

***Vulture's Gate* by Kirsty Murray**

Vulture's Gate is an intriguing new novel which follows the adventures of Bo and Callum who journey through the desolate, dystopic landscape of a post-apocalyptic, *Mad Max* type environment of the near future. Both had very different upbringings and very different dreams but they find a common purpose as they travel across the desert to the ruined city and beyond. On their quest to find Callum's fathers, they encounter many dangers in which they must learn how to survive in an uncertain world and often frightening world. They meet many colourful and dangerous characters along the way which threaten to derail their journey, some of which include violent outriders, street gangs and dangerous religious extremists.

The novel is engagingly told from the dual perspectives of both Bo and Callum and their experiences both together and separately. The settings and characters are developed in such a way that it is very easy to imagine being in this world. The story creates a terrifying but also hopeful view of the future.

The novel could be effectively used as part of a wide reading program or as part of a unit of work on; the future, the hero's journey or survival. The text explores important themes of friendship and courage.

Teaching notes for the novel can be found on -

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=94&book=9781741757101>

Gersha Shteyman, Kesser Torah College, NSW

For Callum, a colony boy, *Vulture's Gate* represents hope. After being stolen from his home in the outback by savage Outstationers and sold on as an attraction in a freak show, forced to perform in a circus for cruel masters, Callum escapes and returns to his outback home only to find his fathers gone, and his home destroyed. The only message left for him, his fathers are waiting for him in *Vulture's Gate*.

Bo is a girl living alone in the outback. She has been alone for the last six months, hunting, foraging and surviving. When one day she rescues a boy on the outskirts of her lands, she finds her once isolated home now set upon by dangerous Outstationers. With her home destroyed and all her family gone she feels lost, but with this boy she finds a friendship and something worth holding on to.

As Callum and Bo travel together across a harsh and desolate land, they are learning that the world they grew up in, and everything they were taught to believe, is not the world that exists before them. Callum always believed girls were extinct; he had been brought up sheltered from the ugliness that exists in the world. Bo, although taught to read, hunt and put together technology, is naive to the world beyond her lands; ignorant to what it is to be a girl.

But it is at *Vulture's Gate* that Callum and Bo discover the harsh truth of what has happened to the world. There, their dreams are crushed and their futures are left uncertain, as each comes face to face with the horrors of what it means to live and survive in *Vulture's Gate*. But once inside are they able to escape?

Vulture's Gate is a provocative and well written story that raises questions of gender and society. In Callum and Bo the male and female perspectives are given, and in the story each sex blames the existence of the other all the ills that have befallen them and the world around them. Society is ruled by dictators with their drones and test-tube babies. Beyond that are the anarchists, religious extremists and Festers with their gambling, bombs and human trafficking. But underlying all that is the theme of hope presented in the fairytales told by Bo.

Larissa Chapman, NSW

In an unusual departure from her previous books, Kirsty Murray has turned her attention to the future and examined its possible direction. A plague has destroyed all females (or so it seems) and the world is in turmoil. Enter Callum and Bo as they are thrust together in a fight for survival. Both have had very different upbringings but must learn to rely on and trust each other to cross

the desert to Vulture's Gate. Along the way they encounter dangers that have to be overcome to reach what they hope will be their final destination and freedom.

Murray has created a desolate post-apocalyptic world that examines what friendship and courage mean. With the story being told from both Bo and Callum's point of view, Murray gives the reader a unique insight into two complex but richly drawn characters. *Vulture's Gate* is a fast paced adventure through a gritty landscape that the reader leaves contemplating well after the last page has been turned and the book closed. Despite the disturbing events and characters, the novel ends with a ray of hope for the future of all mankind.

Highly recommended.

Pia Butcher, Knox Library, Vic

Vulture's Gate by Kirsty Murray is an exciting adventure story that all teenage readers would enjoy. This tale refers to the controlling nature of humanity and it questions what would happen in a societal structure without women. These ideas would lead nicely into some creative writing sessions with students between the Years of 7-10. The female students may want to write about being the last female left on Earth. The male students might like to write a hero's narrative on how they could protect this final girl from all of the other men. Or alternatively, students could challenge themselves and write from the other gender's perspective.

High vocabulary is sprinkled throughout the text, there are many words that teenagers could find meanings of in order to increase their own vocabulary. Along with the rich language and descriptive writing, the text at times alludes to the fairytale genre. Many stories are mentioned of princesses who need rescuing; yet these princesses do not seem as needy as the ones inside the Brothers Grimm tales.

The narrative builds to a climactic ending where teenagers can be left wondering and reflecting. The ending of this text would lead into a rich classroom discussion of: what would happen next? Students could introduce alternate scenarios and endings depending on their own creative abilities. I highly recommend for schools to purchase this novel to have in their libraries and perhaps to utilise as a class adventure text.

Melissa Adams, Literacy Coordinator, St. Peter's Catholic College, NSW

Set in a futuristic Australia, this dark, brooding and thought provoking novel covers some very topical, very deep subjects. From being the last female on earth, to genetic engineering, two young people, Callum and Bo are on the run. When they happen upon one another after a great many hardships and trials, they stick together and decide to try and find Callum's fathers. Weird violent characters, a lonely, desolate landscape and a journey to the city of Vulture's Gate create problems, issues and challenges for the two. After surviving a plague ridden world, these two strong characters lead the novel to a satisfying conclusion. This is Mad Max for teenagers! Much is made of their relationship and the challenges both children must endure, less is made of the how and why of what happened prior to the start of the novel, but would thus be an excellent discussion starter. This novel covers the science fiction/fantasy genre and would be ideal for good readers of 12 plus.

Ideal for small group discussion with capable readers who are prepared to think beyond what is immediately obvious and challenge themselves to deep, critical thinking tasks. This book would greatly complement a SOSE unit about "The Future" or simply be an excellent class novel for slightly older readers.

You will still be thinking about this story long after you have turned the final page.

Francesca Ann Massey, Exeter Primary School, Tas

This story is set in a future I hope is some way off but alarmingly it may not be. I was chilled by the reality of this future conveyed by the author. In this future, climate change has taken its toll, law and order is limited to the government controlled areas of the cities. Beyond the city limits it's survival of the fittest. Callum and Bo live beyond these limits and their lives are precarious. Callum has been living with his fathers at a refuge of the government. He has fathers because

women appear to have disappeared following an outbreak of avian flu which seemed to strike women; babies are now produced to order for fathers. An attack by the outstationers sees Callum captured and stripped of his microchips and on sold to 2 bikers to be the guest star in their circus. Bo has been raised by her grandfather; she lives underground far from the city with only her roboraptors for company. These robots find her food, on this day they find Callum, newly escaped on the stolen bike, the Daisy-May. Bo takes in Callum and restores him to health, but in so doing her secret life ends when his captors destroy her home, they escape on the bike, so begins their quest.

Callum seeks out his fathers who he discovers have returned to the city, Bo goes with him having no real option. Taking one roboraptor, Mr Pinkwhistle with them, they set out for the city. First stop is a garden oasis inhabited by a delusional old man who upon finding out that Bo is a girl wishes to keep her to produce babies and create a new community. They escape and continue onto the city. They arrive to the devastation that is now Vulture's Gate, a Sydney of the future? Joining a street gang of boys they survive by their wits but these feral boys are hunted by the authorities. Eventually all goes wrong and they are captured, Callum by his father who he cannot now understand as he is a government man seeking to kill all the ferals. He escapes to find Bo who has been taken to an island after having been exposed as a girl. There she discovers many other girls, they are treated as princesses. Why? They are the future breeding stock of the authorities and as such are highly sort after, but on the down side if they do not please the selected males then they must have their eggs harvested and live as not much more than caged birds. Bo realises that she must escape and free the other girls from this fate, Callum finds her and they all escape by ship hopefully to an island refuge where they can live normally again. The story ends with this hope but the reader is left feeling that this will not be their likely future. This story is of a bleak future for our world but one that is not too far beyond the believable. I thoroughly enjoyed it and recommend it to upper primary through to college readers. It would be a great basis for classroom discussion of possible futures, ethics, the role of women and the use of technology in the future.

Lorene Furmage, Tas

Vulture's Gate is a dark book with little hope for humanity desperately clinging on, by whatever means possible, to survival, after some future cataclysm has destroyed the fabric of civilization and pitted those who remain against one another.

As the front cover says 'Girls are extinct and chaos reigns', so our heroine, Bo, must disguise herself as a boy as she and friend, Callum, share a mission to find family and home.

The book is fast paced and action packed such that it was hard to put down. However, after the excitement of danger and escape at the start, the grueling despair and hopelessness made this a challenging read. It was actually emotionally taxing to read but if Bo and Callum could keep going then so could I. It was the courageous persistence of the characters themselves that kept me reading.

Kirsty Murray creates a believable world with a large cast of well written characters including deluded dreamers, outback raiders, manipulative cult leaders, underground renegades, tribes of outcastes, prophets of doom, and the walled-in and wealthy colonists of Vulture's Gate.

Far from being a shallow or clichéd portrayal of human response, Kirsty Murray's characters represent an array of plausible reactions to a world on the brink of collapse. Some respond with opportunism others with altruism, some with cruelty others with compassion and self sacrifice. Nothing is obvious as Bo and Callum face daily life or death decisions and moral dilemmas that push their friendship to the limit. Truth, trust and loyalty become the only weapons left to fight with.

There is no neat ending to this book, but the bleak darkness of life is countered with the hope and optimism of a small group who, in the end, escape enslavement in the colony. It is those qualities of character that emerge from Bo Callum and others who refuse to compromise, that provide the basis for the possibility of a life with a future hope.

Because, early in the book an adult is grooming the girl Bo for a future sexual relationship, this book is best for Year 8 and older. That section is definitely more disturbing than later when Hacket takes a potential sexual interest in Bo. It would be an excellent book to read aloud to an old enough group (as determined by the teacher). There would be issues in every chapter to stimulate discussion, debate or written opinion pieces. Obvious themes emerging include the breakdown of law and order, the human need for freedom, balancing order and freedom in our own society, benefits of totalitarianism for the colonists, the emerging character of Roc and his motives and methods of leadership, the importance of trust in relationships between Bo and Callum or between Roc and his boys, explaining the changing behaviour of Callum's 'father' Rusty, projecting a future for those who escape aboard the *Bouboulina*, speculating about changes to order and control following the destruction at the colony.

Stephanie Hanscamp Mountain District Christian School, Vic