



JOHN  
DALE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *HUCKSTEPP*

DETECTIVE  
WORK

WHO KILLED RENEE SUMMERS?

JOHN DALE

DETECTIVE  
WORK

 **b** booktopia  
book club

# 1

Nights when he could not sleep he rolled his body away from hers, slipped on a pair of shorts and T-shirt in the dark, took his keys from the hall table, clicked the door shut behind him, went down the steps and got into his car. He started the engine and eased out of the parking bay onto the road. A cloud of bats glided above the fig trees and the moon hung low in the sky. Nights when he could not sleep, and there were plenty of them, he took the same route heading east down Cleveland through Surry Hills across South Dowling and up past Centennial Park, dark and quiet behind the gates. He turned into Ocean Street and accelerated under the cover of the plane trees, feeling the rhythm of the road through the wheel.

He crossed into Double Bay with the wind blowing at his tail lights, eyes fixed on a lycra-clad jogger, checking out the man's sweating face. Not that he expected to find him here; it was just a habit he'd acquired. He came out at New South Head Road and turned into Point Piper, big white houses hidden behind ornate gates and sculpted bushes. Driving slowly now, picking out the cry of a powerful owl, the squeal of a ringtail possum. He turned back onto

New South Head Road and saw the blue and red lights flash ahead. A cop stood by the side of the road, wanding him over. She approached his car wearing a load-bearing vest, wisps of blonde hair poking out of her cap, tanned skin, silver locket visible as she leaned in with her hand-held device.

‘Evening, sir.’ He produced his warrant card and she stepped back. Took a long hard look at him as if she might need to identify him at a later date. ‘Have a good night, Detective.’

There was not much of it left, but he continued on through Vaucuse and Watsons Bay, counting the CCTV cameras, glimpsing a young woman standing with an older man at a balcony door. Driving through the dead of night, listening to noises, staring at sallow faces in the street. He’d long imagined what he’d say when he tracked him down; the shock of recognition, the extended hand, oh my God, disbelief and denial then acceptance, regrets too, things he would change if he could start over, no hard feelings, son, an invitation to catch up tomorrow or next week at a little sports bar he knew in the money end of town, his face lined by the sun, sinewy arms from all that sailing, blurry tattoo on his forearm, thinning hair swept back, dominant nose. ‘You’ll know him when you see him,’ his mother always said. ‘Look for the scar on his neck.’ Countless times he’d rehearsed what to say and do, meeting the firmness of the grip, eyes locked, let him do the talking, give him nothing, keep him on the hook, reel him in. He didn’t know how long he would have to

## DETECTIVE WORK

wait, but first chance he got, he was going to kill him.

Tiredness washed over him and he fought against it, sucking in air, forcing his eyelids open, gripping the wheel. All he needed was to steer the car home; like a loyal dog the Land Rover knew its familiar route. He passed a truck, two men clinging to its sides, the stench of garbage jolting him awake. Light filtered between the fig trees as he pulled into the block and waited for the security gate to rise. She'd bought their apartment off the plan, a converted biscuit factory in a changing suburb, persuaded him to chip in for the deposit; it was handy for her work, but the modern ceilings were too low for his liking. Instinctively, he ducked his head as he entered the bedroom, pulled off his shorts and T-shirt and slid beneath the sheets. The heat of her body welcomed him. She rolled over and cupped him firmly in her hand.

'You all right, D?' she asked, but he was asleep before he could answer.



By day Dimitri Telegonus was just another cop in a 16,000-strong para-military force. His job was to enforce the law, to maintain public order. If people got out of hand he could cuff them, arrest them, even shoot them; there were plenty of options. 'Apart from the elderly and the disabled, most people you'll meet in this job won't like you,' his instructor at the academy had told him. 'So you'll need to construct a narrative.' He liked that word *narrative*. Since he'd graduated from the detective's

component of his training he'd come to understand what his instructor meant. Being a cop in Sydney meant you did things you mightn't like but you always had a story to back it up. When you busted a teenager for marijuana possession you told yourself you were stopping drugs; when you booked some old digger for drink-driving you said you were saving lives. Dealing with the mentally ill, with gunmen of Middle Eastern appearance, with roid-raging drunks and meth addicts tweaked out of their brains, confronting the flotsam and jetsam that washed up each night in the holding cells, you told yourself that you were making a difference. You told yourself a story.

So far the job hadn't lived up to expectations, but things were about to change. Being picked for this elite unit meant they'd recognised his work. That was the narrative he was constructing. All he needed was an opportunity to demonstrate his investigative abilities.



It was fair to say that sections of the NSW Police Force had a poor reputation in the western suburbs. That was why the bosses had set up the Serious Unsolved Crime Unit in a converted soup factory in Bankstown. The lab was even further out west in Pemulwuy. Detective Superintendent Clennett headed the unit whose sixteen members included three scientists and eight detectives. A former VFL ruckman from Coburg Football Club, Mick Clennett wasn't a teetotaller like the Commissioner or full of bullshit and bluster like a lot of the bosses.

## DETECTIVE WORK

‘We’re concentrating on unsolved cases between 1987 and 2014,’ he was saying. ‘Rapes and homicides are our priorities. If there’s been a sexual assault connected to a murder, there’s more than likely to be DNA evidence. I’m assigning each of you a new partner ...’

Telegonus hoped he would draw one of the female detectives, Cindy ‘Legs’ Parker or Huyen Hac Tran. They had better hygiene. His last partner had a habit of cleaning his fingernails in the patrol car and wiping the gunk on the mat. ‘Do that at home, fella,’ he’d said once, and the guy replied, ‘Gotta problem with cleanliness?’

While Clennett read out the names, Chief Inspector Burrows stood by his side, peeling the skin of an apple into one continuous strip with his Swiss Army Knife. It was a habit he’d acquired since giving up his thirty-five Longbeach a day.

‘Telegonus and Ryan ...’ Clennett called.

Telegonus looked over at Detective Senior Constable Ryan and tried not to show his disappointment. Gale Ryan was in his mid-fifties with a gleaming bald head, eyebrows that didn’t match and a huge cleft nose that reminded him of that French actor he’d seen on World Movies. But Ryan’s looks weren’t the problem. He had worked Major Crime South West at a time when the Commanding Officer – and one of the state’s better-known senior detectives – was found guilty of seventeen counts of corruption.

Ryan lumbered over to him. ‘You the Greek kid, right?’

‘Part Greek.’

‘Growing up, all the Greek kids I knew had fish and chip shops.’ He stuck out a hand. ‘Gale Ryan. Boys call me Rhino.’

Telegonus looked at his new partner.

‘So what do I call you?’ Ryan asked.

‘Dimitri Telegonus.’

‘You want my advice, Dimitri?’ He tapped the side of his nose. ‘Watch, listen and learn.’

He remembered that film now – *The Return of Martin Guerre* starring Gérard Depardieu and Nathalie Baye. He turned back to the briefing session. Mick Clennett had a slow and precise way of talking. He used words like ‘notoriety’ and ‘criminality’. He used abstract nouns. Part of Telegonus suspected that he’d been selected for this squad for his ethnicity. Huyen Hac Tran had told him you had to have at least one wog and one Asian on every Task Force to meet new diversity targets. She’d know.

‘We’ve analysed 1249 samples from 964 cold cases,’ Clennett said. ‘Seven hundred and fifty-two DNA samples have been extracted and loaded onto the national DNA database. Task Force Arcadia is open for business.’

‘Arcadia,’ Telegonus whispered to his new partner. ‘That’s a Greek word.’

‘Look, son,’ Ryan said, shaking his head. ‘The bosses just make up these Task Force names. They don’t mean nothin’. Sound good on the six o’clock news.’

‘You think so?’

‘Know so.’



## DETECTIVE WORK

Clennett shook hands with Burrows who'd finished peeling his apple. Burrows ran the squad on a day-to-day basis. It was rumoured that they loathed each other, but if so, they didn't show it. Chief Superintendent Mick Clennett was a 194 cm lapsed Catholic with plastic hips and an artificial knee; Burrows was a short, Northern Irish proddie with a voice like tyres on gravel. If there was a cop you didn't want to piss off in SUCU, it was Hughie Burrows. Clennett packed up his Powerpoint presentation and when he'd left the briefing room, Burrows turned to his investigators.

'Questions?'

'Yes, what's a *heinous* crime?'

'It's like a brutal murder.'

'What other murders you got, boss?'

Burrows handed out cardboard cartons and thick manila files tied in pink ribbon. They resembled lawyers' briefs and contained running sheets and witness statements going back years.

'Ryan and Telegonus. You're on the Summers case.'

'Why does Rhino always draw the good-looking sorts?' someone asked.

'You like blondes, Telegonus?' Burrows said.

'Sorry, sir?'

'I said, do you like blondes?'

'Yes sir.'

'Well get out there and find the grub who did this. I'll be checking up on all of you. We're a brand new unit. Let's do good work.'



Telegonus and Ryan found their allotted cubicle: two desks back to back in a glass-walled office. Ryan grabbed the larger desk with the computer and phone, leaving Telegonus the smaller chipped desk with a wilted flamingo flower. He moved the pot plant to one side and examined the accordion-style case folder. It took him a minute to cut through the Scotch tape and knotted string. He pulled out a fat manila folder discoloured at the corners, and read the typewritten cover:

**RENEE SUMMERS - UPDATED**

Name: Renee Summers

Place last seen: Sydney, Australia

Date of Birth: Jan 15, 1973 - 21 years old at time of disappearance

Description: White Caucasian Female

5' 5" (165 cm) tall

118 lbs (54 kgs)

Blonde hair

Blue eyes

Last seen wearing blue-grey knee length skirt, blue T-shirt and a silver necklace.

‘You mind?’ Ryan said.

Telegonus looked up, saw Ryan holding the phone to his ear.

‘Private call.’

He wanted to say ‘do it in your own time’ but instead took the folder down to the detectives’ kitchen. Bar

## DETECTIVE WORK

fridge, microwave, uncomfortable metal chairs, Kmart cups, dirty plastic containers and a handful of chopsticks floating in the sink. He sat at the table and began reading.

**Circumstances of Disappearance:** Last seen by 'an acquaintance' who said he dropped her off at the Four Kings Hotel in Sydney at approximately 19:00 on Saturday 10 December 1994. Due to meet her mother at Wollongong station at midday on 11 December 1994, before leaving for London. She never caught her train and failed to arrive. Due to meet her best friend on Saturday evening 10 December 1994 but failed to keep this appointment too. Later that evening she was to meet her boyfriend, a film director, but failed to keep this appointment as well. Her girlfriend last spoke to her by phone at 19:15. The 'acquaintance' told Police she was driven from premises to the Four Kings Hotel 'around 19:00'. No-one from the Hotel saw her enter. Her boyfriend reported her as missing the following day. SUMMERS' bag, shoes, make-up, passport, plane ticket and keys to her flat were found scattered around the suburb. Subsequent checks have found no witnesses seeing her enter the Four Kings. She was also working as an escort to earn quick money. It was later revealed that SUMMERS had gone to a private residence to visit a client. The client denied he was involved in SUMMERS' disappearance,

telling Police he had dropped her at a nearby pub and then gone home, watched television and fallen asleep. SUMMERS was saving to travel to England and Europe. Shortly before her disappearance, she had sold one of her stories to a magazine. Foul play is suspected.

The statement was signed Detective Sergeant Rex Hazzard of the South Region Major Crime Squad.

Telegonus read through the interviews until he got a handle on the details. It sounded simple enough. Renee Summers was smart and attractive and had been working on the side as an escort to save for a trip to London. She had a two-hour booking with a client from 4 to 6 pm on the day she disappeared, but the client said he dropped her off at 7 pm. So what happened between six and seven?

Ryan came into the kitchen, opened the bar fridge, shut it quickly before the smell escaped.

‘This client’s name,’ Telegonus said. ‘Gregory Samsa. Sound odd to you?’

‘Is it Greek?’

‘Kafka,’ he said. ‘*Metamorphosis*.’

‘Another Greek word, eh?’

‘Means transformation. It’s a story. Guy turns into an insect.’

‘You read books, Detective?’

‘Why?’

‘Rule number one. Detectives don’t read fiction.’

‘Not even detective fiction?’

‘Nope. You ever worked Homicide before?’

DETECTIVE WORK

'No.'

'Serious crime?'

'Not until now.'

'Well, when you do this shit, you gotta do a lot of things right. You have to be a first-rate interrogator, you have to be articulate in court, you need to gather evidence, all the forensic stuff. You gotta work the street. You gotta work the phone. It takes time and patience to be a good detective. There's set rules. You can't learn them sitting in an office comparing the name of a suspect to some character in a book. Muster up, son, we're going for a drive.'

'Don't you want to read her file first?'

'No need,' Ryan said. 'I know the case.'

'You do?'

'Sure,' he said. 'I worked it.'

## 2

**T**elegonus followed his partner out to the parking lot. Their Commodore had been sitting in the sun all morning and smelled of sweat, Chinese takeaway and cooked plastic. He knew about the toxins detectives encountered every day, the high incidence of pancreatic cancer in the force. His mother had a phobia about plastic. The proliferation of invasive cancers was connected to the polymers and plastics in our food containers and drink bottles, she said. Modern life was killing us. He didn't want to think about his mother. He needed to focus on the case. The photo of Renee Summers showed a sultry young woman, high forehead, deep blue eyes, lightly freckled nose, full lips, honey-blond hair. She was seven years younger than he was now; but if she were alive she'd be fourteen years older. That took some thinking. Frozen in time. If he could discover a piece of evidence the original investigators had overlooked, then he was doing real police work. This was why he'd joined up. Not to bust drink drivers and pot smokers. He'd joined to make a difference.

Ryan pulled into a side street, parked opposite a nondescript red-brick semi. He got out and started jotting

## DETECTIVE WORK

down details from the auction sign out front. When he got back in, he said, 'Three beds, north facing, car access. Wonder what they're asking?'

Telegonus stared at him.

'You own your own place?' Ryan asked.

He said that he and his partner had bought an apartment.

'Partner, eh? Nice word. How much you pay for it?'

'Shouldn't we be discussing the murder?'

'Who said she was murdered?'

'Vanished in 1994 without a trace.'

'No, Detective,' Ryan said. 'There were traces.'

They drove south along Anzac Parade past nail salons, noodle houses and dumpling bars. At a bus stop an overweight woman pushing a twin pram and wearing a tiny floral skirt that revealed her dimpled thighs caught him staring and waved. 'She likes you,' Ryan said. 'Have you ever noticed how many babies these days are Asian? Must be a fashion thing. Everyone's having Asian babies.' They turned down a side street and parked near a brick bungalow with barred windows and a large untidy frangipani out front. The lawn was littered with its discoloured petals.

'You know what most detectives die of?' Ryan said.

'Bowel cancer?'

'Car disease. Driving around getting fat and out of shape. Let's take a walk.'

Ryan leaned a hand on the broken brick fence. 'This is it,' he said. 'Gregory Omri Samsa. Lived here with his

fiancée, a Jewish primary school teacher. According to his signed statement, he paid Renee Summers who was not Jewish, nor a primary school teacher, \$500 in cash for a two-hour session. To raise the money he pawned his fiancée's trumpet. The local pawn shop recorded the transaction but no money was found in Summers' possessions. Samsa said Summers waited to make a call and shortly after 7 pm he dropped her outside the Four Kings Hotel. He says he never heard from her again. At 7.15 pm Summers rang a friend, Courtney Gleeson-Turner, to say that she was about to leave her client and suggested that they meet for a drink in the city. She did not keep that appointment. Follow me.'

Telegonus tagged along, watching the older man's suit jacket riding up his back. He didn't know if the rumours about him had any substance but Ryan struck him as a capable if unsophisticated detective.

'Here,' Ryan said, and knelt on the nature strip in the adjoining street. 'This is where a neighbour found her blue T-shirt and one red platform shoe around 11.30 on the Saturday night.' He stood up, brushed dirt from his trousers. 'Over there in the gutter was her shoulder bag and driver's licence. A Chinese couple handed them in to police the next morning after Tai Chi.'

They passed a block of 1960s brick flats and turned down a parallel street. 'Over here,' Ryan said, 'was where a man walking his dog early the next morning found a second shoe, her keys, passport and airline ticket.'

Something glinted in the grass. Telegonus bent down



## DETECTIVE WORK

and picked up a tarnished piece of metal, part of an old house number. He flicked it into the bushes. What evidence could you hope to find after all these years?

‘Thoughts, Detective?’ Ryan pulled out a cigarette, ignoring the gangrenous oesophagus on the packet.

Telegonus waited for him to palm the pack away. ‘The shoes are a worry,’ he said.

‘Why’s that?’

‘Scattering her personal stuff across two streets. Why do that unless it’s intended as a message?’

‘Who for?’ Ryan said.

‘People in the industry, other escorts, I don’t know. If it was Samsa who killed her, why not dispose of her shoes and belongings discreetly along with her body? Why chuck everything that identifies her so close to where he lived?’

‘It fits his bullshit story that he dropped her at the Four Kings and some psychopath grabbed her off the street.’

‘Okay, so why not dump her stuff in another suburb then, out near the airport, put some kilometres between her things and his house?’

‘Go on,’ Ryan said.

‘Whoever killed her it was personal. Throwing her things out a car window, especially throwing her shoes, that’s fury. That says “I want rid of you, bitch”.’

Ryan looked at him, his face blank.

‘That’s what the shoes are saying.’

‘Two days after she disappeared,’ Ryan said, ‘detectives interviewed Samsa at Maroubra Station. There were

scratches on his chest and neck consistent with fingernail-type marks. And what looked like a bite mark on his left middle finger. He claimed to have got the injuries surfing.'

'So you're sure he did it?'

Ryan stamped his cigarette out on the road. They walked back to the car, Ryan taking up most of the footpath, forcing him onto the nature strip. Telegonus looked around at the small blocks built on shallow sandy soil with ugly black power lines slung overhead. They stopped outside Samsa's brick bungalow again with its barred windows. He picked up a white frangipani flower from the grass and smelled its yellow heart. They didn't have frangipanis where he came from. Nothing was more emblematic of this subtropical city than this small white flower with its waxy petals and soft fragrance. It surprised him the locals didn't revere it the way the Torres Strait Islanders did.

Next door, a woman wearing a faded pink housecoat was sweeping the flowers from her driveway with a dustpan and broom. Bent over and muttering to herself, she was thin and bony with whiskers on her cheeks like a cat.

'You two are coppers?' She straightened as best she could and shook a pan full of petals into a green-lidded bin. 'He done it. But you haven't got him yet.'

'Have you seen Mr Samsa recently?' Ryan asked.

'Moved interstate years ago. Got away with murder. Too smart for you lot.'

DETECTIVE WORK

Ryan nodded.

'I was lucky—'

'How's that Mrs ... Ridley?'

'You got a good memory. I remember you. He used to get drunk in there and smash things. He was violent, called me some awful names.'

'Do you know where Mr Samsa lives now?' Ryan said.

'Never seen him since. That house is bad luck, no-one stays there long. Sometimes I think that pretty little thing is buried under them floorboards. Sergeant Hazzard told me he found bones in there. Give my regards to Mr Hazzard. He was a real policeman. Not like the rubbish you get today.'

Telegonus didn't know if she was referring to him or to the general decline in standards. He got back in the unmarked Commodore and watched Mrs Ridley sweep her bare concrete yard until it was free of any flower or leaf matter. She kept looking behind her as if she sensed someone watching.

'She remembers you,' he said.

'Never seen her before.' Ryan rested an arm out the window.

'But you knew her name?'

'I read the file, Detective.'

'You said you worked the case.'

'The bosses assigned me around the time of the inquest to help with the running sheet enquiries. There were problems with the initial investigation—'

'What problems?'

‘Enquiries weren’t followed up.’

‘Why not?’

‘It wasn’t a priority case. She had no champion. Do you think anyone gave a shit about some prostitute besides her family? She hung round with low lifes and one of those low lifes killed her. That’s why it’s a cold case.’

‘But she was only twenty-one.’

‘Her disappearance wasn’t a priority. Sure, the bosses on the fourteenth floor made some noises for the media, but they didn’t care, not until the Coroner started asking questions. There was some sloppy police work. I was new to the department. Thought I knew everything about being a detective. But like you I knew nothin’—’

‘Thanks.’

‘Tried to follow up the leads myself and soon realised that certain crimes in this town don’t get solved.’ Ryan paused, scratched his scalp.

Telegonus noticed the scurf lining the collar of his jacket. Ryan had dandruff even though he had no hair. How was that possible?

‘All this talking,’ Ryan said. ‘I need a drink.’ He drove north towards the Parade, double-parked on a busy intersection. Telegonus watched the lumpy-bodied, bald-headed detective disappear into the 7-Eleven. He felt his mobile vibrate in his pocket, took it out and saw the name.

‘Dimitri, darling!’

‘I told you not to ring me at work.’

‘Ask me how I am.’

‘How are you?’

DETECTIVE WORK

‘Not good, darling, not good.’

‘Look, I can’t talk right now, I’m on a stake-out.’

‘They confiscated my plants.’

‘Have you rung Mr Todd?’

‘He wants you to ring them, Dimitri, see what you can do. They’ll listen to you, a big city detective. I’ve used up my three cautions. Promise me you’ll ring them today.’

‘I’ll see.’

‘How can something that grows in the ground be illegal?’

‘Mum, I gotta go.’ In the mirror he saw Ryan striding towards the car. He hung up quickly, slipped the phone into his jacket pocket.

‘Trouble, Detective?’ Ryan was sipping at a can of Diet Coke through a straw, making a slurping sound.

‘Family problem.’

Ryan tossed the drained can onto the floor in the back and slid behind the wheel. ‘Now there’s a tautology.’



It was a two-minute drive to the Four Kings Hotel. Telegonus had expected the place to be abandoned, overgrown with weeds and a For Sale sign nailed to the fence outside. But this was Sydney and any pub that advertised topless barmaids on Tuesdays and Thursdays would never die. According to the file, Samsa told police that he dropped Renee Summers at the titty bar between 7 and 7.15 pm, then went inside and bought three bottles

of Strongbow white cider, a bottle of Smirnoff vodka and a pack of Camel cigarettes. There was no sighting of Summers in the vicinity despite police canvassing nearby shops and flats. Nor did the bottle shop have a record of a matching sale. But the detail that stood out was the bar manager's reply when shown a photograph of Renee Summers. 'Take a look around, pal,' he'd told police. 'If a pretty young face like that walked in here, this joint would stop.'

Nothing much had changed at the Four Kings in the past twenty-one years. A faded lunchtime sign advertised a schnitzel special with a beer for only \$6.95. 'Not bad,' Ryan said. The public bar had all the allure of a locked dementia ward; the noise of spinning poker machines competed with two well-groomed women with plenty of teeth arguing on Sky News. Ryan flashed his warrant card at the elderly barmaid and fired a series of questions that brought forth a series of shrugs. None of the customers looked up from their glasses. The light was so dim you couldn't read the brewers' names on the taps and there was the pervading perfume of toilet deodoriser. Not only had the Four Kings had a dozen managers since 1994, the barmaid said, but there had been hundreds of bar staff working here. Only the customers remained constant.

'That was a waste of time,' Telegonus said out on the footpath.

'Most police work is. Ninety-nine per cent boredom and five per cent action.'

'That's 104 per cent.'

## DETECTIVE WORK

‘Good work, Detective.’ Ryan patted his shoulder. ‘When I re-visit a crime scene, I like to walk the streets, get a feel for the neighbourhood. Samsa drank here, Samsa lied about dropping her off here and he lied about visiting the bottle shop.’

‘So we need to question him?’

‘We need something to hang on him first.’ Ryan checked his watch, a Tag Heuer chronograph. ‘Drop me in Newtown, I gotta be somewhere else. Find out where this insect is hiding. We’ll talk tomorrow.’

He dropped Gale Ryan outside Newtown Police Station, watched him climb into a black BMW 3 series and then drove back to the Unsolved Crime Unit. On the radio a man was arrested for decapitating his much-loved father in Bankstown. Just another day in a changing city. He spent the rest of the afternoon studying the Summers file at his desk. There was something missing, something that didn’t feel right about the original investigation. Had Ryan neglected to tell him some key detail? According to the file, Samsa was the main person of interest. Certainly he had the opportunity, but what was the motive?

At 7.15 pm Renee rang her closest friend, Courtney Gleeson-Turner, from Samsa’s house to say that she was finishing with a client and she would call her back in about an hour. But Samsa said he dropped her off at 7 pm. Gleeson-Turner told police that Ms Summers did not sound stressed or upset, but could not talk freely. ‘Where are you?’ I said. ‘I’m with a client,’ she replied. ‘What are you doing?’ I said. ‘I’m just sitting here,’ she said. ‘Is he

sitting there with you?' I asked. She said, 'Yes.'

If Samsa killed her shortly after this call then he must have done it in his own house. Maybe they argued about payment for the extra hour. He didn't have the money, only enough for the 4–6 pm booking. He'd pawned his girlfriend's trumpet. Summers demanded he pay the extra hundred. They argued, he struck her, she fought back; he killed her. Possible. Then what? He carries her body out to his car, rolls her up in the boot, drives around the block and scatters her shoes, cosmetics and keys. Why? Because he's in a rage, a blind, murderous fury. He's consumed eight twist tops, a line of coke and half a bottle of French champagne that he paid for with his girlfriend's trumpet money. He is incapable of thinking rationally, but he still manages to drive out to Botany Bay where he buries Renee's body so successfully in the sand dunes that she's never found again. No, too many holes.

He closed the file and rested the sole of his shoe on the open drawer of the desk. Alternatively, Samsa drops Renee near the Four Kings Hotel and she's snatched by two henchmen working for an unnamed crime figure. They drive around the suburb hurling her stuff out the window to implicate the client and then dispose of her body in an unknown location as a warning to other working girls not to moonlight. That was even more ludicrous.

Why not rough her up if they wanted to send a message? Killing her served no purpose other than to draw unwelcome attention to an unregulated



industry. There was one other possibility. Renee was murdered by a former client who followed her from Samsa's house, abducted her somehow, then scattered her belongings around the streets to implicate Samsa. At the inquest, Samsa's high-powered Senior Counsel tried to divert attention from the main suspect by producing a statement from a resident living opposite to where one of the platform shoes was found. On the night in question the woman heard the screech of brakes, ethnic male voices and a young woman's short, sharp high-pitched scream. Peering out her bedroom window, the woman saw a dark green or dark blue sedan, possibly a Commodore.

The trouble with this scenario was the time: one o'clock in the morning – six hours after Renee had rung her friend to say she was leaving and would meet her for a drink. The more he examined these possibilities, the more he thought Ryan might be right. Renee Summers did not leave her client's house alive.

A knock on the cubicle startled him and he swung his leg onto the floor.

Huyen Hac Tran opened the door. 'We got a hit,' she said. 'Those two rapes Maddo and I were working from '09. Jimmy Elder, doing eight and a half for sexually assaulting three private schoolgirls on the North Shore. We got a DNA match from the database for two more rapes he committed in the Shire six years ago. Not bad for a day's work.'

'Congratulations,' he said. 'Runs on the board.'

Huyen, or Helen as she liked to be called, was wearing a navy skirt and white blouse with indigo piping. She looked so clean and fresh the older detectives had nicknamed her 'The Weathergirl'. She glanced at the other desk. 'Where's Ryan?'

'Had some personal stuff to attend to.'

'None of my business,' she said quietly, 'but I hear he's a slacker.'

'No, he's solid. Had to take his sick kid to the doctor.'

'Yeah, which kid?'

'I dunno how many kids he's got.'

'I thought he was single. Divorcee.'

'You sure?'

'That's what he told me at the Courthouse when he tried to pick me up.' She smiled. 'You want to grab a bite? Celebrate our first win.'

'Can't tonight.'

'How's Olivia?'

'She's fine. How's Derek?'

'Derek's Derek,' she said. 'Derek's always Derek.'

'Well done today. I mean it.' He wished he'd been partnered with her instead of Ryan. Ever since he'd worked with Tran on general duties he knew she was going places: she spoke Vietnamese and Mandarin, she was completing her Masters in Criminology, she played golf off a handicap of eight or nine. She was one hot cop. No wonder the older, grizzled detectives in the Unit disliked her. Detective Constable Tran closed the door and he listened to her footsteps echo down the hall. For

a tiny Asian–Australian she had a loud, determined step.

He sat at Ryan's computer and opened the COPS database using the new legal software the IT guys had hastily installed after the department was sued for IP infringement. The old pirated software worked much better. It never ceased to astonish him the wealth of highly confidential information that the system – the largest intelligence database in the country – held on every law-abiding citizen in New South Wales. Not to mention criminals. Every time he entered particulars into COPS he was tempted to run his own illicit search. If he got caught, he'd be dismissed.

Since the disappearance of Renee Summers and the Coroner's open finding, Samsa had lived in three different States, doing menial work in country towns. Drifting about. Now he had relocated again. Telegonus stared at the current address on the screen. He looked away. Surely Ryan couldn't have altered the data? He stared at the address again. It's what his mother in her Jungian therapist days might have called a meaningful coincidence, but he didn't believe in coincidence, meaningful or otherwise. Things happened in this world for a reason. Gregory Samsa was living on the island. Not only that but he was employed as a kitchen hand approximately thirty kilometres from his mother's farm. Until today there was no connection. Suddenly there were too many connections. He leapt out of the chair, strode down the hall and knocked on Burrows' door. The Chief Inspector was typing laboriously with two fingers on a mini keyboard. He waited the obligatory

few moments before he interrupted.

“Scuse me, sir. Why was I allocated the Summers case?”

Burrows looked up, trying to suppress his irritation. ‘Problem, Detective?’

‘No sir. Just a query.’

‘Are you and Ryan making progress?’

There was nothing personal in Burrows’ office, nothing on the shelves or walls for a detective to start a conversation with, apart from an encyclopaedia on tropical fish and a signed Duncan Fearnley cricket bat: *Best Wishes to H.B. from A.B.*

‘The suspect’s former house is the focus of our re-investigation, sir. We’d like to conduct a new forensic search of the premises.’

‘Ryan agrees with you?’

‘Yes sir. Full agreement.’

‘Go ahead, Detective. And see if you can get a result with this one.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ He turned and walked back to his cubicle trying to imitate under his breath the way Belfast people pronounced their Rs. Neither Burrows nor Clennett would have known where he lived before he joined the force. Nor cared for that matter. He tried not to believe in conspiracies. The truth was always simpler. Who had the time to conspire these days? No, they had simply partnered him with Ryan because of his inexperience. But Samsa was living within a half hour’s drive of his mother. Most probably she had passed him in the supermarket or parked behind him at the ferry

terminal: there goes the suspect in that unsolved murder case my son is investigating.

How many convicted killers who'd served their time were out there walking the streets? According to the stats, there were 260 homicides committed nationwide last year by 296 offenders. On top of that, there were 557 offenders serving a standard non-parole period life sentence of between ten and twenty years. So a rough calculation meant there were ten times as many convicted murderers on the outside as were currently incarcerated, and that didn't include the 30–40 per cent of others like Gregory Samsa who had, so far, gotten away with it. Compared with the national average of 73.7 per cent, police in the largest State in the country solved only 60.1 per cent of their eighty-nine homicides.

Stick that on a number plate, New South Wales.



He caught the train home, studying his fellow commuters. Some faces you could read like a comic book; others you couldn't penetrate their rubbery masks. The moment he opened the door Olivia called from the kitchen, 'Ring your mother urgently!' She was sitting at the table in her bra and skirt, marking a thesis and drinking a glass of wine. 'Sorry,' she said, 'couldn't wait.' She poured him a glass and he watched it fill a purplish blood red. 'Here's to vampires.'

He sat down, admiring her smooth body, noting a small bruise like a plum on the inside of her arm, while

she scribbled away in the margins.

‘How was your day?’ she said, looking up.

‘I told her, never ring me at the Task Force. So what does she do?’

‘Mr Todd the solicitor wants you to fly down ...’ She passed him a piece of paper with the solicitor’s number on a torn fragment of a student essay: *The Lover Desires the Loved One ...*

‘How was your day?’ he said.

‘You ever notice at work how everyone’s faking it?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘The words, the sentences they use, they’re fake.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like the quiddity of being. The sentience of things passing in and out of existence. Pulsing, visceralising, rinding up like the skin of an orange.’

He laughed and re-filled her glass to the brim.

‘Are you a fake, D?’

‘I’m the biggest fake. At today’s briefing I was convinced one of those old bloodhounds was going to stand up, sniff the air, jab a thumb at me and say what’s that interloper doing here? He’s no detective. You want something to go with that wine?’

‘Food would be nice.’

‘How about I make you a salad?’

‘What about your mother?’

‘I’ll ring her tomorrow. Don’t feel like talking to her now, I’d only be faking it.’

‘You look exhausted,’ she said.

DETECTIVE WORK

'I'm not getting enough sleep. Hell, I'm not getting any sleep.'

First published in 2015 by Brio Books

Copyright © 2022 John Dale

All rights reserved. The author asserts their moral rights in this work throughout the world without waiver. No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher. For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to [editions@booktopia.com.au](mailto:editions@booktopia.com.au).

ISBN 9781922598899 (print)

This exclusive Booktopia Book Club edition is not for resale and has been published under licence in Australia and New Zealand by:

Booktopia Publishing, a division of Booktopia Group Ltd  
Unit E1, 3-29 Birnie Avenue  
Lidcombe, NSW 2141, Australia

Printed and bound in Australia by SOS Print + Media Group



Proudly Printed  
In Australia

[booktopia.com.au](http://booktopia.com.au)



From the bestselling author of *Huckstepp* comes  
a riveting new novel of intrigue and suspense

When Dimitri Telegonus is promoted to the Serious Unsolved Crime Unit to investigate the disappearance of a beautiful blonde escort, he thinks he's finally made the big time. He'd always wanted to do detective work; thought it was his destiny.

But things quickly start to unravel. His assigned partner is an uninterested dinosaur and when progress in the investigation is slow, the bosses threaten to pull the plug.

Desperate to crack his first cold case, Dimitri tracks the prime suspect down – only to find there are forces at play a naïve young detective will never fully understand.

PRAISE FOR THE WORK OF JOHN DALE

'Superb evocation of the underbelly of Sydney'  
*The Sydney Morning Herald*

'A significant, original work that challenges as much as it reveals'  
*The Australian*

'A mightily impressive debut ... Dale's novel is incandescent'  
*Time Out*

'Great energy, dynamic storytelling. Intense entertainment'  
*Kirkus Reviews*

**b** booktopia  
book club

booktopia.com.au

Crime Fiction



9 781922 598899

NOT FOR RESALE