



THE SLAVE AND THE FREE

CONTAINS

Walk to the End of the World AND *Motherlines*
BOOKS ONE AND TWO OF THE *Holdfast Chronicles*

SUZY MCKEE CHARNAS

The Slave and the Free

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The Slave and the Free Suzy McKee Charnas

After thirty years, Suzy McKee Charnas has completed her incomparable epic tale of men and women, slavery and freedom, power and human frailty.

It started with *Walk to the End of the World*, where Alldera the Messenger is a slave among the Fems, in thrall to men whose own power is waning.

In continued with *Motherlines*, where Alldera the Runner is a fugitive among the Riding Women, who live a tribal life of horse-thieving and storytelling, killing the few men who approach their boundaries.

The books that finish Alldera's story, *The Furies* and *The Conqueror's Child*, are now available. Once you start here, you won't want to stop until you've read the last word of the last book.

The Slave and the Free Details

Date : Published June 12th 1999 by Tor Books (first published August 31st 1989)

ISBN : 9780312869120

Author : Suzy McKee Charnas

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From Reader Review The Slave and the Free for online ebook

Caroline Donaldson says

Read this a long time ago and felt it spoke deeply to me as a woman. It is feminist science fiction and was published in the 1970s by The Women's Press in their characteristic black and white striped paperbacks.

These two books look at the role of women in a future society. The first is a dystopia, the second a kind of utopia.

There is loads of info available online via Google (study guides etc).

Jennifer says

amazing. hard to explain it without making the book sound totally weird. but i read this and HAD to read the others in the series... i was totally sucked in. and just to give the book some credit, the way i learned about it was while working at CU textbook's... it was being taught in a class b/c it deals with so many interesting themes: feminisim, queer theory, end of the world, science, ect.

Bruce Wayne says

This technically two books packaged together. I originally picked it up because it was highlighted in the library's Sci-Fi section, and I checked it out because it had a Dorothy Allison blurb on the back. These books are one of my favorite genres: post apocalyptic dystopia. I mostly enjoyed it but felt I would have like some story lines explored more, and you can definitely tell this came out of 70s feminism, but isn't as rhetoric heavy as most dystopia that came out at that time. Overall I would recommend it with the caution that it has quite a bit of violence and weird sex stuff.

Story says

I had trouble with the first part of this book, originally a novel of itself, *Walk to the End of the World*. The reality Charnas created seemed over-the-top, largely because of the manner in which I could see shreds of the modern world in this future society's misinterpretations of certain things common to us, and then on top of that, the culture she described was such an amplified version of "masculine" ideals. It read to me as pretty heavy-handed, in much the same way Heinlein was heavy-handed, only from a strongly feminist direction instead. I found the forwardness of Fossa and the risk she takes in presenting Alldera as a companion/gift to our outlaw main characters not entirely believable given the set up of the world and culture we are presented with. The brushes and streaks of resistance in we as readers see in "fems" at times seem too forward or too muted (I had been comparing it, without actively examining this notion, to women I'd known who lived in abusive relationships, because of the heavy-handed brutality Charnas writes of). Yet at the same time, there are moments when Charnas describes the threat contained in a master's whim, his gaze, his notice, which rung terribly true to my everyday experience. I was left, when Alldera finally risks opening up to Eykar Bek,

with a bit of feeling of bewilderment. I did not feel like their dynamic up to that point would lead to that kind of interaction as its natural conclusion.

It's in *Motherlines* that Charnas began to really grab me, in her comparison of the riding women to the escaped Free Fems, and seeing these two cultures unfold. It seemed clear to me that Charnas has a soft spot for her Riding Women; the details of their society and interaction felt so complete. It was deeply satisfying and saddening to watch the Free Fems replicate the very culture they had fled. Though it hurt to see that dynamic, it felt real to the very bone. Seeing Alldera grow here, and learn to act as a bridge between the two cultures mainly by finding her own way, and exercising her freedom was gratifying.

There is a gap in style between the two books contained in this volume: you can watch Charnas' development of her craft. For parts of *Walk to the End of the World*, there were pieces that felt talky in the way of an author expounding on an idea rather than setting up the parts, setting them in motion, and showing you what happens. That feeling disappeared in *Motherlines*.

I still feel complicatedly about these books. I am fairly certain if I'd not had them paired as one volume, I might not have continued past *Walk to the End of the World*, but I am very glad that I had such, and that I did.

Julia says

I came across this book at CPL on a browsing shelf called "non best-sellers" compiled by library staff. Considering my gender studies major, I'm surprised I never heard of this book before. I enjoyed the characters and the story. Also, after reading *Motherlines* I realized that I need to spend a lot more time outside.

Seth Frost says

It took me nearly a week to read the first quarter of this book and four days to read the rest of it. These books tell the story of the slowly-fading remnants of humanity in a post-nuclear world that is not all darkness and death (though there is a lot of both).

Amanda says

I realize that this book has many positive reviews from people who appear to know what they're talking about. I read the book and tried to see it from a positive view but I couldn't find too much that I admired or even felt a connection to. I'm all for women finding power and a better existence in the face of oppression but this book was just too much for me. I couldn't feel close to the characters and I almost gave up during the first 130 pages but thought that it would get better when the main character escaped(which I knew would happen sometime soon).

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2237380.html>Walk to the End of the World, the first half (I got the combined edition, The Slave and the Free) is a horribly well-drawn future dystopia where women are enslaved and brainwashed, and doped up men fight for their own continued supremacy. It's gruesomely well depicted, though not at all subtle and a bit relentless. But Motherlines takes a lot of Walk to the End of the World and inverts it - we switch from a male to a female central character, and discover that a lot of what had been presented as unchallengeable fact in the first volume is in fact very different looked at from the other side of the gender divide. In addition, the actual plot has some very impressive twists and turns in what is still a very short book. Motherlines is really excellent, and though Walk to the End of the World is not quite as good you enjoy the second much more for having read the first. And neither is very long.

Katie says

Old school feminist future dystopia? Sign me up!

Kassandra Miller says

I got 70 pages in and just couldn't stomach it. I need something to keep pulling me through the horror. Some amazing strength in a character, some love interest, some emotion or feeling. This was just too harsh and bleak. There was just no respite from it.

Wacky says

this book ended up getting pretty badass, as it went on. the first half was hard for me to get through as most of it is told from the point of view of the male characters... who are enslaving the 'unmen' or the 'fems' and there is lots of drearydreary post apocalyptic background to this one, animals have pretty much disappeared, female bodied people are seen as less than human and are enslaved, there are two main food crops, sea weed and hemp. .. almost too easy to imagine as a pathetic future of our dumb species... but once it started to be told from Alldera's pov, it really started to pick up. in the second half she is taken in by 'the riding women' who are living tribally on the other side of the desert, where men dont even know they exist... oh yes, and their entire culture revolves around their horses that they depend upon so much for their independence from the 'civilized' nitemare. Alldera finds her strength and teaches other 'free fems' about horses and fighting skills and supposedly in the next book, they are riding off to battle to go and save the fems that were left behind to toil under the abuses of the men. Queer sex/love is the norm in these socities, het sex is used only for breeding or as a display of power and dominance over the fems. oh yes, and the riding women, they procreate via the usage of stallion semen...

i will be keeping my eye out for the other two books in this series, because i simply must know what happens!

Jesmyn says

I'm obsessed with feminist utopian/dystopian fiction. Yeah, crazy, I know. This one's a bit dated, but it's certainly an adventurous read. Beware of the rape, though; the description of the brutality of this world can get really rough. I don't know if I'll read the rest of the series.

Anastasia says

Made me sick. The world Charnas portrays is too grim, too extreme and depressing. Women are viewed as non-human beasts of burden. What finally turned me off and turned me stomach is how the "free women" procreate.

Taylor says

The Slave and the Free... where do I begin? So much intensity going on in this collection of the first two novels of Charnas' Holdfast Chronicles: *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978).

This is feminist dystopian science fiction at it's best. Inducted into the Gaylactic Spectrum Hall of Fame* in 2003 and winner of the James Tiptree Jr. Award, the Slave and the Free addresses both LGBTQ and gender topics in a fabulous way.

The world has been almost eradicated by an apocalypse referred to as the Wasting, with the exception of a group of white middle class men and their wives who survived by secluding themselves into a shelter called the Holdfast. Following the Wasting women are blamed for all of the damage and enslaved. What develops is a world of extreme sexism where women, called Fems, are treated worse than cattle (all animals, or 'un-men' as both animals and fems are referred to, are dead - and so are all individuals of colour) and ordered to perform all work duties for their male masters. Men are so repulsed by fems that they limit their contact with them to the best of their ability and instead form relationships with men. Fems are left to form relationships with other fems, and it is widely understood that partnering with your own sex is the proper way to do it. Men who enjoy sex with women are considered perverted and deranged. To continue the species, women in heat are sent to 'breeding rooms' where they are inseminated by men via rape, then when their 'cub' is born it is sent to a 'kit-pit' until it is old enough to work. All in all to say it's a dismal misogynistic world is a gross understatement. The suffering of the women is extreme, and parts of the book are hard to read (but thankfully Charnas does not describe acts of rape or violence in intricate detail, only enough so that you know what is taking place).

Where is all this going? Well, the captive fems hear rumours of 'free fems' that have escaped the Holdfast and are building numbers on the outskirts so they can then return to the Holdfast and wage war on the men. *Walk to the End of the World* establishes all this story while we follow 3 men on their own journey, on the way picking up Alldera; a fit fem who has been trained to run. The first 3/4s of this book is about the world-building and the story of the men, which I found pretty boring. We move through the POV of each of the three men before finally arriving at Alldera's, and from there the book improves as we begin to understand her role and about the 'free fems'.

Moving into Motherlines the book is all about Aldera and her experience after escaping the Holdfast. Before she can reach the free fems she is captured by the Mares, who are women on horseback who patrol the edge of the Holdfast and kill any men who travel out and may expose the existence of the free fems. Scenes of violence between men and fems have disappeared as there are no men in this book, but Charnas has added a new element of disturbing content, which I won't spoil for anyone despite the fact that it is revealed fairly early on. The character development is pretty strong, and things wrap up as well as they can before leading you into the third installment, The Furies.

Overall, I thought Walk to the End of the World was a pretty dull book, but I appreciated all the work Charnas put into her world building (disturbing as it may be). Motherlines is exponentially better than the first. I'm looking forward to continuing the series!

*Other inductees include Joanna Russ' The Female Man, Nicola Griffiths' Slow River and Ursula Le Guin's Left Hand of Darkness. Also, in 2001 Joss Whedon won a Gaylactic Spectrum Award for the Buffy the Vampire Slayer television series. In conclusion, Gaylactic Spectrum = rad.

Gremlin says

A post-apocalyptic dystopia in which women are enslaved to men, and life is bleak. But don't assume it'll be that way forever. Yes, this is classic 2nd wave feminist Sci-fi, but it's also really dang good.

But I'm going to tell it to you straight. I think that they put these two books into one single volume, because the first one is rather dull and/or hard to get into. Don't get me wrong, it's a fascinating dystopia - but NOTHING beats the complete change of pace, character development, and engrossing tale that follows in the 3 books that follow (only 1 attached). Seriously, Suzy McKee Charnas is one of my heroines, and these books are so smart and compelling...I LOVED them. You just have to slope your way through the first one to get there... think of it as setting up the background.
