

P
E
R
R
Y
S
C
O
P
E

PERRYSCOPE 34, June 2023, is an issue of a personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Available for the usual or download at efanazines.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, Ireland, August 2019.

INTRODUCTION

Another month and another issue, and this time with added bonuses: less of me and more of other people.

Julian Warner is back with another “occasional column” – looking at his audio equipment, his buying history and his current set-up – and my wife Robyn is here for the first time with her tales of cooking for a Moroccan dinner. If you were wondering why I didn’t look too closely at food in my initial report about our Moroccan holiday in May, well, here’s the reason. She had told me that she was going to write this up, and when it comes to food, I certainly know who is the expert in our house.

Also this month I have my thoughts on my late, dear friend Eve Harvey. I’m never really sure what to say, or how to say it, when I write these things. There is too much to cover in a small space, and sometimes it just comes across as maudlin or too sad. I hope I caught the right balance here, though I suspect not.

In other, more commonplace areas, I note that I didn’t watch, or at least finish watching any films during the month of June. I suspect that I was just too busy doing other things, though what they might have been I cannot think. Time seems to get away from me rather easily these days. I continue my volunteer indexing work for AustLit (the Australian literary Bibliography project out of the University of Queensland) and lately I’ve got back into working on Wikipedia.

Some of you may recall that I wrote about my previous stint editing the online encyclopedia back in **Perryscope 16**. That period did not end well for me and it has taken some seven years for me to return. This time I’m concentrating on areas that definitely need work and which are rather non-contentious, like Australian literature. There are only a couple of others working in that space and, it was pleasing to note, they were happy to see me back.

I got drawn back into editing mode after I was asked to make some changes to a page that was threatened with deletion, and to the late Lee Harding’s wiki page. And then I noticed a couple of other things that needed to be fixed, and then a few more, and then... I think we all know how that goes. Before I knew it I was back working on it for an hour or so each day, slowly cleaning up and enhancing pages I’d created 10-15 years ago as well as adding in new material. I’m actually enjoying it.

These little projects may not be for everyone, but they work for me.

Memories of Eve Harvey — 1951-2023

I first met Eve Harvey in 1985 at Aussiecon II, the World Science Fiction Convention held in Melbourne that year. I was still living in Canberra at that time, though I was looking to get out and move to Melbourne if possible, and was still getting over the break-up of a long-term relationship. On the night in question I had been doing the rounds of the room parties at the convention and found myself sitting on the floor outside one such talking to US fan Joyce Scrivner. She was herself also getting over a similar break-up so we had a lot to talk about. I was drinking some red wine I'd been lugging around in my jacket pocket. I can only surmise I was a little worse for wear. At some point in the evening a woman leaned over me and said: "Are you Perry Middlemiss?"

"Yes." It seemed safe to make that reply.

"You haven't responded to my fanzine have you?"

I checked the name on her badge – I couldn't read it. Must have been the bad light.

"No, probably not, sorry." It was another safe reply as I hadn't been responding to any fanzines I'd received in some time.

"Well, just so I know you are still getting it." Someone seemed to loom over her shoulder.

"Okay, thanks," I said, as I basically couldn't think of anything else.

She, and her shadow wandered off. "Eve Harvey," said Joyce.

"Oh?" I replied, none the wiser.

"GUFF delegate."

"Oh." Well, I knew what that was but still didn't get the connection. I put it down to fatigue. When I got back to Canberra I checked through the piles of unread fanzines and found her publication **Wallbanger**. It was pretty good. But I still didn't write.

I ran into Eve again a few years later when I attended the 1987 Worldcon in Brighton, England. I'd travelled over to the UK with Justin Ackroyd and he was introducing me to a lot of people he'd met on his own GUFF trip a few years before. By this time I really was living in Melbourne, seeing Robyn, and back involved with fanzines again. So I had more of an idea of who Eve was by that time. I also got to meet her other half, John, who, I later realised, must have been the figure peering over Eve's shoulder back in 1985. Maybe. My memory of that night was rather blurry. I suspect my glasses were smudged.

By the end of the 1987 convention I'd had a few chats and a few drinks with Eve and John, and a whole lot of other people and realised that Justin and I would be parting ways in the next few days. Somehow Eve found out I was at a loose end with nowhere to stay for a day or so until Robyn arrived. Next thing I knew I'd been bundled up with a couple of other Australians and I was camping on the floor of Eve and John's in Carshalton in South

Perryscope 34

London. This was to be my first, but by no means my last taste of Eve and John's generosity over the years.

A few days and a few parties later and I was collecting Robyn from Heathrow, then taking her into the city for a few days before we headed off on a long driving holiday around the UK followed by two months on a EurRail pass in Europe. But before I'd even left Carshalton I had been locked in to returning, with Robyn in tow, for a few days before we departed across the Channel. I got the impression that I wasn't allowed to not stay. Needless to say Eve and Robyn hit it off immediately.



Eve and John in the Worldcon bar, Dublin 2019

A year or so later the Harveys were back in Melbourne on a touring holiday of Australia, staying at my flat in Richmond. I was sharing that place with a woman who seemed to be almost permanently absent, travelling in Asia for her Queensland-based family company. I had been using her water-bed in her absence but was happy to give this up to Eve and John for the duration of their stay. I don't think they knew what hit them.

In 1990 Robyn and I were back in the UK staying with the Harveys in their new abode in the small township of Tonwell north of London, as a precursor to a planned two-year stay in London. Their generosity at that time hardly seemed to have any limits at all. We tried to pay them back somewhat by having them around for dinner as often as we could but that just didn't seem to balance the ledger. They helped us move into our Maida Vale flat when that time came, and drove us to the airport a bit over two years later as we headed home. With Eve and John you always seemed part of a larger family.

And for the next thirty years either Robyn and I would be in Europe and would stay with them for a few days, or they would be in Australia and would make a point of camping out

Perryscope 34

with us in Melbourne. They were good times and it was very reassuring knowing that we always had a place to stay whenever we were in their neighbourhood.

Sometime around 2013 Eve and John decided to quit the UK and to settle in France, where they'd purchased a house that they then turned into a seasonal B-and-B. It was a house Robyn and I never got the chance to visit. These years coincided with a lot less travel for us as our kids were in school and long-distance travel was too time-consuming and just way too expensive. By the middle-to-late 2010s they had moved further south in France to their house and gite in Nieul-sur-l'Autise. Again we were either not travelling anywhere or travelling elsewhere closer to home.



Eve, John and me at the Niort railway station in 2019, the last time we saw Eve

Then in the middle of 2018 we started to hear that Eve was having some health issues so Robyn and I decided that we really needed to get to see the Harveys *in situ*. Luckily enough we had a long holiday planned for Ireland (another World Science Fiction Convention) and then Iceland and France in August and September in 2019 so we would be close by, relatively speaking. We meet up with Eve and John in Dublin, and had a few drinks and meals, and then spent a wonderful five or so days with them at their home in France near the end of our trip. It is always sad to say goodbye but we had hopes of being able to get back to Europe at some point in the next few years.

But COVID hit and all travel plans went out the window.

So we just sat and waited and hoped we could get to France again sometime in the future. And then in early March 2023 we got the news that Eve had died suddenly. Within a week I had heard of the passing of two other friends in sf fandom, but Eve's death hit me the hardest. It is difficult to explain properly how welcoming, warm and generous she and John were to us and to many other Australian fans over the years. I think she became rather like a surrogate mother, or older sister, to a lot of us. Her passing was like losing someone in your immediate family: a loss that you can only learn to live with over time as you wait for the open wound to heal.

For me, that's going to take a fair amount of time.

Vale Eve, go well.

My Moroccan Dinner Adventure – a practice run by Robyn Mills

When Perry and I were in Morocco in May we sampled many local dishes and attended a cooking class one evening. As a result I made the rash promise to have a number of other members of our touring group around for a Moroccan dinner party one evening.

So, on a recent Saturday evening we had friends around to experiment with the cooking class recipes in anticipation of that promised dinner party— which will, no doubt, be the social highlight of the year.

Here is a review of how I went—pitfalls and delights—with pictures.



All up it worked well. We had a bottle of Kasbah— a Moroccan rose and not a bad drop for \$7. Would I run back to Morocco for another bottle? No, though I have saved the bottle of Terroir!

I cooked everything we were taught in class and added in Said's meatball tagine—still a winner in my opinion. We only

had this once on our trip, and I was so taken with it that I pressured the chef to give me his recipe.

After reviewing the recipes before donning an apron and starting my mammoth cooking project, I did elect to take some short cuts and deviations:

- I blitzed in the food processor a bunch of coriander and parsley. Why? Many of the recipes had these as an additive so my thought was if I had it all prepared it would save time—it did.
- As there were so many onions I took the same approach here—again a time saver.



Perryscope 34

- I swapped fresh tomatoes in the meatball tagine for a tin. Why? I got worried I had not bought enough fresh tomatoes. I think this worked well.

Importantly I used my new tagine and it worked well. The big bonus was that it didn't shatter when placed on the stove, but we discovered it really is the 2-person version and the meatballs did overflow.

The Menu

Entrees

Moroccan potato salad (the recipe provided had zucchini as the main ingredient, but we used in class potato); Moroccan carrot salad; Moroccan tomato salad; and Eggplant salad.

I played with the Carrot salad — after cooking it tasted wonderful but looked a bit bland, so I went onto panic mode and had a quick internet review and elected to put in some raisins — boiled these in a tiny bit of orange juice. It lifted the dish. Also, at the end I found I had no sesame seeds, so I used some almonds for the crunch.

With the potato salad I added the hot potatoes to the marinade to soak up the juices.

The eggplant salad was not as nice as in class because I cooked the eggplant in the oven and not over the flame. I also realised mid-cook I use a similar recipe from Delia Smith which I really like.

All salads turned out well – everybody agreed the carrot was the winner followed by the tomato, potato and, at the rear, the eggplant.



Main Course

Chicken tagine; Meatball tagine; Vegies and Couscous; and Ottolenghi's bay spinach salad with dates and almonds.

All were fantastic and tasted delicious. The chicken, with preserved lemon and olives, just as I remembered.

I cooked the veggies in with the chicken to add a bit of flavour and then placed on the couscous.

I also precooked the meatballs in the air fryer and then added to the tomato sauce—it worked. We also had a debate about whether the egg topping should be put over the meatballs and, in pure bus trip style decided to go, 50/50. But the egg mixture bled onto the non-egg side—no matter it was still excellent. And of course, to add in a “date” factor and because I cannot resist him, I made up my favourite Ottolenghi salad.



Image 1: tagine chicken, Image 2: date salad and meatball tagine; Image 3: vegetables and couscous, and meatball tagine

Verdict – meatball and chicken a dead heat, then the salad and the veggies.

All up I give myself 10 out of 10.

My friend Pam supplied the desert – a wonderful quince cheesecake with quince sauce – eaten with heaps of ice cream. A perfect end to the evening.

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.

WANDERINGS AND READINGS – An Occasional Column by Julian Warner

Flanders and Swann rightly made fun of hi-fi enthusiasts and their equipment in their "Song of Reproduction" from 1957. It is perhaps instructive that this audio enthusiast breed were already being lampooned this early. In my sad personal case, I blame John Hall-Freeman, one-time owner of the Space Merchants SF bookshop in Perth. Apart from selling books, he also retained some form of employment with Douglas Hi-Fi in Perth and he had access to interesting items of audio 'kit'.

However, the affliction started before I met John. I probably inherited an enthusiasm for music in general from my father, who had fairly broad taste and tried to educate me a little about music. I loved Dad's late 50s jukebox singles and probably added to the well-worn-ness of their grooves. I also liked the thumping solidity of Stravinsky's Rites of Spring, which was supposedly more Mum's taste. Meals at home were often eaten with the BBC in the background – mostly 'light music'. Dad knew the theories about better-sounding music but generally didn't rise above owning a stereogram and similar later equipment. I'd started to buy records and cassettes when I was in high school, from pocket money or earnings from those early mindless jobs that you do. I'd become an assiduous reader of the

New Musical Express, which concerned itself with new music and crusty old music, championing the former and chastising the latter. My tastes were expanding in various directions, without any necessary logic. I learnt that jazz could be something other than Dad's old 'trad jazz' records (e.g. The Dutch Swing College Band, Chris Barber and Sidney Bechet) after hearing ABC announcer Murray Jennings playing Miles Davis's *Tribute to Jack Johnson*. It was jazz that had absorbed rock music and spat it out again. I'd become interested in poetry and folk music and Perth's nascent punk scene.

After high school I eschewed University for a job in a radio station in Geraldton. Sadly for me, the station regarded music as a sort of padding between the paying adverts. Whilst some of the announcers might have had individual enthusiasms for music, it was not the business of the radio station to explore new boundaries of music. The station had some reasonably modern equipment like direct drive turntables which got up to full speed in a quarter of a second. It also had old valve powered equipment that went back to the 50s and old 78rpm records mouldering away in the record library. They had one turntable with a very long arm for playing 18 inch 78rpm discs. Luckily the studio technicians indulged my habit of poking my nose into things that I was unqualified to understand.



None of this helped me much in my personal need to hear the music that I wanted to in some sort of high fidelity. As soon as I could, I bought some secondhand equipment locally: a standard Garrard auto-changer turntable, a small but promisingly heavy stereo amplifier and two big but decidedly dodgy-looking speakers which were obviously built by someone who got to a certain point and gave up. There were Magnavox woofers and some anonymous tweeters built in big cabinets which had cut-outs for extra mid-range speakers which weren't there. The ultra-simple crossover network used very old capacitors which looked like the sort of gun cartridges that started the Indian Mutiny. The backs of the speakers were simple hardboard, which rattled when the volume was loud. More of a low-fidelity system really. Money that wasn't spent on food and rent was usually frittered away on records, mostly from Dave Clark's (no, not that one) record shop in town.

Most pop records of the 70s and 80s lasted around 3 minutes and 30 seconds. The ones from the 50s and 60s were often shorter. For the young radio announcer, once a record was playing, you had to cue up the next record and make sure that the cartridges for the next commercial break were lined up ready to go. Once that was done you had possibly a luxurious two minutes with nothing to do, barring outside interruptions. Reading a book was nearly impossible in those circumstances so I used to read magazines, primarily magazines about music, or making music, or about equipment for playing music. When I'd exhausted all of those I'd even get around to reading Women's magazines.

I blame my early career for my possibly having a short attention span. If pop music can make its point in three and a half minutes, why can't you?

Here I should make a simple observation about hearing and hi-fi. When you are young and have hearing that can detect hummingbird farts and distant mosquitoes, you have no ability to buy hi-fi equipment which tests out your fabulous hearing. Conversely, when you are old enough to have the income required to afford the sort of hi-fi equipment that your younger self would have loved, you don't have anywhere near the hearing you used to. I've heard old hi-fi duffers make claims about their wondrous hearing abilities but simple medical realities tend to make them liars. I was sensible enough to specifically use headphones at work which made it impossible to use them at loud levels. Another old announcer once borrowed my headphones, turned them up to his normal level and then got howling feedback when he switched on his microphone. He was not happy. Nonetheless, I probably have a bit of industrial deafness. Possibly from going to gigs with the volume at industrial strength.

I'd been incrementally improving the bits of my stereo system but it was John Hall-Freeman who put temptation in my path. John was an enthusiastic man in general. We met because of his enthusiasm for SF but bonded further over music. At his home (visiting with fellow SF fan Rob McGough), I boggled at John's enormous collection of jazz records. He also had large photographs of famous jazz musicians – photos which he'd taken himself. As he had access to esoteric hi-fi equipment from his work, he would often be trialling new products at home. I remember seeing him listening to a jazz CD which was playing on a little (very new at the time) portable CD player. It fed into a couple of mono-block valve amps that fed some monstrous speakers. It sounded good.

Later on another visit, John demonstrated some Mission 770 speakers which I liked so much that I decided that I had to have some. I'd been hanging around in different hi-fi shops and auditioning speakers, amps and turntables. For me (and you may differ here), it was the speakers which had the most effect on how good a system sounded. Usually they were also the most expensive component. Eventually John said he could get me a pair of the Mission speakers and he recommended I buy an amp and turntable which were ex-demo stock at Douglas Hi-Fi. I had to secure a loan which kept me poor for a while to buy them, but buy them I did.



Mission speakers

Perryscope 34

The amp was a Harman Kardon PM665, which was a classic eighties amp with plenty of power and lots of connection options. It lasted me for a very long time, for which I am very thankful. The turntable was a Thorens TD160b fitted with an Infinity Black Widow



Harman Kardon amp

tonearm and a ludicrously expensive moving coil cartridge (the name of which I forget). The turntable was a solid classic belt-drive turntable. They are still sought-after now. The tonearm, although I did not know this at the time, was a little controversial after getting reviews claiming that it was a bit too resonant. I suppose it got its name from being black and being a spidery thin thing — made out of carbon fibre. As soon as the needle on the cartridge needed replacing, I bought a much cheaper (but still good) cartridge rather than go through the inordinate time and expense of having the needle replaced (by sending it back to the factory) on the previous one.

The new set-up kept me happy, if impecunious, for a long time. That didn't stop me from reading Hi-Fi magazines and listening to the blandishments of those who were always trying to tempt you toward spending more and more on better and better gear. There's a generally accepted theory that the price of Hi-Fi rises exponentially for gradual increases in quality. A good quality sound can be had for a reasonable price. A sound that will



Thorens turntable

satisfy Hi-Fi snobs will have an eye-watering price-tag. Absolute high-end gear at the moment can cost over a million for speakers, half a million perhaps for an amplifier and a quarter million perhaps for a turntable. Of course, to be able to house this equipment, you would need to have a room which could handle the sheer weight and size of the equipment.

Speakers, for example, which are over 2 metres tall and weigh over a tonne.

Luckily I am satisfied with a lot less than that. Other than a few minor tweaks here and there, I am pretty happy with my current set-up: a Rega turntable, an Arcam CD/SACD player, a Rotel pre-amp/amp combination, a pair of Osborn speakers and some other peripherals. Contrast with dear Murray MacLachlan, who seems to be on an endless dizzy chase to achieve a Hi-Fi that meets the demands of his ears without exhausting his wallet.



To that end he has become an expert on the second-hand Hi-Fi market and acquainted himself with all manner of electronic repairers. He's not helped by a locally unreliable power supply which delights in frying his valves and adding extra wow and flutter to his records. The speakers I have date back to a Hi-Fi show I attended with Murray. I went into a demonstration room and liked what I heard. I was also enthused by the relatively low price. Sadly, Chester Osborn, the speakers' maker, has retired. He was quite bigoted (in Hi-Fi terms) but he knew how to make good speakers.

Hi-Fi is marketed in a way that exploits inferiority, jealousy and pride. There's always something better than what you have. I've been subject to that myself. It's what makes many of us over-spend on consumer goods we don't need. The glaring example for me in the Hi-Fi world is the DAC — Digital Analogue Converter. It's a 'black box' (often literally) which in theory converts music from a digital source to amplifiers and speakers or headphones which will convey high-quality sound. Most digital audio equipment comes with a DAC built-in and usually, a perfectly adequate DAC. The one exception might be phones and laptops which more and more people are

Osborn speakers using as their principle source of music. Then, you might want a decent DAC and headphone amplifier. Otherwise you probably don't need one. Not according to the Hi-Fi industry. You can spend over a hundred thousand dollars on a device which may not produce any audible improvement over what you already have. A magic 'black box' which somehow makes your Hi-Fi better. The industry has been full of snake-oil salesmen and magic solutions to problems you didn't know you had. An old example was the idea that you could improve the sound of your CDs by colouring in the



Rega turntable

edge with a green marker pen. How about special expensive pyramids to lift your speaker cables off the ground to avoid some sort of mystical interference? And so on.

I hope I've been inured to future insecurity over inadequate Hi-Fi. I've spent a lot of time and money getting to this point. Short of getting improved bionic ears, I can't see myself needing any higher fidelity equipment. I hope.

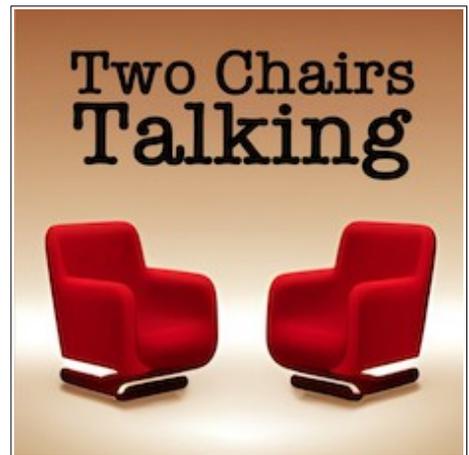
WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 92: (13 June 2023) *A goldfinch in the graveyard*

We started by chatting about the volunteer work we are doing (Wikipedia and Standard eBooks) and then move on to what we have been reading lately: both of us had read ***Real Tigers*** by Mick Herron. We later discuss a couple of films we've seen.



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; Gdn: Guardian 1000 Best Novels; Nvla: novella.

June 2023 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Real Tigers</i>	Mick Herron	Spy	June 11	e	4.3	2016	
All the Horses of Iceland	Sarah Tolmie	Fantasy	June 18		3.4	2022	Nvla
<i>Slaughter-House Five</i>	Kurt Vonnegut, Jr	Sf	June 21		4.3	1969	Gdn; 1001
<i>An Artist of the Floating World</i>	Kazuo Ishiguro	Lit	June 25		4.2	1986	1001
<i>Big Jack Barron</i>	Norman Spinrad	Sf	June 30	e	3.8		

Books read in the period: 5

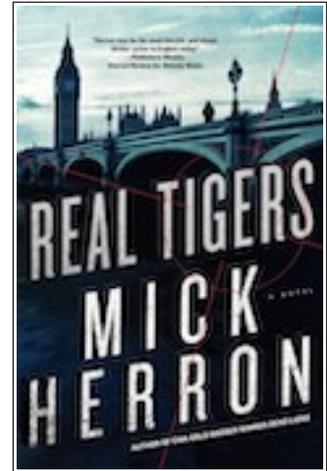
Yearly total to end of period: 51 (just over target)

Reading targets achieved: 6 books from the Guardian 1000 Best Novels list

Notes:

Real Tigers (2016) – #3 in the author’s Slough House series of novels.

This is the third in the author’s series of spy thrillers featuring the denizens of Slough House. This is an establishment of the British Secret Service where disgraced intelligence operatives are sent in the hope that they will despair of the lack of work and quietly resign. These operatives are known by the derogatory term of Slow Horses and are managed by the outrageous character of Jackson Lamb – rather like a Les Patterson style character (as played by the late Barry Humphries), slovenly, swears, flatulent, lazy and generally disgusting on a human level. Second in charge of the House, and Lamb’s office manager and conscience, is Catherine Standish who was relegated to the House after her patron (her boss and lover) committed suicide before the news came out that he was spying for the Russians. Standish was an alcoholic at the time – though she has now reformed and dried out – so she was shuffled off to work with Lamb and be forgotten.



This novel starts with her leaving Slough House one night and running into an old lover in the street. Normally this might be just an annoyance but this man, Sean Donovan, has just been released from prison after serving five years for involuntary manslaughter – he had crashed his car while drunk and killed his fellow passenger. Standish is quick to realise that this “chance” meeting has nothing to do with chance at all and, though she tries to get to some point of safety, she is snatched off the street by Donovan and his associates and so the action of the novel starts.

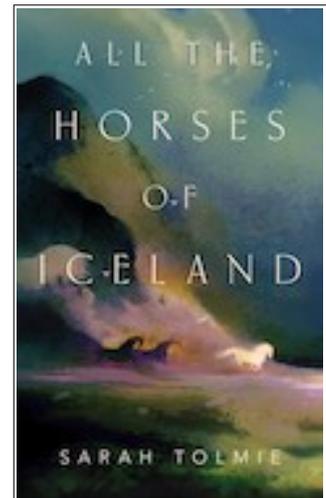
Or so we think. But there is much more to this plot than you first assume. There is an internal managerial battle going on inside the top levels of MI5 and there is a new Home Secretary whose aim is to cripple the Secret Service after they rejected his application some 20 years previously. (This politician is described as secretly coveting the PM’s job, having a thatch of unruly blonde hair and who rides a bicycle – now I wonder who that might be).

The action slowly winds up involving complicated plots, conspiracy theories, MI5 document warehouses and out-of-control operatives. It all ends in a marvellous set piece that comes across as a run-away episode of the X-Files crossed with The Wild Bunch, featuring improbable confrontations and even more improbable escapes.

This is fantastic stuff and probably the best of the series so far. It is really interesting to see Herron grow as a writer here: the plots are getting more convoluted, the books are funnier, and the characterisations are better. It’s all very good stuff indeed.

R: 4.4/5.0

All the Horses of Iceland (2022) – The horses in Iceland are a curious thing. They have been completely isolated from other horses for over a thousand years. No horses, or any horse-related equipment, is allowed in from any other country, and if an Icelandic horse leaves it cannot return. So they have a strange genetic history, possibly related to Mongolian horses. There numbers are small so it is quite possible that they all have one common ancestor, a horse that was brought into the country twelve or thirteen hundred years ago. This novella is an attempt to tell the story of how that might have happened, how such a horse was found by an Icelandic traveller in Europe, and how it was brought overland, and then over sea to the small island in the North Atlantic. It is pitched as an historical fantasy, set in the 9th century, as Eyvind of Eyri sets out to make his fortune along the Silk Road. Along the way he discovers the mare who will be the mother of all Icelandic horses, and finds himself the only one who can control her. The novella is interesting, but rather light-weight, with the fantasy element barely flitting across the surface. R: 3.4/5.0

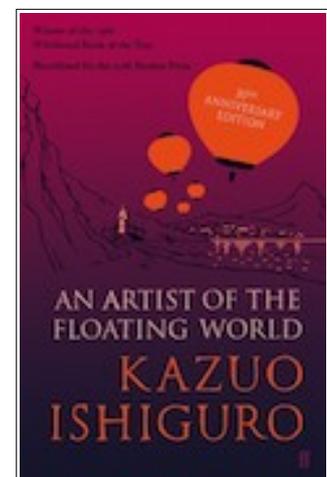


Slaughter-House Five (1969) – This novel appears on the ballots for the 1970 Hugo Award and 1970 Nebula Award for Best Novel, on the list of “1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die”, and on the Guardian 1000 Best Novels lists. It is also subtitled “The Children’s Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death”.

Vonnegut’s main character Billy Pilgrim is, in parts, autobiographical – especially in the scenes set in Dresden before, during and after the infamous firebombing of the city by the Allies during World War Two – and mostly a lens for the author through which he can examine war and its consequences. Pilgrim becomes “unstuck in time” in Dresden, jumping from one point in his life to another, seemingly at random. If that wasn’t enough to make this an sf novel then there are the sequences detailing his kidnapping

by aliens and his transportation to the planet of Tralfamadore, where he becomes a human exhibit in an alien zoo. Along the way we meet some of the others of Vonnegut’s recurring characters – the sf author Kilgore Trout, who seems like a representation of Philip K. Dick to me, and Eliot Rosewater. This is generally considered to be one of the great anti-war novels, but seems a little tame to me now. That doesn’t matter though as the style and content is interesting and perplexing. It’s a novel you keep thinking about even if you’re unsure of what it actually achieves. R: 4.3/5.0

An Artist of the Floating World (1986) – This novel appears on the list of “1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die.” Ishiguro seems to specialise in main characters who look back on their past lives with regret. Sometimes, as in **The Remains of the Day**, is it a regret of a road not taken; here it concerns decisions made in youth that echo down the years. This novel is narrated by



Masuji Ono, an ageing painter, in the years after World War Two who has retired and spends his days looking after his family and reflecting on his own life. Ishiguro never blatantly states the fact but it appears that Ono's work was an integral part of the Japanese war effort, utilising highly patriotic and nationalist themes and motifs to rally support for the Emperor and Imperial Army. Ono had originally been a student of a master artist who specialised in images of the "floating world" – a term used to describe the lifestyle and culture of the pleasure-seeking aspects of Japanese culture between the World Wars. Ono is very much an unreliable narrator, seemingly completely unaware of how his art was used and the impact it had on the Japanese people. It has been noted, even by Ishiguro himself, that he wrote the same novel three times in his first three books – this is the second. But that doesn't detract from the writing chops on display here. R: 4.2/5.0

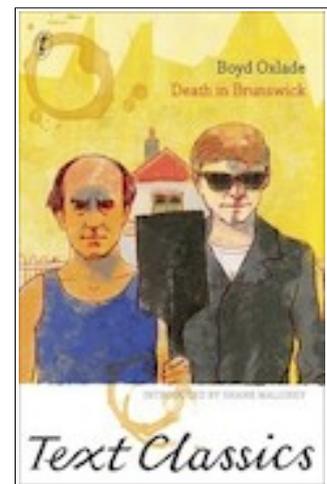
Bug Jack Barron (1969) – This novel appears on the ballots for the 1970 Hugo Award and 1970 Nebula Award for Best Novel. Jack Barron is a television talk-show host who invites viewers to ring in about things that "bug" them, so they can "bug" him and, hopefully, obtain some recompense, or justice, or revenge, whatever it is they are after. The first of these in the book concerns a man who has been refused service by the Foundation for Human Immortality, an organisation that offers to cryonically freeze people after their death. The Chairman of the Foundation, Benedict Howards, is furious at the treatment he receives from Jack and conspires to inveigle Jack into the Foundation's clutches by offering him a special treatment for instant immortality. There is a quite a good story going on here but Spinrad tends to over-write and all the characters start to sound the same: all frenetic and angry most of the time. You can understand the impact this novel would have had in late-1960s sf, and you have to give it points for that. R: 3.4/5.0



REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Death in Brunswick (2018) by Boyd Oxlade
Genre: Crime

In the mid-1980s Carl is a gormless thirty-seven year old working as a cook in a seedy, rundown rock-an'-roll club in Brunswick, in Melbourne's inner-north. He's got mother problems and, as the novel starts, he has, for some fathomless reason, invited her to come and stay with him at his run-down rental property. He is perpetually on the look-out for some easy dope or pills to get himself through the day, and he secretly longs for his mother to die so he can inherit her money. In the meantime he pilfers her medications when she isn't looking. Carl has separated from his wife who, in classic Brunswick fashion, has left him for another woman and he now has to put up with his mother getting on his case about the two of them getting back together again. He can't think of anything worse.



Perryscope 34

Carl has only one skill: he can cook decent food out of practically anything. And that's a skill he needs to put into constant practice as the music venue continually messes up the food ordering, explaining to Carl that he's only kept on due some quirk in the licensing rules which require food to be available if alcohol is served late at night.

To make matters worse Mustafa, Carl's kitchen assistant and drug dealer, has been beaten up by the club's bouncers and now isn't coming into work. The bouncers then tell Carl that they don't want drugs dealt on the premises – unless, of course, they are getting a substantial cut of the takings – and have told Mustafa that Carl doxed him in.

And then Carl meets the lovely, and very, very young Sophie, who is working as a waitress in the club. He is immediately smitten and she reciprocates and Carl finally thinks things are starting to turn for the better.

That is, until Mustafa comes back to the club one night and confronts Carl in the kitchen. A fight ensues and somehow a kitchen knife ends up firmly stuck between Mustafa's ribs. Exit Mustafa. But what to do about the body? Given what the bouncers have said, and his rather drug and alcohol laden history Carl has no desire to report the death to the police. Twenty years to life in prison does not sound appealing. So Carl does the only thing he can do: he stores Mustafa's body in the freezer and contacts his one and only friend Dave for help. As it happens Dave is a gravedigger at the local cemetery and hatches a scheme to put Mustafa's body in the bottom of a recently dug grave – the funeral is the next day - where it will be lost forever.

So we get to the one major comic set-piece of this novel: the burial in the graveyard. It's a wonderfully comic piece of writing; full of dead-pan humour with moments of slapstick and gory and disgusting dead body jokes. I loved it. Unfortunately it's really the only major piece in the book and, we really needed a few other such sequences to lift this novel from the so-so to a rating of excellent.

The novel was adapted into a film in 1990 from a script by Boyd Oxlade, featuring Sam Neill as Carl and John Clarke as Dave. Clarke is just fantastic in the role and raises the level of the burial sequence to very high levels indeed. It's hard to think of anything else in Australian film that is funnier. It was almost as if the role was written for him.

And, yes, the book cover is by Chong who has depicted Dave, just as Clarke portrayed him, in a sort of "Australian Gothic" tableau.

R: 3.3/5.0

Cover notes:

In 2019 we flew into Dublin straight from Australia via Dubai, the usual thirty hours or so from the house in Hawthorn to the destination airport in Europe. We then picked up the car and drove for another hour out into the Irish countryside as we wanted to stay out of the city and get an early start the next morning. So we arrived at the hotel mid-afternoon, too early for bed but just about in time for a Guinness. Robyn took this photo of me as we were heading towards the bar. Can't think of any other reason why I might have looked so calm.

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

The Rig (Season 1 — 6 episodes) (2023)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Supernatural thriller

A British oil rig in the North Sea find itself surrounded by an unusual fog and cut-off from all communications with the outside world. It slowly becomes clear that the fog is carrying a micro-organism that infects humans through cuts and open wounds. As the crew of the oil rig attempt to isolate the ones infected – there are really only a couple and they mostly just want to be left alone – and re-establish contact with the mainland a series of weird underground tremors threatens to break the rig apart. And then a company executive arrives on the rig, he's made it over from a neighbouring platform, and he seems to have an agenda all of his own. There is a good cast here (Iain Glenn, Emily Hampshire and Martin Compston among them), but the story is thin, the writing lame, the dialogue poor and there seems to be a lack of internal logic to the story. Disappointing. R: 2.3/5.0

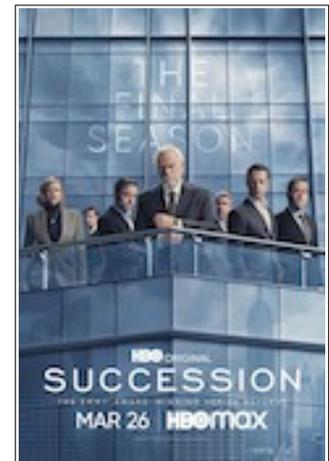


Succession (Season 4 — 10 episodes) (2023)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

And so we come to the end of an intriguing, though perplexing series based around the fictitious media company of WayStar Royco. The basic story is by now well-known: Logan Roy, founder and chair of the company, is getting old and there needs to be succession plan put in place to placate the stock-market and investors. By the time we get to season 4 no plan has been made, Logan's three children are estranged from him and back-stabbing each other and anyone else who attempts to get close. First one sibling is in the ascendent, and then another. I kept on asking "why didn't they...?" and "why isn't anybody...?" which tended to throw me out of the story somewhat. And the final episode, well, that just didn't make a lot of sense to me at all. There has been a lot written about this series noting that it is one of the greatest tv series of all time. In my opinion it's good, but I'd struggle to label it great. Let's say that it is an admirable piece of television craft, made by people who know how to manipulate their characters as well as their viewing audience. R: 4.0/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 32:

Rose Mitchell: "Love that Woolly hat — very nice! Obviously those Icelandic shops leveraged off desperate and cold tourists. C'est la vie. At the very least, it kept you warm and you've brought home a very nice souvenir."

Perryscope 34

“The Rutherglen Adventures travelogue was both interesting and informative: the history of the Rutherglen region was interesting and descriptions of the vineyards/wineries informative. Indeed four hours from Melbourne makes it a couple days’ visit to the region, rather than day trips to the Yarra Valley, or the Bellarine or Mornington Peninsulars. Probably why I have not visited the Rutherglen for 20 or more years and when I did it was a weekend, full of “people” and didn’t really take much in. And I’m not a Big Red drinker. I wonder if Pizzini Wines is embroiled in the ‘Prosecco’ brouhaha currently underway with Italy and Australia.”

[**PM:** I would think the King Valley wineries, in general, are caught up in the naming classification problem over ‘Prosecco’. The wine in Australia is named after the grape – a name now in very common usage around the world – and the grape was named after the Italian town of Prosecco. So you can see that the Italians have a point, but I think there is now a long dis-connect between the name of the town and the name of the wine. I have no problem with French wine-makers forcing the change in wine label from “White Burgundy” to the actual grape variety now used as, as far as I’m aware, there isn’t an actual grape called “burgundy”. Maybe someone will start to complain about the use of the term “Shiraz” next.]

“Julian Warner gave us a fond and heartfelt memorial to Lee Harding; it was chatty yet encapsulated much of Lee’s life and his legacy. Vale.

“From your What I’m Watching List I had a squiz at *Life After Life*. I enjoyed it but admit I had ignored it until I saw your review. Even though it was a bit derivative of *Groundhog Day*, I thought that Ursula eventually did do what she was supposed to do in the end. For me the theme was Regret and when she resolved that niggling regret (and don’t we all have one of those) the loop ceased. I tried not to overthink it.”

[**PM:** Did the loop cease though? Maybe I should go back and have a look at the last episode again to figure that out properly.]

Perryscope 33:

Rose Mitchell (again): “Thanks for **Perryscope 33** — it dropped in my MailBox just as I was about to press Send to mail off comments for **P32**. So I have set a goal for myself: must try harder next time to get in on time.

“Robyn and you are very adventurous, at least to me who is a person who is very risk adverse. I’ve always thought of Morocco as ‘dangerous and exotic’ based on stories of the hippy trail back in the 70s. Spies, nefarious nazis and hash in the Casbah. You’ve depicted an interesting country to explore, in relative safety if not a little discomfort from long bus rides but tempered with beautiful hotels and competent guides. What is the difference between Berber and Arab I asked myself. Looked it up: Berbers are indigenous to the North African continent and Arabs are native to the Arabian Peninsula in Asia. So Morocco is now populated by colonists!”

[**PM:** The point could be made that everywhere is populated by colonists. In this case I suspect the settlement of Arabs across North Africa was probably driven as much by trade as a need to find somewhere else to live. In any event they now

comprise about a third of the Moroccan population. And the Berber language is now one of the official languages of the country, which is a good thing.]

“I chuckled over Julian Warner saying that Justin Ackroyd has his own way of setting up his stall/booth; a massive understatement. And to discover on his arrival at the Clunes Festival venue that Justin was set up prominently near the door — Quelle Surprise :-). Having said that Justin certainly knows his stuff and you can always get a good long conversation out of him, informative and your hands full of books at the end to it. How I miss conventions, (sigh).”

[**PM:** Yes, there only seem to be sf conventions in Australia in Perth and Canberra these days. Melbourne finally seems to have gone the way of Sydney and either worn out its older convention-running fans, or seen the younger ones wander off and do other things. And you are correct, Justin is nothing if not idiosyncratic.]

“Under **Two Chairs Talking**, Ep 90: have you or David changed your pronouns? I am about to tackle *The Mountain in the Sea* so thanks for the recommendation, in fact all your recommendations for books, films and TV. My Cheat Sheet as I look upon both your podcast and **Perryscope**.”

[**PM:** No pronoun changes, at least from my end. I must have copied this from the podcast website description and messed up the edit.]

“Regarding **Top Gun: Maverick**—loved it. It ticked off all my boxes for what a **Top Gun** sequel should be, including massive plot holes and ludicrous escape scenes. I had a really good time watching it in a theatre and deemed it worth my \$25 (Gold Class at Docklands and before I got my pension card). But I set appropriate expectations; only disappointment no song tilt to “Take My Breath Away” and the infamous walk of shame with backdrop of fighter jets and designer sunnies. Yes, I am shallow.”

[**PM:** We may well be looking for different things in films. And I can certainly understand the arguments of both you and Leigh Edmonds (who wrote to comment on the review of the film I gave on the podcast and stated that the whole point of the movie lay with the flying sequences) but I just couldn't bring myself to enjoy it much.]

John Hertz: “Reading people's trip reports is a great way to learn how various viewpoints can be. There you were in Casablanca, Rabat, Chefchaouen, Fez, Essaouira, Marrakech.

P33 gave your initial notes; I hope you'll tell us more of what and whom you saw and what you did in those vital places.”

[**PM:** It is always my intention to produce a full travel blog as a trip report for each of our holidays overseas. Trouble is I'm currently stuck on the Canadian leg of our holiday in 2022 and need to break through that before I can fully get to Morocco. And that can only get done when I get these other projects out of the way. Hopefully soon. Cough.]

“Jeremy Seal's book *A Fez of the Heart* (1993) says people at Fez told him ‘We don't know why some people call that hat by our name.’ Dalmatians have told me ‘We don't know why some people call those dogs by our name.’

“What about Moroccan food? Did you eat *b'stilla*? Did you burn your fingers? I still do.”

[**PM:** Moroccan food could take up a whole trip report on its own. But you'll just have to make do with Robyn's dinner party report earlier in this issue, at least for a while. She has made *b'stilla* at home previously, though we tend to refer to it as Moroccan Chicken Pie. We had it in Morocco and found it rather dry, which seems to be the way they like it. I used a knife and fork.]

“Speaking of ***And Four to Go*** (1958), Nero Wolfe isn't (literary present tense) a fast reader either. So you're in good company. I've only glimpsed television versions of Wolfe stories. They seemed to make him more of a goof than a genius. The Stout stories I think superb. Maybe you see few in used book shops because people keep them.”

[**PM:** I guess that's possible, though I think he is probably very much out of fashion these days. On a literary mailing list recently it was noted that the latter novels seems to drop off in quality quite markedly. I'm only at the very beginning of the series so, at my present rate of reading the Nero Wolfe novels I probably won't hit that point before I finish up.]

“My Greek Macedonian friends would agree with Joseph Nicholas, my Slavic Macedonian friends wouldn't. My Bulgarian friends think Macedonia is really part of Bulgaria. My Serbian friends think — oh, well you see how that goes. The folklorist George Melikis told me ‘I Love studying Macedonia, everybody lives there.’”

[**PM:** I could not possibly comment. That's *way* too politically sensitive.]

“About Naylor's guest editorial in the May-June ***Asimov's*** I wrote in ***Vanamonde*** 1547 that he ‘rightly quotes Mary Shelley's preface to ***Frankenstein*** (1818),

The event on which the interest of the story depends...[his ellipsis] was recommended by the novelty of the situation which it develops; and however impossible as a physical fact, *affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield* [his emphasis]

passing over ‘however impossible as a physical fact’, conceptually the distinction between science fiction and fantasy. But he does not seem to have climbed entirely free of the swamp. He evidently still has to say SF is ‘productive’, or a ‘lens we can focus on our present moment, our past, and — often incidentally — the places we might be headed’; indeed he says the ***Frankenstein*** preface is ‘one of the best justifications for the value of science fiction around.’ Why does SF, or any artform, need a justification? As Midshipman Whitbread says to Motie Mediators (L. Niven & J. Pournelle, ***The Mote in God's Eye***, 1974), ‘What about *Mountains are pretty?*’”

[**PM:** Here's shock, I agree with you. SF, or any artform, doesn't need any justification. The request for one is usually associated with a desire to do away with it. You see this quite a lot from politicians of a certain bent. They demand art justify its worth before they will agree to fund it. It's the standard argument that if you can't find a line for it in an accounting spreadsheet then it shouldn't be indulged, and therefore funded. But you can't quantify the impact art has on the modern human, though I am fairly certain you'd notice its absence if it wasn't there. So drop the need for a justification and look at what SF can achieve that other forms of literature can't. And then you can say, “of all the genres of literature SF does this, which no other does. For that reason alone it is worth your attention.”]

Kim Huett: “Writing as I am from the depths of a most miserable bout of flu the details of your long-distance travels is too much for this plague-raddled body of mine to endure. Back in the mid-90s I only managed to endure travelling between Sydney and London by stopping in Hong Kong for the weekend. Decades later I can assure you that this older, and far more broken, body of mine would no longer be up the quantity of travel you subjected yourself to.

“Indeed, I can't help but feel our civilisation took a wrong turn back in the day. Admittedly in the 30s travelling from Sydney to Southampton by flying-boat took no less than 13 days, but on the other hand each flight stopped overnight in cities such as Singapore, Bangkok, Calcutta, Jodhpur, Baghdad, Alexandria, Brindisi, and Paris. I would suggest given this that the trip in of itself had the makings of an exciting holiday. Anyway, I'm sure that if we had stuck with this more leisurely form of travel flying-boat design would by now be improved to the point that a trip like the one you undertook could be completed somewhat faster and the planes would be equipped with sleeping quarters for all passengers. Given a choice between your day and a half of hell and, let's say, 4/5 days of travel in comfort I know which option I would choose.”

[**PM:** That would certainly be the preferable way to travel. The difficulty we had was based on those old problems of time and money. The flight was included in the tour and really only allowed for a stop-over in Abu Dhabi, and that wasn't something we considered as the temperatures were forecast to be in the low 40s, at that time of the year, in that part of the world.]

“I'm not sure I would be keen on the sort of guided tour you took but have to admit that given I don't speak the language being shepherded about by experts makes a lot of sense. It's just that if I were to visit a country like Morocco I would want to focus on destinations I had already encountered via reading history books. Of course it's quite possible that there are history orientated tours out there which would make for a reasonable compromise.”

[**PM:** You are probably correct about the history tours. I'm sure Joseph Nicholas has mentioned being on a few of these. The need to be on such tours is due, as you say, to the fact that the bulk of the people you would interact with wouldn't speak English. In any event, we chose this tour as it hit all the high points and covered a fair amount of the country. Not all, and sometimes I thought we were a bit rushed. But you take what you can get. Overall it was an excellent tour.]

“I have long assumed that country towns would be a rich source of old Australian paperbacks but even so the idea that anybody would have so many J.E. MacDonnell books for sale impresses. Not that I'm a collector of MacDonnell's war stories or detective series like Carter Brown, Kane, or Marc Brody but if books like those are floating about then so might some Currawong SF ('You can't go wrong with a Currawong!'), the Scientific Thriller series, or perhaps issues of Thrills Incorporated. Who knows, I might even discover books by Australian fans like Alan Connell and Vol Molesworth.”

[**PM:** Heaven forbid!]

I also heard from: Werner Koopmann; Vincent Docherty; Chris Garcia (who notes “Hard Case Crime is a personal fave series”); **Heath Row**; and **Barbara O'Sullivan** (who recommends the Rembrandt exhibition currently showing at the National Gallery of Victoria: “less expensive than a trip to The Netherlands!”); thank you one and all.