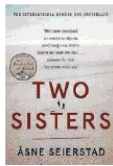


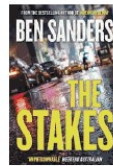
5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES

1



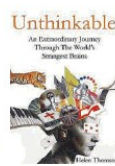
Nonfiction
TWO SISTERS
Asne Seierstad
Virago \$32.99
In 1998, Sadiq and Sara Juma fled war-torn Somalia for Norway where they could raise their two daughters and three sons in peace. The girls, Ayan and Leila, were doing well at school, but Sara wanted the older children taught "correct" Islam.
Always on the fringes, the girls became increasingly fundamentalist and, in 2013, escaped to Syria to help the Caliphate, ISIS. Their "service" was as cleaners, sex slaves and breeders to brutal thugs. The girls' flight ripped the family apart – Sadiq spun out, spending time and borrowed money trying to retrieve his daughters; Sara took the little boys back to Somalia.
Seierstad does a masterly job of untangling the story, explaining how capable young people were turned into zealots and used as pawns in a global horror story.
ROBYN DOUGLASS ★★★★★

2



Crime
THE STAKES
Ben Sanders
Allen & Unwin \$29.99
Characters, coincidence and complex plotting command starring roles in the latest from Sanders, the torch bearer for fans of Elmore Leonard.
New York cop Miles Keller supplements his income by ripping off criminals. He's currently suspended over the shooting of a hitman, who was out to get a former informant – and lover – Lucy. Miles bumps into Nina, whom he investigated for armed robbery five years ago, but let go. She's in the act of ripping off her crime boss husband, who has sent his hired thug to get her back. The thug is the brother of the hitman Miles may, or may not, have killed.
One of Miles's heists goes wrong, and he's caught between the law and Nina. The fun thing is that none of these people is really bad and good times will be had as Miles extricates himself from the mess.
IAN ORCHARD ★★★★★

3



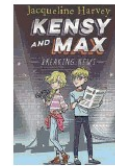
Science
UNTHINKABLE
Helen Thomson
John Murray \$29.99
Thomson has an infectious fascination with the human mind. In *Unthinkable*, she has tracked down nine people with bizarre brains to help her explore neuroscience. Her interviewees range from people with perfect photographic memories to those with permanent hallucinations. Many of these conditions seem quite fantastical, such as the man who can feel other people's pain.
It's a topic that could easily stray into a freak show, but Thomson mostly stays respectful of her subjects. She lets her contributors drive the story, then steps back to explain the science behind their conditions. We learn that everyone's brain has its own quirks, although they're rarely this extreme. These people have all found innovative ways to live with their conditions. Thomson is eager to convey this complexity, and she does it with sharp and engaging prose.
ELLEN PHIDDIAN ★★★★★

4



Fiction
AN UNSUITABLE MATCH
Joanna Trollope
Mantle \$29.99
Another deliciously indulgent novel from Trollope, whose plot-driven portraiture glides along without giving much pause for thought.
This time we meet Rose, older, divorced and independent, who has found her perfect man in an old school friend, Tyler, who loves her madly. Their awkward interactions with their various offspring are rich in detail but drama looms as Rose proceeds to sell her adored mews house in London – the one she took a handyman course for in order to do it up – and move to a cottage in the country.
Tyler, who is faultlessly charming, has no assets and isn't materialistic but his assumptions about their life after marriage start to chafe and no one can quite put their finger on why. It offers effortless diversion and carries more than a nub of truth.
PENELOPE DEBELLE ★★★★★

5



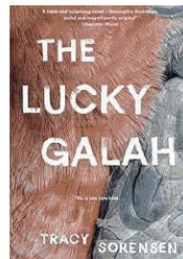
Junior Fiction
KENSY AND MAX: BREAKING NEWS
Jacqueline Harvey
Random House \$16.99
The prolific Jacqueline Harvey (16 Alice-Miranda titles; 13 Clementine Roses) has started a new series starring a pair of bright, feisty and competitive twins, Kensington (K) and Maxim (M) Grey.
The children of a peripatetic doctor and paramedic, they are looked after by a nanny (rather than a nanny) and a butler in a London mansion, are inducted into a most unusual school and are soon entangled in all sorts of mysteries involving disappearing parents, a long lost grandmother, a newspaper baroness, M16, a jewel robbery, a stable of well-trained junior spies and a kidnapping via London taxicab – all quite far-fetched but most enjoyable.
One quibble: surely the newspaper baroness, Dame Cordelia Spencer, should be known throughout as "Dame Cordelia" rather than "Dame Spencer"?
KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★☆☆

Clever cocky sees the bigger picture

WORDS MARGOT LLOYD

Quirky is a term with a lot of connotations, not always good. It's also the first word that comes to mind when reading a book written from the viewpoint of a galah. However, this debut novel by Tracy Sorensen isn't fluff.
Like Lucky herself, it's intelligent and it bites.
Lucky lives a pleasant life with her elderly owner Lizzie in Port Badminton, in Western Australia's northwest, and she literally consumes books. It's a regular ritual. Lizzie takes her to the second-hand bookshop to select the cheapest titles – on this particular day, *The Lucky Country* – so that Lucky can tear them to shreds and nibble on the pulp to save her from boredom. But somewhere in the shredding and the chewing Lucky manages to consume words and sentences, and she becomes "excited – desperate – to join in with the storytelling". Added to her literary diet is the constant natter she somehow receives from the town's satellite dish, dumping data from lunar expeditions, or just gossip it picks up from the townsfolk.
Lucky is surrounded by stories and desperate to be understood by the people around her.
Port Badminton in the 1960s is small, hot

and covered in invisible boundaries. Growing up as the pet of the Kelly clan, Lucky watches the family grow along with their money woes, as a friendship develops between Marj Kelly and the glamorous new arrival, Linda Johnson. Linda's husband Evan works at the dish, which is being finetuned by NASA to participate in the lunar landing. As the day of the landing nears, fractures open up in the community. Lucky the galah might be the only one who sees the bigger picture, and can fully explain why Evan Johnson's life is about to end.
There's a lot of humour in *The Lucky Galah*, but the story has an overriding poignancy. Lucky's yearning to communicate echoes through the other characters, not least of all her elderly owner Lizzie, who turns out to have had as little opportunity to spread her wings as Lucky. Sorensen manages to imbue all of the characters of Port Badminton with their own quiet dignity, despite their many faults. It's this that makes *The Lucky Galah* quirky, sure, but also rich, layered and altogether a pleasure to read.
The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart by Holly Ringland leans more towards the romantic – although it begins with a nine-year-old fantasising about setting her father on fire. From an abusive start we see into the dreamy world of Alice Hart, a young woman who is learning the language of flowers.



Fiction
THE LUCKY GALAH
Tracy Sorensen
Picador \$29.99

Ringland's debut has some wonderful moments, but it tends to get bogged down in detail, such as when we're told the long history of the Harts, who have passed down a flower farm through generations of women.
Alice, not fully aware of this history, moves from traumatic childhood to blossoming teens to difficult 20s, all the



Fiction
THE LOST FLOWERS OF ALICE HART
Holly Ringland
Fourth Estate \$29.99*

while unable to make peace with her past.
Ringland weaves together female stories of strength, neglect and love, but they're let down by overwrought symbolism. Still, her vision of a female utopia on a flower farm is a delightful whimsy.
*19.95 from News Shop, 31 Wymouth St, city, 8206 3317