



Cane Warriors

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Nicholas Tucker](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

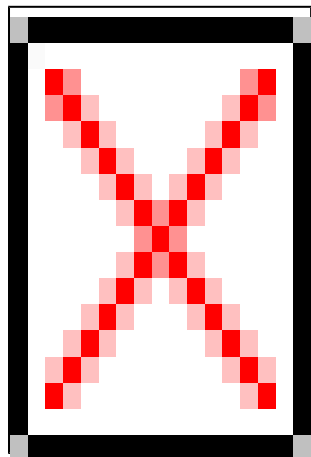
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5



This lacerating story is based on a true-life rebellion that erupted in Jamaica in 1760, when slaves rose against their appalling treatment, killing some of their cruel overseers and acquiring forty muskets. Led by the legendary Tacky, this story of courage and brutality is still comparatively unknown and therefore uncelebrated. Following his own first visit to Jamaica, Alex Wheatle, born in Brixton of Jamaican parents, resolved to put this right and has now done so. No reader could forget this account of such savagery on both sides, with white settlers' children also among the dead. The narrator, fourteen-year old Moa, lives to tell the tale, but his future is bleak.

Although Moa recounts this story in Standard English, the passages of dialogue revert to a rich patois which has its own fascination. Tears, and there are many of those, come over as eye-water, and experiencing fear ? understandably also a frequent occurrence ? is to feel shaky shaky inside. This abundance of new idioms and expressions is a bonus in what could otherwise have been a universally painful read. References to old Gods and a world far away now converted into a vague Dreamland also mix with everyday detail about work, food and the seemingly endless punishments visited upon slaves regardless of gender. There is also open discussion of the routine sexual abuse young girl slaves could expect from their masters.

The author compares slavery to the holocaust in his afterword, and this is fair comment. Willing the slaves to rise

against their oppressors in this story is akin to celebrating those brave Jews who took on their concentration camp guards. Already a frequent prize-winner, with a previous novel [Crongton Knights](#) [4] -soon to be televised, Alex Wheatle is a necessary author for our own times. **Cane Warriors** crackles with linguistic invention linked to an overriding compassion and understanding for those who suffered so much in our colonial past. It does not make for comfortable reading, but how could it?

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