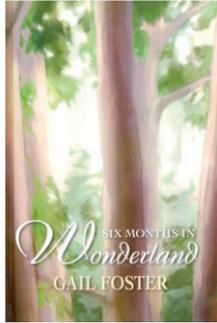




New voice plots path to freedom

Six Months in Wonderland
by Gail Foster
Forty Degrees South
\$39.95



MY first impression of this very personal story concerns its generous publishing treatment. Within its unusual cover is what seems to be a very ordinary story of a woman who finds freedom from an oppressive marriage and begins a new life.

Yet its diary-like intimacy holds the reader. On reflection in its quiet, measured, brilliantly eloquent way, and in its familiar contemporary Tasmanian setting, it addresses a major worldwide problem that spans the centuries – the oppression of women. Often its roots can be traced to religious beliefs and dogma.

Six Months in Wonderland is Gail Foster's story. The foreword describes it as "searingly honest" and so it proves to be. The account of her childhood is interrupted by her diversion into her family history. Frankly it's a distraction, but the momentum of the story is maintained.

Even in her early childhood – despite having a happy and loving family, a mother she adored and a talented father – the church was omnipresent. Her choice of a career in childcare and her training at the foreboding Mt St Canice convent served to accentuate the traditional caring and service roles of women.

But it was obviously an enlightening and rewarding time for her. Her subsequent employment as house mistress at the Quaker Friends' School added yet another dimension to her religious sensitivities.

Gail marries John, a handsome and devout member of her church congregation, and juggles a sometimes frenetic life as mother, wife and student. She graduates from university and then adds nursing to her impressive credentials. Her energy, enthusiasm and urge to explore her talents and relish new life experiences fuel an inner strength that eventually disturbs the equilibrium of her relationship with her husband and her lifestyle.

This gathering tension and frustration reaches a climax when she is unexpectedly elected to the position of elder in her Presbyterian church. She is confronted with male resentment, even hostility, and feels the smothering heaviness of male domination. This, combined with escalating differences in religious beliefs, makes her marriage intolerable. She leaves.

Gail and her daughters begin a new life in a rustic cottage in Fern Tree. In the bush, with its crisp mountain air, she embraces her "wonderland". The joy of her physical and psychological freedom and release of intellectual energy give full rein to her talents. But the search for a lasting and equitable male relationship, however, is not over. That quest, in middle age, and its eventual fulfilment often provides hilarious reading.

The writing process would have been a cathartic experience for the author. For the reader, however, it will become readily apparent that a new Tasmanian writer with extraordinary talent has been revealed.

WARREN BREWER

Top 10 books

1. **Sing You Home** Jodi Picoult
2. **The Troubled Man** Henning Mankell
3. **How the Dead See** David Owen
4. **The Land of Painted Caves** Jean Auel
5. **The Fifth Witness** Michael Connelly
6. **Crack Hardy** Stephen Dando-Collins
7. **Lioness** Katherine Scholes
8. **Batavia** Peter FitzSimons
9. **Chasing Fire** Nora Roberts
10. **I'll Walk Alone** Mary Higgins Clark

Compiled from lists supplied by Angus & Robertson, Fullers, the Hobart Bookshop, Dymocks Hobart, Book City Hobart, Kingston and Eastlands, and Ellison Hawker.

Tiger's tale makes rollicking read

Jamrach's Menagerie
by Carol Birch
Text, \$32.95

MOST seafaring stories are written by men and mainly read by men, but *Jamrach's Menagerie* has earned Carol Birch a spot on the all-women Orange Prize longlist. That honour is well deserved as the book dishes up adventure and horror in equal measures, all in settings carefully crafted to make a reader feel right in the middle of the action.

Birch first recreates the East End of London in the 1850s. Jaffy Brown is growing up among the stinking tanneries and factories of Bermondsey, running wild and loving the feel of the filthy mud of the river Thames between his toes.

Jaffy's life-changing moment on the docks of Wapping could just as well have been life-ending: when the crowds disperse on sighting a tiger, the eight-year-old Jaffy goes and pats it on the nose.

Jaffy is saved from the tiger's jaws by its owner, Charles Jamrach, who imports exotic animals.

Jamrach gives Jaffy a raspberry cream puff and a job. The boy cleans the cages and learns the ways of the Tasmanian devils, monkeys and exotic birds that

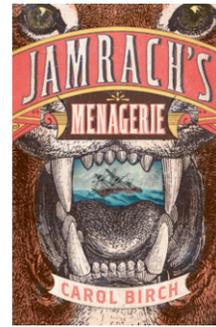
come and go. He also makes friends with Tim, another of Jamrach's young proteges.

Their patch on the dockside is pumping with ships and their cargo from around the world, sailors, pubs and prostitutes.

Jaffy has set his mind on going to sea and when Jamrach sends Tim on a voyage to help bring back a dragon – to Jaffy's disappointment, it's a large lizard rather than a winged fairytale creature – for a wealthy client, Jaffy signs up as well.

The boys board a whaling ship for the long, harsh trip to the waters of South-East Asia, where they hope to catch their prey.

Once the whalers reach their destination, they find the dragon. The sailors capture their prey but having it on board makes them nervous and scared. After bad weather hits, they find themselves facing the



ultimate test of their loyalty to one another. *Jamrach's Menagerie* is often confronting, but at its heart it is a book about friendship.

Tim is at times bullying, at times needy. He and Jaffy have their share of adolescent jealousies, but out on the ocean they grow ever closer together.

The experiences on the voyage are brutal but beautifully written, from the whaling scene to the rising tensions among the crew after the capture of the dragon.

"I truly realised the whale is no more a fish than I am," Jaffy muses. "So much strength dies slowly. We watched in awe, wordless. Ten minutes, fifteen, more. As she thrashed, she swam around in an ever-dwindling gyre, and I begged her to die."

Birch has written several acclaimed historical novels, and *Jamrach's Menagerie* includes real characters and events.

Jamrach lived in London and did save a young boy from the jaws of one of his tigers, and what happens on the boat is based on the whaler Essex.

Birch's deft touch makes the book feel all of it could be based on reality, with the horror of the deciding moment ringing frighteningly true.

LEENA LAVONIUS

Innocence cast aside

City of Fallen Angels
(book 4 in *The Mortal Instruments* series)
by Cassandra Clare
Walker Books, softcover, 424pp, \$27.95

WHEN Cassandra Clare wrapped up her glorious urban fantasy *The Mortal Instruments* trilogy a couple of years ago, she had a feeling there might be a need for a fourth book. She had left some open ends that she felt could do with further exploration.

Her many fans didn't disagree. They were curious to know more.

But Clare had already begun work on her Victorian-era steampunk prequel trilogy, *The Infernal Devices*, so it was some time before she settled down to tackle the major issues confronting Simon (how would he deal with life as a newly-minted vampire?), Jace and Clary (what did the hedge-witch mean when she told Jace he'd fall in love with the wrong person?), Isabelle and Maia (which one of them will end up with Simon), and Sebastian (if he died, where's the body?).

When she finally managed to find the time to turn her attention back to these pressing questions, she realised one book was never going to cover it all. And so she began her second trilogy in *The Mortal Instruments*, starting with *City of Fallen Angels*.

First, a quick backtrack. The series tells of Shadowhunters, an arcane race of humans carrying traces of angel blood, whose calling in life is to fight the demons who force their way into our world from other dimensions.

Just as Shadowhunters remain hidden from the eyes of humans, so too do the werewolves, vampires, warlocks and faerie folk whose relationships with each other and with the Shadowhunters have historically been strained, but are finally on the mend with the new accords being struck.

Most of this series is set in New York, with its coffee houses, ethnic eateries and nightclubs providing an intriguing backdrop of glamour, glitter and grime.

But really, much as Clare works to keep new readers clued in, I'd suggest that you stay away from *Fallen Angels* until you've read all the predecessors.

Fallen Angels picks up six weeks or so after the cataclysmic ending of *City of Glass*. Clary's undergoing Shadowhunter training and she and Jace are finally able to enjoy being young and in love.

Simon's got some truths to tell; his bandmates know about his vampirism, but he hasn't been able to tell him mum yet. He's also still dating both Maia and Isabelle, but hasn't plucked up the guts to tell either one about the other. Magnus and Alec are enjoying a romantic holiday in Europe, and preparations are progressing for Jocelyn and Luke's wedding. But darkness is stealing silently over everything.

While the conversations still crackle with humour and innuendo, and some great new characters are brought into the story arc, Clare has created a story that's deeper, darker, scarier – and sexier – than any of its predecessors.

Her brilliant blend of myth, legend and biblical elements, swathed in the shadows of encroaching evil, take her characters to some bleak and frightening places – and her readers along with them.

Her already wonderfully rounded characters grow and evolve as they are confronted by some of life's big questions about love, belief in ourselves and those we hold dear, forgiveness, and redemption.

Clare has honed the perfect start to what promises to be another finely crafted, enthralling trilogy, leaving her readers howling in protest at having to wait another whole year before her absolute cracker of a cliffhanger even begins to be resolved.



kidz BOOKS
DANI COLVIN

Angel
by James Patterson
(book 7 in the *Maximum Ride* series)
Young Arrow (Random House)
softcover, 291pp, \$24.95

JAMES Patterson's wonderfully imaginative, action-packed and very cool series about a bunch of bird-kids is one of those rare series that both boys and girls love to read.

It's the story of a group of children – Max, Fang, Gazy, Iggy, Nudge and Angel – who, as a result of shocking experimentation by the most self-serving of scientists, have avian DNA. That gives them bones as light as birds, incredible raptor vision – and wings. Yep, these kids can soar with the eagles but the turkeys are always trying to take them down.

During their many adventures, they've escaped from the lab in which they grew up, battled all sorts of crazy evil guys who want to take over the world, and developed amazing new skills.

Just lately, Max has been told that it's her job to save the world. A bit much to ask of a girl who has just turned 15 and spent her life in a dog crate or on the run from baddies while mothering the rest of the rag-tag flock of kids and their talking dog, Total.

Add to her woes the fact that while Fang has always been her best friend and soul-mate, he has become her first great love. But now he's left the flock to start one of his own, and Max is told that the beautiful new scientific creation, Dylan, has been engineered especially for her and is her destined partner. He's handsome as hell, kind, and has her back, but her feelings for him and for Fang are just too confusing for her to figure out.

Meanwhile, there's a new group gaining momentum and media coverage. The Doomsday Group is talking about the apocalypse coming and humankind being obliterated, and a whole lot of gobbledegook about The One Light.

When Max's half-sister Ella falls under the thrall of the group, Max knows it's time to find out more about then and what their intentions truly are. And so the little flock is thrown into yet more danger, chaos and intrigue and once again, they know that there is no one they can trust.

Patterson's series is a swirling mix of outrageous

extremes: real science taken to the nth degree; megalomaniacal baddies that are little more than caricatures of evil; seat-of-the-pants action and explosions and mayhem. All this is balanced out by characters dealing with very real, very human issues and emotions.

All of it is narrated with cool and crackling wit. Some may consider this to be a confused mish-mash that doesn't know what it wants to be, particularly with the introduction of the romantic elements. Others, however, will delight in the bedlam that is already the hallmark of this series.

Bungawitta
by Emily Rodda, illustrated by Craig Smith
Scholastic, softcover, 122pp, \$12.99

IT HAS been so dry in Bungawitta that Glory-Alice, the youngest person in the town, has only ever seen rain on TV. As the land has dried out, the town has shrunk. Now there are only 12 people, two dogs, some chooks, a Shetland pony and a cat called Bruce.

The good folk of Bungawitta know they need to raise some cash fast if they want to keep their town going, and decide to hold a sculpture festival. But will anyone come to the middle of nowhere where the sun always shines? Can they pull this thing off?

Emily Rodda's endearing story about the desperation of drought and the determination of a tiny community is evocative, humorous and hopeful. She describes wonderfully the harsh environment and has pulled the threads of her story together with great care and thought.

Although it's illustrated on every page, this is definitely a book for confident readers who are comfortable with smaller typeface and more complex language. A very Australian book for young Australian readers.

The Sky Dreamer
by Anne Morgan, illustrated by Céline Eimann
IP Kidz, hardcover, 32pp, \$26

LIAM is grieving for his sister Cassie, who has died. The night before his birthday, she visits him, warm and happy, aboard a flying sailboat called The Sky Dreamer. Cassie encourages Liam to sail the little boat through deepest, darkest space, while she continues to quietly sew his birthday present.

When they finally make their way home, Cassie leaves him again. But now, Liam has navigated his way through his loss and grief, and has her gift of love to help him find warmth and happiness in his life.

This is a wonderful book for children dealing with grief, by a talented Tasmanian author.