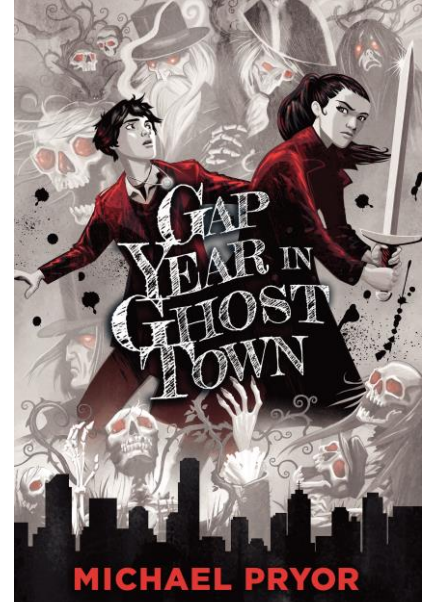


# Gap Year in Ghost Town

By Michael Pryor

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Recommended for readers 14 years and older



## Summary

The Marin family run a two-man operation in inner-city Melbourne. Anton has the ghost-sight, but his father does not. Theirs is a gentle approach to ghost hunting. Rani Cross, combat-skilled ghost hunter from the Company of the Righteous, is all about the slashing.

Anton and Rani don't see eye to eye - but with a massive spike in violent ghost manifestations, they must find a way to work together.

And what with all the blindingly terrifying brushes with death, Anton must use his gap year to decide if he really wants in on the whole ghost-hunting biz...

*Gap Year in Ghost Town* is smart, funny and scary – with extra action and attitude.

## Use in the curriculum

*Gap Year in Ghost Town* would suit genre study, including the popularity of the 'mash-up'; study of narrative voice; study of idiomatic language; and study of the role of humour, especially in books aimed at a young adult audience.

## Writing style

With its lively and often very funny first person narration and curious combining of gothic ghost literature, modern Australian life (footy and all), pop culture references and up-to-the-moment teen argot, *Gap Year in Ghost Town* is an eccentric and thoroughly engaging mash-up from an experienced and acclaimed writer in the fantasy and science fiction field.

From the start, the narrator-protagonist addresses the reader directly and very personally, as shown in such paragraphs as 'You might think that ghost hunting is full of glamour and excitement, international jet-setting, hobnobbing with world leaders and stuff like that. Well yeah, nah. Ghost hunting is more about mud and cold and waiting around for something to manifest.' (p. 15)

This style forms a bond between narrator and reader and allows the narrator to convincingly fill in the back story and comment on the action. The technique, and the warm, humorous voice also allows the narrator to hold the reader's attention while entering into discursions that serve to reveal more about his character and motivation.

## Author's background

Michael Pryor is one of Australia's premier Science Fiction and Fantasy authors. He has more than a million words in print, publishing more than thirty-five books and over fifty short stories. Michael has been shortlisted seven times for the Aurealis Awards

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and seven of his books have been CBCA Notable Books. For more on Michael and his books, go to [www.michaelpryor.com.au](http://www.michaelpryor.com.au).

## From the author

'This book is aimed fairly at YA readers. I wanted to write something that was funny and scary and pop culture aware. I wanted to write something with a main character who wants to do the right thing but is conflicted about it. I wanted to write something that draws on and acknowledges the amazing enthusiasm of fandom in all its incarnations.

'Because this story is set in a real place, I was able to visit various locations before I wrote – even places I thought I knew. I took lots of photos, made notes of sights, sounds and smells. I had to be careful, though. While I was writing the first draft, I featured a building that I didn't know was going to be torn down and replaced with a block of flats. I had to change things in the second draft.'

*Michael Pryor*

## Discussion questions

1. *Let's get this straight – ghosts are everywhere. I can see them. You can't. And, see them or not, they're dangerous...Just don't.* (p. 1)

Define the literary term 'narrative voice' and describe with as much detail as possible Anton's voice in *Gap Year in Ghost Town*. Use examples from the novel where possible to illustrate your description. How did this voice influence your reading of the story? For instance, did it make you feel closer to Anton because he is speaking directly to you?

2. *Part of the issue we have with death and afterlife is the horror of coming to an end. Life being full of so much, the thought of it crashing to a complete close is shuddersome. Deep down, we'd love to know that we go on, somehow, somewhere.* (p. 150)

Accepting death is an important theme within the novel. Anton's mother and Stacey Evans struggle to accept the death of a loved one and, in the process, create pain and suffering for themselves and others. Ghosts are unable to transition completely into death and exist in a miserable state of nothingness but Anton helps them find peace in death.

Discuss whether you think death is portrayed in the novel as tragic and terrifying or just something inevitable and too mysterious for us to understand.

3. *'The willies. You really need to update your vocabulary.'*  
*'Blame old episodes of Doctor Who.'* (p. 292)

This is just one of many popular culture references in *Gap Year in Ghost Town*. Find three more examples and explain what effect such references have on you when you are reading a novel about death, ghosts and murder.

4. *We're adulating like champions* (p. 290).

What does the word 'adulating' mean in this context? Give examples of Anton and Rani 'adulating' at the end of the novel.

- 5a. What do you think happens to Anton and Rani after the events of the novel? Write your own short story based on a different encounter with Rogues, Gatehouse, the Malefactors, baby Carl and Anton's mother.

OR

- 5b. Retell the story of *Gap Year in Ghost Town* from Stacey Evans' viewpoint. In your retelling make sure you explain how you 'tamed' the Rogues, why you went on your murderous rampage, and what you were thinking in your final encounter with Anton.