

Dreamtime Guilt

Dave Langford

They told me there was no need for a trip report on Aussiecon 3 in 1999, but I took notes all the same. The words tapped into the little Psion palmtop came safely home with me; the paper notebook, alas, suffered a mysterious Fortean disappearance, just like Ambrose Bierce and *The Last Dangerous Visions*. Hence the guilt, since I'd travelled under the kindly auspices of the 'Auld Lang Fund' set up in emulation of the funds that brought the great Bob Tucker and Bob Shaw to past Aussiecons. Now, in a rousing anticlimax, the latest beneficiary was not-so-great me. Thanks to everyone who helped! From the jumbled fragments that survive:

Outbound. On row 53 DEFGH with Paul Kincaid, Maureen Speller, Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey – me in the seat across the aisle with a couple who moved to mysteriously superior places (it was quite an uncrowded plane), although the man returned to sleep across 'his' two seats ... and repeatedly came and went to lead a complex social life up and down the aisle, helpfully climbing over me each time to save the effort of undoing my seatbelt. The Peripatetic School of airline philosophy. All this was later recorded in immense detail in Mark's & Claire's fanzine, which I and Paul K. (Famous GUFF Winner) found vaguely inhibiting to our trip reports. My feat of reading the entirety of Peter Hamilton's *The Naked God* during a mere 12,000-mile flight was widely admired or disbelieved, I forget which. Thog note on page 551: 'If eyes had been hands, he would've crushed her.' In the event he merely left twin damp patches on her.

Adelaide & Environs. Exemplary hospitality from John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau and local fandom: parties, restaurants, wineries and wildlife reserves. The Hugo Winery was nervously appreciated by visiting nominees Maureen and myself, while Claire couldn't identify the spindly animals visible in a distant field and (after a sudden flashback to Arthur Upfield's *The Lake Frome Monster*) I covered myself with glory by guessing: 'Camels?' In one wildlife sanctuary, the done thing was to meet the kangaroos up close, feed them with officially approved kangaroo nodules, and then retire to the restaurant to become better acquainted by eating them. On a surprise night walk through the woods, shivering Brits tried hard to believe that the distant might-be-a-ripple on the far side of the lake was a platypus, while our guide's torch unerringly picked out nocturnal clusters of possums, potoroos, numbats, bandicoots and mediafen.

Port Adelaide. All Adelaide's low hotels (i.e. pubs) were plastered with signboards offering POKIES. I came to think of this as some fast-food delicacy, surely pointy

in shape. Hungry travellers would order a plate piled high with steaming pokies, flavoured with piquant outback spices and washed down by cold beer.... Yvonne shattered the illusion by explaining that pokies are slot machines enabling those of little brain to lose money fast at automated poker. With rapid synchronicity, I found a front-page newspaper article bewailing the moral stupor of a land with 27,500 licensed pokies. O Babylon. Meanwhile the Brits were powerless to explain why they found the local crested pigeon so risible. It is a pigeon, an ordinary boring pigeon, the least interesting bird in existence, yet at the same time it has this bloody silly point on the top of its head. Zippy the Pinhead Pigeon.

Melbourne. Gosh: Aussiecon chair Perry Middlemiss drove to the airport just to meet me! In a quick VIP briefing he explained why the pre-Hugo reception had to be alcohol-free: 'We don't want people like you getting shitfaced and falling all over the stage.' Driving through the city's marvels, Perry promised to boggle me with the anthill swarms of diligent fans even now setting up Aussiecon at the Convention Centre. Alas, no fans at all were in evidence there, and while Perry rushed off to panic I found myself for the first time all alone in Australia. Naturally I dived into a bar and got shitfaced.

Pre-Aussiecon. Dinner with Irwin and Wendy Hirsh, whose GUFF trip photos show us all as alarmingly youthful and sylphlike. Wendy to cowering menfolk: 'I've had babies – what's *your* excuse?' Thai restaurant outing with Bruce Gillespie, Elaine Cochrane and others: embarrassing incident of satay chicken (the accompanying dish of fluid emanating foot-high flames is *not* intended for browning the chicken, as Bruce conveyed by whimpering and putting his hands over his eyes) and anticlimactic first encounter with Aussie spiders in the toilet. Pish, tush. The same wispy grey *Phalanges* variety that infest my house in Reading, UK? Little did I know.

Aussiecon. Here that notebook would have been useful. It seemed a fine Worldcon. Winning two Hugos with bases shaped like Ayers Rock (Uluru) was splendid. Not so much fun was taking the wrong door out of the party hotel to find myself trapped in a sealed car park resembling one of the less salubrious levels of *Doom* (Uluru): in the end I had to scramble painfully over the raised exit barrier. I missed the closing ceremony after being shanghaied for a train journey into the interior to visit the legendary Aussie fan shrine of Uluru (John Bangsund). Good times: I'm glad I made that pilgrimage.

Post-Aussiecon. In Melbourne Zoo, in a cunning darkened enclosure, I saw the platypuses swimming. Wow!

Homeward. En route I should have typed more notes but had a tricky magazine column to prepare, about the recent sad death of James White. Also I was flying alone and so of course got shitfaced, which *I hope* is Australian for 'pleasantly mellow'. Sorry. It was a wonderful trip.

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