

# Book Club Discussion Guide

## About the Book

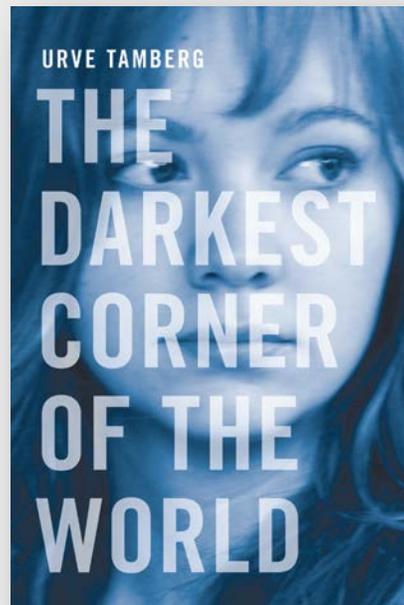
Who can you turn to when the only choice is between two evils?

In 1941, fifteen-year-old Madli hopes that the Soviet occupation is temporary, but when the neighbours, along with thousands of others, are deported, she knows that lives are in danger. She longs for the safety of her grandfather's farm.

Days later, the Nazis invade her country. Friends and family find themselves divided as they try to choose which dictator they'd rather live under - Hitler or Stalin. Madli is horrified by either choice, but how long can she remain neutral?

Every day brings new dangers and unimaginable decisions. In order to survive, Madli knows she can't fight the enemy, so she is determined to outwit them.

Read the first chapter at  
[www.thedarkestcorneroftheworld.com](http://www.thedarkestcorneroftheworld.com)



*The Darkest Corner of the World* takes readers to World War II in Estonia, a country that vanished from world view for almost fifty years. The struggle to survive is brought to life through the eyes of a teenager who is determined to keep her family together against all odds.

*"Tamberg provides rich opportunities for discussion of personal and political choice, compromise, loyalty, nationhood, ends vs. means, and of extreme circumstances creating possibilities that would be unthinkable otherwise." (CCBC Book News Review, Summer 2013)*

*"In the tradition of well-written historical fiction, Tamberg has managed to strike a healthy balance between fact and fiction throughout. A worthy addition to the historical fiction collection of any library."*

*Highly recommended. Rated 3.4 out of 4. (CM Magazine, Vol. XIX. No. 3. Sept 21, 2012)*

*"As historical fiction is meant to, Madli's struggle makes Estonia during World War II seem immediate and relatable. Her everyday chores, crushes on boys, and daydreams make this a perfect slice of life story... This is a good pick for historical fiction collections, particularly since it is an often overlooked piece of history"*

*Best of 2012 List. Rated "E" Excellent. (Resource Links Magazine, December 2012)*

## Historical Timeline Relevant to the Novel

| Date               | Event   |
|--------------------|---|
| August 23, 1939    | Soviet Union and Germany sign a non-aggression pact ( the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), which includes a secret clause assigning the Baltics to the Soviet sphere of influence.   |
| September 1, 1939  | Germany invades Poland.<br>Estonia declares neutrality  |
| September 24, 1939 | Soviet Union declares that since Estonia cannot maintain its neutrality, a mutual assistance pact between Estonia and Soviet Union must be signed, and that Soviet military bases need to be established in Estonia   |
| September 27, 1939 | Soviet Union announces security measures will be tightened and they will send 35,000 troops to defend the bases in Estonia.   |
| October 6, 1939    | In a speech to the <i>Reichstag</i> , Adolf Hitler calls all ethnic Germans back to Germany.  |
| October 17-22,1939 | Red Army units enter the territory of Estonia from two directions.  |
| May 10, 1940       | Germany invades France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.  |
| May 15, 1940       | Soviet Union demands an agreement be signed between Estonia and the Soviet Union to increase the territory of Soviet bases.   |
| June 14, 1940      | German forces enter Paris.<br>Soviet troops in bases in Estonia prepare for war. Estonian harbors are blockaded.  |
| June 17, 1940      | Red Army occupies Estonia. Members of the Defence League hand over their weapons.   |
| July 1940          | Parliamentary elections break electoral laws by falsifying results, and terrorizing the electorate.<br>Act to close the Estonian Academy of Sciences is issued.<br>Nationalization begins. Within a month, banks and 90% of industry is confiscated.<br>Decision to confiscate and destroy all fiction literature.<br>President Konstantin Päts and family are deported to Siberia. |
| August 6, 1940     | Estonia is accepted as the sixteenth republic of the Soviet Union.  |
| August 1940        | Declaration of dwelling space norm of 9 square metres or less per capita.   |
| August 28, 1940    | The People's Commissar for Education endorses the list of books to be removed from public and school libraries  |
| August 31, 1940    | The Faculty of Theology at Tartu University is closed down.   |
| September 7, 1940  | Citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are given "Soviet citizenship."  |
| October 29, 1940   | Archives in the ESSR start to compile a card catalogue of "enemies of the people."  |
| January 15, 1941   | Private savings in Estonian banks are frozen.   |
| May 1941           | By order of the NKVD, 37,794 "enemies of the people" have been taken to account in ESSR archives since the beginning of the year.   |
| June 14, 1941      | Mass deportations of thousands of innocent people in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Cattle cars take the citizens, including the elderly and children to Siberia.  |
| June 22, 1941      | Germany attacks the Soviet Union.   |
| July 1-4, 1941     | Mass deportations from the Estonian islands.  |
| July 7, 1941       | German forces reach South Estonia.  |
| July 22-27, 1941   | Under the banner of general mobilization, all men born 1907-1918 are sent to NKVD labour battalions in Russia.  |
| August 31, 1941    | Mainland Estonia is now under German control.   |
| September 10, 1941 | Arrest and execution of Jews begins in Estonia.   |
| October 21, 1941   | German forces take control of Hiiumaa Island.   |

## Questions

- Most people like to be remembered and recognized for their achievements. How does Madli's current situation challenge this concept? Discuss this with reference to the following quote. "Being memorable to the Soviet army was the last thing she wanted. Being unremarkable, being anonymous, being able to hide in plain sight-that would keep you alive. If you were memorable, they could find you. Arrest you. Kill you." (p. 7)
- You have read about Madli's father's manuscript on the history of Estonia. Why do you think that Madli is willing to risk the arrest of her whole family by keeping her father's writing?
- In Chapter 2 the reader finds out that Madli is keeping a diary where she writes to her father. What is the purpose of keeping a diary and why do you think that Madli is doing this?
- Explain the following quote. "All her life she'd been taught right from wrong and good from evil. None of those rules applied any more. She craved black and white, not shades of ever-changing grey and cloudy morality." (p. 44)
- Madli is happy to see her mother again and asks her why the Soviets would want to take old people and children. (p.52) Her mother explains that "The Soviets want to eliminate the culture, not only arrest government officials and other bureaucrats. They want to remove any trace of Estonia. Who is the future of a country? Its children. If there are no children, there is no future. Who hold the memory of the culture? The mothers and grandmothers. If they are gone, so are the memories." Do you agree with this quote? Are there any examples of this idea from your own culture or background?
- Reread the conversation between Madli and her grandmother in the sauna. (pp.86-88). Do you agree or disagree with her grandmother's perspective. Give reasons for your answer.
- Madli questions herself in her diary entry. She asks herself: "Would I die for my country? For my beliefs? Or would I hide?" (p.124) What do you think about her decision? Would you be prepared to die for your country?
- Madli's diary entry (p. 151) summarizes the conflict that Estonians experienced. She writes: "To think we may have to support the Nazis. The Soviets want to burn our homes to the ground and kill everyone. Hard to believe I'm hoping for the Nazis to arrive." Do you think that life will be better for Madli and her family under Nazi occupation?
- Kalju saves Madli from the soldiers but is captured because of it. Did he do the right thing? Were you surprised by Valter's betrayal? Explain your position. Would you sacrifice your own safety to protect your brother or sister?
- Madli and Toomas both change their appearance and dress like the opposite sex in order to protect themselves. What are the pros and cons of being a female or a male during this time? Are these stereotypes still true in today's society?
- In Madli's diary entry (p.192) she asks herself if they have given up on the notion of right and wrong or perhaps expanded their definition. Discuss what she means by this and how it relates to your own life.
- Madli states in a diary entry: "Now I think freedom is the only thing that matters. The only way to achieve freedom is to push the Soviets out of the country." Do you think that Estonia will achieve freedom by supporting the Nazis? Discuss the position of the Forest Brothers. Did they do the right thing?
- Is Madli's encounter with the German soldiers what you would have expected? Discuss the interaction between them and how it might challenge your understanding of Nazis.
- Madli and Valter have another meeting in the old threshing barn. What is your opinion of Valter now? Should Madli have killed him when she had the chance?
- Madli betrays Valter to the German soldiers. Was she justified in turning him in?

- In her diary entry on page 230 Madli writes, "Helping the Nazis may have been the wrong thing to do, but I did it for the right reasons. To get rid of the Soviets and to stop the killing, even a little." Have you ever done the wrong thing for the right reasons? Explain what happened.
- Discuss the meaning of the title, *The Darkest Corner of the World*, from various perspectives such as geographical, psychological, and societal.

For background knowledge about World War II, see <http://pinterest.com/utamberg/> for information, maps and pictures.



**If you are having a book club meeting, and want me to join you, I'd love to connect via Skype (or in person if you are in the Toronto area).**

**Reviews help people discover books, and help authors connect with their readers.**

**If you have time, please post a review on Amazon, or Goodreads. An honest one, of course - what you liked, what you didn't like, or just a rating.**

## Easy Apple Cake Recipe

One of the things I enjoy best about book club meetings is the food and drink (as well as the non-book related conversation). Here is one of my favorite (easy) recipes. I hope you enjoy it.

### Easy Apple Cake \*

An apple cake is a typical Estonian cake, and there are as many variations as there are bakers.

2 eggs, separated

1 cup sugar

125 g butter, melted and cooled

1/2 cup milk at room temperature

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 tsp baking powder

1 tsp cinnamon

1 kg apples, chopped

Preheat oven to 400F.

Beat together egg yolks and sugar.

Add milk and butter.

In a separate bowl, mix together flour and baking powder, then add them to the milk and egg-yolk mixture.

Stir in chopped apples and cinnamon.

In a separate bowl beat egg whites until frothy, and gently fold them into batter.

Butter a 26 cm round baking dish and sprinkle some fine breadcrumbs or graham cracker crumbs on the bottom and sides.

Pour apple mixture into baking dish.

Bake for 30-40 minutes.

Serve with vanilla ice cream.

\* Recipe from *Estonian Cooking*, ed. Lia Virkus, AS Ajakirjade Kirjastus, 2003.



## About Urve Tamberg

Urve Tamberg didn't realize that she wanted to be a writer until a few years ago. She was side-tracked for couple of decades to pursue a career in marketing and business development in the health care sector. But the stories she had heard from her immigrant parents about the history, people, and culture of Estonia stayed with her. She was inspired by about those little-known tales of stubbornness, ingenuity, and bravery, so a few years ago she began to write historical fiction for teens. Urve lives in Oakville, Ontario with her husband, three children, and a little black dog named Shimmer.

Her first book, *The Darkest Corner of the World*, is inspired by true stories of the Estonian people and their struggle to survive during the Soviet and Nazi occupations during World War II.

Websites: [www.utamberg.com](http://www.utamberg.com)  
[www.thedarkestcorneroftheworld.com](http://www.thedarkestcorneroftheworld.com)

Connect with Urve on social media:



# URVE TAMBERG THE DARKEST CORNER OF THE WORLD

WEBSITES:  
[WWW.UTAMBERG.COM](http://WWW.UTAMBERG.COM)  
[THEDARKESTCORNEROFTHEWORLD.COM](http://THEDARKESTCORNEROFTHEWORLD.COM)

FACEBOOK:  
URVE TAMBERG - AUTHOR

TWITTER:  
@UTAMBERG



ISBN 978-1-77086-214-2

Available in paperback, and as  
an e-book on Kindle and Kobo.

Published by Dancing Cat Books.  
[www.dancingcatbooks.com](http://www.dancingcatbooks.com)