



The Tari-Kākā/Khandallah Literary Review

Welcome to the January edition of our monthly newsletter. Our newsletter can also be found online at:
wcl.govt.nz >About >Locations >Khandallah

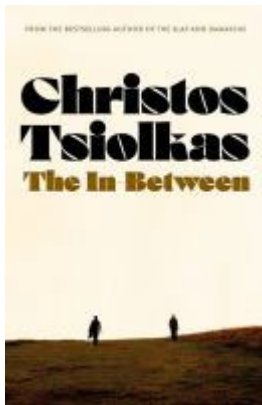
We'll review books, and some music, which appeal to us. Contributions come from library members and staff (basically, anyone who tells us about a Book, Movie or CD they like)

January 2024

"Let's be reasonable and add an eighth day to the week that is devoted exclusively to reading." - Lena Dunham

(Kākā design by Michelle Carlton Wilderness Collection)

[The In-Between](#) by Christos Tsiolkas (Fiction)



A new book from another superb Australian writer. The In-Between is set in post covid lockdowns Melbourne, when Ivan and Perry meet on an internet date (a word Perry finds ridiculous and inappropriate at his age.) Both men are in later middle age and carry with them the baggage and scarring from earlier complicated relationships, in Ivan's case an ex-wife and child, yet they both feel the hope of a new beginning. This candid, tender story explores relationships in many forms from hasty sexual encounters to lasting love, from the thrilling and dangerous to the supportive and safe.

The narration of the story changes between the two men and we learn about their pasts as the story progresses. This is more than a story of dealing with major changes and later in life dating, it takes us on a redemptive journey where the exploration of the character's painful past relationships leads to a transcendent rediscovery of love. Having said that, the author writes, as he always has, with unashamedly earthy descriptions of the body and physical intimacies between lovers that some may find confronting.

The in-between of the title refers to those moments when we are preparing to shift, to change, to grow, but we are not fully done with where and who we are in the present. It's also the place of belonging – or not- of immigrant children like Greek Perry and Serbian Ivan. The final quarter of the novel is told through the perspective of Lena, the daughter of Perry's former lover Gerard. Lena, who has learned of Perry and Gerard's long liaison through her father's diaries and letters, is protective of both her mother's feelings and her father's legacy. It is Lena's response to her mother, Perry, Ivan, to her own partner, Vera, that we see one of the themes of the novel: grace. This is a wise, tender novel with beautiful writing that frequently made me put the book down to reflect on the words.

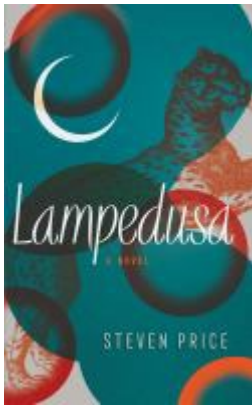
David

[Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World](#) by Helen Czerski



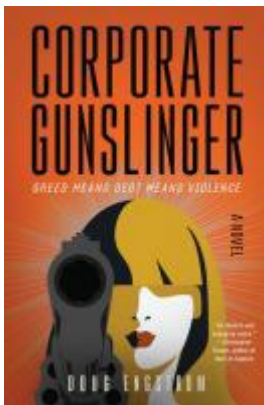
A very readable and very relatable book about the natural engine of the planet, the ocean. The whole eco-system is examined in a moving blend of science and storytelling, from Polynesian explorers and navigators to its underwater denizens, the currents and underwater waterfalls that are all interlinked. It finishes by posing some very pertinent questions about how we value and how we preserve our greatest resource. Angus

[Lampedusa](#) by Steven Price (Fiction)



The Lampedusa of the title is Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, the last in a line of Sicilian aristocrats. Diagnosed with a terminal illness, he ponders what will be left of him when he's gone - he has no children, nor anything left of the vast fortune and estates his family once possessed. So he begins to write *The Leopard* - the novel that will, posthumously, become wildly successful. It's easy for novels about other novels to be heavy-handed, full of overly obvious references to the source, but that's largely avoided here. Instead what pervades both the *Leopard* and this novel is a sense of melancholy, of a protagonist living in a world that's moved past him. The result is a subtle, sensitive story about mortality and legacy. Charlotte

[Corporate Gunslinger](#) by Doug Engstrom



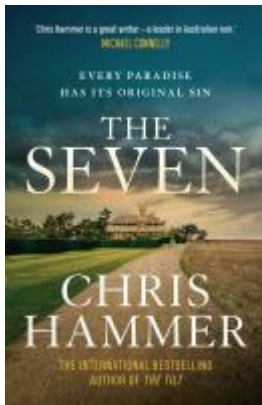
In a world where bankruptcy is not an option, where failure to pay creditors can mean a lifetime of slavery, Kira Clarke has only one hope. She enlists in an insurance corporation's training program for the signing bonus. If she passes, she will become a Corporate Gunfighter, duelling to the death to defend insurance claims. A satirical look at mid-21st century America and their gun obsession taken to the nth degree. Entertaining and thoughtful. Greg

[The Killer](#) by Matz (Graphic Novel)



This series of graphic novels, now filmed with Michael Fassbender as the titular character, is bleak story of a remorseless amoral assassin for hire. The French creators, author Matz and illustrator Luc Jacamon, give a European Noir feel to the story, although most of the events are set in South America. The killer's exploits are fleshed out with accounts of historical events such as Simon Bolivar's revolution, and atrocities like Rwanda, among others, to explain, not to justify his actions. The simple, subtle palette of colours used, olive, khaki, tan, work well with the brutal narrative. Greg

[The Seven](#) by Chris Hammer (Rural Noir/Crime)



The title refers to the seven founding European families who have lorded it over the Australian town of Yuwonderie for the last century, growing in wealth and power. But now, one of their scions is found dead in a ditch and homicide detectives are brought in to investigate. Could the murder be linked to the killing of the victim's friend thirty years earlier or even to the overlooked story of Bessie, a female servant before the Great War? How far will the seven go to keep their secrets?

The seven families made their wealth from a clever irrigation scheme which allowed the dry parched earth they acquired to flourish. The descriptions of the importance of the water and effective systems to use it will resonate with Wellingtonians facing potential water cuts.

This is more than the usual crime thriller or police procedural because of the way the author describes the emotional life of the main characters (particularly Bessie's), their passions, dreams, victories, and losses and how the past influences the present. This is a rich, complex mystery where little is the way it appears at first.

Australian writers own the rural noir genre the way Scandinavian authors created and shaped "Scandi-noir" and Chris Hammer is one of their very best. As one reviewer said it would be unfair to say Hammer is at the top of the crime writing game, he IS the game! David

[The Burned Letter: a New Zealander's Holocaust Mystery: A Memoir](#)

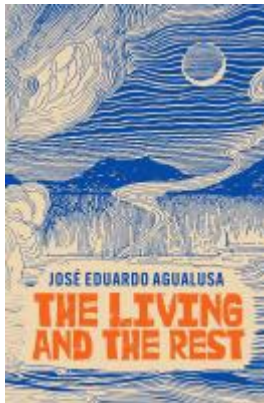
by Helene Ritchie



Helene Ritchie is the daughter of Lidi, a Czechoslovakian woman who fled the Holocaust in 1940 with her mother. They were later joined by her uncle, the only other surviving family member. The letter, received after the war, was a list of family members stating where and when they died. Lidi's regret at burning it, and the information lost, started Helene on a decades long search to find answers.

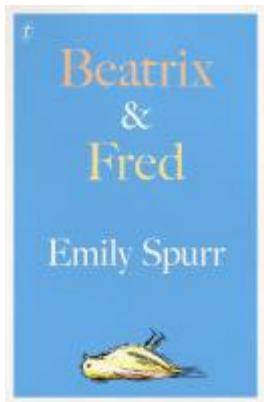
"The author in her political life was the longest serving city councillor in Wellington history and the first female Deputy Mayor. This is moving and well written. My husband knew Helene, and this explains a lot about her." Jane

[The Living and the Rest](#) by José Eduardo Agualusa (Fiction)



Dreamy and strange, *The Living and the Rest* is set on the island of Mozambique during its first-ever literary festival. Once the writers have arrived, however, a storm hits the mainland, leaving the island untouched but completely isolated. Some characters are happy to continue sipping cocktails in hotel bars, while others go to pieces completely. You're never entirely sure what's real and what's not in this story, especially with the writer characters spinning tales all the way through. I read it in the week after Christmas, a particularly liminal time of year, and found its hazy surrealism irresistible (and particularly suited to a summer read). A book best read in as few sittings as possible to keep its power undiluted. Charlotte

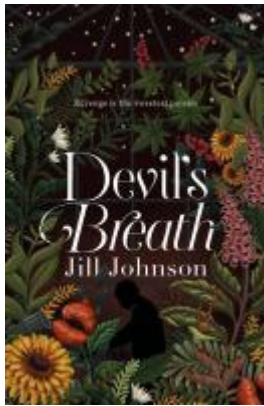
[Beatrix and Fred](#) by Emily Spurr



Beatrix is difficult. Her only human relationship is prickly and tense with co-worker Ray, her only attachment is to a stuffed canary named Horatio. Fred is her 80ish year-old stalker who may be a result of a brain lesion, excessive alcohol or something else entirely. A wonderful and unexpected story of feeling different, unfulfilled and suicidal that develops into a curious courtship and meeting of minds. Feeling threatened at first, Beatrix becomes more and more intrigued by Fred, who worms her way in to her life. The changing weather and shades of light are used to enhance their interactions, and the health chat-bot gives unintentionally satirical insights into Beatrix's mental health. Very funny, gross and lyrical at the same time, even the uplifting ending has elements of tragedy. Fantastic. Greg

Devil's Breath by Jill Johnson (Crime Thriller)

"I've always been better with plants than people" . . . "



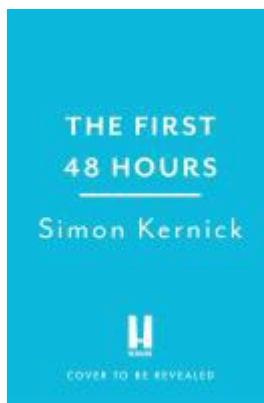
Eustacia Rose is a Professor of Botanical Toxicology who lives alone in London with only her extensive collection of poisonous plants for company. She tends to her garden with meticulous care. Her life is quiet. Her schedule never changes. Until the day she hears a scream and the temptation to investigate proves irresistible.

Through her telescope, Professor Rose is drawn into the life of an extraordinarily beautiful neighbour, Simone, and nicknames the men who visit her after poisonous plants according to the toxic effect they have on Simone. But who are these four men? And why does Eustacia Rose recognize one of them? Just as she preserves her secret garden, she feels inexplicably compelled to protect her neighbour. But when her precious garden is vandalized and someone close to Simone is murdered with a toxin derived from a rare poisonous plant, Eustacia finds herself implicated in the crime and decides to take matters into her own hands . . .

Professor Rose is one of the most refreshingly original characters and she lifts this from being just another thriller. The story is suspenseful, intriguing, and well told but it is the main character that makes it memorable.

Alison and David both loved it!

The First 48 Hours by Simon Kernick (Thriller)



Crime writer Kernick has honed his style over many years and 23 books. He gives just enough character development for the reader to invest in the participants and not slow the plot down. Events are not drawn out; they move at a fast clip. There is a cynical cop with some guilty secrets, a not quite as cynical defence lawyer, her innocent daughter taken by a nasty pair of kidnappers with a so far foolproof method, a hitman and a crime lord tangled up in a conspiracy that's spiralling out of control. Different characters have their own narrative to explain

their actions, none of them completely pure or appealing, but interesting enough to be worthwhile. Greg

[Kids Run The Show](#) by Delphine de Vigan (Social Commentary Thriller)
Translated by Alison Anderson



A cautionary tale for a world in which social media has shattered the boundaries of intimacy.

The first time that Mélanie met Clara, she was stunned by Clara's sense of authority, and for her part, Clara was struck by Mélanie's pink, glittery nails, which shimmered in the dark. "She looks like a child," thought the first. "She looks like a doll," pondered the second.

These two women, both of the same generation and exposed to the same forms of media throughout their lives, could not be more different in adulthood. Mélanie is a social media superstar, broadcasting her children's daily

lives on a family YouTube channel. Clara is a young police officer, assigned to the case after Mélanie's daughter Kimmy is abducted.

Traversing the Big Brother generation, the social media influencer generation, and right up to the 2030s, Delphine de Vigan offers a bone-chilling exposé of a world where everything is broadcasted and monetized, even family happiness.

A great read with two strong female characters. Alison

[Essex Dogs](#) by Dan Jones (Historical)



The well-known historian, television host and podcaster swaggers into fiction, a rousing tale set in France at the start of the Hundred Years war. The English King Edward has come to claim the Throne of France and has brought an army of nobles and their retinues, and also independent companies paid for a fixed term. One such group of swords for hire are the Essex Dogs. Their story is not one of chivalry or noble deeds, rather the brutal sordid lot of medieval foot soldiers with a fondness for Anglo-Saxon expressions. Historically very accurate with

source notes from 14th century chronicles at the start of each chapter that add an extra fillip. Greg

Most appropriate title for a book (I'm Told)

[What Fresh Hell is This? :Perimenopause, Menopause, Other Indignities, and You](#) by Heather Corinna



'This book feels like your best friend talking to you over drinks - if your best friend is a shit-talking, patriarchy-smashing, intersectionally feminist professor of the history of reproductive medicine and also an endocrinologist with a side hustle as a comedian.' - Dr Emily Nagoski (from catalogue)