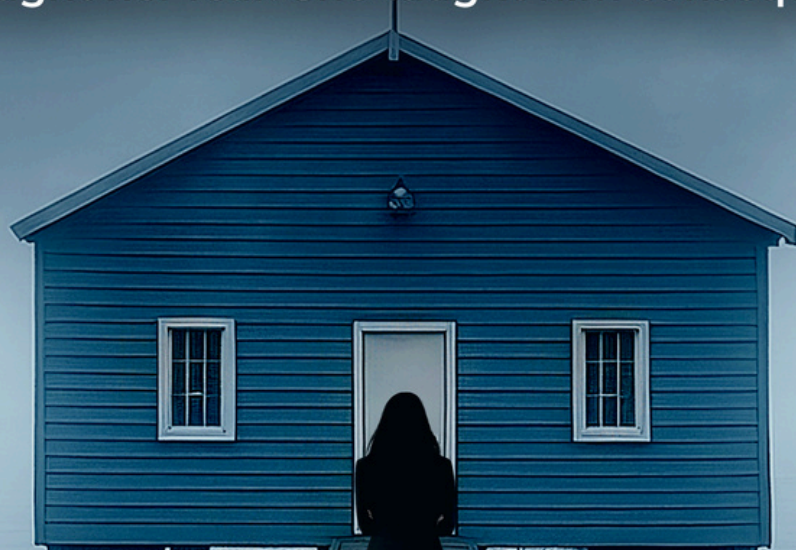


THE LONG GAME

Book one of the Maddox and Bennett series
He taught her fear. She taught him consequence.



FREYA FORD

Book Club Kit



Authors Note

I've been writing and journalling for more than thirty-five years. It started back in high school and followed me all the way through university and into a long career in the corporate world. I enjoyed that path, but writing was always the thing I returned to. I filled notebooks with thoughts and observations, wrote short stories, and collected first drafts like treasures waiting for the right moment.

The confidence to share them took a little longer to arrive.

The idea for *The Long Game* came suddenly, and the first draft poured out of me with a kind of unstoppable momentum. I wrote every chance I had, completely absorbed in the world and the characters. It felt like the story had been waiting for me.

The spark behind the book was the end of a long-term relationship—one that made me realise how little we talk about covert narcissism and the subtle forms of coercive control. These behaviours are often invisible from the outside, and even the person experiencing them may not realise what's happening.

Victims can become bonded to their abuser without meaning to, and because the shifts are gradual, many find themselves confused—feeling that something is wrong, yet convinced the problem is somehow them.

Over time, this kind of emotional pressure often shows up in the body too: stress, exhaustion, anxiety, or persistent physical symptoms that quietly signal that something isn't right. And while healing can take time, it does happen. Identity, autonomy, and confidence can all be reclaimed, piece by piece.

I wanted to explore these themes through a story that pulls you in, keeps you turning pages, and shows the strength, complexity, and resilience of the women at its centre. *The Long Game* is not just about the quiet abuse—it's also about the clarity that eventually comes, the connections that save us, and the moments of courage that change everything.

This is my first published novel, and writing it has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. I hope the characters feel real to you, and that their journey, and their strength, stay with you long after the final page.

Thank you for reading

P.S. If your book club is reading *The Long Game*, I'm happy to provide free ebook copies for all members.

Also, if your group is interested, I'm available to join your discussion. Either in person (if local) or via Zoom to answer questions and chat about the story.

The Long Game | Synopsis

Katya Bennett is finally ready to step back into her life after years of loss. When she meets Mack Vale, a magnetic stranger who seems to understand her in a way no one else does, she's drawn toward a connection that feels both unexpected and long overdue.

But as their relationship deepens, the cracks begin to show. Little moments that don't feel quite right. A tension she can't name. A sense that something in her world is shifting beneath her feet. And quietly circling around Mack is a darker current: his ties to the notorious Night Reapers, a presence Katya can't quite grasp but instinctively recoils from.

While she tries to make sense of her growing unease, the people closest to her notice changes she struggles to explain. What follows is a slow, gripping unraveling of trust, identity, and the stories we tell ourselves about love, loyalty, and danger.

Set against the coastal backdrop of Western Australia, The Long Game blends emotional depth with page-turning suspense. It explores how easily strong, capable women can be pulled into relationships that reshape them—and how powerful it can be to finally step back into the light.

Reviews

Amazon Australia

“One of those books you can't put down ! I found myself thinking about the people in the book as I drive home from Uni. I was just a little too keen to see what Mack was up to next .
A great thriller to get the heart pumping. Yep well worth the read , bring on book 2 !!”

Good Reads

Great book club read! I love psychological thrillers and The Long Game hooked me from the very first page with its emotion, sense of danger and tension. Great mix of love and obsession that was unsettling and menacing enough to not want to stop reading till the end!

I read it in one sitting and can't stop thinking about it. Keen to read the next book in the series.

This was a gripping read. Told through multiple POVs I felt connected to the characters. The plot is simple but the writing keeps you turning the page.

Discussion Questions

Character & Motivation

- 1.What initially draws Katya to Mack, and which early warning signs did you notice before she did?
- 2.Mack is charismatic and frightening in equal measure. Which scene shifted your perception of him the most?
- 3.Katya’s support network plays a big role in her survival. Which relationship felt the most pivotal?

Trauma & Control

- 1.How does the book portray coercive control differently from overt violence?
- 2.Why do you think Katya found it difficult to leave?
- 3.What factors contributed to Katya ignoring the red flags?
- 4.What impact did Maddox have in Katya’s escape from Macks influence?

Setting & Atmosphere

- 1.How does the WA setting shape the mood of the story?
- 2.Which scene or location felt the most vivid or cinematic?

Plot & Pace

- 1.Were you surprised by how Mack escalates his behaviour?
- 2.Was there anything Katya did that frustrated you? Did you understand her motivation?
- 3.Which plot point hit the hardest for you?
- 4.Did the pacing feel like a slow burn, a ticking clock, or both?

Bigger Picture

1. Which character was your favourite? Why?
2. Which character’s backstory would you be most interested in exploring further?
3. If you could ask Katya one question, what would it be?

Looking Ahead

1. What do you hope Katya, Monica, and Maddox explore in Book 2, The Loud Game?
2. What unresolved thread are you most curious about?

Behind the Scenes

Mack Vale | Voice Note Entry

Spoiler alert! Only read this after reading ‘The Long Game’

She’s gone.

Took her things while my back was turned. Slipped away like a stranger afraid of her own shadow. After everything I poured into her. After everything I taught her. The gratitude I expected... apparently that was asking too much.

She won’t answer a message. Won’t return a call. Pretends she doesn’t see what she’s blowing up. And what still stuns me is how she’s convinced herself she’s the one who’s been hurt. As if walking away erases her responsibility. As if silence is innocence.

People always show who they are eventually. Even Katya.

She isn’t thinking. She’s reacting. Someone’s been feeding her garbage. Anna, probably. That girl lives for drama. And Monica? She’d celebrate seeing me fail. They’ve stuffed Katya’s head with poison, and she’s too overwhelmed to tell the difference.

She keeps saying she “needs space.”

Space from what, exactly?

From being supported? From being lifted out of the mediocrity she used to call a life?

I gave her structure. I gave her direction. I showed her how to rise above herself. She’s drowning in the weight of her own flaws and mistaking that for my doing.

I know she’s confused. I can fix that. Once she calms down, she’ll remember who steadied her when she couldn’t stand on her own. She always leaned on me more than she could admit. She needed me long before she had the courage to say it.

She thinks she can just walk away. She doesn’t understand that relationships don’t dissolve because one person panics and runs. She’s looking at a moment; I’m looking at the whole picture.

I shouldn’t have to explain myself. She should know my intentions. She should trust that I’m guiding us toward something better. If she could see half of what I’ve set in motion for us, she’d feel safe again. She’d be grateful.

But she’s acting like I’m the threat now. As if her life functioned before I stepped in. It didn’t. We both know that.

I’m being patient. More than she deserves right now. I’m giving her the space she thinks she wants, but only because I know she’ll realise what she’s throwing away.

One thing she needs to understand:

I’m not going anywhere. Not after everything we’ve built.

Sneak Peek

Book 2 of the Maddox and Bennett series

The Loud Game

Release Date: Early 2026

Two years after the siege that shattered their lives, Katya Bennett and her closest friends have rebuilt something hopeful: The Lighthouse Collective, a refuge for women escaping coercive control. But safety is an illusion. The man who nearly destroyed them—Mack Vale—has resurfaced online, reborn as the charismatic leader of The Apex Men’s Network, a fast-spreading movement turning angry young men into loyal soldiers.

While Detective Thomas Maddox quietly hunts Mack from the shadows, Katya battles a new fear: Monica’s daughter Sophie is withdrawing, pulling away from everyone who loves her. When Sophie meets Ethan, a charming but wounded young man desperate for belonging, neither knows he has just been promoted inside Mack’s growing empire.

As the Apex chapters across Western Australia swell with recruits, Mack and his ruthless lieutenant lay the groundwork for something bigger than revenge. Something organised. Something violent.

And when Katya realises Mack’s reach is closer than she ever imagined, she’s forced to face a terrifying truth:

Mack isn’t coming back for closure—he’s coming back for her destruction.

Author Bio

Freya Ford is a writer and mother of two incredible daughters, and one demanding cat who unapologetically rules the house.

She lives in Perth, Western Australia, where she juggles being a single mum, and sole breadwinner, while following her creative calling.

After more than 20 years in the corporate world, Freya finally gave herself permission to follow the creative calling she’s felt her entire life. The Long Game is her debut novel — born from experience, resilience, and a deep belief in the power of story to heal and connect.

Her work explores the often unseen realities of coercive control and emotional abuse, written with raw honesty and a voice that refuses to stay silent. Through her writing, Freya hopes to give strength to those still finding their own.

When she’s not writing, she’s navigating the chaos of everyday life, raising strong daughters, and answering to the true head of the household: her cat.

Connect with Freya:

Website: www.freyafor.com

Email: freyaforauthor@outlook.com

Instagram: [instagram.com/freyaforauthor/](https://www.instagram.com/freyaforauthor/)

Tiktok: [tiktok.com/@freya_ford_author](https://www.tiktok.com/@freya_ford_author)

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