

All in a day's work for a private eye

From hunting stolen rare spiders to breaking the news on cheating spouses, this is the world of a modern-day private detective. Report EMILY O'KEEFE

Questioning a private detective about the word "trust" is perhaps a little like asking hardened criminals if they believe in fairy tales, especially when 98 per cent of all cases Drummoyne investigator Warren Mallard handles validate his clients' suspicions of infidelity.

Mr Mallard, the director of Lyonswood Investigations, admitted that, when it came to personal relationships, trust was a little thin on the ground.

He said he had noticed a significant increase in clients requesting what he called relationship "due diligence".

The term refers to when clients, quite often older, single women, request a background check on someone they have recently met and are thinking about dating.

"In other words it's a bit like preventative medicine. Taking it is better than getting cancer later on," he said.

It's a trend the director of Sydney detective agency Charlie's Angels, Charlie Rahim, had also noticed.

"A lot of women come to us, who are mainly in their late 20s. They've had a bad relationship in the past and want us to check up on a guy they have met. It saves a lot of heartbreak down the track," Mr Rahim said.

Increasing divorce rates have also sent more business the detectives' way, with both reporting an increase in areas such as "proof of work" in child-support cases.

Mr Mallard, a former policeman, has been in the business for 24 years, and has seen its ups and downs. When tougher laws on insurance fraud came into play in 1987, it took away the bread-and-butter work of



A modern day detective - Drummoyne investigator Warren Mallard.

Photo: Andrew Lee

many detective agencies. Almost half left the industry. Detectives these days are forced to diversify.

DNA testing and drug testing are two recent additions to Mr Mallard's services.

Lyonswood Investigations now employs 36 detectives and, as Mr Mallard was quick to point out, its spacious Drummoyne office belies the stereotypical image of the cramped and dingy detective offices you see in movies.

"We are not all like people think. We don't have two shots of bourbon before breakfast. We are not disgraced police officers with dishevelled hair," Mr Mallard said.

Wearing an dapper suit and a chunky gold wristwatch, Mr Mallard looks nothing like the oft-portrayed struggling detective about to go broke.

However, like the movies, Mr Mallard has had his share of wild times and was ready with a swag of fascinating tales. There's a file in his cabinet labelled "bizarre cases".

Rescuing a stolen rare ruby-haired tarantula and catching out a man masquerading as a doctor were just two cases included in the thick file.

A good private detective, Mr Mallard said, was someone who had a lot of life experience.

"I say you've also got to have a bit of a villain in you to catch a villain. It's usually someone who has run close to the line at some point in their life," he said.

But there is more to the job than being a super sleuth. The career also involves being part counsellor.

"It's very hard when you have to get peo-



More and more people are turning to private detectives for background checks on potential lovers.

Photo: Andrew Lee



Actor Basil Rathbone playing Sherlock Holmes in a 1940s movie.

ple in here and show them some of the disturbing and often quite graphic stuff that you have uncovered," Mr Mallard said.

"But then we also bring people together like lost love ones who are missing, which is really wonderful."

"Matters of the heart are the nicest ones and the ugliest ones."