

GUFFAW



GUFFaw

is a one-off fanzine jointly written and produced by the candidates in the 1999 Europe-Australia GUFF race

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GUFF is, variously, the **Get Up-and-over Fan Fund** or the **Going Under Fan Fund**, depending on the direction in which it's running. GUFF was created in 1979 as a means of 'closing the gap' between TAFF (which links Europe and North America) and DUFF (which links North America with Australia). Like them, GUFF exists to provide funds to enable well-known fans from Europe and Australia to visit each other's national conventions (in this case, the GUFF winner will represent European fandom at the Australian Worldcon, Aussiecon III) and to get to know each other's fandoms better. GUFF exists solely through the support of fandom — your votes and your donations are not only welcome, they're essential.

You should find a GUFF ballot enclosed with this fanzine. If it is missing, please contact your local administrator for a ballot form. The deadline for votes reaching the administrators is midnight on Easter Monday, 5 April 1999.

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Contents

Strange Wildlife of Tasmania — some guidelines for visitors to Australia, from Steve Davies	3
Deus Ex Machina — Julian Headlong comes over all religious	9
Stone of Chu — alchemy that works from Julian Headlong	11
Beyond the End of the Reel — memories of a place he's never seen from Paul Kincaid	13

VOTE TODAY

Australian Agent: Karen Pender-Gunn, PO Box 567, Blackburn, Victoria 3130

Steve Davies

I'm co-editor of *Plokta*, a fanzine of dubious reputation; I'm chairman of Reconvene, the 1999 Eastercon; I've worked on everything from filkcons to worldcons and I have more superfluous technology than is good for me. I don't actually collect skulls, they just accumulate around me. If I win, I'll take vast quantities of notes about my travels, then throw them away and write a scandalous trip report bearing no relation to reality at all. They're more interesting that way. I'll also include lots of digital photos with libellous captions. Special offer! Vote for me and get a free Tasmanian!

Strange Wildlife of Tasmania
—My Career as an International
Coffee Bean Smuggler

In 1997, Giulia de Cesare and I got married in Hobart, Tasmania. Giulia's family had been complaining for years that we should get married and well, we just sort of ran out of excuses. I therefore got to see the fabled Antipodes at first hand and, with this in mind, I proffer these notes as a guide to whichever of the three of us draws the GUFF short straw.

Entering Australia was an interesting experience. Not to give away the plot or anything, but as I was subsequently to discover, Australia is in fact on a completely different planet to the rest of us, a fact demonstrated by its unique ecosystem, mindset and approach to the English language. The fact that we were able to fly directly from Singapore to Melbourne can be easily explained by positing a system of hyperspatial fractures of the sort familiar to most of my readers. Honestly, it's by far the simplest hypothesis. Occasionally, normality starts to break through, but then the truly surreal jumps out and thwacks it over the head with an opal-studded surfboard. But as I was saying, getting in was interesting. You see, you fly in, get to Customs and the first thing they ask you is, "do you have with you any foodstuffs or anything of animal or vegetable origin?" Well, there's our clothes, books, watchstraps... us! We daringly declared a single bar of chocolate and were waved through, successfully smuggling two human beings into the alien ecology of Australia. Phew!

VOTE TODAY

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Now being in Melbourne, we needed to change planes to Hobart International. Astute readers may ask “if there’s an international airport in Hobart, why did you have to come via Melbourne and risk being deported for the heinous crime of wearing a cotton shirt?” Well, I’m glad you asked that. The answer is of course that Hobart’s only international flight is once a month from New Zealand. We could have gone that way, but quite frankly, spending four weeks in the transit lounge at Auckland, fighting off marauding sheep, is not my idea of fun. What’s more, if we hadn’t flown via Melbourne we would have missed seeing people actually paying good money for what they call “Antarctic overflights” (and a man in a very badly done promotional penguin suit). So tell me, what sort of lunatic voluntarily gets on a plane for 6 hours just to fly over a bit of ice and then come back home without even landing to harass the natives? Not that there are any natives of course, but you could always harass the penguins or buy traditional ethnic sun-block from them or something. In fact, given that Tasmania is completely covered in a solid blanket of cloud and looks just like anywhere else does from 30,000 feet, they probably fly them over Tasmania and tell them that it’s really Antarctica.... Little do the unsuspecting tourists know that what is below them is not the Ross ice shelf at all, but the exotic city of Hobart.

Ah, beautiful Hobart, famed in song and utterly familiar to anyone who has listened to London’s Capital Radio at any time in the last several years. Star DJ Chris Tarrant, having decided that the interminable Hobart Radio 7HO jingle was probably the worst he, or anyone else, had ever come across, proceeded to play it incessantly. Somehow or other, he managed to attract an audience of tone-deaf Radio 7HO groupies, including my co-editor (of *PLOKTA*), Alison Scott, who took great delight in singing the jingle at every opportunity and even playing tapes of the show to Giulia. I’ve heard them, and yes it’s exactly the sort of thing you’d expect a small town radio station to produce. That Hobart is the state capital of something about the same size as England (after the awkward daggy bits like Scotland and Wales have been surgically removed), is a mere unfortunate fact and can therefore be safely disregarded.

Alas, having arrived in mysterious, exotic Hobart, we fell victim to that terrifying scourge of foreign travellers, jetlag. It’s not just for Christmas, you know. In fact I’m still not convinced I’m fully recovered. Here it is, some years later and I’m still falling asleep at inopportune moments during the day. Mostly in the middle of long meetings for some strange reason.... But I digress. Here it was, a fine sunny morning in Hobart, and two barely sentient zombies are terrorising the suburbs of West Moonah. Well, we would have been terrorising them if we could have dragged ourselves upright long enough to do so. You can’t do a good job of terrorising when you’re mostly sitting around going “urhh” at irregular intervals. You know, they say that the best way to get over jetlag is to stay awake until night-time and go to bed then, even if it means staying awake for 36 hours. They lie. Actually, to be fair, I’m the one who’s sitting around saying “urhh”, Giulia is modelling *The Dress* for her mother who is concerned that we have (in true fannish fashion) just opened our suitcases and left everything spread all over the floor rather than using the cupboards and drawers. Honestly, I tried to tidy up a bit, but the drawers were already full of stuffed toys, junk and photographs of Shelley (my soon to be brother-in-law Robert’s somewhat estranged wife—they’re separated but still living together... “these Australians are crazy, Obelix!”) which have been banished to the outer darkness. In the process, I discovered that my bag was full of contraband—the contents of a packet of chocolate-coated coffee beans which I forgot to declare at customs and which have in revenge spread themselves

VOTE TODAY

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all over everything. I considered turning myself in and throwing myself on the tender mercies of the authorities, but I think it was just a momentary aberration of the jetlag.

Of course, with that famous Australian hospitality, Giulia's mother (as a special treat) produced a packet of "traditional English muffins" for breakfast so that we'd feel at home. Is this really the time to start ranting about how the English muffin is 99% the tradition of MacDonalds (and the remaining 1% is eaten only at teatime in a small benighted area of the country, in place of the scones/crumpets/pikelets which are eaten everywhere else)? No, probably not.

This, by the way, was intended to be a low-hassle wedding.

The idea was that we would travel light, bringing only Giulia's dress, and be parachuted in to find that everything else was arranged and ready to go. Of course, there are some things which needed us to be on hand for. Firstly, we had to go into town with my soon to be father-in-law, so we could check that the hire suits were OK. They were ordered from Myers, a large department store which seems to have a staffing problem as the place was almost deserted. We eventually tracked someone down and convinced them to let us try on the suits, despite not having an appointment. One set of trousers was at least 6" too long but at least it was a standard suit. I, on the other hand, discovered that I had been provided with the full penguin, tails, cut-away jacket, fortunately no top-hat... if Hobart had an orchestra, I could audition for conductor, no worries. We got home and discovered that just to add insult to injury, the shirt collar was a wing-tip collar and likely to look really silly. Gloom all round, well, apart from Giulia's mother who was all for charging into battle with Myers menswear, demanding a refund, an apology and the salesman's goolies to hang from her banner. Of course, Myers being a large department store must have plenty of other suits? No. Every suit has to be individually ordered from the mainland and rowed across the Bass Strait by caravans of trained koalas. Could we delay the wedding for 6 months until the next shipment? No. I guess Tasmanians don't generally hire suits. Of course, I don't generally hire suits, except when I'm on the opposite side of the planet to my wardrobe. Anyway, it's not going to be possible to change it for the more conventional jacket we'd ordered. Sigh. Ah well, it's going to have to be the penguin. Maybe I can make some money on the side, performing for tourists at Melbourne airport on their way to Antarctica.

Hey, don't get me wrong, I like Tasmania, I'd love to live in a nice friendly place with stunning scenery and superb food like this... just not here. I mean, quite apart from continually being told that the economy is crumbling away, the State government wants to chop down all the 10,000 year old trees and turn them into chipboard for the Japanese, strip mining destroying the landscape, heavy metals poisoning the Derwent, doom and gloom... it's just too far away from anywhere I actually want to be. More to the point, most of our friends are in the UK, which is probably just as well since Giulia's mother would be on the hotline to the Pope, demanding nuclear strikes on the whole northern hemisphere, if she had the slightest idea of what sort of people her daughter associates with (this means you, unless you're reading this in Australia. Of course she probably feels that a few tactical nukes on selected suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney wouldn't go amiss either).

Right. Now we start desperately filling in all the gaps in the preparations. As soon as Giulia gets back from having her hair disparaged by the hairdresser it's off to talk to Jill Webster who is

VOTE TODAY

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going to conduct the ceremony. Actually, this was something of a success. Giulia's mother's attitude was "no daughter of mine is getting married anywhere except by a Catholic priest in a Catholic church", Giulia's was "OK, I won't get married then, and by the way I'm going off to live in England with some fellow you've never met." Eight years later, we compromised on a non-religious ceremony with a female celebrant in Hobart's nearest equivalent to a stately home, Runneymede. More of a stately bungalow, really, but the garden's nice. It's a pick-and-mix wedding, so we go through the assortment of available ceremonies, filling our 6-ounce paper bag with possible wordings, suggesting bits of poetry, selecting sonorous phrases. Jill explains where we have to stand, when we have to enter and how to say our pieces. Giulia had wanted to get married in the garden, but given the flocks of grey clouds which seem to be pursuing us wherever we go, giggling all the time, we take the cowards' way out and opt for the music room.

Then we needed to visit various family friends who were doing things for the wedding. For various complicated and highly embarrassing reasons, we had to go via the airport where their canine superhero, "Quarantine Service Beagle," was out strutting his stuff. This little beast's role in life is to trample all over the passengers' luggage, sniffing for foodstuffs and other organic material, while wearing a "Protecting Australia" jacket in lieu of the traditional superhero cape and underpants. Fortunately, our disguise as non-organic lifeforms appears to be holding good. However, he did succeed in finding some illegal immigrant fruit in a couple bags and promptly handed the owners over to the Department of Agriculture death squads to be shot. And so Australia was saved from a fate worse than death before our very eyes! I try not to think about the guerrilla coffee-beans currently subverting society at that very moment from the safety of my suitcase. Then on to Rick and Anna Cazaly who have an absolutely incredible house in Sharks Bay, built on a steep slope (e.g. almost, but not quite, a cliff) down to the beach. It looks like a shack from the road, while inside it's like a treehouse out of Vogue with all teak and brass and beautiful things. The kids' bedrooms are themed and they can camp down by the beach and paddle canoes in the bay. I thought people only had childhoods like this in 'Swallows and Amazons'. And it's far away from anywhere—except that it's only 35 minutes from the city, maybe we should move here after all.

Next there's Giulia's old friend Angela who lives even further out of town along a road which seems to be in imminent danger of washing away in the pouring rain. And the wipers have started to misbehave. Oh joy. Angela is the sort of person for whom the phrase "dippy hippy" was coined. She's taken a course on becoming a counsellor but says she doesn't feel ready to practise yet and wants to take more courses. Perhaps it's just as well. She's also into drama therapy, numerology and god-knows what else. She gave us a performance of the Shakespeare sonnet Giulia wanted her to read and which she had learned by heart. Umm. Imagine "Let us not to the marriage of true minds..." as performed by Puck, or possibly by one of Macbeth's 3 witches. I never realised love poetry could be so sinister.

Lastly there's supper with Henry, the other soon to be brother-in-law, and his wife. We were sent off armed with a loaf of best Dwarfish Italian Battle Bread just in case we ran into someone from Myers along the way. A pleasant evening, another lovely house with a huge perfect lounge that merges imperceptibly into a superbly planned kitchen with no clutter. How do these people do it? When I think of our kitchen with its rows of shelves, full of little bottles containing essential spices like asafoetida, elfbane, tooth of wolf, tongue of frog, tiger's chaudron.... Not to mention racks of pans and woks and complicated electrical gadgets that looked really useful

VOTE TODAY

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before we bought them and completely superfluous as soon as we got them home; the espresso machine, the food processor, the electric steamer, the couple of dozen different sorts of coffee machine. How do these people live with only a hob and a selection of cupboards?

Friday—It's sunny.

No, no, no. It's SUNNY!!!! In fact it's so sunny that the UV forecast is "Extreme" and the fire forecast is "Danger. If you even think about lighting a fire we will get Superbeagle to make you wish you'd never been born. So there." Amazing when you consider that all they have to do is mention the word "barbecue" and the heavens will open with the downpour to end all downpours. Naturally, we decided to go on a picnic. We covered all the exposed bits in lashings of Factor 50 sun screen and headed off to Seven Mile Beach, stopping at an oyster farm to buy a box on the half shell. I was going to just get a dozen, but Giulia went "we want a dozen oysters, two dozen, no three dozen..." and she doesn't even like them. It's not that far to the beach, about 20 minutes or so from town, but there were probably about 10 people on the whole seven miles of beach, and they were mostly in a small clump a couple of miles away. The sun was hot, but there was a strong sea breeze and we took off our shoes and paddled. After basking in the sun a while, drinking beer and eating oysters, off we went to Bonorong Wildlife Park. Here kangaroos, wallabies and peacocks roam the grounds, being fed by the tourists (entrance includes a bag of food). It also has some slightly less amenable animals like koalas, quolls, wombats, echidnas, emus, eagles and of course the infamous Tasmanian Devils (which, contrary to the misinformation spread by Warner Bros., look something like an unpleasant cross between a rat and a dog, and smell strongly of rotting meat. I wish I had their marketing agency). Out of deference to Croydon fandom, we take care to pay our respects to the wombat (common, rather than hairy-nosed—it appears that there are only 60 hairy-nosed wombats left... or rather there were 60. The Australian government just wiped out another 3 or 4 in a misguided attempt to get the little sods to breed. It seems that if you take a red-blooded Australian wombat and line him up with a couple of hot dates, he either spends his time drunk in front of the telly or gets into a screaming argument over "who are all these other wombats you're going out with, then?" and they claw each other to ribbons as any zoologist or soap-opera enthusiast could have told them).

And now a short warning anecdote. If you, dear reader, were going out for a picnic in the sort of weather where the ultraviolet doesn't just burn you, it eats cosmic rays for breakfast and causes asbestos to undergo spontaneous combustion, you would wear sun-block, wouldn't you? All over the exposed bits? And if you took your shoes and socks off to go paddling, would you remember that you hadn't put any on your feet? Fluorescent pink toes are so fetching, don't you think?

Saturday—"The Day". Things are getting complicated again.

Me: "Do we have the rings? My (not-so) smart shoes? Waistcoat? White shirt? Cravat? Penguin jacket?" Worry, worry, worry... panic!

Giulia: "Steve, can I suggest something? Let's never do this again"

So what do you do on the morning of your wedding? Well, being us, we went shopping. After all, Giulia had been complaining that she certainly wasn't going to miss the chance to hit

VOTE TODAY

UK Agent: Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU

Salamanca Market for anything as trivial as getting married. There were fruit and veg stalls, second-hand junk, collectibles, food stalls of all sorts, tarot readers, tourist tat, arty-crafty things, expensive really nice arty things, preposterously over-priced arty things, new-age stuff, jazz, jugglers and the universal Peruvian folk band. I have a theory that all Peruvian folk bands are simply extrusions of some 4-dimensional meta-band, a folk music monstrosity currently trying to conquer the world, but not trying very hard. Either that, or else the entire population of Peru is out on tour and have just left a few cardboard replicas behind to give the impression of a real country.

Oh well, eventually the dreaded hour came round when we had to stop shopping and Giulia headed off to get changed and drag her frantic mother down off the ceiling. I put on my penguin suit and headed for Runneymede. As the first one there, I got to try and find a mirror to check my cravat in—ties are the invention of the devil and cause progressive anoxia and incipient brain-death, no way was I going to wear one, instead Giulia made me a cravat out of a piece of wedding-dress, along with a matching waistcoat, I thought it was very nice of her. Jill turned up with her ghetto-blasters and marriage register, and we rearranged the seating a bit, then waited for people to turn up in dribs and drabs. I check the music-room clock, it's 5.27, Giulia should be here soon. A few more people turn up. 5.27. Angela turns up and I send her off to arrange with Jill what the signal is going to be for the reading. 5.27. I realise that the clock is stopped and that it's been showing 5.27 for at least the last half hour... if not the last half century.

After several aeons, Giulia turned up in an elderly white Rolls, wearing the cream and gold dress which she'd been slaving over for months (and which I'd been carefully avoiding seeing). The dress was made from an ivory silk sari with an intricate gold pattern. Basically, everything Giulia looked at was unspeakably awful apart from a couple of little things at around the £10,000 mark. So we went shopping for silk in Southall and found some stunning formal saris at prices that were merely extortionate. Then Giulia and Teddy disappeared for a month while they steeled themselves to cut into the sari since it's not something where you can go back and ask for another couple of metres. Finding another sari of the same pattern would be pretty close to impossible. Fortunately, it looks like they sliced in all the right places.

Everything goes swimmingly. We make all the right responses at all the right times, the words aren't too gooey, Angela reads the poem in a responsible fashion, we get through the vows without stuttering or giggling. Amazing! Suddenly, we're outside being attacked by relatives armed with baskets of rose petals. The next half hour is a chaos of kisses, hugs, mugging for the photographers and trying to avoid sudden showers of petals at inopportune moments. Cousin Tony the photographer does his stuff, setting up all the various family groups. Then the guests head off to the reception and Tony switches cameras to do a few atmospheric shots of us with the house. We pose on the music room steps, in the living room, on the front verandah, in front of the Rolls, in front of the fountain, hanging upside-down from the roof... Tony goes over to the camera box to get another battery pack for the flash, and suddenly realises that there isn't any film in this camera and hasn't been for at least the last 20 minutes. Sigh. I guess we're just going to have to start all over again. At the beginning.

VOTE TODAY

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Julian Headlong

Bibulous biblioholic biochemist, part-time alliterate and paronomaniac, and provider of “serious scientific talks” to the fannish intelligentsia — “Headlong into the Drink” on fankind’s favourite tipples, “I am Spock’s Liver” on Vulcan biochemistry (cuprohaemoglobins‘R’us), and “How the Black Hole at the Heart of the Galaxy caused the Russian Revolution and the hits of Boney M” on astrophysics, molecular biology and disco — at Eastercons, Novacons, Mexicons and Worldcons, and as a Guest at Star Trek and Dr Who cons. With a fund of interesting subjects and an inexhaustible supply of bonhomie and bad puns, Australia can be sure of an entertaining GUFF guest.

Deus Ex Machina — the God in the Wordprocessor

As a good agnostic scientist I have a problem with science fiction. Also with fantasy, mystery, historicals, indeed, with all the genres. Actually it’s more of a problem with fiction itself.

I read about a book a day. That’s an average, and includes the standard sf magazines (*Asimov’s*, *Analog*, *F & SF*), each counting as a book. It also includes lots of re-reading. Say 250 – 300 pages a day. Mostly fiction. Mostly sf.

And every single page proves the existence of God.

I find that hard to accept. It’s not just the written word — every piece of fiction, every cinematic film, every theatrical play, every TV drama, all of them show the hand of God. Every one has lurking in the background a Supreme Being, an Omnipotent Deity, an Almighty Creator. Someone who toys with the lives of His creations, while forcing them to hew to the straight and narrow destiny of His all-powerful whim. Behind every work of fiction, every comic, every play, every short story, and every novel, there is the shadow of its Creator — the author.

Some fiction is overtly theistic — religious tracts, biblical “improving” stories, etc. Some fantasy stories take the Judeo-Christian religion as a given — vampire tales, stories of Demonic possession, the American “Angel” craze, *Father Ted*. Some use the symbolism and myths of Islam, of the Hindu Pantheon, of Wicca. Other fantasies use older Gods — the Greek Pantheon, the Aesir, and the old Gods of the Americas, China and Japan, or the legends of Faerie. They have all been resurrected at one time or another, to greater or lesser effect.

VOTE TODAY

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Some fantasies use Gods created *de novo* for an individual book or, more likely, a ten-part trilogy. These will usually have a rather obvious relationship to the standard Greek Pantheon, with a few silly names thrown in to prevent copyright infringement lawsuits. Coming up with a wholly (holy?) new God being rather difficult, you usually end up with Gods of war, love, agriculture, pottery etc. The occasional Pratchettian God of Turtles or Income Tax adds a little light comic relief.

All these Gods are real, of course. They must be — their Prophecies always succeed, their Oracle's predictions always come true, their Champions always win. Again, and again, and again. The magic works. Good triumphs, Evil is vanquished, Life makes sense. An external source of "Evil" actually exists, sometimes with its very own anthropomorphic avatar, sidekicks and minions (usually Orcs) (usually scabrous and foul) (usually copyright J.R.R. Tolkien), and always, always, in the final pages, defeated.

Of course, these Gods are only real within the structure of the fiction they inhabit, but even in the most coldly rational and hardest of hard sf, there is still that lurking feeling of theistic presence. The hidden hand of the creator. The *Plot*.

That's the trouble with fiction generally, when compared with "real life" — it seems to make sense. And, generally, real life doesn't. Make sense, that is. So, do I spend all my time reading nothing but scientific textbooks, histories and biographies? No, because they don't engage my interest the way that fiction does. They don't spark the old *sensawunda* the way good fiction does; I can't lose myself in them the way I can in a well-plotted sf novel. And I do like my plots to make sense.

Odd, really, in an agnostic rationalist, a scientific humanist of sorts, to prefer this quasi-divine whimsy to a rational storytelling. To prefer a nicely constructed plot to a story with no plot, no hidden meanings, no conspiracies — just accidents, coincidences, synchronicity and emergent effects. The real life unexpected consequences of unthinking behaviour don't make for gripping sf. That's just journalism. In real life the rule is: never ascribe to conspiracy anything that can be explained by stupidity. In fiction it's the other way round.

When the rules of plot are broken, the "willing suspension of disbelief" is also broken. So fiction *has* to make sense within its own context, even though this moves the story one step further from the real world. Without this "escape from reality" the reader's attention is lost, there can be none of the "escapism" that well written fiction allows if real life patterns intrude. You can't include in fiction the accidents and coincidences of real life — I once bumped into my brother in London, neither of us lived there, we didn't know the other was planning a trip, just one of life's little coincidences. But you couldn't do it in fiction. Not and maintain that suspension of disbelief, you couldn't.

So, even though I have a small problem with the over-cooked contrivances and sugary subterfuges of fiction, a worry about that oven-gloved hand behind the plot, I still prefer it to the alternative. I still prefer a warm work of fiction to all the coldly factual nonfiction in the world.

I still like my escapism served *well done*.

VOTE TODAY

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**A Nice and Accurate Prescription
for the Very Fine Formula
for the Creation of the Most Wondrous
Stone of Chu
by Means of the Alchemical Arts**

**As described by that Most Famous
Theoretical Alchemist and
Practical Scientifictionalist,
Julian Headlong**

Know then —

At no Time should any Particle of the Ferrous Metal be allowed to comingle with the Various Substances, Humours and Elements herein Described, lest all thy Labour shall be in Vain, and no Good shall come of it. For it is a Truth, Universally Acknowledged, that Cold Iron is the Bane of all Alchemical Enterprise.

Primus —

Take a goodly Portion of that soft, green-hued Stone called Malachite, then grind this Stone into a Powder exceeding fine. Heat this Powder in a good Furnace until it be no longer green in hue, but rather wholly dark and brown in Aspect. Allow this Powder to cool, and set it aside.

Secundus —

Take a goodly Portion of that hard and adamant, yellow-brown Rock, known to some as Witherite, which is oft found in Company and Close Association with that Mineral, called Heavy Spar. Know then that when this Rock of Witherite be cast into the Furnace to be Calcined, it will of itself give Birth to the Valued Substance called Baryta. Now take the Portion of Witherite and grind it Exceeding Fine. Take this Powder, and set it aside.

VOTE TODAY

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Tertius —

Take a goodly Portion of that Rare and Costly Mineral called Yttria, which, having been Discovered by the Learned Scholar Gadolinus in the Town of Ytterby in the Kingdom of Sweden, is now much sought after by the Royal Armourers of Chobham for its Unique and Useful Properties. Take the Portion of Yttria, and grind it Exceeding Fine. Take this Powder, and set it aside.

Quaternus —

Now assemble these Three prepared Powders, in the Proportion by Weight of One part of Yttria, with Two parts of Witherite, with Three parts of the Calcined Malachite.

Mix these Various Powders together most thoroughly until they form a Single Homogenous Species. Now place the Mixture in a goodly Furnace of a Heat sufficiently great to melt the Argentous Metal, but not so great as to melt the Noble Auric Metal.

Heat the Mixture whilst maintaining this same Heat for the Period of a full Night. Thereafter allow the Furnace to cool slowly before withdrawing the Calcining Vessel.

Terminus —

Know then that should the Newly Formed Mineral within the Vessel be of a Green Aspect then the Firing was at Fault. Re grind the Mineral in Mortar with Pestle and Attempt the Firing anew.

However, should the Vessel hold a Stone of Lustrous Black hue, then Rejoice, for Success is at Hand. For you now have in your Possession a Quantity of that Most Wondrous of Substances the

STONE OF CHU

Otherwise known to the Wise and Good as a Sample of—

*Mueller-Bednorz-Chu 1:2:3 Yttrium-Barium-Copper Oxide
100K Ceramic Superconductor*

This was actually the introduction to a talk I gave at the 1987 Worldcon, Conspiracy 87, in Brighton, called "Science is Magic". It involved a lot of lasers, piezoelectric crystals, and a particularly funny Van de Graaff generator (funny to me, that is – I wasn't the one who got zapped).

I guess you had to be there.

VOTE TODAY

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Paul Kincaid

After nearly 25 years in fandom — producing and reviewing fanzines, working with the BSFA and on conventions, writing criticism and the odd story — I want to extend my horizons. Everyone who has been to Australia has raved about it, and I am keen to find out what all the fuss is about. What's more, with the close co-operation that is developing between TAFF and DUFF, I see this as an opportunity to complete the circle and get all the fan funds working together.

**Beyond
the End of
the Reel**

I've been trying to remember the first time I came across Australia. There was the song of 'The Wild Colonial Boy' which I learned sometime in Junior School, I suspect, and promptly forgot, and I don't suppose I ever associated it with Australia. And there were pictures of kangaroos. And there was 'The Flying Doctor' on television at some point, though that may have come during the 1960s. So the first time I really heard about Australia as a place must have been connected with my Aunt and Uncle.

Some time in the mid-50s my Aunt Nancy, Uncle Albert and cousins David, Christine and Larry had mysteriously appeared from somewhere called Rhodesia. I didn't quite know where or what Rhodesia might be, but I knew my Aunt and Uncle had pots of money and black servants to do everything and the life of Riley, so people said, and no-one could quite work out why they ever left. Still, here they were in drab old England and in time settled in Hythe on the South Coast. There seems to be a surprising number of Hythes on the South Coast, in later holidays we kept passing through Hythes only for me to be told, "No, that's not where Nancy lived." Where Nancy lived turned out to be in a Hythe that backed on to the New Forest. In fact, if you squeezed through the gap in the chain-link fence at the bottom of their garden and slithered down a steep grassy bank, you were *in* the New Forest. I know, because I did it several times during that one long summer that must have been around 1957 or '58.

It was only this one time we went to visit them, and I think it must have been for the entire summer because I remember starting out from Middleton Junction — one of those little stations Dr Beeching would shortly axe — and leaving my father behind on the platform. He was to join

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us later. There's not much more I really do remember about that visit. The house seemed new and spacious and bright and plastic, just like the American homes we were starting to see on our new television. And, let's see ... There was the massive block of concrete with a hole in it on the Isle of Wight (probably some rubble from the coastal defences) where I got my head stuck (I don't remember how I got free). And there was the time I left home (I got as far as the end of the street). And there was the time Larry and I were chased round and round in a tight circle by an alsation that must have been about the same size we were. Eventually, I realised it was after the tails of the Davy Crocket hats we were both wearing, so I stopped running then watched as Larry and the dog continued to chase round and round me. And that's all of it.

Shortly after that they left for Australia, as suddenly and mysteriously as they had arrived. "It must be Albert," people said, as if that was meant to explain things.

Then we received a reel of film through the post.

It was quite something to receive a package like that all the way from Australia. (I knew Australia was far away, now; I'd seen a map of the world. It was pink, just like so many other places, including Britain, which made me think that it probably looked pretty much like Britain despite the distance. I mean, how far could far away be?) So we borrowed a projector and a screen and very carefully threaded the film through all the gates without really knowing if we were getting it right and turned out the lights and threw the switch.

It was in colour, which was pretty startling. This, after all, was the late 1950s. Everything we saw on the tiny screen of our television was in black and white, so were most of the films at the cinema. It was the drab 50s, a monochrome world, where pollution had turned every building to the same uniform black and few clothes had much in the way of colour. So even the washed-out colour of this jerky little film which looked as if it had been consistently over-exposed was a revelation.

It was a typical home movie of the period — not that that bothered or surprised or disappointed us — there was no sound and everyone exaggerated their actions for the camera. It began as Aunt, Uncle and cousins boarded a ship in Southampton (that was exciting enough, I'd never seen anything so big or so glamorous) then it showed various of them looking at the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Indian Ocean, somewhere nameless in South East Asia. And it stopped abruptly as they reached Australia.

There was this steady growth in heat and excitement and exotica that reached a climax in mysterious Australia. A place that was so exotic, so exciting, that we couldn't see it. I tried to imagine what a place must be like to come as a full stop after so many weird and wonderful ports of call. I failed, of course, because other than the brief glimpse on the film I had no way of imagining these ports of call. But for a long time after that, Australia was unknown and unknowable, a massive pink question mark on the map of the world.

No other reels of film ever arrived.

Naturally, over the following decades I started to fill in some of the gaps in the map,

but in the way you might grab a random selection of jigsaw pieces and try to imagine what sort of picture they could make without even knowing if the pieces came from the same set. I

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got to know more about Australia, but it wasn't particularly coherent. I mean, Sydney seemed to consist entirely of the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, we never saw any more of the city. If it was a city and not just some peculiar sculpture park in which these two buildings sat in splendid isolation. Anyway, how could you imagine such modern structures which appeared to be situated beside the sea, in a country which we knew — from 'The Flying Doctor' and 'Skippy' and 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport' and what have you — was made up entirely of a sort of scrubby desert called 'Outback'? (And what exactly *was* a 'billabong'?) And then there was Rolf Harris, and that peculiar accent, and people calling each other 'cobber' — where on earth did you fit that lot into the picture?

Come to that, it's not all that different now. If anyone were to ask me out of the blue to name any great Australian landmark, I'd come up with the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge and Ayers Rock and the Great Barrier Reef and ... and ... er, that's it. I don't watch any Australian soap operas, but I somehow don't imagine they are filling the British public with images of great Australian architecture. And most famous Australians still tend to be exiles, only these days you tend to think more of Germaine Greer and Clive James — oh, and Rolf Harris, still. Then there are the barmen, whenever you go into any pub you London you are almost guaranteed to find an Australian barman, and they seem to be 90% of office temps and receptionists as well. Here was this mysterious, invisible land at the end of a trail of wonders, and everyone spends all their time getting away from the place. Was this some sort of Omelas?

As the Sixties became the Seventies and then the Eighties, I started to get other images of Australia, but still fragmented, still not adding up to any coherent whole. For a start there was the Australia of *Walkabout* (and no, unfortunately I don't expect to see a naked Jenny Agutter at the Worldcon) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and Bruce Chatwyn's *The Songlines*. This was a mysterious place, so in a sense it was the closest to the glamour beyond the end of that reel of film. But it was all Outback and desert, an aura of magic overlaid on the barren nowhere of *The Flying Doctor*, not quite the technicolor amazement that the film seemed to promise.

But the modern urban Australia I began to encounter in contemporary Australian literature — from Peter Carey's *The Tax Inspector* to Tim Winton's *That Eye, The Sky* — wasn't much better. The cityscapes, when they appeared in the books, didn't feel different from the cities I read about in American fiction, but without some of the instantly familiar landmarks — except the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, of course. However, most of the fiction didn't take place in cities, but rather in suburbs or small, run-down towns where you felt at any moment the Outback was going to break through and sweep all this tenuous humanity away. And even if the Outback wasn't waiting, predatorially, on the wings, these were hardly the glittering places you could imagine at the end of the film.

The other Australia, in a sense the most common one,

did nothing to dispel this sense of clinging to the edge. From films like *Ned Kelly* to novels like Thomas Kenneally's *The Playmaker* and Alan Garner's *Strandloper*, Australia was a lawless place, a place of transportation for life, a dumping ground for convicts. That glamorous passenger liner was re-enacting the sort of arduous, enforced *Rite of Passage* of William Golding's novel. Beyond the rainbow flicker of colours as the film ran out were colonists in chains wresting a home from the ever-present harshness of the Outback. No wonder so many of them were exiles wandering the streets of London.

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There was a curious confirmation of this pessimistic view while I was away at university, so I never did get the full story. Unlike most family events, people said nothing about this, they just shrugged. At one point my elder cousin, David, was in the Australian Navy, only to go AWOL. What happened next is unclear. Was he really on the run for as long as it seemed? Was he on the run at all — nobody spoke about it, remember, was this just an over-fertile imagination? Some time — I have a distinct impression of some *years* — later the law caught up with him. I presume he spent time in prison, I imagine he must have done, but no-one *said* anything. This was just something that happened in Australia. This was just something that happened *because* it was in Australia. The next time I heard anyone talk of David it was as if nothing had happened. Maybe nothing had.

Then, it must have been around the start of the Eighties because I was living about as far away from home as it was possible to get and still be in the United Kingdom, Nancy and Albert came to visit. They had been in Australia a little over twenty years, though they had moved about quite a bit in that time — “Albert!” people said — and they spoke with the accent. Albert drank endless cans of lager — he called them “tinnies” — which he held in a polystyrene holder. They were awful. I was glad I was living so far away, I didn’t have to meet them for long. They gave me a wallaby skin which I kept with immense embarrassment for a while then discreetly threw away. *This* was Australia, this was what awaited you at the end of the reel of film!

And so it remained. Despite intermittent contact with Australian fandom that started in the late Seventies — *Thyme, Australian Review of Science Fiction* — Australia remained this unknown place beyond the end of the reel with that great unanswered question hanging over it: did I really *want* to know about it? Then my parents went to Australia for three months. By this time Nancy and Albert were living in Cairns, so my parents found themselves on the sub-tropical coast of Queensland. They came back loaded with stories that confirmed all my worst fears and prejudices — particularly about my relatives. Christine lived no more than a 20 minute walk from her mother, yet they spoke on the phone at least five times every day, as well as popping in and out of each other’s homes all the time. They never walked, even took the car to the shops at the end of the street. Nobody walked: when my parents went for a walk one evening they were stopped by the police to check that they were all right. There was no encroaching Outback here — except, possibly, in a moral or social sense — but everything else fitted into my growing jigsaw picture of the great unknown. Closer contacts with Australian fandom since then have convinced me that my relatives are, perhaps, an anomaly — they are, after all, British, not Australian, for all their acquired characteristics. Or maybe it’s just that fans are different.

But my parents also brought back photographs. Roll after roll of them. They showed my aunt and uncle and cousins, as expected. They showed where they lived, a house as bright and plastic as the one I remember from Hythe. And they showed Australia. An Australia of tropical flowers and luxuriant undergrowth and colour. The bright, vibrant colour that really should have burst out at the end of that old, faded film. Maybe here, at last, was the magic that deserved to come beyond the end of that reel.

At least that is something I still have to find out.

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