



# The Devil Down Under

by Richard Hughes

*"So he busies himself with jar after jar of experiments. Years go by, and the jars multiply, each with opal growing in it."*

Any of you ever visit Australia? I had the chance last year. What a piece of work that place is. Something about continuously spinning upside down must scramble the brains. Just look at it. Animals with pouches, birds that can't fly and a version of English that makes translation into Yank-speak more of a challenge than the human genome project. The national gem? It's green, er... red... uh... orange... hmm... blue... keep the bloody thing still, will ya! And if this weren't enough, the country's landmark is an opera house. An o-pee-ra house, mate! Will all those who have actually heard an Australian opera, please stand and repeat after me: "Fair go, ya' bastaaard."

So, there you have it—an upside-down world populated by an upside-down people. And that, my friends, leads to more craziness than burning a piece of red, white and blue cloth in front of an American Republican (down boy, down boy, it's just an Australian flag).

that figured out just what makes an opal show its marvelous play-of-color.

Now flash forward a bit, to a Lightning Ridge miner. Lenny Cram doesn't have any highfalutin' scientific training nor any bomb-science laboratory, just a love for opal and a workshed out back. But he's got ideas, ideas on opals and ideas on how they form—ideas having their germ deep in the ground. So he busies himself with jar after jar of experiments. Years go by, and the jars multiply, each with opal growing in it. Eventually word gets out, back to the lab boys who originally developed the process for synthetic opal. They sniff a patent violation and come calling. But what they see in that back shed is brand new. No patent violation here. They leave him be.

Lenny Cram continues his experiments. And he has some luck. Produces jar after jar of artificial opal. But he's still not happy. Something about the stuff is not real enough. So he keeps tinkering, trying to unlock the secret of how opal really grows in the ground. By the time I visited him last year, he had opal growing in jars just as it does in nature, black crystal, white, seams in dirt, even Yowah Nuts. An incredible sight.

## Decisions, decisions

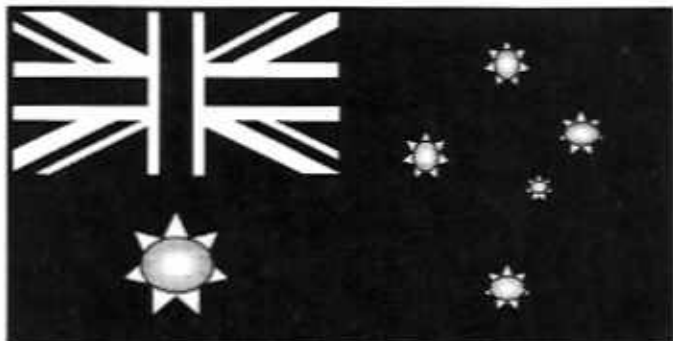
Anyhow, get comfy so I can tell you a little story from the Land Down Under. It's an opal story, but one with lessons for all of us.

Opal was first synthesized a long, long time ago, pre-Beowulf. I think the year was 1963. Those that brought us the first synthetic opal were the same group of test-tube jockeys

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Have any of you ever dug a great big hole in order to find an itty-bitty piece of stone? I must confess I have not. Just thinking about it gets me exhausted quicker than Bill Clinton at a White House intern orientation. But I have an empathy for those that do. The thing about digging in the ground is that it gives you plenty of time to think. Spade by spade, shovel by

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

## *Whew! What a controversial summer.*

Starting with General Electric's announcement concerning the color treatment of diamonds and inflamed by the GIA Symposium War Room, we have had hard issues to confront. One starts to wonder if we are gemologists or ethicists. Well, Richard Hughes has no doubt about this and in his inimical writing style is letting us know his thoughts in this *Cornerstone*. What do you think? Let us know.

And have you cleared your schedule and booked your flight to Tucson 2000? Our annual trek to the gemological "Mecca" is coming up fast and we all know how quickly rooms book out. Buckle your seatbelts and make sure you are free on Thursday, February 3rd in order to attend your annual AGA Symposium and Dinner Dance.

This year we get a taste of Thailand with the long awaited return of Ted Themelis (you old timers remember Ted's lively and revealing presentations of the early 90s) who will bring us up to speed on the latest corundum enhancements and share the magic tricks he and his cohorts are practicing on that popular gemstone.

We are also honored to host Dr. Adolf Peretti who will be presenting his research on "Kashmir Sapphires: from expedition to the mine" including a market review and a slide show covering the gemological characteristics. And that's only two of the speakers online for this year.

Last year we celebrated our 25th Anniversary with a dinner dance that was the talk of the town. Damn that swing band was good! The food was okay—but the presentations were brief and entertaining. Well, this year we will celebrate the Millennium (just in case you miss it on January 1st) with more mediocre food (what can I say), an even shorter presentation (my personal guarantee), and we are working at getting that great swing



band back! So shine your dancing shoes and pencil in your calendar.

Miss it once—shame on you, miss it twice...Well nuff said, see you on the 3rd!

Thom Underwood, President  
San Diego, California

## **Tucson 2000 is coming!**

The AGA will host its Symposium and Dinner Dance on Thursday, February 3, 2000 at the Marriott—University Park in Tucson. Be on the look-out for promotional materials with information about our speakers and other details—or you can call the AGA at (619) 286-1603 or e-mail us at [thomu@home.com](mailto:thomu@home.com) for more information now.

The Annual Membership Meeting will take place immediately after the Symposium (approximately 5:00) in Tucson at the Marriott-University Park. The meeting is scheduled to last no longer than an hour.

The AGA Board Meeting will also be held in Tucson, on Friday, February 4, 2000 at 9:00 a.m. at the Tucson Convention Center (room TBA). It is scheduled for one hour. ■

**Symposium  
and Dinner Dance**

**February 3, 2000**

# Down Under

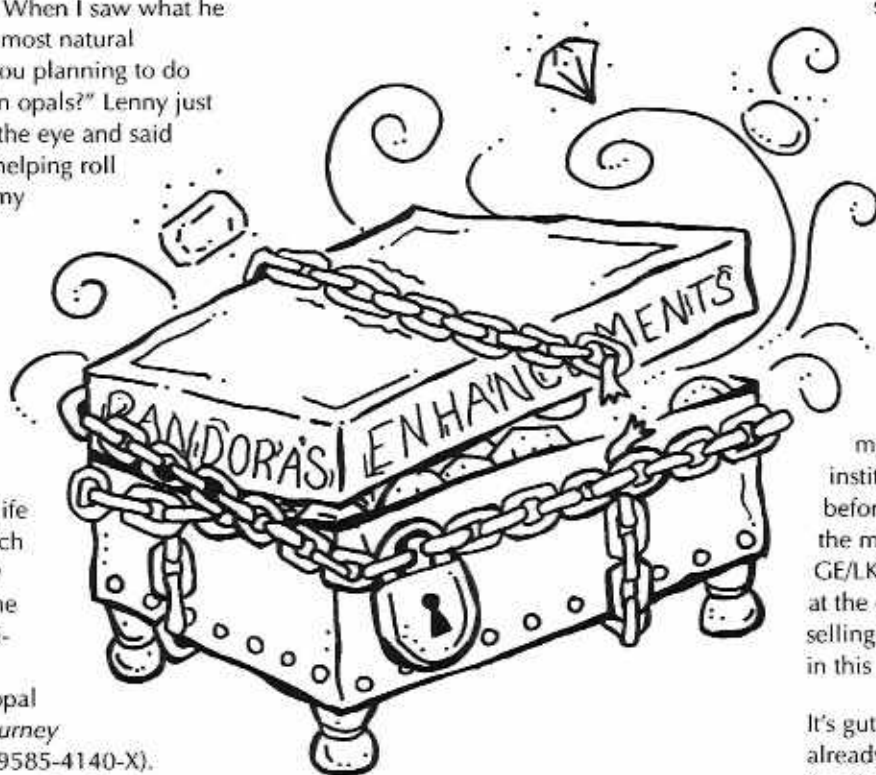
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shovel, one bucket at a time. You get a real close look at what you are digging for.

You also develop an appreciation for it. You begin to understand the pain and labor to bring something up just so that, as Pliny once said, "one finger might shine." Lenny Cram has respect for the stone he has spent his entire life seeking. When I saw what he had done, I asked the most natural question: "What are you planning to do with your home-grown opals?" Lenny just looked me straight in the eye and said "Nothing." And after helping roll my tongue back into my throat, he explained why. He believes his stones cannot be identified. Rather than commercially producing a product that could destroy his industry, he would rather devote the rest of his life to building it up. Which he is doing. 1998 saw Len Cram complete the first volume of a multi-volume work on the history of Australia's opal mines. It's called *A Journey With Colour* (ISBN 0-9585-4140-X). I could suggest an alternative title. Try *R-E-S-P-E-C-T*.

Those who know me understand I shed no tears for De Beers. The simple idea of one company owning over 80% of the diamond business gets my blood boiling quicker than a Bill Gates weep session on how tough the competition is nowadays. But I gotta give the South African monopoly credit for their approach to the new Pegasus diamonds. In between gulps of diamond crow, they quietly admitted that they had known about techniques to alter the color of diamonds for over 20 years. Yep, they knew how to do this, but chose to sit on a potential goldmine. Contrast this with General Electric and Lazare Kaplan, whose public statements have suggested that they are doing what they are doing for the excellent reason that, if they don't, someone else will.

**"...it's time for those  
developing such  
enhancements to  
take responsibility  
for the havoc  
they wreak."**



## Culture

Before I let you go, let me tell you one more Aussie story. The folks Down Under certainly are a cultured lot—why even the cabbies have something to say. On a ride to Melbourne's airport, my driver started talking about Henry David Thoreau, and mentioned the following tale: In 1845, Thoreau refused to pay his taxes, stating he could not in good conscience support a government that allowed slavery (among other things). So the powers-that-be from the Land of the Free threw his ass in jail. While there, his good friend, the writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, came to pay him a visit. Spying Thoreau sitting quietly in his cell, Emerson moaned: "David, what are you doing in there?" Looking him dead in the eye, Thoreau answered: "Waldo, what are you doing out there?"

## Inside out

In this business, enhancements are creating more mischief than ever before. Me thinks it's time for those developing such enhancements to take responsibility for the havoc they wreak. The fact that they are enhancing "precious stones" means they have opted to be a part of the "precious stone" industry. So they should begin to behave like it.

When a company develops an industry-crippling treatment such as the Pegasus diamond, that company has a responsibility to assist in its identification, to help preserve the very business it is taking part in. And if they can't figure out how to do it? Then they need to give others enough information to have a fighting chance. In the Pegasus case, that means providing major gemological institutes with before-and-after samples, before they begin selling material onto the market. Anything less suggests that GE/LKI's only purpose is to make money, at the expense of the very product they are selling. And at the expense of everyone else in this business.

It's gut-check time for our industry. We've already lost the war with colored stones. But it doesn't have to be that way for diamonds. I'm in here. What are you doing out there? ■

*Acknowledgments.* The author would like to extend his thanks to all the fine folks Down Under, who showed off their lovely country with some of the finest hospitality I've ever seen. Too many to name, but in particular, Terry Coldham, who was my host for much of my trip.

*Author's Afterword.* Published in abbreviated form in GemKey Magazine (1999, Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov.-Dec.), this is installment #7 of my Digital Devil column which appears at [www.ruby-sapphire.com](http://www.ruby-sapphire.com).



# Gemologist



# Year Award



The Accredited Gemologists Association announces a call for nominations for the first annual Antonio C. Bonanno Award For Excellence in Gemology. This prestigious award (named in honor of the founding father of the AGA, for his contributions to the gemological field and his work to establish and maintain high professional standards) will be presented on Thursday, February 3, 2000 at the AGA Dinner Dance in Tucson. Please submit nominations to AGA headquarters no later than December 15, 1999.

## CRITERIA

Nominees need not be AGA members nor US citizens, but they must have made a significant contribution to the field of gemology, or defended and upheld gemological standards in a way that has benefited the larger gem and jewelry community. Accomplishments can be in the field of education, research, instrumentation or innovative/practical application of gemological procedures or standards.

## NOMINATION FORM

Name of nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

This nominee deserves to be nominated for the Antonio C. Bonanno Award For Excellence in Gemology because (200 words or less): \_\_\_\_\_

Nomination submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please send me a membership application for Accredited Gemologists Association

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Application Guidelines

Membership with full voting privileges is available to professionals holding gemological diplomas from accepted institutions. Associate Membership is available to students of gemology and avocational gemologists. Supplier Membership is available to providers of goods and services to the gem & jewelry industry.

#### Application Guidelines

\$25 Processing Fee (one-time, non-refundable) will be retained by AGA.  
\$100 Voting Member Dues.  
\$75 Associate Member Dues.  
\$50 Student Member Dues.  
\$150 Supplier Member Dues.  
Make checks payable to Accredited Gemologists Association, in U.S. funds.  
Membership is renewable annually (Voting \$100, Assoc. \$75, Student \$50, Supplier \$150).

#### Return This Request to:

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**AGA will not discriminate against any applicant based upon race, creed, color, national origin, age or gender. Applicants are required to meet substantial member qualifications, and to adhere to the AGA Code of Ethics.**