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'A powerful book ... It's a story that should be more widely known, a story of resilience and survival.'
—TERRY GARWOOD

WHERE'S ALL THE COMMUNITY?

ABORIGINAL MELBOURNE REVISITED

JULIE ANDREWS

Where's All the Community: Aboriginal Melbourne Revisited is a social history deeply rooted in place. From inner-city Fitzroy and Collingwood to regional missions and interstate connections, the historic and ongoing campaigns for social justice, land rights, Treaty and self-determination, this is an evocative introduction to the past, present and future of Aboriginal Melbourne.

'A powerful book ... It's a story that should be more widely known, a story of resilience and survival.'

—TERRY GARWOOD

PROFESSOR JULIE ANDREWS OAM is a descendant of the Yorta Yorta people and director of the Gabra Biik, Wurruwila Wutja Indigenous Research Centre at La Trobe University.



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News

Teen Advisory Board 2026

Applications for this year's Readings Teen Advisory Board are now open. Find out more on page 22.

The Readings Foundation 2026

The not-for-profit organisations and programs that will be receiving funding from The Readings Foundation this year have been announced. The foundation is passionate about supporting literacy, community integration, and the arts in Victoria. To find out this year's recipients, see page 4.

Clunes Booktown Festival 2026

Clunes Booktown Festival is nearly here. A major regional event running from dawn to dark over the weekend of Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 March, the festival is full of author and artist talks, workshops and live entertainment for the whole family. To see the program and book tickets, head to clunesbooktown.org.au

Winners of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs) 2026

The winners of the 2026 VPLAs have been announced. To find out the winners, see page 5.

Promos

Win tickets to see The Mountain Goats

To celebrate the release of John Darnielle's *This Year: 365 Songs Annotated*, we are giving away one double-pass to see The Mountain Goats on 17 April at Forum Melbourne. To enter the draw, purchase a copy of *This Year: 365 Songs Annotated* and email a copy of your receipt to competitions@readings.com.au with the subject line 'John Darnielle' by 31 March 2026. For further details, and terms and conditions, head to readings.com.au

3 for 2 nonfiction favourites

Throughout March we have a great deal on a range of nonfiction favourites. Purchase two titles and get the third (of equal or lesser value) for free. This offer is available at all Readings shops (except Readings Kids) until 31 March 2026. Not available online. Offer valid on stickered, in-stock items only, while stocks last. Not valid with any other offer.

3 for 2 kids and young adult fiction

Throughout March we also have a great deal on a range of wonderful books for kids and young adults. Purchase two titles and get the third (of equal or lesser value) for free. This offer is available at all Readings shops (except Readings Carlton) until 31 March 2026. Not available online. Offer valid on stickered, in-stock items only, while stocks last. Not valid with any other offer.

Events

with Chris Gordon



The very last Readings event held in 2025 was hosted at one of Readings' unofficial headquarters and was titled 'Jimmy Watson's Bedtime Stories'. It was part of the wonderful A Day in Carlton festivities and at this event there were four authors

reading bits and bobs they had written in the past. All the authors walked to the event. The audience was cosy, upstairs there at Jimmy Watson's, and the sound wasn't great, not all the seats were comfortable, and a few members of the audience had to stand. But when those authors read their works there was no movement: we fell still – all of us – because of other people's stories. Yes, we cried and we laughed, but, most of all, we did not care that we were uncomfortable because we felt as though we belonged to a particular moment in time. An audience member told me the night felt magical and I understood immediately what she meant. Therefore, from now on, 'a spell of storytellers' is my favoured collective noun for those clever, brave people who write.

This year, I want to celebrate that bravery with another full programme of launches, poetry, walking tours, workshops, book clubs, and discussions. If you enjoy a walk-and-talk experience, Sean Reynolds of Melbourne Ghost Signs has plotted out exclusive tours for our readers, leaving from both our Carlton and Hawthorn shops. And if you are truly feeling like you want more, we are thrilled to have author Raeden Richardson leading aspiring writers in a short course on Saturdays at our Hawthorn shop. Please do check the events page on our website for dates and tickets. (And see you there!)

I was fortunate enough to spend my summer with many advanced reading copies by Melbourne authors. I do love a novel set in Marvellous Melbourne and don't tell anyone yet, but the one and only Dervla McTiernan's latest story, *Three Reasons for Revenge*, spans locations from Spotswood to Hawthorn. You can find out more at our event with her in April. And I did also manage to watch the film adaptation of *Addition* at my local theatre. You may remember *Addition* is by local author Toni Jordan, one of the generous women in our literary landscape who often appears in our programme.

My extensive reading research over the long summer days has led me to tell you that this year, there is a riot of good stories coming your way. I am delighted to have already lined up events with authors Fiona Hardy, J.P. Pomare, Louise Milligan, Sarah Bailey, Jane Caro, Kate Holden and many more. My favourite part of any event is when the author reads from their work and then later, I head home with my copy, and when I open it to read, I can hear their voice. It makes their words just a little more immediate and powerful. Honestly, I feel like we need stories right now: stories that make us forget where we are, ones that remind us of our origins, and that inspire us to change.

My hope this year is for everyone to fall under the spell of someone else's story. It might just make this year easier.

Bonjour Readings customers,

In September 2026, Readings will be hosting A Reading Retreat at La Gonette, a stunning 14th-century chateau in Provence – and we'd love you to join us.

I'll be there alongside Lou Ryan (manager of our Carlton shop) and a small group of 12 guests for a week created especially for readers: long stretches of reading, stimulating workshops, lively conversations, and exceptional food and wine, all set against the beauty of the French countryside. La Gonette itself is something special – generous, gentle, and deeply restorative.

You'll find all the details, including the programme brochure, here: lagonette.com/a-reading-retreat

The places are filling, so don't miss out. We'd love to spend time there with you.

Au revoir, Mark Rubbo



READINGS MONTHLY

The *Readings Monthly* is a free, independent newspaper published by Readings. The print edition is available in all our shops and a copy is included with every online order. Sign up to our e-news to receive a link to a digital copy of each new edition or view them online at readings.com.au/readings-monthly

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FRONT COVER

The March *Readings Monthly* cover features a range of book covers from titles due to be published this year. Alison Huber highlights these titles and more in our most anticipated books of 2026 feature on pages 6 and 7.

PRICES AND AVAILABILITY

Please note that all prices and release dates in *Readings Monthly* are correct at time of publication, however prices and release dates may change without notice. Special price offers apply only for the month in which they are featured in *Readings Monthly*.

Readings donates 10% of its profits each year to the

Readings Foundation. Learn more about the foundation at readings.com.au/the-readings-foundation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Readings acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay respects to all First Nations people of Australia, and recognise their connection to the land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

SHOP INFORMATION

See shop opening hours, browse and buy online at readings.com.au. Australian orders have \$9 flat rate shipping, with free shipping on orders \$100 and over.

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KEY

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Review

Events

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Foreword

with Joe Rubbo



It has been an eventful start to the year for the Australian literary world. I was taking some leave in January, watching on as Adelaide Writers' Week collapsed. I have never been to AWW – in fact, this year we were planning our first trip – but I've always been aware of its great reputation. Held in tents at the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden, it is highly regarded among publishers and authors as being one of the best literary festivals in the country. As well as attracting some of the biggest names from Australia and internationally, it is the only literary festival of its size that has free admission to all events. This, of course, helps significantly with book sales, and rumour has it that it has the highest book sales of any comparable festival. So this year's cancellation of the festival comes at a great loss not only to the audiences and organisers, but also to the authors and publishers.

For debut, or less well-known authors, AWW might have been the highlight of their year, one of the real ways they could get word about their book out there. To have that opportunity taken away would have been heartbreaking. Writers depend on those events to sell books, connect with readers, and build their careers.

Last year you might remember that Bendigo Writers Festival was called off in similar circumstances.

This disturbing trend is a real threat to the fabric of Australia's literary community, with huge implications for readers, writers, publishers and public discourse. There is the danger that these events cease to exist, or become much more rare. There is also a risk that they become victim to 'safe' programming, designed to be controversy-free. The general effect of this could be to increase these rapidly growing divides. And in this scenario, audiences will be denied the full breadth of Australia's writing talent. Or, worse, if publishers feel like authors aren't going to be programmed for festivals or events, this might affect publishing decisions.

In another recent blow, Writers Victoria, which provides support and employment to writers, has been defunded by the State Government. Creative Victoria has provided emergency funding until the middle of the year, but unless other funding can be secured, Writers Victoria will close in July. For those who love and value books and writing, it is easy to feel hopeless, but there is something you can do: sign the petition to restore funding to Writers Victoria on the Parliament Victoria website.

The Readings Foundation grants 2026

with Angela Crocombe



The Readings Foundation has been supporting Victorian not-for-profit organisations since 2009 and in that time has distributed over \$2 million in grants. In 2026, we are delighted to fund 14 incredible

community and arts organisations with over \$315,000 in total for the projects detailed below.

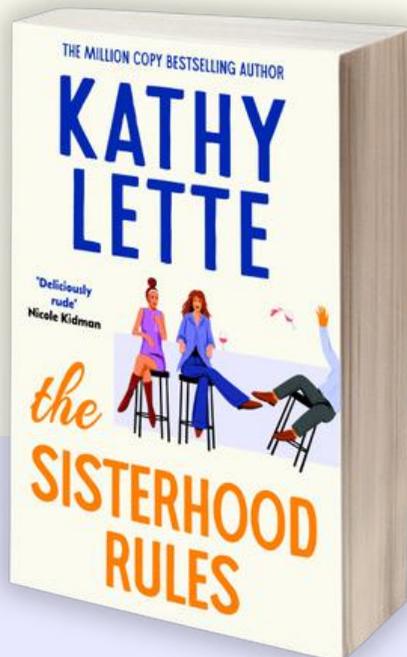
To learn more about each grant project and the foundation, scan the QR code or visit readings.com.au/news/the-readings-foundation-2026-grant-recipients 

Grant recipients

ASYLUM SEEKER RESOURCE CENTRE	MELBOURNE WRITERS FESTIVAL
School Education Coordinator \$25,000	Subsidising the Schools Program \$25,000
BANKSIA GARDENS COMMUNITY SERVICES	NEXT STEPS AUSTRALIA
Aiming High Program \$25,000	Libraries in domestic violence refuges \$25,000
BERRY STREET ORGANISATION	READING OUT OF POVERTY INC.
Library upgrade for disadvantaged youth \$25,000	Books from Birth project \$25,000
CAN COMMUNITY SUPPORT	RIVER NILE LEARNING CENTRE
Family Learning Program \$25,000	English Literacy Classes for Women \$25,000
HOTHAM MISSION	SUDD FOUNDATION
Homework Clubs Program \$20,000	Stories of Strength \$17,000
KIDS' OWN PUBLISHING	WELLSPRINGS FOR WOMEN
Co-creating a children's picture book \$16,657	Literacy circle holiday program for primary school students \$12,510
MELBOURNE CITY MISSION	WESTERN CHANCES
Reading nooks in youth refuges \$25,000	Scholarship Program \$25,000

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READ IT NOW



Victorian Premier's Literary Awards 2026 winners

Behind the scenes at the VPLAs with Readings head of marketing Rosalind McClintock.

Each year in the heat of February (sometimes March!), the Victorian book and writing industry comes together to celebrate the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs), the awards that were established in 1985 by the John Cain government to spotlight contemporary Australian literature. These awards are held close to the hearts of those in the book industry. This might be partly because it is the first event of the year and a chance to catch up after the summer break, but it is primarily because these awards have not only held true to the initial vision, but also built upon it. Amplifying Australian writing is something we are all passionate about.

Now, the VPLAs celebrate the breadth of published works across seven main categories, ranging from poetry to children's literature, and also recognise unpublished manuscripts, giving new Victorian voices an avenue to publication. The Unpublished Manuscript Award has brought to our attention some of the biggest names in contemporary Australian literature, including Jane Harper (*The Dry*, 2015), Maxine Beneba Clarke (*Foreign Soil*, 2013), and Miles Allinson, whose *Fever of Animals* won the award in 2014 and then, once published, went on to win the 2016 People's Choice Award.

The winners of the Fiction, Non-Fiction, Drama, Poetry, Indigenous Writing, Children's Literature and Writing for Young Adults categories each receive \$25,000, while the Unpublished Manuscript Award winner receives \$15,000 and a two-week writing residency. The overall winner of the night takes home \$100,000, making the VPLAs the most valuable literary award in the country.

This year, the Writing for Young Adults category has been renamed the John Marsden Prize for Writing for Young Adults, in recognition of John Marsden, who was the inaugural winner in 1988 for *So Much to Tell You* and passed away in 2024.

And while I can share the winners of each category with you below, The Wheeler Centre team, the stewards of the VPLAs, kept the name of the overall winner under wraps until the awards night – they didn't spill those beans after the NDAs were signed, or even after a few strong martinis!

So, it is with this sense of occasion and anticipation that I will walk into the ceremony at Federation Square the night before this issue of the *Readings Monthly* hits the shop floors and greet my fellow book industry colleagues, who will be none the wiser about the winners. The room will be full of good cheer, hugs and speculation as the crowd discusses their picks for the winners, catches up, and joins together en masse to celebrate all the things we love: good books, writing, publishing, authors, and the book community.

We will sit in the tiered rows, publisher next to bookseller, author next to agent, critic next to publicist, and so on – all with a smile and twinkle in our eye as we listen to the speeches, and stand to applaud and celebrate the following winners and the teams that got them there:

PRIZE FOR FICTION *Fierceland* by Omar Musa

'A glorious family saga, it stood out to the judges for its glittering prose and sweeping, ambitious form.'
—from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR NON-FICTION *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate: An encyclopaedia of a Palestinian family* by Micaela Sahhar

'*Find Me at the Jaffa Gate* is a gift, a remarkable debut memoir that is simultaneously a work of poetry in its lyricism and feeling [...]' —from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR POETRY *KONTRA* by Eunice Andrada

'At once tender and defiant, *KONTRA* is a testament to lyrical mastery.' —from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR DRAMA *Super* by Emilie Collyer

'Chewy and entertaining, the play's critique of a culture that venerates power and hero narratives will resonate with many today.' —from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR INDIGENOUS WRITING *The Rot* by Evelyn Araluen

'Araluen pushes contemporary Indigenous writing into new territory, blending lyric, critique and cultural memory with precision and risk.'
—from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE *Once I was a Giant* by Zeno Swords

'A profoundly moving picture book that invites us to sit with loss and gently imagine futures rooted in tenderness and return.' —from the judges' report

JOHN MARSDEN PRIZE FOR WRITING FOR YOUNG ADULTS *This Stays Between Us* by Margot McGovern

'*This Stays Between Us* is a taut, gripping horror novel, flawless in its execution.' —from the judges' report

PRIZE FOR AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT *The Kookaburra* by Charlotte Guest

'With prose as lyrical as it is assured, *The Kookaburra* is a moving and authentically drawn portrait of grief, care and growing old.' —from the judges' report

PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD *Discipline* by Randa Abdel-Fattah

There is, of course, no judges' report for this award, but the people have spoken!

To discover the overall winner, as announced on the night, check out our blog post at readings.com.au/news



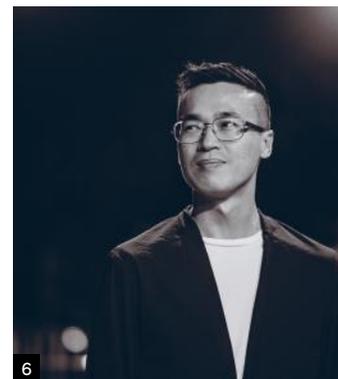
Clockwise(ish) from top left | *Discipline* by Randa Abdel-Fattah (UQP. PB. \$34.99), *KONTRA* by Eunice Andrada (Giramondo. PB. \$27), *The Rot* by Evelyn Araluen (UQP. PB. \$24.99), *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate* by Micaela Sahhar (NewSouth. PB. \$34.99), *Fierceland* by Omar Musa (Penguin. PB. \$34.99), *The Kookaburra* by Charlotte Guest, *Super* by Emilie Collyer (Currency & Red Stitch. PB. \$25.99), *This Stays Between Us* by Margot McGovern (Penguin. PB. \$19.99), *Once I was a Giant* by Zeno Swords (T&H. HB. \$29.99) **R**

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Alison Huber is the head book buyer

The most anticipated books of 2026

Readings' head book buyer Alison Huber shares her much-anticipated annual round-up of the books we can all look forward to in the year ahead!

It's March, and so I'm sure you've already read lots of pieces like the one I'm sitting down to try to write, our annual 'books to look forward to' exercise. My mind often wanders to existential places as I think about the year ahead, especially when returning to the desk after a very long break (very long for me, anyway) over this recent summer, and that feeling of starting all over again settles. It's a moment to reflect on the hits and misses of 2025, and wonder about what their equivalents will be in 2026, as well as broader questions that surround the work that we do in the cultural industries. I think one of the things that keeps the real book people I know coming back for more, in spite of everything, is a desperate need to learn about all the books we haven't met (let alone read) yet. We don't know what we don't know, but we are always and forever in a state of desperation to find out. Which books am I going to fall for this year? Some are obvious; others are yet to reveal themselves, hence the feeling that this exercise is important (though these pieces frequently don't stand the test of time; hindsight has a powerful revisionist urge).

As I'm writing, the results of *Guardian Australia's* poll of the nation's best Australian picture book (as voted by its readers) have just been revealed, with Alison Lester's 1990 glorious classic *Magic Beach* earning first place. I've loved reading all the articles that have accompanied *Guardian Australia's* coverage of their poll, from Alexis Wright's great piece about Dick Roughsey's *The Rainbow Serpent*, to Kate Temple's argument for the importance of supporting contemporary books and new writers in the face of nostalgia's pull, to Graeme Base's reflection on the publishing journey of *Animalia*, and the outgoing 2024–2025 Australian Children's Laureate Sally Rippin's reminder of the importance of reading aloud to children (even when they can read for themselves).

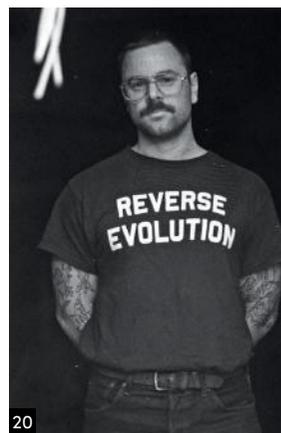
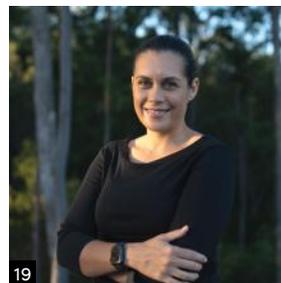
It was exciting to see so many words dedicated to books in a short time frame, and kids' books especially. The *Guardian* is the exception, but you will have noticed over the years that there are fewer and fewer spaces in our traditional media publications for serious engagement with literary culture, both here and abroad; our weekend newspapers used to be heaving with book reviews and features, but not so these days, and even just this morning I read in international news that the

famed books section of the *Washington Post* has been 'retired' amid a significant round of redundancies at the Bezos-owned publication. Of course, there is no direct connection between this mediascape reality and declining rates of reading and literacy, however when the culture at large engages less with the literary, books and the reading of them seem less essential. When (or as) that happens, it's hard not to imagine a slow-moving but ultimately devastating ripple effect across the cultural industries. I think all of us book people are working as much to stop that ripple effect as anything else, because we believe in how essential books and reading are to our wellbeing, both personal and cultural. In related positive news, the *Australia Reads* initiative, a book-industry-wide partnership that began in 2017 as 'Australian Reading Hour', has recently become a not-for-profit organisation, continuing its aim of promoting, supporting, and advocating for reading and Australian books and all the people and industries that coalesce around the act of reading. Bookshops are an essential part of this ecosystem, and the incoming new CEO of the independent Australian Booksellers Association, Susannah Bowen, is on the newly formed Board.

But I feel like I've delayed the inevitable for long enough with this chit-chat (I hear you, dear Ed.), so, what are the books that we can/will/should look forward to this year? I think the top pick for me and many readers will be Chloe Hooper's return to fiction with *Lady Spy* (November). While I hope to be able to exercise one of the greatest perks of this job and be an early reader of this book (hint, hint, HINT, Chloe), there are only bits of tantalising detail to relay at this point; the publisher tells us that Hooper, 'reinvets the Cold War espionage thriller, putting a spycatcher's aristocratic wife centre stage'. That is enough, thank you, I'm all in! Steve Toltz's first book in many years is *A Rising of the Lights* (April) and I'm already hearing great things from people who got their reading in ahead of me. I adored Fiona Kelly McGregor's *Iris* (2022), so am really looking forward to *The Trap* (also April) which again takes us deep into the seedy underbelly of Sydney, this time during the Second World War. Edwina Preston, the author of *Bad Art Mother*, a sleeper hit here at Readings, also has a new book out in April, *Sororicidal* (great title!), which I can

confidently say will be the best 'punk-gothic historical novel' you will read in 2026. Fiona Wright is known for her poetry, reviews, and essays, and also in April she has a debut novel out called *Kill Your Boomers*, the gist of which you might imagine when I tell you it's her literary response to the housing affordability crisis. Inga Simpson is synonymous with writing about nature, and her new collection of stories, *Once We Were Wildlife*, appears too, promising more of her trademark sensitivity and vision. April is also the month for *Frogsong* by Melissa Manning, who won the VPLA for Fiction for her story collection *Smokehouse* in 2022 (I'm reading *Frogsong* right now and it's very good, a heartbreaker). Michael Winkler surely wrote his own fairytale story back in 2022 when his debut book, *Grimmish*, made its very independent path all the way to the Miles Franklin shortlist, the first self-published book ever to achieve this feat. His second book is published by Text, and is called *Griefdog* (April, again).

Speaking of the Miles Franklin, last year's winner, Siang Lu (for *Ghost Cities*) has a new book in September called *Useless Tse*, promising to be his own unique take on the *Odyssey*, while 2021's winner Amanda Lohrey (for *The Labyrinth*) has a new book in May called *Capture*. Romy Ash came to attention with *Floundering* back in 2012, which was shortlisted for the Miles that year, and Ash's second novel is *Mantle* (May), a strong contribution to writing about climate, grief, and climate grief, set in Tasmania as a new pandemic involving humans and fungi unfolds. Yumna Kassab was also a shortlistee and has become a prolific writer, publishing five acclaimed works since 2019. Her sixth is *Goodbye, My Love* (May). There must be something about May this year, it seems, because it's the month we'll also see *Phantom Days*, the third book from one of our most inventive writers, Angela O'Keeffe (you may remember *The Sitter* from a few years ago, a firm staff favourite). This time, the narrative is told by a book, left on the back seat of a taxi. Also joining Club May is Ellena Savage, author of the acclaimed nonfiction work *Blueberries*, bringing us debut fiction with *The Ruiners*, as well as the debut novel from Wayne Marshall called *Henry Goes Bush* (you may remember him from his short story collection *Shirl*), Max Easton's third in a series of novels (*Now*, *Autonomy* which



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follows *The Magpie Wing* and *Paradise Estate*), and Chloe Wilson's debut novel, *The Thornbacks*.

Back during Covid, our then-managing director (and now chairman) Mark Rubbo had a great idea to draw attention to Melbourne-based authors during that difficult time with the Melbourne City Reads initiative, a collaboration between bookshops in the city. The first book we collectively chose to champion was Allee Richards' debut *Small Joys of Real Life*, which Mark compared favourably to *Monkey Grip*. Allee's third book is another coming-of-age story called *Tight Lines* (July). The same month, Laura McPhee-Browne (*Cherry Beach, Little Plum*) publishes *Worry Doll*. Maria Takolander is another poet publishing her debut novel this year, and I'm really drawn to the title *The End of Romance* (July), set in a future some considerable way down the path our climate crisis is beating. Jordan Prosser impressed with his near-future spec-fic debut, *Big Time*, which was shortlisted for several awards; his second novel, *Blue Giant*, will be published in August and is set in the present day, calling itself an 'unruly eulogy for millennial optimism'. Intriguing! Mirandi Riwoe is a past winner of the AHA's Historical Novel Award and her next book is a sprawling multi-generational novel called *A Short History of Longans*, also an August book. I don't think I'll ever forget reading the chilling last few chapters of Laura Elizabeth Woollett's *Beautiful Revolutionary* while I was on a plane (if you haven't read it, it's about Jonestown, and as we know, that story doesn't end well); she has a new book out in September called *Hell Days*. Our former colleague and Readings Friend for Life (there's no getting out of it now), Nina Kenwood, has a new adult novel called *People Skills* due in October.

I'm sort of running out of words to cover the nonfiction offerings in any meaningful way (and I'm well aware I'm lacking details of whole genres of writing in this roundup), but please believe me when I say you'll see books from Stan Grant, Bruce Pascoe, Catharine Lumby, Judith Lucy, Rosalie Ham, Alex Miller, Larissa Behrendt, Kate Holden, Kaz Cooke, Tom Griffiths, James Boyce, Margaret Simons, Kate Grenville, Amy McQuire – the list goes on! Chris Macheras harnessed our collective nostalgic interest in our city to great effect with *Old Vintage Melbourne*, and he has a third

collection coming out in October, this time highlighting our city's food culture. There are some great cookbooks on the horizon too, including from baking queens Natalie 'Beatrix Bakes' Paull and Emilia 'Always Cream the Butter and Sugar' Jackson, plus a very nice 30th anniversary edition of Stephanie Alexander's cookery bible, *The Cook's Companion*.

There are far too many international books to mention alongside this incredible array of local publishing, including but not limited to new books from Elizabeth Strout, Douglas Stuart, Mieko Kawakami, Colson Whitehead, Maggie O'Farrell, Han Kang, Ottessa Moshfegh, Marlon James, Emma Cline, Ann Patchett, Ben Lerner, Polly Barton (a debut novel!), Dave Eggers, Gwendoline Riley, Sebastian Barry, Solvej Balle (with books four and five of her seven-part opus), Patrick Gale, Elif Shafak, Sigrid Nunez, Willy Vlautin, Deborah Levy, Siri Hustvedt, David Sedaris, China Mieville, Lena Dunham, and a follow-up to one of the biggest selling cookbooks in Readings' history, *Simple Too* by Yotam Ottolenghi. But if you think that's all, you'd be wrong of course, because there are also all the new books that require zero minutes of anticipation because they are out this very month and are featured throughout this issue of *Readings Monthly*. Our reviewers have done such a stellar job telling you all about them, I won't try to test your patience and summarise their work (phew, I hear you all say!). That said, it would be remiss of me not to take a moment to congratulate our dear colleague Fiona Hardy, whose second book for adults featuring her most excellent PI protagonists Alice and Teddy, *Old Games*, is out this month. Fiona's first book, *Unbury the Dead* came out last year, so Fiona is now officially a 'book a year' author!

And finally, dear Reader, we're so proud of The Readings Prizes that we award to emerging writers each year: the Children's Prize, the Young Adult and Gab Williams Prizes (named for our much-missed late colleague and voted on by our next-gen tastemakers on the Teen Advisory Board), and the New Australian Fiction Prize. Every year since 2014, we've asked a small number of staff to read a large number of books, some years as many or more than 80 titles. Speaking from experience, it's a lot of reading in amongst the

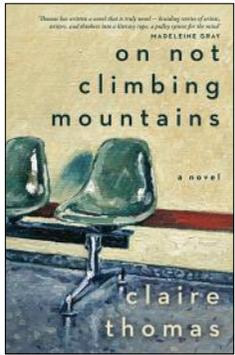
other reading you might be doing, but the commitment our judges show is astonishing, and the dedication to assembling the shortlists and the ultimate winner is always undertaken with the utmost sincerity by everyone involved. Judges have been known to be something approaching evangelical about the books they champion, with debates amongst judges becoming pretty serious at the pointy end of proceedings (though to my knowledge, no fallings-out have ever occurred: it's always in good humour!). With that in mind, and with many more people expressing interest in judging than there are places on the judging panels, we've been wondering how we can involve even more people in the process, how that evangelism might be harnessed amongst an even larger cohort of our staff. We all know the power of a recommendation (something booksellers refer to as handselling): what would happen if even more of our staff read, engaged deeply with, and (most importantly) handsold the novels that make our shortlists? Every single sale of an emerging novelist's book is hugely important, and at the risk of being too blunt about it: our new authors need more than moral support, they need you to buy the result of their life's literary work. The act of buying a book supports our literary culture; it nurtures our authors and enables them to write their next work; it gives us faith in a sustainable project of national storytelling, something that I wrote about in the 2025 version of this column, which I'm struggling to believe was a year ago now.

So, we've decided to shake up our prizes, and in 2026 our revamped approach will be tested with our New Australian Fiction Prize. We'll be assembling a longlist of eligible titles (first or second novels), and then asking our staff to vote for a shortlist of six titles from this list, and then vote on the ultimate winner. Crucially, any of our staff can be involved in judging this year, and we are setting no limit on how many judges there can be. So four might become 40 or 140 ... imagine that! The shortlist will be announced in September, followed by the winner in October. Then the Children's and Young Adult Prizes will follow in early 2027, and we'll also rename the Young Adult Prize the Gab Williams Prize: this is extra special because our staff will assemble the shortlist and the Teen Advisory Board will decide on the winner. **R**

Fiction

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Australian Fiction



On Not Climbing Mountains
Claire Thomas
Hachette. PB. \$32.99
Available now

R I know how large a call this is, but I am saying it aloud now: this is the year's best novel. Claire Thomas has created a perfect and ingenious story – I felt humbled with joy and anguish as I read each perfect line. The novel's concept is simple. A woman is grieving her father's death and travels to his home country, Switzerland, just for a month, to uncover his influences. She travels with a seeking mind and a copy of a guidebook from 1891. At each stop, she finds an art form: photos, paintings, novels, music or even numerology, and traces her connection from end to end. I cannot even comprehend the amount of research that has gone into this celebration of what makes us human. Yes, this is a novel about grief and legacy, but it is also an ode to understanding where we come from and how that affects us now.

Thomas writes about actors, musicians, writers, dreamers and artists, roads and pathways that lead her up mountains and into alleyways, through galleries and memories. Consider this novel the delicious epitome of the butterfly effect, where tiny changes in a complex system can lead to vast, beautiful or horrific outcomes. And then consider art in all its forms and the impact it has on your being. Thomas has connected these specks from all over the world and gifts them to you, whether you are reading on the tram, or by the pool, or when everyone in your home is asleep except you. *On Not Climbing Mountains* is a tonic for those seeking an answer to all we are experiencing in the world presently. It is a novel that gives hope.

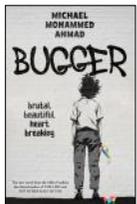
I recommend this unique novel to you with my entire being.

Chris Gordon is the community engagement and programming manager

Australian Fiction

Bugger

Michael Mohammed Ahmad
Hachette. PB. \$34.99
Available now



R We've been following the work of Michael Mohammed Ahmad since his debut, *The Tribe*, which was shortlisted for the inaugural Readings Prize for New Australian Writing in 2014. Since then, among many accolades, he has also been shortlisted twice for the Miles Franklin Award, and continues his work as the founding director of the Sweatshop Literacy Movement which has nurtured many of Australia's most interesting emerging talents. *Bugger* is Ahmad's fourth novel, and like all of his writing, this is a beautifully crafted, thoughtful, generous piece of work, but readers should know ahead of reading that this novel is about childhood sexual abuse.

Hamoodi tells the story, a 10-year-old whose daily life is ordinary enough, dodging bullies, pretending to fit in but sort of never able to, learning about the many (many) things he doesn't know or has got wrong along the way, imagining intricate games involving the heroic Power Rangers. He is loyal to his family and lives with his mother, but his father is absent, and his yearning for him is painfully apparent. Hamoodi is an unforgettable character, and Ahmad captures his embodied moment of childhood so perfectly, the precious and fleeting in-betweenness of being 10, before events change him forever. For the adult reader, there is a palpable sense of unease throughout the book, our worldliness picks up on the things that are not quite right in the scenarios Hamoodi describes. The reader's helplessness in the hands of

the writer and his characters is part of the experience of reading this novel.

Recommending this book is a task I take seriously, knowing that the terrain of its story is painfully present in many families, and so it's not a book that everyone can or will want to approach. But for those who, as I do, read to learn, to understand, I can't recommend this book more. Ahmad is an incredibly gifted writer. The form of this novel is outstanding, its lightness of touch belying the hardworking craft behind it, and Ahmad's respect and care for the reader's experience is clear on every page, along with his desire to create a moment of empathy that might be the seed that starts a conversation, opens eyes, changes lives. I'm very grateful to have read it.

Alison Huber is the head book buyer

The Afterlife of Harry Playford

Steven Carroll
Fourth Estate. PB. \$34.99
Available now



R We first encountered Detective Sergeant Stephen Minter as a minor character in Steven Carroll's *Goodnight, Vivienne, Goodnight*. In that novel, Minter was introduced as the antithesis of a DS in the 1940s – intelligent, well-read, and empathetic, he was the son of Austrian Jews who had escaped to England before the war; his parents were detained during the war as enemy aliens and tragically died while interned. Nobody seemed to care about their fate. Minter was a great character and Carroll liked him, too, and so gave him his own book in *Death of a Foreign Gentleman*. Now, he reappears in *The Afterlife of Harry Playford*.

When Minter sees a poster advertising an idyllic Australia and assisted passage, he and his partner Brigid take the plunge and emigrate. Arriving in Australia, they

both land jobs in the sleepy seaside town of Queenscliff, he as a detective sergeant and Brigid as an advisor to Australia's somewhat compromised intelligence services. Australia, or rather, Queenscliff, isn't quite the solution they'd thought it would be. It's a small, parochial town, closed and insular – and maybe the whole country is, too. Gazing out across the Rip, Brigid asks, 'What are we doing here?', but they are stuck for the time being. Brigid with her work and Minter due to the discovery on the beach of men's clothes – neatly folded, expensive, and with no identifying contents or marks. The next morning, the identity of the owner is revealed as Harry Playford, a senior minister in the federal government. Urbane, successful and popular, he's been touted as the man most likely to succeed Bob Menzies.

Minter is told not to worry; Playford is known for disappearing occasionally and will turn up. Yet as he digs deeper, another Playford comes to light, one different from his public persona, and Minter senses that something's not quite right about the obvious answer – Playford went for a swim, got into trouble, and drowned.

When Brigid, through her spy contacts, learns about some of Playford's sympathies and activities before the war, she (and, indirectly, Minter) is warned off and told to keep quiet. Slowly, Playford's secrets are revealed. Will they help Minter solve the mystery? We'll see. I've become a great fan of Stephen Minter, and I think you will too.

Mark Rubbo is the chairman of Readings

A Concise Compendium of Wonder

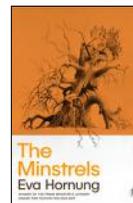
Ceridwen Dovey, Ursula Dubosarsky & Jennifer Mills
Pink Shorts. PB. \$32.99
Available now



Based on the Brothers Grimm's *Hansel & Gretel*, Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*, *A Concise Compendium of Wonder* is a radical collection of reimagined fairytales from award-winning Australian authors Ceridwen Dovey, Ursula Dubosarsky and Jennifer Mills. At the centre of each of these stories is an urgent question about humanity's relationship with nature. But there is also a tiny seed of hope. Destined to be a favourite for all generations.

The Minstrels

Eva Hornung
Text. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



R *The Minstrels* is the story of Gem and, to a lesser extent, her brother Will, who live on a farm that backs onto an area called The Minstrels. It's an area of stunning natural beauty that has a long and chequered past for the township and the people who have lived there across generations. As children, Gem and Will's love is all encompassing and slowly changes as family history and events play out. Ultimately, due to a combination of circumstances, Gem comes back to run the family farm and challenge the local community and government. Society is slowly disintegrating and she must make some fundamental decisions with a cast of lovable characters who come to depend on her.

Eva Hornung is best known for *Dog Boy*, for which she won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction in 2010. *The Minstrels* is powerful and rich in scope and content – a unique story but in the style of *Juice* by Tim Winton or *The Thinning* by Inga Simpson, in that they share an apocalyptic environmental message. This was a surprise and real joy to read because at their heart these books, for me, have such a dark, foreboding feeling, but this novel had such a tender beauty in so many moments, that even with the devastation that overshadows the story, the overriding feeling was joy, particularly at the relationships Gem fosters and cultivates on the farm in the second half of the novel, and throughout at all the smaller details.

At its core, *The Minstrels* is a story of connection and the love of friends, family and the land. It is not without its tragedies, but ultimately it gives a beautiful insight into found families and kindness, especially the love Gem showed others and reaped in return.

Melanie Barton is from Readings Carlton

Soft Serve

George Kemp
UQP. PB. \$29.99
Available now



R How do you carry on when loss and grief are continually happening to you and around you? Australian playwright and actor George Kemp confronts this question head-on in his sensitive, heartfelt debut novel, *Soft Serve*. He brings to life an ensemble of rich, emotional characters who are navigating life in a small, regional town and whose stories are set against the backdrop of raging bushfires. Stuck in the local Maccas, a group of friends – Fern, Ethan and Jacob – are thrown into a complicated love triangle, even as they mourn their dead friend, Taz.

Grief moves through the characters like an active, invisible entity, possessing them all differently. They all yearn for something permanent and tangible, something to hold on to. Amid this turmoil, Kemp captures queer longing perfectly – in this tale, it's achingly, painfully earnest. He also just lets life happen to his characters; he lets the consequences of their choices be what they are and doesn't offer up easy solutions or entirely hopeful endings.

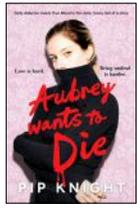
I'm drawn to Australian fiction like this – fiction that allows the poetry in the ordinary and everyday to act as it does; to thrive on its own rather than perform. I appreciate that Kemp doesn't opt for easy generalisations about small-town Aussie upbringings or residents. His desire for specificity stands out in myriad ways, but perhaps most distinctly in how he represents and describes mothers. There's a certain reverence that comes across, showing them as strong anchors during crises – for their own children and everyone else's. Pat and Angie are versions of mothers who are familiar, fully realised and multifaceted.

Soft Serve is a hearty gut-punch of a coming-of-age story with an overarching sense that people are bigger than the small towns in which they grew up. As I spent time with these characters, I couldn't help but love and feel for them.

Ocean Trimboli is from Readings Emporium

Aubrey Wants to Die
Pip Knight

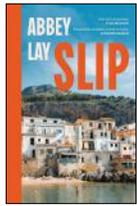
HarperCollins. PB. \$34.99
Available now



Aubrey is a young, beautiful vampire. All she wants is to be human again, or to die. But she can't. She's tried every method twice. Her world changes when she meets Jonathan, her soulmate. When he suddenly breaks up with her, she'll do anything to get him back. But then her long-gone sire returns, and she's thrown into a world that has her questioning everything she knows to be true.

Slip
Abbey Lay

Penguin. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



R When Grace books a six-week research trip to Sicily, she expects to spend her time focusing on Italian dialects while waiting for her long-term partner, Jack, to join her. Instead, renting a room in Nico's apartment leads her down an unexpected path as their friendship slowly deepens into something more intimate just as Jack's arrival approaches.

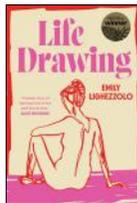
Through Nico, Grace is immersed in the local life, and falls more in love with her new, brief lifestyle and the possibilities that could blossom from it. The longing that grows quietly between them is more raw and palpable than anything she feels for Jack, and so I was extremely surprised when this did not turn out to be the type of book I was expecting. This setup initially seems familiar – a woman in an unfulfilling relationship swept up in a romantic holiday fantasy – but Abbey Lay subverts expectations. *Slip* feels strikingly authentic, like a genuine human experience rather than an escapist fantasy. It is intoxicating in its sensory detail of Italian food, scenery, language, and culture. It is humorously realistic about Grace's distractions from studying, instead indulging in *dolce far niente* as she cooks at home, swims at the beach, explores restaurants, galleries and nearby islands. But it is simultaneously bittersweet and sobering in how realistically the events do turn out, drawing a line between the fantasies that are perhaps too bold or scary for us to make real, and the reality that is safe and comfortable.

Slip is a love letter to the tourist experience of slipping into a new, exciting adventure before returning to the mundanities of life back home. But, more poignantly, it is a love letter to what could have been – the haunting 'what if' that plagues you, the imagining of a different future in a different place, or with a different person.

Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids

Life Drawing
Emily Lighezzolo

UQP. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



R Charlie is an art student at uni in Brisbane, far away from his complicated family, crashing on his long-suffering cousin's couch, just waiting for his new life to begin. Maisie is part-through an over-extended arts

degree, looking for validation while simultaneously pushing away anyone who wants to get too close. She's sick of being viewed as an object, but she wants to feel loved – not just for her mind, her humour, and her heart, but for her body, her beauty and her strength.

The two meet in three stages, at different times in their lives, and we see them through periods of growth and regression, good choices and bad, freedom and foolishness. Through lifelike portrayals of uni sharehouse politics, the parties, the self-discovery, the misunderstandings, miscommunications and youthful cruelties, Emily Lighezzolo introduces us to a cast of characters who we will see through to their mid-30s, as they navigate the cruel concept of 'wasted potential', and the even crueller concept of 'wasted time'. One particularly lovingly portrayed character is Maisie's mum, a creative spirit and force of nature. This complex and challenging relationship is underscored by the shift in priorities for feminists of different generations, as Maisie chooses between freedom and stability, self-reliance and support. *Life Drawing* celebrates the vulnerability and freedom of young love, while reckoning with the reality that those things alone cannot sustain a connection forever. The foibles that are present in our younger, unvarnished selves do not simply disappear as we age if they're not acknowledged and dealt with – as Charlie and Maisie learn when they reconnect as adults, and navigate the challenges of choice, loss, honesty, heartbreak and what it means to be a family – chosen or otherwise.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

Bird Deity
John Morrissey

Text. PB. \$34.99
Available now



R Disconnected. Dissociated. Disembodied. A gripping new entry into Australian speculative fiction, John Morrissey's *Bird Deity* steers a bleak and meditative course through an unsettling narrative, without ever losing its grip on the reader.

David, a surveyor about to finish his five-year posting on an alien planet, is contracted by Sarah, an outsider, for 'one last job'. Apathetic, he accepts mostly to protect Sarah, whose task will lead her to certain death without his guidance. She seeks answers regarding the strange, mindless simians that populate the planet, and is baffled to discover that though David has been journeying into the lands of these apes for half a decade, he knows almost nothing about the species or the ancient technology they worship.

What follows is a haunting sway from scene to scene. We follow the two as they journey out onto the plains, Sarah eager to encounter the alien apes, while David slowly descends into madness and detachment. In the opening section of the book, one might wonder at the apparent absence of cosmic horror; once you follow David and Sarah onto the plateau, it is omnipresent. Narration that appeared calm becomes unnerving as we are immersed in the mind of someone hostile to curiosity, hope, and other life. Hanging over everything, unseen and yet inescapable, is a pale, winged shadow.

Morrissey has expertly crafted an entrancing atmosphere filled with ancient mysteries, the remnants of a devolved civilisation, and a palpable sense of psychological turmoil. Avoiding cliches of both sci-fi and horror, *Bird Deity* is a step in a new direction, showing us the potential of contemporary Australian speculative fiction – suited for our times and yet wholly unique.

Harvey Weir is from Readings Doncaster

The Last Poem
Courtney Peppernell

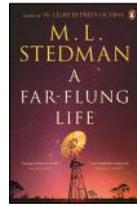
Atria. PB. \$34.99
Available now



Wren is living her dream and about to marry the love of her life. But all that changes when her fiancée dies in a car crash that paralyses a young bystander. To escape the media frenzy in New York, Wren winds up in a small town in Colorado. Here she joins a grief support group at the local library and slowly builds community with the other members, each with their own story to tell. Finally, she can breathe and possibly love again. But can Wren leave her old life behind or will old truths unravel everything?

A Far-Flung Life
M.L. Stedman

Penguin. PB. \$35
Available 3 March



R We all fell in love with M.L. Stedman's writing when we read her novel *The Light Between Oceans*. We loved the epic nature of her storytelling; the way she could make voices be heard within a changing and isolated landscape. We rejoiced in a love story that broke our hearts and confused our moral ground. We can celebrate again now because Stedman's latest novel gifts us another story of a family that is broken, yet, somehow, steadfast and compassionate.

This Western Australian story centres on the MacBride family, the owners of Meredith Downs, an enormous sheep station that covers a million acres. We meet the MacBride males first, on a deserted road after a terrible accident; the consequences of this tragedy become the story. The surviving sons of the accident must go on, but how do they manage legacies that are not their own? How do you honour a father's hope? What choices can they make about their own life without affecting anyone else's? Where can true love fit in? These questions are raised in this grand story that sweeps across the deserts, and which reverberates with family obligations and national identity. The characters will become like family as the novel works its magic on you and personal resolves are set.

Readers who want a quintessentially Australian novel filled with Australians' humour and tenacity – here it is. Readers who are after a love story or a story of good people winning – here it is. Readers wanting to escape an urban setting can do so here. Interestingly, the author wrote this novel from London, although she did grow up in WA. While I was reading it, I could imagine the sunsets, and the hope of this farming family. *A Far-Flung Life* is a visceral read of dust and longing, of change and commitment and of a family

that continues to work together despite grief and ambition.

Chris Gordon is the community engagement and programming manager

Iluka
Cassie Stroud

HQ Fiction. PB. \$32.99
Available now



After their grandfather's death, siblings Helen, Sylvie and Brendan, and Helen's daughter, are gathered at Iluka, the beach house where their grandparents raised them after their troubled mother ran away. As they clear the house for sale, they find a bundle of letters written to each of them from their mother, sent long after they'd been told she died. Shocked, the siblings begin to question all they've been told. Why were the letters hidden, was their grandfather complicit and could their lost mother still be alive?

Side Character Energy

Olivia Tolich
Text. PB. \$34.99
Available now



After a series of Mr Wrongs, Bee has finally found her Mr Right. Attractive and mature William is perfect. Her best friend Gertrude – flatmate, workmate, supporter – is happy for Bee but realises her life is determined by what Bee wants, thinks and feels. Panicked that she's not the main character in her own life, she turns to Arthur, William's best friend for help. As Arthur helps Gertrude discover who she is beyond Bee, hard questions arise – about her life, her choices and above all, her friendship with Bee.

In a Common Hour
Sita Walker

Ultimo. PB. \$34.99
Available now

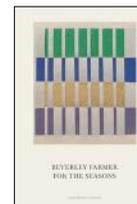


Sometimes the most important lessons are learnt at lunchtime. Parks State High is a melting pot of misfits. There is Oliver Fish, the teen philosopher hiding a secret relationship; Dev Patel, hopelessly in love with the brilliant Maryam Fadel; and a staffroom thick with gossip, camaraderie and burnt-out teachers. At the centre of it all is well-loved teacher Paul Bush. But when a disgruntled student makes a devastating move – one lunchtime is all it takes for Bushie's life to change forever.

Australian Poetry

For the Seasons: Haikus
Beverly Farmer

Giramondo. PB. \$27
Available now



Rediscovered after her death in 2018, Beverly Farmer's *For the Seasons: Haikus* has been published in full for the first time. The haikus, arranged in seasons, beginning with Spring,

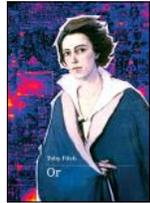
are drawn from Farmer's immersion in the coastal landscape around Point Lonsdale on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria. The haikus' constraints encourage details and textures of light and colour, of air, sand and sea, and foster an awareness of the transient life they hold, its beauty, vitality and decay. Farmer's poetry is remarkable – modest, self-effacing, and yet revelatory in its intensity.

Or: An Autobiography

Toby Fitch

Upswell. PB. \$24.99

Available 3 March



Or: An Autobiography explores fluidities of self, body and imagination. Its central book-length fantasia 'The Or Tree' is a speculative version of the fictional poem, 'The Oak Tree', which was written

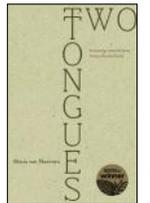
by Virginia Woolf's character Orlando. 'The Oak Tree' takes Orlando over 300 years to write, in which time they live through multiple eras, burn their poetic oeuvre, have various affairs, and change gender from man to woman. 'The Or Tree' is an assemblage poem, resurrected chronologically from fragments of the six chapters of a burnt copy of *Orlando: A Biography*.

Two Tongues

Maria van Neerven

UQP. PB. \$24.99

Available now



Written with a tender love for her Yugambah language, Maria van Neerven reflects on the legacy of colonisation and racism, and the aftermath of intergenerational harm. At the same time, she

shines a light on the importance of family and culture, celebrating the Indigenous women who guided and taught her – extraordinary women filled with resilience and strength. In this way, van Neerven reclaims the stories of her ancestors, giving a voice to those who weren't allowed one in the past.

International Fiction

Departure(s)

Julian Barnes

Jonathan Cape. HB. \$34.99

Available now



R Julian Barnes has been writing for more than four decades, and throughout that time he has played in various ways with form and narrative. *Departure(s)*, his latest – and final! – novel continues this impulse. Divided into five sections, it is a fiction/nonfiction hybrid in which the narrator, Julian Barnes – there's no attempt at complicating his identity – reflects on life as an ageing man with cancer. He also meditates on the relationship between two friends, who become a couple as students at Oxford and, after a long absence, reconnect decades later, exploring their complicated love story and conflicting

personalities in two very different eras of their lives.

Barnes uses this relationship to think about love and romance in our 'post-tragic' times, and the fact that age and experience don't necessarily lead to wisdom: we may learn from our mistakes, but often that just means failing differently. He interrogates the writer's uneasy position when turning real people into characters, and fiction's inherent contradictions – its way of achieving artistic truth while also misleading, getting things wrong, or leaving important things out. At one point, a friend says to Barnes, exasperated: 'Oh stop saying wise things that aren't true.'

Where *Departure(s)* came most alive for me was when Barnes turned his attention fully to himself, ruminating on memory, consciousness, time and death. Memory, in particular, has long been one of his obsessions, and in this novel it is pursued with full force. Deeply irreligious, he puts his life in perspective again and again by returning to the impersonal nature of existence – 'it's just the universe doing its stuff' – an idea whose pathos quietly intensifies as the novel progresses.

My greatest pleasure in reading *Departure(s)* was simply being with Barnes as he thinks on the page: wry, elegant, pragmatic and self-aware. He is a warm and generous writer, and he made me feel as though I were in the room with him, pondering life's biggest questions together. I rarely cry when reading, but by the end Barnes had me tearing up. This book will be treasured by his longtime readers, and for those new to him, it's an excellent place to start.

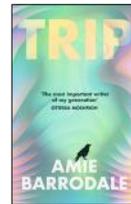
Baz Ozturk is from Readings Emporium

Trip

Amie Barrodale

Jonathan Cape. PB. \$34.99

Available now



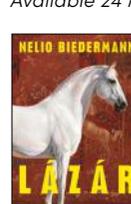
Sandra dies unexpectedly at a conference in Nepal. Across the world, her teenage son, Trip, has run away from a centre for troubled youth. But Sandra soon discovers that a mother's work doesn't end when you're dead. From limbo she can keep an eye on him. When Trip is picked up on the side of the road by a strange man, Sandra is the only one who knows where he is. As Trip ventures further south towards the coast and directly into the eye of a hurricane, Sandra's struggle to save him from the other realm begins.

Lázár

Nelio Biedermann & Jamie Bulloch (trans.)

MacLehose. PB. \$34.99

Available 24 March



At the turn of the 20th century the Lázárs, a noble Hungarian family, welcome a baby boy in their rural summer estate surrounded by a menacing, enchanted forest. Lajos has translucent skin and light-blue eyes, looking nothing like the rest of his family. His birth unsettles them, including his uncle who has visions of a catastrophe, and is emblematic of the many secrets, affairs, and peculiar otherworldly happenings that plague the Lázárs. As decades go by, through war, revolution and tragedy, extraordinary love and hope also shine through.

Yñiga

Glenn Diaz

Pink Shorts. PB. \$32.99

Available now



Yñiga Calinauan's quiet existence in Manila is upended when a biographer starts asking questions about her activist father who disappeared years earlier. Soon after, a former army general is arrested across the road from her home, and her neighbourhood is burnt to the ground. With nowhere to go, Yñiga returns to the small fishing town of her childhood. But the boundaries between her various lives are beginning to crumble. A complex portrait of a woman and a country haunted by a 'forest of history'.

Vilhelm's Room

Tove Ditlevsen, Sophia Hersi Smith & Jennifer Russell (trans.)

Penguin. PB. \$26.99

Available now



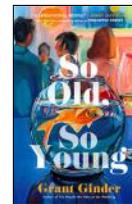
The ripples from a breakup radiate outward from the room where a married couple once loved each other, and a bizarre Lonely Hearts advert sets off a train of tragicomic events that lead to an inevitable conclusion. Tove Ditlevsen's unforgettable final novel – published a year before her suicide in 1976 – is a masterful conclusion to a great work of writing: a blackly funny and devastating tour-de-force that pulses with life even as it journeys towards death.

So Old, So Young

Grant Ginder

Gallery/Scout Press. PB. \$34.99

Available now



For Marco and Mia, Sasha and Theo, Richie and Adam, the one constant in life after college together has been change. New jobs. New cities. New spouses. New children. Through it all, one thing they thought would always stay the same is their friendship. But time has a way of breaking even the strongest bonds, and testing what we thought we knew. A generation-defining novel that is part love story, part tragic comedy, exploring the ways we run from and cling to our friends in love, life, and death.

Brawler

Lauren Groff

Hutchinson Heinemann. PB. \$34.99

Available 10 March



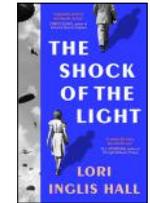
Ranging from the 1950s to the present day and moving across age, class, and region the nine stories in *Brawler* reflect and expand upon a single shared theme: the ceaseless battle between the dark and light in all of us. Precise, surprising and provocative, anchored by profound insight into human nature, the book reveals the repeated fracture points between love and fear, compassion and violence, reason and instinct, altruism and survival. A stunning achievement from one of today's very best short story writers.

The Shock of the Light

Lori Inglis Hall

Borough Press. PB. \$34.99

Available now



Cambridge, 1942. Twins Tessa and Theo had always shared everything, but Tessa hasn't been the same since the summer spent studying in France. Before Theo can discover why, he is recruited by the RAF. Determined to carve her own path, Tessa joins the Special Operations Executive, slipping into the shadows of occupied France. It is dangerous work, but France is the home of her greatest love – and her darkest secret. Tessa has reasons for wanting to return. Two years later, only one of them comes home.

they

Helle Helle & Martin Aitken (trans.)

Giramondo. PB. \$29.95

Available now



A mother and her 16-year-old daughter live in an apartment above a hairdresser's shop in a small island town. Each day is marked by routine and quiet intimacy. They are so enmeshed it can be

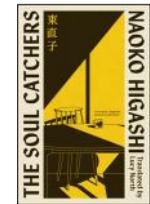
hard to tell them apart. Then the mother begins to feel unwell. They carry on with their lives, avoiding talk of the diagnosis. The mother goes in and out of hospital, and the daughter, just starting high school, makes new friends but remains alone. Illness, and the possibility of loss, cast a growing shadow over her life.

The Soul Catchers

Naoko Higashi & Lucy North (trans.)

Doubleday. HB. \$34.99

Available 24 March



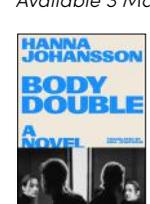
What if you could come back after death to watch over your loved one, installing yourself in a treasured mug, or perhaps your mother's hearing aid, a diary, or feel the clambering limbs of a beloved younger sister? Eleven recently-deceased protagonists find themselves floating in the afterlife where a nameless ghost offers them a joyous reunion with their loved ones. But not as you would expect. This charming, feel-good Japanese classic is an original exploration of our eternal reluctance to let go.

Body Double

Hanna Johansson & Kira Josefsson (trans.)

Scribe. PB. \$29.99

Available 3 March



R Emerging from the fog of an endless Nordic winter comes *Body Double* by Hanna Johansson, a surreal, intimate portrait of women, and the women they observe to, and beyond, the point of obsession.

In interlocking chapters, we meet three women: the transcriber, Laura and Naomi. The latter are two strangers brought together by the whims of chance and one mundane factor: their generic choice of coat. What begins as an awkward encounter becomes so much more – a different way to live in their own city, drawn closer together and pushed

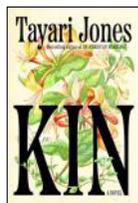
further apart like anxious magnets until they inevitably crash into an immediate intimacy that quickly devolves into something entirely different.

In the background to this eerie romance there is our unnamed transcriber, who acts as a conduit between her client – the ghostwriter – and his clients: wealthy women hiring a boutique biographer to tell their ‘Story of a Life’. These strangers’ stories wash through and over the transcriber, piquing her curiosity on occasion, more often blurring together. These vignettes rely on Johansson’s masterful abilities as a short-story writer, painting richly detailed miniature portraits of characters whose capacity for introspection is limited – a side effect of broadly comfortable lives. Until, suddenly, a tape whispers an eerie message just for her.

In some ways, *Body Double* is about how invisible many women feel, but it’s also about the danger of being over-observed – how being seen changes you and how it can so easily make you disappear. It’s also about how the choices of self-presentation and style affect not only how others see and perceive us, but how we see and perceive ourselves. This lush, introspective and slightly surreal novel would make for great book club discussions, especially for fans of *The Coin* and *On the Calculation of Volume*.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

Kin
Tayari Jones
Penguin. PB. \$34.99
Available now



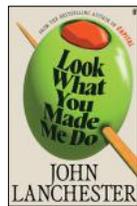
R A fantastic and much-anticipated new novel from Tayari Jones, best known for writing *An American Marriage*. *Kin* is the story of Vernice and Annie, who were born in Louisiana at similar times and have been neighbours and best friends since the moment they could interact. They call each other ‘cradle mates’. Both girls are motherless, leaving a deep hole on their lives and an obsession that shadows them both, as they constantly seek mother figures. As they reach adulthood, they follow different paths and their lives are broken apart, but they are always writing letters to each other throughout their separations.

The chapters jump back and forth from Vernice to Annie in beautiful symmetry. Due to their circumstances, they leave each other and their hometown for different reasons and on distinct journeys. Vernice leaves to pursue studies and finds a life of expectation and privilege. Annie leaves to find the mother who abandoned her and discovers a wilder life of adventure and heartbreak. They are pulled back together along the way through heartwarming and devastating milestones with some powerful conclusions.

This novel is a wonderfully emotive and smart story of chosen family, friendships, motherhood and expectation. Spanning decades, large in scope, and set with the Deep South as the backdrop, *Kin* has a lot to say about what makes real kinship in today’s society. It is equal parts heartbreaking and beautiful – a deep exploration of belonging, identity and friendship.

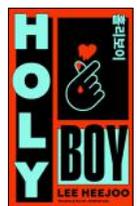
Melanie Barton is from Readings Carlton

Look What You Made Me Do
John Lanchester
Faber. PB. \$34.99
Available 17 March



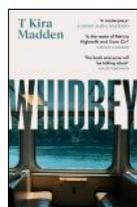
Have you seen Cheating? Do you think it's as good as everyone says? What do you make of the younger girlfriend? Do you think you're supposed to hate the wife? And are you supposed to like the husband? Is there a single person in it you don't hate – or is that sort of the point? Imagine the most intimate parts of your marriage stolen and turned into the subject of the year's hottest TV sensation. How would you take it? Turn the other cheek? Or play the revenge game? Surely, you wouldn't go as far as this?

Holy Boy
Lee Heejoo & Joheun Lee (trans.)
Picador. PB. \$29.99
Available now



Yosep is a beautiful and seemingly perfect K-pop idol who inspires religious mania among his millions of fans. Sacred, angelic: a Holy Boy. His devoted followers come to find companionship in their shared obsession. Adoring fans Mihee, Nami, Heeae and Ahnna, each wish to possess, and save and protect Yosep from the shackles of fame. Together, they might be able to achieve it. As their fixation spirals, secrets come to light and shocking acts are committed. How far will they go to claim what they desire?

Whidbey
T. Kira Madden
Tinder. PB. \$34.99
Available 10 March

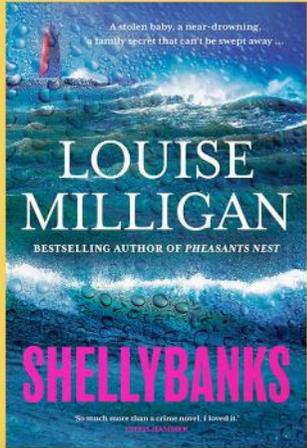


R On a ferry to Whidbey Island, Birdie Chang confides in a stranger about the sexual abuse she suffered as a child and the ongoing harassment she receives from her abuser, Calvin, who has been released from prison. When the stranger offers to murder the man for her, no strings attached, she agrees and gives him the name. His death reverberates through the lives of three women: Birdie; Mary-Beth, Calvin’s mother; and Linzie, a former reality-television star whose bestselling memoir recounts her own experience of sexual assault – along with Birdie’s, without her knowledge or consent – by the same man.

These women grapple with violence, loss, and exposure in very different ways. Birdie exists in a suspended state, trapped in the past, replaying memories of life before fear and paranoia shaped her every thought. Linzie, by contrast, seeks constant validation – from her father, her agent, and the public – using visibility as a means of survival, even when it comes at the expense of others. Mary-Beth retreats into denial, refusing to accept the harm her son has inflicted.

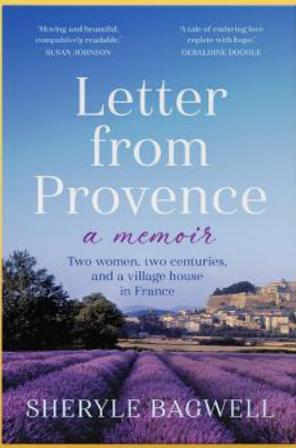
What makes *Whidbey* such an uncomfortable read is how trauma is never presented in clear or morally simple terms. Linzie is difficult to sympathise with as her self-absorption and exploitation of Birdie’s story complicate expectations of how a ‘good’ victim should behave. Yet her life is also one of fragility and instability in her struggle

A NOVEL OF BURIED SECRETS, UNIMAGINABLE RESILIENCE AND HOW THE LOVE OF FAMILY CAN PULL YOU THROUGH TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE FROM LOUISE MILLIGAN, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF PHEASANTS NEST.



‘So much more than a crime novel. I loved it.’
CHRIS HAMMER,
author of *Legacy*

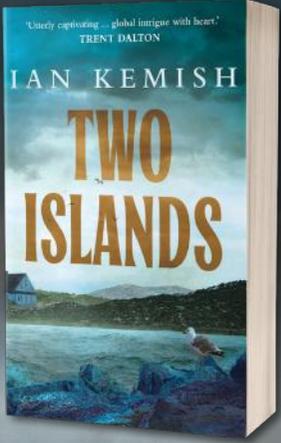
AUSTRALIAN JOURNALIST SHERYLE BAGWELL'S MOVE TO PROVENCE IS ENLIVENED BY THE DISCOVERY OF A BOOK OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LETTERS.



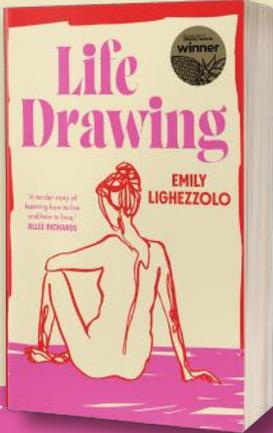
‘Moving and beautiful, compulsively readable.’
SUSAN JOHNSON,
author of *Aphrodite's Breath*

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‘Utterly captivating ... global intrigue with heart.’
TRENT DALTON



LITERARY PAGE-TURNERS



‘I loved this smart, compassionate and sexy story about the irresistible forces that bring people together and tear them apart.’

TONI JORDAN

UQP

HOOKED
ASAKO YUZUKI
BUTTER

The unmissable new novel of friendship and dangerous obsession from Asako Yuzuki, the award-winning author of the global bestselling sensation *Butter*.

BACK ON MY FEET
OLIVIA ONG

The inspirational story of how a rehabilitation doctor overcame her devastating spinal injury with faith and determination, and changed her life and practice as a result.

THE CURSED ROAD
LAURA McCLUSKEY

There are more secrets to this road than just its history ... The hauntingly atmospheric and gripping new novel from the bestselling author of *The Wolf Tree*.

21 DAYS TO A LESS ANXIOUS YOU
ANNA FERGUSON

A toolkit for harnessing the vagus nerve, somatic healing and the power of your own body to soothe you physically and mentally.

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to assemble a 'normal' life after trauma. Mary-Beth's perspective is perhaps the most confronting, as her complicity in and denial of her child's actions remain stagnant, even as more stories of assault are uncovered.

While the beginning of the novel is reminiscent of a Patricia Highsmith whodunnit, *Whidbey* is ultimately a nuanced character study that explores trauma and survival, and challenges readers to consider how society judges, ranks, and responds to different victims of violence.

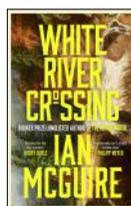
Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids

White River Crossing

Ian McGuire

Scribner. PB. \$34.99

Available now



R Ian McGuire writes novels set in historical times, not historical novels about regicide, or being Joan of Arc's best friend. They concern men (and it's always men) struggling in harsh and challenging environments.

This is the third novel I have read by McGuire and the most accomplished. The first was *The Abstainer*, a beautifully bloody book about a Civil War sniper brought into England to assassinate the mayor of Manchester, who had scheduled a public hanging of captured rebels from the local Fenian Society. This was followed by the hugely impressive *The North Water*, which follows a whaling ship, with one of the characters on the boat, Drax, one of the most appalling characters ever committed to the page. The book was also turned into a stunning miniseries on the BBC with Colin Farrell and, because it is a British series, Stephen Graham.

McGuire's latest novel, *White River Crossing*, begins in Canada in 1766 and follows an expedition to find gold in the great white north, beyond where most of the traders and trappers had ever gone before. With echoes of disparate influences such as Jack London and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, McGuire explores the way the lure of gold drives men mad and the awful decisions they make in its pursuit. McGuire weaves the story with brutal characterisation and careful delineation, bringing to life the three groups involved.

Balancing all of these characters along a tightrope between anachronism and modern-day sensibilities is a dazzling feat and it was an enormous pleasure to read this in one sitting.

Pierre Sutcliffe is from Readings St Kilda

Almost Life

Kiran Millwood Hargrave

Picador. PB. \$34.99

Available 17 March



R First loves are rarely, if ever, our only loves. But whether romantic, platonic or something indefinable between and beyond, they are the root from which our futures fruit: a fixed part of everything that comes after. For Erica and Laure, the lovers at the heart of Kiran Millwood Hargrave's latest novel, *Almost Life*, this bedrock is more than an echo, stronger than a distant memory, and far more profound than the simple holiday fling they wish it could be.

It's a blistering summer day in 1978 when cynical Parisian graduate student Laure is approached by Erica, a naïve English tourist looking for purpose on the steps of Sacré-Cœur. In a moment of weakness, Laure takes Erica under her wing and introduces her to the Paris she knows: fringe, queer, and real. Undeterred by Paris and Laure's equally sharp edges, Erica falls in love – but not enough to stay. Over the next four decades this decision ricochets through both their lives, shaping not just themselves but the loves that follow as they grapple with the impossibility of holding onto something precious without leaving marks.

With the measured hand she applies to the breadth of Laure and Erica's story, it's clear to see why Millwood Hargrave is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. *Almost Life* is an exercise in patience; while our lovers fall quickly, this is a novel that keeps us tethered to their journeys long after the initial euphoria has burned out. With this, time becomes as much of a character as Erica and Laure, bending and warping around them until, like spun sugar finally setting, it snaps into devastating focus. Across years, cities, spouses, jobs, births and deaths, *Almost Life* is unflinching as it traces the lives that must be lived – as well as those un-lived, faint as a carbon-paper copy lying underneath.

Gene Pinter is from Readings Chadstone

The Winter Warriors

Olivier Norek & Nick Caistor (trans.)

Scribe. PB. \$35

Available now



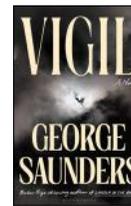
In November 1939, the Soviet Union invades its tiny, relatively defenceless neighbour Finland. So begins what is known as the Winter War. A small makeshift company of soldiers, workers, and farmers must face off against columns of tanks and Stalin's Red Army fighters. Based on the true story of the heroic Finnish infantry division who not only resisted but also forced the superpower to offer terms for peace.

Vigil

George Saunders

Bloomsbury. PB. \$32.99

Available now



R An oil executive lies on his deathbed, barely conscious in his palatial home. Despite the cancer ravaging his body, he has no regrets. He has no need for comfort in this final hour, and certainly doesn't need to be admonished for his choices: he made a good life for himself and that's that. And yet, the dead still come, lost souls convinced that there is some closure to be found here at the end of this man's life. Chief among them is Jill 'Doll' Blaine – once dead, now driven to comfort the dying – and alongside a strange cadre of fellow spirits, she dredges through his life, trying to understand this man so full of insecurity and impotent rage. In turn, he challenges her, refusing her help and undermining her lofty moral detachment until she herself cannot help but change.

Vigil is a challenging fever dream of a novel that initially left me confounded. Behind its beautiful prose and boundless imagination, I expected some statement, some definitive take from George

WISE
Playful
ELECTRIC

VIGIL
A Novel
GEORGE SAUNDERS

Booker Prize-winning author of *LINCOLN IN THE BARD*

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It's time for a *reckoning*

BLOOMSBURY

Saunders about the climate crisis that I could latch onto, but it never really comes. It was only after reading the titular essay from his collection *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* that I see the point of this denial, Saunders replicating the same refusal to let a reader go on 'autopilot' that he so cherishes in Chekhov's stories. There is no simple answer here, no settling into a judgement that vindicates one character or another. Indeed, all there is to see are those characters, each as complex and contradictory as all people are, each brimming with conviction yet nonetheless still malleable. Unlike his ghostly protagonist, Saunders is more concerned with bringing questions than offering comfort and, as he himself espouses, there is something laudable in that: a writer confident enough to remain unsure.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

Ruins, Child
Giada Scodellaro

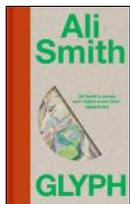
Giramondo. PB. \$32.95
Available 1 March



Set in what may be the future, and centred on six women sharing a space in some sort of crumbling apartment tower, *Ruins, Child* is remarkable for its irresistible sweep, wit, and prickly splintered truth. Giada Scodellaro's debut novel seems to be drawn from deep wells of Black American reality, and it uses the lens of urban infrastructure, social commentary, folklore, choreography, and collective listening to create an ethnography of place and an ode to communal ruins.

Glyph
Ali Smith

Hamish Hamilton. HB. \$39.99
Available 24 March



This is the second work in Ali Smith's two-part project that began with *Gliff*. The first book, when it came out in late 2024, was one of my top reads for the year, so I have been very much looking forward to *Glyph*'s release.

It feels appropriate when reviewing an Ali Smith novel to consult a dictionary (in this instance, I'm quoting Merriam-Webster). The word 'gliff' is from the Scottish dialect, meaning either a glimpse or a sudden fright. This title feels more than apt for a book that presents us a vision of a supposed dystopian future, which in truth is simply a reframing of our present.

One of the definitions of the more familiar word 'glyph' is 'a symbolic figure or a character'. This is something that Smith, in classic form, makes a metaphorical pun of in the story. The titular character of *Glyph* is, indeed, a symbol. It was the deciphering of this symbol's meaning that occupied me for a large part of the book.

It would be a mistake to read this as a sequel, but I still think it important to read *Gliff* first. *Glyph* sits in some ways as a reference to its predecessor, and in other ways as context for it. Where the young characters of the first book asked us to look forward, and answer an urgent call to action, the second brings us characters who are mired in a past both personal and historical.

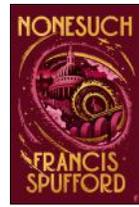
Glyph is definitely a more mercurial work than its predecessor. That it should be a less uplifting read is in keeping with the author's project, and that we have

writers who are ready and able to tackle our times head-on is something we should never take for granted.

Carey Smith is from Readings Emporium

Nonesuch
Francis Spufford

Faber. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



It's 1938 and Iris Hawkins is a Smart Young Thing who's not from old money and takes her climb into London's financial world Very Seriously Indeed. For larks, she seduces hunky young men, but when she relieves lanky, geeky BBC television technician Geoffrey Hale of his virginity, he goes all gooey-eyed for her. This is quite annoying for Iris initially, but becomes positively irritating when a shadow monster tracks her from Geoff's house to her workplace in the city.

Turns out Geoff's dotty dad used to be part of London's esoteric community (Order of the Golden Dawn, anyone?) and even though most of the moth-eaten manuscripts and occult paraphernalia piled up in his cluttered Hampstead Heath home are balderdash, it does seem like some of it is, well, on the money. Iris, drawn further into Geoff's world on the basis of self-preservation, finds that, dash it all, despite herself she's growing sweet on the gawky boy. Awww ...

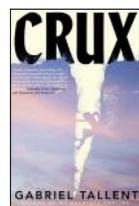
But then the bally war begins. And then the Blitz begins. And, drat it, just as Iris and Geoff are getting the hang of the whole swooning-into-one-another's-arms business, it appears that upper-class English fascists (read: twits) have also gained access to the magical world and are keen as mustard to use it to deliver England into Mister Hitler's grasping mitts ... Blimey! Will Iris and Geoff need to delve further into Geoff's father's mouldering archive to save the day? Looks like it!

Scads of stiff upper lips and flurries of getting-to-know-you sex decorate this jaunty fantasy set against a burning, terrified, stoic London. The vehemence of the magical war matches the violence of the material one, and all the while grimy, perky young women uniformed as ambulance drivers and air raid wardens struggle grimly to keep their beloved city alive. Tally ho.

Bernard Caleo is from Readings Carlton

Crux
Gabriel Tallent

Fig Tree. PB. \$34.99
Available now



In a forgotten corner of the Southern California desert, two 17-year-olds, Dan and Tamma, stare up at a 35-foot tall expanse of rock. Tackling it and climbing their way to the top is a challenge that could kill them in an instant. Even still, neither has ever felt more alive. So begins Gabriel Tallent's *Crux*, a rich, textured and gripping novel that strikes at the core of why so many people (myself included) find meaning in rock climbing: the beauty and poetry of being at your absolute limit and somehow taking one more step.

Although *Crux* revels in its numerous climbing sequences – so tense and technically accurate that my palms were often sweating in sympathy – the novel

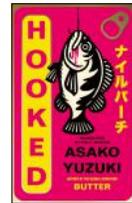
would be nothing without its characters. Dan and Tamma's unshakeable friendship is such a livewire of passion and joy forged in crass, glorious speeches and silent moments of care that I couldn't help but root for them the moment I met them. Climbing is their sole escape from the poverty, mental illness and regret that haunt their families and the expectations that, in one way or another, threaten to suffocate their dreams for good. Every moment on the wall, no matter how dire, feels like a victory.

As the narrative hits its stride and that conflict between soaring ambition and crushing reality becomes almost unbearable, you begin to realise why this story couldn't have been about any sport except climbing. In climbing, the crux is the hardest moment of a route, a turning point between triumph and defeat that requires total commitment in the face of uncertainty. It is the cruxes then, both on and off the wall, that are the heart of this remarkable novel – all those little moments where success only comes from a conscious choice to be brave.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

Hooked
Asako Yuzuki & Polly Barton (trans.)

Fourth Estate. PB. \$34.99
Available 17 March



Hooked, Asako Yuzuki's follow-up to the international bestseller *Butter*, tackles similar themes of womanhood and domesticity, but amps up the psychological tension for an even more intense thriller.

Eriko is successfully climbing the corporate ladder at a large Japanese trading company and following in her father's footsteps, but beneath her polished appearance she's desperately lonely – she's managed romance but has never been able to make friends as an adult. The inadequacy she feels is soothed by the blog of Shoko, a Tokyo housewife who unselfconsciously shares her similarly friendless life online. But when Eriko manages to meet her idol, the reassuring distraction turns into a consuming passion.

Hooked is a gripping read that had me turning pages in horror to see how far Eriko's obsession and need for approval would lead her. With chapters from the perspectives of both Eriko and Shoko, we get to see the similar insecurities of the two women and the cracks of misunderstanding that turn their blossoming friendship into a manic, desperate struggle for control.

Rather than the 'male loneliness epidemic' that has been a trending topic in past years, *Hooked* looks at female loneliness and how, amid the domestic and emotional labour expected of women, female friendship can either be a lifeline, or a toxic performance. Throughout the wild journey of this book, Eriko is fixated by the idea of the Nile Perch, an enormous fish that destroys local wildlife wherever it is introduced. Eriko feels for the fish that is only known for the harm it's done, despite the fact it was human intervention that spread them outside their natural habitat. And if some women are too jealous, too critical, or simply too strange to find or maintain friendship, isn't that because of the demanding, competitive environment they've been forced into?

Ultimately, this is a tragic story of two lonely people, whose discontent and desire for connection drive them to

extremes. Though several male characters repeat it throughout the book, Yuzuki isn't saying that women can't have authentic, supportive friendships – she's showing that putting all of your emotional needs on one person, regardless of who that person is, can only lead to disappointment.

Bella Mackey is the digital content lead

Superfan
Jenny Tinghui Zhang

Michael Joseph. PB. \$34.99
Available now



When Alison, our head book buyer, sent me an email with the subject line 'This sounds good' and a link to the *Superfan* product page, one look and I thought 'Yep, this one's for me!' I went in expecting a light, fun read ... I couldn't have been more wrong.

It's 2014. Minnie is in her first year of college, excited by the promises made in movies and books that this is when her life will truly begin. But making friends is hard and as the weeks slip by, Minnie feels lonelier and lonelier, until she stumbles upon and is transfixed by a video of a boy band. Somehow, they make her feel a lot less lonely as they yell 'We are yours and you are OURS'.

Eason is known to the world as Halo, the sexy, brooding and confident member of HOURglass. But Eason is a boy running from his past, addicted to the unwavering adoration of the fans, dreading the loneliness that settles in every time he leaves the stage. As Minnie and Eason navigate their new lives, they inch ever closer until their paths finally collide.

Switching points of view between Minnie and Eason, with messageboard posts and fanfiction scattered between chapters, *Superfan* is an analysis of fandoms and manufactured stardom. It delves into toxic parasocial relationships between fans and their idols – the obsessing, stalking, conspiracy theories and the fans who take it too far – along with what loneliness and desperation can drive a person to do. But alongside the negatives, *Superfan* highlights the beauty of fandoms: how they build community, provide safe spaces and help the magic of girlhood to flourish.

While I didn't want to put this book down, I was often so stressed that I wanted to throw it across the room. It explores racism, sexism, child abuse, grief, sexual assault, PTSD and so much more. I recommend it for anyone who's ever been in a fandom, misses peak Tumblr or loves reading about human complexity.

Lucie Dess is the marketing and events coordinator

Underspin
E.Y. Zhao

Doubleday. PB. \$34.99
Available 17 March

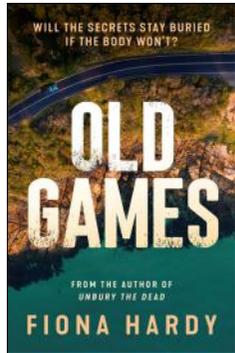


Ryan Lo begins playing table tennis aged eight. His brilliant but ruthless coach sees a talent in him. Through an adolescence marked by hours of practice, matches away from home, clandestine relationships and a determination to win, Ryan ascends to the highest echelons of the game, just as he was supposed to. But here he is now, dead before his 25th birthday. Ryan Lo was meant to be great. What happened? **R**

Crime

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Crime



Old Games
Fiona Hardy
Affirm Press. PB. \$34.99
Available now

If you're in any doubt as to where Alice and Teddy sit on the moral spectrum, it's dispelled by page two of *Old Games* when they threaten a man they've had tied up in the boot of their car with the diabolical torture of having to endure a visit to a pierogi food truck without being able to partake. This combination of light and dark is a signature of Hardy's work, along with her cast of nuanced characters, wit, pacy storytelling, and heart.

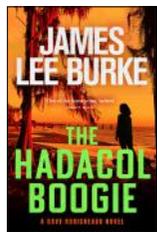
Alice and Teddy play off one another with the kind of fond familiarity seen in the very best fictional partnerships, riffing off one another's dialogue with charm and humour. They're unambiguously loyal to one another, so when Alice's estranged sister finds herself in hot water after the ashes of a long-dead celebrity tennis star are stolen from the mansion she's house-sitting, they have no hesitation in leaping into the investigation.

Twisty and intricately plotted, *Old Games* is a story about legacies and loss, about public figures and who 'owns' them after they're gone, and about families: those we are bound to by blood and those we build ourselves. It's full of good food, great cars, plenty of laughs, a mystery that will keep you turning pages, and a few unanswered questions that will have you champing at the bit for the next book.

Lian Hingee is the digital marketing manager

The Hadacol Boogie

James Lee Burke
Orion. PB. \$34.99
Available now

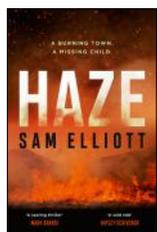


When a cloaked, disfigured man leaves a dead woman in a garbage bag on Dave Robicheaux's property, he knows his world and family are about to change. Along with Valerie Benoit, a

detective new to the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Department who is grappling with sexist and racist harassment from their colleagues, and the volatile but fiercely loyal Clete Purcel, Dave embarks on an investigation that sends him into the most dangerous moments of his career and threatens the lives of Valerie and his daughter Alafair.

Haze

Sam Elliott
Pan Mac. PB. \$34.99
Available now



The dying coastal town of Broughlet is being torn apart by fires, and the inhabitants suspect arson – specifically, arson by the sinister People's Cleansing Light cult. Amid the choking black smoke, Constable

Dahlia Turner discovers a horrifying crime: her best friends have been murdered and their son abducted. Finding him will mean confronting the

 *Unbury the Dead*, the debut novel from award-winning writer (and beloved Readings staffer and former long-serving *Readings Monthly* crime-fiction columnist) Fiona Hardy, was a breath of fresh air in the increasingly crowded genre of Australian crime fiction. *Unbury* introduced us to Alice and Teddy – two women working for the morally (and legally!) ambiguous Choker, in a kind of seedy *Sopranos*-meets-*Charlie's Angels* set up. The book was shortlisted for the 2025 Ned Kelly Awards and made the top 50 in our 2025 bestseller list.

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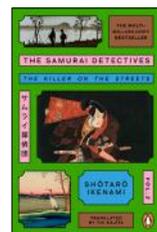
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Lian Hingee is the digital marketing manager

violent past she's spent years trying to outrun. But with danger closing in around her, can Dahlia uncover the truth before it burns away forever?

The Samurai Detectives: Volume 2 – The Killer on the Streets

Shotaro Ikenami & Yui Kajita (trans.)
Penguin. PB. \$26.99
Available 10 March

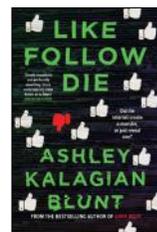


Since their last perilous quest, a fragile calm has settled over Edo. Daijiro trains the first pupil of his quiet riverside dojo, while his father Kohei drifts through an uneasy retirement, too restless for leisure. One autumn

night, Kohei is set upon by a band of tsujigiri, only to discover that the gang's leader is a high-ranking official. What begins as a chance encounter soon blooms into a deadly game of pursuit, vengeance and, finally, siege, as father and son are dragged into the city's pitch-black heart.

Like Follow Die

Ashley Kalagian Blunt
Ultimo. PB. \$34.99
Available now

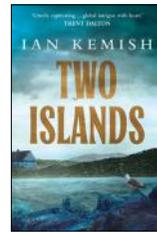


 Corinne's life is falling apart. When homicide detective Kyle Nazarian arrives at her door asking about her son, Ben, she knows why. An average teen in Sydney's eastern suburbs, Ben is

increasingly being drawn into the dark corners of the internet. Corinne tries to explain how her sweet-natured, talented child grew up to do the unthinkable. What really happened to Ben? Meanwhile, Kyle faces his own crisis and his sympathy for Corinne, and must decide how far he's willing to go in his pursuit of justice.

Two Islands

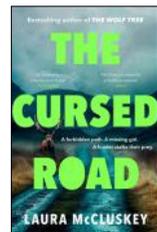
Ian Kemish
UQP. PB. \$34.99
Available now



When a desperate young man arrives on an isolated Scottish isle, the locals view him with suspicion. But Niko is running for his life, pursued by those who want him silenced for what he has seen in the Balkan War. His neighbour is a recluse known as 'Slow Fergus'. As the two men circle each other, Australian war crimes investigator Anita Costello races against sinister forces to locate her key witness. Amid the tightknit community, Niko must weigh his loyalties to his family, his country and himself.

The Cursed Road

Laura McCluskey
HarperCollins. PB. \$34.99
Available now



 This is a ripper read! Detectives George and Richie, who featured in Laura McCluskey's debut novel *The Wolf Tree*, make a welcome return in this gripping crime thriller, this time set in the Scottish Highlands. Smartly paced and totally addictive, the reader is thrust into a murder investigation when a victim's body is found on 'the cursed road'. The case morphs into something far bigger when a connection between the murder and a long-standing unsolved missing person's investigation is revealed. With a cast of intriguing characters, and the rugged landscape serving not only as a backdrop but also a crucial component of the story, this is escapist crime fiction of the highest order.

Central to the book is the fantastic Inspector Georgina Lennox – George – whose sassy nature and quick wit, as well as her astute intelligence and at times hot temper, endear her to the reader. Along with her more experienced policing partner Richie, together they negotiate and argue about how to get answers from a sometimes-reluctant community unwilling to spill all its secrets. Still recovering from the fame they achieved in solving the case central to *The Wolf Tree*, the two detectives are nursing injuries – physical and psychological – as they embark on this new investigation.

Set largely in the (fictional) town of Kirkcree, the clashes between villagers over contested versions of history are a strong feature of the book, along with the town's ambivalence about the prominence of deer hunting as a tourist attraction. As wealthy visitors seek to secure their own 'trophies', activists try to prevent the gruesome hunts. There is also a journalist sniffing around, trying to get a big scoop; a bumbling colleague; a shady character seeking refuge; and good-hearted, ordinary people just trying to make a living and get by.

A truly fantastic and engaging read and, dare I say it, even better than her debut novel, I can highly recommend this terrific book which will transport you straight to the highlands. I can't wait for the next instalment of George's adventures. (I hope there is one!)

Pauline Hopkins is the manager of Readings Hawthorn

What the Bones Know

Kirstyn McDermott
HQ Fiction. PB. \$32.99
Available now



When a ghost gum falls in the Victorian Highlands village of Kiln Creek, the bones of a child are found tangled in its roots. Struggling single mum Jude returns to the family farm to care for her

confused mother, Nance. As Nance drifts into dementia, disturbing incidents occur: strange smells, inexplicable wet footprints, a voice in the night. But when Jude's daughter starts to sleepwalk and Jude's own nightmares begin to take over, she wonders whether her imagination is out of control or if something more sinister is happening.

Shellybanks

Louise Milligan
A&U. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March

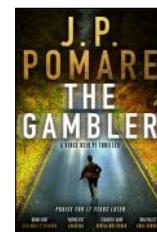


 On the sands of Shellybanks, journalist Kate Delaney once nearly drowned. Years later, reeling from a violent crime that has upended her life in Melbourne, she returns to Dublin to comfort her

beloved aunt Dolores, only to discover Dolores has her own buried trauma. As a teenager, Dolores was drawn into a religious movement that stole her youth, her freedom, and so much more. With Kate's help, Dolores is determined to confront the powerful network that made her suffer years of silence and shame. The two women find strength in each other as they reckon with Ireland's hidden histories and the scars that endure across generations.

The Gambler

J.P. Pomare
Hachette. PB. \$34.99
Available now



 It's been three long years since P.I. Vince Reid made his first appearance in *The Wrong Woman*, and while J.P. Pomare has been writing other

books, Reid has been patiently waiting in the wings for his next chance. In late 2025, I learned about *The Gambler* from its terrific author, and was intrigued at just how this story would unfold. As I read the book, poolside over my festive break, I found it was a perfect summer distraction. The layered plot, jumping between time periods and characters' viewpoints, is gradually peeled back, like an onion, to reveal the resolution.

With two deaths – a cold case and a political assassination – and a mysterious

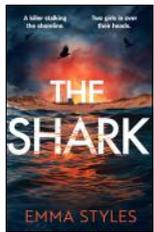
organisation controlling the actions of bewitched acolytes in a scam, there are plenty of threads for Reid to track. Why did Kate Marshall die? What was the assassin's motive? Who is at the heart of the scam? Though these seemingly simple primary notions drive Reid, in true Pomare fashion, more questions abound and force Reid into some sticky situations.

It's always a pleasure for an author to have the opportunity to revisit a favourite protagonist, and even better for us readers to be able to enjoy the finished product! *The Gambler* is a thoroughly enjoyable book, with a well-conceived, realistic plot that is propelled by Pomare's deft writing and great characterisation.

Julia Jackson is from Readings Carlton

The Shark
Emma Styles

Sphere. PB. \$34.99
Available 10 March



R Emma Styles' debut, *No Country for Girls*, was a cracker of a book that saw two girls legging it from a crime scene with a bag of gold in the boot of a car. As they are chased through remote Western

Australia, the stakes and the tension ratchet up and up. It's high octane, unputdownable stuff. So, when I was offered the chance to review Styles' latest offering, of course the answer was yes.

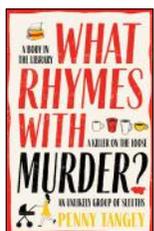
In contrast to her first book, *The Shark* is a gritty urban thriller. Set along the Cottesloe coast area of Perth, this book draws upon a couple of instances of serial killings, notably the Claremont murders, that were recently solved. The hunting patterns of sharks in pursuit of their prey are used to metaphorically illustrate the predatory modus operandi of the serial killer in this book, who stalks swimmers and leaves their bodies on the beach.

Again, women and women victim-survivors are front and centre in this sophomore novel. Our protagonists Raych and Carmen are frankly fed up with the failures of the police in protecting their community. Both women have had their lives destabilised by loss and trauma: Raych keenly feels the loss of her best friend Piper, whose murder is unsolved, and Carmen's relationships with her immediate family are increasingly troubled. Their bond, uneasy at first, is grounded in a shared sense of urgency to do something, even if that means taking matters into their own hands. When another girl goes missing, a horrible truth begins to emerge, leaving Raych and Carmen to grapple with a big ethical conundrum. *The Shark* is a terrific psychological thriller!

Julia Jackson is from Readings Carlton

What Rhymes with Murder?

Penny Tangey
Summit. PB. \$34.99
Available now



R When Frida takes her baby son Finn to the library for Rhyme Time, she considers it a place she might find hope, peace and community, but any sense of peace is short-lived after a scream rings out and a dead body is

found. Already overwhelmed by everything else in her life (what is sleep again?), she's ready to discount her attempt to make new friends, until it turns out she's not the only one curious about whether the fall was an accident – or murder.

Frida's long, lonely days are suddenly filled with new acquaintances, from an equally nosy new dad to a prickly local historian, a doctor, a pilates teacher, and one of the police officers on the case. Toting a baby around as she investigates during daylight hours in a bright neighbourhood shouldn't be dangerous, but soon Frida will have much larger problems than stolen prams or badly timed naps.

Penny Tangey – already an award-winning middle-grade author – has knocked it out of the park (or maybe thrown it out of the pram?) with this hilarious mystery. Extremely relatable for any parents, but equally entertaining for people who just enjoy a juicy mystery with a smattering of inner-Melbourne history, this book will be excellent for readers of Richard Osman, Aoife Clifford, and Sulari Gentill's contemporary books.

Fiona Hardy is from Readings Doncaster

Strange Buildings

Uketsu & Jim Rion (trans.)
Pushkin Vertigo. PB. \$32.99
Available 17 March

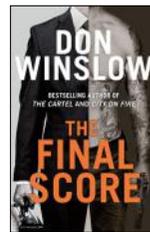


Eleven strange buildings. One terrible secret. A lonely hut in the woods. A murder house. A hidden chamber. A mysterious shrine. A home in flames. A nightmarish prison.

Each of the buildings in this book tells a chilling story. Each one is part of a puzzle. Look closely and you'll see that everything is connected. It all leads to a revelation so horrifying you won't want to believe it. Millions of readers have become addicted to solving Uketsu's dark mysteries. *Strange Buildings* is the strangest, and darkest, of them all.

The Final Score

Don Winslow
Hemlock. PB. \$34.99
Available now



Written with his trademark literary style, trenchant wit and incisive characterisation, the six all-new short novels in Don Winslow's *The Final Score* serve up a collection of tales that is sure to delight.

There's an impossible multi-million-dollar casino heist, which is naturally irresistible to a legendary robber facing the rest of his life in prison. An ambitious, hard-working, college-bound teenager has a side job delivering illegal booze until a crooked cop, a seductive customer, and a fake guru threaten to end his dreams. The entitled, substance-addicted movie star that surfer/PI Boone Daniels and his crew are hired to babysit is a problem, and the momentary mistake that a devoted family man makes sends him to prison and sets him on a terrible collision course. These stories form a deeply immersive collection of crime writing and are the ultimate testament to Winslow's prowess as a living legend of the genre. **R**

OLD GAMES
FIONA HARDY
WILL THE TRUTH STAY BURIED IF THE BODY DOESN'T?
FROM THE AUTHOR OF UNBURY THE DEAD

'Takes the court armed with twisty plots and memorable characters, led by an iconic duo whose shared humour pairs perfectly with their dubious morals.'

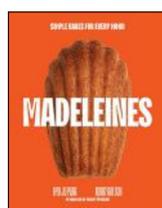
LAURA McCLUSKEY

So Old, So Young
Grant Ginder
Author of The People We Hate at the Wedding

'A triumph. I will never forget these characters.' ELIN HILDERBRAND
'So Old, So Young is as sharp as it is tender.' COCO MELLORS

'A story of romantic love, professional jealousy, misplaced longing, and the gift of lifelong friendship. You will laugh on every page, except for when you find yourself moved to tears.'

JENNY JACKSON



Madeleines: Simple Bakes for Every Mood
Hyo Ju Park & Rong Yao Soh
Quadrille. HB.
\$34.99
Available now

Photo | Michael Gardenia

Celebrate the charm and versatility of this bite-sized French treat by learning from the experts! Pastry chefs Hyo Ju Park and Rong Yao Soh of Lygon Street cult-favourite bakery Madeleine de Proust share their recipe for the classic madeleine that has hungry customers queuing around the block.

Brown Butter Madeleines

This is where it all began. Our first madeleine took many tries to get just right – light, fluffy and consistent, like a cross between cake and cloud. We pair it with Tasmanian Leatherwood honey for a gentle floral lift that balances the richness. Instead of classic brown butter, we toast milk powder until deep golden to mimic those nutty, caramelised notes. This keeps the batter consistent and helps create that perfect hump every time. Be sure to revisit the full preparation instructions until the process feels natural.

Recipe

Suggested mould

Woojung / Chiyoda Madeleine
22mm (¾") deep ^{NOTE 1}

Makes 12

125g cake flour
5g (1 tsp) baking powder
3g (1 tsp) caramelised milk powder ^{NOTE 2}
pinch of sea salt
105g butter
7g milk
85g whole eggs, strained ^{NOTE 3}
80g caster (superfine) sugar
10g Leatherwood honey

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 210°C fan and prepare your mould. ^{NOTE 1}
- 2 Sift the flour, baking powder, caramelised milk powder and salt into a heatproof bowl, then set aside.
- 3 Melt the butter and milk together in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water, keeping the temperature at 40°C.
- 4 Warm the eggs, sugar and honey to 30°C.
- 5 Mix the dry ingredients gently into the egg mixture, then mix in the butter one-third at a time.
- 6 Pipe into the moulds, reduce the oven temperature to 180°C and bake for 10–13 minutes until risen and set.
- 7 Unmould and leave to cool.

Notes

1 How to prepare your mould

The traditional madeleine is made in the classic shell-shaped moulds but there are all sorts of shapes and sizes you can experiment with, from teddy bears, mini-cakes and bananas to cats, crowns and cacao pods. We have listed the mould we have used for each individual recipe but you can choose whatever you prefer. Whatever the size of your mould, you want to fill the cavities 80% full, so if you choose a smaller mould than the one specified, stick to the 80%-full rule. You can make more madeleines and bake for a shorter time.

A properly prepared mould ensures clean release, defined shape and a beautifully even crust. Different materials require different approaches. Here's how we prepare ours.

Steel moulds

If you're using Chiyoda or Woojung moulds and they're still in good condition, you can usually skip the butter-and-flour step. Simply wipe a very thin layer of neutral oil (like grapeseed) over each cavity using a soft tissue.

Butter-and-flour method

To protect the coating and extend the mould's life, you can also use this traditional butter-and-flour method.

- 1 Use softened butter (not melted) and brush an even layer over each cavity.
- 2 Dust lightly with strong flour or bread flour – the larger particles help with release.
 - For chocolate-based recipes, use cocoa powder instead.
- 3 Turn the coated mould upside down and tap gently to remove the excess.

Silicone moulds

Spray the mould generously with oil spray. This helps improve colourisation and surface definition. Always place the silicone mould on a baking tray before filling and baking to ensure even heat distribution and support.

2 Caramelised milk powder

Ingredients

Full cream milk powder – as needed

Stovetop method

- 1 Place the milk powder in a stainless steel pan over medium heat.
- 2 Stir continuously with a heatproof spatula to prevent burning.
- 3 Toast until the powder turns a deep golden brown colour.

- 4 Transfer to a bowl and let cool completely before storing.

Oven method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Spread the milk powder in a thin, even layer on a baking tray.
- 3 Bake for 5 minutes, then stir the powder well.
- 4 Continue toasting in 3–5 minute intervals, stirring between each, until they are all evenly golden brown.
- 5 Cool completely and store in an airtight container.

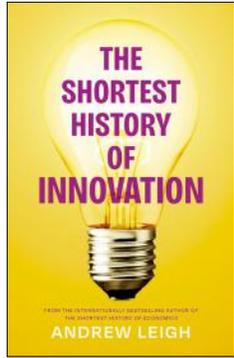
3 Straining eggs

Crack the eggs into a heatproof bowl, lightly blend with a hand blender (just enough to combine), then strain through a sieve. **R**

Nonfiction

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Politics



The Shortest History of Innovation
Andrew Leigh
Black Inc. PB. \$27.99
Available now

R Andrew Leigh is one of those people who make you feel a little small; when he's not running marathons, looking after his family, or being the Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury, he's writing books about the policy areas that he's interested in. His PhD was on poverty and inequality, and his many books reflect that interest – he is always seeking to understand what policies can deliver the best outcomes for the most people and deliver a free and democratic society.

Leigh is basically an optimist, believing that we can solve society's problems. Understanding the drivers of change can help us develop and support policies that have a positive impact; in his previous book, *The Shortest History of Economics*, he examined how economics has impacted the world and, in his new book, he turns his attention to innovation. Innovation has changed people's lives, mostly for the better. How does innovation happen? How can we make it happen? How can we make it happen so that it benefits society? What happens when innovations go 'rogue'?

Leigh's mastery of his topic is impressive as he ranges across all types of human innovation. It's a common myth that a lot of innovation is the result of one person's 'Eureka moment'. Leigh shows that the best innovation comes about through societies that encourage openness and collaboration. When people work together with good will, amazing things happen. With a lively and engaging

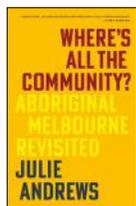
narrative, the book is peppered with Eureka examples, as well as charming, corny jokes.

Mark Rubbo is the chairman of Readings

Australian Studies

Where's All the Community? Aboriginal Melbourne Revisited
Julie Andrews

La Trobe University Press. PB. \$36.99
Available 3 March



R We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. No doubt you've heard an acknowledgement like this countless times, maybe even said it yourself or put it in your email signature.

What you mightn't know so well is the history behind that acknowledgement or the complex and diverse perspectives that make up Melbourne's Aboriginal present. If those questions fascinate you, or you just want to understand your own city a little better, then Julie Andrews' new book *Where's All the Community?* offers an inviting yet comprehensive overview of Aboriginal Melbourne.

Drawing from her doctoral research, Andrews details Melbourne's steady transformation from a colony that segregated and disempowered its original inhabitants on missions and reserves into a modern city increasingly committed to valuing and championing Aboriginal voices. In the process, it becomes clear that every small development was fought for and every change was fiercely debated. The Aboriginal community is no monolith and Andrews' writing dispels that notion with a wealth of interviews and archival material. This is a book brimming with voices and rich with experience, especially Andrews' own, growing up deeply embedded in a community that

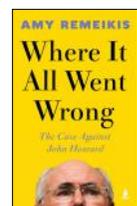
was committed to its own advocacy on every front.

Indeed, Andrews' book answers the question of its own title with a sense of emphatic celebration: community is all around, whether in the early organisations that arranged days of mourning and set up educational institutions and medical services or in the broader pan-Aboriginal connections that define contemporary Melbourne. Culturally informed playgroups lay foundations that make kids into activists, while Aboriginal people living on the street enjoy their own sense of solidarity as 'parkies'. There is community everywhere Andrews looks, but crucially it only exists thanks to the tireless work of Aboriginal Melburnians past and present – something absolutely worth acknowledging.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

Where It All Went Wrong: The Case Against John Howard
Amy Remeikis

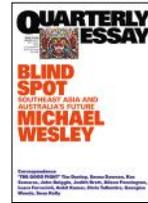
Scribner. PB. \$29.99
Available now



John Howard is often revered as one of Australia's great prime ministers. Yet why are we in such a mess? Amy Remeikis argues that most of our modern crises are directly caused by his policies: the housing crisis, work insecurity, giving away gas, climate denial, and others. Far from being 'great economic managers', the Howard government sold Australia's future for short-term electoral gain and sacrificed the generations now inheriting the nation. In showing us where it all went wrong, Remeikis illuminates the path to a better future.

Quarterly Essay 101: Blind Spot – Southeast Asia and Australia's Future

Michael Wesley
Black Inc. PB. \$29.99
Available 16 March



R Southeast Asia has never been more important to Australia – and Australia has never been more alienated from Southeast Asia and with so little idea of what to do about it. For

Australia, the region holds the key to our security and prosperity. Yet we have never fully grasped its importance. Southeast Asia is where the future world order will be decided – the place where China's bid for regional power will succeed or fail. This is an essay about values, imagination and a new way of seeing ourselves.

Biography

Bring Back Yesterday: On Losing the Love of My Life, and Doing What it Takes to Survive

Bob Carr
A&U. PB. \$32.99
Available 3 March



It was a warm October day when Bob Carr's life splintered down the middle. His wife, Helena, was gone in a flash. Everything changed forever. For three months, in shock at this

horror, he maintained a regime of late-night walks across the city. There came a time when he had walked enough, and so he stopped. *Bring Back Yesterday* is a love story and grief memoir from one of Australia's most respected and longstanding public figures as he finds his footing again after the death of his wife.

Pearls: Memoir Strands
Tracy Crisp

Pink Shorts. PB. \$32.99
Available now



R Tracy Crisp's episodic memoir *Pearls* is a soft, bittersweet collection of personal anecdotes and stories which were originally performed as a series of monologues at Adelaide

Fringe, debuting in 2018 and staged again last year.

Crisp is a true multi-hyphenate: librarian-meets-writer, stand-up comedian-meets-funeral celebrant, and loving mother embracing and embodying all those by whom she has been loved. Throughout her book there is a beautiful through-line and sentiment of carrying with us the lives of those who came before – our parents, and their own parents before them, and so on. Crisp invites us into her life and asks us to stay awhile. The first thing that strikes me is how her memories, particularly her childhood spent in Port Pirie, are deeply connected to sensory experiences. She recalls various scents, smells that remind her of her mother – green apple shampoo, Oil of Ulan, Marlboro Reds. Every story is heavy with nostalgia. It feels as if we are taken back in time, and shadowing Crisp as she revisits the past.

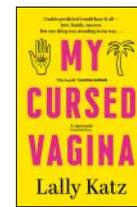
Her writing is conversational and clever, building from moment to moment with intention – leading us as readers gently to follow her as she grapples with her own identity and what to make of it, and her own realisations about coming home to Adelaide after spending many years travelling and overseas. Each piece is charged and emotional on the page, powerful in written form even though all were first intended for live storytelling.

This beautiful chronology of work offers a small glimpse into a big, full life defined by family relationships, motherhood, and grief; a life that confronts the reality of working out who you are, and the ache of understanding who you could be.

Ocean Trimboli is from Readings Emporium

My Cursed Vagina: A Memoir
Lally Katz

A&U. PB. \$34.99
Available now



What happens when a soothsayer tells Lally Katz her vagina is cursed? Has the truth been spoken? In *My Cursed Vagina* Katz shares the many forms this hex takes as she searches for love,

compulsively recording her life in real time as she goes. These are hilarious and heartbreaking tales of disastrous dates, hopeful sex, straight-talking friendships, a surprise marriage, the adventure of motherhood and the strange gifts of illness, by a woman who embraces everything life has to offer.

I'm Not Mad (Anymore)

Bron Lewis
Affirm Press. PB. \$36.99
Available now

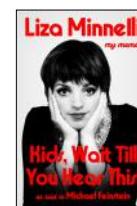


Bron Lewis, one of Australia's most beloved comedians, is no stranger to madness and has experienced her fair share of dark nights of the soul. In *I'm Not Mad (Anymore)* she sheds a light on the

mental struggles women go through silently, from post-natal depression and anxiety to menopause and all the muck in between. If you've ever watched your mum stumble through hot flushes, struggled as a new mum, or just wondered if you're losing it, then this fiercely funny, feminist debut is for you.

Kids, Wait Till You Hear This!

Liza Minnelli, as told to Michael Feinstein
H&S. HB. \$55
Available 10 March



Born into Hollywood royalty, the daughter of Vincente Minnelli and Judy Garland, Liza Minnelli pulls back the curtain on her extraordinary life. As told to her beloved confidant,

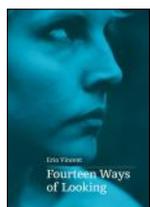
Michael Feinstein, Minnelli sets the record straight. With stories she has never shared before, this memoir is raw, strong, sexy, hilarious and unapologetically honest, and a defiant celebration of self-belief, survival and humanity – proving why Minnelli remains one of the most iconic and enduring figures in entertainment history.

Fourteen Ways of Looking

Erin Vincent

Upswell. PB. \$32.99

Available 3 March



When Erin Vincent was 14, both her parents were killed in a road accident. Almost 40 years later the number 14 began appearing everywhere she looked, so Erin embarked on a quest to seek out historical references to the number. Much of what she found related to her own life at 14. The result is *Fourteen Ways of Looking*, a hybrid memoir in the form of a prose poem which looks at the year Erin's parents died, but is also a reflection on grief, memory and the writing process.

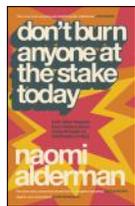
Cultural Studies

Don't Burn Anyone at the Stake Today

Naomi Alderman

Fig Tree. HB. \$39.99

Available now



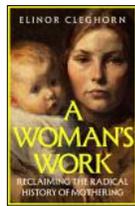
In this era-defining book Naomi Alderman discusses the 'Information Crisis' we are living through – a digital era where the internet is flooding us with more knowledge, opinions, and misinformation, than ever before. Alderman argues this is humanity's third information crisis. The first was writing, and the second was the invention of the printing press, both of which drastically reshaped us. By examining those previous crises Alderman asks what we can learn to better understand our present and prepare for the future.

A Woman's Work: Reclaiming the Radical History of Mothering

Elinor Cleghorn

W&N. PB. \$34.99

Available 10 March



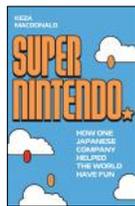
For centuries, motherhood has sparked social and political change. Yet the acts of growing, birthing and nurturing children – and the power they hold – have been pushed to the margins, overlooked in our narratives of the past. *A Woman's Work* is a comprehensive, radical and inspiring new history of mothers and mothering from antiquity to today and a timely reminder that the fight for reproductive freedom is far from over.

Super Nintendo: How One Japanese Company Helped the World Have Fun

Keza MacDonald

Faber. PB. \$34.99

Available 3 March



Nintendo's video games occupy a special place in the hearts of hundreds of millions of people around the globe in their pursuit of a desire to have fun. Lifelong gamer Keza MacDonald explores

Nintendo's legendary roster of games and consoles drawing from exclusive interviews with their creators and the

people whose lives have been changed by them. She also tells the story of how this unassuming playing-card company, founded in 1889, became one of the leading cultural forces of the 21st century.

Herlands: Lessons from Societies Where Women Make the Rules

Megha Mohan

Harvill Secker. PB. \$36.99

Available 3 March



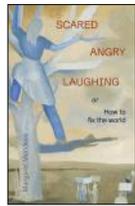
Society isn't working for women – or any of us. But what if the rules were different? Imagine a world in which women have all the power. A world in which they work together to shape their societies and their futures. Women's communities have always existed and continue to thrive. In this groundbreaking book, Megha Mohan goes in search of the roots of women's communities, discovering a vibrant global history. She also takes us into today's women-led spaces, showing us how we can rethink society for new ways of living, working and collaborating.

Scared Angry Laughing, or How to Fix the World

Margaret Merrilees

Pink Shorts. PB. \$32.99

Available now



This slim volume of essays is a pithy, poignant, humorous and sobering collection that gives a delightful insight into the life of the author and some of her escapades, as well as providing a glimpse of her own philosophy and her reflections on where the future of humanity is heading.

In the introductory essay, 'A place in the sun', we learn about Margaret 'Mag' Merrilees' life as a lesbian feminist activist in Adelaide in the 1970s. She works in women's health collectives, protests against nuclear energy and violence, plays in a soccer team called The Armpits and becomes part of a community: 'a composting sort of process'.

While her mother laments, 'Do you have to be on the wrong side of every fence?', Merrilees gloriously laps up life while maintaining her rage against capitalism, unfettered development, fossil fuels and the patriarchy who profit from them. She describes her arrest in Alice Springs and subsequent night in the lock up after protesting against Pine Gap. She talks of the wrongs done to Indigenous Australians and advocates for truth-telling: 'Truth has its own momentum'.

Her timely essay 'Inconvenient' delves into the current debate about protests. She reminds us that women only ever achieved the right to vote by protesting and by having 'the guts to risk upsetting people'.

This feisty author goes on to describe other aspects of her life – dealing with menstruation and abortion, deciding not to have children, encounters with medical misogyny, the after-effects of war, the privatisation of services, the degradation of the natural world, the complications of ageing and the looming 'slow-motion disaster' of climate change.

An enlivening and heartfelt collection that tracks one woman's lifetime of activism, *Scared Angry Laughing* manages to look both back with wisdom and forward with urgency as Mag continues on her quest to wake us out of

our comfortable slumber and our 'rich well-padded lives' and do something to save the planet – and ourselves.

Pauline Hopkins is the manager of Readings Hawthorn

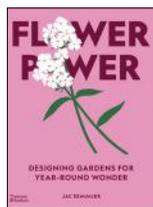
Gardening

Flower Power: Designing Gardens for Year-Round Wonder

Jac Semmler

T&H. HB. \$85

Available 3 March



Plant advocate Jac Semmler introduces a groundbreaking philosophy to create year-round wonder, no matter the season or climate. This is not about following rules; it's about unlocking your vision and understanding the core creative elements of garden design to create plant-driven gardens of beauty that are truly your own. With a seasonal calendar of care, practical how-tos and innovative graphic guides that explore methods for composition and layout, *Flower Power* lights the way for gardens that flourish, change and captivate.

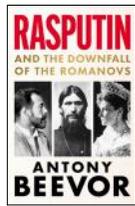
History

Rasputin: And the Downfall of the Romanovs

Antony Beevor

W&N. HB. \$55

Available 10 March



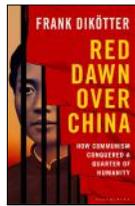
Was Grigori Rasputin a visionary, a fraud, or a victim of history? Antony Beevor searches for the truth about the great seducer of the Romanovs, the wild mystic who laid the ground for the Russian Revolution. Just as Rasputin cast a spell over the Romanovs, his legend has bewitched historians. More than a century later, we still fail to comprehend fully the collapse of the greatest autocracy on Earth. Was there any truth to the wild tales that brought down the empire? Or was his true legacy an unsettling lesson on the potency of myth?

Red Dawn Over China: How Communism Conquered a Quarter of Humanity

Frank Dikötter

Bloomsbury. PB. \$34.99

Available now



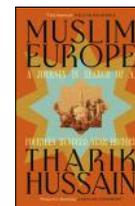
Modern China's history has long been portrayed as a tale of Communists fighting in the hills for freedom, but had it not been for support from the Soviet Union, the Party's victory would have been unlikely. Established in 1921 under Moscow's guidance, the Party plundered the countryside for years, alienating the villagers. By 1936 it had little appeal, surviving only due to the Japanese invasion. Soviet support after 1945 enabled a brutal war of attrition and the Communists finally prevailed, driven by the will to conquer at all costs.

Muslim Europe: A Journey in Search of a Fourteen Hundred Year History

Tharik Hussain

Viking. HB. \$59.99

Available 10 March



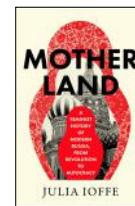
This ambitious history explores the ancient roots of Muslim Europe, tracing their journey through the Mediterranean revealing that Islam is no side show to Western culture – but rather has been integral to its development over 1,400 years. The journey begins in the little-known Sufi lodges in Cyprus, where Muslims arrived in 647 AD and travels through the continent encountering red-haired European Sultans, Arabic-speaking Christian kings, Islam-inspired Mudéjar art, and the long-forgotten tombs of European Muslims.

Motherland: A Feminist History of Modern Russia, from Revolution to Autocracy

Julia Ioffe

HarperCollins. PB. \$36.99

Available now



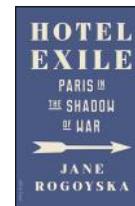
Julia Ioffe fled the Soviet Union as a child, returning decades later to discover the Soviet women she had known growing up – doctors, engineers, scientists – had seemingly been replaced with women desperate to marry rich and become stay-at-home mums. From revolution to utopia to autocracy, Ioffe retells the history of Russia through its women and reveals how one of the most audacious social experiments in history failed the very women it was meant to liberate.

Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War

Jane Rogoyska

Allen Lane. PB. \$39.99

Available 3 March



The Hotel Lutetia is a Paris institution, the only 'grand' hotel on the bohemian Left Bank, long a meeting place for artists, musicians and politicians. It has a darker history, too: a sanctuary for exiles in the 1930s, German intelligence headquarters during the occupation, and in 1945 a reception centre for deportees returning from concentration camps. *Hotel Exile* explores the human lives looking for a path through the period of these most devastating events.

Personal Development

Leading from the Dreaming: Indigenous Thinking for Authentic Leadership

Dr Paul Callaghan with Dr Paul Gordon

Pantera. PB. \$36.99

Available now

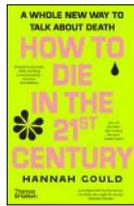


First Nations peoples have known for tens of thousands of years that we are all born to learn and continue learning until we take our last breath from everyone and everything around us. In *Leading from the Dreaming*, Paul Callaghan draws

on his business experience and cultural knowledge to walk you through the Eight Rs of Leadership: responsibility, relationships, respect, recognition, reflection, results, resilience and renewal. By developing this mindset, you will set yourself up for leadership excellence.

How to Die in the 21st Century: A Whole New Way to Talk About Death
Hannah Gould

T&H. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



In today's world, death remains one of our greatest taboos. As religion declines and rituals fade, we are left without guidance for one of life's only certainties. This book is your

handbook for death in the 21st century – a compassionate, practical and surprisingly hopeful guide to understanding mortality. From cremation to green burials, from grieving a pet to navigating tricky memorial etiquette, Hannah Gould answers the questions most of us are too afraid to ask.

Psychology

A World Appears: A Journey Into Consciousness
Michael Pollan

Allen Lane. PB. \$39.99
Available 10 March



When it comes to consciousness, there is one point scientists, philosophers and artists agree on: that it feels like something to be ourselves. And yet, the fact that every one of us has a subjective experience of the world continues to be one of the greatest mysteries in nature. In *A World Appears*, Michael Pollan traces the unmapped continent that is consciousness from different perspectives to see what each has to teach us about this fundamental fact of our lives and uncovers a world far deeper than our everyday reality.

Science & Environment

Original Sin: The Genetics of Wrongdoing, the Problem of Blame and the Future of Forgiveness
Kathryn Paige Harden

W&N. PB. \$34.99
Available 3 March



As a world-leading scientist who examines how our DNA shapes differences in temperament, temptation and behaviour, Kathryn Paige Harden has seen first-hand how we continue to struggle with the tensions between nature and nurture, freedom and constraint, the desire to punish and the longing to forgive. In *Original Sin*, Harden weaves together insights from her own experience with cutting-edge research in genetics and psychology to grapple with some of the most important questions in modern life.

A Brief History of the Universe (and Our Place in It)
Sarah Alam Malik

S&S. PB. \$36.99
Available now



From Aristotle's Earth-centred worldview to Isaac Newton unifying the terrestrial and celestial under the law of gravity, fascination with our universe has never diminished. One of the marvels of our existence is that we can imagine worlds far beyond our own. This capacity of endless curiosity may be among the greatest privileges life has to offer.

Plastic Inc.: Big Oil, Big Money and the Plan to Trash Our Future
Beth Gardiner

Monoray. PB. \$34.99
Available now



Plastic is everywhere in our daily lives. But the companies making it are hiding in plain sight. Award-winning journalist Beth Gardiner exposes the truth of this crisis, and of Big Oil, which is pouring billions of dollars into eventually tripling plastic production. Gardiner also uncovers the recycling myth, the anti-ban lobbying, the health risks caused by the chemicals in everyday items and scientists' growing fear of the greater dangers of microplastics. As fossil fuel demand decreases, plastic becomes Big Oil's lifeline. *Plastic Inc.* is an extraordinary exposé of a ruthless industry.

Elemental: How We Will Live on a Warming Planet
Arthur Snell

Wildfire. PB. \$34.99
Available 10 March



With over 30 years' experience in conflict zones and fragile states, Arthur Snell travels from the heat of the Sahel to the Arctic Circle to show how climate change is coinciding with a breakdown in geopolitical order, increasing conflict and economic crises. Through four sections – Earth, Air, Fire and Water – *Elemental* blends reportage with analysis and interviews to reveal the turbulent future we face – and the choices we need to make to avert disaster.

Visual Arts

OGGETTI

Bruno Leti
Readings. HB. \$39.99
Available now



Renowned Australian artist Bruno Leti's passion for books and the work of artist Giorgio Morandi comes to the fore in this beautiful monograph. In this tribute to Morandi, who is known for his still lifes, Leti uses photographs of objects from his studio, presenting each alongside its interpretation.

This magnificent limited edition volume has been produced in collaboration with Readings. Leti is donating \$22 from each copy sold to The Readings Foundation. **R**

celebrating
30 years of australia's favourite cookbook

Australia's favourite cookbook – fully updated

From the three-time CBCA Award winner

THE BOY AND THE DOG TREE
FIONA WOOD
Three-time CBCA Book of the Year winner

'A beautiful book, filled with courage, magic and a huge ancient dog to wrap your arms – and your heart – around.'

PETER CARNAVAS

UGP 2025 Australian Small Publisher of the Year

Kids

PICTURE BOOK OF THE MONTH

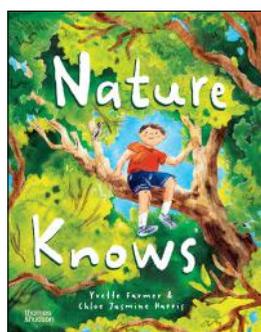
Picture Book

Nature Knows

Yvette Farmer & Chloe Jasmine Harris (illus.)

T&H. HB. \$26.99

Available 3 March



R Today we find ourselves surrounded by the constant hustle and bustle of day-to-day life and technology. Yvette Farmer and Chloe Jasmine Harris have tried to remind us that taking a step back and spending some time in nature can offer a much-needed reset. *Nature Knows* brings together beautifully calming yet vibrant illustrations and a story of a young boy and his family who need some time away from the chaos of their city home to deliver an essential message about the necessity of taking some time to stop and smell the flowers.

Scattered throughout are bite-sized facts about the calming presence of nature, such as how playing in dirt can strengthen our immune system and how seeing the morning sun helps us feel more alert and awake.

A wonderful picture book for any child feeling overwhelmed by the constant happenings of indoor living and an even better reminder for adults to stop and seek out the calming wisdom to be found in nature. For ages 3+.

Lili Reus-Smit is from Readings Kids

KIDS BOOK OF THE MONTH

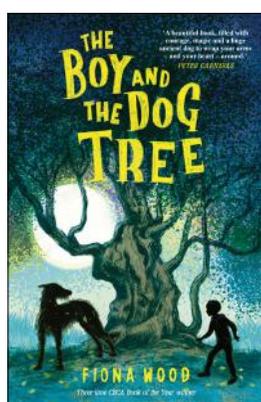
Middle Grade

The Boy and the Dog Tree

Fiona Wood

UQP. PB. \$17.99

Available 3 March



R Mitch's life is being uprooted. Instead of moving to Melbourne as a family, his parents are delayed by work overseas, meaning Mitch and his little sister have to go ahead and stay with their gran. A new city means a new school. Within minutes of his first day, Mitch is the target of the resident Grade 5 bully, Seb. In an attempt to fit in and keep Seb off his back, Mitch announces he's getting a dog. He never imagined his lie would become true, but it does in the form of Argos, an ancient magical dog who emerges from an old oak tree. Argos has been summoned to help guide Mitch. But not everyone sees Argos like Mitch does – and they'll do anything to remove the 'wild and dangerous' dog.

I absolutely adored this book! Mitch and his friends are lovable and relatable and prove the importance of staying true to yourself and finding your voice when it means the most. Fiona Wood has fully captured the magic of friendship between a dog and his boy.

This bewitching and humorous story is perfect for children aged 9+ who feel deeply, struggle with change, or who just love their pets. It's sure to be a new favourite.

Lucie Dess is the marketing and events coordinator

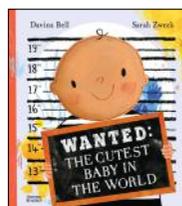
Picture Books

WANTED: The Cutest Baby in the World

Davina Bell & Sarah Zweck (illus.)

T&H. HB. \$24.99

Available now



R Dedicated to tired parents everywhere, this picture book lets you laugh at yourself and the troublesome, tiny, master criminals you have brought into your home.

Highlighting some of the harsh truths about having a little one in your life, the book reads with a cheekiness that is humorous and brutally honest but altogether sweet.

Filled with bright, playful and colourful illustrations, the pages taunt the reader with the chaos and joy that babies bring into our lives.

Opening with a detective in search of 'the most devious supervillain the world has ever seen', the family in the story is adamant they haven't seen him. The detective isn't so sure, describing to them all the horrendously silly, tiresome and tyrannical deeds that the cutest baby in the world has done – the worst of all being, of course, capturing your heart.

For new, growing or, really, *any* families, this picture book is the perfect story to bring a smile to your face. For ages 3+.

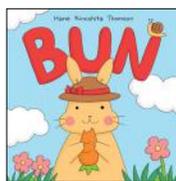
Lili Reus-Smit is from Readings Kids

Bun

Hana Kinoshita Thomson

A&U. HB. \$19.99

Available now



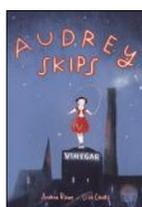
Bun and her friends Daisy, Buttercup and Walnut are getting ready for a big event – a carrot cake party! Children and adults alike will delight in this outrageously cute picture book, which features detailed illustrations that readers will love revisiting again and again. Keep an eye out for Bun's snail friend, Gary, who has a tiny cameo on every page.

Audrey Skips

Andrea Rowe & Lisa Coultts (illus.)

MidnightSun. HB. \$29.99

Available now



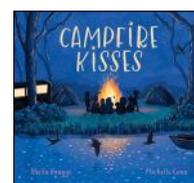
Bright and shiny Audrey loves to skip a jump rope rhyme, right off her rooftop and through the sleeping streets of a city. Peering in windows, Audrey spies folks struggling with hard times as her own light dims. With a little help from city friends, Audrey's light and her hopeful spirit shine again, brighter than ever, in this story about community and kindness, legacy and conservation. A tribute to The Skipping Girl, Melbourne's first neon sign and a timeless, treasured landmark.

Campfire Kisses

Sheila Knaggs & Michelle Conn (illus.)

Affirm Kids. HB. \$24.99

Available now



'There's nothing more delightful, than to sleep beneath the stars and wake up in the morning to the screech of the galahs.' Join Sheila Knaggs and Michelle Conn as they toast marshmallows and celebrate the universal magic of camping in this heartfelt and joyous ode to holidays in the great Australian bush.

Junior Grade

The Lonely Lunch Club (Your Next Read: Silver)

Maddy Mara & Laura Stitzel (illus.)

Affirm Kids. PB. \$12.99

Available now



R A heartfelt and universal story about friendship, loneliness and defying expectations, *The Lonely Lunch Club* sees Maddy Mara (the co-writing duo behind several smash-hit series, including *Dragon Girls*) team up with beloved illustrator Laura Stitzel, whose work you'll recognise from *The Big Backyard Plan* and *100 School Days*.

Benji plays footy every lunchtime, everyone knows that! Until one Monday, he goes to sit on the worst bench in school – except, it isn't unoccupied! Mabel the spider lives there, and Alice eats lunch there too, just so Mabel isn't lonely. Actually, there are quite a few kids who find their way to the Lonely Lunch Club, for all sorts of reasons. But Mabel's rickety habitat is at risk of being demolished by anything stronger than a breeze, and then where will the Lonely Lunch Club meet? This charming story of friendship and teamwork is the debut title in the *Your Next Read: Silver* collection for readers aged 5–8.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

The Missing Pencil Case (Your Next Read: Silver)

Jasmin McGaughey & Jade Goodwin (illus.)

Affirm Kids. PB. \$12.99

Available now



R Lea is proud to have raised money selling chocolates, but disaster strikes when her pencil case goes missing, full of all her hard-earned fundraising dollars! What follows is a fun and adventurous tale of community, honesty, and looking after your things – the second book in the new series for 5–8-year-olds

Your Next Read: Silver, brought to you by Affirm Kids and Your Kid's Next Read. The series encourages young readers to develop a regular practice of reading by providing fun, approachable, and engaging titles by some of Australia's best authors and illustrators.

The Missing Pencil Case features a diverse cast – Lea's family and friends – who help her search and share their own past (and present!) struggles with misplacing important things. Whether read together or solo, chapter by chapter or all in one go, this fantastic new series is all about building great habits and a love of reading, while enjoying a sweet story from prolific duo Jasmin McGaughey and Jade Goodwin.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

Frank the Monster

Mats Strandberg & Sofia Falkenheim (illus.)

Gecko. PB. \$17.99

Available 1 April



Frank is nipped by a dog on his ninth birthday, and his life turns inside out. He's now a werewolf! But Frank can't understand why everyone's afraid. He's still a nine-year-old boy inside, with a strong urge to have his tummy scratched. Forced to own his new identity, Frank learns about the town's secret

underbelly. Beneath the streets live other monsters who have been cast out of their human families. Perhaps he has found his pack of misfits.

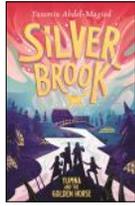
Middle Grade

Silverbrook: Yumna and the Golden Horse

Yassmin Abdel-Magied

Hodder. PB. \$16.99

Available now



Thirteen-year-old Yumna lives in a sleepy town where nothing ever happens. When her friends start sneaking into the woods at night, she follows and discovers they are hiding unbelievable powers. Everyone is changing, except Yumna. But then Kareem vanishes and a mysterious new family, the Maidstones, seem to be hiding something. As secrets unravel and danger creeps closer, it's up to Yumna to rally her friends and uncover the truth.

Freddie Jones: The Mystery of the Troublesome Trees

Kate Foster

Walker. PB. \$17.99

Available now



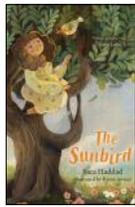
Freddie, along with his trusty assistance dog Hobnob and Grandma Lilly, is off to a luxury resort for his first ever holiday. He can't wait to see the rainforest and its incredible and dangerous inhabitants like cassowaries and crocodiles. But the ecosystem is not behaving as it should, and noises, lights and sounds are popping up all around the resort, leaving behind a trail of mysterious trees. Can Freddie, Hobnob and Grandma Lilly solve the mystery, or will it be too late?

The Sunbird (Young readers' edition)

Sara Haddad & Baraa Awoor (illus.)

UQP. PB. \$14.99

Available now



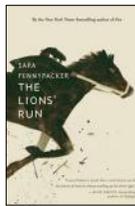
Adapted for young readers from her critically acclaimed adult novel, Sara Haddad's middle-grade story about a child's experience of the Nakba is a lyrical ode to sovereignty, freedom and homecoming. It's 1948 and Nabila Yasmien lives a happy life in her village in Palestine. But when bombs start falling, Nabila and her family are forced to leave. Where will they go? With beautiful illustrations by renowned Palestinian artist Baraa Awoor, *The Sunbird* is the poignant story of a little girl who just wants to go home.

The Lions' Run

Sara Pennypacker & Jon Klassen (illus.)

Hodder. HB. \$24.99

Available now



It's been a decade since Sarah Pennypacker's *Pax* was published and now, with *The Lions' Run*, she has delivered another instant classic. Like *Pax*, *The Lions' Run* is a moving adventure story featuring animals, set during a time of conflict. In this historical novel, a boy named Lucas is resident at an abbey orphanage in a French village that is under Nazi occupation. Lucas rescues some kittens from local bullies and in his furtive efforts to care for them, forms a somewhat unlikely friendship with Alice, the bold daughter of a wealthy English horse trainer.

Alice has secrets too, as do others in the village. Lucas learns that many within his community are engaged in inspiring acts of resistance. Lucas is a great character, sensitive and kind with a moral strength that leads him to action. The final act is thrilling.

Pennypacker does a great job of acknowledging the complexities of family, class and bravery, which are major themes of the book. Don't miss the hardcover edition, which has a stunning cover and interior illustrations by

Jon Klassen. This book is set in the past, yet feels timely, and readers aged 10+ will love it.

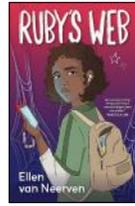
Kim Gruschow is a senior children's book buyer

Ruby's Web

Ellen van Neerven

Magabala. PB. \$22.99

Available now



Ruby is in Year 7 and dreads school. Her cousin/best friend Amber is hanging with the cool kids and pretending she doesn't know Ruby. The whole country is debating the referendum for a First Nations Voice to Parliament, and now Ruby is facing nasty comments online from her classmates. *Ruby's Web* shows how to seek help when dealing with online bullying and racism, and the power of using your voice.

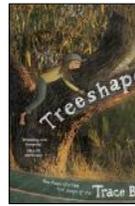
Kids Graphic Narrative

Treeshape

Trace Balla

A&U. HB. \$32.99

Available 3 March



Trace Balla's stunning memoir channels her gift for visual storytelling, revealing emotional truths, sharing her commitment to environmental activism, highlighting trees that have been meaningful in her life, and exploring her deep appreciation of place and connection with First Nations peoples. With its delicate artwork, heartfelt storytelling and timely themes of compassion and environmental care, this graphic narrative will resonate with readers of all ages.

Lamington Left Behind

Andrea Innocent

Figment. PB. \$19.99

Available now



Lamington Left Behind is the fourth title to be published by Figment, an exciting new imprint of Hardie Grant that is dedicated to publishing graphic novels for young readers. It follows Gavin Aung Than's *Creature Clinic*, Karen Wasson and Jake A. Minton's *Inked* and Gus Gordon's *Into the Bewilderness*. Each of these books has offered readers something unique, and it's fantastic to see such high-quality publishing of talented Australian creators.

Andrea Innocent has worked across a variety of graphic media, and the bold palettes of yellows, pinks and aquas used in her debut book are striking. The story is set in a strange future populated by authoritarian robots. It follows Lamington from a life alone in the wilderness to a high-stakes supernatural conservation operation alongside talking koalas. There are shades of *Mad Max* evident, and the author's love of Australia's flora and fauna is unmistakable. Readers aged 8+ who have enjoyed Jason Pamment's books or the *Lightfall* series are advised to check out this cool debut!

Kim Gruschow is a senior children's book buyer

Kids Nonfiction

Let's Go! Stories to Write, Stories to Draw, Adventures to Have, and Fun Galore

Andy Griffiths & Bill Hope (illus.)

Pan Mac. PB. \$16.99

Available now



A book can take you to any time, any place, and anything can happen. Andy Griffiths, the 2026–2027 Australian Children's Laureate, has written this book full of stories, poems and comic strips to demonstrate simple ways for you to create your own imaginary adventures with words, pictures and

ideas. You can read this book. You can write in this book. You can draw in this book. So, what are you waiting for?

Bush Tukka Guide for Kids: Bushfoods to Gather, Cook and Share with the Whole Family

Samantha Martin

Hardie Grant Explore. PB. \$24.99

Available now



Known to many as 'Bush Tukka Woman', Samantha Martin is a descendant of the Jaru from the East Kimberley region. She is passionate about honouring and sharing the traditional foods and culture of Australia's Indigenous people. This edition of her *Bush Tukka Guide* has been created with younger readers in mind. The book introduces us to the diverse cultures, geography and climates within Australia, and within these, an incredible array of foods. Martin uses a field-guide style and each food is listed alongside a photograph, Aboriginal and botanical names, and other information relating to location, seasons, cooking methods, nutritional values and medicinal uses.

Importantly, the book also includes relevant advice regarding safety and conservation. There are tips for those who wish to start a bush tukka garden, and the family-friendly recipes will inspire young chefs who will surely be excited to eat bush tukka after reading this book. For ages 7+.

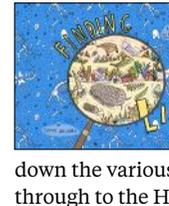
Kim Gruschow is a senior children's book buyer

Finding Life: A Prehistoric Search and Find

Sophie Williams

Cicada. HB. \$28.99

Available 11 March



Get ready to go on an informative, educational journey through the history of life on this planet with a vibrant, detail-packed search and find. Simple texts, accessible to kids as young as three, break down the various epochs – from the Precambrian era through to the Holocene. Kids will return time and again to pick through the incredible detail on each page.

Kids Classic of the Month

Witch Week (Chrestomanci, Book 3)

Diana Wynne Jones

HarperCollins. PB. \$17.99

Available now



A hidden gem written four years before her most celebrated work (*Howl's Moving Castle*), Diana Wynne Jones's *Witch Week* is the perfect blend of boarding-school drama, parallel-world fantasy and characterisation by a master at the peak of her powers.

In a world where witchcraft is a crime punishable by death, Larwood House fills a sad necessity – the education of witch orphans. The strictly regimented curriculum, which includes mandatory journaling, is designed to produce compliant, obedient children, but everything begins to unravel when an anonymous note appears: 'SOMEONE IN THIS CLASS IS A WITCH'.

Through journal entries and multiple points of view, we watch as the school devolves into suspiciously magical behaviour, pranks and puritanical finger-pointing. Set over the last four days of October 1981, *Witch Week* is a reminder that we're never as strange, as alone, or as unredeemable as we feel, and that, in fact, the things that make us feel different are often what others find most fascinating and admirable.

A timeless example of why this student of both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, a mother who was frustrated with the poor fare available for her children, a mentor and an icon in the fantasy community, is more than overdue for a re-read. For ages 10+.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids **R**

Young Adult

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Young Adult



Red Star Rebels
Amie Kaufman
A&U. PB. \$24.99
Available now

R Set on Mars, this is a thrilling, action-packed adventure that takes place during an eight-hour countdown. The stakes are high, and the body count potentially even higher, when an unlikely pair of teenagers are thrust together to save themselves and the planet.

Red Star Rebels is more fun than you could possibly imagine even if you were trying to survive on a Mars colony with minimal oxygen in 2067.

In 2067, Mars has been colonised primarily by the Graves Corporation. Hunter Graves, an heir to the corporate empire, arrives at the United Nations base on Mars to surprise his mother and twin sister, but then there is an emergency evacuation and he is left behind. Also still on base is Cleo, an illegal stowaway hiding from debt collectors. When Cleo realises that the billionaire boy has been forgotten, she senses an opportunity – if she can save him, his family might be so grateful they will pay her or forgive her debt. Hunter and Cleo soon realise that the evacuation is a criminal operation and they are merely collateral damage.

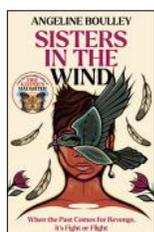
They will need to work together to outwit the criminals or die when the base explodes in eight hours.

This incredible space thriller has all the hallmarks of an Amie Kaufman bestseller – dual points of view, impossibly high stakes, sassy dialogue, and a star-crossed romance – that keep you rapidly turning the pages. *Red Star Rebels* is more fun than you could possibly imagine even if you were trying to survive on a Mars colony with minimal oxygen in 2067. Highly recommended for readers aged 12+ who like adventure, sci-fi or romance.

Angela Crocombe is The Readings Prize and Foundation coordinator

Sisters in the Wind

Angeline Boulley
Oneworld. PB. \$19.99
Available now



Lucy Smith is on the run. Years in foster care have taught her to be smart and cautious. But when the kind-eyed Jamie Jameson and his 'friend-not-friend' Daunis track her down and show interest in her

case, they tell her the truth about her father, and the family that has been hidden from her all this time. As the secrets mount, Lucy must decide what she's willing to sacrifice to protect the people she loves.

The Fox Hunt

Caitlin Breeze
HarperCollins. PB. \$19.99
Available now



Welcome to the University, where an ancient magic secures the right of the elite Turnbull Club to rule – in exchange for a sacrifice to the hidden, magical world of the Night City. New student Emma Curran is that sacrifice. Suddenly, she's transformed into an immortal fox maiden. Emma must harness all her ferocity and cunning to become mortal again and topple the Turnbull Club. And as the Night City loses control and bargains go unpaid, Emma must choose between seeking revenge – and saving herself.

Queen of Faces

Petra Lord
HarperCollins. PB. \$22.99
Available now



R In the nation of Caimor, the wealthy can buy and trade bodies as if they were designer clothes. The poor, however, must survive with what they can get, such as Ana's body, a damaged male

form that is rapidly decaying. Furthermore, she has been rejected from Paragon Academy, Caimor's prestigious school of magic where she would have the opportunity to learn magic and attain a new body. The third time she is rejected, Ana decides to steal a new body instead. When she is caught by the headmaster of Paragon, she is offered the opportunity to work as an assassin in exchange for a new body and a place at Paragon. But a rebellion is brewing, and as Ana commits more crimes for Paragon, she begins to question who exactly the heroes and the villains are, and what role she has to play in it all.

Petra Lord's worldbuilding and magic system are unique. This novel offers a fascinating and original exploration of gender identity and trans representation through the idea of body swapping and the feeling of being trapped in the wrong body, regardless of whether you're rich or poor. With the fun tropes of a magical school, assassins, and rebellions woven through the story, the author conveys many societal issues and LGBTQIA+ experiences in a seamless and entertaining way.

Queen of Faces is an innovative and captivating fantasy debut that explores class, capitalism, gender identity and dysphoria. It's perfect for ages 14+.

Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids

Good Young Men

Gary Lonesborough
A&U. PB. \$22.99
Available 3 March



R Gary Lonesborough's latest book, *Good Young Men*, is another stellar Australian coming-of-age story. In this novel, we follow the lives of three boys who used to be childhood friends but have since drifted apart. Together they struggle with the reality of living in small-town Australia as Indigenous and Queer people. The book's most distinctive storytelling device is that it is broken up into three sections that follow the perspectives of each boy.

Kallum is returning to his small town after being expelled from his private school rugby scholarship. He's wrestling with his father's expectations and his sexuality. Jordy is the only 'out' kid at their school but has a boyfriend who is still closeted. Dylan watched his best friend's murder by a cop and is reckoning with having to testify in the man's trial. Elements of all Lonesborough's other books can be found scattered throughout these three characters. The rollercoaster of emotions in the story is at times heartbreaking, at other times filled with hope. Throughout it all, the book never loses sight of its framing event – the murder of the fourth boy from this childhood friendship group by a white police officer.

I would highly recommend this book for anyone who has enjoyed any of Lonesborough's previous works or for people looking for young adult novels that unflinchingly tackle homophobia, racism and Black deaths in custody in our country. This is a poignant and mature coming-of-age story perfect for readers aged 14+.

Alicia Guiney is from Readings Kids

Poster Boys

Scott Woodard
Lothian. PB. \$19.99
Available now



R Edward Heffernan is in serious trouble. First of all, he's a grade-A loser at Highview Grammar School. Second, his closest friend, Nolan Li, is somehow even more of a loser, but is too lost in his own world to even realise. Last, but certainly not least, Nolan just managed to accidentally break the nose of the coolest kid in their year, James Crombie. As I said, serious trouble. Yet when Crombie asks Edward and Nolan to meet him after school, it's not for the generational beating they expected. Instead, Crombie has identified the true culprit of his broken nose – Highview Grammar itself – and he's looking for retribution.

What starts as a secret scheme to undermine the tyrannical traditions of their old-boys' private school with 'Common Sense' posters spread in the middle of the night, steadily becomes

a miniature revolution of their own, fought for every student tired of pointless rules and pointless competitions. While Edward revels in his newfound friendship with the cool kid, Crombie, Nolan begins to question the morality of their crusade against Highview and all the while, the school gets closer and closer to uncovering the truth about 'Common Sense'.

With *Poster Boys*, Scott Woodard delivers a witty and exciting romp filled with charmingly nuanced characters that feel honest to the rougher edges of high school life. Whether it's the relatably insecure Edward or the disarmingly direct Nolan, it's impossible to be bored watching these boys fight for a school that will welcome them as they are.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

The Belly of a Wolf

Julianne Negri
UWA. PB. \$24.99
Available now



Red is returning to high school six months after the death of her best friend, Wolf. They've been friends since the first day of Prep, when they played Little Red and Wolf in the school play. Now Red is defined by Wolf in life and in death. She is riddled with guilt that she didn't realise Wolf planned to die. Red becomes increasingly self-destructive and wonders if it's ever possible to recast who you are in a story?

We're looking for Readings Teen Advisory Board members for 2026!

We are looking for Victorian teens aged 14–18 to join our 2026 Teen Advisory Board (TAB). Starting in April, the TAB is a volunteer group that meets over Zoom once a month to learn about careers in the book industry, discuss young adult books, talk with authors, write blog posts and reviews, and provide feedback to Readings staff members and publishing industry people on a range of subjects.

TAB members are also given the opportunity to judge the Gab Williams Prize for Young Adult books and attend an in-person work experience day at a publishing house. Select books will be provided free of charge to the board throughout the year and posted out to individual members.

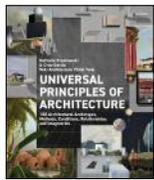
We are an equal opportunity bookshop and aim to nurture an inclusive environment for our teen volunteers. We encourage applications from, including but not limited to, First Nations people, those with a disability, and LGBTQIA+ applicants.

To learn more and submit your application, head to readings.com.au/the-readings-teen-advisory-board **R**

Bargains

Universal Principles of Architecture

Nathalie Frankowski, Cruz Garcia & WAI Architecture Think Tank
HB. Was \$69.99 **Now \$29.99**

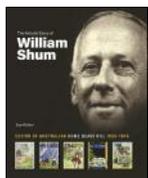


Universal Principles of Architecture illustrates in 100 concepts the importance, possibilities, challenges, and roles that architecture plays in shaping the world.

Divided into five sections, this tour of architectural theory and practice explores everything from basic ideas to speculative design and subversive interventions, and introduces architecture at different scales and stages of the design process.

Untold Story of William Shum

Sue Walker
HB. Was \$59.95 **Now \$19.99**

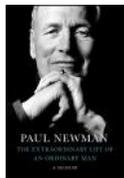


Set against the backdrop of Australia's cultural coming-of-age, Sue Walker traces the life of her grandfather, pioneering magazine editor William Shum.

Shum was the founding editor of *New Idea* (1902) and *Australian Home Beautiful* (1926). His extraordinary influence helped shape modern Australian homes and ideas for over four decades. Beautifully illustrated, this book reveals his lasting yet overlooked impact.

The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man

Paul Newman
HB. Was \$45 **Now \$15.99**



In 2008, Paul Newman tasked his best friend with interviewing the people who had shaped his life in order to create an oral history of it. After hearing and reading what they had to say,

Newman dictated his own version. This candid and unvarnished memoir details Newman's fascinating life and is full of wonderful stories and recollections from his family, friends and film luminaries, revealing his previously unknown sides.

Putin: His Life and Times

Philip Short
PB. Was \$39.99 **Now \$13.99**



He has the power to reduce the West to nuclear ashes. He invades his neighbours, meddles in elections and orders assassinations. Yet many Russians continue to support Putin. Under his leadership, Russia has once again become a force to be reckoned with. Philip Short's biography explores the personality of Russia's leader and demolishes many of our preconceptions about Putin's Russia.

Made in Italy

Silvia Colloca
HB. Was \$49.99 **Now \$15.99**



Italian-born Silvia Colloca returns to the villages where she spent her childhood in the regions of Abruzzo, Marche and Molise. Colloca celebrates the incredible array of fresh produce, its

marked regional variations, and how this affects the local cuisine. Sharing family stories and recipes, she shows how a handful of seasonal ingredients can be transformed into something truly exceptional.

La Dolce Vita

Silvia Colloca
HB. Was \$49.99 **Now \$15.99**

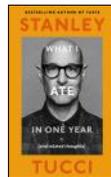


In *La Dolce Vita*, Silvia Colloca embraces the Mediterranean food she grew up with. Italian home cooks are more likely to cook simply, allowing fresh fruit and vegetables,

legumes and fish to shine, with sparing use of dairy, meat, animal fats and sugars. The recipes here are authentic and nutritious, catering to those with dietary preferences – the perfect way to love and nurture your favourite people.

What I Ate in One Year (and Related Thoughts)

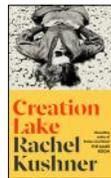
Stanley Tucci
HB. Was \$45 **Now \$16.99**



Food has always been an integral part of Stanley Tucci's life. In *What I Ate in One Year*, he records 12 months of eating: in restaurants and kitchens, on film sets and press junkets, at home and abroad, with friends, family, strangers, and, occasionally, just by himself. This is a funny, heartfelt and satisfying celebration of the profound role that food plays in all our lives.

Creation Lake

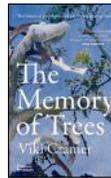
Rachel Kushner
PB. Was \$34.99 **Now \$13.99**



Sadie, an American spy-for-hire, has been sent by her mysterious employers to a remote corner of France to infiltrate a commune of eco-activists influenced by the beliefs of Bruno Lacombe, an elder who has rejected civilisation and lives in a Neanderthal cave. Sadie finds his idealism laughable, but just as she is certain she's the master of those she surveils, Lacombe seduces her with his counter-histories, laments, and own tragic story.

The Memory of Trees

Viki Cramer
PB. Was \$34.99 **Now \$15.99**



From forests to woodlands, city parks to the coast, and on into the bush, eucalypts inhabit our landscapes and national psyche. Yet the resilience of their ecosystems is being seriously tested. In search of answers, Viki Cramer journeys through the richest botanical corner of the continent to help you look anew at the trees and environments that sustain us, while showing us the many ways we can ensure their future.

The Planthunter

Georgina Reid & Daniel Shipp (photog.)
HB. Was \$59.99 **Now \$19.99**



Georgina Reid is a hunter of stories, plants and ideas. In *The Planthunter*, she uncovers the ways people around the world find truth, beauty, purpose and connection through the act of gardening. This book is a visceral and seductive celebration of life in the garden:

for the plant curious, the plant killer, the plant lover, and everyone in-between.

Grand Melbourne Gardens

David Wilkinson & Kimbal Baker (photog.)
HB. Was \$70 **Now \$24.99**



Gardens have always occupied a special place in Melbourne's communal heart. We are known for our vast, meandering Botanic Gardens and our generous green city spaces. We are also known for our tree-lined streets, which give tantalising glimpses of beautiful houses behind high fences. This book takes us behind the fences and into the very heart of these oh-so-private gardens.

Viking Women

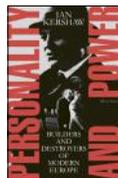
Lisa Hannett
PB. Was \$34.99 **Now \$15.99**



How did Viking women live, love and die? In this groundbreaking work, Lisa Hannett lifts the veil on the untold stories of wives and mothers, girls and enslaved people, widows and witches who sailed, settled, suffered, survived, and thrived in a society that largely catered to men. She presents the everyday experiences of a compelling cast of women who were as fabulous and flawed as we are today.

Personality and Power

Ian Kershaw
HB. Was \$55 **Now \$16.99**



The modern era saw the emergence of individuals who had command over a terrifying array of instruments of control, persuasion and death. This book is a compelling attempt to understand these rulers, whether operating on the widest stage (Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini) or with a more national impact (Tito, Franco). What was it about these leaders and their times that allowed such untrammelled power?

Indoor Green

Mr Kilty's Bree Claffey & Lauren Bamford (photog.)
PB. Was \$39.99 **Now \$16.99**



For centuries, plants have transformed interiors. Today, house plants are once again experiencing a revival. Bree Claffey journeys into the interior worlds of fellow plant lovers to explore the enduring attraction of houseplants. From the ever-reliable peace lily and beguiling fiddle leaf fig to the elusive Chinese money plant, *Indoor Green* makes it obvious that even the humblest greenery can transform a home.

Glow Jigsaw Puzzle (500 pieces)

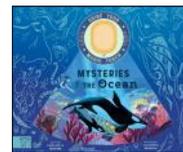
Sara Boccaccini Meadows (illus.)
Box. Was \$35 **Now \$14.99**



This stunning puzzle brings together stars and planets in a rich and beautiful design. A double-sided poster inside shows the puzzle artwork on one side and details star-gazing activities and puzzles on the reverse. With 500 pieces, this is the perfect puzzle to bring the family together.

Mysteries of the Ocean

Camilla de la Bedoyere & Alexandria Neonakis (illus.)
HB. Was \$39.99 **Now \$16.99**



Travel the globe and discover what lies beneath the waves using the UV flashlight included with the book. Search for the dugong lurking in the seagrass in the Great Barrier Reef, find a prickly porcupine in a mangrove forest and spot a semi-transparent salp in the Antarctic sea ice. With more than 50 marine animals from around the world, this collection is perfect for any ocean lover.

The Invention of Good and Evil

Hanno Sauer & Jo Heinrich (trans.)
HB. Was \$55 **Now \$24.99**



For almost five million years, humans have shaped morality, inventing and reinventing concepts of good and evil, weaving them into our cities, laws and customs. Morality can feel oppressive, often associated with things such as restraint, coercion, guilt and shame, but this impression is incomplete. This is a grand, sweeping history of the evolution of morality, from our earliest ancestors through to the present day.

The Future Loves You

Ariel Zeleznikow-Johnston
HB. Was \$55 **Now \$19.99**



Some argue that death brings meaning to life. But given humans rarely live beyond a century, it's hard not to see our biological limits as unfair. *The Future Loves You* explains that death is no longer the loss of heartbeat or breath, but of personal identity. On this basis, it explores how recently invented brain preservation techniques offer us all the chance of preserving our minds to enable our future revival.

Mirka Mora: A Life Making Art

Sabine Cotte
HB. Was \$49.99 **Now \$16.99**



With access to the artist and her studio, Sabine Cotte provides a unique insight into one of Melbourne's most beloved personalities, Mirka Mora. Revealing an unseen side of Mora through her materials and practice, this portrait shares her complex and innovative techniques, illuminating Mora's significance as one of Australia's most compelling, creative and prolific artists.

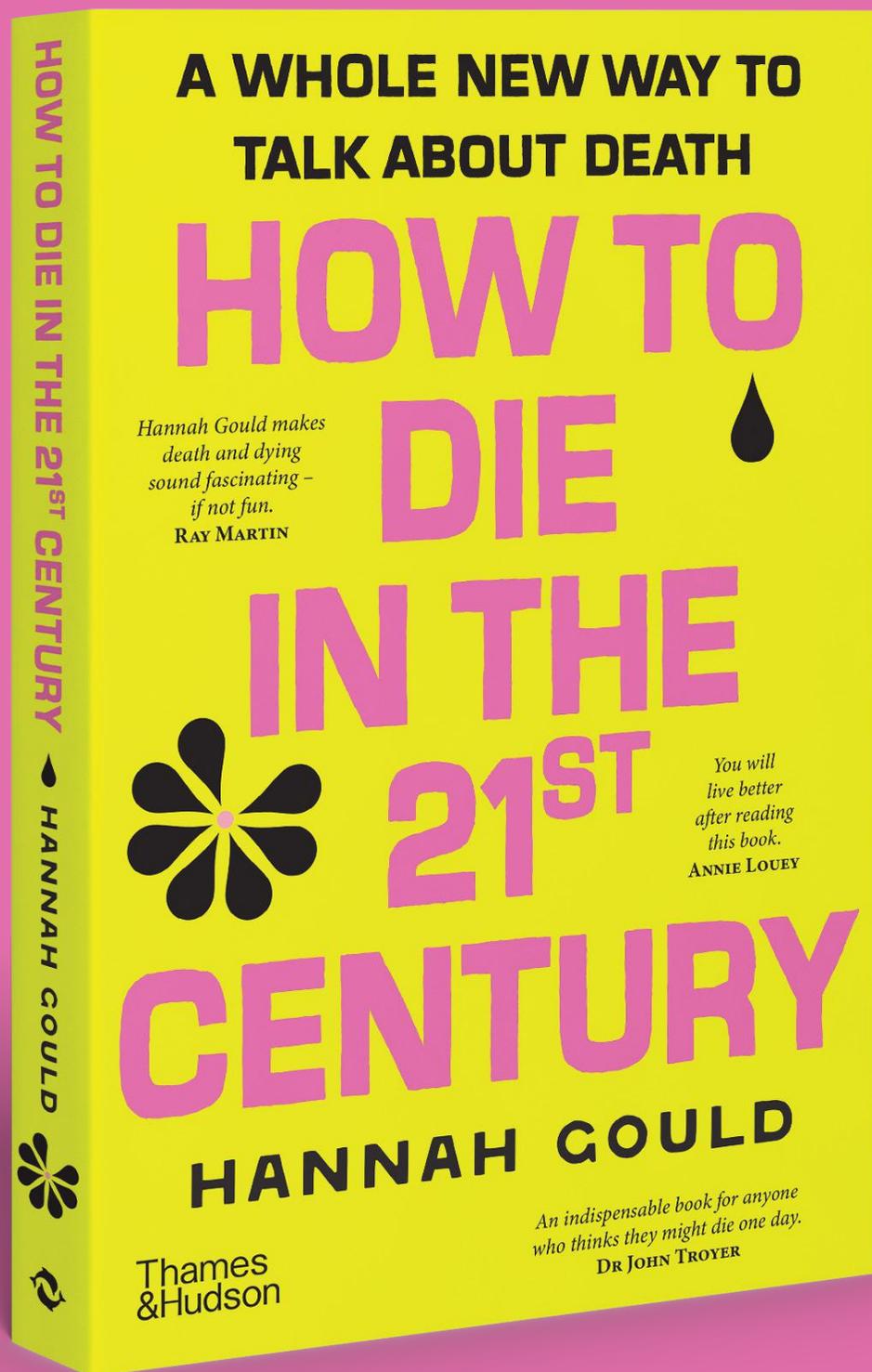
Colony

Cathy Leahy, Judith Ryan, Dr Isobel Crombie, Myles-Russell Cook & Megan Patty (eds)
HB. Was \$80 **Now \$24.99**



In 1770, James Cook landed on the east coast of Australia, marking the beginning of a long and bloody history. Including works by William Barak, Maree Clarke, and many others, this is an essential exploration of Australia's complex colonial mindset, from the tragedies of a contested beginning to the conversations that allow us now to contemplate a better future. **R**

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