THE DEEP
RIVERS SOLOMON

“A wise, daring, touching, and important addition to the Afrofuturist canon.”
—NPR

with DAVEED DIGGS, WILLIAM HUTSON, and JONATHAN SNIPES

2020 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY LITERARY PRIZE FINALIST
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This title was a finalist for the 2020 Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize in Fiction & Poetry.

We hope you enjoy this book and the accompanying kit!

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Bklyn Book Club Kit: The Deep
Yetu holds the memories for her people—water-dwelling descendants of pregnant African slave women thrown overboard by slave owners—who live idyllic lives in the deep. Their past, too traumatic to be remembered regularly is forgotten by everyone, save one—the historian. This demanding role has been bestowed on Yetu. Yetu remembers for everyone, and the memories, painful and wonderful, traumatic and terrible and miraculous, are destroying her. And so, she flees to the surface escaping the memories, the expectations, and the responsibilities—and discovers a world her people left behind long ago. Yetu will learn more than she ever expected about her own past—and about the future of her people. If they are all to survive, they'll need to reclaim the memories, reclaim their identity—and own who they really are. The Deep is “a tour de force reorientation of the storytelling gaze...a superb, multilayered work,” (Publishers Weekly, starred review) and a vividly original and uniquely affecting story inspired by a song produced by the hip-hop group clipping.
The Deep by Rivers Solomon is actually the third iteration of “a game of artistic Telephone,” to use editor Navah Wolfe’s terminology. The game was begun by the techno-electro band Drexciya, who was the first to imagine the sea-born babies of enslaved Africans thriving against all odds. They turned this imagining into nearly-lyricless, instrumental mythology through not one song or one album but all of its numerous albums and EPs. The second iteration of Telephone was also musical: a song titled “The Deep” that was commissioned by the people behind the podcast This American Life and written by the experimental hip-hop group, clipping. As clipping. explains it, each iteration of this mythology shows “a different angle on a world whose nature can never be observed in totality.” Brooklyn Public Library created this playlist so that you might glean a fuller view of the wajinru’s story. The Spotify playlist includes “The Deep” by clipping., as well as Drexciya’s most recent album, Journey of the Deep Sea Dweller IV.

Access the playlist here: open.spotify.com/playlist/5SKCFEOEO1SYJ2P3INWDJ5
“The Deep” by clipping. was inspired by Drexciya’s oeuvre and commissioned for a *This American Life*’s podcast on Afrofuturism in 2017. The track appeared on clipping.’s album *Splendor & Misery* in 2018, a science fiction concept album that was nominated for a Hugo Award. The lyrics were written and performed by rapper Daveed Diggs, who originated the roles of Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson in the musical sensation *Hamilton.*

**LYRICS TO THE DEEP**

Our mothers were pregnant African women
Thrown overboard while crossing the Atlantic Ocean on slave ships
We were born breathing water as we did in the womb
We built our home on the sea floor
Unaware of the two-legged surface dwellers
Until their world came to destroy ours
With cannons, they searched for oil beneath our cities
Their greed and recklessness forced our uprising
Tonight, we remember
Y'all remember how deep it go
Started from the bottom
Y'all remember how deep it go
'Fore y'all had to come back, deep
Y'all remember when it used to be deep
So deep, so, so deep, ay
When y'all swim up out yo' mama
while y'all mama was asleep
andes
So deep, so, so deep, ay
And y'all remember when y'all had the dance floor lit, dark
No two-step, deep, y'all don't even sweat, deep
As deep as it gets
Dreaming dead asleep and keeping time
Y'all heartbeat, deep, y'all heartbeat, deep
And all the fishes had they eyes bugged out
'Cause y'all dancing underwater and y'all don't get wet
And the dark smelled sweet and y'all tails touch reef
Y'all feed off the bottom, but now y'all remember
Y'all remember
Pressure outside the vehicle, 832.2 bars
LYRICS TO THE DEEP (CON’T.)

Y’all remember when the deep got hot when y’all move on up
How y’all used to argue ’bout the water getting warmer
Still y’all loved a little bit of light up in the deep
So deep, so, so deep, ay
Y’all remember saying how it couldn’t be them two legs
’Cause y’all came from two legs
And y’all mama’s would’ve loved y’all if they could’ve breathed
But they wasn’t ready for the deep
So deep, so, so deep, ay
Y’all remember when the first blast came
And the beat fell off and the dreams got woke
And the light bent bad and the fishes belly up
And them coral castles crumbled ’cause they wasn’t quite enough
And conversation used to break like the floor quake
Like the bleached bones and the fin friends fled from they home
But the blasts wouldn’t stop ’cause they wanted black gold
And them no-gills had to feel it ’cause they couldn’t be told
Y’all remember
Y’all remember
Ocean salinity, 35 PSU, water pH, 7.91

Y’all remember when the regime changed
That no pleas, no calm seas, let the water rise
So deep, so, so deep
Oil slick upon the sleeper was an awful thing to realize
If the two legs wanna wake the dead
They gon’ have to bring more fire,
y’all is closer to the earth
So deep and y’all was talking how to get up in they heads
And got to bein’ real inspired circumstances of the birth
Has got y’all feeling like an army, better yet a navy
And they gone gave y’all the blessing now y’all going crazy
They live with green up on the surface but they ain’t deep
That pistol shrimp could knock a two leg off his feet
Y’all perfecting the steam void to rip up they ships
They using sonar as second language, y’all fluent with it
And all the dreamers is woke now, but nightmares swim
But everybody hear that "Bloop" know y’all coming for them
Y’all remember
Y’all remember

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: THE DEEP
LYRICS TO THE DEEP (CON'T.)

Surface water temperature, 308 Kelvin  
Y'all remember when the call went out, ay  
No deep, no more deep, sunshine  
Y'all remember when the call went out, ay  
No deep, no more deep, sunshine  
Y'all remember feeling wind up on your skin  
No deep, no more deep, sunshine  
Y'all remember how it burned in the beginning  
No deep, ride on 'em, ride on 'em, ride on 'em  
Y'all remember seeing sun across the surface  
On the day that y'all first came up out the water, so, so deep  
How the breaking of the surface showed the sky without a border  
And the air is so much hotter, so, so deep  
How the woke dreamer screamed and it rose tides  
And the waves stretched up like a mountain high  
And the no gills gasp and they closed eyes  
And they pray to they gods and they ask why  
And then y'all cry too 'cause y'all recognize mama

In the faces of the ones that y'all were terrorized  
They were sisters and brothers  
They were the babies born up out the water  
Not connected to each other  
Not in knowledge of the one drop  
But they had to learn today  
Y'all had one shot, let the sun burn today  
Let them feel the dark even deeper today  
Make a two-leg a believer today  
Let them know that they done woke a sleeper from a sleep  
So deep  
That y'all been dancin' without any feet, so, so deep  
Here's the nerve that they struck with a blast  
That they broke with a drill, that they burnt with the gas  
Y'all remember, so deep, sunshine, ride on 'em  
Y'all remember, so deep, sunshine, ride on 'em  
Y'all remember, so deep, sunshine, ride on 'em  
Y'all remember when y'all had to let 'em breathe  
Ride on 'em, ay  
Initiating tidal wave sequence  
Uniform Romeo 0-3-0
Yetu and the wajinru were born from the horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The website *Slave Voyages* is a remarkable digital memorial to the 10 to 12 million Africans who were forced to endure the transatlantic journey in dehumanizing conditions. Explore interactive maps, timelines, animations, and the African Names Database.

To learn the history behind the Deep, begin with Henry Louis Gates’ “Introduction to Slave Voyages 2.0,” on the main page: [SLAVEVOYAGES.ORG](http://slavevoyages.org)
Pronouns play an important role in *The Deep* the book and “The Deep” the song. As we learn through Yetu, the wajinru identify as “men, women, both, and neither. Such things were self-determined, and Yetu wondered if two-legs had body self-determination too” (p. 116). When clipping. formed, the band agreed that the lyrics, performed by Hamilton star Daveed Diggs, “should never be written from a first-person perspective,” a rule that evolved into the use of “y’all” as the exclusive pronoun in “The Deep” (p. 160). As clipping. explains, “The word y’all, for us, became both an emblem of the Drexciyan’s advanced communal society, and a reference to the multiple-authorship of the song, shared between those of us in clipping. and our partners at *This American Life*, as well as with Drexciya and their collaborators” (p. 161). This use of y’all even influenced Rivers Solomon’s world building, a world created by someone who, like many of us two-legs, has self-selected their own pronouns (they/them). In short, pronouns contain power and it’s important to respect and understand how to use them.

**VISIT THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE:**
- [GLSEN.ORG/ACTIVITY/PRONOUNS-GUIDE-GLSEN](https://glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen)
- [THEHRCFOUNDATION.ORG/PROFESSIONAL-RESOURCES/ALL-CHILDREN-ALL-FAMILIES-PRONOUNS-101](https://thehrcfoundation.org/professional-resources/all-children-all-families-pronouns-101)
- [TRANSSTUDENT.ORG/GRAPHICS](https://transstudent.org/graphics)
Did you enjoy *The Deep*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

**The fifth season**
N. K. Jemisin.
Essun must cross the dying earth to find her daughter, kidnapped by her husband. Essun will have to use the powers she’s concealed for decades. But will they help her save her daughter or turn her into a target of fear and prejudice?

**Remote control**
Oleszko, Noelia, author.
She’s the adopted daughter of the Angel of Death. Beware of her. Mind her. Death guards her like one of its own.

**The seep**
Porter, Chana, 1984- author.
Trina Goldberg-Oneka is a fifty-year-old trans woman whose life is irreversibly altered by a gentle invasion from an alien entity called The Seep. Through The Seep capitalism falls and hierarchies are broken. Anything imaginable is possible.

**She would be king : a novel**
Moore, Wayo, author.
A novel of exhilarating range, magical realism, and history—a dazzling retelling of Liberia’s formation.

**An Unkindness of Ghosts**
Solomon, Rivers, author.
Aster lives in the low-deck slums of the HSS Matilda, a space vessel organized much like the antebellum South. For generations, the Matilda has felled the list of humanity to a mythical Promised Land.

**The water dancer : a novel**
Coates, Ta-Nehisi, author.
Young Hiram Walker was born into bondage. When his mother was sold away, Hiram was robbed of all memory of her — but was gifted with a mysterious power. Years later, when Hiram almost drowns in a river, that same power saves his life.

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Rivers Solomon is a dyke, an anarchist, a she-beast, an exile, a shiv, a wreck, and a refugee of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Fae writes about life in the margins, where fae's much at home. In addition to appearing on the Stonewall Honor List and winning a Firecracker Award, Solomon's debut novel *AN UNKINDNESS OF GHOSTS* (Akashic Books) was a finalist for a Lambda, a Hurston/Wright, a Tiptree, and a Locus Award, among others. Solomon's second book, *THE DEEP* (Saga Press), based on the Hugo-nominated song of the same name by experimental hip-hop group clipping., was the winner of the 2020 Lambda Award and is on the shortlist for a Nebula, Locus, and Hugo award. Faer third book, *SORROWLAND* (MCD/FSG) is forthcoming May 4, 2021. Solomon's short work appears in or is forthcoming from *Black Warrior Review*, *the New York Times*, *the New York Times Magazine*, *Guernica*, *Best American Short Stories*, *Tor.com*, *Best American Horror* and *Dark Fantasy*, and elsewhere.

LEARN MORE ABOUT RIVERS AT RIVERSSOLOMON.COM
As the historian, Yetu faces death and suffering daily while the other wajinru live free from the burdens of the past. How does Yetu's understanding of pain and grief further separate her from her people? Discuss how the rememberings have shaped Yetu and why her kin cannot understand.

In Chapter 3 the origins of the wajinru are revealed. Discuss the intertwining of mankind's history with theirs. How does the violence in the foremother's lives and deaths influence the way the wajinru live? Why is it crucial that the historian remember but the rest of the people forget this piece of their history?

Discuss Yetu's decision to flee from her people, a choice that means abandoning her family, the History and the only way of life she's ever known. Think of a comparable situation in our world. What would you have done in her position? Should she have handled the situation differently or are her actions justified?

The first historian, Zoti, had pure intentions when they began the rememberings cycle, “I fear if they know the truth of everything, they will not be able to carry on, or they’ll swim to the surface to learn things for themselves I do not want them to learn.” (page 63) How justified is it for Zoti to make this decision for the whole species? Does it help or hinder the growth of their community? Provide examples.

When Yetu is beached, she has nothing but faint recollections of the twolegs to guide her, and her relationship with Oori becomes very important to her. Why are their interactions so significant? What valuable lessons does Oori teach Yetu?

Sharing the burden of the rememberings with all wajinru turns out to be the healthiest outcome for everyone. Not only are the people more whole for it, but Yetu can finally find some peace. Discuss the other pros and cons of this new way of life and how it will impact the wajinru going forward.

These discussion questions were created by the publisher Saga Press and are not affiliated with Brooklyn Public Library.