



The Sky So Heavy

Claire Zorn

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For Fin, it's just like any other day - racing for the school bus, bluffing his way through class, and trying to remain cool in front of the most sophisticated girl in his universe, Lucy. Only it's not like any other day because, on the other side of the world, nuclear missiles are being detonated.

When Fin wakes up the next morning, it's dark, bitterly cold, and snow is falling. There's no internet, no phone, no TV, no power, and no parents. Nothing Fin's learned in school could have prepared him for this.

With his parents missing and dwindling food and water supplies, Fin and his younger brother Max must find a way to survive all on their own.

When things are at their most desperate, where can you go for help?

The Sky So Heavy Details

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From Reader Review The Sky So Heavy for online ebook

rachel says

Last year, I think (it may have been early this year, who knows), I introduced this thing I like to call “soft ratings”. It’s pretty much just my own fancy way of saying that yes, this book is getting a one star rating from me, but no, it doesn’t mean I hated it. *The Sky so Heavy* is just one of those books that I found so utterly boring and bland that I couldn’t find a single thing that I enjoyed enough to justify giving it a higher rating. Yet, at the same time, it wasn’t abysmal. I’ve read worse books. In fact, I’ve read books that were quite a bit worse... but that doesn’t change the fact that this book made me fight off yawns at 2 o’clock in the afternoon. It was boring - so, so boring.

It was a clever premise, yes. An apocalypse story without an actual apocalypse. But reading about people snowed into their houses and slowly getting hungrier and hungrier doesn’t tickle my fancy. It was drab. Realistic, yes? But not the sort of books that I could truly get into. I liked that it didn’t hold back any punches but at the same time, what good dystopian would? I don’t know. I just didn’t think this book was particularly entertaining or insightful. I didn’t get anything out of it like I wanted to. I never connected to the characters. I didn’t like the open ending - it felt like the author didn’t have a good way to end the character’s story so she just left it open and pretended it was meant to be meaningful.

I think there is going to be a lot of people that truly enjoy this book. There are going to be people that this is exactly their sort of thing and that’s okay, obviously. But for me, this book was a snoozefest. I wasn’t a fan. I will definitely be trying to read this author’s other books to see what they are like, but I don’t have high hopes, unfortunately.

Reynje says

The Sky So Heavy is a story of disaster and survival; of human nature in a time of darkness and desperation.

In the wake of a catastrophic nuclear event between unnamed countries, Australia is plunged into a nuclear winter with devastating repercussions. Alone in their Blue Mountains home, brothers Fin and Max Heath struggle to cope as cold and darkness descend, sickness sets in, and food and water run scarce. As supplies dwindle, the fabric of their suburban neighbourhood begins to deteriorate into suspicion and paranoia. Seemingly abandoned by the authorities, their small community is left to face starvation and illness unaided, and hope of rescue becomes increasingly dim.

From the beginning, Zorn delivers a strong, relatable voice in Fin. There’s an immediacy to his narration, a believable edge of wryness to his tone as he describes his ‘whiter than a loaf of Tip Top’ suburb in the Blue Mountains, life with his father and step-mother, his crush on neighbour Lucy Tennington.

Throughout the novel the choices Fin makes become increasingly difficult, with complex consequences. The decisions Fin makes begin to affect him emotionally, as he attempts to reconcile how his personal system of ethics has been skewed by the disaster. The issue of survival at what cost is compounded when Fin and Max join forces with Arnold Wong and Lucy Tennington, and head towards Sydney in the hope of locating Fin’s mother. Faced with the brutal realities of the outside world, there are no simple choices.

Much of Fin's growth as a character is directly related to his companions: Max, the brother he's fighting to protect; and Lucy, the girl who can protect herself. But most interesting of these relationships is that between Fin and Arnold. The resident outsider at school, Arnold was bullied and Fin is complicit in this. While it would have been easy to paint the interactions between these characters as Teachable Moments, Zorn carefully avoids this by refraining from any cheesy messages or unrealistic reconciliation scenes. Rather, she presents them as interesting counterpoints to each other: Arnold with his faith and personal tragedy, Fin with his guilt and doubt. Zorn is matter of fact about the racism and prejudice of their world, without excusing or glossing over it.

The most interesting aspect of *The Sky So Heavy* was, for me, the clear parallels between the post-nuclear event world Zorn depicts and current issues. If you're familiar with recent Australian politics (and let's face it, if you live here it's fairly unavoidable...) the questions raised in TSSH will have ring of familiarity:

'It's like those people out in the ration line complaining about people from over the border taking their share. They have to believe that we're greedy, 'cause the idea that we were actually left to starve is just too awful.'

“Border security” (heavy, sarcastic quotation marks) is a major subject of the novel. Inner Sydney has been divided from the outer suburbs, with those on the inside receiving a measure of relief from the fallout. Those attempting to cross the border and seek refuge within the city do so at risk of death. By placing Fin and his companions in the role of refugees, and the not-so-subtly uttered sentiment that they should “*go back where they came from*”, Zorn’s novel takes a shot at the present fear mongering and moral dubiousness accompanying the issues of foreign policy and asylum seeking.

The Sky So Heavy is a solid, compelling novel of survival and hope. The questions it raises are not easy, nor are the answers. While not unrelenting bleak, this is a confronting novel in its portrayal of a country sunk into physical and moral darkness.

You may like this if you liked:

Tomorrow When The War Began by John Marsden

Ashfall by Mike Mullin

Days Like This by Alison Stewart

Emily says

Amazing. Anything Zorn writes is going on my auto-buy list!

You have no idea how much I appreciated my hot shower this morning.

C.G. Drews says

Well this just blew *Tomorrow, When the War Began* right out of the water. *waves casually to old Aussie classic as it sinks into oblivion* **I APPROVE.** I (personally) adore survival stories, the apocalypse, and the

thought of using cereal as currency. This book had so much going for it. Except...I got seriously hungry while reading it. *Seriously hungry.*

What if the world randomly and suddenly ended in ice and snow? Especially in Australia where we're not really versed in freezing to death. I think THE SKY SO HEAVY explored a lot of survival questions and emotions (damn those little emotions, making me sob at the end of this mean book) ... although it didn't answer a lot of questions.

I do get bothered when situations get set up and not fully explained, especially in apocalyptic books. There's zero closure for this book, and there's not a lot of answers. Like exactly what the country's survival plan was? Towards the end of the book, the army is keeping everyone in lockdown...all numbered and accounted for. They don't want refugees from other towns coming in. WHY. Just for control? It all felt a little floppy to me. **The story focused on characters instead of plot.**

Speaking of plot: it's not so much action and fighting as...hiding and attempting not to freeze to death. Admirable intentions, but I actually thought the teens would be running around with guns screaming, "Viva la revolution". It was more logical and how-long-can-we-survive-on-creamed-corn-and-cereal? I was a little disappointed at the lack of action.

The characters were obviously the gold of the book. It's narrated by Fin, who's looking after his 12-year-old brother Max since their dad went out the night the missiles hit and didn't come back. Fin's Mister Steady. Max is Mister Hyper. I loved them both, a lot. Then we meet Lucy (luuuurve interest, of course) and Noll (the kid everyone bullied but hey, he's got food, so suddenly everyone's friends...I felt so sorry for him). They're a fabulous group, although I felt I'd met them before (in John Marsden's version). Noll was a favourite since he was so calm with just a shred of bitterness.

Yes I wanted more action but instead got cereal and silence, but I still enjoyed it immensely. It's dying for a sequel though. The ending is as open as a can of tuna nobody wants and I NEED CLOSURE. Because the last 50-pages *hurt*. Stuff goes down that makes you close your eyes and whisper, "No, don't do this" and I might have sniffled a little.

Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says

This review appears on Happy Indulgence. Check it out for more reviews!

If you woke up to the end of the world tomorrow, how would you react? Turn on the TV, check the internet, phone your loved ones. But without electricity and disconnected lines, your next reaction would be to find the people that you love.

Sky So Heavy forces us to think about these things, as one of the most relatable and realistic post-apocalyptic books I've ever read. The end of the world is caused by nuclear missiles wiping out nearby nations, causing a long and cold nuclear winter. This premise is so incredibly realistic that you can actually imagine it happening like this. Through the perspective of Fin, a normal teenager in high school, we'll witness the events immediately before and during the nuclear winter.

"Do you think it's alright to do whatever you need to do to survive?"

We see Fin in his last few days of normalcy, by going to school, crushing on a girl and picking on a guy at school. Then, the nuclear winter strikes, and his immediate priorities become food, water, warmth and shelter, which eventually evolve into safety, longevity and survival. We slowly see him becoming a protector and a leader, as his decisions become harder and riskier. I liked how relatable Fin was, as someone who is just looking out for his younger brother. He isn't the smartest or strongest kid on the block, but he's determined and smart, and that's what matters for survival. He isn't without his flaws though, having bullied a guy at school because "everyone else did it".

There is incredible attention to detail here, as the world slowly gets crazier when the food supplies run out. People will become territorial, scared, and they will turn on one another to protect their loved ones. The only thing that matters is survival, and Sky So Heavy reinforced this with every page.

Trying to save yourself and your family isn't crazy. People will try to hold on when their world starts to tilt, they will grab onto whatever is in reach. Doesn't matter if it means throwing punches at your neighbour or pointing a gun at someone's head.

It was great to see a variety of relationships being explored in the novel, from brotherly to family love, neighbourly relationships, unlikely friends, and even a romance. It doesn't just stop at though, with the population's reliance on the government or the army when things go wrong also being explored.

While Fin is quite a serious character, there is a great balance of characters with his brother and the guy he bullied, Arnold. The fierce brotherly love was one of the best parts of the book, with Fin's 12 year old brother Max being quite vulnerable and strong at the same time. I loved Max and his childish charm, with his refusal to follow Fin's overprotectiveness, his teasing of Fin and his evil kid smile. Arnold on the other hand, was forgiving, kind, pious, and quick to help Fin when he needed it most. Although he verged on being a little too virtuous, he brought faith to the group when they needed hope, making sure they never lost their humanity. Lucy presented a much needed female addition to the group, and I'm glad the romance never felt forced or out of place.

I was so emotionally invested in the characters that I was crying at the end. I can't remember the last time this has happened with a dystopian. The ending is left rather open though, which is kind of disappointing given this is a stand alone. I need closure dammit!

I've read so many post-apocalyptic stories that rarely focus on the important matters at hand – like food, water, warmth, shelter and safety. Sky So Heavy does it right, by focusing on these few key elements, but also being incredibly multi-layered and well thought out. It's slow and there isn't a lot of action, but it was realistic which let's face it – not a lot of dystopians are.

Sky So Heavy brought back my faith in one of my favourite genres. If you love dystopian or post-apocalyptic reads, this one can't be missed. Yay for awesome Aussie YA!

Bridget says

The action begins right from the start, in this fantastic Australian take on the post-apocalyptic world. Fin and his brother Max have been left alone while around them the nuclear winter takes hold. Hard to cope with on every level, but in a place such as the hills of Sydney, this terrible cold is something they have never experienced before. The story of them coping alone, dealing with neighbours in trauma and the ongoing

struggle to keep themselves fed and warm is a true survival story. Eventually, they will be forced to take action and team up with others.

The great thing about this book is the relationships, these kids are dealing with something huge and terrifying, their struggle is written so well. I love the way they cope with terrible adversity and from strangers become friends. There are tragedies, and huge decisions to make. Such bravery. I think teenagers will love this. It has been on the shelves of our library for ages but not read, I'm about to give it a huge push because I think that it will appeal to heaps of boys (and girls). Great read.

Amanda says

The Sky So Heavy is Claire Zorn's debut novel. Set in the Blue Mountains and then Sydney, the story revolves around seventeen year old Fin Heath and his younger brother Max. Life is normal for them, if you ignore the threat of nuclear war, until one day Fin wakes up and the world has changed – snow is falling, the electricity is out, his parents are gone.

I loved this book. I loved it so much that I read it in about three hours – I was unable to put it down and from the moment Fin gets a panicked call from his mother my heart was racing and it did not stop.

Fin is an average guy in his final year at high school. He lives with his dad, his young step-mum, and his younger brother. His mum left them two years ago for a job and a boyfriend in the city. Fin has a crush on classmate Lucy Tenningworth and their teasing and flirting was adorable and amusing. Fin's devotion and protection of his brother and later Lucy was admirable, he steps in when no one else will be there for them. I really liked the depth of his character, he has a hobby (drawing) which he continues to do during the war, and he also turns to music; rationing out his iPod battery so he can listen to a song a day.

The setting was vivid, I could easily picture snow falling in an isolated small town in the mountains, as well as their dangerous journey to Sydney. The actions of the characters felt realistic; the stockpiling of food, the fear, the time frame – it all felt well thought out and thoroughly researched.

The book has been billed as similar to *Tomorrow, When the War Began* and it definitely had a similar vibe, as well as feeling similar to *The 5th Wave* (minus the aliens). If you like these two books, then you will like *The Sky So Heavy*, because it is even better! If you had issues with *The 5th Wave* (the most common I've read about are the insta-love and the POV switching) then you will be pleased to know that there is no insta-love as Fin and Lucy were already friends and the story is told from Fin's perspective only.

I liked that we got a snapshot of life before the nuclear winter hit, we saw Fin at school, at home, his dad's attitude towards them, and his friendship with Lucy. We also got some history on Arnold 'Noll' Wong and the racism and bullying he'd been subjected to since year three.

The book has a lot to say on our present situation involving asylum seekers, it definitely left me thinking about the attitudes we see here, and the similarities between the fence that goes up around Sydney, and the way we guard our country against people seeking refuge.

Like all books involving survival, I start to consider what I would do in the characters' situation, here are my top tips:

1. Hide your food supplies around the house, not just in the kitchen. This way, if people raid your house, they won't get all your food
2. Raid your local school - the canteen will have supplies
3. Be compassionate, help others, stick together

The Sky So Heavy is a thrilling and thought-provoking read. It highlights a lot of the issues we're seeing in our country at the present time while providing the reader with an engaging story.

Seeing as Fin has such a love of music, I thought I'd pick a song to pair with the book. I was listening to this the other night and not only did the mood seem right but the lyrics "oh no, not me. We never lost control" really stood out to me. Here's the Nirvana version of The Man Who Sold the World (bonus: Dave in a skivvy!)

If you'd prefer Bowie's original, you can view it [here](#)

Thank you to the lovely people at UQP for my review copy.

Mari says

DONE. FINALLY.

The book went like:

Boy: Heard about the nuke testing?

Girl: Yah. When will people understand that violence is not a solution smh..

Girl: You going to the protest?

Boy: Nah, what's the point? It's not like the government's gonna listen to us anyway.

Teacher: THERE R COUNTRIES ABOTU TO NUKE EACH OTHER!!!!!! DO U NTO CARE?????
prOETSTT?????? U GOIGN????

Class: Dude, chill, that's on the other side of the world, nothing's gonna happen to *us*.

Teacher: OHMUGOD SELFLISH YOUTH!!!!!!

News: It could affect the climate for years.

Australians: Bullshit.

nuke testing goes wrong; shit goes down in Australia

Australians: Aw dang it. Surely the government won't leave us alone?

The government: lol

Seriously, it was so in-your-face preachy. I could just imagine the author being all **wink wink see what I did here???** every single time she tried to make a point.

"I don't know. I haven't seen the news. I've been at work.'

[...]

'Can't you look at it online, Dad?' Max asked. He looked genuinely puzzled.

Dad sighed. My phone beeped. Lucy? I got up to check. Dad pointed at my seat.

'Sit,' he said. 'Have dinner as a family and then look at your bloody phone.'"

//

"It's amazing how slowly time goes when you have no electricity. Several times I reached for the TV controller, forgetting we had no power. Kara had given Dad a plasma for his birthday. [...] It's funny how without something as simple as electricity it was completely useless – just a gaping, blank stare of black. Without electricity our house was a box of useless bits of moulded plastic and wiring."

(So much for showing and not telling, huh?)

//

"I couldn't remember the last time I had done washing-up. Before we got a dishwasher Max and I used to whine about having to do the washing-up and beg for a dishwasher. Mum would say that if we had a dishwasher we'd just whine about unpacking it and we were like 'No way!' But she was right, we did. Spoilt brats."

All of this is just too subtle.

I'm wondering what you're hinting at.

I skimmed through half of the book, not gonna lie. It was boring, badly written, boring, racist, unoriginal, BORING, misogynistic... all things colourful, as you can tell. Awful. Also boring.

There's *one* quote that I thought was really nice (and very sad, if you take in account the character's background), by a kid who'd been bullied (yeah, that's the background, the MC being one of the people who did the bullying because "OMG peer pressure is a bitch. But otherwise I'm like super innocent!!") his whole life:

"But how can you believe that a powerful God could let this happen?"

Noll hesitates, thinking. 'The bible constantly talks about how the world isn't the way God wants it to be and how believers will feel alien here, we will never feel at home because this isn't our home. And that has always resonated with me. Always.' He doesn't look directly at us (~~probably because you've treated him like shit yeah~~) as he speaks. 'God doesn't want this and... and I know that it won't be forever... and that is why I am clinging on to God. That's all it is –

clinging. There's no beauty in it, no eloquence. I'm not offering thoughtful articulate wise prayers every day. I'm screaming at Him to make it stop."

And that's about it, compliments wise.

The ending is disgusting. There's a plot twist and important characters die for melodramatic purposes (view spoiler). But not *the* most important ones, because effectively writing an MC's death is hard, and clearly this book is not on that kind of level.

I don't get the raving reviews. Go read *The Road* (that's mentioned in TSSH, btw, when it is so blatantly copying so many of its aspects) instead.

Trisha says

Late to the party with this one. Working on a presentation about spec fic. Knew this would be a contender.

It is.

Rebecca says

This book felt flat to me unfortunately. I really liked the concept, especially how real it could have been, but not so much the execution. A big thing for me was not liking the characters, as well as issues with pacing. It was very slow and then the ending seemed to come out of nowhere. It was quite jarring and unnecessary. I really did want to like this book but it didn't quite work out between us. Hopefully I have better luck with Zorn's other novel, *The Protected*.

I'd recommend this book to fans of *The Road* and *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. I wasn't a big fan of those books either personally, but I can imagine that readers who liked them would enjoy this.

Aussie bookworm says

Most of you know me well enough now, that you know I don't read books in male POV, I made an exception for this book for a couple of reasons, one it is written by a fellow Australian and two It seemed similar to *Tomorrow when the war began*, which was my favourite book.

The toughest question you could ask a reader like me is what is your favourite book? mostly because I read so many and fall in love with so many it is hard to pick a favourite. To be a favourite it has to invoke all my emotions, I shouldn't be able to put it down without a fight or the opposite that I can't bring myself to finish it because I don't want it to end. Most of all it needs to make me think long and hard after I finish reading, to take time to extract myself from the novel's world.

The Sky so Heavy by Claire Zorn ticked all these boxes, It is the most haunting, heartbreakingly and at time heart stopping book I have ever read. I stumbled upon *The Sky so Heavy* while doing my weekly stalk of publisher pages to see what new books were coming up, I was drawn immediately to the cover, while

nothing flashy It portrays a desolate and scary picture of what appears to be kids standing surrounded by bleakness. Straight away I needed this book, Thankfully Penguin Australia were nice enough to send me a copy for Review.

We meet Fin the protagonist while someone is screaming at him in another language pointing a gun to his head, a truly action packed start to the novel, after a few flashbacks we find that Finn has been left in charge of his younger brother Max, after the world goes to hell when someone sets off a Nuclear Bomb and plunges the world into a nuclear winter. We follow Finn and Max as they struggle to survive, Finn gets a bit paranoid about the snow falling worried that it may be radioactive, This instinct keeps his brother alive while others around him start to get sick and die. Food becomes Scarce and the government abandons the people hoping to keep a select few alive, Finn Teams up with other teenage survivors as they set off in hope of finding Finns mother in Sydney who might be able to save them.

Claire Zorn is not afraid to get to the nitty-gritty and makes you question what could you do to survive, how far could you be pushed and could you abandon what you believe is right in order to survive. I would never have thought about the government abandoning the majority of the population in a situation like this, how could someone in charge make that decision? to let women, children, elderly and men die of starvation and radiation to keep just a few alive, how do you make the decision of who is worthy to live and who should perish.

This book like John Marsden's Tomorrow series really strike a chord for me, because here in Australia we think we are safe, we don't go looking for trouble and we back up our allies when we are needed. To consider that a nuclear war elsewhere in the world would destroy so much for everyone, is terrifying, It leaves us, our little country trying to save itself or in the case of The sky so Heavy everyone for themselves. Most dystopias I read are usually set in places such as america or a made up-country after there were no more borders or countries left. Reading books that are set in your own country can really give you nightmares.

This is a brilliant piece of work that I would recommend to anyone who loves Apocalyptic tales of survival, especially Australian's as it hits so close to home. It is a Hauntingly beautiful tale about survival and how resilient the human spirit can be confronted with the unspeakable.

I cannot wait till the next book in the series.

Favourite Quotes

“isn't there some philosophy about how it's the arts that separate humans from animals?
Really? I thought it was not eating our young.”
? Claire Zorn, The Sky So Heavy

“It doesn't sound like a gunshot. But then if I've been shot in the head, my perception of these things is probably off.”
? Claire Zorn, The Sky So Heavy

“Do you want to walk for a bit? It's probably ridiculously dangerous, but YOLO and what not.”
? Claire Zorn, The Sky So Heavy

Mary says

I will start by saying that this is a brilliant debut novel and I am definitely going to check out anything else that Claire Zorn releases. This book was phenomenal. I read it in a day and I never felt the time pass. It grips you from the very first sentence and it holds you there until the very last. Amazing story telling, compelling characters, fast paced plot. Everything worked for me in this book. Every single thing.

The book follows Fin, a seventeen year old boy, faced with the responsibility of taking care of his twelve year old brother and find his parents, after a nuclear test goes wrong (was it an accident though?) and the world is thrown into a nuclear winter - temperatures drop, the sun is clouded, there's huge exposure to radiation, the food is scarce.

First of all, this book scared the hell out of me. It's not a horror novel, by any definition, but it's more scary than any horror novel I've ever read. Why? Because it deals with something that could happen. It's not supernatural, it's not far fetched, it could actually happen. Nuclear war can start tomorrow, given the tensions that are pretty much everywhere in the world right now and the nuclear arsenal that many countries possess. I had a constant feeling of unease throughout the whole book. I felt it deep in my gut and the possibility of a fate like the characters' scared me a lot. I constantly asked myself: what would I do? How would I react? Could I survive? Who would I trust? Claire Zorn manages to masterfully capture and describe human nature: people driven to violence, people who wouldn't hurt a fly, but who, in desperate circumstances, when hunger threatens them, resort to unspeakable things. It's also a statement to our dependence on technology. Without electricity, internet, television, we would be thrown into a world of unknowns. We're no longer used to information travelling any other way and we rely so much on these things that we'd have no idea what to do with ourselves if they suddenly disappeared. Same goes for everything we take as granted: coffee, a hot shower, freaking soap. We don't appreciate the things we have as much as we should.

The desperation, the fear, the confusion seeps through every page. More so because we see everything through the eyes of someone who isn't an adult, who is still a kid and who has no one to turn to. The people supposed to protect him are not there and he is forced to make decisions and to survive. Like Fin says a lot of times, the central idea is this one: "I don't know". We don't know if they'll survive, if there's going to be a tomorrow, if their parents are alive, if they'll be able to figure out what to do. We don't know.

The characters are beautifully written. They're real, they're believable, their reactions are spot on. You instantly form a bond and you feel for them so much. You want them to be okay. It's been a while since I felt this sort of connection with characters in a book.

I cannot stress enough the impact that this book had on me. I'm still thinking about it days after I finished it and the uneasy feeling is still there. The ending is left open and I love that. I love that the fate of the characters isn't black or white and it's left open to interpretation. Read this book. It's absolutely amazing and you will not regret it. Just read it.

Favourite quotes:

"No one has the capacity to disappoint us like our loved ones."

"The night sky is a void, no light, no stars. We are lost to the universe. We can't see out. I wonder if anyone can see in."

“People will try to hold on when their world starts to tilt, they will grab onto whatever is in reach.”

★★★★★

To everyone who got this far, thank you for reading and have a wonderful day! Also, feel free to share your thoughts, comment or tell me anything :)

Sam says

I don't know what I was expecting when I started this book, I read Claire Zorn's other book "The Protected" before reading this so I know how amazing her writing is. Because of this I didn't bother even reading the blurb on the back, I just started.

I was and still am completely blown away! I can't even begin to imagine how I would survive the way the characters did in this book. While sitting and reading I couldn't help feeling hungry, I made sure I tasted every last piece of the chocolate bar I was eating, just thinking it could be my last one forever!

If you're looking for a survival novel with lots of gun fighting and action, then this isn't the book for you. It's wonderful in a different way, it quietly moves you and gets in your head with the decisions the characters have to make and the gritty realistic situations they are in. You forget that they are only teenagers, and have no parents to help them out or be there to support them. Now thinking about it, the parents in "The Protected" were also flawed like the ones in this book too.

Reading the last 30 pages rips your heart out, but at least in the end you feel hopeful. I've read reviews where people say that they want a sequel, but I don't think my emotions could handle a sequel. I want to leave it where I believe they will make it out and be safe until the world starts to right itself again.

Jabiz Raisdana says

I really liked this one. It starts off with a bang. Love, adventure, swearing and yes post-nuclear chaos, but then it slows down. Way down and forces the reader to trudge their way through long plodding plot points- while the characters and the mood of this scary winter build. The plot picks back up and the ending is satisfying.

This not a fast moving book, but there are little gems tucked into the prose and deals with the morality of man in the absence of law. Deals with some interesting things like ethics, god and more. Well written and all around solid. Feels more real than books like Divergent, and doesn't play with the same rules of dystopian teen novels. It was a breath of fresh air. Take a chance on this one and be patient, you might learn a few things.

Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

The day begins like any other day for seventeen-year-old Findlay. Breakfast with his younger brother, Max, and stepmother Kara; catching the bus to school with Lucy Tenningworth; a lecture on social responsibility

from his English teacher, Mr Effrez, who encourages the class to skip school the next day to attend a protest against nuclear tests; and studying with Lucy in the library after school.

But the day ends anything but normally. His mother, who works for the government consulting on disaster response management, calls and tells him to go to the supermarket and get as much non-perishable food and bottled water as he can carry and get home. The nuclear tests in Asia have gone ahead and all they know is that the north and Gobi Desert have been hit. Entire countries have been wiped out. There's no video feed from the area, no survivors to say what's happened, but it won't be long before the fallout covers the globe.

At home, Fin's uptight, alpha father is unconvinced of any real danger, and conversation quickly degenerates into an argument which sees Kara leaving for her mother's place and their father following without a thought for his kids. They never return. Fin and Max are on their own as dirty grey snow begins to fall, the power is off and the roads are icy. The phones aren't working, there's no communication from the government, but Fin isn't taking any chances and warns his neighbour not to let her kids play in the snow.

Fin's only idea is to find his mum. After months of living on canned beans and rice and sleeping in front of the fire, the food is running out, they're burning the furniture and then books to stay warm, and it's clear they've been abandoned by the government. If he's going to go out into that now-dangerous, unknown world, it has to be now, before things get worse. With his brother and two friends, Fin embarks on a trip from the Blue Mountains to Sydney in the hope of finding his mother at the heart of whatever command is left, helping to plan the country's response to this disaster.

Leaving town opens their eyes to the full reality of what has happened, and what is being done - or not. Getting into the heart of Sydney is no easy feat, but Fin is determined, if not for himself than for his little brother. Nothing about his world is the same, new rules apply, and death is always just a step around the corner.

I love Apocalyptic stories like this and have read a fair few. This is easily one of my favourites. It's not that it's terribly original - apocalyptic novels usually follow one of a bare few plot structures, since you need to stick to a realistic scenario to make it work. And it's not that it's free of clichés, either: there are plenty of those. But the writing just flows so naturally; Fin is a great character and carries the narration and the story so well; the story has excitement and danger and unpredictability while maintaining realism, making the tension far stronger because of it; and it doesn't become bogged down in trite teenage drama or romance. There's a romantic angle, between Fin and Lucy, but it doesn't take over the story like to many YA novels these days.

In fact, this was easily one of the best YA Speculative Fiction-Apocalyptic novels I've read, right up there with *Tomorrow When the War Began*, for instance. It's miles above and beyond the interminably dull *Life as We Knew It*, and spoke to me much more strongly even than some adult apocalyptic novels, like *The Age of Miracles*. It's not comparable to McCormac's *The Road* in terms of writing or story, it doesn't have that quality of utter bleakness, but as far as great apocalyptic stories go, it's the details that make both *The Road* and *The Sky So Heavy* work - the details and the grittiness. *The Sky So Heavy* has such a strong sense of realism and tension and Zorn's writing brings Fin's story so vividly to life, that while reading it I had to look out the window from time to time to remind - and reassure - myself that it hadn't actually happened. It was confronting, even nail-bitingly tense at times, and while you know Fin survives, you don't know what he'll lose in the process - or whether he'll survive in the long run.

This is more than just an end-of-the-world Young Adult novel, though. It also raises some interesting and highly relevant political themes. The nuclear testing scenario seems, at first, almost old-fashioned - the Cold

War has ended, after all. But thanks to North Korea, it's been very much in the spotlight again in recent years. Zorn doesn't say what country in Asia set off bombs, but it's implied that it's North Korea. Closer to home, the disaster raises an ugly truth: an internal Us versus Them prejudice - not along race lines, as you might imagine with Australia's high Asian population, but along class lines. Who is dispensable, who is worth saving? Not only the country and rural towns are left for dead, but the outer suburbs of the major cities as well. There is only so much food, and anyone considered valuable is brought to the city centre by the army. Everyone else is left to slowly die.

Fin comes face-to-face with this new, heartless reality, and how people justify it to themselves. Fin himself has to face his decision to steal food from another person, and putting the hero of the story into that position adds depth to the realism of the story. The good guy isn't perfect, he's just human. It makes it harder to condemn the people in the city centres who are still receiving handouts of food from the army, who turn on people from outside the fence for stealing *their* food. Living and surviving is far from black-and-white, and Zorn's strength lies in her ability to present different perspectives and no clear answer with understated clarity.

I did mention that this isn't an original story or plot: an end-of-the-world situation, a survivor who bands together with other survivors, embarking on a journey in the *hope* of a positive outcome, having to make life-or-death decisions of the kind that affect others, and, of course, there's no real end in sight. An apocalyptic disaster doesn't just resolve itself or go away in a few weeks, like Fin's dad arrogantly declares it will. As for the clichés, the main one is the character of Noll, or Arnold Wang, the lone Asian misfit at school who is taunted but almost never reacts, who turns out to be a solid companion as well as a prosaic, thoughtful young man who makes them face their own consciences. It is the school-outcast-turned-friend that will be familiar to readers, but I love what Zorn did with Noll's character. She doesn't change him, but gives Fin a chance to realise how petty and mean they'd been at school. It's a nice subtle way of reminding teens that bullying others is, well, stupid. The person you bully today may be in the position to save your life tomorrow, and are you worth saving? (We're not talking apocalypses here, but any situation in which you'd need help.)

In a way, the genre itself will always shape the general plot of an apocalyptic story, because it will always have to follow a certain pattern. It's what you do with that structure, those clichés, that make each story different from the others. Zorn's debut novel is an excellent addition to the canon, a great, exciting and nicely thought-provoking story for teens and equally engaging to adult readers. I read this as a stand-alone novel, and I hope it remains so: while there's room for a sequel, I love the open-endedness of the ending, and letting a sense of hope linger in the air like the echo of a dying song. My interest in apocalyptic stories tends to wane if they're drawn out too long, because it just becomes about death and more death, and it's hard to make room for growth and hope in that. I'm happy with this as a standalone novel - I'm not even going to complain about the use of present tense - and I highly recommend it to readers who enjoy survival adventure stories, stories about the heart of humanity and the lengths we are willing to go to preserve human life on this planet. Truly an excellent achievement in the genre.
