

Book reviews

The Gimlet Eye Quentaris, Series 2, Book 3



James Roy
Ford Street Publishing,
2009
978187646772
\$16.95

Things are different in the sky-city of Quentaris. Since the assassination of

the old Archon, the city has fallen into the hands of a lazy, power-hungry ruler who cares nothing for his people – only the acquisition of new and better sources of authority and wealth.

Tab used to be an apprentice magician, back in the good old days. Now she mucks out stalls and tries to duck her boss's bad temper. But she hasn't forgotten her training, and practises on her own late at night. Little does she know that her talents – unrecognised in the new regime – will take her and her friends on an adventure they won't soon forget.

The first Quentaris Chronicles series went to 26 books, and *The Gimlet Eye* is the third book in Series 2 'Lost City', which has a new focus and new look. Each book is written by a different author (though some revisit the world more than once!), and set up a magical city in a fantastical world designed for readers aged 9–12.

The books are designed to be read separately, though for the full experience, I'd recommend starting with the first two 'Lost City' books, at least. Young readers will enjoy the action and adventure, the magic and the mayhem of the stories, with fun and capable young characters.

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Creative Ecologies, Where Thinking is a Proper Job



John Howkins
University of
Queensland Press, 2009
9780702236990
\$35.00

"The main question of our age is how we live our lives" begins Howkins' book, and in the first world and emerging economies, this is certainly true. He may at times have a lyrical and somewhat idealistic point of view on creativity and creative workers,

but Howkins has created a stimulating piece of writing, drawing on a remarkably diverse set of fields of endeavour, from quantum physics and systems theory to art, "evolutionary economics", architecture, fashion, and more. I see echoes of Peter Drucker's writings on knowledge workers, but from a completely fresh direction and informed by influences that are completely of-the-moment and relevant to how societies and individuals are thinking about creativity and how innovation becomes an asset.

Creative Ecologies examines how we think about creativity and how we handle information, and it looks at what makes some environments more successful than others at encouraging what Howkins calls a "creative ecology". From another point of view it's also about what to look for when you choose a job, find an area to live in, or decide how to meet new people. Old ways of thinking aren't enough, Howkins argues; we need to move away from conventional and sometimes fragmented thinking to a systems approach and examining the flows of ideas and knowledge.

The book ends with a look at the young people who will shape the creative ecology as they look for their first jobs and for their own development, and discussion of three principles of a creative ecology: the assertion that everyone is creative, that creativity blossoms in an environment that nurtures free expression rather than hindering it, and that this freedom requires markets for interaction and exchange.

Creativity is hard to do alone, Howkins points out, and his book brings a new look at creative ecologies – communities and their environments.

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Ellis Rowan's Fairy World



text by Susan Hall
National Library of
Australia, 2009
9780642276728
\$16.95

Susan Hall and Ellis Rowan's delightful children's book *Fairy World* has all the ingredients for a bright, colourful, and informative experience.

Susan Hall begins each page with the title of the particular flowering plant and a simple rhyming poem not only describing the plant, but placing it in its surroundings. At the bottom of the page is a 'did you know' paragraph of facts.

The facing page has the plant, beautifully painted by Ellis Rowan, and a flap that lifts up to reveal a fairy living within.

The books' construction and general appearance are of good quality. The cover is not too hard or bulky and the pages are a good medium size in a gloss finish.

Even though this book would most likely suit girls between the age of three and eight, the beautiful and intricate paintings, knowledgeable facts, and the lift-flap reader involvement almost guarantees that boys and girls of all ages will enjoy this over and over again.

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Consuming Pleasures – Australia and the International Drug Business



John Rainford
Fremantle Press, 2009
9781921361432
\$29.95

John Rainsford presents a scholarly but readable discourse on the evolution of the medical profession, on pharmaceuticals from self-medication with quack remedies to a multi-million dollar regulated industry, and on the change of fashion, attitudes, and political forces that dictated the emergence of the 'illicit' drug.

The book provides a fascinating history lesson on a range of matters: politics, religion, and market forces, but also the history of drug-associated criminal activity, starting from British interference with the Chinese opium trade, and proceeding to present-day events, overseas and in Australia. Drugs initially considered medicinal and widely used have increasingly been subject to regulation and restriction, with many now illegal to use and supply. There appears to be a strong case against prohibition, suggesting it is misguided, causes more damage than it prevents, and takes up an inordinate amount of state time and money with paltry results.

CRIME TIME

AUSTRALIANS BEHAVING BADLY

SUE BURSZTYNSKI

Illustrated by Kerry Greenwood

From chillers to thrillers,
gothballs to underworld thugs,
fraudsters to thieves, you'll
find all these stories and more
in *Crime Time – Australians
behaving badly*

RRP \$16.95

Distributed by Macmillan Distribution Services

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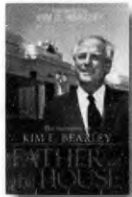
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Other highlights for me were the argument that civil engineering has done more for human health and longevity than the medical profession, and the confirmation that the medical profession maintains historical restrictive policies ensuring only the upper classes and wealthy can enter, also ensuring supply is (conveniently?) not meeting demand and allowing the profession to dictate terms.

Baby boomers would find many of Rainford's anecdotes familiar, but for later arrivals this is a fascinating trip through the history of organised crime in Australia and elsewhere. *Consuming Pleasures* is recommended as a thought-provoking and eye-opening read.

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The Father of the House: a memoir



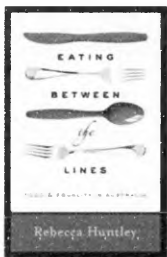
Kim E. Beazley
Fremantle Press, 2009
9781921361425
\$27.95

Kim E. Beazley was the father of the better known Kim Beazley and, like him, a Labor politician for many years. In this memoir, he recounts his childhood and education in Fremantle, and how that led him into both the Catholic Church and the Australian Labor Party.

For a political memoir, it's surprisingly engaging – Beazley writes with an immediacy that brings to life the conflicts within the ALP that led to the splitting off of the Democratic Labor Party, the triumphs and failures of the Whitlam government (in which he was Minister for Education), and the shock of Whitlam's downfall. For all that the tone can be a little self-congratulatory in places, Beazley is fair in pointing out his own faults and failures, and remarkably even-handed in both praise and criticism across party lines. His book illuminates a number of the lesser known back stories of the ALP from the forties to the seventies, and its quiet optimism contrasts vividly with the tone of many other political memoirs.

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Eating Between the Lines: Food and Equality in Australia



Rebecca Huntley
Black Inc, 2008
9781863952637
\$24.95

From the back of the book: "we live in an age of gastronomic soul-searching. Why is childhood obesity on

the rise, especially among the poor? Is the traditional family dinner really dying out – and if so, does it matter? Jamie Oliver and Bill Granger have marched confidently into the family kitchen, but have Aussie blokes followed? What do the contents of our shopping trolleys tell us about the fair go in Australia today?"

Eating Between the Lines is like a rather satisfying selection of tapas: each chapter has a different taste and the serving size isn't overwhelming, leaving me satisfied but also wanting just a little more.

On one hand I wanted to gobble it up as fast as possible – Huntley's writing style is accessible and engaging for what could be a very dry subject – while on the other hand I wanted to savour a chapter at a time, in any order I wished, as the book is rather like a magazine TV program with each chapter standing alone.

Worryingly, I learned on page 87 in a chapter headed 'Table for One' that "epidemiologists have found dining alone to be as hazardous as smoking".

I do wonder, though if this statistic arises from the act of dining alone or from singletons who choke to death on their dinner, realising too late that the cat is useless at the Heimlich maneuver...

If you're interested in social anthropology, Australian culture, or simply eating, then this book is for you.

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Lighthouse Girl



Dianne Wolfer
Illustrated by Brian Simmonds
Fremantle Press, 2009
9781921361531
\$24.95

Long before the label 'creative non-fiction' was coined, there was a tradition in children's publishing of taking the story of a famous person and fictionalising it for young readers.

Lighthouse Girl is a new variant of this genre, taking a broader social history approach. This story is about a real person, backed up with photographs, clippings, maps, postcards, journal entries, and drawings in a hybrid book that allows the reader to engage with the text on a variety of levels.

The daily life of Faye, a young motherless girl shouldering the full weight of household responsibility in a remote location, is in stark contrast to the lives of most Australian children today. Lighthouses invoke a romantic and mysterious tone, which is echoed here

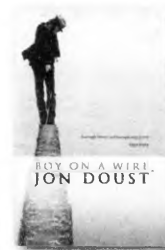
in the windswept charcoal drawings, but tempered with journal entries describing the practical realities of food shortages, isolation from extended family, and the need for self-reliance and endurance. A thread of romance and sorrow for lost soldiers lifts the narrative into a more personal and sensitive experience. This is no mere history lesson.

The book is elegantly presented in a tactile hardback designed to mimic an old-fashioned journal, though the choice of font is puzzling, as a girl of this era would surely have written in copperplate, like I remember my grandmother using.

This book is an original concept, delightfully implemented, that could mirror Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins' *My Place* as a standby in the teaching of social history in Australian schools.

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Boy on a Wire



Jon Doust
Fremantle Press, 2009
9781921361456
\$24.95

The narrator, Jack, tells us a little about his school days in country WA, then a lot about boarding at 'Grammar' school in Perth in the 1960s. Names have been changed, so this work can be regarded as fiction, but 'Grammar' is obvious enough to locals from its description, and named by the author on his website.

To both the school and his family, Jack compares poorly to his scholastic brother Thomas. This is the narrator's continuing concern, along with bullying boys, a gradual waning of Jack's God, and tyrannical masters.

The later chapters deal with the schoolies' rite of passage and the humour of earlier chapters is washed away by binge drinking. However some final redemption comes in the guise of an understanding character.

I found many laugh-out-loud passages in the early chapters, with theatrical overstatements in the manner of early Baz Luhrmann. The book should be enjoyed by boys enduring puberty, who may see that it can be survived with humour; by girls for better understanding of boys emerging scathed by the tribal mores of single sex schools; and possibly by baby boomers who can now ruefully laugh at similar experiences.

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