



















# The reading stack

where you can find a pile of good books

Issue 12, September 2008

## What's Inside

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## From The Editor's Desk

*We have filled this issue with lots of junior/young adult books. Leave a copy of Issue 12 lying around the house and the younger humans may express interest in a book or two—great presents for Christmas which is just around the corner! But then the young-at-heart may also show some interest also. Enjoy!*

*Reader reviews can be emailed to  
thereadingstack -at- people.net.au  
(replace -at- with @ when emailing)*

## Editor's Choice

### How to Cook Children

by Martin Howard and Colin Stimpson

- ABC Books. Hardback rrp \$32.95

One look at this book and I HAD to have it! What better book for someone who never knows what to put on the table for her fussy little eaters . . . maybe I might just put THEM on the menu instead!

Esmelia Sniff is the General Editor of this truly wonderful witches' cookbook and her words will make the taste buds water: 'If there's any greater happiness than smelling a small child gently simmering in the pot then I'm sure I don't know what it is...'

Esmelia has travelled the world to bring together recipes from many crones showing how to create mouth-watering pies or puddings from even the stinkiest gutter-reared urchins. However Esmelia does note that she only cooks kiddies that she has caught munching on her gingerbread

house (it costs a fortune in building repairs).

There are 17 delicious (and not so delicious) recipes including Kate and Sidney Pie, Pie-Ella, Deepfried Small Fry with Fries and Baked Alaskan. At the end of the book are three pages of advertisements for local entertainers such as Elvirissa (The Sweatiest Pits Tour), different types of restaurants and cafés (Now Wash Your Hands Café, The Knife and Nursery and Pizza Igloo) and essentials such as the HAG (Hansel and Gretel) Industries Super Oven.

As an Australian gourmet and parent, I couldn't go past the Barbied Shrimps recipe. The idea of grilling your Australian shrimps right on the beach after a hard day of surfing inspired me. To find and cook the shrimps is as easy as Slip, Slap, Slop –



*Slip 'em in the net, Slap 'em on the barby, Slop on some tomato ketchup. Who could go past this!*

Esmelia includes her own opinions on each of the witches and their recipes so if you can trust Esmelia, you will enjoy this book and the recipes.

*How To Cook Children is a fun way of reading about witches in their different environments and makes you think twice about what you may want to cook for dinner tonight... BRILLIANT!*

# Satan's Circus

by **Mike Dash** - Granta Books/Allen & Unwin. Hardback rrp \$49.95

## Guest Reviewer - Anastasia Gonis

*Satan's Circus* is closely based on legal documents, newspapers and archives of detailed reports 'filed by the most prolific private detective of the day' therefore, 'none of what happens in this book has been invented'. The reconstruction of this incredible era in history has been possible through the existence of these facts along with the exceptional writing and narrative skills of Mike Dash.

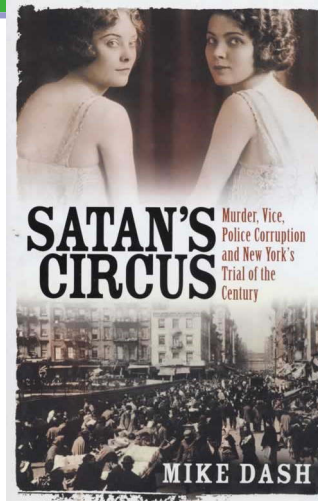
The book begins in Satan's Circus, an area in Midtown Manhattan, in 1896. Gambling clubs and poolrooms are the backdrop of a city consumed by corruption and depravity, but pulsing with power and wealth. The story is about Charles Becker, the only policeman in the United States to have been executed for murder.

Becker's life took shape when he was twenty years old after he left the poverty of his family's farm and went to New York, and through connections, began a promising career in the police force. An

intelligent, ambitious and attractive man, he rose quickly in the police ranks but was not immune to the corrupt climate of the era where people with ethics and conscience were non-existent.

The then police chief, Bill Devery, 'ran his city as one vast racket', and every one of his minions got their cut in one way or another. Grafting – the practice of bribery used to secure illicit gains in politics or business - from brothels and gambling houses, was rife within the force. It was this practise that brought Becker to the electric chair twenty years later.

The fact that he was innocent of the crime was nothing. Powerful men frequently manipulated the legal system by blackmailing criminals to give false evidence. In seeming to punish corruption within the force that was a major social problem, these ambitious



leaders gained more power; power that was never questioned.

This book is outstanding like all of Dash's work. It includes a rich and detailed Index, Notes, and Bibliography. He has also written five other books amongst which are *Thug*, and the bestselling *Tulipomania* and *Batavia's Graveyard*.

Anastasia Gonis is a freelance writer and reviewer, who contributes to *Good Reading* magazine and *Bookseller & Publisher*, and interviews and reviews monthly for *Buzz Words*.

<http://mikedash.com>

# Sri Owen's Indonesian Food

by **Sri Owen** - Harper Collins. Hardback rrp \$60.00

My dream, one day, is to be able to cook a beautiful Indonesian banquet in my "Balinese inspired outdoor kitchen". I want to bring back the memories of my honeymoon in Indonesia years before. Unfortunately for me the outdoor kitchen will probably never come to fruition but the banquet now is very close thanks to *Sri Owen's Indonesian Food*.

This wonderful inspiring book not only has some of the most promise-to-be delicious recipes I have ever seen and read but it is cleverly

interlaced with tales from Sri Owen's childhood in Sumatra and Java, and later when she moved to England with her husband.

I poured over the pages enthusiastically but thought that I would never be able to achieve anything quite like the photographs (all absolutely mouth wateringly stunning!). When I started to read the recipes I found that they were not at all difficult.

I am looking forward to my

Indonesian banquet. But the banquet might have to wait a while whilst I "test" each of the 120 or so recipes! Maybe I'll start with Prawn Satay (sate udang), then Pan-Fried Tuna with Red Chilli Sauce (lapis ikan tongkol berbumbu), followed by Avocado Ice Cream (es krim adpokat) whilst munching on Savoury Peanut Brittle (rempeyek kacang).

I am sure as I leaf through *Sri Owen's Indonesian Food* there is a waft of that recipe folded into the pages! I think it might be time for dinner...

[www.sriowen.com](http://www.sriowen.com)



## Chronicle in Stone

by **Ismail Kadare** - Text Publishing. Paperback rrp \$22.95

**Guest Reviewer - Anastasia Gonis**

*Chronicle in Stone* was the winner of the Man Booker International Prize of 2005. Long before this became the memoir of a wartime childhood, it was an anecdote called *The Big Plane* that was amongst the Albanian writer's earliest works. Added to and reworked over time, it finally took the form it now has.

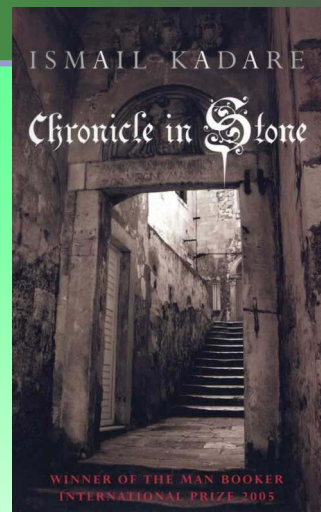
Kadare's literary writing style is like listening to Bach or Beethoven in a shadowed room: floating, stirring, and enfolding the reader. Arshi Pipa's translation captures the literal sense of European speech perfectly, which is at times both comical and thought-provoking.

The biography's central focus is the ancient stone city of Gjirokaster, in southern Albania where Kadare was born, the multi-invasions of the Italians, Greeks then the Germans, and its unusual inhabitants and their curious practices. The narrator is

nameless and of an unspecified age. Is Kadare the boy telling the story? Perhaps, but not at the age of the boy portrayed in the book, for the descriptions are far too mature and insightful.

The boy personifies everything. There is a pulse and an emotional reason for being in whatever surrounds him. This is his way of transforming the monotonous occurrences of his life into significant events.

The inhabitants that Kadare recalls are unconventional and reminiscent of Gabriel Garcia Marques' unique characterisations. They are entwined in the inherited climate of superstition and witchcraft that rules their lives. There is the make-up woman for the



brides of the city. Weddings take place regardless of what's going on around them. The old crones talk of doom and gloom with

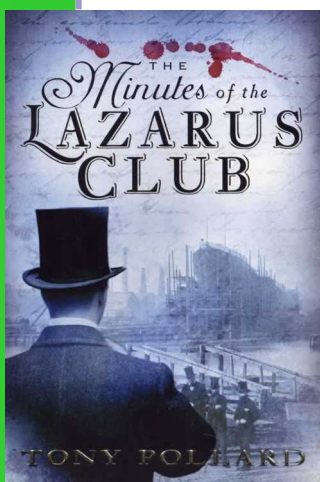
every breath they take. It's always 'the end of the world'. An hermaphrodite is murdered on the night of his wedding by an unknown assailant. A bearded young girl leaves with the Italians and the girls from the brothel, while another 'leaves her embroidery half done, scattered around the house' and runs away to join the partisans. All this uniqueness enters and exits the book, leaving trails of magic behind.

This is a truly magnificent piece of work in which not a word is wasted.

## The Minutes of the LAZARUS CLUB

by **Tony Pollard** - Penguin. Paperback rrp \$32.95

Without my knowledge I was beautifully duped by Tony Pollard and *The Minutes of the LAZARUS CLUB*. I was expecting a story about an elite group of men and murder.



Yes there is murder, plenty of it in fact, but within the first few pages I found myself learning about famous English gentlemen and a few women from the 1800's. Next I was on the internet "googling" names, places and dates. All

the characters from this book were there and what was written about them corresponded with times and dates in the book. But were the murders real? It didn't matter, I was hooked!

It is 1857 and Dr George Phillips is a specialist heart surgeon and lecturer. When mutilated female corpses are fished out of the river Thames, the hunt for a serial killer begins. The heart is missing from each of the bodies and it is not long before Philips becomes a suspect. His life is further complicated when he is asked to join the intellectual secret society known as The Lazarus Club. This lures him into a web of intrigue involving industrial espionage, high treason, body snatching, grave-robbing and murder.

The Lazarus Club's members are Isambard Kingdom Brunel (genius engineer and creator of England's Great Western Railway and the SS Great Western and SS Great Eastern ships), Charles Babbage (prototype computers), George Stephenson (railways), Joseph Bazalgette (London's sewers), Second Viscount Byron King-Noel Ockham (grandson of Lord Byron) and a hypochondriac named Charles Darwin, to name a few.

Brunel enlists Phillips as minutes secretary of the club. When Brunel asks Phillips to pick up a package being constructed for him, things become very personal. The builder of the package is murdered and his son delivers the package to Phillips in the dead of night. Phillips quickly learns the package is extremely valuable to someone, but who and why? Unexpectedly, Brunel travels overseas and Phillips is left with the package. While Phillips has the package his life is in danger.

One of the members of the Lazarus Club must be the murderer and there is no-one Phillips can trust.

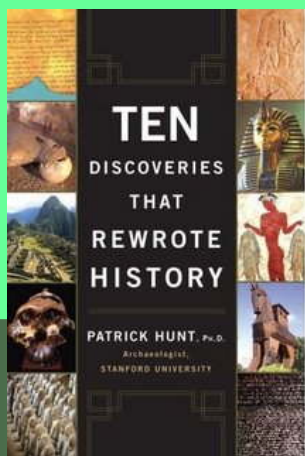
Pollard's attention to detail of the real events and characters of the era makes it very hard to distinguish fact from fiction. Did Phillips exist? Did the Lazarus Club? And the package – could it be real? I'm not one for historical narratives but I LOVED this book and cannot stop telling everyone about it!

# Ten Discoveries That Rewrote History

by **Patrick Hunt** - Penguin (Putam). Paperback rrp \$19.95

Stanford University archaeologist Patrick Hunt has selected the ten key discoveries which he believes rewrote history. He not only explains why each discovery was so important but tells the story behind it. This is the real life substance that no doubt inspired films such as Indiana Jones.

The Rosetta Stone provided the key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics and the French and English raced each other to be first to crack the code. Entrepreneur and adventurer Henrich



Schliemann located Troy by believing Homer's Iliad as fact and changed the way archaeologists viewed historical narrative records.

Some sites were discovered by accident such as the Tomb of the Ten Thousand Warriors and others as a result of long periods of research and excavation such as King Tutankhamen's Tomb. And the story of Hiram Bingham, searching out Macchu Picchu, has

all the adventure of a major motion picture.

Other sites Hunt selected are Nineveh's Assyrian Library, Pompeii, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Thera, and Olduvai Gorge. He takes the reader to visit each site, chapter by chapter, a travel guide through history with some room for debate and the reader's own opinion.

This is accessible history which will be enjoyed by anyone with an enquiring mind, an interest in archeology or past history in general.

[www.patrickhunt.net](http://www.patrickhunt.net)

# 30 Australian Sports Legends

by **Loretta Barnard**. Illustrations by Gregory Rogers

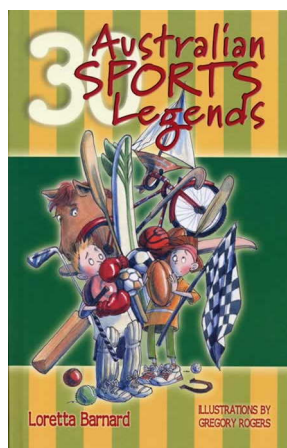
- Random House. Hardback rrp \$19.95

I hadn't even put this book down on the table when my pre-teenage sporting daughter snatched it out of my hands and raced into her room. Of course, she went straight to Cathy Freeman (my daughter likes to run).

A few minutes later she came and read me the story of John Landy. In 1956, at the Australian National Titles (just before the Melbourne Olympic Games) in the 1500m finals, Ron Clarke tripped and fell. John who was behind him, jumped over him but his spike cut Ron's arm. John then turned around and came back to see if he was alright and to say sorry for hurting him. Ron thanked him, picked

himself up and told John to keep running. John then ran so fast he made up his time and won the race!

*30 Australian Sports Legend* profiles 30 of our favourite sports stars and events, from Phar Lap, Ian Thorpe and Dawn Fraser to Karrie Webb, Layne Beachley and Casey Stoner. It also includes snippets about other athletes and events, such as Ron Clarke. I liked reading how the Henley-on-Todd regatta was cancelled in 1993



due to TOO MUCH water! (For anyone who doesn't know, the Henley-on-Todd regatta is held in Alice Springs on the dry riverbed of the Todd River!)

With the added chapters about the human body, health and diet, this is a must for any child that enjoys any sort of sport. And they may learn more than they expect from the likes of John Landy!

# Short and Twisted

by **Various Authors** - Celapene Press. Paperback rrp \$18.00

I'm almost tempted to suggest this anthology of 'stories and poems with a twist' should be read back to front. I flipped through the who's who of contributors and was already, laughing, smiling and occasionally saying 'me too' before I even started to read the book. A varied array of writers has made *Short and Twisted* a smorgasbord of short stories, poems and illustrations.

I have decided I'll just mention a few of my favourites and promise the reader there is much more to be found where these came from.

In Peter Lingard's *the dragon slayer*, the hero laconically discusses the slaying process with the Dragon. There are virgin maidens, a fire-breathing dragon and a brave rescuer and oh, I can't give away the twist - it's only two pages but a story to catch you out. Maria Josey's poem *Surprise* is only three lines long but the awkwardness of the social kiss is perfectly captured. I'd like to paint Heidi Clarke's *from a seed to a tree* onto my bedroom wall. It has such a peaceful green and growing feel.

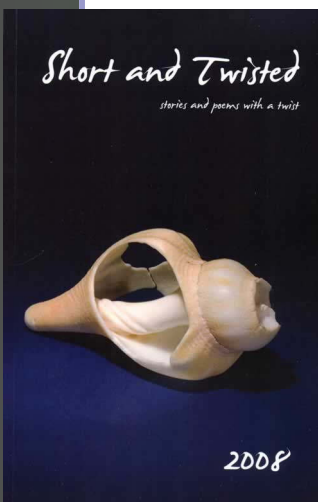
This anthology is a testament to the adage that 'good things come in small

packages'. As a reviewer I am hamstrung by the fact that to tell a little is to give away the whole story. But I can guarantee there really is a twist in every tale.

I found this perfect 'in between time' reading. The stories were bite-sized pieces easily fitting into a busy life - whether waiting to pick up the children at the bus stop, waiting for the dinner to cook or waiting for a file to copy. Waiting was never boring - until I finished *Short and Twisted 2008*. Now I'm waiting for the 2009 edition to be released.

Editor's note: If you can't find *Short and Twisted* at your local bookstore it can be ordered from

[www.celapenepress.com.au/short\\_and\\_twisted.html](http://www.celapenepress.com.au/short_and_twisted.html)



This was a very difficult book to review. I thoroughly enjoyed it but - so many stories, so many poems, so many pictures and so little space to review them in.

# the divided heart

by **Rachel Power** - red dog books. Paperback rrp \$29.99

In *the divided heart*, journalist Rachel Powers explores the co-existing demands of art and motherhood. Is it possible for a woman to juggle both successfully? How does one affect the other? In her search for answers, Powers has interviewed twenty-five women prominent in literature, drama, dance, music, photography and fine art.

No reiteration of the content of this book would do it justice. Only the words of the women found in its pages can do that. So I am going to quote a few of my favourite lines.

"I wanted a family as much as I wanted to be an artist." Sarah Tomasetti (painter)

"I always thought it (family life) would mean the death of the creative self. In

fact I've found the opposite: it's a springboard." Claire Bowditch (musician)

"I felt a kind of resentment about being a mother and not being able to do my work... It was very hard, because my identity was so wrapped up in being creative that I sort of lost myself." Beth Norling (artist)

"Art balances children for me. They both give my life meaning... I have always been both mother and artist." Sally Rippin (children's author and illustrator)

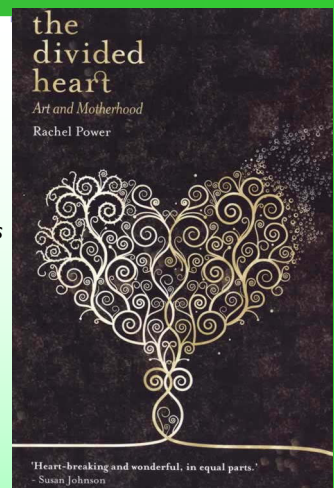
But perhaps my favourite quote, which best summarises the content, comes from the author's introduction:

"A line of text now seamless was once broken, interrupted, hastily scribbled onto the back of an envelope before the lights turned green; a baby was fed backstage

between scenes; a stroke of paint was applied with the telephone in the other hand; a song composed in the blue light of dawn before the family awoke."

Maternal instinct and the creative urge are both very strong and rarely synchronised. *the divided heart* is a testament to the often difficult journey through motherhood by some amazing and talented women. It also provokes a number of questions about the different experience of family men and women in the arts.

This book cannot fail to inspire.



## Ironside (A Modern Faerie Tale)

by **Holly Black** - Simon & Schuster. Paperback rrp \$16.95

*Ironside* is the sequel to *Tithe*, and having not read *Tithe*, I went in fully expecting to be bamboozled and confused (as if a Faerie has enchanted me). But *Ironside* is a story that holds its own. Holly Black has cast her spell on me and now I must run out and get *Tithe*.

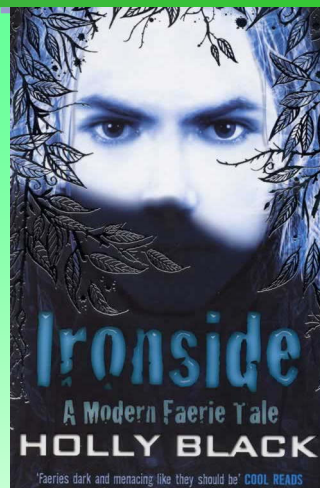
Kaye is a faerie who was placed into the human world when she was a small child. Such faeries are called changelings and they are swapped for real human babies. Kaye is now in her teens, intertwined between her human world and the faerie world. When her faerie love, Roiben, is crowned King of the Unseelie Court, Kaye drinks too much wine at the coronation and makes a declaration to Roiben. When one makes a declaration to a King, the King must hand out a quest to that person. Roiben's quest for Kaye is impossible. She must find a faerie that can lie, but faeries can't lie. And until she succeeds she cannot see or speak to Roiben.

Kaye is taken back by Roiben's quest. Doesn't he love her? Why has he sent her on this impossible task? Kaye is torn

between both worlds. With no hope of ever seeing Roiben again she decides to show her true faerie form to her human mother. Kaye wants her mother to love her for what she is but her mother shuns and despises her.

With Kaye's two loves turning their backs on her she feels driven to put things right – at least to make amends to her human mother. With the help of her human friend, Corny, she sets out to find the human Kaye, to return her to her real mother and her kind.

But once back in the faerie courts, Kaye finds that the queen of the Seelie Court, Silarial, needs her help to win over Roiben and the Unseelie Court. War is imminent and only Kaye can finally stop all this. But how can she make Roiben see her and listen to her? And is Silarial using Kaye to trick Roiben?



As for the quest – Kaye has unknowingly had the answer all along - but you'll have to read the book to find it out.

This is a fantasy story with a modern theme. It is easy to relate to the characters and their surroundings as it is set in modern New York City (*Ironside* is a term used for all the iron used in the buildings, which can zap the faerie's strength).

*Ironside* is a truly magical tale. I have started looking at others differently, wondering if they are changelings and can bewitch me... What a wonderful thought!

[www.hollyblack.com](http://www.hollyblack.com)

## Saltwater Moons

by **Julie Gittus** - Hachette Children's Books. Paperback rrp \$17.99

Do you have a teenage daughter? Or soon to be? Want a book that will help both her and yourself understand about first love, first sexual experience and the circumstances that can make teenagers (and some adults) do stupid things? *Saltwater Moons* is perfect. In fact it is brilliant.

I am going to encourage my young daughter to read this.

Seventeen-year-old Sun is in love. But Tycho, the boy she likes, has a girlfriend; or so Sun thinks. Then Tycho invites Sun to his family's beach house for a party.

Sun thinks that Tycho is interested however once she is at the beach house,

Tycho becomes preoccupied with others and leaves her alone. Tycho's mate, Mark, who also happens to be Sun's best friend Nicky's ex boyfriend, looks out for Sun and makes her feel special. What follows is a relationship that leaves Sun confused. She doesn't quite understand how it happened or if she really wants to be in it.

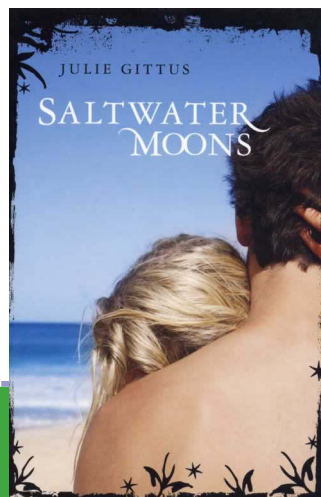
Does she love Mark? If so, why does she feel so different when she is with Tycho?

Back home, Sun breaks her arm falling from her horse,

Nicky won't talk to her, and she struggles to deal with what has happened between her, Mark and Tycho. With Tycho still sending mixed messages and Mark proclaiming his love and then acting weird, what is Sun to think?

Julie Gittus has created a story that could have come from many a young girl's own experience. It is a book that every teenager should read – including the boys!

[www.juliegittus.com.au](http://www.juliegittus.com.au)



# The Magician

by **Michael Scott** - Random House. Paperback rrp \$29.95

## Guest Reviewer - Anastasia Gonis

After the amazing international success of *The Alchemist*, the first book of Scott's magical series, *The Magician* picks up Nicholas Flamel's quest to save the world and his immortality.

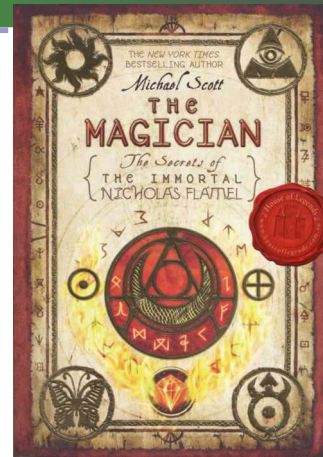
As long as the Codex was in Flamel's possession, immortality was guaranteed to Nicholas and his wife Perenelle. But Perenelle has been imprisoned in Alcatraz and is guarded by the crazed and powerful Dagon. Dr Dee has gained possession of the Book - except for the last two pages that Nicholas has secretly given to Josh for safekeeping. These pages are imperative for the Summoning that will bring his Dark Elder masters back to destroy this world.

Flamel, Sophie and Josh, (the legendary twins from the prophecy in the Book of Abraham the Mage) and Scathach, the ancient Celtic Warrior, return to Paris via

a leygate to try and find someone to awaken Josh's powers. Sophie's elemental magic training has already begun with the Witch of Endor's instruction on the Magic of Air.

Nicholas turns to his old friend Saint-Germain for a hiding place while in Paris and to teach Sophie the elemental Magic of Fire. But they are not safe from the other-earthly forms controlled by Dee and his rival Machiavelli, that stalk them. It is Scathach's fighting skills that save them, while Nicholas weakens and ages as the spell that's keeping him alive fades.

Flamel retrieves Clarent, one of the four great swords of power linked to the elements, and gives it to Josh as protection against Dee and Machiavelli. But Josh, beguiled by Dee who will stop at nothing to gain power, agrees to be



awakened at whatever cost by the great Mars Ultor, the Avenger, and Lord of War.

Meanwhile, Perenelle has discovered that Dee has amassed an army of monsters and destructive spiders, which are awaiting his command in the bowels of Alcatraz.

This is imaginative and fast-paced fiction, full of intricate plots, myth and folklore, and battles between good and evil, played in part amidst the skeleton-framed catacombs of Paris. The third book, *The Sorceress*, continues Flamel's quest.

[www.dillonscott.com](http://www.dillonscott.com)

# Polar Boy

by **Sandy Fussell** - Walker Books. Paperback rrp \$14.95

## Guest Reviewer - Anastasia Gonis

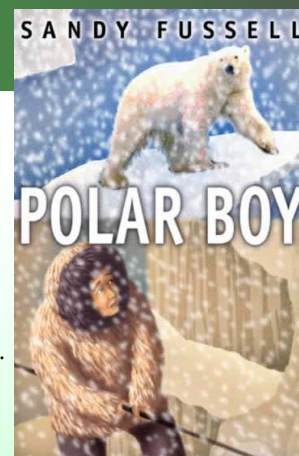
Illuak, the narrator, is thirteen years old. His fate is written in the stars. He wears his late grandfather's bear claw necklace that represents strength and courage. To secure his rite of passage into manhood, prove himself worthy of taking his grandfather's place as leader of the Icelandic Too-lee people, Illuak must overcome his fears, meet his challenges, and face the Bear that has many forms. He must also hold strong against the persuasive power of the Raven that always shadows him and offers the darker alternative to facing his fears. His immensely loveable and wise grandmother, Nana, is his people's shaman and advisor, and one of the best characters in the book.

Regardless of the enormous responsibility that awaits him, Illuak still experiences a normal teenager's feelings such as fear and jealousy. Nana

has chosen Tuak as her future successor. This decision has generated hatred between the two boys who should otherwise be two parts of a whole considering the positions fate has mapped out for them.

Finn is Illuak's closest friend. His body has grown but his mind has been left behind. Blessed with superlative skills, Finn is a person of few words but of great loyalty, wisdom, and strength. It is Finn who saves Illuak from drowning on a seal-hunting trip, and the Raven from claiming his spirit.

The major characters are bolstered by an outstanding cast of minor characters, all with something specific and endearing about them. All the cast evolves by the end of a story where things frequently have a dual form, and whose climax leaves the reader satisfied but longing for more.



An important factor of the story is how

it incorporates a strong sense of respect and connection to the natural world and the human ties to all living things. This is reflected well in the way the people give thanks to the spirit of the animal whose life they have taken to sustain their own, acknowledging its spirit, and taking only what they need to survive on, and nothing more.

The setting is in a brilliant white landscape that is partially night and always white. This is a stylish, perfectly crafted novel by the author of the *Samurai Kids* series.

[www.sandyfussell.com](http://www.sandyfussell.com)

# Blood Red, Snow White

by **Marcus Sedgwick** - Hachette Children's Books. Paperback rrp \$16.99

## Guest Reviewer - Cordelia aged 12

*"Opposite me, the chair by the fire is empty.*

*Everyone should have someone to share their fireside, especially an old fool like me.*

*Time unwinds and I am a young man in Russia once more: as if I were lifting the lid on a box of keepsakes, the memories return; many of happiness, some of sorrow. As if I threw wide a door that leads to a room long abandoned, but once familiar, I am backing another world, a world in which I was another man. And those who think I am an old fool, and those who thought I was a silly young fool, may never know who I really was and how I fought. Let me tell you a fairy tale.*

*I used to tell stories like this all the time; it used to be so important. It even saved my life once. Now let me see how do fairy tales begin."*

*Blood Red, Snow White* is about an English journalist, Arthur Ransome, who is

working in Russia between 1913 and 1918. This is the period where the Bolsheviks seized control of Russia. Their leaders were two men known as Lenin and Trotsky. The revolution was a very long and bloody war with many people who supported the Tsar (Czar), called Tsarists, being killed by the Red Soldiers (Bolsheviks).

Arthur has left his estranged wife and his darling daughter back home in England to go to Russia and be a journalist, writing home to England about the bloody revolution and the World War which England is a part of. But when he falls in love with a Bolshevik he might just be in over his head.

The book is split into three parts. Part one is 'A Russian Fairytale' - an excerpt from a book that the main character has written. Part two, 'One Night in Moscow', describes the one most memorable night in the book

where what the rest of the book will be about. And part three is 'A Fairytale, Ending'.

This is about the rest of Ransome's life and all the complications that he encounters after that fateful night in part two.

*Blood Red, Snow White* is a really good book about living in dangerous times and trying to do what you think is right, even though your judgment might not be very good. I would recommend this book to my friends, because I really enjoyed this book and it would have kept me up reading all night if my parents didn't make me go to bed.

[marcussedgwick.blogspot.com](http://marcussedgwick.blogspot.com)



# The Spook's Mistake

by **Joseph Delaney** - Random House. Hardcover rrp \$29.95

*The Spook's Mistake* is the fifth book in the Wardstone Chronicles. Having not read the first four I thought I would be a little bit lost and may have missed something but I happily found that I could read *The Spook's Mistake* without having read the other four books. Joseph Delaney has ensured the reader is informed of all the necessary past history.

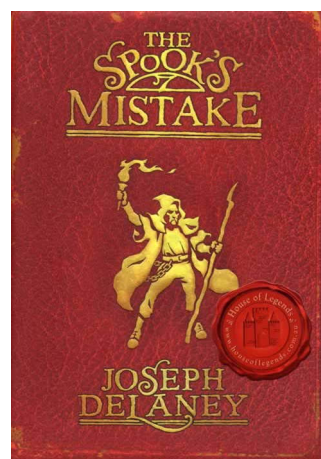
Tom is a fourteen-year-old apprentice to a Spook. Spooks are men who fight witches, skelts, selkies and other such beings. Tom is the seventh son of the seventh son so is automatically placed into training. By Book 5, Tom has been with the Spook for a number of years. Tom is the last apprentice - the last hope to succeed where 29 others have failed before.

Danger has increased in the County with the Fiend (the devil) being released by the witches. The Fiend has sent his own daughter, Morwena, a powerful water witch, to destroy Tom.

The Spook now thinks that Tom needs to be trained by another spook, to toughen him up and prepare him for what lies ahead. Bill Arkwright lives in an old mill which is haunted and Tom furthers his training there. Arkwright has rules that Tom cannot understand and he likes to drink. But although Arkwright can, at times be quite cruel, he teaches Tom well.

Arkwright is then kidnapped by Morwena, the Fiend's daughter. On finding one of Arkwright's bloody boots and his dead dog, Tom can only assume that his teacher has been dragged into the marshes and bogs, and is probably dead. With the help of the Spook and Alice (the Spook's servant), Tom faces the Fiend and then Morwena.

Tom must overcome a number of challenges, not only facing evil, but making decisions about right and wrong. And what of the Spook's Mistake? This



could help the Fiend to win and take over the land. Can Tom change the outcome?

*The Spook's Mistake* has some

wonderful characters and is a great read. It is scary too. Joseph Delaney's excellent descriptions enable you to visualise exactly what these beings look like.

I am looking forward to going back and reading the other four books in the series and then tackling the sixth book. To top it all off, the first book, *The Spook's Apprentice*, is being made into a movie and I will be one of the first queuing up to see it.

[www.spooksbooks.com](http://www.spooksbooks.com)

# The Amethyst Child

by Sarah Singleton - Simon & Schuster. Paperback rrp \$16.95

*The Amethyst Child* has a beautiful cover. I thought that I would be reading a Fantasy story for young teens. But some books are so much more than their cover would lead you to imagine... What I found was a story that could fit into most teenagers' world right now. Individuality, loners, trust, deception, friendship, love, and change.

Amber is a fourteen-year-old who is spending the hot summer school holidays sitting on a wharf watching the water flow beneath her. She would never dive into the water to cool herself – too scared of broken glass, weeds and disease. She is a loner but she is not lonely.

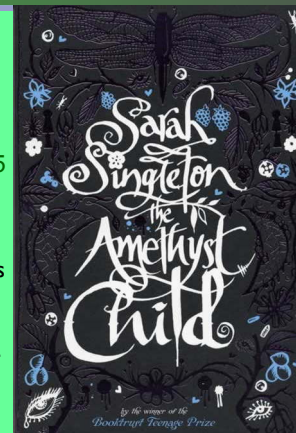
Then she meets Dorothy, better known to everyone as Dowdie. Dowdie is the same age as Amber and lives with her mother in a spiritual community outside the town. Dowdie is the opposite to Amber. Dowdie happily swims in the river, it doesn't worry her, it makes her feel cool and refreshed. Where Amber always wears her favourite colour, black, and has her bedroom walls painted the same – Dowdie likes lots of colour. Dowdie could be described as a hippie – whereas Amber is a goth.

Dowdie sweeps Amber up and embraces her into her "Community" life. Amber falls in love with Dowdie's world.

Amber also meets Johnny. A 16-year-old talented photographer, whose parents are away on a European vacation, he is completely self-sufficient. Amber and Dowdie become friends with him.

When Amber meets Dowdie's father, the community's leader, James Renault, he immediately makes her feel that she matters. Without words, they have an understanding. Can he read her mind? Amber wants to stay with Dowdie and the Community. When her parents leave for a two-week vacation, Amber's wish is granted.

Dowdie confesses that she and James feel Amber is an Amethyst Child – 'children with gifts and abilities not seen before, who would lead humankind into the future. They would be the next evolutionary step.' Amber is not so sure but the charismatic James wants to train her to



find her gift. Is it magic or is James just a good illusionist? Amber starts to believe that maybe she is an Amethyst Child.

However, Johnny seems wary of James.

Is James the person that Amber and her parents see – a likeable and honest man who believes in self sustainability? Or is he the person that Johnny has uncovered whilst searching the web – a dark and dangerous man who has changed his name to disappear?

A phone number is dialled and life as Amber, Dowdie and Johnny know it, is changed forever.

*The Amethyst Child* shows how dangerous things can happen so easily. A great read – one I could not put down.

[www.crowmaiden.plus.com](http://www.crowmaiden.plus.com)

# The General (CHERUB Book 10)

by Robert Muchamore - Hachette Australia. Paperback rrp \$17.99

*The General* may be the tenth book in a successful *CHERUB* series. Even though this book (and series) is aimed at teenagers I loved the story and my teenage years are very much behind me now.

*CHERUB* agents are children from young as ten years up to seventeen years of age. They are

recruited and reared in the *CHERUB* compound in England. These elite agents can do everything an adult spy can do but

they have an advantage – their age. No-one suspects a geeky shy girl or a twelve-year-old with pimples to be ruthless, dangerous and to be able to take over an entire American army base. That is the key to what makes this book a great read.

Ten *CHERUB* agents are secretly despatched to the world's largest urban warfare training compound in the desert near Las Vegas. Their mission is to "disable" and capture the commander in charge of the American forces. It is a war game to toughen up the American troops, getting them ready for any situation. Who would suspect the threat to come from children? Certainly not the Americans!

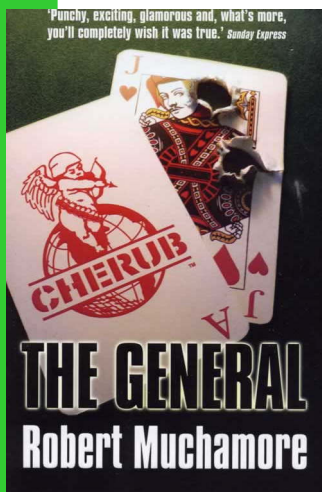
There are a number of key characters in *The General* and they are all teenagers. Each has a story and a personality to match. And all of them

are good at what they do. But they still have the emotional problems of everyday life, which makes them such believable characters.

Throughout the story these kids are faced with real case scenarios that are not only dangerous but often mentally challenging as well. They must be alert at all times. But like adults, these kids too can make a slight misjudgement or error that can totally change the outcome. In the end, the *CHERUB* agents can handle the situation, just as well, or even better, than any adult.

This is a great book for children who want more than ghosts, wizards, and teenage angst. I could easily envisage that *CHERUB* agents are real. Keep the series coming, Robert.

[www.cherubcampus.com](http://www.cherubcampus.com)



# The Tiara Club at Emerald Castle series

by Vivian French - Hachette Children's Books. Paperback rrp \$11.99 each

The *Tiara Club at Emerald Castle* is a six book set of the Tiara Club series following the adventures of the Daffodil Room princesses – Amelia, Leah, Ruby, Millie, Rachel and Zoe – and the not so nice twins, Gruella and Diamonde.

These books are perfectly suited to young girls 6 – 9, including newly independent readers. Complete with black and white illustrations and a page of stickers, the text is not difficult but the stories are good fun.



There are jewels and ball gowns, deportment and dance classes. The teachers are all of royal lineage including the Fairy Godmother (FG) Angora. But the princesses also learn other important lessons such as sharing, being kind to others and valuing friendship. Tiara Club princesses earn points towards their Emerald Sashes which entitle them to return and move on to the next level of schooling - Diamond Turrets (watch for more books!).

Each book is told from the perspective of a different princess. Millie sees a mermaid, Leah looks forward to a visit to Emerald Sea Word, Zoe whispers a special wish to the Wishing Shell, Amelia meets the silver seal, Rachel saves a dolphin and Ruby solves a whale mystery.

There is only one thing young girl readers' love as much as fairies and



that's princesses. And if you know a girl with a Daffodil princess name, she's sure to treasure 'her' special story.

[www.tiaraclub.co.uk](http://www.tiaraclub.co.uk)

# The Volcano Book

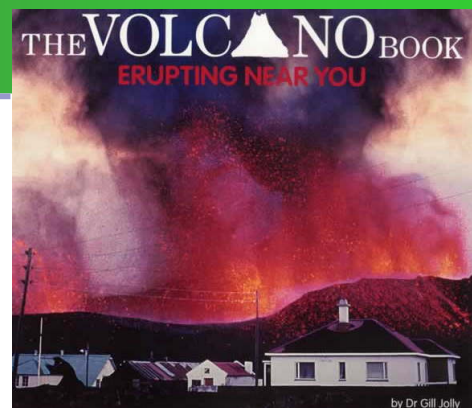
by Dr Gill Jolly - black dog books. Softcover rrp \$16.99

Kids are fascinated by the destructive force of nature. Watch them open the *Guinness Book of Records* and be immediately drawn to the statistics for natural disasters. They're going to love this book! It even begins with information on the biggest bang on earth - the volcanic eruption on the Indonesian island of Krakatoa in 1883.

The *Volcano Book* examines how a volcano works, where they are found and tells interesting stories of survival. It

investigates particular cases for example - the eruptions of Taupo (a super volcano in New Zealand which 26,500 years ago was the site of the largest eruption), Montserrat (the southern half of this island has been destroyed) and Vesuvius (which buried the Roman town of Pompei in 79AD).

Accessible facts and intriguing kid-friendly trivia, stunning photographs and sidebar snippets of information



make this an excellent non-fiction resource for primary school libraries.

Author Gill Jolly is a vulcanologist who lives on top of a real volcano on the North Island of New Zealand. What young reader wouldn't respect that?!

# You're History, Mate!



by Paul Stafford. Illustrated by Shane Nagle -

Random House. Paperback rrp \$14.95

I kept putting this book aside to read "later". History is not my favourite subject; in fact I really don't like a lot of historical stuff. It is usually very hard to keep me interested in a historical book – especially a book on Australian History – so I was sure this book was not for me. Was I mistaken!

*You're History, Mate!* would have to be one of the funniest books I have read about Australian history. I should have twigged with the cover's sub-title *dingbats, dropkicks, dills, duds and disasters in Australian history*, and the great front cover illustration.

I started at the beginning – although with this book you don't have to – and read the first story on William Buckley. Who? Well that was my first thought... then I read on. Paul Stafford had me hooked with the first sentence.

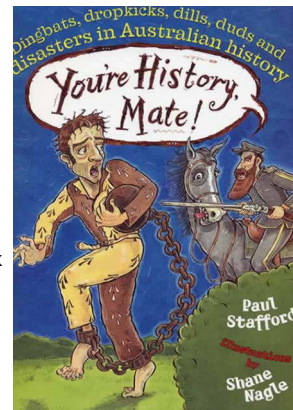
*William Buckley would certainly be Australia's first and greatest hide-and-peek champion, spending a total of 32 years in concealment. Considering he was nearly seven feet tall and described as 'feeble-minded', it was a pretty gutsy effort.*

And it just kept getting better and better. Not only does Paul Stafford give great historical fact but, along with Shane Nagle's illustrations, he personalises each story with his own thoughts and comments.

*Lovely Riley was pretty much the Homer Simpson of the bushranging set.*

and

*Long before Maccas and Pizza Hut spread across Australia, an Irish convict named Alexander Pearce tried to introduce his own early version of fast food – cannibalism.*



Before I knew it, I had read all about Francis de Groot, Captain Moonlite,

Captain Patrick Logan, Harold Holt, Edward Hargraves, Ben Boyd, Lola Montez, Lovely Riley and many many more.

History teachers take note – this is a must! If you want children to be interested in Australian history – not only bush rangers but politicians, prospectors and a few other oddballs – you MUST get a copy of *You're History, Mate!*

[www.pantsonfire.com.au](http://www.pantsonfire.com.au)

# Mythical Creatures ☺🕷

as told by James Harpur. Illustrated by Stuart Martin -

ABC Books. Hardback rrp \$35.00

*Mythical Creatures* is a coffee table book for children but then, watch the adults sit down, look, touch, sneak a peek and then open it up and start reading and interacting with. That is exactly what happened at my house.

And its not only the adults and young children who delve into this book but the "too cool" teenagers who think they are too old for picture books of dragons and mythical beings. Everyone is caught by the lure of this magical book.

We sat, as a family, and slowly opened each page watching to

see what scary or interesting beast would be there waiting to grab our attention. I actually liked the Cyclops and how we got to "see" what was in his belly. Nothing there for the faint hearted – just a few gruesomely dead Greek sailors. My preschooler son gasped when we opened the page of

the Deadly Serpents and sneaked a peek from behind my back.

This captivating book has interactive items such as a pop-up phoenix, a dragon-slayer booklet and cards on the Egyptian Gods. The wall poster was "stolen" by my 12-year-old daughter to hang on her wall! There is also a game at the back to see if you are going to slay, run away or be the Minotaur's supper today! Sadly to say I was the supper for the day!

I challenge you to leave it on your coffee table and see who will be entranced by it next. It might just surprise you!



# Kenny and the Dragon

written and illustrated by **Tony DiTerlizzi** - Simon & Schuster. Hardback rrp \$19.95

## Guest Reviewer - Caitlin aged 12 years

Kenny is a boy rabbit who meets a dragon named Grahame. Grahame and Kenny become friends. But Kenny's best friend, George, is a dragon slayer.

The whole town and the King want George to slay Grahame. George agrees but then Kenny tells George that Grahame is his friend. George wants to meet Grahame to see if he is a nice dragon.

George and Grahame find out that they have a lot in common. But what does

George do now? George, Kenny and Grahame all come up with a plan to help save Grahame and also keep George's reputation in tact.

Although I think *Kenny and the Dragon* is for a younger child, around 7-10 years of age, I thought the book was funny and exciting.

Editors note: Tony DiTerlizzi is the co-author of *The*



*Spiderwick Chronicles* and author of several picture books. *Kenny and the Dragon* is his debut novel. The illustrations are magical and wondrous and the front cover is beautiful.

[www.diterlizzi.com](http://www.diterlizzi.com)

# The Wish Pony

by **Catherine Bateson** - Random House (Woolshed Press). Paperback rrp \$15.95

*The Wish Pony* is a treasure. The book I mean, although fittingly, the little glass pony is as well. This is a story which immediately goes to the heart of those things that trouble middle primary schoolers – best friends, school, fitting in, parents and in Ruby's case, the pending birth of a baby brother she doesn't even want.

Life is changing and Ruby doesn't like it. Her parents have no time for her at the moment as her pregnant mother is often sick and eventually hospitalised. School is full of problems too and for the first time ever, Ruby is labelled troublesome and difficult. After Ruby tries to copy her best friend Sarah's maths, Sarah abandons Ruby for the new girl at school. Ruby feels it's all so unfair. After all, none of it is her fault.

Then Ruby meets Magda, the eccentric

old neighbour who is asked to look after Ruby whenever her mother is in hospital.

Magda opens Ruby's eyes and shows her how to take responsibility instead of trying to blame everyone else. She gives Ruby a small glass pony. A Wish Pony.

Ruby makes a terrible wish.

Then her baby brother is born premature and there's a strong chance

he won't survive. Now things are going very wrong and it might truly be her fault. But something magical happens. Is it the pony or something Ruby finds within when she stops feeling sorry for herself and starts to put others first.

Catherine Bateson has won the Children's Book Council Book of the Year for Junior Readers twice. And this book is another example why. She is a wonderful writer who tells equally wonderful stories perfectly pitched to her audience. Recommended for children 8 – 12 years and in particular, girls.



[www.catherine-bateson.com](http://www.catherine-bateson.com)

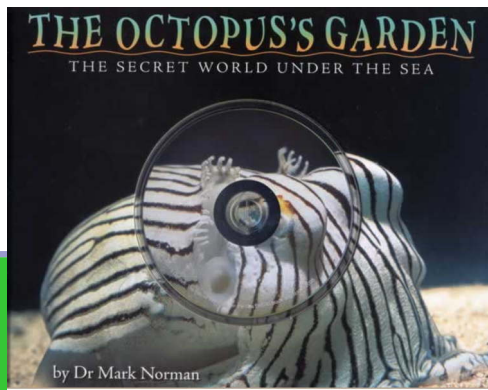
# The Octopus's Garden.

The Secret World Under the Sea  

by **Dr Mark Norman** - black dog books. Hardback + DVD rrp \$29.99

The title and cover immediately grabbed my attention. Was that a picture of an octopus? No – it's a rock with some coral on it. But I look again and yes – it is an octopus, in fact it is a Striped Pyjama Squid (*Sepioloidea lineolata*). Great name and a great picture.

*The Octopus's Garden* is a wonderful book for children to read about octopi. There is not a lot of



text content but images are cleverly used to convey information in a manner readily processed by children. This book is guaranteed to attract their attention. The pictures are incredible, in fact, the book contains the best picture of a Blue-Ringed

Octopus I have ever seen. Even better than the real one I saw in the rocks when I was a child.

According to my hands-on testing, the best way to enjoy this book is to watch the accompanying DVD and at the same time read the pieces of information from the book about the octopi. I was mesmerised. The sounds of the ocean as the noise and the close up photography I felt like I was underwater and could reach out and touch them.

I never thought Octopus' were beautiful or majestic but Dr Mark Norman has changed my view on that. And next time I am in the water I will look twice at picking up a coconut husk or a large shell!

# The Smallest Turtle ☺

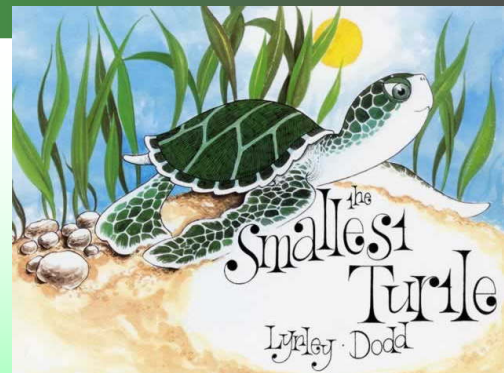
by **Lynley Dodd** - ABC Books. Paperback rrp \$12.95

Lynley Dodd is the author of one of my children's favourite books, *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*, so I thought it highly unlikely she would write another book my 4-year-old son would want to read over and over and over again. Unfortunately for me (and my 12-year-old daughter) - she has. I can't tell you how many times we read this on the very first day I brought it home. And we're still reading it a week later!

*The Smallest Turtle* is all about a baby turtle who hatches late. On his own, he

has to dig himself out of the sand, wriggle across the dunes, brave the heat and keep away from the hungry seagulls. All to get to the one place where his mind keeps telling him to go... to the SEA.

I know the words off by heart now. This is much more than the story of a baby turtle, it is a tale of courage and survival.

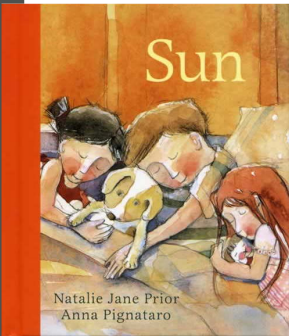


# Sun. Star.

**by Natalie Jane Prior. Illustrations by Anna Pignataro -**  
ABC Books. Hardback rrp \$16.95 each

Two books that compliment each other so well.

*Sun* is the book to start the day. With wonderful water coloured illustrations on each double page, and short sentences to assist with young children to learn to read, *Sun* is a book



to read as young ones climb out of bed ready for the new day.

*Wake up!  
Clap for joy, little seal!  
It's morning!*

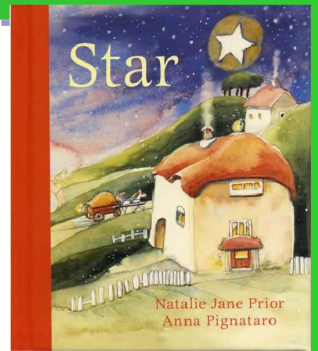
And then we have *Star*. Again, the evocative images lull us into a dreamy state and the repetitive sentences drum us to sleep. *Star* is a book to read as little heads finally nod off.

*This is what the star sees ...*

*A tree in the woods.  
A glow-worm shining.  
Hello, glow-worm.  
Hello, star.*

These two small books are a treasure to keep and often open up and read... in the morning with the first rays of sunshine, or at night, with the moon glowing bright.

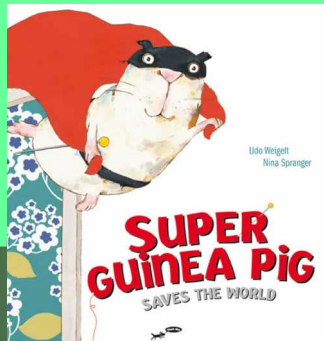
[www.nataliejaneprior.com](http://www.nataliejaneprior.com)



# Super Guinea Pig (saves the world) 😊

**by Udo Weigelt. Illustrated by Nina Spranger –** black dog books. Softcover rrp \$16.99

There are four animals in this story, Von Perlewitz the canary, Frida the old hound dog, Arthur the goldfish and Burrito the guinea pig. They all live together in the Connors home.



Burrito is mesmerised and obsessed with a TV show,

the way many children with Thomas the Tank or Spiderman. Burrito's friends, Von Perlewitz, Frida and Arthur make fun of his hero and Burrito finds that his

friends need to be taught a lesson. But how will Burrito get Super Guinea Pig to come to his home?

*Super Guinea Pig* is a story that most children will easily relate to and there are subtle directions about jealousy, pride and friendship that will help them.

[www.uweigelt.de](http://www.uweigelt.de)

# Big and Me 😊

**by David Miller - Ford Street Publishing. Hardcover rrp \$26.95**

*Big and Me* was a book my four-year-old grabbed and loved and laughed and kept coming back to different pages and pointing to his favourite pictures.

David Miller's colourful 3D paper sculptures make it a book that will immediately be treasured by many children including my son.

The story is about two machines, Big and Small. They work side by side to help each other to do all sorts of jobs.

*But some days Big goes a bit wobbly and I get a lot worried.*

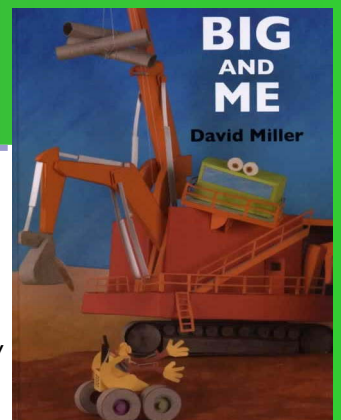
Small realises that with the help of The Boss and Mechanic, and as long as Big keeps taking his tractor medicine, Big will be OK.

*Big and Me* is a metaphor for a child living with an adult with mental illness. The story helps young readers understand how a person can do things

unintentionally without their medicine and yet they can still function normally with the right medicine.

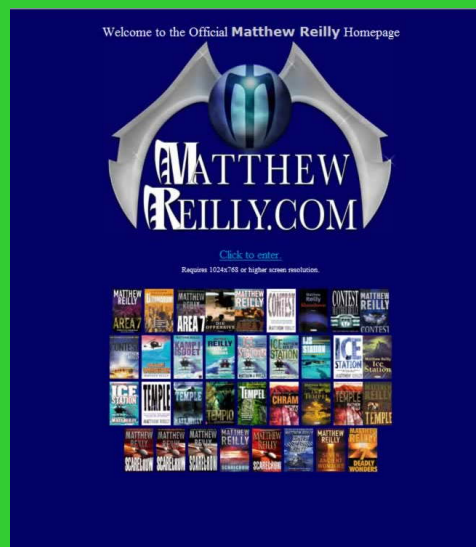
A wonderfully entertaining book with a very important message. Thoroughly recommended.

Mental Health Week is 5-11 October 2008.



# Web Site: [www.matthewreilly.com](http://www.matthewreilly.com)

Australian Matthew Reilly is the international best-selling author of nine action-packed, fast-paced novels, with over 3.5 million books sold world-wide. And the figures are probably increasing as I type.



His website is one of the most interesting adult author sites I have visited. Take a look at Matthew's desk complete with Jango Fett helmet or his replica De Lorean car from *Back to the Future*. Mathew is a movie buff and his memorabilia collection alone is worth a peek. Equally interesting are his hot list of favourite movies and books including his now 'famous' recommendation of the almost unknown 'Da Vinci Code'. Matthew knows how to pick a winner as well as how to write them.



This site is packed full of information – about Mathew, his projects, books and interests. It's also a great example of an author web site.

## Contact us

You can contact us [therreadingstack-at-people.net.au](mailto:therreadingstack-at-people.net.au) (*replace -at- with @ when emailing.*) We are always happy to receive feedback and welcome guest reviews from our readers.

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Adult's Non-Fiction



Young Adult



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