



G'day!

SPIRITUS MUNDI 195

A SFPazine for SFPA #233 by
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Bill stepped on a patch of wet grass and his feet went out from under him. He crashed onto his rear end. A backpack containing his thermos and other expensive gear hit the slope and slid, slowly as a turtle, towards the edge of the abyss in the midst of Hanging Rock.

“Guy?!” Rosy cried. “Get it!”

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

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

Rosy volunteered – after all, she said, she was the lightest and could be easily hauled up to safety. As if. I didn’t risk death and insanity on a 14 ½ hour plane ride to send my wife down a cliff and into peril. *I* had to go. *I* had to drop down into that pit – and worry about getting back after I got there. So over I went, following the pack, sliding on my personality into the unknown.

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

A thin white sapling grew by the edge of the rock shelf. Rosy bent it down to me. I grasped its rubbery limbs and began to haul my heaviness up, hand over hand., my feet seeking purchase on the featureless sides of the crevice. The roots of the tree gripped into the Rock’s thin layer of soil. An inch – two – ripped free. I took a great interest in those roots. If they gave way, down I’d crash, and there would be no way for Rosy and Bill to get me out of there. And to begin with, we were *lost*.

Lost on Hanging Rock. Is there anything *more* Australian?

Oh, *could* be. How about feeding a kangaroo? caressing the ear of a sleeping koala? watching a platypus skim through the water like a misshapen otter? feeling a quokka clamber over your toes – the wind from an eagle’s wing flutter over your ear? How about hearing the hard sharp *tink* of a bell bird echo upward from a valley almost the equal of Yosemite, nothing between you and eternity but your refusal to take one step forward? or the coo-loo-loo of a kookaburra, sittin’ in his old gum tree?

How about cheering for – not “rooting for,” definitely *not* “rooting for” – a “footy” team in the controlled massacre known as Australian Football, as it made its greatest comeback ever? How about scanning an original copy of the Magna Carta under the grass-covered roof of Parliament House? How about running your hands over the tiled roof of the Sydney Opera House, or clambering across the Harbour Bridge?

How about touring the home – now the gallery – of Australia’s greatest painter, eying the ribald and revolutionary work that would one day bring a movie crew to this very house? How about showing your beloved lady a sky she’s never seen before – The Southern Cross (among its stars, Alpha Centauri)?

How about wandering cities clean and modern among people lively and friendly, people, who have a million reasons to visit your own country, but *none* to move here? Because they have almost everything we have, and *Australia* besides ...

Rose-Marie and I visited Australia for three weeks in April and early May, 2003, as American science fiction fandom’s delegates of the Down Under Fan Fund. We have now returned ... and each night since I’ve dreamed of our trip, and wonder in my dream why we left. Was that what it was? A dream?

Let this be my answer. We were driven to – and from – Hanging Rock by one of the two taxis in nearby Woodend. The cab was driven by a charmin’ sheila named Sue, who on my request took us on a futile quest to see kangaroos and showed us a place where – sure enough – a stopped car *rolls uphill*. Her word, uttered through a constant smile? “Yehhhhhh. *YEHHHHHHHHH*.”

So ... a dream? A beautiful memory? *YEHHHHHHHHH*.

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As part of our DUFF duties, we’re expected to pen a report of our experiences downunder, and sell it to recoup the cost of our trip. This small reminiscence in *Spiritus Mundi* is not that report. This is simply the nearly immediate reaction of an exhausted old man, who never felt old in Australia.

Not even at Swancon, the Perth event which was this year’s Australian National Convention, and there I had every reason to feel stricken in years. Swancon was about the size of a DSC and of a constituency similar to your average gamers’ convention. Except for the aforementioned Bill Wright and the great Robin Johnson, the Aussiecon chairman whom we met at the ’74 DeepSouthCon, I’m sure we were the oldest people there.

But it was still fun, at least most of the time, and we made the most of it. The programmers for the event – criticized later for failing to utilize their excellent Aussie guest list – put us on two panels, let me handle another one myself, and, a major treat, had us present the fan Ditmars – Aussie fandom’s equivalent of the Hugos. Rosy and I alternated reading

nominees and then the winner, and even if we'd never heard of them, at least our announcements were met with wild enthusiasm from the winners.

Our mutual panels were on being a newcomer to fandom and fan funds. Rosy shone, her natural charm beaming forth. We really got off on a special **Hound of the Baskervilles** presentation – a compilation of scenes from lots of versions, from Rathbone's to Stewart Granger's (uniformly panned) to a *dreadful* animated version that looked like Scoobie-Doo without the Scoobie. (Right ... just the *doo*.)

Another panel dealt with Batman, and hey, guys, teach your granny to suck eggs, why don't you? An audience member had the ill grace to mention that I was a DC veteran, which I think intimidated the panelists, especially when I mentioned interviewing Bob Kane in his comics-art-bedecked living room and the fact that he was such a ... a ... (Spanier?) *Putz! Putz!*, yes, that's it. The kids had never heard of the Giant Props Era, nor knew much about the enormous change in the character when Julie Schwartz took over **Detective Comics**, but hey, they tried. *I* tried not to talk too much.

The pup moderating my one-man **Smallville** panel *didn't* try – he'd never even seen the series. Expected to carry the full load, I was crippled by the spoiler factor: Aussies are *a full year* behind us in getting their TV. The audience wouldn't let me talk about this season's pivotal Chris Reeve episode or anything more recent than last year's tornado show. I did manage to work in some comments about the place of *character* in the series. I'm convinced that the show is about the building of character, which is why a kid's gripe about Jonathan Kent sparked a long GHLIII monolog about the purpose of parenthood and my only political comment of the con: that Jonathan's moral strength and boneheaded myopia are symptomatic of why America invaded Iraq. All such aside, everyone was happy with the news I passed on from Mark Verheiden – a third season.

But time enough for detail in the DUFF report. Let me cut to the convention's epic moment – our party. Rosy and I decided weeks ago that to make a splash at Swancon, we had to make a real splash – with hurricanes. We bought umpteen packets of the famous Pat O'Brien's cocktail mix and arranged with the concom to hold a party after the masquerade.

They established us in an unused bar on the convention floor and provided us with three huge buckets of ice – gifts from the local McDonald's. (A cut or three above the quality of *your* local Mickey D's ... or mine.) Rosy hung decorations with a Mardi Gras theme, carefully adorned the bar and tables with Mardi Gras beads and *faux* doubloons, and I learned to play bartender. Simple enough. Fill a pitcher with cold water, mix in the powder, fill a cup with ice, pour in the kool-aid, add half a jigger of good Australian rum, and watch the people smile. Costumed Australians flocked to the bar. Rosy hung beads about every neck and I poured inebriant down every (legal) throat. They came back for more, and I heard a compliment I never expected to hear: "You guys *rock!*"

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

Robin knew Fremantle well – he was not only a worldcon chairman but a



travel agent in his past – and knew where to take us – the Maritime Museum, where the wretched and fascinating story of the *Batavia* was the featured exhibit. Fabulous stuff, that – a shipwreck on a desert island, establishment of a **Lord of the Flies** tyranny, murder by massacre, justice by rope. The Museum had relics of every kind from the *Batavia* on exhibit, including the skeleton of a victim (his skull dented as if from a cutlass blow) and a hunk of the keel, preserved somehow at the bottom of the sea. Very cool.

Then we were off on a shuttle across the deep, deep blue *Indian Ocean* – to Rottnest. Never have we, or any members of our families, been further from home. Or hotter. While Bill went swimming and Robin took a bus tour, Rosy and I rented bicycles and pedaled hither and yon about the nearby bays and inlets – a beautiful experience, but criminy, were we out of shape!

Too bad, because the day was beautiful and Rottnest, despite its ugly name, was a nifty island. The sea was exquisite, if just as cold to the toes as its Atlantic and Pacific cousins, and the view of distant lighthouses and even more distant Perth calmed and soothed the heart. I had a serious case of the vacation jitters. There was so much to see, so many wonders to experience, and the days seemed so crowded and busy and short. I found I had trouble staying *in the moment*, because the sense of things-undone-and-left-to-do was just so intense. For instance, after a week in Australia, I hadn't seen any kangaroos not made out of metal – a set of sculptures on the streets of Perth. And here on Rottnest, despite hours of pedaling, we had yet to see any *quokkas*, and that was making me plumb loco.

Quokkas are funny critters, even in Australia, where funny critters abound. A marsupial, they're unique to Rottnest, never having gained a foothold on the mainland, and signs at the boat dock asked tourists neither to fear nor to feed them. So while surreptitiously ogling the sunbathing tourist girls, I also scanned the scenery for quokkas, and found none.

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

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

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

The next day answered almost all of our fauna needs. After being awoken by the contrasting sounds of Cathy Cupitt's breadmaking machine and the unknown bird making beautiful cooing music outside of our window, we accompanied Perth fan Dave Cake into the outskirts of town. Rosy was looking forward to seeing some real outback, not realizing that the Outback to Australians is like the Kansas wheat country is to us. She wouldn't see red dirt and aborigines and Ayers Rock without a separate plane trip – and having committed to an extra day or two in Perth, we just didn't have the time.

So we saw the Swan Valley, instead. Wine country – too far north, David said, for the premium stuff, but the grapes still hung heavy on the vine, and they made attractive counterpart to the white-barked gum trees. I'd hoped to see some 'roos and wombats and whatnot in the wild, but in that *I* was to be disappointed – sort of. Dave took us to the Caversham Wildlife Park, where 'roos and such were guaranteed – if lamentably tame.

I didn't stay disappointed, because though the zoo seemed a bit crude, it was also *approachable*. That is,

you could get up close and personal with the inhabitants, and through them, with a bit of the Australian experience. Such as the sluggish koalas – the poor grey lugs eat nothing but eucalyptus leaves, which are poor in nutritional value and give them only enough energy to scratch. The ‘roos, in their petting pen, also seemed a little tepid – but only because it was the height of the day. But I’m not making a big enough deal about our first live encounter with one of Australia’s signature creatures.

Kangaroos remind me of our deer – they have about the same temperament, and are spotted in the wild with about the same luck and frequency. In captivity, they were anxious to scarf the pressed foodies given us by the park management. Biggest hoot: the joeys, hooves and heads sticking out of their mamas’ packed pouches, sometimes so huge and cumbersome that we wondered why the doe didn’t dump her package out onto the turf with the command to *get a job*.

Possibly my favorite critter at Caversham was a friendly parrot who stuck his head out of his cage and engaged me in conversation. “Helloooo?” he said, and “Helloooo!” I said back to him. This went on for quite some time. My least favorite? The flying foxes, bats which piss constantly and who contaminated the whole zoo with their reek. Yick

We had lunch at one of the wineries in the Swan Valley, the Houghton Vinyards, and Rosy bought a bottle of their brew as a succulent souvenir. It awaits an appropriate moment for uncorking – perhaps worldcon, where it would be shared with **Chall** pals and **DUFF** divas. That night we joined the dead dogsters from the Swancon at a farewell bash in a downtown eatery known as Pancakes, which served crepes, mixed liberally with fannish pandemonium. We probably shouldn’t have given Perth two extra days, but it was still a bittersweet moment when we said farewell.

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And so Melbourne again, and the home of Craig and Julia Hilton. Craig and Julia were old friends, having visited Nawlins before Nolacon, interviewed me for Australian radio, and given me my first taste of Vegemite, that salty sandwich spread which was featured in the lyrics of “The Land Downunder”. (Rosy had tasted some on Hanging Rock, and it is *ghastly* stuff.) That night I had my first intelligent political talk of the trip with Craig; he lamented the mean-spiritedness of Australia’s current “bean-counter” government, and expressed ever-more-understandable unease with the “huge footprint” America is leaving on the world. As ever, I was careful to disassociate myself as bluntly as possible from W and his ego-stroking war. His new and arrogant America is no America of mine.



The Hiltons live in Toorak, an upscale neighborhood spotted with mansions. The next morning we piled into Craig’s “Toorak tractor” – an SUV – and toodled off for our second zoo trip of the week, at the famous Healesville Sanctuary up in the Dandenong Mountains. The vistas were pretty, the hills high but gentle, the turf reminiscent of North Carolina, or “hobbit country,” as Julia said. On the way we heard tell of Australia’s attempt to create a new tradition: the Easter *bilby*. Thanks to mixomatosis, bunny rabbits are considered *déclassé* downunder, so an effort is underway to substitute an indigenous creature in Peter Cottontail’s fabled niche. At the entrance to the sanctuary, in fact, they were handing out bilby masks.

Healesville was a much fancier establishment than the zoo in the Swan Valley, and more formal – they didn’t allow personal contact with the animals. But they made up for it in class and variety. They had *brolgeas* – grey storks with red heads – and *larakeets* – red-tailed black cockatoos – and *tasmanian devils*

– ugly critter, on the constant move – and *echidnas* – funny waddling porcupine-like fellow – and glory of glories, a whole building devoted to the *duck-billed platypus*, surely the silliest, cutest, beast alive. I'd never seen one before and was astonished that such a foolish-looking thing could be real. Bills like ducks, just as advertised, claws like panthers, bodies like silver-bellied squirrels, they swooped and dove through their darkened aquatic lairs like tiny fur flying saucers. *Just too cool.* The Hiltons noted my rapture and gave me a tiny pewter platypus as a souvenir.



Birds flew in aeries and free. The bell bird makes a lovely, sharp *tink* sound that I wished I could have recorded. The rare orange-bellied parrots were among only 200 on Earth. Craig had us stay for a demonstration of native birds of prey, brought forth and put through their paces for the appreciative crowd. Right overhead they swooped, a kestrel falcon hovering, a black-breasted buzzard beating on an egg with a rock, and a huge wedgetail eagle, its wings frothing the air as it caught a tossed mouse – which I trust wasn't alive at the time. Fantastic.

We saw a boomerang demonstration – they really work, and come left- or right-handed – and bought a couple as souvenirs and gifts. We saw bandicoots and quollas and gallahs – whose name has come to mean “fool” in Aussie slang. We *ahem* also saw kangaroos, although these weren't the tame and pettable sort we'd encountered in Perth. These were rather more raunchy. One dude, in fact ... well, how do I put this? Have you guys heard of Ron Jeremy, and his signature trick? I dare be no more specific than that. If asked why this roo did what he did, I think it was because he *could*.

“Yehhh!” smiled the cute female zoo worker. “That's *very nice*, isn't it?”

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A very different sort of animal was our target for that evening: *fannus australianus*.

For years I have received thick and entertaining fanzines from the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, the MSFC. *Thyme*, Alan Stewart's newszine, was a Hugo nominee at the last Aussiecon, and is a rich treasury of information – even if Alan does insist on dating his issues a year or more in the past. (As *him* why, not me.) *Ethel the Aardvark*, MSFC's clubzine, is a classic genzine, with excellent articles by Danny Heap and others and an inspiring sense of a fun group. I've often expressed the wish to drop in on a MSFC meeting, and the Friday after Swancon, by God, we did it.

MSFC meets at a rec center which apparently used to be a church, and it's quite a facility. Alan took glee in showing me their fanzine archives, currently filling box after overflowing box in an old projection booth up a steep flight of stairs. Both Rosy and I were very impressed by the MSFC library, wall-to-ceiling bookshelves crammed with titles familiar and obscure. *La belle* was delighted to find four of her daddy's books on hand.

I presented a copy of *Chall* #17 to Emily McLeay, the cute *Ethel* editor, and in gratitude she sold me a candybar. After Heap and Justin Ackroyd appeared, the meeting took on the proper party aspects, and we adjourned too early.

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Rosy and I had been together almost every minute since beginning our journey. The next afternoon, she

couldn't ask me to go shopping with her and Julia, and I *couldn't* demand her presence at a *footy* game, either. So for once we went separate ways.

Craig and I took the train downtown to meet Stewart and some of his pals to enjoy a scrum or two between the Richmond Panthers and Hawthorn Hawks at the municipal stadium. Quite an experience.

Australian rules football bears a certain resemblance to rugby – a more popular sport in Sydney – and a certain resemblance to World Cup soccer. There all connection with civilization ends. Imagine six-foot-five-inch galloots in tee shirts and shorts slamming into one another like freight trains at full throttle while pursuing a ball that looks very much like our football, except with rounded tips. (Our game is called *gridiron* downunder, by the way.) They can kick the ball, carry it if they dribble it every few paces, *mark* the ball by catching it on the fly, punch it to another player (tossing is forbidden), and tackle or otherwise maim an opposing player who has the ball in hand. The oval field is enormous – larger than a soccer field, I was told – and the scoring frequent – one point if the ball is kicked between wide goalposts, an event so common the crowd barely reacts, six if punted between the narrow posts within them, which causes wild partisan celebration when the dude in the white fedora waves his flags. Alan, Craig and I joined his friends in an exclusive seating section and the game began.

To my surprise, I found I had *no worries* – Aussie phrase – following the contest. I was sharing Stewart's glee in the first two quarters as Hawthorn racked up an enormous lead. (Again I wished I had brought a tape recorder, because the gentle evocations of the gent behind us echoed the sweet *tink* of the bell bird. "*Come on Sammy!*" he'd bellow, and "*What's the difference ya dense Arab!*" at the referees, no more popular there than here, it seemed – and no more Arabic.) In fact, at halftime Alan apologized for subjecting me to a dull massacre, but there is a reason they play two halves of footy, and not just one.



I figured out what Richmond was up to – Muhammad Ali's classic rope-a-dope trick. In the second half the Panthers ran their opponents ragged. Hawthorn had exhausted themselves in the first pair of quarters and now stood winded and helpless in the face of fresh Richmond team. The Panthers made a comeback unmatched in the history of the club. The Hawthorn fans sat dumbstruck, except for one or two who got into fistfights near our seats and were subsequently punted out themselves.

At the end, the stadium reverberated with the Panthers' joyous anthem. I can hear it now: "*Row, row, row ... on down the river / you can row, row, row ...*"

That night we joined the Hiltons for an Italian feed at Leo's, a place well known to local fandom. Bruce and Elayne Gillespie and Stewart joined us, and we talked fannish stuff for hours. I haven't written here about the Melbourne dinner we'd enjoyed the night before leaving for Swancon; Bruce and Elayne had been there, along with Aussie fannish legend Dirk Jenssen (whose artwork as "Ditmar" rivals Alan White in style and quality), but we hadn't seen enough of them. Afterwards Craig and Julia took us on a midnight tour of Melbourne, one of the world's most attractive cities. We were beat, but the jaunt was worth it – handsome historic buildings, parks where possums took the place of squirrels, and an incredible blocks-long casino, where we lingered long enough to experience the hourly flame fountains billow from pylons along the river's edge. Eyebrows toasted, eyelids heavy, we bid the incredible day good night.

We had to hurry the next morning to pack and make the train. Rosy left her coat (the Hiltons mailed it to us in Sydney) and I hurt my back hauling luggage. It hurt anyway to leave Melbourne – our favorite of the cities we saw on the trip. In my notebook, I wrote “Melbourne the most livable city in the world. I want to win the lottery and retire there.”

Our trip to Canberra was nice – outside the window. The pretty country reminded me of America’s upper South, gentle hills, lovely forests, interesting towns. Inside the windows we were tired, cramped, irritated, miserable. Best thing about the journey? My cover. We never made it to Queensland, where Australians break their Broncos, nor did we catch any rodeos – but the *illo is* Australian original art! I spotted it on the wall of a wayside café somewhere in the hills between Wodonga (where they had a KFC, pretty common in Australia) and Canberra. The sign demanded \$5 Australian for it – about \$3 U.S. “How much *without the frame*?” I asked. The salesgirl knocked off half.

The day improved only after we sighted the spire of the enormous Telstra Tower over the distant mountaintops, and we arrived at last in Australia’s capital city, Canberra. Donna Hanson met us at the bus station. During Swancon she had shared a breakfast expedition with us, and volunteered to host us during the Canberra part of our journey. Especially nice was the fact that we were arriving on the eve of her birthday, and her family was throwing her a special birthday feast to which we were invited.

After a quick drive into the country, we found Donna’s home and were introduced to her family: s.o. Tony Crivelli, son David Taamati, nephew James, and her glowingly beautiful daughters. David’s fiancée was in charge of cooking the dinner, a banquet of lamb and pasta that filled and satisfied the spirit as much as it did the appetite. After feeding, talking, and grooving on some of the computer animation David, a student, had been working on, we retired, the day restored.

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There were, I think, three absolutely epic days to the DUFF experience, and April 28 was one of them. It was our only full day in Canberra, and we wanted to make the most of it. Donna, alas, had to work – “my super will have my guts for garters!” – but she enlisted Tony’s charming sister Pat to show us the epic sights we knew we had to see.

Canberra struck me as pretty and new. I got little sense of age or decay out of any of the cities on our itinerary, but from the capital, the least of all. Perhaps this was because it’s a city of design – built for the very purpose it was fulfilling: government.

Our DUFF predecessors, Pat Molloy and Naomi Fisher, had urged us to visit the Parliament House and its environs, and t’was there Pat first took us, stopping first at the Old Parliament House and the Aboriginal Embassy. This latter edifice was, in truth, no more than a colorful shack – a protesters’ billet that had been standing more than 15 years. I got the distinct impression that Australians take an uneasy pride in the continent’s aboriginal heritage; aboriginal art was everywhere, including on a mosaic outside of the new Parliament House, our next stop, but outside of a few burns on the street in Perth, we saw no actual aborigines.

The new Parliament House is one of the most remarkable buildings in a country of remarkable edifices. Most of it is literally underground; grass grows on the roof. Within, it is modern, bright, and attractive, with much woodwork and an especially handsome hall of portraits. Australian Prime Ministers stared down at us – one in a style very like Kelly Freas’, though the man didn’t resemble Alfred E. Neuman – along with other famous Ozzies and Her Majesty. An original copy – that isn’t an oxymoron – of the Magna Carta was on display. On the grassy roof, the whole panorama of Canberra spread before us, from

the “frozen fountain” of Lake Burley Griffin –the American who designed the city – past the Old House to the War Memorial in the distance. It was truly splendid.

After scarfing a small pizza (and buying railroad tickets for tomorrow) we were off to the country. Specifically, we were off for *Tidbinbilla* and its *radio telescopes*. Some of the country we passed through was blackened and bare –residue of the terrible bush fires that devastated the area recently – but most was green and hilly, with more than one Hanging Rock-type rock chimney thrusting into the sky.

The dishes were tremendous white mounted cups turned skywards amidst the pretty scenery. The Canberra Deep Space Communications Complex also boasted a neat space museum for tourists. Inside, a moon rock from Apollo 11 sparkled with flakes of glass; turned out Buzz Aldrin had been there and our sunny salesgirl had met him. She told a funny story about the Australian astronaut who had helped her serve drinks. When we left, she gave me some special photos of the big dish. “I *like* you,” she said. When was the last time a stranger said that to you in America?

Pat drove us back to Canberra, where we picked up Donna. Fetching James from his school, we spotted wild kangaroos in a distant field. At last!

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That night we headed out to Worley, apparently a suburb, to join Tony for dinner. Before leaving Donna’s vineyard home, I romped a bit with her pet maroma – translation, big white sheepdog – Billo Camillo, taking sadistic pleasure as he scattered Donna’s goats.

We picked up Tony at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Worley and adjourned to the local Hellenic Club, a posh establishment thronging with well-dressed yuppies and copies of famous statues. The Venus di Milo is a *substantial* lady. The restaurant, however, was nothing particularly fancy – a Shoney’s without the waitresses. No worries, though; while we supped Tony picked our minds about the best SF to buy (the Mars trilogy, I opined) and Rosy presented Donna with a fancy set of Mardi Gras beads – our gift for hosts all over Australia.

While we were there, Donna got a fabulous phone call. Her agent liked what she’d seen of her latest novel. Could she ship her the rest of the m.s.? Her delight lit up the night.

Back at her home, Tony – an amateur astronomer – took us out on the lawn to show us the night. The stars overhead were astonishing – the Southern Cross lost in the blaze of the Milky Way, though Donna remarked “I didn’t think they aren’t so crash hot tonight.” You can tell someone who lives with glory. We, who exist (I daren’t say “live”) in a vile and filthy city, and in the Northern hemisphere, were blown away. Inside, Tony showed us a DVD of images from the Hubble, so with celestial visions dancing in our heads, we closed down the day.

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We really had to haul boogie the next morning to make our noon train, especially since Donna insisted on showing us at least two more Canberra attractions. Future visits to Australia’s capital need to devote more than one day to touring. She took us by the creative and super-modern Australian National Museum – where we saw John Stanhope, the Chief Minister of the state, signing books on the terrible bushfires – and down the ANZAC Parade of war memorials to *the* War Memorial, a stately and extensive museum. Donna’s military connection



was fascinating – her grandfather, John Charles Reginald McCurdden, invented the first Australian machine gun – but was never able to sell it.

Our quick run through the Memorial prompted both Rosy and I to form curiosity about Gallipoli, the defining Australian military moment. That it was a disastrous defeat dims none of its lustre in their eyes: ANZAC Day, a great national holiday, had just occurred – on its anniversary.

We missed visiting the Art Museum and seeing the million-dollar Jackson Pollock on display – which hurt. But we made our train to Sydney by mere minutes, and I was so flustered by that and luggage disaster to bid Donna the proper farewell. I hope my apologetic e-mail that evening made up for it, because she and her family and Canberra had all been absolutely ace. Damned if it didn't hurt to say so long to Billo Camillo.

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There was a lot of nice scenery out the train window as we choochooed to Sydney – the Goulburn tower, the streets of Bundanoon, and acres of sheep sheep sheep.

Actually, I was trying to get a glimpse of the last great thing I hoped to see during DUFF – the Sydney Harbour. I had to settle for a second's glimpse of the “coathanger” bridge. Then the tall towers of Australia's most populous city rose about us.

There was enormous contrast among the four cities of our journey. Sydney was the busiest, noisiest – the most New-Yorkish. After exploring the high-ceiling train station for a while, we were met by Nick Stathopolous, our host. Nick, a former DUFF winner and '99 Hugo nominee, is a first-rate painter – now engaged in renovating his grandmother's terrace in the bohemian district, Paddington. He was apologetic about the “dickensian” mess in his place, but our bedroom was comfortable and wherever we turned – even in the laundry room – a sculpture or a painting came under view.

Alas, he said, we wouldn't be seeing much of Sydney fandom, because there wasn't much Sydney fandom to see; it was fragmented and uncommunicative. He was most interested in talking about his artistic career, showing us the contrast between the Australian version of a book cover he'd done and the American. There was indeed a vast difference in quality, and not to America's benefit. He also talked about the Australian coverage of the war, opening our eyes further to the vast difference in the way America saw W's hideous Iraqi adventure, and the way the world saw it.

One neatness: turned out that Nick was also an attorney, but that as he descended the stairs from signing his license, he'd been met by an artist asking if he wanted to do matte paintings for **Star Wars**. He's never looked back.

Outside on the street as we retired, we heard cats, dogs, people ...

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Outside on the street as we awoke, we heard children's voices, and small planes.

When we finally got going, Nick led us past the infamous wall at Burton and Darlinghurst – don't ask me why it's infamous, just be assured that it is – and onto a bus for the most famous area of Sydney: The Domain. Nick had been a last-minute find as host and he'd just been through the tourism bit, but he really got into it as we approached the Art Museum of New South Wales. After all, he had a painting there.

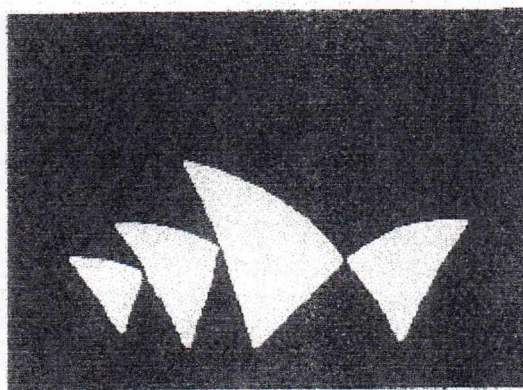
Every year artists about Australia compete for the Archibald Prize in portraiture, and Nick had been one of the 32 finalists. His piece was undoubtedly the most popular of those on display. "Here's Mr. Squiggle" showed a universally-adored Aussie kid's show character – their answer to Howdy Doody, still on the air after umpteen dozen years – with the genius who had created him, Norman Hetherington. It's a jolly piece; Nick volunteered to autograph several museum postcards to auction for DUFF.

After viewing his work, and photographing the smiling artist in front of it (much to the museum's displeasure), we took a quick tour of the other art – including a number of pieces by Norman Lindsay (n.b.). Then we were off through squads of joggers through the Woolloomooloo Gate for the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The Gardens are an elegant park containing some remarkable trees. Possibly the most remarkable was the rarer than rarer than rare Wollemi Pine, one of only 38 in the world, protected by its own cylindrical cage. Nick tapped me once to indicate a tree hanging with sinister fruit – flying foxes. Giant spiders spun webs beneath some lower branches. And there was the Wishing Tree – if you walked around it three times forward and three times *backwards*, you'd get your wish. We did it. And so far, so good – she's still with me.

We stopped at a café to talk about Batman and laugh at the ibises. We figured they'd evolved their curved beaks in order to better poke them into the corners of take-away (Australian for "take-out") containers. I must mention my sandwich – instead of bread, it was served inside a rolled-up leaf.

Then we walked to the end of the Bennelong Peninsula, the harbor spreading before us. Nick pointed out a ship seized by the Australian Navy which had been hauling drugs for North Korea. Then we rounded a corner and there it stood.



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

It's one of the most famous buildings in the world, so its story is probably familiar to you. Rosy & I paid for a tour – the guide's name was Gillian: "Guide Gillian," right. Sitting in the vast concert hall, a space dominated by the largest mechanical organ in the world, *ten thousand pipes*, we got the lowdown literally from the inside out.

In the late 1950s a competition was held for a design for a cultural center to be built on the peninsula of solid sandstone jutting into Sydney Harbour. Most of the 233 entries were complex, detailed blueprints and proposals – but one was a sketch by a Danish architect, Jan Utzon. He'd picked up on the many sails cruising the harbor, and brought it to architecture; the Aussies were, in a word, wowed. On the basis of a single sketch, he won the contract.

The design was challenging and extremely difficult to bring to be. The sail-like arches were only susceptible to Lego-like, segmented fabrication – a million-plus ceramic tiles, triple-glazed off-white so as not to blind onlookers. It took 14 years to build the Sydney Opera House and cost over a hundred million dollars, Australian, financed by a lottery. But the result has acoustics unmatched on that side of the planet, acoustics abetted by timber ceilings of soft wood and sound-deadening rings suspended over the orchestral stage. Over in the opera theatre, the stage was built deep so as to compensate for the lack of wings. (It still looked too small and intimate for a full-scale Broadway musical.)

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

But it was also the source of lament. The sign by the stairway lacked a few letters. The men's room needed toilet paper. Before we went there, the Sydney Opera House was a dream, a fantasy, an unattainable corner of paradise, as distant as the stars in the Southern Cross. Now the dream was a *place*. A beautiful place, an incredible place, a unique and marvelous place – but it's not a dream any longer. It's a *building*, and we've *been* there.

We walked around the Harbour past where the multitudinous tourist boats dock, and went through the Rocks, the tony shopping and restaurant district. Nick took us underneath the staggeringly huge Harbour Bridge, where, he said, part of **Dark City** had been filmed. We flaked out until his favorite Japanese restaurant opened, and with conversation about SF (Rosy) and sketching (Nick), the day slid into night. We thought we had exhausted our awe. Hahaha.

+ + + + +

Nick began our day by presenting Rosy with a Neville clone. You'll have to wait until the full-scale DUFF report to find out more about Neville, but suffice it to say, we forgot him. Mib we brought.

Then he took us to the train station for our journey into the Blue Mountains. We had been assured by Pat and Naomi that any stop in Sydney which did not include a journey to the home of Marilyn Pride and Lewis Morley, in the midst of those mountains, would be utterly wasted. They were Nick's best friends and he wanted us out of the way so he could prepare for a weekend trip, and so he was glad to set it up. How glad *we* were that he did.

Up the train chugged out of the suburbs and into the mountains. Though the hills were rounded and wooded – much more like the Smokies than the younger Rockies – we got a definite sense of *country*; perhaps not the outback wilderness Rosy so wanted to see, but definitely, the city was left behind.

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

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

everywhere hung demons and monsters. All fibreglass and latex; Lewis is a special effects artist, as well as a first class carpenter, and most of the stuff on their walls and shelves were props from films he's worked on. In fact, that was why he wasn't here; he was in Sydney, making an alien tuba for a scene in the next **Star Wars**. In Marilyn's very Australian term, they had "*heaps* of stuff."

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

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

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Like everyone else, I went to see the '80's movie **Sirens** to see Elle MacPherson naked. Indeed, that was an experience worth the fear of death. But the film had many qualities and a serious point, celebrating, in fact, the pagan and sensualist point of view of the great artist Norman Lindsay, on whose estate it was filmed. That estate, his home, studio and gallery, were indeed just down the road, and Sue drove us there, a place instantly recognizable, a place almost supernaturally joyous.

A beautiful house on a hilltop, surrounded by a wide lawn dotted with sexy statuary – some Lindsay's originals, cement shaped over chicken wire, some replacement bronze copies, molded to preserve the great man's work from the elements. Lindsay spent 60 years here, and the place is full of his work – oil paintings, the sculptures, watercolors, furniture, ship models – all featured in his gallery. His children's books are classics, like **The Magic Pudding**, but let's face it, it was his contemplation and reproduction of the undraped female form divine that lives on in our minds and hearts.



Lindsay's nudes aren't the gently insipid dreamgirls of **Playboy** or **Hustler's** raunchy gynecological exhibitionists. His soft but defiant figures have strength and power as well as stunning sexuality. Look at **Ladies of Olympus** or **The Amazons** or my personal favorite, **Solly**. These aren't weak or pliant people. These are women you both *can* win, and *have to* win – women of confidence and substance who make you commit to them and to life in the world. Lindsay's pagan instincts sing to the world.

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

Oh man. And here we were.

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Sue drove us to the end of a road out amongst the low brush of the bush. A barrier stopped us from going further, so we walked along the rutted, puddly dirt path to the sandstone surface beyond. The stone is soft and kids have been carving names and dates and rude messages there for decades. Beyond ...

Beyond was the Jamison Valley. The view stretched from Mount Solitary, opposite, to the Three Sisters to our right. I haven't seen such a view since *Yosemite*.

Below the valley was thick and green, and I mean *below*, the cliff face was unguarded, and sharp, and sheer, and the treetops from which the bell birds sent forth their penetrating *tinks* were hundreds of feet down. How far across to Mount Solitary, bare rock broken by growth – the mountain on which the Sirens of the film title had given us the movie's last, unforgettable image? It seemed infinite.

One step more – one step – and I'd learn all there was to know about infinity. I scrambled back, demanding that Rosy do the same – but she and Marilyn had more nerve than Sue and I. They approached the precipice on hands and knees. "There are three wrecked cars down there!" Rosy told me.

We moved on to view the Wentworth Falls, its Banksia trees, a site replete with fairy stories and a single kookaburra, sittin' in its old gum trees. We drove to the touristy town of Leura, and a more sensible observation platform by The Three Sisters. Stone monoliths reminiscent of the great columns flanking the Grand Canyon. The bell birds kept up their uneven percussive symphony from the valley below. Finally, as night was upon us, Sue led us to another abutment of sandstone, literally behind her house, where aborigines had carved images of emus, their sacred tribal totem – centuries ago. We viewed the etched creatures by torchlight.

Before our train came we ordered small pizzas at a parlor run by a pretty blonde and her daughters. The tables came with crayons so customers could draw on the placemats, and the walls were covered with their efforts. More great Australian art.

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Our last full day downunder began with frustration. Ted Scribner, a Sydney area fan, had been in touch through e-mail. Turned out he had set up a gathering of locals to welcome Eric Lindsay, a *very* well-known fan from further up the coast, for the next night ... *after* we'd gone. Rats.

We would be on our own this 2nd of May. Nick was off for his convention, necessitating a move to a backpackers' hostel near the train station. Called the Wake Up!, it featured an internet café in the lobby and several different styles of accommodation. On two floors, dormitories with communal showers, male and female. On another floor, semi-private rooms with shared baths. On the top floor, private rooms with private baths – which is, no surprise, where we were.

We left our bags – much heavier and thicker with souvenirs -- with the desk clerk. She was tall, slim, blonde, lovely, wearing *low*-cut jeans and a *high*-hemmed blouse, baring her succulently rounded tummy – in short, a typical Ozzie gull. We located the appropriate bus and toddled down George Street, back towards the harbor. Adult bookstores and movie theatres: they're universal.

Our aim was the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the "coathanger," one of the engineering prides of the nation. Remembering our stroll across the Brooklyn Bridge, we decided to take another such walk – with limitations. The bridge offers daring tourists the chance to climb its superstructure, and our DUFF predecessors, Teddy Harvia and Diana Thayer, had done it. We would not do it. For one thing, it cost \$145 Australian, about a C-note American, each. For another thing, although the climbers are given jumpsuits and hooked to a safety cable, *I'm not that crazy*. And I didn't marry anyone that insane, either.

We did climb one of the bridge's decorative towers, for *five* dollars Australian, and got just as spectacular a view. Of course, the SOH dominated, like a queen in her court, but about her majesty buzzed tour boats of every description and teensy human figures, all in a setting as memorable and delightful as any on Earth. We strode the bouncy, vibrating bridge to the town across the way, Kirribilli. Our cute waitress in the café had lived in New York City.

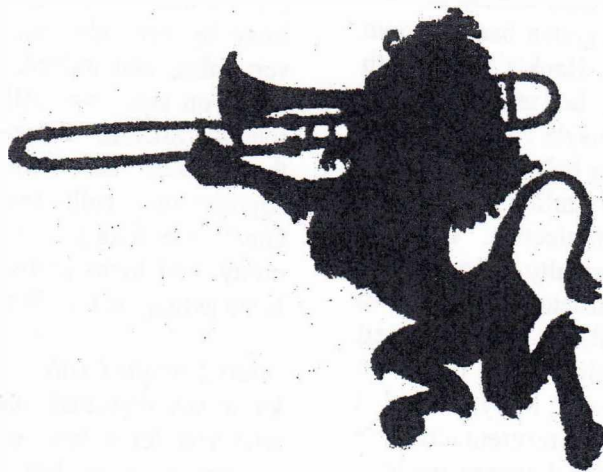
Passing a park with an awesome vista of the harbor, we saw firefighters practicing rappelling down the side of one of the bridge towers, and caught a ferry by the huge gaping mask which is the entrance to Luna Park, an amusement park under renovation. Somewhat to our disappointment, the ferry jetted across the harbor in less than three minutes – no leisurely tour there.

After I bugged Rosy into letting me nap on a bench, we walked back to our hotel through downtown Sydney. We stopped at a bookstore to get me something to read – ha! – on the plane home. Some first-release novels, available only hardback in the United States, were on sale as trade paperbacks, and I bought Michael Connelly's *Lost Light* (superb, by the way). A sign touted L.A. madam and celebrity whore Heidi Fleiss, autographing there soon. At a duty-free store we bought a large, cheap suitcase in which to haul souvenirs, and a few more souvenirs, tees, and like nonsense. A looped CD spouted incessant, obnoxious sales talk. The salesgirls were so sick of it they kept their radios on high.

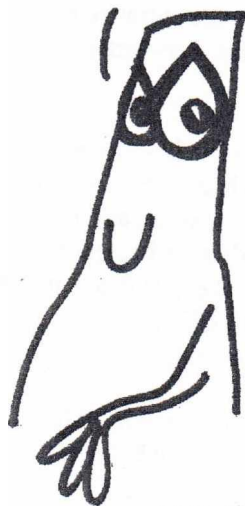
One last journey – that night. We put on the dressier duds we'd brought with us, but never worn – for me, a sports coat and slacks and "hard" shoes. After a deuce of a time finding a taxi, we made for the Rocks – and Doyle's, the most famous restaurant in the city. After all, it overlooked the Opera House, and *had once been in a Visa commercial*. For an American, that's the ultimate in fame. We dined overlooking the SOH, lit beautifully at night. True, the food was so hyper-expensive that we made do with a small entrée and a shared salad – but it was, at least, tasty.

It was an emotional day, at times; I didn't want to leave, I knew we couldn't stay – I regretted what we hadn't done, like visit Ayers Rock, and who we didn't see, like Scribner and Lindsay – but I loved what we had done and who we had seen. The next morning we cabbied it to the airport and were saluted as we took off with a sea as silvery and beautiful as I, at least, had ever seen.

Oz, man.



YES!
IT'S
TIME!



MAILING CaUSTiCS S F P A 232

"Yngvi is a
Louse" #82
Toni Cool
Cleary artwork
on your cover!
I wonder if
Randy could
draw a cari-
cature of Mike
Resnick ... ◇
There was never
any *appease-
ment* in the
Dixie Chick's
opinion about

W and his war, because Saddam Hussein didn't demand anything of us except to be left alone. She was simply disgusted with Bush's mendacity in justifying his brutal little ego trip. Agreed, she should have known that her core audience were the kind of cretins who equate the ability to kill a creep like Saddam -assuming we have - with the moral authority to do so. We blew up Iraq so Bush could strut in front of the public, his corporate buddies could make money and his America could think it'd gotten back its own from 9-1-1. ◇ Ha! Hank's tiffed with George Carlin because he made a nasty remark about Marilyn Quayle (which I agree is inaccurate; Marilyn's a ball-cutter, but she *is* pretty), and I'm mad at Carlin for his snotty comments about the 2000 election. Carlin is obviously an equal-opportunity annoyer. ◇ Speaking of Hank, his article on Islam is as rich as custard! The old boy's got it yet! Does he know the only woman named in the Koran? Mary - *the* Mary. And I understand she's spoken of reverentially. ◇ Katie Couric is adorable and approachable, a national treasure, but it wouldn't surprise me if she buried her 2nd Amendment feelings for the sake of her bosses' prejudices. After all,

she seems to share the common Today show bias in favor of O.J. Simpson, and I think she's too intelligent for that. ◇ Ouch - I still owe dues too. ◇ Is that your backyard in which you can shoot off your gun, or Hank's? Reinhardt's backyard is several acres of forest, or *bush* as we neo-Aussies call it. ◇ I want to read Hank's movie reviews for **Blade** magazine! "**Raiders of the Lost Ark**: Best swordfight I've ever seen in a movie." ◇ My concern about the *Columbia* isn't whether the accident could have been prevented; I doubt it could have been. What irks me is that NASA didn't check out the shuttle for damage while it was still in orbit, through orbiting spy cameras or ground-based telescopes, ascertain whether the tiles were damaged, and do what NASA used to do best: troubleshoot a way out of the jam. The space program's worst moment since *Challenger* could have become its best since Apollo 13. The head of whoever blocked that possibility should bounce down the street. ◇ Current predicted Demo nominee: Richard Gephardt. Solid Congressional credentials, good campaign issue in health care, not a chance.

Home with the Armadillo #57 Liz Yeah, 2003 is turning out to be *quite some year* ... ◇ I sure hope the surgery from April 24th went well - Rosy's mother Nita had a similar date with the doctor at around the same time. For a while we worried that she would need Rosy by her side, but she poohpoohed the very idea, and indeed, is doing fine. As I trust you are. ◇ Allie is graduating high school. Sheesh. I hope she knows how old that makes her Uncle Guy feel, and is appropriately guilt-struck. ("Who's Uncle Guy?" she asks.) ◇ That garden sounds pretty, and looks pretty on your back cover. Keep getting better. Worried about you.

Insert Dignified Title Here #1 George I don't know any dignified titles. ◇ Nice talking with you for a few seconds the other night. To answer your last question of that call nope, none of the movies I've seen so far this year have had any inkling of Oscar quality, but as a Rock Hudson/Doris Day aficionado,

you might like the spiffy satire **Down with Love**. Funny stuff. David Hyde Pierce is absolutely right on in the classic Tony Randall role, Renee Zellweger is better than Doris Day ever could be, but diminutive Ewan MacGregor only proves that there was only one Rock Hudson. Wait – take it back. Ralph (Rafe) Fiennes (Feens) gave a performance in **Spider** that was simply magical – but in so depressing a film (not to mention a genre film released in May) I doubt he'll be considered. ◇ Speaking of Tom Welling and Chris Reeve, here's hoping **Smallville's** "Rosetta" episode, starring both, gets nominated for the short-drama Hugo next year – and the season capper broadcast May 20th was almost as good. ◇ Yes, my poor brother lives on the same island as my poor mother used to – and was stuck with caring for her after Dad died and she began to lose it to Alzheimer's. Just the breaks – my parents were planning to move down to this area before Dad's heart attack put the kibosh to that idea – but he's had trouble forgiving me. ◇ Did you get a room for DSC yet? If not, and you end up not going (horror of horrors) consider going to the Huntsville convention in October: Rosy & I will be Fan Guests of Honor. ◇ yes, that's a werewolf, but ... *that's* a fire hydrant?

Guilty Pleasures 28 Eve Perhaps it's sadistic of me, but I really enjoyed your account of the Boston blizzard. Trust fans to handle disaster so lightheartedly; your description of the travails of being snowbound in a luxury hotel are inspiring. And they made movies about that *piker* Shackleton! Also, good for Raphi for finding romance in college – it took me forever, and afterwards, she cut out my heart and stomped on it, but boy, was it worth it while it lasted. ◇ You mention "dive" motels – that's my favorite kind. On my various cross-country journeys I haven't stayed in one that I'd let Rosy sleep in, with the sole exception of Wig Wam Village, quite clean as well as being infinitely cool. ◇ Amazing that idiots want to replace Alexander Hamilton with Ronald Reagan on the \$10 bill. *Reagan isn't dead* – from the neck down, anyway. Besides, I've seen

Hamilton's grave – it's very near Ground Zero in NYC – and it gives me a grisly thrill to take out a bill and consider how close I've been to the man in the portrait's bones. ◇ General preliminary word about the film version of **The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen** is that it sucks. We'll see.

Hello Kitty Jeff One of the few amusing things about W's Iraqi war was the coalition he built – countries like Iceland, which if it has an army could store it in a refrigerator (and considering Iceland, probably did). I wish we could have seen the uncensored coverage I heard about in Australia, which showed, for example, panicked soldiers shooting up civilian autos because they wouldn't obey incoherent shouted English commands. And has anyone found a genuine unadulterated weapon of mass destruction yet? Or does anyone care in the strutting braggadocio that now marks the American attitude towards the rest of mankind? ◇ I got the impression that Harry Warner wasn't so much of a hermit as a non-traveler. You should've called him and said hello when you went through Hagerstown; he would've enjoyed your visit. ◇ Clint Eastwood is too old for the parts he's taking nowadays. ◇ I avoided **Daredevil** but dug the new **X-Men** – as in the first film, there was some ace action. The measure of a comic book movie is the fights, and because of this, Wolverine stole the show. We love a hero who gets smashed flat, time after time, and struggles back – and that's him. ◇ Adrien Brody's wonderful Oscar as Best Actor was the highlight of a good show this year, and not because he smooched Halle Berry. His speech on the war was humane, temperate and uplifting. Also, as a fan of Chris Cooper's since his John Sayles films – the brilliant **Matewan** and **Lone Star** – I was delighted to see him win recognition. ◇ The early Hugo competitions didn't have nominating ballots, but they weren't selected by committee fiat: the worldcon membership wrote in their favorites and the plurality ruled. Sometimes by a tiny majority; I understand **They'd Rather Be Right** beat Damon Knight's **Hell's Pavement** for the Best Novel Hugo by

something like 13-9. ◇ George McGovern lost a daughter in the last couple of years – the impression remains that it was a suicide. ◇ When I told my client to “Q.F.A.,” I was telling him to *quit fucking around*. He ignored me and continued doing fanzines. ◇ What’s going on in the D.C. sniper(s) case? I needn’t wonder if the courts will admit the evidence taken from Malvo, the younger shooter, while he was effectively being denied counsel – this is the new America where due process means nothing. However, there’s enough evidence against the pair that any mistakes by the prosecution will be considered harmless error. The young guy may get off with life imprisonment, but the older guy is toast. ◇ **For Your Eyes Only** scored because it was a return to form after several films of excess. It brought James Bond down to Earth after the silly space setting of *Moonraker*, with a plausible story and classy female lead. Great song, too. ◇ We gave a moment’s thought o taking our laptop along on our DUFF trip, but opted for a lighter load to carry. After the first few days we were able to find internet cafes – they abounded in Perth – or borrow hosts’ computers. I only regret that I didn’t take the time to type up a one-page zine while downunder and ask you to print it for me – establishing a personal record in the all-important Zine Done Furthest From Home category. Next time.

Tennessee Trash #52 Gary R. Another ConCave concluded successfully and another nifty ConCave report from you. Has there been a collection of those cave covers? I desperately want to attend a ConCave one of these, but it almost always conflicts with Mardi Gras, is covered with snow, and the people in charge *harumph* stubbornly refuse to make it irresistible by making me Fan Guest of Honor! Nevertheless – someday! ◇ I don’t think we met Stephen Boucher during our DUFF trip, but I’m all for a Melbourne in 2010 worldcon bid! As for 2008, I too have heard no rumblings from any source. A quick bid could possibly steal the prize. Don’t worry; New Orleans has no interest in it whatsoever. None, do you hear

me? NONE. **NONE!!!!!!** ◇ The martial arts testing you describe sounds excruciatingly dangerous. Love and peace, people ... isn’t that what Reinhardt named his matching .45s? ◇ Alice Krige is one of the most *interesting* actresses I’ve ever seen. Her edgy sexiness even made garbage like **Ghost Story** and that stupid Stephen King movie worth watching, and what she did with the Borg Queen ... well, I now wish I’d seen **Children of Dune**. ◇ Rule 4? Guy isn’t short? What? ◇ What gets me about Fort Sumter is that it’s on *an artificial island*, built as part of coastal defense for or following the War of 1812, I forget which. Bitchin’ place. ◇ There may be no “big flu” around the US now, but SARS has people in Buffalo scared to cross the river into Canada, and Chemists in Australia were selling face masks.

Avatar Press 2.26 Randy Whatever are you going to do with 120 knives from the Home Shopping Network? ◇ It’s remarkable that we first discovered Elton John when I was in college – Jerrell S, high school and collegiate dream slut, played “Your Song” for me the last time we saw each other, and I cried myself to sleep over Gail Schatzberg while “Rocket Man” played. And although the song is about breaking up with a grasping lover, I savored “Philadelphia Freedom” while reading the *faux* 1776 edition of **Time**. ◇ “Puppies are the key to world peace.” Truer words ... ◇ Good comment about changing comics characters retroactively – like the Rawhide Kid, a foolishness almost beyond compare in my experience. This is different from the liberties taken with the Superdude legend in **Smallville** or the Chris Reeve movies – as long as they aren’t too egregious. Giving Supes teleportation powers in **Superman 2** was egregious. ◇ Love that closing scribble!

Then and Now mike I nearly dropped my upper plate when I found that one of our nicest guides in Australia was a lady named *Pat Gibbs*. And I still have my own teeth! ◇ Thanks for the lowdown on the ribbons issued with the Medal of Honor. It explains why I couldn’t find the guy’s name on the

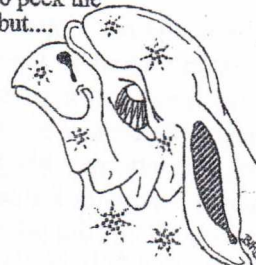
CMoH website. It's disappointing, though, that I have yet to meet one of those guys. ◇ Love this story of George P. Burdell, the ramblin' wreck who never was.

Trivial Pursuits #106 Janice Well, we didn't get to Ayers Rock – Rosy was crestfallen when she learned that it was the equivalent of visiting Kansas City – but as you should gather from my preliminary trip report, DUFF did us the favor of a lifetime. *Epic.* ◇ Since I wear my feelings about W and his war on my sleeve, and Aussies are not bitter folk, the Iraqi idiocy was never a problem during DUFF. Had some good conversations about American psychology, though, and understand it and us a lot better since being over there. ◇ The Republican dodge equating opposition to the war to disloyalty to our troops to outright treason is an ancient scam, going back to Vietnam at least. It's a simple sell to a frightened people, especially those with family in uniform, but it mustn't deter speaking the truth. ◇ Of course Cheney's old company, Halliburton, is profiting from the war! That's one of the reasons it was fought. ◇ Aussies told me that the TV war coverage they saw on their own networks, and certainly on the Arab networks they pick up, was very different from the American feeds. For instance, their news included the carful of innocents massacred by fidgety U.S. troops when they failed to heed warnings to halt – shouted to a moving car in English. Our media mentioned the incident, but immediately justified the slaughter – the same old My Lai rationalization over the same old ditch. I hope those G.I.s learn to live with it, but I also hope they remember it, for their souls' sake. ◇ To assuage my nervousness on one of the long plane flights, Rosy got me to watch the "He Had It Comin'" number from **Chicago**, broadcast on the in-plane TV. Did the trick – for as long as it lasted. ◇ I didn't like **Bowling for Columbine**, as I've said – too many cheap shots, especially against Charlton Heston. But I agreed with everything Michael Moore said on the Oscar dais. And yes, **Spirited Away's** award was a good one – one of several this last Oscar

night. ◇ We were able to get cash at Aussie ATMs without much bother – a better exchange rate, we were assured, than that to be had cashing in our American money. ◇ An inspiring Boskone story, and how the noble fans handled the blizzard: ably and with spirit.

Revenant #17 Sheila Oh, see **Chicago**. It's cleverly made and loads of fun. ◇ What gets me about North Korea is that it really does seem to think it can take on America. With a maniac in control over there, and a clod in control over here, it may well happen ... ◇ Thanks for the DUFF congrats. The report you see in this **Spiritus** is only the beginning. Rosy and I will put together a slide show (two, maybe; one R-rated, and the other one without the self-pleasuring kangaroo) and we've been planning our trip report since we won the contest. Damn ... we've been to Australia and we've come back ... damn ... I don't want it to be over ...

I'm not trying to peck the editorial apart, but....



Oblivion No. 145 Gary B. Probably the most dangerous and deplorable of the results of the Iraq War is that some people who hitherto protested it have backed away from that point of view, as if easy victory made W's war more correct ... in other words, our might made it right. Inhumane and idiotic and an evasion of responsibility; it's clear that the major reason this war was fought was to make W and his party look tough – to give that doofus a photo op in a flight suit. If this is what America needed to restore its confidence after 9-1-1, then we should really ask what America needs to be confident in. ◇ I note that MegaCorp featured the stars of **Smallville** in its advertising. Did you see them? Did you tell *Kristin Kreuk for me that*

all she has to do is ask, and I'll open my veins? ◇ The rescue and recovery of Elizabeth Smart is possibly the best public news of 2003, but it's for the indubitable best that her story has slipped from the headlines and she's being allowed to recover her sanity in peace. The slime that kidnapped her has a lifelong date with a prison cell; his crime could receive the death penalty under Utah law, I understand, but as Elizabeth is alive and well, at least physically, I doubt "Emmanuel" will get the needle. A few decades being kicked in the face by other inmates will have to suffice. ◇ The Wally Wood cover on SM193 was an original, a sketch done for Nita Green. I've never told Rosy that the reason I married her was for her mother's art collection. ◇ Okay, the Tamiami Trail is a better Everglades road than Alligator Alley. Consider it booked. ◇ I've been hit with all kinds of "Guy" lines this year. Latest, and may I hope last: "Oh, he's my lawyer Guy!"

The Sphere vol. 203 no. 1 Don Repeat what you said? Don't mind if I do: *George W. Bush is out of control*. I need to hear more – I need to hear everything – about this Andrew J. O'Connell, the attorney allegedly arrested and questioned for hours for saying that. Is that all he said? If so, the whole situation is out of control, and W's Brain Police better hire a lot of new goons, since they'll be mighty busy.

Frequent Flyer Tom Uhh ... your new house looks great, Tom but what about ... walls? ◇ Insane official paranoia that causes the Army to pull its personnel from your company's hotel just because "a man with Middle Eastern features" talks with a few soldiers there. This country has gone effin' nuts! ◇ Opera! Ballet! You culture mavens are putting the rest of us to shame. You'd've loved the Sydney Opera House – a rather small operatic auditorium, thanks to the inter-disciplinary politics which switched it from the larger theatre, but all the more intimate for that. Of course, we heard no singing there, just the clatter of workmen's hammers, but! the acoustics were terrific! ◇

As Holmes nuts, you'd've enjoyed the program on **Hound of the Baskervilles** at Swancon – especially the clever compilation of scenes from the various film versions. A good Holmes, a good Hound – these, we were told, were the secrets to a good show. I'd add, a good script, since some of the **Hounds** I've seen have really been dogs. ◇ **Porgy and Bess** has some of the most beautiful music I've ever heard. Often have I related the anecdote of Gershwin sitting at his piano in the last years of his short life, playing it and saying, "I wrote this. I wrote this!" ◇ Yes, **Nemesis** was a predictable knock-off, and dull to the extreme.

Peter, Pan & Merry #48 Dave Americans in this jittery age seem perfectly content to let their government, no matter how corrupt, decide who gets Constitutional rights and who does not. Would any atrocity be sufficient to awake them from their terror? I think not. It'll take the turning of the era to do that, just as it took the ending of World War II and the beginning of the postwar boom to make people conscious of the hideous unAmericanism of the nisei relocation camps. For the time being, Americans want to kick ass and strut in front of a mirror – and condemn anyone who doesn't approve. ◇ You speak of driving ... Rosy wanted to rent a car while we were in Australia, convinced that she could handle the switched lanes, but I wouldn't let her, nor try to drive myself. All of our instincts in driving are keyed to the right side of the road. It took me days to get used to hopping into the left side of the front seat and not finding a steering wheel there, and I was constantly looking the wrong way before stepping off the curb – fortunately, I never paid the price for it. In Sydney, for the Olympics, city fathers painted LOOK RIGHT signs on the street to keep American tourists from getting shellacked. ◇ Indeed, if my entitling my yearly summations **Rear-ender** set up a sub-universal mega-vibration which somehow caused my accident, perhaps I should retile the zine **Great Blowjob** and see what happens. ◇ I don't get the correlation among LASFAPA, John Denver and a 27th

year, but the density of my wit is legend. ◇ The USSR transferred power through intraparty political maneuvering – hidden, secret, corrupt. The people never knew who would be leading them until the deed was done. Until the last election, America never chose its President in such a sleazy fashion. Now it will become the norm. ◇ Your comment about “wrapping a star” reminds me that I always thought a Dyson sphere would swell up and explode like a balloon. ◇ Comparing Iraq to Nazi Germany, as in the X’ed-out Saddam Hussein *Time* cover, is a joke – and an insult to the victims of World War II. Like everything else the media does nowadays, it’s designed to make that dope in the White House look tough. The rest of the world thinks we’ve gone insane, and I’m with them.

Twygdrasil #81 Rich D. Fascinating occult stuff to begin this issue – if *Chall* #18 weren’t about full, I’d ask to print it. ◇ The one technological aspect of life in outer space the doughnut-shaped space stations didn’t seem to anticipate was the efficiency and necessity of solar panels. And the fact that astronauts don’t seem to crave gravity, or its centrifugal substitute, all that much. ◇ I thought you told me that your mother met the Ayatollah in the Paris airport, and that he was very pleasant. ◇ Child abuse may not only be non-sexual, it may also be non-physical. Sarcasm, erratic criticism, and lack of nurturing discipline are all ugly child abuse that causes enormous damage. ◇ No, I’d say “inferior” product wins Hugos because it has a familiar name. Fandom is the most conservative and rigid group in that regard that I’ve ever encountered. ◇ Harry Warner will be LOCcing no more *Jomp Jr.s* ... or *Challengers*. We will miss that guy. ◇ Actually sleaze – at least video porn, which is the defining height or depth of sleaze – has gotten worse as an “art form”. I suppose I’m seeing the world these days through the eyes of a boring old married man, but my visits to Major Video’s back room are shorter than ever these days, and I never rent anything anymore. ◇ 9-1-1 didn’t make Americans more conservative. It made us

more radical. Willing to sacrifice fundamental rights for ourselves and due process for others – security-mad – so frightened we’d accept any fascist obscenity if it made us feel more safe.

Last Minute Stuff Steve Say hello to New Zealand for us when you’re there. Flew past it coming and going, and remembering the beautiful vistas from *Lord of the Rings*, wished we could stop ... ◇ The rescue of the 3D film *Sea Dreams* sounds like a thrilling story – one with a happy ending. If you want a genzine outlet for your article when you write it, please think of me! ◇ The material on speed gliding is gorgeous! I’d never have the nerve to do more than watch, but watching such motion is awesome. ◇ You can’t blame SFPAns for talking about the war, the most overwhelming news of the day. In 1963, no one in SFPA even mentioned the Kennedy assassination, nor much about the civil rights movement, but we look at apazines differently now: these are personal journals as much as outlets for our opinions on SF, and whatever affects our lives has a place in them.

Variations on a Theme #19 Rich L. That’s a fine eulogy you provided Harry Warner. You guys were great friends to that great man. ◇ One of our DUFF hostesses, cute Cathy Cupitt, made bread for us, and the machine woke us up at night. Still tasted great, though. ◇ Yes, blogging is popular with the impatient fannish youth of today. But we who do fanzines know the joy of product, something which can be held in one’s hand ~~in the bathroom~~, and that the whelps can never know. Paper forever! ◇ As for writing the best DUFF report ever – we’ll try! Will have to go some to best Janice’s! ◇ Only one *Buffy* episode is nominated in the short-drama Hugo list, but of course, it will win. How was the last episode? Next year, *Smallville*!

The New Port News #208 Ned I love that cover illo! ◇ Somehow it makes me feel shockingly old to think that “Nedpew” Joe got called for jury duty. ◇ Speaking of

clones, has anyone heard why Dolly the sheep fell apart? Was it some flaw in the cloning process that will make it impossible to clone Michelle Pfeiffer **PFEIFFER**

in the future? ◇ Alas for your mention of a brain tumor. I found out this week that Marianne Samuels, lawyer, classmate, lady friend, Carnival companion, had passed away from just that ill. Those that know how, please say *kaddish* for her sweet, sad soul. ◇ Taral Wayne is a terrific fan artist. I'm disappointed he's never won the Hugo he deserves, but so many great fan artists have had to go without recognition. This year Steve Stiles is up for the award; he's among the top tier of the deserving. ◇ See my comment to Schloss about the **Rear-ender** zine titles. ◇ You wow me with this talk of ambient pressures and whistling airplane holes – pretty cool tech! I had a dream while I was in Australia that freaked me completely: I was in a court of law where airplane doors that had blown off were brought in an exhibits. I kept a close eye on the hatches in the planes we flew in afterwards – only to have doors pop off and passengers explode to their doom on a plane in Africa short days after we got home.

Tyndallite Vol. 3 No. 106 NORM! I wonder if you publish here the last LOC Harry Warner ever wrote. If so, you have shared a treasure. Trust him to be interesting, literate, friendly, and to come up with a wretched pun: "How did the casting director for **Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone** decide on how to cast the first stone?" That's our boy.

The Southerner #232 Jeff Handsome heading on this OO, a Russian map of Baghdad, a place I've never been and wish fewer of my countrymen had visited. ◇ Curt Phillips didn't win his TAFF race, possibly because – unlike the victor, and unlike us in our DUFF competition – he didn't campaign. You can't rely on others in such tilts to spontaneously leap forward with propaganda on your behalf; you have to go out there and get the fan funds these days. I actually look forward to administering DUFF

– more elsewhere about what that will entail. ◇ \$43 dues (for first class delivery)! How much was it when I joined SFPA? (find OO collection ... shuffle shuffle ...) A dollar a year (in mlg 39). Of course, no one got first class delivery back then ... I just drove over to Markstein's house and picked up the mailing.

Spiritus Mundi 194 me Here seems like a good place to evaluate my hypnotherapy and update SFPA on some of the other ongoing horrors of my life. The therapy worked fine when it came to getting me through the anticipation of flying; in the air, it was less helpful. I relied on mild tranks followed – somewhat later – by a snort of white wine. The best antidote for my nerves was the TV monitor Qantas provided during the transPacific flights. One graphic showed the plane's position on a globe, how far we'd traveled, how far we had to go – and best of all, the cloud cover ahead. I could tell when turbulence was coming and, most soothing of all, when it would probably end. I was most nervous, strangely enough, on the most comfortable flights – between Perth and Melbourne. We had window seats, without a third seat to crowd us, in a spacious, modern jet – which somehow aggravated my vertigo far worse than the cramped cocoon I was in during the overseas jaunts. Go figure. Anyway, I made it through 41+ hours in the air, thanks to Dr. Mesmer, drugs, alcohol, and the understanding wonder next to me, and no one is more surprised than me. On to Toronto. What's that? SARS? ◇ Rosy has left **The Daily Comet**; they couldn't handle the three-week absence required for DUFF and they still wanted her – and me – to move to their neighborhood. I can't blame her for refusing, although being without her paycheck is nerve-wracking. Fortunately, we're coasting on my accident settlement – and hoping for a pain-&-suffering installment to help get us through the summer. ◇ As for the new car, it's for sale. ◇ My mailing caustics stand completed, 10:06 PM, 5-21-03. Who else thinks Clay Aiken was robbed on **American Idol**?

Spiritus Mundi 195 ends on Memorial Day, May 26, 2003 ... a pretty day in New Orleans. However pretty, thoughts of Australia are never far from our minds these first weeks after our DUFF trip. We still watch Australian movies (the latest, **Muriel's Wedding**) and react with glee when we see places we've been, and dismay when we see places we missed (like Ayers Rock, in **Cry in the Dark**). Go back? Oh God yes.

There were some differences in Australian life that work to America's benefit. Few people there had a dryer or a microwave, and television was shoddy – my favorite show was a kid's show called **Bambaloo**, but that was because the hostess was cute. But *every* Ozzie gull is cute!

I mentioned earlier how I wished I'd brought a tape recorder, because there are Australian sounds I miss: the soft rat-a-tat-tat of the walkway signals, believe it or not – the piercing *tink* of the bell birds – the coo-la-loo of the unknown bird outside our window at Cathy Cupitt's – even the "Row-row-row!" anthem from the footy game! But mostly I miss being in a country where friendliness and humor seem the norm, whose government may kowtow to an ally which is peeling out of control, but isn't out of control itself. It felt downright oppressive to walk down the ramp at L.A.X. after our plane arrived from Sydney, and be greeted by the happy shining faces of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. A cute sniffer dog alerted on the bag ahead of ours in the customs line, tapping it with a paw. The contraband? A banana. When the agent told us, *Welcome home*, I felt like snarling the epigram I'd been saying to every Aussie who'd listen: *There are a million reasons for an Australian to visit America, but none – not one – for him to move here.*

But then we were through customs, and Roger and Sue were greeting us. My cousin and his wife came through New Orleans recently on their way to a cruise, and for our one day in California, had arranged a party at their house in the high desert above Los Angeles. All but three of my grandparents' grandchildren were there – my brother, in New York, my cousin Doose, in Florida, and one of my male cousins who is angry at the family and stayed home. But everyone else showed up, to meet Rosy, to hear first hand about Australia, and to remind me that however ugly and idiotic this turf of ours can act sometimes, it is still Home. When my uncle grasped my hand, as I mentioned how lucky my generation was to have the folks who came before it, I knew that Home was still and forever the place I belonged.

And so Home again, to New Orleans, where John Guidry picked us up, and we resumed our American lives. My seven hours in jail ten days later? A far less attractive story.

