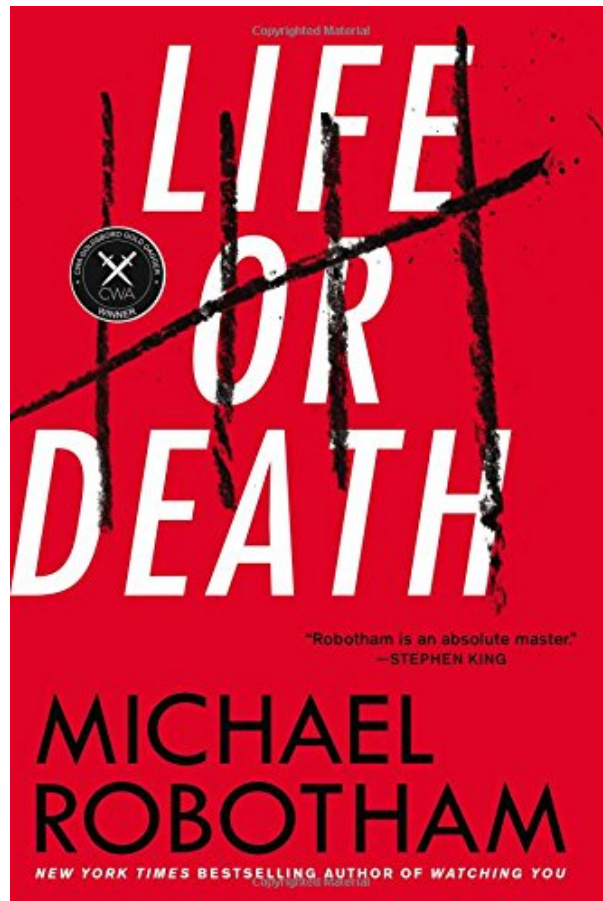
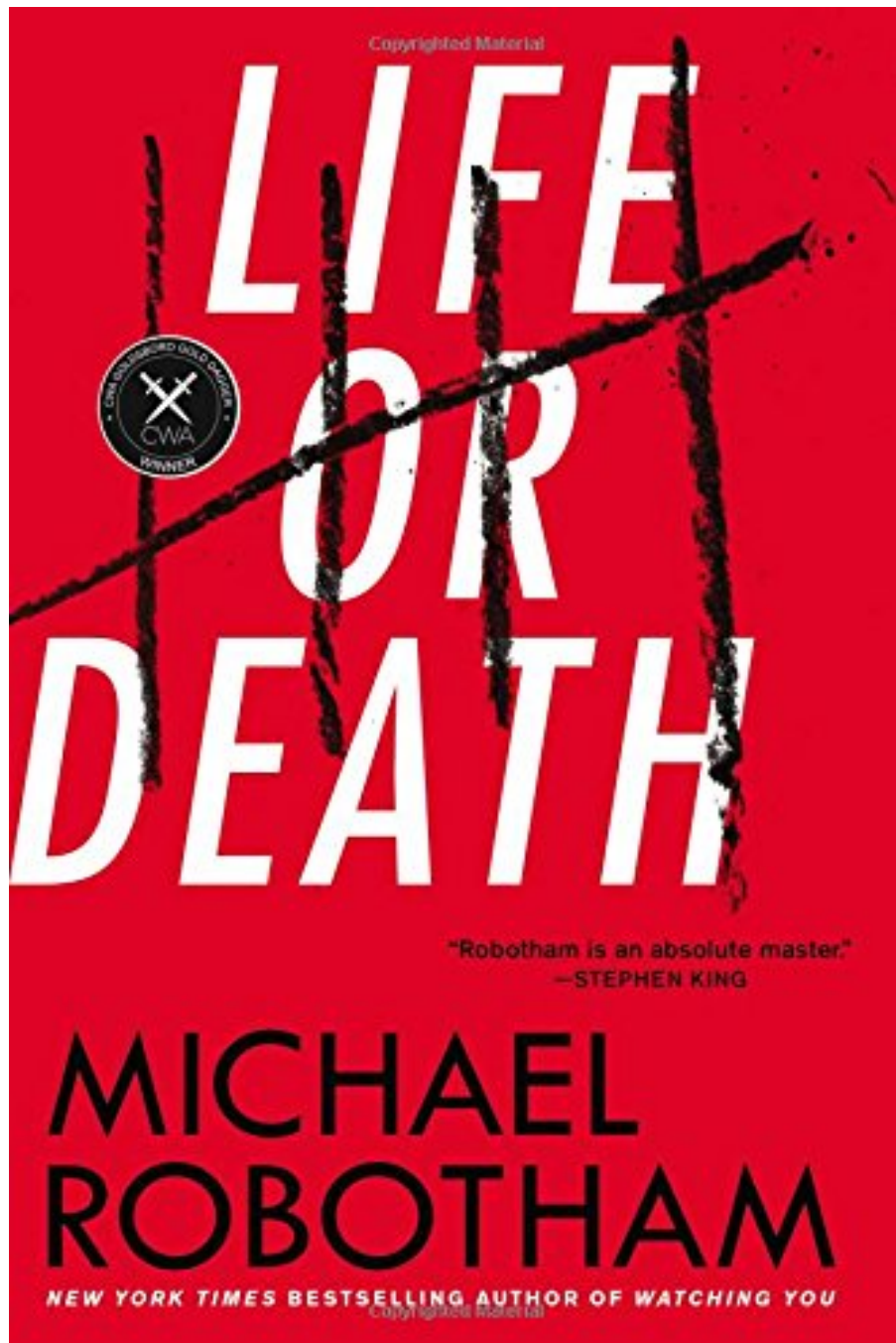


LIFE OR DEATH: A NOVEL BY MICHAEL ROBOTHAM



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Review

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About the Author

Michael Robotham is author of Watching You, Say You're Sorry, Bleed for Me, Shatter, and other novels of suspense. A former investigative journalist who has worked in Britain, Australia and the US, Robotham is one of the world's most acclaimed authors of thriller fiction. He lives in Sydney with his wife and three daughters.

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Why would a man serving a long prison sentence escape the day before he's due to be released?

Audie Palmer has spent ten years in a Texas prison after pleading guilty to a robbery in which four people died and seven million dollars went missing. During that time he has suffered repeated beatings, stabbings and threats by inmates and guards, all desperate to answer the same question: where's the money?

On the day before Audie is due to be released, he suddenly vanishes. Now everybody is searching for him - the police, FBI, gangsters and other powerful figures - but Audie isn't running to save his own life. Instead, he's trying to save someone else's.

Michael Robotham has created the ultimate underdog hero, an honorable criminal shrouded in mystery and ready to lead readers on a remarkable chase.

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Most helpful customer reviews

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Life or Death

By S Riaz

Audie Palmer has spent ten years in jail when he escapes from prison, without telling anyone of his plans. He was sentenced after a robbery on an armoured truck led to four deaths, Audie himself horribly injured, one man – Audie's brother – missing and seven million dollars unaccounted for. .. Through all of the ten years Audie has spent in prison he has suffered threats, beatings and countless attempts on his life by people hoping to get their hands on the money. So, with his jail term almost over, his actions make no sense. Why would a man about to be released escape from prison a day early when, if caught, he could face another, harsher sentence?

During his time in prison, Audie's closest friend has been Moss Webster. Now Moss finds himself sent to locate – and betray – his friend. Also on Audie's trail is Special Agent Desiree Furness, while Sheriff Ryan Valdez (the man who nearly killed Audie after the robbery), of Dreyfus County, also offers to help with the search. During this fast paced, well plotted and exciting thriller, we are taken through Audie's life and discover what happened ten years ago, what Audie hopes to accomplish, what happened to the money and why so many people want him dead?

I really enjoyed this novel, peopled with sympathetic main characters and which did not let down the pace from start to finish. This really is a roller coaster ride in every sense of the word and yet the author effortlessly holds together all the different strands of the plot; both past and present. If you enjoy really well written thrillers, then you will certainly enjoy this. I have never read anything by this author before, but as this is a stand-alone novel it is a great introduction to his work and I will certainly be reading more by him in the future. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Keeping a promise...

By FictionFan

Audie Palmer has been in prison for ten years for an armed robbery that went wrong. Although two of the gang died and Audie was arrested, the stolen \$7 million has never been found. Since Audie's brother is suspected of being the fourth gang member, everyone assumes he's living a life of luxury somewhere and that Audie will get his share when he gets out. So why would Audie suddenly choose to escape, just one day before he's due to be released? It seems he has made a promise that he must keep - but there are people who want to stop him. So not only is Audie running from the law, he's in a race to fulfil his mission before he loses his life...

I've been enjoying working my way through Michael Robotham's Joe O'Loughlin series recently, so grabbed the opportunity to read this new standalone novel. From the moment Audie escapes right at the beginning, the plot begins to twist and turn. I don't think it's a spoiler to say that the reader is very much on Audie's side - we're not sure why he ended up in jail, but we're soon convinced that he's an honourable man and his intentions must be good. As we follow him on his present-day mission, we gradually find out about his past - the brother whose drug abuse and criminality brought Audie under suspicion more than once, the crime lord he ended up working for, the girl he fell in love with. And it gradually becomes clear that these past events

are in some way connected to the present.

The book is told mostly in the present tense but in the third person and, although Audie's is the main viewpoint, we also see through the eyes of Desiree, one of the FBI agents on the case, and Moss, a former prison-mate of Audie's. Desiree has had the original robbery on her books as a cold case, but when Audie escapes her boss takes over the investigation and seems to want to keep Desiree out. But the diminutive Desiree is stubborn and she's determined to be in on it, especially since she's not sure things are quite what they seem on the surface. Moss is a great character - inside for life on the three strikes rule, he suddenly finds himself freed on condition that he hunts Audie down. But will Moss put his chance of freedom above his friendship for Audie? Even he doesn't seem too sure...

As always with Robotham, the characterisation is very strong. Audie himself might be just a shade too perfect to be fully credible, but that's more than compensated for by the characters of Moss and Desiree, both of whom come over as wholly believable and likeable. It takes a while for us to suspect who the baddies are but, when we do, boy, are they bad! And if Audie wants to keep the promise that he made ten years earlier, he has to be running towards the baddies rather than away...

This is a fast-paced rollercoaster of a thriller that reminded me of Harlan Coben at his best (and also just a bit of the Shawshank Redemption). Definitely movie material - has it been snapped up yet, I wonder? Loads of action, strong characters, great writing, a twisty plot and an explosive ending - this is the thriller of the year for me so far. Highly recommended, either for existing fans of the O'Loughlin series or as a great way for new readers to sample Robotham's work.

NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Little, Brown Book Group UK.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Astounding and unputdownable

By Karen B

In an earlier review of Robotham's works, I said they should come with a health warning as they render the reader unable to sleep. I want to correct that statement and instead recommend they be issued as a cure for narcolepsy, because I defy anyone to try and sleep while reading his latest work, *Life or Death*, because I sure as hell could not.

While I will read anything this man writes, I initially thought this was to be another in his Joseph O'Loughlin series and kept waiting for one of my favourite fictive characters (and his cop buddy, Vincent Ruiz) to make an entry. They don't. This novel isn't part of the O'Loughlin series and I initially experienced a small flash of disappointment that was swiftly staunch. That's because this novel is a tremendous standalone with a fabulous premise: why would a man escape from prison the day before he's due to be released?

Why indeed.

That question is enough to arouse anyone's curiosity, and I wondered how Robotham was going to pull off the story of Audie Palmer, a young man convicted of armed robbery ten years earlier and in which four people died, who flees his jail cell the day before he's given state-sanctioned freedom for serving time. Reviled outside the prison, hounded endlessly within, Palmer's life has been one of misery and hardship - so why does he make it worse by escaping? Why risk adding 20-25 years to his sentence by becoming a felon once more?

Palmer's escape sets in motion a series of events over which he appears to have no control. Hunted by the authorities and criminals alike, Palmer is on a mission, but will he succeed and what's the nature of this mission? Why didn't he just wait one more day and walk from behind bars a free man?

This was a simply sensational tale. Taut, fast-paced, filled with believable characters, Robotham's cracking dialogue, and original descriptions, I couldn't put this down. Not only do the people come to life as the

present and past unfold, but the different settings, the American landscape from the borders with Mexico to Texas, also develop a life of their own. You can smell the heat, taste the brackish water or the greasy eggs in an out-of-the-way diner, feel the sand, hear the flyscreens squeaking on rusty hinges as forlorn and deadbeat extras make an appearance. Despite having a horrible headache that required codeine, I stayed up till 3am to finish the book. I had to know what happened to Audie (who you come to champion so hard it hurts!), I had to know why he did what he did. The plot doesn't only thicken in this novel, as back-stories and flashbacks weave their way in, laying solid foundations upon which the present is built, it sets harder than concrete making the conclusion one, though you don't see it coming until the end, marvellously strong and utterly satisfying.

The only downside is that I have finished the damn thing and now have a long wait for Robotham's next book. But if you like crime novels, edge of your seat thrillers, character driven works that also pay homage to setting, and are just superbly written, then I cannot recommend this highly enough.

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