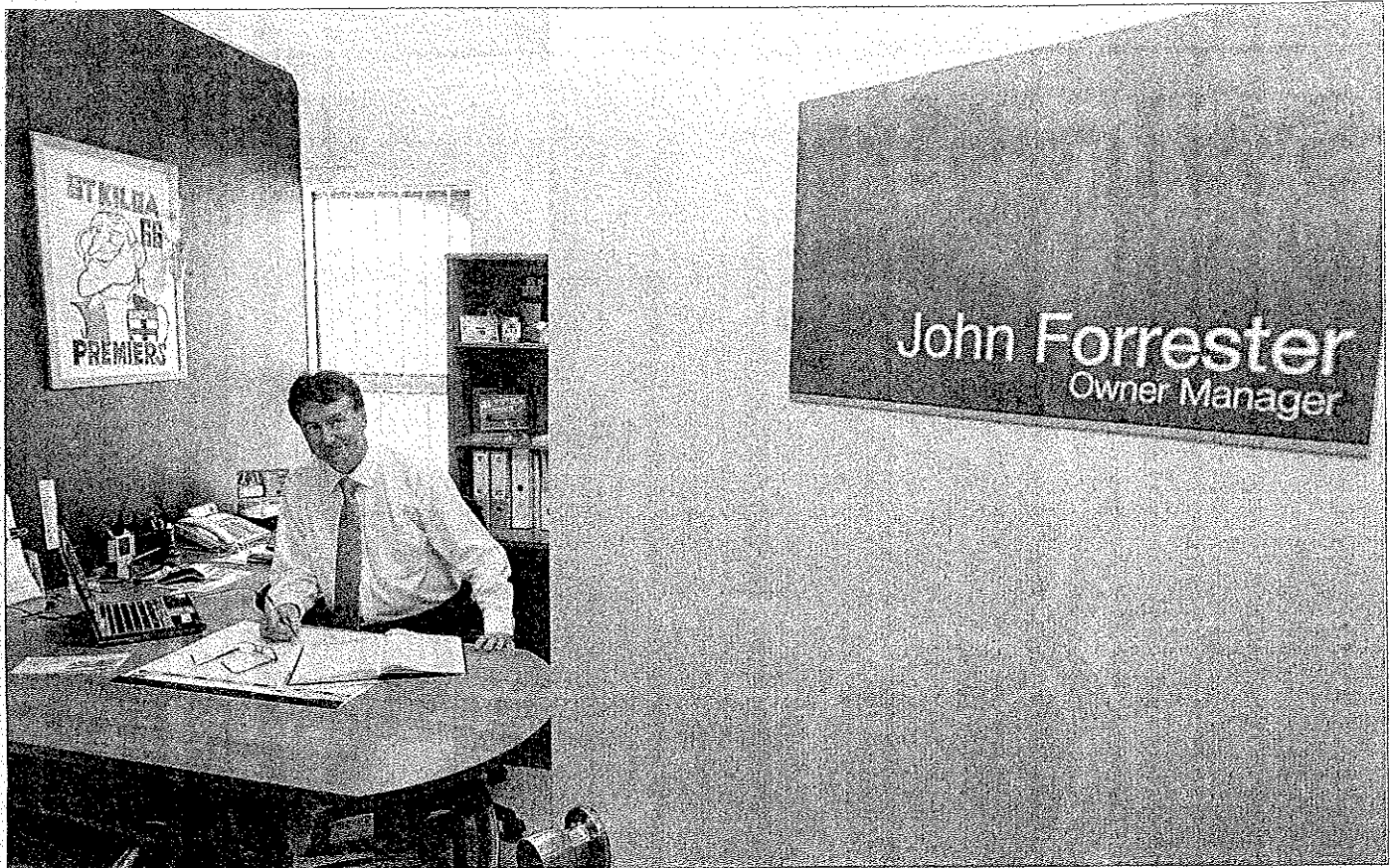


# Theft case that read like a Hollywood thriller has a happy ending



John Forrester returns to his desk two-and-a-half years after an amazing plot to rob the Mudgeeraba branch of the Bank of Queensland ended in his acquittal this week. Photo: MIKE BATTERHAM

# Banker's poison past laid to rest

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IT was a long time coming. Two years, six months and 28 days to be exact, but yesterday the bank manager found not guilty of robbing \$40,000 from his own bank was back at work.

John Forrester's office in the Mudgeeraba branch of the Bank of Queensland was just as he left it. His name was still proudly on the manager's door and the posters of his beloved St Kilda football team are still on the walls.

"I'm a long-suffering fan," he admits. Then, quietly: "It's good to be back."

For two-and-a-half years John Forrester has been fighting to clear his name after he was charged with robbing his own bank in April 2009. His story of that day stunned the court as he told how he was forced to take the cash by Irish revolutionaries who abducted him and injected him with a mysterious poison.

There was a bomb, poison, GPS tracking and listening devices - all the makings of a Hollywood blockbuster, the court was told.

More importantly, under the law the defence is called compulsion - where, in an extraordinary emergency, an ordinary person could not reasonably be expected to act otherwise. Mr Forrester never denied tak-

ing the \$40,000 but his lawyer Bill Potts successfully argued that he only did so under extreme duress.

Mr Potts admits it is perhaps one of the most difficult defences.

As one commentator said: "How the hell did you win that?"

The case came down to the prosecution, which failed to prove that Mr Forrester's story was not true.

Yesterday none of that mattered as Mr Forrester simply went back to work after having been suspended from his job as manager-owner since his arrest. He said he was "gladdened" by an enormous showing of support from friends and family throughout his ordeal and following Wednesday's not guilty verdict.

Staffers were also glad to have their boss back, as many of them had given evidence during his trial painting him as an "almost saintly" community citizen.

Customers were also quick to defend their local branch manager.

Janet King has been a loyal customer for seven years and never believed for a minute Mr Forrester was guilty.

"I've always found him to be pleasant. He's such a quiet man," Mrs King said. "He's proved his innocence and I hope he can get on with his life now."

By 10.30, the media had slipped away and John Forrester simply got back to work.

## Cold glitch kills snails

NEW Zealand's Department of Conservation is under fire from environmentalists after freezing 800 endangered giant snails to death.

The rare snails, collected from the Stockton Plateau several years ago ahead of a coalmine development, died after a temperature glitch in the organisation's West Coast Conserva-

ancy. The office's technical support manager John Lyall said the temperature probe in one of three containers holding snails failed, making the coolroom colder than the creatures could bear.

He said the deaths had upset staff, who had recently celebrated a great captive breeding result.



## Crews probe cause of fire

FIRE crews are still investigating the cause of a massive vegetation fire that burned for more than five hours at Bonogin yesterday.

The blaze spanned 5ha on Chesterfield Drive but did not endanger homes.

The Queensland Fire Service and local rural crews responded to the call about 1.30pm.

The fire was brought under control and downgraded about 4.30pm.

A Queensland Fire Service spokeswoman said the fire was monitored and was burning safely within containment lines throughout the night.

Five crews fought the fire from the ground, while two helicopters water-bombed from above.

# Blockbuster boss turns new page back at work

Jeremy Pierce  
GOLD COAST BUREAU

JUST a day after he was cleared of robbing his own bank, John Forrester was yesterday back on the job for the first time in almost three years.

On Wednesday, Mr Forrester, 51, was cleared of stealing \$40,000 from Mudgeeraba's Bank of Queensland after jurors decided his amazing story was too crazy to be made up.

Like a story ripped from the script of a Hollywood blockbuster, Mr Forrester told the court how he was forced to take the money by Irish revolutionaries who car-jacked him and injected him with a mysterious poison.

Mr Forrester had been suspended from his job as manager-owner of the Mudgeeraba branch since his arrest in April 2009 over the bizarre story, but the sanction was lifted within hours of his acquittal and at 8.55am yesterday he returned to work.

He said he was "gladdened" by an enormous showing of support from friends and family throughout his ordeal.

"It's very good to be back," he said.

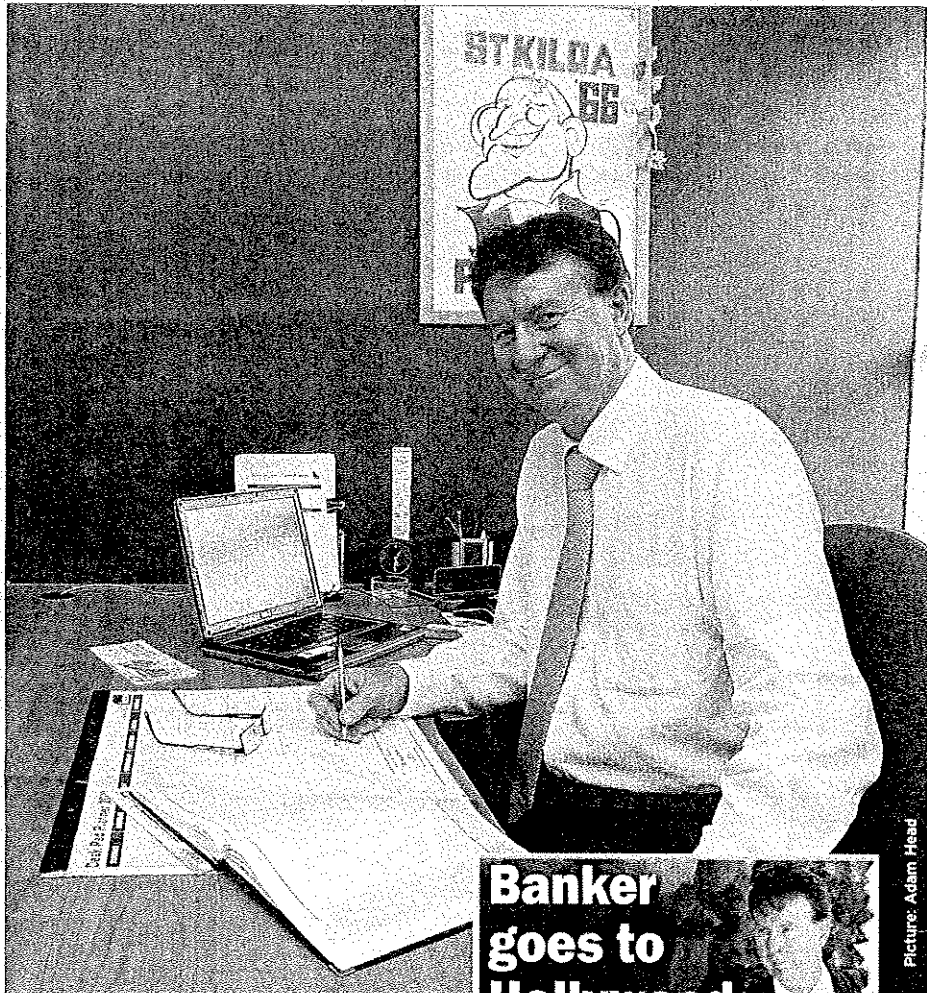
Staffers were also glad to have their boss back, as many of them had given evidence during his trial painting him as an "almost saintly" community citizen who was president of the Mudgeeraba Chamber of Commerce and heavily involved in local charities.

One local resident even brought in a bottle of champagne to mark the occasion.

But there was no champagne drinking in the office as the mild-mannered bank manager quickly got back to work, settling back into his office and getting on with the job of servicing clients.

Mr Forrester never denied taking the \$40,000 from the bank, but his lawyers successfully argued that he only did so under extreme duress.

Jurors were then instructed they could only find Mr Forrester guilty if they were completely convinced his story was an elaborate ruse to deflect



**IN THE CHAIR:** John Forrester at work yesterday after three bizarre years and (left) *The Courier-Mail's* report.

the blame and they duly ruled there was enough reasonable doubt to suspect the story, as crazy as it sounded, could be true.

His defence lawyer Bill Potts has hit out at the police handling of the investigation, which did not explore other leads or suspects.

## Banker goes to Hollywood

The script of an action blockbuster? No, just this man's day at the office.



Picture: Adam Head



**COUP:** Todd Coates with Puss in Boots and Shrek.

## \$10m deal a dream for Coast theme park

Jeremy Pierce  
GOLD COAST BUREAU

DREAMWORLD has landed a major coup in the battle for Queensland theme park supremacy by signing an exclusive partnership agreement with blockbuster movie company DreamWorks.

The \$10 million project will see the Gold Coast theme-park giant become home to rides and attractions themed on some of DreamWorks' best-loved movie franchises, including Shrek, Kung Fu Panda and Madagascar.

The move is almost a direct challenge to the film industry-themed Movie World, which banks heavily on its stable of Warner Brothers stars such as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and other popular characters to lure visitors through the gate.

New Dreamworld CEO Todd Coates said the DreamWorks deal would offer guests an even wider array of experiences.

"We believe Dreamworld is the most complete theme park in Australia and we are really excited about this alliance," he said.

The deal is just the second theme park partnership in the world involving DreamWorks - the other is at Universal Studios in Singapore.

Dreamworld's existing Nickelodeon area will be replaced by three DreamWorks zones dedicated to Shrek, Kung Fu Panda and Madagascar, featuring revamped rides.

A "Shrek-tacular Show" will be open in time for the Christmas holidays.

## FOOD RECALL

### Sanitarium So Good Rice Milk

All 1 Litre packages with Best before 25 Mar 2012 31206

Made in Australia

The recalled product has been available for sale in Coles Supermarkets, IGA stores and Franklins.

The Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing Company is conducting a recall of the above product as a precautionary health measure.

**Problem:** The recall of the above product is due to a production error resulting in the presence of an undeclared allergen (soy) in So Good Rice Milk, 1L, Best Before 25 Mar 2012 31206.

**Food safety hazard:** Any consumers who have a soy allergy or intolerance may have a reaction if the product is consumed.

**What to do:** Consumers who have a soy allergy or intolerance should not consume this product and should return it to the place of purchase for a full refund.

This recall only affects the So Good RICE MILK (Best before 25 Mar 2012) - it does not affect other flavours or any other products.

The Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing Company apologises for any inconvenience.

For further information please call:

The Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing Company  
1 Sanitarium Drive  
BERKELEY VALE NSW 2261

toll free phone 1800 673 392