



# THE HEAT

GARRY  
DISHER

*'Beautifully crafted.'* *Sydney Morning Herald*

# 1

Already it was going wrong.

Wyatt watched Stefan Vidovic complete the call, slip the phone into his shirt pocket. Screw an apology onto his face.

‘That was Jack.’

Wyatt waited. People edged around bad news and setbacks. It wasted time, but what could you do? Vidovic would get to the point in the next few seconds. Or years.

‘Jack Pepper,’ Vidovic elaborated. Seeing no alteration in Wyatt’s granite features, he kept going. ‘He asked if we could meet at some motel instead.’

‘He say why?’

‘No.’

They were in a rented van in a dismal caravan park in the hills outside Melbourne. Wyatt’s choice. People come and go at caravan parks. You stay for a while and move on; you choose a caravan park because it’s cheaper than a motel. Everyone around you is thinking the same way so no one takes any notice of you.



And this caravan park was far enough out of the city and nowhere near any armoured-car collection or delivery location.

Wyatt checked his watch: 8 p.m. 'He give you an address?'

Vidovic named a Budget motel in Highett. Beachside; forty-five minutes away. Wyatt almost said no, but he'd returned from France with almost nothing. Only satisfaction—the satisfaction of killing a man. Not a paying job.

'Okay, let's go.'

On the way down to the flat stretches of streets and tiled roofs that defined bayside Melbourne, Vidovic talked. Wyatt didn't stop him. He didn't really listen either, except to learn that his friend was dead broke and really needed this job.

So did Wyatt. The difference was Wyatt saw no need to say so. He didn't chat. He didn't reveal his needs. He didn't even necessarily recognise that he had them.

But he did think.

The Pepper brothers, Jack and Leon, had approached Vidovic with a job. Vidovic, liking what he'd heard, had approached Wyatt. Vidovic had worked with the Pepper brothers before, just as he'd worked with Wyatt. That's how it went. For the moment, Wyatt neither trusted nor distrusted the Pepper brothers. He didn't know them.

Who the fifth member was Wyatt didn't know yet either. But five men was about right for an armoured-car heist. Straight ambush, hold-up, traffic diversion or intercept outside a bank—whatever. You'd need a driver, a lookout to monitor the radio and eyeball the street, two gunmen and a specialist: some guy handy with cutting tools, electronics or Semtex. So far, Vidovic and Wyatt knew only that the Pepper brothers were claiming to be onto a sure thing.

\*

Down to the Nepean Highway where, hanging gingerly above the toxins, there was the faint briny odour of the sea. The motel was one block back from the beach, faded-looking. Ground down by years of sunlight and salt. In bygone days, families had come for a desperate week in January, that's all you could say about it. Not that Wyatt had anything to say about it. He simply parked two blocks away and switched off.

Vidovic gave him a look. 'You could just drive in, mate.'

Wyatt's return gaze was calm but loaded. Vidovic raised his palms in capitulation. 'Okay, okay, ever vigilant.' A nervous chuckle. 'One day I'll see the laid-back Wyatt.'

One day I'll be dead, Wyatt thought.

He settled a baseball cap over his eyes, shrugged into a zippered wool jacket and flipped up the collar. The cameras would show a hint of bony nose and cheekbone, not an identifiable face.

Vidovic followed suit, grumbling, and they started walking. Past a noodle shop, a launderette, a 7-Eleven. They went unnoticed; there were others about in jackets with collars turned up on this cool mid-September evening.

The motel units were in an L shape with the office at one end, near the street entrance. A solitary camera covered the office, a token effort. As if management believed nothing ever happened in the units. No overdoses, rapes, murders, assaults. Or heist planning.

Wyatt and Vidovic slipped onto the property where the shadows were deepest, then around the edge of a cyclone fence that divided the motel from a block of flats. The lighting was dim, barely illuminating the sea mist. Water dripped. Droplets fell onto Wyatt's sleeves from a couple of miserable shrubs.

Unit 18, a white Camry parked nose-up to it. Wyatt paced around the rear half of the car and, sure enough, there was a rental-company sticker on the window.

He stared at the unit, unwilling to go in. The situation had been dodgy from the start. Still, maybe the Pepper brothers had had the sense to use false names?

Vidovic, reading Wyatt's mind, said, 'Mate, they know what they're doing.' He walked up to the door and knocked.

So Wyatt slid his hand into his jacket pocket, where his little .32 was almost warm from the heat of his body. Comforting. He stood back in the shadows, seeking more comfort. Instinct. Wyatt might have called it good sense if he'd been pressed to explain himself.

He watched Vidovic. Watched the door open and spill light. Watched Vidovic turn and gesture to him: *It's okay pal, come in.*

Vidovic and Wyatt were cut from the same slab—tall, angular, wary—but there was a hint of desperation in Vidovic these days. The Pepper brothers were formed from softer stuff. Barely thirty, with earrings and designer stubble framing pink, inexperienced faces. Sharp suits over open-necked shirts. Young masters of the universe.

Jack Pepper stood in the centre of the room, his younger brother sprawled on the bed. They were consultants when they weren't staging holdups, Vidovic had said on the way down from the hills. He shrugged and grimaced when Wyatt asked consultants in what?

There were no handshakes. Each brother offered a languid wave, then Jack Pepper poured four glasses of scotch—pouring for Wyatt even as Wyatt said no. The man was hyper, the little eyes in his round face shooting sparks of glee.

'Cheers,' he toasted Wyatt. 'You come recommended.'

Wyatt's face didn't move.

'By Stefan here,' Pepper continued, indicating Vidovic, as if Wyatt were a little slow.

Wyatt nodded. He assessed the room: queen-size bed, cabinets on either side of the headboard, a bench with a massive TV on it. Tiny table and two chairs, ensuite bathroom. Apart from a blotch of art on the wall above the bed, that was it. He took one of the chairs, positioned it between the door and the only window, and sat. Facing trouble, backing onto an escape route. Either way. He waited, still and silent.

A snort from the man stretched out on the bed. ‘Get this guy.’ Leon Pepper was fatter in the face than his brother, and not immediately the clever one.

‘We’re one short,’ Wyatt said.

Jack Pepper looked at his watch.

‘Yeah, well, Syed’s a bit time-challenged sometimes, right, Lee?’

Leon sniggered. He wriggled until his back was propped against the bedhead, his meaty thighs distorting the fine wool that enclosed them. His shoes had left streaks on the bedspread.

‘Syed?’ Wyatt said.

‘Syed Ijaz,’ Jack Pepper said. ‘Knows cars and that. How to pinch them, how to drive them.’

And how to take a taxi to a planning session: Wyatt heard the rumble of tyres outside the window, a door slamming. He peered through the glass in time to see the taxi back away from number eighteen, the driver turning on his for-hire light.

A skinhead shuffled past the Avis Camry. Wyatt went immediately to the door and jerked it open before the man named Ijaz could knock.

‘Get in here.’

‘Who the fuck are you?’

Wyatt ran his gaze over the blighted parking lot, the street at the other end, the misty cars passing in the night. A dim, dank, peaceful, hopeless evening. He shut the door and returned to his

chair. Watched the newcomer bump fists with the Pepper brothers. Noted the slight amplification of his movements. Ijaz nodded a wary hello to Stefan Vidovic, who eyed Wyatt nervously. Knowing Wyatt.

Jack Pepper said, 'Wyatt, meet Syed.'

Wyatt said, 'Where did you hail the taxi?'

Ijaz blinked rapidly. 'Hail it? I didn't hail it. Phoned for it.'

'Tell me you used a payphone.'

A smirk. 'Do they even exist anymore? Mum's phone.'

Wyatt closed and opened his eyes. 'How did you pay for it?'

'Cash.'

That was something. 'The taxi came to your mother's door?'

Ijaz shook his head. 'End of the street, it's like a cul-de-sac where we live, easier if you tell them to pick you up on the corner. So.' He rubbed his hands together. 'Where we at?'

'Just started,' said the brother on the bed genially.

'Like, guys, I really need this,' Ijaz said.

For Wyatt's benefit, Leon Pepper explained, a smile in his voice, 'Old Syed owes a bit of money.'

'Ten grand.' Ijaz grinned. 'Crime compensation.'

He was about nineteen, dark, underfed, his nostrils raw and his skin crawling. He couldn't keep still. He was having the time of his life, which would be short.

Wyatt lifted his chin at Vidovic. 'Coming?'

Vidovic nodded wearily. He knew as well as Wyatt this was over. Too many mistakes. Fucked from the start. He joined Wyatt at the door.

'What the hell? Come on, guys,' said Jack Pepper in disgust.

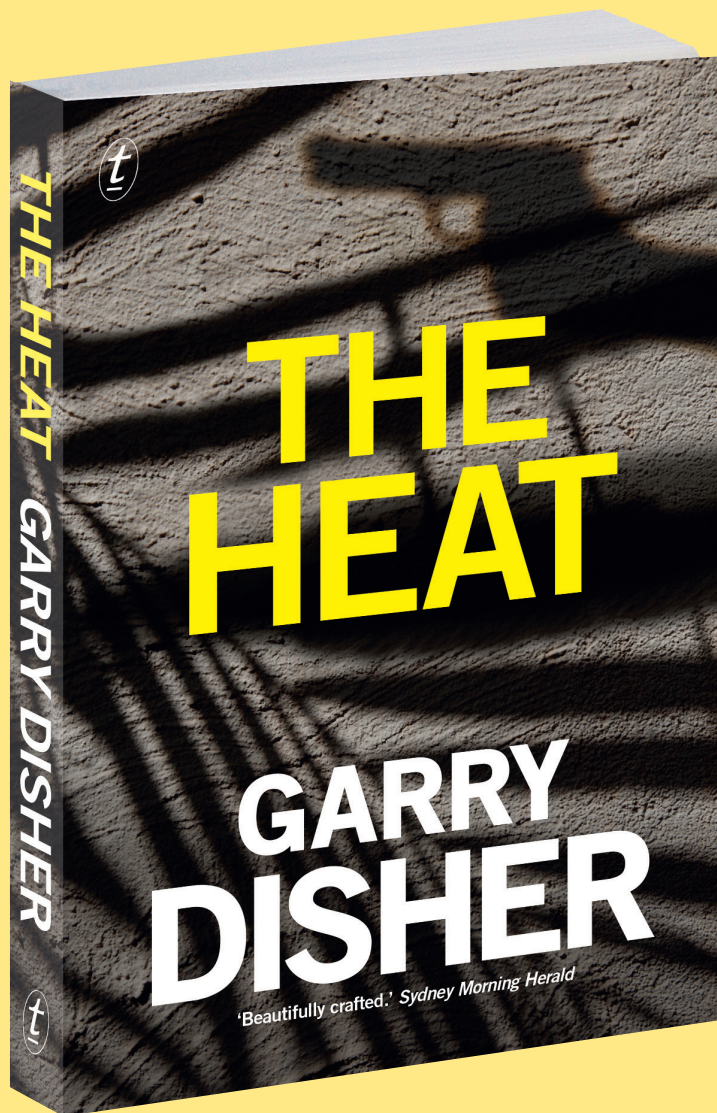
Wyatt didn't bother to spell it out: the motel, the hire car, the taxi. The idiot speed freak who'd arrived in it. He said, 'Tell me this: what armoured car, and what route?'

Jack Pepper was encouraged that Wyatt had asked. He

gestured at the world a short distance from the motel. 'A SecureCor van, and it runs past here two mornings a week, collecting the Monday-to-Thursday takings on Friday mornings and the weekend takings on Monday mornings. Every supermarket between Sandringham and Chelsea.' He waited for surprise or greed or at least a flicker of interest.

All he got from the hard man leaving the room was, 'Moron.'





**Loved this extract?**

Learn more at [Text Publishing](https://www.textpublishing.com.au)

