

MARLBOROUGH MAN

ALAN CARTER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nick Chester lives on the side of a steep hill in a timber house in the Marlborough Sounds at the top of the South Island of New Zealand. If the river isn't flooded and the land hasn't slipped, it's paradise. Unless the local logging magnate is intent on destroying your view. And unless you are hiding from a ruthless man with a grudge, in which case, remote beauty has its own kind of danger.

While Nick waits for his past to catch up with him, he works as a sergeant for the Havelock police. He and his junior officer Constable Latifa Rapata spend their days patrolling the SH6 for speeding motorists and trigger-happy hunters, and those locals desperate enough to shove a cooked chook down their daks from the local supermarket. But it's not only Nick who is experiencing trouble in paradise. In the last couple of weeks, two local boys have vanished. Their bodies are found but the perpetrator, dubbed by the media as the Pied Piper, is still at large.

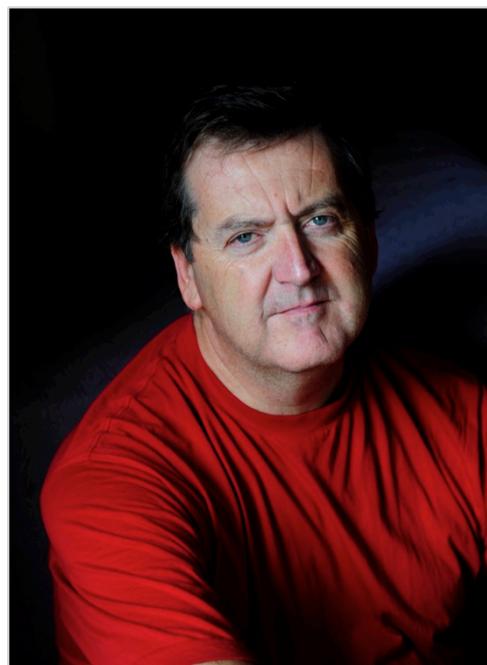
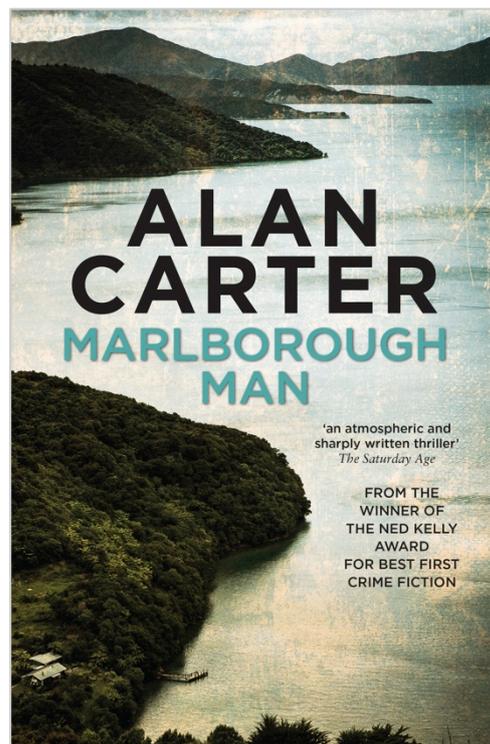
Marlborough Man is a gripping story about being the hunter and the hunted, and about what happens when evil takes hold in a small town.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Carter was born in Sunderland, UK. He immigrated to Australia in 1991 and divides his time between the beach at Fremantle and life on a farm in New Zealand's South Island. He sometimes works as a television documentary director. He is the author of three novels in the Cato Kwong series: *Prime Cut* (winner of the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction), *Getting Warmer* and *Bad Seed*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way is setting important in this novel, and how does it help shape or define the crimes that take place there?
2. How would you describe the author's portrait of small-town life?
3. How has being undercover shaped the character and outlook of Nick Chester? What impact has it had on those around him?
4. *I'm not convinced that I wouldn't do it again, given the opportunity. And so ends another cop marriage.* (p. 52) What is Nick's attitude towards his marriage to Vanessa, and to his little family unit that also includes his son Paulie?
5. Why do you think that being a police officer is so hard?
6. Do you believe that Vanessa is right to stick around for as long as she has?
7. What kind of a man is Sammy Pritchard?
8. If you were plotting degrees of morality on a scale, where would you place McCormack, Des Rogers, Johnny Fernandez, Sammy Pritchard and Marty Stringfellow?
9. Gary tells Nick that this father *knew it wasn't his fight and he probably had more in common with the Vietcong than the pakeha giving him his orders. But he was among some mates, and mates are more important than a cause.* (p. 158) What kinds of examples of enduring loyalty and mateship are there within the novel? In what ways do they cut across whether or not someone is 'good' or 'bad'?
10. How is the reader supposed to feel about Patrick Smith? How does Nick Chester feel about him? How would you describe Patrick's relationship with Denzel Haruru?



11. Does Nick live up to Uncle Walter's moniker of *Weka-tāne*?
12. What kind of a police officer is Constable Latifa Rapata? How would you describe her intervention at the end of chapter 54, and her difference in outlook and attitude to Nick Chester's in this instance?
13. Utu, *payback. They love that shit. They've got photos on their office walls: tribal warriors from PNG, All Blacks doing the haka, the Black Panther salute at the Olympics – accessories to go with their lumberjack shirts and skate shoes.* (p. 221) How does the theme of *utu* play out across this novel? Does it mean something different to Maori people like Deborah Haruru, Gary and Steve than it does to the pakeha characters?
14. At what stage does the reader become aware of the identity of the killer? Is this before or after Nick himself realises it?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

How would you describe the relationship between where you live and what you write about?

They say write what you know. I just put this question to my wife and she laughed and said it's all one. And she's right. When I arrived in New Zealand the next book cab off the rank was meant to be the fourth book in my Cato Kwong series. But the landscape and culture I found myself in immediately took over. Inspiring in the same way that living in Hopetoun was for *Prime Cut*. The newness and exoticism of the experiences comes through (I hope) on the pages. But I also had fun with the other aspect of 'what I know' and that was my experiences and memories of growing up in Sunderland in north-east England.

What is it about small-town life that makes it so perfect for a crime novel setting?

They're both the most perfect and the worst place to hide. It's difficult to be anonymous, everybody knows everybody else's business (or thinks they do, or hopes they do) – tiffs become feuds, rumours become fact – indeed it's a microcosm of the post-truth world. But they're also great places to be when you're in a fix and the most unlikely of people can become the best ones to rely on when everything hits the fan.

Nick Chester encounters a colourful range of miscreants who occupy different places along the law-breaking spectrum. Do you believe that some people really are evil?

Intellectually I should say no but I fear the answer is yes. Every day the news tells us so. Sure, some people are called evil who might be clinically sociopathic and themselves perhaps the products of great harm done to them. And some might never get up close and personal with the harm they do and therefore never attract the label of evil – but they deserve it nevertheless. And yet others seem to bask in the violence they do. But just as I believe that perhaps there is evil I also have to believe that most people are good and that there are enough everyday heroes, heroines, and saints out there. Fingers crossed.

What's next for Nick Chester, and what's next for Alan Carter?

I'm aiming to follow up *Marlborough Man* with a return to Cato Kwong – a conscious recoupling – as I believe he has unfinished business in Western Australia. And if people like Nick Chester enough then I might well pay him a return visit. There's no end of inspiration both in WA and NZ, the two places I currently call home.



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