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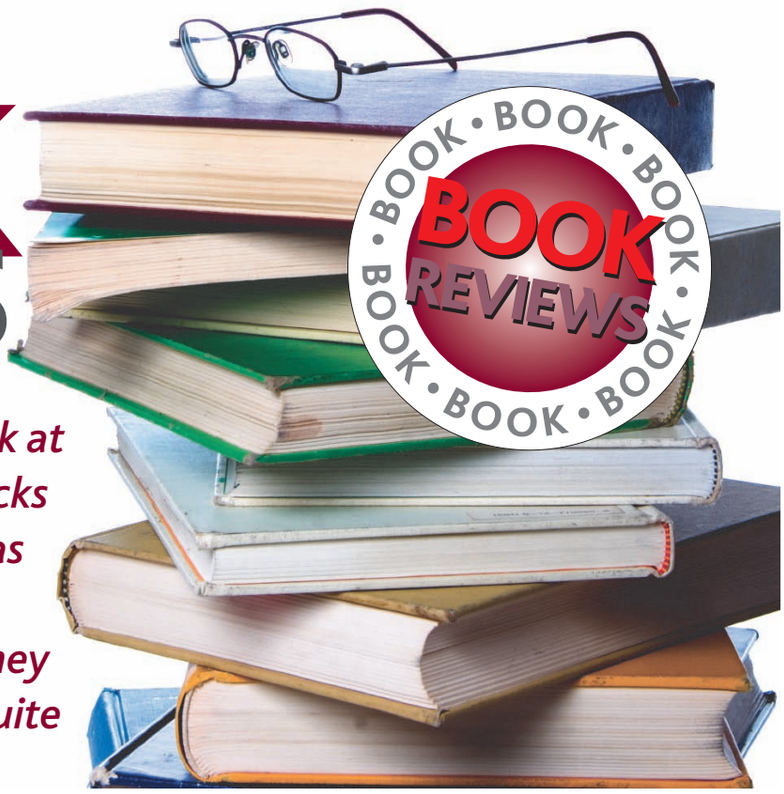
Book Reviews



SH Magazine has taken a look at some of the latest paperbacks in the adult market – our reviewer has made his appraisals purely on the quality of each book, and whether they really do offer what they claim for quite specialised predilections.

Swung

PRICE £11.99

Author: Ewan Morrison
Published by Jonathan Cape, 352 pages

David (30s) is a man with an ex-wife, a daughter (baby-sitting rights only), a girlfriend – and an erection problem. He and Alice have just moved into a flat in Glasgow's upmarket West End – a step up which will put both their salaries under pressure at the small TV company where they work. It's an all-too-familiar scenario – life becomes focused on maintaining the precarious hold on work status, social standing – and the very possession of their home.

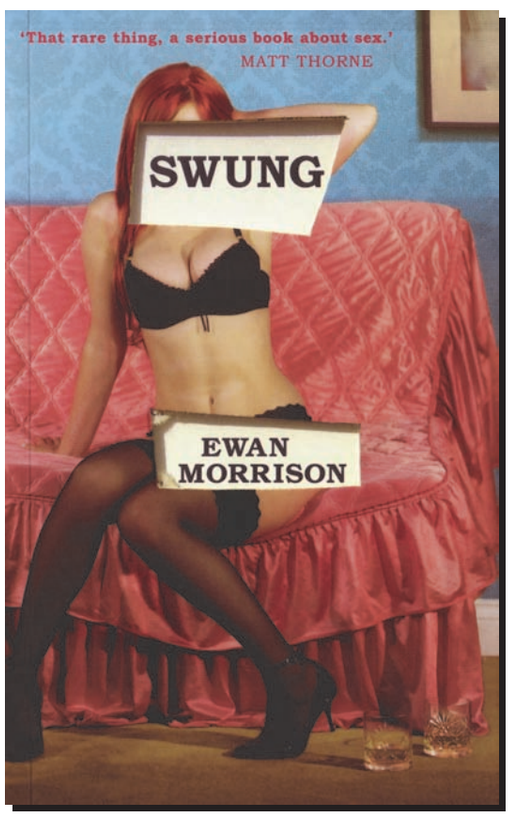
Ewan Morrison portrays all these anxieties with a deft and humane touch, the perceptions swinging (no pun intended) between David and Alice as he confronts his return to work after the house move, then she experiences the crisis of artist's block in the break she takes to rejuvenate her lapsed calling as a painter.

In many ways they've got lots going for them – they're in love, give each other support and handle each other's frustrations with sensitivity. Theirs is essentially an urban love story – but with quite a number of issues, obstacles and hang-ups – enough to keep a whole convention of shrinks going.

Alice tears her hair at home, unable even to find a subject to paint – while David watches, powerless, as his colleagues are 'let go' or made redundant around him in a merger/take-over. Soon he's sitting at his desk, nothing to do and no-one talking to him – so it looks like it won't matter if he explores that swinging website (swinging-paradise, actually), over which one erstwhile workmate had been fired for 'inappropriate use of internet access'.

When, inevitably, David's job collapses, he's left home alone with his insecurities and his computer, and he furtively uses the website more and more – for titillation, curiosity – and escape.

It's a combination of causes which brings swinging into the David/Alice equation. On the evening of David's as yet unconfessed redundancy there's an encounter with a neighbouring couple who are throwing a moving-out party. Then there's David's daytime dalliance with the website – and finally, Alice's desperation to come up with one brilliant series idea which will secure her job. The idea dawns – it's swinging. This would be a responsible social study – with unlimited opportunities for sexual revelation. All she needed to do is find a group of people prepared to participate.



The search – and research – legitimise their swinging forays – and Morrison handles their encounters, anxieties and performances with gentle humour (but no cheap shots), and great realism – all supported by excellent dialogue, both heard and in David's and Alice's heads. Alice feels that if they explore and experiment enough they'll find some miracle formula to sort out David's impotence. For times when they are alone together, Alice swots up some horny stories and tells them to David, for him to visualise other people having sex. However, he might not even need the stories if he can watch for himself. Being with another couple might be what he needs. While it's acknowledged that swinging won't mend a broken relationship, it's not their relationship that's broken – it's just David's erectile function. So perhaps the pair of them are in with a chance after all.

As they approach their encounters, David examines the universally used swing-speak – and wonders what lies beneath some of the terms – but they meet, predictably, nice couples. The sex scenes are, if anything, underplayed – this is not a