

# Perryscope 40



**PERRYSCOPE 40**, January 2024, is an issue of a personalzine published mostly monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org  
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, Morocco, May 2023.

### INTRODUCTION

Looking back on the past year as the calendar clicks over another notch I can say that it was, like most years, one of the good mixed with the bad.

On the bad side of the ledger I lost three friends in about a fortnight in and around the beginning of March. As my friend Marc Ortlieb noted elsewhere recently this is “inevitable” and just a “part of life’s rich and ever changing tapestry”. That may well be true, but it’s just not a very fun part.

My only medical issue during the year concerned a trip to a dermatologist where it was discovered that I had three basal cell carcinomas that needed to be excised. Luckily that could be done as day surgery. Results from the biopsies indicated that all pre-cancerous cells had been removed. Similarly for a fourth one that turned up after some skin cream treatment. So it looks like I’m in the clear for a while. I need to go back each year for a check-up but that’s just a normal servicing arrangement and not onerous.

Travel took up a big part of my 2023 with tours of both Morocco and India. These were both taken using some Covid period credits that we really needed to be used up. I was glad we went to both places, and we didn’t have any major problems on either journey. A few small ones though that is only to be expected.

This January issue – which is a bit late due to the work I was doing on issue 39 – contains, as is my usual schedule, details of the books I read in 2023. Here you’ll find summaries of my reading and my picks for the “best” in each of a number of categories. The February issue will cover details of my film and television viewing from 2023.

Looking ahead to 2024 there is a lot planned, the major trip being to Scotland in August/September. Planning for that is nearly complete. But more on that later as it approaches.

**Cover notes:** I was tempted to refer to this as “one old crumbling structure in front of another” but thought that might be a bit demeaning for the interesting rock formations here. This photo depicts what, prior to her hip operation, was a very usual sight on such walks: me standing, looking back to wonder where Robyn had got to. Her hip replacement last February has certainly helped with this as she now walks a lot faster. It was hot that day so the rest of the group were doing the right thing and waiting in the shade. Not all of them were wearing hats, which I found a bit odd.

## BEST BOOKS OF 2023

This time last year I noted a drop-off in my reading totals compared to the few years preceding. That situation turned around a little in 2023 with a total of 90 books read, out of a target of 100, compared to the 83 I completed in 2022. My best reading months were January, February, October and November, which leads me to think that my reading enthusiasm waxes and wanes somewhat over the year. In 2022 my best months were March, May, November and December, which would seem to back up my activity wave theory, a bit. I could go back a few more years and check their months' activity but, frankly, that way madness lies. Best just to make up a spurious theory and stick with it. It is the Internet age after all.

The 90 books totalled 20,167 pages for the year, which makes it only about a thousand pages more than last year. More novellas maybe? The shortest book was *The Lesson of the Master* by Henry James, at 100 pages, and the longest was *In the Woods* by Tana French at 596.

Those books were split across the following categories:

Literary	27
Science Fiction	18
Fantasy	11
Sf/Fantasy combined	1
Horror	1
Crime	24
Thriller/Spy	7
Graphic Novels	0
Non-Fiction	1

Crime reading was up a bit as I decided to tackle a number of older, classic books in the field in the second half of the year. That trend will be continuing for a while. I read little in the way of new SF as I found the award-nominated books rather uninviting this year, and I was concentrating on other areas. In case you're wonder about the "SF/Fantasy Combined" category that's just there to cover anthologies and collections that include stories from both genres. You can add that number (the solitary "1") to either category as suits your requirements.

Horror lags again – nothing new there – as does Graphic Novels, but I only added that one in 2022 so I don't feel aggrieved about the final total. Non-fiction is another matter. Only one read for the year, which is probably the most embarrassing total for any category. Surely I could have done better than that? Something to look at in 2024. And for those wondering why I bother with all these stats, there's the reason right there.

Again the GoodReads site was the one I used to keep track of my reading, along with my own complicated spreadsheet of course. I am fully aware that a lot of people are becoming annoyed with the site because of the number of negative reviews being lodged that have everything to do with publishing politics and inter-personal relationships rather than being

actual “real” reviews. But I don’t use it for anything like that, and so don’t have the same negative response to the web site. I find it useful to get a general view of what people think of a book, and to get some more detailed information about it before I decide whether I want to read it or not. It’s just another useful resource.

I noted last year that I was one of 886,825 who read Andy Weir’s *Project Hail Mary* in 2022, which I thought quite a significant number. But that is put in the shade by being only one of 2,440,789 people who read and tagged Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughter-House Five* this year. I must try to figure out how to get the overall stats for this on GoodReads. But, in any event, two and a half million readers of a book that was published in the 1960s is rather impressive.

As to the “type” of books read I can say that I read more on paper (57) than any form of electronic resource (33). I have this plan to work my way through the old paperbacks on the bookshelves – some have been sitting there “alone and palely loitering” for over 30 years – and then distributing the book to family and friends. I’m 68 years old and don’t see myself getting back to any of these again, so I might as well try to find them a good home.

On the format front we have the following:

Novel	67
Novella	18
Collection	1
Anthology	3
Non-Fiction	1

There were drops in the number of single-author collections and anthologies this year from 2022; not a lot as I only have a target of 6 for each category for the year, though it is noticeable. I put this down to changes in what I have been “researching”. In 2023 and 2022 I gave talks at the local sf discussion group, the Nova Mob, about the best short sf from 1966 and 1965 respectively. I have no aims to tackle 1967 as it is just too much work, even though it is tempting. So the requirement to complete my reading of the “Year’s Best SF” anthologies for each calendar year has dropped away. Similarly I was reading single-author collections as I had already read about half each book due to the sf short research. And that’s faded as well.

Towards the end of the year I had noticed that I hadn’t been keeping up with my plan to read more of the novels on both the 1001 Novels You Must read Before You Die and the Guardian 1000 Best Novels lists. Mostly the books chosen were from the crime and sf&f subsections of each list. In 2023 I read 11 from the Guardian list and 6 from the other. Not a lot but it shows some sort of headway being made; if I keep going at this rate I’ll likely be around 200 years old before I finish both lists. I fully realise that I don’t have a hope in hell of finishing them. That isn’t the point really. They act as a reading guide and help remind me to keep looking at older novels, as we all should. It’s really the only way to put modern books in context.

A check on the years of publication of my year’s reading shows that I’m concentrating mostly on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century books. I only read two from the 1800s, with 42 from the

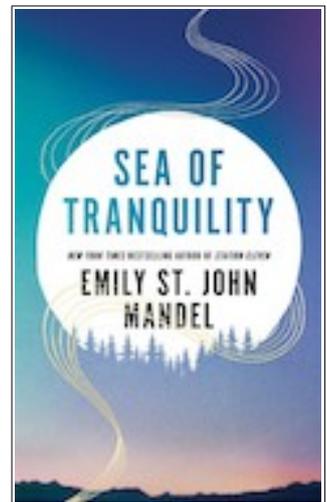
1900s and 46 from the current century. Is that too much emphasis on modern stuff? Maybe, but it will act as a reminder that I'll need to seek out some older books in the coming year. As to my ratings, the highest award was 4.8/5.0, and the lowest 2.1. Thirty-one books received a rating of 4.0 or above, which seems a tad high; I must be more discerning in the year ahead. Forty-nine books fell into the 3.0-3.9 rating range, with the remaining 10 being between 2.0 and 2.9. I look back at some of the ratings now and wonder what I was thinking, though this rarely applies to the books above 4.0. I wonder if that's me being more selective regarding which books to read or just being a bit too lax in my ratings. Who knows, and frankly, I really don't care. I try to give a rating to a book as soon as I can after finishing it. I find that's the best method for me. As I said above I sometimes look at a rating after a couple of months and wonder about it, but I never change it.

And, so to the categories.

## SF

Novels read: 11

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> by Emily St. John Mandel (2022) | 4.6 |
| 2 | <i>The Mountain in the Sea</i> by Ray Nayler (2022)       | 4.4 |
| 3 | <i>Slaughter-House Five</i> by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr (1969)   | 4.3 |
| 4 | <i>Every Version of You</i> by Grace Chan (2022)          | 4.0 |
| 5 | <i>The Migration</i> by Helen Marshall (2019)             | 3.8 |



Notes:

I thought that my SF novel reading had dropped away this year until I looked at last year's notes and realised I had read exactly the same amount. It still isn't enough but I am finding it harder to find interesting sf books to read. I can tell my tastes are different to the general sf reading public as my top two novels this year, which were both eligible for the Hugo and Nebula Awards, made neither of the two awards' shortlists. Too subtle? Not "cosy" enough? I have no idea. Good to see an Australian sf novel (Chan) on the final list.

Honorable Mentions:

None.

## Fantasy

Novels read: 5

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <i>Spear</i> by Nicola Griffith (2022)      | 4.5 |
| 2 | <i>The Grey King</i> by Susan Cooper (1975) | 4.4 |
| 3 | <i>Treacle Walker</i> by Alan Garner (2021) | 4.3 |



Notes:

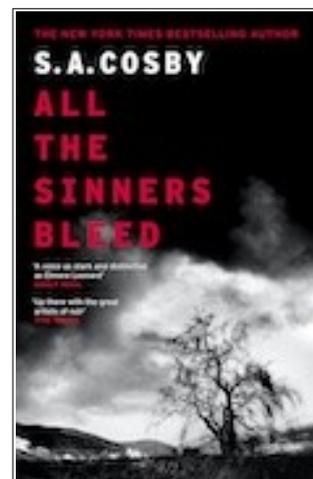
I did read 11 Fantasy books this year but only 5 of those were novels. All of the books here are tremendous, and short. And that's not something you can say much about Fantasy novels these days. I'm nearly finished with Cooper's Dark is Rising series and so should go back and re-read Garner's earlier material.

Honorable Mentions:  
None.

**Crime**

Novels read: 22

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <b><i>All the Sinners Bleed</i></b> by S. A. Cosby (2023)   | 4.4 |
| 2 | <b><i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i></b> by Walter Mosley (1990) | 4.4 |
| 3 | <b><i>Exiles</i></b> by Jane Harper (2022)                  | 4.4 |
| 4 | <b><i>In the Woods</i></b> by Tana French (2007)            | 4.4 |
| 5 | <b><i>The Big Sleep</i></b> by Raymond Chandler (1939)      | 4.3 |



Notes:

The top two entries here are novels by African-American writers which might say something about my reading habits, or might just be a coincidence. I think it's more likely the latter. I'm fairly certain that Cosby has been influenced by Mosley, which can only be to his and our benefit. Again it's good to see an Australian novel (Harper) on the list. Only the Cosby novel here is not part of a series. That also reflects some of my extended reading plans.

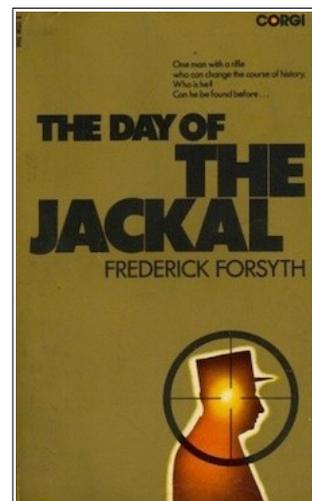
Honorable Mentions:

- Five Decembers*** by James Kestrel (2021) 4.2  
***Wake*** by Shelley Burr (2022) 4.2

**Thriller/Spy**

Novels read: 7

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <b><i>The Day of the Jackal</i></b> by Frederick Forsyth (1971) | 4.3 |
| 2 | <b><i>Real Tigers</i></b> by Mick Herron (2016)                 | 4.3 |



Notes:

The Forsyth novel was read very late in the year which indicates a good reason for leaving your "Best of.." choices until as late as possible.

Honorable Mentions:

None.

**Literary/Non-Genre**

Novels read: 22

- |   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | <b><i>Cold Comfort Farm</i></b> by Stella Gibbons (1932)               | 4.5 |
| 2 | <b><i>The True Story of Spit MacPhee</i></b> by James Aldridge (1986)  | 4.3 |
| 3 | <b><i>An Artist of the Floating World</i></b> by Kazuo Ishiguro (1986) | 4.2 |
| 4 | <b><i>Fly Away Peter</i></b> by David Malouf (1982)                    | 4.2 |
| 5 | <b><i>A Sunday in Ville-d'Avray</i></b> by Dominique Barberis (2019)   | 4.2 |



### Notes:

Two Australians on the list (Malouf and Aldridge) and none of the books here are recent. The Gibbons was a stand-out and much funnier than I expected. I have seen one or two television adaptations of the book and they were amusing but I hadn't expected a 90-year-old novel to be at this humorous a level. The Aldridge was almost nostalgic even though I didn't grow up in Victoria (where the novel was set) nor in the 1920s. Certain things about Australian country life obviously have a resonance down the years.

### Honorable Mentions:

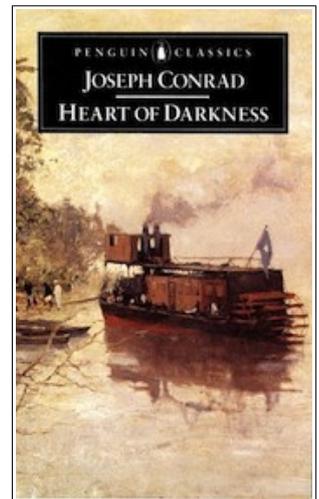
***The Odd Angry Shot*** by William Nagle (1975) 4.0

***A Passage to India*** by E. M. Forster (1924) 4.0

### Novella

Novellas read: 19

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <b>Heart of Darkness</b> by Joseph Conrad (1899)        | 4.8 |
| 2 | <b>The Drop</b> by Mick Herron (2018)                   | 3.8 |
| 3 | <b>The Lesson of the Master</b> by Henry James (1888)   | 3.8 |
| 4 | <b>A Mirror Mended</b> by Alix E. Harrow (2022)         | 3.8 |
| 5 | <b>The Paper House</b> by Carlos Maria Dominguez (2004) | 3.8 |



### Notes:

The SF&F novellas I read this year were rather bland with the exception of the Harrow listed here. Maybe it's the subject matter or the writing sub-genre. Too many of them seemed to be attempting to be completely inoffensive, to their detriment. None of the novellas listed here pander to any pre-ordained agenda.

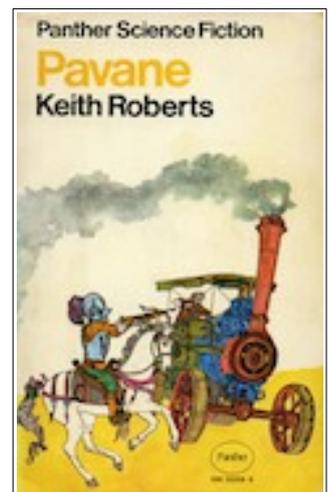
### Honorable Mentions:

None.

### Collection/Anthology

Books read: 4

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | <b>Pavane</b> by Keith Roberts (1968)                     | 3.9 |
| 2 | <b>New Writings in SF-8</b> edited by John Carnell (1966) | 3.6 |



### Notes:

A number of websites will list **Pavane** by Keith Roberts as a novel, and it would be quite acceptable to look at it that way, but I consider it a series of connected shorter stories (some may be novelettes and some novellas). The Carnell anthology of original stories only contains one dud with good pieces by Kapp, Page, Mackleworth, Baxter and Roberts.

### Honorable Mentions:

None.

### Non-Fiction

Books read: 1

- 1 ***Monash's Masterpiece*** by Peter Fitzsimmons (2018) 4.4

Notes:

Only 1 read this year, and, as I've previously noted I will have to keep an eye on this category. I would have thought I'd have read more non-fiction this year given this one was read way back in January but it wasn't to be.

Honorable Mentions:

None.

### Overall

Books read: 90

I decided to split my overall "Best of..." selections into two mostly to fit in with the requirements of our annual podcast episode. I'm not sure I'll keep doing it even though it is an interesting exercise. I'll think about that in a years' time.

### Books read for the first time

- 1 ***Sea of Tranquility*** by Emily St. John Mandel (2022) 4.6
- 2 ***Cold Comfort Farm*** by Stella Gibbons (1932) 4.5
- 3 ***Spear*** by Nicola Griffith (2022) 4.5
- 4 ***All the Sinners Bleed*** by S. A. Cosby (2023) 4.4
- 5 ***The Mountain in the Sea*** by Ray Nayler (2022) 4.4

Notes:

The odd thing I notice about this list is the fact that 4 of the 5 were published within the past two years. I would never have predicted that before I started this process. Two sf, one fantasy, one crime and one non-genre (literary).

Honorable mentions:

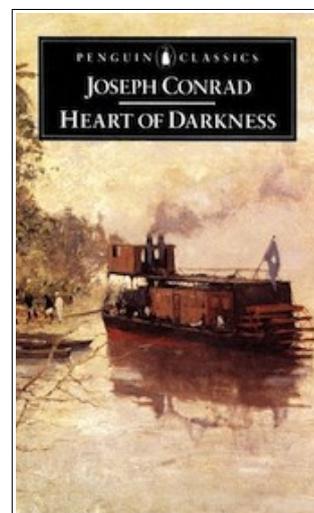
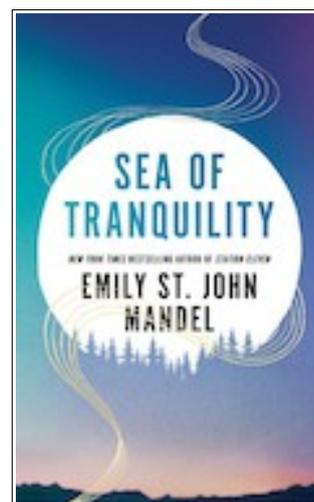
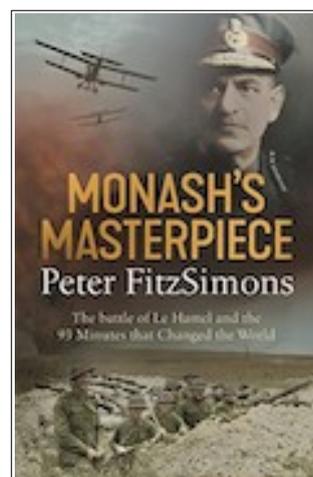
***Monash's Masterpiece*** by Peter Fitzsimmons (2018) 4.4

***In the Woods*** by Tana French (2007) 4.4

### Books re-read

- 1 ***Heart of Darkness*** by Joseph Conrad (1899) 4.8
- 2 ***The Grey King*** by Susan Cooper (1975) 4.4
- 3 ***Devil in a Blue Dress*** by Walter Mosley (1990) 4.4
- 4 ***The Big Sleep*** by Raymond Chandler (1939) 4.3
- 5 ***Slaughter-House Five*** by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1969) 4.3

Honorable mentions:



*The Day of the Jackal* by Frederick Forsyth (1971) 4.3

*An Artist of the Floating World* by Kazuo Ishiguro (1986) 4.2

Notes:

It's hard to go past the Conrad as one of the best pieces of fiction I've read in a long time. There were a few others that had a 4.2 rating and which could have snuck onto the Honorable Mentions list but I felt I had to draw a line under this somewhere. Logically this might imply that I am either messing up my ratings (quite possible) or that I need an extra level, something like 4.45 for example. And I'm not going to do that. I'm okay with the current system, even with its flaws, and I'll be sticking with it.

As I've mentioned before it is possible to get your reading pleasure from anywhere, and reading from anywhere is the best approach. It's always better to have a balanced reading diet rather than sticking to one area of interest over all others. You can't eat pizza all day every day, and neither can you restrict yourself to top-end Michelin starred restaurants. Either approach will give you an unbalanced view of literature and reading, and frankly, isn't all that good for your soul.

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### A LARRIKIN'S DICTIONARY OF SCIENCE FICTION

**Space Opera** – Space Opera is a form of science fiction in which music, space and space travel are fundamental components and dramatic roles are taken by space travellers and aliens, but is distinct from musical theatre. Such a "work" (the literal translation of the Italian word "opera") is typically a collaboration between a writer and an editor and incorporates a number of the performing arts, such as shooting, screaming, alien diplomacy, singing, and sometimes detailed telephathic choreography. The performance is typically given in a spaceship – most usually an interstellar cruiser, eg *The Fifth Element* – accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble comprised of a variety of humans, and other alien races. Occasionally lighter pieces may be performed by a small group in a drinking or eating establishment, eg *Star Wars*, with a shoot-out as an added extra.

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The regrettable thing about the culture war we still, after all these years, seem to be fighting is that it divides books into two camps, the trashy and the worthwhile. No one who is paid to talk about books for a living seems to be able to convey the message that this isn't how it works, that 'good' books can provide every bit as much pleasure as 'trashy' ones. Why worry about that if there's no difference anyway? Because it gives you more choice. You may not have to read about conspiracies, or the romantic tribulations of thirtysomething women, in order to be entertained. You may find that you're enthralled by Anthony Beevor's *Stalingrad*, or Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, or *Great Expectations*. Read anything, as long as you can't wait to pick it up again.

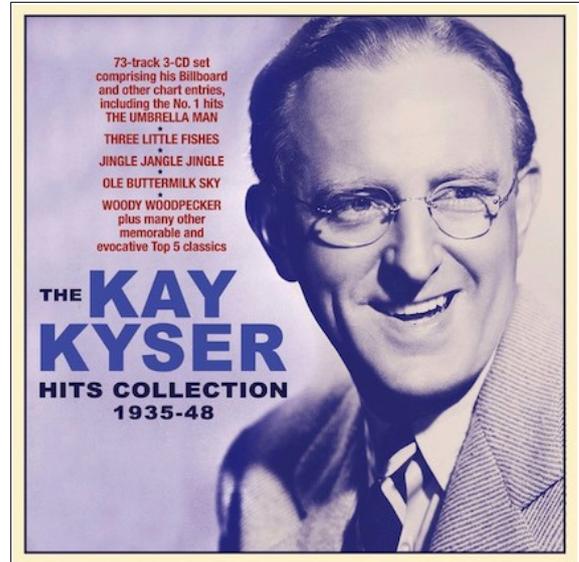
*The Complete Polysyllabic Spree* by Nick Hornby (2007), p8

**WANDERINGS AND READINGS – An Occasional Column by Julian Warner**

**K for Kyser**

Lately I've been listening to a three CD set of songs by Kay Kyser and his various orchestras. It took a bit of effort to find. Although Kyser was one of the most popular Swing-era orchestra leaders, he retired very effectively and isn't heard much of nowadays. He is referenced in the lyrics to Glenn Miller's 'Jukebox Saturday Night':

*Goodman and Kyser and Miller  
Help to make things bright  
Mixin' hot licks with vanilla  
Jukebox Saturday night*



I was familiar with Glenn Miller from my father's record collection and assumed that everyone could quote the lyrics from 'Chattanooga Choo-Choo'. Benny Goodman could swing but he also had some jazz (and Klezmer!) chops, and he had the distinction of backing Billie Holiday in her early years.

Jazz aficionados often have strong ideas about what is or is not jazz. [There's even those who say that anything with vocals is not jazz.] Benny Goodman is jazz. Harry James is jazz. Glenn Miller is not jazz. Kay Kyser is not jazz. They were all stars of the swing era but with different status. Admittedly, a fair part of the repertoire of Miller and Kyser was novelty songs and straight pop material. Lots of novelty stuff in the case of Kyser. (Bing Crosby did the novelty songs too but could still pontificate about what was or was not jazz and could call on Louis Armstrong and others to make appearances.)

Apart from churning out pop hits, Kyser was famed for his schtick for being the "Ol Perfessor" in his "Kollege of Musical Knowledge" — setting up a fad for music-based quiz shows. Unlike other band-leaders, Kyser didn't play an instrument. He announced songs and singers and feature players and conducted in a minimalist sort of way.

The language of Kyser's songs is full of hipster jive and some (now) questionable references. Kyser actually appeared — either by voice or caricature — in some of the cartoons of the period, which also had their problems with racist/sexist etc imagery.

Some of the Kyser material was not jazz of itself but was then used by 'real' jazzers later on. "Let's Get Lost", for example, was used as a theme tune by Chet Baker.

If you like the music and films of the Swing Era, you may also like the oeuvre of Kay Kyser. You just may have trouble finding it on record or CD. There's plenty of music and film clips of Kyser on Youtube.

**Bill Chambers – Rutherglen Legend by Martin Field**

*[Editor’s note: On 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 the Rutherglen wine district lost one of its longest serving winemakers when Bill Chambers (of Chambers Rosewood winery) shuffled off to that great wine cellar in the sky. I always tried to visit the winery whenever I was in the district, not so much for the high quality of his wines – though there were a few of those – as because Bill tended to make wines in styles no-one else was releasing. His cellar door was nothing flash but it was functional, and the staff were always friendly and knowledgeable. I always walked away with something I thought was worthwhile. He will be greatly missed.]*

*Friend of the fanzine, Martin Field, wrote the following piece about Bill around 2001 and he sent it along with permission to reprint.]*



At a grand dinner in Rutherglen, the Winemakers of Rutherglen proclaimed Bill Chambers as the 2000 Legend of Rutherglen. His name now joins the illustrious honour roll of previous Rutherglen Legends: Colin Richardson, John Brown Senior, Mick Morris, Dick Buller and Norm Killeen.

But why did it so long for someone of Chambers’ renown to receive the award? His mate Ian Loftus said, “Whenever he’s been approached in the past to accept recognition of his work, he’s always said ‘Give it to someone else’.”

And that theme runs through the comments of anyone who knows Bill Chambers. “He always downplays his wine expertise and has the attitude that he is more sheep farmer than winemaker,” said long-time friend Allan Watson, of Jimmy Watson’s Wine Bar. He’s known Bill for more than 30 years and says he has one of the best palates around. “I’ve no doubt that’s why Bill has been chairman of wine judges at the Melbourne Wine Show for the past 21 years,” he said.

Bill was born in 1933, the first of seven brothers. “As the eldest son I was the only one to study winemaking,” he said. “My father said that the vineyard was only big enough for one trained winemaker.”

He was educated at Scotch College and in 1950 went straight to Roseworthy Agricultural College to study agriculture and winemaking. The winemaking students, he recalls with a laugh, were known as “plonkies”. He graduated from Roseworthy in 1954 with a Diploma of Oenology, receiving the Leo Buring Gold Medal for his paper, ‘Acid adjustment of wines using sulphuric acid’.

After Roseworthy, Bill’s first job as winemaker was at the Stanley winery in the Clare Valley. There he gained valuable hands-on experience, not least of all, from cellar foreman Pat Connors, “who probably had the most influence on my winemaking”.

In 1958 Bill returned to the family winery, Rosewood, in Rutherglen, where he took over winemaking duties and became custodian of the already well-known Chambers muscats and tokays. “My grandfather laid down the basis for these wines and I was just lucky enough, with the help of Sid McMahon of Seabrooks Wines, to be able to start topping them up and to keep them going.” American wine guru Robert Parker was effusive in his praise about some of Bill’s fortifieds, calling them “the most exceptional I have ever tasted” — thus ensuring the rest of the world knew about Chambers Winery and Rutherglen muscats and tokays.

So, who’ll be winemaker at Rosewood when Bill retires? His 28-year-old son Stephen has an agricultural degree with a major in oenology from the University of Adelaide, and “hopefully he’ll carry on the tradition”.

Bill’s latest project is the development of a white wine made from his three acres of the rare variety gouais blanc. “We used to just blend it with riesling,” he said, “then we heard about that genetic testing at UCLA showing that gouais and pinot noir are ancestors of chardonnay. So as an experiment we’ve made about a hundred dozen Chambers Gouais 2000. I’ve sent some off to the researchers to try.” The wine, which is a ripe fruit style, is available only at cellar door.

(Winestate Magazine circa 2001)

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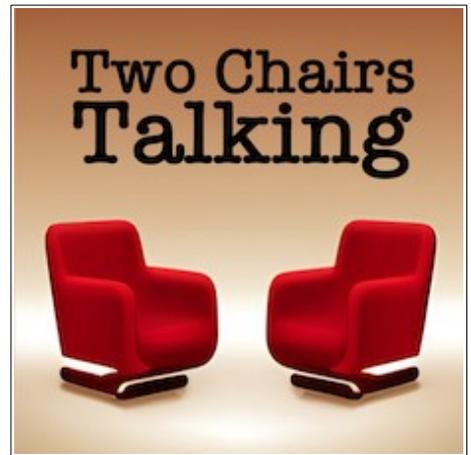
## WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this month's podcasts

**Episode 98:** (21 November 2023) *Sorrow and silence are strong*

David and I are back after a break while I was travelling in India. Here we talk, again, about the books we've been reading lately. I seem to have read a fair amount of crime on my travels (including *The Day of the Jackal*) while David digs into books with a bit more depth.



**Episode 99:** (21 November 2023) *Good thinking, Ninety-nine*

This time we discuss our recent reading, including several crime or crime-adjacent books, a middle-school fantasy, and an excellent piece of historical fiction.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at [twochairs.website](http://twochairs.website), or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – 1001: 1001 Novels You Must Read Before You Die; Aust: Australian; Edgar: Edgar Award winner; Gdn: Guardian 1000 Best Novels; Nvla: novella; Trans: translated

### November-December 2023 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Play it As It Lays</i>	Joan Didion	Lit	3 Nov	e	3.4	1970	Gdn
<i>Sixteen Ways to Defend a Walled City</i>	K. J. Parker	Fantasy	6 Nov	e	3.2	2019	
<i>White Nights</i>	Ann Cleeves	Crime	7 Nov	e	3.3	2008	
<i>The Big Sleep</i>	Raymond Chandler	Crime	11 Nov	e	4.3	1939	Gdn/1001
<i>The Day of the Jackal</i>	Frederick Forsyth	Thriller	14 Nov		4.3	1971	Gdn; Edgar
<i>Winds of Evil</i>	Arthur Upfield	Crime	23 Nov	e	3.0	1937	Aust
<i>Fly Away Peter</i>	David Malouf	Lit	28 Nov		4.2	1982	Aust
<i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i>	Walter Mosley	Crime	29 Nov		4.4	1990	
<i>Black Sheep</i>	Susan Hill	Lit	30 Nov		3.8	2013	
<i>A Morbid Taste for</i>	Ellis Peters	Crime	2 Dec	e	3.6	1977	

## Perryscope 40

<b>Bones</b>						
<b>A Passage to India</b>	E. M. Forster	Lit	17 Dec		4.0	1924 Gdn/1001
<b>Four Soldiers</b>	Hubert Mingarelli	Lit	18 Dec		3.2	2003 Trans (French)
<b>The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum</b>	Heinrich Böll	Lit	26 Dec		2.2	1974 Trans (German)
<b>Stiff</b>	Shane Maloney	Crime	31 Dec		4.0	1994 Aust

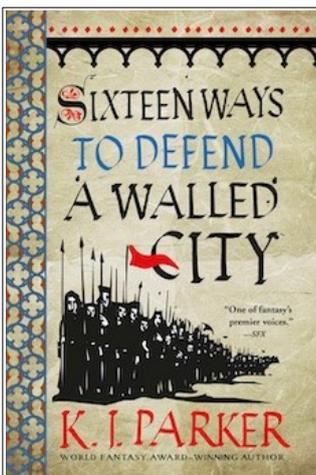
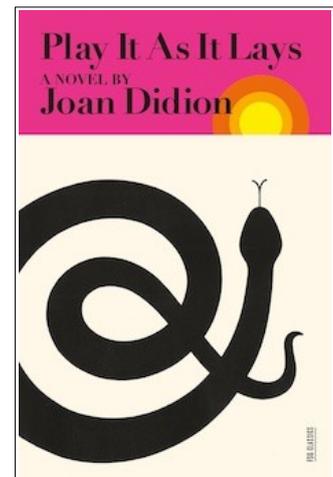
Books read in the period: 14  
Yearly total: 90

### Notes:

**Play It As It Lays** (1970) – This novel appears on the Guardian List of 1000 Best Novels.

Set in the late 1960s in California and Nevada this novel circles round a group of film-makers at the bottom end of the film-making industry. They are making either cheapo art films or porn, it's a bit hard to tell as it is all done off-stage. Maria Wyeth is at the centre of things as she longs to get back together with her estranged writer-director husband Carter Lang, not so much to rescue the marriage as to just get back into the movie business. But she is ineffectual, and just seems to be her own worst enemy. There isn't a single character to like in this book and yet it still comes across as warm and engaging, and I have idea how the author does that. The trouble is there isn't much here that is memorable, and the further I get away from the book the lesser it appears. You can almost read this novel as history now, given it depicts a time that is so far in the past. It seems like a tale of people stretching for things they can never reach. So, yeah, rather like the 1960s.

R: 3.4/5.0

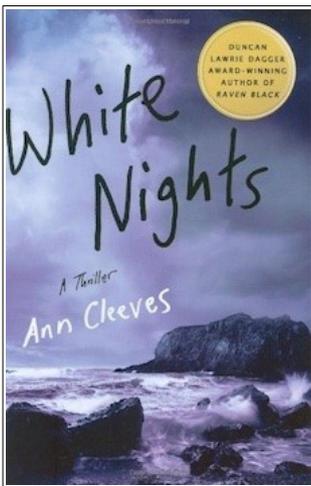


**Sixteen Ways to Defend a Walled City** (2019) – #1 in the author's The Siege series of novels.

I've listed this novel as a fantasy because that's how it's marketed, but, frankly, its intersection with that genre is only fleeting, at best. Orhan is a resourceful, duplicitous, egotistical, and witty protagonist who finds himself helping to defend a city under siege in this alternative Byzantium-like set-up. Told in the first person, Parker has a lot of fun with the character and his detailed descriptions of how this ex-slave engineer rises to the top of his profession and who then finds himself working for the enemy. Are there really sixteen ways to defend a walled city? Maybe, but Parker only explores one or two of them to rather good effect. I kept on being reminded of the Harry Flashman character as I was reading. The main character here seems to continually land on his feet, and, while he isn't as odious or

as funny as Flashman, he is ingenious. I tired a bit of him near the end of this but still didn't expect the ending, which I thought a bit of a let-down. It read like the author had finally run out of steam and just wanted the book to end. Pity as it has some good things going for it.

R: 3.2/5.0

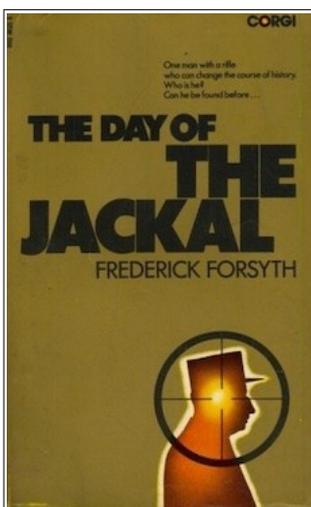
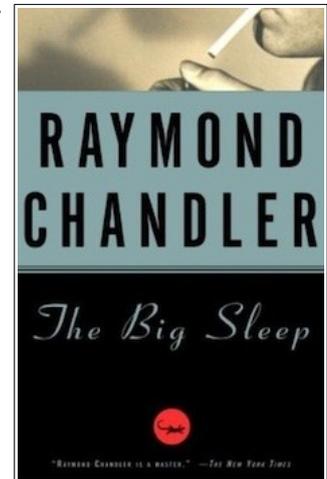


**White Nights** (2008) – #2 in the author’s Shetland Island series of novels.

It’s midsummer in Shetland and the sun never seems to set. D. I. Jimmy Perez is confronted with two murders of people who are close to his latest love interest, artist Fran Hunter. The first murder, disguised as a suicide, is of a visiting Englishman who disrupts the opening of an art exhibition. The second is of a local Shetlander, a world famous musician, who is found on a beach, at the bottom of a cliff. Perez is joined by Aberdeen police detective Roy Taylor, who appeared in the first book and who is miffed with Perez for being better at police work than he is. Cleeves takes us on a tour of the small community of the Shetlands, the secrets hidden and the family and friends relationships that shape the story. A competent enjoyable police procedural. R: 3.3/5.0

**The Big Sleep** (1939) – #1 in the author’s Philip Marlowe series of novels. This novel appears on the Guardian Best 1000 Novel list, the 1001 Novels You Must Read Before You Die list, and on both the Crime Writers and Mystery Writers of America top 100 Crime Novels lists.

As seems to happen quite when a PI visits a client about a new job, the first task they are given is not really the true heart of the case. And so it is here when Marlowe is employed to investigate a blackmail attempt, when really General Sherwood wants him to get his daughters under control and to find his missing son-in-law. But Marlowe figures it all out in the end. There is a thin line of anti-semitism running through this book which is rather disturbing, and unexpected. Chandler pretty much re-invented or re-invigorated the PI novel with this book. It’s gritty, hard, witty and a dead set classic. And try as I might I still can’t work out who killed the chauffeur. R: 4.3/5.0



**The Day of the Jackal** (1971) – This novel appears on the Guardian Best 1000 Novel list, and on both the Crime Writers Association and Mystery Writers of America Top 100 Crime Novels lists. It won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Novel in 1972.

It is interesting to read this novel, fifty years on, as an historical document, telling a story from the pre-digital age. We all know the plot about a lone assassin engaged to shoot President Charles de Gaulle of France in 1962, a story well adapted into a film of the same name in 1973 with Edward Fox in the lead role. The interesting thing I find is that the whole investigation, from the initial rumours to the tracking of the assassin across Europe and into France, is all done with the simple technology of a telephone. All of the sifting of vast amounts of Birth and Death certificates, tourist transit forms and hotel cards is all done by hand; a laborious and tedious process that had the very great potential to drag the pace of the novel down to nothing and leave the reader feeling bored and annoyed. But exactly the opposite occurs. The pace of the evolving

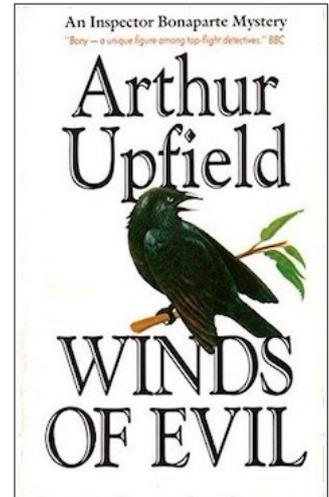
plot — after an initial info-dump that is a little dreary — doesn't let up. There are still large amounts of information dumped into the text but Forsyth has the knack of not over-doing it, of not allowing the reader's attention to sit for too long on one aspect of the operation or detection. It's all good stuff. Rightly considered one of the best thrillers ever written.

R: 4.3/5.0

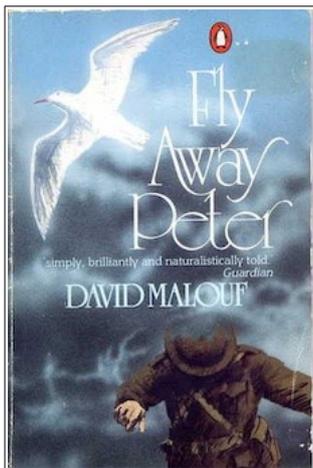
***Winds of Evil*** (1937) – #5 in the author's Bony series of novels.

US crime writer Elmore Leonard once set down his ten rules for good writing. The first of them was: Never open a book with weather. Here Arthur Upfield does just that. In fact he goes on for some pages about the high winds and the accompanying sand storms. So much so that you start to wonder if he's trying too hard to set up the correct circumstances for his plot.

I suppose Upfield could be forgiven for doing so as these natural phenomena play a major role in the reason why two people have been murdered, and another almost, near a large station in Outback New South Wales. Bony arrives unannounced and in disguise, as seems to be his usual way, and sets about solving the case that has mystified authorities for nearly two years. He states at one point that this is the most baffling case he has ever encountered, with few clues, too many possible suspects and no help from the natural environment as all traces of activity are wiped out by the high winds. If it's baffling for Bony then the reader certainly has no chance as the reason for the crimes lies in an inherited case of madness which seemed to me to be more than a bit silly.



This is probably the weakest of the Bony novels so far, though there is still much to like about this one. Just don't get too annoyed with the way the crime is solved, and the reasons behind it. R: 3.0/5.0



***Fly Away Peter*** (1982) – This novel won the Age Book of the Year Award for Fiction in 1982.

In the years immediately before the First World War Jim Saddler is a bird-watcher over a coastal wetland in Queensland. There he meets the owner of the land, Ashley Crowther, and the two hit it off, with Crowther employing Saddler to act as warden and chronicler of the wetland and the birds which call it home. When the war starts it all seems so very far away and far removed from the reality of Queensland. But after he sees a lot of other men start to join up, Saddler also enlists. Later, on the battlefields of France, he runs into Crowther in a couple of brief encounters. This is a quiet, unassuming little novel that seems to have attained a status as a major high school English literature text. Yet another one that sixteen-year-olds

would generally, have no idea about. I know that I would have found it incredibly boring if I'd read it back then. R: 4.2/5.0

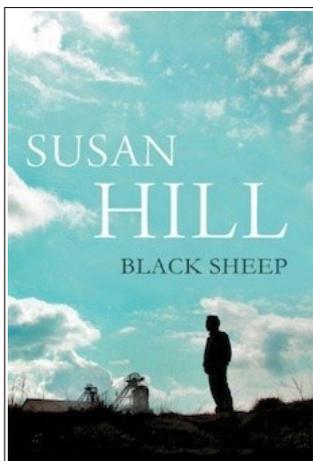
***Devil in a Blue Dress*** (1990) – #1 in the author’s Easy Rawlins series of novels. This novel appears on the Guardian List of 1000 Best Novels, and the Mystery Writers of America Top 100 Crime Novels list.



Walter Mosley’s debut novel is certainly a landmark publication in the annals of crime fiction. It is told in the tradition of Chandler and MacDonald but from the African-American point-of-view.

In 1948 Los Angeles “Easy” Rawlins has just lost his job at an aircraft factory when he is approached by a friend to help an acquaintance with a “problem”. A white lawyer wants Easy to find Miss Daphne Monet, a pneumatic blonde with a reputation, and a habit of hanging around African-American music joints. There is good money on offer and Easy takes it with reluctance, slowly piecing together the women’s relationships, and getting further involved in the case, until he seems to be in way too far. This is an excellent piece of work, and the only real criticism I can find is that all of the main players seem to know each other from either earlier lives in Texas or from connections in LA. But that is really a minor consideration. There are another 14 in this series. I look forward to reading them all.

The novel was adapted for the screen in 1995 with Denzel Washington playing the role of Easy Rawlins. R: 4.4/5.0

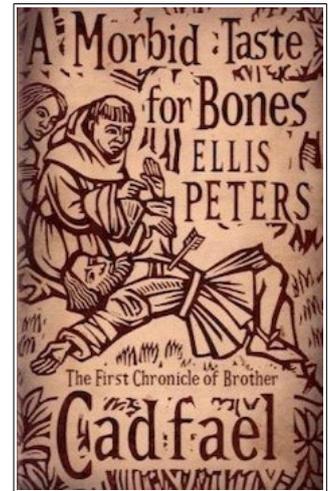


***Black Sheep*** (2013) – Author Susan Hill is best known for her gothic novels, such as ***The Woman in Black***, a book that has been filmed twice and which has also been adapted for the stage. The current production of that play is now the second longest running play in the history of the West End in London, after Agatha Christie’s ***The Mousetrap***. Hill won the Whitbread Novel Award in 1972 for *The Bird of Night*, which was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. If this short novel is anything to go by then those gothic works will be certainly on my list to check out. Set somewhere in the coal mining town of Mount of Zeal, this novel tells the story of the Howker family – father, mother, four sons and a daughter. The father and oldest three sons work down the pit and, it is assumed, that Ted the youngest will follow in their footsteps. But he wants something else and finds work on a local sheep farm. Rose marries the vile son of the pit-manager and starts working in a shop in town. All is not exactly well at the beginning, but it steadily and then very rapidly gets worse. It is extremely bleak in the final chapter.

The title may refer either to Ted alone, as he is rather ostracised from the family, or the family as whole as they follow the traditions of the town like sheep and spend their days covered in coal dust and soot. There is a lot going on here and very important scenes are told in crisp, precise sentences that do not linger on the emotional side. The author leaves that up to the reader to form their own opinions. Very intriguing indeed, though I really felt like I needed something less dark after reading it. R: 3.8/5.0

***A Morbid Taste for Bones*** (1977) – #1 in the author’s Chronicles of Brother Cadfael series of novels. It appears on both the Crime Writers Association and Mystery Writers of America Top 100 Crime Novels lists.

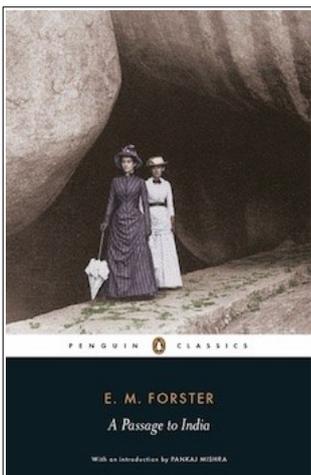
Ellis Peters’s novels about Brother Cadfael were big, very big, back in the 1980s and 1990s, especially after they were adapted for television with Derek Jacobi in the lead role. Now they seem to have slipped into a form of obscurity, maybe because too many other books being published these days. And I think that’s a bit of a pity as these novels, if this one is anything to go by, are certainly worth seeking out, or returning to if you’ve read them before.



Here we meet Cadfael for the first time in 1137 after he has joined a Benedictine monastery in Shrewsbury. He has become well known for his knowledge of herbs and natural medicines and seems to have settled into his monk’s life after a long former period as a crusader and sea captain. The Prior of his monastery has decided that his order needs the relics of a saint in order to attract more devotees. But the saint he decides upon is buried in Wales, so, taking Cadfael as interpreter along with a number of other monks, he leads an expedition to “recover” the bones. The local people aren’t too keen on having their saint disinterred and carted off to England and things take a turn for the worse when their leader is found murdered in the forest, presumably on his way to discuss the Prior’s proposals.

This is all good fun and enjoyable and it’s interesting to see Cadfael use an almost modern approach to his forensic investigations and analysis, while still staying true to his time and place.

Is it accurate for its period? I can’t say for sure but it certainly reads like it is. Maybe some of the dialogue has a tinge of the late twentieth century but that is really a minor concern here. R: 3.6/5.0



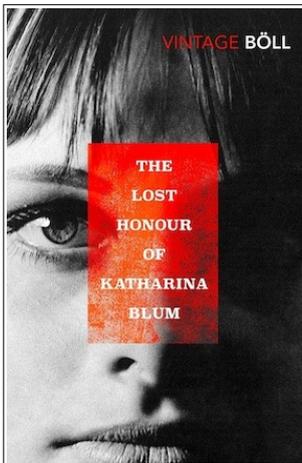
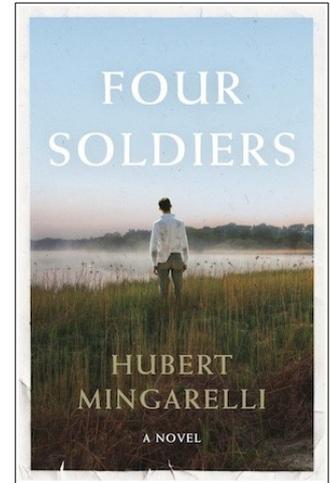
***A Passage to India*** (1924) – This novel appears on the Guardian List of 1000 Best Novels, and the 1001 Novels You Must Read Before You Die list.

Set in the 1920s in India this novel seeks to examine the state of the British in that country as the Indian independence movement slowly gained traction. And Forster does this by means of an “incident” involving a visiting British schoolteacher and an Indian doctor. Somehow the doctor has been cajoled into arranging a visit to a set of nearby caves for the schoolteacher, Miss Adela Quested and her companion Mrs Moore, travel by train to the caves under the guidance of Dr Aziz; Miss Quested is trying to experience the “real” India. At the caves a misunderstanding leaves Miss Quested alone in a cave, she panics and, when rescued accuses Aziz of having assaulted her. While he may have been guilty of being neglectful in

his duties he is certainly not guilty of assault. At the trial Miss Quested withdraws her accusation and the novel seems to be over before it really gets going. There are portents of a

Harper Lee *Mockingbird* scenario here but that possibility is thrown out and the novel seems to just coast along to its ending. This is now feeling very “dated”, though I guess the same can be said for most historical novels of this kind. R: 4.0/5.0

**Four Soldiers** (2003) – A short novel which follows the fortunes of four soldiers thrown together in 1919 during the Russian Civil War. It is winter and there is a lull in the fighting near the Romanian front line. None of them know what is going on, only that they must all work together to survive. This novel follows the familiar pattern I’m seeing with “war novels” of late (*The Odd Angry Shot*, *Fly Away Peter*), especially those told from the point-of-view of the grunt soldier: war is a series of quiet, rather boring moments interspersed with short moment of sheer terror and sudden death. Not that this should be seen as a criticism but it is interesting to see such patterns emerging. Here the soldiers rely on each other for shelter, safety and food and discover a spot in the countryside by a nearby pond where they can sit and feel at peace. That is before they are all told to move out and all hell breaks loose at the end. Hilary Mantel called this book “a small miracle”. I wouldn’t go so far as that but it is still worth seeking out. R: 3.2/5.0



**The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum** (1974) – Translated by Leila Vennewitz. This novel appears on the 1001 Novels You Must Read Before You Die list.

Katharina Blum falls for a young radical running from the police and is soon portrayed by the media as a whore, a communist and just about everything else the popular press delights in. I just could not get into this short novel at all. I suspect it’s because of the long, unbroken paragraphs written in a style that can only be described as “police report”. There seems to be no emotional retrospection, no commentary and little in the way of humanity here. It’s just flat. Some might comment that that is exactly what the author intended. Fine. But it’s not what I would call an enjoyable experience. It’s hard to work out if this is a product of the original novel or of the

translation. Either way, it doesn’t matter. R: 2.2/5.0

**Stiff** (1994) – see major review below

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People say it’s not what happens in your life that matters, it’s what you *think* happened. But this qualification, obviously, did not go far enough. It was quite possible that the central event of your life could be something that didn’t happen, or something you *thought* didn’t happen. Otherwise there’d be no need for fiction, there’d only be memoirs and histories, case histories; what happened – what actually happened and what you thought happened – would be enough.

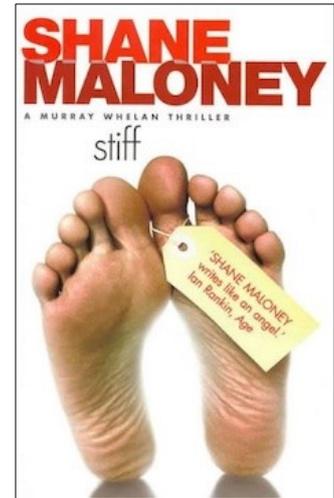
**Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi** by Geoff Dyer (2009), pp. 53-54

## REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

*Stiff* (1994) by Murray Whelan  
**Genre:** Crime

This novel is #1 in the author's Murray Whelan series of novels.

In the mid-1980s Murray Whelan is working as the electoral officer in the office of Victorian State MP Charlene Wills, who is also the state's Minister for Industry. His job is to look after Wills's electoral constituents, those "ordinary voters desperately seeking redress from bureaucratic inanity or government indifference." In the meantime he and his wife were over in "everything but name", as she works as an independent contractor in Canberra advising in the Federal Government's Office of the Status of Women. Their young son Redmond is still in the family home but Whelan thinks that may only be the case for the short-term future.



On the political front there are rumours that a local councillor, with affiliations with the Meat Packers Union, is looking to challenge Wills for her seat in Parliament. When the body of Ekrem Bayraktar is found in a freezer at Pacific Pastoral meat packing works at Coolaroo in Melbourne's outer north, Will's ministerial advisor, Angelo Agnelli, sees a possible problem arising for Wills and orders Whelan to go out and investigate. The police have already deemed it a death by misadventure – he appears to have had a heart attack and then froze solid among the meat stacks – but Agnelli is worried about appearances more than the truth. Whelan knows next to nothing about investigating situations of this sort and just attempts to muddle through by checking the personnel records and working arrangements of the union members. It all seems in order until he asks a Turkish friend about some of the names on his list, most of which appear to be fictitious or the Turkish equivalent of Mickey Mouse or Frank Sinatra. And then things start to unravel as it becomes clear that someone is running a small but lucrative fiddle of the employment records at the packing plant.

As Whelan starts to dig a bit deeper, egged on by Agnelli, he starts to realise he is being followed by an aqua-coloured Falcon which, late one night, runs him off the road into a flooded river. As well as the continuing mysteries around the death of Bayraktar, and his possible membership of a Turkish para-military group, Whelan's life is slowly spiralling out of control. The roof on his house is in serious disrepair and needs extensive work, especially the hole he punched through it one evening attempting some home maintenance; his love-life is a mess; and there are now rumours of an early state election in the air.

Maloney's Murray Whelan is a one of Australian literature's great comic characters. Laconic, love-lorn, under-appreciated, and forever scrambling to stay in control of the situations around him. And it's obvious that Shane Maloney brings a long association with the corridors of political power, as well as the internal machinations of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Labor party, to the writing of this novel. Whelan acts as his mouthpiece as he makes cutting remarks about multiculturalism, Melbourne weather,

unions, Melbourne traffic, politicians, and Melbourne newspapers. It's all very funny but at heart this is a crime novel and the central mystery keeps driving the narrative forward. The fact that Maloney has been able to seamlessly integrate the social and political commentary is a very definite bonus for the reader.

This was Maloney's debut novel and Whelan was later to appear in another five instalments. The first two of these were adapted for television in 2004 by the late John Clarke, with David Wenham in the lead role and a supporting cast that included Sam Neill and Mick Molloy. It's a pity that the productions didn't continue. The combination of Clarke and Maloney, Wenham and Molloy just seemed too good to pass up. At least we have these excellent novels to remind us of what might have been.

R: 4.0/5.0

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

November – December 2023

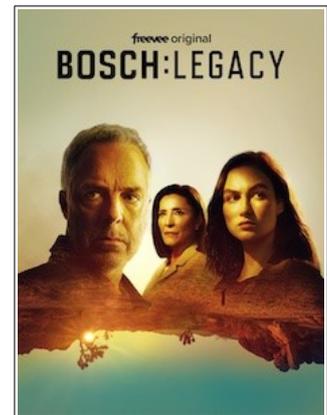
### Television

***Bosch: Legacy*** (Season 2 – 10 episodes) (2023)

Platform: Foxtel/Binge

Genre: Crime

At the end of the previous season Harry Bosch's police officer daughter was about to be abducted by a serial rapist known as the Screen Cutter. That incident is swiftly resolved (with the first two episodes) and then we move on to the main plot line of this series: a man is arrested for the murder of a woman, and it appears that, while he has a lot of hide, he is not the killer. Bosch (Titus Welliver) and Honey Chandler (Mimi Rogers) set out to prove his innocence. Based on two Michael Connelly novels (*The Wrong Side of Goodbye* and *The Crossing*) there's a lot packed into this series but it all flows extremely well, the characters move ahead consistently in their own storylines and the overall series continues to maintain its interest and quality. Sadly there is a brief appearance of the late Lance Reddick, reminding us, yet again, of what we have lost. R: 4.0/5.0



***Shetland*** (Season 6 – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Foxtel/Binge

Genre: Crime police procedural

Somehow we let this one slip through from a couple of years back and now find ourselves three (!) seasons behind. Douglas Henshall returns as D.I. Jimmy Perez in this series set on the Shetland islands (where we'll be next year) and based on the characters created by Ann Cleeves. Here Perez is attending his mother's funeral when he learns that a local lawyer has been shot dead as he



answered his front door. The investigations, which will take Perez and crew to some of the Shetland group islands not previously visited, start to unearth Nosome long-lost secrets which threaten a number of careers. In a separate story line Donna Killick, the murderer from Season 4, returns home to die as she has Stage 4 cancer. Duncan, Perez's friend and Killick's ex-lover, steps in to help her out but it soon becomes clear to the viewer, though not the story's characters, that she has a separate, long-term agenda. This is enjoyable and good research for us for future travel plans, but the overall series is starting to look a little tired and stale. We will persist. It seems there are major changes in the wind.

R: 3.5/5.0

### ***Shetland*** (Season 7 — 6 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Foxtel/Binge

Genre: Crime police procedural

Jimmy Perez returns from suspension and is now investigating the disappearance of Connor Cairns, a young Shetland man who has just published his first graphic novel and who seems to have a bright future ahead of him. And then a suitcase with a body in it is found in the harbour. As with other seasons of this TV series Perez's life and his relationships, familial and romantic, play an important role in the background, and sometimes foreground of the police investigation. There are a number of other threads running through this plot: the connection between a long-term island resident and the body in the suitcase; the police career of Connor's father; and what appears to be an environmental terrorism cell in operation on Shetland. But you can see that Perez is getting tired and worn out by the police work and it really comes as no surprise at the end when he announces his resignation from the force. As I noted with my review of season 6 above it is obvious that this series needs either a re-fresh or a termination. As season 8 is now available it would appear that the first option was chosen. I will watch it, but just not for a few months. R: 3.7/5.0



### ***COBRA*** (Season 1 — 6 episodes) (2020)

Platform: SBS On Demand

Genre: Political drama

A massive solar storm hits Europe and knocks out a large section of the British electrical power system. Naturally, the system has been allowed to deteriorate over a number of years so there aren't enough replacement transformer stations to go around; some parts of the UK will need to go without power for some time. The British PM convenes an emergency committee to deal with the situation in Cabinet Office Briefing Room A (hence the series title) and the series follows the government's at times shambolic response to the emergency. This series had a good premise and a good beginning but it soon started dipping into the grab-bag of political plot devices: PM's daughter involved in drug scandal, tick; PM's assistant having an affair with a man who turns out to be a foreign operative, tick; cabinet colleagues plotting the PM's downfall, tick; etc, etc. I kept on hoping that someone (maybe the PM?) would do something really unexpected, something underhanded or cunning, to stab one of his scheming Ministers in the back, but it wasn't to be and the whole thing, while



reasonable enough, just didn't seem to have the spark needed to entice me onto a second series. R: 2.8/5.0

### Film

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#### *My Name is Alfred Hitchcock* (2022)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Film documentary

This two-hour documentary takes a look back at the film career of Alfred Hitchcock, supposedly written and narrated by the director. But, of course, it isn't. The approach is to delve into the director's film oeuvre examining 6 main concepts: Escape, Desire, Loneliness, Time, Fulfilment and Height. Each of these concepts is examined in turn with clips from numerous films to back up the arguments. Some, like Escape and Loneliness are a mixture of themes and camera work, some are themes alone, and one, Height, about camera work and placement. It's an intriguing look into how the director aimed to "manipulate" the viewer into "seeing" more than was on the screen, implying emotion and drama and tension by use of lighting, design and framing. It's all intriguing stuff, and while a lot of it isn't new it is interesting to see it all in one place dealing just with one director's work. I suspect you'll get a lot more from this if you are a Hitchcock fan (and why wouldn't you be?) though others may find this a little slow in places. It is very well researched. R: 3.8/5.0

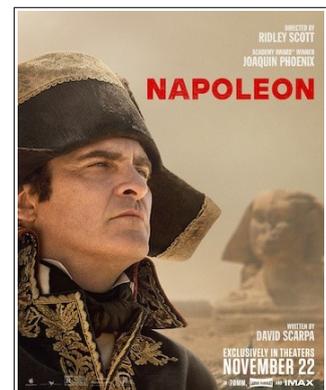


#### *Napoleon* (2023)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Historical drama

It's big. Yes, it's certainly that, and ambitious. Ridley Scott's biographical film about the life of Napoleon Bonaparte from the time he is ordered to relief the siege of Toulon in 1793 from the British until his death on the island of Saint Helena in 1821. Along the way we get magnificent re-creations of the battles at Austerlitz and Waterloo, a deep and personal view of his marriage and estrangement from Josephine, and the manoeuvring of the political forces in Paris in the period after the Revolution. It is interesting to note that Napoleon's fortunes rise and fall long with his relationship with Josephine. She tells him soon after they meet that he is nothing without her. Looks like she was perfectly correct.



You'll read a lot of criticism of the film about his historical inaccuracies — ignore them. If they are there they are inconsequential and critics might as well be annoyed by the script being filmed in English, and the fact that the French army, at the Battle of Waterloo, still seems to be using the British Imperial measurements, and I haven't seen any of that as yet.

The main problem with this film, rather like *Oppenheimer*, is that it attempts to cover a large amount of ground, so some sections need to be skimmed over. It's the nature of such

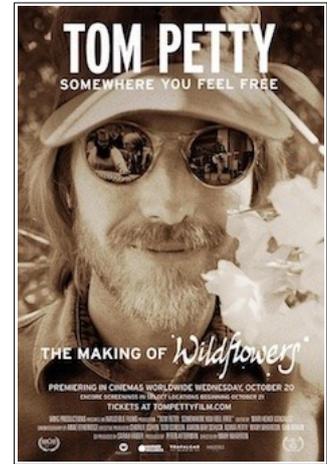
biographical epics and you have to be aware of that going in. The director and screenwriter have made their decisions on which parts to emphasise and we can only participate as best we can. I enjoyed it and would recommend it. Be aware that some of the battle scenes are rather bloody. R: 4.2/5.0

### ***Tom Petty: Somewhere You Feel Free* (2021)**

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Music documentary

After the death of Tom Petty in 2017 a trove of 16mm film footage was found in the artist's archive. The film had been taken during the recording of Petty's 1994 solo album ***Wildflowers*** and had never previously been seen by the public. This is a very interesting look at how Petty attempted to record something for himself rather than another record with the Heartbreakers, although most of them appear on this album as backing musicians. I'm guessing you'd have to be a fan of either the man or this particular album to get a lot out of it. Luckily I am. There isn't a lot of controversial material here: no major histrionics or hissy fits. But it does put the album a bit more in context as you come to realise it is about a middle-aged man slowly reconciling himself to the fact that his long-term marriage is over, and it's time for him to move on. Recommended for fans, for others you'll just have to take your chances. R: 3.7/5.0

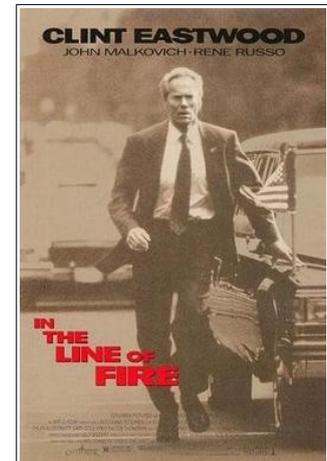


### ***In the Line of Fire* (1993)**

Platform: SBS On Demand

Genre: Thriller

Former Secret Service Agent Frank Horrigan (Clint Eastwood) is still wracked with guilt over his perceived failure to save Kennedy from assassination in Dallas in 1963 while working on the President's security detail. Now, thirty years later, he learns that a man named "Booth" (John Malkovich) is planning to assassinate the current-day president. After he is contacted by Booth, who goads him about his performance in Dallas, Horrigan gets himself assigned to the Presidential protection unit. The film is basically a cat-and-mouse chase with Booth spying on Horrigan and ringing him to continue his needling. This is a well-made, though straightforward, action thriller directed by Wolfgang Petersen with good performances and a taut script. The trouble with it is that it seems just a little tame these days. Malkovich's performance as a psychotic ex-CIA operative has become the template for characters of this type so we really need to remember when it was made. Enjoyable but you're not going to be challenged much by this one. R: 3.0/5.0



### ***Supernova* (2020)**

Platform: SBS On-Demand

Genre: Drama

As the long-term couple of musician Sam (Colin Firth) and novelist Tusker (Stanley Tucci) set off on a driving holiday in Britain in their camper van, it becomes obvious that the black cloud of dementia is



hanging over the pair. Tusker is slowly losing his capacity to use words, is becoming disoriented and wandering off and getting lost. When they drop into Sam's sister's place for a party one of the other party-goers inadvertently reveals to Sam just how bad Tusker has become, and that his pretence of working on his next novel is purely that: he has actually lost the ability to put words on paper. The film explores the deep bond between the two and how that love will be impacted by Tusker's deteriorating condition. This is a heart-warming and heart-breaking film that looks at a condition many of us will face in the years ahead, either affecting us or our loved ones. For all those people who think they don't make intense, dramatic and emotional "adult" films any more, I submit this as a rebuttal.  
R: 4.3/5.0

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### PERRYSCOPE Responses

#### Perryscope 38:

**Rich Lynch:** "Just finished reading **P38**. Your cover photo is intriguing and thanks for the description — without that, and if the three upside-down glasses were opaque instead of transparent, I'd maybe guess you were getting ready to do a cups-and-balls magic trick.

[**PM:** Well, that description was not one I expected.]

"I liked your India trip essay. You didn't say if it was your first visit, but from how you describe it I'm thinking it might have been.

[**PM:** It was.] I've been there four times, always on business, and I never got farther from Delhi than day trips to Agra. Like you, I also had a lot of culture shock my first time there. You write about all the rubbish on the street but you didn't mention a different kind of pollution that I found to be all-pervading: noise pollution. Specifically, traffic noise. The hotel I stayed at during my first India visit was located adjacent to one of the ring roads around Delhi and from sun-up to sundown it was a continuous symphony of car and truck horns. There wasn't a single second of the day when that wasn't going on and it eventually got to the point where I almost stopped noticing it. Every commercial vehicle had a sticker on the back bumper which read 'Please Use Horn' which I guess could be helpful in letting the lorry driver know there was someone directly behind him (though with all the traffic, that probably ought to be the expectation)."

[**PM:** Yes, I was a bit remiss in not mentioning the noise pollution. I suspect that drivers on Indian roads just assume that everyone else is completely blind and can't see them. They sound their horns for every reason imaginable, but mostly to let other drivers know they are in the vicinity. It just seems ridiculous in the extreme. I had one motorcyclist beep his horn at me when I was looking straight at him. I was tempted to stop in the middle of the road and see what he did. He'd probably just drive around me beeping even more as he passed.]

"You apparently didn't need the services of a hired car during your trip. That's what I and a business associate made use of, back in 1995, for a day trip to see the Taj Mahal.



Nowadays there's a multilane divided highway from Delhi to Agra but back then it was only a two lane road. Which allowed me to discover one of the rules of the road — if a driver wants to pass a slower vehicle he pulls out into the other lane. And if it happens that there's another vehicle in that lane bearing down on him, it's the *other driver's* responsibility to veer to the shoulder of the road to avoid a collision. The first time that happened I think my eyes got as big as saucers. The car had a flat tire on the way back to Delhi and the resulting delay in getting back on the road resulted in some of the trip after the sun had set. That's when I discovered another 'feature' about car travel in India — roads are used by more than just motor vehicles. And some of them don't have headlights or taillights. It got really exciting when the driver pulled out to pass a lorry only to find an unlit horse-drawn farm vehicle of some kind over there. The only thing that saved us is that it was proceeding so slowly there was just enough time for him to pull back over behind the lorry. I couldn't breathe for a few seconds after that. But my traveling companion, who'd already been to India a few times, was blasé about it all. He just looked at me and shrugged. "That's India," he said."

[**PM:** The cows in the middle of the roads, in the middle of six-lane highways, scared me the most. Or would have if I'd been driving. Luckily I didn't have to do any of that.]

**Garth Spencer:** "Thank you for your article on traveling to India – read with interest.

"Julian Warner's article on pen-knives struck an unexpected bell with me. For a while I have been collecting pen knives, by-God Swiss army knives, and multitools in various sizes. In fact for a while I was carrying on a prank under the name of the Royal Swiss Navy, which insisted they came up with the so-called Swiss 'army' knife, and I was going to work up a hoax about a Secret War that occurred between the Gerber and Victorinox manufacturers."

[**PM:** If I ever get around to writing a piece about essential travel items, a Swiss Army knife would be at the top of my list. The trouble is that security authorities don't like them much these days so you have to be very careful about packing them away properly.]

"Your reviews of recent reading and viewing remind me again that I could stand to read *new* e-books. But I've said this before. The title *The True Story of Spit McPhee* reminds me of a novel by our regional author, Jack Hodgins: *Spit Delany's Island*.

"Rose Mitchell's loc particularly caught my eye; there are ongoing issues facing fans who want to start, or continue SF conventions. Is there any dialogue about this in N3F publications? Or online? I don't suppose the issues will be the same, from one time and place to another, or that solutions can be the same either. Lloyd Penney, among others, has corresponded with me about the topic; I begin to realize not only that the hotel industry and the congoer expectations/demands have changed, but that the experiences of conrunners are pretty different in different countries, as in different decades. How many people might be interested in an ongoing dialogue about obstacles and possible solutions? Or how many dialogues, Discord channels, websites and conrunner publications are circulating already?"

[**PM:** Speaking for myself, though probably for Rose as well, I can safely state that my con-running days are well and truly over. It's a youngish person's game. That

said I still owe Mike Wilmoth an essay about bidding for a Worldcon from Australia. That is it's own special kind of madness.]

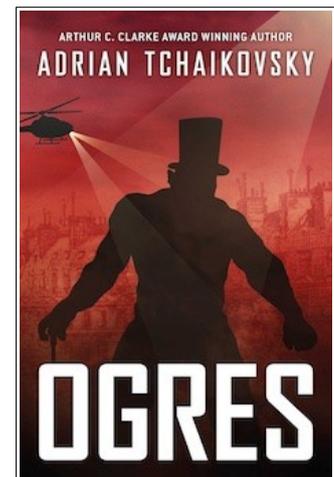
**Rose Mitchell:** “I envy your travels this year to so many fascinating and exotic places. I live vicariously through your travelogues. I’ve never really wanted to go to India, even in my hippy days: too poor, too hot, despite it having many thousands of years history as a sophisticated civilisation. You’ve made it sound compelling but fear I’m probably too old and grumpy now to cope with the vast masses and all that entails. You’ve tempted me maybe to visit Goa and Kerala — more sedate and good beaches. Coincidentally I’ve just watched Joanna Lumley’s Spice Trail Adventure and she covered Kerala because of the cinnamon. Still available on ABC’s iView : Ep 2.”

[**PM:** Luke Nguyen also has a few episodes of a travel/cooking program on Australian television where he visits Kerala. It is certainly a much more sedate and cooler place than the crowded cities of the north. I can’t recommend them enough.]

“What a lad Martin Field is!!! I look forward to reading more anecdotes about London’s music scene in the swinging sixties. I am curious though whether the potato salad was dumped straight onto the actual vinyl disc or just on the cover with the disc inside providing rigidity like a platter?”

[**PM:** Martin has a lot more anecdotes from his London days. I just have to prise them out of him.]

“**Ogres** was my #1 pick for the Novella section of this year’s Hugos. At the time of reading it I didn’t think it packed too much into the story rather though it might be the beginning of a series. Adrian Tchaikovsky turned the standard, and now hackneyed trope depicting the consequences of genetic engineering on its head with his original concept. One of the most frightening pieces of SF I’ve read for a long time. So simple but so horrific. It remained with me for some time after reading it. This novella was a return to how SF should be: thought provoking.”



**Joseph Nicholas:** “John Hertz asked what I saw in Bulgaria. No folk dancing, that’s for sure — it was another archaeology and history tour, beginning in the medieval capital of Veliko Turnovo before moving on to Plovdiv and Sofia. The flight from London to Sofia arrived in late evening, followed by a two-hour drive to Veliko Turnovo; the Bradt guide advises that if you stay at the Yantra Grand Hotel (which our tour did) you should get a room at the rear, for the views. So I wasn’t aware, until I drew back the curtains the following morning and saw the mist slowly rising from the slopes of Trapezitsa and Tsarevets Hills, that I was indeed at the rear, and looking out at the ruins of the fortress captured by Ivan Asen in 1185 in his successful revolt against the Byzantines, to establish the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. A great view, and a great fortress to explore — as is my wont, I separated from the group once we’d entered, and went off to the right to look at Baldwin’s Tower, named for the Emperor who was briefly imprisoned there following the Fourth Crusade (the one which sacked Constantinople on the instructions of the blind Venetian Doge Dandolo). I rejoined the group afterwards, although (as one would expect) their tour was proceeding at the speed of the slowest member, which meant that I’d seen most of the fortress before they reached the halfway point.

“Plovdiv is one of the oldest inhabited cities in Europe, the original Thracian settlement on the three small hills by the Maritsa River dating from the 12th century BCE. The Romans, when they conquered it in the 1st century BCE, gave it the usual suite of public buildings (forum, theatre, stadium), the ruins of which are still visible today. But what captured my attention was something so new that it wasn't in the Bradt guide: the fabulous mosaic floors of the 4th–6th century CE early Christian basilica, under excavation since 2014 and now presented to the public in a purpose-built covering structure and a small site museum. My camera malfunctioned on the group's visit, and I had to go back later on my own to retake the photographs; but as someone absolutely fascinated by Byzantium and Byzantine history I didn't mind that at all.

“Sofia also has extensive Roman-period ruins: the east gate, a section of the fortress wall and the houses and shops immediately behind same are on view in a huge pedestrian underpass adjacent to the Presidential Palace. The group went for lunch on arrival in Sofia from Plovdiv; I skipped lunch and went straight to see the ruins. (The Roman name for the town was Serdika; Constantine is reported to have said "Serdika is my second Rome", but as we know subsequently selected a small village on the Bosphorus as the capital of the eastern half of the empire.) I also separated from the group on our final day in Sofia: they went to Rila Monastery, some distance to the south, but I decided against that because (a) although extensively decorated and scenically situated, the present buildings are mostly of 19th century origin, and (b) I wanted to spend time examining the prehistoric collections of the National Archaeological Museum, especially its extensive Chalcolithic (Copper Age) material (5th–4th millennia BCE) — a period of prehistory that is unrepresented in the UK and Northern Europe, where we went from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age without an intermediate step.

“One other thing worth mentioning about Sofia is the shenanigans around the Russian Church of St Nicholas, which had been recently closed because several of the people associated with or working for it had been arrested and expelled as Russian spies. The congregation is still allowed to meet in the road outside it, and the police actually close that stretch to traffic; when I was passing (or, rather, detouring around it) on the Sunday, I could hear someone delivering what was less of a sermon than an angry, rambling harangue, with frequent references to (I kid you not) Kristallnacht. That some Russian bishop can compare the (probably temporary) closure of his church to the destruction of Kristallnacht is patently absurd.

“Anyway, that's probably told you (and John Hertz) more than you actually wanted to know about what I saw in Bulgaria!”

**[PM:** John can make up his own mind, but I'm grateful for the description. Bulgaria is a place I would love to visit. Just not sure when I can get there. After we travelled from Helsinki to Budapest via Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in 2017, we've had a desire to see more of Eastern Europe, specifically the area between Austria and Hungary in the north and Greece in the south. Robyn wants to take a river cruise from Vienna to Bucharest which would allow us to add in Bulgaria and maybe a few other countries along the Adriatic Sea. I suspect, though, that we'd have to take that as part of a tour as I also suspect the prevalence of English as a second language is not as high as in our 2017 countries. I may be wrong. More research is obviously required.]

### Perryscope 39:

**Rob Gerrand:** “We had a great holiday in Southern Indian almost 20 years ago, and enjoyed Kochi and the houseboats on the water. As you say, it is a completely different aspect of India. It’s helpful to remember that just as Europe and China are a collection of many different geographies and cultures, so is India.”

[**PM:** That is certainly true. The divide between north and south of India is quite noticeable. The northerners hardly know anything about the south at all, and the southerners resent the north receiving so much attention from their government. And that was just from brief exchanges. I have to say that I preferred the south.]



**Leigh Edmonds:** “A quick letter of comment to let you know that I've received the latest **Perryscope** which is your most colourful yet. I've dipped into it and enjoyed reading your simple but often eloquent description of where you went and what you saw. Very nicely done indeed. You've set me something of an example about what I might do on my trip USAwise.”

[**PM:** I’m still trying to work out the best method of producing these trip reports. I found that writing blog posts each night, with both text and photos included, just became too much of a chore. The work started to slip and I just dropped further and further behind. My next option is to write up the notes as I go, so that the experiences are fresher, and then wait till I get home before going through the photos. That’s the part that takes the longest time for me.]

**Mark Olson:** “Finally, a cover portrait which captures the inner man!” [**PM:** Dream on!]

“Very interesting about your trip to India. I was in Bangalore once, for work. The traffic terrified me – I arrived about 4 am and the road to the hotel was nearly empty, so the taxi driver drove me direct to the hotel. Meaning not stopping for red lights or stop signs or cross-traffic or anything. He \*did\* honk a couple of times before he barreled across each intersection. The only time we got away from work/hotel was for dinner one evening. The traffic was wall to wall (not ‘curb to curb’, since they were driving on the sidewalks) and the only thing that prevented mass death was (a) no one could move quickly and (b) everyone seemed relaxed and genial. (Unlike me.)

“I never had the time to go shopping that trip, but just a year or so ago we were with a group at a fairly high-end rug merchant in Turkey and got the full treatment. The show they put on seemed to be entirely spontaneous but couldn’t have been. We were seated along the walls (lined with carpets) of a large room. As the salesman talked, a couple of guys came out and with dexterous flicks of their wrists unrolled carpet after carpet until the floor was covered 5-10 deep. It was beautifully choreographed and they made quite a few sales in our group. (I’m happy to say that we were immune, mainly because we have wood floors and like them.) The selling was artistry of a kind and skill that I never see in the US.”

[**PM:** That sounds exactly like the experience we had. The operation must be universal.]

“I sympathize with you having a cooking class which wasn't hands-on. Priscilla and I love cooking classes and we found a place in Boston where it's 100% hands-on. They're run after hours in a gourmet food shop's prep kitchen and nothing's shiny as it's a working kitchen. A dozen people sit around a table with stoves and equipment all around, and the cook/teacher has us do everything from prep to cooking to eating. (It's always evenings, so they start with bottles of wine and snacks and then with eating whatever we prepared.) Great fun and good eating. We've never tried this while travelling.”

[**PM:** Robyn and I have done cooking classes in Japan, Vietnam, Laos, Bali, Morocco and now India. This one was the least instructive. I wonder if being part of a tour package had something to do with it.]

**Martin Field:** “Enjoyed your comprehensive travelogue – you both must have been exhausted at the end of the trip.”

[**PM:** That's generally the case with all of our travels these days. We try to factor in some down-time where we can just sit around for a half-day or so but that is not always possible. The other approach is to organise things ourselves (like our upcoming Scottish driving holiday) so we can spread things out a bit. If we have days like our recent Indian train trip then we certainly need an easier day afterwards. I suspect pushing things too hard will only lead to a susceptibility to sickness and a general lack of enjoyment. It's supposed to be a holiday after all, not a forced march.]

“We did a similar Tripadeal tour of India – that ended as Covid was taking off – some anxiety there. Overall, Tripadeal does what it offers to do at a very good price. However, it's a pity they don't warn travellers about the about the time wasted at hard sell carpet/jewellery/perfume, etc. factory outlets.”

[**PM:** I'm generally okay with all of this so long as I can get somewhere to sit. I don't want anything and just won't be persuaded to buy something just for the sake of it. Luckily on our tour of India we had two couple who were heavily into the retail side of the trip and that completely took the pressure off us. But travellers do need to be aware that such tours will lead to inevitable “cultural craft demonstration” that is, in fact, a shop.]

**I also heard from: Nick Price; Mark Olson; Jerry Kaufman; Martin Field; Edie Stern** (who liked the turban I was wearing on the cover of P39); **Nic Farey;** and **Jerry Kaufman;** thank you one and all.

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.