

I feel more sorry for my son, William, who turned 21 in April and had some plans for a small gathering of his mates at our place to celebrate. That didn't happen either as the initial COVID lockdown stopped that from even getting started. Not sure what we're going to do about that now. 2020 is turning into a bloody nuisance.

WHAT I'M DOING TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY

Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING

I blame David Grigg. At the end of 2018 or early 2019, he asked me if I had ever had a thought about starting a podcast. “No,” I said. “Well, if you ever do let me know,” he replied.

He had joined our Friday night drinks crew sometime earlier and had jumped into the spirit of the evenings by discussing what he had been reading and watching. His view was that we might as well be recording these chats and putting them out into the world. A few months later I reminded him of his initial offer and we were away. David might well have had some idea of what he was doing. I didn't. I just figured I'd talk about the same sort of crap I was saying over beers, and I kept on thinking that I'd have a few extra people to annoy. Seemed liked a plan.

I've known David since the late 70s or early 80s and we had always gotten on pretty well. Looking back over the podcast episodes so far indicates that we tend to look at books and films slightly differently. Not so much from the overall view of the quality or worth of the piece, but more regarding the way we go about reviewing it. David takes a much more logical approach to his discussions, I tend to have an emotional response to a work and then look for the “why”. That is still evolving and will be interesting to watch.

One of our aims has been to try to find a film, tv series or book that one of us loves and the other one hates. We've had a bit of trouble with that as we also have similar attitudes to what constitutes a a successful work, within the sf context at least. Another thing to get searching for.

Our initial episodes were marred by recording issues as we tended to get a lot of echo and line drop-outs. We've fixed some of those problems by purchasing better equipment and finding better rooms in our houses to record in. All a matter of experience and experimentation.

I'm hoping here to discuss some of our episodes at more depth. That will be coming up in the future. In the meantime I'll just list the summaries of the first ten to give you an idea of the topics we are covering.

If you want to listen to any episodes you can download them from any podcast service or go straight to David's website at rightword.com.au.

Episode summaries:

Episode 1: Star-cold and the dread of space

The genres we read; Australian poetry; how Perry reads so many books; setting reading quotas; award nominations; and various books.

Episode 2: Generation after generation

David's introduction to reading; SF novellas; Generation starships (books and films); peak geekdom; the DARK IS RISING series by Susan Cooper; and 50 years of SF Commentary.

Episode 3: I am the one and only

2019 Hugo nominees; Australian crime fiction; the film MOON.

Episode 4: Into the Hugo-verse!

2019 Hugo short fiction nominees; 1953 Hugo winners; various stuff we've been reading and watching.

Episode 5: An incomplete history of serious events

What we've been reading lately; interview with Leigh Edmonds about his history of Australian sf fandom.

Episode 6: Moth, rust and men with matches

Retro Hugos; 1954 Hugo time machine; the film EX MACHINA.

Episode 7: All this I speak in print, for in print I found it

What are fanzines; ANZAPA; interview with Bruce Gillespie discussing his 50 years publishing SF COMMENTARY.

Episode 8: Encountering irony in the womb

1955 Hugo time machine; Kate Atkinson novels; John Le Carré's Karla trilogy.

Episode 9: Voyage to the inverted world

Interview with Robin Johnson about Aussiecon, Australia's first world science fiction convention held in 1975.

Episode 10: Meet Ursula Le Grong

I was overseas for this episode so Carey Handfield stood in as co-host; he and David discussed Carey's, and Melbourne's, fannish history and the 1975 Writer's Workshop with Ursula K. Le Guin.

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WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

In the first issue of this little magazine I summarised my reading for the first half of 2020. I didn't want to completely bore you with a full list so just gave you the high points. No such luck this time as you get a full listing of all my reading for the previous month. Well, that's the plan, but I will need to catch up this month to get myself on track. So, two months' worth this issue.

2020 targets met prior to this month: 12 books from Guardian Best 1000 novels list; and 6 Hugo winners.

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

Abbr – WFA: World Fantasy Award winner; Hugo: Hugo Award winner; Edgar: Edgar Award

winner; 1001: 1001 Books to Read Before You Die; Trans: translated.

July 2020 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
Sorcerer to the Crown	Zen Cho	Fantasy	Jul 6	e	3.4	
We Are All Completely Fine	Daryl Gregory	Horror	Jul 9	e	4.0	Novella >100p, WFA
The Ruin	Dervla McTiernan	Crime	Jul 10		4.2	Australian
The Planet Savers	Marion Zimmer Bradley	SF	Jul 11	e	3.0	
Murder and Magic	Randall Garrett	Fantasy	Jul 15		3.5	Collection, Re-read
Picnic on Paradise	Joanna Russ	SF	Jul 15		3.4	
A Fall of Moondust	Arthur C. Clarke	SF	Jul 19	e	3.3	Re-read
The Sword of Aldones	Marion Zimmer Bradley	SF	Jul 25	e	3.0	
Little Fuzzy	H. Beam Piper	SF	Jul 27	e	3.6	Re-read
The Dragon Masters	Jack Vance	SF	Jul 28	e	4.3	Novella >100p, Hugo

Seven of these were read specifically for the podcast. Normally I don't like reading two books by the same author close together but this month I had to get ready to discuss THE SWORD OF ALDONES on the podcast. Looking into it I realised that it was the second book published in the author's Darkover series so I thought it best to acquaint myself with the first book in the series (THE PLANET SAVERS) in case there was a strong connection between the two. I shouldn't have bothered. Bradley wrote this series in no particular order and then later on re-wrote THE SWORD OF ALDONES, which I only discovered later. I read the original version of the book as that was the one that was nominated and that was being discussed.

As you can see from the ratings, THE DRAGON MASTERS and THE RUIN were the pick of the month, with the rest being okay.

2020 targets met during this month: 6 single-author collections.

Books read in the month: 10

Yearly total to end of month: 73

August 2020 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
The Magic Goes Away	Larry Niven	Fantasy	Aug 6		3.4	Re-read
The Man in the Queue	Josephine Tey	Crime	Aug 6	e	3.4	
Heatwave in Berlin	Dymphna Cusack	Literary	Aug 9		4.4	Australian
The Scholar	Dervla McTiernan	Crime	Aug 12		4.0	Australian
Raven Black	Ann Cleeves	Crime	Aug 14		4.2	
Beat Not the Bones	Charlotte Jay	Crime	Aug 17	e	4.3	Australian, Edgar
Black Helicopters	Caitlin R. Kiernan	SF	Aug 19	e	3.4	Novella > 100p

Where is the Bird of Fire?	Thomas Burnett Swann	Fantasy	Aug 24		3.4	Collection
Best SF&F of the Year: Volume 12	ed Jonathan Strahan	SF/F	Aug 24	e	3.5	Anthology
Solaris	Stanislaw Lem	SF	Aug 28	e	4.0	1001, Trans

Books read in the month: 10

Yearly total to end of month: 83

Notes:

THE MAGIC GOES AWAY (1978) is a shortish fantasy novel by Larry Niven, more usually known for his hard sf novels such as RINGWORLD, and its sequels. This book is a sequel to his 1969 short story "Not Long Before the End". It depicts an ancient earth where the source of magic is a non-renewable resource, which is slowly depleted by spell-casting. The original short story features The Warlock who discovers that magic is running out and also who figures out a way to expend the magic resource very quickly in a limited location. This novel follows the Warlock and his companions as they attempt to procure an unlimited magic supply. A slight work. 3.4/5.0

THE MAN IN THE QUEUE (1929) is the first of Josephine Tey's novels featuring Inspector Alan Grant, the most famous of which is THE DAUGHTER OF TIME – a novel about Grant's attempt to solve the mystery King Richard III and the death of the Princes in the Tower. This book shows the author starting off in the crime field and while it has a lot of very good elements it is let down a tad by its rather contrived ending. [Discussed on the podcast – Ep 34, 18 August 2020.] 3.4/5.0

HEATWAVE IN BERLIN (1961) – see review elsewhere in this issue. 4.4/5.0

THE SCHOLAR (2019) is the second of Dervla McTiernan's crime novels about DS Cormac Reilly set in Galway, Ireland. McTiernan is an Irish-Australian author living in Perth who has now published three books in this series – the first two have received excellent reviews and appeared on a number of awards shortlists. I have one major reservation about them but will cover this in a longer review sometime in the future. [Discussed on the podcast – Ep 34, 18 August 2020.] 4.0/5.0

RAVEN BLACK by Ann Cleeves (2006) is the first in her Shetland Island series of crime novels featuring Detective Jimmy Perez. This series has been adapted for television under the general title SHETLAND. This follows the investigation into the murder of a young woman on the island which appears to have some connection with the disappearance of a young girl some six or seven years before. Smoothly handled, good characters, and excellent use of the location. Cleeves knows how to lead the reader down one path towards a suspect only for the reader to realise they have been looking in the wrong direction the whole time. [Discussed on the podcast – Ep 34, 18 August 2020.] 4.2/5.0

BEAT NOT THE BONES (1952) – a full review will follow next month. [Discussed on the podcast – Ep 34, 18 August 2020.] 4.2/5.0

BLACK HELICOPTERS (2018) is an sf novella by Caitlin R. Kiernan, and a sequel to her 2017 novella AGENTS OF DREAMLAND. This is obviously a middle section of a much larger work

and, as such, is complicated by its many character viewpoints and jumping timelines. This was a bit of a struggle on its own. 3.4/5.0

WHERE IS THE BIRD OF FIRE? (1970) is a collection of three novellas by Thomas Burnett Swann. The title story was nominated for a Hugo Award in 1963. This is the only book of Swann's that I've read and his common thread here is the retelling of ancient stories (the founding of Rome, the life of Xerxes I) with the addition of magical creatures such as dryads and djinns. A good stylist but not really to my liking. [Title story discussed on the podcast – Ep 33, 4 August 2020.] 3.4/5.0

BEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY OF THE YEAR : VOLUME TWELVE edited by Jonathan Strahan (2018). A mammoth collection of the best stories from the genre published in 2017. I liked about half of them which isn't bad at all. A very good way to get an overview of what is being published in the field. It also helps in getting a look at new writers before tackling their longer works. I'm reading 2017 stories this year so there will probably be a few more of these Best Of anthologies to follow in the months ahead. 3.5/5.0

SOLARIS by Stanislaw Lem (1961) A major novel by this Polish sf writer, exploring First Contact protocols and morality, alien intelligence, and human identity. Slightly marred by some massive info-dumps it's a novel of the intellect rather than of action. 4.0/5.0

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WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

The current lockdown restrictions in Melbourne have given me a lot of free time. And I can't spend all of it reading. So I've been catching up on some television.

Robyn and I both like a good police procedural and loved our time in Iceland in 2019, so it was an easy decision to watch a couple of television programs which combined the two.

Somewhere or other I'd heard about the Icelandic drama TRAPPED, two seasons of 10 episodes each, maybe because it had been broadcast on the SBS free-to-air channel here in Australia. The first season (2016) follows Andri Olafsson who is the chief of police in a remote town in northern Iceland. At first the town wasn't identified but it looked familiar in parts and a bit of research showed that it was set in Siglufjörður, a town that Robyn was happy to see on our trip. She kept on telling all our fellow travellers that this was the "crime fiction murder capital" of Iceland, based solely on her reading of the Dark Iceland series of crime novels by Ragnar Jónasson. Our driver wasn't overly convinced but did give us an extra drive around the town and included a stop at the shop of Iceland's only certified chocolatier. Just north of the town we hit our northernmost point of Iceland and we were able to arrange a stop to celebrate us reaching a point which was the furthest from home we had ever been. The Australians on the bus concurred, the others just thought we were all a bit weird.

With all of that in the background we were positively inclined towards the drama before it even began. And we weren't disappointed. It starts with a gruesome find in a fishing net of a limbless human torso. It's winter, the weather is closing in, there hasn't been a murder in the town for years and poor Andri has to investigate with a minimum of resources and backup. At first he thinks the body came off the weekly ferry. An approach that seems to be backed by the

identification of a Lithuanian people-smuggler on board the ferry who makes a run for it. But, of course, there is much more to this than easy solutions. The weather closes in, the town is cut-off, and Andri has to start investigating people he knows in the town. The atmosphere becomes steadily more claustrophobic and tension builds in both his personal and professional lives. The final outcome is both logical and satisfying, tying off all the loose ends.

The second season, made and set three years later, has Andri now living in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik. An attack on a national politician outside the Parliament in Reykjavik has connections with his old town so he is sent by his superiors to investigate. A local man is murdered, there are connections with a right-wing nationalist group called the Hammer of Thor, there are locals protesting a new power plant and a mass-killing of fish in a nearby lake has been discovered, and poor old Andri is in it up to his ears again. Added to that the problems with his family just get worse.

I often carry on about crime fiction needing to use its locations for maximum effect, and this series shows how true that idea is. The environment is essential to the plot, it shapes the characters and it is impossible to imagine the story in any other setting.

Both series are recommended if you're a fan of "Scandi noir", or if you just like a drama series well-told and well-produced.

My rating: 4.5/5.0 for each season.

After that satisfying drama we had a look around on Netflix to see if there was anything else of interest and found THE VALHALLA MURDERS which we'd had recommended. It looked promising, but 15 minutes in we couldn't stand it: the English dubbing was so bad it kept dragging us out of the story and just grated on our nerves. Our household tech support, generally identified as our son William, told us, with a slight shake of the head, that it was possible to access an English subtitle track on the platform. Menus accessed, options chosen and we were watching what appeared to be a completely different program; one that was what we had been expecting.

Again a police procedural, this time set in Reykjavik (watching was regularly interrupted by cries of "We've been there!"), this 8-episode drama follows the investigation of a series of murders where the victims have identical stab wounds on their eyes. The Police Commissioner is worried that his local police won't have the resources required to do the job properly and so brings in Amar Böðvarsson, an expatriate Icelander currently living in Oslo. Before long it becomes apparent that the victims all have a connection to a boy's home called Valhalla and the police have to race to identify other potential victims and possible perpetrators.

Plot, location, atmosphere, characterisation, tension, this series handles all of them very well. Not quite to the level of TRAPPED, though you won't feel that your time was wasted watching this one. Just remember to use the subtitle track.

My rating: 4.2/5.0

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REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

HEATWAVE IN BERLIN by Dymphna Cusack (1961)

Genre: Literary

Dymphna Cusack is one of those many Australian women writers of the twentieth century who appear to have been nearly forgotten by the modern publishing world – I'm thinking here of such writers as Zora Cross and Mabel Forrest. I'd guess that few, if any, of her 12 novels are currently in print. This novel, HEATWAVE IN BERLIN, was originally published in 1961 by Heinemann in hardback, by Pan in paperback in 1963, and then in 1972 by Cedric Chivers in England. So it has been out of print for nearly 50 years, which is a great pity because it is an excellent book deserving of a wider readership.

Joy Miller is a young Sydney-based woman who has married Stephen Miller around 1950. Stephen had immigrated from Germany after the war, changing his name from Stefan von Muhler to Miller in order to fit in more with his new life in Australia. Ten years after the marriage, the couple have two children, Anne and Patricia, and Stephen is now a senior manager in his father-in-law's engineering firm in Sydney.

After hearing from Stephen's aunt that his mother is ill in Berlin, Joy, Stephen and Anne take a boat to Europe leaving Patricia in the care of Joy's mother. But from the start of the journey things are not right: Stephen is strangely unenthusiastic about the trip and starts to become uncommunicative.

On arrival in Berlin, all seems well. Stephen's family appears genuinely pleased to see him, though his mother is not as ill as was indicated. Joy begins to enjoy her time in Berlin, visiting art galleries and museums, shopping, and attending the theatre. Her German is poor but she slowly starts to pick up a few words here and there and the German community all speak excellent English, except, that is, for Stephen's father who makes no attempt.

Joy and Stephen grow more apart the longer the visit continues, and it gradually becomes apparent that all is not as it first appeared with the von Muhlers. There is a sense of building menace in the atmosphere surrounding the family which becomes quite creepy in parts. More family members arrive at the house and the reader begins to understand more about what is going on than Joy can see. I was reminded somewhat of the butler in Ishiguro's THE REMAINS OF THE DAY in this regard. It takes a rather special writer to be able to carry this off and Cusack does as well as Ishiguro here.

After some months in Berlin Joy runs into her old Sydney music professor who is at first very pleased to see her, but becomes quite distracted when he finds out who her in-laws really are. Joy slowly becomes aware that Stephen's family were major backers of Hitler in the war and still long for the days when they ruled as they liked. Ultimately Joy and Stephen are reconciled and are forced to make a major decision about their futures.

This is a powerful novel detailing the contrast between the openness of Australian life with the closeted, constrained elitism of the German household in Berlin. You can easily see this as a metaphor for the way Western countries slowly came to learn of atrocities committed by the Nazis after World War II; at first denying that this could ever have occurred to the final realisation of the extent of the crime against humanity.

The question occurs to me that reading this book 60 years after it was written has provided me with a greater understanding and knowledge of the Holocaust which may have altered my perceptions of it compared to a reader of the early 1960s. There is nothing I can do about that other than to suggest that this novel might have had a greater impact on that early reader; which would indicate a powerful experience indeed.

A forgotten book by a forgotten writer, both of which should receive greater recognition.

My rating: 4.4/5

[Cross-posted to Goodreads.com and to the Facebook Australian Literature page.]

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EMAILS OF COMMENT (re PERRYSCOPE 1)

[Note: you need to be aware that if you write to me and comment on the fanzine I may well quote you.]

Mark Loney noted my problems with finding work: "...I agree with you about poor behaviour by recruiters. I haven't been looking for work but have been contacted by several recruiters looking for someone with my skill set to put forward for various contract roles. I've agreed to a couple of those approaches, been put welcomed enthusiastically into the fold, put forward to the client and then... silence.

"On one hand, I can see that the recruiters are under the pump to identify candidates and then put them forward - sometimes on an exclusive basis but often in competition with other agencies (I've been approached by multiple agencies for a couple of roles). On the other, failing to follow up with the candidate is just rude, even if the news is that the process has fallen over or the position has gone to someone else. My conclusion is that recruitment agencies are transactionally oriented rather than relationship oriented, but while that might be commercially viable for them in the short to medium term, it's difficult to see how it could be a good approach in the long term. I'm certainly less inclined to invest any time with them even for a role that looks worthwhile pursuing."

PM – More than anything I got annoyed with the lack of common courtesy. I just needed to be told whether or not I had won a position following the interview. I wasn't going to be blaming the recruiter if I hadn't got the job. It was all business, there was nothing personal in any of it.

I also heard from: Nick Price, Carey Handfield, Julian Warner, Rose Mitchell, Martin Field and Tineke Hazel. Thanks one and all.

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Captivitatis Defricatus Urina 1

[Being an occasional attempt at humor.]

DID YOU WATCH THE HUGO AWARDS CEREMONY? I GATHER IT CAUSED A FEW CONTROVERSIES.

WELL, IT DID RUN TOO LONG, AND GRRM DID MIS-PRONOUNCE SOME NAMES. BUT THE REAL PROBLEM WERE HIS **MICROAGRESSIONS**.



WTAF??

HIS USE OF NICKNAMES, ANECDOTES AND INSIDER TERMINOLOGY AS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO ALIENATE HIS VIEWERS.



OH, YOU MEAN HE WAS JUST BEING FANNISH?

YOU COULD SAY THAT, I COULDN'T POSSIBLY COMMENT.

