



Through the Biblioscope

Issue #84: Monday 12 January, 2026

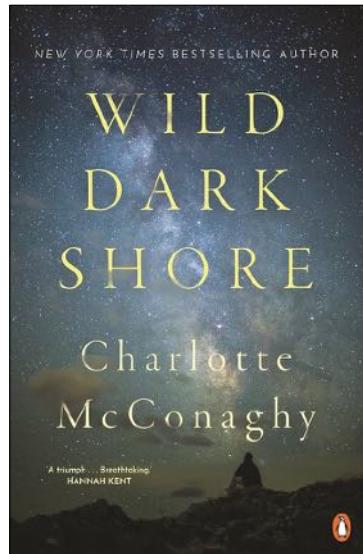
Clockwork Running Wild

Several good books and even more good movies to talk about this issue..

My Reading

Completed Since Last Issue

***Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghay**



Charlotte McConaghay is the author of *Once There Were Wolves*, which I read and reviewed [here](#) a few years ago. It won the Davitt Award for Best Crime Novel in 2022. I really liked it. Her latest novel, *Wild Dark Shore*, was published in 2025 and it's also really excellent. It's definitely going to be in my top 5 books read last year.

It's a bit difficult to assign it a genre, not that that is important. There are science-fiction elements to it in that it seems to be set a few years from now, where climate change is starting to really bite and the sea levels are noticeably rising. But that's just background. I guess you could say it's a thriller, and a mystery novel, but it doesn't fit comfortably in either the thriller or crime genres.

It's certainly a novel of character and relationships, with some shattering revelations as the story goes on. There are five point-of-view characters, and each chapter is headed by the character name. The stories of two of the characters are told from the first-person

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

point of view, the others from the omniscient third-person view.

So what's it about? Well, it starts, in the first chapter, with a woman in the ocean, drowning. Obviously, though, she doesn't drown, or there would be no story. Her name is Rowan, and she's been thrown on the rocks on a rugged island called Shearwater, which is situated somewhere between Australia and Antarctica, so it's a cold and stormy place. Rowan has been dragged from the waves by a teenage girl called Fen. Fen is one of three children of a man called Dominic Salt, who is the other first-person character.

We find out quickly that Dominic and his children live on the island, in a lighthouse which no longer functions as such, but which gives them a home and facilities. Elsewhere on the island is a Research Station, which until recently was occupied by a staff of scientists; and a seed vault set into the permafrost, intended to preserve the seeds of a huge variety of plants, as the rest of the world is increasingly afflicted by wildfires and floods.

Who is Rowan, and why was she out in the ocean? Where was she going, and what happened to the boat she was on? It takes quite a while for Dominic and his children to discover the answers to these questions, and even when she answers them they aren't certain that Rowan is telling the whole truth. From her point of view, Rowan also has many questions of Dominic and his children, questions which take a very long time to be answered truthfully. That's where the mystery element comes in.

As I say, this is primarily a novel of character and relationships, and even in Dominic's small family there are some very tense relationships being worked out. Even after ten years Dominic is still bitterly grieving the death of his wife shortly after giving birth to his youngest son, Orly. Dominic's relationship with his daughter Fen is also, to Rowan's eyes, under immense strain. And his oldest child, 18-year-old Raff, is also clearly consumed with anger and despair. The arrival of Rowan only exacerbates all of these tensions.

Worse, they are all stuck together on the island until the next supply ship arrives, not due for several weeks. And someone—we don't know who until much later—has sabotaged all of the radios and communication equipment on the island.

I just thought this was so very well done, balancing tension and mystery with very moving personal relationships and the issues between all of the characters, each of them very different. And on top of all of that, you have the background issue of the tragedy of climate change.

Top notch! Highly recommended.

The Watchmaker of Filigree Street by Natasha Pulley

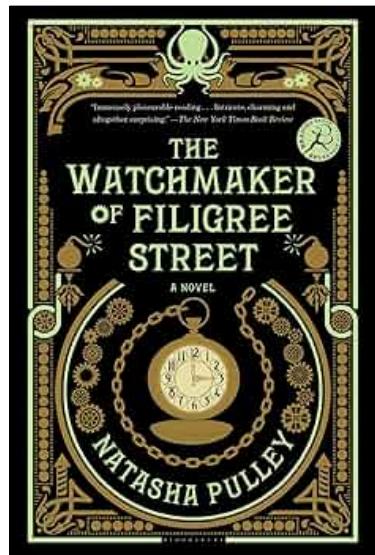
Natasha Pulley is an interesting writer. I really liked her *The Kingdoms* and *The Half Life of Valery K*. This one was her debut novel, and it's certainly intriguing.

I do need to say that I listened to this as an audiobook, and because of that I did find it difficult to follow at times, particularly as the narrator gives a very similar voice to two of the main characters (which similarity is, to be fair, dictated by the plot) and so I found sorting out who was saying what during conversations quite difficult. I'm also still uncertain about what the very last word of the book is, and I think it's important to know! Can anyone help? It is one of those books that would be better read in paper form, I think.

The other problem with reviewing audiobooks is that it's very difficult to backtrack and check a particular passage, so what follows may not be entirely accurate.

Anyway, enough griping. Let's get to the story!

Set in the late Victorian era in England, *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street* features Thaniel, a telegraphy clerk in a government department. Returning to his small room in a boarding house one night, he discovers that someone has left him what appears to be a very expensive pocket watch. Puzzled, he carries the watch with him and several days later when he is in a bar it begins to sound an alarm which he can't turn off. This is so embarrassing that he leaves the bar and goes into the street. Moments later, there is a huge explosion at Scotland Yard, the building next door to the bar, which is also destroyed.



Thaniel eventually tracks down the maker of the watch, a very strange Japanese man called Keita Mori. Mori is suspected by the police of complicity in the explosion, which appears to have been timed and set off by clockwork. Mori is one of the cleverest makers of clockwork in Britain, and he's a foreigner, so immediately suspect. However, Mori befriends Thaniel (in point of fact—spoiler here!—the two men become lovers), but Thaniel finds that Mori has a strange ability to predict events with uncanny accuracy.

The plot is too complex to explain further here, but it is certainly an entertaining read.

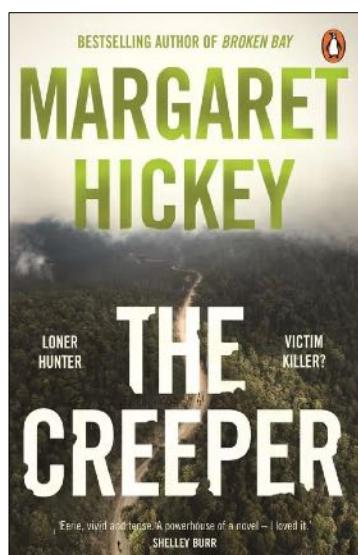
I do wonder a little, though, why all of Pulley's novels that I've so far read feature a homosexual relationship between two men. I mean, that's fine of course, but I do wonder why that seems to be her constant focus in depicting relationships in her work.

***The Creeper* by Margaret Hickey**

This novel won last year's Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime Novel, but I wasn't overly impressed by it.

I thought this was OK, but not outstanding. I haven't read any of the other candidates for last year's Ned Kelly Awards, so I can't say whether it was the best of them. There's not

really a lot I can say about it. But it's another "cold-case" story where the detective discovers that the police originally got it completely wrong, and that seems a bit stereotypical. You can see that coming a mile away at the start. I guess it wouldn't be much of a story if someone investigated a cold case and discovered that the police had it completely right back at the start! I did like the idea (spoiler!) that you could by clever means gather a group of people to go on a fatal hike who were unknown to each other at the start, linked only by their connection to the villain.



If you want more on this book, Perry and I discussed it on a recent episode of our podcast, which you can listen to [here](#), or if you don't like listening, you can read the transcript [here](#).

Standard Ebooks Productions



I've often mentioned the [Standard Ebooks](#) organisation in this newsletter, because I carry out volunteer work for them. Established by Alex Cabal in 2017, the aim is to create very well-formatted ebooks of works in the public domain, ebooks designed to work well on eReaders like the Kindle or Kobo devices. It has now published well over 1,000 books, of which I have personally produced something like 90 titles.

After my wife's death in 2024, I went into a bit of a hiatus, but late last year I recovered my enthusiasm for working with the organisation and I produced four titles for them in 2025, which include the following two titles by Wilkie Collins (I'm a big fan of Collins' "sensation fiction" published in the Victorian era, and indeed I've so far personally produced all of Standard Ebooks editions of his work). Below I'll just repeat the blurbs I have for each book on the Standard Ebooks website.

***The Haunted Hotel* by Wilkie Collins**

One of Wilkie Collins' shorter novels, *The Haunted Hotel* was published in 1878 as a monthly serial in six parts in *Belgravia* magazine. Most of the dramatic and sensational parts of the novel are set in Venice, and feature more of an emphasis on the supernatural than is usual in Collins' work.

The story deals with the death of the wealthy Baron Montbarry in a hotel in Venice. This follows his inexplicable breaking-off of a previous engagement to a pretty young woman and his subsequent marriage to a mysterious Countess, an unhealthy-looking widow. Montbarry's younger brother, and the young woman he had spurned, set out to discover more about his death.

The novel is considered by at least one biographer to be something of a potboiler, written because Collins was desperate for money. So desperate was he that he subsequently sold the translation and international rights to the novel, getting himself into legal trouble with the original publisher for doing so without their permission.

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

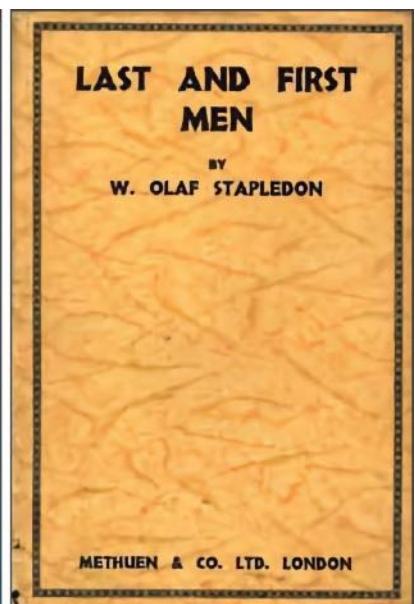
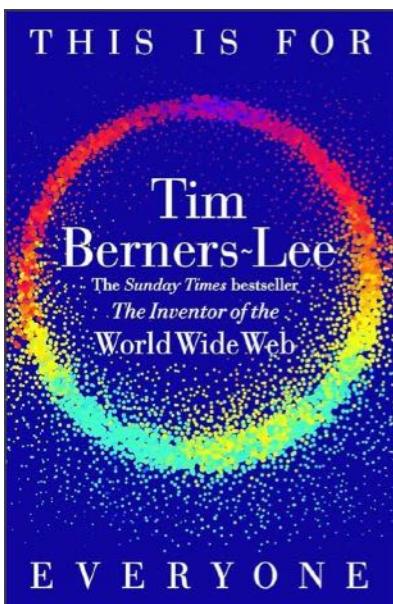
The Law and the Lady by Wilkie Collins

The *Law and the Lady* by Wilkie Collins was published in 1875. As in many of Collins' novels, it deals with themes considered sensational or scandalous by Victorian society, and features a strong-willed, intelligent woman unwilling to be bound by society's conventional attitudes. It also treats the subject of disability with some compassion, featuring a man born without legs as a major character.

The novel, told in the first person by a young woman named Valeria Brinton, begins with her wedding to a somewhat older man, Eustace Woodville. After their honeymoon, she accidentally discovers that he has married her under a false name. When she pursues this issue, Eustace leaves her, pleading with her not to follow him or ask for more details. There's obviously a dark secret in his past, and ignoring his pleas, Valeria pushes on to seek the truth.

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

Currently Reading



- *This is for Everyone* by Tim Berners-Lee: autobiography of the inventor of the World Wide Web and the most important shepherd of its progress.
- *Bird Deity* by John Morrissey: the debut novel of a new Australian author. This was a review copy kindly supplied by Text Publishing.
- *Last and First Men* by Olaf Stapledon: a great classic I will be producing for Standard Ebooks (see above). The cover shown is for the first hardcover edition, I will be choosing a suitable fine art cover for the S.E. edition.

Want to Read

Oh **so** many books! I don't just have a "To Be Read" pile, I have a "To Be Read Really Really Soon" shelf. This is what it currently looks like:



On that shelf are (very roughly in the order I plan to read them):

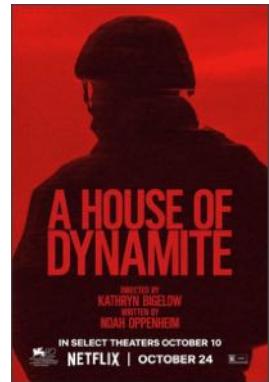
- Serpentine by Phillip Pullman: a precursor to *The Secret Commonwealth*
- Katabasis by R. F. Kuang: the latest novel by the author of *Babel* and *Yellowface*
- Slow Gods by Claire North: the first hard SF novel by one of my favourite authors
- *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* by Bill Gates: picked this up second-hand, looks interesting
- *A Life on Our Planet* by David Attenborough: an autobiographical piece by a World Treasure
- *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt: I've been meaning to read this for ages
- *Dusk* by Robbie Arnott: the latest novel by one of my favourite Australian authors
- *Fireweather* by Miranda Darling: I read her *Thunderhead* last year and found it very interesting
- *Infinite Life* by Jules Howard: a non-fiction work about how eggs have shaped evolution
- *Villager* by Tom Cox: a novel by a rather quirky author
- *On the Calculation of Volume* (parts 1 to 4) by Solvej Balle: I'm very keen to start on this series, which is projected to fill 7 volumes when complete (and when translated); a very different take on the *Groundhog Day* concept
- *Juice* by Tim Winton: the first work of SF by this acclaimed Australian author
- *Insisting on the Impossible* by Victor K. McElheny: a biography of Edwin Land, a pioneer in photography
- *The Dark is Rising Sequence* by Susan Cooper: a re-read of this children's classic series

My Watching

Movies Watched Since Last Issue

A House of Dynamite, directed by Kathryn Bigelow (Netflix)

Really disturbing and thrilling movie about the events in the terrifyingly short period of time between the detection of an ICBM launch and the instant before its impact in the United States. All the better for not taking the story beyond that last instant. Highly recommended.



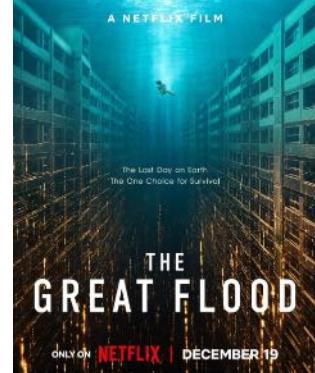
Frankenstein, directed by Guillermo del Toro

Perry and I discussed this new movie at great length on a recent episode of our podcast, which you can listen to [here](#), or if you don't like listening, you can read the transcript [here](#).

The Great Flood, directed by Kim Byung-woo

I saw this being promoted on Netflix, which I subscribed to in order to watch Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*, and I have to say I enjoyed it more than that film.

It's a newly released film, just this year. It starts out as what seems a classic disaster movie: set in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. It has been raining for days and the streets are flooding. A woman called An-na and her young son Ja-in discover that water is now rising outside their apartment block and beginning to reach their level. We discover that an asteroid has impacted Antarctica and melted gigatonnes of ice. The water floods higher and higher, and a huge tsunami hits the city, so that the woman has to evacuate and try to get higher in the building. So does everyone else, of course, so it's chaos and everyone is panicking. An-na is however apparently an important scientist, and her employer sends someone to get her out.



All classic disaster movie stuff, it seems. But then the plot takes a really interesting and very unexpected turn, which I won't reveal other than to say there's one of those moments where you say "Hang on, what did he just say?".

I really enjoyed this, and would like to watch it again. Pity that it's been dubbed into English rather than left in the original Korean and subtitled.

Flight Plan, directed by Robert Schwentke

Great role for Jodie Foster in this 2005 thriller in which a woman is travelling from Europe to America on a plane with her six-year-old daughter when the child goes missing and can't be found. The crew start to question whether the child was ever in fact on board the plane, and Foster's character is increasingly seen as being crazy. I really liked this. Jodie Foster was great in it, but then she almost always is great in any movie.



Yesterday, directed by Danny Boyle

This was a re-watch (prompted by the fact that I watched the Beatles Anthology series). Highly entertaining film, with the concept that some kind of weird event switches the main character Jack from our timeline into one in which the Beatles never got together, and no one has any memory of them, or their music. Jack, however, does remember, though he struggles with some of the lyrics...

Touching moment where Jack encounters an elderly John Lennon, happy in his life, very convincingly played by Robert Carlyle.

What can I say? I grew up in the 1960s and was (and remain) a big Beatles fan, love their music.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, directed by Kenneth Branagh

I watched this as preparation for our podcast discussion of the new Guillermo del Toro version of Frankenstein, see above.

Brick, directed by Phillip Koch

![Poster for Brick by Phillip Koch](./images/issue_84_brick-movie.jpg)

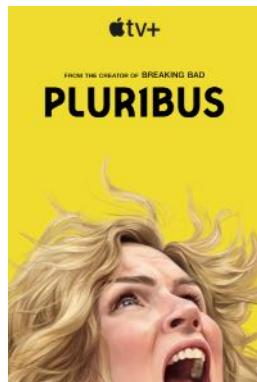
Interesting German thriller on Netflix. A couple in the process of breaking up with each other discover that they can't get out of their apartment because the door to the hallway has been blocked with strange black brickwork. The same goes for their windows. They are completely trapped. Eventually they connect with their neighbours both to the side and below, as they desperately try to escape their strange predicament. I quite liked this, worth watching. Again, though, Netflix has dubbed the dialog into English rather than using subtitles, a definite pity.



TV Series Watched Since Last Issue

Pluribus, Season 1 (Apple TV)

Wonderful new SF series from Apple, created by Vince Gilligan, the man behind *Breaking Bad*. The premise is fascinating: a radio message is picked up from a distant star, and eventually someone interprets the message as a DNA sequence. That sequence, when created, becomes a virus which quickly infects almost everyone in the world, and changes their brain chemistry so that everyone becomes part of a global mind. Everyone, that is, except for a handful of individuals, of whom Carol Sturka is one. She's a snarky writer of trashy romantasy novels. Now the group mind of the rest of humanity want her and the other immune individuals to join them. In the meantime they will do everything to keep her happy. Carol (played brilliantly by Rhea Seehorn) is determined not to join and to do anything she can to reverse what has happened to humanity.



Great premise, really well done. I really enjoyed the first season, looking forward eagerly to the next one.



Down Cemetery Road, Season 1 (Apple TV)

This series is based on the Mick Herron's first novel of the same name. Mick Herron, you will recall, is the author of the Slough House books also made into a series on Apple TV.

When a house in her street is blown up, a suburban woman tries to find out what happened to the young child who used to live there, and finds herself entangled with some very dark doings indeed.

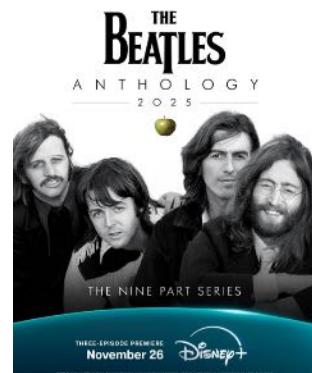
The book is great, but I felt the TV series was rather disappointing, particularly towards the end, where it deviates quite a lot from the source material, and not in my opinion to any great benefit. Still, Emma Thompson is excellent as the private investigator Zoë Boem, and Ruth Wilson is very good as the concerned woman, Sarah Trafford.

I'll be interested to see whether the following seasons (there are four books in the Zoë Boem series of books) are better.

Anthology: The Beatles, Season 1 (Disney+)

Terrific series produced by the Beatles themselves (or by Apple Corps, not to be confused with Apple Inc.), telling their story from their own point of view, drawing on a host of interviews and other footage generated over the years.

I loved this, don't judge me. I remain a solid Beatles fan after all these years, and I found myself singing along to their songs and finding that I remembered most of the lyrics.



Next Issue

The next issue will almost certainly be my annual analysis of my reading and watching during 2025, my "best-of" lists, and with possibly boring statistics. But 2025 was a bad year for my reading, and I only completed 44 books. However, I'll also be talking about this with Perry on the next episode of our podcast, and I will probably prefer to do that before I publish that material here.