

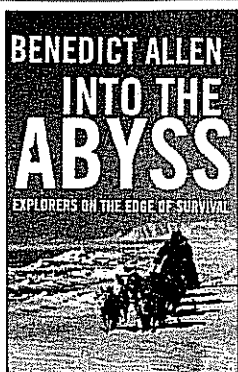
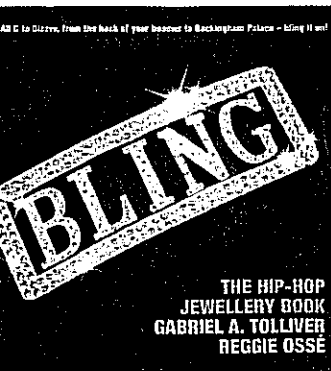
's just so whack

ng: the hip-hop
ellery book
riol A Tolliver and Reggie Ossé
msbury, 176pp, £9.99

the death of "bling" was heralded
ts not very "street" inclusion
he *Oxford English Dictionary*
003. The media and the
ublishing industry, however,
still enthusiastically banging
about it.

This book is a totally pointless,
ntelligent money-spinner for
msbury. It looks like it has
n thrown together in a couple
days: most of the research
ears to have been done on
ogle and there are factual errors
ore. If you were hoping for any
d of analysis or critique – an
loration of the contradictions
style that encouraged black
mericans to express their hard-
n freedoms by contributing to a
mond industry that sustained
ody conflicts in Africa, say –
get it. This book will be helpful
ou only if you wish to learn
w to polish your "pimped-out
ky ring".

ut then, the book's inanity fits
subject matter perfectly. Why
ng any intellectual muscle to
r on a trend that has nothing to
er other than ostentatious
aterialism and glorified violence?
his book simply celebrates the
t that bling has, according to its
hors, become a "major cultural
ovement". Or so they must be
ping, if people are to pay £9.99
this third-rate rubbish.
ce O'Keefe



Breaking the ice

**Into the Abyss: explorers on
the edge of survival**
Benedict Allen
Faber & Faber, 352pp, £17.99

Benedict Allen has been
adventuring for more than 20
years: he has escaped hit men
on the Amazon, led camels along
Namibia's Skeleton Coast and
endured scarification ceremonies
in New Guinea. In this, his
latest adventure, he travels to the
wastes of Siberia to learn from
the indigenous Chukchi and cross
the Bering Strait.

Into the Abyss takes us to a
frozen place where dwindling
communities live it up on vodka.
Allen quickly finds that drunken
spats and heavy hangovers are as
much a threat to his expedition as
are frostbite and thin ice.

Drawn to Siberia to test his
mettle, Allen is intrigued by the
human capacity to survive against
the odds. The book is filled with
boxed anecdotes about exploration
disasters and his own bullet-point
tips, which include "banish all
dark thoughts" and "don't be afraid
of being ruthless".

Interesting as they are, these
constant asides become an
unwanted distraction. What keeps
the reader hooked is Allen's closely
observed depiction of the tundra:
small communities riven with
alcoholism; abandoned Soviet
outposts; corridors of tall whale
bones planted centuries ago in the
thick ice; and the Chukchi, a people
vulnerable to modernity but at ease
in the world's hardest climate.
Sam Alexandroni

Out for a duck

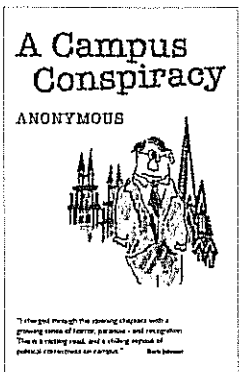
You Must Like Cricket?
*Memoirs of an Indian
cricket fan*
Soumya Bhattacharya
Yellow Jersey Press, 240pp, £12

Soumya Bhattacharya's book title
comes from the author's encounter
with Martin Amis. He remembers
it because "it seemed to epitomise
the English view of Indians...
If you're Indian, you must be crazy
about cricket."

In fairness to Amis,
Bhattacharya is crazy about the
game. He used to eat only bananas
for a month to save the money for
his trip to Calcutta to watch
cricket. He abandons his wife
(temporarily) because he has been
invited to meet Kapil Dev. When
he meets him, he asks if he can
touch his hand – the kind of thing
that is acceptable only if you're
re-enacting Jane Austen.

Anecdotes such as this abound
and are the major weakness of the
book: it's basically all anecdotes,
and there's no story. I've been
fanatical about Indian cricket, I
know what he's talking about, but
this book doesn't satisfy because it
doesn't have a point.

Bhattacharya might respond to
my criticisms by saying that I've
missed the point of the book – it's
supposed to be an entertaining
distraction rather than an analysis
of anything in particular. Fair
enough, but unless you, too,
are passionate about cricket,
this book won't even be a reliably
entertaining distraction.
Pranay Sanklecha



Student bashing

A Campus Conspiracy
Anonymous
Impress Books, 208pp, £7.99

Harold Bloom labelled intellectual
circles as "dominated by fools,
knaves, charlatans and
bureaucrats". The anonymous
author of *A Campus Conspiracy*
agrees, and this is the fruit of
his frustration.

The elusive "prominent
academic" entices us into the
(insistently fictional) St Sebastian's
University campus and the toasty-
warm existence of the aristocratic
Professor Gilbert. Scholarly types
provide excellent comic fodder,
and this *Horse and Hound* lifestyle,
abounding in country-club clichés,
serves to balance the full force of
the novel's message. On-campus
corruption and political anxieties
are brazenly exposed as eroding
any commitment to learning. No
longer is higher education a haven
for the scholarly minded; rather it
is a temple to bureaucracy, league
tables and alumni's donations.

With scholarships mostly
reserved for ethnic minorities to
keep up the quota, unprivileged
white students must keep afloat by
selling essays to their dim-witted
counterparts, namely the offspring
of rich alumni. This is a delicate
equilibrium of deceit and
nepotism. Although written
elegantly, the message can at times
feel laboured. The frustrating
spiral of bureaucracy plagues
the reader relentlessly with
a sense of doom. But then that, I
suppose, is the point.
Olivia Shean