

## **2015 - REVIEW SUMMARY (reviews follow in next section)**

### **Fiction - Mystery/Thriller/Adventure/Crime**

- \*\*\*\*\* "The Oracle" by D.J. Niko
- \*\*\*\*\* "A Company of Roses" by Megan Goodenough
- \*\*\*\*\* "The Serenity Stone Murder" by Marianne Jones
- \*\*\*\*\* "The Drop" by Denis Lehane
- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Christmas at the Mysterious Bookshop" Edited by Otto Penzler
- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Mr Mercedes" by Stephen King
- \*\*\*\* "Frozen Shadows" by Gene O'Neill & "Wild Woman" By Chris Marrs
- \*\*\*1/2 "Bumping Off Fat Vinny" by Dennis N. Griffin & Morgan St. James
- \*\*\*1/2 "Cyber Genius" by Patricia Rice
- \*\*\* "Unknown Sender" by Ryan Lanz

### **Fiction - Science Fiction/Horror/Paranormal/Fantasy**

- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Fear and Courage: Fourteen Writers Explore Sime~Gen" by Jacqueline Lichtenberg
- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Fall of the Cities – Planting the Orchard" by Vance Huxley
- \*\*\*\*\* "The Winter of Springtide's Queen" by Danielle Ste. Just
- \*\*\*\*\* "Those Who Remain" by Ian Blackport
- \*\*\*\*\* "Logan's Run" By William F Nolan & George Clayton Johnson
- \*\*\*\*\* "Soul Mates" by John. R. Little
- \*\*\*\*\* "The Year's Best Science Fiction & Fantasy 2014" Ed. Rich Horton
- \*\*\*1/2 "Revival" by Stephen King
- \*\*\*1/2 "Wintertime" (Aeon of Light Book One) by Aron Sethlen
- \*\*\*1/2 "Starscape" by Benita J. Prins
- \*\*\* "Touched by Magic" by Doranna Durgin
- \*\*\* "The Mansion's Twins" by Rose M. Channing

### **Fiction - Literary Fiction/Romance**

- \*\*\*\*1/2 "The Pool Boy's Beautitdue" by DJ Swykert
- \*\*\*\*\* "Record" by Moro
- \*\*\* "Mad about the Boy" by Helen Fielding
- \*\*\*\*\* "Entanglement. A Novel." by Katie Rose Guest Pryal
- \*\*\*\*\* "South of Border, West of the Sun" by Haruki Murakami
- \*\*\*\*\* "Mexican Mutts, Tequila Pups & Chili Dogs - True Stories of the Dogs of Mexico: Modern Dog Book" by David Gordon Burke

### **Fiction - Literary Fiction/Other**

- \*\*\*\*\* "Tangled Weeds" by Sarah Key
- \*\*\*\*\* "All Involved" by Ryan Gattis
- \*\*\* "The Grey Lady of Long Branch" by Maura Satchell
- \*\*1/2 "Go Set A Watchman" by Harper Lee

### **Fiction - Children**

- \*\*\*\* Health Stories for Kids Series by Brian Wu PhD (Emily's Best Gift Ever, The Zoo Flu Frenzy, Fort Applegate and the Battles of Wounded Knee & Meet Nolan Applegate, explorer and adventurer)
- \*\*\*\* The Jesper Jinx Series by Marko Kitti (Jesper Jinx (Book 1), Jesper Jinx and the Sneezing Season (Book 2), Jesper Jinx and the Turkish Pepper (Book 3) and Jesper Jinx Gone Fishing (Book 4).)
- \*\*\*\*\* "The Joy of Fairy Tales" Eds. Worth Press
- \*\*\*1/2 "Stuff Happens - Michael" by Phillip Gwynne

### **Non-Fiction - Memoirs**

- \*\*\*\* "Afternoons in Ithaca" by Spiri Tsintziras
- \*\*\*1/2 "School days of a Methodist Lady: A Journey Through Girlhood" by Jill Sanguinetti
- \*\*\* "Sassafras, A Quilt Journal: A love story about divorce" by Beverly Ann White
- \*\*\* "Around India in 80 Trains" - Monisha Rajesh

### **Non-Fiction - True Crime**

- \*\*\*\* "Jacks and Jokers" by Matthew Condon
- \*\*\*\* "Handsome Burt" by Sean O'Connor
- \*\*\*1/2 "Three Crooked Kings" by Matthew Condon
- \*\*\*1/2 "Sins of the City. The Real Los Angeles Noir" By Jim Heimann
- \*\*\*1/2 "LAPD 53" by James Ellroy & Glynn Martin
- \*\*\*1/2 "Australian True Crime - Little Girls Lost" by Helen Reade

### **Non-Fiction - Reference**

- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Wonders of the Universe" by Brian Cox & Andrew Cohen
- \*\*\*\*1/2 "Wonders of the Solar System" by Brian Cox & Andrew Cohen
- \*\*\*\* "Air Raid Precautions" - Home Office (UK)
- \*\*\*\* "ART + NYC: A complete guide to New York City Art and Artists"
- \*\*\*\* "Gardener's Q&A" by National Gardening Association
- \*\*\* "Rings" - Rachel Church
- \*\*1/2 "Sci-Fi Movie Freak" by Robert C Ring

### **Non-Fiction - Self help/Instructional**

- \*\*\*\*1/2 "The BALL is in Your Court: Learning a Foreign Language" by Aurelia McNeil
- \*\*\*1/2 "Real Estate Investing Sucks: How to Deal with Change and Find Success as a Real Estate Investor" by Rachel Hernandez
- \*\*\*1/2 "How to Get People to Scream Your Name and Beg for More" by Tom Morrison

### **Non-Fiction - Other**

- \*\*\*\*\* "The Bookshop Book" by Jen Campbell
- \*\*1/2 "So You've Been Publicly Shamed" by Jon Ronson
- \*\*1/2 "Cast Away for these reasons: Economic Jihad" by Jo M. Sekimonyo
- \*\*1/2 "The Wife Drought" by Annabel Crabb

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## THE REVIEWS

### "Record" by Moro



Fiction: Romance

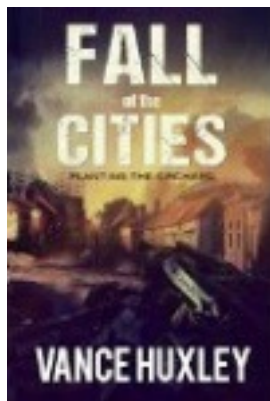
Read: December 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Review:

"Record" is just that: a record, a journal, a diary of one man's experiences with infatuation, love and desire. When a part-time musician and English Language teacher falls madly in love with a leggy redhead, he must deal with the roller coaster of emotions that follow. "Record" is well written, with believable characters. It's novella length makes it an ideal read for holidays, and a public transport companion. The Italian setting adds to the romance and charm of the story. A delightful and honest look at love.

### "Fall of the Cities – Planting the Orchard" by Vance Huxley



Fiction: Dystopian Future/Action/Survivalist

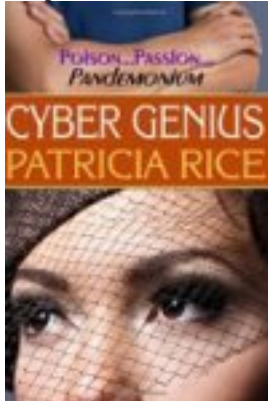
Read: December 2016

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

Oil is scarce and the world is in turmoil. Army pay clerk, Harry (Harold), is on assignment in Kuwait when things go pear-shaped. During a violent skirmish he discovers that he has a natural (and alarming) ability to shoot and fight. This is just as well, because on return to London his unit is assigned to crowd control duties, as the resource-driven civil unrest reaches a crescendo. When he is able to secure a release from the army, Harry goes in search of his widowed sister and her children, with the hope of setting up a safe area for them to survive the turmoil. "Fall of the Cities – Planting the Orchard" by Vance Huxley is well-written, entertaining, easy to read and features memorable and believable characters. It

does contain some violent scenes, which are not for the faint-hearted, and I would generally not recommend it for those under 15 years of age. So what's it like: "The Walking Dead" without the zombies, violence level similar to "The Purge" without the deadline, and the feel (and probably same time setting) of "Children of Men". I thoroughly recommended this for lovers of dystopian future and survivalist style adventures. ***I received this book from Entrada Publishing in exchange for a fair and honest review.***

### **"Cyber Genius" by Patricia Rice**



Fiction: Mystery/Adventure

Read: December 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

When the key executives of a software company are poisoned at a dinner party, Ana Devlin must unlock the clues to determine whether or not her boss is the culprit. This is a fairly standard/formulaic mystery story, but I did like the strong female leads, and the whole "cyber" element adds a modern twist. I thought that the book was okay, but I have to admit that I haven't read the first two books in the series. I didn't have any trouble picking up the story line, but may have enjoyed the book more if I had the full background story. ***I received this book from Book View Cafe in exchange for a fair and honest review.***

### **"Frozen Shadows" by Gene O'Neill & "Wild Woman" By Chris Marrs**

Fiction: Mystery/Adventure

Read: December 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

These two novella are presented in a single book. ***I received this book from JournalStone in exchange for a fair and honest review.***



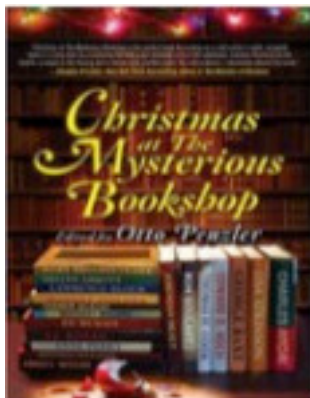
"Frozen Shadows" by Gene O'Neill is a charming story which starts when a young Sean goes to live with his grandparents following the death of his mother.

He and his friends (including future wife Bell) encounter a strange "traveller" who steals children's shadows. Having defeated the stranger once, Bell and Sean are surprised to discover that he has reappeared in another small town. They must save the day before more children die. Entertaining and delightful.



"Wild Woman" By Chris Marrs follows the life of Julie, from her childhood, when she felt ugly, awkward and lonely, to adulthood where she runs away from her feelings through drug and alcohol abuse. The story centres around her life in a small town, where local children (including her sister and later her daughter) go missing, believed abducted. I read this story from start to finish in one hit. It is engaging and rather sad.

### **"Christmas at the Mysterious Bookshop" Edited by Otto Penzler**



Fiction: Mystery/Thriller. Short Stories

Read: December 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

I'm a big fan of Otto Penzler's mystery story compendiums and am particularly fond of his Christmas collections. I picked this one up on my trip to New York. This collection of short stories is inspired by the Christmas holiday and all stories (be they funny, creepy, clever et al) are set (at least in part) in the Mysterious Bookshop. It features stories by Mary Higgins Clark, Lawrence Sanders, Ed McBain, Donald Westlake, Thomas Cook, and more. Really worth a look and a great addition to your holiday reading list.

### **"Those Who Remain" by Ian Blackport**



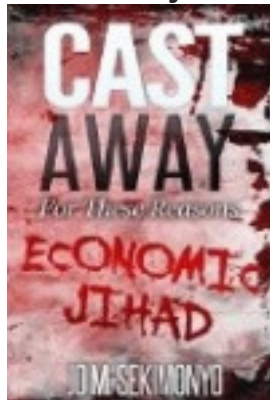
Fiction: Fantasy/Adventure

Read: November 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

"Those who remain" is set in a post-apocalyptic world where those infected by a mysterious disease roam the land in a zombie-like-state. The story follows the lives of two teenage sisters, Mallory and McKayla, as they attempt to travel across what is left of the USA, to achieve their long-dead parent's dream of reaching their holiday home in the Gulf Islands. Along the way they kill loads "Stricken" (zombies), deranged humans, make friends, lose friends and fight off a dangerous enemy. It is well-written, entertaining, easy to read and features strong female characters. Thoroughly recommended for lovers of survivalist style adventures, The Walking Dead, Z-Nation and similar tales.

### **"Cast Away for these reasons: Economic Jihad" by Jo M. Sekimonyo**



Non-Fiction

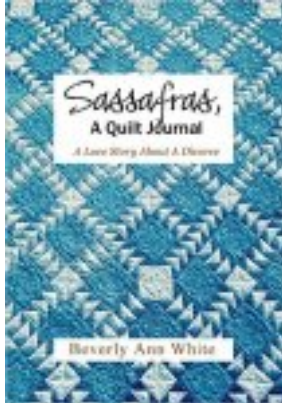
Read: November 2015

My rating: \*\*1/2

"Cast Away for these reasons: Economic Jihad" by Jo M. Sekimonyo, is a memoir style composition and personal manifesto of the author's voyage-of-discovery of his individual beliefs and theory of economics. The promise of something new held me to the end, but I did not uncover any information or ideas, which I consider new or revelatory. Having said that, everyone's education, background knowledge and life-experience is different and I note that other readers got a lot out of it. I personally didn't like the style of writing, finding the prose flowery and the addressing of the reader directly (Dear Reader)

irritating. (However, this technique can work brilliantly in children's books and some self-help texts). Also the formatting is awkward, with different sized and style fonts and spacing. You may need to do some work to adjust your e-reader settings to prevent the visual distraction from interfering with your reading of the text. Not for me, but brain food for some.

**"Sassafras, A Quilt Journal: A love story about divorce" by Beverly Ann White**



Fiction: Fantasy/Adventure

Read: November 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

"Sassafras, A Quilt Journal. A Love Story About A Divorce" describes one woman's very personal journey through life, as she uses her love of quilting to help her work through the deaths of loved ones, divorce, romance, building a home, and finding her true self. It is a heartfelt journey of discovery and recovery. It is well written, genuine, and includes some lovely photos of quilts. The book moves slowly and probably has greatest appeal to women at similar stages of their life.

**"Wintermore" (Aeon of Light Book One) by Aron Sethlen**



Fiction: Fantasy/Adventure

Read: November 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

When Preta witnesses the murder of a young boy, a mysterious light overcomes her. On awakening she discovers that she seems to have acquired unusual powers, including the ability to connect telepathically with animals. When pursued by the murderer's associates, Preta unintentionally puts her family and fellow villagers in jeopardy. She and her brothers must find a way to evade the pursuers, uncover the truth about Preta's newfound powers, and make it to safety. This is the first in a series of captivating adventure stories. This well-written book is evenly paced with not too many characters (something I've found extremely off-putting in similar adventure stories). It will appeal to young and adult readers alike. I would have given the book four stars, but I have a bit of an issue with the book being written in present tense. I personally find this a little distracting in that it can pull me out of the story – this is not an issue for everybody and should not put people off buying and reading the book.

### **Health Stories for Kids Series by Brian Wu PhD**

Brian Wu PhD (and the team at Health Stories for Kids) has produced a number of publications for parents and children describing various health issues.

### **Fictionalised Medical Stories: Adults and Children (Junior/Middle Grade)**

**Read: November 2015**

**My rating: \*\*\*\***

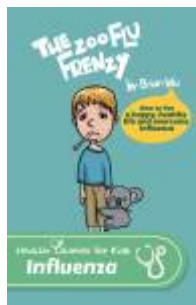
Each book is presented in a similar format with a section for parents, a short story (simple chapters with illustrations) for parents and children to read together, and a resources and references section. The three books reviewed below are being released as paperback editions (currently available in hardcover). Details

on the books' launch are available through the website:

**<http://healthstoriesforkids.com>** Not only do these books have value for parents of sick children, but would be a welcome addition in general libraries, schools, welfare agencies, doctor's surgeries and hospitals.



**Emily's Best Gift Ever:** Meet Emily, a young girl who is soon to become a big sister. This story describes what happens when a baby is born and how babies develop once they are home. There are some useful explanations on topics like why babies are burped and what the umbilical cord is, and why hygiene is important.

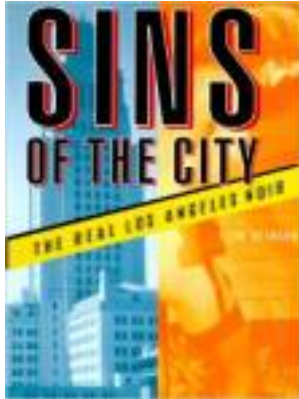


**The Zoo Flu Frenzy:** When friends Daniel and Paul go to the zoo to see the Koala show, Daniel comes down with the flu. This story provides information on the flu, and discusses what it means when an illness is contagious. A great little story with lots of yucky stuff, vomiting and koalas (and vomiting koalas) to appeal to children.



**Fort Applegate and the Battles of Wounded Knee:** Meet Nolan Applegate, explorer and adventurer. When Nolan starts to build a fort in the forest behind his home he falls and cuts his knee. This story looks at how the immune system fights off infection. Fort Applegate and the Battles of Wounded Knee is probably the most complex of the three stories as it uses the idea of building a fort as a metaphor for how the body's immune system works.

**"Sins of the City. The Real Los Angeles Noir" By Jim Heimann**



Non-Fiction - True Crime, Photo Journal

Read: November 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

Another interesting collection of crime scene photographs of Los Angeles. Among the images of corpses and crime scenes there are some great historical photos of LA, including some amazing scenes of what the downtown area looked like before it was developed. This book contains graphic images and is not for everybody.

**"The Winter of Springtide's Queen" by Danielle Ste. Just**



Fiction: Fantasy/Adventure

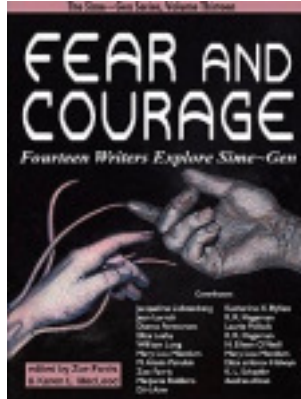
Read: Oct/November 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Set both in the modern world and the realm of Hades, "The Winter of Springtide's Queen" revolves around the life of Greek goddess Persephone (now Stephanie), daughter of Zeus, goddess of flora, and the queen of the underworld.

This captivating story explores themes of love and friendship, as Stephanie examines her relationship with Hades, and, with the help of Portia (yes the Shakespearean character) accompanies her friend Jane on her quest to release her partner from the clutches of Hell. I personally love Greek mythology, and adventure stories, so I really found this story appealing. It is well-written, easy to read and features strong female characters.

**"Fear and Courage: Fourteen Writers Explore Sime~Gen"**  
by Jacqueline Lichtenberg



Fiction: Science Fiction

Read: October 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

There is something for every Sci-Fi fan in this collection of short stories and poems. Even if you have no knowledge of the Sime-Gen books, writings and world, the foreword to the book provides sufficient background information for you to dive right in. The works in this compendium range from the touching to the kind-of-creepy. Engaging and well-written, with the quality of writing consistent across the pieces.

*Please note: I personally know two of the authors in this compendium. I was not asked to complete a review and I purchased the book myself. This is an honest review - Had I thought that the book was rubbish I would not have insulted either of them by pretending that it wasn't.*

**The Jesper Jinx Series by Marko Kitti**

Meet Jesper Jinx, a little bit naughty, a little bit cheeky and rather accident prone.

Fiction: Children/Junior/Middle Grade Readers

Read: October 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\* (all books)

The Jesper Jinx series of books offer an entertaining and delightful set of short stories which will be loved by children and adults alike. Jesper is rather Bart Simpson like but without the vulgarity and insolence. Easy to read and loads of fun for all ages. The quality of writing and content is consistent across the series.



**Jesper Jinx (Book 1)** introduces us to the irrepressible Jesper, his family and close friends. We learn that the author is sharing Jesper's stories without his permission and that we must all be careful not to let Jesper know. In this edition we learn about Snowy the cat, and an unfortunate incident with red paint, and a strange new student at Jesper's School.



**Jesper Jinx and the Sneezing Season (Book 2):** Jesper Jinx is back and causing more trouble than either. When he is not annoying his sister, or entertaining his pal Oliver with a variety of pranks and tricks, he is thinking about his future girlfriend (hopefully), the beautiful Chloe. Will Jesper get the girl? Will he win the 50-pound note for capturing a photo of the rare purple buzzard? Fun for the whole family.



**Jesper Jinx and the Turkish Pepper (Book 3):** Jesper is back and is still looking for new and interesting ways to relieve his boredom. The book starts off with Jesper managing to blackmail the author into giving him his last page of "Turkish Pepper" - a salty liquorice smuggled - by threatening to tell his parents that he is stealing his stories. This series of short stories is particularly funny. Very entertaining.



**Jesper Jinx Gone Fishing (Book 4):** Jesper is back and is learning how to fish, a difficult task for a young man who is afraid of worms! Other stories feature the experiences of the ferret his sister is minding, and a visit to the author from Jesper's dad. Entertaining and full of laughs as usual.

## **"The Grey Lady of Long Branch" by Maura Satchell**



Fiction: Literary Fiction

Read: October 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

Set from the point of view of the house (The Grey Lady), this series of short stories follows the lives, loves and adventures of the various people who reside and holiday in the house. Pleasant reading, not particularly exciting, but well written and charming . A good holiday read. ***I received this book from The Four Pillars Media Group in exchange for a fair and honest review.***

### "The Oracle" by D.J. Niko



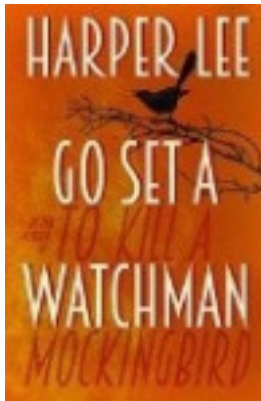
Fiction: Action/Adventure/Mystery

Read: October 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*\*

Do you remember when you had time in your life to sit down and read a book cover to cover? When you could just read and ignore things like the need to eat, sleep, interact with family, go to work? I do, and how I longed for those days again when I was reading "The Oracle." This wonderful action-adventure story has all the elements of Indiana Jones, Tomb Raider and a little James Bond thrown in for good measure. This is exactly the kind of story I love, and I found it very hard to put down. The story moves between the fall of Delphi and a modern-day archeology thriller. Well researched, well written, with strong and believable characters. ***I received this book from Medallion Media Group in exchange for a fair and honest review.***

### "Go Set A Watchman" by Harper Lee



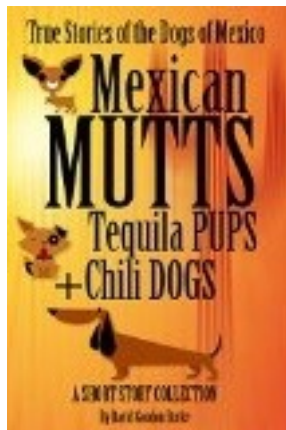
Fiction: Literary Fiction (apparently)

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*1/2

This book managed to be both boring and irritating at the same time. I would not recommend it unless you are a hard-core "To Kill a Mockingbird" fan, in which case you would have it already. I knew that I was in trouble when I was half-way through the book and couldn't work out what the storyline was. The Jean Louise (Scout) character, is now 26 years old. She has returned to Maycomb county, from New York (which apparently she does several times a year) to see Atticus, now suffering from crippling arthritis, and Hank, whom she is stringing a long with a promise of marriage she doesn't intend to fulfil. It finally dawns on her that she is from a town of rednecks and that good people need to compromise their principles to fit in. She comes across as naive (really she is supposed to be 26!), selfish, petty and obnoxious. Good luck with it. I had trouble finishing it.

**"Mexican Mutts, Tequila Pups & Chili Dogs - True Stories of the Dogs of Mexico: Modern Dog Book" by David Gordon Burke**



Non-Fiction: Animal Welfare, Dogs

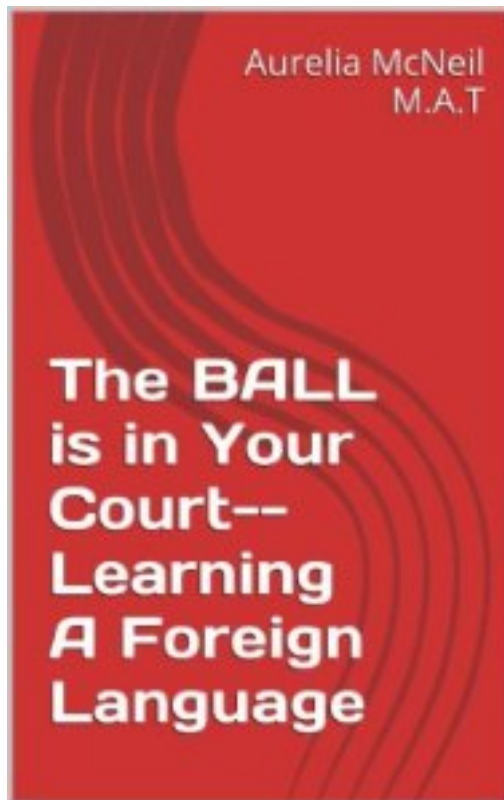
Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

It is difficult to classify this books using conventional genre classifications.

"Mexican Mutts, Tequila Pups & Chili Dogs - True Stories of the Dogs of Mexico: Modern Dog Book" offers a series of fictionalised true stories and news reports, presented in an easy to read, well-written book. It is designed to highlight issues of animal cruelty and the mistreatment of dogs in Mexico. I must admit that I personally get very angry when I hear about acts of animal cruelty, but this book offers hope for a positive future for both dogs and owners. Well worth reading.

**"The BALL is in Your Court: Learning a Foreign Language" by Aurelia McNeil**



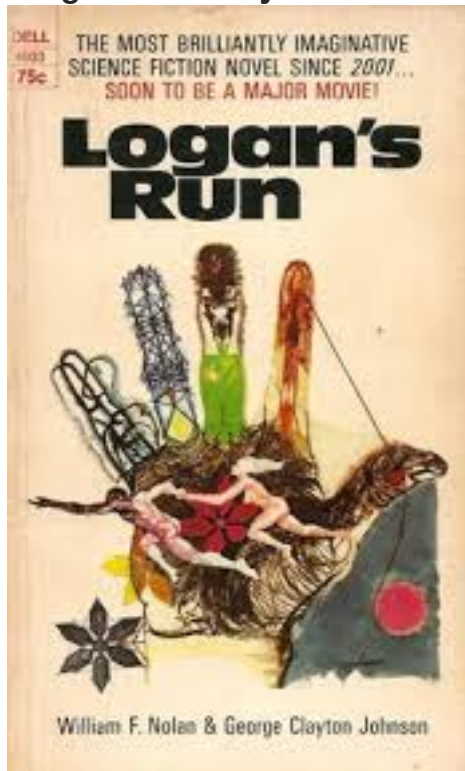
Non-Fiction: Educational, Language studies

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

If you considering learning a second (or even third) language, this book is a great place to start. Aurelian McNeil is a University ESL Instructor, who is currently studying Albanian and learnt both French and Spanish post school. This is an easy to use resource. In addition to describing the elements of her BALL (brain activated language learning) technique, McNeil examines the barriers people place for themselves when learning a second language, and makes recommendations on teaching techniques and learning materials. The book is set out in an easy to read question-and-answer format, with short, sharp chapters. ***I received this book from The Language Professor LLC in exchange for a fair and honest review.***

**"Logan's Run" By William F Nolan & George Clayton Johnson**



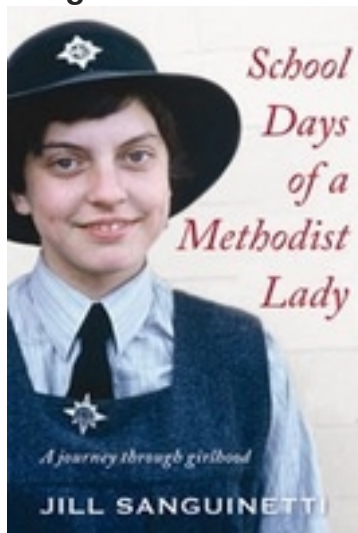
Fiction: Science Fiction

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Okay this is one from the vault. I picked up a copy of the book recently and had to re-read it. I thought that I had read this when I was younger but I suspect that I may have actually read the graphic novel version instead. I am a big fan of the movie (yes it is kitsch) and the TV show (kinda gives my age away there) and I remembered these being very different from the book. And they are. The book is almost an entirely different story from the film, although the concepts are the same. Great science fiction. A great read and well worth a re-visit.

**"School days of a Methodist Lady: A Journey Through Girlhood" by Jill Sanguinetti**



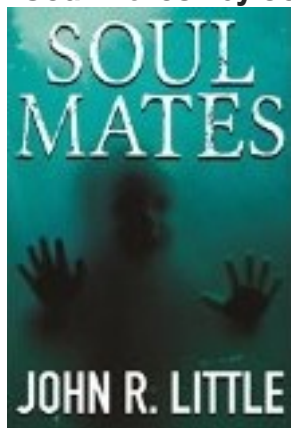
Non-Fiction: Memoir

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

"School days of a Methodist Lady: A Journey Through Girlhood" by Jill Sanguinetti, is a charming and often funny set of recollections about one woman's journey from a rural town girl to a big city boarder. Ms Sanguinetti mixes her own letters and recollections with sections of her favourite books, poems, school reports and hymns to describe her joys and struggles as a country girl in a boarding school. She covers a wide range of topics from, fitting in (or not), making, keeping and losing friends, abominable boarding house food and secret midnight feasts, pranks, crushes, homesickness, lack of privacy, sexual awakening and discovering boys, not having a boyfriend, questions of faith, and of course, concerns about academic performance and becoming a small fish in a big pond. Although not ever a boarder myself, I did attend a school with a large boarding house with girls from far and wide. I had to smile at the descriptions of the poor quality food and lack of male company, as it reminded me of things my boarder friends complained about constantly. Ms Sanguinetti's trials and tribulations of boarding life seem to be universal. The book is worth reading just for the delightful photo journal at the end. The book is available in both print edition and electronic copy.

**"Soul Mates" by John. R. Little**



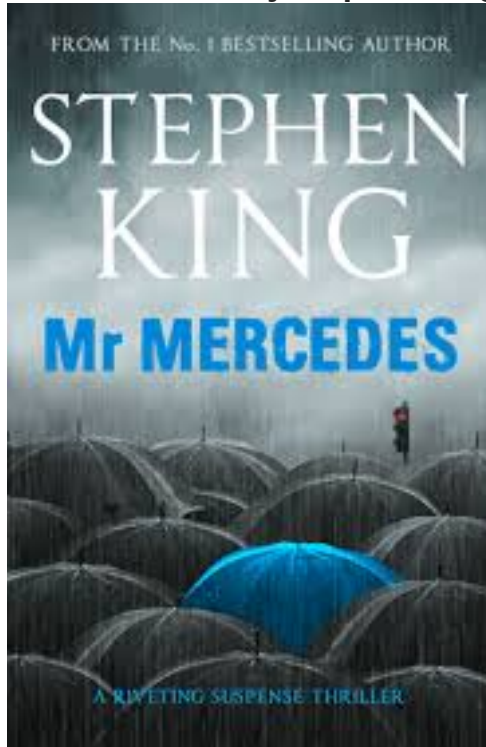
Fiction: Supernatural, Romance

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

This one was a real surprise. I enjoyed it so much that I finished it over two days. I can't tell you much about the plot without giving away the super plot twist, but "Soul Mates" really has the lot: Murder, drama, family dilemmas, sex, romance, twins, a magician, and a creepy dead kid who crops up when least wanted. "Soul Mates" sucks you in and takes you on a wild ride. Available from Amazon. ***I received this book from JournalStone Publishing in exchange for a fair and honest review***

**“Mr Mercedes” by Stephen King**



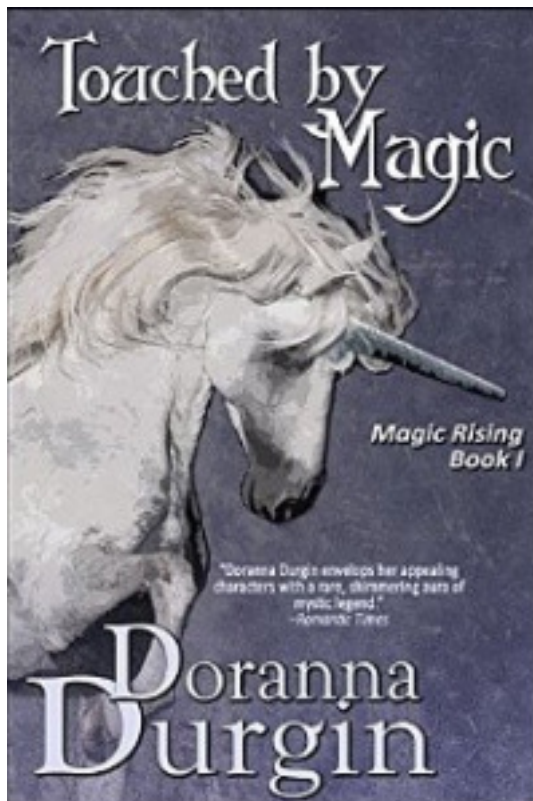
Fiction: Crime/Thriller

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

Some Stephen King fans may be disappointed by this one as it falls outside of the horror genre. I personally loved it - but then I quite liked "Joyland" published through "Hardcase". With a great plot, great character development, good pacing, and a satisfactory ending (which I have lacking on some of King's books), "Mr Mercedes" is a great addition to the detective genre. An all round good read. Available through Amazon, Print Book Sellers.

**“Touched by Magic” by Doranna Durgin**



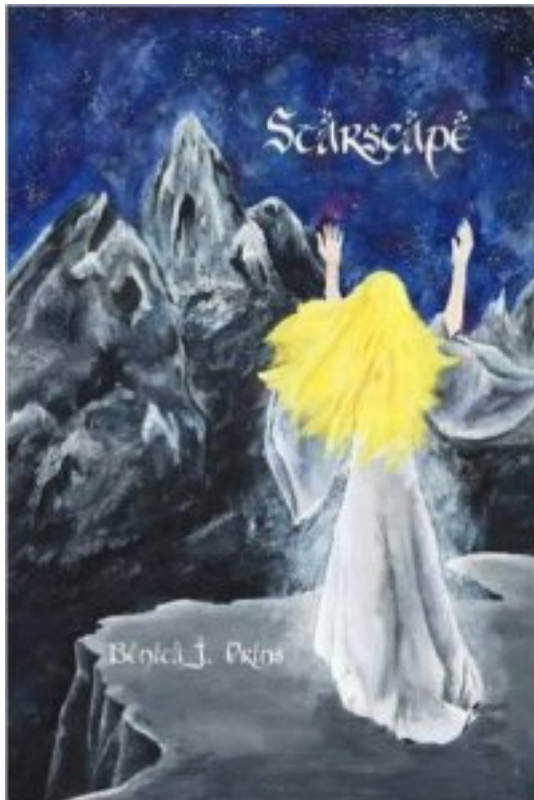
Fiction: Fantasy, Adventure

Read: September 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

"Touched by Magic" is well written, the main character is believable and the story flows well. Despite the many positives the book didn't really appeal to me and it took me a while to get through. The book may hold greater appeal for younger readers, to those dedicated to this genre. Reandn, *Wolf First*, is battling a mysterious illness while attempting to locate a couple of the Kingdom's children who have seemingly vanished without a trace. When a female friend and then his wife also vanish, he makes the connection to the court's supposedly defunct wizard who is using people's energy to restore his own magic. During an altercation with the wizard, Reandn is accidentally transported to the farthest point of the realm. Will he be able to trust the local former wizard, regain faith in himself and magic and be able to return home to avenge those he loves. Available through Amazon.

**"Starscape" by Benita J. Prins**



**Fiction:** Fantasy, Adventure

**Read:** August 2015

**My rating:** \*\*\*1/2

"Starscape", the first published novel by Benita J. Prins is a fantasy, adventure story suitable for teens, young adults and adults. *Four companions embark on a quest for the Sword of Star, hoping to full the prophecy and present the King with the sword to defeat the enemy, Jalavak. On their journey they meet up with escaped indentured servant, Eloderay, the mentally unwell Gonor, and the mysterious Royaleisia. Together they must fight the evil forces of Jalacak to restore the kingdom to its former glory.* The story is fast paced, not too heavy or too long. Well written with believable characters. It would appeal to fans of Lord of the Rings and similar fantasy series. Where can I get it?: Available in paperback from [Amazon](#) and [Book Depository](#)

### "Tangled Weeds" by Sarah Key



**Fiction:** Literary Fiction

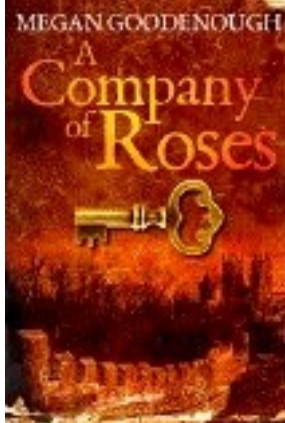
**Read:** August 2015

**My rating:** \*\*\*\*

"Tangled Weeds" explores the tangled lives of a myriad of characters against the backdrop of political upheaval in the African nations at the turn of the century. Covering themes of child abuse, incest, drug addiction, sex and drug trafficking, "Tangled Weeds" covers it all. It is a well-researched novel, with captivating

stories and believable characters. *On a personal note, I loved how one of the characters referred to marijuana as "Sweet Mary Jane" and did wonder if this was giving a nod to the South African obsession with Rodregiez's "Sugar Man" – but I might be over thinking it.* Suitable reading for a mature audience – contains graphic violence, realistic situations, and drug use which some may find distressing. Where can I get a copy?: Amazon/Kindle.

### **"A Company of Roses" by Megan Goodenough**



Fiction: Literary Fiction, Thriller, Mystery

Read: August 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*\*

Five stars! This is a fun and fantastic adventure story, where you get to unravel the mysteries right beside the heroine. Well researched, well written, and I can truly understand why this is being considered for a number of prizes. It is great to see a piece of work with such diverse and well-developed female characters. *After a drunken night on the town, Cas wakes up in the local hospital to discover that her bohemian friend Lacey has vanished into thin air. She has left her with a cryptic letter, which sends on her on a code-cracking treasure hunt across England. She realises that there is more to this Elizabethan mystery, when her adventures are intruded upon by a shady criminal syndicate, a former Russian spy, and a rather dashing chap who swears that he is an Insurance Investigator.* I can thoroughly recommend "A Company of Roses" to anyone who loves a good mystery. Where can I get a copy?: [Amazon](#). Author's Page: [bookmeg.wordpress.com](#)

### **"Real Estate Investing Sucks: How to Deal with Change and Find Success as a Real Estate Investor" by Rachel Hernandez**



Non-Fiction: Finance, self-help

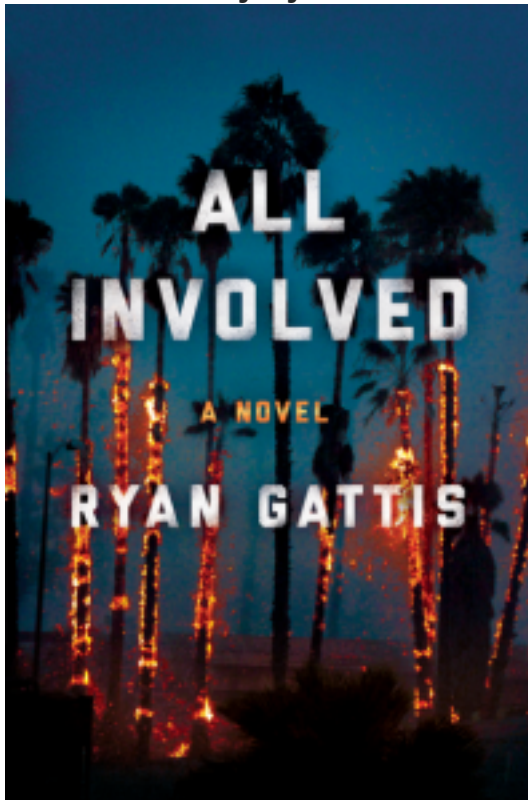
Read: August 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

If you have a thirst for real estate investing this guide will provide practical advice and support for your personal journey. Unlike a lot of self-help style books, this one does not simply gloss over difficult issues, concentrating only on successes. Hernandez provides anecdotes of her personal experiences dealing with the difficult side of the business. She covers managing failing markets, financial difficulties, dealing with evictions, unhelpful agents and bad deals. Information is presented in an easily navigated format. You can get your electronic copy via Amazon: [Real Estate Investing Sucks](#)

***I received a copy of this book in exchange for a fair and honest review***

**"All Involved" by Ryan Gattis**



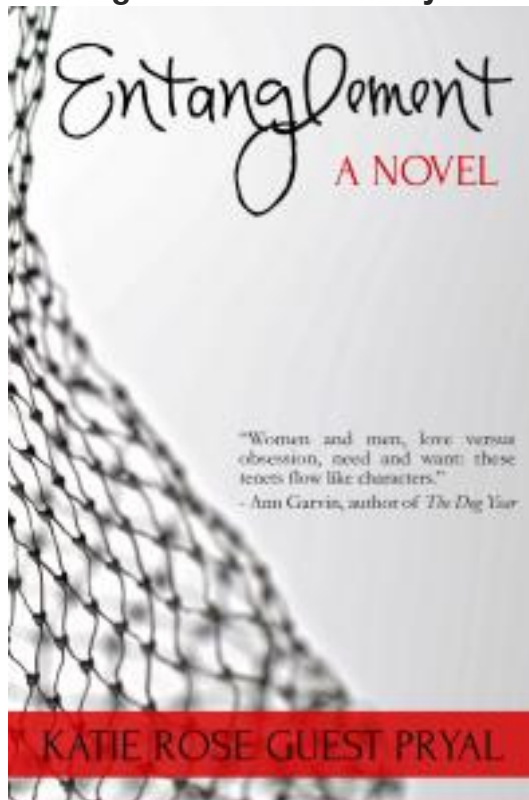
Fiction: Literary Fiction, Crime

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

All Involved, is a powerful and sometimes disturbing novel set in Los Angeles during the 1992 riots following the acquittal of two police officers for the beating of Rodney King. The six sections of the book (representing the six days of the riot) follow the lives of those involved in the riot. It examines the intertwining of the lives of gang bangers, residents, emergency services personal and innocent by-standers during this sad time. This book contains graphic violence, drug use and sexual references - some people may find this upsetting. Where can I get a copy?: Available in hardcopy in shops and through the Kindle store.

**"Entanglement. A Novel." by Katie Rose Guest Pryal**



Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Have you ever had to choose between love and friendship? Entanglement follows the early lives of two young women, whose upbringing in dysfunctional families has impacted on their ability to form appropriate and lasting relationships. Having met other in college, and recognizing their similarities, a lasting friendship is forged. When one of the girls enters a serious romantic relationship, the status quo is jeopardized. Suitable reading for teens, adults and young adults. Well written with believable characters. Where can I get a copy?: [Kindle](#) or [Paperback](#)

***I received an advance review e-copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.***

**"Bumping Off Fat Vinny" by Dennis N. Griffin & Morgan St. James**



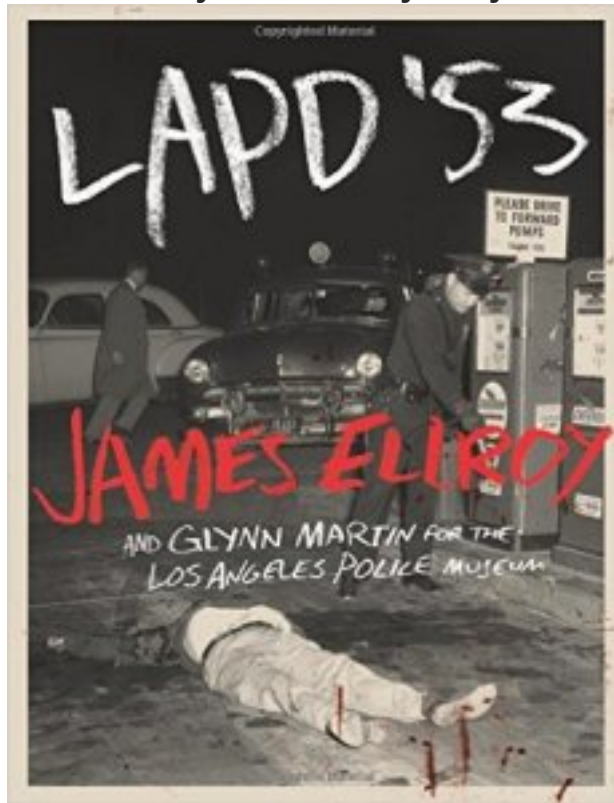
Fiction: Comedy, Crime

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

I'm sure most of us have been there. You've worked really hard to get a project completed, within the agreed parametres, only to have the wind taken out of your sails by a bully of a boss who tell you that they wanted something different all along. Meet Margaret and Danny, two authors, who have entered into a dodgy publishing contract with local con man Vincent Vitali. Not thrilled by the mafia-widow "tell-all" he is presented with, Fat Vinny sends the authors out to re-write the manuscript, and discover and name the murderer of mafia kingpin, Tony the Nose. With a potential best seller completed and a lucrative film deal on the cards, the authors do not want Fat Vinny to queer the deal. Out of options, it is decided that the only solution is to bump off Fat Vinny. An easy, fun read. Available in e-book and hard copy from Amazon. ***I received this book from Marina Publishing Group in exchange for a fair and honest review***

**"LAPD '53" by James Ellroy & Glynn Martin**



Non-Fiction - True Crime, History

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

An interesting photo study of crime scene photographs from the Los Angeles Police Museum from 1953, accompanied by what can best be described as an eloquently expressed manic episode, from crime writer James Ellroy. He won me over with the fabulous statement "dick deep in a shit day". This book is not for everybody.

**"How to Get People to Scream Your Name and Beg for More" by Tom Morrison**



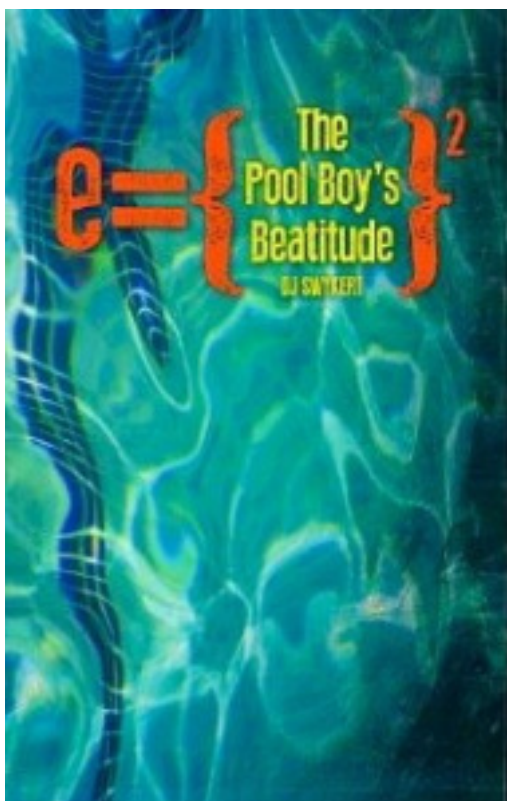
Non-Fiction - Motivational, Self-help

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

Don't be fooled by the cover, or title. This is not a guide to making it big in the Music or Film Industry - but you could certainly benefit from the advice it offers if that is your wish. Too many of us sell ourselves short, spending more time focusing on negative feedback, rather than making the most of opportunities presented to us. "How to Get People to Scream Your Name and Beg for More" by Tom Morrison, is a self-help book designed to help you put yourself on the path to your "Ultimate Life", no matter what stage of life you are at. Using anecdotes of his personal successes and failures, Morrison outlines the key areas for development chapter by chapter. Each section is accompanied by questions and exercises to help you on your journey. It is full of sound and logical advice. A valuable resource for everyone from college to retirement age. You can get your copy (e-book or print) via Amazon, or through the website: <http://www.screamyournamebook.com> ***I received this book from Waldorf Publishing in exchange for a fair and honest review***

**"The Pool Boy's Beautitdue" by DJ Swykert**



Fiction - Literary Fiction, Romance, Drug Themes

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

I have been fortunate enough to have read two really excellent books in a row. Too frequently new authors are overlooked in favour of the old staples and many are missing out on brilliant works. Don't miss this one!

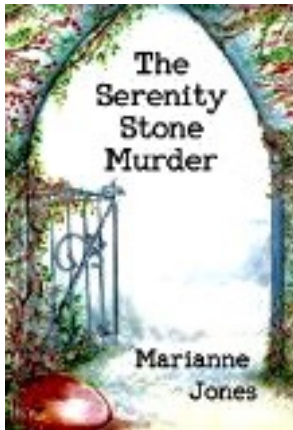
*Jack, pool cleaner extraordinaire, and servicer of bored housewives, believes himself to be "cock of the walk". He dropped out of College, considering his Physics studies tedious, is married to caring woman, and believes that he has no master - except perhaps for alcohol and drugs. He manages to walk the tightrope between lad and stewbum, at least until his wife kicks him out, and he is caught DUI – again. Nowhere to live, no money for his habits, and a potential jail sentence hanging over his head, Jack makes a deal with client Rosemary, and prostitutes himself in an attempt to get out of his hole. Through the haze, he accidentally (or coincidentally) stumbles across Sarah, a woman whom he feels true love. Will love conquer all and be the boost Jack needs to straighten up?*

I can thoroughly recommend "The Pool Boy's Beatitude" to anyone who loves a captivating read, challenging themes, and the promise of new love. This book contains drug use and sexual references. It portrays very realistic descriptions of life as an alcoholic/addict. It is only suitable for mature audiences – who will really enjoy it! Where can I get a copy?: [Kindle](#) or [Paperback](#) Author's

Page: [www.magicmasterminds.com/djswykert](http://www.magicmasterminds.com/djswykert)

**"The Serenity Stone Murder" by Marianne Jones**

Fictio



n - Murder Mystery, Comedy

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*\*

It is not often that I give a book five stars, but with “The Serenity Stone Murders” how could I not. I recommend that you buy this book. You will not be disappointed. *When Margaret and her friend Louise travel to Thunder Bar to attend a new-age workshop, they stumble into the homicide investigation of a prominent businessmen, murdered with the “serenity” stone stolen from a nearby church garden.* This is a charming and wonderful story covering everything from kooky new-age retreats, murder, and covering all the parochial joys of small town life. It is a combination of all of the best bits of Mapp & Lucia, Father Brown, Murder She Wrote and The Golden Girls. A great read for the holidays or anytime. I hope that the author is writing more about the adventures of these ladies.

Where can I get a copy?: If you live in Canada you can pick up a print version from Chapters/Indigo, or contact the author via her website:

<https://www.mariannejones.ca>. An E-book version is available via [Amazon](#)

**"The Mansion's Twins" by Rose M. Channing**



Fiction - Fantasy, Tweens and Teens

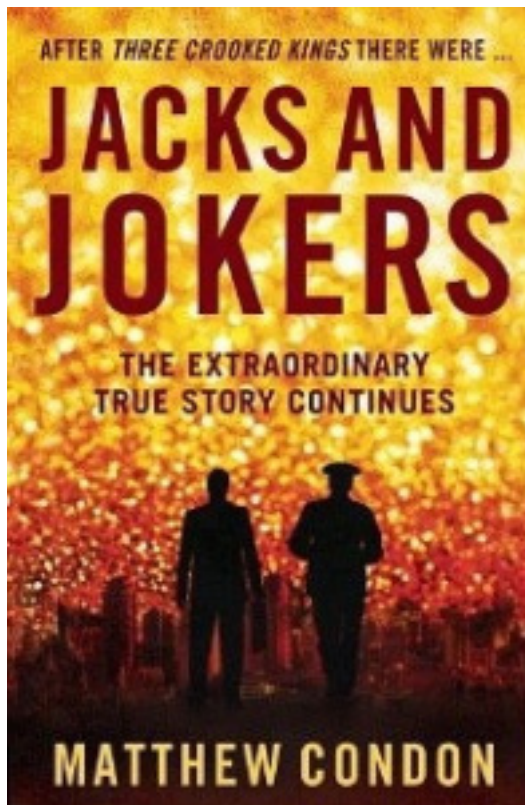
Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

Ellie and Savannah met by chance. Surprised by their similarities, and believing that they are twins separated at birth, they run away together. The twins find a magic portal and enter the mystical world of the Mansion. This new world is still suffering from the ravages of the magical storm, which originally separated the twins from their home. The girls must learn about their world, uncover their magical gifts and fulfill their destiny to restore the Mansion to its former glory. The story features a multitude of characters and a whirlwind of subplots, which carry the story to its conclusion. Where can I get a copy (e-book& Print)?:

[Amazon Link](#)

**"Jacks and Jokers" by Matthew Condon**



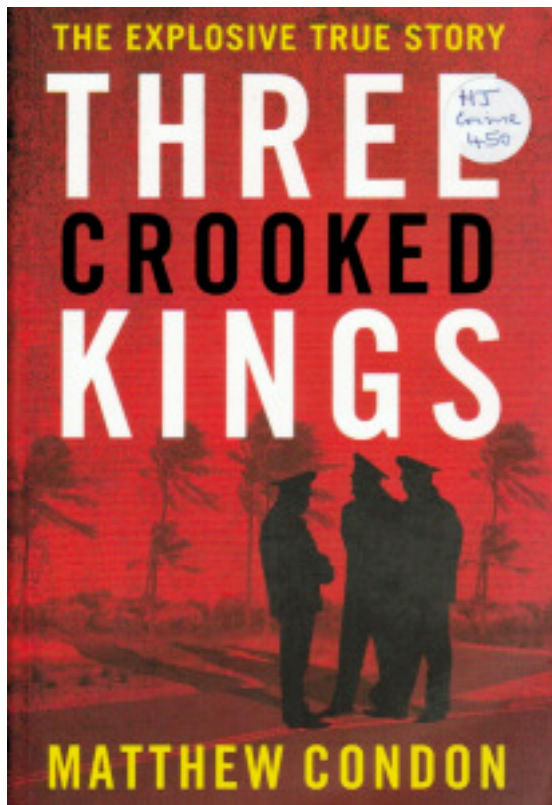
Non-Fiction - True Crime

Read: July 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

"Jacks and Jokers" is the second instalment in Condon's trilogy covering corruption in the Queensland police force from the 1940s to the 1999s. This book covers the 70s and early 80s. I enjoyed this book more than the first and I suspect that this was because I clearly remember almost all of the events described (I was a tween/teen during this time). Despite the choppy style, the almost unbelievable twists and turns keeps the reader going. I am looking forward to the third instalment due for release in September 2015. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Three Crooked Kings" by Matthew Condon**



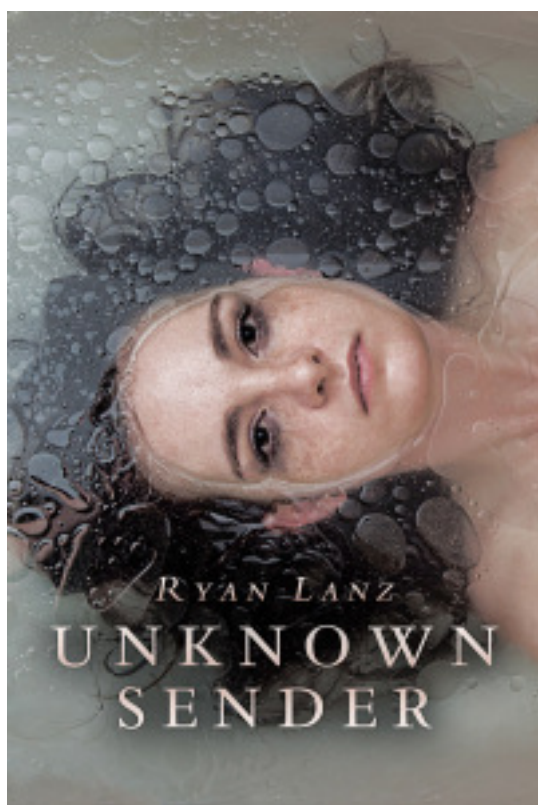
Non-Fiction - True Crime

Read: June 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

"Three Crooked Kings" is the first instalment in Condon's trilogy covering corruption in the Queensland police force from the 1940s to the 1990s. I remember many of these events from my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood and found the recollections rather interesting. Some readers have found the short segments (no longer than three pages) and journalistic style of writing difficult to read, but Condon is primarily a journalist, and this is his style. The seedy story keeps the reader engaged. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Unknown Sender" by Ryan Lanz**



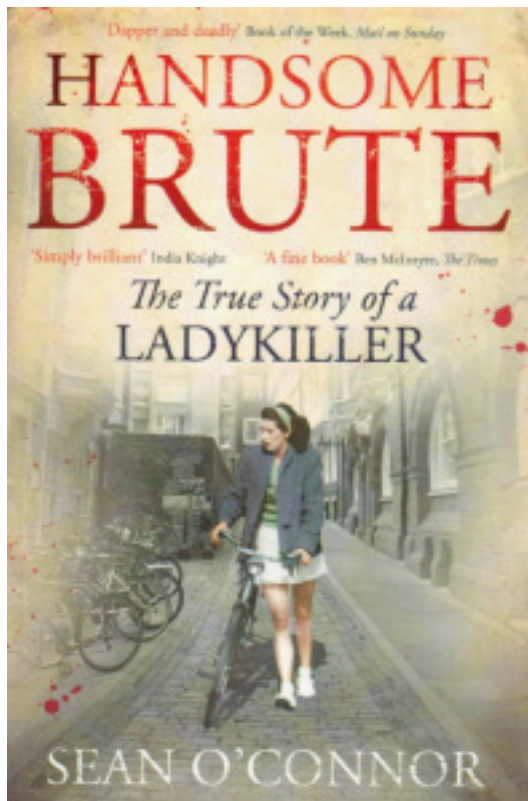
Fiction - Thriller

Read: June 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

When dedicated student Jessica starts receiving anonymous text messages from a person who has knowledge of her most intimate details, her life gets turned upside down. Jessica and her roommate Aubrey join forces to outwit and outrun the creepy cyber stalker. Unknown Sender, Ryan's first novelette, has the potential to develop into a series of twist-in-the-tail stories. Where can I get a copy (e-book)?: [Unknown Sender](#)

**"Handsome Burt" by Sean O'Connor**



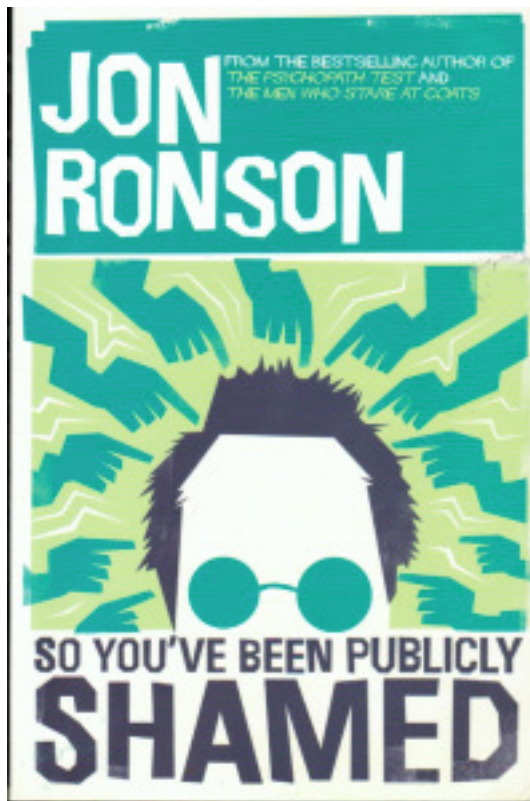
Non-Fiction - True Crime

Read: May 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

A well written true crime book, covering the story of the life and crimes of ex-RAF playboy and all-round sadist Neville Heath. The Hitchcock film *Frenzy* was originally based on Heath's story, but needed significant adjustment to pass censorship required (yes it is that horrible). I recommend this not only to lovers of true crime books, but also to those with a keen interest in post-World War Two England. There are some excellent depictions of what life for ordinary citizens, and returned service men and women. A real eye-opener. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"So You've Been Publicly Shamed" by Jon Ronson**



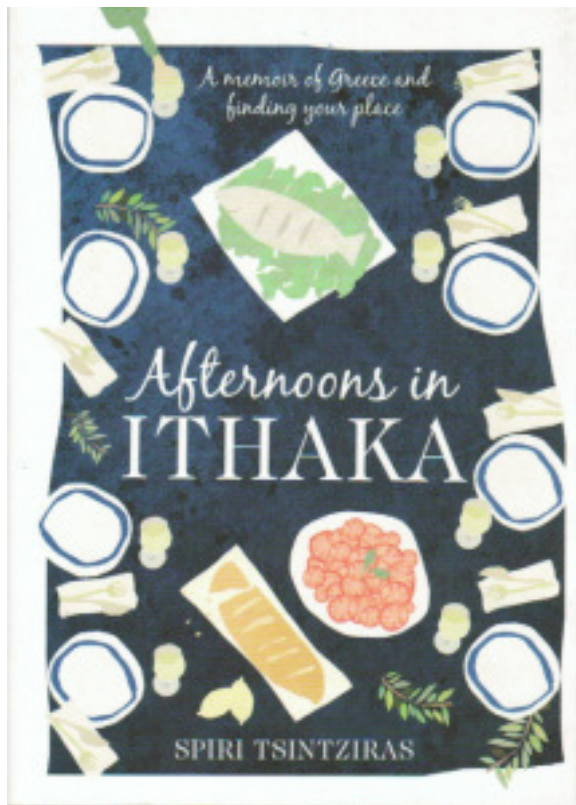
Non-Fiction - Social Commentary

Read: May 2015

My rating: \*\*1/2

I normally love Jon Ronson's books, but this one fell a little flat. The subject material was interesting enough, and it was, as always, well written, but I felt that the whole point of the book was covered off in the first third and the rest just served as filler. It's okay. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Afternoons in Ithaca" by Spiri Tsintziras**



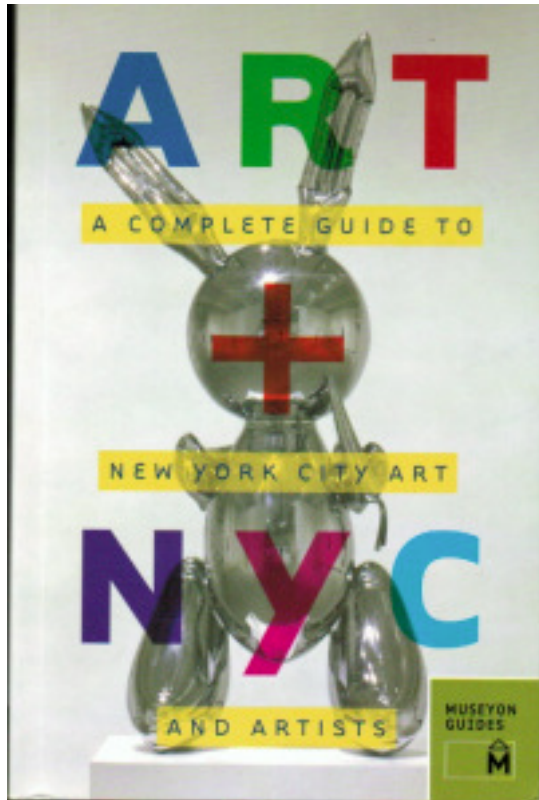
Non-Fiction - Memior

Read: April 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Memiors are not my choice of reading material, but having said that my favourite 2014 read was a memoir. I really enjoyed this book. It retraces the life to date of an Australian Greek woman, following her journey of self discovery as she comes to terms with being caught between two cultures. The recipes at the end of each chapter are an extra bonus. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"ART + NYC: A complete guide to New York City Art and Artists"**



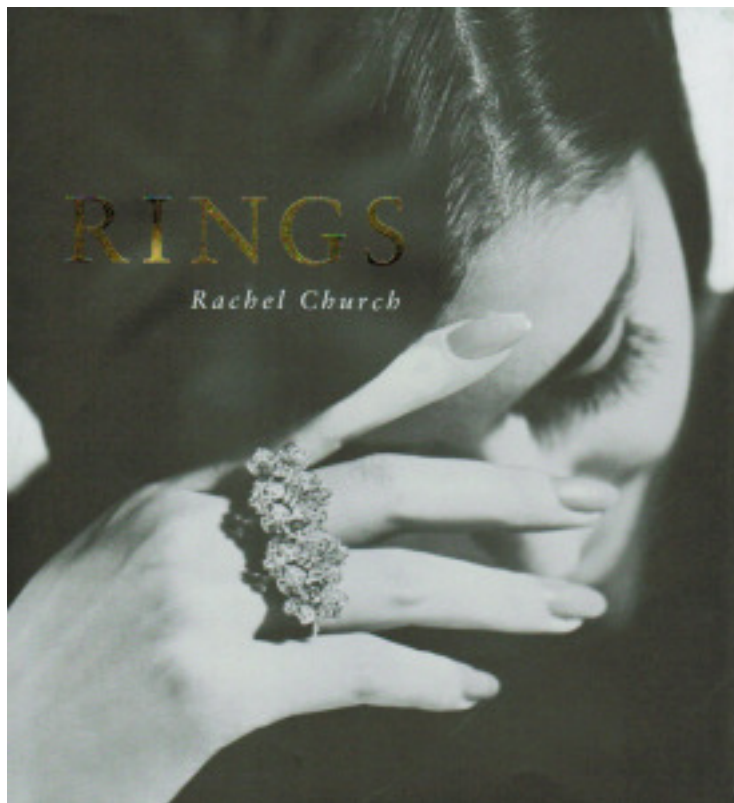
Non-Fiction - Reference, Art, Travel

Read: April 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

A comprehensive guide to the New York art scene complete with district maps and details of galleries, opening hours and public art. A great reference book for anyone travelling to New York, with more art options than you could possibly see in a year. Available in hard copy.

**"Rings" - Rachel Church**



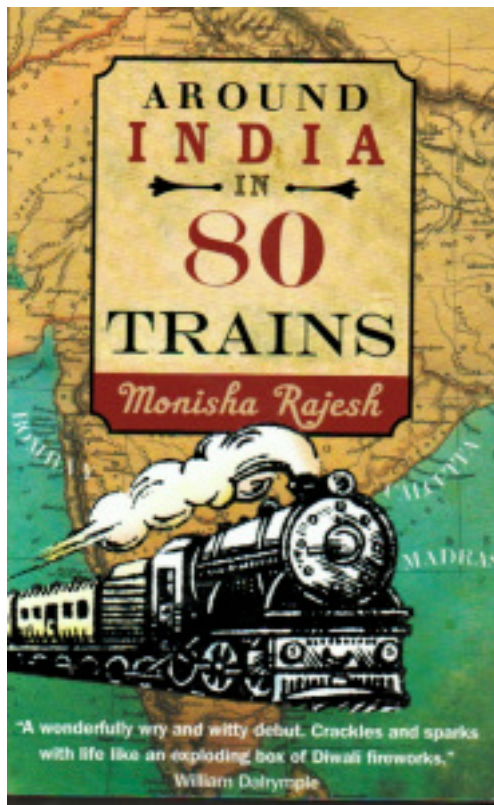
Non-Fiction - Reference

Read: April 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

"Rings" is a comprehensive guide to the ring collections housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London). It provides an interesting history of the ring, both in terms of jewellery making and fashion. Lovely photographs support a well research text. Available in hard copy.

**"Around India in 80 Trains" - Monisha Rajesh**



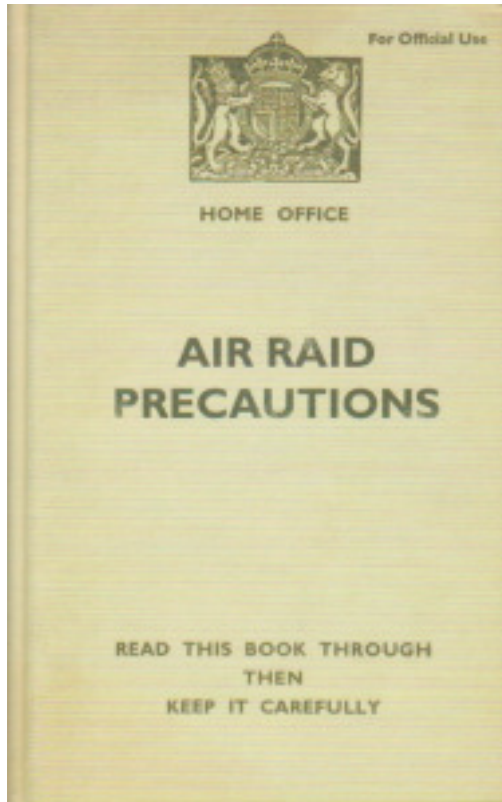
Non-Fiction - Travel Memoir

Read: April 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

I love trains and I love travel, so it is rare that I read a travel book and have no desire to replicate the journey described. This is a well written, and honest account of a UK Indian woman's experiences travelling around her native land. Some aspects of the travels sound delightful (some of the sights and some of the train journeys), but not the company of her rabid atheist fellow traveller, digestive difficulties, filthy accommodations, beggars and thieves, constant inquiries about her marital status and the seemingly never ending need to repel unwanted sexual advances from random strangers. A very interesting book which totally negated any remaining desire I had to see any part of India. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Air Raid Precautions" - Home Office (UK)**



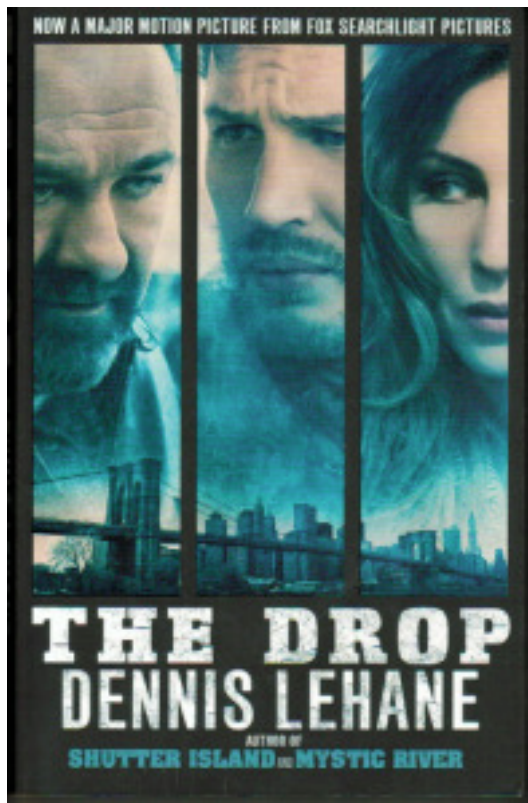
Non-Fiction - Reference

Read: March 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

I picked this up at the Churchill War Rooms museum in London in 2013 and only just got around to reading it the other night. The book is a compilation of all of the brochures/booklets and instructions issued by the Home Office in 1938. If I had received just one of these in my letter box, I would have been terrified out of my mind - but sadly they were required reading. I found this compilation really quite disturbing - probably because of the non-fiction aspect of it - and I am a huge fan of Horror, Sci-Fi and Crime Fiction. An interesting read. Available in hard copy

**"The Drop" by Denis Lehane**



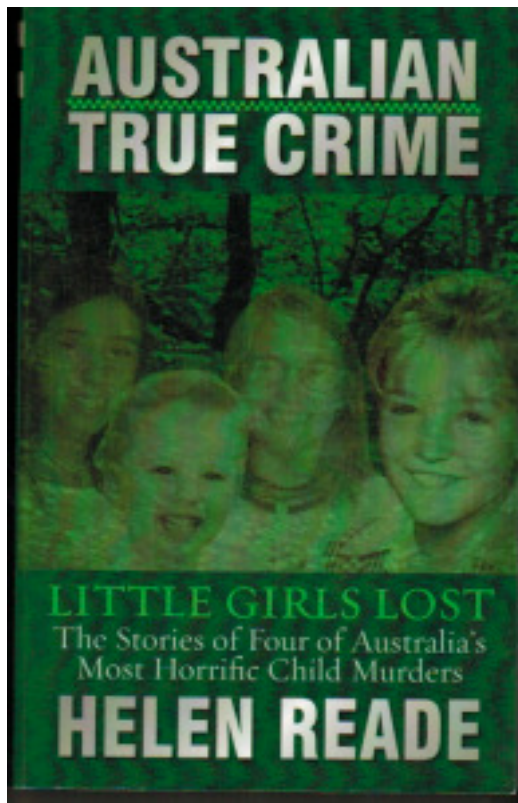
Fiction - Crime

Read: March 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*\*

What can I say? I love Dennis Lehane's work so this was right up my alley. Set in New York, the story tells the tale of barman Ben, who works in a "drop bar" where winnings from illegal bookies are delivered to and collected from. This is a great story with the always present Lehane twist in the tail. I look forward to seeing the movie (I think it was James Gandolfini's last film). Great book, easy to read and not too long. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Australian True Crime - Little Girls Lost" by Helen Reade**

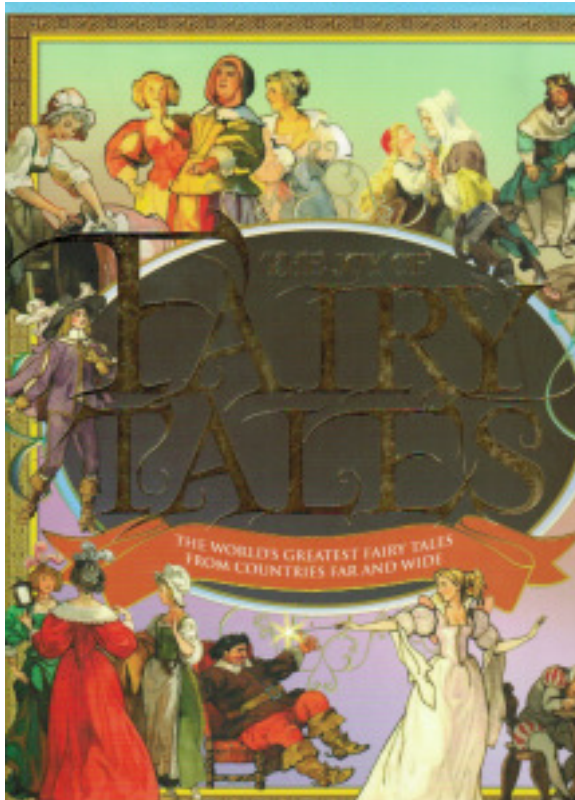


Read: March 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

A lot of true crime books are badly written. This one is okay - a little drawn out in some areas, but pretty good overall. Any re-telling of the murders of children is always a bit harrowing, and the plights of Ebony Simpson, Nicole Hanns, Nicole Collins and Lauren Barry are distressing indeed. Certainly adds weight to the death sentence for violent crime argument. Not a book for everybody. Available in hard copy.

**"The Joy of Fairy Tales" Eds. Worth Press**



Read: December 2014 -March 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

This is a lovely compendium of a Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes. It is beautifully illustrated and includes informative commentary on the origins of various tales. My only complaints are that the book is enormous (A4 size and 768 pages) and can't be held up to read, and the paper is a a little thin (delicate). A beautiful book, suitable for children and adults alike. Available in hard copy

**"The Year's Best Science Fiction & Fantasy 2014" Ed. Rich Horton**



Read: December 2014 - March 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

I generally read short story compilations over a number of months, picking them up between other reads. I generally love science fiction stories (both short and long). This compilation was okay, but a little disappointing. I really loved about 50% of the stories (there are some real crackers here), found 40% okay (well written, interesting enough but not my thing), and thought 10% were really pretty boring and pointless. This is just my opinion of course. Other people may think that every story is a winner. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"South of Border, West of the Sun" by Haruki Murakami**



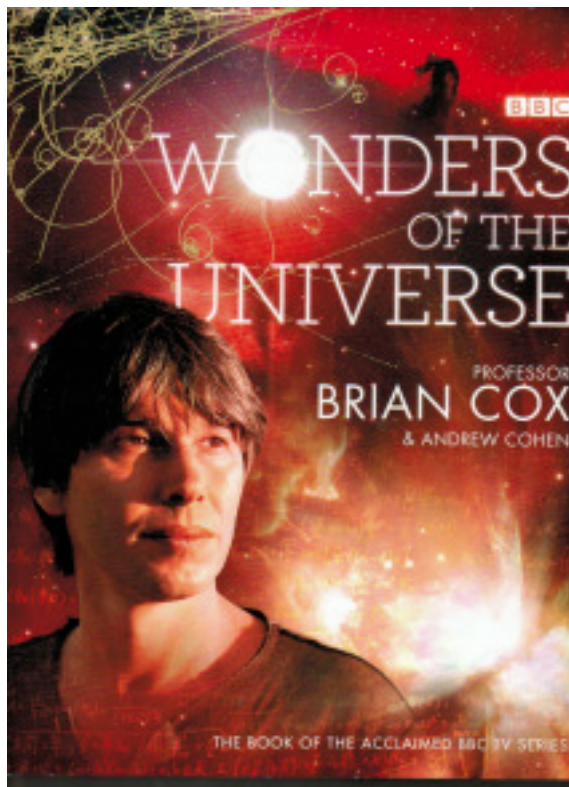
Fiction - Romance

Read: February 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Describing this book as a "romance" seems to cheapen it somewhat. It is much more than that. It has been compared to "Casablanca" and in some ways that comparison is justified. This is a story about enduring love, romance and coming to terms with the realities of life. A lovely book. Available in hard copy and e-book.

**"Wonders of the Universe" by Brian Cox & Andrew Cohen**



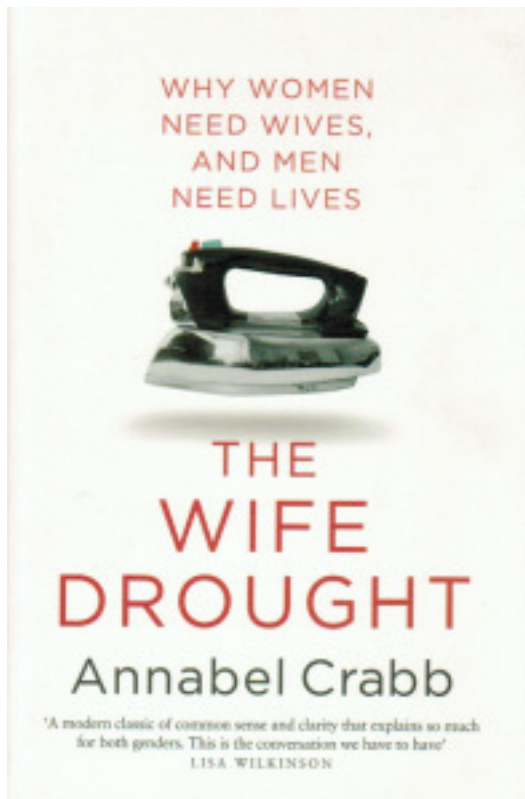
Non-Fiction - Astronomy & Science

Read: February 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

Yes this is the second book in the series and yes like the other is based on the TV series. This is a great book for those interested in theories on the creation of the universe, light, gravity, entropy and time (with all concepts clearly explained with lots of diagrams and pictures). Even if you have no understanding of physics or astronomy it is worth it just for the beautiful photography.

**"The Wife Drought" by Annabel Crabb**

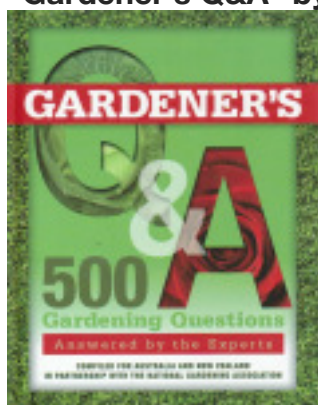


Read: February 2015

My rating: \*\*1/2

This is a well written book, with great arguments about the persistence of gender stereotypes in the workforce and home. I like that it not only argues how women are disadvantaged in the workplace, but how men are also disadvantaged in terms of work life balance and child rearing. Having said that I didn't really enjoy it. As I agree and understand these arguments already, I find it a bit unnecessary to read about them, and the sorts of people who would really benefit from reading a book like this won't.

**"Gardener's Q&A" by National Gardening Association**



Non-Fiction - Gardening

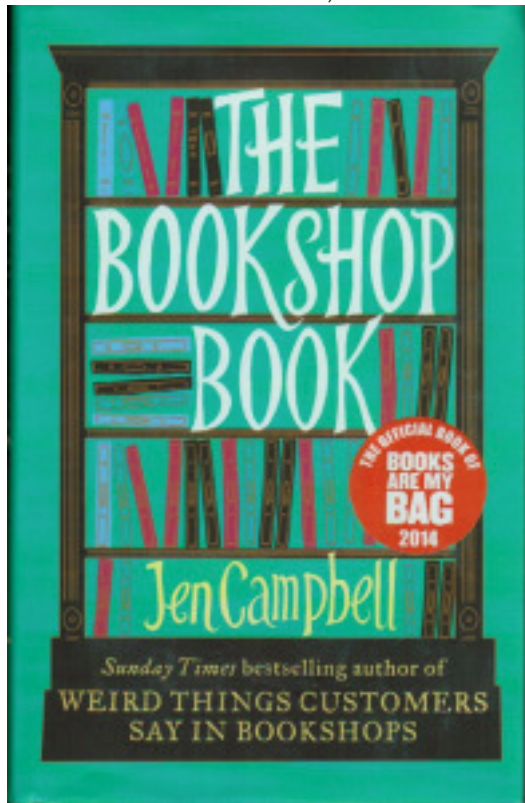
Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*

Great book full of useful advice and interesting gardening facts. Good for beginners and masters alike as it serves as a useful reference. Lots of answers to common gardening questions. For those who don't know, gardening is one of my hobbies. I run a gardening blog too: [Sarah's Melbourne Kitchen Garden](#)

## **"The Bookshop Book" by Jen Campbell**

Non-Fiction - Literature, Arts



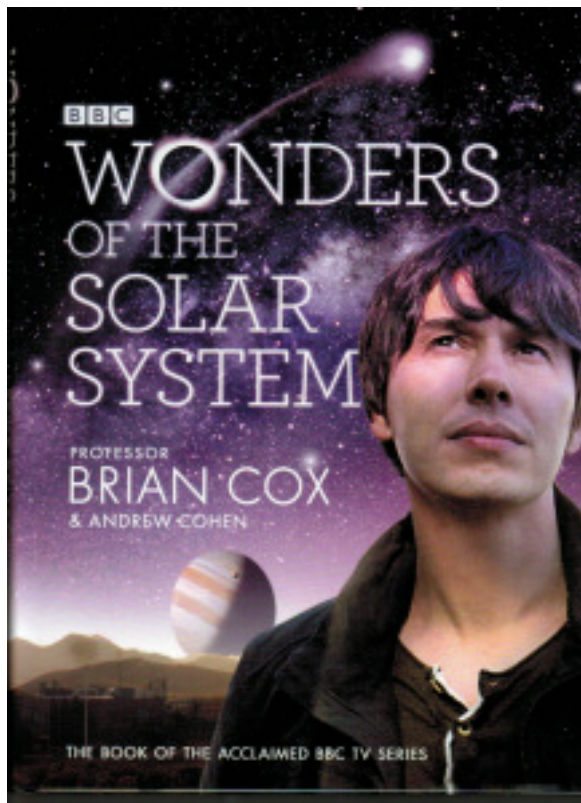
Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*\*

What a wonderful book! This book describes bookshops (independent and commercial) from all around the world. There are fabulous anecdotes from authors and bookshop owners, and delightful descriptions of various stores, from those on the backs of donkeys, to barges, to small shops, to warehouses. A joy to read and an inspiration to everyone who ever dreamt of owning a bookshop.

**"Wonders of the Solar System" by Brian Cox & Andrew Cohen**

No



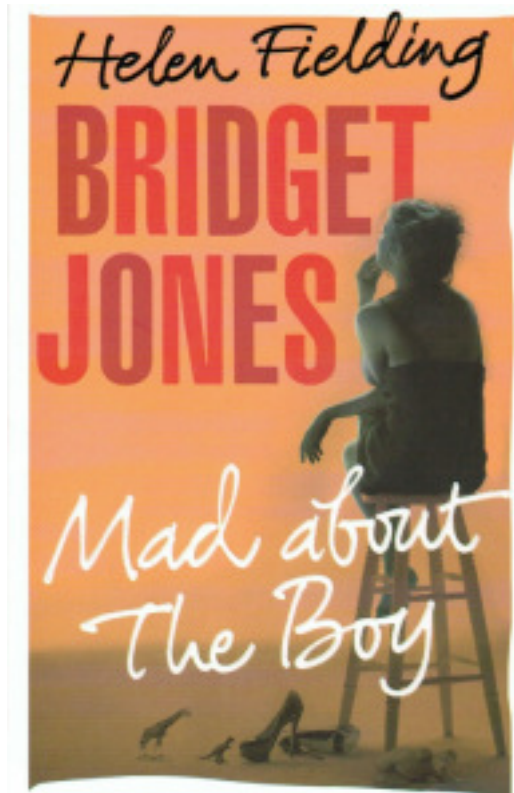
n-Fiction - Astronomy & Science

Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

I love the TV series Brian Cox (et al) put together. I have always been a fan of astronomy and really like how this book is put together. It has wonderful photographs, clear diagrams and excellent commentary. I have a rudimentary understanding of physics at best, and I find the explanations in this book very easy to understand.

**"Mad about the Boy" by Helen Fielding**



Fiction -Chicklit

Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*

I loved the Bridget Jones books when they were first released and this book was a bit of a trip down memory lane. Bridget, now widowed with two small children, struggles with, getting older, gaining weight, single parenthood, establishing a new career as a screenwriter, dealing with social media, and adjusting to the on-line dating scene. Reading this made me feel very positive about my own life. :)

### **"Revival" by Stephen King**

Fiction



- Supernatural themes

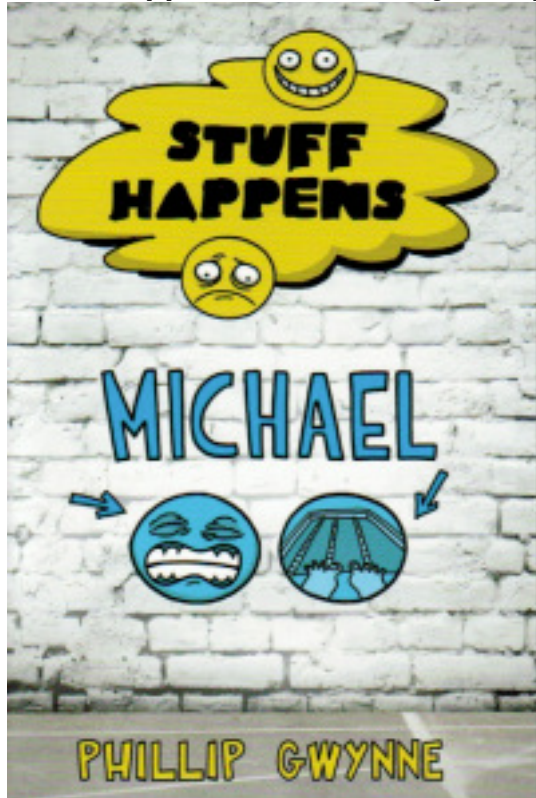
Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

I generally enjoy Stephen King books with their easy to read writing style, convincing characters and interesting plots and this was no exception. The

book moves evenly through the life of the main character and his dealings with a preacher who has an obsession with electricity. The climax (no spoilers) is not for the easily disturbed and is very reminiscent of H.P. Lovecraft tales (whom King acknowledges in the dedication).

**"Stuff Happens - Michael" by Phillip Gwynne**



Fiction - Children

Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*\*1/2

I am trying to read more children's books to help me prepare the new draft manuscript for my children's book. This story, told in first person, describes Michael's concern about his loss of interest in his swimming training (he is training for the games). He wants to try his hand at skating, but doesn't want to disappoint his parents who gave up so much so that he could be a swimmer.

**"Sci-Fi Movie Freak" by Robert C Ring**



Non Fiction - Popular Culture

Read: January 2015

My rating: \*\*1/2

This is one persons compendium of the Sci Fi films they consider the most influential in the genre. I agree with most of the entries, although I am not convinced that some are strictly Sci Fi. The book did not include entries for "Logan's Run", "Westworld", "Futureworld", "Soylent Green", "Omega Man", and only some films from series . OK but it incomplete.