

## **Broken Pencil**

**Fiction review column, March 2005 issue**

### **I Am a Red Dress**

**by Anna Camilleri, \$19.95, 181 pgs, Arsenal Pulp Press, 103 – 1014 Homer Street, Vancouver, BC, V6B 2W9, arsenalpulp.com**

It's usually honesty that leaves the most distinct mark on a work of art, or, in this case, literature. And while there is plenty of honesty in *I Am a Red Dress*, another singular adjective nudges the psyche of those reading this book: brave. Camilleri is no novice – she co-founded Taste This, a spoken-word team of queer writers, and co-edited *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity*. No, Camilleri is a sure master of allowing truth to conspicuously and carefully seep through the pages of her work without appearing leaky or uncomfortable. This control is what's most striking in Camilleri's newest venture.

Deconstructing a three-generational sequence of violence and abuse in her family through memory and imagination, Camilleri successfully handles her most vulnerable sense of self. Camilleri draws a line from her grandmother, to her mother, to herself, successively deepening the meaning and site of their connections via the metaphor of the red dress. Her style gives form to each woman's distinct essence, and Camilleri's diplomacy in dealing with the realities of each of her family members' silence and inaction is admirably honest. Though her realizations are the kind that strike the gut directly, she reveals herself and her family with grace and remarkable charge. *I Am a Red Dress* is exceptionally strong in will, humanity, and bravery. (Star DT)