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## RIDING A CROCODILE

A physician's tale

by Paul Komesaroff

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Some topics to consider while reading *Riding a Crocodile*:

- The hospital system
- Ethics and medicine
- Who defines 'quality of life'?
- Relationships
- Attitudes towards life and death

*Riding a Crocodile* is a novel that gives you an insider's account into life in a major teaching hospital. Abraham Nevski is a dedicated and eccentric professor of medicine at the Royal Prince John Hospital. He prides himself on his diagnostic skills and powers of reasoning. On returning to work after a break he becomes aware of disturbing changes taking place in the hospital.

A series of suspicious deaths then throws his world into confusion. Nevski's inner turmoil grows and he has to confront the dangers that close in around him.



### About Paul Komesaroff

Paul Komesaroff is a practicing physician and philosopher at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. His work spans clinical medicine, biomedical research, social research, philosophy and ethical theory, clinical ethics and policy development. *Riding a Crocodile* is his first novel but he has previously published fourteen books, including *Experiments in Love and Death* (2008) and *Objectivity, Science and Society* (2009). [www.paulkomesaroff.com](http://www.paulkomesaroff.com)

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## Discussion Questions

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- 1 Komesaroff uses an array of literary devices in the first few paragraphs of his novel to create a sense that the reader is a part of Abraham's journey to work. Aside from descriptive language can you identify other devices and explain how they create such an effect?
- 2 Abraham liked to offer his patients 'a sense that he was an authentic witness to their suffering' (p. 29). Did you find Abraham to be a realistic portrayal of a modern medical professional?
- 3 Has reading the novel changed your perspective on the hospital system?
- 4 As a reader, did you empathise or identify with the patients who, after suffering an illness, experienced a realisation on the importance of their lives?
- 5 In many western nations, including Australia, the hospital system has become too focused on quick fix solutions and is less focussed on patient care. Abraham states that there is an 'emphasis on rapid, decisive action [...], tied to the demands of budgets and administrators, [...] in response to ever-increasing numbers of patients in the chronically overburdened hospital system' (p. 9). Can you think of any solutions to this growing problem?
- 6 Abraham asks, 'who is the authentic person; the one who really is as he seems or the one who refuses to play the game' (p. 66). Do you struggle to be true to your personal beliefs or moral code as a professional when your employer or workplace requires you to be someone else?
- 7 Discuss Abraham's relationship with Rebecca. Is it ethical to have a relationship with a work colleague?
- 8 Abraham watches as his work and family life spiral out of control. However, he finds comfort and solace in the smell of the hospital, the clatter of equipment, and the taste of whiskey. Do you have sensory comforts? If yes, what are they?
- 9 How did you react when the identity of the murderer was revealed? Were the reasons for the murders justified?
- 10 Can a person's quality of life be decided and judged by another?