

Perryscope 16



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Cover photograph by Robyn Mills.

INTRODUCTION

In case you weren't convinced that we live in a science-fictional world then I'm sure the recent sub-orbital space flight of Capt. James T. Kirk (sorry, William Shatner) will have put paid to that idea.

There has been a lot of flack over the marketing hype accompanying this flight, which, frankly, I cannot understand. I'm not sure what else people were thinking would happen when the 90-year-old Shatner was named as one of the Blue Origin passengers. Like him or not, Bezos has a product to sell and this is a moment of publicity genius. And surely it is equivalent to the early days of air travel. I'm sure airline companies back in the 30s and 40s would have used movie stars as publicity for their flights. That form of travel was way too expensive for the average punter to even contemplate until the jet age in the 1960s. Even then it took until probably the 1980s before it really became cheap enough for people to undertake it with any sort of regularity.

Think of what airline travel was like a few years back, before this current interregnum, and you'll maybe get an idea of what space travel will be like in 50 years or so. And then, also remember, that NASA's Apollo Space program was scaled back and then cancelled in the 1970s due, in part, to public disinterest.

So, stay away for the hype, or see it for what it is: a necessary stepping stone towards an expansion of humankind's journey beyond this planet.

Oh, and as to the perennial argument that we should be spending the money for the various space programs to fix problems back here on earth: I agree that money should be spent, and more, but would you rather that money was taken from scientific research and innovation or from, let's say, nuclear-powered submarines we don't need? To me the answer is obvious.

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Typos I have known: It's just like me to presume that George Washington appeared in the film *The Current War*, that I reviewed back in **Perryscope 13**. Especially as he had been dead for some years by the time the events depicted rolled around, and as I later, in the same review, referred to the gentleman by his correct name of George Westinghouse; not

once, but twice! This, and no doubt many other typos are there for your entertainment. Enjoy.

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Postal wars: Some of you may be aware of the problems Australia is having sending and receiving mail from the USA. Bruce Gillespie has commented that he has had a number of copies of his fanzine, *Science Fiction Commentary*, returned from US addresses for no specific reason. And a few fans in the USA have noted that local post offices just won't send some items to Australia at all. This has mostly been attributed to US Post COVID-19 restrictions of some sort or another. Letters are getting through, though slowly, with airmail letters from Los Angeles taking three to four weeks to get here to Melbourne.

I've been impacted to a small degree in that some issues of my subscription to *The New York Review of Books* have not been arriving. The 23 September 2021 issue arrived on 11 October, and the 19 August issue on 23 October, and they are the first ones I've seen since the 1 July issue. That isn't quite as bad as it first seems as the *Review* only publishes one issue a month during the northern summer months of August and September, rather than bi-monthly as for the rest of the year. So I missed one July issue not yet received, and, according to the magazine's website, there have been a further four issues published since my latest. This is, overall, a minor inconvenience, but an annoying one.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

I first started editing Wikipedia in November 2005, and by mid 2006 I was editing practically every day. I kept this up until late 2016 when I was burnt out, worn down by the stupid personal politics and the petty nature of some people's arguments.

My early editing work was mainly around the area of Australia Literature. I started by fixing a few perceived problems with the Miles Franklin Award page – as this represented the major Australian literary award – and then gradually expanded to create individual pages for Australian authors, mostly missing prize-winners.

And after that, things began to move. I was creating new pages for Australian poems, books, and Australian literary prizes on a regular basis. Wikipedia had only started in 2001 so the online encyclopedia, and especially the Australian section of it, was really only just starting to take off. There were very few others working in this particular area, and they were dedicated and supportive. Suggestions and debates were handled with decorum and genuine interest. Unfortunately, I think this may have lulled me into a false sense of community. It wasn't to last.

Along with the literary pages I was also making minor adjustments here and there whenever I came across a spelling error, typo or factual error. By early-2008 I was expanding my areas of interest to Australian sport and non-Australian literary pages, even amending the Stephen King and Bruce Springsteen pages from time to time.

Then in September 2008 I got my first insight into the darker side of Wikipedia editing. In that month the page for Australian sf fan Bruce Gillespie was nominated for deletion. The argument given was: “I am not convinced that science fiction fans are notable even if they get nominated for awards for best fanzine. This could lead to articles on soccer or Neighbours fans.” This was exasperated by the addition of the following: “I am also nominating the following related pages because it is similar: John Bangsund.”

At that time I didn't know what the processes were within Wikipedia for dealing with such nominations. To me it seemed simply spurious, and I didn't understand what the nominator was getting at. I started to do a bit of work on the two pages, cleaning up the existing content and adding any external references I could find – back in 2008 there weren't a lot. I wasn't aware at that time that I was quite eligible to make an argument for the pages' retention; I had some idea that you needed to be at a certain administrator level or have extensive editing experience. That wasn't, and isn't the case. Anyone can flag a page for deletion, and anyone can argue for or against that deletion. You just have to be aware that it is happening.

Both Bruce's and John's pages were retained and have since both had a number of edits which have improved and expanded them markedly and made them less likely to be flagged in future.

A short time later the Wikipedia page for ANZAPA was also flagged for deletion in a similar way. There weren't enough Wikipedia-editing sf fans around to support it, nor were there enough external primary references available on the internet to convince the naysayers that it should be retained. It didn't survive. By mid-2009 I found myself too heavily involved in the organisation of Aussiecon 4, the 2010 World Science Fiction Convention of which I was co-Chair, for me to be able to allocate any spare time to Wikipedia. I stepped away, and didn't return until September 2014.

My main project after my return was again associated with Australian Literature, specifically pages under the general topic of “Australian Literature by Year.” Each year, from 1860 onwards, was to have a specific page relating to the works published in that year (major poetry, books and short stories, including young adult and children's), and details of any literary births or deaths. Years from 1928 onwards

Userboxes



-  This user comes from **Australia**.
-  This user has created **675** articles on Wikipedia.
- 16,500+** This user has made more than **16,500** contributions to Wikipedia.
-  This user is a member of **WikiProject Australia**.
-  This user is a member of **WikiProject Australian literature**.
-  This user is a member of **WikiProject Poetry**.
-  This user is a member of **WikiProject Cricket**.
-  This user is a member of **WikiProject Years**.
-  This user repairs links to **disambiguation pages**.

also included details of any prize or awards. In 2020 there were around a dozen literary awards with multiple sub-categories, so the amount of work involved was quite significant. But it was good fun, and I enjoyed it.

Trouble started when I began to move out of my smallish area of main interest. For a long time I've enjoyed the Adam Hall novels featuring his continuing espionage character Quiller. In many ways Quiller is the antithesis to James Bond – he doesn't drink and he never carries a gun. This last affectation is a major, defining quality of his character, hence I thought it should be emphasised on the appropriate page. So I added that note, and backed it up, in best Wikipedia fashion, with a direct quote from one of the novels. Then another editor deleted those edits, referring to it in their comments as “needless junk”. I re-instated, and they re-deleted. I tried to engage the other editor in a discussion on the article's talk page about what I was doing. I also compared this particular article with that of James Bond, which used similar quotes from the books by Ian Fleming to support statements regarding his drinking and his firearm preference. I got nowhere, and after some to-ing and fro-ing I just gave up.

In March 2008 the novelist Nicholson Baker wrote an article for the *New York Review of Books* titled “The Charms of Wikipedia”. In that piece Baker describes the different types of Wikipedia editor and divides them into two main groups: the “inclusionists” who basically want the encyclopedia to hold as much information as possible; and the “exclusionists” who want to delete anything that isn't of specific interest to them, seemingly for no reason other than that. It was very enlightening. I found myself among the “inclusionists”, continually fighting deletion battles against the opposition, who seemed to revel in spending far more energy tearing something down rather than just going ahead and fixing it.

In the end it just became too wearing, so I gave it all away. Every now and then I drop back into the encyclopedia to see how my old stuff is going, and it is heartening when I see some of my earlier work being expanded upon and added to. But it is also disheartening to occasionally have to take up fights again, as I did in November 2020, when the “Peggy Rae Sapienza” page (major US sf fan and ex-worldcon chair) was flagged for deletion with the reason given being: “Questionable notability in spite of long list of references, many of which seem tangential or indirect, and most don't appear to establish notability.” Trying to explain to some editors that a long list of references generally tends to indicate a “respectable” notability rather than a “questionable” one becomes too emotionally draining. Luckily we won the argument for Peggy Rae. But this was just another bad and unnecessary experience. One that I'm not sure I'm in any hurry to repeat.



Cover notes: Robyn took this photo of me sitting on a park bench in Stockholm taking a bit of a rest in August 2017. Any resemblance to the song “Aqualung” by Jethro Tull is purely speculative, and any correspondence will not be entered into.

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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



Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 63: (12 October 2021) *And after the fire...*
David and I discuss the new books by Claire North (*Notes from the Burning Age*) and Evie Wyld (*The Bass Rock*), and then have a look at a couple of other nominees for the 2021 Hugo Award for Best Novel.

Episode 64: (26 October 2021) *And gentlemen in England now a-bed...*
David and I celebrate St. Crispin's Day by discussing recent awards, what we've been reading, both non-fiction and fiction, and summarising our thoughts about this year's Hugo Award Best Novel nominees.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at twochairs.website (please note the change in url), 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 – Anth: anthology; Aust: Australian; Coll: single-author collection; Neb: Nebula Award winner.

October 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Notes from the Burning Age</i>	Claire North	Sf	Oct 3		3.7	2021	
<i>The Bass Rock</i>	Evie Wyld	Lit	Oct 7		3.2	2020	Aust
<i>Black Sun</i>	Rebecca Roanhorse	Fantasy	Oct 11	e	4.0	2020	
<i>Beeswing</i>	Richard Thompson	Non-fic	Oct 11		3.7	2021	
<i>The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag</i>	Robert A. Heinlein	Sf/ Fantasy	Oct 13		3.2	1959	Coll
<i>The Fated Sky</i>	Mary Robinette Kowal	Sf	Oct 17	e	3.4	2018	
<i>Foundation and Empire</i>	Isaac Asimov	Sf	Oct 18		3.4	1952	
<i>Harrow the Ninth</i>	Tamsyn Muir	Fantasy	Oct 22	e	3.1	2020	
<i>May Week Was in June</i>	Clive James	Non-fic	Oct 25		3.2	1990	Aust
<i>Babel-17</i>	Samuel R. Delany	Sf	Oct 29		4.3	1966	Neb
<i>The Book of Magic</i>	ed Gardner Dozois	Fantasy	Oct 30		3.4	2018	Anth

Books read in the month: 11
Yearly total to end of month: 87

2021 reading targets met this month: 6 non-fiction books

Notes:

Notes from the Burning Age (2021) – Set several centuries after the “burning age” of the title – that is, widespread societal collapse as a result of climate change – this novel follows its protagonist Ven Marzouki in his positions of linguist, translator and priest. His main area of expertise lies in recovering and translating information from old servers and hard drives left over from before the technological collapse. After falling foul of a local crime group, known as the Brotherhood, he is taken in by its leader, Georg Mestri, who uses his skills to translate old documents in the hopes of discovering new weapons and terrorist techniques. Arrayed against the Brotherhood is the Council, an organisation that acts as the central government of this region. Soon it becomes clear that both sides have spies infiltrated into the other’s ranks and the novel becomes a form of espionage thriller. North is always an excellent writer, and the basic premise of this novel is intriguing, though it is possible to figure out who the spies are in the different camps fairly easily. R: 3.7/5.0



The Bass Rock (2020) – see major review below.



Black Sun (2020) – Finalist for Best Novel for the 2021 Hugo Award, Nebula Award, and Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel. This novel is the story of four people: Serapio, the man destined to become a god; Xiala, a woman of the mysterious Teek people and an exiled sea captain; Naranpa, a female priest who has climbed out of abject poverty to the highest ranks as the Sun Priest; and Okao, a warrior prince of the Carrion Crow clan. We follow these four story-lines in jagged fashion, bouncing between each, and also backwards and forwards on their individual timelines. But early on you get the idea that all will come together as they are all dated as being a certain number of days, or years, “Before Convergence”, a mysterious event

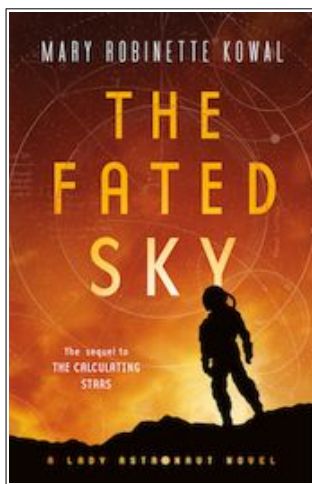
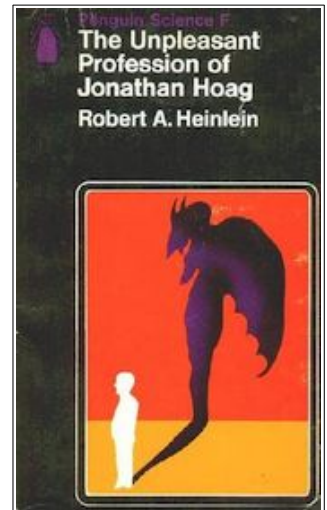
that we only find out about later in the book. The tension and drama builds with each chapter, and, while I think the ending comes and goes too quickly, it is certainly a pleasure to read a fantasy novel that is not smothered by the usual European mythic tropes, mostly pinched from Tolkien. R: 4.0/5.0

Beeswing : Fairport, Folk Rock and Finding My Voice 1967-75 (2021) – Richard Thompson takes us from his early childhood in Highgate and Notting Hill in London, through his

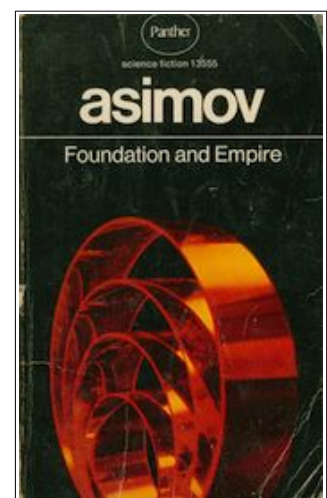


discovery of music, the discovery of his talent, the early playing years, the major car accident that changed his life, the formation of Fairport Convention with Sandy Denny, the sacking of Sandy Denny, through to his marriage to his first wife Linda. Along the way we get a look at the English music scene from the folk-rock side. This intersected the more well-known pop music scene, though only tangentially, so you get to see the hard grind of touring and living off the smell of an oily rag. This is an honest, open autobiography, which fills in the gaps in the history of one of modern music's greatest electric guitarists. Is it one for non-fans? Maybe not. You don't get the deep introspection of Springsteen but you do get to see how hard people had to work just to get noticed. R: 3.7/5.0

The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag (1958) – This collection of six stories from the 1940s and 1950s shows another side of Heinlein, away from the galaxy-spanning novels of the early parts of his writing career, and the tawdry, dreary, social satire of his later works. The main, title novella is a fantasy mystery which seems to have been written by someone else entirely; it was published in *Unknown Worlds* magazine under the pseudonym “John Riverside”. Of the others the best are “–All You Zombies–” and “They”. The stories here were probably much more noteworthy in the times in which they first appeared. Now, they have less impact though it is quite obvious that they are each self-contained stories; something we can only long for in the current sf&f publishing environment. R: 3.2/5.0



The Fated Sky (2018) – Second in the author's Lady Astronaut series, following *The Calculating Stars*. This is an alternate-history series which takes, as its branching point, the impact of a large meteorite in 1952 just off the US Eastern Seaboard. It is calculated that the resulting climate change will make the Earth uninhabitable within 50 years. This super-charges the development of space exploration and, by the time this novel starts in August 1961, travel between the Earth and the Moon is happening on a regular basis and the first manned Mars expedition is being readied for launch. This book follows the journey of that first convoy of three ships, and concentrates on the crew interactions, the accidents and emergencies that plague the journey, as well as the day-to-day running and management of the equipment on board, all using early 1960s technology. Think of it as rather like *The Martian* in space. Enjoyable and competently written without being anything remarkable. R: 3.4/5.0



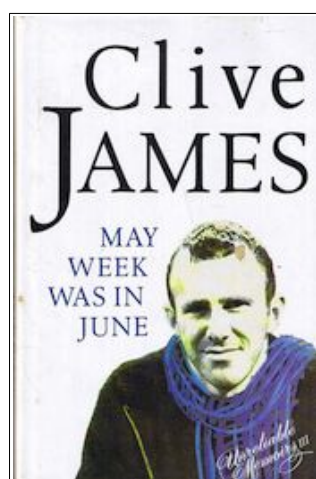
Foundation and Empire (1952) – Second in the author's Foundation series.

This novel is told, as with the first in the series, in parts. Here, two novellas, **The General** and **The Mule**, which were previously published separately, continue the story of Hari Sheldon's Foundation and the collapse of the Galactic Empire, some 10,000

years in the future. In the first story, set 150 years after the founding of the Foundation, the Foundation survives an attack launched against it by the Empire's General Bel Riose. The Foundation survives by basically doing nothing. The second part of the book, set 80 years after the first and after the Empire's decline and fall, introduces the Mule, a mutant telepath who quickly gains control of the remnants of the Empire's forces and defeats the Foundation. The Mule is probably one of Asimov's better characters in his fiction, and it probably succeeds because he is enigmatic and we learn so little about him. On a par with the first novel as a space opera in the traditional sense. R: 3.4/5.0

Harrow the Ninth (2020) – Second in the author's Locked Tomb series, following ***Gideon the Ninth***. Finalist for Best Novel for the 2021 Hugo Award, and Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel.

Gideon is dead and her soul is now merged with Harrow's. Having survived the events depicted in the first novel Harrow is now a Lyctor, dedicated to protecting the Emperor. After she wakes on the Emperor's ship she is informed about the real situation which is far worse than she originally thought. The Empire is under attack from Resurrection Beasts, the "ghosts" of the dead planets of the Nine Houses. Harrow must quickly learn how to defeat these Beasts in order for her, and her House, to survive. The novel is related in two sections: one, told in the second-person depicting Harrow's experiences as a Lyctor; the second, told in the third-person, depicting Harrow's memories of the events in the first novel. This is all very confusing, and would be impossible to follow without having read the first book. Even so, I was still lost most of the time. I think the book is way over-written in baroque-sounding prose, and way too long at a touch under 500 pages. For the dedicated. R: 3.1/5.0



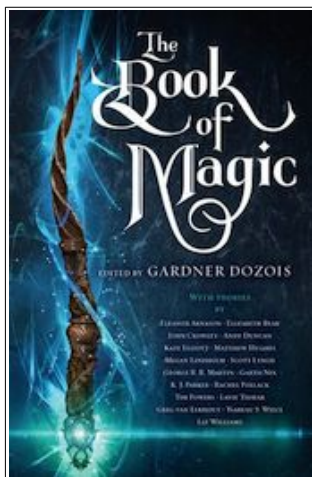
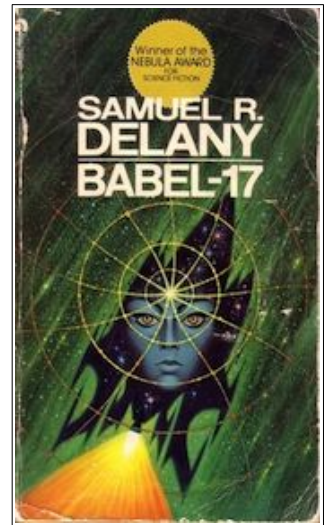
May Week Was in June (1990) – Third in the author's autobiographical series, Unreliable Memoirs.

At the end of the previous volume James had finished two years mooching about in London and had been finally accepted for an undergraduate degree at Cambridge University. This volume follows his time there. He quickly finds Eric Idle and the Footlights and his future life starts to get sketched in. Ostensibly reading English he reads everything bar the prescribed texts, starts to learn Italian and then French, skips classes, drinks and smokes too much, and throws himself headfirst into the University dramatics society. He barely scrapes through his exams but is accepted into a PhD program, only to carry on exactly as he was before. By the end of the book "Literary London" starts to beckon as he begins to get published in various small London periodicals. James's humour, which was once fresh

and free, now seems a bit old and forced, and the short, sharp prose of the earlier volumes has become overly verbose. You could be forgiven for thinking this was written under contract rather than personal desire. R: 3.2/5.0

Babel-17 (1966) – Co-winner of the 1967 Nebula Award for Best Novel, and finalist for the 1967 Hugo Award.

During an interstellar war the Invaders have developed a new language, Babel-17, that can be used as a weapon as well as a form of communication. This is uncovered by Rydra Wong, a linguist, poet and telepath, who is recruited by the Earthpeople's Alliance government to decode it. As Wong delves deeper into the language it becomes clear to her that it is changing her perception and thought processes. She suspects a traitor on her ship and later discovers that it is her. An inventive space opera that concentrates more on the human element than military hardware or technology. The novel is an exploration of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – that language alters thought and perception – recently also featured in the 2016 film *Arrival*. A minor quibble: Wong's language skills seem rather over-developed and she uncovers the solution much faster than you might expect. But that quibble is only minor and the novel dazzles with inventiveness. A worthy winner of the Nebula Award, and should have picked up the Hugo as well. R: 4.3/5.0



The Book of Magic (2018) – An anthology of original stories all based around the central theme of magic. Gardner Dozois's last edited anthology.

You can read this as a companion volume to the editor's earlier *The Book of Swords*, and, possibly, as a precursor to Strahan's *The Book of Dragons*. Here we have 17 novelettes all dealing with one form of magic or another. About half of the stories here are set on or in worlds that the relevant authors have previously utilised elsewhere. Not that that helped me much as I haven't been following a lot of these. There were 7 of the 17 that I felt deserved special mention: K. J. Parker, Megan Lindholm, John Crowley, Matthew Hughes, Garth Nix, George R. R. Martin, and Kate Elliott. That is not to say that the others are poor, by no means. The anthology is of uniformly good standard, which is par for the course with Dozois

anthologies, though not necessarily so for others. In years to come I suspect that this volume will come to be seen as a snapshot of the fantasy genre as it stood in 2018. Can't ask a lot more than that. R: 3.4/5.0



“The journey to the north-east of England and Redcar Jazz Club took us past the ICI chemical works outside Middlesborough, which at night was lit up like some dystopian city straight out of Philip K. Dick. His novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* came out in 1968. Science Fiction was about a third of my reading material then, alongside books about Zen meditation and astrology and more mainstream literature and classics – I was trying to catch up on a formal education cut short.”

– *Beeswing : Fairport, Folk Rock and Finding My Voice 1967-75* by Richard Thompson, p56

REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

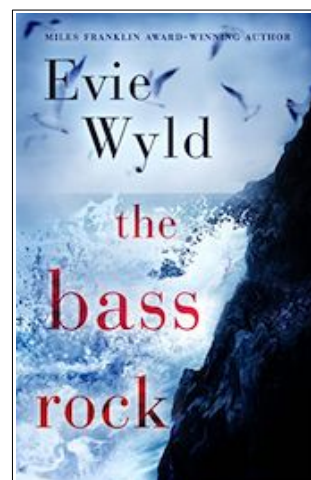
The Bass Rock (2020) by Evie Wyld

Genre: Literary

Winner of the 2021 Stella Prize.

This winner of the 2021 Stella Prize is the author's third novel following *After the Fire, A Still Small Voice* (2009) and the Miles Franklin Award winning *All the Birds Singing* (2013). I have to admit to having read neither of those.

The novel is told across three different timelines all set near the small island of the title, a rock that looms out of the water near the Firth of Forth in Scotland. The first of these timelines is set in the present day and follows Viviane (stream I), an unemployed forty-year-old woman who has come up from London to the family home near the rock to sort through the accumulated family belongings prior to the house's sale. The second (stream II) is set just after the Second World War, also in the same house, and features Ruth who has just moved into the house with her widowed husband, Peter, and his two sons. Stepping back in time we get to the third stream, set in the 1700s, and Sarah who is fleeing for her life after being accused of being a witch (stream III).



The novel is split into sections with each section including chapters for the streams as follows: I, II, III, II, I. These are then followed by a short section detailing, in rather graphic fashion, a series of anonymous women being subjected to extreme violence by equally anonymous men.

The reader soon comes to realise that Viviane is related in some way to Ruth, though the exact relationship did not become clear to this reader until very late in the novel. And Sarah is connected to the other two streams by appearing as a ghost in Ruth's house, the same house that Viviane is supposedly clearing out, to both Ruth and Viviane. I make mention of these relationships because they are important to the narrative though not sufficiently highlighted for a reader to be really sure of them. I kept on having the feeling that I had entered a conversation halfway through, one where all the other participants knew all the names, the personalities and their interconnections, and I didn't.

For the duration of the novel I kept on wondering where it was all heading: is this a domestic narrative, across generations, where a massive secret will be revealed?; is it a Gothic novel where the ghosts of past family members and acquaintances will play a major role and the sense of growing unease will come to dominate the narrative? Well, yes, but mostly, no. There are elements of both dramatic formulas here, though neither are really run through to their standard conclusions. The novel seems to be neither one thing nor the other. And while the reader keeps hoping for a big dramatic climax, it just doesn't appear. Will the men get their comeuppance? Will the women break through the chains that bind them? Why is the idea of the Bass Rock so important to everyone?

As an exercise in toxic masculinity *The Bass Rock* is rather relentless in its determination, so that, by the end, you begin to wonder if there are any males in the novel who aren't totally

self-centered, menacing and violent to women. There isn't much in the way of male to female companionship or love in this book to the extent that their interactions can become rather perfunctory and over-bearing. As a male reader I kept on thinking that one of the male characters would do something nice, or something without an ulterior motive behind it. If it's there I didn't notice it. In the end I started to feel a bit like a punching bag, which may well have been the author's main aim. If so I don't think she achieved anything new here. Surely we've seen this before. As well-written as this is, it is rather easy to get to the end of the book and think, "So?".

R: 3.0/5.0



WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

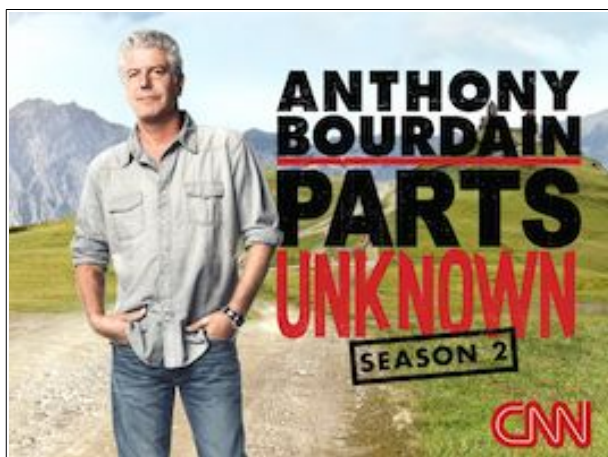
Television

Vigil (mini-series – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Crime

When a man is found dead on board the HMS Vigil, a British nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, Detective Chief Inspector Amy Silva (Suranne Jones) is assigned to investigate. As the submarine is on active duty as part of Britain's nuclear deterrent it is unable to return to port and Silva is helicoptered out to the submarine along with the dead man's replacement. What follows is a classic closed environment murder scene, with little communication between the sub and the mainland, a contest of priorities between the captain and the detective, and a deep web of inter-relations between members of the ship's crew. After the dead man's girlfriend is also found murdered on the mainland the investigation alternates between the two with the British Navy Command and MI5 also getting involved. Very well done. Tense and dramatic with excellent performances all round. R: 4.2/5.0



Anthony Bourdain : Parts Unknown

(season 2 – 8 episodes) (2013)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Documentary Food

Bourdain continues his unique culinary, political and social discovery tour of the world with this second season. This time he visits Jerusalem, Spain (Andalucia), New Mexico, Copenhagen, Sicily, South Africa, Tokyo and Detroit – two of which I have visited. He generally follows his usual plan of getting locals to show him around the various food cultures in the location while he discusses local politics and culture. This is mostly at the street level and in home kitchens, though he does climb the

social culinary ladder from time to time. This is especially so with his Copenhagen episode where his main aim is to spend time at the Noma restaurant and talk with its owner and founder René Redzepi. Weirdest episodes would be those featuring Tokyo and Detroit: Tokyo because of the strange Japanese sub-cultures he seeks out, and Detroit because of the extent of the financial devastation wrought by the GFC of 2007-08. R: 4.4/5.0

Upright (Season 1 – 8 episodes) (2019)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Comedy Drama

Lucky Flynn (Tim Minchin) is a down-and-out musician transporting his upright piano from Sydney to Perth by road when, just outside Mildura, he is side-swiped by Meg (Milly Alcock), and his car is wrecked. Meg has suffered a broken arm in the accident so the two load the piano onto her ute and head to the nearby hospital. Meg reveals she is also heading west so the two combine forces to share the driving. It takes them just over a week, with each episode covering each separate day. The ensuing adventures are funny, dramatic, swearsy, and emotional. The chemistry between the two main characters is wonderful, and Alcock, in a very difficult role for a young actor, excels. I can't fault anything here, so the only thing I can note is that it is highly recommended. R: 4.8/5.0



Only Murders in the Building (Season 1 – 10 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Comedy Crime

Three misfit residents of a fictitious New York Apartment building (played by Steve Martin, Martin Short and Selena Gomez) bond over their mutual love of a true-crime podcast. When one of the building's other residents is found murdered, the three team up to try to solve the mystery, and, while doing so, produce their own true-crime podcast detailing their investigations. The police consider this a clear case of suicide but our three amateur sleuths are not convinced. They utilise their knowledge of the building and its inhabitants to discover clues that the police have completely over-looked. This is a funny and engaging comedy series with great performances from all concerned, bar Gomez who comes across as mono-tonal with little acting ability. Recommended in spite of that. R: 4.3/5.0

Lupin (Part 2 – 5 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama Crime

Part 2 represents the second set of 5 episodes of this French crime drama, centred around the main character of Assan Diop (Omar Sy) who styles himself after the fictional gentleman thief, Arsène Lupin. Diop's main aim is to avenge the death of his father, wrongly accused of stealing an expensive necklace by his employer Hubert Pellegrinni (Hervé Pierre). I thought the first part of this series was "amusing and intriguing" but this second part tends to drag.



Pellegrini has gone from being an unscrupulous businessman to a caricature of a melodramatic villain, and Diop's seemingly endless series of safe houses – all fully furnished and set up – start to stretch the bounds of any form of credibility. Add this to the inept police fumbling and a rather ludicrous plot and the good work of the first part is rather undone here. There appears to be a third part on order but I don't think I'll bother.

R: 3.0/5.0

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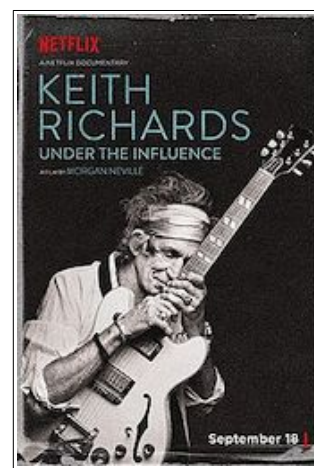
Film

***Keith Richards : Under the Influence* (2015)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Music Documentary

A dive into what inspired Keith Richards, Rolling Stones guitarist, to become involved in music. He talks of the influences from his childhood in Kent when he listened to Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, to his interest in American country music, American Blues and Jamaican reggae. It's hard to tell if the portrait is of "Keef" the Stone or Keith the man, as he freely admits to having a certain persona that he shows the world, which is very different from the one he wears at home. It's interesting that, while he freely notes that the Stones are his real home, none of his fellow band-members are interviewed. Those duties go to the likes of Steve Jordan, Waddy Wachtel and Tom Waits. I'm not a big Stones fan, liking some songs but not others, yet even I found a lot of interest here. R: 3.7/5.0



***Apollo 11* (2019)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Space Documentary

Using new footage and audio this documentary provides a very interesting view of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon in July 1969. Lacking narration (unless you count the use of a couple of pieces of commentary from the wonderful Walter Cronkite) this documentary presumes you are fully familiar with the mission, and the people and institutions involved. If not then I suspect it would still be enjoyable though I think some background might be helpful. This sort of thing is right in my wheel-house. I was just shy of 14-years-old when this mission happened and I kept a detailed scrapbook of newspaper clippings of the event. Unfortunately that book is long gone now. The new film has probably had its visuals and audio digitally enhanced from the original. Never mind, that just enhances the look and feel of this remarkable piece of work. [Final note: I watched this on the second last day it was available on Netflix. You'll have to hunt elsewhere for it now.] R: 4.3/5.0

Emma (2020)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Historical Drama

Based on the Jane Austen novel with a screenplay by Eleanor Catton (the New Zealand writer who won the Booker Prize in 2013 for her novel **Luminaries**) and directed by Autumn de Wilde (her first directorial release). I really enjoyed this comedy-drama featuring Anya Taylor-Joy (from **The Queen's Gambit**) in the lead role, with help from Johnny Flynn, Josh O'Connor and Bill Nighy. Typically for Austen it's all about the marriage game for upper-middle class young English men and women: the plans; the failings; the misunderstandings; the deceptions; and the misdirections. It's a lavish film to look at and I can't fault the acting or direction. Bill Nighy is a wonder. He has little to do with few lines of dialogue, but what he does is just fantastic: the pursed lips, the sideways glance and the bored, blank expression are all given an outing. Recommended. R: 4.4/5.0



Eye in the Sky (2015)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Thriller

This British thriller explores the moral, ethical and legal challenges of drone warfare. The British army has been searching for a certain radicalised British citizen for six years and have finally, they believe, tracked her down to a house in Nairobi, Kenya. The decision is made to send in an armed force to capture her but before they get the chance she is moved to another house, this time in a militia stronghold area. The joint British-American task force are then faced with the options of whether to attack by drone or to await further developments. That is rather taken out of their hands when a miniature camera is infiltrated into the house and it shows that the group is about to execute a suicide mission. Do the rules of engagements allow for the killing of two British citizens and an American? Is it better to take the criticism of a drone strike now, or wait for the killings of ordinary citizens and use that against the terrorists later? A high-tension thriller which keeps ratcheting up the drama right to the end. Excellent work by Helen Mirren as the British colonel leading the operation. This was also Alan Rickman's last film. R: 4.2/5.0

My Salinger Year (2020)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

Joanna Rakoff (Margaret Qualley), a college graduate, leaves her home and her boyfriend in Berkeley to travel to New York, initially just for a holiday. But she is beguiled by the city and decides to stay. She gets a job working as a PA in one of the city's oldest literary agencies run by Margaret (Sigourney Weaver). Before long she learns that the agency's main client is the reclusive novelist J. D. Salinger and the main part of her job is to answer his fan mail. This is a coming-of-age film of a sorts, although the main character is



rather older than normal, and follows Rackoff as she slowly gains more confidence in her own abilities and more support from others in the agency. Charming and amusing, it's a good one for a quiet night home, though I doubt it will linger in the mind for long.
R: 3.4/5.0

The Green Knight (2021)

Platform: Amazon Prime Video

Genre: Fantasy Drama

Inspired by the 14th-century chivalric poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, by an unknown author, with the title added centuries later. Gawain (Dev Patel) of the poem's title, is King Arthur's nephew, who accepts a challenge, issued by the Green Knight on Christmas Day to the assembled Knights of the Round Table. The challenge, known as the "beheading game", results in the actual beheading of the Green Knight – who then collects his own head and rides off – and the realisation by Gawain that he must visit the knight in a year's time to receive his own blow. The film then follows Gawain's journey towards his destiny, and the final resolution of the "game". This is a coming-of-age story, following, in some ways, Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey", through trial, defeat, arrival, conquest, and then return. Visually stunning, with haunting music and wonderful cinematography. Of note, there are a lot of long, silent staring scenes. I liked it more than Robyn did. R: 4.2/5.0



Crisis (2021)

Platform: Amazon Prime Video

Genre: Drama

Attempting to capture an overview of the way the current opioid crisis in the USA is impacting society, this film follows three story-lines: an undercover cop (Armie Hammer) infiltrating the organised crime elements behind the smuggling of pills into the country; a university professor (Gary Oldman) who discovers that a new pain-killer set for approval is worse than those already on the market; and a mother (Evangeline Lilly) who loses her son to an overdose after already recovering from pain-killer addiction herself. It's a good idea, and a good concept but it is rather let down by a lame script, lack of tension and a set of predictable outcomes. The waste of opportunity here is what you are left with at the end. Enjoyable enough, but a time-waster rather than an important film. R: 2.9/5.0



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.

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 13:

John Hertz: “To Asimov is attributed ‘I did a little cribbin’ from the work of Mr. Gibbon’. Asimov may have depreciated his own characterisation – and indeed poetry – ‘Gold’ (1991). Re-reading his three Foundation novels (as I consider them) I find his characterisation better than he and you allow. To cite one moment, the last appearance of the Mule is masterly.”

[**PM:** As noted above, in the capsule books reviews for this issue, the Mule is one of his great characters.]

“I’ve read all the Aubrey & Maturin books twice through so far and concur in Field’s praise. Of special interest to SF fans is O’Brian’s handling of the Explaining Problem: he deploys two protagonists, each in the P’s own field superb and affectionately viewing the other P’s hopeless incompetence, blind to the reciprocal situation in the other P’s field. Thus we readers are led through turn-of-the-19th-Century marine matters upon one hand, medicine and secret-information management upon the other, while alive to the double irony (i.e. ‘a conspiracy of the author and audience against the characters’).”

[**PM:** Okay, the books are slowly moving up the to-be-read pile.]

John Harvey: “I must apologise for not responding to earlier issues, not that I had an awful lot to say. I did want to tell you how much we enjoyed your item about Laura in **P13**. I read it in bed the day it arrived (01/08) and then immediately again out loud to Eve. In all the years we’ve known each other this was the first time I realised you were brought up in a small Australian town and that your father was a pharmacist.

“One of my uncles was head of the pathology lab in the local hospital and his youngest daughter is in a similar position in a hospital in Southport, Lancs. Now what interests me is what level of qualification did they all have to get to for these positions. I must ask my cousin what she knows. These days I would expect a PhD at least, but 50/60 years ago?”

[**PM:** My father obtained a Degree in Pharmacy from the University of Adelaide, which, at that time, was probably a 3-year course followed by a year of close supervision by another qualified Pharmacist. I’m guessing that situation currently applies as well. Head of a Pathology Lab? As you say, probably a PhD these days.]

oooOooo

Perryscope 14:

Rob Gerrand: “I loved the cover – an excellent portrait, and not just a likeness, that captures you well.

“I enjoyed your overview of the Booker nominees. I have only read *The Old Devils*, *What’s Bred In The Bone* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and I recall enjoying the Amis at the time. I think he’s a better and more interesting writer than you do, and I recommend *The Green Man*, *The Alteration* (both sf/fantasy) and *Difficulties With Girls*, the last I recall being very funny.”

[**PM:** I did enjoy Amis's *The Alteration*: a very interesting alternate history. I just don't have the urge to read anything else by him, other than his history of sf.]

"Your current reading list has prompted me to order *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* and a couple of other Dorothy L Sayers novels from the library. I'll also try to find my copy of *The Devil's Advocate*, which I thought was excellent when I read it more than half a century ago.

"It was a delight for me to discover Martha Wells and I've read all the Murderbot stories so far, and hold Wells in the highest esteem for her humour, excellent world-building, and believable characters. As a result, I've now also read three of her Raksura novels, set on a world which has no humans, but where all the characters, whatever their biology, are completely relatable to and the stories enthralling."

[**PM:** Her Murderbot series is all that I have read of hers. They are good enough to encourage me to look at her other works. I'll keep your suggestion in mind.]

"In the 60s I started reading Len Deighton, first with *Horse Under Water*, and steadily read his espionage novels as they came out. He is, I think, a better writer than Le Carré. Look out for *Bomber*, and his superb history *Blood, Tears and Folly: An Objective Look at World War II*, which examines the events of that war up until 1942."

[**PM:** My late father was a big fan of Deighton's book, *Bomber*, and kept on asking me if I had read it. I haven't as yet. I do have a copy and will get to it when I can. And this is starting to become a standard refrain from me.]

"On to your viewing habits: I agree that *Midnight Diner* is delightful, and I also liked *Line of Duty* very much. The new British submarine thriller, *Vigil*, has much the same feeling of credibility and tension."

[**PM:** See review above for my thoughts on *Vigil*.]

"Have you watched the South Korean series *Crash Landing Into You*? Written by Park Ji-eun and directed by Lee Jeong-hyo, it's about a South Korean chaebol heiress who, while paragliding in Seoul, is swept up in a sudden storm, crash-lands in the North Korean part of the DMZ, and meets an army officer in the Korean People's Army who decides he will help her hide. Over time, they fall in love, despite the divide between their two countries. It's on Netflix and is apparently the third highest rating Korean TV show. It combines numerous genres at different times: spy, romance, comedy, thriller, satire. It is addictive viewing."

[**PM:** Korean television – a bit like K-pop some years back – is now starting to make significant inroads into western culture. Another current major popular Korean TV series is *Squid Game* which my son and daughter both like a lot. More titles to have a look at.]

Nick Price: "Go on, take a spin in Patrick O'Brian, Jane Austen at sea. <pedantry> Entirely agree about miscasting of Paul Bettany in the *Master and Commander* movie. Maturin was supposed to be Irish/Catalan. Another issue with *Master and Commander* is that the cannons were shown with new-fangled friction primers whereas Aubrey always favoured the Slow Match. </pedantry>"

[**PM:** Yeah, yeah. As I said earlier, I'll get to it, sometime.]

Jerry Kaufman: “I can see why the Booker has become more disappointing to follow if it mostly duplicates American book awards. Its attraction was to highlight the most interesting of British books. (Did it also include Commonwealth publications?) Now you might as well follow the US National Book Awards and the Pulitzers and the national awards for Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so forth.”

[**PM:** The Booker prize didn't cover Commonwealth publications directly as the books had to be published in the UK or Ireland in the year in question. While this might have meant some of the small Commonwealth publishers didn't get a look in it offered them an incentive to set up partnerships with small UK-based publishers. I would think that is mostly gone now. You would hope the existing partnerships still remain but it makes it harder for new ones to be set up.]

“I wonder why Communist societies have embalmed the bodies of their leaders and put them on display. It seems idolatrous, especially for societies that claim to be free of superstition. But the practice does make for good anecdotes.”

[**PM:** I also find this practice rather odd. It's almost a case of deification, beyond hero-worship, that might well have been assuaged by a large monument or statue in other countries. A bit of research shows me that, apart from the Big Three already mentioned, the other modern leaders who have been mummified are: North Korea's Kim Il Sung; Taiwan's father and son duo Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo; the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin, though he has now been buried next to the Kremlin; Bulgaria's Georgi Dimitrov, later cremated and then buried in 1999; the Czech Republic's Klement Gottwald, cremated in 1962 after the embalming process went a bit “off”; and Argentina's Eva Peron, who was embalmed, entombed, flown to Spain, returned to Argentina and then finally buried in Buenos Aires. All fun stuff.]

“I read **All Systems Red** and **Artificial Condition**, then skipped the intervening novellas in the series to read **Network Effect**. I found myself uncertain about characters that were new to me – I thought. Seems I had forgotten them all and thought maybe they'd been introduced in the two books I didn't read. I couldn't tell one from another, and didn't rate the book very highly.

“The elderly professors in **The Chair**, unable to reconcile their sense of their own importance (based on their earlier years of teaching) with the extremely low number of current students they attract, remind me of some old white writers who are complaining that the current Worldcon is not recognizing their importance when the convention has turned down their offers to be on programming.”

[**PM:** I rather like that comparison.]

Leigh Edmonds: “Thanks for including me on the list for **Perryscope** which, I think, does a great deal to make fandom in Australia look good. I can't imagine where you find the time to do this and everything else.”

[**PM:** I sometime wonder the same thing. At least it keeps me off the streets, as they used to say.]

“Chong's drawing on the cover is excellent even if it does make you look concerned about an undisclosed something. The thing I admire about artists like Chong and others is that they have to get it right the first time with every line in just the right place. Words are a

different matter and you can shuffle them around until they look right on the page. Perhaps being a good visual artist takes real talent while being a good writer requires time and perseverance instead, with talent a bonus.”

[**PM:** Ah, well, I’ve seen Chong work, and I’ve seen him make judicious use of his pencil eraser. But you are right in that he does know how to make the best use of a small number of lines.]

“I gather that the construction on page five is the Ho Chi Min mausoleum. It certainly looks like one of those Soviet era monumental buildings, like something the Athenians would have erected on a very bad day and then quickly knocked down again in shame. The only Soviet era place I’ve been to is Budapest and there that kind of architecture is kept in check by the grandeur of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at its height. I imagine that Hanoi still has a great deal of French colonial architecture too that I wouldn’t mind seeing but as soon as I read you comment that it was ‘hot and humid’ the place dropped to a low rung on my list of things I must get around to doing. While I enjoyed your description of going to see the old chap on display I was curious to know what it felt like to look at the remain of a once famous person who is now basically stuffed.”

[**PM:** Yes, I should probably have captioned the photo last issue. And you are right, it is the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum. So how does it feel to see someone in the “flesh” like that? Actually there isn’t a lot of emotion in it. It’s like looking at a rather strange dummy, vaguely resembling the person in question. Hanoi I can recommend. It is a very interesting mixture of French and Vietnamese architecture, and it is possible to get there in their winter time – January or February – when the weather would be cool and dry. We’ve been restricted to holiday times. Ours, not theirs.]

“Your response to John Hertz on the clash of the old and the new was very nicely put. I find many of the things that modern day fans do very strange and I’m sure that they find what I do similarly that way. Why on earth would one sit at a computer keyboard and do what is basically the same as writing an old style letter when there is so much more that can be done from a computer keyboard, or even the touch screen on a mobile phone. Where the newer and older generations of fandom come together is in the old desire to communicate our love of science fiction and fantasy and, I think, the mentality that creates that love or is created by it. When I’ve gone to those recent conventions in Melbourne the difference in mentalities between old and new generations of fans has been very obvious to me and I would have as much difficulty breaking into their social circles as I did breaking into fandom in the mid 1960s. The place where that divide seems to disappear is in the social setting of the convention where it is easier to find common ground than in the more formal settings. To do that I have to learn some of their language and conventions and they have to learn some of mine.”

[**PM:** It strikes me that there are a number of fanzines being produced these days, but all by old pharts like thee and me. I’m not seeing any new fanzines fans under 30 coming along. Which is not a good thing as it implies the publication format will gradually die out as all the older fans drop off the twig.]

“As an aside, in reading early Australian fanzines it is very clear that one of their main interests was in writing their own science fiction and they used the then relatively modern technology of mimeo reproduction to do it. It was not very successful, commercially, but it kept them busy. In the generation of fandom I grew up in writing fiction was something

that only a few Australian fans really dedicated themselves to because there was really nowhere to publish it locally, but on my return visit to fandom I find that writing and publishing fiction has become a major thing again. The difference seems to be that current technology makes it much easier to write, disseminate and publish fiction. Good for them, I say.”

[**PM:** Like all the other sub-cultures, fandom goes through cycles, returning now and again to its roots. Fiction publishing is not a side of the field that particularly interests me so I tend to feel rather on the side of most of Australian fandom. That’s fine. It’s not a complaint, just an observation. There is certainly room for all persuasions.]

“I’m going to quit here. As you know, I like making little model aeroplanes and that involves using tools like sharp knives. Since I’m also on anti-coagulants that means that when I accidentally cut myself the blood comes out rather energetically and keeps on coming until I do something to stop it. For this reason bandaids are one of my most popular modelling tools and after the past day of model making I now have bandaids on three fingertips. This makes typing a very hit-and-miss kind of activity so if this were a stencil rather than an email there would be so much red corflu on it that you would barely be able to see the stencil underneath.”

[**PM:** I can say that I never really mastered the art of stencil-cutting, or correcting. A journeyman at best. And model making? Nope.]

I also heard from: Simon Litten; Charles Taylor; and William Breiding; thank you one and all.



7 January 1939 35° 09’S 135° 31’E (81 days out)
Raised Cape Catastrophe in the morning, on the west side of Spencer Gulf [named by the explorer Flinders in memory of a boat crew, lost there in 1802]. From it scrub-covered cliffs ran away north-westwards with rollers streaming in at the foot off them – a bloody spot. All day with the temperature up in the hundreds we beat about south of the entrance of the Gulf trying to weather the Cape, tacking ship, slithering on the decks which we have linseed oiled, like a lot of frying flying-fish, listening to the second mate’s wireless as it literally poured out the news, the first we have had for eighty-one days, from Adelaide, like a fruit machine with something wrong with it pouring out money – awful news of bush fires, frontier incidents in Poland, but at least of a world apparently not at war.

– *A Traveller’s Life* by Eric Newby, p103

