

AUTOBIOGRAPHY



My Life, My Way
Cliff Richard with
Penny Junor
Headline Review,
HK\$250
★★★☆☆
Nick Ryan

The crinkled crooner once said he was “the most radical rock star there has ever been”. An idol of the 1950s and 60s, Sir Cliff Richard has sold more than 250 million records and holds the record (with Elvis Presley) as the only act to make the British singles charts in all of its decades (1950s-2000s).

An icon who once defined teenage rebellion, seen in the rise of the 1950s teddy boy movement, Harry Webb found success with the Shadows and hits such as *Living Doll*, *The Young Ones* and *Summer Holiday*, and later numbers during his solo career such as *Devil Woman* and *We Don't Talk Anymore*.

Perhaps better known for his Peter Pan looks, and refusal by BBC radio stations to play his hits, he is more recently identified with hordes of adoring grannies. Today, after a public conversion to Christianity, Richard still outsells them all, radio play or not.

Media attention has focused on the first official autobiography of the eternally young songster, which is co-written by Prince Charles' friend, Penny Junor. In it, Richard breaks his silence on many issues, including his long-rumoured sexuality, admitting he now lives with a former Irish priest, his “companion”. He says: “I think the Church must come round and see people as they are now. Gone are the days when we assumed loving relationships would be solely between men and women.”

Despite such revelations, Richard also writes in *My Life, My Way* that he twice nearly married a woman: the first, Jackie Irving, a dancer, and later Sue Barker, the English tennis player who sent many a schoolboy's heart thumping in the 1970s.

Across the rest of this wide-ranging, sometimes revealing but ultimately “safe” biography, there

are the early days, with the family's return to India after the war; the saga of how Elvis changed his life at school; the temptations of marijuana (he found smoke “disgusting”); life on the road with the Shadows, his first big band; how he tried Botox (“it didn't work”); and his close relationship with his mother, then God.

Sometimes it is a little cursory: elements of life, encounters with the famous, are ticked off at speed as if on a checklist. Then there are the inadvertently humorous moments. For example, rebellion: “I considered myself a radical because I didn't do what everyone else was doing. I didn't want to throw television sets out of hotel windows, I didn't want to kick journalists or punch people on the nose – well maybe I did sometimes – but I didn't do it!”

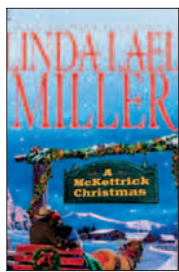
He pontificates at some length about how Christianity saved him from the temptations that sank so many others; and a little tediously waxes on about how great his fans have been and how some of them are now even in their 40s (as opposed to 60s). In between are reminiscences about meeting Mother Teresa and his favourite boltholes in the sun, but perhaps sadly for Harry Webb the public and media have remained most interested in his sexual life – of which there is little detail.

Still, there is much to consider here: while it may not be literary prize material, it is at times fascinating. Long may he reign.



Photo: AFP

ROMANCE



A McKetrick Christmas
by Linda Lael Miller
Harlequin, HK\$136
★★★☆☆
Lezlie Patterson

If you're having trouble finding the Christmas spirit this season, spend some time with the McKettricks.

Linda Lael Miller has written a historical Christmas tale focusing on the family many of her fans have come to love. Lizzie McKetrick is coming home to the family ranch after years away at school. She is bringing a city boyfriend to meet her family and is looking forward to becoming the town's schoolteacher – and to her boyfriend proposing marriage.

But her plans are derailed – like her train, which is knocked off the tracks by an avalanche. With their lives in danger, an unlikely group of strangers form a bond as they try to

keep the Christmas spirit alive, despite the circumstances. Morgan, a doctor on his way to Indian Rock to set up a practice, takes charge of caring for everyone, with Lizzie by his side.

It doesn't take long for Lizzie to realise her city boyfriend isn't the one after all – and that Morgan is.

It also doesn't take the entire book for them to be rescued – thank goodness – and the rest of the story mainly focuses on Morgan and Lizzie's courtship, albeit a rather tepid one. However, their love isn't.

The bottom line is that if you want a decent holiday story, this will do the trick ... especially if you're a McKetrick fan. The romance may not be the most breathtaking but the story comes with a twist or two that will keep you smiling and thinking of the festive season. And while Morgan doesn't have that tough-guy, save-the-damsel sort of appeal, he is a good guy ... and definitely the love of Lizzie's life.

This is a sweet and fun holiday read that won't take up much of your time and will definitely help you find that Christmas spirit. *McClatchy-Tribune*

Paperbacks

FICTION James Kidd



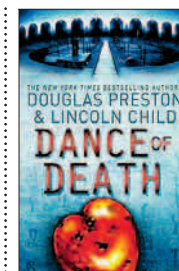
Twilight
by Stephenie Meyer
Little, Brown,
HK\$64
★★★☆☆

If you haven't heard of Stephenie Meyer's series of *Twilight* novels, you soon will. American teenagers, mainly of the female variety, are going crazy over the recently released movie adaptation of *Twilight*, starring hunky Brit Robert Pattinson. Having appeared in the last *Harry Potter* movie, Pattinson makes arteries throb as Edward Cullen, Meyer's moody vampiric hero. Behind *Twilight* is a good, if not entirely original idea. Vampires are pale, moody and don't get out of bed until dusk – just like teenagers. This particular Lost Boy encounters a newcomer at school called Bella Swan. With a name like that you had better be gorgeous and Bella is. Only Edward seems impervious to her charms. Any male adolescent worth their acne knows Edward fancies her rotten. But he is afraid he might skip first, second and third bases and drain Bella like a can of Diet Coke. Meyer's prose is wooden enough to kill a vampire in its tracks. Ever since Bram Stoker, it has been de rigueur to write dialogue such as: “I'd never seen him so completely freed of that carefully cultivated façade. He'd never been less human ... or more beautiful.” But that doesn't stop *Twilight* being good fun.



You Don't Love Me Yet
by Jonathan Lethem
Faber and Faber,
HK\$108
★★★☆☆

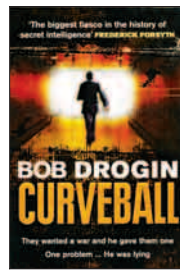
Jonathan Lethem is one of those literary wunderkinds America relentlessly produces. He writes in a bewildering array of genres, from personal confessional to comic book, from hip culture to literary puzzle. Having wowed the world with *Fortress of Solitude*, a tender evocation of life in Brooklyn, Lethem lightens his load with *You Don't Love Me Yet*. It tells the story of Lucinda, bassist in a Los Angeles garage band. Caught between genius songwriter Bedwin and ex-boyfriend Matthew, Lucinda begins working for an artist whose latest concept involves a sticker with the word “Complaint” and a phone number. It is here that Lucinda meets “the complainer”, a caller who speaks rather as Raymond Chandler used to write. When Lucinda passes some of his comments off as her own lyrics, Bedwin is inspired and the band begin to take-off, which really gives the complainer something to complain about. Lethem's latest lacks the verbal and narrative fireworks of his previous novels, but it manages to be fizzy, funny and charming – an enjoyable pop song of a novel after a couple of concept albums.



Dance of Death
by Douglas Preston
and Lincoln Child
Orion, HK\$94
★★★☆☆

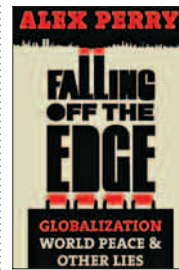
Preston and Child are a literary double act who specialise in neo-Dan Brown adventures. They mix high-concept stories and bursts of staggering violence. In the opening of *Dance of Death* (the second book in the *Agent Pendergast* trilogy), an unsuspecting college professor has his face ripped off in mysterious fashion. He is lecturing about *The Waste Land*, so perhaps T.S. Eliot did it. *Dance of Death* pits FBI Special Agent Aloysius Pendergast against a mortal enemy – his brilliant but dastardly brother Diogenes. I think they should team up and hunt down their parents for coming up with such daft names. Unfortunately for Aloysius, Diogenes has bigger fish to fry. Not only does he commit a perfect crime, he frames his brother for it. There is some silly stuff about multiple personalities: Pendergast is suspected of being both Aloysius and Diogenes, which is surely more than one man could bear. Diogenes, we are told, “exists within the same body ... you haven't met him yet. But you will ... when he kills you.” It makes you think about the authors. Do they exist within the same body? We haven't met them yet, but we will ... when they write another conspiracy thriller.

NON-FICTION Charmaine Chan



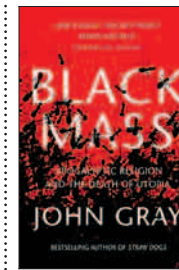
Curveball
by Bob Drogin
Ebury Press, HK\$119
★★★★☆

Bookshop browsers may inadvertently miss *Curveball*, packaged as it is like a dime-a-dozen thriller. A closer look at the jacket reveals the book is categorised as “politics/current affairs”, and the subject so farcical it is stranger than fiction. Taking the codename given an Iraqi asylum seeker who turned up in Munich in 1999, Bob Drogin's book chronicles how the defector's fantastical claims about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were swallowed by a US administration eager for an excuse to declare war on Iraq. Despite reservations by German intelligence about the man, a chemical engineer, the CIA chose to believe his claims about mobile laboratories on trucks and stockpiles of anthrax, botulin and mustard gas. It was a year after the US invaded Iraq that the CIA finally interviewed Curveball and judged him “unreliable”. By then former US secretary of state Colin Powell had cited the man's accounts in arguments put to the UN Security Council to justify war. Drogin, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, includes one astounding explanation for the Iraqi's slew of lies. “All he ever wanted,” Drogin writes, “was political asylum in Germany. And a Mercedes.”



Falling Off the Edge
by Alex Perry
Bloomsbury Press,
HK\$90
★★★☆☆

“If globalisation is standardising the world, and anti-globalisation is resistance to that, then terrorism is a subset of the anti-globalisation movement.” So argues Alex Perry in his book, whose title plays on *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman's metaphor of a world flattening owing to globalisation's creation of a level playing field. The problem is that people fall off the edge, which explains the opposition to the phenomenon. Perry's book looks at, among other things, al-Qaeda as well as Nepal's Maoists, Sri Lanka's Tamils and India's Naxals, all of whom balk at standardisation “in the image of the elite”. Their anger stems from what they see as an unequal reaping of benefits, says Perry, who blames globalisation not only for conflicts around the world but also the spread of Aids, Islamic fundamentalism and more. Where China is concerned, the author argues that the Chinese Communist Party, by rejecting the “global norms of democratic governance”, has the muscle to handle globalisation. *Falling Off the Edge* is nothing if not readable, although readers may tire of Perry's “I went there, I saw that” style of writing.



Black Mass
by John Gray
Penguin, HK\$153
★★★★☆

Black Mass is a brain-shaking polemic that will put together life's jigsaw puzzle for some, or scatter the pieces so far apart for others that they have little chance of ever creating a picture. Subtitled *Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, the book, by *Straw Dogs* author John Gray, argues that utopian projects from the French Revolution through to the US war on terror in Iraq are rooted in apocalyptic Christian belief. A utopian mission is one in which “there are no circumstances under which it can be realised”. Engineering a western-style market economy in post-communist Russia is an example, as is that of establishing liberal democracy in Iraq. To Gray, modern theories of progress are secular versions of salvation myths. Realism in international relations is needed, he contends, while taking aim at neo-conservatism, which he sees as sharing the same revolutionary tradition as communism, Nazism and al-Qaeda. Radical Islam, characterised as “Islam-Jacobinism”, is, he says, “a hybrid of apocalyptic myth and utopian hope and in this it is unmistakably western”. This is a pacy book that requires slow reading.