



Nightsiders

Sue Isle , Alisa Krasnostein (editor)

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In a future world of extreme climate change, Perth, Western Australia's capital city, has been abandoned. Most people were evacuated to the East by the late '30s and organised infrastructure and services have gone.

A few thousand obstinate and independent souls cling to the city and to the southern towns. Living mostly by night to endure the fierce temperatures, they are creating a new culture in defiance of official expectations. A teenage girl stolen from her family as a child; a troupe of street actors who affect their new culture with memories of the old; a boy born into the wrong body; and a teacher who is pushed into the role of guide tell the story of The Nightside.

Nightsiders Details

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From Reader Review **Nightsiders** for online ebook

Tsana Dolichva says

Nightsiders by Sue Isles is a collection of four short stories set in the same world. It is part of Twelfth Planet Press's Twelve Planets series, twelve collections which are showcasing the work of twelve Australian female authors. I believe it's the only one so far to be entirely science fictional (that said, the only other I've read is Love and Romanpunk by Tansy Rayner Roberts -- an excellent blend of Roman mythology, the past and the future -- and I'm not sure what's planned for the rest of the series).

Nightsiders is set in Western Australia, in and around Perth. I want to say it's post-apocalyptic, but that's not quite true. It seems part local apocalypse, part generalised catastrophic climate change. The Australian climate has changed so that the west coast is no longer particularly habitable, with hints at the start that things are better in the east. The former city of Perth is now generally referred to as Nightside, because the people living there have turned nocturnal, seeking shelter during the heat of the day and going about their business in the marginally cooler nights.

A few words on each of the stories:

The Painted Girl

13 year old girl has been with walking with an older woman (who isn't her mother) as long as she remembers. One day, her life abruptly changes and she learns there's more to it than she'd realised.

The Nation of the Night

Ash, 17 year old a trans boy, goes east for an operation. The story is mostly about the stark differences between the parched west and the drowning east. He quickly learns that life is far from perfect in Melbourne, even if they still have hospitals and infrastructure. In Nightside (aka Perth), everyone helps their neighbours, in Melbourne, the infrastructure is overcrowded and they're trying to keep out as many surplus people as they can manage.

Paper Dragons

Some of the kids in Nightside put on a play based on some old TV scripts they found in an abandoned home. Turns out it's a soap about the trivialities of teenage life as in our time. Nightside's entire population of old folk (who remember life before the bombings and the evacuation) turn out to watch.

The Schoolteacher's Tale

This was my favourite story. Mostly, I think, because it filled in some of the gaps left by the other stories with teenage protagonists who didn't know life before Nightside. The titular schoolteacher is a 70 year old woman who had been mentioned as a key figure in the lives of the characters in the previous two stories. We are exposed to some of her reminiscences of how much the world has changed and, through the story, we learn a bit of where Nightside is headed in the future.

It sort of feels strange that I can summarise each of the stories in a few sentences but barely even touch on what the stories are really about. Partly this is avoiding spoilers, and partly because there are some themes and ideas that run through all four stories which are hard to pin down to just one of them.

An idea that runs through all the stories (though features the most in the first one) is that of the Drainers. They are a group of people with a genetic mutation that gives them a tolerance for the harsh sun and helps them go a bit longer between sips of water. They come out during the day when everyone else is sleeping, and hide in caves and drains (hence the name, I suppose) at night. There are stories of them eating people or draining their blood and, because they move about when everyone else is sleeping, they're regarded almost as reverse vampires, a notion which appealed to me.

All the children protagonists have adapted better to life in Nightside than the adults. They have good night vision (and poor day vision) and, of course, they are used to the only life they have ever known. One theme that ran heavily through the first three stories is that of abandonment. In the two middle stories, the children were abandoned by parents who went east during the evacuation. There's a heavy implication that this happened to almost all of the children of Nightside, with some of the remaining adults acting as foster parents to many of them. It sort of felt a bit much. Of course, the children that weren't abandoned when their parents went east wouldn't have still been around. But really, children are pretty much top of the list of things parents take with them when leaving a war zone. Where are the parents that stayed behind with children? Where are the children whose parents were killed rather than left? I appreciate that the theme of abandonment fits in with the greater theme of Nightside being abandoned by its former inhabitants and the rest of the country, but it felt a little bit lopsided by the time I got to the end.

On a happier note, this was a collection full of strong and well drawn female characters. With the exception of Ash (trans) in the second story, all the protagonists were female. There was also a good balance of male and female secondary/background characters, which is always nice to see.

To a small degree, the setting put me in mind of Daughters of Moab by Kim Westwood, but the writing style was very different and thematically the setting and the idea of adaptation to a hostile environment were the only things the two have in common.

Overall, I found Nightsiders an interesting read.

Rating 4 / 5 stars

Katharine (Ventureadlaxre) says

This is written for Journey Through Twelve Planets reading challenge.

Nightsiders is the first book in the Twelve Planets series, released by Twelfth Planet Press, which showcase the talent of female Australian authors. There is now to be a thirteenth in the series, but that's a review for another time. The brief given to authors was to write 4 short stories of up to 40,000 words in total. The stories could be separate, discrete narratives or linked through character, setting or theme.

This collection contains four short stories that leave you desperately waiting for more - I'm still hoping there'll be a novel so we can see more of the characters and Sue's take on dystopian Australia. Set in and around Perth specifically, we see the devastating effects of climate change with a hint of the apocalypse. The

people who have remained in the area generally come out only at night when the weather is more manageable - almost as though Coober Pedy has spread somewhat, and we see the generational influences this has had with their vision (better at night, weakened by strong sunlight).

There are hints that not all of Australia is like this - as always, things are better in the East, as we (who aren't from there) are always hearing (being from the North, I completely understand - it's enough to get a chip on your shoulder.)

As others have commented, it's hard to review short stories themselves as, being short, you don't want to give too much of the plot and certainly not the ending away - which is often what also makes it clever. Mostly what ties these together and then exploring different sections in each of the shorts is what makes this engaging. We want to see more of an Australia that has been through a war and damaged by falling bombs - we're past that horror and trying to rebuild after that, even with so many people having left. We see the stubborn, fiercely independent streak that Western Australians are famous for, through their generations of farming and being so very remote from the rest of Australia where you do just have to carry on, regardless.

This is a very, very good and strong start to the Twelfth Planets collection.

The Painted Girl

Kyra and Nerina run into the city to escape a fire (something rural people know the true terror of), and as it's Kyra's first time there, she's a little excited under the fear to see the place Nerina has told her stories of - of a time when civilisation existed. Yet as though fire isn't enough to contend with, Kyra soon has other worries. At the end of the day there is only survival and we see what lengths people are willing to go to, and it leaves us wondering what we would do if in their place.

Nation of the Night

Ash travels to Melbourne to correct his body, this shows how difficult it would be to be transgendered without resources or medical assistance - as if it isn't hard enough here and now in our time. He has an understanding friend who used to be a teacher and now curates a library, who helps bridge him towards where he needs to go and what he needs to feel right. In this we see the stark difference between Melbourne where things are 'better' in the Australia we've become in this dystopian land, and yet also what has made Perth (aka Nightside) a decent place to be - a place so hard to survive in, people always help each other where they can.

Paper Dragons

Written in first person (as is the previous Nation of the Night story) we have Itch, Shari, who put on a play with a gang of others. The play reminds the older generation of what they've lost and what they want to leave sleeping, and it also provides trouble for the younger generation who don't know what a lot of the things referenced in the play are... but really, it also shows how the arts are important to mental health and having fun, something that remains important even when everything else is lost. Much like part of the novel Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel.

The Schoolteacher's Tale

Shari again, engaged to be married now and a little older than we saw her previously, appeals to the much mentioned Ellen Wakeling who has been previously called Old Wakey and as the teacher, wanting her to be

present when Shari is married. As the oldest person in Nightside who we meet, she's appropriately grouchy yet intelligent and well spoken, having seen it all.

With this story, we end with hope.

Mark Webb says

Nightsiders by Sue Isle is one of the Twelve Planets series published by Twelfth Planet Press (made up of 12 boutique collections of stories by Australian writers). It is made up of four shorter stories, including:

The Painted Girl

Nation of the Night

Paper Dragons

The Schoolteacher's Tale

I've not read any of Ms Isle's work before and quite enjoyed this short volume (138 pages in total). All four stories are related and set in a future where the western seaboard of Australia has been abandoned including the world's most isolated capital city, Perth. Climate change and some kind of terrorism have reduced Western Australia to a wasteland, where only a small number of people who didn't participate in the evacuation remain. Post apocalyptic is probably not the right phrase to describe the world - it seems as though things ended with a whimper not an apocalyptic bang. Still, for all intents and purposes the stories are set in a Mad Max style world.

The stories represented an interesting exploration of what amounts to a small civilisation adapting itself to a radically new environment and what that means for their way of life. Old knowledge and teaching is slowly being lost. Children are adjusting to the new world they find themselves in. I liked the setting and the themes of the stories were strong.

The Painted Girl describes life in this new world through the eyes of a young girl (Kyra) as she enters Perth after living an itinerant life moving between inland camps. The story was an excellent way to introduce the "rules" of life in Perth. This introductory element was woven in well with a strong story in its own right, with Kyra learning some unpleasant truths about her own life and existence, and an interesting exploration of tribalism and how easily people can switch to a harsh set of rules when survival is at stake.

Nation of the Night moves us onto a different character, Ash. We take for granted some of the medical marvels of the 21st century, so reading about Ash's attempts to have gender reassignment surgery when such things are out of reach was compelling. It was a good way of exploring the wider world outside of Perth, with Ash travelling to Melbourne for the operation. It seems as if the eastern seaboard is in as much trouble as the west, albeit trouble of a different nature. Overcrowding, strained services - even New Zealanders aren't allowed to use the welfare system! I thought this story oriented the reader in the world a lot better, and provided good broader context for the Perth settings. Ash's feelings about his own gender are well described and it makes for a powerful story.

Paper Dragons gives more insight into the Nightsider world, from the perspective of young people who have grown up not really knowing anything else. I'm not sure I can get behind the concept of a TV soap opera script having the power to stir the apathetic masses to action, but I thought the description of how children adapt to their environment to be very well realised. There starts to be some continuity of characters in this

story, with Ash in particular making an appearance.

The last story, *The Schoolteacher's Tale*, is from the point of view of an old schoolteacher (Ellen) who remembers the time before the evacuation and is watching the world slipping away from her. There are some strong messages around reconciliation with the various indigenous tribes that inhabit the land around Perth, as well as Ellen coming to terms with the fact that the education she is trying to give to children is not relevant in the harsh new world that they live in. In Ellen there is a connection to our present, and it helps bring the world into much sharper relief. I thought that Ms Isle did an excellent job slowly clarifying the world over the course of the four stories, from the view of an uncomprehending child at the start to Ellen's modern perspective at the end.

As I've mentioned in other reviews, I like speculative fiction stories set solidly in an Australian context and combined with some well fleshed out characters. This book ticks all those boxes and I certainly recommend it!

Ann Schwader says

Disclaimer: I've known Sue Isle for a couple of decades now. At least. However, I've never read much of her post-apocalypse Perth (Perthapocalypse?) fiction before -- and I certainly didn't expect it to be as lovely and haunting as this slender collection is.

Set in a climate-changed future where the western coast of Australia has become a disaster area, these stories offer four different glimpses of those who remain: a child being sold as a trade item, a boy whose body doesn't match his mind, a young scrounger involved with a groundbreaking theater troupe, and a schoolteacher who may have already outlived the world she knew. All are now Nightsiders -- residents of Perth who evade the horrific temperatures and drought by living their very independent lives by night and hiding out/sleeping during the day.

This is excellent worldbuilding SF, but don't look for violent action here. What the reader gets instead is detailed, thoughtful, and lyrically written prose about a quite believable future none of us would choose to live in.

From the viewpoints of those denied that choice.

Omega Howell says

I loved this post apocalyptic setting with a distinctly Australian feel.. So often we are used to America or Ye olde England being the background to our stories - even the fantasy ones.. This was refreshing. The characters were fantastic and the stories were compelling, even though they were more "everyday" than you might expect from this genre. A quick, easy read and well worn the time.

Narrelle says

As a former resident of Perth and current resident of Melbourne it was a double pleasure to read *Nightsiders*, a collection of post-apocalyptic stories set after the environmental, military and social consequences of severe climate change. The connected stories examine the new, marginal society and carefully weave their way to a new, potentially more hopeful future. The characters are wonderfully drawn and the parched environment in which they live made me thirsty to read it. another gem from the Twelve Planets series from Twelfth Planet Press. (disclaimer: a collection of my own is forthcoming in this series. I'm so proud and honoured to be in such excellent company!)

Sally906 says

This book is the first volume in the Twelfth Planet Press's series of short collections by Australian female authors. The instructions given to each of the authors was to write 4 short stories of up to 40,000 words in total. This collection is set in the near future in Perth. Because of global warming the west coast of Australia has been evacuated to the east coast and all the infrastructure and services have long gone. Still, a few thousand people remain, trying to stay alive anyway they can.

The Painted Girl – this story is set around a young girl who has been stolen from her parents while a baby. This story sets the reader up for the lengths that people have gone to in order to survive the harsh conditions.

Nation of the Night – A young man has been born in a woman's body, the lengths he has to go to in order to have his sex change, and gives us a glimpse of life in the rest of Australia

Paper Dragons – back to Perth and this time we see life through an acting troupe who put on a play about how life was before the evacuation.

The Schoolteacher's Tale – This was my least favourite story, two characters from the troupe decide to marry and live outside the city.

Overall, I didn't enjoy it quite as much as I did 'Love and Romanpunk' by Tansy Rayner Roberts but there are still 10 more in the series to go – so will work my way through all of them. For more information on the Twelve Planets series, visit: <http://www.twelfthplanetpress.com>

Stephanie says

Nightsiders collects four interwoven short stories, all set in a future Perth (the capital city of Western Australia). The city has been devastated by war and extreme climate change, most of its population left in the Evacuation. Those who remain survive by sleeping during the day and being active during the relatively cooler night. As a result, Perth is now known as the Nightside.

The stories in this collection are The Painted Girl, Nation of the Night, Paper Dragons and The Schoolteacher's Tale. Each will be discussed individually, and at the end of the review I will add my thoughts on the entire collection.

The Painted Girl

Our introduction to the Nightside comes in the form of Kyra, a thirteen-year old girl who has been travelling with an older woman, Nerina, for ten years. For the first time in their travelling, Nerina is taking Kyra to the Nightside. There, Kyra meets the titular painted girl, Alicia, and her people, the Drainers. Unlike most, the Drainers have the ability to walk during the heat of the day. Through this meeting, Kyra discovers truths about her own life, and is given a choice as to where she wants it to go next.

This story is a vivid introduction to the Nightside and its denizens. Kyra, as a young girl who remembers nothing other than travelling with Nerina, emphasises the wonder and the horror of what has become of one-time Perth. This is no utopia, but a place in which life is eeked out using whatever means possible.

In another author's hands, the Nightside could have remained a bleak place, the stories focused on the depravity and horror that people could stoop to in order to survive in such a changed world. But Isle gives us something very different: in Alicia and the Drainers, and in Kyra herself, there is hope. And importantly, Kyra is given a choice, after a life in which she has had little.

Nation of the Night

This story revolves around Ash, a seventeen-year-old resident of the Nightside. Ash is transgender, and seeks surgery and hormone therapy. With medical care in the Nightside limited or nonexistent, he seeks the closest thing he can find, his friend Professor Daniel. Pre-Evacuation, Daniel was a professor of mathematics, but now lives totally indoors, reliant on others to bring him water and food. Through Daniel, Ash secures a referral to a hospital in Melbourne, and travels East. There, he finds Melbourne as changed as Perth, but in different ways. The city is overcrowded, and they are trying to keep out as many people as possible.

Again, this story could have hopelessly bleak. Both cities have fallen apart, and in both, people are struggling. The fact that, even in this kind of world, Ash finds acceptance and the treatment he needs, is heartening, and like Kyra being given a choice in The Painted Girl, a sign that humanity is not entirely lost.

Paper Dragons

In this story, we are back in the Nightside, following a teenager, Shani, who we first see scrounging in the remains of old house, along with her friend Ichiro (Itch). This is part of what people of the Nightside do to survive. On this trip, they find useful items such as razors, but Itch also finds the sheets of what he believes to be a play. They bring the play to Tom Roper, who runs the Player's Troupe. They discover that what they have found is a screenplay from a pre-Evacuation soapie revolving around teenagers, and seek to put it on as a play. When they do, things in the Nightside begin to change.

This is a story of expansion: of the view we are given of the Nightside and how those born pre- and post-Evacuation have coped with the changes to the city. Ash is here as one of the players in the Troupe, returned from his trip over East and wiser for it.

This story reads almost as an elegy for the lost world. It is a tribute to the power of stories and art (even those stories from a soap opera) and the way they can spark change.

The Schoolteacher's Tale

The final story centres around Miss Wakeling, the oldest person in the Nightside and schoolteacher to the young people. She is one of the few Elders who leave their houses, and on this occasion we see her – reluctantly – take a longer journey out to the Edge to celebrate the wedding of Shani and Ichiro (who we first met in Paper Dragons).

Miss Wakeling's point of view gives a different insight to that of the younger protagonists of the other stories. She refers to the city mostly still as Perth, and recognises many old landmarks and place names as they travel.

Like Kyra in the first story, Miss Wakeling is given a choice by the Aboriginal Elders she finds attending the wedding. It is this choice that will begin to lead the Nightside and its people into the future.

In conclusion

Nightsiders was always going to be a collection I was drawn to. I love the idea of characters dealing with a dystopia, and setting such a story in my home city of Perth? I'm sold immediately.

I loved the threads that twine through these stories. There are characters who appear again and again – Ash, Professor Daniel, Shani and Itch, Miss Wakeling – which really emphasises the smallness of the population which remains in the Nightside. Fascinating, too, are the little hints of how people are biologically beginning to change. Many of the children born into the Nightside have better night vision than the Elders, and the Drainers are known to have some kind of mutation that lets them walk during the heat of the day. Merging all of these things, and the knowledge of the old and new Nightside, as well as that of the Aboriginals still walking on country, has the potential to lead to a new kind of humanity. With the hints that the readers are given about the chaos in the rest of Australia, it is easy to see the once-abandoned Perth giving rise to a place that will lead the country entire into the new world.

There is much diversity in this world, also. People of colour are represented, along with diverse gender identity. More importantly, this also seems to be a world which doesn't see the difference at all – everyone is simply accepted for who and what they are.

It should also be noted that the majority of the protagonists were female, and of diverse age. And, unlike in many other dystopias, all of these females are given agency, and there is no sexual assault or rape used as a plot device. All of these women are ultimately capable of looking after themselves and of each other.

The cover design by Amanda Rainey is, as always, outstanding, and the quality of the print book is high.

As the first collection in the Twelve Planets, *Nightsiders* sets a very high bar for the project, and is highly recommended, even if you're someone who doesn't usually read dystopias.

Marg says

I hadn't read anything by Sue Isle before but knew as soon as I heard what the setting was that I wanted to read this collection of four short stories, one of which (Paper Dragons) had previously been published. The collection is predominantly set in the city where I was born, the city where most of my relatives still live, the city I visit quite regularly - Perth in Western Australia. This Perth however is only barely recognisable as the city I love to visit.

The book is set in the near future in a world where there has been dramatic climatic change in addition to bombings that have destroyed much of the infrastructure and housing. The temperatures soar during the day, forcing the few hardy souls who remain to take shelter where ever they can find it, and water is scarce. Most of the activity happens at night, hence the community being known as the Nightside. Most people have been evacuated to the East, and for the most part those who have been left behind have been forgotten.

The first story in the collection is The Painted Girl. The main character is Kyra, a young girl who travels with Nerina. They have travelled from place to place always being careful to behave appropriately as they travel through other groups areas and never to outstay their welcome. For the first time they that Kyra can remember, they are headed into the city proper. This story has familiar elements - the isolation you feel coming into an established community and not knowing how to act, a coming of age tale where getting to know yourself is made harder by the fact that you are not who you thought you were at all, but the harshness of the environment sandblasts these providing a rawness that is quite affecting.

The second story is Nation of the Night, and this is the story that is for me the lynch pin of the collection. The main character of the story is Ash, a young man born into a female body, and desperate for the gender reassignment surgery that will help him be the young man he feels himself to be. He has no choice but to head East to Melbourne for his operation. Whilst there are people that Ash meets in Melbourne that are welcoming to him as an outsider, the authorities or not. The city that I live in now is portrayed as overcrowded with refugees and suffering from its own climactic issues, different from those faced in Perth, but with its own devastating implications for those who live in this city. As well as looking at the identity issues for Ash, there is also discussion of the fate of refugees in the city and the difficulties that they face like being able to provide and educate their families, as well as dangers facing those who don't belong. To me, this felt like a political statement given the emotional reactions that people have to the refugee issue, not only in Australia, but also in other places around the world.

The third story in the collection, Paper Dragons, is the one that worked least well for me, not so much because of the story itself but because of what we had already learned about the world. This story focused again on the younger members of the group with Ash appearing again within the narrative. I did think about using the word tribe rather than group but hesitated to do so, but there is almost a tribal feel to the group with all the members having prescribed duties. I think that the tribal element really comes to the fore in the fourth story, but more on that later. When on a mission to search through some of the dwellings for anything that might be of use to the group, Itch and Shani find some papers, which turn out to be a manuscript. When the troupe of Players talk of performing the play, there is opposition from within the group as they fear that some of the memories of the past may be awakened and cause new ideas to be born that may cause changes that some within the group. The power of entertainment to provoke discussion and change is an interesting concept to explore in this setting.

Continuing with the idea of change and growth, the fourth story is also one I found very touching. In The Schoolteacher's Tale, Ellen Wakeling (the teacher of the title and oldest member of the group) is asked to perform the function of elder at an assembly to be held outside of the time and in conjunction with a tribe of native Australians. Whilst the vast majority of the people who live in this Perth stay close to the city centre, a few hardy souls have been spreading out into the surrounding areas, and now, there is a chance to move out

to the Edge. For Ellen the trip to the Edge is a journey that forces her to think about the way that the people left behind in the colony have learned the skills that they need to survive and whether it is time for new ways to be examined and put into place. In some ways the expansion into the surrounding areas, and the meeting up with the Aboriginal communities felt a bit like a chance for recolonisation this time in partnership rather than through conflict.

Part of the reason I think that this story affected me as much as it did was that I recognised the journey that Ellen took, out through Mt Lawley, along the railway line (no longer in use in this book), out past the Peninsula hotel, as this is the route that I take most times I go to Perth and visit my family.

This book and Love and Romanpunk are completely different books, connected only in that they have been published as part of the Twelve Planets series, but they were both really good reads, and I can't wait for the next one to arrive in my mailbox in the next few weeks. I will definitely be ordering the future releases in the series and can't wait to see where I am taken next.

Alexandra says

Nightsiders is the first anthology of the Twelve Planets series, a set of twelve collections being put out by Alisa Krasnostein at Twelfth Planet Press. Each of the collections will consist of four short stories. This one, by Sue Isle, features stories that all deal with the same place and similar issues: a near-future Perth, a city ruined by an almost complete lack of water, infrastructure damaged by bombs some time ago, and largely deserted in the Evacuation.

It should be said up front that I am friends with the editor, Alisa, although I do not know the author.

As a package, this is a nice little book. It's 138 pages of narrative (with a short introduction from Marianne de Pierres), and given that's split over four stories it's the sort of book you can consume in one sitting or over several. I'm not a huge fan of the colour, but it is certainly appropriate given how much time is spent in the stories talking about the near-desert nature of Perth.

The first story is "The Painted Girl," and follows Kyra and Nerina as they come into the city for the first time ever in Kyra's experience; they've been wandering from place to place, never setting down roots. Kyra ends up with the Drainers, a name which is never fully explained, and learns something of the ways of this weird new place she's been brought to. As an opening to the collection it works well, because the reader too is new to this near-future city, and has to come to grips with the lengths people go to to get and conserve water, the lack of basic amenities, and the fundamental changes which have happened in Perth, of all places.

The title "Nation of the Night" does not reflect the nature of the second story in the slightest. However, the story itself is fascinating, and I think the strongest of the collection. It deals with multiple issues with an elegance that makes reading the prose very easy indeed. Here, we follow the experiences of Ash - biologically female, psychologically male - as he heads East for surgery to resolve his conflicted nature. In Melbourne - described as intimately and recognisably for me, a Melbournian, as I am sure Perth is for natives of that place - Ash discovers that things over that way aren't that much better, in many ways, than they are back home. The individuals Ash meets are vividly, if briefly, described, but it's really the landscape and geography that stand out in this story; the changes wrought on a city that has taken in millions of refugees are as stark as those wrought on the city from whence all but a few thousand have fled. The story is not without problems - for all the talk of how difficult it will be for Ash to get to and from Melbourne, it

feels quite easily achieved. However, as an investigation into gender identity, attitudes towards refugees, East/West relations in Australia, and the impact of climate change, this is a remarkable story.

Third comes "Paper Dragons," which initially appeared in the ezine Shiny, also produced by Krasnostein. For all that I know entertainment has been a basic, perhaps essential, part of human civilisation since the earliest examples we have, I still found it slightly unbelievable that a community struggling as much as the Perth one appears to be would be able and willing to support a troupe of players who appear to do little else but rehearse and perform. Perhaps I'm too much of a pragmatist. I enjoyed the new characters introduced here, and the fact that Ash reappears in a different role, but I also didn't really understand quite what the point overall was - of post-Evacuation teenagers staging an excerpt from a pre-Evac TV show, and its impact on the older people in the community. However, overall it allows yet more insight into how Perth society operates; the often brutally pragmatic choices that need to be made, and the suppression to some extent of 'finer feelings' that find at least a partial outlet in the theatre.

Finally, the collection closes with "The Schoolteacher's Tale." Here, a character referred to in other stories - Elizabeth Wakeling, teacher to generations of post-Evac Perth residents - gets a voice of her own. As a teacher myself, this story struck a chord with me, with its discussion of what learning would be necessary for generations growing up in a society like this. Elizabeth was delightfully curmudgeonly - as the oldest person in the area, and the only teacher, she's entitled to it - but also pragmatic and willing to be flexible. Appropriately, as the collection opened with a confused young woman entering Perth, this story closes the collection with a determined old woman leaving it, with clear and specific plans in mind.

Across the four stories Isle portrays a striking, not-quite post-apocalyptic world that's not quite believable, but not quite foreign enough to dismiss out of hand. The society she portrays in Perth is ethnically mixed, pragmatic, fiercely independent, and built on cunning. Most of those traits are ones that Western Australians would probably claim today, as well. I'm uncomfortable with the idea that the eastern seaboard would abandon the western so completely, but with Isle's portrayal of Melbourne it becomes all too possible. Overall, *Nightsiders* is an intriguing collection, and it left me wondering whether Isle plans to return to the world in a novel - it certainly feels like it would be sustainable. And if this is the standard of the rest of the *Twelve Planets* series, I cannot wait for the next eleven.

Katharine (Ventureadlaxre) says

Katharine is a judge for the Aurealis Awards. This review is the personal opinion of Katharine herself, and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of any judging panel, the judging coordinator or the Aurealis Awards management team.

~~To be safe, I won't be recording my review here until after the AA are over.~~

I wish there was more! The writing quality was astounding and I could easily visualise the scenes, especially occurring near where my mum's side of the family live rurally.

I would love to read a novel from this author, based around these events.

Ju Transcendancing says

Read as part of the reading challenge I'm helping to coordinate: A Journey Through the Twelve Planets. This is the first novel to be reviewed, my full review can be found on my blog The Conversationalist, but here is an excerpt:

There was so much to enjoy about these stories, diverse characters and situations, points of view, parallels to the present day that were nicely pointed. I loved that both Melbourne and Perth were so recognisable to me! I love that the apocalypse has already prompted adaptive changes from the inhabitants of Nightside – the children see better in the dark for example. There are so many women here and they are simply capable and interesting in their own way – even Nerina who is cast as perhaps the only unlikable character in the book. I almost didn't notice this because it just seemed so normal and comfortable to read – and then I remembered how rare that is. Also, I love that this is not a gritty story of horror-survival but one of massive change, but still with community at its heart. I just want to reiterate how much I'd love a novel from this world, it's so interesting and I want to spend more time here.

Ash says

Perth occupies a unique place in the Australian imagination. So far across the Nullarbor, so often left off any list to do with the other cities. It's always Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane--plus Canberra as the capital and Adelaide if you're lucky.

In Sue Isle's future, thanks to our old friend the apocalypse, Perth is even further away. In *Nightsiders*, our brief glimpse of Melbourne shows a community who know only a storied Perth, filled with strange creatures and inhospitable terrain. Across four stories, Isle shows us different aspects of the Nightside: its relationship with Aboriginal Australians, with the outside, with its own many internal facets.

Always the characters and their struggles ring so true, even when their world seems so far from our own. Always the stories balance light and dark in perfect measure. Always the writing makes you feel as if you are there, walking on the Nightside.

S.B. Wright says

Nightsiders was the first release in Twelfth Planet Press' Twelve Planets Series. A series that showcases 12 of Australia's top female speculative fiction writers.*

The brief given to authors was to write 4 short stories of up to 40,000 words in total. The stories could be separate, discrete narratives or linked through character, setting or theme.

I think the concept is a brilliant one. I have had the chance to sample authors I'd heard mentioned, but never read, discovered some authors I didn't know about and finally, gained an appreciation of the powerhouse of female speculative fiction writing that goes largely unnoticed.

But on with the Review

Sue Isle gives the reader 4 short stories set in a futuristic Australia on the brink of ecological and societal collapse. There's been a war and climate change has rendered the country drier and more dangerous than it is currently. Apart from one story, most of the action takes place in a futuristic Perth termed Nightside, as night the only time the majority of the population can get up and move around due to their sensitivity to heat and light.

Nightsiders is a bit of a mosaic, the stories are linked by setting and characters, though each varies in tone and subject matter to give you a distinct well rounded picture of a bleak future.

The Stories

I don't want to discuss the content in too much detail as I find with short fiction that it can rob the stories of some of their impact.

The Painted Girl - A teenage girl stolen from her family as a child

Paints a picture of what living outside the cities is like, what people are willing to do to survive and to profit.

Paper Dragons - a troupe of street actors who affect their new culture with memories of the old. (shortlisted for Aurealis Award for Best Young Adult Short Story, 2010)

I liked this story because it focused on the arts and what an important part story telling is to civilisation. I was briefly reminded of a scene in the movie Reign of Fire, where survivors act out the Empire Strikes back as a stage performance.

Nation of the Night - a boy born into the wrong body;

The only tale that takes place outside of Perth. Set in Melbourne with a Nightsider as a central character, it's a sympathetic portrayal of a transgender character in a near future dystopia where resources are scarce, our understanding of technology fading.

The Schoolteacher's Tale - a teacher who is pushed into the role of guide.

I like it when schoolteachers are central characters. When they are seen for the important service/role they provide. I found the tone of this story more hopeful than the others.

Summary

This collection tapped into my love of futuristic dystopian narratives that started probably with the Mad Max films, though you won't find petrol heads and spiked leather mutants here.

Isle provides us with a snapshot of a bleak future Australia, where everything we know has crumbled. It's a harsh world, but there are survivors and there is hope.

Nightsiders is refreshing and honest in a way that I think dystopian tales like Mad Max aren't -people get on

with their lives, those born into the new life know nothing else and feel no loss. We don't turn into gun toting maniacs**.

*I feel compelled to mention the quality of TPP products. Beautiful covers, wonderful binding. You feel like you are getting a top flight product – and you are.

**I still went and played Fallout 3 after reading it though.

Chris says

An interesting short story collection of a post-climate change Australia. I found that it was largely more concentrated on the world building than character or plot but still enjoyable for what it was.
