

Perryscope 7

SETTING UP A
WORLD CON BID
HOW TO PRODUCE
A FANZINE
MIDDLEMISS 19121



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Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover by W. H. Chong.

INTRODUCTION

And so another year flashes by. Seeming so slow when it was running yet so brief on looking back.

It's not one that I want to spend too much time contemplating. For all its tragedy and upset it wasn't as bad for me as for others, even though I lost my father. Others came out of it much worse.

On the brighter side of the ledger I personally made it through relatively the same, though there is slightly more of me this year than last. I was able to rekindle some old interests to fill my retirement time and read a fair number of books. My immediate family are all well and in employment and I am not – employed that is. So pluses on both sides there.

Like everyone else I have great hopes that 2021 will be better. I look forward to politics being quieter, and humanity being kinder and more gentle on the earth. I suspect I will be disappointed.

Such is life.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

MY READING IN 2020

2020 is a year most will want to forget. From what I can gather, from reading newspaper articles and listening to podcasts, a lot of people really struggled to get into any sort of reading regime at all during the year, citing their anxiety and worry about the state of the world. I didn't have that sort of problem. I had a few flat months (May, November and December) when my reading didn't hit the number of books I would have liked but I'm aware of why that happened, and it had nothing to do with the pandemic.

It was also a year when my reading habits or patterns changed away from a lot of time spent on public transport during a working week to sitting on the couch in retirement. That meant more books read on paper and fewer on the e-reader, more old books off the shelf and fewer

new purchases, and certainly many fewer anthologies. That's not a bad thing, just a difference in the pattern and something to be aware of.

As mentioned in previous issues of this fanzine I always like to set myself targets, an overall number and then a series of targets for sub-categories. I'm fully aware that I probably won't meet the bulk of these aims when I start out on a year's reading, it's just a little exercise I set for myself to keep me on track.

The overall number for 2020 was a target of 102, up by 6 from 2019. I did well there passing that figure on October 28 with *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke and finally hitting a figure of 119 books read in the year. That is up by 10 over 2019's total of 109, yet not back to the sum of 128 I managed in 2018. That is now starting to look rather like an outlier in this statistical domain. It's my aim to be able to finally settle on a figure of 120 a year. Given this year's performance I'm looking at this being the best I will be able to manage.

The bulk of the extra books read this year were read as a result of programming choices for the podcast I co-host, TWO CHAIRS TALKING. Through the year we had run a number of episodes devoted to the Hugo Awards of the early 1960s, deciding early on that, in order to provide the best overview of the year in question, we really needed to read all of the novels and shorter fiction works that appeared on each ballot. As a result we went from reading one novel and one short piece to four or five entries in each category for each episode. I don't begrudge that reading time (though we did decide later in the year to spread the episodes out a little) but it did tend to skew my reading more towards older genre fiction, specifically to older science fiction written by older white males.

In 2019 I read 63 books out of 109 that could be considered genre (ie science fiction, fantasy, or horror) and 76 out of 119 in 2020. Crime fiction reading was down a lot: from 27 in 2019 to only 15 in 2020. Again due to moving the emphasis to more genre. And then non-genre books went up from 14 (2019) to 18 (2020). Swings and roundabouts.

Digging deeper I find that the number of books re-read for the second, third or whatever time, went from 19 in 2019 to 28 in 2020; pretty much indicating the difference in the two years in just one stat.

I am quite happy to admit that the way I keep the statistics relating to my reading in a year is overly obsessive and that it isn't for everyone. Yet as I get more into assessing my reading habits and looking back over a year's literary intake I find myself thinking that it is a definite advantage. How else could I know that I spoke about 76 different books on the podcast during the year? Or that I read half of the books on paper? Uninteresting? Not to me.

BEST BOOKS OF 2020

As previously I'll split these into categories and then provide an overall "Best Of the Year" at the end. Generally books will only make this list if I gave them a rating of 4.0/5.0 or more.

David Grigg and I did a lot of reading of "older" science fiction novels for the podcast during the year. Hence we felt the need to split the SF category into "old" and "new" in order to have

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a proper differentiation. There was some good stuff read in this category, but also a lot that was probably better left unread.

SF (old)

Novels read: 14

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 5 | <i>Dune World</i> by Frank Herbert (1964) | 4.5 |
| 4 | <i>Way Station</i> by Clifford D. Simak (1964) | 4.7 |
| 3 | <i>The Man in the High Castle</i> by Philip K. Dick (1962) | 4.7 |
| 2 | <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i> by Walter M. Miller Jr (1960) | 4.8 |
| 1 | <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> by Ursula K. Le Guin (1969) | 4.9 |

Notes on the winner: Probably my favourite sf novel of all time. Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards in 1970. Discussed in our first anniversary episode of the podcast. Genly Ai is an ambassador from the inter-planetary Ekumen, a confederacy of human-inhabited planets, to the planet Winter. Each of these planets was “seeded” many millennia ago by the Hainish people. Now an attempt is being made to re-establish diplomatic contact between the planets. But Ai struggles with the planetary politics and the ambi-sexual nature of the planet’s inhabitants. A major work in the history of the field. I don’t hold with the idea of an sf canon that *must* be read. Though if I did this would be the first book on it.

Honourable mentions:

Solaris by Stanislaw Lem (1970) 4.3

Roadside Picnic by Arkady & Boris Strugatsky (1977) 4.0

The Planet Buyer by Cordwainer Smith (1964) 4.0

SF (new)

Novels read: 26

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 5 | <i>Ghost Species</i> by James Bradley (2020) | 4.2 |
| 4 | <i>The Ten Thousand Doors of January</i> by Alix E. Harrow (2019) | 4.6 |
| 3 | <i>A Memory Called Empire</i> by Arkady Martine (2019) | 4.6 |
| 2 | <i>Infinite Detail</i> by Tim Maugham (2019) | 4.7 |
| 1 | <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> by Kim Stanley Robinson (2020) | 4.8 |

Notes on the winner: this came in very late in the year – mid-December. Thereby justifying my waiting until the year has turned before reflecting backwards. It may well be Robinson’s best book in his long career. From statements that he has made recently it looks like it might be his last. I hope not. From the evidence presented here Robinson certainly has a lot more to offer.

Honourable mentions:

Gideon the Ninth by Tamsyn Muir (2019) 4.0

A Song for a New Day by Sarah Pinsker (2019) 4.0

I was suitably impressed with this category, probably more so than many other observers. The quality of the novels drops away quite quickly here in comparison with the SF (old) category, but that is to be expected given we are picking the “best” of the older novels to read.

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The Robinson was the standout for me, though I suspect not for a lot of others. I doubt it will feature highly in the awards' lists in 2021.

Fantasy

Novels read: 6

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 3 | <i>Middlegame</i> by Seanan McGuire (2019) | 4.2 |
| 2 | <i>Piranesi</i> by Susanna Clarke (2020) | 4.4 |
| 1 | <i>Voices</i> by Ursula K. Le Guin (2006) | 4.6 |

Notes on the winner: Volume 2 of the Annals of the Western Shore. The fictional city of Ansul is invaded and overthrown by the Alds, who believe the written word to be evil, though they revere spoken story-telling. Memer Galva lives in the house of the Waylord Sulter Galva who teaches her to read and introduces her to a great secret, that he is the guardian of a vast library of Ansul literature. As much as the novel is about the power of the written word it is also a coming-of-age story. Can be thought of as a companion piece to the author's novel *The Telling*, which is set in her Hainish Universe, and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. This is a very fine novel indeed.

Honourable mentions:

None.

I normally read more Fantasy novels in any given year than this: 13 in 2019, and 20 in 2018. I suspect the drop here was caused by the reading concentration on older sf. I could really only put this top three on the list as I couldn't find 5 with a rating over 4.0.

Crime

Novels read: 13

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | <i>The Ruin</i> by Dervla McTiernan (2018) | 4.2 |
| 4 | <i>Beat Not the Bones</i> by Charlotte Jay (1952) | 4.2 |
| 3 | <i>The Good Turn</i> by Dervla McTiernan (2020) | 4.3 |
| 2 | <i>Strangers on a Train</i> by Patricia Highsmith (1950) | 4.5 |
| 1 | <i>Peace</i> by Garry Disher (2019) | 4.5 |

Notes on the winner: Number 2 in a series of crime novels set in the mid-north of South Australia. Constable Paul Hirschhausen runs a one-cop station in the dry farming country south-east of the Flinders Ranges. He's still new in town but the community work — welfare checks and working bees — is starting to pay off. Now Christmas is here and, apart from a grass fire, two boys stealing a ute and Brenda Flann entering the front bar of the pub without exiting her car, Hirsch's life has been peaceful. And then he's contacted by Sydney police and asked to look in on a family living outside town on a forgotten back road. Disher in top gear.

Honourable mentions:

- Raven Black* by Ann Cleeves (2006) 4.2
Fatherland by Robert Harris (1991) 4.0
The Scholar by Dervla McTiernan (2019) 4.0

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Four women authors in my top five and four novels by Australians. I think my preferences are starting to show.

Literary

Novels read: 13

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | <i>Heatwave in Berlin</i> by Dymphna Cusack (1961) | 4.4 |
| 4 | <i>The Women in Black</i> by Madeleine St John (1993) | 4.6 |
| 3 | <i>The Rain Heron</i> by Robbie Arnott (2020) | 4.6 |
| 2 | <i>A Month in the Country</i> by J. L. Carr (1980) | 4.7 |
| 1 | <i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i> by John Fowles (1969) | 4.9 |

Notes on the winner: My all-time favourite novel, discussed in our first anniversary episode of the podcast. Set in the village of Lyme Regis on England's south coast. Charles Smithson, a gentleman of independent means and with a scientific bent, is on holiday with his fiancée Ernestina Freeman when he meets the mysterious French Lieutenant's woman, of the book's title, standing on the end of the Cobb, staring out to sea. A beautifully written post-modern novel which deals with the morals of the cloistered Victorian era, women's standing in society, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Exceptional.

Honourable mentions:

A Superior Spectre by Angela Meyer (2018) 4.3

The Animals in that Country by Laura Jean McKay (2020) 4.0

Three more Australian novels here in the top five. I can see this trend continuing into 2021. There is vast amount of Australian fiction that I completely unfamiliar with. I must do what I can to alleviate that problem. I can see that I will be delving into the backlist catalog of Australian Classics as published by Text Publishing as a major resource.

Single-author Collections

Books read: 10

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | <i>A Rose for Ecclesiastes</i> by Roger Zelazny (1969) | 4.2 |
|---|--|-----|

Notes on the winner: A major collection of four of Zelazny's early works, including the title story and "The Doors of his Face, the Lamps of his Mouth", both nominated for the Hugo award. These stories date from the start of Zelazny's dazzling writing period of the early to mid-1960s, and offer a perfect introduction to his best work.

Honourable mentions:

Murder and Magic by Randall Garrett (1973) 3.7

Most of the single-author collections read this year included shorter fiction which was nominated for various Hugo awards in the early 1960s. While the nominated story was often of reasonable quality and interest the bulk of the collections appeared to be more an assemblage of an author's uncollected fiction, rather than a representation of their best work. A product of the availability of the material in those times I suspect. I added the Garrett into my honourable mentions list not so much because it met my rating criteria but because I just enjoyed it so much.

Novellas

Read: 18 (14 of more than 100 pages, and 4 fewer)

- 5 *Sisters of the Vast Black* by Linda Rather (2019) 4.0
- 4 *Prosper's Demon* by K. J. Parker (2020) 4.1
- 3 *The Dragon Masters* by Jack Vance (1962) 4.3
- 2 *The Children's Bach* by Helen Garner (1984) 4.4
- 1 *This is How You lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar & Max Gladstone (2019) 4.4

Notes on the winner: The top choice here was the big novella in the genre for 2019: winner of the Hugo, Nebula and Locus awards. Two warring factions are fighting a war across time. And an unlikely love starts to arise between two rival agents, who come to realise that the only person who can understand them is their enemy. Taut and innovative, it is reminiscent of *Time Was*, a novella by Ian McDonald of a few years back, though not to that standard.

Honourable mentions:

- We Are All Completely Fine* by Daryl Gregory (2014) 4.0
The Haunting of Tram Car 015 by P. Djeli Clarke (2019) 4.0

Non-Fiction

Books read: 5

- 3 *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (1949) 4.2
- 2 *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room* by Geoff Dyer (2012) 4.3
- 1 *Unreliable Memoirs* by Clive James (1980) 4.5

Notes on the winner and another: This first volume of James's series of autobiographical works was a revelation when it first appeared back in 1980 when James was 40. Irreverent, witty and, at times, laugh-out-loud funny, it was rather unlike anything we'd read before, and yet seemed exactly the sort of memoir you'd expect James would write. This volume takes James from his early boyhood years in the Sydney suburb of Kogarah to the ship that first took him to England. The Campbell was the disappointment of the year for me. I had it as my favourite non-fiction book of all time in our first anniversary podcast episode and yet it didn't even make my top non-fiction book of the year. It's just part of the joys and disappointments of re-reading.

Honourable mentions:

None.

Overall Top 5 Books of the Year

- 5 *Infinite Detail* by Tim Maugham (2019) 4.7
- 4 *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller Jr (1960) 4.8
- 3 *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson (2020) 4.8
- 2 *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1969) 4.9
- 1 *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles (1969) 4.9

Honourable mentions:

A Month in the Country by J. L. Carr (1980) 4.7

The Man in the High Castle by Philip K. Dick (1962) 4.7

Way Station by Clifford D. Simak (1964) 4.7

The Tango Briefing by Adam Hall (1973) 4.7

She turned to look at him—or as it seemed to Charles, through him. It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favored feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy.

Charles felt immediately as if he had trespassed; as if the Cobb belonged to that face, and not to the Ancient Borough of Lyme. It was not a pretty face, like Ernestina's. It was certainly not a beautiful face, by any period's standard or taste. But it was an unforgettable face, and a tragic face. Its sorrow welled out of it as purely, naturally and unstoppably as water out of a woodland spring. There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness. The madness was in the empty sea, the empty horizon, the lack of reason for such sorrow; as if the spring was natural in itself, but unnatural in welling from a desert.

— ***The French Lieutenant's Woman*** by John Fowles



WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

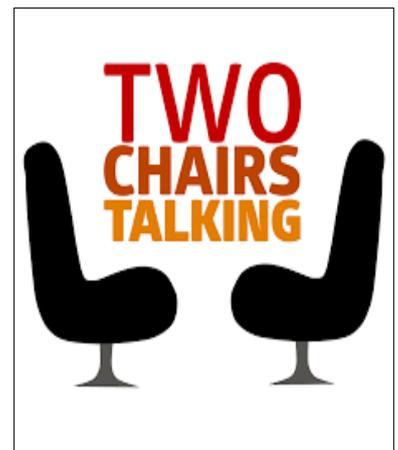
Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING, co-hosted with David Grigg

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 43: Yeah, I read a few books last year (12 January 2021)
David and I work through our Best Books of the Year, though we don't quite finish. This is basically a rehashing of the information given earlier in this issue, but with more laughs.

Episode 44: And I watched some stuff, too (19 January 2021)
We finalise our Best Books of the Year discussion and then move on to our Best TV and Film.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at www.rightword.com.au or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

2021 targets met this month: none, well, it is only one month after all.

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

Abbr – YA: young adult; Trans: translated; Aust: Australian; nvla: novella; Anth: anthology.

January 2021 books

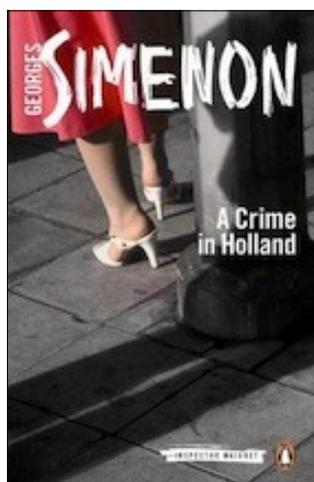
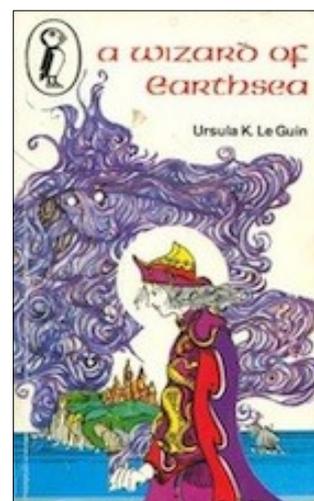
Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
<i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i>	Ursula K. Le Guin	Fantasy	Jan 3		4.8	YA
<i>A Crime in Holland</i>	Georges Simenon	Crime	Jan 6	e	3.2	Trans
<i>The Survivors</i>	Jane Harper	Crime	Jan 11		3.8	Aust
<i>Mapping the Interior</i>	Stephen Graham Jones	Horror	Jan 13	e	4.0	nvla
<i>The Player of Games</i>	Iain M. Banks	Sf	Jan 19		4.2	
<i>Nebula Awards Stories 1</i>	Ed Damon Knight	Sf	Jan 27		3.8	Anth
<i>Shadow in the Empire of Light</i>	Jane Routley	Fantasy	Jan 29		3.4	Aust
<i>Drowned Country</i>	Emily Tesh	Fantasy	Jan 31	e		nvla

Books read in the month: 8

Yearly total to end of month: 8

Notes:

A Wizard of Earthsea (1968) – Ged (common name Sparrowhawk) is a young man on the island of Gont on the world of Earthsea. After conjuring a major spell of weather magic to thwart an invading group of pirates he is taken under the wing of the local wizard. Before long it becomes obvious that the boy has far more power than was suspected. He is sent to the wizard's school on the island of Roke but his temper, pride and power gets the better of him and he accidentally unleashes a shadow force into the world; a force that firstly pursues him, and which he then later pursues throughout the rest of the book. The novel is a fable



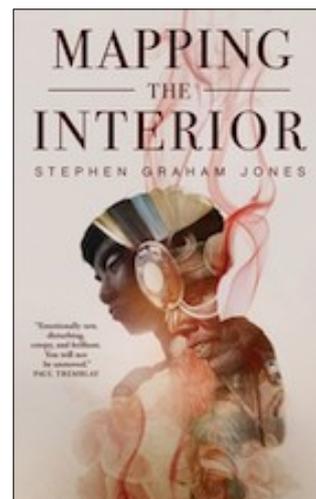
exploring the consequences of the miss-use of power and how a young man must grow into his abilities in his own time. One of the great modern fantasies, originally published as YA but which is much, much more than that label suggests. One of my all-time favourites. R: 4.8/5.0

A Crime in Holland (1931) – Number 8 in the Maigret series of novels. Maigret finds himself seconded to the investigation into a murder in the northern Dutch coastal town of Delfzijl. A visiting French professor is being held on suspicion of the murder as he was found leaving the house where the crime was committed with the

relevant revolver in his hand. The town is quiet and self-contained and the murder investigation takes on the aspects of a manor house mystery: a small number of suspects all of whom seem to have both a motive and an opportunity. Maigret is doubly hampered by his lack of Dutch and the paucity of French speakers among the suspects but he works his way through the problem, antagonising just about everyone along the way until he finds a satisfactory conclusion. A mid-level example of the Maigret novels. R: 3.2/5.0

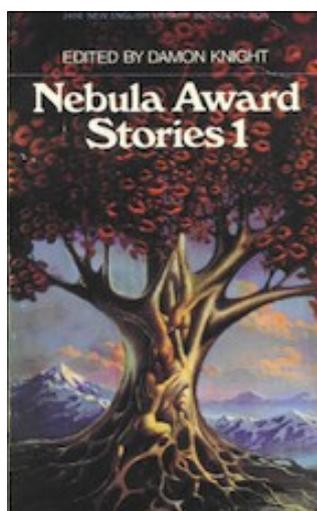
The Survivors (2020) – See larger review later in this issue.

Mapping the Interior (2017) – Junior, a twelve-year-old Native American boy, lives with his mother and younger epileptic brother in a trailer park far from their original home. His father is no longer around, presumed drowned some years before. This horror novella opens with Junior sighting the ghostly figure of his father in the middle of the night. He's unsure about the sighting and doesn't tell anyone, but then starts to see the figure more and more often. And he then begins to notice a pattern between the sightings and his brother's fits. He suspects a malevolent connection yet is later saved by the ghost from a pack of dogs in a very violent encounter. Jones's short novella is a coming-of-age tale told against a backdrop of family chaos. Disturbing without being off-putting. R: 4.0/5.0 Winner of the 2017 Bram Stoker Award for Best Long Fiction. Nominated for the Shirley Jackson and World Fantasy Awards.

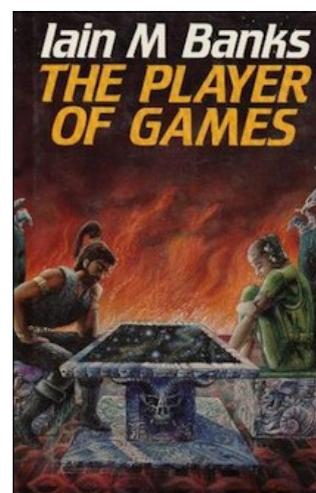


The Player of Games (1988) – The second novel in Banks's Culture series, set some 700 years after the first. Gurgeh is one of the greatest game-players in the Culture, but he has become somewhat bored with the standard games he plays. He gets in touch with Contact – the Culture organisation which specialises in alien interactions – to see if they have anything for him. A drone representative offers him the chance of a lifetime, the opportunity to play a game in a barbaric Empire a hundred thousand light-years away. After some manipulation he accepts and enters the

tournament of Azad, in the empire of Azad, in a game so integral to that society that the winner of the tournament becomes Emperor. Banks pits the philosophies of the Culture and the Empire against each other via the game playing in such a way that the fate of both may well be at stake. A step up from his previous novel in the series, Banks really started to hit his stride here. R: 4.2/5.0



Nebula Awards Stories 1 (1969) – An anthology of the short fiction winners (novella, novelette and short story) for the 1966 Nebula Awards. Also includes four runners-up. The winners will all be reviewed below as I wanted to keep a record of my thoughts on them for an upcoming podcast episode. The Ellison short story is the

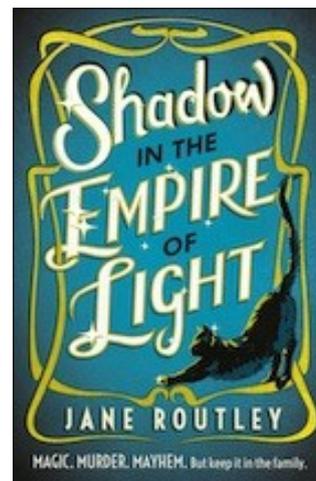


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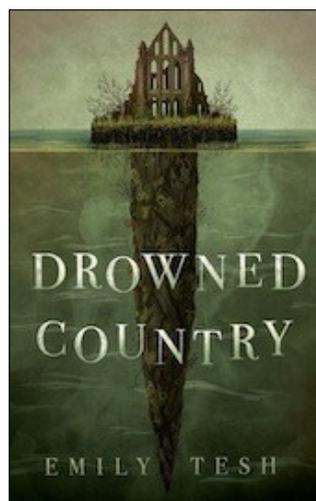
only overlap winner with the Hugo (the Nebulas had three shorter fiction categories and the Hugos one). The winners here are all worthy stories though the non-winners show a real drop-off in quality. Zelazny had a BIG year in 1965, winning a novel Hugo and two short fiction Nebulas. If you are at all interested in the sf prize winners for a particular year this is an essential anthology series.

R: 3.8/5.0

Shadow in the Empire of Light (2021) – Shine is a non-magical young woman who is part of the Imperial Household of the Empire of Light. She lives and works on a farm with her aunt and the novel deals with the arrival of Shine’s Imperial and magical relations for the annual Blessing Festival. Usually a period of rejoicing, feasting and fornication, this time things do not go as planned. Shine is protecting Shadow, a white-skinned “ghost” from a neighbouring country, her cousins Bright and Klea have deep secrets they are trying to hide, and then her Aunt Blazeann is found murdered and things threaten to get totally out of control. A light fantasy with a large number of characters it takes a while to get going yet comes together reasonably well at the end. Plenty of room for sequels. R: 3.4/5.0



Drowned Country (2020) – Novella sequel to the author’s *Silver in the Wood*, which I capsule-reviewed in *Perryscope 6*. Two years on from the previous novella and Henry Silver is still in the manor house attached to the Greenhollow Wood, while Tobias Finch is working with Henry’s mother. Henry is called into his mother’s service to help find a missing young woman. He and Tobias track her down to the local ruined abbey where they find she has murdered an ancient vampire and is using his body magic as a means of entering fairyland. Tesh has written another winner here which extends the English woodland magic she explored in the first novella. I’d expect that she will probably appear on more awards shortlists this year, and she certainly has the chops for a larger piece of work. And I look forward to that. R: 3.8/5.0



Notes on other short fiction:

As mentioned in my capsule review of *Nebula Award Stories 1* above, the following reviews have been written as a memory aid when it comes time to talk about them on the podcast. I also want to keep a record of the novellas I read through the year, which were not published as standalone volumes, in order to better reflect my “Best Of” selections at the end of 2021.

Mostly these will be stories that are nominated for, or won, various awards that we’ll cover on the podcast so you should expect anything at the novella (17,500 to 40,000 words), novelette (7,500 to 17,500 words) or short story (less than 7,500 words) levels.

“The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth” by Roger Zelazny (*F&SF* March 1965)

Novelette

Nominated for the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction.

Winner of the 1966 Nebula Award for Best Novelette.

An entry in that sub-genre of “Alternate Venus” stories, where Venus is cloud-covered, hot, and watery but ultimately habitable. Carlton Davits is a fisherman, obsessed with landing the largest water creature on Venus, *Ichthyform Leviosaurus Levianthus*, a 100-metre long monster. He lost a fortune in his own attempt and is now hired by Jean Luharich, a super-rich cosmetics model – the two have some past romantic history. The story follows the straight-forward account of the hunt but told in typical sparkling style by Zelazny. This is a Great White Hunter story in an sf setting which would generally have made it rather boring but Zelazny saves it with his writing verve. R: 4.2/5.0

“Marque and Reprisal” – Poul Anderson (*F&SF* Feb 1965)

Novella

Nominated for the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction.

A letter of marque in the Age of Sail was a government licence that authorised a private person to act as a privateer, or pirate if you prefer. Anderson’s novella updates that granting of licence to a future space era when Earth forces have expanded into the galaxy and have started to come into conflict with an alien race, the Alerion. After the human inhabited planet of New Europe is attacked by the Alerion the Earth authorities seem reluctant to either investigate rumours of survivors or to retaliate. Gunnar Heim, a wealthy ex-Space Navy man, arranges for the French Government to issue him a licence and he sets out to disrupt the Alerion takeover of the planet. This reads like the first part of a novel and suffers because of that. There is little of interest here. This and two other novellas were fixed-up into Anderson’s novel *The Star Fox*. Better to read the full novel I suspect. R: 2.8/5.0

“The Saliva Tree” – Brian W. Aldiss (*F&SF* Sep 1965)

Novella

Joint winner the 1966 Nebula Award for Best Novella (with “He Who Shapes” by Zelazny) Brian Aldiss’s homage to the sf of H. G. Wells involves the crashing of a meteor into a pond on a farm near the small English town of Cottersall. A scientifically-minded young man, Gregory Rolles, who is actually a correspondent of Wells’s, goes to investigate and discovers that it is actually an alien spaceship inhabited by invisible aliens. Strange happenings begin to occur around the farm such as a huge increase in the fecundity of the farm animals and crops, with the farmer’s wife giving birth to 9 children, and the sow to 18 piglets. But before long it becomes clear that the animals are being fattened up as food for the aliens and Rolles must do all he can to force the aliens to leave and to save the inhabitants of the farm. As much horror as sf Aldiss here delivers a novella very much in the Wellsian style. Odd that it didn’t get nominated for the Hugo. R: 3.8/5.0

“He Who Shapes” – Roger Zelazny (*Amazing Stories* Jan-Feb 1965)

Novella

Joint winner the 1966 Nebula Award for Best Novella (with “The Saliva Tree” by Aldiss)

Dr. Charles Render is a psychologist who practices the in new field of neuro-participation, that is, via some futuristic tech he is able to enter the dreams of his patients and to manipulate those dreams in order to further treatment. He meets a young woman who has

been blind from birth and is also a trained psychologist. The two agree to work on teaching the woman how to “see” and understand the visual world. I normally find dream sequences to be a death sentence for a story but Zelazny uses them sparingly and well enough not to ruin the work. Another that missed the Hugo Ballot. Later expanded into the novel *The Dream Master*. R: 3.8/5.0

“Repent, Harlequin!” said the Ticktockman.” – Harlan Ellison (*Galaxy* Dec 1965)

Short story

Winner of the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction, and winner of the 1966 Nebula Award for Best Short Story.

In a totalitarian state the Master Timekeeper (nicknamed the Ticktockman) enforces a rigid adherence to punctuality, docking life-spans by the amount of time a person is late for scheduled appointments. The Master Timekeeper is Ellison’s Big Brother to his Winston Smith (Harlequin) but this story is a triumph of form over content. While it should be applauded for its ground-breaking style it reads as a product of its time more than a revelatory story for the 21st century. Despite all that it does succeed in its aims and needs to be respected for its place in the genre. R: 4.0/5.0

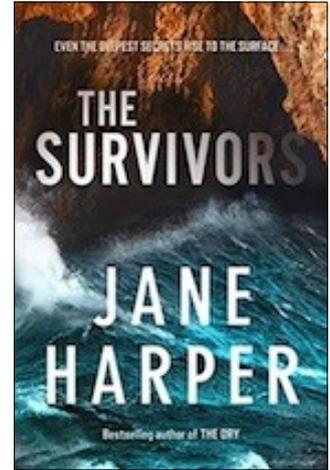


REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

The Survivors (2020) by Jane Harper

Genre: Crime

Jane Harper’s fourth novel, *The Survivors*, went immediately to the top of the bestseller lists in Australia after its publication in late 2020. Following on from her earlier successful novels (*The Dry*, *Force of Nature* and *The Lost Man*) and just prior to the release of the film adaptation of *The Dry*, her works appear to have struck a chord with the Australian reading public like few others over the past decade. Possibly since Colleen McCullough was at her peak in the 1980s.



The first question this raises, of course, is why?

I think the answer lies in her well-defined combination of place and people; both are immediately recognisable to the Australian reading public (exotic to non-Australians), and that familiarity leads to a sense of ease in the writing and in the reading. Winning literary awards both in Australia and overseas didn’t do any harm either. Readers know they are not going to be let down by the writer. Past experience has set up a high level of trust on the part of the reader and they are quite willing to plunk down their hard-earned for another instalment. You can hardly blame them. When large format paperbacks, such as this, are running at a price north of \$30 Australian, people want value for money. And Harper delivers, so her books sell.

Harper’s first two novels were set in the state of Victoria (*The Dry* in the Mallee region, and

Force of Nature in the mountains around Melbourne). She moved further afield in her third book (***The Lost Man***) setting the action in Australia's outback, which could be anywhere in the desert parts of South Australia, New South Wales or Queensland. With her fourth book the locale is now the coast of Australia's island state, Tasmania.

The fictitious town of Evelyn Bay is one of those coastal towns that are swamped in summer and practically deserted for the rest of the year. The residents all know each other, sometimes too well, and have tended to live in the one place for the bulk of their lives; this is the type of place where a twenty-year resident is considered a newcomer. Now the main industries are fishing and whale-watching with the odd diving expedition to a sunken wreck not far off-shore.

Kieran Elliott, his partner Mia and their baby daughter Audrey are back in town at the fag-end of summer to help his mother Verity pack up the family home. His father Brian is suffering from dementia and needs to move out of town to an aged care facility. And Keiran has returned with a baggage load of guilt. Twelve or so years before the start of the novel a great storm hit the town, two people drowned, one of them Kieran's older brother, and another, a young girl, went missing and was never found. If the possibilities for anger, tension and angst arising from that weren't enough another young girl is found dead on the beach the day after Kieran and his family arrive.

As the police start their investigation into the girl's murder, Kieran starts to work over his guilt and the story slowly emerges that his brother died as a result of an accident as he was responding to a rescue call; the person to be rescued, Kieran.

In matters such as this it is the small things that are important: who was where when; what did they see; what exactly did they say; who is being blamed and why. Harper picks over all of these with some skill, gradually shifting the focus of suspicion from one person to another and back again with the aim of holding the reader's attention for the length of the novel until whodunit is revealed.

This is a very similar technique to the one she used in ***The Lost Man***, though here the cast of characters is larger and the inter-connections much more complicated. Which is where I believe that the author has gone just a bit far with this novel. The pace is very slow in the middle section as all the petty conflicts, past infidelities, and present antagonisms are examined in fine detail. I felt it went on too long and then only got into its stride again as more bad weather approaches the town, the reader gets an inkling of where it is headed and the author could see the end in sight.

Apart from these minor quibbles Harper has delivered again. I wouldn't be surprised if someone in the Tasmanian Tourism Bureau is already in contact with various film companies offering help with an adaptation. We'll just have to wait for the other novels to be filmed first.

Rating: 3.8/5.0



WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Bodyguard (6 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

War veteran and British Police Sergeant David Budd (played by Richard Madden – Rob Stark in *Game of Thrones*) thwarts a suicide-bomb attack on a train on which he is travelling with his children. As a result he is promoted to Principal Protection Officer looking after the Home Secretary, Julia Montague. The minister is attempting to push through a Bill in Parliament which would massively increase the level of government monitoring of private information. An assassination attempt on the Minister's life is contained by Budd when he confronts the sniper, only to find he is an old friend who commits suicide in front of him. As the threats to



the minister grow, Budd's professional and personal lives start to fray as the viewer comes to realise that the number of possible people involved keeps on growing. Other police, the Deputy Home Secretary, the security forces and organised crime all have motives. Excellent performances by the leads, and a good script which has a few plot-holes in the first episode and then again late in the series. But the intricacies and fast pace of the action make up for them easily. R: 4.4/5.0

The Undoing (6 episodes)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Crime Drama

Jonathan Fraser (Hugh Grant) is a prominent child oncologist who is charged with the brutal murder of the mother of one of his patients. His wife Grace (Nicole Kidman) at first rejects him but then realises he is not a man who could not have committed the crime. So who did? The script attempts to shift the blame over a series of episodes onto the widowed husband, Grace, her father and her son. There are



a number of unanswered questions and plot holes which caused me some confusion, and the directorial choice of violent flashbacks to the murder, especially showing a point of view designed to shift suspicion, felt rather manipulative. Good performances (especially by Noma Dumezweni as the defence lawyer) but the show is let down by the script, except for the perfect twist at the end. My wife liked it somewhat more than I did. R: 3.3/5.0



Good Omens (6 episodes)

Platform: Amazon

Genre: Fantasy

I'm coming to this rather late and really only because my wife wanted to watch it. I'm not a fan of Pratchett's form of humour, I just don't find it funny. And nothing much has changed after watching this series. The angel Aziraphale (Michael Sheen) and the demon Crowley (David Tennant) have had a cosy relationship since the time of the Garden of Eden; both would cancel out the other's work so they decide to just do nothing. Then the anti-Christ is born in England and it looks like the world will be coming to an end. So the two of them work together to thwart God, Satan, the anti-Christ and the four horse-people of the Apocalypse to ensure they can continue to enjoy their bookshops, cars and lunch at the Ritz. I haven't read the book but I'm assuming if you have then you'll love this adaptation by Neil Gaiman. The acting is great with a large number of famous cameos and the synergy between Sheen and Tennant holds it all together. It might well be for you, as it was for my wife, but it wasn't for me. R: 3.0/5.0

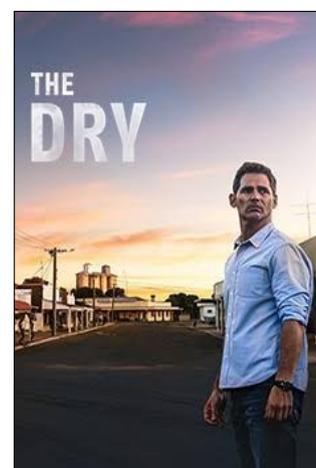
Film

The Dry

Location: at the cinema!!

Genre: Crime Drama

The adaptation of Jane Harper's first novel set in the Wimmera district of Victoria. Federal police officer Aaron Folk (Eric Bana) returns to his home town to attend the funeral of an old friend, Luke, believed to have murdered his wife and son before committing suicide. But Luke's parents don't accept the official decision and ask Folk to investigate, and the local copper also has his worries about the initial analysis. Hanging in the background is the death of a young girl twenty years before with many of the townsfolk believing that Folk was responsible. Slight changes from the book don't impact the film which emphasises the countryside, and the townspeople. Excellent performances by all in a very well-made film. R: 4.2/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Martin Field: Cordwainer Smith – what a writer. I think I've read most of his collected works. I recall reading in *Galaxy* in the early '60s a story, "A Planet Named Shayol". Part sci-fi, part horror story – superb, and the illustrations by ? were memorable.

"Title perhaps from this: Wikipedia: "Sheol (/ˈʃiːoʊl/ SHEE-ohl, /-əl/; Hebrew: שְׁאוֹל Šə'ōl), in the Hebrew Bible, is a place of darkness to which the dead go. Under some circumstances they are thought to be able to be contacted by the living. **Sheol** is also called Hades in Greek."

[**PM:** The illustrations from that October 1961 *Galaxy Magazine* issue were by Virgil Finlay. It's been so long since I read that story that I don't remember it at all.]

"An outstanding writer, the other from way back was Alfred Bester." [**PM:** Yep.]

Carey Handfield: “I am impressed with your reading time when you were working. All those opportunities on public transport! I have to drive for work so I don't have the same opportunities. I could do audio books but they don't work for me.” [PM: I do miss the commuting time, but certainly not the bits in between.]

“Now that you are retired you can read 24/7. Say 5 books a week equals 250 books a year!” [PM: Err, no. That way madness lies. I wouldn't be doing anything else.]

“My aim is 50 books a year. Last year I only read 21 books. The last time I did 50 was in 2017 when I managed 66 books.” [PM: Busy lifestyles chew up time and sometimes we just can't seem to find the spare time to fit in the reading. I'm not actually expecting that this frenetic pace will continue forever but intend to keep it up for as long as I can.]

John Hertz: “P6 says you got a copy of OUTWORLDS 71 + AFTERWORLDS. Just considering its layout it's superb. The choice and placement of words, typefaces, photos, drawings – what fine editorial work. O was always a visual as well as a verbal creation. O + A says ‘design, layout & production by Pat Virzi’. Gosh. The rest of the editing, by her, Bowman, Rosenthl, Coad – and not just for the size of the task – also earns high applause.” [PM: I couldn't agree more. I'm only slowly dipping into it every now and then. It is rather daunting.]

[PM: John then goes on to disagree with me about my review of Glory Road again. I fear we are going to differ in our opinions on this book forever John. I can think of nothing that will get me to change my mind on the subject.]

I also heard from: Graham Peters; Werner Koopmann who tells me that he's also using Libre Office under Windows 10; **Tineke Hazel;** and **Spike.**

