

RED CAN ORIGAMI

MADELAINE DICKIE

ABOUT THE BOOK

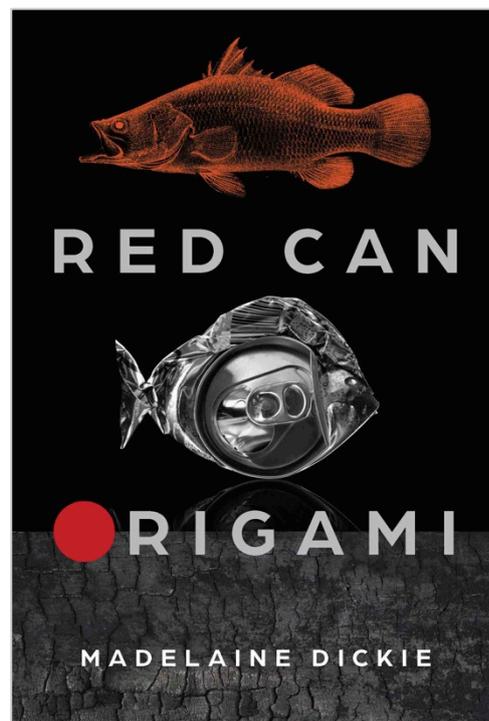
Ava has just landed a job as a reporter in Gubinge, a tiny tropical town in Australia's north. Gubinge has a way of getting under the skin. Ava is hooked on the thrill of going hand-to-hand with barramundi, awed by country, and stunned by pindan sunsets. But a bitter collision between a native title group and a Japanese-owned uranium mining company is ripping the community in half. From the rodeos and fishing holes of northern Australia, to the dazzling streets of night-time Tokyo, Ava is swept in pursuit of the story. Will Gerro Blue destroy Burrika country? Or will a uranium mine lift its people from poverty? And can Ava hold on to her principles if she gives in to her desire for Noah, the local Burrika boss?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madelaine Dickie has been writing since she was seven. Her first novel, *Troppo*, was published by Fremantle Press in 2016. It won the City of Fremantle T.A.G. Hungerford Award and was shortlisted for the Dobbie Literary Award and Barbara Jefferis Award. *Red Can Origami* is her second novel. It was written on Balangarra country, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and at Youkobo Art Space in Tokyo, Japan. A surf obsession has led Madelaine from Spain's Mundaka, to Namibia's Skeleton Coast, to little-known waves in the Dominican Republic. She is studying Spanish and speaks Indonesian. Madelaine currently lives in Exmouth, WA.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What effect does the second-person point of view have as you read the novel? Why do you think the author has chosen this mode of narration?
2. In what ways is the newly arrived Ava naive about the realities of life for Aboriginal people in Gubinge?
3. What is the significance of Noah's Japanese heritage? Does it affect the way he is positioned in the conflict between Burrika and Gerro Blue?
4. How much say does Burrika have in Gerro Blue's approach to the mine? What is their bargaining power?
5. What kind of a person is Watanabe? To what extent does he value the consultation process with the Burrika people?
6. Why does Watanabe take Ava to see the Maruki museum?
7. *Too many kartiya come up here with a 'we wanna save the blackfellas' attitude. You spend, what, two, three, maybe five years, then you fuck off back down south, back over east, back overseas, telling everyone what a great job you did for the 'Aborigines'.* (p. 45) Does Ava come to Gubinge with a 'white saviour' complex? Does her outlook change over the course of the novel?
8. After Ava is offered the job at Gerro Blue, a note from Watanabe has this poem on it: *A chestnut dropped in. A goldfish rose to drink / Their widening rings of water interlink.* (p. 57) Why does he send this to her?
9. What is the nature of Ava's relationship with her sister Imogen?
10. What role does Ava's relationship with Ash play in the narrative? Whose point of view does he represent?



11. *Ethically, well, sure there's issues, but you're on the inside, now. Maybe you'll be able to help more if you're on the inside.* (p. 91) Do you see Ava as an active agent in the interactions between Gerro Blue and Burrika or is she instead a witness to a process?
12. How does Watanabe's mention of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant on p. 121 create tension in the second half of the novel?
13. Why do you think the White Namibian breaks down when Ava visits him at his farm? Does this make you feel any sympathy for him?
14. To what extent is Gerro Blue, and in turn Watanabe, responsible for the disaster at the end of the novel? Should they have foreseen this outcome?
15. In what ways does the landscape of northern Australia act as a character in the novel?
16. Are Noah's actions at the end of the novel inevitable?
17. *Where are the women's places? Who knows the right songs for country? What do Wamberal and Woy Woy and Budgewoi mean? It's as if this fresh map, thin as tissue paper, has been superimposed over your old way of knowing and relating to place.* (p. 148) How does learning and using the traditional names for places in Australia change the way we think about them?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Ava has a bit of a love-hate relationship with Gubinge, but by the end of the novel she seems like she's in it for good. What is it about northern Australia that gets people hooked?

For me it's the danger. I love the constant low-level burn of risk. I love the purple cyclone skies and navigating chocolate whirlpools in a tiny boat and watching the bull-riding and bouncing terrified in a troopy full of loaded guns on a turkey hunt. And the colours are exquisite. In other parts of Australia there is a sombre, understated beauty, perhaps softer colours, but the Kimberley is knock-your-socks-off gorgeous. The cindery reds, the turquoise, the mojito and lime spinifex ... This said, it's a beauty that comes at a high price. You can be watching an exquisite sunset from the sand dunes and suddenly get savaged by march flies, or be having a dip at a secluded beach and see a log morph into a saltwater croc.

It's also a privilege to reside as part of a living cultural landscape, where people have a continuing and powerful connection to country. Through work in the Kimberley, I've attended native title consent determinations, Indigenous Protected Area celebrations, back to country trips and huge bush meetings attended by hundreds of people. It's truly exhilarating working in the native title space under the leadership of Kimberley Traditional Owners. So many great leaders pair political savvy with strong cultural values to drive a positive agenda for Kimberley Aboriginal people. I have been lucky to be a part of this – it's profoundly changed the way I consider country and what it means to be an Australian.

During the writing of this book you undertook a residency in Japan. Had you always intended to have a Japanese influence in this story or did that come about because of your time there?

I intended to have a Japanese influence in the book from the get-go. I find it difficult to write about places I haven't been – places where I haven't breathed the air, wandered the alleys, stuttered through phrases in the language, considered how differently the light falls. I completed the first and second drafts of the book at Youkobo Art Space in Tokyo, courtesy of an AsiaLink Arts Residency. I travelled to Tokyo, a city of nine million, from my previous home in Wyndham, a community of about seven hundred people. Talk about culture shock! Through the residency I met other visual artists creating work around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster and I had the opportunity to travel through parts of the nuclear exclusion zone – places so radioactive they're too dangerous for humans to live. It's horrifying to consider the lives derailed, the impact on children, on country. Within the context of *Red Can Origami*, it was important for me to see what a nuclear disaster looks like. Australian uranium fuelled Fukushima Daiichi. We are, in part, to blame.

As Red Can Origami shows, non-Indigenous Australia still has a long way to reconcile its relationship with Aboriginal people. What do you think needs to happen for that relationship to become more equal and harmonious?

The only way there will be true equality is if governments recognise the right to self-determination for Indigenous Australians. This means acting on issues like the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This statement came from thirteen regional dialogues held around the country with Indigenous people. It is a clear and powerful directive. But as long as you have government ignoring the voice of Indigenous people, ignoring the recommendations for change, then equality is not possible.



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