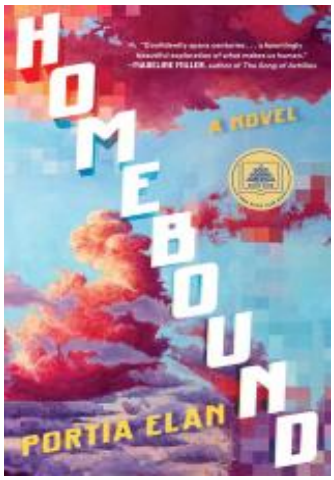
Homebound

by Portia Elan



About the Book

Five interlocking lives. One beloved story. A dazzling adventure across centuries and continents in search of the things that hold us together.

It?s 1983, and Becks can?t wait to get the hell out of Cincinnati. She?s 19, blasting her Walkman, and hiding from the fact that her beloved uncle, the only person who understood her, is dead. But she has work to do: he left her a half-finished game to complete --- one last collaboration to find her way out of loneliness.

Little does she know, what Becks is making will echo far into the future and shape the lives of a scientist, a sentient automaton, and a flinty sea captain in ways she cannot imagine. All are bound together by their search for connection --- and by a futuristic traveler on a mysterious mission through space.

A novel about our deep interconnectedness, HOMEBOUND is a clear-eyed, hopeful adventure into humanity?s future and capacity for love.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel begins with an epigraph by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel on loneliness. Did this quote impact your experience of the themes of the novel? How does it hint at what?s in store for the reader?

2. When we first meet Becks, she says, ?Here is one of the things you taught me: every program is like a conversation in which the programmer asks one question over and over again, ?How do I make the code do X?? and the code answers, offers a cascade of answers...? What are some of the early questions raised in this novel? Are they answered by the end? Who is Becks addressing throughout the novel, and why is that person so important to her?

3. Who are Yesiko and Root? What do they do to make their living, and what do we know about their world and their ship, *Babylon*? What does Portia Elan suggest about the future world of 2586 through her portrayal of the day-to-day life of these two characters, the towns and ports they visit, and the debt Yesiko owes to the mysterious Chante?

4. Describe the first interaction between Yesiko and Chaya. Why does Yesiko distrust the AmAye and their companions, Shula and Tov?

5. Discuss the relationship between Becks and Veronica. Is this a reciprocal relationship? Have you ever felt like you were in Becks? or Veronica?s situation? How did you navigate it?

6. In chapter 11, we?re introduced to storying. Root says, ?We are our stories.... We show respect to the stories, and they keep us.? How does Yesiko react when Chaya tells their story about starships? Why do you think Tov, Shula and Chaya wholeheartedly believe this tale?

7. Who is Dr. Tamar Portman? How does Dr. Portman get involved with Jeffrey Bowker and Bowker Industries? What is Jeffrey?s grand plan? Do Bowker?s ambitions remind you of any real-world figures or systems? Why or why not?

8. Discuss the sections told through Chaya?s POV. What do we learn about Dr. Tamar Portman, the AmAyes, their intended purpose, and Chaya?s ?pivot event?? How does Chaya?s evolution over time shape our understanding of the connection between humans and machines in their early years with Dr. Portman?

9. When Yesiko and Root teach Tov and Shula how to sail, what challenges arise? How does Yesiko?s idea of ?crew? change in the latter half of the novel? In your opinion, what accounts for the change?

10. In part two, we?re immersed in the *Homebound* game universe. What is this world like, and what is Lieutenant Solo?s mission? Who do you think is playing this game, and what might they be searching for? Does this game remind you of similar text-based games in your life?

11. On the superyacht, what deal does Chante force upon Yesiko? Why does Yesiko go along with it? When she later goes back on the deal, what does this suggest about her feelings toward AmAyes, and Chaya, specifically?

12. In chapter 30, what do we learn about Chaya?s past and the dome-city? Who is Yusuf, and how is this person later connected with Shula and Tov in 2586?

13. Root repeats in chapter 40 that ?We keep the stories, and the stories keep us.? Why is this idea so important to him? What does this mean to you? In your own life, what inspires you to share a story with a friend?

14. What actions does Root take to secure the safety of *Babylon*?s crew? Do you believe his choices were necessary? Why or why not?

15. Becks heads to Indianapolis for a punk show in chapter 42. There she?s called ?family? by the bouncer and several of the other concertgoers. What does this feeling of community inspire Becks to do later? How does this event improve her understanding of herself and her uncle?

16. Elan weaves the narrative through three distinctive time periods: 1983, the far future of 2078, and the far-far future of 2586, when Earth as we know it is a distant memory. ?Home? is a core theme in each timeline. In what ways does each character?s definition of the word differ?

17. What does the *Homebound* video game mean to each of our main characters who interact with it across the centuries? How does it connect to their personal quests? What was your own relationship to the in-book game? What feelings did it inspire in you?

18. Queer identity and coming out are central to the storyline of Becks and her uncle. What does Becks learn about herself and others through the events of the novel, and how might those realizations be reflected in the video game?

19. In what ways does the novel raise questions about the balance between innovative fields like artificial intelligence, space travel, and, on the other hand, human friendships and the environmental conservation on our home planet?

Author Bio

Portia Elan studied history at Stanford University and earned an MFA from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, before returning to California, where she has worked as a teacher and public librarian. A former Lambda Literary Fellow, she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her wife and an abundance of cats. HOMEBOUND is her first novel.

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