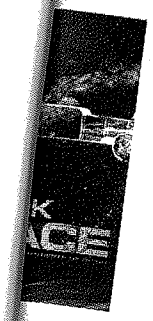
ship right to the
terlife. She contests

three parts together does it reveal
its intriguing harmonies.

Friend of the Devil
Peter Robinson, Hodder & Stoughton
Based on Dymocks SA sales
$32.95

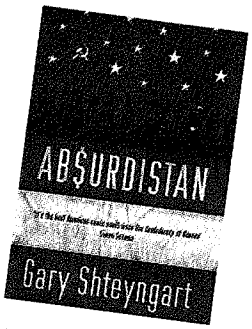


## pace

**fiction** ★★★
**e Pierres, Orbit** **$19.95**

most part, this is a space opera about the se frontier mining Araldis that is invaded arning by mercenary king for a precious new he planet has been run ackle feudal empire by family. The invasion t as Mira Fedor dis- , as a woman, she will stripped of her genetic pacecraft navigation. n the run from the d her own kind as she k out what forces are urn her whole world m. This is the first in the *Sentients of* gy, and Queenslander structure is almost as as the world she de- has kept the wider little more than back- e while relating Mira's

***Tim Lloyd***




## Absurdistan

**Fiction** ★★★★
**Gary Shteyngart, Granta** **$26.95**

Ben Elton meets Joeseph Heller in Gary Shteyngart's unnervingly energetic and acerbic novel about the misadventures of a grotesquely obese Jew in the former Russian state of Absurdistan. Misha Veiberg is not your average everyday modern hero. "Snack Daddy", as he was nicknamed at a U.S. university, is the son of the 1238th richest Russian. He yearns for a modest New York life with Methodist Latina girlfriend Rouenna. But plans unravel during a trip to the motherland when his gangster father kills a U.S. businessman and Misha is refused entry back to the Land of the Free. The tiny, oil-rich state of Absurdistan will issue the ludicrously loyal Rouenna a visa to Belgium, but civil war intervenes and Misha miraculously becomes Minister for Multicultural affairs. Shteyngart packs in the action and the adjectives in a brilliant satire dripping with chutzpah.

***Craig Cook***

## Our Little Secret

**Young Adult Novel** ★★★★
**Allyne Webster, Omnibus Books** **$17.99**

The title of this Adelaide author's first novel immediately suggests the cant of the sexual predator: Don't tell anyone; it's our little secret. Edwina is 14, longing for love, life experience and something to trade in the gossip stakes at her country high school. Her father's workmate is 25, liked and accepted around the family home. When Tom starts paying her attention, Edwina is bemused but thrilled at the thought of being kissed by an older man. Webster is quite explicit about the things that happen to her heroine: penetrative sex, oral sex – Go on, you know you like it! Edwina's mix of feelings also rings painfully true: flattery, confusion, fear and finally the consuming shame of being used, of having failed a maturity test, of somehow causing her own suffering. The story, once it eventually gets into its stride, is as compelling as it is cautionary.

***Katharine England***