

# Readings Monthly

FREE | JUNE 2026

## Readings Australian Fiction Month

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Celebrating  
Australian Books



**ANGERTAINMENT**  
HOW SOCIAL MEDIA OUBRAGE  
RUINED EVERYTHING  
**ED COPER**

Summit Books

‘Masterful and unflinching... essential reading.’  
**CHANEL CONTOS**

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SHIVAUN PLOZZA

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A story about picking your battles and the transformative power of science

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MEG CADDY

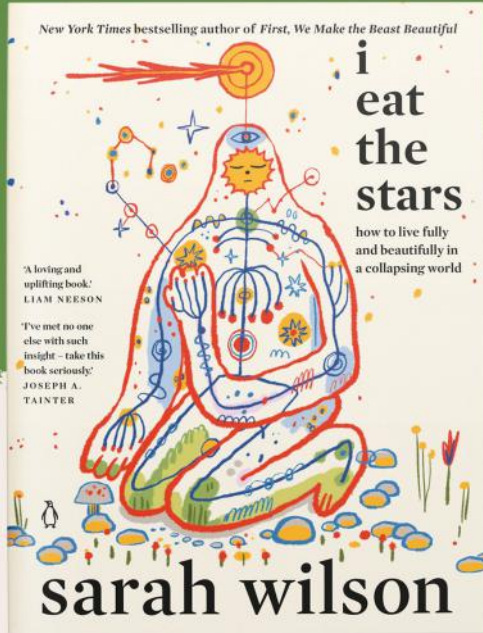
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A gripping historical YA thriller, with a dash of queer romance

UQP

# 'A loving and uplifting book.'

LIAM NEESON



How to live fully and beautifully in a collapsing world

## News

### Readings Kids' 10th Birthday

Readings Kids is turning 10! Come and celebrate with us on Saturday 20 June with storytimes, giveaways, author signings and more! To find out more, visit [readings.com.au/events](https://readings.com.au/events)

### Farewell Oslo, with thanks

After over 16 years as our *Readings Monthly* cartoonist, Oslo has hung up his pencil. He says it best in his own words - 'I think I've exhausted every book-related cartoon possible, which means if Readings were to employ another cartoonist they would have to get out of selling books and into something else. May I suggest they open a car dealership? Or move into animal husbandry?' Thank you for the laughs, Oslo.

### The Readings Big Book Club: *The Odyssey*

Readings has teamed up with the University of Melbourne and Cinema Nova to launch The Readings Big Book Club with a five-part seminar series on *The Odyssey*. The first session is 'The Original Hero's Journey with Dr Seth Robinson' and will be held at Cinema Nova on Thursday 18 June at 6.45pm. To find out

more and to book your spot, visit [readings.com.au/news/the-readings-big-book-club](https://readings.com.au/news/the-readings-big-book-club)

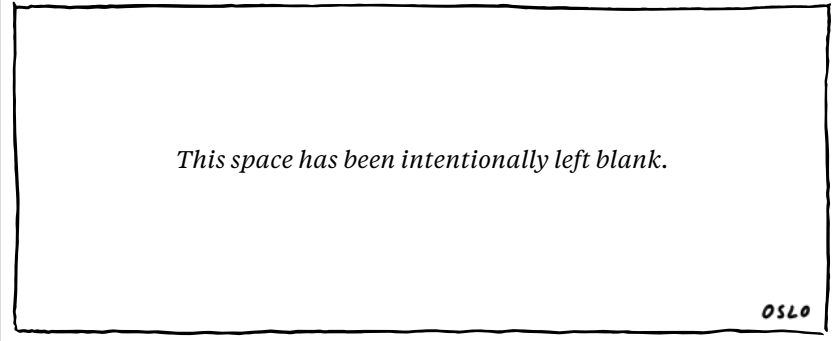
### Stella Prize winner

The Stella Prize for 2026 has been awarded to Lee Lai for *Cannon*, a precise and eloquently written narrative that uses visuality to its benefit. This is a history-making win that sees a graphic novel awarded the \$60,000 prize for the first time. The Stella Prize celebrates the best books by Australian women and non-binary writers. Find out more about the prize and *Cannon* at [stella.org.au](https://stella.org.au)

## Promos

### 20% off Australian Fiction

We are celebrating Readings Australian Fiction Month with 20% off an incredible range of Australian fiction titles. (See pages 6-7 for a sample!) This offer is available online and in Readings shops until 30 June 2026. Offer valid on stickered, in-stock items only, while stocks last. Not valid with any other offer.



After 15 years touring the world Back to Back Theatre's legendary show returns home.



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The New York Times

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The Guardian (UK)

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### 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](https://readings.com.au/readings-monthly)

### EDITOR

Elke Power

### PROOFREADER

Nico Callaghan

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Judi Mitchell & Lucie Dess

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Natasha Theocharous

### 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.

### FRONT COVER

The June *Readings Monthly* cover features artwork celebrating Readings Australian Fiction Month by Arthur Nyakuengama.

### 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](https://readings.com.au/the-readings-foundation)

### SHOP INFORMATION

See shop opening hours, browse and buy online at [readings.com.au](https://readings.com.au). Australian online, mail and phone orders have \$9 flat rate shipping, with free shipping on orders \$100 and over.

CARLTON	309 Lygon St	03 9347 6633
KIDS	315 Lygon St	03 9341 7730
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ST KILDA	112 Acland St	03 9525 3852
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### KEY

Your guide to getting the most out of the *Readings Monthly*

Review

Events

Special price

National Theatre Live

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

by John Millington Synge

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## Foreword

with Joe Rubbo



When I first started at Readings, I would often work evenings and weekends. My colleagues on those shifts had read more widely than I had, and would spend those shifts discussing the novels they loved and what they were excited to read

next. This was over 20 years ago, and I distinctly remember the books that were recommended to me. There was the time an older colleague picked out Cormac McCarthy for me, or another time when I was pointed in the direction of Saul Bellow. We would rarely talk about Australian fiction, and almost never recommend these novels among ourselves. There were novels that broke through, of course, but never in a way to override our prevailing immaturity; the thinking that writing to be admired would almost never come from here. That Australian novels were secondary. The cultural cringe was strong, even among us booksellers, and we had a whole Australian Literature section at our disposal every shift. While you still come across people who never read Australian novels – to their detriment – there has been an undeniable shift in this thinking. *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas came out in 2008 – there was a long period in the bookshop where it felt like everyone who walked in

the door bought a copy of that book. When a customer came to the counter with the question, 'Have you got a copy of ...', you could invariably finish their sentence with the 'The Slap'. Its success was *because* it was Australian, not despite it. A couple of years earlier, Tony Birch published *Shadowboxing*, which was more of a slow burn but has proved to be a huge hit with readers over the years; it captures a moment in time that can never be recovered and illustrates the importance of fiction in preserving collective memory. Tim Winton continued to build on his remarkable body of work with books like *The Turning*, *Breath* and *The Shepherd's Hut*. Helen Garner experienced a massive resurgence as a new generation of Australian readers discovered her backlist. The Stella Prize was launched, and the inaugural winner, *The Strays*, was a hit with Readings customers. Writing this piece, my mind is flooded with authors names such as Murray Bail, M.J. Hyland, Stephanie Bishop, Nam Le, Alexis Wright and Peter Carey. There are too many to name, but this exercise makes you reflect on the wealth of artistry that has been created by Australian authors. As Mark reflects in his column, most of these books have been written over the last 50 years or so. It is something that deserves to be celebrated.

Join us, and read Australian this month.

## Dear Reader

with Alison Huber



Do you ever look around and wonder, 'What are we doing here?'. I mean that question in every which way you might imagine, from home to work to the world to the moon to the outer reaches of space.

Whatever your inclination, we can probably all agree that it's incredible that we're all here sharing time on Earth together right now, and that it's a privilege to be doing what we are able to do, at this time and in this place. It's pretty wild.

When I ask that question, 'What are we doing here?', in relation to what we are doing at Readings (something I do regularly, to keep the feet on the ground), this comes closest to answering this question: we are supporting, championing, and selling the work of Australian writers in a globalised publishing industry. Indeed, everything we do coalesces around this idea, an intent that has grown to be part of the long history of Readings: we've taken the lead of our chairman, Mr Mark Rubbo OAM, on this point, and Mark speaks to some of the background that has framed this approach, which has its roots in the changing cultural and publishing landscape of the 1970s and '80s, in his column. It's not that we don't read and love and recommend books from all over the world (of course we do!), but our routine practice of giving a lot of love and energy to highlighting the work of our local authors and their unique output in the market where it matters most is ideological. It guides everything we do.

The reason why this matters was again clear to me upon the publication of a list, of 'the 100 best novels of all time' kind, this time published by *The Guardian* in the UK. I love lists. They make me think about how and what we remember of culture, and what it takes for a cultural thing to stand the test of 'the test of time', and be retained for use in the future. In the literary world, lists are one of the many mechanisms that contribute to the formation of a canon, the concept of 'backlist', and publisher decisions about what is kept in print. They are also a call to action for a book buyer. The list says, 'Here, this is what you must have, and must have read'. Whatever the parameters and

criteria are that shape these lists (which are themselves ripe for close analysis), when Australian books don't feature on lists like this or only feature in a really marginal way (in this one, only Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus* features at number 53), Australian publishing and Australian writers are made to seem like an exception to the global literary sphere rather than part of it. And this leads me back to the question, 'What are we doing here?'. So this month, we're naming our enterprise, and focusing our attention even further than we usually do, and I'm excited to announce the launch of our inaugural Australian Fiction Month at Readings. We invite you to join our mission by buying Australian fiction in June. It's political, it's cultural, and it's more than just a supportive sentiment, it's a tangible contribution to the work of national storytelling and sustains those who write!

For anyone who needs some inspiration or (re)entry point, we have a fantastic 20% off promotion in both the Adult and Kids departments. You might wonder how we assembled the offering for this promotion, and I will admit to you that it's a daunting thing to put together a representative list, until one realises that in fact it could never be that. Whatever happens, we will omit many of our darlings and the number left out will be unbearable to contemplate, but – *pull yourself together, Alison!* – one does have to put some sort of frame around this collection for practicality, so: for the Adult promotion I've mined some lists of my own, collecting together all the available fiction that covers winners of the Miles Franklin since 2000, the Stella Prize, the books that our community voted as the 'Best Australian Books of the 21st Century' (a list assembled in 2024 following that other infamous *New York Times* list that outrageously featured no Australian writers), plus of course the winners of The Readings Prize, and a chunk of staff suggestions (avoiding the new releases of the last twelve or so months for reasons of scale). But this is just the beginning, dear Reader, the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Come in to one of our shops and ask our brilliant and passionate staff to recommend an Australian novel to you. It's what we love to do.

## Events

with Chris Gordon



Recently, I took part in a weeklong round table discussion, hosted by our very own City of Literature Melbourne office.

Together, local and international representatives discussed what makes a successful literary event and crucially, what we want to achieve with our programming (so much, we want so much). I have come away from these conversations feeling lighter, yet more determined to ensure readers can find a community that offers kinship, encourages creativity and a boldness to explore new reading experiences. (Also, I would love an Australian Poetry Festival!)

Next time you visit us at a Readings shop, take the plunge and pick up a book by a local. Attend their event and let the author/poet/illustrator/publisher know that you spent time with their craft. Know that by doing so, you are building a village where you belong and making literary programmers across the world happy.



For our full events calendar, the latest events information and to book tickets, scan the QR code or visit

[readings.com.au/events](https://readings.com.au/events)

### Laura McCluskey and Kate Horan in conversation Thursday 11 June at 6pm

Readings Hawthorn, 687 Glenferrie Rd  
Free, but bookings are essential

We are delighted to invite you to hear a conversation between two incredible Australian crime writers, Laura McCluskey and Kate Horan!

### Ayesha Inoon in conversation Thursday 25 June at 6pm

Readings Chadstone, 1341 Dandenong Rd  
Free, but bookings are essential

We are delighted to have Ayesha Inoon, author of *Untethered*, join us to discuss her new novel, *The Sisters of Serendib*.

### A Fantasy series: Spice Market Thursday 25 June at 6pm

Readings Hawthorn, 687 Glenferrie Rd  
Free, but bookings are essential

Join Amie Kaufman for a new fantasy panel series! In the first session, Spice Market, Kaufman will be joined by Keshe Chow and Dr Kate Cuthbert as they discuss all things spicy!

### Picture book workshop: Gabrielle Wang Monday 29 June at 2pm

Readings Hawthorn, 687 Glenferrie Rd  
Tickets are \$25 per person, and includes a copy of *The Silken Thread* by Gabrielle Wang

Learn how to create your own picture book in this workshop with former Australian Children's Laureate, Gabrielle Wang! For ages 7 to 12.

## Comments and Note

with Kim Gruschow



On 14 April, Jon Klassen won the 2026 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. The award is considered one of the highest accolades in children's publishing and recognises significant contributions to children's literature. Klassen is best known for his clever and funny picture books that always invite readers to consider what is

happening on the page, rather than explaining it to them. I've never met anyone who doesn't love *I Want My Hat Back*. Since Maurice Sendak and Christine Nöstlinger were announced as the inaugural winners in 2003, Australia has been remarkably well represented with three wins: Sonya Hartnett won in 2008, Shaun Tan in 2011, and the incredible work of the Indigenous Literary Foundation was celebrated when it won the award in 2024. I mention this in case you harbour any shred of doubt that what happens here is world class. Children's publishing in Australia is extremely strong and utterly unique.

This week I've been reading *Wangka Wakanutja: The Story of the Papunya Literature Production Centre*, a book that has been produced and published simultaneously with an exhibition that is currently on display at the National Library of Australia. Between 1979 and 1990, more than 300 Pintupi-Luritja bilingual books were created as literacy tools for children in Papunya. Wonderfully illustrated and covering a broad array of topics, they stand as an extraordinary example of community sustaining and recording culture through books.

In our shops this month we are celebrating Australian fiction and you'll find a wonderful selection of Australian children's novels from the past few decades. If you or a young person you know is looking for a great read, the range highlights excellent award winners and perennial staff favourites for all tastes, and includes books suitable for junior readers through to young adults.

## Mark's Say

with Mark Rubbo



My brush with books began in the early 1970s when, as a rather desultory arts student, I got a part-time job at the Melbourne

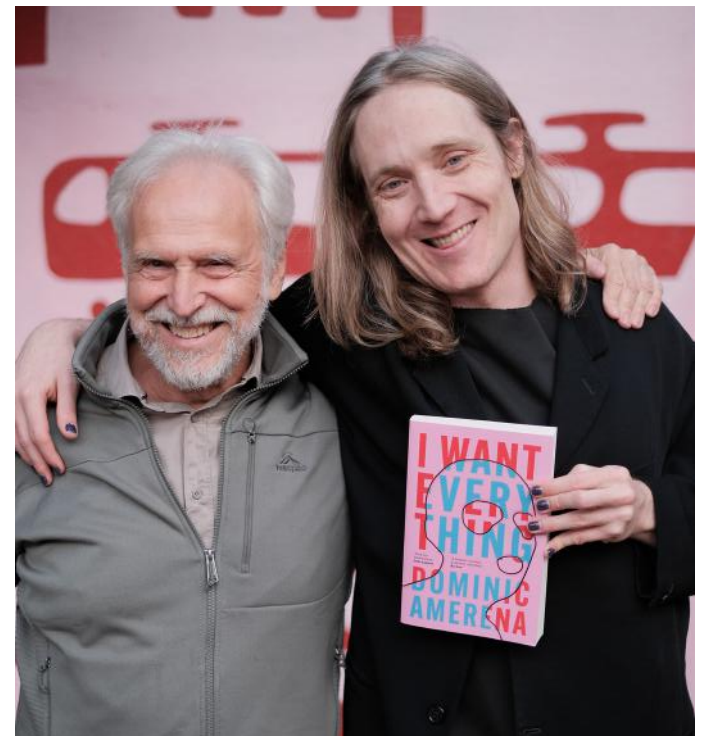
University Book Room. A job there was perhaps as coveted as a job at Readings is now some 53 years later, but it wasn't until my two business partners and I took over Readings in 1976 that I became fully immersed. Ross Reading had started Readings in a small shop in Lygon Street in 1969. It was a time when we were all fascinated by American culture and its counterculture in particular. That movement had spawned a whole new publishing industry centred on alternative presses mostly based around the San Francisco Bay Area that explored new literature, new therapies, and new ways of living. These books were going to help us change the world! None of these books were readily available then and Readings filled a gap by importing them and filling its shelves with books like *The Owner-Built Home*, *The Moosewood Cookbook*, *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, *Spiritual Midwifery*, *In and Out the Garbage Pail* or *Be Here Now*. That was Readings' strength in those days and stocking books that were hard to get remained a core strategy.

When Readings started there were Australian publishers, notably Sun Books, F.W. Cheshire and Angus & Robertson, but many big-name Australian writers were published in the UK. In 1973, the Whitlam government built on the beginnings of the newly created Australia Council for the Arts and established the Literature Board;

prior to that support for writers and publishing had been rather ad hoc. In the late '70s, this support and a more independent national spirit led to a new era in Australian publishing and writing – and Readings, Melbourne and Carlton were right in the centre of this new universe. Around the corner from Readings in Drummond Street, Di Gribble and Hilary McPhee were bravely establishing their eponymous imprint, McPhee Gribble, and would have their first bestseller, *Monkey Grip* by Helen Garner, in 1977. Not far away in Fitzroy, a bunch of blokes – Morry Schwartz, Colin Talbot, Fred Milgrom and Mark Gillespie – were doing their thing establishing Outback Press and publishing a bestseller, an anthology of Australian women's poetry edited by Kate Jennings called *Mother I'm Rooted*. In 1976, Henry Rosenbloom established Scribe Publications after taking over the family printing business, and in 1979, the managing director of Penguin Australia took the audacious step of appointing a political journalist, Brian Johns, as publishing director. Keen to get cracking, one of the first books Johns published was David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*. Every Friday night writers, critics, publishers, and academics would congregate in the back bar of Stewarts Hotel in Elgin Street to argue, rejoice, and plot new schemes.

This was the milieu in which Readings and I found our calling and we felt we had an important role to play in this new cultural awakening by vigorously promoting the new Australian books. Things have changed; in those early years it was rare for readers to have access to Australian writers who interpreted and reflected our society. Now, thankfully, it's more common and there are many more Australian voices out there. This has been helped by the emergence of Australian publishing companies such as Allen & Unwin, Hardie Grant and their literary subsidiary Ultimo, and by local branches of international houses developing local publishing programs. Outback Press is no more, but its love child Black Inc. punches out significant books; McPhee Gribble is no more, and its cultural successor, Text, has been acquired by Penguin Random House in a very friendly takeover; and Scribe continues to seek and deliver books that matter.

Many of the booksellers that were around when I started aren't anymore, and those that remain compete with companies such as Amazon that have no connection to our literary culture. I look at the way countries such as France support their writers, publishers, and booksellers and sometimes despair. Despite years of government indifference, our stories continue to define, inspire and celebrate us. Buying Australian stories from local bookshops supports the symbiotic relationship between our authors and the cultural gathering places in which we readers can discover them. We all have a role to play!



Readings chairman Mark Rubbo with Dominic Amerena, winner of The Readings New Australian Fiction Prize 2025, at A Day in Carlton, November 2025. **R**

If you haven't realised yet, this June, we are leaning into our love of Australian fiction.

We could wax lyrical on this topic until the end of time, but we are attempting to restrain ourselves by limiting this month's focus to books published this century. Read on for a (painfully limited!) sample of Readings booksellers' Australian fiction favourites (with parameters).

See further volumes of our favourites (*still* with parameters) throughout the month of June at [readings.com.au/news](https://readings.com.au/news)

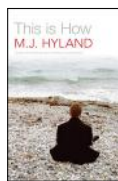
# June is Readings Australian Fiction Month!

Jacinta Richards on *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* by Alli Parker | HarperCollins. PB. \$22.99 **PROMO \$18.39**



I absolutely love Alli Parker, and her published novels, *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* and *Until the Red Leaves Fall*. Both are historical novels with a focus on the White Australia policy, the after-effects of war, and the strength and love of family. They are beautifully written and absolutely captivating in plot, characters, and setting. Parker's astute insights into our lost history are illuminating, heartbreaking, and hopeful.

Jason Austin on *This is How* by M.J. Hyland  
Text. PB. \$23.95 **PROMO \$19.16**



There aren't many writers that I just must read when a new novel comes out, but M.J. Hyland is one of those. Having only written three novels, her oeuvre is doable and all are magnificent.

In *How the Light Gets In*, a Sydney teen goes to the US on exchange and pushes the boundaries, while in *Carry Me Down* a pre-teen boy, too tall for his age and obsessed with *The Guinness Book of Records* navigates bullying and family life in Ireland. In *This is How*, a young man takes a bed at an English seaside boarding house after a break-up with his girlfriend and finds it hard to make friends.

Hyland loves the outsider. These novels are beautifully written and totally unforgettable.

Alicia Guiney on *We Didn't Think It Through* by Gary Lonesborough  
A&U. PB. \$19.99 **PROMO \$15.99**



One of my favourite Australian novels of the last few years is *We Didn't Think It Through* by Gary Lonesborough. It is a young adult (YA) novel about a First Nations boy who ends up in juvenile detention after stealing a car with some mates. The writing is so compelling and powerful, it draws you into the main character's head and you really feel everything alongside him. I read it in one sitting and am still thinking about it, years later.

Honestly, everything Gary Lonesborough's written is top tier YA in my mind, but this book just edges out his other novels for me. And it's not just for teenagers! This is the type of YA book that adults will enjoy just as much. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Lucie Dess on *The Sugarcane Kids* series by Charlie Archbold | Text. PB. \$16.99 each

Despite what you might think, working for Readings isn't always easy. We are sometimes put in difficult situations, like this one, where we are expected to pick just *one* book to celebrate for Readings Australian Fiction Month. I want to be clear, it could easily be considered torture.

I could talk about a hundred books, but I sneakily chose three – *The Sugarcane Kids* series. Set in Far North Queensland, the series follows a group of friends who work together to solve mysteries and save animals! Full of diverse characters and an array of animals, this mystery adventure explores the importance of friendship and family, sustainability, and standing up for what is right. I was chair of judges for The Readings Children's Prize in 2022, and it wasn't a difficult decision to award the first book in the series, *The Sugarcane Kids and the Red-Bottomed Boat*, as the winner. It's a series that will appeal to practically every child aged 8+, and I guarantee you'll fall in love with the Sugarcane kids!



Nico Callaghan on *Shadowboxing* by Tony Birch  
Scribe. PB. \$29.99 **PROMO \$23.99**

There is something quietly devastating about *Shadowboxing*, and perhaps that devastation emerges precisely from Tony Birch's refusal to overstate. First published in 2006, the book remains one of the finest depictions of working-class Melbourne in contemporary Australian literature. It is unsentimental and fragmentary, but deeply humane. Across its interconnected stories, Birch evokes childhood not as nostalgia, but as a condition marked as much by violence as fleeting moments of tenderness.

What distinguishes the book for me is its emotional precision. Birch writes with remarkable restraint, allowing brutality and vulnerability to coexist without simplification. For instance, the father at the centre of the collection is terrifying, but never rendered as merely monstrous. Instead, he emerges from cycles of grief and inherited damage that the book observes with painful clarity. Yet *Shadowboxing* is not without warmth. Running through it is an enduring faith in people, books and memory.

I think Birch should be regarded as having expanded the possibilities of Australian literary fiction in the 21st century, however quietly and modestly: grounding large cultural historical shifts within an intimate, local, deeply lived experience.

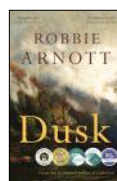


Kate McIntosh on *The Yield* by Tara June Winch | Penguin. PB. \$24.99 **PROMO \$19.99**



As a bookseller, it is rare that you ever make the time to re-read a book – there are simply too many new ones to distract you, or classics that you have never read but know that you should – you can't waste those precious reading hours on something that you've done before. Unless it is a very special book, in which case you read it again, to savour anything missed the first time around and treasure the parts that stayed with you. *The Yield* by Tara June Winch is one of the very few books I have read twice in recent years, because it deserved savouring and treasuring. It is storytelling at its finest.

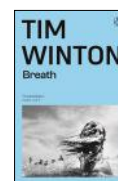
Danielle Mirabella on *Dusk* by Robbie Arnott | Picador. PB. \$22.99 **PROMO \$18.39**



Historical fiction told with contemporary vigour, *Dusk* is a sublime Australian novel. Set in the harsh wilderness of the Tasmanian highlands, twins Iris and Floyd join a mismatched, gruesome bunch of characters on the hunt for the bounty of a wild puma known as Dusk.

Atmospheric with hints of mysticism, Robbie Arnott's storytelling is unique. Landscape features heavily as a character and as the novel unfolds with an addictive unease, the reader is drawn into the rhythm of the story, which mirrors the movements of the big cat at its centre. With an ending that is near-perfect, *Dusk* is Arnott's best novel yet.

Joe Rubbo on *Breath* by Tim Winton  
Penguin. PB. \$24.99 **PROMO \$19.99**



Is there a more quintessential Tim Winton novel than *Breath*? Everything clicks in this story about young surfer, Pikelet, growing up in a small West Australian town: there is the coming-of-age story, the dynamic surfing passages, the beautiful descriptions of the WA coastline, and the connection between the landscape and its inhabitants. There is a deceptive simplicity to this novel, there is darkness and complexity beneath the surface that gives the book its tension. Winton's masterful writing can take your breath away and it is what makes the whole novel shimmer in your imagination for years after you've read it. *Breath* is my favourite Winton novel and an Australian classic for a reason.

**Chris Gordon on *Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent** | Picador. PB. \$22.99 **PROMO \$18.39**

I wonder if Hannah Kent sees ghosts. Her writing is evocative of those wind-swept clifftops in Iceland where surely spirits weave and wave. I wish I could go there to breathe in that clear sharp air and to imagine what it would have been like, back then when a woman's life was as fragile as the clouds and as strong as the roar coming from the waves crashing below.

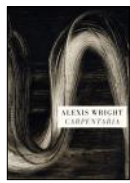
*Burial Rites* is the story of the last woman executed in Iceland, but for me the story is the imagery. I read it over and over for the stark seascape and to escape the 86-tram ride. I read Kent's work so I can be struck by wonder.



**Lian Hingee on *Year of Wonders* by Geraldine Brooks** | Fourth Estate. PB. \$24.99 **PROMO \$19.99**

Geraldine Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for her sophomore novel *March*, but it's *Year of Wonders* that I return to again and again. Set during the Great Plague of London, this brilliant historical novel fictionalises the true story of the people of Eyam, who made the decision to quarantine their village for over a year rather than risk spreading the plague to their neighbours. I most recently reread this book during the 2020 pandemic lockdowns in Victoria, and it was such a timely and vivid reminder of the power of community action and the importance of holding on to your humanity when the world is collapsing around you.

**Gene Pinter on *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright** | Giramondo. PB. \$34.95 **PROMO \$27.96**



I've never envied the task of teachers in choosing texts for their classes: chances are, most of the students are going to hold a grudge against whatever you assign, purely because they were forced to read it. While I can't say I loved everything I read in my undergraduate degree (*Great Expectations*, sorry to say, ended up an academic DNF), one novel I will always be grateful for being introduced to is Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*.

Epic in scope and written in keen, sinuous prose, *Carpentaria* commands your full attention as it weaves together the lives and stories of the fictional town of Desperance, northwest Queensland. *Carpentaria* may be a hefty tome (though not quite as long as Wright's 2023 multi-award winning *Praiseworthy*), but 500 pages are barely enough to contain the vastness, complexity and truthfulness of its world. On a continent filled with literary stars, Alexis Wright is one of our brightest – and *Carpentaria*, a shining example of why.

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**Mark Rubbo on *Cold Enough for Snow* by Jessica Au** | Giramondo. PB. \$26.95 **PROMO \$21.56**



There are so many Australian books that I have liked, but if you put me on the spot and *force* me to nominate one, it would have to be Jessica Au's *Cold Enough for Snow*. It's a book that creates feelings, experiences.

A mother and a daughter travel to Japan; they've not spent much time together and the trip is the daughter's idea, one that's reluctantly agreed to. They visit galleries, eat, walk and have interesting experiences while at the same time testing their interests, memories and relationship. The book is less than 100 pages but after reading it, it feels so much more substantial. While the details, as I write this, are dim, the book lives with me as an experience, as a journey that I've been on. It is very beautifully constructed, gentle and thoughtful. Nothing much, in a dramatic sense, happens, yet it resonates. A testament to this is that it is one of our top-selling novels of all time and four years after publication it still finds new readers.

**Angela Crocombe on *The Strays* by Emily Bitto** | Affirm. PB. \$24.99 **PROMO \$19.99**



This story, set in 1930s Australia and based around fictional characters within the Heidelberg School, is absolutely fascinating in the contrast between the bohemian artistic circle and the conservative morals of the time.

Evan Trentham is a famous artist. His wife, Helena, is an incredible entertainer. Their home is always filled with artists and outsiders, who gather around them like moths to a flame. One of those outsiders is Lilly, best friend of the Trenthams' middle daughter, Eva. Lilly is fascinated by this world and the two girls peer in from the periphery of the parties and events that fill their lives.

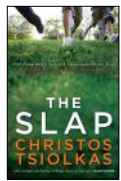
As they move from childhood to adulthood, their life of glamour but also of neglect is the backbone of this beautifully written story of friendship, betrayal and families. This unique perspective – of the children around these towering characters whose influence will resonate throughout their lives – creates an utterly unforgettable book that I continue to champion to friends and readers.



**Rosalind McClintock on *Woo Woo* by Ella Baxter** | A&U. PB. \$34.99 **PROMO \$27.99**

Ella Baxter must be one of the most unique voices in Australian publishing at the moment. *Woo Woo* is a darkly comic satirical take on the contemporary Melbourne art scene. It is much like gleefully belly-sliding down a hallway of very soft fruit: thrilling, shocking and at times pleasingly repulsive. Baxter digs deep into big themes: the fragility of ego and the need to be loved. It is sharp, hilarious and confronting. I loved it.

**Alison Huber on *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas** | A&U. PB. \$24.99 **PROMO \$19.99**



When I think of *The Slap*, I think of working at Readings Carlton during the Christmas season of 2008 when it first hit the shelves, and there that hefty green tome was, in pretty much every pile of books brought to the counter: a bona fide literary blockbuster, a water-cooler book of the best kind, a big chunky novel of ideas that everyone needed to read that summer and have an opinion about. Irresistible! A reader cannot help but get involved in its propulsive narrative, set apace by an outrageous event at a family barbeque when a man slaps another's child. It became an instant classic and so it remains to this day (and unsurprisingly it was voted number one in our community's list of the best Australian books of the 21st century).

No one writes like Christos Tsiolkas does, his piercing eye on class and multiculturalism and family, his beautifully flawed characters so real on the page, the tangled web of relations between them unravelling, and that undeniable feeling of being right inside the places of Melbourne as you read. *The Slap* is the work of one of our best writers at the top of his game: unmissable and unforgettable.

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**Ocean Trimboli on *Bridge of Clay* by Markus Zusak** | Picador. PB. \$22.99

I distinctly remember walking through Warrnambool four years ago gripping Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* in my hands, crying in the street as cars passed by. This is a profound memory for me when I think about the impact of storytelling and Australian fiction writers.

*Bridge of Clay* revolves around a family of five brothers, the Dunbar boys, and how they look out for each other as they grapple with the death of their mother and the disappearance of their father. I gravitate towards this type of Australian fiction, the kind that puts familial relationships and displays of sacrificial love at the forefront, in the face of grief and injustice. The way Zusak explores this isn't explosive and loud, it's deep and imbued with a jarring poeticism that stirs up a strong, fuzzy feeling of awe and emotion in me as a reader.

There's a resounding truth in Zusak's writing about dealing with both the joy and cruelties of life, how they exist in tandem with each other, and surrendering to the ebb and flow of what life brings. I think he truly captures this in my favourite line from the novel, now tattooed on my left calf (pictured, left), 'That's enough, mistake maker'.



**Thomas Busse on *The Spare Room* by Helen Garner** | Text. PB. \$23.95 **PROMO \$19.16**



*The Spare Room* clocks in as a very short read but it is one I still often think about and will always recommend as an Australian read.

Reading as autofiction, *The Spare Room* follows Helen, who offers her spare room to an old friend, Nicola, who is visiting Melbourne to receive cancer treatment. As the novel progresses, Helen becomes sceptical of the medical treatment centre and what they might be offering her friend. This short stay starts to test the bounds of friendship and quickly turns lives upside down.

Beautifully written, *The Spare Room* is gripping and powerful. Helen Garner has such a way with words, simple, mundane issues in life are turned into the most reeling sentences. I couldn't put it down. If you're new to reading Australian Fiction or want to explore Helen Garner's work, I cannot recommend *The Spare Room* enough.

**Kim Gruschow on *Wandi* by Favel Parrett** | Lothian. HB. \$19.99 **PROMO \$15.99**



Favel Parrett's *Wandi*, and its companion novel *Kimmi*, are standout junior fiction books. *Wandi* is a fictionalised story of the little alpine dingo who as a cub was snatched up by an eagle before being dropped in a backyard in Wandiligong, near Bright, far away from his home and family.

Wandi now resides at the Dingo Discovery centre in Victoria.

Favel Parrett does a great job of sharing Wandi's story in a way that is compelling for young readers. We empathise with Wandi as he recovers from his dramatic ordeal and works through challenges such as loneliness, homesickness, getting used to an entirely new environment and making new friends. It's a small book but it does so much. *Wandi* taught me a lot about the unique, special traits of dingoes and I am always recommending it! **R**

# Fiction

## Anthology

### CRUX 2026:

**Australian Speculative Fiction**  
Monte Weir, Michaela Harden &  
Ciar Fhearchair (eds)

Meridian Australis. PB. \$25.99

Available 4 June



**R** Aurealis Award-winning writing collective Meridian Australis returns with a bold new collection of literary speculative fiction and poetry. With original illustrations from local artists, *CRUX* is a collection that will delight, challenge and illuminate in equal measure. It features work from writers on the cutting edge of Australian perspectives and captures the full range of the genre's potential including odes to ancient styles of storytelling and experiments in the new and unexplored. Perfect for readers of science fiction, the fantasy-obsessed, the strange and surreal, and fans of anything Australian and literary.

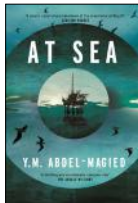
## Australian Fiction

### At Sea

Y.M. Abdel-Magied

Canongate. PB. \$32.99

Available 2 June



**R** Zainab is used to being the only woman on an oil rig. After a decade of drill-hopping and fighting to have her voice heard above the rabble, she knows all too well how to twist pieces of herself to fit into its rigid masculine machinery. But while the men she works with might come to accept a Sudanese Muslim woman working beside them, it's another thing entirely for one to take the helm as their toolpusher – especially on the *Clarissa Clyde*, a rig with a suspiciously pristine track record and a reputation for getting the job done fast.

Called on by an old friend to oversee the *Clyde's* final days on a high-stakes operation, Zainab leaves her heavily pregnant sister behind in Australia to investigate the crew and ensure the extraction goes off without a hitch. From the minute she arrives, however, it's clear the men she's meant to trust do not – or will not – trust her in turn. With every anomaly and oversight Zainab uncovers, the truth behind the *Clyde's* exceptional service comes into terrifying focus, forcing her to confront something more powerful than the rig's hierarchy: nature itself.

Informed by Yassmin Abdel-Magied's breadth of experience as an offshore miner, *At Sea* is a taut exploration of greed, prejudice, and the long, explosive tail of environmental exploitation. The novel, interspersed with poetic fragments from an oceanic Greek chorus, toes the line between allegory and devastating realism over the handful of days we spend with Zainab and the *Clyde's* crew. *At Sea* is a

rare find amid a mid-year bumper crop of new fiction, both intimate in scope and unsettling in its broader prescience.

Gene Pinter is from Readings Chadstone

### Touch Grass

Mary Colussi

Penguin. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



**R** In a nonspecific future, the pastel pelts of genetically modified rabbits are bounties for children, scientists have just discovered the Animal That Cannot Die, and Charlie keeps leaving her body.

Sometimes merely to float, other times to inhabit whatever or whoever is nearby, including a cactus, which she prefers. By day, she spends her working hours scrubbing people's shame from the internet: a debut author's fourth novel, a gaggle of tech bros' viral Zoom call, leaked nudes and AI slop, leaving nothing behind but the acknowledgement that Something Was Here. Charlie's life is a bit like that, a collection of absences – the parents who died in a car accident, the sister she no longer speaks to. It's not that she's deprived, but when you don't enjoy food, or sex, or the company of almost anyone, there are simply fewer things you need.

Even her work is just work: a means to keep going. Her newest client is a rare full sweep, erasing an entire internet presence, permanently. Sold into social media influencerhood at conception, Lady Lakes has had every second of her childhood and adulthood recorded and disseminated, and now she wants to disappear. But Charlie's out-of-body episodes are getting harder to hide, and despite years of self-isolation, the few people who know her – Lady, her boss and her hermit housemate – are starting to notice.

Mary Colussi's 2025 Penguin Literary Prize-winning debut deftly avoids the pitfalls of the genre, producing neither an unrecognisable speculative future nor the kind of preachy innovation-to-extremes inspired by *Black Mirror* and its ilk. Instead, Colussi presents us with a delicately realised vision of a world so familiar you could wake up there tomorrow. Fundamentally, *Touch Grass* isn't about a terrifying techno-future; it's about identity, shame, body neutrality, privacy and the steep but sometimes justifiable cost of being known.

Tamuz Ellazam is manager of Readings Kids

### Night Swimming

Sharon Kernot

Text. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



**R** It is not often that a verse novel for adults comes my way, so I was keen to see where this one would take me. Once begun, I simply could not put it down. *Night Swimming* is the story of January Clare

Colson and her encounter with a man from decades ago whom she knew when her best friend Julie was alive. As we are transported back to her teenage years, when January and Julie frolicked, swam and snuck out of the bedroom window to search for adventure on the streets, we learn of Julie's fate after they meet a sleek, attractive man who is not what he seems. Julie's absence

has inflicted torture on January in the intervening years, so when January sees him, the elusive man no one quite believed was real, she is set on a parallel path of attraction and revulsion, or as she puts it, a 'dance between love and lust, revenge and disgust'.

As January spirals down the path of sleeplessness, drug addiction, alcohol abuse and dysfunction at work, the reader is drawn into an addictive horror tale. January is tempted to ask him, 'Do you sleep well? Do you still like young girls?' but she exercises restraint. The sense of impending disaster looms large, but who will be the victor? Will lust win over justice? Will January implode with her multiple deceptions and lies? Will the truth come out? Will the dreams and nightmares that haunt January come to fruition? As she says, 'You know you won't sleep sober while you're living in the past.'

This psychological thriller is a diary of January's torment as she navigates trying to maintain a semblance of a normal life while being haunted by the past and what could have been. For those new to verse novels, this is a great one to start with.

Pauline Hopkins is the manager of Readings Hawthorn

### Damn Good Television

Loki Liddle

Magabala. PB. \$27.99

Available 16 June



**R** Loki Liddle's brilliant debut is a lot of things. It's a book of poetry. It's a story of memory and identity. It's a murder mystery about a bloodthirsty snake of light. It's a grab-bag of delightfully niche pop-culture references. It's a blast to read and most of all, it's damn good television.

Just like its multi-talented author, *Damn Good Television* is impossible to pin down. As soon as you start to think you have it figured out, it slithers off in a completely different direction. It depicts a mythic world of tension and release, where beings of the land's ancestral past stand in resistance to the idols of Western modernity – within the book's first pages, the black glass of the television screen shatters and something older takes its place. That this force of the past possesses a young First Nations man and begins to rack up a body count hardly feels like a surprise – after all, the land and its people have some centuries-old scores to settle. Yet this revenge story just as quickly bleeds into scenes of Hollywood romance or poignant glimpses into Liddle's own connection to the land as a Jabirr Jabirr man, each new poem refracting the narrative into some new perspective or striking image.

When assembled into a single book, the effect is bewildering yet entrancing, like channel surfing through a fever dream that does want to tell you something but isn't that interested in making it easy for you. Holding it all together is Liddle's voice itself, filling each page with a poetic rhythm that reflects his musical talents and a wry playfulness that welcomes the reader into this world of unbridled imagination. After such a thrilling debut, I can't wait to see what Liddle does next – but in the meantime, I'll be glad to rewatch some *Damn Good Television*.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

### No God but Us

Bobuq Sayed

Ultimo. PB. \$34.99

Available now



**R** Iran, 2013: refugee Mansur is dedicated to protecting what remains of his family, but he can't ignore his desire to connect with other gay men. When a cruising encounter rapidly upends his life, Mansur flees to Turkey and resigns himself to years of separation from his home and his first love – that is, until humanitarian worker Leif takes a vested interest in his case.

United States, two years later: recent college graduate Delbar is dipping his toes into Washington's drag scene when he's publicly outed to his conservative mother. Ashamed and unmoored, Delbar escapes to Istanbul to live with his sympathetic aunt and lick his wounds. What begins as exile blooms into an opportunity for reinvention when he volunteers for a queer refugee support group and finds himself infatuated with the only other gay Afghan in attendance: Mansur, now engaged to Leif.

Told across two intersecting timelines, Bobuq Sayed's *No God but Us* is a vivid portrait of queer kinship in precarity, written with a searing poetic voice. The tightly wrought knot of Delbar, Mansur and Leif's relationship is tightened to Gordian proportions by Sayed's deft hand, testing the threads of vulnerability, sensuality and power that tie them together. Surrounding them in uncompromising detail is a lucid rendering of Istanbul's recent history: its struggles against authoritarianism and the state-sanctioned violence towards migrants, ethnic minorities and the queer community. Balancing this complex setting with restless intimacy, Sayed's debut enters the canon of Australian – and international – queer literary fiction with a confident stride, wholly deserving of its advance praise.

Gene Pinter is from Readings Chadstone

### Later, Only Love Remains

Leah Swann

Fourth Estate. PB. \$34.99

Available now



**R** A page-turning work of literary suspense, *Later, Only Love Remains* examines family, grief and expectation. This is the story of Jack Wolfe, a man who is hounded by guilt, memory and grief

brought on by a tragedy he caused and that cost him dearly many years ago. The novel opens with the funeral of his beloved wife, who has just died in a tragic car accident in which Jack was driving. From there the book develops into a gripping suspense novel that you will not be able to put down until you reach the explosive ending. You've been warned – and those chapters get shorter and shorter the deeper you get into the book!

There are also the characters of Jack's grandson, Christo, and his ex-girlfriend, Lotus, who are going through their own drama and are admirable additions. I loved Lotus in particular – she's a steely and self-assured bohemian who, by the end, proves to be as important a character as Jack. She also brings challenges in many ways. The book is set in a seaside

location on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula and the sense of place, including the small town itself, is a tremendous part of the story, even as a major crisis is taking place.

This is a beautifully written and deeply compelling story. *Later, Only Love Remains* is not Leah Swann's first novel – she had a quiet debut release during Covid, *Sheerwater*, which is just as good and suspenseful. I think Swann will be one to watch for many books to come.

Melanie Barton is from Readings Carlton

**How to Love the World**

**Ilka Tampke**  
Summit. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



**R** After reading this affecting novel, I took myself off for a little walk down by my local creek. I needed to see trees in the sunshine, follow their shadows and examine the foliage around their bases. Ilka Tampke's new book is an ode to the magnificence of trees, but it is also about our relationship with them: our awe and our fear. She reminds us of this power in the most astonishing way. Readers of Inga Simpson, Ceridwen Dovey and Richard Powers, please pick up this book now. This beautiful novel is for readers who need their breath taken away.

The protagonist, Nellika Werner, is a mother and artist who lives by the bush and every day goes for long, solo walks. One morning, she is struck by a large falling manna gum branch, which pins her face down to the ground. She is unable to move and surely her spine is broken. She may die there.

Throughout the day, Nellika ponders not only the pain coursing through her body, but also her mothering, her art practice, and her relationship with Country. Had she really grasped the ecological web linking trees, sunshine, insects and native animals? Had she respected – appreciated – Country enough? And what about her parenting legacy? She had assumed there was more time to build tighter bonds, to forgive herself for her regrets, to rejoice in her memories and her desires.

Tampke has taken a sophisticated, philosophical approach to pondering how much we want, and how little we truly fathom the land we live on. This novel is a powerful reminder to examine our own expectations, and our messy, fraught history with Country. It's a timely wake-up call to recognise the beauty around us.

Chris Gordon is the community engagement and programming manager

**Over to You**

**Georgie Tunny**  
A&U. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June



**R** Best friends Carter, Naya and Greta all want the same thing – to become Australia's most successful TV presenter – but they couldn't be more different. Carter is beautiful and bold, Naya is diligent and cautious, Greta is impulsive and driven. As each woman juggles workplace pressures, romantic entanglements and family dramas, they soon learn that climbing the greasy pole of television news demands more than

talent. But how much of themselves, and each other, are they willing to betray for the top job?

**International Fiction**

**Waiting on a Friend**

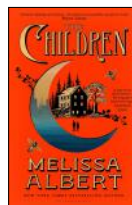
**Natalie Adler**  
Riverrun. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



East Village, summer 1984. Renata, a young dyke-about-town, can see ghosts. Since her friends have started dying of AIDS this has been happening more frequently. When her best friend Mark dies and he doesn't materialise to say goodbye, she's concerned. But a mysterious police-like force is ridding their neighbourhood of anything supernatural, trapping ghosts. With her band of pals and lovers, Renata is determined to fight back against the erasure of her friends' memories and the sanitising of her beloved New York.

**The Children**

**Melissa Albert**  
Bloomsbury Circus. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June



Guinevere is the daughter of the late Edith Sharpe, bestselling author of the successful Ninth City children's book series. Guin is preparing to promote her upcoming memoir which depicts a blissful, bohemian childhood filled with laughter and creativity in rural Vermont. But with her parents long dead after a devastating fire and her now-estranged brother, an artist with a troubled past, announcing his new installation titled *Mother*, Guin can't help but worry that the truth behind their idyllic childhood is about to blow her world apart.

**The Final Six**

**Akinari Asakura & Haydn Trowell (trans.)**  
Sphere. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June



**R** Award-winning Japanese author Akinari Asakura's *The Final Six*, translated into English by Australian literary translator Haydn Trowell, is a tense psychological thriller about ambition, secrets and finding humanity amid cutthroat corporate competition and a scathing hiring process.

Of the thousands of people who applied for the graduate program at Japan's most exclusive tech company, Spiralinx, only six candidates make it to the final stage. The six become close, even friends, because they were under the impression they had all been chosen to begin their careers at Spiralinx. But when the hiring process suddenly changes, the six must now choose one of them to be the only one hired. In their last interview, where they are locked in a room with nothing but six envelopes that contain their darkest, most reputation-ruining secrets, we see to what desperate lengths some would go for the job they want.

With the first half of the novel a gripping locked-room mystery, and the second half debunking what happened in that last interview, Asakura shows humans at their lowest, and then opens up the possibilities for redemption. What is strikingly distinct about this mystery compared to others is that it steps back from the individuals – their background stories and their motives, etc. – and targets the bigger picture instead. Asakura, with careful detail and precision in every word, delivers the ultimate 'hate the game, not the player' thriller, condemning how cutthroat job hunting is, how unfair the hiring process can be, and questioning how much we can truly learn from someone at a first glance. Is one interview really enough to understand a person, their capabilities and strengths? Is one slight failure really enough to be tossed aside?

Through the extreme scenarios our protagonists are forced into, Asakura nonetheless highlights a common problem experienced by many – how we handle ourselves after rejection, and how we proceed from there.

Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids

**Sea, Poison**

**Caren Beilin**  
Scribner. PB. \$29.99  
Available 16 June



Cumin Baleen, a 41-year-old writer in Philadelphia, works at the upscale market Sea & Poison while navigating the onset of an autoimmune condition. An eye exam required for treatment leads to nightmarish laser eye surgery which affects her language and stalls her book on gynaecological malpractice. Kicked out of her boyfriend's studio Cumin rents from polyamorous Maron. Disvelled from medicines and medical scams, unmoored from the reality she once knew, Cumin begins to crack.

**All Grown Up**

**Daisy Buchanan**  
Century. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June



After 30 long years, Louisa's daughters can finally look after themselves, or so she thinks. Because suddenly, they're back. Meg's second-guessing her marriage. Jo's career hangs in the balance. Amy has inexplicably quit university. None of them empty the dishwasher. Louisa knows it's time for some life lessons. She adores her girls, but if she's ever going to get her (sex) life back, they'll have to grow up – and go. But maybe they're not the only ones with lessons to learn.

**Tillinghast**

**Clare Cavenagh**  
Borough. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



**R** I'm always curious about how writers and filmmakers choose to tackle this particular genre, that of the vampire novel. From John Polidori through to Bram Stoker, Anne Rice, and then Charlaine Harris, and Jim Jarmusch, even Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi, there have been such wide-ranging and

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fabulous narratives to dive into. To this hallowed company, we can add Clare Cavenagh and her terrific book *Tillinghast*.

This is a highly sophisticated take on the vampire novel, at once brooding and atmospheric, with a formal-esque prose reminiscent of 19th-century classics. I loved the trail of breadcrumbs laid by the author, who never names the affliction of her protagonist, Rev. Stutley Tillinghast, though he is much, much older than he appears, and periodically murders unsuspecting people for sustenance.

His solitary life, on the crumbling family estate in New England (much like Miss Havisham or the Bouvier sisters of *Grey Gardens*) conveys a sense of reluctance by Tillinghast to draw attention to himself. He is tormented by, and weary of, his existence in equal measure. As far as he knows, he's the only one of his kind, until a young woman turns up, bearing the same last name. What is she to him? Can he help her, and also reconcile himself with his own creation by a mysterious succubus? As the two slowly come to grips with each other and what that means in this tiny part of the world, an unconventional father-daughter relationship forms.

This book really is a terrific read. Indeed, Cavenagh's own inspiration for the story, the New England vampire panic at the turn of the 19th century, adds to the high drama at the heart of the book.

Julia Jackson is from Readings Carlton

### People in Love

Claire Daverley  
Michael Joseph. PB. \$34.99  
Available 9 June



One bright day in February, Nora's partner Robin proposes unexpectedly. They'd always agreed they didn't need a wedding, but after a happy decade together, Nora says yes. Then Bren turns up at their engagement party. Growing up, Bren and Nora were the kind of best friends everyone expected would end up together. When heartbreak struck, Bren left, Nora stayed, and the longing remained unspoken. Now, their spark reignites, leading Nora to remember feelings she's spent 12 years trying to forget.

### Medea Sang Me a Corrido

Dahlia de la Cerda, Julia Sanchez & Heather Cleary (trans)  
Scribe. PB. \$27.99  
Available 2 June



**R** Dahlia de la Cerda's English-language debut *Reservoir Bitches* was a fiery roar in the face of a culture of gendered violence and femicide, a punk album of a book that thrummed with rage and defiance in equal measure. In *Medea Sang Me a Corrido*, de la Cerda's second book in translation, that rage is still there, but so too is a deeper sadness, a grief that haunts the tune. After all, a boy has died and Medea must come to sing him a corrido.

Fresh off a bloody breakup with Jason of the Argonauts, the Medea of classical myth has found her way to a modern-day Mexico cursed by endless cycles of narco-violence, where criminal organisations stake their claims with the blood of young men and boys. Mothers grieve sons buried in unmarked graves while others brave secret abortions lest their children

just become new bodies for the endless violence – the only maternity they know 'is the kind that breeds corpses'. Among these women, Medea descends in an army-green Volkswagen to act as friend, saviour and avenging angel, bringing life and inviting death in equal measure. She knows rage and the pain of dead children all too well, and seeks redemption for a past that was never entirely her own. Perhaps here, in this land of blood and tragedy, she can be reborn.

Once again, de la Cerda has given us a collection of stories that is of devastating impact, one whose power slowly grows with each new voice that joins the chorus until the collective coalesces into a passage that absolutely takes you out at the kneecaps. This is a book rich with lineage and allusion, yet it is never quite so powerful as when it is reckoning with the simple cataclysm of a life cut short.

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

### Skin Contact

Elisa Faison  
Sceptre. PB. \$34.99  
Available 9 June



Unmoored by her mother's sudden death, 32-year-old Frances feels diminished, lost and old. Her husband Ben will do anything to help her regain her vitality and purpose so when she suggests opening their marriage he complies. Over the next two years, they explore their sexualities and latent kinks as a team. But when Ben finds himself falling in love with another woman, just as Frances realises she's ready to settle down and have a baby, they are forced to confront the consequences of their experiment.

Villa Coco  
Andrew Sean Greer  
Sceptre. PB. \$34.99  
Available 9 June



**R** Andrew Sean Greer is upfront about why he authored this novel. He says we need more stories that are fun – kind, even. He felt the need to write a novel in which you can escape the grind of

present-day life. Appropriately, therefore, he set this novel in Tuscany and Venice, Italy. (Greer himself splits his time between Venice and San Francisco.) Narrated by a young, naïve American man, the story follows his secondment to Villa Coco, owned by an eccentric and delightful older woman, the Baroness, where he is tasked with cataloguing her household possessions. The Villa itself is filled with objects, exotica, family members, staff, and friends. The Baroness can spin stories that are wonderfully fantastical and might even be true – and our narrator can barely speak Italian (although he does learn). There are meals that make your mouth water; there is mad driving on twisting roads; olive picking; scenic hills; art to marvel at; and, of course, there is a parallel love story.

Has Greer written a novel that offers a respite from everyday responsibilities, today's wars, and a tense political climate? Yes and no. I could easily picture myself at the table with these characters, yet I also watched the two leads come to understand hubris and friendship. Their regrets and sorrows run through the story; after all, no worthy novel can avoid reflecting on the

human condition. Once you start thinking about that, the present day inevitably intrudes on the pleasures of olive groves, crumbling stone fences, and meals in tiny villages. Still, I enjoyed this Italian romp, and I think you will too. It is the perfect book to slip into your holiday bag – even if you are not heading to Tuscany.

Chris Gordon is the community engagement and programming manager

### The Midnight Train

Matt Haig  
Canongate. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



**R** What if you had the opportunity to rewatch your life after you died? Would you be content to just observe and then enjoy eternity, or would you be tempted to try and rewrite your

past? These are the questions that Wilbur faces after he passes away and wakes up to find himself aboard the Midnight Train. Wilbur was a self-made man who managed to escape the poverty of his childhood and become a millionaire. When rewatching his life, he is forced to reckon with how he sacrificed love and his relationships with everyone he cares about to achieve that success. Despite warnings that he should never try to interfere with the past, he can't resist the temptation of trying to make things right, especially with his ex-wife Maggie. Wilbur and Maggie's romance was beautifully written and the way it slowly blossomed and then fell apart when unintended felt very true to real life. This book explores the toll ambition, trauma, and constant sacrifice can take on a relationship.

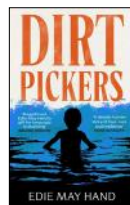
*The Midnight Train* recaptures all the charm of *The Midnight Library*. While this new novel is a companion to the first, it can be read without having read the first book, as the only connection is a fleeting character appearance. Matt Haig's evocative writing and frequent literary references really tied the story together and will add extra charm for anyone who is a lover of classic literature. The lessons Wilbur learns and the actions he takes will resonate with all of us: live life without regrets and don't wait until the end of your life before you realise that you ignored the things that made life worth living.

*The Midnight Train* is perfect for fans of Matt Haig's other books, or anyone looking for a melancholic but uplifting look at the human condition and the dangers of not living in the present.

Alicia Guiney is from Readings Kids

### Dirtpickers

Edie May Hand  
Echo. PB. \$34.99  
Available now

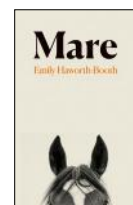


In a remote valley in Idaho in 1981, a man, a woman and three children, survivors of a tragedy, are forced to become a family. Five years earlier, Opal and her husband James arrive in the mining town of Silver

Valley, drawn by promises of fortune and independence. There they meet charismatic and controlling Baron Rowe. Baron's son Denny has tried, and failed, to live up to Baron's expectations, and to protect his sister Maude. A tragic accident will change all their lives. And five years later, will come again at the barrel of a gun.

### Mare

Emily Haworth-Booth  
Granta. HB. \$36.99  
Available 2 June



For a long time, she and her husband have their dog, and she almost certainly doesn't want children. When the dog dies and she learns she can't have a child, she begins to think of horses again. Caring for a mare two

days a week sounds like an ideal arrangement. Something to care for without getting in too deep. But as she brushes, feeds and rides the horse, affection grows into obsession and she must confront what it means to love a being that did not come from her body and is not hers.

### The Keeper of the Camphor Tree

Keigo Higashino & Jordan Taylor (trans.)  
Abacus. PB. \$32.99  
Available 2 June



When a run of bad luck lands Reito in prison, about to be sentenced, a distant aunt he has never met offers him a surprising way out: he must become the next keeper of the camphor tree. In his strange new job,

Reito welcomes the people coming by nightfall to commune with the tree, all of whom are lost and in need of something. What is the secret of the camphor tree? Can its power be more than just a myth? Reito begs his aunt Chifune to explain, but she assures him that when he is ready the answers will come.

### Before I Knew I Loved You (Before the Coffee Gets Cold, Book 6)

Toshikazu Kawaguchi & Geoffrey Trousselot (trans.)  
Picador. PB. \$22.99  
Available now



In a special seat in a fabled Tokyo cafe something irresistible is offered, not just a comforting coffee, but the chance to go back in time to revisit the ones you love. The same rules always apply – you must

return before the coffee gets cold. And while it does, memories are revisited, people are changed forever, and the enduring power of love transcends time. The sixth book in this bestselling series returns with four new guests whose stories of love, lost and won again, will reaffirm your belief in its eternal potential.

### Nymph

Sofia Montrone  
Text. PB. \$34.99  
Available 9 June



**R** Did you know that 'nymph' is a term for an adolescent grasshopper? From when they first hatch, crickets go through multiple moults till they reach adulthood, meaning they don't get the

dramatic transformation of a butterfly's metamorphosis. But the incremental changes of nymph crickets are perhaps a better metaphor for the process of human growth and coming of age – something Sofia Montrone thoughtfully explores in this beautiful, immersive novel. And if you were drawn to a book called *Nymph* for the

allusion to the nature deities of Greek mythology, then let me assure you that the Ancient Greeks feature just as heavily in Montrone's story as the intriguing lifecycle of a cricket.

When we first meet Leo, she's 10 – her best friend is her brother Max, she resents the girlish etiquette her mother tries to instil in her, and she idolises her father, though she is also starting to notice the inconstancy and heavy drinking concealed by his charisma. Over the course of a summer, spent working and playing at her grandmother's hotel in the Italian countryside, Leo soaks up precious moments of her father's attention, learning about the world from his stories, which always come back to the heroics of Odysseus and his patient family in Ithaca. Montrone depicts everything with incredible attention to detail, which makes every scene feel real and tangible – from the hair Leo pulls from shower drains to the fruit she eats straight from the tree.

Then, we move forward through time – Leo is now on the verge of adulthood, about to start university. She, Max and their mother are back at the hotel for the summer, working while their grandmother spends more and more time in bed. Leo is full of the responsible concerns of adulthood, and the inescapable anxieties of adolescence. But through this stressful miasma, there is a vein of happiness – Dolores, a young woman in town for the summer, who gets a job at the hotel and joins Leo for mornings of scrubbing floors and making beds. Dolores is bold and self-assured, but also just as thoughtful as Leo – they're kindred spirits, and over the course of the summer their friendship blossoms into love.

This novel is a sweet, slow-burn story of self-discovery and community that reminded me why coming-of-age stories are so compelling. While Leo has had to grow up prematurely in some ways, Montrone also makes space for all the ways she's still changing and learning.

Bella Mackey is the digital content lead

**Awake Awake**

Fiona Mozley

John Murray. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



Mary has an excess of memories, not too few, including some that are absurd. She has many memories of her childhood and world events, but the most concerning are about her Jewish grandfather and his role in the death of Hitler. Feeling she must have imagined it, but uncertain, Mary retraces her life, from childhood to an adulthood accustomed to tragedy. Guided by her family and friends, she attempts to figure out what is real, both in history and her own life, all the while wondering if her mind has conjured everything.

**Land**

Maggie O'Farrell

Tinder. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



**R** *Land* by Maggie O'Farrell pulled me in and refused to let me go. Set on a windswept peninsula along the Atlantic coast in 1865, it follows Tomás and his young son Liam as they work on the Ordnance Survey, tasked with

mapping Ireland in the wake of the Great Hunger. It's a premise that feels grounded in history, but what unfolds is something far more layered, emotional and quietly haunting.

What made *Land* so compelling for me was how it blended genres. It's historical fiction, but also something more atmospheric, even ghostly at times. There are threads of buried treasure, overlapping lives, ancient woodland and lingering presences that never quite leave. Even the inclusion of a particularly loyal dog added a small but meaningful warmth to the story. It all comes together to create a sense that history is never truly past, that it lingers in the land and in the people and generations who move through it.

O'Farrell's prose is, as expected, absolutely gorgeous. The descriptions of the Irish landscape are rich and immersive, giving a visceral sense of both its beauty and its scars. You can feel the wind, the isolation, the weight of what has happened there. It's writing that doesn't just describe a place but makes you inhabit it. The story also weaves between timelines and perspectives, gradually building a fuller picture of what's happening and why. It felt carefully layered to me, rewarding my patience as everything came together.

*Land* is a beautifully written, deeply moving novel about memory, history and the way the past refuses to disappear. What really stayed with me was how it treats the land itself as something almost alive – by the end, it felt less like I'd read a story and more like I had experienced something.

Nicole Vasilev is from Readings State Library

**The Renovation**

Kenan Orhan

Hamish Hamilton. PB. \$34.99

Available 23 June



Dilara is having her bathroom renovated so her father, who's dementia is worsening, can move in. But the builders have instead built a replica cell from Istanbul's Silivri Prison. Dilara is outraged and wants it removed. Her family fled Turkey years ago, exiled, and have never returned. Gradually her indignation gives way to curiosity. As Dilara struggles to care for her father, with financial hardship and marriage difficulties, she is drawn to the cell. It seems to connect, impossibly, to the city that once belonged to her.

**The Typing Lady: and Other Fictions**

Ruth Ozeki

Text. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



Spanning eras and geographies, this new collection of short stories from Ruth Ozeki is an electrifying meditation on the stories we tell ourselves, and the stories we become. A college student falls for her professor and learns to transmute longing into language; a disquieted husband watches with tenderness and unease as the ghost of his wife's ambition roams the woods outside their home; a long-deceased Beat poet hijacks the mind of a young publishing assistant during a sales meeting, and more.

**CLEOPATRA**  
HEROES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD  
THE GIRL WHO SHOULD BE KING  
JACKIE FRENCH

**HONEY**  
IMANI THOMPSON

Be swept away in a vibrant new series that reveals thrilling untold chapters of history, from Australia's favourite storyteller

**WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO LISTEN TO OUR BODIES**  
**Organ Speak**  
GIULIA ENDERS  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JILL ENDERS

The international bestselling author of *Gut* returns with a spellbinding voyage through the human body

**LATER ONLY LOVE REMAINS**  
LEAH SWANN  
Revealing author of *Sheerwater*

A darkly beautiful suspense novel from the award-winning bestselling author of *Sheerwater*

**Out now**

A new heart-wrenching story of friendship, loss and identity from the author of international bestseller

**AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW**

**THE OCEAN WOULD PAINT ME BLUE**

FROM THE GLOBAL BESTSELLER AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW  
**ZOULFA KATOUH**  
BLOOMSBURY

From masterful writer  
**ZOULFA KATOUH**  
BLOOMSBURY

BRIMMING WITH AMBITIOUS COMPETITIVENESS, COMPLEX FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS AND HIGH-STAKES DRAMA, GEORGIE TUNNY'S GRIPPING DEBUT RIPS BACK THE GLOSSY CURTAIN ON TELEVISION NEWS.

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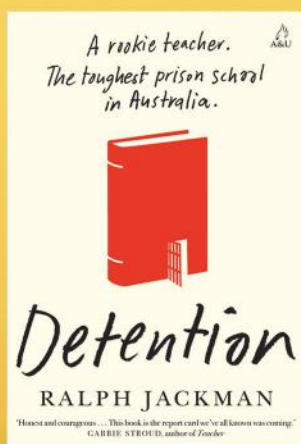
JESSIE STEPHENS,  
author of *Something Bad is Going to Happen*



AN EXPLOSIVE AND INSPIRING MEMOIR ABOUT HOW THE YOUTH DETENTION SYSTEM IS LETTING DOWN OUR MOST DESPERATE AND DAMAGED KIDS, AND HOW ONE ROOKIE TEACHER FOUGHT THE SYSTEM ON THEIR BEHALF.

'Honest and courageous... This book is the report card we've all known was coming.'

GABBIE STROUD,  
author of *Teacher*



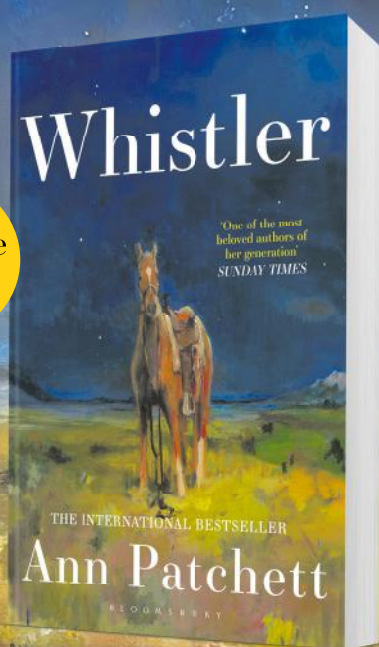
ALLEN & UNWIN

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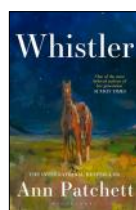
BLOOMSBURY

### Whistler

Ann Patchett

Bloomsbury. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



**R** This is a story about families. The way Ann Patchett writes about families, and all their idiosyncrasies, makes me weep. Somehow, she encapsulates with her words a sort of tenderness that just rests gently as each detail is uncovered. Readers of her past work will know what I mean. She writes a detail in the story and then gossips about it in another passage, but then – that detail she highlighted earlier – becomes the crux of it all. So, yes, this is a story about how families work, but also, not really. Perhaps it is about how to be kind, or how to recall moments, but also, not really – or, not only.

It is best to say that this is the story of two sisters, but the story is told by one of the sisters and by their mother. A terrible car accident occurs and the protagonist of this story – the older sister – climbs out of the car and saves the driver, a book editor called Eddie Triplett, to whom her mother was once married. They were not married long, but for long enough that this story is about the sister and Eddie, then and now.

*Whistler* explores all the reasons families come together or stay apart and how, if you are fortunate, you may have more than just family, in the strictest sense. It's also a tale about how everyone's memory works differently – and by that I mean everyone's truth is different from everyone else's.

Reading this novel was an utterly delightful experience. I love the portrait of Eddie Triplett: how he is distinguished and vulnerable all at the same time. I love the sisters and their bond and their pragmatic mother. But most of all, I love that it's possible to spend time with them all, and that this story is about kind people just living as best they can. And right now, in this mean world, that is exactly what I need.

Chris Gordon is the community engagement and programming manager

### The Maidenheads

Benny B. Peterson

Text. PB. \$34.99

Available now



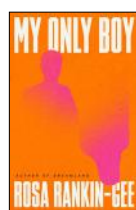
Jamie is stuck at a dead-end newspaper job, having break-up sex with her first-ever hetero partner and haunted by her past with ex-girlfriend Mari and their former band, the Maidenheads. Since they broke up a decade ago, Jamie hasn't been able to sing. When an opportunity to perform with Mari's new band arises Jamie jumps at it. What begins as a return to music becomes a reckoning. A novel about the tenacity of first love, the life-changing power of music and the difficult work of becoming yourself.

### My Only Boy

Rosa Rankin-Gee

Scribner. PB. \$34.99

Available now



Elle's job is managing disasters but lately things have started to spin out of control. Then, on a hot London night, she meets Ed. Elle has only been attracted to women, and Ed is a gay novelist about

to release his first book, but there is a spark between them. Can the unexpected attraction last when it presents such a challenge to their identity? And as the country fractures and the heat rises, how will they choose between the people they've known themselves to be – and those they are willing to become.

### Lovers XXX

Allie Rowbottom

Virago. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



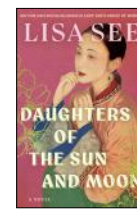
Los Angeles, 1982: best friends Jude and Winnie are 18 and working at a strip club. Soon they progress to modelling for *Penthouse*, *Hustler*, then hardcore porn. Dazzled by drugs, sex and parties they also face sexism, bitter competition and life on the margins. When a betrayal ends their friendship and Jude goes missing Winnie can find no trace of her. Thirty years later, divorced and struggling, Winnie returns to the dark underbelly of the adult industry to solve the mystery of what happened to Jude.

### Daughters of the Sun and Moon

Lisa See

Scribner. PB. \$34.99

Available 16 June



In 1870, three Chinese women from different backgrounds arrive in Los Angeles, each with their own hopes and desires. Dove wants to love and be loved, Petal desires freedom and Moon seeks justice. Together they face a ruthless society devoid of goodwill and increasingly hostile to them. Set during a period of rampant anti-Chinese sentiment in Los Angeles, this book is a gripping tale of an exhilarating but tumultuous society in a fever pitch and three women who must navigate its challenges.

### Favorita

Michelle Steinbeck & Jen Calleja (trans.)

Faber. PB. \$34.99

Available now



Fila's mother Magdalena caused chaos every time she appeared in her daughter's life. Fila hasn't seen her in years, not since she disgraced their family by advertising her brothel in the newspaper. Now, news comes from Italy: Magdalena is dead. It's time for Fila to finally face her family history. Fila collects her mother's ashes and sets out, urn in tow, to retrace the whirlwind life of the woman last known as Favorita. A wild, furious and mischievous novel from an incendiary new European talent.

### Hexes of the Deadwood Forest

Agnieszka Szpila & Scotia Gilroy (trans.)

Footnote. PB. \$34.99

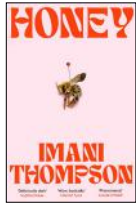
Available 2 June



Anna Frenza, CEO of Poland's biggest oil company, hates eco-warriors. But when she is caught on camera sleepwalking in the woods, making love to a tree, her career ends. In the fallout she discovers her husband's disturbing

secret. Her mind splinters and she suddenly finds herself in a medieval world ruled by the Catholic Church. There she joins the Earthen Ones, a group of women who live in the forest, reject patriarchy and worship Mother Earth – until the Church decides to fell the forest and the women within it.

**Honey**  
Imani Thompson  
Borough. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



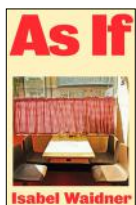
The first time, Yrsa doesn't intend to kill. But the Cambridge professor sitting opposite has manipulated her friend, stolen her research. When she flicks the bee into his Sanpellegrino, she thinks he'll get a nasty sting. Then he's dead. And Yrsa, who – let's face it – has been bored for a while, is alive. It's a sweet feeling, finally having some control. Comic, sexy, addictive, unpredictable, *Honey* is about the not-always-righteous path of taking justice into your own hands.

**Hard Place**  
Gab Torr  
Scribner. PB. \$29.99  
Available now



After a breakup with her long-term girlfriend Billy is left homeless, she takes up an affordable SpareRoom ad. Her new flatmates, Sid and Rhoda are unapologetically political and loudly queer, and slowly Billy becomes enmeshed in their radical, vulnerable world. But as Billy's past starts to catch up with her, and all their carefully laid guidelines and boundaries begin to crumble, each of them must reckon with what they truly stand for – and what they'll sacrifice to hold onto it.

**As If**  
Isabel Waidner  
Hamish Hamilton. HB. \$35  
Available now



Two men meet in a London flat. Total strangers yet they look remarkably alike. Lewis is grieving his dead wife; Korine is hiding from his very-much-alive one. Lewis never had children; Korine is an ambivalent parent at best. Lewis is an erstwhile actor, too depressed to attend the big audition that has just fallen into his lap. Korine has tried a dozen dead-end jobs but never pursued his acting dreams. Two men living mirror image lives. Each seeking a second chance to get things right. Each wanting what the other has.

**Nowhere Burning**  
Catriona Ward  
Viper. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



Once, a girl escaped with her brother into the mountains in search of a place they could call home. Once, a mild-mannered architect fell under the spell of Leaf Winham, the tortured and

enigmatic star of his favourite film, and disappeared. Once, two documentarians investigated the story of a lifetime: a commune of runaway children who kidnap adults for obscure and arcane rituals. Once, there was a place called Nowhere – a leafy haven, a killer's lair, a burnt-out ruin – and it had a grim history all its own.

With *Nowhere Burning*, Catriona Ward has crafted a slippery and twisty thriller that hums with danger on every page. Across a multitude of gripping perspectives, she conjures Nowhere, a place that has been haunted by bloodshed and that invariably haunts all those who come across it. For most, Nowhere is an unspeakable tragedy only mentioned in hushed tones, whose afterlife as an occult Neverland might as well be a myth. Yet for the grimly determined Riley, Nowhere is a promise: of safety from their tyrannically religious cousin and of a purpose beyond simple survival. Her unyielding drive to protect her younger brother Oliver is infectious, and you can't help but watch with clenched teeth as the odds are slowly stacked against her.

Likewise, Marc and Kimble, the wily true-crime documentarians who serve as Ward's other main protagonists, are effortlessly compelling in their hunt for the truth about Nowhere and its runaway children. Every conversation offers just as many questions as answers and yet they nonetheless persist with a fervour that seems to run deeper than the desire for a good story. A collision between runaways and reporters seems inevitable, and indeed, when it comes, it threatens an upheaval that will change Nowhere forever. The only question is, who will escape and who will be left to join its many ghosts?

Joe Murray is from Readings Kids

**Returns and Exchanges**  
Kayla Rae Whitaker  
Scribe. PB. \$35  
Available 2 June



Baker-Taylor is a successful family-run retail discount chain in Kentucky. Fred and Fran have a built a rags-to-riches dynasty along with their four children. However, the business is changing rapidly, and they are struggling to keep up: Fred tries to fit in with high society, Josiah rejects the family business, Sam has visions, the youngest children are neglected and Fran risks everything in a forbidden relationship. Beneath their facade Fred and Fran discover that in matters of love and money, once it's gone, it's gone.

**Boring Asian Female**  
Canwen Xu  
Bedford Square. PB. \$32.99  
Available now



Elizabeth Zhang knows her place in the world. With a hard-working ethic instilled in her by immigrant parents, armed with impeccable grades, she expects a place at Harvard Law School. Until she is rejected for being too ordinary. But when her classmate Laura Kim gets in, everything falls apart. Why was Laura accepted? The answer must lie in Laura's life. Curious, Elizabeth follows her, but

the only thing she sees is that Laura has taken the spot at Harvard she deserves. A spot that she'll simply have to take back.

**Hello, Limerence**  
Momo Yamaguchi  
Faber. PB. \$32.99  
Available 2 June



**R** 'Limerence: an intense longing for another person, even when they don't reciprocate the infatuation.'

I had to look up the meaning of this term before I picked up the book and even then I wasn't quite prepared for how delusional its protagonist, Mika, is for the entire novel.

Mika is a 20-something with an intense longing for love – in any form. Time barely exists, because nothing really matters except for the people going in and out of Mika's life like a revolving door. Told in an erratic, rambling, yet deeply depressing voice, we see Mika's daily struggle as a woman living under the patriarchy.

Like Alison in *Rejection* by Tony Tulathimutte, Mika has never experienced love. Rejected for affection at every turn, she sees cracks form in both her friendships and situationships, which she then desperately grips on to, only to have the other parties take a hammer and smash them completely. To break up the monotony of her own life, whenever something horrid happens to her, she has lurid, vivid, and sometimes justified fantasies. Such as after a manager casually assaults her, or when strangers yell 'Nihaio' at her on the streets of New York despite her being Japanese. However, her fantasies about the men she loves make you want to grab her by the shoulders and shake her awake. She craves that soulmate kind of love, when your person is so utterly and unequivocally obsessed with you, to the point of being toxic. She imagines these men pining and miserable without her, when in reality, they're juggling multiple partners and she is nothing but a blip in their timeline.

Touching on quite a few worldly issues – workplace misogyny, environmentalism, a Covid-like lockdown, sexual assault, and mental health – Momo Yamaguchi possibly packs in just a bit too much for a book under 200 pages. Overall, is Mika a loveable character? No. Is she compelling? 100%. This is a bite-sized novel that will make you angry, exasperated, sympathetic, and *maybe* clutch your pearls.

Jacinta Richards is from Readings Chadstone

**Taiwan Travelogue**  
Shuāng-zǐ Yáng & Lin King (trans.)  
Scribe. PB. \$32.99  
Available now



May 1938: young novelist Aoyama Chizuko arrives in Japanese-ruled Taiwan. Invited by the government, she has no interest in the official or imperialist agenda. Instead, she longs to enjoy real island life and its cuisine. Chizuko travels the island accompanied by Chizuru – a charming Taiwanese woman hired as her interpreter – sharing food and lively banter. As Chizuko grows infatuated with her companion, something keeps Chizuru at a distance. It's only after a

heartbreaking separation that she begins to grasp what the 'something' is.

## Fantasy

**Strange Familiars**  
Keshe Chow  
Hodderscape. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



**R** Gwendolynne Chan is in her final year at Seamere College of Magical Veterinary Sciences. She spends every waking moment studying, desperate to graduate top of her class and secure a job offer at the Magical Ministry. Gwen needs the job and the eye-watering salary that comes with it, unlike her academic rival, Harrisford Briggs, the arrogant, deeply privileged son of the chief financial officer of Magecorp – the biggest distributor of magic. When surges of excess magic explode throughout London, Gwen has no choice but to put down her books and team up with Harrisford to find the source and prevent more surges from occurring, or risk the magical world being left in ruins.

I absolutely devoured this book! Told through Gwen and Harrisford's alternating points of view, Melbourne author Keshe Chow has crafted a delicious slow-burn by giving access to both characters' thoughts and feelings as they're forced to work together. There's also a diverse cast of side characters who are all fully fleshed out, not just wedged in to tick a box. But the character who stole my heart is Percy, Gwen's cat familiar with whom she communicates telepathically. He's sassy, arrogant and so lovable!

The magic system is well thought-out, and Chow has drawn from her own experiences as a vet for her writing, creating scenes that feel authentic, even when many of the animal patients are fantastical.

*Strange Familiars* is Chow's adult fiction debut, and while I adored her two young adult novels, it's clear that adult romantasy is where Chow belongs. She is in her element, blending magic and mystery, lust and loathing, and a dash of whimsy, to create a most delectable dark academia story that explores serious themes of self-harm, racism, classism and so much more. I can't wait for the sequel!

Lucie Dess is the marketing and events coordinator

**The Rainshadow Orphans**  
(The Rainshadow Orphans, Book 1)  
Naomi Ishiguro  
Atria. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



Life is hard for the inhabitants of Rainshadow City. Poverty and corruption are rife, and they are terrorised by the Lucky Crows, an underground criminal organisation. Toshiko, Jun and Mei Kawakami, bonded through loyalty, live outside the city's increasingly corrupt law and are seeking revenge on the Lucky Crows for the murder of their beloved 'aunt' Reiko. When Toshiko steals a dragon pearl from the leader of the Crows, it sets them on a thrilling path which will determine the future of Rainshadow City. **R**

# Dead Write

with Fiona Hardy



I've been working in bookshops since 1998, when an enthusiastic work experience placement at my local bookshop ended up being an introduction to a career I've loved for nearly three decades. I've read widely throughout my years in bookselling, since unfortunately you have to cater for many customer interests, and not just your one particular niche genre-within-a-genre, but whenever I could I read crime books – and when I was asked to take

over the *Readings Monthly* Dead Write column in 2010, I was thrilled. Advance copies of crime books? A monthly chance for everybody to hear my opinions? Sign me up!

Over the past few years, the *Readings Monthly* crime pages have been written by numerous Readings staff instead of me alone, which has seen a 90% downturn in the use of the word 'delight' in reviews (I cannot help it if I am constantly thrilled by the books, all right?). I've still read crime books whenever possible, and I hope never to stop. I've been lucky enough to have two published as well, which means I am able to tell you one thing that may or may not surprise you: that all of those Australian crime writers writing the grimmest things you could possibly imagine are the most lovely, supportive people you could ever meet. I asked Chris Gordon, our programming manager here at Readings, if she had anything juicy to report on the last two and a half decades' worth of crime events she's managed, and I'm disappointed to report that instead of a list of fisticuffs, she sent me an effusive email about how lovely everybody is. The most shocking thing she has encountered seems to be how lovely Dervla McTiernan is despite what she writes; she also mentioned how lucky we are to have crime writers like Karina Kilmore, fellow bookshop worker Aoife Clifford and Robert Gott visiting us in our shops regularly – so much so with Robert that he was put in a SECURITY t-shirt for Readings' 50th birthday party.

Crime – one of Readings' consistently well-performing categories – is occasionally dismissed as a genre. In 2010, when Peter Temple won the Miles Franklin for *Truth*, it reminded everyone that crime can be many things: sometimes fun, sometimes chilling, sometimes "literary". We're also lucky to have two Australian awards that have celebrated all forms of Australian crime writing for years – the Australian Crime Writers' Association's Ned Kelly Awards and Sisters in Crime's Davitt Awards, awarded for excellence in crime writing by women authors in Australia.

You can't discuss crime in the 21st century without mentioning Jane Harper's *The Dry*, a book that came out in 2016 and then spent the next five years being referenced in every book blurb as 'for readers who loved *The Dry*'. Made into a movie in 2020 starring Eric Bana (who, incidentally, also shops at Readings), this book wasn't the first to bring the story of a rural Australian town into the mainstream, but it seemed to blow the genre into orbit. Even now, readers are still desperate to read a crime set in a

small town – and hopefully, they'll never tire of it. Australia has a very specific kind of landscape that lends itself well to a terrifying backdrop – from fire (like the true crime book *The Arsonist*, by Chloe Hooper) to flood (like *The Torrent*, by Dinuka McKenzie) to the relentless sun (like *The Lost Man*, also by Jane Harper).

While most readers are here for the safe, fictional worlds of crime, true crime has always been part of the literary landscape as well. From Mark Read's numerous Chopper books (stolen so much from the bookshop where I worked at the time that we had to keep them behind the counter) to Helen Garner's *This House of Grief*, and, of course, Garner's contribution to the mushroom murders discourse, *The Mushroom Tapes*, with Chloe Hooper and Sarah Krasnostein. The 21st century has seen a shift in how true crime is discussed, both ethically and, more literally, physically – Vikki Petraitis, who has written numerous true crime books over the years, had a bestselling (wait ... best-listening?) podcast, exploring a new medium for the genre, but one that hasn't stopped people from still wanting physical books in their hands.

And what glorious books they are. With titles from the serious (*Hades*, by Candice Fox), to the literal (*Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone*, by Benjamin Stevenson), to the punny (*Live and Let Fry*, by Sue Williams, or *A Decline in Prophets*, by Sulari Gentill), to the musical (see: all of Adrian McKinty's Sean Duffy thrillers, named after Tom Waits songs). The covers have ranged from the vibrant (R.W.R. McDonald's bright pink *The Nancys*) to illustrated (Mark Mupotsa-Russell's *The Hitwoman's Guide to Reducing Household Debt*) to the traditional delights: ones with a dark road, car headlights, gum trees in shadow and a light on inside a dark house.

After one of my first Dead Write columns, I got an email from a reader who chastised me for only reviewing male authors. I was defensive at first – a lot of work at a lot of levels goes into deciding what makes it into the column – but ultimately, she was right. I *had* only mentioned men; that was all I'd been sent to review. While Australian women crime writers have always been working hard at creating books, I think the publicity took a while to catch up to reality – and now, for this month, all of the authors are women, which wasn't even intentional – it is, however, wonderful. (Please don't email me about it.)

There is no Book of the Month this month. That's a good thing – I've always found it hard to pick one book. How can I, when so many are wonderful? I have pages of crime writers I wanted to mention here, but as usual, my editor has reminded me of things like 'We have a word count' and 'No Fiona, we can't just publish a list of all 68 crime writers whose names you wanted to mention' (a number so specific because it's true). I've missed referencing books and events now, as we always have, because there are just so *many* amazing crime books out there. And not giving yourself a chance to find those quiet, excellent crime reads yourself could maybe be the biggest crime of all.

## Find Me

Holly Craig

S&S. PB. \$34.99

Available now



It's been three years since Hallie and Gertie's brother Pete vanished on Tasmania's Mount Mercy; three years during which Hallie and Gertie haven't spoken to each other.

Their dying mother issues one last request: that the sisters get down to Tasmania and do what the police and SES couldn't, and find out what happened to Pete, who was last seen at an isolated commune on the face of the mountain.

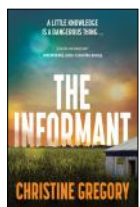
As soon as they arrive at the town of Pine Peak, near Mount Mercy, they hear the rumours everywhere: that the mountain claims people. Whatever lies beyond those trees is dangerous, and Pete isn't the first or the last person to go missing there. The two sisters, with years of bitterness and trauma between them, will go up there anyway – but there's no guarantee either will return. Utterly chilling (and it is Tasmania, so I mean that in both its terror and temperature definitions) and tense, this is a perfect winter thriller.

## The Informant

Christine Gregory

Ultimo. PB. \$34.99

Available now



A man is shot dead next to a cane field. Soon the place is crawling with police, journalists and news helicopters, because this is a newsworthy murder: the dead man is Silas Ziccone, leader of the

Outlaws bikie gang, which controls much of the Sunshine Coast's organised crime operations. A man with this many enemies means no lack of suspects, not least the police tasked with finding his killer.

Detective Sergeant Davis is on the case, but not in charge, and he doesn't trust the people who are. He also doesn't trust Lars Nilsson, the freelance journalist hoping the high-profile case will get him out of the local paper and back into the better-paying spotlight. Avoiding everybody is Silas's girlfriend, Ashley, who needs to find out who killed Silas too – so she can persuade the police to pay her way out of the state and get her and her son to safety. This is a nail-biting procedural in which everybody feels so dangerous you won't be able to read it without looking over your shoulder.

## Devil Mountain

Inessa Jackson

Affirm. PB. \$34.99

Available now



Inland, in the mountains bordering New South Wales and Queensland, a man is chained to a fence and set alight. A GP, beloved by all in his community, it seems unfathomable that

somebody would kill him in such a gruesome way – and when the autopsy finds unfinished pentagrams etched into the soles of his charred feet, the case escalates from the brutal to the bizarre. Detective Sergeant Ana Brown, working the case up north to avoid the chaos awaiting her back at home, is wondering if the death is due to a jealous husband, or the good doctor's desire to stop a new development. There are those in town who have their own theory: the killer is Lady Hay, the ghost who

haunts the mountain, causing flickering fires in the night. Ana knows this can't be true – but the more time she spends in Stony Creek, the more horrors she unearths.

Ana is wilful, determined to succeed, completely readable, and doused in seemingly never-ending rain. *Devil Mountain* is a sterling police procedural that stampedes along at a breakneck pace, and is an unsettling, mysterious and excellent debut.

## Possible Springs

Samantha Ross

Penguin. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



When 11-year-old Jimmy Adams falls into a river in 1987, it should have been the end of her. Instead, she is saved – but she doesn't come back quite the same. Now, whenever music plays, Jimmy can hear the thoughts of everyone around her. Previously boisterous and chaotic, Jimmy is growing into a young woman who wants only silence, and to be seen as normal. While her ability sees her shifting the trajectories of people's lives for the better, she can't reveal how she knows why a fire is about to start, or why someone needs to keep their pants on after a party, and the town of Possible Springs doesn't know what to make of her. It's already the kind of place that barely cares when a teenage girl named Shannon vanishes – and then feels wildly out of its depth when more kids start to disappear.

Somewhere in town, there's a voice that knows what's happened. But Jimmy, quashing her skills just to stay sane in a loud world, can't hear it. And it'll take everything she has to believe in herself enough to listen.

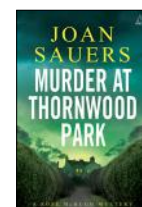
Compelling and original, this is a cinematic, small-town epic about a girl who might just be the next main character of your heart.

## Murder at Thornwood Park

Joan Sauers

A&U. PB. \$34.99

Available 2 June



Historian Rose McHugh, having escaped city life for the Southern Highlands, is happy working at her local museum job, with a side hustle as a historical researcher for various media projects. When her museum is gifted a local mansion's historically significant artefacts, Rose sees this as an opportunity to launch a new exhibition on local history, but – as always – she gets more than she bargained for. What starts as a curious search into hidden costume jewellery turns into suspicions that a serial killer may have been at work during the Second World War. The hunt will see her job, her friendships, and maybe even her life on the line.

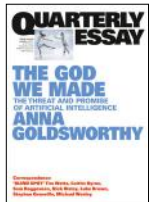
Rose is utterly charming, her friends become the readers' friends, and her quest to see a historical wrong righted will have you gripping the edge of your cosy armchair by your cottage's wood fire.

Fiona Hardy is a bookseller, reviewer and an award-winning author. Her books include two crime novels – *Unbury the Dead* (Affirm Press, PB, \$22.99, published 2025) and *Old Games* (Affirm Press, PB, \$34.99, published March 2026) – and three middle grade novels. She was the *Readings Monthly* 'Dead Write' columnist for many years, and is much missed in this capacity! **R**

# Nonfiction

## Australian Studies

**Quarterly Essay 102:  
The God We Made –  
The Threat and Promise of  
Artificial Intelligence**  
Anna Goldsworthy  
Black Inc. PB. \$29.99  
Available 1 June



How will we be changed by the rise of artificial intelligence? In this scintillating essay, Anna Goldsworthy argues that AI is a rupture that makes us confront what it is to be

human – what we do, and want. As it learns human ways, AI raises big questions about work, leisure and education. It brings new existential, social and ethical risks. Above all, it invites us to consider what is irreplaceable in us, starting with the body and the friction of others. *The God We Made* is a brilliant inquiry into identity and a transformed future.

**The First Inventors:  
How People Shaped a Continent**  
Billy Griffiths, Larissa Behrendt &  
Sean Ulm

A&U. PB \$36.99  
Available 2 June

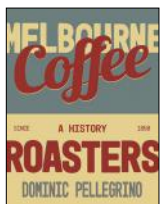


For over 65,000 years, people have made this continent their own through language, song, water and fire. *The First Inventors* tells their story. It is a history of innovation, diplomacy and design,

and a celebration of the survival and resilience of cultural knowledge. It explores how people managed and engineered entire landscapes, and how they orchestrated seascapes according to the stars, tides and relationships with animal kin. Based on the stunning SBS and Channel 10 television series, and grounded in the idea of Country, *The First Inventors* is a story of hope, wonder and possibility. This is what a history of Australia looks like when it has Indigenous perspectives at its heart.

**Melbourne Coffee Roasters:  
A History**

Dominic Pellegrino  
Melbourne. HB. \$59.99  
Available 2 June



Melbourne is recognised internationally as a coffee capital, with iconic cafés and the highest number of coffee roasters in the country. *Melbourne*

*Coffee Roasters: A History* reveals the origins of a coffee-drinking city. From early colonial settlement to the post-war boom of Italian, Greek and Jewish immigrants, author Dominic Pellegrino reveals the changes brought about, both by these immigrants and because of them, in the way this city roasted, bought, sold, distributed, and drank coffee.

**Contaminated Country:  
Nuclear Colonialism and  
Aboriginal Resistance in Australia**  
Jessica Urwin

MUP. PB. \$39.99  
Available 16 June



During the 20th century Australia was embroiled in global military and civilian nuclear programs, from uranium mining to weapons testing, subjecting Australia's lands to imperial nuclear colonialism. Aboriginal communities endured physical, spiritual and cultural harm but persistently resisted these processes, reclaiming their rights and demanding reparations. Tracking the colonial mechanisms Australia used to pursue nuclear industry, Jessica Urwin simultaneously highlights how Aboriginal peoples rejected and reshaped those same mechanisms.

## Biography

**The Girl on the Roof:  
The Life of a Change-Maker**

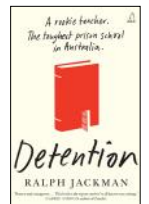
Valerie A. Brown  
Scribe. PB. \$32.99  
Available 2 June



As a child Valerie Brown escaped to the roof of her family home and watched the activities of her family below. Noticing their actions did not match their ideals sparked a lifetime of concern about the damage done to a society when there are gaps between a community's good intentions and its practices. Brown went on to deliver pioneering programs, working with prime ministers, government, universities, communities and activists to reshape public health and health education in Australia and Nepal.

**Detention: A Rookie Teacher. The  
Toughest Prison School in Australia.**  
Ralph Jackman

A&U. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June



What an incredible, raw, gut-wrenching and important book this is. In *Detention*, Ralph Jackman recounts his first teaching job, which he took on in his 50s, leaving his sports journalism career behind. At Parkville College, a school for boys in youth detention, he is assigned to the remand section. The cohort is a mix of boys who have been traumatised by dysfunctional and abusive upbringings and now await their fate. The colourful language and behaviour at the site, alongside the strictures and security they must navigate throughout each day, are juxtaposed with heartbreaking moments, such as when Jackman meets a 15-year-old who has the reading level of a six-year-old, and joyous moments, such as the poetry lesson where Jackman teaches the students alliteration and assonance with song lyrics.

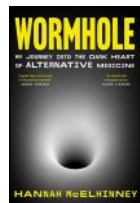
Yet despite his myriad small successes, the environment at Parkville begins to disturb Jackman. There are constant lockdowns when staff numbers are reduced, and the use of collective punishment, meaning boys are driven half-crazy by being in solitary confinement, which in turn leads to riots, which result in even tighter restrictions and threats by government ministers to move the boys to adult prisons. Jackman advises the students that 'The pen is mightier than a popped sprinkler'. However, after assisting a student to write a letter to the then-Minister for Education (James Merlino) advocating for a library at the school, a clash with school leadership is inevitable. As the damaging effects of isolation on the boys cannot be ignored, Jackman decides he can no longer be a bandaid for a broken system or operate within what he has come to believe is a rogue government department that ignores the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, otherwise known as the Nelson Mandela Rules.

This account of what happens inside detention centres and how the basic human rights of children are ignored is eye-opening. When a manager states that, 'The system is not broken, it's on a journey,' it's hard to swallow such hollow corporate-speak. Anyone interested in the justice system and who believes that all children have the right to an education must read this book.

Pauline Hopkins is the manager of Readings Hawthorn

**Wormhole: My Journey into the  
Dark Heart of Alternative Medicine**  
Hannah McElhinney

Affirm. PB. \$36.99  
Available now



In 2022, author Hannah McElhinney's cousin Lauren flew to Malaysia for an alternative hyperthermia therapy, hoping to cure the chronic illness she attributed to Lyme Disease. Lauren never came home. Over the course of the next three years, McElhinney doggedly investigated the chain of doctors, online communities and commentators that led Lauren away from conventional medicine and profited from her journey. Falling down the wormhole is easier than it looks.

As grief and illness can be isolating, so too can the obsessive desire to understand. McElhinney doesn't deny the perspective her own struggles with chronic illness bring to her cousin's story – she revels in it. After all, if this book is part of her quest to understand who and what led Lauren down the path that would end in her death, then she must travel into the wormhole with her. Retracing Lauren's steps into online communities, seeking visibility, care and, most fundamentally, her voice to be heard, McElhinney bares the marrow of her own grief and suspicion, and the ease with which that can be manipulated into hope by well-meaning and ill-intentioned outside forces. *Wormhole* strives to reignite the flame of compassion for those who have fallen prey to conspiracy theories and the dangerous fringe of alternative medicine, reminding us that those who are under-served by our conventional medical

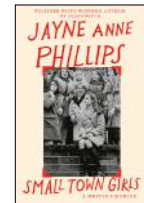
systems – communities that distrust the healthcare system, are not listened to by it, and/or cannot access it – are those most likely to be targets.

In following Lauren's journey in search of answers and relief from the pain she'd endured for so long, McElhinney traces her physical and digital footsteps right to the edge of the wormhole. Equal parts memoir, true-crime exposé and relentlessly researched treatise on our struggling health system, *Wormhole* reveals just how close our systems of support are to the precipice of oblivion.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

**Small Town Girls: A Writer's Memoir**  
Jayne Anne Phillips

Fleet. PB. \$34.99  
Available now



Jayne Anne Phillips grew up in Buckhannon, West Virginia. The Appalachian landscape – dense with forests, small churches, and rich in history – has long been the setting for her fiction. In *Small Town Girls* she recreates the place she calls home, its truths and the ties between the women of the town. She traces her journey across America in search of love, work and belonging, her discovery of writing – as survival and revelation – and offers insights into the fellow writers and touchstones that moved and influenced her.

**Unpolished Gem  
(20th-anniversary edition)**

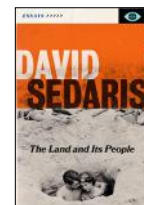
Alice Pung  
Black Inc. PB. \$32.99  
Available 2 June



In a wonderland called Footscray, a girl named Alice and her Chinese Cambodian family pursue the Australian Dream. Armed with an ocker accent, Alice dives head-first into schooling, romance and the getting of wisdom. Her mother becomes an Aussie battler – an outworker, that is. Her father embraces the miracle of franchising and opens an electrical-appliance store. And every day her grandmother blesses Father Government for giving old people money. The 20th-anniversary edition of a modern Australian classic.

**The Land and its People**  
David Sedaris

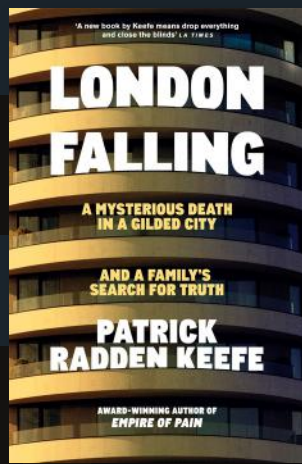
Abacus. PB. \$32.99  
Available now



In *The Land and Its People*, David Sedaris investigates what it means to be a traveller, a brother, a lifelong friend. He tries on the role of carer, rides a horse in Guatemala, buys a bespoke priest's cassock in Vatican City, and much more! Throughout these essays – at once acerbic and tender, playful and profound – Sedaris shows how much there is to marvel at when you keep your head up and your eyes open, observing with warmth and curiosity our fascinating human species and the lands we inhabit.

# London Falling

Patrick Radden Keefe



'A new book by Keefe means drop everything ... you'll be turning pages for hours'  
*Los Angeles Times*

PICADOR

# Before I knew I loved you

TOSHIKAZU KAWAGUCHI



From the author of *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*, the sixth book in the multi-million-copy bestselling series.

## Cinema & Music

### A Place Both Wonderful and Strange: The Extraordinary Untold History of Twin Peaks

Scott Meslow  
Faber Film. HB. \$45  
Available now



In *A Place Both Wonderful and Strange*, film and TV critic Scott Meslow takes us behind the (red) curtain of *Twin Peaks* and into the unique and immersive world created by David Lynch and Mark Frost.

Meslow has conducted dozens of original interviews with cast and crew – including Mark Frost, Kyle MacLachlan, Sheryl Lee, Laura Dern, Naomi Watts, Sherilyn Fenn, James Marshall and Ray Wise – which shed new light on this extraordinary work that often raised as many questions as it answered.

### Still in a Dream: Shoegaze, Slackers and the Reinvention of Rock, 1984–1994

Simon Reynolds  
White Rabbit. PB. \$34.99  
Available 16 June



Twenty years after post-punk bestseller, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, Simon Reynolds tells the tale of what happened next: the underground explosion of noise-pop, shoegaze, slacker rock and grunge that reverberated through the late '80s into the early '90s. Capturing the musical exhilaration and culture of the era, *Still in a Dream* celebrates a golden age of guitar reinvention, a second psychedelia of mind-blowing sounds pioneered by bands like My Bloody Valentine and Sonic Youth.

## Cultural Studies

### The Beginning Comes After the End: Notes on a World of Change

Rebecca Solnit  
Granta. HB. \$32.99  
Available 23 June



Rebecca Solnit writes about current affairs with a clear-eyed humanity. Her latest book looks at greater societal awareness of interconnection during the last century, leading to massive improvements in environmental laws and human rights, despite the current wave of authoritarianism.

Solnit discusses dramatic developments in science that changed our view of humanity, including the Leakey family's discovery that humans originated in Africa and Jane Goodall's observations on the similarities between chimpanzees and humans – findings that gradually overturned the imperialist view that humans were separate from the rest of the living world.

Rachel Carson popularised the view that everything is connected when she wrote her environmentalist classic *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962 and led to the banning of the pesticide DDT. Martin Luther King used Gandhi's

non-violence techniques to fight for civil rights, championing interdependence when he said, 'We are caught within an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny'. Second-wave feminists used many tactics of previous protest movements as they fought for equal rights, and First Nations peoples have demanded a reckoning with colonial imperialism, and in the process changed the way we think about First Nations rights and cultural knowledge.

The current wave of global authoritarianism, according to Solnit, is a backlash against these leaps and she likens the far right to a dying star, burning brightly for a moment before collapsing. Indeed, society has changed so rapidly in the last 60 years that it would not be possible to go back, because people now recognise what greater equality looks like and want these freedoms, such as abortion rights, even where those rights are currently being denied.

Solnit's perspective is optimistic, backed by incontrovertible facts about rapid societal progress. She celebrates interconnectedness and holds firm in the belief that we can create a far kinder and more equal future than the last 400 years of European Christian civilisation. I highly recommend this intellectual yet highly accessible balm for the spirit to anyone in despair with the current state of the world.

Angela Crocombe is The Readings Prize and The Readings Foundation coordinator

### Angertainment: How Social Media Outrage Ruined Everything

Ed Coper  
Summit. PB. \$36.99  
Available now



We were promised a global village; we got a gladiatorial arena. No longer just a tool for connection, social media has spawned an entire outrage industry harvesting and monetising our worst impulses.

*Angertainment* shows how our emotions are being hijacked to build political and cultural capital by those who know how to game the outrage economy. How 'rage bait' can change how you vote, what you buy and who you hate. Ed Coper unmasks the architects of this new power – from manosphere gurus to political demagogues – who have realised that in the attention economy, your anger is the only currency that matters.

### Said the Dead

Doireann Ní Ghríofa  
Faber. PB. \$34.99  
Available 2 June

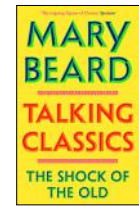


In the city of Cork, a derelict Victorian mental hospital is being converted into apartments. One passerby has always flinched as she passes. Had she been born in a different era she might have lived there. Now a FOR SALE sign tempts her inside where she discovers a river of forgotten voices, those of the women who knew this place best: insistent, vivid and true. Among them she may find meaning, solace, rage; her own salvation, perhaps, or her own vanishing? Both history and ghost story this is an unforgettable book.

## History

### Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old Mary Beard

Profile. HB. \$36.99  
Available 23 June



In *Talking Classics*, Mary Beard points to the surprising connections between antiquity and the present. From revolutionaries to dictators, Bob Dylan to Beyoncé, she joins forces with the varied modern characters who have been transfixed by the ancient world. It's not compulsory, she argues, to be excited by antiquity, but it's a shame not to be. After half a century teaching and studying classics, she shares an abundance of lively stories, curious facts and gossip, explaining why the deep past does really affect us all.

### Europe: A New History

Roderick Beaton  
Allen Lane. HB. \$69.99  
Available 23 June



Since its dramatic birth in ancient Greece, 'Europe' has been defined, and redefined, by its people. Through this powerful lens, Roderick Beaton deftly surveys Europe's major historical developments: from the rise and fall of Rome and the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the violent upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries and the uncertainties of the present. Throughout, original sources allow the voices of the past to speak for themselves.

### The Shortest History of Egypt

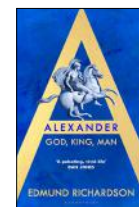
Maria Golia  
Black Inc. PB. \$27.99  
Available 2 June



Egypt looms large in the popular imagination, yet its true allure might lie in its long history and what it tells us about the human condition. Maria Golia draws on extensive historical research, and her years of experience living and working in Egypt, to offer a fresh and insightful perspective on one of the world's oldest civilisations. Golia deftly traces Egypt's trajectory from Neolithic times to the Arab Spring and up to the present day, illuminating the environmental, temporal and cultural forces that have shaped it.

### Alexander: God, King, Man.

Edmund Richardson  
Bloomsbury. PB. \$39.99  
Available 2 June



In 336 BCE, at the age of 20, Alexander inherited a tumbledown kingdom, massive debts and an unruly army. Desperate to hold on to power, he led the army east, into the Persian Empire, and thus began the greatest military campaign in history. He became king, the king became a hero, the hero became a living god, and the god died aged 32, in Babylon. Based on more than a decade of cutting-edge research, *Alexander* is a revelatory retelling of one of the most famous and elusive stories in history.

## Politics

### The Common Good Economy: A New Compass

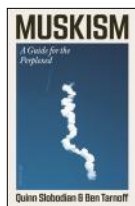
Mariana Mazzucato  
Allen Lane. PB. \$39.99  
Available 9 June



Our economic system is broken, the climate crisis is accelerating, inequality is deepening, and public trust is crumbling. Wealth concentrates in fewer hands while governments scramble to fix what markets can't do, rather than to shape them from the outset. Mariana Mazzucato builds on ideas of the entrepreneurial state and mission-oriented policies to establish a new theory of the common good, creating a rigorous reimagining of economics and a manifesto for a future economy that serves people and the planet.

### Muskism: A Guide for the Perplexed

Quinn Slobodian & Ben Tarnoff  
Allen Lane. HB. \$59.99  
Available 23 June



Who on earth is Elon Musk and what is he doing? According to the media, Musk is best understood in personal terms but this book sees him as an avatar of something called Muskism: a playbook for our new postliberal age. Exploring the forces that have shaped him – from South Africa to Silicon Valley, Space X to DOGE – *Muskism* outlines the motifs and practices that have come to dominate our own crisis-ridden world, one which could elevate technocrats and invoke a less-human future.

### The Coming Storm: Power, Conflict and Warnings from History

Odd Arne Westad  
Allen Lane. HB. \$49.99  
Available 9 June

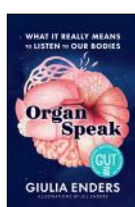


Most people alive today have come of age in a world of stability, presided over by either one or two superpowers. This is not to say the world has been peaceful, but it has to an extent been predictable. As an increasing number of Great Powers jostle for regional supremacy, our world has become more fragile, unpredictable, and combustible. To understand the threats that face us in this new terrain, we must look to the lessons of the late 19th- and early 20th century – a time that carries eerie parallels with our own.

## Science & Nature

### Organ Speak: What It Really Means to Listen to Our Bodies

Giulia Enders & Jill Enders (illus.)  
HarperCollins. PB. \$35.99  
Available now

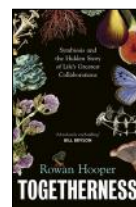


In a world that is increasingly louder and more complicated, sometimes the answer is to look inward. For thousands of years, our bodily organs have faced problems and found their

own unique ways to overcome them. What can we learn from these intricate systems? *Organ Speak* guides us through our inner landscape, revealing how our body is our best teacher. Blending scientific discoveries with making complex ideas accessible, Giulia Enders inspires a deep appreciation for something that is both familiar yet profoundly mysterious.

### Togetherness: Symbiosis and the Hidden Story of Life's Greatest Collaborations

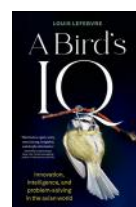
Rowan Hooper  
Fern. PB. \$36.99  
Available 2 June



From evolution to capitalism, 'survival of the fittest' has shaped our view of the world. But we got it wrong – and our mistake has brought us to the brink. For the history of life on Earth is much more than a story of competition. The natural world has been forged and sustained by small miracles of co-operation between animals and plants, insects and fungi, fish and bacteria. *Togetherness* reveals the intimate connectedness of nature through these remarkable stories and will change the way you see the world.

### A Bird's IQ: Innovation, Intelligence, and Problem-Solving in the Avian World

Louis Lefebvre, Pablo Strauss (trans.) & Jennifer Ackerman (foreword)  
Scribe. PB. \$36.99  
Available 2 June



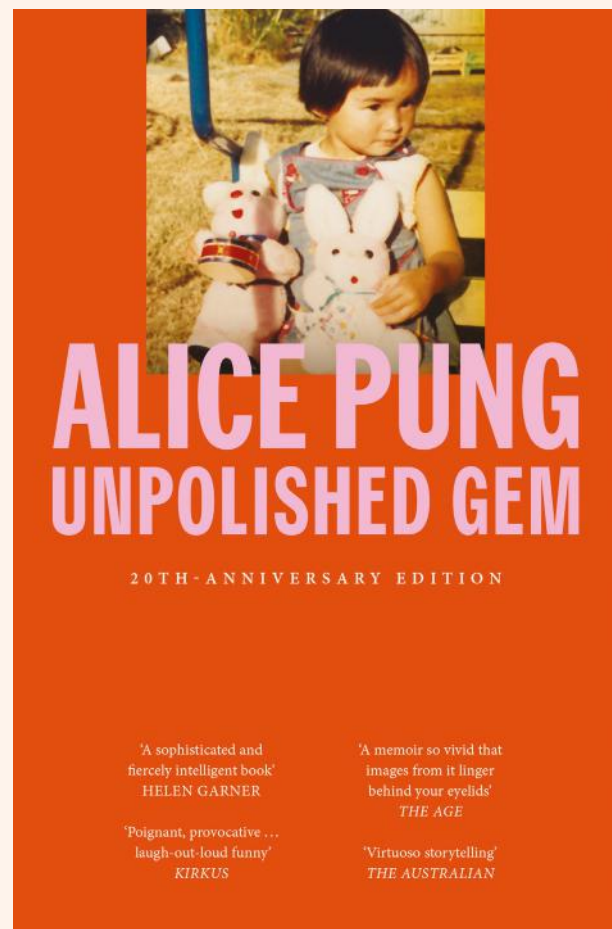
Surveying a variety of birds, from crows and finches to parrots, world-renowned animal behaviour expert Louis Lefebvre describes the remarkable innovations and problem-solving abilities of species often dismissed as 'featherbrains'. From crows using cars as nutcrackers to cockatoos crafting tools, Lefebvre reveals how birds exhibit creativity, social learning, and cultural transmission. This goldmine of bird behaviour yields an 'innovation quotient' widely used by researchers to measure and rank how innovative a bird species is. Blending vivid storytelling with decades of research, Lefebvre invites readers to celebrate the ingenuity of birds and highlights the interconnectedness of all intelligent life.

### Exploring Nature through Citizen Science

Erin Roger, Cameron Slatyer & Thomas Mesaglio  
CSIRO. PB. \$39.99  
Available 1 June



*Exploring Nature through Citizen Science* introduces citizen science and showcases its benefits, with a focus on Australia, including urban environments. The book explores different types of projects and how the data collected is used to create real-world impact, while offering practical guidance on the photographs to take and which data to record for different organisms. Featuring projects from home-based activities to remote areas it is easier than ever for people to get involved in citizen science. **R**



## The twentieth-anniversary edition of a modern Australian classic

This story does not begin on a boat. Nor does it contain any wild swans or falling leaves.

In a wonderland called Footscray, a girl named Alice and her Chinese-Cambodian family pursue the Australian Dream – Asian style.

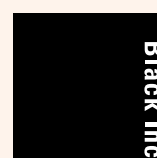
*Unpolished Gem* is a book rich in comedy, a loving and irreverent portrait of a family, its everyday struggles and bittersweet triumphs.

"This is a sophisticated and fiercely intelligent book."

—HELEN GARNER

"Poignant, provocative ... laugh-out-loud funny"

—KIRKUS



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# Kids and Young Adult

## Picture Books

### Ah, Nits! How to Care for Your New Hair Pets

Philip Bunting  
Scholastic. HB. \$19.99  
Available 1 June

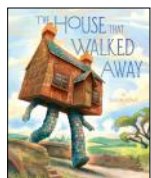


So, you've got head lice? Congratulations! You're at the very beginning of a wonderful journey with your new pets. This handbook is here

to help you take care of your adorable little buddies and make them feel at home in your hair.

### The House That Walked Away

Simon Howe  
Little Hare. HB. \$24.99  
Available now



Anyone who's ever felt out of place, or moved house, school, or even country will feel an immediate kinship with Simon Howe's lushly illustrated and charming

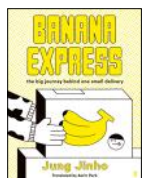
*The House That Walked Away*. A lonely, shingle-limbed house wanders the world looking for a home, but nowhere feels quite right. It almost feels invisible, but there is someone who sees the house, who cares for it, who also wants a home. A whole family of someones!

Their journey together is full of music, sharing, joy on sunny days and comfort on rainy days. Together, they are transformed. The illustrations seem to glow from within, reminiscent of Studio Ghibli and *The Rainbow Fish* while remaining altogether unique. Thanks to its short but sweet text and soothing storytelling style, *The House That Walked Away* is the perfect picture book for developing empathy and to remind us that shared joy makes for an easier journey. For ages 3+.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

### Banana Express

Jung Jinho & Aerin Park (trans.)  
Scribble. HB. \$27.99  
Available 2 June



Bananas, with their creamy texture and bright yellow jacket, are a favourite snack for all kinds of people in a busy 24-hour city. The delivery of a bunch is the catalyst for this clever book, which highlights the connections between people forged through their activities. Workers fix the subway tracks through the night and eat breakfast at dawn. They eat fish caught by fishermen out at sea, on boats lit up with bulbs constructed in a factory. Cities and modern systems are often portrayed as impersonal and lonely, but this picture book instils a sense of solidarity and community by focusing on workers who keep the city alive, and food, which is enjoyed by all.

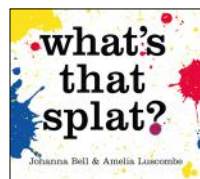
This translated picture book was originally published in South Korea. Its

illustrations are bold and stylish in black, white, and yellow. Like Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*, *Banana Express* recognises that curious children wonder about what happens while they are tucked up in bed. It captures the feeling that exciting, interesting and delicious things are always happening in our big, wide world. For ages 3+.

Kim Gruschow is the children's book division manager

### What's that Splat?

Johanna Bell & Amelia Luscombe (illus.)  
T&H. HB. \$24.99  
Available 2 June

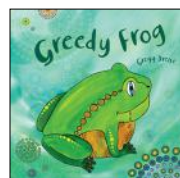


Sometimes a splat is just a splat. but sometimes a splat is much more than that! What will your splat become? Experience the fun

of transforming abstract shapes into just about anything with this playful rhyming book from the creative team behind *What is a Dot?*

### Greedy Frog

Gregg Dreise  
Magabala. HB. \$27.99  
Available now



Way back before Once-upon-a-time time, there was the Dreamtime, and Yirray, the sun, drank all the water. A clever frog, Tjidalih,

promised to take care of all the water. But he kept it in his pouch. The animals had to work out a way to trick Tjidalih, to make him laugh to spill the water. The famous story of Tjidalih the Frog, retold by Gregg Dreise.

## Junior Grade

### Detective Kitty is on the Case! (Star Kitties, Book 1)

Laura Ellen Anderson  
Farshore. PB. \$15.99  
Available now



*Star Kitties* ticks all the boxes for young cat lovers! *Detective Kitty is on the Case!* is the first book in a new junior fiction series. A special key opens a secret door, and through that door is the magical world of star kitties! They are not ordinary cats. They are artists, inventors, and cupcake bakers! There is even a reading kitty named Felicity Page. Each kitty has a little star on their belly! It would not surprise me if the author grew up during the Care Bear era.

A fun map at the start of the book illustrates the magical world of Whiskery Paw. Tabitha loves to visit the kitties each week, but when she crosses into the magical world on her birthday, something is wrong. The queen has gone missing, and it's time for Purrlock Holmes to investigate. With delightful detail, mystery, magic, and many cat-themed

puns, *Star Kitties* is sure to delight readers aged 7+.

Kim Gruschow is the children's book division manager

## Middle Grade

### Kid

Peter Carnavas  
UQP. HB. \$22.99  
Available 2 June



I was immediately charmed by Kid, the miniature farm goat and delightful little titular star of Peter Carnavas' heartwarming new novel. Kid has quite literally been taken under the wing of

Audrey, a caring but feisty hen, and each night she tells him the story of his parents, who bravely chased a fox away from the farm. Kid tries to be brave too. As he practices zooming and jumping, he gazes up at the mountain and wonders about his parents. When he manages to leap over the farm fence, finding his family suddenly seems possible.

This moving adventure story features wonderful animal characters and lovely touches of Australian flora and fauna. It's a book that celebrates friendship and sees courage, kindness and curiosity greatly rewarded.

*Kid* has the sort of universal, timeless appeal found in classic animal stories like *The Sheep-Pig*. It's a perfect choice for a family or classroom read-aloud. I love this book! For ages 7+.

Kim Gruschow is the children's book division manager

### Cleopatra: The Girl Who Would Be King (Heroes in the Ancient World, Book 1)

Jackie French  
HarperCollins. PB. \$16.99  
Available now



When 12-year-old Cleopatra and her father flee to ancient Rome in 59 BCE after Cleopatra's sister seizes the throne, they are in serious trouble. It's up to Cleopatra to raise enough gold to hire an army, gain the support of powerful allies, and take back her country's land. Three years later she had become the most famous pharaoh in history.

### Into the Storm

Hayley Lawrence  
Scholastic. PB. \$19.99  
Available 1 June



Silas's life is spiralling out of control when Eve invites him to trek the Tasmanian wilderness, with a disclaimer: It will be cold. Remote. Treacherous. And I cannot guarantee passage home alive. Exactly what Silas needs to reset his compass. But then a polar blast hits, and Silas and Eve face a stark, gale-forced world. And one terrible choice. Silas has never shied away from making tough decisions. Until now.

## Graphic Narrative

### Detective Beans and the Map of Mystery

Li Chen  
Penguin. PB. \$17.99  
Available 2 June



Your favourite kitten detective is back with a third mystery to solve – and treasure to find! When Captain Scuttlebeard gives Beans a treasure map, Beans is determined to find the prize at the end. With Biscuits by his side, and with help from some other familiar faces, can Beans find the treasure and get home in time to clean up his room?

### Seasons of Clementine

Jess Galatola & Jasmine Berry (illus.)  
Perentie. HB. \$19.99  
Available 1 June



Clementine is a dreamer with her head in the clouds. When her big sister moves away for music school, Clem is heartbroken. Everything is different. Her life, once filled with music and joy,

feels heavy, like rain clouds. When the school talent show is announced, Clem can't find the inspiration to write a new cloud song. Will the arrival of a new student (and potential new friend) make everything light again?

### A Place Between (Lightfall, Book 4)

Tim Probert  
HarperCollins. PB. \$22.99  
Available now



In the fourth instalment of the *Lightfall* series, Bea, Cad, and their friends continue their quest to restore light on their dark world. While searching for the Water Spirit, Cad meets other spirits of Irpa

who transport him to A Place Between, a realm between the living and the dead. Meanwhile, Bea is being held captive by Pellidyr's leader who believes she's a hero with all the answers. When Bea's escape plan also brings her to A Place Between, she makes a shocking discovery.

## Nonfiction

### The Not So Quiet Life of Marcel Marceau

Jenn Bailey, Sherry Bushue & Pamela Zagarenski (illus.)  
A&U. HB. \$29.99  
Available 2 June



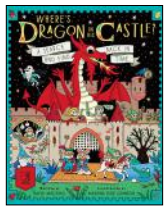
Marcel was a young Jewish Frenchman growing up in the shadow of the Second World War. Born in Strasbourg as Marcel Mangel, he fled to Paris before the Nazi invaders and joined his brother in the Resistance. This is a thrilling story of

Marcel Marceau and how he became the most famous mime of the 20th century.

## Activity Books

### Where's Dragon in his Castle?

David MacPhail & Mariana Ruiz Johnson (illus.)  
S&S. HB. \$26.99  
Available now



**R** *Where's Dragon in his Castle?* is the perfect activity book for kids who dream of knighthood, wizardry, or owning a pet dragon. This fun and magical search-and-find

adventure follows the dragon Blaze as he guides you through his castle and teaches you about medieval history.

Written by a real castle steward, *Where's Dragon in his Castle?* is not only an entertaining search-and-find activity book, but a treasure hoard of facts both fun and foul. We travel through the great fortress of Dragon Castle to the bustling kitchens and gloomy dungeons; explore beyond the castle walls to terrifying battlefields, dramatic hunting parties, and exciting jousting tournaments; and search for heroic knights, cheeky jesters, and spooky ghosts haunting the dark hallways. We learn about the questionable hygiene and medical practices in medieval times, what moats and oubliettes are, the disturbing duties of a gong farmer, and so much more. Each page is an enchanting tapestry of beautifully detailed illustrations and charming characters to find, making this book a stunning work of art in which to spend hours admiring every little detail.

Although it is written for ages 5+, who's to say adults can't indulge in this feast for the eyes, living out every medieval fantasy too?

Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids

### What If?: Tell a New Story Every Time

Tom Schamp  
Magic Cat. HB. \$34.95  
Available now



**R** The ultimate remedy for having to reread the same picture book over and over comes in the form of Tom Schamp's *What if?*, the ultimate unrepeatable

story with around 45 options per page to create over 60 quintillion (that's 18 zeroes!) different storylines. Encouraging creative and divergent thinking, *What if?* charges readers to follow their imagination on a journey from waking up (in a treehouse? On a cloud?), through getting dressed (in royal tights? A beekeeper outfit?), breakfast, shoes, transportation and onward through an adventure of choice!

Championing free thinking and creativity, *What if?* asks readers not just to think divergently while reading this book, but to take that thinking and bring it into crafts, storytelling and ways of approaching challenges in the real world. Young people who aren't yet reading will relish the opportunity to build their storytelling muscles using the pictures, and children learning to read will be

exposed to some wonderfully wacky vocabulary. For ages 4+.

Tamuz Ellazam is the manager of Readings Kids

## Young Adult

### The Boy Maeve

Kai Ash  
Hardie Grant. PB. \$21.99  
Available now



**R** Maeve is a trans boy in an adopted family who has a shapeshifting imaginary friend and a grandmother who occasionally visits. In the middle of the night, he wakes up screaming,

certain his grandmother has died, while his hair has inexplicably turned orange. And that's the least of his troubles. When his schoolteachers suddenly start teaching everyone Scottish Gaelic and how to make fires in the school playground instead of their usual lessons, Maeve suspects that his imaginary friend may be real and somehow bewitching everyone.

At school, Maeve makes his first human friend, the new boy, Mahmoud, who proves supportive as Maeve uncovers the truth about his birth mother, discovers a father he never knew he had, and deals with misunderstandings within his adopted family. Maeve's father is determined to return him to the fairy world, where his brother is waiting to meet him.

Jeremy, the shapeshifting fey, also has their own agenda to get Maeve back to the fairy world, working to give Maeve the skills they will need, but also undermining his family, both adopted and newly reacquainted.

Set in 2002 in Brisbane, this magical realist coming-of-age story explores themes of identity, belonging, family and friendship in a narrative that is both compelling and unusual. Debut author Kai Ash has written a story incorporating the Gaelic language as well as an affirmation of trans identity for young people. Highly recommended to readers of queer stories and those who like mythology, aged 13+.

Angela Crocombe is The Readings Prize and The Readings Foundation coordinator

### The Game of Oaths

S.C. Bandreddi  
Walker. PB. \$27.99  
Available 1 June



**R** A story of glamour, exploitation and revenge, *A Game of Oaths* is a new book that feels like classic YA. Set during France's La Belle Époque, a period typically known for its splendour and

enlightenment, S.C. Bandreddi exposes the dark side of this supposed Golden Era through a dark but luscious revenge plot.

Bound to a magical circus, the main character Falan is forced to compete in a tournament to the death for the entertainment of high-paying patrons. While most dread being picked, Falan has been plotting how she can destroy these games from the inside out after her sister was killed in them the previous year. This book revels in the revenge fantasy and grey morality of its main character,

but that doesn't prevent Falan and the ragtag team she enlists to help her beat the game from becoming characters you endlessly want to cheer on. There were also multiple slow-burn romances in this book that had me giggling and kicking my feet. The entire principal cast is made up of people of colour and queer people. They represent voices that absolutely existed during this time period, but have long been ignored and suppressed. S.C. Bandreddi shines a light on the suffering and exploitation they endured at the hands of the French. If you're after your next *Hunger Games*, *Caraval* or *Six of Crows*, look no further. This book captures elements of all three and weaves them together to create something unique. Recommended for ages 14+.

Alicia Guiney is from Readings Kids

### A Flash in the Dust

Meg Caddy  
UQP. PB. \$21.99  
Available 2 June



**R** Gilberta Brady has spent three years in the Fremantle Asylum because of so-called 'unnatural' desires. In that time, she's done her best to keep her head down and avoid the power struggles of the other women, hoping only to read as much as she can and one day be allowed to go home. Then Norah arrives, screaming curses and insisting that she saw her mother murdered, and it suddenly becomes much harder to stay out of trouble.

Norah is determined to escape and get justice for her mother, and Gil finds that her need to help the reckless, passionate newcomer overwhelms her caution, and drags her back into the world in Norah's wake. On the run through the bushland outside Perth, the two escapees must avoid the search party after them and try to survive – a task that seems almost hopeless until they cross paths with two Nyungar boys trying to get back to their own home in the southwest. They're a motley crew, but together they might be able to protect each other and stay alive ... unless the man who killed Norah's mother finds them first.

*A Flash in the Dust* is both a tense YA thriller and an important, gratifying reminder that queer people have always existed. Their stories weren't always recorded, but people of all sexualities and gender identities are an inherent part of Australia's past (and future).

Caddy's author's note includes a list of queer Australians from the 19th century whose lives inspired this story, to show readers that while *A Flash in the Dust* may be fiction, it's paying homage to a very real group of people. It's a well-placed reminder that if you choose to look for them, there are always stories to be found of people who lived their lives unapologetically on their own terms.

There's a lot more I want to say about this wonderful book, but alas – column inches are limited. So let me just say: Caddy has clearly put a great deal of thought into every aspect of this story, and the result is a moving book that's clearly rooted in its time and place. I highly recommend it for readers aged 13+ who are interested in history, love a gripping thriller, or are keen to see representation for asexual and nonbinary characters.

Bella Mackey is the digital content lead

### The Ocean Would Paint Me Blue

Zoufa Katouh  
Bloomsbury. PB. \$17.99  
Available 2 June



Joining an exclusive high school should be a fresh start for Jihad after her mother's sudden death. But she's the only Muslim student there; her hijab and even her name make her new classmates suspicious. She finds refuge in an old sketchbook and in the stories her mama used to tell her. As she starts illustrating her mother's memories, her canvas becomes bigger than she could ever have imagined.

### One Knight Stand (Lady's Knight, Book 2)

Amie Kaufman & Meagan Spooner  
A&U. PB. \$26.99  
Available 2 June



Saddle up your dragons: We're going on a road trip! Gwen and Isobelle's happily ever after in Darkhaven has hit a few speed bumps: Isobelle can't access her dowry, Gwen's meeting a mixed reception among the other knights, and the question of 'what next?' is looming large. They need a distraction, and fast. And you know where is lovely this time of year? The seaside. Never mind that it's midwinter. Also, never mind the sea monster.

### Shadow Reaper

Lynette Noni  
Penguin. PB. \$27.99  
Available 2 June



**R** From the bestselling author of *The Prison Healer* trilogy and the *Medoran Chronicles*, Lynette Noni returns with another mesmerising fantasy novel, *Shadow Reaper*. There is no safety

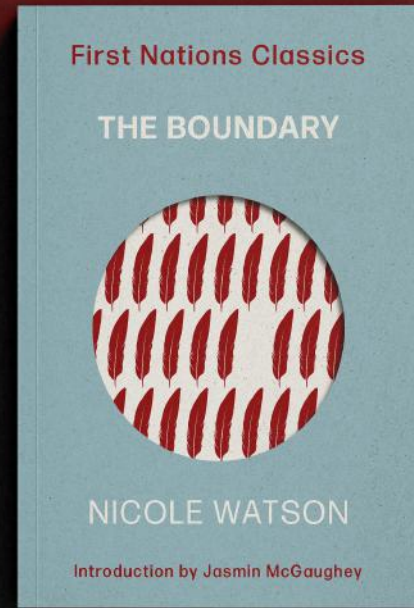
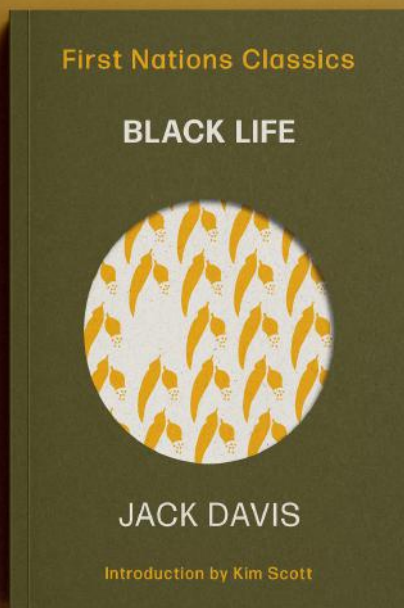
in the city of Aravell. Outside, a black mist kills all it touches it. But inside, there is much worse. Viridia Solace is a hunter, capturing the reapers who hide in the shadows of Aravell, killing and stealing the magic from children in their thirst for power. When Viri disobeys her orders, she is forced to do boring paperwork categorising reported crimes and discovers a growing list of reports about missing children. Teaming up with Reeve, an ex-childhood friend turned reaper and the most loyal follower of the Reaper Priest, Viri uncovers a plot to kidnap 50 children and siphon their magic. This ritual will give the Reaper Priest unlimited power.

*Shadow Reaper* is a dazzling beginning to a duology full of complex characters, rich worldbuilding, yearning romance, and shocking plot twists. With the all-time favourite tropes of found family, enemies-to-lovers, and the chosen one, Lynette Noni delivers a dark and dangerous world where everyone is harbouring secrets and hidden agendas. But amidst the darker themes of the novel, Noni also introduces a troupe of loveable characters (including an adorable pet bunny!) and the kindling of the romance between Viri and Reeve that could be the solace they're both looking for – or the very thing that tears their world apart.

Perfect for fans of Leigh Bardugo or Catherine Doyle. For ages 14+.

Aurelia Orr is from Readings Kids **R**

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