



Through the Bibloscope

Issue #81: Thursday 14 August, 2025

And in the Darkness Bind Them

I managed to finish at least a few books since last issue, including an excellent first-contact SF novel by Adrian Tchaikovsky. And watched or rewatched one of my favourite SF movies.

I managed to finish at least a few books since last issue, including an excellent first-contact SF novel by Adrian Tchaikovsky. And watched or rewatched one of my favourite SF movies.

My Reading

My rate of reading is still, for me, incredibly slow this year. I usually set a reading target on Goodreads of 75 to 80 books read during a year. This year, I'm going to be lucky to hit a revised target of 30 books. The culprit, I know, is watching too much TV in the evenings, but there's a reason for that and I think I'm starting to wean myself off the need to fill up my brain with such stuff.

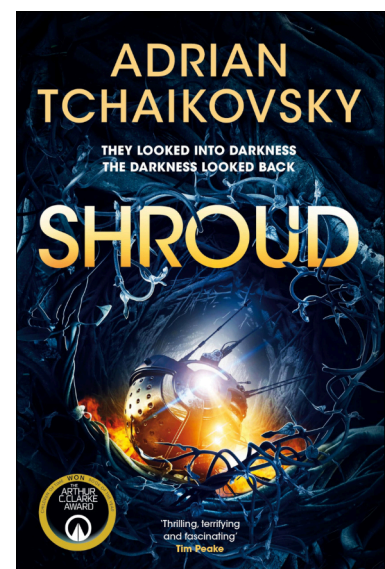
Anyway, it's been two months since my last issue, and I figured that I better get another out or you'll think that I've given up.

Completed Since Last Issue

***Shroud* by Adrian Tchaikovsky**

As some of you may know, I am co-host of a monthly podcast called Two Chairs Talking with my friend Perry Middlemiss. Last month we talked quite a bit about this recent novel from Adrian Tchaikovsky. If you want to hear our full discussion, go [here](#) or to download a PDF transcript, go [here](#). If you can't be bothered with those, here's just a brief summary of my thoughts on the book:

This is a really original first-contact story. As in many of Tchaikovsky's other SF novels, mankind is spread out among the stars after the earth has become essentially uninhabitable. And there are exploration teams like those aboard the vessel *Garveneer*, which survey star systems to see which resources, if there are any, resources that can be exploited. And then other ships on the Acquisition Teams



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

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

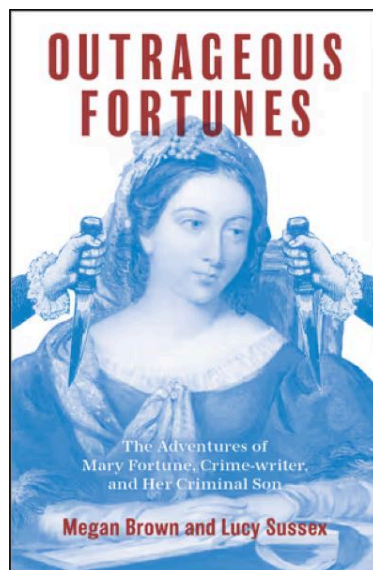
immediately begin to strip those resources. And they use the resources to build space habitats and things like that.

As the novel opens, *Garveneer* arrives in a new star system, discovering a mysterious moon, nicknamed Shroud, which is emitting a chaotic barrage of radio waves, with no pattern to it, across all frequencies. Despite its harsh conditions—complete absence of visible light, intense gravity, crushing pressure, and extreme cold—drones reveal strange moving shapes on the moon's surface, suggesting the presence of life.

The narrative is primarily driven by Juna Ceelander, a mediator for the exploration team, and Mai Ste Etienne, a brilliant engineer. After a catastrophic accident leaves them stranded on Shroud, the initially hostile relationship between the two women evolves as they struggle for survival and seek a way to travel to a distant point where they may be able to contact their mother ship. On their way, they begin to interact with the bizarre life forms on the moon, and slowly begin to convince themselves that they could be sentient. The story alternates between Juna's perspective and that of a mysterious entity, with chapters labeled "Light" for the humans and "Dark" for the alien viewpoint.

Look, I really enjoyed this. I thought it was very clever and very thought-provoking. I thought it was top notch.

***Outrageous Fortunes* by Megan Brown and Lucy Sussex**



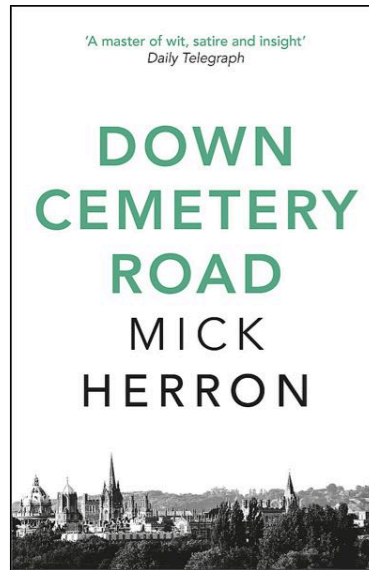
A fascinating and thoroughly researched biography of the Victorian-era Australian crime writer Mary Fortune and her son George, who ended up as a criminal himself.

Megan Brown and Lucy Sussex have done a sterling job in unearthing every bit of information they could find about their subject, no easy task as the records are so spotty, and Mary herself gave away little of her own story, being mostly forced to publish her stories under either a male or anonymous penname. Much can be inferred, though, from the autobiographical details Mary slipped into her voluminous output.

The book has a lot to say about how women writers had to "hide their light under a [male] bushel" and about the struggles of the poor in "Marvellous Melbourne", a nickname which was certainly ironic to many of its less fortunate inhabitants.

An entertaining and informative read. Recommended.

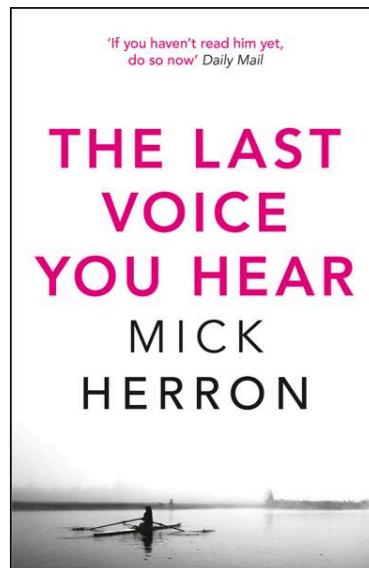
***Down Cemetery Road* by Mick Herron**



This was a re-read, in preparation for me to read the whole of the Zoë Boehm series, of which there are currently four titles (and now being made into a television series for Apple TV+, starring Emma Thompson as Zoë).

My original review is [here](#). TLDR: it's an excellent thriller with a number of unexpected twists and turns to the plot.

***The Last Voice You Hear* by Mick Herron**



The main character of *Down Cemetery Road* was Sarah Tucker (married name Trafford), with the private detective Zoë Boehm only coming in to the story late in the novel after Zoë's husband is killed.

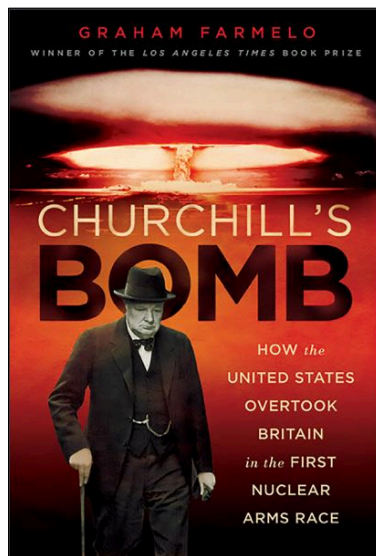
In *The Last Voice You Hear*, however, Zoë is the protagonist. The book starts with an incident with a couple of young inner-city kids who try to snatch her bag, an action for which she turns out to be very well-prepared and delivers summary justice. For a long while this seems unrelated to what is going on during the rest of the novel, but of

course it eventually turns out to be crucial to explaining what happens to Zoë. There's a lot of very clever misdirection, which I don't want to spoil.

Let me say simply that Zoë is tasked with locating the boyfriend of a middle-aged woman who died in an accident. While she is doing her best to find this man, she comes under suspicion by a group of very shady men who decide they need to shut her up. Surviving this takes all of Zoë's skill, and the help of Sarah Tucker, the main character of the preceding book. There are some nail-biting scenes of great tension.

Very well done. I'm looking forward to reading the other two books in the series (and definitely looking forward to watching the forthcoming TV series).

***Churchill's Bomb* by Graham Farmelo**

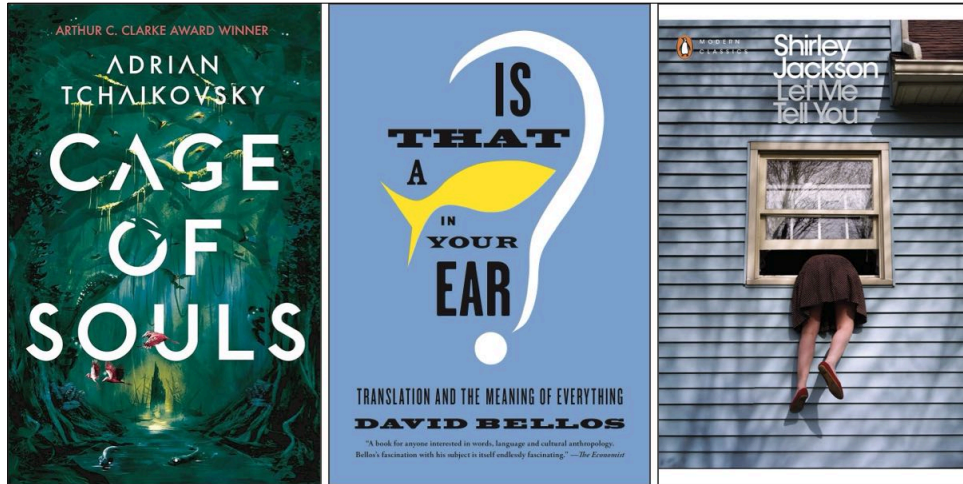


This is a fascinating account of the involvement of the British in the development of atomic weapons. The British made many mistakes in the early years, in particular not being prepared to trust scientists who had fled Nazi Germany, leading to many of the most brilliant departing the U.K. and ending up in the United States, where several of them became important in the eventual Manhattan Project.

In particular, the book details the excessive dependence Winston Churchill laid on the advice of one particular British scientist, Frederick Lindemann, whose ego was rather greater than his scientific expertise. Churchill's confidence in Lindemann was such that it led the politician to downplaying other, perhaps more valid, points of view.

A good read. Farmelo also wrote an excellent biographical account of the scientist Paul Dirac, *The Strangest Man*, which is well worth reading too.

Currently Reading



- *Cage of Souls* by Adrian Tchaikovsky : After finishing *Shroud* I had a look in my collection of ebooks and discovered that I had this novel, and so went on to reading it. Very different from *Shroud*, and I'm not yet sure where it's going.
- *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?* by David Bellos : an entertaining account of language translation, which is a far more complex endeavour than you would think. The title sucked me in, of course, with its link to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.
- *Let Me Tell You* by Shirley Jackson : I've become a big fan of Jackson's writing, so this new collection of her stories, most of which haven't previously been collected, was a purchase I had to make.

My Watching

As I say, I've been watching way too many movies and TV shows lately. And a lot of the movies were re-watches. I won't bore you with an account of them all, just the highlights.

Watched Since Last Issue

Manhattan, Season 1 & 2 (DVD)



This is a very interesting if heavily fictionalised drama set at Los Alamos during the building of the first atomic bombs. It cleverly weaves characters and dramatic situations into the true story. I'm not sure how much it bends the latter to fit its narrative, I suspect quite a lot. But it was very well done, with some great acting, including John Benjamin Hickey as Dr. Frank Winter, Olivia Williams as his wife, the Australian actor Ashley Zukerman as Dr. Charlie Isaacs, and Rachel Brosnahan as his wife. Well worth seeing.

F1, directed by Joseph Kosinski



Perry and I talked briefly about this movie on our podcast. I watched it in the cinema, and though I'm not at all a fan of Formula 1 racing, the movie was entertaining enough, if a bit predictable (old gunslinger returns to the town where he was once famous, gets rubbished by the young guys, but eventually proves he still has the right stuff).

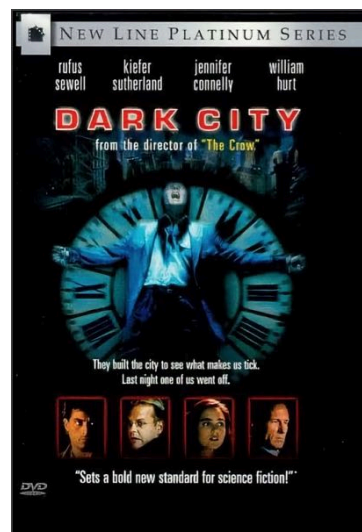
Jurassic Park Series, directed by Steven Spielberg & Others



Last issue I told you about buying a digital boxed set of the *Mission Impossible* series. This time I bought a digital boxed set of the *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic World* movies, of which there are six. A seventh, *Jurassic World Rebirth*, is now in cinemas.

Despite the vast improvement in digital techniques, the original *Jurassic Park* movie is still the best in my opinion.

Dark City, directed by Alex Proyas



As with *Shroud* above, Perry and I talked about this movie at length on our podcast. If you want to hear our full discussion, go [here](#) or to download a PDF transcript, go [here](#). Again, what follows is just a brief summary of my thoughts.

The film came out in 1998, and was directed by Alex Proyas, an Australian director. Most of the shooting and production was done in Australia.

Quick plot outline: John Murdoch, played by Rufus Sewell, awakens in a hotel bathtub with no memory of who he is. After discovering a murdered woman in his room, he flees just as mysterious men in black arrive. With the help of clues from his wallet, he begins to piece together his identity. Meanwhile, Inspector Frank Bumstead, portrayed by William Hurt, investigates the murder, suspecting Murdoch. As Murdoch navigates the city, he learns he can manipulate reality, creating doors and altering his surroundings. The city, where it is always night-time, undergoes strange transformations while its

residents sleep. Murdoch discovers that the men in black, known as "the Strangers," are alien beings experimenting on humans to understand what it means to be human in order to save their own race.

This could be my favorite SF movie of all time, really, other than 2001 *A Space Odyssey*. I just love the dark noir feel and look to the movie. I love the way it starts with a mystery. In the director's cut version, it starts with Dr. Shreber, played by Kiefer Sutherland. He's kind of shuffling along. He's been obviously badly injured at some stage of his life. One of his eyes doesn't work properly. But he shuffles along and he takes out his watch, he looks at the watch and the second hand comes round to midnight and then stops. And that's the start of the movie. Why has his watch stopped? And then you go to the scene with Rufus Sewell in the hotel. So it's just that slow working out of the mystery, as the audience slowly comes to understand that there's something *really* odd going on here. It takes a while to get there, but it's great. I just love it.

It has a terrific cast. Kiefer Sutherland as Dr. Shreber is very good. William Hurt as the inspector is very good. Rufus Sewell is great. Jennifer Connolly is fabulous, I thought. I actually fell in love with her at the start of this movie where she sings "Sway with Me" in a nightclub. Ian Richardson plays the leader of the aliens, and he's always great in whatever he does.

Many Australian actors are in it because it was made in Australia. So we've got Bruce Spence, Colin Friels, who I think is terrific as an ex-detective who has been fired because he's becoming erratic. There's a wonderful scene with Colin Friels where he's going out of his mind, but he understands that there's something absolutely crazy going on, and he's trying to convince Inspector Bumstead of what's going on. It's really excellent acting. And Frank Gallacher is in there. A whole bunch of Australian actors.

I certainly think that this is the best SF or fantasy movie ever made in Australia.

Firefly, Season 1 (Disney+)



Believe it or not, I had never seen the entirety of this classic SF television series, which came out in 2002 but was infamously cancelled by the studio (Fox) even before the last few episodes of its 14-part first season were aired, despite it having been very popular. When the full season came out on DVD it sold strongly, and fans of the series campaigned for it to return. Instead, a movie, *Serenity* was made to carry on the story. The latter movie is definitely on my "must-see" list.

As I say, I hadn't ever seen it all, though for some reason at one point I had watched the first couple of episodes. Anyway, when I saw that it was available via Disney+ I decided to watch the whole thing.

Despite the low production values—the spaceship model work in some episodes isn't even up to the standards of the *Thunderbirds* puppetry show, and the settings on "alien" planets which are obviously just shot in various rural areas of the United States—the concentration on the characters and the storyline made it a really excellent watch.