

BOOK REVIEWS

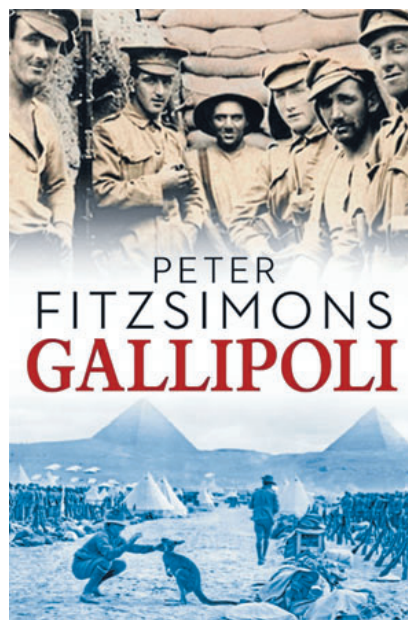
**MILITARY HISTORY**  
**Gallipoli**  
by Peter Fitzsimons  
Random House, \$57

If Peter Fitzsimons is writing about it, it must be Australia, so here he is again, right on cue as the 100th anniversary of those ill-fated landings in that ill-fated place looms. In *Gallipoli*, Fitzsimons ticks the familiar boxes, such as the Battle of Lone Pine and the Nek, while at the same time pondering the point of it all.

That, no doubt, will also be the question close to the heart of this year's centenary commemorations in this country and across the Tasman.

For Gallipoli has taken on something of the power of a foundation myth, for Australia especially, in the absence of any other supposedly defining event such as a revolution, war of independence or civil war.

But quite where it fits into the Kiwi scheme of things is another question that has yet to be fully answered despite those 2000-plus New Zealand deaths in the campaign, casualties that were soon to be dwarfed by what happened in



the trenches of the Western Front.

Small wonder "futility" was one of the key themes of the World War I poets.

Fitzsimons' weighty tome (it rolls out to 824 pages) is a discursive wander through the historical thickets of a military debacle that cost the Aussies more than 8000

dead, but let's not forget the 21,000 British who also died in the invasion, or the more than 85,000 Turkish dead.

There were plenty of examples on all sides at Gallipoli of the stupidity of flinging men at machine guns, but if there were any lessons learned in 1915, there was precious little evidence of anything much changing in the years of slaughter that followed in Europe.

We all know the significance of April 25, but then there was April 24, 1915, when the genocide of the Armenians was begun by Turkey.

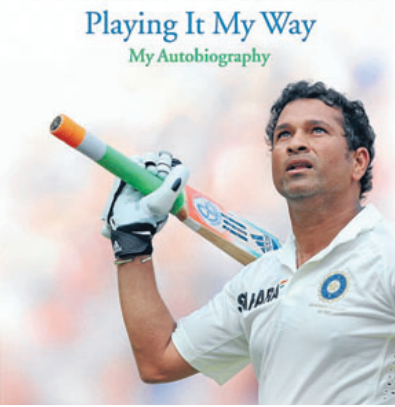
It is said that the Dardanelles landings were used as an excuse by Turkey for the killing of the Armenians on the pretext they might support the allied invasion.

The genocide, in which more than a million men, women and children died, is to be commemorated on April 24 this year in the Armenian capital of Yerevan.

If you are going to Gallipoli this year, just don't mention that word in public, because in Turkey it can get you thrown in jail, for the Turks, needless to say, deny to this day that any such crime against humanity happened on their soil.

ALISTER BROWNE

**SACHIN TENDULKAR**  
Playing It My Way  
My Autobiography



**AUTOBIOGRAPHY**  
**Playing It My Way: My Autobiography**  
by Sachin Tendulkar  
Hachette, \$40

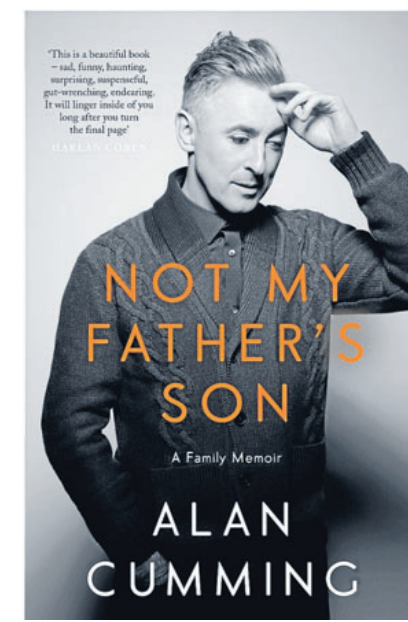
The final 26 pages of the memoir of cricket's greatest batsman are filled with his statistics. Black and white and immovable, they tell of the Little

Master's great career without embellishment or explanation. Which is much the same as the previous 450-odd pages in which Tendulkar treads a careful path intent on not alienating his Indian countrymen or creating global headlines by sharing his views on match-fixing, chucking, bomb threats in Pakistan, sledging... He does, though, thank the media for their support from his school days right through to "this morning". Maybe if he wasn't so worried about headlines, he might have written something more interesting.

JAMES BELFIELD

**MEMOIR**  
**Not My Father's Son: A Family Memoir**  
by Alan Cumming  
Alan & Unwin, \$40

"It's just good to know the truth, though, isn't it... to have everything cleared up." So says Alan Cumming's mum on finding her brother wasn't her father's son. *The Good Wife* and Broadway actor's extraordinarily honest and graceful memoir is pinned around the exploration of his family history for the BBC's *Who Do You Think You*



*Are?* programme and his father's announcement that Cumming was the product of an affair on the part of his mother. The truthful memories of his horrifyingly abusive father are told in a clear, haunting way while his quest for the truth about his family reads like an adventure tale. Hard-hitting, in a gently told style.

JAMES BELFIELD

TOP 5: INDEPENDENTS

**1** **The Narrow Road to the Deep North**  
Richard Flanagan  
Vintage  
\$25



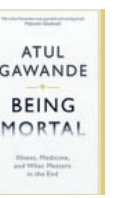
**2** **The Guest Cat**  
Takashi Hiraide  
Picador  
\$25



**3** **We are All Completely Beside Ourselves**  
Karen Joy Fowler  
Serpent's Tail  
\$29



**4** **Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End**  
Atul Gawande  
Profile Books  
\$35



**5** **The Goldfinch**  
Donna Tartt  
Abacus  
\$28



Source: Nielsen BookScan

THE BEST BOOKS I NEVER WROTE

Technology writer Richard MacManus reveals his favourite books.



This is Wolfe's masterpiece, because he got into the heads of his characters like nobody in non-fiction had done before. The story reads like a work of fiction, so it's no surprise that Wolfe's next big work was the novel *The Bonfire Of The Vanities* (which I also love).

**The New Thing**

Michael Lewis

Published in 1999, this was the first great book about the internet. It describes the dot com era superbly, through the larger-than-life personality of Jim Clark - a co-founder of Netscape, the first commercial web browser. Lewis' first-hand accounts of Clark on his giant yacht, Hyperion, are memorable.

The yacht symbolises the vision and ambition of early internet pioneers, as well as their over-reaching. It wasn't until the 2000s that the web lived up to its hype.

**The Great Gatsby**

F Scott Fitzgerald

One of my earliest inspirations, *The Great Gatsby* is nearly the perfect book. The poetic and precise writing is a model for any writer. What also hooked me was the exploration of The American Dream, a theme that continues to fascinate me as a technology writer. If it was to be re-written today, he might be a successful entrepreneur rather than a bootlegger! What wouldn't change is Gatsby's obsession with Daisy, which is what makes it a timeless story.

**Seabiscuit**

Laura Hillenbrand

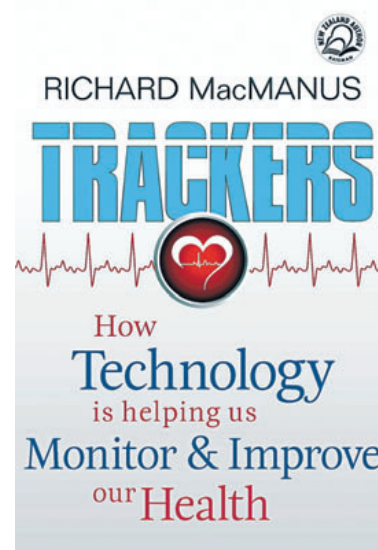
This book brings the poetic language of Fitzgerald into nonfiction. *Seabiscuit* is a rollicking narrative and so it's enjoyable for that alone. But what impressed me the most was how Hillenbrand packed so much detail into the book, yet it flowed beautifully. The

masterful pacing of her story would've made Seabiscuit's jockey Red Pollard proud. Also notable is that there is very little dialogue, which is a departure from "new journalism" non-fiction writers like Wolfe and Lewis.

**The Age of Wonder**

Richard Holmes

Another of my favourite non-fiction writers is Richard Holmes, who has written biographies of the poets Shelley and Coleridge. *The Age Of Wonder* is essentially a biography of an era, roughly "the period between Captain Cook's first voyage in 1768 and Darwin's Beagle journey in 1831". The main characters are three pioneering scientists: Sir Joseph Banks, William Herschel and Humphry Davy. Holmes brilliantly ties their individual stories together, to form what he calls "a larger historical narrative" about the scientific revolution.



Richard MacManus' latest book *Trackers: How Technology is Helping Us Monitor and Improve our Health*, is out now, Bateman Publishing, \$30.



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