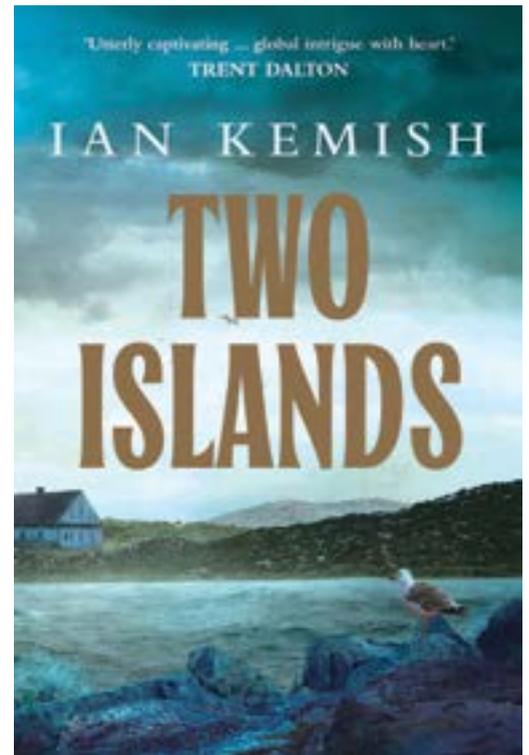


When a desperate young man arrives on an isolated Scottish isle, the locals view him with suspicion. But Niko is there for a reason – he’s running for his life, pursued by those who want him silenced for what he has seen in the Balkan War. His neighbour is a recluse known to the villagers as ‘Slow Fergus’. As the two men circle each other, Australian war crimes investigator Anita Costello races against sinister forces to locate her key witness.

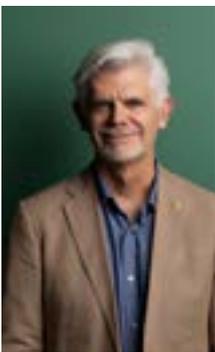
‘A lively, suspenseful and smart book ... a joy to read.’ Bernhard Schlink

Against this rugged landscape, where the tight-knit island community holds painful memories close, Niko must weigh his loyalties to his family, his country and himself. Written with compassion and insight, *Two Islands* explores how the ripples of distant conflicts can wash up on the most remote shores.



BOOK DETAILS

C-format paperback | 978 0 7022 6899 1
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian Kemish AM is a former Australian diplomat who served as ambassador to Germany, high commissioner to Papua New Guinea, international advisor to the Prime Minister, and head of the consular and crisis management service. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his leadership of the emergency response to the 2002

Bali bombings. An adjunct professor at the University of Queensland, he continues to work as a strategic advisor and as a volunteer director in the homelessness and international humanitarian sectors. Ian’s first book, *The Consul* (2022), offered a personal perspective on Australia’s foreign affairs challenges over two decades. *Two Islands* is his first work of fiction, drawing on both his diplomatic work in the Balkans in the mid-1990s and his strong family links with the Western Isles of Scotland.

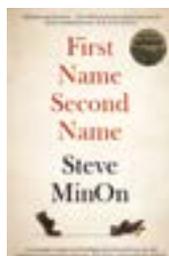
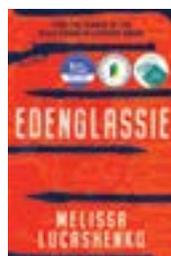
‘A sophisticated thriller that explores the psychological aftermath of armed conflict. Against a stunning island setting, Kemish captures the reverberations of war and its impact on us all.’

Gretchen Shirm

‘Utterly captivating – it’s the page-turning global intrigue stuff as much as the human heart stuff. The best debuts take a lifetime to write. Kemish has lived these pages.’

Trent Dalton

FURTHER
READING



QUESTIONS OVER PAGE

Questions

1. The narrative of *Two Islands* follows four central figures – Niko, Anita, Fergus and Ronnie. Which of these characters did you identify with most, and why? Discuss your reasons.
2. Consider the book's title, *Two Islands*. How well do you think this represents the setting of the book, and which of the characters do you think it speaks to?
3. The fictitious island of Skarnsey is based on other remote Hebridean islands. How does the novel explore the tension between outsiders and tight-knit communities? What does it suggest about how communities protect themselves, and what they might lose in doing so?
4. Reflect on the epigraph quote at the front of the book by Rebecca West about 'goodness'? In what ways did each of the characters live up to this sentiment?
5. When Niko and Fergus first meet, they have already formed an impression of each other. What draws them together despite their differences? How does their relationship evolve? Who, or what, is most influential in their relationship with each other?
6. Anita's work for the Tribunal is interrupted when her father becomes ill, and she returns to Australia following his surgery. What do you think about the timing of her decision? How did this impact both the international search for Niko and her responsibilities to family?
7. The book explores how 'ripples of distant conflicts can wash up on the most remote shores.' Beyond Niko's story, what painful memories does the island community carry? How does the novel connect personal trauma, historical violence, and the idea that nowhere is truly isolated from the world's suffering?
8. Niko must weigh his loyalties 'to his family, his country and himself'. How do these different loyalties pull him in different directions? Are there moments where one loyalty must be sacrificed for another?

9. Much of what is depicted in *Two Islands* – the trauma inflicted during the Balkan War and the political backdrop of the late 1990s – is based in reality. Do you think the fictional aspects of the story effectively highlight the history of this period?
10. There was time when international public attention was galvanised by saturation TV coverage of the siege of Sarajevo and other atrocities in former Yugoslavia, just as it has been by Gaza and Ukraine in more recent times. How much did you remember, or know, about the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s before reading the book?
11. Along the way the book points to the extent of Australian association and involvement with the conflict in former Yugoslavia. The characters of Anita and Julian Thompson highlight Australian Government interest and the work of individual Australians in the international justice and humanitarian sectors. Did this surprise you?
12. Niko is running because of what he has seen in the Balkan War. How does the novel portray the burden and responsibility of bearing witness to atrocities? What does it say about the cost of speaking truth versus remaining silent?
13. What did you think about the ending of the book, particularly the way some of the character narratives were resolved, while others were left unresolved. Was this a satisfying way to end the novel? Discuss.