

# The Robbers

by Paul Anderson

Drawing on his relationship with the Victorian Armed Robbery Squad as an award winning police reporter, Paul Anderson's gritty *The Robbers* is a fictionalised account of modern day policing from the inside amongst the Officers who confront some of society's most dangerous and desperate criminals.

Review written by Shelleyrae Cusbert at [www.bookdout.wordpress.com](http://www.bookdout.wordpress.com)



ABOVE: The Robbers author, Paul Anderson.

When journalist Ian Malone is assigned as the police reporter for *The Age*, his first planned feature is on the fearsome reputation of the Victorian Armed Robbery Squad. Repeatedly under fire in the media for allegations of excessive force and intimidation, the unit's modus operandi is in direct conflict with the growing culture of corporate policing. But protecting society from the excesses of violent, remorseless criminals demands a unique commitment and *The Robbers* explores the myriad of grey area in maintaining law and order.

And there is plenty of grey. Few among us can comfortably condone the use of physical violence against a police suspect but can the ends ever justify the means? Fast paced and action packed; the author highlights the conflicts and complexity of modern policing with unflinching honesty. While police bureaucracy busy themselves with image

making and political point scoring, police on the coalface, such as the members of the Armed Robbery Squad, are mired in the realities of violent crime and the brutality of those that commit them. Anderson expertly delves into the paradox, dissecting the idyll from the truth. This is a world where moral certainty wars with callous indifference and the rules of polite society are dismissed with violent prejudice. It is often said there is a thin line between fact and fiction and Anderson hasn't had to look far to find inspiration for the criminals that taunt the Armed Robbery Squad in his novel. In April 2012 the Herald Sun published a list of Victoria's worst criminals as named by the author who included Victor George Peirce, Bandali Michael Debs and Dennis 'Mr Death' Allen, all of whom have had their violent actions attributed to Anderson's fictionalised characters.

And what of the members of the squad? These are men who play hard and work

hard and I have no doubt are based on real Officers Anderson has come in contact with. While it's easy to judge them for their worst behaviours it's difficult to not admire their commitment and dedication to the protection of society at the risk of their own lives. These men 'hold the line' not for recognition or reward but for "the immeasurable pleasure from removing the worst of the worst from society".

There is a stunning authenticity to Anderson's writing, not only in terms of plot and characters but also in the style and tone of the text. The uncensored dialogue (a note for those easily offended, swearing is rife) is realistic and the novel is well grounded in both time and place.

Definitely one of my favourite crime reads for the year. Compelling, confrontational and thought provoking *The Robbers* is a gripping and entertaining crime drama.

# Q & A with *The Robbers* author Paul Anderson

Paul Anderson is a familiar face to many in the job; he has covered crime in Melbourne for nearly 20 years. He spent 14 years as a police reporter with the *Herald Sun* before becoming the newspaper's chief court reporter in 2009. He has won multiple awards for his work and is the author of five true crime books. *The Robbers* is his first fictional novel.

## What inspired you to write this book?

I have written five true crime books, with a sixth coming out in January, and as you can imagine there are serious legal considerations in respect to contempt of court and defamation when you're writing non-fiction. When you're writing fiction you can let the reins loose and let the creativity flow without the legal hassles. The Homicide Squad had already been depicted in film, TV dramas and books but the Armed Robbery Squad was an untapped resource when it came to its history, camaraderie and colourful characters. This book is fiction but it does have a realistic edge to it. And, as the dedication inside suggests, it's a homage to the former Armed Robbery Squad.

## How closely does the book reflect real life? Are the characters in the book based on real police/criminal identities?

I wanted this book to be recognised for its gritty realism and realistic-sounding characters and situations. That's what gives this book an edge over other crime fiction. The cop characters talk and act like actual cops. The codes and call signs are real. The philosophies of the times are real. The crooks talk and spit like real crooks and the politicians and bureaucrats sound like real G-men.

Having written crime for the Herald Sun for seventeen years and having knocked around with Police Officers and a few criminals during that time I'm confident the characters in *The Robbers* have very realistic and

believable voices. While *The Robbers* plot might be inspired by one or two true events, all of the novel's characters are fictitious. I have relied on my observations and experiences in my job as a crime journalist to make every character as real as possible.

## In the book Malone, the journalist, forms a very personal and close relationship with the members in the Armed Robbery Squad; was this type of relationship common for the times and does it exist with journalists and police members nowadays?

The relationship between Malone and the Robbers is very much of an older era. In the old days journos were openly fraternizing with Police Officers. There was a lot of social interaction going on because, in those days, the journalists were being sponsored by other journalists. You were coming in with a good word, which meant that you were trustworthy – it was a symbiotic relationship and we all understood that. Nowadays this type of relationship doesn't exist.

## Who was your favourite character in the book?

Shane Kelso, he was part of the core group of characters in the book that drove the whole thing. These characters [the Robbers] were really 'anti-heroes', and they were the most fun to write [about] because they didn't always have to follow the rules. You can't help but like these guys.

## Were any interesting or perhaps unfavourable chapters edited out of the book?

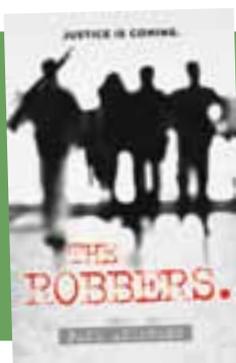
I actually lost the last chapter, which is how I wanted to end the book. But my senior editor decided we didn't need it and that everything that needed to be said had appeared by the end of my second last chapter. That being said, the book still ends with a sting in its tail.

## What process did you use to write the book?

The book actually started out as a script for a fictitious 13-part TV mini-series about the former Armed Robbery Squad. My script was a great blueprint for the novel because I had all the characters' voices and their backstories on paper before I began the book. I developed the book off the existing script.

## What's your next project? Are you working on anything new?

If *The Robbers* sells well enough I'll go ahead with a sequel. In the meantime I'll keep kicking out my true crime books, which contain chapters about high profile cases that have gone through the courts.



## *The Robbers*

by Paul Anderson  
(Hardie Grant)

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