

The Dragon Keeper

By Mindy Mejia

Reading Group Guide

Introduction

Meg Yancy knows she may be overly attached to Jata, the Komodo dragon that has been in her care since it arrived at the zoo from Indonesia. Jata brings the exotic to Meg's Minnesotan life: an ancient, predatory history and stories of escaping to freedom. A species that became endangered soon after being discovered, Komodos have a legacy of independence, something that Meg understands all too well. Meg has always been better able to relate to reptiles than to people, from her estranged father to her live-in boyfriend to the veterinarian who is more concerned with his career than with the animals' lives.

Then one day, Meg makes an amazing discovery. Jata has produced viable eggs—without ever having had a mate. Faced with this rare phenomenon, Meg must now defend Jata's hatchlings from the scientific, religious, and media forces that converge on the zoo to claim the miracle as their own. Finally forced to deal with the very people she has avoided for so long, Meg discovers that opening herself up comes with its own complications. And as she fights to save the animal she loves from the consequences of its own miracle, she must learn to accept that in nature, as in life, not everything can be controlled.

This gripping debut novel highlights the perils of captivity and the astonishing ways in which animals evolve.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. How does the Zoo of America compare to your local zoo? What place do you think zoos should have in society?
2. How do you feel about microchipping pets or animals in general? Do you think a SAM-like technology is the next logical step? Do you side with Meg or Antonio on this issue?
3. Was the zoo right in their decision about Jata? Why or why not? Do you think Meg saw the issue clearly?
4. Meg repeatedly broke rules and ignored important safety procedures when dealing with her animals. Was she a good zookeeper, or had she become too emotionally involved in her job?
5. What do you think our role should be in helping endangered species like Komodo dragons? Do we have the right to step in and create breeding programs? If we have the capability to preserve fragile species, is it our responsibility to do so?
6. With so many endangered or threatened species, conservation-oriented zoos today are forced to choose which species to save and which to abandon. How would you approach this kind of a choice?

7. Has this book changed your perception of Komodo dragons? How do you think you would feel about them if they roamed free in your neighborhood?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Take your book club on a trip to your local zoo and engage the zookeepers in conversation about their jobs and the challenges their animals face.
2. Learn about a species that is endangered in your area and ways that your book club might be able to help.
3. Read Mindy's next novel, *Everything You Want Me To Be*, and compare and contrast the role of animals in agricultural communities with how they are depicted in *The Dragon Keeper*.