

MUMBLINGS

from

MUNCHKINLAND

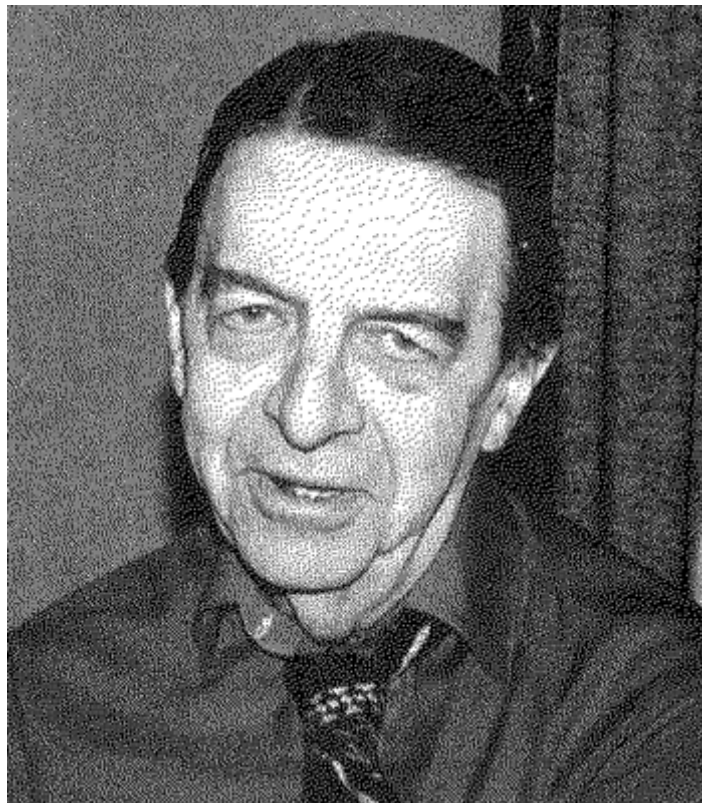


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Mumblings from Munchkinland - the only West Australian fanzine published in Fiji!



Harry Warner Jr.



1920 - 2003

A SHORT VISIT TO FIJI

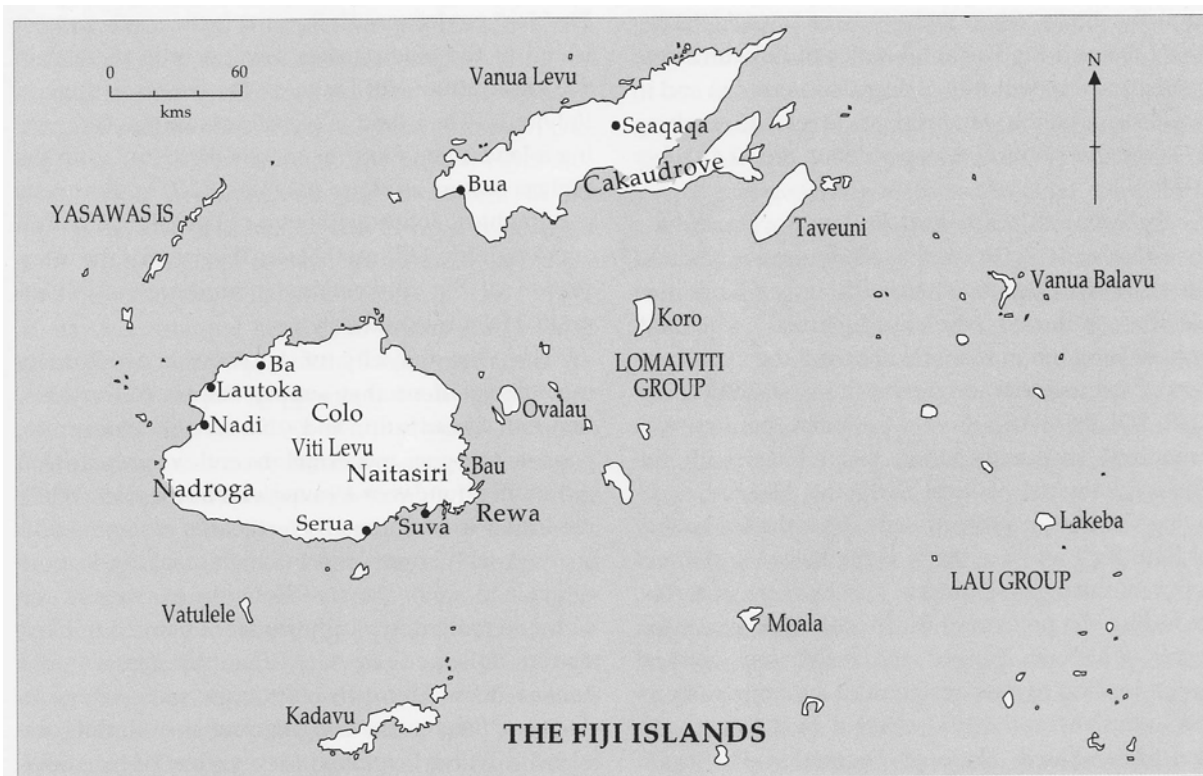
In late 2002 we managed to have a family holiday in Fiji, the first time we'd travelled together out of Samoa. I'd been invited to a short course at the main USP campus in Suva and took leave before and after so we could combine business and pleasure. (The training -- an update on cataloguing -- proved valuable, but not in the way I'd expected. Several of us with strong cataloguing backgrounds wound up assisting the trainer, which impressed some of the more senior library staff. And the introduction to metadata was fun, but I won't bore you with that.)

Most flights to Fiji arrive at Nadi (pronounced Nan-dee) on the western side of Viti Levu, the largest of over 300 islands and reefs that make up the Fiji Islands. Few people stay there very long. Business travellers are usually headed for Suva, the capital, on the far side of the island and most tourists hop on seaplanes or buses to reach resorts in the Yasawas or along the south side of Viti Levu. I'd been to Nadi once before on my own, in early 2002, when in transit to Suva for my tardy "orientation" to USP. I hadn't liked it much then because of all the touts, but this time they weren't so numerous. Anyway, we spent a night in Nadi before heading south.

The Coral Coast is aptly named, since it is on the sea and it is bounded by coral, but the brochures do tend to romanticise how attractive this is. To people with young kids, anyway. The girls really just wanted to hit the beach, but coral outcrops right up to the shoreline made this impractical. Fantastic for snorkeling, but for swimming they had to make do with the hotel pool. They didn't seem to mind.

Most of our fellow guests were on corporate Christmas outings, which led to a slightly embarrassing moment when Santa appeared to deliver presents to all of the Fiji Telecom employees' children. Ruby and Lauren had gone to sleep already but Ella was waiting anxiously for Santa to hand her a gift. We were trying to think of a plausible explanation for her when a couple nearby slipped Santa a t-shirt meant for their son, saving the day. We thanked them profusely on the sly. The hotelier stopped by at breakfast the next morning to hand all of the girls some Xmas lollies; another nice gesture.

After a few days there we had to hop on the bus for Suva, about three hours drive away. Found that our next hotel was close to town, but high up one of the steepest hills in Suva -- hard to avoid, since the only flat portion of land around is right in the city center. Of course it meant we had a nice view out across Suva Harbour. And there was another pool for the girls to enjoy. This came in handy for Megan, since I had to abandon her each morning to attend the training course. She enjoyed the sights and shopping in the city, though. It is quite cosmopolitan compared to Apia. [→ p.15]



A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG FAN

At what age does the sf bug bite? It must vary, of course, but the question occurred to me because of a blast from the past delivered to me by my folks when they visited in mid-2002. My maternal grandmother, Elfie, was a bit of a magpie. In sorting through boxes of crucial, carefully preserved documents like ancient bank statements and tax returns, my Mom found various letters and items we kids had sent Elfie and Vern. One of them surprised even me.

From (dim) memory there was a fad in the early 1970s for publishers to produce little books with pictures of cute kittens and things entitled "Happiness is...". Each photo caption would finish the sentence with something warm and fuzzy like "... hugging a kitten". Such awful stuff that somebody soon will hit upon a revival, if they haven't already.

Anyway, this was clearly the model for a hand-made booklet I must have made at school, probably in Mrs Wickstrom's Grade 4 class. (And how is it that we can always remember the name of our fourth grade teacher? I have no recollection of my third or fifth grade teachers' names.) Obviously I sent the booklet to Gran, for she kept it, safe and secure, for the next 30 years.

Those of you with a bent for social archeology will be a step ahead of me already. Here is a chance to explore the mind of a 10-year-old mid-west American boy. What defined happiness for me back then? Here's a full list, with comments. I won't inflict you with many of the pictures I drew, just enough to demonstrate why I always pinch my illustrations for this rag. As you can see, I was a bad artist then and I never improved much. (My sister inherited all of the artistic talent in the family and makes her living by it.) OK, spot the sf connections:

Happiness Is ...

... walking home from school, without homework

... getting an A in "Conduct" on your report card

... receiving the "first prize cup" for best humorist

... moving to Australia

[From this I deduce that the booklet was made in early 1972.]

... having a tree house

... a nice teacher

... owning your own private clubhouse

... playing with all of your friends

... a good science fiction story

[Bingo! The picture is of a book entitled *The Monsters from Planet X*. Hmmm]

... going fishing with your dad

[A family joke. My dad and I did this just once, both of us under the impression that the other one was really keen to do it. We didn't catch anything, thank goodness, as neither of us would have known what to do next if we had.]

Chris Nelson 4		
MATH	F	F
SPELLING	F	F
MUSIC	F	F
P.E.	F	F
Social Studies	F	F
Science	F	F
CONDUCT	A	A



- ... the first day of Spring
- ... dreaming you're finally a grown-up
[Now it's dreaming when I was still a kid]
- ... scaring a girl out of her wits
[Now I have three I can do this to!]
- ... being the hero when you play war with your friends
[Yes, this is about all the Vietnam War meant to me back then. Dirty commies, etc.]



- ... summer vacation
[A beach scene, despite never having been near a beach until we arrived in Oz!]



- ... reading
- ... having a great day on April Fool's Day
- ... finding out things you didn't already know
- ... being able to watch your favourite TV program
[Bingo again! It's *The Outer Limits*.]

- ... meeting a new friend
- ... having a stamp collection

- ... beating up on little brothers
[Don't recall doing this too often, but Tim has had the last laugh anyway. He grew two inches taller and now earns ten times what I do. Little brat.]



- ... receiving presents on your birthday
- ... a good picture you made
[Bingo! USAF jet versus a UFO in space]

...the school bell at 3:30

... Christmas

... owning and riding a horse

... writing a good story
[*Martians Invade Earth*. Hmmmm]

... running races

... dreaming you kill a monster
[Half a point?]



...after reading this book, suicide
[Gee, self-deprecating black humour at 10]

THE HALDEMAN DIARIES (PART 2)

Continuing the account of Joe Haldeman of travels and travails in Samoa. Having successfully appeared as Guests of Honour at conventions in New Zealand and Australia, Joe and Gay were again able to visit the Cradle of the Pacific on their return trip to the USA. Notes in Arial are by the editor.

June 13/12 (International Date Line)

Pre-dawn flight to Sydney, quick rush around to the international terminal, and off to New Zealand. Inflight movie was one we wanted to see, for a change, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. A good adventure flick, the plot shamelessly stolen from *The Stars My Destination*. The title even has the same number of syllables and meter.

Arrived in Auckland late afternoon. The hotel was only five minutes from the airport, and we were looking at another pre-dawn flight, so we just settled in there. I got up at 2:00 to write, so the day shouldn't be a total loss. Spent a lot of time doing red tape and hanging around the airport. It belatedly occurred to us that this Polynesian Airline ticket was false economy. We saved a few hundred bucks on the LA-Samoa-NZ-Oz trip, but then on the return trip lose time and about the same money, laying over in NZ, Honolulu, and LA, with no time to enjoy the layovers.

At the Tonga airport, barely more than an airstrip, a military band was assembled, along with an honor guard of about a hundred soldiers. After we landed, someone drove off in a black stretch limo with beaucoup cops fore and aft. The band kept playing, soldiers at attention, for the 45 minutes we hung around the airport before reboarding the plane. Maybe they're playing still.

The flight from Tonga to Samoa was short, with beautiful aerial scenery supplied by both islands. I did have enough non-movie time to wrest Jack Dann's riveting novel *The Silent* from Gay, and read the first hundred pages or so.

Chris Nelson picked us up at the airport and drove us back to Vaiala Beach Cottages. Our new cottage, #7, was identical to the previous one except for the lack of a teapot. I used the birthday one from the Victoria Market. Mild coincidence: a couple of days ago I wrote these cottages into *Sea Change*, and #7 was the only one specified.

After the extreme embarrassment of the mix-up surrounding their departure from Samoa a few weeks earlier, I had to make amends by meeting Joe and Gay at the airport again. But I was getting used to the trip by now, since my parents had arrived on one of the red-eye flights as well just before the Haldemans flew back in. (Flight schedules here are based on convenience of arrival time in LA, I think.)

We walked down to the crossroads to get a paper and a snack, and then returned to the cottage to rest and write. About sundown we walked into town along Beach Road and the seawall along the harbor, pleasantly cool and breezy. (Odd coincidence: we passed a bar called Bad Billy's. In the story I'll be reading in the library here, written several years ago, I have a character improbably named Bad Billy Beerbreath.)

The internet place was closed, so we sat at a sidewalk cafe for a drink, a cold coconut for Gay and a gin & tonic for me, just for the malaria. A two-man band was playing, a large guy on an electric keyboard chording over a ricky-ticky percussion program (something I may tire of soon) and slim tall man playing an electric guitar and singing in a high sweet voice.

We checked a seafood restaurant that the Lonely Planet book said was cheap and good, but they didn't take credit cards and we didn't have much cash. So we hopped a cab out to the upscale Kitano Tusitala, which was advertising a poolside prawn special. I got spicy Thai shrimp, which were only spicy by Samoa's bland standards, but tasty enough, and Gay got plain boiled ones. They were "strawberry prawns," with a sweet taste like crayfish. The whole thing, with two Heinekens and a frozen margarita, came to about \$26. Upscale.



The night sky was beautiful, a fingernail moon in a close triangle with Jupiter and Venus. I'd already set up the telescope, so when we got home I got as many lights shut out as was feasible and looked south.

Lots of wonderful Milky Way star fields, wandering with a 32 mm low-power eyepiece (about 12X) even though the sky was not particularly dark. Interesting star clusters around Crux and Centaurus. My star charts were initially confusing, upside down and backwards, but eventually I got them sorted out. One reason for my confusion was that I couldn't see Omega Centauri, the brightest globular cluster in the sky -- when I've seen it at the Texas Star Party it's amazing, bright and as big as the Moon. The sky here isn't that dark, though, and I assumed it was behind some trees, when in fact it was quite high but dim. Still good through the telescope, better at higher powers.

I'd read that Alpha Centauri was the most impressive double star in the sky, and can't disagree. I could just split it with my highest power on the small scope, 57X, a blazing zero-magnitude star pressed close to a first-magnitude one.

14 June

Yesterday we returned to the Hotel Kitano Tusitala, first for breakfast and then for a tour Gay had set up the previous night. This was a low-key drive along the coast east of Apia, a string of relatively quiet and clean villages, leading to the unusual Fatumea Pool, which most people call the Piula Cave Pool. It's underneath the Piula Methodist Theological College, a set of modern buildings set by a church that sits on a cliff overlooking the sea.

You walk down steep steps cut into the volcanic rock to a fresh-water pool that sits only a few meters from the ocean, and leads into a cave under the church. If you're a pretty good swimmer and not claustrophobic, you can swim to the end of the cave and dive toward the light coming through a hole that leads to another pool on the other side. It's a tunnel only three meters long, but for some reason the idea of swimming through it didn't appeal to us or to the two young New Zealanders who were also on the tour. Our guide had been doing it all his life, of course; it was the high point of the day for him. I'd already decided that I was going to paint rather than swim, and in the half-hour they were swimming I did get a rough painting of the cave and water, which I'll touch up later.

We drove over a rickety bridge-over-the-River-Kwai structure and looked back to take some pictures of the waterfall it spans, Falefa Falls. Then he drove us up into the mountains for some beautiful scenery, a vista across rolling pasture to the sea.

On the way back, he tried to explain Samoa's complicated interlocking family and government structure. Everyone belongs to an extended family, an *aiga*, consisting of blood relatives and in-laws and a few people who are not related but were invited to join. The more people in the *aiga*, the more powerful it is politically, so people are always trying to marry into the large ones.

The *aiga* is headed by a *matai*, or chief, male or female. They're theoretically elected by all the adults in the *aiga*, but as a *matai* ages it's usually pretty clear who his or her successor is going to be. Sometimes a wealthy or otherwise influential person will be asked to join the *aiga* with the immediate rank of *matai*.

The *matai* are judges as well as leaders. People who commit social infractions such as insubordination or sexual misbehavior are assigned punishments, which often involve ritual embarrassment and payment to the offended. If the infraction is a civil crime, like drugs, assault, robbery, or rape, the offender is first punished by the *matai*, and then turned over to the police.

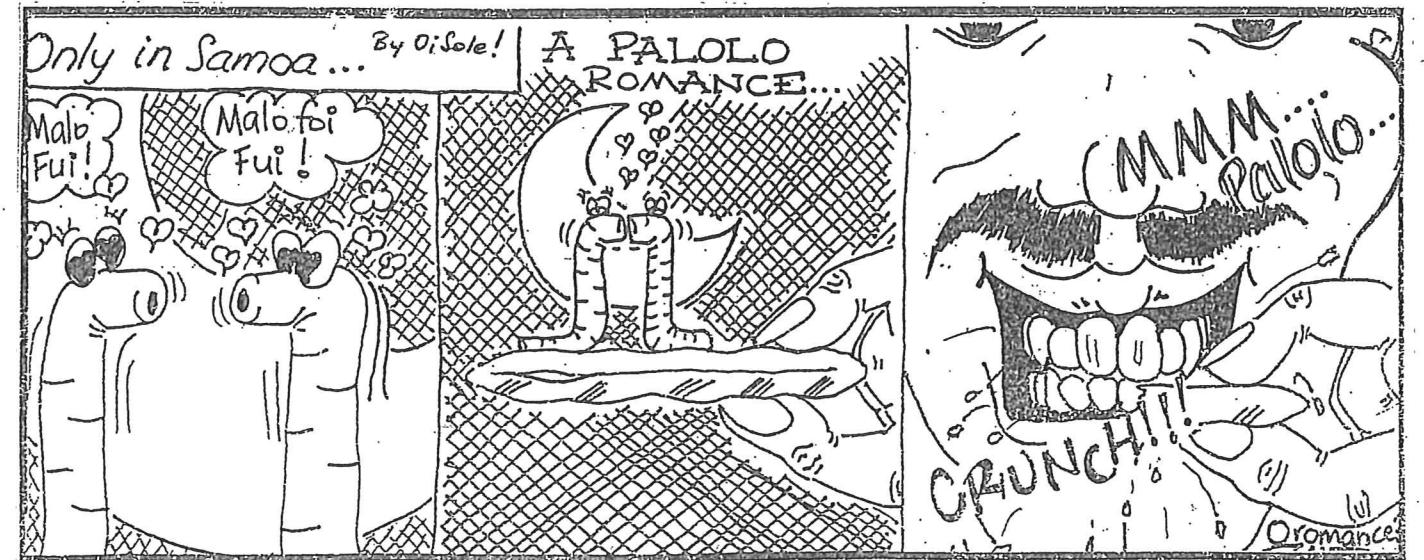
THE RETURN OF PRESS GANGED

From *The Launceston Examiner* (near right; one I've been holding on to for ages!). Monday was recovered later, a bit battered, but intact.

● Monday was stolen from H and K Crafts at the Kingsway, Launceston, on Tuesday night.

At far right, from the *Samoa Observer*, a tale of romance. One night late every year, just after a full moon, palolo reefworms spawn en masse off Samoa. It's a frenzy of mating -- and eating, as the thin blue-green worms are a prized delicacy here.

Also from the *Observer*, below, yours truly in a publicity photo earlier this year. We had been offered a donation of scientific journals from a retiring academic in New Zealand towards the end of 2002; it took the best part of half a year to arrange for their transportation to Samoa. It was fun to meet the NZ High Commissioner, though, who stepped in to represent the donor as well as the High Commission (which paid the shipping costs). The journals received covered all natural sciences, but the sub-editor concerned couldn't resist the temptation to use paleontology in a headline.



Paleontology journals presented to USP

The New Zealand High Commissioner, Dr Penelope Ridings, yesterday presented two sets of journals entitled, *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* and *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* to the University of the South Pacific's School of Agriculture.

The journals represent over 30 years of work in the natural sciences from around the world.

Dr Ridings made the presentation on behalf of renowned Pacific paleontologist Dr Stephen Eagar. Dr Eagar, originally from England, has been studying and working in the Pacific for



The New Zealand High Commissioner, Dr Penelope Ridings, at USP Alafua.

almost 40 years. He is based in New Zealand where he teaches paleontology at Victoria University in Wellington.

About his work, Dr Eagar says, "I enjoy working in the Pacific as there are many interesting scientific problems to examine.

In addition one gets to meet a variety of people, cultures, and see some superb natural history. It is like a giant laboratory with so many things happening."

Dr. Eagar is also a Fellow of the prestigious Linnean Society – the oldest natural history society in the world. He is delighted in being able to add to the literary resources all ready available at the School of Agriculture's library. "I am glad someone can put the journals to good use. I have found them very interesting and stimulating. The USP has always been very helpful to me for ideas, material, advice and have also been open to letting me look at their collections, both in Suva and on Tarawa. I have learnt a great deal and am pleased to be able to reciprocate."

Equally delighted to be receiving the collection is Senior Librarian at USP Alafua, Chris Nelson, "Dr Eagar's donation will be of significant benefit to the staff, students and researchers of the University and will be accessible to other interested parties also."

A village is made up of several aiga, run by a *fono*, which is all of the family's matais put together, headed by the most powerful one, the *ali'i*. That much is straightforward hierarchy, but the situation is complicated by "talking chiefs," *tulafale*, who are orators mandated to conduct liaisons between other fono and engage in ritual debates. The village also has an overall police chief/mayor, the *pulenu'u*.

It's not clear to me who has power over whom in this web of authority. It's probably quite clear to the people who live in it. An anthropology book I read as an undergraduate made the assertion that the more primitive (a word they did use in the sixties) the society, the more complex its familial and social structures. Such people's mental powers are not being burdened with quantum mechanics and income tax, goes the theory, so they have to use all those grey cells for something.

We left the tour with our own grey cells reeling, and returned to the cash-only seafood bar we'd had to miss before. The fish and chips were great, evidently some kind of mackerel. Then we went back to the cottage and gathered snorkel gear, but were frustrated again, having misread or misremembered the tide tables. It was even shallower than the time I got the coral cuts, so we didn't chance it.

For dinner we returned to the upscale Sails restaurant, which is in a late-Victorian building I'd just found out was the first place Robert Louis Stevenson lived in Samoa. Lobster was in and very good. Halfway through dinner we were interviewed by a guy from the local paper, who asked pretty good questions for someone who'd never read science fiction. (Sails stays open until after midnight, and can rightly claim to be the last restaurant to close in the world.)

Gay went to bed early for an early pickup. I spent a couple of hours with the telescope, looking at gorgeous clusters and nebulae in the constellations around Scorpio (which was overhead) and Sagittarius. The previous night had been cut short by moisture on the objective, so I'd improvised a dewcap by painting a sheet of watercolor paper flat black and rolling it up into a tube. When Lyra came up I tested the set-up, and at 57X I easily split the double-double Epsilon, and could clearly see the Ring Nebula, not bad for an 80-mm. scope.

15 June

Another pre-dawn departure, but this time for a ferry ride. The tour organizer picked us up at 6 to meet the 8 ayem ferry to Savai'i Island. It was a pleasant ride along the northern edge of Upolu. She took us through her native village and kept up a patter of lore and history. She lived through the disastrous cyclones of 1990, the first one in a century, and 1991 -- the first high water and the second high wind. (Stevenson experienced the cyclone of 1889, which destroyed the American and German warships in the harbor. Maybe that's why he built his house up on a mountain.)

Her situation is archetypal for a class of go-getter Samoans. Her daughter works in her travel agency, and did the paperwork for our travels and hotels. The grand-daughter hangs around doing errands when she's not at school. Her daughter's husband, who works most days as a technician at the airport, was our tour guide yesterday. Her brother publishes the local newspaper. Powerful clan there.

The ferry ride over was 90 minutes of pretty rough water. We were met at the dock by Warren Jopling, a seventy-something geologist who runs tours that are a hodge-podge of natural history, culture and reminiscences. He took us to our overnight accommodation, the Safua Hotel, which is actually a bunch of fale bungalows behind a large open eating fale and bar. It's the place most favored by the Lonely Planet book, and indeed turned out to be fine.

Our bungalow was an octagonal room with a cold-water bathroom and shower attached. Ceiling fan and mosquito net enclosing the bed; I immediately entered my Somerset Maugham period. We had a late breakfast with Warren and took off, along with a couple of young Samoan helpers, Huti and Samosone.



Savai'i is the largest of the Samoan Islands, but its interior is uninhabited, trackless rain forest crawling over a volcanic wasteland. I'd like to come back some day and spend a week looking through those attractions, but with only one day we mostly stuck to the inhabited parts of the island.

We saw a bunch of churches, about as thick as they are on Upolu. Samoa claims to be 99% Christian, and its motto is "Founded Under God." Made me a little nervous sometimes.

Most villages have fresh-water springs right by the ocean. This is because the breccia and ash that make up the island's soil don't hold on to water very long, and it rains all the time. So the water table is basically sea level, and if you dig a hole slightly inland, it fills up with fresh water. There are usually separate ponds for drinking, bathing, and laundry.

Because of the soil (or non-soil) conditions, there aren't many permanent rivers. One of them, though, terminates in the Mu Pagoa waterfall, one of the few places in the world where there's a significant waterfall that surges straight into the sea. Or trickles, depending on the state of rainfall that morning. In our case, it had been raining pretty hard, though it let up for awhile when we actually got to the waterfall. Warren paid a few tale to a child in exchange for our walking over the family's property. We picked our way over chunks of lava rock to see the waterfall from the ocean side, very interesting.

The other geological oddity on this part of the island is more dramatic. Coming in on the ferry, I watched with binoculars huge wave-driven geysers of water -- blowholes, caused when the ocean pushes in through lava tunnels under the surface and then finds its way to the air. Warren said the ones I could see from the ferry weren't anything, and we drove on further south to Taga. Paid a village fee to a bunch of teenagers waiting at the entrance, by a sign saying "Biggest Blowhole in the World," a title I privately reserved for Jesse Helms. One of the kids got into the van with a couple of armloads of coconut husks.

We drove a very rocky kilometer and then walked over lava sheets to the blowhole field, which was indeed awesome -- fountains of spray spewing as high as Old Faithful. We were there at high tide, which Warren regretted; the fountains are best at low tide with a strong wind offshore. Good enough for me, though. The boy tossed the coconut husks in the hole at the right moment, and they'd come mortaring out. One must have gone a couple of hundred feet high.



A big squall line came in and we ran back to the van, just ahead of it. On our way back through the rain, Warren pointed out various geological and archeological features. There are mysterious pyramidal mounds, now buried under the kudzu-like morning glory leaves, that have never been adequately investigated. There's no Samoan tradition explaining them - they've "always been there" - and since Samoa's independent, there's no convenient colonial academic infrastructure that could feed scientists onto the island, as happens elsewhere. Some rough dating guesses suggest the mounds may have been built sometime around the Tongan invasion, a thousand years ago. (That was the only unifying event in Samoa's pre-"discovery" period. The hundreds of tribes actually stopped killing and eating one another long enough to kill and eat the Tongans instead.)

The last stop was the one most interesting to me, if the least dramatic. We stopped at a fala and watched a woman making *siapo*, the cloth-like substance I'd bought to make covers for my notebooks. She went through each of the ten or twelve steps with impressive speed, from stripping a mulberry branch through various scrapings and soakings and poundings, to the actual painting of the cloth. Warren asked Gay whether she wanted to help with the painting, and she said no, but Joe would. So I sat down for a while and did that, kind of fascinating. Also socially beyond the pale for a Samoan, I think. Many jobs are strictly limited to one gender, and I think *siapo*-making is a female enterprise. But I had fun, and might have gotten a good jacket photo for *Sea Change* -- "the author doing research in Samoa."

Back at the hotel dining fala, they had prepared a good dinner. Three boys who'd been playing together for fifteen years did a good mixture of native music and Western standards, mostly Beatles. Warren said they'd be playing even if there were no audience, and in fact there were only four of us. Then we were joined by the hotel owner, Moelagi Jackson, a large jocular woman who is a mover and shaker in more ways than one. She designed the hotel herself, down to the furniture, and contracted out the work. She's chief of the local village and a computer enthusiast, rare around here. When the band started a Fijian tune, she got up to dance, and was really beautiful -- very light on her feet for a woman about my age and weight. Her arm and hand movements were especially graceful. I noticed through her slit skirt that she wore the ritual *pe'a* body tattoo, a sign of mana much more rare on women than men.

She talked Gay and me and a German guest into getting up to dance. I wound up with a pretty and shy teenage girl who'd come in late to drum along with the band, while Gay danced with a handsome young man who did an odd hybrid of modern and traditional warrior dancing. Good clean fun overall, except for my natural dirty-old-man appreciation of the attentions of a girl young enough to be my granddaughter.

16 June

We took it easy in the morning, passing up an offer to go to the local weekly market. We went down to the ocean and Gay read while I did a small watercolor of a twisted old mangrove with a breadfruit tree in front of it.

Off to the airfield, newly macadamized and not too short. An international airport, technically, since it also goes to and from American Samoa. There was an empty booth with a hand-lettered sign asking for \$30 departure tax. Otherwise just a guy who weighed us with our bags and took our tickets. No security, but we weren't too nervous.

The plane was a two-prop five-seater, fairly new and clean. We got in with three Samoans, an old man and a woman with a baby. The plane rolled out on time and took off at a pretty steep angle -- a good thing, since there were pretty tall coconut palms at the end of the runway -- and banked into a straight course toward the island on the horizon. We saw the smaller blowholes as we passed over them, and the reef, and then water the color of blue-black fountain pen ink, the ferryboat a bright yellow toy.

Through the miracle of modern fanzine publishing we now leave the Haldemans, suspended in mid-air, until the conclusion of Joe's account in our next issue.

THE READER SQUEAKS

John Foyster [as transcribed by Yvonne Rousseau]

14 February, 2003

Murray Leinster's 'The Black Galaxy' has, of course, exactly that name, with a cover by Earle Bergey. Terrific story about Joe Haldeman: really wonderful! And your letter to Fred Pohl, I thought, was interesting.

[Many thanks, John, wherever you are.]

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Edwina Harvey, Sydney, NSW

13 March, 2003

Thanks for sending *Mutterings from Munchkinland*. As I mentioned in the March issue of the *Bullsheet*, it reminds me of John Tipper's zine, *Metaluna*, (which he unfortunately stopped producing a good few years ago.)

I particularly liked "The Haldeman Diaries". As I'd had the opportunity to sit with the Haldemans at breakfast one morning at Convergence, I got to hear a bit about their Samoan respite, but it was good to read about it, and I especially enjoyed your personal notes scattered through the document. (Especially the bit about the eggplants. Glad you heard of Joe's dislike for aubergines *before* you served him dinner!)

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Erika Maria Lacey Barrantes, Logan Central, Qld.

8 May, 2003

Not too long ago I read a book entitled *Catching Cold: 1918's Forgotten Tragedy and the Scientific Hunt for the Virus that Caused It*, by Pete Davies. Prior to reading that book I never even was aware there'd been a pandemic back then! It was very interesting. So many people dead, all over the world. It's a bit scary to realise that there are strains of the flu that could very well hatch into another pandemic much like that, even with all the precautions. Just thinking of the situation over in Singapore, what with SARS, although that wasn't influenza.

It's good to read the history of Samoa; although I've been there I don't know much about the place. I'm glad that you wrote about Samoa's history with New Zealand. I was ignorant of it. This is one of those times that make me realise that I read far too much fiction and really should brush up on history as well as all the other stuff. If I could manage 70 books last month surely at least I could manage half of them to be non-fiction! A look at it says that no, only one wasn't, and that was on a book on Star Wars fandom.

It's good that the New Zealand government apologised for the historical actions towards Samoans. If only the Australian government wasn't so hesitant in apologising regarding all of the crimes committed towards Aborigines! It's said over and over that it's in the past, and so yes, why can't they just apologise? Not exactly a hard thing to say. It's not like a bunch of people are going to come running out of the woodwork to start suing, either, not if they haven't done so in the past already. It would be nice to have it done while there are still people alive who were involved in it to hear. A gesture, something, from the government. It ought to be done.

It's easy enough for animal rights activists to fixate on apes and say that no, one shouldn't do testing on them, as you say. It's also unfortunate that so many other species go unaccounted for because of their classification as vermin, or why some species like pigs are allowed to live in such horrendous conditions prior to being made into fodder. But pigs aren't seen as those darling creatures signing at you in cages in zoos. It's annoying that some are considered good enough to be protected by the UN, and others not.

Speaking of genetic manipulation of any creature, I was reading not long ago upon a fluorescent rabbit some guy made. Fluorescent! What kind of benefit would that be, other than to make weird pets for the delectation of the wealthy? Sheesh! It's not hurting the creature, being fluorescent (one would hope) but it's one weird way to spend a lot of money best spent elsewhere.

Regarding Joe Haldeman's wondering if the charm of ceiling fans would last over airconditioning -- Eek! I suppose that now that I'm in the middle of winter and am freezing (count of clothing being worn: leggings, long skirt, shirt, another shirt, jumper, socks, and still cold) I wouldn't be happy at the thought of aircon anyway. Ceiling fans rule, yes they do, as long as one has windows open. They stir the hot air around as my father points out but they also mean that you're not going to have sore eyes or shiver as you leave the airconditioned area.

Robert Louis Stevenson did criticism? I thought all he'd ever done was write a few books, but now that I look it up online I see that he was more of a writer than I'd realised. I read his works as a child, but haven't touched them since; I do think I have something in my library downstairs.

I find it interesting how often someone shifts a family to a different country, with only one spouse being at all interested and often the children either liking it or despising it. My family moved all over the world because of my father; my mother hated it and my brother and I didn't care much what was happening. Again the family is seeking to shift, my father wanting to go overseas again despite my mother's repeated proclamations of not wanting to go.

I've no doubt that it happens all over the place, but ouch! I know I'm staying behind because of not wanting to chuff off with the family once more, instead preferring to do as I wish myself. An entirely family to Samoa ... well, I know that I'd like Samoa a fair few times over than England, but that's mostly because of weather concerns. I don't do well in cold at all.

It's good to hear that the first Australian convention was so well-attended. 60 people! There must have been quite a few active back then and even without the event of the internet! Quite marvellous. I don't know if I'd ever manage to write so much as I do now if it weren't for a computer -- although I do manage to type reasonably fast it's not without errors, and I remember when I was slave to a typewriter. The eraser was a dear friend, and when I found those little white correction slips I was in heaven! I'm not cut out to be without technology!

9 May, 2003

I forgot I hadn't e-mailed you since I added Barrantes to my name. No, I haven't gotten married; I have adopted my mother's last name in addition to my father's. I thought both sides should have equal billing regards my name.

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Don Tuck, Lilydale, Vic.

The history of Samoa was of interest. My parents went to the USA in 1928 (left me and a brother with grandparents) on the Niagara. The other ship, the Talune, was a frequent visitor to Hobart pre-War.

This reminds me of Bertie "Jack" Chandler who looked us up quite often from the late '50s. There were strikes at times but that didn't phase him -- he just kept on writing sf stories. He used the suburb we lived in, Lindisfarne, as the name for one of his sf spaceship bases! In his later stages he captained a number of small freighters of the Australian-New Zealand Line, names like Kootara, 2,000-4,000 ton vessels. Occasionally brought zinc concentrate to Risdon Zinc Works (my employer) and also copper concentrate from Strahan to Port Kembla. For the latter he had to negotiate Macquarie Harbour Heads -- the so-called "Hell's Gates". He even scraped the ship's bottom at least once because the appropriate Marine Board wouldn't dredge there for economic reasons!

[from p.3]

The highlight of our trip, though, would have to be Levuka, to which we flew as soon as the course finished (okay, okay – maybe a wee bit *before* the course was finished – but after a week of it we were all keen to get away.) Levuka, on the island of Ovalau, was a major regional port in the 19th century and became the original capital of Fiji when a national government was formed in 1871. It was here that the Fiji Islands were ceded to Queen Victoria by a majority of chiefs just three years later (some were at war with other Fijian chiefs, others were wary of Tongan territorial ambitions).

As if to mimic the big island, visitors to Ovalau arriving by plane find themselves on the opposite side of the island from Levuka. A bumpy mini-van ride along the coast delivered us to the quaint town, famed for its many well-preserved colonial-era buildings: Fiji's first town hall, bank, hospital, post office, school, Masonic lodge, etc. After one sweltering night in a cute but poorly ventilated old hostel, we moved to Fiji's oldest hotel, the Royal. Complete with pool for the girls! It was a relaxing time, wandering about the picturesque main road, climbing in the hills, or lounging in the pool. Ella particularly enjoyed the flight back to the mainland as she was designated co-pilot in the little 8-seater.

We flew on to Nadi, spent a few more days lounging, shopping and sight-seeing. Indo-Fijians make up a greater proportion of the population in the west and the Hindu temple, shops and food were a pleasant reminder of our travels in India some years ago. And then it was time to return to the real world.

Well, Samoa at least.

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As many people have commented, 2003 looks like being a bugger of a year – first the Columbia disaster and bushfires in Canberra, then the fiasco in Iraq. Fandom specifically has seen the passing of Harry Warner Jr., Bob Smith and John Foyster (about whom, more next issue). Not a good start.

This issue of *Mumblings* has been produced en route to a workshop in Kiribati, via Nadi. We found the gorgeous Ganesh cardstock in a stationery shop there last year, just calling out to be used on a fanzine. I am happy to oblige. On the back cover is a *ndrua*, a traditional Fijian sailing vessel. The map of Fiji on page 3 is from *The Pacific Islands: an encyclopedia*, University of Hawaii Press, 2001. Most of the other illustrations in this issue will be self-explanatory.

Thanks again to Joe Haldeman for allowing me to reprint a section of his online diary; to Elfie, for preserving my fannish heritage; and to all loccers. As always, I look forward to your comments on this issue.

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