

Gotham
Nick Earls



Based in Brisbane, Irish-born Nick Earls is known predominantly as a children's writer. He's the author of *Perfect Skin*, which was adapted into a successful feature film, and *48 Shades of Brown*, which sounds like another *50 Shades of Grey* parody but it predates that notorious bestseller and is actually a YA novel that won the Children's Book of the Year for Older Readers in 2000.

His latest project is for adults, and it's a fresh concept that will appeal to time-poor readers hungry for something different. Earls is releasing a series of loosely linked novellas, one per month, called 'Wisdom Tree'.

Gotham is the first instalment. It's the story of an Australian journalist, Jeff Foster, who's desperate for money to keep up with the treatment for his severely ill daughter. He's commissioned to write a profile piece on a 19-year-old emerging rapper called Na\$ti Boi (he's as swollen-headed as he sounds). Jeff joins the freshly cashed-up teenager at

Bloomingdale's in New York on a midnight shopping spree that turns into a drug-run. Along the way he attempts to crack the rapper's egotistical shell to find out more about his childhood, his family, and his mother. The story becomes less about fame and more about fatherhood and family bonds. An interviewer scrambling after an emergent rapper seemed like a strange concept for a novella, but

it all just feels real. The characters are so well imagined that I wouldn't be shocked if I were to bump into one on the streets of New York. I've had a skim through the next novella, *Venice*, and it looks as if this excellent characterisation and crisp, approachable yet quirky prose is set to continue across the five instalments.

The novella is the perfect format for Earls's fast and funny writing. It's juicier than a short story and can be devoured much faster than a novel, but it's just as satisfying. Read **Gotham** then wait impatiently for the next four instalments of this innovative series.

★★★★ Inkerman & Blunt \$19.99
Reviewed by Angus Dalton



The Hanging Club
Tony Parsons

The *Hanging Club* is the third outing in the 'DC Max Wolfe' series and so far there is no sense of series burnout. Here you'll find strong characters, solid plotting and a

storyline that combines police procedural with serious moral dilemmas.

A taxi driver is hanged by a group of masked vigilantes, and the film of the execution is streamed on the internet. The victim was a convicted paedophile. There is a second victim, a man guilty of running down a boy in his sports car, followed by

a social media campaign to bring back capital punishment. Wolfe and his team find themselves swimming against the tide of public opinion as they try to uncover the identities of the masked avengers, who quickly gain massive popularity online.

This is a strong work that fits nicely into the developing arc of the series, but it's good enough to stand alone. Wolfe, with his Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Stan, and young daughter, Scout, and a few hang-ups all his own is an engaging central character, flawed without becoming too much of a cliché. The narrative moves at a good pace and has some nice twists and turns and a cast of supporting characters who are well developed and believably human.

★★★★ Century \$32.99
Reviewed by Tessa Chudy