



Book Club Book of the Month

Title: Banjawarn

Author: Josh Kemp

Publisher: UWA Publishing

Summary

Garreth Hoyle is a true crime author whose debut *Banjawarn Sky: The Vanishing of Edward Honeybone* has become a national bestseller. His pockets flush with royalties, Hoyle is free to indulge his passion for hallucinogenic drugs and trips deep into the mulga country of the West Australian Goldfields.

But even under the influence and defiantly alone in this cleansing landscape, Hoyle can't escape the stained memories of what really happened at Banjawarn, where he worked as a shearer and witnessed even stranger events than the disappearance at the heart of his book.

Needing more supplies and importantly more drugs, Hoyle drives the backroads to the settler streets of Kalgoorlie. There he finds Kerryn, an old Banjawarn hand with whom he shares "a love affair with the needle, though their poisons were different".

Though Kerryn is initially furious with Hoyle for his depiction of her in his book, the cash he flashes for their highs wins her tolerance. But when Hoyle finds a ten-year-old girl abandoned in a drug house, suddenly every bad decision he has ever made in life becomes a debt he feels he must repay.

Hoyle decides to help reunite the girl with her father, who lives in Leonora – a remote mining town on the way to Banjawarn Station. As Hoyle, Kerryn and

the girl drive further north into scorched vastness, they find that while sometimes the past is best left alone, it's too late to turn back.

Written with searing prose that is poetic and unsparing, Josh Kemp's debut novel was joint winner of the 2021 Dorothy Hewett Award for an Unpublished Manuscript and finds an immediate place in the Australian gothic canon, leading readers to the very edge of the map and unearthing its monsters.

About the author:

Josh Kemp is a writer from the South West of WA where he is studying his PhD at Edith Cowan University in Bunbury. His short stories have been published by *Kill Your Darlings*, *Overland*, *Seizure*, *Tincture* and *Breach*. He was previously shortlisted for the Kill Your Darlings Unpublished Manuscript Award and longlisted for the Fogarty Literary Award.

Questions for discussion:

1. *Banjawarn's* protagonist Garreth Hoyle is a true crime writer whose account of his days on Banjawarn Station has won him fame and fortune. But just how truthful is he about what happened with Kerryn and the rest of the shearing crew?
2. How does Hoyle's self-centred account of his days on *Banjawarn* affect his relationship with Kerryn, and how does it evolve as they take the journey to Leonora?
3. *Banjawarn* has been described as an Australian gothic novel, where uncanny events and mysterious landscapes heighten settlers' fears of unexplored lands. How does Kemp place these themes in the story and tease them out?
4. There are many unusual events in *Banjawarn*, such as the shooting star and the "dragon" in chapter one. What effect do these strange elements have on the narrative as it develops? Did they make you want to keep reading to solve a mystery, or did they add to the book's lucid qualities?
5. Why does Hoyle decide to help the girl? Is he seeking redemption – or just another good story to tell about himself?

6. Addiction is often seen within society as a moral failing. Yet Kemp's depiction of Hoyle and Kerry is sympathetic, showing their humanity and capacity for good. Did the book alter your perception of addiction?
7. *Banjawarn's* characters are all running or hiding from something – pain, secrets, the past. What do you think they are running *to*?
8. How does Kemp's harsh yet often poetic depiction of the landscape of the Goldfields' landscape contrast with his depiction of *Banjawarn's* human characters?
9. Banjawarn Station is a real place and was infamously owned by the Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo, which attacked the Tokyo subway with sarin gas in 1995. Likewise, the riots in Kalgoorlie in 2016 are explored in the text as well. How does Kemp use the history of man-made places and real events to explore and heighten his fiction?
10. Kemp's writing has been compared to the sparse lyricism of writers like Cormac McCarthy, Tim Winton and Randolph Stowe. What atmosphere and feelings do Kemp's style and language create for *Banjawarn*?

If you liked this book, you may also like ...

Dark Tales from the Long River by David Price (Fremantle Press)

Bila Yarrudhanggalangdhuray: River of Dreams by Anita Heiss (Simon & Schuster Australia)

Locust Summer by David Allan-Petale (Fremantle Press)

Driving Stevie Fracasso by Barry Divola (HarperCollins Australia)

The River Mouth by Karen Herbert (Fremantle Press)

How to Shame the Devil by Ros Thomas (Night Parrot Press)