



NZ mythology inspires author



Some struggle to the end of *Lord of the Rings* just to say they did.

Some give up before the 1008 pages are through.

Then there's that rare person, the real fanatic, who devours the tome 10 times, such as Napier-born author David Hair.

Hair was "blown away" by it at an impressionable age, completely absorbed by its mythology.

"I would finish it and read it again," he said while in Napier this week. "I loved *Lord of the Rings* and immediately read everything I could find in the same genre."

So it was no surprise that his debut novel is in the same fantasy vein, a thrilling tale for young adults steeped in New Zealand mythology.

And it all starts in Napier.

"The beginning of the book is very much rooted in Hawke's Bay," and people would recognise Pania, Napier's inner harbour and the road to Taupo before the action headed towards Cape Reinga, he said.

The Bone Tiki centres on teenager Matiu, who believes he is destined to inherit a bone tiki, but goes on the run with it when a black magic practitioner, or tohunga makutu, tries to lay claim to it. That is where the ghosts of old settlers, taniwha, goblins and creatures of the forest, people from the past start to invade the contemporary landscape, much in the same way they crept into Hair's creative mind in childhood.

"I had a strong imagination and would imagine the landscapes we were driving through were populated by taniwhas and creatures. What I have done is use the concept that the land remembers what happens in it.

"This is the story I wanted to tell. It's been in the pipeline a long time; probably since the early '90s."

Reading Robin Hood, King Arthur, international folk tales and New Zealand myths and legends further fed that

daydreaming. "I really enjoyed them and, because I was in New Zealand, I wanted New Zealand to be magical," he said.

Research for *The Bone Tiki* has required much reading on history, and legends associated with particular areas and travelling the roads he mentions "where practical".

"But not all at once. It's been very disjointed. I wouldn't say I went on a pilgrimage, came back and wrote a book."

Visits though, have been all the way from India, where he now lives with his wife and children. The role of his wife Kerry Greig with Immigration New Zealand allows the family one trip back to New Zealand each year. "We usually use it to come back at Christmas time but we skipped Christmas to coincide with the release of the book," he said.

Living in India

Living in the Indian metropolis of Delhi, a city of 16 million people, was like spending every day on the set of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, said Hair, who lives with his family at the New Zealand High Commission, amid gates, guards and fabulous gardens.

"It's got its old, old areas, the slums, the poverty and the luxury," he said.

Their nearest neighbours were other embassies, so the neighbourhood tennis matches he'd been having had been international affairs. "Most of our social circle is the diplomatic community, in particular the Australians and the English," he said.

Living there had given him ideas for a possible adult fantasy novel, set in an imaginary world. He's on his second draft, and he now has ideas for a *Tiki* sequel.

"One thing I have never been stuck for is ideas, but having the time, space and the inclination to do the writing has been a problem," he said.

Part of the reason he embarked

late on a publishing path was he "wasted so much time thinking 'I'm not bright enough to be a writer'."

Writing was 80 per cent preparation and 20 per cent writing, he said.

Though he had ideas, created chapter plans, character profiles and places ("by the time you start writing, it is like transcription, rather than invention"), researching and logic testing, he eventually found there was "no excuse for not actually doing the writing".

Hair considered himself lucky to be on a sort of "sabbatical" from his usual career in finance, using any spare time to study towards financial papers.

He shifted to Bay View with parents Cliff and Biddy Hair, when he was 7 years old and attended Eskdale School and Napier Boys High School. After leaving school and taking his OE, he returned to Wellington to work in insurance, superannuation and investments at BNZ bank.

Teen targets

There was a worldwide trend towards writing for young adults, Hair said, that had possibly been fed by the enormous success of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

Joanne Harris, author of adult novel *Chocolat* had recently released *Rune Marks* for the teenage market, for example.

"They are adult writers saying, 'Okay, I will have a go at writing for teenagers now."

"But because this is my first novel, I didn't have the luxury of that. The story I wanted to tell suited having a teenage protagonist because of the sense of wonder and intrigue, so the character needed to be a teenager, it naturally suits the teenage market."

■ *The Bone Tiki* published by HarperCollins Publishers in New Zealand was to be released this month. RRP \$19.99.

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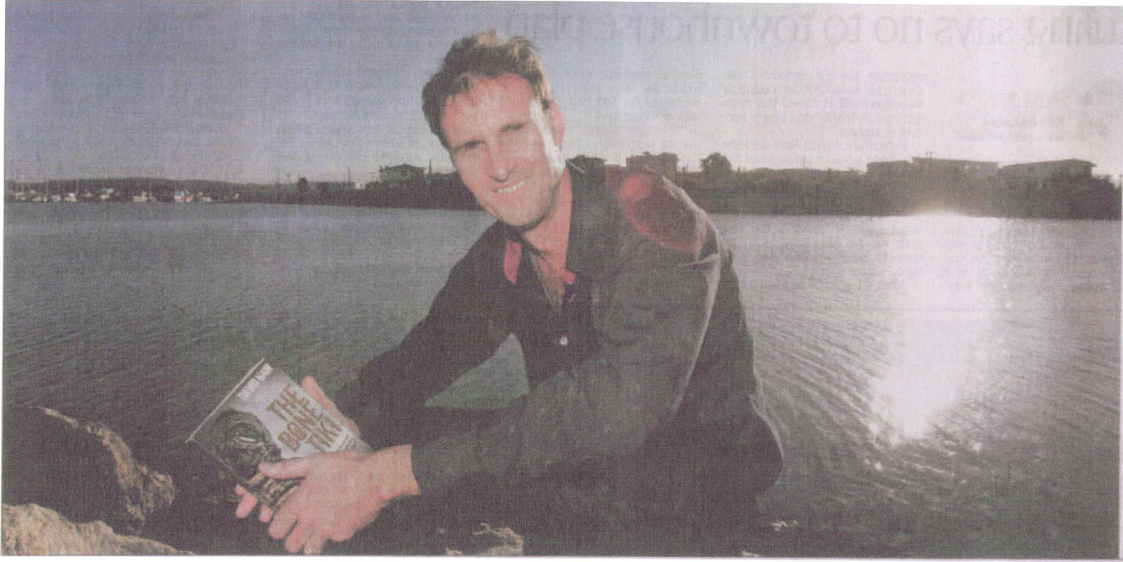


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BAY VIEW: Napier's inner harbour "the Iron Pot", is one of several local icons that feature in David Hair's debut novel *The Bone Tiki*
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