

BEFORE IT BREAKS

DAVE WARNER

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Detective Daniel Clement has abandoned a stellar career to Perth. He's moved back to Broome, his hometown, working at keeping his relationship with his daughter alive, and trying to sort where he stands in relation to his ex-wife and her new boyfriend. He is stuck fast in the stagnation of small-town policing – but then all lethargy dissipates when a corpse is found in a watering hole, and it's pretty clear that a croc is not the culprit. Dieter Schaffer is the first victim, but he won't be the last. Clement and his team find themselves pursuing a decades old mystery, and a ruthless killer, as a cyclone brews on the horizon.

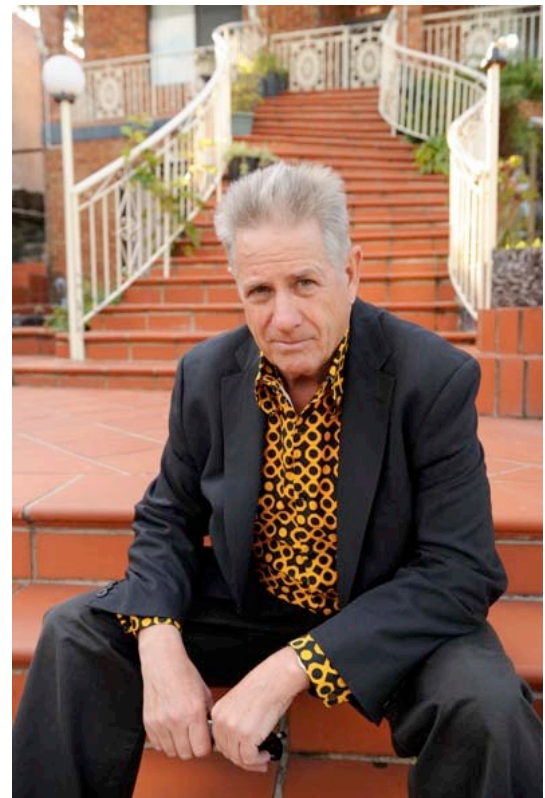
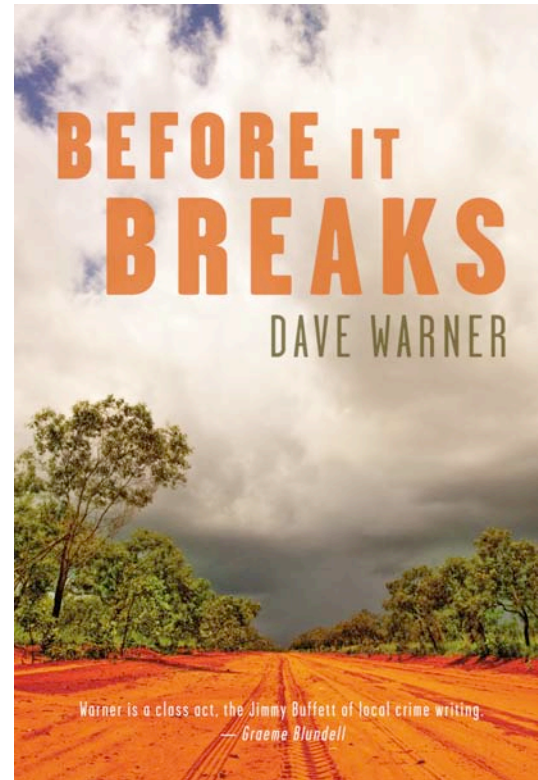
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Warner is the author of nine novels, including *City of Light*, which won the West Australian Premier's Award for Fiction. He has written six non-fiction titles, as well as for feature film, stage, television, radio and newspapers. Dave Warner originally gained national recognition as a musician-songwriter. His nine albums include the gold album *Mug's Game*. In 1992 he was the inaugural inductee into the West Australian Rock'n'Roll of Renown.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

You grew up in Western Australia but nowadays you live in Sydney. Why did you choose Broome as your setting for Before It Breaks? Is the North-West a good setting for crime?

There were two reasons for choosing the North-West. Firstly the detective fiction I enjoy most is that with a strong sense of location – Ellroy/LA, Burke/The American South, Mankell/Southern Sweden etc. The setting is as big a character in the novel as the major protagonist and so I wanted something very unique to Australia. My original thought was to set it in a more remote part of the North-West or even Derby, as Broome is already well and truly represented in literature. However, the main regional police station is in Broome and the plot was conducive to Broome so I went with it.



Do you have any particular connection to Germany?

Unfortunately no. But German people seem to especially love our outback and I thought the contrast of the Australian desert heat with the cold of Germany would give the novel more depth and tone.

Where did the character of Dan Clement come from? Is he the kind of guy you yourself would hang out with?

All my major characters have some element of myself. I am a little bit older than Dan now so I guess in a way I look back on myself at his time of life, a critical juncture between what you have been and what you will be and I try to imbue that into his character. And yes I would feel comfortable to spend some time with him.

Why do you write crime? How has your writing evolved across time?

Crime novels have always connected with me. I think they offer a fabulous combination of exciting plot and complex character and generally I feel comfortable writing in that style. I'm not sure how my writing has evolved or even if it has but I think I'm probably better prepared to structure novels at an early stage now – that saves time and rewrites but the words come out with the aid of some alchemy I do not truly understand.

As a musician, your songs can function as social commentary. Is that why you write both music and prose? Do some messages better lend themselves to particular mediums?

I've never been able to isolate why one creative idea drags me towards music and another towards prose. I really enjoy both forms of creativity but with a song you have a kind of instant feedback from your audience which can be thrilling, whereas with a novel you are often trying to deduce how your work might have affected a reader. I suppose I just write it how it feels it should be expressed.

What's next for Dan Clement?

I'm toying with the idea of putting Dan together with my other WA detective hero, Snowy Lane, to solve some big crime. I also like the idea that Dan might find himself in other far-flung parts of the Big State. I'm pretty sure a murder won't be far away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why has the author chosen to go with this particular prologue?
2. What is its effect on the reader's expectations? What is the role of a prologue in a crime novel?
3. What difference does a setting make?
4. What is the interaction between the natural environment in this novel and the unfolding story?
5. What kind of a township is Broome? How does the author evoke the atmosphere of this town?
6. Are all small towns the same?
7. What kind of a person is Dan Clement? What kind of an investigator is he?
8. What is Dan's relationship to the town where he grew up? In what ways have Dan and the town changed? In what ways have they stayed the same?
9. What is the cause of Dan's relationship breakdown with Marilyn? How would you describe his relationship with her now?

10. What kind of a township is Broome? How does the author evoke the atmosphere of this town?
11. Is killing someone always wrong?
12. How is reader sympathy invited or repelled in relation to different perpetrators of crime in this novel?
13. What is natural justice? Is natural justice at play here?
14. What is the relationship between 'investigator' or 'law-keeper' and natural justice?
15. How would you characterise the writing style of Dave Warner? (Readers may be interested to read or revisit *City of Light*, the author's first crime novel, both for entertainment and to compare the writing styles of the two books.)
16. Is there something identifiably 'Australian' about this author's voice? If so, how would you characterise it?
17. Why do we read crime fiction? Is it a useful platform for social commentary?
18. Can crime fiction make us change the way we see the world, and how we participate in it?

