

JASPER CLIFF

JOSH KEMP

ABOUT THE BOOK

The tiny outpost of Jasper Cliff, in the remote heart of north-west Australia, is a place where people have a habit of vanishing – and it is the place where Lachlan's brother Toby was last seen. As Lachlan drives north to look for his brother, he too is drawn into the foreboding, timeless landscape of the East Pilbara – to a place called the Rift, where the truth of Toby's disappearance may be revealed. This gothic thriller reveals the scars of a colonial legacy in a landscape of such forbidding conditions that dying can be easier than living.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Kemp is an author of Australian gothic and crime fiction who lives in the south-west of Western Australia. His debut novel, *Banjawarn*, was the winner of the 2021 Dorothy Hewett Award, the 2022 Ned Kelly Award for Best Debut Crime Fiction and the 2023 Western Australian Premier's Prize for Best Emerging Writer. *Jasper Cliff* is his second novel and was shortlisted for the Fogarty Literary Award.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

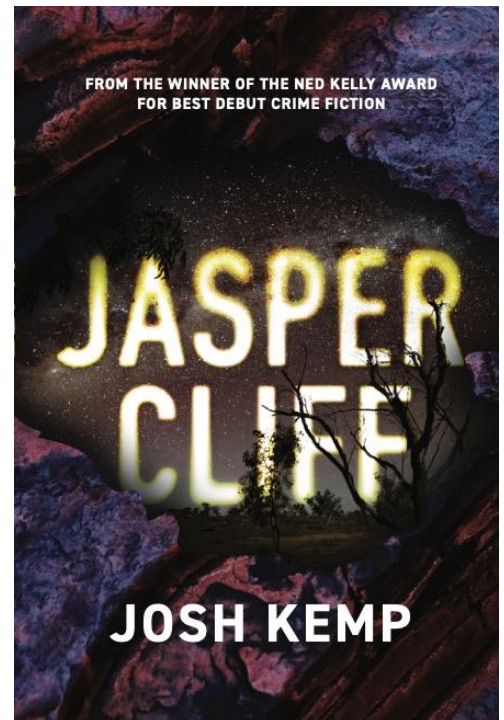
1. How would you describe the genre of this novel?
2. What are the elements that make it gothic? (See some links below for further reading.)
3. How do you think the Rift itself provides a window into north-western Australia's colonial past?
4. Why is it that different people see different things inside the Rift?
5. What is your understanding of these 'visions'?
6. What do you think has happened to Lachlan's missing brother, Toby?
7. What does Lachlan become obsessed with finding the Rift?
8. How would you describe the character of Glen?
9. What motivates Glen – and do you think we understand the extent of what he has done?
10. How central is he as a character to everything that happens?
11. Why is the population of Jasper Cliff so small?
12. Why do you think people still live there at all?
13. What do you think Aunty Belle is waiting for?
14. Why does the Bernese mountain dog keep appearing? What do you think it represents?
15. What happens to Glen in the end – and why?
16. Why do you think the novel ends with the scene it does?

FURTHER READING

<https://crimereads.com/australian-gothic-literature>

<https://theconversation.com/australian-gothic-from-hanging-rock-to-nick-cave-and-kylie-this-genre-explores-our-dark-side-111742>

<https://debbie-johansson.com/2019/11/27/what-is-australian-gothic/>



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What draws you to the country's north-west as a setting for your writing?

While I've lived most of my life in the south-west of Western Australia, I've always found myself drawn to the red dirt of the state's north, and the Pilbara in particular. It could be that I developed a deep emotional connection to these landscapes during childhood holidays. Right from a young age, I could sense how old these landscapes were. It's something I could taste in the air. Not only is this region home to some of the longest continuing cultures on the planet, but to some of the most ancient known landforms: a recent study has shown that the area around Marble Bar is one of the oldest continental crusts on earth.

What sparked the idea for *Jasper Cliff*, and what did you learn while writing it?

The idea for *Jasper Cliff* came from spending a lot of time researching frontier history in the Batty Library. I would often read about the horrors of colonisation for other creative projects, and during this process discovered how history can be twisted or altered by unscrupulous writers.

After reading a lot of this material it became clear to me there were two versions of Australian history. The spurious version in which Australia simply fell under the ownership of the colonisers without resistance or bloodshed. And the version that we know is far closer to the truth: that First Nations Australians fought for their country and the colonisers committed genocidal violence in order to steal the land from them.

I wondered how I could explore this idea of two versions of the same story in a creative project. How would someone react to being presented with two completely different endings to the same story? Which version would they choose to believe? This was the genesis of *Jasper Cliff*.

How would you define Australian gothic literature? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed *Jasper Cliff*?

Australian gothic is an incredibly diverse mode of fiction that emerged during the earliest days of the colony. Broadly, the mode deals with the darker side of the Australian experience, stories about murder and hauntings, isolation and violence. I am drawn to this genre for two reasons. Firstly, how these stories often explore the legacy and trauma of colonisation on both individuals and the landscape. Secondly, I've always been fascinated with how this mode of fiction investigates the relationship between Australians and this ancient, beautiful land we live on – the tension, complexity and spiritual aspects of this relationship. I think both are at the core of just about everything I've written.

If you enjoyed *Jasper Cliff*, I can highly recommend novels such as *The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan, *Bereft* by Chris Womersley and *Angel Rock* by Darren Williams. All three of these books had a huge influence on the development of *Jasper Cliff* and my writing in general.

What is next for Josh Kemp?

I'm currently working on a kind of strange neo-western set in the remote south-east region of Western Australia, down around Cape Arid. It's about the spectre of colonisation and frontier justice. Telling a story set in such an isolated area allows me to indulge my love of nature writing to the extreme. While it was originally meant to have quite a different feel to both *Banjawarn* and *Jasper Cliff*, I can already feel the gothic worming its way into the work.