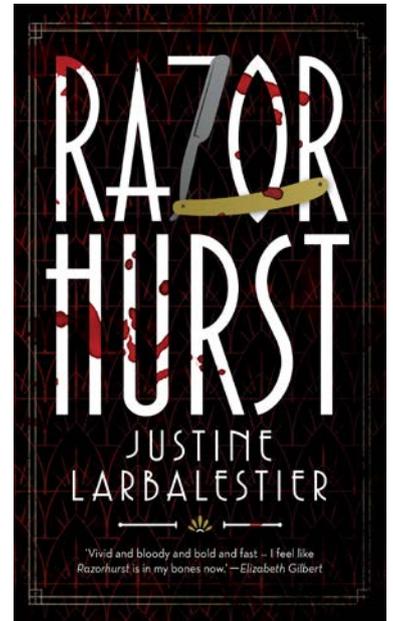


RAZOR- HURST

By Justine Larbalestier

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Summary

It is 1932 in Razorhurst (Sydney's Darlinghurst and Surry Hills) – where guns are banned and 'razor men' rule with their blades. Two competing and powerful mob bosses, Gloriana Nelson and Mr Davidson, have reached a fragile peace but the streets are far from safe.

Sixteen-year-old Kelpie knows the dangers of Sydney's streets all too well. Ghosts have kept her alive, steering her to food and safety, but they are also her torment. She thinks only she can see them and feels utterly alone with her fears. Dymphna Campbell – also sixteen and nicknamed the 'Angel of Death' for her trail of dead beaux – is a legendary beauty and Gloriana Nelson's 'best girl'. Unbeknownst to Kelpie, she too sees ghosts.

Kelpie and Dymphna meet over the corpse of Dymphna's latest boyfriend. Not the most auspicious start to a relationship, but Dymphna pronounces herself Kelpie's new protector and guardian, vowing to care for her and promising a life of luxury that Kelpie is in no position to refuse. Dymphna needs a trusted ally. Gloriana's hold is crumbling, one burly henchman at a time, and Mr. Davidson is determined to have all of Razorhurst – including Dymphna.

As loyalties shift and betrayal threatens at every turn, Dymphna and Kelpie (with both help and hindrance from the ghosts) are determined not only to survive, but to rise to the top.

Brilliantly unfolding through Kelpie's and Dymphna's alternating points of view over the course of one single, extraordinary day, *Razorhurst* draws readers into its dark, deadly world and shocks, surprises, and reveals its secrets in the most unexpected of ways.

Themes

Using *Razorhurst* as a class text (either in Stage 5 English or HSIE) could lead to in-depth discussions relating to: life during the Great Depression, loyalty, ghosts, poverty and its impact on society, crime and its consequences.

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Discussion Questions

Research: spend a class or two looking at life during the Depression in Sydney so that students have a better understanding of the setting of *Razorhurst*. One way of doing this is to divide your class into groups and ask each group to research a particular aspect of this period, such as:

- Razor Gangs and their criminal activities
- Tilly Devine and Kate Leigh
- Mass unemployment and its social effects
- The culture and society of Sydney during the 1930s
- Major events occurring in Sydney at the time, such as the Harbour Bridge's construction and opening.

Have students report their findings back to the rest of the class in brief presentations.

Justine Larbalestier writes in the Acknowledgements & Influences section at the end of *Razorhurst* that *Crooks Like Us* by Peter Doyle and *City of Shadows* by Peter Doyle and Caleb Williams were major influences on her writing of *Razorhurst*. Have students type the title of either of these books into Google Images to see an array of 'real life' criminals from this period. Ask them to choose one image, imagine what that person must have been like, what crime they might have committed and then write a short scene involving dialogue between themselves and the ghost of that criminal.

Ask students to research the literary term 'braided narrative' and ask them to decide if *Razorhurst* is an example of such a writing style, giving examples from the novel.

Ask students to write a short story about what will happen to Kelpie and Dymphna after *Razorhurst* ends. Some questions to get students thinking might be:

Will Kelpie and Dymphna stick together and prosper?

Will Kelpie follow her passion for writing and Dymphna fall back into a life of crime?

Will Gloriana Nelson be their friend or enemy?

Will the police chase them over Mr Davidson's death?

Divide students into groups of two to write and then perform a scene between the ghosts of Neal Darcy and Jimmy Palmer meeting after Dymphna and Kelpie leave Mr Davidson's house.

Comparative study for advanced students: Compare and contrast Ruth Park's *The Harp in the South* with *Razorhurst*. How do the two stories intersect and how do they diverge?

Useful Links

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/great-depression>

<http://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/skint-making-do-great-depression>

http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=67

<http://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au/index.php/galleries/people-of-interest/tilly-devine-the-razor-gang-wars-1927-31/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5UGq07rS00>

http://www.abc.net.au/dimensions/dimensions_in_time/Transcripts/s485143.htm