



Bones

by **Gabrielle Lord**; Penguin 1996, 479 pp; \$14.95.

Gabrielle Lord seems to have a thing about violence against children. The plot of *Bones* is based around a hunt for a child serial killer. Her previous novel, *Whipping Boy*, dealt with paedophilia and corruption. Despite her interest in this invariably horrific subject, Lord is never ghoulish or gratuitous.

Bones deals sensitively and believably with aspects of child abuse and its treatment, including repressed memory syndrome and the value of hypnotherapy. Lord writes in a fluid, gripping style and her characters are solid and engaging. *Bones* is a chunky crime novel that is definitely worth getting to gulp down on holidays. ● FW

Dead Man Walking

Directed by **Tim Robbins**; Rated MA; Screenplay adapted by **Tim Robbins** from the book by **Sister Helen Prejean**.

In the last few months I've spent a lot of time watching films about prisoners. The first instalment was *Murder in the First* about a prisoner who was placed in solitary confinement for three years in Alcatraz. Kevin Bacon gives a strong performance but the film is harrowing in a very Hollywood way: all flashy description and no depth. Then came *Captives*. Again the lead actors, Tim Roth and Julia Ormond, are good but the plot strains credibility in parts. Both of these films were scoring a comfortable A minus until I saw *Dead Man Walking*.

Dead Man Walking is an intelligent exploration of the morality of punishment and revenge. The horror of murder is juxtaposed against the sterile brutality of execution as director, Tim Robbins, raises important questions about redemption, love and the role of Christian spiritual guidance.

Robbins has done it the hard way. The film focuses on one death row prisoner who clearly played some part in two unprovoked, vicious murders. We are not given the comfort of doubting his conviction but must instead concen-

trate on thinking about what kind of punishment is fitting. Both lead actors, Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn, give measured, flawless performances perfectly complemented by the original soundtrack. This is the most compelling film I've seen in a long time.

Dead Man Walking deserves instant membership of the great films about (in)justice hall of fame, alongside *Twelve Angry Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *In the Name of the Father*. Believe the hype. ● FW

Police Leadership in Australasia

edited by **Barbara Etter and Mick Palmer**; Federation Press, 1995; \$45.

The launch of this book in February 1996 must have been a marketer's worst nightmare. How do you promote a book about police ethics in the middle of a Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service? What's more it is book about police management, about police professionalism (many of them certainly look good on camera) and about policing beyond the year 2000. Oh dear.

As if the NSW Royal Commission is not showing us enough about how good police management is, it also revealed in passing a bit of corruption among a number of AFP officers. Victorian police have their own corruption problems, involving, at last report, about 100 officers as well as persecution of a whistleblower. Such matters might be kept in mind as one dips into the chapters in the book by the various police chiefs.

The barely more than descriptive chapter on the success of civilian oversight of police in NSW via the Ombudsman raised a chuckle given that the Royal Commission's Interim Report recommends the creation of a new Police Corruption Commission to have ultimate authority over the investigation of all complaints against police.

Bravely the Introduction to the book says it '... is very much focussed on future directions and challenges. It does not dwell on the deficiencies of the past.' As events in NSW are showing, the 'deficiencies of the past' are the

deficiencies of the present and would have remained the deficiencies of the future but for the Royal Commission.

Whatever good material is in the book the problem seems to be the authors are trying to build a house from the roof down. ● PW

Blasphemy

NSW Law Reform Commission Report No. 74, \$10.00.

The first thing that strikes you about this report is how very very seriously the Commission took the whole thing. Why should a crime like blasphemy be taken seriously when it comes to law reform? The report could have said: 'The criminal law has no place dealing with opinions expressed about one specific religion and the state has insufficient interest in the supernatural to justify expanding such a crime to cover any other religions'. See, only 34 words instead of 63 pages with two appendices.

One only need remember that Galileo was accused of blasphemy in 1616 for certain views about life and the universe but while he was let off with a caution he couldn't help himself and in 1632 was fitted up for continuing to espouse his views. It took until the 20th century for the church to decide it had got it wrong and quash the conviction. There is no place for such a crime in this century.

The Commission favours the abolition of the common law crime of blasphemy and as long as it does not re-emerge under any vilification legislation of any sort good riddance to it. I do not think the Almighty will mind. ● PW

***BITS* was compiled by Frith Way and Peter Wilmshurst.**