

# Scratch Pad 57

January 2005



---

# Scratch Pad 57

---

Based on *\*brg\**, for the **December 2004** mailing of ANZAPA, and *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*, for the **January 2005** mailing of Acnestis

by **Bruce Gillespie**, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088. Phone: 61-3-9435 7786. Email: gandc@mira.net.

Photos: Dick Jenssen: Front cover: 'Tiger Stripes', showing Polly facing our back door and Sophie facing the camera; the door from the main living room looks into the cat-enclosed part of the garden; Back cover: Polly at rest, facing the same door; pp. 2, 3 and 4: Yvonne Rousseau; pp. 5 and 6: Dick Jenssen. Printed by Copy Place, 315 Bourke Street, Melbourne.

---

## Contents

---

2 A HALF-MOVING STORY by Bruce Gillespie

8 THE JOURNEYS THEY TOOK by Bruce Gillespie

---

## A half-moving story

---

Anybody who moves house, voluntarily, more than once every twenty years is a masochist.

We made the right decision — we keep telling ourselves — but *things might well have gone badly*. Although things have gone well most of the time, moving house is a form of long-term mental anguish that nobody could wish for.

The house move went well. That's because of Elaine's brilliant planning strategies — and a lot of luck at the right time. But even a smooth house move falls in that category of critical personal events usually typified by divorce, computer meltdown or radical surgery.

As I described in *The Year of Living Frantically*, after we had sold our Collingwood house, Elaine looked at the Internet real estate Web sites, typed in our criteria (right price, large house, large block, good public transport, good access to shops and vet), and found that only a small part of the Melbourne metropolitan area fulfilled all our criteria. It's an area of the northern suburbs, stretching from Watsonia to Eltham. The train service becomes fairly infrequent past Eltham, so we ruled out suburbs such as Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge. Much of the area is still semi-rural, although some parts were settled before World War II. Parts of it are very hilly, and we quickly ruled out buying a house in areas with streets steep enough to require traction footwear.

The good and the bad luck was that we looked for only two and a half weeks before finding in Greensborough the house we wanted. We didn't need the three months everybody told us would be the minimum time to find a house. So how would we reconcile settlement times? We had to buy the new house (on 4 June, with a settlement date in September) long before we would be paid for Keele Street (15 November). The answer: bank bridging finance, at an appalling interest rate — just one of the many unexpected expenses involved in changing houses.

Elaine had planned that there should be a wide price gap between the sale price for Keele Street and the

buying price for the new house. We needed every penny of the difference. If you think that moving house means simply changing houses, you are wrong, at least in the State of Victoria, which charges stamp duty on the price of the new house. If you want the best possible price, add to that an estate agent's expensive campaign. Add lawyer's fees, the interest on the bridging loan, a building inspection fee, and many other outlays that have nothing to do with actually renovating and moving into the new house.

Follow those expenses with all the costs of actually moving us and our stuff from one place to another. The Greensborough house needed new carpet and a new



Why we moved. Just look at the top of my office window at 59 Keele Street. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau, 8 June 2004.)

coat of paint on the internal walls. It needed a complete upgrade of the electrical system, plus new phone lines. The gutters needed replacing.

We also needed a cat enclosure for our five cats, to protect the local bird life from the cats, and the cats from the local dogs (Harry was certain to try exploring the area). Also, the Banyule Council officially discourages more than two cats per household, so we had to make a good case for our immigrant five. The enclosure is a marvel of modern technology: a tough plastic/wire mesh that surrounds two areas outside the back doors. One enclosure is for Violet (who doesn't get along well with the other cats), and the other is for the other four. That cost a lot. (Thanks to John and Truda Straede for putting us on to the company that could supply the enclosure.)

If it had been left to me, we never would have moved house. 59 Keele Street would have crumbled or crashed around us. Without Elaine's planning, none of the vital work could have done. She had the good sense to get the aid of Harjinder to supervise every stage of the operation. Harjinder is the partner of the person Elaine rings arranging to edit yet another giant maths book for one of her main clients. Harjinder ran a top Indian restaurant when we first met him, but he gave that away and is now a renovator. He enjoys his work, and he knows a network of people who do a good job. He completed most of the necessary work before we moved in. He did his best to make Elaine's plans run with absolute smoothness.

A week before the move, Harjinder had organised the painting of the house interior, the upgrade of the electrical system and replacement of lights, the installation of the new telephone system, and much else beside.

A week before the move, he had taken two days off from our job, confident that he would have everything but the bookshelves finished before our moving day. He needed to build a new fence at his own house. Instead, a trench gave way, he fell in front of a bobcat, and injured his foot badly. He suffered much pain and discomfort, and was out of action for six weeks. He hadn't broken his foot, but it has been mangled a bit.

We had until 15 November to move out of Keele Street. Elaine picked a moving date — 20 October — and worked toward that date. She packed boxes non-stop for three weeks, trying to fit infinite numbers of boxes into the zero space at Keele Street. Lots of friends brought around empty boxes. Murray and Natalie, Justin and Jenny, and Dick were some of the box-donators. I was trying to earn a bit of money. I finished preparing an index two days before the move. Then I had 36 hours to pack everything that was left in my workroom.

We finished packing at 3 a.m. on the night before the move. At 5.30 a.m. we had to get up, as the movers were due to arrive at 6.30 a.m. They arrived at 6.40. Two blokes moved most of the boxes while one bloke packed the LPs. 'Hmmm,' he kept saying, although he was in his early twenties. 'You've got some great LPs here.' The removalists brought some 'port-a- robes', converted boxes on which we could hang the clothes from the wardrobes. Everything was packed in their giant van by 10.30 a.m.

The company (Strack Removals of Airport West — write that name down in your diary) provided a car to take us out to Greensborough so we could open up before the truck arrived. We beat it by only a few minutes. The day had become hot, but nothing stopped these blokes. Everything was unpacked by 2.30. No breakages, no hassles. Then we had to work out the location of our bits and pieces and find places to put

them.

Elaine's planning of the move was so accurate that we were able to locate almost everything essential on the first day. (We remembered the horrors of the move to Keele Street 26 years before; we couldn't even find the most basic kitchen utensils for about a day.) Some things eluded us, though, often little things had been packed at the last moment as filler for some large box. The label on the large box would list only the main contents, not the filler, but it's the filler items we would be scrounging for. It took nearly two days to find the cables for Elaine's computer so she could get back in business. One set of items, packed right at the last moment, did not appear for a week. The cat medicines turned up last. But most essential items turned up quickly.

There has been one critical difference between this move and that to Keele Street in 1979. Back then, our builder had already installed the inbuilt bookshelves. This time, none of them has been built. That means most things are still in boxes, waiting for those bookshelves. We don't feel moved in; at least, I don't. Because the new house had one wall of shelves with doors, we were able to unpack the LPs on the second night. But the CDs and books are still mainly unavailable.

At 8 p.m. on the day we moved, our vet and his wife brought over the five cats, who had stayed there overnight. We showed them the cat tray and the door into the cat enclosure. Sophie hid behind boxes, but purred when we talked to her. Violet now had three rooms to herself instead of two, and she had her own private *en suite* instead of having to use the same cat tray as (sniff!)



House in progress. Elaine's new study before the carpet went in, and before some repairs to the en suite (through door). The three boxes are the new telephone connection and power points. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau, 23 September 2004.)



## Before we moved in

Here are some photos that Yvonne Rousseau took of our new house on 23 September, before we moved in.



Our big back room before the new carpet was laid. The large door looks out into the cat enclosure part of the back garden.



It's hard to see the cat enclosure, but it's there. It's not supposed to be visible, only effective at stopping cat escapologists. This was after the concrete was dug up but before Elaine began rooting out plants and lawn. Eventually all will be replaced by a native plants garden. The big thingies in the background are the large compost bins, which Elaine brought with her from Keele Street. The plaster swan came with the house.

the other cats. After all these years, now she has a real home and her own comfortable chair at night.

Harry panicked. You might remember that in the middle of the year he had disappeared for six weeks, and had been discovered at Werribee. When we got him back from Werribee, he decided for the first time that our place at Keele Street really was Home. Now he had been removed to a new house, and it wasn't Home. Right people, wrong place. He did his best to get out of the house and go home to Collingwood. We went to bed. Harry really panicked, banging on all the doors. Eventually Elaine got up, slept on the settee, and was surrounded by all the cats except Violet. That was enough reassurance for Polly, Sophie and Flicker, but Harry still has days when the only idea in his limited cranium is Escape. We're not sure that he still wants to head off to Collingwood, but he wants to see all of Greensborough. He doesn't know about the large dogs next door and over the back fence.

Harjinder had been injured before he had had time to finish some small things that desperately needed doing. One was the middle door. It divides the two halves of the house: Violet's, and everybody else's. The second night, Harry found he could push it open. If he could push it open, the others could follow. Mayhem threatened. We tried door jambs in the door, but they didn't work well. We pushed the heaviest box against the door. This meant that we could not go through the door either. We had to go the long way round, through the sliding door into the living room, instead of going down the other corridor. As a result, we've both lost several kilograms in weight since we moved to Greensborough.

Fortunately Harjinder has been back in action in the last two weeks, making the house much more livable than it was.

We've had shocks and surprises since we moved here. The shocks first.

It is amazing how difficult it is to persuade people that we really have moved. When we asked for final readings on a range of services, and gave the new address, the final statement usually was sent to Keele Street.

In order to switch off the security system, Elaine had to meet the bloke from Chubb at Keele Street. He was there for a few minutes, turned off a this and that, discovered the battery had long since burnt out on the transformer, and charged some vast sum for this 'service'.

We needed a final reading on the gas meter at Keele Street. It is behind the house, so I had to be there to let in the meter reader. The gas company would not make a definite appointment. 'Any time between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.,' said the person on the other end of the line. So the low point of the entire moving process was leaving Greensborough that morning at 7 a.m. to make sure I got to Keele Street at 8 a.m. I then had to sit as best I could in an empty house, hoping somebody would arrive before 6 that night. I was never so glad to hear anything as I was to hear the door bell ring at 10 a.m. With the meter finally read, I could wander up to Smith Street, get cakes and coffee, and hit all my favourite places in Collingwood and Carlton.

The first time we visited Keele Street after moving, there were two parcels stuffed into the letter box and another on the verandah. We went to Fitzroy Mail Centre to find out why they had not been redirected although we had paid a small fortune for a year's mail redirection. 'Oh, we don't redirect *parcels*,' said the person on the counter; 'we only redirect regular mail!' I had visions of

losing hundreds of dollars of review copies of books. I blew up. The counter assistant went away. 'The parcel deliveries are directed by the controller of parcels contractors,' he said, 'but if you write a letter to him, he will probably redirect the parcels as well.' I wonder how many SF fans throughout Australia have lost parcels because they did not know this vital piece of information, which appears nowhere on the documents we signed in order to get mail redirection. The parcels are now being redirected, but I keep hoping the SF editors at Gollancz, Allen & Unwin and a few others read my Change of Address letter real soon now.

On the hottest night of the summer so far, I was attacked by the Greensborough monster! I was sitting around in shorts and nothing else all night, with the back door open to try to cool down the place. Next morning I was covered in insect bites. I didn't see my attacker. They weren't mosquito bites. They weren't flea bites. Elaine was bitten once, whereas I itched for a week.

Greensborough itself is both a plus and a minus of the move. It really is green, although heavily settled. There are innumerable parks and walking tracks as well as tree-lined streets. While the train service remains fast and frequent, Greensborough remains close to the city. The people are friendly. Not only do strangers say hello in the street, but all the neighbours took the trouble to meet Elaine, while she was gardening and mowing lawns, before we moved here.

I still haven't got used to plaza/mall shopping. This phenomenon didn't exist when I left suburbia in 1973. The only example I had seen in action, a shopping atrium in Houston in 1974, was benign compared to the Greensborough Shopping Plaza. We were used to walking across Wellington Street to pick up the milk, newspapers and snacks. There are no traditional small shops or milk bars in Greensborough. The plaza has absorbed most retail activity. The plaza has three levels that have been carved out of the highest hill south of the railway line. We have to visit the local Safeway just to buy milk. Even the newsagent and post office are in the plaza rather than on the main street. Main Street has several restaurants that look interesting, plus a hardware store, and a very good fruit shop and a good butcher, both with a wider range than we were used to in Collingwood, and much cheaper prices. But there is no little store where you can drop in to pick up a Coke or a carton of milk.

I've lost weight, I suspect, because Greensborough has few cake and coffee places that fit my inner-suburban standards. I've tried most of the ones in the plaza. Most of them have weak coffee and uninteresting cakes. Only one place, up on the hill away from the plaza, reminds us of our favourite place in Collingwood. It's called Urban Grooves. It has drinkable coffee and good cakes, though we haven't tried the meals yet. We've been several times to Linh Linh, a top Vietnamese restaurant that moved out here from Heidelberg. One Sunday night, Lucy, Julian, Justin, Jenny and little Lucy came out to dine with us at Linh Linh. Cheap; very good Vietnamese food. One night I tried a place that just calls itself Italian Restaurant. Not bad, and I was lucky to get a seat.

There are no good bookshops here, no good CD shops, and the only source of DVDs is a small DVD-Ezy in the plaza. That's the main reason why I haven't felt at home here yet. However, recently I took the train to Eltham (two stations up the line), which has the Eltham Book Store, a fine example of boutique bookselling, every book obviously picked for what is seen as a cluey audience. For many years, Eltham has been known as

## After we moved in . . .

On 25 November, Dick Jensen, and Bruno and Keren Kautzner visited us. The expedition included much hard work in digging up the many plants that Elaine does not want because they are Not Native Plants. She has been giving plants to people who will visit and take them off our hands. Dick Jensen took the digital photos.



(Top) Elaine supervises as Keren and Bruno Kautzner dig up their booty from the side garden.



(Right) Greensborough digitally enhanced: Bruce and Bruno consult under the tree in the property over the back fence. Using the wonders of PhotoShop, Dick has actually enlarged the tree's width. The right-hand branches do not exist.



Dick Jensen proves that photography can be really fun these days. He took four digital pictures, then combined them to make one of our living rooms look as big as the bar of the Overlook Hotel. All those boxes contain books, which can't be unpacked until the shelves are built. We plan that the shelves will cover the wall in front of the camera, and that on the side. Harry will just have find some other perch when looking out the front window. You can see a small part of the kitchen on the far right of the image.



Harry wants to go home to Collingwood, but instead has to be content with peering out the front window at Greensborough. Dick Jenssen's photo proves yet again that Harry is one of the most photogenic cats we've ever had. Like Theodore, he's not too bright.

a hilly retreat for arty folk, so I was surprised that the area has no boutique CD shop. I haven't found a secondhand bookshop in Greensborough or Eltham. When the bookshelves are built and we unload most of our boxes, we need to cull the shelves. I have no idea where we might sell the spares.

I still haven't explored Hurstbridge, which is right at the end of the railway line. If Greensborough is quintessentially suburban (its main industries seem to be real estate, mowing lawns and putting junk literature in letter boxes), and Eltham is arty (but the artists live down south near Monsalvat, rather than around the railway station), then Hurstbridge is, we are told, 'alternative'. One day Elaine's sister Valerie drove us up there. It's very rural, but it has a designed main street, with all the shops in the same attractive pattern of brick. It has two organic grocery shops, so I might find a secondhand bookshop as well.

The house? I'm glad you asked about the house. When the bookshelves go up, and all the boxes are unpacked, we will find out all over again just how good it is. It seems to have been built in the late sixties or early seventies, with a large extension built in 1977. It was sold to us as having a ducted cooling system in the roof and a ducted heating system in the floor. We know the floor system works, because it was working on the day we first inspected the house. The cooling system doesn't; when we had it checked a week ago, we discovered that the rooftop unit is so corroded that it can't be used except to blow outside air through the house. However, if the ducts are sound, we might be able to install a new cooling system. A great feature of the house is its ceiling fans in most rooms. They are adequate for all but the hottest days. Better, the whole house cools down after a hot day.

After living for 26 years in a house with an outside loo, we are still not quite used to a house with three inside loos. Ask for the loo tour when you visit.

At the moment, the acoustics in the gigantic main living room are great. They might change when the



Bruce and Bruno in front of the window to my new study. You can see the printer lurking behind the window. If you look up, you might see how the cat enclosure works. It's all done by zippers. The entrance to each section is a big black zipper, and the 'roof' is also attached to the side by zippers.

bookshelves are filled. On one of the days when we cleaned out Keele Street, Elaine's sister Margeret transported me and the record player to Audophile in Fitzroy, where it was finally fixed. We have been enjoying the LP collection for the first time in years. We are reminded again that entire catalogues of records (such as None-such, Turnabout and Vox) have never been released on CD, and never will be. The major labels can be fairly slack as well; EMI has only just released the Sargent version of Holst's *The Planets*, by far the best version, whereas I've owned the LP for years. EMI has still never released many of its Beecham recordings.

The cats don't have as much room to run around as they did at Keele Street, where the whole garden was a effectively a cat enclosure. (We were quoted \$10,000 for enclosing the entire back garden at Greensborough; Elaine decided on something smaller.) Only Harry seems to worry much. Polly is much happier here than at Keele Street, because here she doesn't have to defend *her* territory. Here she is just one of the cats. Sophie is getting old and tottery, and has cat asthma, but she enjoys the house. Violet is getting used to her own cat enclosure; she is downright jolly. Flicker would like an entire garden to walk around in, but most of the time he seems well pleased with life.

Of course this house is infinitely better than Keele Street. You can see this by looking at the photos taken by Yvonne Rousseau (who has visited the house on her two recent expeditions from Adelaide) and Dick Jenssen, who visited a couple of weeks ago.

There is still much to do here, and many small things will have to wait. The electric stove doesn't work properly, but Elaine wants to change it for a gas stove. The electric oven is much better than the gas oven we had at Keele Street. The basic kitchen design is splendid, but the bench tops are old and need replacing. The guttering was corroded, so it is being replaced. When that happens, water won't pour through the garage on rainy days, so we will be able to use all of it for storage.

Don't move house — unless you really have to. But if you do, it helps to be married to a genius who finds you a place like 5 Howard Street, Greensborough.

— Bruce Gillespie, 8 December 2004

---

# Bruce Gillespie

## The journeys they took

---

THE BEST AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION WRITING: A FIFTY YEAR COLLECTION, edited by Rob Gerrand  
(Black Inc ISBN 1- 86395-301-9; 2004; 615 pp.; \$A39.95/\$US32.00)

[A pre-print from *Steam Engine Time* No. 4.]

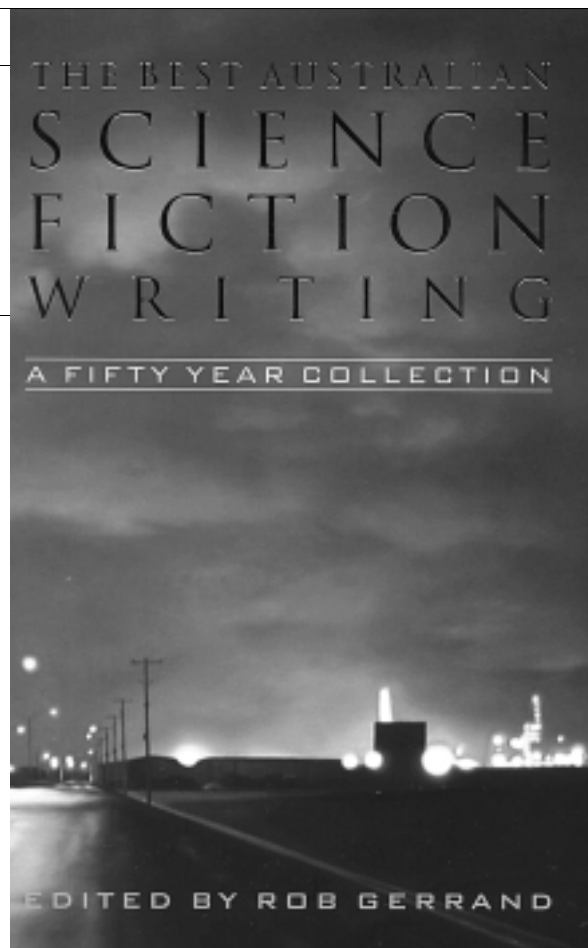
Time is like an ever-expanding bowl. I stand forever at one edge of the bowl — the Present. Over the edge is The Dark. Perhaps it is the Future, and the bowl expands forever, or perhaps all time ends one moment from now. I look backwards down the slope of the bowl — at History, a vast, colourful territory filled with everything that has happened. I cannot jump from where I am and land in any spot in the bowl, but from the edge I can see clearly sections of it, especially that small section through which I lived.

Rob Gerrand's vantage point on the bowl of time is very close to my own. No doubt he also remembers vividly a time in the 1950s when obtaining enjoyable science fiction books in Australia was so difficult a task that it seemed almost unimaginable that any of those books should be written by Australians. Only a few of them were written by Britons; the rest, it seemed, by Americans.

Yet in 1959, when I was twelve and discovered the British magazines *New Worlds*, *Science Fiction Adventures* and *Science Fantasy*, I was amazed to find that Australian authors were published regularly there. The editor of the three magazines, E. J. (Ted) Carnell, had a feature page in each *New Worlds* showing a picture of one of his regular authors, plus a short biography. Two I remember were those for Wynne W. Whiteford and David Rome (David Boutland), although I suspect he also did features on Lee Harding, John Baxter and Frank Bryning.

Frank Bryning and Wynne Whiteford had each begun a writing career in the American magazines before World War II. After the war, these and the other Australian authors usually sold their stories in Britain, although each no doubt they hoped they might score a spot in one of the better-paying American magazines. David Rome (TV writer David Boutland) was unusual, in that his short story 'Parky' was picked up from *Science Fantasy* and included by Judith Merrill in one of her *Year's Best* anthologies. There it was read by Frederik Pohl, who some years later remembered the quality of the story, and asked David for more stories for *Galaxy* and *If*.

No doubt, Rob Gerrand also remembers this long period when we could find stories by Australian writers only in overseas magazines. He chooses to begin his own journey through Australian SF in 1955 (with Frank Bryning's 'Infant Prodigy'), but, as his advisers Graham Stone, Sean McMullen and Van Ikin would have reminded him, he might have begun much earlier. The long reach back into the late nineteenth and early



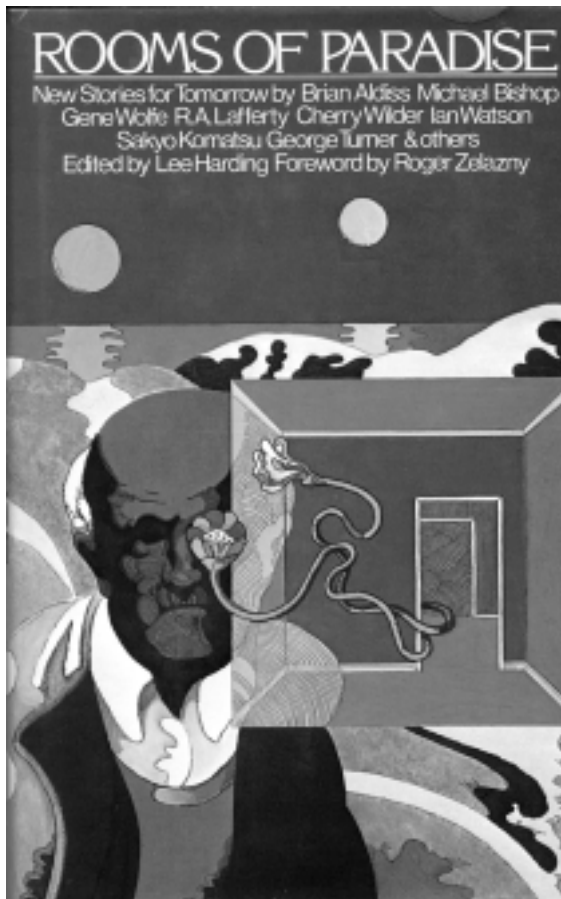
twentieth centuries was one of the strengths of Van Ikin's 1981 anthology *Portable Australian Science Fiction*, which should be revised and reissued.

The lack of local markets had an inhibiting effect on the range and quality of local writing of SF, as can be seen from the first few stories in Rob Gerrand's new collection. Frank Bryning's 'Infant Prodigy', Norma Hemming's 'Debt of Lasso' (1958) and Wynne N. Whiteford's 'The Doorway' (1960) are stories that now seem a little creaky and outdated, although quite readable. They fitted well among stories by people such as Donald Malcolm, John Rackham, E. C. Tubb and Francis G. Rayer.

Much sharper and with a memorable twist ending, is A. Bertram Chandler's 'The Cage' (1957) which had sold to one of the top markets, America's *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Chandler, a British sea captain, had chosen to make his home in Australia after already scoring some major successes in the American magazines. Until 1982, when he died, he was regarded here as Australia's senior SF writer, but the SF world in general saw him as one of the major writers of America's 'Golden Age' of SF magazine publishing.

Chandler, as 'George Whitley', also contributes the much-anthologised 'All Laced Up' (1961, from *New Worlds*). Today's reader might find the theme of alien visitation all too familiar, but it is difficult to emphasise how daring Chandler was to set his story in the Sydney he knew so well — the inner suburbs with their lace ironwork decorations, which were just becoming fashionable — and to have his main characters resemble closely himself and his wife. Until then, most Australian short stories had to be set in a never-never land, or somewhere in Britain or America.





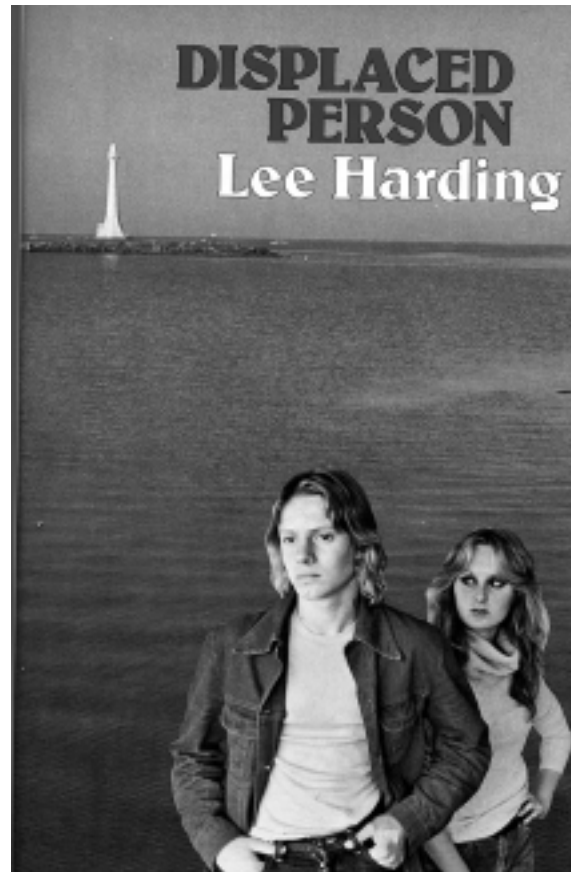
(Above:) Michael Payne's cover art for Lee Harding's international anthology *Rooms of Paradise* (Quartet, 1978).

(Right:) Andrew Scholz's cover for *Displaced Person* (Hyland House, 1979), which won the Australian Children's Book Award in 1980.

As I've mentioned already, David Rome's 'Parky' had an international success that he could never have anticipated. Years later, he was still debating with himself whether he should give up TV writing for what he regarded as more ambitious work in science fiction. Fortunately for him, he stayed with TV, becoming one of Australia's most successful script writers. 'Parky' has that extra spark in its dramatic style that is missing in most of the early stories in this collection; perhaps David did have in him a major SF novel that never was published.

At the launch for this book, Rob Gerrand said that he read several thousand stories before choosing its contents; and that he could have produced several more 600-page volumes while still telling the same story about the progress of Australian SF. One result of this selection dilemma is that the book itself has some odd gaps in chronology. Were there really no notable stories between 1961 and 1967? None leaps to my mind, I must admit.

In February 1967, Jack Wodhams published 'There Was a Crooked Man', the first of a number of stories he sold to John Campbell at *Analog*, then the top US SF magazine, until Campbell's death in 1971. Campbell had never published anything like this story before, and I can't think of any later author whose works resemble those of Wodhams. On the one hand, 'Crooked Man' resembled the dreaded stories emerging from the new *New Worlds* in Britain (Michael Moorcock had taken over



in the mid 1960s). It had no plot; it was told in snappy little vignettes of dialogue; and its feeling was impressionistic rather than preachy. The manic world depicted by Wodhams had some resemblance to those shown by, say, Eric Frank Russell in the early 1950s, but that's the only influence I could ever detect. Wodhams appeared to be saying that any 'progress' in technology will have results that are so disastrous and unexpected that they will make the idea of 'progress' unthinkable. I would have thought this is not a message much liked by Campbell. But Campbell did like writers who poked fun at what he regarded as conventional wisdom; he was the only editor apart from Paul Collins to publish Wodhams regularly.

'The Case of the Perjured Planet', by 'Martin Loran' (John Baxter and Ron Smith) (*Analog*, December 1967), is more conventional in structure than Wodhams' story, but its oddly jagged imagery of a planet that seems insane to terrestrial observers also owes much to the British New Wave. If Campbell had lived, perhaps Australian writers might have undermined Campbell's many prejudices and led *Analog* into a 1970s renaissance. 'Perjured Planet' leaves out almost all the comforting paraphernalia of the detective story, yet it does retain a feeling of mystery. It also has a manic sense of fun that also owes something to Eric Frank Russell, one of the few British authors who is still counted a part of the American Golden Age of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The assumption during the fifties and sixties was that Australian writers still needed to kowtow to overseas editors from either side of the Atlantic. Sydney publisher Horwitz Books, guided by American expatriate Ron Smith, published a couple of SF novels in the late sixties, but nobody could see that as the beginnings of a local industry.

Ron Graham, also from Sydney, caused great excitement when in 1968 he announced the forthcoming publication of a magazine, *Vision of Tomorrow*, that would feature half British stories and half Australian stories. It would be edited in Britain by Phil Harbottle (unknown to most SF people in Australia and Britain), but it would have an Australian advisory editor, John Bangsund. Stories were bought, and Lee Harding even went so far as to quit his job as a photographer to become a full-time author on the strength of all the positive feedback he was getting from Graham and Harbottle.

*Vision of Tomorrow* was published for one year. During the early seventies there were many harsh words said about its demise, but today we can see that the problems posed by its combination of ambition and poor distribution reflect the problems faced by every Australian and British magazine since then. *Vision* looked glossy and substantial, but the cover art on its first issues was just a bit old-fashioned. It became clear that Graham had chosen Harbottle as editor because of their mutual interest in a now almost forgotten British pulp era writer named John Russell Fearn. One of the ambitions of the editors was to publish a magazine that restored the style of the pulps. Meanwhile, the Australian writers who were trying to sell to *Vision of Tomorrow* were influenced most by Mike Moorcock's *New Worlds*, and wanted to leave the pulp style way behind them. *Vision* attracted mainly scorn in Britain, and was dropped by its distributor there. It was never distributed properly in Australia. But it did have its triumphs, including Lee Harding's 'Dancing Gerontius' (much anthologised, and now republished by Rob Gerrand) and 'The Custodian', which Lee illustrated with photos.

'Dancing Gerontius' is a one-idea story that is saved from predictability by Harding's ambition and a genuine lyricism in its last pages. What shall we do with the old in society? Most SF writers have plumped for life extension, but Harding is hardly the first or last writer to suggest that we will all be killed off at a certain age. To judge from statements from Australian government sources during the last year or so, this idea has achieved renewed popularity in Canberra. Their idea is to work us to death by denying us retirement; Harding's 'solution' is rather different, and quite moving. Harding has done better work since, especially in his novels, but 'Dancing Gerontius' stays in the memory as a genre breakthrough story.

Rather more original, however, is the next story in the collection, Michael Wilding's 'The Man of Slow Feeling' (1970). Wilding is one of two non-genre writers in this collection. (The other is Peter Carey.) Literary writers in Australia have tended to stay far away from SF and fantasy, but Wilding (who became one half of Wild & Woolley, the pioneering small press from Sydney that offered much help to Norstrilia Press) shows a poised awareness of the balance between the exposition of the SF idea and exploration of the interpersonal implications of the idea. The idea of a person who is slightly out of time with the rest of the world is not entirely new, but only Brian Aldiss's 'Man in His Time' can match this story for subtle horror. The fine quality of Wilding's story-telling proved not to be unique: he pointed the way forward to the Australian SF of the seventies and beyond.

I don't know what to say about Damien Broderick's 'The Final Weapon' (1969), which I don't like much. To publish a 'Best' collection without reprinting one of Broderick's best stories (especially 'The Magi') does a disservice to the most consistent and productive author

and anthologist of the whole fifty-year period.

A most important date in Australian SF was 1969, when John Baxter edited for Angus & Robertson *The Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction*. The *Second Pacific Book* not long after. Until those collections appeared, nobody had realised that Australia had a heritage of SF story-telling. Once we realised it, our authors, who had seen themselves as isolated lighthouse keepers sending out occasional flares to the rest of the world, began to think in terms of local stories to be told to local audiences. Damien Broderick edited two more collections of Australian short SF, each as interesting as Baxter's collections. Yet Gerrand skips eight years between 1970 and 1978, eight years in which everything, in a sense, had already happened!

As Rob Gerrand was a partner in Norstrilia Press, which began in 1975, it is not clear why he ignores several of Norstrilia's collections, especially *The Altered I*, when compiling *The Best Australian Science Fiction Writing*. In 1976, Paul Collins and Rowena Cory began *Void* magazine, which became Void Publications, then Cory & Collins. Both publishers were small presses that had little chance of making a profit, but both kept going for ten years, and laid the foundation for everything that has happened since in local small press publishing. Enterprising independent publishers, such as Hyland House/Quartet Australia and Wren, were publishing occasional Australian SF novels and anthologies during the same period. Even Penguin Australia offered a short-lived SF line.

Gerrand takes as his starting point for the 1970s renaissance Lee Harding's *Rooms of Paradise* (Quartet Australia, 1978) and *Transmutations* (1979), the anthology he edited for Morry Schwartz (publisher at Black Inc), when Schwartz was publisher at Outback Press. Each of these landmark anthologies took advantage of the enormous boost to the quality and quantity of Australian SF writing that resulted from the visit of Ursula Le Guin to Australia in 1975 (the Writers' Workshop associated with Australia's first world SF convention, Aussiecon I), and Christopher Priest and Vonda McIntyre in 1977 (the second major SF workshop). David Lake's 'Re-deem the Time', George Turner's 'In a Petri Dish Upstairs', Randal Flynn's 'The Paradigm' and Philippa Maddern's 'Inhabiting the Interspaces' have a swagger of approach and command of the English language that one finds rarely in Australian SF stories before the mid 1970s.

David Lake's 'Re-deem the Time' is conventional in structure, with an H. G. Wellsian time traveller finding much more than he could have expected as he travels into the future. Its theme, our responsibility for a livable future, has become more rather than less pertinent during the last 25 years.

George Turner's 'In a Petri Dish Upstairs' is rather conventional, too, and even a bit creaky. Turner made no secret of his dislike of the short story/novella form, and wrote short works only on commission. He collapses the skeleton of an entire novel into the 38 pages of 'Petri Dish'. Turner did write better short pieces than this, but it has its memorable moments.

Randal Flynn's 'The Paradigm' is a story by a young writer about young writers in a future that has little time for creativity of any kind. It's a faithful portrait of the despair that many Australians felt as Fraserism took over from Whitlamism in Australia during the late seventies. It still has some fine sentences and accurate portraits, but perhaps has not aged as well as some of

the other stories.

Philippa Maddern's first published story, 'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City-State' (1976, in *The Altered J*), was listed as Best Australian SF Short Story in a poll conducted by *Science Fiction* magazine fifteen years later. Maddern should have become the anointed monarch of Australian SF from the seventies onward, but she abdicated. 'Inhabiting the Interspaces', which reads as grippingly as it did in 1979, shows her great gifts. The main character, unemployed in a society that does not forgive the unemployed, can survive only by inhabiting the nooks and crannies of a large office building at night when its workers depart. This becomes a perilous enterprise. I had always remembered this story is a long, epic tale, but it proves to be only 14 pages.

Maddern published few stories after this, and in the last decade has been Associate Professor of History at the University of Western Australia. If only writing SF could have offered her a real career path.

By 1979 the maturation of Australian SF had already taken place. Again, Gerrand has an odd elision in his narrative, offering only two more stories before 1989.

Where is a story by our most successful writer of the period, Leanne Frahm, who sold stories to several American anthologies? Where, indeed, is the best Australian SF story ever, Frahm's 'On the Turn'?

Where is any recognition for *Omega* magazine? *Omega*, an *Omni*-style science fact/science fiction magazine, began the careers of many of the best writers of the 1990s. Perhaps it's hard to find archival files of *Omega*.

Where is any recognition of the vital importance of Peter McNamara's *Aphelion* (magazine and publishing company) during the 1980s? McNamara's work is the link between the books by Norstrilia and Cory & Collins (both disbanded by the mid eighties) and that of *Eidolon* and *Aurealis* magazines in the nineties.

The coverage of the 1980s is the weakest aspect of this book. I cannot believe that Gerrand did not have available for reference a copy of David King's *Dreamworks* (Norstrilia Press), which he helped to publish, or King and Blackford's *Urban Fantasies* (Ebony Books), which included David Grigg's best story. However, Gerrand does include Paul Collins' 'The Government in Exile', a dark, amusing fable about future social breakdown, and Rosaleen Love's 'The Total Devotion Machine', hardly her best story, but an effective demonstration of her insouciant verbal facility and fine wit.

Rob Gerrand does his best to cover adequately the 'boom period' of Australian SF publishing (1990 onward). With the sudden development of writers such as Greg Egan, Sean Williams, Terry Dowling, Lucy Sussex, Simon Brown and many others, Australia entered the world stage. Australian stories began to be picked up for international 'Best Of' collections and feature on the annual *Locus* Awards lists. The major Australian publishers began to take an interest in their own writers. In the end, this led to the proliferation of endless fantasy blockbuster trilogies, but it also generated income for writers such as Sean Williams, who otherwise could never have quit his day job. The great Australian small press tradition continued in the form of *Eidolon* and *Aurealis* magazines, and publishers such as Ticonderonga and MirrorDanse. Recently, Agog! Press, the

Vision Writers' Group, the Canberra Writers' Group, Mitch, and several other small presses have published a large number of original fiction anthologies.

I won't look at the later stories in detail, mainly because they are known signposts in the current landscape. I think that Gerrand could have chosen a better story of Sean Williams' than 'The Soap Bubble' and a better Stephen Dedman story than 'A Walk-on Part in the War', but at least the roles of these authors is recognised.

As Race Mathews pointed out when launching the book, Gerrand really scored the jackpot with his reprint of Petrina Smith's 'Angel Thing' (from Sussex and Buckrich's *She's Fantastical!* anthology, 1995). Smith was a graduate of the first major Writers' Workshop (the Le Guin Workshop of 1975); she has published little since; and she works very slowly. The fine writing and sharp dialogue of this quiet story of exploitation and the horrors of true belief makes it one of Australia's best short stories of any kind during the last fifty years.

Oddities remain in Gerrand's book. I can't pretend to like Terry Dowling's Tom Rynosseros stories, but how could one represent Dowling's strange career (adulation from Australian readers; very little success overseas) without featuring a Rynosseros story? 'He Tried to Catch the Light' represents some of Dowling's strengths, but it's hardly his best.

Neither 'Niagara Falling' nor 'The Diamond Pit' seem to represent Jack Dann's work at its best (and Janeen Webb has published stories that are much better than 'Niagara Falling'), but again, recognition must be paid to the role played by Dann and Webb in promoting Australian SF during the nineties, and these stories did win awards and impress people other than me.

The nineties was a good period in which to be an SF reader in Australia. It was satisfying to rediscover the subtlety and power of Lucy Sussex's 'Red Ochre' (it is fourteen years since I had read it.) Re-reading Sussex's story and Margo Lanagan's 'The Boy Who Didn't Yearn' made me feel all gooey and patriotic and proud that the current best stylists in Australian fiction are 'ours'. The division between literary fiction and science fiction disappears, much as it did in stories by Michael Wilding and Peter Carey all those years ago.

The last section of Gerrand's anthology includes plenty of my other favourites, some of which I've reviewed at length elsewhere: Greg Egan's 'The Caress' I've just re-read for the fifth time, with as much pleasure as ever; Russell Blackford's 'The Sword of God' seems retains its freshness every time I return to it; and I enjoyed the only story new to me, Sean McMullen's 'Tower of Wings'.

My fifty-year journey through Australian SF is slightly different from Rob Gerrand's, but I'm satisfied that we have been looking back at the same landscape. His collection corrects the peculiar notion put about by younger, rather arrogant critics that Australian SF starts in 1990. He chooses all the right lamp posts and points to where hang the lamps of the fifty-year journey of Australian SF. Justice has been done, and been seen to be done. I just hope that *The Best Australian Science Fiction Writing* is so successful that Rob is offered a contract to edit those other two 600-page anthologies about which he spoke at his book launch.

— Bruce Gillespie, 28 November 2004



# Scratch Pad 57

