

I'm writing this entry from sunny (today) Madison, sitting on the Terrace at Memorial Union. An excellent suggestion from Britt; it involves beautiful weather, beer, a veggie brat and ice cream. Life is good.



Except that in blog-time I'm not yet in Madison. Instead, I'm headed to House on the Rock...

Let's be clear about this: House on the Rock is a tourist trap. I'd first heard about it from *American Gods*, and when thinking about this tour at some point I decided to visit both this and Rock City (both appear in the book). I am so glad I did.

Approximately one million photos follow, but HotR (I'm lazy and in IT: pointless abbreviations will abound, feel free to debate how to pronounce this one) is difficult to absorb, photograph or explain. It started because a man decided to build a house on top of a rocky spire. He hauled stone and materials up by hand, slowly building an insanely lovely house composed of low ceilings, and many nooks overlooking the valley around it. The House itself, what little of it is still visible, is amazing and inspiring. Other people agreed and apparently kept visiting until the builder decided to start charging admission.

The money rolled in, and this eccentric builder (and collector of many things, especially Asian artifacts) promptly went nuts. The House itself is now a small island amidst a sea of music machines, dolls, carousels, gardens, masks and waves of *stuff*. Going through the full tour turns into an endurance slog, with wave after wave of insane rooms and exhibits piling on. It's difficult to emerge in a state of wonder, I suspect most folks wander out feeling stunned and worked over.

The entire tour, like the original House, is somewhat cramped and dimly light. In person this is perfect, but be warned that I'm not a great photographer and I'm working with a cell phone camera. These pictures will absolutely not do any of it justice. It's not an experience you leave thinking, "I really want to do that again" but thinking back on it (AND THE AMAZING CAROUSEL) continues to make me smile. Here there be magic.



Obligatory scooter-in-front-of-House-on-the-Rock picture. It doesn't look too big, although there's a strange enormous warehouse out of the frame to the left.



You buy your tickets and are given four golden coins to activate music machines and strange contraptions later (pro-tip: follow a kid and indulgent parents! In any other situation this would be annoying, but here it's perfect!). Then back outside to wander through Asian inspired gardens. Seem like there's kind of a lot jammed in here? We have not yet begun to jam.



Rub his belly for luck!



House on the Rock

The original House on the Rock is full of these small, low rooms that once had amazing views out the valley. The windows were later covered in blue to turn the gaze inward and add even more weird for the tourists. The builder used a lot of piled stone and carpet; most of the rooms are oriented for sitting. The original house seems amazing. It's now merged with the crazy circus that makes up the HotR experience; with crazy music machines randomly popping up and...



The Infinity Room. A giant spire, hanging sideways out the building and reaching out over the valley.



View from The Infinity Room.



One of the many great masks decorating the path when you leave the House and enter what looks like a small mill. I thought, "that's kind of

cool, I'll take a picture of the waterwheel when I get around to the other side" but really this is the disguised entrance to a massive warehouse turned into an insane warren of stuff. Have I mentioned I really like this place?

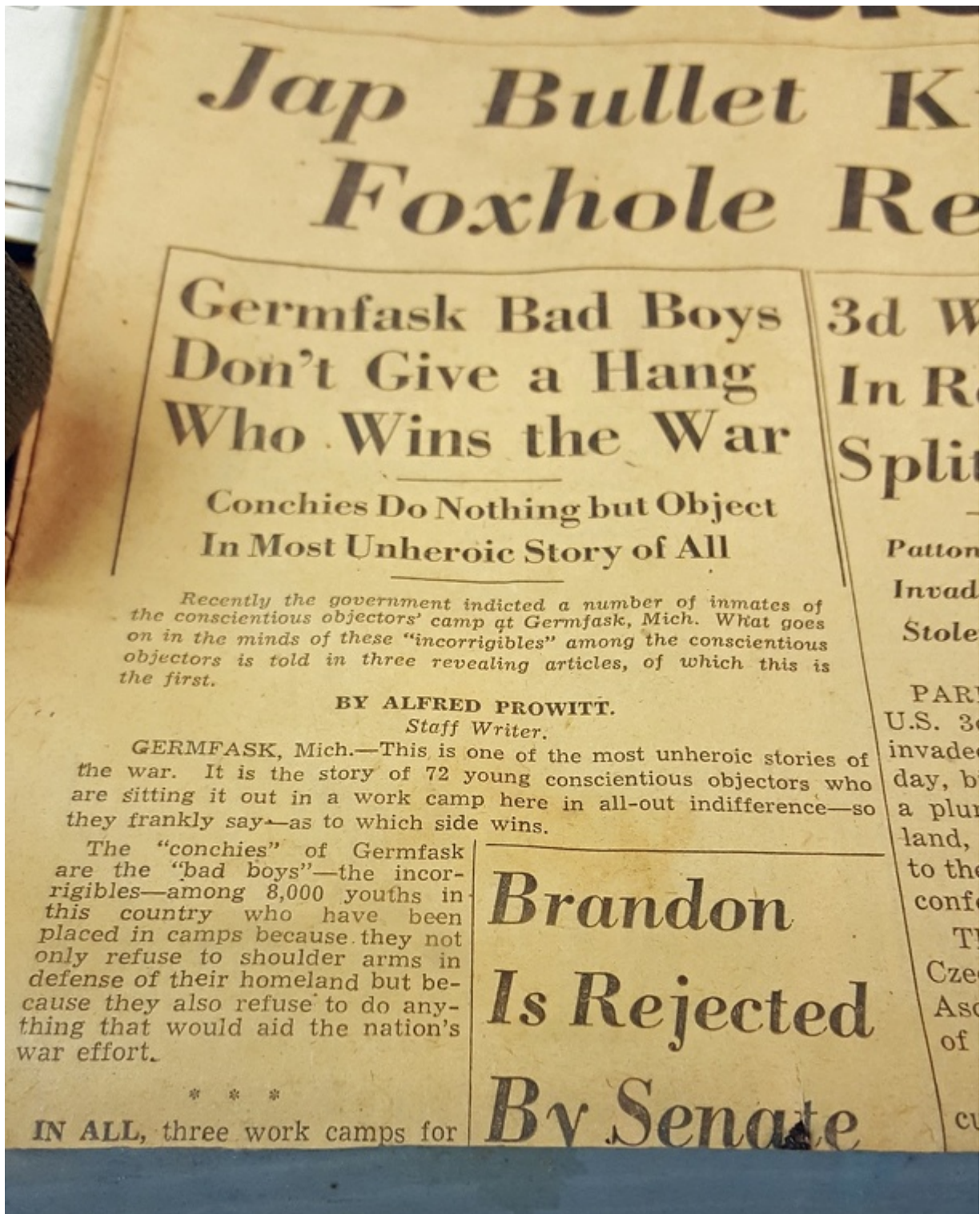


It is difficult to take a picture of a 3 story sculpture of an octopus fighting a whale from a few claustrophobic feet away. Fortunately the walls of all 3 stories are

filled with the remnants of a maritime museum purchased specifically for filler material.



Octopus below, toothy whale above.



The Most Unheroic Story of All.



I suspect this diver is up to no good. Also that the mannequin was not from the original maritime museum.



After the desecrated maritime museum we have a random display of terrifying puppets!



Monkey with devious time bomb?



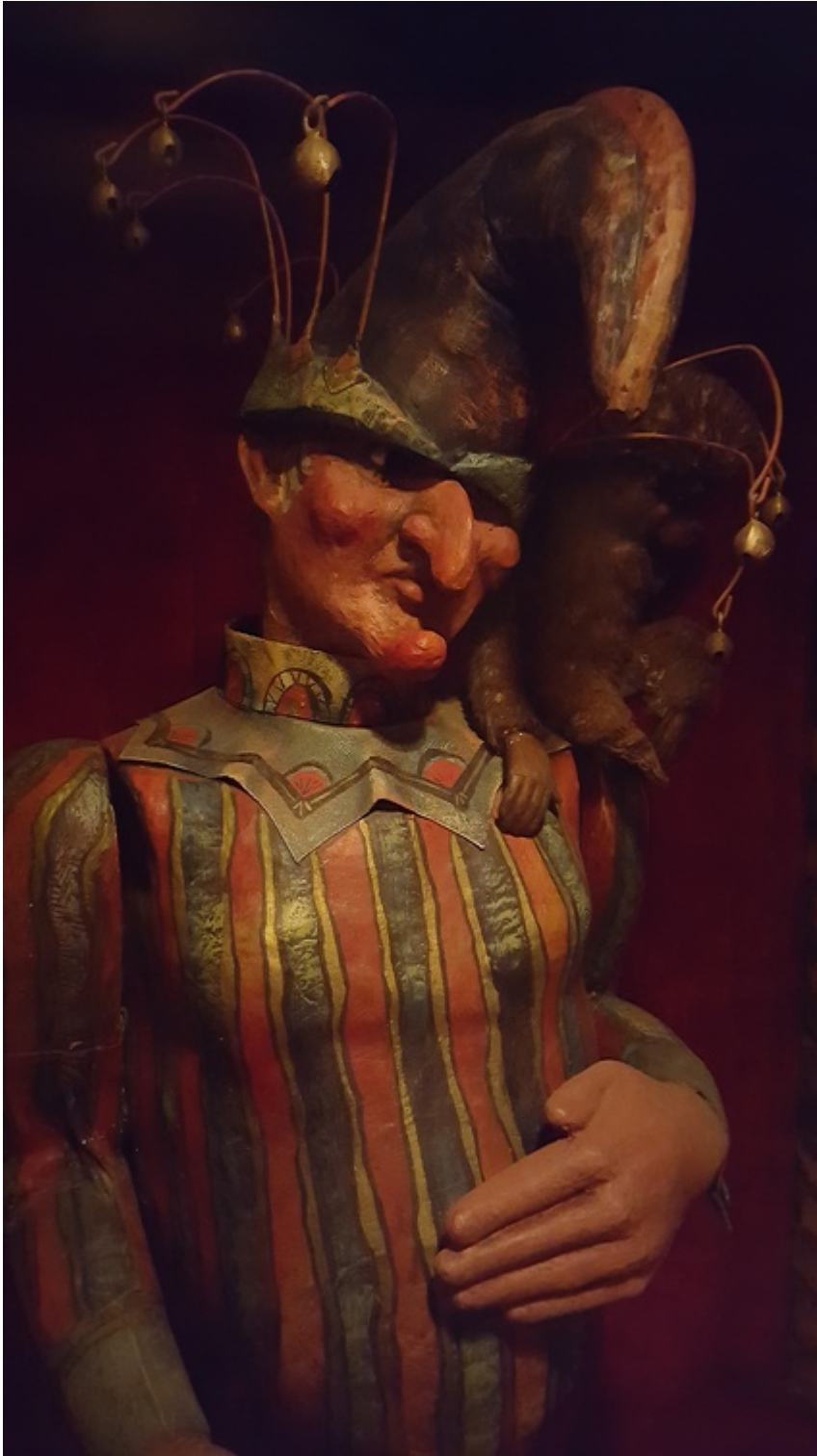
Wait, I came all this way and the Octopus Garden is broken?!

It's probably worth taking a moment to explain the music, um, contraptions that are scattered throughout. Most of these take one or two golden tokens (you can purchase more throughout). Said tokens will sometimes turn on a tiny puppet show that barely shudders its way through a minor performance or power a whole room full of musical instruments performing for several minutes. It appears that these are mostly normal instruments hooked into various pneumatic machines to play them. You never know what ghosts your token will summon.

Here's an attempt to capture one in motion. It's dark of course, but perhaps you can get the idea: [Video of Music Box](#)



Backing slowly away from Schlitz.



Why hello there!



THE CAROUSEL ROOM! It's the magnificent focal point of insanity. I stopped in my tracks when I got here. The room is layer upon layer of carousel, with

the massive central one and then various side carousel sculptures. This room alone is worth the price of admission.



The carousel room is insane, a ceiling covered in angels, walls of horses, a couple carousel like sculptures spinning nearby, etc.

Ok, I'm not really sure how to add video, so it's a link for now to the video of the carousel.



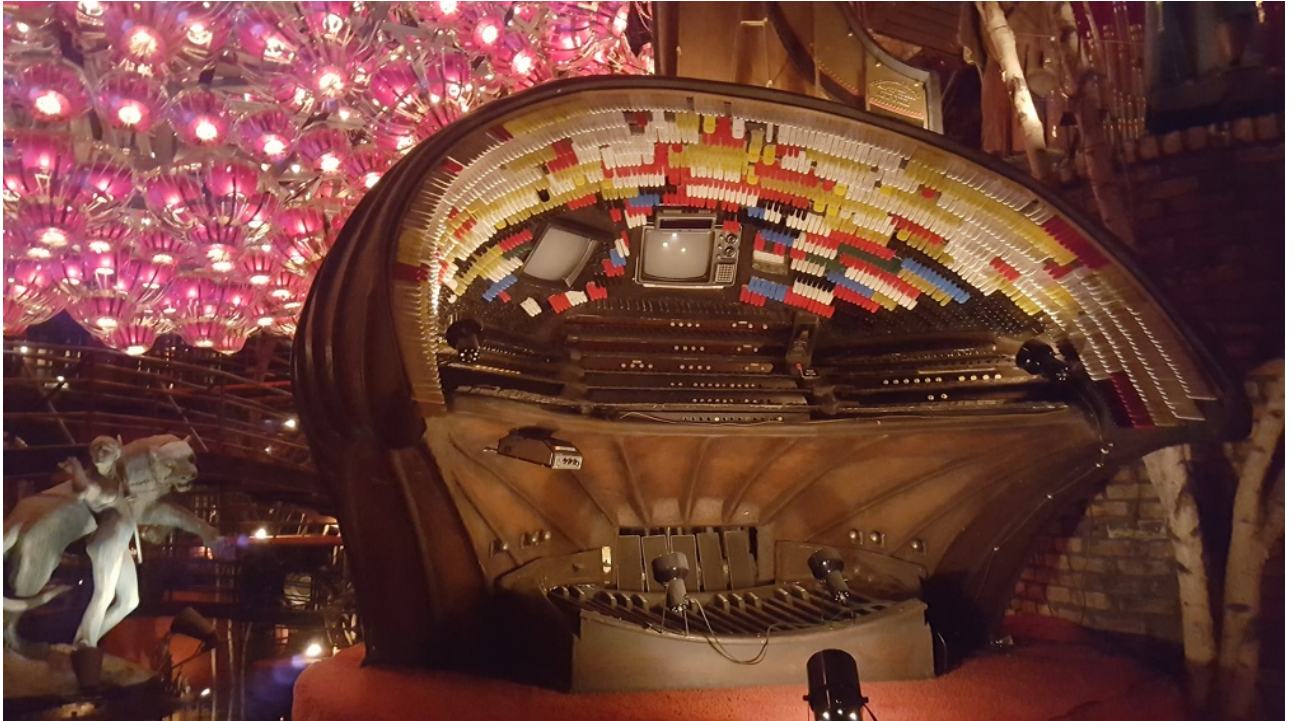
Ok, time to leave the carousel area. Reluctantly. Through the mouth of this dude.



Next up: a massive room with a pile of chandeliers in the middle and giant stacks of distilling paraphernalia. Plus the usual pieces of artillery, statues, etc.



Layer upon layer of weird stuff. I want to hug it all.



A piano ... from SPACE!



I felt like a weirdo stopping in every men's room I could find, but it was totally worth it.



A clown relaxing in an undersized bathtub with a drink. Like any normal person.





The "Funny Bone Tester" takes one gold token. At some point your mind starts to crumble under the onslaught.



Cyclops Doll.



“What do we do with all these suits of armor?” “Let’s stage some elaborate battle scenes.”



Roof of a secondary room full of carousel sculptures contains skeletal horsemen. Important life lesson: look up!



House on the Rock

Because everyone's favorite part is the carousel, the final area ends by leading you back into the same room but up on some balconies to experience all the wonder again.



Hours after descending, you emerge, blinking and overwrought, back into another set of Asian inspired gardens.



"You know what would complete this contemplative rock garden? A nice cannon."

ESMERALDA'S PROPHECIES

You have a special aptitude for the fine arts. Love to beautify the home. Will have a long life and are capable of filling lofty positions. Have a gentle, straightforward nature, very quick temper, strong will power that will accomplish anything you undertake. Fond of solitude and serious studies. A good, commanding nature, and always dreaming of riches. You will have considerable property many times, which will be taken from you repeatedly. You will travel a great deal. You will have few brothers and sisters, and will probably marry an artist or one who works on the stage. Curb your temper and conserve your health.

One of your lucky numbers is 12

Drop another coin in the slot and maybe my next prophecy card will suit you better.

Esmeralda tells all
at
The House on the Rock
Spring Green, Wisconsin

There are actually TWO fortune telling Esmeraldas. This is my fortune from the second and clearly more accurate one.



That's it folks! Here's a picture of HotR ("hotter" or "hooter"?) from the 'Scenic View' on the highway a couple of miles down the road. You're seeing The Infinity Room.

Was this all I did on Sunday? NO. Next I wandered into Taliesin by accident. But that's another post.