



pamby. “The most startling aspect of this story is just how much these people knew, and how unable they were to act upon what they knew. Knowledge did not translate into power.” Beautifully written by a Harvard professor (Oreskes) and a historian of science at Caltech (Conway). **JENNY NICHOLLS**

NOT MY FATHER'S SON
ALAN CUMMING (ALLEN & UNWIN, \$39.99)

When Scottish actor Alan Cumming surrendered the keys of his family closet for the BBC's genealogy show, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the skeleton that tumbled out wasn't the one he was expecting. Cumming (best known here for his delicious turn as political player Eli Gold in *The Good Wife*) does learn the fate of his maternal grandfather, who disappeared mysteriously in the Far East after World War II. But the real revelations in this memoir – most remarkable for its lack of self-pity – are of a harrowing childhood with his sadistic bastard of a father. “Our family had always been one of secrets, of silences, of holding things in,” he writes. So he learnt how to pretend; how to act. It's the only thing he has to thank his father for.

JOANNA WANE

THIS PICTURE OF YOU
SARAH HOPKINS (ALLEN & UNWIN, \$36.99)

Life for Martin, a judge, and his artist wife Maggie is comfortable, fulfilled and easy. But when Martin's brilliant mind starts to spiral inwards, histories are revisited – including the night the couple met in New York 40 years earlier – and unsavoury secrets emerge. For her third novel, Australian criminal lawyer Sarah Hopkins focuses on the importance of memory, including what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget. Nothing, it turns out, is what it seems in this Aussie family, including their son, a lawyer who seems destined to repeat the sins of his father. But while the subject matter is grim, Hopkins treads lightly. Enjoyable isn't the right word for this book, but it will grip you.

SHARON STEPHENSON

THE SENSE OF STYLE
STEVEN PINKER (PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, \$37)

Writer and experimental psychologist Steven Pinker has a habit of treating cherished intellectual dogma like a mouldy old carpet that needs unpicking, reweaving and then whacking to see what falls out. For his bestselling

The Better Angels of Our Nature, he applied the scientific method to history, showing human society is actually less violent today than ever before. Here, he casts a forensic eye on writing itself. One of his most fascinating chapters shows how an innate human mental tic can lead even the brightest thinker into writing unreadable dross. He then goes on to ransack the accepted grammatical rulebook (showing, for example, there is actually nothing wrong with a decent split infinitive), and makes his points with samples both entertainingly ghastly and divine. As he is writing from the saddle of a very high horse, his prose needs to be self-deprecating, funny, and lucid. Which, as always, it is. **JENNY NICHOLLS**

FLYING DINOSAURS: HOW FEARSOME REPTILES BECAME BIRDS
JOHN PICKRELL (NEWSOUTH, \$34.99)

Small boys of the world rejoice: dinosaurs are *not* extinct. In fact, writes journalist John Pickrell (the editor of *Australian Geographic*), dinosaurs are “more successful today than they have been at any other point in history”. He goes on to outline the mass of fossil discovery and

research confirming links from a branch of dinosaurs to modern birds. The reboot in paleontological thinking began in 1996, when the first feathered dinosaur fossils were found in China. The experts now speculate with some confidence – right down to the colour of dinosaur feathers, nesting behaviour, and even call sounds. As well as being fascinating, this is a highly entertaining read, with title sections such as “Feathered tyrants”, “Rise of the dino-chicken” and “Devoted dads or hump and run?” **JIM ROBINSON**

A SLIP OF THE KEYBOARD: COLLECTED NON-FICTION
TERRY PRATCHETT (PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE, \$54.99)

Comic fantasy author Terry Pratchett once said he'd write a book about being a press officer for a nuclear power station if he thought anyone would believe him. Sadly, this isn't that book, but it does touch on the pixie that shut down a nuclear plant and many of life's other absurdities. The creator of the phenomenally popular *Discworld* books waxes wittily on author tours, writing rituals, inspiring people and books, and mushrooming at 5.30am in misty Somerset – though the first section gets slightly bogged down in discussions of the fantasy genre. In articles dealing with Pratchett's recent life with Alzheimer's and his campaign for assisted death, the sly satire and railing against injustice and stupidity that make his novels great are particularly poignant.

MARY DE RUYTER