

## ***How to Ditch Your Fairy* by Justine Larbalestier**

*How to Ditch Your Fairy* is more fun than popping bubble wrap but still offers brain food, making it a highly accessible book both in and out of the classroom.

In New Avalon, almost everyone has a personal fairy that gives a particular brand of luck – but 14-year-old Charlie's perfect parking fairy is more harm than help; she's not old enough to drive herself and she's sick of people borrowing her when they need to find a good parking spot. The lengths she'll go to in order to ditch her fairy and (hopefully) find a new one make for a hilarious novel.

Every character – from Charlie's friend Rochelle, with an enviable clothes-shopping fairy, to Steffi, with an even more enviable never-getting-into-trouble fairy he's convinced isn't real – crackles with personality. Dialogue is fresh, fast and funny, and Charlie sparkles with dry humour – you can't help but be drawn to this unlikely heroine. The usage of invented words gives the novel added individuality – *HTDYF* is a great read for girls in lower secondary years, with adventure, romance, friendship and sport adding to the appeal of this wonderful novel.

The concept of a world much like our own except with personal fairies (equalling added troubles) prompts reflection into our own lives. In the classroom, discussion topics may be based around what life would be like in a society like New Avalon (having a fairy, regimented life at the Sports High, their self-obsession) as well as looking into Charlie's personal journey throughout the novel (from hating Fiorenze to experiencing life in her shoes, the questionable validity of things earned through fairy-magic).

Overall, *HTDYF* is a superb novel, further confirming Larbalestier as an exceptional author of young adult literature.

**Steph Bowe, student of Distance Education Centre Victoria**

What a strange idea? Why would anyone want to ditch a fairy? After all, everyone knows that without her fairy godmother Cinderella wouldn't have met Prince Charming and lived happily ever after. However things are different at New Avalon Sports High. Almost everyone has a fairy but they don't grant indiscriminate wishes. Each has a single purpose such as Rochelle's clothes-shopping fairy whilst Fiorenze *Stupid-Name* has an every-boy-will-like-you fairy. Charlie has a *benighted* car-parking fairy that others enjoy, as Charlie who finds herself being borrowed for car trips to ensure the perfect parking place. In order to ditch her fairy, Charlie walks everywhere which almost works till Anders Danders drags Charlie in to play passenger once again. With all of that walking wasted, how can Charlie be rid of her fairy now?

Justine Larbalestier, though her previous series *Magic* or *Madness* were much more traditional and serious fantasy, has turned her hand to comedy very deftly. Larbalestier's new world, that is neither Australia or The United States but a mixture of both, has a quaint new lingo. It is inhabited by Charlie a quirky, amusing character who finds herself in strife numerous times despite just wanting to be an ordinary teenager of New Avalon. Trying to keep out of trouble, play her sports and have new boy Stefan love her proves to be full of hilarious (sometimes death defying!) incidents for her and, along the way, Charlie discovers allies in unexpected places. An enjoyable, entertaining read that will make the reader laugh out loud.

**Pia Butcher, Knox Library, VIC**

*How to Ditch you Fairy* by Justine Larbalestier is one of love, school and of not wanting the fairy you have got. The story is of Charlie and how she tries to get rid of her parking fairy by any means possible. A parking fairy works when you are in a car and no matter where you try to get a parking spot you get one out the front of the place that you wanted to go. Charlie goes to the new Avalon sports high with her friend Rochelle who has a good clothes finding fairy and Steffi who has a never getting into trouble fairy. Charlie wants to be Steffi's girlfriend but when she sees him kissing stupid name Fiorenze she is shocked because he has also kissed her so she does not know

what is going on. Charlie has also vowed not to get into a vehicle until she has got rid of her fairy so she is always running late to class and is getting demerits for it but if she gets many more she will get expelled from New Avalon Sports High which she does not want to happen. This book is about not changing who you are unless you know what you are getting yourself into. This book is a great read and is well written story line that keeps you captivated in the story.

**William Knight, VIC**

To be totally truthful, I didn't like *How to Ditch your Fairy*. I should say that there are a couple of good things that I took from it, but overall, I found it difficult to relate to and very strange...in a fairy sort of way. I think that Justine Larbalestier is either trying to relate to young people who believe in fairies [may I suggest that to be a minority of youth], or does so herself. Great for the reader who is a fairy believer or bored with nothing else to read. Sorry, Justine, it's just my personal opinion.

There was a lot of new language and a very alternative culture presented and even the layout of her chapters was different for me.

It seems that most, although not all students at New Avalon have an invisible and controlling fairy that sits on their shoulder. They can't see it, choose it, or get rid of it [very easily]. The fairy Charlie has is a parking fairy that causes her to be kidnapped, and she is desperate to get rid of it. I would too. Go Charlie! She goes to dangerous lengths to get rid of her parking fairy only to have it replaced by a boy-attracting fairy.

After Charlie's near death experience at bobsledding [a purposely chosen option to trick her fairy into thinking she was going to die and therefore deserting her], she finally gets a fairy that is a 'keeper': a basketball fairy which was going to make her a huge success.

I don't know about others, but personally I wouldn't want my kids to think that their lives are controlled by unseen fairies or that they must perform deadly acts to gain control of their lives. Am I missing the point?

**Linda Searby, Mountain District Christian School, Vic**

This is a funny and entertaining read aimed more at females aged between 12 and 16 approximately. The voice of the main character Charlie is lively and believable, young teens would be entranced by her efforts to rid herself of her parking fairy in the magical realm of New Avalon.

The strong sporting aspects in the novel will also gain a wider audience and female cricketers feature here. Charlie is a member of the New Avalon Sports High B Stream XL and provides a good role model for aspiring female athletes.

I would recommend this novel for all school libraries and public library YA collections.

While this is not an earth-shattering read which could change young readers forever, Larbalestier has produced a very readable and amusing novel which will please many adolescents.

**Susan Hill, NSW**

*How to Ditch Your Fairy* is an amusing adolescent fantasy. The book is an easy read; it is a "coming of age" story about a girl called Charlie who attends a sports high school.

In Charlie's world, most individuals have a personal fairy. The type of fairy is not evident until a person realises what is happening on a regular basis. Fairies are invisible but they affect the personalities and/or the lives of the individuals. The presence of a fairy can be very useful or sometimes a nuisance. One girl has a fairy that makes her attractive to every male, which becomes a huge problem for her as it makes it impossible for her to have real friends. Similarly, at the beginning of the story, Charlie is too young to drive a car, but she has a parking fairy which means that whenever she travels in a car the driver will be able to find the best parking space very easily. Charlie's fairy is very convenient for her parents but becomes a dangerous liability so that Charlie needs to find a way to get rid of it.

This book should appeal to younger teenagers especially the girls. The format is like a teenage diary or journal with events that concern Charlie listed at the beginning of each chapter. The dialogue is very funny and contemporary. Larbalestier plays with words and makes some up, for example the girls use the word “pulchy” to describe good-looking males!

On a further level, the author introduces some less superficial issues such as bullying, peer pressure, body image and the demands of excelling at sport. These topics are cleverly woven into the school context and lightly addressed for the reader to possibly think about. They are not exactly glossed over but are too easily resolved from Charlie’s point of view as her tale unfolds, hence maintaining the tone of the comic fantasy.

**Rosalie Knox, Burgmann Anglican School, ACT**