

The True Story of the Komodo Dragon

Sébastien Bourbeau

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The unconventional fantasy novel The True Story of the Komodo Dragon follows a young creature on his jaunty, playful quest toward self-understanding.

Both cheeky and heartfelt, Sébastien Bourbeau's fabulistic fantasy novel *The True Story of the Komodo Dragon* charts the unusual adventures of a very unusual dragon.

A young Komodo dragon, Squeak, hopes to discover the meaning of his existence. Traveling between mountains, rivers, and woods, the inquisitive youngster bumps into a variety of colorful characters on his quest, including a regal lion, a stern yet motherly wolf, and an eagle who enjoys pontificating. Eventually, Squeak is led to a time-traveling raven who becomes his mentor, as well as to a human boy, Max, who becomes his most trusted companion. Surprising revelations about Squeak's origins and future change the course of his life.

The book breaks more than a few storytelling rules, but it does so in an enjoyable way. Ultimately, it has little to do with factual information about Komodo dragons; it is a feat of pure imagination. Its spirit of fun spills into its presentation, which is stuffed with unusual fonts and layouts, illustrations that range from childish to detailed, and creative misspellings and puns. Sly poetry and rhymes also play into the narrative, which interrupts itself to posit quizzes and creative exercises to its audience. At one point, Squeak even takes a moment to question these storytelling choices, only to return to the story when he's reassured that all will be well.

This fun, relaxed style results in a tale that moves at a jaunty pace, even as Squeak's adventures become more complicated in the book's second half. With a time-traveling raven involved, there are meetings between past and future versions of the characters, too. Amid this jocularly, the story slips in sober wisdom that stands to connect with people of all ages, including lessons from a fish about surviving in a troubled world, and advice from the raven about living life with intention.

As the narrative stretches to accommodate concepts like alternate universes and the evolution of creatures and humans over centuries, it often threatens to grow unwieldy. Still, its merry charm maintains its hold to the finish, which features a partnership that transcends time and space.

Concluding with poignancy, the unconventional fantasy novel *The True Story of the Komodo Dragon* follows a young Komodo dragon as he becomes something much bigger—and greater—than he could have ever dreamed of.

HO LIN (December 9, 2021)

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