

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Heart's Algorithm

A romance short story by C.R. Lang

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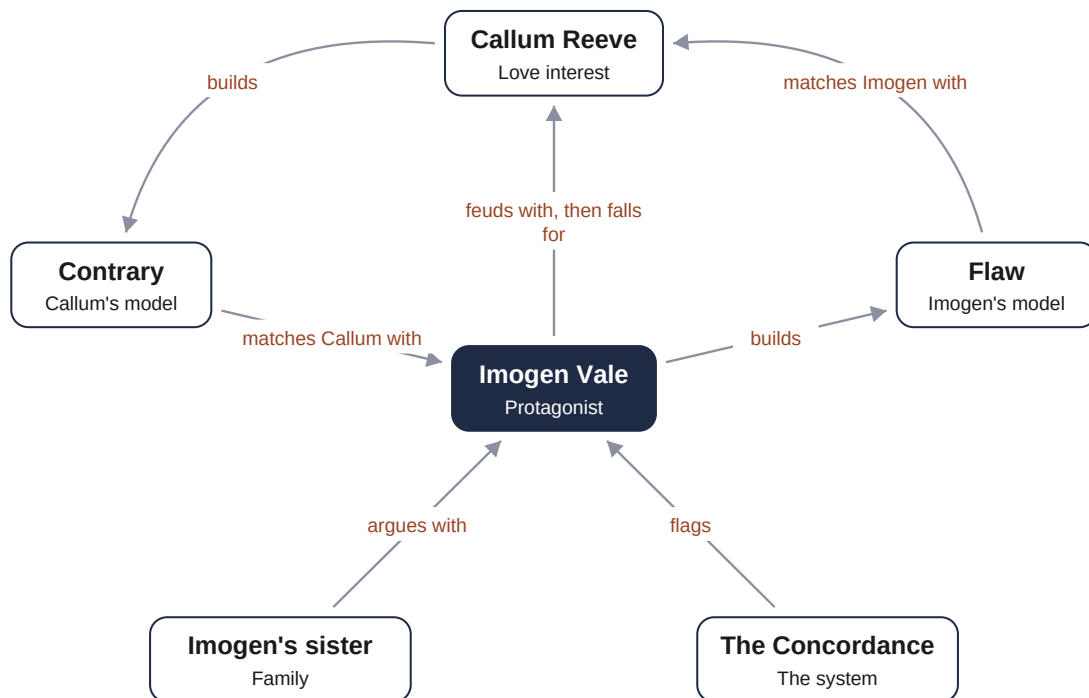
About the story

In a city where a matching system assigns everyone a near-perfect partner, a systems auditor builds her own rogue matchmaker that looks for friction instead of harmony. It matches her with her office rival.

This guide assumes everyone has finished the story, so it discusses the ending.

Character map

The main character is in the dark box. Arrows show who acts on whom.



Who's who

Imogen Vale (Protagonist). A systems auditor who burned her match letter. Keeps every ticket stub, sulks after losing arguments.

Callum Reeve (Love interest). Runs the optimization team upstairs. Precise, irons his shirts, checks the stove four times.

The Concordance (The system). Veridian's official matchmaker, wrong only eleven times in a generation.

Flaw (Imogen's model). Built from an honest list of her defects. Looks for friction, not harmony.

Contrary (Callum's model). Built six months earlier from the same private dissatisfaction.

Imogen's sister (Family). The argument about whether Imogen is 'being difficult' sets everything in motion.

Themes to look for

Flaws as features. The Concordance filters out the strange parts of people. Flaw looks for them.

Friction and love. Some differences 'sharpened rather than dulled.' Can conflict be a kind of compatibility?

Control and chance. In Veridian, 'nobody fell in love by accident anymore.' What is lost?

Enemies to lovers. Two years of feuding, and the report he read twice.

Discussion questions

- 1 Why does Imogen burn her Concordance letter? What does the system get wrong about her?
- 2 Imogen's flaw catalog is honest and unflattering. Why is writing what she needs 'harder' than writing her defects?
- 3 What do you make of the fact that Callum, who seemed to believe in the Concordance, built the same thing?
- 4 Callum read her report twice 'to find the errors.' What was he really doing?
- 5 The first honest thing they say lands 'like a dropped glass.' Why is honesty so disruptive here?
- 6 How do Imogen and Callum learn to handle each other's flaws (the sulk, the spiral)?
- 7 At the end, Flaw can't predict them anymore. Why is that good news?
- 8 Would you trust an algorithm to choose your partner? What would it miss about you?

Craft corner

For writers in the group: two ways to look at how the story is built.

Dialogue. Reread the meeting-room exchange ('This is absurd.' 'Entirely.'). How do short lines create comedy and tension?

Trope. This is an enemies-to-lovers story. How does it play the trope straight, and where does it surprise you?

Try this together

Have everyone write three harmless ‘flaws’ of their own on a card (talks to plants, hates being early). Read them anonymously and try to ‘match’ them by friction: which flaws would make an interesting pair?

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