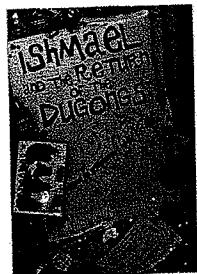


Sequels Briefs



Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs
 Michael Gerard Bauer, Omnibus Books, 978 1 86291 764 4 \$17.99 Pb



There's a lot going on in Ishmael's life as he begins Year 10: Razza is on his case in the matter of the beautiful Kelly Faulkner; his dad is acting in a most peculiar manner; the debating team is riven by an argument between Razza and Ignatius Prindabel. On the bright side, Miss Tarango is still his English teacher (though her poetry blütz has side effects even she wouldn't have foreseen) and Mr Baker blossoms as the manager of the rock band, *The Dugongs* for their reunion gig. There are moments of sheer hilarity and the ending is a triumph as Razza comes into his own and Ishmael experiences his first kiss. In Bauer's second story featuring Ishmael Leseur, the dialogue rings true, the characters are finely drawn, the story-line veers between wisdom and laugh-aloud fun—what more could you ask for?



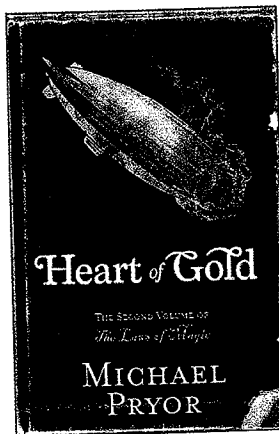
Heaven's Net is Wide (The Tales of the Otori prequel)
 Lian Hearn, Hachette Australia, 978 0 7336 2144 4 \$39.95 Hb



Here we are made privy to the adolescence and early manhood of Lord Shigeru, heir of the Otori, rulers of the Middle Country, who comes into his inheritance after a great defeat involving treachery and days later is forced to abdicate. Following sage advice Shigeru develops a public persona at odds with his warrior upbringing and his hidden agenda of revenge and regaining his lands. Though not all is pretence: Shigeru's sense of justice and the belief that all have a right to a quiet life had been developing from an early age. The book ends with the discovery of his nephew, Takeo, who is part Otori, part son of The Tribe and who is the focus of the existing four books. The details of life in a fantastic feudal Japan are riveting (if often bloody); the examination of the role of leadership and personal morality demands attention; the question of belief is ever present and the role of women in a male dominated society is made clear. Hearn's masterly storytelling is evident on every page with intricate plotting and larger-than-life characters. Wonderful.
 Rayma Turton

simply told and sometimes poetic account by the eponymous Ned of his experiences as an outsider, his hatred and fear of life-long bully Nigel Collier and of his eventual cataclysmic break through his barrier of silence. While the teachers at the local school find him too hard to cope with, the librarian encourages his love of reading, and a passion for bushrangers develops. Ned 'graduates' to the Silver City, the collection of corrugated iron buildings that make up the town's sheltered workshop and he is fortunate in Mick, the supervisor, who values Ned for his silent skills. Into Ned's life comes Erin, a pretty girl trying to escape a troubled past in another country town, desperate for a job to support herself and her invalid mother. She is the other narrator in the book; her sunny nature and willingness to work win Mick, and Ned's silent approval is clear. The two young outsiders warm to each other and it seems as if Erin will pierce Ned's carapace, when his old foe Nigel Collier strikes. Incredulous when he sees Ned with a girl *too foxy to be a spazz* and then when she sharply puts him in his place Nigel is determined on revenge. Ned is witness to his assault on Erin and while he feels helpless to rescue her at the time, his shame and rage force his hand later, and he fears he has left Nigel for dead. It is now that Ned truly identifies with his hero Ned Kelly, on the run from the police and with little hope of justice. He even writes his own Jerilderie Letter, the truth about Collier's assault of Erin, and making his way to the Silver City toolshed fashions a suit of armour from corrugated iron scraps. With Mick's stolen war pistol at his side he is prepared for his last stand against the bullies in his life. Disaster is only just averted by a desperate Erin who reaches him a whisker ahead of the police. Shots are fired, there is a narrow escape, Ned's letter is read and believed and he gets his day in court to defend himself and Erin against Collier's lies. It is then that he hears his own voice, *a stranger's voice escaping from my throat*. Ned's armour, both mental and physical has fallen away. Tim Pegler doesn't always get the voices right in *Game as Ned*. He wavers between rough and polished for both Ned and Erin and some of his colloquialisms are anachronistic. Whether Ned's autistic barrier could be broken by the events portrayed is uncertain. *Check the books and you'll see that no two cases are ever the same* as Mick conveniently says to Erin. But in showing how Ned

impinges on and affects the lives of others—all who are wounded in their own way—and opens up to those he knows care for him, *Game As Ned* is a heart-warming book.
 Sally Harding



Heart of Gold: The Second Volume of The Laws of Magic
 Michael Pryor, Random House, 978 1 74166 130 9 \$17.95 Pb



This sequel to *Blaze of Glory* is set in Gallia, a country reminiscent of France in many aspects of its geography, history and culture, where Aubrey and George are on holidays while Caroline studies taxonomy at the university. The boys find pure recreation impossible. They are too busy with the complicated tasks Aubrey's grandmother, father, mother and cousin (the Prince Regent of Albion) have set him and are embroiled in the international intrigue and disturbing magic all around them. People are having their souls taken from their bodies by an evil photographer; the Heart of Gold, a magical object which must be kept in its rightful place for the survival of the Gallian Republic, is stolen; spies from Holmland are stirring up civil rebellion... What first seem like loose strands of the plot are very neatly woven as Aubrey, George and Caroline solve the mysteries and save the situation. Continuity with *Blaze of Glory* is maintained in Aubrey's ongoing struggle to survive the disempowering effects of his experiments with *death magic* and his clumsy attempts to court the scientifically minded feminist, Caroline. He resorts to trickery to ensure that she leaves the university and helps him with his tasks and he suffers the consequences when she finds out. Pryor is a master of suspense and vividly-realised magical experiences. Readers will especially enjoy vicariously seeking the Heart of Gold from an old tower flying low over the city's parks and buildings.

For the thoughtful reader, there are some interesting ethical and moral questions to ponder. Aubrey's decisions always involve self-knowledge and identifying the right course of action. In the end, the three discuss whether it's worthwhile resisting the many factions and forces which seem to be drawing the world they know inevitably towards war. The ending is open: the wicked magician is alive, the world's powerful nations are aligned in a precarious state of balance, Aubrey still hasn't got a firm grip on life and there is his relationship with Caroline to be resolve. Let us hope for a third volume in 2008.
 Lyn Linning



Our Little Secret
 Allayne Webster, Omnibus Books, 978 1 86291 723 1 \$17.99 Pb



When the news swept the little town of Wattleton that sixteen-year-old Anne-Marie Cooper had been raped on her way home from school one summer afternoon, some townsfolk said they weren't surprised. They could have seen it coming. Some even said that Anne-Marie had asked for it. I know this, because one of those people was my own mother. Fourteen-year-old Edwina is the best friend of Anne-Marie's little sister; Wattleton is a small town that enjoys a scandal, everyone knows the business of everyone else, but people have secrets, some more harmful and dark than even the gossips can conjure. Edwina is about to discover that some secrets should be shared, that sexual predators are ordinary people, they don't wear labels, their actions can be subtle, they can be a family friend, and whatever form they take, they are dangerous and they can destroy you. Her father's friend Tom is a powerful sexual predator who manipulates the naïve, romantic Edwina and ultimately destroys her innocence. *Our Little Secret* successfully explores adolescent self-image, rape, paedophilia, gossip, self-righteousness and life in a small

Australian town. Edwina's riveting account will strike a chord for not only victims of such actions but for young female adolescents who have successfully escaped such predation and for those who should be warned. Allayne Webster has woven a believable, credible tale that successfully draws its female readers into the character and captures the teenage voice. The accounts of Edwina's sexual violations would be confronting for younger adolescents but nonetheless **Our Little Secret** will be valued among older readers for its honest depiction of rape, personal safety, power and exploitation.

Allison Paterson

Scatterheart

Lili Wilkinson, Black Dog Books, 978 1 921167 85 0 \$19.95 Pb

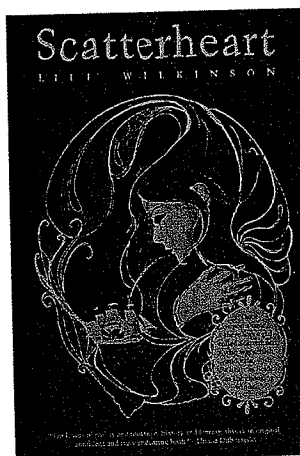


Hannah Cheshire is the pampered child of a wealthy widower but things are not what they seem. Her father has been living on credit for years and flees England having

first dismissed Hannah's tutor, Thomas Behr. The servants pack up and leave, creditors strip the house. Thomas returns to the house to propose marriage but Hannah rejects him as being not good enough for her.

Desperate for food, Hannah pawns a necklace and is thrown in jail on charges of having stolen her own jewels. This is how Hannah becomes a convict on the fictitious ship *Derby Ram*, transported to Sydney for her crimes.

Lili Wilkinson has used the Norse folktale *Scatterheart* as a motif for the novel and each chapter has a short excerpt from the story in bold at its opening. The fantasy element is provided by the white bear which Hannah sees in her dreams and imaginings—a main element of the legend and a reference to her tutor's name. However, the novel is basically a story about the hardships and trials of female convicts transported to the colony of New South Wales. Apart from leaps back in time to explain her circumstances and how she got to



where she is, the first 254 pages recount Hannah's arrest, trial and sea voyage while the remaining 120 cover her experiences at the Female Factory at Parramatta, being claimed by a lieutenant from the ship as his 'wife', and escaping from him to find her now beloved Thomas (also in the colony) and their romantic reunion. The descriptions of the voyage are detailed and honest. There are sexual

innuendoes and indecencies along with mistreatment, brutality and death. These sections of the book are the most realistic. The last chapters where Hannah trudges for days through the bush to find Thomas are a bit far-fetched and it rather beggars belief to have this all come together in a rosy ending.

The author has undertaken a lot of historical research to ensure that details of convict life are accurate and a lot of it makes for uncomfortable but informative reading. The narrative jumps backward in time to previous incidents before returning to the present mean that readers must keep their wits about them to keep track of the plot. While competently written, this novel may not be quite as engrossing as Lili's previous book about Joan of Arc. It is probably not a book for boys, mainly due to its subject matter, but teenage girls may well enjoy the romantic element.

Lynne Babbage

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