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A BOOK CLUB GUIDE



INSIDE THIS KIT IS EXCLUSIVE MATERIAL DIRECTLY FROM EMILY CROY BARKER,
AND OTHER SUGGESTIONS TO ADD A LITTLE MAGIC TO YOUR BOOK CLUB.

RECIPES

Ilissa's Moonlight

From **THE THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO REAL MAGIC:**

She poured herself a drink, ice cubes chiming in her glass, and took a long swallow. Some sort of punch. She couldn't quite describe the flavor. Draining her glass, she poured another...

"Do you like it?" the woman asked. "A friend of mine gave me the recipe."

"It's delicious," Nora said politely. "What's in it?"

"Blood oranges, hibiscus nectar, moonlight!" she said, laughing again.

Not quite sure what the joke was, Nora smiled anyway.

- 1 part Campari
- 2 parts blood orange juice
- 2 parts seltzer

TIPS: Don't have blood orange juice? Try grapefruit juice instead. Too bitter? Replace the 2 parts seltzer with 2 parts ginger ale.

Walnut-Honey Bars with Thyme

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 12 tablespoons softened butter
- 1 egg white

Mix in a food processor until until it forms a dough. Press into the bottom of a greased 9" x 9" pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

To prepare the topping:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup honey
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 2 eggs plus 1 egg yolk
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts
- 1 tsp dried thyme

Mix sugar, honey, melted butter, salt, and eggs. Add walnuts and thyme. Spread the topping over the baked shortbread crust and bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes. Cut into squares.

PLAYLIST

ROXY MUSIC

Avalon

ELLA FITZGERALD

That Old Black Magic

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE

No Light, No Light

SIGUR ROS

Track 4

STEELEYE SPAN

Dance With Me

THE HANDSOME FAMILY

The White Dog

LEAVES EYES

Vinland Saga

SNOW PATROL

Run

TALKING HEADS

And She Was

Posted on Viking's [Spotify](#)

CHARACTER PROFILES

ARUENDIEL

The magician Aruendiel, also known as Lord Aruendiel of the Uland, also known as the Black Wizard. Innovator in real magic. A checkered history with women.

NORA

Nora Fischer, lately a graduate student in English literature, more recently a fairy princess, still more recently a cook in Aruendiel's castle and his pupil in magic.

HIRIZJAHKINIS

Former witch priestess of Holy Sister Night, now a formidable magician, thanks to Aruendiel's tutelage. A little too attached to her pet ghost-demon, the Kavareen.

LISSA

Not exactly the beneficent heiress/fashion designer/impresario that Nora first takes her for. Queen of the Faitoren. Aruendiel's ex.

RACLIN

Issa's son, prince of the Faitoren, and the man of Nora's dreams. That's before she encounters his less charming side.

A NOTE ON ORS

Ors is the common tongue in the kingdom of Semr and a few nearby lands, although some districts, like Pelagnia, also have their own dialects. Its 30-letter alphabet is written vertically, left to right. Ors is a highly inflected language: Verbs, for instance, are conjugated according to eight tenses, five moods, three voices, and three genders.

In the novel, when rendering Ors speech, I have chosen the closest English equivalent without trying to achieve a literal translation.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING: THE POEMS

The poems that Nora has memorized come in especially handy when she meets the ice demon. However, she quotes poetry all through the novel. "She was secretly proud of how easily she could learn poetry by heart, none of the other grad students seemed to bother." (Nora would have enjoyed studying with the wonderful poetry critic Helen Vendler, who has spoken about the importance of memorizing poems—but unfortunately Nora didn't get into the grad program at Harvard, where Vendler teaches.)

Donne, Swinburne, Wyatt, and Sidney are just a few of the poets whose work Nora quotes.

"Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee."

—John Donne, Elegy XIX, "To His Mistress Going to Bed"



"I am weary of days and hours . . . desires and dreams and powers, and everything but sleep."

—Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Garden of Proserpine"



"They flee from me that sometime did me seek"

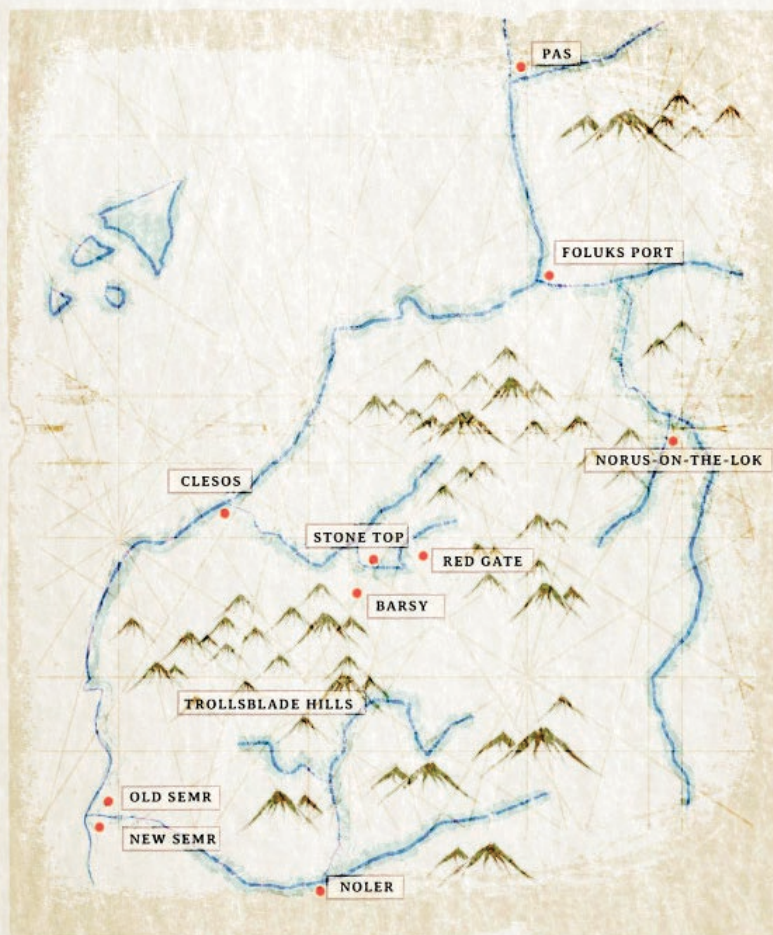
—Thomas Wyatt, "They Flee from Me"



"Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain"

—Sir Philip Sidney, "Astrophel and Stella I"

MAPS



THE NORTHLAND, INCLUDING THE CITY OF SEMR
AND THE UEL RIVER BASIN



ORSLAND AND SURROUNDING REGIONS
A MAP OF THE TERRITORIES BETWEEN THE ICE, THE WESTERN SEA, AND THE MIDDLE LAKES



SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS



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1. Why do you think Nora was so easily taken in by the charming Ilissa?
 2. Discuss the meaning of the novel's title.
 3. Words are a powerful tool and language is a very important status symbol in Nora's new world. Women are uneducated and don't speak to men the same way Nora does; something she is repeatedly frustrated by. How does language affect our lives and our biases of others?
 4. How does Aruendiel change throughout the course of the book? What motivates him to teach Nora magic?
 5. What are the different types of magic that we see in the novel? How are they used? How do they affect Nora? Why do you think he refuses to tell her how he first learned the secrets of real magic?
 6. "I can tell you have a taste for adventure, you have a warm, passionate nature, you like to live life boldly," Vulpin tells Nora. Is he right? Does Nora change as a person over the course of the novel?
 7. Nora translates *Pride and Prejudice* for Aruendiel as practice to improve her written Ors. What do you think he makes of the novel? How does *Pride and Prejudice* relate to the plot and characters of *The Thinking Woman's Guide To Real Magic*? Does *The Thinking Woman's Guide To Real Magic* remind you of any other novels?
 8. Both Nora and Aruendiel hide their feelings for each other—why?
 9. At one point Nora imagines Perin with his future family. Do you think Nora would have accepted Perin's proposal if he had not consulted Aruendiel first? What would her life be like if she did marry Perin?
 10. How do you feel about the book's ending? Do you think Nora has made the right choice? What lies ahead for Nora and Aruendiel?

Photo: Maggie Soladay



A conversation with the author, **EMILY CROY BARKER**

www.emilycroybarker.com

Q. Which of the characters in *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic* did you most enjoy writing?

A. Aruendiel, no question. He says exactly what he thinks, and he doesn't mind giving offense to anyone. Not something that most of us can get away with in our daily lives.

Of course, Ilissa was also a lot of fun, too. Because she's also honest—Faitoren can't tell lies—but at the same time, she's thoroughly deceitful.

Q. Are any parts of this novel autobiographical?

A. You mean, is it about the time I stumbled into an alternate world and started studying magic? Sadly, no.

There were things in my life that I deliberately borrowed for the novel. The way Aruendiel talks about other magicians—I was thinking of how my father, who was a painter, used to talk with his artist friends about other artists, about who was doing good work and who wasn't. My dad was the kindest and most gentle person ever, but he was ruthless when it came to criticizing bad art. It's the idea that you have a calling that you have to follow and you don't sell out.

I gave Nora some of my interests—a penchant for memorizing bits of poetry, a love of cooking—although she's much better at both things than I am. She's also braver than me. You could never get me to go up a cliff like the one at Maarikok, even with a levitation spell! And I let her take a path that I considered but never took—going to grad school in English.

Q. You have so many literary references, John Donne, Miguel de Cervantes, William Carlos Williams, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Grimm's Fairytales*, but it's Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* that Nora ends up with as her only possession in the alternate world. What is the significance of this particular book? Any personal connection to it?

A. Well, *Pride and Prejudice* is so modern in many ways, although written and set in a premodern time. So it seemed like a good match for *A Thinking Woman's Guide*, where a contemporary woman is thrown into a world where women are still second-class citizens, at best. And *Pride and Prejudice* reflects some of the themes that I was interested in—an intelligent woman engaging with a man who has both higher status and worse manners than she does—without being too closely parallel to the plot of my story. Finally, I love *Pride and Prejudice*! And so do many other readers. So I hoped it might resonate with those who read my novel.

Q. How did you develop Ors, the language Nora must learn in order to communicate?

A. I was inspired by how Tolkien, who was a philologist, essentially began imagining Middle-Earth by inventing various Elvish names. He wrote poems about these characters and, eventually, fiction. I thought, wow, what a powerful tool to create a believable fantasy universe, to develop some kind of logical linguistic framework that underlies your story.

Q. Who would be in your dream book club? Where would you meet and what would you talk about?

A. Henry James, Charlotte Brontë, Scott Fitzgerald, Mary McCarthy, Zadie Smith, and couple of my friends. We'd meet at Florian's in the Piazza San Marco every third Tuesday in the month—this is a dream, right?—and talk about whatever I happen to be reading at the moment. I imagine it would be a lively group.

Q. Your writing is loaded with references from history, literature, and fantasy. What sort of reader did you envision for this series?

A. I tried to write the kind of novel I would want to read, so I guess in that sense I wrote it for myself. And as the book took shape and it became clearer that I would actually finish a draft at some point, I decided I would send it first to one of my oldest friends to see if she thought it was any good. She and I grew up watching *Star Trek* and *Monty Python*, reading *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Black Stallion* and *Jane Eyre*, and doing the ultimate in geekdom—taking Latin—so I trusted her judgment. She liked it, so that encouraged me to keep revising.

Beyond that, I was thinking that it might appeal to some of the adults who loved Harry Potter but who wanted more of an adult perspective and a strong female character at the center of the novel.

Q. *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic* ends on a cliffhanger. Can you hint at what's next for Nora and Aruendiel?

A. I'm pretty sure that Nora will find her way back to Aruendiel's world. The two of them really need to talk and to be straight with each other, don't you agree? And of course she has a lot more to learn about magic—and how to use it properly.

PRAISE FOR
The THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO REAL MAGIC
BY
EMILY CROY BARKER

"Barker weaves together classic fantasy and romantic elements (including shout-outs to *Pride and Prejudice* and hints of *Wuthering Heights*) to produce **a well-rounded, smooth, and subtle tale.**"

—*Publishers Weekly*

"**This dark fairy tale has plenty of curb appeal** for a wide range of fantasy, time-travel, and alternate-reality fans."

—*Booklist*

"**Juicily promising** and exactly the sort of adult book fans of Libba Bray's "Gemma Doyle" series and other great YA fantasies of the last decade will anticipate as time goes by; comparisons to Lev Grossman's *Magicians* series, too."

—*Library Journal*

"In **THE THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO REAL MAGIC**, Emily Croy Barker presents an **intelligent, no-nonsense heroine who never compromises on her dignity...** By the end of the novel, readers will feel at home in the alternate universe Barker has created, and their protagonists come to seem like old friends."

—*Shelf-Awareness*

"**A clever and scrumptious debut fantasy**, the kind you happily disappear into for days."

—**KELLY LINK**, author of *Magic for Beginners*

"A marvelous plot, clever dialogue, and complex characters distinguish *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic*. With the intimacy of a classic fairy-tale and the rollicking elements of modern epic fantasy, Emily Croy Barker's delightful debut will sweep readers into another world. **Fun, seductive, and utterly engrossing**, this wonderful tale of magic and adventure is a perfect escape from humdrum reality."

—**DEBORAH HARKNESS**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shadow of Night*

"**A wonderfully imaginative world of illusion and real magic that reveals the importance of a curious and open mind, learning and love.** Barker has great fun toying with our ever-shifting notions of work, beauty, belonging, and reality—creating a delightful book for anyone longing to escape the everyday (and who isn't?!)."

—**KAREN ENGELMANN**, author of *The Stockholm Octavo*

"**To read *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic* is to enter a lush, fantastical dream filled with beauty and strangeness, love and cruelty, playfulness and gravitas.** Emily Barker has crafted a wholly imaginative and witty debut novel that is unlike any I've read. Mind candy for those of us raised on Harry Potters!"

—**SARA GRUEN**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Water for Elephants*

"Emily Croy Barker has written a sophisticated fairy tale that has one foot through the looking glass and the other squarely planted in the real world. **Both classic and wholly original**, *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic* is an imaginative synthesis of the stories that delighted us as children and the novels that inspired us as adults."

—**IVY POCHODA**, author of *Visitation Street*