

BLACK/BLOOD SUN/MOON

Chris Bendall



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Theatre Program at the end of the playtext

For Eloise and Isobel

Black Sun / Blood Moon was first produced by Critical Stages Touring at The Playhouse Theatre, Wagga Wagga, on 20 May, 2022, with the following cast:

MADDY

Adelaide Kennedy

PAUL

Garth Holcombe

KATIE

Francesca Savige

MAN / TINO / ADRIAN /

POLICE OFFICER

Tommy Misa

Director, Chris Bendall

Set and Costume Designer, Isla Shaw

Lighting Designer, Becky Russell

Sound Designer, Kingsley Reeve

Video Designer, Susie Henderson

Puppetry Director, Alice Osborne

Dramaturg, Hilary Bell

‘As yet the wind is an untamed and unharnessed force; and quite possibly one of the greatest discoveries hereafter to be made will be the taming and harnessing of it.’—Abraham Lincoln, 1860

‘I’d put my money on the sun and solar energy, what a source of power. I just hope we don’t have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.’—Thomas Edison, 1931

‘We shall need a substantially different way of thinking, if humanity is to survive.’—Albert Einstein, 1949

‘When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realise, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can’t eat money.’—Alanis Obomsawin, 1972

‘Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.’—Arthur C. Clarke, 1973

‘Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.’—Carl Sagan, 1994

‘Surely we have a responsibility to leave for future generations a planet that is healthy and habitable by all species.’—David Attenborough, 2002

‘Dear future generations: please accept our apologies. We were rolling drunk on petroleum.’—Kurt Vonnegut, 2006

‘And since our time is running out we have decided to take action. We have started to clean up your mess and we will not stop until we are done.’—Greta Thunberg, 2020

CHARACTERS

PAUL, mid-40s male

MADDY, ten- to twelve-year-old girl

KATIE, mid-30s female

TINO, Samoan male

ADRIAN, lawyer, male

SOLVEIG, seventy-year-old Norwegian woman

POLICE OFFICER, mid-30s

A MAN

SHAHIN, a peregrine falcon

POLAR BEAR, SIBERIAN TIGER, GORILLA, SAND GAZELLES,
ANDEAN DEAR, BILBY, PINK COCKATOO, ROCK WALLABY,
DOLPHIN

NOTES

Intended to be performed by four actors.

The same actor should play A MAN / TINO, POLICE OFFICER and ADRIAN.

PAUL should also play SOLVEIG.

The cast should reflect the diversity of Australia.

/ marks the point where the line is interrupted by the next speaker.

dialogue in brackets () is unspoken.

... means the character hesitates or trails off.

The play begins in January 2020 in Australia and takes place over approximately two years, which includes the period of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The production moves through many locations throughout, but should never be too fixed in any one location. A minimalist, transformative

production aesthetic is strongly encouraged. Given the subject matter, recycled materials and a sustainable approach to design are also requested.

This isn't a work for audiences to sit back and passively enjoy. The success of the production will hinge on the production team's ability to involve audience members directly as much as possible throughout.

Before the performance, cards are put under audience members' seats with suggestions on what can be done to protect the environment. The text for these can be found in Act One, Scene Four.

This play went to press before the end of rehearsals and may differ from the play as performed.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

PAUL, *alone on stage, addresses the audience.*

PAUL: So my daughter, at the age of ten, attended her first climate strike.

Beat.

She's worried. We all are, aren't we? Well those of us who believe the science. Who choose to listen to the science. Who believe it's in our power to do something.

Beat.

So a ten-year-old girl strikes.

She was one of the youngest but her voice was as loud as the rest as they marched down the main street of Wagga Wagga, right up to the minister's office.

But now.

Beat.

After the endless drought and years with no rain, now ash is raining down on us. Family homes ... just embers. And our wildlife? Billions of animals they say ... The scale of it all ... I just can't ...

Beat.

And it's not like the Australian wildlife was having a particularly good time before the bushfires either. I mean ... the rate of extinction here ... Right now ...

He clicks his fingers.

That's a species gone. For good. Amazing creatures like the pink cockatoo, the black flanked rock wallaby, the greater bilby ... the platypus ... koalas even! All endangered now.

Beat.

When was the last time you saw a platypus? Anyone? Or a bilby? Will our grandchildren ever see one? Or will they just be ancient

history—as good as dinosaurs. The stuff of museums. Stuffed only. Is this what we are all just supposed to get used to now? Drought. Fire. Dead fish in our rivers.

Pause.

Dead fish in our rivers.

It's like Mother Nature just got so pissed off with the lot of us—the whole country—that she just needed to give us this massive slap in the face. Slap. Slap. Slap. 'Wake up, you dumb nuts. Stop sleepwalking your way to oblivion!'

But will it work? Will we wake up? Will we listen?

What a mess our generation is handing to our children.

I heard this the other day ...

Two planets meet. The first one asks: 'How are you?'

'Not so well,' the second answered, 'I've got the Homo Sapiens.'

'Don't worry,' the other replied, 'I had that once. They won't last long.'

Sorry. Dad climate joke.

One day, some time last year, I'm sitting chattering away with Maddy—that's my daughter. We were playing a board game—snakes and ladders, I think.

And we were talking about books. Her favourites now, and mine when I was her age ... She's devouring the Harry Potter series—of course.

One of mine was this one ...

He walks over to pick a book up from a shelf in the room or perhaps just scattered on the floor.

Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* ... Anyone read it?

He smiles, clasping the book to his chest.

Recently I'd been thinking about the moment in the book where the dolphins flee from Earth forever leaving one final message: 'So long and thanks for all the fish.' I was wondering if it could have been a bit of a nod to early days of learning about the threat of climate change, with dolphins smart enough to see it was time to get out while the going was good. Although of course in the story the

imminent catastrophe that the Earth was facing was an intergalactic spaceship making way for a hyperspace bypass ... Not a climate emergency ... Anyway, I was thinking all this out loud when I realise what I'm revealing to her. I was talking about someone old—and I mean actually old, not just Dad old, but way older than me—we're talking about a book written in 1979 and /

MADDY *appears*.

MADDY: So you're telling me that people knew? Before you were even born?

PAUL: Maybe longer.

MADDY: And that—what—they didn't do anything?

PAUL: Well. Maybe not nothing.

But not enough.

MADDY: Clearly not enough!

PAUL: No not enough. Not nearly enough. You know there have been a lot of people trying though. Investigating the causes. Around the world ... I mean we did fix the ozone layer.

MADDY: The what?

PAUL: Long story. Look—point is—it's not that people haven't been trying. It's just—it's a big challenge ... It's going to take some time.

[*To the audience*] But it's 2020. And there's a young girl watching her future disappear in a cloud of carbon emissions.

And so then—it comes ...

MADDY: [*anger building*] So if you've known all this time. Then—what have you done? What have you been doing all this time?

PAUL: [*to himself*] What have I done ... What have I done ... [*To the audience*] To save the world? To protect our planet? My daughter's future? My grandchildren not yet born? ... Not enough that's for sure.

MADDY: [*furiously*] I hate you, Dad. You're the worst!

PAUL: And I think of this as the moment when it all began. When she disappeared into this cloud. Because this has been our ultimate betrayal, hasn't it? We did this—my generation. Not just our parents or our grandparents or our political leaders. Sure it goes right back to the British—doesn't everything?— and the start of the industrial revolution. But it was *our* responsibility. And we failed.

Pause.

Maddy and I live together in our small house just outside of Wagga Wagga. So good they named it twice.

MADDY: [*rolling her eyes*] Dad ...

PAUL: When I was growing up people said it meant the place of many crows. But in the local Wiradjuri language, it means the place where people come to dance and celebrate. Not that much dancing lately. Air pollution here over the summer was one of the worst in the whole state—far worse than anything those Sydney-siders were complaining about ...

We're about five hundred kilometres southwest-ish from Sydney and a couple of hundred from Canberra. It's a university town. I lecture in English literature.

When she was younger I used to tell her stories at night. Find ourselves riding on the back of dolphins discovering hidden worlds, deep in the ocean, where an underwater lobster band might be found playing [*singing*] 'Under the sea!' Thanks Disney.

But that was then. And now ... She was looking for inspiration, for a role model. And clearly my lack of action to date in the most important threat to civilisation ever, did not qualify me for this role ... She starts to search for books on climate change and climate activists. Greta [*pronouncing her name incorrectly 'Thun-Berg'*] Thunberg ...

MADDY: It's pronounced Toon-berg, Dad.

PAUL: Maddy was in awe of Greta ...

MADDY: Toon-berg.

PAUL: Thanks.

Beat.

Greta threatened the establishment. She threatened the dinosaurs. The corrupt. The inept. Greta was black and white, she shone a light ... no, not a light ... a blowtorch?—on the grey areas ... on the areas that those in power were trying to keep hidden from view. And she spoke her mind.

MADDY: [*holding a book about Greta*] 'We will be a pain in the arse and keep striking.'

MADDY *passes the book to a member of the audience.*

[*To an audience member*] Hi—can you just read this part for us?

AUDIENCE ONE: 'I have learned that you are never too small to make a difference.'

MADDY: Thanks! [*Taking the book back*] Do you believe that's true, Dad? Can anyone actually make a difference?

PAUL: Of course I do—it doesn't matter if you are ten or one hundred and ten. You have to believe that anything is possible, Maddy. 'Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.' That's Tolkien. *Lord of the Rings*.

MADDY: Okay ...?

PAUL: Now—what do we need to get ready for your first day back at school tomorrow?

MADDY: Can I take in this book about Greta?

PAUL: Sure thing. Hey, Maddy—Why did the weatherman blush? He saw the climate change.

PAUL *laughs*. MADDY *rolls her eyes or groans*.

Ha! Sorry! Now go outside and play. It looks like the smoke's not too bad this afternoon.

Beat.

[*To the audience*] So after the summer from hell, she goes back to school ready for action, inspired and bold. She was ready to talk with her friends about what they could do together. Start a newspaper, create a movement, make some noise.

[*TO MADDY*] How was school? What did you all talk about? Are you all working out how to save the planet?

MADDY: I don't know ... They just all want to play Minecraft!

PAUL: Did you talk to them about what you want to do?

MADDY: They're just not that interested, Dad ...

PAUL: [*to the audience*] Had everyone already forgotten checking air quality and smoke levels all summer? Not being able to go out to play or even open a window? Did we all just get used to a sun so shrouded in smoke that you could look right at it? In the day—a black sun. And at night—a moon glowing blood red from the fires. Insta-worthy sunsets every day ... Mementos to our downfall.

MADDY: It's like summer never happened.

PAUL: And she loses confidence. Deflates. Little by little.

[To MADDY] How was school today?

MADDY: Fine.

PAUL: What did you all talk about?

MADDY: I've got homework to do, Dad.

PAUL: [to the audience] Story time ...

[To MADDY] Once upon a time there was a young girl. A girl whose town is being threatened by a great *environmental* catastrophe. But she is a girl who has extraordinary gifts and she starts to hear voices. So she follows those voices across the oceans and into an enchanted forest where she learns of a great wrong committed many years ago /

MADDY: Dad—I know that's just the story of *Frozen Two*.

PAUL: [to the audience] It was worth a try. So the next night I try again ...

[To MADDY] There was once a girl who loved to disobey authority, including her parents, and when her island was suffering and the fish were dying, and her dad did nothing to help, she sailed across the oceans to find a precious stone to return to Mother Earth—

MADDY: *Moana* now? Don't you know any stories other than Disney ones?

PAUL: Okay okay, sorry. There just aren't any new stories anymore! So let's steal honestly next time. I'll recycle some stories. From history.

MADDY *groans*.

What? I thought you wanted me to be recycling more.

MADDY: Really, Dad?

PAUL: [to the audience] So for the next few nights I tell her about some real heroes: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks.

[To an audience member, passing them a book about Mandela] Actually, can you read this for me?

AUDIENCE TWO: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'

PAUL: Mandela.

MADDY *grabs the book and exits to read it*.

So perhaps it was my fault. Perhaps my primer in non-violent civil disobedience was just a little premature ... Did I dream of her growing up and saving the planet? Sure. Doesn't every parent want their child to be a real-life superhero?

Beat.

But was I prepared for the consequences?

MADDY *walks in carrying a sign. She sits in the centre of the stage and holds the sign in front of her. It reads: 'Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot. Things are not going to change. They're just not. Dr Seuss.'*

Blackout.

Music.

News footage blasts across the stage.

Fire.

Flood.

Drought.

Donald Trump: 'A hoax—it's all a hoax. It'll start getting cooler.'

Scott Morrison: 'This is coal, don't be afraid.'

Greta Thunberg: 'I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day.'

Other news footage that is relevant and of the time period may be used in this montage.

SCENE TWO

On a street in Wagga Wagga. It's hot.

MADDY *is still sitting on stage with her sign.* KATIE *walks past on her way into her office.*

KATIE: And what do you think you're doing here?

MADDY: I'm protesting. Hashtag Fridays for Future.

KATIE: Great, but do you have to do that here? You're kind of in our way.

MADDY: There's a climate emergency. It's kind of in the way of my future.

KATIE: So what exactly do you want me to do about that?

MADDY: I want you to *do something!*

KATIE: Good to know. I'll keep that in mind.

KATIE *walks past the protester and into her office. The office of Jacqueline Thompson MP, federal member for the Riverina. Katie's phone rings.*

[*Answering phone*] No comment.

She hangs up. Another call.

[*Answering*] I said no comment.

She hangs up again. TINO arrives.

TINO: Excuse me.

KATIE: No, I'm sorry, Ms Thompson isn't seeing anyone today.

TINO: Oh that's okay, actually it's you I ...

KATIE: Oh God help me, you're not another eco-warrior are you?

Thank you but I don't have time for any more of you today. We have a comments box by the door or you can go to the minister's website. [*Fake smiling*] Goodbye, thank you for visiting.

TINO: No no you don't / understand I just—

KATIE: [*through clenched teeth*] Goodbye.

She ushers him out the door. TINO has no choice but to leave.

Lunatic greenies.

She sees that MADDY is still sitting outside her office.

Are you still here?

A sudden burst of wind. Some rubbish blows at KATIE's feet. She tries to kick it away, but a piece of paper catches her eye, so she takes a closer look and stares at it for a long time before shoving it in her pocket.

[*Leaving*] Go home, kid.

SCENE THREE

Maddy and Paul's home.

PAUL: Hey, Maddy, are you ready for school? Time to go!

MADDY *enters—not in uniform, but holding a new sign: 'I can't go to school, I have to save the planet.' It's decorated with flowers and trees.*

What's this?

MADDY: I've made a new sign—like it?

PAUL: I love it but ... where's your school uniform?

MADDY: It's Friday, Dad?

PAUL: Oh. Sorry. I thought ... You're going again? Aren't you missing out on a bit too much / school now ...

MADDY: Dad—I thought you were with me on this? Every Friday until /

PAUL: Until something is done. Yes I know, I know, but ... it's been a month. Don't you think it's time to—

MADDY: What?

PAUL: You know—take a break? Let it go for a bit?

MADDY: 'Let it go?' Dad, are you serious?

PAUL: Okay okay. Easy. But—it is a school day—I don't want you to get behind in your / classes.

MADDY: [*temper flaring*] We agreed that I just have to keep up with my school work! I'm off, Dad. I don't want to be late for the others.

PAUL: Hold on—just—wait—I might need to check in with your mother about this? I don't want her /

MADDY: Dad—it's fine. Mum knows.

PAUL: And?

MADDY: And she's fine with it ...

Beat.

[*Patience wearing thin*] She's fine with it, Dad ...?

Pause.

MADDY *stares at him.*

PAUL: [*defensively*] Okay!

Okay okay okay.

[*Soothingly*] Sorry, Maddy. I just ... I just worry about you is all. All by yourself.

MADDY: I'm not by myself, Dad. Lily's with me. And Bridget. And Charlie.

PAUL: Great. I'll come and pick you up after my lectures. Good luck!

MADDY: Thanks, Dad!