

# PERRYSCOPE 26





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Cover photograph by Robyn Mills, October 2018, Kampuchea.

### INTRODUCTION

As I have mentioned a few times here in previous issues, my wife, Robyn, and I will be travelling into the wilds of North America from the end of August to the middle of October. I'll be attending the World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago – we'll be there about a week – and then we head up to Toronto and on to points as far east as Quebec City, and as far north and west as Juneau in Alaska.

Generally, when I've travelled as much as this in the past ten years I've put together a travel blog, on a daily basis, to report on our activities. I intend to do the same this time, and you should be able to access it by visiting our blogger site at:  
<http://perryandrobyntravelblog.blogspot.com/>

What that is going to do to the next issue or two of this scurrilous little rag I am not certain. I can't even be confident, as I write, that this September issue will be out on time. It's not that I have any preordained publishing schedule, I just suspect that some readers will have specific expectations that I may not be able to meet. My plan is, however, to be back on track by November. You have been warned.

And while I'm here anticipating publishing delays I should also mention that I had hoped to have an issue of **The Alien Review**, my serious (cough!) sf criticism magazine, out by this time. But the poor health of one of my main contributors – actually THE main contributor for that issue – put paid to any ideas of that. [Get well soon Charles.] Hopefully I can get onto working on another plan for **TAR** when I get back.

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Back in **Perryscope 23** I wrote about the work Irwin Hirsh and I are doing in getting the correspondence of the late Australian sf fan John Bangsund into some sort of order. That work continued this month as we worked our way through Box 2 of 6. We now know that it takes around 7-7.5 hours work – 3-4 hours each – for us to sort through the material in each box. It's certainly doable, though not, I suspect, if you tried to go through all of it on successive days. That would certainly be too much. As it is we are well aware that this is really only the first pass through the material, getting the papers into yearly order, before we attempt to sort it all properly, and then catalogue and scan it. It sure would help if people had put dates on their letters! A certain level of detective analysis awaits.

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## WORKING ON A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF C. J. DENNIS Part 2

Long-term readers of **Perryscope** might recall that I have written about my interest in the life and works of Australian poet C. J. Dennis (1876-1938) here before, specifically in issues 3, 5 and 10. There I talked about my interest in indexing Dennis's work for the Australian Literary Bibliography (AustLit) project based out of the University of Queensland. Most the lead-up work was done by the main Dennis bibliographer, Ian McLaren, in the 1970s and 1980s. Without his pioneering work I might have still been able to make a start but it would have been very much harder. I'm really just enhancing his initial index.

McLaren put in a lot of work indexing Dennis's work in **The Herald** newspaper between his first appearance in 1913, and his last, at the time of his death, in June 1938. I assume that McLaren had access to the original newsprint editions of the paper held in the State Library of Victoria. Dennis had a regular daily, or near-daily, column in the paper, sometimes called "The Mooch of Life" (yes, I have stolen that title from him) from May 1922 to May 1924, and then from March 1927 to June 1938. I have no idea of the exact number of items Dennis wrote for that newspaper but it was a lot. If I estimated a number around 3,000 I doubt I would be far off the mark.

As you might expect with such a massive indexing exercise some things were missed, and some were wrongly titled or miss-dated. Even so it came as a bit of a shock recently when I came across a poem by Dennis, new to me, that McLaren had missed in **The Herald**; especially when it was an important piece that ran on page 1 of the 6 April 1922 edition, only a month or so before he began his initial major run in the paper. I could understand a small poem of little consequence hidden in the depths of an issue, but it seems strange that he missed one on the front page, taking up a full column, and with a sub-title of: '(Being the Reflections of "The Sentimental Bloke.")' It looks hard to miss.

So why do I think of it as being so important? First some background:

Between 1909 and 1915 Dennis worked on a sequence of poems that told the story of the meeting, love affair, marriage and family life of Bill, the Sentimental Bloke, and his wife Doreen. These were all compiled, with a couple of poems specifically written for it, into the 1915 publication of ***The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke***, a book that would ultimately prove to be one of, if not *the*, most popular books of Australian poetry ever published. By the end of 1916 the book had gone through at least 9 editions and sold well over 50,000 copies. There are estimates that over 100,000 copies were printed across all editions in the years that followed. Dennis, at his height, was probably as well-known as any other poet in Australia, up there with Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1909 Dennis saw published, in **The Bulletin** magazine, the first poem that would later appear in this sequence. "The Stoush O' Day" is a strange little poem in that it doesn't mention Bill or his girl Doreen in these original lines; she gets included in the added-on first and last verses of the poem as it appeared in the final book version in 1915. The poem depicts the fight between the light and the dark, characterising it as a boxing match between Day – depicted as a Caucasian – and Night – as an African-American. Readers at that time might well have seen it as a reference to the World Heavyweight Boxing Match held in Sydney the previous December, when the African-American Jack

Johnson defeated the Canadian Tommy Burns. Whether that is true, or whether Dennis had his poem sequence, featuring the Sentimental Bloke, already in mind at that time is impossible to tell. Maybe later, when he came to assemble the various poems into his book version, he remembered this earlier, unrelated poem and just re-purposed it. I tend to think this latter explanation is closer to the mark.

In any event, the 30 September 1909 edition of **The Bulletin** saw the publication of “Doreen”, the first quintessential poem featuring the two main characters. By this time the two have met and Bill is already smitten, with Bill, the larrikin, expressing his love in the idiom of the Melbourne streets of the time.

'Er eyes! Soft in the moon; such *boshter* eyes!  
An' when they sight a bloke ... O, spare me days!  
'E goes all loose inside; such glamour lies  
In 'er sweet gaze.  
It makes 'im all ashamed uv wot 'e's been  
To look inter the eyes of my Doreen.

The initial meeting between the two would not be described until nearly two years later, in “The Intro” (**The Bulletin**, 3 August 1911) which carries those immortal opening two lines:

'Er name's Doreen ... Well, spare me bloomin' days!  
You could er knocked me down wiv 'arf a brick!

Further poems followed in **The Bulletin** in March 1913, February, March, April and July 1914, and also March and April 1915. In the middle of 1915 he wrote two more poems, that weren't to see publication in **The Bulletin**, and on 9 October 1915 the first edition of the completed book was released in a print run of 2,500 copies. It sold out almost immediately and by the end of 1915 another two editions had been printed totalling another 10,000 copies.

The books was greeted with critical success, both in Australia and overseas where it was enjoyed by H. G. Wells. It should be noted though, that not everyone was so enamoured of the work. Norman Lindsay hated it so much he was rumoured to have nailed a copy to a specially prepared cross in his front garden and mutilated it. But overall, it must be said that the general populace in Australia loved it.

Dennis followed the success of *The Sentimental Bloke* with his verse novels *The Moods of Ginger Mick* (1916), *Doreen* (1917), *Digger Smith* (1918) and *Rose of Spadgers* (1924). These also proved extremely popular, though not in the same league as *The Bloke*. And after that he wrote a further six poems either by “The Sentimental Bloke” or “Ginger Mick”, or featuring either of these characters or Doreen. Apart from the collections of poems listed here there is not a lot.

So finding a new Dennis/Sentimental Bloke poem is something of a big deal. The fact that the poem is 100 years old this year is a co-incidence; the relevance of the material covered

### A Digger on Gallipoli

(Being the Reflections of "The Sentimental Bloke.")

There's a Digger on Gallipoli; 'is name was Ginger  
Mick;  
But 'e won't ever need our 'elp no more.  
When Jacko's bullet sent 'im West it 'urt me to the  
quick;  
An', ever since, I've missed me cobber sore.  
There's a Digger on Gallipoli 'oo was a friend of  
mine;  
Down there by Sari Bair 'e's sleepin' well.  
'E reckoned war was bonzer sport an' soljerin' was  
fine;  
But, if 'e come back now, 'e'd think it 'ell.

For Ginger was a 'ero once, like ev'ry other lad —  
A 'ero great an' glorious was 'e.  
But Ginger 'ome, an' down an' out, 'is luck all to the  
bad.  
An' Ginger arstin' aid— wot would 'e be?  
Why, jist a Digger out of work the same as other  
boys,  
A worthy bloke, but slightly in the way.....  
Well; when ole Ginger spilt 'is thorts 'e made a  
wicked noise,  
An' this is wot I reckon Mick would say.

'E'd say: "Gawblimy! Ain't a bloke the same bloke,  
'ere, today,  
As marched down this same street a few years back  
In a bloomin' blaze of glory, an' to one long, loud  
'Ooray!  
That you yelled until we thort yer lungs would crack?  
Yer purses were wide open then; the quids were  
flyin' round;  
An' promises? Oh, 'strewth! you made a row!  
Them promises rung in our ears with quite a pleasin'  
sound;  
An' now— Well, blimey! Wot about it now?

"Jist think them thorts you used to think when  
things were lookin' blue,  
An' cannons made the music 'over there.'  
You didn't 'think' of givin' then. No fear! You dam  
well knew  
You'd fork out every bean that you could spare.

There was rumors in the papers, there was rumblin's  
in the ground.  
There was bugles wailin' — wailin' on the breeze,  
An' the soljer boys in khaki was meanderin' around,  
An' a Digger was a Digger, if you please.

"Oh, a Digger WAS a Digger, when you wanted coves  
to fight,  
An' death an' war was 'ard things to ferget;  
An' a Digger was a 'ero when the world looked black  
as night.  
Well — a Digger out o' work's a Digger yet.  
Aw! Never mind the promises, an' never mind the  
cheers,  
An' jist ferget them things you used to say;  
Per'aps you was excited in them soul-upsettin' years;  
But, blimey! Do the dinkum thing today!

"Wot would you do if war come down an' gripped  
you in the night?  
Wot would you do if bugles blared again?  
Wot would you do if, once again, the world went  
mad with fight,  
An' the country sent a call around fer men?  
Wot would you do— Aw, blimey! Wot?—if danger  
loomed ahead,  
An' the sway of war seemed goin' any'ow,  
While ev'ry day you read the lists of dyin'—an' the  
dead?  
Well, take a tumble, friends; an' do it now!

There's a Digger on Gallipoli, tucked in 'is little  
grave,  
An' 'e'll never tread the Melbourne streets no more.  
'E marched away an' took the count, 'is countrymen  
to save,  
But 'E ain't arstin' 'elp: 'e's marked 'is score.  
There's Diggers on Gallipoli, there's men asleep in  
France—  
Aye, sound asleep; an' talk they never will.  
But I seem to 'ear a whisperin': "Ah, give the boys a  
chance!  
An' don't ferget there's Diggers livin' still."

**C. J. DENNIS.**

in the work — the way the general public and the Australian Government treats its returned servicemen — is not. It has, unfortunately a telling echo in Australia today.

The poem, which I have reproduced on the previous page, rails against the prevailing attitude of that time (1922) in Australia, pointing out that when the Diggers returned from the war in 1918 they were treated like heroes, and yet, four years later, they were all but forgotten; scorned and mistreated. In our own time we now have running in Australia a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. It is a good thing that such a commission is running but a bad thing that it was ever needed in the first place. Its mere existence is an indicator of neglect and mistreatment.

C. J. Dennis's work continues to be as pertinent today as it did when it was first published.

Note: if you want to know more about Dennis and the Sentimental Bloke I can heartily recommend *An Unsentimental Bloke : The Life and Work of C. J. Dennis* by Philip Butterss (2014).

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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 78:** (9 August 2022) *Into many a green valley drifts the appalling snow*

After diving into the works on the 2022 Hugo Awards Ballot last time, and before we tackle the 1969 Hugo Awards ballot in a couple of episodes, we here talk about what we've been reading lately.

Some examples: *The Guns of Navarone* by Alistair MacLean, *Sea of Tranquility* by Emily St. John Mandel, *At Night All Blood is Black* by David Diop, and *The Circle* by David Eggers.

Yes, we do tend to jump around a lot.

**Episode 79:** (30 August 2022) *The evil that men do lives after them*

Another in our regular crime podcasts. This time we mix novels – both Australian (*Wild Place* and *Wake*, and international, *The Island* and *The Inugami Curse* – with non-fiction, and television series such as *The Staircase*, *Outlaws* and *Slow Horses*.

I'll be taking a break for the next episode as I'll be travelling and unable to record.





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

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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.

### WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.  
Abbr – Aust: Australian; Neb: Nebula Award winner; Trans: translated

#### July 2022 books

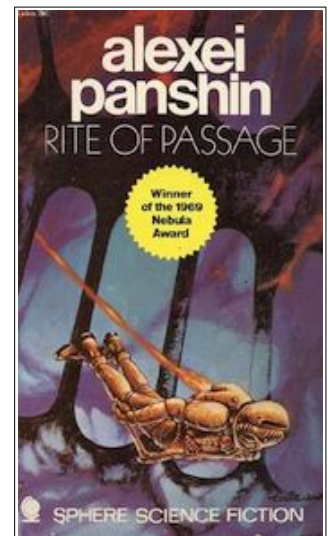
Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Rite of Passage</i>	Alexei Panshin	Sf	Aug 4		3.1	1968	Neb
<i>Wild Place</i>	Christian White	Crime	Aug 9		2.8	2021	Aust
<i>The Inugami Curse</i>	Seishi Yokomizo (trans by Yumiko Yamakazi)	Crime	Aug 22	e	3.2	1972	Trans
<i>The Goblin Reservation</i>	Clifford D. Simak	Sf				1968	

Books read in the month: 4  
Yearly total to end of month: 51

Reading targets met: 6 books in translation.

#### Notes:

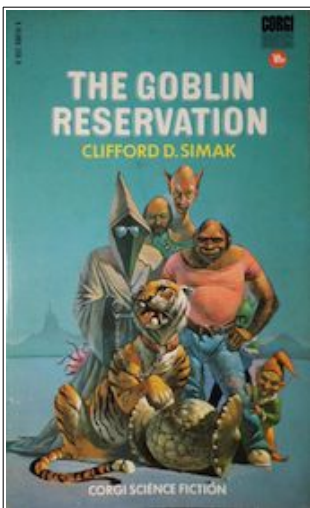
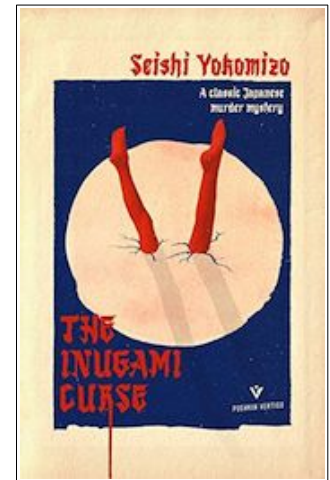
*Rite of Passage* (1968) – Winner of the 1969 Nebula Award for Best Novel, and a finalist for the 1969 Hugo Award. In the year 2198 Earth has been abandoned and humanity now exists on a number of colonised planets, and on a number of large spaceships, carved out of asteroids, which travel the galaxy and act as the last bastion of human knowledge. In order for young people on the spaceships to become fully accepted as adults they each must spend 30 days alone on one of the colonised planets to complete their “rite of passage”, otherwise known as the Trial. The narrator here is Mia Haverro who tells the story of her experiences on ship leading up to the Trial, and her time in the Trial itself, in a flashback some five years after the event. Although not marketed as such this novel would now be placed in the Young Adult category. It is hard to understand how it won the Nebula Award. It is competent but nothing outstanding. R: 3.1/5.0



**Wild Place** (2021) – see major review below.

**The Inugami Curse** (1972) – #6 in the author’s Detective Kosuke Kindaichi series, #2 in English translation.

Just after the Second World War, Sahei, the wealthy head of the Inugami Clan, has died and his lawyer contacts Detective Kosuke Kindaichi asking him to come immediately to the small provincial town where the clan is based. The lawyer suspects that Sahei’s death will set in motion a long period of unrest in the clan, but he is murdered before Kindaichi arrives and so can’t explain what he was thinking. The detective decides to stay on when the lawyer’s predictions start to come true. They all seem to be connected to the very complicated will Sahei left behind. He had no acknowledged heirs but did have three sons with three different mistresses. He was also very fond of Tamayo, the daughter of another couple who acted as mentors and helped him when he was young. The will states that Tamayo will inherit all the money if she marries one of the three young men, her choice. But one of the young men has still not returned from the war, and nothing can happen until he does. Then, a few weeks later, he does seem to turn up. Or does he? He has been horribly injured during the war and now wears a mask to hide his facial wounds. Is it him? Why won’t he take a fingerprint test to prove his identity? Well, that is all resolved and then the murders of the young men begin. All are committed in a rather horrible manner based on the totems of the clan – the ax, the zither and the chrysanthemum. This is a strange mixture of classic western country-house crime setup and Japanese violence and brutality – decapitations a specialty. Interesting but not great. R: 3.2/5.0



**The Goblin Reservation** (1968) – Finalist for the 1969 Hugo Award for Best Novel.

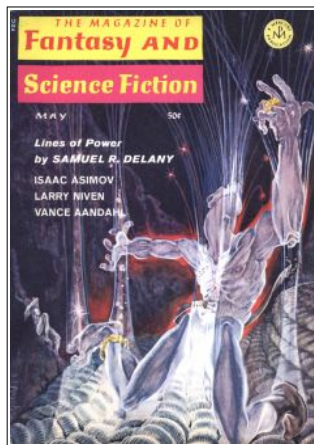
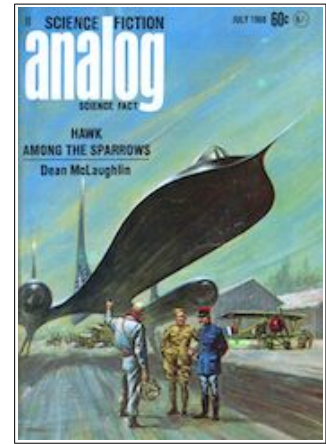
In the far-future, Earth has been transformed into a university planet where creatures from all over the galaxy come to learn and to teach. Travel between the galaxy’s worlds is conducted by a form of matter transmission (think of an updated **Way Station** transport system). Academic Peter Maxwell arrives back on Earth after a long trip only to discover that everyone thinks he’s dead – they attended his funeral. Something seems to have malfunctioned in the matter transmission process causing a duplicate. As he attempts to investigate the causes of his “death”, he is also trying to negotiate the purchase of the “Artifact”, a monolith on display on Earth, that may be used to obtain vast knowledge from an alien race that survived the transition from the previous universe to this one. Also looking to make the purchase is an alien race called the Wheelers which are really a hive mind comprising a mass of insects in a ball attached to two rotating wheels. In the background the Time University is mounting a series of prestigious lectures from William Shakespeare himself, in an attempt to finally decide whether he did, or did not, write the plays. This is a completely-over-the-top sf novel featuring all of Simak’s themes, as well as his love of inventive and faintly ridiculous situations, as well as goblins, a neanderthal named Alley-Oop, and a Ghost. The whole thing seems completely absurd but Simak is able to pull it off as only he could. R: 4.0/5.0



## Other short fiction

**Hawk Among the Sparrows** (1968) by Dean McLaughlin  
This novella was on the ballot for the 1969 Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.

Howard Farman is an American pilot in the later 1970s tasked with carrying out a high-altitude reconnaissance flight to observe a French nuclear test on the edges of space. But he finds himself too close to the nuclear blast zone and has to land quickly. He then discovers that the blast has somehow sent him back in time to 1918 and to the frontlines of the First World War. There he offers to use his advanced aircraft to defeat the Germans, only to discover he has difficulty with fuel and his advanced weapons aren't as useful as he thought. This is an amusing "fish-out-of-water" problem-solving tale but little else.  
R: 2.8/5.0



**Lines of Power** (1968) by Samuel R. Delany (aka **We, in Some Strange Power's Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line**)

This novella was on the ballot for the 1969 Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.

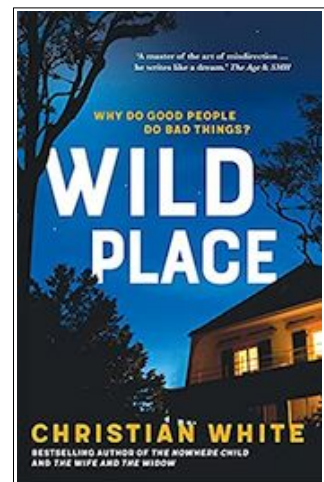
Around the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the world is almost fully connected by a massive power grid, which also provides access to a worldwide computer network. "Blacky" is a newly promoted supervisor on a Gila Monster, a mobile cabling factory, and is told he needs to connect a small survivalist community on the US-Canadian border to the grid. The story follows his team's attempts to get the community on board and that community's internal power struggles in the face of encroaching civilisation; rather obvious use of two versions of the word "power" there. This is lesser Delany, but that still makes it somewhat better than most novellas of that era. R: 3.2/5.0

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## REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

**Wild Place** (2021) by Christian White  
**Genre:** Crime

Christian White's second novel, *The Wife and the Widow*, won the 2020 Ned Kelly Award for Best Novel. I reviewed that book in **Perryscope 12** and was very impressed by its technique and the way the author was able to hide the novel's major twist and final reveal. Unfortunately, this one isn't up to that standard. And it raises the question of whether, as readers, we come to expect too much of an author, especially after they've delivered a cracker of a novel previously. Do we just assume they will continue to deliver at a high level and then downplay them when they don't, or should we



look at each novel on its own merits and judge it accordingly? I'd certainly say the latter. At least we should try.

At the end of the 1980s, in the fictitious upmarket Melbourne suburb of Camp Hill, just near Frankston on the Mornington Peninsular, a young woman named Tracie Reed, goes missing. The police don't seem particularly interested, looking on it as a normal teenage runaway, partly blaming it on her parents' recent divorce, on end-of-schooling worries and maybe an unknown boyfriend. But there are too many inconsistencies in the girl's disappearance, so a number of locals start scouring the area, and putting up missing-person posters. Tom Witter, a teacher at the local high school, becomes obsessed with Tracie and slowly starts to delve into her background and her activities leading up to her disappearance. He discovers that Tracie had contact with Sean, a young man in the neighbourhood, who seems to know more than he is letting on. He wears black all the time, smokes, listens to heavy metal music and rarely leaves his house. Then there's Tom's eldest son Marty, who has just moved out of home at the end of high school and who seems to have been secretly in love with Tracie. And hovering around the edges is his Tracie's father, a man who always appears to be on the very edge of violence. There is certainly enough going on here, enough diverse characters, and enough secret inter-relationships for any amateur detective to get their teeth into.

It becomes clear that Sean was also the local dope dealer, supplying the neighbourhood kids, and possibly some adults, with marijuana. Which leads the author to introduce the themes of out-of-control drug abuse – the concept that marijuana use is a gateway to harder drugs – and to “Satanic panic” – the idea that listening to heavy metal music and dressing like a goth was indicative of devil worship. These are mostly considered nonsense these days but here the author uses them as the motivations for his characters acting as they do. Sitting here, thirty years on, it's hard to be convinced that these ideas would drive the behaviours we see here.

In the background of all of this is the Wild Place of the title. This is a wild nature reserve bordering the backs of a number of the main houses in the story. The author tries to make it much more mysterious and scary than it actually seems and I think he misses an opportunity to align it with Australia's violent past, which might have helped increase the tension and feeling of unease in the story.

White's main fault, however, lies in his use of tired crime fiction tropes that he allows to just meander on to their conclusion. There are two main people involved in the disappearance of Tracie; one slowly becomes obvious the longer the novel progresses, but the second, and major instigator, appears in a sudden reveal at the end, almost like a tacked-on after-thought.

I suspect if you came on this fresh, with no knowledge of the author's other work, you'd find it a satisfactory suburban crime novel; average without being outstanding. If you've read the author's award-winner you know what he is capable of. Having that fore-knowledge, however, will leave you with a sense of disappointment and an opportunity missed.

R: 2.8/5.0

## THE MOOCH O' LIFE

*The young green leaves is shootin' on the trees,  
The air is like a long, cool swig o' beer,  
The bonzer smell o' flow'rs is on the breeze  
An 'ere's me, 'ere,  
Jist mooching around like some pore, barmy coot,  
Of 'ope, an' joy, an' forchin destichoot.*

C. J. Dennis: *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*

In the July 1968 issue of *Galaxy* magazine the sf author Lester del Rey concluded his damning review of the “new” Stanley Kubrick film, *2001 : A Space Odyssey*, with the following words:

“This isn’t a normal science-fiction movie at all, you see. It’s the first of the New Wave-Thing movies, with the usual empty symbolism. The New Thing advocates were exulting over it as a mind-blowing experience. It takes very little to blow some minds. But for the rest of us, it’s a disaster.

“It will probably be a box-office disaster, too, and thus set major science-fiction movie making back another ten years.

“It’s a great pity.”

Well, at least his first sentence there is correct.

Over the next couple of months the editor of that magazine, Frederik Pohl, received a large number of letters referring to del Rey’s review, mostly disagreeing with it. In his editorial for the magazine in the September 1968 issue Pohl had the following to say:

“It strikes us that this is the difference between clear-quill ‘science fiction’ and that other related thing which is sometimes called ‘The New Wave’ or ‘The New Thing’ or ‘Speculative Fiction.’ To our way of thinking, science fiction is as inventive a form of literature as any, but unlike most the inventiveness takes place primarily in the subject matter instead of in the treatment. And if the theme is mind-stretching enough, symbols and allusions are only tolerable when the author cannot manage to say what he wants to say in any other form; in that view, the choice of evocative over explicit and literal statement is not a triumph but a surrender.

“We wish *2001* had not surrendered. It had something to say. It really should have said it.”

Which strikes me as a member of an older generation of sf writers suddenly struck with a new thing, a new approach to the way sf was being written and filmed. An approach they found difficult to understand, and, therefore, unacceptable. It didn’t fit the way they thought sf should be.



But on the other hand, Pohl had, in his June issue of *Galaxy* that year, published Harlan Ellison's short story "The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World". And if that isn't an example of a "choice of evocative over explicit and literal statement" then I don't know what is.

We also need to remember that 1968 was the year that John Brunner published *Stand on Zanzibar*, which later went on to win the 1969 Hugo Award for Best Novel. And that is a novel that was as inventive in its treatment as in its subject matter, and that still stands today as one of the great sf novels. I can only conclude that both Pohl and del Rey ended up on the wrong end of the sf stick here.

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I've had a few people mention to me lately that I seem to have been watching a lot of television. Maybe. I really don't think so.

My wife and I tend to skip most of the general drudgery that passes for free-to-air television these days and usually opt for new drama or comedy on the various streaming services we can access. Our usual diet each evening is a one-hour episode of a drama, and then a half-hour comedy, if we can find it. It suits us as we are usually finished relatively early which then allows for some reading time.

But we don't finish all we start. Over the past six months there have been 5-10 television programs that we've started, where we've watched one or two episodes, and then dropped. Either because it has gone in a direction that one of us didn't like or, more likely, because we just found it boring. I don't review those. I don't think it fair that I condemn a program if I haven't watched all of it and don't have the time to watch something that I don't like.

So, if you think that at times my television ratings are consistently on the high side, take this as an explanation that I'm only reviewing what I persist with.

Maybe I should start listing what I start and don't finish. I'll think about it.

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

### Television

***The Old Man*** (Season 1 — 7 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Disney +

Genre: Action Thriller

Based on the 2017 Thomas Perry novel of the same name, this series features Jeff Bridges as Dan Chase, an aging ex-CIA agent. Thirty years after he dropped off the grid to live a quiet life in up-state New York, following a stint in Afghanistan, Chase's life is thrown into disarray after an intruder breaks into his house and tries to kill him. FBI Assistant Director Harold Harper (John



Lithgow), who worked with Chase when they were younger men, is brought in to help capture him. Things, as you might expect, go very badly wrong and Chase is then on the run. He uses all his old tricks to keep himself one step ahead of the FBI, but the ubiquitous presence of camera technology betrays him. Along his journey he is in contact with an FBI insider who is helping him, firstly to stay ahead of his pursuers, and secondly to work out why they are after him at all. An excellent thriller, with Bridges and Lithgow in superb form. As are the actors they have chosen for their younger versions. I'll certainly be looking forward to the second season. R: 4.3/5.0

### ***Line of Duty*** (Season 5 – 6 episodes) (2019)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Action Thriller

Is it just me or this long-running series starting to run out of steam and lose its lustre? The Anti-Corruption Unit (AC-12) is investigating links between organised crime and missing police officer DS John Corbett (Stephen Graham). Corbett has actually gone undercover and is now an integral member of a crime group but, as the series progresses, he has to carry out robberies and killings in order to safeguard his position. DI Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure) and DS Steve Arnott (Martin Compston) make contact with Corbett and try to bring him in safely but everything threatens to get out of control. In the meantime, the evidence grows that their boss, Superintendent Ted Hastings (Adrian Dunbar), is the mysterious “H”, the high-level corrupt cop who has been protecting major crime figures, both inside and outside the police force. This series' episodes follow the standard template and my wife and I could practically pick when, in the last episode, the penny would finally drop. I suspect this would be much better if you came on it cold, rather than having watched all the previous series within a few months as we have. R: 3.5/5.0



### ***Ozark*** (Season 2 – 10 episodes) (2018)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime Drama

At the end of season one of this series Marty Byrde (Jason Bateman), his wife Wendy Byrde (Laura Linney) and their two children, had somewhat settled into an uneasy life in the Ozarks laundering money for a major Mexican drug cartel. Their new plan is to set up a casino on the lake in association with the Snells, the local heroin producers and owners of a large parcel of land on the lakefront. But, as usual and as expected, all does not go well: the Feds are circling looking for evidence of Marty's mob work; the new cartel contact is a hard-arsed lawyer who doesn't accept excuses of any kind; the family of Ruth, their main local employee, is causing all sorts of trouble; and their daughter decides she doesn't want to be part of the family any more. Stress is just a part of the game, and the only way to stay in front is to be well-prepared or very adaptable to changing circumstances. When the first season of this started Marty was the one driving the family forward but as the episodes roll by it seems that Wendy is becoming more involved, harder and more conniving. This is an excellent crime drama series told from the point-of-view of the criminal, but it is not for the faint-hearted. R: 4.3/5.0

### ***Only Murders in the Building*** (Season 2 — 10 episodes) (2022)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Comedy Crime

Our three unlikely true crime podcast investigators are back with another murder in the Arconia Building in New York. Charles-Haden Savage (Steve Martin), Oliver Putnam (Martin Short) and Mabel Mora (Selena Gomez) this time are investigating the murder of Bunny Folger, the tough board president of the building's residents' association. The three had been arrested at the end of season one under suspicion of murdering Bunny. And in this season they set out to prove their own innocence. Again we get a number of episodes exploring the back-stories of other residents of the building, and number of characters from season one make re-appearances. But the apartment building itself becomes something of a character in this story as well. This is some of the best work Martin has done for some time (he was also the co-creator of the series) as he doesn't ham it up or try to force the comedy, Short is just fantastic and totally over-the-top in a role that seems perfect for him, and Gomez seems to be slowly getting into the role of Mabel, and isn't so mono-tonal as in the first season. Lots of fun and the finale sets up for season 3. R: 4.2/5.0



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## Film

### ***The Snowman*** (2017)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

If we watch a science fiction film — or read an sf novel — we have to be willing to suspend our disbelief in order to allow the film to flow. We have to allow for some logical or scientific fallacies to prevail — fallacies such as faster-than-light travel or workable magic — but a crime story set in the modern area is another matter entirely. There we want consistency, and believability. We want to come out at the end and think that, yeah, that could have happened and that it made sense. This crime film set in Norway, based on the Jo Nesbo novel of the same name, just doesn't cut it. Maybe it was a matter of the author needing an original take on the serial killer sub-genre, but having the perpetrator build a snowman in the front yards of the houses of his multiple victims and not have anyone in the streets or other houses notice anything going on, stretches the bounds a bit too much. That, and the identity of the killer, left this viewer feeling rather let down by the whole thing. Michael Fassbender is good in the lead role of Harry Hole, and the snowed-in landscape looks great though they aren't enough to rescue this for me. My wife tells me that the original novel was very good and held together rather well; you wouldn't know that from this adaptation. I suspect this was expected to be the start of a series of films based on the main character. I can't see that happening after this entry.

R: 2.4/5.0





***The Guns of Navarone* (1961)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: War Drama

I read the Alastair MacLean novel on which this film was based recently and enjoyed that, and now think that this might just be an example of a film adaptation being better than the book on which it is based. A rare event indeed. This film takes all of the book's main plot and action points and adds a number of minor but effective additions: adding an interesting backstory to the tense relationship between Mallory (Gregory Peck) and Stavros (Anthony Quinn), and changing the gender of the island's resistance fighters. At heart this is an action adventure story, and such scenes as the scaling of the island's ocean cliffs in the rain, or the blowing up of the big guns in their mountain fortress, always fare better on the big screen than on the page. I probably first watched this film as a teenager back in Adelaide in the late 1960s or early 1970s, I liked it then and I like it now. Sure film-making techniques have moved on quite a bit since this was made but it's good to see what a bit of imagination, deft camera work, and tight scene direction can achieve. R: 3.8/5.0



***All the Old Knives* (2022)**

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Espionage Drama

In 2012 a plane is hijacked in Vienna and the CIA station there investigates ways to ensure that the situation can be defused. However, as we come to learn later, it all ends badly. Now in 2020, two ex-colleagues and ex-lovers (Henry Pelham played by Chris Pine and Celia Harrison played by Thandiwe Newton) meet in a swish restaurant on the waterfront in Carmel, California. As the movie progresses, using conversations between the two, and flashbacks to 2012 in Vienna, it becomes clear that the hijackers were being passed information from inside the CIA situation room. Henry has been charged with interrogating the other members of the team in

order to ferret out the mole and has ended up with Harrison. Not a good idea, I said to my wife, to have someone involved doing the investigating. There are possibilities here but they never seem to get off the ground. It's competent and a time-waster, nothing else. R: 2.7/5.0

***Thirteen Lives* (2022)**

Platform: Amazon Prime

Genre: Real-life Drama

In June 2018 twelve boys from a local soccer team and their coach went to explore the Tham Luang cave in Thailand. Unfortunately for them a severe thunderstorm blew in starting the new monsoon season weeks early, the cave was flooded and they became trapped 4 kilometres underground. Thai Navy Seal divers are unable to locate them and it is only when two British cave divers (here played by Viggo Mortenson and Colin Farrell) arrive on the scene, that the



boys are found, and only later that a daring rescue plan is hatched in consultation with an Australian anaesthetist and cave diver (Joel Edgerton). This film, directed by Ron Howard with a screenplay by William Nicholson, is based on this real-life event which captivated the world's media for a fortnight in mid-2018. Howard is probably a good choice for director here as he has form with this type of movie (*Apollo 13*), and can handle the technical side of the film-making process without getting in the way. The story is well-told, concentrating on the right people at the right time, and avoiding getting into the whole media circus that surrounded the operation. We all know the final outcome, so it is a credit to Howard and his team that they are able to keep the tension and drama running to the end. R: 3.7/5.0

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### PERRYSCOPE Responses

#### Perryscope 24:

**Kim Huett:** “I assume your knowledge of herbology is not great given you did not remark on the crumbling mansion in Harwood’s novel being called Monks Wood. At least I presume that’s what was being named in the paragraph being quoted. I, on the other hand, immediately suspected a play on words as Monkshood is a notorious herb, the poison of which there is no known cure. It was used as a medicinal herb for its sedative and pain killing properties but any other than the smallest overdoses was almost certainly fatal. In other words an extremely appropriate herb to mix with Harwood’s own name given this is a Gothic novel. Additionally a reference to herbology is entirely appropriate given a knowledge of herbs has one foot in folklore and the other in science.”

[**PM:** As you rightly surmise my knowledge of herbology is practically non-existent. So I completely missed this connection.]

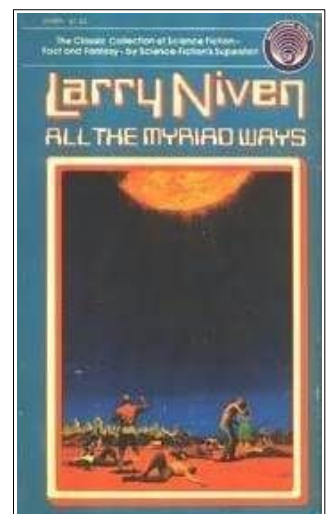
**John Hertz:** “Yet another good picture of you on the cover of **P24**. Iceland, gosh! And I’m sorry if this offends you, but I think you photograph well.”

[**PM:** I think you are confusing me with the environment in which I stand. I doubt whether anyone could in all honesty state that I’m a good subject for a photo.]

“I’d rate *All the Myriad Ways* (Niven, 1971; collection) higher than you. Its stories and essays are terse, comical, ingenious, poetic, and extraordinarily so. Niven’s strength.”

[**PM:** While I did enjoy this collection I do prefer his Known Space stories, especially those involving his aliens and strange and perplexing situations. I was talking to Chong the other day about iconic sf novels that I enjoy and I had to say that I thought Niven’s *Ringworld* was probably the one most representative of the sf I enjoy the most. It’s certainly not the best sf novel nor my favourite, but it has a lot of elements I enjoy.]

“The mere existence of the book *All the Sounds of Fear* by Harlan Ellison almost obviates any further remark. As does the existence of a story ‘The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World’.”



[**PM:** Well, I plainly just have to disagree with those statements. You make it sound like the collection, and that story, are above criticism or reproach. When Ellison was good, he was very good; when he wasn't he could be incomprehensible. I've read "The Beast That Shouted..." just recently in preparation for a podcast episode on the 1969 Hugo Ballot – that story won the 1969 Hugo Award – and can't say that I rate it very highly. I put it into Ellison's incomprehensible sack.]

"Speaking of Asimov (this parenthesis for readers unaware of the Ikie and Harlie Show, which they both carried on lovingly), I've been trying to point out why I assess his writing – we're talking of his fiction; his earlier fiction, before he began writing those Science columns – as I do. It would waste your time and mine if I merely kept urging my opinion. (At the cost of another parenthesis, I'm reminded of a line in a Flanders & Swann song, 'Right, left, what a disgrace; or it may grow straight up and fall flat on its face.') But, as you say, these letters of comment are capsules, having to put a lot into few words."

[**PM:** Yes, I think it best we decide to leave our differences regarding the work of Issac Asimov. We've pretty much said all we can say on that matter. Niven, on the other hand, I could continue to argue about.]

**Heath Row:** "A couple of things in the 'Introduction' to **Perryscope #24** struck me. Firstly, is it common that political posters—and perhaps other advertising flyers—are tidied up so quickly after a relevant date passes, or is it limited to political campaign signs? In the United States, marketing flyers and such—even billboards—sometimes remain up well after the opening of a movie, an advertised event, or some other 'time-bound announcement,' as we say at meetings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. I'm curious whether Australia pays more attention to the timeliness of such things in terms of out-of-home advertising, or whether it's relegated to political campaigns. Secondly, we also sometimes experience legislators being torn between local constituents and focusing more on state or national activities. We mostly see that come into play if a legislator serving at a more local level is campaigning for a higher level or when a politician changes the district or locale they represent. We recently experienced that where I live: California State Senator Sydney K. Kamlager represented the 30th Senate District, which encompasses where I live, and recently campaigned for a seat vacated in the 37th District when Karen Bass chose to run for Los Angeles mayor rather than seek re-election. I would hypothesize that their attention to their previous role diminished as they set their sights on the possibility of a subsequent role. It's hard to be in two places at once."

[**PM:** Flyers and posters for political campaigns get taken down rather quickly here, most probably due to littering laws. Or maybe Australians just want to move on and not be reminded of the lengthy campaign we've just been through. Movie posters change rapidly as well. A lot of billboard or street display advertising is electronic these days so that's not a great problem. We get politicians moving from local politics – representing a town council of a few suburbs or one country town – up to State or even Federal politics, but it is rare for them to move from State to Federal. It does happen but not as often as you might expect.]

"Congratulations on reaching the two-year milestone! Your apahacking seems a worthwhile discipline, and I enjoy the outcome. Personally, I find APA-L's weekly rhythm a helpful writing discipline—LASFAPA's monthly cadence, as well. N'APA's bimonthly schedule is more challenging for me because I sometimes come close to forgetting. And Garth Spencer continues to encourage me to join eAPA. Even though you participate in ANZAPA, your



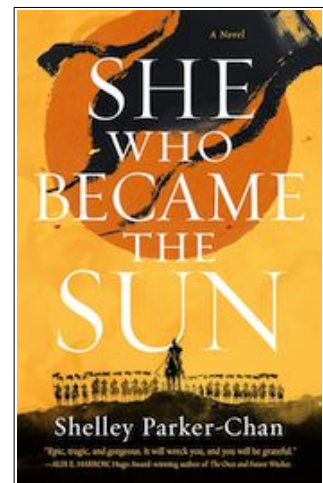
apazine is structured more like a self-contained perzine, which is fun. I wish you safe travels through October and look forward to the bumper issue that is sure to follow, or merely a return to the previous monthly schedule. Blogging as you travel sounds like a sensible solution for the in-between.”

[**PM:** My work with ANZAPA includes this fanzine, as well as a small magazine I put together which only contains mailing comments, though I do add in a few paragraphs each issue about what’s happening in Elphin Grove, and the surrounding streets in Hawthorn. I could not ever see myself wanting to be in a weekly apa. Way too much time-pressure. ANZAPA is bi-monthly and that seems to drop into my email inbox unexpectedly often. I have written a few travel blogs previously and I’m aware of how much work they entail. An hour or so each night is usually the required workload. Hence my feeling that this fanzine might not see an October issue. Maybe a double in November.]

### Perryscope 25:

**Murray MacLachlan:** “I’ve been pondering the mild mystery about *She Who Became the Sun* being on the Hugo ballot. Fantasy regularly appears in the lists, Harry Potter being a well-known example, however **SWBTS**’s surface fantastic elements are slight not central, as you rightly pointed out in **Perryscope 25**. This is where Shelley Parker-Chan’s talk at the recent Nova Mob was illuminating as well as entertaining. Parker-Chan said the ghosts, fire, and similar surface fantasy elements were additions to the original manuscript first submitted to publishers as a historical novel, and injecting those fantastic elements was hard to do. Yet SF is iconoclastic and this is where **SWBTS** in my opinion is deservedly on the ballot, as structurally the narrative is subversive through and through, and falls apart otherwise!

“As she said: The protagonist is female and has a voice, and a path to power. That combination is almost unheard of in Chinese literary tradition, and deliberately undercut the Confucian ideal, a narrative of women being silent and that a “rightful” society has women in their place (of powerlessness and silence). **SWBTS** is a retelling of the origins of the Ming dynasty. Intrinsic to Chinese history is the current rulers wanting to create legitimacy, continuity, and legacy from the previous dynasty or regime — this is aided by, for instance, a tradition whereby the winners are required to write a history of their predecessors — and it is wholly within this tradition that the Chinese Communist Party has placed themselves as logical heir and continuation of the Mings. Undercutting the origin story of the Mings was subversive six centuries ago and remains so today.



“*She Who Became The Sun* is iconoclastic at gender, Confucian, Ming Dynasty, and Chinese Communist Party levels. Little wonder that mainland Chinese official newspapers have been outraged at Parker-Chan. Good on her, may she never make the mistake of travelling to mainland China, and all the best for a Hugo win, the novel is a fine read!”

[**PM:** It is indeed. Parker-Chan’s talk at the Nova Mob was very interesting and it gave a lot more background into how she came to write the book in the first place. As you say, I doubt

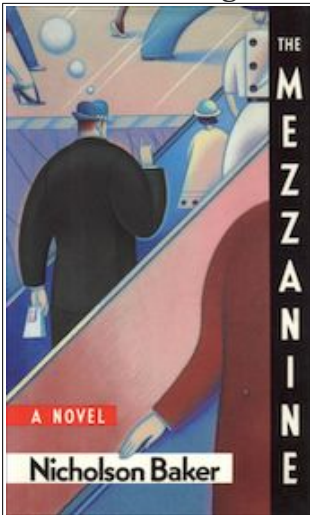
she will be travelling to China any time soon. It certainly sounds like some of the “cultural watchdogs” there are not too pleased with the book.]

**William Breiding:** “I always enjoy **Perryscope**. Sadly while that’s true I never seem to have anything of relevance to add to the conversation. So thank you for keeping me on your mailing list. It is read and *very* much enjoyed every month.

“Your second AnnIsh was of particular note. I found the reprint of your experience of buying your house to be edge of the seat stuff, even though I knew the outcome. (Very handsome house, by the way.) It created my first laugh of the issue when you were describing being hungover and having to slog through a day of house hunting.”

[**PM:** Yes, that was not the best state in which I could be looking at houses. Still, it all worked out for the best in the end, which is all I could really hope for. It was peculiar going back over that account of the house-purchase. It brought back a lot of memories. And that explains one of the reasons why I write this stuff each month – as a way to remember what I’ve done, before the old brain cells start giving up the ghost.]

“The second laugh occurred while reading about your shoe lace trauma. It was when you mentioned feeling as though you were in a Nicholson Baker novel that I threw my head back and had a good chuckle.”



[**PM:** It’s nice to see that someone got the reference. For those wondering what that might be, I suggest you hie yourself off and read Baker’s novel *The Mezzanine*.]

“I very much enjoy the book talk. I hope to up my game in the reading department after retirement next year though unlikely to ever reach your levels. Ditto all the viewing. I don’t know how you do all this and then publish a monthly fanzine, and an occasional awesome sercon genzine—not to mention a podcast. I must be a slacker. Or something like it. Perhaps it’s in the Australian work ethic to produce so much and the Australian water that gives you all that energy.”

[**PM:** As you will read, in my statements earlier in this issue, some of that activity has been conspicuous by its absence in recent months. This fanzine continues, as does the podcast and a few other things, but I have been rather slack about the longer critical pieces that I would need for **The Alien Review**. I’m hoping to re-charge the batteries during the upcoming holiday.]

“Glad there were no long covid effects! Don’t get it again!”

[**PM:** That is the aim.]

**Mark Olson:** “Your description of the house-buying experience sounds so very different from our own. We bought a house when we got married and lived in it for close to 20 years, finally noticing that it was bursting at the seams — books piled in front of the bookshelves in every room but the kitchen and one bathroom — and started looking for another, bigger house which we still live in.

“In neither case were we in an especially hot market (though it turns out that we bought

near market highs, showing mastery of the 'buy high, sell low' strategy) and we looked for about three months each time. The purchase process was the same both times: hear the asking price, make an offer, get it accepted subject to inspection, get an inspector and perhaps dicker a bit based on what he found. In neither case were we bidding against anyone and it was mostly a matter of seeing how much less than asking we could pay.

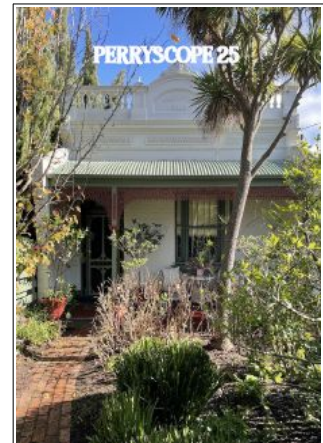
“The true horror was the many-week process after our offer was accepted and we paid what was in effect earnest money. (I don't know what took everyone so long.) Closing, when it was finally there was an elaborate ritual where we sat around a table with the seller, our attorney, the seller's attorney, and our respective real estate agents and signed dozens of pieces of paper — Yes, the seller disclosed the asbestos status, Yes, the seller disclosed the radon status, Yes, the seller disclosed the lead paint status, Yes, we know we need new smoke detectors, Yes, we had a licensed inspector inspect it, Yes, we have an insurance binder, Yes, Yes, Yes. (Getting the mortgage was comparatively easy!)

“Then came moving. Not going to move again if we can help it.”

[**PM:** More than anything else, the prospect of moving has been one of the major reasons why we're still here. I know we are going to have to face that at some point but we're putting it off as long as we can. In the meantime I'm attempting, little by little, to cut down the amount of STUFF we have in the house. It's a long, slow process, and I'm not sure I'm making as much headway as I should be. But I persist. We just recently had a major clean-up of the back-yard, taking a number of items down to the recycling and the tip. I need to do more of that later this year.]

**Leigh Edmonds:** “The cover of **Perryscope 25** was very inviting. I haven't been in your house but I have been in a few that look just like it, from the outside at least. I can kinda imagine being inside, finding a comfy chair and reading a book. Perhaps it's a house that invites reading. All that's missing is a cat to sit on your lap and purrrr while you're reading. I could not help but wonder at that arrangement on the top of the front of your house (which has a name that now escapes me). I guess it's purely decorative but I'm imagining a time, perhaps in the 1920s, when a boy up on the roof would duck out from behind cover and whiz off a few shot with his shanghai at some of the other kids in the street. But no doubt Hawthorn is much more sedate these days.”

[**PM:** Very much more sedate I reckon. I doubt this scenario ever occurred as the only way to get onto the roof is via an extension ladder put up against the right hand end of the house, in the path dividing us and next-door. I can't see the parents of a young lad allowing that to happen. And, you'll be probably pleased to know, I have a wife who won't allow me to do that any more either.]



“Your story about buying the house made me almost as tense as you must have been during the process. Over the years Valma and I have bought seven properties and sold six of them. None have been bought at auction, which was something I really wanted to avoid, and the last two or three have been found through the internet. In one case, when we were still in Perth but planning to move to Ballarat, I cruised the internet for months looking at prices, locations and all that. When we found the place that looked likely my parents



caught to bus down from Dimboola to look at it for us and, when they got home, mum instructed us that we were to buy it, no ifs, buts or maybes. So we did. It turned out to be pretty good but over time our needs changes so we moved on.”

[**PM:** The history of this house, and our renovation of it, will be a story for another time. But, briefly, the changes we made to the back of the house provided us with a fairly spacious kitchen and family room, which in time helped us decide that staying on was a better option than moving. We knew what we had, and we liked where we lived. Moving somewhere else didn't offer any guarantees that those two things would improve.]

“What I find really nerve wracking is selling, particularly if you need to sell the place you are living in to be able to afford the place you are committed to buy. I hope never to have to go through that again, even if it means having to stay here forever.”

[**PM:** Yes, that's our next major life hurdle that we have to get over. Sometime. Just don't know when. Our plans for this continue to evolve, and now mostly revolve around Robyn's plans, and those of our son who still lives with us but is aiming to move out within the next six months or so. It is very much a moving feast.]

“I was not as happy as you with the third season of *The Umbrella Academy*. Thinking about it now I'm inclined to think that my ambivalence is because the first two seasons were about events occurring outside the Academy whereas the third was much more internally focused. As you say, too much time sitting around emoting and re-hashing old arguments. Perhaps the people who made the show wanted to make something of the personalities of the characters but I found them more interesting when they were out in the world doing something that might have been constructive rather than trying to work out their own problems. How many movies have we seen with people with father problems or other relationship issues? There's nothing new there but there was in the abilities that the characters had. The end result was that I was getting sick of them all towards the end of the third series and won't mind if there isn't a fourth.”

[**PM:** It would be interesting to compare the television series against the graphic novels to see if they have deviated from the originals. But you are correct, it is starting to get a bit bogged down.]

“Joseph has my sympathies for his struggles with nature. He will find, as I have, that while we tire and have less energy to expend on gardening and nature keeps on as though we aren't even there. In the end I gave up and declared that I would do no more gardening so what is done here now is done by people we pay money to. Valma would love to keep up her gardening but is also finding it increasingly challenging. I imagine that Joseph will have to give up on the allotment to give himself more time to keep up with the garden around their place which, as I recall from having seen it twenty five years ago (gosh, that long) is delightful and deserves being maintained properly.”

[**PM:** I had many plans to undertake more gardening when I retired, though mostly that involved purchasing a new property somewhere. Age has now wearied me.]

“Thanks for reminding me of the word 'mooch'. That's what life does around here these days. I will have to try getting it into my vocabulary more often.”

[**PM:** C. J. Dennis defines the word “mooch” as: “to saunter about aimlessly”. Which sounds like just my kind of activity.]

**Kim Huett:** “I will admit for the edification of Leigh Edmonds that I swill beer and watch the box at least once a week when in the mood. Of course I do devote a little time to doing other things as well.

“I have watched the first season of *Love, Death and Robots* but only enjoyed “Ice Age” and “Three Robots”, finding everything else rather dull.”

[**PM:** These anthology series are always hit-and-miss. But I, for one, am glad this is out there and that there are further seasons to watch. A quick look seems to indicate that season two has fewer episodes, and the average length of each appears to be longer. That may help mitigate some of the problems I had with the first season.]

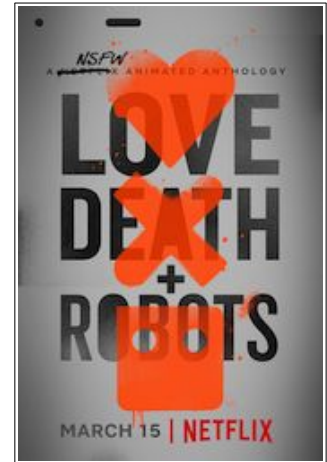
**Joseph Nicholas:** “Although you say that your account of buying your house was distributed only through ANZAPA, it felt familiar — which presumably means that the third issue of *The Wollongong Pig-Breeders' Gazette* did receive some extra-ANZAPA

distribution, as by 1993 I had long since ceased to be a member of the apa. A coincidence is that in the autumn of 1993 we ourselves had begun to look for a house to purchase, and I was finding the process very stressful. Judith, being much more placid, seemed quite unperturbed; but I remember lying awake for half the night, night after night, worrying about all the things that we needed to do to satisfy the estate agents and the mortgage companies and the solicitors, and therefore all the things that could possibly go wrong with respect to the estate agents and the mortgage companies and the solicitors. But, as Judith and I said to each other at the time, it was a lot less stressful than the auction processes you had to endure.”

[**PM:** It is quite possible that I sent copies of *WPBG 3* to a few people outside of ANZAPA, though I have no recollection now of who they might be. Good to hear it made an impression.]

“We had made it plain to the various local estate agents with whom we'd registered that our chief requirement of any house they offered was that it had to be close to public transport, because we didn't have a car and neither of us could drive — yet estate agent after estate agent would excitedly fall over themselves to offer us properties with a garage, or off-street parking, or similar. We routinely rejected such offers; and after a time they ceased to bother us, with only one agent sticking with us. We were shown a house a few streets away from the one we eventually bought, and made an offer for it; that offer was accepted, but a week later the agent called to advise us that we'd been gazumped (someone else had a made a higher offer) and we'd need to keep looking. In retrospect, it was as well that we were gazumped, as that house would have required a lot of work to bring it up to a liveable standard, starting with a new bathroom and a new kitchen (never mind double-glazing and insulation in the attic), which would have only added more stress and expense.

“A few weeks later, we were shown our current house in Jansons Road, which had previously been a buy-to-let and which had been repossessed by the bank because the owner had failed to keep up the mortgage payments; it had then been bought by a builder who was gutting and renovating it. We offered, and were accepted (in time to ask the builder not to do certain things, such as put a gas fire in the downstairs living room — at the time, it



seemed to be a standard accessory even in houses with central heating), and arranged completion (exchange of contracts) for my fortieth birthday in December 1993, thus making it the most expensive birthday present I've ever had or am ever likely to have."

**[PM:** Hopefully in my account I indicated, or at least alluded to, the fact that when an offer is made in Australia you have to put some money on the line, and then make a 10% deposit within a day or so. At that point the initial papers are signed and the house owners or agents cannot accept any other offers. That helps to alleviate gazumping. I'm sure it happens occasionally here, though we never get to hear about it. At least when purchasing. I have heard of it happening quite often in the rental market.]

"It's said that buying a house is one of the most stressful and anxiety-inducing things you can ever do, up there with getting married and coping with the death of a partner. But at least — as we said to each other at the time — we didn't have to go through the auction procedure that wrung you and Robyn out; the recommended selling price of a property is shown on the advertisement for it, and it's up to the purchaser if they wish to offer more (and presumably to offer less if they think it's worth less than is being asked for it). In our case, we agreed to the asking price; no one else was shown the property; and we moved in a couple of months later. We bought at what turned out to be a trough in UK property prices, perhaps as a consequence of the UK having been forced out of the EU's Exchange Rate Mechanism the year before and the economic downturn that followed; if the house was to be placed on the market now, it would sell for at least ten times what we paid for it 29 years ago."

**[PM:** It's interesting to note that we would need to consider a similar selling increase — approximately ten times the buying price — if we were to sell. That is going to happen at some point of course. We just don't know when. It sounds like London house prices are just as stupid and out-of-control as those in Melbourne.]

"Some people have asked whether I'll be staying in the house, as though they perhaps think that I'll want to get away from anything that reminds me of Judith's death last year. But why would I move? We set the house up for our retirement, with a conservatory on the back, stairs up to a fully floored attic that can be used as a proper storage area, and solar panels on the roof; in any case, there are thousands and thousands of books and CDs plus Judith's two big dolls houses and the flat for her two Barbie dolls which would need somewhere of comparable size if I were to move. Moving house is also said to be another of the most stressful things you can do in your life, and as I approach the end of my sixty-ninth year I see no reason to subject myself to it."

**[PM:** If it's all set up just the way you want then I'd just stay there. Once our son William moves out, in the next year or so, this house, which was too small for four adults and just right for three, will seem far too big for the two of us. But at this time we're aiming to put off any final decisions until after Robyn retires in a few years. And when that is going to be is another difficult question to answer.]

"I'm more stressed right now by the UK's continuing drought and the damage it's wreaking to the garden and allotment. (It hasn't rained in the southeast of England for over 140 days, and no rain is currently forecast until October — if we're lucky.) Some of the garden plants have definitely expired, even though I water every evening; the allotment is less badly affected, since for allotments one generally chooses plants which require less attention (and/or which take up more room, such as potatoes, broccoli, broad and runner beans, and



onions), but it looks (for example) as though this year's crop of runner beans will be a very poor one (the flowers wilt and drop off whether they've been pollinated or not). Conversely, this year's crop of peppers and chillies (which I grow in pots at home) looks as though it will be a very good one — I spent a few minutes a few evenings ago picking off the smallest buds, to persuade the plants to put their effort into ripening the myriad fruits they've already produced rather than sprouting lots of new ones.”

[**PM:** When we were living in London in the early 1990s, the UK experienced its first verified recorded temperature of over 100°F, in Gloucestershire I think. That, and a prolonged dry spell, was bad enough. In a country not equipped to cope with temperatures of that sort it makes for a pretty tough time. Being stuck in buildings with little or no air-conditioning, and having to fight your way through the Underground system with train carriages that felt like hot-boxes was not a lot of fun. Hopefully, the British authorities and builders will now start to see the requirement to ensure that their buildings are equipped with suitable air-conditioning systems. Otherwise they will just become unbearable in the near future.]

“But speaking of watering: it's coming up to 5.00pm, and I must hie me to the allotment to deploy the hose and the watering cans. The onions and the raspberries demand nothing less!”

And then, a few days later, **Joseph** again:

“May I be the 94th person (as a **Private Eye** subscriber might say) to point out an amusing typo in the first paragraph of your theatre review at the top of page 19, where you ‘missed risking’ the one-woman dramatisation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Hmm!”

[**PM:** A typo of the first order.]

“In your short comment about buying new laces for your walking boots, you say that you seem to be having trouble with your shoe sizes ‘at this time of my life’. Perhaps this is something which happens to us all as we get older: our feet seem to get flatter and broader, because I too am having trouble getting the right shoe size. It's a pair of walking shoes which I've had for a couple of years and worn happily up until this summer, but in the past few months it seems to be a bit of a squeeze to get my feet into them. I've always had a slight problem with shoe sizes, in that my left foot has always been (or has seemed to be) slightly larger than my right; now I have to really drag and squash to get the left shoe on (although once it's on it seems fine). I've tried loosening the laces, and then loosening the laces again, but the problem persists. Perhaps I need to revisit the outdoor shop where I bought them and try on the next size up. (I remember the advice I was given, by that same shop, when buying another pair of walking shoes a few years previously: always buy the next size up, to allow room for a really thick and comfortable walking sock. Good advice, I thought.)”



[**PM:** Yes, excellent advice. When I bought this new pair (see photo previous page) a few months back I did actually wear a pair of thick woollen socks at the time, for that very reason. Just between you and me, I do think that my shoe size is changing due to gravity. I suspect the amount of time I've spent on this planet has put a lot of downwards pressure on the foot, causing it to get wider. And, for some reason, gravity seemed to increase during our prolonged pandemic lockdowns. And, again oddly, it now seems to have returned to normal. Now I just have to do the same.]

"I realised when reading the extracts from my letter published in this issue than I whinged about the drought in my previous missive — so whinging about it again was, well, repetitive. But we've finally had some rain! A half-hour sprinkle yesterday evening (Monday 15 August) and three to four hours of showers this morning (Tuesday 16 August). Nothing like the downpours and thunderstorms which have been forecast for other parts of the country, and have prompted warnings of possible flooding because the ground is too dry to absorb the water; and we might get some more showers tomorrow. An ideal opportunity, if that happens, to get on with some dusting and vacuuming. (Oh yes, we *really* know how to live!)"

[**PM:** Dorothea Mackellar's line about Australia being a land of "droughts and flooding rains" comes to mind. Your possible flooding issue is exactly the same problem we face. The land becomes as dry as a bone during summer, and then rain from a sudden thunderstorm flows over it like it would over bathroom tiles. Our recent floods in NSW and Queensland have been caused by a very unusual combination of strong consecutive La Nina events in the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean Dipole being in a strong negative phase. So the increased water vapour in the air across the whole top of northern Australia (both west and east) resulted in a number of massive wet weather events hitting Australia's East Coast. The infrastructure couldn't cope and the ground was quickly saturated. As a result, Sydney had reached its annual rainfall average by about the end of April this year. And I hear that they have now had two metres of rain this year — about six times as much as us here in Melbourne. So you have our sympathies.]

**Heath Row:** "I'm sorry to hear that you and your family contracted COVID-19. I recently spent a week working in Mexico City and was curious whether I, too, would finally succumb with so much airport, airplane, hotel, conference room, and restaurant time, but I seem to have escaped unscathed. No symptoms, at least, so no testing. I'm glad that the three of you were fully vaccinated and that the illness passed without too much trouble (as reported in #25).

"Somehow, I missed the memo that you also do a podcast, despite the frequent mentions in your apazine. (Or, it wasn't important to me previously.) I was surprised by the podcast mention in 'What's Been Happening in My Life,' but then recognized the icon in 'What I've Been Talking About Lately,' so go figure. I'm not much of a podcast guy—I read faster than I listen or watch—but I'll check it out. Might be time to do an article for one of the National Fantasy Fan Federation clubzines on fannish podcasts! What other podcasts do you listen to, recommend, or consider *Two Chairs Talking* adjacent to?"

[**PM:** I'm not sure there are many podcasts like ours. At least I haven't found them. It's mostly reviews — of sf, old and new, crime and some film and TV — with the occasional interview with a local sf fan. We have been working our way through works that have been on the ballots for the Hugo Award, starting back in the 1950s. We refer to these as our

“Hugo Time Machine” episodes and we’re aiming to examine the 1969 ballot – novels as well as short fiction – in an episode in October.]

“As always, I enjoyed the book reviews and will submit them to **The N3F Review of Books**. I, too, have a copy of Larry Niven’s *All the Myriad Ways* and will shortlist it based on your review. (He was at the LASFS meeting last night, and his wife Marilyn, or the “Fuzzy Pink” of Fuzzy’s Law and other note, was one of the Patron Saints for the week.) The 1971 Harlan Ellison collection also looks excellent. I recently read an excerpt of Richard A. Lupoff’s *Space War Blues* in a 1989 issue of **Omni**; that fix-up novel combines a novella with an Ellison connection and several short stories. But mostly I’ve been reading Mexican collections of short stories available in English—inspired by my recent trip to Mexico City and hotel room research on the state of sf there—and other short stories. I love reading short stories but find it takes my attention away from books. Maybe short story collections and anthologies are the answer!”

[**PM**: I have a couple of reasons why I’m reading these old anthologies and collections. Firstly, as I’m looking at short fiction from the 1960s and will be moving on to the 1970s soon; and secondly, because I want to get those old paperbacks off my bookshelves. Read, review, and discard.]

“It’s neat that Marc Ortlieb spends time at Gilwell Park. As a Scout leader myself, I’ve received my Wood Badge beads and volunteered on the staff for several Wood Badge courses. Gilwell plays prominently in that experience, the location itself, the Wood Badge courses around the world, and the straight line to the history of Lord Baden Powell. The letter column was wide ranging and interesting, offering a mix of fannish commentary, memories, and other discussion.

“Your description of how you came to purchase your current home in #25 was interesting. Sometimes the best decisions are accidents.

“I’m glad you dipped into the September 1968 issue of **Galaxy** for Robert Silverberg’s **Nightwings**. Martin Lock recently wrote an appreciation of **Galaxy** in **Origin** #54 (August 2022) that you might enjoy reading. In the piece, he considers three issues of the magazine from between 1952-1957. I’ll attach it with this letter of comment. And with you having watched *The Umbrella Academy*, I’m curious whether you’ve read any of the comic books.”

[**PM**: **Nightwings** was read because of the podcast and I will check out the fanzine you’ve sent. I haven’t read the original graphic novels of *The Umbrella Academy*, though I should do so.]

**I also heard from: Julian Warner; Nic Farey; Murray MacLachlan** again (who is kicking himself that he missed the Melbourne season of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*); **Kim Huett** again; and **Barbara O’Sullivan**, thank you one and all.