

Book reviews

The last Anzacs : Lest we forget



Tony Stephens and
Steven Stewart
Fremantle Press,
2009
ISBN:
9781921361463
\$35.00

The last Anzacs is a pictorial and biographical record of the Anzacs still alive in 1996. This revised edition takes us up to the death of Alec Campbell, the last ANZAC, in 2002.

A fairly lengthy foreword, written by Gen. Peter Cosgrove, looks at the ANZAC tradition then, and today, and at the battlefield itself. The real strength of the book however lies in the written and photographic portraits of the Anzacs themselves.

It is a strangely warm and deeply humane historical document about ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances. Many coming home stories were similar, marriages that sustained them, large families, work, homes lost in the Depression, sons lost in WW2. What is missing perhaps are the Anzacs that returned and survived less successfully or gracefully than these. Awareness of that omission however does not lessen the thoughtful condemnations of war, nor the quiet heroism of the men. *The last Anzacs* is a satisfying, informative record that would suit readers from teenage upwards interested in Australian history, and in seeing some of the faces behind the legends.

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Disquiet



Julia Leigh
Hamish Hamilton, 2009
ISBN:
978 0 241 01532 2
\$19.95

Disquiet, dismay, distress, distance – these words all resonate as I seek to describe Leigh's new novel. This artily presented little hardback, with its ghostly black and white dust jacket, tactile linen binding, silver endpapers, and white ribbon marker, announces to the reader that this is Literature, with a capital L.

Since her first novel, *The Hunter*, published in 2001 to critical acclaim, Julia Leigh has been under pressure to produce her second work of fiction. With *Disquiet*, Leigh has produced an extraordinarily tight work of poetic prose.

The novel focuses on Olivia, who has recently escaped home to France from an abusive marriage in Australia. Like *The*

Hunter, this novel centres on an absence: in this case of serenity, embodied by the still-born child being carried around, for days on end, by Olivia's crazed sister-in-law, who cannot bear to bury the child.

This bleak novella will not be to everyone's taste – a quick read, and one that lingers in the mind, it is a highly original and unsettling work of Australian fiction.

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Where's my mum?



Susan Hall
National Library of
Australia, 2009
ISBN:
9780642276797
\$16.95

Susan Hall's lift-the-flap book, *Where's my mum?* follows a cygnet that has just hatched from an egg and can't find its mum. The book is skilfully illustrated with a series of drawings by Edward Ebenezer Gostelow that are held at the National Library of Australia, and is a delightful learning tool for children at kindergarten or junior-primary. The reader can follow the little cygnet's journey through a variety of Australian landscapes and learn which birds live there, what the baby bird looks like, and compare them to the fully grown bird.

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Captain Cook's apprentice



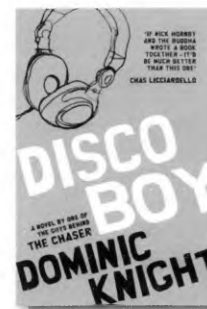
Anthony Hill
Penguin group
(Australia), 2008
ISBN:
9780143004820

Anthony Hill's latest book, *Captain Cook's apprentice* tells the story of Isaac Manley on his first voyage of what turns into a long naval career. A 13-year-old middle child, Isaac leaves home for a life of adventure as a cabin boy aboard the *Endeavour* on Cook's first voyage as Commander. The voyage was to measure the transit of Venus and to map the great southern land. It lasts three years, and Isaac returns to his family a grown man, educated by the other sailors in the ways of the sea, with a desire to continue this life of discovery and adventure.

The story is based on fact, but fictional. Isaac was in the ship's muster book, but the story is largely based on the journals of others on the voyage. The book has been extensively researched and is exciting to read.

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Disco boy



Dominic Knight
Bantam Australia,
2009
ISBN:
9781741666267
\$32.95

Dominic Knight of *The chaser* fame makes his novelistic debut with *Disco boy*, a coming-of-age book for twenty-somethings. Knight is a keen observer of the human condition and draws characters who, in the real world, could be anyone's friends and family.

Paul is a frustrated musician working as a DJ playing retro music. Five years at law school have failed to ignite a passion, and his professional parents despair that DJing is "beginning to look a lot like a career" for him. He is paralysed by indecision, professionally and romantically. The limitations of DJing, the expectations of family and friends, and the desire to realise his own musical ambitions, interweave with conflicts in his love life.

After a disastrous Christmas party, it becomes clear that, for Paul, DJing and musical credibility can never co-exist, and it's time for some tough decisions.

Music pulses through the story and the book. Chapters progress in reverse chronological order, hit parade style. Chapter 1 is #40, *Celebration*, while the final chapter is #1, *Islands in the Stream*. This is a great opening number from Dominic Knight.

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Six months in Sudan



James Maskalyk
Bantam Australia,
2009
ISBN:
9781863256889
\$34.95

Set in the contested border town of Abyei in central Sudan, James Maskalyk's *Six months in Sudan* is an honest and insightful account of life as an aid worker stationed in one of the harshest and most unpredictable environments in the world.

Written months after Maskalyk returned to Canada, the book moves seamlessly from chapter to chapter, helped along by excerpts from his original blog. And while Maskalyk is not able to bring himself to relive some of his more harrowing experiences, his gentle philosophical prose, full of hope despite the sometimes grim reality of its subject matter, continually questions his own ideals.

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With complete honesty he describes his struggle to remain impartial, to switch off to the pain and grief around him. He admits to his weaknesses, regrets, and mistakes, and while he does not set himself up as a hero, his ability to express these feelings gives him a kind of heroism that makes his inner struggle as fascinating as his outer one.

The good, the bad, and the hard to read, James Maskalyk brings the stark truth of life in Abyei into the living room of every reader. *Six months in Sudan* is rough, visceral, and hot, but most of all, it is real.

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The future by us: Young leaders imagine Australia beyond 2020



Edited by Hugh Evans and Tom O'Connor
Hardie Grant Books, 2009
ISBN: 9781740667173
\$24.95

The Future By Us is a product of the Youth 2020

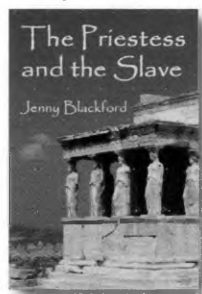
Summit in 2008, and brings together inspirational and challenging ideas from 14 of our country's young leaders. With a foreword by Kevin Rudd, and endorsed by Hugh Jackman, Missy Higgins, and Tim Costello, this collection of essays delivers a well-written, resourced, and challenging blueprint for the future of Australia.

The only flaw with this book is that there is so much information, and it is so challenging, that some may see it as an idealistic, utopian vision for our country. However reading it, and the brave and alternative ideas of how our future could be changed by innovation, participation, and cooperation, I was inspired and uplifted. Far from espousing unobtainable ideals, these young experts in their fields propose well-researched plans for change in every aspect of our society imaginable, from building sustainable economies and environments to the creative health of our nation.

A brilliant challenge to anyone who believes Gen Y is lazy, indulgent, and conservative, *The future by us* is a book that will appeal to anyone who is interested in the future of our country.

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The priestess and the slave



Jenny Blackford
Hadley Rille Books, 2009
ISBN: 9780981924311
\$15.96

If you have even a little interest in or knowledge of

Ancient Greece, Jenny Blackford's first book *The priestess and the slave* is well worth reading. This slim volume tells the stories of two women of very different social standings: Thrasulla, a priestess of the god Apollo at Delphi, who observes the corruption of one of her fellow priestesses, and, sixty years later, Harmonia, a slave owned by an Athenian sculptor, who endures the terrible plague that engulfs Athens as the city is besieged by Sparta and its allies.

Although these two women never meet, both their lives are deeply affected by the politics of the time. They are survivors, living through great difficulties. Thrasulla is disillusioned by people's manipulation of the gods, while Harmonia experiences the horrors of losing much-loved members of her household.

Jenny has an extraordinary knowledge of Ancient Greece, both of the politics and the ordinary lives of the citizens. She writes with authority, providing fascinating details of life at that time. She also develops two characters with whom we can truly empathise. Both stories are suspenseful and fast moving. I hope that Jenny will continue writing historical books of such high quality.

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Now or never – A sustainable future for Australia?



Tim Flannery
Black Inc, 2009
ISBN: 9781863952712
\$15.95

Now or never, Tim Flannery's essay, is a timely call to arms for Australians to pay attention to sustainability as a real and present issue – and inaction as a real and present danger.

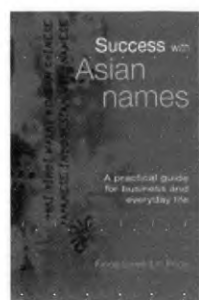
Carbon dioxide and climate change, managing landscape to manage carbon, holistic management of food production – all these topics are covered, and more. Responses from various eminent literary and scientific persons are also contained in this book, with a surprise appearance from Richard Branson.

Flannery presents ideas in clear form, using imaginative description to bring issues into a close and understandable focus. He doesn't just discuss the problems, he offers solutions that could be realised in the near future with enough dedication and planning.

The book is presented in such a way as to make the material accessible to most readers – although the content is worthy of a more academic presentation. Everyone should read this book and indulge in some constructive thought about a sustainable future for this country, and indeed, that of the world.

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Success with Asian names



Fiona Sweet-Lin Price
Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009
ISBN: 978-1857883787
\$19.95

Success with Asian names is a practical guidebook on how to correctly

pronounce Asian names, and address people of an Asian background. This book has chapters on various Asian cultures, ranging from Vietnamese, Thai, and Malaysian to central Asian nations such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. It outlines some of the problems and issues people from a Caucasian background have when trying to pronounce a name of Asian origin, and details advice on how to correctly pronounce Asian names.

This guidebook would be invaluable to people working in the customer service, like public libraries. Having worked in several public libraries, I understand the embarrassment and confusion that can arise when unsure as to the proper salutation and pronunciation of names. Success could be kept as a ready reference guide to help staff answer any queries they may have regarding the correct pronunciation of Asian names.

This book can be quite dry and long winded, and would perhaps benefit from some amusing anecdotes relating to situations where the incorrect pronunciation of an Asian name has been used. Otherwise it is a very useful guide on the correct pronunciation of Asian names.

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