

**The Season of Glass** ★★★★★  
Rahla Xenopoulos (Umuzi, R250)

It is difficult to believe that we have Chanel lipstick and the TV series *American Horror Story* to thank for the epic novel, *The Season of Glass*, but life works in mysterious ways. Xenopoulos first refused to watch the series, but her best friend bribed her to do so – with lipsticks.

As Xenopoulos white-knuckled her way through, she was fascinated by the way the series recycles settings, themes, and unfinished business, which returns until properly resolved. This re-emergence left her pondering reincarnation. She explains: “The first rule of physics is that nothing can completely disappear. Everything becomes something else, so then what happens to a

person, who lives and loves and learns and walks this earth interacting with other souls?”

What emerged from the television experience is Xenopoulos’s finest novel yet. Two souls are sent to Earth in the form of Jewish twins with the potential to change the world. The boy and girl appear in the cruellest of times, and it is humanity’s actions that dictate

whether they will succeed. While the twins are drastically different people in each new life, their souls remain the same: the boy a grounded protector, the girl possessing every story ever told in the past, present and future.

Declared a “modern Scheherazade’s tale”, the story spans the ages from ancient Ethiopia to the Spanish Inquisition, to Austria on the eve of World War I, to times we have yet to live. There are pirates, warrior princesses, rabbis, artists, and monstrous giant mantises. Each section is a new story.

Every section displays humanity at its worst, while still filled with hope. “Perhaps the greatest goal a writer can have is that their work brings hope and love,” Xenopoulos says.

She explains: “All ages are cruel. What’s different about this age is that things are happening exponentially faster, and there are no filters, it’s all thrown in our faces. That’s why I think faith and spirituality are so important, and why we have to take breaks from the screens to smell the roses, listen to music, read a book, hold someone’s hand. We need to detach ourselves from the chaos and take stock. What’s important is kindness, and laughter, and how we treat our neighbour.”

Unsurprisingly, *The Season of Glass*



This is Rahla Xenopoulos’s third book. Picture: Joanne Olivier



## Tiah Beaument

### interviews

## Rahla Xenopoulos

### on her new novel

required an enormous amount of research to write. What some may not realise, however, is that this was necessary even for the section that is set in the future. “Science fiction can seem so outlandish,” Xenopoulos says, “the reality is that these things have and are coming to pass.”

Throughout the story, love and physical human connections are shown to be vital to our humanity. Not an easy balance to achieve at the same time as existing on social media, Xenopoulos admits, as she herself used

Facebook to help guide her through the research. But she is adamant we must continue to seek out the good in each other and in ourselves, and that cannot be accomplished if we don’t step away from screens. This is ultimately what her book is about.

She explains: “If we’d been alive during the 14th century the headline of every newspaper, if they had had newspapers, would have been about war and a tyrant. But the important thing happening was in a small town in Germany where a man called Johannes Gutenberg was developing the printing press. People create war, we use religion the way we use money and other resources as an excuse to fight, but that isn’t all we are doing. There are crazy, exciting and beautiful things going on out there.”

Winter can be hard on many. *The Season of Glass* is a wonderful way to return warmth to your soul. @ms\_tiahmarie

The inspiration for writing *Gold Diggers* was derived largely from the xenophobic violence that erupted in South Africa in 2008. Coincidentally, this is also the time I relocated here. The violence itself was not inspirational, it was depressing. Rather, the provocative conversations that arose following the conflicts stimulated the decision to write this book.

As much as there was sympathy and outrage from some corners, there was also antipathy from those who felt the violence was justified. I often heard the following assertions being articulated:

“What are they doing here?”

“Why don’t they go back to their own countries?”

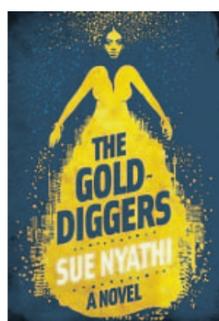
Then there was the total disengagement from some quarters, which often arises because we feel it’s not our problem; it’s their problem. We then become complicit in our own silence. So I chose to confront this issue the best way I knew how, which is through a story.

The xenophobic violence affected various nationalities but I decided to tell the Zimbabwean story because that is the country of my birth. It is also a story I felt I could tell with great understanding and authenticity. I was born and raised in Bulawayo, which provides the opening scene for the book. My paternal

## Jacket Notes



**Sue Nyathi**  
The Gold Diggers



grandfather, Stephen, was also a gold digger. He worked in the gold mines in Johannesburg for the greater part of his life so it is also a story that is close to my heart.

I started writing the book in 2013 and only finished it to my satisfaction in 2016. The writing process was longer because there was greater research involved. As much as I was pregnant with creativity, I also became pregnant with my son, which slowed my progress but did not stop me. I remember being eight months pregnant doing a walking tour in Hillbrow. It was important for me to understand the history of the place. It was not just enough to read about it, I needed to walk and breathe the air, which adds texture and colour to my writing.

After giving birth I took a hiatus from writing *Gold Diggers* and returned to it in 2015. I remember re-reading the first draft and thinking the hormones had certainly taken over! The writing was mushy and so I began rewriting a lot.

This was a harrowing story but I felt it needed to be told. Writing it was also cathartic as I wrote through my own pain. However, even in the darkest moments of pain there are moments of profound pleasure. Through my characters I try to narrate the stories of the migrant experience, weaving together a colourful tapestry.

## Book Bites

**When She Was Gone** ★★★  
SA Dunphy, Hachette, R285



David Dunnigan is in turmoil when a shoe belonging to his niece, Beth, is delivered to his doorstep. Thing is, she was wearing the shoes when she was kidnapped 18 years

earlier, while she was with him. He has never forgiven himself and that has ruined his relationships and his career as a criminologist. Who left the shoe and why? Is Beth still alive? Dunnigan’s hopes revived, he delves into Dublin’s seedy underworld where his quest takes him to a chilling psychiatric asylum run by a mad shrink and his psychotic sidekick. Then to an Inuit village in frozen Greenland where trafficked slaves are worked to the bone in a fish factory. A thrilling read that takes you to the extremes of human cruelty.

Gabriella Bekes @gabrikwa

**The Long Forgotten** ★★★★★  
David Whitehouse  
Pan Macmillan, R285



A cantankerous professor discovers a black box flight recorder of a plane that went missing 30 years ago, and unlocks a story that spans

decades, generations, and continents. A young man named Dove works in an emergency dispatch call centre until he starts getting excruciating headaches that present themselves as flashes of someone else’s memories. Twenty years hence a cleaner by the name of Peter Manyweathers discovers a love letter with a list of rare flowers in a library book, and sets off on a quest for adventure — and love. How do these stories fit into each other? Beautifully intertwined and skilfully crafted, Whitehouse spins a narrative that leaves the reader aching for more.

Anna Stroud @annawriter\_

**The Reckoning** ★★★

Yrsa Sigurðardóttir  
Hodder & Stoughton, R300



There is something relentlessly grim about Sigurðardóttir’s Icelandic noir novels. The setting is a cold, mostly unfriendly atmosphere of grimy police stations, dimly

lit parking garages and a country that is as isolating as it is small and claustrophobic. The characters are unfathomable yet fascinating. This is the second book in the Children’s House series. The detective Huldar and child psychologist Freyja’s careers have both suffered because of the last case they worked on and now they are investigating a chilling case — family secrets and gruesome murders with severed hands and feet found in odd places. Their feelings for each other also complicate matters.

Jennifer Platt @jenniferdplatt