

Taste Not The Pierian Spring #3

First distributed in ANZAPA #218, April 2004

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The Best Carpet Layer I Know

“Come on downstairs,” my brother urged, holding the back door of the parents’ house open for me one day when on a visit. He had dinner in the other hand. “I know you were waiting for me.”

“Um.” I’d actually not been waiting for him at all.

He laughed. “How long have you been waiting? Hours, right?”

“Not long, really.” I’d been hanging around since my father, Phil, had returned and advised that friends of the family were dropping by later. I was on the verge of saying so before thinking that saying I was waiting for my bro instead would earn me brownie points. Plus once he’d said it I thought it was as good a reason as any to stay around.

I set off out the door with him, but Damien didn’t let me down the stairs. He picked me up and tucked me under one arm, the other still occupied with a plate, and carried me down the steps.

“You’re so light!” He hefted me a few times, swinging me under his arm. With me tucked under there he made me open doors—difficult, since I never realised how much I used my lower body to plant myself while dragging sliding doors open. Once they were open it was turn on the light switches. Finally I got myself tossed onto a couch, rather gently.

My brother sure has arm muscles on him. It’s too bad nobody else I know has got similar musculature. It’s so much fun to get picked up and dangled about. Even Damien himself wishes someone could do it to him—at least he says since I look like I have so much fun being dangled. Yay dangling.

I ended up watching a bunch of television with him—the first in months, and “reality” tv. *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy*. I boggled at the amounts of money they must have spent fixing up that one guy’s wardrobe and house and everything else. The guy’s “before” apartment looked scarily like my own does at the moment, only with more furniture. Maybe I should invest in a magic wand to waft a layer of illusion over all for when fashionable visitors feel inclined to drop in.

When the family friends did turn up I ended up staying downstairs with my brother. Leo popped his head in downstairs, looking around the corner.

“Ah-hah! I thought you were here! I could hear you laugh.”

Damien grinned at me. “Your laugh.” He shook his head. “You can hear it a mile away.” Ahh, something old said anew.

Of course Damien would want to show me some more of his fascinating new stripper moves—I am ever so amused by how the first song he dances to is *NSYNC’s “Sailing”. There’s a reason why he wears a sailor’s costume to rip off,

appropriately made with velcro for ease of ripping. So I watched and critiqued and strongly advised him to continue practising.

I miss my brother.

He’s funny and he used to tend to just pick me up whenever he felt like it. Or let me climb him like a tree and walk around with me clinging to his leg or something.

Since my flatmate moved in I’ve felt less at loose ends; he does similar sorts of things as did my brother, such as coming to just sit and talk. Or stand in the doorway.

That would sound disconcerting except for that I’ve known him for years and feel comfortable in telling him to sod off. The conversations and companionship of someone else in the flat makes me miss my brother a little less.

Still. It’s not the same.

Not long before moving out of the parents’ Damien came home when I went into the backyard with the clothes basket, ready to put the washing on the line. I waved hello and started doing things, but hardly had I put one garment on the line when he came running up and swung me up in his arms.

“Eee!” said I.

He swung me around a little, then dropped me half to the ground. “Give me your arm,” he said, which I then gave him.

He dropped one of my legs, so I dangled off the ground while being held up by an arm and a leg. I didn’t have much confidence in his ability to keep me from falling.

“No, don’t drop me!”

Damien had no such intention in mind. He swung me around, held by an arm and a leg. Man. I see people doing that to little kiddies, not women just over 50kg! I must have been a bit of strain on the arms. Eventually he got dizzy and he dropped me to the ground, where I stared up at the sky, laughing.

I laughed all of the way putting up the clothes on the line, because it was unexpected and, well, funny. He’d obviously gone ‘whee, sister to play with!’ and run over.

While he packed up the stuff on the truck I looked over and noticed his t-shirt all over again. “I am an expert carpet layer,” it proclaimed. I read it aloud.

“People always notice that,” said Damien. “They laugh.”

I laughed. “What do they say?”

He didn’t hear me, leaping over the truck to tie things down. “I always tell them that I have to prove it every time.”

Ah, my little bro. Doesn’t have to prove anything to me, not at all. There goes likely the only person I’ll find willing to pick me up and play with me and goof around for a long time. It’s really too bad.

Closer to Cthulhu than Ever Before

We were three women and one man; not exactly the proportions I'd been expecting when I approached the Cave Clan, an organisation dedicated to exploration of urban drains and abandoned buildings. There had been a photographic exhibition in an art gallery a few months previously, with one of the artists having work he said was taken with the Melbourne Cave Clan. There was a short explanation of who they were and what urban spelaeology was; naturally I was fascinated and got in contact with the Brisbane group immediately.

I turned up in old clothes and shoes, torch in hand, ready for drain-climbing. Although the initial group of people waiting was skewed in the woman department (urban exploring didn't strike me as the kind of thing many women would rock up to of their own volition), before long more and more men began appearing out of the woodwork. A large newbie expo, from the looks of things. I'd expected it to be smaller from a complaint one of the Clan people'd made. I found out the reason later on: *The Sunday Mail* had not long ago had piece on them.

Watching the guys who were going to lead us into drains arrive, I immediately thought—these guys are IT people. There is no way in hell that they're not. One of them admitted to having studied it (when discussing whether we were employed), another said, when asked, that he'd worked in IT, and the other, I saw from the newspaper, studies IT. The guy I asked wondered if he looked geeky when I crowed at being right. No—it isn't geekiness. It's something else. Almost infallibly I'll be able to tell. That's what comes of knowing too many IT people.

The first drain ("Darkie", apparently) was the one I'd spotted from a few times from the bicycle track. I was told it's the most obvious drain in Brisbane. A good one to begin with, too—not too hard to get into (although getting back out again proved more of a challenge) and the walk within very damp.

I walked between two larger clumps of people for a bit of it. Off went my torch. Pitch black. No way of seeing anything in there ... one had better hope that they didn't go in there alone, especially not without battery replacement for their torch. Getting lost would be terrifying.

I was amused in that because I was small, I didn't have to stoop as much as a few of the others did. The first drain we were in was old, mostly was orange brick. It gave the thing a lot of character, and made it all the more obvious where things have been added or sealed off. Made me wonder what was behind the sealed parts.

There was more than ample room in the drains, which went on for a lot longer than what we did—we turned into a room-like place where a green doll was hanging from a step, looking a bit ominous. The room had writing all over it, and when I peeked over a ledge I saw that we were directly under the Roma Street Parklands; I was looking at one of the water gardens.

After a light repast, we moved onto another drain ("Toby"). That one involved a bit more slithering to get into and had a different feel. It was more of a modern drain, so instead of brick there was reinforced concrete. After a lot of tromping through it all, however, we came to a sudden large room, all brick. It was amazing. It turned out that it was the underside of a bridge; where we were

walking originally there'd been a creek, but they'd sealed it up. In the process of doing so they'd kept the bridge, just adding it to the drain system.

Tromping through those networks ... it's had been raining a bit the week prior, so there was a lot of water. I wonder what it would have been like in the dry season. One of the guys appeared to be interested in getting along further, but the water levels were a bit overly high. At that point it was dark, and I was real of the several layers of clothing I'd put on. The skin on my feet was about to fall off from the constant rub of wet shoes and socks, so when we left it I took my shoes off.

The last of the day involved abandoned docks, mooching about the area and its buildings. I wasn't wearing shoes at this point and was asked often if I was all right (and I'm sure they thought I was quite mad). They were worried about my feet. I wasn't—I got a few glass splinters, but they were easily removed. No, my hands were what I was worried about. Afterwards I sported cuts, gashes, and scrapes on my hands, the worst of which I got when jumping off a wall. Gloves were needed, not shoes.

The abandoned docks were mind-blowing in area. Absolutely huge. We went into the buildings and poked around, finding that in one someone had installed a lock and was living in one. To get into it everyone climbed over glass in a broken window and did so to get back out again. I'd pointed out a door which was unlocked, but obviously not loud enough. I left by that exit instead and jibed them mildly from outside.

Another place on the agenda was the gas building—one of them exuded a strong odour, and although a few poked their head into it I stayed away. I'm sure smelling gas isn't good to one's health. We went to the tower-like thing where the gas was stored instead, and clambered all over the metal outsides. It made not-very-reassuring empty clanging sounds and I tromped happily all over it while the booted folk slammed their feet.

I was convinced to climb to the top of the tower, and so on the narrow metal ladder I went. Marvellous view. Nice slicing wind, too. I basked in it, but got back down quickly since the other two up there wanted to come down. It would have been a great place for the photographers who stayed on the ground to do some shooting.

There were so many little things. The building we went had skulls and bones all over it. "Guards must not be removed from machinery" was written there, the cage in the same room leading to amusing speculation of people being put in there. We shot wary looks at the abandoned building with running water and electricity, for people lived in there and it was dangerous at night.

We looked around for people and whether they'd notice us going into drains and slithering under fences. At the second drain a car appeared and a guy got out of it, looking about, making everyone drop into the drain all the more faster to get away. The tales they were telling about meeting up with police, security guards, and other people as they left drains? Amusing indeed. Part of the charm of poking around in places—knowing that you're doing things you can get into legal trouble for, trespassing and all that. One day I'll do it again, get dirty and thrilled and explore the deep. Who knows what I'll find.

Mailing Comments on Anzapa 217

Just recently I had occasion to read Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo*, which I found rather disturbing—not because of the storyline or the art, but because I found the graphic novel highlighted my ignorance of the war in Bosnia. **Murray Moore's** comments upon Safe Area Gorazde were much appreciated, although I found to my disappointment that my library did not carry a copy. It has made me eager to follow up on the intent to educate myself on what happened and *why* the war happened.

I too find that I am liking audiobooks, much like **David Grigg**. I don't listen to them while walking about or travelling merely because I do not have a portable player of audio of any kind, but I have been listening to them at home. They're great for when doing housekeeping—the first week of listening to them it was Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which I have my doubts about being able to read in the conventional way. It's quite hilarious to listen to.

The library has a large selection of audiobooks but mostly in cassettes, as David found. What they do have in CD format I am slowly getting and ripping to mp3—while I do not as yet have an mp3 player I intend to get one (sooner or later) for it will enable me to 'read' a book while walking, which I do plenty of. Plus give me a good excuse to ignore people on the train, for reading a conventional book does not appear to give people the idea that you are busy, merely awaiting for someone deathly interesting—like them—to save you from the tedium of the written word.

One of the series I am currently ripping and listening to is Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. It's an excellent audio production with a range of voices. I've found myself quite taken in by it and have been listening as I've done craftwork. Listening to them while housekeeping is out of the question with a flatmate in, so I make do with headphones while fingers are occupied.

Regarding 'posh', in relation to **Cath Ortlieb's** factoid, grabbed from the web:

This is supposed to be the legend printed on tickets of passengers on P&O (Peninsula and Orient) passenger vessels when travelling between UK and India in the days of the Raj. Britain and India are both in the northern hemisphere so the port (left-hand side) berths were mostly in the shade when travelling out (easterly) and the starboard ones when coming back. So the best and most expensive berths were POSH, hence the term. A very plausible and attractive explanation, but this does appear to be an idea that was dreamed up retrospectively to match an existing meaning. P&O say they have never issued such tickets and, although many tickets from that era still exist, no 'POSH' ones have been found. Numerous letters and literary works also remain from the British Raj but nothing has been found which confirms the word being used in that context. The word doesn't seem to have been used in print before a Punch cartoon dated 1918. The term was used from the mid 19th century to mean a dandy and that is the more likely derivation for the current meaning.¹

Cath Ortlieb has two good-looking youngsters there. She's going to have two heartbreakers there when they've grown up a bit.

I am very much taken with Arabic culture—probably partially to do with the number of years I spent in the Middle East as a youngster. It's disturbing to see that they're portrayed as a bunch of rabid lunatics, so it's good to hear from **Michael F. Green** that they were shown as civilised and sophisticated in *Doctor Who's The Crusade*.

Trailing along in technology I have upgrade my computer for a few piddling dollars to something a lot towards 1999 technology instead of early 1990s, so I can now watch multimedia on it without having the computer fall over and die. (\$80 well spent.) Mobile telephone, as well, so that people can contact me at all hours of the day and send stupid SMSs which I do my best to ignore. When I'm not forgetting the blasted thing, that is, as I find I all too often do.

I will not be getting a DVD player, like **Michael F. Green**, although I can't say that his problems with regions does not sound familiar—friends have said similar things, or have bought DVD-ROM drives and then tinkered to make multiregion all on their very own.

Let's see. My hair. It is now long enough that it hits my lower back, and that was even with cutting it earlier this year—I thought that a trim would even it out and get rid of the really bad split ends down the bottom. Leaving it out, however, is out of the question. Long hair, I have come to the conclusion, is the same as a pregnant woman's distended stomach. It becomes public space. People do not think twice of putting out a hand and touching, despite the fact that it is indeed your own body and attached to you. I have taken to wearing a scarf around my head sometimes, much like a hajib. It's getting me some interesting reactions from those who take me to be Muslim, although what with my ankles showing I don't know where they get such a preposterous idea. Ignorance, perhaps. It has been so hot around here of late that like **LynC**, I have been most tempted to hack the lot off and go short-haired—but then I think of the three years' effort involved in its growing and yank myself back into sensibility again.

David Charles Cummer asks what Schoolies Week is. It's an annual event for school-leavers (i.e. just finished secondary school) held on the Gold Coast. It used to be a week and for those youth from south-east Queensland (and probably northern New South Wales). Now it's been extended a week officially for the benefit of New South Wales and Victorian youth. It's a week-long party for them—they book hotel rooms and stay there, getting drunk, probably sleeping with one another, swimming, throwing up, dancing, spending a lot of money, carousing—that sort of thing. All away from their parents' eye. I wonder that any parent is daft enough to pay for their children to go, considering the alcohol abuse, physical trauma, rapes, and other things that go on there ... which all get glossed over by the media and local authorities.

When at the University of Queensland doing the degree in psychology I spent some years on, one of the lecturers was fond of putting up cartoons related to psychology or

1. [<http://phrases.shu.ac.uk/meanings/287800.html>]

science in some way to make a point before going on. One of these was **Bill Wright's** reprinted cartoon of Harris's "I think you should be more explicit here in step two". It loses none of its punch at being seen again.

I don't know that there isn't a market for poetry—while I am not leaping for joy at the idea of it most of the time, there are those who really do care for the stuff. I hope that **Lucy Schmeidler's** efforts do work and it manages to not only find a publisher, but sell reasonably well once it's done so. Having said that I am not a poetry connoisseur, I do appreciate the occasional poem Lucy puts in her fanzine.

Somehow the "glorious living colour" of **Karen Johnson's** fiancé's car is rather dimmed by the pink-and-black aspect, although perhaps that is a malfunction of the eye on my behalf. Or perhaps the colour of pink and black was the one being referred to?

One good way of getting rid of **Eric Lindsay's** surplus of stuff would be to have a garage sale—and sell it all cheaply. If it's something people'll pay money for. Another is to give it to a charity. Last resort: leave it on the footpath. Someone'll take it. (I do!)

What **Eric Lindsay** and **Jean Weber** should do next time he's in Brisbane is grab me so I can take them to my favourite second-hand stores and show them where to get el cheapo SFnal books. This is my most favourite activity. I have cut back on my book buying hugely, but that doesn't mean I don't like to see other people spend their money. Why, it's almost as good as buying them myself! That way Eric won't have that horrible feeling of looking at a catalogue and not finding anything catch his eye.

Of course that would then make a dint into his attempts of getting rid of his current belongings, but one can't have everything. Any visitor to Brisbane is more than welcome to get dragged along on a book buying journey.

Another person who likes Terry Dowling's *Rynosseros* series; I commend **Dan McCarthy's** good taste. I don't know too many who know who the hell I am speaking of whenever I mention Dowling's name, and yet I dare say he's one of my most favourite writers. I'm dying to get my hands on my own copy of *Blackwater Days*. I've already read it, courtesy of the libraries, but it doesn't change that I want my very own! One day when I have enough money to send off for a copy from some extravagantly charging second-hand store.

"I was making more money than I did at home." Jeanne Mealy say that of a job of hers, and I say that of mine own most fascinating paying job: cleaning motels. It's better than the telemarketing I was doing, but gave up since I dislike the idea of commission. The funny thing is that when I begun I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get myself up in the morning to go, would lie around moaning. Not so. I'm up and ready and wanting to go, and now I find myself absolutely *craving* going to work. It gives me something to do. Best of all there's no dress code, not like at the offices my friends work where they're told they have to conform to a certain standard.

Although of late I have begun experimenting with makeup in an outrageous sort of way—lurid colours and overemphasised eyes, that sort of thing, entirely the fault of my Goth flatmate—I don't think I would be able to wake up each morning and put a careful patina on, slip into formal dress, and spend the day smiling at office idiocies. At least where I am now I'm alone and busy and getting money for it. Not very much, but more than when on my arse at home.

Reading everyone's travelogues makes me want to get going, go *travel!* In interests of that I put myself up for DUFF this year—let's not look at **Kim Huett**, who had no influence on this current pursuit of mine, oh no, none at *all*. Once I got into the spirit of things it turned out to be quite fun. Don't know if I'll win or not, but it'll be interesting to see. I've been corresponding with the New Zealander running, Norman Cates, and it's amusing to realise just how much we two have in common, fandom-wise.

As **Jack R. Herman**, I too liked the *Bush in 30 Seconds* website. I thought 'What Are We Teaching Our Children' was clever, and also liked 'In My Country'. It was annoying that they weren't allowed to show the segment during the Superbowl break like they wanted to. I don't see how it would have mattered to those organising Superbowl or whatever went on in the background, but no. Not appropriate. *Sheesh*.

Despite doing online surveys paying in points which I can redeem for a variety of things like movie tickets, I have not seen nearly as many films as have many of the AN-ZAPA folk. It's merely that I tend to feel velleity towards movies, and so nothing ever tends to get done. I'll only see them if someone drags me, and only then if I think it worthwhile! So I missed out on *Peter Pan*, *Lost in Translation*, *Whale Rider*, *Love Actually*, and a great number of others I've heard good things about. There's always video, I suppose.

My most recent viewing was *Lilo & Stitch*, after I had been subjected to a number of pictures of Stitch and was overwhelmed by the cuteness. Splendid film. As opposed to *Finding Nemo*, which I found terribly dull.

Since getting ADSL—one side benefit of a flatmate—I've been downloading a lot more digitised content. My most recent find are short films, which I've always bemoaned not being able to see before. I especially found "Cat With Hands"¹ disturbing.

There are others, of course, like the infamous *Star Wars* fan film, "Troops"², or the special-effects film produced on a home computer, "405: the movie"³. There's a lot of good stuff out there. There's also a considerable amount of bad—it takes a lot of weeding to see which is which! Unfortunately there are no review sites that I've found as yet.

A lovely remembrance fanzine from **Sally Yeoland** on her mother. Not much to say other than it was a lovely read. Sorry to hear of everyone's relatives who have passed on, once again.

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1. [<http://homepage.mac.com/jbrimm/Cat-With-Hands.mov>]
 2. [<http://www.theforce.net/theater/shortfilms/troops/>]
 3. [<http://www.405themovie.com/view.asp>]
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I lied about original pieces for this issue. Versions of "The best carpet layer I know" and "Closer to Cthulhu than ever before" appeared **previously** on my online journal.