

**A fanzine for the February 2015 mailing of ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and a few others.**

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## Sproing!!!

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One day at the end of November I went for a long walk. When I arrived home, I reached into a drawer. When I straightened up, my lower back went sproing!! It hurt like hell. This hadn't happened to my lower back since my visit to Canberra for Conflux a few years ago. I phoned my masseur and chiropractor, and with a bit of digging into muscles and rearranging of spine, everything went back to normal and the pain disappeared. I went back to my usual spring lamb imitations.

On Christmas Eve, I was determined to finish vacuuming the floor in the main living room, because we would be receiving visitors the next day for Christmas dinner. Elaine and I had vacced the rest of the house during the previous two weeks, and only one floor was left untidy. However, our vacuum cleaner is about thirty years old. I need to get down on the floor and crawl around wielding the nozzle to make any effect. I finished the room, put away the cleaner, straightened up — and my lower back went out Sproing!!! to the nth degree. I could barely straighten up, and I had severe pain in both hips as well as the lower spine. Elaine was afraid I would not be able to get out of bed on Christmas morning.

What could be done? Nothing. Nobody would be available for consultation until the Monday after Christmas at the earliest, and my own chiropractor would not be back from holidays until 5 January. Neither chiropractors nor physiotherapists offer a locum service during public holidays. It would be no good calling a medical locum, since all such a person could recommend would be a CT scan.

I asked friends on Facebook whether they knew of anybody who might help me. The only name that was offered (by his wife Julia Hilton) was Dr Craig Hilton (doctor to fandom), but his practice is in Brighton. I could not get into a car seat, let alone travel to Brighton.

Friends on Facebook offered plenty of other helpful suggestions, some of which I followed. I tried cold packs and hot packs, munched on Nurofen anti-inflammatory tablets (ibuprofen) for several days, and took liberal doses of Panadol

Osteo. Elaine went down to the Greensborough Plaza and bought some firm cushions. By piling these onto various chairs, I could sit down, but not comfortably. I had to spend Christmas Day attempting to be sociable, while finding almost any movement intolerable.

I did eventually see my masseur and chiropractor, who weren't much help, because they did not diagnose the real problem. In the second week of January I visited my GP, who recommended a CT scan. This revealed that I have 'bursitis' in the right hip, but still does not explain the continuing pain in my lower back, which still makes it uncomfortable to sit for more than half an hour at a time. I have been given a cortisone injection for bursitis, but it hasn't worked. I could still control the pain only with Panadol.

In the first week of February, thanks to a couple of consultations with Ray the masseur, the pain subsided in my right hip and almost disappeared at the base of my spine. However, I still don't know the long-term cause of either pain. Pulling my wheelie case probably twisted my back, but lots of other people pull along their cases in the same way. The bursitis? A completely mystery.

Why no mailing comments (yet again)? Despite the difficulty of sitting at the computer, I've been able to finish three paying jobs: indexes for my best client.

Until a week ago I could not send out the reminder notices that *SF Commentary 88* is now available as a PDF file on eFanzines.com. I'm trying to eliminate the need for a print edition, except for subscribers (\$100) and major contributors. I trust you've looked at your notice and downloaded your copy: either the portrait edition (magazine style) at <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC88P.pdf> or the landscape edition (wider than longer) at <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC88L.pdf>. If I can get rid of the need to pay printing and postage bills, I can publish more often. I have about a quarter of a million words in the files still unpublished.

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## Has anything good happened?

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A highlight of last year was being able to catch up with my sister Robin, who thought she was migrating back to Victoria from Queensland after 23 years. She had forgotten how chilling a cold Melbourne winter can be, especially as she suffers from bouts of asthma. She migrated back to Queensland in December, but not before visiting her son and his family, and Elaine and me. Also, I travelled with her to visit my other sister Jeanette (and her partner Duncan) at Guildford near Castlemaine, and on another day Robin and I visited Oakleigh, the south-eastern Melbourne suburb where we grew up. My report about that expedition is in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' in *SF Commentary* 88.

Robin Whiteley, my long-time good friend and supporter, gave me two free tickets to see Joan Armatrading in concert at the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall (Melborne Recital Centre) on 8 December. Since Elaine did not want to attend the concert, I emailed Murray MacLachlan, who liked the offer

of a free ticket. We met in town, had dinner at Amiado in Degraives Street, and wound our way through the maze of South Melbourne back streets until we found the hall. (While we were sitting in Amiado, no less a personage than former ANZAPAn Erika Lacey walked past, and said hello. She was visiting friends in Melbourne before travelling north again.)

I had not seen Joan Armatrading in concert. In the 1970s she gained the reputation of being a brilliant musician and singer who was rather stand-offish with audiences (or merely shy). Not so in December. She remains a brilliant guitarist and singer, and now has 40 years of brilliant songs to choose from. She jokes with her audience, even offering a slide show of a potted history of her career. I'm not sure how one person can make so much good noise with just one voice, a few guitars, a piano, and a bit of occasional helpful background sound effects. Who needs a backing band these days?

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## My favourites of 2014 (part 1)

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**On Boxing Day I was going to compile of Favourite Theses and Thats of 2014. Instead, I had to avoid sitting at the computer. The following is merely Part 1 of a much longer article.**

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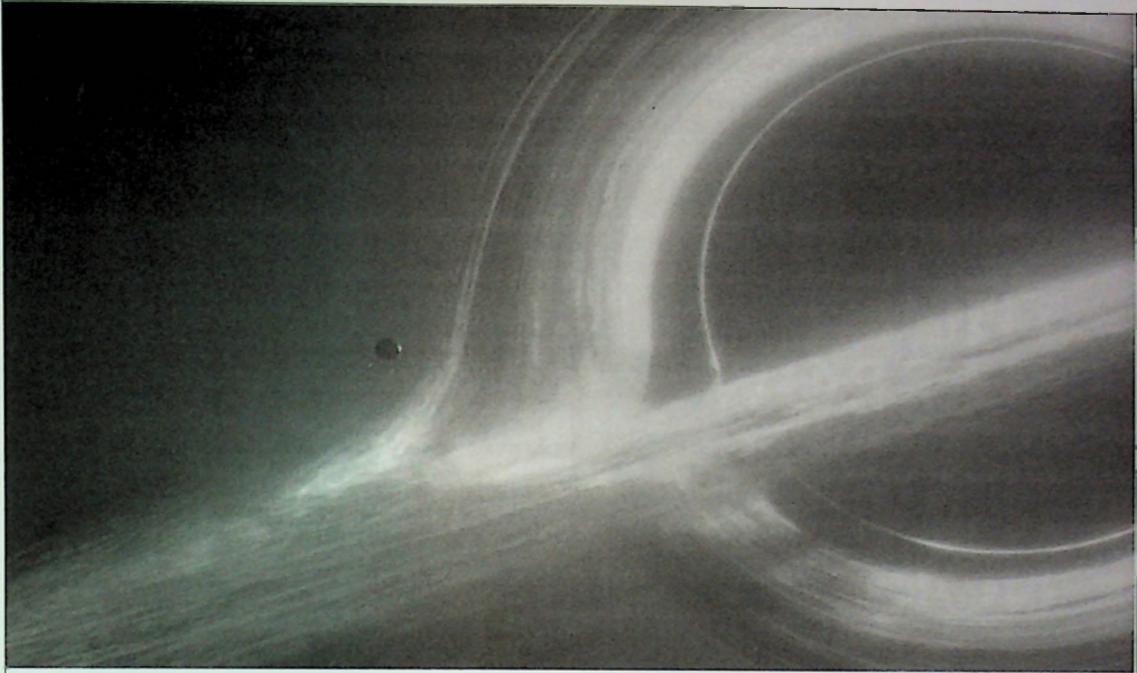
## Interstellar gas

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**Christopher Nolan's film *Interstellar*** slips in at a lowly 15th place on the list of 'Favourite films seen for the first time in 2014' because I don't really feel I've seen it ... or rather, heard it. When I saw it at the Nova Cinema in Carlton, I couldn't catch much of the dialogue in many of the most important scenes, so I didn't really know what happened. (Nolan has since admitted that the dialogue is just a bit unlistenable. Without admitting his blunder he may have shipped out digital disks of an updated version. Many friends who have seen the film in January say that they have had no problems hearing the dialogue.)

I caught enough of the action of *Interstellar* to realise that it is the most ambitious SF film since Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Not the best, but the most ambitious. Nolan tries to justify all the wildly implausible scientific premises that

underly the action of the film. His main helper and guide in the scientific department has been **Dr Kip Thorne**, one of the leading theorists in astrophysics since the 1960s. A couple of years ago, Dick Jenssen gave me a copy of Dr Thorne's magnum opus, *Black Holes and Time Warps*. I failed to get past page 40 when I first tried to read it. Powered by Chris Nolan's mighty images of planets circling a black hole, I plunged back into *Black Holes and Time Warps*. Given that I cannot understand any of the mathematics, I was amazed to find how carefully Thorne has explained modern astrophysics. In particular, I was impressed by the introduction, which is written as a science fiction story. It tells of an expedition that sets out to explore a series of extra-solar system stars. Even as they set off, they realise that they are leaving Earth's time far behind, even



Miller's Planet orbits Gargantua, a black hole: a shot from *Interstellar*.

while they age little between star systems. Eventually they end up 4 billion years in our future, exploring space around a black hole named Gargantua. By this time the crew can hardly be described as human, and their technological powers have developed far beyond any we might imagine today. Even so, some of them yearn to go home. So they build a time warp, and return to Earth of the not-too-distant future.

*Black Holes and Time Warps* appeared in 1994, so the background idea for *Interstellar* has existed in Kip Thorne's cranium for more than 20 years. A couple of years ago, as Thorne reached the age of 72, he was given the opportunity by Christopher Nolan to use these ideas as the basis for the action of *Interstellar*.

The result? *Black Holes and Time Warps* is a

more exciting reading adventure than *Interstellar* is a cinematic adventure. If, like me, you could not work out what happened to the ship's crew after they hit Miller's Planet in the film, read **Greg Keyes'** official movie novelisation of *Interstellar*. It's reasonably well written, concise, and contains all the plot of the film. Also, try to get hold of the illustrated book *The Science of Interstellar*, also by Kip Thorne, also sent to me by Dr Jenssen. Unfortunately, Dr Thorne tends to assume you have read his *Black Holes* book before reading his illustrated version. However, he does fill in many details of all the speculative science that has been published since *Black Holes* appeared. He also tells a few tales of where Nolan demanded that he concoct the science to justify the plot.

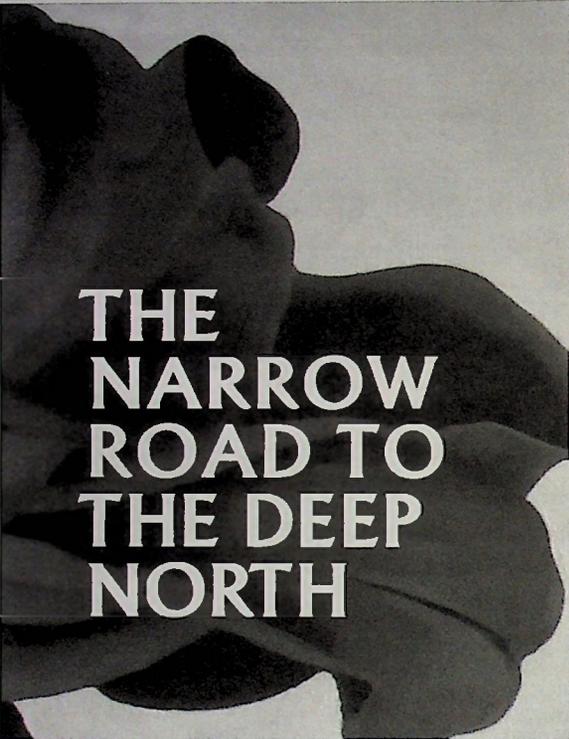
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## Favourite novels read for the first time in 2014

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It's not like me to read the winner of the current Man Booker Award for the year, especially as everybody else has been reading it. I own several novels by **Richard Flanagan**, but had not read them. But I had heard Flanagan talk about the book several times on radio, or rather, about the experience of writing it. He's a persuasive speaker. I found *The Narrow Road to the Deep*

*North* to be a powerful narrative, but it could easily have been only that. For its first two-thirds, it is a litany of horrors. The main characters, Australian prisoners of war during World War II, are beaten and starved and shot by their Japanese captors as they are driven to build the Burma Railway. Some of them survive the experience, and return to post-war Australia ... which



# THE NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH

is when the the narrative takes on a new weight of meaning during the last one-third of the novel. Flanagan dives into the biggest questions, such as 'What is it that impels a person to keep hope and remain alive in the face of the knowledge of meaningless evil?'

The best written novel of the year, though, is a book I plucked off the groaning shelves here at Howard Street. **Richard Russo's** *The Risk Pool* been sitting on the shelf looking at me for over 20 years. I read the first page, and had to keep going. It's about a man in conflict with a hard-bitten father, a vulnerable mother, and various friends in a smallish town in the eastern USA. It should be a bit boring, but it is constantly surprising, informed by sprightly prose and memorable characters. It takes itself seriously, but is often very funny, and never mournful. I must read the other Richard Russo novels I've accumulated over the years.

Several novels on my list, i.e. those by **Jennifer Egan** and **Karen Russell**, are covered in my editorial piece for *SF Commentary* 89, which hasn't appeared yet. It's only 15 months late. Both writers are worth finding and reading, although Karen Russell is the more accomplished prose stylist.

*Under the Skin* is No 3 in my list of 'Favourite films seen for the first time in 2014', but the film is very different from the novel upon which it is based. Although Michel Faber has never officially written a science fiction novel, in fact he's written

two superb SF novels, *Under the Skin*, his first novel, and *The Book of Strange New Things*, which I have just finished reading. *Under the Skin* boasts some very fine writing, but it also includes a background story (a conflict between the aliens who set up a base on Earth to harvest human meat) that disappears in the film. Both book and film feature a creature who looks like a very attractive woman who lures men into her car wandering across the bleak Scottish landscape, then kills them. In both book and film, the alien falls in love with both the Scottish landscape and Earth's people.

**Thomas Keneally**, one of Australia's most distinguished senior novelists, did not allow the republication of his first novel, *The Place of Whitton* (1964), until last year. I have no idea why Keneally kept it under wraps — unless, as with Patrick White's first novel, also republished recently, the models for some of its characters have been both recognisable and still alive. Keneally uses as the stage set for his crime/mystery novel an institution designed to train young men until they become priests. I remember the richness of the physical detail of the book rather than the characters. The solution to the mystery itself is a bit pedestrian, but so are the solutions to most mystery novels. ∴ Equally readable, and with a dark power that matches the feeling in *The Place at Whitton*, is Keneally's second novel, *The Fear*. Again, it has a sense that the 1950s was a period of great moral danger to people who took life too seriously. It is not a fantasy, but it reads like a dark fantasy.

Most of the other novels on this list are powerful thrillers that renewed in me a sense of reading a book for the sake of enjoyment. I lost this enjoyment for awhile.

Until I get sick of his books, **Michael Robotham** (an Australian who lives in Britain) is my favourite suspense novelist. His *Life or Death*, his first novel set in America, is based on an irresistible premise: why should a man escape from jail the day before he was due to be released? (This happened in Queensland some years ago, although the escapee in the actual news item has never been recaptured.)

Robotham's *Shatter*, set in Britain, is nearly as powerful as *Life or Death*, although it is based on today's TV cliché, the serial killer who knows so much about his victims that he seems unstoppable.

For many years all I had heard about **Robert Harris's** *Fatherland* was that it featured the Nazi takeover of Britain during World War II. Not so. This year I finally saw a copy and bought it. Britain is mentioned briefly, but all the action takes place in Berlin after it has been transformed by the Nazis into a city filled with vast monuments to themselves. Rather like Martin Cruz Smith's Renko (a policeman working in the Soviet Union's Moscow), *Fatherland's* policeman hero is a honest cop trying to make sense of a murder committed

within a totally corrupt regime.

**Strange Bodies (Marcel Theroux)** is another SF novel that doesn't carry the label. It tells the story of a man trapped in a strange body, and how he came to be there. As with *Under the Skin* or *Swamplandia!*, it seems astonishing that it was not nominated for SF's glittering prizes instead of the rather pallid books that have won during recent years.

- 1 *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013) Richard Flanagan (Knopf; 467 pp.)
- 2 *The Risk Pool* (1988) Richard Russo (Random House; 479 pp.)
- 3 *Swamplandia!* (2011) Karen Russell (Vintage; 316 pp.)
- 4 *Under the Skin* (2000) Michel Faber (Canongate; 296 pp.)
- 5 *The Place at Whitton* (1964/2014) Tom Keneally (Knopf; 289 pp.)

- 6 *Life or Death* (2014) Michael Robotham (Sphere; 434 pp.)
- 7 *The Keep* (2006) Jennifer Egan (Anchor Books; 255 pp.)
- 8 *The Fear* (1965) Thomas Keneally (Horwitz Grahame; 229 pp.)
- 9 *Fatherland* (1992) Robert Harris (Arrow; 386 pp.)
- 10 *Strange Bodies* (2013) Marcel Theroux (Faber; 376 pp.)
- 11 *Shatter* (2008) Michael Robotham (Sphere; 466 pp.)
- 12 *Personality* (2003) Andrew O'Hagan (Harcourt; 311 pp.)
- 13 *Available Dark* (2012) Elizabeth Hand (C&R Crime; 243 pp.)
- 14 *Look At Me* (2001) Jennifer Egan (Corsair; 517 pp.)
- 15 *Interstellar: The Official Movie Novelization* (2014) Greg Keyes (Titan Books; 279 pp.)

## Favourite books read for the first time in 2014

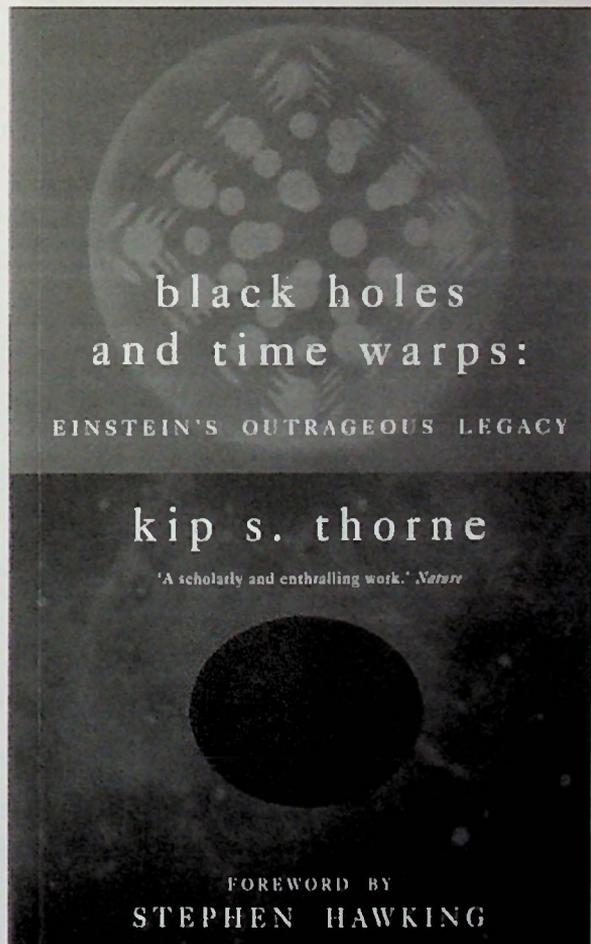
I've already written about **Kip Thorne's *Black Holes and Time Warps***. First-class reading for those who want to renew their sense of wonder.

I'm not a fan of the writing of **H. P. Lovecraft**. Indeed, after reading many short quotations in **L. Sprague de Camp's** famous biography, I cannot work out why anybody reads Lovecraft's prose. That's not the point of the biography. De Camp presents all the contradictory sides of Lovecraft's character. In the process, he writes one of the great vivid biographies. Can one like Lovecraft, despite what one finds out about him? Certainly. He was a prodigious writer and producer of apa contributions, and indeed scorned the idea of professional publication. He could well be the patron saint of ANZAPA.

Three collections that should have been lauded by the SF and fantasy community, but have been ignored, are **Karen Russell's *Vampires in the Lemon Grove***, **Elizabeth Hand's *Errantry***, and **Steven Millhauser's *We Others*** (which I did not know had been published until I saw it on a remainder table at Readings). Again, I write about these in my Nova Mob talk/*SFC* 89 article 'Genres Work Both Way', which should have appeared by now, but hasn't.

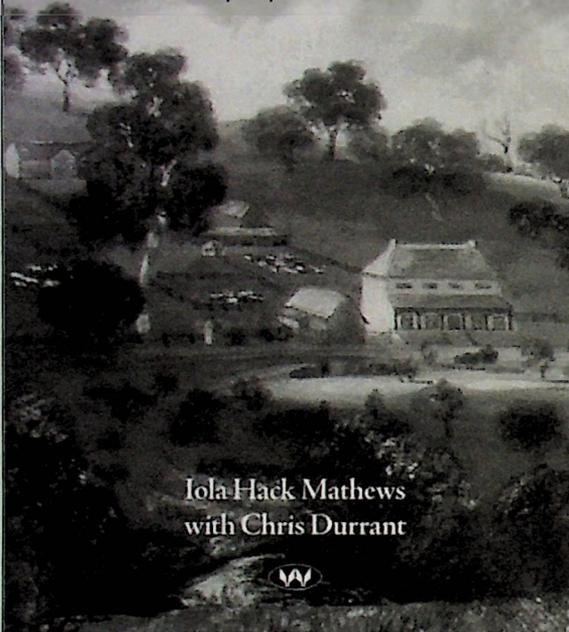
Deserving of a much longer review (when I have time) is ***Chequered Lives***, by **Iola Hack Mathews** and **Chris Durrant**. Iola began this book some years ago as a research project into the history of her family as they migrated to the new colony of South Australia in the 1830s. It grew, and became a first-class narrative about two hard-driving brothers, John Barton and Stephen Hack, as they make their fortunes in South Australia, lose their fortunes, start their families, and move all over

the place. The book even has a villain, a bloke who



# Chequered Lives

John Barton Hack and Stephen Hack  
and the early days of South Australia



Iola Hack Mathews  
with Chris Durrant

pursued the Hack brothers for every penny they owed. Complete with vivid illustrations and maps, *Chequered Lives* is a great yarn. Copies should be available from Wakefield Press in Adelaide, or from Iola Mathews, 123 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra.

- 1 *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (1994) Kip Thorne (Papermac; 619 pp.)
- 2 *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013) Richard Flanagan (as above)
- 3 *The Risk Pool* (1988) Richard Russo (as above)
- 4 *Swamplandia!* (2011) Jennifer Egan (as above)
- 5 *Under the Skin* (2000) Michel Faber (as above)
- 6 *Lovecraft: A Biography* (1975/1976) L. Sprague De Camp (Ballantine; 480 pp.)

- 7 *The Place at Whitton* (1964/2014) Tom Keneally (as above)
- 8 *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* (2013) Karen Russell (Knopf; 243 pp.)
- 9 *We Others: New and Selected Stories* (2011) Steven Millhauser (Knopf; 387 pp.)
- 10 *Life or Death* (2014) Michael Robotham (as above)
- 11 *The Keep* (2006) Jennifer Egan (as above)
- 12 *Chequered Lives: John Barton Hack and Stephen Hack and the Early Days of South Australia* (2013) Iola Hack Mathews and Chris Durrant (Wakefield Press; 291 pp.)
- 13 *The Fear* (1965) Thomas Keneally (as above)
- 14 *Fatherland* (1992) Robert Harris (as above)
- 15 *Strange Bodies* (2013) Marcel Theroux (as above)
- 16 *Shatter* (2008) Michael Robotham (as above)
- 17 *Sourdough and Other Stories* (2010) Angela Slatter (Tartarus Press; 238 pp.)
- 18 *Errantry: Strange Stories* (2012) Elizabeth Hand (Small Beer Press; 286 pp.)
- 19 *Personality* (2003) Andrew O'Hagan (as above)
- 20 *Available Dark* (2012) Elizabeth Hand (as above)
- 21 *The Science of Interstellar* (2014) Kip Thorne (Norton; 324 pp.)
- 22 *The Stars Like Sand: Australian Speculative Poetry* (2014) ed. Tim Jones and P. S. Collier (Interactive Press; 180 pp.)
- 23 *Look At Me* (2001) Jennifer Egan (as above)
- 24 *Interstellar: The Official Movie Novelization* (2014) Greg Keyes (as above)

## Other four-star books, in the order in which they were read:

- Dark Sister* (1992) Graham Joyce (Headline Feature; 372 pp.)
- Time Pieces* (1998) Michael Bishop (Edgewood Press; 90 pp.)
- The Duties of a Cat* (2013) Jenny Blackford (Pitt Street Poetry; 24 pp.)
- Malice Domestic 1: An Anthology Of Original Traditional Mystery Stories* (1992) ed. Martin Greenberg (Pocket Books; 275 pp.)
- Sophie, In Shadow* (2014) Eileen Kerneghan (ThistleDown Press; 241 pp.)
- A Million Windows* (2014) Gerald Murnane (Giramondo; 192 pp.)
- Cloudy Nouns* (2012) Geoff Page (Picaro Press; 80 pp.)

## Favourite films seen for the first time in 2014

The top three form a group of films that startle the viewer with the originality and beauty of their images rather than the coherence of their stories. **Paolo Sorrentino's *This Must Be the Place*** is a deep and strange film that I would not have watched unless Dick Jenssen had told me about it. It tells of a man who had led a pop band in the eighties, but became stuck with a fortune although he hasn't performed for many years. At the beginning of the film he is nearly drowning in the depression of no longer feeling able to take meaningful action. Sean Penn is unrecognisable as the rock star who looks just like Robert Smith from The Cure. Called back to America from Ireland by his father and brother, he sets off on a road trip that rivals the strangeness of the road trips in Wim Wenders' films.

***The Great Beauty***, also by **Paolo Sorrentino**, is the story of a 65-year-old man who has been a fashion leader for so long, accepted as the arbiter of social life in Rome, that he has not created anything for many years. He wanders Rome, reminding fans of Fellini's characters in *La Dolce Vita*, until the ghosts of his own past and Rome itself overwhelm him. Stunning to look at.

Because of financial constraints, in the film version of ***Under the Skin*** **Jonathan Glazer** has had to ditch much of the alien machinery from the novel. He substitutes startling, super-sensual images that overwhelm the viewer. As in the novel,

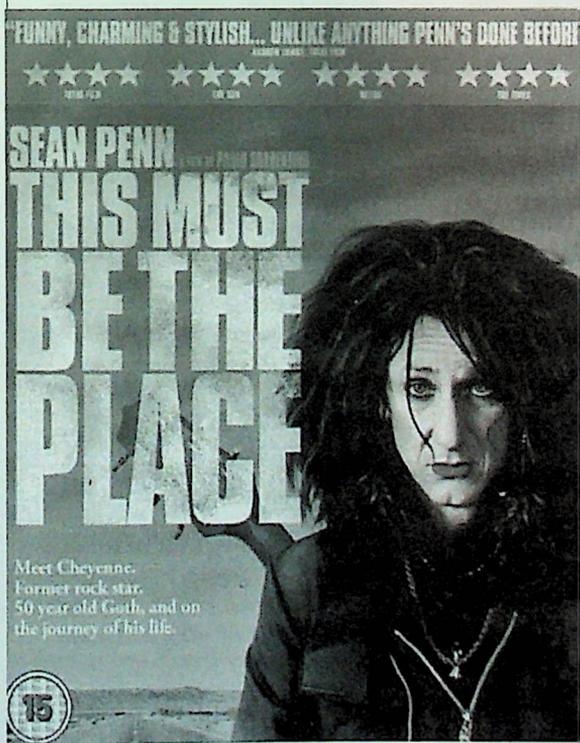
an alien disguised as a woman patrols the roads of Scotland, enticing unsuspecting chaps to their doom. It's never clear in the film what that doom is, or why the aliens need these blokes. Instead, Scarlett Johanson's hunger dominates the story. The whole space-station crew of the book disappear, replaced by a single motor cyclist who follows after the girl-alien's car. Her eventual fate is rather different from that of the alien-girl in the novel, but the cause is the same: 'she' falls in love with our good old rain-soaked planet and its people. I was reminded of the *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

**Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel***, is one of the most original movies of the year, its production design dazzling, its performances wonderful. However, it did not hit me as hard as ***What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*** This was an unexpected contribution to the film offerings we saw at our very small film group every month out in Greensborough. (We would invited more people to attend, but the seating is limited.) At the beginning of *Gilbert Grape*, we find an older teenager (Johnny Depp, in a very early role) taking care of his hyperactive brother, who is suffering from some kind of handicap. Can the actor really be ... Leonard di Caprio? He is. He is unrecognisable for those who know him only from his films of the last 10 years. He lives inside the role completely, as does Johnny Depp as the guardian brother. This film also creates a complete rural community. It's currently available on Blu-ray.

I knew of ***Stalag 17*** as a prison escape movie. Although it's been on TV plenty of times, I had never seen it. What nobody had told me is that in it **Billy Wilder** creates both a prison-escape drama and a wildly funny comedy about men under stress. William Holden dominates the film as the POW who will make any deal anytime to strengthen his position on the prison camp.

***Gone Girl*** has just appeared on Blu-ray, so I'm looking forward to seeing it again. A main impression hit me when I saw it at the Nova: this film is 2 hours 40 minutes long, but it seems to be only an hour and a half long when you finish watching it. That's snazzy story-telling. But it's a David Fincher film, so you would expect snazzy story-telling. What's unexpected is that the main character turns out not to be the husband whose wife goes missing, or the wife who disappears, but the sister of the husband.

***Predestination*** is the Australian movie that few Australians saw, because this multiplex-style SF film was distributed only through the arthouse circuit. The only American in it is Ethan Hawke, and Melbourne stands in for Cleveland and New York. The **Spierig Brothers** do wonders with



Robert Heinlein's 1959 short story 'All You Zombies'. The star of the film is Adelaide's Sarah Snook, who has already won an AACTA award in Australia for her performance. She would have scored an Oscar nomination if the film had been distributed properly in the USA. The film received only two weeks in cinemas in America, but has just opened in Britain. Someday somebody will take proper notice of this brilliant film, but for now it will have to remain our secret treasure.

**Thunderbolt and Lightfoot** was directed by **Michael Cimino**, but it feels like a Clint Eastwood movie. Clint Eastwood stars in it and produced it, and it has all the self-deprecatory tough-buy humour you would expect from an Eastwood guys-on-the-run-from-vengeance thriller. Wonderful widescreen colour photography.

**Dead of Night** is one of those films I had heard about so often that I had seemed to have seen it. Not so. An Englishman arrives at a house. He recognises it, although he has never been here before. He remembers the interior of the house and the people who meet there. Then each begins to tell his or her tale of horror (each episode directed by a different director) ... Now fully restored on Blu-ray, its episodes include much British humour as well as some shocking moments, and the ending is a delicious nightmare that reminds of the work of Philip K. Dick, although Dick had not been heard of 1945.

Most of the following films are memorable because of their scripts and acting, but perhaps not as dazzling to look at as the films already discussed.

**Philomena** features one of those scripts where the surprise ending seems to have been delivered half way through the film — until all assumptions are turned on their head. Judi Dench is extraordinary as the lady who has spent her whole life trying to find her son. This film also features Steve Coogan's best performance

**Nebraska** is not as adventurous a film as some of **Alexander Payne's** earlier films (especially *Election*), but its black-and-white widescreen landscapes and Bruce Dern's haunted face lodge it securely in the memory. Dern plays the old bloke who believes he has won a lottery in a town up north, near where he grew up. On the way to collect his nonexistent prize, he stops at his hometown, where his despairing son, trying to persuade his father to abandon the trip, finds out much about his father that had been kept secret until then. A great road movie.

Some of the other movies are films that do not stand up in the believability department, but are magnificent to watch. **Interstellar** will probably hurtle up the list when I get a chance to watch it properly. **Luc Besson's Lucy** (starring Scarlett Johanson) and **Bong Joon Ho's Snowpiercer** are much more dazzling as pieces of photography and action choreography. Watching them took my mind off my mundane worries, and each is good for a re-viewing.

**Guardians of the Galaxy, The Zero Theorem, and The Lego Movie** are also great fun, and filled in the hours. One would like to know the stab-in-the-back story that explains the failure of *The Lego Movie* to be nominated this year for an Oscar for Best Animated Feature.

- 1 *This Must Be the Place* (2011) directed by Paolo Sorrentino
- 2 *The Great Beauty* (2013) Paolo Sorrentino
- 3 *Under the Skin* (2013) Jonathan Glazer
- 4 *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993) Lasse Hallstrom
- 5 *Stalag 17* (1953) Billy Wilder
- 6 *Gone Girl* (2014) David Fincher
- 7 *Predestination* (2014) Spierig Brothers
- 8 *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) Wes Anderson
- 9 *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974) Michael Cimino
- 10 *Dead of Night* (1945) Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden, Robert Hamer
- 11 *Philomena* (2013) Stephen Frears
- 12 *Nebraska* (2013) Alexander Payne
- 13 *The Railway Man* (2014) Jonathan Teplitzky
- 14 *Interstellar* (2014) Christopher Nolan
- 15 *I Served the King of England* (2006) Jiri Menzel
- 16 *Les Enfants Terribles* (1950) Jean-Pierre Melville
- 17 *Lucy* (2014) Luc Besson
- 18 *Snowpiercer* (2014) Bong Joon Ho
- 19 *Land of Plenty* (2004) Wim Wenders
- 20 *The Haunting* (1963) Robert Wise
- 21 *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) James Gunn
- 22 *The Zero Theorem* (2013) Terry Gilliam
- 23 *A Most Wanted Man* (2014) Anton Corbijn
- 24 *The Lego Movie* (2014) Phil Lord and Christopher Miller

#### Other four-star films seen for the first time in 2014, in the order of viewing:

- Amazing Grace* (2006) Michael Apted  
*Parkland* (2013) Peter Landesman  
*North To Alaska* (1960) Henry Hathaway  
*Prince Valiant* (1954) Henry Hathaway  
*The Broken Shore* (2014) Rowan Woods  
*The Day Will Dawn* (1942) Harold French  
*Chaplin* (1992) Richard Attenborough  
*23 Paces to Baker Street* (1956) Henry Hathaway  
*The Shadow* (1993) Russell Mulcahy  
*Jack Irish: Dead Point* (2014)  
*Robin Redbreast* (1970) John Bowen  
*Frozen* (2013) Chris Buck And Jennifer Lee  
*El Dorado* (1966) Howard Hawks  
*While The City Sleeps* (1956) Fritz Lang  
*It Always Rains On Sunday* (1957) Robert Hamer  
*Stardust Memories* (1980) Woody Allen  
*Minuscule: Valley Of The Lost Ants* (2013) Thomas Szabo And Hélène Girard  
*Quartet* (2012) Dustin Hoffman)  
*Robin And Marian* (1976) Richard Lester

*Call Northside 777* (1948) Henry Hathaway  
*The Monuments Men* (2014) George Clooney  
*Take Shelter* (2011) Jeff Nichols  
*Brute Force* (1947) Jules Dassin  
*Help* (1965) Richard Lester  
*Round Midnight* (1986) Bertrand Tavernier

*Nightfall* (1956) Jacques Tourneur  
*Arabesque* (1966) Stanley Donen  
*Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (1982) Nagisa Oshima  
*The Emperor Waltz* (1946) Billy Wilder

## Favourite films seen again in 2014

Lots of familiar names here — so why did I re-watch these particular movies in 2014? Usually because they became available on Blu-ray for the first time. Thanks very much to Dick Jenssen for giving me access to many of the films on the list, and to John and Diane for the movies they showed at our place for film nights.

First, however, a note of thanks and sadness. **Robert Altman's** *A Prairie Home Companion*, full of echoes of endings and death as well as Garrison Keillor's divine humour, was the last movie that our other film group watched at the home of **Race and Iola Mathews** in August 2014. The monthly group was set up by Race in 1973, after he and Iola bought the house in Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra. Race had just bought as large a TV set as any of us had seen at the time. With it he showed laserdiscs, and later DVDs. In recent years, Race has upgraded to a 50-inch flat screen, and bought a Blu-ray player. Elaine and I felt privileged to be asked to join the group, and enjoyed the socialising even when we didn't enjoy any particular movie being shown on the night. Numbers were sometimes too large for the living room, but attendances decreased during recent years. Bruno died, several members could no longer find transport at night, and ill health prevented some others from attending. Meanwhile, Race was putting his time into a second PhD dissertation and trying to save his beloved Labor Party. Iola was writing books, including *Chequered Lives*, reviewed already. Who could have thought that the Labor Party's enemies could have done such an efficient job of shooting themselves in the foot, thus putting Labor back in power in Victoria and Queensland, and probably in Sydney this year and Canberra next year?

Finally Race and Iola's film group disbanded, although some of us meet occasionally for dinner in Carnegie. This group has been a very valuable part of my life for 21 years. Nothing will replace it.

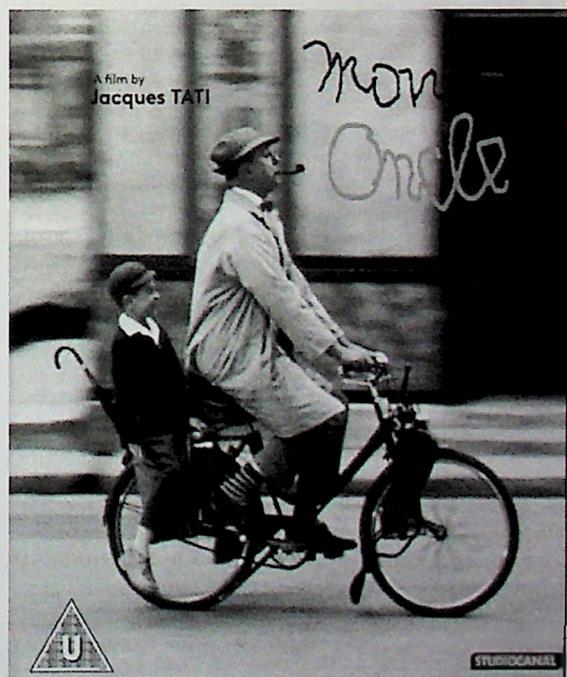
Since the 1960s I've maintained **Jacques Tati's** *Mon Oncle* as one of my Top 5 films. In 2014, at last, all the Tati films were released in a Blu-ray boxed set, with the colour values fully restored. What an occasion for rejoicing!

In the meantime, **Robert Hamer's** *Kind*

*Hearts and Coronets*, with its script as witty as anything written by Oscar Wilde, and Alec Guinness playing all nine members of the rapidly diminishing Gascoigne family, has been ascending my list of favourite films. Each time I see it, I enjoy more and more its succulently English story of revenge served cold.

New Blu-rays (often with vast number of extra features), and the kindness of friends such as Dick and John, account for my rediscovery of most of the other items on the list.

I had not seen **John Frankenheimer's** *The Train* since I saw it as a midday movie sometime in the early 1980s. In 1945, Paul Scofield's Nazi general attempts to scoop up all of France's art treasures and send them by train back to Germany as the Allies advance. All I remembered from my first viewing was Burt Lancaster as a French train driver, and the amazing scheme by which he and the whole French train system contrive to save the masterpieces. (A much duller version of the same story appeared last year in George Clooney's movie *The Monuments Men*.) *The Train* has to be seen in widescreen black-and-white, cinema's greatest medium, to appreciate



the muscularity and solidity of both its steam trains and Lancaster and his crew. An example of mid-1960s Hollywood cinema at its very best.

**Witness for the Prosecution**, story by Agatha Christie and direction by **Billy Wilder**, is one of those films that, after you've started watching it, you cannot stop watching until its last scene. Charles Laughton and Marlene Dietrich are at their best, with Billy Wilder has enormous fun. There is a perfect new print on Blu-ray.

By contrast, **It Happened One Night** came as a complete surprise. I had watched it as a midday movie during the 1980s. All I remembered was that it was a lively comedy, and that it seemed to come from an era much later than 1934, when it established **Frank Capra** into a star director. While watching the fabulous new Blu-ray print, accompanied by such 'fillers' as a one-and-a-half-hour biography of Frank Capra, I could now see how revolutionary the film was, not only because of its affection for all classes of Americans, but also because of its ability to suggest sensuality and romance without a kiss being exchanged (on screen) by Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable. You could run an entire film course using scenes from *It Happened One Night*.

I've usually said that **Bob Fosse's Cabaret** was the best film of the 1970s, but I had forgotten just how good it is until I saw it recently on Blu-ray. Dazzling editing, choreography, photography, acting, and script. It's sobering to reflect, as the credits roll by, that none of the characters would have been left alive by the end of World War II.

I can't say much about the later movies on this list that has not been said in entire books of film history. However, I can report that the only time I had ever seen **John Ford's My Darling Clementine** was on a small black-and-white screen at the home of Lee and Carla Harding in early 1968, not long after I had first met them. All I remembered was Victor Mature's agonised face as he (as Doc Holliday) attempts to recall his doctoring skills as he attempts to save a woman's life. That's still the most powerful scene in the film, which is filled with classic scenes, never surpassed in any western.

**The Third Man**? Even better in Blu-ray than in the DVD version I saw a few years ago. One of the essential films, directed ostensibly by **Carol Reed** and written by Graham Greene, but hijacked by Orson Welles. It includes Welles's 'cuckoo clock' speech (which he claims he wrote) and the chase through the Viennese sewers (also resembling similar scenes in Welles's own films). A great performance by Joseph Cotten, but he should have learned by then never to appear in the same film as Orson Welles.

Watch **Jacques Tati's Play Time** on Blu-ray, in the boxed set available at all JB Hi Fi stores. This is the first time you will have seen it properly. One of the few French films made in 70 mm, it was shown in Australia in 1968 in a faded 35 mm print. The print was still faded and indistinct in

the version included in a recent DVD boxed set. Tati's daughter has since allowed the restorers to work from the 70 mm print. If you have an 80-inch screen at your place, you can finally see the effect that Tati wanted. My screen is somewhat smaller, but I could catch all much detail that had always escaped me, from the chase around the office building at the beginning to all the comings and goings of the restaurant disaster scene that occupies the final hour of the film. I felt two reactions: 'No wonder audiences couldn't make head or tail of *Play Time* in 1967' — and 'Isn't it wonderful to have stayed alive long enough to see *Play Time* p in all its glory?'

Each of the other films on the list was seen again during 2014 because a Blu-ray version became available. They include masterpieces of black-and-white photography, such as **The Spy in Black**, **Jane Eyre**, **Bunny Lake Is Missing** (widescreen b&w), **The Lost Moment**, **The Gospel According to Matthew**, and **Out of the Past**, as well as **Joseph Losey's** gloriously colourful Cannes-winning **The Go-Between**, starring Julie Christie at her most beguiling, Alan Bates at his most commanding, and Dominic Guard in his first role. (He would later appear as a main character in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.)

- 1 *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1944) directed by Robert Hamer
- 2 *Mon Oncle* (1958) Jacques Tati
- 3 *The Train* (1964) John Frankenheimer
- 4 *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957) Billy Wilder
- 5 *It Happened One Night* (1934) Frank Capra
- 6 *Cabaret* (1972) Bob Fosse
- 7 *My Darling Clementine* (1946) John Ford
- 8 *The Third Man* (1949) Carol Reed
- 9 *Play Time* (1967) Jacques Tati
- 10 *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006) Robert Altman
- 11 *The Go-Between* (1970) Joseph Losey
- 12 *The Spy In Black* (1939) Michael Powell
- 13 *Jane Eyre* (1942) Robert Stevenson
- 14 *Bunny Lake Is Missing* (1965) Otto Preminger
- 15 *The Lost Moment* (1947) Martin Gabel
- 16 *Fedora* (1978) Billy Wilder
- 17 *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964) Pier Paolo Pasolini
- 18 *Out of the Past* (1947) Jacques Tourneur

### Other four-star films seen again in 2014, in the order of viewing:

- Zabriskie Point* (1970) Michelangelo Antonioni  
*The Mouse That Roared* (1959) Jack Arnold  
*Foreign Correspondent* (1940) Alfred Hitchcock  
*A Hard Day's Night* (1964) Richard Lester  
*Ace in the Hole* (1951) Billy Wilder  
*Jour de Fete* (1947) Jacques Tati  
*M. Hulot's Holiday* (1953) Jacques Tati

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## Favourite documentaries and music videos seen for the first time in 2014

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This list groups together a whole lot of enjoyable films that could not be separated into further sublists. Documentaries? Music films? Non-fiction films? Concert films? You name them; I enjoy them. Many of the following I've been able to see only because of the generosity of Dick Jenssen.

Elaine and I watched *Springsteen and I* last night. I wanted to make sure that it was the exhilarating film that I remember, and Elaine was intrigued by the premise — that all the pieces of the film had been photographed by amateur photographers who are fans of Bruce Springsteen. Most of them are fanatical fans of the life and songs of Bruce Springsteen. But the film is exhilarating because each young film-maker had an entirely different view of her or his hero. The contributors range from a young Master's graduate who drives trucks to a British working-class couple who won a trip to see a Springsteen concert in New York only to be offered a seating upgrade to the best seats in the house, to a girl who is dragged up on stage to dance 'Dancing in the Dark' with her hero, to a chap who is so overcome by emotion when remembering the songs of his hero that he begins crying in front of camera. A busker takes pictures of a young Bruce Springsteen performing an impromptu 50-minute street gig with him. An Elvis impersonator is dragged onto stage by Bruce to sing two Elvis Presley numbers with him. And on it goes. A film of emotion and experience, with no distracting efforts at analysis.

Rather different is a recent performance of **Philip Glass's** opera *The Last American*, ostensibly about the last days of Walt Disney. This is the most enjoyable Philip Glass music I've heard. The scenario is surreal rather than realistic, reminding me of the staging of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Disney's whole life is evoked, especially his abrasive relationships with his employees and his brother Roy.

I've already written (in *Treasure*) about **Goin' Your Way**, the Sydney Opera House concert collaboration between **Paul Kelly**, Australia's finest songwriter, and **Neil Finn**, New Zealand's finest songwriter. Two hours of magic moments, finishing with a wistful 'Moon River'.

Other fine concerts listed here include those by **Yefrim Bronfman**, whose hands look like those of a brickie's labourer, performing with a great light touch a fine version of **Beethoven's** 'Emperor' Concerto, and **Daniel Barenboim** and the **Staatskapelle Berlin** introducing me to a symphony I've always felt was rather intimidating:

**Bruckner's** gigantic **8th**. I particularly enjoyed the slow movement. The enormous bass sound, all in 24 bit format on Blu-ray, revealed all the faults in my headphones, so Dick gave me a pair of headphones to replace them.

Most of the other items are biographies of one type or another.

**Muscle Shoals** is the biography of a recording studio and a concept ('Southern sound'). A group of musicians who hide away in the back country are so successful they attract all the top musicians from New York.

The Muscle Shoals studio also created a work environment for local musicians, including **Duane Allman** and his brothers in the late sixties. Allman died in a motorcycle accident in 1971, but his brilliance reflects both ways: back to the development of the Allman Brothers as a band, and forward to Southern rock movement. *Song of the South* is highly recommended.

**Frank Capra's American Dream** is one of the best films I've seen about a great American film director. It was shown in Australian at a film festival, but not released in cinemas. Now it arrives as a filler on the Blu-ray of *It Happened One Night*.

Several biographies feature their subjects talking direct to camera:

Melbourne's **Father Bob McGuire** lost his South Melbourne parish because he offered too much to too many people, and didn't ever apologise to the church hierarchy. In *Bob We Trust* is amusing and energetic, its narrative peppered with heart-stopping moments. Father Bob's friendly interrogator is John Safran.

**Gore Vidal** has never apologised to anybody in power in the USA for his scepticism about the imperialist plutocracy who rule the land. In *United States of Amnesia*, Vidal is often very witty, and he has no illusions about his own strengths and weaknesses (mainly strengths).

And in *Pharos of Chaos*, **Sterling Hayden** just talks to the camera for a couple of hours. At first he seems a bit drunk or perhaps on the edge of senility, but slowly he unravels the fabric of his remarkable life's journey.

More entrancing as a person is the great **Charlotte Rampling**. Seemingly ageless, she is interviewed in depth in *The Look*. As the title implies, the film is about surfaces and textures, and how Rampling has used them throughout her career. From time to time the film shows the extra depths of her character: her rich engagement with the people she's known throughout her life. I really must catch up on the great Charlotte Rampling

films of the last fifty years.

- 1 *Springsteen and I* (2013) directed by Baillie Walsh
- 2 *Philip Glass: The Last American*: cond. Dennis Russell Davies (2013)
- 3 *Neil Finn and Paul Kelly: Goin' Your Way* (2013) Paul Goodman
- 4 *Frank Capra's American Dream* (1997) Ken Bowser
- 5 *In Bob We Trust* (2013) Lynn-Maree Milburn
- 6 *Muscle Shoals* (2012) Greg 'Freddy' Camalier
- 7 *Song of the South: Duane Allman and the Rise of the Allman Brothers Band* (2013) Tom O'Dell
- 8 *Gore Vidal: United States of Amnesia* (2013) Nicholas Wrathall
- 9 *The Look: Charlotte Rampling* (2011) Angelina Maccarone
- 10 *Yefrim Bronfman (piano)/Andris Nelson (cond)/Rco: Beethoven: Piano Concerto No 5/Chopin: Etude In F Major/Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade/Dvorak: Slavonic Dance No 3* (2014)
- 11 *Daniel Barenboim (cond.)/Staatskapelle Berlin: Bruckner: Symphony No 8* (2011) Andreas Moreal
- 12 *Miles Davis: Live In Europe: 7 July 1969*
- 13 *Lon Chaney: A Thousand Faces* (2000) Kevin Brownlow
- 14 *Pharos Of Chaos: A Profile Of Sterling Hayden* (1982) Walter Eckart Buhler

### Other four-star items, in the order of viewing:

*Jackson Browne: Live In Concert: I'll Do Anything* (2013) Erica Ferrero  
*Stories We Tell* (2012) Sarah Polley  
*A Musicares Tribute To Bruce Springsteen* (2013) Leon Knoles  
*Linda Ronstadt: Faithless Love* (1980)  
*Building the Wrecking Ball: Daniel Lanois* (2014) Bob Lanois  
*Christian Thielemann (cond.)/Staatskapelle Dresden: Bruckner: Symphony No 8* (2012) Henning Kasten  
*Rockpile: Live At Rockpalast: Hamburg, 12 January 1980* (1980) Christan Wagner  
*American Style: Tati's 'Jour De Fete'* (2012) Stephane Goudet  
*John Hiatt: Terms of My Surrender* (2014) Gary Briggs  
*Crosby Stills Nash & Young: CSNY 1974* (2014) Graham Nash  
*Red Obsession* (2013) Warwick Ross and David Roach  
*Mystery Girl Unravelled* (2014) Alex Orbison  
*Eric Clapton: Planes Trains And Eric* (2014) David Maxwell  
*Touching The Sand: The Improbable Journey Of Nobayuki Tsujii* (2014) Peter Rosen  
*Bizet: The Pearl Fishers* (2013) Gabriele Fero

**And Part 2 of my Favourites spiel?  
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