

**Issue 16**  
**Playing Ping Pong in the Dark**



# Playing Ping Pong in the Dark

Season 2 Episode 16, April 2, 2026



## 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.

—

All textual content in *Two Chairs in Print* is © Copyright 2026 by David R. Grigg and Perry Middlemiss, and is licensed under Creative Commons License CC BY-ND 4.0.

Cover image by Wombo Dream AI.

—

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the members of the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which this publication is produced in Mill Park and Hawthorn, Victoria, and we pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

—

## Podcast Website

<https://twochairs.website>

—

## Email

[twochairstalk@gmail.com](mailto:twochairstalk@gmail.com)

# Transcript of Episode 16

## Introduction

---

**Perry:**

Hello, and welcome to episode sixteen of this second season of this podcast we call *Two Chairs Talking*. My name is Perry Middlemiss, and I'm here as always with my good friend David Grigg. Hi David, how are you? How's the world treating you?

**David:**

How is the world treating me? Well the world's treating me okay, I suppose. I'm not sure that my own body is treating me well, but never mind, we won't get into that.

**Perry:**

Well, let's not get into health matters. Let's not get into weather matters. Let's not get into politics.

**David:**

We could talk about sport, but then you're the only one who likes sport, so...

**Perry:**

No, you don't like sport. You don't like sports, so there's no point talking about sport. You hate sport.

**David:**

We won't venture near politics, especially not at the moment.

**Perry:**

Oh, no, absolutely not. Not at the moment. Things are going... well actually we will venture near politics today. Yeah, we'll get there. Let's not give any spoilers away at this point, David. But we will actually get towards politics and actually talking about a few things in our reviews today because we're back to looking at one film, one book. And it is going to be that order in this episode.

## Discussion

---

**Perry:**

So why don't you kick us off, David? Why don't you start us off with your review of the film *Marty Supreme*?

### ***Marty Supreme*, directed by Josh Safdie**

**David:**

*Marty Supreme*, indeed, directed by Josh Safdie, who I don't know much about as a director. Anyway. Yeah, the film was released just this year and it stars Timothée Chalamet. Did I get that pronunciation right? Timothée Chalamet?

**Perry:**

Well, I'll just call him Timothy. Timmy.

**David:**

He's the character who's entirely central to the story. He's a young American Jewish man called Marty Mauser. And there's hardly any scene in the movie in which he doesn't appear, which is appropriate because it's really just this one person's story, a young man who's utterly focused on a single goal. And that goal is to prove that he's the greatest table tennis player in the world.

According to Wikipedia, this story is loosely, very loosely, based on the true story of a guy called Marty Reisman who was one of America's best table tennis players in the 1950s and 1960s, and also had some similar approaches to hustling, hustling people to make money and so on with his skills.

Anyway, to the film itself. So the film starts off in 1952 in New York. And Martin Mauser is a young man, I think somewhere he says that he's 21 or 22, anyway, about that sort of age, and he's working in his uncle's shoe store. And although his uncle would like him to become manager of the store, Marty is not interested. He's only working there to raise the money so he can get to England to play in the British Table Tennis Open. He's determined to win the championship there and prove American superiority in the sport.

While he's in the store on his last day before his trip, he manages to secretly have sex with his childhood friend Rachel, who is now married, an unhappily married woman. Little do they know that at the time he impregnates her. But we're made aware of that in the film.

What follows is a series of outrageous actions by Marty, driven by his obsession, his singular focus, heedless of the damage that he causes to others. He convinces the father of a friend of his to invest a lot of money in a line of personalized coloured ping pong balls, the "Marty Supreme". So he has this big discussion with him. And when he returns to the store that day, he's too late to get the money that he's owed by his uncle, who's left.

So he's so desperate because he has to have this money so he can fly to England. He uses a gun to force his colleague in the store to open the safe and give him the money. And then he flies to England. So he gets to England and he's put up in this hotel with a bunch of other players and it's a bit of a dump and he's in with several other players in the same room, and he's just outraged by what he thinks is the lack of respect he's owed. So he finds out where the officials are staying at, which is the Ritz Hotel, and he books himself in there and he puts everything on the tab of the World Table Tennis Association. I was wondering while this is happening, how the hell is he going to get away with this?

Anyway, having set the scene as that, I won't try to describe the entire plot of the film, of course. But the interest of the story is just the horrified fascination as you follow Marty through the series of disasters that he causes and he leaves in his wake all this damage, damage to people, it's just terrible really. But he's completely obsessed as he pushes onwards towards his goal. He's completely self-focused and narcissistic. And you see that he really has trouble seeing other people as anything other than just either useful tools to help him or obstacles to be overcome in his way. He does in fact leave at least a couple of dead bodies



behind him, by my account. Not through deliberate murder, but just through failure to appreciate the consequences of his actions.

As I say I'm not going to tell you the whole plot, go and see the film. But at the very end of the film, probably for the first time in his whole life. Marty is awoken from his self-obsession and is reduced to tears. I won't actually tell you why, because I don't want to make it a spoiler. But that's the only point. Right at the end, he finally has a bit of redemption. He has actually started to see someone else as being important other than himself.

So Marty's both a sympathetic character in that you're amused and charmed by his outrageous *chutzpah*. I haven't pronounced that properly I'm sure, but *chutzpah*. and you get drawn into wanting him to succeed. But at the same time he's a very unsympathetic character in that you can't but want him to be brought to account for the problems that he causes to others. But Timothée Chalamet does a great job in this pretty difficult balancing act, I guess.

So, who else have we got? Gwyneth Paltrow was excellent, I thought, as the aging but still famous movie star, Kay Stone, who Marty manages to seduce, initially for the sheer fun of doing it, but then she becomes another stepping stone towards his goal. Odessa A'zion, I don't know how to pronounce that, is the actress who plays poor Rachel, who's in this unhappy marriage and being bashed about by her husband. And she's in love with Marty, but he treats her for most of the film really as more of an annoyance, as an obstacle in his way. But she does a very good job in drawing our sympathy.

So look I enjoyed the film. It's received a largely positive reception and it's gained a number of accolades. It was nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards as well as in a number of other categories. What did you think of it, Perry?

**Perry:**

Yeah, I wasn't overly taken with this one so much. I mean, I can understand the obsessive nature of it all, but it just becomes relentless, this continual succession of events where Marty is just an agent of chaos and his own worst enemy all the way right through.

**David:**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Perry:**

And as you say, he doesn't seem to have any sense of understanding what impact he's having on the people around him, and he just leaves this destruction all the way around wherever he goes.

**David:**

Yep.

**Perry:**

And I have to completely and utterly disagree with you regarding the last scene of this film.

**David:**

Ah, okay, all right.



**Perry:**

I was sitting there and I was thinking, well, actually, all right, it's a film where it's a bad and obsessive guy, and he just, he's following one track and he just keeps on rolling and he then he gets to the end and it's like, oh no, it lets this all down.

**David:**

Yeah, I didn't think that.

**Perry:**

You know, yeah, I did. I just felt that it was completely let down by the whole thing, and I just went "Oh no!"

**David:**

Now we're going to have to tell people what it what the last scene is.

**Perry:**

No, you don't have to. No, you still don't. I just thought it was, I just did not like the way that it went.

**David:**

Well I see that as his redemption. I think he actually does change.

**Perry:**

Yeah, but isn't that a bit of a cop-out here for this redemption? I mean, the guy's been a well, let's call it , he's been a prick the whole of the way through this particular film.

**David:**

Absolutely.

**Perry:**

And he's been a bastard to everybody, and then oh, everything's hunky dory and sweetness and light at the end. No, life doesn't work like that. He's supposed to basically get his comeuppance I wanted somebody to take him out the back and beat the absolute crap out of him...

**David:**

He doesn't actually pay for the consequences of his actions, does he?

**Perry:**

..then I would have gone, yes, I feel better now. I feel better about this now.

But no, I thought, look, there's a lot to like about this film, but there's very, very few characters in it that are sympathetic. I think the girlfriend that you mentioned, she's one of them.

The acting is good. I thought that was all right. But there's this relentless drive of these people that just shred the world around them that I found difficult to get through at the end. He was, he's certainly not a likable character.

**David:**

No, well he is and he isn't. He's got this charm to him.

**Perry:**

No, no, David, no, no, no, no, no. He just is not a likable character. There's nothing to like about him at all. He's got an overblown sense of his own self-importance, and he's got an overblown sense of his own ability to be able to... well, he does

compete at the top level. I'll give him that. He's up there, but he's like just below the top Japanese guy and he always has trouble with that.

And of course, this is set during the 1950s, and so there's a little bit of politics here in the sense that America and Japan had been at war 10 years previously. And suddenly, you've got the lead Japanese guy who really is the best in the world, stoic, classic Asian, basically the classic American version of the Asian, stoic, quiet, silent, but determined. And frankly, there's a little bit of a hint that he might be being a little bit more fast and loose with some of the rules. And Marty Supreme, who's trying everything he can to break all the rules all over the place, is suddenly that next slight level down. So there is a little bit of that tension that's going on there, and that was fine. I was looking at that. I was like, oh, yeah, okay. That's interesting.

But I just got to the end and I thought, nah, I gave it low threes. I really did. I just thought it was well down on my rankings of the films for the Academy Awards because I ended up getting to watch them all. It was down further down near the bottom, basically.

Yeah, because I just thought that I was let down by the end.

**David:**

Did you like the sport? Did you like the games of table tennis? I thought they were pretty well done.

**Perry:**

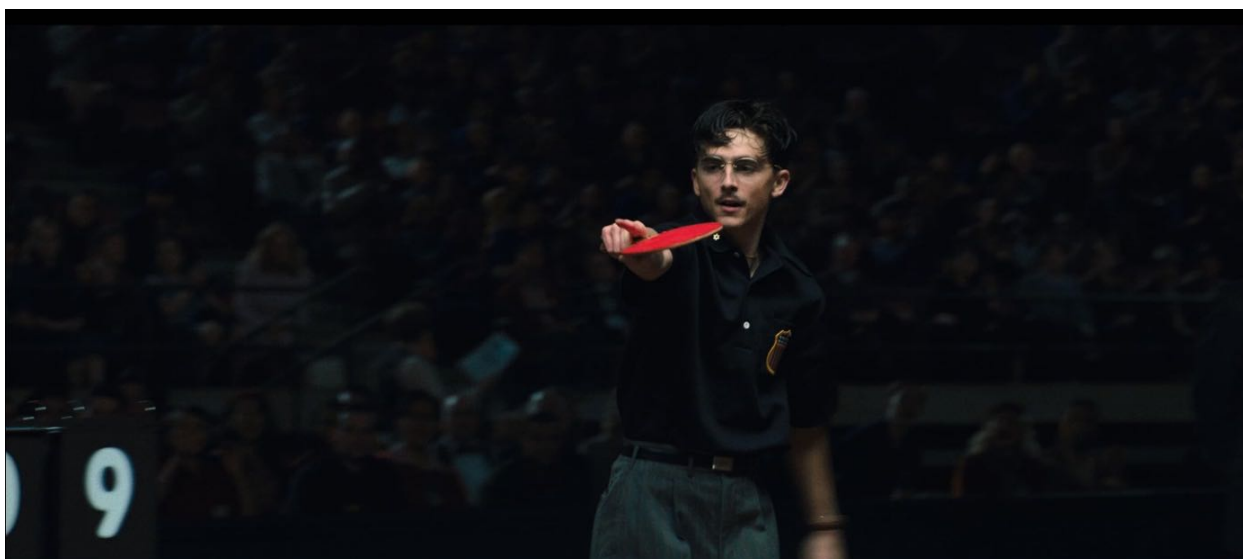
They were they were very well done, yes. Um sport, David, we're talking sport now..

**David:**

I know, I know.

**Perry:**

This is a bit of a shock. We've never talked sport on this on this program before. What an odd show. Yeah, well, it was interesting. It was certainly. I actually played competition table tennis for a while, but I really wasn't very good, and I wasn't anywhere near the level of these guys, because these guys are belting it from five metres from behind the table and jumping around all over the place. So, yes. The table tennis stuff was exciting and really good.



It's a period piece, so it looks pretty authentic, and I was quite pleased with the way the set design went. I thought Timothée Chalamet did a very good job of the acting because he sets himself out to be a prick and he acts as if he's a prick and he does that very well. He convinces you of this guy's level of badness, and self-centeredness.

**David:**

I mean he's like Ripley, isn't he? Not as evil as Ripley, but it's the similar sort of character.

**Perry:**

Not as evil as Ripley. Yeah, and the complete opposite end of the acting spectrum, because Adam Scott in *Ripley* tries to do exactly the minimum amount you possibly can because he wants to be a complete cipher, he wants to be blank so that he can create whatever character he needs to, whereas this guy has got everything. He wears his emotions not only on his sleeve, but all over his face and all over his body. Whatever he thinks he just does. So he's completely the opposite end in terms of characters.

Really good suggestion in terms of the difference and the comparison there. Yeah, so he won a few awards. He was up for the Best Actor Award for the Oscars, but didn't win. That went to Michael B. Jordan for *Sinners*. And look, he could have won. There was a bit of a problem near the end of the voting period where he gave an interview somewhere with somebody or other and he was slagging off opera and ballet saying that nobody's interested in them anymore and nobody goes. Well, if people are going to vote for somebody's acting award because of they make a comment like that, that's pretty pathetic, really, and you shouldn't be pitching that.

I mean, I don't particularly like Gérard Depardieu, for example. I don't particularly like his political points of view, but bloody hell he's a good actor. And you should only be going on what the actor's doing. If you bring in a whole lot of the other stuff, this is where we get to these arguments again about separating the art from the artist,

**David:**

The art and the artist, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Perry:**

Yeah, it's very difficult to do, but yeah, Chalamet, he's everywhere. He's everywhere at the moment.

And he's got the Dune movies. He's got another one of those coming out at the end of the year. And he's got this. He's probably working, just about every day God gives him. So good luck. If he's going to be able to do that, well, that's great. And I hope that. I hope that it just keeps going for him.

**David:**

Yeah, yeah, he's good.



**Perry:**

But no, this wasn't my favourite film of the year, David. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I can understand your point of view. I just don't agree with you.

**David:**

Yeah, that's fair enough.

**Slow Gods by Claire North****Perry:**

All right. Okay. So we'll move on to the book for this one.

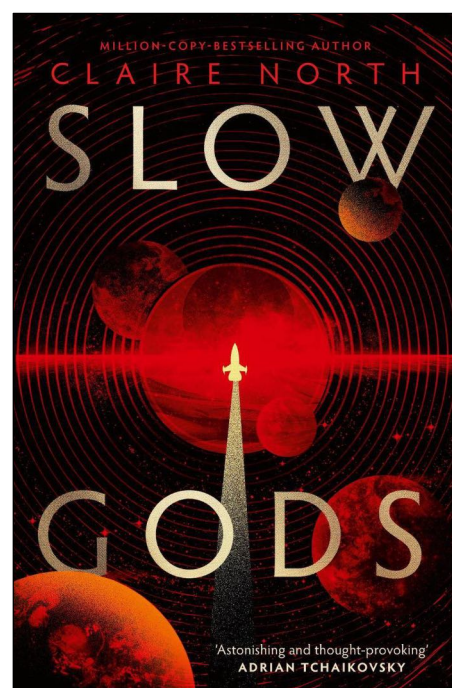
So for a book for this month, we're going to be looking at another novel by Claire North, this one being *Slow Gods*, released at the end of last year. Now, Claire North's a pseudonym for the British author Catherine Webb, and we've spoken a lot about North's work here on the podcast over the years, looking at such novels as *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August*, which we liked, *Sudden Appearance of Hope*, *Touch* and *Notes from the Burning Age*. And you, David, chose the author's *Songs of Penelope* trilogy as some of the best novels you read in 2025. So we're familiar with her work. And we generally enjoy it. I can't say there's anything that I've disliked. And now she has released a new SF novel, and we've decided to have a bit of a close look at it.

Now, it's interesting... we might get to this at the end because you've read probably more of her work than I have. But she does seem to be moving across those major science fiction themes and looking at them from a different perspective. So interesting, interesting.

Anyway, this particular novel is a space opera. It's set in a widely-populated galaxy. Now, I don't recall in the novel any mention of a human diaspora from Earth, though I think there is one occasion where the major sentient inhabitants of this galaxy are referred to as "human". I'll put that in inverted commas. So let's go with the idea that this is a far future version of our galaxy because it's just probably going to be easier to discuss it. After the human race has spread widely throughout its reaches, landing on different planets all over the place, terraforming some to fit human environmental requirements, living in all the various different styles of environments they can find.

This diaspora initially seems to have been undertaken with slow ships taking generations to make their voyages across the distances of the galaxy. However, at some point in the novel's past, a method of traveling through what is referred to here as "arc-space"—North's version of the well-known hyperspace science fiction concept—has been discovered. And this allows for large jumps across vast distances of the galaxy. The standard science fiction travel idea for these galaxy-expanding space operas that we're all fairly used to.

As a result of this, humankind has spread around a lot of the galaxy. Meeting up with a few other alien races which are mentioned in the novel but which don't



really have a lot of stage time and which aren't in themselves important to this particular story. So they are there, but they are just mentioned, so they don't really impact things terribly much. Now, also, rather like countries on Earth, the various human settlements, planets, and solar systems or whatever, have gradually formed themselves into different political and cultural alignments, which I'll get to a little bit later.

Now the difference with the arcspace that is mentioned in this particular novel is traveling through it is not that easy. Each ship requires a pilot, who has interfaced with the spaceship, to ensure the ship ends up where it's supposed to go, to be able to control things and make sure that everything works properly. Now, that seems reasonable enough, and you can understand that, well, it's just the concept that she uses, that seems fair. Except for the fact that within this arcspace, there appears to be *something*—though nobody can really say what it actually is—hanging around within that space. While traveling through it, most people experience a movement at the corner of their eye, something flickering out there, a sense that there is something moving around, over, or possibly within the ship itself. And it gives them the sense that this is like an eldritch horror or sort of Lovecrafty. Now, pilots experience this in a magnified form, and it sends some of them mad and kills others. So most civilizations severely restrict the number of flights they allow their pilots to make. Some only allow one round trip flight, though others of the more authoritarian bent push their pilots to complete breaking point.

I'm going on a bit about the background of this novel, but bear with me, because I think it's important that we actually get through this, because otherwise you won't understand what's going on later on. I mentioned earlier that the various planets have formed into groups of differing political and cultural setups, and the majority of which have formed an alliance called the Accord. One of these ones where I'm not terribly sure if they're associated with the Accord, but the most important of these cultural setups, from the novelist's perspective, is this grouping called the Shine. This is an ultra-capitalist hierarchical society where privilege and status theoretically can be earned, but this is really very, very rare, and it's mostly gained from being born into the right family group. The general populace are treated as slaves, forever indebted to the state from the moment they're born. Their birth is added to their debt, and they get a collar around their neck, which basically tells them this is how much debt that you've incurred from whatever the state has given you.

Yes, you can see we're getting into politics, David. I told you we would. That's to one side, so keep that in mind because they are a major part of what's going to be happening in the novel later on. Now also floating around the galaxy is a strange alien construct called the Slow with a capital S. This is a perfect black sphere moving through normal space, never arcspace, it never goes into arcspace. It appears to have a knack of turning up in places just before events of galactic importance take place. At the start of this novel, the Slow arrives at a Shine planet and sends out a series of messenger boxes to other inhabited planets in that part of the galaxy and announces that a major supernova event will occur in the neighborhood, in 100 years' time, sending out a shockwave that will totally obliterate all life within an 83 light-year radius of the explosion, which includes a number of well-populated planets.

Now this is the event which will provide the major dramatic thrust of the story that follows. So that gives us the background of the novel. Something I can put it in a capsule. This is stuff that's slowly eked out by the author over the course of

the 420-odd pages of the book, 450, whatever is it? Hang on a minute, I've got the book here. We've got what are we? What was it? 422 pages. I saw somebody the other day in a review said it was 480, but it must have been a different format. Anyway, that's 420-odd pages.

The main story itself is narrated by a man by the name of, and I'm only going to say this once, David, because it's too bloody long Mawuka na Vdnaze. Yes. And he's known as Maw, M-A-W for short, so I'm only ever going to call him Maw. Now, Maw is living on a Shine world, born there, lives on there, and one day after the the Slow has made its announcement, he's arrested merely for being on the streets when an anti-establishment riot is happening because of the hierarchical structure of this society, the poor have basically risen up. He's actually trying to get to or from work. He's not supposed to be out in the street, gets pulled in and picked up. Sounds a bit like stuff that happens in certain countries at the moment. So he's accused of being a rebel, convicted in a show trial, and shipped off planet to work in some sort of mining camp on another world, presumably until he dies. That's it. But he doesn't die. But he does break a leg about three weeks after arrival, so he's pretty much useless for the job that he was given there. And one of his captors suggests he be used as a pilot on an arcship, because the Shine is one of these societies that uses pilots, but it forces prisoners to do the work, knowing that it's going to kill them in the end. They don't care. They're dispensable.

So it's either he becomes the pilot on this arcship or a bullet, supposedly. So pilot it is. Now, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you want to look at it, Maw's first flight is not a good one. Something goes wrong, everybody on the ship dies and is torn apart with blood sprayed everywhere. And the ship itself appears in another part of the galaxy, 12 seconds before it actually took off. So something deeply, deeply weird has happened. Time frames all over the place.

A lot of the blood that was on this particular spaceship that they find is identified as Maw's, but enough to indicate that he's actually died, and yet he's found sitting in the captain's quarters very much alive. And this is important because basically, somehow or other, this has formed the point that whenever he dies, he's able to reconstitute himself and really pretty much come back from the dead.

Now, the story then cuts to a time 100-odd years later when Maw is living on a remote planet, and he's earned a reputation as the pilot you go to where no others could do the job. He doesn't really know why he survives as well in the dark of arcspace, but he does, and he suspects it's because he's somehow made of the same material, and whatever lurks in the dark ignores him as being uninteresting. "Well, you're one of us, so I'm not interested in you. I'm interested in these humans, which I haven't seen before."

Maw is first sent to the planet of Adjumir. I think that's how you pronounce it. About 11 years before the supernova is to happen. And this is the closest planet to the explosion. It will be scoured clean by the blast wave when it comes through. He's piloting a ship of microbiologists who are collecting samples from the planet to take off, to take with the population that's being slowly evacuated, and will also be collecting some cultural artifacts that need to be taken off planet and stored as well.

Now, while on that planet, he meets this person, Gebre with whom he starts a relationship. One that is doomed to fail, as Gebre has no plans to leave the planet until the very last moment, if they decide to leave at all.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Perry doesn't have this quite right: there's a ballot for places in the evacuation, and Gebre's number has not been called.



*Catherine Webb (photo from her website)*

I'll be very careful with my pronouns here, David.

**David:**

Pronouns, that's a big big part of this book.

**Perry:**

Very big part of this book, which we'll get to a bit later. Now, this event becomes important to Maw, as it represents the really only real close relationship he has at any time in the novel with another...

**David:**

Human.

**Perry:**

...human, okay, with another human. He has close relationships with artificial intelligences, but they are at an intellectual level, and this is at it more as the physical level. And Gebre will act as his moral compass for the rest of the story. He continually keeps asking himself, is this what Gebre would have done or not done?

And then the supernova mentioned earlier explodes.

By this time, about three billion people have been evacuated from this planet of Adjumir, leaving about 800 million behind. Now Maw is contracted to make another flight to the planet to retrieve some important artifacts that have been newly discovered by his old lover Gebre. And the rest of the novel unfolds from there, because when he gets there he finds out that they didn't ask for him to come at all, but somehow or other he's been tricked into going, but he doesn't know why. He's got to work that out. He's got to work out whether Gebre will come with him at this point or not, because we're right down near the end of the time.

Now, you might ask the question, 800 million people left behind and they've taken about 3.2 billion off. Why didn't the other 800 billion people go? Well, this is one of the major themes of the novel here that floats around in the background, that when a society or a large mass or a world is facing an

existential threat, you'd think that everybody would basically chip in to help. They don't. It's a bit like the refugee crises we've seen here on Earth: that people go, "Yeah, well. Theoretically, we'll take them, but not too many, and we'll take the ones that we want, and we'll dither around about what we're going to do with this and whether we're going to take them or not."

Normally, with a galaxy-spanning space opera, you get a novel that's probably all action and not much else. But there's a lot of politics that floats around at the back of all of this. I mentioned earlier about the hypercapitalist society of the Shine. It tries to impose its system on other star systems. So shades of current events here in the Middle East. There's one situation where they try to obliterate a planet and people are hiding in tunnels, and you think "This is published in 2025. When did she start writing this?" Because there's a lot of parallels about what's going on in the Middle East. So you get a lot of problems that we're basically seeing in our world are being reflected here in this overall structure that North has basically set up. So while the problems themselves may look different from the ones that we have, at heart, the basic core of the problem is the same. It's to do with nationalism, patriotism, my country good or wrong, all of those things that form a sense of "There's us and then there's them, and how much of them do we want to have basically coming in and being with us?"

One thing that I mentioned earlier, which I didn't really go into very much, was the idea of gender. This flows throughout the whole of the book, where basically Maw is considered to be a he, but there are a lot of other characters in there which have completely and utterly different styles of pronouns that the author handles very well. But it doesn't impinge at all. And there's one really interesting point where every now and again in the books he has a chapter which is an interlude that gives a little bit of background to the overall society and cultural setup that she's put together, and one of them is to do with genders. And it's a point where she makes a very telling statement about talking to somebody to say "You say that you can't keep track of these eight genders on this particular planet, and yet you're one of these people that can keep track of 30 or 40 different sporting teams across eight or ten or twenty different sports. So, why are you struggling with just eight genders? Why is this a problem?" And it's an interesting point. There are some things where we basically have to accept that this is what people want, and that's the way it goes. And for most of the people in this particular galaxy, that's exactly the way that things have been set up. Everybody just treats them the way they want to be treated, except for the Shine. And the Shine is really, they're a nasty bunch of people that try to give the impression that everybody's born equal, but of course, they're not. And there's some really telling points that she makes about hypercapitalism and the impact it has on the people living in it, and also the people that are being impacted by it.

This is an excellent novel, reminiscent to me of Adrian Tchaikovsky's work in a lot of ways, in this particular form, especially his Final Architecture series of novels, which also has pilots that go through a hyperspace, they have to be genetically modified to be able to do it. Here it's lucky that some people can survive and some can't, and Maw is really the only one that can just keep on going back all the time.

If you like great space opera written with a brain, then this is the book for you. And it certainly worked for me, David. I enjoyed this immensely. What do you think of it?

**David:**

Hmm it's interesting because the first time I read it, I wasn't sure at all sure that I liked it.

But in preparation for this episode of the podcast, I started to reread it, and I didn't get all the way through the reread. But I must say on the second read, I'm really enjoying it. So I don't know what quite is behind that, but I think I was just a little bit confused the first time through about some of the things. There's a lot of it which is explained by flashbacks. I didn't quite understand the flashbacks, I think. So I actually was a little bit confused the first time round, but as I say I'm enjoying it more the second time round, and I will finish it.

**Perry:**

Can I just jump in there? I agree. I went back to have a look at this because I thought, well, I need to get my timing right in terms of when the supernova is going to happen, and where it's and even now, when I looked at this, I've written stuff down notes and I've put down a timeline. And as I was reading, I was like, "Well, that's wrong. That doesn't make any sense." And so that was difficult to figure out because, as you say, it starts off at one point, jumps all the way at the back, and then it comes back again, and then you have to try and work out are we talking about time lapses since the Slow's announcement or since the supernova or pre-supernova or post supernova, and it gets a little gets a little bit complicated.

**David:**

Yeah.

I'd just like to read the way that the book opens because I think it's one of the great opening lines of all time.

*My name is Mawukana na Vdazne, and I'm a very poor copy of myself.*

And that whole section is called "How I Died". So there's this fundamental core event which has happened, when he's sent off as a pilot and he's not properly prepared for it. He doesn't have the proper processing because the machine that does that is broken, and he ends up having to be the pilot. So, something very weird happens. There's this shift in space and time, which wasn't supposed to happen at all. The fact that he's found without a scratch on him, all his blood is all over the place, and all the blood of all these other people who have been killed on the ship. And somehow he's gone through the dark, and the dark—this weird thing within arcspace—has kind of claimed him and remade him, put him back together. And so that has consequences all the way through the book because he's not actually anymore really a human. He describes himself as a monster. And there are times when the dark part of him gets loose and he has to be monitored. That's one of the things I found confusing the first time. He has to be monitored carefully and people have to pay attention to him, by giving him their attention, they kind of fix him in his human form. But if they don't pay attention or in the dark, something comes out. So I actually think it is actually very clever.

One thing I would like to mention, because you talked about the Shine. and the parallels with modern society. One of the things about the Shine is that the Slow comes along and gives this announcement that in a hundred years there's going to be this supernova explosion which is going to wipe out not only the Adjumir planet, but lots of the Shine planets too, are going to be impacted by this event. And they're going to be destroyed, the population is going to be destroyed. But the Shine's reaction to that is to deny it and to actually jump up and down on

people who try to spread the story that this is going to happen, and they squash it. They actually abduct a particular person who's trying to let people know that this is going to happen and saying "We have to do something about it." So the parallel there with climate change and the denial of climate change by certain administrations that we can think of, I thought that was a quite a strong and interesting parallel too. So that was good.

One thing I didn't like about the book, and I think it's purely down to the book designer. In the typography towards the end of the book, we have this long, long discussion with the Slow, this slow god, if you like, this huge sphere which is like a god. And it's all in all-caps. And it's really hard to read. If it had been me as a book designer, and I have designed some books, I would have set that in small-caps. So that you actually get, just the capital, the start of each sentence is a big cap, and it would be far easier to read.

**Perry:**

Okay. And the rest in small caps.

**David:**

I actually found reading those pages, and they go on for quite some time. where the Slow is talking, to be really hard to get through because it was just all this all-caps. So I thought that was just a poor book design decision.

**Perry:**

Yeah, it's an interesting point. I'm thinking the only other character that I can think of that talks in all-caps like that would be Death in the Terry Pratchett books. Now, do they have it all as all caps, or do they use small caps?

**David:**

I think it's probably all-caps, but he never talks for pages and pages, does he?

**Perry:**

No, he's basically fairly succinct, isn't he?

**David:**

It's just usually a sentence or so, yeah, that's right.

**Perry:**

Yeah, some of these paragraphs do go on a little bit from the Slow, but, well look, yeah, that's part of what he ends up doing.

Maw gets around quite a lot and gets to places where other people basically can't go. Namely, to go and have a talk to the Slow. In fact, the Slow knows who he is and wants to talk to him as well.

There's a lot of interesting things in this book. My question for you, David, at this point. Do you think there'll be a sequel to it? Do you think this is the start of a series? Because I mean, she's spent a lot of time setting up a galaxy-wide civilization. with lots of different parts to it. Do you think that she's going to utilize that to do something else?

**David:**

I suspect not.

**Perry:**

I thought there were hints, just vague little hints about things that had happened. It's almost as if Maw is writing this somewhere way in the future and is looking

back on what's happened here, and there is other stuff. I'm not sure. I just got vague hints. Maybe that was my wishful thing. Because I really liked that, and I'd be happy to go back into this. I'd be happy to go back into this galaxy again.

**David:**

It's interesting because hinking back over her other works, the only trilogy that she's ever done, as far as I can recall, was this one with Penelope in the Greek myths, which is a three novel series. There was no sequel to things like *Harry August* or *Touch* or any of those books. so maybe yeah, that's right.

**Perry:**

Maybe. All right, okay, well we'll just have to wait and see. I mean, I just wondered whether you thought that there was enough enough hints there for...

**David:**

Maybe, but no, I don't think so.

The one thing we haven't paid much attention to is this that it does actually contain this kind of tragic love story, doesn't it, with Gebre. Whose gender we don't know. She always uses pronouns, which are—i's very clever how the author deals with the pronoun issue—she just puts a different letter at the start of things. So Gabriele is always referred to as ter, T-E-R, or te, T-E. So it's completely anonymous. You've got no idea. Which is really good.

But one of the really sad points of the book—I'm giving are spoilers—is that the tragic end of that relationship on the planet Adjumir. And there's a real to me, there's a real *Tristan and Isolde* kind of feel to it, doomed lovers sort of thing. So I thought that was worth pointing out.

**Perry:**

There's a lot going on in here, and you can see there's a lot in this book.

**David:**

But yeah, there's a lot in the book, that's for sure.

**Perry:**

It was published last year, wasn't it? So it was 2025.

**David:**

Yes, you're right. Yes, I bought it in December last year.

**Perry:**

And so I know it was eligible for the Nebulas, and it's not on that list. Because the Nebula list is out. This book isn't on it, and nor was *Shroud* by Tchaikovsky.

**David:**

People have no taste these days. It's hopeless. I just don't follow the awards anymore.

**Perry:**

I don't understand that because, *Shroud's* one of the best first contact novels I've read in a long time. And this is one of the best space operas I've read in a long time. And I think it's been said by other people, really, that you can tell the health of the science fiction field by how good the space opera is. Because that's really for a lot of us, well, it was for me, the heart of what I loved about science fiction at the beginning, then you start picking up other stuff. And then you go, oh, okay, there's these other sections here, there's time travel, there's telepathy, there's

internal dialogues and stuff just only set on the Earth. Space Opera to me was at the beginning when I first started out, when I was, 12, 13. That was it. That was the thing that I was looking for: Galaxy-spanning stuff, high adventure.

**David:**

Which is why I like *The Expanse* series by James S. A. Corey.

**Perry:**

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well, that's why, as I think I've told you before, my father said it was the best science fiction series he'd ever read. Because basically, just Space Opera. Now, I know that space, because of the way science is, and we know at this point pretty certain that it's impossible to travel faster than the speed of light. Within space itself, which is why everybody's got this arcspace or a hyperspace.

But people are now saying, well, you can actually travel faster than the speed of light relative to the space around you, but if you warp the space around you. And this is the Star Trek thing, but they're saying that if you change space and you travel through space, if you change the space you're traveling through, maybe you can change the speed that you travel in for the wider area, but just travel through anyway. So whether that's true...

**David:**

Look, it doesn't matter. I mean, it's just it's a gimmick, so you can have the story.

**Perry:**

It is a gimmick, but a lot of people look at it because it's a gimmick, this then becomes a fantasy, and these all become big quests. So, in essence, they're like an epic fantasy. Well, yeah, that's okay. But really, what they are is they're basically epic stories, aren't they? So, that, we're talking big epic adventures and big epic stories. And you could basically see that this story could really have been encapsulated and brought down to one particular planet in a lot of ways. But it doesn't have that science fictiony galaxy-spanning feel then, does it? And that's what really kicks this off for me. That's what I thought was the thing that I really, really loved about this.

**David:**

Well I'm going to enjoy reading the rest of my second read of it.

**Perry:**

Oh, okay, cool, good. Let me know if your ideas have changed completely and utterly after that.

## What Else We've Been Reading/Watching

Anyway, all right, so what else have you been reading? Let's do oh, let's do books first that you've been reading lately.

### Books

#### *Dusk* by Robbie Arnott

**David:**

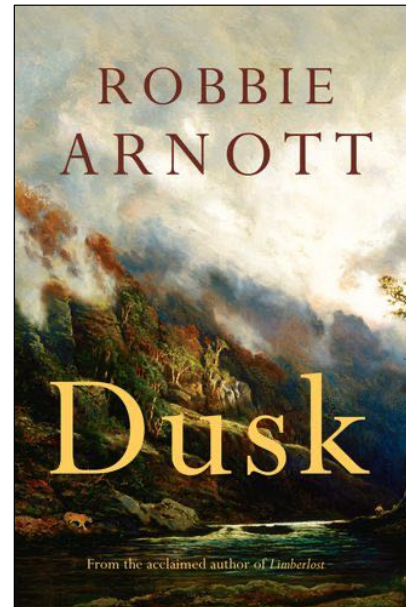
I read *Dusk* by Robbie Arnott, who is one of our favourite authors.

**Perry:**

Oh yeah, that's good.

**David:**

I had a slightly different take on it than you did. I don't know if you read my review online, but yes, it's kind of like a Western, but it has fantasy elements in it, which are interesting. So yeah, I really enjoyed that.



#### *On the Calculation of Volume (Part 1)* by Solvej Balle

I read the first volume or the first part of a projected seven-part series of novels called *On the Calculation of Volume* by Danish author Solvej Bale. I don't know whether that's how you pronounce it, I don't speak Danish.

So, *On the Calculation of Volume*.. And that's the *Groundhog Day* concept of a time loop, but she treats it in a different way and she goes into it in far more depth than you ever see in the film of *Groundhog Day*. And the main character has a lot more freedom of action than the Bill Murray character does in the film. She doesn't always wake up in the same spot, for example. So it's really

interesting because I know there's going to be another six volumes of this.

**Perry:**

Can I tell you, David, that I'd heard about this and thought, "Oh, great, found it at the library", picked it up, only to find out after I'd finished it that I was reading volume three.

**David:**

Well that's interesting. Okay, well don't give me any spoilers.

**Perry:**

No, no, I won't give you anything, but it was completely self-contained and I thought...

**David:**

Well, so was the first volume.



**Perry:**

Oh, okay. This gives me enough to think that it's probably worthwhile going back and reading the others.

**David:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:**

So volume three is pretty good.

**David:**

It's going to be very interesting. But of course she hasn't even actually written the last volume, and of course it still has to be translated from the Danish. So it'll be a while before... maybe by the end of next year we may see the last of it. So I'm not sure whether I should hold off reading the other books until they're all out, or whether I can just read them progressively. Don't know.

**Perry:**

Eke it out over time, about one every three months or so.

**David:**

Yeah, maybe that's the way to do it.

**Perry:**

If you do four this year, by the time you get to the end of it, you won't have too long to wait. If you try and do them all in bang, bang, bang, like my wife does, who likes to read six novels by an author in a series at one time, which I well, I can't stand that. But she likes it, and if you do that, you'll run out, and then you'll forget what it's all about by the time you get to the other end.

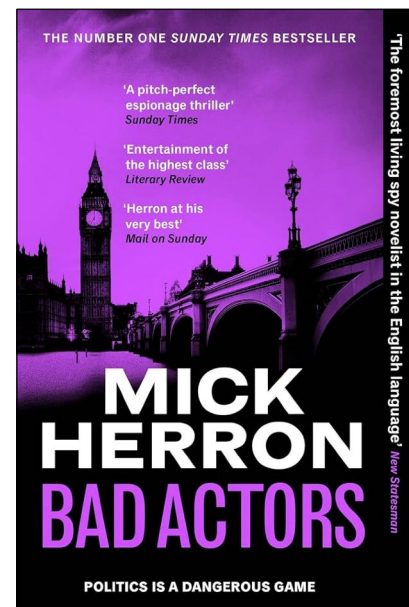
## ***Bad Actors* by Mick Herron**

**David:**

Yeah, anyway, so that's been very interesting. And I'm reading—I haven't actually finished it, but I've almost at the end of it—I've been reading *Bad Actors* by Mick Herron. Another of the Slough House books.

**Perry:**

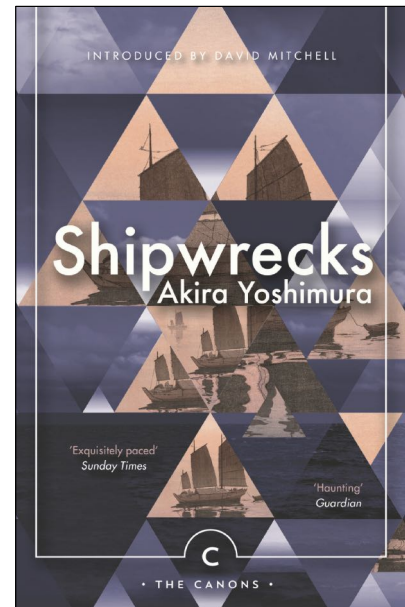
Yeah, well I've got to read the next one on that because of course there'll be another series television series of that coming up probably later this year.



## Shipwrecks by Akira Yoshimura

### Perry:

So I've got a couple of short books that I want to recommend. First one is *Shipwrecks* by Akira Yoshimura, which is a short Japanese novel from 2004. This follows the fortunes of a Japanese coastal village that only truly flourishes when it's able to lure passing ships onto the rocky shoreline where they are wrecked, so that the villagers then go out and strip the ships and dispose of the crew. You know, and so this is the same thing that used to happen, I believe, in Cornwall as well, that people would set up lights on the beach to lure the ships in. They would think it was a lighthouse, they'd come in and smash onto the rocks, and they'd go out and strip everything off that they needed. So the fortunes of this village go up and down depending on whether they are able to get any ships to come in. But on one occasion the village picks the wrong ship with devastating results. Short, really, really very well written. I mean, it's like 140, 130, 140 pages. Lovely book, really, really good.



## My Death by Lisa Tuttle

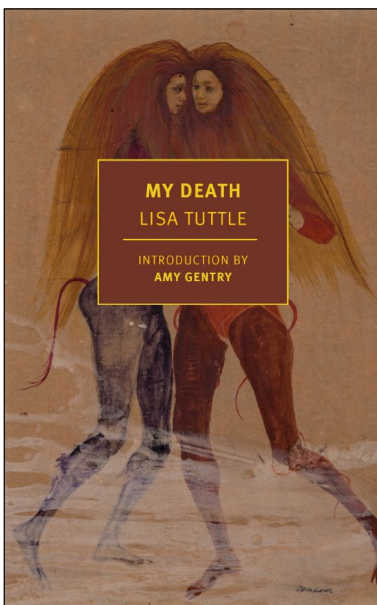
### Perry:

And another one. This one is actually published as a novella is *My Death* by Lisa Tuttle.

Lisa Tuttle is an American science fiction writer who now lives in Scotland. She was in a relationship with Christopher Priest at one point, I believe, and then that broke down, but she stayed living over in the UK. Now this is a horror novella. Now bear with me though, because I call it horror because I can't call it really anything else. It's about a writer who's unnamed, but who bears a very strong resemblance to Lisa Tuttle, if you know Tuttle's history, who attempts to restart

her career, because it's stalled, by writing a biography of a forgotten novelist and artist by the name of Helen Elizabeth Ralston. Interesting name, especially when you note the initials, Helen Elizabeth Ralston, "HER". Sorry, I just thought that was funny.

But anyways, on one auspicious day, when she's going to meet her agent, she sees a painting by the artist in the Glasgow Art Gallery. And she decides to write a biography of this particular artist. On this day, when she decides to write the biography, she meets her agent and pitches it to him. He agrees. He introduces her to somebody who presents her with a painting by Ralston. And she also learns that Ralston is still alive, well into her 90s, and living in Glasgow, near to where she lives. So the writer goes to visit Ralston, and things start to turn very strange indeed, because Ralston was expecting her, and had read all of her previous books.



So this is not horrific, it's not horror, it's sort of like a creepy fantasy, but it's really well done. And as a novella it's good. Now I know you don't like horror, I know you don't like fantasy, but I reckon you'd like this one.

**David:**

What's it called again?

**Perry:**

*My Death* by Lisa Tuttle.

**David:**

Oh, yeah. There you go.

## Films and TV

**Perry:**

Yeah, so any films or TV that you've seen?

### *Jurassic World: Rebirth*, directed by Gareth Edwards

**David:**

Films, I have seen some films. I went to see *Jurassic World Rebirth*, which was just another one in that series where there are big dinosaurs and people run around screaming when the dinosaurs get out. It's very much a template, but it was it was all right.

**Perry:**

All good stuff.

### *The Choral*, directed by Nicholas Hytner

**David:**

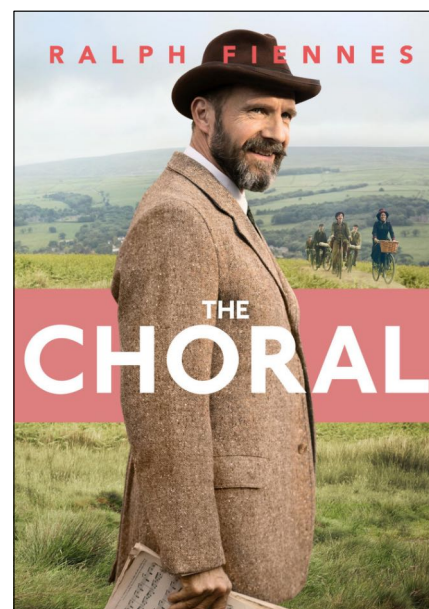
I went to see *The Choral* along with my choir, it was done as a fundraising thing for my choir. Which had Ralph Fiennes in it, and he was very good. And interestingly, it was all filmed in the town where I lived in England. So that was that was good. Interesting.

**Perry:**

Oh, okay. Did you recognize any of the places?

**David:**

I *did*, I thought, I know that mill. And in fact, the place I first went to school there, the grammar school I went to, was there in it. It's just one of the buildings in the film. There you go. It was interesting.



### *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, directed by Peter Jackson

And I re-watched all of the Lord of the Rings trilogy just because I could. That was about it. Yep.

### 3 Body Problem, Season 1

**David:**

And on TV I saw *3 Body Problem*, Season 1. That was I thought pretty well done .And a couple of other things. It's not worth going into detail.



### *Unfamiliar*, Limited Series

**David:**

And a German series called *Unfamiliar*, a thriller.

**Perry:**

Oh, I've seen that advertised.

**David:**

Yeah, I think it was just a limited series. I can't imagine there are going to be more seasons of it. But you never know.

**Perry:**

All right.

**David:**

It was all right.

### *Train Dreams*, directed by Clint Bentley

**Perry:**

Okay, well a couple of films that I've watched recently which I would recommend for people, both of which were on the Oscar lists for Best Film.

One's *Train Dreams*. It's a slow, meditative film about a man who earns his living as a timber cutter in the US Northwest in the early part of the 20th century. And it features Australian actor Joel Edgerton in the lead role and is streaming now on Netflix.

Long and slow, but very interesting. Very interesting. Very well done. Interesting little bit parts played by a few people here and there. I think you'll enjoy it.



### *Sentimental Value*, directed by Joachim Trier

**Perry:**

The other one is *Sentimental Value*, another one nominated for this year's Oscars and it won the Best International Feature Film Award at the Oscars. It's a Norwegian film with subtitles. And as I've said, you need to get out and see more. We need to get out and see more non-English films. It's directed by Joachim Trier and features Stellan Skarsgaard.

It's about a film director, who has attempted to get his career going again. And he's written a film script especially for his actor daughter, played by Renate Reinsve. Not sure if that's how you pronounce it. My apologies if it isn't. But she

rejects the role because she basically has this problem with him because he's been absent for most of her life. And so the father gives the script to a young American actor played by Elle Fanning. And it's then what happens... He's got two daughters, the film director, and so there's a big interplay between them in terms of them coming to terms with their father coming back into their life and possibly being a director for a film that one of them is going to be in.

I saw this in the cinema in early March, so it might still be possible to catch up with it there if you hunt around. Or else you can rent it on either Apple or Prime streaming services. And I would recommend it. I think it's an excellent film. It's one of these films that's filmed in rather small houses. In fact, the film that he's going to try and direct, that he's written the script for, is set purely and simply in this house. And the film that you're watching, *Sentimental Value*, is mostly filmed in this house.

Because the film the script that he's written is based—though he says that it isn't—is based on the life of his grandmother. And when it's pointed out “Isn't this what happened to your grandmother?” “Oh no, it's got nothing to do with her.” You know, just “Oh no, no, no, no”. And you sit there and think, oh, of course it does. It's exactly what happened, because you get a bit of flashback and you get a bit of stories about that.

No, worthwhile seeing, really excellent. The three main characters being played for this, and even Elle Fanning, who picks up, who plays an actor who is trying to move away from rom-coms and stuff into something a little bit more serious and struggles with this particular work that she's been getting is very good in the role. Very, very worthwhile seeing.

So, there's a, although a lot of times we might say that the films nominated for the Oscars are generally not always the best, they had *The Secret Agent*, they had *Train Dreams*, they had *Sentimental Value*.

And these are films that are not for your 15 or 16-year-old kid that's going to go along to a tentpole movie. That might be *F1*. And I was happy to see *F1* even on the list because what it a lot of people said, well, it's not a very good film.

Well, maybe it's not. But it set out to do one particular thing, and it did it beautifully, and what can you ask for a film more than that? You know, it basically set out, it looks really good, had the possibility of diving fully into a sentimental romance, and it got close to it and stepped away from it and went somewhere else. And I thought that was a really good choice and it worked out really well. And so *F1*, my wife came to see *F1* and she hates car racing and she said, “I really enjoyed that.”

**David:**

Yeah, I enjoyed it actually. And I'm actually I'm not a sports person, but I enjoyed it.

**Perry:**

Yeah, I thought that's right, but it looks good, and all of the racing scenes are fully integrated into the plot. They have to be there. And they handled that very, very well.



**David:**

I believe there's going to be a sequel which will not be called *F2*.

**Perry:**

No, *F1 Again*. Oh, I don't know. Who knows? Not sure whether that's a good idea.

**David:**

Yeah, it probably was best to just leave it as it is now.

**Perry:**

Yeah, I would just leave it. You know, there are there are times like we were talking earlier about *Slow Gods*, and I'd be happy read a sequel to that. I don't think I'd be happy to see a sequel to *F1*, if it's not done by the same people with the same actors, and they've got to find another plot that they can use, and I reckon they'll fall into the sentimental trap there.

**David:**

Yeah, might they might have jumped the shark. Yeah, we'll see.

**Perry:**

I think they might have.

## Windup and Next Episode

---

**Perry:**

All right. So I think we're done for this episode, David. We can pack it up and allow the listener to go off and do whatever it is they do. But we should talk about the fact about what we're going to be watching or talking about next time.

**David:**

Yeah.

**Perry:**

So do you want to tell us?

**David:**

We're going to talk about the novel *Wild Dark Shore*, which seems to be getting lots of awards or being put on lots of short lists. It's by Australian author Charlotte McConaghy, and I raved about it in our Best Books of 2025, in our first episode for this year. So I'm going to talk about it again, but I might broaden it a bit and talk a bit about some of her other novels as well.

**Perry:**

Yeah, do that, do that.

**David:**

I've forgotten what the movie is going to be. Oh, the movie was...

**Perry:**

We're going to do *Project Hail Mary*.

**David:**

Oh, *Project Hail Mary*, which is based on a book I didn't much like. And I was one of the few people in the universe who didn't like *Project Hail Mary* as a book, but I went to see the film, and we'll talk about it next time.

**Perry:**

I look forward to hearing what you have to say about it, David. Yes. Anyway, it is the, it seems to be the film at the moment. So people can go and see it. They've got plenty of choice. It's available in wide release all over the place.

**David:**

I went to see it in the cinema, yeah.

**Perry:**

I think it's well made and I think it's a very good idea to see it on the biggest screen you possibly can. How about that? Shall we leave it at that?

**David:**

Okay, fair enough. Yep, we can work and agree on that.

**Perry:**

So we're giving the listener a bit of homework to go out and see the film so they can understand what we're talking about when we come and discuss it in about a month. Okay, David. Well, I'll talk to you then, and we'll let the listener go off and do whatever it is they do when they're not listening to us.

**David:**

Do their thing. Hmm.

**Perry:**

Okay. Thanks, David.

**David:**

Thanks. Thanks, Perry. See you then.

# Emails of Comment

## Comment on Issue 13

**From: Mark Nelson**

**Date: 31 March 2026**

Dear Editors,

One of the most productive periods in my life for reading novels was from June 1998 to February 1999, when I worked in Christchurch (New Zealand) There were two main reasons for this productivity.

Firstly, I didn't own a TV. Prior to moving to Christchurch I'd lived for seven months in Auckland. I'd quickly discovered that there was very little worth watching on NZ TV. To be more accurate, virtually no local content was worth watching.

The second reason, linking to a Perry comment, was that I had a thirty minute bus trip into work. I'm a pretty quick reader, so the five hours of commuting each week in itself allowed me to knock back a large number of pages. Happy days. I'm pretty confident that this short Indian summer will remain, until the end of my days, my peak book reading period. Because, to provide a third reason, it was a period of zero interest in SF fanzines and almost zero activity in postal diplomacy fanzines.

This was also the period in my life when I saw the greatest number of movies.

I don't think it's cheating to give your two top books in a category, rather than your best book, if you gave them the same mark. They're joint winners. There are a number of sporting events where joint winners can be recognised, rather than forcing a resolution into first and second place. For example, in some Olympic events competitors can tie for first place if they have identical records and choose not to do a tiebreak. Horse racing allows a dead heat. That's never been particularly common. I suppose it's become less common due to photo-finish technology. Still, I see no reason why you can't declare a dead heat in.

I have read *The Tusks of Extinction*, primarily because Perry (I think) had reviewed it somewhere. I'd already seen it in the library, picked it up, read the synopsis, and placed it back where it came from. Perry's review encouraged me to be a little less picky and I'm glad that I did. I'd like to read more books of this size!

Like David I reread *Mrs Dalloway* last year. In my case it was because I learnt that 2025 was the centenary of its publication and this seemed motivation enough. What I found interesting was that, although I knew the broadest brush strokes of the story, I did not recall detail. I've got a good memory, it's unusual for me to forget the details of a story I've read. It could, of course, just be an inevitable consequence of ageing; I discount that because I can remember other books I've read. I instead wonder if it's a consequence of the way that it's written. I've not read many streams of consciousness novels, perhaps my mind finds it hard to nail down the details for such a writing style? I did enjoy rereading it, though I'm glad that it was a shorter novel.

— Mark

## Comment on Issue 15

**From:** Rob Gerrand

**Date:** 3 April 2026

Hi David and Perry

Thanks for this.

In notice that neither of you rated any Korean TV series in your top ten. I presume that's because you haven't watched any!

Could I suggest you try *Stranger*, *Crash Landing On You*, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, *Vincenzo*, and *Pasta*, to nominate a variety of excellent series.

— Rob