

best-sellers

NEW YORK TIMES

NON-FICTION

- STATE OF DENIAL** by Bob Woodward
The third "Bush at War" volume by the long-time *Washington Post* reporter and editor describes a dysfunctional administration's inept conduct of the invasion and occupation of Iraq.
- CULTURE WARRIOR** by Bill O'Reilly
The host of *The O'Reilly Factor* describes a culture war between traditionalists and secular progressives.
- I FEEL BAD ABOUT MY NECK** by Nora Ephron
A witty look at ageing from the novelist and screenwriter (*When Harry Met Sally*).
- SAVING GRACES** by Elizabeth Edwards
A memoir by the wife of the vice-presidential candidate John Edwards focuses on the election of 2004 and her subsequent struggle against breast cancer.
- MARLEY & ME** by John Grogan
A newspaper columnist and his wife learn some life lessons from their neurotic dog.
- LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN NATION** by Sam Harris
The author of *The End of Faith* responds to Christians' arguments in defence of their beliefs.
- THE GREATEST STORY EVER SOLD** by Frank Rich
A *New York Times* columnist attacks the Bush administration's approach to message management.
- THE GOD DELUSION** by Richard Dawkins
An Oxford scientist asserts that belief in God is irrational and that religion has done great harm in the world.
- THE WORLD IS FLAT** by Thomas L. Friedman
A columnist for *The New York Times* analyses 21st-century economics and foreign policy.
- U2 BY U2** by Bono, the Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr with Neil McCormick
Photographs, documents and extensive interviews with members of the band.

FICTION

- FOR ONE MORE DAY** by Mitch Albom
A troubled man gets a last chance to reconnect and restore his relationship with his dead mother.
- THIRTEEN MOONS** by Charles Frazier
A man raised in the North Carolina wilderness travels around America in defence of his adopted Indian people and broods over an elusive woman.
- MOTOR MOUTH** by Janet Evanovich
Alexandra Barnaby, her Nascar driver boyfriend and his St Bernard become involved in a murder investigation as they look into a cheating scandal.
- THE BOOK OF FATE** by Brad Meltzer
The apparent murder of a presidential aide reveals Masonic secrets in Washington and a 200-year-old code invented by Thomas Jefferson.
- THE THIRTEENTH TALE** by Diane Setterfield
A biographer struggles to discover the truth about an ageing writer who has mythologised her past.
- UNDER ORDERS** by Dick Francis
Sid Halley, a jockey turned PI, investigates the murder of a jockey who may have been throwing races.
- THE ROAD** by Cormac McCarthy
A father and son journey through post-apocalypse America.
- STRANGE CANDY** by Laurell K. Hamilton
Fourteen dark stories from the author of the Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter series.
- RISE AND SHINE** by Anna Quindlen
The lives of two sisters, one the host of a television show and the other a social worker.
- FINDING NOEL** by Richard Paul Evans
At Christmas, an unhappy young man helps a woman find her family.

US hardback best-sellers list, published on October 15

THE SUNDAY TIMES

NON-FICTION

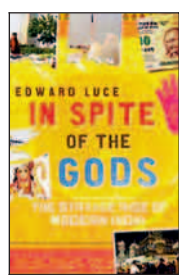
- THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER** by Peter Kay
Laugh-a-minute autobiography from the popular British comedian.
- HUMBLE PIE** by Gordon Ramsay
Controversial celebrity chef tells of trials and tribulations.
- THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CHRIS MOYLES: THE STORY OF A MAN AND HIS MOUTH** by Chris Moyles
Radio DJ muses on life and his rise to the top of the business.
- THE GOD DELUSION** by Richard Dawkins
Author of *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins shares his views on religion.
- GERRARD: MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY** by Steven Gerrard
The life of the Liverpool captain who lifted the 2005 Champions League trophy.
- TOO MUCH, TOO YOUNG: MY STORY OF LOVE, SURVIVAL AND CELEBRITY** by Kerry Katona
I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here winner tells her story.
- THE DANGEROUS BOOK FOR BOYS** by Conn Iggulden and Hal Iggulden
A tongue-in-cheek manual for boys of all ages.
- THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE THUNDERBOLT KID** by Bill Bryson
The American travel and science writer looks back at his childhood.
- MUSTN'T GRUMBLE** by Terry Wogan
An autobiography of one of Britain's best-loved broadcasters.
- MY TAKE** by Gary Barlow
Take that frontman tells of highs and lows following the band's split.

FICTION

- CROSS** by James Patterson
When a series of brutal rapes are committed across Washington, Alex Cross has his work cut out.
- THE AFGHAN** by Frederick Forsyth
British and US intelligence catch wind of a major al-Qaeda operation in the works.
- THE SECRET OF CRICKLEY HALL** by James Herbert
Supernatural goings-on in a Devon seaside village.
- WHITETHORN WOODS** by Maeve Binchy
The inhabitants of an Irish town have divided opinions about a new bypass.
- THE MISSION SONG** by John le Carré
An English translator, born in Congo, is sent by British intelligence to work for a corporate syndicate that wants to subvert Congolese elections.
- ECHO PARK** by Michael Connelly
An unsolved case comes back to haunt Harry Bosch.
- ULTIMATE WEAPON** by Chris Ryan
SAS operatives fight their way through war-ravaged Iraq.
- IMPERIUM** by Robert Harris
A fictional life of Marcus Cicero, a Roman statesman and orator, as told by a household slave.
- UNDER ORDERS** by Dick Francis
Sid Halley, a jockey turned PI, investigates the murder of a jockey who may have been throwing races.
- A SPOT OF BOTHER** by Mark Haddon
Latest from the acclaimed author of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

British hardback best-sellers list, published October 15

NON-FICTION



The Innocent Man
by John Grisham
Century, HK\$285
★★★★☆
Tim Cribb

Perhaps it was coincidence that master of the legal thriller John Grisham's first foray into non-fiction, *The Innocent Man*, was released on October 10. It just so happened to be World Day Against the Death Penalty and the theme this year was "failures of justice in the sentencing and implementation of the death penalty".

The Innocent Man is a powerful book about just those failures. Grisham joins other lawyer-writers such as Scott Turow (*Presumed Innocent* et al), whose

Ultimate Punishment (2003) recalls his experiences on an Illinois death-penalty inquiry, in finding that if a society wants the death penalty it must ensure a fair trial, at state expense if necessary, for those accused of a capital crime.

The Innocent Man is about Ron Williamson, of Ada, Oklahoma, who yearned to play baseball for the Yankees, but ended up five days from death by lethal injection and driven nearly insane because no one would believe he was innocent of the brutal murder for which he was convicted.

It's an unflinching and far from pretty story.

Travesties of justice happen far too often in the US and elsewhere for readers to be shocked that an innocent man was nearly executed. "Wrongful convictions occur every month in every state in this country," Grisham says at the end of his book.

Amnesty International says that since executions resumed in the US in 1973, 123 death-row prisoners

have been released after being found innocent. Six were released in 2004, two last year, and one so far this year.

"Recurring features in their cases include prosecutorial or police misconduct; the use of unreliable witness testimony, physical evidence, or confessions; and inadequate defence representation," Amnesty says. "Other US prisoners have gone to their deaths despite serious doubts over their guilt."

Grisham says the same thing in *The Innocent Man*. He never met Williamson, but was drawn to his story, and that of his co-accused Dennis Fritz, by Williamson's obituary in *The New York Times*. Williamson died in December 2004, aged 51, five years after his exoneration. He spent 11 years on death row.

Williamson and Fritz, like others whose cases Grisham draws into his narrative, were average white, lower middle-class Americans who came from "good families" in a largely white town with "two churches in every

corner". "When you don't have any money to defend yourself, you're at the mercy of the judicial system," Fritz is quoted as saying. "Once in the system, it's almost impossible to get out, even if you are innocent."

Grisham's writing is that of the polished professional. He paces the story with precision and departs on occasion from his narrative, based in large part on court documents and field research, to explain crucial points of law that are generally taken for granted.

The first third of the book introduces the characters: Williamson, the small-town high-school baseball star who took a shot at playing for the Yankees only to be cut after injuring his shoulder; Fritz, an occasional drinking buddy trying to raise his young daughter after the drive-by murder of his wife; the district attorney Bill Petersen, who refuses to admit he made a mistake; Glen Gore, who pointed the finger at Williamson; and the police,

who suppressed or ignored evidence. Then, Grisham takes the reader on a harrowing ride through life on death row as it was in the 1990s and probably still is today for some 3,400 prisoners.

As Williamson spirals towards insanity, brief narratives visit the plight of other, mentally stronger incarcerated innocents, before we're plunged back into Williamson's nightmare.

Williamson's exoneration when it comes is long expected, but offers little relief. He was freed by DNA evidence that cleared him and Fritz. However, what saved him as the clock ran out was the diligence of a single legal professional who woke the judicial system to a gross miscarriage of justice.

Gore was sentenced on June 21 this year to life imprisonment for the 1982 rape and murder of 21-year-old Debbie Carter. He escaped the death penalty because of a jury deadlock.

Villains abound in *The Innocent Man*. Uncomfortably, there are few heroes.

HISTORY



Seize the Hour: When Nixon Met Mao
by Margaret MacMillan
John Murray, HK\$200
★★★★☆
Alister McMillan

Almost 18 months after the release of *Mao: The Unknown Story*, Jung Chang (in town to promote the release of the Chinese-language edition) and David Halliday are still goading us into debate over the claim that the Great Helmsman was the ideologically hollow killer of 70 million Chinese in peacetime. But regardless of their findings, the methods of the husband and wife wrenched open the scope for journalism and historical research on China in the 20th century.

By speaking to a 93-year-old woman in west-central Sichuan whose family had owned a beancurd shop near the Dadu bridge, Chang and Halliday crushed the central myth of the Long March and communist history. The woman revealed that Chiang Kai-shek had left the passage open, allowing the communists to walk across the bridge in 1935 – no marchers crawling towards a nationalist machine-gun nest across a burning bridge over a roiling river.

After the beancurd woman, Chang and Halliday's unprecedented access to the central government's archives and ageing cadres who dealt with Mao Zedong – unthinkable for most Chinese historians and journalists and impossible for scribes from outside the country – almost makes light reading.

For scholars of the mainland, the beancurd woman removed the luxury of bouncing around ideas from limited secondary sources. She revealed a mother lode of accessible primary sources emboldened by age and greater liberties in China.

Seize the Hour is, perhaps, an early casualty of post-Mao China scholarship. Margaret MacMillan – the provost of Trinity College at the University of Toronto and soon to be warden of St Antony's College at Oxford University – is an outstanding historian and author. She may have started her book years before Chang and Halliday's work emerged, but in their wake she's left to cite them in a long bibliography without taking their work further.

Seize the Hour is a thorough examination of the events leading to the meeting of US president Richard Nixon and Mao in 1972. MacMillan patiently explores every avenue in the diplomatic labyrinth that briefly gave four of the most elusive political minds of the 20th century – Mao, foreign minister Zhou Enlai, Nixon and security adviser Henry Kissinger – a shared goal.

But it's told largely from the American perspective and gathers sources that those well-read on the meeting will have already encountered. Like the American diplomats who pored over the transcript of Nixon's short, cursory chat with Mao hoping to find deeper meaning, MacMillan has little fresh material from the Chinese side.

MacMillan places the meeting as the start



Photo: Xinhua

of a new era of international relations. Moscow brought Washington and Beijing together. The US felt vulnerable over the Vietnam war and Mao had caught wind of aggressive Soviet plans on the mainland. Beijing made the Americans work hard to secure the meeting. But Nixon – like so many in the west, from those in corridors of the White House to pop culture – was enthralled by Mao and sensed his chance to "give history a nudge".

And although they had had enough of each other by the end of the meeting, the relationship between Nixon and Zhou is the most compelling. They were paranoid, ambitious men who exaggerated their humble upbringings, enjoyed acting as young men and grew into big-picture politicians. Zhou was a master negotiator

who enjoyed keeping Nixon and Kissinger on ice. Nixon, for all his famous lack of social skill, had a great eye for the slights and grievances to which the Chinese were sensitive. MacMillan finds great colour as Nixon inches towards beating former French president Charles de Gaulle to become the first western leader to visit communist China. We're reminded of the table-tennis player who inadvertently pushed the process along significantly and the girl who reappeared in every Chinese city the Americans visited to hand Nixon's wife a bouquet.

But we're left with the feeling that the flower girl and the remaining Mao entourage of 1972 might have an unknown story. It's no longer good enough to write about Chinese history without trying to track them down.

reading into ...

THE HELL OF WAR



Somme Mud
by Private EPF Lynch
Random House, A\$34.95
★★★★☆
David Wilson

The puff paints this memoir as "a testament to the power of the human spirit" and praises the author's "surprising wit". That's pushing it on both fronts. Sure, Edward Lynch never sounds self-pitying and is often cutting about proceedings. But his story of waltzing into the first world war's most bloody and costly battle is not exactly a bright, uplifting read despite its breezy beginning.

Somme Mud opens in 1916 with the 18-year-old Lynch leaving Sydney on a 20,000km voyage to France. "We're on the first stage of our great adventure. Cheers, coo-es and the cock-a-doodle-do of harbour craft intermingle in a grand finale," he writes, showing his keen ear for the nuances of noise and foreshadowing battlefield cacophony.

Rowdy onboard frolics and aspersions to black Anzacs follow. Acknowledging Lynch's racism, *Somme Mud* editor Will Davies defends its inclusion. "While this is an abridged version," Davies writes, "the turn of phrase, the language and, in today's terms some very politically incorrect words and racial descriptions, are unaltered. These remain as a record of the attitude and language of the period."

Davies was presented with Lynch's frank manuscript, jotted in pencil in 20 exercise books, by the soldier's grandson. It has supposedly only won publication now, almost a century on from hostilities, because originally the content was considered too raw.

That explanation seems credible. The future teacher and army instructor takes a graphic "modern" approach, producing a gritty yet surreal verbal splatter movie that makes rival period

chroniclers such as Robert Graves look tame. In one episode, a German flare strikes a man in the stomach. He runs around screaming and struggling to tear the projectile from his gut. In another, after an explosion, a strange shape appears, spinning in a dust cloud: it's a man, minus head and arms.

Later, after copping a shell himself, Lynch resembles "a spreadeagled frog". But, after a year in an English hospital, he limps on, unlike the stranger whose stomach he stumbles over "as if walking on a half-inflated football". Guts are a *Somme Mud* theme. The telltale squelch made when a bullet enters the stomach crops up repeatedly. The image of a soldier trying to stop his intestines spilling out is in the frame.

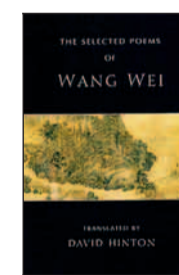
The recurrence of such material might seem gratuitous, but not in this case because it happened. It also warrants logging because we increasingly think of Vietnam as the definitive 20th-century horror conflict. *Somme Mud* is a reminder that the Great War was hell. And it makes you wonder what torments soldiers suffer in modern hot spots such as Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, from where accounts imbued with Lynch's candour aren't exactly pouring in.

Lynch is even so bold as to document Australian actions that might be branded as atrocities. Just look at the scene where Aussie troops gun down distant German stretcher-bearers who seem to be carrying a gun instead of a body. Elsewhere, Aussies kill a surrendered German sniper. "It's short shrift for snipers who fire into men's backs," Lynch writes, apparently more comfortable with face-to-face bayonet attacks.

He's not always the most sympathetic character. But you have to admire the bravura of his phantasmagoria. Despite the shells, a bullet that clips his helmet and an encounter with gas-contaminated stew, Lynch makes it home in 1919, destined to live on until 1980. Spirit indeed.

Somme Mud is available from dymocks.com.au for A\$34.95.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD



The Selected Poems of Wang Wei
translated by David Hinton
New Directions, HK\$117
★★★★☆
John Timpane

David Hinton's translation of the Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei has me thinking of wisdom and quiet. And Way. The Tang dynasty (AD618-907) was one of the poetic high points in human history, equalling those of classical Greece, Renaissance England, 19th-century France, or the 20th-century United States in its poetry. Along with Tu Fu and Li Po, Wang Wei (701-761) is considered the pinnacle of classical Chinese verse.

For his part, Hinton is creating a monumental one-man rendering of Chinese literature. Not only has he translated the great philosophical tracts – the *Analects of Confucius*; the *Tao Te Ching*; the works of Mencius and Chuang Tzu – but he also has published book-length renderings of Li, Tu, Meng Hao-jan, and contemporary poet Bai Dao. Hinton is such a good poet, such a student of history and language, and so consistently good in these volumes, that it's astonishing he's not better known.

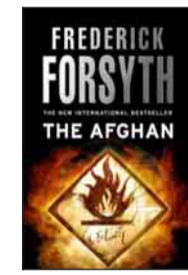
Hinton's flexible, lissome, postmodern line suggests the quiet, the spacious spirituality, and the concreteness of Wang's verse:

"Last night's rain lingers, pooled among peach petals tinged red, / and in willows crowded with green, ribbons of spring mist drift."

Slow, luscious sounds to caress the jaw and tongue, achingly clear images true to the tradition. The first requirement of good translation is it has to be good English poetry. Even if Wang never existed, this would be a very fine book of English poems:

"I never see letters from home arriving with

THRILLER



The Afghan
by Frederick Forsyth
Bantam, HK\$210
★★★★☆
Nick Ryan

In his most contemporary novel to date, Frederick Forsyth launches headlong into the world of al-Qaeda and its clash with the spymasters of the west.

It's perhaps inevitable that Forsyth should turn his hand to Islamic extremism, having tackled many of the great conflicts. With the prominence of September 11, the war against terrorism, the occupation of Iraq and a destabilised Afghanistan that has dragged down conquerors for centuries, it's fitting this one should be next. He does so with aplomb: the skill and meticulous attention to detail that launched him as a best-selling author in 1971 with *The Day the Jackal* shine through.

Forsyth's background as a journalist (he covered the Biafra uprising in Africa in the 1960s) is evident in the opening chapters of *The Afghan*. Seamlessly weaving fact into his fictional narrative, he connects last July's London bombers with senior al-Qaeda members. In the twisted souks and alleyways of a frontier town in Pakistan – an area fiercely loyal to its tribes, not Karachi, and sympathetic to the Taleban – al-Qaeda's leading financier is in hiding.

Unknown to him, the use of a mobile phone donated by one of his Wahabi tribal guards flags up "red" on a monitoring watchlist. From there, the station chiefs of the CIA and MI6 leap into action, the MI6 man joining a Pakistani entry team as it steals into the terrorists' building. After a brief battle, the al-Qaeda man jumps to his death. His laptop is "mirrored" and sent over a secure communications line to the British government's GCHQ listening station. It offers a clue to an impending al-Qaeda "spectacular", an operation with the hand of Osama bin Laden behind it.

From there, the plot twists into a familiar race against time. Washington's Koran committee is summoned, and its four academics puzzle about the meaning of the phrase "Al-Isra", mentioned time and again in the computer files. Literally, it describes the Prophet Mohammed's journey to heaven, from Jerusalem, on the back of a winged horse. But why would al-Qaeda choose such a code name now? Such an important phrase can only hint at something huge in the offing. With that, the tale switches to Mike Martin, by coincidence brother of the youngest member of the Koran committee. The ex-Special Forces officer and former paratrooper colonel is dragged out of retirement in southern England and tossed into the mouth of the dragon.

Martin speaks fluent Arabic and has fought in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He also bears a remarkable similarity to one of Guantanamo Bay's "unbreakables", a Pashto-speaking Afghan named Izmat Khan, a hero to the Taleban.

Martin prepares for one last journey on behalf of his country – and a chance to thwart an operation that threatens to dwarf September 11.

That Forsyth is able to move out of the cold war ghetto that has claimed so many writers speaks to his vision. The detailed research and compelling narrative are hallmarks of an imagination and talent that shows little sign of fading.

wild geese, / only you in the new moon, that moth's eyebrow rising."

Hinton's introduction is masterful, lucid and intellectually thrilling, placing Wang at the junction of three great rivers: Tao, Zen, and the "wilderness" tradition of Chinese verse.

Famed not only as a poet but also as perhaps the most influential of Chinese landscape artists, Wang lived at a time when the philosophical tradition of Tao, or "Way", flowed into a version of Buddhism called Chan, which we know as Zen. Way, to Taoists, includes the way we come into being (creation), the way being continues (existence), and the way to live a proper and ethical life (morality). Each is "a way", and each is Way – each grounded and connected in the process of becoming.

Hinton writes that Way probably descended from the ancient worship of a female nature goddess. Wang, like many Chinese poets, began as a prominent intellectual and bureaucrat, eventually retiring to a life of seclusion, travel and contemplation. Many of his most famous poems are tranquil visions of nature set in the Three Gorges region. These poems penetrate the concrete details – the clouds and mountains, the bird calls, the movement of water beneath sky – to the "nothing" behind all existence. Wang constantly is seeking the blessed "nothing-mindedness" of Zen, the changeless truth outside of thought, outside of contingent existence.

Hinton's translations are those of an American of the late 20th and early 21st century. Yet he does capture the "feeling" of Wang's verse – the stunning, calm way it finds the absence piercing everything. Many poems end with someone or something not being there, or fading.

Far from western nihilism, Wang uses poetry to search the universe for serenity. His poems sharpen our eyes and minds, illuminating sadness, pleasure, travel, friendship. As translator and editor, Hinton gently introduces us to Wang's Way.

The Philadelphia Inquirer