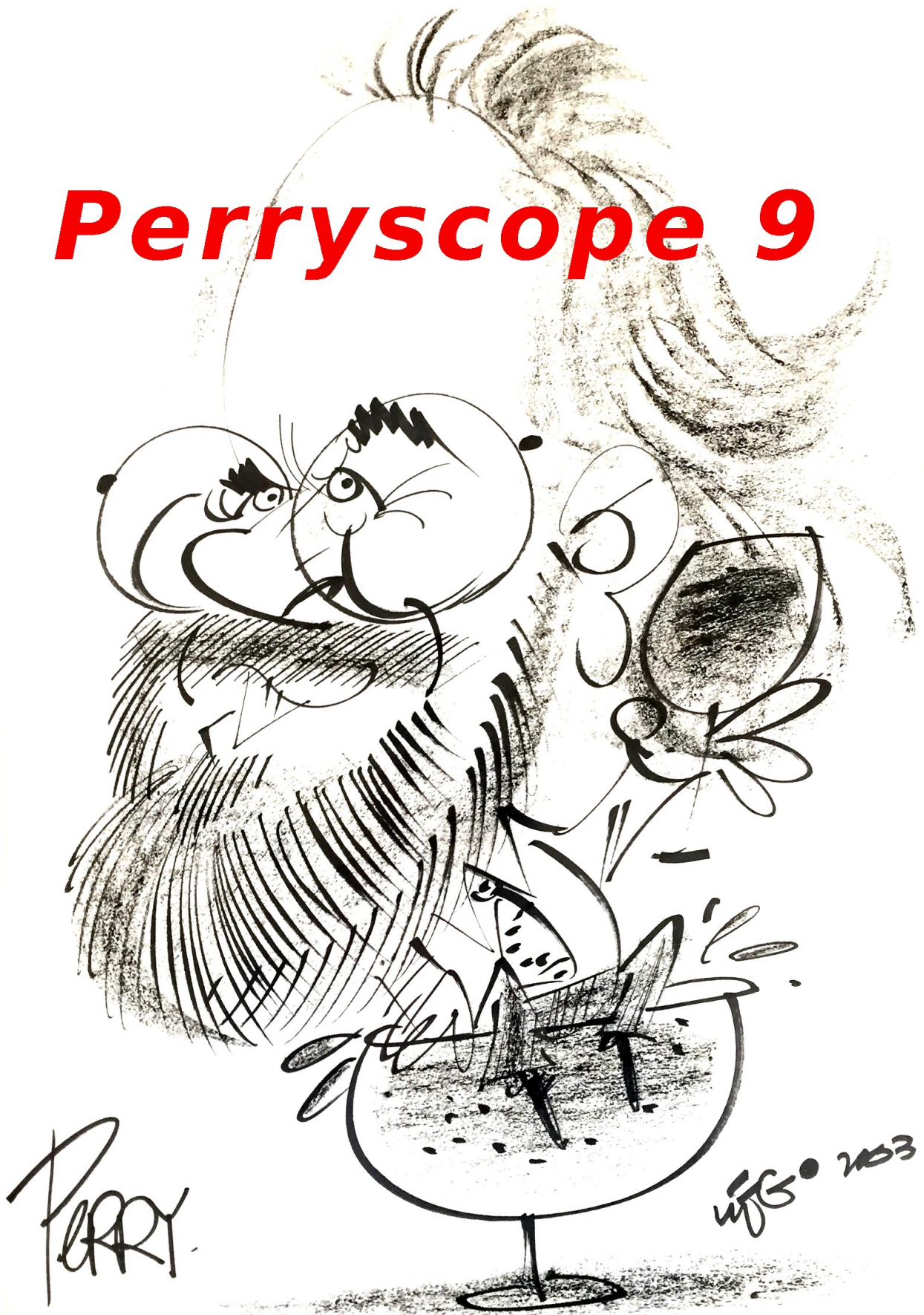


Perryscope 9



PERRYScope 9, April 2021, is an issue of the personalzine published, whenever the mood takes him, 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 whoever else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for download at efanzines.com with thanks to Bill Burns and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern.
Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover by WEG, 2003.

INTRODUCTION

Guy Lillian III, editor of *The Zine Dump* (a fanzine that reviews other fanzines), praises issues 7 and 8 of this little publication in issue 51 and notes: “#7 begins with a nifty portrait of the editor – at least, I guess it’s him – by W. H. Chong”. Yes, Guy, the bloke on the front of issue 7 is me, as are all of the others, so far.

So I suppose this is as good a time and place as any to explain my thoughts on this.

Perryscope is a personal fanzine (perzine if you like), which is all about me and what I do, what I read, talk about and see. It puts the microscope to my life, or at least bits of it that I think are worthy of public consumption – hence the title. The covers are always going to be drawings, caricatures or photos of me at various times in my life. I am lucky to have Chong as a friend. He’s continually drawing whenever he is out with people and for some reason he seems to think the shape of my head is interesting. It’s a conceit and rather egotistical to just use images of me on the cover but somewhere in my fettered little brain this all makes sense: this is my fanzine, and that’s me up front.

And, having said that, I have plans for a different cover for issue #13, but more on that when it happens.

You will notice in the colophon above that I mention that this publication is available from efanzines.com via the good graces of Bill Burns. And so is Guy’s fanzine, and Nic Farey’s *This Here...*, and Leigh Edmonds’s *Iota*, and Bruce Gillespie’s *Science Fiction Commentary*, and so many others. To say it is invaluable might well be faint praise. If you like this fanzine, or even if you don’t, go to Bill’s site and find another title. You won’t regret it, and, if you do, don’t tell me about it.

And we have an addition in this month’s colophon with a note indicating that this fanzine, as well as my travelzine, *Small Steps Across a Foreign Land*, are now also going to be hosted on FANAC.org, the ever-growing fannish history archive put together and maintained by Joe Siclari and Edie Stern, and their band of helpers, of which I consider myself one of many. I’ll probably

write up something about what I'm doing on FANAC in the coming months, when we get a bit closer to the completion of the current project.

Cover notes: this month's cover is a caricature by WEG (William Ellis Green), one of Melbourne's best-known, and best-loved cartoonists. Irwin Hirsh had hired him as part of the entertainment for Adrian, his eldest son, at his bar mitzvah where this illustration was produced. He is probably best known for his Australian Rules Football premiership posters which he drew from 1954 until his death in 2008. In 2001 he was awarded the Medal of Order of Australia for his services to art.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

Home Maintenance

On the home front it has been all go over the past year or so. First a portion (about 3 metres) of the front picket fence finally rotted through at the base at the end of 2019 and threatened to fall over onto the car, so that had to be replaced. Took the bloke about 2 days and he did an excellent job of building a new picket fence and gate. Then the painting, which always falls on me. That is probably my fault more than anyone else's. Paint is bloody expensive and you have to spread it out at about the right, consistent level across the whole of the fence rather than just slaving it on willy-nilly like some in this house have been wont to do in the past. So, braving the nagging ("Why is it taking so long?" "Because I'm not a professional and it's a bloody boring job.") I got through it with the help of some decent (ie not too hot) weather and a lot of podcasts and cricket broadcasts. Two to three hours at a stretch and I was done though.



[Photo shows the 3 meter picket fence and front gate that were replaced – post painting.]

My daughter decided to move out in August 2020 to an apartment so my son had the opportunity to move into her bigger room. But that needed a major paint job and repair on one wall. In a house that's 130 years old the old plaster tends to crack, the paint peels and a

wall can start looking pretty crappy before long, especially if there has been a bit of damp that has found its way through the wall and down the crack. So: paint stripping, cleaning out of cracks, filling those cracks, sanding, washing, water-proofing coat, and then two top coats of paint. It looks good but it took about a week. ("Why is it taking so long?" "I refer to the answer I gave previously.")

Then the railing around our back decking (which has a surface area of about 3m x 3m), had to be replaced. Rot again. This had been in for around 25 years and had come to the end of its life. More painting – two coats this time, three different colours – still one coat to finish (cough).

The back screen door had always been a bone of contention for us. Flimsy fly screen with a couple of tears, light-weight aluminium frame and unlockable, it needed replacing.

Then it was decided that we needed to replace the north side fence. The neighbours had planted some sort of climbing rose on their side a long time ago and it was pushing the whole thing over. But rather than get into a massive argument about whose fault it was we just paid our half. That wasn't too bad but the workmen spent the bulk of their time working on our side of the fence (due mainly to the placement of the uprights) so the garden was totally ruined. It was the wrong time of year to plant anything – way too hot – so I just ordered a load of mulch and threw that around to cover the mess. As it happens it has been a rather cool Summer after a wet Spring so some of the plants that survived underneath the mulch have started to re-emerge. More planting will be required in early Spring later this year but we are starting to see some of the jasmine come back which is a good thing.



[Photo shows the 3 meter by 3 metre back decking area (unoiled); screen door (not yet replaced) middle left; fence railing (with only one coat of paint); and side fence (middle top) nearly ready to topple over.]

Then the back decking itself started to get a bit spongy in places. Again it has been in for 25 years and had reached the end of its life. We got a quote, and they reckoned they might be able to utilise the existing supports and decking boards. They arrived, took off the decking, and the original quote was blown out of the water. Suffice it to say that the whole of the decking needed to be replaced – supports, and decking boards all rotted through. And instead of one

days' work it stretched to three. There wasn't anything else for it really. The decking was unusable and someone was bound to crash through it and injure themselves at some point. Two coats of decking oil required.

And now we need the southern fence (or part of it) replaced. It was actually one of the first things we thought about doing 18 months ago but the other bits and pieces that needed doing took precedence. I've asked for two quotes now: one from the northern fence guys, and one from the decking guys, and neither has bothered. I suspect they think it too small. Robyn wants the whole southern fence replaced but that would require us to negotiate with the body corporate for the apartment block next door. Not a prospect I look forward to in any way.

After that, a bit of painting on the western end of the house (which cops the brunt of the weather – rain and sun) and then some painting inside. There is a sash-window which needs its cords replaced, a number of plaster cracks that I suppose I could fix but probably won't until we come to sell. I need to fix some of the other windows which were painted shut a few years back and there's a brick step, from one level of the back yard down to the next, that needs digging out and re-setting. You work on one thing and then something else pops up.

Maintenance on old houses is a never-ending job. I just thought I was supposed to be putting my feet up when I retired.



Publishing Activities

April sees another burst of fannish publishing activity from me. Apart from this issue of *Perryscope* I have another set of ANZAPA mailing comments going out in *Little Blue Number 4*, and the publication of the first issue of *The Alien Review*. This, in fannish parlance, can be described as a sercon (serious constructive criticism) genzine (a fanzine with general distribution). It came about from a desire, in retirement, to start to write longer pieces than the capsule or single book reviews I include here. I had tried to place one or two of those pieces elsewhere but they didn't find a home, so I just decided to start one of my own.

I've been working on this for about the past five months with the invaluable help of David Grigg. If I provide the written material he will format the interior. Which is great for me as that is certainly not my strong point. I'm not sure that writing long critical essays is either, but that's a point for another discussion.

Luckily enough I have been supported by a number of friends who agreed to write some small pieces for me, and by another long-term friend who allowed me to reprint an article by him from 1971. I thank them one and all.

As I write this the final text is not yet complete – there appears to be this beardy bloke in Hawthorn who is taking a while to finish his promised material – though the pieces I do have on hand fit together very well.

I'm hoping that the publishing schedule for this will be quarterly, and it will be solely published as a pdf online. If you want to get a copy then it will be available from the usual sites: efanazines.com as facilitated by Bill Bowers, and FANAC.org as organised by Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Failing that you can send me an email and request a copy.

It's always a little daunting putting a new publication out into the world. I can only trust that it will start out slowly and find its own place in its own time. I can't ask for more than that.



WHAT I'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT LATELY

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

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 47: (2 March 2021) *Just a couple of volunteers*

This week we talk about a book (THE WOMEN IN BLACK) and two seasons of THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY, before moving onto a chat about the volunteer work we do, David with Standard Ebooks and me with Trove and Austlit. And then David interviews Alex Cabal, the founder of Standard Ebooks.



Episode 49: (16 March 2021) *We're not the judges*

After mentioning the upcoming Nebula award shortlist release and the announcement that NASA has named the new Mars Lander landing spot after Octavia E. Butler, David and I discuss what we've been reading lately. I talk about a website blog I've been using and enjoying and then a couple of books. David keeps it real and stays with the printed word.

Episode 50: (30 March 2021) *Delving down under*

This week I discuss the recent Nebula Award Best Novel ballot, and then we talk about Australian books we've read recently. David concentrates on classics (*Such is Life*, *Robbery Under Arms* and *The Black Opal*) that he has been working on for Standard Ebooks, and I just rabbit on about *The Watch Tower*, *Dispersion* and *Falling Towards England*.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at www.rightword.com.au or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

2021 targets met this month: none, still working on it

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – nvla – novella; Aust – Australian; Anth – anthology; Clarke – Arthur C. Clarke Award winner; BSFA – BSFA Award winner.

March 2021 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>Ring Shout</i>	P. Djeli Clark	Fantasy	Mar 6	e	3.8	2020	nvla
<i>Consolation</i>	Garry Disher	Crime	Mar 8		4.3	2020	Aust
<i>The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction 15th Series</i>	ed Edward L. Ferman	SF/F	Mar 18	e	3.4	1969	Anth
<i>The Old Drift</i>	Namwali Serpell	SF	Mar 23	e	2.9	2019	Clarke
<i>Falling Towards England</i>	Clive James	Non-fic	Mar 25		4.0	1985	Aust
<i>11th Annual Edition : The Year's Best S-F</i>	ed Judith Merril	SF	Mar 31	e	3.4	1966	Anth
<i>Children of Ruin</i>	Adrian Tchaikovsky	SF	Mar 31	e		2019	BSFA

Books read in the month: 7

Yearly total to end of month: 24

March was more of a struggle than I had hoped for. Certain books seemed to dominate and take some time to finish. The Serpell and Tchaikovsky books totalled around 1000 pages.

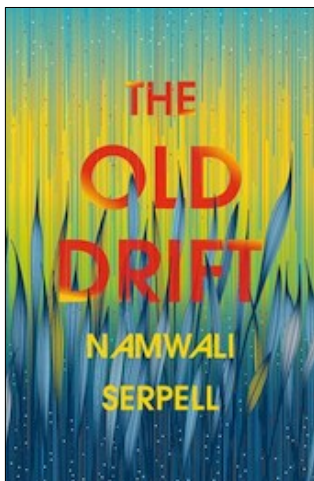
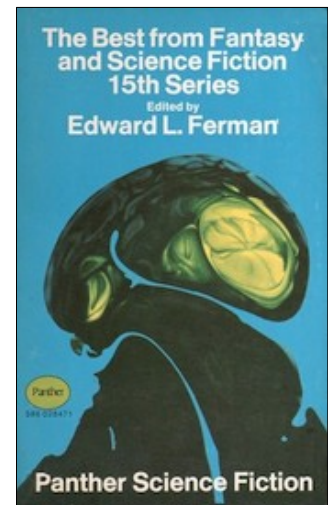
Notes:

Ring Shout (2020) – In an alternate American South the release of D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* is a means by which white men can summon demons. These are Ku Kluxes, pale, pointy-headed creatures that live alongside whites feeding off their racial hate, infecting them and turning Klan members into Ku Kluxes. Fighting these demons is Maryse Boudreaux, who has a magical sword, the sharpshooter Sadie and the explosives expert Chef. Aiding Maryse in her quest to destroy the demons are the Aunties, a group of supernatural beings who appear to come from the same place as the Ku Kluxes and who can only offer moral support and advice. A rich and complicated story that shows the hate on all sides of the racial divide. The underlying plot is familiar though the setting is new and innovative. I suspect it will do very well come awards season. (Late note: it has received a Nebula Award nomination for Best Novella for 2020.) R: 3.8/5.0



Consolation (2020) – see major review later in this issue.

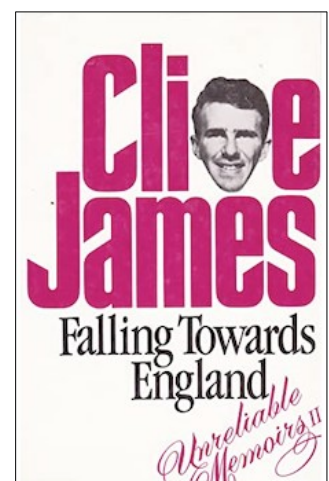
The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction 15th Series (1969) – Continuing my investigation of the short sf (ie anything shorter than novel length) from 1965 is this anthology of stories from the pages of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* – 3 novelettes and 11 short stories. Excellent stories from Henderson, Hodgins, Lafferty, Leiber, Moore, Tilley and Zelazny, which results in a satisfactory package. Some duds from some big names, as might be expected, though most of the lesser stories are at least interesting. Not a lot of “hard sf” in the contents and it appears that the magazine was attempting to delineate itself from *Analog* and *Galaxy* in this period. But the magazine ranked higher in story recommendations in 1965 than any other. These recommendations were taken from award nominations, contemporaneous fanzines reviews and the *Galactic Journey* blog. (Extra note – the cover here reminds me a bit of the creature from *Alien*.) R: 3.4/5.0



The Old Drift (2019) – Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2020. This is an attempt at an inter-generational novel set in Zambia that, for this reader, didn't come off. More a set of slightly inter-connected novellas rather than a novel it follows the fortunes of three families from 1903 to 2023. Each of the novellas are interesting in themselves but it is difficult to see the connections between them and, with a distinct lack of dramatic tension, hard to get a view of the overall thrust of the novel. The book is split into three main sections, each with three chapters dedicated to the grandmothers, the children and to the grandchildren. The novel is ambitious in scope, rather too ambitious, as it includes a lot of excellent writing and a lot of workmanlike prose that just seems to be filling in background to no major effect. I found this a very difficult book to get into and finish. R: 2.9/5.0

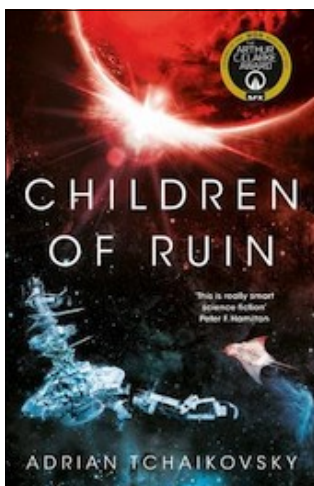
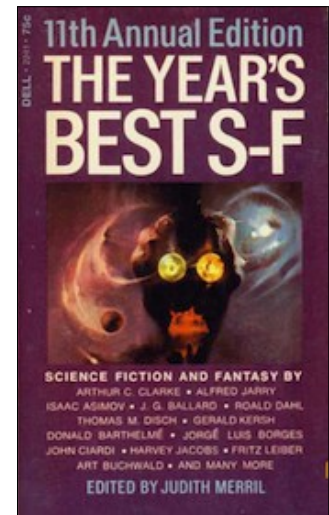
Falling Towards England (1985) – Volume 2 of the author's *Unreliable Memoirs*.

I reviewed *Unreliable Memoirs*, the first volume of James's autobiography, in *Perryscope 4*. This sequel is a straight continuation from that with James arriving in Southampton after his trip by boat from Sydney, woefully unprepared for the English weather, or anything else for that matter. It follows his adventures in and around London from his arrival until he finally gets to head towards Cambridge and a life of study. In the two years between he eats badly, chases a lot of women, cadges a vast quantity of cigarettes, drinks too much, can't hold down a job, has his teeth fixed, and generally scrounges a living by being an unrepentant male oaf. You can see that James looks on his younger self with some dismay, being a lazy,



drunken layabout, but has a lot of fun sending him up. As in the first volume you can attempt to identify some famous Australians (Bruce Beresford is easy, and that might have been Brett Whitely and Barry Humphries lurking in the back ground). Not quite as funny as the first volume – which would have been extremely difficult – though still worth reading. R: 4.0/5.0

11th Annual Edition : The Year's Best S-F (1966) – Yet another in a series of anthologies compiling the “best” short sf from 1965. Merril draws her contents from a much wider field than the Wollheim-Carr book, including *Mademoiselle*, *Playboy*, *The New Yorker*, and *Rogue* as well as the usual UK and US prozines. Despite all of these extra sources of material only one story included is by a woman. There are a few stories here that appear to be originals and at least 5 that were originally published in years other than 1965. There are several poems, two novelettes with the rest short stories. This collection doesn't include the Ellison or any Zelazny works but does have Ballard, Rome, Saxton and Masson. I liked about half the stories here, which gives it a higher percentage than the Wollheim-Carr from last month. R: 3.4/5.0



Children of Ruin (2019) – Winner of the 2020 BSFA Award for Best Novel.

This is the second novel in the author's Children of Time series, following **Children of Time** (2015), which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award. You will need to have read the first book to get the most from this one. In the distant future Earth has sent out terraforming ships to the stars, and one found a planet teeming with life. Originally they believe it is rather primitive until an unfortunate accident disproves that thought. Thousands of years later the human/arachnid partnership from the first novel arrives at the new system only to encounter a well-developed space-based society of octopi, descendants of an uplift experiment. Long, at times very slow, this novel is a further examination by the author of variations of high-functioning species intelligence that is not based on the old sf trope of humanoid

body shapes, among other things. Intriguing, but long. R:3.9/5.0

Notes on other short fiction:

Rogue Dragon– Avram Davidson (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* July 1965) Nominated for a 1966 Nebula Award for Best Novella.

In the far-distant future Earth is now a game reserve, after having been abandoned by Man and then taken over by an alien race, the Kar-che. They built castles and imported dragons to the Earth. Now, centuries after their departure, the main form of game hunting is for those adult dragons. Jon-Joras is an Outworlder who is organising a dragon hunt for his King, when a hunt to kill a Rogue Dragon turns nasty and he is the only survivor. A series of adventures ensues in which he shows his fighting capabilities and his luck, and he is eventually brought back into

safety. Standard run-of-the mill story with little to make it stand out. Seems to hark back to 1950s science fantasy rather than looking forward towards the newer sf styles. R: 3.2/5.0

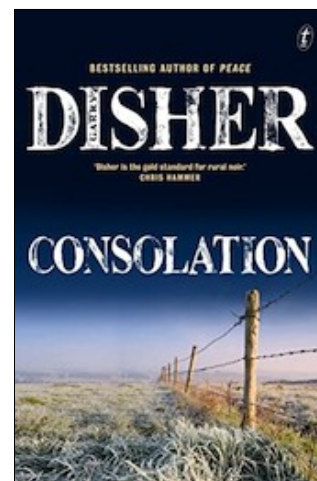
REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

Consolation (2020) by Garry Disher

Genre: Crime

With the passing of Peter Temple and Peter Corris in the past few years, Garry Disher and Kerry Greenwood can now be seen as the doyens of Australian crime fiction. If this novel is anything to go by, being a “doyen” has not hindered Disher in any way.

The Paul Hirschhausen books, of which this is the third following **Bitter Wash Road** (2013) and **Peace** (2019), is the third major series from Disher. From 1991 to 2018 he wrote nine novels in his Wyatt series, about a hard-man thief, and from 1999 to 2016 he published seven Challis and Destry novels set in and around the Victorian Mornington Peninsular. All are worth pursuing.



With his novels featuring Constable Paul Hirschhausen Disher has returned to his South Australian birthplace, setting the books in the eastern part of the mid-North of that state, in the fictional town of Tiverton. Hirschhausen (or “Hirsch” for short) is the only police officer in town and, as such, has to deal with all manner of crimes policing, small and large. He was originally a rising detective in a CIB unit in Adelaide until he discovered the widespread corruption there, reported it to his superiors, was “demoted” from detective to constable and banished to his current situation for his trouble. Disher dwells more on Hirsch’s fall from grace in the first two novels, and, while it sits in the background, it is barely mentioned here. It informs the character’s backstory but isn’t essential to the enjoyment of this work.

Disher certainly likes to pile the police work onto Hirsch whenever he can. At various points in this book the policeman has to investigate a “snowdropper” (someone who steals clothing from washing lines) in town; deal with his discovery of an imprisoned, malnourished young girl; an angry parent at the school threatening teachers; a shooting of a government official; a roving group of Irish roofers ripping people off for repair work; a number of older residents having their life savings embezzled; and various people complaining to him about unpaid bills by the local stock and station agent. Added to that his personal life is in focus as a teacher at the local school appears to have taken a shine to him and may well now be stalking him in person and by phone.

Needless to say a number of these threads are related, and not in a flimsy, haphazard way. Disher is a master of plot, as well as character and locale. He is basically the full package, at the top of his form, and a delight to read. **Consolation** hardly pauses for breath throughout and confirms Disher as “the gold standard for rural noir” as quoted by Chris Hammer on the front cover. Highly recommended. Rating 4.3/5.0

WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

Television

Behind Her Eyes (Mini-series – 6 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama Thriller

A psychological thriller based on the novel of the same name by Sarah Pinborough. Louise is a young woman working as a secretary in a psychologists' office in London. She meets a man, David, in a bar one night and while there is a sense of mutual attraction nothing happens. The next day she discovers that David is her new boss. A sexual relationship starts between them and then Louise becomes friends with David's wife, Adele, who is new to the area and looking for friendship. But there is something sinister in the David-Adele marriage and Louise gets dragged in deeper and deeper until it threatens her whole life. This starts off well, good setup, well-acted, but is let down by a poor script that jumps headlong into the supernatural in the last two episodes. I was disappointed by the stitched up ending which only occurs because a one character does something unbelievable and stupid. R: 2.8/5.0



Ugly Delicious (Season 2 – 4 episodes) (2020)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Documentary Food

A reduced number of episodes for season 2 due to the corona virus in 2020. Dave's life has taken a major change in that he is now a father. So he explores how that is going to impact his cooking career, but he still gets out to look at Indian food, steak, and kebabs – his new life doesn't seem too bad after all. He is the same as he was in season 1, though with a little more life under his belt, as curious and willing to learn as he was before, and as much fun to watch. Maybe not to the standard of the first season due to its reduced episode count but still with enough to make this one of the better

food documentary series around. R: 4.1/5.0

Call My Agent (Season 2 – 6 episodes) (2016) [Original title: *Dix pour Cent*]

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy Drama

Season 2 takes a darker path than the first with various relationships springing up in the office. The ASK agency is sold to a tech entrepreneur who intends to shake things up a bit; Matthias is having marriage, daughter and secretary problems; the parade of French



actors continues with Juliette Binoche and Christopher Lambert putting in appearances, among others; Camille is holding things together, mostly; Hervé is being a nuisance; Gabriel is trying not to lose his girlfriend to a philandering director; Arlette is the same old Arlette; and Andréa's love-life seems to be as out of control as it was in the first season, maybe more so. This comes across as a soap opera but it is much more than that. Funny and dramatic it is a wonderful combination of writing, acting and direction. I note that someone in the UK is working on an English language version now. See this French series first. Highly recommended. R: 4.3/5.0

Collateral (Mini-series – 4 episodes) (2018)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama Crime

A pizza delivery man is murdered on a London street just after making a delivery. This mini-series follows the lives of those involved: the young Vietnamese woman who witnessed the murder, and her female Anglican priest partner; the young woman who allocated the delivery to the victim; the woman who had ordered the pizza and her ex-husband, a Labour MP; the police who are charged with solving the crime; and the sisters of the victim. This mini-series attempts to give an overview of current British society and its problems involving drug use, religion, illegal and legal immigration, and party politics in Parliament. The secondary characters seem to be more engaging as the major ones tend to walk through their roles. The series has an impressive cast (Carey Mulligan, Billie Piper, John Simm) and writer (David Hare) but it lacks a certain spark that might have lifted it above the so-so. R: 3.2/5.0



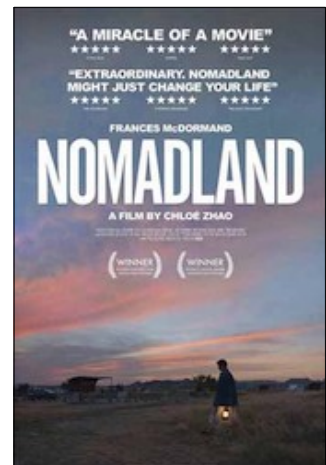
Film

Nomadland (2020)

Platform: In the cinema

Genre: Drama

I've sometimes thought that I would be quite happy to watch Frances McDormand do her laundry on screen. After seeing *Nomadland* I can safely say that wish is now fulfilled. In addition I got to see her cleaning her teeth, folding her laundry, taking a dump, floating naked in a creek and doing lots of driving. It was wonderful. McDormand plays Fern, a woman who has lost her husband to cancer and her town to the closure of the local US Gypsum plant. She now roams the mid-west of the US in a van, taking piece work where she can get it and interacting with others like her on the road. The film follows her life over the course of a year, from one seasonal Amazon contract to the next, as she almost re-connects with her sister and her family, and almost falls into a relationship with Dave (David Strathairn). This film has been nominated for 6 Academy Awards and I can see why. My 25 year-old former self might well have hated this film, but this 65-year-old loved it. R: 4.7/5.0



Mank (2020)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

Over-written, over-blown and over done are three terms that come to mind after watching this. The film concerns the writing of the screenplay of Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane* by Herman J.

Mankiewicz (the "Mank" of this film's title), played by Gary Oldman. I

do have to admit that the film starts well as Mank, swathed in plaster up to the hip after a car accident, is ensconced in a country house and

given 90 (Welles: "no, make that 60") days to write the screenplay.

The interplay between him and his helpers and doctor promises

something interesting but the story of how he got there, told in a

series of flashbacks, starts to become repetitive with a lot of extraneous scenes and lots of episodes of him drinking and being a

shit to everyone who can't appreciate his genius. Films about alcoholics tend towards the

tedious and this one is no exception. There are some good scenes in it mixed with some that

have Mank declaiming in perfectly modulated sentences and paragraphs that come across as pre-arranged lectures. It has been nominated for Best Film at this year's Oscars and you can

see why, but frankly I wouldn't recommend it unless you have a liking for the original Welles film or just want to see all the films on the ballot. R: 2.8/5.0



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Joe Siclari: “..your "Hats" grabbed my notice. I have a primary travel hat. It's a Tilly. Edie got it for me a long time ago and it has survived a variety of wet and messy experiences. I have a terrible history with hats. I break them or I lose them or get them so dirty the dog won't chew on them. So she got me the Tilly. It has a wide brim and is mostly still waterproof after many years. It has an excellent string that holds it to my big head even in high winds. But the real reason she got it for me was in a testimonial ad — an animal handler had it eaten by an elephant and when it came out, he washed it and it was perfectly usable again. Three times! She figured, I couldn't ruin it if it could take that. So far, she's right — so I keep trying. No elephants though.”

[**PM:** Errrrck. Luckily enough the Akubra is a tad too big for any of that. If it made its way through an elephant, or any other animal for that matter, I'd be quite happy to put it out to pasture – the hat that is.]

John Hertz: “Your noting **Come Tumbling Down** (McGuire) as variations on the Portal Fantasy reminds me of “Green Magic” (Vance, 1963) — which, incidentally, I've long thought one of his best, hard to determine as that is. It also reminds me to get to an Internet-access machine long enough to read *Tomorrow's Songs Today* (McGath). [**PM:** This last is a history of filk music. I don't know that book and I'm also unfamiliar with the Jack Vance story John notes. I have

mentioned in the past that there are a lot of blind spots in my sf reading. Vance is one of them. Something I need to remedy.]

“Speaking of getting at things, I believe I have, but if so can’t easily reach, the Wollheim-Carr **World’s Best SF 2nd Series** (1966). I have no prozine collection, and Milt Stevens is dead, so I suppose I must wait for public libraries to re-open in order to compare Budrys’ and Schuyler Miller’s reviews in *Galaxy* and *Analog*. Another hard thing is considering “Becalmed in Hell” (Niven), “In Our Block” (Lafferty), or “The Good New Days” dull or (aieee) pedestrian, as you deem. However, self-knowledge is a consummation devoutly to be wished: at least I do know I’d better not speaking too firmly without re-reading.”

[**PM:** In the capsule review you mention of this anthology (and I do need to emphasise the fact it is a capsule review, and hence, by design meant to be short and pithy), the use of the words “dull” and “pedestrian” are designed to give an impression of the book as a whole. The three stories I noted by Masson, Simak and Vinge are, in my view, better than the Niven, Lafferty and Leiber stories you pick. That is not to say that I did not like the Niven and Lafferty entries, I did, but would not choose them for a Hugo Short Story category for that year, if one existed. I’m currently reading through a great swathe of short stories, novelettes and novellas from 1965 with the aim of writing an essay about the Short Sf of 1965 for the second issue of *The Alien Review* which is due for publication in July. Hopefully my views will become clearer there. And also, possibly, why I should think about putting myself through this work.]

“Won’t you say ‘alternative’ instead of joining the other lemmings in misuse of ‘alternate’?” [**PM:** Probably not.]

I also heard from: Nic Farey; Jerry Kaufman; Werner Koopman (who thanked me for my Icelandic trip report); **Leigh Edmonds; John Harvey; Justin Ackroyd** (who noted that he probably saved my life with the gift of the hat); **Garth Spencer;** and **Jack Herman** (who asked for, and then acknowledged receipt of, my Iceland trip report). Thank you one and all.

