

## Looking for a Book that looks like Candy –the Onboard Book, Club Melbourne Writers' Festival

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I think by the time I'd garnered a Masters, I knew how to unpack a statement. So, at the booze and schmooze when told, 'Liz, you are reviewing the Onboard Book Club,' I was quite excited. Can't be too hard. The Onboard Book Club, I was told, is not an event, as such– it's a process. It is happening throughout the festival. Copies of a book are being placed on a tram each week, and those tram-takers who pick up the books have the opportunity to tweet MWF saying what they thought of the book.

So, I wasn't reviewing an evening talk, or debate, or events which happened but once. No, the Onboard Book club was happening throughout the festival. Right... questions began to arise. What book? Which tram? And When?

Which book–because how would I know if they were picking up MWF-laid books and not books which had fallen out of their Wayne Cooper totes? Or, perhaps not fallen out, but placed on the seat next to said tram-taker as she sets up base camp, before attempting to scour the bowels of her tote to find a comb which has slipped to the bottom. Her bottle of water is displaced, next her best friend's copy of *Gilead*, which she promised she would have back by next Tuesday but oh gee, it's hard going. Her packed lunch is also placed on the seat. Finding a renegade comb can be a devil of an exercise. You can completely miss a deposited tome in times like these. (I eventually identified next week's title).

And which tram– surely I had to witness this happening? That would be neat, wouldn't it? Seeing someone picking up *Kat Jumps a Shark*, this week's title, a frown etched into their brow, as they stare at the back of the book, then examine the front, then whip back over to information about tweeting MWF if they like it, their frown now set. But what is the catch? they might intone, to themselves...there's got to be a catch. (My contact told me she thought it might be the 96 tram).

And when? When would these titles be deposited on trams? Would they get a way early start and steal away before sun up leaving lots of little candy-coloured (that's what the cover looks like) presents on early trams? Or, had they already argued that really early tram-takers would still be half asleep and resolutely plugged into their wake-up music– so perhaps make it a bit later. But not too much later; my contact informed me that an afternoon sweep of a 96 last week netted no remainders. There was nothing for it but to throw myself into the experience.

So, into the big smoke I took myself. It was early afternoon; I hadn't fancied battling through sardine tins full of travelers who frequented the 96 tram of a morning. I rode this way and that; up and down the causeway, threading my way through passengers, searching for candy-coloured books left on seats. There were none. This is a good thing, I thought. They've taken up the gauntlet, those tram takers and like true Aussies, seen the value of a 'freebie'. I prefer to think that this is what occurred. The idea of leaving free books on seats on a tram in the hope that passengers will play along, pick up the book, start reading it, and, when done, tweet MWF saying what they thought of the book, has merit. I'm an English language teacher; anything that encourages reading has merit, in my book (pardon the pun). Perhaps a suggestion for next year, though. It can still be called Onboard Book Club but I suggest leaving the piles of books at tram stops rather than on trams, under cover, with the word FREE clearly visible, in containers which display the words Melbourne Writers' Festival. And yes, it may need volunteers to man these displays, and I, for one, would happily donate my services.