

Australia – Danger Island

A monologue by Pete Malicki

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Cast

A young man or woman.

Scene

I wake up to the crackling of the intercom. The pilot says we're about to land in Sydney Australia where the local temperature is thirty-two degrees. Can you believe it? I'm in Australia! And I know he means thirty-two degrees *Celsius*, not Fahrenheit; they have some weird way of measuring things here. As we land I see half the Americans putting on their heavy coats. Ha ha.

The guy at customs says, "G'day". They actually say this! Then he says, "How ya goin'?" Classic!

They're so friendly here. I go to the train station and try to get my bearings. "Excuse me sir," I say to a man in a suit. "Which way to the city?" He calls me "mate" a lot and even walks me to the platform I need. I really like this place!

I find my way to the YHA – Youth Hostel Australia – and settle in to my dorm. I don't mean to sleep at all but I sit down and two hours later I wake up when some crazy German girls burst in, giggling and touching each other's arms a lot. I half expect them to take their tops off, being Europeans. Sweet Jesus, they *do* take their tops off! I'm so embarrassed but one of them starts talking to me. "Hallo. My name is Heidi und this is Helga. What is your name?"

Heidi und Helga turn out to be wild adventurers and we agree to go to the Great Barrier Reef on Tuesday. I don't realise at the time the Great Barrier Reef is more than a thousand miles away. This is really awkward as I don't want to go that far but I hate breaking promises.

I go to the Opera House and take about a hundred photos. Did you know the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge are right next to each other? I always thought that was Photoshop. I back into someone by accident trying to line up a selfie and she cusses and calls me a horrible name. "I'm so sorry, Ma'am. I didn't mean to. Please beg my pardon."

I walk the length of the Harbour Bridge. That was one of my two goals here. Walk the Harbour Bridge, and face the dangers of Australia. Did you know the most poisonous snakes in the world are mostly in Australia? They have deadly spiders too, and sharks and crocodiles which kill people every day, and most of the country is an empty desert where the sun will fry you to a crisp. I'm brave just for being here on Danger Island!

I make more friends at the hostel and meet some young Aussie guys from Adelaide. These guys are *really* crazy. "Whaddya wanna do mate?" "Let's go canyoning." "Let's go skydiving." "Nah, let's go for a bush bash." A *bush bash* is where you go for a bushwalk where there's no trail so you have to *bash* your way through. They somehow just know from looking at me that I want to go on an adventure so they drag me along.

Deano, Robbo and Shorty buy a beaten up old ute and we drive south for half a day to get to this particular bushwalk they're excited about. I have to admit I'm a little terrified of these gentlemen. They are very friendly and outgoing – far more outgoing than I'll ever be – but they also seem to completely disregard every safety precaution known to man. They have no

maps, no phone, no supplies, and they don't tell anyone where they are. No one can ever call me "soft" again after this adventure!

We go to a place called the Castle, which Shorty describes as "a tough stroll". I quickly realise that "tough" in Australian means "intense torture" in English. The gents are striding along and I'm puffing and panting and tripping over the millions of tree roots and loose rocks that make up what's allegedly the "trail".

Deano and Robbo see I'm struggling and hang back. "It's real cool of you to have a crack at something like this," Robbo says. I ask him what he means. "You're clearly not doing this kind of thing on a regular basis. No offense but it looks like this is the first time you've gone more than three K's in a day."

I tell him I don't know what a "K" is but I'm positive he's right. "You're a bit on the polite side, aren't ya?" says Deano.

"My momma raised me this way. She always said there ain't no way you can disrespect a respectable person."

Deano really liked that idea for some reason it made him insist on carrying my day pack. It didn't weigh too much but it felt like a truck had been lifted off my back. Walking is so much easier now.

Everyone stops all of a sudden. Robbo says, "Snake!"

I freeze. The boys form a semicircle around something I can't see. They laugh and poke at it with a stick. I'm terrified it'll come at us so I back away, trip and fall three feet down an embankment. Hurt my arm real bad. Shorty rescues me and for some reason they can't stop clapping me on the back after this. They call me "trooper" and "king of the bush". I really like it!

We get back to the car too late to drive home. I get the inside all to myself and the boys sleep outside under a sheet of plastic. Get back to the hostel the next day with both my boxes ticked.

Heidi und Helga are real impressed when I tell them about my adventure and we decide to go to the Blue Mountains on our way to the Great Barrier Reef. It's well out of the way but that doesn't matter. We go to a place called Katoomba and see the world's most amazing views.

We walk along a beautiful trail. The forest is thick and tall, with the widest range of plantlife you've ever seen. The bird calls are beautiful. Little bells, whips and chirrups. I'm in love with Australia. This place was what I was missing. All my life living in a bubble in Arkansas and now I'm finally alive! This is paradise!

Physically I'm struggling – my legs keep buckling beneath me – but I don't want to stop. Maybe we'll see a snake and I can poke it with a stick like the crazy Australians. We keep going and going and going until the German girls basically start a mutiny and refuse to go any further. "How about we go to those boulders, have a look, then come back?" "Nein! Every step forwards needs another step backwards."

It's amazing how quickly things can change. I had been an Aussie Adventurer for *one* day and was already so much tougher than these girls. I tell them I *have* to keep going and they're

completely happy to wait for as long as I want. I leave my pack with them and say I'll be back in an hour.

The boulders are ten minutes away. There was a landslide almost a century ago and the cliff face fell right off. When I get there I have to say I'm a little underwhelmed. It's pretty but not as glorious as what I'd expected.

I navigate my way through to join the path at the other end. It heads steeply downhill for a while then gets a lot more challenging after it evens out at the bottom. Deano had mentioned this to me: "The first bit's for soft people. It starts getting real at about fifteen K's."

Still not quite sure what a K is but fifteen sounds about right. I keep going. It's pretty hard to tell which part is the path now. Now I'm starting to wonder what exactly "getting real" means. Does that mean "bush bash"? This sure is a bush bash!

After another fifteen minutes it's time to return to Heidi und Helga. I go back the way I came and it feels *way* longer than on the way there. I mean *way* longer. I check my phone. Ah dang! It's in my pack. "No worries" as the Aussies say. I keep going.

After thirty minutes I still haven't reached the boulders. The path is still really overgrown. It suddenly occurs to me I might have strayed off the main route. Dang! What do they say to do when you get lost in the bush? Retrace your steps? Keep on going? Wait for help? I retrace my steps but I can't see the way to get back up anywhere. It's too steep.

I keep looking and looking. This is okay, isn't it? *Worst* case scenario I can't find the path but the German girls will come get me – or they'll call for help.

I start getting thirsty and *really* regret leaving my pack behind. I call out, "Help! Can anyone hear me? I can't find the path! Help!"

No one responds.

I sit for fifteen minutes. It's better if I don't go anywhere in case I get even more lost. But I'm too thirsty so I go looking for water.

I don't find water. There must be a river somewhere downhill so I stumble downwards, trip, hurt my ankle. I limp my way to a sheer cliff and there's no way I can get further down. I'm *really* thirsty now. Shit. Shit shit shit shit SHIT!

I don't know what to do. I start climbing down so I can find water. Shit! I slip and fall and *really* hurt myself this time. My leg is bleeding badly.

This isn't fair. Australia is Danger Island because of snakes and crocodiles, not dying of dehydration and blood loss!

I make a tourniquet from my shirt. I wait for help. Nothing. I wait and wait and wait but nothing happens. Except it gets dark and cold. I cry. I cry and I cry. Then I feel faint. It's night time, and I'm thirsty, and I've lost a lot of blood.

I feel faint. I feel faint.

I... feel... faint.