

BOOK CLUB KIT

HELLO, READERS

If this book club kit has fallen into your hands, it probably means you're about to read my latest novel, *Femlandia*. Or perhaps you've already finished it. In any case, I hope this guide prompts some lively discussion and answers a few questions.

Imagine a world that has crumbled, not physically, but economically. Imagine a woman and her teenage daughter with nowhere to go. Imagine the safe haven they struggle to reach, looking very much like a utopia on the surface. Imagine peeling away that disguise and finding a terrible secret.

Femlandia is, in my mind, a horror story. It's purely speculative, and I had a ball writing this book. So why would a nice person like me write horror? Why write about near-future systems where one societal element or another has gone frighteningly wrong? The short answer is, I find it both fun and—believe it or not—soothing. We're in a world that sometimes looks bleak and unfair, so I like to push the envelope and create a world that's even bleaker and more unfair. For me, it makes the world we live in seem much kinder.

Writers are constantly confronted with the same question: Where do we get our ideas? I don't mind that question, but I do find it maddeningly difficult to answer. Ideas come from everywhere and nowhere. They come to us while we're standing in a supermarket line (that's how *Master Class* seeded itself); they come from short-story prompts asking for speculative fiction that centers around a woman's unique skill (*Vox* was born that way). And sometimes they come from other literary works we've read. In *Femlandia's* case, that other work was a century-old utopian novel by Charlotte Perkins Gilman called *Herland*. The moment I read the synopsis, I knew I wanted to flip *Herland* on its head and create not a benevolent all-female community but a sinister one, a place where the idea of living without men is taken to an extreme.

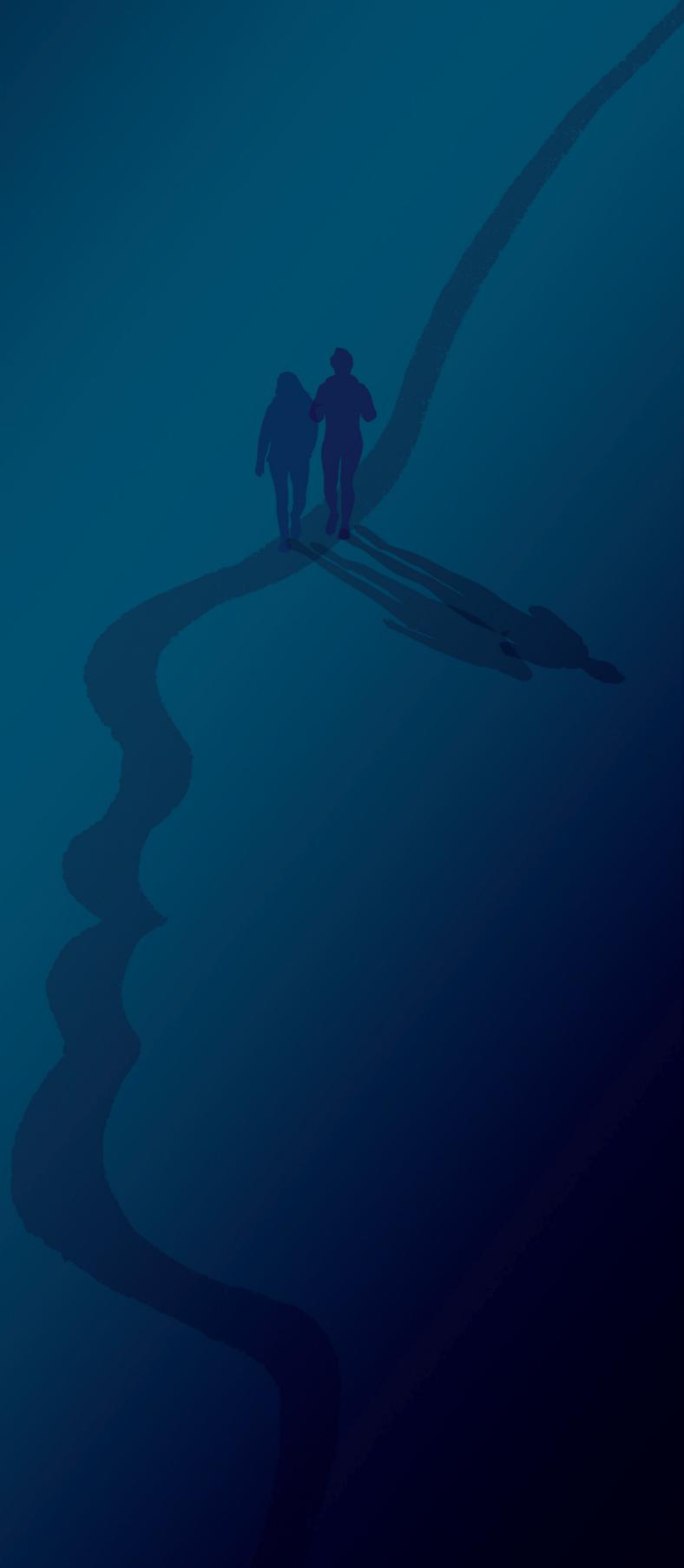
And that, really, is what I write about: extreme ideologies that one group sees as a solution to a problem but that necessarily have negative effects on other groups. *Femlandia*, though, is a little different from my first two books. Its characters—some good,

some evil—are complex, and I found myself sympathizing to a certain degree with the baddies this time around. I'll be curious to hear whether you do, too.

I didn't have a specific take-home message in mind when I was writing, but now that I've let the book simmer for a while, a few thoughts have come to me. Most of them center around the question of whether violence is ever justified or, if not justified, at least explainable in some way. I also think more about family relationships and whether parents risk disillusionment if they expect their children to make similar choices and embrace identical philosophies. Most of all, though, I find it interesting to consider whether all people are capable of horrific acts if they're pushed hard enough and whether humans have an innate tendency to desire control.

That all seems pretty heavy to me, but remember, *Femlandia* is only fiction, and it's my attempt at writing something scary. I hope you enjoy it, and I hope you remember to turn the lights on after you're finished.

Christina



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. One of the quotes in the front matter is “All movements go too far.” Do you think the concept of feminism embraced by Win Somers is an example of this? What other movements—either historic or contemporary—do you perceive as “going too far”?
2. Suppose *Femlandia* were *Manlandia* (in other words, an all-male community that used women as breeders). How would this change affect your reaction to the book?
3. At one point, Miranda recalls her mother, Win, insisting that “anything a man can do, a woman can do equally well.” Win considers men and women to be equal, but at the same time, she believes that “Men lie; women tell true tales. Men [screw] things up; women mend the broken bits. Men fight; women keep peace.” Do you think Win contradicts herself, or is there a way to explain her worldview?
4. If you were a librarian, which shelf would you put *Femlandia* on? Thriller? Women’s fiction? Science fiction? Horror? Or something else?
5. *Femlandia* can be read as a near-future dystopia. What are the elements of a dystopian story? Is there one element in particular that seems dominant in the genre?



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6. There's quite a bit of violence in the book, and this violence occurs in different contexts. Are there situations where extreme violence is justified?
 7. Win Somers and Jen Jones, the leaders of Femlandia, suffered various forms of abuse when they were younger. How does knowing their backgrounds affect the reader? Do Win and Jen deserve sympathy?
 8. Both *Femlandia* and *Vox* examine parent-child relationships. Specifically, we see that children do not always mirror their parents (and sometimes this is a good thing!). Are these rifts always caused by outside forces, or does the parent play a role in the breakdown of a relationship? Also, how vulnerable are younger people to trends and influences that are in opposition to their upbringing?
 9. If you were in Miranda, Sal, and Nell's position, what would you have done with Win and Jen at the end? Would you have let them stay? Do you think they're redeemable?
 10. After reading the epilogue, what do you think will happen to Femlandia? With the economy somewhat recovered, will the colony fizzle out? Will it continue as a self-sufficient community with both women and men? Or will it return to all-female, as its founder meant it to be?

OTHER BOOKS BY CHRISTINA DALCHER

