

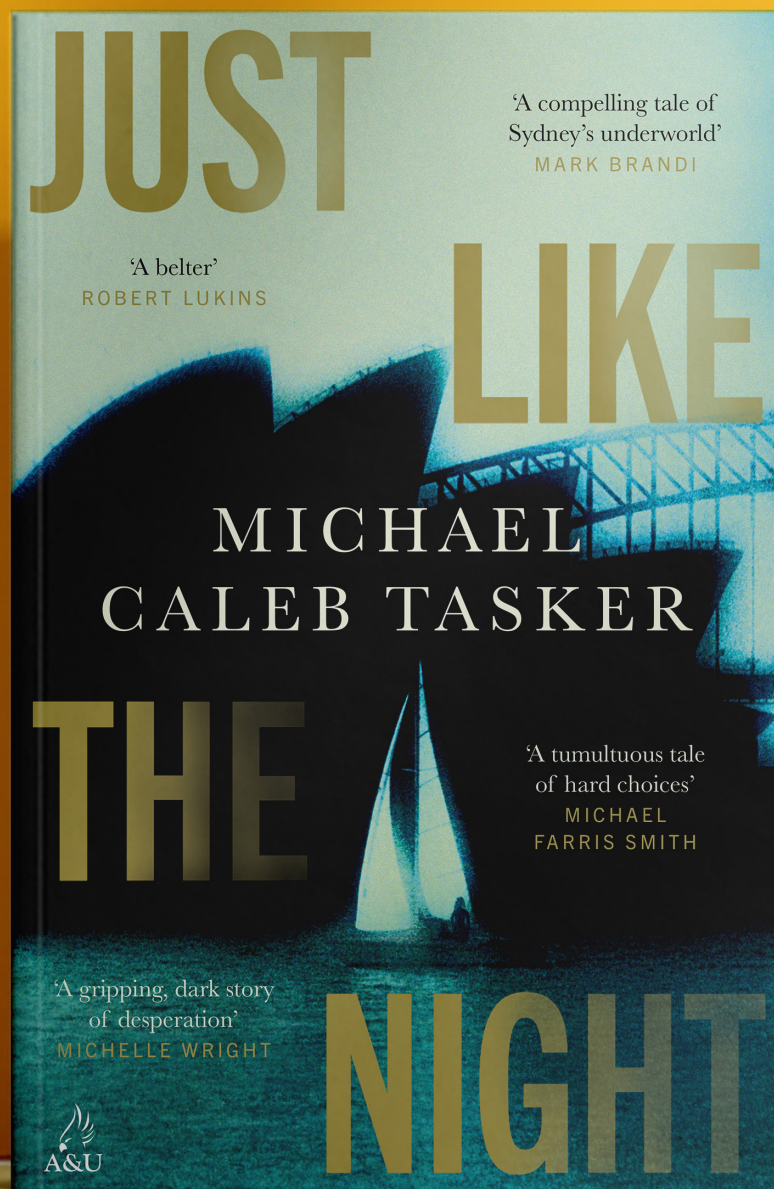


ALLEN & UNWIN

AUSTRALIAN. INDEPENDENT. FOR READERS.

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

JUST LIKE THE NIGHT



AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CALEB TASKER

Where did the initial spark of inspiration for *Just Like the Night* come from?

Sera, the protagonist, came to me pretty fully formed, as someone having difficulty adjusting to post-prison life, and the other ideas built up around that over a long time. A lot of it is answering my own questions i.e. why is Sera, a good person, in prison? Why has her relationship with her daughter crumbled and why does she want it back? Different ways of dealing with questions of moral responsibility kept surfacing.

Tell us about your writing process.

Are you a plotter, pantser – something in between?

I'm not sure. When I come to a piece I have a broad, general idea (story-wise) in mind. Scattered notes on torn pages and the like. The plot is not at all thought out or planned, but that said, the characters are already very full and complete. I'm fond of Fitzgerald's adage that 'character is plot, plot is character', so I'm lucky there, character-wise. I do have maybe three scenes or events in mind that I want to happen along the way, but they often go astray. When I actually write, my thoughts/plan is usually only a scene or two ahead of where I am writing-wise. Of course, this means later re-writing and revision to make sure knots are tied.



You were born in Canada and have lived all around the world from New Orleans to Buenos Aires, and now Australia. Why did you want to set this book in Sydney?

In one sense, it was a given. I lived in Sydney for 9 years (I think, but it's hard to keep track), which is longer than I've lived anywhere else (again, I think; I do lose count as there was often a lot of back and forth—if I'm off, I may have lived in Montreal for a few extra months).

Sydney is massive, not just in terms of a 5 million-plus population, but geographically – it really sprawls, with so much variation in one city, so that works super well for a place that someone might run to, a place in which someone might hide away. Sydney lends itself to the imagination very well. And for a petty criminal or con artist travelling America, like Sera and her father, I think there's a sort of nostalgic sense of safety and security to thinking about Australia (which of course has its own reality and plans for people).

If you could give some words of wisdom to yourself from when you first started writing this book or first started writing, what would it be?

WORK HARDER! THINK HARDER! FIND MORE QUIET...

What is one thing you would like people to take away from reading *Just Like the Night*?

I hope readers enjoy the book, the stories, the people. So, enjoyment, in any sense.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What qualities did Sera inherit from Ray – were they inherited or were they learned? What about Lena?
- Was Sera right to try to help Lena?
- Do you think Sera was a good mother? And was Ray a good father to her?
- Sera reads people well but unlike Ray she fails to read Lena. Why do you think that was?
- *'It was always going to work out that way,' Ray said. 'You had to know that. Some people are just wired to go down faster than others. Lena was wired harder than most.'* Do you think Ray was right about Lena? What do you think the author is trying to say about nature vs nurture? Could Sera's or Lena's path have been different despite their background?
- Did the experience of reading *Just Like the Night* change your thinking around the criminal justice system – and offenders?
- What was your opinion of Sera, Lena and Ray at start of the novel? Did your opinion of them change by the end?
- Why do you think the author leaves Matt's fate unspoken?
- The author has said he is guided by Fitzgerald's adage that 'character is plot, plot is character' and starts with fully formed characters. How is that reflected in the tension he builds through the novel?
- Were you surprised by the ending?
- What do you think Sera's future is? What do you wish would happen?

JUST FOR FUN

- Who would you cast in a screen adaptation of *Just Like the Night*?
- If you could be friends with any character from the novel, who would it be and why?