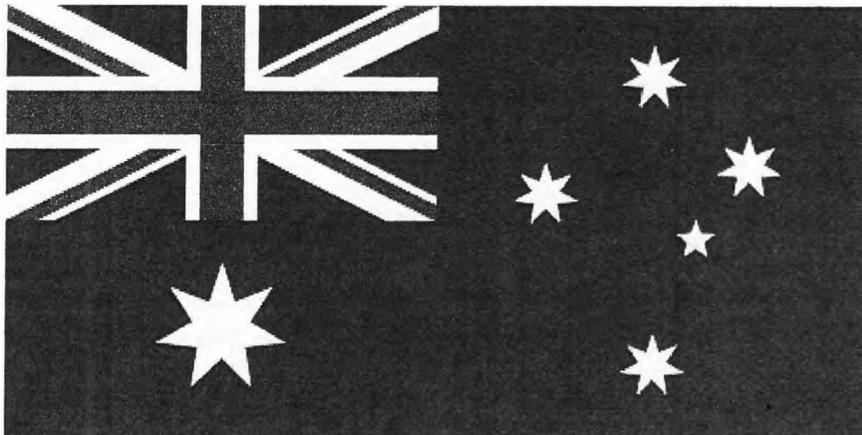
We walked out into the night. *Boing! Hello!*

But now, three years later, I find that the glowing constellation that wowed me so on Frederick Street was *not* Crux – the Southern Cross. True, it was a familiar pattern of celestial lights, known from the Australian flag – but those stars, I've since found, are part of the *Centaur*. Crux lies in the firmament just to its right. So though I undoubtedly looked right at the Southern Cross, I didn't know it. So I guess we'll just have to go back. Sorry, Mama.

Dinner was at a place called Via Vaneto on Carlton, the Little Italy of Melbourne. It was the university district and the street thronged with famished youth, all assailed on the street by enthused restaurant touts. "Sit here! Come on in!" Assertive salesmanship seemed quite the Aussie style! But so did good feeling. "No worries!" one barker girl chirped when Rose told her we had reservations elsewhere. In America we'd say "No problem!" or, in some places, "Up yours, then, mutha-----!"

Anyway, the meal, or at least the company, was splendid. Especially grand to see Paula again! In 1998 she'd come with a group through New Orleans en route to London, and we'd met for a snort at the best bar in the Easy, the Napoleon House. My mind attained another level of amazement: no problem (or "no worries") to keep in touch with fellow fans; just cross the Pacific! Beads were bestowed upon all, and we made arrangements to meet with Bill for our next day's excursion – to Woodend, just outside of Melbourne, and the wilds of Hanging Rock.

In my diary, at bedtime, I closed my entry with "It is actually true – we're *here*. We're on the other side of the world. And we're with friends."



NO PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK



4-15-03

Melbourne & Woodend, Victoria

The Hanging Rock is a spectacular volcanic uprising on the plains below Mount Macedon [in Victoria, Australia], of special interest to geologists on account of its unique rock formations, including monoliths and reputedly bottomless holes and caves ... It was thought at the time that the missing persons had attempted to climb the dangerous rock escarpments near the summit, where they presumably met their deaths; but whether by accident, suicide or ... murder has never been established, since the bodies were never recovered.

Picnic at Hanging Rock by Joan Lindsay

Bill stepped on a patch of wet grass and his feet went flying. He crashed onto his rear end. A backpack containing his thermos and other expensive gear hit the slope and slid, slowly as a turtle, towards the edge of the abyss, in the midst of Hanging Rock.

“Guy!?” Rosy cried. “Get it!”

I stretched my hand towards the sliding pack. It felt as if I were reaching through molasses. The pack escaped me by inches, reached the edge – and went over. I watched it skid to a halt ten feet down, inches from yet another chasm – still deeper and even more inaccessible. One of us, obviously, would have to go after it.

Bill Wright couldn't, of course. He is a large man, hearty with exercise, but pushing 70 and still learning to master his diabetes. He really shouldn't have tried this trek up Victoria's famous mamelon, known from Peter Weir's masterful film **Picnic at Hanging Rock**, and which absolutely *had* to be the first item on our DUFF trip agenda. But he was a great fanzine editor, an enthusiastic friend of the Down Under Fan Fund, had generously appointed himself our guide, and couldn't be refused.

Rosy volunteered – after all, she said, she was the lightest and we could easily haul her back to safety. *As if*. I didn't risk insanity on a 14½ hour transoceanic plane ride to send my wife over a cliff and into peril. *I had to go. I had to descend into that pit – and worry about getting back later.* So over I went, following the pack, sliding on my personality into the unknown.

I reached the pack and tossed it easily back up to Rosy and Bill. Now what? Below – where the pack had almost fallen – was an impenetrable jumble of grey stone. The only way out was up. How? The sides of the pit were about nine feet at this edge – and shear. No hand- or footholds.

Above, a thin white sapling grew by the edge of the rock shelf. Rosy bent it down to me. I grasped its rubbery limbs and began to haul my heaviness up, hand over hand., my feet seeking purchase on the featureless sides of the crevice. The roots of the tree gripped into the Rock's thin layer of soil. As they bore my weight an inch – two – ripped free. I took a great interest in those roots. If they gave way, down I'd crash, and there would be no way for Rosy and Bill to get me out. Like Miranda in **Picnic**, I'd stay there.

Not to mention the fact that we were *lost*. *Lost ... on Hanging Rock*.



Our road to Hanging Rock began, of course, in the early '80s, when laudatory word-of-zine from west coast fandom propelled me to see the movie. I was living in North Carolina and the other theatergoers must have thought the title referred to the Hanging Rock there. They may have been disappointed, but I wasn't. I was enraptured.

Peter Weir's poignant and subtle parable of death and nature was a new thing in so many cinematic ways. The subtext was both spooky and insightful. The message was both serious and

heartening. The metaphor was powerful and compelling. Amidst the stones of Hanging Rock – and the pages of Joan Lindsay’s novel – Weir found an acceptance of nature, and death, that was neither cynical nor despairing. To compensate my sensitive first wife for making her endure the violent insanity of **Apocalypse Now**, I took her to **Picnic at Hanging Rock**, a sane, comforting, beautiful reconciliation with life.

Which was also *Australian*. Aside from its substantial value as a metaphorical movie, **Picnic** also introduced me to downunder film making, then in genuine renaissance. I glommed onto every Aussie flick that opened, from **The Road Warrior** and Weir’s extraordinary **The Last Wave** to **The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith** and **My Brilliant Career**. I noted as much the landscape on which the films were set as I did the actors – although no red-blooded American boy could pay much attention to scenery when Judy Davis was on screen. But a vague desire to go *there*, to visit Australia and see Hanging Rock, began to percolate – not that I’d ever get the chance to, of course.

There matters rested.

Until I married Rose-Marie and found there was something in life that could overcome my fear of flying. And, propelled by *la belle*’s conviction that “it would be fun,” we ran for DUFF.

The movie was on my mind from the very start of the campaign. In our flyer, remembering one of my favorite scenes, I promised “to climb Hanging Rock, and bring [fandom] down a scrap of calico.” When the Down Under Fan Fund race came out in our favor, two ambitions were foremost in my mind: tour the Sydney Opera House – and keep my promise.

So here we were.

Everyone agreed that the day was just right for the picnic in Hanging Rock – a shimmering summer morning warm and still, with cicadas shrilling all through breakfast from the loquat trees ... and bees murmuring above the pansies.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

This didn’t seem a propitious day for a picnic. As we trundled into downtown Melbourne to catch our train, we eyed not only the red “rake” river sculpture and the huge FCUK sign on the department store (French Connection United Kingdom, that is), but the sky ... which was thick with clouds. If there’s one thing a picnic doesn’t need, it’s rain.

Bill Wright, who met us at the train station, didn’t seem deterred. Bill is one of Australia fandom’s senior zine editors, publisher of **Interstellar Ramjet Scoop**, and during the DUFF race had helped both us and our rivals distribute campaign material. He had met us the day before at the house where we were crashing, and had hosted our first dinner downunder with Rose Mitchell, Paula McGrath and Alan Stewart. His offer to guide us to Hanging Rock had been gratefully accepted, and getting us onto the train to Woodend was the first step. N.B.: he carried two thick backpacks of picnic goodies. We brought cameras – and in the pocket of my coat, a two-inch fluff panda with one eye and a red bow tie: Mib, whose adventures have been many.

The hour’s train ride north of Melbourne was a revelation – our first look at the Victorian countryside. The low hills and sublime greenery delighted me with memories of North Carolina, as the sheep fled in droves from the train. But the beauty of the surroundings and the joy of travel on a clean, spacious train (we scored a private compartment) were all but lost on me. Clouds hovered. Rainspecks tickled the windows. Would our picnic be inundated? If so, would this be our only chance at Hanging Rock? Wright still wasn’t worried. Mindful of the hole in the ozone overhead, his main concern was that Rosy slop enough sunscreen onto my baldness.

When we reached Woodend Bill plowed off through the touristy town in search of transport to the Rock. Ladies at a stationery store showed typical Aussie friendliness, allowing Bill to call a cab and us to check our e-mail. The day remained cloudy, but sunshine still broke

through, in the form of our taxi driver. Her name was Sue. She and her mother ran the Woodend cab company, and it must be the jolliest business in Australia. Her smile was constant, her chatter was happy, and her word was “YEHHHHHHHHHH!!!”

I rode with Sue in the front seat – grabbing instinctively for the steering wheel, which wasn’t where I instinctively felt it belonged, on the left. I was enjoying her talk so much – YEHHHHHHHHHH!!! – that Hanging Rock sneaked up on me. Suddenly there it was, to our left.

While they were talking the angle of vision had gradually altered to bring the Hanging Rock into sudden startling view. Directly ahead, the grey volcanic mass rose up slabbed and pinnacled like a fortress from the empty yellow plain. [They] could see the vertical lines of the rocky walls, now and then gashed with indigo shade, patches of grey green dogwood, outcrops of boulders even at this distance immense and formidable. At the summit, apparently bare of living vegetation, a jagged line of rock cut across the serene blue of the sky.

Picnic at Hanging Rock



Sue dropped us off at the gate to the Reserve, and we walked up the road toward the rugged hill before us. Playing in my mind, the haunting melodic theme from Peter Weir’s movie, “The Pipes of Pan”.

Hanging Rock is a mamelon, an extinct volcano, some six million years old – a whelp by geological standards. It rises 105 meters, about 345 feet, from the forest at its base. Its rocks loom from the Earth – as if newly awakened from eons of sleep. The stone, we learned, is *solvsbergite*, lava rich with soda, which accounts for the rugged appearance of the dark grey rock. We headed up along the path.

“Miranda!”

My shout was a joke. Everybody calls for Miranda, one of the girls lost in the Lindsay novel and Weir film. She’s never answered.

The path wound through verdancy thick and wild. No resemblance, here, to the trimmed and tamed civilized landscapes surrounding America’s parks. Up a steep slope, and then the bottom stand of rocks was visible. I rushed forward – groaning at the obscenity of a soggy tennis ball and a beer bottle underfoot – to thrust my

hands into the mossy covering.

The immediate impact of [the] soaring peaks induced a silence so impregnated with its powerful presence that even Edith was struck dumb. The splendid spectacle ... was brilliantly illuminated for their inspection. On the steep south facade the play of golden light and deep violet shade revealed the intricate construction of long vertical slabs; some smooth as giant tombstones, others grooved and fluted by prehistoric architecture of wind and water, ice and fire. Huge boulders, originally spewed red hot from the boiling bowels of the Earth, now come to rest, cooled and rounded in forest shade.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

The stones of Hanging Rock are enormous, but not smooth. The lava is pockmarked and uneven, and if you've any imagination, those marks form faces for you; so it seems, as you ascend along the steep path into the monoliths, that you're climbing into a cluster off of Easter Island: half-graven moss-swathed images of the gods of the Earth, solemn, benign, ancient, and calm; utterly indifferent.

Wildness is endemic to Hanging Rock. There are no signs warning the traveler to restrain his steps to the paths, nor rangers to enforce restrictions and keep you safe. The tempting canyons and passages that open up as the rocks jumble around you are your own risk to explore. So on the way up I clambered into puddle-floored caves and scabbled over leaning pillars – keeping Rosy and Bill within earshot, of course.

We found ourselves at a wide stone plaza, and Bill broke out the grub. We chowed down on roast beef and chicken sandwiches, and even tried the Australian sandwich staple, Vegemite. No comment. While Bill and Rosy ate, I wandered off. A couple and a few teenagers had joined us on the rock shelf, but solitude as sure as outer space was as close as around the nearest boulder. Behind it, out of the wind, a single strand of spiderweb stretched along the lava, and the moss wasn't even cold.

We were still low on the mountain. Above us the trail grew steeper, the stones crowded in even thicker. Here and there, fresh plantings stood wrapped in wire mesh and orange fabric, straining into the wire with the wind. They reminded me of the English boy's notepaper flags, from the film. The trail was marked with tamped earth and a handrail; we followed it, upwards, towards the summit.

High on Hanging Rock the trees from the forest below surrender to the sky, and the view is clear, and far, and spectacular. The clouds had gone on their way for a while, so we could see far out over the green world, to Mount Macedon and the "Camel's Hump". Up there, with such a view, the Rock is serene, and you think, surely this beauty is the reason you've climbed this far, and you can't help but feel that in the beauty, there is safety. As you wander through the highest monoliths, pushing aside branches of gnarled gum saplings growing somehow in this rocky soil, you have about you only sky, around you only loveliness, and by the time you discover that you have squeezed through one too many narrow gaps, clambered over one too many boulders, sneaked through one too many natural arches, crossed one too many abandoned fences, and now have no idea of the slightest kind where the path is or *how to get down* – it's too late.

Everything if only you could see it clearly enough, is beautiful and complete – the ragged nest, Marion's torn muslin skirts fluted like a nautilus shell, Irma's ringlets framing her face in exquisite wiry spirals – even Edith, flushed and childishly vulnerable in sleep. ... The others were awake now and on their feet. Miranda was looking at her strangely, almost as if she wasn't seeing her. When Edith [spoke], she turned and began walking away up the rise, the other two following a little way behind. ... To her horror all three girls were fast moving out of sight behind the monolith. "Miranda! Come back!" Edith took a few unsteady steps toward the rise and saw the last of a white sleeve parting the bushes ahead.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

The girls who vanished in **Picnic at Hanging Rock** were symbols, just as the Rock was, just as their disappearance was – elements in a beautiful and poetic metaphor of death and nature. But *we weren't* symbols, and this was no metaphor – we were three people lost in a clutter of blocked pathways and dead ends. There were no rangers in Smoky the Bear hats on patrol, and no one knew we were up there. It was also clouding up again.

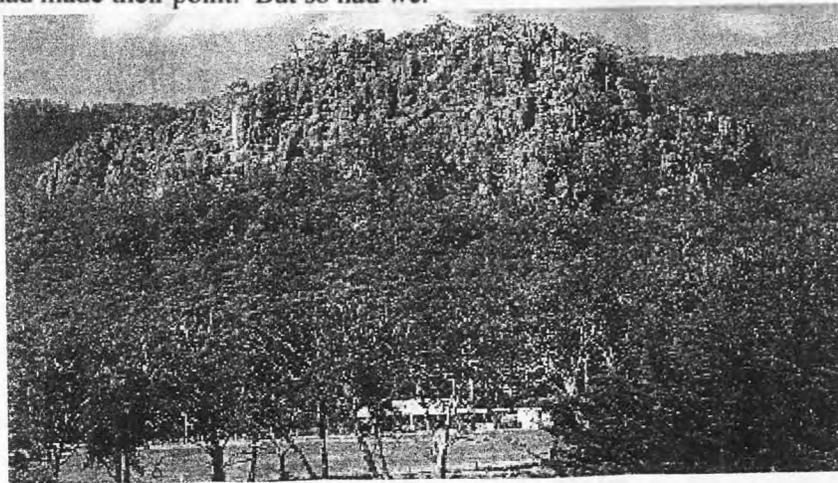
That's when Bill slipped and dropped his pack, and I went to get it. The sapling held, and I rejoined my crew – but we were still lost.

In the midst of this trouble, thank God for Rose-Marie. The woman showed cool worthy of Emma Peel. This route was impassable? Try *this* one! This way leads only in circles past the same old buried fence? Climb atop the highest of high boulders and take a good look around. Truly, my wife showed no fear in the midst of the Rock. 27 years I'd known the woman, and yet she continued to surprise me. I was, I found, better off than the tragic picnickers of 1900 – I had someone precious to carry down. There you go, Rock: real life answers the terrors of impersonal nature. In Rosy I had a living face to pit against the indifferent stupor of the rock gods – a reason not only to climb Hanging Rock but to conquer it.

And we had help, nothing angelic but simply human, appearing from back the way we'd come: a smiling man, Arnold, and a smiling woman, Diane. They had just left the path, and were more than happy to show us the way back. Two smiling ordinary folks, more than happy to lend a hand to disoriented neighbors, two Americans and a brother Aussie, just the thing any good Samaritan blokes would do, 'ey? Just turn *this* way instead of that, take a few steps past the place where before you'd stopped – and no worries, the way down was clear.

At the guest center we shared a happy snort (our treat) with our saviors, owners of a small winery in South Australia. Afterwards, a souvenir binge (including, for Rosy, a special photo-illustrated edition of Lindsay's novel), and lastly, a hilarious ride to the trains with the mad cabbie, Sue – *YEHHHHHH!* Since we were tourists, she searched for wild kangaroos to show us, but in vain. 'Roos are stupid beasts, she said, but solid on one's bumper. On Draw's Lane, she cut off the engine ... and her cab rolled *uphill*. Just part of the mystery of the Rock, Sue explained..

YEHHHHHH, I believed it. Mystery abounded at Hanging Rock – the mystery of nature, beautiful and wild and deadly and indifferent – and the mystery of frail human beings, helping and guiding one another, because we *weren't* indifferent. All during the rest of our journey Rosy and I talked about taking another stroll up among the grey, silent stones of Hanging Rock – but just as we'd feared, we never found the time. Well, this day would do. The passionless gods of the Earth had made their point. But so had we.



INTERIM WITH DITMAR

April 16, 2003

So maybe we should have stayed overnight in Woodend and made a second assault on the secrets of Hanging Rock. Instead, we did laundry.

Or tried to do laundry. Julian and Lucy had a washer, of course, but we were still new enough to Australian ways to feel like intruders. So off we went down Brunswick's main drag, Sydney Road, dirty clothes bagged and in hand, with high ambitions of washing our clothes.

Complete failure.

We stopped at a police station and received directions from a constable named – truly – Brain. But despite his advice we found no launderettes (Americans call them laundromats), settling instead for a rather sleazy breakfast and an internet café with dismally slow computers. Footsore, we rode a tram back to Frederick Street, assisted by friendly locals who helped us figure out how to pay. All part of the cheerful alienness slash alien cheerfulness of Australia, which we were just beginning to comprehend.

The major difference was, the people were actually *nice*. Spontaneously, on their own, strangers would speak to us on the street and on the train, and without ulterior motive. Waitresses wouldn't accept tips. Neurosis and anger weren't at the tip of every tongue. It was an impression that never faded: Australians were just plain *nice*. They made me feel like America was Bi-Polar Central.

Eventually, we did our laundry at Lucy's. It was a new experience for us techno-addicted yankees: drying clothes in the sun.

The rest of the day was spent in planning, setting up cabs and trams, solidifying our dinner date, and getting acquainted with Australian TV. I made note of a game show called *Pick Your Face* – I would've won millions when I was 16 – and a kiddie show called *Bambaloo*, starring a cute blonde girl who wore her tee shirt high and her jean hems low. She was delightfully *typical* of the young ladies of Australia. I never saw more cute *tummies* before in my life!

Melbourne's Saigon Inn, we learned, was a fannish hangout for many years, especially for the group known as the Nova Mob. Thereto we adjourned for the evening's festivities.

There were two fannish dinners set for the night of April 16th – practically at adjoining tables. At one sat Bruce and Elaine Gillespie – and since no discussion of Australian fandom would be complete without an introduction to Bruce, I'm going to ask him to do the honors ...

I entered fandom in late 1967, when I got in touch with the people who produced ASFR. I met most of them in one weekend in December 1967, wrote for ASFR during 1968, and joined the newly organised ANZAPA in 1968. I began *SF Commentary* in early 1969, and produced the first 18 issues in two years (while I was attempting to be a teacher in country Victoria).

At the beginning of 1970 I managed to escape from teaching into professional publishing, and *SF Commentary* itself began to improve. It won Hugo nominations in 1972, 1973 and 1975. At first SFC was very serious-critical, but personal elements began appearing, along with the long-running editorial/letter column 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. I used the magazine as a sort of superior diary through the 1970s.

At the end of the 70s I couldn't face the vast new flood of SF, stopped producing **SFC** for some years, and began *The Metaphysical Review* in 1984, to cover all my interests, including music, movies, and fandom in general. In the end, SF Commentary won through, and it's still the magazine that gets the best response. *Steam*

Engine Time (begun 2000) was an attempt at international magazine publishing longer articles about SF; however, Maureen and Paul Speller dropped out, without explanation, and Jan Stinson has joined the editorial team.

Main awards include lots of Ditmar Awards and William Athelings, those three Hugo nominations, Fan Guest of Honourship at Aussiecon in 1999 in Melbourne, and the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund trip in 2005, where I was award Immediate Past President of the Fan Writers of America.

Elaine and I got together in 1978, and married in March 1979. As with many fans, we have no children, but always five cats, and many books, CDs and DVDS.

Bruce and Elaine were hosting a Memorial Meal with Jenny Bryce and Yvonne Rousseau for John Foyster, who had died short days before. Jenny and Yvonne were two of the late great's wives. Bruce can tell you about John Foyster if, like us, you never got to meet him:

More than any other person except Merv Binns, John Foyster is responsible for the fact that there is any SF scene in Australia at all. When fandom almost disappeared between 1958 and 1966, John was producing quality fanzines that he sent overseas. He organised the 1966 Melbourne Eastercon, which revived convention fandom in Australia, and also set up the publishing of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, with John Bangsund as editor, and John Foyster and Lee Harding as main writers and production team. ASFR in turn led to the revival of fandom in all other state capitals.

In a few years, John Foyster had much to do with the setting up of ANZAPA, he set up the Nova Mob (Melbourne's SF discussion group, which continues), and launched the Aussiecon I bid. We won the bid in 1973 for 1975, but John did not stay on as Chair. John also produced (in 1969) a very remarkable small-circulation critical magazine (known as exploding madonna or *The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology (JOE)*). and a series of great fannish magazines. such as *Boys Own Fanzine* and *Chunder!*

At various times, real life took him out of fandom, but he always returned. One of his best fanzines was the electronic fanzine eFNAC (still up on efanazines.com), more than half the issues produced after he was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2001.

He was married to Elizabeth (until 1976), Jenny (until 1987), and he and Yvonne married just before he died. He and Elizabeth have a daughter, Miranda.

What struck me, from what I overheard of the conversation, was how splendidly Foyster's ex-wife and widow got along. It seemed a warm, remembrance-filled event.

Our table was manned by a witty crew – Michael Green, a founding member of Melbourne's Dr. Who club and a member of the regional amateur press association, ANZAPA; Charles Taylor, a teacher at Taylor's College and a member of MUSFA (the Melbourne University SF club) for at least 30 years; and Thomas Bull, a quiet fan devoted, we learned, both to mathematics and wordsmithery, which made him the perfect collaborator for the gent at the head of our round table. Dick Jenssen, Ditmar.

I knew of this gentle genius from his work on Bill Wright's zine for ANZAPA, *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*, and was delighted to say hello in person. Dick has published a spiffy skiffy autobio for *Challenger* #23 (see www.challzine.net), so I won't repeat his account here. I will say that I doubt I've ever encountered a fan artist more wildly creative in his work. His artwork – photo collages – have a verve and a quality I've never seen matched, and can only compare to Alan White's. The Australian SF award is named after him, and he has won many. In 2010, assuming the Worldcon goes to Melbourne, another award should join them on his shelf. It was a delight to be at the same table. Let's see ... what did we discuss?

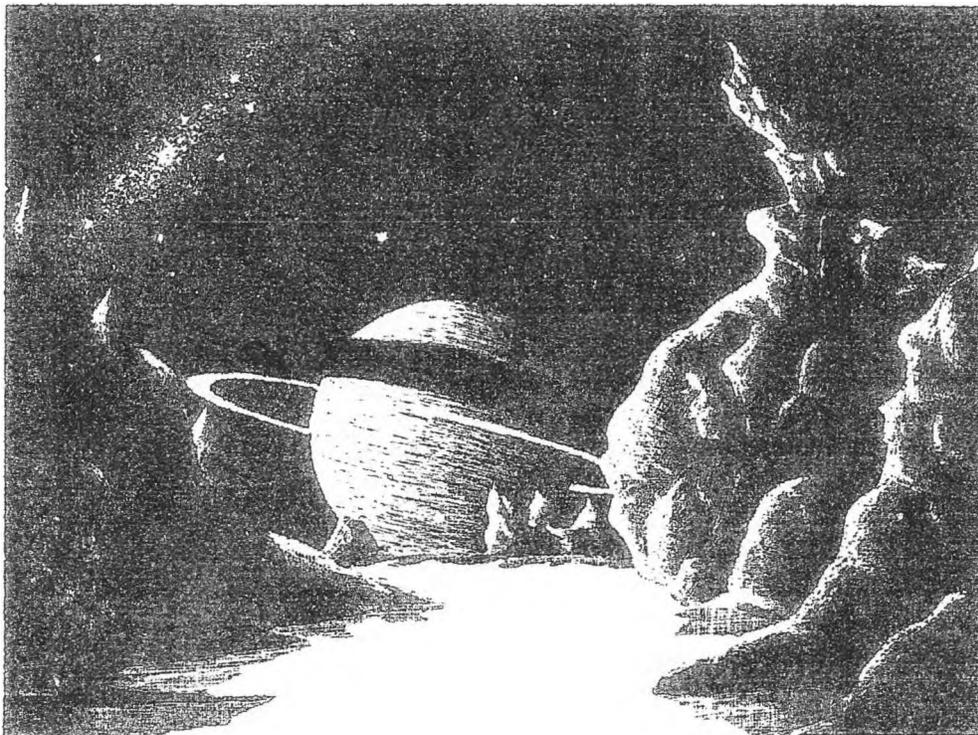
“Gridiron” – their name for American football, which Ditmar admires. To quote his note sent since: “I think gridiron is a great game because it has not only brute thuggery, but wonderful athleticism (the skills of the quarterback in placing the ball tens of yards away into the hands of a catcher” what we call a receiver) “running at full speed, and the skills of the catcher to be in the right spot at the right time), and there is intelligence at work in the plays called, in when to use a running game, in playing to the weakness of the opposition ...”

Mulholland Drive – not the street but the David Lynch movie named for it. Says Jenssen, “One of the best films of recent years. I regard it as a rumination on storytelling, the power of dreams, the nature of reality, our human need to find causal connections when perhaps only coincidence is present ...” Ditmar should talk with John Guidry, who also loves the movie.

“Fairies in Photoshop”? “White coffee”? “You got me there!”

The chow was excellent, the conversation amazing, the evening all too short. Charlie Taylor drove us home, allowing us to see more of Melbourne, which I described in my diary as “a lovely town, wide avenues, gojuss [*sic*] antique architecture”.

He also imparted the information that one of the stars in the lower part of the great constellation I thought to be the Southern Cross is Alpha Centauri – the closest star to our sun. I remembered my *Mystery in Space* ... and Adam Strange. “Hello, Allana,” I wrote, “—or Alanna, isn’t it? (It is.)”



*Ditmar's Cover for
Perhaps 3
January 1954*

THE FAR SIDE OF THE EARTH

April 17-23, 2003

New Orleans is located at 30 degrees North latitude and 90 degrees West longitude. Its antipode - the spot on our planet directly opposite - is at 30 degrees South latitude and 90 degrees East longitude. It's in the Indian Ocean.

Except for two flyspeck islands to the southwest, Ile St. Paul and Ile Amsterdam, the closest solid earth to that point of empty water lies some distance to the east: Rottnest Island, just off Fremantle, close to Perth, on the west coast of Australia. On dry land, you can get no further from the Big Easy.

Rosy and I have been there - as the North American delegates of the Down Under Fan Fund - and as delegates on our own, to the far side of the Earth.



They call them "windcheaters" downunder - the jackets we call windbreakers up here in the States. Both Rosy and I needed ours as we waited for our cab outside the Julian Warner/Lucy Sussex bungalow, where we'd been ensconced for the first few days of our DUFF excursion. It was cool in the pre-dawn, and Venus burned high in the gorgeous purple sky, the Southern Cross having already set. As our taxi negotiated us to the airport, I kept a lookout for kangaroos.

I was feeling cheated. This was our fourth day in Australia and so far we hadn't glimpsed any of its legendary fauna. On our jaunt to Hanging Rock we'd seen sheep and cattle and goats and a Shetland pony and a swaybacked horse - but no 'roos, koalas, kookaburras, or platypodes - nothing distinctly Australian. What a bummer! I was beginning to think that we weren't in Australia at all, but some extreme suburb of L.A. where the moon looked funny.

Perhaps I was merely nervous about the flight. The four-hour loft to Los Angeles from Nawlins, followed by 14 ½ hours en route to Melbourne, had taught me that flying could be endured, even by an aerophobe like me. But that lesson had only been absorbed intellectually. My terror of the airways extended into the *cellular*, and there, nerves reigned.

Perhaps my search for kangaroos and their kindred was born of that fear; for sure, we'd seen none as we pulled under the gate to the Melbourne aerodrome. The sign above the gate should have inspired me:

LIFE IS SHORT, THE WORLD IS WIDE

- but I didn't appreciate the reminder.

The plane, I must say, was a beaut. We don't have Airbus A330s in America yet, more's the loss; the long wings, the wide windows, the comfy seats, the fold-down movie screens - none completely allayed my terror, but I was developing quite a faith in Qantas. Nevertheless it was still with trepidation that I watched the shadow of the plane shrink below me.

As we headed west, we passed over Adelaide, a city Naomi Fisher had praised - and which we weren't scheduled to visit. Already regret was beginning to grow in me for what we could not see on this trip. I eyed the unknowable terrain past Adelaide with something like sadness. I knew from the map that it was *bush*, country, wild turf we wouldn't see up close - if Qantas kept its perfect flying record going, that is. It was territory we wanted to see, too, emptiness having its own appeal. But it also had its purpose; its desolation gave our destination its rarest distinction: the most isolated city in the world.

Craig Stephenson - since early on, our contact with Swancon, this year's Australian National SF Convention - met us at the Perth airport, holding a sign reading DUFF at the gate. Perth's isolation - further from another major metropolis than any other substantial gathering of humanity anywhere - was something of a pride with "Stevo". He hustled us up to Kings Park, overlooking the city and the beautiful Swan River, talking up the city's beauty and uniqueness. I had to say, for a burg founded in 1829, Perth looked both clean and modern, some contrast to its contemporary, New Orleans, even before Katrina.

That was it for the touring, at least for the moment. A con awaited. Now I get to sound like an ingrate.

For one thing, though Swancon was glad to welcome its American guests, and comped us memberships, it couldn't afford to pay for our room. DUFF had to. Also, the event was small - about the size of a DeepSouthCon, i.e., a membership in the low hundreds. And that constituency was young and inbred; everyone seemed not only to know each other, but to hang together most weekends, not just this one. We couldn't help but feel ever so delicately out of place. How doubly glad we were to greet Bill Wright and the great Robin Johnson, the Aussiecon chairman whom I first met at the '74 DSC. Let's insert a word or two about Robin ... from Robin.

Robin, an Australian brought up in Britain in an Army family, became involved in fandom in the late fifties, and attended part of the London Worldcon in 1957. When he moved back to Australia in the late sixties, the only people he knew were fans, and it was not long before he got sucked in to the bid for an Australian Worldcon.

At a time when some great fanzines were heading out from Australia to worldwide acclaim, and thanks to great publicity and staff work by many people, both in Australia and abroad, Aussiecon won the 1975 slot. Robin was left standing as nominal chair of the Con when all the others dodged the moving finger.

An inspired choice of GoH, Ursula LeGuin, generously gave her time for an inaugural writers' workshop, and thus is considered to have given a start to the current wave of younger writers (and small press publishers) that is evident in Australia today.

Robin retired from the North Island of Australia some years ago, now lives in Tasmania, where he occasionally gets involved in running conventions.

Excerpt for these worthies, I'm sure we were the oldest people at the event.

But NatCon/Swancon was fun, and won us over. The kids were friendly - loved those Turner twins! - and the other guests were entertaining and interesting. We enjoyed watching the talented paleontologist Brian Choo paint dinosaurs. Danny Heap and Justin Ackroyd were there - they handled the small auction - and the former DUFF winner, Cathy Cupitt, cuter than ever. Simon Oxwell and Grant Watson, the undoubted stars of Perth fandom, put on their "Raw Cordial" show, a live and film presentation that was the gag highlight of the con. Our hosts, Julian Warner and Lucy Sussex, appeared; this year the lovely Lucy came away with the A. Bertram Chandler Award for her overall contributions to Aussie SF. Lynn Flewelling - sketched here by Tony Shillitoe - was the American pro GoH. Shillitoe, Australian professional Guest of Honor, gave a terrific talk in



which he spoke earnestly and intelligently on the value of the fantasy genre - giving voice to people's passion on a heroic scale. "Voices are important," said this teacher - voices of defiance and hope against unjust systems. Stephen Dedman was a familiar name; talked to him quite a bit at Cupitt's house, where we crashed after the convention.

The programmers for the event – criticized later for failing to utilize their excellent Aussie guest list – put us on two panels, and let me handle another one myself. Our mutual panels were on being a newcomer to fandom and fan funds. Rosy shone, her natural charm beaming forth. We really got off on a special **Hound of the Baskervilles** presentation - a compilation of scenes from lots of versions, from Rathbone's (how 'bout that last line?) to Stewart Granger's (uniformly panned) to a dreadful animated version (which looked like Scoobie-Doo without the Scoobie. Right ... just the *do*.)



Another panel dealt with **Batman**.

Hey, blokes, teach your granny to suck eggs! An audience member had the ill grace to mention that I was a DC veteran, which I think intimidated the panelists, especially when I mentioned interviewing Bob Kane in his comics-art-bedecked living room and the fact that he was such a ... a ... (Spanier?) *Putz! Putz*, yes, that's it. The kids had never heard of the Giant Props Era, nor knew much about the enormous changes in the character when Julie Schwartz took over *Detective Comics* or especially when Frank Robbins re-imagined Bats as The Dark Knight, inspiring Tim Burton and his movie, but hey, they tried. *I* tried not to talk too much.

The pup moderating my *Smallville* panel *couldn't* try – he'd never even seen the series! Expected to carry the full load, I was crippled by a spoiler factor: Aussie television was a full year behind ours in providing fans their Clark Kent fix. So the audience wouldn't let me talk about the pivotal Chris Reeve episode, "Rosetta" – eventually nominated for a Hugo – or anything more recent than the triple-tornado climax of the first season. I did manage to work in some comments about the place of character in

Smallville, a central theme I'm convinced of the whole series. A kid's gripe about Jonathan Kent's attitude towards Lex Luthor -- the crowd was wild about Lex -- sparked a long GHLIII monolog about the purpose of parenthood, and my only political comment of the con: that Jonathan's moral strength and obstinate myopia were symptomatic of why America invaded Iraq. Nevertheless, I insisted, I'd rather have one such dude on my team than ten thousand Arab maniacs.

A major treat, the concom had us present the fan Ditmars - Aussie fandom's equivalent of the Hugos. Rosy and I alternated reading the nominees and then the winner, and even if we shallow American idiots had never heard of any of them, at least our announcements were met with wild enthusiasm. In addition, the con was kind enough to announce *Challenger's* fourth Hugo nomination, revealed by Torcon just that week.

We managed, too, to explore Perth – a little. In addition to thrice-daily excursions to the Internet Café in the bookstore down the block, breakfast jaunts to the legendary Miss Maud's (the delicious pounds leapt upon me and *clung*), and dinner expeditions (don't ask for water in Australia, because they'll bring you *mineral* water, at \$5AU a pop), we wandered on Easter

Sunday into the delightful student quarter to see a movie -- the only film we'd see on our entire trip. Sacrilegious souls that we are, it was **The Magdalene Sisters**, a jolly tale of the sadistic Catholic order that imprisoned Irish girls suspected of sin. The film starred Geraldine McEwan, the brilliant Brit actress who would later play Miss Marple on BBC TV, and championed the courage and defiance of the inmates. Naturally, it was *fiercely* critical of the church. I was glad that, on the way back to the hotel, we chanced upon a religious group collecting funds for charity work. Now *that's* the idea.

Okay, the NatCon was small and its interests younger than ours. So what? We were still grateful and delighted to be among the ken. So how could we make known our delight? Came the convention's epic moment -- our party. Rosy and I had decided weeks ago that to make a splash at Swancon, we had to make a real splash -- with hurricanes. We bought umpteen packets of famous Pat O'Brien's cocktail mix and arranged with the concom to hold a bacchanal post-masquerade.

They established us in an unused bar on the convention floor and very kindly provided us with three huge buckets of ice -- gifts from the local McDonald's. (Cleaner and with quanta more class than your local Mickey D's ... or mine.) Rosy hung decorations with a Mardi Gras theme, carefully adorned the bar and tables with Mardi Gras beads and faux doubloons, and I played bartender. Simple enough task, really. Fill a pitcher with cold water, mix in the powder, fill a cup with ice, pour in the kool-aid, add half a jigger of good Australian rum, and watch the people smile.

Costumed Australians flocked to the bar. Rosy hung beads about every neck and I poured inebriant down every (legal) throat. They came back for more, and more. Turned out that Mardi Gras is an almost exclusively gay holiday downunder; the natives were tickled to find out that it's a universal bash in New Orleans. And that it came with its own signature booze.

The hurricanes and cyclones flowed - the beads rattled - the Aussies got down -- and from cute Coreynn I heard a compliment I never expected to hear: "You guys *rock!*"



Indeed we did, after the con -- *rocked* on a train to Fremantle, and rocked on a shuttle boat to Rottnest Island, on Australia's westernmost coast. Again Bill Wright was our guide, and Robin Johnson came along. My fears that we'd be shepherding a couple of feeble old guys around were quickly dispelled -- active and athletic, both boys put us to shame.

Robin knew Fremantle well -- he was not only a retired worldcon chairman but a retired travel agent. He knew where to take us -- the Maritime Museum, where the featured exhibit was the wretched and fascinating story of the haunted ship, the *Batavia*. Horrific stuff -- a shipwreck on a desert island, a **Lord of the Flies** tyranny, murder by massacre, justice by rope. The Museum had relics of every kind from the *Batavia* on exhibit, including the skeleton of a victim (his skull dented from a cutlass blow) and a hunk of the keel, preserved somehow at the bottom of the sea. Very scary, very cool.

Then we were off on a shuttle across the deep, deep blue-black Indian Ocean, the deepest blue I'd ever seen. It blew my mind. The *Indian Ocean!* Never have we, or any members of our families, been further from home. Or hotter. While Bill went swimming and Robin took a bus tour, Rosy and I rented bicycles and pedaled hither and yon about the nearby bays and inlets -- a beautiful experience, but criminy, was it hot, and Gawd!, were we out of shape!

Too bad, because the day was beautiful and Rottnest, despite its ugly name, was a nifty island. The sea was exquisite, if just as cold to the toes as its Atlantic and Pacific cousins, and the view of distant lighthouses and even more distant Perth calmed and soothed the heart. I had a serious case of the vacation jitters. There was so much to see, so many wonders to experience,



and the days seemed so crowded and busy and short. I found I had trouble staying *in the moment*, because the sense of things-undone-and-left-to-do was just so intense. For instance, after a week in Australia, I hadn't seen any kangaroos not made out of metal - a set of sculptures on the streets of Perth. And here on Rottnest, despite hours of sweaty pedaling, we had yet to see any *quokkas*.

Quokkas are funny critters, even in Australia, where funny critters abound. A marsupial, they're unique to Rottnest, never having gained a foothold on the mainland. The story of the quokka is a funny one, and quite involved, so instead of regaling you with their tale, I'll just refer you to http://www.calm.wa.gov.au/plants_animals/mammal/quokka.html and let it go at that. Signs at the boat dock asked stupid American tourists neither to fear nor to feed them. So while surreptitiously ogling the sunbathing tourist girls, I also scanned the scenery for quokkas, but found

none.

It was late afternoon, and the four of us were cooling off at a beachside café, when I voiced this gripe to Robin and Bill. Robin reported seeing multitudes of the beasts on his bus trip. I fairly seethed with frustration. Then Robin returned from the bathroom and advised me to step into the dining room.

Lumbering patiently amidst the table legs of the café was a brown furry beast that seemed assembled by committee. He was about the size of a beaver - larger than I'd expected - with a rat's tail and a possum's friendly face. He reminded me a bit of Louisiana's nutria, which are not, of course, marsupial - but I was not disappointed. This was a quokka - unique to my experience, utterly unafraid, and cute.

"Now you've seen a quokka in his natural habitat," Robin laughed. "A tourist restaurant!"

And now I felt like I'd been in *Australia!*

Night fell. While Rosy, Bill and Robin chatted, awaiting the boat back to the distant lights on the mainland, I lay on my back on the cool green grass and stared up at the vivid Southern Cross, dominant in the alien sky. I almost dreaded the approaching boat ride. I wished we'd joined Robin for the bus trip to the end of the island, but still, it had been a glorious day - one of the best we'd have in Australia. Never again, I knew, would we be that far from home - never again, I knew, would we watch a quokka bumble across a lawn, as one did just then, a few feet away.



The next day answered almost all of our fauna needs. We accompanied Dave Cake - Perth fan, onetime DUFF (and GUFF) candidate - into the country outside of town. Rosy was looking forward to seeing some real outback, not realizing that the Outback to Australians is like the Kansas wheat country is to us. We couldn't see red dirt and aborigines and Ayers Rock without a

separate plane trip - and having committed to an extra day or two in Perth, we just didn't have the time.

So we saw the Swan Valley, instead. Wine country - too far north, David said, for the primo stuff, but the grapes we passed still hung heavy on the vine, and they made attractive counterpart to the white-barked gum trees. I'd hoped to see some 'roos and wombats and whatnot cavorting in the wild, but in that I was to be disappointed - sort of.

Only "Sort of," because Dave took us to the Caversham Wildlife Park, where encounters with 'roos and such were guaranteed. Though the zoo - soon to move - seemed a bit rough and unpolished, it was also *approachable*. That is, you could get up close and personal with the inhabitants, and through them, with a bit of the Australian experience.

Such as the sluggish koalas - sad grey lugs who eat nothing but eucalyptus leaves, which are poor in nutritional value and give them barely enough energy to scratch. The 'roos, in their petting pen, also seemed a little tepid - but only because it was the height of a hot day. But I'm not making a big enough deal about our first live encounter with Australia's signature critters.

Kangaroos remind me of deer - they have about the same temperament and are spotted in the wild with about the same luck and frequency. In captivity, they were anxious to scarf from our palms the pressed foodies given us by the park management. Biggest hoot: the joeys, hooves and heads sticking out of their mamas' packed pouches, so huge and cumbersome that we wondered why the does didn't dump the joeys onto the turf, commanding the bums, *Get a job!*

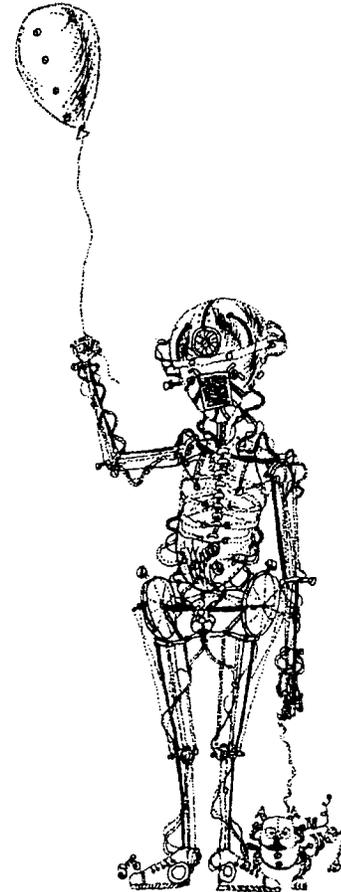
The critters were plentiful - dingoes, Tasmanian devils, wallabies - even camels, brought to Australia as beasts of burden in the Red Center. I made one fast friend at Caversham, a friendly parrot who stuck his head out of his cage and engaged me in conversation. "Helloooo?" he said, and "Helloooo!" I said back. This went on for quite some time. (A photo of this encounter appears elsewhere.) My least favorite? The flying foxes, bats which pissed constantly and contaminated the whole zoo with their reek. *Yick*

Cake escorted us to lunch at one of the wineries in the Swan Valley, the Houghton Vineyards, and Rosy bought a bottle of their brew as a succulent souvenir. It awaits an appropriate moment for uncorking.

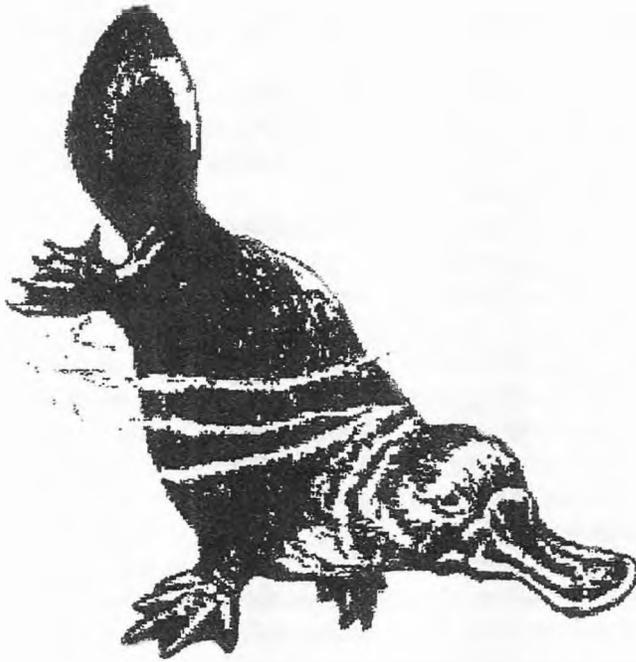
That night we joined the dead dogsters from the Swancon at a farewell bash. The site was a downtown eatery known as Pancakes, which served crepes, mixed liberally with fannish pandemonium. We probably shouldn't have given Perth two extra days, but it was still a bittersweet moment when we said farewell. The lady who drove us back to Cathy Cupitt's, where we were staying, pointed out a building she said was modeled after Marilyn Monroe. Huh? I must have been too tired, or too surfeited with crepes, to understand. Perhaps I was simply too sad about the passage of time. The next day, after all, we would return to Melbourne, and begin the downhill side of our DUFF journey.

That night Cathy's place was rich with Sfers, "filling in the corners" of the convention with late-night conversation. We joined in until exhaustion took its toll. The next morning we were awoken by the contrasting sounds of Cupitt's breadmaking machine and an unknown Australian bird, making beautiful music outside of our window.

Coo-loo-loooooo. Uhh ... that was the bird.



April 24-26, 2003...



The EASTER BILBY

I can still hear it.

Whenever the air is clear and crisp and cool, or whenever I look out at a cityscape, bright and beautiful in the distance, I can still hear it – a thousand voice sharp in the crisp, clear, cool autumn Australian air ...

“Row, row, row – on down the river – we will row, row, row – on down

the river –“

And in memory’s eye I am still gazing over the wide green oval field to Melbourne, beyond, through the gap in the stadium walls.

And there were other sounds, just as memorable. “WOT’S THE DIFF’RENCE YA DENSE ARAB?!?” I can still hear *that*, too.

The morning after Swancon’s crepes orgy, Rosy and I returned to the Perth airport. Edgily I eyed the grey grumpiness of the clouds. Fortunately we had another A330 to fly in – I have never seen a more comfortable plane – and I had another happy pill to soothe me during the four-hour lurch back to Melbourne. I *sort-of* remember the flight, a clumsy way of saying that it held its share of turbulent terrors, but what seems to stand out in memory is my reluctant awe at the beauty of the alien cloudscape, seen from above.

But there was one o’erwhelming virtue to the flight. At its conclusion, we were back in Melbourne, and Julia Hilton awaited us.

Long ago, before Nolacon II, Julia and her husband Craig visited New Orleans, and interviewed me for Australian radio. While they were there they gave me my first taste of Vegemite, the salty sandwich spread featured in the lyrics of “The Land Downunder”. (Rosy had tasted some on Hanging Rock, and agreed: it is *ghastly* stuff.)

Julia drove us into Toorak, their upscale Melbourne neighborhood – I remember pretty mansions on the roadside, and lots of shade from lots of trees. At their abode Julia took pride in displaying her garden, but I was mostly amazed by their bathroom – bigger than some apartments I’ve lived in and blessed with a nifty clear-glass shower stall.

After Craig returned from his practice, we scarfed a late supper of yummy omelettes and began my first comprehensive political talk of the trip. Craig lamented the mean-spiritedness of Australia’s current “bean-counter” government and expressed unease over the “huge footprint” America is leaving on the world. I took that comment in two ways. Culturally, I’d run into that worry during Swancon – the interest in Batman and *Smallville* – and was rather proud of it. Pop culture, after all, only reflects *what people like*. So *Baywatch* was for years the most popular television show on Earth? It’s only idiotic fun. America as a fantasy for the good life is something about which I could feel mildly proud and only mildly embarrassed. But of course Craig wasn’t talking about culture. Our bombs were falling on Baghdad even

as we spoke. He was talking about Iraq.

Of that American footprint on the face of the world, I was neither mildly proud nor mildly embarrassed. Of that I was deathly ashamed. I could only protest to my intelligent and compassionate host what he knew already, that many, many Americans had no truck with W and his ego-stroking war, that his new and arrogant America was no America of mine, or theirs – as this friend of our country was very well aware.

Politics dealt with and done with, we retired to bed, a very comfortable futon in the Hiltons' computer room. The next morning, we loaded up their "Toorak tractor" – an SUV – and toodled off to one of the most magical places in Oz – Healesville.

In 2003 the Healesville Animal Sanctuary was completing its 70th year as one of the world's supreme zoos. It does its sanctuaring in one of the world's great locations, high in the Dandenong Mountains. We give our rivers and ranges Native American names; in Australia, the aborigines are so honored. Pretty vistas, in hills high but gentle, turf reminiscent to me of North Carolina but best described by Julia: "hobbit country."

On the way, the Hiltons told us of Australia's ongoing attempt to establish a new and nationalistic holiday symbol – the Easter Bilby.

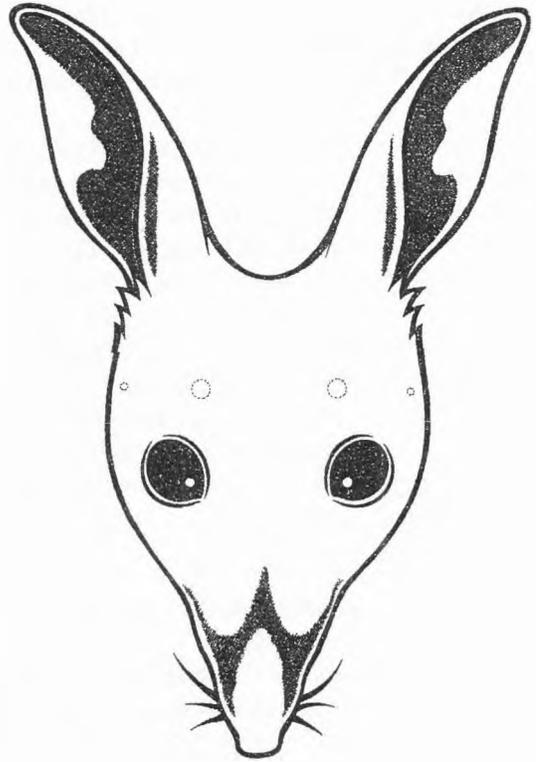
Recall from your Australian history that the introduction of rabbits onto the continent brought along a devastating epidemic of myxomatosis. Bunnies are therefore considered rather *declassé* downunder. Long has an effort been underway to establish an indigenous critter into Peter Cottontail's niche. The **bilby** has been chosen. Also known as the rabbit-eared bandicoot – as opposed, no doubt, to the *moose*-eared bandicoot – the bilby is a cute little marsupial; I could see why the Aussies wanted to anoint him. At the entrance to the sanctuary they handed out paper bilby masks. (Check it out.)

And so in we went to the famous zoo. Healesville was a much fancier establishment than the zoo we'd gone to in Perth, but also more formal – no contact with the beasts allowed. But if I'd hungered for Australian fauna before, the Sanctuary answered my every wish. *Here*, anyway, I could feel like I was truly in an alien land.

Thousands of yards of walkways curl through Healesville, and at every step we found astounding creatures. *Brolgas* (grey storks with red heads – always loved redheads) – *red-tailed black cockatoos* – *larakeets* – *rosellas*, a.k.a. parrots – all flying free in the phenomenal Woodlands Bird Aviary. The *orange-bellied parrots* there were among the last 200 on Earth. They had *Apostle Birds*, and *Bronzewings*, and *Bush Thick-knees* (!) – and *anthornis melanuva*, the *karimako* ... a.k.a. *the bell bird*. Its exquisite cry – **tink** – is another Australian sound that resonates still within my brain.

The cute porcupine-like *echidna* we could almost discern amongst its camouflage of reeds and weeds, but the *quollas* and *gallahs* (their name synonymous downunder with "fool"). More familiar Aussie fauna was on hand – lazy koalas and a jittery *tasmanian devil*, ugly brute on the constant move in his spacious pen. All were amazing, but the prize for absolute wondrousness waited within its own special building. Darkened to mimic the night they move in, with walls of clear glass to reveal the pools they dive in, the abode of the *platypus* was a house of pure delight.

Surely the platypus is the cutest but most mind-boggling beast on Earth. An amazing amalgam of disparate parts. A bill like a duck. Claws like a panther, one poisonous. Birth by egg. Fur like a silver



beaver – but, to my surprise, not the *size* of a beaver. The hyperactive tiny fur flying saucers swooping and diving through their shadowy aquatic lairs were no larger than squirrels. Just too cool. The Hiltons noted my rapture; when we left, they gave me a tiny pewter platypus as a souvenir.

We stopped for a boomerang demonstration, and as the aboriginal weapon corkscrewed through the ozone, learned that boomerangs come right- or left-handed and need grooves to fly. A way cool show of native birds of prey brought forth a *kestrel falcon*, hovering – a *black-breasted buzzard*, beating an egg with a rock (non-primates *do* use tools!) – and a huge *wedgetail eagle*, its wing frothing the air, catching a dead – I hope! – mouse tossed by its keeper. The eagle’s perch was right above our heads. Add a sensation to the Australian catalog – the wind from a wedgetail’s wings.

That was almost it for Healesville, but ... not ... quite. We did see kangaroos there, just as we had in Perth – only ... not ... quite as we had in Perth. For one thing, these were not the tame and pettable beasts we fed by hand at Caversham. These ‘roos were rather wilder, which is to say, less ... subdued. In fact, one randy dude had mothers covering their children’s eyes, and virgins fleeing. I gave him an immediate nickname: *Ron Jeremy*, after the flabby porn king and his trick of self- ... *engulfation*. Why did he do it? Because he *could*. I dare be no clearer than that.

“YEHHHHH!” smiled a cute female zoo worker. “That’s *very niice*, isn’t it?”

Up – up – *up* – along narrow mountain roads into the heart of the Dandenong Range. Julia was a splendid driver, but riding in the front passenger seat, on the *left*, on what I still felt was the *wrong* side of the road, made the twists and turns a bit more entertaining than usual. Our destination – gratefully reached – was on the crest of the hill, beautiful Orlinda, a tourist town *par excellence*.

Colorful cockatoos flew as freely o’erhead as do pigeons and robins, stateside. We found a gourmet restaurant called Pie in the Sky, and supped on delectabilities. Craig reports that I ate something called “a pie floater” and Rosy had “a mild Thai curried chicken pie that was more creamy than she expected” – I remember only leaving, with a happy tummy. Sated, we explored, photoing Craig in a candy store (see the pic in **Chall** no. 18) and touring Orlinda’s many antiques shoppes. Rosy was in hog heaven. A display of go-juss ornate Venetian carnivale masks caught my eye. They could have come straight out of Mardi Gras. A bittersweet thought. I was loving Australia so much that I almost hated being reminded of home.



So we’d seen kangaroos and cockatoos – a different sort of animal than we’d hung with on Friday evening: *fannus australianus*.

The Melbourne Science Fiction Club had been sending me entertaining fanzines for years. From it had issued **Ethel the Aardvark**, an excellent clubzines chockablock with articles by Danny Heap, photos and caricatures of the membership, and an inspiring sense of a fun group. Tall, bearded Alan Stewart, who had met our plane on first arrival in Australia, won a Hugo nomination at the last Aussiecon for **Thyme**, the world’s strangest newszine. It was an attractive, enjoyable, and informative publication – but its latest issues were dated *more than a year in the past*. Alan’s explained this practice to me more than once, but you’ll have to ask him why. Anyway, for as long as I’d been reading those fine publications, I’d daydreamed about attending a MSFC meeting, and the Friday after Swancon, by God, we did it.

Alas that we didn’t get to MSFC that Friday, because the week after Natcon is, we were told, one of exhaustion, and nothing much happens. Ne’ertheless it was fun to see the facility and meet folks I only knew from photos.

The facility is St. David’s Uniting Church Hall in Melbourne’s West Brunswick. Its kitchen was staffed this p.m. by a familiar, and utterly cute, face from **Ethel** – Emilly McLeay. In gratitude for the issue of **Challenger** I pressed upon her, she sold me a Coke and a candy bar. I seem to recall a unique shape to the Coca-Cola can, and a special tanginess to the contents.

Alan gleefully took me up to the MSFC fanzine archives, located up a *steep* flight of stairs in an

old movie projection booth. The archives filled box after box after boxes upon boxes. I despaired. How could my Melbourne friends and readers find **Challengers** to peruse in such a quantity? The answer was, in the MSFC library, which their website claims is “one of the largest fan-owned collections of Science Fiction material in the world.” I could believe it. The little room, walled with shelving 7-8 feet high, holds over 8,000 books – and stacks of fanzines (including, hallelujah, **Challenger**). The titles on hand – and available for loan to members – included books familiar and obscure, from Gernsbackian antiquity to brand new. Rosy was delighted – she found four British editions of her daddy Joe Green’s novels. (Check out her photo with “Jocko” Allen, in **Chall** #18, and our followup volume.)

Rose-Marie had worried that we’d be expected to make a presentation at MSFC, but it was more than enough to say hey to **Ethel**-familiar faces (like Paul Ewins, the club president) and hail friends from Natcon, like Heap and DUFF alum Justin Ackroyd. The meeting evolved into a party, we hobnobbed for far too short a while, we adjourned.

5

It occurs to me how much this account resembles Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, in that it begins in the middle, continues through the beginning, goes back to the middle, and ends ... where it ends.

Sunday morning marked – haha, I made a funny – a unique moment of our DUFF trip: Rosy and I went separate ways. She couldn’t, in good conscience, demand that I go shopping with her and Julia, just as I couldn’t, in good conscience, drag her to a *footy* game.

Like most Americans I first encountered Australian Rules Football when I made the switch to cable TV and discovered ESPN. Does it mark – haha – me as a cultural Nazi to say that I could not believe my eyes? The carnage I observed seemed to be something like rugby – the more popular sport in Sydney, I learned – and something like World Cup soccer, but there ended all resemblance to civilization. Imagine six foot five inch galloots in tee shirts and shorts slamming into each other like freight trains at open throttle – in pursuit of a ball that looks something like our football (only with rounder tips), kicked, dribbled, punched across an enormous field to the accompaniment of head butts, body slams, karate kicks and every other sort of legal violence – in hopes that two guys in white shorts, suit jackets and fedoras will wave a flag or point both hands into space and the crowd will go bananas. It makes American football – “gridiron” to those downunder – seem rank sissified, with its pads and helmets and *rules* ...and who better to guide us through those vagaries than a native – and a fan? Take it, Craig ...



FOOTY

Dr. Craig Hilton

Australian Rules football, known as "Aussie Rules", "football" (no identifier needed) or "footy" (pronounced by slurring the 't' into a 'd'), a code considered emblematic of Australia, existed for a long



time only in three of the six states: Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Each state had sets of teams in their own leagues, respectively the VFL, SAFL and WAFL. Although people followed the games in their own states, Victoria was the centre of gravity of Aussie footy, and Melbourne contained its heart and passionate tribal soul.

Then the Australian Football League or AFL was created. The VFL expanded, exported, included and colonised until there were 16 clubs around the country, and it came much closer to being truly the national sport, or at least the national winter contact field sport. So even though the people of New South Wales have always been far more heavily into rugby, they can still follow the progress of their team, the Sydney Swans in the AFL. Their team, by the way, had spent most of its life as the South Melbourne Swans, and had been transplanted from city to city when the national league was created. In the same way, you won't find any more rugby-loving state than tropical Queensland. But the Brisbane Lions (initially the Fitzroy Lions from Melbourne) were proudly the top club for three years running and last year just missed out on making it a record four

Premierships in a row.

The AFL comprises 16 teams, all the better to match up in the fixtures and ultimately whittle down to the two teams that will go head to head in the Grand Final. Also, by a system of management, salary caps, penalties and financial grants, the League tries to foster a parity that keeps the season's competition interesting. The aim is to avoid a 'Manchester United' situation of a colossus amongst lesser clubs, and it works. There have been a succession of Premiers, historically (the winning streak of the Lions a recent exception), and a constant turnover of both the top and bottom ends of the ladder.

People unused to Aussie Rules may find it hard to get used to, at first – "aerial ping-pong" is one term – but once they get the idea of the relatively simple rules, they can enjoy something that's fast and exciting. The ball goes from one end of the field to the other in a handful of seconds. The big

men fly higher than you would think possible and pluck the ball from the sky. Score after score after score gets belted through. And there's one more thing in its favour. It's always been a family institution. Men, women and children barrack side by side, in contrast to, say, English soccer, which is very much a tradition of crowds of testosterone-fuelled (and some may say alcohol-fuelled) males. That doesn't make supporters of Aussie Rules any less spirited, but there isn't the air of hooliganism here as there is in other countries. It's fun, but it isn't dangerous fun.

The rules are as follows.

There is an oval playing field. There are four long, vertical posts at each end (no cross-bars, and literally no height limit), and in the four quarters of 25 minutes each, the goals alternate between the two teams. Kick the ball cleanly through the centre posts and you score a goal, worth 6 points. Kick it between a centre and outer post on either side and you score a 'behind', worth one point. It's also one point if the ball hits the post as it goes through the middle, or is knocked or punched

through or goes through from anything other than an attacking player's boot, or is kicked through by a defending player by accident. Therefore, scores will be of the type 10 goals 5; 65.

Think of the oval as being divided into a 5 by 3 grid. A team has 15 players for each of the positions, and 3 more without fixed positions. That makes a team of 18 on the field and 4 on the reserves bench – 22 in total.

You can pick the ball up, you can catch it, you can run with it a short way, and you can kick it. You can't throw it. You can kick it off the ground, but as it's an elongated shape and doesn't bounce very predictably, it's best to hold it in your hands, line up and punt. There's no limitation in the direction you can go - right up the field in the direction of the goal if you wish. A standard kick will get you about a quarter of the length of the field. The 50-metre-radius mark around the goal is about the equivalent of a good kick.

You can run with the ball for 10 metres. After that, you have to have disposed of the ball to someone else, or bounce the ball off the ground once and catch it again to continue. You are allowed to do that twice, so the most you could ever is 30 metres.

You can dispose of it either by a kick or a handpass, which is simply a punch. While you have the ball, an opponent may tackle you in a certain, permissible way. This is usually by grabbing you around the waist. He doesn't have to bring you to the ground, just hold you while you are still holding the ball to succeed. If he tackles you and you kick or handpass away, the game can proceed. If he tackles you and you don't have the ball,



Joel Bowden, Richmond



Brad Ottens, Richmond

he is penalised. There are also a number of limitations against rough or potentially dangerous play.

If the ball goes out of bounds, a boundary umpire throws it back in. If a ball is kicked out of bounds on the full, a free kick is awarded to the opposite side.

If you catch a ball that was kicked, this is called a 'mark', and play stops while you take a free kick, immune from the prospect of being tackled. Free kicks are also awarded as penalties against transgressions such as throwing the ball, holding the man without the ball, disallowed tackles, running too far without bouncing, kicking out of bounds on the full, and also by means of returning the ball into play after the opposition has scored a behind. If you are clearly awarded a free kick, such as from taking a mark, and the momentum of events is to your team's advantage, you may choose to play on and forfeit the protection of a free kick.

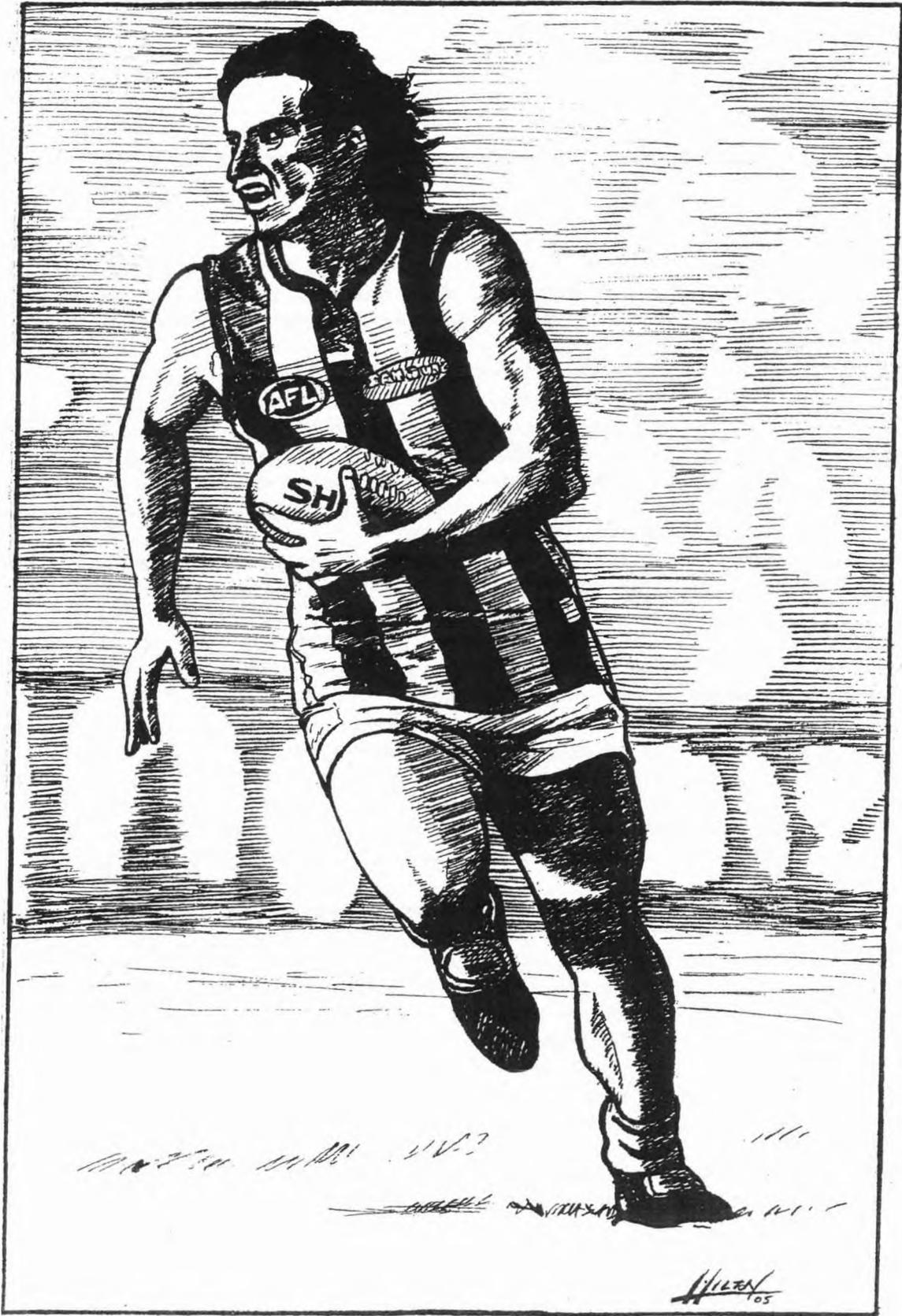
If time runs out and the siren sounds, an awarded free kick can still be taken, even (or especially) if it may result in a score.

After a goal is scored, the ball is taken back to the centre of the field. If a ball gets bogged down in a pile of players, the umpire can choose to stop the play and restart it once people are ready again. Play is started and re-started usually with a bounce-down, in which the umpire throws it hard onto the ground so that it bounces high into the air. The act of jumping up to reach it is called "going for the ruck," and is done by one of the wandering team members designated as the "ruck" or "ruckman." The other type of wandering player is the 'rover'. Sometimes there is a combination of these two talents, in a 'ruck/rover'.

There is one main umpire, a goal umpire at each end and a boundary umpire on either side. (I think.)

That's the dry bones of footy. The experience is much more visceral.





Ben Dixon, Hawthorn



Now back to GHLIII ...

Visceral indeed!

When DUFF came our way, I remembered my television encounter with Aussie football – and rejoiced. Now I could observe the mayhem up close and personal. Enter Alan Stewart. In addition to editing **Thyme** and retrieving jetlagged Americans at the airport, Alan was a diehard fan of one of the local teams, the **Hawthorn Hawks**. (I was told that however fervid his support, he did *not* “root” for the Hawks. We “root” for teams in the U.S. The word has other meanings downunder.) At the MSFC meeting, he offered to fence me an extra ticket or two. Craig volunteered to join us. A good idea. Aussie football might be too intense for a wimpy American, accustomed to the prissy flounces and effete gesticulations of gridiron – and a doctor might come in handy.

Rosy went off with Julia to the Queen Victoria Markets. Craig and I hurried along leaf-shaded streets to the commuter trains – clean, comfortable, and crowded. Most on our train championed Hawthorn’s rivals, the **Richmond Tigers**. Many sported yellow and black team scarves. After a short run, we joined the throngs on foot approaching the hilltop stadium. I remember one adolescent lad bouncing his own football. At the Melbourne Cricket Grounds I noted the sport’s symbol, proudly displayed on a high tower, and a diner decorated with huge gaudy pics of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe! Score another one for the *good* American footprint!

Stewart was where he promised to be, and we headed into the stadium, passing fans having their faces painted with team colors. Again I flashed on Mardi Gras. Then I saw the field and New Orleans was forgotten. The oval playing field was enormous – as big as a polo field, I was told. Through a gap in the stadium wall, Melbourne’s distant skyline glimmered in the cool afternoon. We joined Alan’s pals in our special seats, and the place went crazy with songs sung and flags waved and incoherent cheers as the Richmond Tigers and Hawthorn Hawks assumed the field.

To my surprise, I found had *no worries* – Australian phrase meaning “no problem,” remember – following the contest. As Craig tells us, the players can kick the ball, carry it if they dribble, *mark* it by catching it on the fly, punch it to a teammate, and tackle, block or otherwise clobber an opponent who has the ball in hand. Scoring was frequent. One point was racked if the ball was kicked between the wider of four goalposts, an event so common the crowd barely bothered to react. But if the ball was punted between the two *inner* posts – well, wild the cheering, singing, and flag-waving when the umpire in his white fedora waved *his* flags.

Which happened, in those first two quarters, a lot more often on our side of the stadium than on t’other. Hawthorn scored and scored, racking up an enormous lead. (Possibly this was due to the heroic exhortations of the gent behind us, whose gentle encouragement echoed the sweet *tink* of the bell bird. “**COME ON SAMMY!**” he’d bellow, and “**WOT’S THE DIFF’RENCE YA DENSE ARAB?**” – this directed to the referee, a breed no better beloved there than here, and no more Arabic.) At halftime Alan apologized for subjecting me to a dull massacre. But they play *two* halves at a footy game ...

From website accounts of the game, many commentators have traced the result to a broken cheekbone suffered by Peter Everitt, a star Hawk[ins], in the second quarter. Hawthorn was then leading by 51 points. But I see an explanation further back – to 1974, and Muhammad Ali’s “Rumble in the Jungle” victory over George Foreman. Remember the *Rope-a-Dope*?

The Tigers had loafed in the first half – saving themselves for the second, when they ran the Hawks ragged. Winded, helpless, Hawthorn could do nothing to stop the fresh Richmond team. Time and again the cheers and flags and bursts of song emitted from the far side of the field, while the Hawks fans sat dumbstruck, except for two who got into fistfights near our seats and were punted out themselves.

And then it was over. Though I could scarcely appreciate it, I’d witnessed history – the greatest comeback ever made by the Richmond Tigers in league play. What I could appreciate, and did appreciate, and *still* appreciate ... the cool air, the beautiful cityscape, and the exultant anthem – which I

can hear now.

“Row, row, row – on down the river – we will row, row, row – on down the river –”



So where does this Melbourne chapter of my DUFF account end? In true Tarantino fashion, we've jumped from the early middle over the late middle to the beginning – to the end.

On Sunday night, after Healesville and Orinda, we joined the Hiltons, Stewart, and the great Aussie fans Bruce & Elayne Gillespie at Leo's, an Italian place well known to local fandom. We supped splendidly and gossiped incorrigibly and the hours were wondrous. But the day was not yet done.

After dinner, Craig and Julia took us on a midnight tour of Melbourne. We were so groggy our eyes could barely focus, but the effort was worth it. Melbourne must be one of the most attractive and interesting burgs on Earth. Handsome historic buildings gleaming in spotlights. Dark parks where glow-eyed possums patrol the trees, in the ecological niche occupied by squirrels on our side of the Pond. Lastly, we made a rapid jog through the amazing, mile-long Crown Casino, gaudy and glorious, on the banks of the Yarra. (Was it within sight of the river bridge resembling a whale? the gigantic sculpture like the prongs of Gulliver's garden rake?) Theatres – bars – nightclubs – restaurants, of every class – shops – hotels (yes, plural) – and on the riverbank, every hour, fire fountains spouting geysers of flame. *Incredible. What a city.*

Eyebrows toasted, eyelids leaden, we bid the great day good night, and with the dawn, we bid the great city of Melbourne good-bye. But with the refrain in our brains –

“2010 ...
2010 ...
2010 ...”



AFTERWORD

Craig Hilton's illustrations of footy players were adapted from the *Herald Sun* website.



THROUGH TIME AND SPACE WITH BELLO CAMILLO!

Canberra & Environs – April 27-28, '03

We were in such a hurry to make our train the next morning that Rosy left her coat on the Hiltons' futon. Though Julia mailed it to her in Sydney, and she had mine to borrow for the journey, that all but wrecked her day. It hurt us anyway to leave Melbourne, our favorite of all the cities we visited on our trip. In my notebook, I wrote, "Melbourne is the most livable city in the world. I want to win the lottery and return."

Our journey was nice – outside the window. The pretty country we traversed reminded me of America's upper south, with its gentle hills, lovely forests, and interesting towns. Inside, we were tired, irritated, and chilly. At Wodonga (where we spotted a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet – pretty common in Australia) we switched from train to bus, adding "cramped" to our litany of complaints. Still, I preferred it to flying – roiling o'erhead were some righteous thunderclouds.

The bus journey had qualities of its own. Not only did it enable us to gaze on some pretty Aussie turf, it paused at a wayside café somewhere in the hills midway between Wodonga and Canberra. Its walls were decorated with amateur art for sale, and as we munched on a grilled cheese sandwich I let my gaze wander along the makeshift gallery. It settled on the one pen-&-ink drawing displayed. I had to have it. \$5 read the price tag – about \$3 American. "How much *without the frame*?" I asked. The salesgirl knocked off half. That illo, reproduced over yonder, served as the cover to my zine about the trip for the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. I wonder who drew it? I wonder what they'd think of its appearance here?

The day only really improved when, ahead, we spotted the awesome spire of the Telstra Tower thrusting above the green crest of a mountaintop. Bedecked with communications dishes girdling it like a belt of bells, the 640-foot/195-meter edifice was our first indication of our day's journey's end. Obviously a fabulous place awaited us. Nevertheless, we could see little else of Canberra's wonders as our bus pulled into Australia's capital city – just darkness, and rain, and an angel of deliverance, Donna Hanson.

Remember that Donna had joined one of our epic breakfast expeditions to Miss Maud's in Perth during Swancon. Graciously she had offered us crash space, allowing us this stop in Canberra. What truly amazed us was that she was taking the time to retrieve us nervy American interlopers at 5:50 on the evening of her son's birthday dinner.

We careened into the country – the "bush," as they call it in the antipodes – and I do mean "careen"; Donna was an *exuberant* driver. But she knew the route and, a roundabout or two later, we were opening the gates to the estate she shares with Tony Civello, her significant other, James, her preteen nephew, several goats, many vines, and the maremma, Bello Camillo.

A maremma, if you don't know, is a sheepdog, and I immediately bonded with the big, beautiful, blonde beast. Along with the Caversham parrot who had said "Helloooooo?", the Rottneest quokka who had trundled across my feet, and Marilyn Pride's cute woofers, he was the friendliest inhuman critter I met downunder. *Rorf!*

Tonight, though, Bello Camillo was left outside, and the house belonged to sumptuous human revelry – young David Taamati's birthday banquet. His sisters, like him half-Maori, filled one's sight with supernatural beauty, and his lovely fiancée, in charge of the cooking, produced a

meal of lamb and pasta as satisfying to the spirit as it was to the appetite. Ah. Our grinding day of tight travel faded into dim memory. After dinner, we grooved on some of David's computer animation, a project for school, and retired, restored.

We were up and outta there early the next morning: we had but a single day in Canberra and we had much more than a day's worth to see. Alas, we wouldn't be seeing it with Donna; even though it was *her* birthday, she had to work. (If she took the day, she said, "My super will have my guts for garters!") We were far from helpless, though; Donna enlisted her s.o.'s charming sister Pat to act as our guide.

(A kosmik coinkydink: Pat's last name was Gibbs, and there's a male Atlanta fan – lawyer and Hearts fiend – by that name.)

It was a glorious day, and we saw glorious things. I could not get over how pretty and clean Canberra appeared. This was a general impression of Australia, but it was most striking in its capital. Standing at either end of the exquisite valley vista that began at the War Memorial and ended at the New Parliament House, one could only be wowed at the elegance, beauty and *symmetry* of the view.

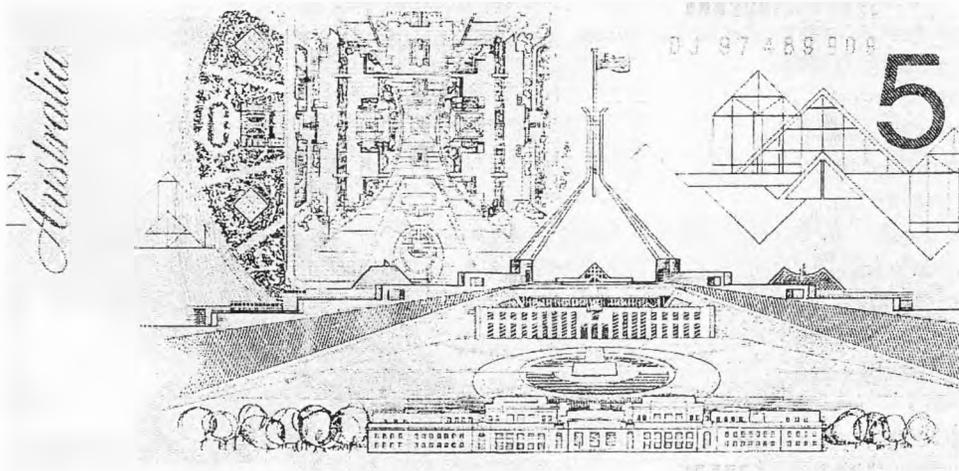
It made sense. Canberra is, after all, a designed city, created within the natural amphitheater formed atop a natural flood basin. The American architect, Walter Burley Griffin, described the geography as a theatrical backdrop, dominated by the parliamentary buildings, an artificial lake, and generous expanses of sky.

Central to the display was the Old Parliament House, a beautiful white edifice in the center of Griffin's valley-spanning canvas. It was our first stop. Though we admired the tripod flagpole and the cool national emblem, created by George IV, above the doorway, we didn't go in. I did, however, invade the so-called Aboriginal Embassy parked in front of it. The small shack – called an eyesore by many – was a one-time protestors' billet, symbolic focus of ugly confrontations between Australia's native people and the European gentry in 1972. Since then it's been granted semi-permanent and semi-official status among the government edifices. I couldn't help but remember my college days. This version of the Embassy had been standing for eleven years. I poked my head in – no staff or exhibits, just some colorful design work on the walls. I got the distinct impression that Aussies take pride – but an uneasy and somewhat guilt-



ridden pride – in the continent’s native heritage. Except for a few bums on the street in Perth, we saw no living aborigines, but aboriginal *art* was everywhere.

It formed a gorgeous mosaic outside of the *New Parliament House*, our next stop. Australia is a land of remarkable buildings, and the NPH must be one of the most remarkable. Architecturally it was a marvel. Take a look at the back of the Aussie five-dollar bill ...



or the aforementioned “Boot” episode of *The Simpsons*.

Although most of the capitol is literally underground, inside it is modern and bright. Broad galleries lined with murals and shiny windows – and an especially handsome wall of portraits. Aussie prime ministers stared down on us – one depicted in a style very reminiscent of Kelly Freas (the man bore no resemblance to Alfred E. Neuman) – side by side with other famous Ozzies and her Serene Imperial Majesty. Also on display was an original copy – that sounds odd – of the Magna Carta. (I discovered that the just-beginning Iraq invasion violated one of its tenets ... but John Lackland was *only* the King of England.)

After a quick glance at the empty parliamentary halls, which I’d seen on TV news, we ascended to the grassy roof. A cool breeze blew across the fabulous panorama stretching from the distant War Memorial past the Old House across the “frozen fountain” of Lake Barney Griffin. Aussies sprawled on the gentle slopes of the lawn, napping amid the strange (to us) black and white birds poking their beaks into the loam. In this pastoral beauty, absorbing the surroundings, and perhaps inspired by the tale of the Aboriginal Embassy, I told Pat the story of People’s Park, the grandest and angriest moment of my youth. Around the world I’d come, to one of the most inspiring and beautiful places in Oz, to relive the hippy days of yore!

We adjourned to a pizza place for lunch, and bought railway tickets for the morrow. Then we were off to the country – excuse me, the *bush*. Some of the turf we traversed was blackened and barren – the residue of the terrible fires that had recently devastated the area. But most was green, hilly, gorgeous – with more than one Hanging Rock-like mamelon thrusting rockily into the sky.

They did not thrust alone. Our destination was *Tidbinbilla* ... and the *Canberra Deep Space Communications Complex*.

As you could tell from my reaction to our 747, massiveness awes me. The radio antennas of Tidbinbilla *awed* me. They were ... *large*. Skyscraper tremendous, King Kong tremendous, giant white cups tipped upwards, drinking information from the enormous Australian sky. It says on their website that the CDSCC has been around for 40 years as part of NASA’s Deep Space Network. While its big 70-metre antenna isn’t the same behemoth as that featured in *The Dish* (a wonderful film), its function – and that of its several smaller companions – is the same: to receive data sent back to Earth from space probes. Of recent, as I write, CDSCC has collated the beeps

beamed back from the Mars Orbiter into its first pictures. I have no idea what they were doing on April 28th '03 – besides blowing our minds, that is.

A mind-pop of another sort awaited inside the Visitors' Centre, which featured a sparkly moon rock from Apollo 11 and some cool computer games. 12 years old at heart, I particularly liked the program that let you choose a star out of the firmament, then told you its name, magnitude, and distance. Too cool! The sunny salesgirl in the gift shoppe related a funny story about an Australian astronaut who had helped her serve drinks. Buzz Aldrin had been there, too; she liked *my* story about buying him a Diet Coke at L.A.Con III. In fact, when we left, she gave me a gift – a special photo of the big dish. Why? “I *like* you!” she said.

I was stunned. People don't say that kind of thing in America. Certainly not to me. Australia, man.

Pat drove us back to Canberra, where we picked up Donna. We paused on the way back to her home to fetch James at his rural school. As we left, I peered across a wide, wild meadow ... and saw, in the distance, a troop of kangaroos, feeding. ‘Roos in the wild! At last!

Back at Donna's vineyard home, I romped for a bit with Bello Camillo, joining in his innocently sadistic pleasure as he scattered Donna's enormous goats.

We humans were soon off again for the suburb of Morley, where we met Tony. Our aim was chow at the Hellenic Club, a posh establishment thronging with well-dressed yuppies, and decorated with copies of famous statues. (The Venus di Milo is a *substantial* lady.) While we supped, Tony picked our minds about the best current SF (Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy, I opined), and *la belle* presented Donna with the present we reserved for our hosts: fancy Mardi Gras beads.

But our neckwear, no matter how appreciated, was probably not the highlight of Donna's evening. While we were at the Hellenic Club, her cellphone chirped. Her agent was on the line. She'd read the sample chapters of Donna's latest SF novel, and liked them. Could Ms. Hanson ship her the rest of the manuscript?

Donna's joy lit up the night.

Speaking of the night – once we returned to *chez* Civello/Hanson, Tony, an amateur astronomer, took us onto the lawn to eye the heavens. The moon had set and the sky, this far into the bush, was free of the occluding glare of the city. Though Donna lamented that the stars “aren't so crash hot tonight,” I was overwhelmed. The startling Centaur, familiar Orion, what I *thought* was the Southern Cross, what *really* was the Southern Cross and both Magellanic Clouds were lost in the glow of the Milky Way. Impossible to believe that everything was not well under such a sky, and so nice to hold my lady close on such a night, lit by alien stars. Inside again, Tony treated us to a DVD of Hubble images, climaxing our day (and night) of celestial wonder.

We really had to haul boogie the next morning. Our train left at noon, and Donna wanted to fit in as much of Canberra as we hadn't seen as she could. Before we left her place, though, I had to grab my canine buddy by the jowls and tell him “You have a *great life*, Bello Camillo!” – because who knew if we'd ever chase goats together again.

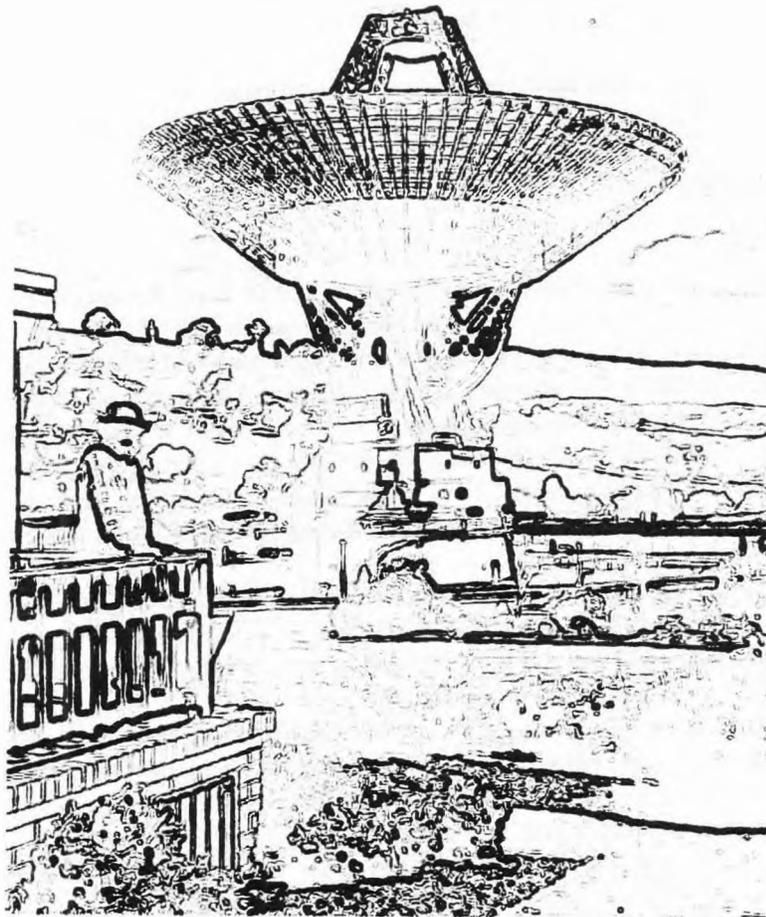
Our mad dash took us first to the magnificent and ultra-modern National Museum on Lake Burley Griffin. There, in addition to cool and creative exhibits and a revolving theatre, we saw the Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory, John Stanhope, autographing books on the region's recent bushfires, conflagrations so terrible they made news in Louisiana. Then down we zoomed along the ANZAC Parade of war memorials to *the* War Memorial, a stately yet spectacular museum devoted to the country's military heroes. We made far too quick a run through its displays, but absorbed enough info to form an ongoing curiosity about Gallipoli, the

defining moment in Australia's wartime history. That it was a disastrous defeat dims none of its luster in native eyes: ANZAC Day, its anniversary, April 25th, is a supreme holiday, just past.

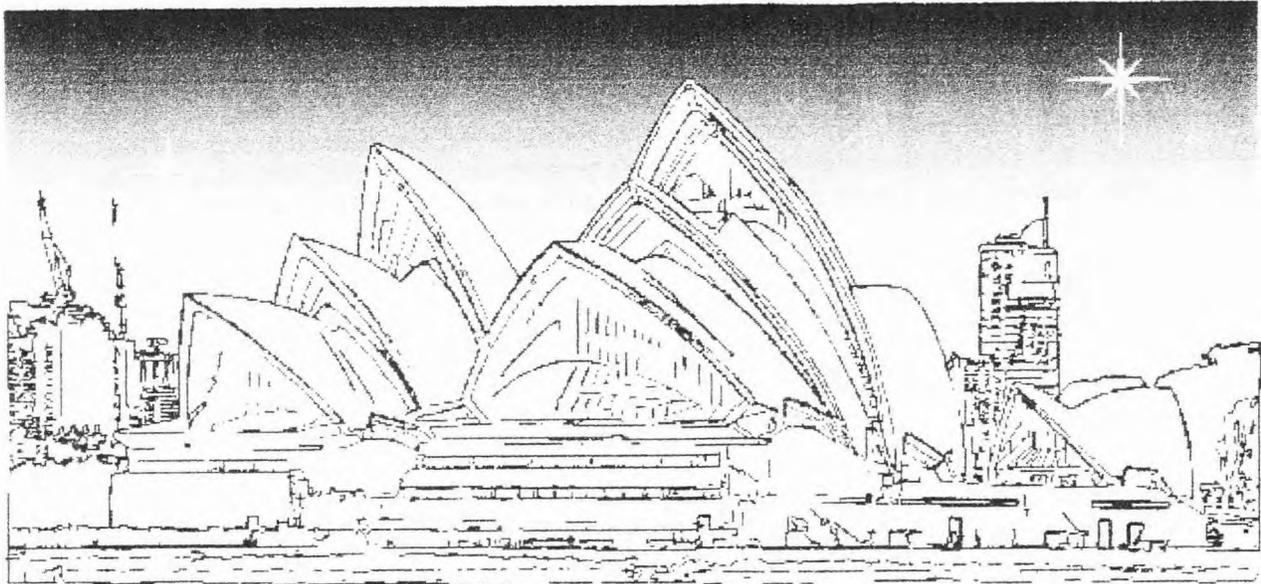
As we toured, Donna let us in on her own fascinating military connection: her grandfather, John Charles Reginald McCurdden, invented the first Aussie machine gun – but never managed to sell it!

Noon was nigh upon us as we left, so we missed stopping by the Art Museum to eye its latest (and controversial) treasure, the million-dollar Jackson Pollock masterpiece, *Blue Poles*. Pollock is my favorite modern painter and I regretted skipping the chance to wallow in his work, but we had to skip so much of wonderful Canberra, and it felt like we were skipping out on the wonderful people – Donna, Pat, Tony and all their ken – who made our day there one of the most magical we'd have in Oz. I found myself in a state of grief – it hurt to come, find warmth and friendship, and then have to leave, all in the space of a day and a half. But such is the disaster with which one pays for the delight of DUFF.

We were off for Sydney.



April 29 – May 1, 2003



PRIDE OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

art by Charlie Williams

Sydney was a celebration of the Arts. Of the four cities on our Australian journey, Sydney was the busiest, noisiest – a Chicago downunder; an antipodal New York. But if there was a common element to our experiences there, it was, indeed, *Art*.

As if to get us into the mood, our train from Canberra traversed a slew of aesthetic sights – the Goulburn tower, the streets of Bundanoon, and acres of sheep sheep sheep, fleeing in great puffy waves from the iron horse choochooing through their midst. I kept my eyes out the window, trying to catch sight of the last marvel we hoped to see during our DUFF excursion – Sydney Harbour. I had to settle for a second's glimpse of the “coathanger” bridge. Then the towers of Australia's most populous city rose about us.

After exploring the high-ceilinged train station, we were met by Nick Stathopoulos, 1986 DUFF winner, 1999 Hugo nominee, and our patient host. Barely a week had gone by since Nick had last put up, and put up with, unexpected visitors, but he was a former DUFF delegate himself, and a trooper. He conveyed us to his grandmother's terrace in Sydney's bohemian district, Paddington, a home he was in the process of renovating. He apologized for the “Dickensian” mess of the place, but our bedroom was comfortable and wherever we turned – even in the laundry room – a clever sculpture or a powerful painting came under view. Nick is, as everyone downunder knows, a professional artist of profound ability and humor. In fact, we had to squeeze past a huge self-portrait in his entryway.

Though we'd see a lot of Sydney on our visit, Nick told us, we wouldn't see much of Sydney fandom. There wasn't much Sydney fandom to see. It was fragmented, he said, and uncommunicative.

As we sat at his kitchen table, however, sampling tasty jams made from his backyard cumquats, Nick himself was anything but. He listened to our tale of Hanging Rock, inquired about the Natcon we'd attended in Perth (he's won a shelf-ful of Ditmar Awards), and chatted about his artistic career. He showed us the contrast between the Australian version of a book cover he'd done and the American. The vast difference in quality was not to America's benefit. Of course, with the Iraqi war just underway, we also touched on the real world. Nick opened our eyes further to the vast distinction between the way America sees W's hideous adventure, and the world's perspective – a world of difference indeed.

One neatness: long ago, he told us, Nick had passed his exams to become, of all horrors, an attorney. But he was saved from the barrister's life of despair and travail. As he descended the stairs from signing his license, he'd been met by a friend, who asked if he wanted to paint mattes for **Star Wars**. He's never looked back.

Outside on the street as sleep overcame us, we heard cats, dogs, people ...



... children's voices, and small planes. Daylight. Morning. We were anxious to move. Sights awaited us in Sydney that had roiled in our dreams for many years.

When we hit the streets, Nick led us onto a bus headed for the most famous area of Sydney: The Domain. His excitement grew as we approached the Art Museum of New South Wales. After all, he had a painting hanging there.

Every year Australian artists compete for the Archibald Prize in portraiture. Nick's submission had been one of the 32 finalists. His work was undoubtedly the most popular on display – it had made the feature page of the local newspaper and had the most avid crowds grouped before it. “Here's Mr. Squiggle” depicted the puppet star of an adored kids' show – still on the air after umpteens dozen years – in the gentle paternal embrace of his genius creator, Norman Hetherington. It's a sweet, jolly piece; later, Nick volunteered to autograph museum postcard reproductions to auction for DUFF.

After photographing the smiling artist in front of his charming work (much to the museum's displeasure), we took a quick tour of the other galleries – including a number of pieces by (note this well) Norman Lindsay. My favorite painting: George Lambert's “Across the Black Soil Plains”, a team of packhorses pulling a wagon across the outback. It resounded of Australia to me, and the finest quality we Americans share with it: the frontier. Then we were off, through squads of joggers, through the Woolloomooloo Gate and into the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The Gardens are a wide expanse of elegant horticulture cut with manicured pathways, a remarkable urban forest. Nick tapped me to indicate a tall pine hanging with huge, sinister fruit – bats; flying foxes. Beneath lower branches spiders the size of a woman's hand spun webs elaborate and deadly. One specimen stood alone within a cylindrical cage: the rarer than rarer than rare Wollemi Pine, one of only 38 known in the world. Safe as it was from nefarious nurseries seeking cuttings, I rather felt sorry for the little Wollemi – trees should be touched, smelled, climbed. Or walked around – like the Wishing Tree, just down the path: circle it three times forward and thrice backward, and you'll get your wish. We did it. So far, so good – Rose-Marie is still with me.

We stopped at a café to eat, talk about Batman and laugh at the ibises who leapt atop the tables to scrounge among the dirty dishes. We figured their curved beaks had evolved to poke into take-away (Australian for “take-out”) containers. Lunch over, we walked to the end of the Bennelong Peninsula, the glorious harbor spreading before us. Nick pointed out a ship seized by the Australian Navy – it had been hauling drugs for North Korea. Then we rounded a corner and there *it* stood.

I cursed the dullness of my mind. For such an experience, every sense should be needle sharp. There had been many sites I had wanted to visit during DUFF. Two were essential: Hanging Rock – and the Sydney Opera House.

It's one of the most famous buildings in the world, strikingly modern, exciting and original, exotic, beautiful. Wowed to our teeth, Rosy & I paid for a tour – the guide's name was Gillian ("Guide Gillian," right). Sitting in the vast concert hall, a space dominated by the largest mechanical organ in the world, ten thousand pipes, we got the lowdown literally from the inside out.

In the late 1950s, we learned, someone noticed the Bennelong peninsula of solid sandstone jutting into Sydney Harbour, hard adjacent to the "Coathanger" Bridge. The space, then occupied by a tram station, seemed the perfect site for a cultural center, which would serve as a symbol of the city. That decided, a competition was held for its design.

Most of the 233 entries were complex and detailed blueprints – but Danish architect Jorn Utzon, been inspired by the many sailboats cruising Sydney Harbour, put forward a simple sketch – this one. The Aussies were, in a word, wowed. On the basis of that single drawing, Utzon won the contract to build the most famous edifice in the southern hemisphere.

The Sydney Opera House had a design – but no real plan. Bringing Utzon's scribble to solid reality presented challenge after challenge. For instance, the arched concert halls. The sail-like arches – chunks from a sphere – were only susceptible to Lego-like, segmented fabrication – a million-plus ceramic tiles, triple-glazed off-white so as not to blind onlookers. With such hassles abounding, it took 14 years to build the Sydney Opera House, and cost over a hundred million dollars, Australian. It was financed by a lottery. But the result is a wonder.

The complex fills its cultural duties magnificently – five theatres! – but its history is not without controversy. Both Nick and Gillian described the conflict before the SOH opened between operatic and orchestral factions, each demanding the largest hall. The orchestra won – and its enormous theatre features unmatched acoustics, abetted by soft timber ceilings and sound-deadening rings over the stage, their purpose to protect players from the distraction of their own music. Apparently there is no superior example of the science of sound on that side of the planet. The opera theatre seemed too small for a full-scale Broadway musical, but the designers had built its stage deep to compensate for the lack of wings. One had to imagine how Carmen would resonate in such an intimate setting, for the only music from the stage that day was the clamor of stagehands, erecting a set, and the chatter of a Japanese tourist, interrupting Gillian's spiel with a cellphone call.

However fascinating the history and interior of the SOH, it was the exterior that kept us enraptured. We eyed and photographed those thrilling arches from every conceivable angle, dazzled by one of the last century's ultimate architectural achievements. It dominated our days in Sydney as it dominated the Harbour itself, drawing attention from every other charm the city had to offer. More than once, prowling about it, Rosy turned to me, or I turned to her, to say "Look where we *are!*"

But it was also the source of *lament*. Before, the Sydney Opera House was a dream, a fantasy, an unattainable corner of paradise, as distant as the stars in the Southern Cross. Now, the dream was a *place*. A sign by a stairway lacked a few letters. The men's room needed toilet paper. A beautiful place, an incredible place, a unique and marvelous place – but a dream no longer. Now, the Sydney Opera House is a *building* ... and we've *been there*.

We walked around the Harbour, where multitudinous tourist boats dock, and underneath the staggeringly huge Harbour Bridge, where, Nick said, scenes from **Dark City** had been filmed. We wandered the Rocks, Sydney's tony shopping and restaurant district, and flaked at various shoppes until Nick's favorite Japanese restaurant opened. With conversation about SF (Rosy) and sketching (Nick), the day slid into night. We thought we had exhausted our awe. Hahaha.



Nick began our day by presenting Rosy with a *Neville* clone. Neville is a koala bear, two inches long, who grips the visor on Rosy's SUV (okay, he's a toy). We forgot to bring him to Australia (Mib the Panda had to stand in for all our ersatz animals) but this cousin was most welcome. He wore a blue vest marked "Melbourne", and Nick suggested she name him that, but Rosy prefers "Sydney," since that's where he comes from. (As I write Sydney sits atop our bedroom chest of drawers, holding fast to a skinny vase of metal flowers, the tackiest – and my favorite – wedding present from my first trip down the aisle.)

Stathopoulos returned us to the train station for our next epic journey – west, into the Blue Mountains. We had been assured: any stop in Sydney would be wasted which did not include a trip into the midst of those mountains, and the home of Marilyn Pride and Lewis Morley. They were Nick's best friends and DUFF compatriots, and since he wanted us out of the way so he could prepare for a weekend convention, he was glad to set up our visit. How glad we were that he did.

Up we chugged out of the suburbs and into the mountains, rounded and wooded – much more like the Smokies than the younger Rockies. Though our train stopped at many suburban towns on the way, we got a definite sense of *country*; perhaps not the outback wilderness Rosy so wanted to see, but definitely, the city was left behind. An unfortunate part of the trip was an argument we witnessed between a petulant collegiate lad and some female passengers; having gotten by far the worst of the exchange, the boy turned to me to ask about the next stop. "Don't ask me, son," I rejoined. "I live in New Orleans!"

Marilyn met us at the train station with Leela, an adorable pup named for a companion of Dr. Who. Marilyn was familiar – she, Nick and her husband Lewis had been DUFF delegates to Confederation, the Atlanta worldcon in 1986. Long of hair and skirt, she seemed the eternal Earth Mother as she walked us up the hill to their abode. There we found their cool fannish friend Sue Batho – and a house of wonders.



It would have been an astonishing place even with a mundane household – built as it was on a beautiful wooded hillside, with gorgeous crimson rosellas – parrots – mooching grain from plates left on the verandah. Within, earth colors, huge round windows, and wooden walls and furnishings blended the house into the nature about it. But there was little natural about the *décor*. A bust of Yoda sat on a bookcase. A unicorn skull hung from the central support beam. The head of the boar from **Razorback** loomed over the bathroom door, and everywhere, demons and monsters surged from the walls.

All fibreglass and latex. Lewis is a special effects artist, as well as a first class carpenter, and most of the frights on the walls and shelves were props from films he's worked on. (That explained why he wasn't here; he was in Sydney, making an alien tuba for a scene in the next *Star Wars*.) In Marilyn's very Australian term, they had "*heaps* of stuff," and cool, scary stuff it was, too.

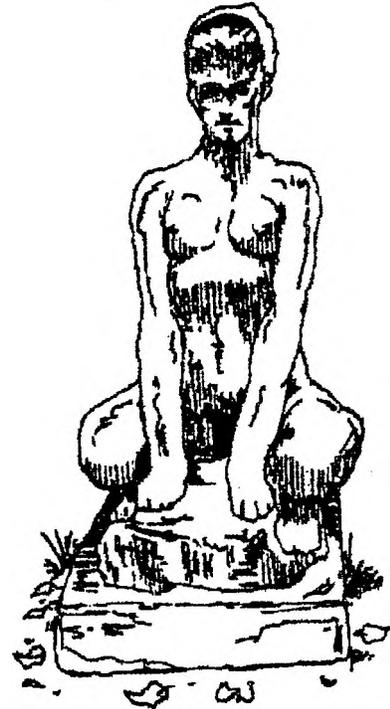
In the basement, where Lewis and Marilyn have their studios and workrooms, the heaps were stuffed onto dozens of shelves and hung from every pillar and post. Toy robots, dinosaurs, puppets, *bones* ... and Marilyn's righteous comic book art. She led us into basement rooms where twisted latex Igors fought for space with aliens and demons ... I was utterly enraptured, and Rosy was impressed, but she wondered how anyone could sleep in a house so liberally adorned with horrors. Easily, methought – all the nightmares were on the walls!

It would have taken a lot to expel me from a haven of such imaginative delights. Words that could were, "Norman Lindsay's house? That's right down the road."

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The artistic sentiment that compelled me to see the movie *Sirens* came straight from the lizard brain. *I wanted to see Elle MacPherson naked.* Truly, it was a sight worth the foreknowledge of death. But the film had a serious point, celebrating the sensualism of the great artist Norman Lindsay, on whose estate it was made. That estate, his home, studio and gallery, was indeed right down the road from Marilyn's house, and Sue drove us there, a place instantly recognizable, a place almost supernaturally joyous.

A beautiful one-story house on a hilltop dotted with statuary – a satyr grasping at a nymph – a crouching sphinx – mermaids cavorting in a fountain with fabulous oceanic steeds. Some are Lindsay's originals, cement molded over chicken wire, and some replacement bronze copies, cast to preserve the great man's work from the elements. Lindsay spent 60 of his 90 years here, and the place *bulges* with his passion and his talent – oil paintings, sculptures, watercolors, furniture, ship models, books. The children's stories he wrote and illustrated, like *The Magic Pudding*, are classics, but let's face it, it was his contemplation and reproduction of the undraped female form divine that lives on in our minds and hearts.



Lindsay's nudes are neither the insipid dreamgirls of *Playboy* nor *Hustler's* raunchy gynecological exhibitionists. His soft but defiant figures possess strength and power as well as stunning sexuality. Check out *Ladies of Olympus* or *The Amazons* or my personal favorite, *Solly*. These aren't weak or pliant people. These are women you have to *win* – women of confidence and substance. They compel your commitment, to them and to life in the world. Their rendering influenced Frazetta and Finlay, I am told, and they influence artists of today – Nick, for instance, called the house at Springwood one of his favorite places on Earth. If it's a pagan effect they produce, then so be it: Lindsay's instincts sing to the soul.

Among the pen sketches on display were two drawings done 40 years apart – the last when Lindsay was quite elderly. It was sharper, funnier (humor rollicks about this artist), more complex ... this guy's genius just kept on growing. In his studio, abandoned in 1969, the year of Lindsay's death, two unfinished paintings sat on easels, as if awaiting the return of the artist's brush. They made me want to cry. He wrote a wonderful epigram into *The Magic Pudding* – one we could adopt for the whole of our DUFF experience: "*Who would have thought there was so much to see in the world?*"

We were not finished. The work of an even greater artist awaited us.



Sue drove us to the end of a road out amongst the low brush of the bush. We stepped over the barrier and walked along the rutted, puddly dirt path to a sandstone platform – broad, relatively flat. Sandstone is soft and teenagers have been carving names and dates and rude messages there for decades. Beyond ...

Beyond was the incredible expanse of the Jamison Valley. The view stretched from Mount Solitary, miles opposite, to the Three Sisters rock formation, miles to our right. Thick and green was the valley below, and I mean *below*; the cliff face was without rail, and sharp, and sheer, and the treetops from

which the bell birds sent forth their penetrating *tinks* were hundreds of feet down. How far across to Mount Solitary, bare rock broken by growth – the mountain on which the Sirens of the film had given us its last, unforgettable image? I say miles. It seemed infinite.

I approached the edge. A *long* way down – one step more and I'd learn all there was to know about infinity. And wasn't that a *wrecked car* nestled amongst the trees? I scrambled back, begging Rosy to do the same – but she and Marilyn had more nerve than Sue or me. They approached the precipice on hands and knees and peered over. "There are *three* wrecked cars down there!"

We moved on to the Wentworth Falls, another site replete with awesome scenery and charm. Marilyn related fairy stories about its Banksia trees and I spotted a single kookaburra, sittin' in its old gum tree. We drove to the touristy town of Leura, and a sensibly railed observation platform overlooking The Three Sisters, stone monoliths reminiscent of the great columns that flank the Grand Canyon. Bell birds kept up their uneven percussive symphony from the valley below. Finally, as night was upon us, Sue led us to another abutment of sandstone, literally behind her house, where centuries before aborigines had carved images of their sacred tribal totem – the emu. We shone torchlight onto the etched outlines, eying eternity in those works of men long dust. They'd cast their faith into material they felt would last forever. Well, blokes ... so far, so good.

The incredible day was all but done. Our friends – and they were that, now – returned us to the station. While we awaited our train back to Sydney we dined at a pizzeria run by a pretty blonde and her daughters. The tables came with crayons so customers could draw on the placemats, and the walls were covered with the efforts of previous vacationers and visitors, local teenagers and other members of Australia's friendly and happy people. Not etched in stone, nor worth millions, perhaps, but to us, more great Australian art.

WAKE UP! GO HOME!

May 2, 2003

If there was a frustration with our time in Sydney, it was that – except for Nick – we didn't see any fans. Apparently the city has no club of its own and SF aficionados are few and far between. But as May 2, our last full day downunder, dawned, it seemed we'd lucked out. An e-mail came through from Ted Scribner, telling us of a gathering of locals he was assembling to welcome the great Eric Lindsay to the area. We rejoiced – until we discovered that the party was set for Saturday – night. We were to take wing for home Saturday – noon.

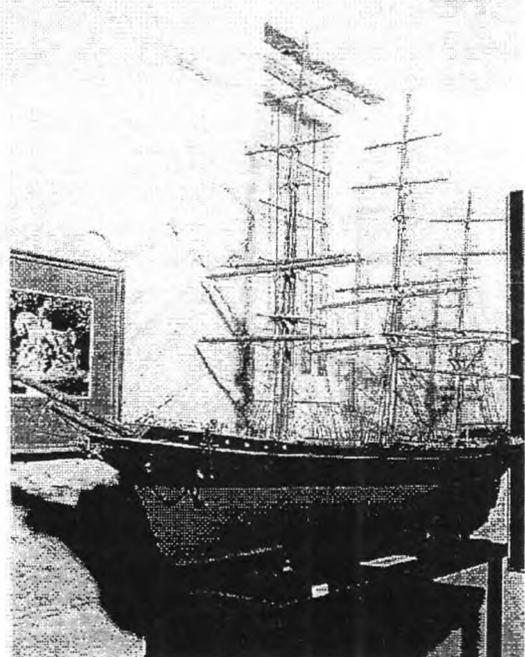
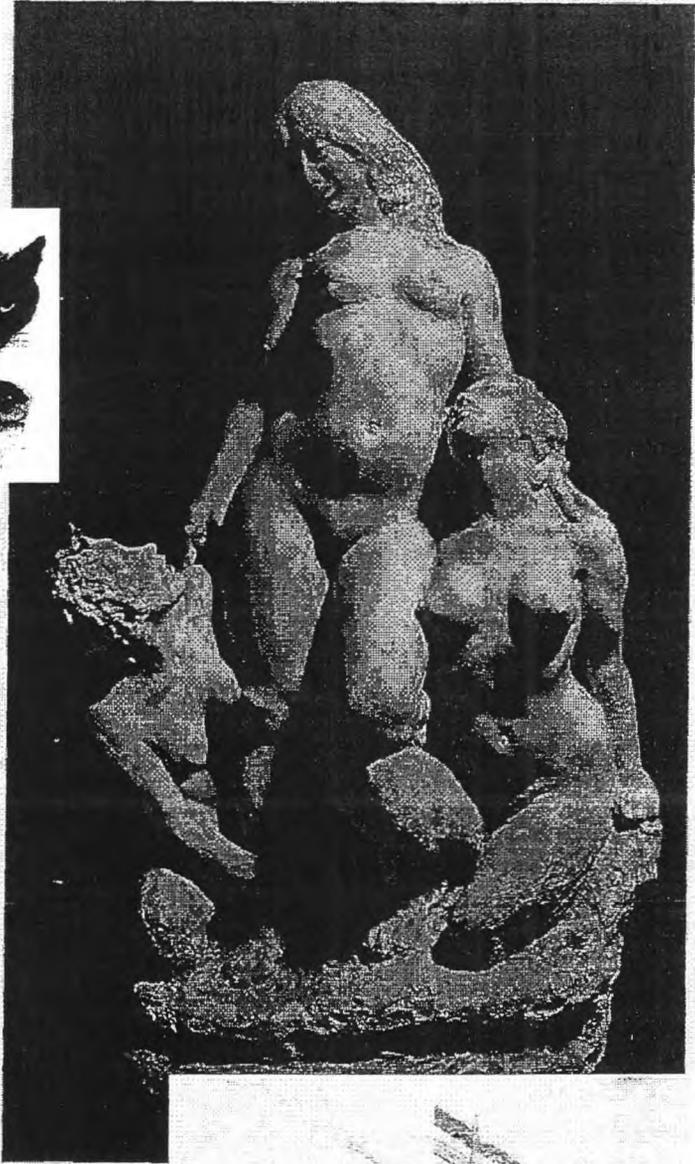
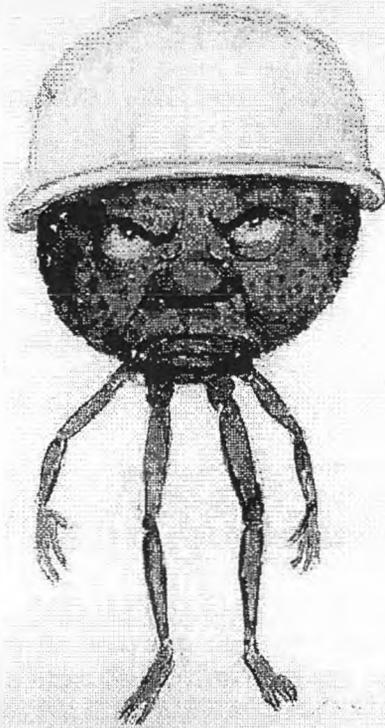
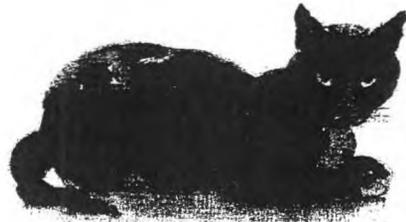
If I had it to do over again, I'd spend DUFF's money and change our tickets – again. I admire Lindsay and meeting fans, as we'd been told and told and told and told, was the entire rationale for our trip. But we'd already changed our tickets once. We had people meeting us in L.A. and, on Sunday, in New Orleans. So t'was not to be. We sent our regrets back to Ted and Eric.

Stathopoulos left town that morning, off to a convention with Terry Dowling (who, we were told, used to appear on Mr. Squiggles – remember Nick's portrait?). We were On Our Own.

On Nick's recommendation we cabbled it to a backpackers' hostel near the train station, the Wake Up! Backpacking is the great youthful avocation about Australia, so much so that an industry has grown up around the travelers. The Wake Up! catered to their needs – and their budgets.

That makes the Wake Up! sound like some sort of collegiate dump, and dump it was not. It was not only clean, with an internet café in the lobby and a sandwich shop, but it boasted several different levels, figurative and literal, of accommodation ("colour coded," says their website, "so that it's easier to find your bed after a big night out! [We have seen your sort before]"). Two floors consisted of dorm-type rooms with communal showers, another sported semi-private rooms with a shared bath. The top, 7th story offered private rooms and private baths and, of course, cost the most. We reserved that one. I'm too old to share a bathroom.

NORMAN LINDSAY was a complete artist – a genius in everything he tried. Sculpture – drawing – writing (that’s the title character in **The Magic Pudding** below) – even ship modeling!

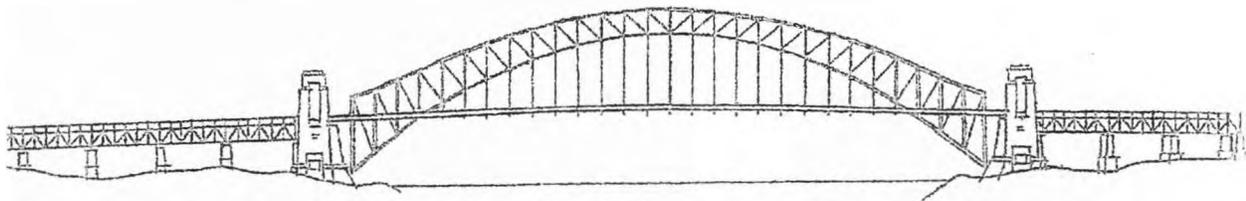


You can reach his museum at
14 Norman Lindsay Crescent
Faulconbridge, via
Springwood 2776
New South Wales, Australia

We left our bags – fat with souvenirs – with the tall and slim and blonde and gorgeous desk clerk, her low-cut jeans and a high-hemmed blouse baring her succulently rounded tummy – a typical Ozzie gull, in other words. (You know why Nicole Kidman left Australia? They kicked her out for being too *ugly*.) Anyway, we found the appropriate bus and rode it the length of George Street, through a downtown I found rather distressingly familiar. It was busy and crowded and sported adult bookstores and movie theatres – Sydney *almost* could have been any metropolis, anywhere. I could see where the Sydney/Melbourne dichotomy had come from – like the difference between L.A. and San Francisco, a matter of pace, tone, and if you want, class. But there was nothing typical about our target, and when we reached it, we knew it could only be itself, exactly where it was.

In 2001, 15 weeks after 9/11, Rosy and I had walked across the Brooklyn Bridge, marveling in the resilience and beauty of the invincible Apple. No horror like 9/11 had (or, please God, would ever) fallen on Sydney, but it has a tremendous span all its own. The Harbour Bridge, the “Coathanger”, is just as important an engineering miracle to the Aussies as magnificent Brooklyn’s is to Americans. We wanted to take another stroll. After all, for decades before the Opera House was built, the Sydney Harbour Bridge was the city’s great landmark.

For that reason I was tempted to feel a little *sorry* for the bridge. One could think that, because of its utilitarian nature and the startling beauty of the Opera House, no one would give it much attention anymore. Untrue.



We reached the bridge deck by mounting some charming staircases at the Rocks. We started across. The roadway bounced and vibrated with the passing traffic.

And what a vista we beheld! The serene (off-)white queen of her harbor court, the Opera House, reigned majestic as about her buzzed tour boats and ferries and, on land, a thousand teeny human figures. Behind us loomed the sky-tickling towers of downtown Sydney. Ahead, the northern suburb of Kirrikill – and a tempting adventure.

Unique among the great spans I’ve known of, the Sydney Harbour Bridge offers daredevils the chance to clamber up its superstructure, 134 meters (that’s *440 feet* to dumbass Americans) above the briny blue. Our DUFF predecessors Teddy Harvia and Diana Thayer had taken this walk, but we would not. Although the climbers are swathed in jumpsuits and hooked to a safety cable, *I’m not that crazy – brave* I mean – and the adventure cost \$145 AU, about \$100 US, *each*. Instead we climbed, inside, one of the bridge’s pylons, to almost as glorious a height – for *five* dollars.

Within the pylon – erected in 1930 to add a decorative element to the bridge – we mined the gift shop, where Rosy bought John Nicholson’s excellent illustrated book on the bridge’s history, and the most practical souvenir of the trip: a bridge-shaped balsa-wood business card holder. Even now it sits on my desk at work.

We proceeded across, to the town of Kirribilli. Our aims were two – a café, for food, and a drugstore chemist’s, for medicine. Ripening at the base of my right thumb was the precursor of my least practical, yet most permanent Australian souvenir: a spider bite.

How often had we been warned about Australia’s poisonous fauna? The insects were murderous, we were told, the jellyfish – particularly the all-but-invisibly teeny *irukandji* – lethal, and even the cutie-patootie platypus carried a toxic venom in his claws. We enjoyed good luck until Sydney; the night

before, I had found a shiny white bump, a bacterial Superdome, risen from my wrist. Foolishly, we had popped it, thinking our mighty American alcohol pads would master any germ – but no such luck. The spot was reddening nastily. The chemist gave me some salve and a bandage, but it took a sincere antibiotic back in the States to resolve the wound into the cross-shaped scar that will remind me of the antipodes till the end of my days.

We also ate lunch. Our Cokes – a bit tangier than their American cousins, I thought – came in 330-ml bottles. Like practically every warm body we met in Australia, our deeply-dimpled teenaged waitress had been to America – and had even lived in New York City.

Heading back, we decided to take a ferry across the harbor, and chanced upon one of the coolest sites in the city.

A visit like ours was as much a charge to the imagination as to anything else, because you can't help but wonder what it would be like to *live* in such a place. Coming up on the park at Milsons Point, at the north end of the Harbour Bridge, we could see what Sydney must be like for those who worked nearby. At lunchtime they could walk down into the magnificent bridge's shadow, its awesome structure looming overhead, and contemplate over their Vegemite the great construction crossing the Harbour, with the Opera House a gleam on the opposite bank, the tremendous Bay on either hand, and the great city overlooking all. This Friday the park was spackled with lucky folks relaxing in the beauty. On the bridge itself, firefighters repelled down the wall of the northwest tower, a cool punctuation to the awesome scene.

We noted the giant clown-faced gate of Luna Park, familiar from the model Nick Stathopoulos had sculpted. The gaping mouth of the entrance led only to renovation – the park was temporarily closed. At Milsons Point we boarded a ferry, hoping for a leisurely chug across the Harbour, and a chance to groove on its beauties – but we were thwarted: the boat jetted across in less time than it took Rosy to get change.

We wandered the Circular Quay, a marvelously busy locus of ferries, trains, buses, and bare-bellied teenaged girls. Plaques beneath our feet commemorated excellences I fear I did not note. We rested on a metal bench, and I defied international etiquette – and my dear wife's insistence that I would be disturbing my sleep cycle – by stretching out and taking a nap.

A stroll followed through downtown Sydney. If every Australian town must have an American counterpart, then Sydney's is Manhattan. It bustled – it was noisy – a teenaged girl shamelessly sported a top reading *I F**KED YOUR BOYFRIEND*. When we paused at Dynock's Book Store to buy a Michael Connelly novel for me to read on the flight (as if!), a sign touted Hollywood madame and celebrity 'ho Heidi Fleiss, autographing there soon. Fleiss may be (im)pure L.A., but the vibe was entirely New York. (Another cultural difference: first-run bestsellers came in softcovers, like American trade paperbacks.) Our last stop was at a duty-free store for a last shopping splurge, buying tees, toys and a large cheap soft suitcase, to tote souvenirs. Reminiscent of the loathsome pitchman who had met our 747 in Melbourne, a recorded salesman blared repulsively in a looped message from a (very) loudspeaker. The salesgirls were so sick of him they kept their radio turned up high.

One last Australian evening – one last small Australian ambition. What, I ask, is the Ultimate in American Prestige? It is to *appear on TV*. That night, Ros and I donned dressy duds we'd not yet worn in Australia – for me, a sports coat, non-jeans slacks, and "hard" shoes. Nothing else would do for a restaurant once featured in *gasp* a *Visa commercial*. **Doyle's at the Quay.**

If not the most famous eatery in Sydney (and it might be), Doyle's certainly boasts the best location. It's right in the Rocks, the spot where, 225 years before, Brits first landed in the land downunder. The restaurant overlooks the Harbour, directly abeam the Opera House. The grandest symbol of Australian culture shone blue and beautiful in the night, spectral, fantastic – once again, magical. We dined simply; the food



Seafood Restaurants

was tasty, but so expensive we shared an entrée and a salad ... and joy, and sadness.

For this was the emotional night of an emotional day. On the morrow we would leave Australia, and end this adventure of a lifetime. We didn't want to leave -- we knew we couldn't stay -- we regretted what we couldn't do, like visit the outback and see Ayers Rock, and who we couldn't see, fans like Scribner and Lindsay. But we would always remember what we had done and whom we had seen. New places, new friends, new skies, new stars ... *the other kinds of men, the other lives.*

The next morning we cabled to the airport, boarded our plane, and were saluted, as we left, by a sea as silvery and beautiful as I, at least, had ever seen.

Oz. man.

GREENER PASTURES

May 3-4, 2003

I remember little about our return flight across the Pacific. I know it got bouncy when we crossed the Equator, and several other times during the 12-hour trip, but I don't recall freaking out as I usually do in turbulence. One time, Rosy got me to watch the wonderful "He Had It Comin'" number from *Chicago*, by way of distraction, and on another occasion I got through the bumpy air by the simple procedure of *delirium*. You can't control the environment, so control yourself ... and go crazy. Thank you, Dr. Beard.

When we disembarked, in Los Angeles, I was not at my best. I strode into the terminal exhausted, disgusted and distraught. We were re-entering the new America of 2003, symbolized by the smiling photos of Bush and Cheney that greeted us on the concourse. After three weeks of light and freedom, America felt downright oppressive, and the customs guy's "Welcome home" earned a bitter and scatological reply. (This though the pooch that sniffed at everyone's luggage was no ravenous Rottweiler, but a tiny, cute canine whose response to smelling something illegal in another passenger's bag was a simple tap with a gentle paw. The contraband so identified? A banana.)

But then we were through customs -- and patiently waiting for us were my cousin and his wife, Roger and Sue King of Rosamond, California. I've known Roger ... well, forever, and consider him my oldest friend. They drove us there, past landmarks that impressed *la belle*: **Sunset Boulevard** -- **Mulholland Drive** -- the giant **HOLLYWOOD** sign -- and, a bit further along, the **Vasquez Rocks**, stone formations familiar from "Arena" on *Star Trek* and a zillion other movies and TV shows. Not Hanging Rock, maybe, but pretty cool.

Rosamond is a tiny little desert community located in the Antelope Valley, northeast of L.A. Once it served as a bedroom for Edwards Air Force Base -- where my grandfather and uncles worked from the time of my birth, in nearby Mojave. All but one of my cousins still live there or nearby. It is one of the few places on this planet that I have always called home.

Inside the Kings' pretty and comfy house we crashed for a couple of loggy hours. When Roger knocked on the door, I thought at first that it was the bellman back in Sydney. Wits recovered, we set out on a meaningful errand to a cemetery in Lancaster -- my grandmother's grave, and my Uncle Bill's, and my Aunt Flo's -- all new since I'd last been to the Antelope Valley. That evening, Roger hosted a party in our honor, and all my cousins but two -- one living in Florida and the other mad at the family for some reason -- came by to laugh at my chubbiness, to meet Rosy, to hear about Australia, and to remind me that however ugly and idiotic America can act sometimes, it is still Home. When I mentioned how lucky my generation was to have the folks who came before it, and my devout and conservative uncle grasped my hand, I knew that I was back where I belonged.

My dreams that night were of a friendly and loving world.

The next morning, Roger drove us back to LAX, and back we flew over the beautiful brown southwest to New Orleans. John Guidry awaited us. At once, we drove across Pontchartrain to recover

Rosy's yorkie Jesse – who, after a moment of confusion, remembered us, and yipped and wriggled for joy. That, as they say, was that.

Our status as DUFF representatives would earn us a Fan Guest of Honorship in Huntsville and we would represent DUFF at two worldcons and even present a Hugo. In time we would be forced to move away from New Orleans, eight months before the city would be destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. And one of us, at least, still dreams about Australia, about the wonderful places and the wonderful people, and the wonderful idea that you can fly literally to the other side of the planet, and thanks to wonderful people, never leave home.

Sounds fantastic, doesn't it? Sounds, in fact, like science fiction.



Notes

Artists who have contributed to this publication ...

Alan White, cover and title page

Steve Stiles, "The IS of OZ"

Frank Kelly Freas, "Running to Australia"

Kurt Erichsen (Dr. Shrinkwrap) and **William Rotsler**, "Flight Fright"

Anonymous (aeroplane) and **Unknown Australian** (DUFF button) "The Shortest Day of Our Lives"

Charlie Williams, "No Picnic at Hanging Rock" and "Pride of the Blue Mountains"

Dick Jennsen, "Interim with Ditmar"

Tony Shillitoe (Lynn Fflewelling), **Anonymous** (Batman), **Randy Cleary** (GHLIII with quokka), and

Julia Scott (robot with balloon), "The Far Side of the Earth"

Anonymous (platypus and bilby), **Craig Hilton**, "The Easter Bilby" and "Footy"

Unknown Australian #2 (cowboy), "Through Time & Space with Bello Camillo"

Nick Stathopoulos, "Greener Pastures"

L'envoi

This is the end of **The Antipodal Route**, but this is *not* the end of our DUFF reportage! Rosy has her perspective to write, and we have photos and photos and *more* photos to share. Another zine is forthcoming! Watch for announcements on my website, www.challzine.net.

SUPPORT DUFF! MELBOURNE IN 2010!



VISITED;

some of our many new friends in Australia

Right, Nick Stathapoulos with his portrait of Mr. Squiggles, below, Marilyn Pride and her drawing desk ...



far right, Julian Warner & Lucy Sussex (and cat)

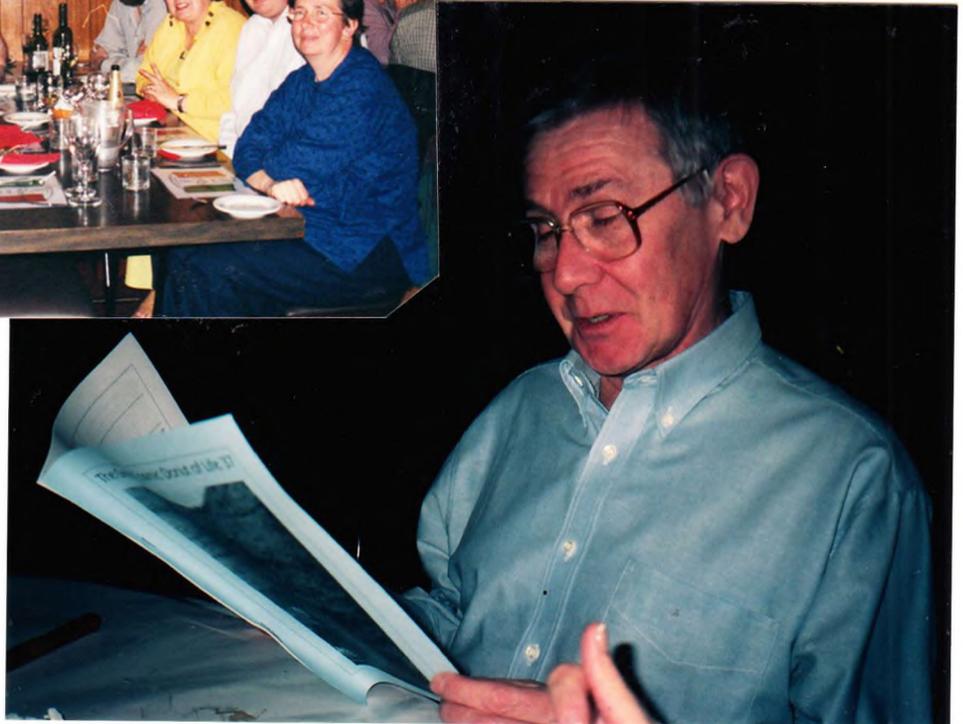


Above, Craig Hilton fondles candies; left, I join Robin Johnson and Bill Wright at the National Maritime Museum; below, Rosy is delighted that the library of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club features four books by her father, Joseph Green





Swancon, the 2003 Australian National SF Convention, featured at least one other American, author Lynn Fleweling (r), shown here at our hurricane party. Below, in Melbourne, we chow down with Craig Hilton, Alan Stewart, Julia Hilton, and Bruce & Elaine Gillespie, and 'way below, at another repast, the great Aussie artist Dick Jenssen (a.k.a. Ditmar) peruses a fanzine.



La belle lends grace to Tidbinbilla, the Sydney Opera House, and the skyline of Sydney itself ...





At a zoo outside of Perth I make contact with an Australian native. True, his conversation consisted solely of “Helloooooo?” ... but so did mine. The ‘roo I met downtown had even less to say.

Ah, Australia ... what a country; what an adventure.



The
Challenger
Tribute

"Do yuhseves a favor, lads ...

Girt yuhsef an

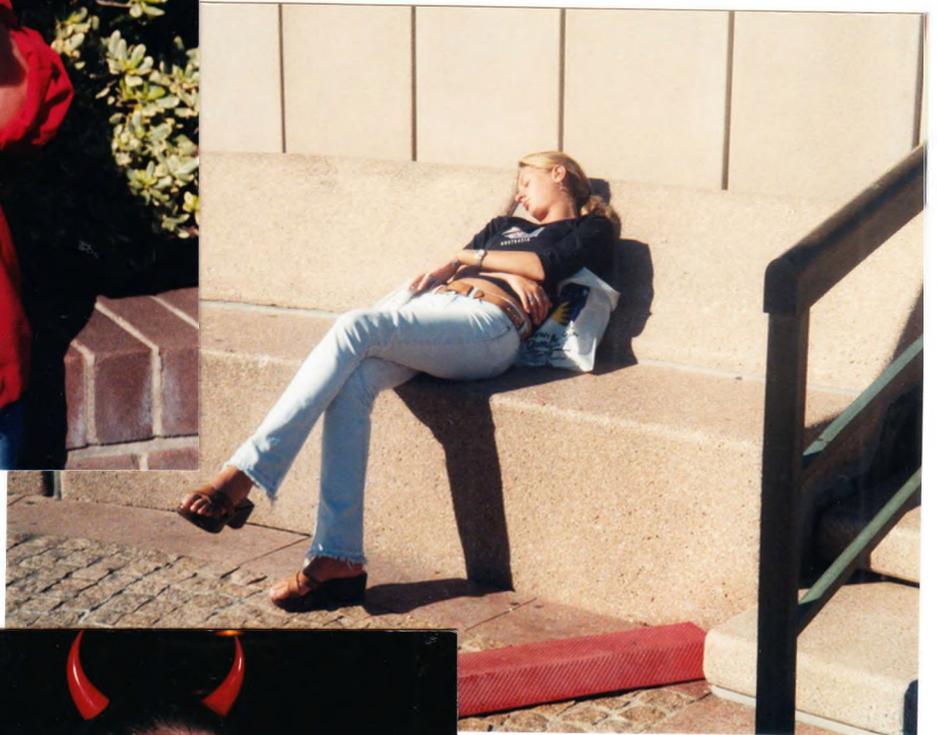
OZZIE GULL



They were everywhere – the prettiest gulls girls in the world. So what if some were born in England or America? Being in Oz brought them all a special magic, and **Challenger** salutes them ... all.



Yes, they were everywhere on our DUFF trip – showing us the sights at Tidbinbilla, asleep on a bench by the Sydney Opera House, acting devilish at Swancon in Perth ... you Aussie boys don't know how good you got it!



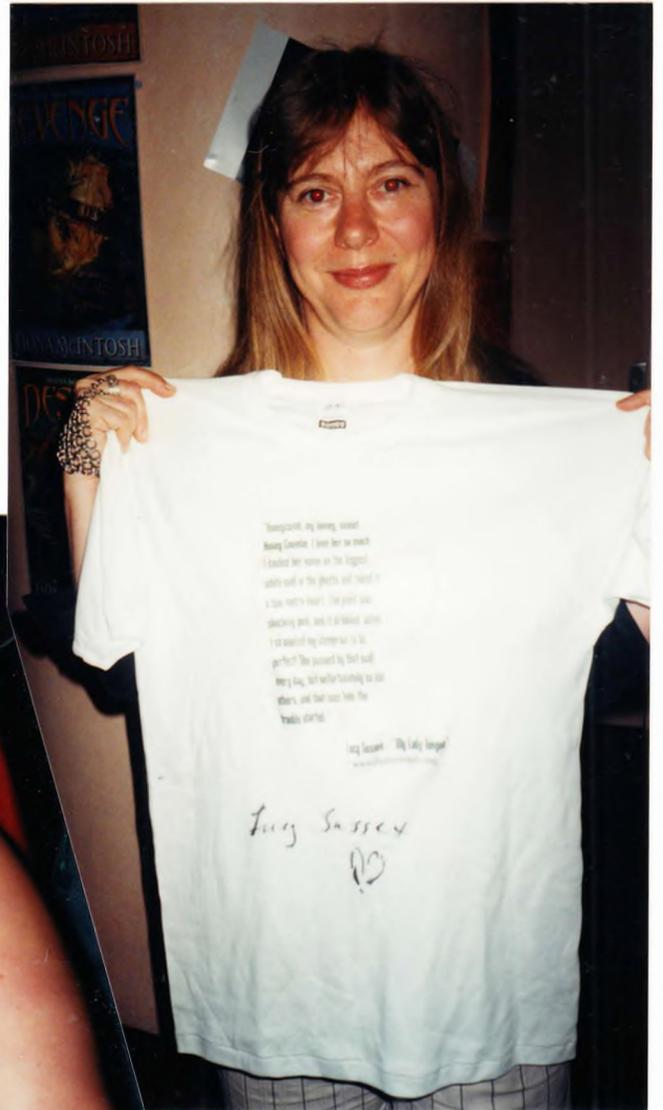
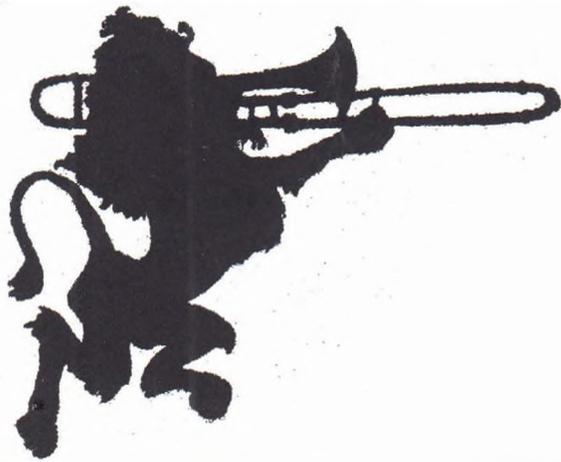


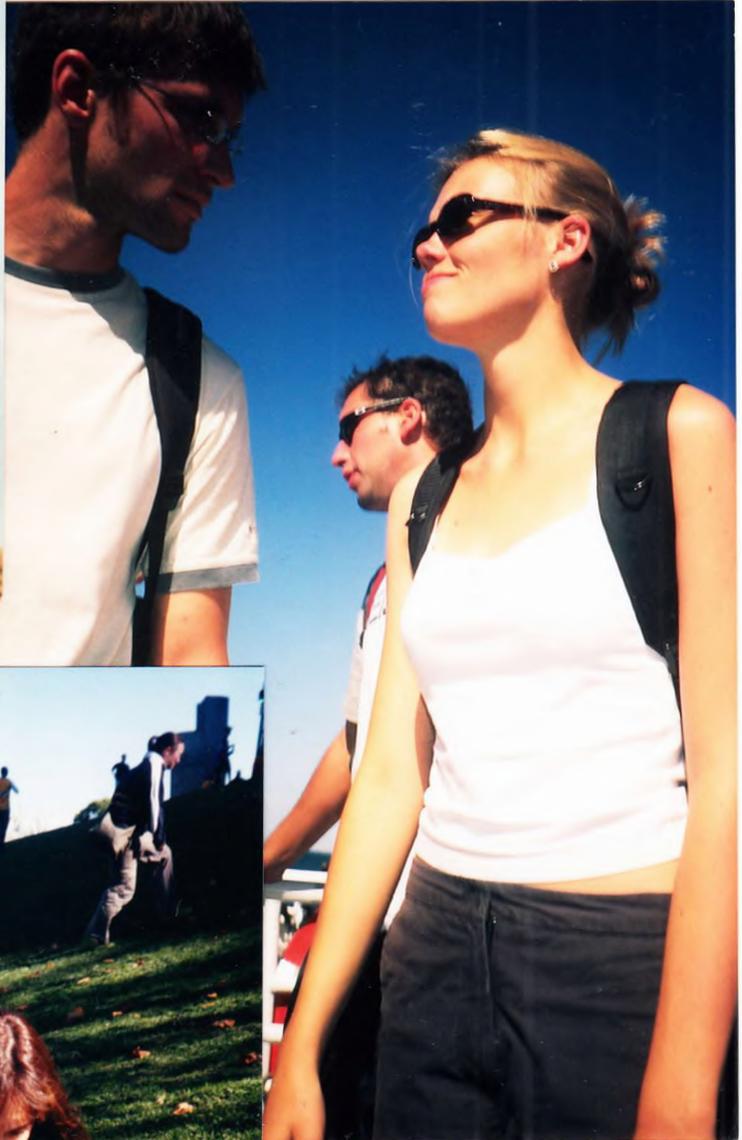
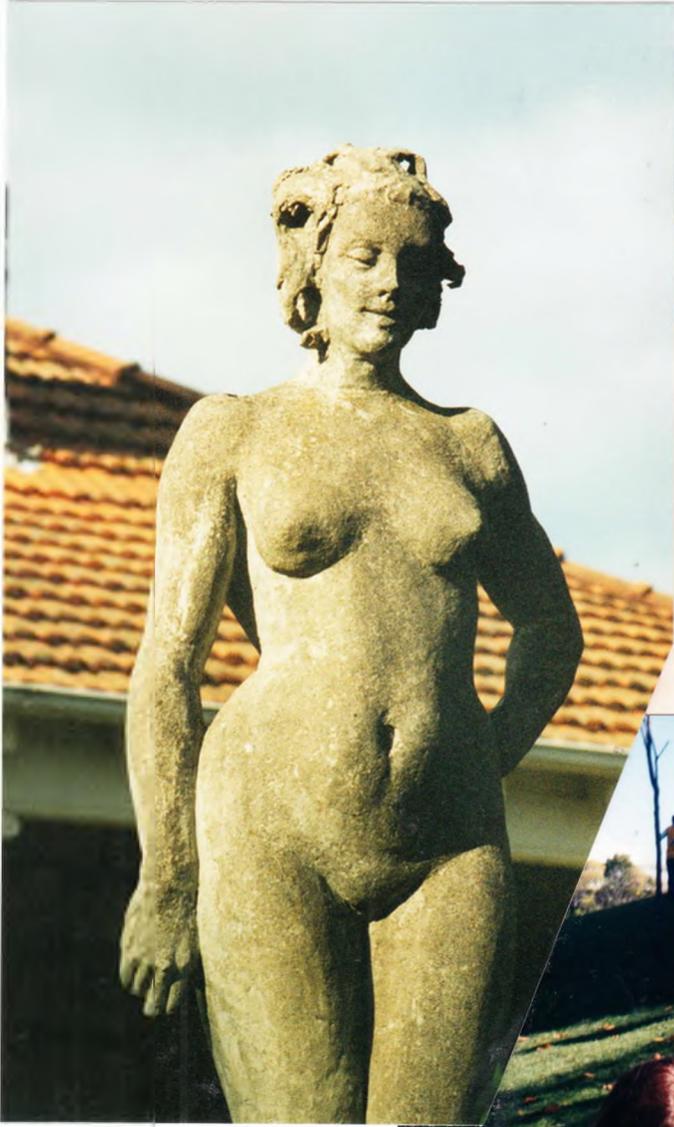
They were at club meetings, and dinners, and standing in line queue at footy games ... friends from fanzines, or visits, or never met at all ...



Be they fans, be they pros,
they make the world
a place we should all want to be.







T'was ever thus, too, as Norman Lindsay could tell you, as this lucky lad on the Rottnest ferry could tell you, as the other fans at the footy game could tell you ...



This small adoration of Ozzie Gulls includes, clockwise: (p.1) Sue the cabbie, Ruth & Rachel Hunter, Marilyn Pride; (p. 2) Emilly McLeay of MSFC, Paula McGrath, Julia Hilton, pretty girl on the Sydney quay; (p. 3) Pat Gibbs at Tidbinbilla, unknown napster at the Sydney Opera House, a devilish lady at Swancon; (p. 4) Lucy Sussex, Coreynn with Craig Stephenson, a remarkable conventioneer; (p. 5) Cathy Cupitt, Sue Batho, Donna Hanson (with Tony Civello), a lady in red; (p. 6) a statue by Norman Lindsay at his Blue Mountains home, a lady on the ferry to Rottnest Island, another after the footy game, and below, me and my favorite girl, at the wishing tree in Sydney, in Oz, in Oz, in Oz.

