

Nice Try

by Shane Maloney; Text Publishing, 312pp; \$16.95 softcover.

The third book involving the character Murray Whelan, dealing with activities within and about the ALP in Victoria. The earlier works were *Stiff* and *The Brush-Off*.

In this book Murray is a member of the staff of the Minister for Water Supply and the Arts. It is set in 1990, at the time of the bid, by Melbourne, for the 1996 Olympic games. After a bit of subtle heavying by an old party mate, Murray gets seconded to the (Melbourne Olympic Bid). His mission is to 'neutralise' a black activist at the time of an evaluation visit to Melbourne by three of the IOC kings. The shakers and movers think this activist is going to take the opportunity to extract certain concessions from the government.

There is a link in the plot taking the characters back to a Polish defector at the time of the 1956 Games and this provides a basis for the final heroic scene enabling Murray to save the day. Throw in ongoing tension between Murray and his ex wife, his relationship with his son, a bit of a tease concerning

a doctor he meets during his attempts to give up smoking (she is probably being saved up for the next instalment) and a bit of physical action of the violent and sexual kinds and it's a good read.

This book, and the earlier ones, should be prescribed reading for students in POLITICS101, the apparatchiks, the deals, the tribalism, the way pragmatism rules and more, are all centre stage and around these points Maloney weaves a good yarn. Perhaps a cross between Balzac and Robert G Barrett.

The bit I liked best was the description of the preparation of an urgent Cabinet submission (pp.104-106), referred to by our Murray as 'my little piece of embroidery'. It's not all like that but it all too often is. It explains why Cabinet papers are kept secret.

The inside front cover reveals the author is a recipient of the Order of Lenin. What more could one want: an author with a medal named after a former lawyer who turned to politics. • PW

Lungfish

by Stephen Gray; NTU Press, 1999; 200 pp; \$20; available by order through NTU Press, Fiona McKean on 08 8946 6801, or through Dymocks.

Like Stephen Gray was several years ago, Alex Lungwicz is a young law graduate with a private-school education and 'a very high IQ'. He has moved to Darwin to work as an articled clerk. Alex is resistant to becoming a lawyer. He is resistant to adaptation. At his admission, he refuses to swear an oath on the Bible or affirm by swearing allegiance to the Queen. He is not admitted.

Teeming with the steamy atmosphere of the Darwin legal profession, Lungfish keeps us Darwin lawyers guessing about whether there are snippets of reality in the characters such as Terry Tatham, partner of Tatham and Spry or Magistrate Loxton who 'likes reducing people to tears if he possibly can'. But this is not a book about lawyers, it is about life when you're going against the flow. Lungfish, the winner of the prestigious Jessie Litchfield Award is a stylishly packaged exploration of the experiences of a year in Darwin. • FH

Judicial Whispers

by Caro Fraser; Orion Books, London, 1995.

Judicial Whispers is a well written, engaging tale of ambition, manipulation and secrets set in one of London's prestigious chambers. Leo Davies, a successful barrister, is utterly charming and well respected by colleagues and the judiciary. Leo believes the time has come to apply to take silk and is quite confident that he can muster the support of the judges. However, his unconventional private life and the hint of past scandal must not become public knowledge.

But there are people who have an interest in seeing to it that Leo is not successful and others who just enjoy seeing the smooth Leo squirm. The whispers have started. Enter the beautiful Rachel Dean, a successful solicitor

with her own secret tragic past and Leo seizes on a plan to parade his respectability and quash the rumours. Leo finds himself trapped in his own web and the lovely Rachel a victim yet again.

This is a good story but it does have some gaps that leave you questioning the characters. How did the incompetent Felicity, keep (or even get) her job at a prestigious legal firm? How can a smart young barrister like Anthony be so dim in working out the problem with Rachel? And why is there no apparent dilemma about his sexuality?

The book does give an insight into how legal appointments are made, the manoeuvring and hierarchy. An entertaining read to wile away a rainy Sunday afternoon. • LM

Bits was compiled by Fiona Hussin, Liz Mumford and Peter Wilmshurst.