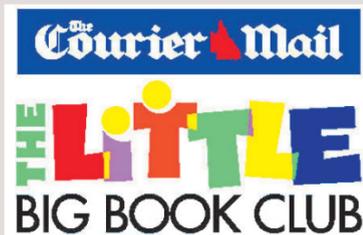


fiction reviews

kid flicks



The daddy of all family jokes

Fran Metcalf

WHEN Katrina Germein decided to write her fifth children's book, she didn't need to look beyond her own four walls for the subject matter.

My Dad Thinks He's Funny is a picture book full of the silly, eye-rolling one-liners that her father-in-law and husband daily dish out to her three children.

Quips like this: "When Mum says 'I'm going to jump in the shower', Dad says, 'That sounds dangerous'."

And "Whenever I say 'I'm hungry', Dad says 'Hello Hungry, pleased to meet you.'"

Then there are old familiar jokes that many of us have heard from family relatives when we were growing up like "When people say 'Would you like sugar?', Dad says 'I'm sweet enough.'"

Then there's "Whenever I go swimming, Dad says 'Try not to get wet!'"

Funnily enough, it is Germein's sister-in-law who cracks the most dad jokes in her family. "She's a really great aunty," Germein says, "but she's a woman in her 30s and I said to her, 'You shouldn't be making dad jokes at your age!'"

But, along with my father-in-law, who is very good with the dad jokes, we have a good collection of them in our family."

Germein began jotting down the dad jokes in her house and came up with a book full of quips.

And her home-grown idea, coupled with generous illustrations by Tom Jellett, has hit the mark for families across the country - the book's first print run of 10,000 sold out late last year and a second batch has been published.

"If it's not their father, it might be their crazy aunt or their mum," Germein says. "There's somebody in every family who has a few of these jokes and the good thing is that they seem to go across ages."

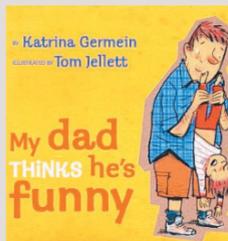
"I thought we should enjoy it while they (children) still think we're funny."

"We only have a couple more years before they start groaning and rolling their eyes." Based in Adelaide, Germein is mother to a 10-year-old boy and eight-year-old twins who are often used as sounding boards and critics for her rough draft versions.

With a background in early childhood education, Germein runs therapeutic groups for children who have experienced domestic violence when she's not writing children's books.

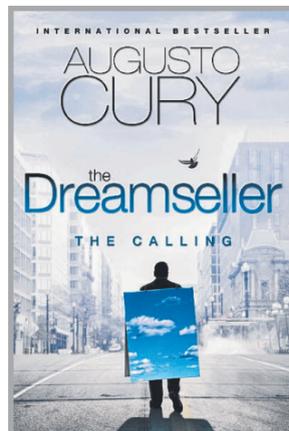
Her first book, *Big Rain Coming*, set in a remote community in northern Australia where everyone is waiting for rain, won the Washington (State) Children's Choice Picture Book award in 2002 and was also voted a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book.

My Dad Thinks He's Funny is a Little Big Book Club selection for May. For more enjoyable selections, go to www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au



The Dreamseller: The Calling

Augusto Cury
Simon & Schuster, \$19.99

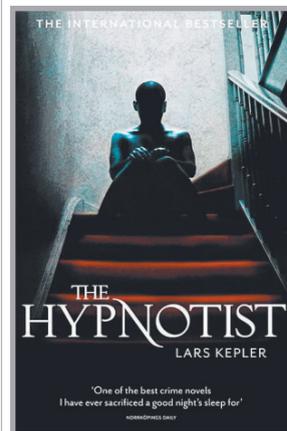


AUGUSTO Cury is a psychiatrist, scientist and best-selling author in his native Brazil. Most of his books have been non-fiction within the mind, body, spirit genre. This time Cury has woven his ideas into a novel, a fable about a mysterious man who calls himself "the dreamseller". The story begins with a man on top of a building in a nameless metropolis threatening to jump. As the crowds gather, a dishevelled man cuts his way through the red tape and talks the man into choosing life over death. Then, in the words of Jesus, he exhorts the man to "come, follow me". This first disciple takes over the narration and chronicles his journey with the dreamseller. He looks on as others are called to join them - the alcoholic, the petty criminal, the miracle-man, the obsessive-compulsive, the anorexic catwalk model, and himself the weary intellectual. Together they eschew the trappings of modern life, sleeping under bridges and accepting food from strangers. They listen and try to learn from their master, never sure what the long-term plan is. Along the way, they discover that without dreams, whatever beast it is that chases us will eventually catch us. They stand by while the dreamseller challenges societal notions of female beauty, the mind-numbing perils of technology, and excesses that cause us to die prematurely in our minds. The problem with this modern-day Jesus and his message to the faceless executives, bankers and brokers "clouded in tranquillisers" is that what he is selling is not new. Cury's style is exuberant and well-intentioned but the theme is simplistic to the point of naivete.

Mary Philip

The Hypnotist

Lars Kepler
Blue Door, \$32.99

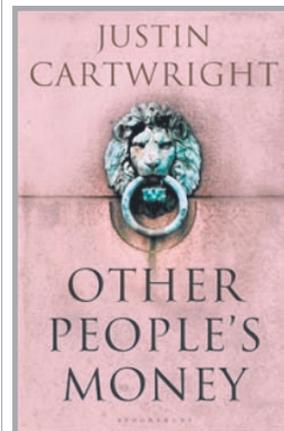


ONE day, in the manner of Sherlock Holmes, I should like to write a small monograph on the subject of literary translation. What a tightrope that must be to walk, particularly today when literature as product is under as much pressure as it has ever been. Economic pressure also engenders some other odd effects, such as fictional authorship, and these two streams of endeavour come together between the covers of this novel. Lars Kepler is the nom de plume of Alexander and Alexandra Coelho, each of whom has critical acclaim in their native Sweden. This is their first book together and they plan on a long series. They obviously have a picture of Henning Mankell above their computer. And, like many other authors in the rich vein of contemporary Scandinavian mysteries and police procedurals, they have come up with an interesting premise. The entire family Ek has, it seems, been stabbed to death. But one daughter is missing and a boy, who everyone thought was dead, hovers on the brink in intensive care. Detective Inspector Joona Linna has the bright idea of using a hypnotist to see if the traumatised boy can give any clue which might save his sister. This clever mystery has been a bestseller in Sweden and the movie rights have been sold, so there's no doubting its commercial success. So why does it seem just a little clumsy? Collaborative authorship or unimaginative translation? Maybe just post-Stockholm syndrome. These days it is just about worth learning Swedish to find out.

Ian Barry

Other People's Money

Justin Cartwright
Bloomsbury, \$32.99



JUSTIN Cartwright, short-listed for the Booker for *In Every Face I Meet* in 1995, has thrown out his magic carpet and given us a true-untrue story of the tinsel lives caught, like flies, in the webs of snobbery, old money, upwardly mobile opportunists and deluded idealists so brilliantly scarified by Charles Dickens in the 19th century. Stakes are higher, the pace is faster, people are more mobile, the jargon is different but, essentially, little has changed. The Tubal Bank of London is 340 years old, and still family owned. Sir Harry, who presided over the bank before its decline, is dying in his villa in Antibes. His younger son Julian, struggling to recuperate the bank's future from his mistakes in hedge funds and other faulty investments, secretly puts the bank up for sale while diverting money from various family assets. Meanwhile, sub-plots involving Sir Harry's young (semi-estranged) wife, her elderly thespian ex-husband, a cub reporter for a small Cornish newspaper and its anti-capitalist editor, all work against the main plot to bring down the house of Tubal. The ending disappoints each of the main players, and we are reminded that this story could have turned out several different ways. The present tense narration, given the multiple points of view and intrusions of the narrator's voice, jars; the characters lean dangerously towards stereotype; and the plot directs the characters, not allowing them to become fully fledged, moving representations of fallible humanity. The genius of Dickens is lacking in this latter-day, over-controlled satire.

Christina Houen

Please Look After Mother

Kyung-sook Shin
Hachette, \$32.99



KYUNG-SOOK Shin grew up in a remote province in Korea and has achieved outstanding literary success in her own country, winning major national prizes. I hope this charming book allows her voice to be heard here, as we in the West can only be enriched by entering into the lives of ordinary Koreans and finding the similarities in their daily struggles and triumphs. So-nyo is the central character, a wife and mother nearing 70, whose health is poor after a lifetime of punishing physical work to keep her family fed and educated. Just as it is difficult for young parents in today's West to identify with the incredible sacrifices made by older generations of women who constantly put others' needs before their own, So-nyo's adult children are baffled by their mother's refusal to consider herself. This all dramatically changes when So-nyo goes missing in a crowded Seoul train station when her non-attentive husband pushes on to a commuter train and does not notice that his wife is left behind. When their search for her is fruitless, her husband and children look back on her life and slowly begin to realise that she, too, had her dreams and desires, her resentments and rages. One after another, they roam the streets of Seoul and rifle through her humble home, remembering incidents which would have shed light on this woman - if they had only been listening and watching. As much a commentary on the changing face of Korean society as an absorbing story about a woman's modest tenure on this Earth, this book will reward those who can appreciate its honesty and lack of pretension.

Mary Philip

REVIEW: FICTION

IF YOU ever had any illusions about the aspirations of the tabloid press, *The Spoiler* will shatter them for you. Mordantly funny, the story revolves around an interview between 80-year-old Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Honor Tait and young, hopeful Tamara Sim, who compiles lists about celebrity disasters, such as bad-hair days or cellulite accumulation, for the gossip pages of a British entertainment supplement. Tait has interviewed historical figures such as Picasso, Franco and Hitler, and was present at the liberation of the prisoners of Buchenwald by the Americans. Sim knows nothing about history - and cares even less - refusing to read Tait's newly released book, upon which she is supposed to base her interview. Instead she is determined to "dig the dirt" on her subject, for which



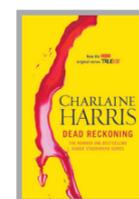
The Spoiler
Annalena McAfee
Harvill
Secker, \$32.95

purpose she stalks her like a bloodhound. Sim's lack of understanding about practically everything provides the humour in the story. While the first half of this novel is hilarious, interest begins to pall because the women are such unlovely characters. Caught up in their own egos, they become as irrelevant as the gossip columns - a mere distraction from a world which could be going to hell in a handbasket.

Cheryl Jorgensen

REVIEW: FICTION

HUMOUR and horror find a perfect balance in the latest misadventures of endearing telepathic barmaid, Sookie Stackhouse. Prolific Charlaine Harris has delivered her 11th novel in the series, the base for cult television show *True Blood*. Spare a thought for Sookie - she seems to be a magnet for violence - who soon finds herself the victim of a firebombing at Merlotte's bar. Mystery runs deep in the town of Bon Temps, Louisiana, which just happens to be home to a varied population of humans and the supernatural world - vampires, werewolves, shape shifters, witches, fairies, elves, and the odd demon. Sookie narrates the saucy novel in the first person, a device that allows Harris to explain background information and help readers new to the series (like me) keep up with her blockbuster plot.



Dead Reckoning
Charlaine Harris
Orion, \$29.99

Secrets are revealed as we learn just how Sookie came by her telepathic powers. Sookie, who has many male admirers of the human and un-dead variety, has a sex life that is off the charts with hunky vampire lover Sheriff Eric Northman. But old flame Bill is back (yes, he's a vampire too) and a love triangle is looming. A warning to Twilight tragics - Harris's heady mix of violence and sex makes this decidedly unsuitable for young adults.

Julia Ross