



Through the Bibloscope

Dateline

Fire in the Kitchen and Ice on the Roof

Two thrillers read recently: a rogue fire-fighting team in New York, and shady dealings in Iceland. And an explanation for the long delay since my last issue.

A Sad, Sad Event

Dear readers and friends, I thought I should let you know why you haven't seen an issue of *Through the Bibloscope* since late September of this year. As some of you will already be aware, the sad, sad fact is that my beloved wife Suzanne passed away in October. We had been married almost 45 years. This is not the place to go into details of her illness, but her loss has knocked me about emotionally, as you can imagine, and I've had a lot of trouble getting back onto an even keel. It's meant that I struggle to get engaged in reading, and similarly I don't feel inspired to write lengthy reviews of what I have managed to complete. So this issue is something of a stop-gap. I hope that in another couple of weeks I might be able to resume a more regular routine. But no promises.

What follows, therefore is more of a short record of what I have read, and what I'm currently reading.

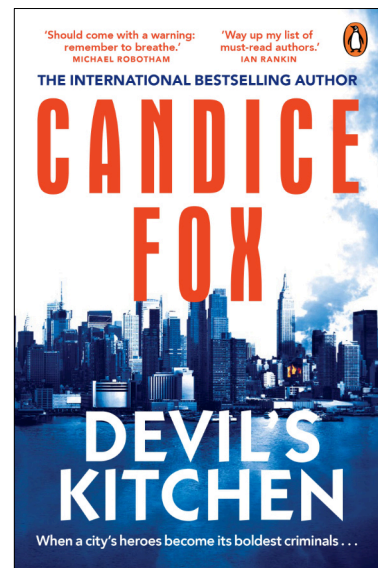
My Reading

Completed Since Last Issue

Devil's Kitchen by Candice Fox

I've been a big fan of this author's work, particularly her early books set in Australia. But in recent years (probably driven by the need to address a larger market) she's been writing books set in America. Some of these have been very good (*The Chase* for example), others OK but lacking something (*Fire With Fire*).

Anyway, *Devil's Kitchen* was a cracker, I thought. A rogue team of fire-fighters, led by a man who survived the collapse of the Twin Towers in 9/11, is secretly carrying out audacious robberies in New York using the cover of their official job. One member of the team, whose girlfriend and child have mysteriously disappeared, suspects the others of foul play and betrays their secret. real page-turner, lots of twists, very well done.



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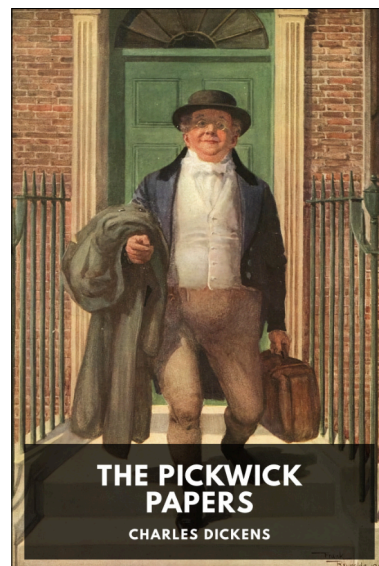
Through the Bibloscope is published by David Grigg of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Website: <https://bibloscope.org>. Email: comment@bibloscope.org

The Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens

Another project I completed for Standard Ebooks. I'm currently on a self-appointed mission to fill in the Dickens titles not yet added to our catalogue. Here's the blurb I wrote for the S.E. website about this book:

In *The Pickwick Papers*, the wealthy and amiable Mr. Pickwick and his friends—calling themselves the "Pickwick Club"—wander around England out of curiosity and an interest in human nature. On the way, they have many loosely-related comic adventures. Mr. Pickwick eventually employs a cockney man-servant, Sam Weller, whose fractured language and forthright attitude adds a great deal of amusement. Late in the book, a continuing story relates to a prosecution of Mr. Pickwick for breach of promise by his erstwhile landlady.



The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, to give it its original title, was Dickens' first novel. He had previously achieved a degree of popularity with his short pieces of journalism published in newspapers and magazines. Published as a serial by Chapman and Hall in 1836, the early chapters of *The Pickwick Papers* weren't initially a success; but when the character of Sam Weller was introduced, the series rapidly took off and became a publishing sensation. Its success launched Dickens' phenomenally successful writing career. The critic John Sutherland called it "the most important single novel of the Victorian era."

You can download a free ebook [here](#).

The Magic City by E. Nesbit

Yet another project for Standard Ebooks, an easy one to do, one of Edith Nesbit's children's novels. Between major projects like *The Pickwick Papers* I like to do something easy to clear my head. Again, in lieu of a review, here's what I wrote for the S.E. website about this book:

Young Philip Haldane has been living a happy life with his beloved older sister Helen, their parents having died some years previously. But when his sister meets a childhood sweetheart—now a widower—and marries him, Philip is plunged into anger and bitter resentment. He extends this resentment to Lucy, the daughter of Helen's new husband. Left alone while his sister goes on her honeymoon, he builds a fantastical city out of wooden blocks and household items. Shortly afterwards, he finds himself inside his imaginary city, and is tasked with carrying out a series of heroic deeds.



The Magic City was published in 1910. Like Nesbit's other children's books, it was first serialized in *The Strand* magazine.

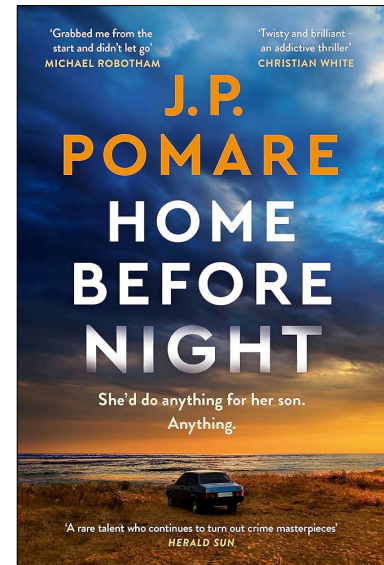
You can download a free ebook [here](#).

Home Before Night by J. P. Pomare

J. P. Pomare is an Australian crime writer whose books seem to get very positive reviews.

This is the first book of theirs that I have read, and unfortunately I was rather disappointed. For me it didn't maintain the level of tension promised by the blurb on the cover. Set during the strict lockdowns which Melbourne endured during the early years of the COVID pandemic, the story is of a young man who doesn't return home to his mother's apartment as expected one night, and of the mother's frantic attempts to locate him. But she is hiding a terrible secret herself, which of course eventually explains her son's disappearance.

OK, I guess, but it certainly didn't encourage me to hunt up other books by this author. Or maybe I just wasn't in the right mood for it.



Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake

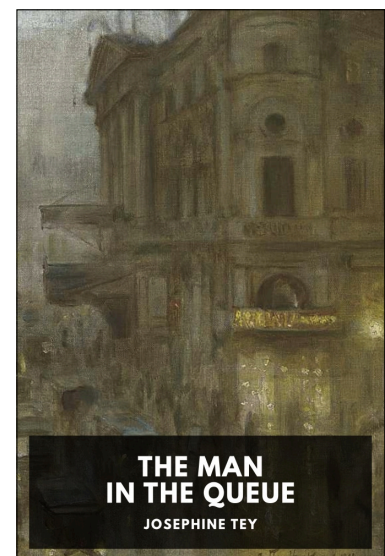
Really excellent non-fiction book about fungi, which are extremely strange lifeforms but also vital for the survival of plants and animals like ourselves. Thoroughly researched and written in a very engaging manner. Highly recommended.

The Man in the Queue by Josephine Tey

Yet another project for Standard Ebooks. Here's my blurb:

Standing in line in a long queue for a show at a theater, a young man collapses. It quickly transpires that he has been stabbed in the back by an unknown person. Inspector Alan Grant of the Metropolitan Police is soon on the case, though it is deeply puzzling, not least because the identity of the victim is itself a mystery for a long while.

The Man in the Queue, published in 1929, was the first of a series of successful detective novels written by the Scottish author Elizabeth MacKintosh under a pseudonym. First released under the name of "Gordon Daviot", this novel was later attributed to "Josephine Tey", as were the subsequent novels in the series.



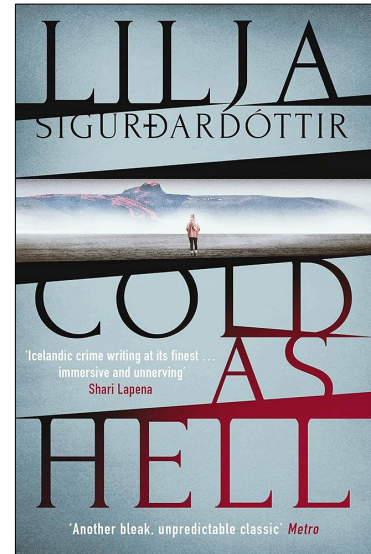
This one, though, won't be released until 1 January 2025, when it falls into the U.S. public domain.

Cold as Hell by Lilja Sigurðardóttir

Translated from the Icelandic by Quentin Bates

I really enjoyed an earlier trilogy by this Icelandic writer of crime/thriller novels. That was the *Reykjavik Trilogy*, which I reviewed here.

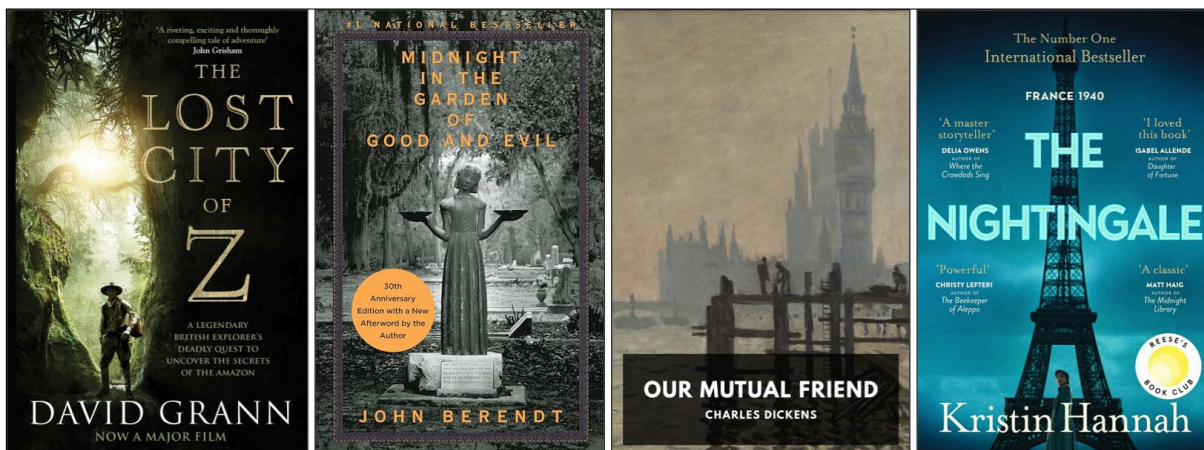
Cold as Hell is the first of a series of books featuring a woman named Áróra Jónsdóttir who is, or becomes, a criminal investigator. As this book opens, though, she is in a much more ordinary job to do with finance, but is being begged by her mother to return to Iceland from the U.K. to try to find out what has happened to her older sister Ísafold, who has disappeared. Her abusive boyfriend Björn claims that she walked out on him and returned to England, but that is clearly not the case. Áróra was not on speaking terms with her sister and is very reluctant to go, but eventually agrees.



I didn't like this as much as the books of the *Reykjavik Trilogy* as it seemed to take too long to take off. I thought that Áróra should have worried that Ísafold was dead and that Björn may have been guilty of foul play much earlier than she in fact does. Nevertheless, there's an interesting twist which makes the reader suspect another character.

While a little disappointed with this one, I will certainly follow up by reading the next book in the series.

Currently Reading



- *The Lost City of Z* by David Grann: fascinating non-fiction about an explorer of the late 19th and early 20th Century who was obsessed with finding a lost civilisation in the Amazon.
- *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt: I've heard about this book, loved the title, but knew little about it, so when it came up in a collection of books in a deceased estate being disposed of recently, I picked it up. Really only just started it, but it's certainly interesting so far.
- *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens: my next Standard Ebooks project. Only a chapter into proofreading it so far.

- *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah: my current bedtime reading. The book has received widespread applause, and I'm looking forward to seeing how well it lives up to that. About the role of women in the resistance in France during the Second World War.

Want to Read



- *Dusk* by Robbie Arnott: I've loved all of Arnott's books so far, so I'm really looking forward to getting to this one.
- *The Hunter* by Tana French: I really liked her earlier series based on the Dublin Murder Squad. This, I believe is a sequel to her previous novel *The Searcher*.
- *Villager* by Tom Cox: I actually made a start on this, but put it aside for a while. I will go back to it, though.

My Watching

Because of my wife's death, I'm now alone in the house, and so I've been watching a lot more television than ever before in order to fill in the empty evenings. This is also why I've been reading less, of course.

This is only going to be a partial list, and I'm certainly not going to attempt fully-fledged reviews. I also haven't kept a very good record of my watching, so this will be hit-and-miss in terms of completeness.

Watched Since Last Issue

Slow Horses, Season 4 (Apple TV+)

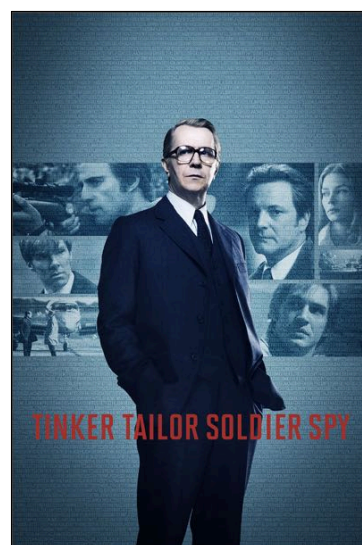


Another great season of this excellent TV series based on the books by Mick Herron. Possibly the best yet. I won't try to summarise the plot. But I will say that Hugo Weaving makes for a great villain in this one.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (Studio Canal)

I wanted to watch this movie for two reasons: firstly to compare it with the excellent TV series from the 1980s featuring Alec Guinness as George Smiley; and secondly to compare the performance of Gary Oldman in it as George Smiley with his character Jackson Lamb in *Slow Horses*, complete opposites. What an amazing actor Oldman is.

The film was pretty good, enjoyable, but because it was only a film and not a series, it had to whizz through the plot and leave a good deal out. I certainly think the TV series was able to be more faithful to the book, though even it had to leave a lot out.



Ted Lasso, Season 1 (Apple TV+)



Very popular TV series. My wife and I tried to watch this some time ago, but she was turned off by the Americanism in the first few scenes. I thought I would give it another try, and am glad I did. A bit saccharine and schmaltzy at times, but amusing. An English team appoints an American coach with no experience in the game of soccer to rescue them from relegation from the Premier League. But was that the real reason for his appointment? As I say, amusing and entertaining if rather lightweight.

Dune, Part 1 (Warner Brothers)



While (unlike many SF fans) I'm not a great fan of the novel *Dune* by Frank Herbert, and haven't read any of its sequels, I thought I would give this movie a go since my friend Perry raved about it when it first came out. I thought it was very good; great direction by Denis Villeneuve, great production values, great cast (though it was odd to see Rebecca Ferguson as Jessica since I've just been watching her in the TV series *Silo*), and as faithful an adaptation of the book as you could reasonably expect. I'll definitely roll on to watch Part 2.