



Perryscope 32

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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 photograph by Robyn Mills, Iceland, September 2019.

INTRODUCTION

You will have noticed that I missed a month, March, after 31 consecutive issues. There weren't any major reasons for that, just a lack of enthusiasm, something I'm still struggling with. I'm not ill, nor injured, though I have been distracted a bit as I was acting as my wife's driver for most of March following her hip replacement operation in early February. That all went well, thanks for asking, and she is now back driving, back at work, and not requiring me to be nearby so much.

So I put my absence down to a periodic sense of ennui, one that I know will crop up from time to time. I never know when these periods are going to occur. It's best to just accept them, and wait for them to correct themselves, as they seem to be doing here at the end of April.

In other news my wife and I are off overseas again; this time to Morocco. And "why Morocco?" I hear you ask. It's a long story but is mainly due to the requirements of utilising some existing travel credits (purchased back in March 2019 for travel in late 2020), which the company was saying were going to expire, and a long-term desire to have a look at the country. This is a three-week fully guided trip. An odd event for us and one we haven't undertaken since the early 1990s when we had a couple of weeks in Scandinavia on a bus tour. I'm not sure how we are going to cope with sitting in a tour bus for that long, and having most of our days fully organised on our behalf. There will be a few days here and there where we'll be left to our own devices so we should be able to get out of the hotels and into the street markets, back alleys and food vendors. We intend to make the most of them.

Later in the year we'll be utilising the other part of that travel credit by travelling to India in late October. Again we'll be away for about 3 weeks. Some of that will be guided tours, and some on our own as we park ourselves in a resort in Goa and explore the local area. More on that one later.

The pleasing thing about all of this is that travel seems to be back on the agenda. Much more expensive than pre-pandemic, but at least it's here and available. Now we just have to be careful to take precautions, with sanitiser and masks, of course.

Cover notes: It was cold in Iceland in 2019, not brass monkey weather, but cold enough that a balding head would need some sort of cover to keep in the warmth. My Akubra hat was good for days when the wind was down though not so flash on the breezier days, of which there seemed to be many. So, the purchase of a knitted skullcap was in order. An event that amused my wife no end. And bloody expensive it was too.

WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING LATELY – A Few Days in the Country – Part 2

[This is a continuation of the piece I started in **Perryscope 29** back in January 2023.]

Thursday ...

We weren't in a rush on Thursday morning. We were checking out of our Rutherglen motel but check-out time wasn't until 10am, and the motel owner had informed us that she was at a medical appointment and wouldn't be there to shoo us out in any case; we just had to lockup and drop off the key. But we had a bit to do in the morning before we left the area so I joined Julian and Lucy in their room for a slice of the fruit bread Julian had picked up the day before, and washed it down with a strong coffee. By a bit after ten we were on the way over to pick up Mark Loney from his accomodation.

Mark was still struggling with the power levels in his EV so we had decided that he could come along with us, saving his battery for the next day when he was heading back to Canberra. Plus he was aiming to drive around Rutherglen a little after we had departed.

First stop in the morning was at Bill Chambers' Rosewood winery. I've been coming to Bill's winery in Rutherglen ever since I first started visiting the area in the 1980s. And



while it always seemed to be one of the places I always stopped at I can't really say that there was anything that I had ever bought there that stuck in my memory as an all-time favourite. He always seemed to be trying to do too much: reds, whites (both dry and sweet), and fortifieds of all varieties (tokay, muscat, sweet and dry sherry, marsala, vintage and tawny port). The list seemed to go on and on. I always came away thinking that Bill was spreading his talent too thin.

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So, on this day, I just didn't have the enthusiasm to try anything: a very odd occurrence for me. Partly I knew I had some driving to do that morning and afternoon and while I might have been fine doing so when I was younger, I've found it harder to maintain driving concentration at levels I like after I've tasted even a few wines in the morning. So I left Mark and Julian to it as Lucy wandered around outside and I listened to the tale of the new tasting shed. Back in the "good old days" Chambers had a big trestle table set up in the packing shed and you were allowed to basically go help yourself. That later changed to a similar arrangement but more closely supervised near the cash register. Now they had divided the tasting zone from the packing area and put in a spanking new wooden bar. It looked impressive. But its installation had been driven by necessity as the rains in January 2022 had flooded the winery to a depth of about a metre and pretty much destroyed the whole interior. They figured that they might as well upgrade as replace, and a new Rosewood Winery tasting experience was the result.



Next stop was Morris's, at the eastern end of the Rutherglen wine-growing area. This winery has been operating in the area for the past 160 years, and five generations of winemakers in the Morris family have worked there. The winery here was also undergoing some major renovations, though this time not caused by any weather problems, so we weren't able to visit their usual cellar door. Nevertheless the temporary arrangements were more than adequate. Mark and Julian were interested in the reds and fortifieds while I was there to pick up a bottle of their single malt matured in their old Muscat barrels. I'd previously had a bottle of their whisky from Tokay barrels from the Australian-based Whisky Club, and that was wonderful, so I was keen to grab their other variant. Morris's whiskies had been receiving some seriously good reviews, opinions that I could only agree with. There may have been whisky tastings available but I skipped that, see my previous comments around Chambers.

Purchases achieved, we headed back to Mark's B&B after a drive around some of the backblock roads along the Murray River. It is still possible to see some of the massive old mansions facing denuded blocks. Between 1851, when Rutherglen vines were first planted,

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and 1899, when phylloxera hit and a lot of the old vines were pulled up, the vineyards here extended almost continuously between the township of Rutherglen and Morris's, a distance of around 15 kilometres. In that period Rutherglen had some of the largest areas under vine of anywhere in the world. Wines, mainly fortified to enable them to survive the long journeys, were shipped down to Goolwa in South Australia by riverboat, or down to Melbourne by train from Albury-Wodonga. From there they were sent around the world.

But the arrival of the phylloxera virus in the 1890s killed all of that, and now the area is but a pale imitation of its former self. I suspect that part of the reason that it hasn't flourished in the past 50 years or so, when there has been a big uplift in wine consumption and appreciation in Australia, is that they tend to make wines that are thought to be too "heavy" for the modern palate – fortifieds and big reds in particular – and also because the region is just a bit too far away from any major population centre. Compared to the Yarra Valley (which is only a bit over an hour out of Melbourne) or the Barossa Valley (just a bit further from Adelaide), Rutherglen sits around four hours from Melbourne, too far for a day-trip. It's a real pity because the region has a lot to offer. Each time I go there I find something new and interesting and food choices also seem to be improving. I have hopes.

After dropping off Mark to tend to his car and to make his own arrangements for the rest of the day, I set off with Julian and Lucy for a lunch date we had with some old friends of theirs, Alan and Kay Souter, outside of Myrtleford. The drive over took us about an hour, and it had been this part of the day that I had been thinking of when I skipped the offered wine tastings in the morning.



The Souters have a wonderfully positioned house on a north-facing slope with vines that run from the level of the house down to the main road. They had moved into the area about 15-20 years before but had now reached the time of their lives when they'd decided that it was better for them to move closer to family and a bigger city. So their property was up for sale. If I was twenty years younger I might well have been tempted to make them an offer.

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But that time of my life has also passed me by and any such dreams are the stuff of vapour these days.

A light lunch, accompanied by a small tasting of the Souter wines was followed by a walk around the property – “keep an eye out for snakes” – to view the various vines and their cellar, which proved to be a shipping container dug into the side of a small hill and covered over with dirt. Not only did this arrangement allow for storage of wines in a controlled temperature environment but it also provided Alan and Kay a place of “last resort” in the event that a bushfire swept through the area. The point was made, of course, that you wouldn’t want for something to drink while you waited for the fire-front to pass over. You just needed to make sure you had decent glasses on hand. The look we got when this comment was made was evidence that that contingency had been well catered for.

Our final destination on the day’s journey was in Cheshunt in the King Valley, where we would be staying with David Coutts, an sf fan who had moved to the area a few years back when he retired and then his marriage broke down.



David’s place is on a quiet road at the end of the Valley just a short walk from the King River. The house he’d purchased had been owned by a married couple who had plans to open it as a B&B at one point. But they had been too enamoured of the quiet rural lifestyle which involved sitting on the first floor landing, drinking wine and taking in the view. They’d never really finished all the work on the house and had taken to chucking their old rubbish – mattresses, washing machines, etc – onto a large pile on the property. The two finally split up, and David was able to purchase the place for a good price as the two owners only wanted rid of it as fast as possible. Unfortunately he’d taken some months and a lot of work to get the block cleared. The previous owners lack of enthusiasm has also extended to the house itself which David purchased unfinished. He has since had the ground floor rooms finished off, sealed and painted and now only needs to do a bit more decorating around the house to have a final product. It’s looking good.

After a look around the house, and the deposit of our bags into our designated rooms we wandered a few hundred meters down the road to the river, which seemed to be flowing extremely well indeed. It is fed with run-off from the nearby mountains – the Victorian Alps – which had been receiving huge amounts of rain over the spring and early summer periods in 2022. It looked like an idyllic spot.

And by then it was time for dinner which David had booked for us in a nearby pub. David drove so Julian and I helped ourselves to a few pints of beer and some wine. It seemed like the fitting end to a long day.

Friday...

There are 28 wineries in the King Valley wine region, but we only had time in the morning for a couple. All of us needed to be back in Melbourne by late afternoon, and as we had a three to four drive ahead of us we wanted to be on the move just after lunch.

I haven't ever been to this region before. It's a bit difficult to get in and out of, in that the only way in and out is along the King Valley Road which runs south from the Snow Road near Oxley. It is possible to keep driving south but the road becomes narrow and very slow going. David advised us against using it. In the past I'd driven along the Snow Road and seen the sign to the King Valley, but it was a road I'd never taken. I should have.



David had hooked us in to a tasting at the nearby Pizzini Wines, just a few kilometres up the road from his house at 10am. The whole of the valley had been originally given over to hops, tobacco, and dairy cattle but with the decline in tobacco use in the 1980s a number of farmers in the region decided to turn their attention to vines instead. And given their Italian heritage it was only natural that they should plant Italian varieties in the main. So we came across varieties such as Barbera, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese, though the valley lately has become famous as the home of Australian Prosecco sparkling.

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We got some rather special treatment from the winery staff as David is a known local and we got to try some 10-12 year old Rieslings that had been opened the night before in the winery for a private function. These are the dry Australian version of the grape, with the best examples, in my opinion, being produced in the Clare Valley in South Australia. The wines we tried here could almost have been mistaken for their Clare cousins and I was quite impressed with the body, acids, fruit and cellaring potential. If I was ten years younger I might well have bought some to put down for a few years, but I have too much in the house already so only picked up a couple to take home for Robyn to try.

I had originally decided that I wasn't going to do any tasting this morning, due to the driving I had in front of me in the afternoon. That, at least, was the original plan; one that was thrown out the window when the older wines put in an appearance. I settled for the unfamiliar option of sip-and-spit figuring that might see me through.

We spent a very enjoyable hour at Pizzini which left us with a bit of a rush through our next stop of Gracebrook Wines, another seven or so kilometres up the road. This was a much more rustic affair, with the cellar door inside a large shed with tastings on a massive length of polished red gum. Manoeuvring it into the shed and aligning it properly must have been a helluva task. Again we came across Italian varieties such as Montepulciano, Tempranillo and Dolcetto, with old standards like Cabernet Franc, Shiraz and Chardonnay also putting in an appearance. I did the best I could but still walked away with another three bottles.



Image taken from winery website, as I find I didn't take any photos here

By this time lunch was required and David had recommended a small cafe in the valley township of Moyhu. That was fine with us as I was aiming to turn west off the King Valley Road from there to travel via a number of back roads to join up with the Hume Highway near Glenrowan for our return journey.

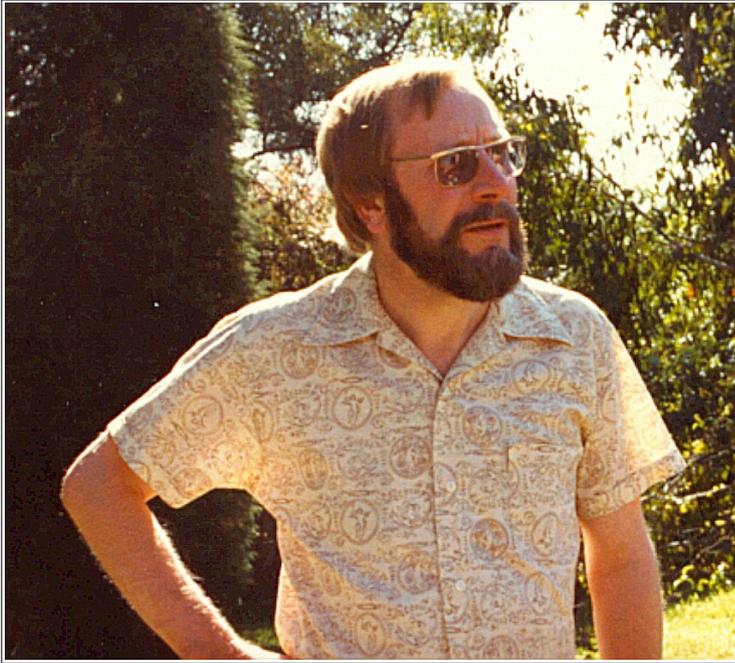
As usual, we probably tried to fit too much in to our four days and three nights away on this trip. But it had certainly been an enjoyable experience and one to repeat when I get the chance.

LEE HARDING: Some Personal Reminiscences by Julian Warner

Lee Harding (19 February 1937 – 19 April 2023)

I am not the most qualified person to write an obituary of Lee Harding, so I'll leave that to others. What I do have is memories of Lee Harding the person, who I regarded as a friend.

My first meeting with Lee was probably at a Science Fiction convention in Perth in the



early eighties when I was new to the world of SF fandom. I knew Erik Harding – Lee's son – as a fellow fan who was slightly younger than me. Erik had a reputation as the 'toy boy' of Perth fandom. He spoke of attending conventions as a baby, taken along by his father, Lee. Erik was 'born into' fandom and was an essential part of the Perth scene. He was happy to introduce people to his beloved Dad, even if that Dad rightly regarded many of us as silly young neophytes. Sadly, Erik passed on some years before his father. Although Erik had departed long ago, he was fondly remembered.

Lee Harding, 1982, photo by Elaine Cochrane, used with permission.

It is unlikely that Lee or I would have remembered our first uneventful meeting, whenever it was. It was clear that the other fans respected Lee for his writing and for his enthusiasm for the genre. He was happy to expound at length on many topics and argue the point with the other pontificators of the period.

Lee was friends with Julia and Craig Hilton and stayed with them occasionally. Julia and Craig maintained a house in Manning in the southern suburbs of Perth which they allowed friends to house-sit while they practised at Doctor and Nurse in the WA countryside. I was one of those house-sitters for a while (and followed by Tim Richards and Narrelle Harris in that role). Lee and Irene Pagram came to stay for a few days by arrangement with Julia and Craig while I was house-sitting. On the first day, I'd had plans for the evening and told them they would have to entertain themselves. As it was, my plans fell through and I came home from work to find an obvious 'romantic dinner' in progress with all of the accoutrements. I brazened out a short period of conversation, blushing slightly. Eventually I made my excuses and departed elsewhere.

My move to Melbourne from Perth was engendered partly by my fondness for one of Mark Loney's workmates. Janet was a member of the Cheltenham Light Opera Company and, although I am not a great fan of musical theatre, I got involved as an usher and general

helper. As I knew Lee was a fan of musical theatre, I took Janet to meet him and they bonded very quickly over their love of Stephen Sondheim, Bob Fosse et al. I was happy to drink Lee's wine and nod sagely while not understanding much at all. As it was, I had to defer to Lee's greater expertise in various areas of music. Lee had been part of a group within fandom of enthusiasts for classical music – a genre which I enjoy but failed to (*ahem*) *grok* in the way that they did.

When Janet sensibly pushed me away I think she had noticed that I had been showing enthusiasm for conversations with Andrew Brown and Lucy Sussex – people with whom I had much more common interest musically. Lucy and I became a couple: she introduced me to many writers; and I introduced her to an even broader fandom. We both liked Lee and once when he and Irene were living in Rosebud in a house near the sea, they invited us down for a day. It was a day of good food, good wine, beach walks in some fine sunshine and lots of chat. I seem to remember Erik and other family being present as well. Lee's daughter Madeleine must have been ten or eleven at the time.

Lucy and I were invited to a celebration of Lee's birthday at 'The Old Cheese Factory', which was an Art Gallery and associated residence on a little rural block in the middle of encroaching suburbs in Berwick. It was a beautiful old homestead where Irene managed the Art Gallery and Lee was writerly. The event was well-attended (others may remember this) and there was a generous meal and wine to enjoy. Lee produced an excellent bottle of Mount Mary Quintet for the occasion – one of the few times I've been able to enjoy that wine. During dinner conversation, Lee made a nasty dismissal of one of Lucy's statements which put a damper on proceedings. While usually a master of charm, he was capable of being particularly acerbic.

Later meetings with Lee were usually at one of Julia and Craig's many Christmas lunches or special dinners in Melbourne. As Lee got older, his love for red wine had to give way to white, and then none at all. He maintained his love for films throughout and I think obtained some vicarious joy when daughter Madeleine started acting. He became cynical about the joys of writing when publishers did not embrace his newer works. Although I knew that he was one of the chief photographers of old Melbourne fandom – often not being in photographs because he was behind the camera – I was never aware of him taking up that role when I knew him. I'd been pleased when he re-established connections with John Baxter (now in Paris), who had been the other main photo-recordist of early fandom. John and Lee were both huge fans of film and spent a long time chatting at a birthday dinner for John on one of his rare trips to Melbourne. Lee had been volunteering at the ACMI and this had allowed him to see a great variety of otherwise inaccessible films.

As Lee aged, he seemed to become even more private, so we enjoyed what encounters there were at Julia and Craig's place. I know he was very reluctant to become an old man and reluctant to become dependent on anyone. I suspect he approached dependency and mortality with loathing. Vale Lee.

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.

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this period's podcasts

Episode 87: (2 March 2023) *Automated mansplaining*

This time round we discuss problems with "generative A.I" before going on to talk about what we've been reading recently. I then chat to W. H. Chong about his best film, tv and book of 2022.

Episode 88: (23 March 2023) *But was it a crime?*

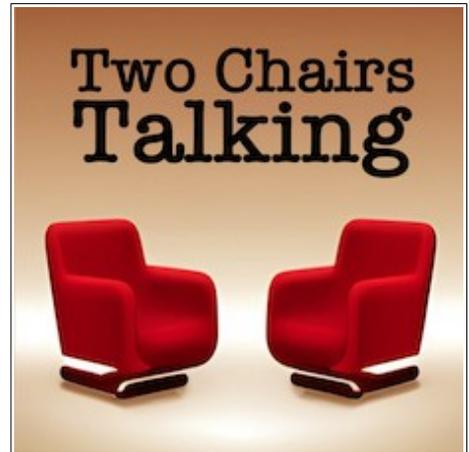
Another in our semi-regular crime fiction episodes, in which we discuss our latest reading in the field, covering such authors as Fred Vargas, Rex Stout, Kate Atkinson, Jennifer Down and Jane Harper.

Episode 89: (12 April 2023) *Again and again and again*

We mainly discuss Kate Atkinson's 2013 novel LIFE AFTER LIFE and the British TV adaptation of it. Is the novel literary or sf? How does it use the time loop concept, and does it work? David and I disagree about a lot of this, but not all.

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

The previously noted FANAC Zoom session with Leigh Edmonds has been postponed. Hopefully we can get to it later in the year.



It is often much harder to get rid of books than it is to acquire them. They stick to us in that pact of need and oblivion we make with them, witnesses to a moment in our lives we will never see again. While they are still there, it is part of us. I have noticed that many people make a note of the day, month, and year that they read a book; they build up a secret calendar. Others, before lending one, write their name on the flyleaf, note whom they lent it to in an address book, and add the date. I have known some book owners who stamp them or slip a card between their pages the way they do in public libraries. Nobody wants to mislay a book. We prefer to lose a ring, a watch, our umbrella, rather than a book whose pages we will never read again, but which retains, just in the sound of its title, a remote and perhaps long-lost emotion.

The Paper House by Carlos María Domínguez, translated by Nick Caistor, p14

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – Aust: Australian; Coll: single-author collection; Gdn: Guardian 1000 novels; Nvla: novella; Trans: translated.

February-April 2023 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Sea of Tranquility</i>	Emily St. John Mandel	Sf	Feb 19		4.6	2022	
<i>Seeking Whom He May Devour</i>	Fred Vargas	Crime	Feb 22		3.3	1999	Trans (French)
<i>The Paper House</i>	Carlos María Domínguez	Lit	Feb 23		3.8	2004	Nvla, Trans (Spanish)
<i>The Dog</i>	Kerstin Ekman	Lit	Feb 28		3.2	1986	Nvla, Trans (Swedish)
<i>A Heart Full of Headstones</i>	Ian Rankin	Crime	Mar 18		3.6	2022	
<i>Pavane</i>	Keith Roberts	Sf	Mar 22		3.9	1968	Coll
<i>Wake</i>	Shelley Burr	Crime	Mar 25		4.2	2022	Aust
<i>Invisible Ink</i>	Patrick Modiano	Lit	Mar 30		3.4	2019	Trans (French)
<i>The Tighrope Men</i>	Desmond Bagley	Spy	Apr 2		2.8	1973	
<i>The Drop</i>	Mick Herron	Spy	Apr 7		3.8	2018	Nvla
<i>Life After Life</i>	Kate Atkinson	Lit	Apr 9	e	3.4	2013	
<i>Double Indemnity</i>	James M. Cain	Crime	Apr 12		3.8	1936	Gdn
<i>A Prayer for the Crown-Shy</i>	Becky Chambers	Sf	Apr 13	e	2.4	2022	Nvla
<i>Treacle Walker</i>	Alan Garner	Fantasy	Apr 20		4.3	2021	
<i>The Mountain in the Sea</i>	Ray Nayler	Sf	Apr 23		4.4	2022	

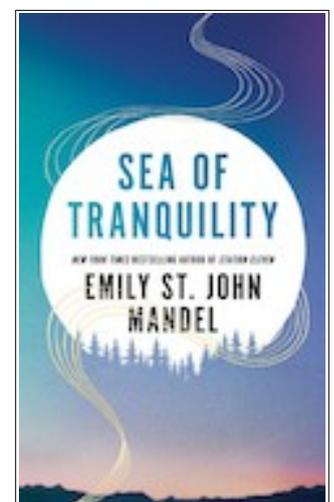
Books read in the period: 15

Yearly total to end of period: 37

Reading targets achieved: Books in Translation (6)

Notes:

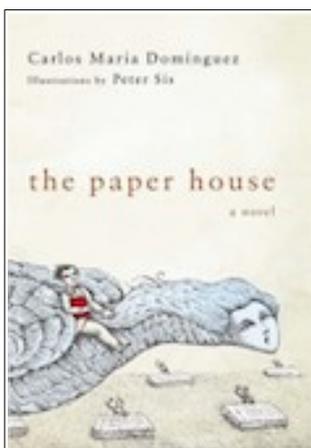
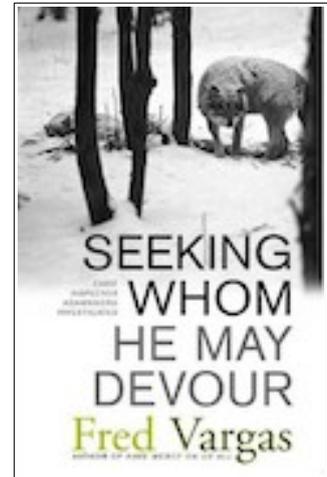
Sea of Tranquility (2022) – If the universe is merely a computer simulation as some suspect, what happens when there is a glitch in that software? How would it manifest itself across time and space? What might be its cause? These, and many other questions are tackled in this excellent novel by Emily St. John Mandel, as she follows a set of characters from 1912 through to 2403, from Vancouver Island in British Columbia to the Moon and back again, utilising the future tech of time travel to follow that momentary glitch. There are some very



intriguing points made about the possibilities and consequences of times travel in a simulation universe, though that is not the point of this novel. If you've read enough time travel stories the final reveal will not come as a shock but that is not to say that the book is not worth your time. On the contrary I expect that this will be on the ballot of the Hugo Award for Best Novel this year, and may well be the eventual winner. This is literate science fiction at its best. R: 4.6/5.0

Seeking Whom He May Devour (1999) – #2 in the author's Chief Inspector Adamsberg series of novels. Translated from the French by David Bellos. Nominated for a CWA Silver Dagger Award in 2005 – for the English translation I suspect.

First quibble: I was a bit annoyed that I had to search the fine print on the copyright page to discover the name of the translator of this novel; it wasn't even included on the page containing the "Translator's Note". This novel starts off concentrating on the death and mutilation of a number of sheep in the Provence area of France. It appears that there is a giant wolf, descendant from an Italian wolf pack that crossed the Alps into southern France, attacking ewes for no reason. Ewes not lambs? The whole thing is odd. Then, a local woman is killed and it looks like the same wolf was responsible, and a strange local man goes missing. The police think he has died on the mountain as his money and papers were left behind, but three locals are convinced he is responsible for all the killings and set out to track him down. Watching from afar, intrigued, is Inspector Adamsberg, who then finds himself in the area of the search on another matter and is contacted by one of the search party. This is an intriguing mystery but it takes a long time to get into its stride. Adamsberg, for example, doesn't show up properly until about page 180, out of a 288 page novel which is a bit odd. But it all ends well, with everything tied up properly with no cheating by the author. I didn't pick it, though I suspect my wife probably would have. She's just better at this stuff than me. R: 3.3/5.0



The Paper House (2004) – Translated from the Spanish by Nick Caistor.

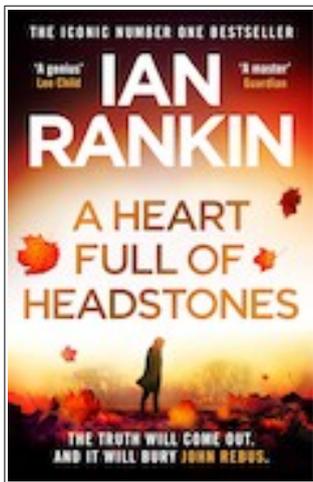
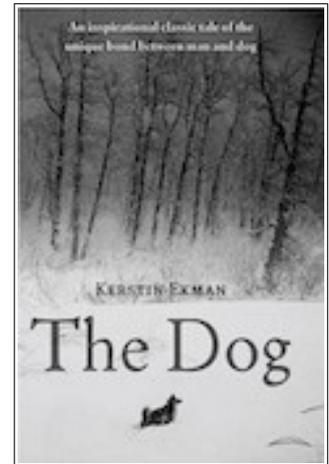
And, finally, it's good to see that the translator's name is on the title page. After a colleague is killed in a traffic accident in London, our unnamed narrator receives a strange parcel, originally intended for the deceased. Inside is a copy of Conrad's ***The Shadow Line***, curiously coated in what seems like cement. It was sent from his home town of Buenos Aires so, on his next visit to the city, he attempts to track down the person who sent it. In doing so he comes to hear the strange, disturbing story of Carlos Brauer, a man who had become consumed by his love of books, to the extent that, after his painstakingly created index was destroyed by fire, went mad.

This short novel is an examination of the reasons for, and the possible consequences of, this love we have of books. As the narrator delves deeper into Brauer's life, the story becomes stranger and stranger. A book for all book lovers, though it is really a cautionary tale, although I doubt very few will end up in the same pitiful state as Carlos Brauer. R: 3.8/5.0

The Dog (1986) – Translated from the Swedish by Linda Schenck and Rochelle Wright.

The main character of this short novel is a dog who, when a puppy, follows his mother out the front door of their owner's house and becomes lost. It's winter, cold and snow is everywhere. The dog, luckily, finds enough food under the snow to keep going, learns to avoid human hunters who visit his range and gradually grows up alone. The story follows the development of this young dog over the course of the year, showing the impact the changing seasons has on his life and his means of survival. Later he unintentionally gets caught by a hunting group with no way out and has to fight one of the hunter's dogs to escape. This leads him to an encounter with another human who he gradually comes to trust, and follow. There isn't a lot to this book, it's a study of a dog in the wild and it's interest lies in that. Enjoyable.

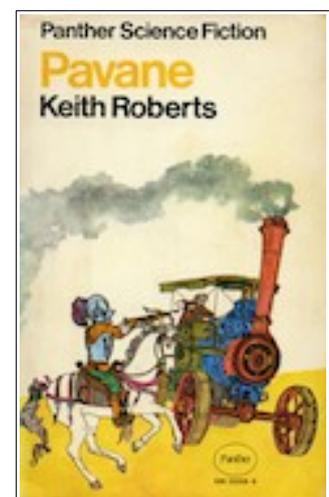
R: 3.2/5.0



A Heart Full of Headstones (2022) – #24 in the author John Rebus series of novels.

Rankin seems set on causing as much damage to his long-running character John Rebus as he can, and this novel goes a long way to achieving that goal. Here Rebus is tasked by wheelchair-bound Big Ger Cafferty to track down a man Cafferty is supposed to have murdered. As Rebus sets about the job he runs across old colleague Siobhan Clarke, nemesis Malcolm Fox and a bunch of corrupt cops from Tynecastle Station who Rebus helped, back in the day. And the further Rebus digs the further he seems to be getting dragged down into the mire of corruption, past debts and past grievances. From all reports there is another Rebus novel to follow but Rankin drops so many hints about his character's slowly failing health you'd be hard-pressed to imagine there will be any more after that. R: 3.9/5.0

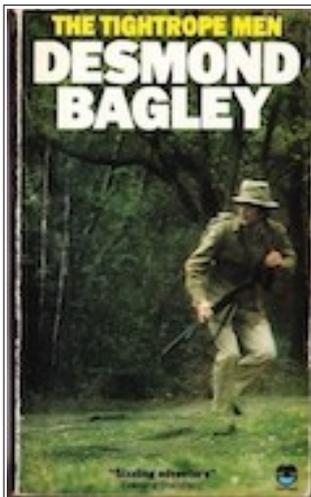
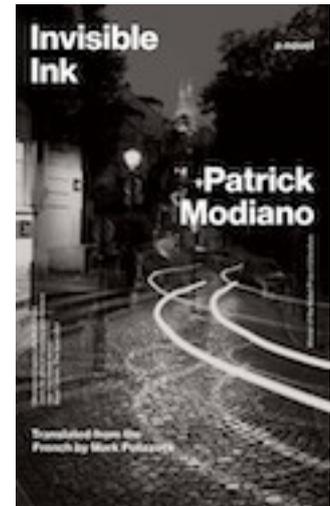
Pavane (1968) – This is a collection of 5 novelettes (although Wikipedia lists it as a novel) which were all published in the British prozine *Impulse* during 1966. Each of them is a story set in an alternate history world, one in which Elizabeth I was assassinated in 1588, which allowed England to be invaded by Spain, thereby reinstating the Catholic Church as the ultimate authority across the whole of Europe. As a consequence the Reformation didn't take place and in the age of the stories, the 1960's to 1980's, technology is rather backward. The stories here are inter-connected, though in very minor ways, but build up the world for the reader, showing various aspects of society: the dominance of the Church; steam-powered road locomotives; and the extensive semaphore signalling system spread across England. This all goes to create a rich tapestry of a world and when you finish these you just wish there were more to be going on with. R: 3.9/5.0



Wake (2022) – see major review below.

Invisible Ink (2019) – Translated from the French by Mark Polizzotti.

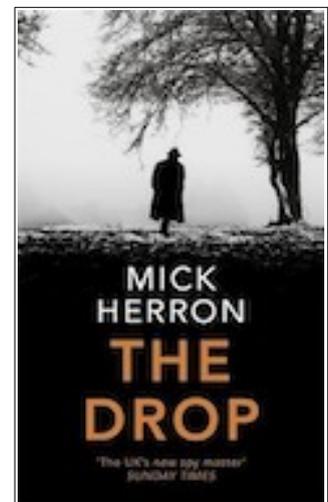
Private Investigator Jean Eyben is given the task of tracking a missing woman, Noelle Lefebvre, but the trail soon runs cold and the investigation is dropped. Thirty years later, and now retired, Eyben picks up the search again and slowly starts to find connections he missed all those years ago. For the bulk of this short novel Modiano sticks to the standard P.I. approach to such a missing-persons investigation, being greatly helped by coincidences and chance meetings. Then, at the end, he makes a big leap from first person narration to third with no proper connections being made. This rather lets down the whole thing and leads this reader to wonder if the author got a bit lost along the way and decided to use a literary trick to obfuscate the plot. Odd as it seems to be saying this about a Nobel laureate, but this could have been better. R: 3.4/5.0



The Tightrope Men (1973) – Bagley was one of those espionage/thriller writers that came out of the UK in the 1960s and 70s, along with Hammond Innes, Alastair Maclean, and Elleston Trevor etc. This follows the standard pattern for these books of a seemingly ordinary man (Giles Dennison) thrown into a situation of international intrigue. He prevails, of course. Here Dennison wakes up to find himself with a new face – that of Harold Meyrick, a scientist and engineer – in Oslo, with no idea how he got there or exactly who he really is. He is contacted by British intelligence and agrees to help them out in an attempt to recover some missing papers buried in a garden in Russia, near to the Finnish border. Lots of feints and deceptions ensue and the whole thing is pretty reasonable without being outstanding. I'm guessing this would have been the height of tension and suspense back in the early 1970s but it now reads a little slow and tame. R: 2.8/5.0

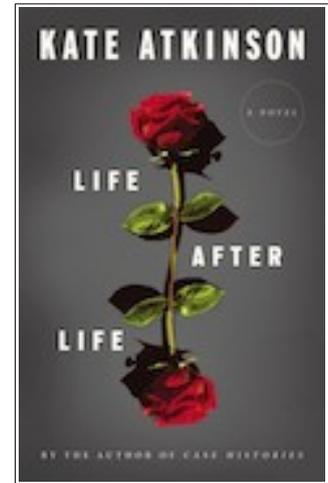
The Drop (2018) – a novella in the author's Slough House series, #5.5.

If I'm reading books in a series then I usually prefer to do so in sequence. But I saw this in the local library and grabbed it. Only later did I realise it was published between novels five and six in the series, and therefore probably deals with series characters that I haven't encountered yet – I've only read the first two. Doesn't matter; it's still a welcome read. Here the word "drop" is a spycraft term for document transfer, but it also refers to the curtailment of a career in MI6, with a demotion to Slough House, where British spies go when they stuff-up. Both meanings make an appearance here as an old spy lag notices a drop taking place in a London cafe, which leads, ultimately to some poor sucker being setup for a fall. Although one of the Slough House stories only Lady Di, Diana Taverner, puts in an appearance but that should not deter you from



reading another excellent comic spy story. There is basically no-one else writing like Herron. R: 3.8/5.0

Life After Life (2013) – I’ve listed this as a literary novel rather than sf, even though it uses the classic time loop sf theme. Here Ursula Todd is born in 1910 and dies in childbirth. She is immediately re-born and this time survives, only to die, and be re-born over and over again during the novel. This happens about 12-15 times overall, and we get her life-story slowly building up, and re-starting, along different possible timelines. A “normal” sf novel would set up this framework, slowly reveal the reason why it is happening and then provide some form of “escape” for the main character, thereby providing both a resolution for the reader and an end to the time loops. Here Atkinson does most of this without positively resolving the question of how Ursula finally reaches an end. For all of that it is an excellent piece of work, although I must admit I was disappointed by its lack of final resolution. R: 3.4/5.0

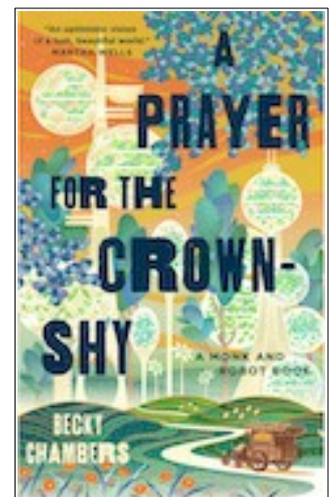


Double Indemnity (1936) – On the list of the best ever Guardian 1000 novels.

We probably all know the classic film noir version of this short novel directed by Billy Wilder featuring Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck from 1944, but I find it interesting to have read this original version of the story and to note the subtle differences. The basic setup is the same – insurance agent falls for woman and conspires with her to murder her husband for the policy payout, paid double because of accidental death – and a lot of the structure follows as well. But there is more background here than I remember and the ending is certainly different. I suspect that the film ending fitted the mores of the time, ensuring the guilty are caught and dealt with, rather than the ambiguous finale that we have here. One of the great crime classics of the period. R: 4.0/5.0

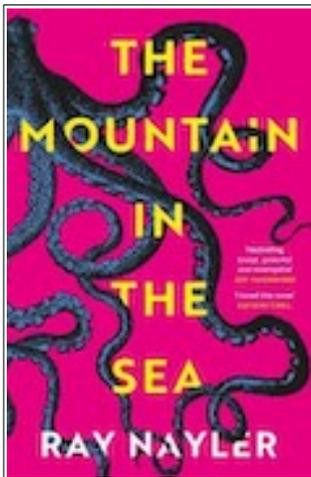
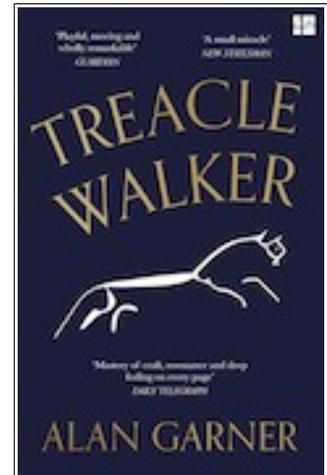
A Prayer for the Crown-Shy (2022) – #2 in the author’s Monk and Robot series of novellas. This novella appears on the 2023 Nebula Ballot for Best Novella.

This novella continues the “adventures” of the genderless monk, Sibling Dex, and the robot Mosschap, after the robot became the first of its kind to contact humans in centuries. The first novella in this series seemed to be setting up something of interest, but this instalment reads like the second quarter of a longer novel. The two have endless discussions about what they want and what they need. Everyone they meet on their travels is kind and compassionate and there is no dramatic conflict and no disagreements between anyone. It comes across as rather tedious. The two of them may well learn something about themselves and their respective places in the world but it hardly makes for an interesting story. R: 2.4/5.0



Treacle Walker (2021) – shortlisted for the 2022 Booker Prize.

I recall Alan Garner's work as being strange when I read some of his earlier works – mostly labelled as Juveniles back then, and now as Young Adult – about 20-30 years ago. If this is anything to go by he hasn't settled down at all, and that's all for the good. Joe Coppock is a young introspective boy with a dodgy eye who lives in a cottage in the countryside – presumably England somewhere. One day he is visited by a rag and bone man who goes by the name of Treacle Walker and his life takes a turn for the fantastical. He encounters a "Green Man" in a nearby copse, he discovers the real reason why his eye is the way it is, and he has strange adventures with a set of characters from the comic book he loves to read. It all seems a bit mad and incomprehensible at times, but let it flow over you – it's only about 160 pages – and the story starts to take some sort of shape when you've finished it, almost demanding an immediate re-read. I don't think there is anyone around who writes like Garner and it seems almost incomprehensible that he made the Booker shortlist last year, even if M. John Harrison was on the committee. Read it for the flow of language, and read it for the weird and beguiling story. R: 4.3/5.0



The Mountain in the Sea (2022) – Ray Nayler's name is not one I was familiar with before this novel, his debut. He's been writing since the late 1990s but he's just flown under my radar for some reason. After reading this novel I'll have to rectify that. This is a "first contact" story – well, two, actually – set some time in the near future here on Earth; I'm not sure when, maybe a hundred years into the future or so. The main first contact is with an evolved species of octopus which is being studied by a research facility on the Vietnamese archipelago of Côn Đảo. There Dr. Ha Nguyen, whose fictitious volume *How Oceans Think* provides quotes at the beginning of many chapters throughout the book, is attempting to make a communication breakthrough with the octopuses in collaboration with Evrim, humankind's only allegedly conscious android. Two other plot lines work their way through the novel: one

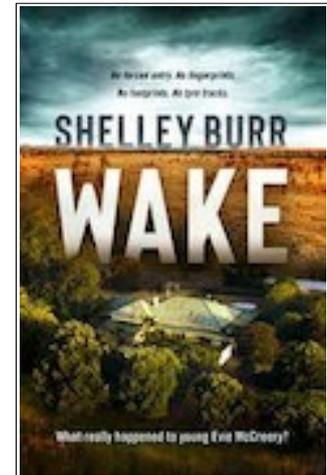
involving a Russian computer hacker who has been engaged to break into a complex neural network which he later discovers is Evrim; and a kidnapped programmer who now finds himself enslaved on a vast illegal fishing vessel being run by an A.I. The novel concerns itself with communication with the "other" – Nguyen-Evrim-octopuses – in its many forms as well as the vast environmental degradation inflicted on the Earth by humanity; damage that may well have been the trigger point for the octopuses' rapid evolution. This is long, engaging novel that raises way more questions than it has time to answer and which, for this reader at least, demands a sequel. One of the best sf novels I'm sure I'll read this year.

R: 4.4/5.0

REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Wake (2022) by Shelley Burr
Genre: Crime fiction

You could be forgiven for thinking, after you'd finished this novel, that Shelley Burr had been writing crime fiction for some time, such is the ease with which she deals with the characters, locale and plot of this impressive novel. But that is not the case. This is her debut, an early draft of which won the Crime Writers' Association Debut Dagger Award in 2019. You can see why when you get to this final published version.



The novel is set in and around the small, fictional town of Nannine – somewhere in outback New South Wales, not far from the Victorian border. The McCreery family run a large sheep farm about an hour's drive out of town. One night, some nineteen years before the start of this novel, nine-year-old Evelyn McCreery disappeared from the bedroom she shared with her twin sister Mina. She was never found and the mystery remains unsolved. Now Mina lives alone in the main farmhouse with only the property manager and his wife also on the property: the girl's mother has died and the father is traveling, though he appears to have moved away permanently. The farm has been de-stocked and it appears that Mina only lives on there in the faint hope that Evelyn may one day return.

Enter Lane Holland, a private investigator who has a special interest in the case of the missing Evelyn as well as a desire to collect the two million dollar reward offered for information leading to her discovery. At first Mina is not interested in helping him with his investigation, but after he appears to help a friend track down her missing sister – apparently snatched by the father in a custody battle – she has a change of heart and slowly allows Holland into her life. He quickly discovers a long-buried secret involving the family which he thinks may be the answer to the mystery – it isn't. We soon get the impression that Holland knows more than he is letting on. He seems to have a personal stake in the investigation that goes beyond what you would expect from his stated background.

There were many questions left unanswered after the initial disappearance and investigation: how did Evelyn get out of the shared bedroom without waking her sister?; who could have taken her from the isolated farmhouse when all tyre tracks in the area only belonged to farm vehicles?; and is one of the other members of the family involved?

Burr is very familiar with the countryside she is describing here and, like all the best Australian rural crime novels, the landscape becomes an important and integral character in the whole story, as much as the human cast. The isolation of the crime scene is important and, while it hangs over the whole of the novel, it isn't allowed to dominate. It's the human interactions we are more interested in here, and it's through them that we'll arrive at a resolution.

The disappearance of Evelyn is finally solved in a rather dramatic ending that I didn't see coming and which also includes a twist or two to finish things off. This is certainly an impressive debut from this new Australian writer. I can only hope that she continues to produce new work. It's the second novel, as always, that will tell us if she has what it takes.

R: 4.2/5.0

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

The Makanai : Cooking for the Maiko House (Season 1 — 9 episodes) (2023)

Platform: Netflix

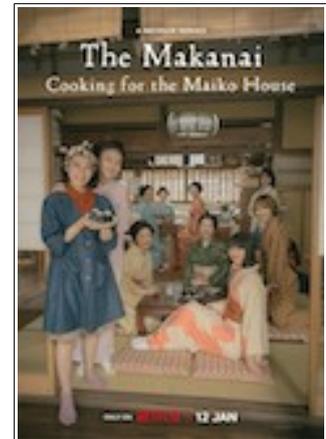
Genre: Light Drama

Two young girls from country Japan travel to Kyoto to join a *maiko* house in the hope that they can graduate one day as *geiko*.

However Kiyo is uncoordinated and continually distracted and it soon becomes obvious that she won't make it. Her friend Sumire is the exact opposite and it appears the house has discovered a future star. But circumstances fall in Kiyo's favour as the main cook of the house, the *makanai*, can no longer work so she takes over and discovers her calling. This is a light drama based on the manga

Kiyo in Kyoto by Aiko Koyama, and is a lot of fun. There is no

nastiness or high drama here, just the sense of a supportive group of women trying to find their way in the world and uphold centuries-old traditions. Be warned, the depictions of the food preparation are liable to make you hungry. R: 4.0/5.0



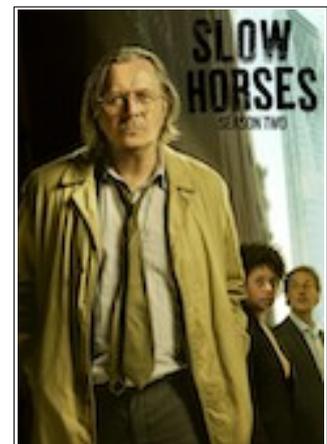
Slow Horses (Season 2 — 6 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Apple TV+

Genre: Espionage Drama

This second season is based on ***Dead Lions***, the second book in Mick Herron's spy thriller series, and again the production and acting staff have conjured up a wonderful adaptation. This time we spend more time with Jackson Lamb (Gary Oldman) as he attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding the sudden death of an old colleague on a bus near Oxford. Did he really die of natural causes as the police believe, or is there something more sinister involved? Although all of the cast do well in their roles, it is really Oldman who steals the show fitting the character of the slovenly, drunk, caustic, abrasive Lamb to a tee. This is some of the best

television going around and while it would be possible to watch this series without either reading the books or watching the first season I can't see any reason to deny yourself that pleasure. The plot is genuinely convoluted with twists popping up all along the path. Do yourself a favour and watch it. R: 4.5/5.0



Life After Life (Mini-series — 4 episodes) (2022)

Platform: BritBox

Genre: Fantasy Drama

Based on the Kate Atkinson novel of the same name this series follows the life, or I should say “many lives” of Ursula Todd. Born in 1910, she dies in child-birth due to the umbilical cord being twisted around her neck. She is re-born and this time the doctor is able to attend in time and cuts the cord. This life, death and re-birth continues and we gradually get a view of Ursula’s life as she survives a fall from a window, drowning, the Spanish flu, among a number of others. This fits into the time loop sub-genre of sf plots and does a good job of it. Ursula is convinced she is being re-born for a reason, she just needs to figure out what it is. Unfortunately the ending was a let-down for me as it left too many questions unanswered. Which was disappointing as the viewer was being led to believe that there really was a purpose behind all of this. Good acting, good period detail, just a problem with the story-line. R: 3.8/5.0

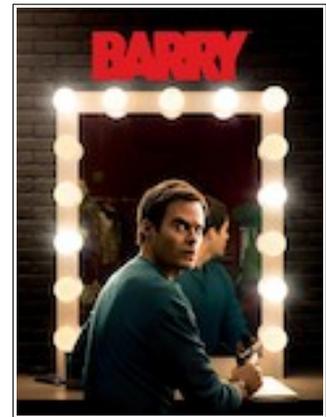


Barry (Season 1 — 8 episodes) (2018)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Comedy Drama

Barry Berkman/Block (Bill Hader) is an ex-US marine and Afghanistan veteran turned hit man for hire. It's a job he's very good at but which he doesn't particularly like. One day he is assigned to take out a young man who he follows into an acting class. Although he's rather useless at it he is drawn both to the community of aspiring actors and to the art of performing on stage. This is a genuinely funny show, though it is rather dark in concept and execution as you might expect from the subject matter. This comes across rather as a US version of the Australian series ***Mr. In-Between*** that I reviewed last issue. I'm not saying either were made with knowledge of the other, just that they are very similar in style and tone. R: 4.3/5.0



The Sinner (Season 4 — 8 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime Drama

Harry Ambrose (Bill Pullman) is now retired and travels to a small island off the coast of Maine for a holiday. There he meets a young woman who appears to be deeply troubled. A few days later he sees her jump off a cliff to her death late at night. The local police force are out of their depth investigating the death and ask Harry to help out. As he digs deeper into the mystery he starts to unravel a lot of tangled secrets relating to the fishing families on the island. Overall this was a pretty good P.I. series with interesting characters and setting, but it has a major flaw in the plotting which entails one character acting in a manner that is required to keep the story running but which is totally unbelievable when you get to the end and the mystery is finally solved. This slightly spoiled an otherwise intriguing program. R: 3.7/5.0



Perry Mason (Season 1 — 8 episodes) (2020)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Crime Drama

This series takes us back to 1931 LA when Mason (Matthew Rhys) was an investigator working for his friend, mentor and attorney E. B. Jonathan (John Lithgow). Jonathan is engaged to defend a young woman accused of arranging the kidnapping of her son for ransom, a kidnapping that goes horribly wrong and ends with the death of the baby. The plot gets rather convoluted involving corrupt police, an evangelical church and a dodgy prosecutor. It also charts the start of Mason's legal career. All in all it looks good, has a good script and cast but I kept on being thrown out of the story a lot by the continuing interest in the inner-workings of the church in question. But it is certainly good enough and holds enough interest to go back for future seasons. R: 3.8/5.0



Film

Can You Ever Forgive Me? (2018)

Platform: Disney +

Genre: Comedy Drama

Lee Israel (Melissa McCarthy) is a down and out writer living in New York in the early 1990s. Her latest biography has bombed and she's now struggling to make her rent. When she sells an original letter from Katharine Hepburn a passing remark from the buyer leads her down a path of forgery, theft and deceit and also into one of the most creative writing periods of her life. But she gradually pushes things too far and recruits old friend Jack Hock (Richard E. Grant) to help her with her sales. This is a slow-moving but compelling light comedy drama about the pitfalls of crime and the things we do to survive. Both McCarthy and Grant are wonderful in their leading roles and you just can't see how anyone could dislike this film in any way.

R: 4.2/5.0

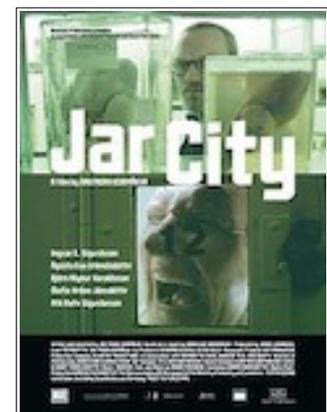


Jar City (2006) (Icelandic with English sub-titles)

Platform: DVD

Genre: Crime Drama

When Icelandic police find the body of a dead man in his flat, their investigations lead them to an unsolved rape three decades earlier involving a group of three men and a corrupt cop. In a separate thread a geneticist father loses his young daughter to a rare genetic disorder and he sets out to find the familial link. Naturally the two threads come together in this atmospheric police procedural based on the novel *Jar City* (2000, originally *Mýrin*) by Arnaldur Indriðason. This was the third of the Inspector Erlendur series of novels, though the first to be translated into English. The film



shows all the classic Icelandic tropes: cold, bleak landscapes; strange ways of eating sheep; lonely, isolated people; deep, hidden secrets; and a mainly blue, white and grey colour palate. In the lead role Ingvar E. Sigurðsson will be recognisable to any viewers of Icelandic film or television dramas, and he fits the role perfectly. If you are a fan of the books or the country then you should try to track this down. R: 3.7/5.0

***John Wick : Chapter 4* (2023)**

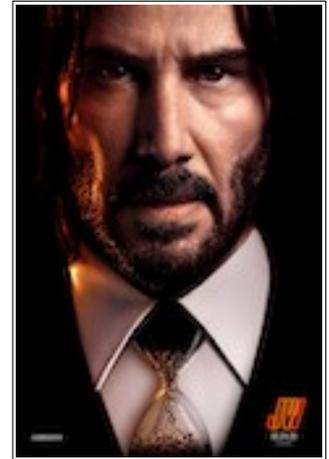
Platform: Cinema

Genre: Crime Drama

If you haven't seen any of the previous three films in the franchise featuring Keanu Reeves then there is no use trying to get into this one. Here we have more of the same — high octane fight scenes, lots of guns, the ubiquitous violent use of a pencil, a relentless series of chase scenes, a fight scene in a very crowded nightclub, innovative camera angles for the confrontations and lots of Reeves looking stoic — but here it is all dialled up to 11 or 12. At just a touch under three hours I had a feeling going in that I might end up squirming in my seat from time to time. No, didn't happen. The film carries you with it on its trajectory and rockets along to its inevitable conclusion, or is it? To me this was the best of the four films so far,

with the presence of Donnie Yen as the blind assassin Caine a highlight. I'd be quite happy to watch a feature with him in it. And I did love the shout-out to Ned Kelly early on.

Vale Lance Reddick. [Note: make sure you wait for the post-credit sequence.] R: 4.4/5.0



***Dungeons & Dragons : Honor Among Thieves* (2023)**

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Fantasy Adventure

I have no idea what I was expecting when I went into this film; probably not much. What we are presented with is a fantasy adventure that is attempting to be engaging and funny. It eventually gets there but it sure takes some time about it. The first half in particular is decidedly unfunny and I fear that may well have clouded my view of the overall film. The plot follows a standard D&D storyline – a group of ragtag, mis-matched people with various powers get together in a fantasy world to steal a treasure. The

trouble is I never really thought there was anything major at stake here. So it becomes a light, casual romp through a series of adventures as Chris Pine's bard, Edgin Davis,

attempts to acquire a magical tablet which has the power to return his wife from the dead.

Opposing him is Hugh Grant's Forge Fitzwilliam who has become the powerful and rich Lord of Neverwinter, and Fitzwilliam's ally Sofina (Daisy Head), a Red Wizard. It's all rather familiar but isn't outstanding in any way. Fun, good-natured and best watched on television when you don't have to give the film your full attention. R: 2.8/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 31:

Nick Price: “From the last **Ansible** I discovered that there was an Imperial College Science Fiction Society. They have a 9,800 book library tucked away in a basement. The simple-seeming instructions and map belie a 'Colossal Cave' like adventure to find it. A maze of twisty passages etc. Opening the door to the library is, as you can imagine, the Science Fiction version of an Opium Den. Rather than a haze mind-altering vapours and drug addicts laying around, there is the overpowering perfume of decaying science fiction novels and eye-contact-avoiding fans tapping away on laptops. Their annual con, Picocon, is on Saturday 11th March.”

[**PM:** Another Northern Hemisphere convention that I will miss. The concept of such a library, when I was younger might well have seemed like a palace of wonders. Now, as I get older, I shudder at the thought of having to work my way through such a place. Hopefully it is well catalogued.]

“I envy you having two more seasons of *Mr Inbetween* to watch. It was a fantastic show.”

[**PM:** Check out the US tv series *Barry*, reviewed above.]

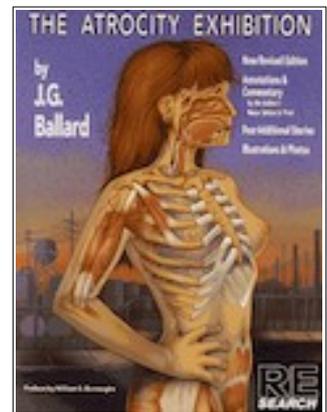
Nic Farey: “Nice to see you're eating something and not just out on the piss – or is that me? [falls off chair]...”

[**PM:** One cover with food is quite sufficient I think. Normal service may well be resumed next month.]



“Once again I see your point on something (in this case *The Atrocity Exhibition*), but although, yes, it's described as a 'novel' but I've always seen it (diehard Ballardian that I am) as more of a thematic collection, and practically impossible to read *as if* it were a more 'traditional' novel. I do of course possess (among other versions) the limited edition signed hardback published by RE/Search, as well as the softcover issue #8/9 Ballard special.”

[**PM:** Total dedication.]



Jerry Kaufman: “I've read *In the Woods* and *The Likeness*, but not seen *Dublin Murder Squad*; I'm not sure if we subscribe to the streaming service that carries it in the US. I believe I wrote about both books on my Facebook page.

“However, there's something in *In the Woods* that I believe I left out of my comments. The early event that scarred the main character's psyche in his childhood seems uncanny, something out of a supernatural horror story. I spotted hints throughout the novel that something odd still occupied the woods. There are instances of rustling noises and a presence that are briefly mentioned but never resolved. I don't know whether these are red

herrings or are indications of something else. But they work for me as suggestions of cosmic horror.”

[**PM:** Interesting points. The original mystery of the missing three children is never explained, and I think that certainly adds to the overall impact of the work. The sense of menace in the descriptions of the woods, where these events take place, reminded me of that sub-genre of English fantasy/horror that includes Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood*. And allowing that menace just to sit there in the background, without explanation, was a delicate and refined touch on the part of the author.]

Rose Mitchell: “Sometimes ‘ennui and boredom’ gets us all from time to time and a major distraction (such as wine trips, tending to loved ones) to take you out of your own ‘space’ nearly always reinvigorates, or puts in perspective priorities which may mean: stop, continue, or change direction. Bit like moving furniture around or a new hair style.”

[**PM:** I mostly agree, but I’ll have to take your word on the “new hair style” approach. Haven’t had one of those in years. Mine alternate between “short” and “long and scraggly”; what there is of it]

“*The Stranger*, I thought you were referring to Harlen Corben’s work given you mentioned that it was on Netflix. I have been ignoring those prompts from Netflix because, well, Corben can be a bit ‘airport novelish’. So must look up this Aussie series as one must support local content and you have enthused so. You have never given a false start that I can recollect. I am seriously considering giving up Netflix as I continually find nothing of interest to watch, that is that piques my interest that is, to justify the cost given I am now on a finite and limited income.

“I loved *The Detectivists*. It was half hour of lovely, soft and gentle amusements. Wonderful characters, so relatable. Fandoms eh? Season 3 is on Prime, well here in Australia it is. Probably on other streaming services which I don’t subscribe to.”

[**PM:** There is quite a lot of interesting material on Netflix. The trouble is that it doesn’t get presented to you up-front, and you have to go searching for it. Hopefully some of the items I’ve watched will give you something to look for.]

“Julian Warner goes in to so much detail about the “Road Trip”, perhaps these type of reviews could be his retirement project? Now I am envious and looking into visiting the northern reaches of Victoria. But I have to ask: what is it about Julian that attracts noisy, boisterous women to sit near him?”

[**PM:** Ha! There is room for a whole series of pieces about such encounters.]

“And finally, thanks for the lengthy review on *Monash’s Masterpiece*. While I knew that Sir John Monash was a famous war hero, and that he had a statue somewhere, a uni and freeway named after him, knew very little except the Brits didn’t like him much. Those bloody Murdochs!!! interfering and manipulating politics, particularly Aussie politics as far back as the beginning of the 20th Century. Is this a genetic trait in their family line? Now searching it out in my local library.”

[**PM:** Robyn is reading it as I write this, and she’s finding it a very informative and entertaining reading experience. We’re now going to try searching out other books by the author that impact on our family wartime history – something about the Battle of Fromelles (19-20 July 1916) would be next. Robyn’s great-uncle died there,

and is one of those “lost” soldiers who was buried in the mass grave at the end of the battle. He is listed on the memorial but doesn’t have a grave and headstone as yet.]

John Hertz: “I agree with you (aiee) in rating *Stand on Zanzibar* high (Perryscope 30). I think I agree with you about *Cold Comfort Farm*, but it isn’t fresh in my mind, nor gave I gotten to re-reading it since January. I think I rate *All the Myriad Ways* higher than you; I see it did make your top five collections/anthologies. We appear to differ about *The Wanderer* (P31). I’d hope, if I ever got to writing a full-length review, I could show you why I rate it high.

“An Irish friend has always insisted there’s *one* banshee (in Irish, as I understand, spelled *bean sí*), but I haven’t seen *The Banshees of Inisherin* so can’t really comment.”

[**PM:** Hopefully you’ve rectified that shocking deficiency by now. It may not have been the best film of 2022, but it certainly demands a viewing.]

“*The League of Frightened Men* is very good but I’m not sure it’s the best of Stout – accept no substitutes – about Nero Wolfe. So many of them are (you should pardon the expression) swell. Detective fiction and science fiction have much in common procedurally (you should pardon the expression). Here is another good moment for Theodore Sturgeon’s wonderful (you should pardon the expression) pun: ‘Science fiction is knowledge fiction.’ I think SF demands more of the author, and expect it’s correspondingly harder to write. Detective fiction written long enough ago that the currents of culture have changed – like *Frightened Men* (1935) – is even more like SF: ooh, aliens.”

[**PM:** Do I take it that you mean that detective fiction written about, say the first half of the twentieth century is so far in the past as to represent an almost alien world? There is something to be said for that, but I think it only applies to works set in that period that are written in the present day. The author is then obliged to define and describe the world they are creating in a similar way to a future earth or an alien planet. Though the major difference between the two would seem to be the presence of new technologies, in the future sf, and the absence of current technologies, in the past detective fiction. And you can’t really describe an absence in fiction in that way.]

“I’ve always though *The Hunt for “Red October”* science fiction. I mean, clearly (you should pardon the expression).”

[**PM:** Similarly *Firefox*, the 1982 Clint Eastwood film based on the Craig Thomas novel. I don’t consider these as straight-out sf films, rather mainstream espionage films with sf elements. There are a number of these – *The Time Traveller’s Wife*, almost any James Bond film you can name, etc etc – that might fit into this genre-adjacent category, but I don’t look on them as being sf.]

I also heard from: **Martin Field** (who is off to South Korea in May); and **Barbara O’Sullivan** (who recommends the film *Till*, about the death of a young black teenager in Mississippi in the 1950s.); thank you one and all.

