



## Tigerman

*Nick Harkaway*

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## **Tigerman** Nick Harkaway

Lester Ferris, sergeant of the British Army, is a good man in need of a rest. He's spent a lot of his life being shot at, and Afghanistan was the last stop on his road to exhaustion. He has no family, he's nearly forty, burned out and about to be retired.

The island of Mancreu is the ideal place for Lester to serve out his time. It's a former British colony in legal limbo, soon to be destroyed because of its very special version of toxic pollution - a down-at-heel, mildly larcenous backwater. Of course, that also makes Mancreu perfect for shady business, hence the Black Fleet of illicit ships lurking in the bay: listening stations, offshore hospitals, money laundering operations, drug factories and deniable torture centres. None of which should be a problem, because Lester's brief is to sit tight and turn a blind eye.

But Lester Ferris has made a friend: a brilliant, internet-addled street kid with a comic book fixation who will need a home when the island dies - who might, Lester hopes, become an adopted son. Now, as Mancreu's small society tumbles into violence, the boy needs Lester to be more than just an observer.

In the name of paternal love, Lester Ferris will do almost anything. And he's a soldier with a knack for bad places: 'almost anything' could be a very great deal - even becoming some sort of hero. But this is Mancreu, and everything here is upside down. Just exactly what sort of hero will the boy need?

## **Tigerman Details**

Date : Published July 29th 2014 by Knopf (first published May 22nd 2014)

ISBN : 9780385352413

Author : Nick Harkaway

Format : Hardcover 337 pages

Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Mystery, Thriller, Adventure

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## From Reader Review Tigerman for online ebook

### Ryan Dejonghe says

Ahhhhhhh! You ever read a book and think, “Meh, that was nice.” But then after you close it, it just builds on you. There was something between the lines that planted a seed in you and it grew and grew and grew. That’s what happened to me with Nick Harkaway’s *TIGERMAN*. I was ready to give it a four-star rating, walk away, and call it good. Nope.

First, Harkaway knows me. He’s one of my people. As soon as I saw him mention “gold farming”...I knew. In-game chat channels, leet speak, comic culture: all my people’s language. So that was nice. As Harkaway writes, “it had a digital flavor, merry and modern.”

Second, there’s the island as a character. Right away we witness a pelican swallowing a pigeon. Amusing. But then it dawned on me later, “Hey! That was symbolic, wasn’t it?” On one hand, we see an island lose its culture and people, being assimilated into the larger world social scheme. On the other hand, we find those who embrace the simplicity and roots of who they are. And, as the author points out, those Leaving were in a majority, while “staying had not been dignified with a capital letter.”

Finally, there’s the relationship between man and boy. That’s the part eating me alive. In this book we witness what a man will become—how he changes—in the face of parental responsibility. And, as a result of that willingness to change, how the child molds, reflects, and responds to that change. “Endearing” would be a good starting word to describe the emotion while witnessing this change. There’s plenty more.

This book has everything else: action, romance, adventure. But, at the risk of sounding like a movie announcer, let me stick to those first three points above. The context of *TIGERMAN* goes way beyond the story and penetrates the heart. That, to me, is full of what I want in a story. Something that makes me think outside the pages and turns me into a more retrospective person because of it.

My final thoughts reflect those of the boy: “”Tigerman,” the boy said fervently. “Full of win.””

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Thanks to Knopf for providing this book electronically for me to review. Do you folks have a Tigerman outfit I can review, too? I want one.

## **Phrynne says**

I loved The Gone-Away World, really liked Angelmaker but was not as interested by this one. It started well and I was really enjoying the characters of the Sergeant and the boy and the relationship between them. The island life style was well described too especially the way the potential disaster situation was affecting the inhabitants. Everything seemed to be going well and then about half way through things seemed to falter and I found myself losing interest. A lot of fighting ensued and some silliness with the Tigerman of the title and I did some skimming to get to the end. I was a little surprised and also happy with the ending so at least I finished on a good note.

So this one was not for me but I will await with interest to see what this author comes up with next.

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## **Alan says**

"Real life has no understanding of proper structure," the boy said, "which is why news stories are always made of little lies."

—p.83

Nick Harkaway's third novel Tigerman begins slowly, but surely. A pelican eats a pigeon on the beach near the stone wall of the old mission house in Beauville, on the doomed island of Mancreu, as the Sergeant and the precociously perceptive boy who's quoted above look on.

The Sergeant, also known as Brevet-Consul Lester Ferris, is Britain's sole remaining official representative on Mancreu, a tropical speck halfway between Africa and India, somewhere near—but not directly on—the Equator. Mancreu formerly belonged to France—the Sergeant's friend Dirac is his French counterpart on the island—and most recently was a British possession, but both governments have abandoned the island in its final days to the jurisdiction of NatProMan: the NATO and Allied Protection Force of Mancreu. But NatProMan is not especially interested in protecting Mancreu from its own inhabitants, nor from the motley multinational Fleet of vessels that has occupied its harbor in order to do business with a minimum of oversight... all of which leaves Lester Ferris as the closest thing Mancreu has to law and order.

It's an extraordinarily awkward position, but the Sergeant takes it very seriously:

His perceptions of copperhood were formed by the dream of England, still. A copper was a bloke in a slightly silly hat who walked the beat, talked to shopkeepers about the price of fish, and sorted out young ruffians. You didn't attack him. It was like attacking a field of wheat, and anyway, you'd have to answer to his mum.

—p.59

Mancreu itself is a major character in Tigerman. The small volcanic island has been traded back and forth between great powers for centuries, without much regard for the few permanent inhabitants in and around its single town of Beauville. In the text, Mancreu's compared to Casablanca, which is apt enough, but its louche

lawlessness more powerfully evoked for me the feverish settings of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria...

It was an irritation to the Sergeant that men who one moment before had been braying for the sexual favours of a fiend could appeal to the Virgin in the next. It smacked of sloppy thinking.  
—p.129

More recently, Mancreu has also been used for large-scale chemical experiments that would have been... difficult to perform in more populous venues. As a result of one such factory's rather inadequate disposal procedures, vast reservoirs of extremophilic, mutagenic bacteria now lie in wait underneath the island. Each volcanic eruption now covers Mancreu with toxic "Discharge Clouds," altering the island's ecology in extremely disturbing ways.

The Discharge Clouds are getting worse, and NatProMan has decided that destroying the island is the only way to contain them. The question is not if, but when, Mancreu will be bombed into uninhabitability. Many of its residents have already left. The rest are mostly divided into two main groups—the ones in denial, and the ones who stay to take advantage of the chaos—and a few exceptions, such as the Sergeant. And the boy, whose name may or may not be Robin.

After a shocking event involves them both, the relationship that the Sergeant and the boy had been slowly developing takes a rather dramatic turn, and the reason for the title becomes clear...

Nick Harkaway's characters and settings are exotic but believable; his prose is clear, well-paced and perfectly matched to the subject matter, while also being leavened with surprising amounts of humour and pop-cultural literacy. This, for example, is a moment I remember from my own childhood:

Alderaan. The Sergeant was the right age to know what that meant. He had been to see the film the first time around, very young and very amazed as the orange and white starship went over his head, and then even more amazed as its enormous pursuer roared after it, going on and on for ever and shaking the seats. Movies had never seemed so big.

—p.120

Revelations, twists and even Firefly references ensue:

"I am a leaf on the wind," he intoned.  
The Sergeant had no idea what this meant. He said so.  
The boy looked at him as if he were a barbarian or an idiot.  
—p.318

After The Gone-Away World and Angelmaker both impressed me greatly in completely different ways, I really rather *expected* to like Nick Harkaway's third novel, although of course I was also afraid that he couldn't possibly go three for three. But... this is, in fact, exactly the kind of thing I want authors to write—the exact opposite of "seriesitis."

Tigerman is an even richer work than its predecessors, that somehow manages to keep being *fun* as well. Ultimately, it's really nothing like his earlier books, except in one all-important sense: it's very, very good.

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### **Liz Barnsley says**

Publication Date: Available now from Randomhouse UK Cornerstone.

Thank you to the author and publisher for the review copy via netgalley.

Lester Ferris, sergeant of the British Army, is a good man in need of a rest. He's spent a lot of his life being shot at, and Afghanistan was the last stop on his road to exhaustion. He has no family, he's nearly forty, burned out and about to be retired.

The island of Mancreu is the ideal place for Lester to serve out his time. It's a former British colony in legal limbo, soon to be destroyed because of its very special version of toxic pollution – a down-at-heel, mildly larcenous backwater. Of course, that also makes Mancreu perfect for shady business, hence the Black Fleet of illicit ships lurking in the bay: listening stations, offshore hospitals, money laundering operations, drug factories and deniable torture centres. None of which should be a problem, because Lester's brief is to sit tight and turn a blind eye.

Well, “The Gone Away World” is in my top 5 favourite reads of all time, not only because of its wonderfully quirky nature but because every time I read it again I get something new from it. “AngelMaker” gave me another beautiful reading experience so I was dying to dive into this latest one and once again the magic happened.

The thing I love most about Nick Harkaway as an author is that he writes in a unique style, despite being pointed towards other so called “similar” books in those endless recommendations we all receive from places like Amazon, I have never found anything that comes close to the sheer illusion and enchantment he can infuse into his varying stories. In this case there is something different again, but once more allowing his individual and dare I say it, slightly crazy outlook on life to shine through. And as far as storytelling genius goes, you don't get much better than this.

Here we meet Lester, killing time whilst waiting for the end to come for the Isle of Mancreu, pretty much sleepwalking through life until he makes a friend and, well, then things happen. Yeah. Don't really want to say much more, the whole story unfolds with gorgeous, sprawling and delightful effect, holding you in that world, walking alongside the people who inhabit it, and going on that adventure with them. Pretty much as with “The Gone Away World” I emerged sometime later blinking into the sunlight. Well, this being the UK the rain, but still. I was dazzled.

What else can I say? Characterisation is as ever top notch, creatively speaking this is a marvel and yes, not everyone will love the way that the author puts words on the page, but I'm fairly sure everyone will appreciate the sheer grace and artistry of it. If you want my negatives, well, sorry I don't really have any. The Gone Away World still remains my favourite of the books so far, but this one enthralled me and surprised me and I don't ask for more. The only problem now is, waiting for another spell to be cast. Its the chronic impatience that will kill me.

Happy Reading Folks!

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### **James says**

This could so easily have been an average novel - or even a bad one - but I can confirm that it isn't. A blurb I read somewhere described it as a superhero origin story which is always going to turn some people off, but they shouldn't let it. I can't think of a single niggle in this book at all - the perfect novel maybe? Nick Harkaway certainly goes on my 'pull list'...

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### **Giss Golabetoon says**

Tigerman, the hero novel with the funny beginning, hilarious middle and the ending you don't see coming. Batman was there too, kinda, it was mostly full of win. The passage on the wasteland was one of the best pieces I've read.

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### **Mitchell Thorson says**

Absolutely loved this book. After loving *Angelmaker*, I didn't know what to expect with this, but it absolutely did not disappoint. The writing is fluid, engaging and funny, and the story has a lot of heart.

Would highly recommend to people who have read other Harkaway novels and newcomers alike.

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### **Kristin (MyBookishWays Reviews) says**

<http://www.mybookishways.com/2014/07/...>

British Sergeant Lester Ferris has been sent to the (fictional) island of Mancreu to ostensibly keep the peace at the end of his career (after a rather disastrous tour in Afghanistan), as the island slowly gives way to waste and chemical abuses resulting in toxic gases that are affecting the wildlife and fauna. This "Mancreu Cauldron" will eventually destroy the island, not to mention leeching toxins out into the ocean into farther reaches, and its denizens have even succumbed to the toxic Discharge Clouds that have caused interesting, and sometimes dangerous, neurological problems. Leaving (that's a capital L) parties have become the norm as citizens depart for brighter horizons, but there is still beauty to be found in the land, and in the people. For Lester, aside from an unrequited crush on a local scientist, he solves small cases and pals around with a young boy with a penchant for comics and a love of American pop culture. After a brutal shooting by five men in a local bar, resulting in the murder of a friend, Ferris is at loose ends, but is eager to get to the bottom of things, and enlists the boy to be his eyes and ears among the locals. The boy is ecstatic at his chance to be a crimefighter and takes to his new tasks with gusto. Soon, the boy and Lester embark on a mission to strike fear into the killers and what results is...kinda fantastic-comically, terrifyingly fantastic.

For all of his physical strength and considerable experience, Lester Ferris can come off as a bit hapless at times, but really, he's anything but. He's plopped on this doomed island, thinking he'll wait out the inevitable by solving mundane, rather boring crimes and knocking around in Brighton House, but the crimes

are anything but ordinary (one missing dog turns into a downright tragedy), and his connection to the boy that calls himself Robin (as an homage to Batman? his real name? ) is unexpected, and yet, as their relationship strengthens, he finds himself entertaining thoughts of taking the boy with him when the island burns, being a father figure to him, and is increasingly astounded at how much he's come to love this funny, smart boy who talks like American film and hoards comics. With certain destruction looming, the populace grows restless, dangerously so, a gang of thugs has been terrorizing innocent people, and just what is going on with the menacing fleet of ships that gather in the harbor? Can Tigerman save the day?

This book, ya'll. Tigerman is wrapped in a sort of old-school, boy's pulp adventure package, but it's actually a very timely book. There's some pretty astute observation on how we treat our planet and what the fallout can be for us, the little folk, but there's no preaching here, and the real meat of the book lies with Lester, who, in the beginning is just sort of existing, not happy or unhappy, but sort of lacking in purpose. It's in the boy, and also the people of Mancreu, that he finds his purpose, and watching this transition, from slightly directionless, to full-on hero is a glory to behold. There are some phenomenal action scenes here, but for me, it was the quieter moments that made this book so good. The moment in which Tigerman is "born", in the quiet stillness of a graveyard, is particularly perfect, and it gave me goosebumps (you'll know it when you read it.)

Tigerman is about the birth of a hero, promises made and promises kept, finding meaning, the freedom we find when we take ourselves out of the everyday, and the fierceness, and heartbreak, of parental love. It definitely broke my heart, but good books have a habit of doing that, and Tigerman is so very, very good. Harkaway's writing is gorgeous, and this unexpectedly funny, and sweet, and sad, and everything-in-between book will have you entranced. Tigerman is full of win, and roarsome, and wonderful. Don't miss it.

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### **Paula says**

If I could read nothing but Nick Harkaway, I think I would. Certainly if I could make a career out of reviewing nothing but Nick Harkaway, I know I would. That said, I'll write this review tomorrow.

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### **Ron Charles says**

If "Nick Harkaway" sounds like the made-up name of a superhero, you're half right. He is a super writer, and that comic-book-inspired name is the pseudonym of Nicholas Cornwell, who's the son of John le Carré, which is the pseudonym of David John Moore Cornwell, who once worked for MI5 and MI6 — so who knows if any of this is actually true.

Trust me, though, when I say that Harkaway's new novel, "Tigerman," is an irresistible delight, something like "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand" as played by James Bond. The plot whizzes past inventive toward ridiculously improbable, but what really makes "Tigerman" roar is its captivating blend of tones — from the light hues of domestic comedy to the bold colors of Spider-Man. And Harkaway doesn't stop there: Like some Marvel mad scientist, he has crossed strains of a modern-day environmental crisis with the sweet story of a veteran of the Afghan war trying to adopt a little boy.

Our hero — so dutiful, so modest, so lonely — is 39-year-old Sgt. Lester Ferris. Scarred from battle, he's enjoying a quiet assignment as the British consul on the island of Mancreu in the Arabian Sea. Since Britain

handed this remote, mountainous paradise over to NATO, the sergeant's primary duty is to offer cheery hellos to the remaining residents.

And there are fewer residents every month. "No one was Staying," Harkaway writes. "Staying meant dying when the island died, and then there'd be nothing left to die for." Decades of chemical manufacturing and careless disposal have poisoned the island. In 2004, seismic movement released the first of several Discharge Clouds — eruptions of caustic gas and newly formed microbes that cause frightening illnesses and birth defects. Before the "symbiotic bugs" can spread, the world's governments decide, the island must be evacuated and sterilized by fire. "Mancreu became a kind of Casablanca," Harkaway writes, "possessed of an uncertain legal status by virtue of the sentence of death, expropriated from its notional sovereignty by the international will, gladly yielded up to its doom, yet still there and officially claimed by no one."

This is the apocalypse writ small: the end of the world in pressed khakis with regular tea time. Or at least that's the official plan. Harkaway uses this remote Superfund site to sketch the hideous underbelly of modern civilization. Floating out in Mancreu's bay is the Black Fleet, unaligned ships drawn from various nations and corporations. Suspended in legal limbo and about to be incinerated, the island offers a convenient spot for "prisons for deniable detainees and hospitals for unethical procedures; data havens, grey banks, untaxed subsidiaries; floating harems and forced-labour factories, auction houses for contraband goods; torture facilities for hire."

All of that officially nonexistent horror is supposed to stay out in the bay — and out of the news — but early in "Tigerman," while Ferris is enjoying his tea, armed bandits burst into a cafe and murder its owner. Only Ferris's heroics with a biscuit tin keep the carnage from being worse. In that moment, he wins the admiration of a 10-year-old island native who calls himself Robin (as in Batman &) and speaks in a curious patois of pop culture and gamer slang. "We are made from awesome!" the boy shouts while looking over the bandits' bodies in the cafe. "Emote later. Right now: Voight-Kampff FTW."

DC Comics never launched a crime-fighting duo quite this touching. Ferris, haunted by "a ghastly aloneness which made the world black around him," is determined to show Robin that goodness prevails — and to prove that he's worthy of the boy's devotion. Robin, meanwhile, is a slippery orphan, desperately poor but as adept with technology as any tween in the West. Determined not to look like "an old fart," Ferris sits down with the boy, and together they page through his comics collection, designing their own superhero. The resulting figure — Tigerman — is an absurd amalgamation of metal shields, a gas mask and bits of fur and bone — but no gun. When he tries to talk, Ferris sounds like a kazoo, but that's not what Robin hears. "It was made and designed by the House of Awesome," the boy declares, "from materials found in the deep awesome mines of Awesometania, and it would be recorded in the Annals of Awesome."

In the novel's most touching parts, Harkaway captures the wonder of youthful enthusiasm, what we used to feel when making a fort from a refrigerator box or launching water balloons with giant rubber bands. But he sets all that childhood frivolity in the context of a rapidly collapsing society. The sergeant's great challenge — and the novel's — is somehow to satisfy the boy's thirst for justice while combating an increasingly violent series of crimes — "to show what one man — one hero — could do on a dark night in a town on the edge."

Since the British government insists that Ferris remain uninvolved in this mess, the bizarre costume comes in handy for disguising his mild-mannered identity, confusing his superstitious combatants and infusing himself with otherworldly energy. Indeed, in several spectacular scenes spiked with explosives and wit, Tigerman performs crazy feats of derring-do that Jack Reacher and Jason Bourne could only dream of. (Are you paying attention, Hollywood?)

But even with bullets ricocheting and rockets flying, what really terrifies the man inside the Tigerman costume is the thought of losing Robin. Ferris has “no direct experience with the violent woes and self-reproaches of children,” and he has no language with which to express his affection. Harkaway, though, finds the words to make those feelings clear.

Just as it’s easy for the residents of Mancreu to forget the Black Fleet in the bay, it’s easy for us to ignore the darker currents of this novel. The touches of sentimentality, Ferris’s awkward romance with an island scientist, the sweet comedy of an accomplished soldier disarmed by a 10-year-old child — these elements lull us into imagining that “Tigerman” must eventually curl up into some predictably warm embrace.

But Harkaway is a far tougher storyteller than that, and the battle in which Ferris and Robin are engaged is ultimately no comic-book fantasy, just as a poisoned island is no paradise. You won’t see the next punch coming. “A proven track record of insane idealism” can’t help a man leap tall buildings in a single bound or make evil governments behave. But that doesn’t keep this brave sergeant from trying. Sure, any kid would want to be Tigerman. In the end, though, Ferris is the real hero worth emulating.

*Originally published in The Washington Post:*

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/enterta...>

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### **Clouds says**

Got a signed copy for my birthday :-)

As per the comments below, Harkaway did not balls up the final act something chronic, and this steamrollered a 5-star rating.

The bar has now been set - all other books read in 2015 will be measured against Tigerman.

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### **Lori says**

This is great. Excellent reading by Matt Bates. *Tigerman* is full of win!

“Bad Jack is an end-of-level boss.”

“Superhero team-up issue.”

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### **Maureen says**

Tigerman is about a sergeant in The British Army, nearing retirement and charged with one last deployment, seeing the former British colony of Mancreu through to its destruction. This was following a combination of industrial waste and volcanic activity, rendering it a Biohazard Eco disaster. Mancreu also has its share of drug factories, dealers, money laundering, and torture centres. For me this book started off really slowly, almost lethargic, but I suppose given the fact that the sergeant in question ( Lester Ferris ) was simply

expected to just sit tight and organise the evacuation of the islanders would explain why it felt like that. At one point I was toying with the idea of giving this a 3 star rating but then ----- well to say it picked up a pace is an understatement! The characters grew nicely into their skins, the banter between Lester and Jed Kershaw was a delight, so witty, and the tension mounted to breathless proportions as the island neared its destruction, and the islanders who hadn't already left, become ever more anarchic. I won't spoil anything but I never saw what was coming, and this book finally earned itself another star, 4 stars and worth every one. Thanks to Goodreads for this first reads giveaway.

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### **Rebecca Foster says**

**(2.5)** In a postcolonial enclave on the verge of environmental collapse, a washed-up British soldier takes on one last assignment: being a hero for the young boy he intends to adopt. Like Joe Spork in *Angelmaker*, Lester Ferris (who could really do with a more interesting name) is an engaging antihero who gets caught up in some wonderfully ludicrous fight scenes. But *Tigerman*, if you'll pardon my pun, is a whole different animal to *Angelmaker*. It's a much more realist, melancholy and subtle (a word I never thought I'd use in relation to Harkaway!) affair; it lacks the joyful zaniness I expected.

Frankly, I was a little bit bored. Harkaway fans will certainly want to give this one a try, but I daresay many will come away disappointed.

(See my full review at [Nudge](#).)

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### **Ben Babcock says**

I had no idea what to expect from *Tigerman*. All I knew is that Nick Harkaway has a new book out, and so I wanted to read it. At first it seemed like this was a pleasant, slightly uneven postcolonial story of an old soldier bonding with a boy on a doomed island. Gradually, I came to understand that there is much more happening beneath the surface. *Tigerman* lacks a lot of the flamboyant absurdity of *Angelmaker*, and it hews more closely to the recognizable tropes of literary realism. But the result is just as surreal and evocative as anything else Harkaway has written.

With a name like *Tigerman*, I kind of wondered if Lester would turn out to be some kind of superhero. And the boy's obsession with comic books pointed in that direction. But this part of the narrative is slow to develop. The boy's comic book and pop-culture-infused language serves merely to highlight and lampshade the absurdity of what's happening on Mancreu.

If you're looking for a book that exemplifies how pop culture and memes have become a part of colloquial English, then *Tigerman* is a good starting point. Lester, being of a different generation from the boy or myself, comes to Mancreu without much knowledge of memes or comic books. (He recognizes *Star Wars* references, of course, because he is the right age to have seen the original movies in theatres, and *Star Wars* is the juggernaut of all pop culture references.) The boy educates him, though, and about half of everything they say to each other is shaded with these allusions to a wider world. But remember that this is a world the boy has no direct experience with, and it's a world that Lester has spent the better part of his life away from, ostensibly defending through his deployments to Afghanistan or Iraq.

So the first half of the book is mostly about Lester's relationship with the boy, as well as his relationship with various other characters of interest on Mancreu. Similarly, language here plays an important role in signifying how to interpret these characters. The foul-mouthed, melodramatic ranting from Lester's politican superiors like Africa gives me flashbacks to the politicians in the Johnny Worriker movies. It's entirely believable, these interactions between Lester and others, regardless of whether they could actually happen.

This holds true for the setting too. The island itself is—and these are Harkaway's words, not mine—a kind of Casablanca, condemned but execution stayed because further study is required. The situation is a mixture of contemporary political thriller and near-future science fiction: black sites and illegal organ transplant ships circling an island of strange, anomalous behaviour-altering clouds. Specifics behind Mancreu's state aside, it's easy to believe that such a political grey zone could exist in today's world. *Tigerman* is realistic, but in a way that explores reality as it is presented by media. Whether or not black site interrogation facilities exist in the way Harkaway depicts here, thanks to media, they are certainly a part of our current cultural consciousness.

So, in one sense, *Tigerman* is Harkaway's most realistic, most serious book yet. A great deal of it is grounded in the here and now. Yet on another level, there are great big incredible parts of this book that require leaps of faith. My own faith is rewarded when Tigerman eventually becomes reality, and as Lester grapples with the disorder and chaos that threatens to swallow the island's beleaguered civilization, I finally came to grips with what this book is.

See, it dawned on me that *Tigerman* is a kind of adolescent comic book superhero fantasy from an adult's perspective. Lester wants to adopt the boy and takes on the Tigerman identity as a way to impress him and bond with him. I don't think Lester takes the idea of Tigerman very seriously at first. It isn't until much later in the book that Lester demonstrates he has internalized the Tigerman identity. As he prepares to invade the *Elaine* and rescue Sandrine, he ponders how to accomplish this without killing anyone:

He was treating this as something for Tigerman, because he could only perform it as Tigerman, in Tigerman's mask.... And Tigerman did not kill, or had not, and did not make his plans with killing in mind.

Lester the Sergeant is an army man, a soldier. A killer, if needs must. Tigerman is a hero in the comic book sense, and he does not kill. For him to kill would be to cross a line:

... that would end it all. Even in this pass, the boy would see the shift in him, in the fiction they had created together, from knight to dragon. He would shy away from a red-handed killer even in his gratitude....

Tigerman, then. It had to be Tigerman, doing things Tigerman's way. *A famous victory*, the Sergeant sighed to himself, *not an infamous one*.

It bothered me, in the new *Superman* movie, when Superman killed Zod. Superman doesn't kill. This is a core part of his character. It doesn't matter how big and bad the Big Bad is. He. Does not. Kill. Not all superheroes are like this, but Tigerman—at least, the Tigerman created as a shared vision of Lester and this

boy—follows that creed. He is a non-lethal but unstoppable force of myth and mystery.

Lester takes on the Tigerman identity reluctantly, but he soon grows into it. He has too long sat idle on Mancreu. He has orders not to act, not to interfere. Lester is an ideal soldier; he follows orders to the letter. Yet he has to act, because at his core he's also a good person. Tigerman allows him to act without holding himself-as-Lester accountable for those actions. It is the type of deniability that dovetails perfectly with the realistic world of cloak-and-dagger diplomacy Harkaway portrays here.

Unfortunately, there has to be a twist that pulls the rug of justice out from beneath Tigerman/Lester's feet. He eventually runs into a villain who is dangerously genre savvy (TVTropes) in a way that reveals the hollowness and futility (TVTropes) of attempting to be a comic book superhero in the "real world". Thus Harkaway provides a potent reminder that not only is it difficult to vanquish the villain, but sometimes it's difficult even to understand who the villain is. This theme recurs throughout the novel, as Lester grapples with the shadowy identities of those involved in the Fleet and their erstwhile nemesis/sometime-ally, Bad Jack.

In some respects, with *Tigerman* and to a lesser extent even his earlier novels, Harkaway reminds me of a softcore China Miéville. Mancreu is a mosaic of misfits, myth, and magic much in the way New Crobuzon is. The identities of Harkaway's characters are fluid, always changing as the facts on the ground change, making for an interesting and dynamic story in which the protagonist is never sure he's on solid ground.

*Tigerman* is not as overtly funny as Harkaway's previous two novels. There are still the occasional sparks of laugh-out-loud dialogue, but by and large this novel maintains a more sombre tone. The ending, with Kaiko Inoue's brief note and the airline ticket, is pitch-perfect in that respect and seems almost inevitable. Lester's reaction is simultaneously an acknowledgement that nothing has changed (he is still "the Sergeant") but that everything has changed (and he has to move on). Rather than seeing this shift in tone as unfortunate, however, I choose to see it as assurance of Harkaway's versatility. I loved *Angelmaker* for the zany pastiche thrill ride that it was, but I also enjoyed *Tigerman*, just for slightly different reasons.

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### Laura says

I liked bits of this a great deal. The idea of this island as a microcosm of life; transformed and transforming, beautiful and deadly always already at the edge of being (probably insufficiently) cleansed by fire – that I like. The British sergeant stolidly representing England better than he has to – that I like. The comic book patois of seemingly orphaned boy our hero wants to be a father too – that was full of win. Taking down assassins with a tin of Bird's Custard Powder – so much win. The tiger that comes out of the darkness and christens him Tigerman: TOTALLY full of win. Our man standing up to the fall of civilization dressed just a bit like Catman? Oh so much win to be full of. The lawless ships lurking in the lawless harbor? Oh yes. The Black Freighters are worth fighting. Maybe worth allying with the old enemy on the islands, Bad Jack, to do it.

But the dogs killed because it will get under the skin of the British? This broke my heart. And learning who was behind all the threads . . . urg. I picked it up about a page before the sergeant did. He's a better man than me.

I loved the stolid sergeant. I loved, a bit, the boy he loved. But the way that family drama played out – hum.

It had many good lines. I think my favorite, despite the lack of Warren Ellis: “This is the world, he thought. And I am in it.” (262).

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### **Howard Brazier says**

I've read all of Nick Harkaway's previous books including the ebook short story and thoroughly enjoyed them. Unfortunately Tigerman is one of the few books that I couldn't finish. I got as far as page 160, mainly based on my fondness for Nick's earlier works, but unfortunately the pace was far too slow for my liking. The book is well written, (hence the two stars), but for me, the story was going nowhere fast. Judging by the overall rating for the book, I'm in the minority. I'm happy to be there as I generally like this author's work. Sad to say that when it takes two weeks to read 160 pages, by someone that can consume a good book in one (insomniac) sitting, it's time to give up and go to the next book in the pile. In this instance R.J. Ellory's carnival of shadows.

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### **Gina123 says**

This is a very different book than Harkaway's previous two works of fiction. It doesn't have the breakneck pace that The Gone-Away World and Angelmaker did, but the tradeoff seems to be a more emotionally resonant heart to the book. His books have a fascinating combination of different components-international skulduggery, loneliness, loyalty, and the quiet (well, not so quiet in this particular book!) heroism of ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. So, to sum up, while there aren't any elephants or arch-villains in this book like there are in Angelmaker, which is one of my top 3 favorite books in the world, there are tigers and killer tomatoes, and by god that's gotta count for something. I loved the book. It is full of win.

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### **First Second Books says**

I love Nick Harkaway's work, and his latest novel is great -- and full of comics, including a comics superhero (and a wonderful plot twist)!

Things I have learned from this book: Nick Harkaway has very good taste in comics!

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### **Matthew says**

So action-packed and yet so easy to put down and forget for days at a time. I was into the first half, despite major reservation's about the author photo on the jacket. But some of the fight stuff was really hard to picture, and the main guy's motivations for becoming a superhero are not at all the motivations I wanted him to have. Not awful but not recommended, either.

