



Nomansland

Lesley Hauge

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Sometime in the future, a lonely, windswept island is populated solely by women. Among these women is a group of teenaged Trackers—expert equestrians and archers—whose job is to protect their shores from the enemy. The enemy, they've been told, is men. When these girls come upon a partially buried home from the distant past, they are fascinated by the strange objects—high-heeled shoes, teen magazines, make-up—found there. What are they to make of these mysterious things? And what does it mean for their strict society where friendship is forbidden and rules must be obeyed—at all costs?

Nomansland Details

Date : Published June 22nd 2010 by Henry Holt and Co. (BYR) (first published June 15th 2010)

ISBN : 9780805090642

Author : Lesley Hauge

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Fantasy, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic

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Hafsah Faizal says

I just finished reading Nomansland, by Lesley Hauge. It was incredible. It was unlike anything I've read before. No Vampires, Fairies, Magic -- Nomansland is unique. The story takes place in the future, on a wind-swept island called Foundland, where there are no men. In fact, the women in Foundland are taught that men are the enemy. Women run the island, grow the crops, tend the animals, and defend the island from an enemy that never shows up.

As I read this book, I kept waiting for action, maybe an attack, but about 3/4 of the way through, I realized that Nomansland was not meant to have action. It was meant for us to think, to contemplate, to ponder over what we call normal and common in our lives.

The main character, Keller, follows all the rules, whatever they may be. She accepts her way of life, even if she's not satisfied in it. When a group of girls, including Keller, finds an underground cavern filled with "smooth glossy, bound books" (magazines), colored paints (make-up), and "shoes that were probably used as weapons" (high-heels) - all things forbidden to them. Keller wonders what made the Old People from the Time Before so... bad. And why do the women and girls of Foundland have to live this way, forbidden from many things that will make them happy? Why live such a dull and colorless life is isolation?

Overall, I really liked this book. It wasn't full of action or suspense, but I felt the need to turn the page to find out what happens to Keller, if her questions will be answered, and by whom. I enjoyed the ending as well, which gives new hope to the island of Nomansland, but most of all, to Keller.

Kate says

I couldn't finish reading it. It started off well enough for a dystopian novel, but the concept was just poorly executed. Seriously, it's not exactly cliché, but more unbelievable. However, instead of having the barest of redeeming qualities (making me laugh at trite jokes because the story is OK, or laugh at the poor story because the one-liners make me chuckle).

As a book, I rate it at a C-, a grade that I consider to be generous. It didn't even have the courtesy to be bad from the beginning, so that I knew to put it down and start something else. No, it was OK at the start and just dropped off at the 50 page mark. Something like that borders on cruel, as I had taken it with me to keep busy ignoring my peers on a bus and found it unacceptable. No redeeming qualities at the end, either, as I broke my own rules to skip to the end and see if I should keep reading (yes, an act of utter taboo). Not only did it fail at the end, it did so doubly as it left with a sort of cliff-hanger. Except it resembled more of an unfinished work, like a tailor who left his suit for lunch and didn't return.

Well, feel free to prove me wrong, but I prefer my seams to be finished and my buttons and cuffs all where they're supposed to be.

Julie says

That was so bad! I laughed the whole time I was reading it because it was so ridiculous!

The writing style is very immature and sloppy. Very simplistic. And it's more of telling us what's happening instead of showing. It was something like this "I go here and I see this and then i turn and do that." For the first 70 pages (!) All they talk about is menstruation. I can't I laughed so hard. When we did get some "action" (action is a very strong word for what was going on, which is basically nothing), I couldn't care for any of the characters because of the dialogue. "Are you dead?" Lol who asks that?? so yeah I had a good laugh reading this book. Do not recommend

Julie (Manga Maniac Cafe) says

When I first picked up Nomansland, I didn't know what to expect. I only knew that once I saw the gorgeous cover, I had to read the book. This cover really is a siren's song to me; it has a girl on horseback, shooting an arrow, and she is surrounded by soft textures that contrast with her powerful back and the rigid strength of her arm. It's stunning.

While I don't think that I can say that I liked the protagonist, Keller, I can say that I grew to understand her. She keeps herself distant and aloof, but she is a product of her upbringing. In a society where friendship and even laughter is forbidden, she has been molded to fit within the strict, inflexible walls of her community. She has one purpose in life, and that is train to be a Tracker, one of the staunch defenders who keeps the rampaging men at bay. Her life is all about discipline and routine, and above all else, about following the rules. It's when she forms a forbidden friendship with the beautiful, rebellious Laing that she begins to question everything, from the cheerless life she leads to the truth about her society and those in charge of it.

I found the details about Keller's life fascinating. As with many post-apocalyptic stories, there is no detailed explanation given for the collapse of the previous civilization, just the drudgery of those left in its wake. Keller is extremely dedicated to her training, and she wants more than anything to become a Tracker. She pushes herself to the limit, and she obediently does everything that is expected of her. That is, until she is caught in the dazzling light that is Laing, and in one event after another, Keller's sheltered world falls slowly, and ever more tragically, apart.

This is one of those books that consumed my thoughts, even when I wasn't reading it. I had to know what happened next, and how it would change Keller. I have kind of an odd way of judging how good a book is; if I would rather keep reading than go and play with my ponies, than it's a really, really good book. This was one of those. I finished the book almost a week ago, and I am still thinking about Keller, wondering what she could have done differently, if she could have changed anything, even the slightest bit.

Nomansland is a haunting tale of a young woman's journey to discover the truth about herself and the people around her. It's an engrossing read, and it's one that will stay with me for a long time. This is one of the best books I've read this year.

Mary Ann says

Set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian society, Hauge's debut novel delves into the inner turmoil of Keller, a young teen, as she struggles with her own values and identity in an oppressive society. In a population made up entirely of women, Keller's society defends itself vigorously against invasion by men from the outside world. The girls in the society are taught to avoid the seven Pitfalls—Reflection, Decoration, Coquetry,

Triviality, Vivacity, Compliance, and Sensuality—and to reject warmth and friendship. The leaders have created a tough, self-reliant society, and yet allegiance to these values and to the leadership is cracking at all levels. One of Keller's fellow «Trackers» discovers a buried ruined house of the «Old People.» The girls' excitement at fashion magazines, makeup, and high heels they discover leads first to fascination and soon to peer pressure and a bizarre fashion show. It ends in death and disaster when their repressive, pleasure-hating leaders find out and punish the girls. Young teens will be fascinated at an outsider's look at our «modern» society with all the trappings of consumer culture on show. This is a novel for reflection on peer pressure, trust, and identity and is not a story for readers who want exciting action.

I would give this to lovers of Hunger Games and Graceling who are clamoring for more dystopian literature with strong female leads. It is more introspective than either of those, with less plot/drama/action. But interesting premise and compelling story that pulled me through.

Lora says

Disappointing is the best way to describe this book. The end flap made it sound so good with an excellent premise of an island populated only by women who sustain themselves and think of men as the enemy. A few of the girls discover a buried house and with it things of the past (teen magazines, makeup, bicycles, heels) and they start to wonder what is really outside their island.

The story drags along and nothing really happens. There is way too much description that tells the reader nothing and not nearly enough dialogue and action. Keller, the narrator, complains throughout most of the book and she is a very annoying character. The structure of the island and the government in place is never really fully explained and makes the basic premise of the book difficult to understand and confusing. Nothing is properly justified. The few action sequences (there are very very few) aren't that entertaining and are so pedestrian I felt like I could have written them better, and I'm a horrible writer. The ending is tied up too quickly with things about the enemy (men) explained too quickly. In fact, the book just kind of ends. I don't know if Hauge is planning a sequel or not, but the reader is really left still wondering what is going to happen to Keller, the island, and what the existence of men really means for their little world.

Avoid this book. Waste of time, and particularly frustrating because it had such good potential.

Emily May says

Warning - I gave away some spoilers while ranting

Well, um, I have no idea why this book was written. And this is just one of those books that definitely requires an explanation, it is quite clearly not for basic entertainment value... there's a message in there somewhere, I'm sure of it, a message that's all about women and men and feminism, the way we live now and the way we could live. I'm just not sure what that is. In fact, "not sure" seems too mild a phrase, to say I haven't got a clue would be more appropriate.

Furthermore, Nomansland read like a short story that someone had desperately tried to stretch into a full-length novel and failed miserably at it. There is only one important chapter in the whole book - the one where the girls find the house from "the time before" - and the rest appears to be just filler, shock tactics, and

some of the worst world-building I've ever read. This novel could be set at any time, even in our present time, it could be set anywhere in this world or another. The world is there to form a weak backdrop against some sketchy feminist discussions ramblings.

I admit I read this because I thought *The Gate to Women's Country* would be too hardcore for a sci-fi wuss like me and saw this as the young adult alternative. So there's this land (somewhere, at some time) whose population is made up entirely of women, I would tell you how this happened and where the men went if only I knew the answer to that myself. But anyway, they are trained warriors, an idea I would very much like to comment on but risk giving away spoilers so I will restrain myself. They are also taught to accept that the lives they live, no matter how stressful, are better than the way things were "before". Before what, one can only imagine.

The big event of this book is when a group of girls stumble across some objects from "before". These objects include magazines, barbie dolls and make-up. They are astounded at the shiny images of women, some unbelievably skinny, when they are muscular and hairy. The clothes and shoes they find seem ridiculous. It is noted how the barbie dolls prove that the women of "the time before" walked permanently on tiptoe. Whether you agree with the ideas portrayed or not, it seems rather clear what the author's intention is with this, right? Basically, poke fun at modern society with it's stick-thin models and obsession with beauty to the point of having painful "spiked" shoes. Uh, no, not quite...

Because this novel's evil bitch character is determined to never return to these ways of the past, she sees these women as weak and submissive to the patriarchal society, the story of genesis as a way for men to hide their fear of their own lust behind the forced subservience of women, and she sees that those who disagree are punished in a variety of disgusting ways. So... confusing. And underneath it all there is an uprising brewing, girls who have not fallen for her lies and wish to escape Nomansland to the world outside. So is the message that the society we live in is actually good? That we should stick with the skinny models and make-up and beauty pageants?

Who the hell knows? Lesley Hauge, just what is your point?

I admire any author who tries to incorporate feminist philosophy into their writing, it doesn't get enough publicity, but I can't figure out what this wishy-washy message is trying to say to me. I almost miss Kristin Cashore, at least I knew what she was going on about, even if her message was scarily radical most of the time and not what I agree with. I won't give away the ending to *Nomansland*, but I will say that it only confuses me even more and I wonder if Ms Hauge even knew herself what she wanted to say with this novel.

Lesley Hauge says

Recently a reviewer on this site in response to my novel, *Nomansland*, and I think in some exasperation, put a question directly to me: "Lesley Hauge, what is your point?"

I felt I had to try to answer her question.

On the whole novelists do not have "points" as such because a novel is a capacious, complex art form full of ambiguity. "Points" are perhaps better made in lectures or essays or some other form. But of course novelists do have something to say. Well, this is what I wanted to say:

The world of *Foundland* is a post-apocalyptic all-female world in which widespread destruction has

obliterated almost everything familiar. The survivors have had to make do with fragments of the past on which to build their isolated, closed, defended little society. Because they have few markers or references and life is so hard, their rules are harsh and skewed. The rules they have internalized are the rules of a half-remembered feminism mixed up with a patriarchal-military society of their own devising that grows further distorted on this bleak, windswept island.

This was my attempt to satirize and to characterize what I often think of as "the matriarchal mafia" of strict, humorless headmistresses, mother superiors of convents, madams running brothels, editors of magazines and, most especially, grim, militant feminists--the kind that young women in the 21st century laugh at and reject. That is to say, I wanted to make a grotesque, distorted version of how women in power rule when they internalize male constructs of how power is to be wielded. But over time, as in all closed societies, their goals and their idealism warps into dogma and a kind of feminist totalitarianism sets in.

Pitted against this is another kind of distorted world, the world of our own era as portrayed by all the objects that a group of teenage girls (known as Trackers since they are in training to patrol the borders of the island) discover when they come across a hidden house buried in the undergrowth. The things that have the crucial impact are the contents of a teenage girl's bedroom: clothes, makeup and fashion magazines. The distortion in this case comes through the lens of the Trackers themselves because these things are so deeply unfamiliar. But the Trackers have another reaction to these things--and it is an entirely natural reaction. They like this stuff! It's fun; it's colorful; it's exciting. And, tragically, they become fatally competitive with one another once they get their hands on it.

Keller, the main character, begins to see that these are two extremes. There is the joyless, colorless, controlled world of Foundland, where a warped feminist dogma has shaped a cruel and hypocritical society--yet it is also a society where the women are tough, independent and active. Contrasted with this, she now has a narrow glimpse into this other strange, smooth, bright world of the past where women seem to be so gorgeous yet passive, sexualized to the point of absurdity.

And so, by telling a story, I wanted to get my readers thinking about a central question for young feminists today. No one wants the grim world where you can't have fun with clothes and makeup but the other "world" where young women are so intensely pressured to ONLY express themselves through their sexuality is equally unappealing. So how do you navigate your way between these two extremes? How do you figure it out? How do you become the courageous, honest, celebratory, funny, competent young woman you want to be? And Keller, who is rapidly rejecting all that she has ever known, discovering so many hidden truths about her own society, is left with that question in the same way as you or I. How do you become who you want to be? I can't say I have really figured it out but it's so important to try and you do it in part by exploring hard questions to which you don't really have actual answers ... and so, here I am, trying to answer your hard question because, in the end, perhaps I don't have the answer for you. All I have is my effort.

Lesley Hauge.

Laura says

I'm at a loss. I don't know what to say about this book and I find it hard to summarize since I am unable to discern a central plot line, and that perhaps is my biggest complaint with this story- it was so very vague.

We have here a futuristic society of women who have reformed their own amazonian civilization and protect it fiercely against "the enemy". The enemy is of course, the men who raped and controlled the women of the past, before the Tribulation (end of the known world). The women of this society are also the only untainted,

unmutated humans left who are still able to breed healthy children. Keller is being trained as a Tracker, a ranger of sorts who defends their lands from the enemy, and other than her being the story's narrator, it's only loosely about her. Eventually the focus shifts from the rules and regulations that dominate the novice trackers (and the story never really gets back to that) when some of the girls discover a hidden pre-Tribulation dwelling that contains mysterious artifacts from the people of the past. One of the home's inhabitants was a teenage girl, like our novices, but so unlike them that her possessions enthrall and captivate the young trackers and force them to question what life must have been like for teenage girls pre-apocalypse and just how much is missing from the lives they know.

It was more a time line of vaguely connected events than one story but I was able to separate a few key elements.:

1. In the future, those of us (women), the ones that suffer no ill effects from whatever it was that destroyed the world, are forced to breed. Well, I would be shocked by this had I not already been shocked (with a high voltage taser) by it in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, which I abhorred.
2. Men are the enemy because they are believed to have controlled and raped the women of the past. However we have basically the same thing happening in this society where the rulers deal out forced artificial insemination, which all the girls live in fear of.
3. The girls discover the makeup, clothes, jewelry and other assorted frippery of a teenage girl from the past. Even when raised and bred in a new society of fierce, rugged women, we are still given to bouts of vanity and our superficial natures aren't really all that suppressed and we would easily throw all of our accomplishments away to be a beauty queen. Keller and her friends were not the only ones plagued with vanity in the story- The commissioner wore colorful flowing skirts and had a rather luxurious bedroom. Keller felt herself to be too ugly to compete in a contest of beauty but still longed to be able to. We never really get far from ourselves, even in the future.
4. The Commissioner, (the one in charge) who was ravenous in her disdain for biblical teachings and its anti-feminist overtones, approached her campaign to make her people as unlike the women who she felt the Bible portrayed with so much venom that in retrospect made her just as much a religious zealot as those she strove against.
5. Even the hardest of their kind succumbed to baser instincts and sought male companionship and desired the comfort that comes with being wanted. Shallow or not, I appreciated the inclusion of the softer elements that make us female and feminine even in the harsh time portrayed in the story.

The book didn't answer a single question- not about what happened, not about what was happening, not about what would happen. Still, I can accept the ending as is, shrouded in mystery and keeping with the ambiguous air that ran throughout the story if she doesn't follow this with a sequel, which I don't feel the book warrants. Only then could I believe that the story was intentional.

Despite all evidence to the contrary, I didn't dislike this book, I just didn't get it. It's dystopian YA Lit so you WANT to read it and I think you should.

Librariann says

ARC

In a future world, Foundland is one pure island populated only by women/girls. They live in institution like dormitories and must adhere to the rigid standards of their order. Keller is training to be a Tracker, one of the women who guards the island. Then one of her Patrol discovers a cache from Before.

The framework for Keller's world is there, but the story feels incomplete. (will review further)

Carlos says

This book was a good idea but it was poorly executed, the plot needed more background information and the characters needed to be more hashed out. The ending was not what I expected, I think the audience needed more information about what had happened to the rest of society and what else was going around in the world. Nice try but poorly executed dystopian narrative.

Clare says

Not my style. A bunch of girls live without men. They find a treasure chest of accessories from our time (their past) and it changes them and their values. Pseudo-lesbianism, vicious high-school girl cruelty. Too dark and dreary and preachy for me. Like an apocalyptic Heathers.

Milly says

*Audible Review

I decided to take a chance on this book thinking it'll be like the Walking Chaos trilogy by Patrick Ness, which I loved. Unfortunately, the only similarity was the premise: inability of two genders co-existing in the same town/world. In the case of Nomansland, the island, Foundland, is survived by only women. The man is the enemy, a tainted species. Our protagonist, Keller, is teenager trained to be a tracker, monitoring the borders of Foundland to protect it from the invasion of the enemies: men. In addition to her training, Keller and the rest of the women of Foundland are taught to refrain from feelings of love and friendship. To befriend another is wrong. To keep secrets, to have feelings of happiness, joy, sadness is unacceptable and frowned upon. Ironically enough, the lack of affect in its characters made them appear very flat and boring. I could not relate or appreciate any of the characters. I felt that there was not much happening in this book and will probably pick up in its sequel. This book basically focused on the world building and not much else. I feel that I still don't know much about Keller and the other significant characters of the book.

The only interesting part of the book for me was when Keller and the other trackers happened upon magazines from the past and how the author smartly described pages full of male and female models. It was insanely funny.

I was still unconvinced and unsold by the plot especially with the existence of babies in an island where no man is present. Did they have like a batch of sperms freezing somewhere and thawed when there's a need to fertilize it with a young and healthy woman? Weird definitely. I know the only explanation will be in its sequel. Unfortunately, I'm still not enticed enough to follow this series.

Blah.

Chelsea says

Keller is training to be a Tracker, those who patrol the outer ridges of Foundland for the enemy. In this case, the enemy is Men. Keller lives in a society of only women, hard work, and survival. No one is permitted to have fancy first names, and all must adhere to the Seven Pitfalls (much like the seven deadly sins) if they do not want to be punished. It is a dreary, boring life, but it is all Keller knows. Until one night, when fellow Patrol member Laing takes her to a hidden underground house from the Time Before, and it is filled with colorful magazines of women and men wearing and doing things Keller has never seen before. Suddenly everything Keller knows about life is tipped upside down, and she must quickly find the strength to carry on with or without the answers she seeks.

I thought *Nomansland* was fascinating dystopian YA lit. Lesley Hauge portrayed a bleak, grim picture of a possible future - one not only without men, but also without so many material things to keep people happy. I was surprised at how seriously this book took itself, keeping with the strong biblical references to Eve and the snake. I am also always surprised at how strict the rules are in these imagined dystopian communities. So harsh! Keller's character is deep and incredibly well written. She goes from being completely compliant of her place in life, to thinking on her own and making her own wise decisions. I kept trying to imagine myself in Keller's position and wondered if I could have been as strong as she was. Hauge has written a fantastic book for teen girls to read and share with each other. I will be keeping my eyes peeled for more from this author!

Brandy says

I'm a sucker for dystopian lit, even though stand-outs are few and far between. At some level, so many of them are the same. As I read through this one, I was mentally ticking off boxes: "vague future setting? check. Strict governmental oversight--check--of an isolated people? check. Inability to travel beyond that town's borders? check again." In an odd bit of synchronicity, the Boston Bibliophile's husband posted a review today of Justin Cronin's *The Passage*, a review that included his checklist of elements found in nearly every dystopian novel. When he says "when reading a novel set in a certain type of post-apocalyptic future, there are things that a genre-savvy audience might expect to see," he's absolutely right, because that's exactly what I was doing the whole time I was reading this.

Nomansland is an engrossing story, but still predictable if you're familiar with the genre. Keller is a teenage Tracker-in-training in a society where frivolities and friendships are forbidden. When a fellow patrol-member invites Keller to check out a hidden house from the Time Before, stuffed with Found Objects, Keller is excited but also nervous. When the group starts making more regular trips, Keller enjoys the experiences but can't shake the bad feeling. Anyone who's ever read a book can see that this isn't going to end well.

My biggest complaint is how precious the descriptions and interpretations of current-world artifacts are--couches are "long chairs" and these "long chairs" are arranged around "a box with a gray window in it," etc. It's kind of interesting from an anthropological perspective, and it makes sense that the girls in the book don't know what, say, a computer looks like or what it would be used for, but the constant stream of coy, almost coquette-ish description is just too well, there's no better word than *precious*.

My biggest disappointment, however, is that in a book about this gynocentric civilization in which men are literally called "the enemy," there was surprisingly little discussion of gender politics. When I picked this up

I was at least expecting something more similar to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, but at the very least hoping for some explanation of why the genders had split the way they had.

Engrossing, but not something I'm likely to buy for the collection--while dystopias circulate pretty well in my library, I don't think this one will really grab my teens.
