



COMES THE NIGHT

Written by ISOBELLE CARMODY

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 14–18 YEARS OLD (UPPER SECONDARY)

GENRE: Speculative Fiction; Dystopian; Science Fiction

THEMES: Fear, Control, Power, Love, Courage, Heroes, Politics, Environment, Government

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English
- Humanities and Social Sciences (History; Civics and Citizenship)

NOTES WRITTEN BY: Christina Wheeler

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INTRODUCTION

Set in 2070, *Comes the Night* portrays a dystopian Australia in which domed cities guard citizens from harmful environmental hazards while the government employs a range of high-tech security measures to safeguard its people. With this comes a distinct loss of privacy and agency; however, most seem willing to accept these restrictions in exchange for protection.

Speculating on the use of fear to control the masses, the story cleverly intertwines the complacency of surrendering to governmental policies with the media's role in swaying public perceptions. Questions are rarely asked, especially with watch drones and hubs tracking every move. The novel's protagonist, Will, becomes increasingly aware of such technology and the intrusion placed on him as a result.

Thought-provoking, intriguing and intense, the story slips between the everyday and the dreamscape, as Will discovers he is a dreamwalker with the ability to receive mysterious clues in the alternate dimension and enter the dreamscape of others. With themes of courage, love and heroism, *Comes The Night* shows how he comes to understand the importance of relationships, imagination, and of maintaining a mindset that questions and seeks clarity when anodyne slogans, such as 'the greater good', are used.

PLOT SUMMARY

Plagued by the death of his uncle, Will suffers from recurring nightmares and several unanswered questions. How did Adam die? Why did his mother choose her career over their family? And where is the kite, Lookfar, that Adam created for him before he died? Living with his poet father in domed Canberra and feeling smothered by his overprotective mother, Will finds refuge in his best friend Ender, whose brilliant twin sister Magda has been seconded to work on a top secret government project. Or has she?

Becoming increasingly sceptical of the government's tracking devices, Will sets about unravelling the cryptic clues revealed in his dreams. But the further he delves into the dreamscape, the closer to danger he comes.

In a gripping story about control, fear and power, Will must find the courage, imagination and strength to confront his nightmares, navigate myriad obstacles and defeat the Despoilers before it's too late.

Q&A WITH ISOBELLE CARMODY

What inspired you to write *Comes the Night*?

'I have been interested in the way politicians of all ilk have more and more tended to use fear as a weapon to shape the dreams and aspirations of people, largely to ensure their own power and political future.

What I was specifically interested in was the effect that a constant miasma of fear had on people.

What I noticed was that, being afraid, people's ideas and dreams shrank and withdrew into behaviours and attitudes connected to making themselves and those they care about safe. Their ability to think on a larger scale was therefore curtailed and shut down. When you are thinking about how to survive you are not open to big picture thinking or to thinking outside your own groups/countries, or indeed, of thinking about the future beyond your own lifetime.

I also wanted to explore the idea that imagination is a kind of ultimate freedom, because our minds cannot simply be spied upon in the real world. I am interested in how fear shuts the imagination down, and so our ability to imagine the world in different ways, and sometimes weaponizes our imagination as nightmares.'

In recent years you took on the mammoth task of completing a PhD. How have your academic studies informed your writing?

'My postgraduate research involved workshopping over most of a year with young people in remote rural parts of Queensland, as a way of exploring their ideas about the future of their towns. Their attitudes and ideas were fascinating and resulted in a collection called *My Future Town*. I was writing *Comes the Night* during that period, when I was working with those young people. I was struck again and again with their ability to dream and hope and imagine their way out of the constraints of safety imposed on them – my research showed that far from being attracted to and desiring manufactured or designed (safe/controllable) urban spaces, they were drawn to adventure, to finding the cracks and wild crannies where they could shape their own lives. I had to face the various constraints and limitations imposed upon me and these young people by the adult world – parents, teachers, government bodies, funding bodies, local council. I and they had to individually and sometimes jointly negotiate these requirements of the adult world, which seemed to me to arise at least in part from a need for control, and in part from the need to be and be seen to be compliant to rules imposed upon them.

Again and again I saw how their resilience and mine were shaped by our imagination, and a desire to risk ourselves in creative ways, and that imagination was a form of courage.'

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

ENGLISH

BEFORE READING

- Predict how Australia might function in the year 2070. How might the nation be governed? How might issues such as the climate and security influence public policies?
- In small groups, create your perfect society. How would it function and keep its citizens safe? How would it interact with other countries? What role would everyday citizens play in this society? What control would the government have over its population?

Part One – The Waking World

Discussion prompts:

- In what ways is the opening sentence of *Comes the Night* arresting? How has the author used imagery to hook readers?
- Why do you think Will wishes there was graffiti in Fyshwick? Why doesn't he have the courage to do some graffiti of his own? What does this share with us about his character?
- How would you feel to have watch drones systematically flying overhead to get 'random captures' of your daily activities (p4)? Why does this prompt Ender's motto 'Someone is always watching' (p4)? Is she paranoid, or are her comments justified? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- Ender's cleverness is the by-product of her mother taking the XD drug during pregnancy, designed to produce brilliant children. What side effects of this drug are apparent in Ender? We are told that she was never 'quenched' (p5). What happens when one is quenched? How is the threat of being quenched used to control citizens?
- Why does Will's uncle, Adam, prefer to do things 'old school' (p5)? What does he mean by this? What are the dangers of letting technology do all our thinking? How has artificial intelligence hampered our creative thinking processes?
- Klare sees the 'carpet of blue blossoms as a mess' (p7). What does this share with us about her character?
- We are told that 'Adam noticed everything. Not just poetic stuff like a spider web blowing in the wind, or an ancient bit of graffiti like Will's father would notice, but inside unspoken stuff too' (p9). How has Adam influenced Will? How are he and Will alike? How are they different? Why does Will wonder 'if he would spend the rest of his life being guided and cautioned by the internalised voice of his uncle' (p21)? After completing the novel, reflect on this question again.
- Explain the 'mysterious night illness' that Will suffered from as a child (p9).
- Why does Klare use the word 'sensitive' to describe Will? Why doesn't he like this (p9)? Why does he instead think of himself as a 'warrior' (p10)? Do you agree with him? Why?
- What is it about 'getting a good capture' with his fingercam that Will loves (p17)? What does this share with us about his character?

- Discuss Adam's fascination with Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin's design of pre-dome Canberra (see p17). How is their work used to synthesise story threads in *Comes the Night*?
- Why does Ender paint her face? What does this share with us about her character?
- Why, when Will says 'not everyone has the strength to put the good of the country ahead of the good of their family', does Klare tell him to stop being 'provocative' (p35)?
- What does Dr Bacchus see as holding Will back from '[taking] up the reins of his own life' (p40)? Why doesn't Will agree with him necessarily?
- Adam says that 'Klare lives with the most ferocious fear I have ever seen in a person' (p46). What does he mean by this? Why does Will disagree with this?
- Why is Will so keen to find Lookfar? How does the author use the kite to propel the storyline? Why is Lookfar referred to as though she is a living being?
- Why does Will find choosing a tertiary track for his future so difficult? Which of the available tracks would you choose? Why?
- Why does Will marvel 'that people would try to stop their government building domes' (p77), believing that 'dome-dwelling was obviously the only safe way to exist' (p78)? How do his opinions change as the story progresses? What prompts these changes?
- What are the dangers of Magda chatting with Scandians in the deepdark? Why is she so upset about Sebastian being conscripted?
- What does Will mean by 'whenever his mother was charming like this, she had a sledgehammer behind her back' (p91)?
- Why does Ender send a message saying, *Meet you in dreamland*?
- When Magda says, 'Adam to the downdeep went,' (p113) what were your initial thoughts?
- Explain the doubts that Will starts to have about hubs. Make predictions about the role of these hubs in the story. How does this make you feel towards virtual assistants such as Alexa and Siri?
- How does Will's attitude towards Magda change when she makes the connection between Lookfar and the brain interface tech that Sebastian had been working on?
- What does hypnopaedia or *sleep learning* have to do with the SRI and the recurring issues with sleep Will experiences?
- How and why does Will plan to use *lucid* dreaming?
- What is meant by the term *undermind*?
- Explain what is actually happening in Will's recurring nightmare sequences. What does it mean for Will that he is a dreamwalker?
- Make predictions about why Badsad has taken Magda away.
- Why does Will feel a 'stab of guilt' when glancing at the *Phantom* comic his mother buys him (p159)? How is the *Phantom* used throughout *Comes the Night*?
- Why do you think Ender and Will are having the same dream with different details? Why can Will 'travel into other people's dreamspaces' (p178)?
- What do you think is the purpose of the message on the back of the *Tech upgrade* receipt: *Better not let Olitron know you are using Lookfar for SRI business, Brother Fox* (p186)?
- If you lived in a dome complex, what would you miss?
- Why is Will reluctant to accept his changing feelings towards Ender?

- Discuss Will's dream in which he realises that 'asking why humans wanted power over other humans was a question people had been asking forever in books and films and poetry and philosophy... some people wanted power over others' (p206). Share books, films and poetry that address this theme.
- Why do you think First Nations territories sit outside the domes?

Part Two – The Dreamscape

Discussion prompts:

- At the start of Part Two, the old librarian, Vanetta, explains to Will that Despoilers are a danger 'to anyone who sleeps' (p260) and that they want 'power in the waking world' (p262). What comments about 'power at any costs' are being made in *Comes the Night*?
- What does Vanetta mean when she says, 'Grief is as infinite as love.' (p262)?
- Explain how Magda uses hypnagogia to safeguard herself and others.
- Explain why Adam created Lookfar. What does Will do with Lookfar that Adam never envisaged? Using the front cover as stimulus, explain how Lookfar is brought to life through Will's imagination.
- What prompts Will to no longer be 'willing to trust anything offered by a government that had been infiltrated by some sort of secret organisation with its own mysterious agenda' (p311)? How is this different from Will's previous acceptance of the government and its rules? How does this reflect his coming of age?
- Why does Will say that he loves Magda as well as Ender?

Learning Experiences:

- As you read, record the dystopian elements that give this text its edge. Create a glossary to explain what each of these are.
- Discuss the language features on p4 that create such a vivid sense of Fyshwick. Using this description, sketch what Will describes as 'contrasting bits of Fyshwick'. Why does he find joy in a 'garden of weeds inside a half-shell of brick'?
- Why does Adam create the Wilful Hunt? What are its rules (p8)? Create your own version of a Wilful Hunt for your classmates to follow.
- Create character portraits of Klare and Padraig. Use short excerpts from the text to illustrate your understanding. Why has Will chosen to stay in Canberra with his father rather than live in Sydney with his mother?
- Will says 'it always seemed to be an argument between the past and the future with his parents' (p40). Using evidence from the text, explain what he means.
- When watching the holo-documentary about Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin, Will discovers that 'Walter had designed his city to embody passionate ideals of equity and democracy and a deep regard for nature' (p75). With reference to this, view the design of Canberra as well as aerial images of the city. Discuss how the Griffins' design achieved these ideals. In addition, discuss whether they planned in accordance with Kahlil Gibran's poem quoted on p76.
- Make predictions about Lookfar's missing litesock and auxiliaries.
- What role does Meganti Crow play in *Comes the Night*? How would the text be different without her?

- Using the description of Lookfar in the form of a 'huge live bird', sketch how she appears in Will's dreamspace (see p295).
- Why do you think this book has been divided into two parts? Describe the essence of each part in a short summary.
- Discuss the use of figurative language throughout *Comes the Night*, and how this contributes to reader engagement. Examples include:
 - His mother would go on and on, pouring a truckload of words over his father p10
 - It opened its mouth in a snarl that revealed yellow teeth and a throat like a red tunnel, and razor tusks slid out either side of the beast's maw p12
 - The door swung open to reveal a swirling, world-swallowing mist p16
 - She shouted something as she sped away, the meaningless shriek of a bird p21
 - His irritation coiled into dislike p34
 - The reasoning fit together like Lego p41
 - The mirror-glass towers looked surreal and gorgeous, surrounded by a sea of mist, a knife-like flare of sunlight firing off one edge p53
 - All Will's old suspicions about Adam's death swirled up like sediment disturbed at the bottom of a pond, clouding and darkening his mind p62
 - He felt like a lion tamer going into a cage with a lioness who wanted to eat him p109
 - The room glowed to life, dark still shapes surrounded by a golden syrup of light flowing from the enormous electric-blue squares that were the apartment windows p231
 - Fear roared through him so ferociously that he fell to his knees p331
 - Will was so cold now that it felt like his bones were shivering inside him p423
 - She stroked his back until the storm of sorrow passed p445

Assessment:

- Discuss Dr Bacchus's comment that: 'There is no harm in having heroes. Although some say the ideal of a hero is problematic because it produces impossible standards of goodness and courage, which leave ordinary people feeling like failures' (p164). Why does Dr Bacchus believe 'heroes tend to be limited. Real people are more complex, and if you can't recognise that your uncle was flawed, you are aligning yourself with a glamorous holo' (p165)? Explain how *Comes the Night* uses the concept of heroes, using evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Write a series of journal entries about living in a society such as domed Canberra. Share your understanding of *Comes the Night* through your pieces.
- Like Will, take *captures* to reflect your interests and observations of life in an annotated portfolio.
- Create a graphic organiser that compares the advantages and disadvantages of doming. Use your ideas to compose a persuasive speech either promoting or condemning this practice.
- Submit your own tertiary application to the Education Board based on 'how your abilities could advance Australia' (p18).

- Adam believed that 'Fear is an animal that lives inside every person and gets bigger and more dangerous the faster you run from it (p46). In a reflection, discuss your experience of fear and whether you agree with Adam. During what times in history has Adam's sentiment rung true?
- Write your own version of Will's recurring nightmare suitable for inclusion in *Comes the Night*, starting your piece with 'Will stepped into the shade of a lane between two factories...'
- In the role of Will, write an account of visiting Adam's apartment for the first time after his death.
- How does the Deputy Prime Minister, Scofield Petrin, capitalise on fear to make changes to security policies and increase his power? What are some examples of politicians doing similarly in real life? Why does Klare say 'scaring people was a long way from educating them'? Explain Will's doubt about people's ability to 'recognise fear tactics'. Why does Petrin say 'security and control [needs] to be established over a population before anything could be done about the environment' (p198)? Write a feature article to explore these themes and issues.
- With reference to the following quote, explain what Will comes to realise about love in *Comes the Night*: 'That he loved her like this, that she made him feel so much, was a gift. And a strength' (p394).
- Create a boardgame that reflects the dreamscape sequences in *Comes the Night*.
- Compile a soundtrack for a movie version of *Comes the Night*, giving brief descriptions of the scenes each song would suit.
- Write an Epilogue for *Comes the Night* suitable for inclusion at the end of the text.
- Choose a character and scene from *Comes the Night* on which to create and perform a monologue. Include appropriate costuming and props in your performance.
- In the role of Klare, retell your life as a younger woman before choosing your career over your family. What prompted you to leave?
- Using Minecraft Education, create a digital version of domed Canberra, or one of the more specific settings in *Comes the Night* such as SRI or Anna's private estate.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: HISTORY; CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP

Discussion prompts:

- Will thinks his teacher has a point about governments needing to 'impose peace so they could come up with solutions' (p6) to issues such as climate change. How do Ender's thoughts differ from Will's? Whose opinions do you most agree with? Why?
- What is the place of the Government Bulletin in *Comes the Night*? What comment about the media is the author making by including this in her book?
- How is life now different from life in the 'pre-dome era'? Why does Adam say 'it is good to remember the past. You can learn a lot from it' (p17)? What has our society learnt from the past? What lessons from the past have we forgotten or ignored?
- Why is Adam dismayed about Will's indifference towards politics? What, according to Adam, does a 'good citizen' need to do (p35)?
- Discuss Padraig's comment that, 'How people in the past saw things and what they did helps us decide what to do in the future. History matters, and it needs to be contextualised, not re-visioned' (p39).

- When it is revealed that Uluru is being eroded by acid rain, why does Will think that a member of the Aunties Council should explain why they don't want it domed? What is the author's point in including how 'there will certainly be a response on the Indigenous channel' but 'a lot of people won't see it' (p198). Why is Will reminded of the man in Meganti Crow's workshop, 'who seemed more than happy for Australia to take the fight against saboteurs into another country' (p199)? What comment is being made about the public's understanding of different perspectives? What role does the media play in this?
- Discuss Will's thoughts about amassed power in: 'The United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan in World War II because once the technology had been invented, people found an excuse to use it' (p273).
- With reference to the following excerpt, explain the Scandian right to resist doming and the ensuing geopolitical issues: 'They would say it is their business because doming enables governments and powerful commercial entities to control us and how we interact with the world for good or ill, and because it promotes a bunker mentality that prevents us demanding that our governments commit money and resources to cleaning up the planet' (p190). What point is the author making about power, control and fearmongering in *Comes the Night*?

Learning Experiences:

- How is this society similar and different from your own? Share your ideas pictorially or through a wordcloud.
- In recent history, which nations or political groups have been subjected to vilification in ways similar to Scandia? Why does this happen?

Assessment:

- In context with modern Australian values and democratic ideals, compare the government in *Comes the Night* with Australia's real-life administration.
- What is the influence of media in influencing public sentiment, both in *Comes the Night* and in modern day Australia?
- With reference to one of the excerpts below, write a research essay to explore its relevance in a real-life historical context:
 - 'Fear can be weaponised by ignorance and misinformation' (p407).
 - The endeavours of scientists 'are nothing compared to the ruthlessness and atrocities considered acceptable to politicians' (p427).
 - 'Much easier to control frightened people if you offer them a safe place to hide, especially if they don't know they are imprisoned' (p448).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Isobelle Carmody is one of Australia's most highly acclaimed authors of fantasy. At fourteen, she began *Obernewtyn*, the first book in her much-loved Obernewtyn Chronicles, and she has since written many works in this genre. Her novel *The Gathering* won the 1993 Children's Literature Peace Prize and was joint winner of the 1994 CBCA Book of the Year Award. *Greylands* was joint winner of the 1997 Aurealis Award for Excellence in Speculative Fiction (Young Adult category), and was named a White Raven at the 1998 Bologna Children's Book Fair. Isobelle's work for younger readers includes her two series, The Legend of Little Fur and The Kingdom of the Lost, the first book of which, *The Red Wind*, won the CBCA Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers in 2011. She has also written several picture books as well as collections of short stories for children, young adults and adults, and is currently working on *Darkbane*, the final book in The Legendsong series.

After living in Europe for more than a decade, these days Isobelle divides her time in Australia between her home on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, and Brisbane, where she completed a PhD at the University of Queensland, and has been conducting postgraduate research.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Christina Wheeler is a Teacher Librarian, speaker, literacy specialist and writer. She has been creating Teacher's Notes for over sixteen years and is a fervent advocate for deep analysis and rich discussion of texts with students. Christina has presented at international, national and state conferences, sharing her expertise in the approaches to learning, teaching, academic research skills and literacy. She is passionate about nurturing in children not only a love for literature, but the cognitive skills to make genuine connections between the stories they read and the world in which they live, learn and love.

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

As companion texts to *Comes the Night*, consider the inclusion of other speculative fiction such as:

Novels

- Abela, Deborah *Grimsdon* Random House Australia, 2010.
- Collins, Suzanne *The Hunger Games* Scholastic, 2009.
- DuPrau, Jeanne *The City of Ember* Corgi, 2005.
- Lowry, Lois *The Giver* Harper Collins, 2014.
- Orwell, George *1984* Text Publishing, 2016. (First published 1949.)
- Westerfeld, Scott *Uglies* Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Picture Books

- Estela, Lucy and Ottley, Matt *Suri's Wall* Penguin Viking, 2015.
- Pinfold, Levi *Paradise Sands* Walker Books Australia, 2022.
- Whatley, Bruce *Ruben* Scholastic Press, 2017.

- Wild, Margaret and Blackwood, Freya *The Feather Blackwood*, Little Hare, 2018.

OTHER RESOURCES

Articles

- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/28/ill-make-a-sign-and-hold-it-up-isobelle-carmody-takes-her-activism-to-the-streets>
- <https://writerssa.org.au/2023/qa-isobelle-carmody/>
- <https://thegarretpodcast.com/isobelle-carmody/>

My Future Town Project

- Isobelle Carmody facilitated the *My Future Town* project with the University of Queensland, which engaged young people from rural areas in town planning processes. For more information about this project, please see <https://hass.uq.edu.au/my-future-town>.