



# *Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs #78*

*Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs* is a small fanzine produced by Roman Orszanski primarily for the assorted members of ANZAPA.

This is intended for the February 2022 mailing.

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## *The February Nova Mob*

I joined in the zoom meeting on 2nd February. There were three items on the agenda: a remembrance of Bill Wright; a look at best SF in 2021, where everyone was asked to nominate a book/film/podcast they would recommend to others; and a discussion of topics for the rest of the year's meetings.

There was much appreciation of Bill Wright and his lifetime of fannish endeavour, from the MSFC to ANZAPA. I was pleased to discover that he was much admired and appreciated by Melbourne fans.

I did have a few suggestions for interesting SF/Fantasy work I enjoyed in 2021.



*The Nevers*

I started by mentioning what I thought the best TV show, *The Nevers*. In Victorian England, a strange event seems to have endowed many women with special powers.

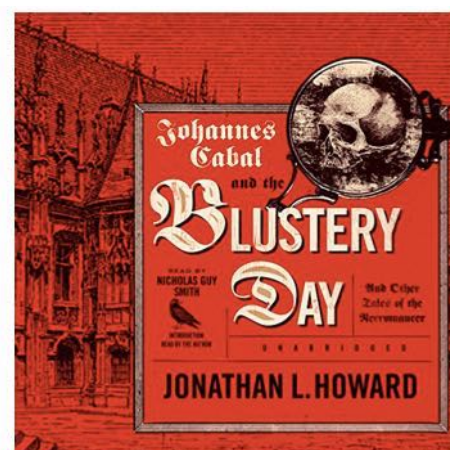
The “touched” gather together for mutual aid and protection, as we discover that not everyone wants to place nice. Some interesting plot twists and surprises in the first half of the season (apparently we can expect the rest of the season sometime in 2022), with interesting characters and excellent special effects. It's an HBO production, so some may not have seen it yet. The reveals in episode 6 (no spoilers!) make me hungry for more information. I also suggested people might like to match the TV series *Hawkeye*, which

unlike many Marvel series has a much lighter touch. The banter between Clint (the old Hawkeye) and the young Kate (the would-be *new* Hawkeye) is delightful. A fine pre-christmas delight.

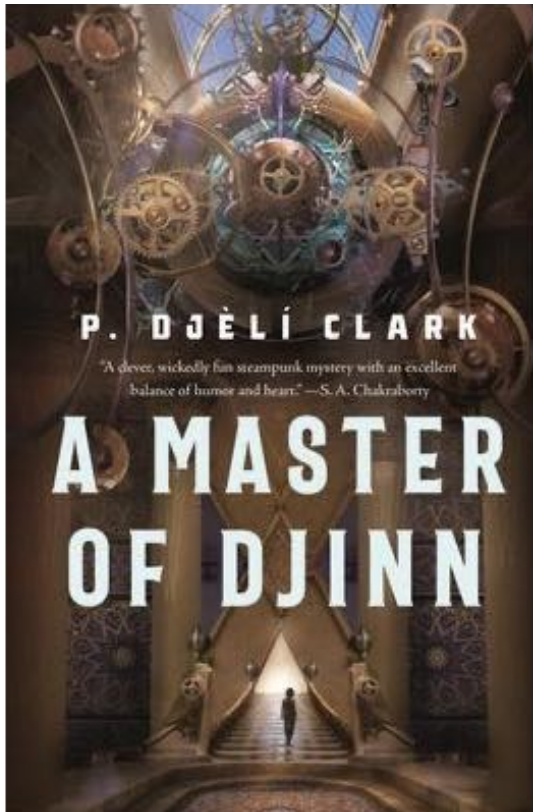
I then turned to audio productions: I thoroughly enjoyed *Orphan Black: The Next Chapter*, a radio serial starring Tatiana Maslany, who played all the sestri in the TV series. The serial was available at serialbox.com, which has now become Realm.fm. They released the second season at the end of last year.



From Audible, I selected *Johannes Cabal and the Blustery Day — and other tales of the Necromancer*. I'd read several of Jonathan L Howard's books about the character a decade ago, when they first came out and enjoyed them. I was delighted to discover several of them are now available as audio books. This one is narrated by Nicholas Guy Smith, and features several stories about the Necromancer. 7 hours, 19 minutes — first released in 2015, but I missed it at the time.



As for best written work, I recommended *A Master of Djinn*, a novel by P Djèlí Clark, set in a Cairo where Djinnns had entered our universe around the 1900s.



I actually enjoyed all the stories set in this universe (2 novellas and a short as well as this novel). The fact that the lead character was based on the leader of the suffragettes in Cairo in the 1920s was just an added bonus. In fact, I've enjoyed most of the stories Clark has produced in the last few years, from *The Black God's Drums* onwards.

Finally, I recommended a Green Lantern comic book series, 12 issues now collected in a single volume. *Far Sector* is written by N K Jemisin, and drawn by Jamal Campbell.

A rookie Green Lantern is sent to the far reaches of the universe, somewhere where she can't call on the Corps for backup, to solve a murder. She's from New York, and everything she knows about detecting she's learnt from TV shows, but...

It's an interesting story, involving three intelligent races, very complex politics and unexpected surprises and some double-crossing. Beautifully written and drawn, it was excellent SF.



So that's my set of recommendations for Best SF in 2021 — or at least what I thought deserved further recognition on the Wednesday night of Nova Mob. 🍷

# Culture Consumed

Curiously, the two books I have recently read producing the greatest sense-of-wonder haven't been fiction, but rather books challenging common political beliefs.

They are both by the same author, the Dutch historian and philosopher Rutger Bregman.

*Utopia for Realists* provides arguments that we could construct a better, more egalitarian society if we follow some simple ideas such as guaranteeing a basic income and a fifteen hour work week. Bregman notes that there have been many experiments in doing these sorts of things; they all show that we can achieve a better society *at less cost than patching our current one*. He sites research, and experiments such as providing free housing for the homeless in the four largest cities in the Netherlands:

"After just a couple of years, the problems of vagrancy in the big cities had been reduced by 65%. Drug use was down by half. The beneficiaries' mental and physical health improved significantly, and park benches were finally vacant.... And to top it off, the financial returns for society proved double the original investments."

Bregman discusses lots of ideas which seem utopian, but it turns out, in practice are cheaper than what's currently done.

Garbagemen struck in New York for better wages: within a week, the city surrendered. Bankers struck in Ireland May 4th, 1970: they gave up after six months, as the Irish issued their own cash and bypassed the banks.

The examples are interesting, and suggest that we can do far better than we have so far. *As Keynes suggested back in 1930, by 2030 we should only have to work 15 hours a week.*

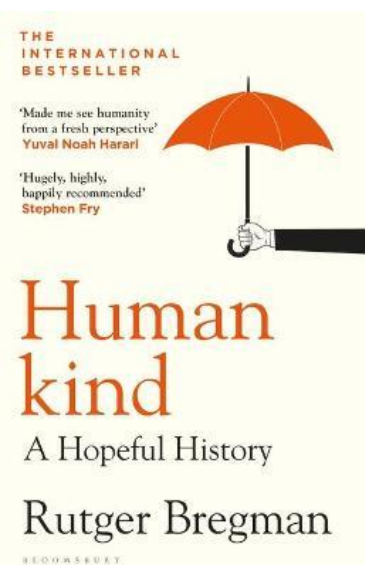
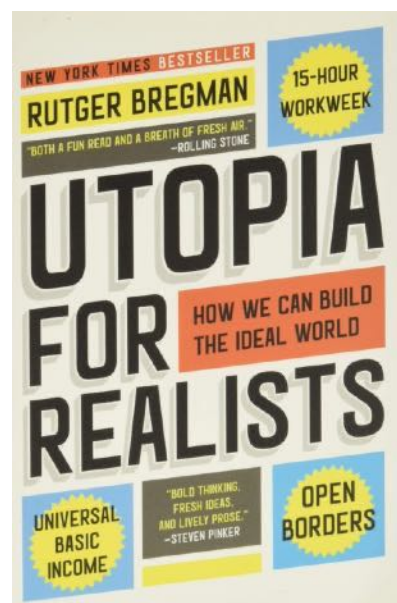


*Humankind, subtitled A Hopeful History*, suggests that people are, at heart, good. As Bregman asks on the cover of this book "*How would your life and view of the world change if you knew people were good?*"

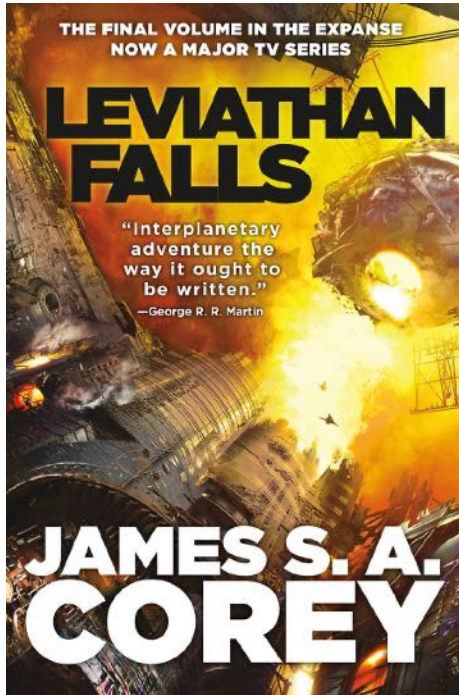
In the prologue to this book, Bregman looks at London during the Blitz, and Dresden under the British bombing. Surprisingly, the English don't panic. A month after the bombing of London started "*So what did the Doctor find, after an air raid alarm? 'Small boys continued to play all over the pavements, shoppers went on haggling, a policeman directed traffic in majestic boredom and the bicyclists defied death and the traffic laws. No one, so far as I could see, even looked into the sky.'*"

Despite this evidence, Britain's military experts still thought they could break a nation's morale by bombing. So they unleashed a massive bombing sortie on Dresden. "*After the raids, people helped each other out. They pulled victims from the rubble, they extinguished fires. Members of the Hitler Youth rushed around tending to the homeless and injured.*"

As it turned out, the bombing strengthened Germany's wartime economy, thereby *prolonging* the war. The military experts learnt nothing from the WWII experience: America dropped three times as many bombs on Vietnam as they did in the entire world war. It failed on an even grander scale. It turns out that in times of crisis, we do not revert to greed and savagery, but help each other out. There are lots of examples in here, including the real-life *Lord of the Flies*, and the fact that most soldiers won't fire upon the enemy in times of war. I'm looking forward to reading more. 🐣



At last, the ninth — and final — novel in the *Expanse* series. At the same time, they're screening the sixth series of the TV show (likely to be the last). While this novel wraps up the story of the alien gates, the TV series takes us up to the end of the sixth book, *Babylon's Ashes*, with the defeat of Marco and the Free Navy.



We have the problems of ships disappearing in transit through the gates, and the ones who wiped out the creators of the gates might still be around. Not to mention that the crew of the *Rocinante* are protecting the daughter of Duarte.

The crew of the *Rocinante* once more find themselves deep in the heart of things as they try to sort out some problems and figure out what can be done about the gates. A satisfying read, and an end to the series.

*There was also a satisfying end to the TV series:* we see the end of Marco and the Free Navy, and the creation of the Transport Union to regulate movement through the gates to ensure the safety of the ships and their crews. While this doesn't necessarily solve the problem of the gates and their



ultimate purpose, the ending is satisfying in that Marco is dealt with, and there seems to be a chance of safely using the gates *if* traffic is controlled through each gate so as not to reach “critical mass” to trigger an event..

The various groups who came together to defeat Marco look as if their *ad hoc* coalition will turn into a functional federation of worlds linked by gates, and will continue to cooperate to explore the systems around the gates.

Not a bad place to leave our heroes, even if it does leave a few loose ends. Guess you can always read the last three novels... 🐼

Friday, Feb 4th: *That's about it for this issue.*  
 I've basically got a day full of other tasks,  
 so I'm just going to leave comments on  
 the rest of the mailing for another time.  
 Off to the theatre tonight, to see Margaret  
 Harvey's production of *Who's Afraid of  
 Virginia Woolf?* It's gotten good reviews,  
 and this is the last weekend before the  
 production decamps to Queensland.  
 I'll give you a report next issue. Stay Well!  
 Roman 🌱

ThreeD Radio has a large studio 3, where bands  
 play live Wednesday nights. Top: the view from  
 the production room, bottom: the actual studio

Note that I *wasn't involved* in the  
 introduction of can deposit legislation to  
 SA; I just note that the Adelaide Uni  
 Friends of the Earth (the first FoE group  
 in Australia) was involved: their dumping  
 of empty bottles on Parliament house  
 steps (aping an action in London)  
 probably kick started the push for deposit  
 legislation. Gabriel Lafitte was doing PR  
 (for coke, I think) and later spilled the  
 beans on the "tin can people" dumping  
 cans rather than recycling them. I caught  
 up with Gabriel years later at a media  
 conference in Melbourne in the early  
 2000s.

RYC to me on describing the Black  
 Widow film as a "delight": I didn't treat it  
 as overly serious, just an interesting action  
 romp with more details about Natasha's  
 past.  
 And, of course, more spying intrigues.  
 In the midst of covid, it was a pleasant  
 distraction.  
 Hugh Laurie was good in *The Night  
 Manager*, wasn't he? You also have a treat in  
 store if you haven't seen him as Bertie  
 Wooster against Stephen Fry's Jeeves.

