

The Age of Miracles: A Novel

By Karen Thompson Walker



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NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY

People ? *O: The Oprah Magazine* ? *Financial Times* ? *Kansas City Star* ?
BookPage ? *Kirkus Reviews* ? *Publishers Weekly* ? *Booklist*

With a voice as distinctive and original as that of *The Lovely Bones*, and for the fans of the speculative fiction of Margaret Atwood, Karen Thompson Walker's *The Age of Miracles* is a luminous and unforgettable debut novel about coming of age set against the backdrop of an utterly altered world.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"Maybe everything that happened to me and to my family had nothing at all to do with the slowing. It's possible, I guess. But I doubt it. I doubt it very much."

Spellbinding, haunting, *The Age of Miracles* is a beautiful novel of catastrophe and survival, growth and change, the story of Julia and her family as they struggle to live in an extraordinary time. On an ordinary Saturday, Julia awakes to discover that something has happened to the rotation of the earth. The days and nights are growing longer and longer, gravity is affected, the birds, the tides, human behavior and cosmic rhythms are thrown into disarray. In a world of danger and loss, Julia faces surprising developments in herself, and her personal world—divisions widening between her parents, strange behavior by Hannah and other friends, the vulnerability of first love, a sense of isolation, and a rebellious new strength. With crystalline prose and the indelible magic of a born storyteller, Karen Thompson Walker gives us a breathtaking story of people finding ways to go on, in an ever-evolving world.

Praise for *The Age of Miracles*

"A stunner."—Justin Cronin

"A genuinely moving tale that mixes the real and surreal, the ordinary and the extraordinary, with impressive fluency and flair."—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"Gripping drama . . . flawlessly written; it could be the most assured debut by an American writer since Jennifer Egan's *Emerald City*."—*The Denver Post*

“If you begin this book, you’ll be loath to set it down until you’ve reached its end.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Provides solace with its wisdom, compassion, and elegance.”—Curtis Sittenfeld

Don’t miss the exclusive conversation between Karen Thompson Walker and Karen Russell at the back of the book.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, June 2012: In *The Age of Miracles*, the world is ending not with a bang so much as a long, drawn-out whimper. And it turns out the whimper can be a lot harder to cope with. The Earth's rotation slows, gradually stretching out days and nights and subtly affecting the planet's gravity. The looming apocalypse parallels the adolescent struggles of 10-year-old Julia, as her comfortable suburban life succumbs to a sort of domestic deterioration. Julia confronts her parents' faltering marriage, illness, the death of a loved one, her first love, and her first heartbreak. Karen Thompson Walker is a gifted storyteller. Her language is precise and poetic, but style never overpowers the realism she imbues to her characters and the slowing Earth they inhabit. Most impressively, Thompson Walker has written a coming-of-age tale that asks whether it's worth coming of age at all in a world that might end at any minute. Like the best stories about the end of the world, *The Age of Miracles* is about the existence of hope and whether it can prevail in the face of uncertainty. --Kevin Nguyen

Q&A with Karen Thompson Walker



Q. In *The Age of Miracles*, you envision a natural phenomenon that threatens the entire world. This "slowing" is global, yet you decided to focus on Julia. Why?

A. Julia's voice--the voice of a young woman looking back on her adolescence--came into my head as soon as I had the idea of the slowing. It was the only way I could imagine writing the book. Adolescence is an extraordinary time of life, a period when the simple passage of time results in dramatic consequences, when we grow and change at seemingly impossible speeds. It seemed natural to tell the story of the slowing, which is partly about time, in the context of middle school. It was also a way of concentrating on the fine-grain details of everyday life, which was very important to me. I was interested in exploring the ways in which life carries on, even in the face of profound uncertainty.

Julia felt like a natural narrator for this story because she listens more than she speaks, and she watches more

than she acts. I think the fact that Julia is an only child is part of why she's so observant. Julia also places a very high value on her friendships, and is unusually attuned to the subtle tensions in her parents' marriage, which increase as the slowing unfolds.

Q. The details of how such a slowing would affect us and our environment are rendered quite realistically. How did you get these details right?

A. No one knows exactly what would happen if the rotation of the earth slowed the way it does in my book, so I had some freedom. I did some research at the outset, but I came across many of my favorite details accidentally. Whenever I read an article that contained a potentially relevant detail--anything from sleep disorders, to new technologies for growing plants in greenhouses, to the various ways people and governments reacted to the financial crisis--I would knit it into the fabric of the book. After I finished the book, I had an astrophysicist read it for scientific accuracy, which was an extremely nerve-racking experience. I was relieved by how many of my details he found plausible, but made some adjustments based on what he said.

In general, I wanted my book to seem as real as possible. I recently read a *Guardian* interview with the Portuguese writer José Saramago, who said that his books were about "the possibility of the impossible." He explained that even if the premise of a book seemed "impossible," it was important to him that the development of that premise be logical and rational. That's exactly the way I wanted *The Age of Miracles* to function.

Q. Like Julia, you grew up in Southern California, where natural disasters are always looming. Do you think this influenced you in writing of *The Age of Miracles*?

A. I grew up in San Diego on a cul-de-sac of tract houses much like the one where *The Age of Miracles* takes place. In most ways, California was a very pleasant place to grow up. But it could also be a little scary. I remember how the sky would sometimes fill with smoke during fire season, how the smoke hung in the air for days at a time, burning our throats and turning everything slightly orange. I remember the way the windows rattled at the start of every earthquake, and the way the chandelier above our dinner table would swing back and forth until the shaking stopped. I sometimes couldn't sleep at night, worried that an earthquake or a fire would strike at night. But when I think of those years now, I realize that my novel grew partly out of my lifelong habit of imagining disaster.

If I've given the impression that I was constantly afraid as a child, that's not right. In fact, one of the things I remember most vividly about living in California is the way we mostly ignored the possibility of danger. We always knew that the "big one"--the giant earthquake that scientists believe will one day hit the region--could strike at any time, but mostly we lived as if it never would. Life often felt idyllic: We played soccer, we went swimming, we went walking on the beach. A little bit of denial is part of what it means to live in California. Then again, maybe that's also just part of being alive. I really wanted to capture that feeling in *The Age of Miracles*.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review This is the way the world ends: by gradually slowing down. When scientists reveal that the earth's rotation has been extended by 56 minutes, there is a minor panic. Twelve-year-old Julia doesn't really recognize what's happening—sure, her drama-queen mother starts hoarding food, and she loses some school friends when their families leave town, but at first, life seems to go on as usual. Until the slowdown continues, and it isn't only by an hour anymore—the days keep stretching, with no apparent return to normal. The world's governments agree to keep “clock time,” forcing everyone to stick to a 24-hour schedule, despite sunrise and sunset. Rebels known as “real-timers” are ostracized and harassed. Some people become

afflicted with “slowing syndrome,” leaving them disoriented and prone to passing out, including Julia’s mother, who causes a fatal accident due to a fainting spell. Studies document an increase in impulsive behavior in others, and those seemingly unaffected by the slowing find themselves making bad decisions. All of this has an impact on Julia, who sees her parents, teachers, and neighbors crumbling around her. All at once a coming-of-age story and a tale of a frightening possible future, this is a gem that will charm readers as well as give them the shivers. --Rebecca Vnuk

Review

Praise for *The Age of Miracles*

“[A] moving tale that mixes the real and surreal, the ordinary and the extraordinary with impressive fluency and flair ... Ms. Walker has an instinctive feel for narrative architecture, creating a story, in lapidary prose, that moves ahead with a sense of both the inevitable and the unexpected ... Ms. Walker maps [her characters’] inner lives with such sure-footedness that they become as recognizable to us as people we’ve grown up with or watched for years on television... [A] precocious debut...one of this summer’s hot literary reads.”--**Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times***

“THE NEXT BIG FEMALE NOVELIST.” --**Rolling Stone**

“THE SUMMER BOOK.” --**Vanity Fair.com**

“[AN] EARTHSHAKING DEBUT.” --**Entertainment Weekly**

“Part speculative fiction, part coming-of-age story... *The Age of Miracles* could turn Walker into American literature's next big thing.”--**NPR**

“A tender coming-of-age novel.”--**Maureen Dowd, *The New York Times***

“Walker creates lovely, low-key scenes to dramatize her premise... The spirit of Ray Bradbury hovers in the mixture of the portentous and quotidian.”--**The New Yorker**

“[Walker] matches the fierce creativity of her imagination with a lyrical and portentous understanding of the present.”--**People (4 stars)**

“This haunting and soul-stirring novel about the apocalypse is transformative and unforgettable.”--**Marie Claire**

“Quietly explosive ... Walker describes global shifts with a sense of utter realism, but she treats Julia’s personal adolescent upheaval with equal care, delicacy, and poignancy.”—**O, The Oprah Magazine**

“Haunting.”--**Real Simple**

“If you begin this book, you'll be loath to set it down until you've reached its end... *The Age of Miracles* reminds us that we never know when everything will change, when a single event will split our understanding of personal history and all history into a Before and an After.” --**The San Francisco Chronicle**

“The perfect combination of the intimate and the pandemic... Flawlessly written; it could be the most assured debut by an American writer since Jennifer Egan's ‘Emerald City.’”--**Denver Post**

“Touching, observant and poetic.”--*The Columbus Dispatch*

“Simply told, skillfully crafted and filled with metaphorical unities, this resonant first novel [rings] with difficult truths both large and small.”--*Kansas City Star*

“The Age of Miracles lingers, like a faded photo of a happy time. It is stunning.”--*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“Both utterly realistic and fantastically dystopian... The big miracles, Walker seems to be saying, may doom the world at large, but the little ones keep life worth living.”--*Minnesota Herald Tribune*

“[An] elegiac, moving first novel.”--*Newsday*

“Arresting... This book cuts bone-deep.” --*Austin Chronicle*

“Evocative and poetic... I loved this book from the first page.”--*Huntington News*

“Walker’s tone can be properly [Harper] Lee-esque; both Julia and Scout grapple with the standard childhood difficulties as their societies crumble around them. But life prevails, and the stunning *Miracles* subtly conveys that adapting.”--*Time Out New York*

“[A] gripping debut . . . Thompson’s Julia is the perfect narrator. . . . While the apocalypse looms large—has in fact already arrived—the narrative remains fiercely grounded in the surreal and horrifying day-to-day and the personal decisions that persist even though no one knows what to do. A triumph of vision, language, and terrifying momentum, the story also feels eerily plausible, as if the problems we’ve been worrying about all along pale in comparison to what might actually bring our end.”—*Publishers Weekly (starred review)*

“In Walker’s stunning debut, a young California girl coming of age in a dystopian near future confronts the inevitability of change on the most personal level as life on earth withers . . . She goes through the trials and joys of first love. She begins to see cracks in her parents’ marriage and must navigate the currents of loyalty and moral uncertainty. She faces sickness and death of loved ones. . . . Julia’s life is shaped by what happens in the larger world, but it is the only life she knows, and Walker captures each moment, intimate and universal, with magical precision. Riveting, heartbreaking, profoundly moving.”—*Kirkus Reviews (starred review)*

“What a remarkable and beautifully wrought novel. In its depiction of a world at once utterly like and unlike our own, *The Age of Miracles* is so convincingly unsettling that it just might make you stockpile emergency supplies of batteries and bottled water. It also—thank goodness—provides great solace with its wisdom, its compassion, and the elegance of its storytelling.”—**Curtis Sittenfeld**, author of *Prep*

“‘Miracles’ indeed. Karen Thompson Walker’s debut novel is a stunner from the first page—an end-of-the-world, coming-of-age tale of quiet majesty. I loved this novel and can’t wait to see what this remarkable writer will do next.”—**Justin Cronin**, author of *The Passage*

“Is the end near? In Karen Thompson Walker’s beautiful and frightening debut, sunsets are becoming rarities, “real-timers” live in daylight colonies while mainstream America continues to operate on the moribund system of “Clock Time,” and environmentalists rail against global dependence on crops that guzzle light. Against this apocalyptic backdrop, Walker sets the coming-of-age story of brave, bewildered Julia, who wonders at the “malleable rhythms” of the increasingly erratic adults around her. Like master fabulists Steven Millhauser and Kevin Brockmeier, Karen Thompson Walker takes a fantastic premise and

makes it feel thrillingly real. In precise, poetic language, she floods the California suburbs with shadows and a doomsday glow, and in this altered light shows us amazing things about how one family responds to a stunningly imagined global crisis.”—**Karen Russell**, author of *Swamplandia!*

“This is what imagination is. In *The Age of Miracles*, the earth’s rotation slows, gravity alters, days are stretched out to fifty hours of sunlight. In the midst of this, a young girl falls in loves, sees things she shouldn’t and suffers heartbreak of the most ordinary kind. Karen Thompson Walker has managed to combine fiction of the dystopian future with an incisive and powerful portrait of our personal present.”—**Amy Bloom**, author of *Away*

“*The Age of Miracles* is pure magnificence. Deeply moving and beautifully executed, Karen Thompson Walker has written the perfect novel for the global-warming age.”—**Nathan Englander**, author of *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*

“Reading *The Age of Miracles* is like gazing into a sky of constellations and being mesmerized by the the strange yet familiar sensation of infinity. Beautifully written, the novel lets the readers see the world within us and the world without with an unforgettable freshness.”—**Yiyun Li**, author of *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*

“*The Age of Miracles* spins its glowing magic through incredibly lucid and honest prose, giving equal care and dignity to the small spheres and the large. It is at once a love letter to the world as we know it and an elegy.”—**Aimee Bender**, author of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

“Gripping from first page to last, *The Age of Miracles* is itself a small, perfectly formed miracle: Written with the cadence and pitch of poetry, this gem of a novel is a wrenching and all-too-believable parable for our times, and one of the most original coming-of-age stories I have ever read. Karen Thompson Walker is the real deal.”—**Dani Shapiro**, author of *Devotion*

“*The Age of Miracles* is harrowing and beautiful on the ways in which those catastrophes already hidden about us in plain sight, once ratcheted up just a bit, provide us with a glimpse of the end of our species’ run on earth: the uncanny distress of hundreds of beached whales, or the surreal unease of waves rolling across the rooftops of beachfront houses. And as it does it reminds us of all of the miracles of human regard that will have taken place before then: the way compassion will retain its resilience, and the way, for those of us in love, a string of afternoons will be as good as a year.”—**Jim Shepard**, author of *Like You’d Understand, Anyway* (National Book Award finalist)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stacey Samuels:

Reading a book tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that may give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire their very own reader with their story or even their experience. Not only situation that share in the publications. But also they write about the information about something that you need instance. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors on this planet always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write to their book. One of them is this The Age of Miracles: A Novel.

Howard Kincaid:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent that they free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity this is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent the entire day to reading a guide. The book The Age of Miracles: A Novel it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book has high quality.

Jonathan Ouzts:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book specifically book entitled The Age of Miracles: A Novel your head will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a reserve then become one application form conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get previous to. The The Age of Miracles: A Novel giving you another experience more than blown away your thoughts but also giving you useful information for your better life within this era. So now let us explain to you the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished reading it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

Jonathan Sanders:

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