Two Chairs In Print

Issue 4
The Eye of the Storm

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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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Introduction

Perry:

Hello and welcome to episode four, season two of this little podcast we call Two Chairs Talking. My name as always is Perry Middlemiss and I'm here also as always with my collaborator David Grigg. Hello David.

David:

Hi Perry how's things?

Perry:

Pretty good thank you very much, pretty good. Everything's ticking along quite nicely I think at the moment. I'm still not reading enough. I'm still struggling to read enough.

David:

I have the same feeling.

Perry:

I don't know, I'm actually finding that if I read, I normally do a bit of reading in the afternoon after lunch and that's a *bad* time because I start to read and then I find myself falling asleep. So either way there's two ways to do get over this: read at a different time, or don't have lunch; one or the other.

David:

Oh well you don't want to miss out on lunch.

Perry:

I'm actually getting the age of my life David where if I have breakfast there's no point in having lunch because you know I really don't need all that amount of fuel anymore.

David:

I like a good lunch *and* a good breakfast.

Perry:

Well the metabolic rate is sort of dropping away quite markedly these days so I find that I'm not chewing up all the energy that I'm pouring into the body so I've got to be a bit careful about that. So anyway,that's a discussion for another time.

So we're back this time. Oh we've got a bit of a change, we should tell the listener a couple of things. Firstly do you want to tell them about this little publication that we've got together just recently.

David:

Well, basically, what it is it's a little fanzine we put together which really just consists of the transcripts of us yammering away at each other. Because there are some people who tell us that they don't like listening to podcasts or don't have time to listen to podcasts. But they're still interested in what we have to say, and so that's the idea, that we can meet the needs of those people who are, I don't know, podcast-averse or something.

Perry:

"Podcast averse" there's another new term for you, that's a good one.

Yeah, so basically we've put the transcripts of the first two episodes of this season out and we will have the third episode out this coming Friday and I assume that

we'll have the transcript of this one the Friday following.

David:

Yes, we'll have it done by then.

Perry:

Yes, well, then we'll drift back to doing it about a week or 10 days after the audio of the podcast becomes available, we'll release the transcript out into the wide world.

Now where can they get a hold of this David? It will be available on *efanzines.com* coming up. The two that we have released so far haven't become available just as yet because efanzines.com is run by Bill Burns and he's been floating around on holidays in the UK. He went to the fanzine convention Corflu in England and then he went over to the British Eastercon which was held this year in Belfast. So he's been at both of those and so he's away from his home in the US. He'll be back sometime this week I think and hopefully in the next few days or the next week they will become available there.

Or they can always write to one of us David, or [is there] somewhere else they can find it?

David:

Well, we've got a new email address haven't we, it's twochairstalk@gmail.com. Or they can go to our website which is *twochairs.website* and they'll have the information there. There will be links to the transcripts there.

Perry:

Oh, you're putting the links on each of the individual episodes.

David:

And there's a page, literally a page called Transcripts so it's all there on the website.

Perry:

We're trying to make it as easy as we can for people to get copies of it. If you would like to receive them on a regular basis via email they all come out as a PDF.

We have to tell you that the transcript is lightly edited because David, when I go back and read what I have been talking about I sound like a total idiot. I have a tendency to repeat myself, I get halfway through a sentence change my mind and move off on a complete other [topic].

David:

That's what editing is about. Yeah, I agree we do we do fix those things up.

Perry:

I think that's what conversation is all about as well. You do have a tendency to start somewhere and jump off to somewhere else: "Oh I've got a better idea of it", then you go down this path rather than going down the other one. So anyway we try to [clean] it up. Keep some of that in without having too many repetitions, too many "ums" and "ahs". They all get cleaned up, which is an absolute blessing. We attempt to get rid of those ourselves [as we speak] but sometimes, as in all conversation "ums" and "ahs" do actually sneak in.

But anyway, so this is all lightly edited.

If you send us an email and you would like to go on to the email list you will get them in your letterbox whatever they come out. We try to keep them down to a reasonable size but they are going to be around about three megabytes a pop and so if that's too much for you you need to be aware of that hopefully.

David:

Three megabytes these days is nothing.

Perry:

I've had somebody come to me to say "Well no sorry I've got an old email server and I can't handle it so I'm going to have to download them separately".

Okay, so that's just the way it goes. That's one of the fans on my mailing list for my personal zine that I put out once a month. These things happen: basically some people are not going to be able to handle the throughput into their email inboxes, just the way it goes. But we are attempting to try to help you out as best we can.

Okay David, the other thing that I wanted to mention is that in our last episode we had said that we intended to the review the novella *It Lasts Forever and then It's Over* by Anne de Marcken. But this proved a little bit difficult to source for us, so we decided to move on to something else and so we are going to be reviewing *The Tusks of Extinction* by Ray Nayler, which came out in 2024. So that will be the second novella that we'll be doing in this episode. So if you're expecting the other one sorry didn't work out. We'll try and get to it at some other date. This is going to happen from time to time. We do the best we can. There we go. Such is life.

Okay David let's move on. So this time, normally, what we do is in our current format we review a book and a film. Well in this case because there was one particular novella that I wanted to have a bit of a chat to David about which we will come to first and I'll mention it in a minute. We decided to go for two novellas just to fill it out because you know novellas are only about maybe 120 odd pages or so.

So you get two novellas and a film this time around. So let's start with the first of those novellas, David. *Typhoon* by Joseph Conrad which is now about 120 years old.

Discussion

Typhoon by Joseph Conrad

David:

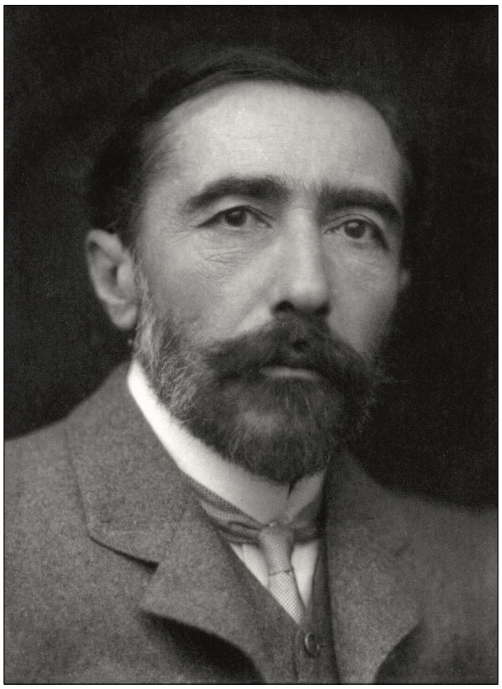
Yes indeed. I thought I'd start with a little bit of a rant about Joseph Conrad himself. Not a very long one, so just bear with me.

I just wanted to say that Joseph Conrad really you've got to say was a really remarkable writer. I can't think of any other writer whose first language wasn't English who has achieved such renown in English literature. Can you think of anyone else?

Perry:

No. He's quite astounding in this regard. You'd have to put him right up there in the classic English writers and yet his first language was Polish. He was Polish and he came to English late and he just obviously had a wonderful way with literature of any sort. He does a wonderful job.

David:



Well just a quick potted biography. He was born in 1857 and I'm going to try and get this pronunciation right so please Polish listeners forgive me if I don't.

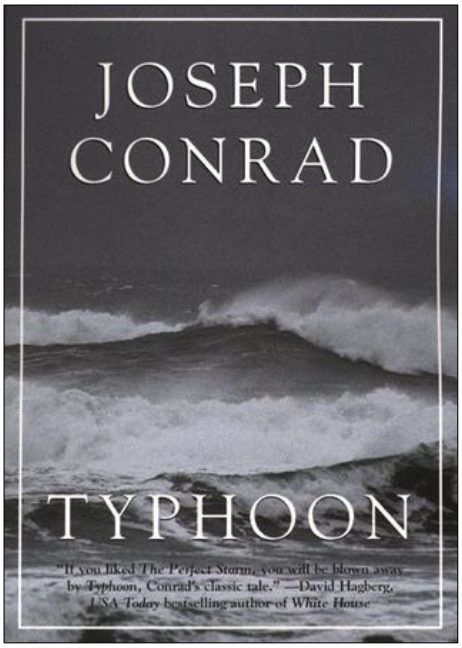
He was born in Poland in 1857 as **Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski**. At the time Poland was under under the control of the Russians and his father Apollo was involved in the Polish resistance movement. Anyway Joseph himself aspired to be a sailor from the age of 13 because he read all these exciting tales set at sea and he'd always wanted to be a sailor so that's what he did. At 16 he was sent to Marseille in France by his father to join the French Merchant Marine and by that time Joseph Conrad was already fluent in speaking French. So obviously he had a talent for language.

And four years later he joined the British Merchant Marine where he obviously learned to speak English and he served in the British Merchant Marine for 15 years. So it's calculated that throughout his life he spent over eight years of his life actually at sea which is amazing.

His travels took him to Africa, Asia and the East Indies which is of course are the basis of a lot of his novels. And particularly he spent time in the Belgian Congo which inspired his short novel *Heart of Darkness* which Perry talked about on the podcast some time ago.

There's a terrific series of episodes on the podcast *The Rest is History* dealing with the Belgian Congo and its horrors, and a full episode dedicated to Conrad himself. It's well worth catching up with those. I do recommend that podcast and those particular episodes if you can find them.

But today we're going to be discussing Conrad's short novel or novella *Typhoon* which was published in 1902. So what's that 125, 123 years ago.



Basically it's the story of one particular steamer in the East Indies on a voyage to a port in China when it encounters a typhoon at sea. Not sure that we're told where the ship departs *from* but anyway it doesn't matter. Among other things it's carrying a cargo of some 200 Chinese men who are returning home from wherever they've been working, with their earnings, which are all packed into wooden chests that they carry with them at all times.

There's some wonderful dramatic writing when the ship actually encounters the storm itself and the ship struggles to survive it. From chapter to chapter you're really not sure at all that the ship is going to survive. It's very tense.

But the story isn't really about that, so much as one of character, particularly that of the steamer's captain, Captain MacWhirr. Conrad makes him out to be this stolid, good man with almost no imagination. He's a man who can't understand a metaphor and he's baffled that his subordinates can talk to each other for hours. He can't imagine what they talk about.

It's this lack of imagination, I think, that enables him to face this terrible storm with equanimity and keep going. Other characters in the story are much more passionate, particularly young Jukes who's the first mate. Apparently this character is based on Conrad himself. And in fact this whole thing must be based on his experiences at sea because I think he actually served for a while under a Captain McWhir, spelt differently. There's some other interesting characters like the chief engineer Solomon Rout who has to keep the engines running through the ferocity of the typhoon so that the ship can make headway and keep pointing into the waves and not be overturned.

But a key plot point is what happens to the Chinamen who are confined below decks during the worst of the storm. They're tossed about violently, to the point that all their precious wooden chests are smashed open and their savings are scattered around. At which point of course they begin to fight each other, each trying to retrieve what the money that they believe is theirs. And this violence is something that MacWhirr is determined to put an end to, even while he's engaged with keeping the ship afloat in the middle of this terrible storm.

So yeah, it's really interesting. Particularly interesting that at the point where things are getting absolutely terrible and they look at the barometer and realise that they're actually going to be heading into an even *worse* part of the storm. And then it cuts, the story cuts right at that point, which is really interesting.

So I thought it was very enjoyable, very interesting. Why did you pick it Perry? Why did you pick this?

Perry:

I just think that, I remember reading this quite some time ago and I hadn't read it for a fair while and I wanted to go back and read it again. I do think Conrad is somebody I need to read more of. I was taken, as a lot of people are, by *Heart of Darkness* but this one [*Typhoon*] in particular.

There's a particular thing that I need to talk about because as you say, it gets to a

certain point and the bulk of the novel deals with the ship going into the start of the typhoon and they're trying to head pretty much straight through the middle of it. So they want to get through to the eye of the typhoon and get out the other side.

Now you sort of get the impression, and I'm not sure if you've got this as well, that basically nobody on the ship has ever been through something like this previously. They've read about it, they've heard about it, they've heard lots of stories about it but mostly they don't believe it because they think, "No, no, no, no, it can't be this bad."

But they are in it and it is horrendous.

I got the impression that the first part of it, up until they get to the eye of the storm, takes around about five to six hours. I think somewhere around there there's a point, the captain saying that he's been in this for six hours, and then they hit the eye of the storm and suddenly it's dead quiet. And there's a [moment] at the end of chapter five where they get to that particular point and I thought that I would read this little bit, so only a few sentences:

Conrad writes

> *The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path [i.e. the captain], and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: "I wouldn't like to lose her."*

And then this is just followed by a single sentence:

> *He was spared that annoyance.*

That's it. That is all you get about the second part of it. That always struck me as being, "What the hell is this, why is he giving up this opportunity?" But then you realise, "How do you tell the same story again?" Because he's told this whole story about going through from the calm on the outside and suddenly winds are starting to pick up and then getting right into it and getting *belted* by the seas and the wind. The whole or the top part of all the stuff that's on the deck gets swept off and they're worried about the bridge infrastructure being lost and everybody's hanging on for grim death and they're holding on to each other and suddenly some of them get swept up in the air and grab hold to whatever they possibly can.

If you were to tell that story again, you'd sort of think, "Well, we've done this. How do we do it again?" And that's a big problem about how to go through and do that second piece. And he handles it brilliantly, by not doing it at all!

I think this is just a wonderful literary technique.

One of the reasons why I wanted to go back to this again, was because actually, and I know this seems like a long bow to draw regarding this, was that it reminded me of something that William Goldman, the screenwriter who wrote *All the President's Men* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, he also wrote the screenplay for *A Bridge Too Far*. And he had a sort of similar situation that he had to go through, not in terms of a typhoon, but a situation where he had men crossing a river under fire and they get across, but they had a bit of smoke cover and now the smoke cover's gone and the second wave has to go through.

Now, he, Goldman, realises that this second wave is going to be a hell of a lot braver than the first, because the first at least had some cover. The second wave

knows now what they have to go through and they have no cover at all from the Germans and they're going to get absolutely belted, but still they go through. And he worked and worked and worked at this and he writes about it in his book, *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, and he says he had no way of being able to figure it out [how] to show it on screen because it made no sense to anybody other than the fact if you dig down into it, you look at it and you go, "Yeah, these guys, they were really up against it here." And so it reminded me of the two of those. You know, it's just one of those connections you make in your head from time to time, that you remember something that you had read in one particular book and you think, "Oh, hang on. That sort of fits very closely to what happens over here in a completely different medium", but it's the same literary problem of literary structure. How do you depict something that you've already depicted and have really written about incredibly well as Conrad does in that first bit?

If you think about it, in that first bit, they've actually built up the strength of the wind, it's got gradually more and more and more until it just cuts out and it's dead calm. They look up and they can see the stars up in the sky right up above them. And then they can see this dark olive cloud in front of them that they're heading towards. And when they hit that bit, it's just going to be, WHAM! It's just going to hit them really hard. How do you depict that? And he does it so beautifully here by not doing it at all.

David:

He doesn't need to, really does he? Because the whole focus of the story is this man, this very stolid man, as I say with no imagination, who's nevertheless just going to keep plodding and keep doing his duty, keep going away and he's going to come back. He's an immovable wall with this irresistible force pushed against it. That's kind of the story. The story has already been told.

Perry:

Yes, well it has, but it's just where do you go to? Do you put it in or not? And he decides he's not and he handles it just in one sentence, which I think is just wonderful.

David:

But it's interesting too that once you get past that in the last chapter, the focus, which seems to be one of the things that he finds most important, is on how he dealt with the problem of the Chinese men and their lost treasures.

This is one of the things that Jukes comes back to his family and says, "He solved this problem in this very stolid, straightforward sort of way." They picked that up as being quite remarkable. So there's that element to it.

Perry:

Yes, I think they're very lucky to have the captain as he is, even though he is a sort of taciturn and unimaginative man. It was exactly what was required to get them through because otherwise they were just probably not going to make it. There were too many guys on the ship that were just absolutely scared out of their living daylights. They had no idea whether they were going to make it or not. [But] he just calmly kept on going because, as you said, he couldn't imagine what they were going through. It made no sense to him.

It's interesting that early on in the book, early on in the story, he actually goes down to his cabin and pulls out his old book about storms and starts reading about it. Because, you know, "I seem to remember this. I must have passed this in the exam, but I don't know how." And so, you know, I just think, I think Conrad was able to depict things from his life and embellish them enough to…

They're just wonderful pieces of writing that he tells and damn good stories. A lot of the time he tells, he uses a structure of a person telling a story. In *Heart of Darkness* it's a person telling a story to a group of men. But he's relating a story that he has heard from somebody else.

And here it's right in the middle of the action, the whole way through. I think that's what made this one stand out a bit.

So I hope you enjoyed it. I really did. I think it's right up there, in my view, with *Heart of Darkness*. Maybe not quite up to there because *Heart of Darkness* has a sort of existential despair and doom to it. This one's more of a circumstantial doom just for this particular ship.

But even so, there is allusions at one point where somebody says, "Oh, having all these Chinamen in the bottom reminds me of another form of trade." Doesn't mention it, but he's talking about the slave trade. And he's worried that his view of everything and these men that he's carrying is going to be changed a bit by slave trade. I don't know whether Conrad was ever involved in that, it was probably over by the time he got through there. But he does recall it.

David:

Although the Belgian Congo in itself was basically founded on slaves.

Perry:

Yes, absolutely. And it was a nasty piece of history.

But Conrad's an excellent writer, and if you want to get into it, the good thing about it is he wrote some really excellent novellas. So 120, 140 pages. You can get in, you get a view of what his writing style is like. And then you can move on to his bigger things like *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent*.

David:

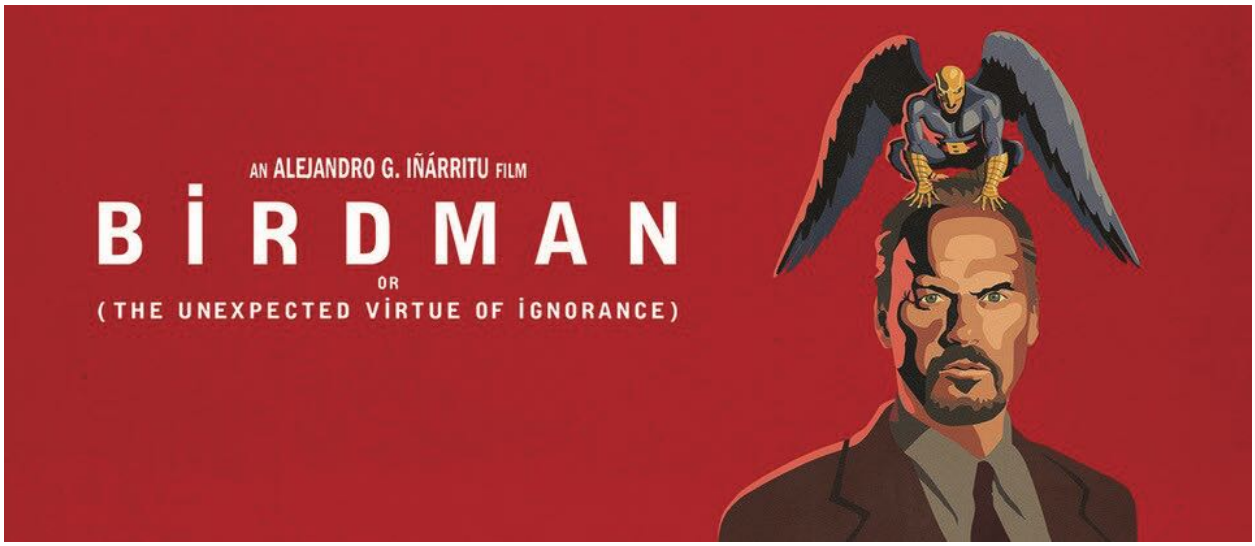
The Secret Agent I think is good.

Perry:

Yeah, well, *The Secret Agent*, we must get to that at some point. Because I don't believe I've read that since high school. And that was one of the very few books on my high school reading list, which I actually got really into. Because it was… Anyway, we won't talk about it. We'll talk about that another time. We maybe will talk about that in a year or so time. Because I think I think it's an excellent book.

And I think Conrad is certainly somebody that I need to, I need to read all of this stuff in the end. I need to get through it all. Because I think it's really good. It's really good.

Okay, so we're finished with that one. We'll move on to the film.



Birdman directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu

Perry:

The film that we're looking at this time is *Birdman (or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*. The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance is in Brackets.

David:

Great title.

Perry:

This was released in 2014. Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. It features Michael Keaton as Riggan Thompson, also known as Birdman, but we'll explain why in a minute. It's also got Edward Norton, Naomi Watts, Zach Galifianakis and Emma Stone in the cast.

It appears on the list of *A Thousand and One Films You Must See Before You Die*. And it won the 2014 Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay and Best Cinematography. And it was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Picture.

For me, the interesting award there is Best Cinematography. And I'll explain why a bit later on, but basically up front, it's all set on a very enclosed set, and normally, Best Cinematography is given to those big wide open vistas, you know, the *Lawrence of Arabia* style, the big westerns, all that sort of stuff. You know, where you get a large view. *This* is all very constrained in terms of its set.

But anyway, to put this film in context, for the Academy Award, it was up against these films: *American Sniper*; *Boyhood*; *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, which I think is excellent; *The Imitation Game*, which is about…

David:

Alan Turing.

Perry:

Yup. …*Selma*; *The Theory of Everything*, which is Eddie Redmayne, I think he won an Academy Award for Best Actor for that, playing Stephen Hawking; and *Whiplash*.

And for the BAFTA, it was up against… It didn't win the BAFTA, but it was up against *Boyhood*, which won; *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *The Imitation Game*;

and *The Theory of Everything*.

They're both quite good lists of films that it was up against.

While we might say that sometimes the Academy Award picks films that are a little bit odd, and you wouldn't think they should win, I think this one, yeah, this was pretty good.

But now, let's get into the film itself.

Riggan Thompson is a washed-up Hollywood actor best known for his roles in three early superhero movies, titled *Birdman 1*, *2* and *3*. And that's why this film is called *Birdman*. And these date from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

Now, he walked away from this movie series after the third, disillusioned with the whole Hollywood blockbuster industry, [he] didn't want to know about it anymore. And so he's been away, but now he's back, sort of back. He's adapted a Raymond Carver book titled *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* for the stage. And he is directing the production on Broadway as well as acting in the lead role.

Now, as if he isn't enough trouble with firing the other lead actor only a few days out from the previews, he's also starting to hear Birdman's voice in his head, urging him to get out of the theatre and back to Hollywood where he can make squillions of money. And he's also visualised himself moving objects by telekinesis, and also levitating, just like his movie character. So all in all, he's not in a good way mentally.

Now, the question that you have to ask yourself early on is, can he actually do this telekinesis and levitating or not? We'll come to that. Maybe he can, maybe he can't.

Anyway, so he's fired his other lead actor only a couple of days out in a very strange scene where one of the lights from above, up in the gantry, falls down and hits the guy on the head. And there's a sort of a running gag a little bit through the film about whether this guy's going to come in and sue the arse off him because of the injuries he's sustained.

And Riggan Thompson actually tells somebody in some point, "Yeah, I did that." You know, basically meaning that he levitated the thing down or used telekinesis

to release it from the gantry and knock on this guy on the head. Did he? You'll have to figure that one out.

Anyway, so Thompson gets a bit lucky—maybe he doesn't, depending on your point of view—when he's able to engage a self-absorbed method actor, Mike Shiner (played by Edward Norton) to the vacant male role, and things seem to be falling into place because, you know, Shiner seems to know the whole of the script before he's even heard it or even read it.

So things seem to be falling into place until the first preview, which is only about a day or so later, which is frankly a total bloody disaster. Edward Norton just goes completely off the planet, pulls the set down, breaks the fourth wall by talking to the other actors about the direction and all the rest of it, and he threatens to ruin everything on the stage, complaining about having to have drink water instead of gin in one scene because he wants to be drunk because he's a method actor and the character is supposed to be drunk, and that a prop gun doesn't seem scary enough. And he also basically tries to rape his female co-lead, which she handles pretty well, but doesn't go down very well with either Thompson, the female lead played by Naomi Watts, or the audience. And then Thompson and Shiner have a major falling out and physical altercation on stage.

Then later on, they also have another one when the *New York Times* runs a feature article on Shiner in the lead up to this play [making it appear that] Shiner [should] get full credit for the production rather than Thompson, who's done all the hard slog getting it to where it is.

Now, Thompson's also encountered Tabitha Dickinson, the *New York Times* theatre critic (played by Lindsay Duncan) in a bar, and she's told him that she's going to destroy his play in her review. She just thinks that he's wasting precious space on Broadway when he's a Hollywood actor and he should just go back there and just get lost because, you know, he's just a waste of space.

So all appears for Thompson to be in a complete and total mess, but on opening night, it all seems to be coming together really quite well. It all seems to be hanging well. Then Thompson takes a bit of a time-out and steps out of the theatre into an alleyway for a smoke and finds himself locked out, with his dressing gown stuck in the door so that he can't use it, so he's got to strip off and underneath he's only wearing his underwear.

And because he has to get back onto the stage because he's basically due around then, around the corner and on stage again in a minute or two, he has to make a rush back through Times Square in only his underwear to make his final entrance, where he takes up the gun and seemingly shoots himself in the head for real at the end of this.

That's all very dramatic to say the least. Frenetic might be a better word, I think. Maybe even chaotic in its full blown meaning because this is just total chaos all the way right through. It's a roller coaster of a story and you have to stick with it even though it seems like a very small, small concept, they've packed every single thing that you can get into it and the frenetic nature of this whole story is matched, I think, wonderfully by the direction. Now, not as you might initially think in a series of fast action cuts that you might get in an action thriller, but by the use of long extended shot shots all set in the confined space of the Broadway theatre in its back rooms.

So if you think of films like Hitchcock's *Rope* or Sam Mendes's *1917* here, you've got these long shots. The director originally thought of the film being photographed in one long single continuous shot. That's tried to be done before

as in with *Rope*, but *Rope* was kept with the scene in one particular room. But here you're moving inside, outside, from one day to the next and so it's basically impossible for you to be able to have one continual shot.

So the director doesn't fully achieve it, of course, but the use of some of these long shots in the first two thirds of the film go a long way to building the emotional tension in the cast and in the story and enhances the mental turmoil being experienced by Keaton in the lead role. And you can basically see him slowly starting to come apart in front of it.

I didn't actually find this whole long shot technique as distracting as in *1917*. Maybe because it's in such a closed environment and not sort of widespread, there's not so much to see around the edges. He's walking through corridors, he's in his room and he's walking around in his room. So maybe that helped.

Anyway, Keaton is perfect in this role and it's actually like it's almost as if it's written for him because it reflects his real life experience. And you might recall that he went through from the lead in *Beetlejuice* in 1988 to much acclaim in two outings as the lead superhero in 1989's *Batman*, and then *Batman Returns* in 1992.

Remember those dates, late 80s, early 90s, exactly the same as the one that Birdman was doing. Now Birdman did three [movies], but he, Keaton, only does two. After Keaton had played some small roles after those, he had long gaps in his working career when there didn't really seem to be very much going for him until he makes a major comeback with this film.

And he won a Golden Globe Award for the performance, and was also nominated for an Academy Award. So in many ways, this particular film and its script almost reflects Keaton's real life experience and puts it up on a film.

Now there are many little touches, too many little touches in this particular film to mention them all. But I especially liked the integration of a jazz drum solo into the score which turns up in one place and you think, oh, okay, then it drifts away and that you hear it [again], and you think, oh, the drum solo, how did the drum guy get over here? It seems to be in the back, you know, back at the end of a corridor, completely ignored by everybody. But there he is playing his drum solo.

And there's also a flying sequence which morphs into something else at the end, which is really quite amusing.

There's Thompson's run through Times Square, where all these people are basically trying to get him to sign [autographs]. They really recognise who he is from, his *Birdman* days.
And they try to get him to sign autographs and he's trying to push them out of the way to get through. "I've got to get through here." And they're all taking videos of him on their phones, which they end up putting up on…

David:

Which goes viral.

Perry:

Putting up on TikTok and all the rest of it.

And then there's the question of the real or imaginary nature of his telekinesis powers. You can figure that one out for yourself. You should see it.

Anyway, there's a lot to like about this film. Though you do need to be ready for the fast pace and extended shooting techniques.

I gave this one quite a good score, 4.3 out of 5. I really enjoyed this. I thought it just flows. But you've got to be ready. There's a lot going on in this and it's all right in your face the whole time.

So what did you think of it, David?

David:

I liked it a lot. Listening to you talk about it I wish I could go and watch it again actually, I think. Because I think it would repay a second watching.

Perry:

Oh yes.

David:

But it's good. I think that extended technique [shooting] actually works very well.

There's actually a very good interview with the director on *Variety*, I'll put a link in the show notes [link here]. But he talks about the sort of claustrophobic feel [he wanted]. He says that in real life, you don't edit your experience in real life. You experience life as a continuous take. That's just the way you are. And that's just what life is like.

That sort of claustrophobic feel all the time, you focus all the time on what's going on around you. Works very well, I think.

I don't have much more to add to what you say other than to say that it's very enjoyable.

The business about levitating and so on, I was prepared to see that as purely happening in his brain. He's hearing the voice from his past character who's like trying to control him and telling him to man up about things and get tougher.

The actual Birdman character keeps coming back and haunting him as it were. And that's good.

So I saw it all as really just part of his mental state.

Until you get right to the end, when the window opens and things happen, which I won't give away, but can that still be part of his mental state? So it's interesting.

One of the other things I took out of that interview in *Variety* which I thought was

very good, was how this business of breaking the fourth wall, which as you say, the Norton character does, when there's no gin in his glass, he wanted there to be real gin rather than water, breaking the fourth wall actually is happening through the whole thing really.

Are we watching this play or are we experiencing this?

The themes of the play really are the themes of Reagan's life. The business about suicide, of course, right at the end where he basically seems to shoot himself in the brain on stage, that's really breaking the fourth wall. He's actually suicided, actually happening as part of the play, as part of real life.

There's some really nice things about it. So I wouldn't mind watching it again, to be honest.

Perry:

I think that the script is really dense. You can understand why it won the Best Original Screenplay, as I said, Best Film, Best Direction, yes. I thought Keaton does an excellent job of it, although obviously that [Best Actor] was given, I think, to Eddy Redmayne for *Theory of Everything*. And I do think there's a certain bias to that sort of style of acting, that where Redmayne's got to play somebody who has a physical disability. You see that quite a bit, but you see that often with the Academy Awards.

But I just think overall that the [Best] Cinematography is the thing that gets me. That whole claustrophobic idea that it is, where he's following him, there's a lot of shots from following him down a hallway as he goes down out of his room out and into another part of the theatre, where he's talking to people and then back again and then it goes into his room.

Now, the interesting thing I read about here was that they actually had to develop a technique to remove the reflections of the camera crew from the mirrors. Because of course inside Thompson's room, he's got a mirror where he's basically going to be made up. And the camera swings around behind him and goes right past the mirror.

And so you would think, well, don't show up in the mirror, but they had to work out a way of cleaning up, in post production, cleaning up all that mirror stuff. So there's a lot of bit of extra things that sort of go on and were done with this particular film.

I greatly enjoyed it. I think it would be an excellent film to see on a big screen because of that whole claustrophobic sort of view that you can basically, if you can concentrate on something that big right in front of you, the sets are, except for one or two scenes outside the theatre, basically stuck inside rooms of the theatre itself.

A wonderful film. I'm glad you suggested it, David. I think it was a good one and I would recommend that people go and watch it.

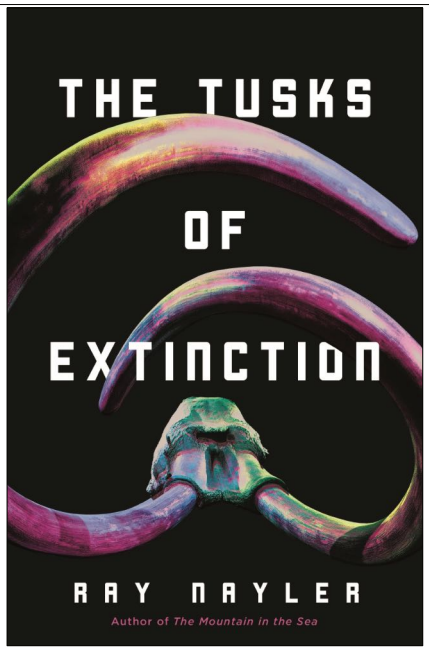
David:

Indeed.

Perry:

All right, so we move on to our second novella for this particular episode. This one being *The Tusks of Extinction* by Ray Nayler. Over to you, David.

The Tusks of Extinction by Ray Nayler



David:

Right, you suggested this one again. Yeah, I found this interesting.

This is up for on the Hugo Award ballot this year, I think, for Best Novella.

Perry:

Yep.

David:

All right, so Ray Nayler is an American/Canadian writer. Perry and I were very impressed by his debut novel *The Mountain in the Sea*, which explores the idea of intelligent species *other* than humans living on the Earth.

His next novel apparently has just been released. It's called *Where the Axe is Buried*. So that would be interesting to have a look for.

Anyway, so, *The Tusks of Extinction*.

Now, on the first page of the book, we're introduced to a character called Damira. And on the same on the first page still, within a few sentences, we discover that she is a mammoth. *Okay...*, you say to yourself.

And I confess that when I read that, I kind of groaned inwardly a bit, because I'm not at all fond of fiction which purports to be inside the mind of some non-human or alien creature, but in which their thoughts are essentially identical to those of white middle-class Americans. I'm thinking critically of some of David Brin's books and certainly those of Becky Chambers, the one that was nominated [for the Hugo] a few years ago.

You've got these tentacled lowly aliens or bizarre creatures living in a sulphur environment, but they think just like middle-class Americans.

Anyway, so that was my first impression on the first page of this book. But I persisted, particularly because on the same first page, we find that Damira, the mammoth, is following a trail of blood, and so there's some suspense involved, so that keeps you reading.

And then we get a flashback of memory, and we find out that Damira is or was a young woman in Africa doing her best to stop the killing of elephants for their tusks, despite worldwide bans on selling ivory, which is always failing, the poachers are always winning and killing elephants.

So that was intriguing. How did Damira get to be a mammoth? You know, mammoths, after all, are extinct. We discover more about that later on.

Another important character in the story is a teenage Russian boy called Svyatoslav, who was taken by his father on expeditions to the frozen north to find bodies of ancient mammoths in the permafrost, again for the value of the ivory in their tusks. It's a rough, brutal business, and the men who do this are also rough and brutal, prone to thieving and murder among themselves.

And finally, we're introduced to Vladimir, who is the husband of a multi-billionaire called Anthony, who is on an expedition to *hunt* mammoths, an

expedition for which Anthony has paid a vast sum of money.

So eventually we discover that at some time in the future, mammoths are being recreated from frozen mammoth DNA and that of the remaining elephants, which are now all in zoos, because at this period in the future, all the elephants in the wild have been poached and killed.

So that's the setup. I won't go into any more detail about how the story pans out, [or] describe the fate of Damira and the other mammoths, but I enjoyed it a lot.

There's an intriguing premise, plenty of food for thought, and certainly makes you hate poachers with a white-hot feeling of desire for vengeance on them.

Yeah, it's good. I enjoyed it. We should obviously not fail to mention the comparison of Damira in her human form with the fate of Diane Fossey, the woman killed while trying to protect gorillas from poachers in Rwanda. There's a lot of similarities in their stories. So yeah, it's good. I enjoyed it a lot.

Perry:

I think the one interesting thing that, or another one of the interesting things that comes out of this particular story, is the idea that you can get to the point where you can use genetic splicing, all the rest of it, to "resurrect" a lost species. And there's a particular reason why they have decided to resurrect the mammoth and to release it into a big national, or big wild park in Siberia.

But there's the point that Nayler makes that we have to remember that mammoths, like elephants, are a creature that lives in tribes, and a lot of their learning is passed down the matriarchal line from one generation down to the next.

Now, if you create a brand new generation of mammoths or animals such as this, where do they learn from? How do they learn to act like a mammoth? And there's a point made in it that the early mammoths were dying because they didn't really know what to do and how to go about acting like real mammoths.

David:

For surviving in the wild, yeah.

Perry:

To be able to survive in the wild.

And so unless they were being sort of hand-fed all the time, and the authorities don't, well, you get the idea that the authorities don't want to do that, they really want these mammoths to be able to create their own society out in the wild and act like that.

They end up deciding that they are going to be able to figure out… [the only way] to ensure that these mammoths can survive is by introducing a character into the tribe that knows about how elephants used to live and therefore try to teach the mammoths how to act in the wild as elephants did when they were alive.

And that's where Damira comes in because her consciousness is uploaded into one of these mammoth females and she then basically leads the tribe and tries to teach them.

I thought that was, I hadn't seen that particular point covered before, but I thought it was made very, very well. I thought that it really stands out as being one of the major points that I took from this particular story.

I think I sometimes have a bit of a problem with novellas wondering whether, and this is just me. I don't know whether anybody else thinks this or not. I sometimes wonder, could this have been better longer or shorter with *Typhoon*

that we talked about earlier? It was about the perfect length really.

David:

I can't imagine it being longer.

Perry:

I can't imagine it being longer because it was just about right. You couldn't have another 40 or 50 pages of descriptions of going into the typhoon because you would be, you would just think, "Oh, come on, not again. We're not going to another pounding going on." So that was done pretty well.

And so is this one, I think. It's got enough in it without going too far. It's got points it wants to make about the idea of the resurrection of lost species. This is sort of apt because, of course, there's been the recent news about the resurrection of these dire wolves. There aren't really dire wolves, but a sort of halfway between the normal wolves that we have and the dire wolves of ancient legend that have just been created with three dire wolf puppies that they've recently produced.

So there's questions that need to be asked about what you do with these resurrected animals. You have to know that they lived as part of a pack. You can't just have one and say right, "Okay, we've recreated a couple." And then say, "Okay, there you are. Off you go. They can just basically procreate and then everything's going to be fine from there on in." Oh, no. All creatures are part of not just their own corporal self, but also what they are as part of the environment in which they live and how they interact with it and how they interact with other members of their species. And unless you can figure out and impart that information to these particular animals, then they're only going to be just sort of like a faint reflection of what they used to be in the past.

And so I was quite impressed with that, the way that Nayler handled that with this particular story. I thought it worked out very, very well.

David:

The other point he's making, of course, fairly forcefully, is our whole attitude to the use of other creatures as a source of material. So treating elephants simply, this capitalist viewpoint, as a source of money because we can sell their tusks.

Obviously, if you re-created mammoths, there would be the desire for people to hunt them down and kill them for their tusks, which is a good part of this novella.

There is unauthorized hunting of these mammoths and there's authorized hunting of these mammoths, which is where this multi-billionaire guy comes in. And the thing I loved about that was the guy's partner, the guy who is doing the hunting, his partner gets to the point where he just thinks, if he pulls that trigger, that's it. I'm gone. I won't love him anymore.

Perry:

Yeah.

David:

And that was very forcefully made, I thought.

Perry:

The idea that he does explore the idea that, I don't think he makes it outright, forgive me, but I can't quite remember exactly. But really what it comes to for me was that he was saying, we need to have these billionaires being allowed to shoot an animal and we charge them squillions of dollars so that we can use those dollars to help protect the rest of them.

And it's a real question, isn't it?

David:

Yeah. But then Damira has her own viewpoint on that.

Perry:

Oh, she does. She does indeed. And it's certainly an interesting take. I was quite impressed with this. It just helps to keep me more and more impressed with Nayler's work.

Again, as you said, he's got a new novel coming out this year, which I think will be fairly high up on my want to read list for this particular year, because I think he is...

David:

Yeah, I think it came out on the first of April. I haven't got a hold of a copy yet.

Perry:

No, I haven't seen it. Importing stuff is a little bit fraught at the moment.

But anyway, so all right. I thought that was good. And I thought that was one that if you want to keep up with what's going on in science fiction in, well, the recent years, this was produced last year. And as David said, is up on the ballot for the Hugo Award for Best Novella for this year.

This is one that is certainly worthwhile, certainly worthwhile watching, *reading*, sorry, reading.

I'm thinking ahead a bit too much here, David. So there we go.

All right. So other stuff.

What We've Been Reading and Watching

David:

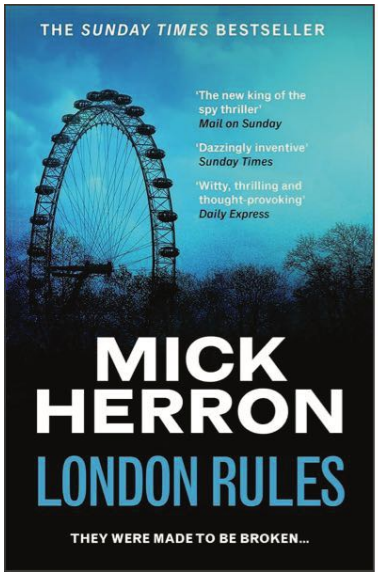
What else have we been reading?

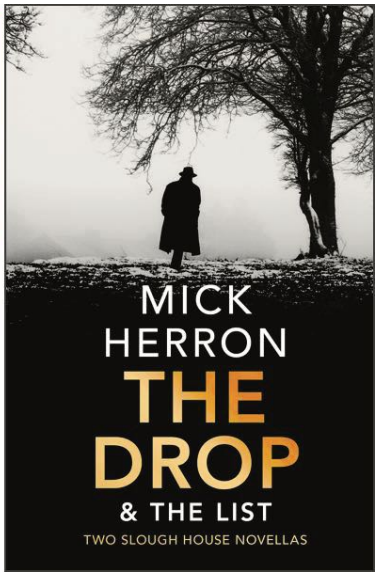
Perry:

What else have you been reading or watching?

As I said earlier, I haven't been reading too very much, but watching a bit.

David:





I've had trouble getting back into reading, I must say. I tend to find that if I get into a book which I'm finding slow, I hate not finishing a book, but that then slows me down for anything else. So sometimes I just have to put it aside and pick up something *really* easy to read.

And so the really easy-to-read stuff has been... I've been reading some more of the *Slough House* books by Mick Herron. So I've read *London Rules*, which was good, and the two novellas, *The List* and *The Drop*, which are linked novellas, they were good. But easy to read stuff. Keeps you turning the page, you know, that sort of stuff. That was good.

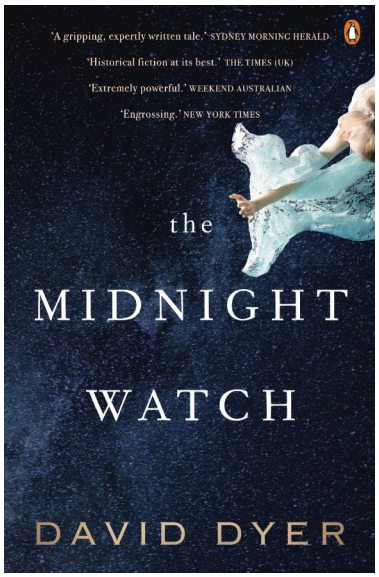
But I also read *The Midnight Watch* by David Dyer.

Perry:

Oh, OK.

David:

He wrote *This Kingdom of Dust*, which we talked about last episode. We can maybe talk about *Midnight Watch* in the future. That's *very* interesting. You probably don't want me to talk about it at any great length. But there's no sort of fantastical elements to it. It's straight historical fiction. It's about the ship which was close to the *Titanic* as it was sinking and which saw its distress rockets, but inexplicably did nothing.



Very interesting. Very interesting stuff. That was good.

Do you want to talk about your books?

Perry:

No, I have, as I said, not much in the way of books that I really want to talk about. There's a couple of films that I think that I'd like to mention.

David:

OK, I've got a couple too. Go on.

Perry:

All right. OK.

The first one for me is *Black Bag*. This is out in the cinemas at the moment. It stars Cate Blanchett and Michael Fassbender as a married couple who both work in the high levels of British intelligence.

The film starts with Fassbender's character being given, been told that some software, looks like its intelligence software, has been stolen and is up for sale to somebody, presumably the Russians or somebody over there.

And there's a list of five suspects from within the organisation that he has to try to determine which one has done it.

And the interesting thing is, his manager says, "Oh and by the way, your wife's on it," on the list. So he's got to investigate his wife. The way the film is structured is that it utilises that classic English country house style confrontation between all the suspects. They all come together for a meal at Fassbender and Blanchett's house.

And then they go away again and then they come back at the end again for a final reveal. So there's that classic detective film arrangement of how we solve this mystery around the whole thing. Look, it looks, it's very slick. It's very a good film to watch, a good film to watch up on the big screen.

The other spy film that's out at the moment is *The Amateur*, which stars Remy Malik as the amateur of the [title], whose wife is killed in a terrorist attack in London. Now, he plays a IT nerd who's very good on seeing patterns and dealing with data. And he basically finds out that his wife's been killed and decides that he's going to go after the people that killed his wife.

Now, of course, there's some elements inside the CIA—I should say that he is working for the CIA—there's some people inside the CIA who really don't want him to do this, but anyway, they get him to do a little bit of training which is absolutely hopeless at, but then he goes off, and off it goes.

Now, this is again one of those slick spy thrillers with lots and lots of locations all the way through Europe. It looks absolutely tremendous, but frankly, it's just sort of so-so really, I think. And it's set up in such a way that right at the very end, you sort of think, "Naah!" They did that just in case they want to make any sequels because if it does well at the box office, they'll carry on. I don't know, I'd watch that one on a streaming service sometime later, but go and see *Big Black* Bag in the cinema. I think that's a good one to go to.

David:

I *did* see *Black Bag* in the cinema.

Perry:

Oh, good man.

David:

And I wasn't very impressed by it.

Perry:

Oh, weren't you?

David:

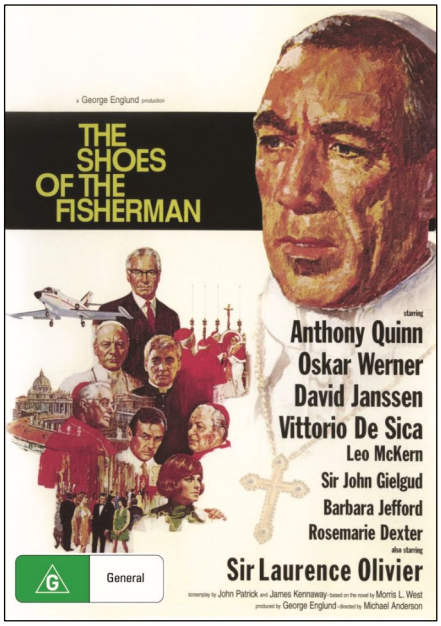
Well, it's kind of a hackneyed story. It's basically *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

Perry:

Well, yeah, sort of.

David:

You've got to pick the bad guy out of the five who's the mole. And yeah, I just thought it was very tame.



Perry:

Oh, okay. All right. Okay. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it a lot. But there we go. Yeah. It just goes to show you.

I also, by the way, wife and I watched *The Shoes of the Fisherman* from 1968. We watched that.

David:

Very Popish.

Perry:

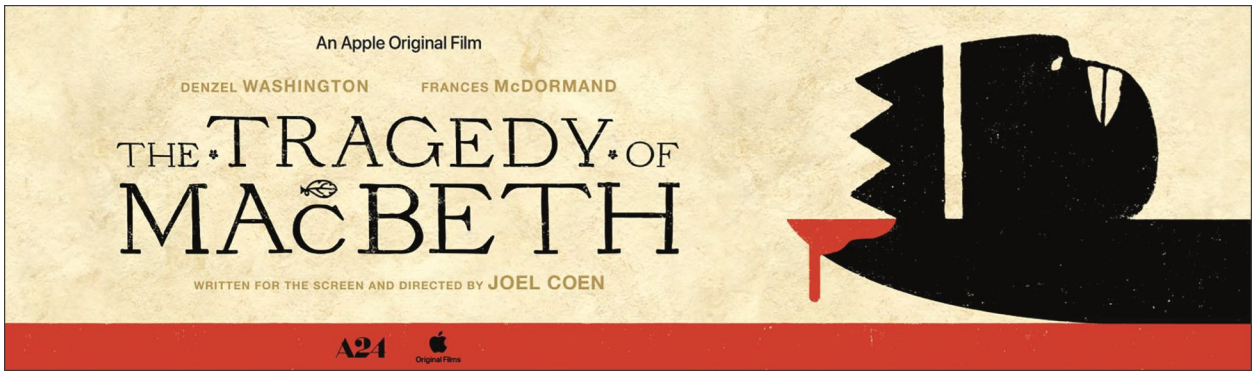
Yes. Well, we see we're doing our homework for the conclave that's coming up. If you've already seen *Conclave*, you've got the real inner stuff. But you need to see all the stuff that goes around the outside. So we watched *Shoes of the Fisherman* for that. So I would recommend that if they can find it, it's not available on streaming. You've got to get it on DVD or some other way. But anyway, that's worth watching.

David:

All right. So the other things I've seen, I watched *Tenet* directed by Christopher Nolan. Which is very strange, very confusing, science-fictional thriller with much during-do about reverse time. Yeah. Not for me.

I did watch *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, directed by Joel Coen. The first film that one of the Coen brothers made alone. Very well worth seeing, I think. Denzel Washington is Macbeth. And Frances McDormand is Lady Macbeth. Very interesting take, shot in four by three ratio. Monochrome, very stark sets. I liked it a lot. Very good, top notch.

And I watched *Finch* with Tom Hanks from some years ago. I enjoyed that. I saw some pretty poor reviews of it, but I thought it was quite fun. And there were



some very touching moments in there. Humor and pathos. I liked it.

Perry:

Yeah, I remember liking that. I wouldn't have put it down as one of my best films of the year, but it was certainly an enjoyable night to watch at home.

I think it's on Apple.

David:

Yeah, yeah, it's on Apple. An Apple Original, I think.

Perry:

Yeah, so I think that's… But there's got to be those films that you said, "Well, I can go and watch this once, enjoy it. I think that's pretty good."

David:

Yeah, I wouldn't go and see it again.

Perry:

Tom Hanks is always going to give you a pretty good performance. And you just hope that the script and direction handles things pretty well. And I think it does with that. And certainly one to keep an eye [open] for. Especially if you're sitting there at home and you're thinking, "Oh, what am I going to watch tonight?" That's one to go and pick up and have a look at.

So, David, there are some things that we obviously like together and some things that we don't. And that's really what it all is.

David:

Yeah, that's the way things are.

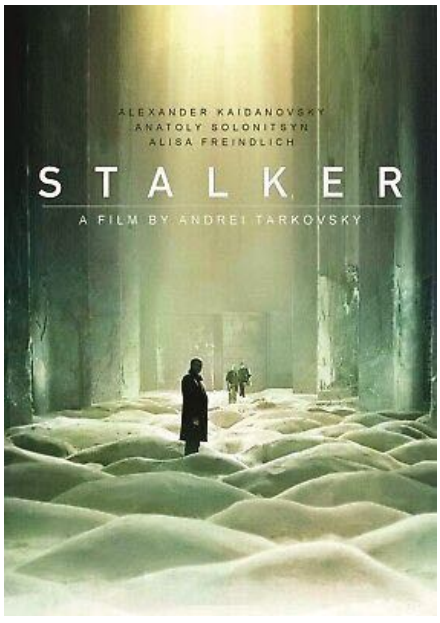
Perry:

That's the way things are.

So, now we've come to the end of this particular episode.

Oh, the other thing I should tell you is I went to see *Stalker* the Tarkovsky film. I should have mentioned that one. My God, I don't know why I forgot that one.

This is the Andrei Tarkovsky film from 1979 based on the novella, *Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. I'd seen this a couple of times previously, but never seen it actually on a cinema screen. And this is part of the retrospective of Tarkovsky films that's currently playing at the Lido [cinema] just down the street from me here in Hawthorn.



And it was only later on when I actually got to the end, because I wasn't really keeping an eye on the credits, because they're all in Cyrillic and you don't really keep… You can't quite understand exactly what's going on. The screenplay for this particular film was actually written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

So they've adapted their own story and made it a very different story with only, as you might recall, it's only got a third of the novella in it, only one entry into the zone. And I hadn't realised it was by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

Although we did talk about *Stalker*, I think, once before on the podcast. And probably if I go back and listen to it, I would go, "Oh yes, I did actually say that it was by the Strugatskys." Things you forget. But I was just interested to see that.

And that certainly was [worth] seeing on a big screen if you can. And I'm glad I have.

All right. I think we're done this time. I'm not entirely sure what we're doing next time… Anyway, we'll be looking at another film and another book. And hopefully we can have a bit of a discussion. And one of us will like one of them and hate the other one. And that'll be the best way. But I don't know. We seem to seem to like similar sorts of things, David. We're going to have to be a little bit more pro-active.

David:

We disagreed about *Black Bag*.

Perry:

Well, we did. But we didn't go into it in great detail. That was the only problem. Maybe we should have.

All right. Thanks, David. And thanks to the listener for bearing with us. As we said earlier, the transcript of this will probably be available in a couple of weeks, maybe?

David:

Yeah, yeah.

Perry:

I don't think… We [need to] have time to get over the recording of this and then basically move on to editing, which takes a little bit of time and putting the actual final product together and putting it out into the wide world.

All right, OK. So we're done?

David:

We're done unless you actually *do* want to tell the listener about what we're going to do next time.

Perry:

Oh, well, if you have them there, that's great.

David:

We've said we would review *Karla's Choice*, which is by John Le Carré's son, and *Parasite*, the movie.

Perry:

Oh, yes. OK. So *Parasite* won the Academy Award a couple of years back. And the Nick Harkaway book is from the end of last year, I believe.

David:

Yeah, I think so. I'm still waiting for it from the library though, I have to go out and buy a copy.

Perry:

Yep. I think there's probably a lot of people looking for it. So I better get on to mine and read mine as well.

All right, OK. Thanks, David. We'll talk to you in a month's time.

Perry:

Thanks to the listener. Bye.

Letter of Comment

From Mark Nelson (28 April 2025)

Comment on Issue 1

Mark:

Dear David and Perry,

I wasn't sure if I should address you by alphabetical order by first name or by surname…

Given that this is the transcript of the first episode of the second volume of your podcast I was wondering what your thoughts are about the first volume. What were the things that you thought worked well the first time around that you want to build upon? Conversely, what were the things that you do not wish to repeat? Answers to these questions might provide interesting insights for anyone thinking of starting their own podcast (shudders). You can rest assured that I will never have my own podcast. Famous last words I realise, which you can quote back at me.

David:

I think what worked best in our first season were those episodes when Perry and I were talking about books and films we had both seen. For example, our series of episodes we called The Hugo Time Machine where we went back to a particular year and read all (or most) of the nominees for the Hugo that year. Maybe we should re-institute that. We just got up to the end of the 1960s, as I recall.

Mark:

I was interested to see your book targets for 2024 and how far along you progressed to reaching them, both in 2024 and earlier years. Does Goodreads allow you to track the number of pages and or words that you read each year? It seems possible that the number of books read could decrease whilst the number of pages and/or words remained constant or even increased.

David:

Yes, Goodreads does allow that kind of tracking, at least to the pages level. But its accuracy would be based on whether you picked the exact same edition on their site as the book you actually read. And of course when it comes to ebooks and audiobooks, the whole concept of pages becomes rather notional. Tracking words would be more accurate but its harder to find that information.

Mark:

Now that I am retired, or at least I'm currently not working, I have an ambition to read more books, but I'm not going to set myself a target. Just a general aspiration. Because there are also other things that I'd like to do with my extra time, such as writing about the books I read. After a gap of forty-two I'd like to start playing chess again. I want to practice the piano more regularly than I did when I was working. And I suppose that I now have more time for reading fanzines and writing locs. (But no more time for producing my own podcast).

Is there something in the water in Melbourne? The publishing activity of fans in Victoria is ever increasing. The publishing activities of Leigh, Bruce, and the two of you put the rest of Australians fans to shame. I am reminded of the movie *Cocoon* (not watched for decades). You don't go swimming in the same pool do you?

The Irishman? What was the Ricky Gervais quip? That the movie was so long that by the end of it Leonard DiCaprio had to ditch his date because she'd become too old for him. No, that was *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*. However, *The Irishman* is thirty percent longer than *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*: thirty percent longer than a movie that is 160 minutes long...

I've read *I am Legend*. The ending of this book is excellent, much superior than *Alpha and Omega* or [the movie version of] *I am Legend*. I wonder at what stage in the production of these movies was it determined to change the ending? Of the other books mentioned I've added a few to my list of books I'd like to read (but probably never will). The first of these was *The Year of the Quiet Sun.* You may find that surprising given my dislike of time travel tosh. But opposites can attract and it seems an interesting read. In any case it appears that the time travel is in the forwards direction. I'm also interested in Thomas Disch's *Camp Concentration*, which looks to be an interesting follow up to *Tears for Algernon* - I read this recently on the recommendation of one of the local librarians. I've seen *The Book of Doors* reviewed elsewhere, probably in ANZAPA. (I wonder if that was by Perry?) It seems like an interesting premise.

Perry:

That review was written by me. I published it in *Perryscope* 49 (December 2024). I review everything I see and read in that fanzine so books I discuss on *Two Chairs Talking* will also be reviewed there.

Mark:

There were many other interesting books which I'm sure that I would enjoy reading, but those were the only ones I added to my list. After all, I have to exercise some restraint so that I can at least entertain the fantasy that I will read a significant fraction of the books on the list.

A useful feature for a future issue would be to have Perry explain his marking system. Does a 3.8 have a specific meaning? Is there a firm distinction in his mind between a mark of 3.8 and a 4.2?

Perry:

My marking system, and the habit of using decimal points came about when I realised that a book that might be a bit better than 3.75 stars was very different to a books that might be rated 4.25, and yet, if rounded out, they both would receive 4. That didn't seem right to me, so I started to add in scores with a 0.1 granularity. How do I determine the rating? Gut feeling, mostly. Something feels like a 3.3 or 3.7 as soon as I've finished reading it or watching it. Sometimes, at the end of a year usually, when I look back over some of my ratings I wonder what I was thinking of at the time, and wonder if I should change them. But I never do.

Mark:

I appreciate that this issue was unusual, in that it overviewed your reading of 2024. I also appreciate that as the fanzine of the podcast, a concept that I hope to return to in my next loc, you may not want to create extra work for yourselves. Still, a number of the books you discussed have also been reviewed in your own fanzines. Would it be useful if there were links, or at least references provided, to these reviews? I suppose their utility would depend upon whether your original reviews contain additional material --- no point providing a link if you essentially repeated your original review.

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Perry:

It would be possible to add in the links as suggested, it's just a lot more work. And I'm not sure you'd gain much from it. Sometimes the reviews we feature on the podcast are pretty much the same as the written material and sometimes more; rarely less.

Mark:

I've also added *The Bookbinder of Jericho* onto the list.

I read and enjoyed the *Mortal Engines* Quartet after the first movie came out. I've read, and very much enjoyed, *Railhead* . I bought this following the rave review that David wrote in *Biblioscope*. But I wouldn't have read it if I hadn't already read and enjoyed the *Mortal Engines* Quartet because I probably would have thought something along the lines that an adult can't find YA fiction interesting, so I'm not the target audience. I may not be the target audience, but the *Mortal Engines* Quartet and *Railhead* are great reads.

Let us never forget that Peter Dutton was the only member of the Opposition front bench to abstain from the apology to the Stolen Generation. I know that he apologised for this in 2023, but for me it's a case of actions speaking louder than words. In his apology he said that he "failed to grasp" the significance of the 2008 apology. I doubt that he will apologise for opposing the 2023 Voice referendum, but if he does then he could reuse that phrase.

It would be interesting to know how political historians write about the 2003 referendum in fifty plus years. (Not that any of us will be around to read their thoughts). Will it be cast as a huge misjudgment by a new Prime Minister or will Peter Dutton be blamed? It's a telling reflection on how Australian politics has changed since the last election that both parties have a cone of silence regarding to Indigenous affairs. Or will the referendum not be considered a significant political issue of the day?

Usually I wait for winners of the Booker Prize to appear in second hand bookshops before I buy them. But having read reviews of *Orbital* I thought that I should read it sooner rather than later. Interesting that Perry was lead to believe that it was a science fiction novel, I would also have been very disappointed if that had been my starting point. I wonder where he obtained this idea? I can't imagine anyone claiming that it's science fiction…

Perry:

I have a feeling that I must have picked this up from a review or an advanced notice of the book. I was wrong about it being sf, just like I was wrong in assuming that it actually might have a plot.

Mark:

…But then there's a very porous boundary between what might be termed science factual novels and science fiction novels. When does the fictional element of a story take it over that boundary from one genre to the other? In 2025 I don't consider a fictional crew of astronauts orbiting the earth in a believable space station to be a science fiction element.

You may remember from ANZAPA that I don't consider *War Games* to be a science fiction movie, though David does. I felt differently when I first saw it. Are you allowed to change the gate posts if the passage of time makes a plot element

seem science factually rather than science fictionally? I certainly see arguments against the moving of gate posts due to advances in science.

Returning to *Orbital*, it's not one of my favourite Booker winners. That's for sure. Will I reread it? It's not near the front of the queue for rereading. OTOH, as you point out it's very short. But I've disliked other Booker winners more than this one. With the exception of one book, the Booker winners that I'd like to reread are the ones that I enjoyed the most reading. The exception to this, the Booker winner that I'd like to reread the most, is Harold Jacobson's *The Finkler Question*. When I finished it I had the feeling that I hadn't enjoyed it as much as I should have done. I'd like to give it a second chance. Is it a better novel than I thought? Or did I get it right the first time?

David:

Thanks for this long LoC, Mark, much appreciated.