



The Book of Speculation: A Novel

By Erika Swyler

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The Book of Speculation: A Novel By Erika Swyler

One of BuzzFeed's 24 Best Fiction Books of 2015

"As Simon, a lonely research librarian, searches frantically for the key to a curse that might be killing the women in his family, he learns strange and fascinating secrets about their past. A tale full of magic and family mystery, *The Book of Speculation* will keep you up all night reading."—Isaac Fitzgerald, BuzzFeed

Simon Watson, a young librarian, lives alone in a house that is slowly crumbling toward the Long Island Sound. His parents are long dead. His mother, a circus mermaid who made her living by holding her breath, drowned in the very water his house overlooks. His younger sister, Enola, ran off six years ago and now reads tarot cards for a traveling carnival.

One June day, an old book arrives on Simon's doorstep, sent by an antiquarian bookseller who purchased it on speculation. Fragile and water damaged, the book is a log from the owner of a traveling carnival in the 1700s, who reports strange and magical things, including the drowning death of a circus mermaid. Since then, generations of "mermaids" in Simon's family have drowned--always on July 24, which is only weeks away.

As his friend Alice looks on with alarm, Simon becomes increasingly worried about his sister. Could there be a curse on Simon's family? What does it have to do with the book, and can he get to the heart of the mystery in time to save Enola?

In the tradition of Sara Gruen's *Water for Elephants*, Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*, and Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, *The Book of Speculation*--with two-color illustrations by the author--is Erika Swyler's moving debut novel about the power of books, family, and magic.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of June 2015: Water shrouds the fascinating, often doomed characters of *The Book of Speculation*. Featuring mermaids, swarms of horseshoe crabs, deadly floods, and the silent secrets of an ancient tarot deck, *The Book of Speculation* is split like a savory peach between the odd ventures of a traveling carnival in the late 1700s and the modern-day discovery by librarian Simon Watson of an old, handwritten volume containing his grandmother's name. The water-damaged book may reveal the root of certain mysteries in his family, such as why the women can hold their breath far, far longer than normal, and the inexplicable reason they have all drowned while young women on the exact same date—a date that is only a few days away as the book begins. When Simon's sister, Enola, unexpectedly returns home, vibrating with an angry sadness Simon has never seen before, Simon dives deeper into the book and the dark waters of their family history, hoping to change what he fears is her destiny. Erika Swyler has written an engrossing literary tale-spinner with an assurance rarely mastered in debut novels, allowing a well-placed detail or a lyrical phrase to paint a character or sketch even as she builds tension like a pro. As Simon grows obsessed with unraveling the secrets in his book, so will you become bewitched by *The Book of Speculation*.--*Adrian Liang*

Review

""The Book of Speculation "is a luscious experience--dark, sweet, and wild." --Katherine Dunn

"In this dazzling novel, the immensely talented Erika Swyler sweeps seamlessly through generations and centuries, moving deftly back and forth and weaving the strands into an exquisite tapestry. I was immediately swept up in this quirky, raucous, and bewitching family saga. Swyler's prose is so polished and elegant it reads effortlessly, even as her distinct voice shines through--her rendering of the sea and its savage appetite rivals that of Annie Proulx's in "The Shipping News." I absolutely loved this book, and consumed it whole. My only complaint is that I am already on the edge of my seat waiting for her next." --Sara Gruen

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THE BOOK OF SPECULATION is a luscious experience--dark, sweet, and wild.--Katherine Dunn, author of GEEK LOVE

While a book whose narrative hinges on drowning might not seem like a great beach read, Swyler's debut effort, redolent of salty ocean air, is just that...Its clever plot--fueled by a musty book and a powerful set of tarot cards--and Swyler's wonderful descriptions keep the pages swimming along. "Entertainment Weekly"

A good book is magical. A piece of our heart stays tucked inside its lines when we return the book to its place on our shelf. Good novels about good books can be even more special, doubling the fun with two tomes to love. And when the book within the book is actually magical, as it is - or may be - in Erika Swyler's "The Book of Speculation," well, let the wild read start. "Star-Telegram"

Mermaids, tarot card readers, a wild man and other carnival characters work their literary magic in this debut novel...packed with fresh, unexpected marvels. "Oprah.com"

A wonderful novel, full of mystery through the centuries [with] great details about carnival life, similar to "The Night Circus" by Erin Morgenstern. "The Daily American"

In this dazzling novel, the immensely talented Erika Swyler sweeps seamlessly through generations and centuries, moving deftly back and forth and weaving the strands into an exquisite tapestry. I was immediately swept up in this quirky, raucous, and bewitching family saga. Swyler's prose is so polished and elegant it reads effortlessly, even as her distinct voice shines through--her rendering of the sea and its savage appetite rivals that of Annie Proulx's in *THE SHIPPING NEWS*. I absolutely loved this book, and consumed it whole. My only complaint is that I am already on the edge of my seat waiting for her next. Sara Gruen, author of *WATER FOR ELEPHANTS* and *AT THE WATER'S EDGE*

THE BOOK OF SPECULATION is a luscious experience--dark, sweet, and wild. Katherine Dunn, author of *GEEK LOVE*

Debut author Swyler creates a melancholy world with hints of magic at the edges. . . Fans of. . . Erin Morgenstern's *THE NIGHT CIRCUS*, Katherine Dunn's *GEEK LOVE*, or Katherine Howe's *THE PHYSICK BOOK OF DELIVERANCE DANE*, won't want to leave this festival. "Library Journal"

Illustrations by the author add even more atmosphere to her prose. "Booklist""

About the Author

ERIKA SWYLER is a graduate of New York University. Her short fiction has appeared in *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, *Litro*, *Anderbo.com*, and elsewhere. Her writing is featured in the anthology *Colonial Comics*, and her work as a playwright has received note from the Jane Chambers Award. Born and raised on Long Island's North Shore, Erika learned to swim before she could walk, and happily spent all her money at traveling carnivals. She blogs and has a baking Tumblr with a following of 60,000. Erika recently moved from Brooklyn back to her hometown, which inspired the setting of the book. *The Book of Speculation* is her debut novel.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathryn Cannon:

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