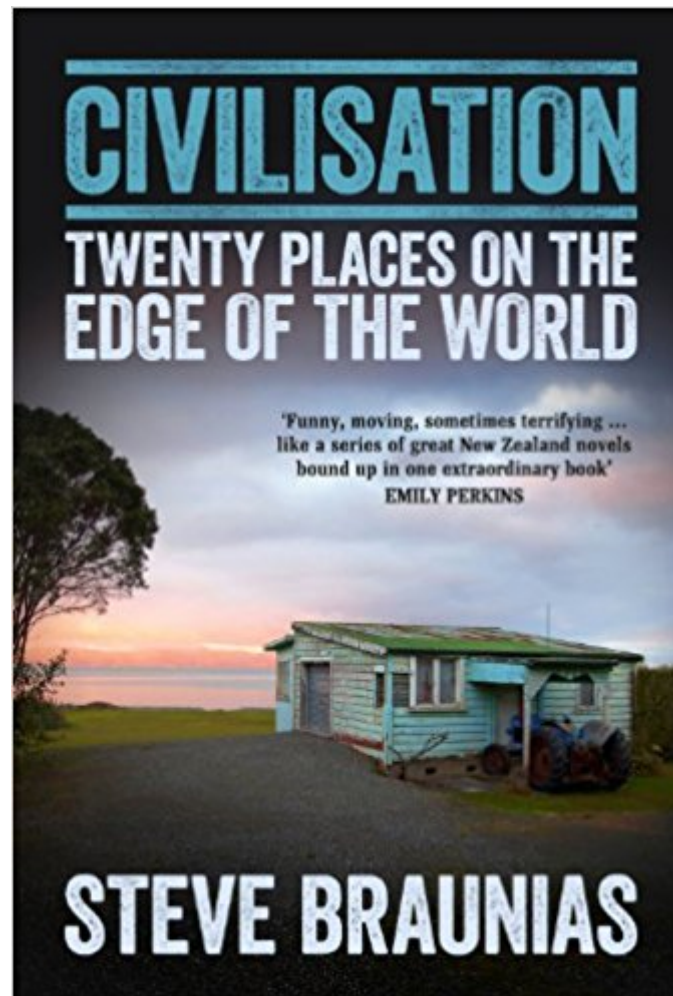




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Civilisation: Twenty Places On The Edge Of The World



Synopsis

In small-town, suburban New Zealand, with its seemingly average people, can be found many stories of lives, loves, aspirations, and, sporadically, a dark secret or two. As reported by a much-followed columnist and awarded journalist, these rich, fascinating, and occasionally disturbing stories of settlements follow people living throughout New Zealand, from Kawakawa in the north to Mosgiel in the south, and Samoa and Antarctica overseas. Funny, moving, and at times terrifying, this book provides a platform from which New Zealand reveals itself and proves that rarely are people and places as they first appear.

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Customer Reviews

"In this funny, moving, sometimes terrifying book, our country reveals itself; people and places are never as they first appear. Full of astonishing phrases, insights, and provocations, *Civilisation* is like a series of great New Zealand novels bound up in one extraordinary book." [—Emily Perkins, author, *The Forrests*](#)

"Steve Braunias could be a character in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, traipsing to places like St. Bathans and Mercer, inviting himself into homes to seek out those little nuggets. More often than not, he finds them." [—Wallace Chapman, radio and television host, *Back Benches*](#)

"Provocative, literate, disrespectful . . . eminently readable." [—Press](#)

"Steve Braunias shares with us the intimacies of people's lives, their thoughts and beliefs, the values of their communities, and so the deep meanings of places. . . . A writer the whole world would like to hear about." [—Jonathan Lorie, author, *The Traveller's Handbook*](#)

Steve Braunias is the editor-in-residence at Wintec School of Media Arts in Hamilton, a writer for many primetime TV series, and a regular panelist on TVNZ's *The Good Word*. He is the recipient of a Montana Book Award and more than 20 journalism awards as well as the author of several books, including *Fish of the Week*, *Roosters I Have Known*, and *Smoking in Antarctica*.

A very funny book about the author's travels through small town New Zealand. Probably of more interest to people who have lived or at least been here. Does have a very left-wing perspective and probably not for those Kiwis of a mindlessly patriotic disposition.

No gloss or shine except for the humble characters encountered. Loved these stories especially the first one about our "Darling Dad" "Augustus Lancelot Roberts" Solo Slaughterman, who died early in July 2013. He would have relished reading about himself through the eyes of Author "Steve Braunias" Hicks Bay (Wharekahika) beneath the mantle of Patangata Maunga and the tip of the Ruakumara Ranges - a privilege to be the start of this book.

A delightful and interesting book about small town New Zealand and the characters that the author meets on his travel around the country. He appears to have the ability to find the folk that are a bit different and have great stories to tell, which he recounts in his usual inimitable way. Highly recommended.

New Zealand journalist and author Steve Braunias loves people. He loves watching them, and hearing their stories, and trying to understand how they see the world and their place in it. The conceit of 'Civilisation' is that the writer picked 20 random spots in his home country "small towns, unremarkable suburbs [...] wherever there was any sign of New Zealand civilisation." And then he hung around, soaked in the scene, knocked on their front doors, sat in their homes, drank with them, laughed and cried, and captured the lives of everyday people on the page. This process took him three years: that is, three years of going to places "no one went to, drawn to their averageness, their nothingness, their banal and exhilarating New Zealandness". In the hands of a lesser writer, this is a okay idea that might falter in its execution. But because he loves people and stories, and has the ability to back up those loves, Steve Braunias turns this strange excursion into a compelling triumph. 'Civilisation' is a fascinating read because the writer manages to turn the mundane into the sublime, over and over again. The most remarkable place he

visits is Scott Base in Antarctica, but he finds it hellish. "Awe is compulsory, but I opted it," he writes. "The standard line about Antarctica is that it's beautiful. I have no idea how the standard line came about. Antarctica was as awesome as death." Instead, Braund much prefers to meet ordinary people going about their daily lives. He enmeshes himself in those lives with the gentle skill of being an amiable sort of bloke, and he listens to what they have to say. These characters burst off the page because he is interested in every single one, and wants to know how they tick, and how they got to where they are. In this sense, 'Civilisation' is pure journalism: it is observing human life and reporting back, with the occasional lyrical flourish. Near the end, he writes a kind of mission statement that summarises the entire work: "Once again, as ever, I was trying to fix the scene in my memory." Though he does not hide himself in the narrative, his true feelings for the reporting process are saved for the very end, where he notes that the book was built on three years of staying in motels. "I wanted to see where other people lived, but every chapter is an unwritten record of loneliness," he notes. "I was homesick for the house where I lived with my girlfriend and our daughter, who turned two, then three, then four years old. They came to the airport to pick me up after I got back from Antarctica. After those white days and white nights, seeing the two of them was like coming back to life in full colour." Something compelled Steve Braund to keep visiting random parts of New Zealand, just to see what he could see, and I'm very grateful that he did. The result is this beautiful book, which I highly recommend.

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