

## **BAD SEED**

ALAN CARTER

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### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

When a prosperous Chinese-Australian family is found horribly murdered, Acting Detective Sergeant Cato Kwong must face his past relationship with the Tan family in a way that makes his role doubly painful.

There is a suspect, and he is very close to home, but somehow the obvious questions fail to lead to obvious answers in this investigation, despite the pressure from DI Sandra Pavlou to find a neat conclusion. Hutchens, in the hot-seat of a child abuse inquiry, appears unable to maintain sufficient focus, and Cato's unease grows as the investigation unfolds.

Soon Cato is on his way to Shanghai as a lead takes investigating team to China. Cato has much to discover about himself in the country of his ancestors. And he and his team have a whole lot to learn about *guanxi* – the intricate connections and obligations that underpin the social, business and criminal structure of China, where cyber dragons are dangerously real and being found guilty under law can be lethal.

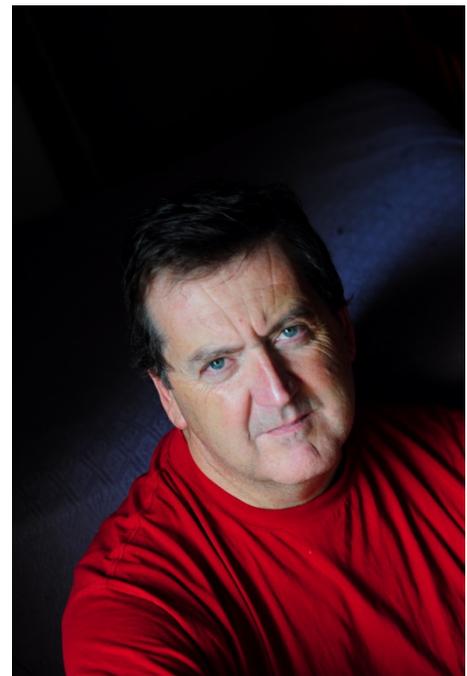
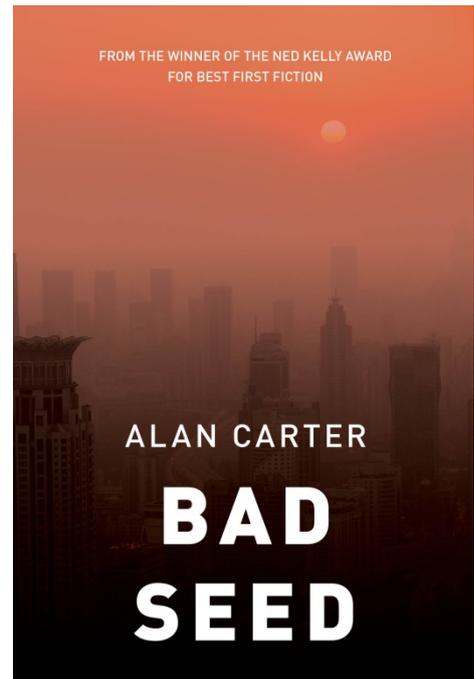
It begins to seem as if the murder of the Tans might be connected to the Chinese acquisition of Australian land – and to those who resent the invasion of the 'Yellow Peril'.

Meanwhile a stressed-out DI Hutchens, faces trouble outside the inquiry as well. One of the victims, David Mundine – the abused boy whose allegations Hutchens dismissed all those years ago – has a bone to pick with him. It's not a great recipe for a man with an increasing reliance on angina spray.

And the unstoppable Lara Sumich – with her hazy moral code when it comes to criminal investigation – has fallen pregnant; she is facing a job crisis of a kind she would never have dreamed.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Alan Carter was born in Sunderland, UK. He immigrated to Australia in 1991 and lives in Fremantle with his wife Kath and son Liam. He works as a television documentary director. In his spare time he follows a black line up and down the Fremantle pool. He is the author of two previous Cato Kwong novels, *Prime Cut* and *Getting Warmer*, and is hard at work on the fourth, *Heaven Sent*.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

*You've been with Cato Kwong for three books now. How have you and Cato developed across the series?*

I think we're becoming a bit co-dependent and we tend to argue about the slightest thing. *Bad Seed* was a challenge I set myself way back when I first invented Cato. At the time I made him Chinese, and not that in touch with his culture and identity and unable to speak the language – because, hey presto, it made life a lot easier for me. But I knew there'd be a day of reckoning when I'd be called upon to do my homework and pay my dues and actually learn something. *Bad Seed* and the Shanghai residency gave me the chance to do exactly that.

*Chinese acquisition of Australian land is a hot topic right now. Do you deliberately use the crime genre for social comment?*

The crime genre, particularly the police procedural, is a great way of holding a mirror up to society. The crime writers I most admire all do this well and that's why I aspire to do the same. The issue of Chinese acquisition of land is out there and remains a vexed one, bringing with it inevitable echoes of Yellow Peril racism. So it was a good vehicle to also explore Australian xenophobia – particularly with a Federal election backdrop – and for Cato to also explore his place in the world.

*Has becoming a crime writer made you see the world differently?*

No, I was always a grumpy and twisted old sod.

*Do you have an obsession with pigs?*

What makes you say that? No, honestly, the fact that *Getting Warmer* and *Bad Seed* both start with an epic pig scene is purely coincidental and the one in *Bad Seed* is based on a real event. But there is something grand and Old Testament about pigs.

*Did you have fun writing the character of Mrs Hutchens?*

Yes, almost as much as I usually do with DI Hutchens. Creating a character who is Mick Hutchens writ large but with a penchant for hedgehog slice, the *Fifty Shades* books, and restorative justice, was great fun.

*What's next for Cato?*

In *Cato 4 – Heaven Sent* – Cato is immersed in the harsh reality of a society now divided into so-called lifters and leaners. And a figure from the recent past returns with vengeance on his mind. On the home front Cato has a rare taste of domestic bliss. It would be a shame to have to snatch it away from him again.

*Do you have any other series ideas on the horizon?*

There's a twinkle in my eye over the possibility of a spin-off series featuring Rory Driscoll – the amoral fun-loving spook from *Bad Seed*. The idea of a troubleshooter let loose in the Asia-Pacific and not bound by the usual rules appeals to me. Watch this space.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who or what is the 'bad seed' that gives this novel its title?
2. What does the term Yellow Peril mean? How long has it been in usage in Australia?
3. Why has Carter chosen to open the book with a prologue from Zhou's perspective? What relationship does this opening scene have to the events that unfold?
4. What does Cato learn about his own heritage on his visit to Shanghai? What insight into his racial identity do we gain as we witness his interactions with his family and, in particular, his father?
5. Do you feel sympathetic towards Mick Hutchens? If you have read Carter's earlier two books, has your attitude towards Hutchens shifted across the three?
6. How has Lara Sumich changed across the series? What are we to make of this new Lara and what happens to her in the course of *Bad Seed*? Why do you think the author has chosen this course for his character?
7. What kind of a man is Des O'Neill? Why has Carter included him in the plot?
8. In his interview, the author describes Rory as an 'amoral, fun-loving spook'. Does Rory's 'likeability' affect how much we as readers tolerate his behaviour as compared, say, to that of Yu Guangming?
9. Why do you think the author chose to include the final conversation between Cato and Tricia Mundine (p. 309)?
10. What elements of social and familial dysfunction does Carter explore in this novel via his characters the Mundines, the Tans, the Soongs and the Harveys?
11. How does family life in Australia stack up against Carter's portrayal of family life in Shanghai, seen via the character of the Lis and the Zhous?
12. In what ways are poverty and wealth represented in *Bad Seed*? What is the difference between the haves and the have-nots?
13. What conclusions might it be possible to draw about the author's take on contemporary Australian society, especially in its attitudes towards Asia?
14. What kinds of social hierarchies does Cato encounter in Shanghai? How do these create points of comparison with Cato's own society back in Australia?
15. How do you feel about Cato's participation in the entrapment of Tommy Li, Xilai Feng, Peter Tien and Phoebe Li?
16. What is the relationship between prologue and epilogue? How does the epilogue help 'bring home' the book's themes?
17. What is the role of crime fiction as a genre in its portrayal of human behaviour? Why do we read it? Why do we need it?