



# An introduction to Blood & Ink by Stephen Davies

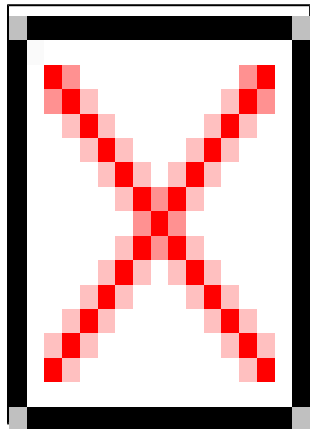
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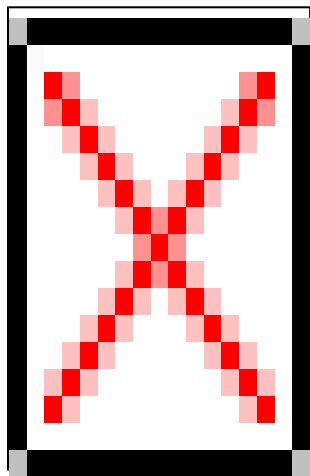
Read the background to this impressive new novel.



My new novel [Blood & Ink](#) [3] is set in Timbuktu in Mali. In a scene near the beginning of the book, fifteen year old Kadija breaks the news to her mother that the word Timbuktu in her English dictionary is defined as 'any far off place'. Her mother is shocked, then hurt, and finally defiant. Timbuktu is 'the most famous city in Africa', she declares. Kadija's dictionary is 'ignorant'.

My books are first and foremost adventure stories. I write to entertain, not to educate young people about Africa. But Kadija's mother is right: Timbuktu is not just any far off place. It is a beautiful, historic and very real city on the edge of the Sahara Desert. While Europe was languishing in the Dark Ages, Timbuktu was a beacon of culture and learning, home to a thriving university and hundreds of thousands of wonderful manuscripts. Riverboats come from the South, goes the ancient proverb, and salt camels come from the North. But Wisdom & Knowledge reside in Timbuktu.

In my own books, 'Write what you know' has always been a useful starting point. However improbable my plots, it is



important to me that tone, setting and characterization be completely authentic. I recently returned to the UK after thirteen years living and working on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. During that time I got to know Moorish traders, Tuareg camel-drivers and Songhai sorcerors. I became fluent in Fulfulde, the language of Fulani cattle herders. I accompanied cattle drives, learned the one-string guitar from a teenage minstrel, drilled for water in a sandstorm, rode a horse to a distant naming ceremony, got malaria and typhoid (at the same time) and accumulated hundreds of folk tales and proverbs.

*Ko leggal booyi ley ndiyam fu, laatataako nowra abada.* However long a log lies in the water, it will never become a crocodile. When I read the work of Malian authors like Massa Makan Diabaté and Amadou Hampâté Bâ, I despair of ever being able to write authentically about Mali. But I'm edging closer to the target, and I reckon **Blood & Ink** is my best attempt yet.

Publication of **Blood & Ink** coincided with the UK release of **Timbuktu**, a highly-acclaimed new film by Abderrahmane Sissako. Both the book and the film are being appreciated by people who wouldn't normally read/watch that sort of thing?, people daring to venture outside of their cultural, geographical and religious comfort zones. Perhaps the #WeNeedDiverseBooks message is getting through at last.

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