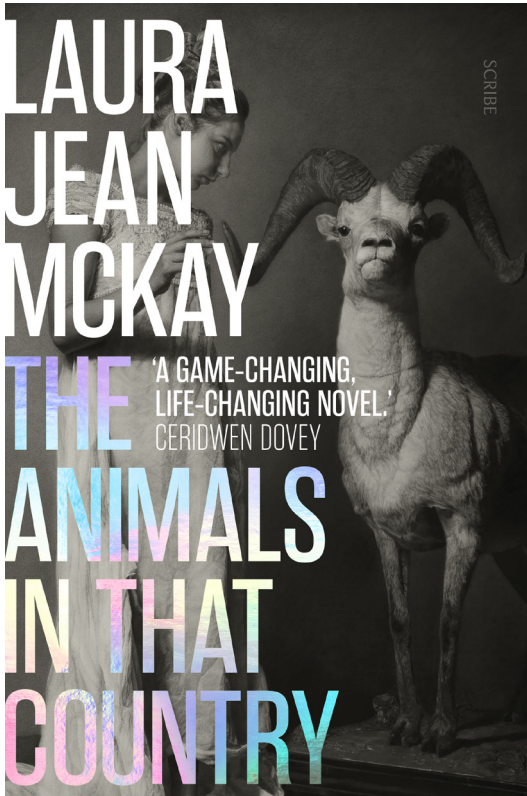


The Animals in That Country

LAURA JEAN MCKAY



BOOK DETAILS

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Laura Jean McKay is the author of *Holiday in Cambodia* (Black Inc. 2013), shortlisted for three national book awards in Australia. Her work appears in *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Best Australian Stories*, *The Saturday Paper*, and *The North American Review*. Laura is a lecturer in creative writing at Massey University, with a PhD from the University of Melbourne focusing on literary animal studies. She is the 'animal expert' presenter on ABC Listen's Animal Sound Safari.

Out on the road, no one speaks, everything talks.

Hard-drinking, foul-mouthed, and allergic to bullshit, Jean is not your usual grandma. She's never been good at getting on with other humans, apart from her beloved granddaughter, Kimberly. Instead, she surrounds herself with animals, working as a guide in an outback wildlife park. And although Jean talks to all her charges, she has a particular soft spot for a young dingo called Sue.

As disturbing news arrives of a pandemic sweeping the country, Jean realises this is no ordinary flu: its chief symptom is that its victims begin to understand the language of animals — first mammals, then birds and insects, too. As the flu progresses, the unstoppable voices become overwhelming, and many people begin to lose their minds, including Jean's infected son, Lee. When he takes off with Kimberly, heading south, Jean feels the pull to follow her kin.

Setting off on their trail, with Sue the dingo riding shotgun, they find themselves in a stark, strange world in which the animal apocalypse has only further isolated people from other species. Bold, exhilarating, and wholly original, *The Animals in That Country* asks what would happen, for better or worse, if we finally understood what animals were saying.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What would happen if we could understand what animals are 'saying'? This is the question that inspired *The Animals in That Country*. What question would you ask if you could communicate with animals? What do you think the response might be?
2. If you could be any animal in this novel, which one would you be and why?
3. There is a lot of dialogue in *The Animals in That Country*, some from people, some from insects, some from birds. Do the animal characters speak in the way you would expect?

REVIEWS

'*The Animals in That Country* will be the wildest ride you take all year.'

— MARIA TAKOLANDER, *THE SATURDAY PAPER*

'The writing is vibrant, energetic, and refreshing, and the narrative leaps off the page.'

— KAREN VIGGERS, *THE AUSTRALIAN*

'A game-changing, life-changing novel.'

— CERIDWEN DOVEY, AUTHOR OF *ONLY THE ANIMALS*

'Engrossing, subversive, and surprisingly profound.'

— J.P. POMARE, AUTHOR OF *CALL ME EVIE*

'Deliriously strange, blackly hilarious, and completely exhilarating.'

— JAMES BRADLEY, AUTHOR OF *CLADE*

'McKay is a master at building tension through sparse, abrupt language.'

— *BOOKS+PUBLISHING*

'Funny, original, and heartbreakingly timely.'

— R.W.R. MCDONALD, AUTHOR OF *THE NANCYS*

'An imaginative tour de force.'

— MEG MUNDELL, AUTHOR OF *THE TRESPASSERS*

'Weird, wonderful and strangely moving.'

— ELOISE GRILLS, AUTHOR OF *BIG BEAUTIFUL FEMALE THEORY*

'A wild and original ride of a read.'

— *NEW IDEA*

4. Is it okay to write from an animal's perspective? Is anthropomorphism something that writers should or shouldn't do?
5. Jean and Sue have both had tough lives. Jean is coping with divorce, family breakdown and the onset of a terrifying flu. Sue, meanwhile, has been put to work as a show dingo. What draws Sue and Jean together? What separates them? Are they friends?
6. Does Jean's relationship to animals change from the start to the end of the book?
7. How do you think you would act in Jean's situation? Would you make different choices?
8. At the time of the book's publication, the world was trying to cope with the impact of coronavirus. Did the global pandemic affect your reading of the book? How do the events in the book correlate or deviate from the coronavirus outbreak?
9. Do writers of apocalyptic narratives have a responsibility to draw from, respond to or predict real events?
10. Discuss the book's ending. What do you think happens next, after the book ends?