



PRINCESS MASAKO

By Ben Hills

Random House, 316 pp, \$34.95

If Princess Masako and the strange goings-on of the Japanese royal family have failed to register on your personal radar in recent years, then this is the book for you. If you want a story of medieval rituals, exotic and alien cultural idiosyncrasies, tragedy on a grand scale and the destruction of a thoroughly modern woman by an ancient patriarchal and dictatorial family then this is a well-written and carefully researched account.

Ben Hills, a *Herald* journalist with a deep knowledge of Japanese life and culture, tells the story of Masako Owada, Harvard-educated and fluent in six languages, and her marriage to the Crown Prince Naruhito Hironomiya.

It began with such glittering hopes – hopes that the commoner might drag the Chrysanthemum Throne into the 20th century, hopes that the Japanese royal family would become part of modern Japan.

But it degenerated into the chaos of a woman suspected of mental breakdown who could not give the royal family the male heir it craved and protocol demanded.