

Media Release
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Novel sheds light on Kurdish women's victory over ISIS!

In light of recent events with Turkey and Syria, local author, Suzanne Strong's novel ***Where the Sun Rises*** is particularly relevant as western attention is drawn to the plight of the Kurds.

President Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from Northern Syria, and consequently, Turkey invaded Syria on October 9, to drive the Kurds from their hard-won territory.

Strong's novel, ***Where the Sun Rises*** tells the story firsthand of the battle Kurdish female soldiers waged against Daesh in Kobane on the Turkish border.

Thousands of people fled Kobane, but a small number of Kurds stayed to fight. This battle was victorious and widely regarded as pivotal in leading to the demise of Daesh. It was predominantly fought by female militia, and these are the people Strong chose to write her novel about.

"I had been watching documentaries about these amazing women who were taking up arms against Daesh. They were ferocious, courageous and winning victories. I thought to myself, what if we could see this war through the eyes of women?"

"Then straight away I had the two main characters, best friends, a mother and a soon to be doctor. Their friendship is the focus of the novel, their courage, devotion to one another but also the dilemmas they faced in this war."

No one had fictionalised the Syrian war from the point of view of these women soldiers, and Strong wanted to tell their largely untold story.

"I was fascinated by how we often see courage as a purely male quality. But this is not the case. I wanted to show the courage of these women I was learning about."

Strong conducted more than 2000 hours of research over three years, received support from the YPJ Kurdish Women's forces, consulted with local Kurdish groups and wrote this novel for her Master of Arts. She travelled to the Middle East to look into the ravaged country from the Golan Heights border. The battle for Kobane lasted six months and two days.

"My novel highlights the courage, bravery, friendship and sacrifice made by these strong women. It is a story of two best friends who stand by each other through everything."

"I want to bring the stories of these Kurdish women into the consciousness of more people; to shed light on the plight of the women who fought to remove Daesh which helped all of our countries."

Suzanne Strong is a journalist and author based on the Sunshine Coast. She received **RADF and Arts Queensland** funding to support the development of her novel. For more information about Suzanne, please visit www.suzannestrong.com *Where the Sun Rises* is available on Amazon and in all other outlets online.

For further information or to arrange an interview please do not hesitate to contact Suzanne Strong on strong.suzanne@gmail.com.



Suzanne Strong – Biography

I was born and grew up in Sydney. My family moved around a lot, including moving to the US for a short time when I was a teenager. After settling back in Australia, and studying journalism and literature at university, I became a journalist and wrote for various publications including the ***Sydney Morning Herald, The New Internationalist, The Big Issue*** as well as many others over the following twenty years.

Some years later, I became a teacher/lecturer and tutor in Academic English and the Creative Industries at UQ and QUT in Brisbane. In 2017, I completed a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at Macquarie University and I now live in Queensland with my two children.

My short stories and poems have been published in various journals such as ***Studio Magazine, Heretical Magazine, The Quarry, Grapeshot, Time off and Compassion: A Creative Anthology***. I also **won a poetry award** with the Sunshine Coast Literary Association. For ten years I have been running workshops in creative writing and writing therapy.

Arts Queensland and the Sunshine Coast Council have provided funding supporting the development and editing of my novel, ***Where the Sun Rises***.

Launched on October 9, ***Where the Sun Rises***, was **Number 1 Best Seller** on Amazon Australia in two categories – and **Number 1 New Release** on Amazon USA.

Book's Genesis

While working as a lecturer at UQ in Brisbane, in 2015, I became fascinated by the amazing story of the women who took up arms in the battle of Kobane and also how these women were fighting for women's rights in the middle east. I wondered what would it be like if we could see this battle from their point of view? I wanted to bring this alive to a western audience and shine a light on what these amazing women are doing within the Kurdish forces in Syria. Then I came up with the idea of the two main characters and that one of them would sacrifice her life for the other.

Over the following three years in writing this novel, I conducted more **than 2,000 thousand hours of research** and **travelled to the border of Israel and Syria** to see and experience as much of it for myself as I could. I wrote a draft of the novel while undertaking a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at Macquarie University (graduating in 2017). The manuscript received the following comments from its external readers:

Where the Sun Rises Reviews

"Where the Sun Rises is an ambitious, compassionate and powerful novel. Sensory memories accessed through scents and tastes are used brilliantly to evoke the physical strain, tenderness and revulsion of war for female soldiers in the fight against ISIS. Their story deserves a far wider readership and Strong's achievement lies in her ability to take us into their dangerous world."

Dr Toby Davidson, Lecturer, Macquarie University, Sydney.

"Strong has taken care to accurately present the reality of the lives of Kurdish women and the dramatic choices they make as fighters defending their land. The story is remarkable for the authenticity of the detailed portrayal of the geography, the intimate lives of the women fighters and the ferocity of the killing in which they are involved...Strong makes good use of the senses to convey the sounds and smells of battle and death and contrasts it with the delights of singing and dancing, the smell of freshly baked bread and the taste of goat's cheese. The extraordinary amount of research undertaken pays dividends. Recollections of peaceful days and olive groves are neatly woven into the narrative, as are the reassuring pots of tea.

Powerful and credible, Where the Sun Rises is an eye-opener to a story we rarely hear."

Dr. Lynne Spender, UTS Lecturer, Sydney.

[Remarkable book that provides Invaluable insights into this sad and brutal war.](#)

"Every day when I watch the news, I see images of the war-torn struggles of Kurdish people as a collective group. What Suzanne Strong's powerful book Where the Sun Rises has managed to do is remarkable: she helped me get to know, care for and identify with those involved with the war on a more personal level. The main characters are women I would like to befriend and could not stop thinking about even after I finished reading the book.

Through Ms. Strong's detailed writing, the reader vividly experiences the sights, smells, tastes and sounds of those regions. We learn about the political and religious conflicts that motivate an amazing group of women and the horrendous obstacles they must fight just to get bare human necessities: food, shelter, love and freedom. This novel is crucial reading for our modern world since the fighting in these regions continues. The compassionate insights apply not only to the sad and brutal stories of these Kurdish regions and their people but extends to basically all war ravished communities throughout history.

Where the Sun Rises is a classic worth reading in the canons of other great works depicting the horrors of war as well as strength of the human spirit, such as Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front and Bao Ninh's The Sorrow of War."

[Lisa David](#) – 5 out of 5 Stars

A vivid account of the 'lionesses' fighting for Kurdish autonomy

Kurdish women have played a central role in Kurdish society and politics despite the fact that they live in a male-dominated world still plagued by profound challenges with regard to women's rights, forced marriages, honor killings, and even in some areas female genital mutilation. Nonetheless Kurdish women have served as chiefs of tribes and rulers, in some instances described as 'lionesses,' for their bravery and determination. Meanwhile, in the last decades in particular, Kurdish women in Iraq and Syria have served as outstanding, courageous, and relentless fighters in the struggle against Isis. When the Sun Rises offers a stirring fictionalized account of the struggles faced by these remarkable women, true lionesses.

The story begins in Kobane, situated at the border between Turkey and Syria, in 2014, when the city was under siege by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as Daesh. The protagonist is Karin, a medical student at university who together with her best friend Roza decides to join the fight against Daesh in the desire to defend their home and their families. Both Karin and Roza experience heartbreaking losses which push them toward making the difficult decision to join up despite the sacrifice of having to leave their families and, in Roza's case, even a child behind. The two women try to stay together throughout their training in the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) and in battle. They also form strong bonds with other women in their unit as well as a few men with whom they interact.

The writing is vivid and believable with colorful descriptions of family life in Kobani and the sounds and scents of Kurdish life which makes the destruction wreaked by the war even more devastating. The author provides compelling insights into the various complex emotions experienced by these women who reach their decisions to join up for a range of reasons, but are united in friendship and affection until the end. The book ends on a positive note, with a glimpse of a recovering city and the sense of life resuming.

As a bitter coda to this moving account which was released in October 2019, just at that time, the Turkish offensive into north-eastern Syria led to the Second Northern Syria Buffer Zone Agreement and forced Kurdish military forces to withdraw from Kobane while the city was placed under the control of the Syrian army and the Russian military police. My heart goes out to the fictional Karin and all her sisters who have been fighting so valiantly for autonomy.

"Freedom crowns the heads of the free but only slaves know it's value. In our society, being a wife or a daughter means you are not a person in your own right..."

This novel is much more than a story about war. Though the war against Isis provides the motivation of the action; this is primarily an intimate tale of two best friends who yearn for peace and equality and are prepared to sacrifice all they have to achieve it.

Sometimes we can switch off emotionally from the endless news cycle of wars in distant lands such as the fight against Isis in Syria. It seems so far away and our lives seem so

different. The beauty of this novel is in its rich exploration of the characters of Roza and Karin. We come to know them and their rich culture and to recognise parts of them in us. Their story is told with compassion, feminine understanding and gentle humour. Suzanne Strong's skill and thorough research takes you deep into the lives and struggles of these Kurdish women in a memorable, compelling and emotionally touching read."

[Malve von Hassell - 5.0 out of 5 stars](#)

[Heather Preston – 5 out of 5 Stars](#)

[An immersive experience in this captivating tale of friendship](#)

"From the first paragraph of *Where The Sun Rises* the reader is drawn into the world of Karin, a young Kurdish medical student forced through circumstances and her own belief in justice to join the war against Daesh/ISIS. We also meet Roza, a teacher and young mother, representing a more passive demographic. How will each react to the horrors of war?

The very human side of armed conflict, as depicted, begs us as readers to consider how we would react under similar conditions. Would we be among those who choose to flee across the border, to what might be safety? Would we defiantly stay in our homes despite the odds? Or would we act by taking up arms and getting involved in beating back the aggressors?

Suzanne Strong's meticulous research pays off, as she seamlessly presents a credible, realistic, immersive experience forming a colourful background to this captivating tale of friendship. Through her richly textured descriptions, we experience the day-to-day circumstances of those living through war. It is only through their darkest days and their camaraderie (with each other and their sisters-in-arms) that the young women get to know themselves and what they are capable of, but the real power of this book lies in how it affects the reader. The questions it raises and the gratitude for being spared the choices demanded by war, will continue to haunt this reader.

It is our agency and integrity that will carry us through dark times and the young heroines of *Where The Sun Rises* stand tall in testament. It is an anthem for female camaraderie and friendship, while recognising their love and respect for the men in their lives. The author manages to breathe life into and foster empathy even for minor characters, both male and female.

A surprisingly uplifting read, despite its serious setting, I recommend *Where The Sun Rises* as a must-read for anyone paying attention to the raging conflicts of our era and concerned about where we are heading in reaction."

Amazon Customer – 5 out of 5 stars

It was amazing.

“‘Where the Sun Rises’ was difficult to put down. It’s a gripping read, amazingly researched and written with great sensitivity. I highly recommend as a narrative on a difficult but vitally important topic.”

Marilyn Cowling – 5 out of 5 Stars

Where The Heart Is

“This is a one-of-a-kind, fantastically ambitious novel. I’d never considered the realities of women in war, let alone their personal, emotional and familial stories. Suzanne Strong has provided us with dramatic insight into this, with the grim reality of war counterpointed with sensual tastes and textures for relief and cultural flavour – a backdrop to these women’s hellish predicament.

What does it mean to fight against an enemy when you don’t have a recognised homeland? A remarkable and necessary tale of women’s friendship in war, and the Kurdish struggle for a safe place called ‘home’.”

Claire Doyle 5.0 out of 5 stars

Where the Sun Rises: A story of feminine courage and friendship

“With Turkish forces invading northern Syria, the release of Strong’s new novel Where The Sun Rises offers a timely and necessary insight into the conflicts of this region. The focus in Strong’s novel is the village of Kobane, a Syrian town within walking distance of the southern Turkish border. In contemporary times – late 2019 – forces backed by Turkey are amassing to drive out the Kurds, but back in 2014-15, when the novel is set, the Kurds are pushing back against Daesh, an Islamic terrorist group. Although the conflicts are not identical, there are correspondences in what it means to be Kurdish against oppressive forces driven by religious imperatives.

We enter the story when Daesh are advancing towards Kobane. Karin, who is a medical student, is estranged from her fiancé, and is in the final stages of completing her medical degree. In a story that runs parallel to this, we are introduced to Roza, married mother of one, and teacher of English at a local school. It is soon evident the woman who are the focus of these alternating chapters have been strong allies in childhood. A decade later they still remain friends, despite their diverging paths. When Karin’s brother, Mani, announces he’s off to join the war against Daesh, she laments that he lacks the imposing physique of a soldier.

“His shoulders seemed smaller and bonier than before, vulnerable somehow. She wanted him to be large and bulky, and felt a terrible dread of wanting to protect him but knowing she couldn’t.” Mani leaves for the war and when he doesn’t make it through, Karin decides

to stand in place and fight in his honour. There is a female militia group she already knows about, and now she treks off to enlist. On her journey there she reflects on the irony of her decision: her life won't be dedicated to saving lives – as it would have been in her medical career – but instead will be dedicated to taking lives away. We forgive Karin's decision because it is clear she has so few choices. The border into Turkey is closed, the war puts a stop to her degree, and her family's lives are endangered. Good people defend their territory even if it costs them their lives.

Roza wrestles with a similarly difficult decision. She has seen her husband go off to war and the school where she teaches is emptied of students. When she learns her husband has been killed, she struggles to be an effective parent for little Yez. Overcome with grief, she believes the best course of action is to take arms against her pain, and fight to obliterate the loss of her husband. Leaving Yez with relatives, she, too, joins the female militia. Roza and Karin meet at the military training camp and are grateful each has the other for this next harrowing chapter of their lives. The experience of war brings Roza and Karin closer together, but ultimately the friendship implodes in a defining incident which is both harrowing and emotionally powerful. Despite the central focus being war, there are keen moments of levity. In the midst of crossfire, we duck into a local bakery – still operating throughout the conflict. Tension is ratcheted down when characters cut loose with singing, dancing and the tembur. There is even an intervention from a gaggle of ducks. "“Chh, chh, chh,” Roza said to the ducks, getting them to move along, and guiding them into the nearest yard, relieved they didn't have any young with them.”

It stands as a testament to Strong's writing that while she has no direct experience of war, readers still feel immersed in an authentic experience. Take Strong's description of Roza's first experience killing Daesh:

“It was strange to see a connection between her fingers, some wood, metal, and powder, and taking a man's life. Instantly she felt sick, an emptiness she had never experienced seemed to open up inside like a cavernous ravine, as she watched his deep thick blood oozing into the dirt.” Key scenes are rendered in simple but powerful prose.

“Your daddy became a martyr today,” she told him. “He gave his life for us.” She could barely say the words; they seemed hollow. They embraced in the dirt of the street. ...It was as if they were the only people in the world.”

If you are curious about how women are inculcated into army life, if you are engaged with feminist empowerment stories, or if you enjoy learning about new cultures through a touchstone like war, I strongly recommend this novel. The story also serves as a sobering reminder of how fortunate most of us are not to be embroiled in conflicts so persistent and harrowing. Highly recommended.”

[Alison Quigley](#) – 5 out of 5 Stars

[A Timely and Important Read](#)

“If you like inspiring stories about strong women, friendship, and family, this book is for you. And if you are less than expert in Kurdish history, *Where the Sun Rises* will open your eyes and heart. I recommend it!”

Always reading – 5 out of 5 Stars

A beautifully written, emotive novel; behold the fierce sisterhood rejecting tyranny.

Suzanne Strong's affecting novel induced me to shed tears, swept me up in the moment as though I was, indeed, on the ground in Kurdish Syria, and had me on tenterhooks throughout.

I had the pleasure of reading 'Where the Sun Rises' over the New Year. On more than one occasion, I found myself with goose bumps and hairs upstanding – unable to put this book down for fear of missing what happens next.

I would highly recommend! Five stars!

Kathryn Le Gay Brereton 5.0 out of 5 stars

This book has it all!

"A wonderful story that pulls at your heart strings while reminding you how strong and determined women can be. The author puts you right in the middle of their dilemmas, their joys and sorrows while beautifully weaving in the culture of the land. I very much enjoyed this book!"

Amazon Customer – 5.0 out of 5 stars

A powerful story of the courage of women

"I really loved Where The Sun Rises. It broke my heart in more than one place, but it really gave me a look inside the ongoing courage of the Kurdish women and their remarkable bravery and camaraderie in the face of a horrific enemy. After a terrific and heroic struggle, the story ends on a note of hope and promise for the future. The story of these remarkable women should be shared widely with the world for the sake of both those who were lost and for those who carry on."

Jessica Ciosek – 5.0 out of 5 stars

"Having just read Where the Sun Rises by Suzanne Strong I am very impressed that it's been launched when Turkey just evicted the Kurdish people – this is SO the book. Female fearless fighters – standing up for what they believe. So well written it feels you are really there.

Recommend it highly. "

Sue – 5 out of 5 Stars

Quite a story!

"Quite a story. I was challenged to read the book as I normally can't handle the brutality and inhumanity of any armed conflict and would avoid such harrowing tales. But.... I did feel the bravery and humanity that was conveyed in the story through all the strong female characters. This helped me through. I actually felt the bravery of the author (exactly like the main characters) in taking on the challenge to write on such a foreign subject to most Australians. I was pretty ignorant of the plight of people in that region."

Gary Stein

"Loved this book. It took me to a place I will never be, amongst people I will never meet, but stories about this part of world often come up in the news. Until now it has been very easy to disconnect from the horror stories coming from these places. Now that I feel I have been there along side these remarkable women I will certainly connect on a higher level to the problems in this part of the world. Ms Strong has a very detailed style of writing which makes it easy to be totally immersed in the lives of the characters. Would highly recommend this read."

Nell Taig – 5 out of 5 Stars

"Well researched, moving story of women fighting for their country and rights."

Mary Kathleen – 4 Stars out of 5 Stars

A Great Read

"Suzanne Strong has written a very powerful book that will tug at your heart. This is a story about the brave women who fought against the Daesh to save their town. An Eye-opener and a tearjerker to the way they sacrificed themselves for their comrades. This is a book that you won't want to put down until you finish it."

Maggie Long – 5 out of 5 Stars

Unique & gritty

"A wonderfully unique read, highlighting the horrors of war while exploring the relationships between women determined to fight and protect their region. At times harrowing and heart-wrenching but also filled with hope. Well worth a read."

Dawn Brookes 5.0 out of 5 stars

"Where the Sun Rises is a novel that shows a largely untold story. The story of Kurdish women who fought ISIS in Syria in 2014. It was an extremely personal story, that showed the reality of war from the point of view of two best friends. The dilemmas, the pain, the humour, and life, are all entwined in this story. It was an intimate tale of loyalty, bravery and strength and how these women were achieving amazing victories against Daesh. I loved it. I bonded with the two main characters and enjoyed seeing this war from their point of view, including the minor characters. I would definitely recommend this book, to experience a largely unknown reality, but also for a story based on real women who did extraordinary things and who risked everything for it."

Leah – 5 out of 5 Stars