

May to June REVIEWS

BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER's star rating system gives readers an indication of the quality of the publication being reviewed in its context. Our reviewers have been asked to use the following guidelines to rate the book:

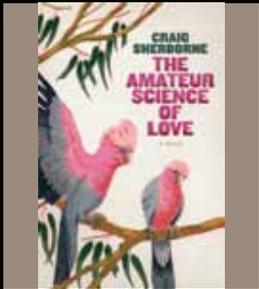
- ★★★★★ an exceptional book of the very highest quality, regardless of genre
- ★★★★☆ an excellent book
- ★★★☆☆ good book, within its genre
- ★★☆☆☆ a passable example of the genre
- ★☆☆☆☆ caution advised

Each issue, **BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER** asks booksellers and writers to review books due to be published in the following month or thereafter. All books reviewed originate in Australia or New Zealand.

📖 ebooks
(simultaneous release unless otherwise specified)

🎧 audio

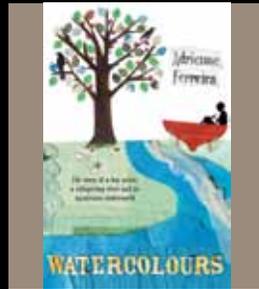
Top Picks Among our reviewers' top adults picks this issue are:



The Amateur Science of Love ★★★★★
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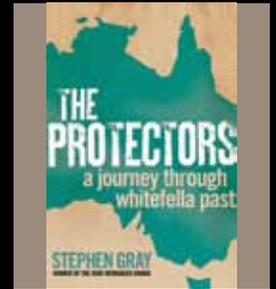
Past the Shallows ★★★★★
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Watercolours ★★★★★
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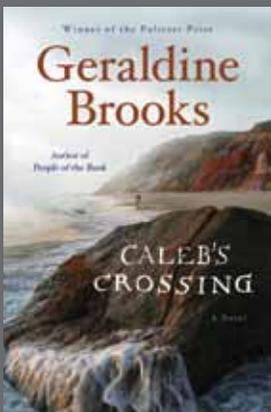


The Taste of River Water ★★★★★
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The Protectors ★★★★★
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'I will be tracking down his other work tout suite.'—Katie Horner on author Craig Sherborne
The Amateur Science of Love was the only title to score five stars this issue, though several others weren't far behind.



Caleb's Crossing (Geraldine Brooks, Fourth Estate, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732289225, May) 📖 🎧 ★★★★★

In 1665 a young man from Martha's Vineyard became the first Native American to graduate from Harvard College. This fragment of history is the basis for the latest novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks. *Caleb's Crossing* revolves around this young man's spiritual and intellectual elevation in the eyes of English society. Bearing witness to this 'civilising' project is a minister's daughter, Bethia Mayfield, who, on the basis of gender, is denied the education she craves. Bethia and Caleb—the son of a chieftain—meet in the wilds of Martha's Vineyard as children and their clandestine but innocent encounters prove to be largely and mutually influential. Bethia teaches Caleb to read and strives to convert him to her Christian god, but he has just as much to offer her, as he shares island secrets and his native language. Caleb's wide-eyed yet witty questioning of the Christian faith is compelling; their soulful and sweet exchanges are at the forefront of a quietly escalating tension between the native inhabitants and the gradually encroaching colonialists.

As Bethia and Caleb grow older the divisions between them become more apparent; both are forced to subdue their natures in different ways. Bethia's impending indenture as a housekeeper sparks a disagreement, which illuminates the diminishing options for both their futures. Such conversations between the pair evoke strong emotion and are a welcome release from the repression of Puritanism that dictates their behaviour.

Reminiscent of Brooks' debut novel *Year of Wonders*, wherein a bubonic plague outbreak is chronicled by an intelligent young maid, her latest fictional history sees

Bethia grow from an uncertain minister's daughter—striving for utter purity but plagued by doubt and failings—to a determined young woman who learns to exercise her intellect in whichever way she can. Bethia's observation of Caleb's triumphs and tribulations on the road to Harvard exposes both a warmth and distance between the pair. Her determination to document the role she plays in his journey bespeaks a desire for recognition.

Caleb's Crossing depicts the harshness of pioneer life and the rigidity of puritan values, tempered by the compassion and kindness of individuals. As the clash between cultures unfolds, loss of life, language and culture is a tragic inevitability that Bethia bears witness to on a personal level. Through the observations of a well-drawn protagonist Brooks conjures the disenfranchisement of an entire people. (See interview, page 38.)

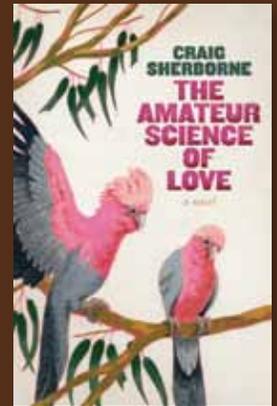
Portia Lindsay works at the UNSW Bookshop in Sydney

The Amateur Science of Love (Craig Sherborne, Text, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921758010, June) ☺★★★★★

Craig Sherborne, poet and author of memoirs *Hoi Polloi* and its sequel, *Muck*, has turned his hand to fiction with *The Amateur Science of Love*. It follows the see-saw relationship of naive but cocksure Colin and eccentric artist, Tilda. Colin pursues an initially reluctant Tilda and they start a new life together in the country and along the way deal with isolation, illness, infidelity and their ever-changing feelings. I can't fault this book—the characters are solid and believable, the storyline unpredictable and the rural Australian imagery vivid. The science of love and lust in its many forms is played out convincingly through Colin and Tilda and is not told in an overly soppy or trite way—it's tangible, and that's what works so well. In my opinion, books with 'love' in the title don't tend to reflect

real relationships, or none I've had knowledge of, but this one does. I admit I haven't read any of Sherborne's previous books but after thoroughly enjoying this absorbing tale, I will be tracking down his other work tout suite. (See interview, page 39.)

Katie Horner is presently on maternity leave from her role as assistant editor of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER



A Blight of Mages (Karen Miller, HarperVoyager, \$22.99 pb, ISBN 9780732287566, May) ★★★

This book returns to the setting of the 'Kingmaker, Kingbreaker' and 'Fisherman's Children' series. It's a prequel that is about the origin of the magical disaster that dominated so much of both series. Readers of the earlier books will know the core of this story—that the Mage Morgan Danfey destroyed the land of Dorana, poisoning the earth and transforming its inhabitants into twisted monstrosities; that his corruption spread and that only by the efforts of another Mage, Barl Linden, was the small nation of Lur protected. While this is true, it is not all there is to the story. Dorana before the fall is a nation totally dependant on magic. But the Council of Mages controls what people are allowed to learn, preserving the deepest knowledge for its own aristocratic class. Barl

Linden may be the most talented Mage of her generation but as a commoner is denied all but the simplest magic. Her efforts to unlock her true potential, heedless of warnings, have dire consequences. This book could stand alone, but is better enjoyed after reading the rest of the series. Rich in characterisation and intrigue, it takes the legends of Karen Miller's previous books and humanises them. Fans of the series have already seen the end—this is the beginning.

Stefen Brazulaitis is a Perth-based bookseller, freelance reviewer and columnist



The Devil's Diadem (Sara Douglass, HarperVoyager, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732291730, May) ☺★★★★

The Devil's Diadem is a historical fantasy novel set in 12th-century England and Wales. While many of the genre conventions of fantasy are present, including mythological apparitions and mystical talisman, these do not dominate the tale, which is instead focused on detailed depictions of day-to-day life. The plot follows protagonist Maeb through various trials, tribulations and trips between London and the disputed Welsh Marches. It is firmly anchored in the historical period—we read about outbreaks of the plague and a fire on London Bridge feature—which makes the book feel at times like a straight historical novel. However, its convincing representation of the period, combined with strong, sympathetic characters, make what could otherwise have been a somewhat slender tale of courtly

intrigue with supernatural undertones a fascinating and surprisingly compelling read. Although far from action-packed, the plot provides enough surprises to keep the reader entertained, and fans of both historical fiction and romantic fantasy should find much to enjoy.

Beau Taylor is a bookseller at Pulp Fiction, Brisbane

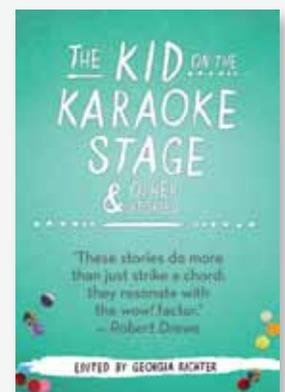


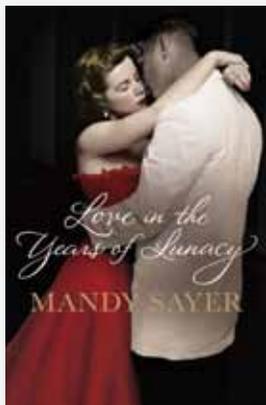
The Kid on the Karaoke Stage and Other Stories (ed by Georgia Richter, Fremantle Press, \$27.95 pb, ISBN 9781921696831, May) ☺★★★★

Short stories are the perfect medium for fledging writers to hone their craft, although they are often overlooked by readers in favour of their longer counterparts. *Kid on the Karaoke Stage* is an intriguing collection of 28 short stories by Western Australian writers, many already published and popular authors. The book opens with the titular story, and then traverses a small slice of Australian experience, ranging from the harsh and unforgiving outback to gritty urban nightmares. Some stories are ultimately pointless, setting themselves up with an idea that just seems to fall flat, while others are simply sublime. Several resonate with a sinister subtext that hums just beneath the surface, and there are other moments of sheer beauty that give the reader profound pause. The stories

flow into each other well, except for an unusual detour late in the book where the reader is suddenly transported to a near post-apocalyptic wasteland London, then taken on a trek through Siberia and America, before coming home to a breathtaking ode to the city of Perth. Pick up this book if you appreciate home-grown literature, and marvel at the talent that resides in the West.

Justin Gloyn is the book buyer at Dymocks Garden City



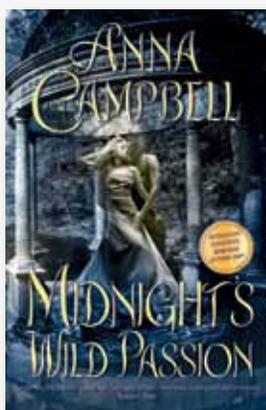


Love in the Years of Lunacy (Mandy Sayer, A&U, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9781742373379, May) 📞 ⭐⭐⭐⭐

Southern American jazz forms the soundtrack to Mandy Sayer's latest novel, *Love in the Years of Lunacy*. The novel follows the story of Pearl Willis: a free-spirited, extraordinary young saxophonist growing up in Sydney during World War II whose life is transformed by a love affair with James Washington, a black American soldier who shares her love of jazz music. Pearl and James face social disapproval and are separated when James is redeployed to New Guinea in the war, but their potential reunion keeps the reader's interest in the novel alive through to the final chapters. Sayer paints a fascinating picture of Sydney, and indeed Australia, in the 1940s: the bars and cafes where Pearl could safely be seen with James; the blackened windows and food rations as a

consequence of the war; and the practices of the lunatic asylum where Pearl is briefly confined, which now seem barbaric. Readers who enjoy historical romance fiction will appreciate this uniquely Australian story, which would also make a great Mother's Day gift.

Eloise Keating is a journalist with the Weekly Book Newsletter and BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER

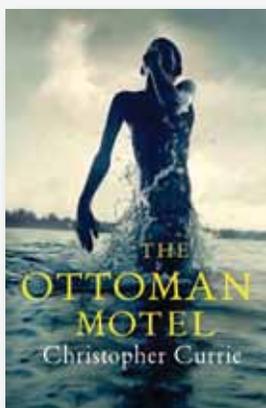


Midnight's Wild Passion (Anna Campbell, HarperCollins, \$29.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732291068, May) ⭐⭐⭐⭐

With her latest historical romance, Australian author Anna Campbell continues to build on her reputation for lush writing and sensuous stories. The Marquess of Ranelaw has the blackest reputation in London: a useful fact that will help him take revenge on the man who ruined his sister. Godfrey Demarest will understand Ranelaw's helpless fury when his beloved daughter faces the same fate. However, the one thing Ranelaw doesn't count on is the intriguing Miss Smith, the girl's chaperone, and her determination to stay between him and her charge. Of course, Ranelaw's never had any problems getting women to do his bidding. Seducing the chaperone and her charge might seem utterly depraved—for anyone other than the notorious Marquess. Chaperone romances

are the historical equivalent of the football star falling for the geeky schoolgirl—and are lots of fun. Campbell's version is darker than most, as both Raneshaw and Miss Smith do not have blemish-free pasts, but this makes for a realistic conflict and a more satisfying ending. Readers who found Campbell's polarising debut *Claiming the Courtesan* confronting will likely have similar problems with *Midnight's Wild Passion*, but most should enjoy this seductive fantasy where love truly does conquer all and it only needs one good woman to reform an unrepentant rake.

Kate Cuthbert is publishing manager for the Australian Library and Information Association



The Ottoman Motel (Christopher Currie, Text, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921758164, May) 📞 ⭐⭐⭐

When Simon Sawyer and his parents arrive in the small town of Reception, they are tired and argumentative and in need of rest. They take a room at the Ottoman Motel, and when Simon wakes up during the night from a much-needed sleep, he finds his parents have disappeared. So Christopher Currie's debut novel *The Ottoman Motel* begins, and the secrets of Reception are gradually revealed. This book is a mixed bag—some of the revelations are truly startling as Simon and his young comrade Pony attempt to investigate the Sawyers' disappearance. But there are some less-believable scenarios that explain the more nefarious side of this small fishing town. There is an element of *Twin Peaks* in the double lives of the main characters, all of whom seem possessed by the past and

their ill-executed escape from it. Much of *The Ottoman Motel* is left unexplained, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but the set-up demands a greater resolution. Simon's grandmother behaves most peculiarly, but we never quite understand why. The local policewoman is bedevilled by a previous investigation, but again the characterisation is somewhat perfunctory. This is a solid but meandering thriller that never reaches the intensity it strives for.

Robbie Eagan is manager of Readings Bookshop in Carlton, Melbourne



Past the Shallows (Favel Parrett, Hachette, \$26.99 pb, ISBN 9780733626579, May) 📞 ⭐⭐⭐⭐

The wild coast of Tasmania provides a moody backdrop for this story of two young boys. Harry and his older brother Miles live in a tumbledown shack with their worn-down and bitter father, who is a fisherman with his own boat. Their mother died some years earlier and the boys' memories of her and her death are sketchy. Fishing is a cold, tough way to make a living, and when the boys' oldest brother Joe leaves town, Miles knows he is stuck with helping his dad on the boat, even though he hates it. Harry is scared of the water and has been spared fishing because of seasickness. One day when their father insists both boys go out on the boat in rough weather, a tragedy seems inevitable. This debut novel doesn't have a single excess word and the characters are thoroughly believable.

Harry in particular is captured with a charm and vulnerability that is really touching. Favel Parrett shows a lot of patience and restraint in her first but hopefully not her last novel. She is a seriously good writer. This book reminded me of Danielle Wood's *The Alphabet of Light and Dark*, also set in Tasmania, and the way the young characters were captured put me in mind of *Jasper Jones* a bit.

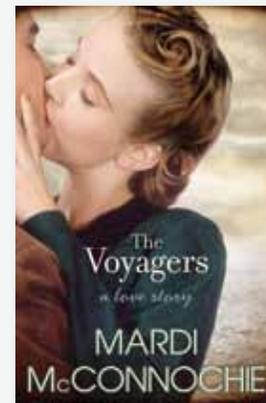
Heather Dyer is the owner of Fairfield Books in Melbourne

The Voyagers: A Love Story (Mardi McConnochie, Viking, \$29.95 pb, ISBN 9780670075966, May) ★★☆☆

This is McConnochie's fourth adult novel (*Coldwater* was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for a First Novel) and her third work of historical fiction. Set prior and during World War II, it is essentially a story of thwarted love (eventually resolved) and as the title suggests, is also largely about travel. In 1938 merchant seaman Stead meets the girl of his dreams while on shore leave for three days in Sydney. Marina is likewise besotted and they promise to meet in Trafalgar Square on New Year's Eve. However, during the journey to London to start her hard-earned music scholarship she discovers that she is pregnant, sending her life in unpredictable directions including a stint as a nightclub entertainer in Shanghai. It's not until 1943 when Stead finds himself in Sydney

again that he starts his epic search to find the now missing Marina. It's not often I would recommend a book ought to be longer but, given the vastness of the plot, its brevity means we lose some depth in characterisation. What makes this novel interesting is the realistic scenarios and its links to Australian war stories. I would recommend this for lovers of historical fiction.

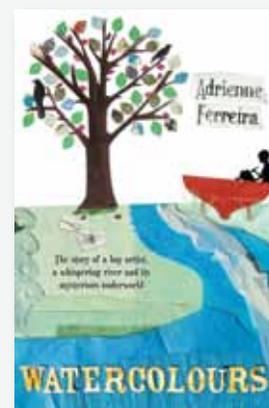
Rachel Wilson is a Melbourne-based media academic and former bookseller

**Watercolours** (Adrienne Ferreira, Fourth Estate, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732292164, May) ☹★★★★

When Dom moves to the rural backwater of Morus, on the Lewis River, as the town's new primary school teacher, he is unsure of his new home. When he notices that one of his pupils, Novi Lepido, is a talented artist, he feels out of his depth. Dom's efforts to foster the boy's talent uncover the Lepido family's links to the local history and the landscape, stirring up hidden wells of grief and ancient history. This is Adrienne Ferreira's first novel, and an excitingly good book. The way in which Ferreira translates her characters onto the page is disarming in its simplicity and immensely enjoyable to read. *Watercolours* is a collection of well-captured moments, presented in a multitude of first-person narratives. It is a refreshingly good Australian story that will appeal to readers who enjoy

reading about love and the triumph of good intentions. The subject matter will suit both adult and young adult readers, and will ensure it is appreciated far and wide.

Rebecca Butterworth is a writer and ex-bookseller living in Melbourne

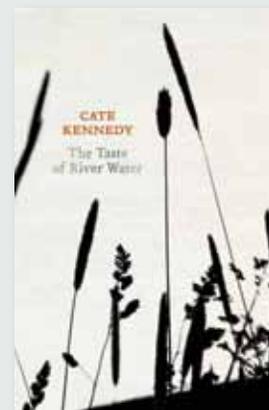
**The Taste of River Water** (Cate Kennedy, Scribe, \$24.95 pb, ISBN 9781921844003, May) ☹★★★★

*I wonder how many times I have broken some lock,
Searched hastily and withdrawn,
Thinking the room empty,
Overlooked the disguised and waiting gift,
Missed the mountain.* ('Thinking the Room Empty')

Poetry has the knack, in the right hands, of capturing the poignancy of a particular moment in a memorable or vivid way—of finding the 'disguised and waiting gift', as the above passage from Cate Kennedy's latest collection calls it. Such moments need not be especially extraordinary in themselves in order to bring forth extraordinary insights. Indeed, Kennedy seems adept at extracting striking conclusions from the least epic of events—a joyflight experienced by

long-dead family members, for instance, or a couple laying a new floor in their house. Sometimes her conclusions are comic—ever considered the parallels between the endless ones and zeros that are the basis of computing, and the 'purl purl plain plain plain, purl purl plain' of a mother knitting? Other times they are powerfully affecting; in one poem she depicts the last excruciating days of a survivor of the 1950s nuclear tests. Kennedy's career as a poet has evolved in parallel with her success as a short-story writer and novelist and her accessible poems display the hallmarks of a poet increasingly well-practised in her craft. There is much to admire here.

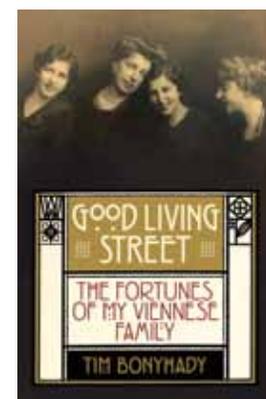
Andrew Wilkins is director of independent press Wilkins Farago and a former publisher of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER

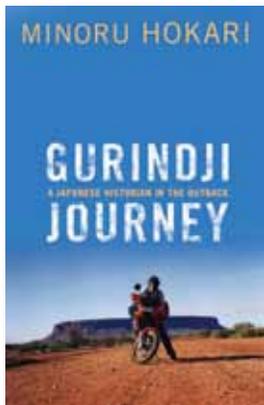
**Good Living Street** (Tim Bonyhady, A&U, \$35 tpb, ISBN 9781742371467, May) ☹★★★★

Historian and environmental lawyer Tim Bonyhady's maternal grandparents were leading patrons of the arts in fin de siècle Vienna. In *Good Living Street* he recreates the lives of three generations of the family concentrating on the women, culminating in a detailed look at the life of his mother Anne. Born into privilege, her life was turned upside down when the Nazis rose to power and the family, of Jewish origin, was forced to flee, choosing Australia as its new home. That they were able to bring with them a major private collection of contemporary art and design, including furniture, was a bonus, both for them and for Australia, the ultimate beneficiary of these significant objects. Bonyhady takes us into the private and public lives of the family, sharing with us its significance,

its social standing, happiness, feuds, and, sadly, its state-sanctioned humiliation during the late 1930s. I found the latter part of the book, after their arrival in Australia, the most interesting and moving, as Bonyhady recounts the family's struggle to adapt to their reduced circumstances in a small flat in harbour-side Sydney. His mother, especially, seems never to have embraced her new home; sad, but probably inevitable, as the book makes clear. Other family members proved more adaptable. The book should appeal to anyone interested in family biography, change and displacement and, of course, Vienna.

Max Oliver is a long-serving Australian bookseller



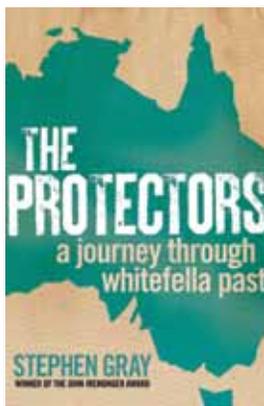


Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback (Minoru Hokari, UNSW Press, \$49.95 hb, ISBN 9781742232683, May) ☹ ★★★

This is an unusual book, to read and review. That's because what might just have been a book about 'ways of doing' history is also a cry from the heart for justice for Aboriginal people. Written by a young Japanese scholar who lived among the Gurindji people of Northern Australia for a year, researching and recording their view of history, it has been posthumously published in English, seven years after his sadly early death. Hokari is passionate about many things: cross-cultural analysis, philosophical theory, anthropology, history, but most affectingly, he is passionate about allowing the Aboriginal owners of their land to tell their own stories of their past and present. When an elder questions his fieldwork, asking 'Why do kartiya (non-Aboriginals) never learn from us? Why do

they never listen to our stories?' we can track our author's response through the rest of the book. Determined to let their stories speak for themselves, he explores Gurindji 'ways of telling', sometimes through scholarly erudition, sometimes through an offbeat, almost poetic sensibility, but always with a heartfelt commitment to the notion that the rest of the world needs to listen and to understand. Accompanied by some interesting photographs, some personal testimonies, and some useful indexes and bibliography, this is a highly idiosyncratic, but compelling, read.

David Gaunt is co-owner of Gleebooks in Sydney

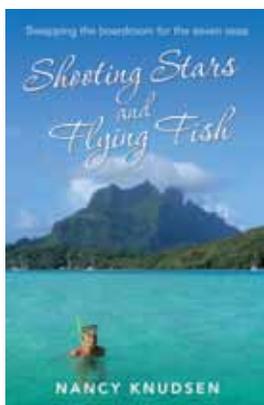


The Protectors: A Journey through Whitefella Past (Stephen Gray, A&U, \$29.99 tpb, ISBN 9781741759914, May) ☹ ★★★

Author Stephen Gray takes a balanced and, at times, personal look at the men who were Northern Territory's protectors of Aboriginal welfare. In doing so he discovers the moral complexity in judging individuals involved in the appalling mistreatment of Australia's indigenous people. Was a generation of children removed from their mothers the result of misguided, paternalistic benevolence or an implicit policy of genocide? Do 'good intentions' excuse the atrocities committed in the name of white Australia? Gray's research reveals that the Protectors 'were rarely, if ever ... malevolent. They meant "the best" for Aboriginal people as they conceived it'. However this 'best' was so entwined with a belief in the superiority of their own culture as to make 'their "benevolent

actions seem often indistinguishable from evil ones'. *The Protectors* will be a hard sell for Australian booksellers, but this very fact demonstrates the importance of this book as it sheds a light on the darkest pages of Australian history. As Gray states, 'Australians ... prefer silence to debate on such topics'. *The Protectors* is a worthy text to amplify this debate.

Andrew Rankin is a buyer for REDgroup Retail

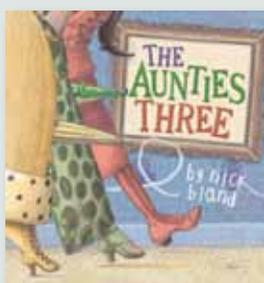


Shooting Stars and Flying Fish (Nancy Knudsen, A&U, \$29.99 pb, ISBN 9781742376653, May) ☹ ★★★

Business owner Nancy Knudsen and her architect husband Ted were the 'typical inner-city Sydney couple, running as fast as we could to keep up with all the other rats in the race'. However, they had a major recreation, their small sailing boat, on which they daydreamed about finding, outfitting and learning to handle the ideal yacht on which to sail around the world. Six years, thousands of dollars and many misgivings later, they set sail, having put their corporate lives on hold, pacified their many sceptical friends and family members, and taken comfort from others who had told them to go for it. Never could Nancy and Ted have realised that the adventure would transform their lives—and themselves. The author spares us little as she recounts details of their extraordinary five-year

adventure: their disputes, accidents and misadventures; the glorious highlights of the voyage; their remarkable decision, having fallen in love with Turkey, to live and work in Istanbul for two years; and the poignancy of their eventual return to Australia as profoundly changed human beings. Neither wants to rejoin the corporate rat-race and this beautiful, inspiring memoir ends with a hint that their next venture might be a small farm ('but that's another story'). This inspiring book deserves the widest readership. (See interview, page 40.)

Max Oliver is a long-serving Australian bookseller



The Aunties Three (Nick Bland, Scholastic, \$24.99 hb, ISBN 9781741697919, May) ★★★

Join three adorable toddlers as they nervously await a visit from their terrifying aunts in Nick Bland's latest picture book *The Aunties Three*. The aunts are not to be trifled with, expecting impeccable manners, extreme deference and complete obedience from all children, especially their little nieces and nephews. The aunts are enough to strike fear into the hearts of even the most well-adjusted adult but gradually the children's behaviour (children being children) sees the aunts leave one by one and a lovely surprise awaits the children and the reader at the end. *The Aunties Three* is narrated with humorous warmth and there is a cheekiness that pervades the text which children will adore. This really is a 'whimsical romp' as the cover suggests and will be a

great hit for any child aged three and up. The colourful, detailed illustrations complement the text and really bring out the humour in the story. Booksellers should see strong sales for *The Aunties Three* and there will be reservations in libraries as soon as the word gets around. Fans of Nick Bland will be enamoured of his latest book, which complements his catalogue perfectly.

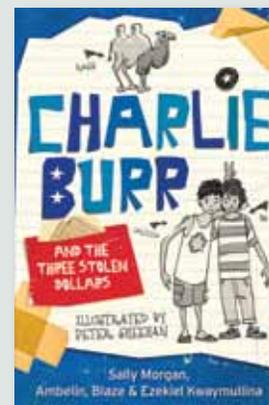
Natalie Crawford is a freelance reviewer and works at Dymocks Claremont, WA

Charlie Burr and the Three Stolen Dollars (Sally Morgan, Ambelin, Blaze & Ezekiel Kwaymullina, illus by Peter Sheehan, Little Hare Books, \$14.95 pb, ISBN 9781921714047, May) ☹ ★★☆☆

Sally Morgan and her children Ambelin, Blaze and Ezekiel drew on their own childhood experiences to create this brand new series for younger readers. Set in the Australian outback, the series follows its narrator, Charlie Burr, on his accidental adventures in the bush. The first adventure involves three stolen dollars, some missing gold, a two-humped camel and a naughty little dingo pup: Charlie isn't sure how he's going to explain the missing money and the new pup to his mum and things seem to go from bad to worse. This is a lively and entertaining book. Spike the dingo is a perfect companion to the mischievous Charlie, as is Rosy the two-humped camel to his friend Johnno. Despite its distinctly outback setting, Charlie Burr will ring true to any child who has ever done something that

they know is going to land them in hot water with Mum. Charlie's dad is a loveable larrikin who tries to keep the peace but, like Charlie, ends up in even more trouble. The outback setting is perfect for the high-spirited exploits of Charlie and his friends, which will ignite the imaginations of its readers.

Bec Kavanagh is a freelance reviewer and writer and former bookseller living in Melbourne



The Dead I Know (Scot Gardner, A&U, \$19.99 pb, ISBN 9781742373843, May) ☹ ★★☆☆

Aaron has left school and *The Dead I Know* opens on his very first day as assistant to funeral director John Barton; Aaron is uncommunicative, but willing to work. Though confronted by the dead bodies, he still takes to his new employ with little trouble and his capability surprises Mr Barton. But at home, Aaron's life is fraught, to say the least. He lives at the caravan park and is the sole carer for his guardian Mam, who is becoming confused, having accidents and forgetting how to do the simplest things. Aaron sleepwalks at night, waking up further and further from his bed and getting himself into trouble with the volatile Westy, whose vulgarity and violence is very frightening. The descriptions of the dead bodies and preparations for the funerals are realistic to the point of

being a little disturbing, but there's nothing vulgar about the way Gardner has approached this story. The characters are very respectful of the dead. Scot Gardner, author of *Gravity*, *Happy as Larry* and the wonderful *Burning Eddy*, writes novels for teenagers that are extremely accomplished and although dark, are also totally uplifting. *The Dead I Know* is no exception—it offers a glimpse into a job, and indeed an aspect of life, that is very strange, and presents an inspirational character in Aaron Garner.

Kate O'Donnell is a bookseller at the Younger Sun Bookshop in Yarraville

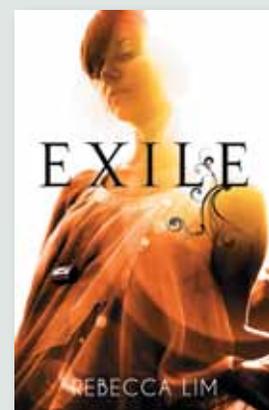


Exile (Rebecca Lim, HarperCollins, \$19.99 pb, ISBN 9780732292003, May) ☹ ★★☆☆

Mercy is awake again—conscious and in someone else's body—and has no idea why. Even the dim grasp of reality she thought she had after the last time is vanishing—blocked by traumatic amnesia. She is no closer to Luc, her beloved, and now there's an indescribable bond between Mercy and a boy called Ryan. But the problem is, Ryan is human. *Exile* is the follow-up novel to *Mercy*, the first book in a series by Rebecca Lim about an angel exiled from heaven. Mercy is an intriguing character, first and foremost because of the mystery surrounding her plight. *Mercy* was an exciting first part to the series, drawing the reader into both Mercy's own identity battle, and the battle of the girl whose body she inhabited. *Exile* is fast-paced and introduces new hurdles, but does not delve into both

lives as well as the first, and with a much less satisfying outcome. Mercy herself does not drive the action in this book, and the story suffers for it. Nonetheless, *Exile* will appeal to readers who loved *Mercy*, and will be eager to continue the story.

Rebecca Butterworth is a writer and ex-bookseller living in Melbourne



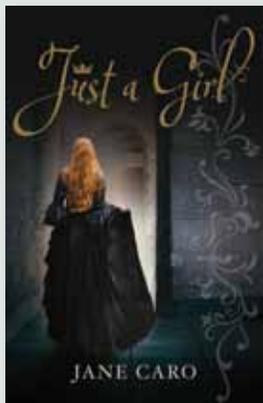
I Am Thomas (Libby Gleeson & Armin Greder, A&U, \$29.99 hb, ISBN 9781742373331, May) ☹ ★★☆☆

Any teenager who has ever felt misunderstood and out of place will find a kindred spirit in Thomas, who differentiates himself from the rest of the pack: 'I am not the child my brother is. I am not the student they are.' But despite his desire to be treated as an individual, he is forever being asked to conform by stern adults, their faces sour with disapproval as they warn that he will face failure if he doesn't do his homework, clean his nails and do a myriad number of things in order to fit into the community. Whether it's a conscription to sign up to war, religious exhortations to save his soul, or a simple call to vote for the right party, Thomas faces relentless scrutiny from all but he is strong enough to step away from the chattering crowd to exercise his own judgement. The

book challenges the lure of conformity through Libby Gleeson's minimal text and Armin Greder's pictures, which are mostly executed in black charcoal with bits of colour on the edges. Stark and confrontational, *I Am Thomas* explores adolescent alienation and helps to assure young adults (7-10-year-olds) to listen to their own instincts instead of following everyone else's.

Thuy On is a Melbourne-based freelance reviewer



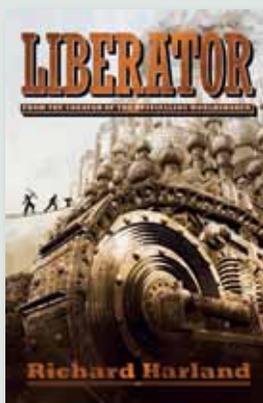


Just a Girl (Jane Caro, UQP, \$19.95 pb, ISBN 9780702238802, May) ★★★

When we first meet Elizabeth the First in the year 1559, she is about to be crowned and is pulsing with exhilaration and dread at the prospect of such responsibility. Jane Caro's novel is set in Tudor times, with the first-person narrative taking the reader directly into the mind of Elizabeth as she looks back and reflects upon her tumultuous past. Here is a young girl whose mother, Anne Boleyn, was beheaded by her father Henry VIII, and who has to live with the terrible knowledge that 'in my birth were the seeds of my mother's death'. *Just a Girl* explores Elizabeth's contrary relationships with her half-siblings, her stepmothers and her father, whom she loves and fears in equal measure. Caro has tried to keep her details historically accurate, ensuring that this YA book will appeal to teenagers,

particularly girls, who are interested in learning about a period of time far removed from their own, when males were the favoured sex and women often died in childbirth. At times it's difficult, not to mention confusing, to keep up with the cast of thousands in the book, with its ever-revolving parade of royal retinue, but Elizabeth is a strong and sympathetic protagonist.

Thuy On is a Melbourne-based freelance reviewer

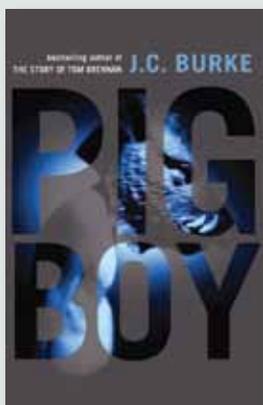


Liberator (Richard Harland, A&U, \$19.99 pb, ISBN 9781742373423, May) ☹ ★★★

In the wake of the uprising, the mobile city previously known as 'The Worldshaker' has been renamed 'The Liberator'. Our hero Colbert Porpentine may have been instrumental in the slave's revolution but he is still considered a 'Swank' by most of the population. Tensions are high: a murderous saboteur has everyone on edge, the city's coal reserves are running out and the Swank ghettos are increasingly under attack. The sequel to Richard Harland's *Worldshaker* (2009) continues the story of Col, Riff and the great moving city. Readers who haven't read *Worldshaker* will find the opening chapters a little slow-going until they become familiar with the characters. However, the pace picks up fairly quickly and once it does there is no stopping it. The tensions in the relationship

between Col and Riff add drama to the storyline, while world history casts a vague shadow over the novel in the portrayal of the nationalities of the different mobile cities and the use of Australia's Botany Bay as a location. Some of the secondary characters tend towards caricature though this does not detract too much from the plot. The recommended readership is the same level as Scott Westerfeld's steampunk novel *Leviathan* and slightly younger than Philip Reeve's 'Mortal Engines' series.

Chris McDonough is a bookseller at Coaldrakes in Brisbane



Pig Boy (J C Burke, Random House, \$18.95 pb, ISBN 9781741663129, May) ☹ ★★★

Damon has been teased, harassed and bullied as long as he can remember. He's smart, he's fat, and he can't shut up; he's just too different for a little town like Strathven. Of course, he might not have helped things with the whole incident at Year 10 camp—that was when the fear started, and his nickname became 'psycho'. Now it's his eighteenth birthday, and Damon has just been expelled for threatening a teacher. All he has are his first-person shooters, his lists of names, and that black bag in his wardrobe he refuses to think about. He's convinced the town's biggest bullies are coming for him, and he has nowhere to turn until he hears of a job with the town's other outcast, the Yugoslavian war veteran and hunter simply known as Pigman. J C Burke's *Pig Boy* is

a dark and harrowing novel, filled with half-truths and grim revelations. Damon is at times an unsympathetic character, but his beliefs and motivations are consistent, if obscure for most of the novel, and his relationship with Pigman is well constructed. With very strong language and themes, this is for older readers only.

Heath Graham is an educator currently working at the State Library of Victoria



A Pocketful of Eyes (Lili Wilkinson, A&U, \$17.99 pb, ISBN 9781742376196, May) ☹ ★★★

A taxidermist-in-training, Bee works at the Natural History Museum and arrives at work one day to learn her boss and mentor has been found dead in the Red Rotunda room—an apparent suicide. Bee doesn't believe it. In fact she is convinced it was murder. Like a teenage Agatha Christie, or an indie Nancy Drew, Bee is determined to find Gus' killer. This book is a lark, immediately engaging and very, very funny. The reader is made suspicious of all the characters in turn as Bee, a highly observant detective, shares her theories and observations. There's a self-conscious tone to the story—it's a little tongue in cheek with its references to the mystery and to the great mystery writers—but this gives the story a delightfully hyper-real feel. With an excellent cast of characters, suspects and

accomplices and sidekicks alike, it's the perfect read for girls (and boys) who like their fiction fast and funny, with just enough edge (and romance) to reel in the older readers, but not so much as to dissuade the younger ones. Melbourne's Lili Wilkinson is the author of five books, including the beautiful *Scatterheart* and 2009's fantastic *Pink*. With *A Pocketful of Eyes* she continues to prove herself master of vastly enjoyable and engaging novels for teenagers as she brings another excellent female character to the Australian YA scene.

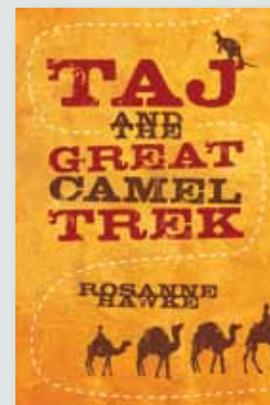
Kate O'Donnell is a bookseller at the Younger Sun Bookshop in Yarraville

Taj and the Great Camel Trek (Rosanne Hawke, UQP, \$16.95 pb, ISBN 9780702238772, May) ★★★

In 1875 Ernest Giles began his fourth attempt to cross the Australian continent, from Beltana in South Australia to Perth. He had tried three times before, always on horseback, but this time Giles took a string of camels and two Afghani camel handlers—Taj and his father. Taj is sure that he and his camel Mustara are up to the journey, but he doesn't realise just how harrowing it will be. The group travel for hundreds of miles through hostile desert with its snakes and scorpions, not knowing if they will find water again. Taj has faith in the camels' ability to survive in the desert, but doesn't know if he is cut out for the hard life of an explorer. Rosanne Hawke's story is well researched, and filled with historical detail. Each of the characters actually existed and took part in Giles'

expedition. The tensions between the explorers and the Indigenous population are deftly handled, as is the tension some of the English explorers feel when faced with Taj and his father's religious differences. *Taj and the Great Camel Trek* would be suitable for readers aged nine and up, and is a good introduction to an interesting part of Australia's history.

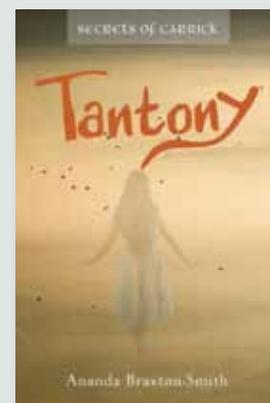
Amelia Vabtrick is the children's book buyer at Better Read Than Dead in Newtown

**Tantony** (Ananda Braxton-Smith, Black Dog Books, \$18.99 pb, ISBN 9781742031668, May) © ★★★

Fermion Quirk and her twin brother Boson are children living in isolation with their family in a remote coastal town where the harshness of life has shaped the people who populate it. In *Tantony* we learn of the challenges faced by the Quirks and the affliction which has dominated their lives and 'stolen' their son. As the story is told through Fermion's eyes, we see the burden she bears protecting her brother but also the ways in which the unknown world of spirits and legends have left an almost otherworldly impression upon them all. When Boson dies, the family unravels and the unmerciful landscape (like the very ocean they live beside) pounds them into various states of submission. *Tantony* is a follow-up novel to *Merrow* and the two are linked by landscape and mythology. Although

some of the same characters do appear in both novels, it wouldn't be necessary to have read *Merrow* in order to enjoy the book. The poetic, fable-style narrative draws the reader to this story but unfortunately the characters in *Tantony* do not seem to have the pull of the previous novel. However, for readers who make the effort, there is still much to like about *Tantony*.

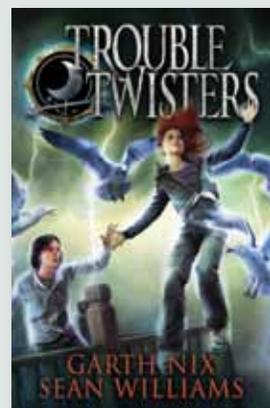
Natalie Crawford is a freelance reviewer and works at Dymocks Claremont, WA

**Troubletwisters** (Garth Nix & Sean Williams, A&U, \$15.99 pb, ISBN 9781742373980, May) ★★★

Jack and Jaide are 12-year-old twins, but far from identical. Jaide is redhaired and fair, like their mum, while Jack has black hair like their dad. During one of their father's rare visits home from his globe-trotting job, the family house is destroyed in a bizarre accident that the twins can't seem to remember clearly. While their house is rebuilt, Jack and Jaide have to stay with their paternal grandmother, the mysterious Grandma X. She lives in a strange mansion, talks to her cats, and calls the twins 'troubletwisters'. And that's not all: it seems since their house blew up, their lives have gotten very strange indeed. Disappearing doorways, miniature whirlwinds and strange animal swarms seem to be following them. Is Grandma X a witch? What's going on in the little town

of Portland? And what on earth is a troubletwister? Two of Australia's best-known fantasy authors have teamed up for *Troubletwisters*, the first volume of a new series. Jack and Jaide's world is fast-paced and exciting, full of magic and mayhem. The cast is small, but well realised, and the setting is ripe for future adventures. This is recommended for upper primary school fantasy fans.

Heath Graham is an educator currently working at the State Library of Victoria

**Underground: The Phoenix Files Book 4** (Chris Mophew, Hardie Grant Egmont, \$16.95 pb, ISBN 9781921502422, May) © ★★★

Underground is the fourth book in an action-packed series that is ideal for upper primary/lower secondary school readers. 'The Phoenix Files' reminds me of a TV series—each book leaves just enough questions unanswered to keep the reader wanting more. *Underground* in particular is filled with twists and references to both past and future events. This means the series is best read in order, but luckily, as each book is being released hot on the heels of the last, there isn't a long wait between books for hungry readers. Where other series spend the first few chapters of each book explaining past events, *Underground* launches into the action of the story. Luke and his friends are mid-interrogation and the reader is immediately swept up in the panic of their situation. The story moves at an exciting

pace as the countdown to the end of the world continues. 'The Phoenix Files' is an ideal series for reluctant readers, or for any reader looking for something exciting. *Underground* has a great blend of action, conspiracy and supernatural that will keep readers wanting more.

Bec Kavanagh is a freelance reviewer and writer and former bookseller living in Melbourne

