

# **The Bat: The First Inspector Harry Hole Novel Study Guide**

**The Bat: The First Inspector Harry Hole Novel by Jo  
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# Plot Summary

The Bat, by author Jo Nesbo, follows the story of Detective Harry Hole, who travels from Norway to Sydney, Australia, to help investigate the brutal rape and murder of Inger Holter, a young Norwegian woman. Assisted by Andrew Kensington and other Australian police officers, Harry soon concludes that Inger's death is part of a series of unsolved murders, leading to a number of suspects and shocking developments.

The book opens with Harry Hole's arrival in Sydney to assist the local police with their investigation of a young, Norwegian blonde named Inger Holter. He is met by Andrew Kensington, an Aboriginal detective, who fills him in on the history of Australia's indigenous people as they proceed with the investigation. Early on, Andrew introduces Harry to two friends -- flamboyant cross-dressing clown Otto Rechnagel and Aboriginal boxer Robin Toowoomba -- but at first the two men seem to have no relation to the case. Harry also meets Birgitta Enquist, a beautiful Swedish girl who tends the bar at the restaurant where Inger worked. They begin dating.

Finding a letter Inger wrote to a friend, Harry and Andrew identify her boyfriend, drug dealer Evans White, as their primary suspect. However, his girlfriend insists he was with her at the time of the murder. As the investigation continues, the detectives begin to realize that Inger's death fits a pattern involving the unsolved murders of other young, blonde women. They decide the crimes are the work of a serial killer. They question Inger's landlord, but he has a strong alibi and is quickly eliminated as a suspect. Harry also gets help from a prostitute named Sandra and others who live on the fringe of Sydney's gay and drug culture.

Eventually, Harry begins to realize that Andrew seems to know who the killer is and is trying to lead him to the same conclusion. After Andrew is beaten up and hospitalized, Harry confronts him, saying he believes Otto Rechnagel is the murderer and will be arrested immediately, and he ignores Andrew's insistence that he is wrong. Harry and the other officers attend a performance of Otto's circus, but when they go backstage to arrest him, they find that he has been brutally murdered. When they learn that Andrew has escaped from the hospital, he becomes a suspect, a concept that strengthens when he is found hanging in Otto's apartment, apparently a victim of suicide.

Andrew's death causes Harry, an alcoholic, to begin drinking again, but he continues to investigate and soon learns that Andrew was a heroin addict. He eventually is able to prove that Andrew was murdered and the evidence points to Otto's secret lover, whose identity is known to no one. Evans White again emerges as a suspect and Harry asks Birgitta to help the police entrap him, but the plan goes horribly awry and Birgitta disappears. Harry soon realizes that Toowoomba is the murderer, but by then he has killed Birgitta. Harry tracks the boxer to the Sydney Aquarium, where he shoots him, causing him to fall into a tank and he is devoured by a great white shark. Afterward, Harry gets a rose tattoo as a tribute to Birgitta and finds an escape in skydiving.



# Chapters 1 - 9

## Summary

Bat is a detective novel featuring Norwegian police officer Harry Hole, who is sent to Australia to help investigate a murder. Working with local police, he uncovers a series of related murders and rapes, and eventually sorts through a number of suspects to find the killer.

In Part 1, Chapter 1, entitled Sydney, Norwegian detective Harry Hole arrives in Sydney, Australia to help investigate the murder of a young Norwegian woman. After some confusion regarding his visa, he is met by Andrew Kensington, an Aboriginal detective, and taken to the Crescent Hotel.

In Chapter 2, Gap Park, Harry meets Neil McCormack, who heads the Crime Squad. The murdered girl is Inger Holter, a 23-year-old blonde. She was strangled, raped and dropped down a cliff, but her vagina was cut up so no semen or DNA could be found for evidence. The police want to solve the crime quickly to avoid bad press and possible damage to tourism. Andrew takes Harry to where the body was found. Then, they go to a restaurant where Andrew describes some of the struggles the Aboriginal people go through.

In Chapter 3, A Tasmanian Devil, Harry and Andrew go to see Inger's rented room, where they are met by a vicious dog owned by the landlord, Mr. Robertson. In her room, they find an unfinished letter in Norwegian. Harry translates it and it describes a man named Evans with whom she says she is in love.

In Chapter 4, A Clown, Andrew takes Harry to a circus and introduces him to his friend Otto Reichtnagel, a flamboyant gay cross-dresser who is a clown with a traveling troupe. Otto says he might join them later at the bar where Inger works.

In Chapter 5, A Swede, the Albury turns out to be a gay bar and Andrew explains that since the Australian outback is not tolerant of gays, all of them come to Sydney. Harry meets Birgitta Enquist, a pretty Swedish bartender, who describes her casual friendship with Inger. As they leave, Harry asks her to dinner the next night and she agrees.

Chapter 6, A Bishop, opens the following day as Harry and Andrew view Inger's body and decide she was strangled with the bare hands of someone who had probably done it before. Then they go to the police station to meet with Detective Larry Watkins and the rest of the team. Inger's new boyfriend has been identified as Evans White, who was recently seen in Nimbin, a town known for drug traffic.

In Chapter 7, Lithgow, Officer Yong Sue finds several old murders similar to Inger's and each victim had similar features, including very blonde hair. Harry and Andrew go to Lithgow to look into a rape that might be related, but the victim turns out to be Aboriginal.



In Chapter 8, A Boxer, Andrew takes Harry to watch Andrew's friend Robin Toowoomba, an Aboriginal from Queensland, defeat an opponent in a violent boxing match. Toowoomba is a member of the Jim Chivers Boxing Team and he tells Harry that Andrew used to be on the team but had no discipline and was suspended for being too bloodthirsty. Andrew is considerably older than Toowoomba and met him when he coached a group of disadvantaged kids. Returning to Sydney, Andrew tells Harry that the bat is an Aboriginal symbol of death and recounts the Aboriginal version of the Creation in which a bat unleashes death into the world.

In Chapter 9, A Sea Nettle Jellyfish, Harry has dinner with Birgitta and she tells him about her long-term boyfriend with whom she broke up shortly after they came to Sydney from Sweden together. Harry says he has no long-term relationships, just a few casual ones. He is very attracted to Birgitta.

## Analysis

The book's initial chapters set up the basic plot and introduce the main characters. They also begin to introduce the Aboriginal customs and mythology that will become important to the story.

Harry Hole is depicted as a respected police officer in his native Norway, but a man with some secrets. He makes a point of not consuming alcohol, leading to questions that will be answered in subsequent chapters.

Upon his arrival in Australia, one of Harry's immediate concerns is how to get people to pronounce his Norwegian name. The correct pronunciation is "ho-leh." He assumes it will be pronounced like the English word hole, but he is wrong. He learns that everyone pronounces it like the English word holy, which the author uses as a form of irony since the reader eventually learns that the word holy by no means describes this character.

The reader also meets Andrew in this section and he begins the process of educating Harry about the Aboriginal culture. The Aborigines are an ancient people who are indigenous to Australia. Their spiritual beliefs are primarily rooted in mythology, which becomes a central theme of the book. Some of this is introduced in this section, including the bat as a symbol of death. Andrew also delivers a piece of foreshadowing when he greets Toowoomba and says that he should be locked up.

Other important plot points that are established in these early chapters include the reasons Andrew makes a point of ensuring that Harry meets Otto Rechner and Robin Toowoomba. The side trips that lead to these introductions are puzzling to Harry as well as the reader because they seem to have no connection to the murder investigation, but the author eventually will reveal Andrew's reasoning.



## Discussion Question 1

Briefly describe the Aboriginal version of the Creation as recounted by Andrew in Chapter 8. What significance do you think this might have to the book's plot?

## Discussion Question 2

Andrew introduces Harry to two of his acquaintances in these chapters -- Otto Rechnagel and Robin Toowoomba. Describe each of the characters and analyze their relationship to Andrew as you understand them so far.

## Discussion Question 3

What do the police officers learn from Harry's translation of Inger's letter? How does this lead them in a new direction in the murder investigation?

## Vocabulary

beam (verb), lumbar, scrutinize, conspicuous, initially, articulate, invariably, furrow, aperture, modicum, warily, protrude, oblivion, forensic, lurch, prototype, spectrum, crescendo, periphery, integrate, cohesive, pragmatic, sparse, elucidate, unanimous, makeshift, proffer, motley azure, ineffectual, impromptu, construe, meticulous, comprise, redundant, jaded, libertine



# Chapters 10 - 16

## Summary

In Chapter 10, A Town Called Nimbin, Harry and Andrew arrive in Nimbin, which appears to be the same as it was during the hippie era. They find a drug dealer who tells them where to find Evans White, whom he says is up and coming on the dealer scene.

In Chapter 11, A Dealer, they find Evans at his home and question him. He knows about Inger's death and says they had been involved, but she wanted to get too serious. He says he was in Nimbin with a girlfriend named Angelina Hutchinson when Inger was killed.

In Chapter 12, Quite a Big Spider, they go to Crystal Castle, a café and shop that sells new age products. They meet Margaret Dawson, who is the store, and Evans' mother. She does not know Inger but says Evans does not know many girls and has avoided relationships. Clearly, she is unaware of her son's activities with women and drugs. As they are leaving, Andrew remarks about her blonde hair.

In Chapter 13, Bubbur, Andrew and Harry fly back to Sydney. Andrew, who is in no rush to get home, says he is divorced and his ex-wife lives in Newcastle with their two daughters. They go to the Albury, where Andrew tells Harry and Birgitta the ancient Australian legend of Bubbur and Walla. In the story, a young warrior named Walla fell in love with Moora and they planned to marry after he returned from a traditional hunting expedition. While he was away, Moora was squeezed to death by Bubbur, a huge yellow and brown snake. After some thought, a devastated Walla molds some rubber into balls and tricks Bubbur into biting into one, sealing his jaws. Walla and the other men do the same to the smaller snakes. Now, the Bubbur snake is a rarity in Australia; but, the people's fear of it has made it longer and fatter each year. Andrew ends his story by saying that love is a greater mystery than death and you have to watch out for snakes.

Chapter 14, entitled A Dressing Gown, begins Part 2, called Moora. After they sleep together, Harry tells Birgitta that he is an alcoholic. He was drunk on the job while chasing a suspect and caused a car accident that killed his partner and paralyzed a teenage boy. As he leaves, he knows he is getting too involved with Birgitta.

In Chapter 15, Statistical Significance, Harry learns that Yong Sue has found seven murders and forty rapes that might fit the pattern, and the detectives conclude that there might be a serial killer on the loose. Andrew also says he has spoken again to Inger's landlord, who recognized Evans White's name. In addition, Angelina Hutchinson, the girl Evans said he had been with at the time of Inger's murder, confirmed his story.



In Chapter 16, *A Fish*, Andrew and Harry visit the landlord, Mr. Robertson again. He says Evans visited Inger twice and the second time ended in a loud argument. They also learn that Angelina has visited and argued with Inger.

## Analysis

This section continues to roll out Aboriginal mythology and beliefs that contribute to the reader's understanding of the book's characters and the plot. Much of the Aboriginal spiritual framework revolves around animals. In Chapter 13, Andrew tells the legend of Bubbur and Walla. Bubbur is a rainbow serpent, a symbol that looms large in Aboriginal mythology. Like this example, these snakes are typically very large and associated with death. Andrew's statement that love is a greater mystery than death foreshadows future developments regarding Harry's relationship with Birgitta as well as revelations about a previous relationship that affected his life.

The reader learns more about Harry in this section as he reveals to Birgitta the reason he does not drink. The incident in which his drunk driving led to the death of his partner as well as paralyzing a young man has had a major impact on him and will continue to affect him as the plot progresses and more about the incident comes to light.

The central mystery of Inger's murder continues to evolve in this section as Evans White is identified as a suspect. As is the case with most mysteries, the author includes a few red herrings, such as Andrew's remark about Evans' mother having blonde hair, to throw off both the characters and the reader. It is also significant that Andrew continues to subtly try to direct Harry's attention in particular areas, specifically away from Evans as a suspect even though he seems an obvious choice at this point.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Margaret's description of Evans differ from the impression Andrew and Harry get upon meeting him? Is there evidence to demonstrate which is more accurate?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Andrew tells Harry and Birgitta the legend of Bubbur and Walla? Are there parallels to the book's plot?

## Discussion Question 3

Briefly describe the evidence Harry and the Australian police have gathered at this point. Do you have a suspect in Inger's murder? Explain your reasoning.





## Vocabulary

culminate, referendum, lethargic, somnambulist, indignation, defiant, deficient, parabola, falter, impenetrable, anticlimax, radiant, lethal, dowry, inconsolable, strenuous, mute, teeming, niche, inebriated, demography, collaboration, isolated, escalate, veritable, bemused, paramount, stimuli



# Chapters 17 - 23

## Summary

In Chapter 17, Terra Nullius, Harry is drinking coffee at the Albury when Otto arrives in full drag. They see a TV news report about the country's new Native Title legislation and Otto explains the history of Terra Nullius – a practice in which the English could claim any parcel of land they wanted because the native Aboriginal people were somewhat nomadic and had not formally laid claim to it. Otto then gives Harry three tickets to his upcoming performance and insists that he come.

In Chapter 18, A Pimp, Harry and Andrew go to Darlinghurst Road and speak with a pimp named Teddy Mongabi, who agrees to send one of his girls, Sandra, to speak with them at a nearby club. When she arrives, she recognizes the photo of Evans, saying she has seen him in the area but knows no more. Harry is ecstatic because his instincts tell him they are getting close, but Andrew is skeptical.

Chapter 19, A Pleasant Prostitute, takes place early the next morning. Harry finds Sandra, who has asked around and found a girl who bought acid from Evans the night before Inger was killed, but Sandra says she is a druggie so not a reliable source. Harry is upset when the police drop Evans as a suspect but Andrew says another contact has given him an alibi. Harry meets Birgitta and tells her more of his story. His partner's name was Ronny Stiansen. Harry was badly injured in the accident, including a concussion, and was in the hospital when his boss came in and described the cover-up the police department was planning. They said Stiansen had been driving and Harry was in the back seat in order to prevent bad publicity about Harry's drunk driving. There was nothing he could do. So, to punish himself, he decided not to commit suicide but to quit drinking, work hard, and give up almost all his friends. He thinks he was sent to Sydney as a test of how he performs under pressure and he plans to leave in a few days and leave the rest to the Australian police.

In Chapter 20, Cricket, Harry goes to a dive bar called the Cricket, where he tries to question a group of rough men about whether they know Evans, but a fight breaks out. Harry is being beaten badly when Andrew arrives and joins the fight. In the end, Andrew and a few of the other men are injured and taken to the hospital, after which the bar owner tells Harry the men's boss will be unhappy about this and indicates that it is Evans.

In Chapter 21, A Drunk, Harry visits Andrew in the hospital, then visits one of the men from the bar, who says he is wrong about Evans being involved in the murder. Harry speaks to Yong Sue, who has found records of previous indecent exposure charges against Inger's landlord and learned he was not home the night of the murder. Harry goes to the park where the exposure incidents took place and talks to Joseph, a drunk Aboriginal man who knows Robertson and tells Harry to wait because he will arrive soon.



In Chapter 22, Two Flashers, Joseph begins speaking in a language Harry recognizes as the same one Andrew used when talking to Toowoomba. Robertson, the landlord, arrives and Harry learns he comes to the park every Wednesday to expose himself to gay men and has witnesses who can confirm this.

In Chapter 23, Black Snake, Harry is at the Albury when he runs into Toowoomba, Andrew's boxer friend. Harry tells him about Norway. Toowoomba tells Harry about his poor upbringing as well as Andrew's childhood and boxing career. Toowoomba says Andrew is a bit like a father to him. Toowoomba then tells the story of a black snake who hid in the bushes, pretending to be a friend and protector of the other animals while he gradually killed each of them.

## Analysis

The concept of terra nullius is raised for the first time in Chapter 17 and again brings up the importance of the Aboriginal mindset to the book's plot. The Aboriginal people are indigenous to Australia and their ancestors were there long before the British colonization that began in the late 1700s. In many ways the British government's treatment was similar to what happened to the Native Americans who populated the United States before European settlers arrive. Terra nullius, meaning no man's land or land belonging to no one, was a concept used to forcibly and legally take land from the Aborigines. Because they had no written laws or organized government, the British authorities determined that the land on which they lived did not actually belong to them – and in fact, belonged to no one – so it was legal and acceptable for British colonists to simply take whatever land they wanted. Knowledge of this concept is important to understanding the history of the Aboriginal people, which is critical to understanding characters such as Andrew and Toowoomba.

The reader also gets further insight into Harry's character in this section and learns that he has many reasons for his deep-seated feelings of guilt. Not only was he responsible for the accident that killed his partner and injured another, but his superiors forced him to cover up his role in order to avoid trouble and bad publicity. While many people turn to drugs or alcohol after such a personal crisis, Harry ironically decided to stop drinking, primarily because it is the best way he can think of to punish himself since he was not punished by the law or his employer.

Although it is not yet clear to Harry, Andrew continues to lead him away from Evans White as a suspect in Inger's murder. By the time a new suspect – Inger's landlord – emerges as a possible suspect, Andrew is in the hospital and unable to contribute to the investigation.

Toowoomba's story of the black snake provides symbolism that is central to the story. Like Toowoomba himself, the snake in the legend is in hiding while he gradually avenges himself on those he despises, all the while keeping up appearances as a protector and savior.



## Discussion Question 1

Describe the concept of terra nullius. What is its significance to Aboriginal characters like Toowoomba and Andrew?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Harry learn about Andrew in his discussion with Toowoomba in Chapter 23? How does this affect his opinion of Andrew?

## Discussion Question 3

In what ways has the accident that killed his partner affected Harry? Describe three ways in which it shapes his personality and behavior.

## Vocabulary

tarmac, olfactory, innocuous, prevail, provocative, guise, ascend, despotic, confiscate, refrain, proverbial, perspective, salacious, enticement, symbiosis, affinity, dormant, incipient, melancholy, jovial, instantaneously, altruism, subsequently, gleam, cacophony, impeccable, ostensible, perilous, opine, tome, contrite, redolent



# Chapters 24 - 33

## Summary

In Chapter 24, *The Great White*, Harry and Birgitta visit the Sydney Aquarium. Harry tells her about Andrew's heritage and says he is ashamed of himself. He is not ashamed of his fellow Aboriginals because he is not really one of them. They fall asleep. Harry wakes to find a great white shark staring at him.

In Chapter 25, *Mr. Bean*, Harry goes to the bar and interviews Alex, the manager, who exhibits a testy attitude, but tells Harry that Inger was friendly with Otto. Back at the police station, the officers figure out that the rapes and murders almost always took place in locations where Otto's circus was performing and they decide to attend his performance and arrest him afterward.

In Chapter 26, *Another Patient*, Harry visits Andrew at the hospital and recounts how Andrew has apparently been trying to lead him to Otto through a series of seemingly-coincidental actions. When he says they plan to arrest Otto later that night, Andrew begs him to wait two more days and urges him to look closer, but can say no more before a nurse takes him for a test.

In Chapter 27, *An Execution*, Harry and the other police officers go to the clown show and plan to arrest Otto backstage after it ends. The clowns perform a skit in which Otto plays a queen who is executed by guillotine, but when the blade drops it is apparent that he was actually beheaded, causing Watkins to think Otto had known they were coming. However, after the lights come on, Otto appears with the queen's head under his arm and Watkins is shocked that it was just a ruse.

In Chapter 28, *The Hunter*, the performance ends and Harry and Watkins go backstage but Otto has disappeared. The bathroom in his dressing room is filled with steam from a running shower. Through the steam and bloody water they find Otto's penis jammed in the drain, then the rest of his dismembered body, which has been chopped up by the guillotine. As the chapter ends, an officer named Lebie tells Harry that Andrew has escaped from the hospital.

In Chapter 29, *Birgitta Undresses*, the police officers try to determine what happened to Otto. When McCormack asks how Andrew is doing in the hospital, Lebie says he is not there anymore and McCormack simply thinks he has been discharged and Harry does not correct him. Back at his hotel room, Birgitta undresses in front of Harry. Although they have had sex many times, she has never done this before and Harry thinks she now trusts him.

In Chapter 30, *Genghis Khan*, Harry returns to the hospital to visit one of the men from the fight at the Cricket. He is puzzled about why the man, whom he calls Genghis Khan because of his appearance, is refusing to sue the police department over the injuries



Andrew caused to him because it seems like an obvious move. Harry threatens to report him for assault unless he tells him what is going on.

In Chapter 31, A Fat Lady, Harry tells McCormack that Andrew knew Otto and that he has escaped from the hospital. When Harry and Lebie go to Otto's home, they find Andrew hanging from the ceiling and Lebie notes that there are no signs of external violence. Harry briefly pulls up his pants leg, and he weeps for Andrew.

In Chapter 32, Chatwick, they return to the police station and report Andrew's death to the other officers, and McCormack tells them to keep the matter secret for now.. Lebie and Harry go to Andrew's home, and while Lebie is in another room, Harry checks the medicine cabinet and finds a number of disposable syringes. This confirms what Genghis Khan told him and what he realized when he saw needle marks on Andrew's legs – Andrew had been a junkie who bought heroine from another of the men at the bar. Khan also said he had never seen anyone deal with dope so well and that he had not heard any rumors about Andrew talking to Evens White.

In Chapter 33, A Pathologist, Harry goes back to the theater and learns that a man had been sitting alone in the back of the gallery during Otto's performance and could have had access to the backstage area. Harry shows the lighting engineer a photo and he confirms that the Aboriginal man in the picture is the one who was at the theater. Harry goes to talk with the pathologist, Dr. Engelsohn, who smells of gin and is unhappy that he has been told to rush Andrew's autopsy. He is uncooperative but eventually says that Andrew was full of heroin but died of suffocation from hanging sometime between midnight and 2 a.m. He refuses to adhere to McCormack's order to send the report directly to him rather than going through normal channels. He only agrees after Harry threatens to report his drinking and end his career.

## Analysis

Harry's relationship with Birgitta deepens in this section, culminating in Chapter 29 in which she undresses in front of him for the first time. Although they have had sex many times, she has never openly disrobed in front of him before. So, this marks a significant increase in her trust of him. Harry realizes this and unwittingly takes advantage of it later when he asks her to help with his investigation, an act that is her ultimate undoing.

While several times it appears as though Harry is closing in on Inger's killer, each incident proves to be another dead end. Harry finally realizes that Andrew knows who the killer is and has been trying to subtly lead him to the right person, but he refuses to accept Andrew's insistence that he wait before arresting Otto for the crime. All signs point to Otto as the murderer until he himself is brutally murdered backstage after a performance, at which time the clues begin to clearly point to Andrew, particularly when he appears to have committed suicide in Otto's home.



The author skillfully leaves clues that seem to point to Andrew, such as the theater employee identifying a photo of an Aboriginal man, but does not specifically say that the photo is of Andrew.

There is important foreshadowing in Chapter 24 when Harry and Birgitta visit the aquarium. Chapter 27 brings back a comment Otto made earlier when he predicted that he and Harry would have a sexual encounter, which indirectly occurs when Harry finds his severed penis in the shower drain. The simulated beheading on stage also parallels Otto's impending death.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways has Andrew tried to give Harry clues about who the killer is? What makes Harry finally realize that Andrew has known the murderer's identity all along?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Harry's conversation with the man he calls Genghis Khan in Chapter 30? How does this contribute to the plot?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Harry moved when Birgitta undresses in front of him? What does he think this means for their relationship?

## Vocabulary

ape (verb), antipathy, exterminate, pretext, billow, grapple, interpret, apparition, protrude, undulate, allude, abject, temporal, relevant, lament, convivial, distorted, wager, reverie, innate, fiery, brusquely, exorbitant, emanate, interval, concede, edifying, presage, coagulate, ritualistic, amiss, auspices, prominent



# Chapters 34 - 39

## Summary

Chapter 34, Frogner Lido's Top Board, finds Harry filling McCormack in on everything he knows about the case. McCormack likens the situation to soldiers from New Zealand continually fighting in wars to help others and says there is no point in letting the truth about Andrew come out. Harry agrees to keep it between them and confirms that he is leaving the next day. Afterward, Harry walks through the city and recalls his relationship with a former girlfriend named Kristin, who ended their relationship similarly by saying "What's the point?" He wonders what Andrew had been trying to tell him and why he had done everything he did, then he goes into a bar and sees a drink on the menu called Black Snake. The waiter says it is Jim Beam and Coke, and Harry orders a double Black Snake without any Coke.

In Chapter 35, An Old Enemy Awakes, Harry is very drunk and wandering through the streets when he finds himself on Darlington Road. He runs into Sandra, who has heard about Andrew's death, and he talks her into going to his hotel room with him, where they are having sex when Birgitta appears at the door. Sandra takes her money and leaves, and a furious Birgitta storms out, telling Harry to stay out of her life. The management of the hotel calls because other guests have complained about the noise and the chapter ends with Harry lifting a bottle of whiskey to his mouth.

In Chapter 36, Room Service, two hotel representatives let themselves into his room and tell Harry he must leave because he has broken the rules by bringing a prostitute into the hotel and causing a commotion. Harry says he is leaving today anyway, but then realizes it is 2:15 and he has missed his plane.

Chapter 37, Two Bouncers, begins the section called Bubbur. Harry again recalls his relationship with Kristin, remembering seeing her again some years after she had left him. He goes to a motel called the Springfield Lodge, where the owner, Joe, hesitates because of his disheveled appearance but finally gives him a room. Harry calls Birgitta, who says he should not contact her again. Very drunk, he goes back to Darlington Road and meets Teddy Mongabi, the pimp, who takes him into a bar to help him choose one of his girls. Harry talks incoherently about Sandra wearing a blonde wig that she no longer uses, then insists on getting her phone number. When Teddy refuses, Harry begins to attack him and two bouncers, Ivan and Geoff, take him outside, where he falls down a concrete staircase.

In Chapter 38, A Bloke Called Speedy, a very drunk and injured Harry arrives at his hotel and Joe patches him up but Harry refuses to see a doctor. Later he calls Margaret Dawson and tells him he can help her son, Evans White, if she tells him he killed Inger Holter and she hangs up on him. Alex Tomaros calls Birgitta into his office at the bar and says Harry called for her earlier. He also says he is concerned about the police questioning him earlier and hopes Birgitta will not tell them about an incident in which he





drove Inger home and frightened her, but Birgitta does not know about the incident. She is upset and tells Alex that if Harry calls again, he should ask how she can get hold of him. Meanwhile, Harry is sitting in the Cricket when the man he nicknamed Speedy comes in. Harry subtly points a gun at him and asks about Andrew's heroin-buying habits. He learns that he bought the same amount twice each week. So, it seems strange that he had enough for an overdose because he was scheduled to buy again the day after his death. Harry also wonders why no syringe was found at the scene.

In Chapter 39, The Lucky Country, Harry is hallucinating as he stands in front of a store window filled with televisions. On one TV, he sees uniformed officers at a crime scene, then a photo of an unattractive young blonde girl. He sees Lebie at the scene. The chapter ends with him yelling that he needs to talk to Birgitta, and someone says another girl was raped and strangled.

## Analysis

Harry's life changes dramatically in this section as the shock about Andrew – his death, his addiction to heroin and the fact that it appears he was responsible for a number of murders – drives him back to his old demon, alcohol. Ironically, the bar's menu includes a drink called Black Snake, symbolizing the snake that represents death in Aboriginal legends and has been referenced throughout the book.

The moment he begins drinking again, alcohol takes over his life and it begins to fall apart one piece at a time. He betrays Birgitta with Sandra, causing Birgitta to leave him. He is kicked out of his hotel room. He misses his flight back to Norway, He is beaten up by a couple of bouncers at a club.

At the same time, even though he is in a fog of alcohol most of the time, Harry begins to see the case with a bit more clarity. He has the presence of mind to realize that what he at first thought was a small dog was actually a blonde wig belonging to Sandra, and he realizes that Andrew's drug-buying habits are a key to his death, as he bought with extreme regularity and would not have had enough product to overdose on the day of his death.

In Chapter 34, as in several other places throughout the novel, Harry reminisces about his old girlfriend, Kristin, which provides the reader with further insights into his past and his psyche. As if the story were happening in the present time, the memories are rolled out in chronological order so that the reader, in a sense, experiences the relationship as Harry did, and although we know it ended, we do not learn the last part of the story until much later. In this particular reminiscence, Harry draws a parallel between Kristin ending their relationship by saying, "What's the point?" with the pointlessness of making public what they think is the truth about Andrew – that he killed Inger and the other girls.

The author also continues to throw in red herrings that seem to provide clues about the murder case but eventually prove meaningless, such as the conversation between Alex and birgitta in which he refers to a problem he had with Inger.



## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Harry's alcoholism and how it contributes to the plot. What is the significance of the circumstances that caused him to stop drinking and those that caused him to start again?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Harry interested in Andrew's drug-buying habits? What role does this appear to play in the circumstances surrounding Andrew's death?

## Discussion Question 3

Analyze the story McCormack tells Harry about the soldiers from New Zealand. How does this contribute to the story?

## Vocabulary

kamikaze, protrude, obliterated, illusion, theoretical, conspicuous, perpetrator, inquisitive, superfluous, enigmatic, hedonist, nirvana, cunning, divert, diction, pretext, undaunted, disgorge, gesticulate, apathetic, condescending, ineffectual, prudence, virtue, permeate



# Chapters 40 - 49

## Summary

In Chapter 40, Skydiving, Harry wakes up in a maintenance building in Green Park with Joseph, now sober, who has the keys and stays there sometimes in exchange for helping with the grounds. Both men are somewhat amused by the reversal in their roles, and Harry is even more surprised to learn that Joseph used to be a master skydiver and instructor. Joseph describes skydiving as an addiction and tells the story of the emu, an Australian ostrich, and the legend of how it lost its wings and its ability to fly. Joseph tells how a series of circumstances caused an accident in which a skydiving student broke his leg and accused Joseph of being drunk, leading to a lifetime ban and his current state, and he says since he is from the Crow tribe, he is not meant to live like an emu. After they leave the building, Joseph can't remember whether he turned off the lights or not and goes back to check, leading Harry to have an apparent revelation.

In Chapter 41, A Baroque Sofa, Harry returns to the St. George's Theater and learns that since Otto's grisly murder, crowds have been flocking to see the guillotine show. When the caretaker opens the door to the prop room where Otto was killed, he says, "Togs on," which is a tradition at this theater dating back to the day a tour guide, who was not wearing his glasses, took a group of students into the room and found a famous actor having sex with a woman. The guide is now the lighting engineer and still does not wear glasses or contacts because he says he works better if he sees the stage in a blur. Afterward, Harry goes back to Otto's home with a crowbar.

Chapter 42, A Visitor, finds Harry at the police station, where he presents evidence that Andrew was probably murdered. This includes the fact that the lights were off when Harry and Lebie entered and Andrew's time of death would have meant he would have entered the apartment and hung himself in complete darkness, the fact that no fingerprints were found on the cord, and other things. Harry and the other officers theorize that Andrew was let into the apartment by someone who had a key, forced him to take a potentially-lethal dose of heroin, then hanged him in case the drugs did not kill him and put the key into his pocket. They conclude that the most likely person was Otto's secret lover.

In Chapter 43, A Big Fish, Harry finds Sandra and asks about her blonde wig. She says a customer bought it and wanted her to wear it and she confirms that it was Evans White, from whom she buys morphine. She thinks he wants her to wear the wig because he either hates his mother or loves her too much, and he did once put his hands on her neck but it did not mean

anything. Back at the police station, the officers theorize that the serial killer is still out there and wonder how to bait him.



In Chapter 44, A Box Jellyfish, Harry runs into Birgitta at Andrew's funeral; then, Toowoomba arrives. Harry says he thinks someone killed Andrew and Toowoomba agrees because he loved life so much and he gives Harry his cell number in case he needs to talk to someone who knew Andrew. After he leaves, Harry and Birgitta are given a ride by Jim Connolly and his wife, who knew Andrew from his boxing days. After they are dropped off, Harry asks Birgitta what they should do now and she tells him to come home with her.

In Chapter 45, Payback, Harry tells Birgitta more about his relationship with Kristin, then asks if she would do him a favor. The next scene finds Harry back at the strip club run by Sandra's pimp, Teddy. He is unsuccessful in getting information about the latest rape and murder victim, then points out Toowoomba, who is sitting at the bar, and subtly threatens to have him beat Teddy up. Harry then says he hopes bouncers Ivan and Geoff are on duty tonight and strikes Teddy with his police baton.

In Chapter 46, Bait, Birgitta calls Evans and asks to buy morphine from him. He says no, but agrees to meet her in Sydney the next day after she offers sex and says Inger told her what he likes.

In Chapter 47, Data, Harry tells Birgitta more about his relationship with Kristin. Back at the station, the officers discuss their plan. Birgitta will take Evans to her apartment, where Harry, Lebie and Watkins will be hiding. She will try to get him to implicate himself in the murders and they will arrest him if they get enough evidence, and they will be there to protect Birgitta from any harm. After the meeting, Harry approaches Yong Sue confidentially and they discuss the possibility that Andrew purposely lured them off Evans White's trail because he was afraid of having his heroin use exposed. Harry thinks he knows who the murderer is, but does not want to tell anyone in case he is wrong again, and Yong agrees to help him get the data he needs.

In Chapter 48, The Plan, Harry and the other officers set up a wire system to listen to Birgitta's conversation with Evans White. Everything seems to be working and Harry leaves a rose in a glass of water on her bedside table to help her feel stronger.

In Chapter 49, A Walk in the Park, they lose radio contact with Birgitta. No one can see her because she apparently took a different walking route to meet Evans than the one they agreed upon. In Green Park, officers find the radio equipment in her bag. Harry thinks Evans probably followed her and knocked her out with ether, as Otto's killer had done before murdering him. Harry goes to the park and tries to get information from Joseph, who is very drunk and remembers seeing Birgitta with a man whom he can't describe. Harry returns to the station and plans to wait overnight in case Birgitta turns up. He looks out the window and thinks about the souls that become stars when their earthly bodies die. He tries to keep from looking for one star in particular.



## Analysis

The book's ongoing theme that nothing is as it appears to be resurfaces in a major way in Chapter 40 in the scene between Harry and Joseph. The two men have now reversed roles completely, with Joseph being sober, coherent and responsible, and Harry being a hopeless drunk. The conversation also brings up the concept of skydiving, which will reappear at the book's end. Ironically, Joseph's addiction to alcohol is a direct result of his loss of his healthier addiction to skydiving, which resulted from a false accusation that he was drinking on the job.

As Harry slowly begins to emerge from his extreme drunken state, he is able to resolve the mystery of Andrew's death with help from a simple incident – Joseph's remark about habitually turning a light switch off and on. Putting together all the pieces of the puzzle, Harry realizes that since it was dark at the time of Andrew's death, he could not possibly have turned off the lights in the apartment, then found his way back to the light fixture and hanged himself in the dark. This, along with other clues, makes it clear that Andrew, despite not being exactly what he seemed to be, was a victim of the serial killer rather than the killer himself.

Much of this section involves clues regarding the serial killer coming in rapid succession, but some are simply red herrings and others later prove important. Evans White once again emerges as the prime suspect, so much so that the police use Birgitta to lure him into a trap that goes horribly wrong when Birgitta disappears. The author throws a great deal of information at the reader in these pivotal chapters, making them somewhat confusing as it is unclear what is important and what is not.

Harry's relationship with Birgitta re-emerges in this section as she sees him at Andrew's funeral. She not only forgives him, but she also agrees to help him trap Evans White. His prior relationship with Kristin is woven into the background as Birgitta asks for more details and he continues to reminisce about how the relationship played out and the effect it had on him.

## Discussion Question 1

In Chapter 40, what does Joseph mean when he says he is a member of the Crow tribe and is not meant to live like an emu?

## Discussion Question 2

In much of this section, Evans White again emerges as the prime suspect. What evidence exists that points to him as the serial killer? What evidence points away from him?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the scene in Chapter 44 in which Harry and Birgitta meet Jim and Claudia Connelly after Andrew's funeral. Why do you think the author included this conversation? What new information does it provide and why might it be important to the plot?

## Vocabulary

comprehend, comatose, gingerly, concoct, affront, reconstruct, strident, abstinence, trivial, convergence, incredulity, eccentric, implicit, emit, convivial, abode, clandestine, indisputable, condolences, turbulent, pugilistic, hirsute, exultant, unscrupulously, effuse, naive, retrospect, alight



# Chapters 50 - 57

## Summary

In Chapter 50, *The Rooster Factor*, Harry reflects on the accident that killed his partner and the fact that right afterward he had asked himself whether he would have exchanged fates with Ronny if he could have, but decided he was happy to be alive. He is awakened by a call on the police radio saying Evans White has been picked. Evans says he drove past the restaurant several times, but Birgitta never showed up. Later, Harry calls someone who is not identified and the person, realizing Harry has figured it out, admits to being the killer. He says he has Birgitta but will kill her if Harry does not have Evans White arrested for all the murders and rapes within 48 hours. Harry tells McCormack that Toowoomba is the killer. He has learned that the boxing group Toowoomba worked with traveled with Otto's circus troupe and that Otto and Toowoomba had been lovers. However, Toowoomba rejected Otto and killed him to keep him from telling his secret. Andrew figured it out but felt a great deal of love and loyalty for Toowoomba so he tried to lead Harry to the truth so someone else would be the one to arrest him. He killed Otto in such spectacular fashion so it would be remembered after the girls' murders had faded. Against Harry's objections, the police decide to have a look at Toowoomba's home to look for clues although Harry is afraid they will be putting Birgitta's life in danger.

In Chapter 51, *A Kookaburra*, Harry goes to the park and talks with Joseph. He is worried that Birgitta is hungry, in pain or frightened, but Joseph says she will be a good wife for him if she passes those tests, as Aboriginal women once had to do. Back at his hotel, Harry receives a package from Toowoomba. It contains vials of blood, hair, clothing fibers, etc. from Inger Holter. Toowoomba calls to ask if he has received the package and tells Harry the details of how he killed Andrew and why he rapes and kills young women, drawing an analogy to the Terra Nullius laws used to take land from the Aboriginal people. After the call, Harry falls asleep and dreams about Kristin, but sometimes she has red hair and speaks Swedish.

In Chapter 52, *A Computer*, the police officers pick the lock on Toowoomba's apartment and enter, but soon realize he has rigged a clever system to let him know someone has been there. A search of the apartment turns up nothing of use and the officers remark about how neat and clean the place is, wondering if he has another home somewhere. A pack of waterproof matches seems unusual and Yong mentions that there is a photo of a yacht in the hall, so they track down a boat Toowoomba owns and go there. No one is on board but as they are about to leave, Lebie notices that the anchor has been dropped even though the boat is well tied to the dock, so Harry asks to have the anchor pulled up.

In Chapter 53, *The Lizards Are Singing*, Harry rides in the back of a car with other officers and recalls seeing Birgitta's body being hauled up with the anchor. He says he might have loved her, but is capable of carrying on with the case. Back at the station,



they realize Toowoomba is still in Sydney because his cell phone is pinging, so they wait.

In Chapter 54, A Good Ear, Toowoomba's phone pings a few more times but the officers are unable to pinpoint his location. Realizing they are running out of time, Harry calls him and they record the conversation, then bring in a sound expert and eventually determine that he is at the Sydney Aquarium.

In Chapter 55, A Straight Left and Three Shots, the police arrive at the aquarium and begin to search for Toowoomba. Eventually Harry finds him and fires three shots, one of which apparently hits his thigh and causes him to plunge from his perch above a large tank, where the great white shark devours him.

In Chapter 56, The Tattoo, tattoo artist Gene Binoche first turns away the drunk man who comes to his shop, but when he offers far too much money, he gives him the tattoo he wants – a rose.

The book concludes with Chapter 57, Four Thousand Feet and an End. Joseph and Harry hire a pilot to secretly take them skydiving. Harry is told to pull his ripcord at 4,000. He is amazed as he looks at the vast and varied landscape on the way down. He thinks that people are always alone and recalls that Kristin made her choice by taking a bottle of pills on a bleak Monday morning. He thinks that some people have a weakness for living as he grips the handle of his cord.

## Analysis

In the book's final chapters, Harry begins to right himself again despite – or perhaps because of – his fears for Birgitta's safety and his eventual grief over her death and the role he played in it.

Once her body is found, it is more important than ever for him to bring Toowoomba to justice, although there is never a good chance that he will be taken alive and imprisoned for his crimes.

Despite its tragic outcome, Harry's relationship with Birgitta proves to be a turning point in his life. Until meeting her, he has closed himself off emotionally because of his role in the accident that killed his partner as well as his failed relationship with Kristin, whom the reader eventually learns took her own life shortly after they saw each other for the last time. Birgitta represented both sides of Harry's current situation – she is a link to his Scandinavian heritage and home as well as his new affinity for Australia. He realizes that he is again capable of love even though he feels great guilt at once again having been responsible for the death of someone he cared about.

The concept of terra nullius comes back around in Chapter 51 when Toowoomba draws an analogy between that practice and his killing spree. In his delusional yet cunning mind, Toowoomba has decided to kill only childless white women, theorizing that no man has fertilized them and so no one owns them, just as white men took the Aboriginal





people's land because no one had formally claimed it. He murders white women to avenge the wrongs that have been committed against his people, and he chooses blondes simply because someone with light hair and a light complexion has less chance of having traces of Aboriginal blood in her ancestry.

The book's final chapters return to previous themes and bring several incidents of foreshadowing to their conclusion. Harry tracks Toowoomba to the aquarium where he spent meaningful time with Birgitta and the great white shark that once stared at him devours Toowoomba. Harry then gets a rose tattoo that is reminiscent of the rose he left in Birgitta's bedroom the night she disappeared, and he goes skydiving with Joseph, discovering the freedom Joseph described to him previously.

## Discussion Question 1

What is in the package Toowoomba sends to Harry? Why does he send it?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Harry's relationship with Birgitta parallel his relationship with Kristin? In what ways do they differ?

## Discussion Question 3

Once the reader knows how the story ends, what earlier clues pointed to Toowoomba as the murderer? Why was it easy for Harry and the other detectives to overlook them?

## Vocabulary

reconstruct, relentless, repress, skirmish, perspective, elucidate, conclusive, alluring, contortionist, itinerary, innate, akin, uninhibited, affront, daub, cynical, ecstasy, conspicuous, convoluted, cerebral, paranoid, delusion, devout, retort, brandish, inscrutable, spasmodic, depravity, indignation, extraneous, banal, maelstrom, vendetta, decisive, consummate



# Characters

## Harry Hole

Harry Hole is a Norwegian police detective who is sent to Australia to help investigate the rape and murder of a Norwegian girl who lived there. He is a well-respected detective with excellent skills, but his background is somewhat checkered. A few years earlier, he drank heavily and was responsible for the death of his partner when he was driving drunk during a high-speed chase. Harry's guilt over this incident is exacerbated by the fact that he was never punished -- in fact he was rewarded in a sense because his superiors staged a cover-up to avoid bad publicity. As a result, Harry has punished himself by giving up drinking, but he relapses following the death of his closest colleague in the Sydney Police Department, Andrew Kensington.

Harry also has a checkered personal history. His failed relationship with a former girlfriend named Kristin continues to haunt him and his new relationship with Swedish bartender Birgitta is doomed when Harry inadvertently gets her killed as she tries to help him solve the murder.

## Andrew Kensington

Andrew Kensington is a detective on the Sydney police force and is assigned as Harry Hole's liaison. Andrew is Aboriginal and had a very dysfunctional childhood followed by a short but successful career as a boxer. During that time, he met a youngster named Robin Toowoomba who was learning to box and became something of a father figure to him. He is divorced and his two daughters live elsewhere with their mother.

It is later revealed that Andrew is secretly a heroin addict, although a very controlled one. Although he discovers that Toowoomba is the killer he and his colleagues are searching for, his complex feelings about his Aboriginal heritage and his deep feelings for Toowoomba make it impossible for him to confront and arrest him.

## Robin Toowoomba

Robin Toowoomba is a large, Aboriginal man who boxes with the Jim Chivers traveling troupe. He is a lifelong friend of Andrew's and is something of a son to him. He has a great deal of knowledge and affinity for Aboriginal history and legend. He is particularly affected by the concept of terra nullius in which British colonists took away land from the indigenous people because they had not formally claimed it. It is this concept that he uses to rationalize his rape and murder of young blonde women.



## **Birgitta Enquist**

Birgitta Enquist is a pretty, Swedish woman now living in Sydney. She works as a waitress and bartender. She enters into a relationship with Harry and is subsequently killed by Toowoomba.

## **Otto Rechnagel**

Otto Rechnagel is a flamboyant cross-dresser who works as a clown in a traveling circus. He is secretly having an affair with Toowoomba and is murdered by him.

## **Joseph**

Joseph is a homeless, Aboriginal drunk who hangs out in a Sydney park. He befriends Harry and inadvertently helps him solve Andrew's murder.

## **Sandra**

Sandra is a prostitute who provides information to Harry and other police officers.

## **Neil McCormack**

Neil McCormack is the head of the detective unit that is working to solve the murder of Inger and others.

## **Larry Watkins**

Larry Watkins is one of the detectives who works with Harry to solve the serial murders.

## **Evans White**

Evans White is a drug dealer and an early suspect in Inger's murder.

## **Angelina Hutchinson**

Angelina Hutchinson is Evans' girlfriend. She provides an alibi for him.

## **Mr. Robertson**

Mr. Robertson is Inger's landlord and an early suspect in her murder.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Black Snake

The Black Snake is an important figure in Aboriginal mythology. In a story told by Toowoomba, the snake tricks the other animals by posing as their protector. Then, the snake hides in the bushes and gradually gets revenge on his enemies. In this novel, the snake symbolizes Toowoomba, whose behavior mimics that of the snake in the legend. Black Snake is also the name of the cocktail that leads Harry back to alcohol.

## Jim Chivers Boxing Team

The Jim Chivers Boxing Team is a group of boxers that tours Australia. Toowoomba is a member and this is where he met Andrew, a former member who was known for his bloodthirsty style of fighting. The team is important in terms of the history between Toowoomba and Andrew as well as the role its schedule plays in identifying the murderer.

## Light Switch

When Harry finds Andrew's body, the light switch in the room is turned off even though it is very dark outside. Later, when Joseph double-checks to see if he turned off the lights in the park maintenance building, the incident leads Harry to determine that Andrew's death was not a suicide.

## Blonde Hair

Each of Toowoomba's victims has very blonde hair, which symbolizes their distinct difference from the dark hair and skin of Toowoomba and other Aborigines.

## Inger's Letter

In Inger's room, the police find a letter in Norwegian which Harry is able to translate. It leads the officers to identify Evans White as the prime suspect in her murder.

## Bat

The Bat is an Aboriginal symbol of death, stemming from the culture's version of the Creation.



## **Terra Nullius**

Terra Nullius means "land belonging to no one." It is important to the story because it is an example of the division between the Aboriginals and other Australians and the persecution suffered by the country's indigenous people, which feeds Toowoomba's anger.

## **Guillotine**

Otto's circus act uses a guillotine as a prop in its performances. The same guillotine is later used to kill and dismember Otto.

## **Heroin**

As the plot unfolds, it is revealed that Andrew was secretly addicted to heroin, which was used to drug him before his murder. It plays a role in the eventual unraveling of the mystery.

## **Skydiving**

In an unlikely scenario, the Aboriginal drunk Joseph tells Harry that he used to be a skydiving instructor. Skydiving is an addiction for him. In the book's last chapter, it serves as a substitute for Harry's real addiction, alcohol.



# Settings

## Sydney, Australia

Sydney, located in New South Wales, is the most populous city in Australia. It is located on the country's Southeast coast and contains older, historic sections and new, modern areas.

The author depicts the city's diversity by incorporating its large gay population, seedy bars and culture of drugs and prostitution, juxtaposed with iconic sites such as the city's famous opera house, aquarium and upscale hotels.

Most of the book's plot takes place in various locations around Sydney, including the police headquarters, the Crescent Hotel, various bars, and neighborhood parks.

## Nimbin, Australia

Nimbin is a small town in New South Wales, Australia. It has a strong drug culture. Its appearance and population are reminiscent of the hippie culture of the 1960s. The town is home to Evans White and is visited by Harry and Andrew when they investigate Evans as a suspect in Inger's murder.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Politics of Race

One of *The Bat's* prevailing themes is the Politics of Race as depicted by the historic conflict between Australia's Aboriginal people – the continent's original inhabitants – and the white population that descends from the British settlers who colonized the country in the late 1700s.

Throughout the book, the Aboriginal characters – primarily detective Andrew Kensington and boxer Robin Toowoomba – provide Harry, who is Norwegian and new to the country, with background information on the history between the two groups, educating the reader in the process. The Aboriginal people inhabited Australia and its surrounding islands centuries before the British arrived. They were a nomadic people who lived off the land and held a spiritual system based primarily on animal mythology. As is the case with many other cultures, the new settlers gradually pushed the indigenous population away and set up a culture and government that marginalized and even persecuted them, and although reconciliation has progressed substantially, racial tensions still persist between the two groups.

The concept of terra nullius is used as a strong example of the politics of race that separate the Aborigines from Australia's white population. The term means “no man's land” and refers to the fact that the Aborigines, as a result of both their nomadic lifestyle and their lack of an organized government, never formally laid claim to the land on which they lived. The British colonists used this failure as a means of taking whatever land they wanted until the terra nullius laws were eventually repealed.

In *The Bat*, the Aboriginal character Toowoomba uses terra nullius as the basis for his series of rapes and murders of childless white women, rationalizing his actions by comparing them to the land the white population stole from his people.

## Aboriginal Legend and Mythology

Author Jo Nesbo weaves Aboriginal Legend and Mythology throughout *The Bat*. As a Norwegian in Sydney for the first time, Detective Harry Hole knows little about the Aboriginal people and their belief system, but his colleague Andrew Kensington makes it his business to educate his new friend. From their first conversations, Andrew, and later Toowoomba, regale Harry with tales from their native people.

Much of the traditional Aboriginal belief system is based on legends involving animals and reptiles. For example, the story of Bubbur and Walla involves a rainbow snake that is central to Aboriginal mythology and is recounted in great detail in the book. In the tale, a bride-to-be is killed by the snake Bubbur and her death is avenged by Walla, her grief-stricken groom. The story parallels the relationship between Birgitta, who is killed by Toowoomba, and Harry, who avenges her death.



In addition to snakes, the bat is a symbol of death in the Aboriginal culture. It plays a central role in the native concept of the Creation, which provides the title for the book.

## **Guilt and Responsibility**

The concepts of Guilt and Responsibility are themes that author Jo Nesbo explores throughout *The Bat*. As a murder mystery, the most obvious example is the search for the person who is responsible for the series of murders that form the book's central plot, but the theme plays out in other ways as well.

As the reader gets to know Harry Hole better, it is revealed that he was responsible for the death of his partner and the paralysis of a bystander when he was driving drunk during a high-speed chase. As if that were not enough, his sense of guilt is exacerbated when his superiors force him to cover up his role in the accident in order to avoid bad publicity for the police department, so in many ways he is rewarded rather than being punished. This is revealed as the reason he no longer drinks. He gave up alcohol as a means of punishing himself since he was not being punished in the way he deserved. Later in the book, Harry is also indirectly responsible for Birgitta's death when he asks her to help entrap a suspect in the case.

Guilt and responsibility are also factors in Toowoomba's killing spree. He holds Australia's white population responsible for taking land away from and otherwise persecuting the Aboriginal people, so he seeks vengeance by raping and murdering white women who have not been "claimed" by a man impregnating them.





# Styles

## Point of View

The Bat is told from the point of view of a third person narrator. Although the narrator is omniscient, the focus is primarily on the book's main character, Harry Hole. The reader is privy to Harry's thoughts and feelings, but often not those of other characters, who are seen primarily through Harry's eyes. As such, essentially every scene includes Harry.

The reader learns things about other characters through him. However, one exception is Joe, the owner of the hotel to which Harry goes after being thrown out of his original hotel. When Harry arrives, drunk and disheveled, the author provides some background on Joe and his thoughts upon seeing Harry. This is an exception because for the most part other characters are seen only through Harry's view.

## Language and Meaning

The Bat was written in Norwegian so the English version is a translation of the original. For that reason and, possibly, because the story is set in Australia, the book uses Australian rather than U.S. English, including spellings such as "centre" and "colour", and terms such as "boot" when referring to the trunk of a car.

The book is aimed at an adult audience so the vocabulary is appropriate. There are a number of sex scenes, but none are written in a graphic manner. However, the descriptions of several of the murders that take place during the course of the story are quite graphic.

The story moves at a steady pace and is easy to read.

## Structure

The Bat is divided into fifty-seven chapters. They are of varying length; but, most are quite short, sometimes only three or four pages. Each chapter has a title that refers to a person, object, or occurrence found in that chapter.

The book's basic plot is written in a fairly straightforward manner, moving from Harry's arrival in Sydney through his activities following the conclusion of the murder investigation. His back story, including his relationship with Kristin and the incident in which his partner was killed, is woven throughout the book, primarily through conversations with Birgitta and his own recollections.

As a murder mystery, the author frequently drops hints about things that do not become clear until later in the book. For example, Harry shows a photo of an Aboriginal man to the theater's lighting director, but the reader is not told that the photo is of Toowoomba

rather than Andrew. When Harry phones the man he has identified as the killer, the author does not reveal that the person on the other end of the phone is Toowoomba until later.



## Quotes

Blood rushed in his ears, in surges, and Harry was the young warrior Walla, and Toowoomba was the snake Bubbur, who had taken the life of his beloved Moora. And now Bubbur had to be killed. By love.

-- Narrator (chapter 55 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This brings back the importance of the Bubbur legend and ties Harry to the Aboriginal culture.

Terra Nullius, Harry! When you came here you defined us as nomads without property because we didn't sow seeds in the earth. You took our country from us, raped and killed it in front of our very eyes." Toowoomba didn't need to raise his voice. The words were loud enough. "Well, your childless women are now my terra nullius, Harry. No one has fertilized them, therefore no one owns them. I'm only following the white man's logic and doing as he does.

-- Toowoomba (chapter 51 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This brings back the concept of terra nullius and ties the Aboriginal culture and history to Toowoomba's motives.

Even though he would never admit he had strong feelings for his own people, I think Andrew loved Toowoomba more than anyone else precisely because they were from the same people. That was why Andrew couldn't arrest him himself. His innate moral concepts clashed with his loyalty to his people and love for Toowoomba.

-- Harry (chapter 50 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This explains the seemingly inexplicable idea that Andrew knew who the killer was and yet could not bring himself to arrest him.

Harry thought of the souls that became stars when their earthly shells died. He managed to restrain himself from searching for one star in particular.

-- Narrator (chapter 49 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** This foreshadows Birgitta's death.

Ha ha. You know how it is when you know a place inside out, you switch off the light automatically, you don't even think about it. And then you can't bloody remember whether you've done it or not . . . isn't that crazy, Harry?

-- Joseph (chapter 40 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** In this passage, Joseph unwittingly provides the clue that will enable Harry to solve the mystery of Andrew's death.

Joseph beamed and wagged his head. Harry couldn't comprehend that this was the same person who'd been sitting in a comatose state on the bench just a short time ago



and with whom he had been vainly trying to communicate." "I couldn't believe it when I saw you yesterday," Joseph said. "That you were the same person who'd been sitting so sober and upright and I had bummed ciggies off a few days before. And yesterday it was blood impossible to talk to you. Ha ha!

-- Narrator and Joseph (chapter 40 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This demonstrates the role reversal that has taken place between Harry and Joseph as well as the author's point that people and circumstances are always in flux and not always what they appear to be.

I see you have a drink called Black Snake . . . " "Jim Beam and Coke." The dogs went wild down below. "Fine. A double Black Snake without Coke.

-- Harry and a Waiter (chapter 34 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This passage not only finds Harry returning to alcohol but also brings the concept of the black snake around again.

Here we go again," Watkins said. "I hope no one else will be killed this evening.

-- Watkins (chapter 28 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This foreshadows the death of Otto Rechnagel.

Here we go again," Watkins said. "I hope no one else will be killed this evening.

-- Watkins (chapter 28 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This foreshadows the death of Otto Rechnagel.

Harry had an indefinable feeling that Toowoomba wanted something; he didn't only want to tell old stories." "Have you got any further with the case you're here for, Harry?" "I don't know," Harry answered. "Now and then you feel like you're searching with a telescope and the solution's so close to you it's no more than a blur on the lens.

-- Toowoomba and Harry (chapter 23 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** This is another good example of irony because the killer for whom he is searching is actually standing in front of Harry.

Just imagine walking away from something you've started. Something you really believed would be good. I don't think I could ever do that.

-- Birgitta (chapter 19 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is a good example of the author's use of irony, as both Birgitta and Harry will soon walk away from something good.

So I punished myself instead. I gave myself the worst punishment I could think of: I decided to live and I decided to stop drinking.

-- Harry (chapter 19 paragraph 3)



**Importance:** This statement helps both Birgitta and the reader understand much about Harry's past and his current personality.

He greeted you but you didn't greet him back. Why not?" "I didn't know him.  
-- Harry and Andrew (chapter 17 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This is one of the characteristics of Aboriginal people that mark their culture and are important to the story's outcome.

Exactly, Harry!" Andrew began to warm to the topic. "In traditional crime fiction every detective with any self-respect has an unfailing nose for when people are lying. It's bullshit! Human nature is a vast impenetrable forest which no one can know in its entirety. Not even a mother knows her child's deepest secrets.  
-- Andrew (chapter 12 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** In this passage, Andrew drops the first hints that perhaps he himself is not being entirely candid with Harry.

I hope no Norwegian blondes have been murdered?" She chuckled and smacked the stamp down hard on the special visa. "Well, just the one," Harry Hole answered.  
-- Customs Officer and Harry (chapter 1 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Harry's remark turns out to be ironic because it is later discovered that a number of blondes have been murdered and the man they are seeking is a serial killer.

Love is a greater mystery than death. And you have to watch out for snakes.  
-- Andrew (chapter 13 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This passage foreshadows the love story between Birgitta and Harry that will soon emerge and begins the author's use of the snake as a symbol of danger and evil.

The bat is the Aboriginal symbol of death. Did you know that?  
-- Andrew (chapter 8 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This remark by Andrew begins the connection between Aboriginal customs and mythology and the case(s) the story will follow.