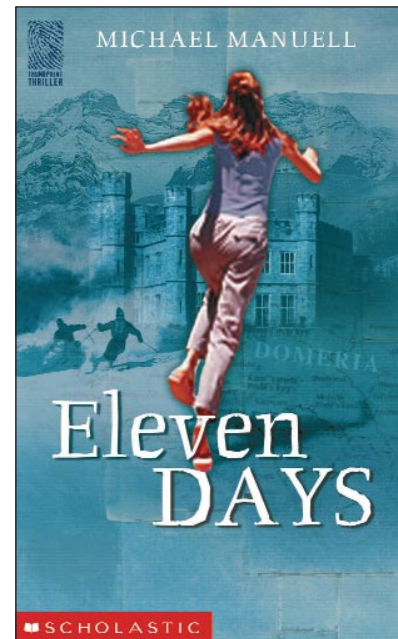


# Eleven Days

Written by Michael Manuell



## ◀ The Back Story ▶ with Michael Manuell

**What were your reasons for writing *Eleven Days*? What were your sources of inspiration?**

*Eleven Days* came out of a long-overdue visit to relatives in England with my daughter. It was a trip that we took a few days after the two planes flew into the World Trade Centre towers. The atmosphere, especially in the world of airlines, was electric. There seemed to be potential danger everywhere, governments seemed close to panic. All that tension provided a background while the holiday gave me an opportunity to write that was too good to miss. I used the international settings my daughter and I were experiencing as the geography of the book and added a thriller on top. *Eleven Days* isn't true of course but it is well connected to our trip to England.

**Why did you write in this way for this book?**

Rather than plan the whole piece I will more often sit down and plan out the activities for particular scenes. Especially with a thriller such as *Eleven Days*, you have to sort out the order of events sometimes to make sure the action makes sense and doesn't contradict itself. So, I wrote with some planning, a lot of note taking and a lot of just writing the story with reference to what was in my head. Having explained all that, I do have to say *Eleven Days* was quite different. I started writing the story, with almost no notes, on the plane to England. A lot of notes came later as the story grew, and apart from a couple of brief halts it poured out.

**How did you personally plan when writing this book – themes, plot summary, structure, characters, setting and style?**

I usually have an idea buzzing around in my head for months and I start to make notes (a character, a setting, an incident, a sentence, anything). It is as if the notes are the pieces of a jigsaw that I will have to assemble, if I can find enough of them. I use the notes I've already made, but the note-making increases as I get into the process. I seldom plan the whole piece but I do like to have that distant goal, an end in mind while I'm writing. New ideas will often arrive unexpectedly as I'm writing, so I have to keep myself open to the new directions the story is taking. Sometimes a character 'goes rogue' and outside of my control and the rogue character takes the story off in another direction to the one in which I was going. It's exciting and unnerving, but in the end much easier to write when a character gets real enough to take over a piece.

By the time I begin the second draft the writing process has become more conscious. Certainly with a thriller the structure will always need tidying and tightening up so that the reader is propelled through the story with as much energy as possible. For instance, in-depth character insights can be interesting but if they delay the story for too long (indeed, are not essential to the plot) they have to be excluded. Certainly *Eleven Days* went through a lot of cutting to keep it as lean as possible.

## What were your sources of information?

My sources of information were the trip to England; maps and photographs of London; images of Greenwich Park from the web; an image of a Desoto Fireflite car from the web; and Rob Evans, a friend, advised me on technical matters to do with digital video recording.

### About the author:

#### Michael Manuell

I live in Sydney with my wife and two children. I have a background in the technical side of theatre and film and I've also been an actor. I wrote my first play at eleven years old for the end of school concert. My present life is filled with writing work, acting, family duties and renovations to my house. I read a lot and am involved with my son's soccer team. The best advice I was ever given was to sit down at the same time every day to write, even if only for an hour.

## Teaching Ideas ✓

### Before Reading ✓

- Look at the front cover illustration with students. Discuss its impact. Does it make them want to read this novel? Have students predict what the story may be about using the title and front-cover illustration.
- Have students read the blurb on the back of the book. Does it alter their predictions of the story's plot?
- Talk with students about other action thrillers they have read. What are some of their common themes?
- Discuss student's memories and thoughts on the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks – a part of our recent history that formed part of the background to writing *Eleven Days*.
- Talk with students about flights and destinations to which they have travelled. Discuss students' experiences of Bali and/or London in particular.
- Ask students if there are any times they may have had to be a hero, and if so, what they did that was heroic.

### Activities

#### Cover creation

Invent a title for a thriller you may one day write. Design a front cover that will attract attention and appeal to a wide group of readers. Show your completed cover to the class. Explain why you chose this title and illustration.

#### Book review

Write a short review of an action/thriller you have recently read. Include its title, author, setting, characters and brief plot summary. Make a collection of the book reviews so the class can choose other titles to read.

### During reading ✓

- Use a variety of reading methods with students during the reading of *Eleven Days*. For example, read some parts in small groups for shared reading; have students read some chapters quietly to themselves, and have students read the book out loud to the whole class. Remind and encourage students to see the importance of thinking about the words as they read them and about the audience they are reading to. Be aware that different students will read at different paces with different levels of comprehension, and ask occasional questions to determine students' understanding of the text.

## BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

- Ask the students to note down places around the world that are mentioned in the text, to later look up in an atlas or the internet. Discuss why the author has positioned real places alongside the fictitious 'Domeria'. Why do you think he has done this?
- Find out how familiar students are with government and politics. Do they understand the term 'democracy'? Do they know why different countries fight or are troubled within their political structures?
- Talk with students about each character as you are introduced to them. Discuss the strengths, weaknesses and interest factors of each character.
- Can students picture places where this story is set? Encourage them to share their ideas and experiences.

### Activities

#### Where in the world?

Find the places mentioned in the story and mark them on a blank world map. You will have to choose a cold, mountainous area close to the former Soviet Union to locate 'Domeria'. Mark the route taken by Isabella and her dad on their holiday. Use a different colour to show where Isabella was taken hostage.

#### Quotable quotes

On page 15 it is written that 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.' Have you heard this expression before? What does this mean to you? Write down your ideas and try and relate them to national and world events.

#### Identikit

Isabella had to remember what the man in the check-pattern hat looked like. How good are you at remembering details? Have someone dress up and walk past the students for about ten seconds. Write down everything you remember about the person – facial features, marks or scars, hair, height, weight, clothing. Try and draw a picture of them being as accurate as you can!

#### Lie-detector test

The characters realised there was a traitor amongst them. How do you know if you can trust someone? Think of some ways you could test out whether someone was being truthful or lying. It could be an invention or machine or a series of questions.

### After reading ✓

- Once students have read the book, come together as a class to discuss it. Encourage students to be honest about their opinions of the book and to justify their comments. Generate a discussion by asking questions such as:
  - What did you like most about this story? What did you like least?
  - Do you think the story was believable?
  - Which character did you relate to most and why?
  - Do you think it was deliberate that the author chose a female character to be the hero? Why or why not?
  - What questions would you like to ask the author?
  - Would you like to read any more stories by Michael Manuell?
  - Do you think illustrations would have been appropriate for this story?
  - What information do you think the author needed to write *Eleven Days*?
  - How do you think the author ensured consistency and continuity in his characters and story in a long book such as this?

## Activities

### Secret code

Part of spy work and espionage involves the use of codes and code-breaking. Invent a secret code using symbols, numbers, pictures and letters. Be as creative and clever as you can. Give the secret message to a friend and see if they can crack the code and read the message.

### Newspaper article

Pretend you are a reporter interviewing Isabella and her father. Write a list of open-ended questions to find out important parts of their adventure. Reword the answers into a 200-word newspaper article and draw a picture as a photo. Come up with a catchy headline.

### Passport

Find out what information is required on a passport. Create a fictional character and make them their own passport.

### The lucky country

Australia is often described as the lucky country. Do you think it is lucky? Why or why not? Compare the Australian lifestyle and politics with that of a country like 'Domeria' and even London and Bali. List ten things Australians can be thankful for.

### Write your own ending

The conclusion of *Eleven Days* is quite a happy one. Write your own ending to the story keeping similar settings and characters. Begin to write what happens after it is discovered that Aunt Helena is the traitor.

### Literature study

Discuss the following questions with the aim of encouraging the students to read and to increase their understanding and enjoyment of *Eleven Days*.

- What do you like about this particular genre or text type (an action/thriller narrative)?
- How do you think the story will be affected by the absence of illustrations? What freedom does this allow the reader?
- What do you think about the book's title? Does it make you want to read the story?
- Is it important for each chapter to have a title? Why or why not?
- Comment about the length of the book. Is it too long, too short or just right?
- What do you think the author hoped to achieve in writing this book?