

About the author

- 2 Meet Peng Shepherd

About the book

- 4 Reading Group Guide

Read on

- 6 Don't Miss *The Book of M* by Peng Shepherd
- 7 An Excerpt from *The Book of M*

P.S.

Insights,
Interviews
& More . . .



Meet Peng Shepherd



© 2017 Rachel Crittenden


PENG SHEPHERD was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona, where she rode horses and trained in classical ballet, and has lived in Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, London, New York, and Mexico City.


Her second novel, *The Cartographers*, became a national bestseller, was named a Best Book of March by the *Washington Post*, and received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her debut, *The Book of M*, won the Neukom Institute for Literary Arts Award for Debut Speculative Fiction, and was chosen as a best book of the year by Amazon, *Elle*, Refinery29,



and *The Verge*, as well as a best book of the summer by the *Today* show and NPR's *On Point*.

When not writing, Peng can be found planning her next trip or haunting local bookstores.

pengshepherd.com


 [pengshepherd](#)

 [pengshepherd](#)

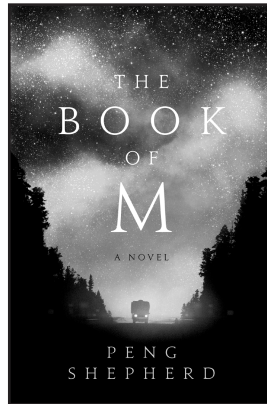
 [pengshepherd](#) 

Reading Group Guide

1. At the beginning of *The Cartographers*, Nell notes that the Fra Mauro map's cardinal directions are upside down, with the south oriented at the top of its design rather than the north. How does this hint at Nell's journey throughout the rest of the novel? Is there a "correct" way to view the world?
2. Did you have any initial theories as to what made the gas station map so valuable and dangerous? Were you surprised by the way the mystery unfolded?
3. Why do you think Peng Shepherd chose New York State as the main setting of *The Cartographers*? Did you learn anything new about the iconic locations Nell visits? What settings stood out to you the most?
4. *The Cartographers* explores different eras of technology, from ancient maps to library databases and contemporary search engines. Why do you think Nell is drawn to older tools? What are the pros and cons of older and newer search technologies?
5. What was your first impression of Nell's father, Dr. Young? How did your understanding of him change by the end of the novel?

6. *The Cartographers* explores the misleading nature of representation, both for people and places. Is it possible to ever understand a person or a place entirely?
7. *The Cartographers* asks, What is the purpose of a map? By the end of the novel, did you feel that question was answered? How has *The Cartographers* changed the way you think about maps?
8. Think about the various characters in the book who take up the quest of discovering the unknown. What motivates them? Do you think you would have what it takes to continue chasing the clues?
9. When do secrets protect, and when do they cause harm in the novel? Do you agree with the reasons why secrets were kept from Nell?
10. How do you interpret the ending of the novel? What thoughts and emotions did you experience as you finished the last page?
11. Has reading *The Cartographers* inspired you to consider what else could be hidden in plain sight? What secrets would you hope to discover? 

Don't Miss *The Book of M* by Peng Shepherd



What Would You Give Up to Remember?

One afternoon at an outdoor market in India, a man's shadow disappears—an occurrence that science cannot explain. He is only the first. The phenomenon spreads like a plague, and while those afflicted gain a strange new power, the magic comes at a horrible price: the loss of all their memories.

Set in a dangerous near future world, *The Book of M* tells the captivating story of a husband and wife caught in an extraordinary catastrophe who risk everything to save each other. It is a sweeping debut that illuminates the power that memories have not only on the heart, but on the world itself.

Turn the page for a sneak peek!

An Excerpt from *The Book of M*

ORLANDO ZHANG

THE END OF Ory's world began with a deer.

He went outside at dawn to where the trees began, to check the game trap. Followed the trip wire, pushed away the leaves, uncovered the hidden metal cage. Empty.

The air had already turned his hands red with cold before he'd scattered the dried twigs back into place with the nose of his shotgun. The last time there had been anything snared inside had been two weeks ago, at least. Pale orange bruised into gray around the edges of the horizon, a gangrenous dawn. He and his wife, Max, were down to just one meal now that it was too cold to catch anything—a jar of spaghetti sauce he'd found the last time he broke into an abandoned house in western Arlington. There was no delaying it any longer. Ory would have to go into the city again to scavenge for food. Go or starve.

On the way back in, he saw it, frozen midstep in the weeds a few feet from the tree line. A deer. Its huge, dark pupils gleamed as they stared warily back, calculating. It should have dropped its antlers for the coming winter already, ►

An Excerpt from *The Book of M* (continued)

but they were still there, perched between its pricked ears. *We're saved*, Ory thought. He raised the double-barrel Remington in silence and aimed. Then he saw.

White steam billowed around its muzzle. The obsidian eyes blinked. It had seemed like a deer, but now he could see that it was not. Almost, but not quite. Where its bony, branchlike antlers should have been, instead a pair of small brown wings sprouted from its forehead, mottled feathers spread in the same way horns might curve.

Max.

Ory made for the shelter at a sprint. Inside, he scrambled to lock all the locks and re-prop the wood plank at an angle under the doorknob as fast as he could. Max was still asleep when he had left her, snoring lightly on her stomach, hair in her face. Ory went straight to the bedroom, straight to her.

"Blue," he said as soon as her drowsy, dream-heavy eyes fluttered open and met his own. He waited, breathless, for her to speak. It was their test, their way of telling whether or not she still knew who he was.

"Fifty-two," she whispered back. They met at a football game.

ORLANDO ZHANG

LATER, HE STOOD IN THE BATHROOM, sharpening his knife. It made more sense not to shave—cover against the cold, camouflage for how thin he'd become, thus how little of a threat his starved body might be—but the act was hard to give up. There were so few things left he could still do that reminded him of the rest. Electricity. Cell phones. A desk job. Ory watched his arm glide past his face in the mirror. At how it blocked the light and cast the dark shape of itself back against his cheekbones, his chest. "Still there," he said to himself. He closed his eyes for a moment and waited for the hammering of his heart to slow. *Still there.*

Two years ago, when the Forgetting first reached the United States, he and Max saw its effects. They had watched a shadowless man speaking perfect English walk straight into a fire, not remembering what it was. Heard children with no silhouettes ask flowers where the nearest water flowed as if the flowers could understand, but then inexplicably were able to head directly to it. Once a woman missing her dark twin named all the coins of their currency, but when she opened her hands, the metal pieces were in shapes they had never seen, engraved with designs of no country.

Why had it turned out to be that shadows were the parts of bodies where

An Excerpt from *The Book of M* (continued)

memories were stored? Why did it happen to some and not others? Once it finally did happen, why did some people forget things after two weeks and some hang on much longer? And when they finally did forget, why did the earth itself seem to forget, too? The image of the strange creature in the woods outside came to him again. Why when a shadowless forgot that deer didn't have wings on their heads, did it become true?

Those kinds of thoughts he didn't talk about with Max. Not anymore. Not since she had lost her own shadow seven days ago.

"Mr. Clean-cut," Max said when she poked her head into the bathroom. Her loose bronze afro floated in the air above her head, living a life of its own. He loved that hair. It was as soft and untamable as she was. It was one of his favorite things about her.

"You mean Mr. Sexy," Ory replied. She winked. He watched her in the mirror as she leaned against the doorframe, warm brown skin bathed gray in the dim light. At the empty space on the floor beneath her feet. At how nothing skipped darkly across the ground after her when she moved.

The amnesia happened at a different speed for each person, but by any measure, Max was doing very well, even after a week. Addresses, phone numbers, how Ory had proposed to her, what they'd done for their last anniversary, she could still recite it

all. *Blue, fifty-two.* In his most hopeful moments, he tried to convince himself that because she hadn't forgotten anything important yet, maybe, just maybe, she might not ever—even though he knew that was impossible. There had been small things. Tiny. So tiny, they had been easier to ignore than accept. Ory turned the blade over and inspected it when he finished shaving. The handle had been black when he'd found it obscured by a fallen cash register in a shuttered sporting goods shop. It was green now, he realized with a sinking dread. Max's favorite color.

And now the deer.

"I don't want to go," Ory said. It would be the first time he'd left her to scavenge Arlington for food since she lost her shadow. "Let's just starve instead."

"Okay," Max smiled. Her untethered feet moved away. "I'll get your canteen."

One more day, Ory wanted to beg. But she was right. What were the odds that while he wasn't home to protect her, she would forget something devastatingly huge? There was only one answer, each of the seven days he had delayed going out—worse tomorrow. According to the news, back when there had been electricity to watch it, today was the day that over 70 percent of victims forgot their first-degree relatives. Tomorrow would be the day that mothers did not remember their children. Yesterday would have been better than today, the day before that better than yesterday. ►

An Excerpt from *The Book of M* (continued)

But it was too late now. All he could do was go today instead of tomorrow, before she forgot something else. Before it was more than a knife handle that was changed, or a forest deer. ☞

Discover great authors, exclusive offers, and more at hc.com.