

Welcome to Pick Up and Deliver, the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder as I step out for a walk, and deliver an episode to you while I stroll around.

I'm Brendan Riley.

Well, good afternoon listeners.

It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago.

The sun is out.

Cars are zooming around.

The robins are looking for worms in the grass.

I am walking back from the library.

I picked up a new Mary Roach book and a movie to watch with the kids or a kid.

Probably only one of them will watch it, but still.

And we're having a good time.

So I looked back and I realized it had been a little while since I talked about stuff

I've read and thus it tells me it's time to do a reading roundup.

Quarter one, 2025.

So as you know, each quarter or every three months, I do an episode in which I talk about the books that I read in the previous three months.

In this case, I'll be talking about books from January, February and March of twenty twenty five.

I read 17 books in that time.

I'm not going to have time to talk about them all, but I'm going to do my best.

So let's see how it goes.

I'm actually going to walk an extra block or two just to have time to talk to you.

So this episode might be a little longer than usual.

We'll see.

So to start off, I read a book that I've read several times, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is my favorite Agatha Christie book.

I've read several of her is probably ten and I think this one's the best.

It's really good.

It's a tight little cozy mystery.

It's got fun reveals and I think it's well paced.

It's just pretty great all around.

So the Murder of Roger Ackroyd, if you haven't read it, I do recommend it's a Poirot mystery.

And I don't think you have to have read very many other ones although if you've read one or two other Poirots, I think it will fit the bill pretty well.

I would recommend not reading much about it before you go into it.

Obviously it's a mystery.

So having stuff told to you about what it's about gives it away.

I'll give you a hint though.

There's a guy named Roger Ackroyd and he gets murdered.

All right.

Next up is the Anthropocene Review.

This is a book of essays by John Green.

They all have the kind of sardonic wit and thoughtful writing that we have come to recognize is John Green's forte.

I have not read his new book yet, everything is tuberculosis but it seems like it's probably

pretty great.

The Anthropocene Review, like I said, is a series of essays.

The premise is basically just writing reviews of reality and the Anthropocene is the Age of Humans.

So John Green is reviewing stuff around us and it's everything from like vaccines to doctor pepper.

It's pretty great.

It's well written and fun.

And I fell into a funny category.

He talked, well I saw him talking once on TikTok about how his book, the Anthropocene Reviewed, for some reason the large print copy is the highest selling edition on Amazon.

It outsells the regular print copy and he figured out that it was because if you search the book, the first copy that comes up on Amazon is the large print copy.

It's not the regular one.

And it's the same price I guess.

So it doesn't come up like this is, you know, there's a cheaper one that you could look at.

And so a lot of people, if they're interested in buying it, they search it and they just click the first one that comes up and then they end up ordering the large print edition.

I laugh about that because I got this as a gift and I got the large print edition.

I will say the paper quality is not as good and the book is kind of annoyingly big but boy it's easy to read.

So something to be said for the large print edition of things.

That was the Anthropocene Reviewed or checking out I think.

Next up we have the Labyrinth Index which is another of the Charles Stross Laundry Files novels.

If you haven't read any of these, they are an interesting series of books in which magic is real and controlled by math.

There's the sort of long short of it.

They're Cthulhu adjacent novels.

They started out as a series of spy novels in which Stross was writing a different novel in the style of each of a number of significant British spy novelists.

And it made four pretty entertaining reading.

I really enjoyed the first two of them.

In fact I like them enough to keep reading them but they've gotten a little bit worse which I guess he knew because the Labyrinth Index is either the last or the second to last of the regular books in the Laundry Files series.

After that, that Stross starts writing with a different main character as the sort of the center point of the story and the different set of characters and the characters from these and the Laundry Files are basically not in the stories anymore.

I've read two of those by the way but you'll hear about those later.

So the Labyrinth Index, the basic idea is that an Elder God has gained control of the British government but there's another one trying to ascend and gain control of the United States and of course the Elder God in Britain doesn't want that.

Neither do the British people.

And so they are working to stop it.

There's also a good spy, shenanigans and interesting covert activity and so on and so forth

that you would expect from the novels.

It's the same kind of thing.

It's like a new album from a band that's steadily producing good albums.

It's another new novel from Charles Stross in the Laundry Files.

Enjoyable to read and as always I listen to it as an audiobook.

Next up is Futuristic Violence and Fancy Suits by Jason Pargin.

I don't remember if I read this, yes I did read this on paper.

This was a book I got after getting another book by accident so I got a book called

Zoey's Too Drunk for this Apocalypse and I thought it was pretty good but as I was reading

and I realized it was in fact the third book in a series so then I went back and got the

first one and read that and I believe there's the second one still that I have not read.

I'll have to look.

Because the first one and the third one have a very similar, or you know, it's the same characters

and stuff I can't really remember if I read the second one or not.

I don't think I did.

The second one is called Zoe Punches the Future in the Dick and I don't think I've read

that one yet.

But I really did like Futuristic Violence and Fancy Suits.

It is a romping, rollicking, violent story that takes place at high speed.

It reminds me a little bit of like Neuromancer or something where there's a bunch of different characters.

It's a crazy technology everywhere.

It's tough to keep up with.

I mean, Pargin is a good writer.

He doesn't have quite William Gibson's chops for language but he really knows how to pace and tell a story.

This does put, make me interested in going and reading his other stuff.

John dies at the end.

I'm really starting to worry about this black box of doom.

There are spiders in this book.

He's got a bunch of weird wild titles.

So I am, these are on my to read list but it's going to take time.

So this one in particular is about a young woman who discovers that her father who is a sort of famous gangster has died and left her all of his money and it's believed that he has some sort of very valuable thing in his safe and so a bunch of people trying to kill her or capture her to be able to get into the safe.

That's the core premise and then mix that with dystopian future tech and you've got Futuristic suits and Fancy Violence.

A few Futuristic Violence and Fancy suits.

I got to read another Rex Stout, Nero Wolfe novel, Prisoner's Base.

This one's got a great premise.

A woman shows up at Rex out at Nero Wolfe's house, asking to stay the night or stay for three days or something until she wants to stay till Thursday when something's going to happen but she won't tell him what.

He says no.

She says, okay, I'll figure something out and she leaves and she's been murdered by the

next morning.

So the book goes from there, Archie particularly feels responsible because he turned her out.

So he tells Nero Wolfe he's going to take a leave of absence if she says no but Nero Wolfe insists that they work it anyway.

So they try to solve the murder of her and then a couple other people get murdered too.

I don't recall why it's called Prisoner's Base.

Oh, it has to do with a game of tag.

The children play a background game.

Next up we have Fritz Lieber's Foshard and The Grey Mouser.

This is a comic book version of a series of short stories that Fritz Lieber wrote about two fantasy characters in a kind of high fantasy world and they are in the style of Old European folk tales.

It was fine.

I was interested in it because Howard Chaykin was the writer who adapted these stories and

I like Howard Chaykin but ultimately I didn't really find it that compelling.

Not as good as I would hope.

Next up we, my wife and I, on our trips to and from birding opportunities we read Field

Guide to Dumb Birds of North America by Matt Kracht.

Basically this is a lightly informative book about different kinds of birds that you encounter in North America full of insults of those birds.

They put rude twists on the birds' names and tell you about what the birds do but full of insults and calling the birds' names and stuff.

It's pretty funny.

It gets a little repetitive but it works fine if you read like three entries and then read some more the next time.

It took us a while to get through it but all in all we had a good time with it.

That's the Field Guide to Dumb Birds of North America.

I am trying to slowly make my way through the Baroque cycle.

I never finished it but I did enjoy it and so I have the three big hard covers that it was published.

It's a Neal Stevenson set of novels.

I think there's eight or nine altogether.

If you buy them in the paperbacks in the hard covers it's three big novels divided into sections books.

So I read the second section of the first book.

The first big novel is called Quick Silver.

The second book in it is called King of the Vagabonds and I read that and enjoyed it.

I thought it was pretty great.

Neal Stevenson as always does a really good job building and elaborate and interesting world full of fascinating people and telling us a lot about the kind of world that evolved and what it was like for people to live there.

Of course it's fantastical as well but it's not fictional or it's not magical realism or anything.

Everything he has in there as far as I can tell pretty realistic and very carefully researched but the characters are a bit goofy.

So that's King of the Vagabonds which was a delightful start.



Delightful part two.

Next up we have Horror Movie from Paul Tremblay.

Paul Tremblay is sort of a guy of the moment right now for his horror novels.

He wrote the novel that the house at the end of the world was based on a cabin at the end of the world.

The movie they made, the book had the same title which looks interesting and scary.

I saw a horror movie at a bookstore and thought it was really interesting kind of admired it for a while and then I found it at another bookstore later and I was like yeah I got to get it.

It's got a really neat premise.

It operates from one of my favorite ways for a book to start is to have a character who's going through whatever is going to happen in the book saying you know if I'd known it was going to turn out this way I would have done things differently or something like that.

And this book starts that way.

So right after that I'm really intrigued by the possibilities at the heart of horror movie by Paul Tremblay.

I will say I like the idea of it more than the execution by the end of the book.

I was like if you'd stopped me halfway through the book and said what are you going to rate this?

I'm like probably five stars and I think I gave it four or even three and a half.

The end was not as great as the beginning.

That's how I don't remember if I go back and look at it and maybe I really loved it at the time but I've cooled on it since.

It was very well written in an interesting idea.

I definitely would be interested in reading more of this writer's works if I encounter them.

That's Paul Tremblay horror movie.

Oh the basic premise is there's a horror movie that was made sometime in the past.

Something went wrong.

We don't really know what.

The main that one of that it was an indie, a little indie film sort of a cult thing,

not many people have seen it.

Little snippets of it exist here or there.

The guy who played the stalker, it's like a stalker movie.

It goes to horror conventions and stuff and won't talk about what happened there but everybody's intrigued by it.

And then somebody decides to do a remake of the film.

So that's the basic premise.

I read Song of Susanna by Stephen King.

This is the sixth of the seven books in the Dark Tower.

I thought it was pretty great.

Not as good as books five or four but it set up book seven really well.

The characters are all going through dark and scary times of course.

You can't have a great ending if everything was unkindore the whole time.

So that part is dramatic and interesting.

Yeah I really liked it.

It did get me excited for book seven and I have read book seven since then.

I'll talk about that more in the quarter two episode which will come out probably in August, July or August so you'll have to wait or you can go over to Goodreads and look at my reviews where I've written a review of it already.

Yeah.

Song of Susanna by Stephen King and as before I listened to that in an audiobook.

Next up I have two books that I read.

The "Circure" and the "Hunter" both by Tana French.

Tana French is one of my favorite mystery writers writing today.

She wrote a series of books, sort of called "The Dublin Squad" about these different police detectives in Dublin.

And now she's written two books about this character Cal Hooper who is a former Chicago police detective who has retired to Ireland in his late 40s or early 50s to get away from it all.

Hello.

Both of these books are really good.

They're very slow although I thought they were delightfully moody and did a good job of setting up a character based mystery.

Some of the reviews I read just said, "Oh man, it takes forever to do anything to happen."

So you know, six and a half and dozen of the other there.

But I thought they were both pretty good.

I like the way they build off each other and the stories they tell are compelling.

The mystery at the heart of them is worth exploring.

So if you get a chance to read the "The Surcher" and "The Hunter" these are the first two books in the Cal Hooper series from Tana French, I don't know if she's doing anymore.

All right, I'm going to buzz through.

I read "Twelve Owls."

This is another bird book that I read with my wife.

It's about different species of owl in Minnesota.

Pretty great.

I read "Tourist Season" which is a very early Carl Hineson novel, which I remember being pretty great and it was in fact fine.

The mystery in it was pretty great but a lot of the interpersonal politics and stuff just were gross because they're old.

So I don't think I'm going to read anymore old Carl Hineson or reread, I should say.

I read "The Righteous Mind Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion" by Jonathan Height.

This is a public scholarship science book about different kinds of moral or ethics and moral systems and why people think that what they do.

Height is attempting to explain basically the divisive nature of the United States in 2013 and there's some interesting stuff in it but ultimately I found it not as satisfying as I was hoping.

In part because he doesn't really spend much time addressing how to bridge that gap.

He does a little bit toward the end but not as much as I would like.

And then finally I read "The Horror novel, The Eyes Are the Best Part" by Monica Kim.

This is probably the best book I read in the first quarter of 2025.

It is a very compelling novel about a young woman who is going through terrifying and dramatic things in her life.

Her father leaves her mother.

Her mother starts dating a new guy.

She's having trouble in college.

There's she's fighting with her friends and she's being haunted by terrible and terrifying urges that make for really good reading.

It is a dark book.

It's not scary.

But it's gripping and I really enjoyed it.

If you can handle something that's kind of gross but really interesting, I would recommend checking out and enjoying "The Eyes Are the Best Part" by Monica Kim.

So that brings me to the end of my list of books that I read in the first quarter of 2021 or 2025.

I mean, I'd love to hear what you were reading in January of February and March.

Head over to board game guild 3.269 and let me know.

And I look forward hearing them.

Thanks for joining me in my walk today.

I hope your next walk is pleasant, smiley, bye bye.

We read "The Field Guide to Dum Birds of North America" by Matt Crotch.

Crack, crack.

I'm not sure.

Matt Crack, that's what I'm going to call it.

Basically this is a lightly informative book.

Brought to you by Rattlebunk State.

[MUSIC]