

## CITY OF LIGHT

DAVE WARNER

### ABOUT THE BOOK

'Jesus Christ. I found one.' These words are blurted over the phone to Constable Snowy Lane, who is preoccupied with no more than a ham sandwich and getting a game with the East Fremantle league side on Saturday. They signal the beginning of a series of events that are to shake Perth to its foundations.

It is 1979, and Perth is jumping with pub bands and overnight millionaires. 'Mr Gruesome' has just taken another victim. Snowy's life and career are to be forever changed by the grim deeds of a serial killer, and the dark bloom spreading across the City of Light.

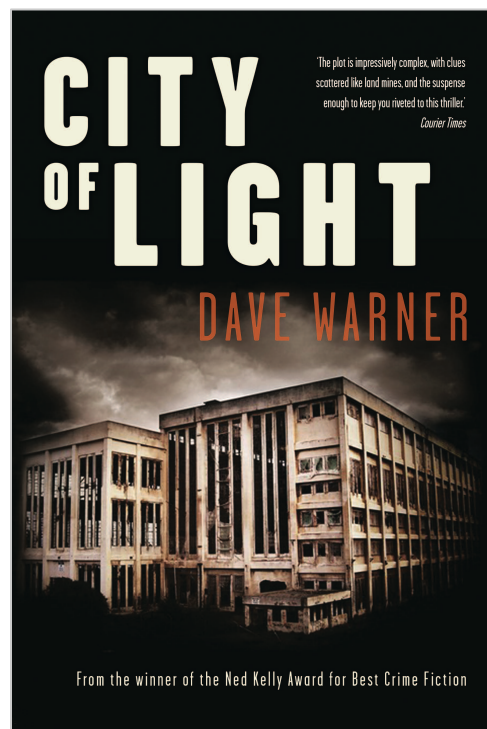
*City of Light* and *Before It Breaks* are both prequels to *Clear to the Horizon*.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Warner is an author, musician and screenwriter. His first novel, *City of Light*, won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction, and his seventh novel, *Before It Breaks*, won the Ned Kelly Award for best Australian crime fiction. He has also authored six non-fiction titles and a successful series of children's novels. Once nominated by Bob Dylan as his favourite Australian music artist, Dave Warner originally came to national prominence with his gold album *Mug's Game*. In 2017 he released his tenth album, *When*. He has been named a Western Australian State Living Treasure and has been inducted into the WAMi Rock'n'Roll of Renown.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as the role of the crime novelist in reflecting the stories of a place or a society back to its citizens?
2. Why did the author choose to make Snowy Lane his main protagonist?
3. Do you like Snowy? If so, what do you like about him? What don't you like about him?
4. What are the roles of Celeste and Wendy in the story? Could they have been rolled into a single character?
5. The story is particular to Perth, but are there universal elements? If so, what? Why, for example, would a reader in Tokyo or Boston find it interesting?
6. If we were to take the same story but set it in today's world, what things would change?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Why a crime novel, why Perth?***

What I like about crime novels is that they give you so much about the personality of the city and people. When I first embarked upon *City of Light* in the late 1980s, I was living in Sydney and I wanted to capture the amazing decade of Perth from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. This era covered an explosion of creativity – actors like Judy Davis, Greta Scacchi, and all the bands that played at pubs – plus the sudden surge of wealth in Perth that saw it have its own merchant bank, leviathan businessmen, colourful political leaders, and the culmination of all this: the America's Cup defence of 1987. It was *the* happening city in Australia for the 1980s and it is the most isolated city in the world.

### ***Did you try to create your own unique style for the book?***

Yes and no. I had never written a novel – well, not a published one – but I knew what I liked in crime novels and I knew what had been unique and most successful about my songs in Dave Warner's from the Suburbs. The songs that had the most impact were songs from the heart of a suburban boy talking about the mundane nature of growing up in Perth and the highlights of that life: sex, the football, courting rituals and inevitable rejection. I had been to Los Angeles a couple of times by the time I began writing and it struck me that in many ways Perth was like LA. The automobile was king, both cities were on the west coast and defined by the ocean with a hot desert inland, and both were early-to-bed cities. In a way, Chandler's LA. of the 30s seemed similar to Perth of the 80s and so I leaned heavily on that kind of style: first-person narratives, murder, mystery, private sanatoriums, political corruption, a woman who the hero could not shake.

### ***Why have you referenced famous Perth crimes in the novel?***

At the time I began *City of Light* I had been reading a lot of James Ellroy who had a particularly evocative technique of taking real Los Angeles historical crimes and creating a fiction around them. I thought it would be interesting to take some of Perth's most iconic crimes: Eric Cooke's killing spree, the Shirley Finn murder and the horrible Birnie serial killings, and to make them part of one giant conspiracy. This would then be placed in the context of a city losing its innocence, a city driven by greed and corruption where the puzzle could finally be solved by the everyman, Snowy Lane, a typical suburban boy with his own flaws.

### ***City of Light is a complex novel. Did you plan it out in detail before writing?***

No. Because it was my first book I simply began at the beginning and wrote from there, with numerous interruptions along the way that meant I had to go back and rewrite so the style was unified. I did do some planning for the book but this rapidly changed. For example, my original idea was centred around what became the first third of the book: basically good cops who do something bad for what they think is the right reason. My main protagonist was originally going to be Detective Dave Holland but as I began writing I thought the story would be better unfolding from a more naïve point of view – hence Snowy.

### ***Did you have any inside information regarding the political elements of the story?***

No. I have always kept my ears open for gossip or rumour but essentially what I used was information in the public domain with a little bit of educated guesswork. More than once I have subsequently been told by political insiders that my rendering of the political situation was quite close to the mark.



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