

A LAND SO WIDE

by ERIN A. CRAIG

Book Club Kit



← We'll see you soon, little Starling . . . →

In this adult debut of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Thirteenth Child* and *House of Salt and Sorrows* comes an irresistible blend of dark fairy tale and romantic fantasy that transports readers into the past and away to the beautiful but brutal Canadian wilderness.

A LAND SO WIDE is at once a lush, atmospheric, and swoon-worthy adventure of love, family, and devotion, and an epic exploration of freedom, courage, and independence. In these pages, you'll find questions to explore the text more deeply; suggested reads to keep your bookshelf stocked; fun prompts to enliven any book club gathering; and some recipes, perfectly paired for hosting A LAND SO WIDE-themed parties.

HAPPY READING!

Discussion Questions

1. How do the time period and setting of *A LAND SO WIDE* contribute to the story? How would the story change if it took place in the modern day? How would the story change were it not set in such a remote place?
2. The female characters in *A LAND SO WIDE*—Greer, Louise, Ailie—often find themselves subject to the whims of the men in their lives. How do their individual journeys reflect the restrictions their sex puts on them? How do their journeys upend the narrative that those men would write for them?
3. Romance is often portrayed negatively as a genre for women. In what ways do the romances in *A LAND SO WIDE* allow Erin A. Craig to let her female characters take control of their stories? In what ways does the genre, in general, allow for a subversion of typical gender roles?
4. The Bright-Eyeds are initially portrayed as monsters in *A LAND SO WIDE*, but they are later revealed to be much more nuanced and complex. In what ways does the society of the Bright-Eyeds reflect that of Mistaken? Do you empathize with the Bright-Eyeds? Why or why not?
5. Greer is introduced as she is drawing one of her maps, a theme that recurs often throughout *A LAND SO WIDE*. How do maps function within Greer's adventure? What symbolism does the drawing of maps play in the story?
6. In what ways are Greer's and Ailie's stories different and in what ways are they the same? Do you relate more to Greer or Ailie? How and why?
7. Much of Greer's story hinges on her discovering secrets—secrets of her own bloodline, of Mistaken's founding, of the Bright-Eyeds. What do you make of her reaction to each of these reveals? Do you relate to her struggles with coming to terms with hidden truths? Why or why not?
8. The main industry of Mistaken is lumber, and the surrounding area contains mining settlements. Do you think the colonists' stripping of the land's natural resources is mirrored in the more fantastical aspects of the story? In what ways?
9. Mistaken represents security, while the world outside the Warding Stones represents danger—but also freedom. How is Greer's internal dilemma reflected in the conflict between these two ideas?

Recommended Reading

When Women Were Dragons ➤ Kelly Barnhill

The Daughter of Doctor Moreau ➤ Silvia Moreno-Garcia

The Bear and the Nightingale ➤ Katherine Arden

Uprooted ➤ Naomi Novik

The Starless Sea ➤ Erin Morgenstern

Emily Wilde's Encyclopaedia of Faeries ➤ Heather Fawcett

The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue ➤ V. E. Schwab

A Court of Thorns and Roses ➤ Sarah J. Maas

Keep the conversation going...

1. What's the best human/nonhuman pairing in literature? Why?
2. Are you team Ellis or team Finn? Why?
3. What do you think is next for Greer and Ellis?
4. If you could have any one sense be a "supersense," like Greer's hearing, what would you choose and why?
5. What fairy tale or folklore story do you think needs adapting most? Why?
6. Discuss your favorite romantic tropes. Why do you think they appeal? What needs do they fulfill?

Create your own A LAND SO WIDE celebration

APPLE CIDER OLD-FASHIONED

Makes 6 cocktails

- 1 quart (4 cups/950 ml) regular or spiced fresh apple cider
- ½ teaspoon pumpkin or apple pie spice blend (if the cider isn't spiced)
- 12 shakes Angostura orange or aromatic bitters
- 2 cups (475 ml) rye or bourbon whiskey, plus up to ½ cup (118 ml) more
- Fresh apple slices, for garnish, if you wish

Note: Because apple ciders can range in sweetness, the concentrate here will, too. You may feel that you need more or less sweetness to get the drink to its correct bracing but lightly sweet flavor.

Boil the apple cider and spice, if using, in a 3- to- 4-quart saucepan over high heat, until it is a shade darker and syrupy, reduced to about 1 cup. This takes 25 to 30 minutes on my stove. Stir occasionally, especially near the end, when you want to make sure it doesn't cook off too far. (If it does, it won't ruin the drink, but the texture can be thicker and harder to keep mixed.)

Let it cool to room temperature; then whisk in the bitters. In a thin stream, slowly whisk in the whiskey until it's evenly combined. Taste and add more whiskey, up to ½ cup, if desired. Transfer the mixture to a lidded carafe and chill thoroughly until you're ready to serve.

To serve: Place one large or a few smaller ice cubes in an old-fashioned glass (6 ounces). If the apple cider has settled in the carafe, give it another stir and pour it over the ice. Garnish with an apple slice, if desired.

CINNAMON BREAD

Makes 2 loaves

- 2 packages active dry yeast
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup granulated sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water (100° to 115°F, approximately)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cups warm milk (approximately)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ stick ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) softened butter
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 5 to 6 cups all-purpose flour

Combine the yeast, sugar, and water in a large bowl and let proof for 5 minutes. Heat the milk, and add the salt and butter. Add to the yeast mixture and blend well. Stir in the cinnamon, then add up to $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour, 1 cup at a time, beating well after each addition. Scrape the dough out onto a lightly floured board, and knead a good 10 minutes, or until smooth and elastic, using enough of the remaining flour to avoid excessive sticking. Shape into a ball and put into a buttered bowl, turning to coat the surface of the dough with butter. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm, draft-free spot until doubled in bulk.

Punch down the dough. Divide it into two pieces and shape them into loaves that will fit into two buttered 8 x 4 x 2- or 9 x 5 x 3-inch tins. Cover loosely and let rise again until doubled in bulk. Bake in a preheated 425°F oven for 10 minutes, then lower the temperature to 350°F and continue baking for 20 to 25 minutes longer, or until the loaves sound hollow when rapped on the top and bottom. Cool on racks before slicing.

Variations

- One or 2 eggs can be added to the dough, in which case you will have to increase the flour content.
- For a rich, golden top crust, brush with beaten egg just before baking.

PORTER RABBIT STEW

Serves one family over 2 days

- ½ pound (225 g) Cedar Salt Lard (recipe follows)
- 1 tablespoon rendered lard
- 1 rabbit, 2 to 2½ pounds (about 1 kg), cut into eighths by you (or your butcher)
- 1 or 2 Hardtacks (recipe follows), aka Prison Bread, per person
- 2 small white onions
- 1 large carrot
- 1 small turnip
- One 14.9-ounce bottle or can (440 ml) stout or porter beer
- 1 cup (240 ml) water
- 1 whole head garlic
- 1 small cedar branch (like a sprig of rosemary)
- ¼ cup (57 g) unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons Herbes Salées (recipe follows)

FOR THE CEDAR SALT LARD

- 2 pounds (900 g) back fat or pork belly, skin on
- 1 pound (450 g) pickling salt
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- A few cedar sprigs

FOR THE HARDTACK

- 4 cups (600 g) whole wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 ⅓ cups (320 ml) water

FOR HERBES SALÉES

- 1 bunch each fresh flat-leaf parsley, chervil, and lovage
- 1 bunch scallions
- 1 cup sea asparagus, aka sea beans, aka Salicornia
- 1 carrot, coarsely chopped
- 1 parsnip, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 10 ounces (300 g) pickling salt

Make the CEDAR SALT LARD

Cut the pork into cell phone–size chunks (think Motorola Razr). Rub ½ pound (225 g) of the pickling salt, the peppercorns, and cedar into the meat. Lay the meat in a nonreactive container, ideally a clay pot with a lid. Cover with the remaining pickling salt, wrap tightly with plastic wrap, and let pickle for at least 1 week at room temperature in a cool, dark place. Two weeks is better. Once cured, rinse briefly and freeze in smaller portions until ready to use. If you really are in the bush or in your dugout, then just leave the salt pork in the pickling salt. You may opt at this point to press the meat between two clean boards of resinous wood for 2 days, then hang it to dry for 2 weeks. Makes 2 pounds (900 g).

Make the HARDTACK

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). In a large bowl, combine the dry ingredients, then stir in the water and knead for a few seconds until well incorporated. On a floured surface, roll out the dough to ¼-inch (6-mm) thickness, then cut it into rectangles the size of playing cards. Poke the dough all over with a fork at regular intervals. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake for 30 minutes before turning the hardtack over and baking for another 20 minutes. Let dry at room temperature for a few days before storing in an airtight container forever. Makes about 20 crackers.

Make the HERBES SALÉES

Wash and dry the herbs, scallions, and sea asparagus. Combine them with the carrot and parsnip in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until finely chopped. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the pickling salt. Store in sterilized jars and refrigerate. Wait 1 month before using. These Herbes Salées will keep for 3 to 6 months, refrigerated.

Make the RABBIT STEW

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Over medium heat—either stove top or fire pit—warm up a Dutch oven. Sear the salt pork (cedar salt lard) in the rendered lard until crisp, about 5 minutes. Add the rabbit, hardtack, and then the onions, carrot, and turnip, cutting them roughly over the top with a jackknife. Pour the beer and water into the mix and add the garlic and cedar. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat, cover, and transfer to the oven. Braise for 2 hours, or until the hardtacks are tender and the rabbit falls off the bone.

Swirl in the butter and season to taste with the Herbes Salées.