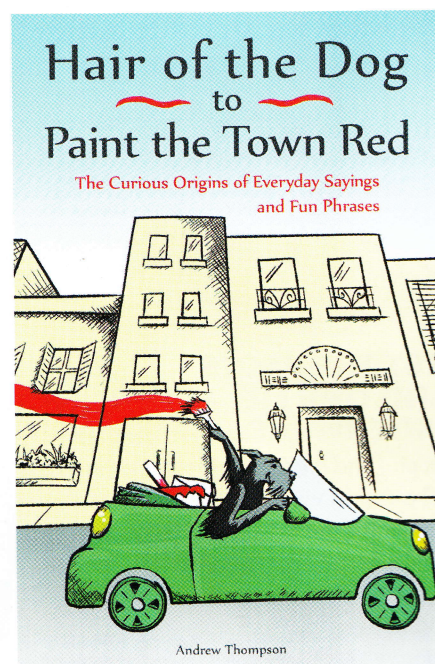


THUY ON Books Editor

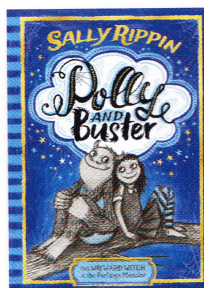
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE is littered with odd phrases and idioms that can flummox native speakers, let alone newcomers. Ever wondered why a thief is caught red-handed? Why you beat around the bush or bring home the bacon? Andrew Thompson has researched the origins of these random sayings and more – about 400 more – in his book *Hair of the Dog to Paint the Town Red*. Often the current meaning is far removed from its earliest usage, but as Thompson explains, you are “unwittingly quoting history on a daily basis”. The book is usefully set out; not only does it provide the meaning, but also puts it in modern language context before explaining its derivation. For instance, the expression “under the weather” was a seafaring term. “The greatest sway on a ship is on the deck and the most stable place is underneath near the keel. If a sailor became ill he was sent down below to recover under the deck”, the book explains, where he was no longer under the weather. Or “at the drop of a hat”, which most would know signifies something that happens with little warning. The term is derived from 19th century sporting contests, where referees raised their hats in the air to signify an event was about to begin. As soon as the hat was dropped, the contest would start. Wordsmiths will be, shall we say, “pleased as punch” with this collection.



POLLY AND BUSTER SALLY RIPPIN

★★★★★

Best known for her beginner reader series of books featuring Billie B Brown and next-door bestie Jack, Sally Rippin's latest book is directed at a slightly older age group – middle primary schoolers – but it too involves a loving relationship between two friends. Polly is a witch, but being awkward and clumsy she's not very good at plying her craft, and hence ostracised by her higher-performing classmates. Luckily, her best mate Buster doesn't care. He's a boofy, good-natured monster, mossy-green in colour, but his body and shape change according to mood. He becomes small and grey when sad and upset, and big and balloon-taut when happy. Together Polly and Buster hang out – but in secret only. The problem is, monsters and witches aren't supposed to be friends, and Polly's loyalty is soon tested. The book explores some particularly pertinent ideas for the tween age group: that sometimes you can feel out of step with others around you, and the importance of having support and a cheerleader at your side. **THUY ON**

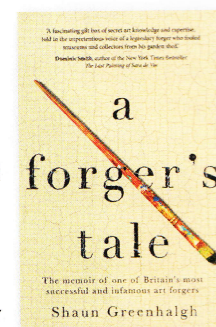


A FORGER'S TALE SHAUN GREENHALGH

★★★★★

Englishman Shaun Greenhalgh spent decades making and selling artwork in the style of famous artists, until Scotland Yard cottoned on in 2006. Written while he served an almost five-year prison sentence, his memoir is preoccupied with both the specifics of his techniques and the rationalisation of his actions. The former is often fascinating, and his intense passion for art certainly shines through, but the latter makes for a frustrating read. Greenhalgh repeatedly whinges about the greedy dealers who short-changed him – despite the fact that he knew he was selling them fakes – and the experts who should have spotted the flaws he worked into his pieces. Yet his work purportedly ended up in the hands of Bill Clinton and the British royal family. There are some sympathetic moments in *A Forger's Tale*, such as when Greenhalgh loses the love of his life to a brain tumour at a young age, but his petty swipes at the art world hinder an otherwise illuminating look at the painstaking craft behind his crimes.

DOUG WALLEN



DISAPPEARING OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH DAVID COHEN

★★★★★

Plagued by dysfunctional father figures and dickhead bosses, Ken dreams of running his own business. He meets Bruce, a handyman with a dark side, at Pharaoh's Tomb Self Storage. Imagine two likeable smart-arses forming a friendship based on taking the piss and taking advantage of rent defaulters and their abandoned things. The Queensland author's second novel riffs off the theme of compartmentalisation – how do we keep our possessions and our personalities in order? Set in self-storage facilities in contemporary Brisbane, Melbourne (Box Hill in particular) and the outback, what begins as a sardonic crime thriller subtly transitions into a suspenseful, tragi-comic portrait of everyday madness. Ken is a prog rock fan, and aficionados of the genre will recognise Cohen's narrative nod to grandiose themes: kings, canyons, temples and tombs. This is an unusual and affecting portrayal of how the best and worst versions of ourselves can co-exist, set against the backdrop of an Australian economic dream increasingly out of reach. **SALLY KEIGHERY**

