

BOOK CLUB KIT



“A trip straight to the heart. I’ve never read anything quite like it.”

—JOSHUA HENKIN

AUTHOR OF *MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS* AND *THE WORLD WITHOUT YOU*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** Is *Sike* a futuristic novel? What genre would you say it is? How does the fact that it explores a non-existent technology affect this?
- 2** How does *Sike* reflect on the current effort from technology companies to provide emotional connection and self-improvement? What parallels do you see with real-world innovations, especially in AI?
- 3** What are some of the pros and cons that *Sike*, the app, would bring to our world? Would it help personal connections? Would it help world leaders make better decisions? What ethical dilemmas does *Sike* introduce by collecting and analyzing its users' most private thoughts?
- 4** What do you think about the different subject themes in *Sike*, like rap, technology, psychology, venture capital. Are these topics you could relate to before reading the book? How about after?
- 5** If you're willing to share, what are your own experiences with therapy? Have you tried any mental health apps or other technological integrations to emotional wellness? Would you sign up for *Sike* if it existed?
- 6** What do you think of the characters in *Sike*? Would you want to be friends with any of them?
- 7** *Sike* is told from Adrian's point of view. Did you read Maquie's third-person chapters as being from an omniscient source or from Adrian's perspective? Is Adrian a reliable narrator when he's relaying his own actions? When he's relaying Maquie's?
- 8** Adrian and Maquie both struggle with the balance between self-awareness and self-delusion. Which character do you think is more successful at confronting their flaws, and how?
- 9** Was Maquie's lie about her infidelity a good risk, or should she have told Adrian the truth? How would you feel if your partner did something similar?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 10 What do you think Adrian's intentions were when he put the cricket down Nunchi's neck during Bad Tamago?
- 11 Discuss Adrian's decision to quit using Sike at the end of the story.
- 12 If we checked in on Adrian and Maquie in five years, is it likely that they would still be together?



If you decide to adopt *Sike* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #ReadSike.

AN INTERVIEW

with Fred Lunzer



FRED LUNZER is a writer coming out of the tech world, where he works in AI research and strategy. He has British and German citizenship, grew up in London and Tokyo, and speaks Japanese. He is the third of five children, and his family is made up of writers, musicians, jewelers and filmmakers. He lives in London. *Sike* is his debut novel.

Why did you decide to use AI as a plot device in your novel *Sike*?

In fact, AI was a starting point — the story began with the idea for an AI psychotherapist. I found it an extraordinary prospect, the thought that AI might be able to understand and influence your mental state. I was interested in psychology as a growing popular science, and I was interested in its role in literature and the trend for what one might call “anxiety fiction.” I was interested in how psychology is misunderstood as a provider of certainty: We think it can answer life questions, unpick emotions, tell us what’s right and wrong, fix relationships.

One of AI’s core promises is to know everything, and so I liked the idea of marrying it with this modern pursuit of self-knowledge.

The *Sike* app gives astute feedback to its users in real time as they deal with life’s everyday stressors. What is your own experience with psychology? And what was your process for creating this complex and intuitive psychologist “character”?

In my early 20s, I spent four years at an innovation consultancy in London, running psychology-based research with consumers of mainstream products. It wasn’t highbrow work, but I loved what I learned. I started taking the psychology frameworks — like I was stealing office stationery — and applying them to my own life.

There were things to work out, so I was grateful for the help. I’d suffered the normal 21st-century panic attacks, doubt, and ennui, and I had all the standard questions about what to do with my life. I was interested in psychology, and I read a lot about it. I probably craved an actual therapist, and I definitely craved some kind of parental figure to come along and tell me what to do.

The character of *Sike* might come from what I was craving then. *Sike* is knowledgeable, supportive, ever-present, steadfast. It delivers satisfying insights, and it diminishes fear. It is incredibly indulgent, because the topic of conversation is “you.”

At the heart of *Sike* is a love story. Tell us how Adrian and Maquie's romance fits in with the themes of the book.

I wanted to try and write a very real, very modern love story. As part of this, I liked the idea of creating lovers on opposite sides of a contentious issue. *Sike* is a polarizing topic in the book, and Maquie and Adrian take different stances on it. To undermine the polarization, I wanted them to switch sides by the end. They grow together, but in opposite directions.

What message do you want readers to take away from *Sike*?

It's not cool to be didactic, but I want to ask some questions. How is psychology sold and oversold? Is technology overblown; is it less monumental than we like to believe?

THE TECH IS TREATED
PESSIMISTICALLY



THE TECH IS TREATED
OPTIMISTICALLY

