

Take out



Felicity Young
Fremantle Press, 2010
ISBN: 139781921361838
RRP: \$22.95

Take out by Felicity Young is her fourth book overall and the third to feature Detective Stephanie (Stevie) Hooper of the Perth police. The setting of crime novels in Australia has only recently escalated; finding one taking place in my hometown is unusual and enticing. Stevie (in an unofficial capacity) investigates an abandoned house, and uncovers a human trafficking syndicate. As events unfurl, her bosses denounce her continuing interference, and Stevie and those she cares about are harmed.

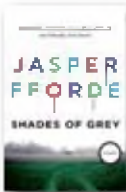
Young has delivered an entertaining story with realistic dialogue, believable characters, and plausible events. She has accurately depicted WA cities, suburbs, and lifestyle, and displays a neat turn of phrase: "Stevie hadn't just hit a nerve, she'd severed a spinal cord" (p. 81). The themes of sexual slavery, the various forms that a family may take, and the value of life are simultaneously topical and timeless.

However, there are some flaws: the author has presumed reader knowledge of the series and provided little back-story for those (like me) new to the characters. Also, while the period is present-day, the season is unclear, and the garbled speech of an integral player is not fully explained.

Felicity Young's works have been likened to Patricia Cornwall and Kathryn Fox; I also found stylistic similarities to Gabrielle Lord. I recommend *Take out* to those seeking a decent weekend or holiday read.

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Shades of grey: #1 the road to High Saffron



Jasper Fforde
Hodder & Stoughton, 2010
ISBN: 9780340963043
RRP: \$29.95

The road to High Saffron is the first of a trilogy titled *Shades of grey* by Jasper Fforde, author of the Thursday Next and the Nursery Crime series, set in Chromatica, a few hundred years after "Something That Happened", where your ability to see a dominant colour determines your caste, your position, your future expectations, and, of course, your name. And so the pun begins.

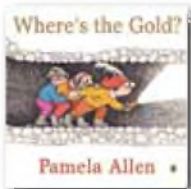
Eddie Russett travels with his father Holden to East Carmine, a hamlet at the edge of the civilised word. Throughout the narrative, their every action is dictated by the Rules, the breaking of which leads to a trip on the Night Train to Emerald City and Rebooting. Fforde has inhabited East Carmine with an interesting assortment of characters, all of whom fit nicely

into his somewhat distorted Orwellian construct of a world. From the Prefects on high, to the Grey labour force, everyone knows their position in life, and all work towards moving up the social ladder. We experience the growing affection of Eddie for Jane, a lowly Grey, and her continued questioning of his beliefs, and, following their narrow escape from a colour mining survey to High Saffron, we experience his awakening, and understanding of the world as it really operates.

The road to High Saffron is a good read. It contains all the quirky eccentricity of previous Fforde novels, with his usual collection of puns, allusions, and chortles for the reader's pleasure. Unfortunately I found it a bit underdone. The story meanders for the first half, and becomes predictable in the second. Eddie is a little too thick and juvenile for the role he plays, and so many strings are left untied that the book lacks closure – which I found unsatisfying.

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Where's the gold?



Pamela Allen
Puffin Books, 2010
ISBN: 780143501473
RRP: \$14.95

In true form, Pamela Allen delivers another treat for the very young in this paperback edition of *Where's the Gold*. It is a tale of three not so brave and bold pirates, Jeremy, Bellamy, and Ted, along with their noisy parrot who are in search of golden treasure.

The illustrations perfectly match the essence of the text and build the suspense for the pre-reader. As they make their way down, through, and up a tunnel, the facial expressions of Jeremy, Bellamy, and Ted say it all. The repetition and rhyme is typical of Allen's style and the moral of the tale speaks to adults and children alike.

'Happiness is not getting what you want, but wanting what you have got.'

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Three weeks to say goodbye



CJ Box
Corvus, 2009
ISBN: 9781848872929
RRP: \$32.95

This thriller opens in a somewhat pedestrian manner, but steadily gains momentum. The McGuanes, parents of an adopted daughter, are given only 21 days to hand her over to a delinquent birth father and his authoritarian federal judge grandfather. The twists and turns of the flawed US legal system that allows a legally adopted child to be taken nine months after custody, and placed in the arms of an 18-year-old with gangland connections and murky ulterior

motives, is matched by the extreme lengths that the McGuanes go to in order to save their daughter from an uncertain fate. Gang reprisals, beatings, murder, blackmail, and undertones of child abuse are par for the course as this novel gains pace and delivers a stunning conclusion. CJ Box's story is all the more shocking for the normality of the adoptive parents who are pushed to the limit of their morality to do what they know is ultimately right for their family. The corruption within the US legal system is exposed within this fictional tale, but it's all too believable in a state where the rich seem to get away with murder. A great rollicking read.

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The Dig Tree: the story of Burke and Wills



Sarah Murgatroyd
Text Publishing Company, 2009
ISBN: 9781921520990
RRP: \$26.95

Praise for Sarah Murgatroyd's vivid account of Burke and Wills' expedition across Australia: Sarah Murgatroyd writes with ease and humour. She writes in a style that both the age-old historians and the novice can relate to and be engaged with in the thrilling and sometimes sad recount of the two explorers' journey.

Sarah Murgatroyd has brought to life Burke and Wills' courage, sufferings, and foolishness in a detailed and readable way. She captures the essence and substance of the whole expedition, its environment, and the psyche of all the people involved. One can almost smell the earth and feel the hot winds on one's face while reading the story.

With Sarah Murgatroyd's entire recount of Burke and Wills' inadequacies and incompetence, one is left to wonder whether it was sheer luck or sheer determination that enabled Burke and Wills to struggle through a harsh and inhospitable land.

Through Sarah Murgatroyd's words, Burke and Wills have shown us a glimpse of how far human endurance and perseverance can go. They have demonstrated the human nature of decency and compassion up to the end.

An absolute page-turner!

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Lonely werewolf girl



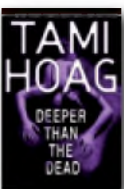
Martin Millar
Piatkus, 2010
ISBN: 9780749942830
RRP: \$19.99

As the title suggests, our protagonist is a teenaged werewolf called Kalix, who has been outlawed from her clan's estate for assaulting the thane, her father, over love gone wrong. Living on the streets of London, she is slowly drinking herself to death and close to overdosing on laudanum when she finds herself entangled in a clan war. Other major characters include two humans caught up in Kalix's life and Kalix's siblings – a fashion designing sister, a cross-dressing brother, and another, more ambitious brother who wants Kalix dead for the attack on their father. Also featured are werewolf hunters, fairy queens, fire queens, and elemental princesses.

This very long book could have benefited from some serious editing. Not only were there some basic grammatical mistakes, but I found myself thinking that many characters, and even some chapters, could've been removed without really affecting the storyline. I initially hoped this book might be a useful 'next read' to Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, but the passion just wasn't in it, and I suspect many *Twilight* fans would be left disappointed. Every character is flawed, leaving me feeling like I didn't really care what happened to any of them. I can see what Millar was aiming for, but unfortunately I feel he's just missed his mark on this occasion. Although obviously targeted at the 'teen girl' market, I would recommend school librarians read this book first before considering it for their collection.

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Deeper than the dead



Tami Hoag
Orion, 2009
ISBN: 9780752891644
RRP: \$32.99

1985. Four kids stumble on a murdered body. Ambitious small town detective calls in FBI. FBI agent is a pioneer in fledgling art of criminal profiling. How do the local cops react to these new fangled ideas?

The eighties are the new olden days, grist for the thriller writer's mill – how did we ever solve crime without DNA testing, profilers? In Tami Hoag's latest thriller, the hunt for a serial killer starts out with an interesting premise, the emotional effect on the child of discovering a body. Mums, dads, and each child's situation are presented through the eyes of Anne, the children's school teacher. She helps the police with their enquiries, in particular the FBI agent, Vince.

There are multiple characters and story lines. This detracts from the tale and ultimately none of the characters are more than two dimensional. This coupled with too long a book, plus gratuitous violence and unrealistic scenarios spoil what could have been a better developed, terser tale.

I had no trouble early on figuring out 'who did it', and the other stories were also easily predictable.

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Earth to Hell: journey to Wudang 1



Kylie Chan
Harper/Voyager, 2010
ISBN: 9780732286866
RRP: \$22.99

Kylie Chan's *Earth to Hell* is the first book of *Journey to Wudang*, sequel series to *The Dark Heavens* trilogy. Though it is set 8 years after the events of *Dark Heavens*, not much seems to have changed. Aside from passing references to their age, Chan's characters might as well have been frozen in time for all the change and progress they've made.

Kylie Chan seems to have taken the old adage, 'write what you know', a bit too far. The main character, Emma Donohoe, bears a remarkably strong resemblance to her creator. Both were raised in Brisbane Queensland, and moved to China in their 20s where they met their future husbands. The main difference between them seems to be that Emma is amazingly good at martial arts and able to turn into a snake at will, where as Kylie presumably cannot.

Earth to Hell is scattered with pop culture references, and not all of them current or relevant. These references amount to one character, usually Emma, saying "this reminds me of X" followed by another character saying, "yes, that's why we call it the X-car".

Despite its many and varied faults, I enjoyed reading *Earth to Hell*. Chan's writing has an addictive quality that made it hard for me to put the book down.

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Making history: the SDA Victorian branch 1908/2008

Interviews by Jim Tennison, research by Barbara Niven
SDA Victorian Branch, 2009
ISBN: 9780646523477
RRP: \$60.00

At the turn of the 19th Century shop assistants in Victoria worked a 65 hour week over six days for a pittance. *Making history...* details how the Shop, Distributive, and Allied Employees Association (SDA) improved the industrial landscape for retail workers over the last hundred years. Recurring issues are

extensions to trading hours and eroding of workers rights.

With 220 000 members, the SDA is a moderate but effective union and the largest union in Australia today. It prides itself on leading the way in the fight for equal opportunity for women, underpinned by a social justice agenda. It was a leader in convincing governments, employers, and individuals to embrace universal superannuation.

The book is a centenary celebration of the SDA based on union records and interviews with key personnel from 1907 to the present day. The often unfair balance between employers and employees is explored from the points of view of the seven SDA secretaries from 1907 to 2008, and twelve union organisers responsible for direct member contact.

The text and photographs together with a select bibliography, sources, and index ensure the book is an accessible social and political history of the SDA and of Victoria, particularly Melbourne.

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