



Nick Lake Interview

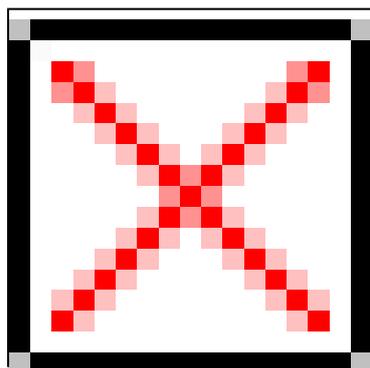
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Nicholas Tucker interviews author **Nick Lake**

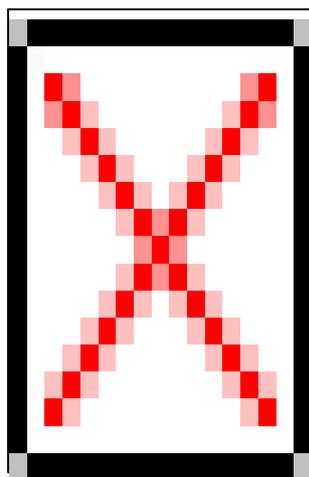


Nick Lake's novel **In Darkness** won the **2013 Michael L. Printz Award** and was shortlisted for the **Carnegie Medal**. This was followed by **Hostage Three**, also very well received. Nicholas Tucker talked to him about his new novel, **There Will Be Lies**.

I meet Nick in the opulent though somewhat prison-like headquarters of HarperCollins, with the firm shortly to be moving to new offices near London Bridge. He works here as an editor. My first question has to be how has he managed to write three lengthy and very well received novels in the last three years while also holding down a full-time job?

I now live in West Oxfordshire and have a 90 minute train journey here every day. This is when I do my writing. But I already have one four year old daughter at home and since my son was born last year I have done absolutely no writing at home.

Nick giggles almost apologetically when he says this, and laughs at other times too. Aged 35 and still looking young, he is excellent company. So how come his novels are so dark? [In Darkness](#) [3] features a Haitian boy trapped under earthquake rubble and convinced he is going to die while hallucinating about the great local hero Toussaint l'Ouverture. [Hostage Three](#) [4] describes a teenage girl and her family kidnapped by Somali pirates and **There Will Be Lies** has another teenage girl this time kidnapped when a baby by a psychotic older woman. Why is he deliberately taking readers into territory that at times can seem dangerous and disturbing?



*I'm not sure what it says about me that I do seem drawn to disaster. But **In Darkness** (2012) set in Haiti, was always in my mind ever since I first read about Toussaint l'Ouverture and decided that not enough*

Hostage Three (2013), *I remember being irritated by a radio broadcast when shipping company executives were being interviewed about piracy and talked entirely about their own problems with cargo and so on. They never for a moment considered the terrible poverty in Somalia and the fact that the pirates from there have not as yet ever deliberately killed anyone. My story isn't an apology for being a pirate, because I don't think people should do that sort of thing. But I thought it would be interesting to try to get into the skins of young Somalis and work out how they might feel about it all.*

You give us novels where there is no obvious right or wrong answer to the problems they raise. So where is the reader supposed to go? Because it's hard to see how some of the worst situations you describe can actually get any better, at least in the short term.

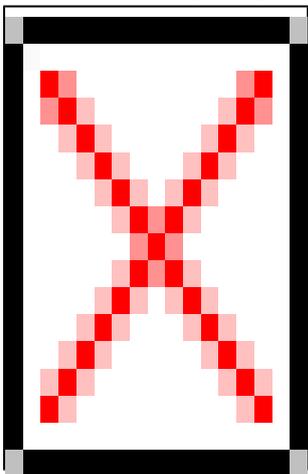
But real life is not about issues that are clearly black and white. They're nearly always ambiguities. I personally believe that people are fundamentally good, and I hope my novels don't in any way appear amoral. But life is complicated and at some stage I think fiction should reflect rather than evade difficult issues. And I hope my characters do get to be more understanding and compassionate as they progress through their stories.

I get the impression therefore that for you the story always comes first, with what readers may think about it not really your concern.

I have been thinking about this myself recently. And without wanting to seem pompous, with me it really is that the story is just there, whether I always like what it is or where it's going or not. But I still think my stories have a message. There are many young readers who are not enjoying the sort of comfortable middle class life I lead who may be looking in their fiction for some sort of recognition of the bad things that happen as well as the good. So if I do have a message it's on the lines that although life can sometimes break your heart it is still possible in the end to pull through the worst bits and make something of yourself.

None of your stories so far has been set in Britain. Is there any reason for this?

Well, I was brought up in Luxembourg and the programmes we saw on Dutch television included a huge amount of



*American material. So I sort of grew up thinking in American. And to the extent that **There will be Lies** is a road novel, it is more convincingly set in a vast country like America where it is so much easier to get lost than, say, taking place around Milton Keynes.*

There are moments in your stories when you bring in the supernatural. Is this a plot device or do you have beliefs along these lines yourself?

I was one of those bookish boy labelled 'imaginative' who are always away somewhere in their heads. And I am fascinated by mythology and how myths can sometimes heal and also help you understand the world as it is today. I am also a very visual person, and when I am writing there is often an accompanying scene going on in my head which I picture very intensely. So if a strong image of something supernatural comes up during this process, there's every chance it is also going to go into the writing.

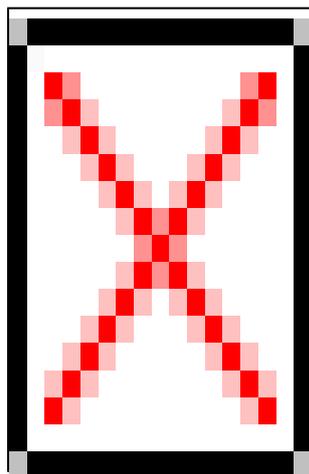
But you clearly do a lot of previous research for your novels. Because of you I now know so much more about the ways of Somali pirates.

*Yes. But as someone once said, it's the things you discard from research that often turn out to be the most important. What's really vital is that the story should always come first. My next novel **Whisper to Me** is set in New Jersey where I once lived and the main character works in an Amusement Park, which I also did. So as you can see, I have deliberately chosen a time and setting where the amount of research I would have to do would be at a minimum.*

What's this one going to be about?

An American girl who is living near a beach that has recently been plagued by a serial killer. One day she finds a human foot and also hears a voice that starts talking to her. She becomes convinced that this is the voice of one of the women who had been murdered. She is also having serious issues with her father at the same time.

Another jolly story, then?



I feel I should be trying to do something lighter, but it hasn't worked out this way yet. My wife has described this story as harrowing! But you can only write what you write. I would love to do some nine- to-twelve magical adventure but I know it's just not the moment for this yet. People who know me find all this very amusing because if anything I can often be quite silly and irreverent. But once I get into a story it just has to go the way that it seems to want to. And while I do write about dark themes, there are also characters in my stories who are good and kind and do the right thing. And when there is violence, it still pales into insignificance compared with what young readers can now see daily on their various screens.

It's now time for Nick to go back to his editing job. But where his own writing is concerned he has three major novels under his belt, all of which are tautly written, well plotted, intensely imagined and supremely readable. A charming and engaging personality he is most certainly a writer to watch out for both now and in the future.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

There Will be Lies, Nick Lake, Bloomsbury Children's Books, 464pp, 978-1408853818, £12.99hbk

Hostage Three [4], Nick Lake, Bloomsbury Children's Books 400pp, 978 1408828229, £6.99

In Darkness [3], 352pp, 978-1408819951, £7.99

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