

# An art that imitates a life

A semi-autobiographical cult sensation that doesn't need the Depp factor yet

Sentenced to 19 years in an Australian prison for a series of heroin-induced armed robberies, Gregory David Roberts set down his fake pistol in favour of a pen and authored a cult sensation.

Popular publishing wisdom states that a book needs to make the bestseller lists within its first month on sale or risk being banished from them forever. Not so *Shantaram*.

Back in November 2005, the Abacus title was selling an average of 202 copies a week. A year later the figure had doubled to 406. Last November, the figure was 1,018.

It's 40,479 annual sale last year earned Roberts a place in the top 250 fiction paperbacks of 2007, happening alongside backlist perennials such as Mark Haddon's *Curious Incident . . .* and Yann Martel's *The Life of Pi*.

Johnny Depp and his production company Infinitum Nihil paid a seven-figure dollar deal to secure the film rights back in 2004, although reported pre-production issues, plus the screenwriters' strike, mean the film looks likely to be delayed until 2009.

But with sales performing just fine, prison-breaker, ex-counterfeiter, former gun-runner and one-time owner of Australia's "Most Wanted Man" title Gregory David Roberts won't be too worried.

