



top sellers

1. 4 Ingredients Kim McCosker and Rachael Bermingham
2. A New Earth Eckhart Tolle
3. Twilight Stephenie Meyer
4. Change of Heart Jodi Picoult
5. Leadbelly: Inside Australia's Underworld Wars John Silvester

Source: Angus & Robertson

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pirates
OF ESPERANCE

A local author has uncovered the story of WA's own pirate Black Jack Anderson who terrorised shipping for a decade from a tiny island hideout. By JAN HALLAM

Picture: Bohdan Warchomij



THERE'S THIS STRANGE THING ABOUT bad men that makes them irresistible to women. And when it comes to bad, they don't come much badder than WA's own notorious pirate Black Jack Anderson.

But it was more by chance than passion that Perth author Elaine Forrestal became captivated by the infamous Afro-American whaler, who terrorised shipping along the Great Southern coastline in the 1830s.

Indeed, it was more a case of Black Jack calling the much-decorated children's author to leap into the world of adult fiction to tell his story and fuel the growing demand for bio-fiction.

"I was ambling through the whaling exhibit at the WA Maritime Museum, researching a story on the Whalers' Tunnel at Fremantle, and noticed a video playing on a loop," Forrestal says.

"I didn't take much notice until the second lap of the room when the three old Albany whalers, talking on the video, mentioned the colourful pirate Black Jack Anderson. I'd never heard of him nor thought WA had anything like a pirate so, intrigued, I started digging."

And as she dug, Black Jack's extraordinary story came bursting to life.

There's nothing small about him. Big in stature and big and violent in character, Black Jack was a whaler from Massachusetts, who arrived in King George Sound, now Albany, on a crippled whaler called the *Vigilant* in 1826. King George Sound was only a trading post then, with a general store that was purveyor, liquor outlet and community centre rolled into one.

The *Vigilant's* battered crew found themselves drinking at the store that night with another ship's crew. A fight between the seamen broke out, one man was killed and the volatile Black Jack was blamed, though there is no concrete proof it was him.

Perhaps his next actions were more of an indictment – he fled the scene, stole a small chaser vessel with several other crewmen and took off for the dangerous Recherche Archipelago off Esperance.

"Recherche is made up of 105 small islands, uncharted at the time, so it needed an expert sailor to navigate through them," Forrestal says.

"The group drifted through the islands for a while, living off seals, before making their base at Middle Island – the biggest island in the archipelago – where there was soil,

vegetation and, most importantly, fresh water. They lived there for 10 years, sealing and raiding passing supply ships heading either to Hobart or Sydney off the Roaring Forties. They did very well for themselves. Seal skins were sold for six shillings a skin on the spot."

Throw in a romance with a captivated, as opposed to captive, Dorothy Newell, growing resentment at Black Jack's autocratic ways and greed for his power and booty among his pirate band and the stage is well set for a rollicking adventure.

The book *Black Jack Anderson* was launched this week by Premier Alan Carpenter, whose Albany upbringing made him well familiar with the pirate. Complementing the launch was a display of some of Black Jack's artefacts discovered from Middle Island by archeologists from the Maritime Museum.

While Forrestal researched her story painstakingly, official records of the renegade are slim and some of the story is imagined, based on her research of historical context.

The good news for Forrestal is that her journey into bio-fiction has only just begun.

"I'm sure there are more characters in WA for me to discover," she says.

★ *Black Jack Anderson* by Elaine Forrestal
(Penguin, \$19.95)