Welcome back, listeners. Today we tackle a query sent in by Feff Field, of Fairfield, and Alf Ingham, of Alphington... "John," they ask, "is it true that there is a giant who lives in the Darebin Parklands?"

Fair question, Feff and Alf. There are many rumours, but nothing's ever been proved. Let's take a gander...

Ahh, Darebin Parklands! A patch of urban bush surrounding an R-shaped stretch of the Darebin Creek...
Hellooo! Anyone home?

Ah-ha! Gos Hawk!

Mister Hawk! Call me Gos, man.

Gos, got any goss about a giant living ‘round here?

Ah! This place, it breathes mystery, 800,000 years ago, lava cools and hardens under our feet here, becoming bluestone.

Uh-huh. Sure. Fine Annnnd... the giant?

Relax, man. I'll get to him...

But did you know that, 110 years ago, Ned Kelly was shot here?
"You're saying Kelly's the giant?"

"No no no. Look..."

"Shoot!"

"Urk."

"Cut."

"Ha ha, that looked great, Frank. Let's go to the Carter's Arms for lunch!"

"Such is art!"

"...and the fluid Kelly story hardens into the flickering and shadowy bluestone of cinema..."

"The Tait Brothers make this feature film, perhaps the first one in the world..."
**BERNARD CALEO**

Just so, when I swoop down, plumed lightning death from above onto unsuspecting Indian Mynas, just so do my actions solidify into legend.

In terrified whispers the Mynas spread the news of how I rend their brothers and sisters wing from wing, and gulp them down like takeaway tandoori.

And YES, I have heard tell of the giant, how he snaps the Indian Mynas’ necks with his thumb, then tosses them down, fluffy curry puffs.

And how he crunches on their hollow bones. Oh, he crunches HARD, John.

CRACK!
CRUNCH!

Wait, wait, wait!

That’s great for Hollywood, MAN, but this is a news service, yes? I am a journalist. I demand EVIDENCE. Facts. Good day, sir!!!
Ducks and drakes!

I need a more reliable, less addled witness...

Ahh! A person walker!

She'll have her head screwed on tight alright.

Mrs... Nine? Kay, isn't it?

That's right. Taking it pretty easy today, John?

Oh, you know: plenty going on under the surface...

Now, Kay. How long have you been walking your person here?

Oh, years, John. Years.

I see. Ever cop a sniff of this supposed giant?

Well I have heard that, 10 years ago, he was suddenly at the Parklands entrance, blocking our way in...
WELL. ALL the dogs, and ALL their pets, met up at the train station.

And there they built an enormous wooden dog.

That night they took it up to the Parklands entrance and they all climbed inside. In the morning...

HAH! Once hed taken it into the Parklands, they all burst out and we've been here ever since!

I see, that's -- WALdaminnit. You said THEY built the wooden dog. But did you? Were you THERE?

Well, I...
Great Genyornis! All I'm asking for from you people is some truth! I'm a Waddley-Award winning reporter, you know!

Join the media, they said. Meet funny animals, they said.

Quacking HEll!

I gotta face it. I'm a washout. Up sewer creek, sans paddle.

I need a scoop. A giant a bunyip... hell, a bloody platypus would do at this point.

Donk!


But even the poor suckers who do believe in this giant can't give me a lead. I'm stuffed, a stuffed duck. Stick me on your mantelpiece.

But wait! Up there! Could it be the private apartment of Ms. Marsupial 2017? Yes! An exclusive could save me!
HELLoooo!
Ms Ringtail!
Are you in?

≡yawn≡
HiLo,
John,
What’s
up?

You are, Ring. Haha! Come
on down! Can you tell
me anything about this
mythical giant? Does he exist?

Oh yes, your quarry is
right here. Where the
old quarry was, between
1890 and 1965 about a
billion tonnes of bluestone
were hoiked out of here.

Then they had this big big
hole, they called it a
‘tip’ so that they could tip
all their rubbish into it.

In those days, there was
no such thing as the
environment. Just as well,
because they tipped some
horrible stuff into that tip...
then they covered it up and let it simmer for 20 years.

precisely according to the recipe, a vile black goop began to bubble out.

Isn’t it called “leachate”? That gives a bad name to leeches. It’s vile black goop.

But it looks like a leech.

It’s goop, John. Vile, black goop.

When the giant first came here, he dug a bunch of ponds and pumped the goop through ‘em, through clumps of reeds and beds of activated charcoal.

and it was gooping down into the Davebin Creek.

as the goop passes from one pond to the next, the chemicals and the heavy metals and the bubonic plague and the black death all get filtered out...

This is going on in those pretty ‘ponds’?

yea, yep, yeow, yep, yep.
the giant built himself a mountain and he sat on it.

he looked out upon his work and he saw that it was good.

but 20 years on, there’s a new problem - salts are concentrating in the pondwater.

Huh. That’s probably why we ducks like it around here so much...

mm, probably.

recently the giant told the people that he reckons bringing in big pink birds could take care of the salts problem.

The future is flamingoes.
"The future is FLAMINGOES"?
Now I KNOW that you've been making ALL this up...

Come ON, Ms. Tail!! "Ring? ....Ring?"

Ducks and drakes, this is Mister John Cluck, signing off from Darebin Parklands.

"waddle waddle waddle SPLASH!"

Ducks, Alf, it's pretty clear there's no giant here, but folks keep those cards and letters coming and I'll see you next time. I hope.

PHNEE!
There are two big ash trees either side of the footpath as you come into the park from northeast corner where Tharratt Street meets Pender Street. That’s the way the boy comes running in, from the direction of his school a couple of blocks away, backpack slung over his shoulder, although it’s not a school day today. It’s Sunday. If you listen closely you can just hear the congregation singing in the next street; in the Church of St James the Great where the boy’s parents were married all those years ago. They never talk about that day, but the boy likes to look at the wedding photo on the mantelpiece when he’s warming himself in front of the Vulcan.

At the other end of the park, an old lady pushes her walker along the path that dissects the greenery from the corner where the boy came running in down to this end where she’s standing, catching her breath. She’s always thought of this as her park, and those ash trees as her trees. They weren’t always big, those ash trees. Once upon a time they were no more than saplings planted in the ground one cold day in the years between the two great wars. The old lady doesn’t remember that day, but her father does. Or did. He was a nurseryman who got a job with the Northcote Council after he got back from the horrors in France. He planted those trees. But that’s not why he remembers that day. He remembers it because it was the day his boss drove up to the park from the depot to give him the message - and the rest of the day off. His wife was in hospital. His daughter was on her way. June 20, 1933. Arbor Day.

Despite the terrible things he’d seen while serving in France, they still called her Frances. He thought it might help make things better. Pro Bono Ad Meliora. It was the motto he saw every day at work. It was on the Council’s Coat of Arms. It was on the sign over the entrance to the park. From good things to better. He hoped that Frances would make things better. And she did.

Even now, eighty-four years later, Frances still likes the older trees more than the Eucalypts, not just because her father planted them, but because they are such an odd collection of species – her ash, the silky oaks, the Canary Island palms, the poplars and the conifers and the stone bordered garden beds. Even the wisteria draped over southern entrance – it’s such a mixed bag. A hodgepodge. A bit like life.

It’s a small park; an island floating in a suburban sea, bound by a bitumen shoreline: Tharratt, Collins, St David and Pender. This morning, it’s a desert island, populated only by the boy and the old lady. Here and there is evidence of long gone intruders: the tennis ball lost in the shrubs, the blue coat abandoned by the bubbler, the tinselled ‘happy birthday’ banner strung between posts and left behind by revellers in the barbeque area. But these things are just archaeology. Today, it’s only Robinson Crusoe and her Man Friday.

Frances puts the brake on the wheels of her walker and eases herself onto a park bench. She watches the boy as he looks up at her ash; into the canopy of red and gold leaves. It’s almost three weeks into winter but the ash trees are still clinging to autumn like they need their coat to ward off the approaching cold. This one’d make a good climbing tree if you were tall enough or if the bottom branches were a bit closer to the ground. But he’s not and they’re not so he has to jump to try and get a handhold.

No luck. Too high.

Eventually he gives up. He looks at the swings and the slide in the empty playground, at the toilet block, at the old lady on the park bench. She looks lost. He smiles at her. She smiles back. He picks up his backpack and goes to sit beside her. She stares up into the gold and red of her ash tree.

Are you okay?
She nods.
Are you lost?
She shakes her head.
Do you live around here?
She vaguely points a crooked finger back the way she came.

The boy unzips his backpack and rummages around inside until he finds a lunch box. He snaps off the lid and takes out a ragged looking sandwich, soft white bread torn where the butter was too thick to spread.

Are you hungry?
She looks at the sandwich.
It’s vegemite.
She looks at him.
I made it myself.
She cracks a smile. I love vegemite.
She takes the offering. There are two sandwiches. The boy eats the second one.

They don’t have vegemite, she says, just marmite. They say it’s the same, but it’s not. It’s just cheaper.
Who says it's cheaper?

She stares off back the way she came. They do. At the home.

You live in a home? Like an old people's home?

She nods.

They let you out on your own?

She shrugs.

Are you running away?

She looks up into the ash tree. She nods.

The boy is quite excited about that. I didn't think grown-ups ran away. Especially old ones.

She doesn't say anything. He wonders whether calling her old was rude.

But then she turns to him. Sometimes they wish they could but don't. Too many responsibilities.

But you ran away anyway?

All my responsibilities are gone.

He's not sure what she means. Won't someone miss you?

No-one important. No-one who should. They're too busy.

He thinks about this for a bit. I'm running away too.

She turns and grins at him. Good for you.

They sit and eat their vegemite sandwiches.

The boy looks at the old lady. Why are you running away?

I don't like it there.

She finishes her sandwich. It's given her a vegemite moustache. The boy giggles, rummages again, finds a mostly unused tissue and offers it to her. She thanks him, wipes the vegemite away and gives the tissue back.

The boy sees the smear of black paste and red lipstick on the white tissue. It fascinates him. He folds the tissue and puts it in his pocket.

The old lady asks him, why are you running away?

His eyes shift away from hers. For a moment she thinks he won't answer, then he pulls up his sleeve and shows her the bruises. She nods, and pulls up her own sleeve.

Her skin is blemished, more brittle and papery thin than his. But the bruises are the same.

Frances looks over at the barbeque area, at the tatty old tinsel birthday banner fluttering in the breeze.

Do you know what today is?

The boy shakes his head.

It's Arbor Day.

What's that?

Arbor is Latin for tree. It's a day when all the kids at school plant trees. At least it used to be.

The boy looks at all the trees in the park. He looks at the ash tree. It's as though it had never occurred to him that there was a time when it wasn't there. That someone might have planted it.

What school was that?

She points that crooked finger again, but this time in the direction that he came from. The one up the road there.

Hey, I go to that school too. Pender's Grove Primary.

Frances seems really happy at that idea. Well, well. Isn't it a small world.

I don't think we have Arbor Day anymore, though. Maybe there are enough trees.

There are never enough trees.

He nods. No, I guess not.

I love trees.

He nods again. Me too.

I used to love climbing trees when I was a little girl. It always got me into trouble.
He can’t imagine her as a little girl, or that anyone would tell you off for climbing a tree.

Do you know what a Tomboy is?

He shakes his head.

It’s a girl who does things that most people expect boys to do.

But boys and girls do most things the same. Lots of girls at our school climb trees and stuff like that.

It wasn’t like that when I went to school. Girls were expected to behave differently than boys. To be more ladylike. I wasn’t very ladylike. I was a tomboy.

Did you get into trouble with your folks?

She shakes her head. It was at school. Not at home though. It was my dad who encouraged me.

To be a tomboy?

She nods, and smiles at the memory of her father. But the smile sours.

Now my son tells me off.

What for?

For not appreciating the home he found for me. For complaining about how they treat us in that place. For thinking he should make the time to visit me.

Will he be worried that you’ve run away?

She shakes her head. He’ll be annoyed.

The boy grins. Maybe you’re still a tomboy. Just a different sort.

Frances doesn’t understand.

Well, grownups aren’t supposed to run away. But you did. Maybe a tomboy can also be a grownup who does things that most people expect kids to do.

Frances likes that. Will your parents worry that you’ve run away?

The boy shrugs. Maybe my mum will.

Your dad?

He hates me.

I’m sure he doesn’t hate you.

The boy shrugs her off. He doesn’t want to talk about it. He reaches into his bag and pulls out a book.

They sit in silence, the boy reading, the old lady lost in the canopy of her ash tree.

The boy doesn’t notice the police car cruising east up Collins street.

The old lady doesn’t notice a different police car cruising west down Pender’s Street.

The officers in the first police car are looking for a missing boy. But all they see is a kid with his grandma.

The officers in the second police car are looking for an old dear who wandered off from her nursing home. But all they see is a grandmother enjoying a morning in the park with her grandson.

None of the officers in either of the police cars see each other.

In the park, Frances watches the boy turn the pages of his book. He’s a fast reader. You like reading?

He nods but doesn’t look up. Library day is the only day I look forward to at school.

What’s the book?

He shows her the cover; a cartoon drawing of two little boys climbing a crazy treehouse.

What’s it about?

It’s about these two kids, Andy and Terry, who run away from home and find this awesome treehouse where anything they can imagine can happen.

Frances laughs to herself.

The boy is a little hurt that she isn’t taking his book seriously. What? You think it’s stupid?

No. Not at all. It just reminds me of my favourite book when I was your age.

They had these books back then?
She shakes her head. *It was a different book. About three children called Jo, Bessie and Fanny who find a magic tree in an enchanted wood. They meet a man with a face like the moon and one who looks like a saucepan and the tree is full of strange and wonderful places like the Land of Do-As-You-Please where you can do anything you want. My favourite character was always Fanny.*

*Terry. He's the crazy one.*

Frances looks over at her ash tree again. *You know I used to climb that tree when I was a girl.*

*No way. Those branches are too high off the ground to get a hold of.*

She winks at him. *They hadn't grown that high back then. Plus, I had help.*

The boy's curious now.

*I'd climb up on my dad's shoulders and he'd bunk me up to the first branch.*

*I wish I could climb your tree.*

Frances does too. *What if I gave you a bunk?*

The boy looks at the frail old lady on the park bench. He doesn't want to be rude, but…

*Really?*

Not me, silly. *This.* She puts her hand on her walker. *You could stand on this.*

Frances tries to get up from the bench. It's hard going, until the boy offers his hand and pulls her to her feet. She takes the brake off her walker and wheels it over to the tree. The boy follows.

She positions the walker under the lowest branch and puts the brake back on. *Come on then. Up you go.*

The boy climbs onto the walker's seat. It wobbles a bit but he's got good balance. He reaches up and grabs hold of the lowest branch and then hoists himself up into the tree. *I made it.*

Frances grins. *That's the romance branch you're sitting on.*

The boy has no idea what she's talking about.

*When I'd get onto that branch, I'd hang upside-down low enough to give my dad an upside-down hug. He called it our romance branch.*

The boy crooks his legs over the branch and hangs upside-down. *Like this?*

Frances claps her hands together. *Just like that.*

The girls used to hang like this from the monkey bars at school but you could see their undies so the Principal made them stop.

Frances thinks back to her own school days. She laughs and recites to herself. *I see London, I see France, I see Fanny's underpants.*

Who's Fanny? *The girl from the book?*

No. *Fanny's me. I'm Fanny. At least I was. Now everyone calls me Frances. But my dad always called me Fanny. I was Fanny when I used to climb trees. She looks at the boy hanging upside-down from the romance branch. Well, now you know my name but I don't know yours.*

The boy sticks out his hand. *I'm Mikkel. But mostly I get called Pickle.*

Oh. Frances is a bit taken aback by that.

*No, it's okay. I like it.*

She takes his hand. *Well, then. Pleased to meet you Pickle.*

He gives her an upside-down handshake. *Pleased to meet you, Fanny.*

Fanny giggles like a little girl.

Pickle swings himself back up into the canopy. Frances looks at him. *How high can you climb, Pickle?*

*I don't know. Why don't you come up too and we'll see how high we can go together?*

Frances shakes her head. *I'm far too old for that sort of thing.*

Don't be silly. *There's no such thing as too old for a tomboy.*

Frances wants to say yes. Wishes she could climb her tree one more time. Wishes she was Fanny again.

Pickle reaches down to her. *Come on Fanny. Take my hand.*

And as she takes the boy's hand her creaky bones and aching joints start to feel free again. She's unsteady on the walker and Pickle thinks she might fall off, but she's determined now. Her grip on Pickle's hand tightens and he pulls her up onto the romance branch, all the way, until her black shoes disappear amongst the glorious red and gold autumn leaves.

Back towards Northcote, St David Street runs into Dennis Street which is where the Police Station is.
In the break room, the officers from the first police car are talking to the officers from the second police car. It's only then that the officers from the first car realise the grandma they saw could be the old dear the officers from the second car are looking for. At the same time, the officers from the second car realise the grandson they saw could be the missing boy the officers from the first car are looking for.

The four officers all pile into one police car and speed back up St David Street towards Pender's Park.

But the island's deserted.

Under the red and gold canopy of the ash tree they find Fanny's walker with the brake still on, and Pickle's backpack with everything except his book still in there.

Then, just as they're all standing around scratching their heads, a big gust of wind blows through the park... unexpectedly strong... unseasonably warm and fragrant.

It's so strong that it buffets the four police officers and blows all the red and gold leaves off the ash tree. They look down at the newly laid carpet of autumn leaves falling around their feet.

Then they look up...

...in time to see the folded tissue smeared with a lick of vegemite and a dab of lipstick fluttering down to earth from the bare and empty branches silhouetted against the wintering morning sky.

_Fanny's Ash Tree drawn by Gully Thompson_

One: This is it?
Two: This is it.
One: This is it?
Two: This is it.
One: This is...
Two: YES, this is it.
One: This isn’t right.
Two: What’s not right?
One: You come up.
Two: Yes.
One: To what?
Two: What did you expect?
One: I expected something.
Two: Like what?
One: There’s a hill, there’s a path, with rocks on its edges, winding, leading you up. To what?
Two: To the top.
One: I want more than this.
Two: What do you want?
One: This is a letdown.
Two: It’s a good view.
One: A disappointment.
Two: It’s alright.
One: I was led to believe that I was going somewhere.
Two: Who led you?
One: The path. With the rocks and the winding up.
Two: It’s alright.
One: It’s like they forgot.
Two: Forgot what?
One: The statue, the monument, the lighthouse, the something. They forgot.
Two: Relax. Look around you.
One: What the hell? Did they think no one would notice? Did they think nobody’d bother to come up? Did they think we wouldn’t know something was missing?
Two: Nothing’s missing. This is it. This is how it’s meant to be.
One: No way. That’s bullshit. You don’t do this.
Two: You look out. It’s a lookout. To the mountains there. Who knew we had some of them? And the city. Look, there it is, in the distance. And there’s where I live. There’s the cop shop. And there’s Kmart and Coles.
One: You don’t lead people up the path for nothing.
Two: It’s not nothing.
One: It’s lonely that’s what it is.
Two: I’m not lonely.
One: It’s lonely.
Two: I like it.
They got here and went shit, look at this, what’ll we do here?

I like it.

They had a chance to make something, something beautiful, something magnificent. Grand. Close your eyes. Close them. Up we come, and turn the corner and we go, oh my god, look at that. Look at it. Breathtaking isn’t it? Isn’t it? And we smile. And we go, /wow.

/Wow.

And we stop for awhile.

They stop for awhile.

Beautiful isn’t it? Magnificent. A wonderful surprise that takes our breath away.

It takes their breath away.

It’s quiet. It’s peaceful. I like it that there’s nothing here.

We’ve been cheated.

I like it that it’s away from it all.

Taken for a ride.

I don’t want a monument. I don’t like monuments. They’re for the dead. Always for the dead. Something weird about that.

For the fallen.

For the what?

The fallen.

The fallen?

In the war. They fall, they fell, they... they got killed.

How many monuments do they want?

Thousands of them. Millions maybe. There’s that many of them.

The fallen?

Millions of them. They’re digging them up all the time. They fell and they got covered up and then when they find them they dig them up.

And then what do they do with them?

They bury them again. That monument down there, that’s for them.

That scares me that monument.

It scares you.

I told you, I don’t like them. They scare me.

They’re meant to scare you.

I don’t think monuments should scare you.

They’re telling you this is what could happen to you. If you go to war you’ll die, or you’ll lose your legs, or your mind.

If I had some paint...

Oh my god, they would shoot you if you touched their monument. You don’t go near their monuments. They’re very serious about their monuments. They’re more serious about them than anything else. Their monuments are sacred. You don’t touch them. They would kill you.

Who?

The cops would kill you. They’d shoot you. They wouldn’t ask any questions, they’d just pull out their guns and shoot. Someone passing by seeing you would try to kill you with their bare hands. Do not touch their monuments. They’re crazy about them. They will kill for their monuments for sure.

Shit!

I know.

They stop for awhile.

I get it.

What?
One: I get the fallen thing.
Two: I don’t get it.
One: The fighting for your country thing, I get it.
Two: I don’t get it.
One: It’s doing something bigger than yourself.
Two: What? Carrying a gun?
One: Carrying a gun, wearing a uniform, defending your country, risking your life. It appeals to me.
Two: What the hell?
One: You want to go to war?
Two: Maybe. If it was for the right cause, I’d go.
One: What the hell?
Two: You would not.
One: My body like a machine.
Two: You’d be like that dick head that does a hundred chin ups every morning on the gym equipment down there.
One: Hey you, number 5552, we’re on the move, up the hill, over the rocks, down through the olive grove, past the playground. Take them out.
Two: Those olive trees they worry me.
One: They worry you?
Two: They really worry me.
One: The olive trees worry you? What the...?
Two: This time of the year, when they’ve got olives, then they worry me.
One: Why would they worry you?
Two: Who’s going to pick them?
One: Someone will.
Two: Who?
One: Someone will come along.
Two: Who?
One: I don’t know. Someone. Someone who likes olives.
Two: I don’t reckon they will. I reckon they’ll fall on the ground and they’ll rot there and nobody will have them.
One: They’re there for people to pick them.
Two: I don’t think people know that.
One: You know it. I know it. Someone will know it.
Two: I don’t think they’ll dare.
One: They’re allowed to pick the olives.
Two: They’re too afraid to pick them.
One: They’re waiting for them to ripen.
Two: They’ll think all these olives. And just for me?
One: Once someone starts they’ll all come picking.
Two: They’ll fall off the tree and rot on the ground.
One: Now you’re worrying me.
Two: See? No one’s going to pick them.
One: Someone will sneak out in the middle of the night and take them.
Two: They need a sign.
One: A sign would be good.
Two: “Pick them.”
One: That’s all they need.
Two: They’ll fall off the tree and rot on the ground.

They stop for awhile.

Two: I better go.
Silence.
Two: I better go.
One: Go.
Two: It’s just...
One: Go.
Two: ... getting late.
One: I’m staying.
Two: Two minutes ago you were complaining.
One: It’s growing on me.
Two: You like it now?
One: It’s a bit creepy.
Two: Ghosts you reckon?
One: Maybe.

They stop for awhile.

One: This is a big kissing place, I reckon. People sneaking up after work and meeting for a kiss. Someone from K-Mart has been smiling at one of the butchers and they get talking a bit.
Two: The man from the fish shop’s got eyes for the woman in the dress shop.
One: The woman in the $2 shop falls in love with the guy in the liquor store.
Two: The girl in the chemist fancies the baker in the bread shop.
One: The cashier at Aldi loves the teller at the bank.
Two: They go to each other’s stores every chance they get.
One: They start to meet up here on the hill after work.
Two: Have a kiss.
One: Have a cuddle.
Two: Have a root.
One/Two: Romantic.
One: Sort of.
Two: People don’t do that anymore.
One: What do you mean?
Two: They do Tinder. They don’t waste time with smiling and giggling and talking and stuff. They don’t bother getting to know each other. That stuff’s gone. No one does that anymore.
One: Do you want to kiss?
Two: What?
One: Kiss? Do you want to?
Two: No.

They stop for awhile.

Two: People love their dogs.
One: So much.

Two: They love them more than kids or grandmothers or anyone.
One: Look at them talking to them. Feeding them treats. Patting them and patting them and loving them and loving them. So much they love them. It's sort of out of control.

Two: I'd love a dog if I had one.
One: Would you love it that much?
Two: I don't know. I think so.

One: it's a huge responsibility.
Two: Having a dog?
One: Loving it. You've got to take it on walks, and feed it, and pat it and talk shit to it.

Two: Look at them.
One: I know. A whole lot of love going on down there.
Two: Yeah.
One: It kind of shits me.

Two: Yeah.
One: All that love for their dogs.
Two: Too much.
One: Way too much.

Two: Are you jealous?
One: Maybe.

Two: I don't think they should let kids in parks.
One: That's who parks are for.

Two: It's a big mistake letting them in.
One: Kids love parks.

Two: They cry. They always cry. Off their heads screaming about something, because they drop their sandwich or they fall off their skooter or they can't keep up or someone's got something they want.

One: All kids cry.
Two: I didn't cry.

One: Of course you did.

Two: I think kids cry more these days. They cry at the drop of a hat.
One: Why are they crying all the time?

Two: I watched this kid at the skate park and he's little on a little bike and he's going to go arse over head no doubt and his mother says, it's too dangerous, you're going to hurt yourself and he screams and screams, he's going to do as he pleases, break his neck, his arm, his head. He can't be told and his mother can't tell him and away he goes and of course he falls. Funniest thing I've seen for a long time and then my god, he cries like something that's got to be put away somewhere and everybody hates him and thinks that he shouldn't be allowed in the park, no way.

One: Not all kids are like that.
Two: A lot of them.

One: You can't keep kids out.
Two: Give me a dog any day.

They stop for awhile.

One: This is a dump.

PATRICIA CORNELIUS
Two: Here we go, now it’s a dump.
One: It’s a dump. Underneath. The park’s sitting on top of a dump.
Two: Really?
One: Years and years of people’s crap. Mountains of it. Who knows what was buried here. Those pipes are letting out gas because stuff is still rotting and without the pipes there’d be eruptions all over the place.
Two: Are you bullshitting me?
One: If you stand down by the lake and wait you will see eruptions coming up through the pond. Water bubbling madly from down below.
Two: Bullshit.
One: If you climb up one of those pipes and you put a match to it, a great flame will ignite.
Two: Really?
One: There was another park built on a dump and poisonous gases were leaking out all over the place. The ground would cave in and filthy muck would erupt. People in surrounding houses had to move out.
Two: All that stuff ready to come out.
One: And it looks so safe.
Two: Neat.
One: Green.
Two: Healthy.
One: Nothing to hide.
Two: Nothing to disturb the peace.
One: How exciting It makes this place.
Two: Any moment something’s going to blow from the crap below.
One: The crap buried in the past.
Two: Is going to come up and disturb it all.
One: Lots of places are like that. Looking safe when they’re not.
Two: School.
One: Yes. And other places.
Two: Home.
One: Sometimes.

*They stop for awhile.*

Two: It wasn’t always so safe here.
One: Pretty bloody safe.
Two: Some kid went berserk. In the skate park. He was carrying a couple of knives, wandering about threatening people’s lives.
One: Where was I?
Two: This was about ten years ago. Off his head he was, telling people that he wanted to die.
One: And did he?
Two: Yes. The police were happy to oblige.
One: They shot him?
Two: They did.
One: Dead?
Two: 12 bullets dead.
One: Whoa, that’s wild.
Two: Don’t be telling anyone you want to die because someone will happily help you out.
One: Why?
Two: Maybe just to try it out.
One: No, why did he want to die?
Two: Unhappy I guess.
One: That's very unhappy.
Two: Or drug fucked or just nuts.
One: Maybe he was telling a lie and didn't really want to die.
Two: A cry for help you think?
One: He'd have done it himself otherwise.
Two: He was fifteen.
One: Fifteen. That's us.
Two: I repeat, don't be telling anyone you want to die.
One: No way, I'll be keeping that to myself.
Two: Me too.
One: Where's his monument?
Two: No monument for him.
One: Why not? Isn't he one of the fallen?
Two: He's got a plaque. It's on a rock almost covered up. I think his mum put it there. She says how she loves him. How he was a brave son, something like that I think.
One: And that's it?
Two: A monument would be too big.
One: He could have a small one don't you think?
Two: Yeah, a small one would be good.

They stop for awhile.

One: Oh my god!
Two: What is it?
One: I get it.
Two: What you get?
One: Lie back. Lie back.
Two: Yes!
One: Look at that.
Two: Must be a million of them.
One/Two: Wow.
One: Beautiful isn't it?
Two: Beautiful.
One: Magnificent.
Two: A wonderful surprise.
One: That takes the breath away.

It takes their breath away.

The End.
EDWARDES LAKE, RESERVOIR: NO DIVING
CYNTHIA TROUP

E

The elegance of the royal spoonbill! When the lake is drained for siteworks, a single spoonbill flies in, sweeps the mudflats for edibles.

When the lake is drained for siteworks, sound falls differently into its ear-shape:

barking dogs, shrieks from the skatepark, local traffic, electricity cable humming under high wind.

D

‘With Government assistance a new retaining wall was built damming back a fine sheet of water’. So wrote a subcommittee of the Preston Historical Society in 1971—about construction of the weir to develop Edwardes Lake for a park in 1919. ‘A fine sheet’ suggests a thin covering, a hard polished surface, like glass. Perhaps it takes on this appearance for a while at dusk, when fringing reeds and rushes are outlined at the boundary, and the lake is a mirror for thoughts of the day done.

‘Dammed back’ in 1919 (and informally some twenty years before), was the flow of a narrow, seasonal creek that begins three hours’ walk to the north-east. The same commemorative book reported on the lake as a matter of depth:

‘the lake has recently been drained, cleaned, edges graded and a large tonnage of polluted oily muck and rubbish excavated from the bed, and removed to the tip’. Elsewhere there is mention of sludge and dead fish.

No doubt the Preston Council of 1971 would have preferred to disown such a haul, deny those murky depths.

Being a ‘man-made’ body of water, without wet and dry cycles, the lake’s depth and drainage patterns have varied dramatically. Stratification. Sedimentation.
With their crossed ‘t’s and dotted ‘i’s stretched across five syllables, the words give an impression of horizontal layers, falling particles in a process of settling. From the page this impression, though, is too tidy, dull, uncluttered—because life capsizes, descending on life.

Where it slides over the concrete spillway at Edwardes Street the lake water is warmer, aerated. But a large volume of the water north of the spillway is cold, and too still. So overnight, at the bottom of the lake, a pump sucks out and recirculates the deeper water from the basin—drawing it up towards the breathing body of Edgars Creek, then the Merri Creek, which joins the Yarra at Dight’s Falls.

W

On World Environment Day, a June day not long ago, fifteen hundred school children gathered at the lake’s edge, and linked arms.

Their fluttering embrace expressed a wish for good, clean water—
the life-sustaining water once believed to be a gift from the gods.

The school children knew not to throw coins, add to the litter and pollutants.

Even so, for a watchful moment the lake overflowed with hope like an age-old well.

School children learn that the wetlands to the west are part of a marsh filter system. The low-flow bypass wetlands belong to a green corridor that nourishes wildlife. Protects wonder. Attracts
the growling grass frog, and the buff-banded rail
(a wary bird smaller than a wood duck).

A

Again, four years ago the lake in places was a mere forty centimetres deep.

Five years ago blue-green algae bloomed, also affecting water health.

Around the lake periphery: signposts for visitor safety, advisory graphics crossed in green that mean ‘No Feeding Waterfowl’. ‘No Fishing’.

The aquatic birds catch their beaks in abandoned hooks and fishing line. Prohibition signs are crossed in red: ‘No Boating’. ‘No Diving or Swimming’. Imagination, of course, dives down without a splash—not a quiver in the cool air above.

CYNTHIA TROUP
R


Previously the lake was framed by the spreading roots and branches of weeping willow trees. It was surrounded by hand-split bluestone blocks repurposed from Reservoir’s street channels, gutters, and kerbs. The willows and regular stone walls had their English romantic aspect. How remarkable that they remained for so long.

Is it a rumour? Councillors are considering options to rejuvenate the boathouse, last used by the Preston Yacht Club. Right now it contains the odd mast and scrap of rigging.

D

There is human folly in those depths, despair enough in their DNA.

Newspapers of the 1920s drew attention to ‘sad fatalities’ among boys swimming in the lake; in 1945 The Argus declared ‘There is no caretaker at the shed. There have been several drownings’.

Dredge the lake’s memory, delicate and far-reaching. Dredge the heavy tears and curses. Disturb something of the locked safes, empty safes, guns, and drug labs that have been dragged or flung there. The slaughtered sheep. Oh, and most weekends a remote control toy simply disappears, it seems.

Depths by their nature will not fit description.

Meanwhile certain hardy currents of the creek hold, hold, hold their course— deliver past and future debris downstream.

CYNTHIA TROUP
Eleven years ago Edgars Creek turned an eerie blue upstream at Keon Park. From its factory a multinational company had emptied waste ink into the stormwater network. The Environmental Protection Agency issued a fine.

The effects of such events will be felt in Edwardes Lake. The name of the lake remembers the parcel of land donated to the Preston Council by Thomas Dyer Edwardes, English speculator, in 1914.

The wider ecology remembers eons.

Flowing south to the sea, flowing through a young valley that slopes through ancient volcanic plains, Edgars Creek runs a narrow line from Epping North. When it leaves the lake, it joins the Merri east of where Pentridge Gaol was.

Here two hundred years ago—say—grassy woodland: the dark canopies of great river red gums shading their slow-rotting limb hollows, surrounded by scattered shrubs (various wattles), and ground thick with bunch grasses and wildflowers—the fast-growing yam daisy, orchids, lilies. Home in some way to two hundred bird species, forty kinds of butterfly, swamp rats, swamp wallabies, and … .

Lying beneath, for more than four hundred million years, early and late Silurian rock strata: siltstones, sandstones; to the west and north, newer volcanic sheetflow basalt.

In the park at sunset two pairs of nankeen night herons tend to roost in the sheoaks by the creek shallows. These are soft minutes when the herons’ slender breasts gleam like lanterns—solar lanterns suspended below the steel pylons of the Thomastown to Brunswick power supply. During the day in breeding season, the herons might be seen hovering, and diving.
Edwardes Lake, Reservoir: No Diving might be described as a floating acrostic. It was written in May 2017 for the ‘Writing this Place’ project initiated by the Darebin City Council.

For generous assistance with research, thanks to Ben Forster, Luke Sandham, Mark Scillio; special thanks to Elizabeth Welch.

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Also the dedicated project page on the website of Rush Wright Associates: http://www.rushwright.com/parks-wetlands/edwards-lake-park/
Oliver Peters likes your photo.

Five hours and only two likes. One of which was Dad.

When Natalie Begazzi posted a photo of her cat the day before, it’d got 183 likes and more than 30 comments:

“OMG so jealous”
“Sooooo cute, I luv him”
“Look at that fluff!! #want”

It wasn’t fair. Al deleted the photo of Missy basking in the afternoon sun and stuffed the phone back in her pocket.

Two likes was just embarrassing.

Al squinted, sheltering her eyes with cupped fingers. A swarm of ants had gathered around a puddle of spilt Coke and half a dim sim. Al watched as they marched off along a crack in the asphalt carrying the fried crumbs.

Beyond the carpark a council worker mowing the grass was creating looping circles, the cuttings flying up behind him.

“You ok there, mate?”

She was peering down at Al, grey curls poking out from under a cap with ‘Noosa Champs ‘92’ stitched on the front. A smile split her face like a sliver of the moon.

Al waited for the wash of confusion that usually followed. The sharp stares at her hair and chest and clothes as people tried to figure out which box – girl or boy – Al belonged in. But it didn’t come.

“Yep, ok thanks,” Al replied.

“What's you doing sitting out here? Shouldn’t you be in school?”

Al checked her phone. 2.34pm. English with Mrs Langley. A fog of Lynx-tinged teenage sweat would be descending on Room 34C right about now, settling in a fine sheen on desks and textbooks.

Al could still feel the soft bruise of Sam Christo's finger from where he'd jabbed her shoulder in the cafeteria line, snarling “He, she, it” with each prod.

“Um…I've got the afternoon off. Study period.”

“Yeah sure sunshine. I didn’t come down in the last shower. Anyway, if you’re just gonna sit there you may as well come inside for a cup of tea.”

She ushered Al through the gate.

Rose bushes and low lavender hedges flanked the entrance, clipped into submission. In the battle of wills between humans and nature, Al thought, human brutality always seemed to win out.

“What's your name anyways? I'm Denise.”

“Al.”

Denise shoved the sliding door open with her shoulder. They stepped into a wide hall full of perfectly aligned laminate tables and chairs. A particleboard dancefloor was cut out of the industrial carpet like a slab of cake.
“Everyone, this is Al. Al, this is Bob, Tony, Jill, Brian and Bosco.”

She flicked a finger at each person in turn. They were sitting in a ragged semi-circle facing the wall-mounted TV, each wearing a pressed white polo shirt with blue and yellow splashes. Kingsbury Bowls embroidered over their hearts.

Al shifted from foot to foot in the silence that followed, wishing she'd gone to Northcote Plaza instead, where random old ladies just left you alone.

“Ever bowled before, Al?”

“Nup.”

“Want to give it a go? I could use a roll today.”

Al shrugged.

“That's a yes then. Come on, give me a hand with these balls.”

Denise had already started moving towards the door.

“You take these,” she said, handing Al two wooden boxes, “and follow me.”

The astroturf glowed dull green in the bleached light. Everything in sight was clipped and brushed and scrubbed, hours of effort sitting on the surface like a veneer.

“It's simple really. Just try and get your big ball as close as you can to the kitty,” Denise said, pointing to the small white ball at the other end of the green. Her right hand was frozen in a pincer like a bird's beak, and she flexed the fingers back and forth with her left.

“Ok so easy does it, and off we go,” she said, bending to release the ball.

It veered off to the right, missing by miles. But just as Al started to think she'd stuffed it, the ball arced smoothly back towards the white, a planet orbiting the sun.

Denise straightened up and winked at Al.

“Your turn, sunshine. Hold it like this, and make sure this side is facing outwards.”

Al stooped down and let go of the ball. It rolled off to the right like Denise's, but there was no curve, no return to safety.

“Call that a warm up,” Denise said, passing Al another ball from the crate.

Al's second and third balls skidded past the white and crashed into the guttering at the end of the green.

“What the hell?!” Al dropped her hands in frustration. “You made it look so easy.”

Denise chuckled, her laugh catching like the lawnmower when Al tried to start it.

“Years of practice, Al. Everything looks easy when you've done it a million times. Remember that.”

She adjusted the ball in Al's palm.

“Have another go. It's like anything in life. The trick is to believe it'll get there. Feel it.”

Al weighted the ball in her hand.
“Really feel it, Al.”

The ball rolled wide, before curling around to nudge Denise’s out of the way and coming to rest next to the kitty. As if it was finding its way home.

“Yes Al, yes!” Denise was pumping her fists next to her body, sparring with the air.

“See. You’ve just got to believe it’s gonna go in the right direction.”

Al grinned.

“You’ve got a knack for it, kid. You could come down and join the club, play properly. We need some young ones coming through. Otherwise we’ll be closed within a couple of years. People die off and we can’t replace them.”

Al imagined the clubhouse as a sleeping giant, lying dormant until some future generation of bowlers threw open its doors and discovered its secrets.

“Bring some of your mates down.”

“L.” Al hesitated. “I don’t really have any.” It felt like an ugly secret bubbling up, uncontained.

“It takes time to find your people, Al. Take Jill in there. I only met her when I joined this club a few years back. But it’s like we’ve known each other our whole lives.”

Denise scraped at the ground with her foot as she spoke, sending a shower of sand granules flicking upwards.

“You’ll come across thousands of people in your life. We’re all just muddling through like a million grains of sand. But the ones you’re meant to know – you’ll stick together somehow.”

How was it that life ticked away, second by second, whether you were ready for it to or not. That every minute you got older. Closer to dying.

Al’s 17th birthday was on Monday.

And how was it that you could only ever see the world from these eyes, in this body. But no one could tell you what to do if that body felt wrong.

“You’ve got to go the way your blood beats, Al. You’re the only one who can do you.”

Denise caught Al’s eye and held it. She smiled and her skin crumpled like tyre tracks in the dirt.

“Anyway, let’s go back in. I’m parched.”

Dad’s favourite Fleetwood Mac song was blaring from the bar radio’s single working speaker as they squeezed through the sliding door.

“C’mon Al, let’s dance.”

“I don’t really dance,” Al said. Her feet looked huge next to Denise’s neat white canvas sneakers, like a couple of punctured footys.

“Whadda ya mean, you don’t dance. Everybody dances, Al.”

She deftly levered Al by the elbow and marched her over to the dancefloor.

“You can go your own waaaaay,” Denise sang as she flicked her hips from side to side, throwing her arms
across her body.

“Go your own way.”

She grabbed Al's hand and swung herself around.

“You can call it an-oth-eeeeeer lonely day.”

Four arms above two heads, they jumped and twirled and felt the beat catch their limbs.

Al closed her eyes and let the music surge through her body. It felt whole and real, like it actually belonged to her.

Bob and Jill had joined them, carving out a neat box step around the dancefloor. They looked weightless, as though their upper bodies were supported by invisible ties. Bob winked at Al as he swung past.

This. Maybe this was what it meant to find your people.

“So, you gonna come back and see us again soon, Al?” Denise said, breathless, hands on her knees.

Al grinned.

“Yeah. I reckon I might.”
What I know

Bundoora Homestead was built in 1899 by the wealthy horse breeder J M V Smith. In 1924 the 14-room mansion became a mental hospital for soldiers returning from WW1, then later WW2.

Dr John Cade, imprisoned by the Japanese in Changi during WW2, later discovered lithium carbonate (a revolutionary treatment for bipolar disorder) whilst working as a psychiatrist in the same mental hospital.

Henry ‘Lofty’ Cannon was also imprisoned in Changi when he was a medical orderly in the Second World War. Lofty spent most of the remainder of his life as a patient in the Bundoora Repatriation Mental Hospital.

What I wonder

Hey Lofty is this how it was?

The mind returning and returning to the leaking body,
to the seeping ulcers where the bones are peeping through,
the bones aching from the fever,
the head aching from the blows you took
when you tried to stop the Japs burying a skeleton
who was not quite dead,
a skeleton whose hands still shook,
though his blank eyes stared star-wards?

Hey Lofty is this how it was?
Did your eyes turn away from the fish
swimming in the wood panels on the staircase,
swimming quicksilver through your dreams,
your hands reaching out to catch them,
stuff them in your mouth, swallow them whole,
fish and rice, that’d be nice,
make a change from the beetles you caught
and buried in your handful of wet grains –
on a good day.

Hey Lofty is this how it was?
Did the doc stuff a rag in your mouth
when he sent those electrical currents through your temples,
funny word, temples,
doors to the mind, the mind is a shrine, a shrine is a temple,
the Japs had temples on the railway,
built to ease the souls of soldiers who died,
their soldiers, not our soldiers,
not the men whose hands you held in the hut they called Ward 5,
the mummies wrapped in bloodied bandages,
who you sometimes saw at the bottom of the wooden staircase,
stroking the pokerwork fish as a soldier might stroke his wife’s face
when the war ends and you all Come Marching Home Again, hurrah, hurrah.

_Hey Lofty is this how it was?_

Did you stare at the bird trapped in the stained glass at the top of the staircase,
the diving swallow who never reaches the nest,
forever plummeting, never landing,
ever making it home again to the girl you married
a week before they sent you off to war;
the girl who waited,
who took you back though you were a ‘sad sack’,
that’s what you wrote on the photo they took of you in the ‘rehabilitation camp’,
funny word, _rehabilitation_, from _habitare_,
to make fit, to live, to dwell,
but you couldn’t fit, not after Changi,
there was no safe dwelling, no home-place,
only the Homestead now,
for ever and ever, amen.

_Hey Lofty is this how it was?_

Did they nail the wire mesh over the balcony for you
in case the swallow took a dive over the railing
on a night when the dreams were more real than life,
the same dreams over and over;
the same Jap with the same stick of cane beating down on your back,
the same trembling twig-fingers
hanging over the edge of the stretcher in Ward 5,
waiting for that last ciggy,
_mate do us a favour, just one more smoko, hand it over, ya miserable coot_,
but in your dreams there are no more smokes,
just the twig-fingers stilling and stiffening on the stretcher,
over and over again,
and is that what you wanted, Lofty,
Hey Lofty is this how it was?

Did you think that words would cure you –
‘it’s unburden or burst’, you said –
did you think that a poem was a ticket home,
that if you wrote it all down and called it ‘So, you want OUT’,
even better, if you started a magazine at the hospital, handed it round,
someone would read those words - ‘So, you want OUT’ –
someone would come and get you out,
but out to where, Lofty,
back to the dry red dust under the dying orange trees,
back to the free farmland they gave you after the war,
funny word, free, no costs,
and when you came home you were free,
but there was a cost and no way to pay,
no freedom,
just Mr Smith’s pokerwork fish swimming under the staircase,
burnt into the wood ‘in the Japonaise manner’,
way back when nobody knew what the Japs would do
if they got their hands on you.

Hey Lofty is this how it was?

Did Dr Cade try to get you out,
the alchemist of Bundoora, the lithium magician
messing about in Ward E,
hey, E is the fifth letter of the alphabet, making it Ward 5,
no, not the ward with the mummies on the stretchers,
but maybe Dr Cade was there too, watching those Japs –
‘hmm, they’re suffering from cultural psychopathy’ –
funny word, suffering, to put up with something, or to experience distress,
but in the camp there was no choice,
you had to suffer the suffering,
and what a marvellous marching song it would make –
hup two three four,
keep-it-up two three four:
oedema, malaria, cholera, typhus –
bronchitis, rheumatics and then dermatitis –
ulcers and dysentery, starvation, misery –
after the war - there was still more:
giddiness, trauma, psychosis, anxiety –
migraine, malaria, and for variety –
night sweats and nightmares, loneliness, blank stares,
and more of the misery, misery, misery.

Hey Lofty is this how it was?

Did you lie in your dormitory bed staring
at the rows of climbing roses in winding poses
on Mr Smith’s pretty wallpaper,
and did they remind you of the barbed wire fences around the prison camp,
did you dream of squeezing past those thorns
and escaping into the jungle to find some fungus to feast on,
digging in the mud like a lunatic,
but you weren’t a Lunatic, Lofty,
the Lunatics went to the Asylum in Kew,
with their Melancholia and their Idiocy and their Inebriation,
but you were a Returned Serviceman, the nation was grateful,
it was just your Nerves,
so we gave you a bed in a dormitory in a house on the top of a hill,
with snarling gargoyles and Japonaise fish and thorny wallpaper
and children’s choirs who came to sing for you on a Sunday afternoon,
with their hair brushed neatly, their shoes all shiny,
their eyes popping at the sight of you,
and the children’s songs floated up the wooden staircase,
past the frozen swallow,
through the balcony doors
and out, out, OUT
into the wasted blue sky.

Sian Prior

I would like to thank the City of Darebin staff who look after the Bundoora Homestead for their wonderful help with this project, and also Cassie May for her invaluable research about Lofty.
UNDER BOWLING GREEN LIGHTS

Poems
BOWLING IN THE COLLECTED WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

The ‘rub’ Hamlet gleams
In the sleep of not being
(Perchance to dream)
Is a Lawn Bowls thing;

It refers to a rugged spot
On the green that defies
The natural arc of a shot
Left to the devices of its bias.

And Richard II’s Queen
In the DUKE OF YORK’S Garden scene baulks at
The very same metaphor;

The world’s full of rubs, she says,
Having obviously never bowled
On a green like Greenkeeper Nev’s
On which the truest fates are told.

TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

firstly, there’s an inherent bias
in lawn bowls, from

zero up to hard five, towards rhythm and speed.

the race is won or lost
in the breadth of a microblade.

second, only the most spartan of competitive weight throwers

would put their shots like bombs

along over-the-top parabolas of distance and time

only to have them land blunt-force in craters of sand.

if I’d wanted you to heft a dead weight
I’d’ve put a shotput in your hand.

in bowls we skate the elliptical edge of a narrow win or loss

across an ellipsis three microblades of a moment wide,

half a heartbeat inside of which the umpires of fate decide.

and thirdly, I don’t reckon it’s a cosmic correlation

that lawn bowls are the same class of shape as a planet in rotation.

the object of the game isn’t just to be the closest to the jack

but to orbit, observe, re-enter, and make it safely back to the mat.
Pennants for the Underdogs

Backhand Barry calls heads and Harry tails

Jack throws out the kitty from the mat
Out of bounds calls Harry so Matty rolls the jack

Each end draws nearer the end and with each

Backhand Barry bowls an arc promising
to approach the absolute most absolute

But Jack sends one up way behind the head in case

Barry trails the jack to the end's furthest end

And the other side's third sends him round the bend.

Mrs Pascal's Wager

Let's make the last end interesting.

Shirl only bets on games with a round ball.

Not even footy tipping?
No, not even.

I don't put money on odd-shaped odds,

There's no accounting for sidelong bounces
Or the influence of air on a pear-shaped surface.

What about the jack?
It's as round as anything.

Sure, says Shirl.
I'll bet a round million

You roll it like a damn girl.
THE EINSTEIN-ROSEN KITCHEN

An eyeline runs through
The servery to the kitchen

Across the alabaster-look
Formica countertop

Under strings of LEDs,
The Wattle Painting’s gaze

And gilt-inlaid names
Haloed in a varnish haze

To where the head a
In space and the eye

In space make parallax
Back through the pass

An impossible vision
Of the undemolished past.

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

If Nan never grows old it’s because
Every bowl she delivers turns
To rolled gold

Which in turn is rolled out
To fill the honour board’s grooves
With its golden grout

So almost every dremelled line
In the end belongs to her
Since, like, 1979.
The way she lets ‘em loose,
The leading edge is always falling
Away, away! Vamonos! Vamoose!
IT’S A WASHOUT

The cut-out bowler
Mounted on a pole
Like a weathervane
In the car park turns
At centrifuge speed.

The members in
The clubhouse are
Getting hammered
With drum lines
Of thunder and rain.

The ditches fill
Quickly with water
And a blue tarpaulin
Wraps itself around
The floodlights.

It sounds just like
A grandmother’s
Typewriter tapping
‘It’s a washout’
Flapping in the wind.

A CLUB WITHOUT A BAR IS LIKE

A cop without a badge;
A pilgrim with no hajji;
A Harold without a Madge.

A window with no ledge;
A seam without an edge;
A cricket match with no sledge.

A snookered ball without a bridge;
A bar with no fridge;
All ridgey, no didge.

A watercolour splodge;
Art without the artful dodge;
A widge with no bodge.

A fete without fudge;
An ex- without a grudge;
A wink without a nudge.
BOWLS CLUB EPITHALAMION
AFTER EDMUND SPENSER

By legs eleven the hard work is done;
The hall is rapt in fine decorations
And though the centrepieces yet are young,
The soon in-law’d mothers’ preparations
In floral bursts recall the distant age
Of Clytemnestra’s burning sage.

Long candles await their confirmation
Set in vessels emptied of their pourage,
Bottles drained in prior celebrations
Of Jack and Jim and Mr Glenfiddich;
All are crowned with ready wicks.

By afternoon the bowlers changing ends
Admire through a glaze the ready scene
As if observing Christmas through a screen;
They quickly pay the barkeep their amends
As the bride’s fate and family impends.

While aunts and uncles park their yellow cars,
A changing of the guard;
The re-stocking of the bar.
NEW TRADITIONS OF SELF REFLECTION

#mirrorselfie
#sostealthy
#instacool
#oldschool
#goodtimes
#greatfriends
#cutestbathroom
#ontrend
#albumlaunch
#launchparty
#cheapbeer
#nofear
#wallpaper
#noscrubs
#partytime
#bowlsclub
THE LEISURE FACILITY
AS A PLURAL SPACE

Thornbury Bowls Club, The Year 2067

Members. Stakeholders. Members’ guests.
The Year 2067 has been Thornbury Bowls’ best.

As our Facilities Management Plan approaches Realisation, we wonder: what comes next?

We have synthetic greens for Social Bowlers
Offset against hanging gardens of Tru-Surface Turf in a sprawl of Urban Leisure Terraces
From the Old South Morang Line in the West
To High Street in the East, floating on discs
High above the Old City’s ground-level concrete.

We have Monorail access, our own boarding pods.
The old Crackerjack nightmare of developers
Out-crowding the bowling crowd has turned out
Not only unfounded, but fully turned around.

The 2067 competition was dominated, as always
By two sides. But surely the underlying value
Of any Community Leisure Facility lies
In the breadth of the playing field it provides
For the controlled collision of ideas,
The promise of grass-roots debate
Played out in the abstract ceremony of its game
Of arcs and lines, of Mutually Idealised Time.

So with great pleasure, I am greatly pleased
To report: our 2067 diversity scores have been
The best that anyone has ever seen.
Nobody knows the reason for the uptake,
But it seems the Bowls Club is now the place
Where ideas come to be made, or break.

Of course 2067 had its share of challenges.
The Cyberpunk and Android Alliance, E.g.,
Has doggedly lobbied the Controlling Body,
Set laser sights on the Leader Board
For the admission of cyborgs into the comp.
The Required Rule Change remains blocked
By an unwavering coalition—a conservative
Rump of Gen Y Luddites in strained cahoots
With Majority Progressives who’ve opposed
Augmentation ever since the Great Reboot—
Despite convincing argumentation
To the effect that hearing aids in sport,
Contact lenses, even telescopic arms
For the arthritic, are a tradition of a sort.

Otherwise 2067 went pretty smoothly, E.g.,
whenever the New Dharma Individualists
Played fours against the Buddhist-Hedonist
Yogis, or the Spiritual-Socialist Árévalismo,
Or indeed any of the Latter Stage Meditators,
Their pre-game throat-chanting warm-ups
Approached the sublime; they criss-crossed
Through vibrations in time to harmonise
The very texture of the air with the hidden
Tonic of the still-pink fallout clouds’ despair.

We had one near-miss involving Musico-
Falangist Aesthetes, visitors to the club,
Who purposely sang unhelpful discords
Across otherwise harmonic overdubs.

Special thanks in this regard are due
To the Anarcho-Syndicalist Pennants Team
Who, hovering a few lengths from the green,
On seeing the rinks in disarray, intervened,
Despite their preference for disorder,
Dressed in black with red cravats
And harlequin-banded, non-regulation hats,
To send the fascists packing with cricket bats.

With no skip, per se, and all hierarchy eschewed
It’s difficult to find a member to accept an award

On behalf of this particular group
Because, despite their stated aims,

They spend the best part of every single game
Schisming into factions with newly made-up names.

So it was in 2067 the club welcomed in
A slew of new groupings to its Pleasure Dome:
The Gamer’s Union and Allied Players;
The Ninth- and Tenth-wavers; The Post-This,
The Post-Post-That, The Proto- and Anti-Anti;
The Neo-Revivalist-Revivalissimo;
Immigrants, re-emigrated apostates;
Worshippers of every trend in New Faith;
Veterans of, and objectors to, Ongoing War;
Each with their bias and their weight,

And they throw it down. But, despite their
Many differences, all their spheroids are oblate
And I’m pleased, with great pleasure, to relate:
No blood’s been shed on the TruSurface to date.
My eyes were dust. I wore sunglasses on the tram. It was a relief to step out in the softness. Stencil clouds. The last spark of sunset. A puffing thrum atop the hill.

I was attending a mindfulness class at Northcote Town Hall. Or was I seeing a play about superfoods? I couldn’t remember. I haven’t been sleeping much.

Whatever it was, I wasn’t in the mood. I had my life-cancelling headphones set to ‘nature noise.’ Campfire star-gaze. My survival mix. Flames crackled, children squealed. There was a magic festival on. Colourful banners and applause in a tent. I thought of myself as a kid. I would have loved that. I’m too cynical now.

I strolled past the front counter with a girl I can’t talk to but should and pamphlets for shows I could see but won’t. Everyone’s twenty. There’s too much music. I’m writing a memoir. I’m going backwards, willingly.

They say architecture can be good for anxiety. Cathedrals and ballrooms with their high rooves and heavy beams. It humbles the senses, awes the spirit. Town Hall feels solid. Thick ribs of a tough nut. I trudge up the staircase with its scuffed charcoal sparkle. Soft steps echo with grace.

At the top is a landing. A long ornate table rests beside a big backed chair. I perch on the lone throne. It’s quite a thing to sit in. This is what it feels to be chief. Supported. Curious. Alone.

I wander down the hall. I like the red carpet. Raspberry wool and flinty wine. Soft air drifts, easy and warm. My eyes are heavy. I can’t recall which door. There were a few. The signs confuse me. I find a room, take a mat and curl up.

Carpet meanders into earth. A rich blanket of crayon green. Thick and bouncy against my feet. Long fronds tickle my legs. I breathe leaf smoke and point my glasses up the hill.

It’s night-time and there is Life!

I see Stella first. Actually I see her chair, glinting in the firelight. A mighty six wheeled thing. She sits up in a black dress and wild toadstool shoes. Her hair is copper orange and her eyes sparkle with attention. She’s a grown up with a child’s body.

She forms part of a circle with men - or are they creatures? There’s something unusual about their heads. They have animal masks. Or is it the other way round? The glint of their teeth is human through smoke. They are laughing with Stella.

“I’m the queen so I can only go diagonal!”

I’m shy in my stripy shirt. I keep on towards them. I want Stella to see me. I haven’t met her but I feel like I know her.

“What’s the time Mr Wolf?” She has a funny high pitched voice.

“Midnight!” The words slip from my mouth.

“Wait, how do you play this again?”

Stella motors her chair around. The wheels dig but make no sound.

“Dinner time!” she says.

There comes a pop from the fire as she advances towards me.

“Gotcha!” she grins.

“Where are we?” I ask.
I freeze. I don’t know the place or the word.
“It’s okay mate, I’m Stella. And this is…come and join us. Bunjil can explain better than me.”
“Shut the door boy, you’re lettin’ all the heat out!” grins a lizard, making his frill go up and down.

When I see the fire I know I’m not dreaming. It’s a kaleidoscope of yellows and mauves and violets. Rising embers dance with the heat. I sit on a stump. I can see the others now. They are Aboriginal spirits. One has the feathers of an eagle. Another is sharpened like a goanna. There’s a crow-bloke with wild eyes and a wombat-man with a busy, buck-toothed mouth. Next to him sits a young platypus, not much older than me. He seems awkward and shy.

The group are hushed. Sets of eyes lock upon me. I’m nervous but not scared. The warmth and stars soothe me.

“Who do you want to be when you grow up?” the Eagle asks.

“An astronomer or a vet.”

“Not what, who?” He tips his head. His gaze locks.

I wonder if it’s a trick question. I look to the ground. My cheeks flare up.

“A good person?”

Eagle doesn’t move. His feathers are the shade of autumn leaves. I know I can do better.

“Someone who helps others.”

Eagle nods.

Stella leans over with her hand to her face.

“Don’t worry, the same happened with me! I said a teacher and then changed it to ‘fabulous.’”

* 

We spend the night playing games and telling stories. We even toast marshmallows, which turn out to be barby grubs! I tell my best joke about ‘what’s the difference between a bad shooter and a constipated owl?’

“One shoots and shoots and never hits, while the other hoots and hoots and never….”

“Aaaaah!” Crow likes this one. He’s the trickster of the group and performs magic from his bag. Platypus does a funny routine where he accidentally jabs himself with his own poisonous spur. Stella shows us her dancefloor moves and does a hilarious routine about how there are no ramps in nature.

“You can ride around in my pouch,” offers Kangaroo.

The Eagle’s name is Bunjil. He’s the leader. He fans his wings and tells the story of creation. He sent the spirits to create all the mountains and valleys and rivers. He has two wives who are swans and a son who is a rainbow! Bunjil says his destiny is to become a star.

“Same as you Justin,” chirps Stella.

I’m able to ask all the questions about Aborigines I’ve always wanted to know. The same with Stella. Until now there’s never been a time or space. The elders have song lines that tell their history. Stella has laugh lines.

She tells me about her condition called osteo…something imperfecta. It means she has brittle bones.

“I had a bloody great life!” she beams. “I had a whole career being a writer and advocate and talking about what mattered to me. I did my stand-up show here, ‘Tales From The Crip.’ I won an award and everything.”

“Were you standing up?” asks Platypus. The others laugh at him. He lowers his bill.

“No, just sitting! It was still exhausting. I had to take every second night off. One night I even broke a bone because I was laughing so much!”

“It must have been your funny bone,” I say.
I ask her if she was worried about people not getting the jokes.

“I loved rejection! I was afraid that people would clap and smile no matter how shit I was! I didn’t want pity laughs.
I didn’t get bad reviews exactly but there were some negative comments and I was like ‘Yessss!’”

Stella pumps her fist in the air. I keep looking at her hands because they’re so different to mine. Everyone is so different.

The elders are fascinated by my project book. Frilled-Neck Lizard likes his scientific name “Chlamydosaurus Kingii.”

“Hey, there’s me!” says Platypus, licking his lips. “You got it right with the food. I love horsehair worms and fresh water shrimp!”

On the next page is the Wedge-Tailed Eagle. We have lots of them in Tasmania. Bunjil scans over my work with deep, inky eyes. I hope my sketches are good enough.

He’s interested in the page on The Universe. It’s my final project and not finished yet. I mention how the universe will either keep expanding until all the energy evaporates or shrink until it disappears. Bunjil makes a high pitched whistle and squeal. The other animals lower their heads and close their eyes. I’m not sure what it means.

* 

“Are you ghosts?” I ask. I’ve just seen the movie with Patrick Swayze.

“Mate, I’m an atheist so I’m still working that one out. This might be my encore,” she says.

“Will you live forever?”

“Hopefully,” says Stella. “Unless a solar flare wipes out the internet.”

“Did I die?” I ask softly.

Stella takes a while to answer.

“Well…” she sighs. “In a way… pass me that stick.”

I take a glowing stem from the fire. Stella waves it skywards, joining the stars like dots.

“We’re all in different canoes. I lived on earth and died outright. The elders lived on earth a long time ago before they transformed into things like trees and stars and watering holes. You’re still on earth but you…change.”

Bunjil opens an eye.

“The boy is lost to the man. There is something sacred about who you are now.”

Coolness. I had a feeling I was special!

I watch the fire for ages before getting the courage to say what’s worrying me.

“Mum’s still having some problems,” I croak, clearing my throat. “Sometimes she won’t stop crying.”

“I know honey,” says Stella. “It must be so hard on you.”

Tears twinkle in her eyes.

Bunjil says a word that sounds like ‘Dad deary.’ It means deep listening.

“Dadirri. There is wisdom within.”

I like my new friends but it’s time to go. I take a final look around. I admire the ripening dawn against the sweeping contours of the land. A maze of plum blue hills and trees. Clusters of light and plumes of smoke pepper the waterways. Orange dots surround a silver snake.

I ask if we can meet again.

“Where there is dreaming, this is our place,” says Bunjil

JUSTIN HEAZLEWOOD
“As long as the fire’s going, I’ll be here,” says Stella.
For a moment she appears to be part animal too. A rosy cheeked pig.

She holds out her hand. I pass my fingers through hers. They’re cool like milk.
“What’s the time Mr Wolf?”
“Seven o’clock.”
“One, two, three, four....”

I tumble back.
Nowhere and everywhere.
Inner space and outer space.
A spiral of stars and colour.

I wake on the carpet. There’s drool on my sleeve. Sun streams through the window.
“We’ve got a class in here mate.”
I squint up. It’s the comedian Steady Eddy. He’s teaching stand-up to a disability group.
In the distance I hear Kookaburra.

“What’s your disability?”
I have a photograph of my grandmother, Phyllis, taken in the Westgarth Cinema’s foyer. She’s about eighteen, standing by the marble dress-circle staircase, next to a man in his early twenties.

My mum and I found the photo in a shoebox while we were cleaning out Phyllis’s room at the aged-care facility.

‘Wow, Papa was cute,’ I said.

‘It’s not Papa,’ Mum said, moving on to clearing the next cupboard. After a minute or two she told me she thought the man’s name was Wesley.

Phyllis had talked a lot about somebody called Wes when she was really sick.

The photo is black and white, but hand-coloured so their cheeks are ethereally pink; Phyllis’s lips are too red and Wes’s eyes too blue. She’s smiling up at him from under her peek-a-boo hair-do. The rhinestone-rose brooch I remember from Christmases and funerals is pinned to her simple but shiny halter-neck dress, tiny hourglass figure — Veronica Lake. He’s holding his Humphrey Bogart hat by his side. Double-breasted suit, broad shoulders — Superman.

It was taken before the Greek-language films filled the house in the sixties and seventies. And long before the Valhalla moved in with its arthouse movies of the eighties and nineties — the High Street shopping strip was just derelict buildings and a fish and chip shop back then. No cafes, bars or organic foodstores bearing rooftop bicycle sculptures.

With the photo in Phyllis’s shoebox are letters from long-ago friends; cigarette cards of dogs, birds and butterflies; a Westgarth Theatre ticket to The Star Maker starring Bing Crosby and Linda Ware; and a picture postcard of the pyramids from Wesley Kennedy. Wes’s cursive handwriting is hard to read — tiny and squashed, as though he’d tried to jam too many words onto a surface that was never going to be big enough. And it’s smudged. By tears? the romantic in me wonders. More likely, time and wear has blurred the words. I can make out Dear Phil, still safe, practised action stations, pictures in the Officers Lounge, beautiful moonlit night, and the last line — just above the kisses — Can’t wait to take you to the flicks again when I get home.

Mum told me to stop looking at things and get a move on with the cleaning. I asked her if she wanted the shoebox. She thumbed through its contents and said she had enough stuff already, so I kept it.

Memory is like a camera — recording, illuminating, flashbulb moments. The unlit, blank and forgotten spaces we fill with stories.

It was the start of the war, before Pearl Harbour, and Australians were keen for mass entertainment, as well as war-news footage. Propaganda cartoons and messages from the prime minister would have screened before the main feature. And ads reassuring all would be well if we consumed Aeroplane Jelly and Bushells tea.

The Saturday night session of The Star Maker had been billed as A Grand Picture Evening. A glamorous occasion. That’s why a professional photographer had been there.

Phyllis’s smile was only for the camera; it would have slipped away as the flash faded, leaving her with the appearance of already having lost something. I can guess her thoughts: Please don’t go. And if Wes were to have read them, he’d have shaken them off with something like: ‘Let’s forget about everything for tonight and just enjoy the picture, live for the moment.’ From his crooked grin — a bit too clever or too cocky — I can tell he would have been all about fun. Perhaps a little heavy on bravado. Reckless?
The smell of popcorn, and Phyllis’s gardenia perfume, if she’d been able to afford it then. The heat from Wes’s hand on the small of her back. The youthful ache of expectation, for something to happen when the lights went down in the theatre. Maybe not a kiss — that was for later, under the streetlight on the way home — but she would have slipped off her gloves to hold his hand.

Today the cinema is pink in the autumn sun — a fairytale castle. In different light it might look imposing with its arched windows and patches of peeling paint. A Renaissance Palazzo tower. Below the parapet, a vertical sign of glass panels glints Westgarth Pictures.

At the box office a young woman in black scans the barcode on my phone and prints two tickets to Beauty and the Beast, while my daughter, Quinn, ponders the choc-top selection.

We cross the red-white-and-brown terrazzo floor and climb the staircase to cinema four. Back in Phyllis and Wes’s day there would have been only one cinema — the one with Art Deco light panels like giant Fruit Tingles on the ceiling. A couple of older women, with glasses of wine and a tube of chips, take the seats directly in front of us. Quinn has to sit on my knee to see.

We sigh with Belle, singing and longing for more than her provincial life. And laugh at Lumiere and Cogsworth. I sniff and pretend to have something in my eye when the last petal falls from the enchanted rose, surely dooming the Beast and his castle’s cursed inhabitants forever. But, of course, a Disney happy ending ties everything together beautifully.

I blink away that after-movie dreaminess as we follow the wine-and-tube-chips women down the stairs. A teenage couple bluster past on their way up to see Ghost in the Shell, holding hands and popcorn, and taking selfies.

‘The roof looks like papier-mâché,’ Quinn says. ‘Or the inside of an egg carton.’

I look up at the fibrous plaster; the geometric shapes in the leadlight glow gold, green and red.

The same ceiling Phyllis and Wes stood under.

I found Wesley Kennedy’s service records online. He enlisted in the army on 16 May 1940. He was from Preston. Age 21. Single. Occupation — theatre worker. That’s how he must have been able to wangle tickets to the Grand Picture Evening. The record doesn’t say what his actual job was — maybe an usher or projectionist; I see him more as the sweets-counter manager. It doesn’t list his place of employment either, so it could have been Hoyts in the city or any of the other local cinemas, but I like to think it was the Westgarth because Phyllis used to work at the tailor’s shop over the road. Perhaps Wes’s shifts started just as Phyllis was knocking off for the day and they watched each other from across the street, until one of them built up the courage to ask the other out. It would have been Wes — I imagine it was always the boy in those days.

Wes’s battalion embarked for the Middle East in October. He died in Syria on 24 June 1941. KILLED IN ACTION stamped in red letters at the top of his Service and Casualty form.

A door slams, the coffee machine behind the sweets counter gurgles, the number 86 tram dings and squeals to a stop out the front.

I imagine Wes leaning against one of the pillars in the vestibule, cigarette in one hand, rose in the other, gazing — through the glass doors with bevelled edges that distort the streetscape like a prism — across at the shop that’s now a drycleaners, waiting for the girl with peek-a-boo hair.

Can’t wait to take you to the flicks again.

TANIA CHANDLER
1867. The colony of Victoria. The road from Melbourne climbs north towards the Ovens goldfields and the sister colony of New South Wales. In a generation, the non-indigenous inhabitants here have grown from zero to 127,000 and the lands of the Wawirrong and the Taoungurong have already been staked out by Robert Hoddle’s survey markers, not just in Town but in the pastoral leases of the Interior.

From Imperial Melbourne, to reach the first peak of Plenty Rd near Jeffrey’s farm could take a day. Despite decades of boots and horses, the road is still a muddy and rocky track, often impassable, swallowing whole pairs of bullocks and testing the axles and spokes of carriage wheels. From the peak you can see the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle and beyond it, Doolan’s forge, a ramshackle building constructed of fence timber and iron sheets. Hotels and blacksmiths band together because rough roads mean delays. A stout man with a long beard, Baldwin Doolan lives across the road from his forge. He’ll repair wagon wheels battered by the ascent at all hours, their owners put up in rooms of the Bush Inn.

To reach this peak on Plenty Rd is to rehearse the longer climb out to Yan Yean where the fresh water from the colony’s first reservoir flows down to the town. In another ten years, a new road will join the hilltop to the new Tyler St School but for now the future is uncertain. Newspapers are reporting that gold is drying up. The mining boom is over.

At the end of the Roman Empire, the philosopher Boethius wrote:

“It’s my belief that history is a wheel. ‘Instancy is my very essence,’ says the wheel. Rise up on my spokes if you like but don’t complain when you’re cast back down into the depths. Good times pass away, but then so do the bad. Mutability is our tragedy, but it’s also our hope. The worst of time, like the best, are always passing away.

As wheels are breaking on the rocks of Plenty Rd and travellers wait in the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle for their repairs, men are meeting at another hotel. This is room 10 of the Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee. In that room is Nathan Bedford Forrest, the slave trader, Confederate soldier and brilliant military tactician known during the Civil War as “the Wizard of the Saddle”. In room 10, in April 1867, it is said that Forrest is sworn in as a member and soon leader of the Ku Klux Klan. His official title will be the Grand Wizzard of the Invisible Empire.

We are taught these histories are separate, but they are not. Just watch. The wheel of history will bring these times together, and they will meet at the corner of Plenty Rd and Tyler St.

In the present day, the corner contains a closed down bank and a strip of shops (the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle is still there down the hill, the original weatherboard building replaced with brick). Painted on the empty bank building is a spray-painted mural of a young girl reading a book. The girl’s looks to be of Asian heritage. Her straight black hair partly covers her face and the book she’s holding is Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant’s Subway Art. Released in 1984, it sold 450,000 copies, spawning a global graffiti movement, taking New York spray can art to the ends of the earth. The title page isn’t visible but I feel an electric shock of recognition seeing this larger than life painting (by @camscale) of this young girl, the same age as my eldest daughter, engrossed in the Torah of train painting.

My first thought (what would a young Chinese girl make of this special book?) is followed by a second one: could I be spinning the wheel of history in the wrong direction? Maybe she’s not the inheritor of this book but the originator?

In 1983, after the rights to Subway Art were sold at the Frankfurt Book Fair, could the publishers Thames and Hudson have arranged to have this book printed in China? Is this girl holding a copy of the book straight from the presses, before the American audience could see it?

Or even more decisively, what are the Chinese antecedents of this book? The answer lies in the book’s somewhat controversial place in the history of Hip-hop.
If you take Tyler St west all the way to the train line you can still see the faded spray paint slogan of “Hip Hop. Don’t Stop”, a slogan from the Sugarhill Gang’s single “Rapper’s Delight” of 1979, the song that took rapping to the world. The pioneering musicians from the South Bronx included Grandmaster Flash and a bevy of others Grandmasters (Flowers, Caz, Melle Mel). But why were pioneering DJs and MCs given the title of Grandmaster?

It wasn’t a reference to the Knights Templar (title dates from 1118) or chess prowess (gromeister in German, formalised in 1950). In 1972, just as graffiti writing was exploding in New York neighbourhoods, Warner Brothers released _The Chinese Connection_ (later known as _Fist of Fury_), starring Bruce Lee in American cinemas, sparking a martial arts craze. The film as its successors made Lee’s muscular body, his street poise, fighting prowess and spiritual orientation available to the youth of America. Films such as _Black Belt Jones_ (1974) built on the psychic connection between blackness and fighting skills: black skin and black belts.

Though the title of “Grandmaster” is likely an invention of returning American soldiers who served in Asia in the 1950s, this became available to the young Black and Latino Hip-hop pioneers of the South Bronx. As Hip-hop became formalised the title of Grandmaster was given to many of the seminal MCs and DJs and the very structure of Hip-hop (its “five elements”) was borrowed from Wu Xing, a cosmology governing a range of Chinese cultural practices including some martial arts. And before he produced the landmark Hip-hop/graffiti film _Wild Style_ (1983) artist Charlie Ahearn made another low-fi improvised feature film with youths on the Lower East Side. It was a martial arts movie called _The Deadly Art of Survival_ (1979).

Featured in Ahearn’s movie _Wild Style_ is Theodore Livingston, a student of Grandmaster Flash credited with inventing the DJ technique of scratching by accident in his bedroom. Scratching, where the manual over-rotation of the wax disc pushes streaks the stylus over its grooves. But for inventing one of the foundational gestures and sounds of Hip-hop Theodore wasn’t given the title of Grandmaster. His title – unique among Hip-hop pioneers – was the Grand Wizzard Theodore, a title stolen from Nathan Bedford Forrest, the first leader of the Ku Klux Klan.

On an autumn morning, I ride up Plenty Rd to Tyler St, hoping to see a martial arts establishment, to complete one track of this piece, maybe a Jujitsu place, like the hall down the hill on the train line. But it’s even better. The personal trainers at 593 Plenty Rd are called “Fighting Fit”, meaning to be fit enough to fight in the colonial army.

The mural of the Chinese girl reading _Subway Art_ is still in place, though now the building is under contract to an investor, it won’t last. But signs of New York are everywhere. The beauty salon’s window is covered with a folding screen (an idea imported form Japan) with badly printed names of New York landmarks: Lexington, Central Park, Broadway, 5th Avenue and the Bronx (the very sites of Hip-hop’s origins). Three stores up, the shutters are down on a former fruit shop – a spray-painted mountain range (the Plenty Ranges) has the word “HOP” floating next to it, a short-lived community centre run by activists forced out by high rents.

Almost exactly a century after Forrest’s last public appearance, a speech in which he reportedly renounced the Klan and advocated racial reconciliation of a kind, the young black Theodore took (or was given) the title Wizzard, from a man who had laboured so hard to enslave and eradicate his forebears. The Grandmaster Protocol is the clock by which all other clocks are synchronised. But Theodore is different, out of sync.

As the tip of the stylus was dragged over the peaks and troughs, the hills and ranges of the record, all this comes together again at the corner of Tyler St and Plenty Rd. From China via New York, martial arts come to the West provides a template for Hip-hop, that spits out graffiti and scratching into the news streets of Melbourne. 100 years after the Wizzard’s repentance young Theodore is his bedroom on 159th Street...taking his name, spinning the wheel, scratching history. Forward. Back. Forward. Back.