



This week's selections

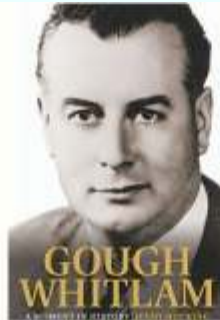


Born Standing Up

Memoir ★★★★★
Simon & Schuster \$21.95

For several generations of filmgoers, Steve Martin has been a movie star and nothing else. From the charm of *LA Story*, to the silliness of *The Jerk* to the puerile *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*, Martin has appeared in more than 40 films. He has been a full-time movie star for so long it's easy to forget that in the 1970s and early 1980s he was the biggest stand-up comic in the world, regularly playing to packed stadiums. *Born Standing Up* is the story of the first part of Martin's life, from his childhood in Texas and California to the truly gruelling years of touring the country playing in grungy clubs honing his act. It is a fascinating insight into the mechanics of comedy and how Martin slowly turned himself into a star. It also tells the story of a sometimes-troubled individual and is by turn touching, funny and just plain weird.

Michael McGuire



Gough Whitlam: A Moment in History

Biography ★★★★★
Jenny Hocking, MUP \$59.99

This is the first instalment in what shapes up to be the best Australian political biography in decades. Monash University research professor Jenny Hocking has crafted a wonderfully detailed, but never boring, story of the man many consider to be the most charismatic prime minister this nation has ever had. From his early life in Canberra to his bid to win the 1972 election, Hocking's book presents a contemporary and definitive study of the former Labor prime minister who not only had to battle the Liberals but also his own party as he fought to drag it into the 20th century and make it a relevant political force. Whitlam is an extraordinary and complex man who could turn his hand to acting – he once played British prime minister Neville Chamberlain – but also reach out and charm the ordinary voter.

Greg Kelton

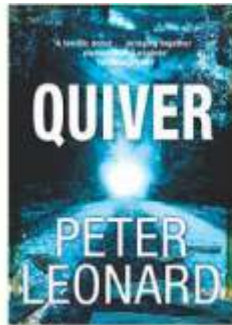


Taking Off

Fiction ★★
Matt Howard, Allen & Unwin \$23.95

This is late-naughties, metro-lad-lit for the VirginBlue generation. Ash Lynch is a 27-year-old paper-pusher whose life has been mired in tragedy. When he meets renegade hard man Miller at a local bar, Ash is seduced by his charm and good looks. But not, like, in a gay way. The new best mates escape suburban Perth and take off overseas. Their jaunt through Europe feels like a bloated group email from a friend who has "found" himself after a 21-day Contiki tour. *Taking Off* is aimed at fans of the two Nicks, Earls and Hornby, but Howard doesn't achieve the same heights of wit or originality. His constant pop-culture references feel as though they've been lifted from Wikipedia (search: *hip young music*). You can almost hear the author saying: "Enough of the fun stuff. Now it's time for a poignant chapter." Still, hero Ash is a nice lad, so his inevitable transformation from hopeless loser to confident stud is mildly engaging, if not especially memorable.

Michael Harry



Quiver

Crime ★★★
Peter Leonard, Faber \$32.95

There are two ways of looking at this book. One is judge it on its merits. The other is to factor in that Peter Leonard is the great Elmore Leonard's son, and see how it stacks up. Using the first method, *Quiver* is pretty good. A bunch of wise-cracking, dumb and not-so-dumb small-time crooks and a rich, sexy widow and her son are somehow connected. The crooks see a chance to make the big time. Each, of course, is planning to keep all the proceeds for himself. It's a bit jumbled as all the players are introduced with no connection and no clue about what's to come. But it's lively, entertaining and engaging. Then the big scheme is revealed and there's a pleasant sense of suspense, pace and action as the drama plays out. But if you add the father-son factor, the book is a travesty. Peter has just cloned his father's distinctive style and hijacked some of his characters. It's nice that Peter so admires his father, but maybe he should try standing on his own two feet.

Ian Orchard



Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?

Pop-up book ★★★★★
Lauren Child and Corina Fletcher, Hodder \$35

Herb loves story books, but that doesn't stop him leaving crumbs between the pages, cutting bits out of the pictures and adding his own crayoned touches, so when he falls one night into his favourite book of fairytales he finds some very irate characters. In the ballroom, the queen is angry about her moustache and her missing throne; next door, the entire cast of Cinderella is hanging from the ceiling. When the fairy godmother has helped Herb escape up a haphazard ladder of pop-out text, he spends the evening setting things to rights – evidenced by a cute, clean mini reproduction of the book, pop-ups and all, attached to the last page. This is an innovative, entertaining, intertextual way to start children thinking about books as artefacts as well as stories. Fletcher's paper engineering is original and inventive but not very strong.

Katharine England