Two Chairs In Print

Issue 20
Racing to the End of the Line



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Colophon

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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.

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Transcript Season 2, Episode 20

Introduction

Perry:

Hello and welcome to season two, episode 20 of this little podcast we've called Two Chairs Talking. My name is Perry Middlemiss, and I'm here with the globetrotting friend of mine, David Grigg, who's just back from a long vacation. How are you, David?

David:

Not long enough, really. It would have been nice to have had more time in some places. But yes, I've been to Europe and back. I flew into Paris and then trained my way through Europe down to Rome, where I met my daughter and her family, who were on an even longer holiday. They'd been going for three weeks before I joined them. And then we all trained back via Turin to Paris again, and then flew out from Paris.

Perry:

It's a shocking place to be, isn't it?

David:

Paris?

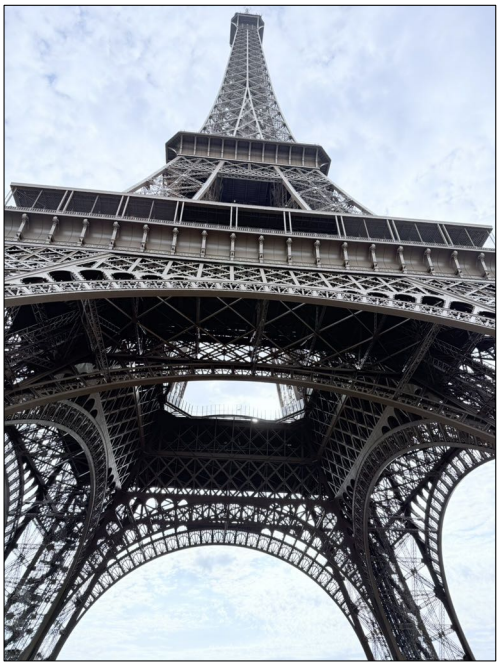
Perry:

[Joking] Absolutely absolutely terrible.

David:

Well, if you're in traffic, yes, the traffic jams or the not traffic jams, the gridlock at intersections, which is astounding.

Nobody in Paris obviously has learnt the lesson of you don't go into an intersection unless you can clear it on the other side. Nobody knows that. Nobody's even remotely interested in that as a thought. You get these buses and trucks, and they're all just shoving their way into the intersection. Oh god, it's a nightmare. So we did you know, traveling on the metro is the only way to get around Paris.



Perry:

Public transport, only way to fly.

David:

The way to go, yeah, well. Yeah, oh, it's fantastic.

Perry:

Lots of it and a very interesting underground system in Paris, with the trains with the rubber wheels, which I always thought was some of them, which I thought was really interesting.

David:

I didn't know that.

Perry:

Lovely place. I really, really like it a lot. And I'm glad you've finally got a chance to get back and you enjoyed it.

And Rome's good and all the rest of the city.

David:

Rome is the Eternal City, as they say, and there's so much to see. Although we couldn't get into the Colosseum, there was a problem. Someone had had a fatal accident there the previous day, a worker, I think, and they closed it because of that, so we couldn't get in, so that was a pity. But never mind. Apart from that, there's plenty of other things to see there.

Perry:

Next time, you'll have to go back.

David:

Next time, well that's right, the places I would like to spend more time in on the way if I do go back, which I'd like to, are Turin and Zurich. I found Zurich a wonderful place. I really would like to go back to Zurich.

So they're the places I'd like to go to.

Perry:

Yes, going back's good. Also, going to other places is also an excellent idea.

David:

Yes, true, true, true. I shouldn't just simply repeat myself, that's for sure.

Perry:

No, but I can certainly understand it though, because the first time, if you haven't been for quite a while, you're really just getting the lay of the land and working out which bits you like and what you like about certain things and some cities speak to you and don't speak to other people. And that's fine. There's absolutely no problem with that, I think. It's part of the whole deal about traveling, isn't it? That you're going to get different experiences and you're going to enjoy yourself.

David:

Sure.

Perry:

Hopefully. So have you got the travel bug now?

David:

I think I might have. That's the danger, because it could become very expensive.

Perry:

Oh yes, you're in trouble now, my friend. Absolutely in trouble. But hey, something to look forward to.

I find a lot of people ask me why I keep spending so much time looking at travel and planning so far ahead, and I reckon the reason is that, you know, half the fun of the travel is the expectation and the planning of actually getting to do the stuff

that you want to do. It's not as if you're trying to fill in every single little thing that you see when you're traveling. You're not trying to get to everything. That's just impossible. Anybody that tries to do that is just deluding themselves.

David:

Oh, I agree.

Perry:

You just need to be able to think, well, what are the high points that I would like to get to? Get those? Did I get to them all? Sometimes, sometimes not.

It doesn't matter. But you can just enjoy yourself and you can find some good stuff. But if you do the research beforehand, you've got a better chance of filling out all those little bits and pieces. And that also doesn't mean to say that you have to spend every minute of every day charging around like an idiot all over the place just to try and fit it all in.

David:

Yeah, true.

Perry:

No, that's too much. That's too much.

David:

Yep.

Perry:

We're too old for that. That's what you did in your 30s, David, or 20s.

David:

Yeah, that's right.

Perry:

Don't do that anymore.

That's a fair while ago for both of us, I think.

David:

It certainly is.

Discussion

Perry:

All right, well look, that's enough of travel because I'm off next week to the wilds of Sri Lanka and we can talk about that when we get back. When I get back and talk about that next episode. But this time around, we have a book and a film to talk about, as usual. But we have a little bit of a change from what we've announced before, but we'll get to that a little bit later. But first off, you're going to be looking at the book, and which one is that?

The End of Romance, by Maria Takolander

David:

The book is *The End of Romance* by Maria Takolander.

Perry:

Okay, off you go.

David:

All right, well I always like to start these discussions with a bit of a brief biography of the writer. This is just simply—I haven't done a lot of research, I have to say—this is just out of the blurb that was in the back of the book. But I'll go through it anyway.



Maria Takolander
photo courtesy of Text Publishing

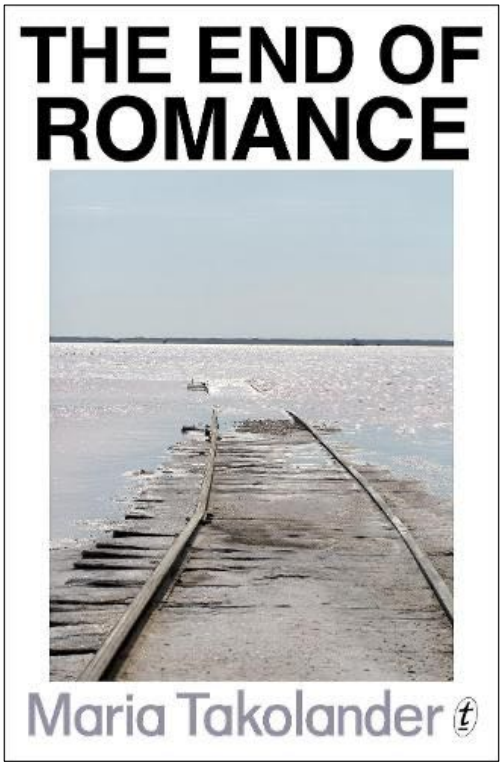
So Takolander is an award-winning Finnish Australian writer of fiction and poetry. She's published one short story collection and four books of poetry, one of which, *Trigger Warning*, won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 2022. And her short story, I hope I'm going to pronounce this right, her short story, "A Roānkin Philosophy of Poetry", won the Elizabeth Jolly Short Story Prize in 2010. And apparently she's also got words on some public art at the Royal Botanic Gardens, I'd like to go and see that. And she lives in Geelong with her husband and son.

All right, well let's get on to the novel itself, *The End of Romance*, published just this year by Text Publishing, with a great cover design by friend of the show W. H. Chong.

Now Perry talked briefly about this book a couple of episodes ago and gave a plot summary, so I'll try to summarise the plot as quickly as I can and not repeat too much of what he had to say about it, but I need to cover some of the plot, obviously.

Okay, well I think the twin themes of the book are the existential damage to our planet caused by humanity and toxic masculinity.

The story is told in four parts. The second part and fourth parts being very short. In the first part, we're introduced to a woman, a mother, living in an abandoned



house. I don't know that we ever discover her name. I couldn't find it quickly anyway when I was looking back over the book. And she has a young son who is, I suppose, five or six years old, really just sort of started school age. And the author does, I thought, an excellent job of quickly using this woman's experience in day-to-day life and thoughts to set up the world that she lives in.

So there's a lot of world building really happening in that first part. So things are in a very bad way on the earth, and with climate change continuing to create devastation. And although civilization doesn't seem to have completely collapsed, the outer suburbs of cities, or at least the city where this woman lives, are all but abandoned. The outer suburbs are abandoned, but with electricity, water and services only available at the core of the city. So this woman chooses to live in these outer regions which are largely abandoned, and she scrounges from abandoned buildings and gardens in order to survive. So things are grim.

But an alternative planet called The Promised Land has been discovered, and apparently humans are having to fight to take it over. To this end, all male children are trained in military schools from a young age, like the age of this young son of the woman, and when they reach their late teens, they are all shipped off to fight in the war. Now some mothers, like the protagonist of this part of the novel, dearly love their sons, as mothers do, of course, and they dread their loss and will do almost anything to keep them from having to serve in this war, even in extreme cases mutilating their sons by cutting off a limb or blinding them or in other ways making them unsuitable as soldiers.

What this means is that any adult male the protagonist sees will be disabled, until she discovers a man who appears to be perfectly whole, hiding out. She's determined to find out why he is able to survive and hasn't gone off to the war, hoping that she can find a way to keep her child safe from military service. And so she tracks down and confronts this man.

The second part of the book is the most puzzling, I think, in some ways. It's told from the point of view of a female astronaut sent with a male pilot on the first expedition to check out the promised land, this new planet. The third part is told from the point of view of this not-disabled man that the mother discovers in the first part.

And the final part of the book is told from the point of view of the mother's young son himself, just very young.

So it's an intriguing book, which had me lying awake thinking about it for quite a few nights after I read it. And in doing that, I came up with my personal take on what I think it's about. Now, I haven't read any other reviews of the book, nor was I able to attend the Nova Mob meeting at which Takolander spoke. So my review here is composed entirely of my own thoughts. Maybe they're not original at all. Maybe everybody understands this is what the book is about. But it doesn't

matter. I'll tell you my spin on it. And maybe my ideas are completely wrong. I'll let you make up your own mind.

So, I want to start by talking about negative space. In art, negative space is the region behind or between the main subjects of the piece. Sometimes negative space, as in a silhouette define the picture entirely. It's what's left out that matters. And I'd like to suggest that Takolander's novel works in just that way.

What's left out is any depiction at all of this planet, The Promised Land. Nor do we get to see any fighting in this supposed war. The expedition in the second part of the book never reaches the place, but drifts in negative space beyond the heliopause.

I'd like to suggest that The Promised Land doesn't exist. But if it doesn't exist, why are all these boys being trained and sent away? And why *only* the boys? Is this a misogynist society which doesn't believe women can fight? And why do none of them ever return, even as wounded soldiers?

The second part of the book, told by the female astronaut, is really interesting. [It's set] in space. They've been traveling some time, they're now beyond the heliopause, and she's in despair now that she's left any connection with the living world. And it ends with her trying to persuade the male pilot to ask that they return to Earth.

The third part of the book is told by the man, the adult male who hasn't been sent away to fight, because his mother concealed him when he was a child in an old monastery run entirely by women. But he and his mother were forced to leave there when he becomes a teenager and starts having sex with the girls that he grew up with. Now, after the mother in the first part of the book discovers him, she forces him to accompany her and her young son on a journey to look for this monastery. She's hoping that her son can be safe there. And throughout this part of the book told from the point of view of this man, he's such a whiny, needy, self-entitled character. He's always whinging about how unfair life is and how terrible this woman treats him. You know, he's a boy who never really grew up. And I suggest that he displays much that's wrong with men in general.

And the fourth part, told by the mother's young son, suggests that this child too is going to grow up with all of the defects of toxic masculinity.

So here's my theory of the book. There is no planet called The Promised Land. That name may be significant. Recall that in the Bible Moses never reaches the Promised Land, but dies within sight of it.

My theory is that the authorities on Earth, desperate to fix the problems caused by humanity, have invented The Promised Land and invented the war against its supposed inhabitants, as a means to cover up that they're deliberately removing males from society.

Maybe the fake war is just a way to drastically reduce the human population to save what's left of the earth. Or from another point of view, consider that the boys are shipped off really just once they reach an age that they can impregnate women. There's an interesting scene outside the military school at the end of the day when mothers are picking up their sons, and the teenage girls accompanying their mothers are all over themselves trying to make themselves look attractive to the boys being shipped off, and more than one is already pregnant by one of the young soldiers-to-be.

Now, close to fifty per cent of all human babies born are male, with the rest born female. But you don't need fifty per cent of the population to be male to keep a

population going. You only need a very few males. Think of a cockerel in a farmyard full of hens. Or think of cattle where most male calves are killed early and only a few kept to become bulls.

So where do the teenage boys go if they're not going off to this planet to fight?

I don't know. But I don't believe it's to fight a war on an on this other planet. Look at the depictions of the trains full of troops that the mother sees speeding by on the rails. Are they going off to launch pads or somewhere else? They make me think of cattle cars packed full of people being sent to places like Auschwitz and Dachau. You can draw your own conclusions.

Look, that's my very grim reading of what the book is about. I might be completely wrong.

There's a good deal else in the book worth considering. It has very capable world-building; interesting back stories for the main characters; and just generally a very well written and intriguing book, which I would highly recommend to our listeners and they can make up their own minds.

So, Perry, what do you think of all that?

Perry:

Well, that's a version of it that I hadn't actually thought of, but you're very persuasive, and I can see that from yes, I can see that that is...

David:

It's one reading at least, isn't it?

Perry:

It *is* one reading and it is something certainly to think about. I had not thought of it. See, I just took it all at face value. I just took it all as the idea that, okay, the Earth's a mess. There's no rain. Not much is growing. Massive amounts of climate change. And I just took it as a literal truth that they had actually found another planet and that they were, this is the Earth authorities were sending the males off to fight.

Now, I think the reason why the females aren't sent out to fight is given in that second section. And I think there's a bit of an allusion to it. At some point, somebody says something along the lines of, oh yeah, the women couldn't handle space or whatever. And that second section is the reason why, because the first woman that goes off to this particular planet has a crisis of conscience or whatever, and demands to be sent back to the Earth. The authorities, as we're talking about here in terms of toxic masculinity, make the overall assumption that all women are going to be exactly the same, and therefore there is no reason to send them off because they're not going to be able to do any good. So they stay at home.

And of course, the population is diminishing all the time because the birth rate's gone down, the climate's becoming an absolute and utter mess. So that's part of it, but I always thought that there was that planet there. [You gave] me something to think about here, David. I'm going... no, no, no, that's good. No, no, that's the whole point, isn't it? having a discussion. I had not thought about that at all and I thought that's an interesting way of looking at it.

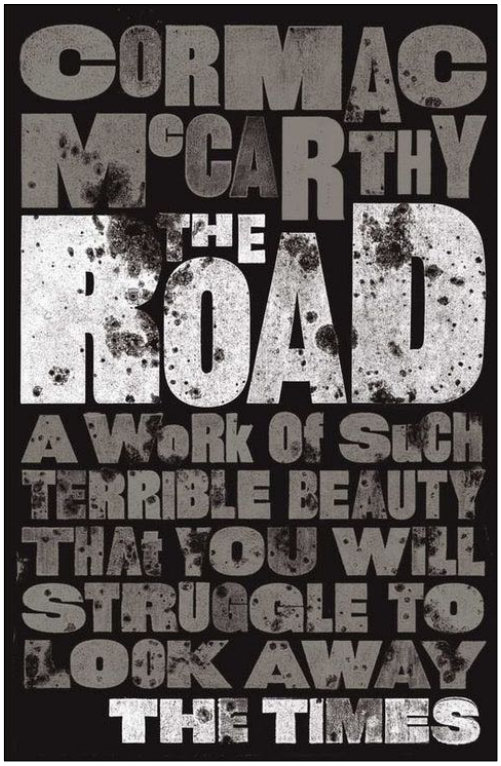
I saw this particular book, as yes, that's the background, that sort of clears the way out for this Journey that is being taken because, as you say, the mother, the child, and this whiny bloke start heading off theoretically to the monastery. But

the interesting thing is when they get to the railway line where theoretically they are going to take some sort of transportation and they get one of those carts that you push up and down and off you go. They head the wrong way. She just takes off and just goes and heads off. And he knows they're going the wrong way, but he doesn't say anything to her, which is a bit odd. Anyway, so off they go. It then becomes the journey. And when we were discussing this with Maria at the Nova Mob a couple of months ago I asked her the question if she'd actually had any other novel as her model for this particular book that she's written. And she said that she saw this as a female-led version of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

David:

Okay.

Perry:



So if you get the idea that Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* has the father and the child. The mother commits suicide because she doesn't believe there's any hope for the rest of the world and doesn't want to be around, and knows that if she's ever going to get caught by anybody, she's going to be raped and then eaten. And so the son and the father head off, and it's that male-centric view of this particular journey that our author here, Maria, wanted to basically examine. So that's part of it, which was very, very, very interesting.

I don't think the son is as [prone to] toxic masculinity based as you particularly think of it. I think that he's the very important part of this whole thing. There's something peculiar about this kid all the way right through, I reckon. We get an idea that there's something there that the mother is really desperate above and beyond just the standard maternal responsibility of looking after her child, there's something about this child that makes it stand out, but we don't really know what it is. It's just I just seem to get little snippets of information about that along the way, and then in that last section, it seems to become a lot more apparent.

Anyway, look, I thought this was an excellent book. Very well written. I really liked the four different viewpoints all the way right through. It's short and sharp. It doesn't go on for massive amounts of time, but it certainly gives you a hell of a lot to think about.

We had a big discussion, well, not a big discussion, but we had a discussion there about the climate and the way that water is collected in this particular novel. And the author said that she based it on her observations of what happens in Peru. I thought, well, I was there last year, and yes, this is true, because the whole section of Peru is split into three different regions. There's the coastal region, the mountainous region, and then the jungle region as you go further inland. The coastal region is completely and utterly dry. Although I have to admit that somebody told me the other day that it's just been raining in the Atacama Desert and that it's completely covered in wildflowers now. However, well, that's a bit

further, that's a bit further down because that's in the top end of Chile. What we're into is Peru here. The bottom, the coastal area of Peru is completely desolate.

There is no vegetation there at all. Lima, it does not rain in Lima. And now Lima is the only major capital city of any of the countries on the west coast of South America that it's actually on the coast. It doesn't rain there. And the only way they can utilize any water is runoff from the mountains. or by collecting water in rain nets. So they hang rain nets and dew forms, because fog rolls in from the ocean They collect the rain or the dew that accumulates on the rain nets and it drips down, and they collect that and put that on their gardens. And that's what she does here in this particular book.

Look, there's a lot to think about in this book. I think it's an excellent piece of work. Lots, lots to go on, and you've given me even more. I thought there was enough in it already, David. But here you are, you've come up with a completely and utterly different viewpoint that was never mentioned at Nova Mob. So I think there might be some people that might find that to be... Anyway, look I would heartily recommend that people read it.

David:

Yeah, I think it's definitely a book people should read.

Perry:

Yes, I was very glad that Murray McLachlan, the convener of the Nova Mob, had found it and I read it. Because it was coming up for the Nova Mob, and I'm glad I did. Yep, and I think it's one of those ones that people should actually get out and have a look and track it down. I think it's an excellent book.

David:

Yep, I agree.

Perry:

All right.

Okay, so let's move on to the film. Now, the end of the last episode, we announced, David, that we were going to be reviewing *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. But later on, I discovered that Chong and I had carried out a detailed discussion of this particular film back in episode 87 in 2023, so we decided let's not do it again, let's go on with something else.

Snowpiercer, directed by Bong Joon Ho

Perry:



And so, you made the suggestion that we watch the film *Snowpiercer*. And that's what we've done. And so this is my review of that.

Snowpiercer is a 2013 South Korean-USA co-production. Directed by Bong Joon Ho, who also wrote the screenplay with Kelly Masterson. And it's based on a French graphic novel that first began serialization back in 1982. So this story's been around for a long time. Now the film depicts an alternative future in the year 2031. So the film is set in that particular time and it also looks back in terms of what's happened and how it got to that particular future.

Earth has now completely frozen. It's been rendered a Snowball Earth. After the aerosol ejection in 2014, of a chemical into the stratosphere went horribly wrong. The chemical was originally designed to mitigate the effects of climate change, but the experiment backfired, temperatures plummeted, the earth froze and nearly all life died. As far as they are aware, the only remaining members of the human race are all clustered together on a state-of-the-art, self sustaining train that continually circumnavigates the globe, never stopping, making the full circuit of its track every year. Now I don't know, they actually mentioned how long this is in the film, something like, I don't know 400,000 kilometres or something. I don't know, it's a massive amount. But anyway, it does, it's almost like a bullet train. It looks like a bullet train, and it hurtles around this track once a year.

The passengers on this particular train are segregated into two major sections. The elite at the front, up near the engine, where all the heat and all the good stuff is, and the poor and hungry at the rear, where there's basically nothing very much at all. Now, 17 years after the train set off and the earth froze, a large group of passengers from the rear carriages decides to stage an uprising, attempting to overthrow the elites and their armed cronies and to get better conditions for themselves. This isn't the first of these uprisings as we find out; some of them are mentioned along the way. But this particular group is led by somebody by the name of Curtis Everett, played by Chris Evans, who is probably best known for his role as Captain America in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films and also led by Gilliam, played by the actor John Hurt.

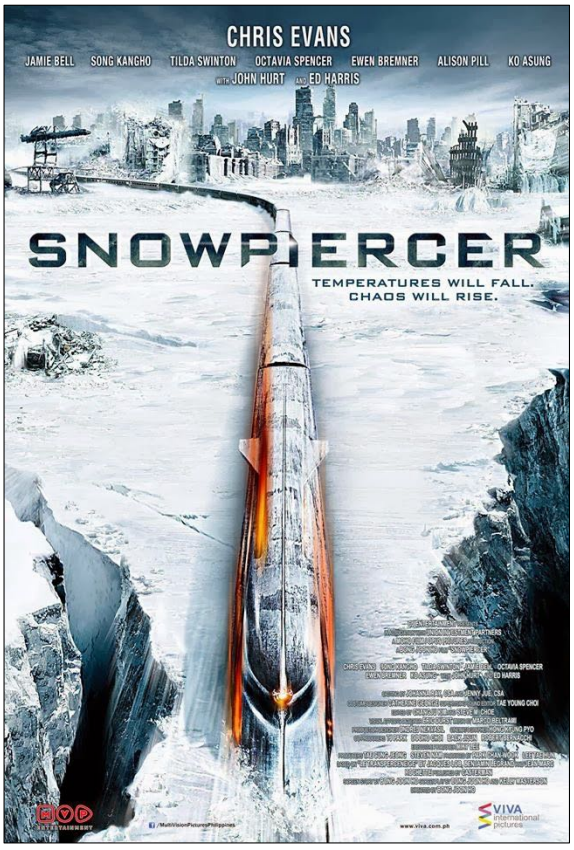
Now, don't forget this is 2013 when this was made, 13 years ago. Hurt has now died, but anyway, here he is. Everett has been receiving secret messages. Supposedly passed along to him by a person by the name of Namgoong Minsoo, a captive security expert who is reputed to have the knowledge of how to open the gates, that is, the doorways between the carriages all the way down along the train. Everett's aim is to break through to the holding pens where Namgoong is

being held, free him, bribe him by supplying him with his drug of addiction, to open all the gates all the way through to the front of the train. There they hope they will confront the train's owner and builder, Mr Wilford, played by Ed Harris, and get him to improve the conditions of the poor on the train. Or just change the whole way that things are run.

Now, if you heard this and you think that you're hearing plot devices and story arcs you've heard before, then you'd be very correct. The setup here is similar or the same as a lot of books and films where a large group of people are bundled together in a small space, where there are two groups, the haves and the have-nots, and where tensions build to boiling point. I can certainly remember similar setups in Generation Starship novels, for example. We've looked at some of those in the past on this particular podcast. This isn't new. The question then is, is it fresh, innovative or exciting? And unfortunately for me, the answer is no it isn't. In fact, I found the whole thing kind of boring in the end.

Firstly, it's slow. The time frame of the film is supposed to be a short space of time. In which the passengers make their way forward. You're expecting this to happen quickly. They have to have the element of surprise. They have to move quickly and get going and overpower everything. They have to subdue one carriage, open the next gate, subdue the next carriage, and repeat over and over until they get to the front of the train. You'd expect them to want to seize the initiative and move fast before the elites can get their soldiers and police in place and force them back. But no, they stop for sushi at one point. They stop to admire the fish, to spend time in a schoolroom. They seem to do just about everything other than to move forward.

Yes, they get there, but why are you spending all this time stopping in places where you don't need to? They get there eventually, but by God, it's slow. We therefore have an action film in which the action is disjointed and rather uninteresting. Along their journey towards the front of the train, Everett's group encounters Wilford's second in command, Minister Mason, played by Tilda Swinton. A grotesque cardboard character who's really wasted here, I thought.



David:

[Exclaims in diagreement] Oh no!

Perry:

Buckteeth, terrible hair, looks oh no, just a grotesquery in my view. I think everybody is wasted here. Evans walks through his role. He's competent, but not much more. Hurt plays the wise old mentor whose main job, it seems, is to convince Everett that he really is the group's leader, even though everybody knew that anyway.

And Harris does the evil overlord thing that's been done many times before. I was very disappointed in this film, David. I expected a whole lot more from it. It was Bong Joon Ho's first mainly English language film and maybe that's where the



problem lies. He would later go on to make *Parasite* in 2019, which I enjoyed immensely, and we really both thought that was an absolutely fantastic film. Maybe this film's setup and plot might have been a tad more original in 2013 than it is now, but I'm watching it in 2026 and I really have to judge it from this perspective. And there it just doesn't cut it, in my view.

And lastly, I was kept on being drawn out of the flow of the film all the time with questions about the motivations of the various characters. Because, you know, when things slow down in an action film, you stop to think “No, you can't do that”. I had to think about how the train worked, about why they were on it at all, and about who was doing the maintenance, etc. etc. This thing just plows through snow drifts, and you know a good film that has its ducks all in a line, that has its story points fully covered and its characters working properly, can actually suspend your disbelief and line up for the film to skate over these sorts of problems. This one allows you too much time to sit back and think and then go, hang on a minute. So I only gave this one 2. 8 out of 5, David. Disappointed.

David:

Oh gosh.

Perry:

Disappointed.

David:

Well that's a pity because I quite enjoyed the film. I've watched it twice now, watched it again just last night. I agree that the initial premise is absolutely absurd. You know, if you had the technology to keep a small group of humans alive in this frozen waste, why would you spend the time being on a train that's going around the world on a track which is perfectly timed so that their speed

means that they pass the same point every year, exactly on the New Year's Eve? They get to this particular bridge, the long, this long journey, which I think is 43,000 kilometers or something. So they're going along at whatever speed they're going, that makes it so that when they get to this point, it's always been a year has passed. So that's yeah, so the whole premise is absurd. But then the whole film is absurd, and I think it's an absurdist film.

Because as they sort of fight their way forward, things start to become surreal. You know, when they get into the place where there's the aquarium and then there's the sushi place, it just becomes more and more absurdist, and I think that's kind of deliberate. I don't think it's a coincidence that the John Hurt character is called Gilliam. I think that's a hat tip to Terry Gilliam. I thought Tilda Swinton was just brilliant as this horrible, horrible monster, this character, Minister Mason, she just she eats it up, it's wonderful. With this wonderful thick Yorkshire accent, you know, and the buck teeth and the whole thing.

So I don't know, I liked it as an absurdist film, I think, is what I would like to say about it.

And I thought that Chris Evans does a pretty good job in that role. The bit right at the end where he tells them what it was like right at the very start when there was no food at all for the poor people.

I mean, it's obviously a thing about the class systems throughout the world. You know, the poor people slave away for nothing, and the rich people up at the far end live in absolute luxury, and they have discos, and goodness knows what. So it's a metaphor for that, but it's a pretty obvious metaphor, I suppose. I don't know, I liked it. I would score it higher than that. And certainly as a director, he's certainly well worth watching, anything that he puts together, I think.

Perry:

I was going to say that I thought that it looked good, but that's a bit like going along to a stage play and say, "What'd you think of it?" And you go, "Yeah, the sets were good." You know, it's sort of damning with no praise at all. I agree with you.



The bit at the end where you finally figure out what Everett's motivation is, why he's there, why he's doing what he's doing, and what things have come along.

I think Harris's explanation of what's going on I thought was a bit yeah, no, not great. But I thought that Evans's point about why he was doing what he was doing, yeah, that was probably about the best thing of the film.

No, I just thought it was disappointing. I just thought it was disappointing. And I can see your point about it being an absurdest thing. But you know, you need something new, I think, with this. And as I said, it was made in 2013. And this is always the problem about looking back at something. It's hard to remember where this fitted in these stories about groups of people being stuck in a closed environment at the end of the world. You know, as I said, with Generation Starships, you've got this sort of small world or proto world situation. And you've got the haves and the have-nots, and we see this all the time. I don't know where in the timeline this particularly fits. But I think it's been done to death now, and I don't think it carries anymore. There we go. Some people might like it.

David:

It got well reviewed.

Perry:

Sorry?

David:

It got well reviewed and in and critics liked it.

Perry:

Yeah, it probably did.

That had it in a lot of their top tens according to the Wikipedia page. I wouldn't put it in my top ten. I mean, I wouldn't put it anywhere near what else that I've seen. I've only seen three films by Bon Joon Ho now. *Parasite's* certainly the best.

David:

Didn't he do *Mickey 17*? That was very good, I thought.

Perry:

He did do *Mickey 17*. Maybe I'm thinking of somebody else then. Yeah, he did *Mickey 17*. So I don't think this is as good as *Mickey 17*. I thought that that was a lot more satirical than this one and I thought that there was also some grotesqueries in that in the sense of the two main... Well now that you're bringing it up, now that you're talking about this and you bring up *Mickey 17*, you start thinking about it, you can start seeing there's a lot of comparisons between what he was doing there. I think I, he knew what he was doing a lot better. And I think that works a lot better than this one does.

I'm not going to change my rating on it though, David.

David:

I'm not trying to persuade you to do so. That's fine.

Perry:

All right. Okay. All right, so that's the book and the film. So what else have you been reading? Anything else?

What Else We've Been Reading and Watching

Farthing, by Jo Walton

David:

Still very slow reading. Even while I was overseas, I didn't read a lot. The last three books I've *completed* because there was one I started and decided I didn't want to keep reading. Last three books I've finished are *Farthing* by Jo Walton, which is the first of her Small Change series, which I'd like to go on and finish the rest of, which is set in an alternate history where Britain made an agreement, a truce with Hitler's Germany.

Eon, by Greg Bear

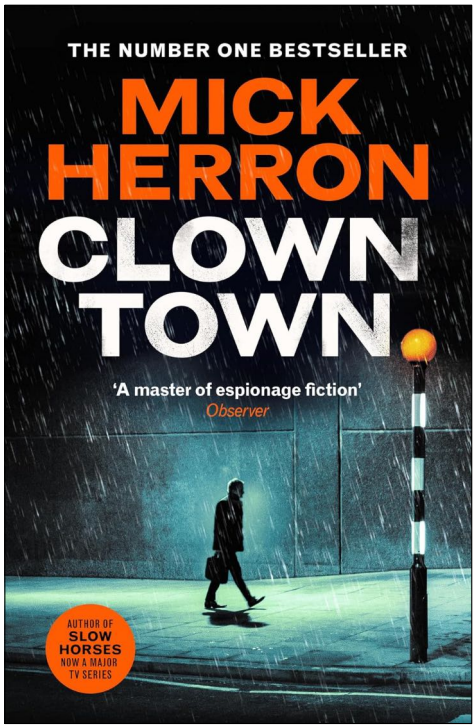
David:

I reread *Eon* by Greg Bear, which is pretty good super science type science fiction.

Clown Town, by Mick Herron

David:

And *Clown Town* by Mick Herron, which is, I think, the last so far of his *Slow Horses* series. And that's very interesting because I got to the end of *Clown Town*, I thought: "Is he winding this series up? Is this the end of this series?" Because there are a number of things which are kind of irreversible. If you haven't read the book, I won't give spoilers. But there are a number of things which are irreversible that happen at the end of *Clown Town*, and you think, "Oh God, how's he going to continue this?" And so I'm kind of wondering whether he will continue it or not. So that's that was interesting. From that point of view. Have you read [it]?



Perry:

No, not yet.

David:

Well, I won't give away any spoilers, but the ending, towards the ending, is you sort of go, "Oh my god!" So it's well worth reading.

Anyway I read far less than I thought I was going to when I was on planes and [travelling].

Perry:

Oh, okay. So what how were you passing your time? Sleeping? Or watching any movies?

David:

I did watch a couple of movies on the way back. I didn't watch anything on the way there. So I must have been reading my way through *Eon*, I suppose, and *Clown Town*. I think *Clown Town* was first. So I was reading that. I hadn't started it before I got on the plane, so I got a fair way through that in that time. So it takes me a while to read. I mean, I suppose if I really pushed, I could read a book in 10 hours, but I didn't anyway. Films, I did watch a couple of films on the way back.

The Sheep Detectives, directed by Kyle Balda

David:

And that was *The Sheep Detectives*, which you talked about, which was amusing. Like one of those cozy, cozy detective sort of stories, but with sheep.

Perry:

Hmm. Well, that's it. It's just amusing. It's a lovely little pastime, but that's it. You forget all of it.

Night and Day, directed by Tina Gharavi

David:



And I watched a film I hadn't heard about before, which I quite enjoyed, which was *Virginia Woolf's Night and Day*, directed by Tina Gharavi. And it's based on obviously on a Virginia Woolf book. It's about this young woman who wants to become an astronomer, but this is the kind of Edwardian or earlier era, and women just you know, she gets laughed out of interviews for college and so on because she's a woman, you know, women don't study physics!

Perry:

Yeah.

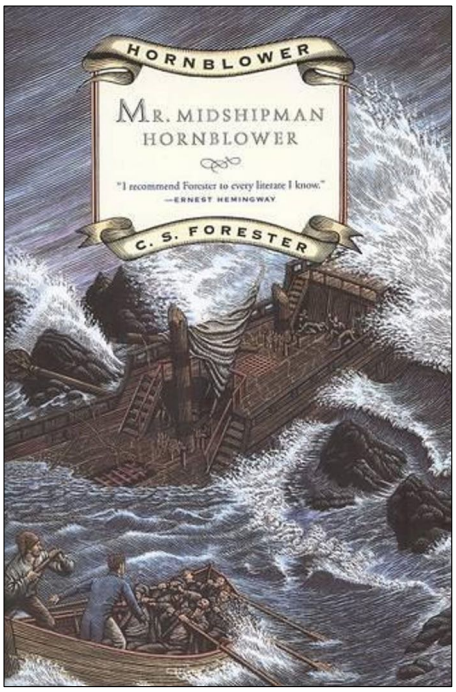
David:

But this obviously because of Virginia Woolf, of course, she's very much moving against this thing and so her main character defeats them in the end. Haley Bennett plays the main character. Timothy Spall, you remember from many other films, plays her father as a sort of very conservative character from the era. I quite enjoyed it: I gave it four out of five. But, yeah, that was it. And that's all I saw on the films. On the way there, I rewatched some episodes of what's it called? *Sandman*. based on the comic books by Neil Gaiman. But then I sort of stopped that for reasons.

But anyway, that was it, so that's about all I've been reading and watching recently. Well, I did see one other movie, an Apple TV movie called *Mayday*, starring Ryan Reynolds and Kenneth Branagh, which is a comedy thriller, I suppose you'd have to call it. Which was all right. That was about all I could say about that.

Mr. Midshipman Hornblower, by C. S. Forester

Perry:



All right, just all right. Yeah, that's fine. Okay, well I've I actually picked up just recently the first book in the *Hornblower* series by C. S. Forrester. And this is wasn't the first book he wrote, but it's the first one chronologically in the series. He wrote it later to fill in all the gaps, because obviously, I think what had happened is as he was writing the *Hornblower* series, he was mentioning things that Hornblower had done in the past. But he hadn't covered those in any of the stories.

And so *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* dates from the time that he first enters service in the Royal Navy. It is a sort of series of longer short stories, novellas, if you like, covering a lot of those incidents. It was really good. I enjoyed it. And I thought, well, that's good. That's another comfort read. I know my father had always told me that he really liked them, and I'd never gotten around to reading them. And now I understand why.

There are science fiction readers and science fiction writers who really like this stuff, like the Patrick O'Brien books as well. Because it puts a small group of people into an enclosed environment and you have to basically be able to negotiate with everybody else, and as a writer, you can then talk about the different characters and how they interact and what they do with each other. And so I'm actually looking forward to getting back into the Hornblower stuff. I think that would be, it looks like it's going to be very interesting indeed.

David:

Yeah, I read a few of those quite a while ago, but it's a long time ago now, but I think I probably read three or four of the whole series.

Perry:

Yeah, nice comfort reads. So you can basically sit down and read them and you know that you're going to get a good story. It is going to have a fair amount of historical detail because of course he puts Hornblower smack bang in the middle of the wars between England and France around the turn of the 1800s.

David:

The Napoleonic Era.

Perry:

From the 18th century, yeah, the Napoleonic stuff. And so it's a bit like reading the Flashman, the *Flashman* stories, which I should go back and have a look at as well. They are just an absolute comedy, and you know, Flashman's an absolute bastard. You know, he's just a coward and he does everything wrong, but he just seems to fall on his feet the whole time. And Hornblower basically survives because he's generally a decent human being who treats people around him decently, and the crewmates that he's with realize that he's got their best interests at heart and he will stand up for them. And he will own up if he thinks he hasn't

done the right thing and he'll cop the punishment. So he just seems like a fairly decent sort of guy. There are times when you actually do want to read about decent sorts of blokes to get an idea about, you know what happened at that particular time? So, I'm looking forward to those.

So, I might have to read one or two of those when I'm away. When I'm actually flying, it's comfort reading, and part of the comfort reading will be some of the *Show Horses* stuff. So I will read the next one of that because there's a new TV series out and the latest TV series of *Slow Horses*, I believe, covers two books. I've read one of them, so I've got to read the other one. I better get to that. So that's what I'm going to read next week.

Hope, directed by Na Hong-jin

Perry:

But what I did want to talk to you about, David, was a film that Chong and I, as you mentioned Chong earlier, who did the cover for *The End of Romance*. Chong and I yesterday went to see another South Korean film, called *Hope*.

This is astounding. Firstly, it's a bladder buster, two hours, fifty minutes. It's a long film. So, as you can imagine, at the end of the film, I was only interested in getting to one place at that time. But that was okay.

Now look this is a—how do I describe it?—science fiction horror action thriller film. So it starts off with the local police chief in a small village in South Korea, and you get the impression it's up near the North Korean border because they talk about certain areas being mined, lots of forests, and you see signs up saying report any spies to the authorities.

So the local police sergeant is driving with one particular guy and they're going out to this place out in the fields where a bloke has found something that he wants to show the policeman. They turn up, they stop, they see in a distance what looks like the dead body of an animal, and as they get closer, they realize it's a big bull, and it's been shredded by something.



First off, everybody thinks that it might be a tiger, and somebody comes up with the idea it's a Siberian tiger that's come down from Russia, down through North Korea, and comes in every two or three years, cleans a few animals up and goes away again. But no, no. This isn't a tiger: much much bigger. They don't really know what to do, but the policeman says, "Well, get it off the road, so put it in the ditch, get it off the road so that nobody runs into it." And then he finds out that he needs to be called back into the local village

because there's a bit of a ruckus going on and he has to get back there. So he heads back to the local village.

And here it's the film really kicks off and really starts. He realizes that when he gets back that there's a monster somewhere. He turns up and there's a big hole that's been punched into the side of a shop or a wall. So he gets out of the car and he starts following it. And he follows this path going through the village. The village has been trashed. And for the next twenty five, thirty minutes, you get this absolutely fantastic piece of action cinema. where the camera is mainly focused on the police officer as he's working his way through the village. Things happen in the distance. Where he stops in a street and turns around and 200 metres away he sees these people shooting at something. A car comes flying across and smashes into these people and pushes them over, and he rushes down there and everything's gone. Then he moves off to the next thing, and it goes on and on and on.

It was absolutely frantic, and it was just a wonderful piece of filmmaking. You finally get to the point where that first section is resolved and you start to realize that the creature, which he's finally seen, because he's it seen a bit in the distance, you see bits and pieces of it, but you're almost an hour in this three-hour film, before you see the creature at all. Which is good because that's basically the way that you build the tension up. You don't know what you're expecting, you don't know what you're going to see, and suddenly you do see it, and it is scary, and yes, it is.

And then I'm not sure. The film starts moving more towards a more of a science fictional interest. The hunters that were out with the police sergeant have gone up into the hills and they are working their way through trying to find things and they're seeing evidence of things being torn apart, eaten, dead bodies. And they come across what looks like an alien spaceship, a pod, a large metal sphere with a ramp coming out of the middle of it, and they go in to have a look, and it reminded me a bit like the engineer's ship at the start of *Alien* when they walk in and they've got all that sort of funny little things on the walls, and you think, oh, there's something in here going to be going to infect them, but anyway, they move on.

This is an astounding piece of work. I don't know whether it's going to have a sequel. There may have been a “To Be Continued” right at the end of the credit statement, but I couldn't wait that long. I had to get out and visit the little boys' room because I just couldn't make it in time. There may be, it certainly is set up for there to be a sequel.

And as I came out, I actually said to Chong, you know, I reckon this was originally conceived as a TV series because it's got really good solid acts of, you know, forty five minutes here, forty five minutes there, forty five minutes there. It could have had three or four 45, 50 minute episodes taken out of this particular film. But it's certainly astounding, certainly worth seeing. Probably best to watch it at home so you can get to the end of a sequence and stop and go, “Okay, I'll go and have a bit of a wander up to the toilet, then come back again and get myself a cup of tea, cup of coffee.”

But it's interesting that the South Koreans are doing such good, so much stuff, so many interesting things.

David:

I talked briefly on the podcast about a film called *The Great Flood*, again South Korean film. Did you ever get to see that?

Perry:

Yes, I have seen that. I don't think I liked it as much as you did, but I did think that it was certainly interesting.

There's just... Well it's just they're doing different things. They seem to have a sense that they can push the boundaries of a lot of their plots. They don't have to stick to the same-old, same-old as we seem to be finding from the Americans at the moment. There seems to be, well... American cinema, there seems to be there's a lack of a sense of adventure. "Let's not try anything new. We're spending so much money to make these things. We have to make sure that we're going to get covered in terms of the money coming back in." They don't want to take a risk. Whereas the South Koreans think, yeah, what the hell? You know, it's South Korean. The South Koreans will go and see it. And I realized, we looked it up, there are 52 million people that live in South Korea. 52 million.

In [a country] about the third of the size of Victoria.

David:

Yeah, well it's right, twice the population of Australia.

Perry:

Yes, a third of the size of Victoria. So they have a big captive market.

David:

Hmm. And they're doing good things, yeah.

Perry:

Yes, they are. And the films that are coming out are great. And so I realized I've watched about, I don't know, about half a dozen South Korean films this year. And they are interesting. If nothing else, they are interesting. You're not going to get something that's going to be perfect every time, but at least if it actually gives you something of interest, that's great. *Hope* did. *Snowpiercer*, not so much.

But *The End of Romance* did.

David:

Fair enough, fair enough.

Perry:

The End of Romance, there was a lot of interesting things in that.

David:

Yes, yes.

Perry:

And I'll go back and I'll reiterate, as you did, I think people should go out and read it. I think it's great.

Windup and Next Episode

Perry:
Okay, David, I think we're done.

David:
Yeah.

Perry:
We're not sure what we're going to be doing next month. We haven't made up our minds about that yet.

David:
No, we didn't actually discuss that. Never mind.

Perry:
We didn't actually discuss that and I'll be away, so we'd better come up with something in the next few days so I know what I have to read when I'm away.

David:
Read on the plane.

Perry:
Yes, that's right.

All right, okay, David, I think we're done.

David:
Yep.

Perry:
Thanks very much. I shall see you next month. And hopefully I will, and hopefully, the listener will be back.

David:
Yeah, well have a good trip.

Perry:
Thanks.