

# Stack up on good reads...

SABRINA GOSLING

Book selector

**ABBOTT, Jeff**

**A kiss gone bad.**- Orion, 2004.

**Panic.**- Time Warner; 2006.

**Panic** is an exciting and gripping thriller about a young documentary filmmaker on the run. It is a stand-alone title, not part of Abbott's series of suspense novels featuring Whit Mosley, but just as enjoyable. I really like Mosley, the rather laid-back, definitely unconventional judge in Port Leo, Texas. The best place to start reading the series is with **A kiss gone bad**, in which he is still a rookie judge. It is an action-packed, violent, pacy crime thriller with quite a convoluted plot. We have two more series titles in stock, but all his books are worth recommending.

**ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi**

**Half of a yellow sun.**- Fourth Estate, 2006.

This Nigerian author's first novel, **Purple hibiscus**, was a great success, both commercially and critically, winning the Commonwealth First Book Award. She has followed it with another winner - a rich and powerful story set in 1960s Nigeria during Biafra's struggle for independence. What particularly impressed me was how easily Adichie reels the reader in. She never loses sight of the personal, focussing on two very different twin sisters and the impact the civil war has on their lives and the lives of those close to them. A deserved winner of the 2007 Orange Prize.

**ANDERSON, Scott**

**Triage.**- Macmillan, 1998.

A memorable debut novel from an award-winning war correspondent about the recovery of a shell-shocked photojournalist. It's a haunting and riveting exploration of the effects of war on the human psyche.

**BLAKE, Victoria**

**Skin and blister.**- Orion, 2006.

This is Blake's third novel. Her first, **Bloodless shadow**, introduced her very likeable female sleuth, Sam Falconer, a private eye and former world judo champion. In this her brother, an Oxford don, is kidnapped, apparently as a way of getting hold of their father who was a SAS assassin in Ireland. This is a good crime series which makes entertaining reading. I have just read her most recent novel, **Jumping the cracks**, which is perhaps a bit darker than the others, but just as enjoyable.

**BANKS, Iain**

**The steep approach to Garbadale.**- Little, 2007.

Family drama from this award-winning Scottish author who also writes science fiction under the name Iain M Banks. The central event in this social comedy is a gathering of the Wopuld family both to celebrate Grandma Win's birthday and to decide whether to accept the lucrative offer from American investors to buy the family game-playing business. Filled with humour, social commentary, and spot-on observations of families and family relationships this is a wonderfully engrossing read.

**BOOTH, Stephen**

**Scared to live.**- HarperCollins, 2006.

**Dying to sin.**- HarperCollins, 2007.

Booth's police procedurals, set in the Peak District and featuring police detectives Ben Cooper and Diane Fry, are atmospheric and gripping, with a strong sense of place, good characterisation and interesting relationships. These are the 7th and 8th titles in this gripping crime series. For those new to the series, you'll regret it if you don't start at the beginning - with **Black dog**.

**BOYLE, T Coraghessan**

**Drop City.**- Bloomsbury, 2003.

**Talk talk.**- Bloomsbury, 2006.

**Drop City** 'describes the experiences of an idealistic Californian hippie commune transplanted to the wilds of Alaska - and what happens as these two vastly different communities collide. A wonderful evocation of 1970s America...' (*Bookseller* 20/12/02.)

**Talk talk** is a fast-paced suspense story about identity theft. 'Dana Halter races across America in a bid to confront the man who has stolen her identity, leaving in his wake massive debts and criminal charges in her name.' (*Bookseller* 14/4/06.) Boyle is a good writer and an accomplished story-teller and these are two of his most readable novels.

**CARROLL, Claudia**

**He loves me not...he loves me.**- Bantam, 2004.

First novel from an Irish actress - an entertaining story set in rural Ireland at the ancestral home of the impoverished Davenport family. To make some money, they offer their house as a location for a new movie. This is great fun; humour, romance, eccentricity, and a likeable central character in Portia, all combine to make this an enjoyable read. There is a sequel too.

**CHALLIS, Sarah**

**Footprints in the sand.**- Headline, 2006.

A romantic novel of adventure set in West Africa. It tells the story of two young English cousins who travel to Mali to scatter their eccentric great-aunt's ashes. The story of their journey and what they learn along the way, about both their great-aunt and themselves, makes good reading. Challis's novels are reliably entertaining.

**CHANDRA, Vikram**

**Sacred games.**- Faber, 2006.

Chandra's 900-page epic of organised crime and corruption in Mumbai has been described in a local magazine for men as 'simply unputdownable... It plunges you into another world, one you wouldn't choose to live in, but will find increasingly difficult to leave.' (*Best Life* 10/2007.)

**CHILD, Lee**

**The enemy.**- Bantam, 2004.

**The hard way.**- Bantam, 2006.

**Bad luck and trouble.**- Bantam, 2007.

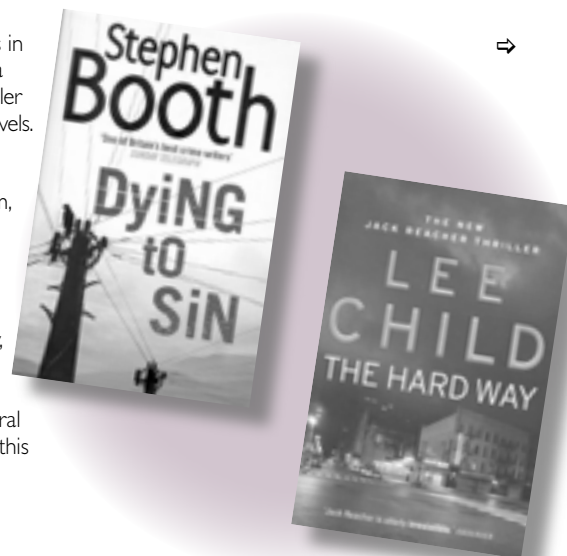
**The hard way** and **Bad luck and trouble** (which should be in the libraries soon) are the two latest entries in the gripping **Jack Reacher** series of thrillers. He is a popular figure: an ex-military cop, an unencumbered loner, tough, intelligent, attractive to women, and always moving on. While Child's readership is predominantly male, the number of women readers has grown tremendously. I am a great fan. **The killing floor** began the series but his 2004 novel, **The enemy**, an exciting military crime thriller, is set chronologically earlier than the others and would serve as a good introduction to the series for any new readers.

**CONNOR, John**

**A child's game.**- Orion, 2006.

**Falling.**- Orion, 2007.

Police procedurals set in West Yorkshire - the 3rd and 4th in a series of violent, gripping crime novels with an intriguing central character: Karen Sharpe, an ex-M15 undercover agent now



working as a police detective. The events in **A child's game** have left her in a fragile state. At the beginning of **Falling**, she had been working fraud and theft cases for the past year, but is called in as police liaison to deal with the traumatised 6-year-old daughter of a pregnant woman who had been brutally murdered. This gripping series is extremely popular, but should ideally be read in order, beginning with **Phoenix**.

## DALLAS, Sandra

**The Persian Pickle Club.**- Arrow, 1996.

A charming first novel set during the Depression. Queenie, our very likeable narrator, tells the story of how the arrival of a city woman, Rita, and the discovery of a dead body effects the group of women who meet weekly to quilt, chat or be read to. A delightful story with a strong rural simplicity and reserve to it.

## DARWIN, Emma

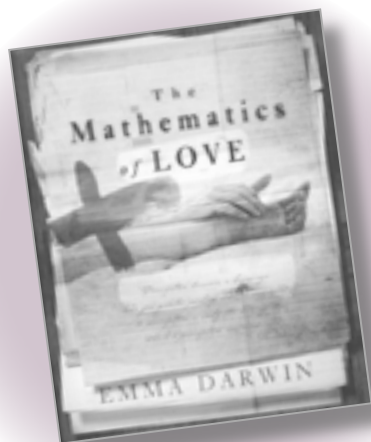
**The mathematics of love.**- Headline Review, 2006.

A wonderful debut novel written by a descendent of Charles Darwin, this is an historical novel, 'set partly in the 19th century, where Major Fairfield is escaping memories of Waterloo and a lost love, and partly in the 1970s, where teenager Anna finds herself sent to stay with her eccentric uncle and falling for an older man.' (*Bookseller* 7/4/06.)

## DESAI, Kiran

**Hullabaloo in the guava orchard.**- Faber, 1998.  
**The inheritance of loss.**- H. Hamilton, 2006.

Desai (daughter of the writer, Anita Desai) won the 2006 Man Booker Prize for her second novel, **The inheritance of loss**, which is set in India in the mid-1980s. The clever and comic **Hullabaloo** tells the story of Sampath, a man who is a bit of a loser and misfit, until he gains fame and respect as a guru when he takes refuge up a guava tree. While not everybody's cup of tea, this is certainly an impressive debut.



## DOWLING, Finuala

**Flyleaf.**- Penguin, 2007.

A charming novel, the second from this local poet and Kalk Bay resident. For more about it see the *Between the lines* column in September/October 2007 issue of the **CL**.

## EARLS, Nick

**Bachelor kisses.**- Pan, 1999.

**Perfect skin.**- Macmillan, 2001.

These are two Australian novels in the 'lad-lit' category. The author is a medical doctor who won a Betty Trask Award for a previous book. **Bachelor kisses** is the story of a young man in the 90s, a medical student called Jon. **Perfect skin** carries on the story but it can stand alone. (I haven't read the first one). Jon, a thirty-something plastic surgeon, is now a widower with a baby. I thoroughly enjoyed this - it is witty, moving, romantic, and great fun.

## EDWARDS, Kim

**The memory-keeper's daughter.**- Penguin, 2005.

During a blizzard a doctor delivers his wife of twins. He decides to send his daughter, who has Down's syndrome, to an institution, telling his wife that she died - but the nurse, in turn, decides to keep the baby and bring her up as her own. This first novel, an emotional drama, has proved extremely popular in the UK.

## ELLIOTT, Kate

**Crown of stars.**- Orbit, 2006.

This is the 7th and final book in her engrossing fantasy series of the same name. The sequence begins with **King's dragon**.

## FALLON, Jennifer

**The lion of Senet.**- Orbit, 2005.

**Eye of the labyrinth.**- Orbit, 2005.

**Lord of the Shadows.**- Orbit, 2005.

Here's another wonderful fantasy series by an Australian author and called **The second sons** trilogy. Set in the world Ranadon, where there is no night because its two suns shine so brightly, these are absorbing, intelligent fantasies filled with plot and counterplot, political and religious rivalries, and a large cast of well-drawn characters. These entertaining, layered novels will be a great find for anyone looking for a new fantasy author. They certainly show that the science fiction/fantasy scene in Australia is thriving.

## FERRIS, Joshua

**Then we came to the end: a novel.**- Viking, 2007.

Set in a Chicago advertising agency threatened with closure, this first novel is a darkly comic exploration of office life. 'Regardless of vocation, you know these people, and, what's worse, you see yourself in them.' (*Library Journal* 1/1/07.)

## FRENCH, Nicci

**Catch me when I fall.**- Penguin, 2006.

**Until it's over.**- Penguin, 2007.

The duo of *Observer* journalist Nicci Gerrard and her husband, Sean French, has written a number of compulsively readable psychological thrillers. Some of them, like **Secret smile** and **Land of the living**, I found almost oppressively tense but impossible to put down. **Catch me...**, about an attractive extrovert whose life seems to spiral out of control, is the same. She keeps on doing things: irresponsible, wild things, that just make her situation worse.

**Until it's over** is set in a London communal house where Astrid Bell, a bicycle courier, lives. A neighbour accidentally knocks her off her bike and then later is found murdered. The police become suspicious when other bodies start turning up - all in some way linked to Astrid. This is a most enjoyable read, just as gripping and suspenseful but not as overwhelming as some of their earlier books. All are ideal beach reads.

## GALE, Patrick

**Friendly fire.**- Fourth Estate, 2005.

**Notes from an exhibition.**- Fourth Estate, 2007.

'Gale's many fans are accustomed to the appearance, every two years or so, of a new novel, each as polished and mellifluous as the last. At the same time, each book takes on a startlingly original tangent, focus and method.' (*Independent* 17/8/07.) He is one of my favourite authors but I think he's often overlooked. Anyone unfamiliar with his work is in for a treat - all his books are worth reading. Unfortunately, some, like **Little bits of baby**, are no longer in stock. Here are his two most recent novels. **Friendly fire** is a wonderful coming-of-age story set in an English public boarding school. The heroine is 14-year-old Sophie who is an avid reader. **Notes from an exhibition** is about family relationships, bipolar disorder, and the relationship between mental illness and artistic creativity. 'A psychologically astute tale about a troubled artistic mother... as rich and inventive as we expect from this brilliant author. Its understated, tragic conclusion is as moving as anything Gale has written.' (*Guardian* 11/8/97.)

## GARDNER, Lisa

**Hide.**- Orion, 2007.

Author of the **Pierce Quincy/Raine Conner** crime series with a new title that is not part of that series, but a sequel to her 2005 book, **Alone**, which also featured Bobby Dodge, previously a police sniper, now a detective. This is another chilling psychological crime thriller. A woman reads in the newspaper that her mummified remains have been found in an underground cavern in the grounds of the state mental hospital. This is bound to be popular with Gardner's many fans.

## GEORGE, Elizabeth

**With no one as witness.**- Hodder, 2005.

**What came before he shot her.**- Hodder, 2006.

**With no one as witness** is the latest crime novel in her series featuring the aristocratic policeman, Thomas Lynley, his working-class sidekick, Barbara Havers, and the other characters in his circle. In this one he investigates his first serial killer case. This is just as absorbing as ever, but it also has a sting in its tail - a tragedy that will shock loyal series readers. **What came before he shot her** is a companion volume to the series and something quite different. It provides the background to what happened in the previous book. 'It takes a long bus ride into London's mixed-race slums to tell the backstory of the kids... The hero of this tale is an 11-year-old boy named Joel... George took a gamble with this one, and it pays off brilliantly.' (*Time* 23/9/06.) I was a bit reluctant to read this, thinking it would be too depressing, but was completely hooked once I began. George does an excellent job.

## HANNAH, Sophie

**Little face.**- Hodder, 2006.

**Hurting distance.**- Hodder, 2007.

Two chilling psychological thrillers from this award-winning poet. In **Little face** a woman believes her 2-week old daughter, Florence, was swapped with another baby while she was out. No one believes her. In **Hurting distance** the police aren't particularly interested when Naomi reports her married lover missing, but start to take her more seriously when she changes her story claiming that he raped her at a stag party. 'Hannah constructs her novels like a 19th century conjuror using smoke and mirrors, until the great reveal. The plot twist has been there all along staring you right in the face - pure genius.' (*Bookseller* 16/11/07.)

## HISLOP, Victoria

**The island.**- Review, 2005.

This first novel, a multi-generational saga set on a remote Greek island, had mixed reviews: 'an unwieldy debut,' 'historical romp,' 'a romantic page-turner but a little shallow.' I haven't read it but am including it here because it was the Richard and Judy Book Club's top Summer Read of 2006 - the public does the voting, so obviously a great many people in Britain loved it.

## HOBB, Robin

**Shaman's crossing.**- Voyager, 2005.

**Forest mage.**- Voyager, 2006.

**Renegade's magic.**- Voyager, 2006.

This author uses two pseudonyms: this one for epic traditional fantasy and Megan Lindholm for contemporary fantasy. Hobb is the more popular. This new fantasy sequence, the

enjoyable **Soldier son** trilogy, is likely to be just as popular as her others. Set in a new world unrelated to her previous series, it follows the life of Nevare Burvelle, the second son of the Lord of the Kingdom of Gernia, and his preparation for and education at the King's Cavalla Academy.

## HORTON, Lesley

**Devils in the mirror.**- Orion, 2005.

**The hollow core.**- Orion, 2006.

The third and fourth titles in this gritty, absorbing series of British police procedurals set in multi-cultural Bradford, and once again featuring DI John Handford and DS Khalid Ali. This is good crime fiction, with something a bit different because one of the main policemen is Muslim. **Devils in the mirror** involves the murder investigation into the death of a girl who was found suffocated on the moor. Evidence suggests it may have been a ritual killing. In **The hollow core** a woman is gunned down in a parking garage in front of her husband and daughter as the family return from celebrating the daughter's 25th birthday, and she dies in hospital soon after. It was deliberate, not random, she was the intended victim, but no one can understand why. There are many twists and turns, complications and subplots before the mystery is resolved. This is good crime fiction - definitely a series worth checking out.

## HOSSEINI, Khaled

**A thousand splendid suns.**- Bloomsbury, 2007.

'Afghan-American novelist Hosseini follows up his best-selling **The kite runner** with another searing epic of Afghanistan in turmoil. The story covers three decades of anti-Soviet jihad, civil war and Taliban tyranny through the lives of two women... His tale is a powerful, harrowing depiction of Afghanistan, but also a lyrical evocation of the lives and enduring hopes of its resilient characters.' (*Publishers Weekly* 26/2/07.)

## ISHIGURO, Kazuo

**Never let me go.**- Faber, 2005.

This is a wonderfully-engrossing, elegantly-written novel in which a 31-year-old woman recalls her childhood spent in the cloistered, privileged school of Hailsham. While it is disturbing it isn't harrowing, and one comes away glad to have read this beautifully-rendered story. It was definitely my favourite to win the Man Booker Prize of its year.

## JEAN, Wendy

**Unstolen.**- Pan, 2006.

This very readable first novel was inspired by a true story - the abduction of Michael Dunahee from a school playground in Victoria,

Canada, in 1991. The novel looks at the effects an abduction such as that can have on a family. Bethany is grown up with a child of her own now, but throughout her life she had been conscious of an absence - her elder brother had been abducted when she was a baby and her mother had always believed that he would return some day. The novel opens with a description of her mother following a man home from the supermarket and bludgeoning him to death.

## KERNICK, Simon

**Relentless.**- Bantam, 2006.

A nail-biting thriller about an ordinary man on the run. This is a stand-alone book, not one of Kernick's London cop novels. John Meron is a young, happily-married father of two whose life changes with a phone call one Saturday afternoon. Exciting and very readable.

## KING, Jonathon

**Eye of vengeance.**- Orion, 2006.

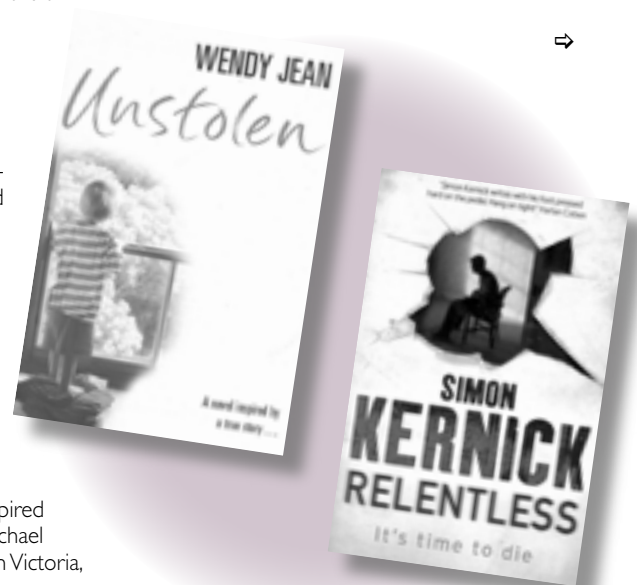
This new book is something of a departure for King, not part of his enjoyable Max Freeman sequence of crime novels. This one is concerned with the question of what happens when a journalist finds himself no longer simply a reporter observing and commenting on events but somehow becomes a participant as well. Crime reporter Nick Mullins realises that there's a link between sniper shootings and the profiles of criminals he's written for the paper. An intelligent and entertaining crime thriller with a realistic newspaper setting.

## MCCARTHY, Cormac

**No country for old men.**- Picador, 2005.

**The road.**- Picador, 2006.

I have been a great fan for many years. **The road** (which won the Pulitzer Prize) is a beautifully-written apocalyptic novel about a father and son on the road, traveling through



a scary post-holocaust America. This is something of a departure for McCarthy but it will still appeal to his fans, and I think will get him new ones. I loved it, as did many reviewers who selected it as a book of the year in 2006. The *Cape Argus* reviewer chose **No country for old men** as one of her four best novels for 2007, calling it 'a literary masterpiece'. This modern-day Western thriller has been widely praised. I haven't read it yet and I know of people who have not enjoyed it. I gather a strong stomach is required. Mars-Jones remarks in the *Observer*: 'As a prose stylist...[he] is like a man who spends hours in front of a mirror getting his hair to sit just right, but will break your jaw if you tell him he's beautiful.' Roos wrote: 'Some books are so perfect that I am filled with envy at the writer - this is one.' (*Cape Argus* 31/12/07.) However, I don't think this is the book for readers new to his work; rather try his wonderful Western, **All the pretty horses** and its sequels in *The border* trilogy, but note that the lack of quotation marks in his books takes some getting used to.

#### McEWAN, Ian

**Atonement.**- Cape, 2001.

**On Chesil Beach.**- Cape, 2005.

McEwan's latest, **On Chesil Beach**, is a short, elegant novel in which he traces the history of a doomed relationship. A young couple, both virgins, come to Chesil Beach on their honeymoon in 1962. Although they are in love, their wedding night experiences colour the rest of their married life. 'Known for his dark portrayals of humankind, the acclaimed British novelist takes on a sexually-frustrated marriage in his newest work.' (*Time* 18/6/07.) It's an accomplished work and a quick, easy read. There is another novel, an earlier work, **Atonement**, which I also want to recommend here, especially to anyone unfamiliar with his writing. It's a rich, powerful and deeply satisfying novel that I would urge you to read

before the forthcoming movie. An *Observer* reviewer wrote: 'It is, I think, the best thing he has ever written and I read it (at first) as one might drink a good wine, relishing every word, not wishing to swig too fast, not wanting it to be over.' (*Observer* 16/9/01.)

#### McINTOSH, Fiona

**Betrayal.**- Orbit, 2006.

**Revenge.**- Orbit, 2006.

**Destiny.**- Orbit, 2006.

This *Trinity* trilogy is terrific - I was immersed in the books for days. It's good traditional fantasy, with strong characters, interesting world-building and an absorbing plot.

#### MCNAB, Andy

**Aggressor.**- Bantam, 2005.

**Recoil.**- Bantam, 2006.

**Crossfire.**- Bantam, 2007.

McNab's first book was **Bravo Two Zero**, about his experiences with the SAS in the Gulf War. He was the British Army's most highly-decorated serving soldier when he left. He then turned to fiction, writing a number of best-selling military and espionage thrillers, beginning with **Remote control** (1997) which introduced Nick Stone, an ex-SAS soldier working for British Intelligence. After discovering the murdered bodies of a fellow SAS soldier and his family, Stone goes on the run with the only survivor, the 7-year-old daughter. He's just not sure from whom or why. Here are the 7th, 8th and 9th titles in this compelling series of action-packed, very readable thrillers. In **Aggressor** Stone 'is catapulted into terrorism and intrigue, from the villages of Azerbaijan to the city lights of Istanbul, with the US secret services'. (*Bookseller* 12/08/2005.) **Recoil** is set mainly in Africa, while **Crossfire** is set in Iraq where Stone is working as bodyguard to a TV crew. One of the reporters saves Nick's life but then disappears soon afterwards, presumed kidnapped.

#### MATAR, Hisham

**In the country of men.**- Penguin, 2006.

A Libyan writer's moving and compelling first novel. Set in 1970s Libya, a time of great political turmoil, the book focuses on one particular period: the summer holidays of 1979 when the narrator was nine years old. It is an impressive debut - a powerful yet readable novel and a convincing portrayal of this period in history as seen through the eyes of a child. (There is an autobiographical element to the book. Matar has not been back to Libya since 1979 and

has not heard from his imprisoned father for a decade.) Highly recommended.

#### MATLWA, Kopano

**Coconut.**- Jacana, 2007.

This award-winning debut novel from a young Cape Town medical student has been widely praised. For more see article and review in the September/October 2007 issue of *CL*.

#### MOSSE, Kate

**Labyrinth.**- Orion, 2005.

The historical religious quest genre is very popular at the moment and this is a book in that genre that many readers loved. 'Mosse's page-turner takes readers on another quest for the Holy Grail, this time with two closely linked female protagonists born 800 years apart.' (*Publishers Weekly* 23/1/06.)

#### MOYES, Jojo

**Silver Bay.**- Hodder, 2007.

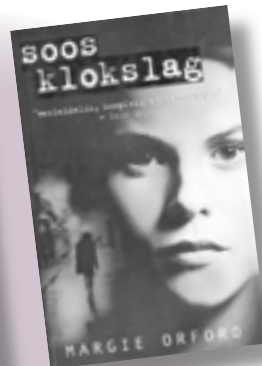
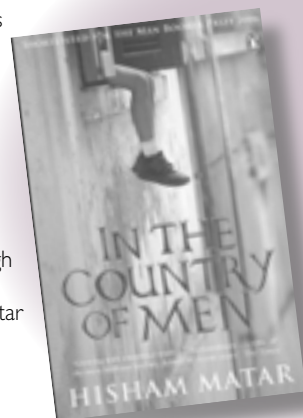
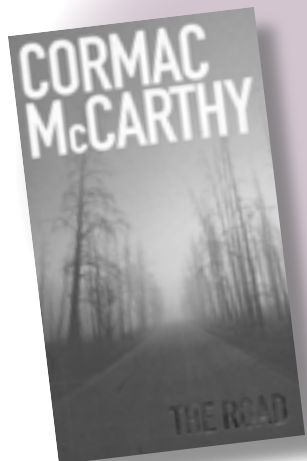
A warm, entertaining novel set in a small Australian coastal town with a close-knit community and low-key tourist trade of dolphin and whale watching. Their way of life is threatened when a young, ambitious property developer arrives from England with plans for a huge resort development. Moyes has created a rich cast of interesting characters and perfectly captured the different feelings and responses of people in a community under threat. Her story-telling appears effortless and, as always, the reader comes away satisfied.

#### ORFORD, Margie

**Like clockwork.**- Oshun, 2006.

**Blood rose.**- Oshun, 2007.

The first two books in a 7-book local crime series featuring journalist and part-time police profiler, Dr Clare Hart. The first book is set in Cape Town and the second in Walvis Bay. These have been well received and are to be published in many languages. An Afrikaans



translation, **Soos klokslag**, should be in the libraries soon.

## PENNY, Louise

**Still life.**- Headline, 2005.

**Dead cold.**- Headline, 2006.

**The cruellest month.**- Headline, 2007.

A delightful Canadian series of three novels which need to be read in sequence. They are most enjoyable traditional-style detective stories, all featuring the rather jaded but enormously appealing policeman, Armand Gamache of the **Sûreté du Québec**, and the small community of Three Pines. The first book won many awards but I actually think her writing has improved with each book. They all have a distinctly Canadian flavour - the tensions between French and English, the harsh Canadian winter; and so on. The sophisticated Gamache is an endearing character and Penny has painted a colourful portrait of the village and its cast of quirky and often eccentric characters. These really are charming.

## POLLEN, Bella

**Hunting unicorns.**- Macmillan, 2003.

**Midnight cactus.**- Macmillan, 2006.

**Hunting unicorns** is a quirky romantic comedy in which an American journalist is sent to England to write a piece on the decline of the British aristocracy. An entertaining book which was voted favourite summer read by viewers of the Richard & Judy TV show. **Midnight cactus** is a bit different - it's an absorbing story set in the desert lands of Arizona close to the Mexican border. Alice and her two small children move there from London, to an abandoned mining town which her husband had bought with plans to turn it into a desert resort. There they 'must adjust not only to the deceptively dangerous desert climate but also to the cowboy culture and the border politics... Pollen tells a darker story here but also deftly mixes in comical dialogue from the Coleman kids, a beautifully-evoked desert setting, and an intriguing romance.' (*Booklist* 15/10/06.)

## PYNCHON, Thomas

**Against the day.**- Cape, 2006.

Something for the more serious and determined reader is Pynchon's latest - an historical novel written in densely-detailed prose beginning in 1893 with the adventures of a group of young balloonists and ending after the First World War. One reviewer called it 'brilliant if sometimes exasperating'.

## RANKIN, Ian

**The naming of the dead.**- Orion, 2006.

**Exit music.**- Orion, 2007.

If one is looking for gritty, urban police procedurals, there are some excellent British

series. Rankin's compelling **Rebus** series, set in the seamier underside of Edinburgh, is surely one of the best. **The naming of the dead** is set during the G8 summit in Gleneagles. **Exit music** involves the investigation into the death of a dissident Russian poet - as engrossing as always but with a bittersweet quality to it because Rebus retires at the end of it. I can't believe that this is really the end of this long series.

## ROBERTSON, James

**The testament of Gideon Mack.**- H. Hamilton, 2006.

'Robertson has not shied away from tackling major theological and religious issues. It is the life story of a minister in the Church of Scotland and his eventual fall from grace, and it contains an entirely convincing account of a meeting with the devil. I really found this one of the most thought-provoking novels I have read in a long time.' (*Bookseller* 10/3/2006.)

## ROBINSON, Kim Stanley

**Forty signs of rain.**- HarperCollins, 2005.

**Fifty degrees below.**- HarperCollins, 2006.

**Sixty days and counting.**- HarperCollins, 2007.

A near-future trilogy of eco-thrillers about global warming and climate change.

## ROBINSON, Peter

**Piece of my heart.**- Hodder, 2006.

Robinson's series of rural police procedurals started about 12 years ago with **Gallows view**, when the sophisticated, urbane, and thoroughly likeable Chief Inspector Alan Banks moved from the CID in London to a post in the Yorkshire Dales. The books are well crafted, with complex characters, intriguing, thought-provoking plots, questions of moral and philosophical ambiguity, and vividly-painted descriptions of the country setting. And of course there's always rock music - in this new one even more than usual. There are two time-frames in the story: the murder of a young woman at a rock festival in the 1980s, and the contemporary police investigation into the murder of a music journalist. For those who have not yet met Alan Banks there's a treat in store.

## ROBOTHAM, Michael

**Suspect.**- Time Warner, 2004.

**Lost.**- Time Warner, 2005.

**The night ferry.**- Sphere, 2007

Three linked crime novels from an Australian ex-journalist, all set in London. The main protagonist in **Suspect** is a clinical psychologist, Joseph O'Laughlin, who suspects a patient of murder and then himself becomes the prime suspect. A policeman,

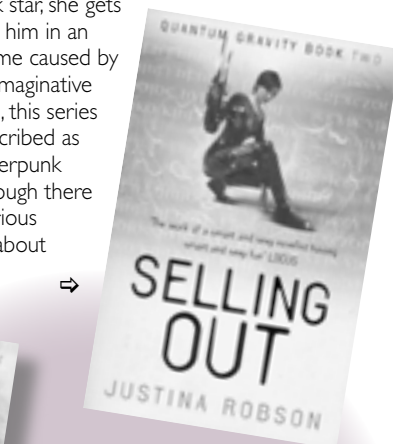
DI Vincent Ruiz, takes centre stage in **Lost** (aka **The drowning man**). He is found, barely alive, clinging to a buoy in the Thames and is in a coma for a few days. When he recovers he has lost his memory, but no one believes him. Ruiz also features in **The night ferry** but in a more minor role. He is retired now and it is Ali Barba, the young Sikh policewoman who used to work with him, who is the central protagonist. She has recovered from her injuries (her back was broken in the first book) and is ready to resume official duties when she is contacted by a friend who thinks someone is trying to steal her unborn baby. Ali's investigation leads her into the dangerous world of sex trafficking and an international baby-selling conspiracy. These are all sharply-plotted, fast-paced thrillers which make for most enjoyable reading. I certainly hope this isn't the last we hear of Ali Barba or Ruiz.

## ROBSON, Justina

**Keeping it real.**- Gollancz, 2006.

**Selling out.**- Gollancz, 2007.

Books 1 and 2 in **Quantum gravity**, a post-holocaust science fiction series with a strong fantasy element. The setting is a world changed by the Quantum Bomb of 2015 that destroyed the boundaries between dimensions so that humans, elves, demons, and others live alongside each other. After nearly dying from elf-inflicted injuries, Lila Black, a 21-year-old special agent, is built up into a kind of nuclear-powered cyborg. When on bodyguard duty to an elf rock star, she gets trapped with him in an elaborate game caused by wild magic. Imaginative and colourful, this series could be described as a kind of cyberpunk fantasy. Although there are some serious undertones about



class conflict, racial prejudice and so on, it is essentially an entertaining romp. With its witty dialogue, cast of well-drawn characters, pop culture references, intrigue, and sexy, fast-paced, action-packed plot, **Quantum Gravity** is great fun.

## SHRIVER, Lionel

**We need to talk about Kevin: a novel.**- Serpent's Tail, 2005.

This powerful and compelling exploration of the parent-child relationship won the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2005. 'In a series of brutally-introspective missives to her husband... Eva tries to come to grips with the fact that their 17-year-old son, Kevin, has killed seven students and two adults with his crossbow... In crisply-crafted sentences that cut to the bone of her feelings about motherhood, career, family, and what it is about American culture that produces child killers, Shriver yanks the reader back and forth between blame and empathy, retribution and forgiveness.' (*Booklist* 1/5/03.)

## STACEY, Lyndon

**Murder in mind.**- Hutchinson, 2007.

This new novel is another entertaining horse-racing thriller. When his friend and fellow jockey, Jamie Mullen, is suspected of the murder of the attractive Sophie Bradford, Matt Shepherd wants to find out the truth, so decides to do some investigating of his own. For all those Dick Francis fans out there, I recommend Stacey's books. There are six so far - all exciting, very readable horsy thrillers that I think really fit the bill for those looking for a Francis-style read. Actually, I think they have a bit more substance than some of the slighter Francis books and, of course, a more modern feel. Ideal beach reads.

## TEMPLE, Peter

**The broken shore.**- Quercus, 2006.

An ex-journalist (originally from South Africa), Temple is a multi-award-winning Australian author, best known for his Jack Irish thrillers. His books have only recently been published for a wider market - **Broken shore**, a stand-alone crime thriller, was the first. A 'tautly-written tale of a homicide detective returning to his home town to rehabilitate after a devastating case, but finding a local crime revealing the town's hidden past', it really is a wonderfully-engrossing crime thriller with a strong Australian feel to it. It has been enormously successful overseas, garnering heaps of praise and winning the Duncan Lawrie Dagger for Best Crime Novel of the Year. (*Bookseller* 7/4/06.)

## WAGNER, Jan Costin

**Ice moon.**- Harvill, 2006.

A translation of this German writer's first novel - a psychological crime thriller set in Finland. CID detective, Kimmo Joentaa, is investigating a serial killer who apparently sits by the bedside of his victims watching them die. Kimmo himself has been sitting watch at the deathbed of his beloved young wife. A haunting novel but thoroughly enjoyable - the writing is compelling and the detective, Kimmo, a complex and attractive character. Wagner is a great find. Recommended for readers who have enjoyed the fiction of Scandinavian authors like Mankell, Hoeg, Karin Fossum, Kerstin Ekman, and Arnaldur.

## WALTERS, Minette

**Devil's feather.**- Macmillan, 2005.

Walters has a winner with this novel in which a sadistic serial killer is using the chaos and confusion of the world's conflict zones to cover his murders. A woman news correspondent working in Sierra Leone and Iraq suspects a mercenary working for a private security firm, but then is herself kidnapped and tortured.

## WHITFIELD, Kit

**Bareback.**- Cape, 2006.

The setting for this hard-boiled fantasy thriller is a parallel world where '99% of the population are werewolves. The remaining 1% are drafted into DORLA, the Department for the Ongoing Regulation of Lycanthropic Activity, a much-hated organisation with the difficult job of keeping the peace at full moon. Then one of DORLA agent Lola Galley's friends is murdered and she sets out to track down the killer'. (*Bookseller* 5/5/06.) The film rights to this engrossing novel have been sold. It has the pace, danger and excitement of the best action thrillers, but has some depth and

substance too in its exploration of issues like prejudice, class and oppression. 'Terrific first novel... Tackling a major social issue, this thought-provoking novel is recommended for readers who enjoy intelligent, literate fantasy' (*Library Journal* 15/9/06.)

## WHITLOW, Robert

**Life support.**- W Pub. Group, c2003.

**Life everlasting.**- WestBow, 2004.

**Jimmy.**- WestBow, 2005.

**The Santee series** is a popular choice for those wanting readable legal thrillers with a strong Christian angle.

## WILLIAMS, Liz

**Darkland.**- Tor, 2006.

**Bloodmind.**- Tor, 2007.

This is dark, gothic science fiction where the story moves between worlds and communities which are not only very different physically but have very different systems of organisation and government. Vali, an assassin, was betrayed by Frey, a man who was both her mentor and her lover. Her quest is to find him to find out the reasons for his betrayal. There is quite an emphasis on politics and society, gender issues and feminism, ethics about the treatment of animals, and so on, but, even though she raises all these questions and issues, the story still moves at a rapid pace and is filled with action. These are gripping, inventive novels that showcase the author's considerable world-building skills. I can recommend them, but they are not for the fainthearted - this is scary stuff (often nightmarishly so), and violent.

## WILLIAMS, Niall

**Four letters of love.**- Picador, 1997.

A lovely, lyrical debut novel about two Irish families - a dreamy, passionate story for those readers who enjoy a touch of magic realism.

## ZUSAK, Markus

**The book thief.**- Doubleday, 2007.

This sophisticated novel set during the Second World War had been published in both adult and juvenile editions. It won the 2007 Boeke Prize and has been recommended to me by a colleague who loved it. 'Death itself narrates this deeply affecting tale of young book lover Liesl, her loving foster parents, and the Jew hiding in their basement. They struggle, with their small, poor community, to endure the double-edged dangers of Nazi Germany. Zusak's poignant tribute to words, survival, and their inevitable entwinement is a tour de force to be not just read but inhabited.' (*Horn Book Guide* 1/10/06.)

