

# Dark matter

Taking a dim view of literary success,  
this author tells it like it is

**ALTERNATIVE VOICE ...** Brisbane writer Will Elliott's stories centre on a war of the worlds, with battles between good and evil, reflecting his view of reality

Here's a reality check for authors from one of their own: a writer's life is tough and hardly worth the effort. This reflection, by award-winning Brisbane author Will Elliott is gloomy, but also kind of refreshing. After years of listening to writers gush about their craft, work ethic and the spiritual fulfilment of the literary life, it's a welcome relief to hear a voice of dissent.

"Writing has just become another treadmill in the rat race and it's built lower to the ground than some," Will says.

"Do you feel like that generally or are you just having a moment?" I ask.

"My life seems to be one extended moment," says Will, 32, who has a reputation for telling it like it is. He did so in his acclaimed 2009 memoir *Strange Places*, a candid look at his experiences as a sufferer of schizophrenia. The book also tells how his writing career began.

Despite his dourness on the day of our interview, he has a lot to celebrate. His

debut 2006 novel *The Pilo Family Circus*, about a group of psychotic clowns (not autobiographical, he says), won the inaugural ABC Fiction Award and then went on to win some other gongs – in early 2007, a Golden Aurealis award for best novel, and he was named *The Sydney Morning Herald's* best young novelist for 2007.

Recently, critics have been enthusiastic about his Pendulum dark fantasy trilogy. The first book in the series was *Pilgrims*, and *Shadow* (Harper Voyager, \$22.99), the second, was published in January.

A third, *World's End*, will be published later this year. The books deal with battles between good and evil in a world that exists parallel to ours; a dark place where violent forces conspire. This, says Will, reflects his view of the world we live in.

With his credibility firmly established (he has been compared to Mervyn Peake, J.R.R. Tolkien and H.P. Lovecraft) and his

reputation soaring with fantasy and horror fans internationally, Will Elliott is fast asserting himself as a powerful voice. So he's a success, right?

"It depends how you measure success," Will says.

"Well, you are publishing books and getting well reviewed," I point out.

"Yes, but you can't eat that," Will says. "I looked at writing a lot differently when I started out, but circumstances wear you down a bit when you find you are working for half the minimum wage. I've considered other career options, but I'm not even qualified to stand by the road and hold a stop-go sign. I think you need a certificate to do that."

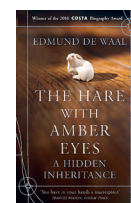
He has a stand-alone novel, *Nightfall*, due to be published in early 2012 and is now sketching out the plot of a new trilogy for an American publisher. This shows a certain amount of optimism, despite his gloomy prognostications about the literary life.

## must read

### THE HARE WITH AMBER EYES

AUTHOR • Edmund de Waal

PUBLISHER • Vintage Books, \$24.95



I love stories about rabbits, or even hares for that matter. Such books include *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo and *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. Edmund de Waal's memoir is about a hare with amber eyes and other Japanese miniatures (known as netsuke), which he first saw in the Tokyo apartment of his great uncle Iggy. Later, when Edmund inherited the collection of 264 pieces carved in wood and ivory, he traced their provenance back to the 19th century. It's a tale of exotic ports and wealthy merchants. This netsuke collection was bought by a business tycoon when Japanese objects were all the rage in Europe. The fortunes of the collection and the family, brought to the brink of oblivion under the Nazis, is fascinating. De Waal, an author and potter, finds the netsuke objects the perfect foil for a moving and original narrative.

### THE HOUSE AT SEA'S END

AUTHOR • Elly Griffiths

PUBLISHER • Quercus, \$32.99



Geography is often an important factor in crime fiction. The UK is littered with places that are locations for tales of murder and mayhem. Elly Griffiths has claimed the Norfolk Coast as her territory and it's a lovely part of the world. This is forensic archaeologist Ruth Galloway's beat and when a team from the University of North Norfolk, investigating coastal erosion, finds six bodies at the foot of a cliff she is put on the case, along with local police. Tests show the bodies are from Southern Europe and were buried 60 years previously. As Galloway and local cop DCI Nelson work to find answers, secrets from World War II emerge and when a visiting German reporter is killed, Galloway and Nelson realise someone still wants to guard the secret of the bodies uncovered at Broughton Sea's End, on the Norfolk coast. Lovely spot for a murder, actually.

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