

Perryscope 29



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Cover photograph by Perry Middlemiss, Bendigo, July 2022.

INTRODUCTION

Immediately after Chengdu in China was announced as the host city for the 2023 World Science Fiction Convention I was probably a 80-20 chance of attending. I like the idea that the Worldcon pays attention to the “World” part of its name and have aimed to attend and support such conventions when they are located in non-traditional countries, ie not the UK or North America, when I can.

But now, about 8 months out from the start of the convention I have definitely decided that I won't be attending. There are a number of reasons for that, which I'll get to.

I was aware of all of the arguments for not attending a Worldcon in China, such as their government's treatment of ethnic minorities, their authoritarian rule over Hong Kong, etc etc. And I certainly did consider those arguments. They were the points that had me at a position of “not certain” in the first instance. But my aim in attending was to support the local Chinese sf community rather than the Chinese government. If I were to boycott a Chinese Worldcon on the basis of their government's actions, then it would have been reasonable to suggest that people boycott an Australian Worldcon on basis of ours, either the current one for its detention of asylum seekers, or previous ones for their treatment of Indigenous Australians. If one argument held true, then so did the other. I'm sure similar points could be made about any other Western country as well. They swayed me but not enough to definitively reject any thought of attendance.

Then the actual problem of entering the country started to become an issue. I was in no way going to spend 7-14 days, or whatever it was, in quarantine prior to the convention starting. So until the Chinese Government changed that policy I wasn't going. Nor did their policy of “COVID zero” help. Sudden lock-downs for days or weeks without warning are not conducive to travel. I'm not that desperate to attend that I would put up with a week in a dodgy hotel staring at the walls, at my expense. Now it appears that that policy is being relaxed, but the situation is not improved by the poor Chinese vaccine efficacy, nor by the adequacy of their hospital and medical facilities. The question of casual infection is also a bigger issue when it comes to crowds, of which there would be many in China.

I had to make a decision sooner or later and decided to land on the side of not attending. I figured the risks were just too great to justify any attendance. As much as I would have gone in better circumstances I just can't justify the risks at this time. I hope it goes well for them.

WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING LATELY – A Few Days in the Country – Part 1

Tuesday...

If you head north out of Melbourne along the Hume Highway, and keep on driving for about two and a half hours, past the new commuter township of Wallan, past Seymour and past Benalla, you'll eventually get to the turnoff to the small town of Glenrowan, site of Ned Kelly's Last Stand. And if you then drive into the middle of town, past the current roadworks, turn left over the railway bridge, past the wooden statues indicating the layout of that fateful shootout, left again at the T-intersection and then drive for 5 or 6 kilometres to the west of Glenrowan along the Upper Taminick Road, you'll eventually get to the cellar door of Baileys (no apostrophe) of Glenrowan. That was to be the start of our four-day wine tour through North-Eastern Victoria in December 2022.

My wife and daughter had decided, some months back, that they would like to visit the island of Samoa, in the South Pacific, for my daughter's upcoming birthday. Neither my son nor I were invited; it was to be a girls-only week of lying in the sun and generally relaxing. So I, being a retired gent, decided I'd head off out of town as well and contacted Julian Warner and Lucy Sussex to see if they were interested in visiting the Rutherglen wine district in North-East Victoria, and some nearby locations. Julian is currently taking up his long-service leave in preparation for possible, maybe, retirement. Lucy works from home and was keen on getting out of town for a while as well, especially as I'd be doing all the driving. And Julian is always a free square when it comes to winery tours.

Glenrowan is a primary stop on the way north to Rutherglen. There are only two cellar doors now on the outskirts of town: Baileys and Booth's. Last time I was here, in 2018, there were three, in the early-1990s there were four. Harry Tinson started HJT Wines there sometime in the 1980s after retiring from his wine-making work at Baileys. He kept producing the big, hefty reds that are a hallmark of Baileys, and worked there with his daughter. She took over after Harry died but by the mid-1990s the winery was no more, probably stymied by a poor location leading to poor sales. Auldstone Cellars were still operating when I was last in the area in 2018, but were in the process of trying to sell. On this visit we noted that the property was now given over to horse agistment. We were to learn later that some of the vines had been pulled and the rest were just being left to their own devices as the new owners weren't interested in them. A great pity.

Baileys, on the other hand, just keeps rolling on along. The first vines were planted here in 1866 and the winery established in 1870. The Bailey family sold the business in the early 1970s but the wine traditions continued. I've always liked Baileys. They tend to the medium heavy reds with quite a lot of flavour, and also produce a couple of excellent fortified Muscats and Topaques. This is a rather dead time of year for the wineries, visitor-wise. We



found out we were the first customers of the day, two hours after the doors opened, and I doubt they would be expecting many more. It was mid-week, a Tuesday, and outside holidays. So the only ones touring are strays like us, and Julian and I had a pleasant time chatting to the cellar door attendant. Julian generally sips and spits, and I followed suit this trip, asking for very small samples, as I was driving. At most cellar doors these days you only get to taste what's been pre-set, but on slow days, such as this, with Julian and I showing a bit more knowledge of the wines than would be usual for casual drop-ins, we were offered tastings across the full range.

After Baileys the road took us about another five or six kilometres over to Booth's, also referred to as Taminick Cellars. This is old-school wine making. There is no elaborate cellar door here. It's situated in a wine storage shed that must be well over a 100 years old, solid stone walls, white-washed, wooden beams holding up a corrugated-iron roof, lots of cobwebs in the corners and the tasting held on a trestle sitting on a couple of wine barrels. Rustic, and wonderful. The reds here tend to a bit more oompf that those at Baileys. The range isn't as great, but the prices are ridiculously low: \$18 for their standard Shiraz that is way better than a lot of \$35 brands that I have tried elsewhere. I bought a few; had them shipped.



We'd booked into a motel in the middle of Rutherglen and aimed to get there mid-afternoon. The GPS lady on my phone steered us back over the range of hills to the west of Glenrowan to the road that took us through Wangaratta with its bucolic smells of old pig farts, through the centre of town and back onto the Hume Highway. Another 30 minutes down the road and the signs had us turning left past Springhurst and then north as we drove on for another 30 minutes to the township of

Rutherglen, coming up to their iconic sign at the east end of the main town drag.

After checking into the motel, Lucy decided to have a rest and stayed behind while Julian and I headed further west along the Murray Valley Highway to that most distant of Rutherglen wineries, Warrabilla. Most wine drinkers might have ranked Baileys red, from earlier in the day, as rather heavy, but you can't do that if you compare them to the wines on offer here. The bulk of the reds – shiraz, cabernet, and durif – start at 15% alcohol content and then head north of that mark. Rutherglen is



definitely a hot climate wine-growing district and it shows here as much as anywhere else. More purchases.

We had hoped to drop in to Stanton & Killeen winery on the way back to the motel as our last stop but Julian noted that in all the times he'd been to Rutherglen he had never been to Lake Moodemere Estate, and as we would be passing he thought we should give it a try. I'm always up for looking at a new winery and similarly had never been to this one before.



Things didn't start well for us. The cellar door attendant was the matriarch of the family,

married to the wine-maker, and mother to the vineyard manager. She was most pleased to be able to note that their estate was North-East Victoria's first and only sustainable



vineyard. Julian made some comment about other vineyards and their attempts to achieve the same certification, and she completely misunderstood. Our tasting was a little cool after that, at least until the wine-maker wandered through and she left us with him.

By the time we had finished there we were coming up towards five o'clock, closing time for most cellar doors. So back to the motel for a bit of a rest, and then sausages and steak on the barbeque for dinner, just finishing in time before the rain started. I skipped the wine and

had a beer. It seemed like the semi-sensible thing to be doing.

I slept well.

Wednesday...

Most cellar doors in the region open at 10am so we had a bit of a sleep-in, then Lucy and I headed off down the main street of Rutherglen for breakfast while Julian stayed in bed. It wasn't my aim to drink a lot in any tastings during the day but I still wanted something in the stomach before hitting the first hefty reds of the day.

Before heading north from Melbourne I had contacted our mutual friend Mark Loney to see if he wanted to join us in Rutherglen. Mark lives in Canberra, about four hours drive away, normally. Mark had some family obligations on the Tuesday and had decided to experiment by renting an electric vehicle, hoping to get to Rutherglen around lunch time on Wednesday.

In the meantime, we had some cellar doors to open.

First up was Stanton & Killeen, which we'd missed the night before. As much as I appreciate S&K's reds I was really there to purchase 25 litres of bulk muscat for my barrel at home. My family gave it to me for my 40th birthday and it had been empty, or nearly empty, for most of this year. This is not a good situation for a wine barrel to be in as they tend to dry out and start to crack. The only feasible solution is to fill it with some form of liquid to keep the staves moist. And my favourite form of liquid here is Muscat. I tried a couple of other things on offer but didn't buy anything. The Muscat made a big enough dent in the credit card.

Lucy wasn't tasting much and she and I had had a discussion previously about whether she should be ready to drive my car between wineries. I figured it was the possible driving that stopped her but later realised that she just wasn't that interested in tasting wine on this trip. Her intention was just to enjoy the countryside. And that seemed like a quite reasonable thing to be doing.



We heard from Mark. The electric vehicle he had rented was not getting the range that he had been quoted and he found himself having to re-charge more often than he'd planned. Latest ETA was now mid-afternoon. Even through the text messages he didn't sound happy.

Andrew Buller's family winery was sold some years back and he's now started a new establishment down the side road from Stanton and Killeen. We had visited there on our last trip and I'd enjoyed their fortified wines, so a return visit was justified. By this time a lot of the early conversations we were having in the wineries were about the weather – Rutherglen got hit by major storm damage in January 2022 – and the impact the year's wet conditions had had on the vines, specifically causing a large increase in the incidence of downy mildew. The parasites that cause this can have a devastating effect on grapes on vines and unless it is kept under control with rigorous spraying may mean the total loss of a year's crop. Everyone in the region was having trouble with it. And everyone seemed to be talking about it.

I again picked up a few bottles of the fortified, plus a bottle of their sparkling shiraz. This last seems to be gaining a bit in popularity with winemakers in Rutherglen. A few years back you might have one or two winemakers putting out their versions, now they nearly all seemed to be doing it. As long as the base wine is of good quality and the final wine is dry I'm willing to try any of them. However, I still think there is one winemaker in the region that does a better job of this than anyone else and we would be visiting him later that afternoon.

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Andrew Buller always has a reputation for being a bit of a talker, which is good as it makes for an agreeable time at the cellar door. He wasn't around this day – off at a winemakers' meeting somewhere – but his wife filled in and she was quite happy to have a long chat as well. I was getting the impression that all cellar doors had been receiving only small numbers of recent visitors and that any excuse for a chat was welcomed.

Further texts from Mark Loney indicated he was still struggling with his battery charging, though his ETA hadn't changed.

By the time we had finished at Buller's it was time for lunch, so we took a short drive over the river into New South Wales to have a wander around Corowa. Julian had visited the Corowa distillery in the past few years and thought their wares were, as yet, way too young to bother with, so we skipped that and just headed into town for a walk and a toasted sandwich.



Julian wanted to drop into All Saints winery on the way back into Rutherglen. I was happy to oblige but have never found their wares to my liking. Just a matter of taste I suspect. Texts from Mark were showing his increasing levels of frustration by this time. It seemed he could barely make it from one EV charging station to another on the Hume Highway and he wasn't going to be in Rutherglen until around 4pm. We decided to carry on.



To Cofield for a few more sparkling red tastings and then it was on to Anderson's, my favourite of the Rutherglen wineries and a place I'd been buying from since the mid-1990s. Howard Anderson was previously a sparkling wine maker with Seppelt's in Great Western, original home of the sparkling red. He'd started planting his vines in Rutherglen in the late 1980s and released his earliest wines around 1992. I discovered him in about 1995, and joined his wine club a few years later, thereby receiving a dozen wines from him twice a year. I like to drop in to say hello, have a chat and try his new wines whenever I'm in the area. There is usually something here that I want more of, but not this year; I was getting near the point of having too much.

We decided on a coffee back in town while we waited on Mark's arrival and it was while we were drinking that that we heard from him

again. He was stuck in Albury at a charging station and wouldn't be able to join us until just before the dinner that we had booked that evening. His four-hour drive had turned into something closer to eight by the time we caught up with him later that afternoon. We got all the sordid details over a beer at the Star Hotel and then a fine meal at Tuileries restaurant in the middle of Rutherglen. Mark's story left none of us impressed; either with the maker of the electric vehicle, nor the rental company that misled him about the car's range. The only saving grace for his trip was that it was a mild summer's day. The car's manual had noted that it was not advisable to use the air conditioning for extended periods as that would drain the battery faster! Hardly a strong selling point for use on Australian roads. The EV industry would appear to have a lot of work to do.

[To be continued...]

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING, co-hosted with David Grigg

Notes from this period's podcasts

Episode 83: (22 November 2022) *And what does this one look like?*

David and I review and discuss a couple of novels we received from Text Publishing (*Limberlost* and *Day's End*). I also reviewed these novels in this issue and in the previous one. We

were then joined by Chong, who happens to have been the cover artist for both books. And I noticed a very interesting aspect to the Disher cover that Chong was not aware of.



Episode 84: (13 December 2022) *Heading towards the end of the year*

This episode David and I chat about what we've been reading lately: mostly novels, some old and some new. I talk about one particular find and later we briefly mention some other novels and some non-fiction as well.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at twochairs.website, or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.

Home is a place in the mind. When it is empty, it frets. It is fretful with memory, faces and places and times gone by. Beloved images rise up in disobedience and make a mirror for emptiness. Then what resentful wonder, and what half-aimless seeking? It is a silly state of affairs. It is a silly creature that tries to get a smile from even the most familiar and loving shadow. Comical and hopeless, the long gaze back is always turned inward.

— **The Visitor** by Maeve Brennan, p8

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – Anth: Anthology; Aust: Australian; Gdn: Guardian 1000; Nvla: novella;
Trans: translated.

July 2022 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Day's End</i>	Garry Disher	Crime	Nov 19		4.3	2022	Aust
<i>The Visitor</i>	Maeve Brennan	Lit	Nov 28		4.6	2001	Nvla
<i>A Bookshop in Algiers</i>	Kaouther Adimi (translated by Chris Andrews)	Lit	Nov 29		3.9	2017	Trans
<i>Amos Barton</i>	George Eliot	Lit	Dec 2		3.3	1857	
<i>Thor, God of Thunder, Vol. 1 : The God Butcher</i>	Jason Aaron (writer) Esad Ribic (illustrator)	Graphic novel	Dec 2		3.9	2013	
<i>Last Bus to Woodstock</i>	Colin Dexter	Crime	Dec 5		3.4	1975	
<i>Thor, God of Thunder, Vol. 2 : The God Butcher</i>	Jason Aaron (writer) Esad Ribic (illustrator)	Graphic novel	Dec 2		3.7	2013	
<i>Orbit 4</i>	ed Damon Knight	Sf	Dec 6		3.1	1968	Anth
<i>Hull Zero Three</i>	Greg Bear	Sf	Dec 7		3.0	2010	
<i>The Shape of Water</i>	Andrea Camilleri (translated by Stephen Sartarelli)	Crime	Dec 7		3.4	1994	Trans
<i>Travels With My Aunt</i>	Graham Greene	Lit	Dec 11		4.0	1969	Gdn
<i>New Writings in SF-5</i>	ed John Carnell	Sf	Dec 18		2.4	1965	Anth
<i>Great Granny Webster</i>	Caroline Blackwood	Lit	Dec 21		3.6	1977	
<i>The Talented Mr. Varg</i>	Alexander McCall Smith	Crime	Dec 23		3.4	2020	

Books read in the period: 14

Yearly total to end of period: 83

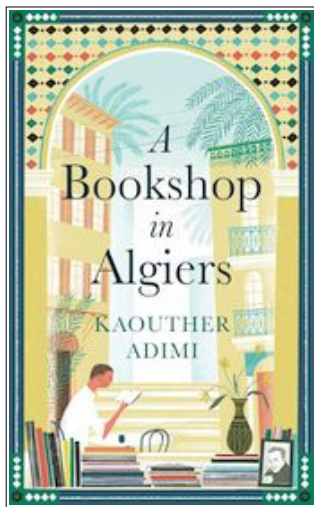
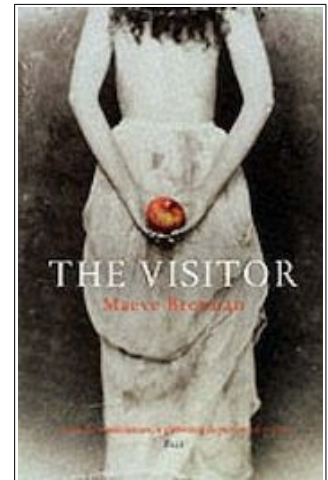
Reading targets achieved: 12 Australian books

Notes:

Day's End (2022) – see major review below.

This fanzine acknowledges the members of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which it is produced in Hawthorn, Victoria, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

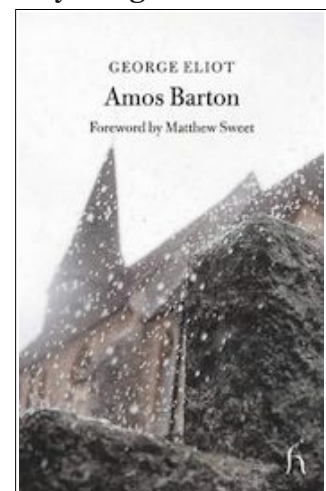
The Visitor (2001) – I knew that I had heard Maeve Brennan’s name before I picked up this small volume in the local library, but I can’t recall when or in what context. Then, in the week before I read this, the good people on the **Backlisted** podcast featured Brennan’s work in an episode, and I knew I had to read it. Twenty-two-year-old Anastasia King has returned to her grandmother’s house in Dublin from Paris after the death of her mother. There the household is still in mourning for the death of her late father, her grandmother’s only child, some years previously. This novella follows Anastasia’s attempts to integrate herself into Dublin and her grandmother’s affections while also trying to find her way in this new world. Resentment, loss, grief, longing and sorrow are the bedrocks on which this story is built to great effect. Originally written in the 1940s this languished in a publisher’s drawer until it was discovered in a library archive and published to great acclaim, all of which is justified. Brennan is a very observant and creative writer, though not one you’d consider flashy. The prose is subtle but very deep; things are more hinted at and hidden by many surface layers rather than being spelt out in fine detail. This is a small gem of a work, and it is a pity that there are only another two short story collections of her fiction, plus a collection of her writings for *The New Yorker*. R: 4.6/5.0



A Bookshop in Algiers (2017) – Originally published in French in 2017, translated by Chris Andrews and published in English in 2020. In 1936, in Algiers, Edmond Charlot opens a small bookshop. Eighty years later, another young man named Ryad, travels from Paris to Algiers tasked with cleaning out the old shop and disposing of its contents. The book is told in two streams, one following the notebooks of Charlot from 1935 to 1961 as he expands his bookshop and in book publishing, meeting and working with Albert Camus, being drafted into the army and finally ending up living and working in Paris. The second details Ryad’s problems in Algeria and his interactions with the bookshop’s community in 2017, none of whom seem very interested in books but are nostalgic for the bookshop itself. This is a story about a man who will do anything for his love of books, and the people who read and write

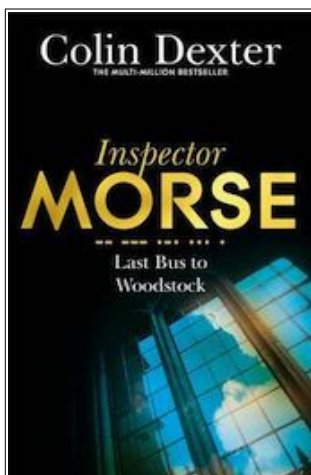
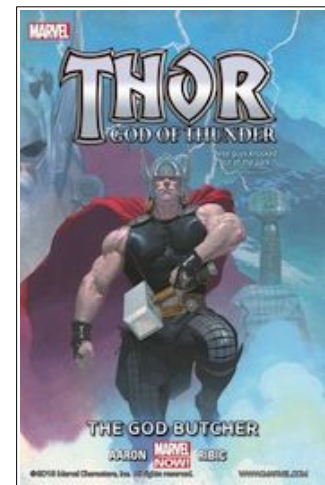
them. It also presents a view of the colonial attitudes of mid-twentieth century French governments, which is very different to the picture-postcard view we get of metropolitan France. Read it for a picture of colonial North Africa, and read it if you suffer from bibliophilia. R: 3.9/5.0

Amos Barton (1857) – Otherwise known as **The Sad Fortunes of Reverend Amos Barton**, this is #1 in the author’s Scenes of Clerical Life series, and is the first piece of published fiction by this author. Amos Barton, of the title, is the new curate in the small English village of Shepperton. His stipend is inadequate and he finds himself having to beg for funds from various local benefactors. Added to that he later finds himself the host of a local



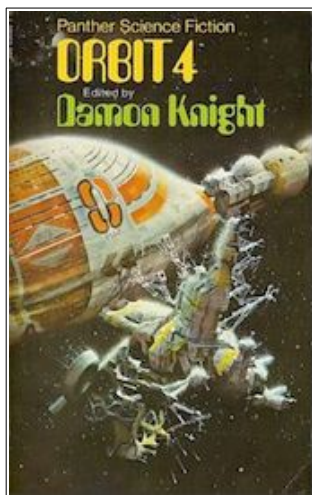
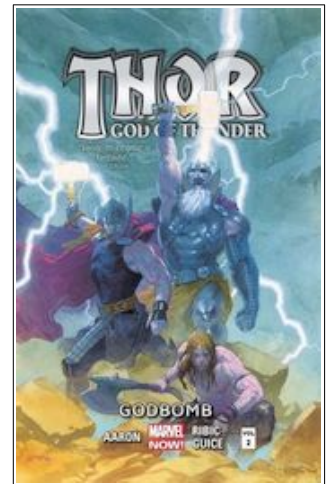
Countess (a young widow of an elderly Polish aristocrat) who has left the home of her brother after he took up with her maid, and things for poor Amos steadily go from bad to worse. The omniscient narrative voice is quite strong here as Eliot slowly gives her opinions about the town, its inhabitants and the general state of the church. It took me a while to get into the cadence of the prose but it is worth persevering here as the work is quite funny, in a black sort of way, when you get into it. Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) knows how to skewer her characterisations of the locals, across all classes, though her descriptions seem to tend more towards what people are “not”, rather than what they “are” which required me to re-read a number of sentences. Nevertheless, I enjoyed my first encounter here with “George Eliot”. R: 3.3/5.0

Thor, God of Thunder, Vol. 1 : The God Butcher (2013) – This volume collects the comics **Thor : God of Thunder #1-5** and forms part of the original material that was incorporated into the screenplay for the Marvel Cinematic Universe film **Thor: Love and Thunder**. Thor discovers that there is a creature in the universe determined to destroy all gods. As he follows the trail of destruction across worlds he joins forces with his younger self, who escaped the butcher in 893 AD, and with his far-future self in the devastated halls of Asgard. Gorr, the God Butcher of the title, is brutal but considers his actions justified, and, to some extent, you can appreciate his arguments, if not his actions. Yes, it’s completely over the top, but the writing here is much more sophisticated than you would expect and the artwork is really of a quality matched by the publication. This is not the Marvel of the 1960s or even 1970s: the characters are more fleshed out, and the plot is far more detailed than the normal bash-and-crash of earlier times. R: 3.9/5.0



Last Bus to Woodstock (1975) – #1 in the author’s series of crime novels featuring Inspector Morse. I found it very difficult to read this novel without visualising the late actor John Thaw as Chief Inspector Morse and Kevin Whately as Sergeant Lewis, such is the influence the television series has had on my perception of these characters. After a while I just gave up and bowed to the inevitable. I doubt it influenced my feeling about the book in any way. The murder here is a complicated affair of, well, affairs, secret liaisons, misunderstandings and confusion, made all the harder for the reader as the author hides some of the information gathered, and what some of the characters are doing. That, along with the very old-fashioned gender attitudes rather lowered my feelings for this book. Yes, it was written in 1975 and things then aren’t as they are now, but even so they still feel out-dated. As to the mystery, if you use the technique of looking for the most unlikely of suspects you’ll be on the right track to solving murders such as this. Just make sure they are introduced relatively early in the book. Don’t get fooled into thinking the “other” one may be the culprit; they didn’t get mentioned until well into the plot. Those suspects are just designed to throw you off the scent. Otherwise, it’s a decent murder mystery. R: 3.4/5.0

Thor, God of Thunder, Vol. 2 : Godbomb (2013) – This volume collects the comics **Thor : God of Thunder #6-11**. Gorr, the God Butcher, has designed a bomb that will travel back in time and will be used to destroy all gods before they begin their reign. The three Thors from the first volume (young, pre-hammer; present day; and far-future) are the last gods left and they join forces to defeat the butcher at the end of time. Suspension of disbelief is a definite requirement here, especially when you have to ignore any forms of causation with time being treated with wild abandon. The art is again of a high order, though this one is let down a bit by the out-of-control storyline. At least here you get to find out how the young Thor finally gets to yield his hammer Mjolnir. R: 3.7/5.0

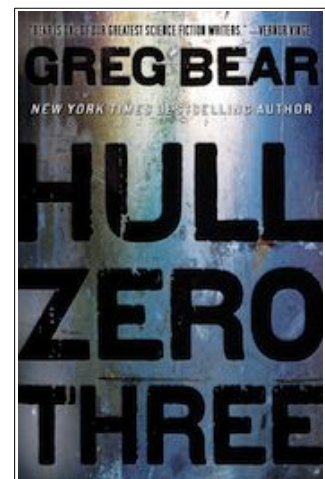


Orbit 4 (1968) – #4 in this series of original sf and fantasy stories. The stories in these anthologies are nothing less than interesting, even if some of them don't work that well. Due to the vagaries of the Nebula Award nominating period during these early years Ellison's story here, "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin", was nominated for the 1970 Best Short Story Nebula Award, which it lost to Silverberg's story in this volume, "Passengers", both of which I enjoyed. Charles Harness's novella **Probable Cause** was also nominated for a Best Novella Nebula Award in 1970 but seems to be making up the numbers there. It's a long-winded story about the US Supreme Court dealing with psi abilities and would have been better placed in Campbell's **Analog**. Others I enjoyed were Kate Wilhelm's "Windsong", Jacob Transue's "The Corruptible", and Lafferty's "One at a Time" (showing, yet again, that he's better at shorter length). I

make that six out of nine starred stories I would put onto a recommended reading list for 1968; so, much better than average. A great Chris Foss cover here as well. R: 3.1/5.0

Hull Zero Three (2010) – This novel was on the shortlist for the 2011 John W. Campbell Memorial Award.

I am rather embarrassed to admit that this is probably the first novel of Greg Bear's that I have ever read, and I probably only picked this up at the library because he had recently died. He just seems to have been one of those authors that passed me by, coming into the field, and being at his peak, when I wasn't paying a lot of attention. This novel is set on a generation starship that has run into difficulties, in this case an internal conflict between crew factions has severely damaged the ship placing the whole mission in jeopardy. There is a lot of depiction of people wandering around the ship in this novel. So much so that I started to skim over these sections, and I don't feel that I lost anything in the process. This is

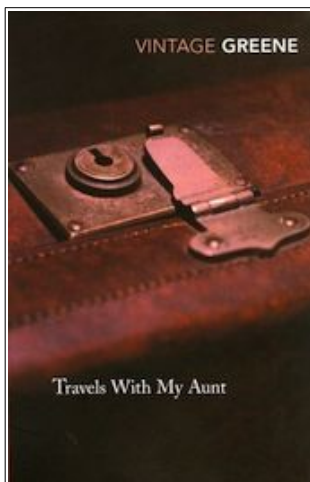
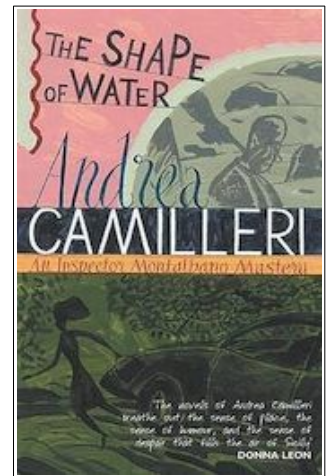


as much a puzzle piece as anything else as our main character – who wakes from an extended sleep in "Dreamtime" – struggles to work out who he is and what is going on. This now reads as somewhat dated, with the interactions between characters being rather

superficial. I got the impression that the author was more interested in the hardware than anything else. R: 3.0/5.0

The Shape of Water (1994) – The first in this author’s series of novels featuring Inspector Montalbano, originally published in Italian.

When the body of a local political dignitary is found semi-naked in a car in an area frequented by sex workers, everybody from the Pope down wants the matter hushed up as soon as possible. But Inspector Montalbano suspects foul play, of some sort, though he doesn’t know what, and stalls the closure of the case while he investigates. This is a refreshing take on the standard police procedural, set in Sicily with all of its political and organised crime implications; plus food. I’ve only read two police procedurals set in Italy (this and one by Michael Dibdin) and the common factor between the two seems to be the fact that the main character is irresistible to women. I wonder if this is an accurate representation of the forces of the law in Italy or just wishful thinking on the author’s part? I strongly suspect the latter. This was an enjoyable and easy read. R: 3.4/5.0

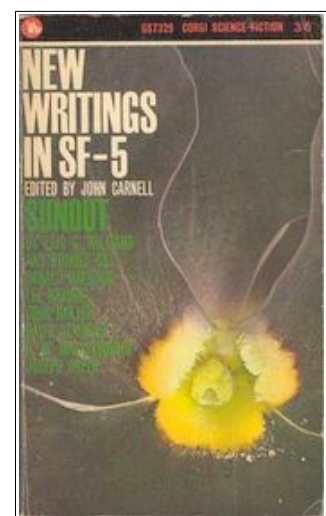


Travels With My Aunt (1969) – On the Guardian 1000 Novels list, one of 149 comedies on that list.

Retired bank manager Henry Pulling meets his Aunt Augusta at his mother’s funeral, and he is soon to learn some secrets about his family life, his father, his mother and himself. He is soon also travelling with his Aunt across Europe to Istanbul and back, and later to South America, meeting a number of strange people along the way. This is very much a novel of its time, poking fun at various members of British society though also mocking an African character with his ungrammatical speech and his love of the weed, which seems rather forced and unnecessary. It is a comedy and there are some quite amusing parts to it, not least the long-running gag involving Henry being completely unable to understand what Augusta was doing throughout Europe in

the first half of the twentieth century. He thinks she was working in some sort of theatre troupe, which appears to be rather adjacent to the actual truth. He is also unsure of his true identity and his relationship with his Aunt, something that will be very obvious from the beginning for an astute reader. Greene would probably have rated this one of his “entertainments”; a book not to be taken too seriously. You shouldn’t either, though it does have some serious and some seriously funny things to say. R: 4.0/5.0

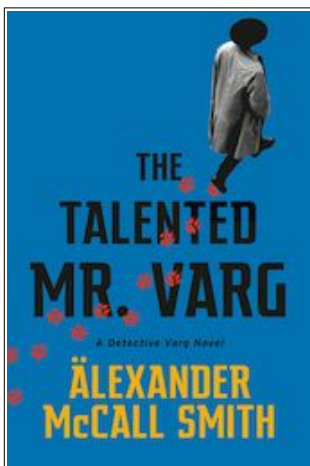
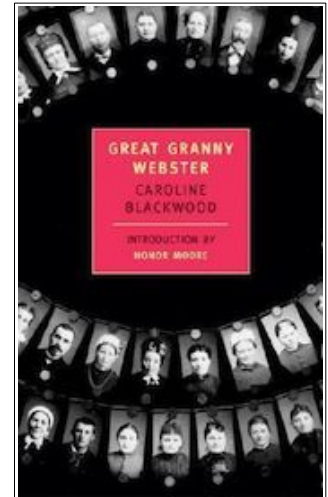
New Writings in SF-5 (1965) – Another in this series of original anthologies out of the UK. I note that I’ve read these anthologies a bit out of order, probably because I can’t find my copy of #4. There is nothing at all wrong with this anthology, but there is nothing that really stands out either. All of the stories are three stars or below,



and I didn't include any of them in my recommended reading list for 1965 (see **The Alien Review 2**). The reviewer on the **GalacticJourney** blog disagreed and highly rated four of the stories here, so it may well be a matter of taste. To me this is a collection of stories that perfectly reflects the state of sf in the mid-1960s – male, and backward looking – though I have to admit that I am reviewing it nearly sixty years later and can only look at it from my current perspectives. The anthology includes two stories by Australians: Lee Harding's "The Liberators" and John Baxter's "Takeover Bid". I'd put Harding's story as the pick of the bunch here. R: 2.4/5.0

Great Granny Webster (1977) – Shortlisted for the 1977 Booker Prize.

I seem to be reading multiple books about strange, brooding, Celtic old women lately – see my review above of **The Visitor**. This short novel is told from the point-of-view of an orphaned teenager who is sent to stay with her Great Grandmother Webster in her home in Hove in Southern England. She can't get out of the place fast enough. The book – told in four parts – then explores the other members of the narrator's family: the lively Aunt Lavinia; the narrator's father who died young in the war; and her deranged grandmother, GG Webster's daughter. But it all comes back to and revolves around GG Webster, who hovers like a life-stealing bat over the whole unhappy lot of them. This is a gothic satire about English, Scottish and Irish aristocracy, their unrealistic expectations and lifestyles, and their lack of communication, compassion and any semblance of decent human interactions. This is supposedly a semi-autobiographical novel – Lady Caroline Blackwood was a member of the Guinness brewery family – and it shows. Short, and cutting. And, yes, funny too. R: 3.6/5.0



The Talented Mr. Varg (2020) – #2 in the author's Detective Varg series of novels.

If you are expecting a pastiche of a certain novel by Patricia Highsmith due to this book's title, then you are going to be very much disappointed. Detective Varg, of the Department of Sensitive Crimes in Malmo, Sweden, is at the opposite end of the personality spectrum to Ripley. In this novel Varg is asked by his colleague Anna, with whom he is secretly in love, to investigate her husband who she suspects is having an affair. Along the way he also investigates the possible fraudulent export of dogs masquerading as wolves, and the possible blackmailing of a prominent local author. None of the crimes seems overly serious, but "sensitive"? That is the question that Varg grapples with. Amusing and light, this is probably the epitome of a "cosy" mystery: the main interest here is in the development of Varg's character and his interactions with his work colleagues and neighbours. R: 3.4/5.0

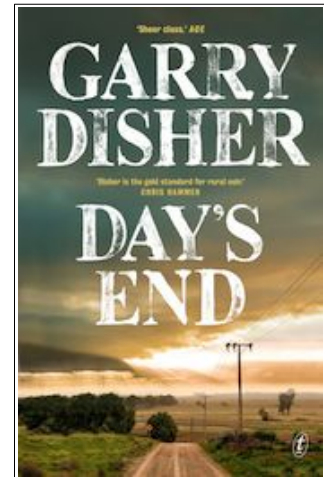
REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Day's End (2022) by Garry Disher

Genre: Crime

[Many thanks to Text Publishing for the review copy of this book.]

This is the fourth in the author's series of novels featuring Paul Hirschhausen, who is a police constable in the small town of Tiverton, in South Australia's Mid-North. Known as Hirsch for short, his rural beat is very large, at one point he likens it to the area of Belgium, and very rural. The previous volumes were *Bitter Wash Road* (2013), *Peace* (2019) and *Consolation* (2020). And it is very good to see him back.



The novel starts with Hirsch showing an international visitor, Janne Van Sant around the area. She is looking for her backpacker son who has gone missing, with his last known whereabouts being on a large sheep property on the outskirts of town where he had been working as a jackaroo.

While Hirsch is doing that, a call comes in about a roadside fire which turns out to be small, burning an old suitcase. The interesting thing about the suitcase is that it contains a male body, but not that of the missing young man.

And so Hirsch's investigations begin. Apart from the missing boy, and the dead man in the suitcase, he has to handle incidents ranging from a dog chasing children on bikes, his partner's daughter being bullied and harassed on social media, the shooting death of a prize ram, a dispute over a large artwork carved into the countryside, vandalism at the local First Nations centre, COVID deniers and anti-vaxxers, misuse of police videos, evidence that a white supremacist group is recruiting local young men and women, and the list goes on and on. Basically Hirsch is up to his ears in crimes, possible crimes, community disturbances and the like; everything that a normal small-town copper would have to face on a day-to-day basis. But this is not to suggest that this is all mundane and boring. On the contrary, Disher is a master at the descriptions of country towns, and their inhabitants, in a time when inter-personal relationships are being strained by social media and pandemic restrictions. And the reader should have no worries about all of these separate threads. They are all resolved satisfactorily before the end. Some rather tragically, as you might expect.

Hirsch himself is gradually integrating himself into the local community. He occasionally thinks about studying for the police sergeant's exam but you get the feeling his heart really isn't in it. That would take him away from this small town where he is beginning to build a life for himself.

We learned in the first book that Hirsch had been demoted from a position at an Adelaide police station after a bunch of detectives there were found to be corrupt. Hirsch wasn't involved but his presence in the station convinced some in authority that he either knew or was complicit. They couldn't prove anything so they shuffled him off to the country. There was an underlying sense of resentment by Hirsch in the first few books about the way he

had been treated then, and the continuing way he was being treated by his superiors. With this book we start to see a change in that with some previous adversaries becoming more welcoming as they start to realise they have a valuable asset on their hands.

This is an excellent series of police procedurals set in an area of Australia that otherwise gets little, if any attention in the literary field. In many ways Tiverton could be any small town anywhere in Australia – it just happens to be in the Mid-North of South Australia, which is an area that Disher grew up and knows extremely well.

You have to put these books in the top echelon of Australian crime series. And I, for one, can only hope that we have many more installments to come.

R: 4.3/5.0

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

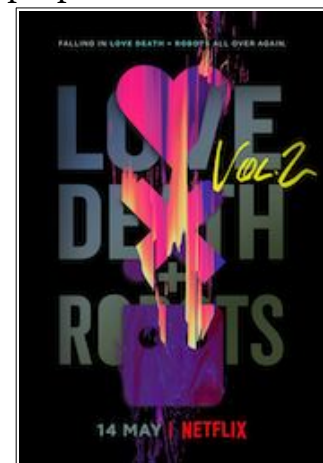
Television

The Twelve (Miniseries — 10 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Courtroom Drama

This Australian television series is based on an earlier Belgian series from 2019, “De Twaalf”, and follows the deliberations, interactions and personal lives of twelve jurors who are brought together for the trial of artist Kate Lawson (Kate Mulvany) who is accused of murdering her niece. Star-power is provided by Sam Neill (as Brett Colby, the defence barrister) and Marta Dusseldorp (as Lucy Bloom, prosecutor), though there are some familiar local actors in the jury and supporting cast. The mystery is an interesting one as no body has been found and the bulk of the evidence is circumstantial. Lawson is a controversial photographer who chooses subjects (eg young girls engaging in “scarfing”, which is the intentional restriction of oxygen to the brain for the purposes of sexual arousal) where her missing niece features prominently. The slow



unwinding of the interactions between jurors outside the courtroom is mirrored by the unravelling of the details of the case inside it, and there is some excellent story-telling in operation here. I especially liked the work of Brendan Cowell, who plays juror Garry Thorne, a drunken gambler who is approached to help manipulate the jury to obtain a specific outcome. Definitely worth your attention.

R: 3.9/5.0

Love, Death & Robots (Season 2 — 8 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: SF Animated

This second season of the animated anthology of sf, fantasy and horror stories follows on the good work begun in season 1. Again we

have a number of episodes based on stories written by well-known authors such as Harlan Ellison, J. G. Ballard, Joe Lansdale, Neal Asher, John Scalzi, Rich Larson and Paolo Bacigalupi. Of special interest to me here was the animated version of “The Drowned Giant” by Ballard, a story from 1965 which I placed second in my review of the best stories of that year in **The Alien Review 2**, August 2021. They’ve done a good job of the adaptation. The episodes here are slightly longer than the first season (7-18 minutes) which gives the stories more room to breathe and allows the viewer to become more involved. I note there is a third season (from earlier this year) and I’m hopeful that the producers, and Netflix, will keep this show going. R: 3.7/5.0

The Patient (Miniseries – 10 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Drama

Therapist Alan Strauss (played by Steve Carell) wakes one morning to find himself in an unfamiliar room with his leg chained to the frame of a bed. It becomes clear that he has been kidnapped by a patient of his, Sam Fortner (Domhall Gleeson), who tells him that he, Fortner, is a serial killer who is trying to break his compulsions and has kidnapped Strauss in order to receive intensive and, hopefully, effective treatment. This sets up a high level of conflict between the two characters with the drama’s action mostly contained within the four walls of the basement bedroom where Strauss is being held. In other words we are essentially looking at a stage play, confined in time and space, and living and dying on the strength of its performances and writing. And it does this exceedingly well. There is no padding here, with episodes taking as long as they need (anywhere between 21 and 46 minutes). Such a situation can really only have either one of two outcomes and the one chosen here is handled convincingly. Not easy to watch at times. R: 4.3/5.08



Film

See How They Run (2022)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Comedy/Crime Drama

With the new ***Knives Out*** movie coming out soon, and the recent Kenneth Branagh Hercule Poirot films in mind we come to this Agatha Christie spoof about a murder associated with the long-running West End production of ***The Mousetrap***. Set in the 1950s it follows Inspector Stoppard (really?) played by Sam Rockwell and his off-sider Constable Stalker (Saoirse Ronan) as they attempt to solve the murder while still allowing the play to carry on. It’s a spoof, I know that, which means it should be rather amusing. I didn’t find it amusing or funny in any major way: a couple of mild smiles and that was it. Rockwell’s world-weariness is now a cliché and Ronan’s overly enthusiastic idealism is rather wearing. It is completely forgettable, which is unfortunate as it could have been much better given the rest of the cast. R: 2.6/5.0



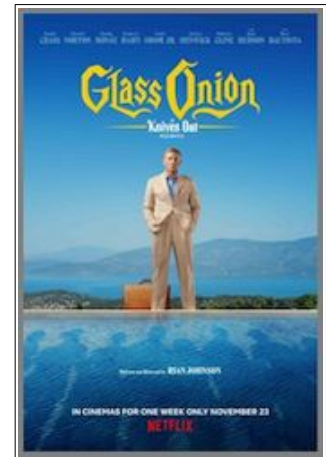
Glass Onion (2022)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Comedy/Crime Drama

And here is that new **Knives Out** film: subtitled “A Knives Out Mystery”, this is the second film by writer/director Rian Johnson featuring Daniel Craig as the master detective Benoit Blanc. This time we’re with a completely new cast as a number of people assemble on a Greek island owned by Miles Bron (Edward Norton) for a weekend getaway solving a fake murder mystery. The first film, 2019’s **Knives Out**, had a lot of interesting things to say about race and race relations, mingled in with an intriguing death. Here Johnson tries to do something similar, commenting on the vacuous nature of billionaires (Bron is heavily based on Elon Musk) and their associations with people, art, and business. But it falls rather flat and adds little to the overall effect. The mystery itself is complicated and rather amusing until the final 20 minutes of this long film (139 minutes) when it starts to go off the rails and, effectively, gives up. The actors all have a good time of it, and the film is full of amusing and unexpected cameos, but, all in all, for this viewer it just wasn’t in the same league as the first film.

R: 2.8/5.0

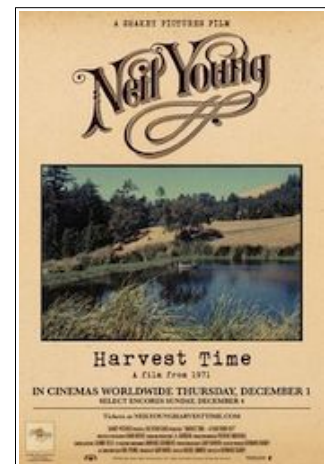


Harvest Time (2022)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Music Documentary

Originally filmed between January and September 1971 this documentary follows the recording of Neil Young’s **Harvest** album, a record I wrote about in **Perryscope 20** (it was the first album I ever bought). Young records tracks from the album on his farm in California, in Memphis, and with the London Symphony Orchestra in a suburb of London. The footage had been languishing for 50 years before this limited release in cinemas in December 2022, and, frankly it shows, with a lot of it showing the signs of age. Young records a very brief intro to the piece, in which he appears almost sheepish and ill at ease. Apart from that there is no new material, no commentary of any sort. So unless you are a fan of the album, or, at least, aware of it and its place in the history of rock music I fear this just isn’t going to be for you. Given I am a fan it meant a lot to see this, to me, new material. R: 4.5/5.0



Operation Mincemeat (2022)

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Drama War Espionage

Colin Firth and Matthew Macfadyen lead a team of intelligence agents charged with deceiving the Germans in the Second World War. They devise a plan to dump a dead body into the waters of the Mediterranean with credible but incorrect plans for an invasion of Greece, rather than the true target of Sicily. This film follows the planning and execution of the operation, and the personal interactions between the team members. I suspect a large number of liberties were taken to add some form of romance and drama



into the tale. Some of it works, and some of it comes across as rather twee, especially the scenes involving Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming – yes, that one. I wouldn't be rushing out to watch this but it is competently made and an agreeable time-waster. The story was previously filmed as *The Man Who Never Was* in 1956. R: 3.4/5.0

Prey (2022)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: SF Action

This is the fifth film in the **Predator** movie franchise which started back in 1987 with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Carl Weathers in the lead roles. This entry is set in 1719 in the Great Plains area of North America. As previously this film involves the interactions between humans and a Predator who has been dropped on Earth to undertake some sort of hunting ritual. Here the alien comes into contact with Comanche, and, in particular, a young woman warrior, Naru (played wonderfully well by Amber Midthunder) who is trying to prove herself to her brother and her tribe. This is a rather simple film, but that's where its strengths lie. It doesn't try to be anything more than an action thriller and yet succeeds in providing insights into a culture we have rarely seen depicted realistically, and also building a level of character development which is uncommon in such films. Yes, it's a bit gory in places, but that's the nature of this sort of beast. I liked it, as I have most of the other films in the franchise. R: 3.8/5.0



Avatar : The Way of Water (2022)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: SF Action

If you go to see this for the story then I fear you are going to be greatly disappointed. On the other hand if you want to see it for the visuals then you are in for a treat. It's been 13 years since the first **Avatar** was released in 2009, so I went along to this to remind myself what James Cameron has been up to. He hasn't progressed much. Again we are presented with a plot and story line that seems like it has been lifted from a B-grade western: the bad guys are really, really bad (burning villages and torturing children?), and the good guys are too good to be true. The only ones showing any deviations from this are the "naughty" children, of course, and their actions are justified in the end, again "of course". I can't comment on the acting as nearly all characters are fully CGI (Kate Winslet was there? Missed her completely.) and the dialogue makes them all sound like middle-class Americans, circa 2005, including the telepathic whale-like creatures. The only amusing character is the gung-ho, over-the-top whaler Captain Mick Scoresby, played by Australian actor Brendan Cowell. This is a long film (over three hours) and it drags somewhat in the middle as Cameron embarks on a National Geographic-like exploration of the world he has created. (I saw a review somewhere that said the only thing missing was a David Attenborough commentary!) As I said, go for the visuals and leave your critic abilities at the door.



R: 3.2/5.0

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 27:

Frank McEwen: “Re Travel: As a 193cm ape, travelling on a plane long distances is a pain so the longer time between long flights the better. Could not stand flying the full distance and then heading back after a couple of weeks.

“So we were away this year for about 6 weeks, walking 25 days out of that (which I realise is not for everyone). It was good but there are always things you could change in retrospect. We make sure we don't walk until de-jetlagged. We always make sure we have a break of one day doing-nothing every week. Plus longer breaks around that. It's a pain having to pack up every day and while we have it down pat, 25 days of doing that becomes a drag.

“Next year we will do 10 days walking (with wineries) then have a big break then stay in one place doing radial walks (stay in a city for 2 weeks, catch a bus/train out to start walking and then bus/train back from the walk terminus).

“See how we walk (not run).”

[**PM:** Some good thoughts on how to handle the difficulties of travel there. My main area of concern, as yours seems to be, is the problem of continually changing where you sleep. Packing up and moving on, day after day, along with the associated laundry problems can put a real dampener on a holiday. It becomes exhausting and impacts your enjoyment of the travel. The idea of staying in one place and using it as a base is looking more and more appealing the older I get. I'd rather a week in one place, then a long drive to the next, and then another week.]

John Hertz: “When the LASFS Website is fully restored you can see my note on Lafferty's *Past Master*. Or if I find my own copy sooner, I'll send. Among other things, More's *Utopia* is a satire. When the people of Lafferty's world Astrobe bring More from the past, he tells them that, only one of the things they'd rather not look at.”

[**PM:** The trouble I have with satires is that they only work in context. Without the context and without knowledge of what is being satirised you're left a bit adrift with a work that has to stand on its own.]

“On the wall of my synagogue is a photo of a past rabbi's granddaughter playing in a sandbox with Anne Frank. I haven't read the Philip Roth novel you mention in which she stefnally survives.”

[**PM:** Well, supposedly survives; at least in the main character's head.]

“I mentioned **Perryscope** to various people at Chicon VIII, this year's Worldcon. I mean, favorably. I find I keep disagreeing with you, but I don't read fanzines to be agreed with.”

[**PM:** Disagreement is the beginning of discovery. It wouldn't be very interesting if we all agreed with each other, all the time. I can understand your liking for certain sf authors from the 1960s, and I think they were probably very good for their time. The trouble is that their time has now passed, at least for me.]

Perryscope 28:

Mark Olson: “I was struck that Brunner's overcrowded world had 7 billion people. Ours has 8 billion and is not especially overcrowded and many countries are seriously worried about depopulation! We don't make very good prophets, do we? (But, then, does anyone?)”

[**PM:** He got the numbers right, though probably didn't make allowances for the increases in food production. Regarding overcrowding however, I think we are looking at this from a privileged Western perspective. People living in the Brazilian favelas, and elsewhere, would have a very different view on that.]

“Speaking of design trumping functionality, here's a bit from a report on our trip to Rome and Barcelona in 2019:

“**Annoying European Plumbing Technology Part II**”: The sink in our bathroom was gorgeous (as plumbing goes, anyway), with modern, almost sculptural, fittings. The spigot, instead of pointing down, pointed straight out, a shiny, half-cylinder of graceful chrome. It was wide and I imagine the idea was that water would flow out to the end of the channel and then cascade downwards to the sink in a graceful arc. Unfortunately, water pressure was high enough that if you just turned the water on without taking very particular care, the water came straight out and missed the bowl, hitting you in the stomach. *You may ask how I came to know this...*”

Martin Field: “Re smoking. I understand the difficulties in dropping the habit. Unlike many smokers I used to actually savour different smokes. Late 60s in London it was Abdulla Turkish and cigarillos and of course prime hashish. Then back in Oz early 70s it was unfiltered Camel and the odd Chesterfield and rollies and grass and Sobranie Black Russian. Around this time there was heavy grass going around at La Trobe, allegedly spiked with horse sedative – it left everyone zonked so I stopped smoking everything overnight. As a result my tastes in red wine changed and I found I could enjoy lighter reds for the first time. Mid 70s in Bali I discovered clove flavoured Gudang Garam and gave them a nudge. At the same time a housemate was earning lots of cash and took to buying Cuban Romeo y Julieta half coronas by the box of 25. Of a Friday night we'd light up, along with a snifter or two of Cognac and thought we were doing well. Like you I eventually lost the taste and now can't stand cigarette smoke at all.”

[**PM:** For which, I suspect, we are both grateful. I did notice, however, that my sense of taste took a few years to get back to anything resembling normal after I've given up smoking. My father told me that he'd had the same problem. He could smell things quite well while he was smoking, but not for some time afterwards.]

“A friend and I saw *North by Northwest* a year or three after it was released. It was showing at one of Melbourne's arthouse cinemas – The Curzon? At the bit where they're hanging precariously over the faces of Mt Rushmore my mate thought it was really funny and burst into hysterical laughter – stern looks from the arthouse crowd.”

[**PM:** Somewhere or other I read about a rumour that Hitchcock wanted Cary Grant to crawl into the nose of one of the Presidents on Mount Rushmore, and the to have some sort of sneezing fit. I have no idea if this is true or not but that would certainly have sent the arthouse crowd into apoplexy.]

Leigh Edmonds: “Giving up smoking. I still recall the last cigarette I stubbed out, some time in 1975. Later I told Valma that all the money I’d saved from giving up smoking could be spent on grog. Which we did for a long time.”

[**PM:** I’ve never gone into how much I might have saved over the past 30 years by giving up smoking, though I’m sure it’s quite a sum. Maybe I put that money into drink or maybe travel. In any event it was a good choice for quite a number of reasons.]

“Your piece on Springsteen and ‘Thunder Road’ was very well written and conveys the sense of how it affected you with great feeling. I have to admit that he is an artist I’ve noted but not spent much time listening to. ‘Tut tut’, I hear you say. Being a few years older it was other musics that had the same effect on me. I can, for example, still remember where I was and what I was doing the first time I heard, on the radio, The Beatles’ ‘Please Please Me’. After all the turgid pop music that rock and roll had degraded into it was like a bolt of lightning, direct and raw and it felt very liberating.

“The other music that changed my life was heard one night when Bernie Bernhouse took me to visit a friend of his and they had just got a copy of Big Brother and the Holding Company’s *Cheap Thrills*. That was the only record we played all night and I had a copy first thing the next day. Most people will tell you that Joplin’s backing band was not good but they played the music I liked to hear the way I liked it on that record and it is still my favourite despite all the great records published since. You write that you don’t care if Springsteen is ‘old-hat, irrelevant and outdated’ and like you, I don’t care what the current attitude is to *Cheap Thrills*. Still the essence of West Coast music at a high point in popular music.”



[**PM:** The interesting thing in looking back at the things I like is trying to figure out why I actually like it. Why this, and not that? What was I interested in at the time and why did this affect me so much?]

“I also enjoyed re-reading your comments on *Stand on Zanzibar* and recalling you and David talking about it. Brunner is, I think, one of that generation of British writers who, along with Aldiss and Ballard, rewrote the playbook on science fiction. I still recall reading *Shockwave Rider* with the same sense of excitement that *Neuromancer* brought on a couple of decades later. Both being about the way the world was being changed by emerging digital technology in the period before the process really got going.”

[**PM:** Australian art critic Robert Hughes referred to this as “The Shock of the New”. I look on it as being a good shock, providing us with a different way of seeing things that had become rather blasé.]

“I think I’d agree with Rose’s comment that the Hugos are about what is being read and the state of the market rather than being about the best of the year. That’s what things like yours and David’s ‘Hugo Time Machine’ is for.

“It was interesting to read the background circumstances of the photo of you on the cover

of thisish. If I hadn't read that and if I were a school pupil and you the headmaster I'd be worried about that problematic look on your face. 'What's the meaning of this then, Edmonds?!' or something like that."

[**PM:** My stepmother showed a picture of me to a friend of hers once and was told that I look like a priest. I've never been thought of as a teacher before.]

Chong: "I read this **P28** with interest, especially your reverie on 'Thunder Road'. Whatever switches on in your early 20s remains switched on.

"I guess we owe a debt to any artist who opens a door for us. And that's one grandiose definition of artist, I guess.

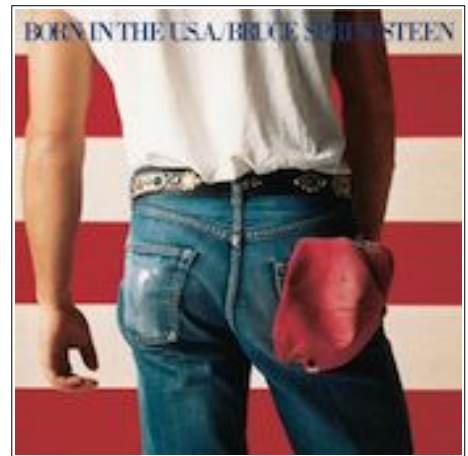
"That Springsteen instinct, or basic fantasy, for *Escape From This Life* is writ particularly American by the adoption of the automobile, the wide open road ('wind in your hair' — which doesn't work for bald male love interests), and the Hollywood iterations which have developed this trope into a shiny, affectless cliché — a Pavlovian button marked ESC on the writer's keyboard.

"Of course Bruce was a pioneer in popularising these tropes. It was part and parcel of his evolution from greasy-haired alleyway poet to musclebound Every (working) man. From an interesting marginal to exactly my antithesis, in image.

"But he always did play on the Romantic passion, the glory of the Dream to make it. This too is the meaning of the Stars and Stripes on the *Born in the USA* cover, a



symbol of ambition and defiance with Bruce's arse to the viewer, rather than any Old Country's grim duty and obligation.



"In contrast to Big Bruce, I'm amused and charmed by Neil Young's characteristically ironic riff: *Stars and Bars*, where the cover picture shows Young's face pressed into the picture plane, like a drunken barfly passed out on the glass counter.

"Not that Bruce hasn't been reflective about his milieu: *Nebraska* is a mid-career antidotal statement to the triumphalism of his consensual symbolism. Still, his romantic escapism will always trump his realism. He sings in a recent song, a lyric with a stage cowboy as metaphor (for a bonus he actually covers Glen Campbell's rhinestone cowboy):

Here's to the cowboys, riders in the whirlwind
Tonight the western stars are shining bright again

“The yearning masculine bass crests and releases in a wash of gorgeous melody, an analogue to a deep open horizon.

“Truth to tell, I haven’t heard that song since it was released in 2019 with its beautiful, evocative horse on the range cover art. But I know I’m not wrong in my description; one can predict the music and intended effect by simply reading the lyrics — it is programmatic, without even Campbell’s resigned irony, never mind Young’s pugnacious sneer.

“At this point I suspect Bruce is like religion. His meaning and utility to his followers is to soothe and bring promises or at least rumours of a better life. It would take a hard heart to decry that salve; to suggest it is not salvation itself.

“One need not reach for the earnest redemption of *Nebraska*. There are campy escape routes too. Let’s take the thunder road to thunder ball:

He always runs while others walk
He acts while other men just talk
He looks at this world, and wants it all
So he strikes, like Thunderball.”

Barbara O’Sullivan: “Like you, I’m a big Bruce Springsteen fan. Unlike you, alas, I’ve not yet seen him live in concert. I live in hope!”

[**PM:** A Springsteen gig is certainly something to be experienced. He’s generally on stage for well over three hours and has been known to hit four from time to time. It’s practically a religious experience!]

“By the way, *The Good Nurse* (streaming on Netflix) based on a disturbing true story of serial killer, Charles Cullen (Eddie Redmayne) is worth a look.”

[**PM:** I was impressed with David Tennant’s work as the Scottish serial killer Dennis Nilsen in *Des* (see review in **Perryscope 4**) so I’ll look out for this.]

“Also can recommend the book, *She Said* by Pulitzer prize winning journalists, Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey. The investigation of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, which triggered the ‘Me Too’ movement, is a powerful work. It also makes for a compelling film starring Carey Mulligan.”

[**PM:** Both noted.]

“On a lighter note, *The Lost King*, due for release in cinemas soon, is a fascinating real life tale of the search for the remains of King Richard III. Steve Coogan and Sally Hawkins don’t disappoint.”

[**PM:** This one is certainly on the cards. I’ll have to keep an eye out for it as such offerings only seem to last in the cinemas for a week or so. With so many other things going on at this time of year it’s a case of “blink and you miss it.”]

I also heard from: **David L. Russell** (who found this month’s typo(!)); and **Werner Koopmann** (with Christmas greetings); thank you one and all.