

The creation of crop circles by two psychologically damaged men seems an unlikely subject for a novel, but this is the basis of *The Perfect Golden Circle* by Benjamin Myers. The novel focuses on the two men as they spend the summer of 1989 travelling around the south of England searching out suitable crop fields in which to create the circles; although they are not simply circles but designs of increasing complexity. One of the men, Ivan Calvert, is an ex-soldier who had fought in The Falklands conflict and had been in the SAS. Late in the novel, we learn that he had been wounded by an Improvised Explosive Device. He hated everything about war and, although not stated specifically, was clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress. His companion, Redbone, is someone for whom one might imagine Calvert would have little in common. When he was younger, Redbone took drugs and was a follower of hardcore punk bands whose talent was inversely proportional to the noise they created. Their one area of agreement was the desire to be separate from society, to be free and to create something beautiful.

The story follows Calvert and Redbone as they create ever more complicated circles across southern England. Calvert locates the most suitable fields while Redbone produces the designs. He has a mathematical mind and the ability to envisage complex patterns. At one point, he argues that it is impossible to create the perfect circle because, when examined more closely, there will always be imperfections. Redbone is very philosophical in his outlook while Calvert is more political, with strong views against conflict and class divisions.

Calvert and Redbone stick to a strict code, the most important elements being that they do no damage and tell no-one about being the creators of the circles. They always operate at night and, although they aim to be by themselves, they are sometimes disturbed; on one occasion by fly-tippers, whom they loathe because of the damage they do; by a drunken member of the aristocracy and, most poignantly, by an old lady who was still looking for her dog, Sebastian, who disappeared in the field 80 years before when she was thirteen. These events and the lifestyles of the two men often provide a fair degree of humour.

Much of the writing in *The Perfect Golden Circle* is metaphorical. Most of the group liked the book, though some thought there was a lack of development. They were particularly amused by the newspaper articles that were published about the circles and how they were made, which had created widespread public interest that led to blocked roads, trampled crops and some farmers making money by charging for parking, while university professors pontificated about the influence of aliens. The group also wondered how the circles could be made without causing damage and how they could be completed over relatively short summer nights. Nevertheless, everyone felt that *The Perfect Golden Circle* deals with many aspects of being human in an engaging way.

July – *Act of Oblivion* by Robert Harris

September – *I'm not scared* by Niccolò Ammaniti

October – *The Broken House* by Horst Krüger

November – *Two Storm Wood* by Philip Gray