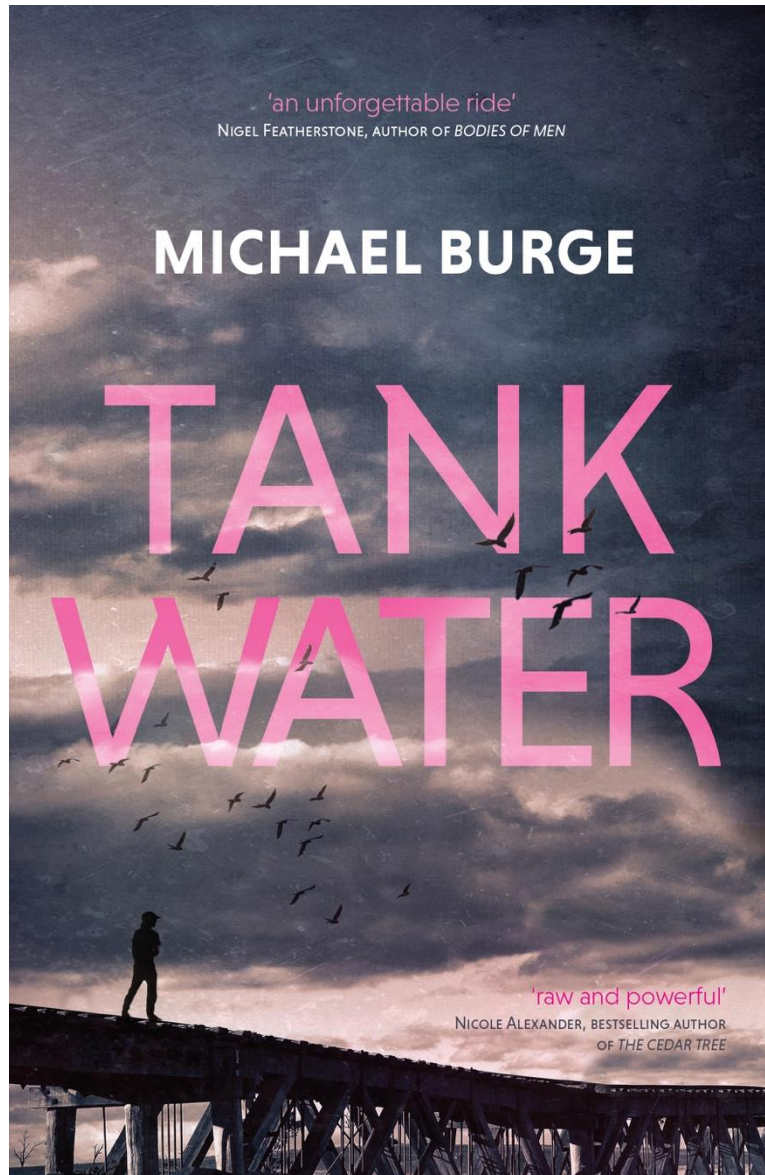


TANK WATER

by Michael Burge



Book Club Questions

MidnightSun Publishing 2021

About the book

James Brandt didn't look back when he got away from his rural hometown as a teenager. Now he's returned to Kippen for the first time in twenty years because his cousin Tony has been found dead under the local bridge.

The news that Tony has left him the entire family farm triggers James's journalistic curiosity – and his anxiety – both of which cropped up during his turbulent journey to adulthood. But it is the unexpected homophobic attack he survives that draws James into a hunt for the reasons one lonely Kippen farm boy in every generation kills himself.

Standing in the way is James's father, the town's recently retired top cop, who is not prepared to investigate crimes no one reckons have taken place. James must use every newshound's trick he ever learned in order to uncover the brutal truth.

A coming-of-age story and crime thriller with a large and gentle heart.

About the author



Michael Burge is an Australian author and journalist who lives at Deepwater in the New England region of NSW with his husband and their dogs. After graduating from the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Michael undertook media studies in the United Kingdom. His non-fiction debut *Questionable Deeds: Making a stand for equal love* lifted the lid on familial and institutional homophobia in Australia during the marriage equality campaign. Michael has written, edited, directed and broadcast for Fairfax Media, Intermedia, United News & Media, Margo Kingston's *NoFibs* and a range of lifestyle mastheads. He is the director of the annual High Country Writers Festival in Glen Innes.

For discussion

1. Many of the main characters in *Tank Water* break some kind of law. Are there any circumstances in which crime (even petty crime) is excusable?
2. Historical gay-hate crimes such as those committed against Scott Johnson (the young man killed at Manly in Sydney in 1988) are still being investigated, and suspects have been charged with murder. In what ways does *Tank Water* contribute to the debate about whether these cases should be reopened?
3. *Tank Water* is set in a fictitious country town in northern NSW. Is it an accurate portrayal of life in the bush? Why?
4. Do you think James should have stayed away from Kippen like his father suggests in the prologue? What might have happened if he hadn't returned?
5. In what ways do you believe the characters in *Tank Water* dig deep emotionally to assist James in finding the truth?
6. Is gay-hate crime just a 'generational thing' or was it always unacceptable to attack people for being different?
7. At the end of *Tank Water*, who do you think the real villains are?
8. In what ways do James's parents Beck and Daniel contribute to him staying in the closet?
9. What pivotal roles do the female characters in *Tank Water* fulfil in the story?
10. Life-changing moments for teenagers James Brandt and Bobby Jones take place in *Tank Water*. How responsible are they for what they do?
11. How toxic does a man have to be in order to be considered a 'toxic male'?
12. What could have been done earlier than 2005 to prevent the deaths taking place at Kippen Bridge?
13. In what ways is James better off at the end of *Tank Water* than he was at the start of the story? Why?