



# Q&A Interview with Rupert Wallis

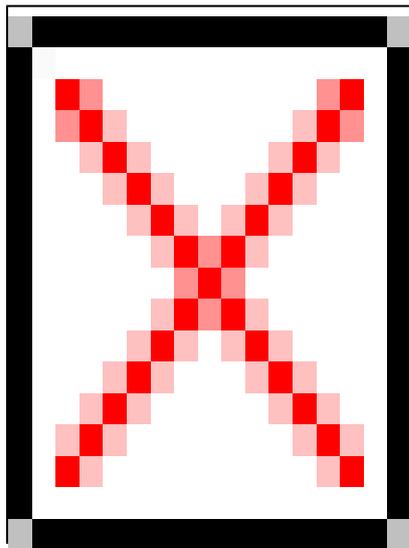
Article Author:

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Byline:

Rupert Wallis talks about his debut novel **The Dark Inside**.



***The Dark Inside* is your first published book. How long have you been writing? Did you set out to write a book for young people?**

I have been writing on and off for a very long time, learning my craft I guess and honing my voice. I think for most writers the actual process of wanting to create something is instinctive, vocational, and there's really no getting away from it whatever life throws at you. In my case I've always written - poetry, screenplays and now novels - without much traction in terms of success. It's meant making sacrifices along the way but I've always kept strong by believing in my work. The challenge for the future is to attempt to carve out a living as a writer

I certainly didn't set out to write specifically for young people, rather I wrote the book I wanted to write. I would like to think it is for anyone who connects with the story, the characters and the themes within it. All I can do is write stories that feel true to me in the hope they resonate with anyone who reads them.

**You studied theology at university. How has that fed into your novel?**

Studying theology was purely an academic pursuit, not vocational, because I've always been interested in what different cultures believe and why. More specifically I'm interested in what people might choose to believe at times in their lives when they're challenged to make sense of what seems to be a cruel and unloving world. Such pressure can be very revealing about people. It can also be a very useful tactic when you're writing a story, and creating the world in which it occurs, because if you push your characters into uncomfortable emotional places, areas where they don't necessarily want to go, they are forced to open up and reveal their inner selves.

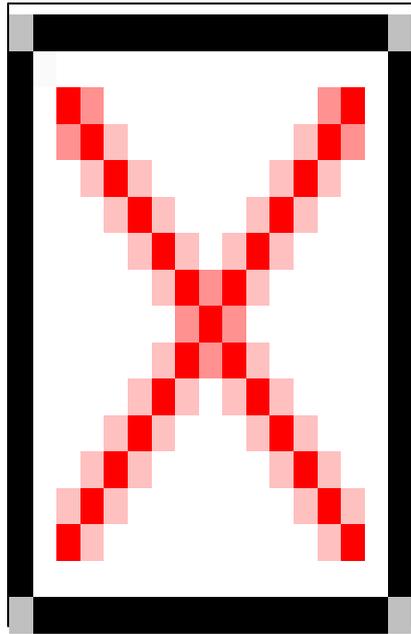
Broadly, I have tried to leave some questions in **The Dark Inside** unanswered allowing readers room to come to their own conclusions about what really happens in the story. As in life, I expect people will have different opinions about what they want to believe and why.

**You've mentioned that *The Dark Inside***

**was inspired in part by the death of your father. Were you conscious of that while writing the book? What other influences inspired the book?**

Yes, my father died a few years ago and I think his death is bound up in the book and in particular with the main character, James, whose mother has died before the story begins. Part of his journey is about coming to terms with losing her and I am sure it mirrors my own processing of my father's death as I was writing the novel. However, I would say this was largely unconscious because the story itself was the key thing I was pre-occupied with.

As for other inspirational factors then I'm not really sure. It's quite difficult to pin down where stories come from. I just try to let the process of writing them happen naturally, evolving out of the wellspring of who I am, which is defined by the catalogue of experiences and observations I've been party to whilst living my life so far.



**Your novel is full of ideas and themes, but is also a cracking story. Where did you start ? with the characters and events, or the ideas?**

I always start with the story and the characters because if you write to themes and ideas you invariably end up writing didactically, which is boring for me as well as the reader. I don't think I'm ever completely sure what my themes and ideas actually are until I have written a story out. Really, they should arise naturally as long as you focus on the nuts and bolts of the story you're trying to tell.

My writing process tends to be based on having a very general view of what might happen - the big beats - combined with getting the characters up ?walking? and ?talking?. Once they're doing that they can start dictating how the story develops, acting spontaneously and naturally and surprising me. Therefore, having ?real? characters is a very important part of my creative process. At its core a story is usually about a character or characters trying to return to the status quo that existed before the story started. It's a departure from their normal lives that sets a story in motion, which usually ends when some sense of normality resumes. My goal is to try and join in on this journey as best I can.

**What would you like readers to take away from the novel?**

Purely and simply I would just like them to enjoy the story and enjoy spending time with the characters. Some readers have told me they have missed the characters since finishing the book, which is lovely to hear because it means those imagined ?people? must seem very real.

I am sure there will be lots of different opinions about the book and different interpretations all of which will be valid so I'd be interested to hear those and learn what inspired readers and what did not.

## What are you most pleased with in the book?

I'm just pleased to have written a book that has been published. I feel extremely lucky indeed because it's a very difficult thing to achieve. I'm very grateful to all those people who have helped make it happen. I would urge anyone reading this who wants to be a writer to keep persevering. I would also tell them not to worry about trends or the market or what other people are doing and write the story that appeals to them to the best of their ability because ultimately that is the one thing a writer can control, which is hugely empowering.

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