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Perryscope 8

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Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover photo by Robyn Mills, August 2019, Iceland.

INTRODUCTION

This month I finish off my Best of's for 2020, covering Film and Television. This will be the end to the interminable lists. At least until January 2022 when I'll probably be doing this all over again. You have been warned.

As I write the state of Victoria has now gone back into a short, sharp, total lock-down of 5 days due to a new outbreak of COVID-19 in the community. As much as some people might find this hard to cope with I don't see another method of ensuring the virus is kept under control until the various vaccines start to roll out and we get the vaccinations up to an acceptable level.

Time to contemplate travel again, if only in a wistful, staring-out-the-window, sort of way. So the cover photo of me in Iceland about to start our little whale watching tour on a speedboat, and my piece that follows this about my various hats are really just balm to my travel itch.

Robyn and I have many plans for various trips though New Zealand, India, Sri Lanka, UK and Europe, Canada and South America, all sitting there mapped out and waiting to be activated. I fear this may not be happening in 2021, unless New Zealand opens up. We can only hope.

Stay well.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

Travels with my hat

I've been wearing a hat whenever I travel for most of the past thirty years. Mostly they have been wide-brimmed Akubra hats, although occasionally an interloper will make an appearance (see this issue's cover). I plead expediency in this case, given the wind and cold in Iceland a skull cap was really the only option. If I'd worn the Akubra that day it would have launched towards the Arctic Circle within minutes.

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This hat-wearing all started as a result of my wedding to Robyn back in March 1990. Justin Ackroyd was my Best Man and decided a hat would be the perfect present for each of us. I



couldn't have been more delighted. And, as it later turned out, the choice was rather fortuitous. My father had, and my brother is having, trouble with melanomas on his ears. My brother now has a pair of ears that look like they probably belong to separate people. And I have recently learnt that he has further work on them to look forward to. He's been getting wider and wider brims on his hats lately. He needs it.

I have luckily avoided this issue and I put it down to the wearing of the hat. I've now had four in total (see above), each of them lasting around ten years before the felt at the tip of the crown starts to give way and breaks. At that point they are okay for around the house but not suitable for "formal" wear outside. You can see that progression above. My first (above, top left) got a real hammering in that first ten years: scorched in the Valley of the Kings; drenched in Barcelona; and snowed on in London. It did a wonderful job but needed to be put out to pasture around the year 2000.



By the time I came to purchase my second (above, top right), which I found in an R. M. Williams shop, I had decided on the style (Cooper Pedy) and colour but had not yet twigged to the secret of the sizing. Given the nature of the material – rabbit fur felt and leather – that makes up the hat it is just a fact that they tend to shrink over time; not much but enough to make them very tight near the end of their lifespan. By the time I bought my third hat in 2010 (above, bottom left) I knew to pick a hat one size up what was comfortable. Padding the inner band is easy and for the first four or so years it will feel a little loose without it. For the following three or four years the fit is just about perfect, and then the shrinkage kicks in. At the ten year mark, when the crown is fraying and the fit is just a bit too tight for comfort it's time for a change (top photo, bottom

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right). Same style but a slighter different colour this time.

I almost tend to forget that I am wearing the hat overseas until a passer-by makes a remark about it – yelling “nice hat” from the back of a motorbike in Cambodia, offering to buy it in Belgium and Egypt, leaving it behind in a shop in Osaka, and having someone walk off with it in jest in Vietnam. Above all else it has been a faithful companion, as much a part of my travel regime as the suitcase and the daypack. I really wouldn’t know what I’d do without it.

And Robyn, she likes it because I’m easy to find. No-one else wears one, or so it seems, so looking around and seeing a wide-brimmed hat floating about a display or across a hotel lobby is enough.



Thanks, Justin.



BEST FILM AND TELEVISION OF 2020

2020 was a tough year for watching film, and I don’t think that I visited the cinema at all during that year. Most of the films I did watch were those we had up for discussion on the podcast, and they were viewed at home either on one of the streaming services or on DVD.

Television was a rather different matter. If you had asked me during 2020 whether I was watching much television I would have said a very firm “No”, and yet I got to the end of the year, started tallying up all the single episodes documentaries, mini-series and longer TV series, and was quite surprised by the amount I had managed to get through. I doubt I am alone in that regard. Luckily there was some quite excellent fare available.

FILM

Films watched: 13

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 5 | <i>Brazil</i> directed by Terry Gilliam (1985) | 4.0 |
| 4 | <i>Sometimes Always Never</i> directed by Carl Hunter (2018) | 4.0 |
| 3 | <i>Yesterday</i> directed by Danny Boyle (2019) | 4.2 |
| 2 | <i>The Old Guard</i> directed by Gina Prince-Blythwood (2020) | 4.3 |
| 1 | <i>Stalker</i> directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (1979) | 4.4 |

Notes on the winner:

I have no doubts that my appreciation of this film was greatly enhanced by my reading of Geoff Dyer’s book *Zona*. Without that reading I suspect this film may not have appeared on this list at all. Sf, Russian, and very, very slow. Just about says it all I reckon.

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Honourable mentions:

Solaris directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (1979) 4.0

The Two Papes directed by Fernando Meirelles (2019) 4.0

TELEVISION

TV watched: 34

This was way more than I thought originally. I only realised how much I had watched when I began to put these lists together. Now, it seems, I'll have to keep track a little better.

TV Food

Programs watched: 4

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 3 | <i>Chef's Table : BBQ</i> – Netflix (2020) | 4.2 |
| 2 | <i>Rick Stein's Secret France</i> – ABC TV (2019) | 4.2 |
| 1 | <i>Food Safari : Fire</i> – SBS TV (2018) | 4.3 |

Notes on the winner:

10 episodes. Maeve O'Meara's investigation of how different cultures around the world use fire for their cooking. From spit roasting to tandoori ovens, smoking to street food, Europe to Asia to South Africa to South America. Great stuff.

Honourable mentions:

None.

TV Crime

Programs watched: 17

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | <i>Giri/Haji</i> – Netflix (2019) | 4.5 |
| 4 | <i>Des</i> – Stan (2020) | 4.5 |
| 3 | <i>The Alienist</i> S01 – Netflix (2018) | 4.5 |
| 2 | <i>Trapped</i> S01 and S02 – SBS TV (2016 and 2019) | 4.5 |
| 1 | <i>Criminal : UK</i> S01 and S02 – Netflix (2019 and 2020) | 4.6 |

Notes on the winner:

Anthology series of one-act plays all using the same set, S01 with 3 episodes and S02 with 4 episodes. A crime unit investigating serious crimes interviews one suspect each episode with varying members of the team undertaking the interrogation. This is all above board, there are no physical beatings, and each of the suspects has a solicitor present. All are extremely well written and acted. It is very interesting to watch the interview techniques used by the police as they attempt to slip past the defences of the accused to get to the truth. Actors playing suspects include David Tennant, Hayley Atwell, Kit Harrington and Kunal Nayyar.

Honourable mentions:

Criminal : Germany S01 – Netflix (2019) 4.5

Bosch S05 and S06 – Netflix (2019 and 2020) 4.4

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TV Horror

Programs watched: 1

- 1 *The Outsider* – Netflix (2020) 4.4

Notes on the winner:

10 episodes – Based on the Stephen King novel of the same name. Australian Ben Mendolsohn is chief of police in a small town who investigates the gruesome slaying of a young boy seemingly by a very popular school teacher. But things aren't quite that easy as the teacher can prove he was nowhere near the scene of the crime at that time. Further investigations ensue with the help of Holly Gibney (from the *Mr Mercedes* TV series – though with a different actor playing the role). Interesting and disturbing without being overly gory or horrific.

Honourable mentions:

None.

TV SF

Programs watched: 67

- 5 *Star Trek : Picard* S01 – Amazon (2020) 4.0
- 4 *The Umbrella Academy* S01 – Netflix (2019) 4.1
- 3 *For All Mankind* S01 – Apple (2019) 4.2
- 2 *The Umbrella Academy* S02 – Netflix (2020) 4.4
- 1 *The Expanse* S04 – Amazon (2020) 4.6

Notes on the winner:

The Expanse is easily the best hard sf series on television., based on one of the best sf series in recently memory. Unfortunately there are only two more seasons to go.

Honourable mentions:

None.

I ALSO LIKED

Freeman – Documentary – ABC TV (2020) 4.5

1 episode – A documentary covering Cathy Freeman's race for the 400metres in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. It covers the lead-up, the race and the aftermath. A fine portrayal of people under pressure and how they cope.

The Test – Documentary – Amazon (2020) 4.5

8 episodes, subtitled "A New Era for the Australian Cricket Team". An insider view of the Australian cricket team over the 18 months following the infamous ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in early 2018. Yes, it's a lot about cricket but it's also a study of people under extreme stress and how different management styles can generate different outcomes.

The Queen's Gambit – Drama – Netflix (2020) 4.7

Mini-series, 7 episodes. A Coming-of-age drama based on the novel by Walter Tevis (*The*

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Hustler and **The Man Who Fell to Earth**) this 7-episode series follows the life of an orphaned Beth Harmon (played by an excellent Anya Taylor-Joy) from her first introduction to the game of chess at the age of 9 through her winning the US Open Championship at 16, and later taking on the Russian World Champion in Moscow. It's a character study showing how an outstanding talent in one area can lead to a sense of isolation, and, in Harmon's case, addiction to pills and booze. Fantastic stuff – set design, costumes, acting, music, characterisation, script – it all works.

Best TV of the Year

5	Trapped S01 and S02 – SBS TV (2016 and 2019)	4.5
4	The Test – Amazon (2020)	4.5
3	Criminal : UK S01 and S02 – Netflix (2019 and 2020)	4.6
2	The Expanse S04 – Amazon (2020)	4.6
1	The Queen's Gambit – Netflix (2020)	4.7

Honourable mentions:

Giri/Haji – Netflix (2019) 4.5

Des – Stan (2020) 4.5

Freeman – ABC TV (2020) 4.5

The Alienist S01 – Netflix (2018) 4.5

Criminal : Germany S01 – Netflix (2019) 4.5



WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 45: Not waving but drowning (2 February 2021)
David and I talk about the books they've been reading lately, ranging in length from novellas to a nine-volume, almost million-word opus written entirely in the form of letters. David talks to Lucy Sussex about the latest M. John Harrison novel **The Sunken Land Begins to Rise Again**. And a rather damp theme emerges...



Episode 46: These accusations, and these grievous crimes (16 February 2021)
Another episode concentrating on the crime novels and crime-related books we've been reading lately. David reviews a couple of Michael Robotham novels and I look at the S. A. Crosby novel I read last year, the latest Jane Harper, and the Wallace and Yokomizo novels listed in this issue.

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, still working on that.

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

Abbr – Aust – Australian; nvla – novella; Gdn – Guardian 1000 novels; trans – translated; anth – anthology; WFA – World Fantasy Award winner.

February 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
Dispersion	Greg Egan	Sf	Feb 3	e	3.5	2020	Aust/nvla
<i>The Four Just Men</i>	Edgar Wallace	Crime	Feb 6	e	3.2	1905	Gdn
Seven of Infinities	Aliette de Bodard	Sf	Feb 8	e	4.1	2020	nvla
<i>The Honjin Murders</i>	Seishi Yokomizo	Crime	Feb 10	e	4.2	1946	trans
Come Tumbling Down	Seanan McGuire	Fantasy	Feb 14	e	3.8	2020	nvla
<i>The Watch Tower</i>	Elizabeth Harrower	Literary	Feb 17		4.3	1966	Aust
<i>The World's Best Science Fiction Second Series</i>	Ed by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr	Sf	Feb 21		3.0	1966	anth
<i>The Raven Tower</i>	Ann Leckie	Fantasy	Feb 22		3.8	2019	
<i>Queen of the Unconquered</i>	Kacen Callender	Fantasy	Feb 28	e	3.4	2019	WFA

Books read in the month: 9

Yearly total to end of month: 17

January was a little under my scheduled number of books but February is back on track. I now just need to ensure I get through what I have planned for March.

Notes:

Dispersion (2020) – Novella by arguably Australia's greatest ever hard sf writer. The world of this novella is composed of material that is made up from one of six different "factions" that can only interact with each other momentarily. In an unknown country six villages are representatives of one faction each, but there is a new factor at play, a virus or flesh-eating cancer called the Dispersion that impacts all six factions and which each village blames on the others. The novella's main character Alice works to understand the interactions between the factional material and thereby hopefully find a cure to the spreading disease. Egan has obviously worked out the intricate interactions of the factional material as a mathematical problem and the translated these into the story. The end result is rather cold and, while interesting, is not up to Egan's usual high standard. R: 3.5/5.0



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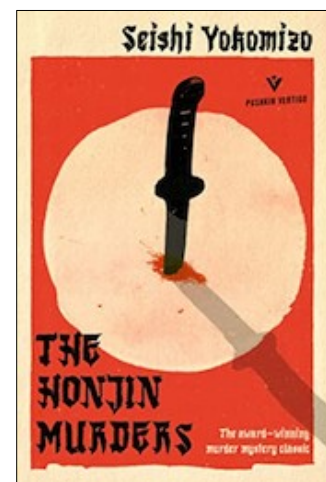
The Four Just Men (1905) – The first novel by Wallace featuring his Four Just Men, which is an odd title as this novel starts and ends with just three of them and the fourth is a short-term substitute. The Men of the title are vigilantes who have murdered various men of power around the world who the Men consider deserve their fate. In other words, from our 21st century perspective, they are terrorists, though I'm sure Wallace envisaged them as being on the side of justice. In this novel the Just Men threaten the life of the British Foreign Secretary unless he withdraws his plan to introduce an Aliens Extradition (Political Offences) Bill. When the death occurs it happens in a locked room with no sense of a method. Putting aside the moral issues here this is a tense story with an unusual viewpoint, though the characters are mostly flat. Interesting to read this as a classic crime novel from the early 20th century. R: 3.2/5.0



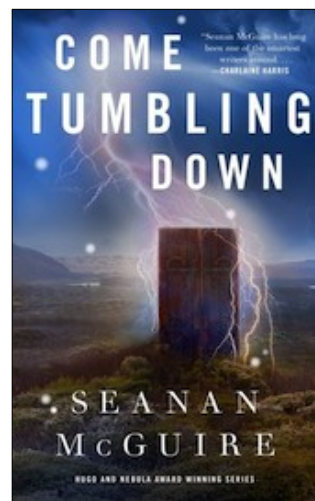
Seven of Infinities (2020) – A novella in the author's *Universe of Xuya* series of stories. This Universe depicts an idealised pre-communist Vietnamese society set in the far future in a section of the galaxy known as the Scattered Pearls Belt. Vân, the main character here, is a scholar eking out a living working as a tutor to a rich family. At some time in the past she has manufactured an illegal memory implant that provides her with vast literary knowledge. Then, one day, a woman comes to the house, ostensibly to see the student, and drops dead for no apparent reason. And then Vân's past threatens to overwhelm her. Very much an homage to Banks's Culture series with its orbitals and mindships interacting with humans via their avatars this is a very entertaining and award winning set of stories. This one is a tad long in parts and it tends to wallow a bit much in the

romantic side of the story for me. Still, it should be a contender for various sf awards this year. R: 4.1/5.0

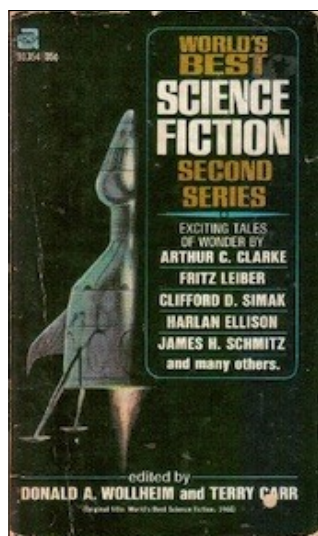
The Honjin Murders (1946) – The first in the *Kosuke Kindaichi* series of 32 detective novels, but only the first of two so far translated into English. This is considered a classic of Japanese crime fiction and is a locked-room murder mystery that would rival any Western novel of its type. It is 1937 in the Japanese village of Okamura and the main upcoming event of interest to all is the wedding of the oldest son of the Ichiyangi family, the highest ranking family in the village who used to run the Honjin (upper-class inn) of the title. On the night of the wedding the married couple are found dead inside a locked room, with lots of clues, the murder weapon outside and no visible means of escape. The groom's uncle calls in his young friend Kosuke Kindaichi, who has lately made a name for himself as a private detective, to help the local police who appear to be floundering. This is a wonderful piece of work with a puzzling death and a very satisfying, if complicated solution. I'll certainly be looking for more in this series when they become available. R: 4.2/5.0



Come Tumbling Down (2020) – This is the fifth novella in McGuire’s *Wayward Children* sequence following **Every Heart a Doorway**, **Down Among the Sticks and Bones**, **Beneath the Sugar Sky**, and **In An Absent Dream**. These are variants on the “portal fantasy” theme in that they feature various children who have wandered through a mysterious doorway, ended up in one of a myriad of fantastical worlds, and then, somehow, have found themselves back Here. These maladjusted children are then placed at Eleanor West’s Home for Wayward Children by their troubled parents. And from there all the children want to find their way back to their adopted fantasy lands. This novella continues the story of Jack and Jill, twin sisters, who travelled to the same land, the Moors, but who then followed different paths: Jack as the apprentice to scientist Dr Bleak and Jill as “child” of a master vampire. Things get a little complicated and it helps to have read the previous entries in this series before tackling this strange little story of swapped bodies, Frankenstein re-incarnations, goblins, lost boys and Drowned Gods. But if you have the slightest interest in this sort of material then I recommend you check these out. R: 3.8/5.0

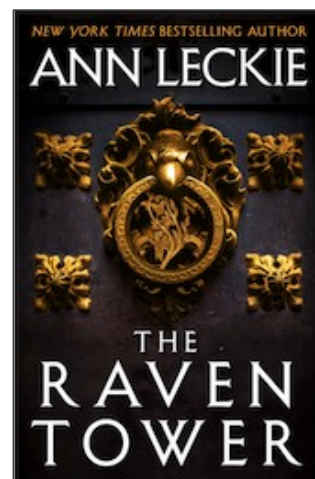


The Watch Tower (1966) – see detailed review later in this issue.

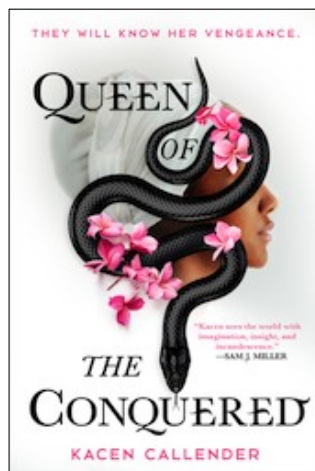


The World’s Best Science Fiction Second Series (1966) – Originally titled *World’s Best Science Fiction : 1966*. This book was read mainly to fill in the background for an upcoming discussion on the podcast about the 1966 Hugo Awards. Only novelettes and short stories are included, and only the Ellison is an award winner. It does include stories by David I. Masson, Clifford D. Simak, and Vernor Vinge that may well have been on the Hugo ballot if they had a Short Story category that year. The stories here are all from the US SF magazines except for two from the British *New Worlds*. Take note, the contents are by wall-to-wall male writers. This comes across as a limited and very pedestrian anthology, which is probably an adequate description of the short sf of that period. Without the Zelazny stories it is a bit dull. R: 3.0/5.0

The Raven Tower (2019) – Leckie’s first foray into fantasy earned enough nominations to make the final 2020 Hugo Best Novel ballot, but she declined the offer. In the kingdom of Iraden the god known as the Raven guards the city of Vastai. Its will is enacted by a chosen human, the Raven’s Lease, and it is powered by the self-sacrifice of the Lease. But now a usurper has taken the Lease’s place and the designated heir is struggling to make sense of it all. Meanwhile the city is threatened by enemies and it seems to have lost protection from its gods. An intricate and detailed fantasy novel by a renown sf writer. Interesting characters though you do wonder at times why some of them are so unbelievably dumb. It seems that this writer is



at home on both sides of the sf&f genre. R: 3.8/5.0



Queen of the Unconquered (2019) – Winner of the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel in 2020. Sigourney Rose is a daughter of a family of noble lineage on the islands of Hans Lollick. She is also the only survivor of her family's massacre at the hands of the islands' colonisers. After escaping with the help of a local slave she comes into her power to enter and control minds when she reaches puberty. Needless to say she plans revenge on her enemies and sets out to get it. When the childless king of the islands announces that he plans to chose a successor from among the most eligible noble families she uses her power to manipulate her way into their company. But she is rather naive at the games these people play and is out-manoeuvred at each turn. Repetitious in parts this novel is just too long, and the actions of some of the characters seem more

manipulated by the author to her own ends rather than being a natural progression from their previous actions. R: 3.4/5.0

Notes on other short fiction:

Stardock – Fritz Leiber (*Fantastic Sep* 1965)

Novella

Nominated for the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction.

One of Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser* sword and sorcery stories. In this one the two have heard of a treasure to be found on the top of the mountain Stardock, the highest peak of the Mountains of the Giants in the Cold Waste region of Nehwon. Accompanied by their newly acquired ice-cat Hrissa they set out to climb the mountain. Along the way they are attacked by a snow-serpent, goblins and another pair of climbers also searching for the treasure. This is a rather light-weight adventure story which is more of the same from Leiber – it doesn't add anything particularly new to the genre. Enjoyable, but that's all. He also published the novella **Four Ghosts in Hamlet** in 1965, and that would have been a much better choice for the Hugo ballot. R: 3.3/5.0

Day of the Great Shout – Philip Jose Farmer (*Worlds of Tomorrow* Jan 1965)

Novella

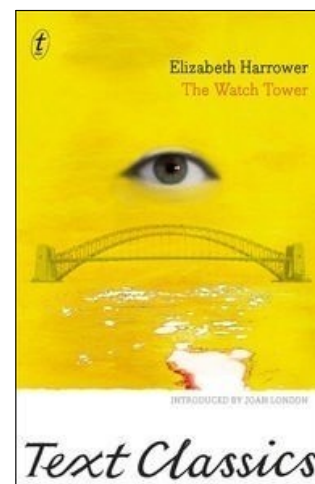
Nominated for the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction.

This is the first story in Farmer's *Riverworld* series. This novella and another, **The Suicide Express**, were combined into the author's **To Your Scattered Bodies Go**, winner of the 1972 Hugo Award for Best Novel. Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) wakes up after his death to find himself resurrected in a strange place surrounded by others (such as an alien from Tau Ceti, an Australopithecus, Alice Pleasance Hargreaves, and a man from the late 20th century) and in his hairless 25-year-old body. The world they find themselves in is Earth-like and appears to be a long river valley. Building a bamboo boat the group sets sail downriver where they have a number of adventures and finally meet one of the creatures who has created this world and resurrected the entire human race, past as well as present. The novella starts off well as an interesting adventure but it doesn't progress anywhere. Another case of read the final novel instead. R: 3.1/5.0

REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

The Watch Tower (1966) by Elizabeth Harrower
Genre: Literary

The Patrick White Award is an Australian annual literary award established in 1974. White used the money he received from winning his Nobel Prize for Literature to set up a trust to administer this award, presented to Australian writers who have been highly creative over a long period but who may not have received the recognition that was their due. The initial award in 1974 went to Christina Stead, and subsequent recipients have included Sumner Locke Elliott (1977), Randolph Stow (1979), Thea Astley (1989), Amy Witting (1993), Gerald Murnane (1999) and Gregory Day in 2020. Elizabeth Harrower received the award in 1996.



Harrower was born in Sydney in 1928 and her writing career started with three novels in quick succession (***Down in the City*** in 1957, ***The Long Prospect*** 1958 and ***The Catherine Wheel*** in 1960). This was followed by a gap of six years until ***The Watch Tower*** in 1966. Her fifth novel, ***In Certain Circles***, was due to be published in 1971 but she withdrew the book from publication around the time of her mother's death. After that, she appeared to put aside her writing career.

In 2012 the good people at Text Publishing released this version of her fourth novel to wide acclaim, which subsequently led to the publication of her fifth in 2014. Apart from a collection of short stories Harrower's writing career was restricted, for whatever reason, to the novels listed here.

The Watch Tower is set in Sydney during and immediately following the Second World War. It follows the lives of the sisters Laura and Clare, whose father dies suddenly, who are then abandoned by their mother as she returns to her family in England, and who are then taken under the wing of the abusive and controlling Felix Shaw. After the young Laura finds herself alone and fending for herself and her much younger sister Shaw offers to marry Laura and also to take in Clare into his household, not, it seems, from any sexual or romantic interest, but as a means of obtaining willing and competent workers for his chocolate factory business. It is a course of action that both sisters will come to regret as the novel progresses.

Felix Shaw is a monster: secretive about his business dealings, verbally and at times physically abusive to the two sisters, manipulative and controlling. He comes to dominate their work and home lives, at one point moving the business office into the family home so he can have greater oversight and control. He is variously drunk and off-the-wagon, riding an alcoholic arc familiar to many Australian families. And slowly, over the course of the novel, his influence becomes all-pervasive. Laura gradually drops any ambitions she may have had to an independent life, either intellectual or social, and becomes an apologist for her husband's actions, covering up for him and deflecting any abuse as something out-of-the-ordinary. Clare is finally able to make a life for herself away from Felix and Laura, under

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various forms of duress, and her final journey to an unnamed destination provides an endpoint of hope for the book.

In another's hands this novel may well have shifted into the realms of horror. Kitchen knives are intricately described at one point and, for a time, I thought a blood-bath might be the ultimate outcome. But there is a horror here, the horror of domestic abuse, of manipulative control and the enforced destruction of hope.

This is a difficult book to read if you grew up, like I did, in an Australian era when the boundaries of a life for many were confined by home, work and the pub. Difficult, but a classic of Australian literature all the same.

Rating 4.3/5.0

“There are only three things that Australians take seriously: sports, drinking and breakfast.”
- **David Chang**. *The David Chang Show* 22 February 2021.

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Call My Agent (Season 1- 6 episodes) (2015)

[Original title: *Dix pour Cent*]

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy Drama

This light French comedy drama set in an actor's agency is a delightful change from all the crime, death and destruction I've been watching lately. The head of Paris agency ASK goes on holiday in the first episode and that's the last we see of him – he dies after swallowing a wasp. The remaining partners scramble to raise the cash to save the agency while at the same time working to get their clients more work. It is good to see the agents working for art more



than money here. Lots of cameos from French actors playing themselves. This is an enjoyable series (3 more seasons to go) and it's always nice to see Paris in the sunshine. R: 3.8/5.0

Street Food : Asia (9 episodes) (2019)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Documentary Food

The companion series to Netflix's **Street Food : South America** which I mentioned in P7. This season preceded the other so you can see the themes being set up that carried over into this season 2: each program is as much about the impact that the street vendor's work has on their family and community as it is about the food. That isn't to downplay the food's

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role of course just that the two parts are indivisible. The series travels to Bangkok, Osaka, Delhi, Yogyakarta, Chiayi (Taiwan), Seoul, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and Cebu (Philippines). Again we have some food that I would tend to steer well clear of but it's a light entertaining series that, unfortunately, tends to emphasize my recent lack of overseas travel. R: 3.6/5.0

Lupin (Season 1- episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime Drama

Intriguing revenge drama set in Paris. Assane Diop's father was framed for the theft of a valuable necklace when Assane was about 15. His father subsequently committed suicide in jail (allegedly) and Assane, now in his mid-thirties, has vowed to clear his father's name and bring down the man who set him up. This season comprises the first five episodes of the series with the next five to be released later this year. Mostly based on the adventures of Lupin, the fictional French gentleman burglar, some of the situations Assane finds himself in seem very contrived. Amusing and of interest without being over the top. R: 3.7/5.0



Ugly Delicious (Season 1- 8 episodes) (2018)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Documentary Food/Travel

The creator and presenter of this food series, David Chang, is a Korean-American chef with a genuine interest in the preparation and eating of food, and all of the things that go along with that: culture, race, environment and history. In this series he explores the worlds of pizza, tacos, homecooking, shrimp and crawfish, BBQ (American), fried chicken, fried rice, and stuffed foods pitting Asian against Italian varieties. Chang is the genuine article. Unpretentious, he shows a willingness to learn new things, explain his own methods and make a bit of a fool of himself when required. He also swears a lot. There is much to like about this man and the way he explores the culinary world. R: 4.3/5.0

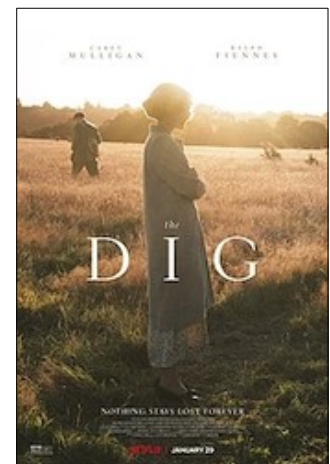
Film

The Dig (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

On the eve of World War II a widow Edith Pretty (Carey Mulligan) engages an archaeological "excavator" Basil Brown (Ralph Fiennes) to investigate some ancient burial mounds on her property in



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Suffolk, England. At first considered to be from the Viking era it becomes apparent that the site is of Anglo-Saxon origin and the hoard uncovered, Sutton Hoo, which is now in the British Museum, is considered one of the greatest treasures ever discovered in the UK. As the national authorities attempt to take control of the site, Pretty maintains her faith in Brown. But after her death his role was written out of the story until recently. There are some deviations from the true history of the dig but this is a film “based on a true story” and should be viewed as such. Slow-moving yet emotionally engaging and beautifully filmed, the whole cast give fine performances and it will be hard to top this in 2021. My wife and I joked afterwards about the number of sunny days the film-makers received during filming. Almost an alternate England – weather-wise. R: 4.4/5.0

News of the World (2020)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama/Western

In post-Civil War Texas ex-Confederate Army Captain Kidd (Hanks) earns a living travelling from town to town reading the news. On the road he one day comes across a lost girl (Helena Zengel). He discovers that she was captured by the Kiowa people six years previously and that she was being transported back to her surviving relatives. But no-one at the nearby army camp can or will accompany her so Kidd takes on the role himself. On the road he finds that some people consider the girl a commodity, to be bought and abused, and that some fanatics will do whatever they have to in order to maintain their worldview. Mostly a two-hander the leads do very good work and the film delivers an enjoyable viewing experience from a rather cliched plotline. Both are looking for a home, and their partnership maybe the only way they can find one. Sometimes good deeds are rewarded. R: 4.2/5.0



Outbreak (1995)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

After watching *Contagion* at the beginning of the pandemic period last year I thought it a good idea to watch this as a follow-up. It was not one of my best thoughts. This is a remarkably dismal film with very little if anything to recommend it. The plotline is formulaic, the characters are flat and unendearing and even Donald Sutherland as the villain of the piece just seems to walk through his part. The premise of the film is that the US Army has been collecting virus samples from around the world (the emphasis here is on Zaire) and developing anti-viral drugs based on them as a means of creating a larger biological weapons program. By happenstance a very virulent hemorrhagic fever, much more deadly than Ebola, is transferred to the US mainland via a host monkey. The army already has a specific vaccine for this virus, ... and you can guess the rest. Don't bother with this one, watch *Contagion* instead. R: 2.4/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Martin Field: “You have inspired me to re-read Iain M. Banks’ *The Player of Games*. Banks, is my all-time favourite SF author. His scope, his imagination, his wit, his use of language, always left me wanting another of his adventures. As you will know, other than in the SF field he was also a well-reputed author of ‘literary’ novels – no doubt contributing to his superb genre story-telling.

“And to top it off he knew his malt whisky. His book non-fiction book *Raw Spirit* is a happy little road trip to some of his favourite distilleries.

“I am sorry he’s gone.”

[PM: Yes, we’re all sorry he’s no longer with us. He had a lot more to offer to the literary world. I’m currently re-reading the early Culture novels in preparation for a discussion on the podcast. Not sure when that will be as yet. His *Raw Spirit* is a delight.]

Graham Peters: “There is much to recommend the *Perryscope* format. You have just prompted me to look again at Clive James’ *Unreliable Memoirs*, a favourite from forty years ago. As you say, a laugh out loud book which, in its way can contrast with Hugh Lunn’s recollections of growing up in Brisbane in a similar era. Different cities and faiths (Lunn is Catholic raised) gives different perspectives of a childhood at the same time. As a child I read voraciously, including a large collection (stored in the chiller cabinet of our disused ice-chest) of humorous magazines from Sydney (not, I think *Smith’s Weekly*) which highlighted to me the cultural differences that experience of each city brings to one’s life experience. As my reading widened I could see the same distinctions between New York and the rest of US literature. I am sure there are similar distinctions in other cultures, although the English (UK) version seems more homogeneous.”

[PM: I don’t know the Lunn book but will attempt to track it down at some time.]

“You have also prompted me to revisit *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, attempted too young. It may be more meaningful me as a middle aged man.”

[PM: Books read when young, and hated, can sometimes become a much-improved reading experience as we get older. That was certainly true for me with Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* – hated it as a teenager but loved it when I re-read it a few years back. This is always a lottery and, of course, the opposite can also occur. I hope you enjoy the Fowles.]

Tineke Hazel: “I was going to comment on the fact you were comparing book numbers you have read. However, would not the number of pages be an influence on this? Some books have larger print as well and I am being picky here...of course.”

[PM: Just a bit picky. Anyway I did read 30,906 pages last year with an average book length of 259 pages. I haven’t started on the large print volumes as yet. The good thing about an e-reader is that it allows you change to the font size – which is always larger these days.]

Leigh Edmonds: “Not that I have much to add to what you’ve written but it is pleasing to note that some of my favourite stf is in your list: *Way Station*, *The Man in the High Castle*

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and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* in particular. I must have been quite young when I read the Dick book because it seemed rather deep to me at the time but the style of *Way Station* struck me very much and when I got the opportunity to visit Minnesota it seemed even more accurate.”

[PM: You have taste sir, very good taste.]

“The other book I would add to my list – which I wouldn't because I'm not going to make a list – is *Rendevous with Rama* which struck me as being among Clark's most impressive works and the kind of restrained but vivid speculation that the best British stf has. That reminds me of other British works like *A Dream Of Wessex*, and now you've got me started, you bad man.”

[PM: Didn't read the Clarke in 2020, and not sure I'll get to it this year either. It will feature in an episode of the podcast when we get to looking at the 1974 Hugo Awards. And that may not be until later next year. There was a possibility that we might have read the novel in preparation for our podcast episode on Megastructures but we decided it was too obvious and that we would be covering it in greater detail later. Similarly we left *Ringworld* off that episode's roster as well. Same reason.]

“Your list reminds me that I cannot recall reading *The Left Hand of Darkness*. I believe we have a copy somewhere in this house but all is chaos at the moment when it comes to bookshelves.”

[PM: I would certainly do so.]

“Flicking on to your comments on what you've been watching I saw your review of *Bodyguard* and that it is on Netflix. Goody, I said to myself, something good on Netflix. Then I recalled that Valma and I had watched the first episode and not gone back to it. The reason, it was far too intense for our liking. These days we prefer to watch stuff that is not so tense, even if it is great television. There is more than enough stress and enough unhappiness around that we prefer to keep it outside our door.”

[PM: I'll try to find something more to your liking in February (see earlier in this issue). *Bodyguard* doesn't get any less stressful after the first episode so you probably made the right choice.]

“I'm looking forward to seeing *The Dry* one of these days. I'm told it's a good movie but I'm going to be interested too in the background, having grown up in the Wimmera from a family that farmed out at Beulah West with a grandmother who, in later years, lived in a little house in Beulah just off the highway opposite the big wheat silos and just around the corner from the main street. My sister and I, and lots of our cousins, ran around the streets and played in the playground opposite the hospital many times over the years. The last time I was there was for the funeral of Auntie Dot who had been very big in the CWA. You've never in your life seen a spread like it at the reception after the burial. Happy memories come from Beulah, surely nothing terrible could ever happen there.”

[PM: It will be interesting to hear what you think about the movie and the setting. Very well done in my view. They were either very lucky or skilful in picking the right time to film it in that part of Victoria. If they had left it another month or so the rains would have arrived and those dry, arid aerial shots of the farmlands would not have been as effective. No-one, but no-one, messes with the CWA when it comes to spreads at country functions.]

Joseph Nicholas: “I’m impressed by the number of books you manage to read in a year — 128, 109, 119, which is at least double what I think I’d manage. (Indeed, there are probably whole weeks in which I don’t manage to open a book, which would push the annual total down to around 30.) Unlike you, I don’t keep lists of what I’ve read, but I suspect that if I did it would show that over half of the titles were non-fiction, mostly history and archaeology (Britain and Europe, from ancient times to the early modern period), which has been the case for at least the past quarter century. For the past four to five years, additionally, some of that non-fiction has been natural history, no doubt prompted by our membership of the Natural History Museum, which gives one 20% off in the museum’s shop: a real incentive to buy. We are also members of the British Museum, which also offers a 20% discount: another incentive to buy. As we tell ourselves repeatedly, we have officially given up buying books, but they do keep following us home.”

[**PM:** Listing is vitally important. As we get older we forget; at least I do. I look on the listing as a reinforcement of my reading commitments.]

“I remember, a few months before I retired in the spring of 2014, encountering a neighbour on the way to work, who had retired from her (academic) job some six months previously, and was off for a day out at a heritage property with another neighbour. The conversation led on, and I said that I was looking forward to retirement because I could finally start catching up with the reading backlog. She laughed like a drain, and said that in the past six months she’d read far, far less than at any time in the previous year. I thought that scarcely believable....but then found, in the first year of my retirement, that I read hardly anything either, because there was so much else to do: visits to heritage properties, days out in historic towns and gardens, the special exhibitions and the lecture programmes offered by the various cultural institutions we support (which we hadn’t time to attend while we were working): all things which the coronavirus lockdown brought to a crashing halt last spring. So since then year I’ve been really catching up on the fiction backlog, some of which has been there since (cough, shuffle, look slightly embarrassed) the 1980s and 1990s. For instance, a few months ago I finally read Ursula Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home*, which had been unopened since it was acquired in 1986, although I wasn’t very impressed — invented anthropology is all very well if that’s what one actually wants, but I think it works better when she uses it in and as a driver for a narrative, such as the late Hainish works (*The Telling*, *Four/Five Ways to Forgiveness*, “A Fisherman of the Inland Sea”, all of which I also hadn’t read until a few months ago). And probably also in *Annals of the Western Shore*, although that still awaits attention.”

[**PM:** I set myself the task a few years back of keeping track of the books I had read (see earlier issues of *Perryscope* for the gory details) and also a schedule of books to read. I spent a lot of years not reading much while I was working on other things and just felt I needed to catch up. Then the podcast started and it just snowballed from there. From conversations I’ve had with people most of them tend to think of this as a weird way of going about reading, but I think of it as a research project. Most of what I read will be reviewed, either here or in other places and the act of reading, say all books on a Hugo ballot for a given year, starts to uncover themes and patterns that can be discussed on the podcast or in longer critical essays. And sometimes I do actually wonder, “what was sf or Australian crime fiction like in {insert year here}?” I know it’s not for everyone but it works for me.]

“(I am going to disagree with you about the greatness of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. I realise

that it has now been awarded the supreme honour of appearing on a US postage stamp, but in my estimation *The Dispossessed* is the much more better novel. When I reread *The Left Hand of Darkness*, many years ago, it seemed to me to be mostly about two guys escaping from their pursuers through a very long snowstorm. If I wanted to go on a sleighride in winter, I'd sing the appropriate songs.)”

[PM: You are probably right about *The Dispossessed* being a better novel than *The Left Hand of Darkness* but I was thinking more of favourites here. Until I re-read *Left Hand* last year my feeling about it was the same as yours in that I remembered it as being mainly about a long trip across the ice. But it is much, much more than that.]

“I should perhaps add that I was unaware of the existence of these late-period Le Guin works until I opened one of the later *Earthsea* books — also purchased many years ago, and similarly unread until very recently — and discovered therein a full list of her titles, some six or seven of which were entirely new to me (but which I promptly scratched around to acquire). The perils, I daresay, of not keeping up with what's happening in the world of skiffy....although I wonder, these days, whether anyone can or does. I read the reviews, of course (the Saturday edition of *The Guardian* has a handy monthly round-up of new works by Eric Brown in its *Review* supplement), but in order to avoid even more stuff piling up unread I can really only allow existing favourite authors through the gate. (And even then I'm behind — I have six titles by Kim Stanley Robinson, not counting *Ministry for the Future* which would make it seven); three by Chris Priest; a couple by William Gibson; mumblety-mumble by Ken MacLeod, China Mieville and Alastair Reynolds; I'll spare you the rest of the list.) Not that new favourites don't get added from time to time — Dave Hutchinson's *Fractured Europe* series is v. triffic, and lots of people (including Judith) speak very highly of Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* sequence, which I must read RSN before it's turned into a television series in the next couple of years — but I am very, very selective. (And sometimes get the selection wrong, as with Ann Leckie's *Ancillary* trilogy, which promised something intriguing — a mechanical construct sundered from its spaceship and forced to live as a human in order to revenge itself on those who'd killed its AI master — but seemed to abandon that partway through the first volume and spent the next two giving us routine space opera.)”

[PM: Your discussion here of the many books you have piling up demanding to be read is one of the reasons I've set myself the schedule I have. I'm still behind and I know I will never catch up but I feel like I want to try. I still haven't read all of Le Guin though I can say the *Earthsea* series and the *Annals of the Western Shore* are wonderful books. I've read one of Aaronovitch's series and will certainly need to read more – maybe in conjunction with Tremblay's *Shadow Police* series. I enjoyed the Leckie series, and a couple of Hutchinson's *Fractured Europe* books were excellent but at least one was marred by not finishing in the right place...There's way too much to discuss here which is one of the reasons why I'm working on another fanzine to cover this sort of stuff. More details later, though the first issue should be out in April.]

“I know not how it has worked in Melbourne, but the continuing lockdown here has meant that we can't really go anywhere other than the allotment and/or a perambulation around the local streets and parks; hence all the reading. [PM: At one point Melbourne people were constrained from travelling any more than 5 kilometres from home. That went on for 8 or so weeks, then it was raised to 20 km, before being freed up completely. Total lockdown time

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ran to about 110 days.] As an alternative to reading, we've also turned to a pastime in which we usually indulge only during the Christmas/New Year break and which has apparently experienced something of sales boom amongst discerning adults: jigsaws. Only the other day, for example, the mail delivered, from *New Scientist's* online shop, a 1,000-piece CG-generated image of the Milky Way Galaxy, which I suspect is likely to keep me occupied for a not inconsiderable period of time....[PM: I did consider the possibility of getting into jigsaw puzzles as we do these when we go away for a week over summer, but lack of space and the time requirements made me keep putting it off. I just find myself too busy in retirement.]

Jerry Kaufman: "Thanks for sending me these two most recent issues of *Perryscope*. I enjoyed them and look forward to new issues. (I should also dive into efanazines and look for the previous numbers.)[PM: Do that.]

"I liked the covers on these. That's a very good drawing of you on issue #7, and the photo of you doing something in Bali on #6 is intriguing. Are you by any chance grinding grain for dinner?"

[PM: The photo on P6 is me using a very large mortar and pestle to grind a lot of spices. We were attending a cooking class in Bali at the time and we need quite a lot of spice mix for a dish we (me plus my wife, daughter and son) were cooking. We all had a go at the grinding which was a lot of fun.]

"You're much more meticulous about planning and recording your reading than I am. I'm certainly not making any effort to read lots of novellas and shorter fiction. My reading consists of books interrupted by fanzines and magazines. We subscribe to a few mags, and also get some from organizations to which we donate.

"One of the fanzines I've read recently was *Outworlds/Afterworlds*. The writing in *OW* was above average, but the only piece that's stuck with me was Chris Sherman's diary of his child's birth. And all that Bowers writing in the *Afterworlds* segment was more teasing than fulfilling for me, with all its hints meant to hit home with only two or three of his readers, was frustrating. The later editorials, with all Bill's misery from a bad marriage and bad medical problems, were quite saddening; I had forgotten much of it."

[PM: I've been dipping into *OW/AW* from time to time but it's so huge that trying to tackle it in any organised manner is a bit daunting.]

"On the other hand, the job that Pat, Jeanne, Alan, and Rich did to assemble and edit, lay out the pages, print and distribute the results, was superb." [PM: Agreed.]

"Suzle and I watched *Enola Holmes* in part because we've enjoyed various other re-imaginings of Holmes stories, in part because we like British approaches to crime and detection, and in part because we have liked Millie Bobby Brown's appearances in *Stranger Things* and *Godzilla*. I liked *Enola Holmes* well enough; my only real issue with it is the depiction of the young Sherlock and Mycroft. Sherlock seemed too friendly and understanding, while Mycroft was too much of a jerk."

[PM: It was light entertainment for the night, so light that the fine detail of the film is starting to fade already. It is clearly pitched at its preferred audience.]

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“We watched both *The Undoing* and *Good Omens*. I enjoyed the former for the performers (I like Nicole Kidman quite a bit) but was not that surprised by the ending, as the script salted a few clues in the last several episodes. I tried reading *Good Omens* years ago, as well as another Pratchett novel, but like you did not find them funny. Yet the series was very entertaining. I'm glad I watched it.”

[**PM:** I just kept on thinking that *Good Omens* was trying too hard for its jokes. I really wanted to like it a lot more than I did. Which sounds a little weird. My wife, and a lot of other people I know, enjoyed it. Far more than me.]

John Hertz: “I agree with you about *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Also Bester. I rank *Roadside Picnic* higher than you, and think *Hard to be a God* even better. For 2020, I think *Glorious* (Greg Benford and Larry Niven), *Forced Perspectives* (Tim Powers) and *Starborn & Goodsons* (Niven, Pournelle and Barnes).”

[**PM:** I'm really only starting to get to 2020 novels about now – with the exception of the KSR and Susanna Clarke – as I'll need to do some thinking about the Hugo Awards, nominating and voting. So I'll keep these in mind. And, John, I do see your reviews and other items on *File770*. I maybe don't pay as close attention to the reviews as I should.]

I also heard from: **Nic Farey** who produces the monthly fanzine *This Here...*, which you should be reading – go to efanazines; **Chong** who castigated me for not including the publication year in my reading spreadsheet – fixed that now; **Werner Koopmann**; **John D. Berry** and **Kim Huett** who sent me some contemporaneous fanzine reviews of the novels on the 1961 Hugo ballot, and some background to the Hugo voting that year. Thank you one and all.

