

THE PENGUIN POST

VOLUME 36 THE MAGAZINE ABOUT BOOKS FOR BOOK LOVERS

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INHALING
**THE
MAGIC
WITH**

**SVEN
AXELRAD**

**NEW
LOOK**



FIVE MINUTES WITH

Country of My Skull
author Antjie Krog

NATURAL WONDERS

Ten of South Africa's
most exquisite spots

HOMEGROWN FARE

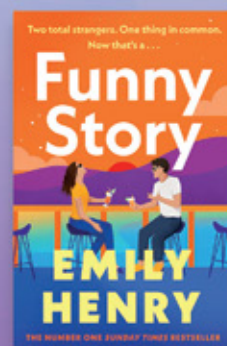
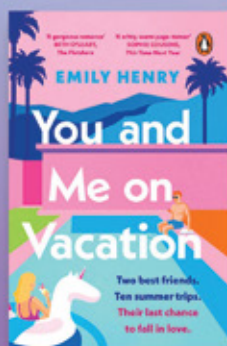
Dombolo and peppermint
crisp ice cream sandwiches

ON MY MIND

The path Milton Schorr
chose to follow



A dazzling and sweeping new novel from
#1 *Sunday Times* bestselling author
EMILY HENRY





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Welcome!

Though things may look a little different, we continue to bring you the best in author interviews, columns and books in every genre you can imagine.

Kicking off with our cover feature, there's something delightfully odd – and oddly delightful – about stepping into a Sven Axelrad novel. His latest, *The Nicotine Gospel*, is no exception. It's strange, tender, darkly funny, and filled with the kind of characters who feel too weird to be real – and yet, somehow, too real to be made up. Sven chats to us about magical thinking, his hometown, and the reason he took up smoking.

This issue is filled with stories that bend reality and truth in fascinating ways. Antjie Krog reflects on autofiction and how memory and history collide on the page. Sophie Stava explores the lies we tell to be loved. Tom Eaton talks about the strange confidence it takes to write fiction.

We also head into wilder places, with real life stories that refused to be silenced, and a roundup of South Africa's top ten natural wonders. And we serve up something comforting: Warren Mendes gives SA classics a bold new twist (yes, there's peppermint crisp – and, spoiler, it's in ice cream form). It's all a reminder, really, that whether in fiction or food, the best stories always have a little magic.

So, settle in, and until next time ... happy reading!

Lauren

Lauren Mc Diarmid

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bookscape

news | snippets | what's new



Everyone's talking about ...

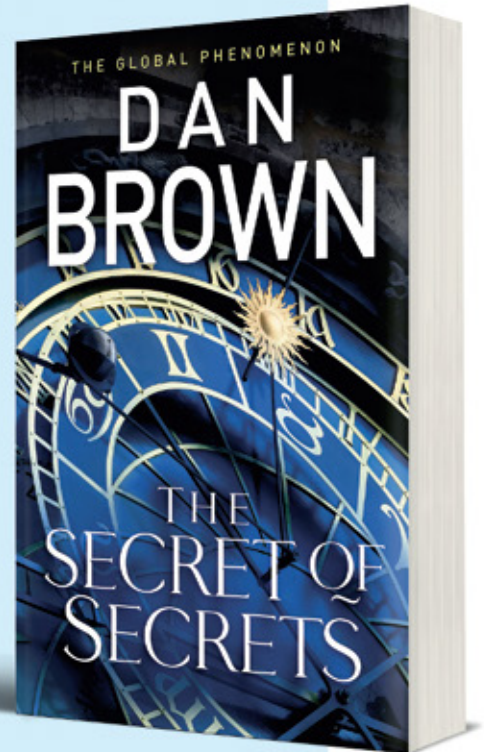
Dan Brown's New Robert Langdon Novel

Worldwide number one bestselling author Dan Brown's new novel, *The Secret of Secrets*, will be published on September 9, 2025. Brown is the author of the international publishing phenomenon, *The Da Vinci Code*, featuring Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon, and his novels are published in 56 languages internationally with over 250 million copies in print. Brown is also the author of numerous bestsellers, including *Origin*, *Inferno*, *The Lost Symbol*, *Angels & Demons*, *Deception Point* and *Digital Fortress*.

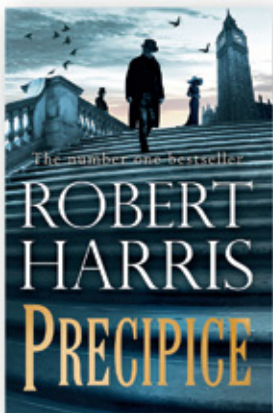
Dan Brown says, "*The Secret of Secrets* is by far the most intricately plotted and ambitious novel I've written to date – and also the most fun. Writing it has been an unforgettable journey of discovery."

Penguin Random House Global CEO Nihar Malaviya says, "Dan Brown has created a new Robert Langdon thriller that will mesmerise and delight readers across the world. The hallmarks of Dan's books – codes, art, history, religion, and cutting-edge science – are on full display alongside a propulsive plot. And we find one of fiction's greatest heroes, Robert Langdon, in love and on the run in one of the most mysterious and beautiful cities in the world. *The Secret of Secrets* is Dan's best novel yet and this will be the biggest publishing event of 2025."

Brown's longtime editor Jason Kaufman says, "Dan always amazes me with his masterful plotting and prescient ideas. *The Secret of Secrets* delivers ingeniously, unveiling a fascinating world – with twists you'll never see coming. This is classic Dan Brown."



The Secret of Secrets hits shelves September 2025.



DOMINATING THE BESTSELLER LISTS

Precipice by Robert Harris

"Harris's novel reads almost like a thriller, as the sense of impending doom, both in the relationship and in the political world, is built up. Despite Asquith's astonishing behaviour, Harris creates in him a believable and even sympathetic character, and as events move towards their poignant climax, the reader cannot help feeling for Asquith and Venetia, caught in a web of their own making. *Precipice* is a skilful and fascinating novel – Harris in top form."

Margaret von Klemperer, *Sunday Times*



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MUST of the MONTH



In her own words, Annica Hendricks is a crazy-coloured book-loving graphic designer, who finally understands the concept of 'me time' and fills it with as many fantasy and thriller books as she can.

"In 2013, Laura Nowlin gave us *If He Had Been with Me* (IHHBWM). In 2024, she surprised us with a masterpiece, *If Only I Had Told Her*. If you're thinking, *There is no way she can break my heart more than she already has*, be prepared to sob. If you're asking yourself, *Why should I read this novel?* I mean, it's just IHHBWM from the Finn's perspective, I'm here to tell you it's not just about love and loss; this book is about what happens after loss – the nasty moving on part that sucks. When grownups say to teenagers, *This is not the end*, and, *It gets better*, that's this book! Laura is saying at least try. Autumn and Finn were destined to be, but life has a way of making fools of us all. If you're looking for that happily ever after, don't read this; however, if you're looking for a beautifully written book about love, loss, grief and survival, this is the book for you."

If Only I Had Told Her is out now.



WIN! WIN! WIN!

A hamper of books from this issue valued at R1 000 is up for grabs to one lucky reader. To enter, scan the code using your phone camera, or visit www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za/competitions. Ts & Cs apply. Entries close 30 June 2025.

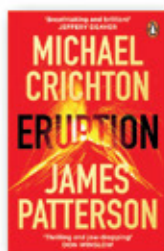


OUT IN PAPERBACK



THE BOOK OF DOORS by Gareth Brown

Cassie Andrews, a New York bookseller, discovers a magical book that grants extraordinary abilities. As danger and violence surround her, she must rely on Drummond Fox to survive.



ERUPTION by Michael Crichton and James Patterson

A massive volcanic eruption threatens Hawaii, but a long-buried military secret could make it even deadlier. Now, a few brave individuals must act fast to save the island – and the world.

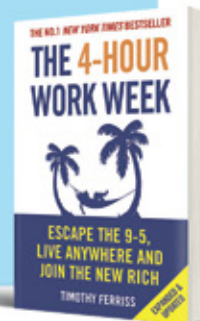


TABLE FOR TWO by Amor Towles

A collection of six stories that explore fate and marriage, plus a noirish Hollywood novella following Evelyn Ross from *Rules of Civility* as she forges a new future in 1930s Los Angeles.

To enjoy life, you don't need fancy nonsense, but you do need to control your time and realise that most things just aren't as serious as you make them out to be.

Timothy Ferriss,
The 4-hour Work Week





Five minutes with ... **ANTJIE KROG**

Antjie Krog explores autofiction's blurred lines between truth and storytelling, tracing her literary evolution to *Blood's Inner Rhyme*.

The concept of autofiction blurs the lines between autobiography and fiction. How do you navigate this genre, and what freedoms or constraints does it present?

Determining the "genre" of a book is essential for bookshops: where to put these books on their shelves? Also, perhaps, for reviewers: what are the yardsticks to measure the success or failure of the text? For writers it matters less. Because of having published books for nearly five decades, I have experienced the germination of this concept that tries to encompass the eternal tension between "truth" and "fiction". As a writer, I know that the moment something is in language, it is already no longer the "truth" that it was, while at the same time the words make it more the "truth" than ever before. *Country of My Skull* was marketed as "literary non-fiction" – the "truth" but with literary devices affecting this truth. My later books were "faction" – facts presented in the format of fiction. I am now at autofiction – autobiographical facts presented in the format of fiction. The thing is that a telling remains a telling. It must have characters, it must develop, it must have a kind of climax and an ending. Even those who write only facts write to keep the reader engaged.


Your previous works have addressed national trauma and reconciliation. Does *Blood's Inner Rhyme* continue this exploration on a more personal level?

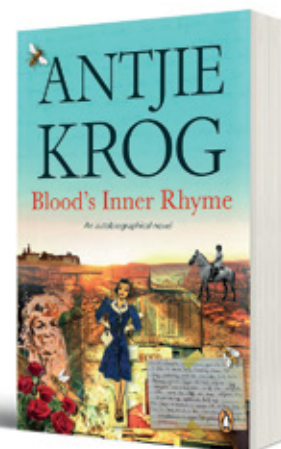
My very first poetry volume published in 1970, *Dogter van Jefta*, covered a few themes: love, land, politics and writing. Looking back, I can see how that remains the basic fields of my literary explorations through various works and as time changed so did the perspectives. *Blood's Inner Rhyme* is still about national trauma and reconciliation but in terms of love, land, politics and writing.

How do you envision readers from different cultural backgrounds connecting with the Afrikaner heritage and historical contexts in the book?

I think no text worth its salt is without a cultural context. The art lies in telling a story that transcends the specifics of culture and moves into the domain of the humane. *Blood's Inner Rhyme* explores how intimate contact with various cultures, literatures and beliefs affect the expiry date of many cherished Afrikaner values. South African literature is uniquely interesting in that we can access such different worlds to find the truth of characters other than ourselves.

Reflecting on your extensive literary career, how does *Blood's Inner Rhyme* represent your evolution as a writer, and what new directions do you foresee in your future works?

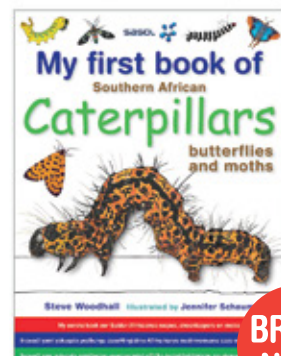
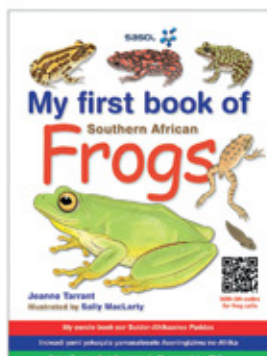
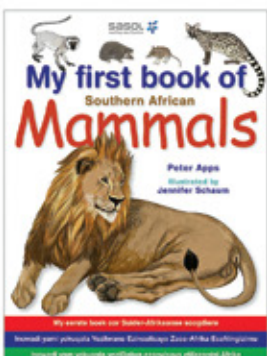
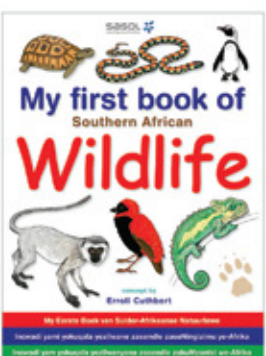
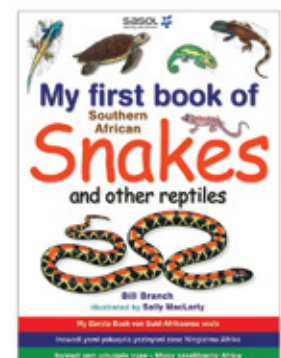
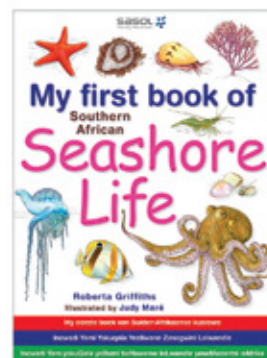
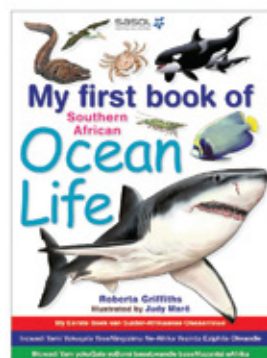
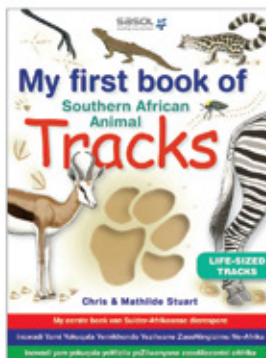
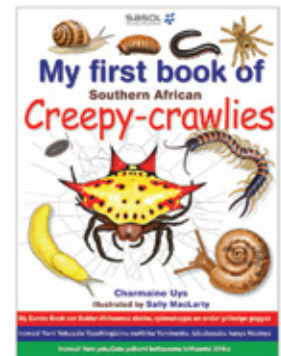
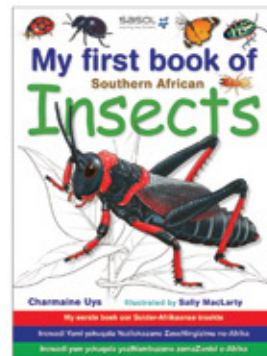
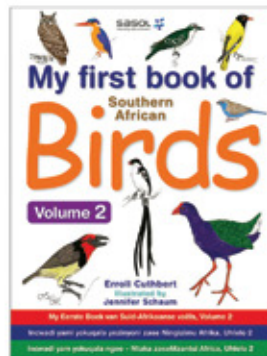
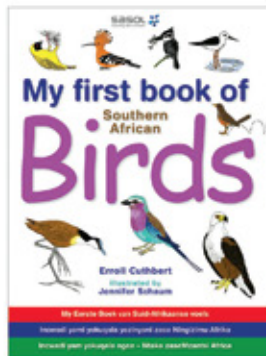
I published my last poetry volume a few years ago, and this will be my last prose book. It is important to know when to stop. I am stopping now. The world is changing so fast that it would take a tremendous effort to keep oneself drenched in current issues, strife, anger and discourses to engage meaningfully through literature. I want to let go of a lot of the noise necessary to keep pace with the contemporary and rather enjoy the abundance of life still gifted to somebody my age. 



Blood's Inner Rhyme is out now. Ook beskikbaar as *Die binnerym van bloed*.

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INHALING THE MAGIC

Since introducing readers to the quirky characters living in Vivo, first in *Buried Treasure* and then *God's Pocket*, Sven Axelrad has become a fast favourite. He tells us more about his latest book *The Nicotine Gospel*, his hometown, Durban, and the two women in his life.



I had smoked before – who hasn't had a cigarette when out drinking? – but it was always a casual thing. Until a few years ago, when I found the perfect excuse to smoke in earnest: I was researching a novel. All I had was a title, *The Nicotine Gospel*, and the certainty that it would be deeply personal and deeply strange. Armed with this knowledge, I stood at a kiosk and, much to the amusement of the tellers, bought a pack of every brand of cigarette for sale. Over the next few weeks, I systematically tried every one of them, making notes as I peeled off the cellophane and examined the filters.

Truth be told, I wasn't getting very far – not until I started questioning other smokers. Approaching strangers is something I find difficult, but it became surprisingly easy when holding a cigarette. A first cigarette holds the status of a first love: a doomed enterprise consummated with cordite and fire. I listened. I made notes on my phone. Later, I legitimised them, transcribing them into a notebook. After a few months, I had compiled a guidebook, an almanac of who smoked what and why. One glance at my notes would be enough to raise questions as to my sanity – tidal charts connected to Bible stories, new signs of the Zodiac linked to

tarot cards I made up myself. For a while, I was one of them. I coughed. I burned my fingers. I flirted casually with death, standing shoulder to shoulder with strangers, leaning against walls outside bars, libraries, cafés. That's what I'll miss about smoking. Not so much the cigarettes themselves, but the idea of cigarettes. The camaraderie of it.

The story I ended up telling belongs to Nate, the older of two brothers. Why Nate? Maybe because, in real life, I'm the younger of two brothers. Maybe because I wanted to mix up the roles and characters in the book, to create some distance. Maybe I did it to protect myself from these sorts of questions. (Buy me a coffee or a beer one day and we can chat about it.)

At the beginning of the book, I included a quote by Julio Ramón Ribeyro: *At a certain point, my story becomes mixed up with the story of my cigarettes.* That quote wasn't there from the start. Unlike Bob Dylan's lyrical scaffolding for *Buried*

Treasure, this one came later, during the revision process. Part of my writing method involves surrounding myself with literature, music, art, movies, and people that add to the work. It's one of my favourite things about writing. At the time, I was reading novels in which characters smoke obsessively (*Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar, for example) and I think I arrived at Ribeyro, *For Smokers Only*, via Chilean poet, Alejandro Zambra. Musically, Cigarettes After Sex and their cover of *Motion Picture Soundtrack* stand out. And the movies? There are too many to count – cinema is full of cigarette smoke. I seem to stumble upon these things by chance, but it happens so often and so naturally when I'm writing that I have to wonder. I am a 'Lucky' boy after all, right?

The story begins with Nate and Danny's mother dying after being hit by lightning. Their father, Esben, can't cope on his own, so he develops *The Nicotine Gospel* to teach his boys life lessons. In a world seemingly run by chance and chaos, I think Esben was desperate for a way to make sense of it all – to retain some control. In a way, I see a lot of myself not just in the brothers, but in Esben too. I've dealt with my own childhood, in part, by writing novels – by looking for hope and understanding through made-up characters. In the end, I'm not sure if that's any stranger than what Esben does in the novel. It's self-contained, at least.

Every one of my novels has dark forces at work. In *The Nicotine Gospel*, the boys have Margot, their own version of a wicked stepmother. Something I've learned from readers is that we all have Margot Merlots in our lives, whether in the form of

"I found the perfect excuse to smoke in earnest."





depression, loneliness, grief, illness, or actual, real-life Margots. Her presence, in all her violence, binds Nate and Danny together, forging a bond far deeper than that of just brothers. That said, fiction often operates differently from real life. In novels, characters learn and grow in a set timeframe; in reality, the message can be difficult to divine, unclear, or sometimes non-existent. I have little clarity on my own past, other than to say that some of the darker characters in my life only served to bind me closer to the ones I love. I also want to add that the novel is narrated from Nate's perspective – Margot is seen through his eyes, without full understanding. No doubt her life was filled with her own Margots. Even fictional monsters deserve that small grace.

The story is set in Durban, my hometown. It felt like the natural place for it – Durban is a fascinating, crumbling harbour city, always somewhat in disrepair, haunted (politely) by lethargic angels and filled with interesting people. It's a place for retired dreams. I wrote the first draft of *The Nicotine Gospel* before I invented the town of Vivo, so it made sense to use a setting I knew. Even so, I had my doubts. I wanted to set the novel here, at home, but I also wanted to reduce the focus, to shine the stage lights on this small family and keep


everything else out of it – not an easy thing to do in a place with such a rich, volatile history. For Nate and Danny, their world is contained in just a few locations: their house, their school, and a petrol station (a real-world location down the road from where I live). Because of that, we only get a sliver of Durban. But there will be another novel set here; one with a wider lens.

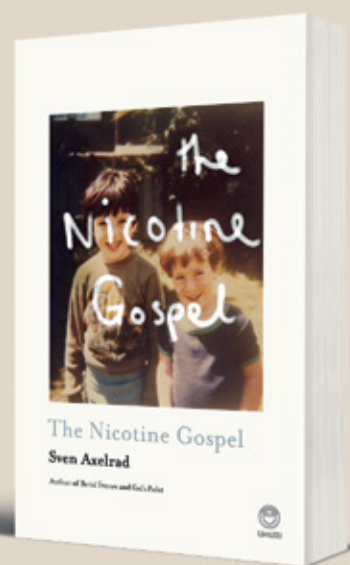
There are two teachers in Nate's high school who encourage him to aim higher. I think about that often – the role grown-ups play in showing kids a way forward. My brother had those people in his life, kind souls who stepped up to fill a void they must have seen. There were surely many adults who played that part for me, too – whether I remember them or not. Small acts of kindness, forgotten or unmarked, make big differences in our lives.

And speaking of my big brother, I dedicated the book to him. The number of hours Eric and I have spent listening to music, playing guitar, watching B-grade movies is staggering. He's someone I've looked up to since we were kids, the first person I'd call if I were in a car crash. If I had to compare him to one of the brothers in the book, I'd say he's more of a Nate than a Danny, but really, he's very much his own person. He's now a father of three boys, a chemical engineer by trade

– logical, science-minded, whereas I've always been more impractical, lost to magical thinking. Would you believe that as of writing this, my brother still hasn't read *The Nicotine Gospel*? I'm looking forward to that. (For the record, Eric has never touched a cigarette.)

Through all of this, my wife, Shannon, and our dog, Zoë, have been my first listeners. I read the work aloud to them, but only once a first draft is completed. It's difficult to keep a year-long project to yourself, but I like it this way. Some days, they see me smiling or with tears in my eyes and ask what's up, and I just say, *I'll tell you soon*. Their reactions are priceless. I'll never forget reading *Buried Treasure* to Shannon – she laughed, she cried, she was horrified, sometimes all within a few pages. Back then, I was unpublished, and her responses probably gave me the confidence I needed to keep pushing forward.

That's the thing about writing. You are both completely alone and never really alone at all." 



The Nicotine Gospel is out now.



AT MY DESK

Count My Lies explores the complexities of human connection through Sloane, a compulsive liar who bends the truth to fit in. Inspired by a chance encounter, author Sophie Stava explores the dangers of secrets and the glossy façades we create.

“When I started writing *Count My Lies*, I wasn’t thinking about a compulsive liar – not really. The inspiration came from a completely ordinary moment. I had just had my second baby, and our days followed a predictable rhythm, with mornings at the neighbourhood park. The park was usually empty, but one day, there she was. A woman with two small children, who looked to be about the same age as mine. We started chatting, and within minutes, I felt that rare, electric connection – an instant camaraderie.

She told me she was a nanny, looking after two kids who lived nearby. We laughed about the chaos of wrangling toddlers and even swapped numbers so we could meet again. But as I walked home, a sudden, unsettling thought hit me: what if this wasn’t a chance encounter? What if she already knew who I was, had orchestrated our meeting? That single, fleeting ‘what if’ planted the seed for a character who would go to extraordinary lengths for connection, weaving lies to fit into someone’s world.


Writing Sloane felt like stepping into another dimension. I am a terrible liar. My face betrays me

every time, and guilt gnaws at me over even the smallest fibs. Sloane is my polar opposite: she bends the truth with ease, skilfully constructing a version of herself that’s more likeable, more interesting. But her lies aren’t malicious. She doesn’t lie to harm; she lies to be accepted. Her need for connection makes her relatable – and puts her in danger.

The glossy, curated surfaces of my characters’ lives were another layer I loved exploring. We live in

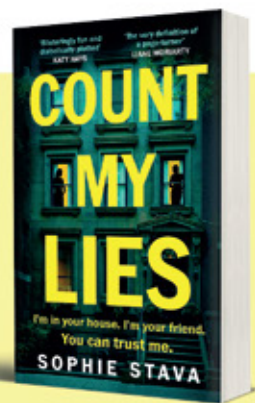
Her need for connection makes her relatable – and puts her in danger.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Sloane Caraway’s little lies make life more interesting. One impulsive fib lands her a job as a nanny for the seemingly perfect Lockhart family. Their idyllic life – complete with a brownstone, exclusive schools, and summers on a private island – becomes Sloane’s dream. But beneath the surface lies a dangerous truth. A psychological tale of obsession, deception, and the price of desiring someone else’s life. 

a world where social media offers endless highlight reels, carefully curated to show the best moments. It’s fascinating to think about what’s hidden just out of sight. Writing *Count My Lies*, I wanted readers to feel like they were peeling back layers, discovering the imperfections and secrets beneath. To me, the messy, complicated parts of life are what make us real.

As a reader, I crave surprises. I vividly remember the twist in *Gone Girl* and love books that give me that same jolt. Writers like Gillian Flynn, Tana French and Paula Hawkins have mastered tension. Twists, layers, and suspense – they’re at the heart of the stories I love to read and write.”



Count My Lies is out now.

TOP FICTION MAY

Great Big Beautiful Life by Emily Henry

Reclusive heiress Margaret Ives invites two rival writers to uncover her family's scandalous past – but only one gets to tell the story. As Alice Scott and Hayden Anderson dig deeper, secrets, NDAs, and undeniable chemistry complicate their assignment. Is it a tangled mystery, a tragedy ... or a love story? The dazzling new novel from a *Sunday Times* bestseller.



Private Dublin

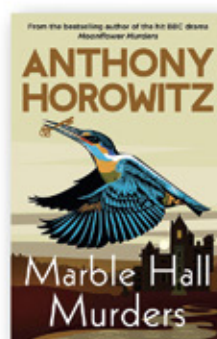
by James Patterson & Adam Hamdy

In the latest Private thriller, Jack Morgan's hunt for a ruthless gunman leads from a chaotic L.A. premiere to Dublin's underworld. When he realises the shooting was an attempt on his life, the case becomes personal. To protect those he loves, Jack must identify his enemy – and take them down before they strike again.



Air by John Boyne

From internationally bestselling author John Boyne comes a powerful story of a father and son on a journey to heal. As Aaron Umber travels the world with his 14-year-old son, he confronts past trauma, struggling to mend his bond with his son before it's too late. This riveting fourth book in Boyne's *Elements* series is a moving exploration of regret, redemption, and reconciliation.



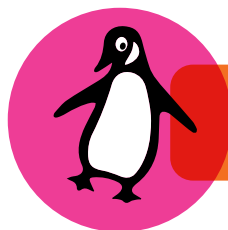
Marble Hall Murders by Anthony Horowitz

Bestselling author Anthony Horowitz delivers another Magpie Murders mystery. Editor Susan Ryeland, drawn into an Atticus Pünd case, must solve a real-life murder hidden within a novel. As she uncovers eerie parallels between fiction and reality, danger closes in – because someone will do anything to keep the truth buried. Expect puzzles, red herrings, and juicy murders!



Death at the White Hart by Chris Chibnall

A brilliant debut crime novel from the creator of *Broadchurch*. Detective Nicola Bridge returns to Dorset, only to find her quiet hometown hiding dark secrets. Pub landlord Jim Tiernan is dead – his body staged grotesquely. As Nicola digs deeper, everyone seems suspicious. Whispers, lies, and a killer in plain sight ... because the smallest villages conceal the darkest crimes.



READ THE EXTRACTS

Visit www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za/penguinbooksblog

TOP FICTION JUNE

The First Gentleman by James Patterson and Bill Clinton

James Patterson and former president Bill Clinton return with a gripping political thriller. The U.S. President seeks re-election – while her husband stands trial for murder. Is the First Gentleman a killer? Two investigative journalists race to uncover the truth as a high-stakes White House scandal unfolds. Patterson and Clinton are back, delivering a page-turning blockbuster.



The Girl with the Suitcase by Lesley Pearce

London 1941. When Mary meets a glamorous stranger named Elizabeth she realises their lives couldn't be more different. But when an air raid forces them to take shelter underground Mary's life is set in change forever. This is her chance to start afresh. The enthralling new novel from the 10-million-copy, number one bestselling author.



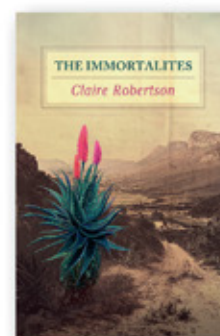
Atmosphere by Taylor Jenkins Reid

The #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* and *Daisy Jones & The Six* returns with *Atmosphere* – an epic novel set in the 1980s Space Shuttle program. As astrophysicist Joan Goodwin pursues her dream of becoming an astronaut, she faces ambition, love, and the extraordinary limits we push to reach the stars.



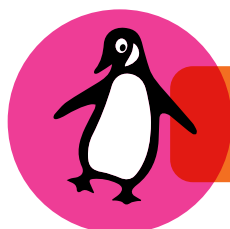
The Emperor of Gladness by Ocean Vuong

When nineteen-year-old Hai meets Grazina, an elderly widow, their unlikely bond reshapes his life. A poetic, intimate, and profound meditation on love, loss, and survival, Vuong's latest work is both heartbreaking and beautiful. A novel about chosen family, unexpected friendship, and second chances.



The Immortalites by Claire Robertson

Abandoned as a child and raised in an asylum, Ellie Kent becomes a governess bound for South Africa – only to be left behind again. Forced to join a settler caravan, she journeys with a rogue trader, an opera singer, and young Afrikaner Gysbert de Boer. As war looms, Ellie must fight for survival and a place to belong. A sweeping tale of sacrifice and resilience. 



READ THE EXTRACTS

Visit www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za/penguinbooksblog

Navigating Family, Humour, and Heartbreak

BOOK CLUB



A heartfelt exploration of sibling dynamics, family complexities, and the delicate balance between humour and heartbreak, Morgan Dick's *Favourite Daughter* delves into what binds us, even when life pulls us apart.

“I’ve always had a soft spot for family stories, perhaps because I come from a big, messy family myself. My own experiences shaped the heart of *Favourite Daughter*, especially when I watched my dad, an adoptee, meet his long-lost siblings later in life. Seeing their connection grow sparked my curiosity about what half-siblings share – not just physical traits like noses or eyebrows, but habits, hobbies, and even vices, despite being raised apart. This curiosity led me to wonder how people from different backgrounds and upbringings could still carry something of each other.


When it came time to choose a setting for this story, I decided that the best place to explore the messy dynamics of siblings would be inside a therapy room. I’m not a psychologist, but working in an adjacent profession has given me a real appreciation for the delicate balance therapists maintain between their own personal baggage and the work they do with clients. A therapy room is rich with power dynamics, both between therapist and client and within the clients themselves. It seemed like the

Even in the darkest moments, there’s room for laughter.

perfect backdrop to unravel the complex relationships I wanted to explore.

Siblings have always been a perennially popular topic in literature, and I think this is because their relationships are uniquely intense. I once heard an author – whose name I can’t quite remember, though I’ve been searching for it ever since – compare adult siblings to survivors of a lost civilisation. It’s an analogy that resonates with me because my upbringing with my brother and sister shaped us in ways that only siblings can understand. We share not only a history but values, customs, and a language that no one else really knows. That shared experience creates a bond so deep that only siblings can truly understand each other, which is why writing about them is so compelling.

Favourite Daughter tackles serious topics like broken families and alcoholism, but what I love

about the story is that it maintains a surprising sense of humour. For me, balancing sadness with humour has always been essential. Life is rarely all joy or all despair; it’s usually a combination of both, often in the same moment. Stories that lean too far in one direction can feel inauthentic, even lazy. In a world that’s often tough and overwhelming, I think it takes real courage and skill to acknowledge the potential for pain while still finding moments of hope and humour. That’s what I wanted *Favourite Daughter* to embody: a reflection of life’s complexity, where even in the darkest moments, there’s room for laughter.” 



Favourite Daughter is out now.

IN CONVERSATION WITH ...

Rachel Joyce

Rachel Joyce's *The Homemade God* is a tale of siblings, secrets, and self-discovery set against the shimmering backdrop of Lake Orta. Here, she reflects on grief, art, and unexpected characters.

Let's start with the setting: Lake Orta in Italy. Why there? Did you get to spend time there while writing, or was this pure armchair travel?

I always knew the story was set by a lake. It just took me a long time to find the right one. And then I began reading about Lake Orta, which is one of the smallest Italian lakes and one that locals call their well-kept secret, and I thought, *this is the one*. So I went and honestly it was like falling in love on the spot. Not just the water, the surrounding hills, the beautifully painted palazzi, but also the island set in the middle like a stone crown. I found the villa where the family would live. I found where they would buy bread, where they would go out to eat, I even found the police station. But it was the changing light on the water that captivated me most of all. The way it both mirrored and magnified what was on the shore. For a story that is all about reflection and projection, Lake Orta is the most perfect setting.



Did you always know you wanted to write about siblings, or did they sort of elbow their way into the story?

This was always going to be a story about siblings and the subterranean cracks within families; that period of what I call lawlessness that can follow any traumatic event within a family. The 'suspense' element of the story came later.

Vic Kemp, the famous artist and absent father; was he inspired by anyone real, or did he just appear, fully formed, demanding to be written?

Vic is exactly the kind of character who demands to be written. And he came to me pretty fully-formed and unapologetic. It always interests me when a character wants the story to be about them.

This book deals with grief, but it's also warm, funny, and full of life. How do you strike that balance?

It's possibly just part of who I am. But I am also interested in telling stories that reassemble the mess in ways that will make it more conscious and therefore something that can be dealt with. I don't mean that I want rainbows. It's more that I want my main characters to be more awake.

Sibling relationships can be complicated, messy, and wonderful. Did writing this book make you reflect on your own experiences with family?

I have two sisters and four children. I think a lot about these relationships. I *live* with them. They will always be complex and I will always be grateful I have them. But once you have created and understood four characters, you find them behaving

For a story that is all about reflection and projection, Lake Orta is the most perfect setting.

in ways that are not necessarily ones you've seen. You just know in your gut that they are true to those four people.

Then there's Bella-Mae, the much younger, mysterious new wife. Was she always part of the story, or did she arrive unexpectedly, like a guest nobody invited?

She is a disturber. She turned up soon after I had found the siblings. But I was very interested in how long I could keep a central character like her waiting in the wings. We know a lot about Bella-Mae before we meet her and that excites me because you're playing with the readers' projections and prejudices as well as those of the characters in the book.

Art plays a huge role in the book. To you, is creativity something we inherit, or is it something we make for ourselves?

I am a strong believer that we are all creative in different ways. I wouldn't say it's inherited so much as instinctive. We like to play in one way or another, we like to imagine alternative realities: that's creative. But it needs to be nurtured, not crushed. The problem for Vic Kemp, the artist at the centre of this story, is that his art has become about ego, and not an authentic form of self-expression.


If you had to be stuck in a villa with your own characters for a weekend, who would drive you nuts, and who would you happily share a bottle of wine with?

Well, Netta would offer me a bottle of wine the moment I walked in the door. And I do have a soft spot for her. She's difficult, sharp as a knife, very smart, very witty and deeply wounded. And like her, I wouldn't last two minutes with Laszlo.

There's a lot in this book about finding yourself – through art, through family, through mistakes. Was there a particular part of that journey that felt personal to you?

I know that feeling of chaos within a family after something difficult happens, and I also know that the only way for me to make sense of it is to write about it.

And finally, your writing process! Are you the kind of writer who plans everything, or do you enjoy being surprised along the way?

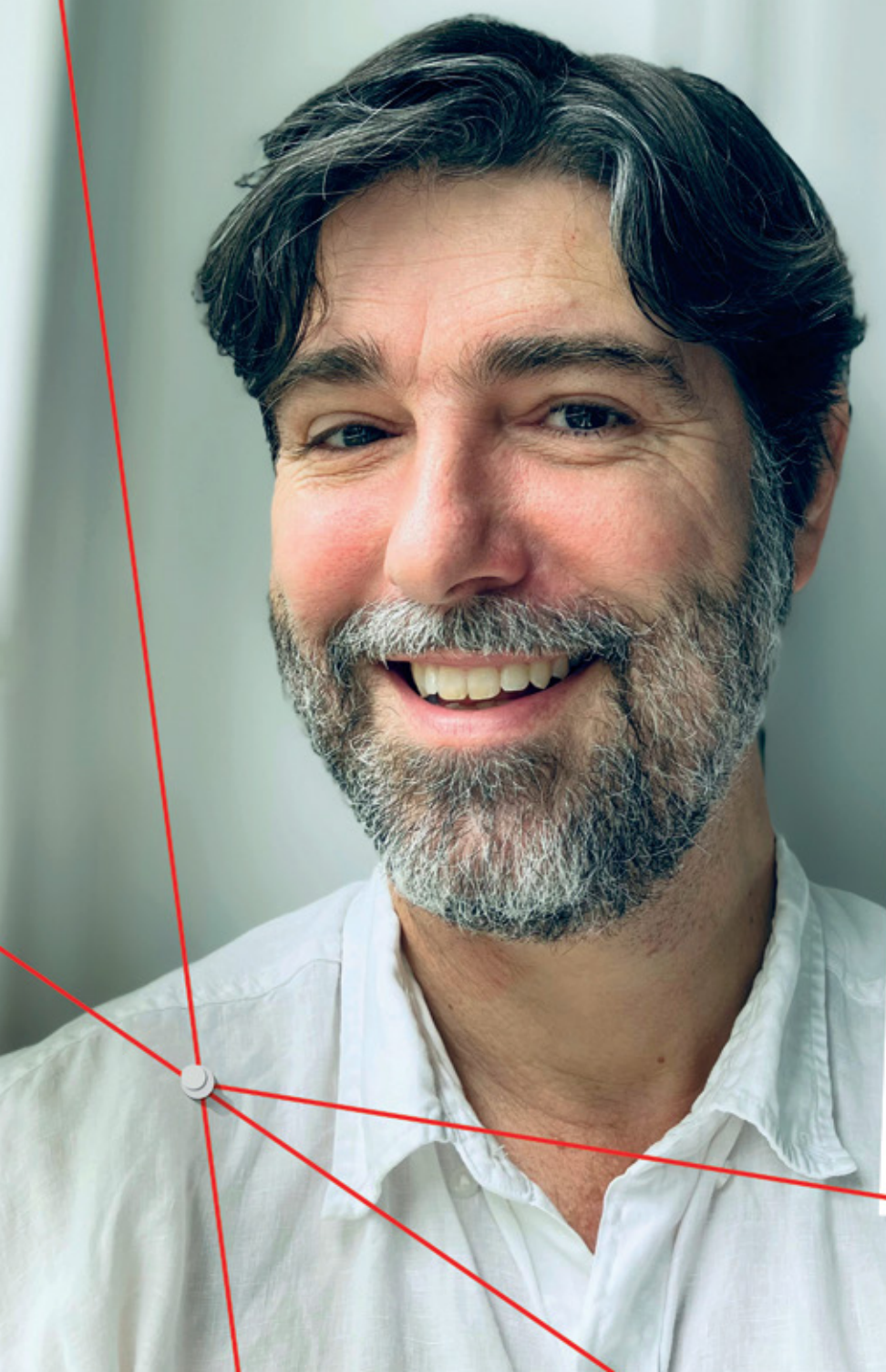
I do try to plan and there is a lot about the story that I know before I begin to write. But there is also a lot I find as I go. The more I learn about the characters, the more complexities and surprises I discover. But I make a lot of mistakes in order to meet the book I originally imagined. It's like rehearsing a play. You need to go wrong to see what's right. 



The Homemade God is out now.

ALL ABOUT THE CONFIDENCE

Of all the pieces of advice that writers and teachers offer, perhaps the most well-thumbed is that you should write what you know, says **Tom Eaton**, well-known for his columns and satire. And now also for his fiction.



“It’s a truism that hasn’t always sat well with me, mostly because of how quickly it can fall apart under interrogation. You don’t even need to go as far as Socrates’ claim that the only thing we know is that we know nothing: the entire field of psychoanalysis exists because so many of us don’t know even ourselves particularly well.

All of this is why I tend to offer a less pithy (and therefore less satisfying) version of that original piece of advice, namely, that instead of writing what you know, you should write what you feel reasonably confident you can intuit with a sensible margin of error.

Perhaps that’s a cop-out, a way of admitting that I’m not sure what I know about writing, especially

as I grow older and the blazing confidence of youth fades, taking with it so many assumptions and, in some cases, snobberies.

After the last year, however, which I spent writing my first cosy crime novel, *An Act of Murder*, I can finally say with some confidence that I do, in fact, know a few things, at least about writing; things I learned in small increments, month by month.

You'll have encountered most of them before, I'm sure. Don't get hung up on your first draft. Let your characters lead you. Find out what your writerly tics are and try to keep them in check before your manuscript becomes a swamp of 'suddenly's or exclamation marks. If you're writing a book involving murder, make peace with the fact that your internet search history is going to look very, very, very bad if you're ever accused of a crime.

I'd heard them all before, too, but it's often the case that you need to do a thing before the theory stops hovering in the air just in front of your forehead and seeps into your body, becoming something you not only understand but feel.

Which brings me to the thing I found most surprising – a thing I'd been told but never felt properly until *An Act of Murder*.

It was, simply, that writing is a muscle.

It was a strange discovery to make so late. I've been a jobbing writer for over two decades, and in a good year I might write 200,000 words. But despite this output, and despite having written three novels myself as a much younger man, I realise that before *An Act of Murder* I was still drawn to the myth that novel-writing is largely an act of inspiration rather than a series of

I now understand that there is no brain-scoop and definitely no perfect little bird.

scheduling decisions strung together by perseverance and, if you're lucky, routine.

Deep down, I think I still believed that stories are entirely cerebral things, and that writing is a sort of brain-scooping operation during which you extract those stories from your mind and plop them on the page. The finished novel, I felt, was a bit like a hatchling in a nest: one moment it is a perfect little bird inside its egg, and then, after a short struggle, it is a perfect little bird in the world.

I now understand that there is no brain-scoop and definitely no perfect little bird. Instead, there is simply a physical practice of sitting down and writing words – the right words, the wrong words; words that sing or mutter, that slip into place obediently or stick out like rusty nails, defying you until you realise that they don't belong here but rather in the next


book. There are walks, and repetitive tasks to quiet your mind, and lots of breathing, but always there is the act and the action of writing, whether for an hour or a whole morning, or as long as you can keep your back turned on that eternal critic who hovers behind you pretending to demand perfection but who is merely encouraging surrender.

I was lucky. For me, surrender wasn't an option. I had to keep going, having been blessed with the greatest motivator a writer can have; greater than passion, greater even than ambition and the desire to make something good: a deadline from my publisher.

And so I persevered, and I finally learned what so many writers (and runners) already know; that, if you keep doing it, every week, every second day, in that hour that's suddenly opened up, the muscle takes shape; takes hold; and one day you realise that it no longer feels like something you should be doing but has become something you want to do, something you can't wait to do. When you started, all you wanted to do was finish; now, you're sorry it has to end.

Thank heavens for sequels."

ABOUT THE BOOK

Struggling actor Arnold Prinsloo's life is in shambles – his career is failing, his love life is over, and now he's accused of murder. To clear his name, he must take on the role of a lifetime: a tough East Rand detective. Expect twists, danger, and a dash of dark comedy in this gripping page-turner. 

An Act of Murder is out now.



ENCHANTED SHELF

From the historical settings of Paris, Canvey Island, and Chicago, to the creation of Maisie, author, Fiza Saeed McLynn shares a behind-the-scenes look at her novel, *The Midnight Carousel*.



“As an author with a deep passion for history, I knew that *The Midnight Carousel* would be set in the past. The decision to take readers from the 1900s in Paris to 1920s Chicago via Canvey Island wasn't entirely intentional, but rather an organic evolution of my research and curiosity. Paris was an easy starting point because it's a city with such a richly textured atmosphere. I was particularly drawn to the Exposition Universelle of 1900, a world fair celebrating new technology, where I could imagine the carousel as a revolutionary machine, a perfect fit for such an event. From there, I chose to progress through the decades, moving into the 1920s to capture the monumental social changes that followed World War I.

The idea of a carousel – and the characters – moving between countries felt like an essential part of the story. I wanted to create settings that were as diverse and evocative as possible: Paris, dark and brooding; Canvey Island, isolated and cut off from the mainland; and Chicago, a vibrant, bustling metropolis. As I explored these different time periods and locations, I loved how the changing backdrops kept the

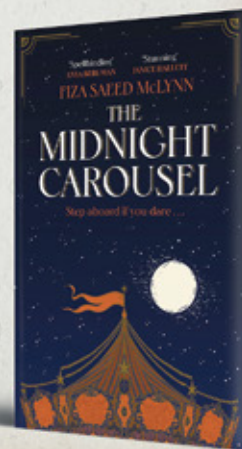
narrative flowing. However, there was something especially exciting about capturing the glamour of the Jazz Age!

The carousel itself is central to the story, almost a character in its own right. As a child, I eagerly anticipated the arrival of the funfair every June. The carousel was always my favourite, with its painted horses and the way it transported me to fantastical adventures. I wanted to bring that same magic and nostalgia into *The Midnight Carousel*, using the ride as a thread that ties the story together. The carousel is an inanimate object, yet its presence affects each character differently. It serves as a symbol of escapism, a portal to self-discovery, and a reflection of the inner lives of those who encounter it.

Maisie, one of the novel's central characters, was a challenge for me. She didn't even appear in

the first draft. I struggled to find the right voice for her – someone who was desperate for love and acceptance but needed to grow from being completely dependent on others to stepping into her own power. Maisie had to be vulnerable, yet resilient; adventurous, yet anxious. Just when I was about to give up on her character, I had an image of a barefoot little girl running wild along a windswept beach, collecting pebbles. And there she was – Maisie, free and innocent, yet alone, relying on her own rituals to feel safe. That moment sparked her transformation, and I set out to show how she grows into a woman who can trust herself.” **P**

“The carousel is an inanimate object, yet its presence affects each character differently.
”



The Midnight Carousel is out now.

OOOR MUSIEK EN MOORD



Die inspirasie vir die vyfde boek in die Nicci de Wee-reeks het Bettina Wyngaard beetgepak hoog bo in 'n kloktoring.

“There is nothing to writing, all you do is sit at a typewriter and bleed.” Hierdie woorde word aan Ernest Hemingway toegedig.

Ek het een van my eerste kortverhale, iewers in my hoërskooljare, op my ma se vriendin se Remington uitgehamer. Those were the days. Deesdae is dit veel makliker, met 'n rekenaar. Druk net Delete en enige foute verdwyn. Vergete is die dae van Tippex, of bo-oor die fout tik. Maar terselfdertyd bly skryf moeilik, want waarom skryf jy? Hoe vind jy 'n storie wat jou laat uitstaan bo al die ander? Dis wanneer jy sit en bloei, soos Hemingway.

Selfs voordat jy begin skryf, moet jy oop en ontvanklik wees vir die wêreld rondom jou. Stories is oral, as jy weet waar om te kyk. Die vonk vir my nuutste Nicci de Wee-krimi, *Knal*, het gekom terwyl ek eendag in Ann Arbor, Michigan, die trappe na die binnegoed van 'n stel klokke agter die amptelike beiaardier geklim het. Ek het geen kop vir hoogtes

nie, en toe ek afkyk na hoe steil die trappe agter my is, en hoe ver die val sal wees, het ek skielik besef dat hier 'n storie lê. Die arme beiaardier het aan musiek gedink, ek aan moord.

Soms lees ek 'n koerantberig, of hoor twee mense praat, of kry 'n flits binne iemand se lewe – stories is oral, as mens maar net kyk. Maar daai vonk moet 'n veldbrand word as jy enigiets meer as 'n haiku wil skryf.

Write what you know. Dis gewoonlik die eerste stukkie advies wat nuwe skrywers kry. Natuurlik beteken dit nie dat ek net moet skryf oor dit wat ek ken nie. *Knal* sou andersins nooit die lig sien nie, want wat weet ek van musiek oor die algemeen of klokke spesifiek? Wat dit wel beteken is dat ek moet navorsing doen sodat wanneer ek my storie skryf, dit geloofwaardig moet wees. 'n Musikant moet meegesleur word deur die storie, nie geïrriteer word deur verkeerde feite nie. Die storie kom altyd eerste, maar ek verloor nooit uit die oog dat 'n leser dalk 'n kenner is op die gebied

waaroor ek skryf. Respek vir daai leser noop my om seker te maak dat my navorsing deeglik is.

Die lekkerste kompliment wat ek nog gekry het, was toe 'n hoëkop in die polisie by 'n boekgesprek oor *Lokval*, my vorige Nicci de Wee-krimi, ontstaan en sê hulle soek daai een in hulle kantoor wat so uitpraat. Dit beteken my navorsing is akkuraat!

Natuurlik verklap ek nie my bronne nie.” 



Knal is nou beskikbaar.



VAN ANTIEKE KLOOSTERS EN ORTODOKSE MISTIEK

In sy nuutste boek, *Donker vuur*, ondersoek Pieter Stoffberg temas soos geloof, skynheiligheid en die soeke na waarheid en God.

Jou nuutste boek speel af in Oekraïne. Was jy al daar? Vertel asseblief meer!

In die middel negentigs was ek op 'n kerktoer na Oekraïne en het vriendskappe gesluit met jong manne wat pas hulle pastoorsopleiding klaargemaak het. Dit was net enkele jare na die val van die Berlynse muur en onafhanklikheid van die Oekraïne – 'n kraakvars seisoen van godsdiensvryheid met nuwe gemeentes. Met ons aankoms was ons ook op die Rooi Plein in Moskou en die gees van Stalin in sy praalgraf, die absolute gravitas van dekades se kommunisme, het 'n atmosfeer geskep wat ek nog nooit op 'n ander plek beleef het nie.

Die een konstante in hierdie milieu – in Rusland en Oekraïne – was die honderde goue koepels van Ortodokse kerke wat vorige dekades in wisselvallige verhoudings met die staat was; altyd onder hulle beheer, maar somtyds vervolg en dan weer verhef as staatsbesit en kosbare erfenis van Slawiese kultuur.

Die boek Ester uit die Bybel speel 'n belangrike rol. Dan is daar 'n kelder waar die joernaal van 'n hermiet gevind word. Wil jy iets sê oor die temas geloof, skynheiligheid, die verloor van geloof, die soeke na waarheid en God? Terug in Suid-Afrika is ek – deur

bemiddeling van wyle Tom Gouws – deur 'n publikasiehuis genader om 'n boek te skryf oor Ester van die Bybel. Vir 'n suiwer historiese roman het ek glad nie kans gesien nie. Ek het regtig nie geweet wat ek vir die uitgewers gaan sê nie, maar op pad na ons eerste gesprek, het ek die betowering van die antieke kloosters en ortodokse mistiek onthou. In 'n oomblik het ek geweet hoe ek die Esterstorie kan vertel binne 'n raamwerk waarin ek graag wil skryf: 'n Vergete kelder met 'n antieke Esterboekrol, die mafia en spanning rondom godsdienswetgewing wat op daardie stadium van die geskiedenis aan die broei was.

Die hoofkarakter, Olja, is sonder heenkome, oorgelewer aan die elemente. 'n Verskydenheid mans raak om die verkeerde redes op haar verlief. Sy doen wat sy moet om te oorleef. Vertel ns asseblief van haar, waar kom sy vandaan?


'n Straatkind, die mooiste onder vrouens, soos Ester in antieke tye, wat die verhaal na hedendaagse Oekraïne transposeer. Dit was die basis van my eerste roman, *In die lig van vuur*.

Die held is 'n oud-Recce wat ná die Grensoorlog sendingwerk gaan doen en by die Russiese

Ortodokse kerk in Oekraïne beland. In *Tenk* het jy ook oor die Grensoorlog geskryf: is daar 'n verbintenis?

Tenk is 'n boek oor 'n militêre operasie waartydens die eerste tenkoorlogvoering in Afrika sedert die tweede wêreldoorlog plaasgevind het. Dit was vir my lekker en natuurlik om iemand uit daardie oorlog te plaas in die konflik met die Oekraïense mafia, 'n verhaallyn uit *In die Lig van Vuur* wat ek verder wou uitbou.

Korrupsie is oral – die regering, polisie, kerk en mafia. Jy sleep dit ook by in *Donker vuur*?

Dit is 'n roman waarin ek kon besin oor geloof en die soeke na God te midde van 'n onstuimige wêreld van geweld, korrupsie en verraad. 



Donker vuur is nou beskikbaar.

The Life-Changing Power of LETTING GO

Mel Robbins' *The Let Them Theory* is all about the power of letting go – and she learned this lesson firsthand on her son's prom night. In this candid and heartfelt moment, she discovers how stepping back, instead of stepping in, can lead to the biggest breakthroughs.

“Twenty kids in black tie were planning to head out into this rainstorm with no umbrellas or rain jackets to a fast-food joint that maybe ten of them can squeeze inside of ... before prom?! I couldn't help myself.

You know that feeling when your body is two steps ahead of you, and you just can't stop yourself from saying something or doing something irrational? In my defense, I wasn't the only parent who intervened. Dozens of parents were now swarming their kids trying to take control of the situation. I broke out my phone and started searching for restaurants that might have a sit-down reservation available for twenty.

Nothing ... There was nothing. I could feel [my daughter] Kendall watching me. She just stood there as I yelled out to the other parents, 'I can't find a reservation anywhere. I'll look for a pizza place that delivers here.'

And that's when she reached out and grabbed my arm, pulled me toward her, and looked me in the eyes.

'Mom, if Oakley and his friends want to go to a taco bar for pre-

prom, LET THEM.'

'But it's too small for all of them to fit in; they're going to get soaked,' I said.

'Mom, LET THEM get soaked.'

'But his new sneakers are going to get ruined.'

'LET THEM get ruined.'

'Kendall, they're brand new!'

'MOM! You're being annoying. LET THEM show up to prom in wet tuxedos and dresses. LET THEM go eat where they want. It's their prom. Not yours. Just drop it.'

LET THEM.

The effect was immediate. Something inside of me softened. I could feel the tension disappearing, my mind stopped racing, and the stress of trying to control what was happening evaporated. Why did I need to get involved? Why did I have to manage this situation? Why not worry about what I was going to do for dinner tonight, rather than what they were? Why was I stressing about them at all?

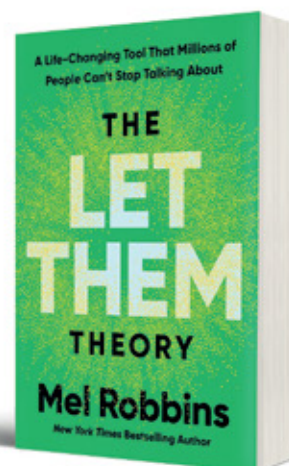
Let. Them. It's their prom, not yours. Stop controlling it or judging it, or managing it, and LET THEM. So that's what I did. As the other parents kept trying to micromanage their kids, I walked

up to Oakley and smiled. 'What now?' he said. 'Here's forty dollars for Amigos,' I told him. 'Have an awesome prom.'

He smiled wide, gave me a huge hug, and said, 'Thanks, Mom. We will.'

Then I watched as Oak and his date stepped out the door, into the pouring rain. I watched them run through the storm and splash mud up onto her gown and ruin his new sneakers. And I didn't care. In fact, it was kind of cute.

Little did I know, that one moment would fundamentally change my entire approach to life.” 



Extracted from *The Let Them Theory*, out now.

UNSILENCED HISTORY

Three authors, three harrowing stories of survival, power, and justice. From war-torn DRC to apartheid's gallows and South Africa's first high treason trial, these books reveal the darkest corners of history.

SURVIVING THE UNSPEAKABLE

The Smallest Ones by Popina Khumanda is a harrowing true story of survival and resilience.

Captured by rebel soldiers in the DRC as a child, Popina endured unimaginable horrors before escaping to South Africa. This extract captures the moment her world shattered.

"I didn't want to leave the safe darkness of our hut. Something told me I needed to hide from the tall man and his comrades. That he was coming back for me, that it wasn't over yet.

Footsteps – someone was walking towards the hut.

I panicked. Where was *YaZiana*? "Good morning, *popi*."

Instant relief at my sister's voice.

Behind her, through the door opening, I could see Lola and her mother. Mama Nzembo was wearing a green dress with a black shawl wrapped tightly around her face.

"Good morning, Ziana. *Oza ndenge nini?*" Mama Nzembo asked softly as she entered our hut. "I have come to check up on you girls. How are you doing, Popina?"

My mouth couldn't form any words. I felt sick.

Nyota, one of the village girls, called from outside. "Popina! Lola! Come play!" Nyota was funny – her hair was short like a boy's, and she wore only boys' pants because she had eight brothers and her mother said there wasn't money for girls' clothes.

We didn't feel like playing, not this morning, but *YaZiana* insisted that we join the game – she needed to start her daily chores. Mama Nzembo offered to watch us.

I got up from my bed on the floor and stood in the doorway. I could see the girls playing *ukugenda* outside. Over the road from our hut, the boys were playing soccer. I watched as someone kicked their ball into the forest and a boy called Beya ran to fetch it. He was coming out of the bushes when a bullet pierced his head. I was just standing there in front of our hut. And I saw Beya die.

And then gunshots shook our hut and suddenly there were soldiers everywhere. *YaZiana*, Mama Nzembo, Lola and I, standing there together as soldiers came out of nowhere, running in all directions, stopping and searching people – what for? – firing guns, torching huts.

Everything happened in slow motion. I felt as if I had left my body and was looking at the scene

from somewhere else. All around us huts were going up in flames, mothers screaming for their children. I saw a man kneeling, his hands raised in the air. A single bullet in the back.

Soon the ground was littered with bodies, limp and lifeless like cloth dolls, but these were people I knew.

I looked around me, rooted to the spot. Was this really happening? My mind told me to run, but my limbs wouldn't move. My child-brain didn't comprehend this. Couldn't comprehend that Burundian rebels were invading our village. Collecting people. Collecting little girls and boys. Killing the older men and women.

All around me, people were dying. I gazed out over the wasteland that had been our village, our home.

And then a shot rang out, much closer."



The Smallest Ones hits shelves in June 2025.



THE BOEREMAG'S DEADLY PLAN

When journalist Karin Mitchell was assigned to cover the Boeremag trial in 2003, she never imagined the story would consume her for years. Her book, *The High Treason Club* unpacks the complex motives and unsettling realities behind South Africa's first democratic high treason trial.

"I've always believed that a story will choose a journalist. I was descending the steps into a dark tunnel of the Kgoši Mampuru II Correctional Facility to interview one of the 'alleged masterminds' when I realised that the story of the Boeremag had chosen me. It was only once I started to write *The High Treason Club* that it dawned on me that although most of the events to overthrow the democratically elected ANC government had played out while I was still in high school, my age and my background placed me in a position to dissect the story from unique angles.

When I was deployed to cover the trial, I was excited to cover a story of such magnitude, but I wasn't too fond of the subject. See, we looked the same and we shared a language and certain cultural traditions, but the men embodied everything that I had been taught not to be. But as the months in court dragged on and I started to speak to different role-players, I realised that 'the Boeremag' was not as clear cut as the South African society thought the group to be. Yes, they wanted to overthrow the government. Yes, they were white supremacists. Yes, they'd

planned their actions over several years. However, all twenty-three of the men who stood accused had different reasons for getting involved. And once I realised this, I started to view each accused as an individual. A father. A husband. A son. And I couldn't ignore the fact that there were innocent children

I couldn't ignore the fact that there were innocent children and family members on the other side of the court dock.

and family members on the other side of the court dock.

To create a balanced view of the various layers attached to the trial, I relied heavily on the court transcripts of approximately 60 000 pages, interviews I'd conducted with key players, including several years of interviews with plot leader Mike du Toit while he was in custody. I also would not have been able to write the behind-the-scenes stories of the investigation process without the exclusive recollections from the lead investigator on the case, Colonel Tollie Vreugdenburg.

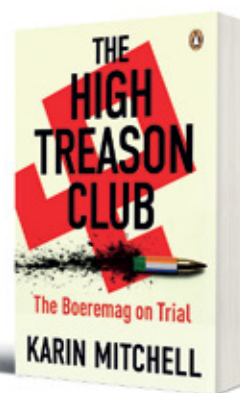
The Boeremag trial started in 2003, less than a decade since the country became a democracy. It was the first high treason trial under the new dispensation, and the Boeremag had been driven by fear. They were guided by visions of the South African prophet, Siener van Rensburg, which suggested that there would be large-scale black on white violence in the country. Siener's visions also alluded to what was happening in Zimbabwe at the time, and since the group was convinced that South Africa was going to follow the same trajectory, they decided to take matters into

their own hands and launch an offensive.

One of the things that struck me while I was covering the trial was that nobody had been able to produce a full version of what the Boeremag was, simply because there were so many accused, and the trial spanned over a decade. Due

to the lack of previously published material on various nuances in the trial, I found that I was discovering new details every day. My objective in writing the book was to let the characters – some of whom I'd never seen – come alive to tell the story to the reader in a way that would be easy to digest.

My connection with this story started in 2011. Never in a million years would I have guessed that the current global political debates surrounding nationalism or race supremacy would be taking place at the time of the book's launch. I've spent years writing this story, and as the Boeremag has taught me – it's up to readers how they choose to view the facts."



The High Treason Club is out now.

"I AM UNASHAMEDLY FIERCELY OPPOSED TO THE DEATH PENALTY."



Peter Auf der Heyde's *Death in Pretoria* tells the harrowing stories of political activists executed under apartheid, many now forgotten.

Through interviews with families, lawyers, and warders, the book exposes injustice and erased histories.

Your book focuses on political activists who were executed during apartheid, many of whom remain unknown. What drew you to their stories?

There were two aspects that drew me to the stories. For one, I am unashamedly fiercely opposed to the death penalty. The other aspect is that the overwhelming majority of them are forgotten. Their stories do not feature in the history books and often, what little is said about them, is a distorted view of their lives.

You've interviewed a wide range of people – family members, lawyers, judges, even death row warders. Were there any standout conversations?

Whilst all the interviews were emotionally draining, there are three that stand out. The interview with Aiken Zondo (father of Andrew Zondo) and Ann and David Wolfe (wife and son of John Harris). Both of them were incredibly powerful and I was amazed by how much compassion they had in dealing with the deaths of their son, father and husband. The other interview that stands out is with Pat Mulveno, who worked for the deputy sheriff and was responsible for informing the condemned when their execution

would take place. He was also in charge of working out the necessary length of the rope used to hang them. During our interview, he worked out how much rope would be needed to hang me. The banality of that interview stood in stark contrast to the emotional depth of the others.

In your research, did you come across any individuals who you believe were completely innocent?

Yes, there are two condemned who even the state lawyers believed to be innocent. I hope, once the book is published, that the Ministry of Justice looks into the case. Having said that, I believe that in a way (not legally speaking) all but a handful of those I write about in my book were innocent in the sense that they would not have done the deeds they were convicted of, had it not been for apartheid.

***Death in Pretoria* highlights activists who were later disowned by the ANC. Can you expand on why this happened and how it shaped their legacy?**

I think the ANC struggled to deal with the backlash to their call to make the country ungovernable. I think very few people will say that it is acceptable to necklace a person because they bought something from Checkers during a consumer boycott. But again, this has to be placed into the context of the times. Sadly the majority of those (who were not executed) were 'thrown' back into the township and really struggled.

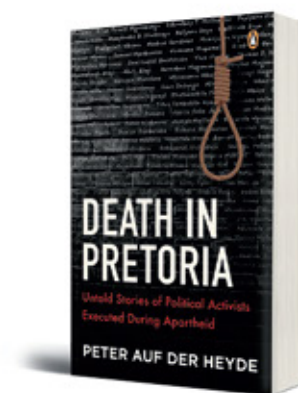
Many of these activists went to the gallows believing in their cause. Based on your

research, what were their final moments like? Did their beliefs remain unshaken?

Judging by what I have been able to glean from my research, particularly in the dying days of apartheid, they remained committed to the cause. Some of the letters that I wrote substantiate these findings. Having said that though, I also believe that some of the narratives of the heroic fighters going to the gallows are not always a true reflection of what really transpired.

The death penalty remains a divisive topic in South Africa. Do you think revisiting these cases could influence the debate today?

I would be very happy if that were to be the case. The only justification in the death penalty is revenge. All other factors put forward by those calling for a return of the death penalty (like prisoners are released too early, it is too expensive to house them, etc.) have been debunked. The only "real" reason why anybody would be in favour of the death penalty is "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". To those calling for the death penalty I would say: What number of innocent people hanged is acceptable? ⓘ



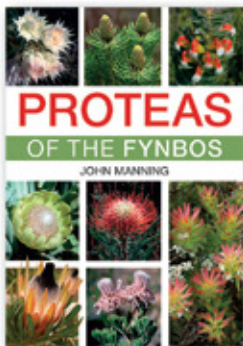
Death in Pretoria is out in June 2025.

SOUTH AFRICA'S NATURAL WONDERS

From the fynbos-clad slopes of Table Mountain to the rugged expanses of the Karoo, South Africa's diverse landscapes are home to extraordinary biodiversity, rich histories, and breathtaking natural wonders waiting to be explored.

1

The Cape Floristic Region



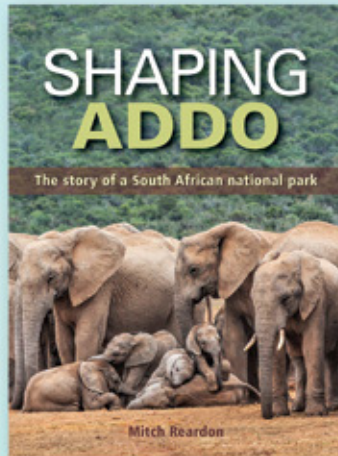
The Cape Floristic Region, located at the southern tip of Africa, is a globally recognised biodiversity hotspot and home to an astonishing

variety of plant life, including the iconic proteas. With 330 species found in the fynbos, this region is a botanical treasure trove, showcasing some of the most striking and diverse wildflowers in the world. Proteas hold a special place in South African culture – the King Protea, with its bold, sculptural blooms, is proudly displayed on the country's National Coat of Arms and lends its name to the national cricket team. In *Proteas of the Fynbos*, John Manning celebrates these charismatic plants, featuring 165 of the most common or visually striking species. The book provides detailed descriptions

of their unique characteristics, flowering times, and habitats, with vibrant photographs capturing their beauty. An insightful introduction delves into their biology, pollination, and conservation, offering valuable context for both enthusiasts and researchers. Organised for easy identification, this guide allows readers to confidently recognise over half of all fynbos protea species. As the threats of habitat loss and climate change loom, *Proteas of the Fynbos* highlights the importance of appreciating and preserving these botanical gems for generations to come.

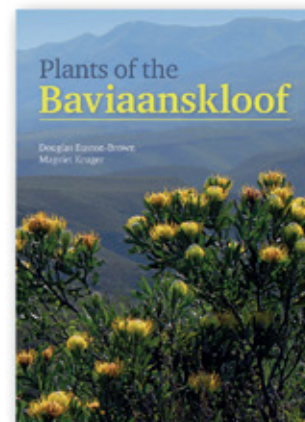
2 Addo Elephant Park

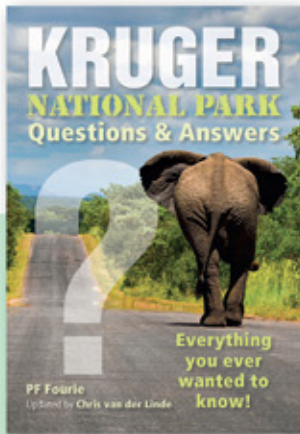
More than a century ago, the elephants of the Eastern Cape were on the brink of disappearing, their numbers dwindling to just 16 due to relentless hunting. Today, the Addo Elephant National Park is home to a thriving population of 650 elephants – the highest concentration of wild elephants in the world. But Addo's transformation is about more than just saving a single species. Over the past four decades, conservation efforts have expanded beyond elephants to protect five distinct biomes and the rich diversity of wildlife they support. Once a modest sanctuary, Addo has evolved into South Africa's most ecologically diverse protected area, now boasting the Big Seven: elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino, great white shark, and southern right whale. Mitch Reardon's *Shaping Addo*, much like its predecessor *Shaping Kruger*, unpacks the park's extraordinary journey, exploring how shifting conservation strategies have reshaped this landscape and its inhabitants. Drawing on decades of research, the book offers a compelling look at the delicate balance of nature – how species interact, adapt, and survive under careful management. Addo's story is one of resilience and renewal, a testament to what is possible when conservation embraces complexity, ensuring the survival of both land and marine ecosystems.



3 The Baviaanskloof

Tucked away in the southwestern corner of the Eastern Cape, Baviaanskloof is a rugged, 200 kilometre-long valley cradled between the Baviaanskloof and Kouga mountain ranges. Named after the chacma baboons that once roamed its cliffs, this extraordinary landscape forms part of the Cape Floral Region World Heritage Site, a haven of biodiversity where nearly all of South Africa's eight biomes converge. The result is a remarkable array of plant life, with countless endemic species thriving in its varied terrain. *Plants of the Baviaanskloof*, compiled over two decades by Magriet Kruger and Douglas Euston-Brown, is the definitive botanical guide to this region, cataloguing over 1,000 plant species with vivid photography and concise descriptions. More than just a field guide, it offers insight into the geology, climate and vegetation of this remote wilderness, making it an essential companion for botanists, gardeners, and nature lovers alike. As the only botanical guide dedicated to this area, it stands as an enduring tribute to the kloof's ecological richness, inviting travellers, hikers, and conservationists to explore and appreciate the intricate tapestry of life that flourishes within its ancient mountains.



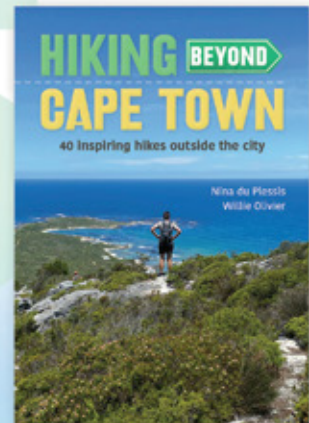


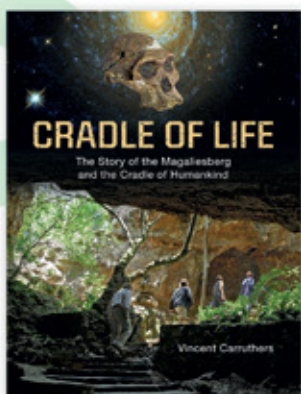
Kruger National Park

Kruger National Park is one of Africa's most celebrated wildlife reserves, spanning nearly two million hectares of untamed wilderness. Home to the Big Five – lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhino – it offers visitors an unparalleled safari experience, with vast landscapes ranging from open savannahs to dense riverine forests. Beyond its famous mammals, the park boasts an extraordinary diversity of life, including over 500 bird species, reptiles, and countless other creatures that shape its delicate ecosystem. Conservation remains at the heart of Kruger's management, with ongoing efforts to combat poaching, preserve habitats, and balance tourism with environmental responsibility. For those eager to deepen their understanding of this remarkable place, *Kruger National Park: Questions & Answers* is an essential companion. Written by PF Fourie, a seasoned game park official, the book answers visitors' most frequently asked questions, covering everything from animal behaviour and ecology to the park's history, safety tips, and even the origins of place names. This newly expanded edition offers up-to-date insights, making it the perfect guide for both newcomers and seasoned safari-goers. Whether driving through Kruger's winding roads or simply dreaming of an African adventure, this book brings the park's wonders to life.

Table Mountain

Rising majestically above Cape Town, Table Mountain is more than just an iconic backdrop – it's a playground for hikers seeking breathtaking views, diverse landscapes, and a connection to nature. Its vast network of trails ranges from gentle paths winding through fynbos-covered slopes to steep ascents that test even seasoned adventurers. Whether tackling the popular Platteklip Gorge, scrambling up India Venster, or opting for a more secluded route, hikers are rewarded with panoramic vistas stretching from the city to the Atlantic Ocean. While *Hiking Beyond Cape Town* by Nina Olivier and Willie Olivier focuses on trails beyond the city, its expert guidance and practical advice equip adventurers with the knowledge they need to confidently explore Table Mountain and beyond. The book's detailed descriptions, maps, and insights into the region's rich biodiversity offer an essential toolkit for those eager to venture off the beaten path. With routes tailored to different fitness levels and time constraints, it inspires hikers to step outside their comfort zones and embrace the untamed beauty of the Western Cape. Table Mountain, with its sheer cliffs and hidden ravines, remains a gateway to exploration – a place where every step uncovers new wonders.





The Cradle of Humankind

The Cradle of Humankind, nestled within the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve, is one of South Africa's most extraordinary destinations, offering a window into our distant past. This World Heritage Site, recognised for its 'outstanding universal value,' has captivated scientists and visitors alike, providing crucial insights into human evolution. With around 200 caves scattered throughout the region, its unique geology has preserved some of the most significant fossil discoveries ever made, helping to piece together the story of where we come from. For decades, researchers have been unearthing remnants of early hominins, revealing a timeline that stretches back millions of years. With breathtaking photography, maps, and diagrams, Vincent Carruthers' *Cradle of Life* brings this remarkable area to life, making it an essential read for anyone eager to understand the rich and complex history embedded in South Africa's soil.

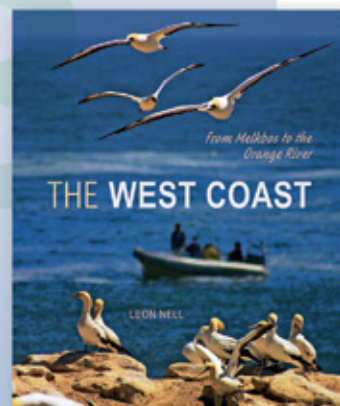
The Karoo

The Karoo is a land of quiet grandeur, where vast plains stretch endlessly beneath an open sky, and time seems to slow. By day, the Karoo is a study in contrasts – golden grasses against red earth, blue-hued mountains in the distance, and the occasional burst of green where life clings to dry riverbeds. But it is at night that the Karoo becomes truly magical. With little to no light pollution, its skies offer some of the clearest stargazing in the world. Here, the Milky Way stretches across the heavens, meteor showers dazzle, and planets glow with an intensity rarely seen elsewhere. For those eager to explore this celestial spectacle, *2025 Sky Guide Southern Africa* is an essential resource to help visitors make the most of the Karoo's incredible night skies.



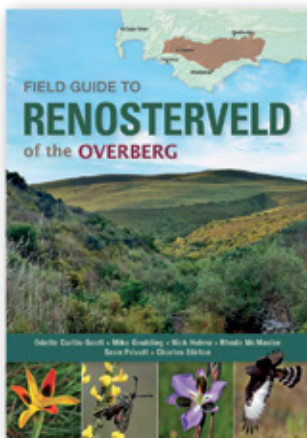
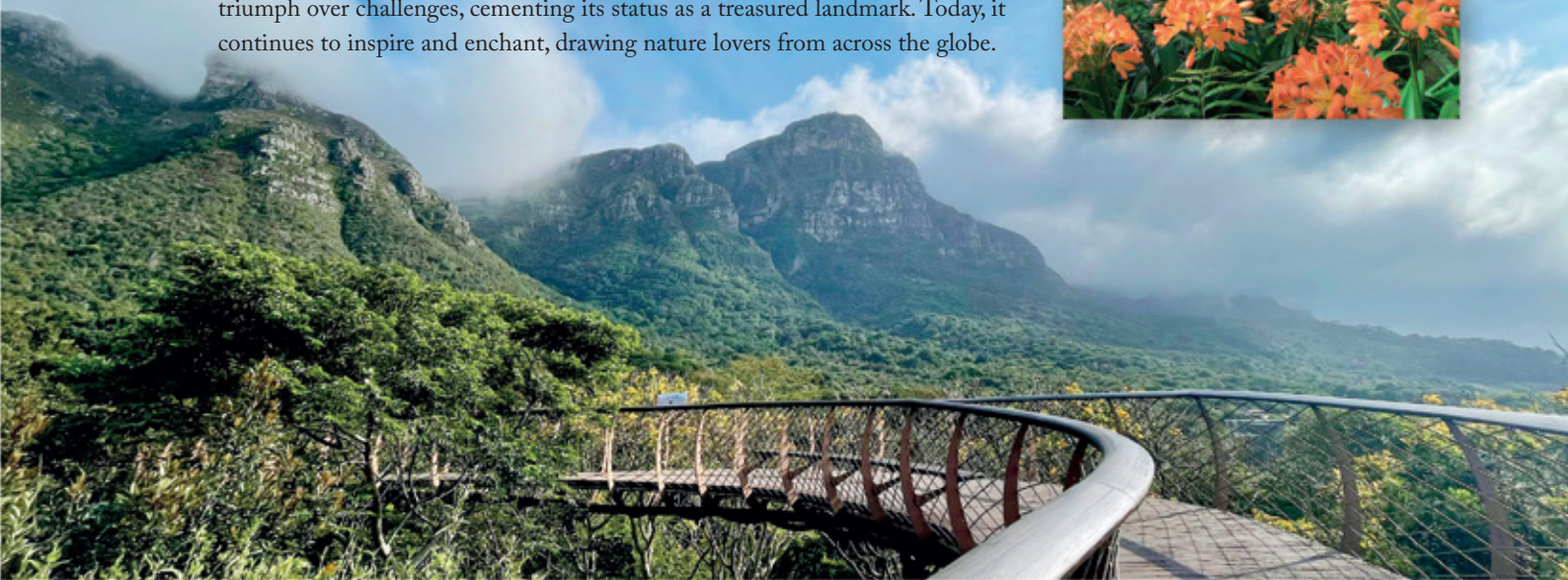
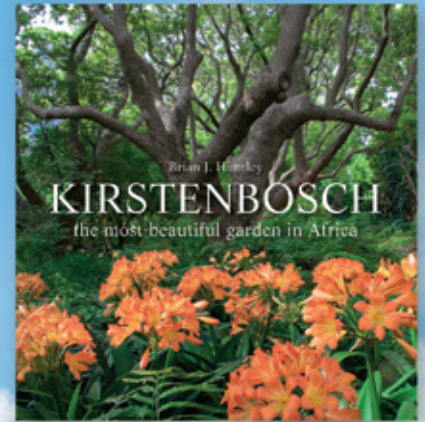
West Coast

Stretching from Melkbosstrand just north of Cape Town to the remote meeting point of the Orange River and the Atlantic Ocean, the West Coast is a land of striking contrasts and hidden treasures. Bordered by the rugged Atlantic on one side and the winding N7 highway on the other, this vast region is shaped by windswept beaches, rolling vineyards, and bursts of wildflowers that transform the landscape each spring. In his book *West Coast*, Leon Nell delves into the essence of this unique stretch of South Africa, exploring its rich history, diverse ecology, and vibrant communities. The book divides the region into four easily navigable sections, revealing the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve and the cultural gems of Darling in the south, the pristine waters of Langebaan Lagoon and ancient Eve's Footprints in the central stretch, the famed fishing villages of Velddrif and St Helena Bay in the north, and the remote Diamond Coast with its long-forgotten mining towns and untamed shores. Whether drawn by the call of the sea, the solitude of the open road, or the stories etched into the land, the West Coast offers a sense of adventure and nostalgia that lingers long after the journey ends.



Kirstenbosch

Nestled at the foot of Table Mountain, Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden is a breathtaking testament to South Africa's botanical richness and natural beauty. Renowned as one of the most spectacular gardens in the world, it has captivated visitors for centuries. Visitors can explore the iconic Boomslang Canopy Walkway, enjoy open-air concerts, or simply soak in the tranquility of its vast landscapes. As captured in *Kirstenbosch: The Most Beautiful Garden in Africa* by Brian J. Huntley, the garden's journey has been one of triumph over challenges, cementing its status as a treasured landmark. Today, it continues to inspire and enchant, drawing nature lovers from across the globe.



Renosterveld

Renosterveld, a rare and highly threatened vegetation type within the Fynbos biome, once covered vast stretches of the Overberg region in the Western Cape. Unlike the nutrient-poor soils that define much of the Fynbos landscape, Renosterveld thrives on fertile, shale-derived soils, making it a prime target for agriculture. Over centuries, ploughing and intensive farming have reduced this unique ecosystem to a mere five percent of its original extent, leaving behind only fragmented pockets of biodiversity. Despite this loss, Renosterveld remains

an ecological treasure trove, home to an astonishing variety of plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world. Its wildflower displays are breathtaking, with over 980 recorded plant species ranging from delicate bulbs to hardy shrubs. The region also supports a surprising diversity of wildlife, including rare insects, birds, and small mammals that have managed to survive despite habitat destruction. *Renosterveld of the Overberg*, the first comprehensive field guide dedicated to this ecosystem, captures its fragile beauty and ecological significance.

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TRADITIONAL DISHES REIMAGINED

Warren Mendes reimagines South African classics with spiced fried chicken *dombolo* and peppermint crisp ice cream sandwiches – bold flavours, nostalgic treats, and creative twists from his cookbook, *Food Trail South Africa*.

Dombolo with spiced fried chicken and pickles

“Dombolo is the Zulu word for traditional steamed bread. In its simplest form the recipe is flour, water and yeast and is usually eaten with stews or meat. It’s incredibly pillowy and perfect to mop up the sauces of a rich dish. Here, however, they are the cocoon for some spicy fried chicken and pickles – some ultimate indulgent comfort food. These breads are also great to make as an accompaniment for a braai, even if you are skipping the whole fried-chicken filling.”

7g sachet dried instant yeast
2 tbsp castor sugar
325ml warm water
3 cups (450g) plain flour
2 tbsp sunflower or other neutral oil
1 pinch of salt

FRIED CHICKEN

6 chicken thigh fillets
1 tbsp smoked paprika
2 tsp each garlic powder, onion powder, ground white pepper
1 tsp each ground cumin and ground coriander
300ml buttermilk
1 cup plain flour



**MAKES
12**

¼ cup cornflour
½ tsp baking powder

QUICK PICKLE

1 red onion, very thinly sliced
1 Mediterranean cucumber, very thinly sliced
juice of 2 limes

PERI-PERI MAYONNAISE

¾ cup mayonnaise
2 tbsp peri-peri sauce or other hot sauce

For the pickle, place the onion, cucumber, 1 tsp salt, lots of cracked black pepper and the lime juice in a bowl. Toss to coat and set aside to pickle.

Cut the chicken so you have 12 pieces. Combine the spices with 2 tsp salt flakes. Combine 1 tbsp of this spice mix with the buttermilk then add the chicken and marinate for at least 1 hour (or overnight). Combine the flour, cornflour and baking powder with remaining spice mix in a big bowl and set aside.

For the dombolo, combine the yeast, sugar and water in a bowl and set aside for 5 minutes until frothy. Add the flour, oil and salt and knead for 5 minutes using a stand mixer or by hand on a clean bench (using a little flour to help your hands from sticking). Place in the bowl and set aside to rise for 1 hour to double in size. Knock the dough down again and roll into 10–12 small balls (about 70g each) and place each on a small square of greased baking paper and allow to rise for another 10 minutes.

Place a wok or saucepan of water over medium heat and bring to a

simmer. Top with a steamer basket. Add the bread rolls, leaving a few cm in between each (the baking paper will also make sure they don't stick to the bottom) and steam for 15 minutes or until cooked through. You may need to do this in batches depending on the size and levels of your steamer.

Back to the chicken. After it's marinated, working with 1 piece at a time, take the chicken from the marinade, allow excess to drip off then coat in the flour mixture. Repeat with all chicken. Half-fill a large saucepan with oil, place over medium-high heat and heat to 160°C. Cook the chicken in batches for 5 min or until deep golden. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on a wire rack – not paper towel, which will create steam and make it soggy.

For the peri-peri mayo, combine the peri and mayo. Serve chicken in split steamed bread rolls with the quick pickle and mayonnaise.



Food Trail South Africa is out now.

**MAKES
9 ICE CREAM
SANDWICHES**



Peppermint Crisp Ice Cream Sandwiches

"Peppermint crisp tart is a very nostalgic no-bake South African dessert that you would almost certainly come across at a braai. It's more of a trifle than a tart really and simply consists of layers of crushed Tennis biscuits (or coconut biscuits), caramelised condensed milk, whipped cream and, of course, crushed peppermint crisp chocolate. You can use Caramel Treat, or make your own using condensed milk (see TIP)."

500g dulce de leche (or Nestlé Caramel Treat)
500ml thickened cream
1 tsp salt
4 peppermint crisp chocolate bars, chopped
18 Tennis biscuits, or other square flat biscuits
200g dark chocolate, melted and cooled slightly

Line a 22cm × 22cm tray with baking paper, with sides overhanging slightly so you can remove the filling easily.

Place the dulce de leche, cream and salt in a bowl and beat with electric beaters until thickened. Finely chop half of the peppermint crisps and fold through the mixture. Add the mixture to the lined pan and smooth out the top.

Freeze for at least 6 hours or best overnight. Remove the ice cream from the freezer and edge out the slab using the overhanging baking paper.

Arrange 9 Tennis biscuits on top of the ice cream then use the biscuits as a stencil and cut into squares. Place a biscuit on the other side.

At this stage freeze the individual ice cream sandwiches if they are melting. Chop the remaining peppermint crisps and place on a plate.

Place melted chocolate in a small bowl and dip each ice cream sandwich in the chocolate, then coat in the peppermint crisp.

Freeze for later or eat immediately.

TIP To make caramel (dulce de leche), place two cans condensed milk into a saucepan, then cover with water, making sure the water goes at least 2 – 3cm above the tins. Place over medium heat and bring to a gentle simmer. Reduce heat to low and continue to simmer for 3 hours. Ensure the can is completely covered with water at all times during cooking. Remove from water carefully and allow to cool for at least an hour before use. ⓘ

CHOOSE A PATH WITH HEART

Milton Schorr navigated life's shifting meanings – from childhood curiosity to teenage rage, artistic passion and exhaustion – before ultimately embracing the wisdom of choosing a path with heart.



I'm sitting in the cigar tube of a FlySafair flight, full, with the engines warming up for take-off. The flight is Cape Town to Joburg, and my personal destination is a semi-corporate, full-time job. Just a month ago this was *not* the plan. My third book, *Addict*, was about to be published, and my career as an actor was progressing steadily. Sitting on this plane, in the face of this upheaval, the age-old questions return. *What is life all about?* And, *How do I know what to do next?*

At the age of six, my mom and I were walking along our street, and she said to me, 'The rapture is coming, my boy. And I hope it comes soon. I've had enough.' Although I didn't grasp the darkness of mom's sentiment, I got the honesty of it. And I responded in kind.

'But ... but I want to have sex before my life is over, mom!' Now, I had no idea that sex was *sex*. To me, it was another word for mystery. It was a secret thing that adults did. That was my view on life then; it was about the mystery. The purpose, then, was to discover.

Ten years later, things had changed. An angry sixteen-year-old had taken that curious boy's place. Mom and Dad had divorced not long after our talk, and I had grown to be full of rage. *F#ck the world,*

for all it's worth, every inch, of planet earth ... These were the lyrics to my favourite metal song at the time, and they were my mantra. Life was about pain, and the instruction was to express it, to self-destruct.

At twenty, once again the outlook was different. As a theatre student, I had discovered art, and the possibility of transforming anger to something beautiful. 'Why are we concerned with art?', the visionary Jerzy Grotowski asked in one of my well-thumbed books, and answered: 'To cross our own frontiers ... to fulfil ourselves.' I took his instruction well and created madly. I wanted to be full to bursting.

But after another ten years of this rolling life, I was tired, perhaps like my mom all those years ago. I *had* discovered the secrets of adulthood, but still I wasn't satisfied. I was not at peace with my understanding of the world.

'The meaning of life is just to be alive,' the spiritual teacher Allan Watts wrote, and when I read those words a weight fell from me. *Stop trying!* I chuckled to myself, letting my worries go. *Just enjoy the ride.* But again, it did not last. Like all the mantras before, Watts' words only took me so far.

And so, as myself and all these other worker bees rush down the runway, the engine roaring and the

sky tugging at us, the question is asked again. *What am I doing? Why?*

'Life is about choosing a path, and walking it,' said the great sorcerer Don Juan, in Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*. 'In life we always have various paths ahead of us, and all we have to do is choose one. That is all life is. Walking a path.'


'Does it matter which path I choose?' asked Carlos, his apprentice.

'Very much,' Don Juan replied. 'You must choose a path with heart, otherwise it will not change you.'

'How do you know a path has heart?'

'You know,' Don Juan replied simply, and powerfully. *You know.*

This is my mantra today, the words that arm me as we rise into the Cape's blue summer sky, and I leave an old phase of life behind.

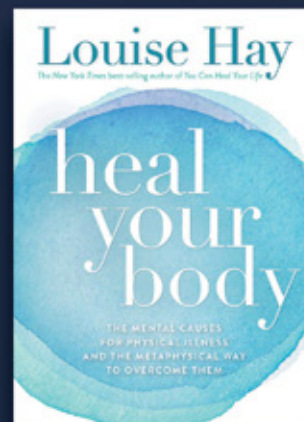
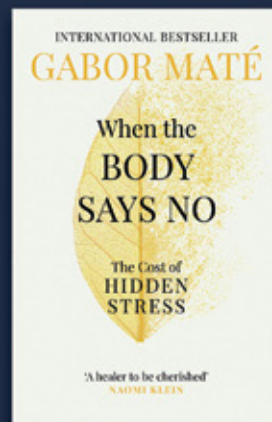
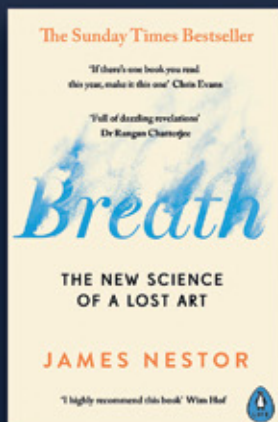
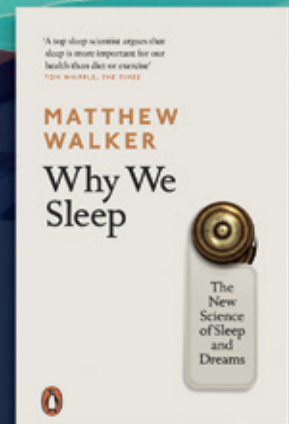
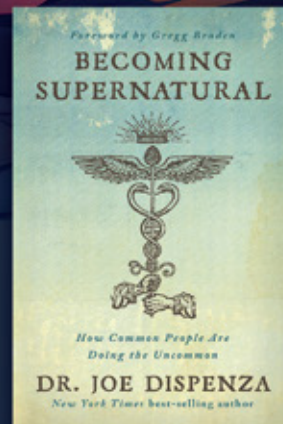
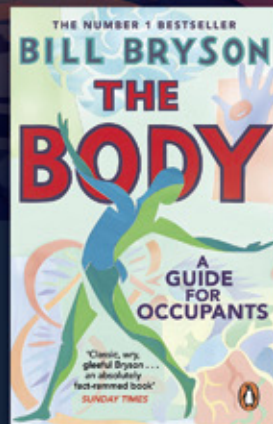
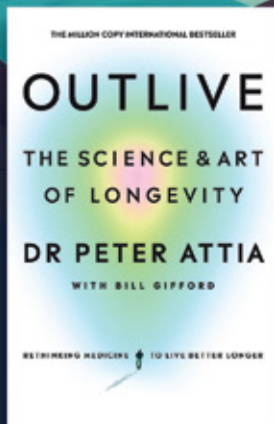
I am following a path; the same path it's always been. A path with heart." 



Addict is out now.

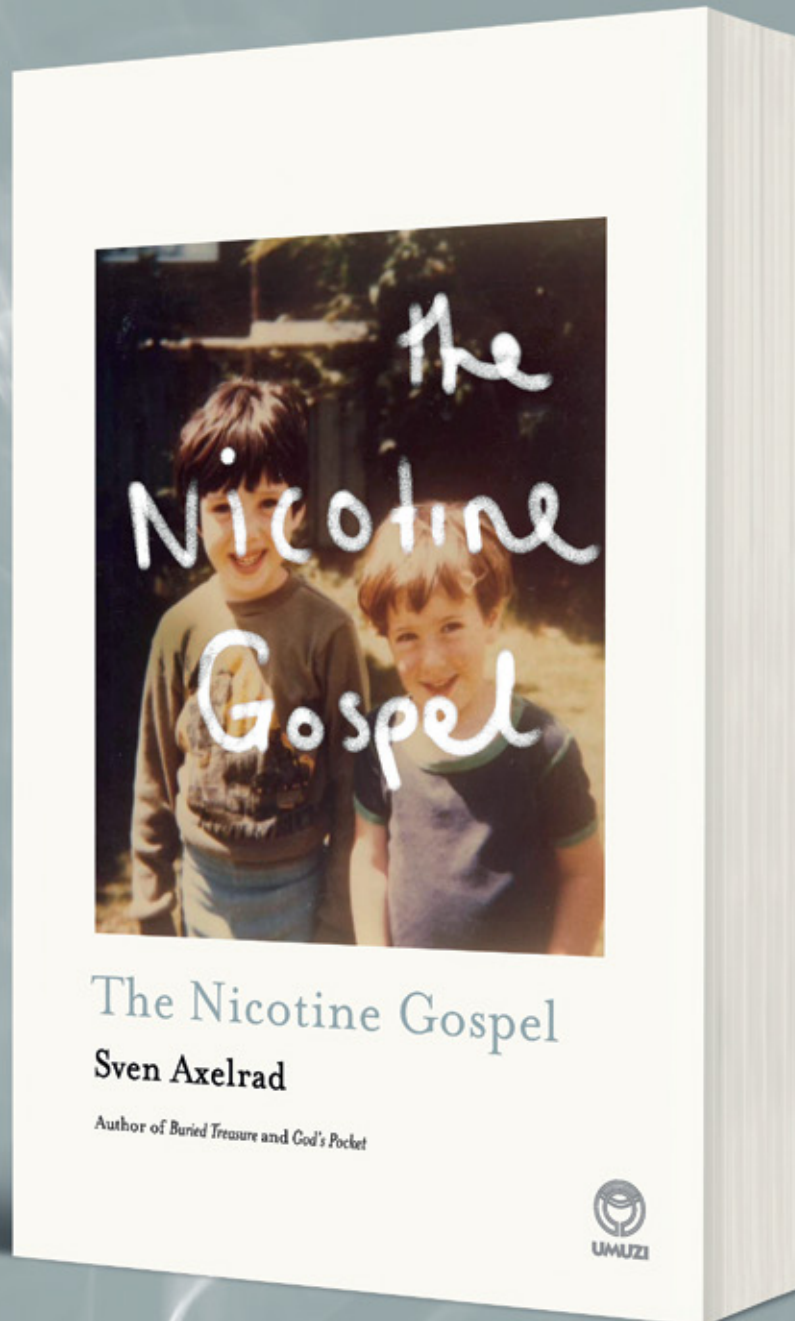


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