

Only Killers and Thieves

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Summary:

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Two adolescent brothers are exposed to the brutal realities of life and the seductive cruelty of power after a tragedy shatters their family in this riveting debut novel—a story of savagery and race, injustice and honor set in the untamed frontier of 1880s Australia—reminiscent of Philipp Meyer’s *The Son* and the novels of Cormac McCarthy

An epic Western, a tough coming-of-age story, and a tension-laden tale of survival, *Only Killers and Thieves* is a gripping and utterly transporting debut that brings to vivid life a colonial Australian frontier that bears a striking resemblance to the American West in its formative years.

It is 1885 and the McBride family are trying to survive a crippling drought that is slowly eroding their lives and hopes: their cattle are starved, and the family can no longer purchase the supplies they need on their depleted credit. When the rain finally comes, it’s a miracle. For a moment, the scrubland flourishes and the remote swimming hole fills. Returning home from an afternoon swim, fourteen-year-old Tommy and sixteen-year-old Billy McBride discover a scene of heartbreaking carnage: their dogs dead in the yard, their hardworking father and mother shot to death, and their precocious younger sister unconscious and severely bleeding from a wound to her gut. The boys believe the killer is their former Aboriginal stockman, and, desperate to save Mary, they rush her to John Sullivan, the wealthiest landowner in the region and their father’s former employer, who promises to take care of them.

Eager for retribution, the distraught brothers fall sway to Sullivan, who persuades them to join his posse led by the Queensland Native Police, an infamous arm of British colonial power whose sole purpose is the “dispersal” of indigenous Australians to “protect” settler rights. The group is led by the intimidating inspector Edmund Noone, a dangerous and pragmatic officer whose intellect and ruthlessness both fascinates and unnerves the watchful Tommy. Riding for days across the barren outback, the group is determined to find the perpetrators they insist are guilty, for reasons neither of the brothers truly understands. It is a harsh and horrifying journey that will have a devastating impact on Tommy, tormenting him for the rest of his life—and hold enduring consequences for a young country struggling to come into its own.

Set in a period of Australian and British history as raw and relevant as that of the wild frontier of nineteenth-century America, *Only Killers and Thieves* is an unforgettable story of family, guilt, empire, race, manhood, and faith that combines the insightfulness of Philipp Meyer’s *The Son* with the atmospheric beauty of Amanda Coplin’s *The Orchardist* and the raw storytelling power of Ian McGuire’s *The North Water*.

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