

***The Emporium of Imagination* by Tabitha Bird**

A book that encompasses grief in a way that is warm, deeply real, and magic. If a book was a hug or a boxing bag, this is it. It has a Narnia-wardrobe-in-a-country-town vibe. It is a place to heal, to cry, to scream and to remember.

I loved it! Tabitha has moved in leaps and bounds in her writing. It is beautifully real and raw, yet polished. It is kind of like an uncut diamond in a ring – it has beauty all of its own.

It was an easy read, yet covers a topic (grief) that everyone will encounter at some point in life, with poise.

If Tabitha came here with a Journal and some Midnight Muffins in a box – I would be ‘in’ hands down.

Sarah-Jane

***The Single Ladies of Jacaranda Retirement Village* by Joanna Nell**

Two school friend re-unite, unexpectedly, after 50 years. Peggy at 79 has a very sedate lifestyle, whereas Angie is very flamboyant. Peggy is also attracted to a handsome widower.

I want to book into this retirement Village! You are never too old to be young again. Everyone needs a friend like Angie in old age – “Just release and let go.”

It’s funny. It challenges our idea of what old age is and what it can be if you are willing to change. At times, things from the past should be left there.

Judy

***Home Before Dark* by Riley Sager**

“What was it like, living in that house? Maggie Holt is used to such questions. Twenty-five years ago, she and her parents, Ewan and Jess, moved into Baneberry Hall, a rambling Victorian estate in the Vermont woods. They spent three weeks there before fleeing in the dead of night, an ordeal Ewan later recounted in a nonfiction book called *House of Horrors*. Maggie doesn’t believe a word of it.”

Maggie inherits the estate after her father’s death. Wanting no part of it, she prepares it for sale. As she experiences strange occurrences, the story explores human emotions and reaction.

Definitely worth the effort to persevere. Adeptly crafted. Neither predictable nor fantastic.

A good read for a sceptic (not me normally). I found it intriguing and believable.

“Every house has a story to tell and a secret to share.”

Camille

**Agent Sonya by Ben Macintyre**

*This true-life spy story is about the woman code-named "Sonya." Over the course of her career, she was hunted by the Chinese, the Japanese, the Nazis, MI5, MI6, and the FBI—and she evaded them all. Her story reflects the great ideological clash of the twentieth century—between Communism, Fascism, and Western democracy—and casts new light on the spy battles and shifting allegiances of our own times. (ED)*

This book tells about being a secret agent in Britain, Germany and other countries, before and between the two great wars, when communism was starting.

It told so much about the history of communism, the Nazis, Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union, amongst other political topics.

It is a true story, very interesting, and easy to read.

Suzanne

**Red Lead by Roland Perry**

The HMAS *Perth* was sunk by Japanese naval forces. This is the story of the men who survived and of Red Lead, the ship's cat.

This is a story of extraordinary courage and love - and this describes the cat well. It's a story of mateship in the most difficult circumstances.

This book was a history lesson for me. I knew of the fall of Singapore and of Changi, but didn't know any of the history of the battles around Java.

Judy

**Bitter Wash Road by Garry Disher**

A policeman is appointed to a quiet country town, which soon reveals an underbelly of corruption, paedophilia, murder and cover-ups at all levels.

Fact-paced and well written in Disher's authoritative style. Combines the best and worst of the exploits of our "law keepers".

If you have ever had suspicions about some members of the police force and have followed the exposés of corruption over the years, then you will love this one.

Pam

**The Friendship Highway: two journeys in Tibet by Charlie Carroll**

A story from Charlie's perspective about his journeys to china.

Very well written and an easy read for the hard topic of the book.

I was completely clueless about how horrible China was and is to Tibet. Absolutely Blown Away!

You would like this book if you have an interest in China or Tibet, want to hear someone's obsessive love for a country, or love travel.

Cindy

***The Pearl Thief* by Fiona McIntosh**

A story about a Jewish family caught up in the war and the aftermath in the following decades.

I loved the book. I found myself reflecting back to the story the following week, after finishing the last page. It would make a great movie.

A good mix of historical fiction, including war crime, war history, suspense and a touch of romance. The main character is intensive and so very intelligent.

I have to admit to having both the paper version and the audiobook at my fingertips. I found myself favouring the audiobook as I love the different accents used. That made the experience more authentic for me.

Debbie

***You Love Me* by Caroline Kepnes**

*"Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive."*

Tangled webs lurk in every page of this psychological thriller. The 'hero', Joe Goldberg, tries to re-start his former 'shady' life in a quiet isolated community. He presents as the 'perfect man' to troubled librarian, Mary Kay, and is determined to win her love and make her his own.

Just when it seems Joe's ambitions and dreams are coming true, tragedy and evil conspire to bring them crashing down every time.

Cleverly written from the workings of Joe's mind and based on his assumptions of the thoughts of others. Exhausting.

Pam

***When All Is Said* by Anne Griffin**

(In an Irish pub) Maurie spends an evening reminiscing, and proposing a toast to (five) significant people in his life.

I enjoyed this book because I loved hearing the stories of Maurie's life, and what shaped him and his life.

It is different. I love reading people's stories - experiences and interactions of a life, reflecting on a life, regrets and good things.

Enjoyable and engaging

Anne

***The Bone Code* by Kathy Reichs**

Kathy Reich's heroine, forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan, is once again on the trail of a ruthless killer.

With little to work with except badly decomposed corpses, Tempe doggedly pursues the limited evidence until her instincts start to yield snippets of information.

Death masks from the 1800s, genetic coding, exhumations and US-Canadian co-operation with law enforcement, eventually start to strip away the clever concealments and throw light on an opportunistic scheme.

References to the Covid19 pandemic and the development of vaccines make for a chilling read.

Pam

***The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen**

A Vietnamese viewpoint of communism and the Vietnam War, seen through the eyes of 3 great friends. Explores the aftermath of war and the resulting dislocation.

Very well written with effective use of satire and humour. It illustrates the effects of the war and then the resulting dislocation and disillusion, and the effects on friendship.

Many of the issues raised are applicable in so many other areas, such as loss of human rights in autocratic regimes.

This book had a profound effect on me. I recall it often when many international affairs are discussed.

Diana

***The Great Escape From Woodlands Nursing Home* by Joanna Nell**

Three elderly residents, previously unknown to each other, have been placed in care – “short term” – by their families. Hattie broke her hip in a fall (defending her tree); Walter is forgetful and unsteady on his feet; Murray is dying and his devoted wife can no longer care for him at home.

This is another beautiful story from the mind (and the keyboard) of Joanna Nell. I hope there are more to come. It proves that you are never too old to make new friends, or for love and adventure.

I would like the address of this nursing home! If I am put into residential care before I am ready to go, I hope there are people like Hattie, Walter and Murray to help me escape.

My 96 year old father was placed in residential care 12 months ago. He won't accept that it was for his own good and has been planning his escape ever since.

Judy

***Dead In The Water* by Richard Beasley**

This book is about the mismanagement of the Murray-Darling River system.

Most thinking people would already be aware that a lot of bad things have gone on the Murray-Darling Basin. This reinforces that.

I couldn't imagine someone actually liking this book.

This bloke, from his position of virtual impunity, dishes out vitriol in bulk, on everyone who doesn't share his views.

Without doubt the most disgusting language I have ever seen on paper, whether one agrees with his views or not. (He is anti-everyone, except perhaps rabid greens and the New World Order.)

Never mind not being welcome in my house, he would not be allowed in the front gate!

D.S.