



12 August - 26 August, 2025

Dear Reader,

I first got the inspiration for this book during the devastating bushfires here in Australia in the black summer of 2019/20. While shocked and alarmed at the severity of the crisis that was unfolding I couldn't help thinking that this might also provide a great premise for a crime novel - what if someone used the cover of the fire to commit a murder?

Although *SMOKE* is set in California it is clearly a story that every Australian can relate to.

As a journalist I have reported on fires in both Australia and the US and shifting the narrative to California provided me with both a challenge and an opportunity.

The themes that thread through the book - corruption, poverty, the challenges of providing health and aged care, climate change and politically charged ignorance are universal challenges but they are arguably even more evident in the US today than they are here. I felt this helped sharpen the premise for '*SMOKE*' and raised the stakes of the narrative.

The story opens with the discovery of a body in a shed. At first police think the person is simply a victim of the fire but they then discover the shed was locked from the outside and the death quickly becomes a murder investigation led by Detective Alex Markov.

As the smoke begins to dissipate, Alex unravels a web of corruption entrenched in the town's core. Yet, the cost of revealing this crookedness threatens to shatter not only her own life but also the lives of those she holds dear. Faced with the dilemma of turning a blind eye to the pervading corruption or confronting the truth, Alex must decide whether to risk everything for justice.

Above all this is a human story; a story of an individual, a family and a community under pressure. It is also, I hope, an engaging and thrilling read.

I'm so pleased that this book has been chosen to be part of Together We Read and that it will reach more of the wide reading audience that use our wonderful libraries.

I hope you enjoy it and look forward to hearing what you think. If you feel like dropping me a line, I always welcome reader feedback, and you can find me through my author website.

Michael Brissenden