

A vintage photograph of a young boy with short blonde hair, smiling and holding a wooden baseball bat. He is wearing a green t-shirt, light-colored shorts, and dark sandals. He stands on a dirt field with trees in the background.

Perryscope 18

PERRYSCOPE 18, January 2022, is an issue of the personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: 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 efanazines.com with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover photograph by Brian or Nan Middlemiss, circa 1959-60.

INTRODUCTION

I'm actually quite surprised that I made it through to the end of 2021 before coming into contact with someone infected with COVID-19. I had thought it was only a matter of time, just didn't expect it to be nearly two years.

My son's girlfriend has been diagnosed with COVID, and she is rather unwell; double vaccinated but not yet with a booster. It appears that she picked up the infection either at work a few days before Christmas, or at her family's Christmas Day function from her cousin, who has also tested positive. She visited us on Christmas Day though she wasn't here for long and we only sat outside. My son, as you can imagine, spent a lot more time with her.

So he was a close contact and needed to be tested, and we all live in the same house so my wife and I decided we'd better get tested as well. Oddly enough, if we had been a day later the new testing regulations would have meant we could just have used a Rapid Antigen Test – which are impossible to buy in this state due to a lack of supply – and if that returned a negative result we would have been free to go about our business.

As it is, we waited in line for two hours for a test and are now, as I write on December 31, self-isolating until the results come in. I don't begrudge any of this. The initial infection was no-one's fault and the subsequent contact was fleeting. I feel sorry for the staff at the testing stations who are working under extreme conditions and pressure just as the temperature is starting to rise into the high 30s centigrade. My concerns are nothing in comparison.

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WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING LATELY

Looking into Australian Literature

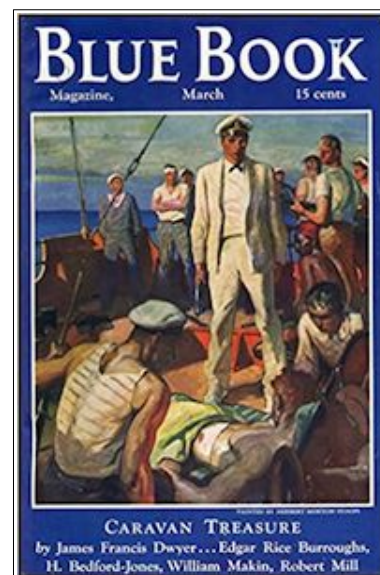
In mid-November, Bruce Gillespie, of this parish, contacted me via email with a request he had received from Mike Ashley, the well-known UK sf anthologist and researcher. Mike was looking for information regarding an ex-pat Australian author, James Francis Dwyer (1874-1952). In particular he was trying to track down a copy of a specific book, **WITH**

JUST BUT RELENTLESS DISCIPLINE by John Ramsland published by Kangaroo Press in 1996, a book about the NSW penal system. In a chapter in that book which concentrated on Dwyer, Ramsland had used him as an illustration of a prisoner who had been reformed by the prison system and who had succeeded in post-prison life. Ramsland had made the statement that Dwyer “was the first Australian-born writer to become a millionaire from his writing,” and it was this claim that Mike wanted to check.



Dwyer was born in Camben Park, New South Wales in 1874. He attended the local public schools until he was 14 when he was sent to Sydney to stay with relatives and obtain work. He started as a publisher's clerk and then moved on to work at a local post office in 1892. In 1899 he, and a few associates, were convicted of forgery offences and Dwyer was sentenced to seven years in Grafton goal. He was released into the custody of his parents after three years, presumably due to his good behaviour. At some point in the 1890s Dwyer had met Robert Louis Stevenson, during that author's stay in Sydney, and, while in gaol, he appears to have decided to “go straight” after his release and attempt to earn his living via writing. Due to the assistance of a fellow inmate, who was released before him, and one of the prison guards, Dwyer was able to get a couple of poems and a short story published in the **Bulletin** magazine. (See the sidebar box on page 4 for the first of those poems.)

After his release he turned to journalism, writing for **Truth** and **Sydney Sportsman**. By 1906 he had left Australia to try his luck in London. Although he sold a few stories there his luck wasn't great, so he moved again to New York in 1907. There he wrote and sold short stories while working as a streetcar conductor, and slowly built his reputation and his following. Writing mainly in the mystery and adventure genres his work was to appear in such magazines ranging from **Harper's Bazaar** and **Collier's** to pulp fiction publications such as **The Scrap Book**, **The American Magazine**, **Short Stories**, **The Blue Book Magazine**, **The Cavalier**, **Munsey's**, **The Argosy**, **The Red Book Magazine**, **The Green Book Magazine**, **Action Stories** and **The Popular Magazine**. The Internet Science Fiction Database (isfdb.org) lists 8 novels, 1 story collection, and 18 shorter works which it considers fit into the horror or speculative fiction genres. There may well be more.



Dwyer briefly re-visited Australia in 1913, and travelled extensively in Europe and North America gathering material for his stories. In the early 1920s he moved to Pau, in the French Pyrenees, with his wife. The two of them then supplied a number of pieces regarding European travel for American magazines. He left France for America during the Second World War but returned in 1945 and remained there until his death in 1952.

Bruce had no knowledge of Dwyer, nor of Ramsland's book, and pointed Mike Ashley in my direction thinking I might either have a copy of the book (I haven't) or had some knowledge of the writer (not that either). Ashley was attempting to get a copy of the book in order to see if Ramsland had provided any backing evidence for his major claim. It sounded interesting. A quick search of the National Library's Trove website indicated that a copy of the book was available in the State Library of Victoria. I let both Bruce and Mike know what I was aiming check it out and put in an order at the State Library to have the book retrieved from "onsite storage". This basically means that it is not available on the general shelves but is stored elsewhere in the main library building on Swanston Street – in other words, the basement, or sub-basement, or somewhere in the bowels of the building.

That afternoon I received a phone call from the Library itself. "Err, sorry, we can't find it. The most recent movement record we have is from 2013." So the book was missing in the State Library and hadn't been accessed in any way for 8 years, which means it had been neither ordered by a reader or taken off the shelf in any way in that time. An odd occurrence, but, I suspect, not that uncommon in a large library with millions of books. It had probably just been put back on the wrong shelf.

Back to Trove again and the discovery that there was also a copy in the Monash University Library. A week later I drove the 20-minutes out to Monash, parked and found their library without much problem. Three floors up, through two doors and down a couple of aisles to the right shelf and...it wasn't there. I checked my numbers again and realised I'd written a "7" on my scrap of paper that looked like a "9". A quick shuffle backwards and there it was.

The Boot of Fate by James Francis Dwyer

We're a God-forsaken legion, and we lift our heads with pride,
Or sit, blown with self-importance, in the saddles we bestride,
Caring not for Fate's grim shadow or for Destiny's bequests,
For Conceit has set a temple for self-worship in our breasts;
Ever striving for a fancy or a yearning undefined,
While our ears are deaf to footsteps that are creeping up behind, —
Till the rough-shod foot has touched us, and our folly shows too late,
And we're kicked from out our stirrups by the ruthless Boot of Fate.

There are wreaths of fame and glory that we fancy we can win:
"Nothing surer—very easy," comes the whisper from within ;
And our pride and self-importance make us eager to compete,
But we wonder what has struck us when we're lifted from our seat.
When a woman's smile has lured us—to the Fiend with spur and whip!
Shall we think of girth and stirrup when we kiss a ruby lip?
And we never heed disaster, and we ride a reckless gait,
But it takes a practised acrobat to dodge the Boot of Fate!

Then be gentle, stiff-backed brothers, to the men who are unhorsed;
Some mad passion of a moment in a smooth career has forced
Just one reckless, mad, wild gallop when the rein has hung too slack,
And they did not think old Nemesis was riding on their track.
Have a feeling for the footmen as you press on in the race;
There are many who rode like you and who watch your giddy pace,
And some trifle long-forgotten, that you never calculate,
May start the cursed lever that controls the Boot of Fate!

First published in the *Bulletin*, 21 September 1901

Photos of the title, contents, copyright, index, chapter and end notes pages and I was done and out of there within fifteen minutes. Unfortunately Ramsland doesn't actually provide any supporting evidence for his claim about Dwyer's extraordinary success. He does note that Dwyer wrote around a thousand short stories, though Austlit only lists 224 at the time of writing, along with 17 novels and 7 novellas. Dwyer himself later said that he occasionally received a thousand dollars for a story, which might have been possible, but I doubt it was the norm. If so maybe Ramsland just multiplied the number of stories by that rate. In any event, it is an interesting claim that is impossible to prove or disprove.

The only other Australian authors who might have beaten Dwyer to the million dollars – if he ever achieved it of course – would have been Guy Boothby (1867-1905), author of the Doctor Nikola series of novels; or C. J. Dennis (1876-1938), Australia's best-selling poet, in Australia, prior to the Second World War. And I doubt either of them made as much money from writing as has been claimed for Dwyer.

Mike Ashley has recently sent me a draft of the essay he has written about Dwyer for an *Encyclopedia of Irish Fantasy & Supernatural Fiction*. In that piece Mike makes the point that, although very popular when they were first printed, few of Dwyer's stories have been reprinted and the author is now mostly forgotten. He ends with the note: "Dwyer's life was every bit as exciting as his fiction, which is why he was such a convincing adventure writer and when that is mixed with the blarney of his Irish storytelling heritage, there is nothing more potent."

I can see that I will have to look into him a little more.

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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 67: (7 December 2021) *The clues in the labyrinth*
David and I discuss who invented science fiction and go on to talk about our recent reading, including intriguing crime novels and literary award winners.

This was our last podcast episode for 2021. We'll return in early January 2022 with our "Best Books of Year" and then our "Best Film/TV of the Year" episodes.

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.

Also available for your viewing is the interview I conducted with Leigh Edmonds, on Sunday 5 December 2021, for the ongoing FANAC series of talks about fannish history, in



this case the Australian version. Titled "Wrong Turns on the Wallaby Track: Australian Science Fiction Fandom to Aussiecon – Part 1, 1936 to 1960".

Part 2 will probably be available sometime later next year.

The links (it's in 2 parts): <https://youtu.be/yh6FLBOWCDs> and <https://youtu.be/Ldl6n5YbKiY>

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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.

December 2021 books

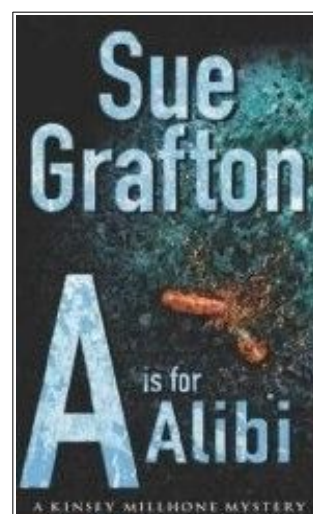
| Title | Author | Genre | Date | F | R | Pub Date | Notes |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------|--------|---|-----|----------|-------|
| <i>A Is For Alibi</i> | Sue Grafton | Crime | Dec 1 | | 3.7 | 1982 | |
| <i>Laidlaw</i> | William McIlvanney | Crime | Dec 4 | | 3.9 | 1977 | |
| <i>Billy Summers</i> | Stephen King | Crime | Dec 9 | | 4.3 | 2021 | |
| <i>Nebula Award Stories 3</i> | ed Roger Zelazny | Sf | Dec 17 | | 4.0 | 1968 | Anth |
| <i>The Year's Best Science Fiction No. 1</i> | ed Harry Harrison & Brian W. Aldiss | Sf | Dec 26 | | 3.1 | 1968 | Anth |
| <i>'Broadsword Calling Danny Boy': On Where Eagles Dare</i> | Geoff Dyer | Non-fic | Dec 29 | | 3.6 | 2018 | |
| <i>Too Many Magicians</i> | Randall Garrett | Sf | Dec 30 | | 3.6 | 1966 | |

Books read in the month: 7

Yearly total to end of month: 100

Notes:

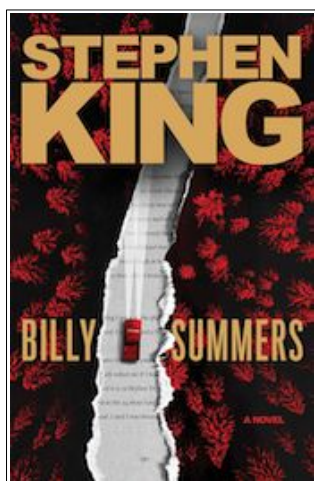
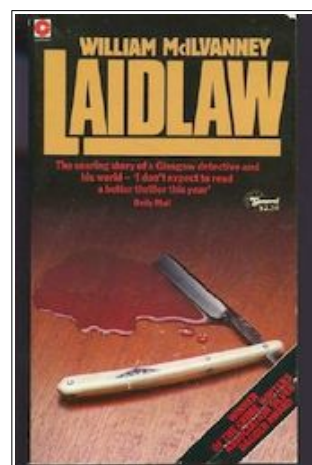
A Is For Alibi (1982) – #1 of the author's Kinsey Millhone series. Nikki Fife has just been released from 8 years' jail for the murder of her husband Laurence; a crime she says she didn't commit. Now she's out on parole she wants PI Kinsey Millhone to investigate and try to identify the true murderer. Before long Millhone discovers a second, unsolved murder which occurred four days after Laurence's, using the same method – the substitution of an anti-histamine tablet with poison. Set in Southern California, in true Lew Archer territory, this is a fast-moving, easy read which ticks all of the boxes for this type of novel. The difference here is that the PI is a smart, determined woman who would go on to feature in another 24 novels featuring the same title structure.



Unfortunately, Grafton died before she could complete *Z is for ...* Worth following up. R: 3.7/5.0

Laidlaw (1977) – #1 of the author’s Laidlaw series.

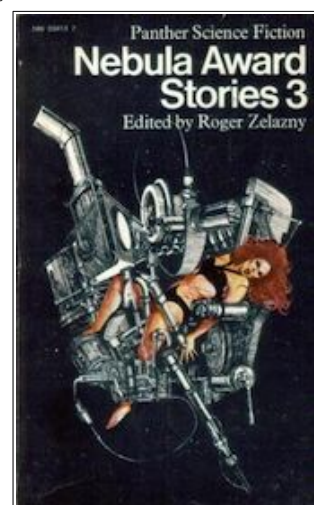
Jack Laidlaw is a Glasgow Detective Inspector assigned the case of a missing 17-year-old girl, found raped and murdered. Laidlaw has something of a reputation within the police force of being a maverick in the way he solves his crimes by getting involved with the people, rather than relying purely on the data and facts as presented. Joining him for the first time is Detective Constable Brian Harkness – he will come to represent the establishment police view, though this will gradually be eroded during the course of the book. This is a crime novel where the crime is almost incidental to the proceedings. McIlvanney is far more interested in the victim’s family, the various Glasgow criminal elements either protecting or seeking the perpetrator, the city of Glasgow itself, and, of course, his lead character. As a police procedural this seems slim; the way into the crime’s solution is stated very early, rather than pieced together from the evidence. But it is as a novel of Scottish big-city life in the late 1970s where it shines. Be aware that there is an anti-homosexual thread running through the plot that might repel some readers. R: 3.9/5.0



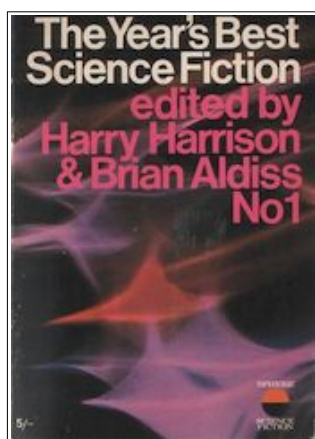
Billy Summers (2021) – Stephen King seems to be undergoing a late career shift towards crime and away from the fully supernatural, and this new novel fits that movement like a glove. Billy Summers is an ex-US Army sniper, now working as an assassin-for-hire, with conditions: the targets must be provably “bad” men. After a long career of successful assignments he has decided that this will be his last, so he is rather blinded to the fact that the \$2million fee is higher than normal. But he wants out, and so he takes the job. Making the shot, and getting away cleanly are two different things, however, and Billy makes his own arrangements for his getaway when he is uneasy with the escape offered which seems dedicated to his death. As a result he is on the run from the authorities, and his employers, and has been stiffed of the bulk of his fee. So the book is broken

into two major parts, and, in the second, when Billy has a lot of free time on his hands, he decides to write his life story. And here we get King expounding on his philosophy of writing as well as writing in a voice not his own. Needless to say he succeeds admirably. This is really only average King fare overall as it lacks the patented King sparkle of his earlier days, but even that is way better than the bulk of similar material available. R: 4.3/5.0

Nebula Award Stories 3 (1968) – An anthology of the Nebula short fiction winners from 1968, covering stories first published in 1967. You would be hard-pressed to get a better year of winners than those of this year. Delany’s “Aye, and Gomorrah...” and Leiber’s “Gonna Roll the Bones” are innovative, lively and among



the best short fiction from either author; Leiber also won the Hugo Award, and both were published in Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthology. Ellison himself is represented by "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes", a story nominated for both Hugo and Nebula Awards and which, for once with this author, matches literary pyrotechnics with story and content. Moorcock's **Behold the Man** deservedly won a major award here, though probably a year late as it was originally published in 1966 in the UK – see **Perryscope 15** for my notes on this novella. Of the others, Ballard's "Cloud Sculptors of Coral-D" and Wright's "Mirror of Ice" are also very good, with the only average work being McCaffrey's **Weyr Search**. A good year of winners which has resulted in a wonderful anthology. If you want to get an idea of where sf was at in the mid-1960s this is a good place to start. R: 4.0/5.0

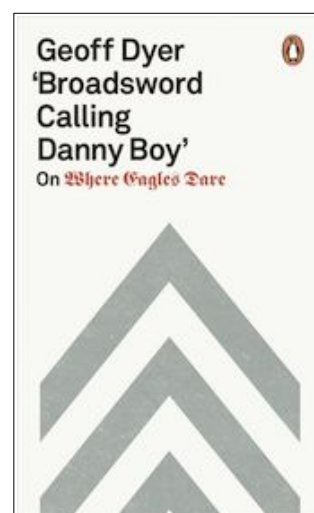


The Year's Best Science Fiction No. 1 (1968) – This was the first in a series of what would be nine volumes, all edited by Harrison and Aldiss, giving a British view of the best sf stories of the year. This is a basic collection of stories from 1967, which included: Ellison's "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes" (as above); Silverberg's **Hawksbill Station**; Sladek's "1937 A. D."; Bova's "Fifteen Miles"; and Wright's "Mirror of Ice" (also mentioned above). These were the best of the stories here, and there were also some acceptable and some that you really have to question. Oh, yes, and add in James Thurber's story "Interview with a Lemming" from 1941, because.., well, who knows? As expected the bulk of the stories are from the US prozines, augmented by a couple from the UK magazines, and one from John Bangsund's **Australian**

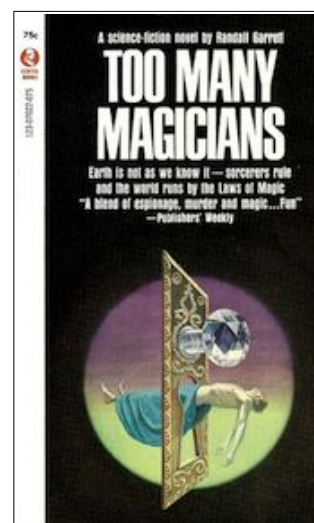
Science Fiction Review. I made it 5 good stories out of 13, with no real duds; a bit under a pass, but this was the editors' first shot at this concept so some leeway is required. The weirdest story: Ballard's "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race", a story only slightly longer than its title. R: 3.1/5.0

'Broadsword Calling Danny Boy': On Where Eagles Dare (2018) – Dyer here presents his second film commentary, following his earlier book *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room* (2012) – see **Perryscope 4** for notes about that book. This time he looks at a film he first discovered when it was originally released in the 1960s, *Where Eagles Dare*.

Featuring Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood, in this WW II action thriller, as commandos dropped behind enemy lines in order to infiltrate a German castle and rescue a high-ranking Allied officer who has knowledge of the upcoming D-Day landings. Dyer has great fun in sending up both Burton, who seems to have over-acted in just about every scene, and Eastwood, whose only acting ability seems to be squinting, as well as the whole war time action film genre. But don't misunderstand, Dyer loves this movie, and he can be funny in parts and very cutting in others. Maybe not up to the standard of his earlier work, and you probably have to be a fan of the film to get a lot out of this. He mentions, at the end, that if he was ever to write another such book it would be about the film *Point Blank*. Yes, please. R: 3.6/5.0



Too Many Magicians (1966) – part of the author’s Lord D’Arcy series. Nominated for a Hugo Award for Best Novel in 1967. This is the only novel, written by Garrett, in his Lord D’Arcy series – the rest of the entries are at much shorter length, although Michael Kurland wrote two further novels after Garrett’s death. Set in an alternate history world where Richard the Lionheart did not die of his wounds at the battle of Limousin in 1199 but recovered and returned to the throne. This sets in motion a long Plantagenet dynasty, with no Parliament, a vast Anglo-French Empire opposed to a major enemy in Poland, and in which the Laws of Magic are developed to an extent rather like the modern Laws of Science. D’Arcy is investigating the murder of a double agent in France when he is dragged into another mystery, that of the death of a high-ranking magician at a Sorcerer’s Convention. What develops is a detective story involving a locked-room mystery and an espionage thriller. Garrett does a good job of keeping the resolution of the crime within that genre’s conventions while also allowing the fantastical to get a decent run. Probably one of the best combination of the two genres ever written. R: 3.6/5.0

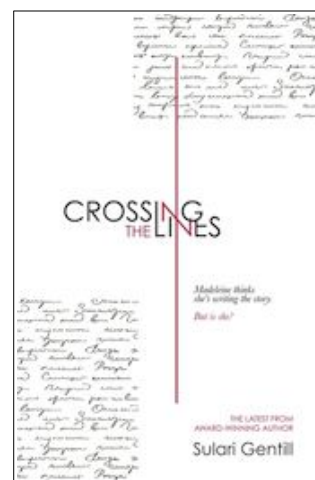


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REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Crossing the Lines (aka ***After She Wrote Him***) (2020) by Sulari Gentill
Genre: Crime
Winner of the 2018 Ned Kelly Award.

Sulari Gentill is mostly known for her long-running series of historical crime novels featuring Rowland Sinclair, a young artist and gentleman from a wealthy NSW family who is also a reluctant amateur sleuth. Those stories are set in Sydney in the 1930s, and Gentill won a Davitt Award for the second novel in the series, ***A Decline in Prophets***. Two of the books featuring Sinclair (***A Murder Unmentioned*** and ***A Testament of Character***) had previously been shortlisted in the Best Novel category of the Ned Kelly Awards, but this was her first win. This novel is not a part of that series, but is a standalone.



The novel features two main characters, Madeleine D'Leon, a corporate lawyer who has dropped that career to become a full-time writer (rather like Gentill herself), and Edward McGinnity, a literary novelist who has an idea to write a novel with a crime novelist as his main character.

D'Leon has decided to step away from her long-running series of novels featuring her amateur sleuth Veronica Killwilly – another nod to Gentil herself – to write a standalone novel about a literary author who is present in an art gallery when the murder of an art critic is committed and who slowly becomes the chief suspect. Her character’s name:

Edward McGinnity. Within D’Leon’s book McGinnity is working on his literary novel which he describes as “an exploration of an author’s relationship with her protagonist, and examination of the tenuous line between belief and reality, imagination and self, and what happens when that line is crossed.” His character’s name: Madeleine D’Leon.

McGinnity’s life slowly starts to spiral out of control as he is drawn further and further into the concentrated gaze of the police investigating the murder and he attempts to carry out a form of investigation of his own. But he is totally out of his depth and turns to his lead character to try to figure out how she would tackle the problem. On the other side of the line, D’Leon is becoming more and more obsessed with her main character noting at one point that she is “just living and breathing the manuscript at the moment. Sometimes I have to remind myself what’s real.” And as the novel progresses she finds it increasingly more difficult to separate the real from the imaginary, the truth from the fiction.

In a lesser writer’s hands this meta-fiction approach to the story might seem cute or just fall flat, but Gentill is too skilled for that to occur. The slowly merging stories are handled with care and expertise, with each character using their fictional character as a sounding board for discussion of their problems. The reader may find this a trifle confusing in places – what part is reality and what part fiction? – so it is best to trust in the author’s expertise and follow her through to the end.

When I finished the book I was a little disappointed by the ending, but with a bit of distance I can now see that it really couldn’t have ended in any other way. Gentill joins an excellent list of Ned Kelly Award winners with this one. Recommended.

R: 4.5/5.0

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WHAT I’VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Succession (Season 1 – 10 episodes) (2018)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

This black, satirical drama centres around the Roy family, who own the fourth (or was it fifth?) largest media and entertainment company in the world, Waystar RoyCo. The 80-year old patriarch, Logan (Brian Cox), spends the bulk of the first season recovering from a brain haemorrhage he suffers in the first episode, and also fending off takeover bids from his second eldest son, Kendall (Jeremy Strong). Also involved in the business is youngest son Roman (Kieran Culkin), and sitting outside, but still heavily involved and invested, are eldest son Connor (Alan Ruck) and daughter Shiv (Sara Snook). None of these characters are at all likeable, as they all spend their time either completely self-obsessed or manoeuvring to outplay the others in the



family. But it is all rather fascinating to watch a bunch of corrupt billionaires cavorting in this way. Obviously heavily based on the Murdoch family. I will definitely be watching the next two seasons over the coming months. R: 4.5/5.0

Line of Duty (Season 2 – 6 episodes) (2014)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime Drama

A police convoy, escorting a major crime figure under Witness Protection, is ambushed with the death of all involved other than witness and DI Lindsay Denton (Keeley Hawes), who organised the operation. DS Arnott (Martin Compton) and DC Fleming (Vicky McClure) are tasked with investigating the event. Fleming begs off, citing her relationship with one of the dead officers and then her replacement is killed, along with the witness, in an attack in a hospital. The investigation moves along, slowly at first, as the viewer is pointed towards one suspect, then another, and another. This series takes a while to get into its stride – probably around episode 3 – but it does get there in the end. There are a few important plot points that aren't fully explained and some that are just plain silly. Not up to the standard of the first series, but a reasonable distraction. R: 3.4/5.0



Midnight Diner (Season 3 – 10 episodes) (2014)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy Drama

Continuing the stories surrounding a motley crew of customers who frequent the Midnight Diner (open from midnight to 7am) in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo. The mysterious scarred chef of this small restaurant is known only as “Master”. Again the stories range from the humorous to the sentimental with many stops in between, though I didn't think the first half of this series was up to the usual standard. But it started to pick up in the second half and began to get back to its previous levels. It is interesting to note that Chinese and Korean versions of this series have been made along with a Chinese-language feature film. I'm not sure I'll seek any of

them out as they don't appear to have followed the inherent nature of this original Japanese-language series. R: 4.0/5.0

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Cover notes: This photo of me was taken on the street outside the house where I grew up in Laura, South Australia (see **Perryscope 13**). The road was only packed dirt when we arrived in 1958 but was sealed in the early 1960s, most probably due to the number of trucks using it to access Golden North Dairy at the end of the street. Behind me is a small pine plantation, one of several planted around the town sometime shortly after the Second World War. It was still there when I last visited in 2015. The photo itself is of rather poor quality and I have to thank Chong for manipulating it into something reasonable.

Film

The Truffle Hunters (2020)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Documentary, subtitled

This is essentially a long, slow study of truffle hunters, particularly old men of the Piedmont district in Italy, and their dogs. In the forests of northern Italy there is a white truffle, prized by gourmets and chefs the world over, that has proved impossible to cultivate in any way. As a result buyers are prepared to pay big money for the best examples, and we get some views of the shady deals undertaken by the truffle merchants as they squeeze both ends of the chain: the truffle hunters and the truffle buyers. The relationships between the men in their 70s and 80s and their dogs is one of mutual love and respect, with the dogs being treated more like family members than anything else. This is a wonderfully evocative documentary, beautifully filmed with a very poignant and funny ending. R: 3.8/5.0



Last Night in Soho (2021)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama Horror

Innocent young Eloise Turner (Thomasin McKenzie) is a fashion design student who has been accepted for her dream degree in London. Her original student lodgings don't work out well so she finds a bedsit in a Soho building run by Mrs Collins (Diana Rigg, in her last role). From the start she begins having dreams of 1960s London, following along with her alter ego, wannabe singer Sandi (Anya Taylor-Joy), as she meets local bad boy Jack (Matt Smith), and gradually finds that entertainment in Soho is not what she first thought it would be. In the background, in the present day, a silver-haired gentleman (Terence Stamp) is a throw-back connection to that time in the mid 1960s when London, and Soho in particular, seemed to be the centre of a new world. Beginning as a simple coming-of-age drama, morphing through an East End crime drama and finally landing in the realm of horror and the supernatural, this is one weird and wild ride. If you like films that start off in one place and then end somewhere at the other end of the spectrum then this film is for you. Stay with it, it's worth it.

R: 4.2/5.0

Dune : Part 1 (2021)

Platform: Cinema

Genre: SF

This long-awaited adaptation of the first *Dune* serial from *Analog* (titled *Dune World*) is big, wide and loud. It's also pretty, damn good. Set far off in the galaxy in the year 10,000 and something, House Atreides is tasked by the Emperor with taking over control of the planet Arrakis, along with its invaluable asset *melange* – the



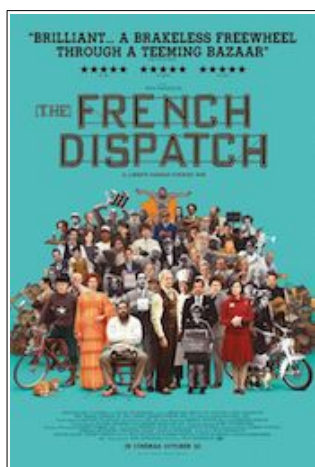
spice that extends life and allows the Space Guild members to navigate across galactic distances – from House Harkonnen. It soon becomes clear that Duke Leto Atreides (Oscar Isaac), his consort Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) and their son Paul (Timothée Chalamet) have been set up. Before they can get settled in they are betrayed and the planet attacked by Harkonnen forces backed by Imperial special troops. The true question is not whether this a true adaptation of the first half of the novel, but whether it is a film that works. And the answer to that is a resounding “yes”. The director, and co-writer, Denis Villeneuve (*Arrival*, *Blade Runner 2049*), has the background and ability to produce a film that many thought would prove beyond him, and anyone else. It has to be remembered that this is “Part 1”, so a full, detailed appraisal will have to wait for the second part in 2023. Until then, this will do me. R: 4.6/5.0

***The Power of the Dog* (2021)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama/Western

Jane Campion’s new film, from the book of the same name by Thomas Savage, features the Burbank brothers, Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch) and George (Jesse Plemons), who together run a cattle ranch in Montana in 1925 – Phil looking after the cattle and men and George handling the business side of things. When George becomes enamoured with, and then marries, widow Rose Gordon (Kirsten Dunst), Phil feels betrayed and begins a long sequence of bullying and harassment acts against Rose and her son Peter (Kodi Smit-McPhee). Eventually Rose turns to alcohol to survive; then when Peter starts to take an interest in Phil the dynamic between the three changes completely. Cumberbatch seems an unlikely choice for the role of Phil but he handles it superbly, almost wallowing in the pain and havoc he causes. The film is a long, slow exploration of family dynamics, inter-personal and internal. And while all the filmic elements come together here superbly, I was left with a feeling of something vaguely missing – maybe the pacing, and in the dramatic flow. In any event, this will feature among many lists of the best films of the year. R: 4.3/5.0



***The French Dispatch* (2021)**

Platform: Cinema

Genre: Drama/Comedy

Wes Anderson’s films are always a little quirky, and probably not going to be enjoyed by a lot of film-goers. But they are always interesting, and a lot of fun to look at if nothing else grabs your fancy. His latest outing utilises an anthology format of three main standalone stories – pitched within an overarching framework – to tell the story of “The French Dispatch”, a France-based off-shoot “The Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun”, an obvious parody of “The New Yorker” magazine. Each story within the film covers a section of the last issue of the magazine to be published; the long-term editor played by Bill Murray has died and his will indicates that the magazine is to fold upon his death. Alongside Murray are

Anderson regulars Tilda Swinton, Adrien Brody, Francis McDormand, Willem Dafoe, Léa Seydoux, Edward Norton and Owen Wilson, with many others. Sometimes very slow-

paced, laced with very funny sections, the film is wonderful to look at and diverting for a few hours though I think you'd have to be a full-on Anderson fan to really rate it highly.
R: 3.8/5.0

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PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 16:

John Hertz: “The commotion about Shatner’s trip to Space is a compliment to science fiction. *Star Trek* is science fiction. Some of us may wish it were better science fiction, but that’s another story. It reached people. That’s artistic merit. It’s not the only artistic merit, but still. And Shatner was a good enough actor as Captain Kirk to credit him with artistic merit too.

“We should be spending the money instead to cure troubles here on Earth’; has been called the Moon and Ghetto argument. Non-Jews may not know that *ghetto*, an Italian word, was originally part of 16th Century Venice where Jews were required to live. In some regions – for example, 15th Century Morocco – ghettos had physical walls, and locked gates. But I don’t intend a suffering contest. Blacks living in a slum called the ghetto suffer plenty. Anyway, in the days when the U.S. was striving to put men on the Moon, folks cried ‘How dare we spend money getting to the Moon when people are starving in the ghetto?’

“Part of the answer has been that technological improvements achieved through Space programs have increased absolute wealth, even if they didn’t affect relative wealth. Ghetto-dwellers in 1968, or 2018, are terribly poor compared to kings and queens, or J. Paul Getty, or Jeff Bezos. But they also, through Space spin-offs, can e.g. drive or ride safer on grooved highways and with better tires. Here’s another part. If you put money into something you know how to do, you may well get results; if you put money into something you don’t know how to do, Heaven only knows what you will get, maybe nothing. We didn’t in 1968 and don’t today know how to remedy slums and poverty. Throwing money at them has not clearly accomplished much. We mustn’t neglect them. Maybe this is a case for the 80-20 rule: 80% of resources into strengthening what’s going right, 20% into trying to cure what’s going wrong.”

[**PM:** I wouldn’t suggest you go into politics with an economic strategy such as that. You’d never be able to sell it, as it smacks of “more for those who have too much already”. I’ve always felt that the best way for people to get themselves out of poverty is to provide them with the opportunities to do so themselves: good health care; free education; consumer protection; clean environment, air, water and food. Fix the basics and if people see a chance they’ll take it. Not all of them, sure, but the vast bulk will. Despair kills hope.]

“I rate highly *Foundation and Empire*, and *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag*; maybe higher than you. I recently re-read *Nova*, not yet *Babel-17*. I think Asimov, Heinlein, and Delany fine, possibly great writers. Maybe where we differ is your making much of ‘impact’ and ‘dazzles’.”

[**PM:** I see Asimov as an interesting writer, but not a great one. Certainly not in Delany's class. As a stylist Asimov is thin, and he is poor on characterisation; though redeemed, somewhat, by his ideas and scope. Heinlein was good early, and poor later.

["Impact" is certainly important for me, "dazzles" not so much. I see the measure of a book's greatness in its longevity – can it still have an impact on a new reader well after initial publication? Now, that impact might be the realisation that a particular work has an influential place in the history of the genre – which the Foundation series of novels certainly has – or it might be the realisation that a novel did something that few other novels in the genre have ever tried to do, such as *Babel-17*. Either works for me.

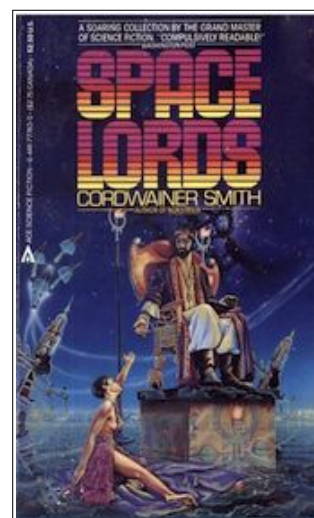
[I am happy to be "dazzled" by a work – who wouldn't be? But it's not the be-all-and-end-all of a novel's worth for me.]

Perryscope 17:

Martin Field: "*Midnight Diner* is an excellent show – we have watched all episodes and hope there are more. The writing is tight as is the direction."

[**PM:** I'm very taken with this series of short story episodes, and have been recommending it to everyone. After this month I'll still have one series to watch. So I'm now looking around for something to replace it. *Detectorists* appears to be our current preference.]

"I found at an op-shop a paperback edition (Ace, 1984) of Cordwainer Smith's *Space Lords*. It contains five short stories including the memorable and still disturbing "A Planet Named Shayol". In the prologue Smith (real name Paul Linebarger) reveals the basis for his tales. "Mother Hitton's Little Kittons" derives from "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"; "The Dead Lady of Clown Town" – Joan of Arc; "Drunkboat" – *Le Bateau Ivre* by Arthur Rimbeau; *The Ballad of Lost C'mell* – *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* by Lo Kuan-chung; *A Planet Named Shayol* – Dante Aligheri's works – Smith writes, "Shayol is the same as the word for hell in Arabic and Hebrew, sheol."



"Smith writes in the book's epilogue that he expects 'to type many hundreds or thousands of pages before I, in my turn stop.' It didn't happen. The epilogue is datelined, 'Canberra, A.C.T., Australia. 15 April, 1965.' He died just over a year later in August 1966.

"According to Wikipedia and the site Cordwainer-smith.com, Linebarger was, amongst other things, an expert in psychological warfare and East Asian studies, a confidant of Chiang Kai-shek, godson of Sun Yat Sen, professor at both Duke and John Hopkins universities, a serving officer in the US military where he reached the rank of colonel in the reserves.

"One can only imagine what his role was in Canberra in 1965, just as Australia started sending troops to the Vietnam War."

[**PM:** Err, yes, better not go there. No-one wrote like Smith then, and no-one writes like him now. Gone way too soon.]

Leigh Edmonds: “You flew Australia-Tokyo by Jetstar!! Are you crazy? Even in business class that’s sheer lunacy. [**PM:** I plead the streakers’ defence: “It seemed like a good idea at the time.”] Valma and I once flew Newcastle-Melbourne in Jetstar and I’m never going near any of that airline’s long metal tubes again. I’m sure that the only reason Jetstar exists is to make you feel like you’re flying in luxury when you fly in a Qantas long metal tube (remembering the more modern ones are plastic).”

[**PM:** I’ve occasionally had to fly Jetstar between Melbourne and Adelaide as they have been the only flights available at the times I wanted to travel. I can understand your reluctance to fly with them, especially after a poor experience, but our flight that day, other than the situation described, was at least acceptable. Not the greatest, but not the worst either.]

“On the matter of travel, as I was out driving today for those essentials of life there was a discussion on the radio about virtual travel. There were some converts and others who said that there’s no substitute for being there. Even your couple of travel stories in this issue of **Perryscope** highlight how truly dreadful the travel experience can be and virtual travel would overcome that part of the experience. (The kid behind you in the airliner kicking your seat is so commonplace that I imagine the only reason the airlines don’t allow passengers to carry guns is because the world’s population would soon be a lot lower in the under 14 demographic than it should be.)”

[**PM:** !?]

“The ABC presenter asked people where they would like to go using virtual tourism and people named all the places you can guess. But, remembering our discussion in the previous issue about the impact that travel times would have on space tourism, I almost rang in to say that I’d like to visit Mars using virtual tourism. Those NASA photos of the blue sunset on Mars makes the possibility of seeing that very attractive. That way you’d miss out on all the tedium, mangled genes due to radiation exposure, space rations and all that but, you’d also miss out on the gravity difference that would really be something to experience. Realistically there is no way that I will ever make it to Mars in person but I’m sure somebody will be offering virtual visits to Mars in the coming decade. And if that comes about it’s highly probable that I will be able to make a virtual tour of the rings of Saturn before I die. I wonder what the odds on that would be?”

[**PM:** I wouldn’t be expecting the Rings of Saturn virtual tour, but I’m sure that Elon Musk will be thinking about such VR experiences when he finally gets his crew to the surface of Mars. The only problem is the time-lag for signals. So I’m guessing they won’t be in real time. An immersive, pre-recorded offering will be more likely.]

“On to stfnal matters, I think I agree with your review of the first edition of **New Writings**, which I of course first read when it was first published (probably bought from Merv in McGills). As you note, Carnell began editing those **New Writings** volumes after **New Worlds** was sold off and became the avant guard prozine. While the new **New Worlds** had many flashes of brilliance its performance seemed to me to be very uneven. On the other hand, **New Writings** continued on in the furrow that Carnell had plowed from many years in **New Worlds**, very little of it revolutionary or even very

daring, but almost none of it dross either. Maybe that's what most readers want and perhaps one of your more bibliographically inclined readers can tell us whether or not *New Writings* outlasted the new *New Worlds* and, if so, by how much."

[**PM:** The *New Writings in SF* anthology series started in 1964, ran for 30 instalments and finished in 1977. *New Worlds* was mainly finished with issue 201 in 1971. There were attempts to revive it after that time, but they didn't take. There were a few anthology publications using the same name after that time but it was basically over in 1971.]

"Finally, as for your comments on your reading habits – Valma thinks that I'm organized, but I have nothing on you."

[**PM:** It's all bluff really.]

I also heard from: Nick Price; Rob Gerrand; Julian Warner ("Re Walter Lindrum, I would additionally note that he has one of the most remarkable memorials in the Melbourne cemetery – it being in the form of a billiard table."); and **Richard Lynch;** thank you one and all.

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| 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. |
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Next issue: I'll be covering my reading for 2021, listing my favourite reads in a variety of categories. Further ahead – well, actually the month after – I'll be looking at my favourite film and television for 2021.

Further down the track, you'll just have to wait and see. Actually, so will I.

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