

# Viewpoints on a life

**BOOK REVIEW:**  
**Deeper Than Colour**  
 James Clelland  
 Jacana

JAMES Clelland's novel is the winner of the 2010 European Union Literary Award, which guarantees publication and an appearance on Exclusive Books' end-of-year list of top reads.

Previous winners include Zinaid Meeran's *Saracen at the Gates*, Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret* and Fred Khumalo's *Bitches' Brew*.

Clelland gives us the story of Angus Smith, a former recce in the bad old days of the South African Defence Force and veteran of the Angolan War. Now he is an architect, a husband and a stepfather, and, we come to realise, an exceedingly unreliable narrator of his life. Depressed, and suffering from untreated post-traumatic stress, he is also part of a drugs trial and has to record his life and feelings for his psychiatrist.

But Angus has a better idea: he will put hidden surveillance equipment around all the places where his life evolves. So he films himself and oth-

ers at his home, in his mistress's bedroom, visiting his senile mother in her nursing home, in his office. What he sees shows him different aspects of his life, and other things he never expected and doesn't like. He is not as in control as he thought he was.

There are other voices too, being interviewed at some point later than Angus's main narration, and together they build up a disturbing picture, sometimes but not always blackly funny.

Angus may not be likeable, but neither is his wife — she is horrible. A successful maker of short films, she is not much impressed with Angus's problems, questioning, as the reader also does, whether they can all be laid at the feet of his military experiences.

As a portrait of a marriage, *Deeper Than Colour* presents a grim warning. It is also a portrait of extraordinarily unpleasant people.

*Deeper Than Colour* shows that to see ourselves as others, or even as the apparently neutral camera sees us, is unlikely to be pleasant.

The novel is about viewpoints as much as it is about post-traumatic stress, and, while powerful, is not a pleasant read.

**Margaret von Klemperer**

