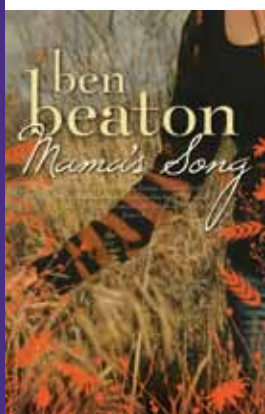


The Loblolly Boy (James Norcliffe, A&U, \$15.99 pb, ISBN 9781742371160, September) ★★★★★

The loblolly boy is a magical being. He can fly on his beautiful green wings. He's invisible to most people. He can be seen, but only by certain special people called Sensitives. And most amazing of all, if he chooses to, he can Exchange—you become the loblolly boy, and he becomes you! Michael is living in the Great House for unwanted children when he meets the loblolly boy, and Exchanges with him to escape his miserable life. It is only then that he discovers that while the life of the loblolly boy has its own magic, it also has its own restrictions, rules, and deadly dangers. James Norcliffe's *The Loblolly Boy* is a unique fantasy adventure, built around the ideas of identity and actions having consequences, both

intended and unintended. Norcliffe's world is well realised, and peopled with a strong cast of original characters. The book is highly recommended for fantasy fans 10-years-and-up looking for an original and intriguing story.

Heath Graham is a teacher and occasional bookseller at A&R Greensborough

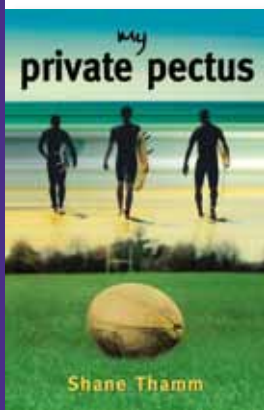


Mama's Song (Ben Beaton, Black Dog Books, \$16.99 pb, ISBN 9781742031057, September) ★★★★★

As an English teacher in a WA secondary school, one should expect Ben Beaton knows his audience well—and he certainly delivers. Georgina, a pregnant teenager, has run away from home to her grandma's rural town to escape pressures and fraught relationships at home. The narrative is confined to a short period of time almost wholly in hospital, but flits between her current predicament and back to the past as the events which led her there eventually unfold. The story never lacks in narrative drive, and Beaton writes about young women and pregnancy with astonishing emotional accuracy. In particular his attention to the details of pregnancy and childbirth are both educational and brave. I was

suitably impressed. This would be a fantastic book for high school syllabus and a good prize contender. Yes there's sex (obviously), but it sure as hell deals with the consequences and is not afraid to get right into the guts of a very confronting topic. Beaton never once judges Georgina, whom we can only respect wholeheartedly for the way she chooses to face consequences, even if she is—understandably—misguided at times. A must read for mature girls.

Hannah Francis is a bookseller at the Sun Bookshop, Yarraville



My Private Pectus (Shane Thamm, Ford Street, \$19.95 pb, ISBN 9781876462833, September) ★★★★★

Jack, or Sticks to his mates, is in Year 12. His dad's just landed a job as assistant rugby coach at his school. This is not good news. Jack's dad had two loves in his life before the accident that left him an invalid—rugby and the army. He expects his son to follow in his footsteps with both. There are two problems with this. The first is that Sticks would much rather work on cars with his mate Gez—he has no interest in rugby or the army. The second is his pectus excavatum—the caved-in hole in the middle of his chest that he's hidden from everyone in his life for years. Hiding his deformity has shaped his life, but he won't be able to hide any more. Shane Thamm's *My Private Pectus* is a strong story of

adolescence, family, body image, and social life from the perspective of a young man. Thamm gets inside Jack's head, showing the pressures and difficulties he faces, and his maturation through the course of the novel. With its casual drinking and occasional drug use, this is not a novel for younger readers, but is recommended for older boys in particular.

Heath Graham is a teacher and occasional bookseller at A&R Greensborough



Time of Trial: The Laws of Magic Volume Four (Michael Pryor, Random House, \$17.95 tpb, ISBN 9781741663082, September) ★★★★★

The fourth volume of the 'Laws of Magic' series, *Time of Trial* finds Europe on the brink of war and Aubrey Fitzwilliam—adventurer, magician and son of the Prime Minister—is once again in the thick of the action. As political tensions escalate and rumour and propaganda spread, Aubrey is certain that the manipulative ex-sorcerer Dr Tremain is the one pulling the strings. Together with best friend George and the redoubtable Caroline, Aubrey seeks a way to draw Dr Tremain into the open and expose him before he leads the world into war. Full of action, *Time of Trial* quickly immerses readers in the exciting alternate world of sophisticated magic and political intrigue that distinguishes 'The Laws of Magic' as a

must-read series. Pryor's clever use of Victorian-era language and skilful character development lends *Time of Trial* a charming and entertaining style that will reward 13-plus teens and adults alike. This is a fine addition to a noteworthy fantasy series that can be recommended with confidence in both retail and library environments to anyone who loves fantasy adventure and appreciates well conceived magical worlds.

Richard Bilkey established Banjo Books in Sydney and is a freelance editor and reviewer