

TEDDY & brad w. 2000
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2000

Janice's Adventures in Down-Underland

1999 DUFF Trip Report by
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Proceeds from the sale of this fanzine benefit DUFF

The Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF) is a fannish cultural exchange program that in alternate years sends an Australian science fiction fan to North America and a North American fan to Australia. I was lucky enough to be chosen as the DUFF representative to attend Aussiecon 3, the 1999 world science fiction convention in Melbourne. This is a report of my adventures.

Photos from my trip can be seen at <http://home.pacbell.net/jgelb/>

Acknowledgments

Many Australian fans were wonderful to me during my trip, but I'd especially like to acknowledge the following people:

Melbourne: Stephen Boucher, Perry Middlemiss, Julian Warner

Hobart: Robin Johnson, Cary Lenahan

Adelaide: Damien Warman and Juliette Woods, Yvonne Rousseau

Canberra: Karen Herkes, Kim Huett

Sydney: Ted Scribner

I'd also like to thank **Eve Ackerman**, traveling buddy extraordinaire, for her cheerful companionship and patience with my foibles.

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Dedication

This trip report is dedicated to **Stephen Boucher**, who cajoled me into running for DUFF in the first place, provided support and encouragement before and during my trip both in person and by omnipresent mobile phone, and nagged me to produce this report.

Prologue

I suppose this trip really started at Bucconeer, the 1998 worldcon. Australian fan Stephen Boucher had been after me for a while to run for DUFF and after another lecture at the CFG room party, with added encouragement from Pat and Roger Sims, I finally said I'd run. The election was an interesting experience: while I'd helped out on bids asking fans to vote for a particular venue, it was very different, and much more personally difficult, to ask fans to vote for me. Richard Lynch voluntarily produced a wonderful campaign zine for me (with articles from my friends Eve Ackerman, Mike Glyer, and Arthur Hlavaty). I also sent out a collection of excerpts from my fan writing called *Janthology*. In early May, I found out I'd won.

Local travel agent Lucy Huntzinger, who is not only a fan but also a past DUFF winner, helped with arrangements. I had already planned to go to Australia with fellow fan and college buddy Eve Ackerman even if I hadn't won, so the trip would be a combination of a few weeks of DUFF travel meeting fans and then some sightseeing before worldcon. (Before I ran, I made sure that I could take a month's unpaid leave from work if I won.) Terry Frost, who'd won DUFF the previous year, helped me get in touch with some Australian fans, as did Stephen. On August 1, 1999, I was on my way.

End Prologue

Sunday, August 1 - Tuesday, August 3

The flight didn't start out well, with one 45-minute delay when they discovered deep scratches in the cargo bay doors that had to be burnished out to pass inspection. Then we had another hour delay because by the time the repair was finished, we'd lost our place in the takeoff line.

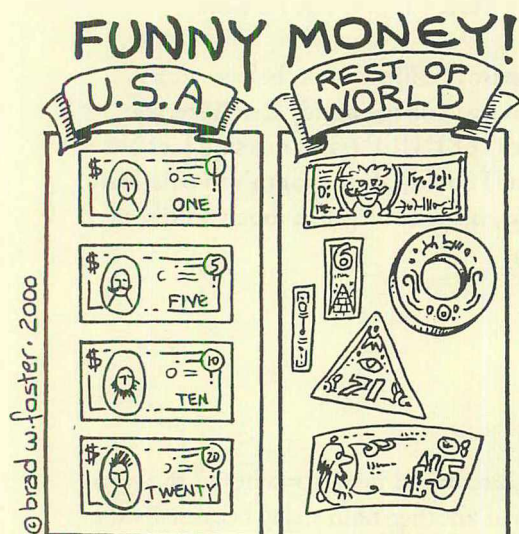
Everyone who said that traveling in business class would make a huge difference in the trip to Australia was right. I used up a good part of the travel delay just exploring the amenities of the seat! Lumbar support, a foot rest, a personal video screen, and low lockers next to my window seat, plus water available throughout the flight, made the trip as comfortable as is possible when you're stuck in a tin can for 14 hours straight. Unfortunately, I couldn't take advantage of the great food in business class: the regular dinner menu had a lobster medallion appetizer. Even the veggie meal, uninspiring in comparison, was helped by the real plates, glassware, and silverware presentation.

When we finally landed in Auckland, I thought that the end was in sight at last. Wrong! We landed and then stopped on the runway. The pilot announced that there was a bomb threat in the international terminal and we weren't allowed to pull any closer to the gate. I felt like I was in some weird Zeno's paradox: I was going to get closer and closer to Australia but never actually get there. After an hour, we were allowed into the terminal. I called Stephen, my host in Melbourne, to tell him about the delay. He said, "You're early!" before I could explain that no, I was still in Auckland.

At last, we reboarded. It wasn't until I was on the plane to Melbourne and started filling out the customs form that I realized that although I knew Stephen's email address and mobile phone number, I didn't know his street address. The customs inspector wasn't too happy about the missing address but finally settled for the mobile phone number. On arrival, I fell into the cab that Stephen had waiting and he filled me in on the latest worldcon gossip during the ride back to his place.

Melbourne

I was actually in better shape than I expected so after dumping my luggage, we went out to do some errands. Walking the streets was disconcerting: things looked so familiar (English-language signs, chain stores like Borders and Subway) that I was even more startled by the unfamiliar things. Some of the differences were familiar to me from the times I've visited the United Kingdom ("chemists" instead of "drugstores") but some were purely Australian ("pokies" video gambling parlours).



Our first stop was to get some cash for me. This was my first sight of Australian money, and it is seriously cool. It has different colors for different denominations, as with nearly every other country but the U.S. It's also nearly impossible to counterfeit thanks to plastic cutouts and microscopic print backgrounds. The smallest bill is for \$5, with coins for \$1 and \$2. (I kept forgetting this throughout the trip and would find myself with nearly \$10 in change on occasion.)

The 24-hour supermarket we went to next produced various surprises, including varieties of dairy products like different percentages of cheeses and types of yogurts, again similar to other countries but not the U.S. I also found amazing flavors of canned ("tinned") tuna, including one with pesto and another with lemongrass! Back at the flat, I took advantage of the fact that Stephen's employer pays for his phone bill and his ISDN line by calling my brother to tell him I'd arrived safely and checking my email.

Aside - You may wonder about my obsession with checking email throughout my trip. Because I was on the Aussiecon committee and the con wasn't until the end of the trip, I had to keep up with committee email.

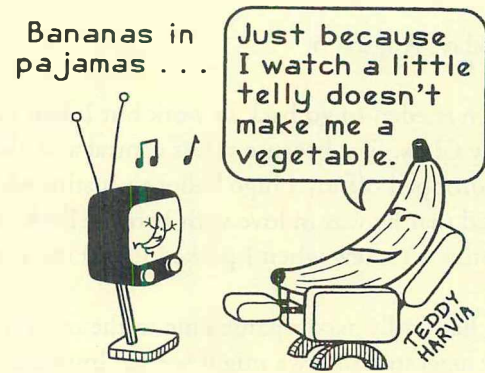
My optimistic anticipation of going out to dinner soon warred with my jet lag. Instead, we ordered from a pizza delivery place. That's when I got my first lesson in Australian *ahem* cuisine: the default pizza at most pizza places comes with ham, even if you don't order it. After dinner, I crashed at 7:30 p.m. local time.

Wednesday, August 4

Stephen doesn't have a driver's license and now, having used Melbourne's public transportation system, I can see how he can get away with that. The tram system in Melbourne is great and very trusting: payment is at the rear door or the seats in the back away from the driver. Although inspectors do board occasionally, I saw only one in the many trips I took. (I was told that some people don't pay but keep a ten-trip ticket in their wallets. When they spot an inspector, they quickly validate it.)

Our first stop was Slow Glass Books, run by Justin Ackroyd. Aussiecon 3 (A3) Finance head Rose Mitchell was also waiting at the bookstore, with a thoughtful and beautiful bouquet of Australian flowers as a welcome. I delivered the things I'd brought for the DUFF auction, which Justin was running. I'd decided that books and fanzines weren't my best contribution, so I had brought an eclectic collection of Americana ranging from cocktail napkins from Cheers in Boston to Star Trek coffee that I'd found at Westercon.

Lunch was at a Malaysian restaurant (one of the few cuisines that you can't find in northern California). They steered me to the mildest vegetarian thing on the menu, described as steamed vegetables in peanut sauce. It was relatively mild, as advertised, but it was certainly the first time I've ever seen banana slices classified as a vegetable.



Next, we went to a site visit at the convention centre, where I got to see the programming rooms. (Nick Price and I did dueling Palm Pilots to exchange our email addresses.) After the tour, Stephen had to meet with the site liaison so chair Perry Middlemiss and a few others went off to find beer. Julian Warner thoughtfully volunteered to show me more of the site before we met them wherever they ended up. This loose plan was made possible by the fact that everyone had a mobile phone (they're endemic in Australia).

Julian and I strolled down the Southbank mall along the Yarra River near the convention centre. After a few false starts, we finally figured out where Perry's party had gone. People spent most of the time at the gathering complaining ("whinging" in the local vernacular) about various problems on the committee. However, we also got some constructive work done in determining pricing for the banquet among some other odds and ends.

Stephen had assured me that we'd be going back to his place before dinner and the Nova Mob science fiction club meeting at Julian's that evening. We left the post-review meeting so late, though, that there was no time. This was a problem as I'd hoped to take pictures at the meeting but had left my camera at his place. We did have time to go back to Justin's store to pick up the flowers and the pullover sweater (which I miraculously remembered to call a jumper) that I'd left. I then had the brilliant inspiration of buying a disposable camera.

We had a quick bite at a Pancake Parlour, where I found out that "cream" means "whipped cream" and that kitschy theme restaurants are not exclusively American. And that an "entrée" is a small-sized portion (which makes a lot more sense than the way Americans use that term). Then, we took a taxi to the Nova Mob meeting at Julian's, where I got to meet his partner, writer Lucy Sussex. It was at that point that I discovered that I'd left the disposable camera on the counter in the store when trying to fit the flower bouquet in a plastic bag for safer transport. *sigh*

Current DUFF administrator Terry Frost soon showed up, bearing welcome wads of cash for walking-around money and a thoughtful giftbook called *Australian Gnomes*. The theme for the meeting was a talk about Greg Benford's work by past DUFF winner and present Hugo nominee Alan Stewart, and Charlie Taylor, whose name I knew from his work in the A3 programming area. Julian had earlier noted approvingly that unlike most Americans, I hadn't remarked on the "cuteness" of Australian accents. However, I must admit that hearing some questionable Benford poetry read in Charlie's heavy Australian accent was somewhat disconcerting. I really enjoyed the after-meeting conversation with various people I'd corresponded with about my trip but had never met before, like Irwin Hirsh and Ian Mond.

By 10 p.m., I started fading and Stephen begged a ride from Ian and his friend Kristen. I still wasn't used to the opposite traffic flow, so I had some heart-stopping moments before we arrived back at Stephen's.

Thursday, August 5

Stephen needed to go back to work but Julian had very kindly offered to show me around town. We met at Slow Glass, first because it was central and also so I could get a refund from the disposable camera place. I also dropped off my Hugo ballot to Justin, who was collecting them. A conversation the previous day had revealed that he was in love with Fenway Park, so I gave him a pin from the 1999 baseball All Star game held in Boston – I knew when I packed it that the pin would come in handy as a gift for someone!

Julian heroically accompanied me to the central tourism bureau where I needed to get information on tours. I then suggested that we might see the Immigration Museum, and was glad when Julian said he'd never been there. It wasn't until we were inside that I recalled that he works at the Immigration Bureau. I was afraid that it might be a busman's holiday for him but luckily he was interested in the subject and had some personal experiences to relate to enhance the exhibits. I was shocked at the blatant prejudice of immigration policies in force through the 1960s. One of the methods for keeping immigration white was a language test that could be given in any language, so Chinese people could be asked questions in Swedish, for example.



The museum is located in the old Melbourne customs house, a beautiful building with intricate interior wrought iron. For some odd reason, the other exhibit there was of Byzantine and post-Byzantine liturgical objects. I thought the silver plate and ceremonial raiment were especially interesting. Also interesting were the signs every so often reminding people that although the museum was aware that the icons on display had religious significance, people should please not touch or kiss them.

After lunching at the Southbank food court, we took the tram to go down to Acland Street near St Kilda Beach. We strolled past its famous pastry shops before walking down the beach esplanade and passing an evidently notorious con hotel called the Diplomat. By that time, I had to return to Stephen's to meet him before going off to dinner at Perry's. Perry and his wife are excellent cooks and dinner was impressive. So was their five-month-old son William (their daughter made herself pretty scarce). As with Julian's the night before, the house appeared small from the outside front but went straight back and was very spacious. Also present was Michael Jordan, A3's Hugo ceremony coordinator. I'd corresponded with him earlier and sent artifacts from my own stint in the job.

About halfway through dinner, I mentioned a planned excursion to an Aussie Rules football game on Saturday. I asked Perry, a football enthusiast, which team I should root for. A stunned silence at the table ensued, at which point I was informed in no uncertain terms never to say that I was "rooting" for a team, a term that's obscene locally. The substitute word, it turns out, is "barrack." (Perry said it was a source of vast amusement during A3 bidding when an American would say to them "I'm rooting for you.")

I also mentioned my needing to get in touch with A3 travel agent Wayne Cummins to pick up my hotel vouchers. [Using a local travel agent had been a mixed blessing: Although he was very accommodating and friendly, he didn't always book us on what we'd asked for. I canceled a few reservations he'd made when I found places through the web that were both cheaper and more in line with our interests/requirements.] Wayne's office is far away from public transportation and Stephen's place, but close to Michael's place. And Michael's place is on the way to the airport. He kindly volunteered to serve as a drop-point for the vouchers, with me taking a taxi to his place on the way to the airport for my flight to Hobart on Sunday, and he taking me the rest of the way.

Friday, August 6

Aside - Because it affects understanding of this text, I should point out that I observe some Jewish dietary laws (meaning I don't eat meat or shellfish out), and strict Sabbath (Shabbat) laws. (On the Sabbath, which is from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday, I can't use electricity in any form, drive a car, or spend money, among other things.) Also, my father died after I won DUFF but before the trip. At least every Shabbat, I wanted to get to religious services so I could say a memorial prayer for him.

My main agenda for the day was getting in food for Shabbat. I took the tram to the Jewish area of town to a kosher bakery that had also been recommended by New York fan Zev Sero, who grew up in Melbourne. While waiting for my number to be called in the very crowded line, a little boy in front of me said something amusing. I murmured how cute he was to his mother, who was standing with her back to me. She turned around and said, "You sound American." Then she looked closer and said that I looked familiar. She was American as well, although she now lives in Melbourne. We played Jewish geography for a couple of minutes and discovered that we had gone to the same synagogue in Los Angeles!

I had assumed that I'd be able to get packaged cold cuts at a nearby kosher market, but they're only sold in butcher shops. Someone pointed me to one, and I was surprised at how inexpensive the prices were when compared to kosher meat prices in the U.S. There were very few signs in the display and I had to ask about some unfamiliar offerings, including some sort of sliced veal breast delicacy. The butcher spotted my American accent and was very patient. After overbuying, I walked towards the tram stop and stopped at "Kosher Express." No matter where I am in the world, I always find it thrilling to be able to walk into a burger place and say "a burger and fries, please"!

Back at Stephen's, I stashed my treasures in the fridge and took care of my other housekeeping chore: laundry. Thanks to winter-time sunset, it was then time for synagogue. I had originally planned to go to a large Orthodox synagogue, but it was a little further away than I wanted to walk at night. The closer synagogue was Progressive. This meant that the service featured three or four things that were *ahem* wildly divergent from the standard Conservative and Orthodox practice I'm used to, including the use of an organ.

I was surprised to be stopped by a guard, who grilled me about my place of origin and home synagogue before letting me in. (I'd heard heavy security was common at synagogues outside the U.S. but had never experienced it myself.) I did get to say the memorial prayer for my dad that I'd gone for, and I refrained from throwing my shoe at the rabbi when he delivered a very offensive-to-me sermon, so all ended well.

I walked back at Stephen's, and we dined on some tasty chicken schnitzel and he had his first taste of potato *kugel*. In after-dinner conversation, he discovered I'd never seen "South Park" (my neighborhood skews toward "senior citizens likely to be offended by the Comedy Channel"). So, I got a quick two-episode introduction ("Metha-Streisand" and "Pink Eye"). He thought it was amusing that I'd had to come to Australia to see the show.

Julian had dropped off the mobile phone I'd be using and Stephen showed me some of its tricks. I'd pointed out when I agreed to run Program Ops that it might not be the best idea to have a department head who was running around the country the month directly before the convention. My splitting the rental cost of a mobile phone with them was the agreed-upon solution. So many people already have their own mobile phones that the committee had decided to use them instead of beepers, and rented them for departments or key people who wouldn't have access to one.

Right beforehand, some of the committee were getting a little antsy about paying for even half of my phone, even though I was getting it mainly so they could keep in touch. Ironically, it turned out that the rental place hadn't been too happy about the number of phones being rented for only the short period of time of the con, but when they found out about my phone rental for five weeks, they dropped the price on the rest of them.

Just as I was toddling off to bed, a teasing voice from the living room called out "You're missing Forbidden PLA-net." Back to the living room, where I blearily watched through the introduction of the comely daughter to the crew, and we looked up the supporting cast to find the name I was missing (Jack Kelly).

Saturday, August 7

This was my first day to really sleep in. Our only plan for the day was to attend an Australian Rules football game at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). We were originally supposed to be in a luxury box through Stephen's work. Unfortunately his boss, who's usually in Sydney, was in town, so we had to buy reserved seats instead. Unlike in the U.S., these merely get you into a certain section but there are no seat assignments.

I'd watched the Fox Sports hour roundup of the Australian Football League (AFL) several times before I left. However, the announcers understandably assume that you already know the game, so I still had some questions. Stephen was incredibly patient in answering them. (The 9-or-so-year-old boy next to me looked at me a couple of times like I was mentally retarded, though.)

Some of the more unusual features of the day:

- I finally found out something that had puzzled me from watching AFL on Fox: why nothing appeared any different during the game when whistles blew. It turns out that when a player makes a legal catch, or "mark," of a ball, the player has the choice of continuing to run or of stopping and then taking a running start up to where he caught it and then kicking it. The whistle just indicates whether it's a legal mark.
- At the end of the first and third quarter, there is a break during which the two teams merely move off to one side or another on the field to plan strategy. (I felt sorry for the two poor guys for each team who stand around near them with advertising banners.) There are no other huddles during the game.
- Halftime consisted of a half-field Little League-equivalent game, featuring teams affiliated with the teams playing the real game. The result was the opposite of the senior game being played, in which the favored team was losing big-time. During the third quarter, Stephen suggested that they might be better off substituting the Little League team :->
- The other halftime feature was a blow-up football about 10 feet long with the name of the ball manufacturer and the M of McDonalds. At first I assumed that it was merely being inflated so it could float around the stadium or something. But no, it just sat there on the ground with two men on either side making sure that it didn't keel over. Not exactly a halftime extravaganza!
- After the game (but not until they rope off the Sacred Cricket Pitch), people are allowed onto the field.

The morning dawned cold and windy but the weather report that said it would be 17° (about 64° F) and sunny. Luckily, I didn't believe them and brought a jumper in addition to my coat. The morning cold and wind never let up and by the end of the game, even Stephen had put his jacket on, a real concession for him.

Aside – During the game, I made a comment about the paltry amount of information on the MCG scoreboard compared to most U.S. stadium scoreboards. Three weeks later, I got a call on my mobile phone from Stephen: “Your wish for a new MCG scoreboard should come true now. They had to evacuate the stadium last night because the scoreboard caught on fire!”

Earlier in the day, I’d mentioned to Stephen that I was sorry that I hadn’t had more time at the Nova Mob meeting to talk to Bruce Gillespie, a long-time Australian fan and the A3 Fan Guest of Honor. This casual remark revealed the power of being a DUFF delegate: Stephen quickly called Julian and arranged a dinner at an Indian place close to Bruce and Elaine’s neighborhood. The timing didn’t quite work out for us to go straight there after the game, a shame as we were about halfway there already. It did mean that we could go back to Stephen’s for my camera, and could also skip the long lines at the MCG toilets.

We soon began to regret this latter decision. At Stephen’s, I went into the bathroom first and the water level and shredded paper there looked a little odd to me so I called him in and he agreed. The 24-hour plumber on-call from his apartment agent hadn’t gotten back to us before the taxi came to take us to the restaurant. However, we left anyway as the number we’d provided was Stephen’s mobile. When we arrived at the restaurant, we made a beeline for the toilets in the back.

Once again, I was eating in an ethnic restaurant despite a gentle reminder that I don’t really like spicy food, and “mild” to everyone else isn’t usually “mild” to me. I made do with an *extra* order of plain nan bread. The conversation more than compensated for the food, and ranged from Wordstar to tales of Australian conventions past, including the one at the Acland Street hotel that Julian had showed me on Thursday. Evidently, fanzines were sent out to sea in plastic soda bottles! Unfortunately, my camera woes continued: although I’d remembered to bring my camera, it wouldn’t advance the film.

Julian and Lucy kindly drove us home and stayed for some coffee. I eventually excused myself to finish packing for Hobart. The suitcase in which I’d brought the auction stuff was staying at Stephen’s, to be used to lug back whatever goodies I bought during the trip. After Julian and Lucy left, I searched the net for data about my phone, which hadn’t come with instructions. I finally found the PDF user’s guide and also copied down the notes needed to program a tune for the ring. Mobile phones in Australia are everywhere so if you don’t have a customized ring, you’re likely to be looking at your phone a lot to see if a call is for you. (Stephen’s played the theme from Monty Python’s Flying Circus.) I finally decided on “Walk of Life.” I like it a lot and figured I’d better pick something that I wouldn’t get sick of by the end of the trip :->

Sunday, August 8

I made a final free phone call to my brother and a final fast check of email before closing my luggage. The taxi came in response to my call within minutes, and I frantically grabbed everything and struggled out into the worst weather since I’d come to Melbourne, cold and raining. Wayne had indeed dropped off my hotel and tour vouchers at Michael’s. I felt terrible about dragging Michael out to take me to the airport but he was very gracious about it.

At the airport, I went down to the Vodafone concession to get an official printed user’s guide for the mobile phone. (To no avail: I never did get the hang of using the phone, and was always pressing the On button twice by accident and putting incoming calls on hold *sigh*) As I was walking through the terminal, I glanced up and saw a familiar sight: an NFL game on the monitors of an airport on a Sunday afternoon. It took me half a minute or so to register how bizarre that was: turned out there was a special American football exhibition game being played in Sydney!

Hobart

Waiting at baggage claim were my Hobart host, long-time fan Robin Johnson, and fellow Hobart fan Cary Lenahan. Luckily for me, Cary is a doctoral student in the area of tourist, and his local knowledge proved invaluable. We drove to some overview points to give me an idea of the layout around Hobart, including Kangaroo Point, one of the batteries around the harbor intended to look out for invaders such as the Russians (who never arrived...). Robin, his wife Alicia, and I went out to a very late lunch at a yuppie-like cafe in their neighborhood of Battery Point. The food was good but the service was spectacularly slow (it took me a long time to get used to this feature of Australian restaurants).

Back at the house, I discussed my plans for the rest of my time in Tasmania. When Robin and I originally had talked, I had been planning to spend a few days in Hobart and then do a tour up to Cradle Mountain, a national park reserve. That tour would land me in Devonport in the north, where I'd catch the overnight ferry back to Melbourne. During my day with Julian, though, he'd highly recommended that I go across the country to Strahan, a historic fishing village on the west coast at the edge of unspoiled rain forest. Robin and Cary enthusiastically agreed, so we looked at some maps and timetables.

Monday, August 9

I knew I wanted to see Port Arthur, the convict island where "incorrigibles" were sent, which is in driving distance of Hobart. Cary managed to shake loose of his other obligations to take me around, and Robin decided to spend the day with us as well. After a stop at the Hobart Visitors Centre to book my bus travel, river tour, and accommodations in Strahan, we were off. On the road, I spotted a sign that said "Roadside slasher ahead" – I thought it sounded like a warning about a crazed gunman, but Robin and Cary told me that it was just an innocuous machine that trims side hedges near the road.

There were several sights to see on the way to Port Arthur, including:

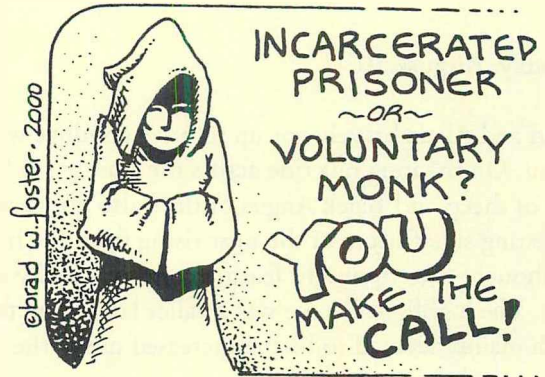
- The blowhole – a rock pool at the end of a low cave from the sea that produces some interesting waves
- Doo Town – a small village in which all the houses have pun names using the word "doo" (e.g., Just Doo It, Doo Drop Inn, Didgeri-Doo, etc.)
- Tasman Arch – a spectacular natural arch carved out of massive rock by wave pressure
- The tessellated pavement – a fascinating formation near the sea formed by hot lava meeting cold sea water, resulting in geometric patterns in the rock

In addition to the horrific history of Port Arthur as a convict prison, a sad chapter was added in 1994 when a lunatic out to kill foreigners opened fire and killed 35 people. Cary, as part of his doctoral work, had interviewed people in the area, so he was very familiar with the site.

The main display area (called an "interpretive centre" at Australian museums) was relatively new and very nicely done. You're given a playing card when you enter, and you then match this card to a real convict's history. I was pleased when it turned out that after two tries, my guy escaped. Cary was astounded that his guy survived a total of 732 lashes. The displays include many aspects of convict life, including the life of the overseers, the many trades practiced by the convicts (most important being shipbuilding), and so on.

As with other sites with a shameful past, there had been an attempt after Port Arthur closed to erase its history and turn it into a vacation resort with a different name. This didn't work very well, and eventually the site was taken over by a heritage foundation.

One of the first things we saw was the very depressing "model prison," a disciplinary area with small stone cells on either side of a central aisle, where prisoners were kept for 23 hours a day in complete silence. When they did get to leave for an hour of exercise a day or for church, they were kept in silence and made to wear hoods so they could not see fellow prisoners. Even in church they were put in separate closets so they couldn't see or speak to anyone.



The penitentiary is in ruins, but some of the houses of the staff are still in good shape, as is part of the insane asylum. (Small wonder they had to provide for the insane after the "model prison" experience!) The day turned wet and windy while we were there, which only added to the overall atmosphere. The tour ends with a small memorial to the people killed in the recent massacre.

After this sobering experience, we went to Tasmanian Devil Park, a small wildlife rescue spot. I hadn't been enthusiastic about this stop since I knew I'd be seeing wildlife at Healesville Sanctuary near Melbourne. However, Cary said that there were animals that were only found in Tasmania so we stopped. The park was a bit of a dud: the Tasmanian devils were all asleep and there was no sign of the Bennett's wallabies in their area. We did get to walk among plenty of kangaroos and wallabies, with no fences to separate us from them (or our shoes from their, uh, poop). My favorite animal was an isolated fenced-in young wombat, my first sight of one, who was surprisingly cute and lively and ate some grass I gingerly fed him through the fence.

My next attempt to be adventurous was taking a gallah bird in the aviary from Cary's arm at his urging. The bird wasn't too happy about this exchange and I got some long scratches on my left hand. Once I recovered, I spotted a very interesting bird called a tawny frogmouth: an owl-shaped bird that with its mouth shut has nearly impenetrable camouflage as a lump on a tree. We also saw a fascinating short film about the thylacine or Tasmanian tiger, a cool marsupial with a dog-shaped head and a skinny striped rear with a typical marsupial tail and an amazing jaw spread. These are presumed extinct, with the last one expiring in 1933, but there have been credible but unconfirmed sightings since then.

During our travel from Port Arthur back to Hobart, we battled the intermittent signal on my mobile phone to organize a dinner in downtown Hobart for that evening. Cary took pity on my freezing ears and stopped off in a small historic town called Richmond. Amazingly, I was able to find a hand-spun, hand-woven wool cap that matched my somewhat non-standard purple stadium coat.

The one reason I was sorry about going down to Strahan was that I wouldn't be seeing more of Hobart, including the oldest synagogue in Australia. However, I did see a little bit (and tried out my new woolly cap in the cold) on the walk down from Robin's house through Salamanca Place, a snazzy restaurant, shop, and gallery area. We had dinner with local author Tansy Rayner Roberts and her partner Andrew Finch at a casual fish restaurant. The presentation of the food was rather odd: the grilled fish was served on top of a mixed mound of french fries, potato salad, and pasta salad. The ice cream for dessert was great. (There are no worries about low-fat, cholesterol-free food in Australia, which made dairy desserts a special treat).

Tuesday, August 10

Robin and Alicia bravely got up to wave goodbye when the taxi came at 6:45 a.m. to take me to the bus station. On the long bus ride across the country to Strahan, I saw vistas of pine-covered hills, and grazing areas of sheep and Black Angus cattle. I also got to see a lot of small Tasmanian towns on the way. An interesting side feature of the mist rising from the hills around several bends was lots of rainbows! Robin had thought the trip might feature commentary by the driver, but instead we got to listen to Tasmanian talk radio. The highlight for me was a caller lamenting the loss of authentic Australian life, the warning signs of which mainly seemed to be the increased use of the American "zee" for "zed" and "zero" for "naught."

Aside – While we're on the subject of language differences, many of the ones that I noticed I remembered from hearing them in Great Britain: "jumper" for "sweater," "shout" for "treat someone." Others, though, I'd either forgotten or they were purely Australian; for example, "chook" for "chicken," "ta" for "thank you," "arvo" for "afternoon," and, of course, the comforting "no worries." (One specific to Melbourne came up when I bought Stephen some towels as a hospitality gift: "Manchester" for household goods like sheets, towels, etc.) The trickiest one for me (besides "root" mentioned above) was "serviette" for "napkin," mainly because its equivalent, "napkin," means something different: "baby diaper." Luckily for me, most waiters are used to tourists getting this wrong :->

Once we passed Lake Burbury, the scenery changed dramatically, going from pine-covered hills to rock- and ore-laden hills and gorges. We had a scary winding ascent into Queenstown, the next-to-last stop before Strahan. (It was made even scarier by the fact that the luggage was not in the hold of the bus itself but in a trailer hitched behind.) The tourist agent in Hobart had said the bus would get into Strahan at 2:45 p.m., and had tried to book me on a Franklin River tour at 4 p.m. but with no luck. Good thing, as it turned out, because rather than arriving in Strahan at 2:45, the bus left Queenstown at 2:45 to get to Strahan. It does double-duty as a schoolbus to take high school kids home to Strahan, where there is only a primary school.

So there I was at a bus station/cafe at 12:45 p.m. with two hours to kill. I used up some of that time getting lunch, but was at a loss about what else to do until the driver told me that the downtown area was only a ten-minute walk away. There wasn't much to see but luckily there was Internet access at the library. I spent a blissful hour or so checking my email on the really slow machines until it was time to go back to the bus station. The teenagers were very impressed by my laptop when I took it out to write some notes.

Strahan

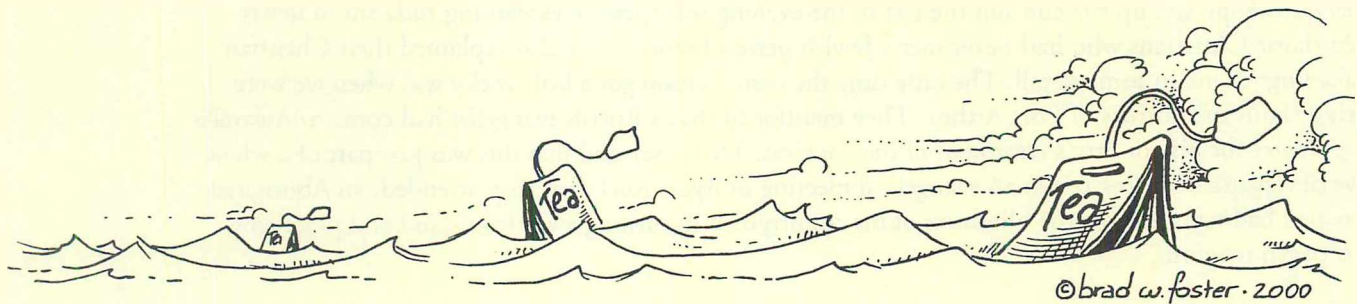
The tourist area of Strahan is pretty much a one-street downtown. Strahan Village, where I was staying, is a combination of a main hotel and cottages. My cottage was fine, but I was puzzled when the television and table lamp worked but the overhead lights and heater didn't. When I asked about this at the main desk, they said that the long white tag attached to my large wooden key tag had to be placed in a slot inside the front door to turn on those appliances. This power-saving arrangement was standard in several places I stayed.

Robin and Cary had told me to make sure to check out the Strahan Visitors Centre, which had an impressive historical exhibit. It was closed for electrical work. Cary had mentioned trying to see a participatory play about a ship stolen by a group of convicts who had built it. The play was off for the winter. The hotel restaurant was also closed. (See a pattern here?) I spent the blowy, rainy afternoon unpacking and working on this trip report. I was especially glad that I'd found the Internet connection at the Queenstown library when I discovered that my room didn't contain a telephone.

Dinner was pretty much of a disaster: the first place I tried had the worst pizza I've ever had in my life, featuring two different kinds of overloaded gooey cheese and hardly any tomato at all. There were too many people at the counter to let the waitress know so I just abandoned it. Down the street was what was essentially the only restaurant on the main drag that was open for dinner, and luckily they had a decent vegetarian pasta dish. (I passed the pizza place to let them know why they'd found an abandoned pizza and despite my not asking, they gave me a full refund.) I spent the rest of the evening watching Australian comedy/dramas on one of the three available television channels.

Wednesday, August 11

The luxurious electrically heated mattress pad unfortunately did not make up for the incredibly soft mattress. My weak sacroiliac joint was killing me when I got out of bed – not a good omen for a day to be spent sitting on a boat. However, when I left the cabin I found the most gorgeous day since I'd arrived in Australia: sunny, no breeze, relatively warm (around 62° F). The cruise is on a 3,000-horsepower ship that takes you down the Gordon River, which flows into Strahan's Macquarie Harbor. The water in the harbour and on the river flows through a field of a tannin-laden plant called buttongrass, so it's a dark brown color. This results in great reflections off the water but also means that the wave crests are eerily tea-colored. The ship stops at a dock that leads back into unspoiled rain forest: towards the end of the path is a huon pine tree that is over 2,000 years old!



The boat trip back went sideways to a place called Hell's Gates, evidently the narrowest entrance to a harbor in the world (only 70 metres wide). The wind by then was up to 30 knots so the waves in this entrance were pretty impressive. There were also several sea breaks and, on the other side, some salmon and other fish farms. (Fishing is very big in Tasmania; they even have a museum of trout fishing.)

Back at Strahan, I contemplated having to eat dinner at the same grill place as the previous night and just couldn't face it. Robin had given me a brochure for a restored Federal-style guesthouse with a gourmet restaurant a little way up the hill from the main part of town. I decided to treat myself so I went over to hotel reception (I hate not having a phone in the room) and made a reservation, plus asked them to order a taxi. Then it was time for travelers housekeeping; namely, laundry.

A little while after I put my load in, a fortyish couple whom I'd noticed being very lovey-dovey on the boat came in. We got to talking and it turned out they were on their honeymoon. We mutually lamented about all the restaurants and other things that were closed, and I mentioned my planned splurge at Ormiston House. After a whispered consultation, they asked if I'd mind if they joined me for dinner. Given that the alternative was eating alone with a book, I readily agreed, and changed the reservation. (They also had a car, which saved me from having to take a taxi.)

The guesthouse was beautifully restored, and the owner invited us into the charming bar for a drink before dinner. Imagine our surprise when we found two grotty looking guys in orange prison garb ensconced there already. A party of American journalists covering the various tourist marvels of Tasmania was staying at the guesthouse. In their honor, the owner had arranged for the play that I'd heard about ("The Ship That Never Was") to be performed there that evening. He was apologetic that the first part of our dinner would be a little raucous because the performance would be going on, but we were pleased at the unexpected bonus.

The play is about the last ship built in the convict settlement at Strahan, which some of the convict builders stole before it was commissioned. It was improvisational, with the two actors using funny props to involve members of the audience to act out the story with cues that they provided. The guys were really good (and I'm a tough critic) and eventually the audience got with it and had a great time.

Once the play was over, we were served the best food I'd had in Australia (including Grand Marnier creme brulée for dessert). Conversation revealed that my dinner companions were recently born-again Christians who'd left their previous occupations (which in the case of the husband was being head vintner for one of the largest wineries in Australia) to go to ministry school in Adelaide, where they'd met. This meant a quick decision on my part: tell them I'm Jewish or not? I decided it would probably liven up the conversation so when the opportunity presented itself, I casually mentioned that in addition to the various cities I'd lived in the U.S., I'd also lived in Israel.

They quickly picked up the cue and the rest of the evening was spent in explaining Judaism to newly enthusiastic Christians who had never met a Jewish person before. They also explained their Christian awakenings to me in some detail. The only time the conversation got a little rocky was when we were talking about the horrors of Port Arthur. They mentioned that a British evangelist had come to Australia to apologize for his country's treatment of the convicts. Then they said that this was just part of a whole wave of repentance going on: at an evangelical meeting in Ayers Rock that they attended, an Aboriginal Christian had repented for the blindness of his countrymen in turning away from God and practicing their pagan religion.

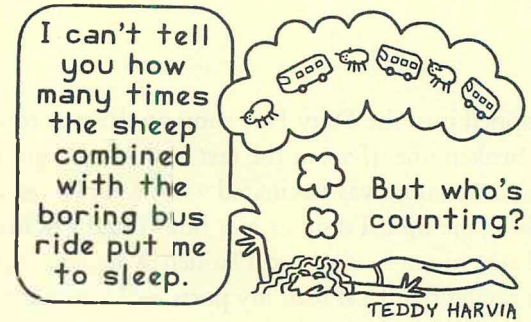
That one really got me: I tried to explain the difficulties I had with the arrogance of someone claiming to repent for people who were perfectly happy in their own faith. It was a little difficult for either side to comprehend the other's point of view, but was not a heated disagreement by any means. The conversation soon turned back toward a discussion of the horrific prison conditions in the past, on which we could all agree. We then went upstairs at the urging of our hosts to see their history gallery: family pictures of the builders of the house in 1899, who were a prominent Strahan family.

Thursday, August 12

During the night, the weather turned incredibly nasty, and at 4:30 a.m. a tremendous storm woke me up. I was sure that the electricity would go out or there'd be flooding. However, by the time I blearily got up and went out for breakfast, the sun was actually peeping through the clouds every once in a while, even though the temperature had dropped about 10° F from the previous day.

I'd traveled from Melbourne to Hobart by plane, but a few people had recommended that I take a large car ferry, The Spirit of Tasmania, back to Melbourne from the northern Tasmania port of Devenport. Unfortunately, the bus from Strahan to Devenport didn't leave until 11:30 a.m., which basically killed the whole day. I spent the morning repacking my suitcase so I could check the monster and only keep my shoulder bag in what I anticipated would be a pretty small cabin.

If you get nauseous on winding roads, I definitely do not recommend taking the bus ride from Strahan to Devenport. Aside from the adventurous hairpin turns, though, I was pretty bored after a while. There are only so many large ferns, pine-covered hills, and sheep you can marvel over. After a while, I couldn't even see outside once the temperature differential between the outside and inside of the bus fogged up the windows. I did get to listen to even more Tasmanian talk radio, though :->



Halfway through the trip, we ended up at Cradle Mountain, my original planned destination after Hobart. I was glad I'd changed my mind about coming here for the whole day as a light wet snow was falling. The bus was 20 minutes early but had to stay on schedule, so instead of continuing on we went into a cafe for coffee. The occupants of another bus were already inside.

When the other bus's driver came in, the cafe's owner lifted down an ornate didgeridoo from over a doorway and handed it to him. (The didgeridoo is an Aboriginal wind instrument made out of a hollowed log, and is one of the oldest musical instruments in the world.) I was surprised when the blond, blue-eyed driver produced eerie but obviously musical sounds. Some of the bus passengers accepted the invitation to try it, but produced mostly rude-sounding noises. The driver took it back and played for a few more minutes, at one point imitating a native kookaburra bird according to my tablemate. Another serendipitous treat!

We finally arrived at the dock, in sight of a very big ship. Three of its decks are just for cars. The wake displaced when we left the dock was truly impressive. The ferry fare includes dinner and breakfast at one of two buffet restaurants, a gift shop, a combination disco/bar, a game room for teenagers, and a game room for adults featuring "pokies." I'd seen signs advertising these gambling machines all over Melbourne, and figured this was the ideal opportunity to try them. What a ripoff! They aren't even poker machines, as the name might imply. They're just video slot machines featuring playing card art that doesn't mean anything. I found them excruciatingly boring. (Of course, I feel that way about regular slot machines too.)

The dinner buffet was fairly ordinary. I did have a moment of unwelcome excitement when I took a bite of what I thought was an onion ring, only to discover that it was fried calamari (which I'm forbidden to eat). By about an hour after dinner I had exhausted the entertainment opportunities on board, so I got my laptop from my room and parked near a power outlet in one of the two lounges. I figured that at best it would be a conversation starter and at worst I could bring this report up to date. I eventually fled when the piano bar lounge singer started singing Billy Joel's "Piano Man." So much for exotic travel by ferry.

Friday, August 13

Rather than being lulled to sleep by the gently tossing waves as I'd hoped, I had a very restless night due to badly joined metal fittings rattling when the ship tossed. I finally resorted to earplugs, but as usual I confounded all my friends who say "the foam ones don't hurt" by being constantly aware of the feel of them in my ears.

Once we docked, I waited in the cold for my checked luggage. I grabbed one of the last cabs and decided to see how far I could get trying an Australian accent on the driver. It wasn't until about 20 minutes had passed, when we were on our way to the Melbourne airport, that he asked what part of Adelaide (my destination) I was from. His surprise when I confessed I was American made me smugly proud of myself.

Adelaide

I popped into the Duty Free shop on the way to my gate and quickly bought a small Canon camera to replace my broken one. (I spent the rest of the trip regretting that I didn't get one with a zoom feature.) My chatty seat companion was fascinated when I explained my trip. He wondered how I was going to spot the person picking me up if I'd never met him. I said I figured someone would be trying to spot a lost-looking American and sure enough, my host, Damien Warman, and I had no trouble hooking up. He'd written me before my trip saying that he'd read my posts on Usenet for a while and would be glad to be my host if I wanted to come to Adelaide.

My Guide to International Jewish Travel had said that kosher food was available at the local Orthodox synagogue (which I wouldn't be attending because no accommodation was available in walking distance). Sure enough, they had various frozen and tinned items, including a kosher version of an Australian staple, meat pies. Damien drove me over to the motel where I was staying for Shabbat (unlike his house, it was in walking distance of a synagogue). Unfortunately, we discovered that there were no facilities in my room to heat up the frozen food I'd just bought. Damien had to go to a downtown food hall anyway so I went with him and picked up an eclectic mix of dairy stuff for dinner that night and lunch the next day.

Aside – Even the sleaziest place I stayed had a refrigerator and electric kettle for coffee in the room, and most provided milk in the fridge as well. At this small motel in Adelaide, I was handed a pint of milk along with my room key. I can't imagine what Australians think when they stay in hotels in the U.S.

The Progressive synagogue in Adelaide was much smaller than the one in Melbourne, but had the advantage of no organ. (They did have a small choir, though...) I'd let them know in advance that I was coming so the guard let me through. After services, I told the president that I'd gone to college with their first rabbi, whom he remembered quite well. After dinner in my motel room, I walked to a cafe downtown where some Adelaide fans were meeting. The group consisted of Damien and his partner, Juliette Woods; John Foyster (with whom I'd corresponded before the trip) and Yvonne Rousseau; and Roman Orszanski.

Saturday, August 14

On my walk to synagogue in the morning, I was astounded to see parrots all along the power lines and in the trees! They're so common that the Aussie fans were amused that I was so enthralled by them. After morning services, I met Roman and Yvonne at the Botanic Gardens, conveniently located in walking distance of my motel. A strong shower came through during the walk, but luckily that was it for rain for the day. The Botanic Gardens were beautiful, featuring native plants in the main walks, a tropical palm house, and a restored Victorian greenhouse with plants from Madagascar. There was a nifty fountain with thin glass panels closely linked in an upright geometric pattern that changed the play of daylight and water depending on the angle from which you viewed it.

Tired from all the walking, we went to a kiosk and I had my first Australian Devonshire tea (tea with scones, clotted cream, and jam). Hovering magpies, ducks, and swans got the leftovers. Roman had to leave but Yvonne and I went on to the Art Gallery of South Australia. It had an exhibit about a female Impressionist artist of the 1920s, Clarice Benner, that Yvonne particularly wanted to see. I found it fascinating too. There was also one of the most unusual exhibits I've ever seen in an art museum: a famous Australian painting, "Reflections in Shadow," and various imitations of it made by art students and other artists over the years.

Once again, I was impressed by a trusting honor system of payment: for special exhibits you were supposed to place your money in a slot and then take a pin to wear to prove to guards that you'd paid. But as no one was around near the money deposit box, there was nothing to prevent you from taking a pin and wearing it.

Yvonne took me briefly around the main collection to show me some famous Australian paintings so I'd be able to tell others that I'd seen them. By that time, we were both pretty tuckered out so I went back to my room for a nap before an evening party at Damien and Juliette's. This pasta potluck provided lots of good food and conversation, ranging from Monty Python sketches to religious tolerance in Australia.

Sunday, August 15

Damien picked me up at my motel early in the morning and we deposited my luggage at his place. Then we walked to the train station to meet John and Yvonne for a trip to the Maritime Museum in Port Adelaide. On the way, I noticed that there were what looked like two small rust stains on the grey jeans I was wearing, which I swore hadn't been there when I'd put them on. When I went to get out money for the train ticket, I discovered the source: one of the scars from the bird attack on my hand had opened up and was bleeding.

I only mention this because of an encounter with a chemist when we got to Port Adelaide. When I asked where I could find some bandages for the cut, I mentioned that I wanted a small package because I already had some in my luggage. The chemist replied that she thought there might be some loose ones in the back, and returned with a plaster and a tube of antibiotic ointment, which she let me apply without charge. This is definitely not something that would happen in most pharmacies in the U.S.

On the way to the museum, we stopped at a large enclosed flea market that John said had decent bookstalls. (I love traveling with fans :->) I scored a 1926 etiquette book, and a British paperback of *A Case of Conscience*. I also looked at some dusty Pez dispensers for \$A3 each, unsure whether I should buy them in case they were worth a fortune and I'd have an "Antiques Roadshow" experience, or whether I'd just end up carting worthless plastic figurines around for the rest of my trip. I finally decided against them.

We had a large and delicious lunch at an unprepossessing but excellent Greek fish and chips place that John recalled from a previous trip. Then, it was off to the museum. Upstairs is an old-time maritime museum collection with the original hand-lettered display cards. We had a lot of fun looking at the old-fashioned ship instruments. There's also a modern display of the sea-faring history of the region, with a restored ketch in the center. (When I read a placard about a dockers strike in the early 1900s, I came across the word "larrikin." I knew this as the name of a fanzine produced at one time by Perry and Irwin, but I'd always thought it was a made-up word. John said that it meant someone who is irreverent, a sort of benign hoodlum.) Downstairs is a section on the experiences of the convicts, and later the emigrants, on ships to Australia.

After a scrumptious tea, we walked back to a lighthouse that was included in our museum admission price. On the way, we found a Coca Cola Museum that was closing, and I bought a couple of souvenirs for Coke memorabilia fan Moshe Feder. The lighthouse was a very narrow climb but provided some great views of the harbor. We made one more pass through the flea market before heading back to Adelaide.

I finally got to try the kosher meat pie for dinner, but spent most of the rest of the evening in frustration. First, my laptop dial-in work desktop emulation program wouldn't recognize an Australian dialtone. Then, I tried the AOLConnect program that Sun gives us to check our email remotely. That method was foiled when I asked for the access number for Adelaide and it replied "OK to call the United States to look up this number?" Finally, I managed to connect through my CompuServe account, which seemed trouble-free until my computer wouldn't turn off at the end of the session. I finally resorted to pulling out the laptop's battery.

Monday, August 16

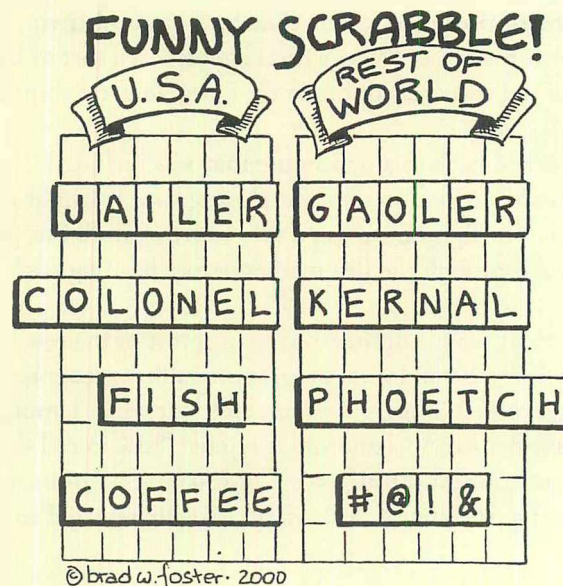
This was errand day: we started out by dropping off some dry cleaning, turning in my disposable camera for processing, and mailing letters at the Post Office. We met Yvonne at the Migration Museum, which was more depressing than the one in Melbourne. It's at the former site of a poorhouse/orphanage, and I found the displays about the wretched conditions of the previous inhabitants wrenching. By amazing coincidence, the museum had a special exhibit for the month on the Jewish history of south Australia, and my college friend – who had been the first rabbi of the Progressive synagogue – was mentioned and pictured.

The part about migration itself was similar to what I'd seen in the Melbourne museum, with more emphasis on the journey and less on past government policies. An exhibit of historic newspaper clippings in a different building revealed those policies in an elliptic way, though. There was a story about the millionth emigrant to Australia, and a placard underneath added that the government had fixed it ahead of time so they'd be sure to honor a young, white English couple.

When we passed a Woolworths on the way to lunch, I asked to stop, thinking it might be a prime spot to pick up touristy stuff for DUFF auctions back in the States. Boy, was I right! T-shirts were on sale for A\$2.50, so I loaded up on those and on other memorabilia. Our next stop was Tandanya, an Aboriginal art gallery. Unfortunately, a special exhibit on winners of a regional art competition was on display so there was only one type of painting shown, although a standing display showed the other typical regional styles. I loaded up on bookmarks as presents for co-workers, plus some larger gifts, keeping Damien's offer to take things to Melbourne for me in mind.

Yvonne left to go home but Damien is a graduate student at the university and we stopped there for a couple of hours. There is a weekly games night at his house and the restaurant where they meet for dinner was near the university. Luckily I wasn't hungry, because there wasn't a lot on the menu at their Chinese hangout that I could eat. I was glad for the chance to show off the photos I'd retrieved.

Back at the house, I was introduced to a cut-throat and challenging local form of Scrabble play called "Take 2," which uses two sets of tiles and requires the player to create an individual crossword-type layout. My American spelling of gaoler (jailer) caused some amusement but I was eventually granted special dispensation. I proved to be hopelessly inept at the game and after a while, I just sat back and marveled at the experts.



Canberra

Tuesday, August 17

Bright and early, I flew off to Canberra, where once again I was able to spot my local host easily. This time it was fanzine fan Kim Huett, who was wearing an outrageous zebra hat from the Sydney Taronga Zoo. We dropped off my luggage at his place (a newly inhabited condo) and I let him know which local attractions I was interested in. (He'd thoughtfully sent a packet of local information to Stephen's before my arrival.)

We started with the national art gallery, which had a special Monet exhibit. There was also a display of costumes from the Ballet Russe, including a costume worn by Nijinsky and some from 1920 for a ballet called "Song of the Nightingale" by Henri Matisse. Viewing was interrupted by a mobile phone call from New York from fan Ben Yalow, answering some email questions I'd sent him the day before! (In the next hour, I would receive calls from Julian about office supplies and from David Evans about Registration...)

Then we went to the crown jewel of Canberra, the new Parliament House. It makes stunning use of local timber and the entry hall has colored marble pillars giving an impression of a eucalyptus forest. The lower and upper houses of Parliament also use color well – one is in shades of green for the color of new trees, and the other shades of pink for older ones. At the Portrait Gallery of past prime ministers, one stood out by virtue of its subject wearing an ascot, an open-necked shirt, and casual pants, in contrast to the power suits in the surrounding portraits. It was explained by the dates of service: 1968 - 1971 :-> Kim provided color commentary on the foibles of many of the prime ministers pictured, which was a special treat.

Kim's overly optimistic view of our schedule meant that I was a little late for a fannish gathering at a local suburban bookstore arranged by Karen Herkes. The local fans had thoughtfully arranged a spread of Anzac biscuits and crackers with vegemite, and were politely interested in my photographs. I was surprised and delighted when they gave me a beautiful silver necklace with a bush hat charm. Unfortunately, Karen had an unexpected memorial service to attend so a planned post-meeting dinner expedition wasn't taking place.

The mobile phone came in handy as bookstore proprietor Gayle Lovett kindly drove me back toward Kim's. He'd already eaten so I ate at a small shopping center in walking distance of his place and then walked back. Kim kindly let me use his account to quickly look at my email before I retreated to a rather cool bedroom. (His new condo didn't have heat there yet and Canberra was the coldest city I'd yet to visit, at -4 C!)

Wednesday, August 18

The down comforter that Kim provided was a great help in keeping warm, but I made a very quick dash in and out of the bathroom! Being up much before Kim, I used his Internet account again, this time to catch up with all of my email. This took, according to his ISP record, 1:42 hours! Our plan for the day was a charter bus tour of Canberra tourist spots, which Kim had agreed to do with me. On the way to the bus, my parrot-spotting was augmented by wild flocks of cockatoos!

The first stop was the official Canberra Visitors Centre, with a video on the history of Canberra that was long on marketing but short on facts. (It reminded me of the short promotional film that opens *The Full Monty*.) The next stop was the new Parliament House, which we'd already seen, but the official tour, needless to say, did not include the scandals Kim had mentioned the day before. I did, however, learn some things about the Australian political system (for example, voting is compulsory) and some more facts about the construction of the building.

A stop at the Art Gallery, which we'd also seen the day before, luckily offered the option of heading across a pedestrian bridge to the High Court. We fell in with a friendly docent and had a chat comparing U.S. and Australian court and political systems before we got back on the bus. Then it was on to new sights, including the excellent War Memorial Museum, with several rooms devoted to the Gallipoli campaign.

The Canberra fans had rescheduled dinner for this evening but Kim had work to do so he stayed home. The group – consisting of Karen, Lawry Bredhauer, Carol Bott, and Andrew Wynberg – picked me up. At the restaurant, I experienced a cross-cultural blip when my cream of tomato soup arrived and was strong, spicy, and thick with a dollop of cream rather than the mostly cream concoction I was expecting. I also was surprised when the group started collecting for a tip. I'd read in many guidebooks that one does not tip in restaurants in Australia and I'd been struggling to overcome my tendency to tip ever since I'd arrived. The explanation that tipping is only for superior service and friendliness by waitstaff made me feel even guiltier.

Sydney

Thursday, August 19

After a final use of Kim's Internet account, I flew off to Sydney. This was the first airport at which I was completely on my own. I decided to get a 5-day unlimited public transportation pass, including a round-trip on the Airport Express bus. It dropped me about two blocks from my hotel. I really missed the personalized attention shown to me as a DUFF delegate previously! I was relieved to shed my winter coat for the first time outdoors, thanks to the abnormally but welcome warm weather (about 72° F).

The Park Regis, as advertised, was inexpensive and convenient to Sydney's Great Synagogue, but also a dive. The room was exceedingly small, with a fridge but no real table to eat on, barely any room to walk between the beds or negotiate the bathroom, and the traffic noise was very loud. Needless to say, there was no data port. First on the agenda was the coin laundry, of which I was in desperate need. My frustration at the time this required was eased by the fact that the laundry room was on the 45th floor of the hotel and had a spectacular view. A young man also doing his laundry pointed out the sights.

I did some shopping and checked my email at a 24-hour Kinko's before meeting a small group of fans for a weekly dinner outing that Gerald Smith had told me about. It ended up being a really small group of Gerald and his wife Womble, me, and another fan named Blair. We went to an Italian place in a relatively new shopping complex. My dinner companions were very interested in my impressions of Aussie Rules football, Blair having watched the special American football exhibition the week before.

Halfway back to my hotel, I suddenly realized that I no longer had my mobile phone! I frantically returned to the restaurant and the Kinko's (no luck). I was about to call the number from a pay phone and see who answered until I remembered that I'd tried on some clothes at a department store. I ran back and got there five minutes before closing and the saleslady found the phone in a drawer. Then she said, reading a note attached by rubber band, "I guess your friend Stephen won't have to pick this up tomorrow."

I immediately dialed Stephen, who told me that he'd phoned to let me know he was going to be in town for the weekend for business and had been surprised to have a saleslady from David Jones answer! He also snickered at my description of the Park Regis, as he'd told me previously that it was a dive. Then he told me that the Marriott where he'd be staying was across Hyde Park from the Park Regis, and also in walking distance of the synagogue. Despite being way more than my traveling companion Eve Ackerman and I had talked about spending, it sounded really tempting.

Friday, August 20

A sleepless night listening to traffic noise and the 24-hour pub next door made me even more determined to make a case to Eve for us to switch hotels. She arrived early in the morning, in great shape considering the lengthy flight. One look at the room and a use of the shower meant that I didn't have to do much convincing to have her agree to a move to the Marriott. (I did remind her that her husband was likely to snicker almost as much as Stephen, given that Howard is a Marriott Marquis club member who is usually disdainful of our preference for small atmospheric hotels.)

Checkout was complicated by the fact that we'd used a voucher from the travel agent. Finally, though, we caught a taxi for the short ride to the Marriott. After having stayed in spare bedrooms and inexpensive motels, I must shamefacedly admit that I sighed with contentment at the luxurious accommodations and deferential staff. Eve was in good shape, so we took advantage of our transportation passes and caught the on/off Sydney Explorer bus. It played commentary about its stops and gave us an overview of the city layout. I realized how much I'd acclimated when I started explaining some Aussie customs and foods to Eve as we went around.

Aside – Some of the cultural differences I described to Eve were: light switches where On is down and Off is up (the opposite of the setup in the U.S.), power points (outlets) with on/off switches due to the increased power of the electrical feed, half-flush/full-flush toilet buttons, and cigarette machines everywhere.

We got off at the Circular Quay harbor area and walked around, eating at a small cafe and doing some window-shopping. (There are definite differences between going around town with a female rather than a male friend :->) Then we went back to the hotel area for some food shopping for Shabbat, including (finally) the flavored tuna I'd seen in Melbourne. Once Eve crashed, I ate a quick dinner at an Italian place around the corner before getting ready for my local contact to pick me up for the Sydney Futurians club meeting.

My host, Ted Scribner, had been in close email touch with me and recommended that we walk to the University of Technology, given that the wonderful weather had held through the evening. He described his discovery of fandom, his trip to Swancon in Perth that year, and his disappointment that Sydney fandom had declined from its earlier heyday and could not support an annual local convention. Our walk also led us by an actual Burger King, as opposed to the Hungry Jack signs I'd become used to seeing.

Aside – According to Stephen, there was a local burger chain named "Burger King" when the multinational arrived so they used the name "Hungry Jack" but with the same BK logo. I was therefore surprised when I saw the actual Burger King name. Stephen was as well; we never did figure it out. While we're on fast food facts, McDonalds was just rolling out a "McOz" burger when I was there, featuring a burger accouterment that Australians demanded: beetroot! The traditional burger in Australia evidently also features a fried egg...

I'd known that Baltimore fan Michael Walsh planned to attend the meeting, and that fellow Washington-area fan Barry Newton and his family were coming as well. However, the locals were surprised to see more than the one American (me) they were expecting. About ten minutes into the meeting, the American fans were equally surprised when Americans Mark and Evelyn Leeper and Jan Howard Finder arrived. (I was especially surprised because I'd traded itineraries with Evelyn before our trips and they were supposed to be in Alice Springs! They had left early because of extreme cold at their campsite and less to see than they had expected.) The Leepers had bumped into Jan at dinner nearby and he'd told them about the meeting so they had decided to come along.

The local fans were very nice, and one presented me with an egg-shaped container of powdered mix to make the national Australian dessert: pavlova. The first item for Futurians meetings is a round-table. This same fan handed out a disjointed 10-page document proposing a Sydney in 2005 worldcon bid. Given that I'd just heard on my walk about the lack of enough coherence in Sydney fandom to host a regional convention, I was surprised to hear about a worldcon bid. How many of the other Futurians supported it wasn't clear.

The rest of the meeting agenda every month is an announced topic of discussion, which this month was "Displaced people in science fiction." Much of the rest of the meeting was spent either proposing stories or novels, or trying to narrow the broad category into a more manageable one. By the end of the meeting, there was a sizable list. Our end of the table's contribution was often books from the 1950s, with Mike and Evelyn naming not only titles but also publisher, original price, and cover artist!

After the meeting, I was touched and surprised when Ted gave me a book on Australian birds with beautiful paintings of each. I chatted for a bit after the meeting and showed off my pictures, and then Mike and the Leepers and I walked in the direction of the Marriott. We dropped off the Leepers and then Mike phoned Stephen from the Marriott lobby to meet us at the bar. We sat around smoffing and examining the Sydney bid proposal. It took a lot of willpower to remember that worldcon was over two weeks away.

Saturday, August 21

After breakfast, we walked to the Great Synagogue through the very pleasant Hyde Park, stopping to examine a fairly large bird with a rounded sharp beak that was new to both of us. At the synagogue, we were subjected to the most intense security yet, including a metal detector wand. The synagogue is stunning, the closest to a cathedral of any synagogue I've ever seen. It has a blue ceiling with silver stars, gold-leaf columns, and an upstairs choir loft directly opposite the women's section. (We really wanted to come back later in the week to take photos, which is forbidden on Shabbat, but we'd be gone before the next weekly tour and they don't allow visitors in the sanctuary at other times.)

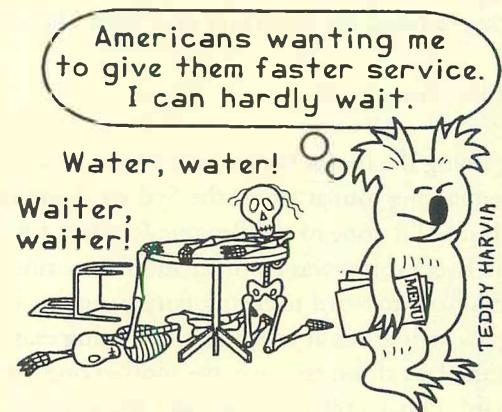
The service was a little different than the usual Orthodox service: the 14-member male choir that burst forth into little set segments took some getting used to. There were also large bench seats facing the congregation on either side of the raised service platform. In them sat the president and other officials of the congregation (who were wearing top hats!), and everyone who came up for an honor shook their hands before returning to his seat. I'd never seen this arrangement before, although Zev told me later that it's common in the U.K. Also, perhaps because of a twin bar mitzvah, 16 people were called up to the Torah (the scroll from which the weekly reading is chanted) instead of the usual 7.

After services we strolled through a small but interesting exhibit of artifacts from the synagogue's history. Back at the hotel, we lunched on the supermarket fare we'd bought the day before. The tuna with lemon and cracked pepper was fine but the big hit for me was tiny flavored yogurts. Eve was pleasantly surprised to discover that the supermarket tiramisu had real liquor in it.

Despite our post-lunch stupor, we forced ourselves onto the Explorer bus and got off at the Botanic Gardens. I wasn't too enthusiastic about this as I'd been to a similar site in Adelaide, but Eve really wanted to go. In the end, I was glad we did. The gardens had a different emphasis than the Adelaide ones, concentrating more on historic plants and trees. We were puzzled at one point by large triangular bundles hanging from the trees until we spotted a sign explaining that they were flying foxes, a local nuisance. As we were examining some palms nearby, I felt a shadow and looked up to see one of the foxes flying overhead! There was also an extensive cactus garden. A book in the souvenir shop even provided the name of the odd bird we'd seen in Hyde Park, which turned out to be a type of ibis.

The edge of the gardens let on to another of our (free) destinations: the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It had an exhibit of two early Japanese photographers from the 20s/30s. Most of the museum was fairly uninteresting but the Asian porcelain exhibit was very nice. Another stop was the Museum of Sydney, built on the site of the first British Government House in Australia. There was a great exhibit on Art Deco buildings in Australia, which turned out mostly to be in Melbourne. We then walked down to Circular Quay to catch a public bus back to the hotel.

Stephen had said he'd call after sunset and we made dinner plans with him and Mike to go to a harbourside restaurant called Sails. Eve had local specialties of barramundi fish and a sticky date pudding for dessert. Our different cultural expectations of restaurant service came up near the end of dinner – I was disappointed that we hadn't gotten water refills and thought the waiter was taking a long time to bring the bill after we'd said we were done. Stephen explained that this magic phrase doesn't automatically mean you want the bill. He also countered that he hated being besieged by waiters in the U.S. and that the waiter would come when we indicated we were ready to leave. Finally, the bill came and so did a taxi to take us back to the hotel, where weary Eve fell into bed.



Sunday, August 22

The largest Jewish neighborhood in Sydney is near "world-famous Bondi Beach." We went there by another on/off bus, the Bondi/Bay Explorer. We had an unexpected stop when a Japanese tourist in a rented minivan decided that his turn signal gave him instant permission to change lanes right into the front side of our bus. He furiously tried to make a case with our driver that it was our fault, but as the bus was in the straight-ahead lane and had been stopped for a red light, that didn't work. Given that we were parked waiting for the police for about 15 minutes, we were glad that it was in a colorful neighborhood: King's Cross, the 24-hour, anything-goes area of Sydney. We had fun reading the signs (mainly featuring "Nude Girls" and "XXX") before the bus got moving again.

The canned commentary on the bus informed us of the nature of the neighborhoods through which we passed and the sea tragedies at various coves and outcroppings. Finally, we arrived at Bondi Beach. We had read about a Sunday flea market/crafts fair and found it in the parking lot of a local school. Although there were some typical old clothes/tacky jewelry stands, the average offerings were a bit more upscale than American craft fairs, with stands featuring some elegant fountain pens, well-made Australian-themed hair barrettes, and beautiful silver-work business card and cigarette cases.

My friend Moshe Yudkowsky from Chicago was staying in Bondi Beach, so we picked him up at his hotel so he could join us for lunch at a kosher meat restaurant. I had a list taken from my good old international guidebook, but the first two places we tried were closed. We had trouble finding the third, so when we found ourselves in front of a Jewish private club, out of desperation we asked the doorman. He told us that the restaurant was across the street from the local police station, which helped us decipher the directional signs and we finally found it. It was a decent Israeli grill place, where I at last got my first taste of Australian lamb. It wasn't great but I hoped to do better in Melbourne, where we'd be staying in the midst of the largest Jewish population in Australia.

Back on the Explorer bus, we agreed that we were glad we hadn't chosen to stay in Bondi for part of our Sydney stay, which we had been considering at one point. We got off downtown at the Queen Victoria Buildings, a restored edifice that offers a variety of upscale shops. We both were looking for one of the more noticeable Australian souvenirs: Coogi sweaters, which are a colorful blend of fabric techniques. The Coogi shop we'd gone to the QVB to find was pricey and overwhelming. A smaller shop (Carina, for those who might want to go there) offered a nice selection at much more reasonable prices. Eve scored a sweater there and I got a vest as a present for my brother. However, the sweater colors were a little too bright for me and Eve decreed that the black and grey ones I favored were too monotonous.

Monday, August 23

After doing the inevitable laundry in the morning, we got on the faithful Explorer bus and went to one of our two remaining tourist stops: the Sydney Aquarium. This was payback time for Eve: she wasn't too interested in it but as I'd gone to the Botanic Gardens on Saturday, it was a tradeoff. She ended up enjoying it, as did I. The Reef exhibit was colorful and fascinating, especially a tube that you walk through with fish overhead. We'd looked forward to seeing fairy penguins but when we got to their exhibit it was empty, with signs on the glass saying that it was penguin mating season and they might not be in view. As we walked through the semicircular exhibit to leave, we spotted one lone penguin who stood with its back to onlookers in a corner. Eve said, "That's the one who isn't getting any." The outside seal pool was much more active than the penguin enclave had been.

In the nearby Harbourside shopping complex, we found Gavala, an Aboriginal arts store run and owned by native people, a minimal requirement of mine to buy Aboriginal goods. Eve was going to wait until we were at Uluru (Ayers Rock) for this type of shopping but as long as we were there we looked around. We each found some interesting gifts for others and things for ourselves as well. Downstairs in the food court Eve had her first Aussie pie at a chain called Shakespeare's Pies: vegetarian curry for her, tuna mornay for me.

I'd wanted at least one ferry trip on the harbour and now was our chance. We went around from the Aquarium to an artsy area called The Rocks, and then caught a bus to the Sydney Jewish Museum. We had been somewhat surprised that a Jewish museum was mentioned in all the tour guides and on most of the tourist maps we'd seen. The exhibits were certainly nicely presented, but we were disappointed to find that they had a much more extensive section on the Holocaust than on Sydney or Australian Jewish history.

While I was doing research for the trip, I'd checked the schedule of the Sydney Opera House. They were doing "The Magic Flute" (in English!) during our stay in Sydney. Thanks to the Internet, we bought tickets in advance – the best seats we could get. As we were getting dressed, our feet complained about wearing real shoes after days in boots and Reeboks. That's when we decided to avoid walking as much as possible and just eat at the restaurant in the Opera House. We took a taxi and picked up our tickets, and then found to our dismay that we had to brave the harbour winds and cobblestones to go around the building on the outside to get to the restaurant. The food was mediocre and we regretted our decision not to go to a better restaurant in the area since we'd had to walk anyway.

The opera production itself lived up to every expectation. The performers' voices were uniformly excellent, as was the orchestra, and the acoustics were perfect. The only flaw in the production was a weak-chinned and even weaker acting talent in the male lead but even his voice was wonderful. The whole performance was stunning. We also had fun people-watching in the lobby during the interval. The dress standard ranged from tourists who'd pulled jeans from their backpacks to people dressed very formally.

Ayers Rock

Tuesday, August 24

We left the paradise of the Sydney Marriott and after a tension-filled wait at the street-corner airport shuttle stop, we finally made it to the airport for our flight to Ayers Rock. Looking out the window of the plane, I could understand why Ayers Rock became a religious site, and a must-visit tourist site. For miles and miles and miles (or, rather, kilometres and kilometres and kilometres), there's nothing but bush scrub. Then, all of a sudden, there's a giant red rock! On arrival at the tiny Ayers Rock airport, who should we bump into but Moshe, waiting for his flight back to Sydney.

Ayers Rock resort was privately held for a long time but is now leased to the local Aboriginal people from the government. What used to be private hotels are now part of a larger resort complex, with each hotel offering a different level of service and amenities. We finally found the right resort bus and got off with a crowd of people at the Outback Pioneer, a rustic hotel that was the lowest level private-bathroom accommodation at the resort (at A\$238 a night!). I was a little worried when the hotel reservations clerk vanished mysteriously into a back room, but she soon returned with the assistant manager. He cheerfully told us that we were being upgraded to the next highest level resort hotel for the same rate. (I suspect this was because we had a voucher from a travel agent, one of the few benefits we got from the whole agent debacle.)

The lobby and restaurant of the new hotel were a vast improvement over the rustic look, but the room itself was so utilitarian that we shuddered to imagine what the next step down would have been. Wayne had made reservations for a sunrise tour with a regular tour company, even though we'd specifically asked to take the "Liru Walk" tour run by an Aboriginal-owned company. It is a walk through the outskirts of the Rock with a local native guide and an interpreter. There were no spots left for the sunrise portion of that tour, but we arranged to join them at breakfast and afterward for the walk. This meant we were paying for part of our original tour that we wouldn't be using but we decided it would probably be worth it.

We barely made our 2:30 p.m. sunset tour. The bus first drove out to the Olgas, a nearby very large rock formation. I managed to get about halfway up and rested at a small pond, waving Eve on. The formation was really interesting, but I was especially fascinated by the springing up of vegetation wherever there was a little bit of rain runoff – a real ecological spectacle. Back on the bus, we stopped at a viewing area to take photos, and then rode (to the accompaniment of mood-destroying rock music) to the area where we'd be watching the Rock at sunset.

I hadn't realized that in addition to being famous for its mere existence, Ayers Rock is also well known for its color changes at sunrise and sunset. The bus driver told us not to waste film taking continuous photos, but to wait and take shots every five minutes or so in order to reflect the changes more dramatically. And dramatic is the word: you could swear that something must be casting a shadow, but the gradual changes from red to bluish purple are purely due to the rock striations. Even the presence of about five other busloads worth of people at the viewing area couldn't take away from the grandeur. We decided to make an early night of it as our sunrise tour was leaving at the unghodly hour of 6:30 a.m.

Wednesday, August 25

6:30 a.m. arrived a lot sooner than we would have liked, and we stumbled out into the cold and dark to catch the first tour bus. The outline of the Rock against the horizon as the sun rose was beautiful. The sunrise color changes were dramatic, although some of the magic was gone because we'd already seen the trick at sunset when it wasn't as cold. The warm coffee and tea from the bus was much appreciated.

Some of the people on the tour were climbing the Rock, which is a very controversial subject in the area. (There was even a survey at the Cultural Centre where people were encouraged to express their opinions on the matter.) The natives of the region dislike the practice for two reasons: (1) they consider the site a special one and there are areas that are especially sacred, and (2) they feel responsible for accidents that happen to tourists. (While giving instructions to the potential climbers, the bus driver noted that the most common cause of fatal falls was tourists trying to catch hats or bags that flew off because of the wind. Talk about evolution in action...)

Eve and I got off at the Cultural Information Centre, where there were mural displays of the history of the Rock told as a Dreamtime story from the Aboriginal point of view. (I thought one of the more fascinating aspects of the exhibit was that some of the photos of native people who were quoted were missing, due to a belief that the photos of dead people should not be exhibited.) We managed after a little confusion to find the group we were supposed to join. After a hurried breakfast, we got on a small tour van for the Liru Walk.

This was by far the best thing we did at Ayers Rock, and made up for our limited time at the Cultural Centre. (We were glad that we'd decided to get Aboriginal artifacts in Sydney, as we turned out to have no time to do so at Uluru.) The Liru Walk was fantastic: an older native man named Andrew showed how they live off the scrub plants in the bush, and told some Dreamtime stories that he illustrated in the sand. A young female interpreter translated. Some of the tourists tried to throw a spear, mostly to amusing effect.

Cairns

Back at the resort, we packed and checked out, and then walked over to the town square to do some small errands before our flight to Cairns. Once we landed, we took a taxi to a small, family-run hotel called the Floriana, which the Leepers had found for the bargain basement price of A\$60 a night. Evelyn had warned me at the Futurians meeting in Sydney that the management hadn't seen any need to provide curtains for the room even though the bedroom windows weren't that far from the street. She and Mark had managed to convince them to hang sheets over the windows. Lo and behold, when we checked in, we got the same room, which we could tell from the sheets still hanging on the window!

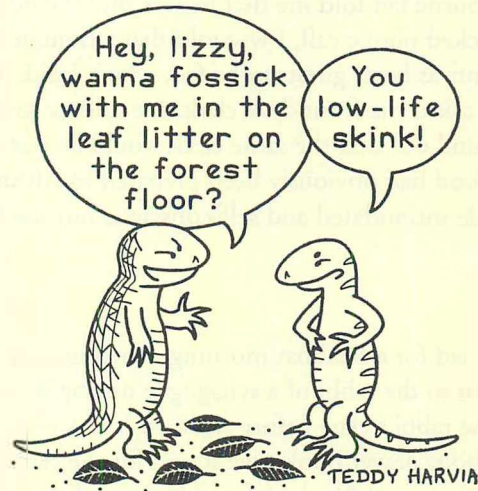
Besides no curtains, the room had no electrical outlets except one in the bathroom, and pretty inadequate towels. The manager's son obligingly humped our luggage up the narrow stairs (no lift, either). The Art Deco atmosphere of the hotel made up for the lack of amenities, and so did its location, directly on the esplanade, the main drag by the beach. We walked down to the more populated area for dinner, ending up in a large food court, and then checked out the local mall. Eve left me at a combination backpackers booking agent/Internet cafe on the walk back so I could check my email. Logging on to the Internet at an open-air station with the waves at my back was an interesting experience.

The nearness of the hotel to the beach turned out to be a disadvantage while trying to get to sleep. Eve gallantly took the front bedroom closer to the street, but even in the back room I ended up resorting to my uncomfortable earplugs to get any sleep at all.

Thursday, August 26

In the light of day, we were able to see the architecture of Cairns, which remarkably resembles the architecture of my hometown of Miami Beach. The tour bus picked us up at the hotel and took us to a really large and very fast catamaran to see the reason we'd flown to Cairns: part of the Great Barrier Reef. The windy hour-long ride ended at Green Island, a long-time resort in the area. (It's even the site of a chapter in one of my favorite books, Nevil Shute's *The Legacy*.)

The public part of the resort is fairly small (the luxury hotel and its amenities are off-limits to day-trippers). We went on a walk through the rain forest trail on the island, alternately reading the informative signs at several stations along the way. I had to call Eve over to read one of them: "By night, you can hear the skinks fossicking amongst the leaf litter." After we finished giggling, we figured out that the skinks were local lizards and "fossicking" was like "foraging," but for the rest of the trip, just murmuring the word "fossicking" was good for a laugh.



We returned to the ship to queue up for a lavish buffet lunch before our assigned 1:30 stint on a glass-bottomed boat. I was really disappointed by this jaunt, as the boat cast a shadow downward so all the fish looked grey. Shortly after we got back, we had a scheduled trip on a "semi-submersible." This is a small boat with seats below the waterline and glass sides, so that you can look out to see the sights. The coral was amazing, in many more shapes and colors than I would have imagined. The fish were also really colorful, and even seeing them in aquariums in the past doesn't really prepare you to see them in their native habitat weaving between the coral.

Back in Cairns, we stopped back at our hotel to change for dinner. The restaurants recommended in Eve's Lonely Planet Guide looked disappointing or had long lines. After a walk around most of downtown Cairns, we ended up at a small restaurant in a hotel lobby that had fabulous flavored breads. After a quick stop at the mall to pick up something for breakfast, we returned back to the hotel to prepare for an early taxi pick-up the next morning to catch our *gulp* 6:30 a.m. flight to Melbourne. (It was the only one that would get us back before sunset on Friday.) Our early-to-bed-for-plenty-of-sleep strategy was ruined at about 2:30 a.m. by what sounded like a bomb headed straight for our room. It turned out to be a helicopter delivering a patient to the Cairns Base Hospital half a block away.

Melbourne

Friday, August 27

After an insanely early arising, we got the cab driver to carry our luggage down the back stairs for a quick getaway. In Melbourne, we had the first truly bad weather on the trip, a teeming rainstorm. I was able to point out some neighborhood spots to Eve on our circuitous cab ride to the Kimberley Gardens, the kosher hotel we were staying at in St Kilda. We took advantage of the bad weather to do our laundry (in a tiny laundry room with one washer and one dryer, which managed to ruin a blouse of mine).

Instead of wandering the neighborhood as had been our original intention, we decided because of the weather to just spend a quiet afternoon watching local television and preparing for the Sabbath. After our adventures, we were pleased to once again be back at a hotel with decent towels and shower, and comfortable beds. The room was also enlivened by some flowers that Moshe (who was staying at the hotel but not eating there) had thoughtfully provided for the Sabbath.

Earlier in the trip, an observant Melbourne fan told me that he was sure the hotel's kosher restaurant was closed for the Sabbath. During a panicked phone call, I was told that although the restaurant was closed to the public, we could make arrangements as hotel guests to be fed, which I did. We went down to the lobby unsure of the procedure but when we asked the front desk clerk, she told us to just go into the restaurant. We chose a table and shortly thereafter found out that the same clerk would be our server for the evening! Only two other tables were occupied. The food had obviously been prepared in advance to be served in between the clerk's other duties. We were a little intimidated and self-conscious but the food itself was quite good.

Saturday, August 28

The breakfast buffet was unusually varied for a Shabbat morning, when usually all you have (if anything) is a piece of cake or fruit. Eve had written to the rabbi of a synagogue nearby so we decided to check it out first. We arrived there in time for part of the rabbi's class before services. It was very interesting, and he was a good speaker. After some confusion about prayer books, we stayed for the service. I was relieved to finally experience the first "normal" service of my trip! Afterward, we discovered that the person giving the talk wasn't the regular rabbi, who was out of town.

Back at the hotel, lunch was even stranger than dinner had been the night before. This time, we were the only ones in the dining room! We spent the afternoon sightseeing on Acland Street, the main drag in the St. Kilda Beach area, and had a fun time window-shopping. Unfortunately, when we returned that night ready to shop, many of the stores we'd seen in the afternoon were closed. We did stop in at one of the lavish pastry places that I'd seen on my walk with Julian but hadn't had a chance to try. Yum!

Healesville Sanctuary

Sunday, August 29

The next morning was our bus excursion to Healesville Sanctuary. Our original plan was to move after Shabbat to a less expensive downtown hotel that would be closer to the bus station and a livelier end of town. However, the Kimberley Gardens was so comfortable that we decided to treat ourselves and put up with the longer distance. Therefore, we got up very early and took a cab down to the transportation center.

I had the reservation number for the tour, but I hadn't realized until reading brochures in the hotel lobby the day before that there was more than one company running similar tours, and I hadn't noted the name of ours. Luckily, they all leave from the same office so after a few false starts, we found the right one. Most of the passengers were already on board.

Our extremely talkative driver first took us to a national park on the outskirts of Melbourne. There, we stopped for a "typical" breakfast of billy tea (made by putting ingredients in a metal pot and whirling it around one's head, which he demonstrated), and lamingtons, basically sponge cakes surrounded by coconut. The guide also had some bird feed that he scattered around to lure nearby parrots. This was our first chance to see our fellow travelers, an interesting mix of older tourists, and visible Americans. A younger couple in tacky T-shirts set off our fan radar, although we never confirmed this impression positively.

After breakfast, the bus continued on to the station for Puffing Billy, a steam engine train that we took for one stop through part of the Dandenongs. The seats face sideways rather than frontways so it was a little hard to see but just riding the train was an interesting experience. At the train station, we met the bus and continued on through part of the Yarra Valley. I was impressed by the spectacular greenery that we passed. I also liked seeing the small towns on the route, many of which, even in very isolated places, sported bed-and-breakfasts.

Our destination was Fergusson's Winery for lunch. And a very enjoyable lunch it was: the food was excellent and even the garrulous elderly gentleman across from us mellowed us by ordering dessert (an extra cost) for our end of the table. A talented jazz trio playing 40s standards made the meal even more enjoyable. Replete with lunch, we marveled at the diehards who were continuing on to other wineries. We joined our original bus to continue on to the main attraction: Healesville Sanctuary, a wildlife refuge that combines research facilities with restoring wildlife habitats. The scenery by now was pretty familiar, although we kept our eyes peeled for possible interesting animals in the wild (which we never did see throughout the trip). We passed the time with Eve telling me the plot of the book she had just finished writing, her first.

By this time, we were overly acquainted with our fellow bus travelers and as soon as we got to the sanctuary, I grabbed Eve and we ditched the tour guide. As I suspected, we did quite well without a guide. My favorite animals by far were the echidnas, also known as "spiny anteaters," the only other known monotremes (mammals who lay eggs instead of bearing live young) besides platypuses. They are really amusing, being wider than they are tall with legs close to the ground so that they waddle when they walk and poke their sensitive noses into the ground for bugs.

I had been lucky enough to see wallabies and kangaroos close-up at the Tasmanian Devil Park. At Healesville, not only were they behind fences but they were also somnolent. After waiting for a while so she could see one hop or, failing that, at least stand up, Eve started to berate them: "I came 9,000 miles, the least you could do is move around a little bit!" We finally gave up on them and continued on to the koalas, where we were lucky enough to see a mother with a baby still in her pouch. When she appeared, there was a universal sigh. I said to the ranger nearby that he must know how to say "How cute" in about 15 languages.

The only wombat was an injured one who was sleeping when we came by, and we also didn't have much luck with the Tasmanian devils (my second miss on those). I thought the bird exhibits were really interesting, with teeny birds in aviaries contrasting with big herons and black swans in the lake. We finished the park with a splurge in the gift shop. I found a purple koala pin and some other stuff. I nearly missed the bus when Eve reminded me after I'd already paid about the discount coupon we had and I asked them to redo the sale.

The other big animal-related thing to do in commuting distance of Melbourne is to go to Philips Island to see the blue fairy penguins. However, this usually takes up a full half-day, since the tours leave at 2 p.m. and don't get back until after 9. Perry had convinced me that this was a waste of time: he said you basically stand there forever with a bunch of other tourists, freezing your tushie off for a brief view of penguins rushing by. I'd heard from someone we met at Slow Glass Books that there was another colony of penguins that were reachable by boats that left from Southbank in Melbourne. The boats left at 5:30 and we rushed back from the bus station hoping to make it in time. Unfortunately, we were too late. Both of us were exhausted after the touring and this last mad dash, so Eve indulged my desire for one last kosher meat meal (lamb chops!) back at the hotel.

Melbourne Zoo

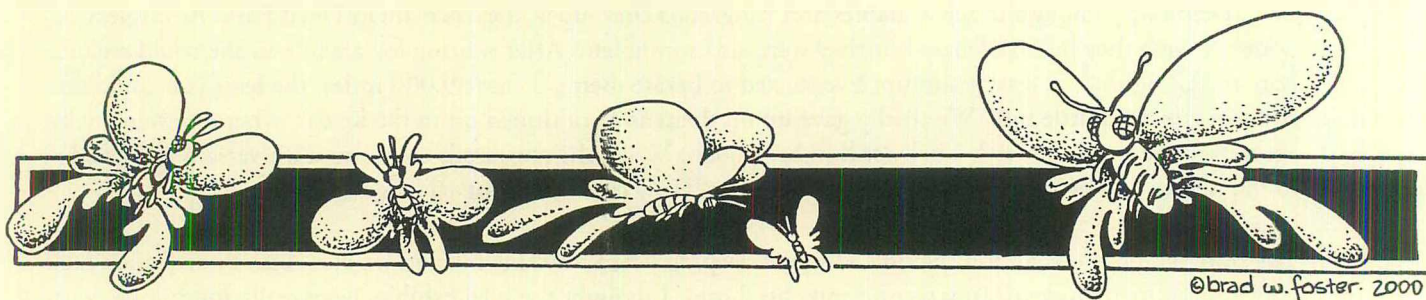
Monday, August 30

We hadn't been too enthusiastic about the Melbourne Zoo given that we'd already been to Healesville (and I'd been to the Tasmanian equivalent, too). However, Stephen had said that the butterfly house was not to be missed, and Eve was still hoping to see ambulatory kangaroos.

When we got off the train, we weren't sure where the zoo actually was. The train leaves you off near the back entrance, which isn't very clearly marked. We finally figured it out by watching fellow travelers. The kangaroos were marginally more awake than at Healesville, but not by much, and Eve never did get to see them hop. There weren't any echidnas either, and many exhibits were closed for renovations.

However, Stephen was right: the butterfly house was well worth the trip. After a double-door entrance with an air-blower, you're in a tropical environment with butterflies flying free everywhere. They light on trees, feeding platforms, and you. Also in the exhibit was the inevitable school group, whose students were charmingly excited to be that close to these flying bits of color.

On the way out of the zoo, we found a well-designed platypus exhibit with the history of the discovery of the platypus and the first impression that it was a cobbled-together hoax. The store here was as interesting as the one at Healesville and I found some classy koala and echidna magnets for my office whiteboard.



When we got back to downtown Melbourne, Eve went to do some shopping while I went, believe it or not, to the local Sun Microsystems office! I'd sent some Program Ops forms to the A3 program coordinator before I left the U.S. so I wouldn't have to carry them around Australia, but she couldn't find them. I'd asked Stephen if he could use his influence at the local Sun office to get me in so I could gain access to the files. It was a weird feeling to be logging on to my machine back home directly on the internal Sun net while sitting in an office 6,000 miles away.

The remote login and printing process took so long that I barely made my rendezvous with Eve for dinner on the Colonial Tramcar Restaurant. This is a fascinating concept: a 1927 tramcar that runs on the same lines as the regular trams (but is burgundy rather than the municipal green) while serving a gourmet meal. As Eve noted, you really feel above the hoi polloi wandering the streets when you're riding by in a luxuriously appointed tramcar, surrounded by Victorian furnishings and fawning staff and eating berry mousse.

Ballarat

Tuesday, August 31

Eve and I were originally scheduled to take a round-trip bus tour to Ballarat, a historic mining town about a 90-minute drive from Melbourne. However, I was worried about getting back too late because I'd promised the con committee I'd start to work Tuesday night. The tourist centre assured us that the Ballarat sights were easy to see on one's own. That, combined with our dislike of tours, meant that ever-cooperative Eve agreed to cancel the bus tour and take the train. This would get us back to Melbourne at 6 p.m. rather than 7.

I figured that I would probably have to stay late at the convention centre doing work, and that I'd want to be there early on Wednesday. So, I decided to take a room at the cheapest of the convention hotels, the Terrace Pacific, even though I was still splitting the room in St Kilda. Accordingly, I'd packed my large suitcase for eventual check-in at the hotel where the con was putting us up, the All Seasons Grand, and a small shoulder bag for the one night at the Terrace Pacific. Luckily, the hotels were near the train station and across from each other.

We got up even earlier than planned and decided to try for the 8 a.m. rather than 9:30 train, partially assuaging my guilt over losing Eve time in Ballarat from our original schedule. However, I had made a boneheaded suggestion that Eve go for tickets while I dropped my bags off at the hotels. Because neither of us realized that one could buy tickets for the train either upstairs or downstairs, we missed the 8 a.m. train by seconds. I stupidly waited at the upstairs ticket booth (thinking it was the only one) and managed to miss Eve the few times I ran down to check the platform. She, meanwhile, didn't realize there was an upstairs ticket booth so she was waiting at the downstairs one for me to arrive.

Foiled, we grabbed some breakfast and gawked at the impressive Victorian office buildings in that part of town before catching the next train. Ballarat's main attraction is Sovereign Hill, a historic re-creation of a typical mining town, with workers dressed in period garb stationed in various places to explain what life was like for the miners. The interpretive centre listed some interesting facts and statistics; the re-created mining town itself was smaller and less focused than I had pictured. (My favorite spot was the period bowling alley.) Eve's being the mother of two sons means that she has more experience with historically re-created areas than anyone should have to have, so we left after a few hours and were very glad we hadn't taken the tour bus.

Lunch was at a funky cafe where we were strongly tempted to stay for hours, given the walls covered with magazine and newspaper pages from the late '60s (including one of Princess Anne with "hippies"). The hairdos and clothes provoked many embarrassed reminiscences. We took advantage of a train discount on entrance to the local art gallery. When we arrived there, we discovered that in any case entry was free on Tuesdays. That's about what I thought the art was worth. (Eve liked the gallery better than I did, although I thought the period furniture exhibit was fairly cool.) We then wandered around the shopping area of Ballarat until it was time for our train back to Melbourne.

Our last dinner together before the madness of the con was at a very nice Greek restaurant in Southbank. At about 7:30, Eve left to go back to St. Kilda, and I went to the convention centre. My plans to get right to work were immediately changed by the fact that Perry and most of the committee were standing in a group by the door. They were ready to go out to dinner, and there would be no one around to orient me. I trooped back to Southbank with them, figuring that I could get an information download while they were eating, which turned out to be true. I also got to tell Julian what I thought of his enthusiasm for Strahan :->

Aussiecon 3 - Pre-Con

I had arranged to meet with Donna Heenan, the A3 program director, for a briefing at about 9:30 - 10 p.m. I figured that meanwhile I would take a look at the program database that Perry had taken over from a programming person who hadn't completed the data entry. (Several months before, I'd asked Donna to look at the Noreascon programming database, as I knew it was dependable and had documentation. However, she told me that she had decided to get a Microsoft Access database by Seattle fan Linda Deneroff, which had been used for Lunacons and a Westercon.) Perry had some trouble with it but had eventually managed to bang away and enter things.

I knew the con program was not yet completely entered, but figured that would be how I'd spend my time the rest of the evening. We got back from dinner and loaded the database program onto a laptop belonging to Mark Loney, the efficient and levelheaded boss of publications. Perry saw that it was the previous version, so he went back home to get the updated disk. Meanwhile, I went across the street to the Terrace Pacific to check in and leave my bag in my room. In a truly weird moment, I zoomed out of the door of my room just in time to practically run into a person coming out of the room diagonal to mine: Moshe!!!

I left a message for Donna asking about our meeting, as it was then 11 p.m. After Perry's return, we started to look at the program. I realized that I would never get any database entry done that night, but suggested that I steal Mark's machine anyway to at least become familiar with the database. I finally got a return call at 12:15 a.m. from Donna cheerily saying that she was in and how about meeting in 15 minutes?

She told me that the absolute latest version of the program was in an Excel spreadsheet on the disk she'd given me. She also handed me a word-processed grid (with the room name headers only on the first page), which had been edited in pencil and highlighter. I was a little taken aback, but figured I'd just compare its version to the database. I never did figure out how she had planned on coordinating things at the con with divergent spreadsheets, databases, paper grids, and knowledge in her head that wasn't written down.

Back at the Terrace Pacific, I looked through the database but unfortunately couldn't check the reports it generated because it wouldn't show them without an attached printer. Finally, at 1:30 a.m., I went to bed in my very noisy room.

Wednesday, September 1

I bumped into Moshe at the hotel's free breakfast and then arrived bright and early at the at-con office at the convention centre to use their computer. It soon became horrifyingly apparent that the database was not generating consistent or correct reports: some reports, for example, would have a person on only one program item, while others would show the same person on three. More and more people came in as I became more and more agitated, all sure that if they pushed some buttons, they could get the reports to work. *sigh* My first staff member, in the person of Irish fan Pat McMurray, showed up and couldn't believe the situation either. It became clear that the database would not be able to give us the reports we desperately needed in order to see the state of the program, room assignments, and participant schedules.

Because Perry had said that the database had the latest version of the schedule, Pat and I, plus more of my staff, UK fans Tim and Marcia Illingworth, started checking Perry's list of changes against participant letters I'd gotten from Donna, generated from her Excel spreadsheet. Some changes were there, others weren't. We decided to update the spreadsheet, since we could use it to generate new letters, and worry about the database later. Pat frantically did data entry as the rest of us called out changes.

Meanwhile, Perry arrived with his promised Microsoft Access expert, David Arblaster, a local fan who had been handling pre-con volunteer tracking. Pat finished his heroic task and after we generated the new set of participant letters, we let David take a crack at the database. He couldn't get any correct reports out of it either, which made the rest of us feel a little better. It also unfortunately meant that we didn't have a database. After talking it over, Tim, Ben Yalow (who had written the original Noreascon programming database), and Perry decided that David should try to extract data from the spreadsheet. Having used the other database extensively, we could describe its underlying data structure to him while he built a new program.

Wednesday evening was a long-planned dinner for present and former DUFF winners. It was scheduled for 6:45 p.m. but I wasn't able to leave The Boys until about 7:30. At that point, they had miraculously managed to extract enough data out of the spreadsheet to do a crude schedule of sorts for the next day. I shoed them off to eat and ran off myself.

I had a great time at the dinner, chatting up seat companion Greg Turkich (1990 DUFF winner and head of security for A3), who was disappointed to learn that I'd already been to Canberra and hadn't called. I said that I would have done so had I known that he lived in Canberra. Unfortunately, I didn't get to talk much to former DUFF winners Leigh Edmonds or Jack Herman, whom I'd never met before. I did get to chat with Pat and Roger Sims at my end of the table. (I was especially pleased to see Roger because he'd recently had a heart attack and it hadn't been clear until the last minute that he and Pat would be able to make the grueling trip.) I also got a present from fellow table member Nick Stathopolous. This Hugo-nominated artist drew quickly on a five dollar bill (illegally, I might add) and the result was Queen Elizabeth II bearing a striking resemblance to a Vulcan!



I zipped out of the dinner back to the board room, and began frantically reformatting the crude but hopefully accurate schedule that The Boys had miraculously extracted. The fact that I'd never used Microsoft Word before didn't help. I finally finished the daily schedule. Then I individually formatted 119 nameplates for program participants extracted from the spreadsheet. At about 1:30 a.m., I slipped the schedule under Mark's hotel room door and went wearily off to the All Seasons Grand hotel.

Eve had checked in already but I had yet to see the room. My check-in was delayed by a bored and chatty night manager ("Oh, you've been to Strahan? We just got back from there. Wasn't it great? Yadayada...") It was quite a shock when I finally escaped him and took the elevator up to my floor. I've never seen such wide corridors in my life, not to mention the glass doorways every so often, which put me in mind of the opening to "Get Smart." Our room was, of course, all the way at the end of the lengthy hallway.

Despite knowing that we had a suite, I was stunned to discover that the kitchen and living room area were larger than some apartments I've rented. I staggered upstairs to discover a smaller bedroom loft, where I undressed and fell into bed. Unfortunately, a combination of nerves, a very cold room with no visible bedspread or comforter, and the wind loudly howling through an improperly closed window (which in my stupor I couldn't identify) meant that I lay there in the magnificent suite cowering under a single blanket, desperately trying to sleep.

Aussiecon 3 - The Convention

Thursday, September 2

Needless to say, I was not in the world's best shape a few hours later when Eve got up. I shakily informed her that I hated the room and had gotten no sleep the night before. She was her usual comforting self (believe me, she earned sharing the free DUFF suite!). Soon, I'd recovered enough to get out to the convention centre by 8. First, I heard that Special Guest J. Michael Straczynski's flight had problems and he wasn't going to get to the con until Friday. Then came the next great news of the day: the photocopier was on the blink...

I walked down to Program Ops in the Otway 1 room, and found Eve setting up the Green Room in Otway 2 in preparation for the first panels of the day. She was ably assisted in the Green Room throughout the con by Baltimore fan Perrienne Lurie and Florida fan Melanie Herz. Luckily, Volunteers had a few warm bodies so I stole them and started them busily folding tentcards. Marcia Illingworth and Philadelphia fan Joni Dashoff eventually took over the job of supervising the Program Ops volunteers and distributing tentcards, which thankfully spared me so I could concentrate on program changes and database horrors.

As expected, the parade of program participants wanting to change or cancel panels started. My faithful database crew was still working on getting useful reports, so at this point all we could do was take notes. New Jersey fan Saul Jaffe had volunteered to work the program participant registration table in the main hall and continued to do so with only a few breaks throughout the con, earning my undying gratitude.

At noon, I had to go off to a panel of my own, on "Fan Speak." I've done this panel before but this had an interesting slant to it: most of the audience was Australian and hadn't heard much fan speak to ask about. We started with a brief review, and then spent the rest of the time talking about cultural differences between Australian and American sf clubs, with pauses to explain terms like "apazine" and "sercon" to the audience. The other panelists were Jan Howard Finder and Australian fanzine publisher Irwin Hirsh.

Back at Program Ops, there were more notes about requested program changes, but the database guys, mostly David coding and Tim and Ben offering program advice, were even closer to solutions. I was very grateful when local Jewish fan Joe Slater showed up with photocopies of the Friday night Sabbath service that he'd promised, even though he himself wouldn't be in the hotel. He said he was going out for kosher pizza and would I like one? This sounded great. (Eve put up a notice on the Program Ops whiteboard, which I didn't notice at first, saying "Please remember to feed and water Janice regularly"). Unfortunately, the pizza didn't arrive until 20 minutes before my 3 p.m. panel, so I wolfed down a piece and gave the rest to the staff.

The panel turned out to be a competitive quiz, with Australian DUFF winners Terry Frost and Alan Stewart pitted against me and former North American DUFF winner Roger Sims. Former DUFF winners Joyce Scrivner (NA) and John Foyster (Oz) had put together the questions about the opposite countries. Points were given for both accuracy and amusement. The Australia team beat us but not by much, and I was proud of myself for knowing the capitols of the states and territories (only missing the easiest one), and for getting a question about British worldcon chairs correct.

Back at Program Ops, database designer Linda appeared in response to messages we'd left for her. I'd been wondering all along why we'd had such problems with the database when I knew it had worked successfully for other cons. Linda had the answer: contrary to what Donna had told us, she only had a sample version of the program, not a production one with documentation. Linda was horrified to discover that anyone was using the sample to do a live program, let alone trying it without documentation. It explained a lot...

My 5 p.m. panel was on con running horror stories. Panelists Susan Batho, Peggy Rae (Pavlat) Sapienza, Alan Stewart, Ben and I had a great time reliving past disasters. The audience was alternately horrified and amused.

Seattle fans Tom Whitmore and Marci Malinowycz insisted on dragging me and Eve off to dinner, and we were joined by Saul. We decided on the hotel restaurant just down the stairs from Program Ops, as I'd been ordered to appear at opening ceremonies as a featured guest. The service was even slower than I'd gotten used to, and I barely managed to make it to opening ceremonies. I was greeted by Perry saying "You were supposed to be in the Green Room 15 minutes ago!" Luckily, they hadn't started yet. My non-appearance in the Green Room meant that I was unprepared for the fact that I, GUFF winner Paul Kincaid, and FFANZ winner Linette Horne were expected to sit on stage with GoHs Greg Benford and Bruce Gillespie instead of the "stand at your seat and wave" that I'd been expecting.

After the introductions, I snuck out during Bruce's speech and started work on the next day's schedule. Ben came by and stayed through midnight, tag-teaming with Tim, who stayed another hour or so. It was another half-hour after that before I finally finished and slipped the master under Mark's hotel room.

Friday, September 3

Word had come that JMS was going to be arriving at last at about 10 a.m. Having been told that he was not the world's best traveler, I assumed that he probably wouldn't be in shape for his noon signing. I conferred with Michael Jordan and we decided to reschedule. I made up some signs to that effect and took them up to the autograph area, which was part of the dealer's room. Then it was back to Program Ops to deal with the many changes that had accumulated while we were getting the database up and running. Much to my surprise, JMS arrived on time at noon and graciously agreed to do the signing as scheduled. Indeed, he was very cooperative and accommodating for the entire convention.

By afternoon, the database program was working well enough that we were able to do room schedules. That's when we discovered the fatal flaw in the spreadsheet version of the program: only items connected to people were listed. The rooms into which we'd been moving program items weren't really empty after all; they merely contained program items that weren't connected to a particular person, such as the Alternate Awards ceremony. We had to hastily undo many of the changes we'd done and rearrange things yet again.

Late in the day, Julian came by with extra banquet tickets for my hard-working staff. I rushed back to the room to change for the banquet and let Eve know about our good fortune. Back at the convention centre, I wanted to do Sabbath services so I could say the memorial prayer for my dad. This requires ten Jews, and I managed to scrounge exactly that many by combing the lobby and making a loud announcement to the crowd of people waiting to get into the banquet.

I did the service at record speed and we got to the banquet in time to get star seats at the same table as Perry, Perry's dad (who looks and sounds remarkably like him), and UK fan and perpetual Hugo winner David Langford. He was the reluctant but game entertainment for the evening. (He'd been asked only a few weeks before the convention.) He gave a side-splittingly funny speech on famous food incidents in science fiction, including heroes in a Sheckley novel who starve to death in an alien food warehouse because they can't face eating food that giggles.

After the banquet, it was back to the Program Ops room. Sabbath rules meant I couldn't type the next day's program schedule, so Tim had generously agreed to do it for me. We dropped it off at Mark's room before going to a party thrown by British fan Caroline Mullen. I had a great time at the first party I'd gotten to attend at the con!

Saturday, September 4

I wanted to keep to the Sabbath rules as much as possible, and Tim yet again came to my rescue to handle phone calls, typing, and like stuff. (This had resulted in an amusing interchange the day before when, without thinking how it would sound, I'd yelled across to Marcia in the Program Ops room, "Can I have your husband tomorrow?") My other rescuer was Robert Louima, a great volunteer who came in early and was invaluable doing room schedule changes.

Just before I was leaving to put up some room schedules, a call came in from Ben from the WSFS Business Meeting, asking for people to come vote on the controversial "no zone" proposal that would eliminate the three-zone U.S. rotation of worldcon bids. I got there just as they were doing the standing vote. I literally walked in the door, stood at the end of a row, got counted, and left the room within about 30 seconds!

After my errands, I went to participate in the Fan Fund Auction. As usual, my predictions of what would be popular were totally off. The Star Trek coffee (flavors like "Vulcan Decaffeinated" and "Federation Supremo") that I'd bought at Westercon made barely anything. On the other hand, SF Bay Area fan Mary Kay Kare and I had independently brought some Intel bunny people that fit on computer monitors, and amazingly hadn't duplicated colors. They went for four times what we paid for them. The biggest surprise may have been a holographic Harlan Ellison mouse pad, a promotion for the release of one of his books. I had gotten it for free at Readercon; it went for about \$20 at auction! Mike Walsh, who'd been at Readercon, leaned over and said that it was too bad that I hadn't commandeered more of them.

One of the great revelations of the auction was seeing Justin auctioneer. Having spent some time with him prior to and during the con, I'd gotten accustomed to a somewhat laid-back book dealer. I discovered that at auctions, Justin turns into a wild man, with ratty green socks and outrageous claims for merchandise. One of the more popular items was a plastic squeeze toy with iridescent liquid that jumps away from you as you squeeze it. It's vaguely obscene even to me, but "vaguely" didn't stand a chance once Terry Frost started auctioning it. I whispered to Justin that I hoped no one ever found out I'd been the one to bring the toy: big mistake! Next thing I knew, he was announcing it to the entire room. The auction was very successful and we managed to find an overflow room to keep it going for another hour or so.

When I went back to the hotel, I discovered that although Eve had left the lights on in the room, she had also taken her key out of the electricity-enabler switch by the front door. This meant that because it was still the Sabbath, I got dressed for the Hugo ceremony and did my make-up mostly by feel. I made it to the pre-ceremony reception in time to make up for my neglect in not previously naming Eve as my guest for the event. It was a really odd feeling just to be an honored guest at the Hugos after a few years of frantically rushing around arranging things backstage! I'd asked to present the Fan Writer award, on the assumption that Dave Langford would win again and I'd be able to hand him the award.

Hugo organizer Michael Jordan served as his own toastmaster and did a swell job. Against my advice, they'd ordered huge silver-painted foam Hugo rockets for the stage. I didn't think they'd be worth the cost, but they looked great. Michael wanted a quick ceremony, with the presenters just reading the names of the nominees and then announcing the winner. However, I wanted to say something amusing, so I'd prepared the following short introduction:

"One of the highlights of my trip was getting to see an Australian Rules football game. The main differences between it and American football, besides the *ahem* behinds, is the speed of the game. So, without further ado, here are the nominees..."

(For those readers not familiar with Aussie Rules, points are scored when the ball passes over the goal line. Six points are awarded for a goal, when the ball passes between the two centre posts, and one point for a "behind," when the ball passes between a centre post and an adjacent outer post. More importantly, the players wear shirts and shorts with no padding and, thanks to the speed of the game, are in very good shape. Eve and I really enjoyed the games we caught on television, and not just for the sports aspect :->)

My reason for picking this particular award panned out: Dave won and gave me a hug big enough to lift me off my feet (to "woo-woo"s from the audience :->) before giving a very humble acceptance speech. (Despite his many Hugo wins, he hasn't had the chance to accept very many of them in person.) The other highlight for me during the ceremony was Michael's closing remarks, in which he said some very flattering things about my being the most memorable person he'd met during his time working for the convention and his role model. *blush*

The usual practice for the post-Hugo party hosted by the next year's worldcon is to limit attendance to nominees, presenters, and their guests. However, host Chicago opened it to everyone. The lines were enormous but were taken in good spirit by most people. I tried to escape the crowd by going outside on the connected concrete deck, but it was so cold there that I soon retreated just inside the door. I chatted about Aussie Rules standings with Irwin Hirsh, and also took some photos of the party at Caroline Mullen's request.

[As some of you know, I give out Sorta Annual Worldcon Awards every year in various categories like Best Button, Best T-shirt, etc. The party featured what would be my award for Best Overheard Conversation: I noticed a pin being worn by Best Fanzine nominee Rich Lynch that showed entwined American/Australian flags. I mentioned that as he lived in Washington DC, it would probably be popular in government circles. Rich leaned over so his lapel was lower down and said "Speak into the microphone." He also gave me the pin as a gift, which was really sweet.]

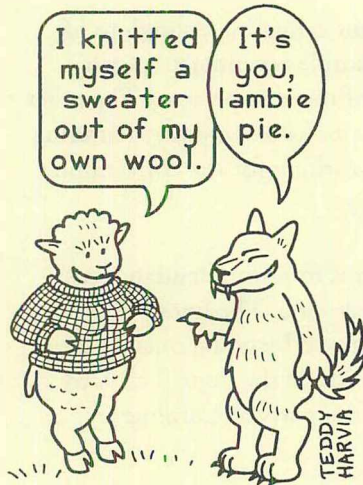
Sunday, September 5

The nervous insomnia that had been plaguing me since Wednesday let up and I had a good night's rest. Knowing when I got to Program Ops that I finally had a handle on the schedule made feel much more relaxed. A good thing, too, since the day started out in a bizarre fashion: someone claiming to be from the Information Desk said that one of the 10 a.m. panels was short of panelists. As it was only 9:30 a.m., I asked him why Programming was supposed to be involved: it wasn't time for the panelists to be there quite yet and we weren't in any case expected to magic up more participants if the original assigned people weren't there. He repeated that he'd been told that there weren't enough panelists and we had to arrange for more.

On my rounds to put up room schedules, I stopped by the Information Desk to clarify. Information Desk chief Cath Ortlieb looked at me in a puzzled way for a minute and then laughed: the messenger was supposed to tell me that the room needed more chairs for the panelists.

Having done programming and program operations for some years, I've gotten used to meeting "big name" professional writers. My usual composure was somewhat shattered, though, when Jack Dann came by to explain that his wife Janeen Webb wouldn't be able to make a panel and asked if it could be rescheduled. Dann was the editor of *Wandering Stars*, a collection of Jewish science fiction stories published in 1974 to the joy and delight of every Jewish science fiction reader. I managed to stammer out my gratitude and we chatted a bit about the book before I recovered and checked into rearranging the panel.

With the collusion of my staff, Eve kidnapped me at noon and took me away to the Queen Victoria Market. After choosing from the many food items for sale in a large food court, we dodged the rain to wander up and down the numerous stores, which were selling everything from jewelry to cheap toys. I searched around to find suitable items for DUFF auctions back in the U.S., which ended up including some Aussie Rules football merchandise.



As you may recall, when we'd shopped for Coogi sweaters in Sydney, Eve had found a sweater and I'd found a vest for my brother, but no sweater for me. A sweater shop called Emaroo in the market claimed to have been making "three-dimensional knitwear" for far longer than those upstart Coogi people. In their stall I found my sweater: a combination of lavender, light blue, and rose. Eve approved, and even found a sweater for Howard. The staff were very informative and helpful, even ducking out in the rain to get a better full-length mirror for us. (Not to be too commercial, but if you're interested, you can see their merchandise on the web at <http://www.emaroo.com.au>. The pattern I bought is called Sturt :->)

After a harrowing cab ride in the rain down blocked one-way streets, I dropped Eve off at the hotel and went back to the Program Ops cauldron. I was met by a mix-up with a filking panel that we'd already moved twice. *sigh* A Virtual Reality computer setup was in the room they were supposed to be using. (Remember the deal with panels without people attached to them?) I finally found a vacant room down the hall, created signs to send people to the new room, and prostrated myself abjectly before them. They magnanimously forgave me... eventually.

Then it was time for my 4 p.m. panel, "Why DUFF?" We turned this into a "Why Fan Funds?" panel with the addition of GUFF representative Paul Kincaid on the panel itself, and TAFF representative Maureen Kincaid Speller chiming in frequently from the audience. Fellow panelists John Foyster and Fred Patten explained how and why they started DUFF (for publicity for Aussiecon 1). Then we talked a bit about how unusual fan funds are, in that other people donate money so someone else can get a trip abroad. The panel closed with each of us making a case for fan funds based on our own experiences, and Terry Frost produced a surprisingly elegiac speech.

A bunch of us went to eat an early dinner at the bar. Given the long time before the waitress appeared, it started to look like it wouldn't be so early after all. We might never have gotten food at all if it hadn't been for Facilities liaison Stephen, who of course knew the bar manager by name :-> I rushed back to my room to do my laundry and check my email for the first time since the con started. That's when I discovered that my modem wouldn't work...

At the Former Worldcons Chair party, I took some pictures of the worldcon chairs in attendance, plus one of all three Aussiecon worldcon chairs. I celebrated being at leisure for parties by attending the combined worldcon bid party in the Centra, and then an ANZAPA party back at the Grand. There I got to meet some Australian fans whom I'd heard about but hadn't yet met, thanks to being stuck in my Program Ops cave for most of the con.

Monday, September 6

I had never gotten around to a few things I'd left to be done in Melbourne once the con started. I had thought that I would have some time free during the con but obviously that hadn't happened. I'd taken the rest of the week off from work so I could recuperate before Rosh Hashana, which was starting soon after I returned. In the middle of the night, I realized that if I wanted to, I could delay my return. So, I called United (and had to call again later after breakfast – I was shocked that their reservations line is only open during regular business hours). They agreed to the change, and Michael Jordan later used his connections to duplicate the great seat in the upstairs of the 747 that I'd had on the way out.

With that off my mind, I cheerfully went off to my last day in Program Ops. After taking care of the morning room schedules, I popped into the Internet lounge to send email to let my brother (who was meeting me at the Los Angeles airport between planes) and my ride home from the San Francisco airport know that I had delayed my return. Stephen and I were supposed to go to lunch, but my conscience made us go to the final Board meeting instead. Then we grabbed Tim and Ben and dragged them off to the convention centre food court. The staff had been eating there a lot but I was glad this was my first time: there wasn't much I could eat and what there was wasn't very good.

The final afternoon was livened up by the arrival of copies of the parody newsletter, one of the best I'd ever seen aside from the fact that, untraditionally, it contained the authors' names: UK fan Steve Davies and local fan Emilly McLeay. Even though a few of the jokes were at my expense, I still thought it was funny. We spent the rest of the afternoon packing up extra program books and pocket programs and saying goodbye to whoever stopped by.

Then it was time for closing ceremonies. Perry had told the fan fund delegates that we'd have a chance to speak, which was great because I had wanted an opportunity to thank my various trip hosts and the whole committee. Much to my surprise, when I got onstage and saw Perry, the thought flashed through my head that it was the last time that I'd see him and the rest of the committee. By the time I reached the mike, my eyes were tearing. Luckily, after a few sobbed opening words, I managed to gain control and finish the rest of the speech. I was very embarrassed afterward but most people said they thought it was sweet.

At the large volunteer party in the ballroom following closing ceremonies, I took some photos of the whole staff before we went our separate ways. I also used the opportunity to tell people that I was planning to have a DUFF Dead Platypus party in my room the next night. When Maureen and Paul heard about this, they asked if it could be a jointly hosted fan fund party, to which I quickly agreed. After the party, Eve and I went to dinner with Pat, Mark, and Nick Price at the Greek restaurant at Southbank. It was nice to unwind and trade horror stories now that the con was over, and I finally got to taste pavlova! Eve went back to the room but I stopped by NY fan Lise Eisenberg's dead dog party for a little while before joining her.

A Last Taste of Melbourne

Tuesday, September 7

Eve left very early, with much regret, and I spent the rest of the morning packing. When I went downstairs for a quick breakfast, I serendipitously ran into Marcia and Tim. Then I rushed off to the Centra for the final committee meeting. I found Nick Stathopoulos waiting for his ride to the airport and prevailed on him to Klingonize every fiver I had in my wallet. After the meeting, Ben let me use his laptop to read email, as my modem still wasn't working. I discovered that my brother wouldn't be able to meet me at LAX but my ride could still pick me up a day later (much better than the reverse).

I'd arranged to have lunch with 1974 DUFF winner Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown back at the Grand. We had a great time. I heard horrifying (and DNQ) tales of their trip through America, which made me blush for my entire homeland. On this serendipitous day, when I left the restaurant I bumped into Lise while she was accompanying trolleys of leftover food from her party to the hotel's fridge. She'd heard about the Dead Platypus party and generously offered to donate her leftovers to the cause.

I finally was free to run the errands for which I'd extended my trip. Number one: buy an opal! In the prime opal district, I went from shop to shop seeing nice stones in boring settings or vice versa. Then I found an irresistible harlequin opal in a beautiful modern setting. I verified it as a great deal for the price but still much more expensive than I'd counted on spending. What the heck... With this bauble safely tucked away in the bottom reaches of my purse, I went on to buy stuff for the party, including the essential item: beer.

It took forever to get a cab back to the hotel with my booty, which barely left time for my next errand. I loved Melbourne Federal architecture, especially the paint schemes coordinating with wrought iron balconies in contrasting colors. I wanted to take some photos and had hoped to go to the neighborhoods near Stephen's where I'd seen the most numerous examples. There wasn't enough time for that, so I switched to Plan B: taking a tram from the hotel in the direction away from the business district, and getting off when I saw a neighborhood that looked like it might have houses of the type I was looking for. Amazingly, this worked!

Party set-up loomed so there was no time for a planned dinner expedition with Stephen and Jane and Scott Dennis. I did get to ask him to please finish my final errand: buying authentic chocolate Yowies (accept no Goosebump imitations!) to bring to the U.S. for DUFF auctions. (Yowies are shaped Cadbury chocolate containing a plastic egg, inside of which is a well-crafted put-it-together-yourself Australian animal toy.)

There was nothing on the room service menu I could eat but I decided to test the full-service aspect of the upscale hotel in which I was staying. I went down to the lobby restaurant and after some hurried explanation, they agreed to make me a smoked salmon sandwich. I carried it up to my room to prevent them appearing during the party to retrieve the room service cart. While setting up the party, I realized that Terry Frost probably hadn't heard about it but I managed to track his phone number down and let him know.

The party went pretty well and I was glad of the chance to see everyone for one last time. And the chance to take some photos of folks I hadn't snapped already. And a last chance at some Australian gastronomic delights, like the smoked salmon, good cheese, and apple-pear juice. Given my flight the next morning, I kicked everyone out around midnight and had a good cry before straightening up and going to bed.

Wednesday, September 8

At the airport, I discovered that I was on the same flight as Mike Walsh and Mary-Rita Blute and George Martin and Parris McBride. They made some pointed remarks once they found out I was flying business class, but that stopped when I threatened not to bring them Godiva chocolates from the upstairs stash :->

I'd bought an attachment for my laptop power supply so I could get a lot more work done on this trip report on the flight home. Although this gizmo had worked fine on the way out, it of course didn't work on the way back when I really needed it. You can imagine my surprise when the guy sitting next to me volunteered the information that he had one of them with him as well and offered to test it. His didn't work either. After some whispered consultations with the stewardess, we found out that the electricity supply to the seats wasn't working. (A complaint to United after I returned resulted in a \$100 voucher to cover the gizmo's cost.) Aside from that, and the curious opinion on the part of United that fish is a vegetarian appetizer, the ride was relatively comfortable and I even got to see Notting Hill.

Epilogue

Nearly a year later, I'm still processing the trip and its ramifications in my life. I think I accomplished the main goals of a DUFF delegate: while I may not have had the chance to hang out in the hallways at worldcon and meet local fans, I think I strengthened the ties between North American and Australian fandom (especially as far as the con committee was concerned!). Many people who have heard about my Program Ops experience have been surprised at how positive I am about the trip. However, that experience didn't take away from how very kind and accommodating everyone was, from my hosts on my travels to the convention staff.

Australia is fascinating and beautiful, and I hope to get back there someday to see more of the countryside and travel out west. And, of course, to visit the people I met on this trip, many of whom I now consider to be my friends.

I recently did a panel on fan funds, and all of the panelists agreed that no one but another fan fund winner could possibly understand what it's really like. I hope this report gave you some small idea.

