

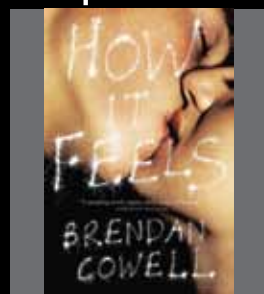
November to December REVIEWS

BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER's star rating system gives readers an indication of the quality of the publication being reviewed in its context. Our reviewers have been asked to use the following guidelines to rate the book:

- ★★★★★ an exceptional book of the very highest quality, regardless of genre
- ★★★★☆ an excellent book
- ★★★☆☆ good book, within its genre
- ★★☆☆☆ a passable example of the genre
- ★☆☆☆☆ caution advised

Each issue, BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER asks booksellers and writers to review books due to be published in the following month or thereafter. All books reviewed originate in Australia or New Zealand.

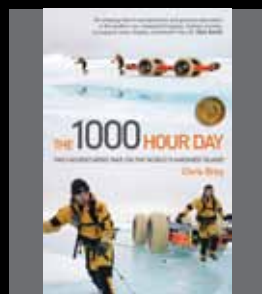
Top Picks Among our reviewers' top picks this issue are:



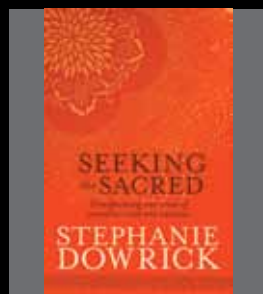
How It Feels
★★★★★
Page 38



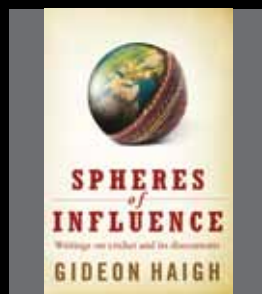
Managing Death
★★★★☆
Page 38



The 1000 Hour Day
★★★★★
Page 39



Seeking the Sacred
★★★★★
Page 41



Spheres of Influence
★★★★★
Page 42

'If you like tales of derring-do in the company of charming, enthusiastic men, this is the book for you.' Reviewer Paul Landymore certainly does, awarding *The 1000 Hour Day* four stars for its efforts.

Feature review: Nonfiction



Street Fight in Naples (Peter Robb, A&U, \$49.99 hb, ISBN 9781741754124, October) ★★★★★

Peter Robb's new book reminds me of a kaleidoscope. Turn the barrel, or page, and a new, mesmerising image, fact, opinion or event reveals itself, leading the reader to re-think the intricacies, contradictions, beauty and barbarity of the history of the challenging city of Naples. The book's subtitle is 'A book of Art and Insurrection' but that does not do justice to the breadth and depth of Robb's command of his subject.

Commencing with references to Bronze Age trading and ending with a contemporary beach vignette, the book gives the reader a remarkable overview of the history of this 'great and terrible' city, with particular focus on the 16th and 17th centuries. This was the period when Naples became the European capital of Spain's world empire and the base for the bloody Christian struggle with Islam. Robb certainly does not skimp on the political, religious, mercantile and domestic realities of this period, culminating in a vivid, even exciting, account of the city-wide Food Tax revolt of 1647 and its aftermath. However, his passions are the Neapolitan artists and writers who flourished in what was arguably one of the most important cities of the time.

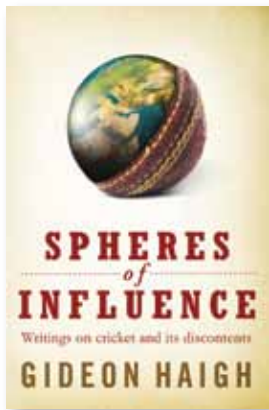
The reader needs to remain focussed as names, commissions, friendships, rivalries and vendettas spill from the page, not always chronologically. Caravaggio (whom Robb usually refers to by his given name, Michelangelo Merisi), Gargiulo, Ribera, Bartolomeo Passante (a painter of genius who died too young), the 'elusive' Caracciolo, to name just a few, live again due to the vitality of the writing, and we are directed more than once to Naples' Museo di Capodimonte and various

churches to rediscover for ourselves a multitude of glorious painted treasures.

Writers, too, throng the pages in a sometimes quirky way. Latin poet Virgil is linked with Robb's Neapolitan barber Virgilio, solely due to his name. Boccaccio and the Decameron make an appearance. The original Cinderella and her unique slipper are explained. Writers of political and religious tracts are discussed both for their influence and for their sometimes grisly fate. Brief musical references appear, not least a casual mention of San Pietro a Majella, 'Europe's first music school'. If one of the functions of a serious factual book is to stimulate the reader to explore further, this one certainly fulfils the brief. The author simply does not have the space to flesh out all his allusions.

Peter Robb has crafted a turbulent book about turbulent times. It will amply repay any serious reader whose interests include Neapolitan artists and interlopers, their passions, rivalries and vendettas; the Spanish Inquisition; political and artistic patronage; the survival skills of the Neapolitan working classes; the rise and decline of empires; and much more. Don't expect an easy read: do expect to be informed, entertained and transported to a particularly resilient people and place. (See interview, page 44.)

Max Oliver is a Sydney bookseller with a particular interest in Italy



Spheres of Influence: Writings on Cricket and Its Discontents (Gideon Haigh, Victory Books, \$34.99 pb, ISBN 9780522857870, November) ★★☆☆☆

When it comes to reviewing a book by Gideon Haigh, the question is never going to be whether the book is any good, but just how good it will be. Few writers possess his incisiveness and eloquence. Haigh returns to his favourite topic in this book about the complexities of one of the oldest and most-analysed sports—cricket—and how it is in danger of being both outdated and under-analysed in key areas. As he outlines in his introduction, the on-field issues of 'sledding, appealing, chucking, cheating' and the off-field worries of traditional versus Twenty20 are well covered. However, the big issues of governance and the global economy, he argues, are excluded with 'a kind of studied indifference'. *Spheres of Influence* is Haigh's attempt to 'make sense of cricket's new order': the

rise of Twenty20, of private ownership, of India, and of the issues with Pakistan (a timely topic given the latest match-fixing allegations). With his background in both business and cricket journalism, Haigh is ideally placed to produce such a comprehensive, authoritative and readable commentary. The question is not whether you'll stock the book, but how many copies you should order.

Fiona Crawford is a freelance writer, editor, blogger, proofreader and sports fanatic



Careful What You Wish For (Maureen McCarthy, A&U, \$15.99 pb, ISBN 9781741758573, November) ★★☆☆☆

Careful What You Wish For is Melbourne author Maureen McCarthy's latest novel and her first aimed at younger readers since *Flash Jack*. Ruth is a smart and sensitive 11-year-old girl who is having trouble with her school friends and her family. She feels ignored and out of place. Ruth got along really well with her well-travelled aunty Mary Ellen—who really understood Ruth—but Mary Ellen has recently passed away. Before she died she gave Ruth a mysterious rat—but is it a toy, or is it alive? There is a long set-up, over 100 pages, before the main portion of the story starts. After finding Rodney (the rat), who had been lost far from home, and thanks to some powerful rat magic, Ruth is able to try out a few scenarios—and perhaps change her life for the better. Would it help if

her parents paid more attention to her? If she had no parents at all? If she were a somebody? McCarthy's prose is solid, though the scenes that take place inside the 1950s Catholic boarding school are the most vivid and really leap from the page. Ruth has a clear and engaging voice and the thief Howard Pope is a fantastic character—I'd like to see more of him. This story is a sweet and funny tale about coming to appreciate your family and your life, and seeing your friends for who they really are.

Kate O'Donnell is a bookseller at the Younger Sun bookshop in Yarraville

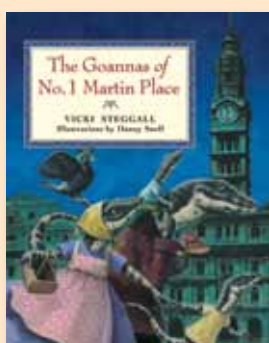


First Dog on the Moon's The Story of the Christmas Story (Andrew Marlton, Text Publishing, \$29.95 hb, ISBN 9781921656750, November) ★★☆☆☆

The picture/humour/gift book is a genre that really comes into its own at Christmas, particularly for last-minute purchases and those tricky Secret Santa gifts. *First Dog on the Moon's The Story of the Christmas Story* by Crikey cartoonist Andrew Marlton (aka First Dog) is a welcome addition to the genre. It's an irreverent take on the Christmas story, with digressions on whether Jesus was really born in a stable or in someone's spare room, how many wise men showed up, and why there wasn't a donkey in the story (apparently there are a few gaps in the gospels of Matthew and Luke). The book is illustrated with a mix of cartoons and defaced paintings—Mary and Joseph get googly eyes and speech bubbles spouting silly lines—and there are lots of little details to keep kids

amused, such as the feral Christmas puddings and the biblical scallops. The satire isn't so strong that it is likely to offend: if you're OK with God rendered as a dog with a halo, accompanied by the line 'people don't often agree on quite who or what God is, but in our story God looks like this', then you'll be OK with the rest of the story. I have a friend who loves Monty Python and Blackadder and enjoys exchanging reasonably priced gifts that gently mock the Christmas story, and this would be perfect for her.

Andrea Hanke is editor of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER



The Goannas of No. 1 Martin Place (Vicki Steggall, illus by Danny Snell, ABC Books, \$24.99 hb, ISBN 9780733324987, December) ★★☆☆☆

When the goanna family is driven out of its ancestral stomping ground in Sydney's botanic gardens, they must find a new home. While this requires some searching, Go-Pa finally finds the perfect quarters at the top of the GPO clock tower. As Go-Ma, Go-Pa and Moreton adjust to life in their new neighbourhood, and the newly arrived baby Martin adjusts to life in general, adventures are had and acquaintances are made. Plop becomes a valuable friend, as does Oris from the Laughing Prawn cafe. But not all is well because the Pitt Street Cat is on a rampage. Even more dangerous, Moreton has discovered a human is watching them. I love an animal story with a difference, and *The Goannas of No. 1 Martin Place* delivers, with heroes of less glamorous and often despised species (Plop

is a pigeon and Oris is a rat). The carefully rendered, brightly coloured illustrations are realistic and expressive, and not only complement the text but break it up to make it more accessible to younger readers. This works as a first chapter book but also as a read-aloud book for any age, with amusing turns of phrases and instantly likeable characters.

Clare Hingston is a bookseller at the Younger Sun in Yarraville and a librarian in training