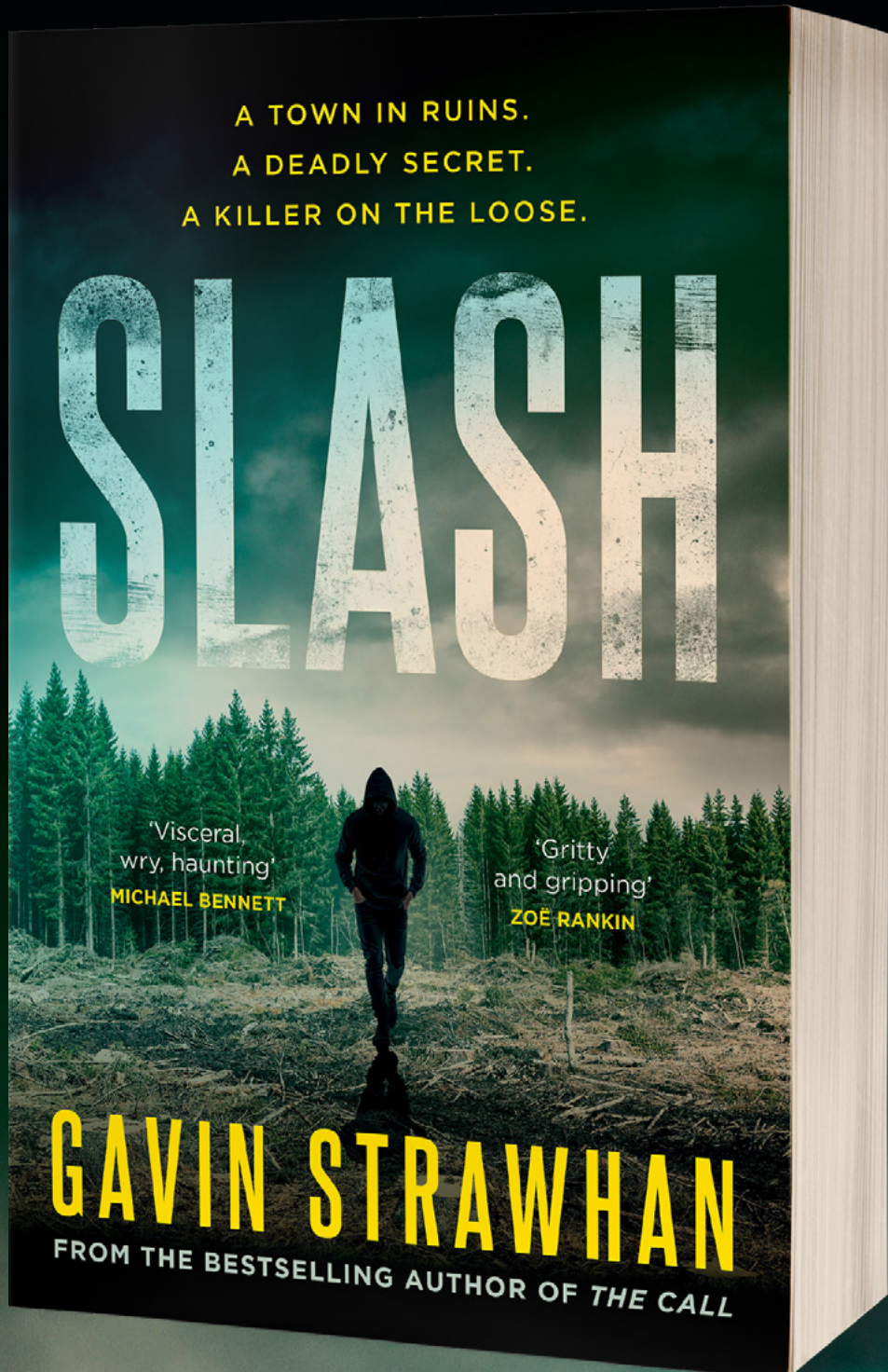


BOOK CLUB NOTES



A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

GAVIN STRAWHAN



Credit A McNutt

Kia ora and thanks so much for reading my second novel, *Slash*.

Phew, second novel. After the success of *The Call* – winning the Allen & Unwin fiction prize, getting such nice reviews and feedback, writing a follow up was way harder than I thought.

I knew I wanted to stay with my lead character, Honey, and had plenty of story ideas, but not enough to carry a whole novel.

The trouble was, I didn't really know why the first book had worked, and I kept trying to come up with the magic formula. That created a lot of uncertainty, second guessing myself and a lot of dead ends.

C'mon, someone (my wife) said to me. You've written one, you know how to do it, just write another one.

While sitting on various panels and doing interviews about *The Call*, I said repeatedly that crime drama was a good way to hold up a mirror to society. Okay, so what did I want to reflect?

Driving through rural New Zealand, and especially around Hawkes Bay and the East Coast, one thing that really winds me up are pine forests. They are a blight on the environment, but a great setting for a thriller...

And of course, the damage done by forestry slash following weather events like Cyclone Gabrielle is well documented.

Then there was Honey. The environmental damage that is the setting for *Slash*, could be seen as a reflection of her inner devastation. In trying to solve the crime, she might just heal herself.

The result is *Slash*. I think it can be enjoyed as a stand-alone novel, but if you enjoyed *The Call*, I also hope you enjoy spending some more time with Honey.

Ngā mihi
Gavin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In *Slash* Honey is asked to investigate a missing young man who is suspected of armed robbery — perhaps even murder. She initially turns down the case. What changes her mind? Do you think she is driven by a sense of justice, or does she have more personal reasons for getting involved?
2. Honey recalls her counsellor saying: ‘None of us is as bad as the worst thing we’ve ever done’, which she dismisses as ‘fridge magnet psychology’. Do you agree?
3. Can you imagine any circumstances where you might kill someone? Would that single act negate everything good you might have done in your life?
4. Honey indulges in sexual fantasies while acknowledging they are inappropriate. As Tom Waits sang — ‘you’re innocent when you dream...’ Do you agree?
5. Honey shares a joint with Vinnie — with deeply embarrassing consequences. Why do you think she does it? Have you ever been in a situation where you’ve taken risks you regret?
6. Guilt weighs heavily as a theme throughout the novel and Marshall appearing as a ghostly voice in Honey’s mind is ever present. How does it impact your understanding of Honey’s character development in *Slash*?
7. When Vinnie breaks down over his son’s disappearance, Honey chastises herself for not showing the same overt emotion when Marshall died. Do you think it’s easier to sympathise with another person’s grief than to deal with your own?
8. Honey wonders why people are so eager to believe that the Cunninghams were murdered and not the victims of natural disaster. She concludes that, ‘it was easier to comprehend tragedy if there was a human cause; a way of making sense out of chaos.’ Do you agree? Do you think it’s human nature to look for someone else to blame when things go wrong?

9. Aotearoa New Zealand has been deeply affected by natural disasters recently and it can be scary to think these will continue to happen. How do you think we could build resilience towards these events? What is within our power as a society?
10. At one point Honey compares herself to Cyclone Gabrielle. In what ways do you think her inner turmoil is reflected in the landscape?
11. Vinnie is in the horrible position of having a son who disappeared without a trace and is now being accused of murder. How far do you think a parent should go to defend their child? What responsibility do they have as a parent when their children are grown?
12. In *Slash*, Honey and Michelle travel to Fiji and uncover a major drug smuggling operation aimed at New Zealand and Australia. Some of the consequences on the local community — such as high level corruption, addiction and money laundering — are explored in the process. What responsibility do you think wealthier countries have towards assisting their less affluent neighbours?
13. When you travel to a ‘tropical paradise’ do you think about the darker side of the places you visit? Does that make those places more or less interesting?
14. A spotlight is placed on Michelle and Honey’s friendship in the novel. Honey comments that she needs Michelle to ‘help [her] be a better person’. How healthy do you think their relationship is? Do you have any ride-or-die friendships that you couldn’t live without?
15. ‘Toxic masculinity’ and the ‘manosphere’ is very topical at the moment. In what ways does the friendship between Nick and Oliver touch on this? How would you protect teenage boys from developing anti-social and unhealthy behaviours?
16. There are some incredibly trustworthy characters in the novel and some who are initially presented as trustworthy but revealed to be the opposite. Do you think Honey is more or less trusting than she should be considering her background? How far should you trust your gut when it comes to trusting others?