

A number of meaningful messages

AS OUR rock-star economy starts to sound off-Key, it's admirable that New Zealand publishers keep producing quality books, well-written and well-presented. Makaro Press' newest production is one example.

Janis Freegard tells *A Tale Of Two Sisters*, in a first novel that ranges from suburban Wellington to suburban Reykjavik.

Selina is nearly 30, a graphic designer and sophisticated city single. Smith is significantly older, lives in a house truck, makes jewellery, and believes we're made out of stars.

Younger sister plunges into an affair with a sex rat disguised as "the most beautiful man in Wellington ... a dark-haired Norse god". He's also engaged to her boss. You know almost immediately it's doomed to end in tears and drained wine bottles.

At the same time, double-faced dolls in grubby clothes begin appearing in cardboard coffins on her doorstep.

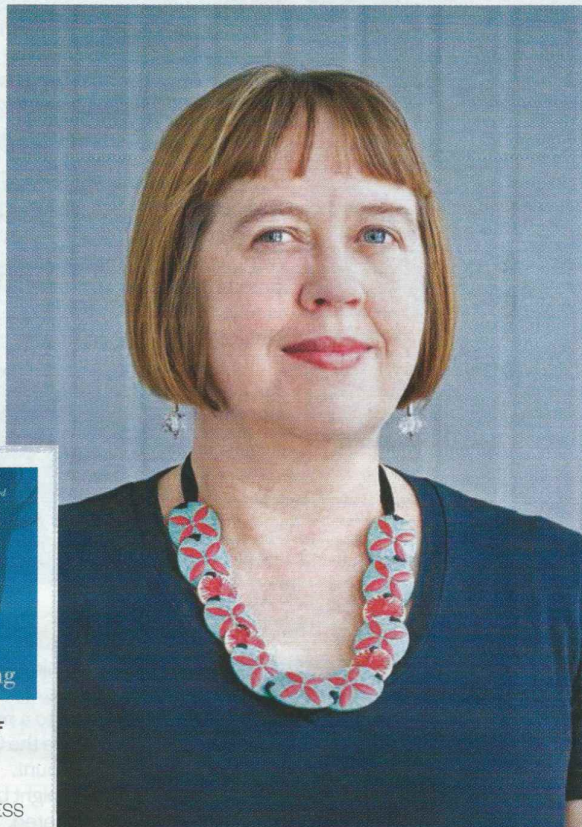
Smith, meanwhile, is trying to deal with her own desires and duties. The net of sibling contrasts and connections is authentic, nicely varied and energises the narrative. One grows in authority while the other disintegrates into despair.

Alternating between their viewpoints, supplemented by the story of Quilla the landlady, who's "had seven husbands, four of them my own" (ho, ho), the plot traces old beliefs and attitudes as they're reshaped by new shifts or revelations.

Characters set out on various quests. An engaging small boy and a few unengaging business types feature. There's room for a magician's assistant; a set of absentee parents; a sad death and a grotesque death.

Choices take people to a lavender farm, a poisonous garden, a distant father, up a tree in the Nelson bush. Kindness and kindness become increasingly important. Participants move towards degrees of bruised fulfilment; easy solutions are satisfyingly avoided.

Settings are immediately, convincingly contemporary: a South Island religious commune;



JANIS FREEGARD MAKES YOU CARE ABOUT EACH CHARACTER, EVEN THE MOST LOATHSOME.

Iceland's whale-meat restaurants and vegetarian cafes; the "repurposed" buildings of central Wellington. Characters wear Karen Walker tops, buy Seraphine Pick paintings, listen to Sufi music.

A number of meaningful messages are carried. Significant disclosures and tourist details threaten to clog the narrative on occasions. Characters sometimes stand still and utter aphorisms.

However, it's an immediately readable book. The crisp, crackly prose kicks things along. There are nice little leavenings of irony. Freegard controls a substantial cast adroitly, and makes you care about each one of them, even loathsome Randall and bubble-brained Bailey. ©

KINDNESS AND KINDLINESS BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT. PARTICIPANTS MOVE TOWARDS DEGREES OF BRUISED FULFILMENT; EASY SOLUTIONS ARE SATISFYINGLY AVOIDED.

Veiled

by Benedict



our hero, a L habits. Jack well-thought of what diff therefore Al nearly all m of chess ga titution ring former mas

The Lon Planet

by Becky C



feminist-gee which a sma the galaxy o genre-litera no great mo on characte which peopl sive values t are interesti

Stray

by Rachael



sound like a that's why it added kick i which has m kind of writin

The She by Terry Pr



and unweloc not the plac Weatherwa start. But an going to war