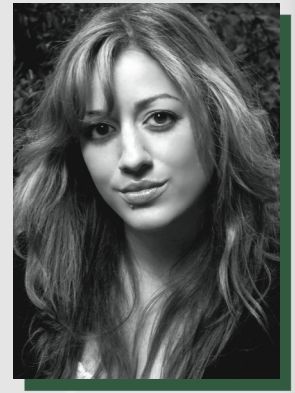


An interview with Inbali Iserles, author of **THE TYGRINE CAT**



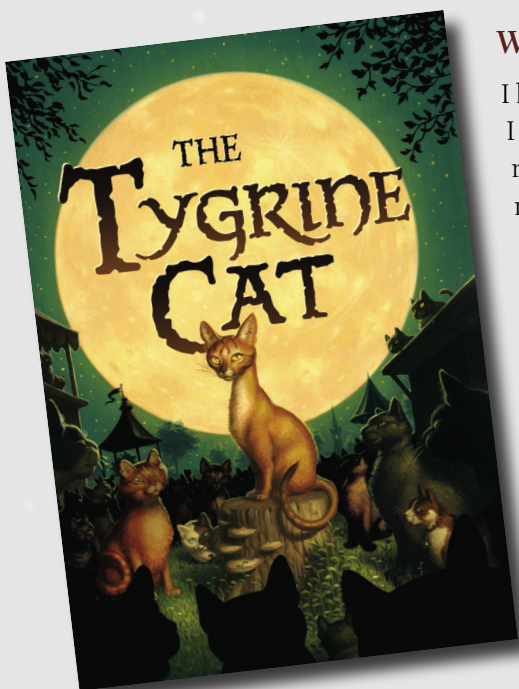
Where did the idea for The Tygrine Cat come from?

I came upon the idea by chance. I was flicking through a book on feline breeds, which made claims about the nature of the first domestic cats—claims that conflicted with other material that I had read. I started to ponder this. What if there had been a conflict between feline dynasties, long before the earliest human being walked the earth? What if warring tribes had fought over the ancient throne of the first cat, calling upon magic in their struggle for power? What if that rivalry still exists today?

Do you have any cats?

My wonderful old cat, Wilma, still lives with my parents in Cambridge, England, where I grew up. She turned twenty last year, which is over a hundred in cat years! I visit her whenever I can.

In London, where I live now, I share my apartment with four degus—exotic rodents that I adopted from an animal hospital. Degus are cousins of gerbils and chinchillas. In the wild they live in the foothills of a mountain range in South America.



When did you start writing?

I have always loved writing, as far back as I can remember. Even before I *could* write, I would daydream. For instance, I recall a story that I made up about a friendly dragon that slept under my bed to scare off my older sister (we shared a room with bunk beds, and she had the top bunk—I was very jealous of that—so I had to think of ways to make the bottom bunk more interesting!).

Art and English were my favorite subjects at school. In other classes—much to my teachers' despair—I was forever filling notebooks with illustrated adventures. At the age of seven I came up with a place called “Cat Paradise,” a secret land, deep in the woods, where cats ruled without human intervention. At age eight, I wrote a poem called “Rich Cat, Poor Cat” that won a class award. At age nine, my sister and I cowrote a series of tales about two kittens called Cyril and Nigel. Can anyone spot a feline theme?

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Describe the process of writing this novel. Did it come easily or take a long time?

I wrote *The Tygrine Cat* on and off over a period of three years while practicing as a lawyer in London's busy financial district. When work was hectic, I would set the book to one side for days, weeks, or even months, but I never left the story in my mind. My journeys into Cressida Lock took me far away from my life as a lawyer. In Mati, the main character, I saw the world from a new perspective, through the eyes of a cat. Human priorities melted away—such as deadlines, shopping, or remembering to pay the gas bill. Mati had bigger things to worry about than bills—like the deadly assassin stalking him from a land beyond dreams. . . .

The first “pillar” of the book—or the first of three sections—came almost effortlessly in an excited frenzy of writing. But faced with the start of the second pillar, I struggled. There were several weeks during which I was lost about how to begin. Then the words started to flow again, juddering at first, then free and fluid. And they scarcely stopped until the final page.

What were your teen and preteen years like?

At the age of eleven, my family moved to Tucson, Arizona, where my dad was a visiting professor. I loved Arizona, with its bright blue skies, endless summer, and deserts that throbbed with life. In one short year I came into close quarters with a rattlesnake, a roadrunner, cotton-tailed bunnies, and black widows. I even saw a Gila monster—the infamous poisonous lizard of the Sonoran Desert.

Junior high also made quite an impression on me. I was introduced to brand names, baseball, hall passes, and the Super Bowl; Oreos, *The Facts of Life*, and rocky road ice cream. I came to Tucson a tomboy, a devotee of sweat suits with a mane of chaotic hair. But the girls at junior high were wonderfully groomed! Twelve months after my arrival in Tucson, I left for England with a bob glazed with hair spray and a range of pretty pink dresses. My return to England was quite a shock. There were no more poisonous lizards, no more rattlesnakes. You were lucky to see the occasional squirrel! And at school we had to wear uniforms! Uniforms—can you imagine?

What kind of books did you like to read in those years?

I really enjoyed the books of Margaret Mahy, such as *The Catalogue of the Universe*, and Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea adventures—fantasy at its best. I liked stories with a supernatural or magical element—stories that took you on strange journeys, but ones in which the characters were startlingly real. I liked to be scared a bit too. I remember a very creepy book that I read in Tucson called *Blind Date*, about a boy who was being pursued by a mysterious girl. I read it beneath the sheets and it gave me nightmares, but that didn't stop me!

What are you working on now?

I am just finishing another fantasy novel called *The Bloodstone Bird*. It is about a quest to find an enchanted bird, from the back streets of London to a dazzling new world.



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