

How the West was run

ZERO AT THE BONE

David Whish-Wilson
Penguin

It's 1979. A century and a half after colonisation, the atmosphere in Perth is one of celebration and self-congratulation. WA is in the midst of a mining boom and a Liberal government, which wants the unions and activist organisations crushed, looks to the police to help out. The price of silver and gold is rising, diamond production is up; it seems the entire north-west is made of iron ore.

Ex-detective Frank Swann is now operating on the outside of the police force — the only way to get justice done in Perth back in the seventies. Swann has bills to pay. All three of his daughters live at home. He's just pulled a 26-hour surveillance stint to come up with the identity of the guys stealing astro turf off a building site. Turns out it's the same guys who sold it to the developers in the first place. Payday next week. Some crayfish on the table. Summer wine for his wife Marion, who worked as a community nurse.

Jennifer Henderson was a decade younger than Swann, with mischief in her blue eyes — that Irish look he'd always loved — black hair and ice-cream skin with a dusting of freckles.

He guessed (wrongly) the prospective client was a spouse who wanted revenge.

'Last week my husband shot himself. In the backyard'. He hadn't seen that coming.

In a disturbing prologue to *Zero at the Bone*, the woman's husband, Max Henderson, shoots his two dogs before turning the rifle on himself.

"He put the barrel into his right eye. And then it was done."

Henderson was a geologist and according to his wife, one of the best in the world. Mining was in his blood.

After graduating he had been a riverwalker in Papua New Guinea, one of the three fabled geologists who discovered the Ok Tedi El Dorado.

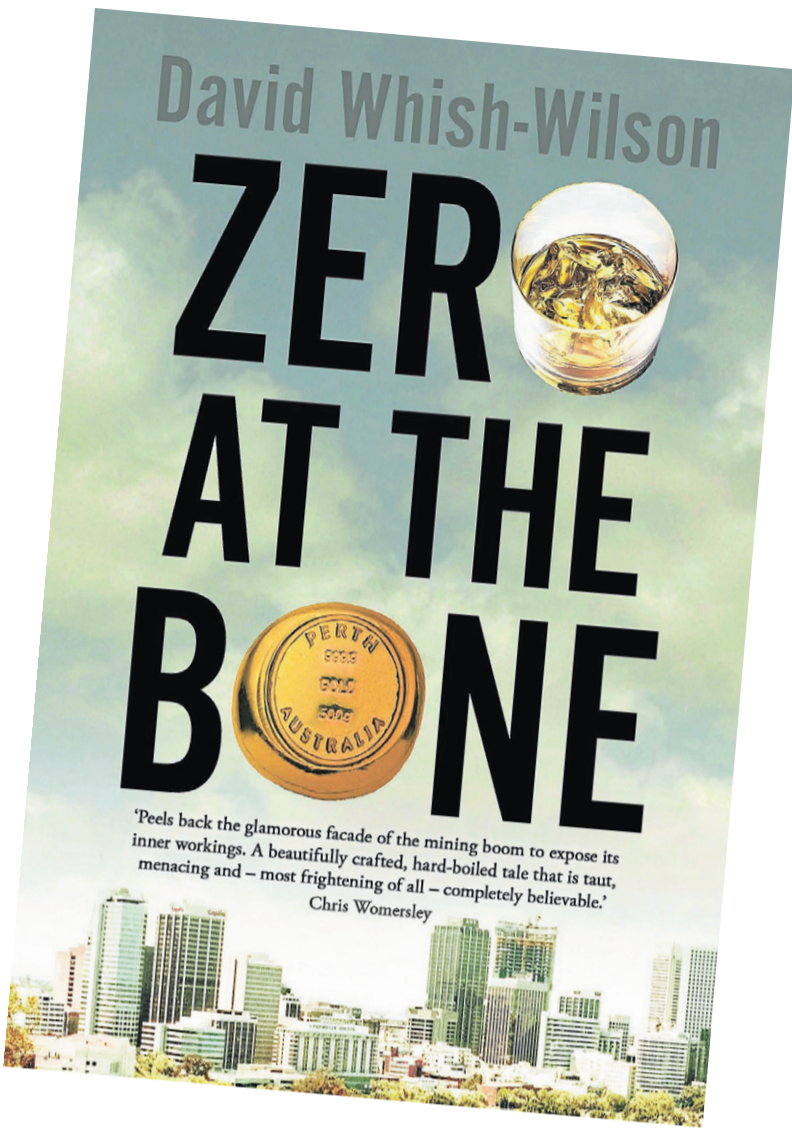
But despite already being a wealthy man, and despite suffering from recurrent bouts of malaria, Henderson had become involved in a new stake somewhere out in the desert. Swann picked up a photo. Henderson was an impressive man, tall and rangy, tanned the deep red of the desert from where he'd recently returned. He was excited about the find and he had persuaded some developers to stump up the money for on-site drilling. So what had gone so terribly wrong? On the flip side of the photo was a quote from Cortes, 'I and my men suffer from a disease of the heart that can only be cured by gold'.

A file labelled 'Rosa Gold' found in the dead man's office recorded a 'highly significant find'. No other details. His wife didn't believe her husband had killed himself. And neither did Swann.

When a man like Frank Swann, with scores to settle against senior police, is hired to probe the suicide of the respected geologist, he becomes drawn into a vortex of vice and fraud, at the centre of which are the directors of a gold-lease consortium. They're an unlikely collection of the seemingly respectable and the clearly not, with one thing in common: a lust for wealth that verges on a disease. And gold fever is very infectious and often fatal.

Highly recommended.

BARBARA FARRELLY



HEROES

Tony Stephens
Slattery Media

The word hero is often bandied about these days. Bravery or noble qualities are no longer necessary, you just need to survive harsh circumstances or play rugby league. During his 49-year career, former Fairfax journalist Tony Stephens met some people — famous and not so well-known — who are more deserving of the title.

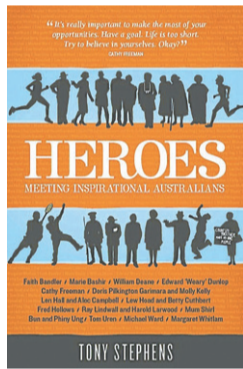
Faith Bandler was the daughter of a South Sea Islander who had come to Australia to work as a slave. She played a big part in convincing white Australians to give the vote to Aborigines in 1967 and in 2009 she was honoured by being made a Companion of the Order of Australia.

Republican and environmentalist Michael Ward was only 51 when he died of cancer. He faced his illness with courage and much of the journal he kept — the *Tumour Times* — is reprinted here.

In the days of amateurs, tennis was a very different profession, but Lew Hoad's winning the French Open in 1956 was a remarkable feat. It may not be admirable, he didn't want people to know, but it certainly is impressive — he is the only person to ever win a Grand Slam while under the influence of alcohol.

Other people included in *Heroes* are Margaret Whitlam, Weary Dunlop, Fred Hollows, Tom Uren and Marie Bashir.

FRANCES RAND



I CAN SEE IN THE DARK

Karin Fossum
Harvell Secker

I read this book in the week killer nurse Roger Dean was jailed for life after he set fires in a nursing home resulting in the cruel deaths of 11 frail and elderly patients. Dean was an addict, covering up the theft of drugs. Dean has been punished, but the public is left wondering what checks and balances exist in our health system to ensure our most vulnerable are not abused.

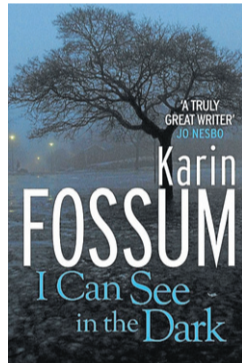
Haunting, sad, disturbing and, dare I say, pointless, *I Can See in the Dark* is about a man who is a pathetic sadist.

Riktor leads a depressing life, working in an old folks' home in Norway where he relishes in the torture of the most helpless patients.

He is apparently taking food, juice and medicine from room to room, checking off that the patients have eaten and taken their tablets. But the truth is rather different. The injections go into the mattress; the meals and drugs are flushed down the toilet.

The old people wave their pale, wrinkled hands helplessly after the vanishing food.

Blind Nelly Friss is the one he hurts the



most.

"I bend over the bed, take hold of the delicate skin behind her ear, and with my long, sharp nails squeeze as hard as I can," Riktor says. He has also pulled out tufts of hair at her temple, where it is most tender.

At night, at home, Riktor's head begins to seethe. Billions of tiny creatures swarm through his brain. He cannot sleep for imagining a diesel truck parked by his bed, its motor revving.

Let's face it, Riktor is a sick puppy.

He doesn't like the way the policeman comes straight into his house without knocking and ironically Riktor ends up in jail for a crime he did not commit.

Inside, he finds comfort in the routine, support from the guards and purpose in the prison kitchen. He starts to envisage a better life, a life that has the potential to include others and, in his own deluded mind, develops a relationship with the prison cook. Upon his release, his schemes and desires unravel spectacularly.

Yes, Karin Fossum is a very good writer, admired by Ruth Rendell among others. But, be warned, here you will find no optimism, no redemption, just grey.

MY LIFE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Kim Izzo
H&S

This book starts with a bang. Beginning in the present tense, the first chapter sets the scene in a police station, captivating the senses with an intriguing character and moodily set out like a hazy 1950s gangster movie.

The reader is introduced to the main character Clara Bishop, a mysterious and beautiful woman with a wicked sense of vintage style and flaming red hair. It feels like the lead into a thrilling, twisted and seductive murder mystery [it was *Scarlett*, in the dining room with the candlestick].

The book continues on with this American temptress's confession to the police officer, somewhat of a flashback into her life as the 'predictable Clara Bishop' who has gone on a journey of self-discovery after her husband leaves her for another woman.

When she hits the lowest of emotional lows by chasing her husband and his new lover to England where she is publicly rejected and humiliated, Clara finds strength in her family history — in particular her grandmother, a well-known '50s actress.

With a suitcase full of her grandmother's original vintage gowns, a picture of the starlet and a newly discovered unfinished script [written just before her grandmother died], Clara reinvents herself with a packet of red hair dye, a wardrobe swap and a plan to finish the script whilst plotting to ruin her husband. Isn't revenge a dish best served cold?

Even though the book is well written and enticing to the imagination, as Clara suddenly wakes up one morning to find herself transported back in time to a black and white world in 1952, it loses something along the way and suddenly struggles to be a page turner.

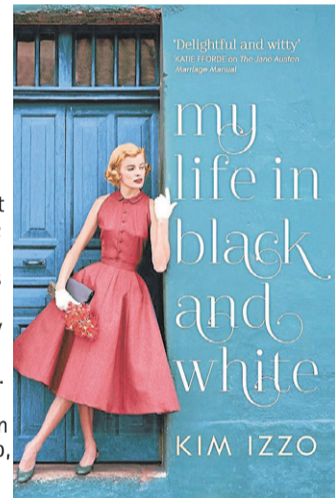
The reader looks forward to something really juicy as this living breathing femme fatale waltzes along her path to revenge but sadly is left hanging. Everyone loves a happy ending but this book needed that last kick it promised in the beginning.

You can forgive the plot a little as the pages are filled with the glamour of a film noir and Clara becomes less predictable with a sexy, raw edginess but sadly this just doesn't go quite far enough.

The main disappointment occurs with the uncovering of the reason Clara is at the police station in the beginning — because she dished up a slap to her arch enemy. The story needs a little bit more of the juicy stuff.

In the end, Clara gets everything she desires, but the reader is left a little disappointed.

JESSICA LONG



RESTAURANT & CAFE OWNER/OPERATORS!

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For more information, contact: Rose Blyth 4421 9123
rose.blyth@fairfaxmedia.com.au