

# This All Come Back Now: An Anthology of First Nations Speculative Fiction

EDITED BY  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Drugs/Alcohol, Obscene Language, Sexual Content)



## SYNOPSIS

The first-ever anthology of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speculative fiction—written, curated, edited and designed by blackfellas, for blackfellas and about blackfellas. In these stories, ‘this all come back’: all those things that have been taken from us, that we collectively mourn the loss of, or attempt to recover and revive, as well as those that we thought we’d gotten rid of, that are always returning to haunt and hound us.

Some writers summon ancestral spirits from the past, while others look straight down the barrel of potential futures, which always end up curving back around to hold us from behind. Dazzling, imaginative and unsettling, *This All Come Back Now* centres and celebrates communities and culture. It’s a love letter to kin and country, to memory and future-thinking.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mykaela Saunders is a Koori writer, teacher and community researcher of Dharug and Lebanese descent, and working-class and queer, Mykaela belongs to the Tweed Goori community. Mykaela has worked in Aboriginal education since 2003, and at the tertiary level since 2012. Her research explores trans-generational trauma and healing in her community. Mykaela’s work has won the ABR Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize, the National Indigenous Story Award, the Oodgeroo Noonuccal Indigenous Poetry Prize, the Grace Marion Wilson Emerging Writers Prize for creative non-fiction and the University of Sydney’s Sister Alison Bush Graduate Medal for Indigenous research. Mykaela is working on two short story collections and a novel, *Last Rites of Spring*, which was shortlisted for the David Unaipon Award in 2020. More information can be found at [mykaelasanders.com](http://mykaelasanders.com).

## THEMES

Some of the stories connect through a common trope, event or setting. Saunders has attempted to arrange the stories so that each is ‘in conversation with its neighbours’ (p 15). Themes covered in this collection include:

- Family
- Old People (Elders) and ancestors
- Government intervention in First Nations people’s lives
- Corporate greed
- Destruction of land and water
- Technology

- Language
- Law
- Ghosts and hauntings
- Belonging
- Alienation
- Reclaiming of sovereignty
- Timelessness of cultures and traditions (such as they can be revived and relearned in the process of decolonisation).

## STRUCTURE

The stories vary in structure from stand-alone short stories or extracts from novellas and novels. Teachers can therefore select short stories that connect with a particular topic or theme, perhaps within the context of a broader novel study. The extracted pieces are:

- Ellen van Neerven's 'Water', from their novella of the same name in their collection *Heat and Light*.
- Archie Weller's 'The Purple Plains' from his novel *Land of the Golden Clouds*.
- Sam Watson Snr's 'The Kadaitcha Sung' from his novel of the same title.
- Alexis Wright's 'Dust Cycle' from her novel *The Swan Book*.

## STUDY NOTES

### 'MYTH THIS!' BY LISA FULLER

- Discuss with students the ways in which the author builds suspense throughout the story. Have students collect key quotes and map the points when suspense is building. Consider common writing techniques used to build suspense:
  - withholding information, or not showing the full picture, to create uncertainty
  - foreshadowing and creating a sense of foreboding (the reader knows something is about to happen but isn't sure what)
  - creating a pressure-filled situation, with a challenge, time-sensitivity or element of risk
  - using the setting as a character, and employing detailed descriptive language to create atmosphere.
- An important feature of suspense is strong characterisation that makes the reader empathise and worry for the characters. Discuss this with reference to Dina's children—Alira, the classic sullen teen; Brianna, the peacemaker and people watcher; and Tommy, the cautious baby, innocent and naïvely hopeful.
- Di faces the unknown beast and announces herself to it as kin connected to this country: 'this being, that whitefullas long ago made into fable, stolen for their own selfish reasons, spat on as nothing more than myth and legend.' (p 86). Discuss how this represents the different approaches and relationships to land—Aboriginal respect of the land and awareness of its rules vs white settler 'ownership' and conquering of the land, which dismisses Aboriginal knowledge.

### 'AN INVITATION' BY TIMMAH BALL

- Discuss with students the many incongruities and hypocrisies in modern culture that the author comments on in this story. Have students select key quotes to illustrate the author's commentary on the below topics:
  - queer and gender equality
  - Blak knowledge economy
  - destruction of land by built environment and how sick it makes people despite the feeling of 'progress'.

### 'YOUR OWN ABORIGINE' BY ADAM THOMPSON

- Compare each character's approach and attitude. Which character do students align with? Can they understand each point of view?

**'WATER' BY ELLEN VAN NEERVEN**

- Discuss with students how the story may change if told from Larapinta's point of view. Is Kaden initially complicit with the government? Does she have a 'coloniser' attitude towards Larapinta?

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS' CREATIVE RESPONSES**

- Many of the stories in this collection do not fully explain the backstory to their future worlds, or leave the reader guessing in open and unresolved endings. As Weller writes in 'The Purple Plains': 'For part of the skill of a good storyteller was to make a story humorous and then leave the message to be chewed over by the listener as he lay thinking at night' (p 271). In the context of this collection, loose ends offer opportunities for students to write their own creative responses, whether filling in gaps in an epilogue or prologue, or taking a tangent into their own completely original writing. The stories in the list below provide some good opportunities for students to further explore the story and provide some creative responses.
  - 'Terranora'
  - 'When From'
  - 'The Kadaitcha Sung'
  - 'An Invitation'
  - 'The Centre'
  - 'Closing Time'
  - 'Muyum, a Transgression'