

FREE WORLD

DAVID WHISH-WILSON

ABOUT THE BOOK

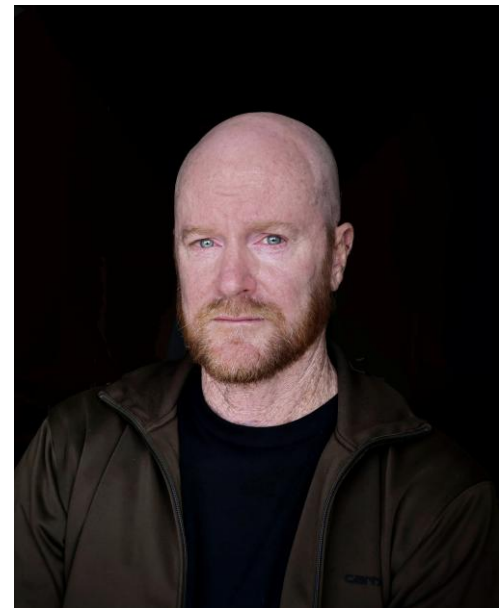
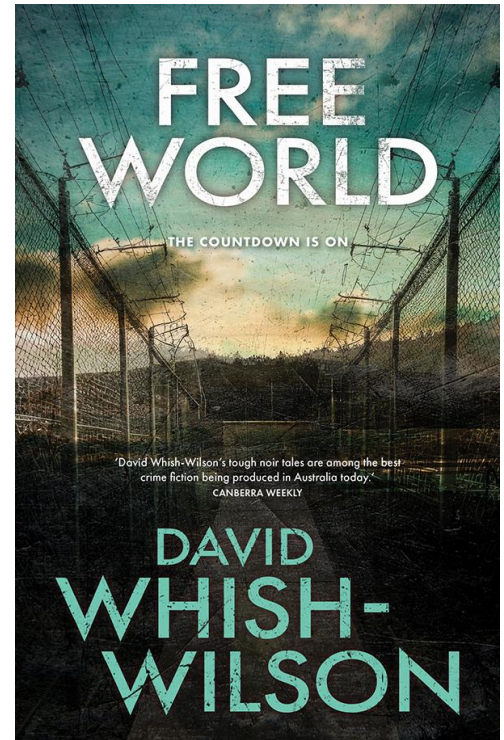
When a murder in a prison cell winds up with the wrong man dead, private investigator Lee Southern is hired to protect the intended target by going undercover as his cellmate and bodyguard. It is 1999 and, with the end of the millennium only weeks away, rumours of a Y2K technology meltdown have guards and prisoners on edge. As violence simmers and tensions ignite, Lee's hopes of a quick mission disintegrate. Instead, he finds himself trapped with no way out, looking for a murderer in a prison full of killers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Whish-Wilson was born in Newcastle, NSW but raised in Singapore, Victoria and Western Australia. *Free World* is a standalone novel but follows on from *True West* (shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime), and *I Am Already Dead*. The Frank Swann novels that are precursors to the Lee Southern series are *Line of Sight* (also shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award), *Zero at the Bone*, *Old Scores* and *Shore Leave*. David 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, WA, with his partner and three kids, and teaches creative writing at Curtin University.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of this novel's title?
2. What is a 'locked-room thriller' and how does this novel conform to that sub-genre?
3. Why do you think the author has chosen to set his novel in the lead-up to the new year of the new millennium?
4. What do you see as the challenges of setting a novel in a prison setting?
5. How does this novel conform to a 'locked-cell' mystery genre?
6. What are Catherine Farrell's motivations for hiring Lee? Do you think these have changed by the novel's end?
7. What are Lee's own motivations for getting himself sent to prison?
8. What line does Lisa Malone have to cross to get Lee sent there?
9. What skills does Lee need to be able to survive this undercover role?
10. Why do you think that Roy elects to be his ally?
11. What do we learn of Gary Coleman as the novel progresses?
12. Why do you think the final part of the novel is set on the outside, in the 'free world'? To what extent is it 'free'?
13. Do Lee's own motivations change once he is released from prison?
14. Who is Gloria, and how does her story fit into the tale of the death of Gary Coleman?
15. Do you think that justice is restored by the novel's end?
16. What do you think is the symbolism of the final image on which the author ends this story?



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

This novel has a series of plot revelations that will keep readers guessing. How do you go about constructing a watertight plot?

My usual approach to developing plot is to focus on character and let the consequences develop naturally, building up atmosphere and testing characters by way of placing them in difficult positions, which is pretty standard for the hard-boiled or traditional noir genres. I greatly admire the puzzle-creating mysteries associated with cosy crime but have never been able to stick with writing one – my brain just doesn't work like that. With *Free World*, I had an existing character to work with, and a setting, and it seemed pretty inevitable that, given the setting and the inciting incident, that despite myself I was working with a traditional form – that of the locked-room mystery, from which the rest of the plot flows.

What aspects of your own experience of working in prison, and with prisoners, have made their way into this very atmospheric novel?

I make a point of not using anybody's stories directly, as they're not my property, but certainly I was able to draw upon my own experiences and observations of working in prison environments when building up a picture of the prison used in *Free World*. I've also read a lot over the years about prisons and imprisonment and there is, of course, a great tradition of prison writing to draw upon when referencing a prison as a setting for a novel like *Free World*.

Would you say that writing about masculinity (toxic and healthy) is one of your preoccupations as a writer? What are some of your others?

I'm primarily interested in human behaviour, as something that I find endlessly fascinating, and certainly masculinity in its varied forms is something that I think about a lot. Given that my novels often explore extreme environments where people are in difficult situations that draw both the best from them (loyalty, kindness, generosity, etc.), but also the worst (cruelty, misogyny, selfishness, etc.), it's natural that many of the more toxic aspects of masculinity are represented. Even though I feel like in real life I'm surrounded by good men, sadly you don't have to look far to see how disproportionately the darker aspects of masculinity affect our domestic, community or broader social lives. However, if there's one question that all of my novels return to time and again, it's this (since we all think of ourselves as good people) – what does a good person do when that goodness is tested, or when the consequences for doing good are worse than from doing nothing, or doing bad?

This is the third Lee Southern novel, following on from I Am Already Dead. Do you have plans for a fourth?

I get quite sentimental about my characters, and often find myself thinking about them. Since writing feels like giving them a life, I find it hard to imagine not writing more about them, and there are always a few ideas wandering about – so yes, plans are afoot.



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