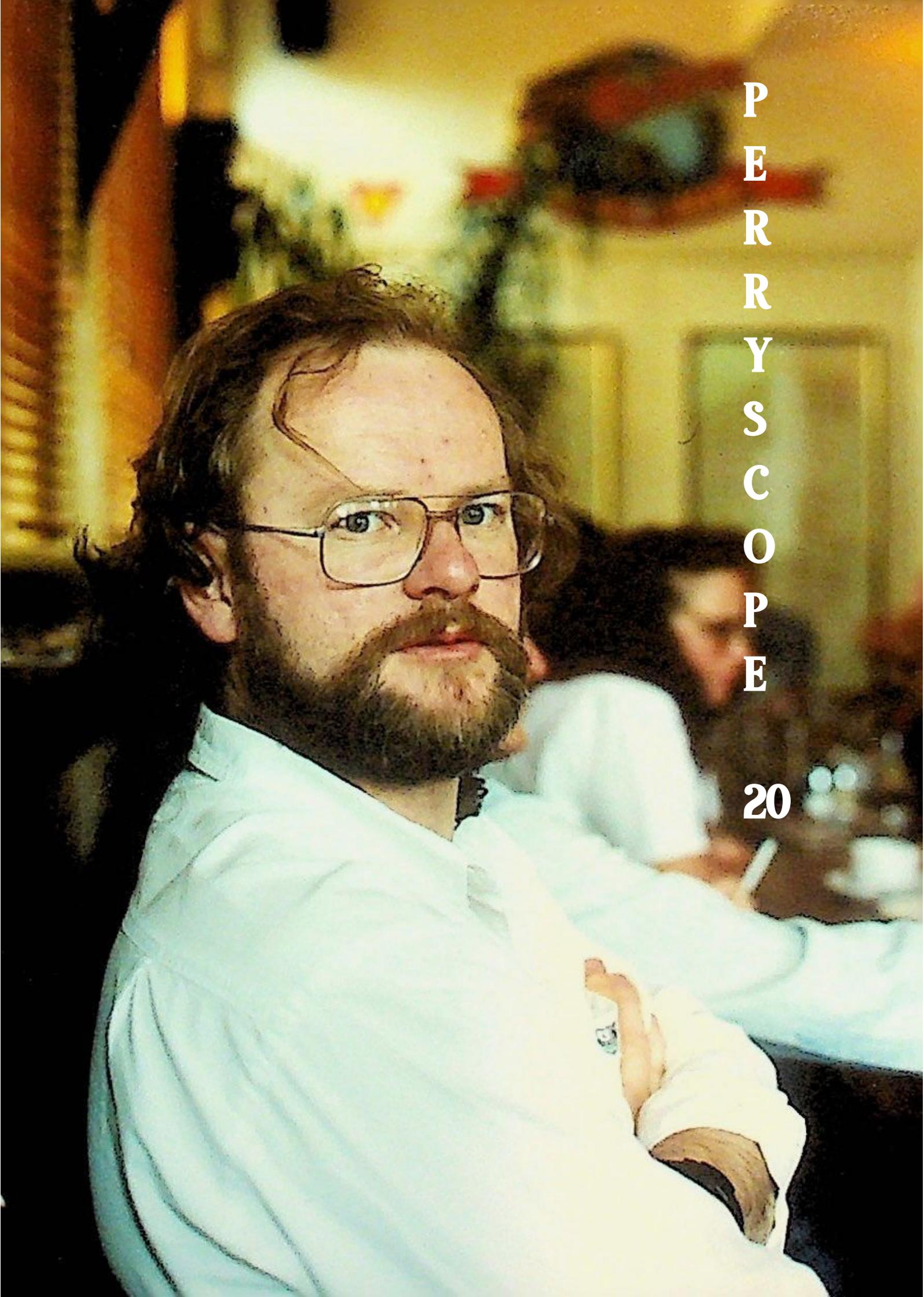


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PERRYSCOPE 20, March 2022, is an issue of the personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur 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 unknown (see Cover Notes on page 7).

INTRODUCTION

With the gradual easing of pandemic restrictions, and the lifting of state border lock-outs, my wife, Robyn, and I have been indulging ourselves with a few driving holidays into the regions of Victoria and beyond.

Like a lot of other people at her work – the Victorian Public Service – Robyn has been building up a lot of banked-up recreation leave that her employer desperately wanted her to take. As mentioned in the past few issues here, we had originally planned to travel to New Zealand for a couple of weeks at the end of January, but that country’s government decided that allowing tourists in wasn’t their best option, and so have kept their borders closed, probably until May. So Robyn had two weeks of leave booked, and was told she had to take them. And the last thing she wanted to do was to spend the two weeks sitting around at home staring at the ceiling.

Within a week she’d booked us three nights down on the Victorian surf coast in the township of Lorne, and also a week away in the Central West of New South Wales. While I’m rather used to sitting around home these days it was good to get out and about, seeing parts of the country we’d never been to before and making plans for further driving holidays for the years ahead. I really must document these on Google Maps somehow. It can be easy to forget where you’ve been and what you did without them. Getting old is no excuse.

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Yes, I allowed a couple of typos to slip through last month – misspelling the “Miles Franklin” award title, and putting the wrong title on my review of *Detectorists*, and probably a few others. I’m guessing it came about because I was attempting to get the issue out when I was away from home. I’ve decided to use a new technique for proof-reading this time around. Doubtless that will ensure the numbers increase. It’s sometimes hard to win this game, but we keep trying.

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You will no-doubt be pleased to know that this will be the last of my “Best of” pieces for this year. After tackling my Best Books of 2021 last month, this time I move on to Film and Television.

BEST FILM AND TELEVISION OF 2021

A reasonable year for television watching, and finally a chance to get back to the cinema, although that only occurred late in the year.

The ongoing lock-downs during 2021 as a result of the pandemic offered more opportunities to sit on the couch and do not a lot. But, like the problems I found in 2021 with my reading, it all became a bit of a struggle to concentrate and maintain a level of interest. Thankfully there was some good stuff discovered.

FILM

Films watched: 40

5 eq	<i>The Dig</i> directed by Simon Stone (2021)	Netflix	4.4
5 eq	<i>Emma</i> directed by Autumn de Wilde (2020)	Prime Video	4.4
4	<i>Green Book</i> directed by Peter Farelly (2018)	Netflix	4.6
3	<i>The Father</i> directed by Florian Zeller (2020)	Cinema	4.6
2	<i>Dune Part I</i> directed by Denis Villeneuve (2021)	Cinema	4.6
1	<i>Nomadland</i> directed by Chloé Zhao (2020)	Cinema	4.7

Notes on the winner:

As I noted in my short review in **Perryscope 9** I have no doubt that I would have hated this film if I'd seen it at any age under about 30. It's slow-moving, and basically plotless but it does have the wonderful Frances McDormand in the lead role. I'm fairly sure viewers either loved this or hated it.

Honorable mentions:

Echo in the Canyon directed by Andrew Slater (2018) 4.4

The Trial of the Chicago 7 directed by Aaron Sorkin (2020) 4.4

The Power of the Dog directed by Jane Campion (2021) 4.3

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TELEVISION

Series watched: 43

TV Food:

Programs watched: 8

3	<i>Street Food : Latin America</i> (2020)	Netflix	3.7
2	<i>Ugly Delicious</i> Season 1 (2018) and Season 2 (2020)	Netflix	4.5
1	<i>Anthony Bourdain : Parts Unknown</i> Season 1 (2013) and Season 2 (2013)	Amazon Prime	4.6

Notes on the winner:

I got onto a bit of a Bourdain roll this past year, watching his tv programs and reading his books, so I'm quite happy to admit that my enjoyment of one aspect of his career might well have influenced the other. So be it, I'll take that. This was also the year I discovered the Korean-American chef David Chang. Discoveries like this sometimes make me wonder where I've been the past ten years.

TV Crime:

Programs watched: 14

4	<i>Vigil</i> (2021)	Foxtel	4.2
3	<i>Only Murders in the Building</i> (2021)	Disney+	4.3
2	<i>Bodyguard</i> (2018)	Netflix	4.4
1	<i>Mare of Easttown</i> (2021)	Foxtel	4.4

Notes on the winner:

Kate Winslet is excellent in the lead role here and the other actors all do well. This is a gritty, honest police procedural that the Europeans do so well but which is usually "glammed" up by US producers. And there is a real mix of sub-genres and styles in this list.

TV Drama/Comedy:

Programs watched: 16

5	<i>Time</i> (2021)	Foxtel	4.3
4	<i>The Chair</i> (2021)	Netflix	4.4
3	<i>Midnight Diner</i> Season 1 (2009), Season 2 (2011), Season 3 (2014) and <i>Midnight Diner: Tokyo Stories</i> Season 1 (2016)	Netflix	4.5
2	<i>Succession</i> Season 1 (2018)	Foxtel	4.5
1	<i>Upright</i> Season 1 (2019)	Foxtel	4.8

Notes on the winner:

If I gave out any 5.0/5.0 ratings then this would be the one that hit that mark; but I like being perverse, so it didn't happen. Tim Minchin and Milly Alcock are wonderful in the lead roles and the chemistry between the two works really well. Watch out for Alcock in the new GRR Martin tv series ***House of the Dragon***, the new ***Game of Thrones*** prequel series coming out later this year.

TV Documentary:

Programs watched: 2

1	<i>Hemingway</i> (2021)	SBS	4.5
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Notes on the winner:

Ken Burns up to his usual excellent bag of tricks with his documentary. Even if you don't like Hemingway's writing you'd have to admit he had a profound influence on 20th century writing styles and literature in general. A dead-loss as a human being, self-centred and arrogant. But these sorts of people tend to make for the best documentary subjects.

BEST OVERALL

5	Hemingway (2021)	SBS	4.5
4	Midnight Diner Season 1 (2009), Season 2 (2011), Season 3 (2014) and Midnight Diner: Tokyo Stories Season 1 (2016)	Netflix	4.5
3	Succession Season 1 (2018)	Foxtel	4.5
2	Anthony Bourdain : Parts Unknown Season 1 (2013) and Season 2 (2013)	Amazon Prime	4.6
1	Upright Season 1 (2019)	Foxtel	4.8

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WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

1972 was a rather momentous year for me: it was the year I turned 17, it was my last year of high school and in some ways the last year of massive restrictions, and the year I started to get an idea that music might be interesting.

For the previous four years I had been boarding in Adelaide with a Mrs Murphy while I attended Unley High School in Adelaide*. She was a widow who took in student boarders from the country, mostly attending the nearby agricultural high school of Urrbrae, for companionship and to supplement her old-age pension. This wasn't a household of music. I don't remember a radio playing at any time and there certainly wasn't a record player. Even if there was I doubt I would have been allowed to either play it on my own or to listen to any music that I might at that time have liked. It just wasn't an option.

But at the start of 1972 Mrs Murphy decided that the house and garden was really too big for her to look after properly and she decided to sell. Luckily for me, in some ways, she had decided that she rather liked having me about the house so I was free to stay on with her for a fifth year. She moved a couple of blocks west over Unley Road to a two-bedroom unit that was just big enough for the both of us, and importantly, only a few minutes further away from the school.

In addition, as I discovered very soon after I started my final year, a friend of mine from my class lived only about 5 or 6 houses down the street. I'd met Wilton Catford when I first got to Unley High School in 1968 and while we weren't the closest of friends we got along pretty well. The big bonus for me was that Wilton was one of the smartest kids in the class, which

was borne out some years later when he was appointed a Professor of Particle Physics at Surrey University in England. I also learned rather early that his parents had moved to Adelaide from Caltowie, a town about 20 kilometres from where I grew up in Laura. His father had been a farmer, as I recall, and when it became obvious that Wilton was not cut out for the farming life they decided to sell up and move to Adelaide so he could get a decent education. Most of the high schools in the mid-North of South Australia in the late 1960s were rather poor: ill-funded and ill-resourced and none of them having classes past year 11. The Catfords didn't seem to have much choice. Rather like my parents.

I really wasn't a very good student in high school. I was too easily distracted, too easily bored, and tended to rely on a basic level of understanding to get by. Mrs Murphy never understood a single thing I was studying so she was no help, and I was away from my parents who may well have cracked the whip a bit harder to get me to do the work required. But it was all down to me. I just didn't do the work.

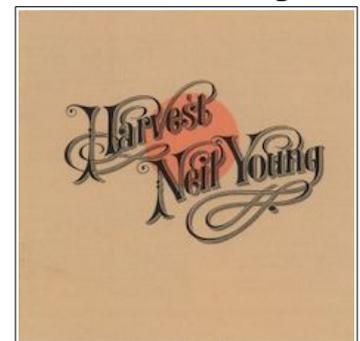
That started to show in 1972 when the work took a leap up in difficulty. I was rather useless in English, okay in Mathematics and woeful in Physics and Chemistry. Luckily Wilton was damn good at the last two subjects and seemed willing enough to have me drop around to act as a study companion. I put down the fact that I did passingly well in the two science subjects in my final exams to the time I spent with Wilton studying.

The other thing that Wilton had a lot of interest in was music. He could play the piano, a bit, and had a record player in his house. And one that his parents allowed him to use. At some time during that year I first heard the music of Neil Young. I'm not sure when or where, so I can only assume that it was at Wilton's place one study afternoon. And later that year I bought my first long-playing record, *Harvest*, by that same Neil Young. I paid a grand total of \$5.95 for it from a department store music shop. Which I only know because the price tag is still attached.

I'm not entirely sure what drew me to this. I like the album now, in my sixties, but I see it more as a collection of songs that would appeal to older people, not one that a sixteen-year-old would really be interested in. It was also odd in that I didn't buy another Neil Young album for fifteen or so years after that. Again I have no idea why.

The album itself is a strange mixture of styles and themes: country ballads, songs with symphony orchestras, Dylanesque acoustics, a paean to old age, and a lament for drug addiction.

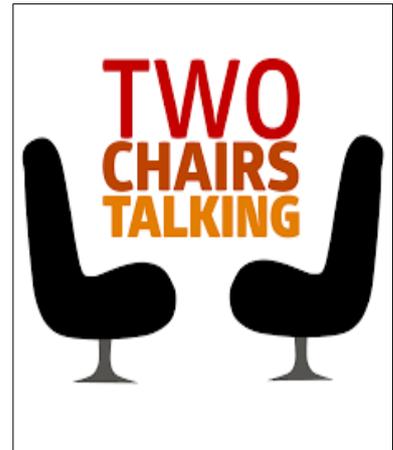
Looking back now I like to think that my sixteen-year-old self had some sense of the value of this music, though I suspect it was just because I liked a couple of the songs and maybe wanted to seem a little more sophisticated than I really was. And that wasn't going to be hard.



[Footnote: I've been skirting around this change in schools, from Laura Primary School to Unley High School, for a while now but I am building up to an explanation. It's just going to take some time to get right so it might not appear until later this year.]

WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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



Notes from this month's podcast

Episode 70: (15 February 2022) *Up in the clouds*
David and I chat about what we've been reading lately, including *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (see below). We also cover *The Lost Daughter* by Elena Ferrante, where David talks about the book – which I haven't read – and I talk about the film adaptation – which he hasn't seen. In addition I interview Lucy Sussex about her favourite reads of 2021.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at twochairs.website, or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service. Remember that we have now moved to a three-weekly schedule, though the episodes are longer, so far.

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What I Will Be Talking About

On March 9 2022 I will be presenting a talk at the Melbourne-based Nova Mob, the long-running sf discussion group. My topic will be "Short Sf in 1965"; a riveting subject if ever there was one. The talk will be based on the article I wrote in *The Alien Review 2*, which is available on efanzines.com. Or you can write to me and I'll send you a pdf copy.

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My daughter told me recently that I hadn't, as yet, mentioned her in any issue of **Perryscope**. So I thought I'd best rectify that here, by giving her a shout-out, before we go any further: "Hello, Catherine!" Waves.

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Cover notes: I have very little information about this photo of me. I found it lying loose in a large batch of other photos which were all jumbled up. I don't know where or when it was taken and I don't know by whom.

If I were to hazard a guess I'd say that it dates from the early to mid 1990s – most probably in the period after Robyn and I returned from London in 1992 – and it was also most probably taken by Robyn, somewhere in Melbourne. But neither of us have any recollection of it. Who said I was getting old?

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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; Nvla – novella; Trans – translated

February 2022 books

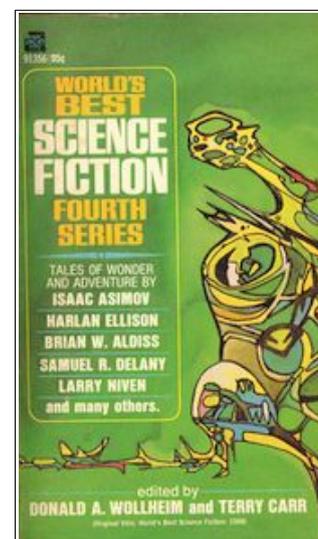
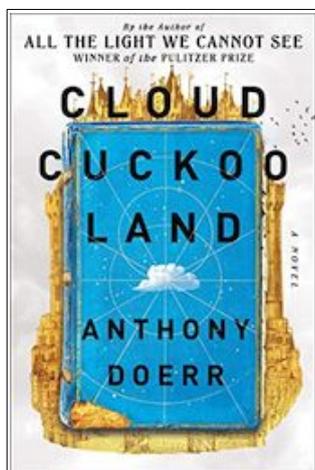
Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>World's Best Science Fiction Fourth Series</i>	ed Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr	Sf	Feb 8		3.3	1968	Anth
<i>Cloud Cuckoo Land</i>	Anthony Doerr	Sf	Feb 13		4.5	2021	
<i>The Department of Sensitive Crimes</i>	Alexander McCall Smith	Crime	Feb 14		3.4	2019	
<i>Remote Control</i>	Nnedi Okorafor	Sf	Feb 21	e	3.2	2021	Nvla
<i>The Way It Is Now</i>	Garry Disher	Crime	Feb 23		3.7	2021	Aust
<i>The Housekeeper and the Professor</i>	Yoko Ogawa	Lit	Feb 25		4.0	2003	Trans
<i>New Writings in SF-2</i>	ed John Carnell	Sf	Feb 27		2.7	1964	Anth

Books read in the month: 7

Yearly total to end of month: 14

Notes:

World's Best Science Fiction Fourth Series (1968) – The fourth in this series of the year's best sf, this time for stories published in 1967. This is the third anthology of stories I've read from this year and probably ranks second to the Zelazny Nebula Awards anthology I reviewed last month. This collection includes "Driftglass" by Delany; "The Man Who Never Was" and "Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne" by Lafferty; **Hawksbill Station** by Silverberg; "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" by Ellison; and "Handicap" by Niven, among others. All stories are mostly taken from the main SF prozines of 1967, with only one Lafferty story coming from a horror magazine. Oddly, no stories from Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthology. Perhaps there were problems with reprint rights.
R: 3.3/5.0

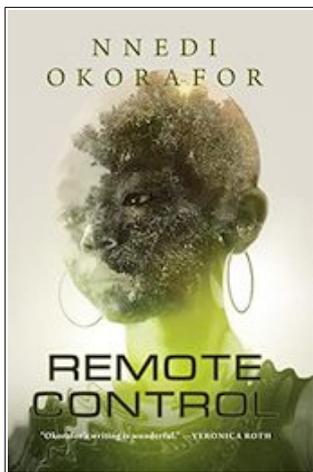
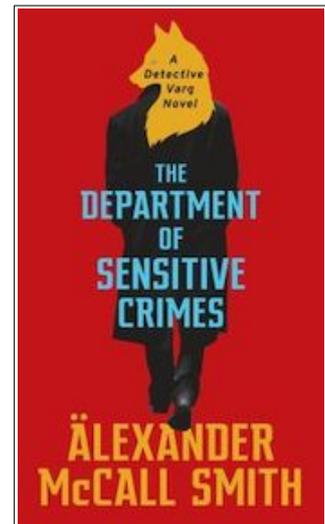


Cloud Cuckoo Land (2021) – Science Fiction or literary? Does it matter? Not really, but I've listed it as sf because it appears on the 2021 Recommended Reading List, under SF novels, recently released by Locus Magazine. This 600-page novel follows the tale of Antonius Diogenes' *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, an ancient Greek text

telling of a man's fabulous adventures, across the centuries from 15-century Constantinople to a future generation starship on a voyage to a nearby star. The book is stolen by a young woman before the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, hidden, damaged and finally delivered to a famous library, where it is forgotten until Zeno Ninis takes on the task of translating the work. Doerr's novel is told across a number of different timelines, sometimes jumping backwards and forwards in each, to follow Diogenes' book and to chart the impact it has on his different characters. Long, complicated, but every easy to read and follow this will certainly be one of my best books of 2022. R: 4.5/5.0

The Department of Sensitive Crimes (2019) – #1 in the author's Detective Varg series.

Detective Inspector Ulf Varg works for the titular Department of Sensitive Crimes in Malmö, Sweden. This department looks after crimes that are a little too complicated for the local police, but not so complicated that homicide or anti-terrorist police are required. So they cover crimes such as the stabbing of a man behind the knee, the disappearance of a young man who may not be all he seems and the possible appearance of a werewolf. Smith refers to this series as "Scandi blanc" which probably provides you with all the description you really need – there is nothing noirish about it at all. The book is light and amusing with Smith's standard style of concentrating more on the characters than the plot and events. And, yes, his name really does translate to "Wolf Wolf". R: 3.4/5.0

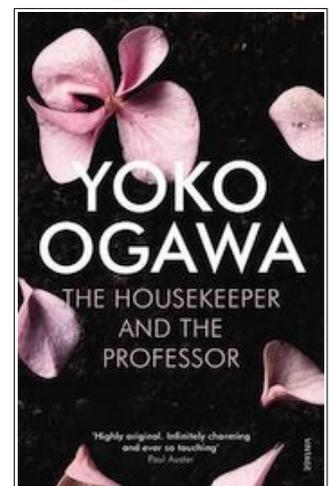


Remote Control (2021) – In a near-future Ghana a young girl named Fatima spends her days sitting in her favourite tree, staring at the sky and the stars. One day a strange green light falls on her and her town. Later she finds a small wooden box at the base of her tree, and inside the box is a seed. Sometime after this her father sells the box to an unscrupulous politician and shortly thereafter a power grows within Fatima that kills all of the inhabitants of her village, including her family. She wakes from this episode with no memory of her own name – she then adopts the title Sankofa – and with the power to kill at will. This is a coming-of-age story as it follows Sankofa up into her teenage years, helping people when she can (euthanasia can be beneficial) as she searches for the missing box. All the while Death walks with

her, but she remains in charge of her own destiny and fate. This is an interesting story though it doesn't really offer anything new. R: 3.2/5.0

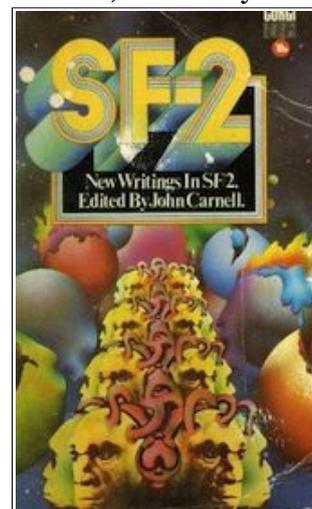
The Way It Is Now (2021) – see major review below.

The Housekeeper and the Professor (2003) – The Professor in this tale was involved in a car accident in 1975 – 17 years prior to the time of the novel – which left him with permanent brain damage and the ability to only remember details of the period prior to the



accident, and only the past 80 minutes of his life. The Housekeeper is engaged to look after him, and this novel follows the gradual development of a virtual family involving the two adults and the Housekeeper's 10-year-old son. There are no named characters here: the Professor is referred to as such; the Housekeeper is the first person narrator; and the young boy is nicknamed Root by the Professor because his flat head reminds him of the square root symbol. Nothing much happens in this book, but it is graceful and sensitive rendering of people surviving very difficult circumstances, making do and forging a life for themselves. R: 4.0/5.0

New Writings in SF-2 (1964) – The second volume in this long-running original anthology series. The contents include 2 novelettes and 6 short stories of what can only be described as run-of-the-mill sf, even by mid-1960s standards. The all-male authors represented are: John Rackham, Colin Kapp, Joseph Green, G. L. Luck, John Rankine, Dennis Etchison, William Spencer and Steve Hall, with the best of them being the stories by Rackham and Etchison. Overall, this is not a very interesting set of stories at all. R: 2.7/5.0



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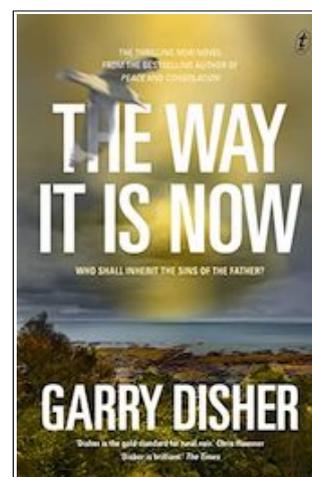
REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

The Way It Is Now (2021) by Garry Disher
Genre: Crime

Maybe Garry Disher has finished with his Hirsch series of crime novels set in the mid-North of South Australia, or maybe he just wanted to have a further look at the Victorian Mornington Peninsular that he dealt with a lot in his Challis and Destry novels (1999-2016). In any event he can't stay away damaged police officers as he presents another in this standalone crime novel.

The book starts back in the year 2000 when Charlie Derawin is a young probationary police officer involved in the search for a missing 8-year-old boy, Billy Saul, when his mother goes missing near the family beach shack. When her car is found, crashed with blood inside and her belongings strewn down the road, she is believed to be have been murdered. But her body, nor that of young Billy, is ever found.

Twenty years later and Charlie is back living in the beach shack on enforced leave from the police force, and dealing with a marriage breakdown. He had gotten involved with a juror in a rape trial he had investigated, and their relationship, and her digging into the case in her spare time caused the magistrate to declare a mistrial. Blamed for that, and accused with mis-conduct leads to a physical altercation with a senior police officer and suspension from the Force. So Charlie is biding his time, trying to decide if he wants to stay with the police, continuing his long-term private investigation into his mother's disappearance,



negotiating the fraught relationship between his homosexual brother and his ex-police father, and also trying not to mess up his own love life.

And then two bodies are found, in the same makeshift grave, near to Charlie's house, and near to where his mother went missing. It's not a stretch for the reader to figure out who the two bodies are. The difficulty comes in trying to work out who put them there, and why.

Disher always writes an enjoyable book, with a compelling plot, realistic settings and detailed characterisations, but this novel, somehow, doesn't quite have the spark of his earlier work. None of the male characters here are at all likeable, as they all seem to be extremely self-centred and as much into power struggles as in trying to live a half-way decent life. And there is also a bit too much GPS-inspired driving, which tends to get a bit repetitive and tedious.

Disher isn't at his best here, but even his second-level work is better than most.

R: 3.7/5.0

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"But books, like people, die. They die in fires or floods or in the mouths of worms or at the whims of tyrants. If they are not safe-guarded, they go out of the world. And when a book goes out of the world, the memory dies a second death." – *Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr, p52

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

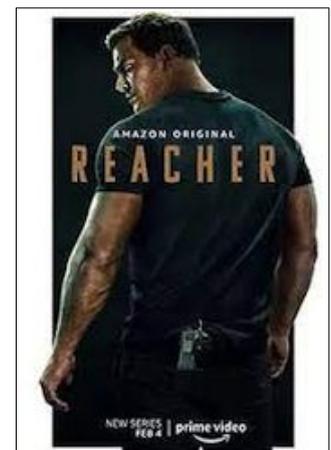
Television

Reacher (Season 1 – 8 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Prime Video

Genre: Crime Drama

This series states in the titles that it is based on Lee Child's first novel, *Killing Floor* (1997), and the character Jack Reacher. And it does a pretty good job of it. You don't get an exact match to that first novel – mobile phones and the internet have been added, and a character from later books is introduced – but the changes don't detract from the plot or the action. Alan Ritchson, who plays the title character, is a far better match for the physical attributes required than Tom Cruise from the two previous movie adaptations. I was worried that he might not be a good fit as the series trailer portrays him as a bit too smug and talkative, but the first episode puts any such concerns to rest as Reacher says nothing for the first 6 minutes of the action, despite being the centre of attention. If you like the novels by Lee Child then this should be on your watch list. R: 4.4/5.0



Succession (Season 3 – 9 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

Continuing the story of the fictitious Roy family, owners of the 4th largest media company in the USA. After Kendall's bombshell announcement at the end of season 2, about the criminal activity in the company's cruise ship division in years past, his star seems in the ascendant while Logan's has hit rock-bottom. The series follows the fallout from those allegations as Kendall attempts to destroy his father's reputation and his hold on the company, while Logan pulls out all stops to manoeuvre for his own survival.

This season is not up to the standard of the second, with a couple of episodes being only average and one, concerning Kendall's 40th birthday party, being rather poor. The season is saved by the last two episodes in the series as the family travels to Italy to celebrate the wedding of Logan's second wife and mother to Kendall, Shiv and Roman, and the season ends on a rather ominous note. R: 4.2/5.0



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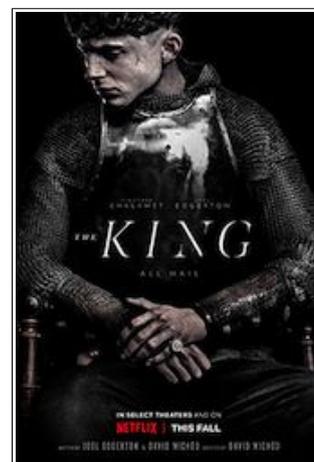
Film

The King (2019)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Historical Drama

Joel Edgerton, who wrote the screenplay (with director David Michôd) and who stars as Sir John Falstaff, here presents us with a quasi-historical drama about the ascension of King Henry V of England. I say “quasi” because there are a lot of changes from the true history of how young drunken Hal becomes king. Edgerton seems to have channelled Shakespeare in adding Falstaff to the story but goes a step further in providing him with a major role, especially in the King's invasion of France and his victory at the Battle of Agincourt. So you can't take this as a true history, merely as a dramatisation of events. As such it hangs together well with excellent acting by Timothée Chalamet (yes, him, again!) in the lead role and Sean Harris as the scheming William. The depiction of the major battle at Agincourt seems to rely more on hand-to-hand combat on the muddy battlefield – very much like the Battle of the Bastards from **Game of Thrones** – rather than the English longbows. Interesting, but I could see how history buffs would be screaming at nearly every scene. R: 3.8/5.0



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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.

PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 19:

Mark Olson: “Once again, I enjoyed **Perryscope**. (Not the best portrait you've used though...)”

[**PM:** No, not the *best*, if you compare it to the work of W. H. Chong, but I was looking for charm more than anything else. Some of the photos that will be used for the front covers of this fanzine will also not be of the best quality, nor that flattering. That doesn't bother me. I'm beyond the point of worrying about how people see me, and this portrait of me by my son fits my mood perfectly.]

“I recently got around to reading Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* and, while I enjoyed reading it, I found it to be vastly annoying. I can certainly see how it won the Hugo, but it's a **very** flawed book— all glitz with little underneath.

* First, it's a Mary Sue story. A pretty ordinary woman from a small town (well, 30,000-person space station) goes to giant interstellar empire and is immediately taken into the confidence of the highest officials and has sex with some of them. Just like her predecessor. (Who was also a genius, etc. Must be something in the water at that station.)

* Did I mention that she's instinctively brilliant at politics, playing superbly in the big leagues in spite of being inexperienced and clueless?

* And of course this tiny community she comes from would have top-notch neuro-technology, better than anything the giant empire knows of. (Ultra-high biomedical technology is normally invented by a lone genius in his volcano lair, after all.)

* But in spite of the Empire's abhorrence of neurotech, they **do** have lots of black neurosurgeons (there must be lots if one of the two people she knows on the planet knows one) who can do neurosurgery to repair an entirely undocumented and hitherto unimagined damaged implant in his apartment. (Doc Smith and John Campbell's super-scientists have nothing on this guy!)

* Note also that she's apparently the first person in her space station community to notice that the Giant Aggressive Interstellar Empire next door has a tendency towards disputed successions. I mean, they study the empire's poetry, but not its government... Who needs to know about the government? Or if they did, who'd bother to tell the ambassador?

“But the thing I hated the most was something that I also disliked about Frank Herbert's writing. Both of writers seek to show genius-level people interacting. Since that's **really** hard to do even if you're a genius yourself, they both instead chose to have the people around the geniuses gasp in amazement at the genius-like brilliance they are witnessing. In *Empire*, for instance, at the big party two people are quoted as emitting something that looks like it might be poetry — at least, it doesn't make sense as prose — and the listeners are amazed at the astonishing references to past masterpieces and the incredible mastery of some difficult art form. This happens again and again. Bah.

“And don't get me started about the author's ideas about encryption...”

“Still, the book was quite entertaining — the imagery was impressive — and I don't regret reading it. But, ‘Bah!’”

[**PM:** I can see that some of your criticisms of the book are perfectly valid though I also enjoyed the book. The concept of “the hero” with totally outrageous skill levels is an old one in literature, and has been especially prevalent in sf over the years. It was interesting to see this shifted from the male position to the female one in this novel. I have the second in the series, *A Desolation Called Peace*, staring at me from the bookshelf. I’ll get to it sometime this year, as I strongly suspect it will be on the Hugo Novel ballot.]

Nick Price: “The problem with scanning is that you then have to label the f*cking things. If you want a 'good enough' quality photo scan but REALLY fast then get a Fujitsu ScanSnap scanner. Great scanner for ALL paperwork and fast OCR if you switch that on.”

[**PM:** I’m mainly scanning documents, mostly old fanzines, and only a few photos.]

Here's a review from the future of Denis Villeneuve's *Rendezvous with Rama* from the "Emperors New Clothes Film Review":

‘Villeneuve's take on *Rama* eschews the book’s aesthetic for surprising variations of arid ochre settings. How unpredictable. Similarly he chooses to strip down the book's exciting content and pace to a mesmerizing minimalist, meditational, plodding labyrinth walk.

“Playing at The Astor in a double bill with *Samsung QuickDrive | Washing Machine: The Feature Film* — *Michael Nyman.*”

[**PM:** I take it that you find Villeneuve’s dramatic style a little too slow?]

“*Termination Shock* by Neal Stephenson is a 700 page turner thriller.”

[**PM:** I’ll have to take your word for that. It doesn’t call to me at all.]

Chris Garcia: “I must watch *Framed!* I’m an art nerd, and an Art crime nerd (I did an entire issue of *Claims Department* about Art Crime!) and the wife and I finished watching *This is a Robbery* about the Isabela Stewart Gardner Museum heist. Fascinating. “

“I've heard nothing but good things about *The Memory Police*, and must find a copy! Almost all my 2021 reading was either William Saroyan (I work at his literary foundation) or short stories for my podcast, *Short Story, Short Podcast.*”

[**PM:** You’ll find a capsule review of another of Ogawa’s novels earlier in this issue. Not sf in the slightest though certainly worthy of your attention. I’ll keep an eye out for the podcast.]

“I love the cover! Makes me think I need to put my boys to work drawing my covers!”

[**PM:** And why not?]

Paul Voermans: “I too have read *Flames* and *The Rain Heron*. *Flames* is quite brilliant.

“Like to hear about Girt Big Loony books, like Olga Tokarczuk's *Books of Jacob* and Alan Moore's *Jerusalem, Ducks, Newburyport*, by Lucy Ellmann.

“Who reads these things besides professional readers? And what's the line? ***Stand on Zanzibar?*** ***Dhalgren?*** ***The Fountainhead?*** These books have a crossover readership.”

[**PM:** I'm finding big bricks of books harder and harder to get through. I will be getting to Brunner's ***Stand on Zanzibar*** in the next year or two but the prospect of a 1000-page one-sentence novel like ***Ducks, Newburyport*** fills me with complete dread.]

Leigh Edmonds: “Whilst out driving to do the shopping and other errands this morning I heard some clown from the Victorian parliamentary opposition arguing that it was about time that we gave up with the sign in to places we visit, the masks and all that, and just treated covid like any other virus, adding that we should still all be safe and sensible. That would be okay so long as everyone was safe and sensible. Sadly that does not seem to be the case. Valma and I continue our hermit like existence and I'm beginning to wonder if we will every feel as safe out in the world as we did before all this. Don't know, but I guess there will be a time when I feel comfortable out in public not wearing a mask and distancing, etc, etc.”

[**PM:** And, as this issue flies out into the outside world, that is exactly what has happened in the state of Victoria. QR-code sign-ins have now been scrapped and mask-wearing has been lifted in most settings. But I think I'll be carrying on with the masks for a while yet. Especially where there is a chance of crowding: public transport certainly; supermarkets and shops as well. I'm feeling more comfortable with not needing them outside so much these days.]

“Your analysis of your reading during 2021 made somewhat interesting reading. So far as my foggy memory allows, I think I've read two of the books you mention, ***Flowers for Algernon*** and ***Neutron Star***. I may have also read ***Behold the Man*** and perhaps one or two of the Nebula Award anthologies but I haven't kept any records to remind me of the details. Not bad, really, since I expect that your collection and ours date from around the same time, although yours extends much further towards the present than ours.”

[**PM:** I do try to read a mixture of older and newer sf works, both for the podcast and also to finally getting around to reading some of the paperbacks that have been sitting on the shelves forever.]

“Your analysis led me to analyze my own performance in 2021. Not reading books, silly, but making scale model aeroplanes. I've been maintaining a fairly detailed database since around 2000 which tells me all sorts of interesting things, including that I built 41 models last year, which is about average. Of those 23 were your standard plastic kits and eighteen the more obscure resin kits which are, generally speaking a lot harder to put together but also of much more interesting subjects. On the subject front, 14 were of fighters, 14 were airliners with a few racers, gliders and general aviation aircraft thrown in. I've been having a US Navy kind of year and 12 were of US Navy aircraft while another six were French. The most models of the same subject were nine A.320/321 airliners. Twenty-one were in the scale of 1/144 and thus there must have been 20 in 1/72 scale. This makes sense as most of the fighters were in the larger scale and all of the airliners in the smaller scale.

“My objective for this year is to make more larger models. This past year has been dominated by the move to our new place and all the work involved so I've made mainly smaller models. Also, my airbrushing booth is rather small right now so even some larger airliners I've half completed await the builder completing my nice new and big painting

booth sometime soon. There are some nice big models calling for attention so I hope to get to them when the builders have finally finished with the renovations.

“Well, I found that instructional anyhow. It’s a different world, isn’t it.”

[**PM:** Yes, and we all have our own interests to keep us busy.]

“Valma and I started watching *Don’t Look Up* but soon lost interest, during the early scene when they are waiting for an interview with the President (of the US). Instead we went to watch something else — probably involving car chases to wake us up. I went back and tried it again later but could work up no enthusiasm for watching a bunch of generally stupid and self absorbed people in action and fast forwarded through in the hope of finding it more interesting later on, which didn’t happen.”

[**PM:** Satire is always a hit-or-miss proposition. What works for some doesn’t for others. I enjoyed it but really can’t see why it made the nomination list for Best Film at this year’s Oscars.]

“I always knew that Rob Gerrand was a fan of taste and distinction and he renewed his membership of that group by mentioning one of the more enjoyable tv series of many years, *GLOW — Glorious Ladies of Wrestling*. It was one of the most enjoyable and entertaining shows in a long time with a good balance of human emotion and action in the ring to keep us entertained from the beginning to the end. The final episode suggested that there would be more, but I don’t recall seeing anything. Among the other things we watched was the continuation of Grace and Frankie which was a little disappointing, perhaps because the season was truncated because of covid. We also enjoyed what there was of *The Black List* which was, again, effected by covid. For my sins I’ve been reduced to watching reruns of the various Star Trek shows on Netflix at the moment, usually while doing something else like sticking pieces of plastic together so as not to be overwhelmed by boredom.”

[**PM:** We all do what we have to do Leigh. Hopefully my small reviews might give you some extra suggestions for things to watch.]

I also heard from: Nic Farey; Charles Taylor; Jerry Kaufman; Barbara O’Sullivan; Murray Maclachlan; Chong; thank you one and all.

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