

Book reviews

Time machines repaired while-u-wait



K.A. Bedford
Fremantle Press, 2009
ISBN: 9781921361739
RRP: \$32.95

K.A. Bedford's *Time machines repaired while-u-wait* offers us a future in which time travel is a leisure activity, but what appears to be a unique premise is instead a very slowly-paced rehash of science-fiction's most overworked theme. Refreshingly set in Perth, the storyline centres on Aloysius "Spider" Webb, a former cop turned time-machine repairman in the year 2027 who stumbles upon a murder and a conspiracy to rule over all time, a conspiracy in which he unknowingly plays a central role. While everyone in the struggle to control the fate of time – his future selves included – manipulate him to their own ends, Spider tries to save his wife.

The story sounds like good fodder for the young adult male market, but its epic scope has remarkably little tension, unnecessary profanity, anachronistic pop references, and a passive protagonist who must rely on external events to drive the plot. *Time machines* struggles to justify the slog it takes to get to a dark and abrupt conclusion.

TMRWUW is the winner of 2008's Aurealis Award for Best Science Fiction Novel, 2008.

Ben Reynolds
mrben1@gmail.com

The best Australian poetry 2008



Edited by David Brooks
University of Queensland Press, 2009
ISBN: 9780702236549
RRP: \$24.95

The series *The best Australian poetry*, edited by Bronwyn Lea and Martin Duwell, continues with another year of 40 contemporary Australian poems.

Guest editor David Brooks, co-editor of the *Southerly*, displays visual, modern pieces telling different stories about everyday life. Each poet is displayed with a short biography and discussion of their own work in the contributor notes at the end of the book. In his introduction, Brooks, who is a poet, short-fiction writer, novelist, photographer, essayist and currently Associate Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney, describes the nerve racking process of deciding which poems will be one of the 40 in the 2008 edition of *The best Australian poetry* – especially as, for the first time, online journals have been included in the selection process!

"This collection was not only to be the best poems selected within the guidelines [...] but it was also, of course, to be as entertaining, informative and representative an anthology as it could be." An enjoyable and diverse poetry book for everyone.

Anna Simpson
anna.simpson@deta.qld.gov.au

Mama Jude: an Australian nurse's extraordinary other life in Africa.



Judy Steel with Michael Sexton
HarperCollins Australia, 2009
ISBN: 9780733324789
RRP: \$32.95

Judy Steel had been a nurse for 37 years when, after a long spiritual search, she decided to travel to Uganda in east Africa to see if she could make a difference there. She was appalled and saddened by the poverty, malnutrition, and the prevalence of AIDS and other diseases in the slums of Kampala.

Judy returned to Uganda seven times and was much loved by the people who named her "Mama Jude". She set up a charitable organisation UACO (Uganda Australia Christian Outreach) and obtained donations from Australia to equip a hospital and to start a maternal health clinic, a physiotherapy centre, a micro-loan bank, a literacy school, and farming projects.

Mama Jude is written in a friendly conversational style, as if Judy is talking to the reader. She doesn't spare us the details of the unfortunate lives lived by the people in the slums, but she counterbalances this by showing us their great capacity for love and their gratefulness for help. I found the details of the donations less interesting, but understand that this is a way Judy can acknowledge these all important gifts. All in all I thought this an enjoyable and most inspiring book.

Jill Enks
jillenks@gotalk.net.au

Grandad's gift



Lyn Lawrence, illustrated by Cath Chegwidden
Little Steps Publishing Australia, 2009
ISBN: 9781921042980
RRP: \$16.95

Lyn Lawrence's nostalgic *Grandad's gifts* celebrates a day in the Queensland bush. When Lillian visits her grandad, she believes that it will just be another ordinary day on the farm. What she gets, however, is a look into the lives of those on the land and a gift from her grandad that she will cherish forever.

Cath Chegwidden's whimsical illustrations will transport children from bustling cities and burned beaches to a simpler Australia, one of billy-tea and Blundstones; of kelpies and koalas; of Akubras, stockman, dust, and floods.

The story is based on the author's own experiences, especially those of her husband. It reminds us of those treasures that are so oft forgotten, of the value of stories passed from generation to generation, and the importance of acknowledging the history of the land.

Annelies Allcock
a.allcock@student.qut.edu.au

Dear Undercover Economist



Tim Harford
Abacus (Little, Brown Book Group) 2009
ISBN: 97800349121543
RRP: \$24.99

Tim Harford has written the "Undercover Economist" column in the Financial Times newspaper for six years. In this column, each week, he responds to readers' letters, dispensing advice from an economic perspective.

The letters chosen here, reprinted one to a page, run the gamut. There are people who write in for advice about their love lives, their sex lives, their working lives, and their studying lives. They ask about food and drink, about gardening, home decorating, and about whether to leave the toilet seat up or not. Some of them even ask for financial advice, although this is rarer than you might expect going by the title.

Harford responds to every letter with unfailing good humour (although he isn't afraid to make fun of his correspondents), and finds economic studies that cover the relevant issues, and derives from them advice for each response. His responses are, without exception, serious analyses of the problem, followed by rather flippant advice to the letter writer.

The book divides up letters by subject matter, with one chapter each allotted to sex and love; work and study; family life; entertainment; and finally, a catch-all miscellany. Each section

Book reviews

has questions that will make you laugh, questions that will make you wonder at the intelligence of the writer, and questions (and answers) that will make you think.

Loki Carbis
loki.carbis@gmail.com

Australian tragic: gripping tales from the dark side of our history



Jack Marx
Hachette Australia, 2009
ISBN: 9780733623417
RRP: \$35.00

Jack Marx aims to offer the reader a different slant on Australian history. He makes an analogy between mainstream history – “packaged by bureaucrats” – and experiencing a football game. I approached this as an Australian curious about what he would show, and as a reader who likes gritty real-life stories with a bit of a trashy edge.

What I found was a shapeless mix of genuinely moving stories – some definitively Australian – intermingled with hard-luck stories lacking cultural or historical significance. Side-by-side I find the slaughter of a group of Aboriginals, a woman trapped with her son in a sinking, overloaded refugee boat, alien abduction, and religious exorcism.

The writing is pure ‘journalese’: emotional and brisk. The language is flattened, aimed perhaps at an international market, rather than using language that speaks to the theme.

It’s a pity because the aim has merit, but the delivery and treatment of the material lets it down. If after a popular, alternative look at where we have been, consider *True Blue?: on being Australian* ed. Peter Goldsworthy (2009), 9781741750591.

Rhonda Cotsell
rhonda.cotsell@canberra.edu.au

Dear Editor... The collected letters of Oscar Brittle



Glenn Fowler, Christopher Smyth, and Gareth Malone

University of New South Wales Press, 2009

ISBN: 9781742230115

RRP: \$29.95

What are, in fact, the limits of what is publishable?

Oscar Brittle has few limits in his letters. This book is a beautiful resource that everyone should refer to – it’s written especially for those of us who wish to complain about vegetarian food, young people, and unaesthetic travelling companions.

I admire Oscar’s courage in telling *The Australasian Science Magazine* that even computers get things wrong. I love the savoir-faire with which he reveals his preference for lightly perfumed young women as travelling companions on public transport, and the lyricism with which he describes the tears he wept upon viewing the Brindabella Ranges ... or perhaps it was while considering Canberra as a possible place in which to live.

Oscar Brittle is visionary and inspiring. His writing (which in reality is the work of the very clever Glenn Fowler, Christopher Smyth and Gareth Malone playing the ever popular game of “how much can we get away with?”) delights and challenges. The readers who respond to his letters with varying degrees of appreciation for the satire involved all add to the fun.

Christine Tursky Gordon
christine.tursky@southtechsystems.com.au

InCite readers - you could WIN a \$50 voucher!

EnhanceTV

Your online resource for teaching with TV



Brought to you by **screenrights**

Join now – it’s FREE!

Enter the promo code INCITE when you join in Oct/Nov. 4 x \$50 EnhanceTV vouchers to be won in the draw.



Around 20,000 members are using **EnhanceTV** to plan their copying schedules, get copies of broadcasts, and to discover new teaching ideas and resources to inspire and engage students of all ages.

- Free weekly guides to educational TV
- Over 7,500 hours of ad-free broadcast TV
- DVDs delivered within 7 days
- 700 free study guides and feature articles to download
- Free DVD covers to download

Nearly all schools, TAFEs and universities in Australia have a Screenrights licence – *you can copy from TV and radio.*

www.enhancetv.com.au