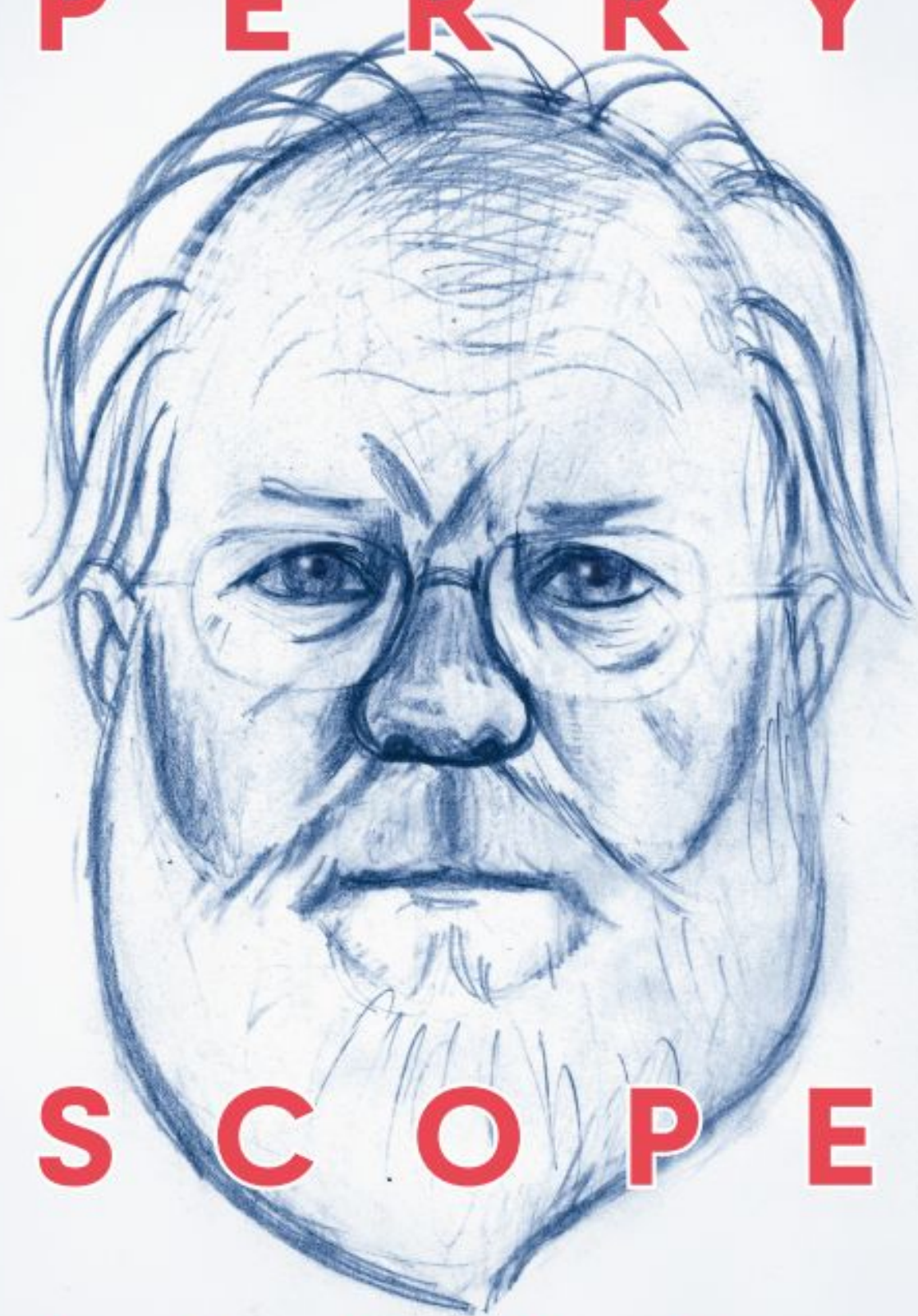


P E R R Y



S C O P E

E L E V E N

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Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and then whoever else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for download at efanazines.com with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover by W. H. Chong.

INTRODUCTION

In May Robyn and I finally got to take the driving holiday to Canberra and the South Coast of New South Wales we'd been denied in January. Back then we had the whole trip lined up, with accommodation booked and plans in place only to be foiled by rolling COVID-19 bans on interstate travel. Either the ban stopped us from even entering NSW or returning, or, if we did either then we could have been subject to 14 days isolation at either end. We couldn't take the risk so cancelled all of that and just went driving around our home state of Victoria. There was nothing wrong in that – in fact we had quite a good time – but it wasn't what we had originally set out to do.

February rolled around and, of course, we realised we would have been able to make the original trip. COVID cases either side of the border had dropped to near zero and any lockdowns were becoming more localised and short-term. March came and we decided that we really wanted to take the trip, so May it became.

Back in my younger days I might well have been able to drive to 10 hours straight from Melbourne to Batemans Bay, but not any more. Speeding fines and fatigue just don't seem to have the same appeal. Luckily Canberra had both Robyn's cousin Rae and a travelling art exhibition I wanted to see. Seven and half to eight hours I could handle, so an overnight stop was set up.

The National Gallery of Australia's current exhibition, *Botticelli to Van Gogh: Masterpieces from the National Gallery, London*, featured works by such artists as Vermeer, Goya, Turner and Monet, as well as the two featured in the title. With our lack of overseas travel since 2019 it gave us the chance to have a taste of European art without the expense. It's a reasonable collection of works, though, due to its very nature, it doesn't have any overall theme running through it. There were a lot I had seen before and there were also a number of artists that were new to me. About what I would have expected.

The highlight, naturally, was Van Gogh's Sunflowers. The picture is a marvel; it seems to glow with its own light almost as if it were radioactive. The gallery had given it plenty of space on a long wall at the end of the exhibition and, with the crowd being limited due to COVID

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restrictions, there was plenty of time to have a really good look up close. I'm just sorry my photo doesn't do the work justice.



The rest of the week was spent touring up and down the south coast sampling the seafood, oysters and prawns as much as possible and soaking up the warmth of the sun before we returned to a wet and miserable Melbourne after 10 days. I probably covered more than 3,000 kilometres in that time so I've over driving for a while.

Highlights, apart from the art and food, were Tilba, Araluen, Braidwood, the wonderful coastline and the green and lush hinterland. Lowlight was the realisation of just how much of the countryside had been burnt in the fires at the end of 2019. But the bush is starting to make a comeback. We can only hope the wildlife does the same.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

FANAC and John Bangsund

Back in *Perryscope* 1 I wrote about how I came to be retired, somewhat against my will. In that piece I intimated that I had been contemplating retirement for some time, discussing it with family and friends and trying to get my head around the actual day-to-day consequences of forever giving up the commute to work.

Everyone I spoke to kept on saying things like “you have to keep busy”, and “you have to find things to do”, neither of which I thought would be terribly difficult. I already had the volunteer work I was doing for Austlit and, in April 2019, had started the podcast *Two Chairs Talking* with David Grigg, so I had a few things lined up but figured there could always be more.

In August 2019 I was in Dublin for the World Science Fiction Convention wandering around the Dealers’ Room, looking at the various books, magazines and other merchandise for sale when I noticed that the FANAC people had a table up against the wall. Joe Siclari and Edie Stern, the driving forces behind the project, were sitting in front of some computer equipment and scanners, putting what seemed like a continuous stream of paper (obviously old fanzines) through a machine, and chatting to people who wandered up. And an idea began to take shape.

Fanac, you may recall, is fannish slang for “**fannish activities**”. Fanac.org is a website that “is devoted to the preservation and distribution of information about science fiction and science fiction fandom. There are fanzines, photos, and all sorts of strange and wonderful information about fandom's past.” Just the sort of thing I thought I could get interested again. So I approached the desk, had a chat to Joe, and then Mark Olson and then Tom Becker, and before long I was all in.

It took a while for me to get my act together to be able to help out properly. The old flatbed scanner I had wasn’t going to be up to the task so I needed something that would handle side-stapled fanzines without the need to extract the staples first. Enter the CZUR Aura overhead scanner (see photo) which works a treat for these sorts of publications.



My main interest in Fanac was always going to be looking into the Australian side of fandom, attempting to find and scan in old fanzines and material that might be of interest to both me and other people. So it was that soon after I picked up the new scanner that Joe and Edie indicated that they wanted to concentrate on the works of John Bangsund, a major figure in Australian fandom who died last year.

So for a couple of months earlier this year, Mark Plummer, Irwin Hirsh, Marc Ortlieb, Kim Huett, Joe, Edie and I worked on getting as much of John's material up and available as possible. We haven't got it all, as yet, but we gave it a fair shake. There is still more work to do and we'll be getting to that over the coming months.

A couple of years back Sally Yeoland asked a number of people to contribute small pieces to a publication that was aimed to celebrate John's 80th birthday. By way of introduction to John, and my first meeting with him, I am reprinting below the article I wrote for that publication.

From the Southern Cross to La La Land

Melbourne, August 1975

The first Australian worldcon, Aussiecon, held at the Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne in August 1975, was my first ever sf convention. I had been reading sf since my early teens, had made some tentative contact with the Adelaide University SF Association but hadn't been involved in fandom in any way till that point.

I think I first became aware of the convention in a listing in Analog, and then picked up more information when I passed through Space Age Books in Melbourne in January 1975. Paul Stevens pointed me towards a flyer, so I grabbed two. Eight months later my father and I were wandering around the Southern Cross hotel, attending panels, not knowing anyone but getting to put names to faces as people were introduced: Silverberg, Foyster, Bangsund, Le Guin, Edmonds.

For whatever reason my father and I had signed up for the Hugo Banquet and we found ourselves sitting at a table with the late Adelaide fan Paul Anderson, who my father mistook for the author Poul Anderson to our amusement.

The Toastmaster for the evening was John Bangsund, who introduced the awards and kept bobbing up from his place at the top table to introduce the next award presenter. He looked a tad agitated but the evening flowed pretty well, and John kept things moving along. The night ended with the Best Novel Award going to the convention's Guest of Honour to great applause. Even though she was too unwell to accept the award in person John seemed to be beaming, as if all his plans had come together. He made a major impression.

Los Angeles, September 1996

It's Los Angeles, LACon III, the 54th worldcon and I'm the Down Under Fan Fund winner for the year, travelling through the US spreading the good word about Australia. As it happens, it's also the year that the convention members get to vote for the venue of the 1999 Worldcon, the year for which Australia has put forward a bid.

Things were hectic in the lead-up, and during the con I spend a large amount of my time manning the Aussiecon bid table, talking to fans and drumming up support. I'd also known for

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a few months that I had been listed as a presenter at the Hugo awards: best fanzine and best semi-prozine.

I had nothing prepared prior to the trip but I knew I had to start with something when I went on stage. I couldn't just walk to the lectern and launch straight into the list of nominees. I was trying to softly sell Australia after all.

The pre-Hugo reception came and went and I stayed sober. I took my seat and still had no firm idea how I was going to start. Somehow I had found myself sitting in the audience in the middle of a row rather than near the end where I should have been so I could make my way easily to the stage.

The early awards came and went and I realised I'd better get to the front of the auditorium if I was going to be on time for my gig. I was sweating, a bit shaky and rushed things so I succeeded in kicking a pile of books from under one seat and then nearly ending up on my face before I even got started.

I recovered, somehow, and on the way down the front I remembered 1975 and had my opening.

Then I was halfway up the stairs, waiting for my cue, striding to the lectern and being blinded by the lights. A good thing as it happened as I was only able to see the first few rows of the 5000-seat auditorium.

"The first worldcon I ever attended was Aussiecon in Melbourne in 1975. At that con the toastmaster at the Hugo Banquet was John Bangsund. Every time he stood up to make an award announcement he looked like he was going to wet himself...I now know exactly how he felt."

It got a laugh.

I had come full circle.

[Originally published in *John Bangsund : Eightieth Annish*. Reprinted with kind permission of Sally Yeoland. You can get a copy of the *Annish* at the following URL:

<https://efanzines.com/IBangsund/EightiethAnnish.pdf>

Haber gazed again at the mural and wondered when such a photograph had been taken. Blue sky, snow from foothills to peak. Years ago, in the sixties or seventies, no doubt. The Greenhouse Effect had been quite gradual, and Haber, born in 1962, could clearly remember the blue skies of his childhood. Nowadays the eternal snows were gone from all the world's mountains, even Everest, even Erebus, fiery-throated on the waste Antarctic shore. But of course they might have colored a modern photograph, faked the blue sky and white peak; no telling.

The Lathe of Heaven by Ursula K. Le Guin (1971)

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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



Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 52: (12 May 2021) *Nothing is so perfect...*

We return to the Hugo Time Machine, this episode looking at the fiction works on the Hugo ballot in 1966. David actually liked *Dune*, and we both felt that the Ellison short story had lost some impact over the years.

Episode 53: (25 May 2021) *Fact and fantasy*

David talks about the non-fiction books he's been reading lately and I discuss **The Yield** (see review here), a BBC podcast and the two Nghi Vo novellas (also here).

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, but getting close with a few

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

Abbr – Hugo : Hugo Award Winner; Aust – Australian; Miles – Miles Franklin award winner; nvla : Novella; Anth – Anthology; YA – Young Adult.

May 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>...And Call Me Conrad</i>	Roger Zelazny	Sf	May 3	e	3.6	1965	Hugo
<i>The Yield</i>	Tara June Winch	Lit	May 10		4.4	2019	Aust/Miles
<i>Skylark DuQuesne</i>	E. E. "Doc" Smith	Sf	May 11	e	1.4	1965	
<i>The Empress of Salt and Fortune</i>	Nghi Vo	Fantasy	May 17	e	4.1	2020	nvla
<i>When the Tiger Came Down the Mountain</i>	Nghi Vo	Fantasy	May 19	e	3.7	2020	nvla
<i>The 27th Kingdom</i>	Alice Thomas Ellis	Literary	May 20		3.2	1982	
<i>Flying to Nowhere</i>	John Fuller	Literary	May 21		3.4	1983	
<i>Analog 5</i>	Ed John W. Campbell Jr	Sf	May 22	e	2.8	1967	Anth
<i>The Chase</i>	Candice Fox	Thriller	May 28		3.8	2021	Aust

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<i>Finna</i>	Nino Cipri	Sf	May 28	e	3.3	2020	nvla
<i>The Farthest Shore</i>	Ursula K. Le Guin	Fantasy	May 31		4.8	1972	YA

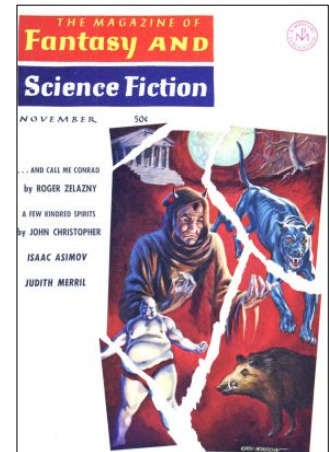
Books read in the month: 11

Yearly total to end of month: 41

Notes:

...And Call Me Conrad (1965) – Co-winner of the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Novel. (I read the original magazine serialisation.)

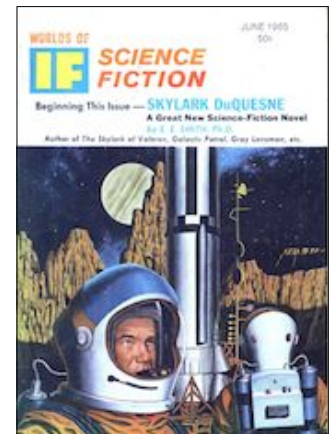
Set in a future many years after a brief nuclear exchange has rendered most mainland territories on Earth radioactive, overrun by mutated life-forms, and with only 4 million humans left on the planet. In addition Earth is now mainly owned by the blue-skinned alien race of Vegans. One of whom has come to Earth, ostensibly to write a travel guide, and commissions Conrad Nomikos, the novel's narrator, to act as a tour guide. Conrad comes across as a wise-cracking tough guy out of a 1940s PI novel and seems to be a pre-cursor to Corwin, the author's hero in his Amber series of novels. While the setting of this novel and the characters are interesting the plot relies far too heavily on "just-in-the-nick-of-time" coincidences for the hero to survive to the end. Zelazny throws in all he can think of to add high-brow lustre to the work but it basically comes across as a simple quest-plot. R: 3.6/5.0



The Yield (2019) – Winner of the 2020 Miles Franklin award. (see my review later in this issue)

Skylark DuQuesne (1965) – Nominated for the 1966 Hugo Award for Best Novel. (I read the original magazine serialisation.)

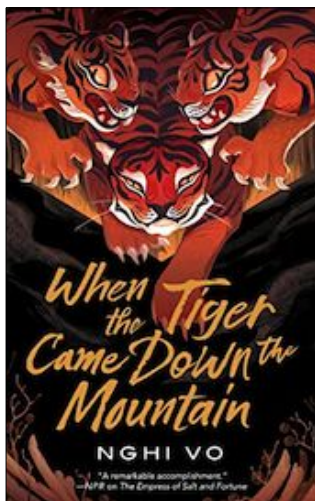
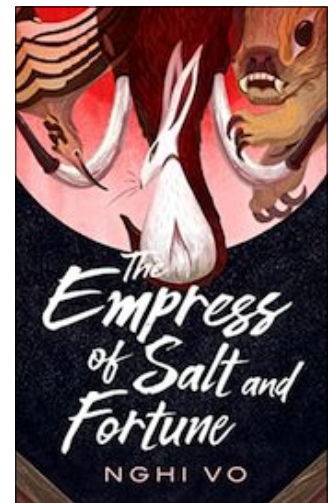
This is the fourth book in the Skylark series, but the first that I've read. Marc DuQuesne, the villain of the previous books, is now shown to have matured and reformed and has been offered the chance to help Dick Seaton. The novel deals with the interactions between the two and an alien race known as the Chlorans. These aliens are threatening to escape from their own galaxy and take over the Universe, enslaving humans in the process. In order to defend against this menace DuQuesne and Seaton undertake an act of genocide against the Chlorans by destroying their entire galaxy, suns, planets, people, the lot. And everyone lives happily ever after(!). This was published just before Smith died and you have to think that the Hugo nomination was an emotional rather than a logical one. Very, very poor. R: 1.4/5.0



This fanzine acknowledges the members of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which it is produced in Hawthorn, Victoria, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

The Empress of Salt and Fortune (2020) – Nominated for the 2021 Locus and Hugo Awards for Best Novella.

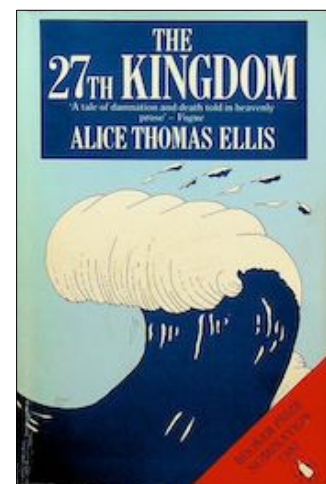
In a fantastical fictional country somewhere in Asia the ungendered cleric Chih attempts to record the rise, fall and rise again of the Empress In-yo who has recently died. As a young woman In-yo was chosen as the new wife of the Emperor but soon bored him and was exiled to an estate at Lake Scarlet – better than the silk garotte of the alternative – where she plotted her revenge. Chih travels to the house, accompanied by their magical bird companion Almost Brilliant, where she encounters Rabbit, the Empress's companion during her rise and exile. The full story of the life of the Empress gradually emerges like the layers of a cake, with secrets revealed at each turn. A beautifully quiet, exquisitely paced, dialogue rich novella that fully deserves its award nominations. The first story in the author's Singing Hills Cycle.
R: 4.2/5.0



When the Tiger Came Down the Mountain (2020) – A sequel to the previous novella, though not a direct one, which doesn't quite have the same impact. This time Chih is travelling over a mountain pass under the guidance of Si-yu on the back of the mammoth Piluk when they are waylaid by three fantastical tigers who are able to speak and to take human form. In order to prevent the party being eaten Chih relates the story of the legendary tiger Ho Thi Thao and her human lover, the scholarly Dieu. The tigers are mesmerised by the story and offer their own version of events which Chih notes down to update the official record. The basic structure of story-telling revealing a wider and deeper history is again employed but this time the setup seems rather contrived. Whereas the first novella revealed hidden secrets that were not revealed until very late, this novella telegraphs its ending rather more clearly. Still an excellent novella, just not up to the standard of

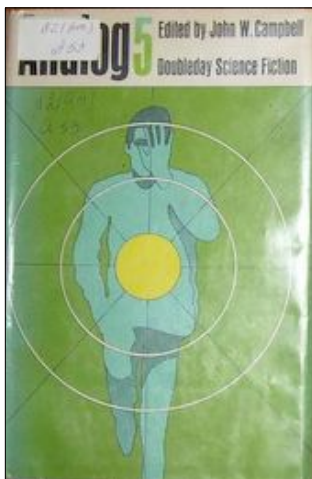
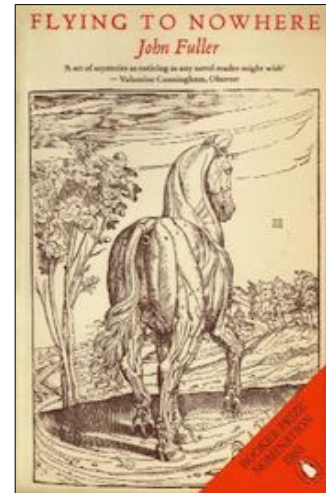
the first. R: 3.7/5.0

The 27th Kingdom (1982) – Shortlisted for the 1982 Booker Prize. Aunt Irene (pronounced I-ree-na) has moved across Europe from her home in the east, through Ukraine and other cities and countries to land in her 27th location, Chelsea in London. There she inhabits the Dancing Master House with her nephew, Kyril, and lodger Mr Sirocco. The house is thrown into disarray when Irene receives a letter from her sister, a Reverend Mother in a nunnery in Wales, informing her that a young West Indian postulate, Valentine, is being sent from the nunnery to live with Irene, presumably to have her faith tested in some way. This short novel starts off very well indeed. The characters are brilliantly, and amusingly illuminated and the setup promises fun and revelations. Unfortunately it fails to deliver, and none of the main characters, bar one, evolves in any way. After the first 50 pages or so the novel just coasts along with little drama and no plot to speak of.



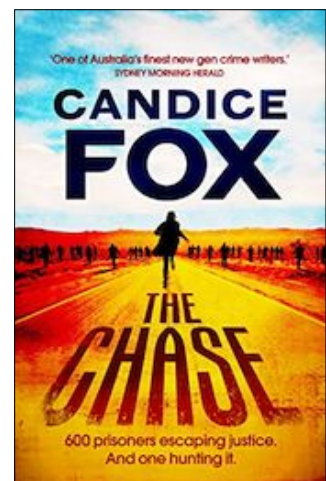
Everything seems to happen off-stage, which is especially true with a large party that Irene hosts that sounds like a riot. Could have been great. It isn't. R: 3.2/5.0

Flying to Nowhere (1983) – Shortlisted for the 1983 Booker Prize. Vane, a Bishop's emissary, visits a monastery on a Welsh island which is home to a well with supposed miraculous healing powers. But something is awry. Pilgrims are either not visiting or are disappearing without reason. Vane suspects the Abbott, who, the reader learns, spends most of his time at a dissecting table searching for the location of the soul within the human body. Part crime novel, part religious discussion, this short novel struggles to find its place, jumping from one focus to another, never truly settling. That may have been the author's intention all along, in which case I think he has taken the wrong track. By the end some questions are resolved but many more have been raised and left unanswered. You get the impression that this should have been longer, or shorter. At this length it appears somewhat unfinished. R: 3.4/5.0



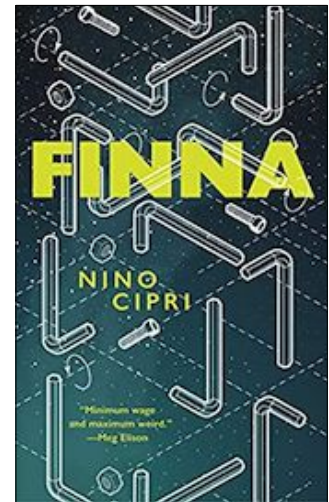
Analog 5 (1967) – The last, and least satisfying, of the anthologies I'm reading for the survey of short sf from 1965 I'm working on. The contents here are taken solely from Analog stories from 1965. Only the Schmitz ("Balanced Ecology") and the Reynolds ("The adventure of the Extraterrestrial") stories would appear in my long list of recommended reading for the year. Then again there probably wasn't much else of worth published in the magazine that year, except possibly Garrett's Lord Darcy story "Muddle of the Woad" and another Schmitz title, "Trouble Tide". R: 2.8/5.0

The Chase (2021) – A well-orchestrated mass break-out from a prison in Nevada sends 600 violent prisoners out into the desert. Some head for Las Vegas but John Kradle only wants to head back to his hometown to have a chance of proving that he did not kill his wife and son five years before. Determined to catch him at any cost is Celine Osbourne, a Death Row supervisor, who hates Kradle as much as anyone she has ever met. Fox has moved to a much wider canvas and much bigger cast of characters with this novel. She handles the various threads of the novel well, not allowing one line to dominate and keeping the action moving ever forwards. There is one storyline featuring a serial killer who comes across on the page as a lonely old man just helping people out where he can which is actually rather amusing, if you have the same sort of black sense of humour that I do. R: 3.8/5.0



Finna (2020) – Nominated for the 2021 Locus, Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.

An elderly customer goes missing in a big box furniture store (think IKEA on steroids) and two minimum-wage employees, Ava and Jules, are tasked with trying to find her. Unfortunately for the two of them this involves navigating their way through a maze of inter-dimensional portals using a dodgy device called a FINNA which points an arrow in the direction of the lost item. Generally this is green when the best fit (ie the actual person) is located, and yellow when the next best fit (ie a variant of the person in another world) is found. Added to their overriding problem is the fact that Jules and Ava have just broken up an intense relationship. This novella is amusing and readable but hardly, in my view, of a level that would make it onto three awards' ballots. You have to wonder if it's the sexuality of the main characters that has won people over rather than the quality of the story itself. R: 3.3/5.0



The Farthest Shore (1972) – Winner of the 1973 National Book Award for Children's Books.

This is the third volume in the original Earthsea trilogy – it would be another 18 years before Le Guin revisited the series with **Tehanu** in 1990. Ged (aka "Sparrowhawk") is now Archmage of Earthsea and Warden of Roke, the most powerful wizard alive. Prince Arren arrives on Roke with news that there is trouble in the world as wizards everywhere seem to be losing their magical abilities. Ged and Arren set out to determine the cause and their journey will take them south and far west, to the edges of their known world and into the realm of the dragons. There they discover a figure from Ged's past who has crossed a barrier and opened a forbidden door. I'm in two minds as to whether this is better than **A Wizard of Earthsea** or not. Suffice it to say that this trilogy is one of the high points of modern fantasy. Don't let the

fact that this was originally published as Young Adult as a deterrent. This is as good as it gets. R: 4.8/5.0



REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

The Yield (2019) by Tara June Winch
Genre: Literary

Tara June Winch came to national attention with her first novel **Swallow the Air** in 2006. Then we had to wait until 2016 for a short story collection, **After the Carnage**, and another three years for this, her second novel.



Wiradjuri elder “Poppy” Albert Gondiwindi has died, so his granddaughter, August Gondiwindi travels back from England to her home town of Massacre Plains in western New South Wales to attend his funeral. It is the first time in over ten years that she has returned home, a place that has changed markedly since she left. As August attempts to re-connect with her grandmother, Elsie, she continually runs up against the missing: her mother, languishing in jail on a drugs charge; her sister, Jedda, mourned, lost and presumed dead; the Wiradjuri language; history; and her country. The town is waiting for a major tin mine to open, an operation that promises new jobs but at the cost of more destruction and the potential for more things to go missing.

The novel is told in three major streams. There is August in the present, preparing for her grandfather’s funeral and also remembering the good times of her childhood with her sister. There is the long serial letter from Reverend Ferdinand Greenleaf, written in 1915 to Dr George Cross of the British Society of Ethnography detailing the reverend’s attempts to set up a mission station to protect the indigenous people around Massacre Plains, and the opposition, both political and murderous, of the state authorities. And there is also the missing dictionary of the Wiradjuri language that Poppy was writing at the time he died. August is unaware, until near the end of the novel, of the contents of either the dictionary or the letter, so the author has a balancing act to maintain, knowing the reader has more information than her protagonist while still holding the narrative tension of the novel in place. She handles this with some dexterity.

Poppy begins the novel with:

I was born on *Ngurambang* – can you hear it? – *Ngu-ram-bang*. If you say it right it hits the back of your mouth and you should taste blood in your words. Every person around should learn the word for *country* in the old language, the first language – because that is the way to all time, to time travel! You can go all the way back.

As August slowly learns about the dictionary and its contents, about the damage the mining company will inflict and about the people missing in her life, she begins to come back to her country and to her history to help her family and people make decisions about their futures.

This is an excellent book, and highly recommended. I was especially taken with the decision by the author to include Poppy’s dictionary entries in reverse order in the novel. That takes us from the opening paragraph and his entry for “**yarran tree, spearwood tree, or hickory acacia** – *yarrany*” where he states “from it I once made a spear in order to kill a man,” to the final entry:

Australia – *Ngurambang* That’s my country, anyway. It spreads to almost the size of England, from the mountains in the north, to the boundary of *Ngurambang* in the south. The water once flowed through the Murrumbidgee from the southern rivers, filling the creeks, the lagoons, the lakes, and feeding everything in its wake. *Ngurambang* is my country; in my mind it will always be on the waterfront. Five hundred acres where the Gondiwindi lived, live. Australia – *Ngurambang*! Can you hear it now? Say it *Ngu-ram-bang*!

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Call My Agent (Season 4 – 6 episodes) (2019)

[Original title: *Dix pour Cent*]

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy Drama

In season 4 we start to see the steady decline of the ASK agency: Andrea is overworked and is struggling to combine her role as a parent with being CEO; Gabriel is still pining for Sofia and losing focus; Mathias and Noémie have left to become film producers; Camille is leaning towards starting her own young talent agency; and Hicham has moved on. Maybe it's the slow destruction that gives this season a dark feel. In any event it doesn't appear to be at the level of the previous season. According to Wikipedia there will be a 90-minute film followed by a fifth season. Hopefully they can get it back on track. R: 3.9/5.0



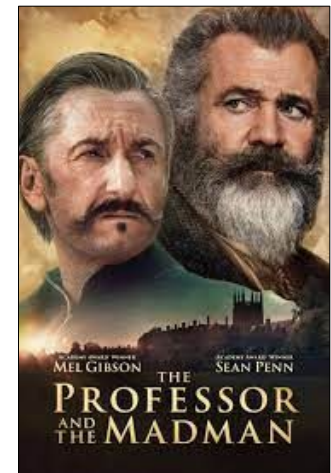
Film

The Professor and the Madman (2019)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

Film adaptation of Simon Winchester's book *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, using the terrible US book title. The basic idea of the story follows the development of the first Oxford English Dictionary. James Murray, a Scotsman played by Mel Gibson, is appointed editor, and sets up a system whereby volunteers send in word definitions and quotations. One of these is an intelligent, schizophrenic American doctor (Sean Penn) consigned to Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. The story doesn't make for much drama so the film-maker over-emphasises the American's mania and treatment, and adds in a dubious love-story. The two main actors over-act while the bit players are generally excellent. Interesting, but nothing great. R: 2.9/5.0



The Mauritanian (2021)

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Drama

The Mauritanian of the title is Mohamedou Ould Slahi who was arrested in connection with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and imprisoned without charge in Guantanamo Bay. Jodie Foster plays the American lawyer who takes on his case on a *pro bono* basis and Benedict Cumberbatch is the American army lawyer determined to bring him to trial and execution. This is based on a true events and while we know

most of the overall story the fine detail makes it a harrowing experience with Slahi being tortured over an extended period until he confesses to everything under duress. It has a lot to say about everyone's right to representation in court and the way a powerful government can manipulate a legal situation to its own benefit. R: 3.9/5.0

The Courier (2020)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama

In 1960 a low-level British businessman, Grenville Wynne (Bernard Cumberbatch), is recruited by British Intelligence to act as a courier, bringing packages back to the UK from Moscow as supplied by their new source Oleg Penkovsky. Based on a true story the film follows Wynne as he gradually gets more and more involved until, in a final attempt to get Penkovsky out, all players are arrested. What starts as a casual jaunt by Wynne gradually takes control of his life and the last quarter of the film, detailing his imprisonment and torture, is very dark. Cumberbatch is impeccable as usual. He handles the transition from easy-going hail-fellow-well-met character to one fighting under overwhelming duress just to stay alive and sane with great intensity. Recommended. R: 4.3/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Chris Garcia: “I rather enjoyed [*Perryscope* 9], and I especially like the look at *Nomadland* and *Mank*, neither of which I've bothered to see, but both of which sound like my kind of films! I need to read more Australian Crime writing!”

[**PM:** Certainly watch *Nomadland*, but you can only take your chances with *Mank*. I can only note that there is a lot of very good Australian crime fiction being written at present.]

Leigh Edmonds: “I was not in the slightest surprised to read that the little tacker on the front cover was you, that's what we've come to expect. I have to say that I thought you looked rather flash all decked out in red. On the other hand, if I was to indulge in putting photos of myself as a little fellow on the cover of my fanzines they would be in black and white (I can't be that old?) and I would not be dressed as well (or at all) as you are here.”

[**PM:** B&W? You're not that much older than me. My father was a fan of photography back in those days, though there don't seem to be all that many of me around for some reason. I wonder if they got purged at some point.]

“Your biography of Dennis *et al* continues to be interesting and fills in some gaps in my knowledge. I had not come across that definition on wowser before and should have it framed. How come there are still so many of them around?”

[**PM:** They just keep on breeding. Dennis was rather sensitive to these sorts of people. I think he hid details of his sexuality for the major part of his adult life.]

Joseph Nicholas: "I'm responding in particular to your comments in *Perryscope* 10 about *Dune*, 'considered one of the greatest sf novels ever written, by some'. When read the first time, it is undeniably impressive – the extremely detailed and worked-through background, the complex byzantine politics – but when read a second time it's immediately obvious that the book is actually the first and third volumes of a trilogy from which the second, covering character development and plot complication, is absent: an absence which results in a jarring leap across several years and a severe risk of throwing the reader out of the story altogether. I certainly remember how, on my second reading, I had to pause for a few days before picking the novel up again and continuing with it."

[**PM:** This makes a lot of sense and is not one that I had really considered previously. I'm guessing the clues to the passing of time are given somewhere in the novel though I'm not going back into it again to try to find them. This was probably my third, maybe fourth reading of the novel, and I suspect my last. My father used to joke that losing one's memory had the benefit of forgetting you had read some novels so you could pick them up as for the first time. *Dune* was one he cited, as he really liked it. Not sure he ever got back to it though.]

"In David Lynch's 1984 film version, this gap had to be covered by a voice-over, which was not at all convincing. Dennis Villeneuve's forthcoming film (if it ever does forthcome!) will get around the gap by filming the two volumes separately, but having said that I wonder whether the projected second film will ever be made: the constantly postponed release date for the first and the lack of box-office receipts from a post-pandemic audience wary of spending time in an enclosed, crowded space may cool the studio on its financing. Never mind that all the key personnel – actors, director, photographers, digital effects specialists, modelmakers – could all be committed to other projects for years ahead and thus physically unable to shoot a second film. Never mind the possibility that some of the older players – Charlotte Rampling (Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam) is in her seventies – may actually die before the second film can be made. Or that Timothee Chalamet might be involved in a road traffic accident (*a la* Mark Hamill in the gap between *Star Wars* Parts 4 and 5) that destroys his youthful beauty and along with it the charisma that the character of Paul Muad'Dib requires to become a religious revolutionary. Or – or – or...one could multiply the hypothetical possibilities, but perhaps I shouldn't!"

[**PM:** Yeah, best not. Anyway, Rampling looked pretty robust last time I saw her in anything, I will certainly go and see the Villeneuve film on the big screen. My feeling about it currently is hopeful, but wary. The local cinema is putting on a screening of the Lynch adaptation and I'm tempted to wander along. Will two versions of the one book on film in one year be too much?]

"Reading your review of Ross McMullin's biography of Will Dyson prompts me to wonder whether the problems that you found with its first chapter – the large cast of characters, the failure to follow a clear narrative path – might be a consequence of the fact that the book is a reworking of an earlier work: something with an existing structure into which the new research was shoehorned rather than being a completely new structure, which could have been built to cope with the new information. Well, it's a thought."

[**PM:** And very probably the correct one. I don't think the correct amount of thought was put into how that book would all come together. And that's a pity.]

"Another thought, in response to Mark Olson's comments about the geographical locale in

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which Clifford Simak's works are set, is actually a reminder that many decades ago Ian Maule and I agreed that Simak's stuff seemed to be mostly about farming in Minnesota. Which is doubtless fine if you happen to have a special interest in farming and Minnesota...."

[**PM:** That's a tad rough. In an article about Simak's work in *Foundation* 11/12 (March 1977), David Pringle noted a dozen themes that run through Simak's work: "1. The Old Man, 2. The House, 3. Listening to the Stars, 4. The Neighbour, 5. The Alien, 6. The Pastoral, 7. Animals, 8. The Evils of the City, 9. Servants, 10. The Frontier, 11. Bartering, 12. The Artifact." You could argue that *Way Station* covers all of those bar 7 and 9.]

[**PM:** Back in *Perryscope* 9 I quoted **John Hertz** asking me to consider using "alternative" rather than "alternate" when compounding it with "history" in describing counter-factuals. I demurred.] "I loved 'Probably not.' Of course I think you are mistaken, but it was a fine reply. I could almost hear your voice. And it reminded me of Kenge's – and Vholes'! – answering probably in ch. 65 of Dickens' *Bleak House*, another fine moment.

"Merril made a point of bringing into her *Best* anthologies things she found outside the SF prozines – like the Jarry in the 11th you review." [**PM:** the story John is referring to here is "Two Telepathic Letters to Lord Kelvin".] "Pataphysics is *the* science. [**PM:** 'Pataphysics (note the leading apostrophe) is defined as the science of imaginary solutions. There is a Wikipedia page devoted to it. If there isn't a branch of this science that deals with politics then there should be.] "May her [Merril] memory be a blessing."

[**PM:** I was impressed by her willingness to look outside the restricted sf genre circle for her selections. The Wollheim/Carr anthology covering the same year was very predictable in its source material. And suffers for it. I'm being deliberately cagey here in my replies as I am writing up a survey of short sf in 1965 for the second issue of *The Alien Review*. So you'll just have to wait till that it finished and published to get to my final views on the subject. I think some people are going to be rather annoyed with my conclusions.]

I also heard from: Garth Spencer; William Brieding; and Werner Koopmann, thank you one and all.

