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## Russell, Karen. *Swamplandia!*

*Swamplandia!* is a somewhat shabby tourist attraction tucked into the depths of the Everglades. Run by the Bigtree clan, it features alligator wrestling and similar performances. When Hilola Bigtree, the park's star attraction, dies, it leaves both the park and her family unmoored. The attraction is failing, and Chief Bigtree—never the strongest business man around—leaves on a trip to the mainland to drum up money to purchase a new breed of alligator for the park. This leaves the three Bigtree children, son Kiwi and daughters Osceola and Ava, alone on their island. Kiwi, fancying himself smarter and more capable than his father the Chief, leaves as well, only to end up working a dehumanizing minimum-wage job at World of Darkness, a Hell-themed amusement park and *Swamplandia!*'s mainland competitor. This leaves young Ava alone with her increasingly unstable older sister. Ossie has retreated into old-fashioned Victorian spiritualism and believes herself to be in love with the ghost of an Everglades dredgeman. When Ossie, too, vanishes—heading into the swamp to join her lover in the underworld—Ava takes it upon herself to rescue her from death.

Quirky and fanciful, yet always deeply grounded in believable emotion and realistic motivations, Russell's imaginative first novel is difficult to categorize but impossible to put down.

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