

Book reviews

The great cold



Gladys Milroy
Fremantle Press, 2009
ISBN: 9781921361586
RRP: \$9.95

Bush secrets

Tjalaminu Mia & Jessica Lister
Fremantle Press, 2009.
ISBN: 9781921361593
RRP: \$9.95



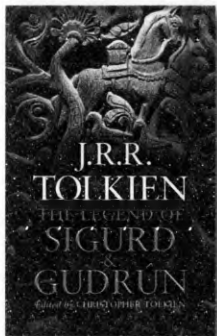
The final sentence at the end of each chapter of *The great cold* ensures young readers will want to discover what happens next. Crow must decide how best to care for her egg in the face of encroaching snow. "She had to do something, but what?" The next chapters tell of friendship and co-operation between birds and animals in a successful bid to help each other stave off the effects of environmental disaster. Tracey Gibbs' illustrations are decorative and charming and well-placed within each chapter. Author Gladys Milroy's inspiration is her concern for damage to the environment.

Bush secrets has a contemporary setting with a strong sense of positive family life. Much-loved grandpa, Dada Keen, visits his grandchildren Debbie and Billy. Debbie and her grandpa have a special trusting bond and share treasured secrets. The family's stories are funny, touching and relevant to young readers, with an underlying theme of the importance of generational interaction. The illustrations are witty and complement the text. The authors Tjalaminu Mia and her granddaughter Jessica Lister tell stories from the heart.

These elegant fables written by Indigenous authors are the first titles published in the Waarda series for young readers. The series is designed to support the literacy needs of Indigenous children. It is edited by Sally Morgan who is also credited with the bright and inviting cover artwork. Indigenous and non-Indigenous beginning independent readers will enjoy the simple, natural language and the grown-up chapter format of the appealingly presented paperbacks. Waarda, Nyungar for talking and sharing stories and information is an apt name for this exciting new series.

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The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrun



JRR Tolkien
Edited by Christopher Tolkien
HarperCollins Publishers Australia, 2009
ISBN: 9780007317233
RRP: \$45

In *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun*, JRR Tolkien displays exceptional penmanship and scholarship in his translation of these Old Norse legends. In keeping with Old Norse and Old English, Tolkien has written the legends in a metrical form

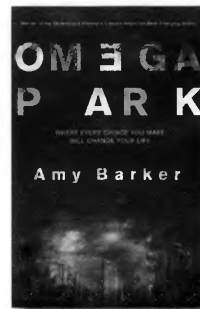
comprising of opposing word groups (p.45-48) and maintained the brevity of the old Norse which "aims at seizing a situation..., illuminating a moment with a flash of lightening" (p. 48). This style of writing lends a power to the verse and the reader is drawn into the story almost as if sitting by a campfire hearing these tales told by a Norse bard, centuries ago.

If you enjoyed *Beowulf* or poetry in the *Lord of the Rings* then these lays are for you. Some clear parallels exist between the legends and the mythology of Middle Earth. However, it is not prose with all the details given; expect to use your own imagination to create a vivid mental tapestry.

Christopher Tolkien displays his own scholarship through the clear and detailed commentary. His explanations provide a thorough understanding of the context, sources, and literary devices used by JRR Tolkien in the legends. However, this explanation may not be for everyone. You may prefer to jump directly into the tales and read the commentary when finished, or not at all.

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Omega Park



Amy Barker
UQP, 2009
ISBN: 9780702237201
RRP: \$24.95

Omega Park is a heartbreaking modern tragedy set within the 'other world' of a housing commission estate. The death of Jackie Box in a police chase is the catalyst for a week of futile riots. The reader, meanwhile, is taken back to Jackie's childhood, to retrace his life in all its warmth, beauty, and pain. There are scenes of delicate tenderness, and deft sketches of horror, cruelty, selfishness, frustration, and despair. The character of Jackie Box unfolds beautifully throughout.

Dingo is experiencing the conflict surrounding Jackie's death. In him, the reader sees a reflection of the earlier hopes and innocence of Jackie, and it is through him that Jackie's never-completely abandoned hope of a better existence is finally realised.

Omega Park raises many difficult social questions, and prompts a reassessment of preconceived ideas. Cleverly, ends are left loose. Barker knows her subject matter too well to offer neat solutions for the complexities she has portrayed. The reader is even left questioning Jackie's final interpretation of one of his most beautiful memories: does it represent a true insight into the characters and relationships around him, or is his final view of reality as incomplete as his life?

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Finding home



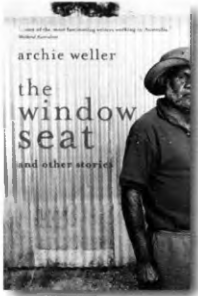
Gary Crew
Susy Boyer, illustrator
Ford Street Publishing, 2009
ISBN: 9781876462871
RRP: \$26.95

Author Gary Crew makes every word count in this story, told by an unidentified narrator. This picture book for older children tells the story of an Australian family living on farm in early 1900s. It deals with the themes of home, belonging, family relationships, and the loss of the indigenous landscape at the hands of the white colonists.

The boy and his parents are worlds apart. The boy's parents don't value his differences. While the boy's parents seek to destroy all that stands in their way of 'making a living from the land', he lives in tune with the landscape and wild life.

Australian Susy Boyer's full-page expressive illustrations bring this rich and beautiful story to life. The cover illustration draws the potential reader to raise questions as to what might be happening within the book. The color and texture of the end papers enhances the mood of the story.

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The window seat

Archie Weller
UQP, 2009
ISBN: 9780702237157
RRP: \$24.95

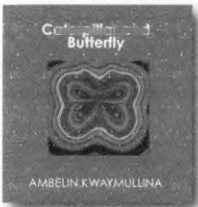
Reading Archie Weller's collection of short fiction, I was simultaneously shocked by the events he was describing and impressed by the ways in which he described them.

The first story, *Stolen car*, recounts the experience of a young Aboriginal man encountering city life for the first time. It introduces themes of justice, police brutality, and racism, which recur throughout the collection. In each story, Weller explores these themes in a direct and brutal way, forcing the reader to confront some unpalatable truths.

The highlight of the collection is the seamless integration of threads of Aboriginal Creation stories and Celtic folklore into the stories of Aboriginal people in contemporary Australia. In *Spirit woman*, Weller uses the metaphor of a creation story from the South West Nyoongahs to tell the life story of an English settler. In *Walking with mermaids*, he describes the protagonist's mother with reference to the Celtic myth of the *murbhach*. He transcends time with similar ease, often combining past, present and future in the one story.

It's only a game is the sole comic contribution and the majority of stories strike a sombre and unsettling tone. Overall, the collection is a refreshing, provocative, and powerful contribution to Australian literature.

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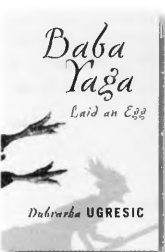
Caterpillar and butterfly

Ambelin Kwaymullina
Fremantle Press, 2009
ISBN: 9781921361579
RRP: \$26.95

The underlying message in *Caterpillar and butterfly* is that if there are things in your life that make you afraid, a period of self

reflection and analysis may be required to give you the courage to transform yourself into a proud and beautiful creature. Ambelin Kwaymullina shares the story of a scared little caterpillar that does just this and transforms into a courageous butterfly. The book is boldly illustrated and written, and each character that we meet along the way: Goanna, Snake, Wallaby has a distinct and charming personality. This title will be appreciated by junior primary school students, in particular the girls; really, who can resist a story about butterflies?

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Baba Yaga laid an egg

Dubravka Ugresic
Translated by Ellen Elias-Bursac, Celia Hawkesworth, and Mark Thompson
Canongate, 2009
ISBN: 9781847670663
RRP: \$29.95

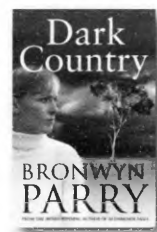
This book is one of the most unusual books I've ever read. Written in three parts, plus an introduction, it combines stories of ageing, women, and sexuality. There is the story of an author and her mother, who is suffering from Alzheimer's; of three old women from Croatia who travel to a health spa; and an essay relating the two first parts to the Eastern European mythical character of Baba Yaga.

The language is, in many places, beautiful – and my congratulations go to the three translators who worked on this novel, as well, of course, to Ugresic herself.

I think I would have enjoyed this book more if I had grown up with stories of Baba Yaga and Eastern European folklore (such as I enjoyed Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* because I had grown up with the story of *Sleeping Beauty*). I would recommend this book for inclusion in Adult Fiction collections of public libraries who have a high Eastern European population, or one whose clientele enjoy more unusual and/or intellectual works.

Although I couldn't say this book was 'easy reading' it has certainly inspired me to read more Eastern European folklore.

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Dark country

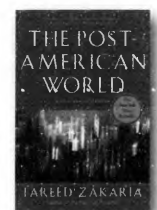
Bronwyn Parry
Hachette Australia, 2009
ISBN: 9780733623233
RRP: \$32.99

Dark country is the second in a series of loosely connected stories set around a small town in the outback of New South Wales. This is never explained in the book itself; you have to go online to find out why the main character makes constant references to a serial killer that never appears, or affects the plot in any way.

This minor gripe aside, Bronwyn Parry's novel succeeds in everything it sets out to do. The main characters are as different as they are instantly likeable; a small town cop, and a gruff millionaire from Sydney with some shady connections. The Australian outback is a great setting for the mix of romance and thriller aspects, and the narrative is tight and gripping.

If you're a fan of romance, definitely check it out...though you might first want to read Bronwyn Parry's debut novel *When darkness falls*, the previous book in the series.

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The Post-American world

Fareed Zakaria
Penguin, 2009
ISBN: 9780393334807
RRP: \$24.50

The Post-American world explains why the United States will soon be surpassed by countries like China and India. It has received rave reviews overseas, particularly in America, where New York Times reviewer, Michiko Kakutani, wrote that it was "provocative and shrewd" and Gideon Rachman from the Financial Times described it as "the most timely book of the year".

Zakaria's journalistic style transforms this potentially difficult journey through geo-political and economic analysis into an informative and enjoyable one. While he relies extensively on statistical evidence to illustrate his points, he is careful to explain his data and its applicability, which prevents the reader from being overwhelmed by a sea of numbers.

At times, Zakaria's tendency to glorify America's past ingenuity and success detracts from his ultimate proposition that America has ceased to dominate. Additionally, he often refers to collective labels like 'the West' or 'Asia' without appreciating the great diversity within these collectivities. However, despite these criticisms, *The Post-American world* is a fascinating reflection on the current global context and the rise and fall of superpowers.

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