

**Book Title:** Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living

**Author:** Carrie Tiffany

**Publisher's Name:** a Picador book (by Pan Macmillan Aust Pty Ltd)

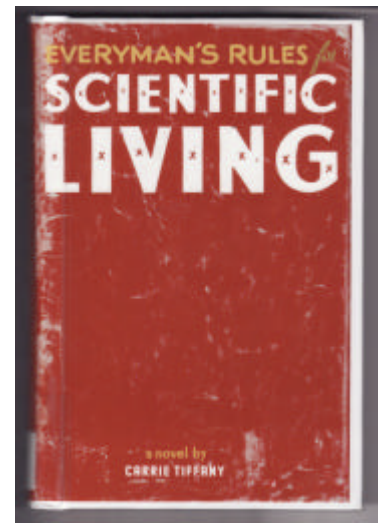
**ISBN:** 0-330-42191-3

**Publication Date/Year:** 2005

**Category/Genre:** Fiction (hardcover)

**Reviewed by:** Adrian McGlinchey

**Date Reviewed:** 20 February 2009



## Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living

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**THE 1930s...** people in most western nations were suffering the effects of *The Great Depression* and times were particularly harsh for rural Australia, as they were during the *Dust Bowl Migration* of California in the United States of America. The Lyons government tried to bolster up agriculture and livestock farming by encouraging a more scientific approach, in ways that were strange to an older generation of the *man-on-the-land*. Some of these new approaches included the use of modern fertiliser chemicals such as *super phosphates*. The Australian government of the day sponsored travelling agricultural shows that moved across the country by rail, complete with a team of agricultural experts aboard who would propagate their scientific method to farming communities.

In Carrie Tiffany's novel, Jean Finnegan is a sewing instructor on the *Better Farming Train*, which chugs its way through the wheat fields, grazing lands and orchards of the Mallee and Wimmera districts of Victoria. On this project Jean meets her *husband-to-be*, Robert Pettergree, agricultural scientist, a man who has a great dream of improving the production and quality of wheat crops throughout the land.

Against this backdrop of domestic problems in Australia, World War II is looming... as dreams are tossed and blown on the swirling dusty winds, Robert, like most of the men, is '*called*' to war. To some men, the war front is an adventure, to some merely a patriotic duty, to others a *ready-made* escape route away from their already harsh and uncertain circumstances. Whatever his reasons for enlisting to fight overseas, we are left with an overwhelming sense that Robert never realised his full potential, as Jean is left to draw upon her inner strength and carry on the farm at Wycheproof.

The Pettergrees' neighbours may not have shown enough depth of character for some readers. For example, with Doris and Ern McKettering, was it just the problems on the farm that made them leave, or were there other things happening between them? Also the ending was somewhat abrupt, leaving us to only wonder whether Jean succeeded in her intentions to persist with the farm, and I was left wanting to know more about the fate of Mr Ohno. Perhaps there is a sequel in this.

Despite these shortcomings, I *thought Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* was well worth the read. It gives us an impression of life in the Victorian Mallee during the Great Depression years, and Carrie Tiffany has touched on the issues of irrigation and land management from a uniquely Australian perspective. Don't go past the part on Ern McKettering's water tank. Personally, I feel this is emblematic of the '*Australian dilemma*'... What good is a water tank if the rain doesn't fall in the right places to fill it? Why, for that matter, keep building more dams that don't catch the rainwater anyway? Should we be investing in smarter water recycling or desalination technology? Is there anything to be learned from Robert's textbook manner? Whatever your viewpoint, these questions are as relevant today as they were back in the 1930's.

**RATINGS  
LEGEND**

★  
(APPALLING)

★★  
(MEDIocre)

★★★  
(GOOD)

★★★★  
(EXCELLENT)

★★★★★  
(PURE GENIUS)

## Review - Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living

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**RATING (out of 5):**



... not a particularly gripping plot, for those who prefer adventure, intrigue or romance, but this book raises some thought-provoking questions about the land and it's European inhabitants.

**Adrian M<sup>c</sup>Glinchey**

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