

MEET THE...

# THRILLER WRITER

Tony Park had a relatively ordinary childhood in Sydney. Who knew he would join the army, fall in love with Africa and become a best-selling novelist?

BY JESSICA ABELSOHN

Tony Park spent his childhood playing soldiers and writing stories. Whenever anyone asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would immediately answer, "write a book". Now, Tony's living proof that dreams really can come true. But first he had to live a bit.

## ARMY DAYS

Tony joined the Army Reserve when he was 17 years old, never dreaming that he would see any service in a war overseas. In 2002, he headed to Afghanistan as an Army public relations officer.

"It was an eye opener," he muses. "My most vivid memory of serving in Afghanistan was going out into the mountains and linking up with an SAS patrol to cover a mission they were involved in. I saw the harshness of the country and the equally tough existence its people live."

While it was tough being away from his wife and home, Tony believes his time in the army was a really rewarding experience.



Since his first trip to Africa in 1995, Tony has used the beautiful country as inspiration for his books.

"I was an army reserve officer attached to the Special Operations Task Group," he recalls. "I was working with Australian Special Air Service personnel, the most professional soldiers in our army, so working alongside them and making friends was a highlight of my military career."

## FINDING INSPIRATION

"I fell into journalism because I really couldn't do anything else," Tony explains. "I'd done well at English in school, but was hopeless at maths and science, so I thought I'd end up working with words in some form. I didn't particularly want to be a journalist, but after dropping out of university and spending a failed year as a bank teller, I answered an ad in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for cadet reporters."

He didn't get the job. But he did secure a position at his local paper, *The Glebe*, before working as a press secretary for former NSW Premier Nick Greiner.

By 1995, he was hooked on Africa, following a holiday to South Africa,

Zimbabwe and Botswana. Tony and his wife, Nicola, keep going back. In fact, it was Africa that seemed to be the turning point in Tony's career.

"Eventually, it gave me the inspiration I'd needed, but been lacking, to sit down and write a novel."

Tony and Nicola now spend six months of every year in Africa, where Tony researches and writes his books. "My first novel, *Far Horizon*, set in southern Africa, was published in 2004 and since then I've done a novel a year. All of them are set in Africa."

"The landscape, the wildlife and the people are an unending source of inspiration to me," Tony reveals. "I see no shortage of problems, even tragedy, in Africa, but, equally, I see no shortage of good people working their hardest to bring about change and improve their lives and the lives of others." ••

Tony loves talking at Probus clubs and no matter where your club is located, he's open to coming along. To get in touch, contact him here:

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