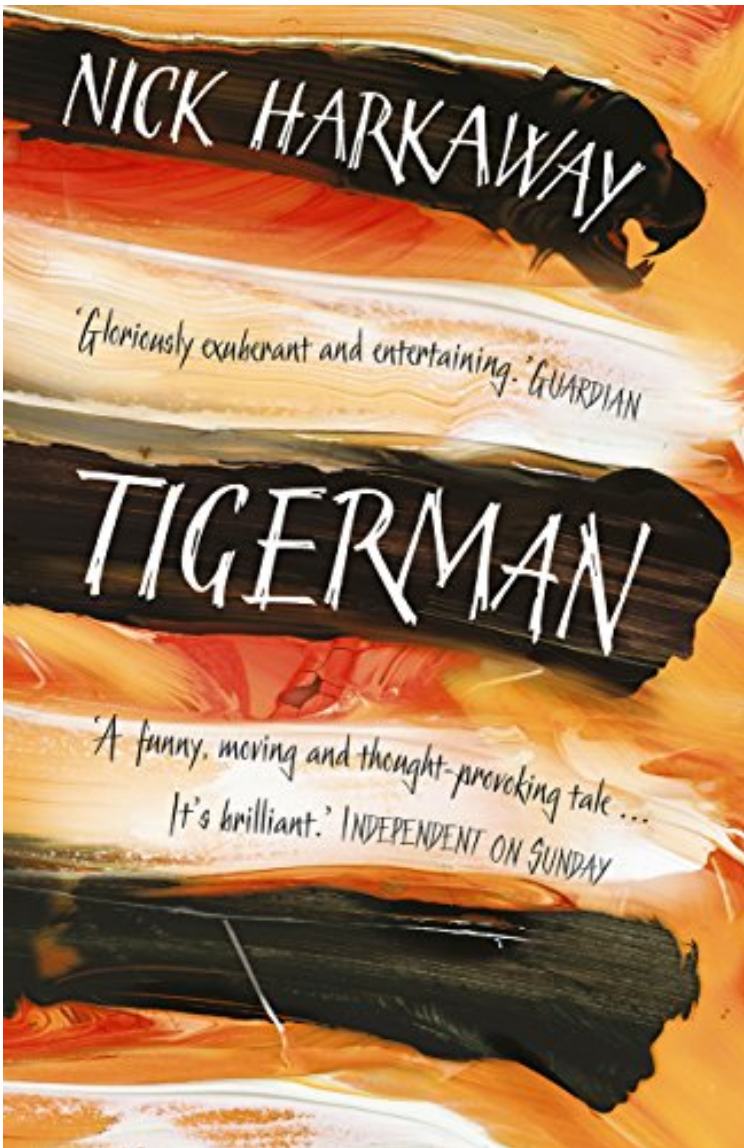


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Tigerman



Par Nick Harkaway
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur'Gloriously exuberant and entertaining.' Guardian'A funny, moving and thought-provoking tale ... It's brilliant.' Independent on SundaySergeant Lester Ferris is a good man in need of a rest. Hes spent a lot of his life being shot at. He has no family, hes nearly forty, burned out and about to be retired. The island of Mancreu is the perfect place for Lester to serve out his time and the perfect place for shady business, too, hence the Black Fleet of illicit ships lurking in the bay: listening stations, money laundering operations, drug factories and deniable torture centres. None of which should be a problem, because Lesters brief is to turn a blind eye.But Lester has made a friend: a brilliant, internet-addled street kid with a comic-book fixation who might, Lester hopes, become an adopted son. As Mancreus small society

tumbles into violence, the boy needs Lester to be more than just an observer. He needs him to be a hero. Extrait 1. Pelican On the steps of the old mission house, the sergeant sat with the boy who called himself Robin, and watched a pigeon being swallowed by a pelican. The whole business had come as a surprise to everyone involved, not least of all it seemed to the pelican herself, who had engaged in the attempt almost absently and now appeared to be wishing it was over and done. She was by nature a placid bird, slow to take wing and hard to rile, but the pigeon had been presuming on her good nature for several months now, scooting between her and the pieces of bread that people tossed in her direction as they wandered by, fluttering down to snatch treats of fish almost from her beak. This morning, the pelican had had enough, and when the pigeon came between her and a bit of tuna, she had just opened to the fullest extent and engulfed the fish fragment and the pigeon both, to squawks of outrage and alarm from her antagonist. To the Sergeant's eye, her swollen gullet had possessed at that moment the dreamy smugness of a trick well played, but he acknowledged inwardly that the faces of birds were impenetrable, so it could as well have been the foreknowledge of indigestion. The boy had been very impressed, which is to say that contrary to established practice he put down the comic book he was reading on the wall beside him and stared, his attention entirely taken up by the drama unfolding. The Sergeant had never seen him do this before. Even last year, when the volcano had briefly erupted and ash and fire had been falling all around, and the Sergeant had scooped him up under one arm and run like hell for the shelter of a convenient cellar, the boy had retained a desperate grip on Planetary no. 7, and clamped his other hand to the elderly Nokia cellphone which he kept in his left hip pocket. These items were the only evidence that someone else cared for him. The phone kept working and every so often he had a new comic, worn about the edges but with all its pages, and rarely more than three months out of date. Sometimes he carried a knapsack which contained several at once, when the supply had been irregular and he had been hoarding two or three while waiting for the previous issue, so as not to have things happen out of order. He was very particular about continuity, he had told the Sergeant in so many words. Events should happen in their proper time. Otherwise the story will not work, he said. Totally bogus narrative structure. WTF? He actually spoke the letters WTF, and rolled his eyes. That was just how it was. The boy's English was self-taught and uneven, peppered with guest appearances from movies and TV, from online games whose players were in America, Europe and China. When he spoke he could shift in one moment from the manner of a too-serious Harvard freshman to that of a teenaged Shanghai gold-farmer sweating in a vast warehouse of machines. On the topic of stories and character, he was particularly donnish and snifty: There must be development-over-time or it is just noise. And when it appeared that the Sergeant was not entirely following this line of discussion it was one of their earlier conversations and the older man's education in these matters was not yet properly begun he had changed tack and demanded whether the Sergeant might have any lightweight twine that would work for a kite string. Which he had, and had happily given up. The pigeon's head disappeared, and the noises of protest from the pelican's throat began to fade. The boy picked up the comic again and read with his usual intensity. The Sergeant leaned back against the stone in such a way as to suggest that the affair had been nothing special, though in all honesty he had never seen anything to compare with it. They were an unlikely twosome. The man was of medium height and craggy. He was still six months shy of forty, but he looked fatigued and even a little lost. His face was leathered by a life of actual soldiering in inclement places, and he had scars, about which he was self-conscious. Scars were supposed to be narrow white lines which looked raffish, not puckered worms slithering forever across your shoulder and itching abominably. They should be discreet, so that a man could boast about them to girls. He was thickset and some of that was this recent bout of soft living, he had to concede, even if the rest was working hard but he seemed to move carefully, as if the world was fragile and he didn't want to break it. The boy meanwhile was androgynous in the way of boys, with no fat on his body at all, and scruffy black hair cut short. He seemed to be interested in everything, had a restless intelligence which might even qualify as genius. The Sergeant guessed his age as between ten and fourteen, but could not narrow the range. There was dust on him always, and often grass stains or splashes of oil. His forearms were corded with child's muscle from whatever work it was that he did and it seemed he did a bit of everything when he wasn't reading comic books and spending time with his friend. He wore a long smock which was rather too big on his shoulders, so that on a bad day he looked like a match-stick man in a lampshade. In the late-afternoon light and under the cracked facade of the mission house, he resembled a monk, and the Sergeant expected him at any moment to lift his head and preach from the Book of Superman. Chapter 9, verse 21: the world shall know thee as a blur and as a sign upon the heavens, as a hope and an earnest of good things. When the boy had finished reading, he looked up to assure himself that nothing of

importance was taking place with the pelican, and then glanced over at the Sergeant. It was the hour of the day when they usually went to Sholas and took tea. The island of Mancreu had very few customs left, but tea had somehow clung on, and of all the cafs and bars and as far as these two were concerned the remaining living rooms and campsites and samovars as well Sholas made the best tea. Shola had a proper kettle and he didnt leave the dregs in the pot or the scale in the water. He was a dandy and a gambler, but he knew tea.

The sergeant had left his car at the fish market, ten minutes away along the seafront. This was also customary. Walking along the front allowed him to say hello to everyone. The afternoon greeting was important for social order. Like tea, a British sergeant taking his ease along the promenade was a solid, familiar thing. It said that there was still sense in the world. In theory, of course, the British presence here had been withdrawn three years ago, claims of sovereignty having been yielded to the NATO and Allied Protection Force on Mancreu, NatProMan. The Sergeant was technically the senior officer (albeit non-commissioned) in the United Kingdoms Mancreu Command, and as a side job he was a senior consular staff member, too. Just dont issue any bloody passports without checking the rules, the actual Consul had told him as he left, and for Christs sake dont let anyone talk you into signing any treaties. Could I? the Sergeant asked. No, the Consul said. But you could make a frightful mess, so dont. Take the keys, enjoy the house, and rest up. I understand thats why youre here. Just nod to everyone and dont annoy Kershaw at NatProMan and thisll all be done in a few months. They cant keep the place around much longer. Itll be nice for you.

Yes, sir. Saying hello, therefore, was the greater part of the Sergeants official function. He was to keep the consulate open and ensure that assistance was forthcoming to any British citizens who needed it, though this essentially meant calling the British Embassy in Yemen, and in any case had never actually been required. In many ways his real job was simply to occupy Brighton House, the sprawling, haunted old manse on a hill overlooking Beauville the only town of any size on the island which had in former times been the seat of colonial power. With its back to the mountains and the jungle, and its pocked face to the sea, Brighton House was almost identical to every British holding in the various candle ends of Empire even if perhaps the coming destruction of the island did make it dolefully unique. And so these were his days, week in and week out, and had been for more than two years: walk, take tea, and say hello. As the inheritor of what remained of British authority, he could additionally marry anyone who for some unlikely reason wanted him to officiate rather than a local priest, and he could facilitate adoptions and divorces for EU passport holders. Other than that, he could if he chose investigate local crime at the behest of a relevant person (it was unclear who was relevant so he tended to interpret this according to his lights) and he had the right to sit in on NatProMan Strategic Board meetings as representative of the United Kingdom which had chosen firmly to abrogate such representation and therefore he was under orders not to. Seen on the map, the island of mancreu was a double arc, the shape of a seagull sketched by a child. The central segment, the beak, was thirty miles deep, the wingspan perhaps a hundred. Along the concave edges, mountains reared out of the restive water of the Arabian Sea. Mancreu was a first-and-last isle perched on the lip of the great mid-ocean ridge, midway between Socotra and the Chagos Islands. The people were an unbothered ethnic jumble of Arab and African and Asian, with the inevitable admixture of Europeans. France and Britain had held Mancreu alternately for centuries, with the French coming off considerably better, until late in the Victorian period it fell almost by accident under the Union Flag once more, and British it had remained thereafter, far flung and mentioned mostly in the footnotes. To the north, the water grew pale green and warm. To the south, it turned blue, the bottom falling away into a frigid darkness which was the site of the indigenous populations hell. The south coast was known to be peopled with demons: fish-finned men and feral women ruled by Jack the Wrecker, Mancreus resident fairy king. Bad Jack was capricious. If the milk turned, Jack had molested the cow. If you left honey on the doorstep, Jack might trade it for cash or rum or even a hunting rifle. He was known to rescue lost travellers, but also to rob them, and if a ship went down in bad weather, well, no doubt Jack had stood on the cliff with his lantern and seen it onto the rocks for spite. He was, in other words, the warm-water image of every bogeyman up and down the British coast, and likewise an object of knowing derision until the night drew in, after which people were discreetly more circumspect. Bad Jack, Mauvais Jacques, Jack Storm-eye and even, by some strange twist, Jack of the Nine, the bitter memory of a colonial governors justice. The name, Mancreu, had been given by mariners grateful for the sandy beaches on the lee side. Those early sailors thought the island was an image of the Grail carved into the face of the Earth. On embroidered pieces of canvas cloth, sometimes crude, sometimes alarmingly intricate and ethereal, they showed Mancreu as the curved palms of the Virgin catching the blood of Christ. In Beauville, this perception was still a matter of known fact. Elsewhere in the world it was less well

understood, but from time to time a ship out of North Africa would put in, crewed by tyro seamen from missionary towns baked dry and starving, and somewhere near the bow would be a benediction in French: Hail, Madonna of the Gulls Wing. Hail, Madonna. Let your mark be upon us sinners, and your voice upon the deep. Bid the blue water roll softly. Speak to the clouds and hold their thunder. Guard us from men of ill-intent and from plagues and sorrows. Hail, Madonna. Hear us, Madonna. Bring us home. There was still a scrivener's office on the harbour front, where a holy sign-painter hung his papal warrant. He was an albino or something like it named Raoul. He was subject to strange infirmities, either in consequence of his condition or from overuse of magic inks, but was said in person to be magnetic, like a poet or a prophet. He was also said to have been a mercenary, a leader of men, or perhaps a great pirate before the calling found him and the writing of God's word on ships became his life. The Sergeant had never ventured into his lair. It was his experience that one did poorly by involving oneself in matters of local religion. The world looked one way if you believed, and another if you did not, and that was all there was to it. The scrivener's beautiful daughter was famous around Beauville, and famously out of bounds. White Raoul's girl: what might the father do, should her heart be broken? Or worse: should harm befall her? What might he not do? Take down his sign, for sure, and close his shop but what else? Might he not write maledictions with the same strength as blessings? Or call upon whatever armies he once commanded to avenge her tears? Might not the papal warrant, conferred in the name of mercy, give equal prominence in God's eyes to a father's rage? Beautiful Sandrine must live a lonely life, uncourted and unloved, because it was not known where Raoul's disapprovals might begin. The Sergeant had never seen her. He wondered sometimes if she were a myth, a sort of running joke on the big foreigner. More likely he'd walked past her a dozen times and not realised it, and her beauty was more to be found in its own fame than in her face. Tea, the boy said firmly. *Revue de presse*"Graham Greene meets Lee Child in this dark caper about a soldier recuperating on a politically fraught tropical island." --Entertainment Weekly Tigerman is an irresistible delight, something like Major Pettigrew's Last Stand -- played by James Bond. . . . 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. . . . [Tigerman] is ultimately no comic-book fantasy, just as a poisoned island is no paradise. You won't see the next punch coming. Ron Charles, *The Washington Post*"The kind of good that makes you wonder why every book isn't this smart and joyous and beautiful and heartbreaking; that makes you a little bit pissed off that you ever gave away bits of your life to reading worse books, and sad that so many trees get wasted on authors with less grace, less surety, less confidence than this man who can throw comic books, video games, post-colonial guilt, the longing ache of the childless, murder, tea drinking and mystical tigers all together in a big hat, shake it vigorously, and draw from the resultant, jumbled mess something so beautiful." Jason Sheehan, *All Things Considered*, NPR This fantastic book deserves to be widely read and long remembered. . . . Harkaway writes with such a wonderful mix of humor, erudition, sensitivity and appreciation for a good bit of decidedly English fun. Nicholas Mancusi, *The Miami Herald* Harkaway takes over where guys like Kurt Vonnegut left off. He walks the line between reality and fantasy and writes with a charming cynicism. . . . [A] mad genius. Andrew Blom, *The Boston Herald* "[Tigerman] is, in short, awesome. Read it immediately. . . . Abundantly funny. . . . And incredibly moving, too. . . . For all that Tigerman seems to be about a superhero on the surface, appearances are deceiving indeed: Harkaway is markedly more interested in the relationship between Lester and his friend. . . . In Harkaway's hands, this friendship is as gripping as any mystery." Niall Alexander, *Tor.com* A funny, touching and meditative page-turner that will leave you thinking about what it really means to be a hero for days after you've finished it. Matthew Jackson, *BookPage* An adventurous romp of a thriller which, like [its] hero Ferris, at its core contains a bit of longing. . . . But rest assured, Tigerman is full of win. *Readers Digest* With his playfully erudite vocabulary and whizz-bang action plots, Harkaway, son of John le Carr and jiu jitsu practitioner, brings to mind the meaty thrills of Neal Stephenson. . . . [In Tigerman he] writes of an Afghanistan vet who ends up in a former tropical colony where he meets a young boy drunk on comic books. Were betting things get a little weird. *Time Out Chicago*, 14 Books You Must Read This Summer Packed with sharp wit and quick humor. . . . Harkaway's novel offers big rewards: a world slightly skewed from our own, and yet still recognizable as the backdrop for a story that asks big questions about parenting, friendship, family, heroes and how to go on living when the world is ending. The resulting novel is a rollick of a read, packing emotion, hilarity and a dose of self-deprecation into a story that is, to borrow a phrase from Lester's young friend, full of win. Kerry McHugh,

Shelf Awareness A splendid book, literary fiction that defies genres as it tells a timely superhero story with intelligence and warmth. Largehearted Boy Yet another bravura performance from a writer whose imagination knows no bounds. Nick Harkaway is at it again, celebrating pop culture, mixing genres like a mad scientist, and producing a book that is both profoundly moving and deliriously entertaining. . . . [But] Harkaway throws a spanner in the comic-book works, adding depth and complexity to the mix, more Haruki Murakami than Stan Lee. Bill Ott, Booklist (starred review) Brilliantly imagined. . . . A hoot and a half, and then some: hands down, the best island farce since Vonnegut's *Cats Cradle*. Kirkus (starred review) "[A] poignant morality tale, equally fueled by emotion and adrenaline. . . . Adroitly explores the lengths one man will go to save what he's come to love, even in the face of almost-certain failure." --Publishers Weekly (starred review) Advance Praise from the UKAs much a homage to Graham Greene as to Stan Lee. . . . There are plenty of scrapes and escapades, lots of derring-do and derring-really-don't, building to a morally satisfying conclusion. . . . Through social media and the disconnection between inhabitants and governments, to the emotional difficulties of ex-servicemen and the way in which power is the display of power, Harkaway uses the story of a disappointed man and a disenfranchised boy to examine matters of real import. His great gift as a novelist one he shares with writers such as China Miéville, Lauren Beukes and even Eleanor Catton is to merge the pace, wit and clarity of the best popular literature with the ambition, complexity and irony of the so-called literary novel. Tiger Man is in some ways all about the stripes: the distinctive becomes camouflage. Stuart Kelly, *The Guardian* Will move you as powerfully as it will enthrall you. . . . 5 out of 5 stars. Jenny Barlow, *The Daily Express* (UK) Astonishingly imaginative Graham Greene would have treasured this book. . . . Outlandishly larger than life, with a cast of characters written in Technicolor Nick Harkaway has all the writerly skills to pull it off. His Tiger Man lives because of his wit and daring intelligence, and his empathy. Words quiver whenever he writes. Tom Adair, *The Scotsman* Extraordinary. . . . The action sequences in Tiger Man are some of Harkaway's best. As ever, the writing is economical but lively, revelling in modern idiom. . . . [Has] the cinematic scope and dynamism one has come to expect from Harkaway. . . . The ending of Tiger Man is pitch-perfect, thrilling and dramatic. Frank Brinkley, *Literary* (UK) A peculiar but winning combination of a Graham Greene-like end-of-empire tale and lots of Lee Child-style baddie bashing. . . . Full of fine descriptive passages and memorable figures. John Dugdale, *The Sunday Times* Tedious is the last word you could use to describe [Harkaway's] writing He tops his intellect in a ringmaster's hat. But for all the entertainment to be had from the reading, the serious stuff is in there Harkaway is a writer who nests big ideas inside bigger ideas. Teddy Jamieson, *The Herald* (Scotland) Uses politics in the service of outsized entertainment. . . . Harkaway mashes this [up] with a hyperactive, quite possibly deranged, apocalyptic imagination to produce novels whose mind-splitting pile-up of subplots usually involve various corrupt governments, a ninja or two and at least ten explosions. Claire Allfree, *Metro* UK Often hilarious but with an undercurrent of dark violence . . . an impressive novel that conceals provocative questions inside an old-school tale of ripping adventure. Saxon Bullock, *SFX* magazine A captivating and emotional real-world superhero tale. Jack Parsons, *SciFiNow* As entertaining and imaginative as you'd hope. . . . Clever and confidently written. . . . A treasure chest of brilliant and barmy delights. The end of the story seems to come too soon and that's usually the mark of a great novel. Nick Harkaway takes the reader on a wild adventure and, though you know it's all fiction, there's a little part of you that wishes that Tiger Man was actually real. Natalie Xenos, CultureFly.co.uk