

5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES



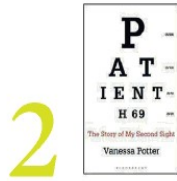
1
Thriller
THREE ENVELOPES
Nir Hezroni
Oneworld \$26.99

Like the Pied Piper, Israeli author Hezroni draws you into his novel with a gentle tune, lulling you into thinking he's taking you on a safe ride to familiar territory. By the time you realise that he has crafted an outrageously implausible, fantastical, wildly inventive tale you don't care: you just shriek with delight and race to the end.

Agent 10483 was an obsessive compulsive psychopath recruited as an assassin by The Organisation to eliminate threats around the world. He was thought to be dead, but now, 10 years later, he is back, and his notebook sheds new light on what went on.

Was 10483 mad or being manipulated? It is up to senior Organisation member Avner to make sense of it and try to save himself and his family from the vengeance of a deadly foe.

IAN ORCHARD ★★★★★



2
Science
PATIENT H69
Vanessa Potter
Bloomsbury Sigma \$24.99

You can learn a lot about something when it stops working. Vanessa Potter woke up one morning to find she was rapidly losing her sight.

Within days she was completely blind, and her doctors could not explain why. *Patient H69* is an account of her illness and her search to discover what happened over the weeks and months of her recovery. The story is candid and intimate, mainly transcribed from audio logs during her illness and interviews with experts later on. Potter staged an art exhibition to tell this story before she wrote the book – it's a bitter irony that she is much more comfortable with images than with words. This has made her determination to understand and fix her vision all the more poignant.

Patient H69 is a very personal narrative, but it helps to explain how everyone uses their eyes.

ELLEN PHIDDIAN ★★★★★



3
Fiction
THE NOTHING
Hanif Kureishi
Faber \$24.99

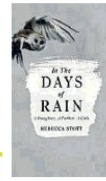
Waldo was once a decorated, admired filmmaker. He was the sort of director who had his films studied by university students looking for deeper meaning.

But now he is old and dying, full of regret and bitterness, angry at his impotence and failing health and convinced his younger wife Zee and his friend Eddie are having an affair in the room next to his own. Waldo constructs fantasies of revenge against the pair, all the while trying to win back his wife.

The Nothing is a short novel, only 167 pages in the hardback version, but manages to feel longer. This may be because all the main characters are essentially unlikable and keeping their company is not much fun.

Still, Kureishi occasionally lights it all up with some mordant black humour and some good one-liners, which make it worth the effort.

MICHAEL MCGUIRE ★★★★★



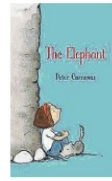
4
Memoir
IN THE DAYS OF RAIN
Rebecca Stott
4th Estate \$27.99

There have been several exposés of the Exclusive Brethren, a fundamentalist Christian cult in the UK, US and Australia.

This is a personal account of its effect on Rebecca Stott and her father, once a respected English preacher. Stott's childhood was defined by a sect which strove to keep its members separate from the evils of the world, under the thumb of an increasingly paranoid leadership. She describes the Brethren's behaviour control as almost Stalinist, resulting in suicides and many shattered individuals and families.

In 1970, many members left in disgust as the "messiah" revealed himself as a drunken lecher, and Stott describes how her father's life spun out of control. Stott left the cult as a child, but it cast a long shadow over her adulthood, even her own children.

ROBYN DOUGLASS ★★★★★



5
Junior Fiction
THE ELEPHANT
Peter Carnavas
UQP \$14.95

Peter Carnavas is usually to be found illustrating his own and other people's picture books, but his own first novel – a chapter book for newly independent readers – is utterly charming. Olive's father is grieving her dead mother. Olive sees him constantly accompanied by a large grey elephant, but Grandad has moved in to cook and keep Olive entertained – until an accident gives him his own load of regret which manifests as a cumbersome grey tortoise.

Olive is determined to get rid of the suffocating animals with the help of her friend Arthur and a centenary school project about artefacts of the past like the typewriter and record player and Arthur's Grandma's old squeeze box.

Manageable chapters, simple, evocative line drawings and well-spaced type add to the appeal of a wise and engaging story.

KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

Of river and red gum, and a family's pain

WORDS KATHARINE ENGLAND

The Choke was where the river was at its thinnest, the banks like giant hands around a neck ... and when Justine is at her most desperate the banks seem at last to touch, the flow of water as suddenly stopped as her own held breath.

Justine lives near the Murray with her grandfather Pop, an old man haunted by his experiences on the Burma Railroad, their awkward love for one another mediated through Pop's little band of Isa Brown chooks. Farther up the road with a gypsy-like array of cousins live her two half brothers, the sons by different wives of her handsome, womanising crook of a father, around whose rare visits the life of both households revolves.

In an interview following her 2015 Miles Franklin Award for *The Eye of the Sheep* Laguna suggested that her powerful writing about damaged young people comes from a place of anger – that she is angry on such children's behalf and wants justice for them. It is an anger that seethes through *The Choke*, portraying with swingeing exactitude the struggles of children coping with emotional and physical neglect, with sexual violence, with a simple but devastating lack of appropriate information.

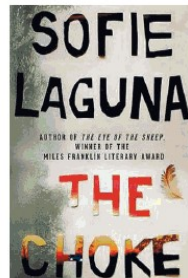
Justine – 10 when the book begins, just 14 at its end – blames herself for her mother's early desertion and for her own dyslexia. Sitting

with severely disabled desk-mate Michael Hooper is a punishment, but the two become fast friends. The reader's heart sinks when Michael moves to Melbourne and sinks again when Justine rejects a correspondence without explaining that she will be unable to read his letters.

It is not the horrific but cleverly distanced rapes or the subtle intimations of the violence that Pop inflicted on his late wife that most affect the reader: it is the viscerally realised pain of the teenage boys as their father ignores them, breaks his promises and preferences his daughter, mocking their need for his attention and approval.

This is, if anything, a more confident work than *The Eye of the Sheep* – one that interrogates the power and responsibility of parenthood while celebrating the strength and courage of marginalised youth and the inspiration of river and red gum – a book and a cast of characters that tease the mind long after the last page has been turned.

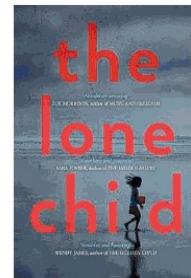
The Lone Child, Anna George's second novel, is lighter and narrower than Laguna's but is also interested in parenthood at society's extremes, contrasting a well-off architect struggling alone with her first child and a working class mother of two small girls who has just been evicted from her sister's couch. The two are linked by Tayla, the chilled and skinny four-year-old that Neve



FICTION
THE CHOKE
Sofie Laguna
Allen & Unwin \$32.99

the architect fishes from a rock pool as she tries to walk her son to sleep on the beach below her holiday house.

When the child reappears in her life and quietly but efficiently helps with the tetchy baby, Neve names her Jessie and virtually adopts her for the Easter long weekend, buying her treats and relying on her



FICTION
THE LONE CHILD
Anna George
Viking \$29.99

efficiency prior to reporting her presence to officialdom. Meanwhile, Tayla's mother and aunt frantically search the beachside scrub, too terrified of losing both children to welfare to enlist the police. There are hints that readers may choose to decide how much of Neve's scenario is reality and how much an exhaustion-fuelled dream ...