

# Book Reviews



## **Among the chosen: The life story of Pat Giles**

Lekkie Hopkins and Lynn Roarty  
Fremantle Press, 2010  
ISBN: 9781921696022  
RRP: \$27.95

*Among the Chosen* is a celebration of Pat Giles, a woman whose achievements are myriad, but who remains little known for them in Australia. The book traces her political and feminist evolution from a doctor's wife in a conservative West Australian community, to a radical trade unionist, a feminist campaigner, a Senator in the Hawke and Keating governments, and a world-respected political mover and shaker in women's issues.

The book is mostly chronological in its telling, although it will at times separate out parallel threads of Giles' life for chapter length individual examination. The focus is on tracing the political education, development, and achievements of Giles, which are primarily concentrated on what are all too often dismissed as women's issues.

What emerges is an inspiring portrait of a woman who refuses to see her sex as in any way inferior, and fights passionately and intelligently to change the views of sexism everywhere. The book's prose style is at times amateurish, but so compelling is the story of Pat Giles that the few lapses are easily forgivable. This book should be required reading in every high school across the nation, as the lessons of Giles' four decades in political life are ones that everyone can benefit from.

**Loki Carbis**

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## **The breaking of eggs**

Jim Powell  
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010  
ISBN: 9780297859772  
RRP: \$29.99

Imagine turning 61 and suddenly realising that your whole life and all your beliefs were built on false presumptions and lies! It is 1991 and a year full of life-changing events for Feliks, from the sale of his own business to the discovery of his family history and the journey of finding the place he can call home. All his life Feliks believed in the idea of a communistic society and was even a part of the communist party in France. By getting to know his own real story and the story of his mother's life, Feliks begins to question the famous Stalin quote, "You need to break eggs to make an omelette", and starts opening his eyes to all the changes that have shaped the world he is living in now.

*The Breaking of Eggs* touches upon

real life topics and covers historical facts, without being a non-fiction book. It definitely gives food for thought, and I enjoyed following Feliks on his journey very much.

**Anna Simpson**

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## **Meridian**

Amber Kizer  
Random House Australia, 2010  
ISBN: 9781864718782  
RRP: \$18.95

*Meridian* is clearly written for a teenage audience. The language and style are easy to read and would be accessible to younger teens. The plot is mildly intriguing, drawing the reader in with a simple desire to know why. However, there is a lack of complexity and the storyline continues along predictable lines. *Meridian's* separation from her family and later love interest are dealt with superficially and this lack of depth detracts from the novel.

The focus on death and transition to an afterlife are themes that are dealt with sensitively and could be a useful starting point for teens to discuss and engage with death in a positive way. However, the extreme new age approach and denigration of mainstream religion were unnecessary and may be a cause for parental concern and possibly complaint.

While the language and style make this an ideal book for younger teen readers the themes and content are more suitable to older teens and may require some scaffolding by parents. The superficiality and predictability were major detractors but *Meridian* may still resonate with less discerning teen readers. All in all it was a pleasant Saturday afternoon read.

**Rowan Michael**

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## **Murdering stepmothers: the execution of Martha Rendell**

Anna Haebich  
University of Western Australia Publishing, 2010  
ISBN: 9781921401459  
RRP: \$26.95

Anna Haebich, academic and social analyst, examines the story of West Australian Martha Rendell who was convicted and executed for the murder of three of her stepchildren in 1909.

Shaped as a piece of creative nonfiction but based on thorough research, Haebich recreates the event using the voice of forces and personalities surrounding the case - Photographer (media), Doctor (medical

background information), Reverend (the voice of compassion), and Researcher (Haebich herself, as woman and analyst). The photographer is repentant, the doctor doubtful, the Reverend's compassion tinged with distress, the Researcher examines and questions.

By using this approach Haebich has been able to ask questions on which historical record is silent, and show how Martha's silence and seeming inability to defend herself, and the passivity of the children's father, her lover, blurred the picture at the time.

The people and circumstances surrounding the case made it easy to see Martha as either victim or villain, not, as Haebich proposes, an ordinary woman in harsh and unfriendly circumstances.

Recommended as an entertaining, thought-provoking read.

**Rhonda Cotsell**

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## **Pirate outrages: true stories of terror on the China seas**

Douglas R. G. Sellick  
Fremantle Press, 2010  
ISBN: 9781921696077  
RRP: \$26.95

Sellick has compiled an intriguing set of true accounts of piracy on the China Seas. The accounts are roughly presented in chronological order from the early 1800s through to the mid 1950s. Each account is a single story but the compilation does manage to create a sense of an overarching narrative of piracy. Many of the accounts are presented in the language and style of the period in which they were written. This may seem a little difficult to get into at first but the reader quickly becomes accustomed to it.

*Pirate Outrages* is enjoyable and can be read as a series of short accounts. If you enjoy the historical naval genre in the vein of Patrick O'Brien then this book is for you. I am sure that historians, naval enthusiasts, and anyone interested in the true accounts of piracy will not be disappointed.

**Rowan Michael**

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## **Radical cataloging: essays at the front**

Roberto, K. R. (editor)  
McFarland & Co., 2008  
ISBN: 9780786435432  
RRP: \$40.50

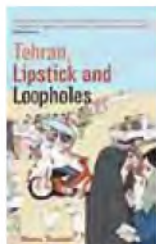
Books solely about cataloguing, that are not aiming to teach how to catalogue, are far and few between and, in fact, most would be found in the dusty area of the stack. Radical cataloguing presents a collection of compelling

essays on various topics by experienced cataloguers like Thomas Mann. Essays provide discussion concerning the areas of the future of cataloguing, historical overviews, cataloguing rules, subject headings, and an unconventional cataloguing aimed at making cataloguing more meaningful and user friendly for patrons. *Radical cataloguing* brings a breath of fresh air to those cataloguers out there waiting for something controversial that speaks what some have always been pondering. It is a book that will leave many cataloguers questioning their profession and the conventions they follow. It is comical in parts, controversial, thought provoking, and most importantly an interesting read which brings cataloguing back into the limelight (something continually denied). It provides for discussions and encourages exchanges of ideas among all library professionals. Non-cataloguers will find the discussions to be mind expanding and eye opening, helping them to realise the importance of cataloguing and some of the issues cataloguers face on a daily basis.

This is one book not to overlook. Put simply, it is a book with a heart of cataloguing passions sure to awaken even the mustiest soles.

**Lesla Maclean**

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## **Tehran, lipstick and loopholes**

Nahal Tajadod

Virago, 2010

ISBN: 9781644085132

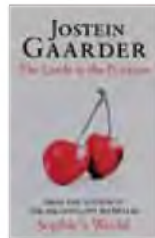
RRP: \$33.00

Nahal Tajadod explores the complexities of modern Iranian life with grace and humour. The realisation that she needs her Iranian passport renewed sets her on a convoluted quest which in the process reveals the constraints and contradictions of modern Iranian life. Being an Iranian who lives abroad married to a Frenchman, her perspective is one of the outsider but also of one who has sympathy and understanding. Though her actual background is not revealed explicitly, her privileged position is alluded to and affords her opportunities not readily available to others. She contrasts her situation with other Iranian women and in so doing highlights differences in culture and the resilience of the population under the oppressive regime.

This is an enjoyable read with a wry humour to lighten the frustrations that are met at every turn and a revealing exposition of contemporary Iran.

**Kathryn Leong**

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## **The castle in the Pyrenees**

Jostein Gaarder

Weidenfeld & Nicolson/Orion Books, 2010

ISBN: 9780297859444

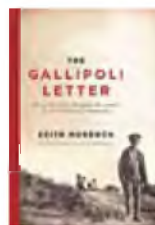
RRP: \$29.99

*The castle in the Pyrenees* is the latest novel by Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder. Gaarder is probably most well known for his bestselling novel, *Sophie's World*. Like *Sophie's world*, *The castle in the Pyrenees* is filled with complex ideas, tackling the debate of scientific empirical knowledge versus religious and spiritual belief. The narrative takes the form of emails, exchanged and then instantly deleted in a sort of electronic dialogue between Solrun and Steinn, two ex-lovers who have not met for thirty years. When the pair meet serendipitously at a fjord where they once stayed together, it prompts this long exchange of ideas and beliefs, showing the divergence of their lives over their years apart. As the pair attempt to understand each other again, the mysterious 'Lingonberry Woman' resurfaces from their past, bringing with her yet more questions.

Although, as ever, Gaarder's ideas prompt a myriad of thoughts and discussions, the text feels a little as though it has lost something in translation from the original Norwegian. In addition, the format of emails is sometimes a little trying, limiting action and often slowing the pace of the narrative.

**Laura Kerton**

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## **The Gallipoli letter**

Keith Murdoch

Allen and Unwin, 2010

ISBN: 978747373133

RRP: \$29.99

Keith Murdoch's *Gallipoli Letter* should be in every library because of its historical significance as part of the Anzac story. Murdoch, a close friend of Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, was sent to Gallipoli to find out what was really happening as the PM was only getting half the facts about the Australian troops and the Dardanelles campaign.

The letter itself is a curious thing. Murdoch went to Gallipoli as a journalist, but the letter lacks journalistic qualities like balance, objectiveness, or accuracy. It is rightfully damning of the whole campaign, especially the British Generals, but it also paints the Australian and New Zealand soldiers as heroic and brave, while the British are weak and lacking intelligence.

While nobody can doubt the impact

of the emotive language of the letter, there is no wider context into which to place it. The introduction does not mention British Government thinking about the Dardanelles and implies that the decision to withdraw from Gallipoli was based solely on the letter, which seems extraordinary and not quite true.

Despite this, everyone should have the opportunity to read this letter by a passionate Australian who loved his country and the men fighting for it.

**Danielle Johanesen**

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## **Pilgrims – Pendulum Book One**

Will Elliott

Harper Collins, 2010

ISBN: 9780732289478

RRP: \$22.99

*Pilgrims* was a gripping fantasy novel that, in the end, I was not able

to put down. Set in the cleverly crafted world of Levaal, which abuts our own, the 'hero' Eric Albright falls into a world where Vous, the world's Friend and Lord, struggles with insanity in his quest to become a god. Eric is followed by his friend, Case, into Levaal and together they become Pilgrims from the Otherworld.

Eric and Case join with a band of the Free Cities mayor's soldiers to help them in their quest to stay free of Lord Vous' control. They become entwined in the magic of Levaal and find that perhaps they are not there by the happenstance they originally thought.

There is much magic and many monsters in this book. The characters intertwine well and there is not a barrage of them, which is sometimes confusing. I felt the author gave us time to be introduced to a character before more were presented. The author used humor and present day references, sometimes unexpectedly, but to good effect.

There will be at least two more books in Pendulum and I will be looking forward to the next one.

**Donna Reid**

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# Book Reviews



## The ambassador's mission

Trudi Canavan  
Orbit, 2010  
ISBN: 9781841986669  
RRP: \$32.99

Please don't be put off by the cover of this book. It's actually a lot better than the generic fantasy painting of a man-in-a-hooded-cloak would suggest. This is the first book in a new trilogy from Canavan and takes place after the events of The Black Magicians Trilogy. The story itself is interesting, even if you are not totally familiar with the earlier series, and will keep you turning the pages as the tension mounts and the story unfolds. Expect conspiracies, daring-do, a quest and magic. Canavan is good at pacing her stories and makes sure that the story unfolds while still leaving you wanting more. Also Canavan's writing style means that the reader is never bombarded by words or events, and the reader is never left drowning beneath pointless descriptions and minute detail. All in all I enjoyed reading this and look forward to the rest of the series.

One for genre fans, I just wish Orbit had put a better cover on it.

**Peter Stoakes**

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## The star

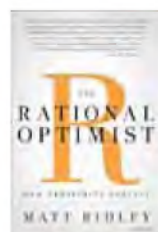
Felicity Marshall  
Ford Street Publishing, 2010  
ISBN: 9781876462925  
RRP: \$26.95

Marion longs for adventure; her trusted friends Polka and Harley aren't going to let her experience it alone. She is lured into the world of fame, but stardom comes at a cost. Marion becomes famous with the help of her friends and their hard work, but the mansion has no room for them and they are forced to leave. Years pass with only the slightest thought of them as she listens to cheering fans. But Marion's beauty runs out and she needs her friends' help more than ever.

Superficiality concept great idea for younger female readers; my nieces are getting this for sure!

**Colette Stapleton**

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## The rational optimist: how prosperity evolves

Matt Ridley  
HarperCollins, 2010  
ISBN: 9780007378906  
RRP: \$35.00

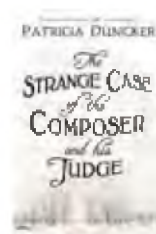
Like Billy Mumfrey before him, Matt Ridley might be a cockeyed optimist mixed up in the high stakes game of world diplomacy and international intrigue. A former Economist journalist, non-executive chairman of Northern Rock, and author of several popular science tomes, Ridley writes a self-consciously provocative and determinedly upbeat examination of the human condition. He argues that the human habit of exchange and specialisation created a collective brain that set living standards on a rising trend.

Thus begins a rollercoaster ride through 100 000 years of human history in just over 400 pages. Along the way are some thought-provoking theories: organic farming hurts the planet, free trade makes the world safer and happier, and big corporations are frail, fragile, and frightened (definitely not punishing, polluting, and profiteering). "We are wealthier, healthier and better educated, more equal and, with the exception of women in America, we are happier": Ridley doesn't examine why American women are the only unhappy people left on the planet. Indeed many questions were either sidestepped or summarily dismissed.

Nonetheless, there's enough here to make a reasonable case for optimism. It'll be interesting to see what the pessimists have to say about it all.

**Donna Worland**

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## The strange case of the composer and his judge

Patricia Duncker  
Bloomsbury, 2010  
ISBN: 978 1 4088 0417 9  
RRP: \$29.99

Academic and writing teacher Patricia Duncker's first novel, *Hallucinating Foucault*, was a dark yet illuminating exploration of the intimate relationship between writer and reader.

It was with an expectation of writing of equal intensity that I began reading *The strange case of the composer and his judge*. But instead of being tossed on wild black seas, I found myself dog-paddling down the well-marked lanes of a chlorinated swimming pool. A tepid, solar-heated pool. With floaties on.

All the elements of the stock-standard mystery/crime/detective novel or TV series are here. Exotic locations. The strong, aloof, worldly-wise investigator. (OK, this one is female, French, and chic.) The quirky, young, inexperienced yet intelligent sidekick. (This one has piercings.) The amusingly dog-like policeman (this one in love with the investigator.) The coded, antique, leather-bound book. The powerful, sexually-attractive and manipulative cult-leader. Mention of the Masonic organisation. Egyptian and other ancient gods. Astronomy. Conspiracy theory. A scene in the British Museum with a 'professor' who turns out to be (first) on the other side and (second) a goodie.

I don't know which reader Duncker had in mind when writing this novel – perhaps someone who liked the *Da Vinci Code*? – but it wasn't me.

**Julie Thorndyke**

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## The other bears

Michael Thompson  
Fremantle Press, 2010  
ISBN: 9781921361951  
RRP: \$24.95

Michael Thompson explores racism and acceptance in *The other bears*, as he depicts a family of koala 'bears' meeting bear species from around the world. Unfortunately, these worthy themes are mishandled in the telling. Thompson takes the all too familiar route of reducing vibrant and complex cultures to outdated notions of national dress, and national activities, which is disappointing, as Thompson has done a lovely job of capturing the differing natural features of the bears. These would have been a much better basis for his themes. A final quibble, which Thompson is sure to encounter: koalas are not bears!

**Rebecca Sylvester**

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