

**CHRISTMAS BOOKS**

**BLOKEY DAD (HARD TO BUY FOR)**

**UNBROKEN**

Laura Hillenbrand

4<sup>th</sup> Estate \$35.00

Laura Hillenbrand was responsible for *Seabiscuit*, a book with the pace of a thoroughbred. *Unbroken* is similarly sports-historical, but with a war angle. While *Seabiscuit* was an uncomplicated narrative of battlers triumphing, *Unbroken* examines a life of extreme adversity. Louis Zamperini was a US runner, of Olympic standard. As a youth he was delinquent, surely headed for jail. Sport saved him, and he showed promise at Hitler's Olympics in 1936. He might have won gold at the next, but for WW2. Instead he joined the airforce, only to be shot down over the Pacific. The surviving crew drifted in a rubber raft for thousands of miles. That ordeal nearly killed Zamperini, but it was followed by internment in a Japanese POW camp. Here he was singled out for abuse from a sadistic guard. The experience nearly destroyed him; and after the war he suffered severe PTSD. A misery memoir? No, for something in Zamperini always bounced back. Hillenbrand presents an engaging, uniquely tough character. Unlike many POWs, he could forgive. Aged 80, he carried the torch for the Winter Olympics—in Japan.

Also useful for: Sports and War buffs.

**LITERARY-MINDED GOTH**

**THE ENGLISH GHOST: SPECTRES THROUGH TIME**

Peter Ackroyd

Chatto & Windus \$35.00

It used to be a typical Christmas pastime to tell ghost stories. Such activities need reprising, and an impetus could be this book. Ackroyd notes that the English see more ghosts than anyone else, although there seems evidence of a particular national character here. These revenants can be rather well-behaved, matter-of-fact, even mundane. They go to church, push wheelbarrows, even stand at urinals. Some, like a moving cloud of soot, seem inexplicable, while others seek vengeance. Ackroyd shows a particular interest in poltergeists, perhaps for the chaos they cause. The sightings here range from prehistoric figures to thoroughly modern ghosts on motorways. Ackroyd even includes dog ghosts. It is a dipping-into book, that in its quiet way contains much food for thought. Why did a window repeatedly show

figures walking through a churchyard, something seen from no other vantage point? Or a ghost's eyes not move? These extracts are told in a low-key fashion that ultimately becomes more unsettling than horror-genre hysterics.

**FANTASY READER**

**I SHALL WEAR MIDNIGHT**

Terry Pratchett

Doubleday \$49.95

If you don't know Terry Pratchett by now, consider him the fantasy Wodehouse. If you do know, 'nuff said. *I Shall Wear Midnight* is set in his Discworld series, within the subset devoted to witch Tiffany Aching. Tiffany's story began when, as a child, she discovered her witch-powers. Now, four books later, she is coming of age, becoming a young woman. It might sound like the stuff of genre teen fantasy, but Pratchett is far too funny and clever for that. A Witchfinder General arrives, and suddenly Tiffany is fighting for her life. The book thus neatly crosses over from the upper teenage to the adult readership. Fantasy is used here to tell some sharp, universal truths, chief of which is the uncomfortable nature of being human. As usual, the Nac Mac Feegles—Scots fairies behaving badly—continue their merry reign of comic chaos. Pratchett might have Alzheimer's, but his verbal facility continues unaffected. Lovely stuff.

**FASHIONISTA**

**WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU WEARING?**

Michi

Penguin \$29.95

The Michi blog has been affording delight to intelligent fashion followers for over five years. This second associated book is a companion to the first, *Like I Give a Frock*. Michi's persona is typically irreverent, casting a trained fashion gaze over the trends. Since fashion is primarily a visual feast, her words have been always accompanied by exquisite Kat Macleod illustrations. Here Michi presents a dictionary of fashion-speak. The reader will learn what galloon means, served with a dash of sarky opinion. Fascinator is defined as 'proof that not everyone owns a mirror'. Cheap, we learn, is pronounced crap. Hidden behind the wit is some sound fashion advice, as when under the word criminal we find double denim and skorts listed. If there is more than one fashionista in the family try also Fifi Lapin's *What Shall I Wear Today?* (Sceptre, \$30), which is like Michi as an haute couture rabbit, or Janie Bryant's *The Fashion File* (Grand Central, \$45) by the *Mad Men* designer.

style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/> <span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>BUSY PERSON</b></span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
♦</p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/> <span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>THE SLOW GUIDE TO MELBOURNE</b></span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Simone Egger and Martin Hughes</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Affirm 29.95</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
♦</p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/> <span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">'I really have to slow down in 2011', goes the refrain. Well, take them at their word, with this book, just released in a second edition. The theme is quality of life, experienced locally. Just because a pleasure is inexpensive does not mean it has to be cheap as well. The book considers sensory happiness, experienced at leisure. While some of the options presented might not suit everyone (like the Ukelele Collective) there is enough variety presented here for most people to find their particular groove. Unusual Melbourne sights include Marybyrnong river cruises, or the Museum of Printing. The book is also enlivened by short interviews with genuinely interesting characters, such as the Urban Honey farmer (employing 20,000 worker bees). It is a dip-into text, a browsers' delight. And usefully it is also light enough to pop into a backpack for a slow day sightseeing around Melbourne.</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
♦</p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Also useful for: the retrenched, the glum and the new arrival in Melbourne town</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
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<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>GROWING OLD DISGRACEFULLY</b></span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
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<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>BLOOD, SWEAT & BEERS: OZ ROCK FROM THE AZTECS TO ROSE TATTOO</b></span><br /> Murray Englehart</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">HarperCollins \$35.00</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
♦</p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Englehart has previously written the best-selling story of AC/DC. Now he details their brothers-in arms, the bands who comprised the raw and raucous beast that was oz rock. The genre was home-grown, rough as guts, and typified by Billy Thorpe and Rose Tattoo. None would ever be as huge as Acca Dacca, but they created immense vital fun. Englehart was lucky enough to interview the key players over the years, all hard-bitten and hard-living men. What he presents here is something uniquely Australian, which anywhere else would have made the musos multi-millionaires. There are some great anecdotes here, and some unforgettable personalities are drawn. It can be read equally for the gross-out passages, and for nostalgic memories of a good time getting wrecked. But Englehart does end on a sad note. Though key bands like the Angels and X are still performing, he considers the genre of oz rock is effectively dead. So are many of the performers in this book.</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
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<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Also useful for: the family rockpig</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
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<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>THE LITERARY READER</b></span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"/>  
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<span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;"><b>THE PENGUIN BOOK OF

THE OCEAN

James Bradley

Penguin \$35.00

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The constant literary reader is as hard to buy for as the relative who claims they never need anything. The Franzen fan may despise anything Booker; Jane Austen readers will not necessarily warm to Winton. Under these circumstances, an anthology can be a safe bet, and what could be more suitable to Australians than the sea? Whilst any selection for a theme anthology is naturally personal, Bradley casts his net widely. Australians appear, but also the best of overseas writing talent. Of course an extract from *Moby Dick* has been chosen, but also Nam Le's "The Boat". Poetry also features, and non-fiction, arranged judiciously. Poet Emily Ballou appears between James Cook and Charles Darwin. Whilst due space is given to the classics, lesser-known writers, more unusual voices also appear. Owen Chase survives a whale attack; William Beebe explores with the bathysphere. The range of sub-topics displayed here includes ecology and the economics of merchant shipping. A fine, discerning read.

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Also useful for: the beach holidaygoer, the yachtie

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**HAPPY GARDENER**

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**THE ROSE**

Jennifer Potter

Atlantic \$59.99

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Devoted gardeners are hard to please in the gift department. They tend to have all the garden tools they need, and turn up their nose at seeds they haven't selected. On the other hand, there are few people who don't love a rose, even if secretly. This lavishly-illustrated book comprises a history of the rose, from its wild beginnings to modern hybrid market. Potter shows how the flower has exerted an enduring fascination for humanity. Fossil roses are millions of years old, but the first recorded image is found in a Minoan fresco. How the rose came to be developed remains a horticultural mystery that is only now beginning to be revealed. Roses traveled from China to Europe and America, in a constant process of metamorphosis. Humans altered their form; and they in turn influenced us profoundly. Potter's extensive account considers plant genetics, the language of flowers, and the rose as artistic theme. The stories of rose devotees like Vita Sackville-West and David Austin are similarly compelling. A beautiful, informative book.

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**THE UNEXPECTED XMAS GUEST**

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**THE HAIRY BIKERS' 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS**

Si King & Dave Myers

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◆</p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"> <span style="font-family: times new  
roman,times,serif;">Eek! The shops are closed, the turkey is on the barbie. Now a stray orphan  
has been added to the family feast. Will they sit there sadly while everyone else unwraps  
presents? You could give them an emergency present, like soap, but better is a Christmassy  
book. Sadly most books for the season are vomit-inducing. This one will actually make the  
reader hungry. Two of the most down-to-earth TV cooks serve up a selection of nosh to take the  
foodlover to Epiphany. The emphasis is on stress-free cooking, including gravlax, coq au vin  
and fudge. The bikers even include suggestions re leftovers on Boxing Day. Of course it tends  
to hearty Northern hemisphere fare, but there are hot weather foods, such as kebabs or the gin  
and tonic sorbet (not for the designated driver).The recipes are road-tested, and served with  
lashings of good humour. Just note the book isn't released until the 21<sup>st</sup>, but you  
can wait two days, surely?</span></p> <p style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"> ◆</p> <p  
style="margin-bottom: 0cm;"> <span style="font-family: times new roman,times,serif;">Also  
suitable for: the office Kris Kringle, the foodie.</span></p>