



Informant's fine line

BY JOHN MACLEAY

FOR many Sydneysiders, the name Kings Cross denotes an image of a sleazy underbelly.

The inner-city suburb is also home to several thousand residents, is prime metropolitan real estate and is prone to invasion by backpackers and yobs on the prowl amid the massage parlours and brothels.

Author, screenwriter and former journalist Jimmy Thomson, a Kings Cross resident of many years, dwells on its seedier past in his book about its crims and crooked cops in the period before and during the Wood Royal Commission of the mid-1990s.

The royal commission exposed police corruption and subsequently led to a wholesale change in policing culture in the state.

The book, *Snitch*, is told from the perspective of a young man of Lebanese heritage from Sydney's west who fell into the underworld scene in the late 1980s, making friends and trading information with both the

police and criminals.

He was a police informer for 10 years and lived to tell the tale.

The man whom Thomson befriended and dubs "the Inspector" is now a technical adviser for the third Underbelly series, *The Golden Mile*, which is set in Kings Cross and is being broadcast on the Nine Network.

From humble beginnings working in a menswear store for \$200 a week, the Inspector entered the Kings Cross scene as a doorman and bouncer at a strip club, his wage skyrocketing to

about \$3000 a week.

"Kings Cross still had its magic back then," the Inspector said in the book.

"The Pink Pussycat, the Pink Panther, Les Girls and the Bourbon and Beefsteak — that was the Cross. There were plenty of other places but without these four there was nothing."

Kings Cross back then attracted the best and the worst of both sides of the law.

"It's life in the street, as shown from the perspective of a foot soldier, if you will," Thomson said of *Snitch*.

He said there were good cops and bad cops, just like there were good crims and

bad crims. Everything was a shade of grey.

"The Inspector survived because he was a likeable sort of bloke who could trade information with both sides," Thomson said.

The Inspector said he never traded drugs and didn't like them because of how they affected him.

His vice was gambling. He'd make huge amounts of money only to lose it again just as quickly.

"His life was a roll of the dice," Thomson said.

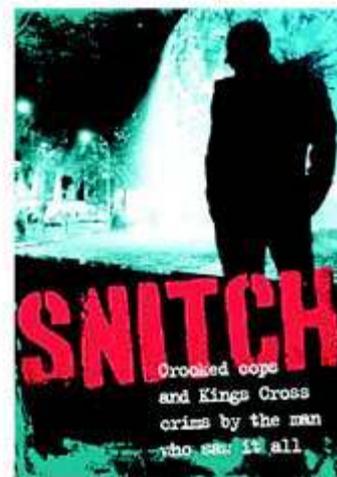
On one occasion, for

instance, the Inspector was on the verge of being severely beaten or even killed by rivals in nearby Rushcutters Bay Park when a police car happened to cruise by and ask what was happening.

The book is full of juicy and controversial titbits that the Inspector swears are true.

Thomson said he was in two minds about including that snippet but the Inspector insisted.

■ **SNITCH**, Jimmy Thomson, Allen and Unwin, rrp \$24.99.



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