

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

This is Write Your Novel, an innovative, write along podcast series presented by me, Yvonne Battle-Felton.

I'm a novelist and lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, and in conversation with other leading writers, I'm going to explore the process of writing. It's about the specifics of how stories can be constructed, of what decisions writers might make and of how to make the most of the writer's toolbox. In each episode, you'll hear one writer talking about one book to shed light on one narrative device. So there may be the odd spoiler as we go under the skin of their writing and their process. And at the end of each conversation, there's a writing exercise to help you try out the technique in your own writings. Funded by Arts Council England, supported by New Writing North, this series is very much for you, the writer. Let's get started.

In this episode I speak with Alex Wheatle. The British novelist hails from Brixton, South London, where he was born to Jamaican parents. His beginnings have inspired a lot of his early work, including his debut novel Brixton Rock. He was awarded an MBE for services to literature in 2008. His work has been adapted for theatre and for TV. Today, we're focusing on his novel, Cane Warriors. You'll hear more about the novel in a moment, but just to give you a sense of it before we start, it's based on the true story of Tacky's rebellion, an 18th century slave uprising in Jamaica.

Cane Warriors follows the story of a 14 year old enslaved boy called Moa, who joins the fight for freedom. And it's a book that tackle some of the biggest themes in literature; liberty, family, slavery, legacy and hope. There's a lot to talk about in relation to this book, but for this series, I wanted to speak to Alex about tension in particular. Tension is a vital element in driving narrative and sustaining a reader's engagement, but it can be challenging to develop, build and sustain. First, Alex reads out a passage of the book, which helps to set up our discussion.

**Alex Wheatle:**

I'll dive straight in, when Moa and Keverton are about to fulfill the task that is being given to them by the leader of the revolt, Tacky.

We dropped our bowls and mugs in the wooden box. Miss Gloria didn't meet our eyes. Fireflies hovered over her cooking pot. We collected our billhooks from the water tub. I sensed all eyes on me. I glanced up and down the dirt track. The western hills were now crowned with an amber glow. My heart pounded like old Mr. Cliff's hammer, when he was fixing a large wheel. I shared a now-or-never look with Keverton. He nodded. The small creatures in the field had already started their nighttime arguments. I gripped the handle of my knife so tight that redness appeared under my nails. Hamaya had stopped pulling her hand cart on the way to the millhouse and watched us.

I felt her eyes burning into me. They will soon come for me, Moa. It might be tonight. They will drag her out of her cabin. If she refused, they would take her anyway. I didn't want to fail her. My heart started to beat a warrior drum song. I prayed that the sky god, Nyame, would guide me. Pickney stop playing. "Say," I whispered to Keverton. "Say de door bolted?". "Bolted, or not bolted we have to kick it down". And when Keverton dashed towards Mr. Donaldson's hut, I soon caught up with him. If my heart could have run, it would have reached the cabin first. We both kicked the door down. Dust flew up in my eyes.

I blinked furiously. Mr. Donaldson was taking his rests on his bed. He only wore his pants. His chest and feet were bare. His back whipper was on the table beside him, next to an open Bible and a wooden cup.

He shot up quickly, not quite believing that he was being confronted by 2 field slaves armed with billhooks. He went for his back whipper. Keverton hesitated, his weapon trembled in his right hand. I didn't want to see Keverton whipped again. I didn't want Mr. Master to force me to view his broken body. I couldn't bear it to dig Keverton's pit. I didn't want to see him dangling from a thick branch. Fear left me. Nyame was with me. I charged towards my tormentor, the whip crack was loud. He caught me on the neck and the pain was deep and intense. It didn't stop me.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

What a moving, descriptive passage. Thank you so much for letting us start there. So Cane Warriors is inspired by a true event, the 1760 Easter uprising. I wondered about... So the text draws explicitly and implicitly on what I personally think I know as a reader and that context that I think I know of history and worst case scenarios, and the best case scenarios. How do you orchestrate what's written in the text or shown, and what's imagined by the reader, because there's a beautiful tension there?

**Alex Wheatle:**

The first thing is, tension is very important, for especially aspiring writers, to understand, in the way that I'm manipulating the reader. I have, throughout the book, around about seven or eight climax points. For instance, when Moa and Keverton killed the overseer, that's just an example of what I read just previously. And how I'm manipulating the reader in that lead up to that event, what I do, I slow everything down. I make the sentences shorter. And so when you're doing a dramatic scene and you shorten the sentences, you tend to read that bit quicker. And when you read that quicker, in a dramatic scene, your heartbeat raises, it up tempos. It does that. People have done experiments on this and it actually manipulates the readers heart, and it does all kinds of things to their brain, and maybe someone to accelerate their own tension that they feel for the characters, so I'm actually manipulating that.

It's gone under the radar because, as you read it, you're not realising that you're being manipulated, but that is what is occurring. And so I'm just paying service to all the great dramatics of the past. So really it reads almost like a song. For me it's like a Bob Marley song like The Heathen, when he comes with the opening verse and he comes with the chorus, and he comes with a high point with the drums and the snare and really, that's what I'm, in effect, doing with my sentences. I'm bringing you up slowly, slowly, slowly, and then I'm slowing it right down and I've got short, vivid sentences, and so I'm loading your mind with images. That's what I'm doing. Like the Bible, the cup, the floor board.

And so in your mind, you can actually see Keverton and Moa preparing what they need to do. And that adds to the tension and the woe inside your heart. Because I want you to have empathy with these characters. I'm really, really making the reader suffer there, and I make no apology for that because I want them to feel it, not just read it, but feel it. And for me, it's a difference between reporting something that happened, like if you're a journalist, to being a proper dramatist. And that's how I described myself in this book, I'm the dramatist

here. I am loading images in your mind and I'm loading the empathy in your mind and that's going to have a reaction.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

You absolutely do that. And you do it wonderfully and sometimes it's in the things that you give us, the moments of laughter, the moments of joy or the moments to breathe, and I love knowing that yes, you quite did it intentionally, and I'm curious, how did you know when you've achieved it? How did you know that you had achieved it?

**Alex Wheatle:**

You can never be too sure that you've achieved it because obviously I cannot occupy the reader's mind, but I'm just applying what I've learned over the years. It's just a feeling that I have of me creating drama from, as a teenager, when I used to write lyrics, for effect in a dance. And sometimes when you write a lyric, you play it like "Okay, which line would get the greatest response, a reaction from the crowd?" And I haven't really changed from that riser. I'm still looking for that reaction in the crowd as I'm writing Cane Warriors or any other book. That high moment when you think "Woah!" That line had that certain impact. This is what I'm doing in Cane Warriors. Every now and again, I'm going to bring you up and I'm going to hit you.

I'm going to hit you emotionally. I want an emotional reaction here. That's what I'm doing. It's so much easier for the reader if I just reported this as a nonfiction piece, and when someone could read "Okay, that happened. 300 died, and so on", but they wouldn't get that emotional if I didn't manipulate, I did not overload the emotional content of the narrative. And I think that's the important word, the emotional content, and sometimes when I'm teaching aspiring writers to write, sometimes they forget that. I said "You've got to load it with emotional content". What's their reaction as were going through these stages or the narrative? Like when Miss Pam died, for example, I want to see a reaction on somebody's face. I'm going to describe that reaction. So if you describe that reaction, the reader's going to feel it. When Moa is going to see his father at the millhouse, again I'm manipulating the reader here, because even though the father does not agree with what Moa is doing, I want the reader to see his reaction, not just in words, but I want to describe his face.

So all these interactions are really important, body language, and so on is very important. If you're trying to create an emotional piece.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

We talked a bit about that first page. I know as writers, we often struggle on making our way into the text and how we present that to the reader. You've done it with vivid description, lush language, engaging voice, and there's that sense of right then that something's about to happen, something's going to give. As a reader, I know I was anticipating danger and it was even before the story opened, so part of that, whether the reader knows or didn't know that this was based on a real event, there were the whisper in the night. It was the location, Frontier Plantation, the year 1760, the descriptions of the moon. It's like changes in the air, and then it drops readers right into a moment fraught with tension. Can you tell us a bit about what writing that first page, and your decision to start the novel there, three days before the event, and within that moment, with Moa sleeping?

**Alex Wheatle:**

Yeah. It's one of the most important things a writer can do is to find your entry point to the story. Is my entry point 6 months previous? Is my entry point 2 weeks previous? Or should I hit them with the crux of the story from the first page, what this story is all about? And I decided to go for the latter, especially as it's a young adult novel. And you probably know that it takes a certain skill to engage a young reader from the first or second page, to get them reading through the narrative, to get them to chapter three or four. So my task was to present them with an opening page that is going to pull them right in. This is before I even wrote a word, I'm thinking in my head "Okay, I've got to set it up. I've got to give it a really good setting so that they can imagine it".

And obviously the year helps, 1760. And then for me the dramatic part of it is the whisper. It's the whisper. It's not a spoken word, it's a whisper. And once you hear people whispering, it's always people "Oh, what are they whispering about?" I'm using a drama element there to engage the reader in the story, in the narrative. And there's a challenge isn't there? The old slave reveals what they're about to do and Moa is given a task. And I'm always telling my university students that you must present the problem. Every narrative you're writing, you must present the problem. Something's got to happen out of the ordinary for the reader to take notice. I could not start the story with Moa just working in the fields and nothing really happens.

Apart from maybe of course... A rough or foul mouth overseer, who's maybe barking a few words at him. For me, that's not dramatic enough to really engage the reader, I need to create a situation where he's given something to do, where his life is about to change, for good or for bad. From the bottom of the first page, I want to leave the reader in no doubt that this young boy's life is in danger. So I need to create that sense of jeopardy in that. And the one thing about writing about Jamaica is that it offers incredible backdrop, incredible settings and locations. And I tried to use that to the max. I've walked those lands in St. Mary, I've walked to the north coast. And I really wanted to explore that and use that to create those images for the readers' minds. And so I think the landscape is just as dramatic as the tension I'm creating with the characters.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I love that you know the land and that you... It could feed into your telling of the story so that readers, we imagine it, and it feels like we're there in these moments and we're worried and we're scared and we're fearful and we're joyful, and we're hopeful as well. Can I ask about... There's so much spoken and unspoken within the text. And for me, I felt like there was that sense of danger, right from that first page. And it was in the writing, but again, it was in those nuances. So he's told "Don't chat to anybody of this except me" and it seems expected, right, but then he says "Not even your Papa" and for me, it's a bit of a shock that you can't even trust your father with this, someone that you love and you admire and that you want to hold on to.

And there's that warning. And so as a reader, the warning introduces questions of trust, reliability, and motive, and Moa doesn't comment on it, either while he's awake or asleep, and it's another potential conflict that runs throughout the narrative. And then when he goes to visit his father, I know for me, my heart was beating, and so that might not be one of those points where you set up your seven pressure points, but for me I was thinking "Oh,

no!", and so I'm really curious about how you created that balance between the spoken and the unspoken.

**Alex Wheatle:**

I planted seeds of jeopardy. And so when the reader understands that Moa has to keep his secret to himself, obviously when I reveal to the reader that he's going to see his father, the reader automatically thinks "Oh, what's going to happen here?" What happens is Moa actually reveals his secret, or this revolt, because his father doesn't want him to go, obviously. So I'm creating conflict there, even between son and father. And I think that really drives the story along. I'm trying to read the two sides of this. It's not all gung ho is it? It's not all reckless behaviour, it's considered behaviour. Obviously Tacky and his band, they're intent on leading this revolt, but I'm sure in every revolt in history, there's been people who said "Well, I'm not quite sure about this. I'm worried about this. What's going to happen? Are we all going to die?"

But these are real debates that I'm sure happened in the time, or any revolt in history. It doesn't have to be people fighting their freedom, but the cost of what that struggle could lead to. So that's got to be considered, I've got to show that side of it, of the argument. I can't just skip it by, I can't just ignore it. It's there. And I think it adds a fascinating aspect for the reader to consider as well. And also when I am countering the two different narratives, or two different ideas of how they should live their lives, at least to the heroes, in Cane Warriors, even more laudable, I think, even more heroic. Because this is what they have to consider initially, before they even set off on their quest. They've got to consider the children, they've got to consider the women, they've got to consider everything, and it's going to cost. So I think it was important that I put that aspect in there.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I think you did a wonderful job of weaving that cost in, even if at times it seems Moa didn't understand it. But he was quite mature for a 14 year old and made some decisions that were based on his reality and based on his circumstance, that were absolutely extraordinary. It was not just what was going to happen to them, but slavery is a violence and it was a violence that they were living. And I think acknowledging both violences, because you showed us part, what it was like for him and for Hamaya and for his mother, for his father who lost his arm in this accident and still had to keep working, but who had also pledged to die at the mill, he was going to die at the mill. And so there were quite a few acts of violence.

**Alex Wheatle:**

Yeah. Again, it's a dramatic device that has been used in films and drama. So what I'm doing here, I'm giving notice to the reader what might happen if they fail, and in certain dramas we should always do this because what you do is your inputting a threat and a jeopardy in the reader's minds. And you think about films like Psycho or even Jurassic Park, they use the same device. Jurassic Park, when you see the big T-Rex in that first movie, Steven Spielberg has that T-Rex eat somebody in half almost as soon as you see the monster, or this big dinosaur. And so the reader, or the viewer, is left with that, thinking "Oh my gosh, if that T-Rex comes across the children again, that might be their fate, so where's the jeopardy there,

where's the dramatic level there? I am showing the reader what can happen if you rebel, if you're not doing what you're supposed to do on this plantation. So the threat's there.

I call it the Hitchcock thing, because he does it so well in his movies. If you watch Psycho, it's not that horrific, but what he does so well, he loads that jeopardy in your mind, because remember, Janet Lee, she gets killed in the first 20 minutes of the film. The film is 90 minutes long, but the threat, because of what we see on the screen with her being murdered in that shower, stays with us even after the movie. The threat is so vivid, it's so powerful, that it stays with us. That's what I'm doing here. I'm loading the reader with threat and jeopardy.

And this is the secret of trying to create an antagonist, if you like. Any films with a monster, or a monstrous figure, you show what they're capable of, you show them at their worst. So when your hero comes along, the viewer or the reader is thinking "Oh my gosh, if they lose it's going to be a horrible, horrible murder, a horrible threat and jeopardy". And again, I'm manipulating the reader's mind here and the images here. So that makes them turn the page wondering "I hope they don't suffer the same fate as what happened earlier in the narrative".

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

And there is another question that I was curious about, and it's about three quarters of the way through the book. There's another shift and there's that current where the tension snaps yet again, and you know that something is happening that cannot be undone. And here I'm talking about the oath and that realisation that even if the characters win, and with what they've achieved even up to that point, there's this commitment to themselves and their future, their legacy, that they will not return to slavery. And understanding what that means. It's a really powerful moment and it isn't highlighted or showcased or glorified. It's just this is the way that this is going to be. And we aren't present during the oath taking, which also makes it more secretive and important. And can you talk to us a little bit about that decision, not to show the oath and the effect not showing it, as well as the oath itself and its introduction, what that has on the tension and on the narrative.

**Alex Wheatle:**

In that particular chapter, Yvonne, I have to admit I wept. After I conducted my research, I discovered that... I can't confirm it as 100% accurate, but there are many references to this oath taking and the fact that many of these freedom fighters would rather commit suicide than be slaves again. And indeed, it is referenced that they did actually go down to the caves of the north coast, but it is Moa's story. I had to stick with Moa, and I had to stay with him. He's my wing man. He's relating this story to the reader.

Maybe if it was a double narrative with Keverton, I was considering that for a while before I wrote the first draft, but I decided, no, this is Moa's story so I'm going to leave it to the readers imagination, what that oath taking might have looked like, what it might have felt like, that commitment. For me, it's one of the most powerful things that anybody can do, to sacrifice themselves in that way, because they love freedom so much. And hopefully the reader will not forget that after they've closed the book, that will linger in their mind and they will think "Wow, these Cane Warriors, they were true heroes because they would not give up their freedom no matter what."



**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I think you're right. I think there are a lot of things that will stay with us from the moment that we close the last page. There are characters who will live on through us in memory and ideally in action. I'm curious how you protected yourself in the writing of it and through that research and through some of the descriptions and the violence that you read about, and the things that you learned, how did you protect yourself as a writer through this process?

**Alex Wheatle:**

It's a very good question because of course there were times when I just had to look away. There were times when I was creating this story and creating some of the scenes, especially the traumatic ones, and I felt tears running down my cheeks. At that point I had to withdraw just to protect my own... Because I really do believe that we carry the trauma of the ones who have gone before us, I strongly believe that. There's no doubt for me that that is not a real phenomenon, and in some ways affects our behavior somewhat today. The phrase that I use throughout the book "The blood remembers", I actually believe in that. It's something that I learned through reggae music with certain artists, where they would refer to that traumatic time. I strongly believe that. So when those moments came, I had to just turn away, just sign off my laptop and just concentrate on something else, or watch the comedy on TV or something just to balance that because it's a lot to take in and process, when you understand and realise what your ancestors had to go through.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I think you're right. I found myself, throughout the reading of it, I was on high alert and I was just, emotionally, I felt like I was on, in some points, a rollercoaster, but a rollercoaster that didn't necessarily stop. And I felt that was because of the rich language you drew us in. We fall into the characters, through their voice, their stories, their pain, their journey, through so much of the book I was in tears. I was worrying about Moe, the characters he trusted, the consequences that he and everyone around him could play. And the use of patois, it provides readers with access to information that the overseer may not understand and/or access. So in a way we're insiders, we're co-conspirators, it gives us that access that we can connect on so many different levels. What effect would you like the use of it to have on the reader and/or of the reading of the book?

**Alex Wheatle:**

I think if I write the patois, I wouldn't say it's full patois, but I hinted that these characters are indeed Jamaican. I think that helps the reader to recognise these characters that [inaudible] I really do, and I can never have them speaking the Queen's English, that wouldn't make sense for who they are and what they represent. It's very evident in my writing, that hopefully throughout Cane Warriors, is that one of the first things you lose, if you're a conquered people, is your language. So I wanted my Cane Warriors to at least have some kind of acknowledgement of their language through patois, or even some of the Ghanaian terms or the Akan terms that they sometimes use. I think that's very important for the reader so they recognise who these people are and where they come from.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

What led you to write Cane Warriors?

**Alex Wheatle:**

Really the seeds of it came 40 years ago when I was serving time in prison after the Brixton uprising of 1981, and my cellmate, Simeon, he became my mentor and he was an avid reader. And one of the first books he presented me to read was *The Black Jacobins* by the great Trinidad writer, CLR James. And *The Black Jacobins* tells a story of the Haitian revolution in 1791, that revolt led by Toussaint Louverture. And so this story was always in the back of my mind, even when I started my career 20 years ago, over 20 years ago with Brixton Rock. And it was on a conversation with my mother, I never grew up with her, so I'm always eager to learn about her experiences as a child growing up in Jamaica.

And she grew up in the parish of St. Mary, which is very close to the north coast. She remembers when she was a young girl that some of her elder relatives, they would whisper and talk about the legend of Tacky and the Easter uprising. She didn't know too much about it, but she remembers hearing sometimes that the old men would walk in Tacky's footsteps and the legend and spirit of Tacky was still intermingling throughout the trees, and it was there in a natural mystic of the land. So she grew up with that, and so after I conducted my research I thought "What a hero".

For me, he's just as much as a hero as the 300 Spartans, as Nelson or anybody else anybody would like to care to mention. And really I wanted to see Tacky and his Cane Warriors in that company of great world heroes, because it's no doubt that Toussaint Louverture must have heard of the uprising that occurred in Jamaica, 30 years before he led the Haitian revolution. So there's no doubt it was a massive influence. And I feel that generations after me should get to know and learn about Tacky and what occurred in Jamaica in that time, and should be taught in, not just in Caribbean schools, but in schools all over the world.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I think that's an incredible legacy and inspiration and also a responsibility as well. Can you talk a little bit about, how does writing about a true event affect what's possible for the characters, especially knowing what you knew about the uprising? How does that impact the story that you're free and able to tell?

**Alex Wheatle:**

It was difficult because Tacky's story was incomplete where I couldn't confirm strong details about, especially his early life in Africa, and so sometimes there were contradictory narratives about Tacky before he arrived in Jamaica. So I had the bare bones of his story, if you like. I knew where the revolt occurred; on the Trinity and Frontier Plantations, which was in St. Mary. I knew that it happened on Easter Sunday, I knew that they killed all the overseers, they burnt down all their houses, and they marched to Fort Haldane on the north coast, which is almost next door to where Captain Morgan used to live. And indeed, Noël Coward took that estate over and he called it the Firefly Estate, and he lived there for many, many years. And so it was quite a famous site in Jamaican history. I knew that once they marched to Fort Haldane, they sacked the armoury there, the castle there, and they managed to get themselves 40 guns and lots of ammunition and gunpowder.

And I knew they had the last stand. And unfortunately, I knew that Tacky was killed and his head was displayed outside Spanish Town on a spike, and that sent chills down my spine. That's no way for a hero to go. And so I had this bare information or facts, and so I built my narrative around there, especially when I discovered that the way they used to torture the



slaves if they were rebellious, they would put them in cages and they were just left hanging in these cages for days on end, and they'd starve to death. And that was acting as a warning. And even teenagers were put through this process, even teenagers were whipped just as hard as the men. And that's when I decided that I'm going to centre this story on a teenager, I think it could be even more powerful if I did it that way. So yes, that was my template. I had about a two, three page template to build this story... I had a skeleton, and basically all I'm doing, I'm putting flesh and muscle and blood on that skeleton.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

It's fascinating and it does show a bit about why Moa would be 14 and how you might use that character to show us a different side of history. Something that we do need to be considering, the traumas and the different violences and how it didn't matter how old they were and gender and all these different things, and I think you've done such a wonderful job of giving us Moa to carry this story and to be the bearer of this news. I think for my final question, I would love to ask you, and you've given us so much advice already about how to balance tension and about writing historical characters and creating legacies through our work, so I'm still going to ask for one more. What advice might you offer to writers in terms of introducing, balancing, and/or sustaining tension in our own writing?

**Alex Wheatle:**

It's the same intention. Conflict, that's crucial. Any kind of conflict, and the conflict doesn't have to be about slave, overseer or master, the conflict can be in the mind, or creating a jeopardy as well. Especially if you're writing young adult fiction, or any kind of fiction, even crime fiction is very important for creating tension. You might have a detective who's stressed out about solving a crime, but it cannot just be about the outcome of him solving that crime. He's got to also have a conflict in his own life. Where is his personal battle? Is it with the drink? Is it with his partner? Is it with friends? Is it with family? Where is that conflict? Where is that tension? And so I'd advise any aspiring writers, if they want to write something that's full of tension, then introduce those conflicts wherever you might find them.

And sometimes you could use your own life experience, it doesn't have to be your own personal experience, but about who you've met in life and what they've had to deal with and conquer and get over. So writers, we should be using that because that way it becomes more authentic when we write about those themes. So anything that you felt was important for someone in your family or a friend of yours, what they had to go through and overcome, what they had to battle with, introduce that, introduce that theme. And then through that theme we can create our conflicts and our tension and so on.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

I absolutely love that. Thank you so much for your generous advice. I love the idea, or knowing that this book was an idea that, was a seed that was planted 40 years ago, and that you returned to it. I feel like it's such a blessing that you returned it to this book, to this story, it's something that young readers can really enjoy and learn from, and older readers can also engage and aspire to write, but also enjoy the reading of it. So thank you so much for the book, for reading to us today, and for your generous responses.

**Alex Wheatle:**

Thank you for having me, Yvonne. Thank you very much.

**Yvonne Battle-Felton:**

Tension can drive a story. It can develop character, setting and really grip the reader, moving and guiding us through the narrative in ways that make us hold our breath before letting it go. Now, let's write.

This exercise is inspired by Alex Wheatle's discussion on tension. For this exercise, using a character you've already created, or one for this specific exercise, put your character in the middle of a conflict. Big or small, internal or external. Consider what the character wants, what stands in their way, and what's at stake. When I write conflict and tension, I write with music. I usually choose classical music because of the mood it creates. As I get to know the character, I write scenes along with their music. So once you've put the character in a scene, put on their music, this is the piece that might play as they enter a room. If you don't know it yet, you might find it useful to search for some movie soundtracks as a starting point.

The piece I like to write to is Requiem For A Dream. Once you have a song or piece that you connect with, the way it makes you feel, what you visualise when it plays, it's time to see how your character reacts in the conflict. Write along to the rhythms of the piece. It's a draft. Anything is possible here. Use the setting, landscape, dialogue, character, and any other tool at your disposal to build tension and show the conflict.

Writing to music can remind us about the emotional landscape of a story. It also reminds us that a number of writing techniques weave together to create, sustain and develop tension. Once the piece ends, keep writing, only for about two minutes beyond the end of the music. Write down how you felt, how the character might've felt, their changes, the surprises, and anything else you learned about the story, scene and/or character. See where the music takes the character and where it takes you. You may find that it doesn't fit the wider narrative, and that's okay. Try a different song, a different character and/or conflict. Ideally, at the end of the exercise, you'll have a sense of the emotions you want to take the reader through.

That's the end of our tension episode. I hope it's given some food for thought and ideas for your writing. Thanks again to my guest, Alex Wheatle. His book *Cane Warriors* is available at all major bookshops. *Write Your Novel* was presented by me, Yvonne Battle-Felton, and it was produced by Candace Wilson. The music was by Joe Gardner. This is a Sonderbug Production funded by Arts Council England and supported by New Writing North. Next time, David Nicholls joins me to talk about using dialogue and writing. See you there. And if you want to know more you can follow me on Twitter @YBattleFelton, and don't forget, the conversation continues on Discord. Sign up for the Write Your Novel server, on the New Writing North website.