



Cover: Stephen Campbell: 'Dear Diary'.

# **SF COMMENTARY 97**

**August 2018  
72 pages**

## **AWARDS**

**ION NEWCOMBE:  
EDWINA HARVEY  
WINS A. BERTRAM  
CHANDLER AWARD 2018**

**EDWINA TELLS  
HER STORY**

## **TRIBUTES TO**

**LUCY ZINKIEWICZ  
SHELBY VICK  
GARDNER DOZOIS  
HARLAN ELLISON**

## **NEW BOOKS**

**COLIN STEELE**

## **BEST OF 2016 & 2017**

**BRUCE GILLESPIE  
JENNIFER BRYCE  
IAN MOND  
DOUG BARBOUR**

# SF COMMENTARY 97

August 2018

72 pages

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**FRONT COVER:** Stephen Campbell: 'Dear Diary'.

**BACK COVER:** Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Jewelled Landscape'.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** Nigel Rowe (p. 4); Graeme Batho (p. 5); Ion Newcombe (p. 6); James  
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# I must be talking to my friends

## Unkindest cut

First there was *SF Commentary* 96. It was meant to come out in January this year. The months ground on. *SFC* 96 kept growing. When I thought it was finished, I rang **Lindsay Bacon** at **Copy Place**, my printer. ‘Can you print a 108-page magazine?’ Sure. Then I realised I had not counted one file before ringing him. ‘Can you print a 120-page magazine, Lindsay?’ No, it wouldn’t work.

Why should readers who download the PDF version of *SF Commentary* have to be bothered about the length of the fanzine? Because I am still under various obligations (including the last of the subscribers) to print some paper copies. 72 pages is the maximum I can fit in an envelope weighing 250 g that travels overseas for \$9 a copy. Step over the 250 g and it costs \$18 a copy.

So *SFC* 96 suffered the unkindest cut — being sliced in two. *SF Commentary* 97 is the second half of a single magazine, plus a new column by the ever-busy Colin Steele. As always, many thanks to **Bill Burns** at eFanzines.com for hosting the PDF version.

## In case you’ve missed seeing *SF Commentary* 96 ...

*SF Commentary* 96, April 2018, 49th Anniversary Edition, 70,000 words, includes:

- tributes to such recently fallen tall timbers as Ursula Le Guin, Kate Wilhelm, Peter Nicholls, Brian Aldiss, and Dave Hartwell
- lots of **letters of comment**
- **Colin Steele**’s ‘The Field’: reviews of recent SF and fantasy books
- **Andrew Milner** on George Turner’s *The Sea and Summer*
- **Ron Drummond**’s ‘The Frequency of Liberation’, based on his reading of the novels of Steve Erickson
- **Ray Sinclair-Wood** on ‘SF Poetry’
- **Pete Young** on becoming a Moderating Editor for the International Science Fiction Database
- covers by **Carol Kewley** and **Elaine Cochrane**.

Find it at:

- <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC96P.pdf> (portrait/magazine edition); or
- <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC96L.pdf> (landscape/widescreen edition)
- and if that doesn’t work, go to:  
<http://efanzines.com> and look for each issue.



## Fifty years young

*SFC* 96, which appeared in April, should have appeared in January, which would have made it truly the 49th Anniversary Edition. Which means that the Fiftieth Annish approaches like an express train, scheduled for January 2019. How to celebrate the occasion? I can’t afford to put on a Launch Event, although some magazines stage a launch of every issue. It’s probably worth aiming at publishing the last all-print edition, but I’m not confident of being able to pay for the postage for it. What to include in this issue? Suggestions, please. One possibility is a list of every person who has contributed to *SF Commentary*, *Steam Engine Time*, *The Metaphysical Review*, and *\*byg\*/Treasure/Scratch Pad* during the last 50 years. Lots of Ditmar and Hugo winners, and even a few Nobel Prize hopefuls, but I’d like most to celebrate the people who keep supporting me for year after year, with articles, letters, donations, review copies, trade copies, etc, etc. But I suspect such a list would make a large fanzine in itself. As I say, suggestions please.



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## 2018's shower of awards

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### Surprise! surprise!

As I wrote in *SFC* 96, it was very chuff-worthy receiving a **Ditmar Award** (Australian Science Fiction Award) for Best Fan Production this year when I had thought a fanzine would forever be beaten by podcasts and blogs. Thanks again to everybody who nominated and voted.

Even more surprising was to discover at the beginning of May that a committee of **Corflu** (the annual convention of fanzine fans) had awarded me a **Lifetime Achievement Award**. **Andy Hooper**, editor of *Flag*, made the presentation at this year's Corflu, held in Toronto, Canada, but I couldn't afford to be there. Thanks to the committee, whose members placed me in the company of past winners Ted White, Art Widner, Earl Kemp, Shelby Vick, Elinor Busby, Ray Nelson, Peter Weston, and John Bangsund. **Pete Weston** and **John Bangsund** are, along with **Dick Geis** and **Bill Bowers**, the major influences on the early years of *SF Commentary*.

Such an elevation — but I can think of many other fanzine editors and writers who should well have received this award before I did.



Andy Hooper presents Bruce Gillespie with his Lifetime Achievement Award at Corflu 35, Toronto, Canada, 2018.  
(Photo: Nigel Rowe.)

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## Congratulations to Edwina Harvey

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Ian Newcombe:

### Edwina Harvey wins the 2018 A. Bertram Chandler Award

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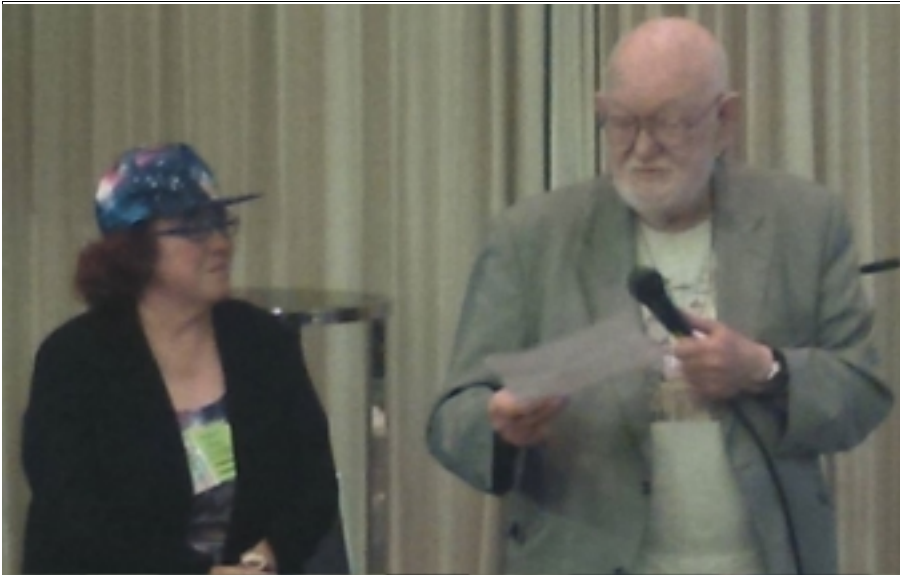
**Easter 2018, in Perth, Western Australia, at Swancon, this year's Australian nation convention, Edwina Harvey was awarded this year's A. Bertram Chandler Award for Lifetime Achievement by the Australian Science Fiction Foundation. Here is the official citation, written by Ian Newcombe.**

Edwina Harvey is a worthy recipient of this year's A. Bertram Chandler Award. She has been an active member of Australian science fiction fandom: writing, publishing and with her amazing artwork for 40 years.

She was one of the founding members of Astrex, the Star Trek fan club of NSW, and regularly contributed fiction to the associated fanzine *Beyond Antares* as well as other SF fanzines from the mid 1970s onwards. She was also an active member of The Hitchhikers Club of Australia (Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy Fan club) from approximately 1984 onwards, contributing to the newsletter *Australian Playbeing* through articles and comments, and assisting with the copying and distribu-

tion of some issues of the newsletter. Known locally as the Fund Raising Queens, Edwina has worked with Karen Auhl on organising fundraiser events for Medtrek 4, Huttcon 90, and two Sydney Worldcon bids (late 1980s–mid 1990s). Edwina has been a contributing member of FOLCC (the Friends of Linda Cox Chan), which was an informal group donating monies raised to Diabetes Charities in Australia. Linda Cox Chan was a Sydney-based SF fan artist and writer who passed away in 1991. From 2012 to the present time, Edwina has also run a lucky dip at Australian SF conventions to raise money for FFANZ (Fan Fund of Australia and New Zealand).

Edwina has been organiser/co-organiser of three SF relaxacons: Nowracon (with Karen Auhl, 1989), Nelcon (with Sue Pears), 2001, and the highly successful Medtrek Reunion 33 and 1/3rd Reunion in 2015. She worked on the committee as secretary for Huttcon 90, the National Science Fiction Media Convention, 1990, held in St Kilda, Melbourne, November 1990. In 1994, Edwina was the treasurer for Comedycon, a SF/Comedy



**Robin Johnson (r.) presents Edwina Harvey (l.) with her A. Bertram Chandler Award 2018. (Photo: Graeme Batho.)**

convention with Hattie Hayridge from the TV series *Red Dwarf* as Guest of Honour.

More recently, in July 2017, Edwina was Guest of Honour at the highly successful Medtrek 6: the 50th Anniversary of Star Trek in Australia.

At Australian conventions, Edwina is a well-known and respected fan huckster, the 'Celestial Cobbler', promoting Australian written and published SF, and becoming well known for her own creative works in ceramics, jewellery, and painted silk creations.

From 2002 to 2010 Edwina co-edited (with Ted Scribner) the revived version of *The Australian Science Fiction*

*Bullsheet*. Edwina was one of the founding members of *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* (ASIM). She worked in various roles on the magazine from 2002 to 2015, including editor for five issues. She has co-edited two anthologies of (mostly Australian) original speculative fiction: *Light Touch Paper*, *Stand Clear* (2012) and *Use Only As Directed* (2014). She is the author of three books with Peggy Bright Books: a young adult SF novel, *The Whale's Tale* (2009), a collection of interlinked short stories, *The Back of the*

*Back of Beyond* (2013), and *An Eclectic Collection of Stuff and Things*, a collection of her writing (2017). A complete bibliography of her works can be checked out on <https://edwinaharvey.wordpress.com/my-writing-and-editing-cv/>.

She currently works as a freelance editor, and has edited several SF books for Australian small press, Peggy Bright Books, and US small press, Dragonwell Press. She also gives back to the current Australian SF scene by editing short stories, and novels for emerging SF writers.

Edwina also rescues elderly dogs and cats from shelters, the occasional donkey as well — and is looking for a miniature horse to graze in the back yard.

In other words, Edwina is a hard-working treasure.

## Edwina Harvey: The A. Bertram Chandler Award: What goes around comes around

I was honoured to receive the A. Bertram Chandler Award at Swancon this year.

I was lucky to meet Bert Chandler. He was the Guest of Honour at the first Medtrek run by Ron and Sue Clarke, held at the Hydro Majestic, Katoomba, NSW, back when it was a rickety old building in need of renovation. He'd had stories published in the SF magazines. I wasn't interested in the SF magazines. A few decades later I'd be a founding member of *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, a digest-sized Australian SF magazine.

Chandler wore a tuxedo (I think for the entire weekend) to distinguish himself from the other con-goers. As the Guest of Honour he had a certain mystique, and at my age I would have been too shy (yes, really) to approach him. GoHs were to be watched from a respectful distance, and *not* to be spoken to lest you betray

yourself as a gibbering idiot (as I did when I met George Takei at the first convention I ever attended.)

If I had a time machine, I'd go back and tell my younger self to pay closer attention to the old guy in the tux, talk to him about writing and pulp magazines. But my younger self thought she knew everything and where she was going. Wrong on both counts.

Julie Townsend and I were two *Star Trek* fans in high school when we wrote to Diane Marchant, the Australian Welcommittee contact. The Welcommittee was a global scattering of *Star Trek* sentinels who put *Star Trek* fans in contact with other *Star Trek* fans. We asked if there was a *Star Trek* fan club in Australia that we could join. Diane sent us a list of names and addresses, including Sue Clarke (now Susan Batho), Shayne McCormack (who managed Galaxy Bookshop), and Nikki White (who made her career in the National Library).



**Edwina Harvey with her A. Bertram Chandler Award 2017.  
(Photo: Ion Newcombe.)**

Ron and Sue Clarke owned a device beyond the means and pocket-money of two teenage schoolgirls: a Gestetner duplicator that they used to run off Ron's zine *The Mentor* and Sue's fanzines.

Sue, Shayne, Nikki, and others had previously formed DUSK (Down Under Space Kooks), which had gone into hiatus, but Sue gathered Julie and I and everyone she knew interested in *Star Trek*, and ASTREX (The Star Trek Club of NSW) was launched.

As the fanclub grew (Ron and Sue printing and posting the newsletters), Sue produced more issues of her *ST* fanzine *Beyond Antares*, and was looking for submissions. Cue young Edwina, who was sure she was destined to be a best-selling author! Susan's zines gave me the chance to test my writing-wings. Astrex had an annual writing competition, and I often placed in that.

Before long I started dabbling with fanzines myself. Mum bought me a box of Gestetner stencils when I finished high school and, courtesy of the Clarkes' Gestetner I produced *Tahler's Trilogy*, my original fiction, in three parts. I sold copies at the monthly *Star Trek* marathons at ANZAC House.

My next venture into fanzines was more orthodox. I'd taken to Douglas Adams' radio series *The Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy* with the fervour of a religious zealot. My copy of the novel got pressed on friends so they'd know what I was talking about when I spouted on about Zaphod Beeblebrox, towels, and Vogon poetry. But I needed *more*, so I wrote HHG fan-fic, encouraged others to do the same, and started producing *Pangalia*, possibly the first HHG zine. (I also discovered British HHG Club, ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha, and the Hitchers Club of Australia,

started by Ian Gunn and a mate.) I also wrote *Trek*, *Blake's 7*, *The Professionals*, and fantasy fan-fic that Sue Clarke published in her zines. I won Australasian Science Fiction Media Awards for Best Media Fanwriter at Zencon in 1988 and again in 1990.

Conventions were an addiction for me. I attended and participated in *all* the Medtreks, working on fundraisers with Karen Auhl. We did So Long and Thanks for All The Fish' New Year's Eve parties at Karen and Ace's place, where singing along *very quietly* to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* after midnight became a tradition. In the mid 1980s we held annual SF & Fantasy Gala Days in Surry Hills in Sydney. Attendees paid a small entrance fee to browse and buy from SF market stalls. Years later I'd sit behind tables at Sydney Supanova, which draws over 20,000 people, and wonder what might have happened if I'd only dreamed big!

I attended Syncons, Sydcon, a Kinkon, and Aussiecon 2! Too young to attend the first Australian Worldcon, I'd lapped up Worldcon stories, and I wasn't missing out this time. I descended on Melbourne with a group of girlfriends, met up with Ian Gunn and James Allen, who I didn't know didn't know each other, and we all had a four-day party.

Ever the prankster, Gunny drew a flyer for Huttcon, a hoax worldcon bid for the Hutt River Province, a part of WA that Prince Leonard annexed from the rest of Australia. The alleged bid party was in room 1313 of the Southern Cross Hotel, which didn't have a thirteenth floor; that's never stopped some fans claiming they were at the bid party though. I didn't go to the bid party, but when I interviewed Douglas Adams by mail I asked if he'd consider being a GoH at an Australian SF convention, and he tentatively answered 'Yes'. That was enough to get a group of young fans excited about running Huttcon for real. (The instigator was safely overseas, but growing increasingly concerned as news reached him that his hoax con had been hijacked and was taking on form and substance.)

Douglas Adams soon bowed out as GoH. Ironically he was touring Australia promoting his book *Last Chance to See* in the weeks prior to the convention.

An earlier media SF con had had problems securing guests, so I commissioned Gary Armstrong to make a replica Marvin the Paranoid Android, which he did, to his specs so he could wear the costume. News about the 'secret guest' leaked before the con, but no one was certain until Marvin took a walk along the St Kilda Esplanade, promoting Huttcon and scaring small children the weekend before the con. Ed Bishop was our overseas guest, and Norman, Margaret, and Rebecca Hetherington, creators and presenters of Mr Squiggle, the Man from the Moon, were our local guests. I doubt there was an adult who didn't revert to childhood when Mr Squiggle appeared at the con.

A year before Huttcon, Karen Auhl and I ran Nowracon, a 'dry run' fundraising relaxacon in Nowra. James Allen and Danny Oz drove up from Melbourne but had car trouble, and spent their first night parked in a paddock. The hotel contact failed to pass on the final catering numbers and payment to their restaurant staff, leading to awkward moments for all concerned and the great cake stampede of '89 as we were all determined to

get dessert.

We ran Huttcon for the National Media SF Con for 1990 on the grounds that it would be good publicity but no one would vote for us. We won. Despite a few mishaps, the resulting Media Natcon was considered successful. We donated our profits to Greenpeace, and several friendships were shattered, never to be repaired, which was considered par for the course.

Just after Christmas 1991, I heard Linda Cox Chan had passed away. Linda was someone you expected to always see at fundraisers and cons, and her unexpected death affected all of us. Linda was a Type 1 diabetic, so we banded together as FOLCC (Friends of Linda Cox Chan), an informal group to raise and donate money to diabetes charities.

I was marginally involved in two Sydney Worldcon bids, mostly with fundraising and promotion. The proposed venue was Darling Harbour, but neither bid won. After the second Sydney bid, Susan Batho came back saying there'd been a lot of interest and the next Australian bid it would probably win. Aussiecon3 (Melbourne, 1999) was the next successful Australian bid. I was their Sydney poster-putter-upper, and I tapped into my library contacts to get the Worldcon posters distributed around NSW, and other states too. I also promoted Aussiecon 3 on a SF radio program on community radio station 2RRR.

A couple of months ago I was at the new International Convention Centre at Darling Harbour. The dreamer in me was thinking it would still be the perfect venue for a Worldcon. The realist in me was thinking those days are long gone. For one thing, Sydney no longer has the fannish infrastructure to run a large con; for another, I believe pop expos have out-evolved SF conventions. Where SF conventions were always trying to find and attract people into fandom, SF, fantasy, and cos-play has entered the public domain now, and people who don't necessarily recognise themselves as fans are participating through pop expos. It could be argued that SF cons are the victims of their own success.

In one of those dangerous discussions you don't realise you're having, Graeme and Jo Batho and I talked about running a con with a Red Dwarf actor as GoH. The result was Comedy Con, with the lovely Hattie Hayridge (Holly #2) as our GoH. Like Huttcon, it was a sharp learning experience. Despite getting good publicity, we couldn't get the membership we needed to make it financially viable. Unlike Huttcon, at least we are still friends despite Jo and Graeme divorcing since then.

My mother had passed away a few months before Comedy Con. My father had a stroke two months after the convention and my life changed abruptly.

My mum dying was the catalyst to have another go at writing. My father and I never really got on. After dinner, I'd retreat to my room and write while he watched TV.

In 1996 I had a story accepted by *Aurealis* magazine. In later issues they published a couple of articles and interviews that I did. I also had some success with other magazines emerging at the time: *Under Magellanic Clouds*, *Fables and Reflections*, *Harbinger*, *Consensual*, and *Antipodean SF*, which taught me to write flash fiction.

I also wrote a YA SF romance novel called *Boyfriend Wanted: No Experience Necessary*, which I entered in the

inaugural George Turner Prize offered by Transworld Publishers. I was chuffed when my novel was a finalist. I got invited to the dinner where the winner would be announced by Terry Pratchett, the Guest Speaker. I remember wondering who the young smiling girl was sitting on the carpet as we gathered before dinner. I found out soon enough! It was the winner, Tansy Rayner Roberts who had her novel, *Splashdance Silver*, published by Transworld.

At the dinner I met several other short-listers including Les Petersen and Luke Kendall. We've kept in touch over the years, and Tansy, Les, and I were founding members of *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* a few years later.

Despite my father becoming more and more controlling as he aged (I acquiesced to his wishes and gave up meeting with other SF fans in Sydney on Thursday nights), I was determined to go to Aussiecon 3 in 1999. I thought if he didn't know about the convention I could just get in the car and drive away, but he found out and a battle of wills ensued. I got to Aussiecon 3 — I even drove the Great Ocean Road to Warnambool to see Southern Right whales afterwards — but there was always the pall of my father hanging over me stunting my enjoyment. My hard-fought victory was a guilt trip and eventually I had to drive home.

Given my home circumstances, I have no idea why I thought I could run (let alone get to) a relaxacon at Nelson's Bay in 2000, but I needed to escape and socialise with SF fans again. Ted Scribner gave a talk on Tolkien, Rob Riel spoke on publishing. Rod McLeod proved himself a great story-teller over dinner. Lucy Zinkiewicz, teaching at UNSW at the time, was also there. Jack Dwyer and other Newcastle space/SF fans joined us for part of the weekend. The venue offered a pool, spa, and tennis court and the relaxacon started with a dolphin-watching cruise.

The anticipated battle with my father never eventuated. He was in a nursing home by then.

I found Marc Ortlieb's *Australian SF Bullsheat* a wonderful source of news of the wider SF community and really missed it when he stopped producing it. I tried hinting what a loss it was but he was resolute. My tactics finally shifted from 'When are you going to start the *Bullsheat* again?' (which wasn't having the desired effect) to 'Well, would you mind if I took it on?' I didn't have Marc's energy to produce a (primarily) e-zine every fortnight, but I could commit to producing it once a month. I had no idea of how to run a web-page, but Ted Scribner did, and was happy to take on the role.

Launching the revived *Bullsheat* on 1 April (April Fool's Day) 2002 seemed appropriate. It ran pretty much to schedule for the next eight years. The only times we didn't publish on time was due to medical problems. I released an issue early (and was the headlining news item) because I was facing the first of several (not that I knew it at the time) eye operations to stop me going blind. I think Ted couldn't update the website once, because he also faced surgical procedures.

Around the same time Tony Plank set up his Ink-spillers webpage, primarily as a list of resources for writers, but like the *Bullsheat*, it grew and grew. We often duplicated each other's material but with a sense of

camaraderie rather than competition. We all became (mostly online) great mates.

In 2001 Robbie Matthews started a discussion on the Eidolist about a lack of local SF markets that would accept lighter SF and fantasy. A lot of people agreed that there was a niche for such a magazine. Some of us, including Robbie Matthews, me, Tansy Rayner Roberts, Andrew Finch, Les Petersen, Ian Nichols, Sally Beasley, Tehani Croft, Simon Haynes, Danuta Rayne, Monissa Whitely, and Dirk Flinthart (I hope I haven't forgotten anyone), were willing to financially seed the idea. Others, like Zara Baxter, Stu Barrow, Sue Bursztynski, and Lucy Zinkeiwicz, joined later, and many more came and went over the years. I'm pretty sure it was Simon Haynes who came up with the title *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*. We were scattered all around Australia, but connected by the internet. We also had a rotating editorship but these things worked in our favour.

We had a pre-launch at Swancon in 2002, and a main launch of the magazine at Convergence, the Natcon in Melbourne a few months later, with many of us meeting face to face for the first time. My post-launch impression was that if the magazine folded, at least we had a future as an amateur theatre group! I loved the imagination and ingenuity people like Danuta and Tehani brought to the magazine. I shared my Celestial Cobbler dealers table with *ASIM* at first, but as the magazine produced more issues, it got its own table, usually near mine so we could share the human resources. I held back from editing until Issue 12, but that coincided with my eye problems. I'd pretty much edited the issue before I went into hospital, but proof-reading post-op was beyond me. I had to rely on Sally and Zara for that.

I think four stories in *ASIM* 12 received honorary mentions in Gardner Dozois' *Year's Best Science Fiction, Volume 17*. That made me feel pretty good about the stories I'd selected.

While I expected my first edited issue of *ASIM* to be my last, things settled down on the eye front and I went on to edit issues 24, 33, 42, and 58 of the magazine, as well as helping out with other issues. Like dabbling in fanzines before it, *ASIM* rekindled my love for editing.

In 2007, I was the winning NAFF (National Fan Fund) delegate, which allowed me to get to my second Swancon. I enjoyed it very much.

In 2009 my YA SF novel *The Whale's Tale* was published by Peggy Bright Books. Like many writers before me, I suspect, when I first held my novel in my hands I burst into tears.

Ted and I kept producing the *Bullsheet*, but it felt like a thankless task at times. People seemed more interested in finding typos (of which there were many) and the internet was evolving; sites like Facebook were negating the need for newsletters and websites that collected SF information together. Ted was still interested, but after eight years (and three Ditmar Awards!) my enthusiasm was flagging. I suggested he do both roles, or find a replacement for me, but he decided we'd bow out together. We printed issue 101 just after Aussiecon 4 in 2010, and that seemed as good a place as any to leave it. The *Bullsheet* was handed on to Wendy Palmer, who kept it going for a while.

I helped do a little promotional work for Aussiecon

4, mostly around Sydney and through library connections, but we'd all migrated to digital for most of our information needs by then.

I enjoyed Aussiecon 4. My dealer's table selling books and craft was beside the *ASIM* table, and it was the biggest *ASIM* reunion we'd had since the magazine's launch. Other highlights of Aussiecon 4 were being on a panel with Erica Lacey and reading from *The Whale's Tale*.

After 30 years of working in the University of NSW library, I took redundancy in 2011 and studied to get my editor's qualifications, helped and encouraged by Sarah Murray White. My new career is freelance editor. I have fandom to thank for that!

In 2012 I won the FFANZ race to attend the NZ Natcon in Auckland. I thoroughly enjoyed mixing with New Zealand fans, getting to be on panels and running a dealer's table in another country. My way of paying back FFANZ has been to run lucky dips at cons I go to. They usually sell out, and I intend to keep doing fan fund fund-raising for as long as I can.

My second book, *The Back of the Back of Beyond*, a sort of urban/rural fantasy featuring dragons and gamers, UFOs and Worldcons, was published in 2013. It was partly sponsored by people paying up-front to be woven into the stories (or have their cats included) in the book.

Though he died early in 2013, it was early 2014 before some of Jan Howard Finder's (aka 'Wombat') ashes arrived in Australia with instructions that they be scattered on Australian soil. He'd been a frequent visitor to Australia. He had sponsored a wombat called Charlotte at Taronga Zoo. I knew him more by reputation than in person, though we briefly met at Aussiecon 3 in 1999 and we'd traded notes on the Voodoo board at the Worldcon in Anaheim in 2006. It was an atypical cold wet January day when Susan Batho, Sue Bursztynski (recording the event), and I huddled while Anne Devrell conducted a memorial service in a reserve at Wentworth Falls.

Later we warmed ourselves and reminisced in a pie shop at Wentworth Falls and I threw down the usual challenge to Susan Batho: 'So when are you holding the next Medtrek?' Usually it's a red rag to a bull, but this time she lamented the lack of Medtreks.

I wanted to say 'thank you' for all Susan had done for fandom so I started plotting and planning a Medtrek Reunion in the Blue Mountains. The Hydro Majestic, venue of the first Medtrek, had been lavishly refurbished and was beyond our means as a con hotel. I found an affordable venue — the Hotel Blue in Katoomba, even though you had to climb a flight of stairs to get to the function room. Naturally Susan Batho, Mother of all Medtreks, was Guest of Honour; we just didn't tell her. Everyone attending was told not to tell Susan she was GoH. No one did. Susan's husband Graeme and her daughters Eleanor and Evelyn helped the 'Susan wrangle'. Graeme lured Susan to the venue for what she thought was a romantic weekend away. She was surprised but delighted to discover it included about 50 fannish friends.

Paul and Colleen Boland were our honoured guests. We'd all got to know each other through meeting at cons and fundraisers over the years. Colleen had end-stage cancer, and it was a long way from the Hunter Valley to Katoomba, but she was adamant she wanted to go, and



Paul wasn't going to deny her wish. I'm glad so many of us had the chance to see her again, as frail as she was. She passed away about six weeks after the reunion.

Profits from the Medtrek Reunion were donated to 'The World's Greatest Shave', an annual event that raises money for leukemia and blood-borne cancers.

My association with *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* came to an abrupt ending after the Medtrek Reunion. One of the *ASIM* co-op members had been manipulating me (and others) on line and in person for several years. When a mutual acquaintance, who wasn't a part of *ASIM*, contacted me saying the magazine really needed a poetry editor — a role I'd been filling for about four years — I suspected who was behind this suggestion and decided I'd had enough. I had been with *ASIM* for 13 years by that stage, but she'd made the later years a feat of endurance. I bailed, but I'm glad the magazine is still being produced with a fresh crew.

In 2017 my book *An Eclectic Collection of Stuff and Things*, a sampler of my writing over the past 30-plus years, was co-launched at Continuum 13 in Melbourne with Simon Petrie's SF mystery novella, *Matters Arising from the Identification of the Body*, which I'd edited.

It seems that by holding the Medtrek Reunion I'd

thrown down the gauntlet to Susan Batho. She was determined to run one more Medtrek, and I was flattered to be Guest of Honour at Medtrek 6 at Penrith in 2017. It was a fun con and it marked 40 years in fandom for me.

This year I was honoured to receive the A. Bertram Chandler Award at Swancon in Perth. I particularly like Swancons because they make all feel welcome, and also because they encourage children and young adults to discover SF and fantasy.

This is where I came in! I stumbled into fandom in my teenage years and was encouraged to stay. It's shaped and enriched my life. I've met so many wonderful, talented people through fandom, made lasting friends of some of them. I've been given opportunities to explore my creative side: write stories, articles, poems, novels; produce and edit fanzines, magazines and books; create ceramic and silk art; run my Celestial Cobbler dealers table; help with conventions.

My life's road hasn't taken me where I expected to go, I have no idea how much longer the journey will last, but I've enjoyed the ride.

— Edwina Harvey, June 2018

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## My melancholy duty: More tall timbers crashing

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It is my melancholy duty (as Bob Menzies said to all Australians at the beginning of World War II) to tell you that we have lost more tall timbers — distinguished colleagues — even in the couple of months since I published *SFC* 96.

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### Edwina Harvey: Vale Lucy Zinkiewicz

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**\*brg\*:** Lucy Zinkiewicz is a Melbourne fan I met only once, at the 1987 annual Melbourne convention held in St Kilda. She was a Friend on Facebook, so I knew that she was gravely ill from cancer, but she died suddenly from an undiagnosed heart attack while in hospital. Many fans around Australia knew her well and valued her highly. It seems that we did not meet because she mainly attended media conventions, which have a long history quite separate from the that of the conventions I attend. At one time she was a co-editor for *Andromeda's In Flight Magazine*, one of Australia's two regular online SF magazines. And she was very nearly 20 years younger than I am. Here's a tribute from Edwina Harvey, read by Tehani Croft at the opening ceremony of Continuum 14 this June in Melbourne:\*



James 'Jocko' Allen and Lucy Zinkiewicz 1982.  
(Photo courtesy Jocko Allen.)

The generous soul who bought me *Blake's 7* magazines decades ago. The girl from Hoppers Crossing, the girl who (with Adina Hamilton?) wrote *Strawberry Filks Forever*. The girl who had her identity swiped by Ian Gunn (with the best and funniest intentions in the world) to produce *Zinkiezine*. The woman who came to University of New South Wales as an academic. The woman who was the best slush-mistress *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*

ever had. The woman who showed us the joys of eating at a sushi train at the Brisbane natcon in 2006. The woman who decided at short notice she'd come to Perth and share my room and make sure I could find my way around the con hotel OK at Swancon in 2007. I so much wanted to show you how much you'd touched so many of us, how much you were appreciated ... I left it too late. I'm sorry.

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## Shelby Vick (ShelVy) (1928–2018)

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On the list of past Lifetime Achievement Award winners is **Shelby Vick** ('ShelVy'), who died very recently in his late 80s. I've never met him, and his name rings with me more as a fannish legend than as somebody I was ever involved with. I know he once put on Corflu in Panama

City — poorly attended, but everybody who went to Panama City remembers that convention clearly. He was in at least one Yahoo e-list with me, but had not posted for about a year. I must check the *Fancylopedia* to find out his many achievements in fandom.

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## Gardner Dozois (1947–2018)

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I did not ever meet **Gardner Dozois** (who died aged 71 on 27 May 2018) but I do realise that he has probably influenced my life and reading more than most people. I first enjoyed his work when he was a hot young New Wave author in the early seventies. His novella 'The Last Day of July' is one of the best pieces of fiction Robert Silverberg published in his series of *New Dimensions* original fiction anthologies. Another story of his from the period infuriated George Turner so much that he wrote one of those diatribes he tended to emit if he believed that another author was writing inauthentically about the experience of being a soldier. As I remember, Gardner replied more in puzzlement than in anger.

Gardner Dozois has published a lot of memorable fiction, but it his work as anthologist that has made him the centre of science fiction publishing over the last 35 years. *The Year's Best Science Fiction* appeared first in 1984, and the last volume to be edited by him will appear later this year. Other editors have published *Year's Bests* since the 1950s, but the completeness of Dozois' coverage over a long period makes his collections into a fiction encyclopedia of the age.

I am told that he was a very funny man at conventions, a great friend, and all those other qualities we value in our science-fictional friends, but as I say, I didn't meet him. My loss.

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## Harlan Ellison (1934–2018)

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**Dave Langford** writes in the latest *Ansible* (July 2018): '**Harlan Ellison** (1934–2018), US author, anthologist, screenwriter and controversialist whose many trophies include seven Hugos and four Nebulas for short fiction (plus a further Hugo for his *Star Trek* script 'The City on the Edge of Forever'), died in his sleep on 28 June; he was 84. [JDB] His noted anthologies *Dangerous Visions* (1967) and *Again, Dangerous Visions* (1972) both received special Worldcon awards, while even the non-appearance of *The Last Dangerous Visions* became legendary. Among his life achievement honours are the World Fantasy Award (1993), Bram Stoker Award (1996), SFWA Grand Master (2006) and SF Hall of Fame (2011). Ellison's flamboyant, hyperbolic, take-no-prisoners approach to life and literature won him much admiration and some enmity; the SF world is a drearier place without him.'

Long-time *SFC* reader **David Pringle** unearthed the following excerpts from **J. G. Ballard's** review of Harlan Ellison's *Approaching Oblivion* short story collection (in a reviews-article 'Zap Code', *New Statesman*, 25 March 1977, pp. 405–6): 'The most notable exception among contemporary writers of sf is Harlan Ellison, an aggressive and restless extrovert who conducts his life at a shout and his fiction at a scream. Teenage gang-leader turned Hollywood screen-writer, polemicist and unarmed combat specialist (he once unnerved me in the elevator of a Rio hotel by offering to demonstrate how to kill a man in the three seconds between floors), Ellison is one of the most interesting and talented sf writers to appear since Ray Bradbury. Ten years ago he published the first of his remarkable series *Dangerous Visions*, collections of specially commissioned stories whose authors were urged to capitalise on every taboo or deviant notion



inside their heads, and which made a complete break with the already fossilised conventions of American sf. Out went outer space and the far future, in came inner space and the world of *Zap Comics* and biomorphic fantasies inspired by William Burroughs. *Approaching Oblivion*, Ellison's latest short story collection, has all the visceral and paranoid obsessions that run through the anthologies ... Ellison may be the first of a new kind of sf writer, completely uninterested in science but attracted to the medium by the ample opportunities which New Wave sf offers for exploiting the most sensational emotional mixes.'

I've never met Harlan Ellison. I attended neither the 1983 Sydney convention at which he was the Guest of Honour nor the party that John Foyster and Jenny Bryce held to welcome him to Melbourne. Many people who've known him since he became known as the *enfant terrible* of SF in the early 1950s (and remained so for the rest of his life) have deeply mourned his death, and many others have not. I found most of his stories nearly unreadable, because, as Ballard writes, he conducted his 'fiction at a scream'. The hysterical quality in most of his stories made it hard to appreciate their other qualities.

As a reader and fan of what became known as New Wave SF, I did appreciate the efforts he made to promote a fresh way of thinking about SF in America. The true genesis of the New Wave was in Britain, of course, in *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy/Impulse* after Michael Moorcock and Compass Books took over those magazines from E. J. Carnell in 1965. And even in America, Judith Merrill's promotion of the 'New Thing', both in her anthologies and her reviews, preceded Ellison's efforts. But Harlan knew how to hit people hard, for better or worse, and wake them up. For his first *Dangerous Visions* anthology (1967), he encouraged his writers to expand their literary and thematic reach. Unfortunately, Ellison created a rich pudding to which he added too many rich sauces. In everything that he did, Harlan Ellison's efforts had to be more obvious and important than anybody else's. To each story he added both an author's com-

ments and his own commentary. When he produced *Again, Dangerous Visions* in 1972, the volume contained much more of the same mixture. However, the visions had become much less dangerous, because a vast amount of New Wave fiction had already been published, not only in Britain but also in the American original fiction anthologies and the Ace Specials. Nevertheless, Ellison was still hooked on the sound of his own voice as heard in the symphony of authorial voices.

When he put together the vast *The Last Dangerous Visions*, he set out to include any author who had not been included in the first two volumes, including the many new writers who emerged after 1970. But if he wanted to include his own comments on every story, Harlan Ellison faced an impossible workload. The result was the largest, most famous science fiction book never published. Some years later, Christopher Priest wrote about the whole saga in his fanzine-that-became-a-book *The Last Deadloss Visions*. Priest's voice was moderate, but his message was deadly: that Harlan Ellison either could not or would not finish the project (whose publication date was re-announced every year or so), but he would not release the many stories bought and locked up in his files.

All of which would not have mattered to me if the sorry situation had not happened twice. When Harlan Ellison visited Sydney in 1983, he was much feted by the locals, including Terry Dowling, perhaps his greatest fan. Terry is a fine writer in his own right, but he was misled by Harlan. And Carey Hanfield, partner in Norstrilia Press, who did attend the Sydney convention, was also misled. The proposal was simple. Terry Dowling would collect the best stories from the many Australian writers of the period, Harlan Ellison would co-edit and gather other stories from authors who were interested, and the whole would be published by Norstrilia Press. It would have been our swan song if it had ever come together. Stories were bought, and Harlan gathered them at his place, but nothing happened. And nothing happened. The promises continued, but *Down Deep*, the anthology, never appeared. However, after George Turner died in 1997, and I found out he had appointed me his literary executor, his agent (now my agent) Cherry Weiner reminded me that George's last short story remained unpublished in the *Down Deep* cache. It took Cherry well over a year to persuade Ellison to revert the rights to the story. In 1990, Peter McNamara (Aphelion Books, Adelaide) published *A Pursuit of Miracles*, confident that it included all of George Turner's short fiction. It didn't. If anybody now wants to re-issue *Pursuit*, we can include George's last story for the first time.

The internet has been ringing with Harlan Ellison stories ever since he died. Perhaps the most interesting piece is a 1960 fanzine fragment that Kim Huett sent me as an attachment to an email, in which such fans as Nick Falasca, Bob Tucker, and Harry Warner Jr show themselves as outraged by Harlan Ellison's antics as they had been by the antics of Claude Degler a decade before. He will not be forgotten.

— Bruce Gillespie, 11 July 2018



**Colin Steele's** qualifications include MA, GradDipLib, FAHA, FLCIP, FALIA, and KtCross Spain. He is an Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University since 2004. Before that, he was Director of Scholarly Information Strategies and University Librarian, ANU (1980–2002). He was the SF reviewer for *The Canberra Times* for many years, and been contributing to *SF Commentary* since the 1970s. **Review copies should be sent to him at ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, Room 3.31, Beryl Rawson Building #13, Acton, ACT 2601, Australia.**

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# Colin Steele

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## The field

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### Books about books

**A CONVERSATION LARGER THAN THE UNIVERSE.  
READINGS IN SCIENCE FICTION AND THE  
FANTASTIC, 1762–2017**  
by Henry Wessells (The Grolier Club; \$US35)

The Grolier Club in New York, founded in 1884, held its first exhibition on 'science fiction and the fantastic', *A Conversation Larger than the Universe*, from 25 January to 10 March 2018.

The exhibition was based on the collection of antiquarian bookseller **Henry Wessells**, an SF aficionado and a frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, as well as an editor and bibliographer of SF author Avram Davidson. The exhibition lives on in the excellent monograph/catalogue with many colour illustrations.

As one whose own large SF and fantasy collection resides within the Fisher Library of Sydney University and which, like that of Wessells, includes many signed and inscribed editions, it is interesting to see the focus of Wessells's journey through the SF collecting universe. Wessells says he uses the terms 'science fiction' and 'the literature of the fantastic more or less interchangeably to refer to a mode of writing (and reading)'.

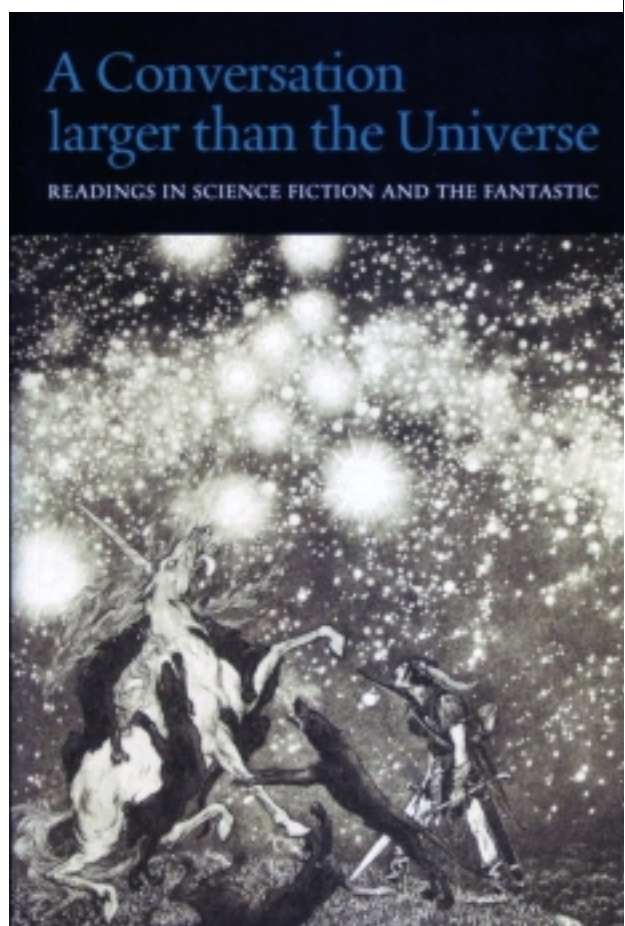
Wessells, in his Introduction, notes that the chapters/essays 'take their shape from my reading and thinking about science fiction during the past 25 years ... the chronology, from 1762 to 2017, proceeds from the Gothic origins of science fiction to works by contemporary authors (sometimes friends)'. The 70 items in the exhibition include books, many signed or inscribed, as well as magazines, manuscripts, letters, an LP (Brian Eno) and works of art, dating from the mid-eighteenth century to the present.

Wessells acknowledges this is a decidedly personal analysis deriving from the 70 items documented in Chapter 18, 'Exhibition Checklist'. There are omissions; for example, he writes, 'No Poe, no Tolkien, Asimov, or Heinlein, for matters of inclination and means'. Nor Alfred Bester, Arthur C. Clarke or Jack Vance. This does

not preclude, however, his commentary on specific works by, for instance Heinlein, in the eighteen chapters.

John Crowley, a proof copy of whose novel *Little Big* inscribed to Thomas Disch is in the collection, notes in his Foreword that 'the pleasure Henry takes in these books arises not only from his reading history ... but also from the personal acquaintance he has with many of the writers he cherishes and from the physical objects themselves'.

Chapters include such topics as 'Gothic Roots and Imaginary Voyages', 'End of the World', 'World War One and After', 'H. P. Lovecraft and Modern Supernatural







Henry Wessells. (Photo: Nicole Neenan.)

Fiction', 'Dark Science', 'The New Wave of the 1960s', 'Four Women Authors', 'Flying Saucer Rock 'n' Roll and Others' and 'Bibliography and Scholarship'. In this Chapter 16, Wessells pays tribute to pioneering bibliographers and SF historians, such as E. F. Bleiler, Damon Knight, Brian Aldiss, L. W. Currey and John Clute.

Wessells' gothic begins with Thomas Leland's *Longsword* (1762) and continues with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which the author considers 'the point at which science fiction emerges from the gothic'. Shelley is represented by a copy of the first American printing of *Frankenstein* from 1833. Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion* (1837) is seen by Wessells as the first fantasy novel published in English.

One chapter surveys publications from 1885, including *After London* by Richard Jefferies and Richard Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights*, 'most recently owned by author-explorer Wilfred Thesiger (1910–2003), who walked through the Empty Quarter in Southern Sudan and Ethiopia'.

Wessells has some other very nice association copies, such as novelist Larry McMurtry's copy of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and a typed letter signed by 'Phil' (Philip K. Dick) to David Hartwell and Paul Williams.

Wessells doesn't simply follow the SF big names such as Dick, James Blish, Thomas M. Disch, Brian W. Aldiss, William Gibson, J. G. Ballard and Ursula K. Le Guin, but also has some left-field choices, such as his appreciation and collection of the 1930s pulp character Doc Savage, 'the man of bronze', and relatively less well-known names such as Christopher Brown, Kelly Link, and Wendy Walker.

Women writers are not neglected; for example, Chapter 12 covers Jean Rhys, James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Sheldon), Ursula Le Guin, and Joanna Russ. Wessells quotes Thomas Disch that Russ's novel *The Female Man* (1975) 'must be accounted the best feminist science fiction

novel of all time'.

It is good to see his appreciation of Katharine Burdekin's 1937 novel *Swastika Night*, written under the pen name Murray Constantine, depicting a world after centuries of Nazi victory where women are reduced to the status of breeding animals, thus predating the classic novels with similar themes of Philip K. Dick and Margaret Atwood.

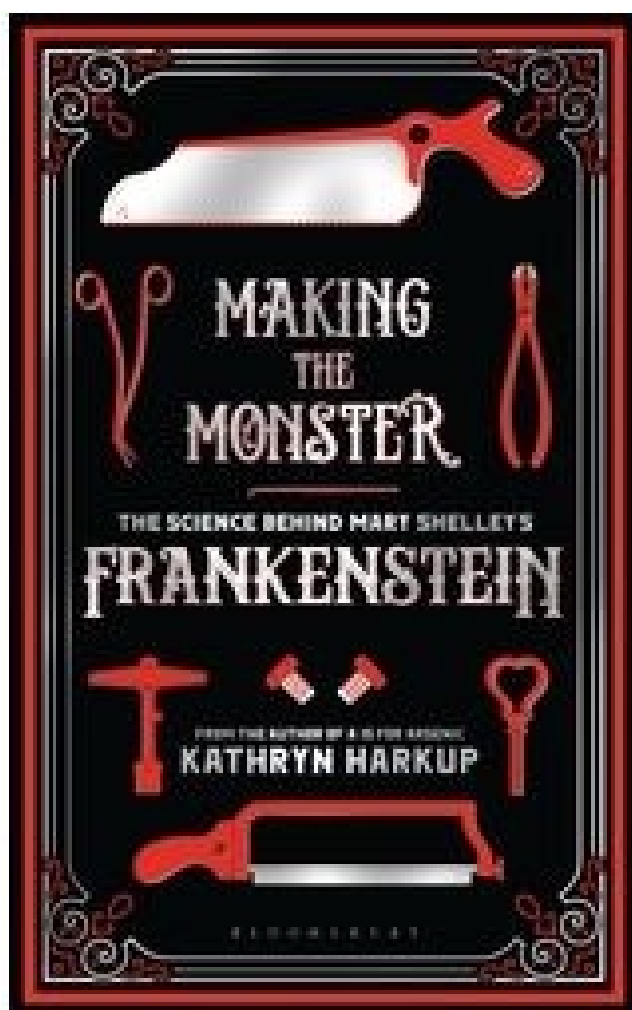
Wessells notes, 'Far from being escapist reading, science fiction is a way of seeing the world. It may be the essential literature for life in the twenty-first century.' A very prescient comment when one surveys the world today.

## MAKING THE MONSTER: THE SCIENCE BEHIND MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

by Kathryn Harkup (Bloomsbury Sigma; \$24.99)

2018 is the bicentenary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Kathryn Harkup's *Making the Monster: The Science of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* places Shelley within the context of her life (1797–1851) and the science of her time.

Dr Kathryn Harkup, a chemist by training and now a science communicator, explores the science fact behind the fiction in a book divided into three sections, 'Conception', 'Creation', and 'Birth'. Harkup ranges from Mary Shelley's birth and family, to the now famous days at the Villa Diodati at Lake Geneva in the summer of



1816, to the origins of *Frankenstein* and the subsequent life, in part tragic, of the Shelleys. A brief 'Epilogue' reflects on the impact of novel in popular culture and treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy.

Harkup has said in an interview, 'Mary Shelley was a teenager with no formal education when she wrote the book so I wanted to know how she could have come up with such a concept, what kind of scientific developments she might have drawn on for inspiration and how she could have found out about the science at a time when women were more or less barred from being active scientists'.

Harkup succinctly analyses how contemporary science influenced Mary Shelley and 'Could a real-life Victor Frankenstein have constructed a creature?' She documents late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century science in readable fashion for the layman. She is particularly strong on the rise of chemistry and the fall of alchemy. She covers key innovators in contemporary science, experimental surgery, and anatomical advances as well as the morbid fascination with dead bodies and grave robbers, sensationalised by the Burke and Hare case.

Naturally, in the context of the novel, 'galvanism' — the 'electrical stimulation of muscles to produce movement after death' — features strongly, both in gruesome contemporary entertainment and in medical science. Harkup writes, '*Frankenstein* stands out as something new and different because it tapped into contemporary advances in science. The terrifying spectacle of a creature brought to life from a collection of dead flesh, scavenged from dissection rooms and graveyards, was all the more terrifying because it felt all too possible'.

She aptly notes, 'Many people see *Frankenstein* as an example of how science can go wrong, but I would disagree. Victor Frankenstein's scientific work is enormously successful, it is his lack of care for his creation that results in his downfall. In that respect *Frankenstein* can speak to us all about how we regard our fellow creatures and how we treat them'.

*Making the Monster* will appeal to several categories of readers, as Harkup superbly places Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* within the historical and scientific framework of the period.

## FROM MADMAN TO CRIME FIGHTER: THE SCIENTIST IN WESTERN CULTURE

by Roslynn D. Haynes (John Hopkins University Press; \$66)

**Roslynn D. Haynes** is an adjunct associate professor in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales. She is the author of seven books, including *H. G. Wells, Discoverer of the Future: The Influence of Science on His Thought* and *Desert: Nature and Culture*.

*From Madman to Crime Fighter* is an updated version of her excellent 1994 book *From Faust to Strangelove*, in which she examined the image of scientists in popular culture over the centuries, seeing them popularly depicted as 'old, male with a great deal of hair like Einstein, and indications of being mad and dangerous'.

Haynes suggests that scientists have been encapsulated in seven fictional stereotypes: 'the morally suspect



alchemist; the idealist; the stupid virtuoso; the unemotional type who doesn't do human relationships; the hero; the 'mad, bad and dangerous'; and the helpless.'

She observes, 'They were Faust and Frankenstein, Jekyll and Moreau, Caligari and Strangelove — the scientists of film and fiction, cultural archetypes that reflected ancient fears of tampering with the unknown or unleashing the little-understood powers of nature.'

Since 1994, she notes in the Preface to *From Madman to Crime Fighter*, the image of the scientist has received considerably more scholarly interest, particularly in relation to their portrayals in the media. Haynes acknowledges, however, she also needs to have a more extensive coverage of the media. She notes that she is preparing a another book 'that focuses exclusively on twenty-first century novels and films and explores the new perception of scientists in different disciplines as risk monitors and potentially risk averters in the face of environmental dangers and climate change'.

Haynes' coverage of scientists in literature is compendious and well documented, except perhaps in more recent science fiction. She covers the major authors like Philip K. Dick and Isaac Asimov, but not some of the more recent British and American authors, a number of whom have doctorates in science. Haynes notes that there are now more realistically drawn scientists, characters who are conscious of their public responsibility to expose dangers from pollution and climate change.

This new edition contains two completely new chapters, 'Robots, Cyborgs, Androids and Clones: Who is in Control?' and 'The Scientist as Woman'. Haynes notes

that there are significant differences between female scientists in film and TV as compared with fiction. Screen female scientists are often depicted as younger, more professional, and more attractive than their fictional counterparts. There can be a downside to this in reality. A March 2018 article, in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, has Eva Maria Kaufholz stating that ‘body consciousness stereotypes still hold back female scholars in the sciences and mathematics’. Ms Kaufholz cites Marie Noëlle’s 2016 film *Marie Curie: The Courage of Knowledge*, in which the Nobel Prize winner, described by one reviewer as ‘so hot, she’s radioactive’, devotes most of her time and energy to a passionate affair with a married man.

Haynes successfully demonstrates that ‘Literature has most frequently acted as a mirror, reflecting contemporary attitudes towards science and scientists’, in a book that now runs to nearly 400 pages and deserves to become a standard reference despite its somewhat hyperbolic title.

**TELLING IT LIKE IT WASN'T: THE COUNTERFACTUAL IMAGINATION IN HISTORY AND FICTION**  
by Catherine Gallagher (Chicago University Press; \$68)

In *Telling It Like It Wasn't*, Catherine Gallagher, Professor Emerita of English at the University of California, Berkeley, has written a fascinating book for both historians and the general public, namely alternate history and counterfactual history narratives, which closely overlap and to many would seem intertwined.

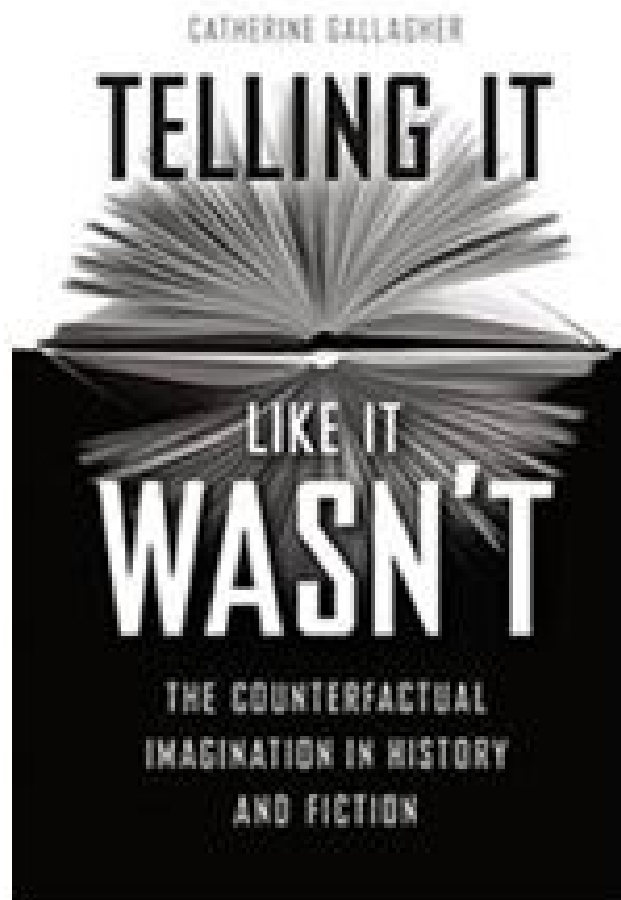
Gallagher has previously identified three modes of the alternative history narrative, namely counterfactual professional history; alternate history within popular history; and alternate history novel as historical fiction.

Gallagher states, ‘Counterfactual history attempts to examine the past by determining what might have followed if certain key historical events had happened differently. Alternate-history novels explore the minds and fates of private (and fictional) characters living within such counterfactual historical worlds. Philip Roth’s successful novel *The Plot Against America*, for example, is based on the counterfactual premise that if Charles Lindbergh had run for US president in 1940, he would have won.’

Gallagher notes, ‘The alternate-history novel did not emerge in our timeline until the twentieth century. It has many important things to tell us about the uses of historical, fictional, and counterfactual characters in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but it still retains the fundamental character categories developed in nineteenth-century texts.’

Numerous examples exist. What if the Spanish Armada had defeated the English navy in 1588? What if Napoleon had won the Battle of Waterloo? What if JFK had not been assassinated in November 1963? What if Donald Trump had not been elected in 2016 might become another key point for future historians as it has already for SF novelists. There is now the excellent, suitably named, website ([www.uchronia.net](http://www.uchronia.net)) for alternate history source material.

Gallagher’s study traces these hypothetical and specu-



lative modes of thinking and writing about history back to the seventeenth century and investigates their huge increase in popularity in the late twentieth century. For Gallagher, this popularity tells us a great deal about the state of our collective historical imagination.

Previous books in this counterfactual category have included Niall Ferguson’s 1997 collection, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* and Andrew Roberts’ *What Might Have Been: Leading Historians on Twelve ‘What Ifs’ in History?*, published in 2004. Professor Richard Evans from Cambridge University has argued that many of the non-fiction counterfactual analyses have been written by conservative writers whose ‘declared purpose is to restore free will and contingency to history and to reenthron the individual actor in history too often studied in terms of impersonal forces’. This might be the case in non-fiction writers, but certainly in SF novels and cinema this is far from the case.

Gallagher notes in her Introduction that in popular culture the presence of counterfactual history has steadily increased in recent years. After her Introduction, her book is organised into six chapters: ‘The History of Counterfactual History from Leibniz to Clausewitz’; ‘Nineteenth-Century Alternate-History Narratives’; ‘How the USA Lost the Civil War’; ‘Historical Activism and the Alternate-America Novels’; ‘Nazi Britain: The Invasion and Occupation That Weren’t’; ‘The Fictions of Nazi Britain’.

In Gallagher’s ‘Acknowledgements’, she notes that the book had its origins when a graduate student made a presentation on Philip K. Dick’s classic SF novel, *The*



*Man in the High Castle*, now an Amazon TV series, in which Nazi Germany and Japan are victorious in the Second World War. But strangely enough, neither Dick nor the book is referenced, presumably because they fall within the alternative history category. Thus, SF, is not mined as much as one would have thought, perhaps reflecting on the overall structure of the book, although Len Deighton's *SS-GB* is covered, as is Robert Harris's *Fatherland* and Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*.

Gallagher certainly covers the historical side of counterfactual narratives extremely well. There is probably no other book that has mined the historical counterfactual perspective as comprehensively as Gallagher. This is the result of Gallagher's long-time work on the cultural history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as on the historiography and theory of the novel.

Gallagher locates the origins of contemporary counterfactual history in eighteenth-century Europe, where the idea of other possible historical scenarios first eventuated. The then desire for philosophical understanding and historical justice are still evident today, although more political issues, ranging from Brexit to climate change, impinge on ideas about alternate worlds. Gallagher shows how the counterfactual habit of replaying the recent past often shapes our understanding of the actual events themselves.

Two major case studies form the core of the book. The first is of counterfactuals about the American Civil War. There is a long tradition of counterfactual speculation about the alternative courses American history would have taken had the South won the Civil War, including narratives of slave emancipation. The second case study focuses on the invasion and occupation of the Great Britain by the Nazis. Examples range from the Churchillian realpolitik and fictional depictions of the resilient British character, recently resurrected for Brexit purposes, to the underlying acceptance of fascism, exemplified in numerous novels such as *SS-GB*.

While this is a book largely focuses on Anglo-American writers, *Telling It Like It Wasn't* is a deep and authoritative overview, suitably footnoted, of issues that are even more relevant today than in the last century and a half.

#### **PACKING MY LIBRARY: AN ELEGY AND TEN DIGRESSIONS**

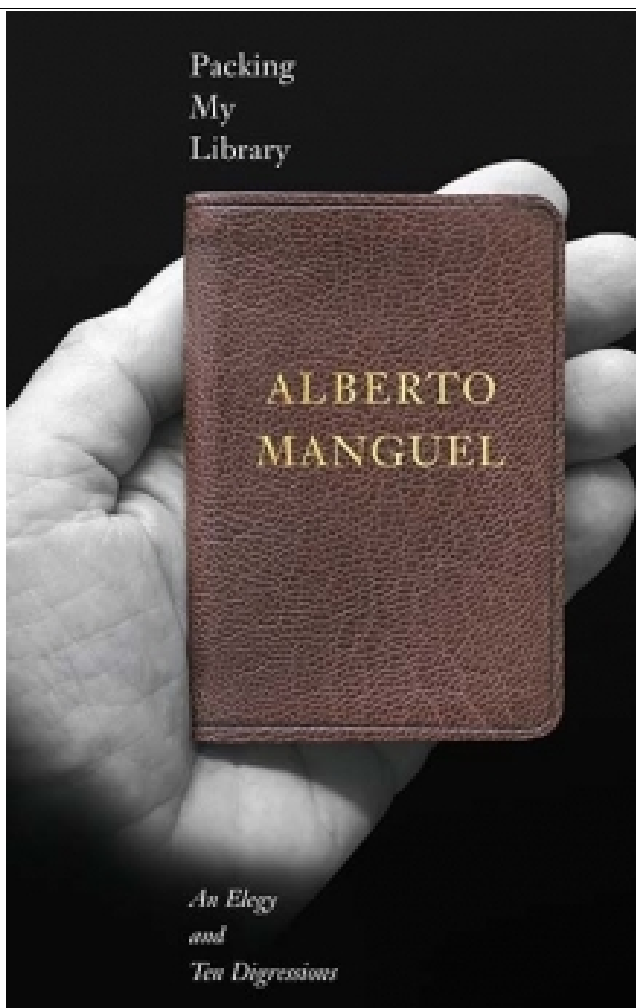
by **Alberto Manguel** (Yale University Press; \$37.99)\*

**Alberto Manguel** visited Canberra in March 2017, when I had the pleasure of lunching with him at the National Library of Australia. He reflected on the various challenges and opportunities he faced as the new Director General of the National Library of Argentina, which brought him full circle from his time in Buenos Aires as the son of Argentinian diplomat.

His literary career has brought him significant suc-

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Items marked \* are reprints or preprints from *BibliNews*, the journal of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia, edited by Richard Blair (blairitage@optusnet.com.au).



cess, his books often focusing on, or spinning off, his bibliophilic interests and collecting as he lived in Canada, England, Polynesia, France, and the United States.

*Packing My Library*, his latest book, results from his leaving France in 2015, apparently fed up with French bureaucracy. Extrapolating from an essay on 'unpacking the library' by Walter Benjamin, the German critic and cultural historian, Manguel recalls the packing up 35,000 volumes, his 'last library', which he had accumulated in his historic house near Châtelleraut, in the Loire Valley.

Manguel writes that the basic organisation of the collection was by language, but 'Certain subjects — the history of the book, biblical commentaries, the legend of Faust, Renaissance literature and philosophy, gay studies, medieval bestiaries — had separate sections. I had on the shelves dozens of very bad books which I didn't throw away in case I ever needed an example of a book I thought was bad. Balzac, in *Cousin Pons*, offered a justification for this obsessive behavior: "An obsession is a pleasure that has attained the status of an idea".'

Packing the books into boxes, a.k.a. cardboard coffin, for warehouse storing in Montréal becomes 'an exercise in oblivion. It is like playing a film backwards, consigning visible narratives and methodological reality to the regions of the distant and unseen, a voluntary forgetting.'

*Packing My Library*, which is more of a bibliophilic reflection than an autobiographical one, is essentially two texts: Manguel's extrapolations from the book pack-



ing is supplemented by 10 chapters of 'digressions'. In some ways, the volume could be read in two different sequences.

The digressions constitute a composite meditation across time and geography. The chapters range in content from a description of Pedro de Mendoza, who sailed to South America in 1536 to found a colony in Buenos Aires, travelling with 'seven volumes of medium size bound in black leather', to the Alexandrian library, the nature of religion, a meditation on memory and justice, and the utility of dictionaries.

*Packing My Library* is a literate and passionate reflection on books, reading, and the value of libraries, both private and public, in ensuring a democratic and civilised society.

## THE LIBRARIAN

by Sally Vickers (Viking; \$32.99)\*

British author **Sally Vickers** is probably best known for her bestselling novel *Miss Garnet's Angel*. *The Librarian*, her eleventh novel, has strong links to her childhood. Vickers beautifully evokes England in 1958 through her descriptions of food, family behaviour, and generational conservatism butting against new social attitudes.

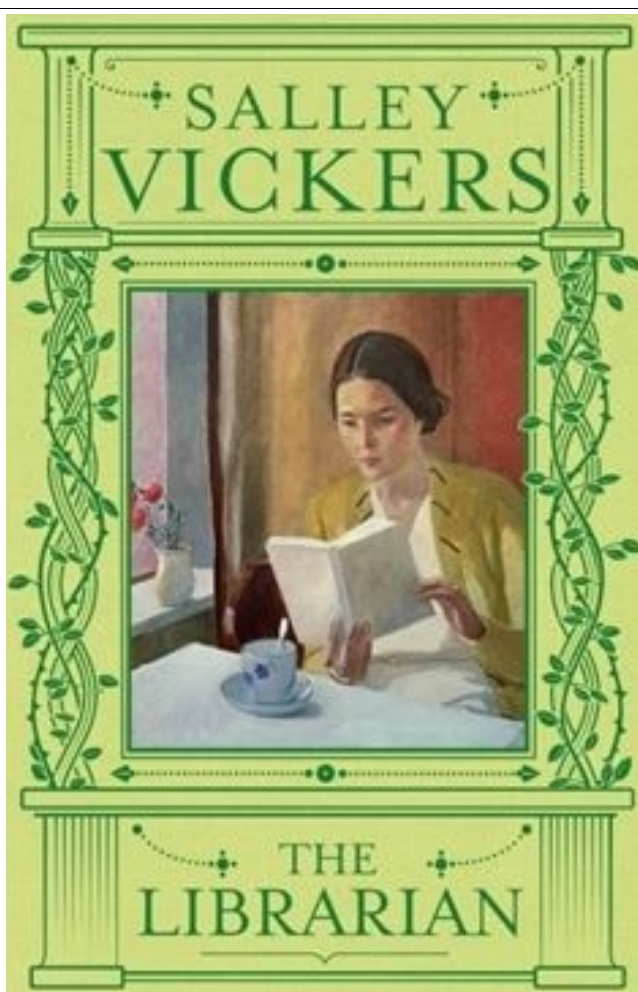
Vickers writes, 'When I was a very small child ... the highlight of my week was the regular Saturday trip I made with my father to the children's library. The children's librarian there was a Miss Blackwell. Middle-aged, unmarried, with a neat grey perm, a straight tweed skirt and classic sensible shoes ... Miss Blackwell's was the voice of a highly cultivated and benign siren beckoning me to steep myself in untried waters'.

In *The Librarian* we meet Sylvia Blackwell, 24, who has just become the new children's librarian in the small town of East Mole, after qualifying from one of the new library schools in Britain. Sylvia certainly shakes up the library with new stock, some of which is listed in an appendix at the end of the novel: 'Recommended reading from East Mole Library'.

Sylvia forms a positive relationship with a number of the local children through the library and their school. She unfortunately runs foul of Mr Booth, the stodgy and conservative chief librarian, something of a caricature, and members of the library committee.

Memories are evoked here and elsewhere in Vickers' novel of the social mores depicted in Kingsley Amis's 1955 novel, *That Uncertain Feeling*. Peter Sellers memorably played the librarian in the 1962 film version. Comparisons could also be made with the recent film of *The Bookshop* by Penelope Fitzgerald, which also highlights similar themes of small-town attitudes, the place of a single woman, and philistinism in regard to books and reading.

Vickers can't quite resist reflections on the period when she was a child. For example, she highlights the social benefits of a grammar school education in the context of the 11+ examination, which decided the educational fate of a generation at the age of eleven. With Sylvia's assistance, her landlady's granddaughter Lizzie passes the 11+, an exam which she was not expected to pass, but her neighbour's boy Sam, wrongly accused of stealing Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* from the closed



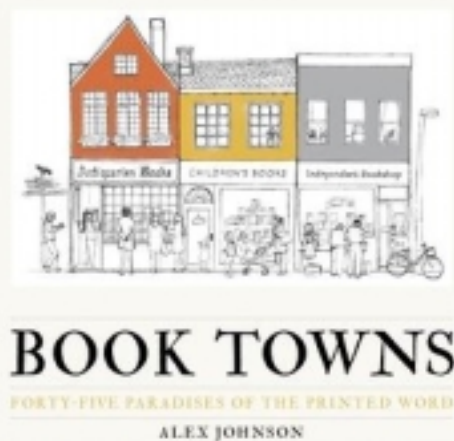
reserve section of the library, fails to pass the exam.

Sylvia begins the novel as a relatively demure young woman, but matures in action and language perhaps too rapidly as she becomes 'the other woman', following her affair with the local married doctor. This relationship has significant ramifications, not only for themselves, but for others. Adding to Sylvia's problems is the threat that the children's library will be closed down and Sylvia will lose her job. Sylvia reflects, 'She had come to East Mole, taking it as her oyster, and the pearl she'd hoped to find had proved the sharpest grit.'

A sudden change of tone and direction comes in the short upbeat 'Part 2' of the novel, in which Vickers takes the reader to the present day, and in particular, Melbourne, where we reconnect with Lizzie and Sam. We also find out tangentially what happened to Sylvia Blackwell, but the end of the story belongs to Lizzie and Sam.

*The Librarian* is underpinned by a Vickers' cry of anguish when faced with the current cuts in England to public library systems. She demonstrates the power libraries have to stimulate and entertain particularly for the disadvantaged.

Vickers writes, 'We live in an age of terrible philistinism — perhaps more so in Britain ... The current decimation of our libraries here is a public disgrace, especially the loss to our children. People speak idly of the superior powers of the internet, of digital reading but not all children are lucky enough to have these resources. How on earth are they anyway supposed to



know what to read if the choices are not in plain sight — if there are not wise and engaged librarians to steer them towards treasures that may otherwise be passed unseen?’

### **BOOK TOWNS: FORTY-FIVE PARADISES OF THE PRINTED WORD**

**by Alex Johnson (Frances Lincoln; \$29.99)\***

In *Book Towns: Forty-Five Paradises of the Printed Word*, Alex Johnson, author of *Bookshelf*, *Improbable Libraries*, and *A Book of Book Lists*, provides a profusely illustrated guidebook to 40 book towns and five ‘book havens’ in 30 countries, mostly in Europe, South-East Asia, North America, and Australia, arranged alphabetically by the name of the town.

Johnson describes a book town as ‘simply a small town, usually rural and scenic, full of bookshops and book-related industries’. Johnson provides, in his short four- to five-page illustrated sections, a descriptive account of each book town creation, the bookshops and associated literary events, and tourist type details. Each section ends with a small segment containing relevant website links and transport details on how to best get to the town.

There is now an International Organisation of Book Towns, whose aims are to raise public awareness of book towns and stimulate interest by giving information via the internet and by organising an International Book Town Festival every second year; strengthen the rural economy and enhance the quality of book towns by exchanging knowledge, skills, and know-how between the book towns and their individual sellers and other businesses; undertake other activities that can serve the interests of book towns and strengthen independent businesses in book towns, e.g. by stimulating the use of information technology; and by these means, help to maintain regional and national cultural heritage, and to raise international public awareness of such heritage. Members of the Organisation may be associations, organisations, local governments, businesses, or individuals in book towns.

Not all of the towns listed by Johnson are members of the International Organisation of Book Towns. Johnson’s coverage is more extensive, ranging from the most famous book town — Hay-on-Wye in Wales — to Uruena in Spain, Fjaerland in Norway, Damme in

Belgium and Wigtown in Scotland.

Johnson has said in an interview that, when writing his previous ‘books about books’, ‘I kept coming across more and more book towns around the world that were doing really rather well. But nobody had written anything substantial pulling the various parts of the movement together, other than an occasional article online. So basically I wrote the book about them that I wanted to read, which I realize is a bit selfish ... They’re remarkable places, spots in the world which give you a bit of hope for the future of civilization after all the terrible stuff in the news grinds you down. The people who have set them up and kept them going are so impressive — none of them have massive funding and they all rely hugely on volunteers.’

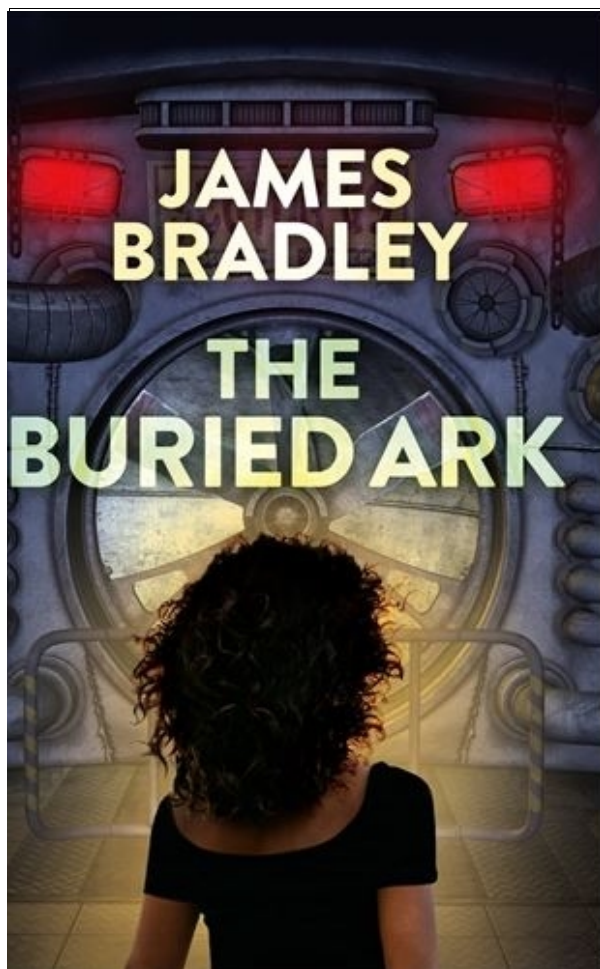
The original book town, of course, is Richard Booth’s Hay-on-Wye, which from its 1961 origin ultimately provided the stimulus for a number of the towns around the world, such as Gold Cities Book Town in California and Bredevoort in the Netherlands. Johnson’s format prevents him from giving extensive histories of the towns and, in the case of Hay-on-Wye, probing the sometimes strained relationship over the decades of ‘King’ Richard Booth with the town itself and other bookshops. Many booktowns spin-off literary festivals and Hay is probably now just as well known for the annual huge Hay Literary Festival as its bookshops.

Johnson has not actually visited (which is understandable because of the cost involved) the majority of the towns documented. He says, ‘I’ve been to the ones in the UK and a couple in Spain where my in-laws live.’ This has its problems, because when one is familiar with a particular town, the entry doesn’t read quite right, as in the entries on Bowral and Clunes in Australia.

For Bowral, he takes his cue from the 2001 Book Trail Map and the continuing Southern Highlands Literary Festival, but not having visited, doesn’t realise the historical and contemporary impact of the Berkelouw Book Barn at Berrima, ‘just outside of Bowral’ [sic] with a brief description taken largely from their website. In realistic book terms, the geographic entry should perhaps have been listed under Berrima rather than Bowral, which is now a shadow of its former bookshop richness.

Clunes has grown in importance, particularly in relation to its annual May literary festival. Nonetheless, it is curious to read the section, ‘just down the road from Clunes is Melbourne, which not only has numerous flourishing bookshops but is also home to Readings’. This is perhaps stretching the geographic location of a book town a little far.

Johnson comments that he’d really like to visit Fjaerland in Norway, ‘the most dramatically picturesque book town in the world’, where bookshops have been set up in ‘old sheds, ferry buildings and even a former pigpen’. Other fascinating book towns include Wunsdorf, Germany, the former headquarters of the German Armed Forces, the Wehrmacht, now dubbed the ‘book and bunker’ town; Óbidos, north of Lisbon, which didn’t open new bookshops, but simply added bookselling to existing businesses, and Paju Book City, near the demilitarised zone in South Korea, which is ‘not the typical book town which is usually very rural and beautiful, but there’s something magnetic about a town which



is 100% devoted to the production of books’.

This is not a book, however, that provides an analytical description of the economics and the social impact of the book towns. Book towns also rise and fall, as in the case of Bowral and Fontenoy-la-Joûte, 100 km west of Strasbourg, which has been reduced from 23 booksellers in the village to currently a still admirable ten. Such societal analysis will have to wait another author, but, in the meantime, many readers will enjoy Johnson’s global survey, which will, I hope, stimulate even more book towns and the love of collecting and reading books. As Johnson concludes, ‘please visit them and buy a book or two’.

## Australian Young Adults fiction

### THE BURIED ARK

by James Bradley (Pan; \$14.99)

**James Bradley** began his ‘The Change’ trilogy with *The Silent Invasion*. While it is marketed for young adult readers, the trilogy will be of interest to many adult readers because of Bradley’s narrative pace and imaginative concept. New readers, however, as with most trilogies, will have to start with the first volume.

The trilogy is set a decade from now, with the human race infected by spores from space and becoming absorbed into a composite hive-like intelligence. Humans retain their physical body but ‘up close their skin was in

fact translucent, the lights moving within them like blood or some kind of fire’.

Bradley’s locale is the eastern seaboard of Australia, where infected humans are quarantined or terminated by the authorities but it seems increasingly to be a losing battle for the authorities. The ‘Change’ is also affecting the landscape and vegetation, ‘a natural world that was no longer passive, but connected, sentient, its mind distributed not just through animals and humans, but plants, bacteria, all living things’.

In the first book, 16-year-old Callie tries to save her younger sister Gracie, who has been infected, by travelling north to Queensland and the mysterious ‘Zone’. But, by the end of *The Silent Invasion*, Matt, her boyfriend, has been killed and Gracie has been absorbed into the Change.

At the beginning of *The Buried Ark*, Callie meets up with her father in Brisbane and learns of his work with a vaccine, which means that people would still be infected but would retain their individuality, but the Change means that he’s not quite her father. Callie must enter the Zone, where she faces a number of dangers, but nothing as dangerous as entering the ‘Buried Ark’, which may have the ability to destroy the alien infection, but also humanity itself. Bradley has set the scene beautifully for the final volume of the trilogy.

## British science fiction

### ELYSIUM FIRE

by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz; \$32.95)

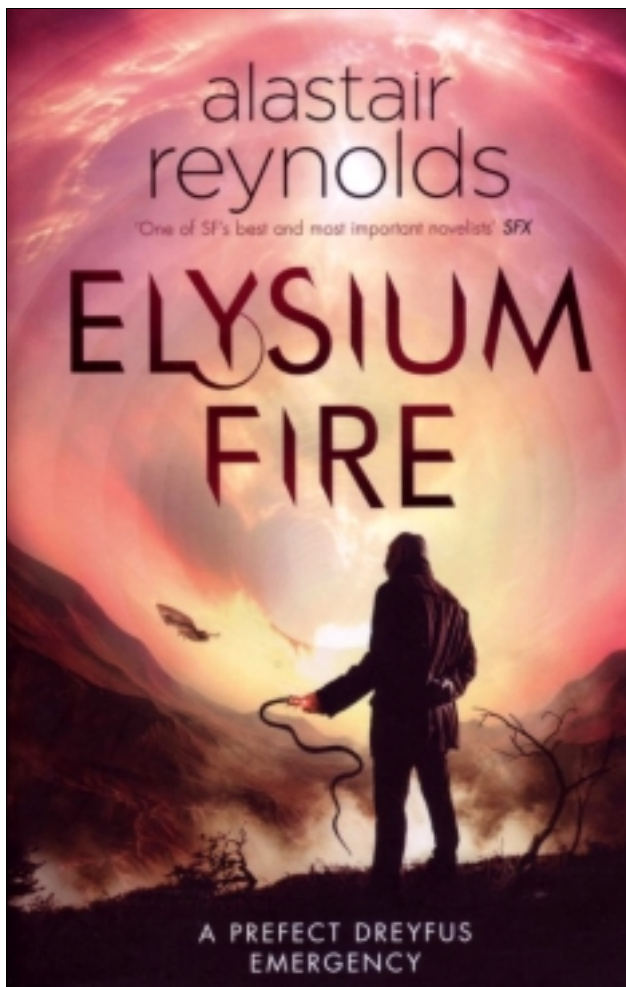
Following *The Prefect* (2007), recently retitled *Aurora Rising*, comes **Alastair Reynolds’** second ‘Inspector Dreyfus’ novel, *Elysium Fire*. The two Dreyfus books, incidentally, are prequels, taking place before the events that will occur in such Reynolds’ novels as *Chasm City*.

The setting is again the Glitter Band, which comprises ten thousand city-state habitats orbiting the toxic atmosphere of the planet Yellowstone. In the Glitter Band, citizens vote instantly, via neural implants, on all matters to maintain social equilibrium. ‘The people were as grudgingly content as the truly free will ever be ... The only binding law was the iron rule of universal suffrage.’

The Glitter Band equilibrium, however, is shattered when brain implants malfunction and people begin dying. There are no clues left as to the cause of the death of the ‘melters’. When it becomes apparent that the ‘Wildfire’ deaths are increasing, and could ultimately spread across the whole Glitter Band, it’s up to Chief Prefect, Inspector Tom Dreyfus, from Panoply, the law enforcement agency, assisted by an unusual duo of hyper-pig Sparver Bancal and Thalia Ng, to investigate.

Their task is not helped by an evangelical manipulative provocateur, who regularly confronts Dreyfus, while encouraging insurrection in the Glitter Band. As ever in a Reynolds’ book, the technology is inventive. The several plot lines, including avatars and two interchangeable brothers, come together successfully in the conclusion. Like Christopher Brookmyre’s recent novel *Places in the Darkness*, *Elysium Fire* is an absorbing novel, which mixes SF and detection.





### THE REAL-TOWN MURDERS

by Adam Roberts (Gollancz; \$29.99.)

Adam Roberts' *The Real-Town Murders* provides an SF twist to the locked room murder mystery of crime novels. In this combination of SF and crime, Roberts follows other recent novels by fellow British writers Chris Brookmyre and Alastair Reynolds.

Roberts has said of the book, 'I hope it's entertaining, ingenious, and readable. But that's all it will be: it will attempt no Thing Itself-style contortions or clever-clevernesses, it will push no envelopes, certainly not to tearing-point'. Professor Adam Roberts is overly modest, as his novel has many allusions in film and literature, notably to Alfred Hitchcock and T. S. Eliot.

Roberts says, 'The germ of the book was an account I came across of a film Hitchcock never got around to making. He had the idea for a pre-credits sequence, set (this was the early 1970s) in a fully automated, robot-only car factory. He said the camera would follow the whole process of a car being made: you'd see the raw materials being delivered by automated truck; the camera would work its way along the assembly line. No people around at all; everything automated. The camera would follow the now completely built car out the other end of the factory, down a ramp to join a long line of similarly assembled autos. And inside would be a dead body. "If only I could figure out how that dead body got into that car", Hitchcock said, "I would make that movie." But he never did, and so the movie was never made.'

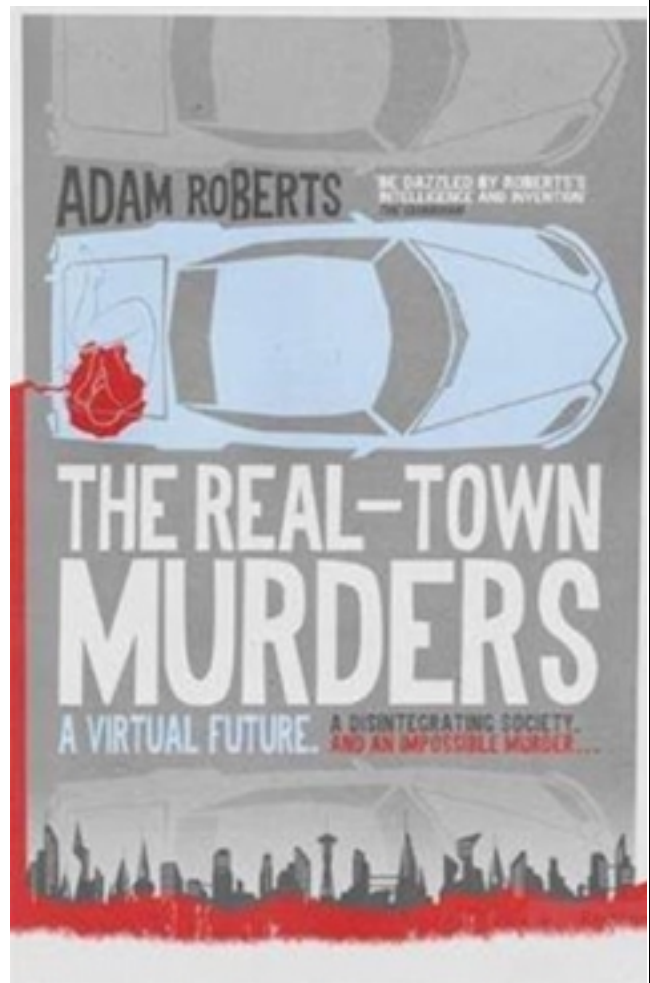
Accordingly, *The Real-Town Murders* opens in a near future England with a dead body found in the boot of a car. But how did it get there, given it was made in a completely robotic car factory, under constant camera surveillance with no human access? Alma, a private detective, is brought in to investigate.

Alma is one of the few people who is not plugged into 'The Shine', a virtual online world, where most people are in near-suspended animation. The streets are deserted, with 'R', Alma's town (Reading?), described as 'a desert cityscape'.

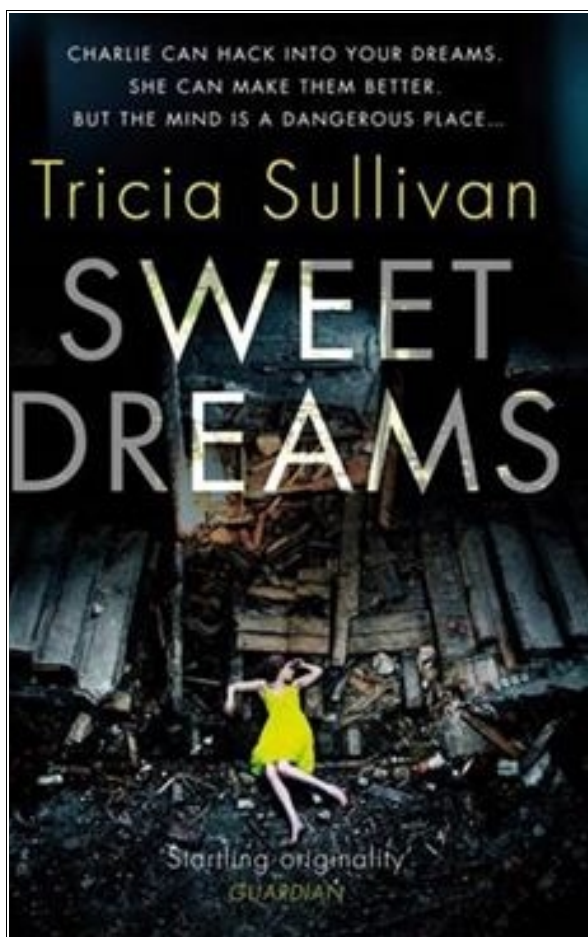
Alma's partner Marguerite requires medical treatment, which only Alma can administer, every four hours to treat a malware virus. After four hours, Alma only has a five-minute window of delay, otherwise Marguerite will die of 'a sudden brainstem inflammation'. Alma has an almost impossible task to investigate the murder in the robotic factory and juggle her partner's medical needs.

Alma soon realises that the murder of the 50-year-old civil servant in the car factory has major political implications. The wider governmental framework allows Roberts to explore data manipulation and the nature of power and government as well as issues of identity in an era even more internet obsessed than our own.

Roberts follows, in *The Real-Town Murders*, an imaginative crime/SF path in an Hitchcockian *homage*, imbued with Roberts' own considerable literary creativity.







## SWEET DREAMS

by Tricia Sullivan (Gollancz; \$32.95)

*Sweet Dreams*, Tricia Sullivan's eleventh novel, is set in 2027, where her main character Charlie Aaron is a 'dreamhacker'. Charlie, as a result of a failed drug experiment by mega-corporation Big Sky, is able to enter the dreams of sleepers in order to help cure their nightmares, insecurities, and phobias.

It takes a while for the plot line to get going, as Sullivan establishes the technical background on sleep problems and Charlie's own narcolepsy. Most of her dreamhacking tasks are mundane, until she takes on the problems of a harpist who has a serial stalker in her dreams. When the harpist dies in her sleep Charlie is suspected, but it also brings her into contact with 'the Creeper', who invades dreams with murderous intent.

Charlie's character is well developed by Sullivan, as are the main supporting characters, who include Charlie's feisty, wheelchair-bound landlady, known as O, before a dramatic conclusion that decidedly ups the ante on 'Sweet Dreams'.

## THE FEED

by Nick Clark Windo (Headline; \$26.99)

E. M. Forster was very prescient as to internet disruption when he wrote his now famous short story 'The Machine Stops' in 1909. Now many sections of society grind to a halt when the internet goes down, as is the case for Forster's 'the machine'.

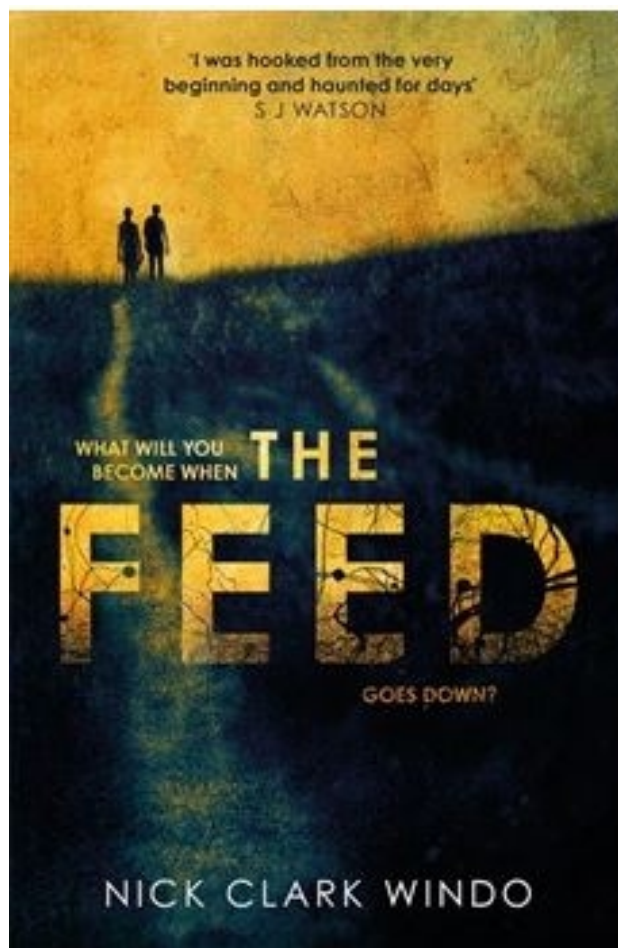
*The Feed*, British author Nick Clark Windo's debut novel, is set in a future world in which everything is connected by 'the Feed', an uber-internet cum Facebook mechanism, that instantly links everyone's thoughts and feelings through 'spraying', a virtual telepathy. The Feed can be turned off, but relatively few people, such as Tom, one of the main characters, do it.

The problem comes when the Feed collapses. Some people who become psychopaths become killers. People's minds can be hacked. As with the collapse of Forster's machine, civilisation falls with the Feed, as it imparts all knowledge and use of knowledge. Even language and speech have become obsolete, because most people communicate through their minds.

Windo has said in an interview, 'I mean, it feels like we're playing around with the nature of what it means to be human and once that's done it can't be undone. So the novel is definitely aiming to be part of that conversation'.

Tom, whose father invented the Feed, and his partner Kate are distraught when their six-year-old daughter Bea goes missing from their survivor camp. The rest of the novel largely follows Tom and Kate's search for Bea through a dangerous landscape.

The novel originally takes us into an unoriginal post-disaster apocalyptic world, familiar to most SF readers, with the usual deserted towns, dangerous marauding groups, and pockets of survivors. The novel becomes interesting with the introduction of a mysterious character called the Pharmacist, who plays a key role in their search.



*The Feed*, despite the fact that the reader never really feels empathy for the main characters, explores some intriguing concepts, such as how technology impacts on a physiological and neurological level. Ultimately, it provides a timely reminder of the need to question the pros and cons of a digitally connected and digitally addicted world.

## FROM DISTANT STARS

by Sam Peters (Gollancz; \$32.99)

*From Distant Stars* is the second book in a trilogy from British author **Sam Peters**. It is set five years after *From Darkest Skies*, but unlike most trilogies, the story can be easily picked up in the second volume and therefore enjoyed as a relatively stand-alone novel.

The background to the trilogy is the impact of the 'Masters', who as Peters says, are 'enigmatic aliens whose motives and technologies remain as much a mystery a century and a half after they vanished as they were when they arrived'. Peters notes in *From Distant Stars*, 'there were billions dead and no idea why. The creeping suspicion that maybe they'd killed half our species more through carelessness than design. Millions abducted and carried to other worlds. And then POP and they were gone, their entire infrastructure left behind. Their ships still carried us between the stars.'

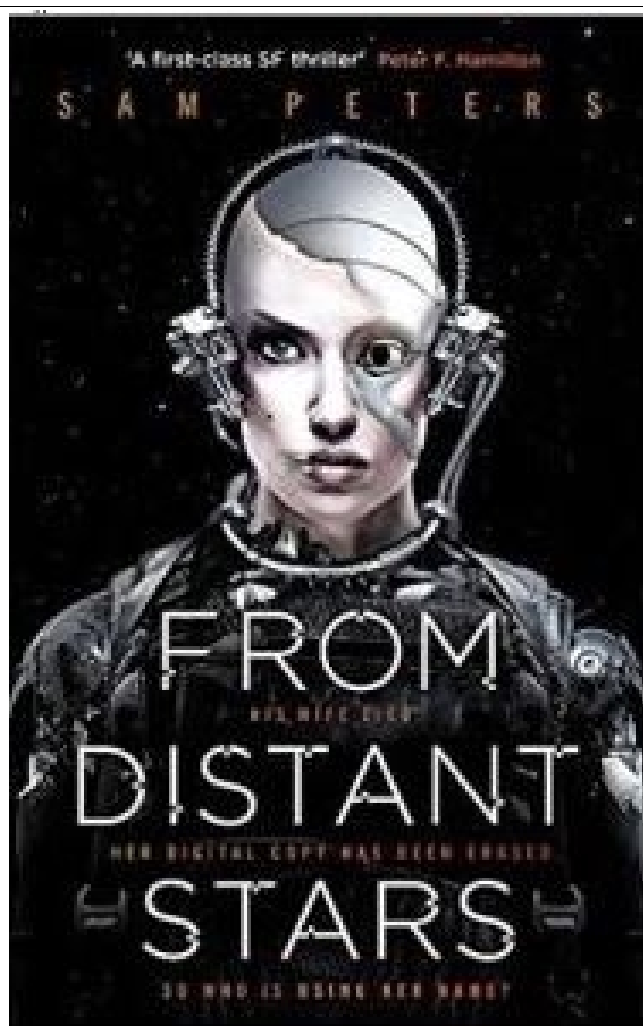
Magenta is one planet that humanity was dumped on. It is thousands of light-years from Earth, 'a fundamentally hostile place, not fully explored, with a primitive form of alien life that interacts with human neurochemistry in a way no one really understands.' It took humanity a long time to establish itself, on what one character calls 'a shithole'.

It is five years since Alysha, Inspector Keon Rause's wife, was killed in a terrorist attack, but she is now regarded as a traitor. Keon has created an illegal AI version of her, Liss, a.k.a. Alysha 2.0. Peters writes, 'On a very personal scale are the relationships between Keon and Alysha and what I now realise is that on all these levels I'm exploring our relationship with both the unknown and the unknowable.'

Keon is asked to investigate when a prisoner is killed in a secure hospital, along with his three guards. Has this anything to do with the discovery of a possible Masters ship found buried under Magenta's north pole, whose secrets clearly people are willing to kill for. Conspiracy and cover-up seem to be the norms in *From Distant Stars*, not least in the security services and through the use of AI 'Servants'.

Keon finds that he is soon on the dangerous path that his wife took to unearth security secrets. This may prove ultimately that she was a traitor, but Keon has no choice but to follow that path.

*From Distant Stars* suffers from a somewhat over-complicated and repetitive plotline, so some editorial pruning would have helped the novel. It concludes on a cliffhanger that will have significant personal ramifications for Keon in book three.



## US science fiction

### THE OVERSTORY

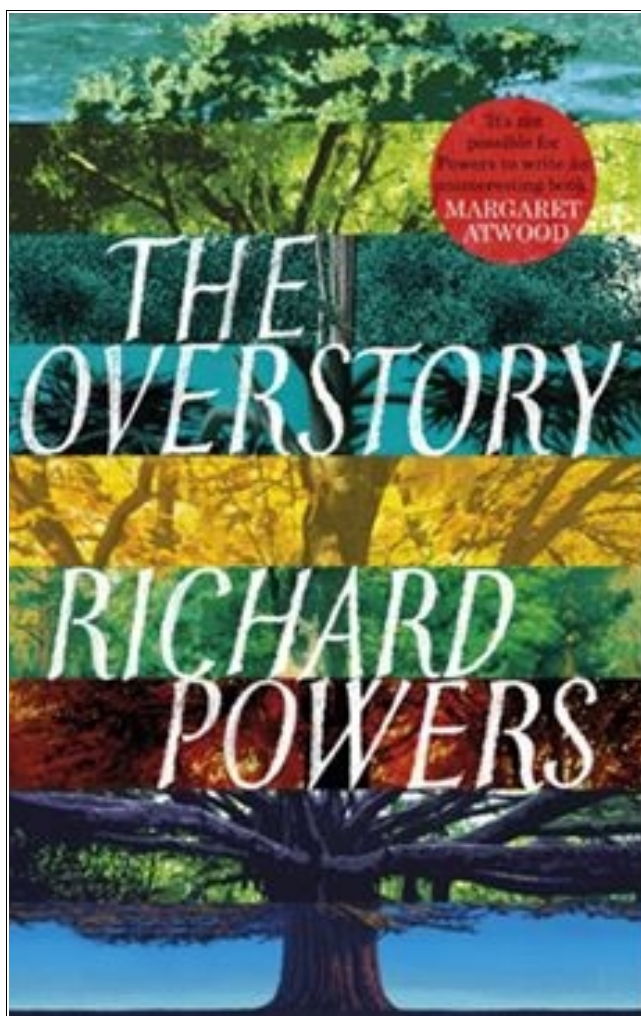
by Richard Powers (William Heinemann; \$32.99)

Award-winning American author **Richard Powers** often focuses on elements of science to underpin his novels. His latest novel, *The Overstory*, is no exception. It follows nine very different people, who, are 'summoned by trees' and who come together to fight against the destruction of the Pacific Northwest's redwood forests.

The novel is structured into four sections: 'Roots', 'Trunk', 'Crown', and 'Seeds', and takes the reader forward from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. The nine characters become involved in environmental activism and some in ecoterrorism. It doesn't end well for all of them, but it does reinforce the message that the environment is worth fighting for, particularly when the current American administration is decidedly not pro-environment.

Powers has said, 'Donald Trump, Ryan Zinke, and Scott Pruitt are spokesman for those who feel that the environmentalist victories of the last quarter century, as limited as they were, need to be rolled back. And they are rolling them back with a vengeance. In the last year, this administration has undone much of the environmental protection that it took half a century of concerted political will to create'.

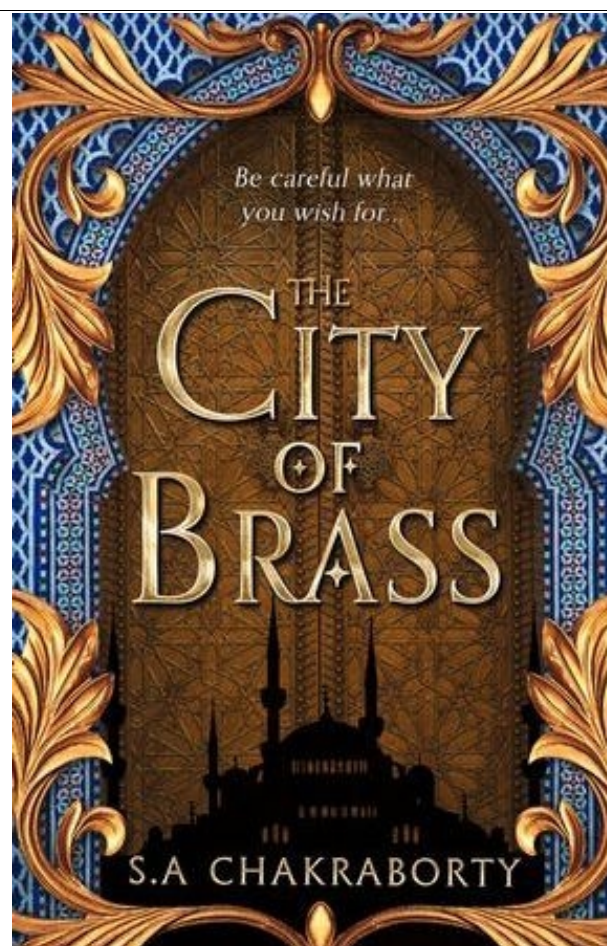




Powers goes on to say, 'If I could have managed it, I would have tried to write a novel where all the main characters were trees! But such an act of identification was beyond my power as a novelist, and it probably would have been beyond the imaginative power of identification of most readers. As one of the characters in the book laments, we are all "plant blind. Adam's curse. We only see things that look like us". My compromise was to tell a story about nine very different human beings who, for wildly varying reasons, come to take trees seriously. Between them, they learn to invest trees with the same sacred value that humans typically invest only in themselves. And in doing so, they violate one of individual-centered capitalism's greatest taboos.'

Trees interact specifically with the characters, such as plant biologist Dr Patricia Westerford, whose research on the communality of trees is initially seen as controversial before becoming scientifically acceptable. Douglas, a Vietnam war veteran, is saved by an old banyan tree when he fell 'like a winged seed' from his plane when it was shot down over Cambodia. A Norwegian migrant family, the Hoel family, arrive in the mid nineteenth century and their family history is paralleled through the growth of a large chestnut tree near their house in Iowa. Family life and its concentric circles are paralleled through trees.

The phrase 'you can't see the wood for the trees' is perhaps a little unfair as an ultimate description of *The Overstory*, a powerful, if perhaps overlong, environmental



novel. The characterisation does, however, get a little lost in the 512-page narrative 'wood'. As Powers concludes, 'My nine bewildered characters in *The Overstory* each must discover, to their own amazement, that there comes a point when you need to take a forest as seriously as a city, and a tree as seriously as a human being.'

## THE CITY OF BRASS

by S. A. Chakrabarty (HarperVoyager; \$29.99)

American author S. A. Chakrabarty has described *The City of Brass*, the first in a trilogy, as 'historical fan fiction'. It is set in Egypt in the early nineteenth century when conflict between Napoleonic France and the Ottomans provides a backdrop to the story of a young girl Nahri, with healing skills, hustling to live on the streets of Cairo.

Chakrabarty converted to Islam as a teenager and studied at the American University in Cairo, where she heard 'stories of djinns ... created from smoke or fire, and as a homesick, homework-laden, and rather wide-eyed new Muslim myself, I found in these stories a refuge; they spoke of a history that dazzled, a faith of breathtaking diversity in which my weird background was nothing new nor particularly noteworthy'.

Nahri's life changes dramatically when she realises that one of her clients has been possessed by a djinn, an 'evil *ifrit*'. The *ifrit*, in turn, recognises that Nahri has special powers, which also bring her to the attention of the great djinn warrior Dara, who has a complicated history of his own. Dara persuades Nahri to accompany him for safety to the legendary djinn city of Daevabad,

with its gilded brass walls.

Those looking for the apparatus of the mystical East will not be disappointed, with flying carpets, creatures of fire, harems of female djinns, and rings that hold the souls of djinns. Nahri turns out to be the last in the line of the 'Nahids', healers of the djinn races and previous rulers of the City of Brass. As such, Nahri is catapulted into djinn and palace politics.

Chakarborty somewhat lengthy text does not probe deeply into Islamic philosophy and history, but she certainly provides a potent narrative mix with underpinning concerns relating to slavery and religious conflict.

**FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD**  
by Louise Erdrich (Corsair; \$29.99)

*Future Home of the Living God* could be termed American author **Louise Erdrich**'s first non-realist novel.

The novel takes the form of a retrospective account to her unborn child, written by 26-year-old, four months pregnant, Cedar Hawk Songmaker. It begins with Cedar writing, 'I'm the adopted child of Minneapolis liberals, and that when I went looking for my Ojibwe parents and found that I was born Mary Potts I hid the knowledge, maybe you'll understand. Or not'.

Its theme of genetic regression has, according to Erdrich, resulted from her belief that the United States has regressed politically and socially in recent years, starting with the Iraq War and the 'global gag rule', which barred funding health-care organisations that provided abortions or abortion counselling.

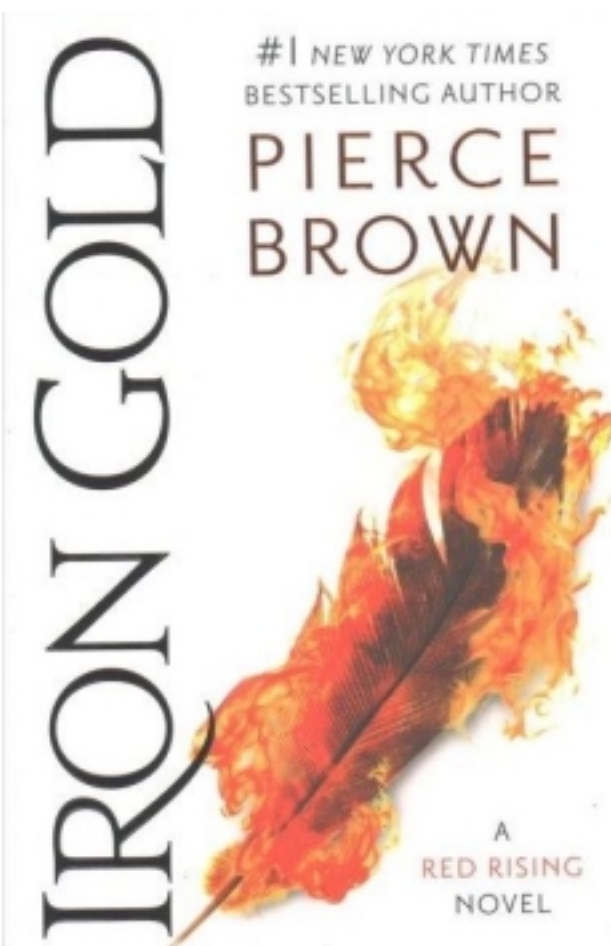
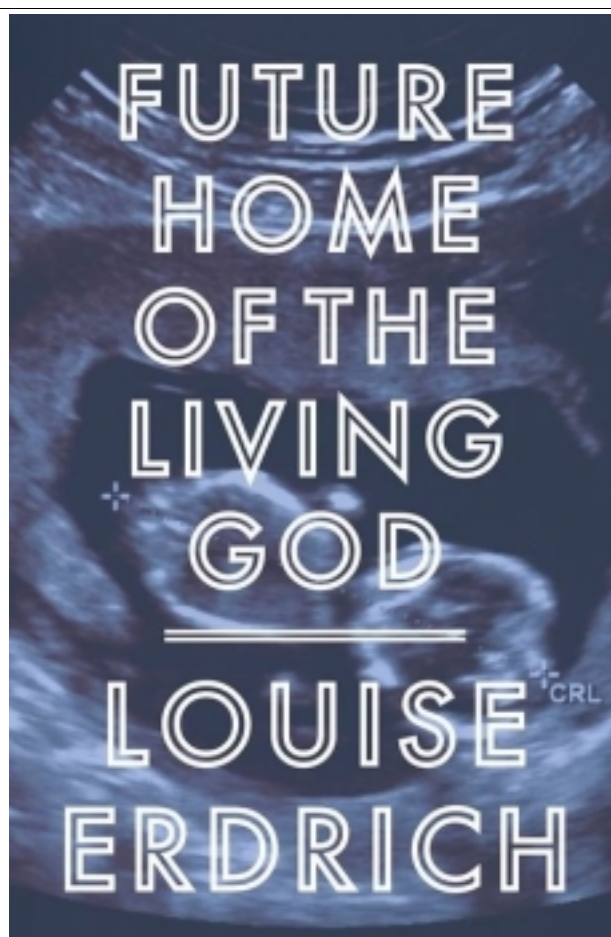
Erdrich's portrayal of this evolutionary reversal is extremely sketchy. For example, animal mutations are encompassed within terms such as a 'saber-toothed cat thing' and a 'lizard-bird'. Dogs, cats, horses, pigs begin to breed abnormally. As Cedar observes, 'Maybe God has decided that we are an idea not worth thinking anymore.'

This evolutionary trend extends to women and fertility problems, with babies appearing almost primitive. A policy of 'gravid female detention' is instituted and pregnant women, either through volunteering or enforcement, are imprisoned, so that review the government can keep the successfully birthed 'perfect' babies. Mysteriously and unconvincingly to accommodate them, 'all of the prisoners in the country have disappeared. Most people say they have been euthanized ... The prisons are for women.'

The details of Erdrich's America, let alone the global background, are also extremely vague, even though significant global warming has occurred, there are no longer winter snows in Minnesota, and the land borders of the United States have been closed, enhancing populist nationalism.

With the pregnancy crisis, the US government strengthens the *Patriot Act*, so that the government becomes practically a theocracy, 'the Church of the New Constitution', as Cedar strives to escape her imprisonment. Cedar's diary form means that the reader only has Cedar as the microcosm of national issues and at the personal narrative level, the reader never really empathises with Cedar's situation.

*Future Home of the Living God* is ultimately a curious





mixture of SF novel and political polemic, with subject matter that has been done so much better by other authors, not least Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler.

### IRON GOLD

by Pierce Brown (Hodder; \$19.99)

Pierce Brown's 'Red Rising' trilogy (2014–2016) outlined a future world modelled on the Roman Empire. People are colour-coded through their hair and eyes, such as ruler Golds, Yellow healers, and naturally the workers as Reds.

The trilogy followed a rebellion led by 'the Reaper', Darrow, originally a 16-year-old slave on Mars, and an ensuing long war that liberated Earth, Mars, and Luna from the control of the Gold ruling body. Other planets, far from accurately scientifically depicted, like Mercury and Venus, were also the scene of vicious warfare.

Brown has written in his blog, 'The novels tell a story about a young man fighting for a better future for his people, on Mars. There are spaceships, caste struggles, racial oppression, family feuds, political back dealing, and space knights falling from the sky in an iron rain.'

The question for Brown was: how do you follow that successful trilogy? In part, by focusing in *Iron Gold*, the first book in a new trilogy set a decade later, on new characters and on the reflection that no victory comes without a price.

Darrow, in his early thirties, is exhausted, haunted by the millions killed in his name. Is the world now a better place? Governing the universe is not as simple as he thought it would be. Brown has said in an interview, 'You get to see how the unintended repercussions of good actions are often just as bad as the intended repercussions of bad actions.'

Having only Darrow as the main protagonist in the books would be somewhat myopic. We'd be blinded to the social ills his revolution has created and the effects on people who are not superpowered. That's a huge concentration for me in this book: exploring the world from the minds and lives of people who have been trod under the feet of giants. Darrow is a character who sees the cracks in the sidewalk but he doesn't get to dive into the cracks because he's a 7'1" killing machine. How can a 5'1" girl from the mines survive in Darrow's world?'

This is a reference to a young girl Lyria, a Martian Red, who was a small child when Darrow freed her and her family from slavery in the mines. But Lyria remains bitter as to her place in the new Republic, replete with refugee camps. The other two main new characters are Ephraim, a traumatised freelance mercenary, who is tired of war, and Lysander au Lune, a Gold prince in exile and in hiding. *Iron Gold's* narrative focus shifts between these three new characters and Darrow and their respective fates.

Brown says, '*Iron Gold* is about the struggle to preserve liberty in a bleak landscape, where heroes of the past look suspiciously like villains and the inspiring dream of liberty has been hijacked by politicians, dirtied by social strife, and muddled by interest groups and competing factions.' As noted many times before, SF provides a window into the contemporary world.

## US fantasy

### THE FIFTH SEASON

by N. K. Jemisin (Orbit. \$22.99)

### THE OBELISK GATE

by N. K. Jemisin (Orbit. \$22. 99)

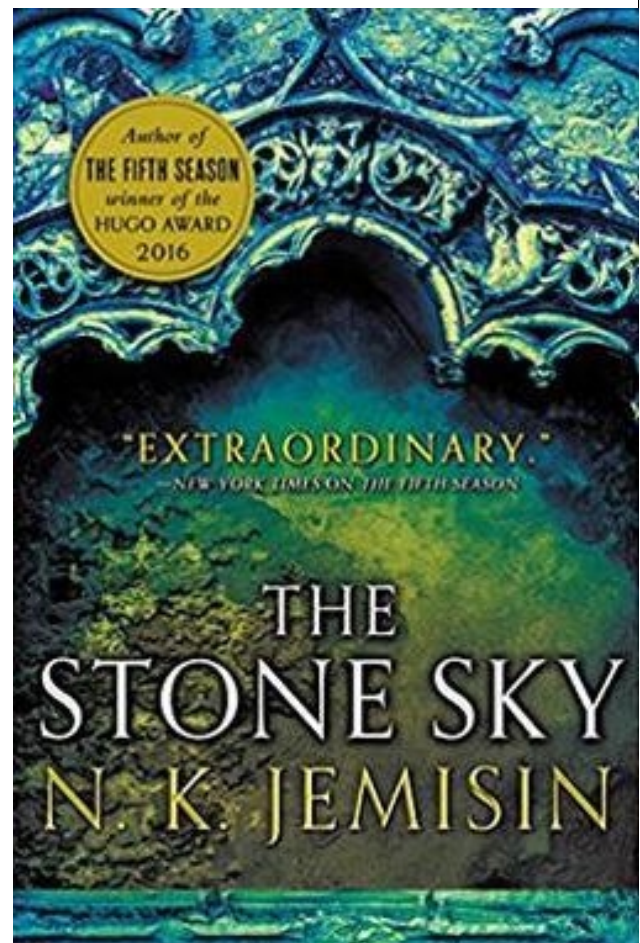
### THE STONE SKY

by N. K. Jemisin (Orbit; \$22 99)

The 'Broken Earth' trilogy mixes fantasy and SF, magic and science, in a story spread over millennia. Both of the first two volumes, *The Fifth Season* and *The Obelisk Gate*, won the Hugo Award for Best Novel of the Year, while N. K. Jemisin is the first African-American author to win a Hugo Award for Best Novel. The detail of this complex and challenging trilogy, which concludes with *The Stone Sky*, cannot be covered adequately in a short review.

Jemisin has created a single-continent world, probably a far future Earth, racked by earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Here 'seasons' derive from natural disasters, such as the 'acid season', rather than the weather.

Jemisin has said of the series, 'The idea for the core of the story, a society of disaster preppers who have the ability to stop and start earthquakes, that came to me from a dream. I dreamed of a woman walking toward me with this furious look on her face and a mountain floating along behind her, and I remember being convinced



in the dream that this woman was [mad] at me and she was going to throw the mountain at me if I didn't figure out why she was angry. From there I came up with a world where people might need the ability to control seismic energy in ways that transcend the laws of physics ... And I think I wanted to mess with that notion.'

Orogenes have the ability to manipulate thermal, kinetic, and other related forms of energy to address seismic events instigated by a deliberately vengeful Earth. As individuals, however, they are constantly oppressed, as their power can damage as well as restore. Jemisin follows three women, all different ages, stages of life, and circumstances. Each of these women has the ability to influence seismic dangers, but ultimately each is striving to survive in a world on the edge of total destruction.

Much of the series is told in the second person, which reduces to some extent the impact of the traumas that each individual experiences, but there are decidedly difficult relationships, especially the complexities of a mother-daughter relationship and the nature of family love. Jemisin also reflects contemporary issues of racism, oppression, and climate change. Can, ultimately, a cycle of pain and violence ever be broken, and what does the moon have to do with it?

Jemisin has woven a powerful and thoughtful trilogy that needs to be read as a single long narrative. It will remain long in the pantheon of the best SF/fantasy fiction.

#### KING OF ASHES

by Raymond E. Feist (Harper Voyager; \$39.99)

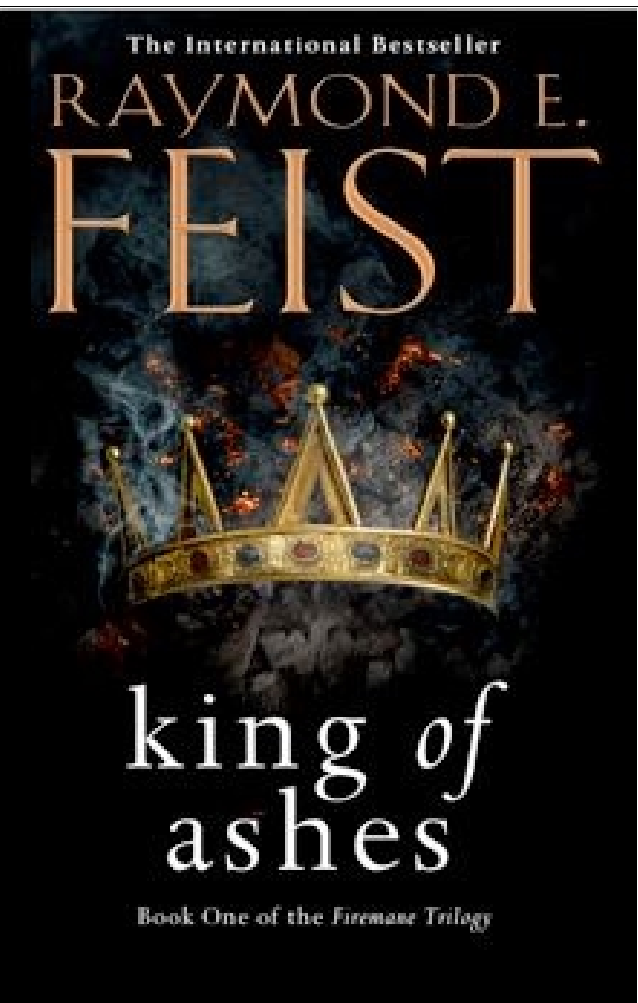
**Raymond E. Feist** is one of the world's best-selling fantasy writers. His 30 novel 'Riftwar' series begins with *Magician* (1982) and ending with *Magician's End* (2013).

*King of Ashes* is the first in his 'Firemane' trilogy, which Feist began, he says, 'because I had run out of Riftwars, here were always five of them, and at the end of the last one it seemed a logical place to call it a day (or 30 years if you'd rather) and move on to something new.'

With Raymond Feist you know what you're getting, namely uncomplicated and occasionally earthy language, not terribly deep characters and big world-building. *King of Ashes* is very predictable in its narrative structure, but this will not destroy its appeal for Feist's legion of fans, nor its sales.

The five greatest kingdoms on the world of Garn had been peacefully coexisting for centuries, but everything changes when four of the kingdoms band together to overthrow the fifth, Ithrace, ruled by red-haired Steveren Langene, 'known to all as Firemane, lifelong friend to any man of good heart'.

The prologue begins with the impact of that conquest on Daylon Dumarch's, the Baron of Marquensas. Daylon, while realising his action within the coalition was inevitable, comes to regret his bloody action. His chance of redemption arrives when he arranges for a young



baby, who turns out to be Firemanes heir Hatu, to be raised in secret on the Island of Coaltachin, a home of spies and assassins.

Feist's narrative jumps forward 16 years. We meet Hatu, now a young man, 'prone to anger, often barely able to control it and quick to erupt', but still unaware of his regal lineage. Hatu's story is juxtaposed with that of another orphan, Declan, a young blacksmith who learns the secrets of forging the King's Steel, and is more traditionally set in the mould of a fantasy hero.

Raymond Feist has described *Ashes* as 'primarily a very straight action adventure, with the theme of revenge', with the two young men being 'motivated by revenge but for entirely different reasons'. The decisions that Hatu and Declan make, will, in classic fantasy tradition, have ramifications, not just for themselves, but for Garn and its warring kingdoms.

Hatu and Declan's stories are kept separate in most of this first book, with them meeting only briefly near the conclusion. Readers will know that, having made their Feistian bargain, the main action is yet to come.

— Colin Steele, 2018

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# The best of everything, 2016

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## Favourite novels read for the first time in 2016

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A meeting of the Nova Mob in the middle of 2016, organised by bookseller Justin Ackroyd, set the tone for my fiction reading during the year. Justin circulated copies of the Arthur C. Clarke Award nominees for the year. Nearly everybody contributing a crit on one or other of the titles. Two books dominated my lists: **Dave Hutchinson's *Europe at Midnight*** and **Iain Pears' *Aracadia***. Both novels deal with alternative Britains. In Pears' novel, the alternatives are reached by ping-ponging through events of time travel. One set of characters reached one of these alternatives by stepping through the back of a cupboard. In Hutchinson's what-now-has-proved-to-be-a-trilogy 'Europe' novels, alternative Britains, alternative Europes, are reached simply by stepping through unsuspected time-space nodules. A fantasy premise, but everything else rings true. Both novels stink of the fear of modern Europe. In each, one of the alternative Britains represents a country that Brexit-voting Britons believe would be theirs if only the rest of the world would go away. In Hutchinson's worlds, little bits of Europe keep declaring independence and becoming new countries. (The Catalonia vote has taken place since *Europe at Midnight* was published.) Both novels are very lively, distinguished more for their concept twists than for the individuality of their characters.

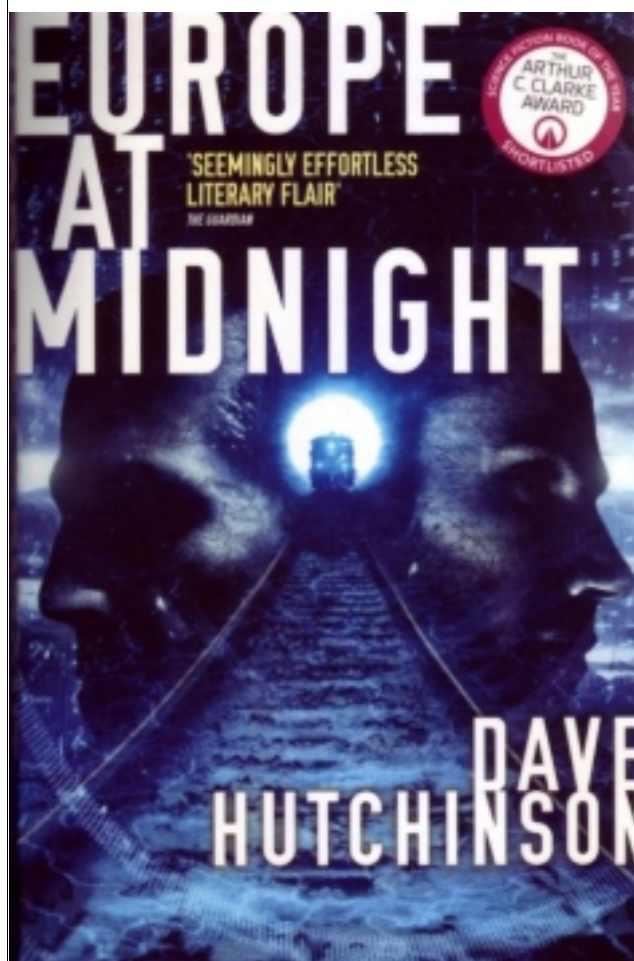
**Claire North's** novels show the same sense of acute mind-fizz as do those of Hutchinson and Pears. North's characters are afflicted by being totally out of step with the rest of the world. In ***The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August***, Harry August must re-live his life from the beginning each

time he is resurrected, thus creating new world possibilities. (In North's later novel *Touch*, for instance, a character changes bodies each time he/she touches somebody. We never do discover which body, he or she, he or she started from.) Claire North's prose is very readable and busy, and her characters travel a great deal.

Thanks to original *SFC* subscriber **Derek Kew** for putting me onto the novels of **William Sloane**, whose potent mixtures of mysterious imagery and gothic unease (expecially in ***To Walk the Night***) remind me of the best prose of Fritz Leiber.

The most esoteric title on the list is ***A Fearful Joy***, by **Joyce Cary** (today remembered only for *The Horse's Mouth*). I forget where I bought this 80-year-old novel 40 years ago. A very racy novel for 1937, it tells the story of a character who might have been based directly on John Le Carré's (John Conrwall's) father (described in *A Perfect Spy*), which raises the possibility that all the characters are based on people also known to Le Carré. Le Carré's father was the ultimate con-man, whose abilities were so considerable that he seemed to lead a life of endless crime only for the pleasure of getting away with it.

Melbourne critic Peter Craven reviewed **Adam Sisman's *Le Carré: The Biography*** as the best literary biography he had read. I suspect he's remembered a few other contenders since. Sisman has discovered or guessed as much as he can about his subject, but Le Carré's memories are protected by the *Official Secrets Act*: he will never be allowed to say much about the espionage





stretch of his life. However, Australian radio journalist **Mark Colvin** (who has died since his book appeared) gives credit to Sisman for uncovering information about MI6 methods that sheds light on the life of Colvin's own father, the subject of ***Light and Shadow: Memoirs of a Spy's Son***. Colvin snr did not reveal to his son that he had been a British spy until his son was in his twenties.

One of the most fruitful books of the year is ***Browsings***, by **Michael Dirda**, who writes for *The Washington Post* (and many other American periodicals). I did not know what Michael did for a living when he began posting in the Fictionmags e-list a few years ago. Then I discovered that he had already won the Pulitzer Prize for an earlier book, and had just published *Browsings*, a collection of essays about the enjoyment of reading and book buying. Michael Dirda is remarkable because he loves all kinds of books, including science fiction, fantasy, mysteries, and all byways of literature that I and *SFC* readers love. I've bought five more of his books since I read *Browsings*. They are all filled with delicious and informative writing, without any hint of academese.

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- |    |   |    |   |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | EUROPE AT MIDNIGHT (2015) Dave Hutchinson (Solaris)                 | 11 | KOLYMSKY HEIGHTS (1994) Lionel Davidson (Faber)           |
| 2  | ARCADIA (2015) Iain Pears (Faber)                                   | 12 | THE WORLD REPAIR VIDEO GAME (2015) David Ireland (Island) |
| 3  | THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION (2002) Nancy Farmer (Atheneum)            | 13 | MOCKINGBIRD (1980) Walter Tevis (Gollancz SF Masterworks) |
| 4  | THE FIRST FIFTEEN LIVES OF HARRY AUGUST (2014) Claire North (Orbit) | 14 | HARD LIGHT (2016) Elizabeth Hand (Minotaur)               |
| 5  | A FEARFUL JOY (1949/1951) Joyce Cary (Readers Union/Michael Joseph) |    |   |
| 6  | TO WALK THE NIGHT (1937) William Sloane (Panther)                   |    |   |
| 7  | GENERATION LOSS (2007) Elizabeth Hand (Constable & Robinson Crime)  |    |   |
| 8  | UNDERGROUND AIRLINES (2016) Ben. Winters (Century)                  |    |   |
| 9  | ANGELMAKER (2012) Nick Harkaway (William Heinemann)                 |    |   |
| 10 | EUROPE IN AUTUMN (2014) Dave Hutchinson                             |    |   |
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### Other four-star contenders, in the order in which I read them:

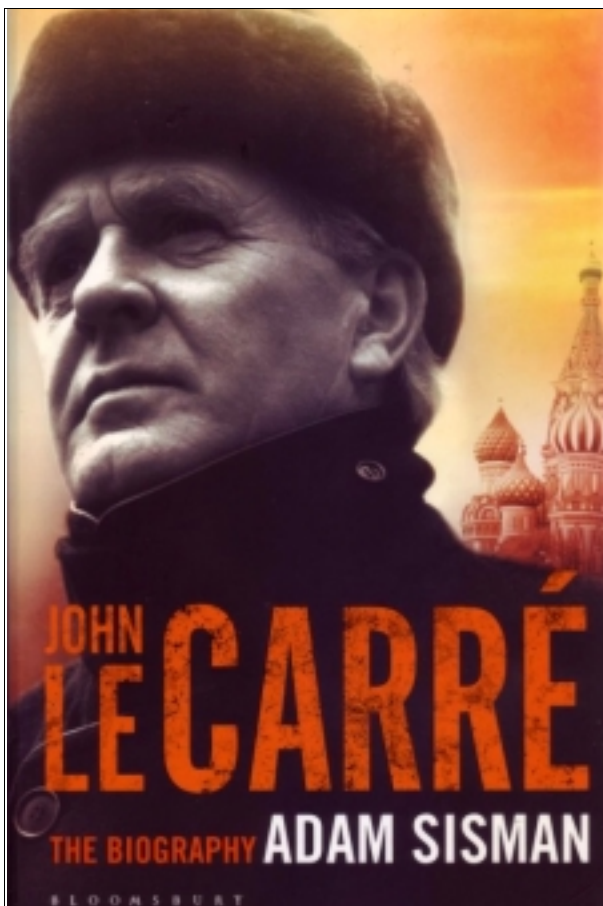
THE MARTIAN (2013) Andy Weir (Del Rey)  
 THE DRY (2016) Jane Harper (Macmillan)  
 GOODBYE MR CHIPS (1934) James Hilton (Hodder)

## Favourite books read for the first time in 2016

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- 1 LE CARRÉ: THE BIOGRAPHY (2015) Adam Sisman (Bloomsbury)
  - 2 EUROPE AT MIDNIGHT (2015) Dave Hutchinson (Solaris)
  - 3 ARCADIA (2015) Iain Pears (Faber)
  - 4 HAWKFALL AND OTHER STORIES (1974) George Mackay Brown (Triad Granada)
  - 5 BROWSINGS (2015) Michael Dirda (Pegasus)
  - 6 THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION (2002) Nancy Farmer (Atheneum)
  - 7 MERMAID SINGING (1958) Charmian Clift (Collins Imprint)
  - 8 THE LEIBER CHRONICLES: FIFTY YEARS OF FRITZ LEIBER (1990) Fritz Leiber ed. Martin H. Greenberg (Dark Harvest)
  - 9 THE BOY BEHIND THE CURTAIN (2016) Tim Winton (Hamish Hamilton)
  - 10 THE FIRST FIFTEEN LIVES OF HARRY AUGUST (2014) Claire North (Orbit)
  - 11 A FEARFUL JOY (1949/1951) Joyce Cary (Readers Union/Michael Joseph)
  - 12 THE ISLE OF FOULA (1938/2001) Ian B. Stoughton Holbourn & M. C. Stoughton Holbourn (Birlinn)

### Other four-star contenders in the order in which I read them:

THE MARTIAN (2013) Andy Weir (Del Rey)  
 J. M. BARRIE AND THE LOST BOYS (1979) Andrew Birkin (with Sharyn Goode) (Macdonald Futura)  
 GENERATION LOSS (2007) Elizabeth Hand (Constable & Robinson Crime)  
 MOCKINGBIRD (1980) Walter Tevis (Gollancz SF Masterworks)  
 FAR FROM HOME (1981) Walter Tevis (Doubleday)  
 TO WALK THE NIGHT (1937) William Sloane (Panther)  
 KOLYMSKY HEIGHTS (1994) Lionel Davidson (Faber)  
 ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE: A PERSONAL VIEW OF HOLLYWOOD AND SCREENWRITING (1983) William Goldman (Futura)  
 READINGS: ESSAYS AND LITERARY ENTERTAINMENTS (2000) Michael Dirda (W. W. Norton)  
 HARD LIGHT (2016) Elizabeth Hand (Minotaur)  
 THE DRY (2016) Jane Harper (Macmillan)  
 LAST SUMMER AT MARS HILL (1998) Elizabeth Hand (HarperPrism)  
 EUROPE IN AUTUMN (2014) Dave Hutchinson



(Solaris)  
 VOICES IN THE NIGHT (2015) Steven Millhauser  
 (Corsair)  
 ANGELMAKER (2012) Nick Harkaway (William  
 Heinemann)  
 THE WORLD REPAIR VIDEO GAME (2015) David  
 Ireland (Island)  
 STORIES OF YOUR LIFE AND OTHERS (2002) Ted  
 Chiang (Tor)  
 THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM: HOUSING EXPERIENCES  
 OF OLDER AUSTRALIANS (2016) Alan Morris  
 (CSIRO Publishing)  
 LIGHT AND SHADOW: MEMOIRS OF A SPY'S SON  
 (2016) Mark Colvin (Melbourne University Press)  
 UNDERGROUND AIRLINES (2016) Ben. Winters  
 (Century)  
 GOODBYE MR CHIPS (1934) James Hilton (Hodder)

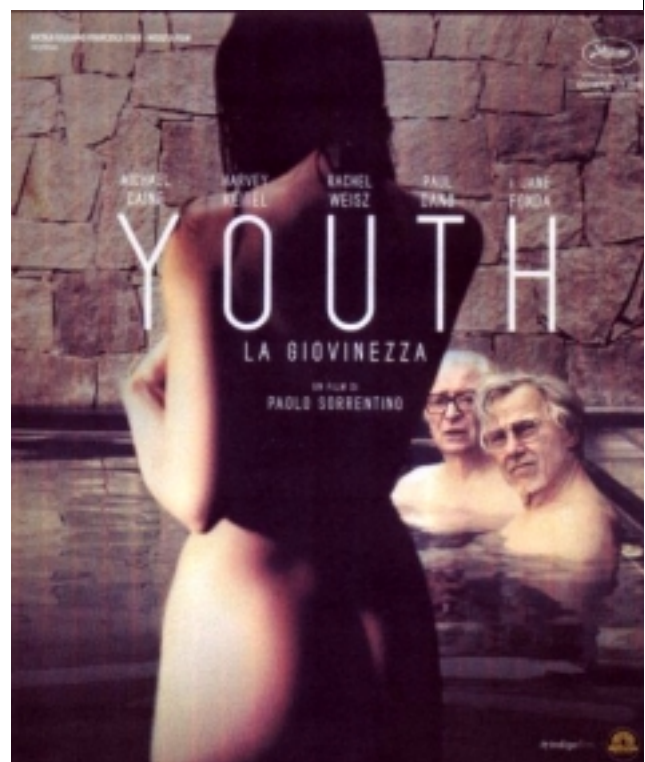
## Favourite films seen for the first time in 2016

Two films dominate this list.

Paolo Sorrentino's **Youth** is drenched with remarkable imagery, but at heart is a superb comedy about two old friends, devoted to music all their lives, who find themselves spending their last days at a fabulous resort in the Swiss mountains. Michael Caine and Harvey Keitel have rarely had better roles than in this film. (Yes, *Youth* is an ironic title.)

Dennis Villeneuve has been quietly gathering admirers during recent years, for movies such as *Enemy*, *Prisoners*, and *Sicario*. In **Arrival**, nobody could have expected him to make such a great job of Eric Heisserer's adaptation of Ted Chiang's story 'Stories of Your Life', giving life to Chiang's aliens and widening the implications of the story: communicating with visiting aliens enables all of humanity to see time and destiny in a new way. (After finishing *Arrival*, Villeneuve was chosen to direct *Blade Runner 2049*, and, to demonstrate that no good deed goes unpunished, has been chosen to direct the next *Star Wars* movie.)

The other films on my list are all fine achievements in different ways, but don't stay in memory in quite the way that *Youth* and *Arrival* do. But certainly memorable is **Leon the Professional**,



one of Luc Besson's best movies, a cheeky comedy about violence and sex that makes most ordinary English-language movies seem pallid.

The most original film on my list is Gareth Edwards' **Monsters**. It's about big scary monsters, but isn't. It features two people (the film's only professional actors) who must cross an area of northern Mexico that has been invaded by aliens who are really big and dangerous. The monster effects have been added by CGI programming on a single computer. Do not miss the surprise ending of this film!

- 1 YOUTH (2015) Paolo Sorrentino
- 2 ARRIVAL (2016) Dennis Villeneuve
- 3 LEON THE PROFESSIONAL (1994) Luc Besson
- 4 MONSTERS (2010) Gareth Edwards
- 5 SUNSET SONG (2015) Terence Davies
- 6 RUSH (2014) Ron Howard
- 7 TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING (1977) Robert Aldrich
- 8 MIDNIGHT SPECIAL (2016) Jeff Nichols
- 9 THE GLASS KEY (1942) Stuart Heisler
- 10 FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS (2016) Stephen Frears
- 11 MR PIP (2014) Andrew Adamson
- 12 LAST CAB TO DARWIN (2014) Jeremy Sims
- 13 A SINGLE MAN (2009) Tom Ford
- 14 THE ENEMY BELOW ((1951) Dick Powell
- 15 MATILDA (1996) Danny DeVito
- 16 EASY VIRTUE (2008) Stephen Elliott
- 17 THE BIG SHORT (2015) Adam McKay
- 18 SPOTLIGHT (2015) Tom McCarthy

### Other four-star contenders, in the order in which I saw them:

THE DRESSMAKER (2015)  
80,000 SUSPECTS (1963) Val Guest  
PHOENIX (2014) Christian Petzgold  
THREE LITTLE WORDS (1949) Richard Thorpe

PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED (1986) Francis Coppola  
THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES (2015) Billy Ray  
THE WHISPERER IN DARKNESS (2011) Sam Branney  
THE THREE MUSKETEERS (1993) Stephen Herek  
SNOOPY AND CHARLIE BROWN: THE PEANUTS MOVIE (2015) Steve Martino  
THE SAINT IN LONDON (1939) John Paddy Carstairs  
THE LADY IN THE VAN (2015) Nicholas Hytner  
THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR (1975) Sidney Pollack  
WOMAN ON THE RUN (1950) Norman Foster  
FINDING DORY (2016) John Stanton  
HAIL CAESAR! (2016) Joel and Ethan Coen  
RAFFLES (1930) Henry d'Amast & George Fitzsimmons  
ZOOTOPIA (2016) Byron Howard & Rich Moore  
INTO THE WOODS (2015) Gary Marshall  
SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC (1948) Charles Frend  
LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP (2016) Whit Stillman  
THE DARK CORNER (1946) Henry Hathaway  
THE MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY (2015) Matthew Brown  
REPO MAN (1984) Alex Cox  
WILLY WONKA AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY (1971) Mel Stuart  
ALL NIGHT LONG (1962) Basil Dearden  
WHIRLPOOL (1950) Otto Preminger  
THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN (1973) Stuart Rosenberg  
THE BFG (2016) Steven Spielberg  
HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE (2016) Taiki Waititi

## Favourite films seen again in 2016

Most of these films are sufficiently famous as to not need further comment. Most of them were re-watched in 2016 because I gained access to newly remastered Blu-rays, of which I had last seen TV scratchy scan-and-pan prints many years ago. Thanks to **Dick Jensen** and **John Davies** for making available many of these films.

- 1 ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS (1939) Howard Hawks
- 2 INSIDE MAN (2006) Spike Lee
- 3 QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH) (1967) Roy Ward Baker
- 4 DARK PASSAGE (1947) Delmer Daves
- 5 GOSFORD PARK (2001) Robert Altman
- 6 THE WITCHES (1989) Nicolas Roeg
- 7 GILDA (1948) Charles Vidor
- 8 YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN (1974) Mel Brooks
- 9 THE DEAD (1987) John Huston
- 10 AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD (1983) John Schlesinger

- 11 FINDING NEMO (2003) Andrew Stanton
- 12 WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS (1950) Otto Preminger
- 13 LOST HORIZON (1937) Frank Capra
- 14 HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR (1959) Alain Resnais

### Other four-star contenders, in the order in which I saw them:

ON THE BEACH (1959) Stanley Kramer  
THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (1957) Jack Arnold  
I'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT'S 'IS NAME (1967)



Michael Winner  
THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU (2004) Wes  
Anderson  
BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE (1988)  
Stephen Herek

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## Favourite documentaries and music films seen for the first time in 2016

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At least one critic (on radio, not in newspapers) picked **Senna** as his Best Film Ever at the end of 2016. That's a bit too much hype, even if your main interest is documentaries (or motor racing). **Asif Kapada** seems to have had a unique opportunity to put together the whole life of racing driver Ayrton Senna during his glory days, mainly because Grand Prix promoter Bernie Ecclestone let him use a large amount of film available to no one else. Kapada treats Ayrton's career as a suspense story, a ripping yarn that becomes a Greek tragedy. It's also a story about Brazil's political national tragedy. Not a frame wasted here.

Ken Russell's **Elgar** is one of the series of TV documentaries about great composers that he made before directing his first feature film. *A Song of Summer*, about the working relationship between Frederick Delius and Eric Fenby, is still Russell's greatest film, but **Elgar** is also very moving. **Ken Russell at the BBC** is still available as a boxed set.

Among filmed concerts, **Talking Heads: Stop Making Sense** is probably the best since *Woodstock* and *The Last Waltz*. That's because Jonathan Demme choreographs every image with every phrase of the music, as David Byrne and the Talking Heads perform their hits with increasing energy while Byrne's fat suit expands and expands. Very funny, as well as musically exciting.

Because **Dick Jenssen** made the Blu-ray available to us, he would want me to make a special recommendation of **Flight of the Butterflies** as the ultimate feel-good movie. As the cover blurb says, 'Experience one of the most incredible natural phenomena on earth — the emigration of hundreds of millions of Monarch butterflies — and the remarkable story of two determined scientists who spent decades unravelling the mystery of where the butterflies disappeared to each fall.'

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- 1 SENNA (2010) Asif Kapada
- 2 ELGAR (1962) Ken Russell
- 3 TALKING HEADS: STOP MAKING SENSE (1984) Jonathan Demme
- 4 SONG OF THE EARTH/DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION (2013) Jason Starr (Neemi Jarvi/Orch. Suisse Romande/Thomas Hampson/Paul Groves)
- 5 THE HIGHWAYMEN LIVE (1990) Jon Small
- 6 ERIC CLAPTON: SLOWHAND AT 70: LIVE AT ROYAL ALBERT HALL (2015) Blue Leach
- 7 ROLLING STONES: HAVANA MOON (2016) Paul Dugdale and Simon Fisher
- 8 THE ROLLING STONES: TOTALLY STRIPPED (1995/2016) Elaine Shepherd
- 9 ADELE: LIVE AT ROYAL ALBERT HALL (2011) Paul Dugdale
- 10 FLIGHT OF THE BUTTERFLIES (2013) Mike Slee
- 11 HITCHCOCK TRUFFAUT (2015) Kent Jones
- 12 THE BEATLES: EIGHT DAYS A WEEK: THE

TOURING YEARS (2016) Ron Howard

### Other four-star contenders, in the order in which I saw them:

JEFFREY SMART: MASTER OF STILLNESS (2012)

Catherine Hunter

RY COODER: DARK END OF THE STREET (2015)

IT MIGHT GET LOUD: THE EDGE, JIMMY PAGE, JACK WHITE (2009) Davis Guggenheim)

MAVIS! (2015) Jessica Edwards

MAHLER: SYMPHONY No 4/RUCKERT LEIDER

Abbado/Kozena/Lucerne Festival Orchestra

CATS LAUGHING: A LONG TIME GONE: REUNION AT MINICON 50 (2016) Theo Lubke & Anne-Marie Kim

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS: LIVE IN AUSTIN TX (2008)

Gary Menotti

THE MUSICAL MOJO OF DR JOHN: CELEBRATING

MAC AND HIS MUSIC (2016) Kevin Wortman & Justin Kreutzman)

THE DEBUSSY MOVIE (1965) Ken Russell

## Favourite television (seen on DVD and Bluray), 2016



For someone who never watches TV, I watch a lot of TV. I don't watch programs in real time, and often I watch programs on DVD or Blu-ray that I couldn't watch in real time even if I wanted to. I don't bring-watch TV. In fact, I watch TV as a gesture of anti-binge-watching. A two-hour movie is often too much for me, especially as I usually watch films and TV at midnight. A 50-minute episode is a perfect midnight snack.

Almost the perfect TV series is *Forever*. It tells of a bloke who finds himself immortal. But if you can't kill yourself, and can't be killed, you have to live as best you can, with people you can trust. So the main character of *Forever* solves crimes in New York, but his family, particularly his son, are now much older than he looks. The overall situation is well developed over one season (26 episodes); perhaps I enjoyed it so much because it doesn't drag on to Seasons 2, 3, and 4.

The main pain of serials, as opposed to episodic series, is the need for filler material. Entire episodes can be redundant. One and a half hours is the perfect length to tell most stories. Eight hours is an ice age. Therefore I'm really impressed by some of the recent Australian ventures. *Jack Irish* began as two TV movies based on private eye novels by Peter Temple. The serial version of *Jack Irish*, called Season 1 although there was no

Season 2, stretches the story-line a bit, but Guy Pearce's main character is up all the biffs and knocks of outrageous fortune dealt to him by the people whose stories he's trying to unravel. Especially enjoyable are vignettes by famous Melbourne identity John Flaus as one of the three old geezers sitting in a pub reminiscing about the Fitzroy Football Club, who incidentally hands to Jack Irish the answer that he needs to solve the case.

The *Doctor Blake Mysteries* recovered in Season 4 from an almost unwatchable Season 3. Dr Blake's mysterious Asian wife turns up, causing consternation to everybody, and several characters nearly get married, but the emphasis is on the police cases, set in Ballarat in the late 1950s.

And I finally caught up with a huge chunk of Scandi-noir in three seasons of *The Bridge*. As usual, the relationships between the two main investigators are far more interesting than the serial killer cases.

- 1 FOREVER
- 2 JACK IRISH: SEASON 1
- 3 THE CODE: SEASON 2
- 4 DOCTOR BLAKE MYSTERIES: SEASON 4

- 5 THE BRIDGE: SEASON 1
- 6 THE BRIDGE: SEASON 2
- 7 THE AVENGERS: SERIES 4 (1966)
- 8 ENDEAVOUR: SERIES 3

- 9 LEWIS: SERIES 9
- 10 MIDSOMER MURDERS: SEASON 17
- 11 DOCTOR THORNE (2016) Julian Fellows

- 12 THE BRIDGE: SEASON 3
- 13 WORRICKER (2013) David Hare

## Favourite popular CDs heard for the first time in 2016

As you'd expect from any of my music lists, lots of alt.country, alt.blues, fok, and other acoustic music — plus **Leonard Cohen's** last album, ***You Want it Darker***, distinguished not only by his doom-laden but very listenable 'singing' but also by the most intense set of lyrics to be found on any of his albums. Lenny facing The End argues existence, death, and guilt with God, and God doesn't have any ready answers.

The DVD of the **Highwaymen's** 1990 concert (***Live: American Outlaws***) is even more exciting than the CD concert. At that time, the four of them were all still very much alive, looking a bit chewed about the edges, and Willie Nelson was at his very best. He still is, 28 years later.

This year I discovered or rediscovered a whole lot of wonderful female singers: Melbourne's **Ruby Boots**, who is about to release her second CD; the smoky-voiced **Lindi Ortega**, sounding as if she could knock down Trump's wall all by herself; and **Cary Anne Hearst**, the female singer of the duo **Shovels and Ropes** (my great rock and roll discovery of the year).

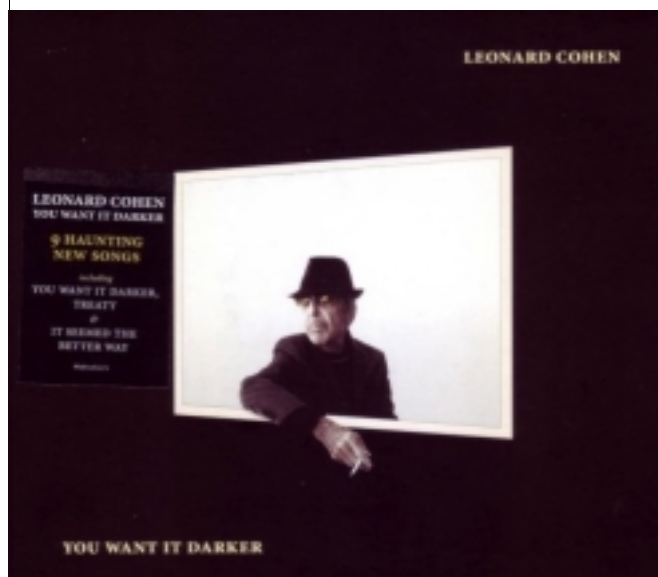
Melbourne's **Kelly Auty** is also a strongly melodic singer, but I would never have known about her ***Live 2016*** if it had not been sitting on a shelf in Readings, Carlton. Nobody reviewed or played it.

Thanks to **Murray MacLachlan** for handing me **Herbie Hancock's** ***Headhunters*** from 1974. I'm not sure how you would describe it: more rock and funk than jazz, much like Miles Davis's CDs from the same period. I need to listen to more Herbie Hancock.

Brian Wise ('Off the Record', 3RRR, 9 a.m.–midday Saturday mornings) alerted me to the fact that ***Mudcrutch*** is in fact the re-formation of Tom Petty's first band, before the Heartbreakers. The two two Mudcrutch albums add up to Tom Petty's very best recordings of what have proved to be his last years.

- 1 Leonard Cohen: YOU WANT IT DARKER (2016)
- 2 The Highwaymen (Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings): LIVE: AMERICAN OUTLAWS (1990/2016) (3 CDs)
- 3 Lindi Ortega: FADED GLORYVILLE (2015)
- 4 Ruby Boots: SOLITUDE (2015)
- 5 Shovels & Ropes: LITTLE SEEDS (2016)
- 6 Shovels & Ropes: BUSTED JUKEBOX VOLUME 1 (2015)
- 7 Shovels & Ropes: SWIMMIN' TIME (2014)
- 8 Kelly Auty: LIVE 2016 (2016)

- 9 Herbie Hancock: HEADHUNTERS (1974)
- 10 MUDCRUTCH 2 (2016)
- 11 Jeff Beck: LOUD HAILER (2016)
- 12 Rolling Stones: BLUE & LONESOME (2016)
- 13 Joan Baez & Friends: 75TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION (2016) (2 CDs)
- 14 Drive-By Truckers: AMERICAN BAND (2016) (2 CDs)
- 15 Eric Clapton: LIVE IN SAN DIEGO: WITH SPECIAL GUEST J. J. CALE (2016)
- 16 Neil Young: PEACE TRAIL (2016)
- 17 Katy Moffatt: LOOSE DIAMOND (1999)
- 18 Leon Bridges: COMING HOME (2015)
- 19 Ethan Johns & the Black Eyed Dogs: SILVER LINER (2016)
- 20 Cyndi Lauper: DETOUR (2016)
- 21 Paul Simon: STRANGER TO STRANGER (2016)
- 22 Mary Chapin Carpenter: THE THINGS THAT WE ARE MADE OF (2016)
- 23 Various: SOME LONESOME PICKER: GREG QUILL TRIBUTE (2016)
- 24 THE LUMINEERS (2012)
- 25 Paul Kelly & Charlie Owens: DEATH'S DATELESS NIGHT (2016)
- 26 Brian Cadd & the Bootleg Family Band: BULLETPROOF (2016)
- 27 Various: GOD DON'T NEVER CHANGE: THE SONGS OF BLIND WILLIE JOHNSTON (2016)
- 28 Dave Rawlings Machine: NASHVILLE OBSOLETE (2015)





- 29 Jennifer Warnes: THE WELL (2016)
- 30 Black Sorrows: FAITHFUL SATELLITE (2016)
- 31 Drive-By Truckers: LIVE FROM AUSTIN TX (2008)
- 32 Buddy Miller: CAYAMO: SESSIONS AT SEA (2016)

### Other four-star contenders, in the order in which I listened to them:

Various: THE JOY OF LIVING: A TRIBUTE TO EWAN MCCOLL (2015) (2 CDs)  
 Patty Griffin: SERVANT OF LOVE (2015)  
 Bruce Springsteen: THE RIVER: OUTTAKES (1980/2015)  
 Dan Kelly: LEISURE PANIC! (2015)  
 Jimi Hendrix Experience: LIVE AT BERKELEY, 30 MAY 1970 (2003)  
 Don Henley: CASS COUNTY (2015)  
 Tift Merritt & Simone Dinnerstein: NIGHT (2013)  
 Glen Hansard: DIDN'T HE RAMBLE (2015)  
 Willie Nelson: SUMMERTIME: WILLIE NELSON SINGS GERSHWIN (2016)  
 Mavis Staples: LIVIN' ON A HIGH NOTE (2016)  
 Henry Wagons: AFTER WHAT I DID LAST NIGHT (2016)  
 Paul Kelly: SEVEN SONNETS AND A SONG (2016)  
 George Washington and Ian Date: THE STRING BAND (2001)

The Little Willies: FOR THE GOOD TIMES (2012)  
 Ben Harper & Innocent Criminals: CALL IT WHAT IT IS (2016)  
 Allen Toussaint: AMERICAN TUNES (2016)  
 Diesel: AMERICANA (2016)  
 CASE/LANG/VEIRS (2016)  
 Shawn Colvin & Steve Earle: COLVIN AND EARLE (2016)  
 Oh Pep!: STADIUM CAKE (2016)  
 CHAIM TANNENBAUM (2016)  
 Crusaders: RURAL REVIVAL (2003)  
 Avett Brothers: TRUE SADNESS (2016)  
 Drive-By Truckers: GO-GO BOOTS (2011)  
 Sarah Watkins: YOUNG IN ALL THE WRONG WAYS (2016)  
 Hurray for the Riff Raff: SMALL TOWN HEROES (2014)  
 Tracy McNeil & the Good Life: THIEVES (2016)  
 Kasey Chambers: AIN'T NO LITTLE GIRL (2016) (EP)  
 Madeleine Peyroux: SECULAR HYMNS (2016)  
 Ian Hunter & the Rant Band: FINGERS CROSSED (2016)  
 Floyd Cramer: RCA COUNTRY LEGENDS (2001)  
 David Bromberg: THE BLUES, THE WHOLE BLUES, AND NOTHING BUT THE BLUES (2016)  
 Sturgill Simpson: METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY AND WESTERN MUSIC (2014)  
 Courtney Mavis Andrews: HONEST LIFE (2016)  
 John Prine: FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE (2016)  
 Archie Roach: LET LOVE RULE (2016)  
 Paul Kelly: WAYS AND MEANS (2003) (2 CDs)

## Favourite popular boxed sets bought during 2016

All of the boxed sets listed below are recommended. Still around at JB Hi Fi is: **Trio: The Complete Collection**, which corrects the injustice that robbed us of the complete Parton/Harris/Ronstadt recordings when the two *Trio* CDs were released in the 1980s. This boxed set is all the more valued because Linda Ronstadt can no longer sing.

**Greenwich Village Folk Scene** is one of those five-CD Original Albums Series that have been very useful in recent years in filling in gaps on the shelf. The two most valuable CDs in the set are **Fred Neil's Bleeker & MacDougal**, one of the greatest white blues albums of the 1960s, long unavailable; and **The Blues Project**, which I first heard on a borrowed LP in the mid 1960s and have never encountered since. It features such giants of the American 1960s blues movement as **Dave Ray, John Koerner, Geoff Muldaur, and Dave Van Ronk**. (The other CDs in the set are by the Even Dozen Jug Band, Phil Ochs, and Tom Paxton.)

- 1 Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt: TRIO: COMPLETE COLLECTION (3 CDs)
- 2 Rolling Stones: TOTALLY STRIPPED (4 Blu-rays + CD)
- 3 Various: GREENWICH VILLAGE FOLK SCENE: ORIGINAL ALBUMS SERIES (5 CDs)
- 4 Staple Singers: FAITH AND GRACE (4 CDs)
- 5 Various: 100 GREATEST AUSTRALIAN



- 6 SINGLES OF THE 60s (4 CDs)  
Kev Carmody: RECOLLECTIONS, REFLECTIONS  
(A JOURNEY) (4 CDs)

Skyhooks: DON'T YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU'VE SEEN  
OR YOU'VE HEARD (3 CDs)  
Fleetwood Mac: TUSK (3 CDs)  
Chick Corea: FIVE ORIGINAL ALBUMS (5 CDs)  
Various: DAY OF THE DEAD (5 CDs)

**Other contenders, in the order in  
which I bought them:**

## Favourite classical CDs heard for the first time in 2016

Boxed set time! In 2014 and 2015 I bought a few too many boxed sets when I thought I had the money. I'm listening to them now that I don't have the money. That great and sparkling pianist **Martha Argerich** provided many of the most enjoyable listening hours of 2016. In some cases, such as **Liszt's Piano Concerto No 1**, she transforms an old warhorse so effectively that you would think you were listening to it for the first time. In the case of **Bartok's Piano Concerto No 2**, she makes it difficult to listen to other versions.

I've barely started listening to the big **Leonard Bernstein** DG boxed set (and keep hoping that his earlier Columbia/Sony recordings will be re-released). It has been very enjoyable to hear his brilliant version of **Beethoven's Symphony No 3**.

During 2016, I bought very few classical CDs that were new recordings. The best of them was **Sol Gabetta's** recordings of various cello pieces by **Pieterin Vasks**, one of my great discoveries of recent years. Any piece written by him is worth hearing.

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|--|--|
| <p>1 Martha Argerich (piano)/Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana: <b>Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 2/Liszt: Piano Concerto No. 1/Bartok: Piano Concerto No. 3/Mozart: Andante and 5 Variations in C Major K501</b> (2004/2012) (Martha Argerich Complete Recordings on DG CD46)</p> <p>2 Leonard Bernstein (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic: <b>Beethoven: Symphony Nos. 1 &amp; 3</b> (1978/2014) (Leonard Bernstein Collection Vol. 1 CD2)</p> <p>3 Joshua Bell (violin)/Neville Marriner (cond.)/Academy of St Martin in the Fields/Peter Maag (cond.)/English Chamber Orchestra: <b>Bruch: Violin Concerto/Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto/Mozart: Violin Concertos Nos. 3, 5/Adagio in E major/Rondo in C major</b> (1988/1992/2008) (2 CDs)</p> <p>4 Sol Gabetta (cello)/Kandida Thompson (cond.) Amsterdam Sinfonietta: <b>Vasks: Presence/Musique Busoir/Gramata Celum/The Book</b> (2015)</p> <p>5 Martha Argerich (piano) and friends: <b>Beethoven: Piano Quartet No. 3/Clarinet Trio/Piano Trio No. 1 'The Ghost'/Chopin: Introduction and polonaise brillante No. 3</b> (2002/2005/2007/2009/2011) (Martha Argerich Edition: Chamber Music CD 2)</p> <p>6 Mandelring Quartet: <b>Mendelssohn: String Quartets Op. 12, Op. 13, WoO</b> (2015) (Mendelssohn Complete Chamber Music for Strings CD1)</p> <p>7 Martha Argerich (piano)/Alexandre Vedernikov</p> | <p>(cond.)/Mikhail Pletnev (cond.)/Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana: <b>Shostakovich Piano Concerto No. 1/De Falla: Nights in the Gardens of Spain/Pletnev: Fantasia elvetica</b> (2008/2011) (Martha Argerich Edition: Concertos CD4)</p> <p>8 Leonard Bernstein (cond.)/New York Philharmonic: <b>Copland: Symphony No. 3/Quiet City</b> (1985/2014) (Leonard Bernstein Collection Vol. 1 CD44)</p> <p>9 Simon Tedeschi (piano)/<b>Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition/Tchaikovsky: Album for the Young Op. 39</b> (2015)</p> <p>10 Martha Argerich (piano)/Gidon Kremer (violin)/Mischa Maisky (cello): <b>Shostakovich: Trio No. 2/Tchaikovsky: Trio in A minor/Keiswetter: Tango Pathetique</b> (1999/2011) (Martha Argerich Recordings for DG CD34)</p> |
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## Other four-star contenders, in order in which I listened to them:

Benjamin Britten (cond.)/Mstislav Rostropovich (cello)/English Chamber Orch.: **Britten: Symphony for Cello & Orchestra Op. 68/Haydn: Cello Concerto** (1964/2013) (Decca Sound Analogue Years CD32)

Lorin Maazel (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic: **Sibelius: Symphony No 1/Karelia Suite/Symphony No. 4** (1963/1968/2013) (Decca Sound Analogue Years CD34)

David Oistrakh (violin)/Jacha Horenstein (cond.)/Paul

Hindemith (cond.): **Bruch: Scottish Fantasia/Hindemith: Violin Concerto** (1962/2013) (Decca Sound Analogue Years CD36)

Martha Argerich:(piano)/Claudio Abbado (cond.)/**Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 3/Ravel: Piano Concerto in G major** (1967/2015) (Martha Argerich Complete Recordings on DG CD3)

Bruno Walter (cond.)/New York Philharmonic: **Strauss: Don Juan/Tod und Verklarung/Barber: Symphony No. 1** (Bruno Walter The Edition CD37)

Ronald Brautigam (piano)/Andrew Parrott (cond.)/Norrkoping Symphony Orchestra: **Beethoven: Piano Concerto No 4/ Violin Concerto piano transcription**

Kodaly Quartet: Haydn: **String Quartets Op. 64, No. 4, 5 ('The Lark'), 6** (1993)

Leonard Bernstein (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic: **Beethoven: String Quartet No. 14/No. 16 (string orchestra versions)** (1977/1989/2014) Leonard Bernstein Collection CD

Martha Argerich (piano)/Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana: **Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 1/Piano Concerto No. 3/Schumann Piano Concerto Op. 54** (Martha Argerich Complete Recordings on DG CD45)

Martha Argerich (piano) and friends: **Schubert: Hungarian Divertissement in G minor D818/Brahms: Leibesleider Waltzes Op. 52/Stravinsky: Noces/ Milhaud: Scaramouches Op. 165b** (Martha Argerich Complete Records on DG?)

Martha Argerich (piano)/Claudio Abbado (cond.): **Mozart: Piano Concertos 25, 20** (Martha Argerich Complete Recordings on DG CD 42)

Martha Argerich (piano)/Charles Dutoit (cond.)/Montreal Symphony Orchestra: **Chopin Piano Concertos 1, 2** (1998/2011) (Martha Argerich Edition: Concertos CD1)

Martha Argerich (piano)/Renard Capucon (violin)/Mischa Maisky (cello)/Alexandre Rabinovich (cond.)/Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana: **Beethoven: Triple Concerto/ Robert Schumann: Piano Concerto** (2002/2003/2011) (Martha Argerich Edition: Concertos CD3)

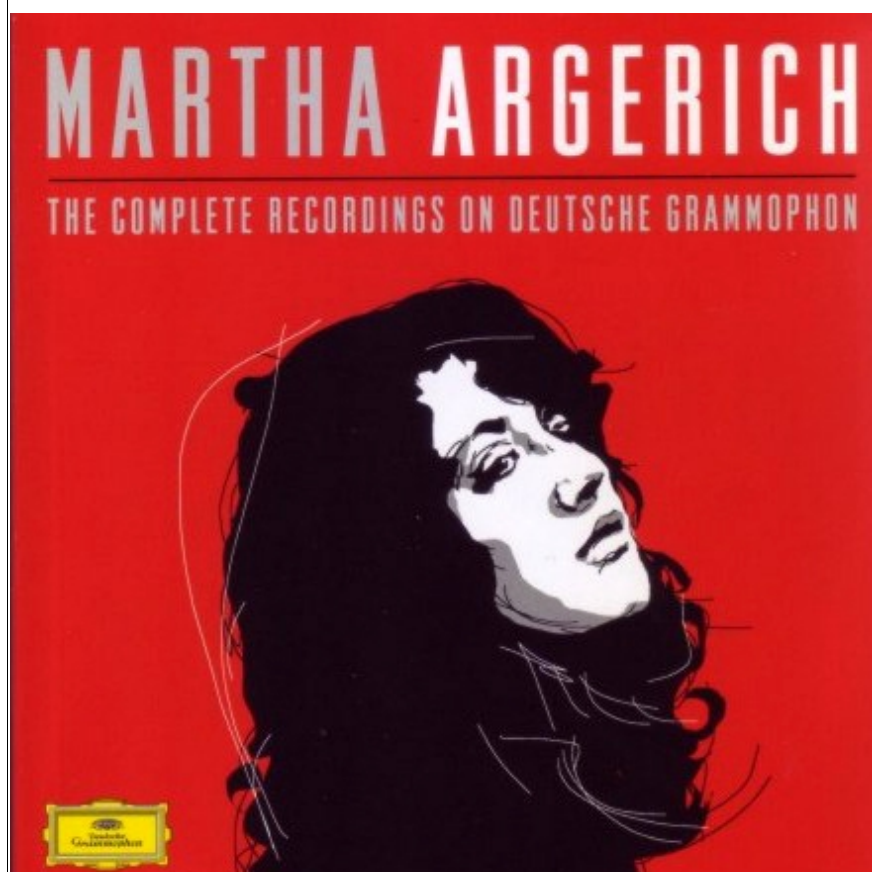
Martha Argerich (piano) and friends: **Haydn: Piano Trio in G ('Gypsy' trio)/Mendelssohn: Piano Trio No. 1/Schumann: Fantasiestucke Op. 88** (1981/2002/2003/2009/2011) (Martha Argerich Edition: Chamber Music CD5)

Herbert von Karajan (cond.)/Geza Anda (piano)/Berlin Philharmonic: **Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2** (1967/2012) (Karajan 1960s, CD60)

Istvan Kersetz (cond.)/London Symphony Orchestra: **Dvorak: Symphony No. 1** (1963)

Alicia de Larrocha (piano)/Zubin Mehta (cond.)/Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra: **Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5// Ole Mustonen (piano)/ Jukka-Pekka Saraste (cond.)/German Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra: Beethoven: Violin Concerto (piano version)** (1979/1994/2004)

Mandelring Quartet: **Mendelssohn String Quartets Op. 44, Nos. 1 and 2, Op. 80** (2015) (Mendelssohn Complete Chamber Music for Strings CD2)





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# The best of everything, 2017

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## Favourite books read for the first time in 2017

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No dazzling No 1 in 2017. Each of the top three novels is excellent in a different way.

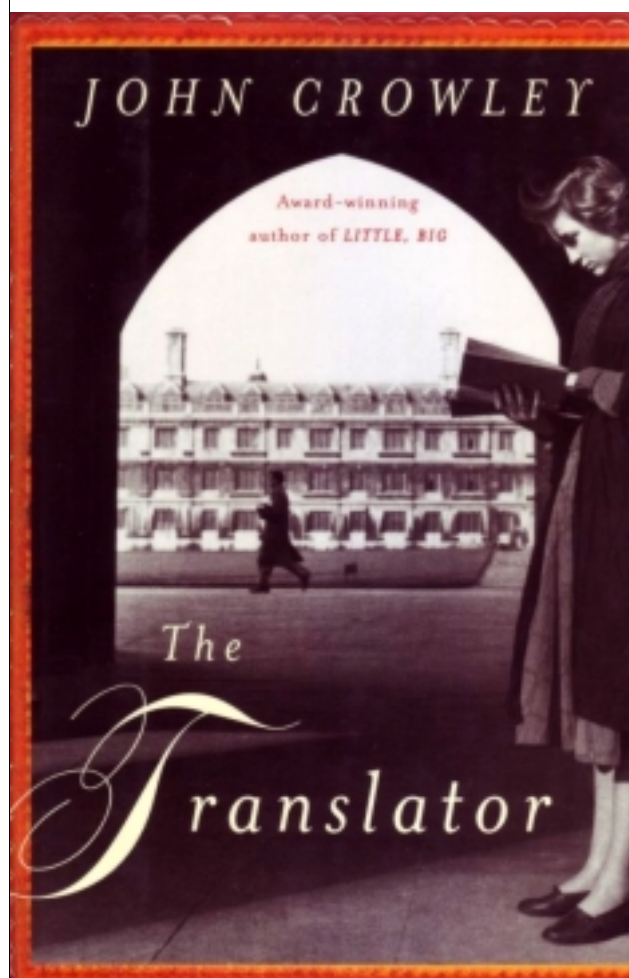
**John Crowley's *The Translator*** is both a suspense novel and a novel of culture clash featuring two powerful personalities, with more than a hint of fantasy/SF.

**Garry Disher's *Under the Cold Bright Lights*** is an assured and stimulating Australian thriller/police procedural. Garry Disher's cop has left the force, and returns to a dreary job, only to find himself solving three cold cases and a personal case that comes to mean more than any of his official work. As always, Disher evokes Australian seediness in a forensic and stimulating way.

And **Jennifer Egan's *Manhattan Beach*** is an epic novel of crime and corruption in New York during the middle of the twentieth century. But it's mainly the story of a determined woman and her lost father.

Last year I did a lot of searching along the Gillespie–Cochrane bookshelves for books I've owned for anything up to 50 years, but *have not yet read*. In the early 1970s Elaine bought the Penguin Modern Classics editions of most of **Virginia Woolf's** novels. Each is very different from the other, but the ones I enjoyed greatly during 2017 were ***Night and Day*** (1919), Woolf's tribute to Henry James; and ***Mrs Dalloway*** (1925), which is not describable. The book bought earliest is **Terjai Versaas's *The Ice Palace*** (1963), which I bought in paperback in 1970.

At least one Melbourne writer holds that one should not review books by people one knows. For the indigent fanzine editor, who no longer receives review copies, the only books one is likely to review are those by people one knows. During 2017 I read lots of good books by friends of mine.

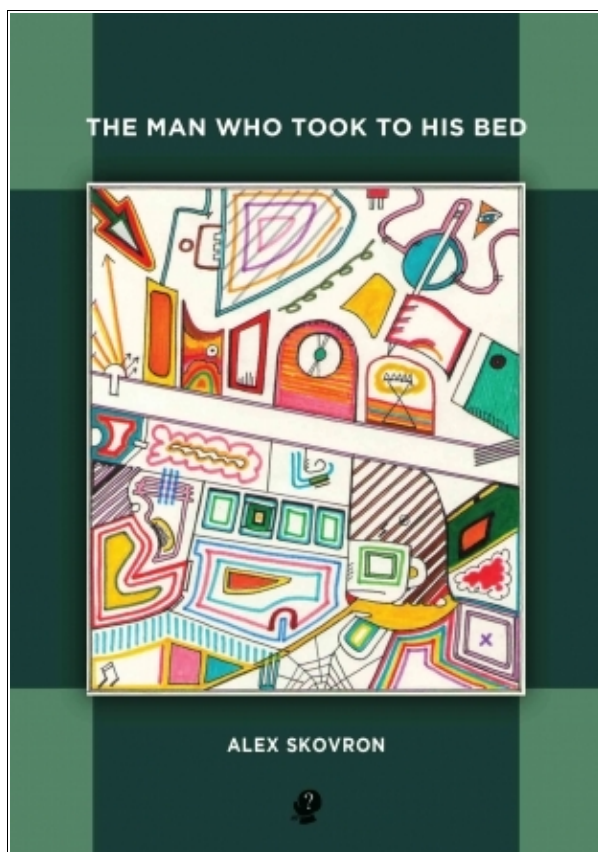


- 1 THE TRANSLATOR (2002) John Crowley (William Morrow)
- 2 UNDER THE COLD BRIGHT LIGHTS (2017) Garry Disher (Text)
- 3 MANHATTAN BEACH (2017) Jennifer Egan (Corsair)
- 4 THE END OF THE DAY (2017) Claire North (Orbit)
- 5 THE GOLDEN DAY (2011) Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin)
- 6 NIGHT AND DAY (1919) Virginia Woolf (Penguin Modern Classics)
- 7 THE HIGH FLYER (1993) Nicholas Shakespeare (Vintage)
- 8 BLOODFATHER (1987) David Ireland (Viking)
- 9 THE ICE PALACE (1963) Terjai Vesaas (Panther)
- 10 MRS DALLOWAY (1925) Virginia Woolf (Penguin Modern Classics)
- 11 BORDER DISTRICTS (2017) Gerald Murnane (Giramondo)
- 12 THE VERY BEST OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION: SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY ANTHOLOGY (2009) ed. Gordon Van Gelder (Touchstone)
- 13 MOON SHOTS (1999) ed. Peter Crowther (DAW)

- 14 IN SUNLIGHT OR IN SHADOW: STORIES INSPIRED BY THE PAINTINGS OF EDWARD HOPPER (2016) ed. Lawrence Block (Pegasus)
  - 15 SELECTED TALES (1962) Nicolai Leskov (Secker & Warburg)
  - 16 THE MAN WHO TOOK TO HIS BED (2017) Alex Skovron (Puncher & Wattman)
  - 17 LINER NOTES: ON PARENTS & CHILDREN, EXES & EXCESS, DEATH & DECAY, & A FEW OF MY OTHER FAVORITE THINGS (2017) Loudon Wainwright III (Blue Rider Press)
  - 18 INSIDE THE WHALE AND OTHER ESSAYS (1957) George Orwell (Penguin)
  - 19 BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON (1937) Dorothy L. Sayers (Hodder)
  - 20 STRONG POISON (1930) Dorothy L. Sayers (New English Library)
  - 21 BLACK FEATHERS: DARK AVIAN TALES: AN ANTHOLOGY (2017) ed. Ellen Datlow (Pegasus Crime)
  - 22 THE LOYALTY OF CHICKENS (2017) Jenny Blackford (Pitt Street Poetry)
  - 23 NOT SO GOOD A GAY MAN: A MEMOIR (2017) Frank M. Robinson (Tor)
  - 24 UNNATURAL DEATH (1927) Dorothy L. Sayers (New English Library)
  - 25 THE BLUE CAT (2017) Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin)
- Other four-star contenders, in order of reading:**
- TAKE SIX GIRLS: THE LIVES OF THE MITFORD SISTERS (2015) Laura Thomson (Head of Zeus)
- MOONGLOW: A NOVEL (2016) Michael Chabon (Fourth Estate)
- THEA ASTLEY: INVENTING HER OWN WEATHER (2015) Karen Lamb (University of Queensland Press)
- AN OPEN BOOK (2003) Michael Dirda (W. H. Norton)
- ELLERY QUEEN'S BOOK OF MYSTERY STORIES BY 25 FAMOUS WRITERS (THE LITERATURE OF CRIME) (1952/1964) ed. Ellery Queen (Penguin)
- EPHEMERON: A MEMOIR (2017) John Litchen (Yambu)
- LOTUS BLUE (2017) Cat Sparks (Talos Press)
- HARRY HARRISON! HARRY HARRISON! (2014) Harry Harrison (Tor)
- ALL OUR WRONG TODAYS: A NOVEL (2017) Elan Mastai (Dutton)
- ROSE MOTEL: FANZINE PIECES 1980–2014 (2017) William Breiding
- REFLECTIONS ON THE MAGIC OF WRITING (2012) Diana Wynne Jones (David Fickling Books)
- THE NIGHT FERRY (2007) Michael Robotham (Hachette)
- AUSTRALIAN ECHINODERMS: BIOLOGY, ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION (2017) Maria Byrne & Timothy D. O'Hara (CSIRO Publishing)
- OF LABOUR AND LIBERTY: DISTRIBUTISM IN VICTORIA 1891–1966 (2017) Race Mathews (Monash University Publishing)
- DARWIN'S BLADE (2000) Dan Simmons (Mulholland Books/Little Brown)
- HER (2017) Garry Disher (Hachette Australia)
- A LEGACY OF SPIES (2017) John Le Carré (Viking/Penguin)
- THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AUSTRALIA (2017) Sami Shah (ABC Books)
- OVERHEARD: THE ART OF EAVESDROPPING (2017) Oslo Davis (Hardie Grant)
- THE RED SHOE (2006) Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin)

## Favourite short stories read for the first time in 2017

- 1 'A DAY IN THE LIFE': Alex Skovron (The Man Who Took to His Bed, 2017)
- 2 'THE MATHEMATICAL INEVITABILITY OF CORVIDS': Seanan McGuire (Black Feathers: Dark Avian Fantasy Tales: An Anthology, 2017)
- 3 'SPIRIT GUIDES': Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Heaven Sent, ed. Peter Crowther, 1995)
- 4 'BEFORE THE PARTY': Somerset Maugham (Ellery Queen's Book of Mystery Stories by 25 Famous Writers, ed. Ellery Queen, 1952)
- 5 'THE MURDER': John Steinbeck (Ellery Queen's Book of Mystery Stories by 25 Famous Writers, ed. Ellery Queen, 1952)
- 6 'TWO HEARTS': Peter S. Beagle (The Very Best of Fantasy & Science Fiction: Sixtieth Anniversary Anthology, ed. Gordon Van Gelder, 2009)
- 7 'THE ENCHANTED WANDERER': Nikolai Leskov (Selected Tales, 2007)
- 8 'LADY MACBETH OF THE MTENSK DISTRICT': Nikolai Leskov (Selected Tales, 2007)
- 9 'MARKING TIME': Alex Skovron (The Man Who Took to His Bed, 2017)
- 10 'ROOMS BY THE SEA': Nicholas Christopher (In Sunlight or in Shadow: Stores Inspired by the Paintings of Edward Hopper, ed. Lawrence Block, 2016)
- 11 'THE INSTRUMENT': Alex Skovron (The Man Who Took to His Bed, 2017)
- 12 'THE FORTUNE OF SPARROWS': Usman T. Malik (Black Feathers: Dark Avian Fantasy Tales: An Anthology, 2017)
- 13 'AN APOLLO ASTEROID': Brian Aldiss (Moon Shots, ed. Peter Crowther, 1999)
- 14 'THE RUSSIAN AGENT': Michael Bishop (Other Arms Reach Out to Me: Georgia Tales, 2017)
- 15 'THE RAFT OF THE TITANIC': James Morrow (Reality by Other Means: The Best Short Fiction



- of James Morrow, 2015)
- 16 'THE MAN WHO STOLE THE MOON': Paul Di Filippo (Moon Shots, ed. Peter Crowther, 1999)
  - 16 'HOW WE LOST THE MOON, A TRUE STORY BY FRANK W. ALLEN': Paul J. McAuley (Moon Shots, ed. Peter Crowther, 1999)

### Other four-star contenders, in order of reading:

- 'ALLEGRA'S HANDS' (1996): Michael Bishop (At the City Limits of Fate, 1996)
- 'INDRID COLD, INDRID COLD': Chris Capp (Antares, Vol. 1, ed. David Grigg, 2016)
- 'THE PROJECTIONIST': Joe R. Lansdale (In Sunlight or in Shadow: Stores Inspired by the Paintings of Edward Hopper, ed. Lawrence Block, 2016)
- 'SPINOZA'S GOLEM': James Morrow (Reality by Other Means: The Best Short Fiction of James Morrow, 2015)
- 'THE WISDOM OF THE SKIN': James Morrow (Reality by Other Means: The Best Short Fiction of James Morrow, 2015)
- 'IN GETHSEMANE': Stephen Gallagher (Heaven Sent, ed. Peter Crowther, 1995)
- 'THE ADVENTURE OF THE LAZARUS CHILD': Doug Elliott (Sherlock Holmes: The Australian Casebook, ed. Christopher Sequeira, 2017)

## Favourite films seen for the first time in 2017

With **A Quiet Passion**, a film based on the secret interior life of poet **Emily Dickinson**, **Terence Davies** again shows himself the best film director working today. I saw this film first at the Nova Cinema in Carlton, but was able to buy the overseas Blu-ray, which contains a wealth of extra material, especially Davies' director's commentary.

**David Lowery's A Ghost Story** is a the weirdest and most endearing film of the year. The story is told from the viewpoint of the ghost.

The most amusing film of the year is **John Carroll Lynch's Lucky**, starring Harry Dean Stanton as a character very like himself, shortly before he died at the age of 90. From now on people who see this film will think 'turtles' when they think 'David Lynch'.

Many films on my list are from the 1950s and 1960s, and are now remastered and available on Blu-ray, thanks to the generosity and detective abilities of **Dick Jenssen** and **John Davies**.

**Arthur Penn's The Chase**, **Fred Zinneman's The Day of the Jackal**, and **Rudolf Maté's Union Station** have more suspense and implied violence than most films made today — and the photography is much better than the murky blues and browns of today's movies.

The most original recent film is **Tom Tykver's A Hologram for the King**, which could be compared with **Andrew Nicol's Lord of War** from a few years ago.

**David Lowery**, who mainly makes experimental films such as *A Ghost Story*, also made **Pete's Dragon**, one of the finest children's films I've seen.

- |   |  |    |  |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | A QUIET PASSION (2016) Terence Davies      | 7  | A HOLOGRAM FOR THE KING (2016) Tom Tykver  |
| 2 | LUCKY (2017) John Carroll Lynch            | 8  | FROM HERE TO ETERNITY (1953) Fred Zinneman |
| 3 | A GHOST STORY (2017) David Lowery          | 9  | FINDING NEVERLAND (2004) Marc Forster      |
| 4 | THE CHASE (1966) Arthur Penn               | 10 | UNION STATION (1950) Rudolf Maté           |
| 5 | THE DAY OF THE JACKAL (1973) Fred Zinneman | 11 | ELLE (2016) Paul Verhoeven                 |
| 6 | GOODBYE MR CHIPS (1939) Sam Wood           |    |  |



- 12 A MONSTER CALLS (2016) J. A. Bayona
- 13 ALFIE (1965) Lewis Gilbert
- 14 FUNERAL IN BERLIN (1966) Guy Hamilton
- 15 THE THIEF OF PARIS (1967) Louis Malle
- 16 THE MAN BETWEEN (1953) Carol Reed
- 17 HOUR OF THE GUN (1967) John Sturges
- 18 THE HIDDEN (1987) Jack Sholder
- 19 HIDDEN FIGURES (2016) Theodore Melfi
- 20 DUNKIRK (1958) Leslie Norman
- 21 SHERLOCK HOLMES (2009) Guy Ritchie
- 22 LION (2016) Garth Davis
- 23 PETE'S DRAGON (2016) David Lowery
- 24 WONDER WOMAN (2017) Patty Jenkins
- 25 KINGSMAN (2015) Matthew Vaughan
- 26 DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS (1958) Delbert Mann

### The other four-star contenders, in order seen:

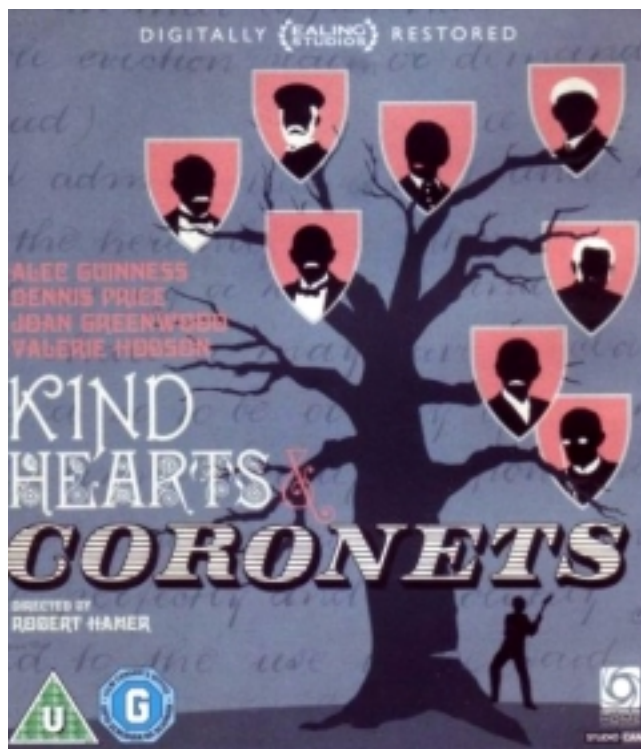
PASSENGERS (2016) Morten Tyldum  
 ADAM'S RIB (1949) George Cukor  
 NOCTURNAL ANIMALS (2016) Tom Ford  
 THE NEVERENDING STORY (1984) Wolfgang Petersen  
 GHOST IN THE SHELL (2017) Rupert Sanders  
 THEIR FINEST (2016) Lone Scherfig  
 CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED (1964) Anton M. Leader  
 THREE CASES OF MURDER (1953) George More  
 O'Ferrall, David Eady, Wendy Toye  
 RETURN TO GLENNECAUL (1951) Hilton Edwards  
 HEAL THE LIVING (2016) Katell Quillévéré



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, VOL. 2 (2017) James Gunn  
 THE FABULOUS BARON MUNCHHAUSEN (BARON PRASIL) (1961) Karl Zeman  
 BLADE RUNNER 2049 (2017) Denis Villeneuve

## Favourite films seen again in 2017

- 1 KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS (1949) Robert Hamer
- 2 MY FAVOURITE YEAR (1982) Richard Benjamin
- 3 THE HUSTLER (1961) Robert Rossen
- 4 RIDE THE WILD COUNTRY (1962) Sam Peckinpah
- 5 FORREST GUMP (1994) Robert Zemeckis
- 6 5000 FINGERS OF DR T. (1952) Roy Rowland
- 7 THE IPCRESS FILE (1965) Sidney J. Furie
- 8 THE DEADLY AFFAIR (1966) Sidney Lumet
- 9 COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT (1970) Joseph Sargent
- 10 NO HIGHWAY IN THE SKY (1951) Henry Koster
- 11 GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY (2014) James Gunn
- 12 VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED (1960) Wolf Rilla
- 13 WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? (1988) Robert Zemeckis

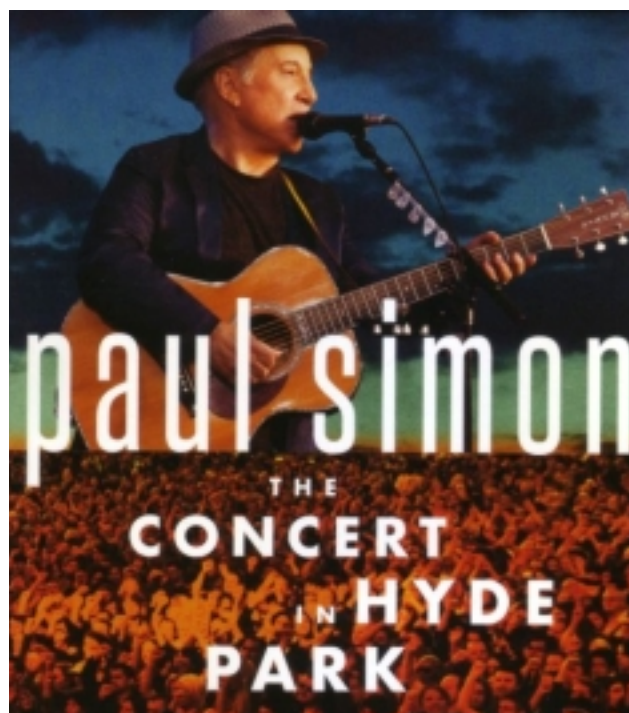


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## Favourite documentaries and music films seen for the first time in 2017

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- 1 PAUL SIMON: THE CONCERT IN HYDE PARK (2017) Jennifer Lebeu & Matthew Amos
- 2 ROY ORBISON: A BLACK AND WHITE NIGHT: 30TH ANNIVERSARY (1987/2017) Tony Mitchell
- 3 OUTLAW: CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF WAYLON JENNINGS (2017) Conor McAnally
- 4 Various: MAVIS STAPLES: I'LL TAKE YOU THERE: AN ALL-STAR CONCERT CELEBRATION (2017)
- 5 KEDI (2016) Ceyda Torun
- 6 THE FARTHEST: VOYAGER IN SPACE (2017) Emer Reynolds
- 7 JOE COCKER: MAD DOG WITH SOUL (2017) John Edginton
- 8 THE WRECKING CREW (2014) Denny Tedesco
- 9 DAVID STRATTON: A CINEMATIC LIFE (2017) Sally Aitken
- 10 JANIS (2015) Ami J. Berg
- 11 OLE! OLE! OLE! A TRIP ACROSS LATIN AMERICA (2016) Paul Dugdale
- 12 ERIC CLAPTON: LIVE IN SAN DIEGO 2007 WITH J. J. CALE (2017) Martyn Aitkins
- 13 THE LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS: DON SIEGEL AND THE MAKING OF CHARLEY VARRICK (2014) Robert Fischer
- 14 TICKLED (2015) Daniel Farrier & Dylan Reeve
- 15 JOAN ARMATRADING: ME MYSELF I: WORLD TOUR CONCERT (2016) Joan Armatrading
- 16 NO EXIT: MADE IN BUDAPEST (2016) Krisztian



- Kovacs Ender
- 17 FABULOUS FROGS (2014) Sally Thomson
  - 18 WHITELEY (2017) James Bogle

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## Favourite television (seen on DVD or Blu-ray) of 2017

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As I've said already when talking about 2016's TV-on-DVD, most TV series feature an awful lot of filler, but the Australian series **Cleverman** is an honourable exception. There's no other TV series of film like it. It deals with the implied persecution of Australia's indigenous people by taking up the story of a lost Australian race, long hidden from Australia's Aborigines and only now visible to Europeans for the first time. Violence and mayhem ensue, but the story of these people, told from their point of view, is powerful and touching. However, the end of the second series left cliffhangers all over the place.

Appearing out of nowhere on the shelves of Dynock's ABC Shop was **Michael Gambon's** superb embodiment of **Maigret** (a boxed set of a 1992 series that seems never to have been shown on Australian TV). Still no sign of Rupert Davies' **Maigret** from the 1960s, and I've been warned away from the Rowan Atkinson series.

Also appearing without warning on DVD shelves have been two very different **Lord Peter Wimseys**: **Ian Carmichael** in the 1970s series and **Edward Petherbridge** in the 1989 series. The earlier series is much more amusing and better photographed than the later series. Also, I just don't like Edward Petherbridge in the role.

I'll make a special recommendation of **Sally Aitken's** superb three-part **David Stratton: Stories of the Australian Cinema**. The very last program I watched regularly on TV was *At the Movies*, where David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz provided weekly sharp reviews and general cinema coverage. I don't know how independent cinemas are surviving without David and Margaret's weekly

reviews of new films. David Stratton's lifelong dedication to the cinema provides the backbone of his potted (and sometimes potty) history of Australian films. The movie version, shown in cinemas, was rather different, and also excellent.

- 1 MAIGRET (1992) starring Michael Gambon
- 2 CLEVERMAN: SEASON 1
- 3 DAVID STRATTON: STORIES OF THE AUSTRALIAN CINEMA (2017) Sally Aitken
- 4 MIDNIGHT SUN (2016) Mans Medinck & Bjorn Stein)
- 5 SS-GB (2016) Philip Kadelbade
- 6 THE DOCTOR BLAKE MYSTERIES: SEASON 5 (2017)
- 7 LORD PETER WIMSEY: SERIES 4: THE NINE TAILORS (1974)
- 8 CLEVERMAN: SERIES 2 (2017)
- 9 LORD PETER WIMSEY: SERIES 3: MURDER MUST ADVERTISE (1973)
- 10 LORD PETER WIMSEY: SERIES 1: CLOUDS OF WITNESS (1972)
- 11 LORD PETER WIMSEY: SERIES 2: THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB (1973)
- 12 ENDEAVOUR: SEASON 4
- 13 DEATH IN PARADISE: SEASON 1
- 14 RIVER (2017) Abi Morgan
- 15 DEATH IN PARADISE: SEASON 2
- 16 DOROTHY SAYERS MYSTERIES: GAUDY NIGHT (1987)
- 17 ELEMENTARY: SEASON 2

### Other four-star entries, in order of watching:

ELEMENTARY: SEASON 3



SHERLOCK: SEASON 4  
 DEATH IN PARADISE: SEASON 3  
 LORD PETER WIMSEY: SERIES 5: FIVE RED HERRINGS (1975)  
 DOROTHY SAYERS MYSTERIES: HAVE HIS CARCASE (1987)  
 THE MOONSTONE (1996) Lise Mulcahy

## Favourite popular CDs heard for the first time in 2017

Pretty much what regular Gillespie-fanzine readers would expect: alt.country rather than country, with lots of blues and rock and roll thrown in.

Australian group **All Our Exes Live in Texas** provide the most unearthly and thrilling harmony vocals since First Aid Kit's *The Lion's Roar*. I hope their first album, **When We Fall**, does well here and is released overseas.

**Paul Simon** shows that he is still the best songwriter and performer in the world, with his epic two-CD-plus-a-DVD **The Concert in Hyde Park**.

The tribute set **Outlaw: Celebrating the Music of Waylon Jennings** does just that — and also shows the talents of all the other Outlaws, especially **Willie Nelson**.

Again **Lindi Ortega** was best solo female performer of the year (*Til the Goin's Gets Gone*), followed closely by gospel-style rave-up protest singer and balladeer **Rhiannon Giddens**.

**Randy Newman** has the year's best set of satirical lyrics in **Dark Matter**.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 All Our Exes Live in Texas: WHEN WE FALL (2017) | 3 Various: OUTLAW: CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF WAYLON JENNINGS (2 CDs) (2017) |
| 2 Paul Simon: THE CONCERT IN HYDE PARK (2         |  |



- 4 Lindi Ortega: TIL THE GOIN' GETS GONE (2017)
- 5 Tom Russell: FOLK HOTEL (2017)
- 6 Rodney Crowell: CLOSE TIES (2017)
- 7 Old Crow Medicine Show: 50 YEARS OF BLONDE ON BLONDE (2017)
- 8 Nick Lowe & His Cowboy Outfit: THE ROSE OF ENGLAND (1985/2017)
- 9 Rhiannon Giddens: FREEDOM HIGHWAY (2017)
- 10 Rhiannon Giddens: FACTORY GIRL (EP) (2017)
- 11 Shelby Lynn & Allison Moorer: NOT DARK YET (2017)
- 12 Randy Newman: DARK MATTER (2017)
- 13 Various: MAVIS STAPLES: I'LL TAKE YOU THERE: AN ALL-STAR CONCERT CELEBRATION (2 CDs) (2017)
- 14 Willie Nelson: GOD'S PROBLEM CHILD (2017)
- 15 Chuck Berry: CHUCK (2017)
- 16 Hugh Laurie: DIDN'T IT RAIN? (2013)
- 17 Sonny Landreth: RECORDED LIVE IN LAFAYETTE (2 CDs) (2017)
- 18 Richard and Linda Thompson: IN CONCERT, NOVEMBER 1975 (2017)
- 19 Rolling Stones: ON AIR (DELUXE EDITION) (2 CDs) (2017)
- 20 Chris Hillman: BIDIN' MY TIME (2017)
- 21 Crowded House: TOGETHER ALONE (1993)
- 22 Hardworking Americans: REST IN CHAOS (2016)
- 23 Gurf Morlix: THE SOUL AND THE HEAL (2017)
- 24 Aaron Neville: APACHE (2016)
- 25 Ray Davies: AMERICANA (2017)
- 26 Herbie Hancock: RIVER: THE JONI LETTERS (2007)
- 27 Bob Seger: I KNEW YOU WHEN (2017)
- 28 Tesky Brothers: FULL MOON HARVEST (2017)
- 29 Paul Kelly: LIFE IS FINE (2017)
- 30 Neil Finn: OUT OF SILENCE (2017)
- 31 Nora Jones: DAY BREAKS (2016)
- 32 Rag'n'Bone Man: HUMAN (2017)
- 33 JEN CLOHER (2017)
- 34 Aretha Franklin & Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: A BRAND NEW ME (2017)
- 35 LINDSAY BUCKINGHAM CHRISTINE MCVIE (2017)
- 36 CHARLIE WATTS MEETS THE DANISH RADIO BIG BAND: COPENHAGEN 2010 (2017)
- 37 Neil Young: THE VISITOR (2017)
- 38 Alex Lahey: I LOVE YOU LIKE A BROTHER (2017)
- 39 Valerie June: PUSHIN' AGAINST A STONE (2013)
- 40 Bob Weir: BLUE MOUNTAIN (2016)



### Other four-star entries, in order of hearing:

Cliff Richard: JUST ... FABULOUS ROCK 'N' ROLL (2016)

Marianne Faithful: NO EXIT (2016)

Marianne Faithful: VAGABOND WAYS (1999)

John Cale: FRAGMENTS OF A RAINY SEASON: EXTENDED VERSION (1992/2016) (2 CDs)

Randy Newman: RANDY NEWMAN SONGBOOK VOL. 3 (2016)

Ryan Adams: PRISONER (2017)

Elton John: THE DIVING BOARD (2013)

Sturgill Simpson: A SAILOR'S GUIDE TO EARTH (2016)

Chuck Prophet: BOBBY FULLER DIED FOR YOUR SINS (2017)

Nora Jones & Friends: FEATURING (2010)

Cinderella: HEARTBREAK STATION (1990)

Texas: MOTHERS MILK (1991)

Waifs: IRONBARK (2 CDs) (2017)

Martha Wainwright: MARTHA WAINWRIGHT'S PIAF RECORD (2009)

Elizabeth Cook: BALLS (2006)

Jerry Jeff Walker: GONZO STEW (2000)

Dream Syndicate: GHOST STORIES (1988/1995)

Mike McClennan: DANCING IN THE RAIN (2014)

Tom Russell: PLAY ONE MORE: THE SONGS OF IAN & SYLVIA (2017)

Neil Young: TIME FADES AWAY (1973/2017)

James Luther Dickinson & North Mississippi Allstars: I'M JUST DEAD, I'M NOT GONE (2017)

Rosanne Cash: THE LIST (2009)

Valerie June: THE ORDER OF TIME (2017)

Neil Young: HITCHHIKER (2017)

Van Morrison: ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES (2017)

Mavis Staples: IF ALL I WAS WAS BLACK (2017)

Roy Orbison & Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: A LOVE SO BEAUTIFUL (2017)

David Bowie: BLACK STAR (2016)

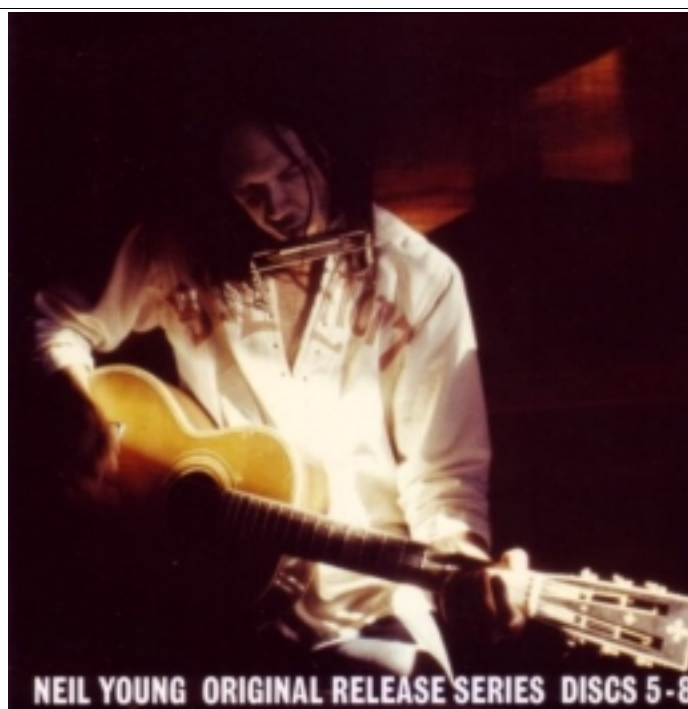
Gang of Youths: GO FARTHER IN LIGHTNESS  
(2017)  
Mental As Anything: 5-TRACK EP (2017)

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## Favourite popular boxed sets bought during 2017

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- 1 Neil Young: ORIGINAL RELEASE SERIES 5-8 (4 CDs) (2017)
- 2 Willie Nelson & Emmylou Harris: TEATRO: THE COMPLETE SESSIONS (2017) (CD + DVD)
- 3 Duke Ellington: EIGHT CLASSIC ALBUMS (4 CDs)
- 4 Various: RUNNING SCARED: THE MONUMENT RECORDS STORY (2 CDs)
- 5 Georgie Fame: SURVIVAL: A CAREER ANTHOLOGY 1963-2015 (6 CDs) (2017)
- 6 Bob Dylan: TROUBLE NO MORE (2 CDs)
- 7 Mental As Anything: 5 ALBUM SET (5 CDs)
- 8 Various: BIG TIME OPERATORS (2 CDs) (2017)



- 9 Various: RUNNING THE VOODOO DOWN (2 CDs) (2016)

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## Favourite classical CDs heard for the first time in 2017

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Again in 2017 I listened mainly to the best CDs from the various boxed sets I've bought over recent years. Still the boxed sets keep appearing on shelves, but I can't afford them any more. A friend I visited the other day had bought one set of *The Complete Mozart* and another of *The Complete Bach*, but I suspect that Elaine and I already own most of the best music from each set. I lusted after a vast boxed set I saw in Readings' window: the complete recordings of **Herbert Von Karajan** on DG, but at \$1300, that defeats me. As you'll see from the lists, I have found two boxed sets of previously unheard music from **Karajan** himself, as well as wonderful collections of the performances of **Martha Argerich**, **Vladimir Ashkenazy**, and **Georg Solti**.

A very special CD of 2017 is **Brahms' German Requiem**, as recorded the group of which **David Grigg** is a member: the **Star Chorale**. Elaine and I were in the audience. This is a much better version than almost all of the many other versions I have on CD.

The most notable new CD of the year was **Krystian Zimerman's** electrifying playing of two of **Schubert's** late piano sonatas. Zimerman records little, so this CD was very welcome.

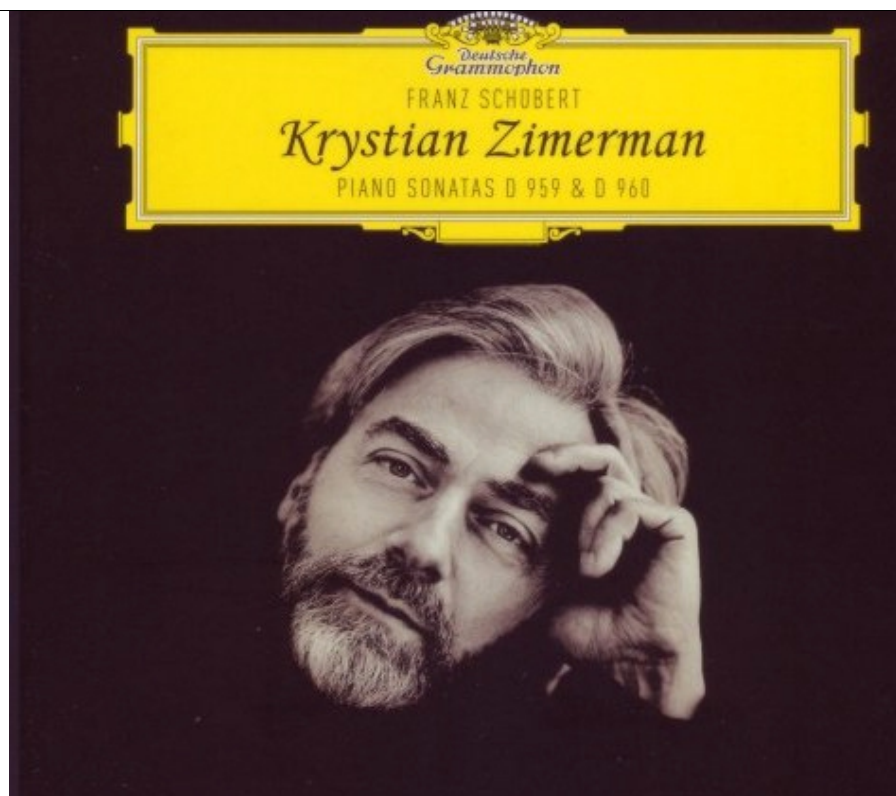
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|---|--|
| 1 Krystian Zimerman: <b>Schubert: Piano Sonatas D959/D960</b> (2017)  | <b>Stravinsky: Petrouchka (complete)/The Rite of Spring</b> //London Symph. Orch.: <b>Four Etudes for Orchestra</b> (1952/1959/1964/1993)          |
| 2 Esa-Pekka Salonen (cond.)/Philharmonia/Los Angeles Philh. Orch.: <b>Messiaen: Turangalila Symphony</b> // <b>Lutoslawski: Les Espaces du Sommeil</b> (John Shirley-Quirk)/ <b>Symphony No 3</b> (2 CDs) (1986)              | 5 Marcel Bertrand (cond.): <b>Stravinsky: Petrouchka</b> (LP) (1960)   |
| 3 Geoffrey Simon (cond.)/London Symph. Orch./Margaret Fingerhut (p)/Sarah Walker (mezzo): <b>De Falla: Love the Magician (El amor brujo)/Nights in the Gardens of Spain/Interlude and Spanish Dance: La Vida Breve</b> (1986) | 6 Herbert von Karajan (cond.)/Berlin Phil. Orch.: <b>Mozart: Requiem KV 626</b> (1961/2016) (Karajan Complete Choral and Vocal Music on DG CD 1)   |
| 4 Antal Dorati (cond.)/Minneapolis Symph Orch:  | 7 Herbert von Karajan (cond.)/Berlin Phil. Orch.: <b>Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique</b> (1964/2015) (Von Karajan Complete on DG The Sixties CD 26) |
|   | 8 Thomas Beecham/Royal Phil. Orch.: <b>Sibelius:</b>   |

- Symphony No 7/Pelléas et Meslisande/ The Oceanides/Tapiola** (1955/1990)  
 9 Christian Lindberg (cond.)/Norrkoping Symph. Orch.: **Petterson: Symphony No. 11** (2017)  
 10 Kathleen McGuire (cond.)/Star Chorale & Orch.: **Brahms: German Requiem** (2017)  
 11 Martha Argerich (p)/Daniel Barenboim (p): **Piano Duos: Mozart: Sonata for two pianos in D major/Schubert: Variations on an Original Theme in a flat major/ Stravinsky: Rite of Spring** (2014/2015) (Marta Argerich Complete CDs on DG, CD 43)  
 12 Martha Argerich/Nelson Friere (pianos)/Peter Sadlo/Edgar Guggers (percussion): **Bartok: Sonata for 2 pianos and percussion/ Ravel: Mother Goose Suite/Ravel: Rapsodie espagnole** (1994/2016) (Martha Argerich Complete CDs on DG CD 7)

### Other four-star items, in the order listened to:

- Joe Chindano: **Duende: The Romantic Project** (2007)  
 John Hopkins (cond.)/Dene Olding (v)/Queensland Symph. Orch.: **Bozidorkos: Violin Concerto** (1990) (Forbidden Colours)  
 Vladimir Ashkenazy (cond.)/Sibelius: **Symphony No. 2 /Finlandia/Tapiola/Luonnotar** (1980/1981/2013) (Ashkenazy Fifty Years on Decca CD 26)  
 Melos Quartet: **Schubert: String Quartets 4–7**



- (1971/1975) (Schubert String Quartets CD 2) Kronos Quartet/Sam Amidon/Rhiannon Giddens/Olivia Chaney/Natalie Merchant: **Folk Songs** (2017)  
 Vladimir Jurowski (con.)/London Phil. Orch.: **Rachmaninov: The Isle of the Dead/ Symphonic Dances** (2005)  
 Tommie Haglund: **Flaminis Aura** (2017)  
 Georg Solti (cond.)/Chicago Symph. Orch.: **Mahler: Symphony No. 7** (1971/2017) (Chicago Solti The Complete Recordings CD 4)  
 Georg Solti (cond.)/Chicago Symph. Orch.: **Brahms: Symphony No 1** (1979/2017) (Solti Chicago The Complete Recordings CD 35)  
 Leonard Bernstein (cond.)/Krystian Zimerman (p.)/Vienna Phil. Orch.: **Beethoven: Piano Concertos 3 and 4** (1989/2014) (Leonard Bernstein Part 1, CD 7)  
 Steven Isserlis (vc and cond.)/German Chamber Phil. Orch. Bremen: **Haydn: 2 Cello Concertos/ Mozart: Geme la Tortorella/CPE Bach: Cello Concerto in A major/Boccherini: Adagio** (2017)



# Jennifer Bryce

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## The three best books and concerts for 2016

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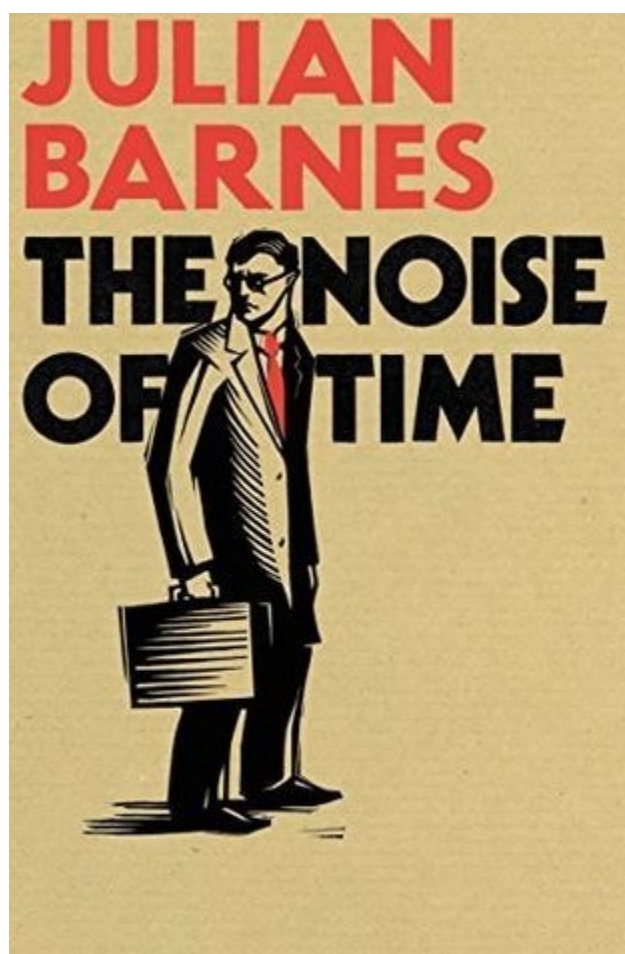
### Best books 2016

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#### **Julian Barnes: *The Noise of Time***

Another brilliant book by Julian Barnes. It is a fictitious exploration of the life of Shostakovich. After reading it I thought, this is so much better than a 'non-fiction' biography. It has been meticulously researched, but as it is fiction, Barnes can slip inside the mind of his subject, and we are there with Shostakovich, waiting at the lift for The Power to arrive and arrest him, feeling the utter humiliation of being forced to denounce those people he respected and admired. In the end I started to understand, much better than through general biographical material, how it was that Shostakovich joined the Communist Party against his will, and how he came to speak out against Stravinsky, who he saw as the greatest composer of the twentieth century.

Some sense of Shostakovich's position comes through in Barnes's quoting of Pasternak's poem about Hamlet: 'I am alone; all around me drowns in falsehood' (page 111). I thought of Solzhenitsyn's descriptions of suffering in the gulags — bitter, human suffering. Yet this book has helped to explain a further dimension — a state one falls to when forced to betray oneself and to condone those things that one abhors. To what extent can cynicism and irony address this terrible act of self-betrayal? The title of the book suggests that maybe an inner music is the only lasting truth: 'What could be put up against the noise of time? Only that music which is inside ourselves — the music of our being — which is transformed by some into real music' (page 125). Shostakovich saw Bach's music as this kind of 'real music', which he found to be 'impregnable'.



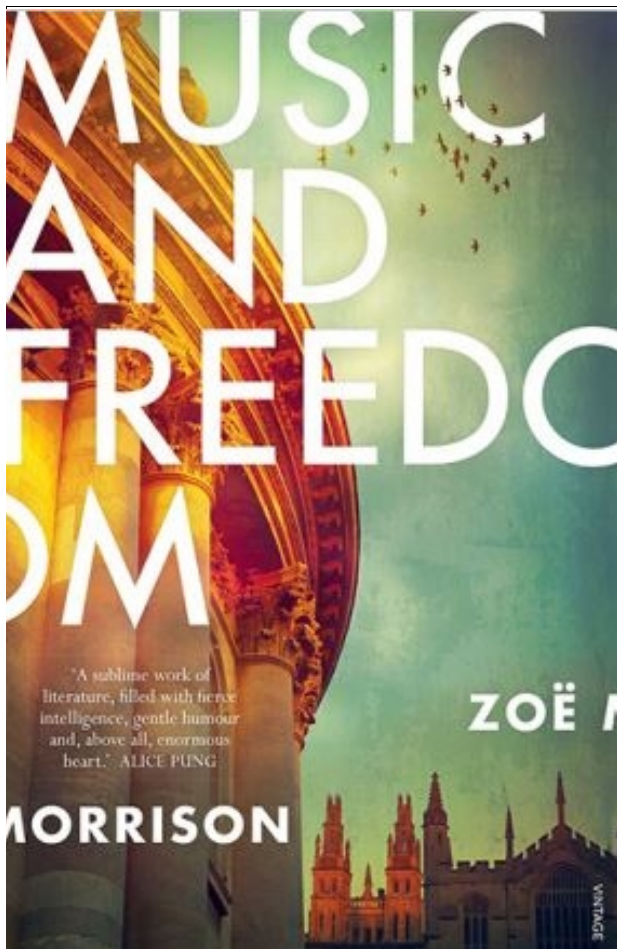
#### **Zoe Morrison: *Music and Freedom***

Alice Murray was of a generation when it was exceptionally hard for women to be recognised in the arts. She grew up on an orange orchard somewhere up near Mildura. A difficult childhood was on the cards, with isolation, poverty, and her parents' deteriorating marriage. But Alice's mother recognised that her young daughter was a gifted pianist and (finding the money somehow) sent her off to boarding school in England.

Alice would have been about eleven when she travelled to England by herself, and she never saw her parents again. I was a little surprised that she didn't pine

for them more, but as a young prodigy she was intent on learning all she could about playing the piano. She wins a scholarship to the Royal College of Music and at a workshop in Oxford, meets the young (ish) man who will become her husband. Alice must marry this comfortably off professor for economic reasons — her parents have died leaving her no money at all. Her infatuated late-teenage heart allows her to have some misgivings about the marriage, but in fact she has no choice.

The brutality of the marriage (we would now call it domestic violence) is almost unbelievable. And Alice is totally trapped — no half-way houses or shelters in those days. Music gave Alice some identity, some *raison d'être*. But she loses that. When she ultimately does have the

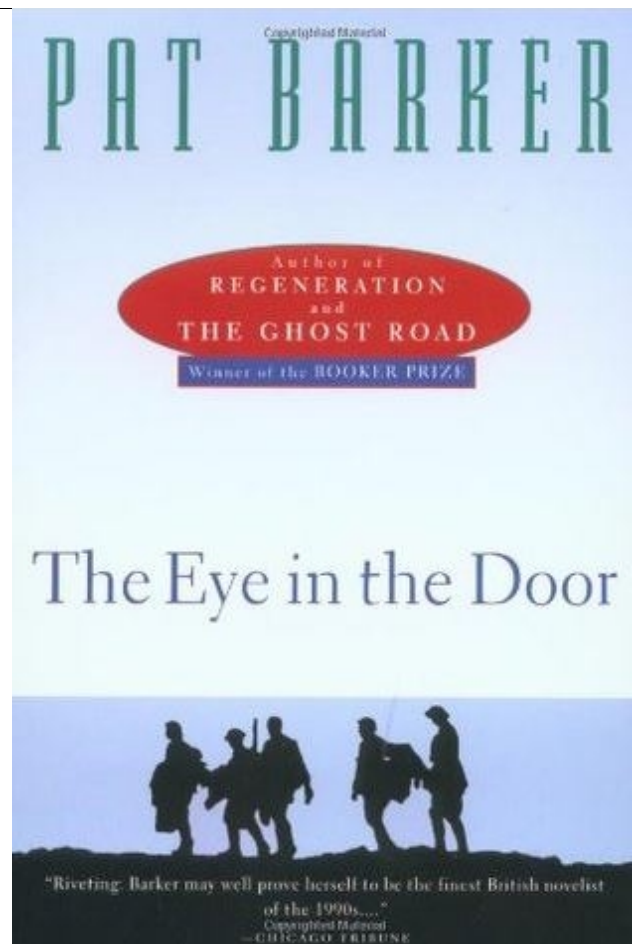


opportunity to give a public performance of the Rachmaninoff No. 2, she develops, presumably through neurosis, a kind of arthritis and, with her husband forcing her to play, she makes a huge mess of it — she has lost everything, including all aspirations of being recognised as a pianist.

Near the beginning of the book we see an elderly Alice who is quite deranged. Her husband has died, but too late for her to make anything of the career or life she might have had. She has a son, a successful composer, who has inherited some of her musical ability. While she is starving herself to death and burning her husband's prized research papers, Alice one day hears piano playing through the wall of her terrace house. A young woman is practising the Rachmaninoff No. 2. This rescues Alice, who is able to help the young woman. Over what seems a fairly short time, the young woman becomes the lover of Alice's composer son — all very neat, but not annoyingly so.

Over the next few years Alice takes up a completely new life as a writer and returns briefly to the home of her childhood. At the end of the book is a radio news report indicating that Alice Murray died at the age of 85, a writer of sufficient success for her death to be mentioned on BBC Radio 4.

Zoe Morrison's book is easy to read — divided into short chapters headed with a date and place. You know where you are. Zoe is a pianist and has also worked professionally with victims of domestic violence. This combination of experience has led to a book where horrific domestic violence can be believed, and the sense



of performing music is immediate: 'Emily was playing parts of the concerto as if she were surfing it, as if the music were a wave coming towards her and she was pushing herself towards it ... becoming part of it' [page 251]. I was totally absorbed and read the book far more quickly than usual.

### Pat Barker: *The Eye in the Door*

This book is the second part of a trilogy by Pat Barker set at the end of World War I. The empathic psychiatrist W. Rivers is central to the book, but he is a little less centre stage than in the first part of the trilogy, *Regeneration*. Most of the characters are based on real people, but through fiction we can get closer to their horrific experiences of being at the front: holding an eye that had belonged to an injured companion, shooting a dearly loved comrade because there was no way he could be pulled out of treacherous mud. Two main interests in this book are the fugue state, whereby a sufferer has long periods of amnesia during which, it seems to others, he is quite lucid, and the contemporary campaign against homosexual men — 'sodomites'. It's all terribly British, which is a great strength, and we see some of the life of the working class, often not documented in the literature about that time.

Amusingly, one of the characters who makes a brief appearance is Winston Churchill. I did feel that Pat Barker came across this information and enjoyed being able to use it, mentioning that Churchill and Edward

Marsh (a poet and civil servant known to 'have sympathies' with the homosexual community) spent an entire afternoon beating each others' buttocks with plaited birch.

The whole novel takes place during 1918, before the war ends. The main character is Billy Prior, who works in Intelligence and suffers from fugue states. Rivers is his doctor — and we see how Rivers respects Prior's intellect and is deeply interested in Prior the person, as he is in his other patients, notably Siegfried Sassoon. Rivers himself seems to be torn between pacifism and patriotism — he is 'curing' these men so that they can go back to the

manslaughter of the front. Rivers suggests that a state where a person has dual personalities is quite natural — the face put on to carry out duty versus the compassionate human being.

The eye in the door is, literally, an eye on a prison door, which Prior sees when he visits an inmate — a probing eye that watches even when the prisoner defecates. To me, that eye seemed more generally applicable, suggesting constant scrutiny of clandestine activities. Through fiction, this book manages to tell us things that maybe the participants, in that still rather laced up British society, might not have dared to divulge.

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## Best concerts 2016

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### **Beethoven and Crumb, ANAM, South Melbourne Town Hall, Saturday, 14 May 2016**

Why play the music of Beethoven alongside that of the twentieth–twenty-first-century composer George Crumb (born 1929)? Pianist Paavali Jumppanen, undertook a residency at the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) in South Melbourne. According to the program notes, Jumppanen believes that both composers share a similar deep worldly human experience. In an interview he said, 'When we listen to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* it is a journey from darkness to light on a grand scale. And in the end we see the components of society joining in a celebration of brotherhood and so on. It is right there, even though the piece is called a symphony. With Crumb's *Macrocosmos III* the journey is more intricate; we are in the middle of an African jungle, and then we are in the middle of some sort of spiritual celebration'

The concert started with Beethoven. It's a long time since I've heard a live performance of the well-known Beethoven *Emperor* piano concerto (number 5 in E<sub>b</sub>, opus 73). Jumppanen is recognised for his performance of Beethoven's works. On this occasion he worked with the ANAM orchestra and the performance was as it might have been in Beethoven's day — conducted from the piano by the soloist with no separate conductor. This was a great achievement with a fairly large orchestra of 15 violins, 6 violas, 5 celli, 2 double basses, and the usual complement of woodwind and brass. The timpani play an important role in this work. To the credit of the student orchestra, led by Kyla Matsura-Miller, everyone played together as though it were chamber music. Jumppanen's playing was brilliant; the scale passages rippled.

George Crumb's *Makrocosmos III* was completed in 1974. There are five movements: Nocturnal Sounds, Wanderer-Fantasy, The Advent (including Hymn for the Nativity of the Star-Child), Myth and Music of the Starry Night. It is performed by two prepared pianos and a large variety of percussion instruments including gong and tubular bells. I was amused to see that 'percussion' included slide whistles — percussion players have to be

versatile. Three movements are based on poems by Quasimodo, Pascal, and Rilke. I had expected the 'Wanderer Fantasy' movement to relate to the technically challenging piano piece of that name written by Schubert, but in fact the Crumb movement was very different, being the most calm and dream-like of the five movements. Likewise, I had thought that 'Music of a Starry Night' might relate to the Van Gogh painting of that name — indeed, it did for me, the piano strings, covered with paper, gave a surreal effect and the percussion was bright and scintillating. I found this movement the most interesting. The whole piece is described by the composer as a 'cosmic drama', influenced by the work of Bartok, whose piano pieces, *Microcosmos*, were much admired by Crumb.

### **Jerusalem Quartet, Musica Viva, Melbourne Recital Centre, Saturday 17 September**

The Jerusalem Quartet's concert started with a 'middle' quartet of Beethoven: No. 6 in B<sub>b</sub> major. By this stage Beethoven had composed his early quartets and was reaching towards some innovation, for example, he labels the last movement 'Melancholy', rather than adhering to the style of naming every movement according to its tempo. In this movement he is working around a reflective idea, ultimately ending with what the program notes describe as a 'vivacious swirl'. I know every note of this quartet, and yet, hearing the Jerusalem Quartet's performance was a new experience. They had a special cohesion — playing as one, but it also brought to the music far more than one person could bring — it was one, but with the increased intellect and emotion of four.

The second item on the program was an Australian piece: Ross Edwards's quartet called *Summer Dances*, composed in 2012. It was influenced by sounds Edwards heard when walking along a fire trail on the coast north of Sydney — the 'myriad sounds of bird and insect life', his fascination with the idea of an earth mother and union with the earth.

The final piece was a quartet by Dvorak: No. 13 Opus 106. I don't think I had heard this quartet before — it





While many of Europe's best composers managed to escape the maw of Nazism, many others tragically did not. This concert reminds us of the beauty and talent lost to the world when the lives of these young Jewish composers were brutally cut short.

HAAS Quintet for winds op. 10  
 SCHULHOFF Divertissement for oboe, clarinet and bassoon WV87  
 SMIT Sextet for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn and piano  
 SCHULHOFF Flute sonata  
 WEIN Duettmannen

has an unexpected opening of free arpeggios — perhaps like bird calls; blissful melodic phrases from the Jerusalem Quartet. It seemed utter perfection: four people playing as one instrument but with the musicianship, wisdom, and brilliance of four.

## ***A Voice for the Silenced, ANAM,*** **South Melbourne Town Hall, 20** **October, 2016**

With this concert the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) reminded us of the music of those composers who were Jewish victims of Nazism. Three of these composers were in their 40s when they died/were murdered, and one was only 26. We can only know their early and mid-career music, and must imagine what they might have created had they lived their natural lifespans.

All of the music in this concert was for wind instruments, some also with piano. The first piece was a wind quintet by Pavel Haas, written when he was in his early twenties, some years before the war. Although I play a wind instrument, I sometimes don't like the medium of wind quintet — the winds, I feel, need support from a more flexible, perhaps forgiving timbre, maybe a 'cello. But in the case of Haas's Wind Quintet Opus 10, the medium seems absolutely right. For example in the first movement (*Preludio*) the clarinet and oboe play a short driving rhythm beneath the soaring melodic flute. There is playfulness in a *Ballo Eccentrico* movement. Much of the

music in this concert was joyous, written well before awareness of what was to come.

There were two pieces by Erwin Schulhoff who, the program tells us, was a child prodigy pianist. At the outbreak of World War II he tried to resettle

in the Soviet Union, but was arrested in Prague. We first heard Schulhoff's *Divertissement* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, written in 1927 and redolent with jazz chords and rhythms — there is a movement entitled *Charleston*. Then, after interval, a flute sonata also written in 1927, which displayed the superb playing of guest flautist Silvia Careddu, who, among many other posts, is principal flute in the Wiener Symphoniker.

Although Leo Smit's Sextet for five winds and piano was written in 1933, this was its Australian première. Smit studied in Amsterdam and was influenced by the composers known as 'Les Six', particularly Francis Poulenc. The structure is traditional: three movements, *Allegro Vivace*, *Lento*, and *Vivace*. I loved the first movement — a bouncing rhythm, sustained by the piano, then in the slow movement there is a beautiful oboe solo, with, perhaps, fleeting touches of Cole Porter. The final movement is another energetic vivace.

The concert finished with a wind octet (two each of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns) by Gideon Klein who, the programs tells us, had to turn down a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, London, because of restrictions on travel for Jewish people. Undoubtedly, if Klein had been able to take up this scholarship he would have survived. Instead, he was deported to Terezin, a concentration camp in north-eastern Czechoslovakia — a propaganda tool to look like safe, modern accommodation, but it was a staging post to extermination camps such as Auschwitz, where Klein's life was ended.

— Jennifer Bryce, January 2017

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## Three best books and concerts for 2017

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### Best books 2017

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After much deliberation, here are my three best books, in no particular order. Close contenders were **Steven Carroll**: *A New England Affair*; **Heather Rose**: *The Museum of Modern Love*; and **Hannah Kent**: *The Good People*.

#### **Brian Aldiss:**

##### ***When the Feast is Finished***

This book is Brian's moving account of the death of his wife, Margaret, from Pancreatic cancer. 'When the feast is finished' comes from a poem by Ernest Dowson, unknown to me. What I found more touching, was Aldiss's quotation of William Blake's 'O Rose, thou art sick!' which poignantly describes the destruction of a beautiful person by cancer.

The book is based on journals, kept by both Brian and Margaret, over the all-too-short weeks of her illness and the reader becomes a part of their daily lives as they eat their chicken pies and Brian learns how to do the shopping and work the washing machine.

At first I thought that there was too much; that we

were sharing more than necessary of this wrenchingly sad time. Yet I came to realise that the daily routine: new doors being installed, a new car (Margaret's gift to Brian), an inventory of Margaret's jewellery, its value, and to whom it is to be bequeathed — the practical side to dying — is significant, because it takes us right there.

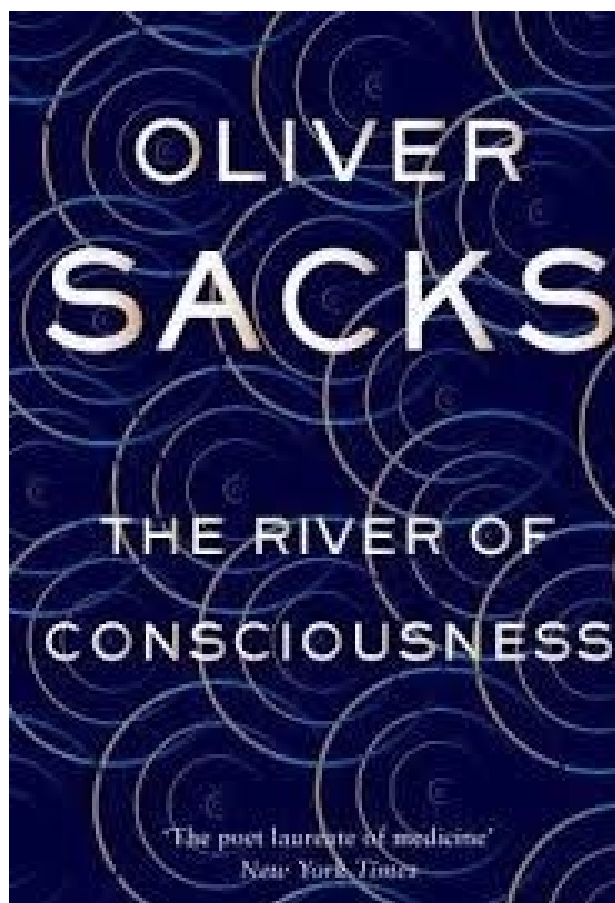
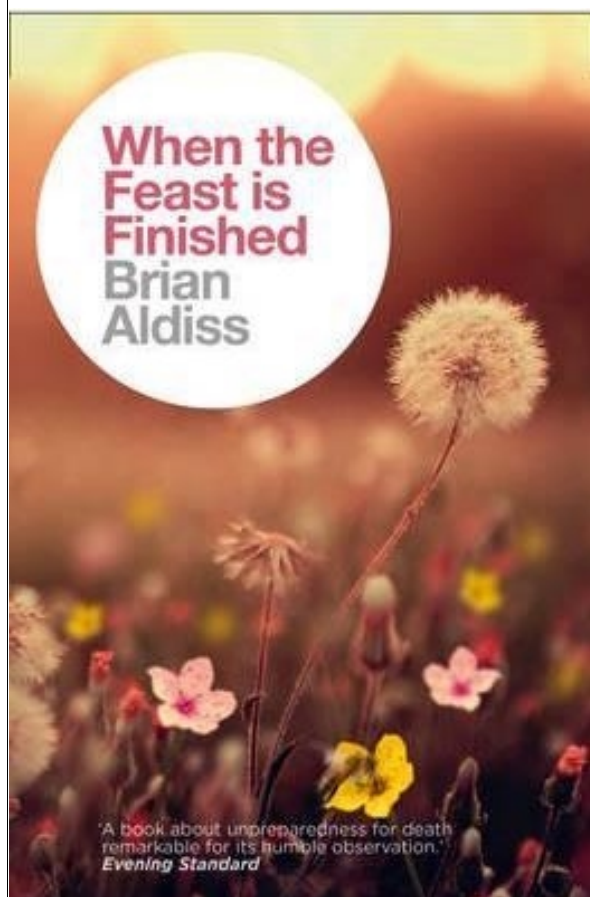
Margaret's last moments are transcribed from Brian's journal:

'One more breath, my darling!' I begged. She delivered it. Her breaths became few and slight. Far between. I held her gently. She ceased to breathe. It was about 3.55.

#### **Oliver Sacks:**

##### ***The River of Consciousness***

From the time I read *Awakenings* — many years ago — I have been an admirer of Oliver Sacks. The two main qualities for me are his lucidity — his ability to express complex scientific ideas in an accessible way — a way that



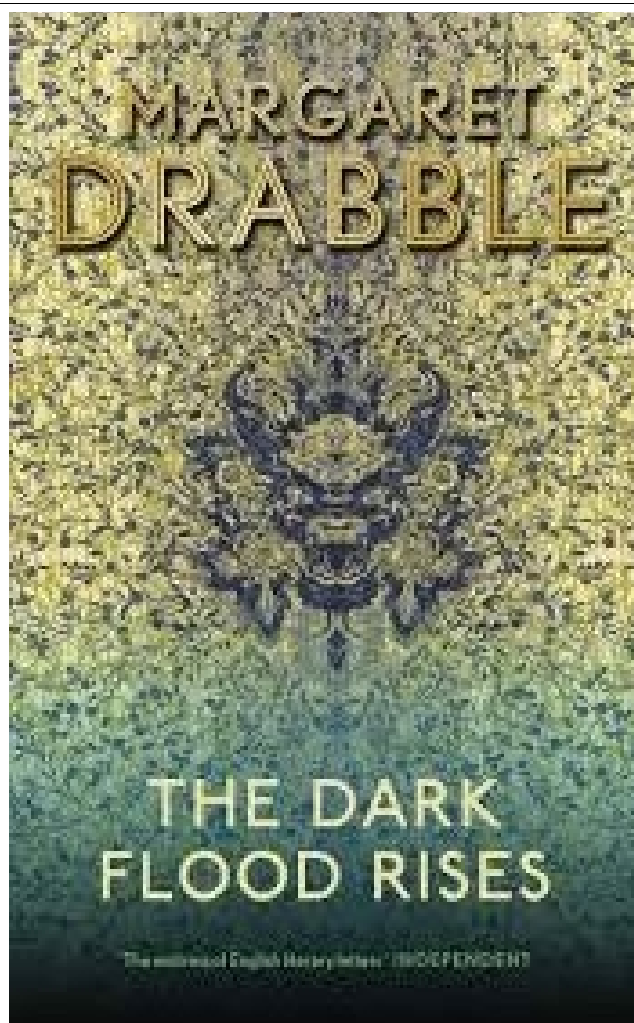
is a pleasure for a non-scientist to read. And the second quality is his vast interest and knowledge about all things; his breadth of knowledge of literature, his fascination with chemistry, botany, history of science, and much more. And underpinning all of this, the boy who loved solitary work with his chemistry set, the meticulous collector of facts, turned out also to be fascinated in people.

The essays in this book, dictated only weeks before his death in 2015, range from Darwin and the Meaning of Flowers, to the Fallibility of Memory. I came away from reading this book with a different view of Freud — the young neuroanatomist who studied fish. I gained a new awareness of the importance of looking back to scientific studies of a hundred or so years ago, where significant observations were made (and then almost forgotten) on phenomena such as continental drift and Tourette's syndrome. And the 'river of consciousness', our memories, are formed by transforming and organising that often includes misappropriation — essentially a creative process, and the 'river of consciousness' is not continuous, but a series of discrete experiences, more like shots in a film. Above all, I marvelled at Sacks's legacy and thought, how sad it is that there will be no more from him.

### **Margaret Drabble:** ***The Dark Flood Rises***

Margaret Drabble's most recent novel weaves around de Beauvoir's observation that with people living longer 'their idleness [is] all the harder to bear ... mere survival is worse than death'. Such a person is Aunt Dorothy who has lived 'becalmed' in Chestnut Court for many years in a late stage of dementia, 'a porcelain figurine'.

The main character in this book is Fran, in her seventies, 'too old to die young'. She is not idle — she works as an inspector of nursing homes and is thus in a position to muse about the various arrangements of the characters in this book, who are all connected by blood or friendship. There is no plot, and there doesn't need to be. The title is from D. H. Lawrence's poem 'The Ship of Death': 'Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul / has her footing washed away, as the dark flood rises'. The title, for this reader, also suggested climate change



— we live longer, we are idle, yet along with the inevitability of death is the inevitability of destruction.

The book ends much as it begins, with Fran on the road inspecting nursing homes, staying in her favourite hotel chain eating an Indian dinner and watching the antics of a young family. I'd been worried that the book was going to end with Fran's death in a road crash, as she keeps forgetting to have the brakes checked, but no, her road to oblivion continues: 'Seeing it through, that's the best she can do'. Not a great prospect for those of us who are about the same age as Fran.

## **Best concerts 2017**

Many concerts could have been chosen as my 'three best'. The following are included because, as well as standing out in my memory, I happened to write notes at the time. Gnawing for inclusion is a performance of Shostakovich's 'Leningrad' symphony, which I have described elsewhere (JenniferBryce.net).

### **Ensemble Françaix, Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM), South Melbourne Town Hall, Thursday 6 April**

Ensemble Françaix is a newly formed chamber group for oboe, bassoon, and piano — a fairly uncommon combination although some beautiful chamber music has been written for it, particularly by French composers, Jean





Françaix (1912–97) and Francis Poulenc (1899–1963).

Françaix's Trio for oboe, bassoon and piano suits the double reeds perfectly and is woven together by an often jazzy piano part. Many of the movements are lively — phrases are tossed off, as if playfully (although in fact many are difficult to execute) contrasted with liveliness is lyrical writing, in particular some beautiful phrases for bassoon, which does a great deal more than plod around the bass line.

Included in the program was a trio by André Previn (1994) — known for his jazz writing. As the three movements suggest (Lively, Slow, Jaunty), much of the music is busy and syncopated, but, particularly in the slow movement, also smooth with rich harmonies.

The final piece is a favourite of mine: Francis Poulenc's Trio for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano (1926). Matthew, the bassoon player, reminded us that Poulenc was influenced by Mozart — and although I'm very familiar with the piece, I'd never thought of that before. Knowing this helped me to become aware of the beautiful aria-like phrases that mingle with French jollity.

Ensemble Françaix has a mission to encourage more writing for their combination of instruments. To this end, they had written their own arrangement of Grainger's *Molly on the Shore*, which was lively and appealing.

## **Australian World Orchestra in collaboration with ANAM, Messiaen: Turangalīla Symphonie, Hamer Hall, 29 July**

This ten-movement symphony of Messiaen (the only symphony he composed) is not often performed, so it was very exciting to hear this superb performance — a collaboration of fine players, conducted by world-class Simone Young. The actual technical performance was brilliant and for one and a half hours I was plunged into contrasting exuberance and tranquillity.

'Turangalīla' is a Sanskrit word that combines ideas

of rhythm and passage of time with divine cosmic play, or love. Messiaen's interest in the nature of time — cyclic, as in Hindu beliefs — is addressed in his *Quartet for the End of Time*, where 'the end of time' is both literal and figurative. This symphony is seen as 'playing with the passage of time'; moving through the traditional symphonic idea of different movements whilst expressing something static or cyclic.

Themes suggesting static

time, played by lower brass, and love, marked *caressant*, played by woodwind, recur through the symphony.

The instrumentation is expansive: a large conventional orchestra of strings, wind, brass, with a huge percussion section (10 players), piano, celeste, glockenspiel and *ondes Martenot*, an early form of electronic instrument developed (by M. Martenot) in 1928, which reminded me of sounds that occurred when old valve radios were tuned. The piano part is virtuosic, rippling, and at times crashing, over the compass of the keyboard.

For me, the experience of hearing this performance of the *Turangalīla Symphonie* was by no means transitory — not the case of whistling a melody or being overtaken by an 'ear worm'. The experience, the brilliance and the sense of jubilation remains with me even now.

## **Elias String Quartet, Wigmore Hall, Tuesday 31 October**

This concert was titled *In Beethoven's Footsteps*, and (as annoying as these labels for concerts are) it was appropriate; we were led to consider how Brahms, Webern and Bartok do connect with and to some extent build on the substance of Beethoven's late quartets.

The concert opened with Webern's *Langsamer Satz* — an early romantic work. This was followed by a superb and very exciting performance of Bartok's String Quartet Number 4 — one I know and love, with a rhythmic figure that persists throughout the piece and ends in an arresting flourish.

The final work on the program was Brahms String Quartet in A Minor Op. 51 No 2. Beautifully played. The lead violin and 'cellist are both women and, with their strong, resonant playing, I couldn't help but reflect on Bernard Heinze's statement, made decades ago when he was the Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium. He contended that women don't have the physical or psychological make-up to play Brahms. These women once again proved him wrong.

— Jennifer Bryce, December 2017

There was a time when Elaine and I met with **Ian Mond** and friends once a week, then once a month. Then we went to his wedding, when Julie and he married, and they became a family and probably he has become a successful executive, and they seem to have disappeared forever. But no! Ian does write a blog called *The Hysterical Hamster*, the source of the following reviews. With Kirstyn McDermott, who we also used to see often, he conducts a regular podcast called *The Writer and the Critic*, which has won the Ditmar Award several times, and recorded its final episode in December.

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## Ian Mond

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### My top books for 2017

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This was a record reading year for me. I finished 139 books (including novels, novellas, and collections), 112 of which were published in 2017. My top 11 books of the year (I couldn't reduce it to 10 — and it nearly bloated out to 15) are drawn from those 112 books.

The list isn't in any particular order, but there was a tie for my favourite book of the year: *From the Wreck* by **Jane Rawson** and *The Long Drop* by **Denise Mina**.

Here is my top 11 of 2017:

- *From The Wreck* by Jane Rawson
- *The Long Drop* by Denise Mina
- *Fever Dream* by Samanta Schweblin

- *Reservoir 13* by Jon McGregor
- *Broken River* by J. Robert Lennon
- *The Changeling* by Victor LaValle
- *Room Little Darker* by June Caldwell
- *Winter* by Ali Smith
- *This Is Memorial Device* by David Keenan
- *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado
- *Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile* by Adelle Stripe

— 1 January 2018

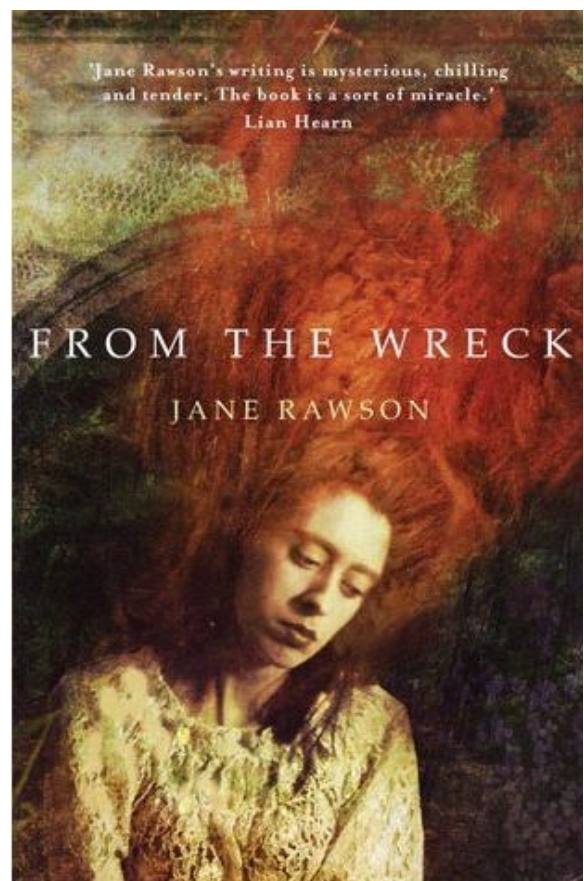
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#### *From the Wreck* by Jane Rawson

If the world were fair and just, **Jane Rawson's** *From the Wreck* would win numerous awards, both literary and genre.\* Not that shiny trophies are the arbiter of great fiction, but they do draw attention to the nominees, and this a novel that's worthy of the hype and buzz regularly applied to lesser works. *From the Wreck* is an extraordinary piece of writing, in the way it blends genres, in the way its ambitions are matched by sublime prose, in the way it explores and questions life in all its varied states.

At first *From the Wreck* reads like a traditional historical novel. George Hills, a steward on the steamship *Admella*, is one of a handful of survivors when the hapless boat sinks off the South Australian coast in 1859\*\*. A second survivor, who plays a significant hand in keeping George alive while they're lost at sea for eight days, is Bridget Ledwith. Years later, George, who is married with children, is haunted by what he and Bridget did to survive (which given they had no food or water should have been impossible). Bridget vanishes soon after reaching shore and George spends his free time trying to find her, hoping she will explain his fractured memories of those eight days at sea.

I'd rather not mention the primary genre element — though for your own safety **KEEP AWAY FROM THE BLURB** — not because it's a twist — it's introduced in



the second chapter — but because the novel's lens, so focused on this one tragic sinking, abruptly widens its gaze, reminiscent of that famous final shot of *Men In Black* as the camera zooms out, in all its CGI glory, from a street on Earth to the Universe at large. And that abrupt shift generates a giddy sensation, an indication that this intimate story about a man dealing with post-traumatic stress is something so much stranger and transcendent.

While the novel is always wonderful, it somehow finds another gear when Rawson's discussion of the natural world bleeds into a meditation on mortality and the bounty of life. George's son Henry is endlessly fascinated with the skeletons of dead animals, a collection of which he keeps hidden in the house. This fascination with death isn't expressed in a dark or creepy manner, but as something complex and layered — inevitable and joyful and frightening and numinous. Or as Rawson beautifully puts it:

[Henry] plunged into the swarming ocean, felt its wriggling abundance ... Henry felt his place in it — just to be this boy and never wonder why or who or how to be better, braver, otherwise. Just to be and to love. To notice it fresh every day. Not to fear it leaving; to know it always was and always will be, and that when this body stops and rots and makes itself food that still it will all go on just like this, just like always. Tiny tragedies, tiny triumphs and none of it meaning a thing against the great still monstrousness of forever and always. This always ocean, this always world, these always stars, this stretching, boundless, eternal universe. This quiet space.

The ease in which Rawson articulates complex thoughts around mortality and eternity, the way she seamlessly slides the narrative between historical and science fiction, and how her characters — especially George — are as complex and flawed and brilliant as the themes Rawson's tackling is, simply put, a master class of storytelling.

I'm not saying that reading *From The Wreck* is a spiritual experience — because there's only so much hype I can slather on one book. But I truly doubt I'm going to read anything this year that as rich and deep and intelligent as this tremendous novel. And if I do it will be one helluva year.

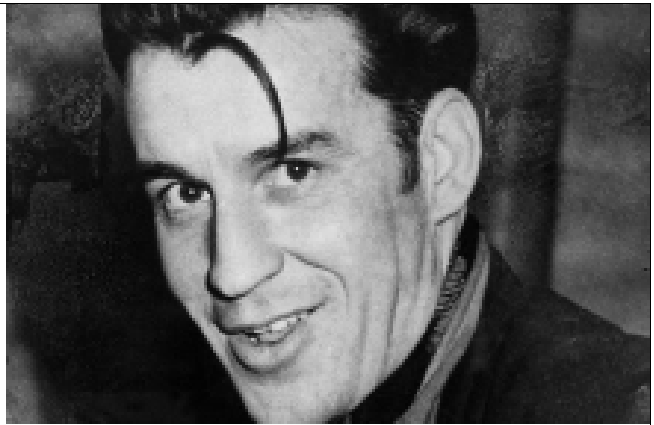
\* *From the Wreck* has indeed won an award — this year's Aurealis Award for Best Novel, presented at Easter in Perth during Australia's national SF convention.

\*\* There was an *Admella*. It did sink in 1859. Of the 113 on the ship, 24 survived.

### ***The Long Drop* by Denise Mina**

This novel about the serial killer Peter Manuel is simply astonishing. I can't hype it enough.

Denise Mina's *The Long Drop* has been on my TBR pile since it was published. But, as often is the case with me, it takes an awards list — the Gordon Burn Prize — to get me off my arse and read the novel.



**Peter Manuel.**

I can't say for certain if this is the best opening sentence I've read all year, but it's right up there:

He knows too much to be an honest man but says he wants to help.

Based on the first 50 utterly engaging pages, *The Long Drop* would appear to be a fictional account of Peter Manuel's killing spree in Glasgow during the 1950s.

Of course, the novel isn't as simple as recounting Manuel's awful crimes — mostly against women. In fact, Manuel is almost a side player in his own story — at least to begin with — with a greater focus on prominent Glasgow solicitor Laurence Dowdall. The lawyer had, as clients, both Manuel and William Watt, the owner of a chain of bakeries, who was a suspect in the murder of his wife, daughter, and his wife's sister, three women who may have actually been killed by Manuel. It's all a bit complex, but utterly fascinating given I know nothing about the case.

The novel alternates — at least initially — between Peter Manuel's court case in May 1958 and the months leading up to the proceedings, including a boozy meeting between Manuel and Watt where they discuss the possible location of the murder weapon used on Watt's family. During the court case, Watt is asked why he would spend the night with the man he suspected murdered his wife and daughter. Watt explains that he had no choice; he needed to know the location of the gun Manuel used because the cops, convinced Watt was the murderer, weren't willing to explore other options. While recounting the court case, which is gripping and grisly (especially when Watt relives seeing his dead wife and daughter) we get these neat little asides from Mina explaining some of the oddities of the Glasgow court system in the 1950s. It's just one of the narrative quirks that make for such gripping reading.

I'm in admiration of the way Mina employs tone and voice in this novel. The shift in perspectives — from a police officer to an underworld boss to a prominent, if shady, lawyer to a mother praying for the well-being of her violent son — means the novel is tense and chilling and comedic and colourful and sad and tragic. The chapter where Brigit Manuel is called to testify on behalf of her son — who has fired his lawyers and is now running his own defence — is this beautiful and moving portrayal of a broken-hearted mother leaning heavily on her faith.



It's no wonder that Denise Mina won this year's Gordon Burn Prize. *The Long Drop* is an incredible novel. Her control of language, her ability to switch tone and voice, her profound observations into the interior lives of these living, breathing people — all of it is perfection.

While Mina never shies away from the fact that Peter Manuel is a cold-blooded killer — although there's some ambiguity as to how many people he actually murdered, with the suggestion that he might have been a patsy for a couple of the killings he's accused of — she does the extraordinary job of ... not humanising Manuel ... but putting him into context, providing an explanation of why he might have turned out this way. Manuel, from his perspective, is a man immersed in his own narrative where he's the hero, has the best lines, and everyone else is a fool. The most wrenching scenes are those from the point of view of his mother, who has to come to terms that this person, blithe to the pain he has caused, is her son.

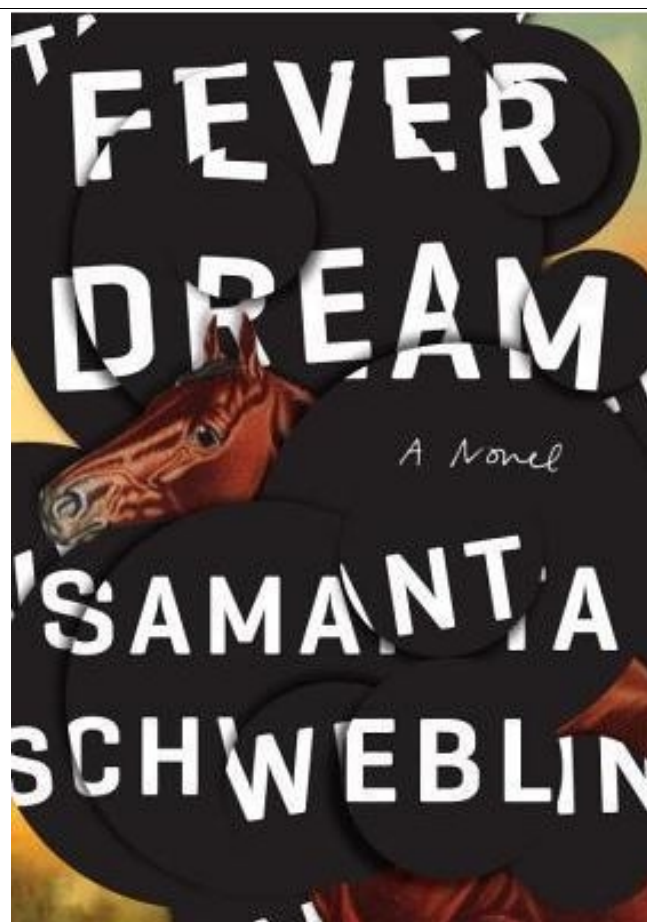
Mina also doesn't forget that Manuel's victims — and victims of violent crimes in general — are more often than not women. Manuel's complete disregard for the two 17-year-old girls he is accused of murdering is symptomatic of a society that to this day fails to adequately recognise or treat brutal acts against women.

But there's so much more going on in this book, whether it's a peek into Glasgow's underworld or providing insights into the legal system and court structure at the time. The novel is powerful, chilling, sometimes laugh-out-loud funny and educational. And if I haven't already said it multiple times, the prose is sublime. Even if you're familiar with Peter Manuel, Scotland's first modern serial killer, you still need to read this book just so you can be exposed to a writer in complete and utter control of her craft.

### ***Fever Dream*** by Samanta Schweblin

*Fever Dream* by Samanta Schweblin (translated by Megan McDowell) is the best horror novella/work of fiction of the year. Am I calling it early? Abso-fucking-lutely.

The opening of the novella not only sets the scene but almost immediately induces a level of tension that shouldn't be possible so early in the piece. A woman — Amanda — lies dying in the hospital. Her world is dark, her sheets are rough, and the only indication she has that a small boy is sitting next to her is that he keeps murmuring into her ear. Why is the boy there? Why is this boy so insistent that Amanda find that moment when the 'worms come into being'? What do these worms have to do with dead horses, toxins seeping into the mud, and the migration of tainted souls? But most importantly of all — where the *fuck* is Amanda's daughter Nina!?



No, seriously, where is she?

The novella's title gives you a sense of the tone. Amanda's life is ebbing away, so there's a dreamlike aspect to her interactions with this small boy and his probing questions. But there's also a rhythm to the prose, propelling you through Amanda's memory of the few days/weeks as she pieces together what's happened to her, her husband, and her daughter Nina. It's a memory fraught with doubt and uncertainty, often undermined by the creepy boy — his name is David — whose questions become an interrogation.

The novella's compact length means that Schweblin can sustain and amp up the tension and fear. The novella's structure — essentially an extended dialogue between Amanda and David — would make for one terrifying audio play. I had to take a deep breath after I finished *Fever Dream*. I even took a pause before jumping onto the next book. If there's a more propulsive and frightening work of horror fiction written this year I'll be stunned.

And kudos to Megan McDowell for her superb translation.

— Ian Mond, 2017

Readers of my magazines, especially SF Commentary and Steam Engine Time, might have thought that **Doug Barbour** was just another friendly Canadian fan who liked writing about science fiction, fantasy, and music. I knew that Doug was a distinguished Canadian academic, but until I looked up his entry in the ***Science Fiction Encyclopedia***, I hadn't realised quite how distinguished:

**Douglas Barbour (1940– )**: Canadian poet (author of at least 14 volumes of poems) and academic, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Alberta; his 'Patterns of Meaning in the SF Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ and Samuel R. Delany, 1962–1972', accepted by Queen's University in 1976, was the first Canadian doctoral dissertation in the field of sf. [He has published] *Worlds Out of Words: The SF Novels of Samuel R Delany* (1979). Several shorter essays ... have demonstrated Barbour's adhesion to a high-road view of the genre [John Clute].

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## Douglas Barbour

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### Top science fiction and fantasy books of 2016

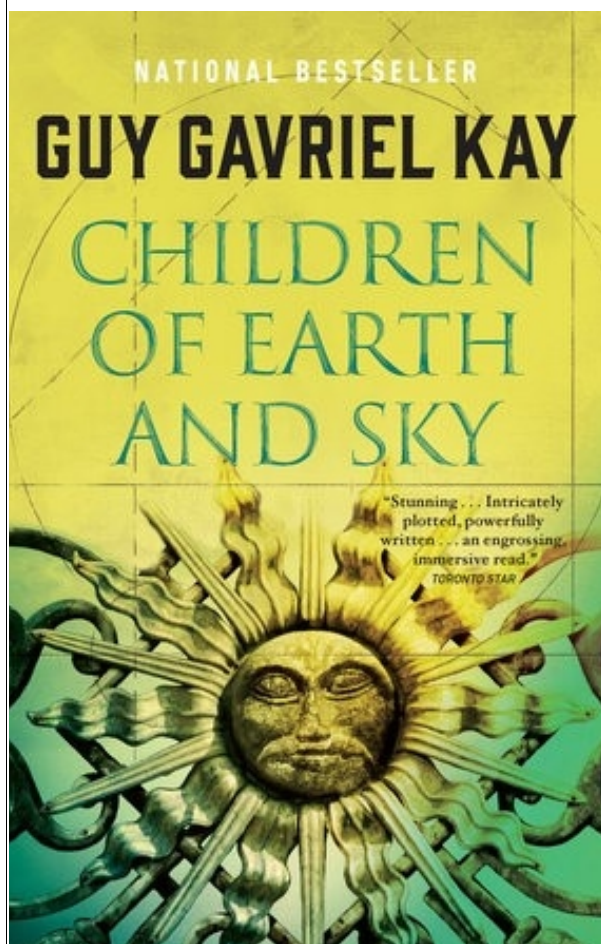
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*Children of Earth and Sky*  
by Guy Gavriel Kay (Viking; 2016)

Following his two novels set in an alternate Tang and

Song dynasty China, in *Children of Earth and Sky* Guy Gavriel Kay has returned to the world beneath two moons of many of his novels, most relevantly *Sailing to Sarantium* and *Lord of Emperors*. He sets this new and, as expected, wondrous novel some 900 years after that duology. In the continent that looks somewhat like a simplified Europe next to the Middle East, Sarantium has fallen to the eastern forces serving the god of the stars, Ashar, while the western empire, much smaller now, still follows the sun god, Jad. The map at the front is both important and necessary.

In this world, which he has so completely and complexly imagined, Kay introduces a number of main characters, whose lives and stories will intertwine throughout this highly satisfying network of plots and counterplots (all orchestrated by the historically learned narrator, who assumes a mastery of the inner lives of these people but also offers commentaries on the ways of the [this] world, and the crises, both individual and social/cultural, that confront them all). The main figures, those whose changing lives will most propel the narrative, who come from all levels of their various societies, are Pero Villani, a young and mostly untried artist of the city state of Seressa; Leonara Valeri, a young noblewoman with a past, from the same Seressa; Danika Gradek, a young woman archer from the fighting town of Senjan; Martin Dvijo, younger son of a major merchant family in the lesser city-state of Dubrava; and Damaz (the name given him by the Asharites who abducted him from a village near Senjan when he was four), a 14-year-old trainee in the khalif of Asharias's infantry). There are many other figures, many of them people of power, such as the Grand Khalif Gurka, residing in Asharias, once Sarantium, which he conquered and made the capital of the Osmanli Empire some 20 years before this tale begins; or Duke Ricci, the head of



Seressa's Council of Twelve, whose plotting propels the stories of Pero and Leonara, and thus those of the others, whom they encounter early in their travels.

To go into much detail about their stories would be to deny readers the pleasures of this complex text. Suffice to say, Seressa is a great trading city whose leaders are willing to do just about anything to maintain its primacy as the major centre of trade in its part of the world beneath the two moons. Dubrava is also a trading city, smaller and nearer the edge of the Osmanli Empire, trying to maintain its place, and even increase its trading power, especially if it can also do some damage to Seressa's. Jad's Holy Emperor lives in the city of Obravic far to the north of Seressa, while the High Patriarch of Jad lives in Rhodias, somewhat to the south. And in Asharias, the Grand Khalif sends out his army every spring to try to break through the great walled city of Woberg to conquer the 'infidel' lands under Jad.

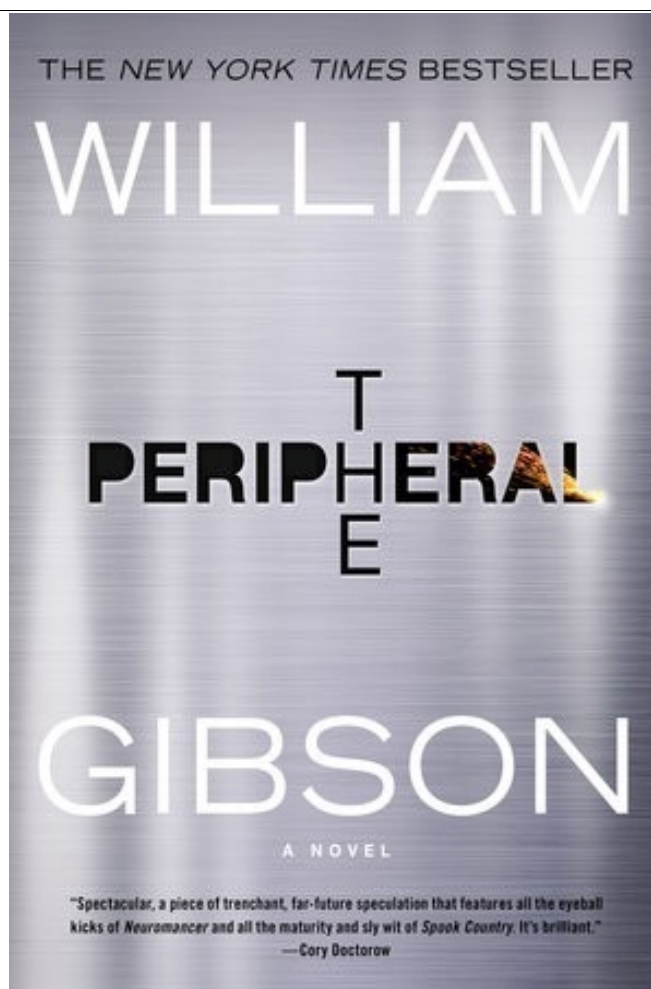
Spies are a necessary part of war and diplomacy in this world, and all states use them. When the Grand Khalif expresses a wish to be painted in the western style, Seressa chooses a young man without family to send to Asharias to do that job, and perhaps manage to spy and even try to kill the Khalif; also inducing a young woman to become a new spy in Dubrava. To get to Dubrava and thence onwards to Asharias, the spies must sail on board a trading ship from that city. Fighting men, and one woman, from Senjan will board that ship to steal any wares from Seressa or Asharias (they are, after all, not pirates but heroes of Jad, dedicated to fighting the followers of Ashar in any way they can). From this conjunction much of the rest of the narrative follows: multifarious, full of deceit, betrayals, battles, and confrontations both large and small — an extravagant tale full of tales, an adventure of bodies, minds, and souls in conflict.

Kay has perfected a fascinating narrative voice during his decades of constructing these marvellous tales set in an invented world with a history neatly parallel to our own. It is that of a somewhat scholarly, but never too prim, historian all too aware of the vagaries, injustices, and just plain unfairness of life in such a world, yet one who can find moments and individuals that rise above the general chaos and loss. There is a place for love and loyalty among the ruins of a greater past. As an author, he likes people of intelligence and wit, and he finds them in a variety of places in the societies and cultures he constructs with subtlety and nuance. He also includes a touch of the supernatural, which deeply disturbs any who experience it. All of which makes him one of the few truly philosophical fantasists writing today. As in his other novels set in a history just a few degrees off from our own, *Children of Earth and Sky* is a superbly entertaining, profoundly moral, and politically astute, novel.

### ***The Peripheral***

by William Gibson (Putnam; 2014)

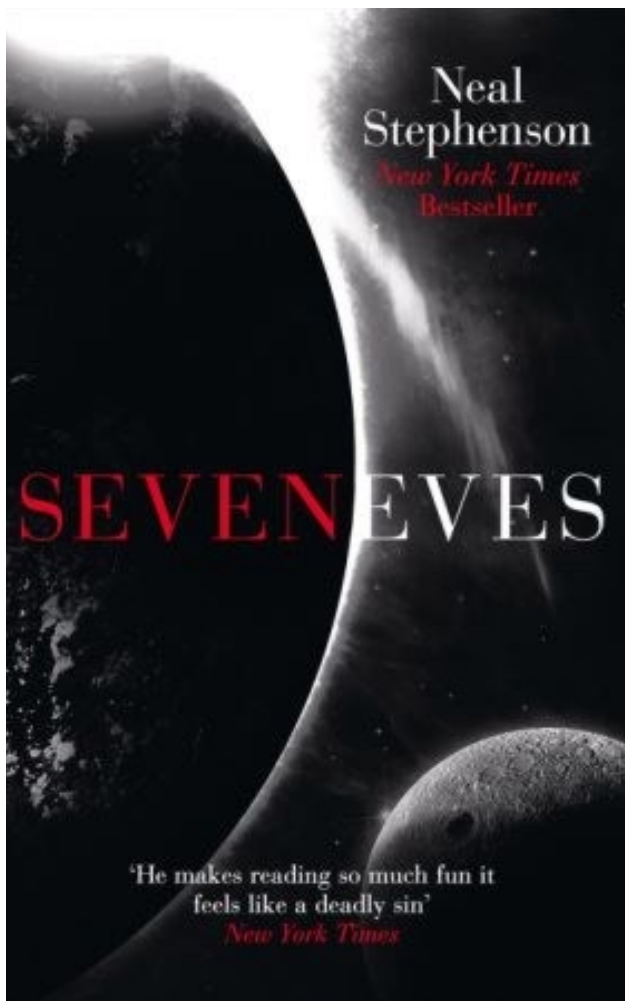
This is another terrific witty and savvy glimpse at some near futures by **William Gibson**, a master of social-consequences-of-new-tech fiction. Set both around 2030 and 70 years after that, but in two different time-lines (or 'continua', as the further future people have found a way



to connect to past 'stubs' — continua that are no longer that world's exact past simply because they have engaged with it), *The Peripheral* lives up to its ambiguous title by demonstrating that almost everything is peripheral to everything else. This is especially true for a few people in a third-world-like rural US of the near future and a few people in an almost empty London of a world of a small population (brought about by 'the jackpot,' a slow-motion apocalypse made up of many different small effects and events that have led to the destruction of the environment and the deaths of about 90 per cent of the world's population).

Gibson has populated both continua with a bunch of intriguing characters, each neatly presented. The main ones are Flynn Fisher, a young woman who subs for her brother in what she assumes is a game that pays well but is in fact the reality of the future London: acting as the pilot of a quadcopter trying to keep paparazzi flying mites away from a window in a huge building, she sees a woman murdered in a frightening manner, thrown over a balcony, then quickly 'eaten' by some little machine. In that future, Wilf Netherton is a PR man who foolishly gave the performance art sister of the dead woman a 'key' to Flynn's stub. He is a friend of a very rich 'klept' who has invested in the stub as a hobby. Eventually a London police official, Ainsley Lowbeer, gets involved, and slowly these people bring much money to bear on the small county (on the whole country) to protect Flynn and her family and friends from the other side that wants her dead because of what she saw. They too bring much





money to bear, and the buying of political power at ever higher levels is a running joke about the present (especially the US since *Citizens United*). It's a very complicated double narrative, but Gibson keeps all the balls in the air.

In a series of alternating chapters, mostly through Flynn's and Wilf's points of view, he constructs an increasingly complex plot that slowly brings Flynn and her friends to understand what is happening and those around Netherton and Lowbeer to understand just how wily and tough Flynn and her supporters are. Also, Lowbeer seems to think that if they handle the situation in London right (and it's a dangerous game), she can perhaps make things better in the stub's future than in her (their) own past. Gibson brilliantly evokes Flynn's slowly growing awareness of just how weird a situation she has gotten into, and her willingness and ability to deal with it.

Something I have surely noticed before, but only truly realised while reading *The Peripheral*, is how smartly Gibson does titles, especially chapter titles, marvellously double-edged, always deployed thus in the chapter, and almost poems in themselves. His evocation of the near-empty and rather desiccated world of the future London contrasted with the rich if culturally limited world of Flynn is effective. Flynn's world is pretty bad, poverty-US close to what it is now, with many of the men in this small town ex-soldiers not very well taken care of; but Netherton's, while rich (the 1 per cent are the main

survivors of the jackpot) and scientifically advanced, having found the technological means to clean up the environment, is also culturally devastated by the loss of so much of humanity. On the whole, *The Peripheral* is both a solid thriller and a mostly a dystopian vision of where we are going, even if it holds out some hope for one stub. It will surely reward a second reading.

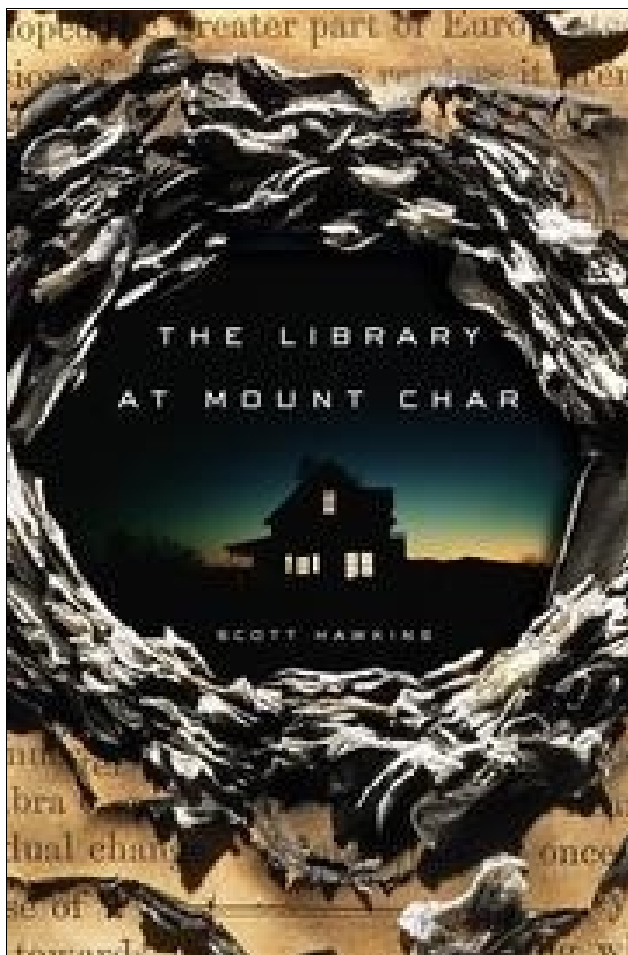
#### Seveneves

by Neal Stephenson (William Morrow; 2015)

This, as usual, huge book is perhaps Neal Stephenson's most purely Sci(techno)fiction, with both the science and the tech capitalised. It could also be seen as two novels, the first, taking up two-thirds of its 861 pages, being a highly technological description of humanity's response to the event that sets everything in motion, the explosion of the moon into seven large pieces, caused by 'the Agent' (as people came to call the mysterious force that did it). The narrative follows this apocalyptic event, of how scientists soon realise that these seven large rocks will bump and grind and eventually send a huge number of rocks into the Earth's atmosphere causing it to burn up and kill everything living on it, and how all the countries on Earth join forces to send as many of the best and brightest young people (and scientists in all fields) up to the International Space Station (known as Izzy) before the end comes. This long and complicated tale takes 566 pages to arrive at the meaning of the novel's title.

The first story tells of the two years or so during which those in the station attempt to expand Izzy and Earth sends up 'the Swarm': many small habitats that can be joined into slightly larger ones and remain in touch with the station, and all the problems and conflicts that ensue. The loss of most of the young sent up to save humanity leads to seven women being 'chosen' (a loaded term) to become the mothers of whatever humanity survives.

On one level the whole of Parts One and Two is just one huge expository lump, but the explanations throughout are exemplary in their clarity, and the intrigues and political fights highly believable. Part Three, 'Five Thousand Years Later', allows Stephenson to wax more visionary and to construct a narrative more directly suspenseful (in the political thriller sense) on a world finally made habitable again. It is set in the huge Habitat Ring circling the Earth, where the seven 'races' (each carrying specific marks of their 'Eves') have divided into two factions, the Blues and the Reds, caught in something of a Cold War, carried even down onto the renewed Earth. A number of characters representing all seven races, have been gathered to investigate some strange anomalies on Earth, which has been sparsely settled, but their adventures lead to discovery, death, and a skirmish in the ongoing war, all related to finally meeting with, first, the humans who survived in deep caverns, and then, later, the heirs of those who have dived deep under the ocean and have evolved into a very different sort of human. While telling this exciting story, Stephenson is able to fill in how humanity, in its seven 'races' based on each of the Eves, has survived in space and eventually built a new civilisation of 3 billion or so living in the habitats ringing the Earth, and still living



under the aegis of ‘the Epic’, the recorded tale of all that happened in the first two parts of the novel. In *Seveneves*, Stephenson has constructed a reimagined hard science fiction with his usual élan, a version that owes a lot to Stapledon’s majestic visions of humanity’s possible future but with the snap of more contemporary story telling. In its own way, it does a masterful job.

***The Library at Mount Char*  
by Scott Hawkins (Crown; 2015)**

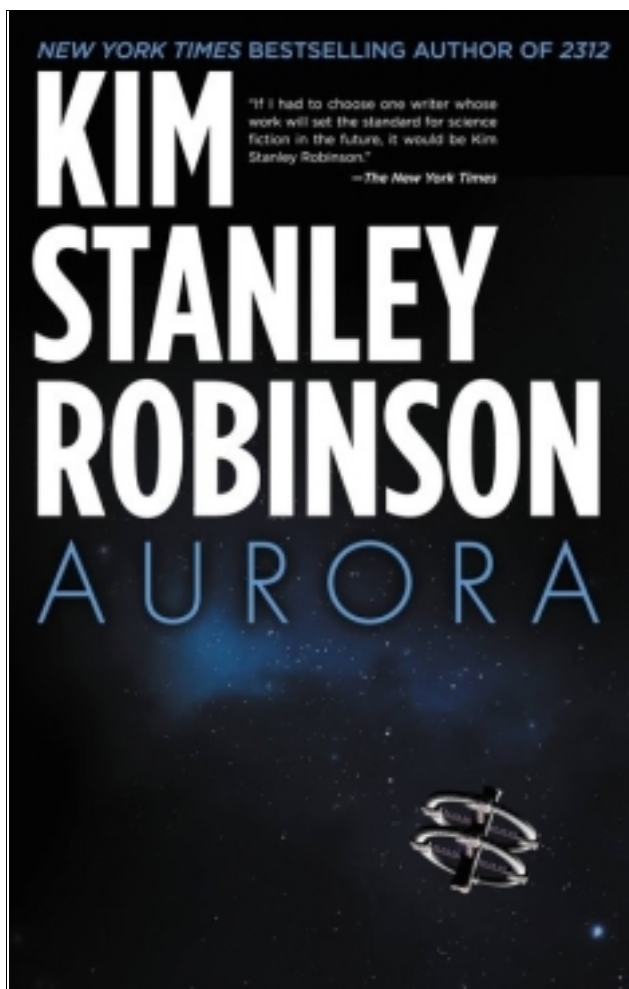
Scott Hawkins’ *The Library at Mount Char* is kind of urban fantasy but with terrifying bite. The ‘Library’ itself is massive and important, and belongs to a personage known to his ‘adopted’ ‘children’ as Father. How they became orphans, what he then did to and with them, what every event, both narrated and merely implied, leads to, and more important, how and why, takes the whole novel to emerge. The Father appears mostly as perceived by Carolyn, who was eight when the event that caused her to become one of Father’s protégés occurred, but also by some of the other children, as they grow up, learning the ‘catalogue’ he has assigned them (with strict orders not to tell the others anything of one’s catalogue, and not to try to learn anything of another’s catalogue). David’s is war and violence; Michael’s animals; Margaret’s the land of death; Jennifer’s medicine; Peter’s, math and engineering; Alicia’s, the future; and Rachel’s, all the ghosts of children of uncreated futures who can eavesdrop on secret information. Carolyn was assigned every language ever used, which, she first

thought, ‘was more dull than terrifying’. The major figures, after Carolyn, are David, who can wreak destruction on whole armies, Michael, who is as innocent as the animals he learns to live with/like, Margaret, who keeps coming back to life, and is close to David, and Jennifer, whose medical abilities help keep the others alive.

When the novel begins, the Father has disappeared, but the youngsters cannot believe that he is dead, and they try to find him in all the realms they know through their catalogues. But something prevents them from approaching the Library to see if they can find him somewhere in there, a force seems designed to stop only them, killing them if they go too far beyond its boundary. They hole up in Mrs McGillicutty’s home, where she feeds and takes care of them. Carolyn tries to get them some mundane (I guess you could call it) help, especially from Steve, a young man of their old home town. In doing so, she causes him all kinds of trouble (a murder charge, and later, when David takes him away from the jail, killing a number of cops in the process, much worse). So there’s his story, of his interactions with the Librarians, who have immense powers, if limited to their catalogues. Somehow or other, Erwin, ex-special forces, finds himself involved in the ongoing contretemps with the Librarians, who are trying to find out what happened to Father and keep his enemies from taking over his powers. David, of course, thinks that if Father is dead, he should take over, and he is certainly cruel enough it seems (given what we slowly learn about the Father’s cruelty to all the children, and David’s learned cruelty in response).

Hawkins slowly develops the contemporary narrative of the battles between the Librarians and the US military and presidency and, in a series of Interludes, the story of how these children grew up under the Father’s violent tutelage. Why Carolyn’s remains the main perspective in the limited omniscient narration (which also utilises Steve’s and Erwin’s points of view, as ordinary humans watching these powerful beings at work) only slowly emerges: she was traumatised early in her apprenticeship and has hated both Father and David since. She intends to win power over them all, meek little linguist that she appears to be.

The strategies, the long plan unfolding, the way in which she uses the others’ strengths for her own advantage, her growing inhumanity (to be top god, one has to lose empathy and compassion: there will be a lot of deaths), are the narrative bones of the novel, but Hawkins presents it all with a suave wit and very black, often highly violent, humour. Because of Carolyn’s extraordinarily complicated plots (which include her having to make herself not know, consciously, all that she has planned and is now doing), the Sun has been destroyed by one of Father’s (and now her) enemies, but that’s just one of many moments of violence and terror. There are also the lions, one of whom becomes Steve’s friend, the power over the President(s), and the political destruction when one of them disobeys orders. By the end, the twists and turns might leave readers feeling a bit woozy, and the climax(es) flip the tale even more. That Library, as usual much larger inside than out, but then not fully in our universe, remains the site of most danger and possibility.



In the end, things start to work out, as the new boss (maybe not quite the same as the old boss?) starts organising things again, but it's not a sure thing, even if Erwin still lives and hears as we read the delicious final sentence: 'Don't worry, ... I have a plan.' *The Library at Mount Char* (another delight: the way in which the title becomes clear only in the final pages) offers a wildly entertaining ride.

### ***Aurora***

by Kim Stanley Robinson (2015)

With *Aurora*, Kim Stanley Robinson proves once again that he is one of the very best writers of real science fiction. In this novel he does something close to what Stephenson does in *Seveneves* — he drives a whole century-spanning story of scientific endeavour through a deliberately complex and scientifically literate narration.

*Aurora* is the epic tale of a generations-long starship journey to attempt to colonise a planet-sized moon in the Tau Ceti star system. The story is split into seven sections, the first and last of which are in limited omniscience, and the other five narrated by a major figure in the tale: the quantum computer running the ship, an AI coming into something like consciousness.

It's a brilliant narrational move on Robinson's part, as it allows him to report on both the human and the material developments on the ship and explore a number of questions about storytelling as a particularly

human (or intelligent being) action. In part 1, he introduces the major characters, especially Devi, the chief engineer at the time of approaching the star and entering its system to attempt landing on a moon and surviving there (the whole reason for being there); her daughter Freya, lacking her technological skills but having certain social skills of her own; her father, Badim; and a few of their friends, all people in the ship's General Council for this generation, 158 to 170 years into its journey.

Devi is a fixer. When problems arise on the ship, if no one else can solve them, she asks the questions no one else thinks of and usually finds an answer that can solve the problem. At this point in the voyage the problems usually involve some mechanical or technological breakdown unanticipated by the original designers of the ship. Devi is a driven, often angry, person, taking the weight on her own shoulders of keeping the ship going. Theya often accompanies her around the various biomes of the ship, based on 24 different areas of Earth, as she fixes various problems. Theya listens to Devi's interactions with the people, usually not understanding the technical details (and certainly not the math), but very much understanding the way the interactions themselves work. She is young, and apparently not as smart as her mother or as many people of previous generations, but she is her mother's daughter. Something she only guesses at, however, is how engaged Devi is with the ship's computer.

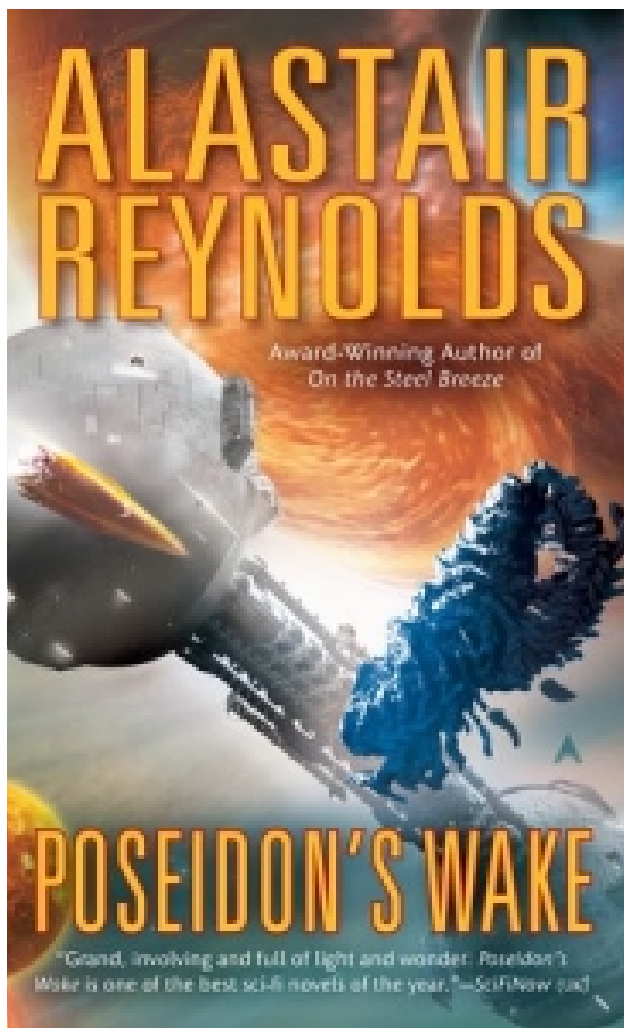
Part 2 begins with Devi telling Ship to 'Make a narrative account of the trip that includes all the important particulars'. This is something it finds very difficult to do, but it will try. Thus begins the narrative of parts 2 to 6. The Ship finds it difficult, even with Devi's advice and insistence.

The ongoing problem, as outlined by Devi, which becomes clearer as the effort proceeds, is that (a) clearly metaphors have no empirical basis, and are often opaque, pointless, inane, inaccurate, deceptive, mendacious, and, in short, futile and stupid; (b) nevertheless, human language is, in its most fundamental operation, a gigantic system of metaphors.

I could refer to a bunch of linguistic and philosophical studies, most of which I am sure Robinson has read, but this questioning of what it's doing by the emerging AI narrator allows the author to explore, often with great wit, the whole enterprise of telling any story, let alone this one. The Ship eventually solves this problem by analysing metaphors and similes, coming up with a beautiful (algorithmic?) solution, forced to it by Devi's instruction, which seems even more powerful after she dies (as the ship finally reaches its destination), 'as promised to Devi'. It asks if analogy could be better than metaphor.

It's strange to consider that these two linguistic operations, metaphor and analogy, so often linked together in rhetoric and narratology, and considered to be variants of the same operation, are actually hugely different from each other, to the point where one is futile and stupid, the other penetrating and useful. Can this not have been noticed before? Do they really think *x is like y* is equivalent to *x is to y as a is to b*? Can they be that fuzzy, that sloppy? Yes, of course. Evidence is copious. Reconsider data at hand





in light of this; it fits the pattern. Because fuzzy is to language as sloppy is to action.

The AI has to work something out, and it does eventually (but really quickly in human terms of time): 'Perhaps there is a provisional solution to this epistemological mess, which is to be located in the phrase *it is as if* ... In the infinite black space of ignorance, *it is as if* stands as the basic operation of cognition, the mark perhaps of consciousness itself.' And that is a clue to the narrative, or rather the narration, that follows, how this quantum computer is becoming conscious, self-conscious, an intelligent being.

All this narratological theorising takes place at the beginning of part 2. The story itself is immensely complicated, various plot strands intertwining in multiple ways, all told by the AI, making both the narrative itself and the narrator's involvement, with its many strands, fascinating. In the end, it manages to do its job, and drops its people off. It also manages to become an engaging character itself, growing into a self readers will care about by doing and telling. Indeed, it finds itself 'coming to the conclusion, preliminary and perhaps arbitrary, that the self, the so-called I that emerges out of the combination of all the inputs and processing and outputs that we experience in the ship's changing body, is ultimately nothing more or less than this narrative itself, this particular train of thought that we are inscribing as instructed by Devi. There is a pretense of self, in

other words, which is only expressed in this narrative; a self that is these sentences. We tell their story, and thereby come to what consciousness we have. Scribble ergo sum.'

But it doesn't stop there; it feels there is more: 'We are bigger, more complex, more accomplished than our narrative is.' And: 'Possibly this is true for humans as well. One doesn't see how this could not be true.' A highly suggestive comment on how little any narrative can tell us about any individual consciousness, yet also how much. In the end, the AI achieves something more, a true sense of empathy (without which no narrative succeeds?). Then its narrative ends.

*Aurora* is simply a great contemporary science fiction; it also fits into a particular future history sequence Robinson seems to be constructing, as the solar system from which the ship came and to which it returns is certainly that of his novel *2312*, and perhaps others, including his new novel, *New York 2140*, all including an Earth in which the oceans have risen by at least 20 metres. He has chosen to think this possible future through.

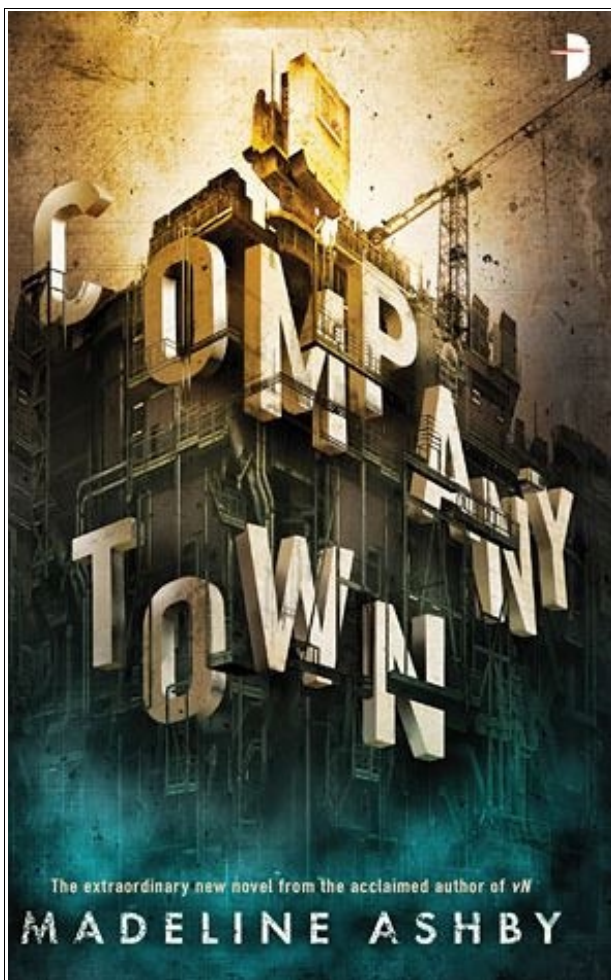
### ***Poseidon's Wake* by Alastair Reynolds (2015)**

Like many other of Reynolds' novels, this is another huge and wide-screen space opera, a highly scientific speculative vision at work. This is the third book in what might be called The Akinya Trilogy, if Reynolds sticks at a trilogy (there are openings to more stories by the end). Set some time after *On the Steel Breeze*, it's a double narrative concerning the adventures of one Akinya, Kanu, Ambassador to Mars and the robot civilisation there, and Goma Akinya, a biologist working with the devolving elephants on Crucible, the world where humanity first came into contact with the alien Watchkeepers and the Mandala of an even greater civilisation, long gone, the M-builders.

The machine society on Occupied Mars has intercepted a message aimed at Crucible from the star system where a Trantor, a human and a machine (based on Eunice Akinya, the great early explorer of the clan) were taken by the Watchkeepers, and where, it later turns out, half a huge starship had been sent by the Mandala on Crucible. When Kamu is killed by a human revolutionary group, then revived by the machines for a purpose he and they agree to but which he forgets, he returns to Earth and takes up with his ex-wife, who has a ship going to Europa, where he has hidden a starship.

Meanwhile, on Crucible, message received, the government agrees to send a starship to that system, and Goma, her wife Ru, and her uncle Mposi, join the crew, with many others, including someone determined to destroy the Trantors (the elephants with enhanced intelligence). And I haven't even begun to name all the important characters, all of whom have major roles to play in the complex narrative Reynolds has constructed in *Poseidon's Wake*.

It would take pages to just begin to unravel all the convolutions of plots as these two groups come together with the Trantor society on the old starship, and the changed-back-to-human Eunice on a different world there; and the incredibly advanced technology of the



M-builders (not to mention their discovery of the ultimate destruction of everything when the universe ends and the despair thus engendered).

Love lost and found, strained loyalties among one's own people and between races (the human, Tantor [or Risen], & machine), and betrayals all play out against the science-beyond-science of the forces so far beyond the advances Reynolds speculates (as a scientist-writer) would be possible for humanity in a few thousand years. In the end, some important figures die, some knowledge is gained, and all agree that the three entities will have to work together to study and learn from the archives left behind by the M-builders. The final few chapters are something of a letdown, deliberately and quietly tying up narrative threads, while leaving an opening for further stories set in this future history. Reynolds has achieved a visionary SF epic in the trilogy of *Blue Remembered Earth*, *On the Steel Breeze*, and *Poseidon's Wake*.

### ***Company Town* by Madeline Ashby (TOR; 2016)**

*Company Town* is a fine example of the kind of book that can happen when cyberpunk meets noir thriller cum dystopia. It's also nice to see **Madeline Ashby**, a Canadian writer, set her story on New Arcadia, a city-sized oil rig off Newfoundland, with many of its characters being Newfoundlanders, not least the Korean-Canadian tough girl at the centre of the plot(s). Go Jung-hwa begins as a kind of minder for the sex workers, who are unionised

on New Arcadia. She is possibly the only person left there who has no bio-engineered enhancements, partly because her mother refused to get her birthmarked daughter any. She finishes as an ambiguous harbinger of human hope in a world quickly going beyond the human.

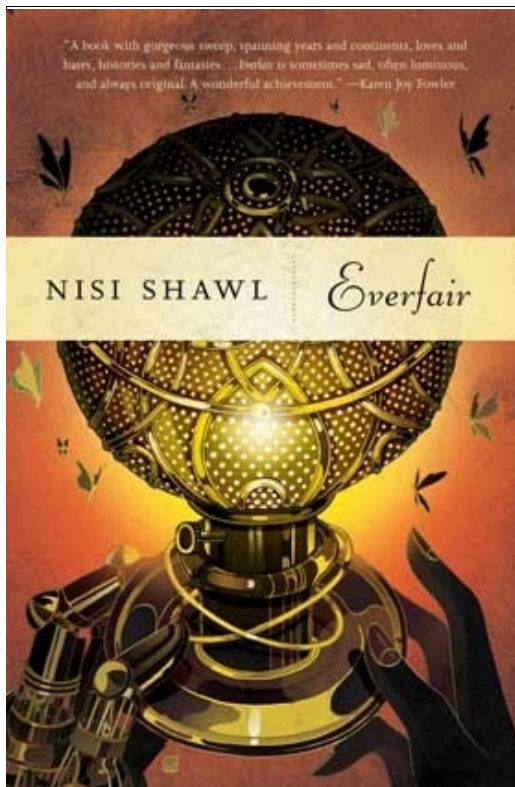
A new family-run company, Lynch Ltd., has just bought New Arcadia. It plans to make things better, or at least that's what it says. Some years earlier, her brother Tae-kyung, the family's great hope of course, died in a fire that destroyed the Old Rig. As a trained fighter (who's also able to take a lot of pain), Hwa gets some insurance as well as pay working for the Union. But when the Lynch family arrives and she sees a man with a gun, she accidentally gets involved with them.

There are many complications: the father, the head of the family, is held together by machines; he is a futurist-dreamer who believes he has somehow obtained from beyond the Singularity some tech that informs him of how humanity will become post-human, especially under the guidance of the Lynch corporation. He intends, in fact, to use technology to evade death; the rest of his children, all much older than Joel, are jealous (and could try to eliminate him); Lynch Ltd. is building a 'safe' and small reactor under New Arcadia to provide power for the city as it moves away from oil to a new economy; and various of Hwa's friends in the business are suddenly being killed in monstrous ways.

Lynch senior hires Hwa to be his son Joel's bodyguard and trainer, bringing her back to the high school she left before graduating, where he is to mix with the ordinary students whom he will someday lead. Overseen by Siofra, a superbly enhanced man who seems to have her safety at heart, but who also is something of an cipher to her, she runs into an attack at the school, probably aimed at Joel, but later wonders if it was aimed at her, especially when what appears to be a serial killer starts murdering her friends from her previous job.

Things just get weirder and more violent, and Hwa finds herself caught up in internal Lynch family conflict, some of which, it turns out, is generated from the future (or one of many possible futures, including attacks on the two people within the corporation she cares for). As well, she must go into various 'undergrounds' in the city as she tries to discover who is slaughtering the women she once worked with. Her travels and travails generally end in violence and pain. But it is her innate humanity (tied to her lack of biotech enhancements) that makes her a target. She is 'the strange loop', 'the Disorder', in all the models the future technocrats/post-humans have of how they got to the stars and to their new android-like state. But Joel, who is even more important than his father knows, is also very human in his youthful idealism and concern for Hwa.

Ashby has created a group of fascinating characters and constructed a complexly twisted plot that never falls into the expected. Hwa, especially, with her biting wit and savage sense of what's right, emerges as a great noir protagonist. Although the conclusion seems a bit forced, the author has provided some preparatory clues. After a 'final' catastrophe, she still finds a way toward a kind of SF transcendent end.



**Everfair**  
by Nisi Shawl (2016)

Nisi Shawl's *Everfair* is a marvellously complex (alternate) historical/steampunk novel about the birth and growth of an African nation torn from the ruined territories ruled by King Leopold's Belgium, where the natives are essentially slaves worked to death in the production of rubber. Shawl tells her story in two parts. The first part tells of a varied group of people, including European Fabian socialists, US evangelist Christian missionaries, and an African 'king' of the territory and his closest followers (including his favourite and smartest wife), who slowly bring about the political possibility of purchasing territory from King Leopold, which is named Everfair by one of the leading women in the cause, Daisy Albin, a British Fabian. In a narrative move that takes this tale into fascinating sexual politics, she is one 'wife' (at the beginning, the only legal one) of Laurie Albin, a founder of the Fabian Society, mother and stepmother of two boys and two girls, and now lover of his latest and youngest lover, the adventurous Lisette Toutournier, who will become a nurse, an author, and a spy in the new country.

There is no single protagonist unless it is Everfair itself; rather, Shawl shifts from chapter to chapter among a widely diverging number of people involved in the creation and political construction of the new country during the final years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth (after the war of independence, for many Europeans do not accept the new politics of Everfair when it is born; the country is unable to stay out of World War I, and finds itself on the wrong side). Some characters of importance she makes us care for are killed, some romantic liaisons go awry, and some political moves prove wrong and must somehow be fixed. Shawl mixes the public and the personal

with great subtlety. In her representation of the various sexual possibilities, she offers the lesbian love of Daisy and Lisette (but Daisy also has relations with one of the Fabian leaders, and in most of the world lesbianism is seen as wrong), the 'miscegenation' that occurs (and that Daisy feels is wrong although she has fought for general equality in Everfair) when young George Albin falls in love with the much older Christian missionary; Martha; the polygamy of both the African king Mwenda and eventually of the missionary Thomas Jefferson Wilson, whose life becomes dedicated to an African god; as well as various more 'normal' (but in this narrative simply another-way) relations among other figures. These relations affect the political relations among these people, especially as the king eventually thinks his spirit guide wants him to rid his country of all whites, a mistake that almost sets off a civil war toward the end of the novel, but his wife, now his spymaster, and Lisette (and Daisy, whose blind and unconscious racism has caused Lisette to leave her until she finally sees how she has not fully accepted the Africans as fully human), manages to find a way to allow all who want it to become citizens of the growing country. This is alternate world building of great complexity, with a marvellously varied cast of interesting characters. Good stuff.

## Short takes

All three recent **Ann Leckie** novels add up to one large narrative arc. *Ancillary Justice*, *Ancillary Sword*, and *Ancillary Mercy* add up to something pretty special, certainly worthy of the many awards they have been nominated for. Everyone knows about them, so I'll leave out my lengthy comments. The character of Breg, the ancillary/AI, is fascinating, as is the galactic cultural history that has shaped her. The 'Imperial Radch' series is a fine addition to the SF tradition.

*All the Birds in the Sky* by **Charlie Jane Anders** (TOR, 2016), came encrusted with rave comments by Michael Chabon, Karen Joy Fowler, Lev Grossman, and Cory Doctorow, so it looked like a good one to try, as I did not know anything about Anders. It is a strange mixture of coming-of-age story, magic fantasy (with its own college of witchcraft) story, near-future science fiction (with its crew of nerds seeking ever further out technology), and eccentric love story. *All the Birds in the Sky* covers a lot of genre ground in its 313 pages, but it manages to assemble all these elements into a unique work of fiction.

*The Time Roads* by **Beth Bernobich** (2014) is an alternate history/time travel/multiple universe fix-up. Not a novel, exactly, but four novellas adding up to a single, if multiply stranded, tale. The queen, her most trusted agent, and a group of mathematicians manage to save the world, in which Eire is a major country with an empire that includes the Anglian Dependencies. Various other powers in Europe and the rest of the world struggle to maintain their positions and gain from others. These tales mix murder mysteries with spy stories, and sets them all in a well-imagined alternate 1890–1914 world. Bernobich creates strong characters with powerful emo-



tional connections, and her writing neatly captures the feel of this (alternate) time.

***Blood and Bone*** by **Ian C. Esslemont** (2012) takes us close to the end of Esslemont's Malazan Empire books — a tying up a number of loose ends. As with most of his novels set in the shared secondary world he and Steve Erikson created, the various actions occur, here, on another (in this case fairly small) continent, at about the same time as the final confrontations of Erikson's ten-volume epic have been taking place. The representations of very different, and sometimes quite disquieting, characters slowly build a whole array of unlike cultures. *Blood and Bone* is another terrific addition to the Malazan

oeuvre.

***The Nightmare Stacks*** by Charles Stross (2016) is another Laundry novel, another high comic horror story narrated with the usual Stross verve. *The Nightmare Stacks* takes a new turn, dropping Bob and Mo while bringing in a new character to deal with a deadly magical attack from another dimension. It also continues to suggest that the world of these tales is approaching some kind of final apocalypse. It's fully up to the comic thriller standard of the rest in the series. Highly literate and well-written entertainment.

— Douglas Barbour, 2017

## Top science fiction and fantasy books of 2017

### Re-reading

Looking back at my reading diary I see I read more fantasy than SF this past year. At a certain point I went into a re-reading mode, but all the re-reads were great, and the novels earned a second (or even third) reading, as they are all suitably complex and nuanced. They included (without further comment) a number of the **Malazan Empire books** by **Steven Erikson** and **Ian C. Esslemont**, to which I admit to being addicted; **Neal Stephenson's** great *Anathem*; some of **Guy Gavriel Kay's** great historical fantasies; **K. V. Johansen's** *Blackdog*; and **William Gibson's** *Spook Country* (with some aperçus that really bite: about the country under another bad president: 'The old man was as American as it got, but in what she thought of as some very recently archaic way. Someone who would've been in charge of something, in America, when grown-ups still ran things.' Inchmale thought that America had developed Stockholm syndrome toward its own government, post 9/11.').

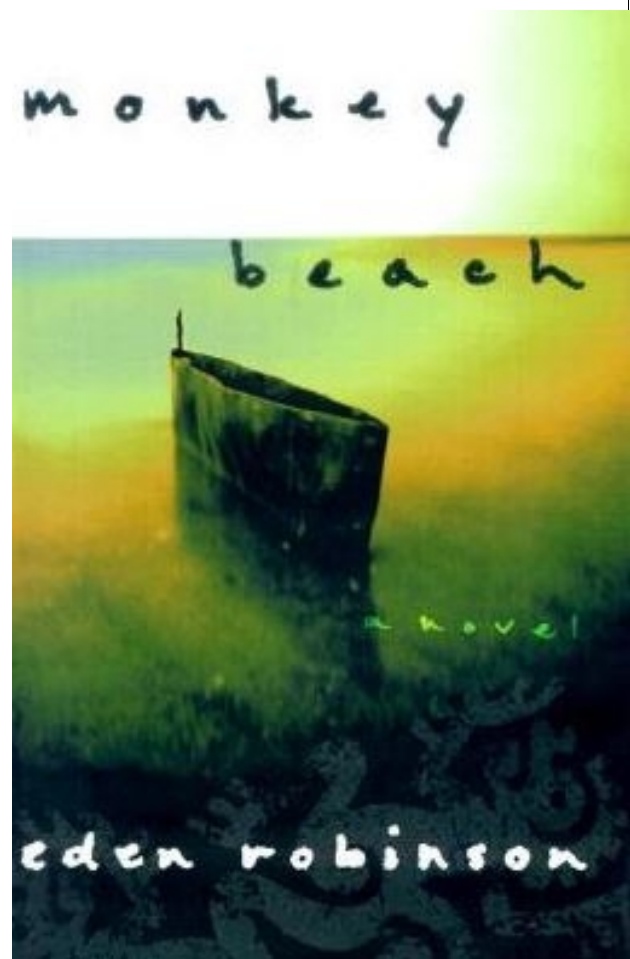
### And so, to the new:

#### ***Monkey Beach***

by **Eden Robinson** (Houghton Mifflin, 2000)

This powerful, magic realist (and best-selling in Canada) novel by a First Nations writer has been sitting in my bookcase for too long. A meditative, tale-containing-tales, coming-of-age, multi-generational, small-epic story, narrated by nineteen-year-old Lisamarie Michelle Hill of the Haisla, it begins in possible (and more than probable) tragedy, when news arrives of a missing gill-netter on which her younger brother Jimmy (17) was working for the first time. Eventually, near the end of the novel, she will finally understand and tell us why he was working on that boat for that captain, Josh, but first she needs to narrate her and her brother's young lives, as well as what she knows, through her loving engagement with them, of the lives of her grandmother Ma-ma-oo and her uncle Mick.

As her parents fly from Kitamat to Vancouver, then back up to Namu (in Area 8), where the boat was last sighted, and she prepares, and then takes her own small boat toward Namu via Monkey Beach, a place of both mystical connections and personal memories for both her and her brother, Lisa remembers. This is a novel soaked in memories, and in the stories within stories that memories contain. As she attempts to deal with the possible death of her brother, Lisa remembers their life, hers as separate, especially in terms of her dealings with Mick (over the first half of the novel, where he is a bit of



# THE LIFECYCLE OF SOFTWARE OBJECTS



TED CHIANG

a wild man and encourages her wildness, calling her 'Monster') and Ma-ma-oo (over the second half of the novel, where she teaches Lisa much about her world), and with their deaths.

It is in these memories that Lisa tells of her sightings — of the little man whose presence always announces someone's death (until she sends him away) and of the ghosts (and perhaps even of the B'gwus (also known as Bigfoot or Sasquatch)), as well as dreams that seem to present real scenes of others' lives. Her Ma-ma-oo tells her that this is a power some Haisla have, but that it can be dangerous. Her parents think it is a psychological problem; they even try to get her into therapy at one point. The novel itself remains ambiguous, although Lisa as narrator believes, and so makes events seem real to the reader.

Lisa often drops into her narration little essays (in SF they would be seen as expository lumps) that at first I found somewhat bothersome. But as she tells of both her poor studying and her grandmother's heart attack, followed by her learning with Ma-Ma-oo all about such things as the heart, these bits of knowledge come to represent her real learning, which she picks up without really realising that she is in various ways being taught important things about the human body as well as Haisla history and legend. All this information slowly accretes as ballast for the imaginative flights involving Lisa's visions.

For a novel so full of violence and loss (Ma-ma-oo's relationship with her husband; what the residential schools did to him and to her uncle and one of her aunts; her own tomboy childhood; her retreat into alcohol and drugs in Vancouver after her grandmother's death; some rapes, etc), *Monkey Beach* is full of humour, love, even grace, as Lisa's memories flit between the violent and the loving, not least all the joyous family gatherings that

mark the major moments in her growing up. It ends in a mystic encounter with her dead, an understanding in dream of why her brother may have killed Josh and may have died trying to swim to shore, but refuses to reach a firm conclusion (Jimmy may or may not be dead; he hasn't turned up; she may have engaged with magical aboriginal spirits; her dreams may be right). Nevertheless, as a powerfully engaging narrative of a young First Nations woman's complex coming-of-age in the midst of wonderful and terrible events, *Monkey Beach* is fantastic.

## ***The Lifecycle of Software Objects*** **by Ted Chiang (Subterranean Press 2010)**

Ted Chiang is primarily a short story writer, and this novella is his longest work. It's a very pure kind of science fictional speculation, and well done, with a rather harsh open ending. There are two main characters, both of whom begin by working for an startup, Blue Gamma, which has been developing *digients*, digital organisms that live in online environments like Data Earth, a huge world of gaming and other activities (somewhat similar to the digital world of *Reamde*), and are capable of being trained and even increasing their learning if treated by their owners as a pet, to be dealt with personally every day. Are they a step toward AI? If so, they would be the first example of providing 'a machine with the best sense organs that money can buy, and then teach[ing] it to understand and speak English. This process could follow the normal teaching of a child. Things could be pointed out and named ...' It would also be a much longer process, and it is this process that Chiang's narrative follows, in the case of a very few people who keep interacting with their digients, as most of those who buy them give up on them, much as many people give up on pets.

Ana, who worked in a zoo and is hired by Blue Gamma because of her experience training apes, and Derek, a graphic artist hired to create the avatars, end up with digients they come to care for. Ana has a little robot figure, Jax, and Derek has the two little bears, Marco and Polo. For awhile, Blue Gamma does very well, but as sales drop off (and they depend on continued sales of additions, such as food and games for the digients, so when people give up on them, they no longer buy the additions), the company goes under, as so many startups do. The owners keep the digients in their world (and occasionally in their robot housings in the 'real' world) as they become less and less important in digital computerised circles, and eventually, because they are old, are unable to move to new platforms when Data Earth also goes under.

Because they are fellow digient owners, Ana and Derek grow close, partly because Derek's wife shows no interest in his interest in the digients, although they are important parts of their lives. Chiang follows the various changes in both the humans and the digients over the period of a decade, revealing the difficulties that accrue after everyone moves to another platform that the digients cannot access, but where many of their human friends made online have gone. In a cool and analytical style, Chiang shows how they do grow, becoming more 'human' (if by human we mean intelligence nearing or



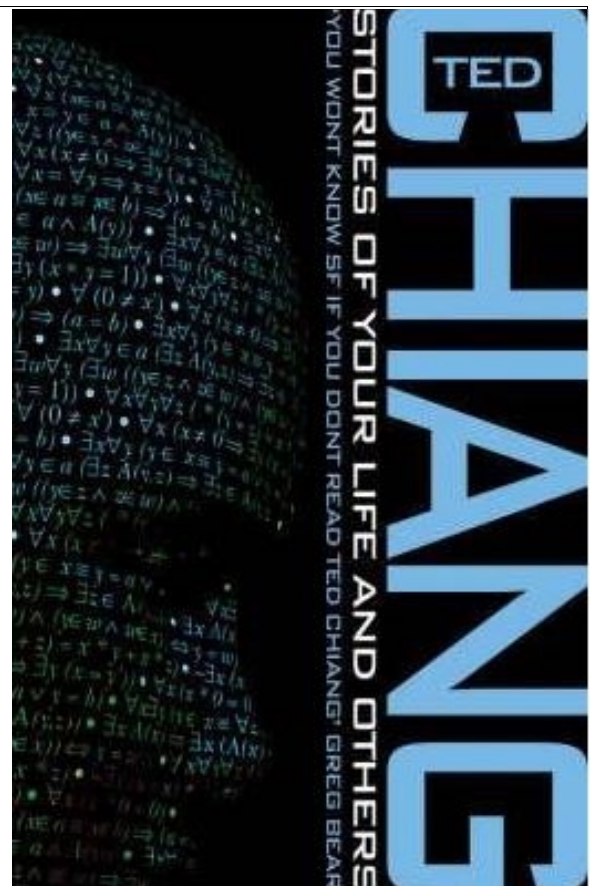
resembling that of humans); and how those few who have maintained relations with their digients have grown more emotionally attached to them.

Binary Desire is a company that seeks to give the digients sex organs and a sex drive in order to market them to a specialised but highly vetted clientele of sexual adventurers. It is willing to pay for the expensive upgrade that would allow the digients into the new platforms. Some of the digients want to agree to this change, although most of their human owners do not. This leads to philosophical and ethical dilemmas, which Chiang registers with necessary complexity. What happens by the end is no real conclusion, but merely a perhaps more stringent change for all, giving no real idea of how it will all work out. For the reader, this is a fine, mind-stretching work.

### ***We Stand on Guard***

**graphic novel by Brian K Vaughan and Steve Skroce (Image Comics, 2016)**

Brian K. Vaughan is a US American, but he seems to have made a study of Canada. This is a dystopian vision of the US, Canada, and the world in 2112 to 2124. In this world Fortress USA is suffering from drought and other afflictions. Whether in response to a sneak attack by Canadian forces or just because it can, it attacks Canada. A family in Ottawa watches as missiles destroy the capital, also killing the parents. Only the teenage boy and his younger sister remain. Move to 2124. The young girl is alone in the Northwest Territories, where she is found by a ragged group of rebels/terrorists. US forces seek to eradicate these few while planning (having already drained the



Great Lakes) to take all the water from Great Slave Lake for the southern US. The rebel leader is captured, and the young woman's final act is as a suicide bomber or resistance fighter as a Canadian patriot. It's a grand epic tale of resistance to an evil empire, but with nuance, as well as a sly reference to the ways people on both sides see similar situations today. The visuals are bright and powerful. Very interesting.

### ***Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang (Tor, 2002)**

I would have thought that I had read some of the stories in this collection, but I couldn't recall even the title story. They're all fascinating: as China Miéville says, 'In Chiang's hands, science fiction really is the "literature of ideas" it is often held to be.' What's interesting is that the ideas are not necessarily the usual SF interesting. In 'Tower of Babylon', he assumes that the cosmology of ancient Babylonian culture is real, then carefully works out a narrative based on it. In 'Seventy-Two Letters', he constructs an alternate Victorian age of scientific discovery based on the creation of golems and the concept of preformation. Once again, he works out the possibilities with a scientific rigour.

The same is true of the other stories: of a mathematic genius almost going mad when she 'proves' mathematics is inconsistent; of a world in which God exists and which He loves, but it's a very tough love, & angels, but terrible things happen when the latter become manifest, and Hell is truly the place He is absent from.

And then there's 'Story of Your Life', which is the most complex, most emotionally satisfying of them all.





In Louise Banks he has created a truly empathic character, one with more emotional and intellectual depth than we usually find in his fiction. The first narrative tells of an encounter with the aliens, the Heptapods, whose written language she begins to unravel. She sees

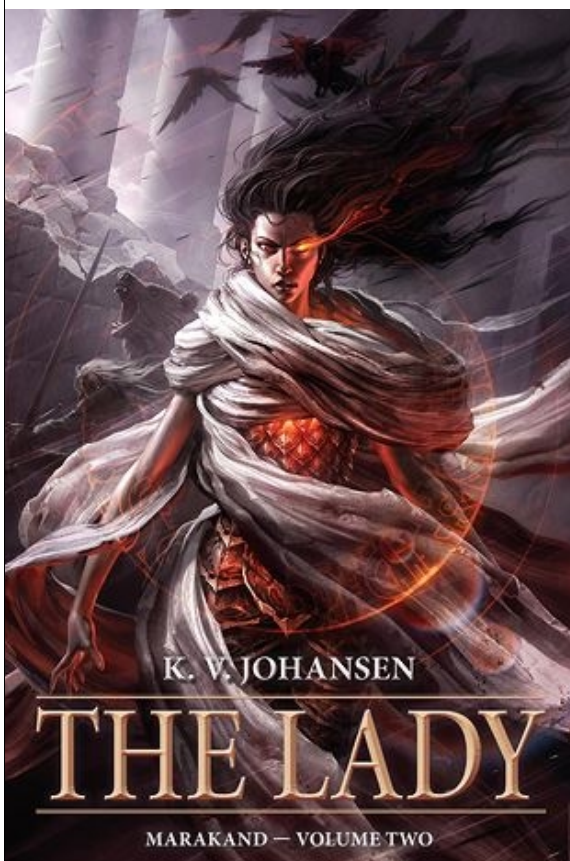
that it is based on a full understanding of all events past, present, and future, whereas human language and thought are based on cause and effect, but not foreknowledge. The other narrative recounts the life of her daughter not yet born. She can tell this story because she has begun to think (a bit) like the aliens, seeing all of an event at once (even when that 'event' is her or her daughter's life). The one is a deeply moving tale of love and loss while the other is a profoundly intellectual adventure. One can't exist without the other.

I began to think Chiang thinks that way too. All the stories have a feeling of inevitability emerging as one reads. Usually, his narrative style assumes an intellectual distance even when his characters go through some dark events, and these stories are solid, well-crafted speculations, but in 'Story of Your Life' he achieves something much greater & more humane.

***The Leopard: Marakand: Volume 1*  
by K. V. Johansen (Pyr, 2014)**

Set in the same world as her first epic fantasy, *Blackdog*, and just a bit later far to the East in the trading city of Marakand at the southern end of the Malagru Mountains, which separate the five deserts from the Praitan dominated lands south of the Forest Kingdom (or what's called the Lands Over-Malagru) and the Five Cities south of there, around the Gulf of Taren (Johansen is expanding this secondary world), *The Leopard* introduces new characters (gods, devils, demons, and people) as well as bringing back some of those we came to know in *Blackdog*.

Johansen weaves together all her narrative threads to



create a fast-moving yet character-driven tale of a wide variety of people.

Johansen has created a fully envisioned world with a long history of the Old Great Gods, who have left the earthly plane, gods and devils at war, lost empires, and a rich and, in terms of the novels, expanding present. She also creates fascinating characters full of contradictions and powerful emotional lives, finding themselves caught up in complicated plots that continually threaten to overwhelm them yet with always the power to make moral choices in the manner in which they respond to what is happening.

***The Lady: Marakand: Volume 2*  
by K. V. Johansen (Pyr, 2014)**

As the title suggests, *Marakand, Volume 2* mostly concerns what happens in Marakand, where the false goddess (demon and dancer) tries to take control of the city while various individuals and factions rebel against her/it. By the end, having accomplished this, various figures, especially the assassin called The Leopard and his Nabban-born servant, are called back to the empire, but a few of the other survivors in Marakand also make ready to take a caravan east, beyond Praitan to Nabban, which will be the setting of the next novel. Johansen is building a wonderfully complex world book by book, both keeping important characters and adding others equally compelling. This is high fantasy of the highest quality.

***Gods of Nabban*  
by K V Johansen (Pyr, 2016)**

This is a much larger novel in this growing series, in which some characters grow to be god-like, others learn to understand and use their power, and new figures emerge in this Empire, both defending it and fighting it.

There are many plots interwoven, and many more lesser figures are introduced, who follow either Ghu, the returned god-to-be, and his closest allies, or the false goddess-empress and hers. Johansen slips easily from one narrative to another, but the Ghu/Ahjvar one is the central one. Ghu comes into his place as a god, but with many checks along the way. At the end there is a surprising revelation of how his human love for Ahjvar, the cursed undying one, leads to his surviving what would otherwise have been his death and the death of his and the older gods' hope for their land. Johansen also delves deeply into the desires, the inner moral growth, of the other major figures, and slowly constructs a compelling tale of revolution.

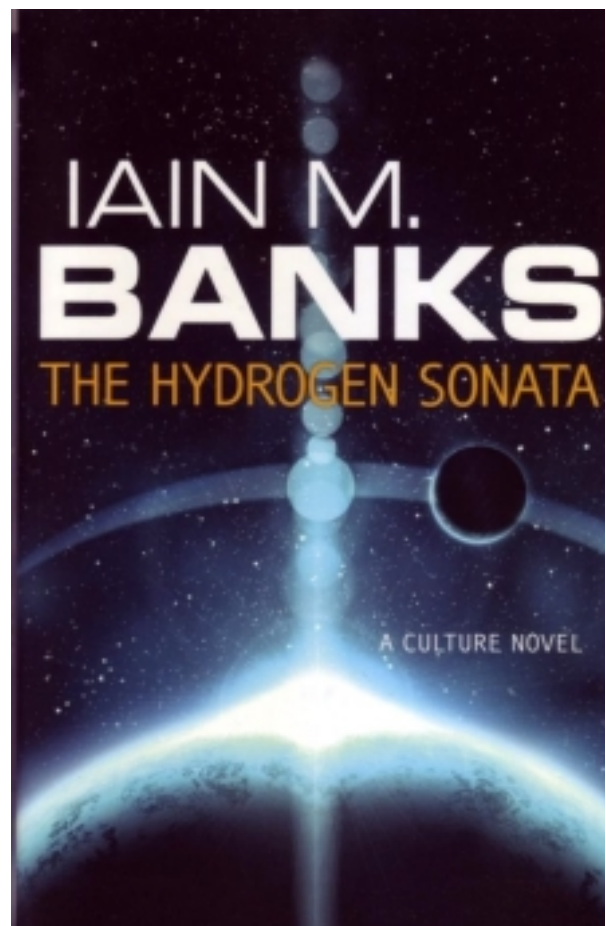
*Gods of Nabban* is both a terrific epic tale that seems to bring to an end a number of the tales of characters we have followed through the previous three novels, leaving open the possibility of following those of a few major characters, should Johansen wish to, and I hope she does. The series so far is one of the best around, not least because beyond its epic stories of the battles of gods and men, but it also offers deeply personal revelations of character. I will happily read any further volume.

***The Hydrogen Sonata*  
by Iain M. Banks (Orbit, 2012)**

*The Hydrogen Sonata* is the late **Iain M. Banks'** final Culture novel. It is well worth the wait — witty, with plenty of Clarke's technology=magic representations of a far future galaxy full of civilisations at various levels of technological (and [multi]cultural) advancement. The Culture ship-minds have an interesting time checking in on whatever's happening anywhere in the galaxy. They sort of oversee without really (but sometimes necessarily) interfering.

As *The Hydrogen Sonata* begins, the Gzilt (who eons ago worked with other groups who eventually formed the Culture, but in the end declined to join it while remaining friendly) are preparing to enter the Sublime (apparently a transcendent site within some further dimensions than the Fourth to which many other civilisations have Sublimed (or is that Sublimated?)). All the people and AIs of this fairly large galactic civilisation will join in a single moment to leave the 'Real' universe for this promised place of transcendence, with celebratory goodbyes from most of the other civilisations in the galaxy. All would seem to be well: the Gzilt have spent centuries debating this move and now the majority have voted to do it; their mentor civilisation, the Zihdren, preceded them eons ago, always with the intent that they would one day, when they had reached a certain level of advancement, follow. They mentor two other less advanced civilisations, to whom they are leaving their advanced technology.

What could go wrong?



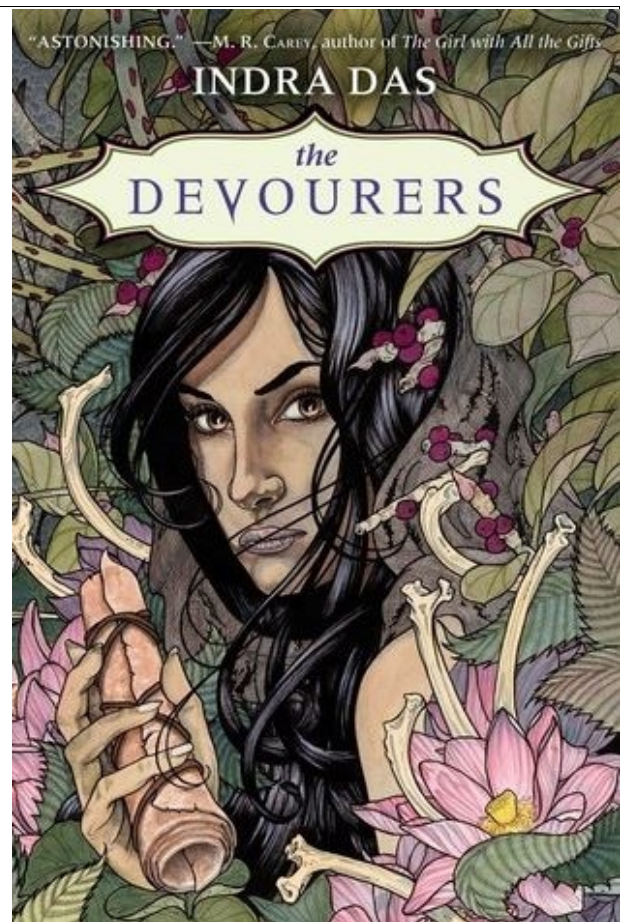


First, a ship representing the Zihdren–Remnanter arrives in Gzilt space with a sealed ‘gift’ to be opened on the day of the ascension, only to be interrogated and then destroyed by a Gzilt warship, the 8<sup>th</sup> *Churken* — which will reappear in later episodes of this multi-layered narrative.

In the second chapter, a four-armed reserve military Gzilt, Vyr Cossont tries to play the hydrogen sonata on an absurd instrument created for it after its composition, again millennia earlier (time scales in the Culture fictional universe are huge). She is not sure if she really wants to Sublime, but is planning to do so with the rest of her (humanoid) people. Suddenly she is picked up and taken to a satellite of another world, the headquarters of her Regiment 14, one of many factions within the Gzilt military. In Chapter 3, the Culture ship, *Mistake Not*, deliberately undefined, and escorting a fleet of the Liseiden, one of the so-called ‘Scavenger species’ chosen by the Gzilt, bored silly by their slowness, picks up a very small disturbance on a distant dead sun in Gzilt space and gets curious. Chapter 4 shows us some of the political factionalism in the top government of the Gzilt, and one leader’s awareness of both the destruction of the Zihdren–Remnanter ship and the possibility that Regiment 14 may know about it, setting in motion a number of deadly plots to prevent that knowledge from becoming public. The *Mistake Not*’s curiosity engages a number of Culture ships in conversation in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the narrative engages the other younger and less advanced species, the Ronte, showing a bit of their hive culture. Now most of the pieces on this narrative chessboard have been put in motion. The multi-threaded narrative that follows is mind-bogglingly complex, clearly articulated, and a delight to get lost in.

Banks masterfully represents the mind sets and mentation of his species and civilisations at different stages of development. He also, with satiric slyness, shows nasty politics in action, mostly among the top Gzilt. Then there are the Culture ship-minds, so advanced as to be beyond description, yet they demonstrate a winning legacy from ‘humanity’ in their chosen names and their continuing to use natural metaphors in their conversations even though they are AIs. Banks represents their conversations at length while reminding us that they take place in microseconds.

There is a very old human of the Culture who may know the secret the Zihdren–Remnanter is bringing to the Gzilt. There is a chance, albeit a small one, that public knowledge of that secret might change the Gzilt’s minds about Subliming — and that is the moral conundrum facing the Culture ships who choose to observe and perhaps interfere with Gzilt activity during the countdown to Subliming. Both Vyr Cossont, who once spent some time with that ancient man, and the *Mistake Not* seek information about where he might be, while another ship with a wakened woman who was once his wife seek him as well. Both these sub-narratives involve quests and some violent encounters, while that of the political and military leaders trying to keep the secret secret assumes a form of a political thriller. Much happens, and although the Gzilt have achieved a technological level near that of the Culture, the latter’s minds have taken their tech far further, as every engagement



between the 8<sup>th</sup> *Churken* and the *Mistake Not* reveals.

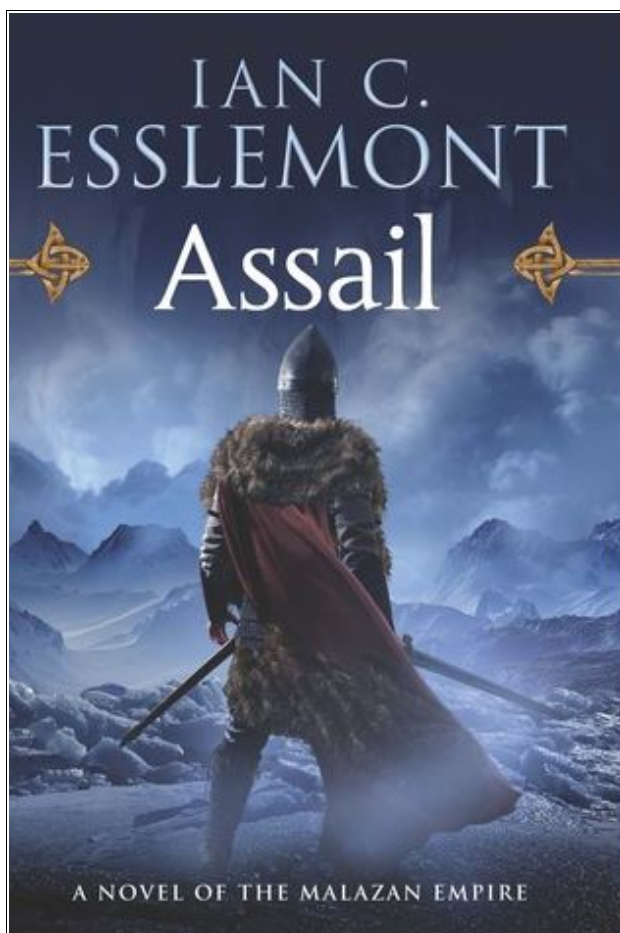
In the end, the secret remains secret and it wouldn’t have changed anything, so it’s a kind of red herring — except it is the little engine that powers the whole delightful apparatus. I enjoyed *The Hydrogen Sonata*. Because it alludes to other Culture novels and the Culture’s history, it makes me want to read the other Culture novels again — especially as I now know there will be no new ones.

### ***The Devourers* by Indra Das (Del Rey, 2015)**

*The Devourers* is a first novel, set in India, offering a new and carefully ‘academic’ and ‘historical’ version of ‘werewolves’ or rather, shape-shifters. It is narrated by a youngish historian, Alok, who meets a stranger who turns out to be more strange than he could imagine. The stories within stories begin. While telling Alok that he is a ‘half-werewolf’ the stranger tells a tale that Alok seems to experience. They meet again, and Alok narrates a bit of his own life, how he is alone now because he and his fiancée broke up, and how that isolation makes him the perfect scholar to type up the scrolls the stranger gives him after making him experience another story of his past history, or rather that of his ‘parents’.

Das has constructed a history of non-human tribes of shape-shifters, who all begin as human (they cannot reproduce as humans do) and yet become monsters who see humans as their natural prey. The two scrolls (made of human skin) tell the tales of his father, originally from northern Europe, and his mother, fascinating character





studies as well as horror tales. Then at the end, the two travel together to where the stranger was 'born' into his life as a monster. He tells his tale, then ... Does he consume Alok, or merely insert his life into our narrator's through sexual congress, or ...?

I could write at length about each tale, for they are finely wrought, but it's enough to say this is a fascinating new take on the shape-shifter legend, offering us a fully developed history of them across the world, but mostly in India. I think some further editing would have made this novel even better, but it's good, and definitely different from the other books I've been reading recently.. The title is a finely judged name for these monsters we imagine — or, asks the historian before being devoured by these tales, not.

### ***Assail***

**by Ian C. Esslemont (Tor, 2014)**

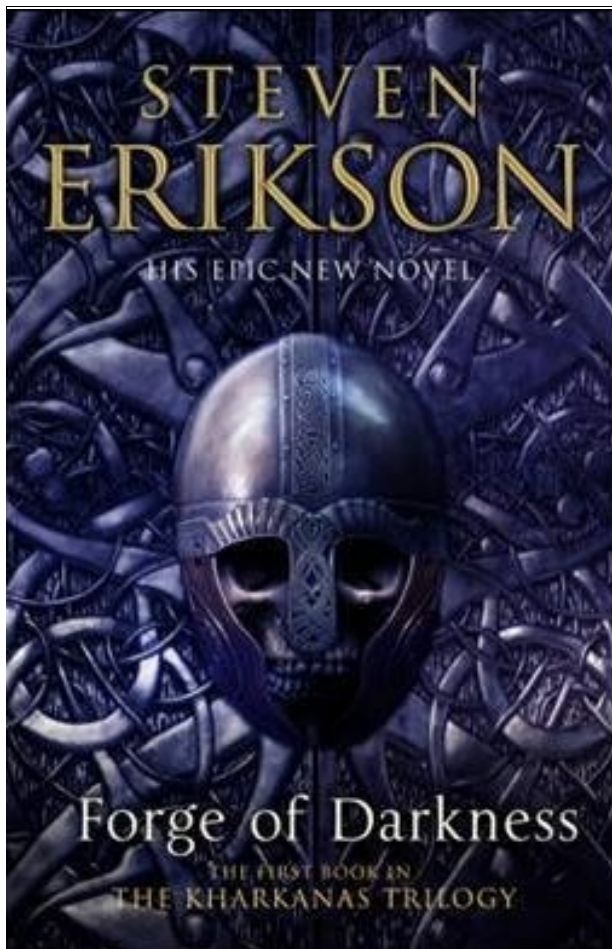
Subtitled 'The Final Novel of the Malazan Empire' *Assail* is a highly complex narrative tapestry weaving together a number of individual stories, all centred on the continent of Assail, which is more than it appears (and has appeared slightly in earlier novels), and almost all featuring figures Esslemont and Erikson have presented in earlier Malazan novels. The main characters now find themselves moving toward the frozen north of this country, a site of older communities and more than one ancient war, still being fought, or able to be renewed.

The novel begins with a Prologue set 33,500 years and 6000 years before Burn's Sleep, which is some time

before the actual time of the narrative. Many of the figures in *Assail* have had active adventures in earlier novels by both writers, notably various of the Crimson Guard, serving more than ordinary lifetimes under their Oath, Fisher the Bard, Kyle, who was part of the Guard for awhile, Silverfox, the T'lan Imass Summoner, Cartheron Crust, an old Malazan ex-High Fist, and possibly Malle, also once a Malazan Claw. They share various quests into the northern reaches of Assail, rumoured to be full of gold and thus drawing many seekers from more advanced cultures.

Some are coming home, like Fisher; others are seeking answers, like Shimmer, Second in Command of the Crimson Guard; some, like Kyle, are drawn to find a family that has sort of adopted him; others are part of the gold rush. There is an anonymous Tiste Andii (who is much more than he seems or knows) and a number of the main figures from old and dying tribes. As Fisher says, 'Any subsistence society, even one that is small scale horticultural, cannot possibly stand against the invasion of a full-scale agricultural society. The inequity in numbers is simply too great. The locals find themselves swamped every time. If not in one generation, then in two or three. Such has been the story for every region of human migration and settlement. Even regions that boast of themselves as "pure" or "native" stand upon the bones of forgotten predecessors.' Many meet near the end, after various dark and violent adventures while getting there, in the ice fields of the far north, where they must find a way to prevent the Forkrul Assail from emerging and attacking the world once again. How they manage this is the (one) conclusion to the novel (and to the Malazan Empire story); another takes place further South, where various characters join to protect a town and its inhabitants, and a case is made for the benefits of an Empire like the Malazan one, even given all the negatives, especially political corruption, that accompany imperialist conquest.

To describe all the ins and outs of these interwoven narrative strands would take almost as much space as the bloody novel. Suffice to say that Esslemont handles it all expertly, with wit and grace. Reading this final book, I note something always there in both writers' novels. The psychology of the characters is comprehensibly 'human', but a lot of them, in their ability to survive and fight on, are almost superhuman (often because of magic, or some kind of supernatural aid/input). They are heroes, as in legend and myth, already a part of ancient tales. Achieving that sense of epic, mythic narrative seems to have been something E. and E. sought from the beginning, and found ways to achieve throughout the 16 huge books about the Malazan Empire and the world during that period, with all its huge history bearing down upon every important individual's actions. Finishing *Assail*, I want immediately to start over with *The Gardens of the Moon*, partly to rediscover various characters' earlier tales, partly because I love getting lost in this magnificent world. *Assail* is a fitting end to the two writers' series, and a marvelous multiplex tale on its own.



***Forge of Darkness (The Kharkanas Trilogy, Book 1)*  
by Steven Erikson (Bantam, 2012)**

Both Erikson and Esslemont have begun new (shorter) series set before the time of the Malazan Empire, the latter with *Dancer's Lament*, the beginning of the story of the men who became Dancer and the Emperor Kallanved, the former with this dark (eventually literally) tale from the deep past (many hundreds of thousands of years) dealing with the Tiste in their country (space, world, warren?) of Kurald Galain, bordering on the countries of other First Peoples such as the Jaghut (not yet hunted to their destruction but already having chosen to deny the civilisation of cities, and so living in proud isolation from one another and from all others), the Azathanai (more like gods than most mortals and having something to do with the Azath Houses found in later times), and the people who will become the T'lan Imass, and others (some gods to come).

*Forge of Darkness* features a number of intertwined narratives, stories of rebellion, dishonour, assassination, the coming of new gods, certain young people being taught and perhaps learning something to see them survive the(ir) future(s), and especially the coming civil war (which will split various cadres of the Tiste off from Mother Dark. Many of these narratives engage figures

who are still around in the Malazan Empire books: Anomander (named First Son by Mother Dark), Silchas Ruin, his brother, Draconus, and various of the Azanathai, especially Caladan Brood. The tale, we are told, is told by the poet Galan (who has therefore lived very long) to Fisher kel Tath. And as he says, 'There are no singular tales.' But there are different kinds of tales. E. & E. write epic fantasy, as others define it, but I would say the term needs nuanced definition: the 16 books of the Malazan Empire are epic legendary; this seems to be epic mythic, at least in its implications, even if the narration keeps mainly to the ordinary, 'human' level: the Tiste are not human as the people of the world are in the time of the Malazan Empire, but they live and love and die as humanly (that is in terms of narration).

There are Anomander and his brothers Silchas Ruin and Andarist (about to wed the beautiful Enesdi of House Enes). They, like many in the story, are of the noble class (and class counts, as most of the nobility look down upon and hate the upstart Consort to Mother Dark, Draconus). There are priests and priestesses, officers and soldiers, and some children. All have their own stories, and as they enter the stories of others they rise or fall, survive or die.

The General who led the successful wars against the Forulkan and then against the shape-shifting Jheleck now sits alone at home studying arcane texts, his army disbanded. But some of his officers are unhappy about how they've been treated and seek recompense and, for some of them, a revolution.

Out at the borderlands, something has come out of the Vitri, that sea of deathly liquid, and it becomes T'riss, possibly an Azanathai, certainly a power. Many characters deal with the repercussions of that, both at the frontier and back in the Citadel in Kharkanas, the Tiste capital. Draconus takes his illegitimate son, Arathan, on a long journey into Azanathai, then Jaghut lands to protect himself and his son.

A Jaghut with the only Tiste hostage ever, a young woman, also takes her on a pilgrimage, ending up with Draconus and Arathan at the Lord of Hate's home; Gotho's, as it turns out. When some of these figures appear in the earlier written Malazan novels they are huge, almost godlike (certainly 'ascended'), and legendary presences (for example, not only Anomander, but all his Tiste are magically invested assassins, though still mortal in that they can be killed), but in this time and place they are ordinary people, possibly beginning to assume some of the powerful magic they have later, but not fully aware of what such power is or means. Perhaps some will understand by the end of the trilogy.

By the end of *Forge of Darkness*, many have died, some brutally, families have broken, dissolved, and civil war has begun, even if those in charge on both sides have sought to prevent it. That will be the tale of the next volume.

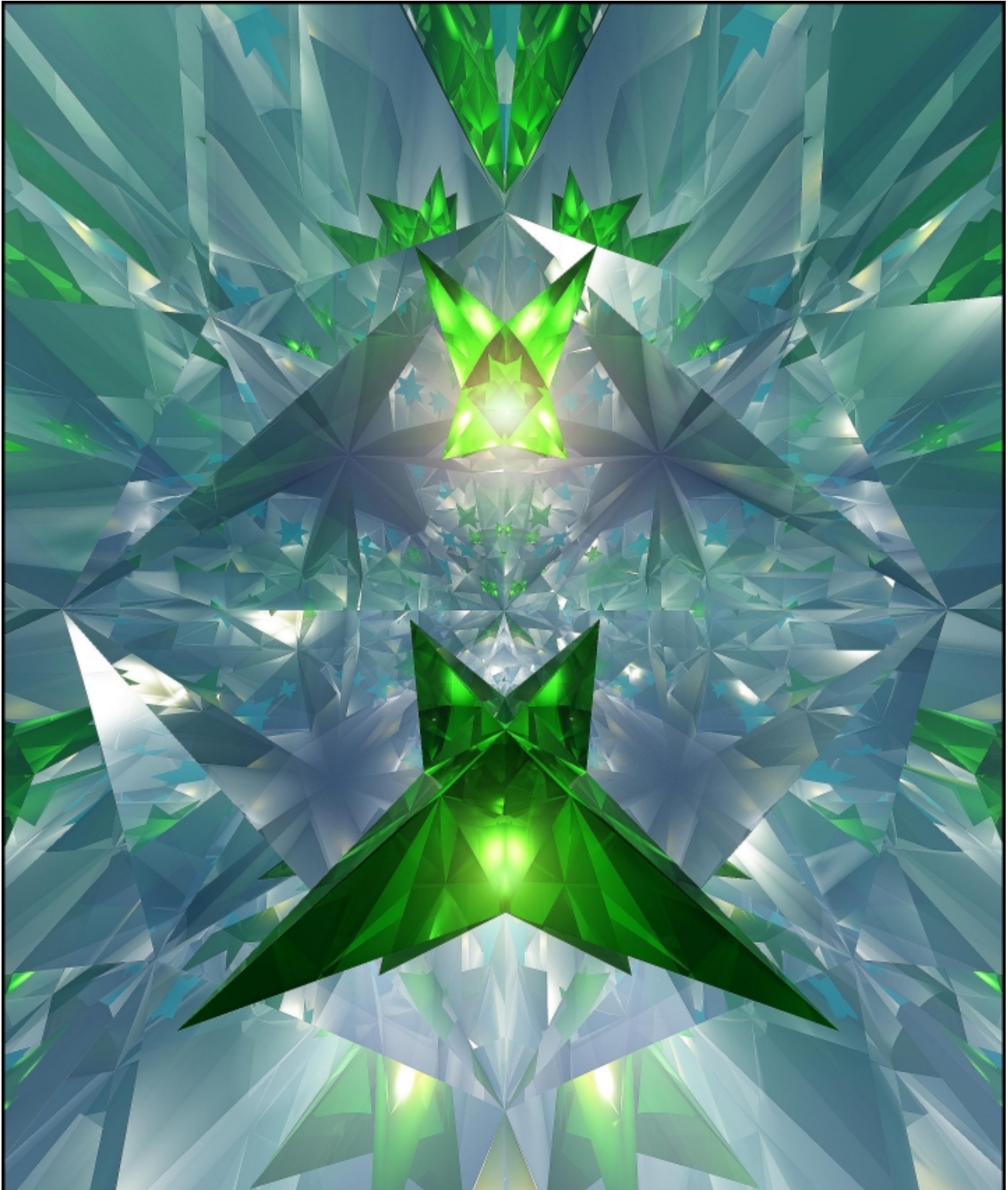
— Doug Barbour, January 2018



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