



Tommy Bell Bush Ranger Boy
Book 1: Shoot-out at the Rock (2016) 978 1 925275 94 0
Book 2: The Horse Thief (2016) 978 1 925520 06 4
Book 3: The Gold Escort Gang (2017) Jane Smith, Big Sky Publishing, 978 1 925520 21 7 \$12.50 ea



Three stories featuring Tommy Bell, a young lad who has disappointed his teacher and parents by aggressive behaviour at school. As a solution he is sent to live with his grandfather while he sorts himself out. At Grandpa's place Tommy finds an old hat, that, when placed on his head, transports him—together with Grandpa's pony, Combo—back to the bushranger era in Victoria. In the first book he meets Fred Ward, aka Captain Thunder-bolt, escaped convict from the dreaded Cockatoo Island prison. It is a glimpse into an earlier era for Tommy and like him, the reader comes to see that history is complicated and open to interpretation according to whose 'side of the story' becomes accepted 'knowledge'. The second book introduces Francis, a new boy at school who lives by a different code of behaviour than Tommy, who worries about Francis's ethics while being drawn to him.

A similar scenario arises when his next time-slip brings him face to face with Frank Gardiner who shares a similar

approach to right and wrong with Frances; it is enough for Tommy to realise that decisions on what best to do reside with him and that he should be careful as to whom he befriends.

The Gold Escort Gang also features Frank Gardiner and introduces Ben Hall and Flash Jack, as it raises questions as to the motivations of some of the bushrangers and highlights the incompetence of a few government officials of the time. All three stories are easy to read, and by focusing on the adventurous aspects of the story, historical details are slipped into the story without slowing the pace of the action. Large well-led type makes for easy reading. While not condoning the actions of the men the reader is positioned to view them sympathetically. Historical notes are appended. **Shoot-out at the Rock** was named in the CBCA 2017 Notables book list. *Rayma Turton*

Horizon (2017) Scott Westerfeld, Scholastic, 241pp. 978 1 74381 760 5 \$9.99 Pb

Horizon grips the reader from the opening pages and refuses to let go! A seemingly normal flight suddenly turns deadly as revealed by the disturbing air traffic control transcript from Aero Horizon Flight 16. There are only eight young survivors. Every adult on board has disappeared and, despite the plane's Arctic trajectory from Brooklyn to Japan, it has crashed in dense jungle teeming with killer birds, carnivorous vines and howling monsters. The discovery of a mysterious anti-gravity device provides some protection but there are some big ques-

tions which must be answered. Why are they the only survivors and are they still on Earth? Combining their diverse skills, from the analytical engineers of the Killbot Robotics team, to a sword-wielding Manga fan, these young people are determined to find the answers and ultimately their way to safety.

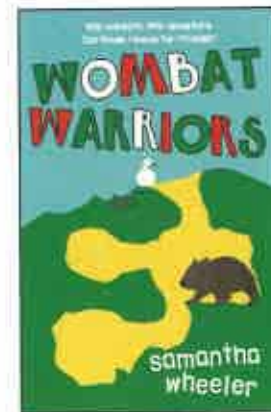
Horizon is the first instalment in a new multi-platform series of seven books to be written by different authors—Westerfeld has also outlined the subsequent books. Told from the alternating perspectives of the survivors, I occasionally became tangled in the characterisation as it moved from one voice to another. However, as the adventure develops, I am sure there will be opportunities for the reader to develop greater identification and empathy. Fast-paced and full of suspense and supernatural action, the series will be certain to appeal to the younger fans of Westerfeld, while the online interactive game gives readers the opportunity to become part of the action. A must-have for adventure lovers from late Primary years to mid-Secondary.

Allison Paterson

Wombat Warriors (2017) Samantha Wheeler, University of Queensland Press, 192pp. 978 0 70225 958 6 \$14.95 Pb



Who doesn't love wombats? They're furry, and cute, and altogether adorable. As Minnie (otherwise known as Mouse) soon discovers, some farmers are not so keen on wombats. In fact, they actively destroy burrows found on their properties, filling them with



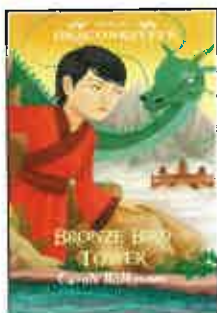
rocks and wire—a devastating shock for Mouse.

Nine year-old Mouse is staying with her Aunt Evie in Truro, South Australia, while her parents attend a funeral in Ireland. While Aunt Evie keeps her rescued wombat, Miss Pearl, a secret from her farmer landlord, Mrs Campbell, Mouse is concerned for the other wombats living nearby.

Mouse struggles with her need to defend the wombats and her fear of speaking out and being visible to those around her, especially the students in her new school who can be less than kind. However, the more she learns about solutions to the wombats' plight through her school project, the more attached she becomes to Miss Pearl and recently rescued baby wombat Willow, and the more she feels the support of new friend Harry (Mrs Campbell's son), she comes to realise that she can stand up and share her passion, and possibly even save a few wombats. Mouse's social development and tenacity are a pleasure to read, showing that even the most afraid can find the courage to do what's right.

Wombat Warriors is an inspiring—and educational—tale, perfect for an upper primary audience. The wombat facts in the back of the book are fascinating, and testament to Wheeler's research. Young wombat fans and animal lovers will devour this rousing tale of courage.

Tina Cavanaugh



Bronze Bird Tower (2017) Carole Wilkinson, Walker Books Australia, 356pp. 978 1 922179 58 6 \$24.99 Hb



Book Six, the last of the **Dragon Tales** draws together the many strands that have made the journeys of Ping and, later, Tao, so engrossing. While neither will live the thousands of years it will take to see a fully grown Kai, the pair can travel the kingdom together,

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spreading word of the wonder of dragons, ensuring, as they say that, *Whenever anyone glimpses a dragon, they will not be afraid, they will feel blessed.*

Bronze Bird... begins with Tao and Kai faced by immensely high black vertical rocks with no obvious way of ascent and a sheepish Kai admitting that he did not actually leave the dragon haven but fell off the mountain and couldn't climb back. It was up to Ping and Sunila the dragon to fly up to ask for entrance and help in bringing up Kai. It is not the triumphant return they had hoped for and when they all finally do arrive at the top, it is obvious that something is amiss. Lethargic, ill-kept, suspicious, the dragons are uncooperative and life on top of the mountain is difficult until the dragon Lian lays two eggs and the entire

horde becomes focused on the care and protection of them. The old enemy Jilong appears with an army and after his defeat ends up on the mountain top as a prisoner. Reformed and making himself essential in the care and rearing of the Lians newly hatched twin dragons he shows his true colours and abducts them incarcerating them in his Bronze Bird Tower. The rescue is exciting and the resulting rearrangement to the lives of the dragons logical. All story ends are tied and the dragons can look forward to long, enjoyable lives.

Reading the last book in a series can be akin to seeing off a friend. That is so here but leavened by the knowledge that the series has become a part of so many lives that it will be a part of young readers' lives for years to come.