

## FRANZ JOSEF

ALAN CARTER

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Nick Chester (*Marlborough Man*, *Doom Creek*) is now a detective based in Nelson in New Zealand's South Island. Along with colleague, trainee detective Latifa Rapata, he is summoned to investigate a body found suspended in the glacier at Franz Josef on the west coast. But the tiny town of Franz Josef already has woes of its own – it sits smack on the Alpine Fault, making it the subject of a doomsday scenario for a projected massive earthquake, and it's prone to flooding and landslides most years.

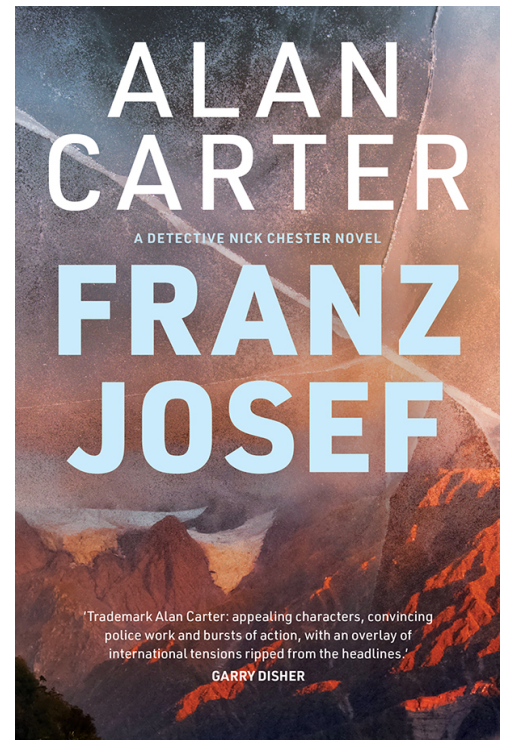
The discovery of the body sets Nick and Latifa on an investigative trail that leads into the heart of corruption in the international aid industry and the fallout from a civil war. As the body count rises, why can't Nick and Latifa find a killer in a tiny town where the forces of nature have cut it off from the outside world?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Alan Carter** was born in Sunderland, UK. He immigrated to Australia in 1991 and now lives in splendid semi-rural, semi-isolation south of Hobart, Tasmania. In his spare time, he follows the black line up and down the local swimming pool, or drags on his wetsuit and braves the icy waters of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. Alan is the author of *Prize Catch*, which is set in Tasmania, and three novels in the Sergeant Nick Chester series: *Marlborough Man* (winner of the Ngaio Marsh Award for Best Crime Novel), *Doom Creek* and *Franz Josef*. He is also the author of the Fremantle-set DS Cato Kwong series, which includes *Prime Cut* (winner of the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction), *Getting Warmer*, *Bad Seed*, *Heaven Sent* and *Crocodile Tears*.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the speaker in the prelude? What does it mean when it says: 'He once was lost but now is found' (p. 7)?
2. In what year do you think this novel is set? What are the pointers to this setting?
3. What was the social, cultural and political environment in New Zealand at that time? How do these contribute to the novel's setting?
4. How does climate change make itself felt in this novel? Can the glacier of Franz Josef be read as a metaphor?
5. What is the relevance to the story of the Māori placename of Kā Roimata o Hine Hukatere, and the story that Latifa tells (p.15)?
6. How does the natural environment help to shape this investigation?
7. What kind of a detective is Nick Chester? How does his role in the investigation shift over the course of the novel?
8. What qualities does Latifa Rapata bring to the investigation?
9. This novel also concerns itself with the impact on the personal lives of the police officers. Do you think that the benefits of their jobs outweigh the risks?
10. Who is Ice Man and how has he come to be in the town of Franz Josef?
11. What is the relevance of his own country's troubled history to his demise?
12. Why do you think this novel includes transcripts?
13. Who is Aroha? Why is she in Franz Josef? Why do you think Carter has included her character?



14. What is the role of the helicopter pilot in this novel? What is his own attitude to his past experiences and how they do compare to Ice Man's?
15. What is the relationship between Deng and du Plessis? What motivates each of these men in the novel's present day?
16. What do you think the author means by the novel's final sentence (p. 291)?

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

***Why did you choose Franz Josef as the setting for this Nick Chester novel? Is it a place you have been to yourself?***

I've visited FJ a few times and, in particular, on the last occasion (a good ten years after the previous) I was struck by how far the glacier had receded in that decade or so – nearly a kilometre. It was a good job I checked because my first draft of this novel was based on my ten-year-old memories, and scenarios I had envisaged for the opening were no longer possible. I was drawn to setting a novel here after reading about the possibility of the town being closed and relocated because of the earthquake risk. The doomsday scenario of an abandoned town offered fertile ground for the setting of a crime story. Of course the relocation plans never eventuated, but this novel posits a speculative what-if?

***The tiny town of Franz Josef is the pinch point for some bigger events that have taken place far away. What drew you to these include these particular plotlines?***

In part, it was becoming aware that there are enterprises in New Zealand and Australia whose expertise in tracing and tackling corruption lead them into some precarious situations in a precarious world. Having previously worked in the international aid sector, I'm aware both of the good work that is being done, the potential for corruption there (as in any industry), and the vicious politics that accompanies it. It's never far from the news headlines these days too. But as the world turns ever grimmer, I try to find some light in the darkness.

***What do you see as the role of the crime novelist in exploring some of the world's wicked problems?***

Crime fiction, with its universal themes of good versus evil, greed, betrayal, ambition and any other deadly sins you can think of is well placed for explorations of a wicked world. Furthermore it does so with characters you can cheer for or boo, a usually compelling plot-driven storyline, and a sense of right triumphing in the end. If only it were so in the real world.

***What is next for Alan Carter and Nick Chester?***

I'm writing a sequel to the Tasmanian novel *Prize Catch* – sending Sam Willard and Jill Wilkie into the heart of more Tasmanian darkness. As for Nick Chester, well he can't keep himself out of trouble, can he?



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