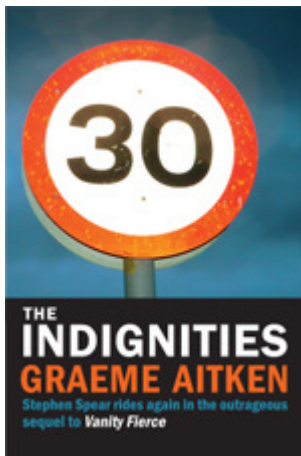


Dallas J Baker

## The Sweet and Funny Twists of Gay Life after 30: Review of Graeme Aitken's *The Indignities* Series



Graeme Aitken  
*The Indignities*  
Clouds of Magellan Press  
ISBN: 9780980712063  
Paperback, 310pp. 2010.

We first met Stephen Spear, the central character of *The Indignities* series, in Aitken's earlier book *Vanity Fierce* (Random House 1998). In that book, Stephen goes to extreme lengths to secure a relationship with the man who is the object of his (obsessive) affection. In *The Indignities*, which are basically a series of comic and sexual sequels to *Vanity Fierce*, Stephen's well laid plans seem to come undone.

The character of Stephen is at once loveable and irritating (in a good way). He epitomizes everything about Oxford Street society that many of us find tiresome and seductive in equal measure; deliciously showy but a bit empty. True to his type, Stephen puts a lot of energy into avoiding the unpleasant realities of life (like aging and the changeable nature of relationships).

A psychologist might diagnose Stephen as suffering from Avoidance Syndrome. But Stephen's avoidance is more a cultural practice, a norm in the urban gay scene of Sydney, than it is a psychological vulnerability. For that reason, it's easy to see the funny side of his compulsive behaviors. Core among Stephen's issues is the aforementioned fact of aging. He actually ignores his 30th birthday rather than face that he's no longer truly "young". There is an anxiety that surfaces in some gay men's lives when they turn 30. This is not surprising given that in certain gay circles turning 30 is equivalent to turning 120; gay years being something like dog years. Many gay men go through a crisis of identity at this age. They cannot see themselves as toy-boys anymore, and dare not consider themselves "daddies". So, how to think of oneself when one is neither young nor old in a culture in which sexual attractiveness and youth is almost everything? *The Indignities* goes a long way to discover precisely that, and does it with humor and not a small amount of insight.

*The Indignities* opens with Stephen's carefully constructed life coming undone, and him realizing that his life and relationships are just as vulnerable to the vagaries of time and change as is his body. In short shrift, the easy life he took for granted has dissolved into a bit of a mess. His friends succumb to online dating fraudsters and leave town, other friendships come undone in other ways. The end result is that Stephen starts to feel somewhat put upon and lonely. But what is Stephen's

response, does he take himself in hand and determine to act his age? I don't want to spoil it for the reader but let's just say that Stephen's response is not as mature as it should be, and results in an amusing (and endearing) journey.

Aitken's writing style is detailed and nicely evocative. He writes characters extremely well, with both humor and poignancy. Aitken also knows how to deliver a satisfying ending, which is prefigured when Stephen meets the character Damon. Damon and Stephen are two peas in a pod in some ways, but where Stephen is puckish, Damon is a little more wicked. The Damon character acts as a mirror to Stephen and triggers some reflection which opens up Stephen's character nicely and leads to some interesting developments. Overall, *The Indignities* series provides a satisfying read that tickles the funny bone and the heart strings. I enjoyed these books quite a bit and look forward to more from Aitken, who is a skilled and sensitive writer.

## Author Bio

Dallas J. Baker (also known as Dallas Angguish) is a writer and academic based in Australia. He has been published in a number of journals - Lodestar Quarterly, Retort Magazine, Bukker Tillibul, TEXT - as well as in a number of anthologies, including *Dumped* (1999), *Bend, Don't Shatter* (2004) and the US edition of *Dumped* released in 2003. *America Divine: Travels in the Hidden South*, A collection of Dallas' travel pieces set in the South of the USA, was published in 2011 to very positive reviews. For more info: [www.dallasangguish.com](http://www.dallasangguish.com)

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