

Media Release:

## ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS OF SISTERS IN CRIME'S 5<sup>th</sup> DAVITT AWARDS



***Malicious Intent*** (PanMacmillan), the debut novel of Sydney doctor, **Kathryn Fox** has won the Davitt Award for the best (adult) crime novel by Australian women in 2004 presented tonight in Melbourne by Sisters in Crime Australia.

The novel, which features a forensic physician, has received international acclaim from the likes of Jeffrey Deaver and James Patterson and has been sold, with its yet-to-be published sequel, *Without Consent*, to the US, UK, Canada, and South Africa. *Malicious Intent* is being released in Italy, Germany and January early next year and is already available in Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand.

Dr Fox told tonight's gala ceremony at the Celtic Club, "I've long been a supporter of Sisters In Crime, for the way they encourage, nurture and support Australian crime writing. Without the support of organisations like Sisters In Crime, I doubt that I would have had the confidence to write *Malicious Intent*. They are helping Australian writers tell our own stories, which, judging by the numbers of Australian crime writers selling overseas, are proving to resonate with readers from around the globe. I couldn't be more thrilled to be the recipient of the Davitt award for adult fiction."

The Davitt award (young adult) went to Albury writer, **Joanna Baker** for ***Devastation Road*** (Lothian), set in country Victoria. *Devastation Road*, her first novel, was chosen from many by Isobelle Carmody to be the subject of a mentorship through the Victorian Arts Centre and Arts Victoria. Ms Baker is currently working on two sequels to *Devastation Road*. The second, entitled *The Queen of Swords*, concerns the Tarot and has psychological themes.

She told the crowd, "I vividly remember the thrill I got as a young teenager reading my first Agatha Christie, and my delight at the surprise ending and at the way the clues had been there all along, hidden in the details of the story. In *Devastation Road*, I set out to write a classical small-village murder mystery for today's young people, something concerning people and places they could recognise, with a plot that would keep the pages turning. It has many traditional elements: two mismatched detectives, twists and turns, clues laced throughout the plot and an ending that is simultaneously surprising and (hopefully) logically unassailable."

The Davitt (Readers' Choice) went to Brisbane's **Leigh Redhead** for ***Peepshow*** (Allen & Unwin), her debut novel featuring Simone Kirsch, stripper turned private eye. Ms Redhead herself turned to stripping after she left university and couldn't get a job despite a communications degree. *Rubdown*, her second novel featuring her St Kilda/Elwood sleuth, was launched on September 1 at the Elwood Lounge by drag queen, Amanda Monroe.

Ms Redhead said, "I'm absolutely thrilled to win the Davitt readers choice award. I've found the most satisfying part of writing is when readers tell me they couldn't put the book down and finished it in one go. After all, I've been an entertainer from way back! It's also great how people have taken to my PI, Simone Kirsch. I created her as an antidote to all those goody-two-shoes female crime characters and thought, being a stripper, she might be a bit extreme for some. Not so. Readers of all ages seem to love her and even my grandma keeps pestering me for the next instalment."

In the adult category, a special commendation was presented to Sydney writer, **Denise Young** for ***The Last Ride*** (HarperCollins), her first novel. *The Last Ride* was a winner in the ***Fighting for justice for women crime writers; promoting women's crime fiction***

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2002 Varuna Awards for Manuscript Development, a unique program run jointly by the Varuna Writers' Centre and HarperCollins Publishers to develop new writers. The novel was subsequently awarded the NSW Premier's Award for New Writing.



**Catherine Jinks**, a highly successful author of nearly thirty books for children and adults, also scored a special commendation in the adult section for *The Road* (Allen & Unwin). Ms Jinks, another Sydney resident, has garnered numerous awards, including the prestigious Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year.

The Davitt awards were presented by Debbie Kilroy, the founder of Sisters Inside, a unique advocacy group run by women prisoners, acclaimed for its groundbreaking work not only in Australia but also internationally. The winners received handsome carved wooden trophies.

National co-convenor and La Trobe University academic, **Dr Sue Turnbull**, who compered the evening, said that Sisters in Crime established the Davitts in 2001 to give some recognition to the growing body of Australian women's crime fiction.

"In 2001 seven crime novels written by Australian women competed for the award whereas this year 21 novels fought it out. Australian women are writing a new chapter in crime fiction," she said.

According to Dr Turnbull, the standard of women's crime novels is also getting higher.

"Part of the reason is that new writers are getting more nurturing and support, not just from groups like Sisters in Crime but by writers' centres, publishers and government programs. Four of the winning novels are first novels and two were officially mentored. It is clear that support from other writers and workshopping of material through writers' centres and other programs was an important step for fledgling crime writers mastering their craft.

"The judges say they had a lot to choose this year from but complain that the covers didn't match the quality of the prose. Publishers, please take note," she said.

Dr Turnbull said that next year Sisters in Crime planned to award a Davitt for the best true crime book by an Australian woman.

"True crime is a growing branch of crime writing and it's one where women excel," she said.

The judging panel composed **Katrina Beard** (Sisters in Crime national co-convenor, and reviewer), **Jane Sullivan** (*Sunday Age* literary columnist), **Lucy Sussex** (crime reviewer and historian), **Lyn Yates** (scholar, University of Melbourne) and **Rosi Tovey** (former owner of Chronicles Bookshop in St Kilda).

The awards are named after **Ellen Davitt** (1812-1879) who wrote Australia's first mystery novel, *Force and Fraud*, in 1865.

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