

"Expertly paced, hugely unsettling, and perfectly dark."  
—ASHLEY AUDRAIN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Push*

# THIS MIGHT HURT

A NOVEL

We'll keep  
your secrets . . .  
if you keep ours.

STEPHANIE  
WROBEL

USA Today Bestselling Author of *Darling Rose Gold*



BOOK CLUB KIT



Property of Wisewood

Date: 1/2/22

Conversation with Stephanie Wrobel

IN: Interviewer

SW: Stephanie Wrobel

[BEGIN TRANSCRIPT 00:00:10]

IN: With a title like This Might Hurt, is there anything you'd like to warn readers about before they dip in?

SW: I think the opening scene is the most gruesome! From there, the action becomes significantly less...repulsive.

IN: How would you describe This Might Hurt?

SW: This Might Hurt is a story about pain, fear, and endurance. It explores the light and dark sides of belief.

IN: What kind of research did you do for the novel? Did anything surprise you?

SW: I read books and articles and listened to podcasts about some of the most famous cults: Peoples Temple, Heaven's Gate, the Manson Family, FLDS, the Rajneeshpuram community, and NXIVM. I also did a ton of research on mentalism, self-help retreats, fear, pain, and persuasion.

On the cult front, I was most surprised to learn that pretty much anyone can be taken in by a cult if you catch them at the right—or wrong—time in their life. Plenty of lawyers, doctors, etc., have signed up. We tend to view cult members with disdain, judge them as naïve at best and unintelligent at worst. That's simply not true.

Another surprise was learning that brainwashing isn't real. Human beings can, of course, manipulate one another to extremes, but there's no such thing as taking over someone's mind against their will. A degree of consent must be present.



From the pain/fear perspective, I had never really thought about how much fear plays a role in pain. It's been scientifically proven that dread is more painful to the brain than the thing you're dreading. If you're afraid of an impending experience, the physical pain of said experience will be much worse than if you weren't afraid. That blows my mind!

IN: In our culture there is a fascination with the psychology of cults—their leaders, followers, and those who escape. Why do you think our society finds cults so intriguing?

SW: People love a good story, and cults almost always offer one. You become more aware of an unusual, exceptional individual who gets a bunch of other people to live under strange circumstances through means that are manipulative, unethical, and sometimes degrading. Conflict is inherent within cults; watching others try to navigate that conflict fascinates us.

IN: Why were you personally inspired to write about the subject?

SW: Like everyone else, I'm fascinated by cults—and have been for as long as I can remember. In writing the book, I wanted to answer two questions: why do people join cults, and why do people lead them?

IN: Did any real-life cults inspire the story?

SW: An amalgamation of the cults mentioned above inspired the story. When you dig into a lot of them, you find patterns: peculiar terminology, hierarchies of participation or loyalty, the use of blackmail to keep members in line, leaders who are charismatic, narcissistic, and unpredictable. I incorporated all these elements into the novel.

I always want my books to be based in psychological and practical reality, so I dove deeply into real cult belief systems before developing my own. For example, Manson preached that his Family should live in a constant



state of fear. To them, fear was beautiful, a state of heightened awareness. My fictional cult, Wisewood, takes a different approach. They believe fear is the single biggest obstacle standing in our way; only by eliminating it can guests reach their Maximized Selves. These sound like opposite positions, but when you strip away the jargon, most cults promise the same thing: an elevated consciousness, a superior way of being.

IN: The fictional community of Wisewood lives on a private island off the southern coast of Maine. Is it based on a particular place?

SW: Wisewood isn't based on any real island or resort, but I imagine its location in mid-coastal Maine, about seven miles south of Vinalhaven island, which is the most populous island in the area. Choosing a real region grounded some aspects of the story, like weather, transport, and agricultural possibilities, but creating a fictional island allowed me to dress the set precisely as I wanted.

IN: In your debut novel, Darling Rose Gold, you explored a complicated mother-daughter dynamic, and in this novel you explore the equally complicated dynamic between two sisters. Tell us about Natalie and Kit's relationship at the start of the novel.

SW: Natalie and Kit have only each other as family, but they have opposite outlooks on life. Natalie is all about security—climbing the career ladder and contributing to her 401(k). Meanwhile, Kit's focus is on finding meaning; she has spent her entire adulthood trying to discover the thing that will give her life purpose. Consequently, Natalie sees Kit as an irresponsible flake, while Kit sees Natalie as an inflexible tyrant. At the beginning of the novel, they haven't spoken in the six months that Kit's been away at Wisewood.

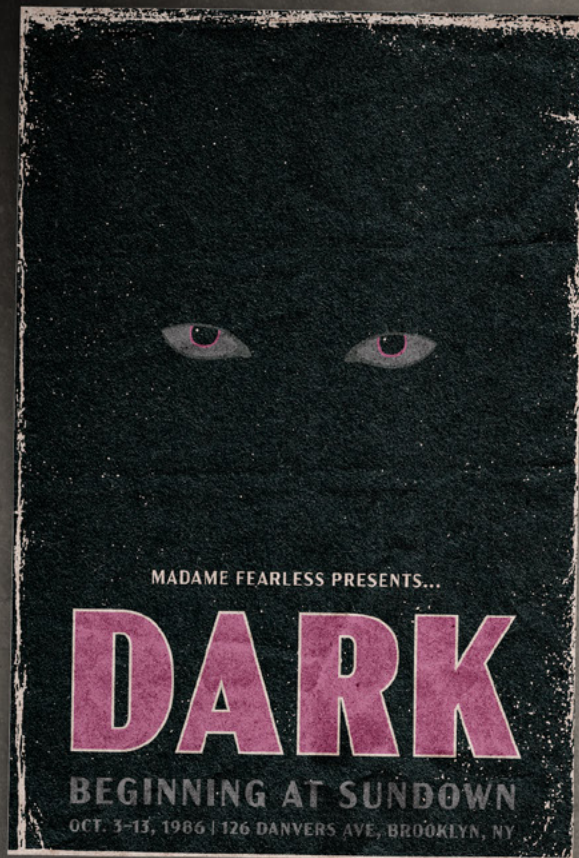
IN: What challenges did you face while writing This Might Hurt?



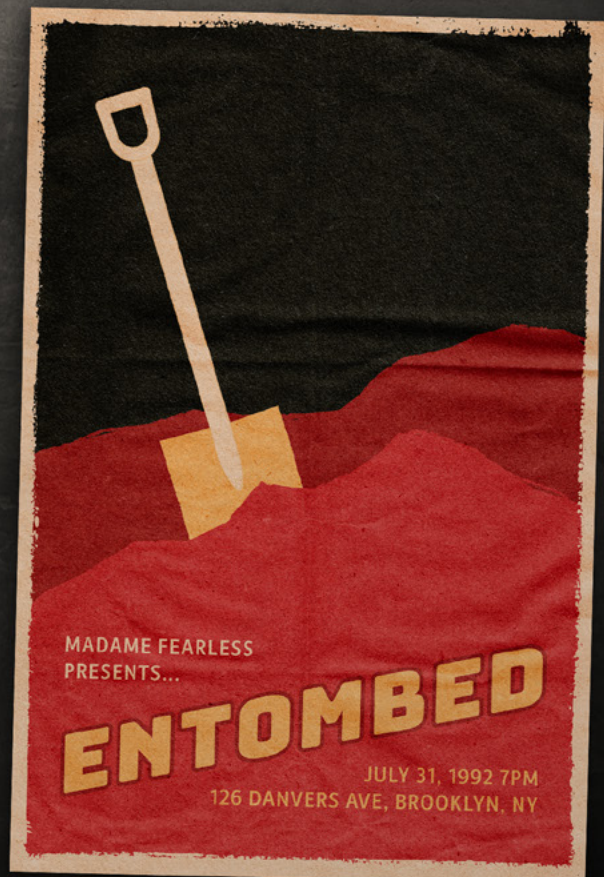
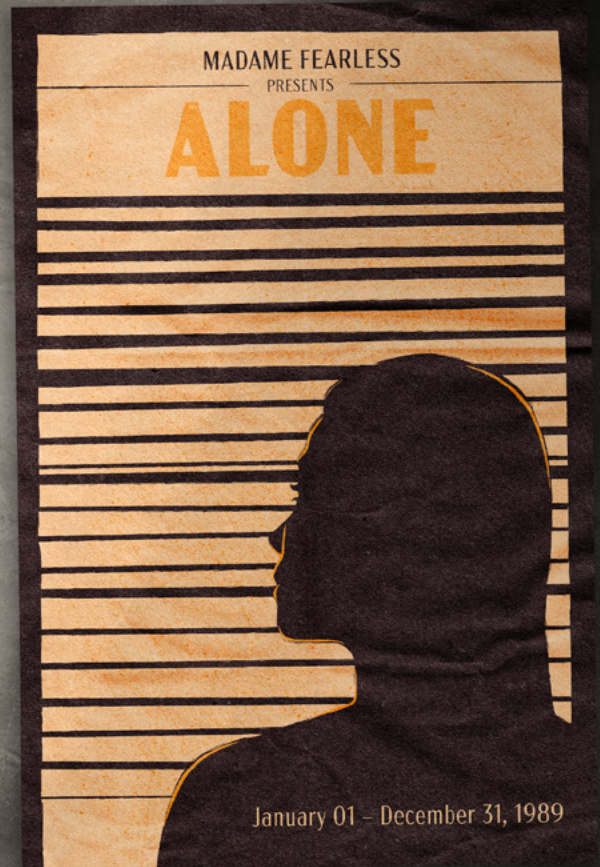


SW: What challenges didn't I face?! That old chestnut about the second book being the hardest one for an author rang true for me; I struggled through all seven drafts. First and foremost, I found writing three first-person narrators with unique voices to be a real challenge. My cast was also much bigger this time than with Darling Rose Gold, so I spent an entire draft bringing the supporting characters to life. Finally, I didn't want my fictional cult's beliefs to be outlandish. My aim is for readers to nod along with Wisewood's principles, to think of them as harmless at first, even smart—because that's how these communities come off to new members. Nobody goes to an introductory meeting and is told they'll someday be forced to drink cyanide-laced Flavor Aid at gunpoint. The slide down the rabbit hole is gradual.













## READING GROUP QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Full and thoughtful answers will be extremely valuable to us in providing you the best possible care.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- ① Is fearlessness a worthwhile goal? Why or why not?
- ② How does fear affect Kit? What about Natalie? Rebecca?
- ③ Has any character in the book achieved true fearlessness? Does such a thing exist?
- ④ What does the novel say about self-help culture?
- ⑤ How does family trauma influence the main characters?
- ⑥ How does each of the three women find and express control over her life?
- ⑦ Which of the characters did you most identify with, and why?
- ⑧ How did you feel about the ending? Why do you think the author ended the book where she did?
- ⑨ What do you think happened after "the end"?



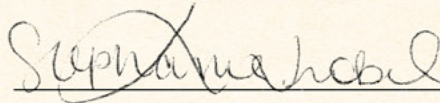


- ⑩ How did you view cults before reading the book? In what ways, if any, did your perspective change as you read it?
- ⑪ Did you find yourself agreeing with any of Wisewood's principles? Did any of the exercises seem benign, even useful? If so, which ones?
- ⑫ At what point did Wisewood cross the line from well-intentioned to unethical? Who is to blame for that line being crossed?
- ⑬ Kit says to Natalie, "Scientists have proven it's not possible to empty a person's head against their will. You can't take over someone's mind." How much free will do you think a cult member has?
- ⑭ Famous British illusionist Derren Brown said, "The more attentive a spectator is, the easier he is to fool. The more you watch, the more you'll miss." Which members of the Inner Circle are especially attentive spectators? Which of them are harder to fool than the rest? Are you an attentive spectator?

PATIENT SIGNATURE:

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PROVIDER SIGNATURE:



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