
Scratch Pad 22

Based on the non-Mailing Comments section of **brg** No. 18, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the April 1997 ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) mailing.

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My computer goes bung

During the first three weeks of February I had no editing work, but I could not spend the time publishing fanzines. In the middle of January, the fan on the Pentium chip went bung. After six phone calls and a week's wait, Louie from Rod Irving Electronics arrived to fix it. All on the two years' on-site warranty, of course.

The trouble is, as we kept discovering, computers are no longer built to last two years. I was attempting to print a very large Word file when everything on the computer suddenly went slow. It was as if a 286 chip had been suddenly installed instead of the Pentium 75. A few false hopes made me think that software was the problem. But the computer went slower and slower. We rang Rod Irving Electronics. A week later Louie arrived. Luckily the hard drive failed while he was on the premises. Equally luckily, I had realised that the problem must be the hard drive, and had saved all my data files.

Louie worked on the machine for two hours, but could not make contact with the CD-ROM drive in order to put Windows 95 back on the machine. He said he'd be back 'early next week'. A week later he returned. He was becoming quite affable by this time. He's Rod Irving's only on-site technician for the metropolitan area. Considering what his workload must be like, he took things fairly well. After several hours work he discovered that a previous Rod Irving technician, in an attempt to solve some previous problem, had switched the cables inside the computer so that DOS

could not talk to the CD-ROM player. He changed the cables. Now I could begin reinstalling. Right? Sort of.

The noble Dick Jenssen helped me begin the installation process. I kept at it for a few days, until it became obvious that the 3.5-inch drive had failed. Another phone call to Rod Irving Electronics. A week later, Louie returned. 'You mean this drive has lasted as long as this?' he said. 'I've been replacing them all over Melbourne.' Whoopee. A few minutes later, and a month and a half after the initial failure of the chip fan, the 3.5-inch drive was replaced. *Now* I could begin reinstalling.

Further thanks to Dick Jenssen for the second reinstallation. With any luck, he's left me with discs from which I can reinstall the system if anything else goes wrong. Several weeks later, I still haven't put back all the programs that disappeared when the hard disc went down.

I don't know what lessons one can draw from all this. Elaine's computer was working through all this, but she doesn't have a printer for it. When and if we get some spare cash, we must get a printer for her computer as well as mine.

The Tax Department now depreciates computers in a year. That's how long each computer is expected to remain useful before it must be replaced. Maybe they're now built that way as well. Which means that Rod Irving Electronics is perhaps a bit foolish in offering two-year on-site warranties. All I can say is: better these failures happened before 1 July 1997 than after it.

Happy birthday to me! Happy birthday to me!

Since it was obvious that Elaine was not going to get sufficiently excited about my fiftieth birthday to stage a surprise party for me, I decided to do it for myself.

We couldn't hold any celebration at home. The house is not big enough, and Elaine was not going to allow vast crowds onto her precious garden. Since we already knew

that we were facing imminent income deprivation, we couldn't afford to cater. I already knew that Mount Everest restaurant, in Johnston Street, could provide the food for such an occasion. I had to cross my fingers that people can still afford to eat out, and that the restaurant could provide the service on the night. I made the list of everybody who should be invited. It came to about 160. The restaurant could only hold 100. I crossed about 20 from the list (sorry, folks, whoever you are) and took a chance that from a list of 140, about 100 would accept. This happened, but it was a close thing. A few people left early on the night, and a few people left late, which means that 98 people actually paid

for meals.

Thanks to everybody who turned up. Lots of people caught up with people they hadn't seen for years (decades?) and the restaurant did even better than I could have hoped — good food, more than anybody could eat, delivered promptly, plus the incredible birthday cake and present at the end.

I don't care how bad the next year (or decade) is: at least I had my fiftieth birthday party. Anybody else facing the Big Five Oh could do much worse than celebrate it at the same restaurant (11 Johnston Street, Collingwood; 9417-3960).

Night music

Cheerfulness keeps breaking in, as Brian Aldiss has been known to say. Thanks to Jeanette for a very jolly 50th birthday present — a night out at the National Theatre to see Loudon Wainwright III and Richard Thompson. Last time they appeared in tandem, eleven years ago at Her Majesty's Theatre, Loudon was more impressive than Richard. This time Loudon gave a rather offhand performance — not many of his best-known songs; lots of requests from the audience; a slightly glum flavour to everything. Loudon turned 50 last year; he's allowed his melancholy. Richard Thompson must have hit 50 recently, but age has just improved his songs and singing. On stage, accompa-

nied by the magnificent double bass of Danny Thompson, he explodes and unfurls his songs. He gives many of them, such as 'Bee's Wing' and the one about the Vincent motor bike, a power they don't have on the studio albums. Amazing guitar work: these days Thompson turns his guitar into a complete band.

The other wonderful night in the theatre was the Melbourne Theatre Company's perfect production of Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*. Sondheim's music's not something I'd listen to on CD, but on stage the marriage of drama and song is irresistible. Ruth Cracknell, Pamela Rabe and Helen Morse are the stars.

BOOKS READ RECENTLY

These are books read since February 1997. The ratings are:

** Books highly recommended.

* Books recommended.

* *Meeting in Infinity: Allegories and Extrapolations* by John Kessel (Arkham House 0-87054-164-1; 1992; 309 pp.)

Kessel's story 'The Lecturer' has been a favourite of mine since I read it in Michael Bishop's collection *Light Years and Dark*. I had hoped that the rest of the stories in this collection might match the quality of that story. (I suppose it's an allegory of some sort; Kessel's outdoors lecturer, unstoppable for year after year, is certainly a memorable image.) Most of the other stories, although deftly written, have a mean obviousness about them; they're twisted to suit some ulterior purpose. Apart from 'The Lecturer' the only other standout stories are the novella 'Another Orphan' (Kessel's moving Nebula Award winner about the time traveller who finds himself on the *Pequod* just as Captain Ahab begins the final chase for that damn whale) and 'Buffalo'.

** *Four Ways to Forgiveness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (HarperPrism 0-06-105234-5; 1995; 229 pp.)

These stories, which give flesh to references in earlier Hainish novels, are really four episodes in a revolutionary war that affects two planets for several hundred

years. The four sections add up to a novel that is more interesting than any particular story, as linked strands of the conflict are revealed in the lives of individuals. A companion novel to Le Guin's 1970s novels of revolution (*Malafrena* and *The Dispossessed*) except that in the 1990s most of Le Guin's heroes are female.

* *The Second Ruth Rendell Omnibus* (Arrow 0-09-936301-1; 1993; 458 pp.)

This collection includes three early non-Inspector Wexford novels by Ruth Rendell. Apprenticeship stuff, showing few of the writing skills that I've come to expect from latter-day Rendell/Vine. The first two novels in the collection, *To Fear a Painted Devil* and *Vanity Dies Hard*, I've forgotten already, although I read them only a month ago. *The Secret House of Death* has some of the cool originality of the later Rendell: especially her David Hockneyish depiction of the sterile housing estate in which one woman watches her secretive neighbours from her window and makes all the wrong conclusions.

** *Confessions of a Failed Southern Lady* by Florence King (St Martin's Press 0-312-05063-1; 1985; 278 pp.)

This book was much mentioned by various people who inhabit my other apa, Acnestis, but I had little hope of finding a copy. The wonderful Yvonne Rousseau, however, found a copy in Adelaide, and sent it to me for my 50th birthday. (What's this about no presents?)

This will be hard to beat as Book of the Year; very funny; very serious. This is the one book any woman would want to give any man to show just why the women's movement restarted in the 1960s among intelligent American middle class women. Not that it's a theoretical tome; all the book does is show what it's like to grow up female, intelligent and out of step in the 1950s American society where everything was guided by a suffocating McCarthyism of the spirit. When Florence bursts out, she really goes. Failed at the dating game, she discovers love in the arms of a divine Southern lady, and suffers everything any of us have suffered from first love. But Florence is still fabulously funny, even when she's piquantly pained. Her father,

mother and grandmother, more vivid than any characters in an Anne Tyler novel, are the stars of the book.

** *The Fallout*

by Garry Disher (Allen & Unwin 1-86448-330-X; 1997; 209 pp.)

Is this the fifth or sixth Wyatt crime novel? I should be getting sick of them, but I don't. Each one is more relentlessly gritty and downbeat than the previous one, but I feel that Disher is drawing from the underside a map of 1990s Australian society that is more accurate than any sociological treatise. I suspect this is also a metaphor for writing as a form of guerrilla activity, but Wyatt is not a man to mess with metaphors. Not much hope here, but great entertainment.

Favourites 1996

FAVOURITE FILMS 1996

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|---|---|
| 1 <i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i>
directed by James Cameron (1991) | 4 <i>The Big Country</i>
William Wyler (1958) |
| 2 <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>
Frank Darabont (1994) | 5 <i>The Boyfriend</i> (complete)
Ken Russell (1971) |
| 3 <i>The Music Teacher</i>
Gérard Corbiau (1988) | 6 <i>Mona Lisa</i>
Neil Jordan (1986) |
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FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES 1996

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| 1 'The Poacher'
Ursula K. Le Guin (<i>Unlocking the Air and Other Stories</i>) | 6 'Isabelle'
George Saunders (<i>CivilWarLand in Bad Decline</i>) |
| 2 'Olders'
Ursula K. Le Guin (<i>Unlocking the Air and Other Stories</i>) | 7 'Robert and Edith at the Song Festival'
Aina Vavare (<i>The Blue Mountain in Mujani</i>) |
| 3 'Hidden'
Stuart Kaminsky (<i>Dark Love</i>) | 8 'Mathias' Fortifications'
Aina Vavare (<i>The Blue Mountain in Mujani</i>) |
| 4 'Lunch at the Gotham Cafe'
Stephen King (<i>Dark Love</i>) | 9 'Bounty'
George Saunders (<i>CivilWarLand in Bad Decline</i>) |
| 5 'Looking Forward to the Harvest'
Cherry Wilder (<i>Dealers in Light and Darkness</i>) | 10 'His Angel'
Robert Lannes (<i>Off Limits</i>) |
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