Two Chairs In Print

Issue 18
Magic and Mayhem



Magic and Mayhem

Season 2 Episode 18, July 28, 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

Transcript Episode 18 Season 2

Introduction

Perry:

Hello, and welcome to season two, episode 18 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. Hello, David, it's been a little while.

David:

It has been a while, hasn't it? We've both been doing things, that's the problem.

Perry:

Yes, I mean, we've both…

David:

I've been moving house and you've been overseas and oh goodness me, so many things.

Perry:

Well, I wasn't overseas for terribly long, but it just seemed to chew up a lot of time, but nowhere near as much as your move of house.

David:

Long story.

Perry:

That's a fully traumatic event to have happened, but it had to be done. And I'm sitting here looking at you on FaceTime, and I can see a big wall of books behind you, so you must be happy about that.

David:

Absolutely. That's one of the things that made me choose this apartment, this big blank wall and it's got high ceilings, like three and a half metre ceilings. And I thought, *Books!*

So I've paid to have a bookcase built in.

Perry:

Well, what's that title? Is it *The Dance to the Music of Time*? "Books do furnish a room". Is that the title?

David:

Indeed they do.

Perry:

Great. I've never read that book, but the title always impresses me and I must get into it at some point and actually read it. I think I've read the first book in that series, but there's something like 13 or 14 books in it, so it's a bit of a commitment.

David:

It's a bit of a challenge, isn't it? You've got to think to yourself, well, how many years left have I got, whether am I going to be able to finish the end of this series?

Perry:

Well one a year… I'll be in my dotage by then, by the time I finish it I would think.

David:

The trouble is, by the get time you get to the end you've forgotten the start of the thing, you know.

Perry:

Oh, you have to do it like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge and go back and restart it again, and just keep rolling around and round and round in circles again.

David:

I could do that with *The Expanse*, I suppose.

Perry:

Oh, you could. I had this great intention earlier this year to have this year as being my year of *War and Peace*, but we discussed earlier about how our reading habits have dropped off a bit. And mine have dropped right away. But I kept it ticking over a bit and I think I think I've worked out what I need to do now in terms of getting that reading back up. To where it should be again, and that's to stop doing some things, you know. Like, I was looking at too many of these video reels that you get on Facebook. I was looking at too many of those and realizing that you go down a rabbit hole, and "Oh, that's interesting, and that's interesting, and that's interesting," and you just keep going, going, going, and then I realized also that I was sitting in front of the laptop for too long.

And I really need to get to the point where I say, right, okay, middle of the afternoon, that's it. It's just got to stop about three o'clock.

David:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think you're right.

Perry:

You've just got to stop. Go off. Have a cup of tea, do things that you need to do, and then just sit down for an hour, hour and a half, before you start getting ready for dinner and or going out or doing whatever, and just read. And suddenly, I'm thinking, oh, I found a couple of books that I've really liked just recently, and I just powered through them. So I'm thinking, why wasn't I doing this before? But we all go through phases, don't we, David?

David:

We do, we do.

Discussion

Perry:

And talking about phases, we're going back, quite a way with the stuff that we're dealing with today. We're looking at a book and a film. Well, the book…

David:

It was [published in] 1992, so that goes back a long way.

Perry:

And the movie was 2006-2007, so 20 years [ago]. So we'll mention something about that a bit later on when we get to it. But why don't we dive straight in, David, and start talking about the book that we decided on this month.

David:

Okay, so I can't quite work out why we decided to discuss it. Perry, can you remember which one of us chose it? I don't know, doesn't matter.

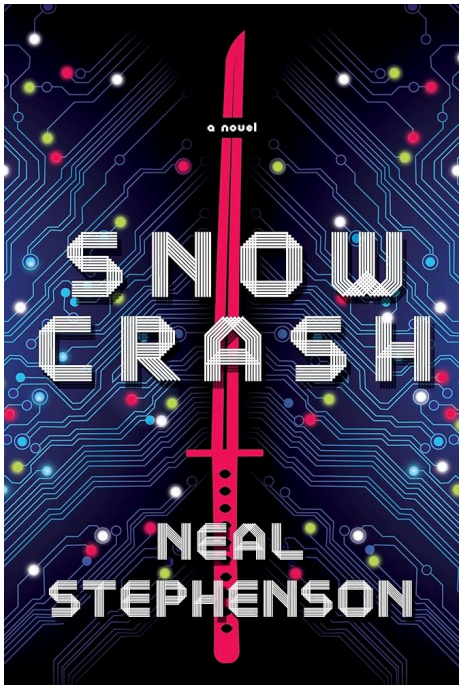
Perry:

Well, I've always had it as one of those books that I really should have gotten to by now. But it came up at a time, in 1992. I was living in the UK. I was just married. I was living overseas for a couple of years and I was jumping around all over the place. And so this came out. I knew of it, thought, yeah, must get to that at some stage. As these things happen, it just passed me by David, and I then clean forgot all about it and then realised, well, you know, I really should get to have a look at this and see what the book is. I'll let you go. You get on with it.

Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson

David:

Okay, well the book is *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson, and it's considered a bit of a classic, I suppose, in some ways. I probably read it twenty years ago but I had forgotten most of it when I came back to read it again.



Now, as I like to do, usually I'll start with a little bit of a biography of the author, who's an interesting character, really. But Neal Stephenson is an American writer, born in 1959, which makes him now in his late 60s. Wikipedia tells me that Stephenson comes from a family of scientists and engineers. Both his father and his grandfather were professors at college. His father was a professor of electrical engineering. and his grandfather was a professor of physics. And his mother was a biochemist, so you know, real, real science technology family. However, when Stephenson went to college, he apparently switched his college course from physics to geography.

And you think, why would you do that? And the reason was apparently that doing the geography

course gave him much more time to play with the mainframe computer that the university had. And that's why he changed. So he ended up with a BA in, whatever it was, master's in geography. Anyway, but that sort of scientific background of his family may explain why his books, both fiction and non-fiction, are often concerned with advanced technology, particularly computer technology and software, and that's certainly true of this book. All in all, he's published about 20 novels so far, plus some short stories, and quite a bit of non-fiction as well.



Neal Stephenson in 2019 (photo Christopher Michel)

All right, so *Snow Crash* itself was published in 1992. And that was his third novel. It was the first one that really attracted much attention and success.

How do we describe it? It is set sometime in the not too distant future when America and perhaps other countries, we don't know, but America is broken up into many, many fragments of little enclaves of kind of miniature countries. The United States of America itself is just a tiny area within the North America. which is populated by the Feds, the Federals, and what remains of the Government of the US. Capitalism really has conquered democracy almost completely. A lot of these little enclaves are run by corporations or companies or organizations, as we'll find out. And there's a definite satirical streak to the novel in that regard. There are parts of the book which are quite funny, I find.

Now I don't know whether I'm going to be able to summarise the plot, but I'll give it a bash. I'll try not to go too long. So the book starts with one of the two main characters. He's driving a fast car on a pizza delivery run. And his name is, get this, Hiro Protagonist, which made me laugh the first time I encountered it. I thought it was very funny. Anyway, as the book opens, he's delivering pizza for the Cosa Nostra Pizza Incorporated company, which is headed by the Sicilian Uncle Enzo. Yes, the Mafia is now a public company, making money from a pizza franchise, among of course other things.

And the customer promise of Uncle Enzo's Pizza is that they'll deliver your pizza within thirty minutes or your money back. Now this being the mafia, woe betide a delivery driver who fails to honor that promise. Alas, Hiro manages to crash his fast car into a backyard swimming pool with only minutes to go. Fortunately, the pool is empty of water, but his car is wrecked. So his bacon is saved, however, by a 15-year-old skateboarding courier who calls herself YT, which is short for yours truly. So again, we don't have kind of real names for either of these characters. And anyway, YT whisks the pizza away on her super high-tech skateboard, and she makes the delivery with seconds to spare. And so this begins a connection, definitely not a relationship, but a connection between Hiro and YT which lasts throughout the novel. And we have alternating chapters between these two points of view.

When he's not delivering pizza—and of course after he's totaled the delivery car, believe me, he's no longer delivering pizza—Hiro is a stringer for the Central

Intelligence Corporation of Langley, Virginia, gathering random bits of information which might be useful to the CIC and uploading it to their library, which used to be the Library of Congress, and he gets paid for each bit of useful information he puts up onto their website or into their database. Hiro and his friend live in a shipping container in a storage facility. Pretty miserable place to live, but that doesn't matter so much because Hiro spends a lot of his time living in the metaverse, a term which Stephenson coined in 1992. (Take that, Mark Zuckerberg, 1992!) And the metaverse is a 3D virtual world which Hiro helped build. Did I mention that he's also a brilliant computer hacker? Anyway, yes, he helped build this metaverse. So both the other thing is that to say about him is that both in reality and the metaverse he wears a pair of Japanese swords, the long two-handed katana and the one-handed shorter wakizashi. Anyway, throughout the novel he makes a lot of use of these. There's a lot of violence in the book. It's not particularly gory violence, but there's a lot of violence. Then we have YT, who is much, really a much more interesting character, I thought, a teenage girl with a heck of a lot of attitude and even more brains. I became much more engaged with her travails than those of Hiro.

The only other characters worth noting are Uncle Enzo himself, who comes into play, and a sort of villain called Raven who drives around a motorcycle with a nuclear bomb in the sidecar.

The plot is very complicated, and I have to say in parts it becomes very tedious. Hiro and YT get involved with a plan by one group to essentially rewire the human brain using a virus called Snow Crash, hence the title of the book, which is both a computer virus and at the same time a an actual biological virus. And this whole rewiring business has to do with Sumerian mythology, the Tower of Babel and Pentecostal glossolalia. And the explanation of all this is very, very drawn out and not very interesting.

It just goes on and on and on. I just about went to sleep through some of those passages which outline all that.

The interest of the book really is the world-building, this fractured America and all the control of all these areas by corporations. and the concept of avatars and the metaverse and the action sequences, which, as I say, involve quite a lot of violence, but which do keep you turning pages. So I enjoyed it, but if the novel had been severely edited and cut down in length it would have been a much better book.

And as it is, I'd be pushing it to give it a score of more than about three and a half out of five, I would have thought. So I found it disappointing on this second read. What about you, Perry?

Perry:

Like you, David, I found it really difficult to get into. Just the first forty odd pages, which, yeah somebody said to me that Stephenson is a maximalist. He puts everything into his books.

David:

He's very long-winded.

Perry:

Fills it up with everything. And the first 40-odd pages, it's like I have a world that I have to introduce you to, and I'm going to info-dump as much as I possibly can into this first 40 pages. And you're just going to have to lap it up, so and then

figure out how it all works afterwards. Oh, God, does it go on? Actually, I found once he's actually got it all set up in what is it, it's about 400 pages, the book? Bit more than that, something like that.

The last 200-odd pages actually goes pretty well because he's got everything in place by that point. All the bits are there. You know what he's talking about, what's going on, who the people are, where they're all going. Although, Snow Crash doesn't seem to crop up all that often as much as I thought it might. But anyway, the last 200 odd pages seems to flow pretty well. It's mainly an action sequence, some on land, some on water.

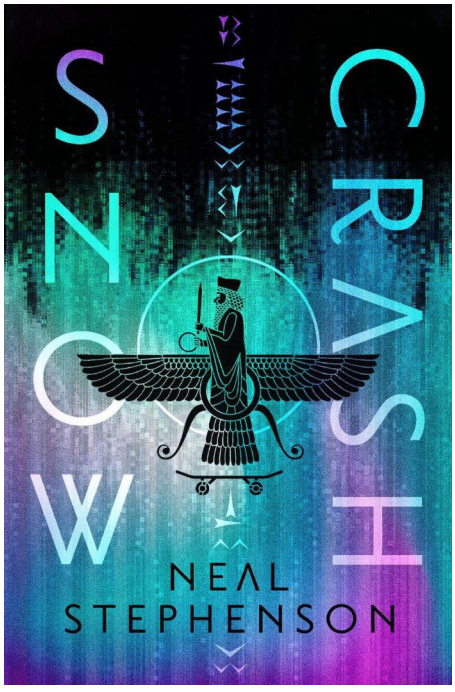
You get quite good descriptions of fairly complicated pieces of action involving quite a large number of people. He handles it pretty well and brings it all together. But like you, David, I think that, you know, I reckon that when this first came out in about early 92, so what's that? It's about eight years after *Neuromancer*. It probably hit pretty hard. It probably did very, very well. Again, I wasn't really reading very much science fiction at that stage, so I don't know what sort of impact it had. Although when you start talking about it, as you were doing then, and you were talking about how the United States has been fractured into these small, tiny, little communities, it reminded me a bit of Dave Hutchinson's *Fractured Europe* series, which is much, much later.

David:

Much later, but yeah.

Perry:

And you have to think, hmm, is there a connection between those two? It might be worth having a think about that at some point later on. Because I know you like Dave Hutchinson's books better than I do. I think there's a couple of them that are really good, and I think that a couple that don't work all that well. But they are also action sequence novels, if you like, set in a future continent, so basically Europe instead of the United States. Now, this is the first time that I'd ever read this, and actually, this is the first time I've read anything by Neil Stephenson. At all, David.



David:

Well, let me tell you, if you think *this* was long-winded, you should see his other books. Oh my goodness.

Perry:

So I've heard, I've heard that some of the others are real bricks to basically work your way through. But it's interesting to read this work. And I, yeah, like you, I think it's, you look at it, and it's a bit ho-hum now, almost, isn't it? You look at it and you think...

David:

Because we're taking so much of it for granted now. I mean, at the time it was very prescient of quite a lot of things that were going to happen.

Perry:

I think that's right. I think he goes into a lot of detail trying to explain things which now we would

devoured it along with Banks and *Neuromancer* and Gibson and all the rest of the stuff that's all the cyberpunk stuff that was around at the time. Uh, and of course they've warped its vision and viewpoint, but in some ways, this is much more along the lines of what the tech bros are basically currently thinking about in terms of their high level of capitalism, where capitalism runs everything. The idea that the Cosa Nostra is now a pizza franchise is very amusing. And I thought, well, that's good. And they probably make really bloody good pizzas too, I would have thought.

David:

I'm sure.

Perry:

But the whole idea of trying to get them in there for 30 minutes, I think that well that's about what you'd expect now, isn't it, that if you ordered a pizza from a pizza place that…

David:

Uses Door Dash or something.

Perry:

Yeah, Door Dash or one of those that you basically aim to be getting it in thirty minutes. I don't use that service. If I want a pizza, I go out and get it myself and bring it home.

David:

Now that's because of where you live.

Perry:

Yeah, well that's right. I mean I just the hardest part for me is trying to find a car park. That's the problem because I don't want to have to walk home with it.

So what impact do you think this had on the rest of the field? Do you think that it was really a seminal work, looking back on it now?

David:

It's hard to say, isn't it? I certainly think it was influential, but I don't know that I could point to particular works that drew from it. The concept of the metaverse, I think, is a really good one, and I'm sure that must have inspired people like Zuckerberg. The idea of a complete virtual world which people can walk around in as avatars, again, a term that Stephenson coined. apparently, although the word itself goes back to Hindu mythology. But yeah, I'm not sure if I could point to particular book or books that I would definitely say is derived from it. Although, as you say, the *Fractured Europe* idea of Hutchinson reflects it a little bit. Not sure.

Perry:

Okay, all right. Well I know that the The Guardian considered it to be one of the best science fiction novels ever written and yeah, I think it is interesting. I'm glad I've read it. I can't see myself ever going back and reading it again. I gave it, like you, high threes, three and a half, somewhere between three and a half and four out of five, because I think that it's just let down by [the fact that] it just goes on too long, I think.

David:

I think he's obsessed with explaining this whole business to do with Sumerian mythology, which is an interesting idea, but you could have explained it in a page. And instead he takes like about 50 pages and keeps coming back to it.

Perry:

Too ticked to get through it.

David:

He keeps interacting with the Librarian.

Perry:

Yeah, he just keeps coming back and giving you a little bit extra and…

David:

The Librarian is interesting too, because [Hiro is] talking to this AI who is answering questions. And when you look at it, the Librarian isn't able to answer some of the questions that today you'd say would be no trouble at all for Claude or one of those other modern AIs to answer. So it's quite a restricted AI [at the] time, but as a concept it's really quite interesting. But he spends all this time talking to the librarian about the Sumerian gods and the cuneiform tablets and the, oh, it goes on and on and on and on and on forever.

So it's just too much. But yeah, but nevertheless, the basic concept of that is quite interesting. The idea that you could rewire the human brain with a series of images or a series of sounds that are tied into this deep language, the underlying core of the human brain, I think it's quite interesting.

And the way he ties it in with the Pentecostals and their talking in tongues, I thought it was interesting.

Perry:

I'm glad I've read it. I'm glad I don't have to look forward to reading it again, let us say that. It took me a long time to get through this book. I found, as you say, I think it drags in a lot of places and it's very slow. But I think the last two hundred fly pretty quickly and I'm of the view that's what brings it up to a level where you can look at it and go, yep, okay, this it rounded out as a novel.

I can see what he was attempting to do by setting up this whole new world and in the 1992 pre-internet for the bulk of people, pre-mobile phones, pre-connectedness.

David:

Yes, before the Internet, of course. Yeah. Oh, sorry, well, before the World Wide Web, anyway.

Perry:

Oh yeah, absolutely. The old internet was around, it was around in the universities and so on, but not available to the general public like you and I, David, to any great extent. So from that perspective, it's got a lot of things going for it. And I mean, somebody could really write a very interesting thesis about all the stuff that he covers and seeing where it all connects through. I'm not going to be that person to do that, David. So you might. I'm not. But anyway, it was interesting to read of it. And I think it probably is one of those books that most of us should be at least familiar with in the field if we want to know where things are going. But I wish I'd read it in the mid-90s. I reckon I probably would have got a lot more out of it than I do now.

David:
Yeah, yeah.

Perry:
Anyway, there we go.

David:
There we go.

The Prestige, directed by Christopher Nolan

Perry:

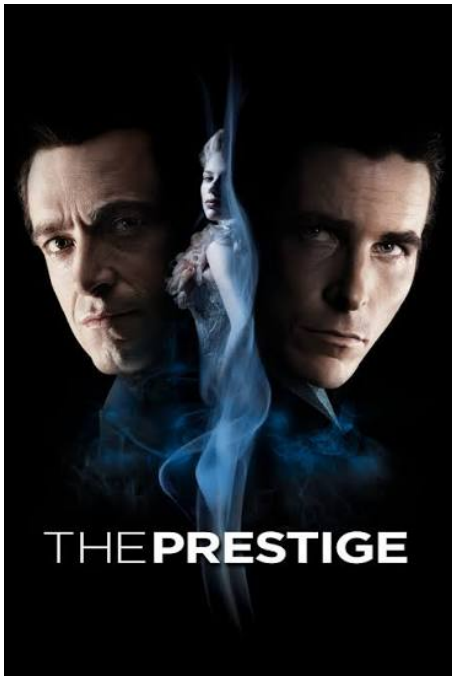
All right, so moving on to our next little item, we're coming up to the film which I'm going to have a look at, which is *The Prestige* directed by Christopher Nolan. Now this is rather interesting because of course Nolan is all over the newspapers and all over the internet at the moment with the release of his latest film *The Odyssey*, which you and I have both been to seen, and which we will talk, which we will mention a bit later on. So it is an interesting idea to go back and have a look at something that he did quite some time ago.

So, David, let me start this review with a quote from the film, because I think this is important, which explains the title and gives us some understanding of how this film is structured.

And the quote is:

> *Every magic trick consists of three parts or acts.*
>
> *The first part is called the Pledge. The magician shows you something ordinary, a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object, perhaps asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real. But of course it probably isn't.*
>
> *The second act is called the Turn. The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you're looking for the secret, but you won't find it because of course you're not really looking, you don't really want to know, you want to be fooled. But you won't clap yet because making something disappear isn't enough. You have to bring it back.*
>
> *And that's why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call the Prestige.*

That quote's delivered by long-term Nolan collaborator Michael Caine in the role of John Cutter, who is a mentor and stage engineer for one of the main characters in this particular film. It is interesting, David, that three-part explanation of a magic trick is very similar to the three-act explanation of a dramatic piece of work, like a film or a novel. And you could probably map those two definitions basically on top of each other. So that's interesting. But you get the idea of what it is, what is "the Prestige", so that you know why this film is called that.



Now, *The Prestige* is a film that was released 20 years ago in 2006. It was directed by Christopher Nolan, as I said, from a script by himself and his brother Jonathan, based on the 1995 novel of the same name by British SF writer Christopher Priest. The film's a reasonable adaptation of the novel, with some notable differences, which we'll get to later. But I have to say up front that the changes made between novel and screen don't have any major impact on the themes of the story, and we'll also get to those as well all in a good time.

The film follows the rivalry between two stage magicians working in theatres in England in the



1890s. Hugh Jackman plays Robert "The Great Danton" Angier. And Christopher Bale plays Alfred "The Professor" Borden.

At the start of the film both Angier and Borden and Angier's wife work as assistants to John Cutter. That's the John Cutter from my earlier quote, played by Michael Caine. Angier and Borden sit in the audience each night and are called up on stage during the major water tank trick. Their role, which is unknown to the rest of the audience who think they've been chosen at random, is to tie up Angier's wife so she can be lowered into the tank from where she miraculously escapes. The trick lies in tying the correct knot that she can easily slip off her wrist so that she can open the mechanism and get out of the tank. But one night Borden ties the wrong knot and Angier's wife drowns in front of everybody. Borden refuses to believe that he made a mistake,[1] but Angier blames him for his wife's death, and the two become bitter rivals over the course of the film. After this event, two men then pursue separate careers on stage and an ongoing feud is carried out as they try to sabotage each other's acts. On one occasion, Borden loses two fingers after being shot by Angier while performing the bullet-catching trick.

See they each do the same thing, they hide in the audience, in disguise, and then get called up by the magician's assistant to help out, and then mess about with the trick and mess it up. And on another occasion, Angier's Bird Act is interfered with by Borden, resulting in an injury to an audience member. Now, Borden eventually debuts a spectacular illusion called The Transported Man, in which he seems to be teleported instantaneously from a wardrobe on one side of the stage to a wardrobe on the other. There's a very good depiction of this where he's standing in one particular wardrobe and as he steps into the wardrobe to close the door behind him, he bounces a ball across the stage, steps out of the other

[1] I don't think Perry is quite correct here. Borden says he doesn't *remember* how he tied the knot. And once you understand his secret later on, that could literally be the truth.

wardrobe and catches it as it's coming through in the air, which is quite spectacular. Now, Angier becomes obsessed with bettering this trick. Which he does by procuring the services of a look-alike. He just assumes that Borden's using a look-alike as well. But his act is still not as good as his opponent's, and he hates the fact that he has to stay below the level of the stage while his lookalike takes all the accolades upstairs.

So Angier decides to send his assistant Olivia, played by Scarlett Johansson, to spy on Borden, acting as if she was dissatisfied with Angier and wants a change. Olivia falls in love with Borden, but passes his coded diary to Angier along with the code's keyword, which is TESLA. Now, Angier becomes convinced that Borden has attained some sort of true teleportation device from Nicholas Tesla, the famous Nicholas Tesla. And so he travels to Colorado Springs in the US, where he meets Tesla, played by David Bowie, of all people. Wonderful choice.

David:

Yes, he plays it very well.

Perry:

And [Angier attempts to convince Tesla] to make him a similar machine.

This film is a tale of obsession and rivalry and asks the deep question: how far would you go for your art? Would you sacrifice your family, your livelihood, or even your life in pursuit of your goals? Or is it a matter that your obsession starts out with the art but later morphs into a rivalry that is something much more sinister?

That's what happens here. Both Angier and Borden are willing to sacrifice everything to get what they want. Firstly, ascendancy over their craft, and maybe more importantly, ascendancy over their rival. They want to be known as the best magician on the stage in England of their time. I said earlier that this film was based on the Chris Priest novel of the same name, but that doesn't mean that it sticks faithfully to the original text. Priest's novel uses that old framing device of the discovery of a manuscript, here in the form of two diaries, one from each major protagonist, that tell the story that makes up the main part of the plot. Nolan has dispensed with that artifice with good reason. It works in the novel and works very well as a framing device, but here it would have just used up more screen time to really little or no effect, I think. As it is, we're already out to 130 minutes, David. And copying Priest's framework would have probably added another 20 or so minutes for the running time, and the film is long enough as it is.

This is a typically well made film by Nolan. It looks great, especially the cameo appearance of David Bowie as Tesla, walking across a platform with electricity arcing all around him, all over the place. It's fantastic. And the attention to detail of the concert halls and buildings of 1890s, London, and England.

Now, we see a lot of obsessed male leads in Nolan films. Odysseus of late, Oppenheimer of a couple of years ago, Batman of ten years ago or so. They're all obsessed in one way or another, and none of them are purely good or purely evil, really. And they all seem heavily conflicted about what they choose to do, or feel they are forced to do. As an aside here, David, I've been thinking about this. Has Nolan ever made anything with a female lead [who] dominates the story? I know that Penelope is a main driver of things in the latest his latest film *The Odyssey*, but I can't really think of any film that he's made that has a female as a lead. Anyway, we can think about this later on and talk about it. Now, anyway, Christian Bale is excellent in his role as Borden, as he's got the menace behind

the eyes. You know, he played Batman, and he was also in *American Psycho*, I think, wasn't he? Was he in that?

David:

I think he was, but yeah, yeah, I haven't seen that.

Perry:

Yeah, I haven't said it either, but anyway, he's, you know, that's a manic serial killer. And Johansen is not just there for decoration. She continues to impress me with the work whenever I see her. I think she's slowly becoming one of the major actresses of the 21st century. Really, in film.

The only miscasting I can see is that of Hugh Jackman. Now, I like Jackman. I like Jackman's work. But I just don't see he's the right person here. He's got the showmanship skills of a stage magician, so he carries off that part of the role with ease. And Jackman is a song and dance man after all. But it's the darker side of the character that he struggles with.

Maybe he was the best choice they had. I don't know. Frankly, I'm not sure that who could have done it. I'll just leave that up to the listener to think about. I think to me he's just too good a character and he doesn't really have that killer instinct in this. Maybe people can disagree with me. Anyway, so it's interesting to note that the film will be re-released in the cinemas in January 2027 to mark the twentieth anniversary of its initial run. I think that Nolan has done a complete refurbishment of the original film and they're going to re-release it in cinemas next year so you can get to see it. So I'd suggest people go and see it there.

David:

Absolutely.



Perry:

You can always watch it here in Australia on SBS or HBO Max. Or it is available to rent via either the Amazon Prime or Apple Streaming services. Now all in all, I like this film, even though I had some slight reservations with it. I gave it a solid rating of 4 out of 5. What did you think of it, David?

David:

I think it's brilliant, and I would have given it a much higher score. I didn't mind Hugh Jackman. I thought he did a pretty good job.

It's just such a clever, clever, clever film. It's just… once you know the answer. Are we giving away spoilers today? Do we want to warn the listener that are we going to give away spoilers?

Perry:

I tried not to in my review, but it's been out for 20 years, so if you haven't seen it by now, you know. And the book's been out for 30, so you should know by now.

David:

The thing is that you can watch it again and again. I've watched this [several times]. I re-watched it [when] we decided we were going to talk about it on the podcast. And I watched it again just last night because I had it on DVD and it's now on my media server. So I watched it again [with pleasure].

—***SPOILER ALERT***—

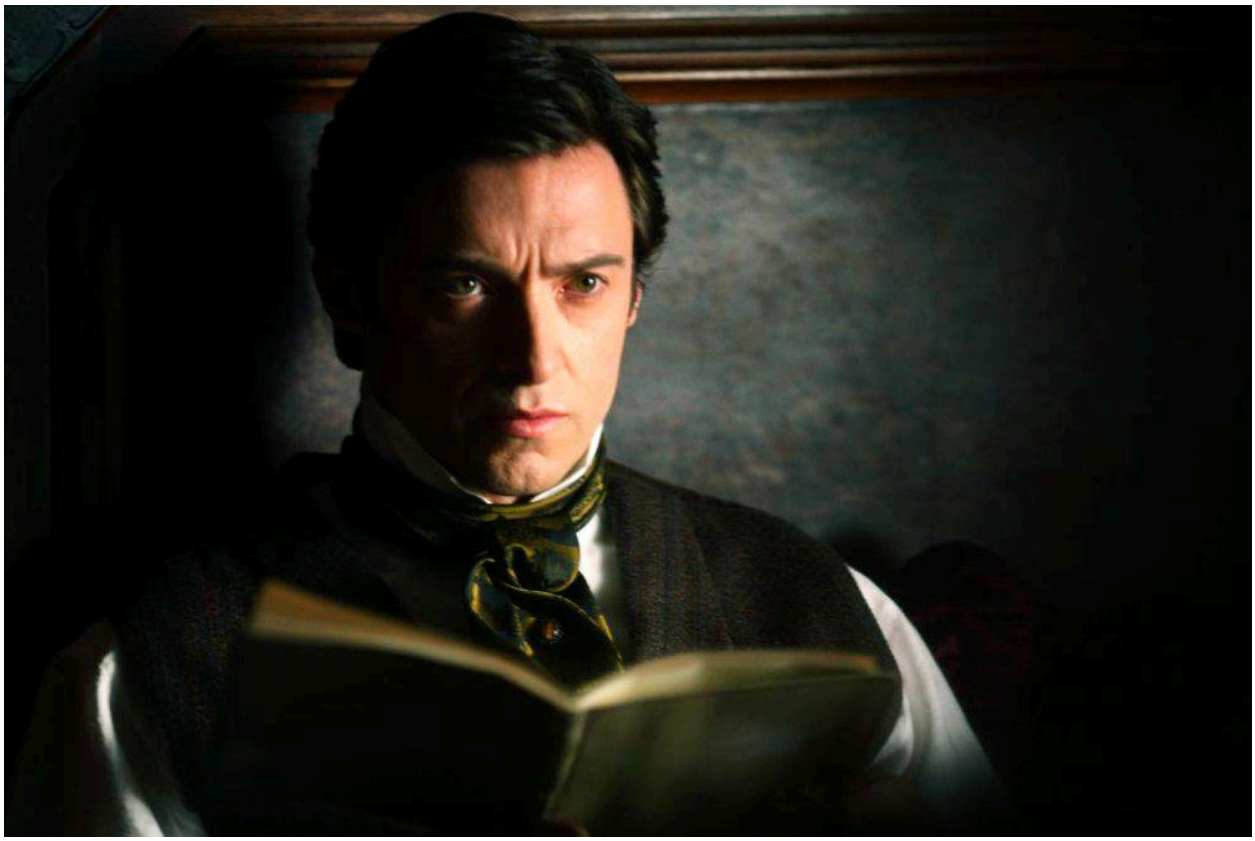
The key to the story is this business of the trick of The Transported Man. As you say, the very clever way that Borden does it initially of bouncing the ball from one side of the stage to the other, and he pops up in the other wardrobe and catches it. So clever. And that's the key to the whole film, is that particular trick, because the Hugh Jackman character Angier becomes obsessed with being able to reproduce it, and he can't work out how Borden is doing it. Now Cutter, the Michael Caine character, tells him there must be a double, he must be using a double.

Angier won't believe that. Even when he tries to reproduce it using a double of his own, they find an actor who looks like Hugh Jackman, like Angier, and they use him as the double. But the trouble is that once they got that guy on board Angier really is at the mercy of that guy of either revealing the secret or being a problem, which indeed he turns out to be. So that's the core thing, this business of the transported man. So Cutter tells Angier that he must be using a double. But Angier refuses to believe that and goes on this huge trek to America to see Tesla to get him to build a machine that will do this.

Which indeed eventually he does. He comes up with this machine that makes the trick possible.

But the real secret, and again this is a dead spoiler, the real secret of Borden's act is that he's an identical twin. So they are two brothers, but they don't reveal, they've never revealed that to anyone, even to Borden's wife and child because one of them disguises themselves alternately they disguise themselves so that no one knows that he's an identical twin. But what I loved in looking at the film yet again last night is just the number of little references, little things which hint and hint and hint. So if you didn't know the secret which I've now given away if you didn't know that secret, it's all there. It's all there in the dialogue.

You remember the bit where there's the child watching an older magician do a trick with a disappearing dove? Disappearing bird. And there's a little child in the



audience watching this. And once the bird disappears, the child cries out, "He's killed him, he's killed him." You know, and [the mother says] "No, no, no, he hasn't killed him. Look, look, look, he's brought it back again. The dove." "Oh, he killed it. But, but, look, there he is." "No, no, but *where's his brother*?"

It's very clever. Yeah, and so much stuff. And when Cutter is trying to disguise this slightly drunken actor they get to play the Angier part, so as to be Angier's double in the trick. Cutter says, "When I'm done with him, he could be your brother." And Angier says, "I don't need a brother, I need him to be me." You know, all these little clever, clever little references all the way through.

And I thought it was clever that they don't make this actor who's supposed to be Angier, they don't make him look exactly like Angier. He's got something to do with the teeth or something. His face looks just a little bit different. It's clever, so you can always tell which one of the two you're looking at.

—END SPOILER ALERT—

Anyway, I won't go on and on, but I just thought it was so clever. I thought that David Bowie was so good in that role. His face is, you know, he doesn't give away very much, it's just always very this very distant sort of character, but you know, he's dignified. He plays it beautifully, I thought.

And I like this bit of dialogue, where they're sitting outside and Tesla says to Angier, because Angier's going to pay him to build some machine that will let this trick happen, this transportation happen. [Angier] thinks that Borden's actually got a transportation machine, you know, literally transported from side to side of the stage. And Tesla says to to Angier "Consider the cost, Mr. Angier." And Angier says, "Ah, price is no object." And Tesla says, "Perhaps not, but have you considered the cost?" And of course we learn at the very end what the cost of that is. Look, I just I think it's brilliant.

One last thing. I'm going on and on and on, I know, but I'm enthusiastic about it. I love the hall of mirrors effect that you've got of Borden who is reading Angier's diary, which has been handed to him after the Angier character has [supposedly] died. And he gets handed this diary, and he starts reading it. And Angier is writing about reading Borden's notebook. You know, it's this kind of hall of mirrors effect. I haven't read the original book. It's very clever the way the two diaries kind of work together. And at the end, both of these works reveal that they know that their rival is actually reading the diary at the time. Clever, so clever. So look, I would score it very highly.

I think it's just about the best of Nolan's films. And even *The Odyssey* included. So because it's so clever. It's just very, very clever. Anyway, I've raved on enough, but I'm enthusiastic about it. I will go and see it in the cinema again.

Perry:

Okay. Uh yes, next year, supposed to be coming out in January, and I would suspect that it's probably going to be… Well, I think what I read about this just the other day is the original film is in 35mm and they're blowing it up to 70mm, which of course they can do now. And Nolan basically can do whatever he wants now. He can pick and choose to do what he wants. He can re-release his old films, he can go back and clean them up and do whatever he wants and put them out, and people will go to see them.

I actually like the idea of films getting an anniversary release, re-release. I mean, it doesn't have to be widespread, but people get a chance to see it on a big screen.

Do we get the feeling that people are going back to the cinema? They seem to be moving away from streaming services a bit now. There's reports that Netflix, while they're not necessarily in a lot of trouble, are losing subscriber numbers in droves. People are moving away from the idea of watching stuff at home and now actually want to get out and about and go out and see something in a cinema, and I always prefer it that way. I mean, sitting in the dark, and luckily enough, we have a situation here where most of the time in the cinema, people are well behaved.

They will stay on the phones right up until the time that the shorts finish, and then you look around and the phones are gone. Which I think is great. And I don't really hear many people talking. Very, very rarely. In the last couple of years, hardly at all. And I think that's a good thing. I think that means that people are willing to sit and watch, just watch it as it should be watched, you know, in the dark. Silent and then talk about it afterwards. The cinema that I go to down the street, the Lido, has as one of its tags, "cinema to talk about". Well, that's true, but they don't want you talking about it in the cinema when the [film is] going. Although, I have to admit, I have been there with our mutual acquaintance, Chong, on a number of occasions, where we're the only two in the cinema. And we have chatted about the film a little bit, and that's okay because we're not disturbing anybody else.

David:

Oh, that's fair enough.

Perry:

But it does seem to be okay. I hear stories about how people can get very, very noisy in the US. I think I remember going to see a film when I was over there twenty odd years ago. And the lights were only dimmed, it wasn't dark. And I thought that was a bit odd. I don't know whether it was just that cinema or what

the story was, I've got no idea. But I thought I found that very, very peculiar and very, very strange.

Anyway. I'm glad you liked it. I thought it was interesting. He's done some pretty good work, Nolan.

David:

Definitely.

Perry:

I don't rate it as highly as you do, although I can see what you're getting at about how well it is put together. If I went back through and dug into it and really dissected it in a deep, deep way. I think that, yeah, I think you might it might climb a little bit but I've seen it now. This is probably the second or third time I've seen it, no third I would have thought, over the years and I enjoyed it. So I'm glad we discussed it.

David:

Yeah, yeah, well worth discussing.

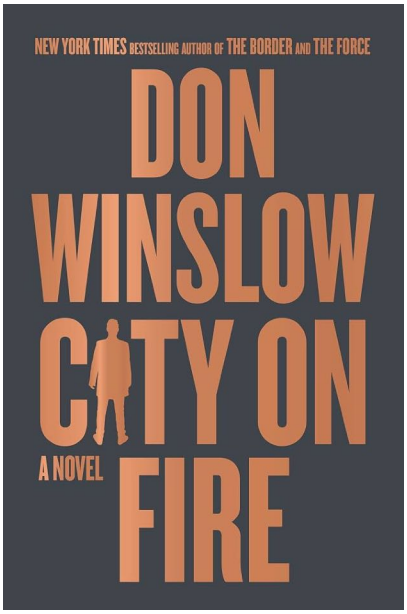
What Else We've Been Reading and Watching

Perry:

So, what else have you been doing? Reading, watching.

City on Fire by Don Winslow

David:



I haven't been reading a great deal still. I'm still struggling a bit with that, but I read a book called *City on Fire* by Don Winslow. Do you know that? It's it's apparently the first of a trilogy. I think it's set in Rhode Island or somewhere.

Perry:

I know of that, I know Don Winslow, yes.

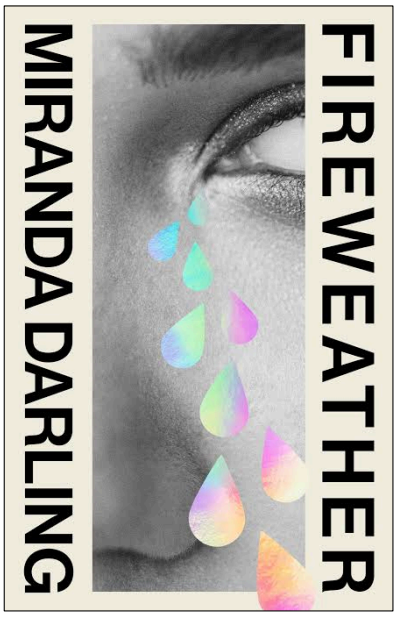
David:

It starts off where you have the mafia and you've got the Irish organized crime groups and they've actually worked together very amicably. They divided up the territory between them. This is set in the 1980s, I think. But then in this very amicable arrangement between the two, there becomes a fly in the ointment, which is this beautiful young woman that turns up and she becomes the focus of these two groups becoming pitted against each other, and there's a good deal of violence happens. But it's a good read.

Fireweather by Miranda Darling

David:

I also read a book called *Fireweather*, which is by Miranda Darling, and that's the sequel to her book *Thunderhead*. Australian author. It's really interesting, it's really all set in the head, literally, of the main character, who is called Winona Dalloway. And there's a reference there to Virginia Woolf's book, *Mrs. Dalloway*. It's really all about her mental goings on in her brain. She's the victim of a great deal of not really domestic violence, but domestic *psychological* violence by her husband, and eventually ex-husband.

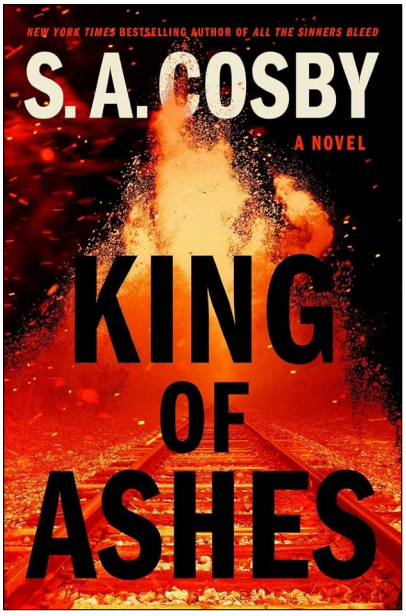


The two books are well worth reading. They're well worth reading together.

That's about it, I think. I also read something for Standard Ebooks, but I won't talk about that.

King of Ashes by S. A. Cosby

Perry:



Okay. Well, a couple of books from me that I've read recently. *King of Ashes* by S. A. Cosby. You may have remembered that I've spoken to you about S. A. Cosby before. He's an African American novelist writing new urban noir novels using African Americans as his main protagonists. This one is set in a city whose name escapes me at the moment, but anyway, it's in one of the big cities in the US, in the middle, in the south, somewhere.

The main character is a high flying financier who deals with a lot of high-flying people and makes a lot of money for them by investing it for them and making sure the tax office can't find it. He goes home for his father's funeral. And he finds out that his father owes a lot of money to a lot of people. And these guys come around to collect. His sister is now the only one running the business, which is a crematorium. So the main character decides that the only way that he's probably going to get out of out from underneath all these people that he owes a lot of money to, is he offers the services of the crematorium to the crime gang, which is to get rid of bodies very easily. And they decide to take him up on this.

But things go a little funny when some of the people they decide to get rid of are a little bit close to his family because there's another brother who's a bit of a gambler as well and also a drug addict, and he's been involved with a scheme that has got him into a lot of trouble.

It's a good book. I enjoyed it. It's won a major award already so far this year. For the life of me, I can't think of what that is either. But it continues Cosby's run of hits, not quite up to his last couple. But I still think it's fairly high standard and I still think it's really very worthwhile reading.



The End of Romance by Maria Takalander

Perry:

The other one I wanted to mention quickly was a book I finished during the week, which I found very, very interesting indeed, and one which I think you should read, David. One from Text Publishing. Australian book, which is an Australian Finnish writer, called *The End of Romance* by Maria Takalander. So this is a science fiction novel which is basically set at a time sometime in the future where climate change has really wrecked havoc with the Earth.

The Earth authorities have all got together. They have found what they called the "Promised Land", which is a planet in another solar system somewhere, but it's already inhabited by a native population, and the

authorities have decided that really the only way that they're going to be able to utilize this is to go to war with these native populations. So they've been shipping off all the men when they hit 16, 18 years old. Putting them through training courses, putting them on ships and sending them off. As a result, there's very few men left around on the planet. It's all women and young children.

And it tells the story of a woman who is raising her son, who's pre-teen. He's about six or seven, and he's just started military school because they start them right away, normally the time you would start a primary school. She hates the idea of him being at this school and wants to get away. And she finds somebody, a male, who she tracks down to his house, who doesn't look as though he's injured or whatever. So that if you're injured or disabled, they won't take you because you're not medically fit. And so there's an idea that there are some women, when they have a male child, will disfigure the child. Basically, have a leg amputated or a foot amputated so that the child will not be able to be sent off somewhere.

Anyway, this guy doesn't seem to be disabled, and she follows him, tracks him down and realises that or comes to find out that he has arrived in this city, which is pretty much completely deserted. They're on the outskirts of it with his mother, who has now gone off and gone missing somewhere.

And they have escaped from a sanctuary, a monastery of some sort up in the hills. and she wants to take her son up there to get him away from all of this. Very very interesting, very well done. Doesn't come to any major conclusions.

I thought it was beautifully written. It's told in four different first person narration points of view. One from the mother, one from the first female astronaut they send off to this particular planet. One from the man that they find, and one from the young son at the end of the book. This is going to be discussed at the Nova Mob in August. And so I'm very glad I read it. It's a very interesting book indeed. Very interesting book.

David:

Okay, sounds good.

Perry:

You should have a look at it.

David:

Okay.

Perry:

I think you'll appreciate it. So, have you seen anything? I know we're going to.

David:

Yes, yes.

Perry:

Well, there is one thing that we've both seen that we've both said, but we'll talk about that in a minute, so we'll skip over that one. But the other one, anything else?

Bohemian Rhapsody, directed by Bryan Singer

David:

Yeah, I've seen a few things actually, some of them on the TV, you know, through Netflix and so on. I saw *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which I hadn't seen before, which is kind of a biopic of Freddie Mercury and Queen.

Stowaway, directed by Joe Penna

David:

I saw a film called *Stowaway*, which was again I think it was a Netflix Original. It's a science fiction film. Basically that the concept of you remember the short story, "The Cold Equations"? Yeah, it's basically that concept of the stowaway on board a ship. It's not a deliberate stowaway, he's accidentally on board the ship on its way to Mars. But of course, his presence stuffs up all their calculations of how much oxygen and so on, carbon dioxide absorption and so on that they need.

And so there's this big tension. I thought it was actually very well done. Directed by Joe Penna.

Supergirl, directed by Craig Gillespie

I saw *Superman*, which I think you saw and talked about last time, which I enjoyed. And then I went to see *Supergirl*, which I liked it a lot.

Perry:

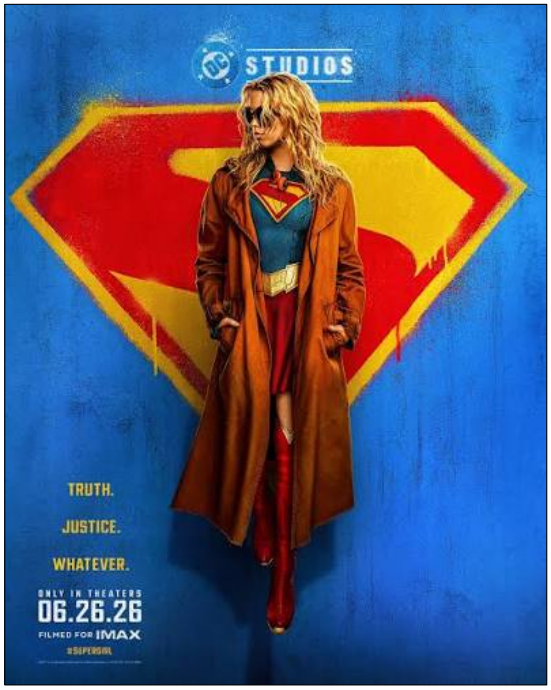
Okay. What do you think?

David:

The main character, *Supergirl*, is played by Millie Alcock, who is an Australian actor, who I first saw in Tim Minchin's limited series *Upright*. She was great in that.

Perry:

She was stunning in that, absolutely. That first season, couldn't think of anybody better for it. It was just amazing.



David:

And she's very good in this, because she's not the kind of prettified soppy character you might imagine Supergirl from some of the comics.

She's tough, and at the start of the movie, she's getting plastered, she's getting drunk in a bar on an alien planet, and she's gone to a planet with a red sun so that she doesn't have any of her powers and so she can get really drunk. But she encounters a younger girl who's trying to get revenge for the death of her family, and of course gets tied up with the story of that.

But it's good and like she doesn't and also Milly Alcock is not wearing like a Supergirl costume until almost right at the end. And when she does put on this Supergirl costume, you think, what a silly costume you know, it really makes the contrast between what she's been wearing throughout, which is like a leather overcoat and jeans and so on. And you think, what a silly costume, and it really picks it up. But I think it was really quite a clever take on the whole concept.

And there's a lot of self-referential stuff. You know, when they first encounter Superman, she and this little teenage girl encounter Superman. The girl says, "Why is he wearing his underpants on the outside?" You know, the classic joke.

Then there's the whole thing about, you know, "Why do they call you Super*girl*? You know, you're a grown woman. Why don't they call you Super*woman*? Like they call him Superman." "Oh, well, you know…" So they've explored this.

Perry:

Yeah, I thought that was good. Yeah, yeah.

David:

No, I enjoyed it a lot, so that was good.

Perry:

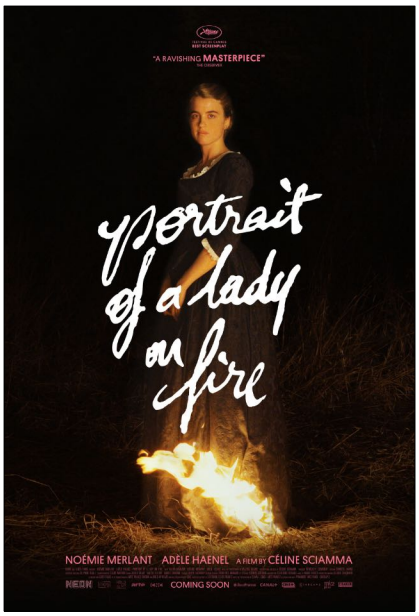
Oh good. All right.

David:

That was about it. The other things I see weren't worth talking about.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire, directed by Céline Sciamma

Perry:



Okay. Well I've seen a few things that are interesting. One from a couple of months back which I hadn't had a chance to talk about as yet. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. This is a French film that came out in 2019. It's a historical romantic drama set in the late 1700s on an island off the coast of France. A woman artist travels to this island where she's been asked to paint a portrait of the daughter of the lady who runs the island. You don't ever come across the father, [so] whether he's there or he's gone or he's dead, I don't think we ever actually find out.

The idea is that this young woman is going to be put up for marriage to somebody, an aristocrat somewhere on the mainland. And the aristocrat wants to see what she looks like, so they send an artist along to paint her portrait, so they can send it along. Classic thing that it was used to do in those times. You find out that this daughter is the second choice, and she's been dragged out of a monastery to be put up for marriage because the older sister who was the original intended wife has committed suicide or has died, but you find out later on [that] she's committed suicide on the island.

So the Daughter who's come from the monastery, is not really very happy about this whole concept at all. And is really difficult to deal with, won't smile, won't

look at everything, won't be engaged with the artist. Surly all over the place. But it slowly starts to change and the daughter starts to realize from this woman portrait painter that is there has a life of her own, that she's doing these things that normally a male would be doing, and that she basically has control over her whole life, and slowly but surely you get this relationship starting between the two women. Remember how I spoke about *Silence of the Lambs* and I was talking about the male gaze looking at Jodie Foster the whole time. Here you get the opposite. You get the female gaze. You get the portrait painter looking at this young woman, talking to her and looking at her, and the woman walks out of the room but the gaze is still held on where the woman went to.

This is a stunning piece of work, I think. I really loved it. I thought it was one of the best films I saw this year. In the 2022 Sight and Sound Critics Poll, it was voted the 30th greatest film of all time. Now you're going to say, well, why haven't I heard of this? Because it came out in 2019, David. Do you know what else came out in twenty nineteen? *Parasite*.

David:

All righty.

Perry:

So *Parasite* just killed everything. I mean it won the Oscar for the best film and Oscar for the best international feature. I think *Parasite* also won the Palm d'Or.

This was selected to compete at the Palm d'Or, but didn't win that either. I think it's a stunning piece of work. I saw it on Mubi, which is the streaming service which deals mostly with foreign films. I'm thinking that this is an excellent streaming service, although you have to concentrate on it. It's not one of those ones where, oh, well, I'll just sit down and just watch any odd thing that's popped up. You really have to know what it is you're looking for. It's not cheap because this one's something about \$16 a month for the streaming, but I got a special deal for six months, so I thought I'd try it out. I got it at about half price, so I thought, well, that's worthwhile, I'll try that out, and see how that goes. And I'm really liking it. I think it's got some really excellent films on there. It's got Korean, Italian, French, and it's even got some old English films on it as well. By English, I mean films in English. So I was looking the other day and I realised it's got *The Graduate*.

David:

Oh okay.

Perry:

From the late 60s, on there. It's got *The Deer Hunter*. I thought, oh, well, okay. Time to go back and watch those again. So, you know, just it's very, very, very, very interesting.

The Sheep Detectives, directed by Kyle Balda

Perry:

If you want another role of Hugh Jackman's, you can watch *The Sheep Detectives*. This is an amusing comedy mystery where Hugh Jackman plays a shepherd, where he lives in a caravan on the paddock where all the sheep are, and each night he reads to the sheep the latest mystery that he's reading, assuming, of course, that the sheep have got absolutely no idea what it is he's

talking about, except when he goes off screen and suddenly they start talking to each other. “Why did he finish it there? I wanted to find out what happened.” “You know, I’m sure it’s the brother. I’m sure it’s the brother.”



Anyway, Hugh Jackman’s character is found dead one morning. The sheep are basically hanging around watching what’s going on and decide that the local policeman’s a bit of a plodder and not really very good.

So, they decide to take on the role of solving the mystery themselves. Now, when this first started off, I thought, oh no, this is going to be terrible. It’s going to be an animal version of *Midsummer Murders*. And while it does have some of those characteristics about it, it’s still funny and it’s still amusing. It’s very well done. There’s some very good interplays. There’s some nice in-jokes. I think that’s on Netflix. Certainly worth having a look at if you’ve got that streaming service. It’s good fun and just enjoyable.

One of those films you never go back and see again, but you don’t care because it was just amusing for the night.

And if you’re if you’re sick of if you want a little bit of light entertainment, that’s a good one to go and see.

David:

Yeah, okay, good.

Perry:

That’s a good one to watch. And that’s about it for me.

David:

What was the name of the service again? Sorry. What was the name of the service that you talked about before, the foreign language one?

Perry:

Mubi M-U-B-I.

Yep, so have a look at that and as I said it’s not cheap but if you can find a deal where you can get six months of it for a small price, or if you can just buy it for a year and see what you think of it. And I think that, you know, if you were to watch what, \$16 a month. If you watch two films a month, you’re down to quite a reasonable price. And it’s got a large number of films on it. A couple that are there, I think it’s got *It Was Only An Accident*. One of my favorite films of last year, an Iranian film, which is just spectacular, really, really good.

David:

Oh yes, I know about it.

Perry:

Sirat, which is a Moroccan film, which I missed seeing in the cinema last year, but which is there. I also just watched recently on there *Harakiri, Death of a Samurai*, which is very interesting.

One of the very different takes on the Samurai lifestyle. And it's got a whole lot of stuff on it that I think it's worthwhile having people look at. Even if you go and have a look at the service, just to see what's there.

I shouldn't be advertising it, but I just think that it's got a lot of stuff on it. And it's just come at the right time for me because this is the type of stuff that I'm interested in at the moment. And seeing a lot of foreign films there that you won't normally come across in a small cinema. I'm lucky that around the Lido in Hawthorne, they do show a lot of these, but some of them don't turn up. You're not getting all the films that are being released, all the major ones being released are not being shown at the Lido.

Friends of my wife told her that they went to see Ian McClellan's latest film, *The Two Christophers*, which is supposed to be one of McClellan's greatest roles. And I don't believe it's coming to my local cinema at all. It's either at one of the chains, either the Village or Palace, or one of the other chains. So but that's supposed to be quite an excellent film. I might have to wait for that to hit a streaming service somewhere. So let's see how that goes.

David:

Yeah, indeed.

Windup

Perry:

That's me done. So next month, David, what are we up to? What are we going to look at?

David:

We thought we were going to talk about *The Odyssey*, I think, as a film.

Perry:

That's the one we were going to have a look at. So we're back with Christopher Nolan yet again. I've seen it. I didn't go and see it on IMAX. I think that their sessions are about \$47. So that's a bit much. I mean, it would be nice to see it there, but I saw it on a bigish screen with my wife Sunday afternoon a couple of weeks ago. She really enjoyed it, and so did I. But I reckon I'll go back and watch it again. And if people do want to go and watch it. One big tip. Have a toilet break before the film starts.

David:

It's a long film.

Perry:

It's a touch under three hours and you might get to the point where you start to struggle. Do not drink the big Cokes, as somebody said to me.

David:

Oh heavens no.

Perry:
Don't drink, don't have a big drink before you go in. So you might struggle.

David:
But on the other hand, once you're actually watching it, it flies by really. I didn't feel any point of being bored. Anyway, we'll talk about it next time.

Perry:
No, no, I felt exactly the same.

David:
Yeah, yeah.

Perry:
And the book we're going to be going to be talking about is an Australian book. *Capture* by Amanda Lohrey,. We've spoken about a few of her novels in the past. She won the Miles Franklin Award for *The Labyrinth* a couple of years back. And so this is her latest book, which I'm halfway through already, and I'm finding it very, very interesting indeed, very enjoyable and very interesting. So we will talk about those two next time.

David:
Indeed.

Perry:
And that's it. I think we're about done, David.

David:
Okay, all right.

Perry:
I think I'll stop rambling now and we can go off and have a cup of coffee.

David:
Do our things.

Perry:
See you later. Bye.

David:
See you.