

## I AM ALREADY DEAD

DAVID WHISH-WILSON

### ABOUT THE BOOK

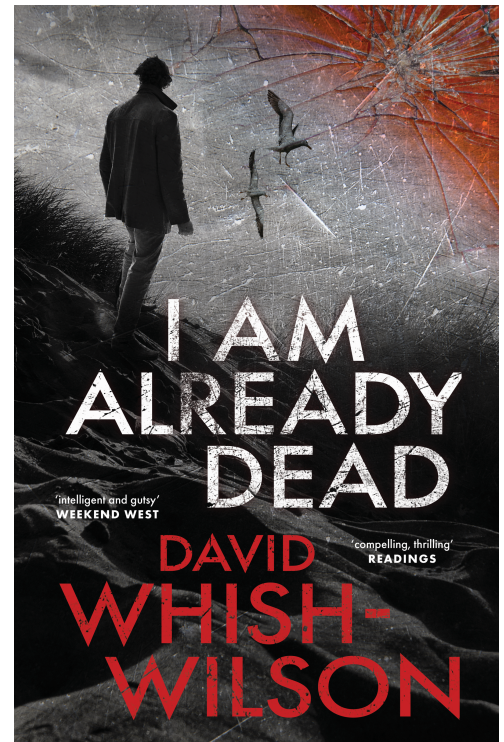
Trainee private investigator Lee Southern finds himself drawn into a web of danger and deceit as he investigates a series of bribery attempts targeting a wealthy entrepreneur. Under the expert tutelage of retiring PI Frank Swann, Lee uses all of his developing skills, instincts and cunning to get to the heart of a sordid mystery. In the meantime, his job working the door at Club Summertime is causing him headaches. His boss Firmin wants Lee to find out who is responsible for a violent armed robbery at the club, but somebody is keen to warn Lee away. As Lee delves deeper into the case and questions the intentions of those he's working for, he finds himself the target of increasingly ominous threats and several attempts on his life.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Whish-Wilson was born in Newcastle, NSW but raised in Singapore, Victoria and Western Australia. *I Am Already Dead* is a standalone novel, but follows on from *True West*, which was shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime. The Frank Swann novels that are precursors to these are *Line of Sight* (also shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award), *Zero at the Bone*, *Old Scores* and *Shore Leave*. David also teaches in the prison system in Perth and previously in Fiji, where he started the country's first prisoner writing program. He currently lives in Fremantle, Western Australia with his partner and three kids, where he teaches creative writing at Curtin University.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the relevance of this novel's title? To whom does it apply?
2. What is a noir crime novel, and how does this novel fit the genre?
3. Who is the speaker in the prologue? At what point do we work out who this is?
4. Why has the author chosen to chapters from the point of view of the young woman?
5. What kind of a world does Lee Southern live in? What skills does he need to survive there?
6. What do we learn about Lee from the way he interacts with his mother?
7. What is the relationship between Southern and his PI mentor Frank Swann?
8. What is the relationship between Bamber and Enright?
9. What is the connection of Corbett to Enright?
10. What is the relationship between the sisters?
11. How would you describe Enright's value system and his moral compass?
12. What kind of a man is Firmin, and what are his priorities?
13. What are the clues for the reader that this novel is set in the first half of the 90s? How does this setting contribute to the plot?
14. Why do you think the author spends some time describing Lee's work as a car mechanic and bodyworker?
15. Do you think that justice is restored by the novel's end?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did the idea for this this novel come from?***

The title comes from a time when I was younger, living in Tokyo, Japan, for a few years, working as a nightclub bartender and occasional bouncer, teaching myself how to write short stories and studying Japanese language and martial arts during the day. The title is derived from an old samurai saying invoked by warriors prior to battle – the idea being that if you can convince yourself that you're already dead, then you won't fear what's to come – relevant here because of the danger that Lee Southern soon finds himself in.

The idea for the plot came from a conversation with a Melbourne-based crime writer friend of mine, who'd newly become a father. This guy is a great writer and a very mild-mannered and gentle fella too. He said that after his first child was born, he was surprised and a bit shocked to discover there was a dark side to being a father. He said that almost without thinking about it, in the middle of all the sleeplessness and exhaustion, he began sleeping with a hammer beside his bed, just in case someone broke into their apartment – because his instincts were telling him that he would take it that far – in order to protect his young family.

There are plenty of crime novels that use the 'how far will a parent go to protect their child' motif, so I wanted to reverse my friend's instinct a little, namely, to ask what kind of twisted values would allow a parent to knowingly put their child in harm's way, and what the ongoing repercussions of that might be.

### ***What is it about writing noir crime that appeals to you? Do you have 'rules' for how you approach writing about violence?***

I like crime noir or hard-boiled novels because they're a little bit 'real'. While my primary focus is to entertain my readers, it's good form, I find, to also freight the story with examinations of the nexus between organised crime, politics and business. Good crime noir can be political and relevant without being didactic, examining crime that is structural rather than just the product of aberrant personalities.

I feel like I'm pretty careful about writing violence, and as writers we certainly don't want to cross the line and trigger or traumatise our readers. That said, in the violent contexts which are often products of criminal enterprises, it's also important to represent the ugliness that is part of that life, where being violent is often rationalised as a product of a business decision. My own guide for how I represent violence is the great deal of violence I myself have witnessed and have personally experienced. Representations of violence rarely approach the full ugliness of real violence, and that of course is a good thing.

### ***Lee Southern is something of a renaissance man. In what ways is he different to his mentor Frank Swann – and do they share any qualities?***

Lee is trying to learn as much as possible from Frank Swann. There is a mutual respect there, due to their similarly traumatic childhoods and their shared values of doggedness, loyalty and kindness toward those who are weaker or struggling – that classic respect for the underdog. They belong to different generations, with Frank coming from a generation where detection and investigation proceeded largely by way of developing relationships (as opposed to contemporary policing, which proceeds largely by way of surveillance.) If Frank Swann is old-school, Lee readily avails himself of modern techniques and technologies where useful, trying to build up a store of knowledge and experience as rapidly as possible.

### ***This is the second Lee Southern novel, following on from True West. Do you have plans for a third?***

I always have a hard time letting go of characters I like. I do like Lee Southern a lot, and he'll no doubt be returning in another story, which I'm already looking forward to writing.



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