

As Darkness Falls, by Bronwyn Parry

Reading Group Notes

Each reading group operates differently – some analyse books in depth, others discuss what they enjoyed (or didn't enjoy) and others meet for mostly social purposes and occasionally remember to talk about a book!

The following notes and discussion questions, grouped loosely into broad themes, may provide some assistance for groups (or individual readers) who wish to discuss *As Darkness Falls*. Your group might like to pick one topic or theme, or select several – or just pour another glass of wine and ignore them all!

Dungirri

The image of the rural town is strong in Australian culture, despite the fact that most of the population lives in or near cities, and it's usually romanticised. How has the author chosen to portray the town of Dungirri and its people?

How does the depiction of Dungirri relate to your experience of, or understanding of, the issues challenging rural communities?

Given the particular tragic events Dungirri has experienced as the story opens, does the portrayal of the community ring true for you?

At the end of the book, do you feel hopeful or pessimistic about Dungirri's future? Why?

Landscape

Alec is city born and bred. How does his experience and perception of the landscape around Dungirri differ from Bella's?

How does the landscape around Dungirri shape the characters and the story?

Writing style and structure

What conventions of the crime genre has the author used? Are there ways in which she has departed from genre conventions?

What conventions of the romance genre has the author used? Are there ways in which she has departed from genre conventions?

While some crime novels use the criminal's point of view, or that of an omniscient narrator, in this book the author limits the narrative to two points of view only – those of Alec and Bella. Why might the author have used this structure? How effective was it for you?

The investigation

Bella thinks at one point: 'Life mostly didn't work out the way it did on TV. The good guys didn't always win. The rescuers didn't always make it in time. People disappeared without ever being found.' How well do you think the unfolding investigation reflects the reality of police work in isolated areas? Does the author sacrifice realism to balance the dramatic expectations of the novel structure? Discuss your thoughts.

To what extent is the investigation a success? To what extent is the investigation unsuccessful? What skills, knowledge, processes and intuition do the characters use in the investigation, and how effective are these in the particular circumstances?

Characters

Bella describes herself as reclusive, and mentions not fitting in. To what extent is she a part of Dungirri, and it a part of her?

What are Bella's strengths? What are her vulnerabilities?

What aspects of Alec first attract Bella? Why are these aspects important to her?

What are Alec's strengths? What are his vulnerabilities?

What aspects of Bella first attract Alec? Why are these aspects important to him?

Both Alec and Bella lost a parent at a young age. How might this, and their subsequent upbringing, have affected each of their characters?

What qualities do you think are important for a successful, loving relationship? Does the developing relationship between Bella and Alec contain those elements? Is it believable, for you? Discuss your reasons for your view.

Leadership and courage

Early in the book, Bella notices about Alec: 'the air of self-confidence, of authority, sat comfortably on him'. In many ways, Alec fulfils through his gender, position and expertise the role of a leader as we traditionally recognise it in our society. What aspects of his personality and approach give his leadership depth beyond the authority of his position?

What kinds of leadership responsibilities and attributes do Bella and other characters in the book assume, and how important are these to the community and to the investigation?

Bella observes the change in Steve from 'a devil-may-care action hero on a constant overdose of energy and testosterone' to 'a man knowingly going into danger without

that high'. How has the author explored different types of courage? In what ways do the various characters in the book demonstrate emotional courage?

Guilt, redemption and forgiveness

Alec makes a distinction between the calculated planning of the abductions, and the '...a pressure-cooker of anger and grief that found an outlet and burst. It happened because they were human enough to care about Jess.'

How does the book address the themes of guilt, redemption and forgiveness?