



Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs #80

Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs is a small fanzine produced by Roman Orszanski primarily for the assorted members of ANZAPA. This is intended for the June 2022 mailing. I can be reached at PO Box 3231 Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5001, or electronically via email at websmith@internode.on.net

The Play's the Thing

AS YOU MAY RECALL, THE *original plan* for the reading of *The Burlesque of Frankenstein* was to amuse ourselves in one of the breakout rooms at a zoom gathering to announce the Australian SF Awards, organised by the ASFF.

Critical Mass suggested we do a reading, and the Nova Mob decided to join us.

All was proceeding apace, but we were cancelled three days before the event.

In fact, the whole event was cancelled — a bit of a surprise to the presenters of the awards¹.

After discussion with my colleagues, we decided to go ahead with the event at a later date. [I was very tempted to go ahead on the

original night, but calmer minds (Murray, Adam and Gillian) persuaded me it would be better done later.]

We ran three dry runs, tracked down the music — it was a burlesque, after all — and sorted out a few minor difficulties.

Part of the problem was that, being on zoom, we didn't have a stage *as such*; zoom meant we might also have some time delays. This meant that we would need a *narrator* to indicate when people came *on* or *off* stage, or when they were lurking in the background, etc. Since I have little musical talent (can't read music, or hold a tune) — you don't want to hear me try karaoke, no matter how drunk — I decided I should be the host/narrator.

Gillian Polack hunted up some recipes of the time; I invited Anne Black to present a brief introduction to George Isaacs, the

author of the burlesque. By coincidence, she was in Adelaide mid-may, so we caught up to talk about Isaacs and the burlesque at our local tea & coffee merchants, Kappys.

We settled on a time when our readers could meet, noted what minor roles remained to be filled, and plugged the event at Critical Mass, Nova Mob, Cafe Moose, the MSFC, emails and via facebook.

There were a few unexpected health issues — Charles Taylor, who took part in the dry runs with his partner, couldn't read on the night because he had undergone surgery; Adam and some of the other readers (Murray, Julian) were battling with Covid.

Jane Routley joined us to take on two roles that weekend. [The bunny ears on the child, Ernest, were a nice touch.]

I started up the zoom at 4:15, allowing the cast to join us before the official start at 4:30. The reading took just over an hour, and some of us hung around chatting for another 40 mins.

We recorded the event, which I'll edit and post on the web in due course.

I think all of us enjoyed the event, both readers and audience. *My thanks to all who participated.* 🐰



The narrator, focussed on the final lines of dialogue in Scene IX, the cavern.

¹ Lucy Sussex found out about the cancellation while browsing the web; the ASFF hadn't bothered to tell the presenters!



CHARACTERS :

Ewart Shaw **FRANKENSTEIN.**
 Julian Warner **ALPHONSE** (HIS FATHER).
 Lucy Sussex **CAROLINE** (HIS MOTHER).
 Terry Frost **WILLIAM** } (HIS BROTHERS).
 Jane Routley **ERNEST** }
 Jennifer Bryce **ELIZABETH** (HIS COUSIN AND BROTHERED).
 Tony Thomas **THE MONSTER.**
 Jane Routley **CLERVAL** (FRANKENSTEIN'S FELLOW-STUDENT).
 Kate Treloar **JUSTINE** (NURSE TO ERNEST).
 David Carlisle **ALFERD** (PROFESSOR OF NATURAL HISTORY).
 Murray MacLachlan **WALDMAN** (PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY).
 Gillian Polack **MAGISTRATE.**
 Tony Thomas **INSPECTOR.**
 Roman Orszanski **JOSEPH DOBOY** (CONFECTIONER).
POLICEMEN, PEASANTS, STUDENTS, SAILORS, AND PIRATES.

Adam Jenkins **SOUNDFX**

Murray MacLachlan, LynC & Jocko **POLICEMEN**

Roman Orszanski **NARRATOR**

Election Notes

LIKE MANY OTHERS, I VOTED EARLY in the recent federal election. I was doing a long shift at the radio station Saturday, so I popped into the booth in Rundle mall to cast my vote on the Thursday.

As a consequence, I didn't look at the ABC election coverage until 8:30pm, by which time the pattern was clear: the "teal" independents were stealing seats from the Liberals, demonstrating the effectiveness of the "Voice of..." selections, and the hatred of the then Prime Minister.

By the end of the weekend, it was clear that the Liberals couldn't form a government, while Labor was likely to form a minority government. By Monday, Anthony Albanese had secured promises of support from a number of independents to form a government.

Frank Bongiorno² notes

Climate and energy policy, more than any other issue, now defines what it is to be "conservative" and "progressive" in Australia. This is the handiwork of a succession of powerful conservative politicians who saw political advantage in this framing and enjoyed their parties' relationship with the fossil fuel industry. Tony Abbott, Morrison and Barnaby Joyce have been among the most influential.

John Quiggin comments³:

Australia now has a radically changed political scene in which the assumptions of the two-party system no longer apply. Even if Labor scrapes in with a majority, it is unlikely to be sustained at the next election, given the challenging economic circumstances the incoming government will face. As for the LNP, unless they can regain some of the seats lost to independents and Greens, they have almost no chance of forming a majority government at the next election, even with a big win over Labor in traditionally competitive seats.

² <https://theconversation.com/did-australia-just-make-a-move-to-the-left-183611>

³ <https://theconversation.com/the-election-showed-australias-huge-appetite-for-stronger-climate-action-what-levers-can-the-new-government-pull-183548>

⁴ <https://theconversation.com/view-from-the-hill-morrison-was-routed-by-combination-of-quiet-australians-and-noisy-ones-183600>

⁵ <https://icanw.org.au/new-prime-minister-backs-the-ban/>

As Michelle Grattan⁴ notes

"As leader of the house in the minority Gillard government, Albanese is experienced in dealing with crossbenchers, which would stand him in good stead."

The fact that the minority Gillard government passed more legislation than any other (over 500 bills) suggests that Albanese was very good at negotiating.

With the conference of the parties to the Treaty to Ban Nuclear Weapons coming up at the end of this month, I expect we will see the new Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, attending.

As ICANW⁵ notes:

"Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is a long-term champion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, inspired by his late mentor Tom Uren, a former Labor Minister who witnessed the atomic bombing of Nagasaki as a prisoner of war. In proposing the resolution committing to the treaty in 2018, he said the new policy is "Labor at its best" and that "nuclear disarmament is core business for any Labor government worth its name". In 2016 Albanese launched the Tom Uren Memorial Fund with ICAN, and has spoken out in support of the treaty in parliament, at public events and demonstrations since its negotiation in 2017."

What are the odds Australia announces its intention to sign the treaty before the end of the month? Pretty good, I reckon. 🇺🇸

Culture Consumed

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE TV SERIES of *Slow Horses*, so I thought I'd read the novel on which it was based. Mick Herron's novel came out in 2010, and garnered good reviews. The TV series is a fairly accurate rendering of the novel. It's a quick read, probably because of Herron's technique of cutting rapidly between two different settings which are related: we follow one setting until it comes to a crunch point, then cross to the other setting where we follow until it hits a crunch point, whereupon we return to the earlier setting to see how the difficulty is resolved, and so forth. The effect is a chapter full of short, interesting scenes which quickly build the overall story. Add to this the central figure of Jackson Lamb, head of Slough House, where spies who fail are sent to waste their time on administrative tasks. The *slow horses*, as the workers at Slough House are called, are expected to resign, thus saving the service the expense of firing the incompetent spies. Lamb — played by Gary Oldman in the TV series — is an old but crafty spy who can still show the service a trick or two.

Dead Lions opens with Dickie Bow, an ex-spook from Berlin, unexpectedly noticing an old hood from days past now in London, following the hood from train to bus. Dickie dies on the bus, apparently from a heart attack. Lamb is not so sure...

Real Tigers starts with a protester atop a bridge, ready to unfold his banner, "A Fair deal for Fathers". He's dressed in a Spiderman costume to attract the media. Unfortunately his companion, Batman, isn't cooperative and throws him off the arch onto the roadway below.

Both of these books start with an interloper wandering through Slough House: in *Dead Lions*, it's an inquisitive scrawny cat; in *Real Tigers*, it's a spirit.

Their survey provide a quick introduction to the House and the curious folk within.

In each novel we discover more about Jackson Lamb and his crew, all of whom are keen to return to the field, rather than carrying out meaningless admin tasks in the House.

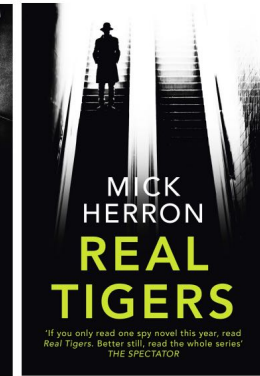
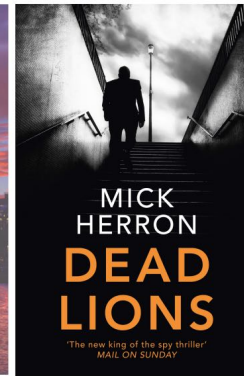
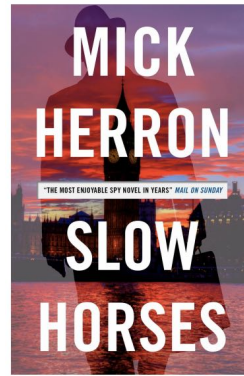
Both are interesting reads: Herron pulls us quickly into the action, though events are often not be what they seem at first glance. It's clear that Lamb is a clever and formidable fellow, despite his outward appearance: a fat, lazy, arrogant, rude, farting overweight drunk. Clearly he retains the skills and sharpness of mind which allowed him to survive the cold war.

The second season of the TV series (apple+) will follow the events of *Dead Lions*, and there are already plans for two more seasons.

One of the delights of the TV series is the theme song, "Stranger game", sung gloriously by Mick Jagger
*"Surrounded by losers, misfits and boozers
Hanging by your fingernails
You made one mistake, you got burned at the stake
You're finished, you're foolish, you failed."*

The Orville: New Horizons

There's a new season of this ST parody, which seems to have evolved into a more serious sf story: the first episode deals interestingly with the suicide of its AI, a concept which raises all sorts of moral questions. A good start to the new season. 🐾



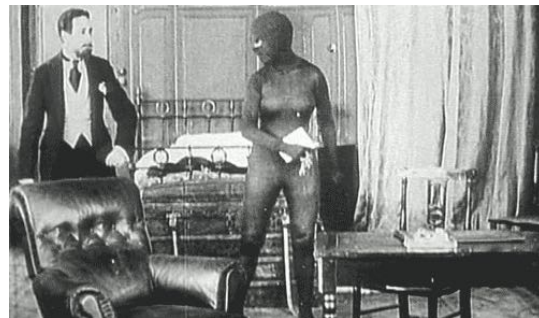


Star Trek: Strange New Worlds

The re-appearance of Christopher Pike is just one of the delights of the new Star Trek series.

We have a new, younger Uhura; a more rebellious Captain, and the latest

episode revealed an unexpected love life for Spock! Although nominally set before the original series, it's quite clear that *this* trek is of the 21st century in terms of social issues, diversity and inclusivity. *Fans of the series will probably enjoy many of the references.* 🐾



Irma Vep, from the gang of thieves known as *Les Vampires*

cinema and the madness and beauty that shadow it. Rather than a direct remake, it features a director trying to recreate the original. Maggie Cheung takes to the Parisian rooftops as Irma Vep.

Now HBO have released a series, *Irma Vep*, based on the 1996 film. The director? Olivier Assayas, He notes that the series should be seen as a continuation of the movie.

The first episode looks promising:



looks like the series is taking shots at Hollywood, rather than French cinema, which was the target of the 1996 movie. Alicia Vikander clearly enjoys the Irma Vep outfit, sneaking upstairs

when she first tries it on. (*Not sure about the practicality of the high heels, though*).

The first episode was interesting enough that I fear I shall have to track down the movie — perhaps even going back to some of the 1915 episodes! 🐾

Last page written Friday 11th June 🐾 Roman



One Hundred years ago, *Les Vampires* strike Paris

Irma Vep

By 1915, the French writer/director Louis Feuillade had been making films for 9 whole years, in the earliest stages of the art form. Feuillade was engaged to make another serial, and the result was his great achievement, *LES VAMPIRES*, a nine episode serial. Olivier Assayas' 1996 film *Irma Vep* is an homage to this