

Checking in with Christopher John Farley

The Jamaican-born *Time* magazine editor and author of the critically-acclaimed novel *My Favorite War*, set during the first Gulf War, weighs in on his new novel about pirate Anne Bonny, *Kingston By Starlight*, his presence at this year's Calabash Festival, and his work in progress on a Jamaican icon.

SkyWritings: Bring us up to date on your work.

Christopher John Farley:

These days at *Time* I'm mostly editing, and when I write, it's an essay, or something I'm particularly interested in, or a book. I wrote a book on Aaliyah and co-wrote a book on the blues for Martin Scorsese's documentary series. And I'm working on a book on the early life of Bob Marley, up to his first big record.

SW: Given the scanty historical record, did you have to take a lot of creative licence with *Kingston by Starlight*?

CJF: Anne Bonny really was from Ireland, served aboard a pirate vessel, ran into characters like Calico (Jack Rackham). Some of the other things—her racial background, how she got to the New World, who the father of her children was—were made up, but could have happened. The voices of the people who lived in Jamaica then were not heard for a long time after this period, so I had to put their voices back. The way to do that was to do as much research as possible, in Ireland, England, the National Archives in Jamaica.

SW: How often are you

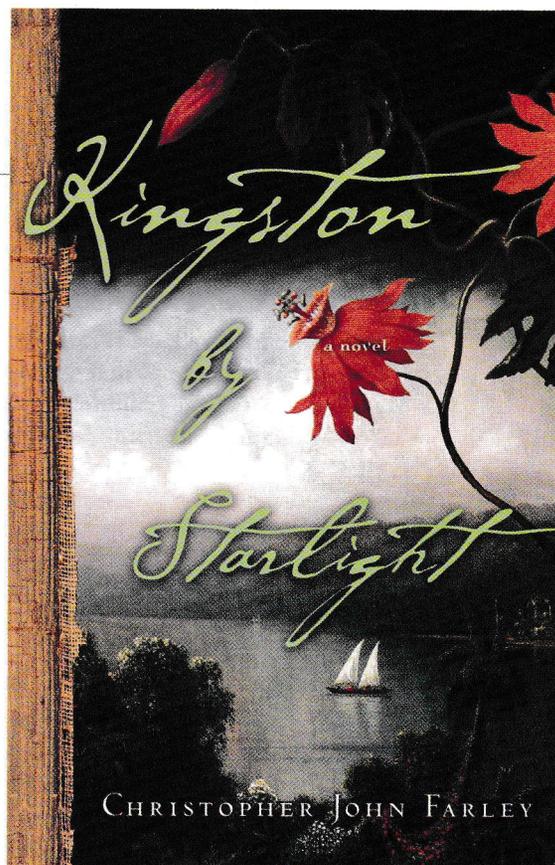
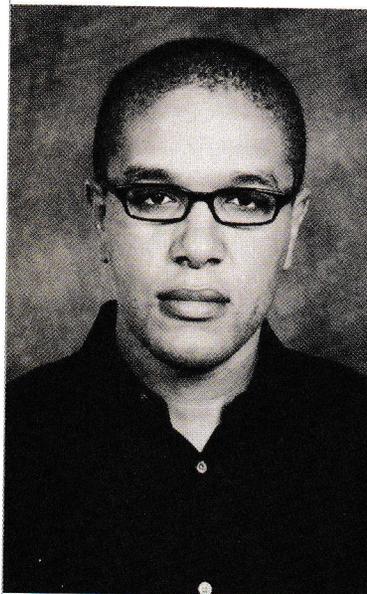
in Jamaica? Do you have relatives here?

CJF: I do have family there, in Kingston. My brother Jonathon, who's currently at M.I.T., has joined the University of the West Indies as head of math and computer science. When I was younger I would always go to see my grandparents in Mocho. I never really knew what it was like to hang out at the beach in Jamaica. Now that I'm married we stay at the Ritz-Carlton, because if you go with guests, they want to go to the beaches, Dunn's River Falls, things like that, and my two-year-old wants to see the hummingbird sanctuary and the patty shops and the Bob Marley museum. When I'm there by myself, it's hanging out in Trench Town at the Culture Yard, and going to places Bob Marley used to go.

SW: What Jamaican culture do you impart to your son, subconsciously or not?

CJF: I think, a lot. He listens to Claude McKay reading his own poems; a lot of Bob Marley. If it's not from Jamaica it's from elsewhere in the Caribbean: there are great recordings of Derek Walcott reading his own poetry. Plus,

he's been to Jamaica three or four times. He's a little bit afraid of the Doctor Birds, though. That's the kind of Jamaican culture he's soaking up, those scary hummingbirds.



SW: Considering your work for your college humor magazine [The Harvard Lampoon], did you ever think of writing comedy as a career?

CJF: I did for a while, but I felt like I wanted to write novels, and not just sitcoms. Interestingly enough, my brother Jonathon, who graduated summa cum laude from Harvard and got a D.Phil. at Oxford, is a part-time standup comedian and performs at clubs around Boston under the name "The Notorious PhD," so it turns out he's far funnier than I am.

SW: You used to be *Time*'s music writer, before you became Senior Editor/News, and you are a frequent guest on MTV, VH1, MSNBC, Fox and CNN talking about music and pop culture. What reggae artists do you like most right now?