

GREAT READS

Exotic mystery exposes greed



THE HALF-CHILD

BY ANGELA SAVAGE

TEXT PUBLISHING,

RRP \$32.95

Angela Savage's latest crime novel, set in Thailand, is a cracker. Bangkok-based private investigator Jayne Keeney is hired to investigate the death of young Australian volunteer Maryanne Delbeck.

Jayne's investigation takes her to Pattaya to pose as a volunteer at the orphanage where Maryanne worked.

Further questions lead Jayne to Pattaya's seedy nightlife, with its go-go bars and sex tourists. Her talent for wise-cracking, hard drinking, smoking and pool are a good cover for her inquiries.

Savage creates many full-blooded characters, such as Jayne's Indian love interest, Rajiv Patel. This patient, clever and humble bookseller is the refreshing antithesis of the classic male hero. Another big-hearted character is bargirl Mayuree, who desires a better life for her baby.

Beyond its suspense and exoticism, this is a sobering story about the tragic consequences of Western greed and corrupt adoption practices. Perhaps Jayne's deductive processes are overexplained, but that's a minor quibble in a story that has warmth and humanity. **C.K.**

* **Verdict: suspenseful**