

# Perryscope 17



**PERRYSCOPE 17**, December 2021, is an issue of the personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: [perry@middlemiss.org](mailto:perry@middlemiss.org)  
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and then anyone else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for trade or download at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.  
Cover photograph by Robyn Mills, France, September 2019.

### INTRODUCTION

In his letter of comment on **Perryscope 16** – see the lettercol later in this issue – Joseph Nicholas admits to being “staggered” by the number of books I read each month. This is a question that comes up from time to time so I’m overdue for another explanation.

My basic aim is to read around 100 pages of material a day. As I generally read at a rate of 1 page a minute that equates to about 100 minutes a day. Some people might think that a lot, but I don’t. When I was working I would read for 15 or so minutes each way on the train each day, and, hopefully, be able to pick up another 15 over lunch. That would leave me with only 60 minutes to fill in the evenings, which I never found that hard to achieve as I was only watching about that amount of television a day. So, of an evening, the plan would generally be: dinner, ABC TV news to 7:30pm, 60-90 minutes of watching something with Robyn (see the “What I’ve Been Watching” section of each issue), and then reading time before bed. Not every day would work out like that but enough would to make the reading target easy to reach.

Since I’ve retired, but Robyn hasn’t, I try to emulate that overall scheme by reading over my morning coffee or over lunch. The evening plan is the same.

I don’t always reach my target of 100 pages a day: sometimes it’s none at all, and on others I get the flow going on an interesting book and I might clock up 250. It’s the target that counts for me. It reminds me of all the books I want to read sitting on the shelves in the house; hundreds of them.

I don’t have any other hobbies that will take away from my evening reading time. I don’t spend time doing crosswords, or knitting, or playing computer games, or making model aeroplanes, or completing jigsaw puzzles. And I don’t spend time looking after children any more. I don’t denigrate any of those activities, I’m just pointing out that I don’t do any of them. I’m lucky enough to have spare time to myself in the evenings that I can do with as I wish. And that wish is to read.

So, if you hit 100 pages a day you get through 2 average-sized books a week, and there’s your yearly target of 100 books achieved. This approach works for me, it may not for you. I happen to like goals and targets, reading plans and schedules, even if I don’t reach all of them. It keeps me focused. But as they used to say, your mileage may vary.

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I've started a new project; as if I didn't have enough on my plate already. This one, however, actually gets me out of the house.

I live in Hawthorn only a few streets away from the northern end of the long shopping strip that is Glenferrie Road. On, or near, our local section of that street are a number of private schools and Swinburne University of Technology. That means that the local Glenferrie Railway Station is very busy in the mornings when the schools and the uni are back. There are a lot of people moving through the station and up and down the street, either by foot or tram. And where there are a lot of people there are usually a lot of restaurants and small eateries. Such is the case with Glenferrie Road.

With the extended, pandemic-induced lock-downs of the past two years, a number of the eating places in the street have shut down or changed hands. It isn't the same now as it was in 2019. And I do need to start finding out what is there.

So I'm working my way down the street – north to south – eating at a different lunch time spot each time and writing up the experience for Facebook and Instagram. To date it has been once a week, which seems like a workable and enjoyable schedule. If you want to follow along you can search for me on either of those apps. I'm easy enough to find as I use my own, full name for my accounts. And there aren't many people around with that combination.

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I had hoped to have the third issue of my other publishing project, the sercon genzine **The Alien Review**, out before this issue of **Perryscope**. But it was not to be. David Grigg, who does the layout of the contents, and I both have a few other deadlines we have to meet before **TAR 3** can be tackled – I always wanted to keep busy in retirement, I just didn't think it would be this busy. I expect the next issue will be out in December. Which means that my original proposed publishing schedule of quarterly will not work. Thrice-yearly looks like being a better option: April, August and December.

And in other news I've decided to change the publication of this fanzine to monthly rather than "whenever the mood takes him". With this issue it will be 17 in a row, all published on a monthly schedule. If that doesn't give me a hint then I don't know what will.

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<p>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.</p>
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## WHAT I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT

In a word: travel.

Intrastate, interstate, overseas, I don't really care. I'm thinking about it; Robyn and I are planning; and, now, thankfully, we can be looking forward to it again. Maybe.

I feel a little sheepish when I complain about the fact that I haven't been travelling too much over the past two years due to COVID-19 lock-downs, especially when we spent nearly three weeks on the road during 2021. Back in January we drove around the north-eastern parts of Victoria (Beechworth, Corryong etc), then down through the Victorian mountains to Orbost, over to Golden Beach to see our friend Andrew O'Rorke, and then back home. In May we drove up to Canberra, stayed for a week on the NSW South Coast and then drove back home via Mallacoota and Gippsland. And in July we went to Mildura for a week. That last trip wasn't what we had hoped as both the South Australian and New South Wales borders were closed to Victorians at that time. And then our time got cut short by a couple of days due to the most-recent lock-down starting on August 5. Overall we didn't do too badly.

And now our thoughts start to turn overseas. Firstly to New Zealand where we'll be heading at the end of January 2022. This is really a catch-up trip for the cancelled holiday we had planned in that country for July-August 2020. We've now decided to extend it, and flip it around by starting in the South Island and then heading north, rather than the southerly direction originally planned. We've taken a bit of a risk by booking parts of this as New Zealand isn't fully open (ie no 14-day quarantine period on arrival) as yet. We expect it will be, though we may be disappointed yet again.

Then there is a trip to Sydney in late February, replacing a similar weekend from August this year, and then, looking further ahead we have Adelaide in March for my father's ashes' interment, and, again very hopefully, the US and Canada in August-October this year. It's a lot to plan, and a lot to anticipate, which always forms part of the fun of travel for the two of us.

And, as with all good things like travel, there is always a darker side. Sometimes it's the bureaucratic bullshit you have to endure in airports or embassies, and sometimes it's the mistakes you make as a traveller: forgetting the time, your tickets, your passports, or your money. But mostly, as Jean-Paul Sartre said: "Hell is other people". The ones who step in front of you at a ticket counter and then argue vehemently with the staff for what seems like ages, only to stomp off in a huff with nothing gained other than your annoyance. And sometimes it's just the people who happen to also inhabit that long metal tube environment we call an aeroplane. Anthony Bourdain obviously has the same problem:

Back to New York, Christmas dinner, wake up, exchange a few presents, and it's back on the infernal machine: New York to Frankfurt, Frankfurt to Singapore, Singapore to Ho Chi Minh City, another marathon of smoke-free flights, my personal circle of hell, sitting next to the smelliest man on earth, the engines droning on and on without variation, making me yearn for turbulence – anything to break the boredom, the gnawing, terrible sense that

I'm in some gruesome state of suspended animation. Is there anything so expensive and yet so demeaning as tourist class on a long flight? Look at us! Stacked ten across, staring bleary-eyed straight ahead, legs and knees contorted, necks at unnatural angles, eagerly – yes, eagerly – waiting for the slop gurney finally to make its way down to us. That all-too-familiar brackish waft of burned coffee, the little plastic trays of steamed food, which would cause a riot in a federal penitentiary. Oh God, another Sandra Bullock film, another Willis. If I see Helen Hunt squinting at me from a hazy airline screen one more time, I'm opening the emergency door. Being sucked into thin air has got to be preferable to that. I find myself looking for any diversion, anything to take my mind off the nicotine yen: Focus on the snoring human compost heap across the narrow aisle, pretend that if I stare hard enough, he'll explode.

From *A Cook's Tour* by Anthony Bourdain, p52

Sometimes it's the kid in the seat behind you that insists on kicking the bottom of your chair over and over and over again, and its parents who take offence at your requesting it stop. Or the kid in the aisle seat opposite who falls asleep with his eyes open, staring at you through the long night like some drooling, demented ghoul. Or the fellow passenger who just doesn't know what he wants to do or where he wants to be. Such as the one on a flight to Japan:

Our difficulty concentrated on one family we were travelling with: mother, father, daughter about 8 and daughter about 3. They had obviously found it hard to get four seats near each other in the 3 rows of Business Class so had ended up with 2 in front of us in row one and 2 in the third row. He kept on looking back at his kids at what seemed like 30 second intervals (catching my eye every time as he had to look straight past me), the youngest kept on complaining about everything, and the mother couldn't work out if she wanted to sit with her husband or one of her daughters and so was up and down seemingly all the time, with, of course, her seat tilted back as far as it would go.

From my travel blog "Japan 2014 Day #1: Up and Out and Falling Down" – Melbourne to Tokyo, 14 September 2014

No, we don't normally travel Business Class. On this occasion Robyn had found a very good deal on a Jetstar flight to Tokyo from Australia that was only slightly more expensive than the standard Qantas economy fare. It was too good to pass up. With Jetstar being the "cheaper" companion airline to Qantas, the Business Class seats and service were about equivalent to a standard Premium Economy seat.

Usually it's the bog-standard economy seat. Hopefully on an emergency exit row in order to get the extra leg-room but more often than not just in one of the crunched up seats in "cattle class". And there, you sometimes have to just go with the flow and enjoy the frenetic energy of your fellow passengers.

A group of about 15 women, accompanied by one or two men, got on and all sat in the seats around us. All was good until another passenger pointed out

that one of the women was sitting in his seat. I'm not sure how much English was understood by the group but there was certainly a lot of arguing, finger pointing, laughter (from a young teenage girl in the middle of the group who was obviously enjoying herself immensely), more arguing and moving of seats. With about 5 minutes to go till departure we had already had three different people sitting next to me and the one that ended up there should really have been two rows behind on the other side of the plane. The poor male air steward who came along to fix the mess did his best but gave up and just told them to find a seat and stay there. And after he left all was quiet. Very much ado about very little indeed, and lots of fun to watch.

From my travel blog "Europe 2017: Day #32/33 Heading Home" – Budapest to Dubai, 23 September 2017

The flight back to Melbourne from Dubai was nowhere near as much fun.

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**Late update:** our trip to New Zealand is now off. It looks like that country will continue to impose a minimum of a seven-day quarantine period upon arrival until about April 2022, regardless of vaccination status or COVID test results. And adding another seven days to the vacation just isn't going to work. Ah well, another well-laid plan turns to dust. I can't see us getting to NZ for at least another couple of years now.

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

**Notes from this month's podcasts**

**Episode 65:** (9 November 2021) *Awesome awards*

This week we discuss some recent awards news and then jump into the Hugo Time Machine to re-visit the Hugo Awards of 1967. Do we agree with the final 1967 results? In the main, no.

**Episode 66:** (23 November 2021) *Where great whales come sailing by*

This episode David talks about *Bewilderment*, the best book he's read all year; I review a magnificent book about whales; and then interview prominent fan Justin Ackroyd.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at [twochairs.website](http://twochairs.website) (please note the change in url), or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



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**What I will be talking about :** Coming up on December 5 I will be talking to Leigh Edmonds for a FANAC Zoom session. The topic for this talk will be: “Wrong Turns on the Wallaby Track: Australian Science Fiction Fandom to Aussiecon – Part 1, 1936 to 1960.”

The promo reads: “From the 1930s to the 1950s sf fandom in Australia was active and buoyant. Centred mainly around the city of Sydney their activities included fanzine production, club meetings and feuding. Yet by the beginning of the 1960s it had nearly all withered away. How did this vibrant community survive the Second World War and yet somehow fail to make it through peacetime? This, and many other questions, will be addressed by Dr Leigh Edmonds, sf fan and professional historian, in his FANAC talk.”

At the time of writing I don't have a Zoom link for the talk, but you will be able to track it down by visiting fanac.org. It will also be recorded and available for viewing later.

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### 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; Neb: Nebula Award winner; Ned: Ned Kelly Award winner.

#### November 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>New Writings in SF-1</i>	ed John Carnell	Sf	Nov 4		3.2	1964	Anth
<i>Flowers for Algernon</i>	Daniel Keyes	Sf	Nov 5	e	4.3	1966	Neb
<i>Fathoms: the world in the whale</i>	Rebecca Giggs	Non-fiction	Nov 13		4.6	2020	Aust
<i>The Relentless Moon</i>	Mary Robinette Kowal	Sf	Nov 16	e	4.0	2020	
<i>Orbit 2</i>	ed Damon Knight	Sf	Nov 26		3.5	1967	Anth
<i>Crossing the Lines</i>	Sulari Gentill	Crime	Nov 30		4.5	2017	Ned

Books read in the month: 6

Yearly total to end of month: 93

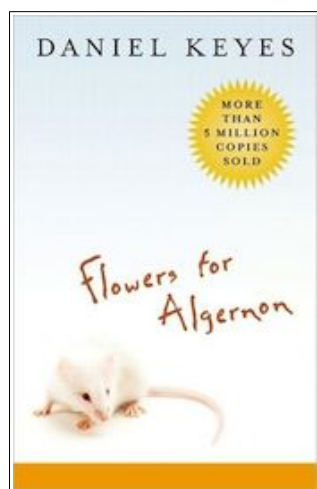
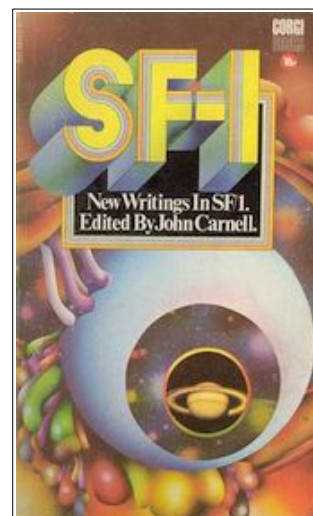
2021 reading targets met this month: 4 Nebula Award winning novels; 18 Australian books; 2 Ned Kelly Award winners.

A rather poor month for reading, in fact the worst of the year. I put it down to the opening up after an extended lock-down. Suddenly all these other things are on the social landscape and finding time for reading becomes harder and harder.

I hope to do better in December. The initial rush of catching up with people is now over and I can probably concentrate on other things a bit more. Well, I can hope, anyway.

Notes:

***New Writings in SF-1*** (1964) – The first of what would prove to be a long-running series of original sf anthologies out of the UK, finishing with 30 volumes in total. This was rather ground-breaking stuff in its time, being the first of this particular type of publication. Carnell was just off editing **New Worlds** magazine (1946, 1949-63), leaving after that publication had been sold to a new publisher. There are five stories here – 2 short stories and 3 novelettes – with the best of them being “Man on Bridge” by Brian W. Aldiss and “The Sea’s Furthest End” by Australian writer Damien Broderick. The rest read like standard sf material from the late 50s. This is not a great collection, though a competent one, but needs to be praised for what it was attempting to do, and for what the series became.  
R: 3.2/5.0



***Flowers for Algernon*** (1966) – Co-winner of the 1967 Nebula Award for Best Novel.

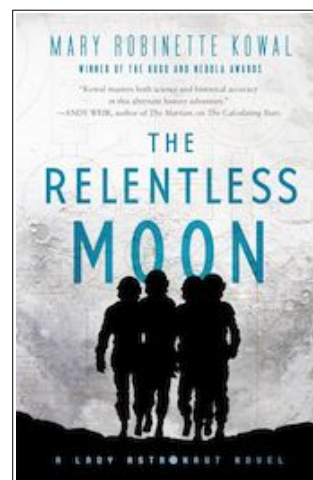
This novel is an expansion of the 1959 short story, of the same title, which won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1960. It was later adapted, in 1968, into the 1968 film **Charly**, for which Cliff Robertson won the Academy Award for Best Actor. In other words, it’s good story material. Charlie Gordon (as named in the novel) has undergone an experimental surgical procedure aimed at raising his intelligence, starting with an IQ of 68. The novel is told in a series of diary entries, written by Charlie, as he charts the changes he experiences – both intellect and emotional – following the surgery. The “Algernon” of the title is a mouse who experienced the same procedure prior to Charlie and who acts as a

measure against which Charlie can chart his progress. This is a wonderful piece of technical writing by Keyes as Charlie’s spelling, grammar and style changes in his writing, along with his intellectual development. But it is the emotional roller-coaster that Charlie experiences along his journey that makes this book so compelling. R: 4.4/5.0

***Fathoms: the world in the whale*** (2020) – see major review below.

***The Relentless Moon*** (2020) – Finalist for the 2021 Hugo Award for Best Novel.

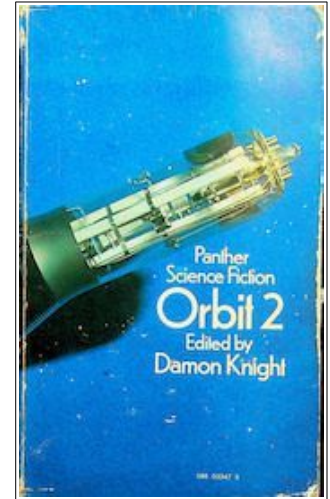
This is the third novel in the author’s Lady Astronaut series, following ***The Calculating Stars*** (2018) and ***The Fated Sky*** (2018). The books form an alternate history set on earth in the late 1950s and early 1960s after a huge meteorite fell to earth and wiped out large swathes of the eastern United States. The ensuing climate catastrophe is predicted to make Earth nearly uninhabitable within 50 years, so the various countries’ space





programs are combined to accelerate the chance of getting a number of people off-planet. Where the first two novels followed the exploits of the original lady Astronaut, Elma York, this one has another US female astronaut, Nicole Wargin, as the lead POV character. Set mainly on the moon this details the problems the program has in setting up a viable moon colony in the face of sabotage from a group known as the Earth Firsters. This is a very good piece of work. The science and societal norms are displayed with convincing detail and the hunt for the moon-based saboteur provides tension and action. A worthy Hugo finalist. R: 4.0/5.0

**Orbit 2** (1967) – The second of Damon Knight’s continuing original anthology series. No award winners this time round but I liked the stories by Ted Thomas, Kate Wilhelm, Gene Wolfe, Joanna Russ, Kit Reed and Brian W. Aldiss; so, 6 out of 10, which puts it into the very acceptable, above average range. The Thomas and Wilhelm short stories were both nominated for a Nebula Award in 1968, losing out to “Aye, and Gomorrah” by Samuel R. Delaney, which puts them into good company. Knight drops his introduction for author bios and very short paragraph notes before each story. The lack of such an introduction leaves the anthology slightly adrift in my view, lacking any historical context. R: 3.5/5.0



**Crossing the Lines** (2017) – see major review next month.

**Typo justification #1:**

“...perhaps in order to write a really great book, you must be rather unaware of the fact. You can slave away at it and change every adjective to some other adjective, but perhaps you can write better if you leave the mistakes.” – Jorge Luis Borges, in an interview 1967.

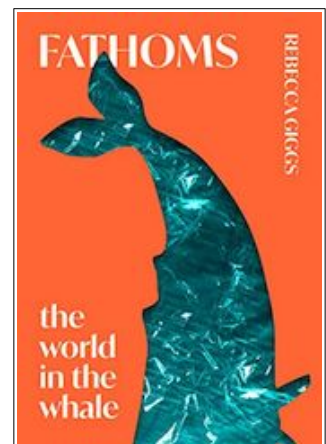
**REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS**

**Fathoms: the world in the whale** (2020) by Rebecca Giggs

**Genre:** Non-fiction

Winner of the 2021 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction, and shortlisted for the 2021 Stella Prize.

I can’t definitively say when I first saw a live whale in the flesh. It might have been off the coast of Australia somewhere in my youth. If I did see one then the memory has gone; most probably overtaken by the close encounter my family and I had one holiday in Queensland when we went on a whale-watching boat out from Hervey Bay. Humpback whales migrate north up from Antarctic waters along the Australian east coast and sometimes rest for a while in the sheltered waters off Hervey Bay, between the mainland and Fraser Island, the world’s largest sand island. If you are lucky you might get a chance to see mother and



calf together on such a tour. We didn't, though we did have a large whale dive under the boat and come up the other side, which was rather spectacular. It was certainly close enough to get a very good look.

I did see a bit of whale in Bergen, Norway, once, some 30-odd years ago. It was a large cube-shaped slab of dark red meat sitting on a butcher's block. I didn't stay around there for long.

So my encounters with whales have been infrequent and glancing, at best. Yet, like most of us I suspect, they loom large in my imagination. They certainly fascinate Australian journalist Rebecca Giggs who examines, sometimes in minute detail, her interest in the creature. Her first encounter with a whale was with a beached humpback on the west coast of Australia. The whale had been rescued and pushed back out to sea, only for it to re-beach. It then takes some three days to expire, with various government ministries wiping their hands of it; the Department of Fisheries denied it was their responsibility because a whale was a mammal, rather than a fish. As she sits with a wildlife officer watching over the whale the question of euthanising is raised: a simple bullet won't do it, as the animal is too big; a drug overdose might end up not being enough, in which case the animal would suffer more, or too much which would result in a toxic carcass; and dynamite might also not work or cause a massive cleanup problem. She, and the officer, can only sit and watch it expire.

This encounter leads her on to the death of whales, a process called "whalefall" if it happens at sea, and what the decaying carcass means to the ocean ecosystem, and also what its absence might cause. And from there on to other deaths, natural and man-induced, and the impact on the world's climate as a whole caused by the widespread slaughter of the animals by the whaling industry. But this is not an emotional-laden rant. The book induces emotions in the reader by a steady and relentless discussion of facts and the history of various whale sub-species; emotions ranging from anger and despair to hope for the future.

Along the way the reader will learn a lot of surprising facts; such as the use of whale oil as a lubricant in the space program, up until 1973. None of this is presented in dry academic style, replete with data tables. The opposite is true.

Perhaps it is best for Giggs herself to say what the book is about:

This book tackles what it means to pollute not just places, but organisms; and then, not 'just' organisms but *beings*, a category of creatures to which we have granted a central place in our imaginaries – whales, which we have often projected human qualities into, and personified, but which are also responsive, cognitively sophisticated animals, perhaps even capable of configuring our relation to their social worlds. It is thus an exploration of obligations to another animal, beyond attempts to merely preserve their species: what kind of sensory realities do we want to protect animals from, what sort of lives in the wild do we want to insure. This book looks at how contact with whales – through tourism, captivity and the media – has provided a remedy to people's feeling of malaise about the natural world, and it asks what it means to desire connection, at a time

when connection can entail damage to animals, or expose us to grief. The bid this book makes is for the potential of a scientifically literate imagination to allow us to better understand the sensoriums of other species, to gauge the true extent of the changing environment from perspectives other than our own. But it is also a book about where we find hope today, how we control ourselves, where commonalities can be sought with the past, and between cultures, and how to remain compassionately engaged with distant, unmet things. (pp 26-27)

I found the use of the book's subtitle - "the world in the whale" rather than "the whale in the world" – to be of utmost significance when reading this text. Under the tutelage of the author we come to see both the significant place the whale holds in the world – real and imaginary – and also the extent of the world within the whale, something that can be easily forgotten.

In their review of this book in **The New York Review of Books**, Verlyn Klinkenborg described it as being: "...one of the best accounts I've ever read of the interaction, intended and unintended, between humans and other species—a work of genuinely literary imagination." I can only concur.

R: 4.6/5.0

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**Cover notes:** On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019 we were in France. The previous night we had stayed in the small town of Villers-Bretonneux after visiting the new Australian-built Sir John Monash centre nearby, and on this day had driven about 90 minutes north to Fromelles. There we aimed to have a look at the museum and the World War I battle site where Rob's great-uncle had died in 1916. We arrived at the Fromelles museum at about lunch-time only to find it was closed on Tuesdays. Nothing for it but to utilise one of the picnic tables out the front for our lunch and ponder our next moves. As it turned out we were back the next day to actually visit the museum and had pretty much the same lunch on the same picnic table.

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

### Television

**Annika** (mini-series – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: ABC TV

Genre: Crime

DI Annika Strandhed (Nicola Walker) is the new head of Glasgow's Marine Homicide Unit. Each episode in this series involves a separate murder case where the bodies have been found in or near the water on the west coast of Scotland.

Underlying the series is the ongoing relationship between Strandhed and her teenage daughter who is having trouble



adapting to her new environment, and Strandhed's evolving love-life, what there is of it. Walker is very good in the lead role, though her occasional short monologues to the camera are a bit hit-and-miss. The whole thing seems a little light in terms of drama and tension, and the short investigation periods for each case come across as a tad forced. Diverting but not top drawer. R: 3.4/5.0

### **Midnight Diner** (Season 2 – 10 episodes) (2011)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy Drama

I'm continuing my fascination and enjoyment of this Japanese language (with subtitles) comedy drama set in a small Tokyo diner. Again, each episode of around 25 minutes, tells a different story, though, as usual, there are a number of recurring characters. Sometimes the co-incidences can be a little repetitive – what are the odds of a young woman discovering her long-lost father eating in the same little diner – but the combination of pathos and comedy that can be found in each episode mitigates that little quirk. We like to stretch out our viewing of this, restricting ourselves to one episode a night after we've watched something a little more dramatic and/or gritty. The perfect accompaniment, like a fine dessert wine after a heavy red for dinner. R: 4.5/5.0



### **Temple** (Season 1 – 8 episodes) (2019)

Platform: SBS On Demand

Genre: Drama

Daniel Milton (Mark Strong) is a brilliant surgeon who is willing to offer his services to provide illegal medical care to people in order to fund his undercover care of his wife and his research into the illness that afflicted her. But this covert care means that he has had to fake his wife's suicide, to lie to his daughter and his work colleagues and to leave his lucrative position at a major hospital. The series follows his attempts to care for her, to purchase a human kidney for a transplant after she develops chronic renal failure and to keep his previous affair with a colleague, Anna Willems (Carice van Houten) a secret. He is aided in this by Lee Simmons (Daniel

Mays) a transport network employee who is a closet "doomsday prepper", and who helps Daniel set up his illegal clinic. But Lee has his own problems which cause more than a little tension and drama. This is very interesting piece of television which explores the moral issues behind the question "how far would you go to save the person you love?"

R: 4.1/5.0

### **Detectorists** (Season 1 – 6 episodes) (2014)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy



Andy (Mackenzie Crook) and Lance (Toby Jones) are a couple of gormless blokes in the small fictional town of Danebury in northern Essex. This series follows their faltering love lives and their metal detecting ambitions as they search for the ever elusive lost treasures of the Saxons. Written and directed by Crook, this series won the Best Situation Comedy Award at the 2015 BAFTAs and is a wonderful piece of work. It utilises a light, playful comedy that doesn't attempt to get its laughs by demeaning or embarrassing the characters. The acting by the two mains is spot-on with very good support from the others in the cast. Part of the series' success lies in its simple ambitions, which it meets commendably. The best thing about this is that I have another 3 series to go. Who knew that discarded ring-pulls and buttons could be so interesting? Recommended. R: 4.3/5.0

***Catherine the Great*** (Mini-series – 4 episodes) (2019)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

Written by Nigel Williams, directed by Philip Martin and featuring Helen Mirren as the titular character, this mini-series follows the life and loves of Catherine the Great of Russia from the period after she deposed her husband in 1764 until her death in 1796. The great love of her life during this period was Grigory Potemkin (Jason Clarke) who we first meet as a second lieutenant, and who gradually works his way into her favour and up through the army ranks to Major-General. As the Empress's consort (possible husband?) he is also raised to the title of Count, and later Prince. The series details Catherine's attempts to govern Russia at home as well as utilising Potemkin to expand her empire abroad, her problems with her son, and her attempts to make her grandson the true heir. At 74 Mirren seems to me a little too old to be playing the 40-year-old Catherine, but as the series progresses she comes to excel in the role of the ageing monarch. Clarke plays Potemkin with gusto. Early on I was a little annoyed by the modern turns of phrase in use which made the first two episodes the weakest of the series for me. A lavish period drama made with style and much expertise. R: 3.8/5.0



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**Film**

***Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*** (2021)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Superhero Action

This is the second film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) Phase Four, following ***Black Widow*** from earlier this year, which I still have to get to. Shang-Chi (Simu Liu) is the son of a near immortal Asian warlord, Xu Wenwu (Tony Leung), who has conquered and ruled – behind the scenes – vast areas of the globe utilising the power of the mystical ten rings. After he is attacked in San Francisco, where he now lives, by a group of men working for his father, Shang-Chi travels to Macau in an attempt to re-unite with his sister. This is basically Shang-Chi's origin film following



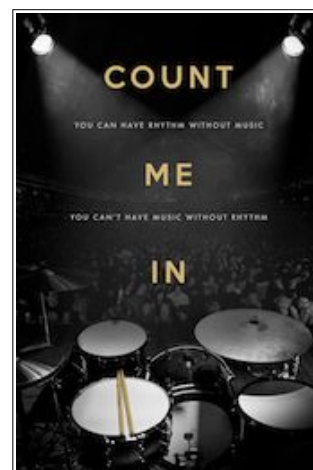
Campbell's familiar hero's journey with "the call to adventure", "acceptance of the challenge", "overcoming the adversaries", and "the return with the gifts" all playing their parts. It works well. Apart from the obligatory back-story conversations in the first half the film motors along with some wonderful special effects. It is refreshing to see this from an Asian perspective with all major parts played by actors with an Asian background. I always liked the Shang-Chi comics and I suspect that, as the character is integrated more into the new MCU, I will enjoy his future appearances there as well. R: 3.8/5.0

### **Count Me In** (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Music Documentary

This music documentary investigates the role that drummers play in modern music, specifically rock music. Based, in the main, around a series of interviews, cut into rather short segments, with a number of leading rock drummers it aims to provide the viewer with some idea of the importance of the percussion section in any band, and to explore the reasons why these musicians decided to choose this particular set of instruments. You get the basic idea but I was left wanting rather more than the documentary delivered. The drummers featured have been chosen with care as they all seem articulate and passionate, rather at odds with the general view of dumb, super-jock drummers of legend. It is good to see a number of female drummers putting in an appearance with the emphasis being on their musicality and precision rather than anything else. Interesting without being anything really new. R: 3.3/5.0



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## **PERRYSCOPE Responses**

### **Perryscope 15:**

**Joseph Nicholas:** "I was very touched by your short note about Judith in **Perryscope 15**; I hope you were able to watch the funeral service online, although it would have given very little idea of how many people were there (unless you counted them as they came up to place flowers on the willow casket). The livestream focused only on the front two rows (and then only part of the front two rows) on the right of the chapel, occupied by myself, Judith's sister Zena and her husband Peter, and my siblings and their children. I think total attendance must have been close to 70, which is the maximum that the chapel can hold: neighbours, local gardeners, fellow allotmenters, members of Judith's dance group, about a dozen SF fans, and others who knew her from the various things she did. She truly touched and inspired, and was loved by, a large number of people.

"I miss her dreadfully. But you can probably guess that for yourself."

[**PM:** I was able to attend Judith's funeral via the livestream feed, for which I am very grateful. It was an informative and moving event. As you say, it was hard to get a sense of the numbers in attendance until the end but that didn't diminish it in any way.]

“Sticking with **Perryscope 15**, I have to say that I've never paid that much attention to the Booker Prize, which far too often – especially in the 1970s and 1980s – has plumped for undemandingly obvious English fiction about people bonking in Kensington bedsits (or similar) over anything genuinely original or challenging. The nadir, for me and many others, came in 1984 (I think it was) when J G Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, his semi-autobiographical novel about internment in a Japanese PoW camp in Shanghai during the Second World War, was kicked out in favour of some tediously mainstream drivel fawned over by the people who write for the Sunday newspaper review supplements. As we know, the Ballard went on to be filmed by Steven Spielberg, while nobody now remembers who collected the trophy for which he was nominated. (Memory suggests that it was Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, but perhaps that was another nominee which didn't win. Who did? Who cares?)”

[**PM:** I would have been happy if either *Empire of the Sun* or *Flaubert's Parrot* had won in that year of 1984. But the big winner was *Hotel du Lac* by Anita Brookner. An interesting, if slight, novel that wasn't really a patch on either of the others. Sometimes you get the feeling that winners were chosen as a compromise rather than for innovation or excellence.]

**John Hertz:** “Yet another good rendition of you, this time by Chong on **P15**.”

“As it happens I've not only read *Schindler's Ark* but I met Poldek Pfefferberg. He had a leather-goods shop in Beverly Hills under the name Leopold Page (“Leopold”, his given name; “Poldek” is a Polish nickname for “Leopold”). Like Keneally, I dropped in looking for a new briefcase. The book had been published in 1982; the *Schindler's List* movie was the next project. It may have happened because Pfefferberg knew Spielberg's mother; anyway, I too ate at her restaurant the Milky Way.”

[**PM:** Keneally's story about entering Pfefferberg's shop and hearing his story is one of those fortuitous things that can happen to an author from time to time. But hearing the story is one thing, having the talent and skill to recognise its worth and to be able to render it properly is quite another. Luckily, Keneally has both.]

“I've never been to Hanoi but I was at a Vietnamese restaurant today. I told the waitress ‘You got the four best things from the French – their alphabet, billiards, coffee and sandwiches.’ Billiards, incidentally, not pocket-billiards, called ‘pool’ in the U.S. because it arose in horse-race betting-pool halls. ‘Right on all four!’ she said; ‘are you a professor?’ I didn't tell her I was in her neighborhood because, in my professional capacity (I'm a lawyer), I'd just been interviewing a professor.”

[**PM:** I'm always rather bemused by the U.S. interpretation of the word “sandwich”. To Australians it is anything between two *slices* of bread. Not a bun, not a roll. A “burger” is not a sandwich here, nor is a *bánh mi* roll. A sandwich is occasionally called a “sanger”, which is then used in an expression such as “two sangers short of a picnic”; the meaning of which should be obvious. Billiards we know about. The great Australian billiards player, Walter Lindrum, broke a number of world records during his long playing career. He was so good that the rules of the game were changed to prevent him going on huge scoring runs. I'm not sure this can be said about any other single player in any other game, anywhere.]

“A wonderful crime novel and a wonderful literary novel as well.... A glorious piece of writing. The description of the town, its inhabitants and their interactions is wonderfully handled and the prose flows with an ease that is to be admired. The crime ... and the ... resolution ... seem almost secondary to the world being created’ is how I’d describe *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*. Sayers’ putting ‘unpleasantness’ in the title, echoing her characterisation, is a masterly touch.”

[PM: You obviously liked it more than me. And, as your made-up review quotes me talking about *Ordinary Grace* I can say that I think the Krueger novel is by far the better of the two. Though I do agree with your comments regarding the Sayers title. The word “unpleasantness” there is just perfect.]

“You must have worked hard to get ‘We should be more welcoming’ from my letter. [PM: Which is not what I said.] Indeed newcomers often fail to try our door, not even considering it might be, as it is, unlocked; another topic. I want to improve letting people know we exist. We don’t even get as far as the fellow in *Time for the Stars* who says ‘Outdowngo rightwards. Ask for allone.’”

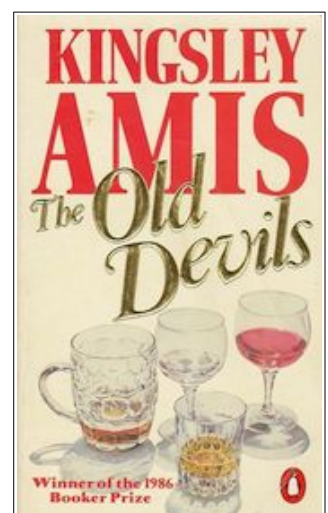
[PM: How do we publicise our interests? How do we find the people that might be interested in sf fandom now that most sf bookshops have disappeared? I don’t know. We had the same problem with publicising the Worldcons I worked on. We did the best we could but some people said they only found out about us after the convention was over. And when we asked where they were expecting to find the information they needed we were either met with blank stares, “I don’t know”s, or answers (such as television advertisements) that were way too expensive for us to contemplate. You would need someone with expertise in the area of public relations to find a solution.]

**Rose Mitchell:** “I thought I held onto grudges for a long time but it seems for you, the judging of The Booker Prize 1986 was a great travesty and deep wound. 35 years! Well done I am in awe of you.”

[PM: Sometimes it’s just the slow burn of annoyance that keeps the indignation fires a-burning.]

“My observation, and further research sparked by your article, was for that year there were 4 finalists with science fiction credentials: Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Kazuo Ishiguro and Kingsley Amis himself. I can’t believe that *The Handmaid’s Tale* lost out to *The Old Devils* but then it was a slow burn and over the intervening 35 years now considered, ‘seminal’. Interestingly, Davies won a World Fantasy Award for Best Collection/Anthology (1984). And Amis was a keen SF reader rubbing shoulders with the pillars of the genre by all accounts.”

[PM: The isfdb database lists four novels by Amis as being in the genre. The best known of these is probably *The Alteration*, which I can recommend. He also wrote *The New Maps of Hell* in 1960, which was his survey of the sf field. There are also a number of short fiction pieces and five volumes of the *Spectrum* anthology series that he co-edited with Robert Conquest.]





“Back in my very young teenage years (13 or 14 IIRC), I read *The Green Man*. And I vividly recall my high school English Literature teacher discreetly advising me to hide the book cover as it was not deemed suitable reading material for students. She didn’t tell me not to read it, merely to keep it under wraps. I got the impression she thought it worthy literature. It could be loosely described as SF genre: horror (the ghost thread) and sex and orgies – a fave activity amongst SF fans at cons!”

[PM: Far be it for me to make any comment there.]

### Perryscope 16:

**Julian Warner:** “We just watched *The Green Knight* with Jane Routley and Terry Cooper this evening. To me it seemed like a hallucinogenic commentary on the original with a very rumbly soundtrack. Slightly over-doing the Indo-Anglian cast thing and with a very limited colour palette. Look! It’s a bit of yellow in his cloak! The Green Knight fails to be very green because it’s so fucking dark.”

[PM: It wasn’t known as THE Dark Ages for nothing you know.]

**Marc Ortlieb:** “You don’t expect to write a review of a Richard Thompson biography without a pedantic correction from me do you? You note, in **Perryscope 16**, “the formation of Fairport Convention with Sandy Denny, the sacking of Sandy Denny,”. Fairport Convention was formed by Ashley Hutchings, Richard Thompson, Simon Nicol (because he owned a 12-string guitar) with a drummer Shaun Frater, who lasted one gig before being replaced by Martin Lamble. They then added Ian (or Iain) (MacDonald) Matthews and their first female vocalist, Judy Dyble before releasing their first album. Judy Dyble, who was Richard’s girlfriend at one point, was sacked by Ashley Hutchings to be replaced by Sandy Denny. Sandy wasn’t sacked. She left Fairport partly because she had developed a relationship with Trevor Lucas, partly because she wanted a band that could play more of her own compositions and partly because she hated touring overseas. I can recommend to you Mick Houghton’s *I’ve Always Kept A Unicorn: The Biography of Sandy Denny*, strangely enough with an introduction by Richard Thompson. Judy Dyble, incidentally, also sang with the band Giles, Giles and Fripp who went on to become King Crimson and then formed a duo Trader Horne. She did later appear at Fairport Convention’s Cropredy Festival. She died of lung cancer in 2020.”

[PM: Thanks for the correction. And the extra information. I was probably attempting to be a bit “concise”, to the point of being a bit “wrong”.]

“I’ll allow, as a typo, your mention of Hari ‘Sheldon’ in your review of *Foundation and Empire*. [PM: Another in the growing list of amusing mistypings.] As John Hertz notes, Asimov wasn’t apologetic in cribbing from Roman history. From the same poem that contains the quotation that John provides, there are the following lines:

“So success is not a mystery, just brush up on your history, and borrow day by day.  
Take an empire that was Roman and you’ll find it is at home in all the starry Milky Way.”

“The poem “The Foundation of S.F. Success” (with apologies to W.S. Gilbert) appears in Asimov’s collection *Earth is Room Enough* and, if I knew enough Gilbert and Sullivan, I could probably sing the poem — as Asimov would have, allowing me to claim

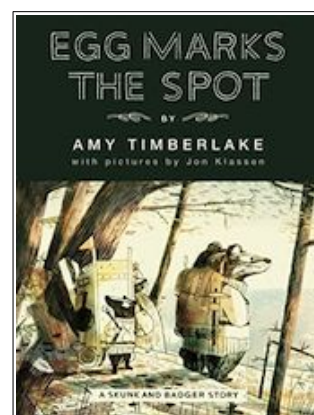
Asimov as one of the first filk singers. The character Bel Riose from *Foundation and Empire* is directly based upon Belisarius, one of the Emperor Justinian's most successful generals."

[PM: Interesting snippets.]

**Jenny Ackroyd:** "When I read of your angst regarding your subscription to *The New York Review of Books*, I was immediately struck by the similarity with Skunk's predicament of not having access to a precious resource in the latest book by Amy Timberlake, a junior fiction novel I have just read.

"... When a former neighbour, Mr G. Hedgehog, threatens to resume his weekly theft of Skunk's *New Yak Times Book Review*, Skunk convinces Badger to undertake a rock-finding expedition in order to assuage the pain of a *Book Review*-less Sunday..."

Skunk knows the value of a good book review, telling Badger that ... "You will like the *New Yak Times Book Review* too. Yaks make the best book reviewers. Is it their shaggy bangs that bring focus? Or is it the hump of nutrients, which allows them to read many books without eating? It is a mystery." Another aficionado tells us that ..." Yaks know how to review books. Yaks are passionate about books and reading. Yaks write with style, originality and humour. ... Also yaks reveal their likes and dislikes so you know *why* they hold an opinion, which allows you to disagree with them more easily. ... Yaks are respectful of their readers."



"You and Skunk need to have a conversation."

[PM: We certainly must, and I really should follow up on those books as well.]

**Leigh Edmonds:** "These days I hear people saying that this or that is 'in their wheelhouse'. I don't know where this saying emerged from so recently or what it actually means, but I think I get the sense. So, if I've got it right, a lot of the stfnal stuff in this issue is not really in my wheelhouse but your comments on page 2 are.

"You are entirely correct that early aviators used famous personalities to promote flying, partly to attract attention and partly because flying was too expensive for ordinary folks. The entertaining Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers *Flying Down to Rio* [RKO, 1933] comes to mind. There not being too many film stars in Australia the most used source of famous people here seems to have been politicians. This might suggest that politicians were more highly regarded then than they are now but it probably also has something to do with the way in which the development of civil aviation in Australia depended on political support to get ahead.

"More interesting were your comments about what might be the popularity of space flight fifty years from now. My suggestion is that it will not be as popular as you might think. Here beginneth the lesson. The real popularity of air travel began in the 1970s with the arrival of the Boeing 747 'Jumbo Jet' which began flying in airline service in 1970. (As an

aside, I wonder if Aussiecon in 1975 might have depended more than we think on the entry of the 747 to North America-Australia services around 1972, making it possible for American fans to think realistically about visiting Australia for the event.) The boom in air travel either created or developed in parallel with tourism. Airlines had to fill the seats on these enormous airliners and they did it by offering cheap fares and creating a demand by giving people places they wanted to go. In Australia the arrival of modern jet airliners in the 1960s coincided with the development of tourist resorts in north Queensland and the arrival of the 747 coincided with the development of tourist resorts and the development of the global tourist industry more generally.”

[**PM:** Excellent point about the availability of air-travel in 1975 and the popularity of the first Australian Worldcon that year. I should follow up with a few people who made that trip.]

“The lesson from this is that space travel will only become popular, as popular as air travel was up until 2019 anyhow, when there are places in space where people want to go on tourist jaunts. I’m struggling to imagine how popular a visit to the Moon or Mars will be in the coming century or two as a tourist attraction, particularly when in competition with existing earth bound tourist destinations. In the longer term you may well be right, but I can’t see it happening in the lifetimes of our great-grandchildren. Of course, as living conditions on planet Earth go down the gurgler spending a week or two on the Moon or Mars might have more appeal than it does now.”

[**PM:** Low-earth orbit will be the first stop for most people followed later by the Moon. Trips to Mars will be a problem unless the travel time can be reduced markedly. But I can certainly see lunar travel – 2-3 days en route each way and a week bouncing around in low gravity – would be rather appealing to the well-heeled. Maybe my 50 years prediction was a bit short of the mark but it will happen as more and more space hotels come on line.]

“The other part of the lesson is that jet air travel made it possible for people to fly to tourist destinations in a few hours so that most of their one or two week holiday could be spent at their destination rather than in traveling to it. (Only a few of us actually enjoy the process of air travel these days and it’s becoming less attractive as the standard of cabin service and comfort falls into a deep and dismal hole.) Only the rich could afford the time to be tourists and I wonder what the transit time to Mars will be even a few centuries from now.”

[**PM:** Ocean liner travel was enhanced by the opportunity to stop off at a few “exotic” locations along the way. That will not be the attraction here until someone nudges an asteroid, or two, into an interesting spot. One or all of the Earth-Sun Lagrangian points maybe.]

“Anyhow, the rest of the issue was also interesting. Your long commentary on your relationship with Wikipedia was informative. I find it mainly useful in finding out about rare and barely remembered old aeroplanes, mostly French, so there must be a bunch of editors out there beavering away on my behalf without knowing it. Recently somebody said to me, with a touch of awe in their voice, that I had a Wiki entry. Fame at last I thought and went to look. By golly, yes there is an entry with my name at the top and, if I exercise my imagination a little, it might be about me too. I see that it was last edited

back at the end of September this year which might mean I am not slated for eradication just yet.”

[**PM:** I could put in a deletion request if you'd like. No, just kidding. A quick check on your Wikipedia page reveals that it was started back in 2012, and contains nary a mention of your fannish activities. Crikey, you gave the opening speech at the 2010 Worldcon – that must count for something!]

“There are several of the items you reviewed that are on Netflix so I will have to see if I remember to look them up. I would have entirely missed the fact that I've read both Heinlein's collection *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* and Asimov's *Foundation and Empire* had you not had illustrations of the covers which I recognized as I flicked past. So that's where I read 'All You Zombies' for the first time, the only Heinlein short story that I have any memory of. As for *Foundation and Empire*, perhaps it might make a better memory than a present day read.”

[**PM:** I think this is another case of certain British paperback editions being so common in Australia in the 60s and 70s. I doubt the publishers changed the covers that often. Everybody who has an interest in sf in Australia at that time probably came across these same paperback editions somewhere or other.]

**Joseph Nicholas:** “Turning to **Perryscope 16**, and your review of *Vigil*, I have to agree with you that it was gripping, exciting television. However, the premise is also complete tosh – if a crewperson dies on a submarine mission, whether or not the submarine is still in UK territorial waters, the Navy doesn't call in a civilian detective to investigate a possible homicide: the crew simply stick the dead body in a convenient location, very often a torpedo tube (the writers got that right: because the tube's proximity to cold seawater keeps the body cool and thus slows down the decay processes) and continue with the mission, bringing the body out for examination only when it's over and they've returned to harbour. But if the writers had gone down that route, of course, there would have been no story.

“(Naval personnel who have served on nuclear missile submarines also objected that the set was much roomier than a real submarine; that a dummy launch exercise would never have gone as far as opening the hatches to the SLBMs and so flooding them with seawater (is there any means of pumping it out again, given that launching a nuclear missile is the end of the world?); and that security vetting for service on so important a piece of the national defence infrastructure as an SLBM submarine would have weeded out officers such as the potential traitor before he'd got anywhere near the boat. The last is arguable – the armed services always like to big up how clever and on-the-ball they are – but the first two are indisputable.”

[**PM:** I agree that the initial setup had some problems but once you got past that things moved along very nicely.]

“I continue to be – what's the word? staggered? – by the number of books you've read in any given month. Perhaps you have a faster reading speed than I – I know that Judith did – but in the past couple of months I've been struggling to get through the daily newspaper (*The Guardian* and its supplements) before the evening....with the evening then devoted to the various magazines to which we subscribe: *Private Eye*, *New Scientist*, *Current Archaeology*, *History Today*, et al). Of course, I have had other

demands on my time of late, connected with Judith's death – the sheer volume of paperwork that's involved is quite amazing. As Judith said to me more than once in her final days, "I've got the easy part – I'm leaving you with all the paperwork", and every other day (it seems) there's a new letter or email from the probate solicitor requiring the completion or signature of this or that form or document. There are some days when I go through from breakfast to midday (or later!) without doing anything else than dealing with this stuff – thank \*!£\$%&!\* we're heading into winter, and I don't have to spend that much time at the allotment: if it was summer I really wouldn't be able to cope!"

[**PM:** See my notes in the intro at the start of this issue. I used to read a lot of magazines but now constrain my reading to the *Australian Book Review* and *The New York Review of Books*. The first of these is monthly and the second mainly fortnightly. That's enough.]

**Martin Field:** "I've watched most of Bourdain's output and enjoyed *Kitchen Confidential*.

"The earlier shows I enjoyed the most, more about food and cooking and travel. Later shows became more abstract and I thought self-consciously cerebral, and for me therefore less enjoyable."

[**PM:** I like the way he integrates culture and politics into his food reporting in his later work, especially when he sits down with a family around their dinner table.]

"The slapdash and booze-laden early Keith Floyd is my yardstick though."

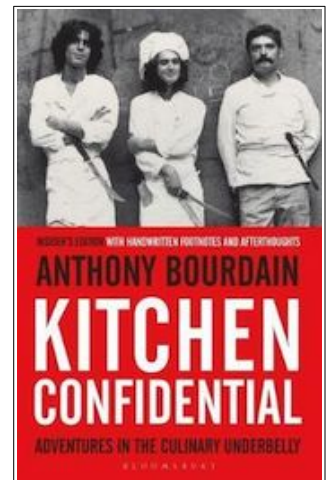
[**PM:** I'm glad you mention the early Floyd because those are my favourites as well. In later years he tried to become the centre of attention all the time, nudging other chefs out of the way and then taking over the cooking. In his earlier years he was more interested in learning what other cooks did. One day I must write up the time we had dinner at his pub in Devon for Robyn's birthday thirty years ago.]

"A food show I can recommend is *Hyper Hardboiled Gourmet Report* on Netflix.

"A reckless Japanese film crew dares to go where few would. The first episode, in an almost post-apocalyptic Liberia, is like Mad Max meets Anthony Bourdain. The crew visits a derelict cemetery where 800 and more armed, drug-addicted, now grown up, formerly cannibalistic child soldiers live in mausoleum doss-houses. They support themselves by drug-dealing, prostitution, thievery and pick-pocketing – including the crews' pockets. Insane."

[**PM:** It sounds like it requires a late-night screening accompanied by a good whisky or two.]

**Rose Mitchell:** "I enjoy your lists and appreciate the effort you put into compiling them. Love a good spreadsheet! I use them as primers or references on what to read or watch next or in the future. I'm compiling a list of your top recommendations; is that a bit meta? Nick Price once advised me a long time ago that life was too short to waste time on rubbish you didn't enjoy; always refer to the long/short lists of major prizes. So much more efficient.



“I was unaware of the extent of your war on Wikipedia until I read your piece on the fight over Bruce Gillespie’s, John Bangsund’s and surprisingly, Peggy Rae Sapienza’s Wiki entries. I do remember you talking about it at the time but didn’t fathom the extent of your campaign for their pages to be retained. I would have thought that these 3 pillars of science fiction fandom would have been well documented to support their listing in Wikipedia. Was the recommendation for removal motivated by malice, or more fannishly, revenge? We will never know I suppose. It would be fun if this was revealed; love a good fan feud. However with the way the Internet is nowadays, the stoush would be pretty ugly, even violent.”

[**PM:** I think the Wiki deletion notification wasn’t made from any sense of personal malice, more a matter of someone not thinking about what they were doing as they tried to make a name for themselves. I’ve never been keen on the way these deletions are handled within the community. I would prefer that specified administrators were engaged to vet the “deletion request” before it was publicly flagged. That way a lot of effort and anguish could be saved by those attempting to make the Wikipedia a better place. But I’m sure people would scream about that idea as well.]

“I was very fond of Peggy Rae; very generous person. When she was GoH at Chicon 7 (2012), her main event was tucked away in the second tower of the Hyatt (it was a long way from the central part of the gigantic facility – I swear it was a suburb in its own right!) and sparsely attended. None the less a scintillating panel delivered with much enjoyment and energy. I was deeply disappointed for her but she seemed not to be concerned. And the panel went overtime to everyone’s delight!”

[**PM:** I agree with the assessment that Peggy Rae was a genuinely caring and generous person. I will always remember her taking some time to have a few words to me during the 1999 Worldcon, just when I needed exactly that.]

“I agree with your assessments of this year’s Hugo Best Novel category. I too think that either the Wells or the Robinette Kowal will take it out. I adore the Murder Bot series: it’s engaging, entertaining and raises some interesting questions on what is self awareness, not necessarily sentience. Same with the Lady Astronaut series: engaging and highly readable but really, nothing of substance except a cute alternate timeline. Robinette Kowal will be seen as the saviour of Discon III and Wells as a favourite. I enjoyed Black Sun immensely; it was a refreshing take on fantastical hijinks and political intrigues. And loved Piranesi but neither of these will win the popular vote. *Harrow the 9th* I just couldn’t get into – too bleak. Perhaps I will go back to it in a few months; I tried to read it when I was under some emotional duress.”

[**PM:** I actually think the winner will be N. K. Jemisin for no reason other than name recognition. I would prefer either Clarke or Wells to win.]

**I also heard from: Rob Gerrand; Werner Koopmann; Ron Gemmell; Nick Price; Carey Handfield; and Don Ashby; thank you one and all.**

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