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Perry  
Middlemiss





**PERRYScope 19**, February 2022, is an issue of the personalzine published monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: [perry@middlemiss.org](mailto:perry@middlemiss.org)  
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and then anyone else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for trade or download at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) with thanks to Bill Burns, and FANAC.org with thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.  
Cover drawing by Will Middlemiss, circa 2007-2009.

### INTRODUCTION

When I left off last month I was in COVID-induced isolation awaiting a PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test result. Thankfully the results arrived the next day (January 1) and turned out to be negative for all of us.

My son had been able to get his hands on a few RAT (Rapid Antigen Test) kits from someone at his work and they had returned a negative result as well, late on December 31. But according to the then-current rules we were required to self-isolate until our PCR results became available. Oddly enough, the person who might have passed on the virus to us, and who had tested positive, was able to leave their quarantine on the day our results came through.

Our results took seven days from test to notification, and it has now been revealed that the pathology labs analysing the tests have indicated that the swabs become nonviable after seven days. We just made it by that measure. With the rapid spread of the Omicron variant throughout Australia the PCR testing infrastructure is breaking down. And with no RAT kits available, people employed in the food supply chains are having to isolate, after being identified as a close COVID contact, with no means of determining if that isolation is really necessary. As a result shop shelves are rather bare. It's a total mess.

[Postscript: as I write I'm in New South Wales on a driving holiday, to make up for the New Zealand holiday we had to cancel a few months back. Yesterday my wife and I got pinged for being a casual contact of a COVID case. Seems we visited a winery at the same time as someone else who has since tested positive. This alert came about due to our use of the check-in QR codes. I doubt we'll have any problems though. The area where we were sitting was rather open and had a lot of good air-flow, and everyone was seated a reasonable distance apart. We've never been pinged like this before. Looks like we'll cover all bases before this thing is over. Just hoping the big one, ie an infection, stays away.]

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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'S HAPPENING IN MY LIFE

### MY READING IN 2021

For me, 2021 didn't turn out to be as good a reading year as 2020. I think the continual in-and-out of lockdowns and the lack of any sort of coherent social interaction led to feelings of angst and ennui. From what I've been reading and from what I've heard, it seems a lot of people were in the same boat.

I wasn't affected so much in 2020 because it was the first year of my retirement, and I could stay home and read as much as I wanted. And I did. But by the time I got to 2021 I was getting a little over that. I wanted to get out and do things with all this "spare time" I had on my hands, and couldn't.

I had set myself a target of 108 books during 2021, up from 102 the year before. That seemed perfectly reasonable, as I'd easily achieved that number each year from 2018 to 2020, and a simple upward progression was an ambition that appeared reasonable. But I struggled to 100 in the year, hitting that mark only on the second last day of December.

That number may seem a lot to most people, though not to me. Two books a week seems like a good rate, especially if you throw in some shorter novellas among the few five or six hundred page "bricks" that happen along.

I've discussed my reading habits here before so I won't bore you with that saga again. I struggled along and now think that leaving my target at 100-104 each year is the best option for me.

In 2021 I spread my reading across most genres, hitting about half of my targets. The books I read in that year fell into the following categories:

Literary	11
Science Fiction	35
Fantasy	18
Sf/Fantasy combined	3
Horror	1
Crime	18
Thriller/Spy	5
Non-Fiction	9

Of these I discussed 53 on the podcast, and 18 were books that I had read previously. Interestingly enough, I read a higher percentage of books on paper in 2021 than I did in 2020. Usually I aim for about a 50-50 split for books on paper or in e-book form. That was certainly the mark I achieved in 2020. In this past year the rate has shifted to 67-33 on the paper side. I suspect this is because I am making more of a conscious effort to read the books that have been sitting on my shelves for twenty, thirty, and sometimes forty years without being read. And a lot of those were old science fiction and crime novels I'd been meaning to get to, but never actually making it. I suspect this trend will continue in the

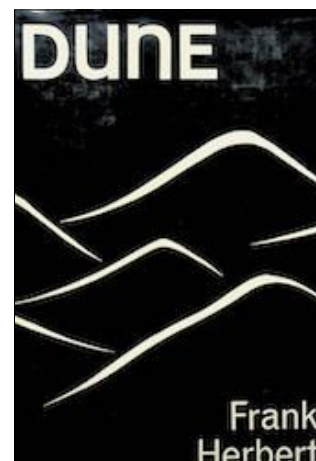
next few years as there are still large numbers of books, mostly paperbacks, staring at me accusingly from the shelves. I won't be shying away from that task. There is a lot of good stuff there waiting to be re-discovered.

### BEST BOOKS OF 2021

#### SF

Novels read: 19

- |   |                                                        |     |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <i>Flowers for Algernon</i> by Daniel Keyes (1966)     | 4.3 |
| 4 | <i>The Ballad of Beta-2</i> by Samuel R. Delany (1965) | 4.3 |
| 3 | <i>Babel-17</i> by Samuel R. Delany (1966)             | 4.3 |
| 2 | <i>The Memory Police</i> by Yoko Ogawa (2019)          | 4.4 |
| 1 | <i>Dune</i> by Frank Herbert (1966)                    | 4.5 |



Notes:

I read *Dune* this year for a couple of reasons: David and I were discussing on the podcast as part of our Hugo Time Machine episode for the awards of 1967; and because of the new film adaptation by Denis Villeneuve that was scheduled for later in the year. I was pleasantly surprised by how well it held up after all these years. It must have been at least twenty years since I read it last and, while some of the scenes were familiar, there was a lot to be gained from this re-reading. Including the fact that Herbert totally gives away the whole plot of the book in the second chapter. I don't know why I had forgotten that. The preponderance of books from 1965 and 1966 is also due to the required reading for the podcast. Some people might assume that because this reading is "required", it is also something of a burden. As you can infer from the rankings here, that was far from the case.

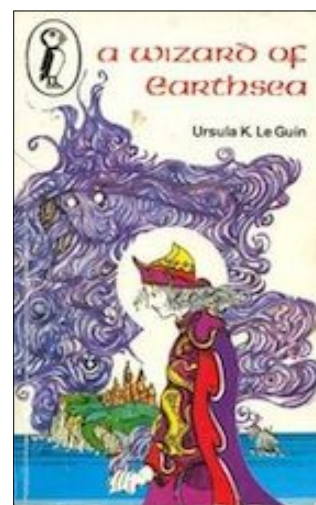
Honorable Mentions:

*The Player of Games* by Iain M. Banks (1988) 4.2  
*Network Effect* by Martha Wells (2020) 4.2

#### Fantasy

Novels read: 8

- |   |                                                         |     |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <i>The Raven Tower</i> by Ann Leckie (2020)             | 3.8 |
| 4 | <i>Black Sun</i> by Rebecca Roanhorse (2020)            | 4.0 |
| 3 | <i>The Tombs of Atuan</i> by Ursula K. Le Guin (1970)   | 4.5 |
| 2 | <i>The Farthest Shore</i> by Ursula K. Le Guin (1972)   | 4.8 |
| 1 | <i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i> by Ursula K. Le Guin (1968) | 4.8 |



Notes:

Somewhat dominated this year by the Le Guin original trilogy Earthsea trilogy. I suspect that any year in which I read these would return exactly the same results. It is interesting, also, that all entries here are by women.

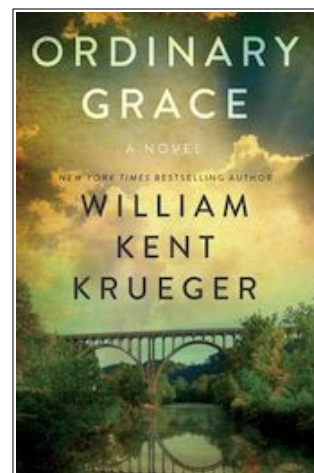
Honorable Mentions:

***Queen of the Conquered*** by Kacen Callender (2019) 3.8

### Crime/Thriller/Spy

Novels read: 22

- |   |                                                                |     |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b><i>Billy Summers</i></b> by Stephen King (2021)             | 4.3 |
| 4 | <b><i>Consolation</i></b> by Garry Disher (2020)               | 4.3 |
| 3 | <b><i>The Wife and the Widow</i></b> by Christian White (2019) | 4.3 |
| 2 | <b><i>Crossing the Lines</i></b> by Sulari Gentill (2017)      | 4.5 |
| 1 | <b><i>Ordinary Grace</i></b> by William Kent Kreuger (2013)    | 4.5 |



Notes:

Three Australian novels on that list (Disher, White and Gentill) and all of them winners of the Ned Kelly Award for Best Novel. Which again goes to point out how good an indicator that award really is. The Kreuger was the stand-out, and, in hindsight, I probably should have bumped it by a decimal point or two. But the rating is as I gave it at the time of reading so it stays.

I exceeded my initial year's targets here, though I could do with a couple more that fit into the thriller or spy sub-genres.

Honorable Mentions:

- The Honjin Murders*** by Seishi Yokomizo (1946) 4.2  
***A Song for the Dark Times*** by Ian Rankin (2020) 4.2  
***Get Shorty*** by Elmore Leonard (1990) 4.2

### Literary

Novels read: 11

- |   |                                                           |     |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b><i>The Devil's Advocate</i></b> by Morris West (1959)  | 4.3 |
| 4 | <b><i>The Watchtower</i></b> by Elizabeth Harrower (1966) | 4.3 |
| 3 | <b><i>The Labyrinth</i></b> by Amanda Lohrey (2020)       | 4.3 |
| 2 | <b><i>First Love</i></b> by Turgenev (1860)               | 4.4 |
| 1 | <b><i>The Yield</i></b> by Tara June Winch (2019)         | 4.4 |



Notes:

By "Literary" here I basically mean anything non-genre. Again we have Australian works dominating., with 4 of the 5 entries. This is another category where I fell short of my initial target.

Honorable Mentions:

None, everything dropped away markedly after this top five.



## Novella

Novellas read: 16

- |   |                                                            |     |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b>Seven of Infinities</b> by Alliette de Bodard (2020)    | 4.1 |
| 4 | <b>Mapping the Interior</b> by Stephen Graham Jones (2017) | 4.1 |
| 3 | <b>The Empress of Salt and Fortune</b> by Nghi Vo (2020)   | 4.1 |
| 2 | <b>The Last Castle</b> by Jack Vance (1966)                | 4.3 |
| 1 | <b>Behold the Man</b> by Michael Moorcock (1966)           | 4.5 |

Notes:

The older novellas, read for the podcast, tended to dominate this year. I was pleased, however, to see that my pick for the 2021 Hugo Award (**The Empress of Salt and Fortune**) actually won.

Honorable Mentions:

**Riot Baby** by Tocho Onyebuchi (2020) 4.1

## Collection/Anthology

Books read: 17

- |   |                                                                          |     |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b>Neutron Star</b> by Larry Niven (1968)                                | 3.6 |
| 4 | <b>Nebula Award Stories 1</b> ed Damon Knight (1966)                     | 3.8 |
| 3 | <b>Nebula Award Stories 2</b> ed Brian W. Aldiss & Harry Harrison (1967) | 3.8 |
| 2 | <b>Nebula Award Stories 3</b> ed Roger Zelazny (1968)                    | 4.0 |
| 1 | <b>The Book of Dragons</b> ed Jonathan Strahan (2020)                    | 4.0 |

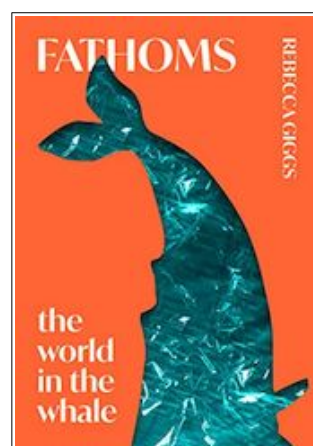
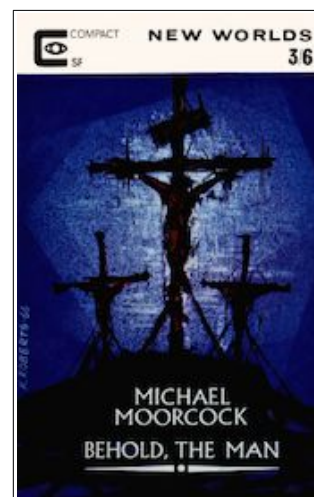
Notes:

Most of the anthologies read this year were for the podcast and our discussions regarding the Hugo winners. The Nebula Award story anthologies offered a quick and easy way to read the other award winners in the relevant years. I rate them all highly.

## Non-Fiction

Books read: 9

- |   |                                                                |     |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b>Beeswing</b> by Richard Thompson (2021)                     | 3.7 |
| 4 | <b>Falling Towards England</b> by Clive James (1985)           | 4.0 |
| 3 | <b>The Premonition</b> by Michael Lewis (2021)                 | 4.4 |
| 2 | <b>A Cook's Tour</b> by Anthony Bourdain (2001)                | 4.5 |
| 1 | <b>Fathoms: the world in the whale</b> by Rebecca Gibbs (2020) | 4.5 |



### Notes:

The Gibbs was the standout for me this year, closely followed by Bourdain's book about his search for the perfect meal; the man could really write.

### Overall

Books read: 100

- |   |                                                                       |     |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5 | <b><i>Crossing the Lines</i></b> by Sulari Gentill (2017)             | 4.5 |
| 4 | <b><i>A Cook's Tour</i></b> by Anthony Bourdain (2001)                | 4.5 |
| 3 | <b><i>Ordinary Grace</i></b> by William Kent Kreuger (2013)           | 4.5 |
| 2 | <b><i>Fathoms: the world in the whale</i></b> by Rebecca Gibbs (2020) | 4.5 |
| 1 | <b><i>The Earthsea Trilogy</i></b> by Ursula K. Le Guin (1968-1974)   | 4.8 |

### Notes:

I've cheated somewhat here by putting all three Earthsea novels by Le Guin into the one entry, but, what the hell, my game, my rules. It is, and always has been, one of my favourite set of books ever.

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**Cover notes:** this issue's cover was drawn by my son William back when he was about 7 or 8. I regret not putting the date on the back. But who thinks of those things at the time?

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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 68:** (4 January 2022) *The endless bookshop*  
In our first episode of the year we concentrate on chatting about the best books we read during 2021 in a number of categories – which I cover in this issue as well.

It's also where we announce that we are moving to a three-weekly schedule away from fortnightly.

**Episode 69:** (25 January 2022) *A dream we dreamt with our eyes open*  
Finishing off our best of 2021 episodes, this time we talk about our favourite Film and Television. I then go on to have a long chat with Chong about the merits and problems – the few there are – of the film ***Dune : Part 1***.

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



## WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

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

Abbr – Aust: Australian; Coll: single-author collection; Nvla: novella; Trans: translated.

### January 2022 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Pub Date	Notes
<i>The Dark Remains</i>	William McIlvanney & Ian Rankin	Crime	Jan 10		3.9	2021	
<i>Fugitive Telemetry</i>	Martha Wells	Sf	Jan 12	e	4.0	2021	nvla
<i>The Last Defender of Camelot</i>	Roger Zelazny	Sf	Jan 16		3.3	1980	coll
<i>The Princess of Mantua</i>	Marie Ferranti	Lit	Jan 17		3.2	2002	trans
<i>A Shilling for Candles</i>	Josephine Tey	Crime	Jan 18		3.2	1936	
<i>Last Stand in Lychford</i>	Paul Cornell	Fantasy	Jan 21	e	3.0	2020	nvla
<i>Flames</i>	Robbie Arnott	Lit	Jan 31		4.4	2018	Aust

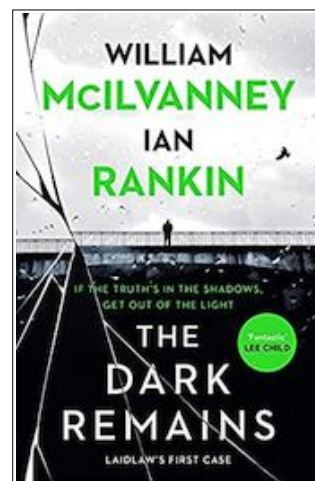
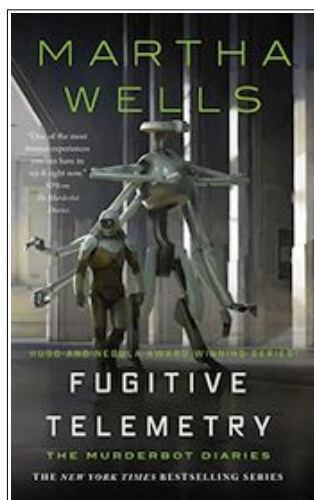
Books read in the month: 7

Yearly total to end of month: 7

### Notes:

***The Dark Remains*** (2021) – part of McIlvanney's Laidlaw series of novels.

When William McIlvanney died in 2015 he left behind notes on a novel he intended to write which would be a prequel to his well-regarded Laidlaw series of police procedural crime novels set Glasgow in the early 1970s (see **Perryscope 18** for my brief review of the first of these). Ian Rankin, author of the John Rebus series of novels set in Edinburgh, took up the task of completing that novel and this book is the result. Glasgow is ruled by competing criminal gangs and when the second-in-command of one of those gangs is found murdered the city threatens to turn into a bloodbath. Rankin has done a great job of transferring his eye for a city environment to Glasgow and you could really be forgiven for thinking that this was written by McIlvanney alone. This was obviously a labour of love for Rankin, and it shows. R: 3.9/5.0



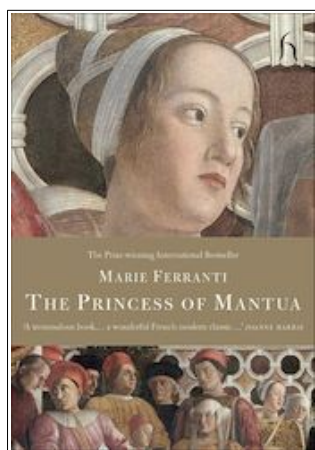
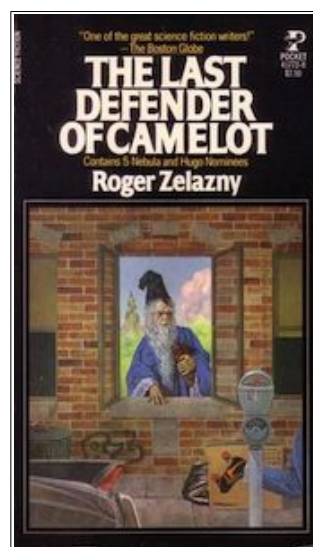
***Fugitive Telemetry*** (2021) – #6 in the author's Murderbot series, and the fifth novella.

Martha Wells is on something of a roll with these stories about a rogue SecUnit (part human, part bot) as she picked up Hugo Awards for Best Novel and Best Series in 2021. This novella



continues that series. Murderbot is asked to help investigate the death of an unidentified traveller on the Preservation Station, against the wishes of the Station's Security unit. Disallowed access to the Station's systems and memory banks, Murderbot has to rely on good old-fashioned detective work to find a solution. Based on a series of analyses and a lot of leg-work, it discovers the location of the original murder, the method used to move the body and a possible set of suspects. But, like all good murder investigations, initial suspicions are generally just that and Murderbot finds itself having to rely on human help, and also talking to them – neither of which it particularly likes – in order to find a solution. R: 4.0/5.0

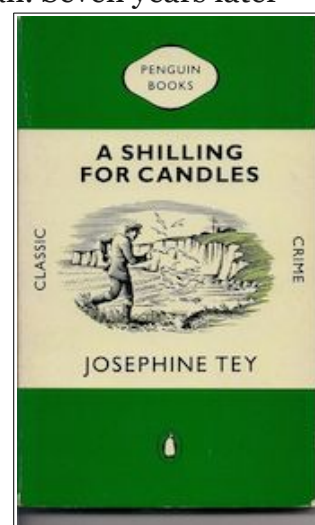
***The Last Defender of Camelot*** (1980) – A collection of 16 stories by Roger Zelazny from the period 1962-1979. It is interesting that these are published, mostly, in chronological order of first publication, which is rather unusual for these sorts of collections. This aids in the examination of the author's style and focus changing over time, and it shows that Zelazny's short fiction star was rising up till the mid-to-late 60s when it started to drop off; possibly as a result of him concentrating more on his longer works. The pick of the lot here is the author's novella ***Damnation Alley*** (1967) – see notes below – which was on the ballot for the 1968 Hugo Award. Of the rest, "For a Breath I Tarry" and "Comes Now the Power" were nominated for Hugo Awards in 1967. The title story from 1979 showed the author still had interesting stories to write but too many here seem just thrown off for commissions. Zelazny introduces each story with a bit of their publishing background but these are short and of little interest. R: 3.3/5.0



***The Princess of Mantua*** (2002) – Winner of the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie française in 2002. What a strange little book this is. It supposedly tells the life story of Barbara of Brandenburg (1422-1481) who was married to Ludovico III Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua at the age of ten, when he was nineteen. Immediately after the marriage Ludovico abandons his wife and enters the service of the Duke of Milan. Seven years later he returns a conquering hero and resumes his marriage to Barbara, and settles down to rule. Her story is told based mostly on her letters to her German cousin, Maria of Hohenzollern, which detail her hopes and dreams, worries for her ten children (well,

only some of them), and the goings-on at the court of Mantua. This is described in the flyleaf as a piece of "docufiction", which is normally applied to a genre of film but which seems to fit this book admirably. This is an interesting novel, though I doubt I will remember it for long. R: 3.2/5.0

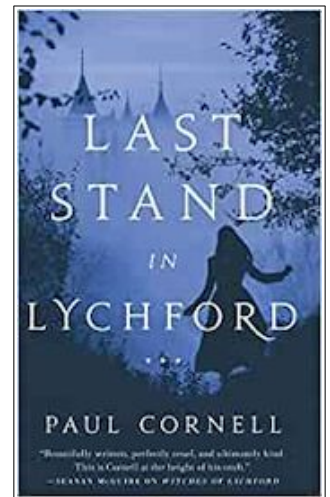
***A Shilling for Candles*** (1936) – #2 in the author's Inspector Grant series.



A young woman's body is found on an isolated beach on the south coast of England and Scotland Yard's Inspector Grant is called in to investigate. The woman is finally identified as being Christine Clay, a young British actress who had lately found fame in Hollywood. But how did she come to be here, and who killed her? Similarly with the first novel in this series, Grant becomes convinced he knows who the killer is by about halfway through the book, but, of course he's wrong. And the murder is finally solved by information discovered by others and conveyed to the inspector, or by him reading something in a very coincidental manner. This is a police procedural where a lot of the novel's attention is on other people. The author writes well but lacks a bit of sophistication on the crime-solving front. R: 3.2/5.0

***Last Stand in Lychford*** (2020) – #5 in the author's Lychford series of novellas.

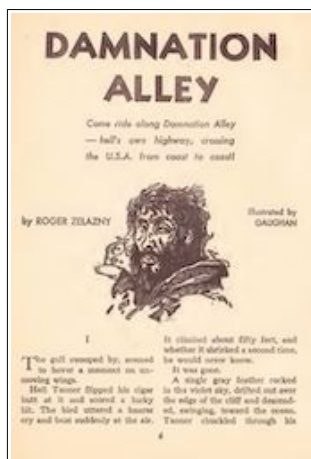
In this conclusion to Cornell's Lychford series, the forces of darkness finally begin their assault on Earth, via the small English village of Lychford. Standing against them are the town's local "witches" – including the local female Reverend – and a reconstituted fairy. It's all well-written, and amusing, if rather inevitable and brings the series to a reasonable conclusion. I thought the earlier novellas came across a lot better, when the whole conflict was being set-up and everything was new and fresh. R: 3.0/5.0



***Flames*** (2018) – see major review below.

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### Other short fiction:



***Damnation Alley*** (novella – *Galaxy* October 1967)

This novella by Roger Zelazny was nominated for a Hugo Award in 1968, though it didn't win, losing out to the co-winners McCaffrey and Farmer. The story is set in a future version of the USA after a nuclear war, where most of the major cities are now just smouldering, radioactive ruins. The atmosphere above a few hundred feet is a raging hurricane, eliminating the possibility of any air travel. In addition, a plague is raging through the remaining human population although the Californian authorities have developed an antidote. When a driver from Boston arrives in the west, indicating that there is a remaining human group in the east, Hell Tanner is offered an amnesty deal to deliver some vaccine to them. His journey across the country is a nightmare

series of encounters with weird weather, monstrous animal mutations and marauding human gangs. This concept was later utilised by the author in an early Amber novel. An interesting story, and possibly the last of Zelazny's excellent shorter fiction. R: 4.3/5.0

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## REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

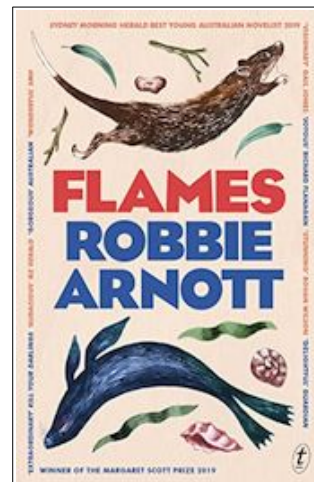
*Flames* (2018) by Robbie Arnott

**Genre:** Literary

Winner of the 2019 Tasmanian Premier's Literary Prize for Fiction – the Margaret Scott Prize.

Back in **Perryscope 4** I reviewed Robbie Arnott's second novel, *The Rain Heron*, and was greatly impressed with his style and vision. It turned out to be one of my best reads of 2020.

This novel, *Flames*, was Arnott's first and he attracted a lot of attention from the beginning. The novel won the Tasmanian's Premier's Literary Prize for Fiction, and was also on the longlist for the 2019 Miles Frank Award, and the shortlists for the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Award and the Voss Prize in the same year.



Set in Arnott's home state of Tasmania *Flames* follows the McAllister family, about a third of the female members of which have an unfortunate habit of returning home after they have been cremated:

Our mother returned to us two days after we spread her ashes over Notley Fern Gorge. She was definitely our mother—but, at the same time, she was not our mother at all. Since her dispersal among the fronds of Notley, she had changed. Now her skin was carpeted by spongy, verdant moss and thin tendrils of common filmy fern. Six large fronds of tree fern had sprouted from her back and extended past her waist in a layered peacock tail of vegetation. And her hair had been replaced by cascading fronds of lawn-coloured maidenhair—perhaps the most delicate fern of all.

This type of thing wasn't uncommon in our family.

Luckily she doesn't stay long. Four days later she walks to her ex-husband's house and self-immolates. Her son Levi is spooked by her re-appearance and is determined that his sister Charlotte will not do the same. So he decides to build her a coffin to ensure she is buried rather than cremated.

Charlotte, not unexpectedly, is deeply concerned that Levi has become unhinged and is worried that he may attempt to hurry her death along. So she runs, and runs hard, from the top end of Tasmania to the very bottom.

The novel follows the course of her journey, told in separate point-of-view character chapters; some in the first person, some in the third; some in the past tense and some in the present. Each tells a different part of the story of Levi and Charlotte. The characters featured include a water rat—the self-styled River Esk God; Thurston Hough, who Levi commissions to make his sister's coffin; the private detective that Levi engages to find his sister; elemental fire; and Levi's and Charlotte's father, among many others. Arnott

imbues each with their own voice in a remarkable feat of writing for a debut novel. This is a technique that could easily fall flat if the voices come to sound too similar. But Arnott is too good a writer for that, and the reader should feel no sense of dislocation, beyond the early feeling of change in each chapter. By the end of each, its connections to the central thrust of the narrative becomes clear.

If you are looking for a straight-forward novel simply told then this is not the book for you. If, however, you are seeking something audacious and refreshing then I reckon you will find it here.

On the basis of this, and his second novel, I can only conclude that Arnott is one of the best of the younger Australian novelists working today. In fact, he was named as such by *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 2019.

R: 4.4/5.0

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## WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

### Television

***Framed*** (4 episodes) (2021)

Platform: SBS On-Demand

Genre: Documentary

A version of Picasso's "The Weeping Woman" was purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria for A\$1.6 million in 1985—at the time the highest price paid by an Australian art gallery for an artwork. In August 1986 the painting was stolen and a ransom note received from a group calling themselves the Australian Cultural Terrorists. Seventeen days later the painting was retrieved from a luggage locker at the Spencer Street Railway Station. To this day the crime has never been solved. This 4-part series examines the crime, the people involved, and the possible theories around the event. Marc Fennell hosts this investigation of a very intriguing true-crime mystery. R: 3.4/5.0



***The Beatles : Get Back*** (3 episodes) (2021)

Platform: Disney+

Genre: Documentary

Peter Jackson's 8-hour documentary about the making of the Beatles' 1970 album *Let It Be*. Drawing mainly from sixty hours of film footage, and over 150 hours of audio recordings made at the time – January 1969 – Jackson's film follows the initial rehearsing at Twickenham Studios, through to rehearsals at their Apple Studio headquarters in London and then the short public performance on the roof of that building. The first episode sees the band members arriving and starting the song-writing process from



various song fragments that the individual players bring to the table. Paul McCartney has, mostly, assumed the lead role in this, especially as John Lennon seems completely out of it for the first three days. Only McCartney and George Harrison seem completely engaged but after a few days Lennon starts to show some interest and Harrison starts becoming side-lined. By the end of that first week Harrison announces that he is leaving the band and walks out. By the middle of the second episode he has been persuaded to return and all seems back on track. More than anything else this fly-on-the wall documentary shows the creative process at work and it is amazing to watch songs such as “Get Back” start from a few bars and gradually evolve over weeks to become the song we know now. I found some of the first half of the third episode a bit repetitious though that might be due to the fragmented approach I had to my viewing. You don’t have to be a Beatles fan to enjoy this though it probably will help to get through some of the slower patches. Very highly recommended. R: 4.7/5.0

**Framed** (season 2 – 7 episodes, including the 2015 Christmas Special) (2015)

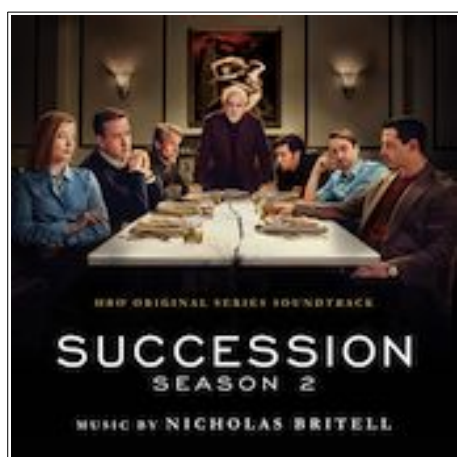
Platform: Netflix

Genre: Comedy

Continuing the metal detecting “adventures” of Andy (Mackenzie Crook) and Lance (Toby Jones) as they bumble from one minor “crisis” to another. Andy’s son Stan has been born and his wife Becky (Rachel Stirling) wants the family to re-locate to Botswana to undertake volunteer work; Andy is reluctant, very reluctant. Lance’s long-lost daughter, from a summer fling twenty years previously, has arrived on the scene which throws him for a loop as he totally over-compensates and appears to mess things up.

Lance finally makes a major discovery but then seems to be struck by the “curse of the gold”. A wonderfully warm and generous comedy of manners. My wife Robyn keeps on comparing the show’s characters to sf fans. She may have a point.

R: 4.4/5.0



**Succession** (season 2 – 10 episodes) (2019)

Platform: Foxtel

Genre: Drama

Continuing the backroom machinations and politics of the Roy family as they manoeuvre for control of their large media company. Kendall (Jeremy Strong) is dragged back into the firm to explain his takeover attempt from last season; Connor (Alan Ruck) decides to make a run for the US Presidency; Shiv (Sarah Snook) quits her political campaigning job and starts to hover around the edges of the family business; Roman (Kieran Culkin) attempts to ingratiate himself with everyone who he thinks can help his cause; and Logan (Brian Cox) tries

to maintain his iron-grip on the company. This is a step up in quality from the first season – which itself was rather high – as the family’s internal tensions bubble up into full view. Again, there aren’t any characters here that you will find likeable. You get the impression that each of them would stab any of the others in the back and cheerfully climb up the

embedded knives to get to their goals. Tremendous work all round, from the actors, the writers and the directors. R: 4.7/5.0

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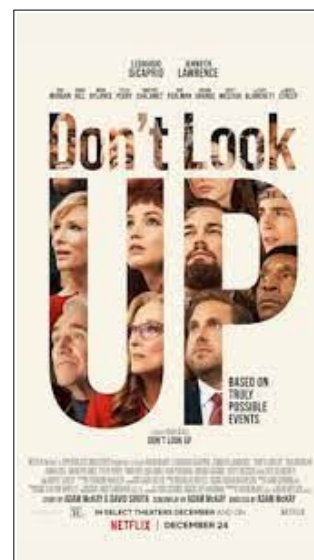
## Film

### ***Don't Look Up* (2021)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Science Fiction Drama

Two astronomers (Jennifer Lawrence and Leonardo DiCaprio) discover a large comet on a collision course with the Earth and attempt to convince the US Government and the populace of the upcoming extinction-level event. But no-one is interested. The President (Meryl Streep), and her chief-of-staff who is also her son (Jonah Hill), is more interested in the upcoming mid-term elections, and the cable networks – with Cate Blanchett as a very intelligent but self-obsessed media host – want to make light of it all. This black satirical comedy is cutting in its portrayal of modern scientific and political commentary. It is hard not to see this as an analogy regarding the current view of climate change, and also that the President and staff mirrors the Trump presidency. Derided by some critics as unbelievable, this film is certainly not that. I don't think it quite hits all of its marks, but it does a pretty good job. R: 3.8/5.0



### ***The Lost Daughter* (2021)**

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

This debut feature film from writer/director Maggie Gyllenhaal is based on the novel of the same name by Elena Ferrante. Olivia Colman plays Leda Caruso, a middle-aged college professor, who is on a summer holiday on a Greek island when she is on the beach when a young girl goes missing. This brings back a memory to Leda of a similar incident involving one of her daughters when she was young, and leads to Leda becoming involved with the girl's family. The film is told half in flash-back as we get Leda's recollections of her early married life and the struggles she had with motherhood and her burgeoning career as a literary translator. But Leda, we come to find, is an unreliable narrator and isn't to be trusted, lying to others around her and, presumably, to herself and us, the audience. This film is very slow in the first hour as it builds the characters and sets up conflicts and alliances. It is also full of ambiguity, where it is impossible to determine if what you are seeing is the truth or the full story. I thought this was done to up the sense of mystery about the characters and their stories and left me with far more questions than I would have liked. R: 3.4/5.0

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## PERRYSCOPE Responses

### Perryscope 16:

**Mark Olson:** “Your excursion into Wikipedialand was fascinating. I never really got involved — I've made a few edits over the years, but I just never got interested, probably in part because I've heard about experiences like yours. If I cared more about Wikipedia, I'd perhaps find the fight worthwhile. But I don't. (I find it useful, but so very, very uneven.)”

[**PM:** I think I'm slowly coming to the conclusion that if I'm going to re-enter the Wikipedia editing world at any time then I'd best avoid situations where these types of arguments are likely to occur. The best option for me is to get back to editing the Wikipedia sections dealing with Australian literature. The people working there have always struck me as being very helpful, and the dumbos, who aren't, aren't at all interested in the subject.]

“I am very definitely an inclusionist in your terms. Electrons are cheap and, most of the time anyway, trivia is self-limiting since no one links to it. One of my projects is Fancyclopedia 3, and with it we're trying to \*not\* let it slip into the edit wars of Wikipedia. In particular, we're trying entirely to avoid the question of notability, so if someone feels moved to document some unknown fanzine or fan or whatever, this is not a problem. (I suppose it could be someday if someone with a great deal more energy than sense got started, but that's a problem to be dealt with when and if it happens.)”

[**PM:** This seems like an excellent approach. For those unaware of it, Fancyclopedia 3 is being developed under the umbrella of FANAC.org and can be found at [https://fancyclopedia.org/Fancyclopedia\\_3](https://fancyclopedia.org/Fancyclopedia_3) ]

“The one limitation I do think is important is to keep Fancy focused on fandom, and by that I mean the fandom I discovered fifty years ago and still love. We cover fandom in depth but we cover things in fandom's penumbra — SF as a literature, pros who aren't also fans, commercial things in general — only insofar as they overlap with fandom. And we're \*not\* an online encyclopedia of SF — the SFE already does that brilliantly. We also cover some of the fannish groups that have developed something of a separate identity (e.g., filk, Tolkien fandom) but which have not completely split off, so we don't cover things like Trek, SCA, and comics fandom which now have their own identities.”

[**PM:** I see Fancy 3 as an adjunct to the online Science Fiction Encyclopedia. From time to time there are going to be some overlaps between the two, but they are really unimportant.]

“Again, we're trying not to build a complex set of rules until we're forced to. (For one thing, until we see what happens, how do we know we want to rule it out?)

“And after a decade it's still fun.”

[**PM:** That's about the length of time when my enthusiasm for something starts to wane. The fact that yours has not bodes well for the project.]

“The biggest problem we have is the vastness of fandom. If you'd asked me ten years ago how big Fancy 3 should be I'd have guessed that it needed to be much bigger than Fancy 2

— maybe as much as a thousand articles. We're now at 29,000 articles and still missing a huge number we ought to have, and most of the articles we do have are sparse and incomplete. 'Your report is neither complete nor conclusive!' Fandom is vast (and so's my ignorance) and time is short.

"Articles which go beyond the bare facts to tell a coherent story are barely begun. The sheer size of fandom has defeated attempts to carry Harry Warner's work beyond the 50s, and I think that we'll never see a book covering the later years unless it is so cursory as to be worth little. My hope is that we can, in time, add topical articles which bring some piece of fan history into focus. They're hard to do though."

[**PM:** Best of luck with all of this. Hopefully the work of the current batch of fan historians — including Leigh Edmonds and Kim Huett here in Australia — will add a lot to the sum total of the Fancy 3 coverage.]

"Finally two short points: First, when I saw the headline 'The Bass Rock' I was immediately interested since Priscilla and I had taken a boat out to Bass Rock — a sea stack in the Firth of Forth that is a famous gannetry. We had also hoped to see puffins, but it was too late in the year: as the boat's Scots captain said, 'there are nooo poofins', a phrase which thereafter became our code for when we got to a site out of season. Second, we also visited Budapest a few years ago and were really struck by the contrast between the beautiful old buildings and the Soviet-era monstrosities mixed among them. It will be a very long time before Budapest regains its charm. (Definitely still worth a visit, though.)"

[**PM:** Budapest is one of our favourite European cities. Robyn and I visited there in 2017 at the end of our trip that started with the Helsinki Worldcon. I'm hoping to get back there at some point, though I have no idea of when that might be given the current climate.]

### Perryscope 18:

**Carey Handfield**, who decided to send a LoC in advance: "This year has been a strange year. I have a target each year of reading 50 books. In 2021 I managed 44 books which was well up on 2020 when I only read 21 books.

"For long periods this year I just got out of the habit of reading. Not sure why. Possibly Covid. I was never short of books to read it was just lack of motivation. Hopefully 2022 will be better."

[**PM:** Similar outcomes to me, as explained earlier.]

"I have not read enough books to have a 5 best in the different categories. Following are my best titles for 2021.

#### **"Susanna Clarke — *Piranesi* fantasy**

This book can be enjoyed on many levels. Certainly the best fantasy I have read in the last 5 years."

[**PM:** I agree. I've covered this book in detail on the podcast and with David Grigg's review in **The Alien Review 1**.]

#### **"Arkday Martine — *A Desolation Called Peace* sf**

A follow up from *A Memory called Empire*. Not as good as the first book but still very good. I love its use of language.”

[PM: This is on my list of sf books to read this year. I expect to see it on a lot of Awards’ lists in 2022.]

**“Sujata Massey — *The Satapur Moonstone* crime**

A crime novel set in India in the 1920's. Lots of local colour

**“Anthony Wildman — *The Diplomat of Florence* historical**

A novel based upon the Life of Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia. Wonderful book set in Italy in the 1500s. Full of intrigue.”

[PM: Haven’t previously heard of either of these.]

**“Donna Leon — *Transient Desires* crime**

The latest in the Brunetti detective series. Recent books in the this series have become mundane. This one returns to some her best works with the city of Venice being the main character.

**“Robbie Arnott — *The Rain Heron* fiction**

Just finished reading this. I need time to understand it and why I like it.”

[PM: I can also recommend his first novel, *Flames*; see the review above.]

“If I had to pick one title of the above it would be *The Diplomat of Florence* for its depiction of the history and the people.

“Finally I continued my habit of bingeing on certain authors.

“The first is Alan Bradley and his Flavia series. It is a detective series sent in Northern England in the 1950's. The main character is a 12 year old girl. Very whimsical. 9 titles

“The second is Isaac Asimov and his Foundation series. I did not realise he had written a number of titles in addition to the original 3. 6 titles.”

[PM: I’ll pass on the Bradley recommendation to Robyn. This looks right up her street.]

**Rob Gerrand:** “I too enjoyed Garrett’s *Too Many Magicians*, which I read in 2020 (I was going to say ‘last year’, which of course would have been an error, and also enjoyed it. At that time I also read the related stories; I hadn’t realised that Garrett wrote so well.”

[PM: This series has always been a favourite.]

“I’ve watched four seasons of *Line of Duty*, and they are pretty engrossing, if maybe a bit drawn out. But excellent police procedurals. *Midnight Diner* is a delight, and it’s one of those programs that we used to dole out as warm human relief when needed. That job then fell to *GLOW — Glorious Ladies of Wrestling* on Netflix, which is written by and stars women. It’s about friendship, I suspect, more than anything else. It’s set in the 1980s, when apparently there was a real TV show called *GLOW*. This recreation is delightful. The odd bit of wrestling shows how it was always pure theatre.



“Two other feel good shows are **Bump** — we’ve been watching two episodes a time of Season 2 which was released on Boxing Day — and **Ted Lasso** (unfortunately it never got to Season Four, due to Covid). **Bump** is the family comedy/drama based around a sixteen year old A student giving birth, and the complications that ensue with her mother, boyfriend and respective families.”

[**PM:** More stuff to check out, thanks.]

“And I saw **Dune** last Thursday and Spielberg’s **West Side Story** last night. Both very good films, and both better than I expected.”

[**PM:** **Dune** I discussed recently on the podcast. Short take — I enjoyed it a lot. I’m not a big fan of musicals so **West Side Story** won’t be high on my list of films to watch when it hits the streaming services. But I might decide to give it a go if the other film-watcher in the house picks it for a night’s viewing.]

**Graham Peters:** “The image on the front could as easily be Will, who (as a little bloke) looked remarkably like you. I think it might be something of the stance or the turn of the head, but I did check the attribution on the photo as I am sure there is one of Will in a similar stance somewhere about this house.”

[**PM:** My son Will had, in his early years, the standard round head shape and blonde-ish hair that seems to be a particular genetic trait passed down through my mother’s side of the family. Three of my four nephews also looked very similar prior to their fifth birthdays. Luckily they all started to diverge after that!]

“I have an ambition to digitize the massive volumes of snapshots taken, pre digital cameras, but my efforts to secure a bulk photo scanner (an Epson Fastfoto 680W) seem destined to fail. My efforts at doing it on a flatbed scanner have been frustrating and slow — good for individual shots, but not a bulk effort. Photo scanners must be hot property in these Covid lockdown days, with supply and chip shortages, as the model I want is on Special Order from every supplier and the quoted price has skyrocketed from about \$600 to almost \$1,300. Maybe it is a task for the future, when maybe this machine has been replaced with something even snazzier.”

[**PM:** The question you then have to face is where do you store the resultant scans? I’ve been thinking that a combination of the Cloud and local, hard drive storage is the best option: the Cloud for easy access now, and the hard drive for everyone else after you kark it. But how long will the hard drives last? And will you have to backup the Cloud material every 5 years or so? The question of whether the kids will care at all is quite another matter.]

“I was pondering the cycle of technological redundancy as my desktop PC is intermittently warning of the need for replacement as Windows 11 will not operate on it. Given I got 13 years from my first home desktop and 12 so far from this one, I probably cannot complain. However, having to familiarize myself with latest PC trends in order to specify the new machine is a necessary evil, especially as I intend to reuse a RAID5 array of disks, graphics card and large SSD. If I can achieve a similar life from the next one, I will be 75+ and have to outsource computer buying to a child, when that occurs.”

[**PM:** I don’t bother trying to keep up with the new trends any more. Just too hard. So I’m basically outsourcing a lot of the decision-making to Will already. At least to the point of running a decision past him first before buying anything. This only applies to non-

Apple equipment as he has a major dislike of anything Apple and won't help in that regard at all. Luckily I have some friends who can fill in that part of the home computing spectrum.]

"The commentary about traveling by Jetstar had a familiar tone to it. A colleague and I spent a tedious seven hours stranded in the understocked bar/cafe at Newcastle one afternoon / evening, wary not to drink more than one per hour, lest a plane might eventually arrive and we would not be able to drive home. By the time we made it back to Melbourne we were much better friends and knew far more about each other than we would normally share. It was not all a bad thing."

[**PM:** I've been stuck in a few airports over the years — Canberra and Hobart being two that come to mind — but luckily they were somewhat larger than Newcastle. Jetstar is not our airline of choice, but the deal on offer was too good to pass up. And, as a member of the Qantas Club, I was able to spend a lot of the waiting time in halfway reasonable surroundings, with a well-stocked cafe.]

"I am sorry you did not spend longer in the Monash University Library. I have always regarded trips to unfamiliar libraries as an opportunity to feast on an unfamiliar smorgasbord, checking out the collection, lest there be something to tempt me back. Mind you, the parking police at Monash would dissuade you from a long visit."

[**PM:** The weeks leading up to the Christmas/New Year period are always ones where time is of a premium, so it was a short sharp visit. At least I now know I can get in and look at a book if it's there, though I don't have borrowing privileges. What I neglected to mention about that visit to Monash was the tedious part of looking for a park. There were no free slots to be found so the general car park was the only option. I had to spend about 10 minutes downloading an app to the phone, and then using that to pay for my parking time. I've kept the app on the off-chance that I might return. But it was still a bloody nuisance. And this pre-supposes that you actually have a mobile phone. An attitude that is becoming more and more prevalent.]

**Leigh Edmonds:** "I shall try to bear in mind your visual recommendations. Since we only have Netflix our choices are somewhat limited but I see that you subscribe to that too, so there's some interesting suggestions here. Like the rest of the universe we watched the new season of **The Witcher** which was something of a disappointment, I thought. Visually exciting, for sure, but sometimes I found myself thinking about the amount of set-up that must have gone into putting together some of the scenes rather than the scenes themselves, which might tell you something, perhaps that it was all getting a bit boring. I also thought the final episode of the second season told us that the whole of that season had been a prelude to season three rather than being a package in itself. After that we been catching up with **Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries** which we missed when it was on the ABC. It's quite entertaining within the limits of its budget and, I must say, quite fun in many of its little bits of business."

[**PM:** My son is a fan of **The Witcher**, and my wife likes the **Miss Fisher** mysteries. I'm not called to either.]

"The closest we've come to covid was in fact our GP who had to cancel an appointment because he had become a contact. Apart from that, the major inconvenience had been to our renovations which are now running around six months behind schedule and with

rather alarming cost overruns due to cost increases on almost everything the builder uses. We went to have our booster injections last Friday and I spent Saturday feeling rather poorly — if I hadn't had the injection I would have thought I'd picked up covid itself somewhere. This made me very appreciative of modern medicine which meant I only experienced the feeling for a day, and mildly at that. Getting the virus itself would not be fun, judging by my experience."

[**PM:** My wife and I are now both "boostered" with a shot of Moderna vaccine to compliment our earlier AstraZeneca shots. We've been mostly keeping to ourselves for the past month to six weeks, but even doing that won't fully isolate you from possible infection. It does look as though the Omicron variant infection rate is starting to peak in the major parts of Australia here at the end of January 2022. Now for the next wave of whatever is out there.]

"I thought John Hertz's justification of space exploration rather lame. Even the amount that the United States, Russia and China have spent of space has been minuscule in comparison to the amount of money they have spent on war and preparations for war. Let's say that expenditure on that would be much better spent on improving the life experiences of the poor rather than complaining about the paltry amount spent on space in comparison. If the United States had one less Carrier Group I'm sure a lot could be done."

[**PM:** My thoughts exactly.]

"I enjoyed your little essay about James Dwyer. You make the process of doing a bit of research a lot more entertaining than I would have made it."

[**PM:** Generally I'd agree with you. Research is really only interesting, in the main, to the person carrying it out. But, just occasionally, some things around the edges creep in which give it a little more colour. Mostly when things go wrong unfortunately.]

**I also heard from: Mark Plummer; Tineke Hazel; Charles Taylor; Bruce Gillespie** ("I'm glad the James Francis Dwyer reference became such a goldmine of information"); **Joe Siclari; Joseph Nicholas** (who wasn't so keen on Mike Ashley's line about Dwyer); and **Spike** (who sent through a heap of Dwyer material she'd obtained from various US magazines); thank you one and all.

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