Two Wolves
By Tristan Bancks

Author Biography

Tristan Bancks is a children’s and teen author with a background in acting and Filmmaking. His books include the My Life series, Mac Slater (Australia and US) and Two Wolves, a crime-mystery novel for middle-graders. Two Wolves won Honour Book in the 2015 Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards. It also won the YABBA and KOALA Children’s Choice Awards. It was released in the US as On the Run in November 2015 (Farrar Straus Giroux). Tristan's short films as writer and director have won a number of awards (Flickerfest) and have screened widely in festivals (Sydney, Melbourne, London, Cork, Aspen, Clermont-Ferrand) and on TV (US Sundance Channel, The Movie Network, Qantas Inflight)). His most recent book is My Life & Other Exploding Chickens, a fourth book of weird-funny-gross, semi-autobiographical short stories. Tristan is excited by the future of storytelling and inspiring others to create.

Short Synopsis

What would you do if your parents committed a crime? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

Long Synopsis

‘An old man tells his grandson one evening that there is a battle raging inside him, inside all of us. A terrible battle between two wolves. One wolf is bad – pride, jealousy, greed.

The other wolf is good – kindness, hope, truth. The child asks, ‘Who will win?’ The grandfather answers simply, ‘The one you feed.’

- Unknown source

One afternoon, four police officers visit Ben Silver’s home. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they’re going on a holiday. Which is weird, because Ben’s family never goes on holidays.

Why have they changed cars? What was in the grey sports bag that Uncle Chris gave Dad? And how can Mum and Dad think that staying in the falling-down cabin in the bush miles from anywhere is a holiday? Things aren’t right and Ben knows it. His parents are on the run. So Ben and Olive are running, too.
Ben’s always dreamt of becoming a detective – his dad even calls him ‘Cop’ because he asks so many questions. Now Ben gathers evidence, writing down the clues in the brown leather notebook that belonged to his grandfather, trying to uncover what his parents have done. The trouble is, if he figures it out, what does he do next? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

Author Statement

Why Two Wolves would make a great adaptation to the screen

Two Wolves is an action-packed thriller and family drama with a compelling mystery at its core. It has broad appeal to a family audience aged 10+. It is very Australian but explores universal ideas and has global appeal.

With a background in acting, directing and screenwriting, I think visually when I write novels. The central character, Ben Silver, has strong internal conflict but that conflict is expressed visually, in the actions and choices he makes under enormous pressure from fast-breaking events.

Two Wolves is a tale of an ordinary family in an extraordinary situation. The children are forced to be brave, positive and resilient. The story emphasises the rewards of courage, determination and honesty. It is suspenseful and fast-paced with characters we care about.

Cinematic Devices

The story is struck through with cinematic story devices. At the opening, Ben is making a stop-motion movie, Within the Woods. Throughout, he visualises scenes from his movie ‘playing on the cinema screen at the back of his eyelids’ and, as the story progresses, he uses the movie he is creating to help him process events in his own life. He secretly records his parents’ conversations on his old, beat-up video camera and he writes dialogue for Within the Woods that parallels and provides answers for his own difficult situation.
I have been reading, speaking about and screening the video trailer for Two Wolves with audiences across Australia for the past two years and I am constantly told by kids, teens and adults that it would make a fantastic movie. I hope that the Books 2 Screen program provides a pathway towards screen adaptation.

**Production Considerations**

The story is set in the Northern NSW / SE QLD hinterland and could be produced on a low budget. The setting is contemporary, there are few characters, relatively few locations and no special effects. I am confident that the characters would attract a strong cast. The chase and mystery aspects of the story offer excellent transmedia possibilities.

**Audience**

The book has sold 30,000 copies through Education and Trade channels in Australia and New Zealand and has also just been released in the US as On the Run (Farrar Straus Giroux / Macmillan). Since winning Honour Book in the Children’s Book Council Awards Two Wolves is being studied widely in schools across Australia, opening up strong potential for educational use of the film.

The book appeals to its core 10-14 year-old audience but has been a hit with older teens and adults. It offers a grittier alternative to family hits like Red Dog and Paper Planes.

‘Two Wolves recalls the great adventure stories of Jack London but with the gritty realism of 21st-century story-telling. Gripping and unpredictable, with a hero you won’t forget.’

– John Boyne, author of The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas

‘Two Wolves is a tense, hard-edged, no-holds-barred thriller.’

- Anthony Horowitz (Alex Rider series, Foyle’s War, Midsomer Murders, House of Silk)
‘Suspense and fear make Ben feel like he’s living his own stop-action movie, and indeed his story has both the exciting pace and high stakes of a summer blockbuster.’

- Publishers Weekly, US.

Honour Book, CBCA Book of the Year Awards 2015

Winner, KOALA & YABBA Children’s Choice Book Awards 2015

Shortlisted, Australian Prime Minister’s Literary Awards

Top 10 Aus YA Novel 2013-14  Top 10 YA Book of the Year

- Nielsen Bookscan - Booktopia

How the author would like to be involved in the adaptation and pitch process?

I would like to develop the pitch alongside the screenwriter. I would hope that we could meet and discuss the tone and approach to adaptation and the pitch materials to be developed and I could then support the writer. I am an experienced public speaker and would be happy to be part of the verbal pitch to producers and funding bodies at the festival.

Two Wolves Video Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36e5BeuT1qY

Two Wolves Byron Bay Story Safari: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5N7ZwUqYxzQ

Key Character Breakdown

The Silver Family
When Mum and Dad pull up in front of the house one Tuesday afternoon and hurry Ben and Olive into the car, saying that they’re going on a ‘family holiday’, Ben is surprised. They aren’t really one of those family-movie-night, camp-in-the-backyard, let’s-discuss-this-and-get-everyone’s-opinion kind of families. They are more of a dinner-in-front-of-the-TV, key’s-under-the-mat, if-you-want-breakfast-make-it-your-damn-self kind of family.

Ben Silver
Ben dreams of being a police officer. And working for Lego. He’s happiest when he’s in his dark, messy room eating microwaved jam doughnuts and making stop-motion movies about a zombie thief being pursued by Sydney’s toughest cop, Ben Silver.

Ben is overweight and gets a hard time at school. He has few close friends and a complex relationship with his parents. His father taunts him, calling him a ‘baby’ and a ‘girl’ while his mother gives him helpful weight-loss tips. Ben has never really left the suburbs before. Nature is not his favourite thing but it comes to be his redemption.

Ben’s journey is a coming of age, of growing up and reaching maturity – his struggles, mental and physical, help him learn resilience and strength, and to trust his own judgement. He progresses from innocence to experience, from ‘not-knowing’ to knowing, trusting in his own power, as all children must at some point.

Ben also discovers that adults are fallible, and that parents don’t always make the best decisions for themselves or their children. What he learns about his family – in particular that his dad and grandfather were criminals – shakes Ben to his core. If they were crims, will he be too? Is it possible to outrun your genes?

Olive Silver
Olive is small, white-blond, seven years-old, one of the smartest kids Ben knows. She has a peculiar way of looking at the world. She read The Hobbit by herself and for three weeks afterwards she refused to speak unless people called her ‘Gandalf’. She has an unbreakable will and sees her father for what he is. At the opening of the story she has not spoken to Dad in over
a week after he put her stuffed rabbit, Bonzo, away. She calls Dad ‘Maugrim’, the evil wolf from \textit{The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe}. Ben would never dare to stand up to Dad the way Olive does.

\textbf{Ray Silver} \\
Ray (‘Dad’) is skinny and serious. An ex-mechanic, salesman and now motor wrecker. He wears an armful of tattoos, black wraparound sunglasses and a dirty cap with a petrol company logo on it. He has a chipped front tooth and looks ‘rat-like’, Ben thinks. Ray is an opportunist and when a large sum of money is mistakenly transferred into his bank account, he transfers the money and sets in motion the events of the story. Ray’s father was a petty criminal who would retreat to a cabin in the bush when the heat was on. Ray wanted a close relationship with him but it was never to be. He is ill-at-ease with fatherhood but there are moments when we see that Ray is trying to do his best with limited resources, that he wants to connect with Ben and Olive but does not know how.

\textbf{April Silver} \\
Ben sometimes wonders how Dad ended up with Mum. April is ten years younger than Ray. People said she could have been a model years ago but then Ben was born and that changed everything. Now she works at Ray Silver Motor Wreckers instead. Dad thinks he runs the business but Mum does. Ben knows. At the outset April is trying, desperately, to keep the family together, complying with Ray’s plan, lying to her children to protect them from the crime that has been committed. Her journey forces her to stand up for herself, for her children and to walk away from a man who has undermined her confidence, authority and sense of self since the beginning.
Adrenaline streaked through him. He craned his neck to look out the back window. Mum looked, too.

‘Don’t!’ Dad snapped.

‘What do they want?’ Ben asked. ‘Are they after us? Were we speeding?’ Dad drove on. He hadn’t taken a break in five hours.

Olive kneeled and stared out the back window, sucking her thumb. ‘Sit,’ Ben whispered, but she didn’t listen. This was not a surprise. ‘Are you going to pull over?’ Mum asked.

They rode on in silence. Ben wondered if Dad had heard her. There were two short, sharp blasts on the siren.

Ben had never wanted anything more than to look out the back window. Adults were weird. If kids ran the world everybody would be allowed to look when the police were following them. Not just annoying little sisters.

‘What are you doing?’ Mum asked. ‘Are you going to pull over?’ Dad shrugged. ‘We haven’t done anything.’

‘Ray, it’s the police.’

Dad wiped his nose on the back of his hand and kept driving. ‘I haven’t done anything.’

They drove on.

‘If we haven’t done anything, won’t they let us go?’ Ben said helpfully. Surely that made sense to his father. When Ben became a police officer, if he pulled someone over and they hadn’t done anything, he would let them go, for sure.

An engine roared and a car moved up quickly beside them. The vehicle was royal blue with a white-and-blue chequer print, dark-tinted windows and four antennas. Ben knew what all of the antennas were for. He had sat in a police car at the Royal Easter Show a few years ago and committed every detail to memory. One was an 800 MHz enhancer. Another was a VHF low band antenna. Another for 468 MHz and then the standard radio antenna above the back window.
The lights and siren weren’t on but the police officer – black wraparound sunglasses, short spiky hair, square head – pointed directly at Dad, then to the side of the road.

Olive started to giggle. ‘He looks angry,’ she said. Olive wanted to be a robber when she grew up. And a judge.

Dad swore under his breath but Ben heard it. Mum chewed what was left of her nails. Ben watched the cop.
Dad kept driving.

Tension spilled from the gaps around the windows and dripped down the sides of the car. With a low growl, Dad veered to the left and pulled onto the crunchy gravel shoulder of the road. He kept the engine running. They waited.

Ben caught a glimpse of movement in the side mirror as the officer stepped out of his car, put on his police cap, shut his door and walked along the edge of the road toward them. He had a wide, steady walk, his legs far apart, his body like a gum tree trunk. He wore a light-blue shirt, dark-blue pants, dusty black boots. His pistol was slung low, strapped to his thigh with a harness.

He stopped beside the car. His left arm was heavily tattooed, like Dad’s. Ben was surprised that police were allowed to have tattoos.

Dad wound down the window. Mum smiled at the policeman. ‘Can you please turn your engine off?’

Dad twisted the key and the car became still and quiet. Just the click and tick of hot motor. And the tock-tock-tock-tock of the indicator.

‘Why didn’t you slow down?’ the officer asked. ‘I didn’t see you at first.’

‘Did you hear my siren?’

Dad sat for a few seconds then nodded.
‘Well, why didn’t you pull over?’
Dad waited. ‘I’m not sure.’ Pause.

‘Make sure you pull over more quickly in future.’ Dad nodded.

Ben was listening so intently he forgot to breathe. He stared out the window at the officer, whose thick, reddish neck seemed to burst from his collar into a roll of fat that ended at his
tight-fitting police cap. He looked about ten years younger than Dad. Early thirties. His name badge read ‘Dan Toohey’. A good name for a police officer. Not as good as Ben Silver, but good.

‘Is this your car?’ the officer asked. ‘Yes,’
Dad said.
Ben bit his tongue.

‘Right. Do you know why I’m pulling you over?’

Dad sat there. Mum chewed on her finger and gave the officer a smile to make up for Dad’s surliness. Ben still could not get used to her short, whipper snipper haircut.

Dad shook his head. ‘No.’ ‘You have no idea?’

Dad shook his head again.

Dan Toohey looked in at Olive and Ben sitting there in their school uniforms. A semitrailer thundered by, ruffling the officer’s shirt. Ben leaned forward in his seat, his right ear twisted toward the action so he would not miss anything.

‘Your indicator,’ the officer said seriously in his farmer’s accent. ‘You’ve had your indicator on for about ten k’s, you dodo.’ He smiled for the first time, then he laughed, a big policeman’s belly laugh.

Dad looked down and snapped off his blinker. He laughed too. It was a bit forced. Then Mum laughed and Ben tried to laugh, even though he didn’t think it was that funny.

‘That was all. But since you didn’t want to pull over, I’ll have to run your licence, all right?’ The laughter petered out. ‘It’ll only take two ticks.’

Dad took his time finding his wallet. Ben could see it on the dashboard but he didn’t say anything.

‘It’s on the dash,’ Dan Toohey said.

‘Oh.’ Dad passed his licence through the window. ‘Ray Silver . . . Back in a minute.’

‘Excuse me,’ Ben said to the officer from the back seat Mum shot him a glare.
‘Do you have any police things you give to kids?’ Ben felt like an idiot so he added, ‘For my sister.’

‘Is not, Poo Face!’ Olive said. ‘It’s for him!’

‘No, yeah, no worries. Let me think. I’ll have a look in the car for you.’ ‘It’s okay,’ Dad said. ‘Don’t worry about it. He’s just –’

‘No trouble at all. It’s good to encourage the young ones. Otherwise the firies get all the new recruits. You a budding officer, mate?’ He smiled at Ben, who felt embarrassed and didn’t say anything. ‘Actually, you know what I’ve got? They’ve just started giving us these business cards and I dunno what to do with them.’ Dan Toohey took a velcro wallet from his back pocket and passed a card through to Ben.

It bore the name Dan Toohey and his rank, Constable, with the New South Wales police logo – a circle of green leaves with a red crown on top and a bird in the centre. At the bottom were the words ‘Culpam Poena Premit Comes’.

‘Maybe you can use it like a copper’s badge or something,’ Dan Toohey said. Ben looked up and said, quietly, ‘Thanks.’

‘I’ll just run this licence. Back in a minute.’ Dan Toohey headed to his car.

‘What’d you ask that for?’ Dad said. ‘I –’

‘He’s just excited,’ Mum said.

‘Baby,’ Dad said under his breath, shaking his head.

They sat in silence, the car filling with tension once more now that Dan Toohey and his belly laugh were gone. Trucks roared by, rocking the car with wind-rush.

Ben studied the business card, mouthing the words ‘Culpam Poena Premit Comes’ over and over again. He flicked open his notebook, slipped the card in and wrote the words on the inside cover, pressing hard to etch into the leather.

*Culpam Poena Premit Comes*

‘Hey Mum, what does “Culpam Poena Premit Comes” mean?’ He stumbled over the words.

‘I don’t know. I don’t speak Chinese,’ she said.
Mum seemed to call any language she didn’t understand ‘Chinese’.
‘Dad?’

He was looking in the side mirror on his door. ‘Neither do I.’ ‘You guys are old. Didn’t you do Latin at school?’

Ben was thrust back into his seat as Dad floored the accelerator, spinning the wheels, spitting gravel. They drove away. Fast.

Ben looked at the reflection of Dad’s eyes in the rear-view mirror. Mum looked back at the police car sitting beside the road. Olive opened her mouth and stared at Dad, thumb frozen in midair a few centimetres from her face.

‘Wasn’t he coming back?’ Ben asked. ‘You left your licence.’

Dad drove on, sitting up, arms straight, holding the wheel firmly with two hands now. He took a motorway exit a few hundred metres up the road. Ben heard the siren as they turned right at the bottom of the exit ramp. They sped underneath the motorway bridge and along a winding, narrow road past fields of sugar cane. The siren sound was moving closer when Dad took a sharp left down a dirt track. It was a trail between two fields of tall green cane. Ben sat up and looked back as their car fishtailed.

Dad turned right down another dirt track and slammed on the brakes, switching the engine off. Sheets of dust blew in through the open windows. Ben heard the police car dart by on the road. His heart pummelled his chest.

Olive laughed. ‘That was fun.’

They sat, engine off, sound of a crow aaarking in the cane nearby, siren in the distance, dirt settling all around them. For the first time ever, Ben did not ask a question. Mum sniffed and covered her mouth and nose with one hand.

‘Must’ve been after someone else,’ Dad said. The siren faded.

‘You got any of that drink left?’ Dad asked.

Ben picked up the soft drink bottle from the seat next to him and handed it to Dad, who guzzled it all and wiped the corners of his mouth with the back of his hand.

‘What do we do now, Ray?’ Mum asked.

‘Stay here for a bit,’ Dad said. ‘Then keep going up to the cabin.’