

The crooked Cross

by Jimmy Thomson
 Allen & Unwin, \$24.99

THIS true crime story — subtitled *Crooked Cops and Kings Cross Crims*, by the man who saw it all — is a compelling, unsensationalised and often sordid account of the corruption, sex, violence and drugs in Australia's most colourful suburb during the late 1980s and 1990s.

The characters that litter the pages are brought to life through the eyes of criminal and police informer, the Inspector.

In the thick of the scams and rorts, power struggles and gang wars, match fixing and illegal gambling that typified that period, the Inspector was so clued into the mean streets of Kings Cross that the producers of the top-rating TV series *Underbelly 3: The Golden Mile* hired him as their technical adviser.

Written in a straightforward, street-talkin' style, screenwriter and author Jimmy Thomson's book brings the key players alive on the page. Personalities such as Lennie McPherson who, with Abe Saffron and George Freeman, controlled most of Sydney's organised crime for several decades, crooked cops Roger Rogerson, Graham "Hook" Fowler and Trevor Haken and notorious hitman Christopher Flannery strut their stuff against the sordid cast of bit-players, hookers and shady figures.

For many years, the Inspector, as he was known by friend and foe alike, was a confidant of some of the top detectives in the NSW police force who traded information with both sides of the law.

He knew the best and the worst: the good cops who only wanted information and the 'dirty' cops who only wanted money.

Born into a hard-working Lebanese family from Western Sydney, in his early 20s he was afforded the opportunity to go from a low-paying job in the suburbs to a very well paid job in the clubs of the Cross. He jumped at it.

"When the Wood Royal Commission into police corruption was begun in the mid 1990s, I was a witness because they believed I knew everything that was going on and everyone involved," he wrote.

They were right. He did.

The Inspector later became associated with the Ibrahim brothers and watched them closely as



A young John Ibrahim, right, with Dave, then licensee of the Tunnel. The Inspector, his image blurred in the background. Picture: ALLEN & UNWIN. Below, author Jimmy Thompson.

their empire rose. John Ibrahim was a regular in the Cross from the age of 15, later becoming a driver for the feared George Freeman.

At the age of 19, Ibrahim had bought into his first nightclub, the Tunnel, and now has an interest in 17 clubs.

At the royal commission, where accusations of providing protection were levelled at him, the Inspector told them what he knew. But today, he takes a relatively benign view of the activities in the Cross in his hey-day. "We might not be totally innocent, but at least we weren't evil," he says.

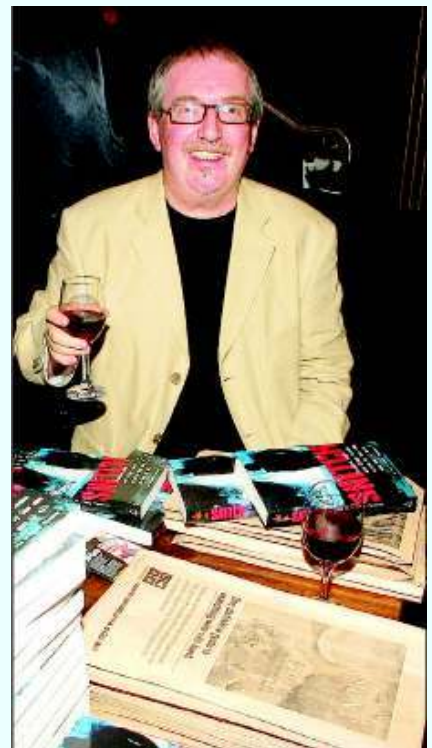
He also defends his role as a police informer, a snitch, insisting that he gave the commission information only after someone had already been exposed by someone else.

John Ibrahim's meteoric rise followed the fallout from the royal commission and now, according to the Inspector, he keeps the Cross "pretty clean and tight". So clean and tight, he reckons that it is now safe for civilians to venture back there.

Overall, *Snitch* is an enlightening insight into the crime world, past and present and into the darker side of human nature. If, like thousands of others you are a fan of the *Underbelly* series, then it is a must-read, a gritty look into the brazen corruption that characterised those times.

The power of this story is not just that it is true, but that the Inspector lived to tell the tale.

As Thomson says of the story: "*Underbelly* is entertainment, *Snitch* in comparison, is the closest to the truth you are going to get."



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