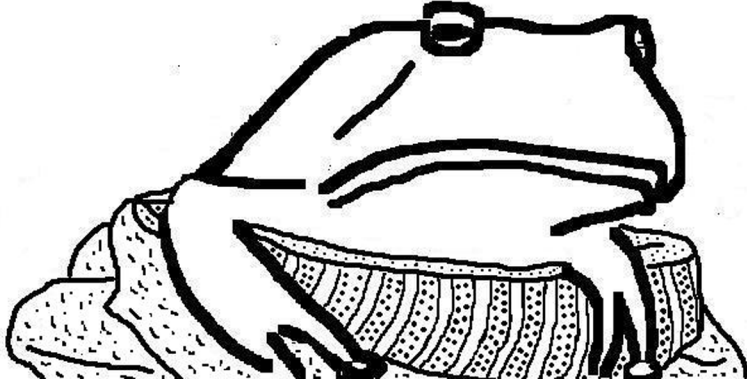


CROSS FROG IN A SOCK



CHAPTER 25

AMAZING MAZE

And there it was—dazzling and awesome. With sound—Ross’s tango music and then—Mindy’s voice calling from a distance. That tore us up. We followed. There were so many streets, corridors, tunnels, buildings, rooms, and gardens where we’d been and almost been—easy to access with close up or sky view, obvious how to navigate, well-constructed. The clues we’d solved were there. But there were new questions and hints that led to new locations with hyperspace links that opened up other clues to other places, cyber places yet many familiar places—our WA universe on the screen.

We’d get blocked till we figured something out and then to new spots to get stuck again. A lot of it wasn’t so difficult such as: *What the hippie and female Saudi adulterer had in common. They were ____.* This led to a bar called the Stoned Goose located in downtown Perth. But we didn’t have to go to the real there to get the next clue.

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Some were based on old trick questions like this one: *An old Aussie term for angry is “as cross as a frog in a sock,” and hungry can be “peckish.” That’s two words that end in GRY. But there are three words in our tongue, English. What’s Oz slang for the third one?* I started trying to figure out a third word that ended in GRY, but Gupta had heard something similar before and knew it was a trick. The answer to that one was found when we ignored the first part and reduced it to: *There are three words in our tongue, English* and then answered, *What’s Aussie for the third one?* In other words, what’s Aussie slang for “English,” the third of those three words?

“Frannie taught me that one,” I said. “Wenchin’ poms. Poms as in pomegranates.”

“That’s just one theory of what it means, what it comes from,” said Techo.

“Really?” I said. “What else?”

“Abbreviation of Port of Melbourne where a lot of Brits landed. Prisoners of Her Majesty. Permit of Migration. There are others, most of them recently made up.”

“I said pomegranates in an email so try it first. Right? If you can find any.”

We then hunted for a pomegranate, which we found in the cyberspace Dwellingup general store.

A link on a box of that red fruit opened to a bad joke with a bad word: *Sounds like the Abo Buckster wants to return to where you met him last.*

“That’s Outback,” I realized right off and told Techo to take us to a place that sounds like that, namely out back behind the main Perth train station where Gupta and I had run into him on the way to Ross’s. There he was. “Try his hat with the money in it,” Gupta guessed. Called it. The cursor turned to a pointing hand at that spot. The next clue opened up with a click.

It read simply: *How far everyplace is from here.* That led to the sign near Mai’s sister’s home, the one at the wharf that had the distances from that spot to far off cities in Aus-

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tralia and elsewhere. That led to a clue in Mai's brother-in-law's workshop.

How did they have time to do all this? Must be made from something they were working on already. But there was so much that had to be specifically done for us—like Daniel's workshop. Places we went and wanted to go were laid out so we couldn't see much at once or what led to what—the passages would be hidden. But it was all there—the Forest Heritage Center, Frannie's home, Tazi John's book, the mazes at The Maze and the animals there from numbat to Double-wattled Cassowary. There was a lead to the motorcycle engine tombstone. There was a dead end at Frannie's behind her hibernating car's license plate that had the sequence 921 on it, the reverse of her address. From Ross's ruined piano innards, one could go to the sub and back or straight to the web site that led us here. It went all the way to Cue and who knows where from there. We didn't try because we were sure it was a dead end. The quokka clue led also to the cave on Rottnest to a message in a bottle lying in a bush just outside. That clue, which included "swing low sweet chariot," led to the gallows of the prison with a note at the bottom that brought one back to the cave—another dead end. We'd find links just putting the cursor down at random and go off on new tangents of the cyberspace treasure hunt.

"Isn't that cheating," I wondered aloud.

"Curse you," answered Gupta shaking his fist in my face.

We examined the riddles as they came up and solved them one by one. It was a lot easier in the computer because we could see what the choices were and hunt around quickly. And having Techo, who speaks Australian, was helpful at times such as when we went to the Swan Bells. We heard them ringing. There was a vender outside selling apples and pears. Techo said, "Apples and pairs—climb the stairs."

The marquee of a movie house featured Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan in *You've Got Mail*.

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“Boilerplate formula romantic film,” I said. “Silly. And charming.”

“Check your mail,” said Techo.

There was email from Kelly, Dennis, Tazi John, and Eihei Dogen. That’s interesting—he’s been dead since the mid thirteenth century. That’s his posthumous title—which would be easy to get from the Tanahashi Dogen book in Fenster’s library. The email Subject line read: *Today’s profound quote*. The message simply read, “For today’s profound quote, go to this link: <http://www.dogensays.com.au>.” I hit that link and it opened up a site with the famous, for some Zen people, self-portrait of Dogen. Below the portrait was written, “What is your name?” I put the cursor in the box and wrote my name. A box opened that said “Wrong name.”

“Forgot your name?” asked Gupta.

I tried it a few different ways. Didn’t work.

“Try Tom Hanks,” said Techo. “He’s the one who had mail.”

“Oh yeah.” I tried that and Meg Ryan. She had mail too. “Ah heck.”

“No wait,” said Techo. “It wasn’t Tom Hanks who got it. That’s the actor’s name.”

“I sure don’t know what the name of the character was,” I said.

“IMDB,” said Techo sliding over and typing.

“IMDB?” said Gupta. “Sounds like someone thinks they’re a little yellow flying colonial insect with a sweet tooth and a stinger.”

“Not quite,” said Techo. “Internet Movie Data Base.” He already had the movie up on the screen. He scrolled down to the cast. “Tom Hanks is... Joe Fox.”

Back to dogensaysdotcomdotau. I write “Joe Fox” and yippee! Enter we do—to a screen with a checkered board, which we instantly recognize as a Scrabble board. An empty Scrabble board.

“Are we supposed to play Scrabble now?” asked Gupta angrily.

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Techo tried his cursor on the screen. Nothing. He typed. Nothing. The tiles were poured from a cup, then turned letter side down.

"It's a video," said Techo. "All we can do is watch now."

That's what we did. Quietly we watched the game unfold word after word. The screen froze at one point.

"It's not finished," I said.

"That's what we've got to figure out," Techo said. "It's a word jumble. We can arrange the letters now as we figure the words out."

"Where's Greg now that we need him," I said referring to my Zen friend who solves these things at a glance.

We got a few words and then I solved it at a glance. "I see it. That's easy. It's a famous Dogen quote to take the backwards step that turns the light inward. Almost that."

In a while we had it. *Learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly*. More silence.

"That was quick for a change. Hey, we should high five sometimes," I said.

"Shut up," said Gupta.

"How about saying 'yes!' with our fists up the way they do in movies?" I demonstrate. "Yes!"

"Stop it. Do that when we get Mindy back," he said unmoved. "And by yourself. Focus. Think about what your pal Dogen has to say."

"Well, you said IMDB," I charged.

"A moment of weakness. Think Dogen now."

Techo and Gupta look to me for an interpretation of the Dogen quote.

"Hmm. I, I, I, I—let me think about it," I said. "It's famous." After a minute: "It's from the *Genjo Koan*, Dogen's most famous work." We went to Tanahashi's *Moon in a Dew-drop* on Amazon.com, opened the book so to speak, went to the *Genjo Koan*. It's not there. "It's in something else Dogen wrote." We searched for the phrase. It came up on the Berkeley Zen Center's web site. "Oh. It's from the *Fukanzazengi*,

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Dogen's instructions for *zazen*. My gaffe. Hey, it's word for word—it's their translation, their copyright." Nothing though. No links, no clues. "Let's just go on," I said. "*Learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly*. Another dead end."

We went back in the maze to downtown Perth. We were lost for a while and then picked up on another lead by putting the cursor over a piece of paper on the sidewalk. Need to enlarge. Turned the cursor into a magnifying glass. Click. It was a brochure from the Perth Mint. That's not hard to find. We went from room to room—gift shop, mining site, glass-walled hall to observe minting in action. The big ingot was sparkling in the Plexiglas case. The cursor would lift it. We went to the Pour Room. The ingot there was sitting cooling and shining in the same spot as in the real tour. On the audio Jimmy Cliff sang, "You Can Get It if You Really Want."

We went on. Once again, it seemed as if everything from all my emails was there—the Leeuwin winery kinetic sculpture, the pub with Mindy's hair hanging, the Indiana Tea House, the Hotham Valley Railway—wished I'd had a chance to ride it. And there were places I hadn't heard of Fenster obviously thought were must-see spots—the Kalbarri Coast with coral reefs, Ningaloo Marine Park, a picturesque town named Esperance, no night clubs or strip joints though.

"Go back to that Dogen quote," said Gupta.

"Yeah," said Techo. "I don't think we exhausted that."

"How can we *learn the backward step that turns our light inwardly*?" Gupta asked. "How about going to Fenster's library?"

Techo found the way—zooming up over WA, back down on Dunsborough and Fenster's estate, into his house, and to the library. We snooped but could detect nothing that responded with a hot spot in the books or the room. Weird thing was we did find a copy of the Berkeley ZC's *Fukanzazengi* lying on a table, magnified it and there was that quote highlighted—but no link.

We went further out the front door to the gate house. There's the roadster. Back to the swimming pool and yes—

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through the woods to the cabin the Goony Twins took our chloroformed or somethinged limp bodies to. There was a plastic bag dispenser thoughtfully placed on the wall. But nothing in our attempts to go back or inward opened a door.

Return to the library. The Fukanzazengi on the table seemed to be just a reminder, a tease. The only hyperlinks in that room were highlights and background for Robina, Phar Lap, Genghis Khan, the Japanese sword, and Joan Sutherland. Her hyperlink also unleashed her voice, which was good for a while but which Techo could only get rid of by re-booting.

“They’ve been working on this every day,” Techo said as the operating system started up again. “Building it, modifying it. It’s massive.”

“They’re crazy,” said Gupta. “I mean he’s crazy, nuts, a sadist, a bully, a freak, a fanatic, a psychopath, a kidnapping crook, a nasty villain. He’s bad, evil, malicious, crazy...”

“Now you’re repeating yourself,” I broke in.

“Unproductive,” said Techo.

We went on and on and on through the treasure hunt maze. It got late but we didn’t stop. At one point in the early morning I turned to Gupta and said bleary-eyed, “Four,” and he said, “No, it’s earlier than that.” Then he paused and said, “Oh yes—four.”

“Four what?” asked Techo.

“Four more days to live at the rate we’re going,” Gupta said. “And it’s getting less funny and more frightening every day.”

We took turns nodding out but no one lay down for long. I stepped outside to see the top of the red hydrogen ball of glowing sunrise. The next time I noticed, setting sun rays were streaking through the window. It was endless, really endless. At first the online maze was a great relief but we realized this too was getting us nowhere—and it was just a larger infinity in which to be lost and confused.

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Frannie called. She'd been at a costume shop in Freo. Samo was looking at some video porn stores. They were going home to respective family. She wished us well.

Darkness. Gupta was ready to explode. We'd tried everything we could think of—like I talked to Techo about wall-following and asked if there were any way to apply that to this cyberspace maze. We couldn't figure anything out with that. I remembered something Sid said about another method to use on 2D mazes, which was to fill in the dead ends and loops but that didn't seem to help. It wasn't a simple maze.

"Once again we need to cut through that knot," I said. "Back to Dogen. Back. *Learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly.* It really sounds like good advice but how can it be applied? We went inward when we went to the web. How much more inward can we go. Or backward?"

"If we could just get to the bottom of this!" shouted Gupta.

"Good idea!" said Techo. He was lickety-split back in Fenster's library and put the cursor over that line in the text of the Fukanzazengi and clicked the mouse somewhere that changed the screen into bland, black on white irregular lines of words and symbols.

"HTML?" asked Gupta.

"Yes," I said. "Of course—the inward language the Internet is all done in. See—it's all just typed out. Well, let's read what's there and see what we come up with."

Gupta and I leaned over Techo peering at the computer screen.

"I'm not real used to it," I said. "I have a web site and I do a little HTML, but it's tedious for me. Mainly I work with WYSIWYG—What You See Is What You Get—with Front Page or Dream Weaver and don't see the HTML. Incidentally Gupta, those initials don't remind you of anything do they? Nothing about bees or pees?"

"What initials?"

"HTML."

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"A blank. What's the acronym stand for? Happy The Many Lilliputians?"

"Haven't Thought My Liege," I said.

"High Time Mister Loony," he countered.

"He's The Most Lost," I said to Techo.

"Heavens, That's Most Ludicrous," Gupta trumped.

"Please look at it," said Techo impatiently. "Both of you."

"It's over our heads," I said.

"No—look at it," Techo said. "You might see something I don't."

Gupta and I looked closely at the formulas, words, letters, numbers, and symbols of the site. The whole Fukanzazengi was written out in regular English but there were embedded instructions in code as well that determine font, margins, colors. And nearby were all the more complicated codes for the images and sounds.

"What's that Hindi doing there?" Gupta said pointing.

"That doesn't do anything," said Techo. "It's for the people who were working with it and some of this must have been done in India. It's not a message to the computer, doesn't show up on the web page. It's probably a technical message from one Indian programmer for other Indian programmers. Nothing that applies now."

"They were working on this in India?" I asked.

"It was probably just scooped up accidentally when some web designer copied something he wanted to duplicate from a page on the web."

"That's not what it is," said Gupta.

"It's not?" Techo asked.

"No. It's for us."

"You can read that?" Techo says.

"My father made me learn Hindi when I was a kid."

"That's neat," I said.

"I had to worship the monkey god too."

"Oh that's terrible," said Techo.

"I still worship the monkey god."

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"Yeah," I said swatting Techo. "Hanuman's a cosmic archetype."

"Whatever works," said Techo.

"Now listen to this," said Gupta, "Ha! I think you will like it."

"Read it!" I commanded.

He did. "*Take that walk... you've been wanting to go on... tomorrow.*"

"Hmm," Gupta looked at me. "It's a decidedly less cryptic message. But what walk would that be?"

"That can only mean the walk from Perth to Freo," I said, "along the Swan River that, as it said, I've been wanting to do. Remember? I wanted to go?"

"Oh yeah."

"But how do we know *our* tomorrow is the one intended in the message here?"

"Oh, it says the date—August 26th. Tomorrow. Even says 'leaving at 9 a.m. Check your calendar to see if you're free,'" said Gupta.

"Nine a.m. tomorrow," I said. "Oh great. Sleep. Rest."

"Sleep. Rest," echoed Gupta with relief.

"We're back in the real world. Turn off the computer, Techo. I think that may be the end of this... this amazing maze."

"We don't know that," said Gupta. "It might just start up again in some way. But I really, truly hope you're right. I'm going to go take a hot tub."

"Me too. Oh my gosh," I said. "I forgot. Ross is giving a concert in Freo tomorrow night. We're on the guest list—all of us. Remember? That's perfect. We'll get there and eat dinner and go to his show."

"Unless you're murdered on the way," said Gupta.

"So who should go with me on the walk? Both of you? Just me?"

"You two go," said Gupta. "I'll drive."

"Nope—you'll walk too," said Techo, "And I can't go. It says right here in English after that Hindi, 'Septics only.'"

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“And that’s uh, who?” questioned Gupta.

“You two,” said Techo. “Septic tank—rhymes with yank.”