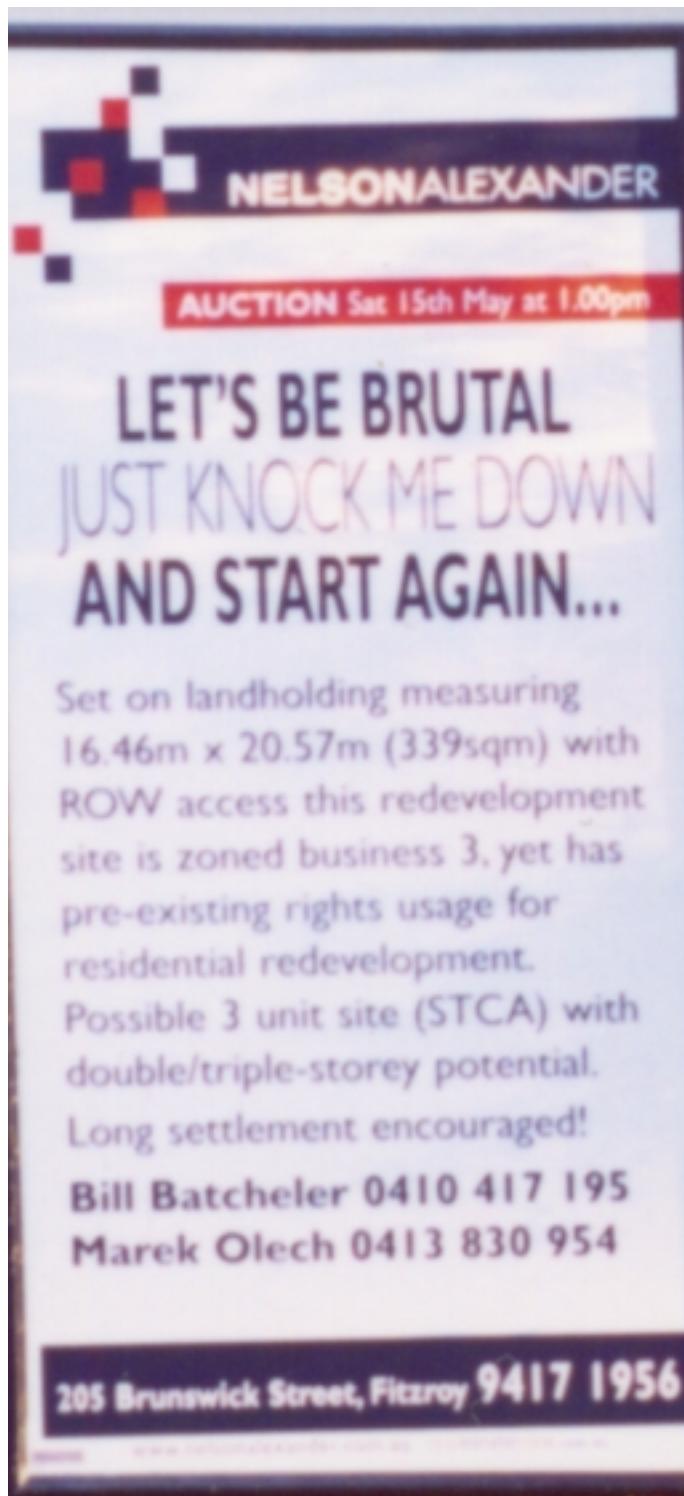
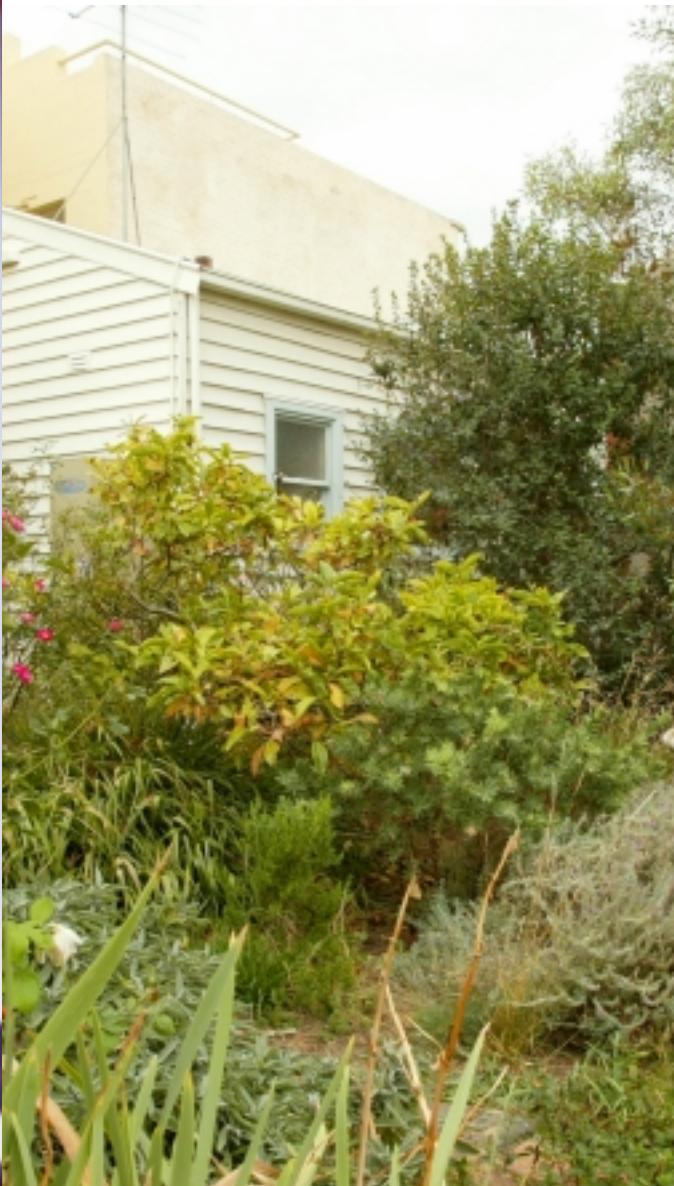


Scratch Pad 56

The year of living frantically



Based on
a one-shot fanzine for
Acnestis, August 2004, and
ANZAPA, August 2004,
by Bruce Gillespie.
Email: gandc@mira.net.



Photos of 59 Keele Street Collingwood by the selling agent, Nelson Alexander Pty Ltd.

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The year of living frantically

When Elaine first talked to the builder, in February 2003, she was quoted a price for replacing the side wall. Let that amount be x . Because she could afford that amount, she made a wish list of all the other things that needed doing to the house while the wall was being replaced. She assumed that the cost of the extras, her wish list, would be $2x$.

In February 2004, she submitted the full wish list to the builder. The sum he quoted was $5x$, well over twice what she had in her savings account. So Elaine wrote a revised wish list: those things that absolutely had to be done while the wall was being replaced. The builder's quotation on that work was still more than she could

afford.

We were faced with the unthinkable — moving house. We have the perfect location: an inner-city suburb with much public transport, two non-neighbours on either side (one an office block, and the other a house that faces away from us), the side garden (one of the few in the inner suburbs) . . . everything. We had assumed when we moved here 25 years ago (26 March 1979) that we would live here until carried out to a funeral parlour.

But the house was built in 1914, and like an old piece of machinery, it's died on us. The builder looked under the floor, and could not work out what was holding it up. The floor as well as the stumps need to be replaced.



One of the photos that the estate agent photographer took of 59 Keele Street. He didn't bother taking photos of the house's interior. Right of centre, there's that bloody big crack in the wall that started the whole exercise in changing houses. The big thingies in the foreground are compost bins. (Photo: Nelson Alexander Pty Ltd.)



Our New Home, outside and inside — before we get into it and fill it up. Note (above) all that concrete in front that Elaine would love to dig up and replace with native plants. Note (right) all those walls that need filling with books, CDs and other stuff. (Photo: Morrison Kleeman Pty Ltd.)

The roofing iron should be replaced. And that damned wall with its crack of doom must be replaced urgently. The house itself is not worth anything. Only the double block of land 3 km from the centre of Melbourne is worth its width in gold.

However, selling the block would still not buy us the sort of house we want in the inner suburbs. Our criteria were (a) a big house (at least four bedrooms, so that Elaine can have her own study), (b) on a big block (the standard Australian suburban quarter-acre), (c) nearby frequent public transport, i.e. train or tram, not merely a bus service, and (d) a price significantly lower than the selling price for our house, so that we can cover all the associated expenses of moving. By looking at real estates' Web sites, Elaine quickly found that we would have to head for the outer suburbs, or at least the outer-middle suburbs. Elaine's research pointed to a strip of suburbs to the north of us that met our criteria: Watsonia, Greensborough, Montmorency and Eltham.

After making the unthinkable decision — to move house — we consulted a couple of real estate firms. We settled on Nelson Alexander, because of four different recommendations from friends. Bill and Marek, the two agents in charge of our case, didn't hide any of the problems of selling our house and block. Our block is zoned Business 3, not Residential. A builder would not be allowed to build three residences on the site, but could build either three offices, or a warehouse, or possibly two offices and one residence. We would not get the amount we had first hoped for, but the agents suggested an amount that would enable us to go looking for houses in the outer suburbs. We would need to put up with five inspections of the house, plus opening the house on auction day. There was no guarantee that we would sell on the day. The selling campaign would cost us a not-so-small fortune. The campaign would be aimed at developers, not home buyers.

Our respect for the estate agent profession steadily improved during the selling process. The hoarding went up outside. It read: 'Let's be brutal. Knock me down and start again.' No pretence. The publicity photos showed the garden and block, not the interior of the house.

The campaign worked. Lots of people looked through the house and garden on inspection days. By the day of the auction, eight developers had shown interest, and had asked for and been sent the paperwork. We sat in the front room of the house while the auction took place.



The agents were in the kitchen, armed with the contract of sale. The developers turned up on the day, but they wouldn't bid. The agents had warned us that this might happen. The developers wanted the auction to fail, hoping during the next few weeks to put in bids that would force down the price.

On auction day, 15 May, only one developer made a bid, at a ridiculously low offer. The place was passed in. At that moment, another person rang the agents and asked that the auction be held up for twenty minutes. The person(s) was stuck in traffic. The people who had made the lone bid had to be offered first negotiating rights. They sat with the agents in the kitchen, while we still sat in the front room. We said that the minimum we could accept was our reserve. The person on the phone offered to pay our reserve. The people in the kitchen matched the offer. So we sold on the day. We collapsed in relief.

The buyer's obligation is to pay the deposit on the day, but the deposit does not become automatically available to the vendor for 30 days. From that amount the agent's commission plus the cost of the campaign were extracted before we received the deposit.

We now knew how much money we had to play with when house hunting. We had to allow for \$40,000 or more in basic costs incurred by changing houses (including Victorian Government stamp duty on the new house). We knew which suburbs to look at. The next weekend we set out. We had asked for a very long settlement date on 59 Keele Street, because a developer could take anything up to a year to get plans through Yarra Council, and because we expected to take three months to find a new house.

House hunting is an interesting but exhausting experience. It was exhausting because we were travelling by foot and public transport. On the second day we inspected houses, Carey Handfield helped us a lot by driving us to the first three houses we looked at. The next weekend, one of the agents drove us to several houses in Eltham. We walked back from those houses to the railway station in order to test the territory.

Greensborough is part of an arc of suburbs that were country areas when I was growing up in the fifties and sixties. On one side of the main road to Eltham there were isolated houses visible through the trees. Then, on the other side of the road were ranges covered in gum trees. These days, the undulating area south of the railway line is densely populated. The area on the north of the railway line is hilly, covered with trees, but also houses and roads. Many of these houses have wide-ranging views and scads of bird life, and the house



Harry (left) and Flicker (above). Harry is a bit smaller and thinner than Flicker, but is trying to be as big as his daddy. Both were thin starving strays six months ago. (Photos: Elaine Cochrane.)

blocks fall away dramatically into valleys. We looked at one excellent house in Briar Hill, not far from Greensborough station. This might be It, we thought, until we walked down the hill to the station. Imagine trying to lug a shopping jeep up that hill in ten years' time! Quickly we scratched whole sections of Greensborough and Eltham from our list.

We found the right house only a week later. It's a very large house, and it feels airy to be in it, despite its current turgid colour scheme (puce and tangerine). Settlement on the new house is in early August, whereas settlement at Keele Street is not until November. We have already arranged a bridging loan for the intervening months.

The house has four bedrooms, plus ample living areas, plus lockup garage (for storing stuff!), plus a large block, although perhaps not quite large enough for Elaine's gardening ambitions. She should be able to fit in a fair number of plants once we tear out the lawn and concrete. We hope we will have enough time to put in all the desired changes and minor renovations before we move in.

Meanwhile . . . fans call from San Francisco

Meanwhile, as all the above was going on, I was exchanging messages with overseas SF fans on the Internet, as I do regularly. There was much chat on Trufen about the recent, very successful Corflu. How could we ever stage a Corflu in Australia, if American and English fans could not afford to attend? How could I ever attend a Corflu, since I could never afford to attend? It seemed unlikely I would ever see many of my overseas friends again.

In the last week of April, Marty Cantor suggested, in a short message on Trufen, that there should be a fund to import me to next year's Corflu in San Francisco at the end of February. Robert Lichtman seconded the motion. Arnie and Joyce Katz volunteered to raise the money in America. Bill Wright became Australian administrator, and a bit later, Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey became British agents. They have all been amazingly efficient. In two months, they raised the \$A2500 air fare. They are hoping to raise the money for all my other expenses for a three-week trip.

Not for the first time in my life did I wonder 'why me?' I'm not a Social Jiant. I'm certainly not Australia's best

fan in any department. I don't have a Willis's or Tucker's fund of funny lines. Something more important than Bruce Gillespie is involved—a feeling that overseas fans should stick together, and make contacts at small, friendly fannish conventions rather than at gigantic worldcons. Not that I would turn down the chance of attending another overseas world convention, but Corflu—the fanzine fans' convention—seems a lot more important. Also, the following weekend I will have the chance to attend Potlatch, the literary convention for fanzine fans, as it will also be held in San Francisco.

Meanwhile . . . read me, read me

Meanwhile, local fan Irwin Hirsh volunteered to edit an anthology of my best writing. He did this very quickly (since he has access to all 5500 pages that he says I've published since 1968), and *The Incomplete Bruce Gillespie* is now available. I've included the publicity material in this magazine. Victorian Science Fiction Conventions, the organisation that remained after Ausiecon 3 in 1999, donated the whole \$400 needed to print the first 110 copies, most of which have sold already.

Meanwhile . . . 36 years late, I achieve High Office

Meanwhile, another Internet discussion (a great barney prompted by David Grigg's dire need to find a new Official Bloody Editor (OBE) for ANZAPA and my suggestion that ANZAPA operate the same way as Acnestis) led to me volunteering for the first time in its 36-year history to become OBE of that august organisation. David Grigg handed over the paperwork—spreadsheet system—in the middle of July.

Meanwhile . . . black cats get lucky

Meanwhile, the all-black daddy of the kittens Elaine took care of last year moved in. (You remember the five kittens Elaine raised from when they were three weeks' old, don't you? They've all gone to great homes, and have grown into hefty fabulous furbeings.) From being a very

timid skinny cat with lacklustre fur, so timid that we called him Flicker, he has become a sooky fat lustrous-furred cat who sits on people's knees. It's nice to have a cat who appreciates his own good fortune.

His black-and-white son from a previous litter, who was also on the skids, moved in, but not completely. We called him Harry. He kept moving around the streets of the immediate area, only appearing for meals, and on 6 May he disappeared. Since we knew he was crossing busy Wellington Street regularly, we assumed he had been killed by a car. However, six weeks later the organisation that manages cat identification (through microchipping) rang us. Our cat Harry had been identified in Werribee, about 40 km away from Collingwood! Elaine's sister Margaret very generously drove all the way from Bundoora to Werribee to pick him up. As soon as Harry entered the house, he knew where he was. And this time he was *home*. The other cats looked up, more or less saying, 'Hi, Harry; you're back', and went back to sleep. Flicker was very glad to see his friend Harry again; Flicker had been pretty bored by the three divas (Polly, Sophie and Violet), as all they do is spit at him. Now Flicker has somebody to chase around the garden and rassle with, and Harry (so far) has not been roaming too far.

Meanwhile . . . I become unretired

Meanwhile, paying work has resumed. I am no longer involuntarily retired — for now. My despair in February over the complete lack of work was because of the non-appearance of a manuscript that eventually arrived in the middle of June. I've had quite a few indexes to edit, plus an organisationally difficult book on visual art, plus a pleasantly boring academic textbook for a new client.

Meanwhile . . . the social whirl whirls

Meanwhile, we have been deluged with lots of social activity. Continuum is now an annual winter convention in Melbourne, and Continuum 2 was just as as successful as Continuum 1. I enjoyed being on the Philip K. Dick panel with Jon Swaby, Alison Barton and Andrew Macrae. The Ian Mond Panel was the funniest panel I've seen since the great days of Bangsund, Foyster and Harding panels in the late sixties. Somehow I found myself as the least likely person ever to sit on a Sports Panel. And I was flattered to be asked by Sarah Endacott to launch the latest issue of her fiction magazine *Orb*. Beware —



Luminaries at Continuum 2, June 2004: (l to r) Adam Browne, Sarah Endacott, Claire McKenna, Wendy Waring. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)

I'm becoming addicted to delivering public rants.

Tuesday night gatherings, a bright idea of Ian Mond's, still burble on, and some of us also eat out at Cafe Beelzebub the same night. The Nova Mob, now moved to the upstairs room at the North Carlton Library, continues as ever, with attendances remaining high. Friday night gatherings at the Australia Food Hall continue, as do dinners at Ciao, also on Friday night. The Melbourne SF Club has an enthusiastic committee. They were nice enough to offer some of we ancient beings Lifetime Memberships of the Club.

Merv Binns celebrated his 70th birthday barbecue in July. Dick Jenssen had his 69th birthday at the same occasion. Cedric Rowley, another survivor of the great early days of the Melbourne SF Club, also had his 70th birthday. Most of the other people at the gathering are also in the sixties. It was nice to feel like a young fella again. These days people have started saying 'sir' to me in the street, and the nice young fans at Continuum 2 were downright deferential. How things have changed since the 1970s.

Meanwhile . . . SFC and TMR will stay in print

That's a brave thing to write. At the beginning of March, when I had had one and a half months' work in the previous five months, it seemed impossible ever to publish print editions of my main fanzines again. I told everyone that I was going all-electronic. The magazines would appear only in PDF format on efanzines.com. *You're not going all-electronic*, you said, and sent quite a bit of money towards the next issue of *SFC* or *TMR* (or even *Steam Engine Time*).

But it's still the case that an issue of one of my magazines costs several thousand dollars to print and another thousand dollars to post. I will probably let everyone know that the PDF file is available, then send out print copies only to people who have sent money, traded paper fanzines, correspondence, artwork or other contributions. Some kind people have already said they are willing to download the next issue instead of receiving it through the post.

Maureen and Paul have been far too busy to think about *Steam Engine Time* for some time, but Jan Stinson from Minnesota has offered to become joint editor with me and get the show on the road again.

Meanwhile . . . meanwhile????

Almost none of the events just described could have been anticipated in mid February this year. So I don't want to predict anything for the rest of the year. The schedule is to move house in September or October, settle in, then I leave for San Francisco in the last week of February next year. I hope the Paying Work continues, so I can produce another magazine soon.

All I can do confidently at the moment is to thank Arnie and Joyce, and Bill, and Mark and Claire for all their work and amazing success; and Elaine for making everything else possible; and everybody who has contributed to the BBB Fund, or bought *TIBG*, or put up with me rabbiting on over dinner. The serendipity of fandom and kindness of fans is astonishing.

— Bruce Gillespie, 21 July 2004

The Bring Bruce Bayside Fan Fund

The Bring Bruce Bayside Fund (BBB) was hatched in the week after a most successful Corflu, the annual fanzine fans convention, held in Las Vegas in March 2004. In the course of a discussion in Trufen, an Internet-based fannish chat group, it was decided to invite Australia's **Bruce Gillespie** to attend next year's Corflu/Potlatch pairing at San Francisco in February/March 2005. A special fan fund was set up to raise funds for the purpose.

Requests for information, donations, and messages of support should be sent to:

Arnie & Joyce Katz Fund Convenors	Bill Wright Australian Administrator	Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer British Agents
JoyceWorley1@cox.net	bilw@iprimus.com.au	banana@fishlifter.demon.co.uk
PMB 152, 330 S. Decatur Blvd. Las Vegas, NV 89107 USA	Unit 4 1 Park Street St Kilda West VIC 3182 AUSTRALIA	14 Northway Road Croydon Surrey CR0 6JE UNITED KINGDOM

Information about the fund, including all the BBB Bulletins issued to date, can be accessed at www.efanzines.com and www.users.bigpond.net.au/hirsh/bbb/bbb.html.

Who is Bruce Gillespie?



Bruce in 1973

Melbourne's Bruce Gillespie joined fandom in 1968 and started his best known fanzine, *SF Commentary* in 1969. The first eighteen issues appeared in its first two years. In 1972 he won the first of many Ditmar (Australian SF achievement) awards and received his first Hugo nomination for *SF Commentary*. His other fanzines include *The Metaphysical Review* and *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*. He is co-editor of the universally acclaimed intercontinental fanzine *Steam Engine Time*.



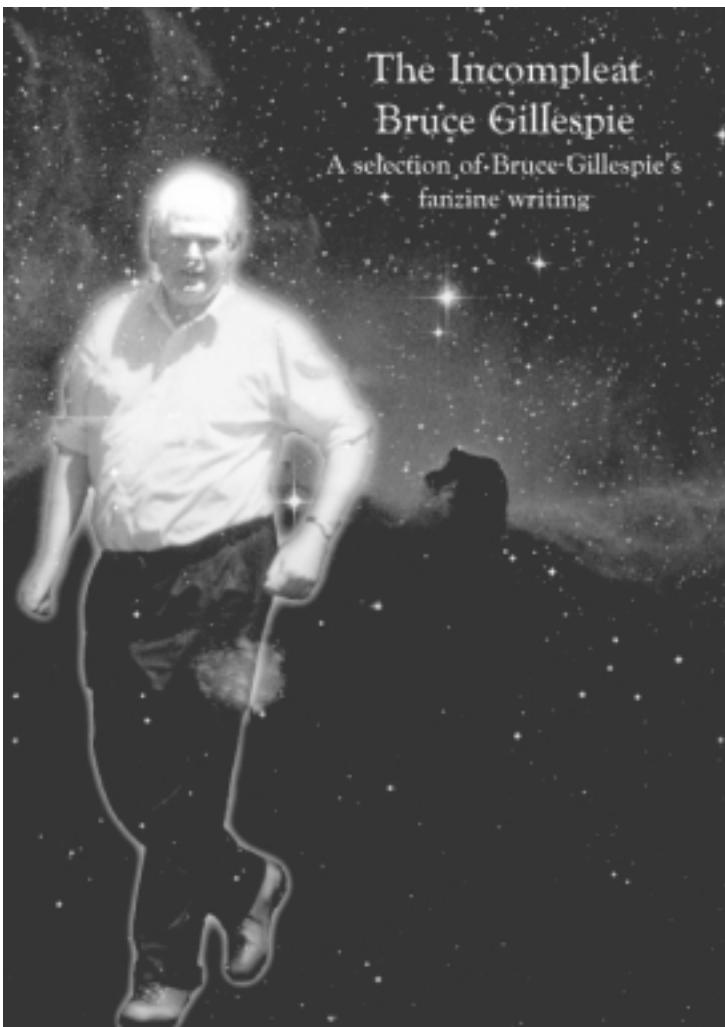
Bruce today

Bruce spent four months in North America in 1973, attending Torcon II (the 31st Worldcon) where Australia won the right to hold the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne in 1975. Then he went across to Britain for all of January 1974. On his return to Australia he met his life mate Elaine Cochrane (they were married in 1979) and established himself as a freelance editor. In 1975 he formed Norstrilia Press with Carey Handfield and, later, Rob Gerrard. Their first book was *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. He coordinated a successful writers' workshop at the 1975 Aussiecon conducted by Professional Guest of Honour Ursula K Le Guin, where he wrote short stories of his own. Bruce was Fan Guest of Honour at Aussiecon Three (the 57th Worldcon) in 1999.

United States \$10.00

Australia \$10.00

United Kingdom £5.00



Available at last

The Incompleat Bruce Gillespie

A selection of Bruce
Gillespie's fanzine writings

Edited by Irwin Hirsh

Published by
the Bring Bruce Bayside (BBB)
Fund

with the aid of a generous grant from the
Victorian Science Fiction Conventions
organisation.

Find out why Bruce Gillespie has won sixteen Ditmar Awards and three William Atheling Awards and been nominated three times for the Hugo Award.

Since 1968, Bruce Gillespie has been writing some of the science fiction world's finest personal articles, reviews and critical articles. This is the first collection of the best of them.

Irwin Hirsh, himself one of the best fan writers and publishers in Australia, has gathered his favourite Gillespie articles in one 40-page volume.

Proceeds from the sales help to fund an air fare so that Bruce can attend Corflu (the fanzine fans' convention) in San Francisco, February 2005. This is the BBB (Bring Bruce Bayside) Fund, convened by Arnie and Joyce Katz, and administered in Australia by Bill Wright.

Australia: Send your \$10 to Bill Wright, Administrator of the Fund, at Continuum, or send your money to him at Unit 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda West, VIC 3182.

UK and Europe: Send your £5 to UK Administrators, Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE, United Kingdom.

USA and Canada: Send your \$10 to Arnie and Joyce Katz, Fund Convenors, PMB 152, 330 S. Decatur Blvd, Las Vegas, NV 89107, USA

First nights

I'm not quite sure what has happened recently to my public image (certainly nothing to do with anything I've done). Twice in the last year I've been invited to deliver a launch speech. Even more astonishingly, I was asked to launch an exhibition of artworks. The artworks are a lot better than my speech. The *Fever* exhibition ran from 7 to 20 November 2003 at the Samuel Gallery, Malthouse, South Melbourne.

Inquiries about Joe Szabo's art: 29 Bessazile Avenue, Forest Hill VIC 3131; ph: (03) 9877 9948.

Launch speech:

FEVER An exhibition of works by Joseph F. Szabo

I am that fabled person: the one who says he knows nothing about art, but knows what he likes. There is no justification for me standing here launching this exhibition except for the fact that Joe Szabo asked me to do so. I have almost no connections in the art world, and have almost no art on our walls at home — mainly because the walls are covered in floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcases.

Let me tell you why I *think* I am here.

In 1984 I began to work for Macmillan Publishers in Melbourne as an in-house freelance, a nice position that was invented for me by Brian McCurdy, the fabled head of secondary textbook publishing at Macmillan, who has now retired. Brian trained me up from a raw editor until he could give me the manuscript of the book and I could take it away and return with everything ready for the printer. Secondary textbooks feature photographs, technical illustrations and filler cartoons. By great good fortune, one of the first illustrators I worked with was a young chap named Joe Szabo. He was given the task of producing several hundred drawings for each of a series of volumes on a subject neither of us knew much about and cared even less about: physical education. Joe had to research every one of the drawings he did for those early books in the series, although later both of us were able to recycle much of what we produced in the mid 1980s.

I soon discovered that Joe was also very good at the cartoons that are needed to fill inconvenient spaces in page layouts. These take a fair bit of skilled imagination: not only does the cartoonist have to have a sense of humour, but he or she has to grasp enough of the book's subject to guess what will be funny to students of the subject.

This was a rapid learning experience for both of us, but we found we were becoming very weary from producing vast tomes purely to make a living, especially as we weren't greatly interested in the subject matter. At some point I must have talked to Joe what actually interested me — the magazines about fantasy and science fiction that I have been publishing since 1969. Joe said he was also interested in these fields, and had



Joe Szabo. (Photo: Szabo family.)

occasionally tried his hand at doing full-scale fantasy paintings.

I thought little about this until a few years ago, when Joe sent me on computer file some of his smaller-scale pen-and-ink illustrations, much in the style of 'Specimen' drawings, numbers 16 to 31 in the catalogue. I found these drawings both amusing and superbly crafted. They seemed to be illustrations of other-worldly creatures, rather different from earth creatures, and definitely not ones I would want to meet on my visit to far Centaurus.

I only gained an idea of what Joe was really up to when recently I saw his large-scale paintings. They are so original that I cannot find any art in the reference books with which to compare them.

Let's go back in time a little to put his work in context. For many years, fantasy illustrators made a living by painting covers or doing line drawings for the pulp magazines — the American magazines that were literally printed on pulp paper. The bright colours of the originals almost disappeared into that paper, and the line art could not be too subtle or it too would disappear into the pulp paper. The situation was not much better when paperback book cover work came along. Illustrators from the Golden Age of fantasy, such as Richard Powers,



Joseph F. Szabo: Retina Burn.

Hannes Bok and Virgil Finlay, yearned to have their work more widely recognised, but this seldom happened. Both Hannes Bok and Mike Hinge, a more recent figure, died in poverty, the walls of their apartments covered with their unsold paintings.

Such fantasy artists worked to commission, usually being given a couple of days to do an entire painting to illustrate the lead story of a magazine. Today's great fantasy artists, such as Leo and Diane Dillon, would still see themselves as primarily the illuminators of the work of fiction writers. Even *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* talks about art only in terms of illustrating the work of fantasy writers.

Joe Szabo, I believe, is actually doing what a fantasy artist should do—painting images from inside his mind, not images from some exterior, agreed-upon fantasy world. You might have noticed that there are three paintings with 'Fever' in the title. In his notes to the first 'Fever' painting, Joe writes: 'As a child,' he says, 'suffering from the onslaught of a nasty cold accompanied by the fearful fever, I would lie in bed at nights hallucinating. A large undefined red object would pulsate in the distance and suddenly appear right up against my eyes. Some dreams can last a lifetime.'

Well, we all have dreams, but few of us can dredge them out of our heads and give them life in the way that Joe Szabo can. It's not even as if these figures from his dreams are constructions dictated by theories of psychopathology, as happened with many of the Surrealists. Neither are they just illustrations from an as-yet unwritten work of fantasy. No, here is something unique, an entire populated inner world.

What is the nature of this world? I can only offer brief clues.

One clue comes from Lewis Carroll. At the beginning of *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice yearns desperately to look through the looking glass, where everything just beyond her view might be the opposite from what she

knows from her everyday existence. Magically she travels into Looking Glass Land, one of the most haunting dream landscapes in all literature. You might remember that, in order to reach the top of the hill in Looking Glass Land, she must walk in the opposite direction. At the end of the book, Lewis Carroll offers a haunting little poem, one verse of which reads: 'Still she haunts me, phantomwise./Alice moving under skies/Never seen by waking eyes.' Like Alice, Joe Szabo can perceive territory 'never seen by waking eyes'.

What does Joe find in that inward world? As you can see from looking around the exhibition, they are very biological shapes. Not products of technology, but overflowing with an unknown form of life. They are not creatures from outer space, but creatures from inner space. A clue comes from *Schild's Ladder*, the latest novel by reclusive Western Australian author Greg Egan. In that novel, an anti-universe comes into existence in our universe, relentlessly swelling inside ours and swallowing entire planets, then galaxies. The intrepid explorers who enter the anti-universe find that is not made of our kind of space, empty space with its scattered suns and planets dotted around it, but a space entirely filled up with matter! That's the feeling I get from Joe Szabo's paintings: that they are merely the tiniest part of an filled-up, richly coloured personal universe that he has barely begun to explore.

Joe offers a nice clue to his methods and intentions in the painting 'Fungal Interlude'. As he says in his catalogue note to the painting, in his father's old shed, his creations are lying there thinking and waiting for Joe to release them.

In other paintings, you will notice the extraordinary skies. To me, they don't look like the skies of conventional landscapes, but feel like the curtains of a vast room that is Joe's universe.

I can commend all these works to you, although my special favourites are the ink and pencil pieces that Joe Szabo calls his 'specimens'.

May this be the first of many successful exhibitions for him. I declare the *Fever* exhibition open.

— Bruce Gillespie, 7 November 2003

Joseph F. Szabo: The Keeper.



Greetings, Earthlings!

Launch of Orb 6, 13 June 2004, at Continuum

The members of the Aussiecon 3 committee started something terrible when they got me on my feet to deliver the Fan Guest of Honour speech on the first night of the convention. They awoke in me an itch for standing up and flapping my arms about and delivering silly monologues in a loud voice. Sarah Endacott, editor of *Orb*, one of the major SF magazines/anthologies in Australia today, took advantage of this addiction and asked me to launch the latest issue at Continuum, the annual Melbourne convention held at the Cato Centre, Melbourne, June 2004. She fed my growing addiction to public speaking by ensuring me an audience: all the people waiting to enter the main ballroom for the Maskabolo. If you survived my speech, subscribe by sending \$45 to Sarah Endacott, PO Box 1621, South Preston, VIC 3072. Make cheques out to 'ORB'.

Greetings, Earthlings!

At last I have the photograph to prove that I am not one of you, but merely a visitor from the stars.

[Holds up cover of *The Incompleat Bruce Gillespie*.]

For years and years I've been stuck on this ghodforsaken planet, way off in the boondocks of the universe, on a planet in a solar system so small that it only got on the star maps after I discovered it. And then they made me Chief Watcher of the place! I just hope the superannuation payment in a few thousand years makes it all worthwhile.

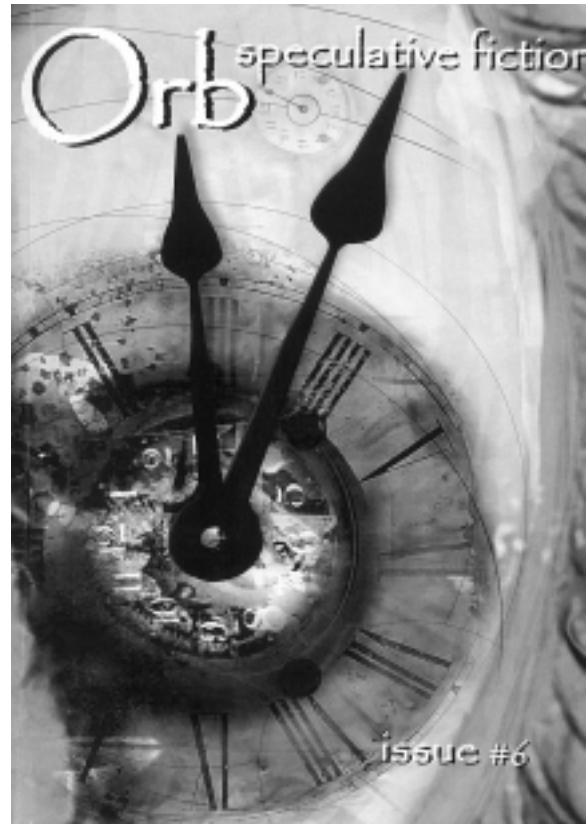
I can't tell you who They are, these people who pay me a paltry salary for staying here. They are hard taskmasters. They assigned me to send back cultural artefacts. Cultural artefacts! From the most isolated, non-important planet in the universe! They laughed when I sent back the *Mona Lisa*. They yawned when they read Dickens' collected works. They sent all the books of Hemingway back to me in a bag. They wrote: 'Stick 'em in the files and let 'em moulder for another 2000 years.'

Only one thing from Earth has ever interested those dolts back at home. It's these little travel magazines and books that you call 'science fiction'. I even scored a personal tendril-written note from my boss. After she read the first few issues of *Astounding* I sent her, she wrote: 'So when are these guys — Asimov and Clarke and Kuttner and all that crew — going to show up here for drinks? Have we got a few nice galaxies to show them!'

It's been the same ever since 1942. I send them Salvador Dalis and Jackson Pollocks and Andy Warhols, sheet music by Shostakovich and Lennon and McCartney, films by Orson Welles, and now they don't even unwrap the stuff. Just send it straight back.

But send them these little travel magazines, which for some reason you call fiction, and They send a flood of u-mails (universe-mails). They want me to send them on to the science fiction authors. You should have been here *last week*, they say, 'Those three moons rose together all at the one moment.'

One thing always puzzled them. Where were *Australia*'s little travel magazines? All during the fifties there were only a few. When I sent them back to headquarters, they sent them back to me for the archives. In the sixties



Cover painting by Renee Dillon.

there was a magazine called *Vision of Tomorrow*. Nobody at home got excited about that, but they liked the pictures. I sent them a few books and magazines from the seventies and eighties. They liked some of the stuff from Norstrilia Press and Cory & Collins, and from *Omega* and *Aphelion*.

In the 1990s, I started to get nice little notes back about the Australian stuff. 'That *Aurealis* and *Eidolon*! Those books from *Aphelion* and *MirrorDanse* and *Ticonderonga* and *Agog* Press! At last you've got a travel industry going.'

They really took notice when I sent them copies of *Orb*. 'More! More! When's the next one?' my boss keeps



Bruce Gillespie pretending to be a speechmaker pretending to be an alien pretending to be a human. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)

writing. 'Somebody took my copy out in the methane atmosphere and it just went kerflupp and disappeared.'

My job is not easy. At home, everybody's a critic. I sent them the latest issue of *Orb*, and they wrote back: 'Where's some stuff about *our* neck of the universe? They're starting to write a bit too much about Earth.'

I wrote back saying: 'Didn't you look at the cover of *Orb* 6? It shows a big clock. This issue is all about time travelling.' Only *some* star visitors can time travel. That's what gives us the advantage over everybody else in the universe.

So *Orb* has leapt to the frontline of the time travel magazine industry. In the new issue, I like that report by Cat Sparks on your future. It's called 'Home by the Sea'. Just how it's going to be on Earth, folks. Wet and deadly. Read all about it in *Orb*. That's when I will start packing my bags for home.

The folks back home really liked Alinta Thornton's 'The Healing Soup of Chu-Chou Village'. 'Earth people are very strange,' they wrote back, 'but now we know they were even stranger way back then in China.'

They still like *Orb* for the travel stories about places they've actually visited. There's Lee Battersby's 'Tales of Nireym'. Really classy report about how the whole of society began change on Nireym. I used to visit that planet a lot before I was stuck here on Earth.

Orb 6 has that Andrew Macrae story with the very long name: 'The Superb Grace of the Steel Beam, the Delicacy of Reinforced Concrete'. 'Cut the name in two,' wrote back somebody from headquarters, 'and double the length of the story'. Buildings that run around the city. I've visited that planet. We hopped out of our space truck, thought there were no people in the city, and turned on the loud music. The buildings started dancing to the music. Only a few of us escaped alive.

One thing puzzles all of us about the latest issue of *Orb*. What about these pieces about people who don't seem to know *where* they are? At home they're scratching their heads about Chuck Mackenzie's 'Retail Therapy'. I've been on this planet long enough to know where Chuck's story teller *really* is. They are really intrigued



Orb contributor/Clarion South graduate at work — Claire McKenna (photograph by Cat Sparks). But this was supposed to be a fun-filled SF convention!

by the idea of seeming to be in one place, yet actually occupying another place. The same goes for Kim Westwood's 'Tripping over the Light Fantastic'. You people in the audience will guess what's really happening to the dance student in this story, but They are still arguing about what it all means. The same goes for Kurt Von Trojan's 'Don't Mess with Me' and Deborah Biancotti's 'Cinnamon Gate'. The folks at home can't quite grasp the idea of being dead and alive at the same time. These stories will start whole new stream of philosophy at home.

Sorry I don't have time to talk about everything in this issue — the stories, the art and articles and reviews. After all, I have to answer all the u-mails from friends who are demanding copies of *Orb* 7. The only thing I'm afraid of is that the folks at home will get so interested by *Orb* and *Aurealis* and all those other great Australian travel publications they will want to send more representatives here. There'll be millions of them drinking your drinks and sitting on the beach. Then I'll be downgraded or have to go home. Before that happens, buy your copy of *Orb* 6, drink up, and then let's head off to the Maskobalo.

— **Bruce Gillespie, 13 June 2004**



Luminaries at the Orb launch (l to r): Cat Sparks, Brendan Duffy, Tracey Rolfe, Matt Chrulew. (Photo: Cat Sparks' camera; I'm not sure of the photographer.)

