

Perryscope 30

PERRYSCOPE 30, January 2023, is an issue of the personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), and then anyone else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for the usual or download at efanzines.com with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover by Chong.

INTRODUCTION

With the change of years I move into looking back mode, with my annual survey of the best of what I've read, and what I've seen over the previous 12 months; though there is a change this year. I normally leave my "Best Books of the Year" summary until February. The main reason being that, on a normal publishing schedule, I'd be aiming to have a new issue out at the start of each month, so trying to get the summary together for a publication date only a day or two after the previous year ended was too much to ask. So I'd write up my summary in January, and publish in February. That was in a normal year.

My 6-week trip through Canada in September and October last year changed a few things to do with this fanzine. The main one of these being that the monthly publishing date slipped back to the middle of the month. Travelling, attempting to write a travel blog as I went, as well writing pieces for this publication, was just a bit too much to ask of myself. Things slipped; as they do. As did the travel blog, which I am still attempting to finalise.

I'm now trying to get that publication date back to the beginning of the month again. It suits me better: I have a specific date to aim for rather than any old day in the latter-half of a month; and it helps me keep the best track of my reading and media watching, which I like to do on a month-by-month basis.

So, here we are, a little earlier in the month than last time with my "Best Books of 2022" summary, but not with the second half of my winery trip report. That is going to take a bit of work to write, and to get it the way I want it, therefore it's better to leave it for an extra month and spend a bit longer on the actual text. That will be coming in February, with again, hopefully, an earlier day-of-the-month publication date. I'm guessing that will allow me to get the March issue even closer to my preferred date. We can only wait and see what happens.

Of course I'm then liable to take another holiday – yes, there is one lined up for May – which will scuttle all such plans. Such is the way of all good intentions.

Next month I'll be summarising my film and television watching for 2022, and the second part of my recent winery tour.

BEST BOOKS OF 2022

After noting last year that my reading tallies had dropped away a bit since 2021, this year they were down again: 119 in 2020, 100 in 2021, and only 83 in 2022. While the numbers aren't going in the right direction I'm not overly concerned by the drop-off. I spent six weeks travelling during the year and didn't find a lot of time for reading during that period. That time, and a couple of other months when I didn't read a lot, reduced my book numbers this past year.

So, 83 books and 19,150 pages for the year – shortest book at 72 pages (*Ness* by Robert Macfarlane) and the longest at 626 pages (*Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr). Those books were split across the following categories:

Literary	17
Science Fiction	26
Fantasy	12
Sf/Fantasy combined	0
Horror	1
Crime	19
Thriller/Spy	4
Graphic Novels	2
Non-Fiction	2

These numbers meant that I only hit my category targets for Literary, Science Fiction and Crime. Given the overall numbers that is hardly surprising. I'll just need to pay extra attention to the other categories in the coming year. I fear, however, that I'll probably end up with similar numbers when I undertake my year's write-up in 2024. So it goes.

As usual I've been listing my books read on the GoodReads website throughout the year, and adding my reviews from here onto that site at the end of each month. I find it a very useful resource for tracking my reading, and also for exploring other books that I might be interested in. I recommend it to you.

Occasionally the GoodReads site will throw up some interesting facts when it summarises my reading at the end of a calendar year. For example, I was one of only two people to read Arthur Upfield's *Mr. Jelly's Business* in 2022, while 886,825 also read Andy Weir's *Project Hail Mary*. I wouldn't have expected either of those numbers.

On the topic of "ebook versus paper" I find myself reading more and more books on paper. This year it was 31% ebook and 69% paper, similar to the year before when the percentages were 33% and 67%. This makes some sense as: a) I no longer have the half-hour-each-way commute on the train to work; and b) I am actively working my way through the bookshelves of paperbacks that I purchased in the decades past.

The dates of publication of the books I read in 2022 are heavily skewed towards recent publications (2018-2022) and those from the 1960s. This reflects the reading I do for the

podcast, which tends towards current books and those appearing on the Hugo Awards ballots for the 1960s.

I'm pleased to see that my "Books in Translation" tally has risen from 3 in 2020, to 5 in 2021 and now to 8 in 2022. I think this illustrates the advantage of keeping track of these sorts of statistics, in that it tells me when I'm falling down in some areas and then helps me maintain some sort of varied literary consumption.

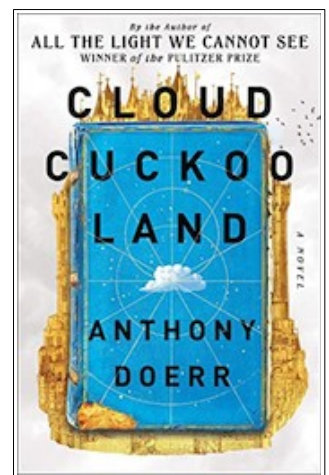
A check of the marks I gave for books this year reveals that the highest was 4.7 /5.0 (which I awarded twice) and the lowest of 2.2/5.0 (again awarded twice). Twenty-three books received a rating of 4.0 and above, 49 got a rating of 3.0-3.9, and 11 between 2.0 and 2.9. I have a feeling I may be a bit too generous sometimes. Must keep an eye on that in 2023.

And, so to the categories.

SF

Novels read: 11

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | <i>Cloud Cuckoo Land</i> by Anthony Doerr (2021) | 4.5 |
| 2 | <i>Stand on Zanzibar</i> by John Brunner (1968) | 4.3 |
| 3 | <i>A Desolation Called Peace</i> by Arkady Martine (2021) | 4.0 |
| 4 | <i>The Goblin Reservation</i> by Clifford D. Simak (1968) | 4.0 |
| 5 | <i>Project Hail Mary</i> by Andy Weir (2021) | 3.8 |



Notes:

This was not a great year for my sf novel reading with less than one a month. I seem to be reading more novellas in this category these days. Which is understandable as I tend to think sf is better at the novella length. I was surprised to see the Simak appearing so high on this list; not that I didn't enjoy it, I did, but that it is rather a light entertainment. The Doerr and Brunner novels were obviously the stand-outs.

Honorable Mentions:

None.

Fantasy

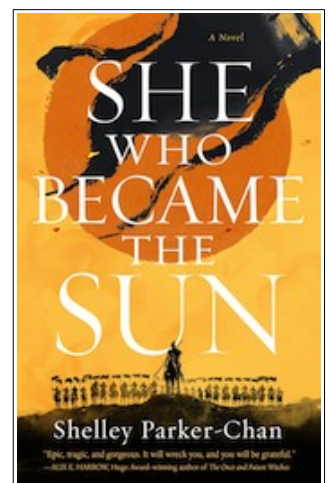
Novels read: 2

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | <i>She Who Became the Sun</i> by Shelley Parker-Chan (2021) | 4.4 |
|---|--|-----|

Notes:

If I thought that my sf novel reading had fallen away then I should have waited to compare it to my reading in the Fantasy genre. Again the number of Fantasy books I read this year was dominated by novellas – 10 of the 12.

Honorable Mentions:

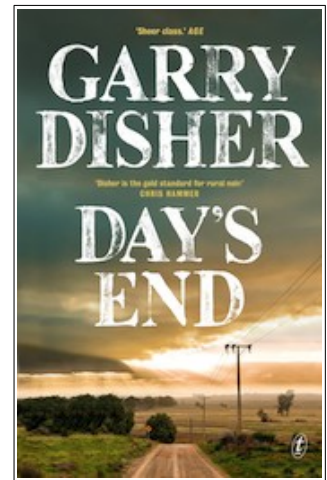


None.

Crime/Thriller/Spy

Novels read: 22

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <i>Day's End</i> by Garry Disher (2022) | 4.3 |
| 2 | <i>Dead Lions</i> by Mick Herron (2013) | 4.2 |
| 3 | <i>B is for Burglar</i> by Sue Grafton (1985) | 4.2 |
| 4 | <i>Razorblade Tears</i> by S. A. Cosby (2021) | 4.0 |
| 5 | <i>The Dark Remains</i> by William McIlvanney & Ian Rankin (2021) | 3.9 |



Notes:

Those of you keeping track may note that if you go to the table in the middle of page three and add the number for Crime to the number for Thriller/Spy you actually get a total of 23; the other one was a collection of short stories – *Lord Peter Views the Body* by Dorothy L. Sayers – which is in its relevant category.

There is a nice mixture of sub-genres reflected here (police procedural, spy, PI, and neo-noir) with authors from Australia, UK and the USA. Should I be reading more books from non-English writers? Yes, absolutely. I've started on the Simenon *Maigret* and Camilleri *Inspector Montalbano* series of novels and will have to search out others.

S. A. Cosby continues to improve with each novel and I'm hoping there will be another one from him this year. If that happens then look for that novel to appear here next year.

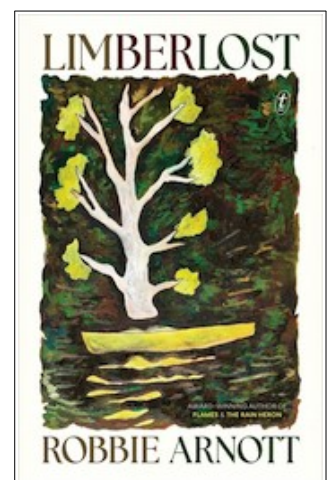
Honorable Mentions:

None.

Literary

Novels read: 16

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <i>Limberlost</i> by Robbie Arnott (2022) | 4.7 |
| 2 | <i>The Spare Room</i> by Helen Garner (2008) | 4.7 |
| 3 | <i>Flames</i> by Robbie Arnott (2018) | 4.4 |
| 4 | <i>The Ghost Writer</i> by Philip Roth (1979) | 4.4 |
| 5 | <i>Travels With My Aunt</i> by Graham Greene (1969) | 4.0 |



Notes:

With two entries on this top five list it is rather obvious that I enjoy the novels of Tasmanian writer Robbie Arnott. His second novel – the first of his that I read – rated highly in my annual survey of 2020, and now his other two novels appear here in 2022.

I note that past the top four my ratings drop off rather quickly in this category. I wonder if this is because I'm getting better at my utilisation of this ratings system or just becoming more discerning. Either is possible.

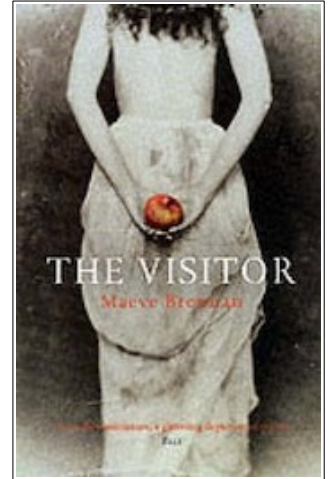
Honorable Mentions:

The Housekeeper and the Professor by Yoko Ogawa (2003) 4.0

Novella

Novellas read: 18

- 1 **The Visitor** by Maeve Brennan (2001) 4.6
- 2 **Fugitive Telemetry** by Martha Wells (2021) 4.0
- 3 **Inside Man** by K. J. Parker (2021) 4.0
- 4 **A Spindle Splintered** by Alix E. Harrow (2021) 4.0
- 5 **Light Chaser** by Peter F. Hamilton & Gareth Powell (2021) 4.0



Notes:

As expected the bulk of novellas on this list fall into the sf & f genre, and the ones listed here are certainly worth your attention. Again I seem to be reading a lot of recent stories in this category for the usual reasons. But the absolute stand-out for me was the Brennan novella. Unfortunately that's the only one of hers ever to see print. A great loss.

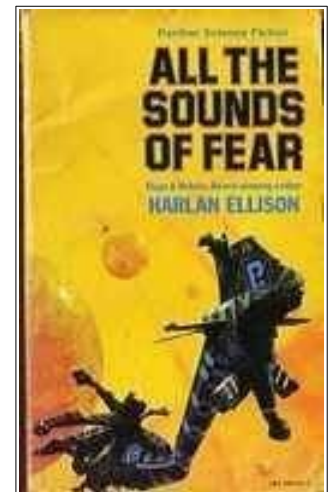
Honorable Mentions:

The Necessity of Stars by E. Catherine Tobler (2021) 4.0

Collection/Anthology

Books read: 9

- 1 **All the Sounds of Fear** by Harlan Ellison (1971) 3.4
- 2 **World's Best Science Fiction Fourth Series** edited by Donald A. Wollheim & Terry Carr (1968) 3.3
- 3 **The Last Defender of Camelot** by Roger Zelazny (1980) 3.3
- 4 **All the Myriad Ways** by Larry Niven (1971) 3.2
- 5 **Orbit 4** edited by Damon Knight (1968) 3.1



Notes:

The books listed here are mostly old paperbacks that have been sitting on the bookshelves for decades, unread and unloved. And now mostly read for podcast reasons. After I've completed my readings of award winners and nominees for a year or two I find that I've nearly completed some of these collections and anthologies, so reading the remaining stories in each volume is, usually, a simple matter. As you can see from my scoring here there isn't much between each book. I'm starting to think that such collections and anthologies have to contain a large majority of standout stories in order for them to get a score in either the high threes or low fours.

Honorable Mentions:

None.

Non-Fiction

Books read: 2

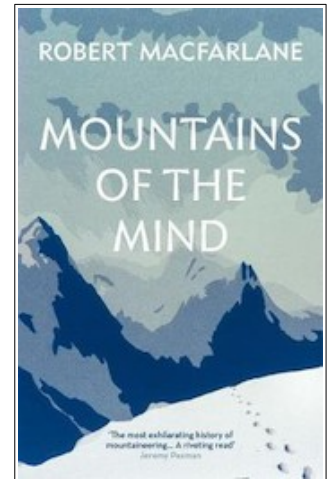
- 1 *Mountains of the Mind* by Robert Macfarlane (2003) 4.5
- 2 *Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli* by Mark Seal (2021) 4.0

Notes:

Only 2 read this year, so another category that I'll have to keep an eye on. I continue to be impressed with Macfarlane's work and there are a number of others of his that I am looking forward to.

Honorable Mentions:

None.



Overall

Books read: 83

- 1 *Limberlost* by Robbie Arnott (2022) 4.7
- 2 *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner (2008) 4.7
- 3 *The Visitor* by Maeve Brennan (2022) 4.6
- 4 *Mountains of the Mind* by Robert Macfarlane (2003) 4.5
- 5 *Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr (2021) 4.5

Notes:

A good mixture of novels, one novella and a work of non-fiction. And it's rather easy to recommend any and all of these. There is only one sf novel in this list and no crime novels, and that pretty much reflects my views of my reading in those categories during 2022. I hope and expect, as always, that things will improve in 2023.



Honorable Mentions:

She Who Became the Sun by Shelley Parker-Chan (2021) 4.4

Flames by Robbie Arnott (2018) 4.4

The Ghost Writer by Phillip Roth (1979) 4.4

The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (1899), p. 2

THE MOOCH OF LIFE – January

January is the month when summer starts to kick in, it's a time of long days and hot nights, barbecues and watching the cricket, reading and staying out of the heat, cold food and colder beer. Unlike the general view of Australians I am not a beach person; I like them well enough but I don't like lounging around on them between swims in the ocean. The British/Celtic skin I inherited from my mother's side of the family tends to burn very easily, then peel, and then burn again. None of this tanning stuff for me. As a result I tend to wide-brimmed hats and spending the bulk of my time in the shade.

When I was a kid January meant the long summer school holidays which ran from just before Christmas until the week after Australia Day, 26th January. The early parts of January were generally taken up with "learn-to-swim" classes. These were State Government sponsored and ran for two weeks in the early part of January each year. The nearest pool to Laura, South Australia, (where I lived in my early years) was in Gladstone, about 7 miles (10 km) south.

As my father needed to have his Pharmacy open each day it was left to my mother to drive us down to Gladstone and wait for the one hour lesson to finish. I ended up doing something similar for my son when he played hockey each Saturday morning. I came to enjoy that period, talking to the other fathers, watching my son running around, and knowing that, for one hour at least, I didn't have to be anywhere else. I hope she felt the same.

The main aim of these swimming lessons, I assume, was to ensure that country kids got the same opportunities as the city kids, and that they would at least pick up enough swimming skills to help stop them drowning in country waterways and farm dams. Along the way some of us progressed to getting some life-saving skills such as getting people out of trouble and then extracting them from the water, as well as CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation techniques. I haven't had cause to use them in the years since these lessons but I figure they're still there if I ever have to call on them.

Those swimming lessons usually took up the first two weeks of January and holidays for our family were generally confined to the long weekend at the end of the month when we

January 2nd by C. J. Dennis

How many have you broken up till now?
I know that yesterday you made a vow,
And most solemnly 'twas spoken;
But how many have you broken?
Oh, you kept 'em for an hour or two — But how?

You swore at twelve o'clock or thereabouts,
Most resolutely, scorning any doubts,
That the glad New Year would find you
With your vices all behind you.
And you'd be the very best of good boy scouts.

But you fell. And, oh, how quickly did you fall!
And now you're feeling low, and mean, and small;
For, despite all your devising,
You have come to realising
That you're really only human after all.

Ah, well, at least you had the will to try;
And you may reform some day before you die,
And there's this small consolation
On the road to reformation:
There's another New Year coming by and by.

First published in *The Herald*, 2 January 1931

would all travel down to Adelaide and stay with my mother's sister. My father wasn't able to get away from his pharmacy in the country for any extended period other than the three or four days over this weekend.

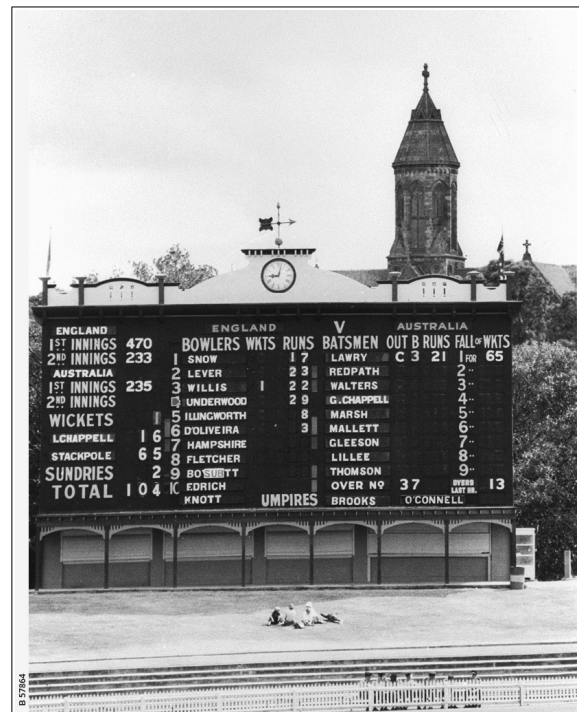
I can't remember what we used to do on these holidays when I was in primary school, but once I reached the secondary level I was allowed to go into the Adelaide Oval and watch a day of the Test cricket. This was before the Adelaide Test was moved to early December to accommodate the rise in One-Day cricket that swept the cricketing calendar in the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

At the Oval I'd park myself on the grass up behind the wide, unmovable northern sightscreen under the Moreton Bay Fig trees. From there you got a great view down the ground with the Members' Stand on the western side (my right), the Bradman Stand at the other end, the terraces on the east, and the famous Adelaide Oval scoreboard to my immediate left (see picture this page from the State Library of South Australia). The ground is almost completely changed now after a major, and long needed, makeover. But the scoreboard is still there, as are the fig trees. Both are probably heritage-listed, and rightly so. If you know how to read it The Adelaide Oval scoreboard is one of the best cricketing scoreboards anywhere.

The earliest match I can remember seeing at the ground was between Australia and the West Indies in January 1969, so I was 13. It was Garry Sobers's last tour of Australia for the West Indies (he did come back for the Rest of the World tour in the early 1970s) and Clive Lloyd's first. Not much else remains of that memory other than seeing Sobers bat, and, at the end of the day, Charlie Griffith being called for three no-balls in the one over. Cricket in Australia was using 8-ball overs in those days, which meant Griffith seemed to take an eternity to finish the eleven deliveries he needed.

Two years later I was able to watch Dennis Lillee steaming in from the northern end during his Test debut as Australia took on England in the summer of 1970/71. Though, probably, the most fun that day was seeing Ian Chappell give Geoff Boycott a send-off by pointing to the pavilion after Boycott had been run out and seemed reluctant to accept the decision.

Those days at the Adelaide Oval watching cricket in the searing heat were the last of the summer break for me as February, and school, started in the following week. Six weeks never seemed to go so fast as it did back then.



These days January is again spent watching the cricket. The current summer cricketing schedule in Australia means that Test cricket – my favourite, and the best, format of the game – is finished by about January 10th, after the Sydney New Years' Test. After that it's

limited overs cricket (20 or 50 overs a side), which I find enjoyable but immediately forgettable.

The barbeques, however, continue.

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 85: (17 January 2023) *"The Books! The Books!"*

This week we discuss our favourite reads of 2022 in a number of categories: sf, fantasy, crime, spy/thriller, literary (non-genre), novellas, YA, collections/anthologies and best overall. For the first, and probably only time, we agree on our best book of the year.

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



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – 1001: 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die; Anth: Anthology; Aust: Australian; Gdn: Guardian 1000; Nvla: novella.

July 2022 books

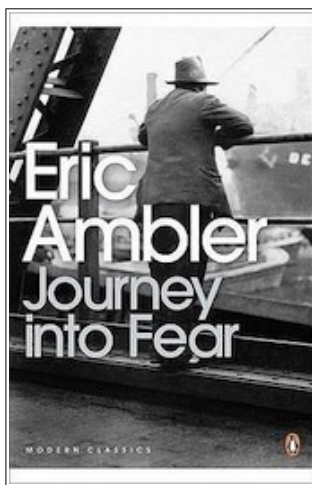
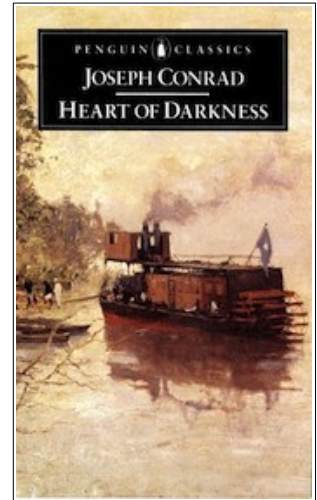
Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
Heart of Darkness	Joseph Conrad	Lit	Jan 3		4.8	1899	Nvla, 1001, Gdn
Journey Into Fear	Eric Ambler	Thriller	Jan 4		3.8	1940	Gdn
A Great Deliverance	Elizabeth George	Crime	Jan 8		3.4	1988	
Cold Comfort Farm	Stella Gibbons	Lit	Jan 11		4.3	1932	1001, Gdn
New Writings in SF 8	ed John Carnell	Sf	Jan 13		3.6	1966	Anth
Exiles	Jane Harper	Crime	Jan 16		4.4	2022	Aust

Books read in the period: 6

Yearly total to end of period: 6

Notes:

Heart of Darkness (1899) – Joseph Conrad’s iconic and seminal novella about a journey that is as much metaphysical as it is physical. It’s got a very strange structure with the omniscient, unnamed writer transcribing the tale told by the true narrator Marlow. Conrad starts and ends his story on a cruising yawl in the Thames, moored and waiting for the tide to turn so it can continue its journey up into London. But, as is well known, the story is mostly about Marlow’s journey from the African coast up a long river into the heart of the continent to meet Kurtz, one of the great enigmatic characters in literature. By the time Marlow meets up with Kurtz the man is dying, and he utters the great line: “The horror! The horror!” It’s almost as if, as he stared into the abyss of death, it not only stared back but also reached out to drag him in. Gothic horror incarnate. This is simply one of the great novellas of English literature. Would I have enjoyed it if I’d had to study this in high school? Maybe not, but I would have liked to have been given the chance. At least we we given Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*. R: 4.8/5.0

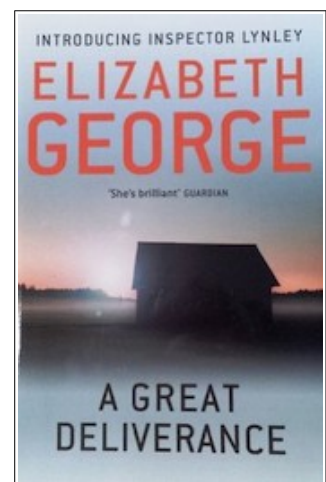


Journey into Fear (1940) – Ambler’s follow up to his classic thriller *A Coffin for Dimitriou*, is another in a similar vein, and just as good. Here Graham, an English armaments engineer working with the Turkish government in 1940, escapes an assassination attempt in Istanbul and heads to Italy by steamer. But his fellow passengers are not all that they seem on the surface. The author has basically provided us here with a “country-house” style espionage thriller, with high stakes and a rich array of characters, set against a backdrop of World War II Europe. It’s hard to see how writers such as Deighton, Bagley, Furst and even le Carré might have fared without these earlier works of Ambler’s. The novel was first adapted for the screen in 1943, featuring Joseph Cotton in the lead role (there changed to an American engineer) with a script written by Cotton and Orson Welles. And that’s surely one I’ll have to track

down. R: 3.8/5.0

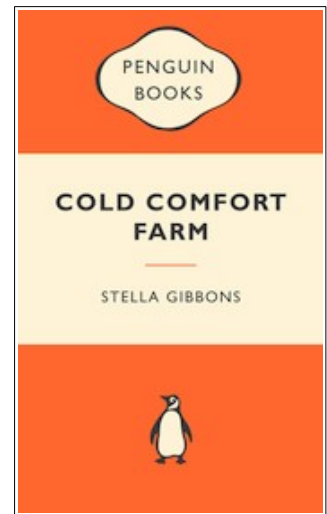
A Great Deliverance (1988) – #1 in the author’s Inspector Lynley series of novels. Winner of the Anthony Award for Best First Novel in 1989.

Inspector Thomas Lynley is assigned a new partner, DS Barbara Havers, and a case involving a decapitated corpse, in, of course, a peaceful Yorkshire village. This mystery is more about the relationships between villagers, and family members, with the solution to the crime slowly becoming obvious. But what was the motive? That is far more detailed and involved. Reading this novel in 2023 you could be forgiven for dismissing it as just another cliched family murder drama but you need to be aware that it was written in the late 1980s and you have to give it a lot of leeway for that reason.



So the mystery isn't that great by today's standards but the people and the village setup are well-handled with more than enough initial suspects to make it interesting. R: 3.4/5.0

Cold Comfort Farm (1932) – A genuinely funny novel, which is something of a rarity. I found myself smiling and laughing on a number of occasions. Nineteen-year-old Flora Poste has been recently orphaned and finds herself in early 1930s London with a hundred pounds a year and nowhere to live. After spamming her relatives seeking somewhere she decides to move to Cold Comfort Farm in bucolic Sussex, where her mother's oldest sister, Mrs Ada Doom (!), reigns over a strange mixture of her cousins, the Starkadders. Lesser writers might have been content to poke fun at the farm's inhabitants and to portray them as a bunch of illiterate, rutting country bumpkins, and, to some extent, Gibbons does just that. But that is only the surface level of these characters and the novel, and Flora soon realises that she can smarten up the farm, get some of her cousins looking towards the outside world, and maybe achieve something in her life. It is quite odd to realise that this was the author's debut, and yet we know very little about the other 25 or so novels she also wrote. This is a very good book indeed. It appears on both the "Guardian 1000 Novels" and "1001 Novels You Must Read Before you Die" lists. R: 4.5/5.0



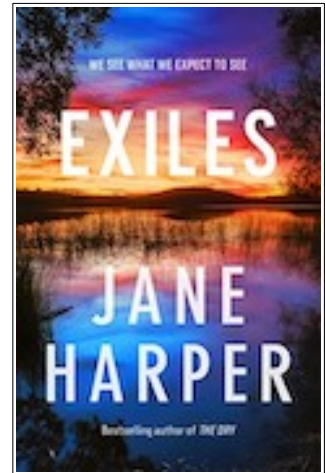
New Writings in SF 8 (1966) – At last a decent collection of stories in this original anthology series, with five of the six worthy of being on a recommended reading list for 1966. Colin Kapp returns with an Unorthodox Engineers novelette in "The Pen and the Dark", which is the best of those I've read so far. Keith Roberts supplies the other novelette in the anthology with "Synth" – an interesting tale about a synthetic human being involved in a divorce proceedings – which is the only story here which is not a planet-based space story of some sort; contact with aliens on extra-solar planets was a strong theme in the mid-1960s obviously. Of the short stories which worked well, Gerald W. Page's "Spacemen Live Forever" reminded me of the recent Chris Pratt/Jennifer Lawrence film *Passengers*; "The Final Solution" by R. W. Mackelworth pits two militaristic, fascist planetary societies against each other in an attempt to determine whose is the more racially pure; and Australian John Baxter's "Tryst" deals with a planet on the galactic rim that has been abandoned by its rulers. John Rackham's "Computer's Mate" is the only story that falls flat. It has possibilities but the author falls into the trap of stereotyping women in space and spending too much time philosophising, in a condescending way, about the nature of humans with disabilities. R: 3.6/5.0

Exiles (2022) – See major review below.

REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Exiles (2022) by Jane Harper
Genre: Crime

Harper's third novel in her series featuring Australian Federal Police Officer, Aaron Falk, follows *The Dry* (2016), and *Force of Nature* (2017). She has also written two other standalone novels in *The Lost Man* (2018) and *The Survivors* (2020). These are all of interest with my preference being for *The Dry* and *The Lost Man*. She has achieved considerable success with all of these, so I'm always curious to see what she is up to with any new novel, and especially what she has done with her character Falk.



A year before the main timeline of this novel Aaron Falk had been in the small South Australian wine-making town of Marralee visiting the annual Marralee Valley Food and Wine Festival at the invitation of some friends who live in the town. During that festival thirty-nine-year-old Kim Gillespie went missing, leaving her six-week-old daughter alone in a stroller. A frantic search for the woman finds nothing. The mystery remains unsolved.

A year later and Falk is back in town for the festival again staying with his friend, Greg Raco, a police officer who is uncle to Gillespie's teenage daughter. Raco persuades Falk to look over the material he has gathered on the disappearance but nothing, initially, seems to stand out. We learn that Gillespie's husband appears to have a firm alibi for the night and that Gillespie had been suffering from depression. One of her shoes has been found in a nearby reservoir and it is generally considered that she committed suicide, though no-one can fathom why.

In the background is the six-year-old fatal hit-and-run case of Dean Tozer, the late husband of a woman that Falk is interested in. The two cases, both being unresolved, could be connected though no-one can find the link.

The novel explores both of these mysteries against the backdrop of the festival and the christening of Greg's young child, at which Falk is nominated as the godfather. Harper has produced here a slowly evolving mystery with subtle turns as nearly every minute of the night Gillespie went missing is dissected and analysed.

The reveal, when it comes, is one that certainly fooled me but which is perfectly consistent with the information the author has provided throughout the book. There is no cheating here; the fact that the reader doesn't see the solution just shows the skill with which Harper is able to weave the required detail into the story.

Some readers will find this novel rather slow, but I found it a compelling read, as good as her first.

R: 4.4/5.0

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Three Pines (Season 1 — 8 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Crime

Adapted from the Louise Penny novels which feature her Canadian police detective Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, here played by Alfred Molina. The series is based on novels 2-5 (?) in the series with each book covering two one-hour episodes. In addition there is a long-running story arc behind each mystery dealing with the disappearance of a number of young Canadian indigenous men and women, which is very relevant to present-day Canadian society which is grappling with this very issue. Overall the mysteries are okay but only allowing two episodes for each means the stories aren't given enough time to breath and seem to be over almost before they really get started. Added to that there have been a number of changes from the original novels which is annoying my wife – not so much me as I haven't read them. Another case of what might have been. R: 3.3/5.0



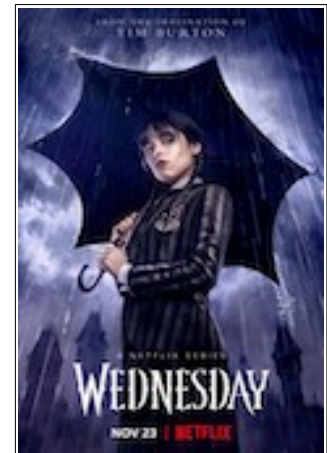
Wednesday (Season 1 — 8 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Gothic drama

Tim Burton's re-imagining of the Addams Family mythos finds Wednesday Addams (Jenny Ortega) being sent to the Nevermore Academy after causing mischief at several other schools. This is where her parents first met and the school's principal Larissa Weems (Gwendoline Christie) is an old classmate of her mother's. The school's students consist of vampires, werewolves, sirens, medusas, shape-shifters and the like, and they have a love-hate relationship with the inhabitants of the nearby town. When a hiker is killed and mutilated near the school Wednesday takes it upon herself to solve the mystery. This is an amusing and interesting series though it does tend to drag a bit in the middle. Ortega is wonderful in the lead role.

R: 3.9/5.0

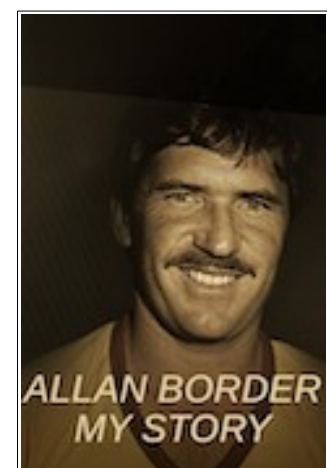


Allan Border My Story (3 Episodes) (2022)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Documentary Cricket

Allan Border's time in the Australian Men's Test Cricket team spanned the late 1970s (during the Kerry Packer/World series Cricket shakeup) through to the early 1990s when the team was about to become one of the most successful in history. The documentary includes interviews with his teammates and opponents



and attempts to put his legacy into some sort of historical context, at least from a cricketing point-of-view. It does a reasonable job without providing anything revelatory. Border was always one of my favourites, not least because he was born about one month before me in 1955. When he retired I started to feel old, as from that time on all Australian Test cricketers would be younger than me. R: 3.3/5.0

Upright (Season 2 — 8 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Comedy Drama

The first season of this was my favourite television series of 2021, this one isn't as good. Meg (Milly Alcock) again teams up with Lucky (Tim Minchin), this time in order to try to track down Meg's mother who seems to have gone missing somewhere in Queensland. Lucky has moved on a little since the first series as he's now a successful touring musician, but still an emotionally immature stoner type, always trying to please people and always failing. There are some good parts to this season but it lacks the freshness and absurdity of the first. Alcock is now four years older and a much more accomplished actor which tends to show through, and which takes away one of the major elements of the first outing. R: 3.4/5.0



The Test (Season 2 — 4 Episodes) (2023)

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Documentary Cricket

This is another cricket documentary, this time following the Australian Men's Test Cricket team as they find themselves, in November 2021, again facing the loss of their captain and then their coach, shortly thereafter, to resignations. This is anything like ideal as it comes just before the start of the 2021/22 Ashes series at home against England, arguably the most important contest on the cricketing calendar for both teams. That was later followed by a tour of Pakistan, the first in over twenty years and then a tour of Sri Lanka. This fly-on-the-wall documentary features interviews with the new captain, Pat Cummins, the main players and commentators and basically follows the team as they attempt to deal with management problems and still play their sport at the top level. Special attention is paid to Cummins, as the new captain, Scott Boland, only the second indigenous player to player for the men's team, and Usman Khawaja, the first Muslim men's player. Probably more for cricket followers like me than for anyone else. R: 3.7/5.0



This allusion to brandy and water suggested to Miss Gibbs the introduction of the liquor decanters, now that the tea was cleared away; for in bucolic society five and twenty years ago, the human animal of the male sex was understood to be perpetually athirst, and 'something to drink' was as necessary a 'condition of thought' as Time and Space.

— ***Amos Barton*** by George Eliot, p13

Film

Enemy of the State (1998)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Spy Drama

The follow-up to *North By Northwest* in my “film course” for the kids. This one, Tony Scott’s 1998 film featuring Will Smith and Gene Hackman, is another in the “wrong-man, wrong-place” sub-genre of thrillers. Here Smith is passed a video, on disk, of the assassination of an American politician. A rogue element of the CIA, led by Jon Voight, is responsible for the murder and the subsequent attempts to discredit and/or destroy Smith’s character as they try to recover the film. There is a lot to like about this story of paranoia in the electronic age and it is remarkably prescient. Think about your interactions with the mobile phone network in 1998 (I may have only just acquired one), the internet and satellite technology. I’m guessing “not a lot”. But it’s all here. Even by this time, if you were on the web, your personal details were probably already known by both government and the criminal element, and this may have been the first film to make this so explicit. Another point of interest with this film lies with the number of minor characters played by actors who would become far better known in the years ahead: Jack Black, Jason Lee, Anna Gunn, Seth Green, and Tom Sizemore, to name a few. Interesting stuff, and a wise choice to pick Hackman given his previous outing in 1974 in *The Conversation*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. R: 3.9/5.0



The Lost King (2022)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: True Life Drama

In 2012, Philippa Langley, an amateur researcher undertook to find the final resting place of the remains of King Richard III, monarch of England 1483-1485. Richard was killed at the Battle of Bosworth (22 August 1485) by the forces of the future King Henry VII, and it was believed that his body had been thrown in a river. But Langley is convinced that his body was recovered and buried in a nearby church choir, which was subsequently destroyed. Her researches lead her to a local car park, specifically a car spot painted with the letter “R” – you’d be laughed at if you had this in a novel. This film directed by Stephen Frears from a script by Steve Coogan and Jeff Pope, follows Philippa’s battles with the local council and with Leicester University, and with her struggles to raise the funds to finance the dig. History shows that she was perfectly correct and that Richard’s body was discovered where she said it was. The film has been criticised by University authorities who say it shows them in a bad light, probably doing more to prove that Langley’s account is the more accurate. This reminded me a lot of the 2021 film *The Dig*, featuring Carey Mulligan and Ralph Fiennes, with similar themes and outcomes. I enjoyed both. R: 3.7/5.0

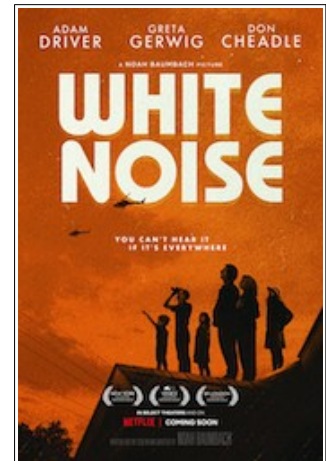


White Noise (2022)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

This film, written and directed by Noah Baumbach, is based on the 1985 novel of the same name by Don DeLillo. That novel won DeLillo the US National Book Award for Fiction, which gives it a decent sort of pedigree. This 2022 film is being billed as a black comedy, which it is, and a satire, which, to a degree, it also is. The main targets for this comedy and satire are: academia; American shopping and supermarkets; pollution and ecological collapse; middle American sexual mores; American family life; obsession with death; dubious medical cures – the list goes on and on. It’s a shotgun approach, shooting at a wide-range of targets hoping that something will be hit. A lot is but they are really only passing grazes, with nothing cutting very deep. And it’s hard to see how a satire based on mid-1980s material can be all that relevant to today’s world. Haven’t we seen all of this before? The film is also a mixture of styles and techniques, borrowing from sources such as Spielberg, the Coen brothers and any number of music video directors. Overall it’s too much of a mishmash to hold together well. R: 2.6/3.0



The Banshees of Inisherin (2022)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama

On the fictional island of Inisherin, off the west coast of Ireland in 1923, all is quiet; the Civil War rages on the main island but doesn’t reach here, and the bulk of the inhabitants lead a peaceful, if somewhat dull life. Then, Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson) decides he will break off his long-term drinking relationship with his friend Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell), a decision that will have dire and long-term implications for both men, and for the island as a whole. The break-up starts out as a black comedy but about halfway through the film it turns very dark indeed. It is possible to see this as an allegory for the Irish Civil War in that what starts out as a misunderstanding that morphs into a verbal spat then becomes a conflict where one side is willing to commit more damage on themselves than on their opponent just to appear to have the moral high ground. Be aware that this is not an easy film to watch at times. Farrell is wonderful in his role as the dull but dependable and nice one, while Gleeson tends to spend the film being rather stoic. He doesn’t have as much to do but does make a good fist of it. (Sorry couldn’t resist, and, if pushed I’ll blame Chong for that one.) R: 4.4/5.0



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.

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 25:

Carey Handfield: “Your story about buying your house in Hawthorn reminded me of our own experience. Sometimes you can be lucky.

“We lived in our house in Eaglemont for 20 years. We were very lucky to get it. It came on the market just before Christmas with a planned auction in February. We went the first inspection and fell in love with the house. Lots of room and a big garden both items on our wish list. We made an offer on the property which after some negotiation got accepted. We were told later the offer was accepted because the wife could not stand having strangers walking through her house for 6 weeks. The offer was a bit over our budget. If it had gone to auction I am sure it would have reached a higher figure which would have stopped us getting the property.”

[**PM:** In a strange twist of fate I think that was my accountant’s house.]

Perryscope 28:

John Hertz: “That line about beginning a story *in medias res* (Latin, ‘in the midst of things’) is from Horace, although he was talking about Homer. It’s trickier in SF because the author has to tell us more about what’s going on. The three classics of SF on which I led discussions at Loscon XLVIII last month, *The Paradox Men* (Harness, 1953), *Time for the Stars* (Heinlein, 1956), and *Doomsday Morning* (Moore, 1957), all do that in one way or another.

“A while ago I read Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* (1937: comprising *The 42nd Parallel*, 1930; *1919*, 1932; *The Big Money*, 1936), then re-read Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). Indeed Brunner uses Dos Passos’ collage technique. Both books (or if you prefer, Dos Passos’ three and Brunner’s one; I’d go along with saying *U.S.A.* is more a trilogy than is *The Lord of the Rings*) are heavily flavored with politics. Decades after *Zanzibar* we in SF, for all our independent-mindedness, too likely cheer or jeer a story according to whether or not it makes us right and our enemies wrong. Nabokov said ‘Minor readers like to recognise their own ideas in a pleasing disguise.’

[**PM:** I don’t think that SF readers are alone in this regard. Nabokov’s *Lolita* is a major case in point: a lot of readers and critics think it is a great novel, maybe one of the greatest. I don’t. Spending time inside the head of that slimy piece of shit, Humbert Humbert, was not my idea of an enjoyable experience. A vastly over-rated book in my opinion.]

“I saw Lesleigh Luttrell, among much else the first DUFF delegate, at a Fan Funds party during Chicon VIII. It wasn’t the best of Worldcons or the worst of Worldcons. Much of what went wrong looked to me like self-importance hindering a willingness to look around; as Dean Gahlon says, no so much re-inventing the wheel as re-inventing the square wheel. Much went right. It was fun being one of the Masquerade judges (there’s hard work for you), being one of the Art Show judges (there’s —), and helping in the Fanzine Lounge. I spent four or five hours taking Chengdu folks here and there. When they won I’d quoted

them Confucius, ‘When you know something, to know that you know it; when you don’t know something, to know that you don’t know it: that’s knowledge’ (*Analects* 2:17), which I thought friendlier than quoting Dean Gahlon.”

[**PM:** Having been on the inside of two Worldcon committees I will never overly criticise a Worldcon’s organisation. The fact that the bloody thing works at all is something of a miracle. I suspect the bulk of attendees didn’t see any problems at all.]

Perryscope 29:

Mark Olson: “Priscilla and I are not going to Chengdu and never seriously considered it. The reasons were the hassle (getting there, getting in, getting out, and getting home) and that we go to Worldcon primarily to see friends, and few of them were seriously talking about going. China’s politics would probably have been an issue, but we never reached it.”

[**PM:** Good points. I’m finding that as I get older I am spending very little time engaging with the Worldcon in the usual, “normal” sense of attending program items, book readings etc. Like you, it’s the old friends I’m aiming to see.]

“Hopefully Glasgow will be great.”

[**PM:** I am definitely aiming to be there.]

“I enjoyed the wine country report — it sounds like an enjoyable trip — but I was struck by Mark Loney’s EV problems. I drive a Tesla Y and love it — it’s the most comfortable car and best car I’ve ever driven. I don’t find charging during distance travel difficult (we drove it to Chicago for Chicon a few months ago, for example). Tesla took EVs seriously from the start and have built superchargers pretty much everywhere and the car’s navigation software keeps an eye on the battery and suggests appropriate chargers along the way in plenty of time to charge up.

“We do have to stop for 20-30 minutes every 3-4 hours, but, honestly, this has been an improvement for us as we’ve always had a tendency to drive until we really can’t stand it anymore. (Charging at home is not an issue, as I put a charger in the garage and once or twice a week I hook the car up overnight giving me ~250 miles of range with a nice safety margin.)

“I’ve had it for a year now and would never willingly go back. (I do like living in the future!)”

[**PM:** Australia hasn’t taken to EVs as quickly as other parts of the world for a number of reasons, mostly political. This has resulted in poor infrastructure development with not enough chargers of the right types in the right places. Mark was quoted a range of 350 km between charges by the rental car firm, but only barely managed 150km. It appears that legacy car manufacturers who build EVs do not do as good a job with their setups as newer companies who look at the whole car build in a more holistic way, from the ground up.]

Graham Peters: “Oh, for days past, meandering around the ‘stickies’ of Rutherglen. You missed my favourite, Chambers Rosewood, especially their glorious Tokay.”

[**PM:** See Part 2 next month.]

“Ruminations on electric cars; I suspect we are still some years from reliable long distance pure-electric car travel. We have happily embraced a Toyota Hybrid for the past 3 years, enjoying fabulous economy and a range of 1,000km before filling up — we need refuelling long before the car.”

[**PM:** In Australian conditions I think the hybrid will be the dominant form in a few years' time.]

“Graham Greene has always been a problem. *Travels With My Aunt* is far better as a film than the book, a trait it shares with *The Third Man*, albeit that was essentially a treatment for the later film script. A lot of the archness of Greene's writing of *Travels With My Aunt* is softened in the film.”

[**PM:** I'm thinking that I should really start watching film adaptations of books I've recently read. I should wait a month or so and then see how the novel has been transformed into a film. It is an interesting exercise, and, as you say, it may prove that there are more film adaptations that are better than the original novel source material. See my thoughts on *The Guns of Navarone* a few months back.]

“The impression that I was left with was that Greene ‘knew’ that he was a ‘great writer’, a peculiar malady of many of the more tedious English authors of the twentieth century. I have just discovered that he was successfully sued by Twentieth Century Fox for his review of a Shirley Temple movie *Wee Willie Winkie*, fleeing to Mexico until matters calmed down.

“I have recently stumbled through *Terry Pratchett — A Life With Footnotes* which confirmed my suspicions about memoirs masquerading as biography. I did not enjoy Scott Berg's memoir of Katherine Hepburn, recently wasted some hours reading the Jon Faine tale of *Apollo and Thelma* (hopefully remaindered or pulped quickly to put it out of its misery. Inserting the personality of the author into a biography seems rude and rarely well done. The Terry Pratchett book has lots of interesting detail but should have been passed to a competent author/editor rather than the hands of his personal assistant. I found it peculiarly unsatisfying and slow reading. I cannot recommend it.”

[**PM:** The Pratchett biography is not a book I would have been searching out in any event — for some reason I have never taken to Pratchett's work. I find his **Discworld** novels entertaining enough although I can't figure out why some people see them as very funny indeed. I just feel like I'm missing the joke or something.]

Chong: “HNY! Another one fights the rust! as NY would say.

“*Glass Onion*. I watched. I really liked it!

“You write: ‘...it falls rather flat...The mystery itself is complicated and rather amusing until the final 20 minutes of this long film (139 minutes) when to starts to go off the rails and, effectively, gives up.’

“Puzzle films! I can see a relationship to *The Power of the Dog* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. *Dog* definitely has a solution clicking into place, and *EEAAO* renders complexity down to a simple thesis — made unsimplistic through the trials of the

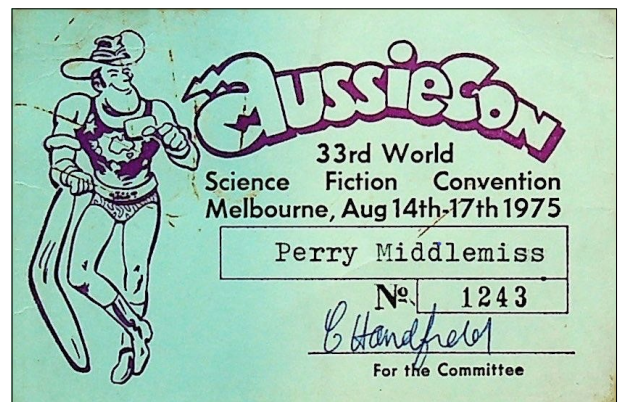
journey. I feel like **Onion** does have emotional stakes along with its substantial serving of puzzle. Also considerable garnishes of humour and irony. (That McCartney guitar joke lol.)

“I wonder if your response to **Onion** says something about one’s taste or tolerance for certain forms and formulas. Certainly as time goes by I feel like my ‘taste’ however it’s been arrived at, really sorts my pleasures. Even the most lauded items can fall dead at my doorstep within the first paragraph or scene or bar or glimpse. I guess this is how accumulatively we become more and more the ‘character’ that people who are not us identify us with, even though within it seems that we are/I am maelstroms (as Sontag once said).”

[**PM: (Possible spoiler ahead.** I think I should be a little more open about what I thought didn’t work with this film, and now that it has been out for a few months, and is widely available on streaming services I can probably give away some spoilers.) I was actually quite liking the film up until the last 20 minutes or so. It was a mystery that seemed to be moving towards a reasonable ending, and isn’t this film all about the mystery, the puzzle, the whodunit? All the clues were in place and we seemed to be heading for a denouement that would be acceptable. And then the script sets about destroying all that has been setup so far – okay, still good – but the promise/expectation is still there of a satisfactory ending. And then Benoit Blanc basically says “I don’t know what to do, I give up”, and I’m expecting someone else to step up and tie it all together. But no. It’s almost as if no-one knew what to do at that point so they simply burnt it all down and walked away. I looked on it as being a *deus ex machina* ending of the worst variety.]

Leigh Edmonds: “I liked your post-modern cover, very enigmatic. It gives you a big burly upper body which makes us think of you as some kind of super hero. Then there’s the hat. Do super heroes wear hats like that?”

[**PM:** I had to turn side on with my arms crossed in front of me in order to take the photo without the camera’s shadow appearing, hence the burliness. As to superheroes with hats, how soon we forget the superhero who helped bring the Worldcon to these shores in 1975.]



“Your write up of your trip to and around Rutherglen was entertaining and I enjoyed it a lot. It also bought back some happy memories which I am now going to share with you.

“Sometime in the 1970s Valma and I did a driving holiday down the Murray River, starting at Robinvale and heading back to Melbourne from Wodonga. (I can date the trip precisely from a memory of being in a shop in Swan Hill fondling a scale model kit of the newly released Frog 1/72 Sea Vixen when the news came over the radio that Elvis had died. ‘Isn’t he dead already (artistically if not physically)’ I thought. (What interested me more was that this kit had not turned up in any of the shops in Melbourne, but was there in Swan Hill. So I bought it and I still have the model around here somewhere.))”

[**PM:** It is always interesting the way we can access our memories in this way, though the connection between a scale model kit and the death of Elvis would be unique to you, I suspect.]

“Leaving that aside. Our plan a day or two later was to hit Rutherglen around lunch time and take in a winery or two in the afternoon. However, the day was stinking hot and there was, of course in those days, no air conditioning in the car, so we were seriously exhausted from the heat when we got to Rutherglen. When we got to our motel room we closed the door, turned on the air conditioning and didn’t emerge until the following morning. That’s all I know about Rutherglen, your visit seems to have been much more enjoyable.”

[**PM:** Rutherglen is not a place to be visiting much during the summer months, generally. We took a bit of a punt in December on the basis that spring had been very wet, and the summer really hadn’t gotten underway by the end of November. And it seemed to work out all right. Now, in mid-January as I write, Rutherglen is again topping the State’s temperatures on a regular basis, with figures in the low forties occurring quite regularly. That is not the type of weather to be sampling big, red wines. Better leaving it for late autumn to spring.]

“Glenrowan, on the other hand, is a place I know a little more about. In 1980 when I started studying history at ANU in Canberra the Head of Department, John Moloney, had just published his biography of Ned Kelly. During his research for that book he’d got to know the Kelly clan well so it was too good an opportunity to pass up so a load of students got a bus and drove down to Albury where we spent a couple of nights. One day we went down to Glenrowan where Moloney walked us all around the site of the siege at the pub and bought it to life with his story telling skills. In the afternoon we went out to Greta West where the Kelly homestead had been, saw the forge where the armour was supposed to have been made and where one of the gang had been buried behind a barn to keep his body away from the authorities.

“No wineries were visited during that excursion but I can assure you that a large amount of grog was consumed in Albury. It was a great weekend and it made me think that if history could be that much fun I’d like to do more of it. Which I have. Over the years it’s involved a lot of serious drinking too, but I’m clearly not as discerning as you are. For some of my postgraduate years I had a simple motto, if it was red and contained alcohol it was alright by me.”

[**PM:** As I attempted to point our last issue, Glenrowan is a winery area that has never really “kicked off”. I suspect that there was quite a lot of vines in the area in the late 1800s that were ripped out after the phylloxera epidemic hit Victoria between 1877 and 1902. That is a pity as I think it has a lot of potential, and it’s always sad to see a winery shut down.]

“Changing the subject, I find that I have to chastise you again about the rating of one of your movies. [**PM:** Too high? Too low?.] I watched *Glass Onion* with a kind of morbid fascination, waiting for something that would give the movie any significant worth. I agree that the movie went seriously off the rails towards the end and when the characters started smashing glass objects and setting fire to things I came to the conclusion that the director had seriously lost his marbles. And why bring the Mona Lisa into the movie at all? If the movie was some kind of commentary on the vapid lives of rich celebs then my only rejoinder

is that the French and Italians did that kind of thing much better several decades earlier.

“To follow up we rewatched *Knives Out* the following night and it is a much more satisfying movie. I still found the Daniel Craig character somewhat unbelievable but everything else worked beautifully.”

[**PM:** I much preferred the first film to the second, as I’ve tried to point out. Craig’s character is one that people either love or hate. I like it. I was much more bothered about the script and the way it just gave up, and took the easiest way out when it had written itself into a corner.]

“Is Chong always as insightful and precise as he is in this letter and when you have him on your podcast? [**PM:** Mostly.] In a few short paragraphs he probably explains why I find Springsteen interesting but not compelling. He is an entertainer at base and does what he thinks will work best on his audience. Not that all the great musicians of the rock and roll era aren’t entertainers, it’s just, I think, that some have something more to add. For example, while I’ve really enjoyed seeing the Rolling Stones and AC/DC the concert that sticks in my mind is seeing B B King. Sure, he was a great entertainer and put on a polished show, but to me at least there was more to his performance than just pulling the audience’s strings.

“I’m still amused by the way that you and David manage to turn your reading into a statistical analysis. Still, I can’t mock, I recently posted photos of all the scale models I’d made in 2022, and isn’t that the same thing.”

[**PM:** You have to get your fun where you can find it. I’m not as much into statistics as David. He tends to include pie charts and bar graphs in his yearly analysis. I like to stay with the straight numbers, at least in public. What happens behind the scenes is another matter entirely.]

I also heard from: Marc Ortlieb; Charles Taylor; Nic Farey; Jerry Kaufman; William Breiding; Garth Spencer; Ahrvid Engholm; and Barbara O’Sullivan (who was impressed with the musical Hamilton and suggests people make every attempt to see it. I unfortunately must disagree – it wasn’t for me.) thank you one and all.