



SCRATCH PAD 43  
MAY 2001

**Above: BRG at his desk, 1979.**

Note: absence of computer on desk and umpteen boxes of books. Note: bottle of corflu on desk; duplicator in front of desk; and empty shelves behind BRG and on his right. BRG is editing on sheets of paper instead of computer screen.

**Right: BRG at his desk, 2001.**

Note: Computer and printer fill most of the desk. Books once filled the shelves, but are now being replaced by CDs. Boxes of books fill the rest of the room. It is rumoured that BRG can still escape his room, but only with difficulty.

**Photos: Elaine Cochrane.**



# Scratch Pad

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No. 43. Based on *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*, a fanzine for the 100th mailing of Acnestis (May 200) by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066. Phone & Fax: 61-3-9419-4797. email: gandc@mira.net

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## The pleasure of it

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Of course I must appear in Mailing No. 100. Let the Acnestis Achievement be celebrated throughout the world.

But I wouldn't be writing this little contribution unless I felt a bit ill today. If I didn't have that excuse, my conscience would not allow me to put aside the latest 20,000-word chapter of the 470,000-word book that originally I was supposed to finish editing on screen by Easter. It feels all too difficult for me at the moment. I'll look at it again in the morning.

So how is everybody in Acnestis? I'm slowly catching up on everybody's adventures, and getting to know the newer people. During the last few weeks I've been catching up reading on the mailings. I'm only a year behind. It's fun exploring the sweep of events in the Acnestis year. I won't 'do a Gillespie' and comment on a whole year's mailings. When eventually I reach April and May 2001, I'll comment on those.

Some thank-yous are in order, including a special thanks to Elizabeth Billinger for donating the unused part of her dues to me when she left. A great pity she's not here, but I know all too well how Ordinary Life destroys the ability and time to produce fanzines. I have an uneasy feeling that I haven't yet thanked Mark and Claire for sending me Rowson's graphics version of *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Thaks, Mark and Claire.

I'm itching to comment on all sorts of stuff from last year that other members have probably forgotten. Remember Gary's discussion of 70 mm films? Does anybody else remember sitting four rows from the front (because the rest of the cinema was full) watching the ginormous first shot in *Patton* in which you can see the tiniest details of all that vast number of soldiers who are sitting (I remember them sitting) waiting for General Patton to give 'em hell? Or sitting in the balcony of the Odeon (write in your local equivalent: an old-fashioned cinema with both stalls and balcony), watching the hairier flying scenes in *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* and feeling, for a few delirious moments, that I was up there in a biplane, hurtling over that beautiful countryside, or about to crash into a haystack or a windmill or whatever?

Only two cinemas left in Australia can show 70 mm films — the Astor in Melbourne, and a cinema in Sydney. They are the last of the giant picture palaces. All the rest have been pulled down or turned into multiplexes. The bloke who has been remastering the Hitchcock films (I can't remember his name) claims that there are only fifteen picture palaces left in America. I presume there are only one or two left in Britain. They are the sort of cinemas that retain 70 mm equipment. Yet Kenneth Branagh went ahead and made his version of *Hamlet* in 70 mm. When the four-and-a-half-hour version was shown in Melbourne, only at the Astor, it

reached the top twenty box office list for several weeks in a row. When the Australian rights for the long, 70 mm version ran out recently, the Astor itself paid to renew them.

The Astor is Melbourne's last remaining repertory cinema. There used to be another, the Valhalla. When it was sold a few years ago, the new owners kept the old-fashioned look of the cinema (which is about twenty minutes' walk from my place) but reverted to showing only first-release films. The Astor (which takes an hour to reach by public transport) has downstairs a giant thirties-style lobby. You walk up the stairs, to find an upstairs lobby that is twice as large as the one downstairs. It is fitted out entirely in thirties memorabilia, including an old console wireless set that looks just like the one we had at home for the first twelve years of my life. The Astor has a cinema cat, who prowls around, accepting pats from everybody. It can't be the same cinema cat I saw when the Astor opened — that cat must be long since dead.

Usually you are allowed to sit only in the balcony of the Astor, which holds about 300 people. This concentrates the audience and lets you feel that buzz of excitement that comes from being in a jam-packed auditorium. There are about a thousand stalls seats downstairs, but it's not often opened. I've seen it open only once — every seat in the Astor was taken — for a double bill of *The Matrix* and *The Sixth Sense*.

When you are sitting upstairs cosily at the Astor, you face a screen that seems to me like a fair proportion of the size of an Imax screen. The sound is superb. In a few weeks' time it will be showing the remastered 70 mm print of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and nothing could keep me away. I recently saw it, for the first time since 1971, on DVD, and that was wonderful.

Nothing will ever replace Cinerama, which Gary's article doesn't mention, although Abel Gance did it first, in 1928, in *Napoleon*. Cinerama started as the three-screen technique, with *This Is Cinerama*, in the middle 1950s. Only one cinema, the Plaza, could show Cinerama in Melbourne. In the mid sixties (after *How the West Was Won* ran for two years in Melbourne) the three-screen process disappeared. Some of the later 'Cinerama' pictures were actually 70 mm prints shown in a special way so that the screen seemed to start somewhere off to the left of one's eye and wrap the viewer before finishing somewhere way off the right. That's how *2001* was shown for its first three months in Melbourne (during which time I saw it three times), and nothing could replace that experience.

Gary mentions the failed films that brought down 70 mm, including musicals such as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, but I suspect quite a few cinemas retained the equipment until it was clear that almost no new films would be made in the process. The oddest 70 mm film was *Castle Keep*, Sidney

Pollack's first film, based on a William Eastlake novel that was even more obscure and arty (as only an American 'serious novel' can be arty) than the film. The studio must have become desperate when it gave Pollack, who must have been very young at the time, lots of money to make a gorgeous film that was certain to fail. (But it just *might* have succeeded; odder films did; but it didn't, and lasted for a few weeks in Melbourne only because the chain didn't have its next 70 mm film ready to go into the same theatre.)

Nothing has replaced 70 mm. The best evidence is John Frankenheimer's recent *Ronin*, in 70 mm, which must have the single most incomprehensible story ever made into a major film, I couldn't help enjoying *Ronin*, despite its stupid script, because of its awe-inspiring shots, in pinpoint detail, of the south of France.

Some 35 mm films, as shown properly at the Astor or the Valhalla, provide near-adequate substitutes. Camera equipment and film have improved greatly since the sixties. The Imax process, at least as shown in Melbourne, is very disappointing, mainly because of the trivial films that have been made in the process. The critics have been particularly hard on *Fantasia 2000*. The actual Imax projection is poor in Melbourne, with bands of visibly lighter area showing at the bottom and the top, and a lack of intensity in the image. I suspect the original Imax cinemas in America give the intended effect.

I can't afford DVD anywhere but on my computer, but watching films on a 19-inch screen gives nearly the same experience as watching them on a very large screen. It was only when I watching *Jackie Brown* this way that I realised how brilliantly it has been directed. The first time I saw it, I noticed only the acting and Elmore Leonard's story. Dick Jenssen lent me *The Green Mile* a few weeks ago. I watched it in two parts on two nights, a viewing luxury available only to the home viewer, and enjoyed it a lot.

I'm talking about recent pleasures because most of my life for the last year has been very dull, or even disappointing. Life has been dull because of my good luck. It's reported that Australian publishing is in a bad way (because of the evil, absurd, spit-on-it, stamp-it-into-the ground GST — Goods and Services Tax, equals your VAT — which is the first tax ever applied to the book trade in this country), and some freelance editors are finding it difficult to find continuous work. I keep expecting to be one of them. I keep expecting to be given a week or two's involuntary holiday to produce a fanzine or two. But (crossed fingers) the work has rolled in since the two weeks in October last year when I finished the Turner issue of *SFC*. I get some reading done, and watch some films (best so far this year, David Fincher's *Seven*, Michael Mann's *Manhunter*, Michael Darabont's *The Green Mile* and Jules Dassin's restored *Rififi*), but not much else.

One of the pleasures of life is our side garden. Maureen and a few others saw our garden during Elaine's garden tour after Aussiecon III. I know nothing about gardening or plants, so I just watch with awe and wonder as everything keeps growing at a great pace, despite the five-year drought that has settled over Melbourne. (We had a couple of inches of rain in October, and about four inches a few weeks ago, with very little in between.) The pleasure, for me, is sitting on the garden seat. Elaine's sister and brother-in-law gave it to us some years ago. At that time, Elaine still had about half the garden to dig over. Now that's done, every inch is filled with foliage (nearly all Australian native plants), except for

the area that contains the huge compost bins and the humble garden seat. That's where I sit, especially in the long summer nights, or, as autumn rolls on, during the magic hour or so between 4 pm and 5 pm.

I sit on the seat. I begin to relax. I am approached by a small grey cat. Polly has to be patted. After all, why else would I sit on the garden seat except to pat cats? Theodore notices that Polly is being patted, so Theodore rolls up for his pat. Sophie notices that she is missing out. Suddenly she is rolling on the ground at my feet. It's nice to feel wanted — until I remember that what they really want is for Elaine to come out in the garden and begin gardening. Mere sitting on seats is not good enough. To score points with cats, one has to dig. Polly stands on my foot and points her sharp little nose toward the garden. 'Dig!' I refuse to dig, and usually go inside after the cats have got bored and wandered off. Their garden is not my territory, but I enter it from time to time.

One of the more interesting items from last year's Acnestises was Maureen's piece about book and record clubs. I never joined a book club. There was no need to, since early in my teens I discovered the cheapest and best sources of second-hand books in Melbourne. But until well into the 1970s, records were not discounted. The only way to buy classical records at a cheaper price was to join the World Record Club. I have an idea that Britain also had a World Record Club, but Australia's ran an independent operation. It offered about ten records a month, under different categories, at about two-thirds of regular price. (For many years regular retail prices were 52/6d for pop LPs and 57/6d for classical LPs, in today's dollars at least \$60-\$70, so WRC prices were a breakthrough in marketing in Australia.) The selections were made by a bloke who called himself 'Harvey Blanks'. He once wrote a very good popular guide to music, called *The Golden Road*, which my mother let me have after my father died. He picked nothing but the best current English releases, usually from Decca and EMI, and rereleased them here under the World Record Club label. For awhile, each LP had a dinky little stroboscopic pattern on the label. Played under a regular 60-watt light, the lines on the pattern would appear to stay still if your turntable was playing at the correct speed. For more than twenty years, WRC had offices in each state capital. As discounting became widespread among retailers, the number of offices shrank, until only the Sydney office remained open. The Club tried other options, including a steadily increasing range of pop LPs and, for about six months, a very useful catalogue of classic jazz LPs. But then WRC was sold to a CD club, which offers few classical CDs, but occasionally digs up a CD that has not been released widely in Australia. I've stayed in the modern version of the club because of these occasional rare items, including a few DVDs that are not generally available. (Who else but me would buy two copies of *In Dreams*, the documentary biography of Roy Orbison?)

I'm sorry to bore all those people to whom my piquant memories may mean little. Claire, after all, says she was born in 1970, my second and final year of teaching, the second of two years in which I produced eight issues of *SF Commentary*. There's not a lot happening around here, although it sounds as if Rose Mitchell and the team for Convergence (next year's national convention, in Melbourne) are on the ball. We received our receipt within two weeks of paying our memberships, instead of the usual six months. Rose and team are also talking about Australia for '07, but others say that that's the wrong year for another bid.

The monthly fannish social occasion for Elaine and me is Nova Mob, once a month at the home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner. The talk is the only serious bit of the night; the rest is highly social, including the dinner in town at the Saigon Inn, where some of us meet before going onto the meeting. The Nova Mob was begun by John Foyster in 1970, disappeared a couple of times, and has been operating nicely since the late seventies. It would have been great if we could have imported everybody in Acnestis for the May meeting. Each of the books that nominated for the Arthur C. Clarke award was discussed by one member of the Nova Mob. In this way, we gained a pretty good idea of what is likely to win. (Even as I write, the winner is being announced.) Most summarily dismissed, by Charles Taylor, was Ken MacLeod's *A Cosmonaut Keep*. Alan Stewart described Alastair Reynolds' *Revelation Space* as having some interesting big ideas, but few interesting characters. It reminded him of Iain Banks's 'Culture' books, but Banks does it better. Sarah Marland admired many aspects of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*, but was annoyed by the tone of voice of the narrator. I interpreted this as 'worthy but dull'. Elaine Cochrane gave a detailed paper on Adam Roberts's *Salt*, showing that the authors sets up his two sets of characters in order to get the result he wants. She liked the writing style, but not much else about the book.

The shootout was between the two biggest books. Lucy Sussex gave a coherent account of why Mary Gentle's *Ash: A Secret History* is an endlessly complex and interesting book, 'which gets weirder and weirder', and unputdownable, despite its 1100 pages. Equally articulate, and funny as hell, was Ian Mond's account of China Mieville's *Perdido Street Station*. Ian particularly liked the book because of its horror elements, but he also pointed out to its sense of place, dark atmosphere, and brilliant characterisation. He read out a wonderful passage to prove his point. Ian had also read *Ash* and *Revelation Space*, which proves that he is a masochist as well as a fine speaker. I think he persuaded us most of us to vote for *Perdido*, if we were on the Clarke panel, but *Ash* sounded very good as well.

I haven't read any of them. I received review copies of nearly all of them. I took one look at the page count for three of them (*Ash*, *Perdido* and *Revelation*) and page one of each of them. Where I haven't been able to find reviewers, I've handed them onto Alan Stewart for either the Melbourne SF Club library or anybody who wants to pay money for them. Life is too short to read long SF books. Life is too short to read long books of any type.

You'll notice I haven't written anything about books, although this is supposed to be the apa for people who (still) read. I just haven't written my usual column of mini-reviews. Nothing touches the Avram Davidson stories I read early in the year, but I did enjoy Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*. The nineteenth-century evangelical religion described there is close enough to my own upbringing for me to nod — often — in recognition. Gosse believed that his father's extreme faith had disappeared as a phenomenon by the end of the nineteenth century, but I remember it as being alive and well in the Melbourne suburbs in the 1950s. I'll get back to lists next time. You have been warned.

— Bruce Gillespie, 5 May 2001

It's two days later. I keep telling myself that this issue will not arrive in time if I do not put it into the mail today. It won't leave until tomorrow. I keep thinking of bits and pieces I

should have mentioned already.

Way Back When — in the era of the mailings I have just been reading — several people asked me how I gained good results printing photographs and other graphics. I could pat myself on the back and say, 'By playing around with computer programs until I achieved fabulous results', but it wouldn't be true. 'With lots of help from Elaine and Dick Jenssen' would be nearer the truth. Also, as a result of my biggest ever financial blunder. When my special deal with Macmillan was falling through in 1996, I thought that if I bought Quark XPress for Windows, I could continue to do typesetting for Macmillan. Not so. The technology was changing too much. I would have needed to buy a Mac as well as Quark for Mac. Even then, I could not be sure of getting typesetting work. Spending \$2000 on Quark has brought me no financial benefits whatsoever, but it's been a great help to my fanac. Hitch up Quark to my laser printer (which is the best purchase I ever made), set the lpi (lines per inch) to 120, and it's possible to gain magnificent results from good photos and graphics. You can gain equally pinpoint pics from inkjet printers, but you need to set the resolution very high. This slows production to one picture every 20 minutes. Complex pages in Quark take a while to download from memory, but each copy then prints quickly.

I recovered from my indisposition (mentioned on page 2). It was a one-day-and-a-half bug. I slept much of Saturday, therefore kept waking up during the night. When I slept, I dreamt strange dreams. I dreamt about Acnestis — at least the Acnestids who visited Australia. We were all in a hotel room. Everybody put down their goods and chattels on the floor, and said they would go out for awhile. We would all meet up in a few hours. I left the room soon after. I found myself floating in space, with no need for a pressure suit. People were streaming past me. We were floating up and down a vast path of stars, as if the whole Milky Way had been lined up as a white rainbow. I could not see the people from Acnestis, so I decided to search for them. Only when I had left my room (connected to what? where was the room itself? I have no idea!) did I realise that I did not know how to find its door again. This was the biggest convention in the universe. Did I express my sense of wonder and revel in the staggering beauty of the star chain around me? Not a bit. I was too worried about finding my own room again, or the room where the Acnestic people might be staying. I can be overcome by anxiety in any situation, even in dreams.

I was reminded of Acnestids, past and present, when on Friday I finally received my copy of *Earth Is But a Star*, edited by Damien Broderick, and launched at Swancon at Easter. Contributors include Claire and Elizabeth, as well as me. As I've been reading Acnestis-from-a-year-ago, I have again been surprised that Claire and Elizabeth were so surprised to be asked to contribute. Okay, Damien didn't know about them before I pointed out that they (and Maureen, who was too busy) were just the women writers who might contribute to his forum on the far future, but Damien doesn't see much of the fan press. Claire, Elizabeth and Maureen are such good writers that I thought they would be constantly being asked for contributions to this or that book. *Earth Is But a Star* is about half-and-half fiction and essays, but it's the essays that interest me. Not only does the book include the people I've mentioned, but it has a wonderful article by Alice Turner about Cordwainer Smith, Stanislaw Lem on Stapledon, John Clute on Simmons, Yvonne Rousseau, Rosaleen Love, and many more. Send requests.

— See you soon — Bruce Gillespie, 7 May 2001