



Perryscope 42

PERRYSCOPE 42, March 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 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, Morocco, May 2023.

INTRODUCTION

As I mentioned last issue, the section of this fanzine dealing with the long-running (five years) podcast that I co-hosted with David Grigg is no longer required, and has been omitted. Well, yes, and no. Notes about the **Two Chairs Talking** podcast have now finished but I find myself making one last entry in this section with notes about something else I was involved with; details on page 11.

Which just goes to show, I reckon, that whatever I decisions I write about here will have a guaranteed lifespan of about one month only. After that I might change my mind, I might get asked to do something that I find interesting, or I might just fall into something by happenstance. All have an equal chance of occurring.

It's not that I'm trying to be difficult or unpredictable, it's just something that I'm finding about my life as I get further into retirement. Apart from the obvious familial and household commitments to my nearest and dearest I have come to realise that I am no longer really answerable to anyone about what I do with my time. Which is rather liberating. It means that I can decide one month that I will stopping working on one activity only to discover the next month that I really wanted to work on it after all, and that I had a few new ideas to explore. And so, off I go, backtracking and sidestepping as my whims direct me.

David Grigg said, in a conversation we had a few weeks back, that he misses talking about books as we did on the podcast, but that he didn't miss the amount of work it took to get to the point where he could sound at least mildly interesting. No, that last bit is about me. I also miss the chats but not the work, the consistent feeling that I had to figure out what I was going to discuss, and how I was going to say it. David always sounded interesting. I mostly winged it as best I could.

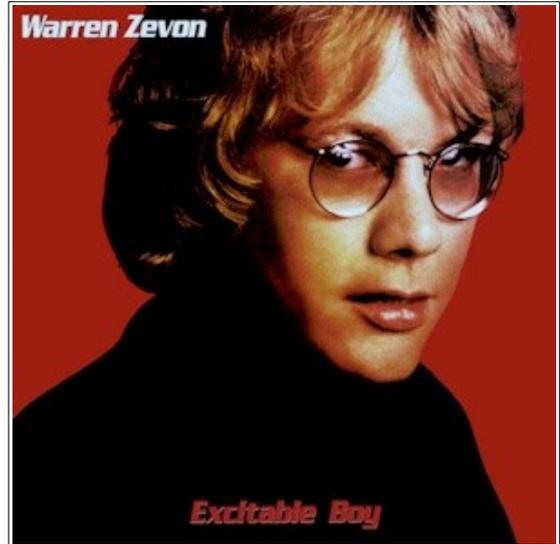
David and I have a commitment to talk about 1960s sf novels at the May meeting of the Nova Mob, a Melbourne sf discussion group that meets once a month. That should be fun, and we can utilise the reviews we've written over the years. Re-use and re-cycle, it's the only to get through it. After that I'm going to swear off these talks. At least until next month.

Cover notes: Somewhere out in the middle of nowhere we stopped the bus in Morocco and got off and had a look at an ancient garden watering system. It was a very simple and effective means of getting water from a large communal pool out to each garden in turn. I'm guessing it relied a lot on everyone taking an equal amount of communal responsibility. It seemed to be working though I was rather dubious about its application elsewhere. Robyn, as usual, caught me with my thoughts all over my face.

WHAT HAS IMPACTED MY LIFE – *Excitable Boy* (LP) by Warren Zevon

I don't know when I first heard a Warren Zevon song. It seems that they have been a part of my life for so long that I have no recollection of how I first encountered him. Maybe it was one of the songs on *Excitable Boy* – the album peaked at number 9 in Australia during 1978. More than likely it was his song "Werewolves of London" from that album that got to number 8 on the Australian charts and was probably being played all over the place that year.

Or it might well have been the year before, 1977, when Linda Ronstadt released a gender-altered version of Zevon's song "Poor Poor Pitiful Me". I'm sure I heard that. Though I doubt I heard her 1976 studio album titled *Hasten Down the*



Wind, the title track of which was also written by Zevon. In any event, I wouldn't have known the songs were Zevon's at the time, as radio announcers were notorious for not providing any details of the songs they played; these days you're lucky if they even give you the title or artist's name.

So let's stay with the man himself, and the songs on *Excitable Boy*. A bit of research at that time – maybe a review in **Rolling Stone** magazine – informed me that he was a part of what was referred to as the "California sound". To me that meant the Beach Boys (chasing waves and girls on the beach, which wasn't my style) or The Eagles (excellent harmonies about songs with a longing for the old west) or Jackson Browne, who mourned the passing of yet another love affair, and who stood on the sides of roads waiting for a lift. They all had their place, but they weren't Warren Zevon. Not by a long chalk.

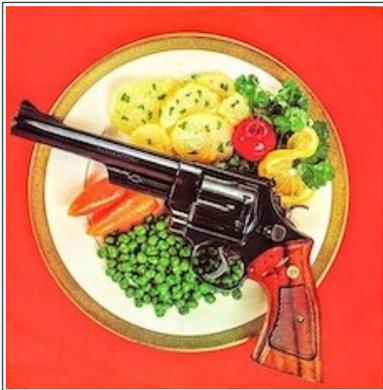
The characters inhabiting Zevon's songs were at once more earthy, more visceral: the

Album song list
All songs written by Warren Zevon except as noted.
1. "Johnny Strikes Up the Band" – 2:49
2. "Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner" (David Lindell, Zevon) – 3:47
3. "Excitable Boy" (LeRoy Marinell, Zevon) – 2:40
4. "Werewolves of London" (Marinell, Waddy Wachtel, Zevon) – 3:27
5. "Accidentally Like a Martyr" – 3:37
6. "Nighttime in the Switching Yard" (Jorge Calderón, Lindell) – 4:15
7. "Veracruz" (Calderón, Zevon) – 3:30
8. "Tenderness on the Block" (Jackson Browne, Zevon) – 3:55
9. "Lawyers, Guns and Money" – 3:29

psychotic young man who rapes and murders his prom date ("Excitable Boy"); the loser "strung out on heroin/On the outskirts of town" ("Carmelita"); the Hollywood writer running out of money and living in a run-down motel ("Desperadoes Under the Eaves"); the desperate but hopeless suicide who lays his head on the railway track only to discover the train doesn't run anymore ("Poor Poor Pitiful Me"); or the chancer who gets caught in a Russian honey trap, or who risks too much in the wrong gambling house ("Lawyers, Guns and Money"). The

list goes on. Though the strangest, dirtiest, most fantastical of all must surely be the Norwegian mercenary Roland who, after he has his head blown off in an ambush, wanders the world with his machine gun seeking revenge and retribution in “Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner” – it’s funnier than it sounds.

With Zevon’s songs and characters we weren’t in Kansas any more, nor were we in sleepy Adelaide in the 1970s. These were places I’d never been, places I’d been warned to avoid, places that seemed just that bit more interesting, places I wanted to go to. Places that I was starting to discover in other ways as well, in film, television and novels. This was California, but it was the sleazy end of town, the noir version, the dark and dangerous side of the street. The side that just kept on drawing you back, whether you wanted to go there or not.



I would have purchased the *Excitable Boy* album soon after its release in 1978. I was working part-time as a cleaner, attempting to put myself through university, and so I had a bit of spare cash that I would occasionally spend on books and records. This one went onto high rotation on my stereo. It just seemed to fit my mood and feelings at the time.

The opening track of “Johnny Strikes Up the Band” immediately informed you that you weren’t listening to a standard soft rock or pop album here, although in anyone else’s hands it might well have charted. With its veiled reference to Queen and Freddie Mercury (“Freddie get ready Rock steady”) the track is just there to get things moving, and it is by far the weakest of the five tracks on side one. It serves as a punchy intro but is rather forgettable, especially when you hit “Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner” as the first follow-up. Maybe Zevon or producer Jackson Browne thought this a tad too “out there” for a first track, and they may have been right. This is one of Zevon’s glorified mercenary songs, a subject he was later to re-visit in “Jungle Work” on *Bad Luck Streak in Dancing School*. “Roland” starts as if it’s just a progression from “Johnny”, piano-dominant before the drums come in. But the simple intro belies the song’s content. Roland, “Norway’s greatest son”, gets too good at his killing for his employers and is dealt with: “So the CIA decided they wanted Roland dead/That son of a bitch Van Owen blew off Roland's head”. Thereafter he wanders the world’s conflicts as a phantom, “the eternal Thompson gunner”, keeping up the fight “In Ireland, in Lebanon, in Palestine and Berkeley” until he encounters finally Patty Hearst. You can guess the rest.

This isn’t top 40s subject matter. John Lennon is reputed to have said that every pop song is about girls, cars and escape. There is none of that here. There is a girl in “Excitable Boy”, the title track that follows next, though not in a good way. With its subject matter concerning the rape and murder of a young woman you would be hard-pressed to see this released on an album these days. I am aware of its problems, and while I like the track a lot, I’m not going to dig into it.

So we should move on to probably the best known song in this set, “Werewolves of London”. It was released as the first single from the album, giving Zevon his only US Top 40 hit. It got a resurgence when it was used in the film *The Color of Money*, with actor

Tom Cruise lip-synching to the song's lyrics as he plays pool against Paul Newman's "Fast Eddie" Felson. From its opening, "I saw a werewolf with a Chinese menu in his hand" to its wonderfully alliterative line "Little old lady got mutilated late last night" we have a werewolf stalking the streets of London, looking for "a big dish of beef chow mein", tearing the lungs out of people as he goes; black humour indeed. We're in Fantasy-Land, walking the streets with Lon Chaney and Lon Chaney Jr, doing what werewolves do, but doing it with a perfect haircut and well-tailored suit. Jackson Browne was later to say that he thought the song was about an upper-class English womaniser, a gigolo, preying on defenceless Victorian women. That's one way to look at it; I just see a werewolf. And I'm happy with that. And, yes, I have stood in a street in London's Chinatown howling at the moon. Why the hell not?



"Accidentally Like a Martyr" closes out side one of the album, and brings us back down to earth somewhat with its tale of a man looking back on an intimate but ultimately doomed relationship. He laments opportunities lost ("Should have done, should have done, we all sigh") but you know, deep down, that he isn't really going to change much. This relationship is gone, most probably through his neglect, and the next one will more than likely end up the same way. Bob Dylan played this song live quite a few times following Zevon's death in 2003, which might say something, or not.

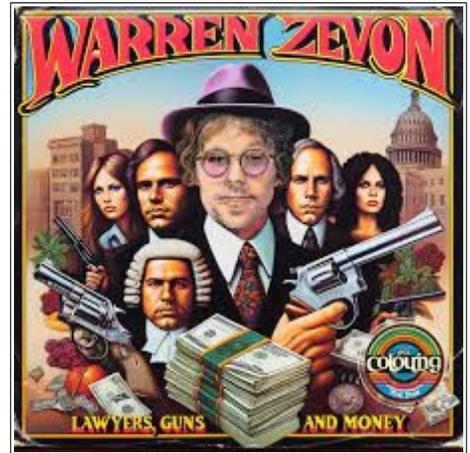
"Nighttime in the Switching Yard" starts side two of the album, and comes across as merely a filler. It is certainly an odd choice for this position on the album's song-list. This always reminded me of Queen's "Another one Bites the Dust" released two years later in 1980. In retrospect this is probably because of the similar backing drum and bass beat. But when I first heard the Queen song I immediately thought of "Nighttime". I'm not saying that there was any copying going on here, just that some songs trigger memories of others, and that's no bad thing.

The album then turns to a meditation on the incursion of US forces into Mexico and the destruction of the city of Veracruz by the forces of Woodrow Wilson in 1914. It's hard to know how to take "Veracruz", so I won't bother. I look on it as a condemnation of any invasion, anywhere and, while it's a beautiful song, it seems out of place here.

"Veracruz" is followed by a touch of Jackson Browne. He was the album's producer and a main source of encouragement for Zevon so it seems appropriate that he would play on a number of the tracks and co-write "Tenderness on the Block", the third track on side two.

These two songs give us a brief interlude before we hit the final track of the album, "Lawyers, Guns and Money". Here we move back into the territory that is more in line with "Excitable Boy", "Roland" and "Werewolves", a rollicking tale of a young man (maybe of the type alluded to in John Fogarty's "Fortunate Son"), son to a father with influence – he hopes – who finds himself in various sorts of trouble around the world. He gets caught up in a Russian honey trap, a dodgy gambling establishment in Havana, Cuba, and ends up hiding out in Honduras. Just an idiotic kid who wants his father to come rescue him, no matter what the cost.

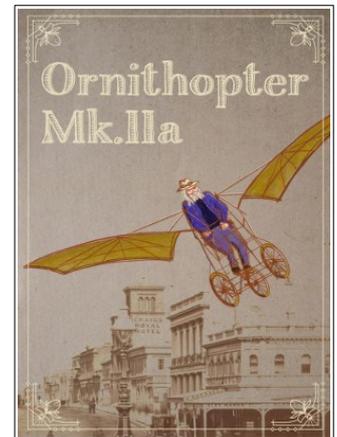
Released as a single in July 1978 – the fifth and last from the album – this song has always been a favourite of mine, and many others it seems. It is used over the closing credits of the third episode of the HBO series *The Staircase* (2022), and for the opening of the Fox TV series *Justice* (2006). But it was its use as the title and main theme of the 1980s Melbourne community radio program *Lawyers, Guns and Money* that really cemented it in my mind. Hosted by the pseudonymous pair of "Donoghue & Stevenson" this hour-long program took a light-hearted, but informed look at the local legal fraternity. It was broadcast on Saturday mornings and was followed by *The Coodabeen Champions* (a comedy show about Australian Rules Football) and then *Film Buff's Forecast* (an in-depth critical program about film). This was the best four hours entertainment of my week.



Excitable Boy was Warren Zevon's third album, after the forgettable *Wanted Dead or Alive* in 1970, and the cruelly over-looked *Warren Zevon* in 1976. It's patchy. At its best it's wonderful, though it also contains some fillers that tend to bring down the overall quality somewhat. It doesn't matter, it's still one of my all-time favourites. One I'm still listening to almost fifty years after I first heard it. Your favourite albums don't have to be stone-cold classics all the way through. They just have to speak you in any way that seems appropriate.

WHAT I'VE BEEN WRITING ABOUT LATELY

Every now and then someone gets in touch and asks me to write about something or other for their fanzine. Such was the case at the end of last year when my old friend Leigh Edmonds decided that he wanted to put out an issue of a genzine (a general distribution fanzine written by a number of contributors) for the first time in about thirty years. He was heading off to the USA for a number of reasons, one being that he wanted to attend a small convention in Las Vegas and wanted to have something to hand out to the approximately 60 people who would be attending. I was happy to oblige and took his suggestion of "stepping out and going to the cinema" and ran with it. I'm not sure he got what he was expecting, but I enjoyed the writing of it, appreciated his suggestion of an improvement and was happy with the final result. You can download a copy of Leigh's fanzine **Ornithopter Mk. IIa** from efanzines.com. The whole thing is pretty damn good.



“So I started out
For God knows where
I guess I'll know
When I get there” – “Learning to Fly”, Tom Petty

WANDERINGS AND READINGS – An Occasional Column by Julian Warner

Further Out There – Recent CD Acquisitions

Thanks to a website called Discogs, I can shop for music around the world. This is a good thing for finding obscure recordings. It's a bad thing for the wallet. Originally I was just using Discogs to check on the discography of various musical artists and groups. It isn't necessarily definitive but it is updated and maintained by some pretty anally-retentive enthusiasts. There will be details given of incredibly minor variations between different versions of the same LP or CD. So you want to get hold of the version of Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" that was pressed in Hamburg because those pressings supposedly had superior sonic qualities? Discogs is where you might look.

It was workmate and friend Craig the Former Drummer, who suggested that I should be buying via Discogs. He's an LP-only person but Discogs offers music in pretty much any format you can think of – even 'dead' formats like 8-track cartridges and Minidiscs.

Principally, Discogs is a forum where individual record shops or just individuals can display their wares for sale, and sell them. There are enormous record stores with hundreds of thousands of stock items and then there are collectors (or their widowed spouses!) selling off collections. Some of my favourite Australian record shops have a presence on Discogs. I've bought from all sorts of overseas countries with no problems so far. Some vendors are quite chatty and friendly.

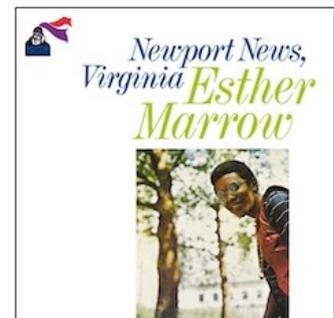
There is some logic to where you can buy recordings – for example, music on German record labels is bought most easily (but not always most cheaply) from Germany. However, I've bought hard-to-get Australian or New Zealand recordings from odd countries. I've bought English folk music from Italy. Japanese rock from the Netherlands. And so on.

Discogs will tell you when something which you have added to your 'wantlist' becomes available. Sometimes you will discard this because the price is outrageous and sometimes you will wait until there are competing prices where the freight/postage price will become the determinant for where you buy. Often, once I find a vendor for a particular item, I will have a browse through the rest of their offerings to see if there is anything else I like. That last bit is the most dangerous because I'll encounter recordings that I didn't know existed. So I buy them.

Following is a representative sample of recent acquisitions with some explanation of why I might have bought them.

Esther Marrow – Newport News, Virginia

There is actually a place called Newport News in Virginia. It's where Esther Marrow was born. Her full name is Queen Esther Marrow but Queen sounds like a title when seen on record covers.



She is a famed gospel singer who briefly dabbled in secular soul singing. I bought this on the strength of a very favourable review in a music magazine. I think if she'd stuck with singing pop music, she would be competing with Aretha Franklin. The album contains a favourite song of mine, "Chains of Love", which became a Northern Soul classic.

Dare Devil Band – Dare Devil Band

This is a CD I just spotted on a vendor's site. It's on the PSF label, which is known as a home for heavy Japanese psychedelic bands. There's often not a lot of English on their covers, so some research is needed to work out exactly what they are. In this case, I knew of the guitarist who currently plays with Acid Mothers Temple and the drummer, who has played on a lot of Free Jazz albums. The group is named after an album title - an album I have.



Once I got the CD, it turned out to be musically similar to early Captain Beefheart with some odd Beatles references. Enjoyable but unexpected.

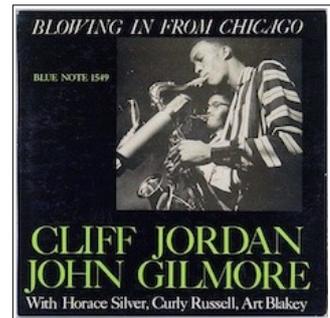


Sun Ra – Sun Song

I have quite a lot of Sun Ra albums but I didn't have Sun Ra's very first album which he made in 1956. It was called "Jazz by Sun Ra Vol. 1". Later it was acquired and re-issued by another record label and re-titled "Sun Song". The reissued album contained extra tracks recorded at the same time as the first album. Unsurprisingly, "Sun Song" contains possibly the least weird music produced by Sun Ra. Much of it sounds like normal Chicago jazz of the period with a few odd flourishes (tympani in jazz?). The band he used contained the core of the musicians who would make some much more "out there" music in the next few years. The bass player on this album was Richard Davis, who went on to be involved in some great jazz and pop recordings.

Cliff Jordan and John Gilmore – Blowing in from Chicago

Gilmore was Sun Ra's main man, the saxophonist who gave Sun Ra's bands a lot of their distinctive sound. Cliff Jordan was another simpatico tenor sax player from Chicago and together they made a straight jazz album for Blue Note Records with pianist Horace Silver. Apart from the fact that you didn't often get to hear Gilmore outside of the Sun Ra context, this is good free-blowing jazz.

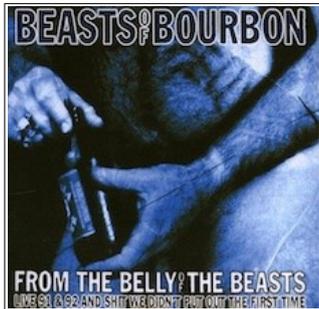
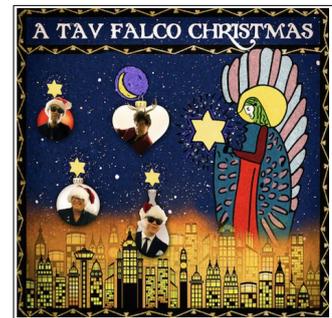


Various Old French Blokes – Messe Du Sacre De Napoleon 1er – Coronation Music

I believe I've written before about how Lucy Sussex and I heard Napoleon's Coronation music whilst walking around an exhibit at the National Gallery of Victoria about Napoleon and Josephine's relationship with Australia. I was impressed with the music but disappointed that it was not on sale in any form and no-one seemed to know how you could hear it further. There is a very informative page on napoleon.org on the coronation music and more information about the performance of it on the Chaise-Dieu festival website. I could not obtain a copy of the CD recording of the music for a long time until I joined Discogs and tracked one down. The music is big and bombastic, as befitting and involves two orchestras and two choirs. Given that the music was performed out in the open, this might have been necessary so that it could be heard for a distance. However, it's definitely worth a listen, even if via a lowly mp3 on Youtube.

Tav Falco — A Tav Falco Christmas

It's a bittersweet thing when an old favourite rocker stoops to recording a Christmas EP. Tav Falco was part of the 'wreckabilly' school of producing 'shambolic' versions of old rockabilly songs. The better practitioners even wrote some of their own. Falco's voice is not great but he knows all of the right people and is respected for his long-term commitment to a particular pocket of the rock genre. I'm just not sure about the Christmas bit though.



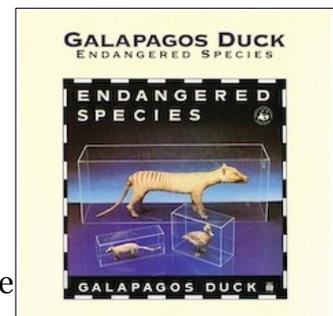
The Beasts of Bourbon — From the Belly of the Beasts

I got a free copy of this via the circulating box of free CDs which goes from house to house in fannish circles. Unfortunately this was a 'party CD' which looked like it had suffered a lot. Both discs were in bad shape but one looked like it had been kicked around in the footwell of a car for a long time. Accordingly the sound was terrible with stuttering and full stops.

So I relinquished the disc and went searching on Discogs. The new version was in good condition. According to the aforementioned Craig, this is one of the best records by the BoB. It's all live recordings, often rough and ready, which gives a good approximation of the experience of seeing the band live. I wish Tex Perkins' voice still sounded this good.

Galapagos Duck — Endangered Species

Not many people can name an Australian Jazz group unless they are hardcore jazz fans. The Duck were one of the rare Australian jazz groups who almost crossed over into the mainstream. You could hear them quite frequently on the ABC - and this was well before the ABC Jazz channel came into existence. If you find one of their old records or CDs, there is an unfortunately strong chance of it being in poor condition. This one was near new and a good representative of the Galapagos Duck sound.



That's enough for the moment. There were lots of other CDs which I have not listed.

Swiss Army Waiters' Friend – Upgrade by Martin Field

At long last I can announce, exclusively, an upgrade to that popular and essential multifunctional tool, the Swiss Army Waiters' Friend, (SAWF – AKA Waiters' Knife). This is a major step forward in the evolution of the simple corkscrew and blade we know so well. Previously famous only for chocolate, cuckoo clocks, yodelling, holey cheese and secret bank accounts, the ingenious Swiss have come up with a new twist on the historic gadget that is sure to rival the Swatch in sales volume.

Designed by a committee comprising one Swiss watchmaker, two Masters of Wine, and a drunk chosen at random from a local wine bar, the Swiss Army Waiters' Friend provides a number of traditional functions along with a wealth of breathtaking innovations. All made possible by recent advances in the fields of nano-technology and artificial intelligence.

Features

I will list just a few of this indispensable tool's major features.

New: a round grippy thing for loosening screwcaps on wine bottles, also serves as a tourniquet. A blade that doubles as an Android/iPad compatible micro SD card for handy data storage. A toothpick that also serves as a GPS.

A breathalyser. Tongs for the removal of recalcitrant champagne corks. A tastevin. A bottle top remover. A glass cutter for turning empty beer bottles into decorative vases. A blade modelled on the Bowie Knife. This, as well as being useful for removing bottle capsules and self-defence, has engraved upon it in tiny script: a vintage chart, a number of food with wine suggestions and useful conversational wine terms such as, "peaches, melons, figs, mercaptan" etc.

There is a magnifying glass/microscope for reading information engraved on the blade, and what's more, this glass can be manipulated when hungry (in a somewhat cumbersome way) to char-grill a steak using the sun's rays. In a similar fashion it will serve admirably to warm a glass of post-luncheon Cognac.

Cunningly hidden is a small compartment in which to write your name and address in case you have drunk so much that you forget who you are and where you live. Also, for the tired and emotional, there is a minuscule air bag that will inflate explosively should the owner fall over, thus saving him or her from injury and humiliation. The airbag also works as a pillow for a boozy snooze as well as an instant life raft if, when less than sober, one stumbles into the river whilst meandering home.

Medical usage

For the hungover there is a cleverly incorporated phial containing capsules of vitamin B, aspirin and Alka Seltzer. And if good health is a concern one can quickly self-test for cirrhosis using the SAWF medically approved hollow surgical steel needle to sample cells via a blind liver biopsy. Surviving brain cells are similarly accessible.

(Being hollow, the needle doubles as a straw. This can be handy when taken thirsty on a long trip with no gritty anodised aluminium cups in the glove box and a flagon of cheap port in the car trunk saying, “Drink me.”)

Scientifically inclined users can utilise the SAWF’s wee gas spectrometer attachment for immediate study of the biopsied cells and, obviously, it will also be frequently employed to examine the constituents of a suspect wine before calling on the sommelier for another bottle.

Least but not last is the thingy for removing stones from horses’ hooves when riding to hounds at your friendly vigneron’s country estate.

The ultimate feature of the SAWF is the patented Crick-Watson double-helix corkscrew. As well as being a most efficient cork extractor this is quite useful for illustrating the wonders of recombinant DNA when, as sometime happens, one is called upon unexpectedly to deliver an important scientific lecture.

Major retailers will shortly be advertising the SAWF at the astonishingly low price of \$3.95, plus post and packing of \$79.95. Or customers can choose to pay in four equal monthly instalments of \$59.95. This imaginative doodad which, while more than a knife, is, admittedly, less than a butler, is a bargain whichever way you look at it.

WHAT I’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

WRONG TURNS ON THE WALLABY TRACK Part 2 – Australian SF Fandom 1960-1975, with Leigh Edmonds

Notes on this session

It’s rather a case of false advertising to say that this session featured me along with Leigh Edmonds: basically it was all Leigh’s work, I just acted as sheep-dog, introducing the talk and trying to keep Leigh on track.

But I was very interested to hear him talk about this part of Australian fannish history as it covered the period directly before I became involved in 1975. All the usual suspects are mentioned: Merv Binns, John Bangsund, Lee Harding, John Foyster, Robin Johnson, Dick Jensen and all the rest. The major item of interest was finding out how a disorganised groups of fans in 1960 in Australia could actually get themselves organised enough to be able to bid for, and then run a World SF Convention in Melbourne in 1975.

This session forms a part of the FANAC FanHistory project and it, along with Part 1 and a host of other sessions, can be found with a little judicious searching on YouTube.



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – Aust: Australian; Coll: single-author collection; Nvla: novella; WFA: World Fantasy Award

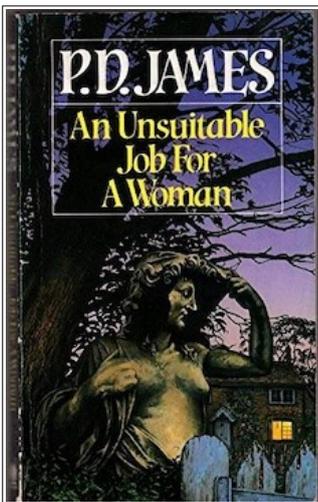
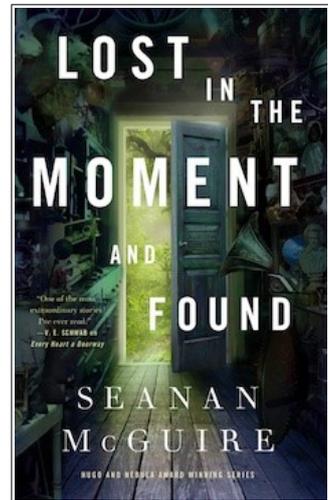
February 2024 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
Lost in the Moment and Found	Seanan McGuire	Fantasy	Feb 4	e	3.2	2023	Nvla
An Unsuitable Job for a Woman	P. D. James	Crime	Feb 6		3.4	1972	
Orbital	Samantha Harvey	SF	Feb 8	e	2.2	2023	
E is for Evidence	Sue Grafton	Crime	Feb 12		3.4	1988	
Pomegranates	Priya Sharma	Fantasy	Feb 15	e	3.1	2022	Nvla; WFA
The Wild Places	Robert Macfarlane	Non-fic	Feb 22		3.6	2007	
Honour & Other People's Children	Helen Garner	Lit	Feb 29		4.0	1980	Coll; Aust

Books read in the period: 7
 Yearly total to end of period: 17

Notes:

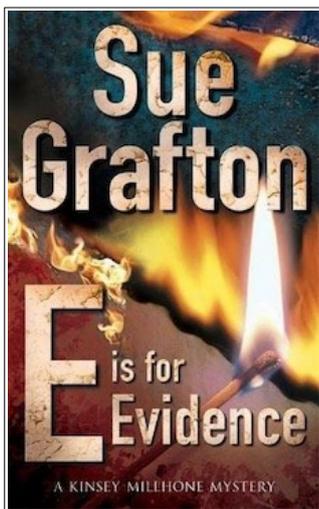
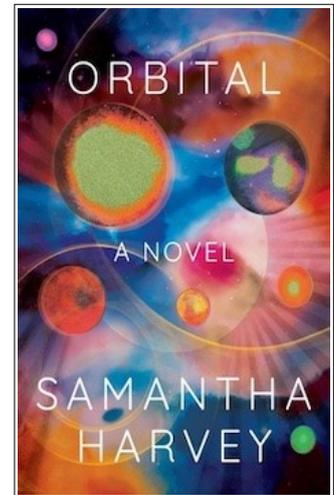
Lost in the Moment and Found (2023) – This is #8 in the author’s Wayward Children series of novellas. McGuire continues her series about lost children finding their way through door portals to different worlds with this story of seven-year-old Antsy Ricci who runs away from home and her new, predatory step-father. She finds her way to a door that opens onto a shop called Anthony & Sons, Trinkets and Treasures. Above the doorway is another sign, written in big black marker: “Be Sure”. Antsy thinks she is, and enters. And so she begins a new life, away from her old world, where she helps to run the store in concert with an old woman, Vineta, and Hudson, a talking magpie. These stories are becoming rather repetitive now with little new happening each time. Sure there are minor variations but the interest of the earlier stories in the series is waning with each instalment. R: 3.2/5.0



An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (1972) – This is #1 in the author’s Cordelia Gray series of novels. Cordelia Gray is a 22-year-old woman who is a partner in a Private Investigation firm. As the novel opens she arrives at work to find

her older partner, ex-policeman Bernie Pryde, dead by suicide at his desk. He has left the whole firm to her and so, when she is summoned from London to Cambridge by eminent scientist Sir Richard Callender who wants her to look into the reasons why his son committed suicide, she really can't refuse the offer of employment. What follows is a rather typical PI novel, though set in London and Cambridge and featuring a young, inexperienced, though resourceful, young woman as the main character. The plot is complicated and intricate, with enough twists and turns to keep the reader engaged to the very end. This must have been a sensation when it was first published back in 1972 given the nature of the novel's set-up. The beginning is a bit slow and clunky but it picks up and provides a surprise appearance, near the end of the book, from James's principal detective Adam Dalgliesh. R: 3.4/5.0

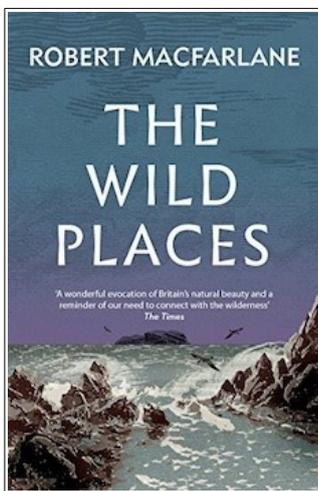
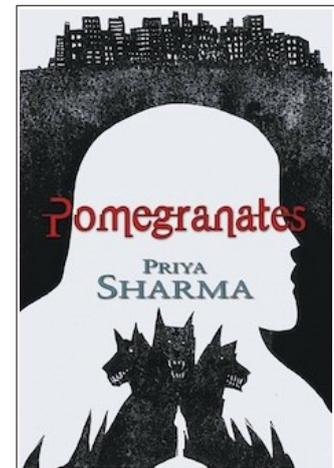
Orbital (2023) – This short novel is set on the International Space Station and follows a day in the lives of the six astronauts stationed there. It shows them working, sleeping, eating, relaxing, looking out the windows and thinking. And that's about it. My idea of a story is one that contains characters within a narrative structure, where events progress from the beginning to the end of the story. Here, none of that happens. The most dramatic things that occur are the death of the mother one of the astronauts, and the launch during the day of four US astronauts for a mission to the moon; both are observed from a distance, and have limited or no impact of the station astronauts. This reminds me of **Cold Enough for Snow** by Jessica Au, beautifully written but completely forgettable when you finish. Some people might attempt to describe it as a prose poem, but only because it barely seems like a novel at all. If this is the future of fiction then count me out. R: 2.2/5.0



E is for Evidence (1988) – This is #5 in the author's Kinsey Millhone series of novels. Kinsey Millhone is in her early thirties, twice divorced, no kids, and earns her living as a Private Investigator. She used to be a cop and also worked for a time for the California Fidelity insurance company, and still does some freelance work for them. So she isn't surprised just before Christmas to get a rush job from them checking out a burnt-out warehouse. By coincidence she knows the family who owns the warehouse, having gone to school with one of the daughters. But then some money turns up in her bank account unexpectedly, some of the insurance file papers go missing and next thing she knows she's being investigated herself for fraud and conspiracy. The high standard of these novels continues with Grafton filling in more of Millhone's background – an ex-husband turns up at one point – and putting her under more pressure than she has seen for a while. All good stuff and an excellent PI novel. R: 3.4/5.0

Pomegranates (2022) – This novella won the World Fantasy Award for Best Novella in 2023.

This is a variation of the Persephone myth, told in a modern context. Bear Ursa, a mortal man, has somehow found his way into the underworld where he encounters Persephone. Her uncle Hades is dead, her mother Demeter is missing and she has retreated from the world which she believes has forgotten her. She is angry, extremely angry and as a result the Earth has undergone massive climate-change with everything frozen solid. We learn all of this as Persephone explains herself to Bear. There is a lot to like about this story but it is very hard to follow as it shifts narrative perspective unexpectedly and is interspersed with Chorus sections. I suspect you would get a lot more out of it if you are intimately familiar with the original legend. R: 3.1/5.0



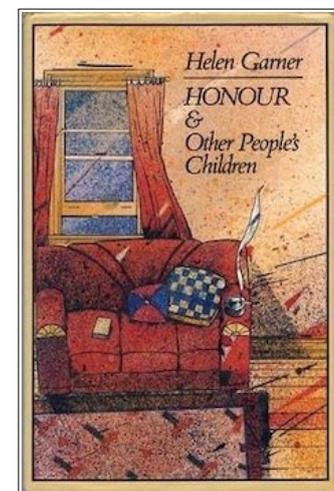
The Wild Places (2007) – In the first few years of this century Robert Macfarlane found himself living in Cambridge, UK. Good things held him there (“my family, my work, my affection for the city itself, the way the stone of its old buildings condenses the light”) but he still had a hankering for wild places and had somehow found himself in a city that seemed as remote from the “wild” as he could find anywhere in the UK. So he resolved to seek out Britain’s wild places, which he assumed would be in the far north and the far west. This book is a collection of essays he wrote as he sought, found and explored those places he longed for. He mainly heads to the far north of Scotland – Ben Hope and the islands – and wilder parts of Wales Devon and Cornwall. But he also finds wild places in the saltmarsh along the Essex coast, and on a storm-swept shingle island off Norfolk. This is maybe not as revelatory a work as his first (**Mountains of the Mind**, see my review in **Perryscope 28**) but it’s still a wonderful collection of writing by one of the best in this field. R: 3.6/5.0

Honour & Other People’s Children (1980) – see main review below.

REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Honour & Other People’s Children (1980) by Helen Garner
Genre: Literary

Helen Garner was awarded the inaugural Melbourne Prize for Literature back in 2006. The prize is given for a writer's body of work "which has made an outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life". That statement is missing the fact that this prize is for Victorian writers, and frankly, it is hard to think of a writer more Victorian, more Melbourne, and specifically more North Fitzroy, than Helen Garner. She, herself,



has noted that she has only ever wanted to write about Australia as it is, not as a sort of phenomenon, not a strange country, filled with strange people and even stranger flora and fauna. Her subject matter rests with the inter-relationships of people living in the inner northern suburbs of this major city. There are not “sunlit plains extended” in her work. It’s all inner-suburban streets and pubs, trams and local shops, and lost and lonely people trying to find a path through life. Which probably explains why her work has not had a lot of resonance with overseas readers.

So it is with both novellas that go to make up this collection.

In **Honour**, the first of the novellas, we meet Kathleen and Frank, a married couple with one child Flo, who no longer live together. Frank is starting to see someone else and that relationship looks like becoming rather serious. He’s now starting to talk about a divorce and buying a house. Although he lives near to Kathleen, and sees their child regularly, he now wants to take over more and more of the day-to-day care of her and asks that Flo comes and stays with him for an extended period. Kathleen acquiesces and the story then goes on to explore the changing, dynamic relationships between the three adults and the child: Kathleen seems to have been cast adrift as her life is no longer revolving around her daughter; Frank doesn’t seem to change much and carries on thinking that everything will be fine; and Jenny, the new woman in Frank’s life, desperately wants to be friends with Kathleen as she has only been in the country for a few years and hasn’t made any close female friends.

In **Other People’s Children** the author introduces us to a couple of group houses where small families or singles all live together as a collective, sharing household and parenting duties. Scotty and Ruth are two women who are the mainstays of one of these houses. They were once close friends but that relationship is souring as the two start to move apart: Ruth has a new lover in her life and wants to move out and take her children with her; and Scotty, who has been almost a co-parent to Ruth’s children, despairs at their bonds breaking possibly even more than the break-up of the adult relationship.

Garner gets to the hearts of all of these connections, picking away at the small wounds that cut so deep, yet not being so voyeuristic as to watch the blood flow. She is interested in how people consciously or unconsciously hurt those around them, and also how those that are hurt react to the slights they receive.

Both novellas cover similar territory, though they are unconnected, but both left me with a slight sense of a story unfulfilled. This seems to be a feature of literary novellas, which non-genre authors appear to believe is what’s required with the form, namely, that it is fine to just end the story at any convenient break point, not allowing it to develop to a fully rounded outcome. It’s perfectly reasonable that both of these stories should leave the reader wanting more but I wonder if it might have been better for an extra portion of that “more” to have been provided. If a story demands to be written at novel length, even a short novel, then I’d prefer it to be allowed to extend itself, and stretch a little.

Then again, maybe this attitude says more about me as a reader than about Garner as a writer. If nothing else, and there is a lot else here, she has given me something to think about. R: 4.0/5.0

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

February 2024

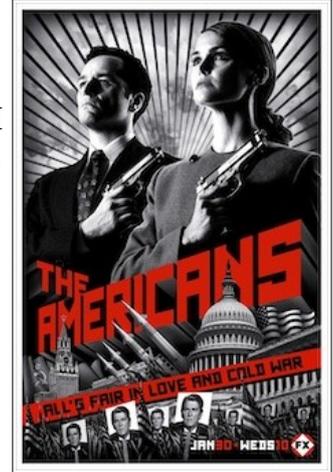
Television

The Americans (Season 1 – 13 episodes) (2013)

Platform: Disney +

Genre: Spy thriller

It has taken me a long time to finally get to this and I'm rather sorry I had neglected it until now. It is certainly a change from the relentless lawyer/cop/medical shows that seem to dominate the small screen. This is a period spy drama (set in the early 1980s) that follows the lives of Elizabeth (Keri Russell) and Philip Jennings (Matthew Rhys) who, on the surface, appear to be a typical suburban couple, married with two children, running a travel agency together and living in Falls Church, just outside Washington, D.C. But in reality they are a deeply embedded couple of Russian spies masquerading as "normal" Americans. Each episode finds the couple having to undertake some form of espionage for the local Soviet Embassy (kidnapping a Russian defector, planting a listening device in the Secretary of State's home office, etc, etc). Pitted against them is a local FBI team, a member of which just happens to live opposite the couple, who know there is a Russian spy couple somewhere but not much more than that. This is dramatic and interesting material and I certainly look forward to the other 5 seasons. And remember when series such as this had 13 episodes? Something to get your teeth into. R: 3.8/5.0



Nemesis (Miniseries— 3 episodes) (2024)

Platform: ABC iView

Genre: Political documentary

This will probably be of interest only to Australian viewers as it chronicles, in some depth (each episode is about 90 minutes), the rise and fall of the three Liberal Prime Ministers of Australia between 2013 and 2022, namely Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison. (Just for the record I rate two of them to be among the worst three PMs Australia has ever had). Told in a series of interview snippets and factual information displayed on the screen (short statements of who did what when, and so on) it follows the scheming, back-stabbing and evisceration of politicians by others of their ilk, as the overly ambitious scramble for the top job. You start to wonder if they ever had time for anything else. This is another instalment of a long-running series of these documentaries. It is interesting to note that Tony Abbott is the only PM in the past thirty years who did not consent to an interview. There are other notable absentees as well, including Julie Bishop and Peter Dutton. They may have been the only ones to make a decent decision; about this program at least. R: 4.2/5.0

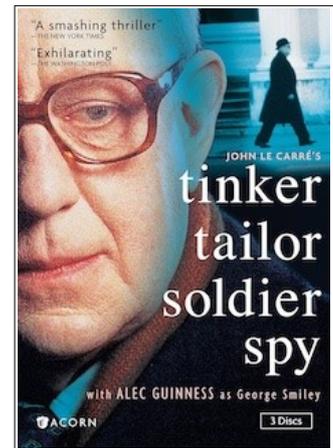


Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (Mini-series — 7 episodes) (1979)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Spy drama

In my time television has had two golden ages. The first of these ran from the middle of the 1970s to the middle of the 1980s, starting with the BBC's production of *I, Claudius*. This was followed by *When the Boat Comes In*, *Pennies from Heaven*, *To Serve Them All My Days*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *Boys From the Blackstuff*, among many others, and ending with *Edge of Darkness* in 1986. Right in the middle of this golden run was the BBC's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* featuring Alex Guinness in the lead role of George Smiley. The production was originally broadcast over 7 episodes in the UK in September and October 1979, in Australia on ABC television at the same time, and in the USA a year later. The series, of course, is based on the John Le Carré novel of the same name and concerns the investigation of a suspected Russian mole in the British Secret Service (the Circus).



On the acting front Guinness rightly gets a lot of the credits for his work here. The way he is able to convey so much by the simple act of removing his glasses and polishing them on his tie, or by just by not saying anything and staring intently at someone is a wonder to behold. It's a case of doing a lot with very little. But we should not forget all the other actors here; there are only a handful of female actresses in the series and their on-screen roles are very minor, although their influence on the script is profound, especially that of the mostly absent Anne, Smiley's wandering wife. Keep an eye out for a silent Patrick Stewart who turns up in one scene as Karla, who later becomes the head of Moscow Centre.

Modern viewers of this series might wonder what all the fuss is about: the production values are low, it is screened in a square ratio rather than the rectangular screen format we are now familiar with, and everything seems to move so very slowly. But that is its charm and its strength: tension builds in small increments.

I first watched this series when it was first broadcast back in the late seventies and then probably watched it again about twenty years ago. And I've read the book a couple of times. None of that matters. Each time I watch it it seems like I'm seeing it for the first time.

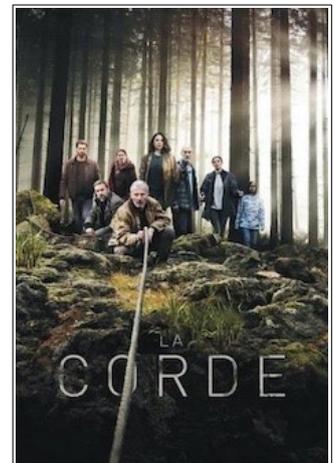
You need to give yourself time to wallow in this, even if you know the story, the outcome and the identity of the mole. It's worth every minute. R: 4.9/5.0

The Rope (Mini-series — 3 episodes) (2022)

Platform: SBS (French with subtitles)

Genre: Thriller

At a remote Norway radio astronomy observatory a group of scientists, lead by husband and wife team Bernhardt and Agnès Mueller, are studying Fast Radio Bursts, though that seems hardly important. One day someone finds a rope lying in a forest; a rope that seems to stretch out into the distance. On a whim a group of



the scientists decides to set out to find the end of the rope – they are never seen again. This story follows the attempts by those left behind to find their vanished colleagues and of the wanderers to either keep going or head back. At the end of the first day, Bernhardt heads back but suffers a fall and, we later learn, dies of his injuries. The others stay out overnight, and then keep going and going. Some turn back, and try to follow the rope home only to find that it seems to lead them off somewhere else. This is an interesting story, at first, with a strange and perplexing premise but it seems to be set up as a heavy-handed metaphor about not following blindly with no plan. The only one who does make it back is someone who, by necessity, forgoes the rope and follows a stream downhill instead. High production values and good acting let down by a simplistic script that attempts to hide its flaws by trying to be weird and mysterious. R: 2.2/5.0

True Detective (Season 4 – 6 episodes) (2024)

Platform: Foxtel/Binge

Genre: Thriller

I was very impressed with season 1 of *True Detective*, bored with season 2, and somehow skipped season 3, so was interested to have a look at this new season, especially as the premise seemed interesting. Well, they always do. After an Alaskan scientific research station is found deserted the bodies of the missing scientists are discovered in the ice and snow some distance away. The bodies are all naked, frozen together, and appear to have died screaming. As the station and the nearby town of Ennis are entering a prolonged period of perpetual night, the local police detective, Chief Liz Danvers (Jodie Foster), is assigned to investigate. She is joined by Trooper Evangeline Navarro (Kali Reis) a native Alaskan, who is still trying to solve the murder of Annie Kowtok, an Inupiat woman, who was found six years previously with her tongue cut out. When that tongue is discovered at the research station Navarro attempts to re-open the Kowtok case, against the objections of Danvers. There is a lot to like about this series and it is certainly a step up from season 2, but it doesn't land the ending properly and the reason why the bodies are found as they are is not fully explained. Interesting. R: 3.4/5.0



Film

Codes – P: platform (c for cinema, blank for home); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – 1001: 1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die; Aust – Australian

February 2024 films

Title	Director	Genre	Date	P	R	Rel Date	Notes
<i>Force of Nature</i>	Robert Connolly	Crime drama	Feb 10	c	3.8	2023	Aust
<i>Spiderman : Far from Home</i>	Jon Watts	Marvel superhero	Feb 22		3.2	2019	
<i>Bad Day at Black Rock</i>	John Sturges	Drama	Feb 26		4.1	1955	1001

Films watched in the period: 3
Yearly total to end of period: 8

Notes:

Force of Nature (2023)

Platform: Cinema

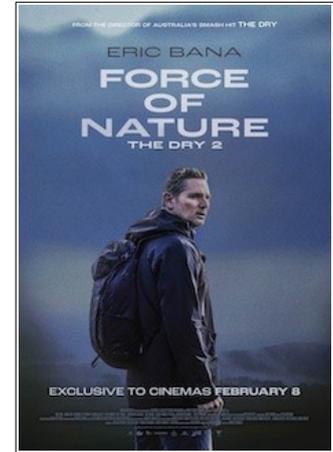
Genre: Crime Drama

(Also called ***Force of Nature : The Dry 2.***)

This is the second film to feature the character Aaron Falk, and is based on the Jane Harper novel of the same name from 2017.

Five women go missing on a bush walk in the Dandenong Ranges, north-east of Melbourne. The walk is part of a company team-building exercise – the participants are split up into all-men and all-women groups – and one of the women, Alice (Anna Torv), has been acting as an informant about the company for Federal Policeman Aaron Falk (Eric Bana) and his team. The women make their way out of the bush after a day, but Alice is not with them having decided to separate from the rest of the group and make her own way to safety.

When they hear that Alice is still missing Falk and his partner Carmen (Jacqueline McKenzie) decide to join the search party and begin to investigate what went on in the bush that lead to Alice's disappearance. We gradually get Alice's back-story filled in as well as her relationships with the owners of the company. And we also see a number of flashbacks to Falk's teenage years when he, his father and his mother got into difficulties in this very same area of the mountains. This one isn't up to the standard of the first Aaron Falk film (***The Dry***) mainly because the level of tension and mystery isn't as high and also because Falk isn't so heavily invested in the outcome. It's still worth seeing as the production values are high, the acting and direction are all good, and the script extracts as much out of the book as it can. Hopefully, the Connolly/Bana combination will now move onto the third, and final, book in the series. R: 3.8/5.0



Spiderman : Far From Home (2019)

Platform: Disney +

Genre: MCU Superhero

I never really understood the popularity of the ***Spiderman*** comics when I was actively reading Marvel; he always seemed conflicted by teenage angst and uncertainties, which was I was trying to avoid. So that disinterest has carried over into the films. I have watched a few of the various iterations over the years but haven't been greatly taken with any of them. I decided to watch this one, with Tom Holland in the lead role, as it came directly after the two major ***Avengers*** movies that I reviewed last issue and as it acts as a bridging story between the end of that phase and the beginning of the next within the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

So I had my reasons for watching it, though I was certainly questioning them by about half way through this. It was so slow, setting up all sorts of teenage dating problems, riffing on the themes of incompetent teachers and embarrassing adults, etc, etc. When it finally does get going after about an hour it starts to become



interesting with some discussion of what is real and what is not and how you can tell the difference; all while dealing with the problems of a super-powered villain who is attempting to endear himself to the world by defeating illusionary monsters. But it's all rather forgettable, and I don't see a single reason why I would want to re-visit it. R: 2.4/5.0

***Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955)**

Platform: DVD

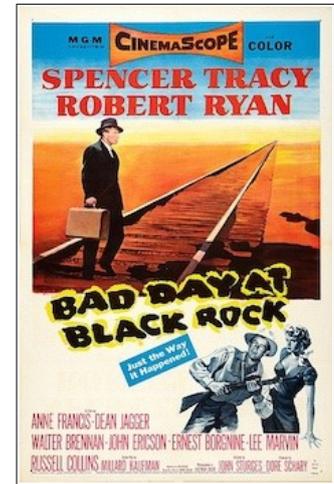
Genre: Crime Drama

This film appears on the list of 1001 Films You Must See before You Die.

The film opens with a long train crossing a bleak landscape. We're out west somewhere, it doesn't really matter where. We know it's way west though as we get shots of high, snow-capped mountains in the distance, and that desert is a bit of a giveaway. Andre Previn's music is the only distracting feature here as it sounds discordant and out of quilter with the opening shots. It seems to be attempting to create an air of tension, to presage the conflicts to come. Sure, the title gives us a sense of that already, but this music over the opening credits seems to be trying too hard. And then

John J. Macreedy (Spencer Tracey) steps off the train, and everyone in this tiny town (I counted only about ten buildings all up) seems to be out on the street with the sole purpose of watching the train stop and watching him disembark – “first time in four years” according to the station master. As monosyllabic, cro magnons Lee Marvin and Ernest Borgnine spend a lot of time sitting and staring in this film. Don't they have any work to do? Before long we discover their real role is to act as muscle men for the main villain of the piece, Reno Smith, played by Robert Ryan, a man with something to hide. Something that he is convinced Macreedy will discover. And so we have all the elements of a small town western in place – and yes, it is a western at heart: the mysterious stranger, the crooked landowner with something to hide, the drunken sheriff, the tough guys, the gullible woman and the world-weary doctor. Of course, Tracey shines in the lead role. Fantastic stuff.

R: 4.1/5.0



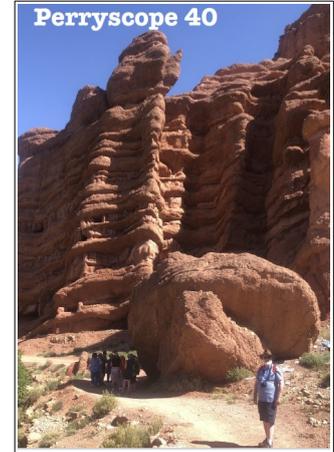
THE MOOCH OF LIFE – 1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die

As I noted last issue, I'm making more of an effort to log my film-watching in a probably vain attempt to improve and expand the range of films I watch. I have noted a tendency to restrict my self to “new” films, mostly from this century, neglecting the vast array of notable films from the past that I have either never seen, or which I saw so long ago that they are now barely a faint memory. And one of the ways I am aiming to improve this aspect of my cultural diet is to utilise the selection of films listed in **1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die** (ed Steven Jay Schneider), the filmic equivalent of the **1001 Books...** I'm already using elsewhere. The first edition of this book was published in 2003 and has since been updated on the web on the “1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die Wiki” which now actually lists 1245 movies up to **Nomadland** from 2020. As with the book version there is no way I am ever going to finish all of these. But that's really not the point. The point is to be reminded of what's out there and available. That will do.

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 40:

Heath Row: “Have I really not written you a letter of comment since **Perryscope** #24-25? This afternoon, I enjoyed reading **Perryscope** #40, and I appreciate our monthly email exchange, even if it’s just to inform each other that we’ve received a fanzine. One of my goals for 2024 is to be a more active fanzine reader and correspondent. Who knows, perhaps I’ll merit... HEATH ROW FOR FAAN LETTERHACK IN 2025!”



[**PM:** It’s always good to have something to aim for.]

“Your cover photograph this is glorious. My birthday is Monday, and because that’s a workday, my wife and I plan to go on a hike tomorrow, Sunday. While your photo reminds me of Vasquez Rocks Natural Area and Nature Center and the numerous rock formations in Joshua Tree National Park, we’ll likely hike closer to home. Regardless, it’s a welcome inspiration to spend more time out of doors.”

[**PM:** I should note that the path we were on here was rather easy, only a gentle rise and fall, and we probably only walked a couple of kilometres. But it was rather hot. So this was a mere stroll rather than an actual bush walk.]

“I condole with you on the deaths of your friends. And I hope that your basal cell carcinomas can be excised easily. My father has had similar experiences, and the procedures have proven to be effective.”

[**PM:** All appears to be going well. I’ve now had four bccs excised and the results have all come back saying the carcinomas were all benign and had been completely removed. I’m now just due for an annual check-up, which shouldn’t be too onerous.]

“It was welcome to see the name of Marc Ortlieb, with whom I recently exchanged Facebook messages while reading Marty and Robbie Cantor’s dual Down Under Fan Fund reports **Duffbury Tales** and **Tales of Duffbury**. While my involvement in Scouting ended when my son went to college, Ortlieb remains actively involved. That’s another fun connection to have! (Please pass on my regards.) [**PM:** I’m sure he’ll get them here.] I shall have to delve into your back issues to read about your travel to Morocco and India. I’ve not been to either country, though as my wife and I spend more time in Portugal—we went twice last year and plan to return this spring—I hope to explore portions of North Africa. Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have long held an appeal.”

[**PM:** I can certainly recommend Morocco. And I hope to have a full trip report compiled sometime in the next 12 months. I have to get through the Canadian one first. My India trip was covered in **Perryscope 39**.]

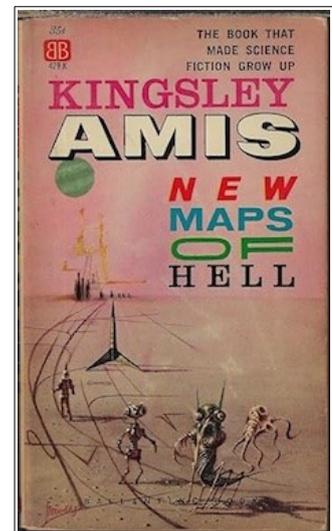
“Your ‘Best Books of 2023’ analysis was fascinating. While I keep track of what books I read over the course of the year, occasionally reviewing books in the apazines that make up the monthly **The Stf Amateur**, I don’t crunch my numbers to this extent. For example, using Goodreads and participating in their annual Reading Challenge, I know that I read 77 books in 2021, 93 in 2022, and 91 in 2023—and 15 so far this year—I don’t do any additional analysis. Your breakdown by genre, format, and publication date is intriguing.”

[**PM:** All of the data points I provide for each book read goes to help me with my reading goals, making sure I’m aware, each year, of where I’m up to with new vs older books, paper vs e-reader, one genre vs another, etc. It’s the only way I can ensure I’m reading as widely as possible. It may not work for some people, it does for me.]

“I appreciated the definition of ‘space opera.’ I’ve been buying my dad science fiction books as presents recently. It’s not his usual fare, which is more along the lines of thrillers and westerns. He has tended to enjoy space opera, but not all space opera. Today I received a text from him indicating that he’d recently finished Michael Mammay’s novel **Generation Ship**, my Christmas gift to him. ‘Best scifi novel I’ve read,’ he texted.

[**PM:** My father developed into a big fan of the James S. A. Cory **Expanses** series though, unfortunately, he passed away before the series was completed. He had also been a fan of space operas over the years and probably read a great deal of the early not-so-good ones as he started reading sf in the early to mid-1940s. I’m not aware of this Mammay novel so will have to go check it out.]

“Julian Warner’s column ‘K for Kyser’ included a fun sentence: ‘Jazz aficionados often have strong ideas about what is or is not jazz.’ That reminded me of Kingsley Amis’s consideration of jazz as a parallel to sf in **New Maps of Hell**. I’ve started listening to Kyser’s **Bandleader** on Spotify as we speak, so to speak. His Spotify bio reads, in part, ‘Kay Kyser couldn’t read a note of music, and spent nearly as much time doing comedy as music on radio.’ He also has an LA connection! ‘Kyser and his band became nationally known following a series of radio broadcasts from the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica.’ That hotel is now the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows. Originally a private estate built in 1889, it first became a hotel in 1921. The original 1889 construction was demolished in 1939, and the hotel’s bungalows were renovated in 2002-2003, though there are currently plans for a new hotel building, pending approval from the Santa Monica Landmarks Commission and the Architectural Review Board. The clock might be ticking in terms of being able to stay in part of the hotel as it was when Kyser performed there! As I listen to the record, it’s definitely Big Band music, so I suppose the question is whether Big Band music is jazz. Your mileage might vary.”



[**PM:** I have no knowledge or opinion one way or the other. I generally leave the music questions to Julian.]

Perryscope 42

“Your more recent book, television, and movie reviews were also enjoyable, and I remain pleased that you continue to showcase Australian fiction.

“In his letter of comment, Garth Spencer asked whether the National Fantasy Fan Federation membership is discussing the future of fan-run conventions. I don’t believe they are, but that might not be the organization to do so most effectively. On Facebook, there’s a group called JOF (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/many.jofs>) that seems to be populated by ‘journeymen of fandom,’ including many conrunners. Spencer’s a member. In the United Kingdom, there’s also Conrunner (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/conrunner>) for ‘organizers of volunteer-run science fiction conventions in the UK.’ Are there other communities for conrunners? Perhaps the ConRunner’s Wiki (<http://conrunner.net>)? While I enjoy participating in cons and volunteering at cons—I most recently worked in hospitality at the Doctor Who con Gallifrey One—I’m always torn between the programming and my work shifts. I don’t know that I’m a conrunner at heart.”

[**PM:** I was a conrunner for a while – okay, quite a while, as the two Worldcons seemed to have run into each other with only a year or two downtime between them. So that took up about 15 years of my life. I might dip my toe in the water again for a very small fannish convention sometime, but that will be about it. Nothing big, ever again.]

“The remainder of the lettercol made it clear to me that I definitely need to read your trip reports for Morocco and India. What travels you must have had!”

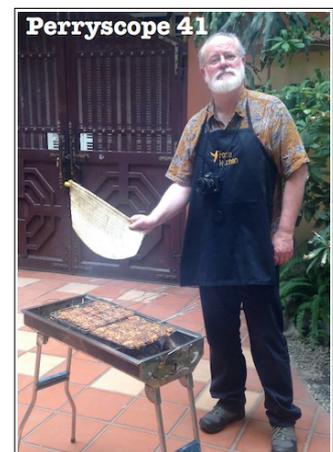
Perryscope 41:

Graham Peters: “Mention of Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* reminded me of finding it in our book cupboard at our Lakes Entrance holiday house, probably a hand off from my sister Michelle. Other cast-offs that I can recall included an extensive collection of Mary Grant Bruce (themselves, handed down from a cousin), E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* and James Michener’s *Centennial*. I was surprised to find I have read more American Literature than I had thought.

“I think it is a work better discovered outside of a school setting, echoing your experience. For me, it raised a series of questions, trying to place myself in the shoes of each of the travellers, the Perichole’s being the hardest for a teen boy to fathom.

“I can recall being fascinated by the structure of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, which consists of a Framing Story of the Bridge’s collapse and an examination of three major and two minor characters. I was delighted, many years later to discover that the Perichole and the Viceroy were founded on real people and the bridge, although never visited by Wilder, was based on a real Inca Bridge.

“The idea of a Framing Story has always appealed to me and I have just ordered a 2013 translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and a couple of works on Chaucer, to pursue my



interest. I regularly pick up my Mardrus and Mather translation of *The Book of The Thousand And One Nights*.

“The structure lends itself to tying together a series of short stories or novellas, within an overall universe. There are parallels to television series, where each episode explores a separate incident, but the structure allows examination from different participants' perspectives.

“It is a book that warrants re-reading and I can see why it won Wilder the 1928 Pulitzer Prize.”

[**PM:** On the other hand, I can't see myself going back to it.]

Julian Warner: “I had a bias against Mike Cotton because I was confusing him with Billy Cotton — a throwback to Britain's old dance hall days. Mike is an entirely different kettle of drums.

“I'm impressed that the Mike Cotton Sound were successful enough that they could afford a roadie. I've heard tales of bands choosing their drummer (for instance) not because of his talent but because he had access to a transit van. Similarly band members having to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of electrical wiring so they didn't electrocute themselves.

“The Mike Cotton Sound appear to be one of those bands who were the warp and weft of 'Rock's Rich Tapestry rather than the highly colourful embroideries.”

To which Martin Field replied: “Re Julian's comment. Mike Cotton started off in the Trad Jazz era in England in the 1950s, moved to pop in the early 1960s and to a soul based band in 1966. They were never chart toppers but were respected and accomplished musos and as such, aside from their own gigs, worked as backing bands for acts like Solomon Bourke, Gene Pitney, and support acts for the Beatles, Aretha Franklin and others. They were also in demand for studio sessions.

“After they broke up as the Mike Cotton Sound, Mike (trumpet) worked with Acker Bilk, The Kinks and various bands. John Beecham (trombone) toured and recorded with The Kinks and other bands. The late Jim Rodford (bass) was a founder member of Argent and then became The Kinks bassist for some 18 years before joining his cousin Rod Argent with the reformed Zombies, John Crocker (saxophone) went on to work with Chris Barber and Kenny Ball's bands. Derek Griffiths (guitar) played on the London Chuck Berry Sessions and toured with Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs.

“When I worked for the band – I started as roadie in 1967 – I drove a big – 3 ton? – Commer van partitioned with the gear in the back and aircraft seats in the front for the band. As a trade qualified electronics technician I knew about amps, leads, mikes etc., although it took a while to learn to set up the drum kit. Driver, sound engineer, lights, heavy lifter, fixer, it was all down to me. And, despite the free drinks and smokes going around, I had to remain relatively sober for the drive back to London. We worked constantly year round, five and six nights a week. On my days off I often had to go into London for parts etc. My pay was 27 quid a week, not a bad screw then. Web sources indicate that Beatles roadie Mal Evans was paid 38 pounds a week at that time.

“Over the years since I’ve been delighted to catch up with Mike, Jim and John when their bands have toured Australia.”

Nic Farey (swamped with organising this year’s Corflu): “I’ll only note that I’ve only seen one of your top five listings for TV and movies for 2023: **Slow Horses** and **John Wick Chapter 4**.”

[**PM:** Well, that’s enough, both of them are excellent. But time for more TV and film watching now you’re retired.]

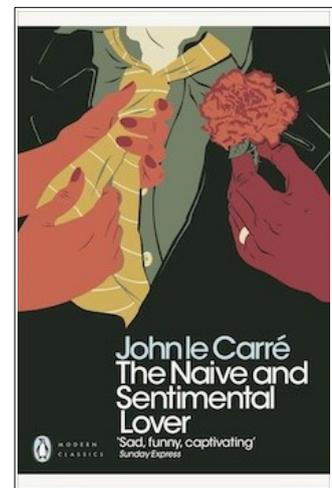
Rose Mitchell: “**PS41**’s cover photo is indeed a composition depicting ‘A Man In His Element’.

“My take away from **PS41** is that a lot of your subscribers are reading and watching old ‘stuff’. The contemporary critiques of these books, films and TV shows, some seminal works, are thoughtful and intriguing and my curiosity is sufficiently piqued that I’m dipping into these works myself, sometimes reading or watching for the first time. Perhaps, as you say, retirement and all the free time that provides, allows one to explore more. Keep this theme going, it is very interesting.

“So much product is published nowadays that it is difficult to keep up. And who wants to? Most is utter rubbish, cheap to publish electronically with nary an editor in coo-ee. Everybody wants to be a writer now-a-days, the majority shouldn’t, or should only in the privacy of their own homes.

“Julian Warner’s review of early Le Carre hits the nail on the head when he cautions the early novels are ‘a different Smiley to what you might expect’. And for something completely different try Le Carre’s **The Naive & Sentimental Lover**. No Smiley, not even a hint of The Circus; rumoured to be based on the breakdown of his first marriage; it’s mildly racy, the level of debauchery one would expect from folks living in an English home county village in the Seventies. Sex, drugs and rock & roll—well, not so much rock & roll, but plenty of sex and drugs to make up that shortfall.”

[**PM:** That’s a novel I’ve never read. Maybe its lack of spies or espionage of any sort has put me off. But, as you say, I have time now. Just need to find when I can slot it in.]



“Laughed long and hard at Leigh Edmonds comment about the historian’s role in history.

“Congratulations on 100 episodes of **Two Chairs Talking**. A fine effort and will be missed.”

[**PM:** I find it interesting that both David and I came up with the thought, that we had to end it, at about the same time. David was the first to articulate it, and that is perfectly understandable as he had all of the production work to do. Work on the podcast for both of us was getting in the way of everything else! The best podcasts

are those that sound like two people sitting down for a quiet chat about whatever comes into their heads. But it takes a lot of work to sound anywhere near casual enough.]

Marcin Klak: “Firstly I am amazed by how many things you read and watch. I am consuming the culture in a way slower pace. Last year I read only 23 books. The numbers for (usually) shorter pubs like comics and fanzines are better but I regret of not going so fast with the books. So I admire that you are able to do so!

“While reading your piece about the Shakespeare and C. J. Dennis I had some thoughts. I was quite happy to discover Shakespeare when I was in 7th grade. We had to read **Romeo and Juliet** and I was enchanted by it. Once I finished reading it I knew that I want more of Shakespeare’s works. I ended up going through some of his other plays including **Hamlet**, **Macbeth**, **Merchant of Venice**, **The Two Gentlemen of Verona**, and probably a bit more. I recall starting (but not finishing) **As You Like It** which was the only one I read in English not in Polish. At some point my interest diminished and although I still treasure his works I didn’t come back to them (yet).”

[**PM:** I received most of my knowledge of Shakespeare, after school, from film adaptations which might well be a condensed form of the original play. But it seemed all that I had available at the time.]

“My first work after graduating (I spent there just five weeks) was requiring me to come to the office for the afternoon/evening shift. It meant that I had some time during a day for myself. One day I visited an ‘inexpensive bookstore’. We have such shops in Poland that sell new books for a very small price. I suppose they just get what is not selling well or the end of the print runs. I came out of it with a **Complete Works of Shakespeare** in English. Three hardbound books in a carton case. They costed 20% of the ‘normal’ price and I was so happy. I carried them to work as I didn’t have the time to go back home. Unfortunately no one at work understood my excitement.

“And Shakespeare had an effect on my fannish life. My fandom journey started with manga and anime fandom. I started to watch **Slayers** anime on Polish TV (I had no idea what anime was at that time). When a friend from school learned about it she told me about manga, anime, and about fandom. Thanks to her I attended my first convention and joined a group of M&A enthusiasts who published a fanzine and ran the said convention. But getting to Shakespeare – there was a fanmanga called ‘Hamlet the manga’. It was a story of characters from **Slayers** preparing to play **Hamlet** on the stage. I decided to review it in our fanzine and while doing so I contacted the Polish translator of it. This led to a long-lasting fannish friendship. In fact the mascot” of my fanzine was designed by her.”

[**PM:** I find it fascinating to read of the different ways that fans around the world discovered fandom, and where this discovery lead them on to.]

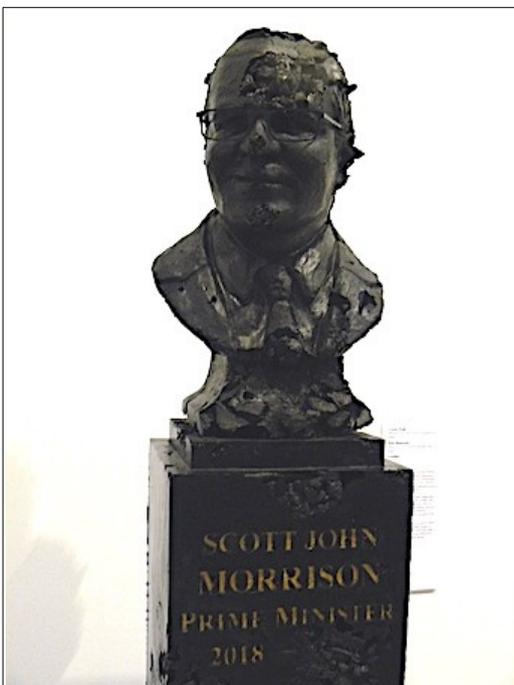
“So this is for what memories this brought back to me. Yet there is another thought it evoked. You mentioned that you don’t trust that the school would bring “The Play” should you be studying **Romeo and Juliet**. For years I keep thinking that schools in Poland are doing a lot to convince people that reading is not a cool hobby. The way how we were taught

about literature was rather dull. And that is a pity. I recall when I was at university a friend of mine recommend me a music record. It contained songs with lyrics by famous Polish poet, playwright, and artist – Stanisław Wyspiański. All the songs were showing different facets of rock music. It was quite amusing. Also many of the poems used were way more interesting than the ones we had to study in the classroom. And to quote you I found the fact that those are not presented in schools ‘An opportunity lost.’

[**PM:** And it also interesting to read how schools across the word did their level best to destroy the reading experience for many people. And it is interesting to note that I know of no-one who read comics, of any sort, as a young kid and then as a teenager who did not go on to be big readers in later life. And yet we were continually told that we were reading “trash”. I don’t care what people read when they are young, so long as they read something.]

Irwin Hirsh: “I agree with Barbara O’Sullivan that a visit to the Art Gallery of Ballarat is time well spent. I was there in May ‘23, visiting the gallery ahead of attending the wake for Valma Brown. Parts of the Gallery were closed, as they were preparing for a new set of temporary exhibitions, but I had a good visit through the permanent exhibitions.

“Barbara is sort of wrong about there not being a bust of former PM Morrison on the Prime Minister avenue. There has been one, though is wasn’t there in May ’23. In the week before the 2022 election two artists (Louise Pratt and Rob Beamish) covertly installed a bust of the then PM on the avenue. It is made from resin and coal, and is titled CoalMo. It was, and may still be, on display in the AGB. Attached are a couple of (I really needed better lights) photos.”



Joseph Nicholas: “Many thanks for **Perryscope 41** — and good to see you and Robyn in Melbourne last month. (As I said to Julian and Lucy, when writing to thank them for

organising the barbecue, I always feel, when leaving Melbourne, as though I've never spent enough time there. This time, my plans to spend more of my holiday in the east of Australia were rather kiboshed by the West Australian branch of the Hanna family not being available on the actual weekend of Judith's mother's birthday, and the celebration therefore having to be put off until the following weekend, meaning I spent at least a week longer in WA than originally anticipated. Next visit, I hope, I'll spend more than just a weekend in Melbourne.)”

[**PM:** I can only agree that you need to spend more time in and around Melbourne. There is a lot here that you'll miss by only spending a weekend.]

“Further to your comments under ‘The Mooch of Life’ about typos and grammatical errors, I would say that this is something to which I am also prone. I habitually type ‘fo’ instead of ‘of’ (but not, strangely, ‘i’ instead of ‘if’), ‘an’ instead of ‘and’, ‘now’ instead of ‘not’ (and vice versa), and other misfingerings. (Just lately, the letter ‘g’ has been turning up in the word ‘the’, as ‘tghe’, while ‘museum’ sometimes spawns a double ‘s’. Like you, I am not a touch-typist.) These usually get picked up on a read-through before pressing send, but (like you) not always. I also tend to omit words, for example if a sentence is particularly long or has a number of sub-clauses then a conjunction may be dropped — but because I know what I meant to say, I sometimes fail to spot the omission when reading the piece through.

“Heigh-ho, as we used to say....”

[**PM:** I do the best I can but am sure more errors and typos will crop up in the future. More so as I get older.]

Leigh Edmonds: “First, thanks to you and Rose for organizing last night’s get together. I found it very enjoyable to catch up with everyone and only left earlier than I had planned because I could feel my batteries running flat all of a sudden. You are right about people heading off after 7, the 7.28 to Ballarat was packed and there was barely standing room room.

[**PM:** Leigh is referring here to the Second Thursday night drinks that Rose Mitchell and I have organised in Melbourne. The first “meeting” was Thursday 14th March at the Platform 28 pub in Melbourne’s Docklands area and we are hoping to make it a regular get-together.]

“As it happened, traveling down to Platform 28 gave me the opportunity to catch up with my fanzine reading, which included **Perryscope 41**. Stimulating reading as usual.

“Even though I saw it on a small screen in a noisy aircraft experiencing a fair bit of turbulence I think I might have enjoyed **John Wick: Chapter 4** almost as much as you did. The plot was adequate to the main purpose of the film and more clearly enunciated than in the earlier Wick movies I recall seeing. What really impressed was the almost balletic fight sequences, and in particular the final sequence as he fights his way up the stairs. The choreography was as tight and precise as you’d see in the best ballets and the movements also economical and precise. When I get the opportunity I will watch this one again. Of course, I’ll have to go back and rewatch the earlier ones as well, which will be no

great punishment. (I recall our reaction the first time Valma and I watched the first Wick movie, a sort of stunned amazement that such a violent movie could be so good, and an immediate search to find out if there were any more.)

“The other movies of note that I saw on fights were *Barbie* (well, I went to sleep half way through so I don’t suppose that counts) and *Dunkirk*. I’d heard a lot about this movie and found it rather strange. Have you seen it and written about it, I don’t recall? [PM: No, and no, but I should.] I can’t decide whether it was brilliant or a disaster since it seemed to be an almost personal or visceral recounting of individual experiences during the event rather than an overall account of what happened. I wonder how this left viewers who knew nothing about the actual evacuation. From an aviation view point I was surprised that the movie didn’t make more of the way in which Spitfire pilots discovered how vulnerable Stuka dive bombers were during their dives and began the end of the Stuka’s fearsome reputation. Anyhow, I suppose if the opportunity comes up to see it on a bigger screen I will see which way I fall on the movie.



“Your comments on *Galaxy Quest* and *Avengers: Infinity War* were also more or less in line with my own, though I think I might have given *Galaxy Quest* a slightly higher rating because, as you say, it resisted the temptation to make fun of the fans and, in fact I thought, treated them rather sympathetically.”

[PM: The film pokes a little bit of fun at fannish activities, but, then, so do we all. Overall, it handled it about right.]

“Unlike you *Romeo and Juliet* was my first exposure to Shakespeare in my first year at High School. People around me said it was hard going but once you got over the blank verse and sometimes obscure words it seemed like a good story to me — not as good as Asimov and Doc Smith of course. I’ve got the feeling that we did one of his plays every year in English but the only others that come to mind were *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*. For some unaccountable reason I also read *The Tempest* which was not on the curriculum but I enjoyed.

“Over the years I’ve seen a lot of Shakespeare one way and another. One time we went to see rather bemusing performance of *The Tempest* imported from Britain in which the main character seemed to be a big drapery hanging in the middle of the stage that got twirled around at key moments for no purpose that we could discern. I guess I’ve seen quite a few performances and movies of *Romeo and Juliet* but the most memorable was the school performance we went to while I was doing a history for Haileybury College. It was very high quality, directed by a well respected Melbourne dramatist I understand, so there was nothing second rate about it. But what stood out was that every other version I had seen slowed down the pace to draw every drop of emotion from the final scenes when Romeo discovered Juliet apparently dead. In this performance, however, the final sequences were driven as though there were a giant metronome pushing it on so that the emotional shocks of each event and declamation piled in on the previous one, allowing no time to recover from what had just happened before the next terrible occasion. Even the closing, which is

usually played to show that the deaths of Romeo and Juliet count for something by bringing the families together, focused on the cost of resolving the feud.

“So, having already known about the play when I started at uni, when I came to C J Dennis in a course on Australian history I was prepared for ‘The Play’. That Dennis was taught in a history course almost fifty years ago says something about the changes that have taken place in Australian culture in a century. After a century a lot of the vernacular and flash talk of those times made it difficult for me to keep up the rhythm of the poem as I read through it so I found a performance on You Tube which brought it to life for me again. If your readers are interested, try <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>.

[**PM:** As I’ve noted I don’t recall Dennis’s name ever being mentioned at high school, though I do have to admit that this is now almost fifty years ago and my memory isn’t what it was, and even then it wasn’t much good. As I’ve also implied I really don’t think that we were taught all that well back then. I tended to be too easily distracted if I found something particularly boring and it was rather easy to get bored with dense prose, or blank verse when you can’t hear the words being spoken. Having some shy teenage kid at the next desk proclaiming a piece from Shakespeare when they had no idea of the emotional context was not conducive to my sense of enjoyment. I am amazed I didn’t fall asleep at my desk more often.]

“For some reason I had always thought that The Bloke was set in Sydney. Perhaps because the Dennis progenitors, Lawson and The Banjo, are so closely related to the Sydney *Bulletin*. Just goes to show, there’s always new things to learn.”

[**PM:** Now that is odd. It never occurred to me that anyone would think that The Bloke was set in Sydney. I suppose I’m more aware of the detail in the poems in the book and knew more of Dennis’s history.]

I also heard from: Murray MacLachlan (who wondered if I might be hitting the end of my production run with this issue number – no such luck for you sir!); and **Martin Field**; 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.