

## 5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES

1



**Thriller**  
**THE GIRL IN GREEN**  
Derek B. Miller  
Scribe, \$32.99

English journalist Thomas Benton meets US soldier Arwood Hobbes during the first Gulf War, when both are involved in an incident in which a young Iraqi girl dies.

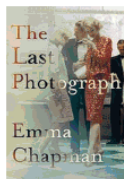
They go their separate ways but 22 years later Hobbes phones Benton to tell him he has seen the girl being killed in Kurdistan again. Benton, now aged in his 60s and with his marriage in tatters, agrees to meet Hobbes in the desert to find the girl.

It's funny, sad, enlightening and upliftingly hopeful as the two scared men navigate the chaos of the Middle East and the bureaucratic world of NGOs on their mission of redemption.

Miller writes with a languid simplicity and has a keen eye for the absurd. As more about the men's lives in the intervening years is revealed, the story and the characters wrap around you like a cloak that you never want to let go.

IAN ORCHARD ★★★★★

2



**Fiction**  
**THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH**  
Emma Chapman  
Picador, \$29.99

It was six decades ago, but the war in Vietnam seems never too far from public consciousness. Chapman, a British writer who lived for a time in Australia, thoughtfully constructs the life of a celebrated war photographer, Rook, who fell into a plum job in London in the 1970s because back then anything was possible.

Married to the beautiful actor June, he goes to Vietnam where he is caught up in the rivalries and friendships forged in intense conditions. His exclusive image of a self-immolating monk throws him into the thick of a worsening war, just when he should be at home tending his marriage.

It is partly the story of an old man ruefully looking back but comes into its own as a vivid depiction of war correspondents and the normality they must sacrifice.

PENELOPE DEBELLE ★★★★★

3



**Crime**  
**THE TWISTED KNOT**  
J.M. Peace  
Macmillan, \$29.99

In a country Queensland town where all the residents know each other, one man is ostracised. "Pete the ped" is blamed for the suicide of a young girl he allegedly molested.

Then rumours start flying that another girl has fallen victim to his attentions and the police are besieged, especially Constable Samantha Willis, pulling desk duty after a too-close brush with a serial killer (in the author's debut novel).

When Pete's body is found hanging in a barn, the list of suspects is long and includes his brother and sister-in-law, who can't be found.

Peace's second police procedural is not so much a whodunit – or even whydunnit – but rather an exploration of the justice system. It's all the more germane because Peace herself is a serving police officer.

SHELLEY ORCHARD ★★★★★

4



**History**  
**THE MINISTRY OF UNGENTLEMANLY WARFARE**  
Giles Milton, John Murray, \$35

If Operation Sea Lion had succeeded and Nazi Stormtroopers had landed in Kent they would have found their way impeded by a group of highly trained saboteurs and guerrilla fighters. That's just one insight in this entertaining account of sabotage operations ordered by Winston Churchill.

Under the auspices of the Military Intelligence Research unit, men were trained for daring raids including the ramming of the St Nazaire dry dock, the sabotage of the Norsk Hydro heavy water plant and destruction of the Gorgopotamos viaduct.

The unit even had its own weapons research section which helped develop the PIAT handheld antitank weapon. There is also the suggestion that the bomb it developed to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich had been laced with botulinum toxin.

DAVID BRADBURY ★★★★★

5



**Picturebook**  
**MY BROTHER**  
Dee Huxley (with Oliver and Tiffany Huxley)

**Working Title Press, \$24.99**  
Intended for mid-primary rather than pre-school readers, this beautiful picturebook is plangent with pain and loss as it traces a metaphorical path through grief.

An emblematic horned creature, designed by Huxley's son Oliver with mingled overtones of cuddly human, wombat and bear, deeply mourns his missing brother and sets out with a faithful companion duck to look for him.

A tiny donkey moving across the foot of the expansive white text pages stages the journey, while on the facing pages the creature visits fantastical landscapes all created in shades of grey. Eventually an exhausted sleep brings on a glimmer of dawn and the journey ends in joyful sunlight and an assuaging new understanding of a changed relationship with the once-lost brother.

KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

# Family legacy casts long shadow

KATHARINE ENGLAND

If the word "inheritance" has promising, positive overtones for you, here are two new Australian novels to give those overtones the lie. Paul Mitchell's timely debut novel opens with a simple family tree – four generations of Stevensons, rich in sons. The second and third star first: Ron drives his wife and children home after consigning his sister to a mental hospital; the squabbling little boys have been playing football in the rain, his wife is bursting with pent up emotion over Ron's callous expediency; the eldest boy watches the windscreen wipers "trying", in a telling parental metaphor, "to touch each other but never making the distance".

Apart from a little ruffling of hair the touching in the book is punitive and bleeds through the responses of generation after generation: routine "belts, whacks and punches", plates thrown and some play with a knife that will forever haunt the boys' memories of their father.

On the football field the violence starts well before the whistle and ranges from a "fair hip and shoulder" to a pre-emptive jawbreaker; out skunk-drunk clubbing it's the king hit precisely set up and placed according to advice passed down from grandfather through father.

In their italicised thoughts the fathers wrestle with but eventually excuse their

behaviour – the pressures of the job, the collapse of the building society in which savings were supposed to grow. Some take themselves deliberately out of the family picture and Mitchell draws a telling parallel with the mating issues of young male crocodiles. The wives don't last long, but make alliances among themselves and come back to nurse their men to their early graves. Inflicting another kind of violence on children some outliers of the family, known as the Nutter Stevensons, take up an extreme religious life, renouncing property to live like St Francis, camping around railway stations and scavenging their food.

The book is intriguingly organised to bring out the cyclic, inherited reach of damaging behaviour, moving easily and clearly to and fro between generations and setting the poetry of place and sensibility, of a kind of difficult love against the pain and ugliness it is concerned to expose.

A very different, less pervasive but no less devastating type of inheritance lies at the secret heart of GP Jacinta Halloran's third novel set largely in a skilfully evoked 1950s Melbourne. It begins in country Kyneton with the sudden death of their father when twins Dominic and Mary are 13. Quiet, clever, studious Dominic is devoted to his stern mother; lively, artistic, ambitious Mary is already kicking against the pricks of small town life.



**FICTION**  
**WE ARE FAMILY.**  
Paul Mitchell  
MidnightSun Publishing \$24.99

Halloran has her convincingly drawn and very different characters experience some of the mid 20th century's most exciting and far reaching movements. Determined, positive Mary seizes potentially dangerous opportunities that open to her the world of art (with nods at a young Nolan and a burgeoning Heide) as well as of affection and generous friendship, if not quite love.



**FICTION**  
**THE SCIENCE OF APPEARANCES**  
Jacinta Halloran  
Scribe \$29.99

Cautious Dominic becomes entranced by genetics in an era moving between the tainted field of eugenics and the discovery of DNA, and just when the genetics of his own inheritance become an issue of vital concern. Readers may decide for themselves whether Halloran's solution to his problem is a little over-fortuitous, but it makes an upbeat ending to a lively, informative novel.