

Issue 12
It Creeps Through the Dark



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Season 2 Episode 12, December 31, 2025



Colophon

Two Chairs in Print is published by David Grigg and Perry Middlemiss. It is based on transcripts of our regular podcast Two Chairs Talking.

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Acknowledgement of Country

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Podcast Website

<https://twochairs.website>

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Email

twochairstalk@gmail.com

Transcript of Episode 12

Introduction

Perry:

Hello and welcome to season two, episode twelve of this little podcast we call Two Chairs Talking. My name is Perry Middlemiss, and I'm here as always with my good friend David Grigg. Hello, David. How are you?

David:

I'm pretty well. I'm pleased that we managed to actually fit another episode in this year. If I manage to get it out today, then we will have had twelve episodes for the year of 2025, so we'll have just made it.

Perry:

I think that's a goodly number. I really do. So we're only just we're recording this on New Year's Eve, just snuck it in. As normally happens at this time of year, there's always bits and pieces charging around. One of us can do it one day, another one can't. There's something else on. But at least the silly season's just about over, David, after we get past this, so that we can settle back down into blissful ignorance about everybody else's doings, comings and goings.

Perry:

We can just settle down and read some good books and watch some good films.

David:

Indeed, yes, indeed.

Perry:

Yeah, and I think that's basically what we should do. And I think we should go straight on to talk about it because everybody complains about how much time we spend talking about the weather or what else we've been doing. So we should just...

David:

[Laughs]

Perry:

I don't mind it. I don't mind it, but a lot of other people I've been telling me, it takes so long to get going. "I really don't want to know about the weather." Well, sorry, but that's just generally the way conversation runs. You start off by having a talk about whatever you feel like and what's going on at the moment, and then you lead into the good stuff.

David:

That's right.

Perry:

If you jump into it straight away, everybody says, oh, there was no lead in. That was a bit rude. So you can't win one way or the other.

David:

You can't win. No, that's right.

Perry:

Anyway, so let's cut all that out, move directly into what we were going to talk about. And we're talking about a a movie and a book.

David:

All right.

Perry:

Do you want to head us off with the film?

David:

Yes, I will.

Discussion

Frankenstein, directed by Guillermo del Toro

David:

So I'm going to be talking or we're going to be talking about the movie *Frankenstein*, directed by Guillermo del Toro. I hope I have the pronunciation right.

Perry:

Yeah, that'll do. Sorry, it's the best we can do.

David:

So this is the most recent iteration of this particular story. So I'll just do a little bit of background. I like to do a little bit of background on these things. And I've done some research, Perry.

Perry:

Woo! Different.

David:

You'll be very impressed, I know.

I mean, most people know this, but Mary Shelley wrote her novel *Frankenstein* in 1816, when she was only eighteen years old, which I find remarkable. And she was inspired to write it by... she was on holiday with her husband, Percy Shelley, the poet, and Lord Byron, another poet. They were all on holiday there together in Germany, and they had this little competition about who could write the most thrilling story. Anyway, she wrote this. The others didn't actually do anything worthwhile, but she wrote this. She published it in 1818 when she was still just 20, which is remarkable.

It would be impossible really to say how many other books, stories, movies, comic books, games, and so on have been inspired by Shelley's original story of *Frankenstein*,

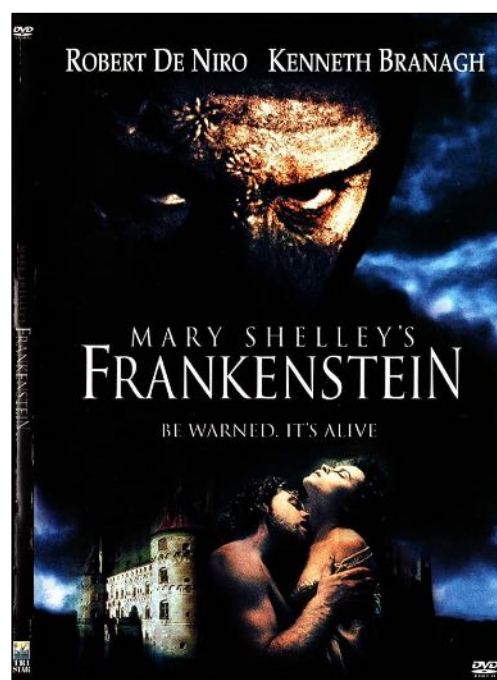


but it must be many, many thousands. I mean, you can check out the Wikipedia page. There's a Wikipedia page dedicated just to the "[List of films featuring Frankenstein's Monster](#)", and it goes on and on. You scroll down and down and down, it goes on forever. And they all vary really in how seriously they take the idea, whether they take it seriously and try to stick to the original story to to some degree, or whether they treat it as a joke. There are a lot more of them that treat the idea as a joke, you know, *Young Frankenstein* and so on, that sort of thing. *The Munsters*, *The Addams family*, all of those things.

If we concentrate [just] on films, the most famous film version is probably the 1931 film featuring Boris Karloff as the monster, as a ghastly creature with greenish skin, flattened head, and a bolt through his neck. And that image has kind of stuck in the popular imagination.

But then there's a more serious film which was made in 1994 by Kenneth Branagh, and that was titled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. So you can see from the title that he's trying to stick quite closely to the original novel, the original story. And that's certainly the version that sticks closest to the original book. It's not bad. I watched it just the other night just for research. See, I do all this research! Branagh directs it, but he also plays the role of Victor Frankenstein, the creator of the of the monster. He does a fairly good job of that. But it just seems a little bit too old to play the part of Frankenstein. I mean, he was only in his thirties when it came out, but anyway, I just felt he was a bit too old because the book's really about... Frankenstein's just a young student at that point. In that film Robert De Niro does a really good job as the Creature. Very ugly, scars and patched together, stitched together face. And Helen Bonham-Carter does a reasonable job as Elizabeth, who is Frankenstein's love interest in that.

But I'm not supposed to be talking about that version. I'm supposed to be talking about Guillermo del Toro's version, which was released just this year. Now it's clear that he's also trying to stick... well, he's trying to pay his respects to the original story by Mary Shelley. Both the Branagh film and this more recent one start out like the book with a man travelling over the Arctic ice. and he's then picked up by a sailing ship where he tells his tale. But then this latest version wanders far off course from the book and from the earlier films. And while I was watching it, I really had to say to myself, "Look, forget the book. You know, forget that there is a book. Just try to treat this as a unique piece of art in itself. And on that basis, it's a pretty good





film. I mean, the production values are far greater here than any of the earlier film versions that I've mentioned. And there's no question that it looks great. It's visually impressive. The cinematography and the acting are pretty well done.

However, overall, I didn't much like the film. And I've been trying to decide *why* I didn't like it. I think it's clear from the start that Del Toro is focusing on the message that it's Victor Frankenstein who is the monster and not the Creature that he [makes]. I think he does it in too heavy-handed a way, too heavy-handed for my taste anyway. So in this version the character of the adult Frankenstein is played by Oscar Isaac and he's just an unlikable bastard throughout. You know, he never for a moment seems to show any humility or remorse for what he's done in bringing the creature to life. He's shown as arrogant, hot-headed, stupidly-so when he's defending his ideas in the University.

Once he's brought the creature to life—in this very, very gothic fashion, he has to climb, you know, he's climbing up this spire in the pouring rain and the storm to connect the lightning conductor. Well, you know, it's really gothic stuff there, which I thought again was a bit overdone. But anyway, once he's brought the creature to life, he's needlessly cruel. He locks it up in a dungeon and beats it with an iron bar to try and get it to talk, to say anything more than his own name. He apparently has absolutely no empathy at all for the creature that he has brought into being, and seemingly little interest in it other than to try to get it to talk. And when it doesn't, he just he decides to destroy it in a very cruel way by abandoning it in the dungeon and burning it alive in this remote tower.

That's all very, very different from the book in which the young student Frankenstein creates the thing, but then immediately flees in horror once he sees what he's done, once it starts to become alive. And he suffers considerably from remorse in the book, particularly when this creature starts killing people, like it kills off his young brother—in the original story the young brother is only a toddler but in Del Toro's version, he never seems to feel any regrets whatsoever, until right at the very, very end of the film when he's dying, at which point you're so sick of him being such a bastard that it doesn't really feel like he's sincere [in his remorse] to me.

It takes the character of Elizabeth, Elizabeth Harlander, played by Mia Goth, to see the creature as a *person*, as a *someone*, and not as simply as an *it*. But I also thought that was done in a very heavy-handed way too. Because, I mean, she just about falls in love with the creature the moment she sees it, and she's almost taking off her clothes for it within the first five minutes. I suppose it's fair enough [because] in this version. The creature is almost beautiful. It has this angelic face. I suppose Del Toro is trying to show us here: well, this is the angel, you know, the good angel, and Victor Frankenstein is the devil in comparison. Yeah, I just all thought it was a a bit heavy-handed and overdone. That was my take on it.

I have quite a lot of other nitpicks of the film, but I'll I'll let those go for the moment. We may come back to them later. So, what was your take on it, Perry?

Perry:

I like your point about the fact that Frankenstein himself is as much a monster, if not more of a monster, than the creation. Because, of course, we have to remember that Frankenstein is the name of the scientist and not the name of the "monster", which we'll put in vertical commas here. And yes, I can see that Del Toro has pushed the emphasis of this film towards the idea that man is the monster creating things. That he first doesn't understand, then he becomes to hate because of what it is he's created. And as you say, it's only really, on his deathbed, that [Frankenstein] starts to repent and say, "Well, I did the wrong thing, and maybe I shouldn't have done this, and I'm very sorry, but I just had to try." And it's very much a metaphor for so much in the scientific world and so much of the modern world, isn't it? Most of the versions in the past, as you've pointed out, have a monster who is frankly, well, the best thing we could say is ugly. And if you look at it from the perspective that the monster is created as a patchwork of bits and pieces from other humans stuck together as sort of a jigsaw, then you can understand why the monster may well be depicted as being rather ugly. In this case, however, I actually got to the feeling that I was looking at the monster—I was watching this, and I'm going, he looks like he's almost a spaceman. He looks like he's almost made out of plastic. You know, the skin's very smooth and very white.



David:

And the stitching, there's no stitching, is there? It's just marks.

Perry:

Yeah, you can see marks and seams, but you can't see the stitching of parts of the body being put together. And in fact, it struck me as I was watching it that I'd seen this sort of thing before, this sort of monster before. And I'll have to jump to a completely other franchise in terms of what I'm talking about here. But in the film, Ridley Scott's entry in the Alien sequence *Prometheus*, right at the very beginning. There's a scene set obviously in well, it was obviously filmed in Iceland by the looks of things where one of the Engineers, as they're called, is there, he drinks something and then falls into the water. The idea being that his body basically becomes the the seed for the rest of life on the planet Earth. I think that's the way.

But this monster that Del Toro created looked and reminded me very much of the way that Engineer looked. not so much in how chunky it looked, but just in terms of the white plastic-looking flesh. So it was almost depicting him as a spaceman, if you like. So he's trying to make, I believe, the monster be something very different from a human. Yes, it's got human form. Yes, you know where it's come from, and yes, you know that it's been created from other human parts. But if you were just to look at it, you go, don't see the connection almost. So that was interesting, and I think he's done that very, very deliberately to make this... And I know that you can push this a bit too far, but he's really used this as a metaphor for humanity's push.

David:

Yes, but you see that's *Mary Shelley's* point.

Perry:

No, no, that's exactly right. That's what I was about to say.

David:

It's not unique to him.

Perry:

Now no, it's not, but he's pushed it to a degree and he's pushed it over to one side. Now, well, he's changed the emphasis. Now, am I right in thinking that the original subtitle of the original novel was *The New Prometheus*?

David:

A Modern Prometheus.

Perry:

A Modern Prometheus. Okay, so Prometheus, of course, bought fire down from the gods and gave it to humans. And so that was the idea that, you know, man was moving forward and being able to create things and fire was the combustion engine and that pushed everything along and became the the major energy source for everything to move ahead later on. What Del Toro is doing here is pushing that side of things and saying science has gone too far and they're not taking responsibility for the consequence of all their research. And they're just doing it because, well, we can. And in fact, that's what Frankenstein does here. He does this because, well, it's a scientific problem and he's just going to solve it, and that's it. And he doesn't give any thought to the consequences. And that's probably exactly What Mary Shelley was thinking about in the beginning. And so



you can certainly understand now when you look at this and you look at the better versions or the adaptations of this particular novel, how bloody good the original piece of work was.

David:

Absolutely, absolutely.

Perry:

Over two hundred years ago, and it's still completely applicable to every single thing that is going on.

David:

Written by an eighteen-year-old.

Perry:

Written by an eighteen-year-old. She saw something in humanity that nobody else had seen, and you can certainly understand why people like Brian Aldiss consider the original *Frankenstein* novel to be the start of science fiction as you and I know it, modern science fiction as you and I know it. And it's just astounding, astoundingly good, how she made this and made it so well so that it can you can still get these different versions of it with different emphasis. And I think Del Toro has gone to the line of saying the real and absolute monster here, as you alluded to, is Frankenstein. It's not the creature, it's the scientist, the monster, the human that creates this creature without giving any credence to what impact that's going to have on himself and the rest of the world. And from that perspective, I liked it from that perspective because I thought it was more of a push down that line than I had seen previously. I didn't go and watch the Branagh, but now that you've mentioned it, I really should go back and have a look at that again.

David:

Yes, it's worth it's worth seeing. It's not as good, I have to say, it's not as good a film as the Del Toro one.

Perry:

Oh, this [one] looks really stunning. I mean, the sets, you can tell he spent a shedload of money on setting the sets up. The whole scenery, the way that it's all put together, it's beautiful. It looks fantastic. And it's certainly a very, very interesting... And well, I'd say it's a *good* film. I think it's good because I like what Del Toro is attempting to do. It is certainly a very interesting entry in the whole of the Frankenstein mythos in terms of the adaptations and all the rest of it. And I think that it is certainly worthwhile seeing. It's available on Netflix.

David:

Netflix, you've got to have Netflix now, yeah.

Perry:

You've got to have Netflix. I think it did a bit of a run in the cinemas, and I'm sorry I missed it there.

David:

Yeah, it was only a couple of weeks, yeah.

Perry:

Yeah, I know. Well, that's what Netflix does these days when it does its adaptations or it does its productions. They last about two or three days or a week [in the cinema], and then boom, they're off. There's so many of them around at the moment that are doing that. And if you think, I'll go along and see it. If you don't get to it the first couple of weeks, you can forget about it because they basically, Netflix want you sitting at home. They want you sitting at home streaming their stuff so that they can push stuff through to you, find out what you want to watch, because they can't get that from so much from the cinemas, they can find out exactly what you as an account holder with Netflix want, and they can push that via algorithms and say this is what we want you to watch. The difficulty is going to be with that approach where those streaming services are doing these big films, showing them only for a short period of time in the cinema and then putting them onto the streaming services Is that they are going to be only making those films which the algorithms tell them everybody wants to watch. They are not going to be making the *difficult* ones. They're not going to be making the ones where the subject matter is going to be either difficult or unusual. It's going to be what do people want to sit in front of the T V and [eat] popcorn for. They don't want to sit and watch difficult films that are going to be three hours. Not going to do that. "All I want is this." And, you know, it's It's a bit sad from that perspective. You hope that they keep well, I want them to keep making these films, but I want them to keep making them and putting them in the cinema and not necessarily only putting them up on streaming.

David:

Yeah, the the problem is that they end up in in a locked walled garden, don't they? You know, they're locked away.

Perry:

Yes.

David:

And unless you've got a subscription, that's it, you're never going to see the film.

Perry:

Well, right, that's right. And you're looking at this, and I don't know about you, but I've got a reasonable size television, but I don't have something that looks really good on a big screen. I don't have a big screen like you get down in the cinema. I've mentioned this to you before. I go to the cinema quite a lot. Well I probably average about once a fortnight which you know, for some people isn't much, but for a lot of people, it's a huge amount. And I just like being able to sit in a darkened room, in a reasonably comfortable chair, because I'm lucky I've got a good cinema near me, where the chairs are good because it's reasonably modern. And be able to see a film projected on a big screen in front of me. I want to be able to get to the point where that screen is my whole world because everything else is dark, except for the exit lights and all that crap. But really, when you're concentrating on the big screen, all that extra stuff just disappears. It all just goes. You know, I sit there and I think, oh God, you know, the lights on the end of the rows over the stairs are a little bit bright and the exit lights are a bit bright. Halfway through the film, I've forgotten all about that.

David:

Yeah, yeah, of course.

Perry:

It's just completely disappeared. You can't do that at home. So it's a completely, for me, it's a completely different experience. That being said, I would suggest that if you're going to watch this, watch it at night with the lights off. Turn all the lights off. Don't have your side light on, and while you're reading a book, put the phone away.

David:

Ah, yeah, yeah.

Perry:

Don't watch, do *not* watch movies with the phone on. Turn it off. Don't get up and down and go and get something to eat all the time. Sit down and just *watch* this. It's two and a half hours. It's 150 minutes according to the running time sheet on Wikipedia. That's okay, that's not too bad. Get in and just watch it and watch it from start to finish. It looks stunning. It looks stunning.

David:

Yeah, I agree with you about cinemas, except you're lucky and you have a good cinema.

Perry:

Yes.

David:

The projection in some, like the chain cinemas, like the Village cinemas, the projection can be absolutely crappy. Like in terms of the difference between light and dark. I went to see the Fantastic Four film. And it was OK at the cinema, but it was a lot better watching it again at home, because I do have a big TV, I have a 65 inch TV, which has got really good contrast. The contrast on my TV at home between dark and light was far better at home than in the cinema. So you've got to have a good cinema as well to go to. As I say I'm lucky, I've got this big screen

on this TV. I actually accidentally bought it [I didn't mean to] buy one quite as big, but it's only 65 inch, some people [have much bigger]. I think Leigh has got an 85 inch screen.

Anyway, look, it's definitely worth seeing. People should see this *Frankenstein*. I do have some nitpicks I won't bother going into at the moment, but I might do that in a written review. But yeah, it it was worth seeing, I grant you that.

Perry:

I like your idea though, and this is something that I agree with, that we have to look on films as being a completely different medium from the original material, the written word, the book. It's an adaptation, so therefore it's not going to be exactly the same. The people that say, oh, you know, "It's moved away from the story, therefore I don't like it." Well sorry, read the book and have the film in your head. That's what it's for. Then when you go over and see a film adaptation, treat it on its own terms. It's going to be different. It's a bit like people going along to a Shakespearean play and saying, well, they left a couple of speeches out, so I hate the whole thing. Well sorry, sometimes, just in terms of timing, cost, the number of people you've got working, you just can't do that. And so you have to look at it. It does say it's an adaptation. It doesn't say this is an absolutely 100% direct from the book onto the screen. You can't do it. You just can't do it.

David:

And if it was, it would be if it was, it was it would be dead boring. I mean, If you literally followed every scene in the book and made it into a film, no one would want to watch it. And it's true of almost any book.

Perry:

That's what people seem to forget. They also seem to forget that a page in a book is about a minute on the screen, so that if you've got a 300-page novel, "Oh, I want the whole thing and I want it all done," that's five hours. I don't know about you, David, but...

David:

Yeah, well that's why it's got to be a TV series in that case.

Perry:

...I can't sit down for five hours and, you know, not have to stop something and go and visit the little boys' room. It just isn't going to work. If it becomes a TV series, well then that's fine. But then they have to find spots to break it to [keep] the tension working so that you've got it, you've got an end point. And so you end up having to adapt it to be able to do that.

David:

Yeah, that's true. Very true.

Perry:

So people have got to realize that films are a completely different medium. Look, the feature film for me is the major new art form of the 20th century. The 21st century, I don't know what it's going to be, if there is going to be one, but the 20th century it was the feature film. And we have to look at that as being its own art form. Yes, it moved on and utilizes a lot of source material from literature and from novels, but it is its own thing. And you have to think of it as a being its own thing and look at it that way. You can refer back to the original, and say, well, I like this better and I didn't think they'd work that. But that is okay because the

guy has adapted it, and you have to work it and say, I think it would have been better this way or that way. And that's fine, but they are two completely different things.

All right, I think we're probably done with that. I would recommend people see this. You may not like it, but I recommend you see it.

David:

Oh yeah, I saw it, I saw it twice.

Perry:

Oh, good man.

David:

I watch all these films we talk about twice.

Perry:

I haven't seen it twice yet. Well the good thing about the one good thing about having it on streaming on Netflix is if you do like it, you can go back and watch it the next week and it doesn't cost you another fifteen, twenty bucks.

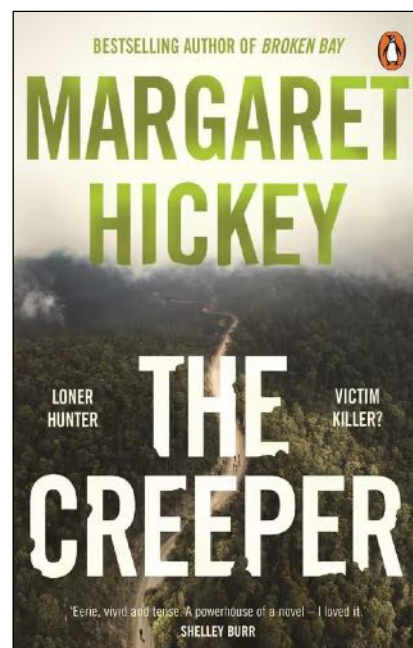
***The Creeper* by Margaret Hickey**

Perry:

So David, we should move on to the book that we're going to be dealing with. And that book this time, the novel that we're going to be looking at this episode as we presaged last time is *The Creeper* by Margaret Hickey. And this is in a 2024 Australian crime novel, which won last year's Ned Kelly Award.

Now, we've spoken about Ned Kelly Awards over the years. We've read quite a lot of them and we really quite like what's there. So I had high hopes for this particular book, as I do for all the Ned Kelly winners. The judges normally pick something worthwhile reading. But I think on this occasion they might just have missed a trick. I'm not quite sure that they got the right one here. Anyway, it's an interesting thing to try and figure out why the judges chose it and why I wasn't as captivated with it as I thought I might have been.

Now, this novel won the Ned Kelly Award from a short list that included novels by Garry Disher (*Sanctuary*, which I really liked) and Michael Robotham amongst others. But also on that Ned Kelly Award shortlist was a short story collection. Now, normally [they] only do novels, but there's a short story collection called *Highway 13* by Fiona McFarlane. Now, this is something that I haven't read, but I may in fact recommend that we actually read this later on. It's a series of connected short stories about a particular character, and it's a crime set of crime short stories. I mention this one in particular because during 2025 it won the following awards, David: it won the Victorian Premiers Prize for Fiction, the New South Wales Premiers Prize for Fiction and the Australian Literary Gold Medal. Now that's up there. In addition, it was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Award. So it did very well indeed. So, you know, it was one of *the* books of last



year. Absolutely one of the books of last year. But it, the Disher and the Robotham books, all lost out to this particular novel that we're going to discuss. Now, Disher and Robotham are always reliable. I mean, we can always basically guarantee [them]. Yeah, they go up and down in quality, but they're always reliable. You know, you're always going to get a good novel out of them. So, you could, from that perspective, you can understand why I was thinking that this particular novel [*The Creeper*] was going to be something special.

Now, I have to admit that I haven't read anything else by this particular author, Margaret Hickey, which is a bit remiss of me because this is actually her fifth novel. And there's been another one published since in this past year, which brings her up to a total of six. Her work has been shortlisted for both the Ned Kelly and Davitt awards previously. The Davitt Award is for best crime writing by Australian [women] crime writers. She's been shortlisted for both of those awards previously, but for some reason it's just passed me by and I haven't taken any notice. I haven't been digging down as deeply into the shortlist as I possibly should have. I'll have to go back and probably do that a bit more later on. Now, from a bit of research into those previous novels that she published, I can think we can safely say that Margaret Hickey writes in that crime sub-genre now known as rural noir. Generally, murder investigations are set in small Australian country towns. And this one, *The Creeper*, certainly fits that mould.

Now, to give a bit of background in this particular novel, the novel is set in the small town of Edenville in Victoria's high country. Ten years before the action of this novel starts, six people were found dead on a walking trail in the hills above the town. Five of them were bushwalkers and the other was a local identity who was known to police. The rifle that was used to kill the other five was found next to him. and he appeared to have been killed by a self-inflicted gunshot wound from that same gun. The police at the time did a certain amount of investigation, you know, with the DNA evidence and the supposed killer's criminal and social history. He's the one that was known as The Creeper in Edenville due to him sneaking around campsites for bushwalkers at night, taking photos, letting tents down and all the rest of it, accusing people of trespassing on his property and so on. So he was known as The Creeper. And the police use that social history, the fact that he had the rifle next to him, and that was the one used to kill everybody. And they just decided to wrap it all up. It just seemed too cut and dried an explanation to warrant any further digging. It closed the investigation off. Everybody was happy. All done. All fixed. Fantastic.

Now, the 10-year anniversary of that tragic event is now approaching, and [there's a] new police officer in the town of Edenville, Senior Constable Sally White. And she's in a one-person police station. She's been asked by her superiors to get familiar with the case, as she's bound to be questioned by reporters and people who would be coming to the town for the tenth anniversary. They may well be coming to interview the sole survivor of the shooting, who has returned to the town to make a documentary about the event. All of this starts to stir up feelings around the town, as you can imagine, and things begin to get a little bit tense. Now, the [sole] survivor of the of the shooting was as you can imagine rather traumatized but she's got over that, she's now a documentary filmmaker and she's come back to the town to make this documentary. It was a way of getting closure [for] herself, I think.

Senior Constable White, our main character of this particular [book], starts looking into the case notes of the incident and starts interviewing relatives of the victims and of the alleged killer. And she starts to notice that some things just

don't make a lot of sense. There's some little bits and pieces that start niggling at her. More to the point, though, she starts to think that the initial investigation was rushed. As I said, you know, all the evidence seemed to be really quite fitting all together, and a simple explanation was probably the best. But she realises that not every lead was followed up, and many assumptions were made during that initial investigation. And she starts to wonder it was all conducted as properly as it should have been. She also finds out there are a lot of still a lot of people in the area who are involved with that tragic event in some way or another. For example, her boss was one of the first on the scene after the shooting. He's now living and working in a nearby town, but he's her manager. And also, White's new Park Ranger boyfriend carried the survivor back down the mountain to Edenville after she was discovered up there. As White gets deeper into the investigation, she starts to find other connections as well, some involving the local townsfolk and some the murdered bushwalkers who seemed to have been connected in various ways, even though they were unknown to each other at the time they went on the initial walk. N

There's a lot to like about all this setup, David. It's complicated, it's all there. But it seems like we've seen all this stuff before. The small town, the curious, quirky characters, the conflicts and the secrets. All those secrets, David. All those secrets. It's just all these secrets. Everybody's got a secret. I thought the first 80-odd pages of this were very slow indeed as all the relevant characters were introduced, and as the chapters alternated between the present day following White around town and also another line of the time of the bushwalk 10 years before. You can see the author trying to ratchet up the tension by getting each short chapter to a stress point and then jumping off to the other timeline. The aim is to throw you, the reader, off balance a little. And to keep you turning the pages to find out what's going to happen next. Unfortunately, the author made this rather too obvious to me. You can see the wheels turning and the gears meshing. It just came across as rather boring and tedious and pedestrian, even. Then when the bushwalk timeline is about played out, and we start to concentrate more on the here and now, things start to move along at a much faster pace. And I'd say that I read the last two-thirds of the book at about the same time as it took to read the first one, first third. And I must admit, I was pretty grateful for that.

So where does this leave us? Well I guess it depends on how much rural Australian crime fiction you've read over the past few years. Fiction of the type written by Jane Harper for example. If that amount is very little, then I suspect that you'll actually like this book a lot. On the other hand, old and tired readers like you and me, David, want to see something a bit different. And I don't think I got that from this book. It's close, but it misses the mark, I reckon. I just don't think it gets there. I gave it a score of 3.4 out of 5. What did you think of it, David?

David:

I'm pretty much with you. There's not a lot I can add to what you've said, but it just does seem a bit stale as an idea. You know, you've got yet another cold-case story where you have a new detective come in, and oh no, you know, there was clearly something wrong with that original investigation, so we'll have to go back and fix all that up. You can see that coming from a mile away when you start the book. I suppose it wouldn't be much of a story if you had a cold-case investigation and the the person investigated the original thing and found that the original police had it completely right. You know, that wouldn't be a story. So you're always going to have this [approach] and it can't have been right. So, you can see that was where it was coming from.

It was okay. The one thing I did like about it was this way that the original people on that original bushwalk. were connected. You know, the teasing out of what these connections were between these people who all thought they were complete strangers to each other with no connection But Sally White investigates this and starts to see these connections between them and the original concept of how the the killer worked out how to get those that group of people together, that was clever, I liked that, but that was kind of the only way it was okay. But again, like you, I don't know quite why it would have won the Ned Kelly Award above some of the other people, the other books in the list

Perry:

Yeah, I think as I said, if you're a reader who has not read a lot of this Australian crime fiction then I think you'll probably like this and think this is really innovative but if you've read a lot of crime fiction I don't know. I don't quite know how the the judges picked it. As I was saying, the last two thirds are a heck of a lot better than the first third. And it does kick off and get going. But I don't know, my final feeling about it has got to be taken on the whole of the book, not the last two-thirds. So I'm not sure why they decided to choose this one. I haven't read any judges' reports about it. I wasn't at the awards ceremony, so I don't know what they had to say about the particular book itself. It's one of those ones where I won't be interested in reading it again. I may try, I'll have a look around, and I may try another one of hers or look at something that was shortlisted a little while back, but I've got a feeling that I'm going to be seeing something fairly similar. I think she's probably found a formula that suits her style, suits her plotting and her pacing. Other than the plot and the story and the fact that we've seen bits of this before, she's a good writer. I don't have a problem with it. Once it got going and started to head towards a conclusion, it was handled well. The pacing just moved along very nicely. The difficulty was all the setup and everything that was around it and how it all came together. But anyway, we can't have everything, I guess. It's just purely what you're given, and that was it. So, would I recommend people read it? So-so, I think, is my view.

David:

Depends what else you've got on your your to be read list, I reckon. I wouldn't put it very high.

Perry:

Oh, I thought that was it. So it was a bit disappointing. It's probably the least interesting of all of the Ned Kelly Award winners I've read so far, I think. I haven't gone back and done a list and worked that out, but I think I could probably pretty safely say that that would be the case. So you know average, average book is what I've got to it.

So what else have you been reading?

What Else We've Been Reading and Watching

Wild Dark Shore by Charlotte McConaghy

David:

Well, I've read a cracker of a book which I'd like to talk about and that's *Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghy. She's [also] the author of a book called *Once There Were Wolves*, which I don't know whether you read, but that was very good too. That one won the Davitt Award for Best Crime Novel in 2022. And I really liked that.

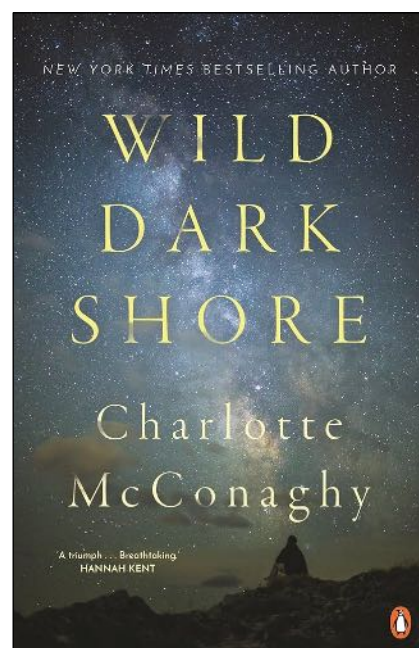
So this is her latest novel, *Wild Dark Shore*, published in 2025. And it's great. It's definitely going to be my top five of the year, which we'll we'll discuss in our next episode. Might even might even hit the top. We'll see.

It's a bit hard to assign it a genre. You don't *have* to give things a genre, I suppose, but there's a science fiction-y flavour to it, in the sense that it's set a little bit ahead in the future. but not very far, when the effects of climate change are starting to become more and more noticeable. In particular sea levels are noticeably rising. But that's just the background of the book.

You could call it a thriller or a mystery novel, but it doesn't really fit in comfortably in either of those genres. What it *really* is, is a novel of character and the relationships between people, particularly between parents and children. And there are some shattering revelations in the story as it goes on. I don't know whether I'll talk at any great length about it. I'll save it for my newsletter, I think. It's really a novel about relationships. It's a novel about family. I'll give you a very quick, brief rundown otherwise none of this will make sense.

It starts with this woman being washed ashore on a remote island. It's called Shearwater, this island. It's somewhere between Australia and Antarctica. Macquarie Island is kind of the model which she's used. There's a scientific research station on it, and a seed vault, trying to preserve seeds for the future. But this woman has washed up, and the only people on the island at the time—all the scientists of the research centre have gone—is this man, Dominic, and his three children. And so it's really all about this character, this woman [who] has been washed up, this man who is the father of these children, his relationship with his children, his relationship with this new person has just arrived on the island. And there are mysteries involved which slowly get revealed as as the book goes on.

So I won't talk in any more detail about it now, but I just thought it was great. It may well be my top book of the year, even though I've *just* finished it the end of this year. So I can highly recommend it. And certainly if you haven't read *Once There Were Wolves* I'd recommend that. And her first novel I think is called *Migrations*, which I haven't read, but everyone who writes about that says that that is brilliant. So she's obviously a really good writer. I must go back and read *Migrations*.



So that's my book reading that I'd like to talk about. I've got films I can talk about, but do you want to talk about something in the reading category?

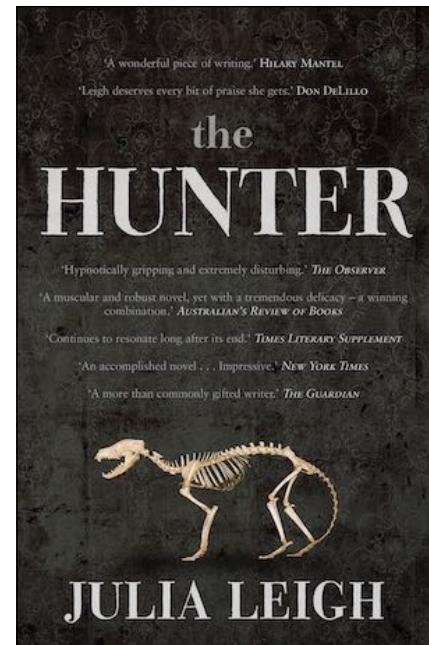
Perry:

I'll talk about a book. This is *The Hunter* by Julia Lee from the early 2020s, no, maybe even longer ago. Can't quite remember how old it is, but anyway, let me see, it's from 1999. I didn't realize it was that long ago. Okay, so This is an Australian novel set in Tasmania.

The hunter is an ex-military mercenary who's been contracted by some multinational company to go and track the last thylacine in Tasmania. There's been a report that a well-credentialed park ranger somewhere in Tasmania has found a recent footprint or paw print of a thylacine and also has either found some scat or some hair or something that seems to be very recent and seems to fit the profile. Now, this particular company—you get this idea, but it's not really pushed terribly hard—the company seems to think that there is something in the thylacine's DNA that's going to be a big biological breakthrough of something or other, and it doesn't matter. Doesn't really matter. All that it is is that this company has basically said they want this hunter to track down the thylacine. That's it, David. And the book's fantastic.

The book is real short, less than about 180 pages, and it just details the hunter who doesn't tell anybody his name. He travels to the particular area. And the company has arranged for him to stay when he's not up in the mountain doing his hunting—because he's normally up there for about 10 or 12 days and then back for two and then back up again and he keeps doing this and he's going to keep doing this until he finds finds what he's after—he stays with a woman and her children on the edge of the park. The woman is basically bereft because her husband, who was a bushwalker, went missing up in the mountains and just disappeared and has never returned. And she's got two young children, and she spends most of the novel doped out of her brain on antidepressants and valium and all the rest of it, and the kids run a little bit wild, but and he just uses the time when he's there to reflect on what sort of life he's had and what life he hasn't had. You know, the road not taken. If he'd been here, if he'd had this sort of family, would this have been like this, and so on? So he's got to look at what that has happened in his life. He doesn't really dwell very much on what's happened to him in the past, nor does he dwell very much on what other tasks that he's had to undertake for this particular company. But mostly it's about him going through the high country in Tasmania looking for the thylacine. It's just beautifully well written. short, affecting. I just really enjoyed it. I just wanted to keep going back to it and turning the pages. There was just something about it. There wasn't a lot of tension. There wasn't a lot of story. It was just him going about his business trying to find the thylacine.

It was made into a film with William Dafoe probably about 10-12 years ago, which I'm now going to try and track down and try and watch to see how that goes. Yeah, I liked it. I liked it a lot. I thought it was very interesting and I'll probably be tracking more of Julia Lee's books down as well. I would recommend it to anybody to read. I thought it was great. I thought it was really good. Anything you've been watching?



***House of Dynamite*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow**

David:

Yeah, I watched *House of Dynamite* on your recommendation, now that I've got Netflix, and yes, that was excellent, very disturbing with and I like the way it backtracks and sees the same events from different people's points of view. Very, very effective, very clever.

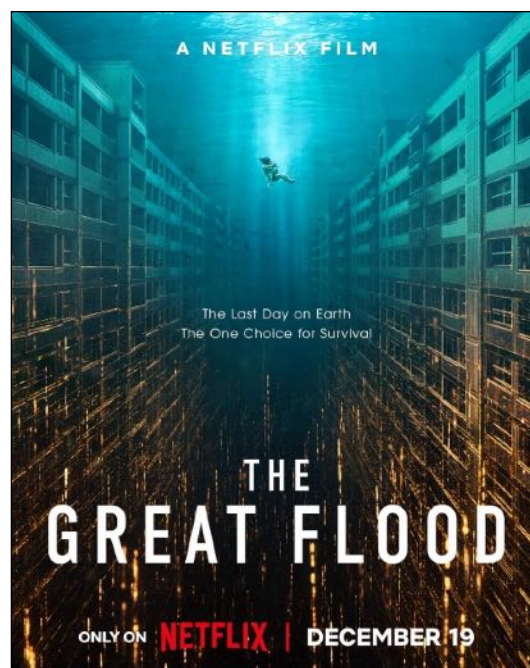
***The Great Flood*, directed by Kim Byung-woo**

But the film I really want to talk about is called *The Great Flood*, which is also on Netflix. And it's a South Korean film directed by Kim Byung-woo. I saw it being promoted on Netflix, which I subscribed to in order to watch *Frankenstein*. And I have to say I enjoyed it more than *Frankenstein*.

It's a newly released film just this year, and it starts out as what seems like a classic disaster movie. It's set in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. It's been raining for days, and the streets are flooding. And a woman called An-na, two syllables, An-na, and her young son Ja-in, they live in an apartment in one of those tower blocks. And they discover that water is now rising outside the apartment block and starting to come up to their level. And they must be on the third or fourth or fifth floor or something. It's starting to come up to their level. We discover a little later on that an asteroid has impacted Antarctica and melted gigatons of ice and everything's flooding and the world is flooding.

Yeah, and the water floods higher and higher, and in fact, then there's a huge tsunami wave hits the city and starts to knock into the towers. So the woman's still in this apartment building with her young son. He's only a toddler, really. So she has to try to evacuate and get higher and higher in the building. But of course, everyone else in the building is trying to get higher and higher. So all the stairwells are jam-packed full of people. But it appears that An-na is an important scientist with some organization, and her employer sends someone to get her out. They're going to send a helicopter to get her out. An ex-military guy is sent to try and get her out and up to the roof. So, this is all classic disaster movie stuff. And well done.

But then the plot takes a turn. A really interesting and unexpected turn. I won't give it away, other than to say that one part where this this guy's been sent to save her, he just says something to her, "Couldn't you just...[something]?" What? *What did he just say?* And that's where it turns and you go "Oh, crikey, this is different than I thought it was!" And it turns out to be quite a different sort of story. So I can definitely recommend it. I thought it was really excellent. The only thing I didn't like about it was that—apparently this is the case with all of Netflix foreign language films—is that it's dubbed and not subtitled. I hate that, really. It



would be much better if the language was all in the original Korean and lip-sync works and so on, and just use subtitles, because I always have the subtitles on anyway.

So, I can definitely recommend it. I thought it was really good. It's a really interesting thing. And there's some interesting effects in it as well. So, yeah, so that was good.

Perry:

Okay. So, what was the name of it again?

David:

Yeah. It's called *The Great Flood*.

Perry:

The Great Flood. All right.

David:

Yeah, directed by Kim Byung-woo.

Perry:

On Netflix.

David:

And it's on Netflix, yeah.

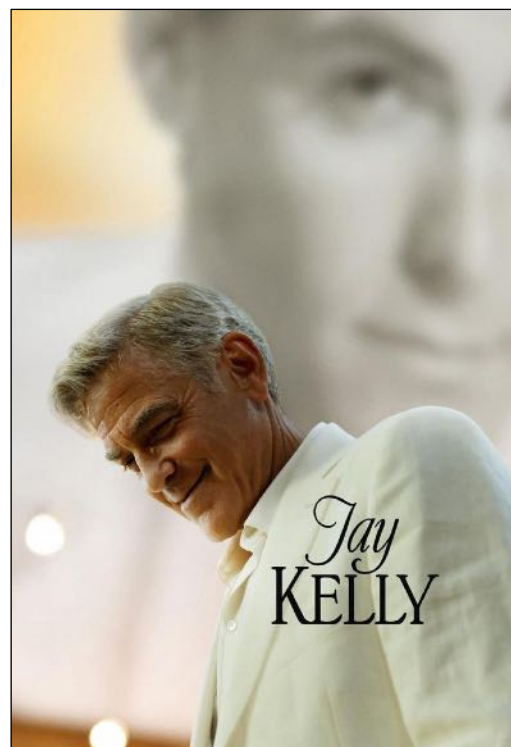
Perry:

Right, okay. all right, well, I'll track that down.

Uh my film that uh I think is interesting. I won't say it's fantastic, but I'll say it's interesting. *Jay Kelly*, which is also on Netflix. Again, was another one that got about a week in the cinemas and then went over to the streaming service.

This features George Clooney in the lead role playing Jay Kelly and Adam Sandler as his agent. Now, Jay Kelly is an aging cinema star in the classic mould of Cary Grant and Jackie Cooper and Clark Gable and... George Clooney. So the interesting thing is, it's basically pretty much George Clooney playing a version of himself. Now he continually, the Jay Kelly character is continually making films. He's always oh I've got two weeks off before the next one you know so he's making three four films a year and that basically means that his family has basically been let go and God knows how many wives he's had and what's happened to his kids? So he's basically not really had a family life at all, and he's starting to realize this.

Somebody offers him a tribute for his lifetime work in the cinema in a place in Italy. Firstly, he turns it down and then decides when he finds out that his daughter is going to Italy to go to a festival or something, that he'll just tag along. But she doesn't want him there, of course, because she's going out with all of her friends and doesn't want her old man floating around because he's recognisable everywhere because he's been around all over the place. But he



follows her anyway, and he starts getting a bit of a revelation about what he's done with his life and where things should be going.

Now, I've got to say, this is an American film, so it's rather sentimental and rather melodramatic. But if you put that aside and you think, well, okay, you know that's what you're going to get as you go along with this, it's actually not too bad at all. It starts to get to the point where I was watching it with my wife at one point, I said, "Oh, this was an Italian film they would end it here." And they did! And I thought, oh, okay, that was a bit interesting. They did actually utilise a lot of European techniques. With an overlay of American sentimentality over the top, of course.

David:

They do like their schmaltz, don't they?

Perry:

Yeah, they do, but it doesn't go too far into it. It goes far enough without going completely over the top. I know that some people will watch this and go, "Oh no, it is too schmaltzy, I just don't like it at all." But it's got an interesting better retrospective of Hollywood and of movie stars and what they do and how they live their lives. And from that perspective, it'll probably do very well in the in the awards. I mean, George Clooney plays George Clooney. That's okay. I mean, a lot of actors just play themselves. I mean, you know, Sean Connery only ever played Sean Connery the whole of his career, and who cared about that? So when you've got when you've got him playing a Russian submarine commander with a Scottish accent, who cares? You know, it's basically Hollywood. That's the way things go.

I think this is worth having a look at. I think this is an interesting film. I wouldn't go out of your way. If you've got something else to watch, watch that, but we enjoyed it, got to the end and thought It wasn't too bad. Will I go back and watch it again? No. But that's all right. There's a lot of films around that I only ever want to watch once. This is one of them. I mean, Frankenstein, I'll go back and watch it again. Even though you have reservations and I have reservations about it. It's got enough going on there for me to want to go back and look at that film again. This one, not so much. But if you've got time and there's nothing else on, and you see *Jay Kelly* there and you think, no, Perry said this was all right. So you watch it, then you come back and say, Perry's an idiot. That's fine. Don't have a problem with that. I enjoyed it so and it and it's on Netflix so it's easy to watch.

David:

Yeah, I would go back and watch *The Great Flood* again. In fact, I wouldn't mind watching it [again]. It's one of those films where you think, now, if I knew how this was going to end up, I'd like to go back and see how it works out.

Perry:

Well see how they all set it all up and see to see what the bits are and If you say that it takes a sharp turn to the left at one point, well then you want to know how did everything figure out and what do they do then and how does that work? All right, okay, I will go and watch that. That sounds good.

Windup and Next Episodes

Perry:

All right, David, I think we're probably done for this particular episode. We're coming up to the hour, finished what we need to talk about. which is good.

Next month, sometime in January, as we sit [on New Year's Eve], it's only tomorrow, but sometime in January. We'll be starting our Best of the Year episodes as we normally do. January will be Best Books of the Year. February will be Best Film and Television.

We may have to change a little bit in terms of what we normally do with our best books of the year, because I didn't read anywhere near as many this particular year as I've normally done. You and I might have to have some discussions in terms of cutting down the the length of our episode. I think in the past it's gone for close on two hours, but I don't think it'll go that long this time, David. Can't see it at all.

David:

On the other hand, the film and T V episode could go for three hours, I think.

Perry:

Well, we might need to change, we might we might need to split that and just do two.

David:

Yeah, we might have to split it up.

Perry:

We'll see how we go because I've got a lot of films to talk about.

David:

Yeah, me too.

Perry:

Jay Kelly was number 112 for me, and I've got another one, and I've got another one to go today, so I'm off to see another one.

David:

Oh, crikey. I haven't watched that many, but I've watched far more than I usually have done in the past.

Perry:

Oh, good. That's good. All right, David, we're done.

David:

All right. We'll see you next time and have a happy new year.

Perry:

Yep. And you as well, and also to the listener.

David:

Bye.

Letter of Comment

From: W. H. Chong

Date: 3 January 2026

Listened to your last pod of 25. I pretty much agree on *Frankenstein* — it was a bit heavy handed.

I didn't mind he made his own thing of the story; it's an adaptation, like Kurosawa's & Orson Welles' *Macbeths*.

I think while it was a failure of story-telling that Dr Frank was pretty Eeveel thru and thru (though Isaac did good as a Hot Bad Boy), it was not a failure of realism to characterise Tech Bros as lacking in empathy with only interest in ambition and domination. Truth. And Dr Frank was the Tech Daddy, the Godbro to all the tech bros.

But no one else can throw up an image like the first sight of Frankenstein's mother, or the coffin scene, or the gothic baroque of the grotesquerie of the body parts on the way to the final Creature, the gothic excess of the thunderstorm and climbing the tower in the rain. And the Creature is an indelible marvel, a beautiful invention and characterisation. ("The Modern Prometheus" — I do like the connection of that subtitle and Ridley's Scott's *Alien Prometheus* and Del Toro's echo in his creature design.)

When I first saw *Hellboy* I didn't know it was Del Toro — but what a swinging movie. And *Pan's Labyrinth* was, is one of the greats — full of amazing visuals which conveyed all the stuff beyond words. And I think that's what I missed this time in *Frankenstein* — Del Toro tried mightily, but his hope for operatic emotion was somehow muffled...? Still he is one of the good ones, and a wizard of the eye.

Reply from: David

I'm interested that you mention the first sight of Frankenstein's mother (standing on the steps veiled in red).

Did you realise that the same actress (Mia Goth) plays both Frankenstein's mother *and* Elizabeth Harlander? I hadn't until I saw the cast list. I'm not sure what that says, something Freudian, no doubt.