

# *Perryscope*



# **Thirteen**

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Cover by unknown.

### INTRODUCTION

**July 9:** As predicted last issue the interment of my father's ashes and the wake, that were scheduled for late July, have both been cancelled. The current outbreak of the delta variant of COVID-19 in NSW has caused both South Australia and Victoria to close their borders with that state. But, given the greatly increased rate of infections from this variant it's really only a matter of time before most other states have a similar outbreak. After that all borders will be closed, again, and we'll be forced into another sustained, tight lockdown, again.

So we haven't got anything planned and all we can do is monitor the situation and hope we can get together by the end of this year.

Planning and booking any sort of holiday outside of Victoria is also a problem, of course. Robyn and I have lots of ideas, but that's all they can remain at this time. Booking, and then later cancelling, is tough on us and also the service providers we would be using. Better we just sit and wait it out.

**July 16:** And Victoria enters its fifth strict lockdown. A team of furniture removalists from Sydney have travelled into Victoria while infected and, without wearing masks, have spread the delta variant around the city. Firstly to an apartment block, which then led to secondary spread at the MCG, a major pub in the city, schools and country towns.

The current lockdown is scheduled for five days (Friday to Tuesday) though I wouldn't be surprised if that is extended if the case numbers don't drop quickly enough.

Our planned excursion to Sydney in late August looks like being out of the question and we may also have to cancel our week in Mildura, booked for the end of July. I'm guessing the current rolling lockdowns will now last until around Easter next year. It will take that long for the Australian vaccination rates to get anywhere near the levels required to prevent them, especially with this delta variant being as contagious as it is.

**July 23:** Any hopes that Victoria would exit the latest lockdown in rapid fashion were overthrown during the week with an announcement that the current arrangements would be extended for another seven days. I think some commentator noted that, sometime next week, Melbourne residents will pass the 26 week mark for full lockdown since this pandemic began back in March 2020. That doesn't make me feel any better. I understand the reasons for it, while at the same time wishing it would just be over and done with.

Our week in the north-west of Victoria, and the weekend in Sydney in late August, are now going to be cancelled. It's just not worth taking the risk of being caught out anywhere, even if we could get into NSW. In fact New Zealand in late October is looking more likely than anything else at this time.

The number of COVID-19 cases in Victoria is trending downwards, with most of those receiving a positive test result already being in self-isolation. That augurs well for a reduction in lockdown restrictions next week. Though I suspect that reduction will be implemented in stages: increasing our travel bubble distance, expanding the number of retail outlets that can open, and making minor shifts in mask wearing rules. It will take some time before we are anywhere near to where we were in late-June.

**July 30:** Well, that was a bit of a shock. Last week I was predicting a slow, phased reduction in movement restrictions and then the State Government goes ahead and announces a much faster reduction. The 5 kilometre travel limit has been completely removed so we are now free to go on our planned holiday to Mildura this weekend after all. Of course, the state borders are still closed, which means a lot of what we planned to do next week is now off the table. Still, it will be good just to get away from the city for a while. A change of scenery, a long drive, visits to a few wineries, breweries, distilleries and eateries. All we can hope for is no local outbreaks when we are there. Reports next month.



### **WHERE I GREW UP**

When people ask me where I come from I like to say that I grew up in Laura, a small country town in the mid-North of South Australia about 225 kilometres north of Adelaide. That is mostly true, but not completely.

I'm not entirely sure when our family moved to the town. My sister was born there in early January 1959 so that would indicate a 1958 start date. I stayed there full-time until I hit my high school years in 1968. The reason why I left will have to wait for another time. So, all up I only lived in the town for about 10 years. It had a major impact, though only in a good way.

Laura, as I said, is small. The population at the 2006 Census was only 570. I'd assume the total in the late 60s or early 70s would have been roughly the same. Adding in the local

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regional area you wouldn't get to 1000. The local primary school (for ages 5-12) had about 140 kids when I was there in the mid-1960s, and that covered an area of about a 10 kilometre radius.

The township sits about 10 kilometres north of Gladstone, which is at the southern-most crossing of the Flinders Ranges. This are the only major mountain range in South Australia; though it seems a tad ridiculous to call a range "mountainous" when the highest peak is only at 1,171m (3,842 ft), but that's the flat nature of this part of the country.



Laura is a service town, providing shops and amenities (doctor, pharmacy, hospital, banks, school etc) to the surrounding district, which is mostly made up of small mixed farms. These farms run some sheep and harvest wheat and barley. None are overly big, and none are very profitable; enough to cater for one family and that would be it.

Being in the Mid-North region of South Australia it's hot in summer (mid-40s Celcius) and cold in winter, with frosts overnight, but no snow. The rainfall is marginal – about 18 inches, or 460mm, annually. It's a dry harsh country, located near the northern limits of the arable agricultural land in the state. Climate change has only made it more marginal.

My father was a pharmacist, and, after graduating from University, worked for about six or seven years for other people. His main aim was to be able to run his own business. So, after stints in Blackwood and Tailem Bend in South Australia, and Launceston in Tasmania, he was finally in a position in 1958 to look towards reaching that goal.

Two pharmacies in the mid-North of South Australia became available at about the same time, one in Jamestown and the other in Laura. I'm not sure which of these would have been my father's preference, but by the time he was able to make an inspection the Laura shop was the only one available. We moved there sometime in 1958. Given I was only about three at the time I don't remember anything about this, of course. My memories of the town would start a few years later, around the beginning of 1961, when I first started going to primary school.

Later in his life my father wrote a memoir about his early life growing up in Adelaide, going to school and university, meeting my mother and then his professional life. When he came to write about Laura he described it as follows:

"Laura was designed as a miniature copy of Adelaide. The main section, to the South, was approximately square, and separated from the smaller Northern section by a sort of park land. Surrounding the whole area were parklands and farmlands. Adelaide and North Adelaide.

"The shopping centre lined both sides of the main street in the Southern section. It included three garages, a bank, two hotels and a post office. A further hotel was in the smaller Northern section, and this area also included the Laura Hospital and the Laura Milling Company. Included in the shopping centre was a big shop—for the size of the town—called Eudunda Farmers Co-op. It was a branch of what was a big chain of shops at that time, and cut into everyone else, as it sold groceries, drapery, hardware, etc.. There were two other grocery stores, two butchers, two greengrocers cum delicatessens, a draper, two bakers, a shoe store, an undertaker cum carpenter, and even a newspaper, which closed a few months later. There were also seven or eight empty shops, something I should have noted earlier. Five churches, no less. They must have been a very religious bunch in the past."

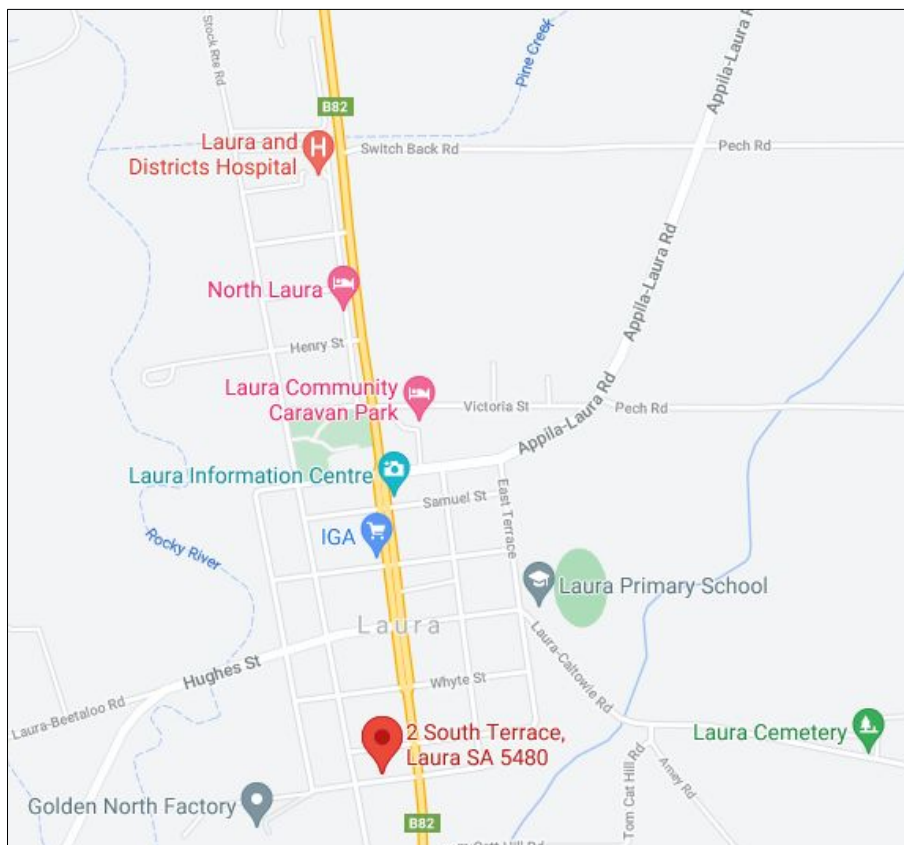
My father mentions two pubs here, but there were a few more in the town at various times. The most famous of these was the Beetaloo Reservoir Hotel, in Herbert Street, which was once owned by C. J. Dennis's father. This was the hotel in which Dennis scratched his initials on a window pane with a woman's diamond ring, something I mentioned back in *Perryscope 3*. That pub was a derelict when we moved to Laura and was demolished sometime in the early 1970s. There was also a brewery that opened on West Terrace in the mid-1870s, supplying beer to nearby towns, but was shut down before 1910. It is now refurbished as a B&B.

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I also note it a bit peculiar that he didn't mention Golden North, the dairy company located at the end of our street. It is one of the largest employers in the town and produces a range of dairy products, probably the most famous of which is their honey ice cream.

Along with the pharmacy business my father purchased the pharmacist's house, situated at 2 South Terrace. This was a large three-bedroom, brick house with a wide verandah across the front, down the right-hand side, and across the back. I only have a vague recollection of that front and side verandah. My father decided to remove it shortly after we arrived as it was in a very bad state and would have cost a fortune to fix. I think he probably regretted that later, but it was the only reasonable decision he could make at the time. In any event, the house took on the shape and frontage that is shown on the front cover of this issue, the image that fits my major memory of it.



The back verandah, as we called it, across the back of the house, remained as cover for the trek to the outside toilet. Within a few years my father had renovated the house to include an updated kitchen and bathroom, to move the toilet further in under the verandah and closer to the back door, and to open up the dining room to make a large kitchen/eating area. My father was to live in this house until after my mother died in 1981, not leaving the town until about 1983. Other than general repairs and maintenance, and a new septic tank, the house was to remain unaltered after this initial major work.

Externally, Dad added a large television antenna, about 10 metres tall, at the side of the house – behind the pine tree on the right of the cover picture. With no local television transmission we had to rely on the broadcast signal from Adelaide. It was always iffy – some days good and some days non-existent. The last time I went through the town and past the house I saw that this antenna had been removed. Not much need for it now, but in the early 1960s it was the only television option we had.

Life in the small township of Laura was rather quiet. There was no cinema (there was a drive-in picture theatre in Gladstone, 10 km south that only ran on weekends), no library other than the one in the school, and no bookshop. If you wanted to enjoy yourself you had to come up with ways to do it yourself. And that mostly meant playing with your siblings, if you had any, on your own or with children of a similar age who lived nearby. And by “nearby”, I mean quick walking distance. Children living at the other end of town, if they weren’t related to close friends of my parents’, might as well have been on another planet.

Television reception picked up around 1965, when a transmitter aerial was constructed at The Bluff, a high-point of the lower Flinders Ranges. This was situated to provide television reception to the larger Spencer Gulf towns of Port Pirie, Whyalla and Port Augusta, and we got the benefit, at last, of being in direct line of sight of the tower. Even then we only had access to two channels: the ABC and a local commercial station that mostly replayed programs transmitted from Adelaide. It seemed like luxury at the time.

I had a good time living in Laura. Life was relatively easy. We didn’t want for much, and we kids were pretty much allowed to run as free as we wanted: “don’t get into trouble”, “don’t go on the main road”, and “get home before dark” were about the only three instructions we were given. Needless to say we got into strife at various times for breaking all of them. All of this was prior to the disappearance of the Beaumont children from an Adelaide beach in January 1966. That changed everything. Parents became a lot more protective and the leash was shortened.

But even that didn’t slow us down that much.

Note: all Australians of a similar age to me will know about the Beaumont children. They were three children of the one family who went missing in 1966 and who have never been found. Over the years a number of suspects have been identified but none charged.



Cover notes: this issue’s cover is a painting of the house in Laura where I grew up. My mother commissioned three copies of this (one for each child) around 1974. While my brother and sister have both had theirs for some years I only just came into possession of mine last year after my father died. The artist is unknown. There doesn’t appear to be any name on the painting or frame. Which is a pity.

## WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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



### Notes from this month's podcasts

**Episode 56:** (6 July 2021) *Labyrinths and Rooftops*

This week we discuss the Locus and Clarke Awards, list our top 5 books of the year so far, and then go on to chat about the books we've been reading lately.

**Episode 57:** (21 July 2021) *From a Skewed Perspective*

The main topic of conversation this episode is the 2021 Hugo Award Novella nominees. We both agree on our favourite, though we suspect it won't win. And then it's a few books we've read lately. This episode was released a day later than our normal fortnightly schedule. The simple reason, Life. That strange thing you experience between reading bouts.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at [www.rightword.com.au](http://www.rightword.com.au), or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



## WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – Aust: Australian; Gdn: Guardian Best 1000 Novels; 1001: 1001 Novels to Read Before You Die; Nvla: novella.

### July 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Interlibrary Loan</i>	Gene Wolfe	Sf	Jul 4		3.0	2020	
<i>Slow Horses</i>	Mick Herron	Spy	Jul 10		3.8	2010	
<i>The Kill Artist</i>	Daniel Silva	Spy	Jul 13		3.5	2001	
<i>A Stairway to Paradise</i>	Madeleine St John	Lit	Jul 15		2.8	1999	Aust
<i>The Kingdom by the Sea</i>	Paul Theroux	Non-Fic	Jul 16		3.2	1983	
<i>Get Shorty</i>	Elmore Leonard	Crime	Jul 25		4.2	1990	Gdn; 1001
<i>The Four Profound Weaves</i>	R. B. Lemberg	Fantasy	Jul 31		3.0	2020	Nvla

Books read in the month: 7

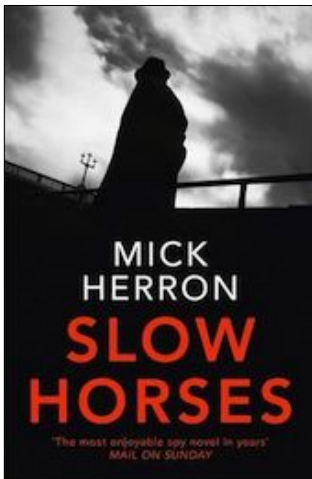
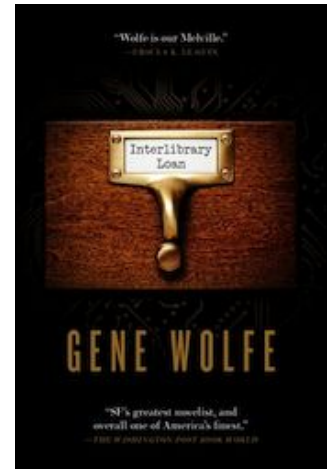
Yearly total to end of month: 57



### Notes:

***Interlibrary Loan*** (2020) – Nominated for the 2021 Locus Award for Best SF Novel.

This is a sequel to the author's 2015 novel ***A Borrowed Man***, and the last novel Wolfe completed before his death in 2019. E. A. Smithe is a "re-clone" of a 21<sup>st</sup> century mystery writer. As in the previous book this reclone is living in a library, available for loan to any person willing to pay the deposit and act as a patron. Smithe is transferred from his large city library to the small town of Polly's Cove where Mrs Fevre wants him to help her find her missing husband. This is a very obscure book. I kept on thinking that there was a lot going on that I couldn't grasp, lots of references back to the previous book and lots of inside jokes. Unfortunately I didn't get most of them and the mystery, at least on the surface, is very mundane and lacking in interest. I suspect it is a novel for Wolfe devotees, which is a pity because I really enjoyed the earlier book. R: 3.0/5.0

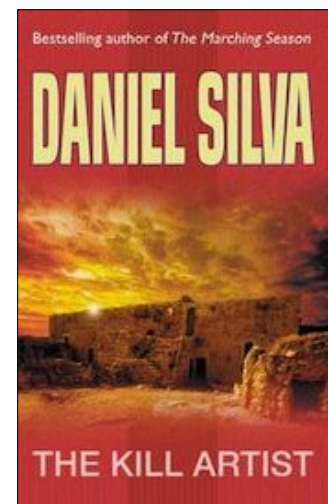


***Slow Horses*** (2010) – #1 in the author's Slough House series.

Slough House is where British Intelligence banishes its "almost agents" – the ones who messed up by talking too much when drunk, or failing a major assessment, or leaving sensitive material on a Tube train, etc etc. But Slough House isn't in Slough, nor is it a house. It takes its name from the "slow" agents who work there. Run by Jackson Lamb, the establishment doesn't run operations, it pushes paper, analysing useless data and generally passing the time. But somehow they get involved in the case of a young Pakistani, allegedly kidnapped by a British ultra-right wing group who threaten to behead him and live-stream the act. Thwarted by Regent's Park (intelligence HQ) at each turn Lamb's unlikely crew force their way into the centre of the action. Okay, it's not

to Le Carre's level but this is a funny, enjoyable, and fast-paced espionage novel. It takes a while to get going as the author sets up the background but it picks up in the last two-thirds. Read it before they adapt it into a TV series. R: 3.8/5.0

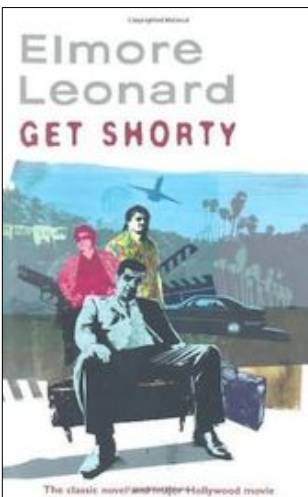
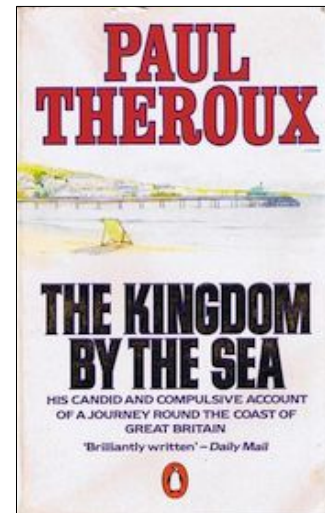
***The Kill Artist*** (2001) – #1 in the author's Gabriel Allon series. Gabriel Allon is an ex-Israeli intelligence officer now living in Cornwall and working as a restorer of fine paintings. After the assassination of the Israeli ambassador in Paris by Tariq, a terrorist mastermind, Ari Shamron is reinstated as Mossad director and recruits Allon to help kill Tariq. Allon takes on the task as he and Tariq have a history, with Allon killing Tariq's brother and Tariq killing Allon's son and maiming his wife in reprisal. This is an



espionage thriller in the grand style, zig-zagging across Europe and the middle East and landing in Canada and the US. The plot is intricate, global and also very personal. Most of the characters are one-, or maybe two-dimensional, but it is the plot that really matters, and that hums along. R: 3.5/5.0

***A Stairway to Paradise*** (1999) – see major review below.

***The Kingdom by the Sea*** (1983) – Subtitled “A Journey Around the Coast of Great Britain” which pretty much gives the game away. After eleven years of living in London Paul Theroux realised he really didn’t know anything about his adopted country; as he puts it “This floating kingdom was a foreign country.” So he decides to walk around the coast, as you do. Starting in Margate, heading in a clockwise direction, he walks, rides on buses and takes small branch-line trains for the next three months. Set against the background of the Falklands War in early 1982, and later the birth of Prince William, Theroux uses these two events to comment on the British obsession with the sea – always looking out, not inwards – employment and the degradation of the country’s culture and way of life. I have always thought of Theroux as a grumpy old misanthrope and this book is a classic example of that attitude. It can get a bit tedious at times so best to read this in small chunks. R: 3.2/5.0

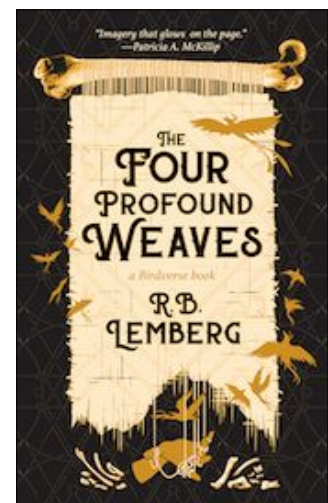


***Get Shorty*** (1990) – #1 in the author’s Chili Plamer series.

Chili Palmer is a small-time loan shark in Miami when he heads west to California and Nevada chasing a bad debt. In Beverley Hills Palmer teams up with Harry Zimm, a director of B-grade horror movies who is now attempting a comeback via a screenplay for a crime flick. Palmer keeps manoeuvring around the debt while also slowly succumbing to the lure of Hollywood and wangling his way into becoming a “producer” on Zimm’s film. Leonard’s combination of the two great amoral industries of the USA provides for a wonderful dance of characters, sharp dialogue, and amusing and ingenious set pieces. This was adapted into an enjoyable film of the same name,

featuring John Travolta in the lead role, in 1995. Also made into a television series in 2017, but I haven’t seen that as yet. R: 4.2/5.0

***The Four Profound Weaves*** (2020) – The main character of this novella, the trans Uziya, is a carpet weaver. They were originally taught the first three weaves by their aunt Benesret, but she disappeared 40 years prior to the start of this story, leaving the last of the weaves – carpets woven from bones, signifying death –



untaught, and possibly lost. A nameless man is also searching for Benesret, hoping that she will provide him with a name and identity. The two set out together to search for Benesret but their quest doesn't end as they expect. I really wanted to like this story as it appeared intricate and interesting, but it soon becomes difficult to follow. The narrative is told from differing points-of-view that all seem remarkably similar. It just becomes confusing, and slow. R: 3.0/5.0



### REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

***A Stairway to Paradise*** (1999) by Madeleine St John

**Genre:** Literary

I reviewed ***The Women in Black*** by this author back in ***Perryscope 5***, and gave it a very high rating. That was the author's first novel; this is her fourth, and last. Which may explain some of my feelings about it.

It's hard to review a book that I didn't much care for, especially after I was so impressed by the author's earlier work. This is very much a disappointment: insular, and filled with uninteresting people being uncommunicative and boring. Twenty or so years ago some book reviewers decried the types of books that were then being nominated for the Booker Prize in the UK. These were books that seemed to deal solely with the upper middle classes of Hampstead or Chelsea going about their tedious lives with little or no regard for the world around them. I'm sorry to have to say that I believe they may well have been thinking of books just like this. This novel wasn't on the Booker shortlist, it's just an example of a type that might have been.



Alex and Andrew are old friends, both of whom are infatuated by Barbara, a beautiful young woman who flits across their lives, interacting with them, and their families. Both become emotionally involved with her. They find this all very disturbing, in a self-absorbed way, and agonise about what they will do about it all. Barbara joins a group of friends and travels overland from London to India, and then continues on to Sydney. And that's about all there is.

The author was off to a bad start by giving the two main male characters such similar names. Maybe she was attempting to make the point that men of this age and class are nearly all the same. Fair enough but it's a rather obtuse and confusing way of going about it.

I'm fully aware that all parts of the human experience are fair game for writers, though why you would want to concentrate on the boring and inconsequential parts of it escape me. I

would have much preferred to read a novel with Barbara as the sole main character; a caustic satirical novel about the childish infatuations of middle-aged men with pretty young women and the impact that has on the women concerned. There are glimpses of that book here. Just not enough of them.

R: 2.8/5.0



## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

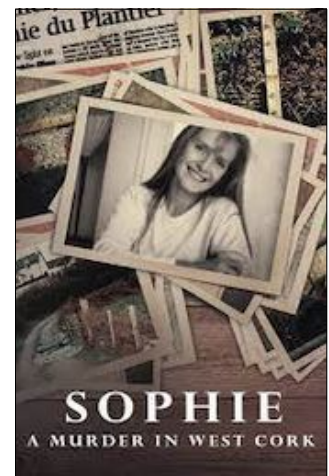
### Television

***Sophie : A Murder in West Cork*** (Mini-series – 3 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: True Crime Documentary

On the night of 23 December 1996 French television producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier was murdered outside her home near Schull, County Cork, Ireland. Her murderer has never been brought to trial in that country. This three-part documentary provides the background to the murder, the subsequent investigations, the arrests and releases of one suspect (who is named and interviewed), and the long journey by Sophie's family to provide her with some level of justice. Many people who were living in the town in 1996 are still there and are interviewed here, providing an interesting view of the thoughts, prejudices and societal norms of this remote area of Ireland. An intriguing and engaging series. R: 3.5/5.0

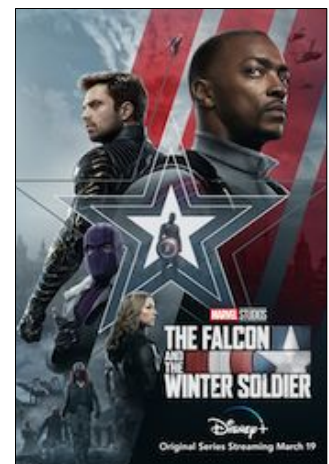


***The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*** (Mini-series – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Sf / Superhero

Following directly on from the events of the film ***Avengers : Endgame*** (2019) this series forms a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Its main aim, so it seems, is to act as a bridge between that film (which saw the final outings of Iron Man and Captain America) to the next phase of the MCU. Sam Wilson (the Falcon) has been presented with the shield by the original Capt America (Steve Rogers, as played by Chis Evans) but has rejected it as he can't comprehend how a black man can represent a country that doesn't represent him. It helps to have been keeping up with the Marvel films to this point, though I suspect it would be enjoyable without that background. The chemistry between the two main players (Anthony Mackie as the Falcon, and Sebastian Stan as the



Winter Soldier) is good, and it adds a level of social commentary to the MCU that will make it more acceptable to a wider audience. R: 3.3/5.0

**Loki** (Mini-series – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Sf / Superhero

This series forms another part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and I'm guessing if you are not up-to-date with all of that then this is going to be very confusing. Tom Hiddleston plays Loki – the God of Mischief, adopted son of Odin and brother of Thor – and the action of this series again takes place after the events of **Avengers: Endgame** (2019). The plot is too complicated and obtuse to go into here, and that is probably the main problem with this series (a second has been announced). It is more a love letter to comics fans than a bridge between MCU instalments. Maybe it will improve but I just got the impression that the story-line here wasn't aimed at explaining anything. It was just trying to be too clever and missed the mark. R: 3.2/5.0



**The Sinner** (Season 1 – 8 episodes) (2017)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

A police procedural with a difference, concentrating more on the motive rather than the crime itself. Cora Tannetti (Jessica Biel) appears to be a quiet, well-adjusted wife and mother. One summer's afternoon, at a nearby beach, she gets into a verbal altercation with a group of young people and stabs a man to death. The crime is not disputed, but there appears to be no motive. Detective Harry Ambrose (Bill Pullman) is convinced there is more to this incident than meets the eye, and begins to dig into Cora's back story. If you get over the problem of this detective being allowed to

spend his time investigating what appears to be a closed case then it becomes enjoyable if a little stretched at times. The episodes slowly unfold the mystery a piece at a time to a satisfactory conclusion, though Robyn and I had a big discussion about the "retrieved memory" approach used. Well-written and well-acted. R: 3.7/5.0

## Film

**State of Play** (2009)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

Russell Crowe, as Cal McAffrey, walks through a role as a newspaper investigative reporter who stumbles across a connection between a



street killing in Washington and the death of a Congressman's aide on the subway. The Congressman (Stephen Collins, played by Ben Affleck) is, of course, an old college friend of McAffrey, and, of course, again, McAffrey is involved with the Congressman's wife. Is this an attempt by big business to stop Collins investigating defence budget blowouts and corruption? Can Helen Mirren, as the newspaper's editor, get McAffrey to just bloody finish whatever it is he's trying to write? Can Rachel McAdams as the paper's resident blogger (it is 2009) really climb the reporting hierarchy that quickly? Haven't we seen this sort of thing before? Yeah, probably. Competent, but not overly thrilling. R: 2.7/5.0

### ***The Current War*** (2017)

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Historical Drama

This film depicts the contest, in the 1880s and 90s, between Thomas Edison (Benedict Cumberbatch) and George Washington (Michael Shannon), over the electric power delivery system in the USA:

Edison supporting the Direct Current (DC) technology, and Westinghouse the Alternating Current (AC). Nikola Tesla also makes an appearance, at first working to Edison, and then setting out on his own before joining up with Westinghouse to build a practical electric motor.

After a somewhat jumpy start to the film, where it attempts to cover too much ground too quickly, the script settles down and the drama becomes rather engaging. Both Cumberbatch and Shannon are competent in their roles without producing any major highpoints. R: 3.4/5.0



## ***PERRYSCOPE*** Responses

### ***Perryscope 10:***

**John Newman:** "I was surprised at the very start of *Perryscope 10* to be confronted with the idea that a perzine might **not** be about the author! Whether explicitly, with photos and family details, or implicitly by the choices made about content, comments, layout, presentation and attitudes revealed, surely a perzine is the epitome of something that is about the author.

"But then, I've never made one, formally, so what would I know I suppose?"

**[PM:** I tend to agree with this. I think Nic Farey was more thrown by the continuing series of photographs and drawings of me being used as cover material. It is a conceit, but a minor one. The overall concept is given away by the fanzine's title after all.]

"Thanks for the report on your studies of C.J. Dennis, his times and associates. One gets a good impression of the creative (and social) ferment in the pre-war years."

**[PM:** There will be more of these to come about various other authors I've come across in my trawling of old newspapers and magazines. And I hope to have more on Dennis as well. Not sure when. Other projects keep building up.]

"It had never occurred to me that *Dune* was written in two halves. [PM: Nor me.] That certainly explains a lot, there was definitely a speed bump in the middle. I have never been good at seeing through a novel, into its possible formation and influences. Some components can be obvious in their inspiration, especially where they come from current events or tropes, but I have trouble seeing where the strengths and weaknesses of the novel itself might have come from."

### **Perryscope 11:**

**John Hertz:** "You tell of L.A.con III the 54<sup>th</sup> Worldcon where you were the DUFF delegate and a presenter on Hugo Night. I was a Hugo presenter and an acceptor at the one you and Rose chaired, Aussiecon IV, the 68<sup>th</sup>. I rejoiced accepting Best Fanartist for Brad Foster, who'd told me 'Don't worry' — what, me worry? — 'it'll never get voted to me.' I being the DUFF delegate was given the honor — as I saw it; naturally from the concom's point of view I was given an honour — of presenting Best Fanwriter. It had been voted to Fred Pohl. Robert Silverberg accepted for him with 'This is the strangest of Fred's Hugos.' I can say no more."

[PM: Bob was right, it was very strange. That was also the first year since 1978 that Dave Langford had **not** appeared on the ballot. ]

"The first time I read *Dune* I thought 'What a lot of claptrap. Derivative. Heavy-handed. Pretentious.' Some years later wondering if I might have been too harsh I read it again. I thought 'What a fool you were. It's brilliant. Thoughtful. Poetic.' Some years after that I read it again and thought I'd been right at first. I haven't gone for a fourth. In the David Lynch 1984 film I liked the knife fight."

[PM: I have a feeling that I like *Dune* most while I'm reading it and in the short period afterwards. I do think it has to be taken in context of its time, when the longer sf of 1965 was still attempting to replicate the simplistic space opera of the 1940s and 1950s. The Lynch film adaptation is lamentable.]

"Some may re-read because they've forgotten. I'm more with Nabokov who said 'You never appreciate a good book until you read it at least a second time.' A vivid adventure for me was going secondly to Patrick O'Brian's books of Seaman Jack Aubrey and Surgeon Stephen Maturin, wonderfully parallel to SF not only because the sailing-ship technology was so alien to me a city boy. They're full of crashing surprises. How would they be when I knew what would happen? I needn't've feared. Watching the author work his enchantment was even better. I felt the same way about *The Avram Davidson Treasury*. I knew all those stories. That was enhancing."

[PM: My father was, and my stepmother is, a big fan of O'Brian's work. As is Stan Robinson. I've only read the first of the series so if I read one per year — there are 21 all up — I reckon I might just get through them all. The books are on the TBR list — the very, very long list.]

**David M. Shea:** "I am shocked to find myself in agreement with Joseph Nicholas, with whom I have crossed swords before. But in regard to *Dune*, he's on to something. I think of *Dune* as an amazing book whose time has come and gone — much like Joan Vinge's *The Snow Queen*, another book very popular in its time and quickly forgotten. The importance of *Dune* now is commercial rather than literary: it's the focal point for people who don't know much about SF, but can pretend to, because 'I've read *Dune*' (or more likely, seen the film). It fills the place in mundane literaria for SF that 'Harry Potter' does for fantasy. All without considering that the impact of *Dune* in the genre lies buried under a plethora of sequels, prequels, and side stories by Brian Herbert and Kevin Anderson."

[**PM:** I think you describe it perfectly. It will get another surge of interest due to the new film version about to be released but I suspect most people won't go back to the original source material.]

"To say Clifford Simak's work is about 'farming in Minnesota' is a misleading truth. Simak was almost unique in combining rustic nostalgia with futuristic ideas. And, *The Werewolf Principle* is set in and around Washington DC; *Cemetery World* apparently somewhere southwest of Pennsylvania; *Shakespeare's Planet* on another world; *Out of Their Minds* all over the place!"

[**PM:** As I noted in my response to Joseph in *Perryscope 11* Simak's work has rather more themes than Joseph's simplistic description. But I think that was just a throwaway joke more than anything else.]

"Fantasy heresy: I read the first book of Le Guin's 'Earthsea' stories long ago; it didn't interest me at all, and I never read the others. If I were to chose one book to introduce young readers to Le Guin, it would be *The Beginning Place*. There is more than one road to the city."

[**PM:** Indeed there is, and every traveller takes their own path, even on the same road. And that's the beauty of book discussions: each traveller can give their opinion on why they took the path they did, and others can learn from that explanation.]

"I never read 'Doc' Smith at all, and feel no sense of loss at admitting that." [**PM:** I wish I could say the same thing, but I had my reasons at the time, and, hopefully, those same reasons will never arise again.]

**John Newman:** *Perryscope 11* was also a good read, and of help to me because the local museum I volunteer for has been looking for an overhead scanner, so I will pass on the details of the CZUR Aura, which has a number of great features (so far we are just looking at a Fujitsu SnapScan). Are the scans of Bangsund's *Threepenny Planet* on FANAC done with the Aura?"

[**PM:** Possibly, but the more recent scans of *Etherline* and *SF News* (which Joe and Edie have tagged as being scanned by me) were done with the overhead scanner. Mostly the scanning process involves a toss-up between dismantling the fanzine and then re-stapling, or trying to scan it as is. Sometimes it works well, and sometimes not. And the final result,



while looking bad, may actually be a fairly true representation of the original publication, however bad that was.]

"FANAC seems like a great idea, but there seems to be many issues. I've seen lot of really poor fanzine page scans. Pages are clipped, unreadable, or duplicated... Why are there no Australian photo albums? Why is there no entry for Melbourne's Funcon? The whole site looks so '80s. Mmm, this could start to look like a job! (I'm not blaming you!)

"Ah well, archives are a particular horror!"

[**PM:** The reason why some material is there and some not is purely a matter of time, access and personnel. It takes some time to work through a pile of fanzines – I think a recent batch of 10 *Etherlines* took me about 90-100 minutes. And sometimes it's just because the printed matter isn't to hand. We are starting to move ahead with the Australian material (and some New Zealand stuff as well) but it will be a slow and steady task. If you find Australian fanzines that look dodgy or need re-scanning let me know and we'll see if we can re-do them.]

### **Perryscope 12:**

**Rose Mitchell:** "I was fascinated with your gin masterclass and like you I discovered craft or small batch gin (very important distinction) some years ago. I can't really recall how, it just happened. Might have been a Junipalooza event or because I am bit of a hipster. [**PM:** !!] I prefer citrus flavours rather than herbals. My favourite gin is Big Tree (Mt Macedon) <https://bigtreedistillery.com.au/> Elegant Dry. [**PM:** This isn't one that I've tried. Which is hardly surprising given the vast numbers that seem to be appearing almost daily.] They also do a Sloe Gin in very, very small batches. For day to day guzzling, Patient Wolf, wonderful citrus after-notes. And the tonic you use is just as important as the gin. Never use that commercial Schweppes stuff!"

[**PM:** I'm more of a straight ice man, myself. Tonic, and any other mixers, can tend to overshadow the original gin flavour. Which is fine with run-of-the-mill gins which need all the help they can get, but not the newer, more botanical ones. I'm paying good money for the gin, and that's what I want to taste.]

"Interesting your comments about **Riot Baby**. I couldn't finish it; it was just one long diatribe on how badly treated black people are in America. While true and an important conversation to effect change, Christ it was dreary. My notes say: Carrie in Harlem! Perhaps I'll go back and finish it now you've alerted me that (a) it gets better with a hopeful resolution and (b) it actually does have some SF / fantastical tropes that are not bolted on to a non genre story. How hard can a novella be to finish?"

[**PM:** As you've found, sometimes very difficult.]

**Joseph Nicholas:** "Reading of your problems organising your late father's funeral recalls to mind the restrictions around my late mother's funeral in November last year. (My father had died in 2011.) She had been suffering from steadily advancing dementia in the final decade

of her life, and for the last half of it had been resident in a nursing home because she was no longer able to look after herself (and had begun to forget who we were — she knew she had children, but couldn't match the adults we are now to her memory of us as young boys and girls); it was something of a relief (and a release) when she finally passed away. But the rules on funeral attendance, in what was then the UK's second lockdown, were strict: my two sisters and my niece attended; my brother and his wife would have attended but had their car malfunction on the way to the crematorium (near Exeter, in Devon); I had to stay at home because a good part of my journey would have involved the use of public transport, with the attendant risk of catching Covid-19 and (in any case) a requirement to self-isolate somewhere other than home (and Judith's chemotherapy-induced immuno-compromised status) for 14 days afterwards. But the service was live-streamed; and I was able to see and hear my eulogy read out by the vicar brought in for the occasion.

“We have still to decide what to do with her ashes — they can't be interred alongside my father's, because his were scattered in the sea to the west of The Cobb in Lyme Regis by a Sea King helicopter from the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down (now just plain MoD Boscombe Down). (He was able to swing this because part of his career in military aviation had been spent there, and the helicopter crew was able to log the trip as a training mission. Anyone in the UK now reading this who wants to complain about this misuse of taxpayers' money knows where they can go.) We also need to decide on when and where to hold a wake or memorial event, bearing in mind that all her siblings are deceased, scattered second cousins and similar are all that remain of her side of the family, and most of my parents' friends are now either deceased or too frail to travel. (My father was an only child, and all his relatives are dead.) Also to be borne in mind is that that Boris Johnson's removal of all remaining restrictions in a week's time means that there will inevitably be a third wave of Covid-19 infections going into the autumn and another full-scale lockdown before winter arrives, meaning that a memorial event is unlikely to take place this year.”

[**PM:** Our current plan is to place Dad's ashes next to Mum's. Dad took out a 50-year lease on the site when Mum died, so that has another 10 years to run. After that the general feeling is that we'll spend a weekend or so spreading their ashes together in various places where they lived. Final details not yet decided.]

“3 vols surplus rant about the Johnson government's inept and chaotic handling of the Covid-19 pandemic omitted at this point. (The rationale for the imminent removal of all restrictions seems to be that avoiding infection is a matter of personal responsibility rather than government direction — with the obvious corollary being that if people do get infected it's their own damn fault, so yah boo hiss. (The arrogant yah boo hiss one expects of an Eton toff such as Johnson.) The removal of all restrictions is supposed to contribute to reviving the economy, but an upsurge in infections, business closures and unemployment can scarcely be expected to do anything of the kind.) Especially as (it seems) Australia now has problems with its own management of the pandemic: having closed the borders to keep the infection out, you now seem to be in a position where the delta variant is taking off but less than 10% of the population has been fully vaccinated against it — a level similar

to what one expects of a sub-Saharan nation with an underdeveloped and under-resourced public health system, not an advanced industrial nation. (To quote from an article in *Guardian Australia*: "Australia remains almost the worst performing OECD nation on Covid-19 vaccinations, behind countries such as Costa Rica and Latvia".) One must surely blame Scotty from Marketing for this fiasco."

[**PM:** The number of mistakes that have been made by the Australian Federal Government over the past 17 months regarding this pandemic is quite mind-boggling. There hasn't been a single stage of the Federal vaccine response that you could say has been effective. All of the heavy lifting has been done by the State governments. The end result is, as you note, a very, very low number of fully vaccinated people in the country at this time. This comes about due mainly to an overwhelming desire to: 1) look like you are on top of things by making frequent announcements; 2) make promises about rollouts that you had no hope of meeting; and 3) stay in power. All sizzle and no sausage. Hopefully this will all be remembered when we have our Federal election next year, but I fear that the Australian voting public has the memory and attention span of a dead frog in these matters.]

"I read your article on gin-tasting and gin-making, but cannot comment as I'm not much interested in spirits. (I don't much enjoy the taste.) Other than to ask whether one of the local gins is really called 'Nosterfatu Blood Orange' — should that be 'Nosferatu', or did that spelling have to be avoided to filmic copyright reasons?"

[**PM:** It should have been "Nosferatu". Put that down as yet another dumb typo. The gin was pretty good, though.]

"Finally, I don't usually bother with podcasts, primarily because of the issue of needing to find something to occupy one's hands while one listens (there are only so many games of Scrabble one can play on one's tablet before one's interest in the game starts to wane), but I did give a whirl to the section in your 54th, on fandom and fanzines. Again, though, I have no comments. (Well, I daresay that I could churn out a lengthy screed on why Young People Today Will Never Be Interested In Fanzines As We Have Known Them, but we've all been there, so I won't. Besides, I think I've written enough as it is!)"

[**PM:** Yes, I fear that while certain old dinosaurs like Bruce Gillespie and myself continue to churn out "Fanzines As We Have Known Them" the current appetite is for something else entirely.]

**I also heard from: John Harvey; Robyn Mills** ("I'd forgotten what a good photographer I am!" — Hmmm...); **Martin Field; Nick Price;** and **Tineke Hazel**, who enjoyed the film *Green Book* and will be checking out *The Labyrinth*, thank you one and all.

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.