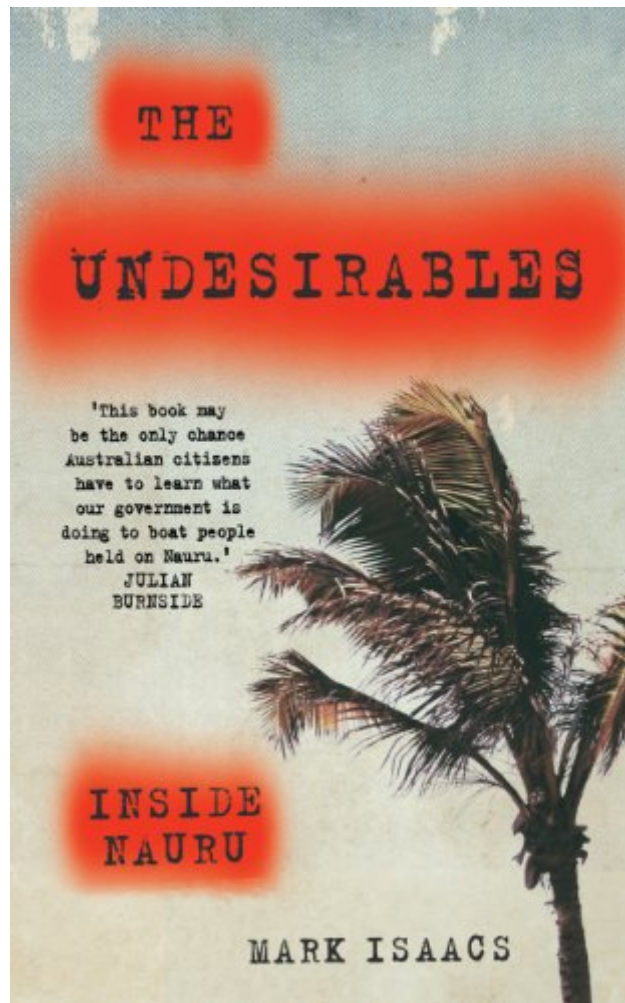


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The Undesirables: Inside Nauru



Synopsis

'How long will we be here?' one man asked. Nobody could answer him. Nobody knew. The intention was clear: this was the No Advantage policy. Take them to a distant island, lock them away, punish them, forget about them. Criminals were given a sentence to serve; these men were not even given that. Lost hope ebbed out of the men in uncontrollable sobs and tears. Queue jumper, boat person, illegals. Asylum seekers are contentious front-page news but obtaining information about Australia's regional processing centres is increasingly difficult. We learn only what the government wants us to know. Mark Isaacs worked for the Salvation Army inside the Nauru Detention Centre soon after it re-opened in 2012. He provided humanitarian aid to the men interned in the camp. What he saw there moved him to speak out. *The Undesirables* chronicles his time on Nauru detailing daily life and the stories of the men held there; the self-harm, suicide attempts, and riots; the rare moments of joy; the moments of deep despair. Mark's eyewitness account humanises a political debate usually ruled by misleading rhetoric. About the author Mark Isaacs became impassioned by the asylum seeker debate after a visit to Villawood Detention Centre while writing for Oxfam. Months later, in October 2012, Mark was employed by the Salvation Army to work at the regional processing centre in Nauru. While there, Mark established the Recreations program and Oceans program for asylum seekers. He eventually resigned from the Salvation Army in June 2013 and spoke out publicly against the government's No Advantage policy.

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Customer Reviews

I have no hesitation in giving Mark Isaacs' 'The Undesirables: Inside Nauru' five stars. Isaacs worked as a counsellor in Australia's off shore detention center for asylum seekers on Nauru, a tiny, isolated, desolate and impoverished island. Therefore, he has an insider's knowledge of conditions and treatment. These desperate people from countries such as Sri Lanka and Iraq, flee war, persecution and possible murder, find their way to Indonesia and risk their lives on rickety, unseaworthy boats in search of a safer life...many of them drown. During his time on Nauru, Isaacs befriends many of the prisoners and finds the majority of them to be ordinary, decent people and not 'queue jumpers' and 'illegals' as they are commonly labelled. Isaacs points out that this harsh treatment flies in the face of the UN Convention for Refugees. Finally, unable to endure what he sees, he returns to Australia and breaks the code of silence by writing 'The Undesirables'. The book is not a novel...it is a compassionate account of conditions inside the 'processing' center and the hopes and longings of unfortunate people. I commend Mark Isaacs for his bravery and humanity.

The ring of terrible truth is here. Preceded by a tersely informative preface by top lawyer Julian Burnside, who neatly skewers the lies and misinformation about asylum seekers, this is a searing document of shocking cold cruelty. The detention centres are a playground for heartless psychopaths who gravitate to the job of destroying the hopes and mental health of detainees. The sheer meanness of some of the decisions is breathtaking. Read it and weep.

I had to read this book in small chunks. I loved it and I hated it. Loved it because it was a brilliant read, capturing the personal stories of the refugees, the feeling of the camp, the experience of the staff and the FACTS about the asylum seekers debate in Australia. I hated it because I could barely stomach the revolting manufactured system of punishment that the Australian government is conducting right under our noses and most people are not even aware. It would have taken great courage for Mark Isaacs not only to do the work but then write about it and RELIVE it again through the writing. What courage and strength he has shown. He gave us a window in to a world that we

are actively being kept from knowing about and I appreciate that. Everyone should read this book. My eyes have been opened.

A very well-written and moving account by a young (secular) employee of the Salvation Army, who applied to work in an Australian camp for illegal immigrants on the tiny island of Nauru. Faced with major issues ourselves on the immigration topic, I think the scary thing for me was not so much Australia's way of handling it (terrible though it is) but the veil of secrecy that is drawn over their activities. Thus the visa fee to Nauru is now \$8000 – non-refundable even if you're not granted one. There was a complete media ban on camp operations. The Wilson guards monitored all people within the camp, not just the men. They monitored Salvos (Salvation army workers), listened to our conversations, recorded our interactions. When journalists arrived on the island, Wilson Security kept photos of them on their guard house wall so they could be easily identified and prevented from entering. It was also quite a shock to see how the Salvation Army, an organisation I had always regarded as Christian based, was forcing its employees to say nothing – indeed to lie – in order to keep a lucrative contract. The author writes movingly of the men he met – largely from Sri Lanka, Iran and Iraq – and their gradually eroding mental health awaiting a decision on when (if ever) they could settle in Australia. Criminals were given a sentence to serve; these men were not even given that. Unsure whether to fritter away the months and years in a substandard camp where self-harm and suicide are commonplace, or to return home and face the attendant dangers, this is a thought-provoking and informative book.

An important and informative expose of the reality of harsh life currently in the Nauru asylum detention centre written by one who has actually lived and worked alongside those detained there. We all need to read documents such as these to acquire facts rather than rely on biased journalistic and government opinions in various media that do not serve humanity well but rather attempt to influence the people with "hidden" political agenda.

I was surprised that a young, inexperienced writer could write such a clear, concise book about a subject with so many layers and stories within the story. Mark Isaacs is so passionate and at the same time objective about his subjects and isn't blinded by his close association with the refugees in the camp. The book gives such a clear picture of the lives of the refugees and the injustices committed on all sides, at the same time retaining his sense of justice and fairness. He never loses hope and never stops 'feeling' even if it means taking on the sufferings of his subjects. This is a book

by someone who has personally experienced the cruelty of the refugee system by the Australian government. It is simply and clearly told in an honest and provocative way. Mark Isaacs deserves to be voted as Australian of the Year for his uncompromising book, without the self-pity that would have been understandable in such a situation. Read this book that encapsulates the whole refugee crisis in a few pages of truth.

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