

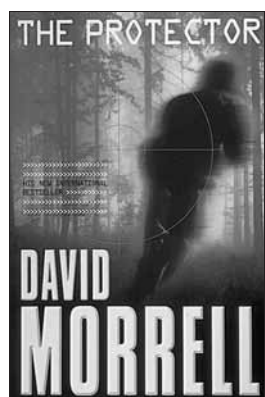


Compiled by SABRINA GOSLING  
Book Selector

During the summer holidays many of us will have more time for leisure reading. The editor thought it an appropriate time to publish an article recommending books for holiday reading, so I have asked various people - the book selectors, public and regional librarians, the systems librarian and one enthusiastic library user - to suggest some titles. They could choose a favourite book from the past year or so, a favourite author, or simply a book or books they strongly recommend. The result is quite a mix, both interesting and varied, so there should be something here for everyone. We hope you find the following selection helpful, and wish you many hours of happy reading.

## My personal favourites...

My first recommendation, **The curious incident of the dog in the night-time** by Mark Haddon, is definitely one of my favourites. It is a strange book but a truly wonderful read. Set in England, it is the story of a teenage boy with Asperger's Syndrome; 15-year-old Christopher Boone loves maths and science and Sherlock Holmes, hates being touched and the colours

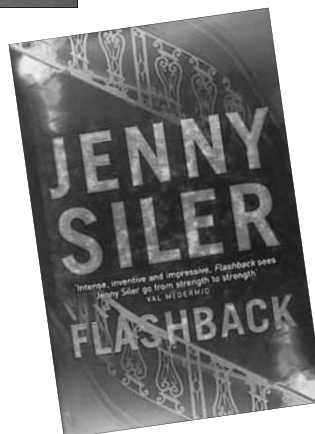
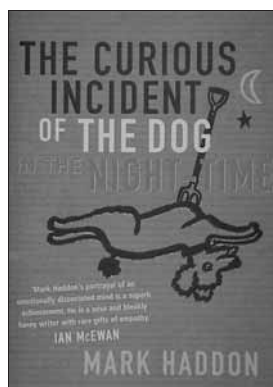


yellow and brown, cannot understand jokes or the motivations for people's behaviour, cannot read other people's facial expressions, and doesn't 'do' chatting. Not the likeliest of narrators one would think, but Haddon has his voice spot on. When he discovers the murdered corpse of Wellington, the neighbour's poodle, he decides to turn detective and find out who killed him, but his investigation uncovers more than he expected. He learns new things about both himself and his family. Although Christopher doesn't understand everything that is going on, he documents it all in this book - accurately and honestly - in a detached, literal style. A summary of the book doesn't do it justice; it is

touching, poignant, original, very funny, and completely unforgettable. Which is why it has won so many awards and remained on bestseller lists so long. Do give it a try, you won't be disappointed.

The second book I've chosen is something a lot less offbeat. It is not a particular favourite of mine but one that I thoroughly enjoyed reading, and would confidently recommend to anyone wanting an enter-

taining action thriller. David Morrell has always been able to tell a good story, and his latest is no exception. **The protector** is a pacy, action-packed and extremely gripping thriller about a top-class bodyguard.



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Cavanaugh and his close protection company are hired to protect a scientist from people who are after the new drug he's created - but all is not as it seems. Morrell has included a lot of 'tradedcraft' in the story, so one can pick up some useful tips like what to do when your car's being rammed, and so on. Of course, I forget it all straightaway, but it does add something extra to the book, something thriller readers will relish.

My third choice is Jenny Siler's compelling fourth novel, **Flashback**. The story begins with the massacre of the nuns in a Burgundy convent, where a young woman called Eve has been living ever since she was found with a gunshot wound in the head and no memory of who she is or where she comes from. The story moves from France to Morocco following Eve as she tries to discover her identity. **Flashback** is a beautifully-written spy thriller, with interesting characters, suspense, action, loads of atmosphere, an intriguing plot, and a strong sense of place. This should satisfy anyone looking for an absorbing thriller to read over the summer holidays.

## Erich Buchhaus

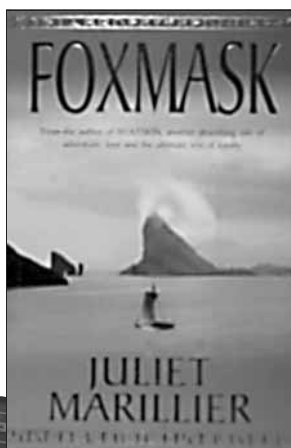
### Book Selector

When asked to suggest books for a good summer read, I just froze in my tracks and went blank. The question that came to mind was, 'What to suggest when there are so many books!' To make it easier, I have decided to concentrate on one genre, namely historical fantasy.

**Wolfskin** is an engaging and riveting story of an early Norse settlement in the Orkney Islands by the author of the acclaimed *Sevenwaters* trilogy, Juliet Marillier. The story centers on young Eyvind, whose main desire is to become a Wolfskin, an elite

order of Viking warriors. He befriends Somerled, a somewhat troubled and ambitious youngster, and eventually finds himself part of a Viking colonising group out to settle in the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland. This fantasy tale is full of adventure, rivalry, loyalty, love and death.

**Foxmask**, its exciting sequel continues the story centering on the children of the characters of the first title, some years later. Thorvald, son of the now banished Somerled, sets out on a journey to find his father. Criedhe, Eyvind's daughter and his good friend Sam join him in his quest. They reach a group of islands known as the Lost Isles where they meet the Long Knife people ruled by a cruel tyrant. It is there that Criedhe meets her future lover and the visionary child/seer known as Foxmask. In an artful blend of history and mythology, with a hint of magic, this book will be popular with



readers of both genres.

Now jumping back to an earlier period, namely ancient Greece, I enjoyed reading **Spartan** (Valerio Massimo Manfredi) telling the story of twin brothers separated from birth by a

cruel Spartan custom. Talos the younger brother, abandoned because of a crippled foot, is rescued and raised by a Helot shepherd. Brithos, his older brother, is schooled into the caste of the warrior elite. Destiny brings the brothers together at the famous battle of Thermopylae, during the famous Persian invasion of the Greek city-states. This is a gripping epic saga of passion and adventure set in ancient Sparta by the author of the bestselling *Alexander* trilogy.

Another title by this same author is **The last legion** set during the declining years of the Roman Empire. It covers the daring exploits of a handful of ex-Roman

legionaries to rescue the 13-year-old emperor, Romulus. It is brilliantly told and extremely entertaining.

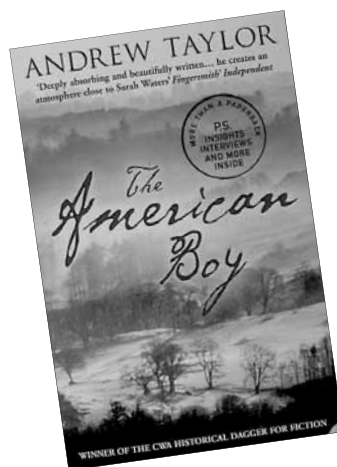
## Alexander van der Poll

### Library user

In selecting my favourite summer reading, three distinctly different titles immediately come to mind.

The first is from the pen of well-known author Andrew Taylor, who so brilliantly evokes the atmosphere of Regency London in **The American boy**.

The eponymous 'boy' is none other than the young Edgar Allan Poe, who features in this historical crime novel as a young boy on a sojourn in England, and who becomes strangely nuclear in this complex plot.



Taylor creates a rich, literary approach to this murder mystery, tinting his work with shades of Dickens, and even a tinge of Allan Poe himself. This is a novel to get thoroughly lost in on those balmy summer evenings, and will be enjoyed by all who enjoy taking their murder with a splash of intellect.

My next selection takes us across the Atlantic to America, in the mid 20th century, and into the strange, rural life of the heroine of William Kowalski's **The adventures of Flash Jackson**. We meet Flash as a vivacious, free-spirited, young girl. However, through extraordinary and fantastic circumstances, we come to know a young woman of quite a different ilk. This lush coming-of-age tale, set over a long, hot summer, is ideal for enjoying on a hammock strung across a shady garden spot.

Lastly, we return to London, this time to the 21st century, for a most enthralling supernatural excursion by one of our most

talented fantasy authors, James Herbert in **Nobody true**.

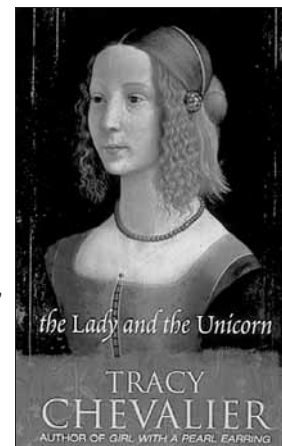
Reminiscent of the 1990 film **Ghost**, Herbert takes a step into a darker, frightening world, where it takes one's own death to measure the happiness of a life spent in blissful ignorance. This one is definitely not to be missed.

## Alta Oosthuizen

### Librarian, Bellville Public Library

In **The lady and the unicorn** Tracy Chevalier (**The girl with the pearl earring**) weaves a rich and satisfying historical tale about the creation of this six-panel tapestry, commissioned by a 15th century nobleman, and woven by a family of Brussel craftsmen. The story is told in alternating chapters by different characters, with fascinating detail about the weaving process and industry: the strict rules of the guilds, the symbolism, the weaving of *millefleurs* (a trademark of Belgian weavers) and the colouring of the wool. It's the type of book that makes you want to know more about the era and wish you could see the tapestries. (In 1841 the tapestries were rediscovered in a French chateau in a neglected state, pieces gnawed by rats and parts cut off for use as tablecloths or curtains. Restored to their former glory, they now hang in the Paris Musée National du Moyen Âge. Some detail of two of the panels is shown on the cover pages of the paperback edition. (On page 42 we feature a set of reproductions in the Central Art Print Collection.)

**Dissolution**, CJ Sansom's debut, is a dark atmospheric medieval mystery set against the background of Thomas Cromwell's zealous dissolution of the large monastic houses in England, ostensibly to root out corruption and idolatry. One of his commissioners is horribly murdered at a Scarnsea monastery and other acts of sacrilege are performed. Cromwell dispatches Matthew Shardlake, an idealistic hunchbacked lawyer, and his young disgraced assistant Mark, to investigate. They uncover unsettling facts, discover more



deaths and soon find themselves in danger. Disillusionment sets in slowly as Shardlake realises one corrupt system is just being replaced with an even harsher, and equally greedy one. Likened by some to Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose* without the philosophical overlay, this is a most enjoyable and intriguing mystery.

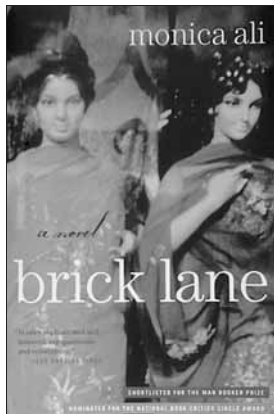
Dit het al mode geword om à la Peter Mayle iewers in die platteland van Frankryk, Spanje of Italië 'n groot ou huis of plasie te kry en te skryf oor jou ervaring van die plek en sy mense. Wel, nou het ons ook 'n skrywer in Provence'. En al sê die literatuurwetenskaplikes wat, ons hou mos eenmaal daarvan om meer van die skrywer agter die boek te wete te kom! In *Die hart van ons huis* vertel Marita van der Vyver op onderhoudende wyse van haar nuwe Franse man en haar groot aangelapte gesin, van haar stryd met die Franse taal, burokrasie en dokters. Sy skryf met deernis en humor, meestal ten koste van haarself. Ek kan my kwalik lekkerder somervakansie-leesstof voorstel!

**Vaselinetjie** van Anoeschka von Meck, die wit dogtertjie wat deur 'n ou barmhartige bruin egpaar as hul eie grootgemaak word, kruip sommer diep in jou hart. Die troetelnaam kry sy van die Vaseline wat haar ouma altyd in haar droë beentjies ingevryf het. Die Welsyn stuur haar ver weg na die kindershuis, waar 'n harder werklikheid haar inwag. Maar sy maak ook vriende: Puck, Killer, Pizzaface en natuurlik Texan. Anoeschka von Meck het self lank in 'n kindershuis gewerk en draai nie doekies om oor wat werklik in so 'n kindershuis gebeur en wat dit kos om te oorleef nie. Die boek word as 'n tienerboek bemark, maar verdien werklik 'n wyer leserspubliek.

## Denise Harris

### Book Selector

I loved Monica Ali's debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) which is recommended as a memorable read. It traces Nazneen's



journey from childhood in Bangladesh. She accepts the marriage her parents arrange with Chanu, an older man who works for the London City Council. Her life in a run-down council flat, surrounded by Bangladeshi neighbours is contrasted with that of her sister, whose life, back home, is on a downward spiral. Nazneen patiently endures her life with Chanu, listening to him pontificate about his education, job prospects and how they should live. Their daughters grow up identifying with British teenage culture and are caught up in a culture clash. Nazneen takes in piecework, starts a love affair and through her affair with Karim, has a brief foray into the world of Islamic extremism. This realistic portrayal of the life of an immigrant family in the Indian diaspora, is moving, and has many comic moments. The complexity of the characters, particularly that of Nazneen, unfolds in quiet and clearly written prose.

Another very enjoyable read is Barbara Trapido's *Frankie & Stankie* (2003), an autobiographical novel about two sisters growing up in Durban in the fifties and sixties. The observations of typical, mostly white, South African attitudes are wonderfully accurate. Interwoven with the personal story are observations on injustices in the society of the time, historical and political events. This is a humorous and entertaining novel.

## Penny Dommissie

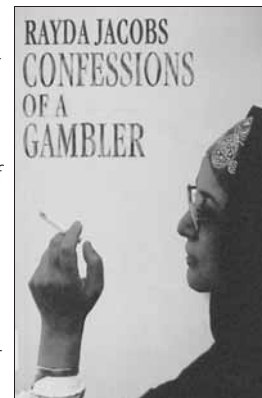
### Librarian, Goodwood Public Library

Interest is sparked immediately by the setting of the novel *The kite runner* by Khaled Hosseini: Afghanistan from the early seventies to the era of the Taliban. Emotions are stirred by elements of jealousy, betrayal, redemption and atonement as the reader is hooked into a story about the relationship between a wealthy landowner, his servant and their two sons. Shocking cowardice by one of the boys when the other is brutally attacked during a

kite running competition leads to an incomprehensible act of treachery from which the plot springs.

A valid criticism is the author's use of unlikely coincidences to promote the plot. However, this flaw is of little consequence in a book which is so compelling it demands to be read in one sitting.

*Confessions of a gambler* by Rayda Jacobs is far more than the dizzy round of one woman's spiral into gambling addiction and the waves of destruction left in its wake. Abeeda's stubborn optimism and colourful intelligence linger on long after the last page has been turned. Universal themes of family ties and friendships set off kilter by divorce, adultery, and AIDS are depicted with such uncanny verisimilitude that at times it is as though one is reading non-fiction.



I posted a copy to family living in England for their local book club. It was received with high praise, especially by the South Africans for whom the perfect dialogue was a nostalgic reminder of home. Although the book deals with potentially depressing themes, the end result is an uplifting story with an illuminating view of South African Moslems, their religion and culture.

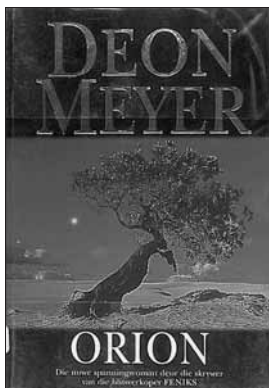
## Pieter Hugo

### Streekbibliotekaris, Beaufort-Wesstreek

Ek weet nie regtig of ek nou die regte ding doen nie. Aanhangers van Deon Meyer het teen hierdie tyd beslis al sy jongste spanningsroman, *Proteus*, gelees. Dis immers al in 2002 gepubliseer. Hulle sal dus ook lankal weet dat dit Meyer se beste uit 'n viertal puik speurromans is. En dit is juis hier waar die probleem inkom. Moet 'n mens nou die lesers wat nog nie vir Meyer ontdek het nie, vertel hoe goed *Proteus* is? Want as jy eers een van sy boeke gelees het, gaan jy beslis die ander ook wil lees. Maar as jy *Proteus* eerste lees, gaan jy dalk net so effens teleurgesteld wees in die eerstes. Nie oor hulle swak is nie, allermens, almal is goed, maar elke volgende een is beter as die vorige.

In *Proteus* het Meyer 'n randkarakter uit

sy vorige roman, **Orion**, gevat en hom as een van die interessantste hoofkarakters in die Afrikaanse spanningsromangenre laat ontwikkel. 'n Mens leer vir Tobela Mpayipheli, oftewel Tiny, in die loop van die roman ken as 'n veel-vlakke mens met besondere karakterdiepte. Meyer slaag daarin om al die belangrike karakters in die boek lewe te gee met 'n diepte van karakterontwikkeling wat 'n mens eerder in goeie literêre werke verwag as in spanningsromans.



**Proteus** is eerstens egter steeds 'n puik spanningsverhaal wat moeilik neergesit kan word. As die storie jou eers gevang het, lees jy omtrent so vinnig soos wat Tiny met die BMW motorfiets oor die vlaktes jaag. Terloops, Meyer slaag daarin om die motorfiets as 'n belangrike karakter, goed, kom ons noem dit eerder 'n belangrike rolspeler, te laat ontwikkel.

En, ten laaste, goeie nuus vir aanhangers van Deon Meyer. Ek het 'n voëltjie hoor fluit dat sy volgende roman alreeds by die uitgewer is.

## Brenda Kyle

### Acquisitions Librarian, Cape Town City Libraries

Crime writers seem to have a particular predilection for developing long-term relationships with the characters they have created - think of Rankin/Rebus; Dibdin/Zen; Leon/Brunetti amongst many others. So it has been a real pleasure over the past two years to discover not one, but two sleuths of outstanding quality, AND both reflecting a society that has been relatively uncharted within the genre until now. They are Henning Mankell's *Kurt Wallander* series set in Sweden, and Karen Fossum's Norwegian detective, Konrad Sejer.

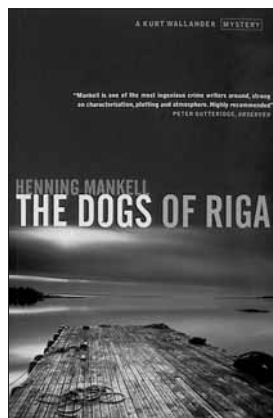
Mankell is an interesting character in his own right. The son of a judge and a librarian (hooray!), he writes both adult and juvenile books as well as plays, and divides his time between Sweden and Mozambique where he is the director of Teatro Avenida in Maputo. Obviously a man with a social conscience, he frequently (but without hectoring), I assure you, incorporates into

his Wallander novels events that demonstrate how prejudice and extreme political views readily escalate into violence.

Wallander is a melancholy, decent policeman, much troubled in his personal life by divorce, the consequent pressures on his relationship with his daughter, and continual guilt over his inability to meet the needs of his increasingly infirm father. In other words, he is real - and not averse to taking refuge in the bottle from time-to-time.

Mankell's well-constructed plots and engrossing police investigations are set in vividly-drawn landscapes whose beauty is starkly at odds with the ferocious violence of the crimes he describes. Be warned - the derangement, perversion and sadism underlying his engrossing plots is not for the faint-hearted.

There are nine Wallander novels, not all yet translated into English, of which seven are now in stock, on order or under review. They are: **Faceless killers** - the murder of an elderly couple on an isolated farm provokes hatred of local refugees; **The dogs of Riga** -



a bizarre murder is linked to political changes in Latvia, and Wallander is reluctantly forced to become involved; **Sidetracked** - a serial killer starts axing and scalping prominent businessmen who appear to share no common links; **The fifth woman** - how are the murders of four nuns and a Swedish tourist in

Algeria linked to that of a car dealer in Ystad?; **One step behind** - Wallander's

trusted friend and colleague, Svedberg, is murdered, and three young people disappear; **The white lioness** - set chronologically before some of the others, Wallander is drawn into a plot to assassinate Nelson Mandela on the eve of the 1994 elections; **Firewall** - international terrorists aim to manipulate the commercial world through cyberspace.

I'm still getting to know Karen Fossum's Konrad Sejer,

another rather melancholic sleuth still in deep, unresolved mourning for his wife and his dog. Fossum's novels inhabit a more local landscape than Mankell's but again, the juxtaposition of the orderly Norwegian social landscape, and the graphic brutality of the crimes is startling. She is particularly adroit at developing nuanced and convincing sub-characters, and through them one gains fascinating insight into how the worldview and social attitudes of Scandinavian people differ from ours in South Africa; a quality of good fiction that I love, especially when it is also highly entertaining.

So far I have only read two Sejer novels, and the opening scene in the first, where a little girl, pushing her doll's pram is stalked by a man in a van, had my hair on end.

In the second a young boy who has run away from a psychiatric hospital is the obvious suspect when an elderly woman is murdered on an isolated farm. The depiction of this boy and the other socially-marginalised characters who are drawn into the mix is excellent.

Number three, **When the devil holds the candle**, is currently being reviewed and ordered - can't wait ...

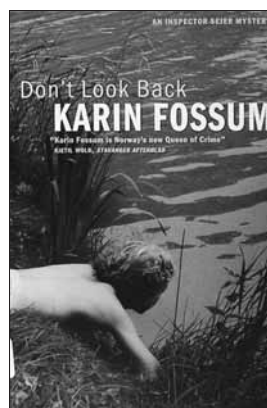
## Johanna de Beer

### Book Selector

Who would have thought that reading about the crime situation in South Africa could be so entertaining and interesting that I have selected **People who have stolen from me** by David Cohen as my most enjoyable read of 2004?

The author, a London-based journalist who grew up in South Africa, localises and personalises his investigation into the current state of crime in the country by focusing on one particular furniture store in the working-class area of Malvern, Johannesburg. Jules Street Furnishers is a family-owned business that over the years

has catered to working class people who buy their furniture and appliances on hire purchase. So much is stolen from the business in the course of the year Cohen covers, that it is a wonder that it still opens its doors for business - armoured trucks ram the windows at night so that organised robbers can gain access, trusted staff collude to defraud the owners, debtors default on



their monthly instalments, potential customers carry away goods under their clothes.

But it is not the scale of criminal activity or the ingenious schemes that remain with the reader - it is the people associated with Jules Street Furnishers who come alive in the most real way possible that each one of them reminds the reader of someone they have met or know. There are the owners, brothers-in-law Harry Sher and Jack Rubin with their packed lunches and jokes in the back office, the ex-carhijackers, Obi and Veli, who now do an honest day's work as debt collectors, Detective Inspector Rich Molepo, a customer at the shop who can't believe it when one of the shop managers is brought into the police station, charged with theft, and Shane the man from the security company who says that crime is good for his business.

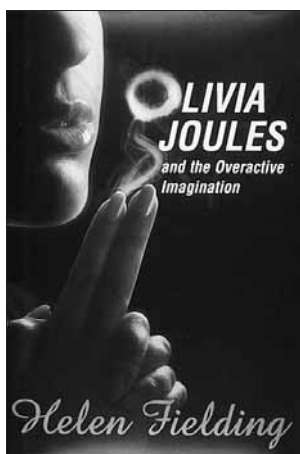
## Nazeem Hardy

Librarian, Heideveld Public Library

**O**livia Joules and the overactive imagination is the first novel from Helen Fielding since her genre blazing Bridget Jones' novels. As the first female James Bond, Olivia Joules is far removed from the concerns that preoccupy much of the heroines of the chick lit novels that made Helen Fielding famous. Instead, Olivia Joules is an ass-kicking, fist-chopping spy that is concerned most of the time with saving the Western world from an imminent terrorist attack (according to her imagination).

Olivia Joules (not her real name) is a freelance journalist for glossy magazines but she has higher ambitions. She wants to cover more than just beautiful people in exotic locations and so her fevered imagination sees clues to more than just what is on the surface, leading her into situations that usually threaten her job.

While on assignment in Los Angeles, she meets the gorgeous millionaire and film producer, Pierre Ferramo. Olivia suspects though that there is more to Pierre than meets the eye and immediately finds clues that make her believe that he might possibly be a terrorist intent on causing havoc in the West. It is this question that occupies



most of the action throughout the novel as Olivia looks for clues from Los Angeles to the Caribbean and Africa. In between she finally becomes a spy, gets recruited by MI6, finds Osama Bin Laden (she thinks) and also finds time to fall in love.

Although the novel goes on too long, it is still a pleasant read (especially the first half). It does not require much concentration and even though it is a light read it also poses some profound questions on topical issues, as is the case in most Helen Fielding novels. As a bonus, it is also very funny in places. With all this on offer, could one ask for more in a holiday read?

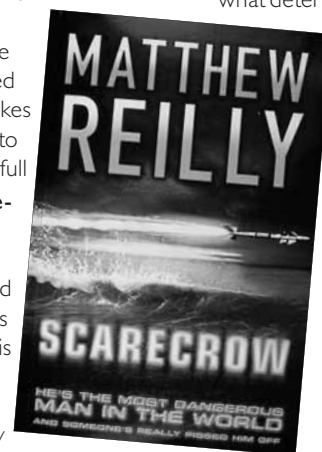
## Bradley Meyer

Systems Librarian

**C**autions! Do not read this book outdoors, you will end up sunburnt. If you do, wear sunblock when you pick up this book, as Matthew Reilly's signature style of suspense wrapped up in non-stop action makes this page-turner difficult to put down. For a lazy day full

of action **Scarecrow**, the third book featuring Shane Schofield and company, is a must read. His fans who have read the previous **Scarecrow** books **Ice station** and **Area 7**, are in for a massive shock as Reilly ignores, bends and breaks one of the prime rules of action novels/movies. (I won't reveal which one...)

In his previous books **Scarecrow** has to save/protect something or someone. In this latest book, (may there be more to come), Shane is the target and has to stay alive while trying to figure out who wants him dead and why. When you have paramilitary organisations and the world's most feared bounty hunters slash killers after you it helps to have friends who can point you in the right direction. The Black Knight, premier bounty hunter is a new character introduced by Reilly who gives Shane a run for his money and a sort of one-upmanship ensues. The interaction between these two characters leads to memorable action sequences, Reilly does not believe in an



action scene; he has action sequences. Enjoy this book indoors - if you get burnt, I warned you...

In this latest Elvis Cole PI novel, **The last detective** by Robert Crais, Ben Chenier, his girlfriend Lucy's son, is snatched from Cole's home. The kidnapers call to say they don't want money, only retribution for a crime they claim Cole committed in the past.

We learn more about Elvis Cole's past in this book, who he was, what shaped him, what motivates him. It is amazingly similar to that of Joe Pike, his partner. We see how different people cope with adversity and how their characters are shaped by their history, or how the characters determine their actions. The opening scene of Pike hunting a rogue Alaskan brown bear, the largest predator on land, also gives us insight into what shapes and motivates him, what determines his self-image.

**The last detective** provides Robert Crais with a platform to give his characters greater dimension, make them more real without compromising a good plot and story line. It also includes the main character of one of his other books, Carol Starkey from **Demolition angel**, now in the juvenile section of the Californian Police department. These two detectives, police and private, in their own unorthodox way go about trying to find Ben and clearing Cole's name, while fighting interference from Ben's high-powered rich father and the FBI. With the right break, they might succeed.

## Ethney Waters

Boekkeurder

**'E**k was agt jaar oud toe my ma oom Danie huis toe gebring het. Agt jaar. Vandat ek agt was, tot met 16 jaar, was my lewe...anders. Dis al woord waaraan ek kan dink om my lewe te beskryf. Anders...'

So begin die ware verhaal van Anna of Stom Anna in **Dis ek, Anna** deur Elbie Lötter soos sy haarself begin noem het nadat sy deur haar stiefpa seksuele gemoelsteer was en vir jare nooit 'n woord daarvoor gerep het nie. Anna se stilswye word uiteindelik verbreek toe sy haar stiefpa by die swembad betrap waar hy seksuele spelletjies speel met haar

babasussie, Carli. En selfs toe eindig Anna se hel nie, want haar moeder weier om haar te glo. 'n Swanger Anna bevind haar haweloos toe haar moeder haar verwerp en die huis belet. 'n Liefdevolle egpaar neem haar onder hul vlerk en sy besluit om haar baba te laat aanneem.

Anna se verhaal is 'n uifers pynlike een, en word vertel deur terugflitse terwyl sy op pad is na Bloemfontein om haar te gaan wreek op die man wat byna haar lewe verwoes het. Dis 'n verhaal wat skok en die leser met afgryse vervul, want jy wonder hoe dit moontlik is dat een mens se lewe met soveel pyn gevul kan wees. Maar dis ook 'n verhaal wat troos, omdat Anna ten spyte van alles tog anderkant uitgekom het. Sy het 'n sukses van haar lewe gemaak en is vandag getroud met twee kinders, wat al vroeg ingelig is oor seks. Beslis 'n boek wat iedereen moet lees, want behalwe die besonderse waarde van die teks self, bevat die boek ook 'n addisionele hoofstuk oor kindermolestering: hoe om dit te herken en hoekom ma's seksuele molestering ontken of toesmeer. Verdere leesbronne oor seksuele molestering tesame met 'n lys van tolvrye nommers word ook verskaf. Definitief 'n noemenswaardige publikasie deur Tafelberg Uitgewers wat gestalte gee aan die wêreld van die seksueel-misbruikte kind.

Elbie Lötter is die skrywer se skuilnaam.



White Prophet to prevent his fate taking place. And yet more and darker dreams plague Thick, the servant, as the journey progresses. Dreams filled with beating wings and terrible voices, terrifying those around him. They are not eagerly awaited, however, nor is their terrible quest, and they must adapt to a situation far different from anything they could have imagined. With wit and skill, and an assassin's stealth, Tom has to fulfil his destiny with choices only he can make and changes only he can work. Aided by his assassin-mentor Chade, Thick the servant, and the unlikely aid of his skill-possessing daughter, the journey is made believable and incredibly exciting.

The author balances the machinations of power politics and courtly intrigue with the delicacies of human relationships. Fitz's relationships with the court develop in an intriguing fashion, which satisfied this reader on a number of levels. The characters are believable, making choices throughout the series in line with their expectations rather than having the plot dictate their actions.

## Margaret Iskandar

### Book Selector

Think of the archetypal private eye of old: a tough, cynical, wisecracking, hard-drinking man, walking the mean streets of some large city, encountering murder and mayhem - and the odd

seductive blonde. Now picture a private detective who's as far away from that image as you can possibly get. (Incidentally, she's also about as far as you can get from the young, glamorous, sex-and-shopping-obsessed heroines of glitz and many chick lit titles.) Her name is Precious Ramotswa, and you'll find her at the No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency in Gaborone, Botswana, drinking rooibos tea. Mma Ramotswa is middle-aged, plump (or traditionally built, as she likes to describe herself), shrewd and compassionate. A dignified woman, she treats others with old-fashioned courtesy. She has had troubles and sorrows in her life and by Western standards, she is poor, yet she generally considers herself fortunate and happy. The author, Alexander McCall Smith, a professor of medical law, was born in Zimbabwe but has spent most of his life in Scotland. However, at one stage he worked at the University of Gaborone, and Botswana and its people clearly made a favourable impression on him. His first title about Mma Ramotswa was a modest publication, presumably expected to have limited sales. Instead readers took it to their hearts. The success of the series has grown and the books have become critically acclaimed international bestsellers. The titles, in order of appearance, are: **The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency**, **Tears of the giraffe**, **Mortality for beautiful girls**, **The Kalahari Typing School for Men**, **The full cupboard of life**, and the recently published **In the company of cheerful ladies**. These are not tightly-plotted whodunits. Mma Ramotswa deals with human problems more often than outright crimes (particularly in the later titles), and even these tend to take a backseat to developments in her own life and the lives of those around her. But the thoroughly decent, likable main characters, affectionately portrayed, the wit and humour, which is clever but never spiteful, and the vividly-evoked settings make these books a sheer delight and perfect for relaxed, happy summer reading.

## André Davids

### Librarian, Avondale Library

**F**ool's fate, the third and conclusive title in the epic *Tawny man* series by Robin Hobb follows on the trials and tribulations of Fitzchivalry Farseer and his Fool, the White Prophet. The saga continues as they change the fates of the world and the Six Duchies. As Tom Badgerlock, he sails towards Aslevjal to fulfil his part in the capture of Icefyre's head, thus sealing Dutiful's union with Princess Elliana, and bringing peace between the Six Duchies and the Out Islands. Fitz, however, has a secondary role; he must work with the

