



## The Cage

*Megan Shepherd*

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When Cora Mason wakes in a desert, she doesn't know where she is or who put her there. As she explores, she finds an impossible mix of environments—tundra next to desert, farm next to jungle, and a strangely empty town cobbled together from different cultures, all watched over by eerie black windows. And she isn't alone.

Four other teenagers have also been taken: a beautiful model, a tattooed smuggler, a secretive genius, and an army brat who seems to know too much about Cora's past. None of them have a clue as to what happened, and all of them have secrets. As the unlikely group struggles for leadership, they slowly start to trust each other. But when their mysterious jailer appears—a handsome young guard called Cassian—they realize that their captivity is more terrifying than they could ever imagine: their captors aren't from Earth. And they have taken the five teenagers for an otherworldly zoo—where the exhibits are humans.

## **The Cage Details**

Date : Published May 26th 2015 by Balzer+Bray/HarperCollins

ISBN :

Author : Megan Shepherd

Format : Kindle Edition 405 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Aliens, Dystopia, Romance

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## From Reader Review The Cage for online ebook

### Penny says

[Lucky would be our romantic hero (hide spoiler)]

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### Ashley says

#### 4.5 Stars

FREAKING FANTASTIC!!!

#### Things I loved:

- \* It was so interesting and different.
- \* ALIENS!
- \* There was a sort-of love triangle that I actually really liked.
- \* I could not put this sucker down. I was GLUUUUUED to those pages. Until like 4am. Yikes.
- \* The ending had me CLAWING for more. But it was still a satisfying ending (not open-ended or annoyingly cliffhanging).

#### Things I didn't like:

- \* I didn't like Rolf's character development. I loved him at first but HATED him at the end.
- \* Sometimes Cora could do annoying/stupid things.
- \* I got annoyed how no one questioned one of the MASSIVE reveals ((view spoiler)).

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### Giselle says

Everything considered, this is not a bad book at all - the writing is good and flows well, the world building is excellent, and the characters well developed - but I was kind of meh about a large portion of it.

My biggest complaint is how a big part of the book is spent bickering and pointlessly planning an escape. I mean, how do they expect to get back home? They're in some alien world for gods sake and Cora's plan is to make a run for it and hope for the best? It's like she never even takes this into question until way later when she makes up some half-ass plan that seems to be all about blind luck and a whole lot of guessing. I'm all for not giving up, for fighting despite the odds - and I applaud her take-no-crap attitude, I really do - but this directionless plan made the whole escape plot feel frivolous. She should have focused first on getting a

decent understanding of where she even was before she thought of how to get home, and while this actually does happen a time or two spontaneously, she puts all her energy on making flimsy weapons (to beat aliens that have the strength of beasts!) and looking for the cage door that seems to be hidden even beyond human ability, with no idea of what would come next. Like, then what? Long story short, I feel like the book spent too much time wandering instead of progressing its *real* plot.

Another, more minor complaint is with the romance. We've got an alien-human love triangle that just weirded me out. He watched her for years, for one, and I know he's an alien race so age comparison is weird, but his attraction to her gave me the heebie jeebies. I just could not root for that unless it was to try and manipulate herself into getting information or escaping, which I don't think it was. She clearly felt attracted to him (it.. whatever).

Aside from those complaints, however, the novel is a good one. Despite the slow-ish pace for the first part, it kept my interest and left me intrigued enough that I didn't want to put it down. The world building and sci-fi aspects were extremely well done and very interesting. I just wish we'd gotten more answers about earth, and seen more of "space life" (however you want to call it..). The species, the societies, their economy; they're just as disturbing as they are fascinating, but as trilogies are as of late, much of the world building is saved for the second book. The character building is another aspect to praise, especially considering the 3rd person tense that I often have difficulty with. Though focusing on Cora more than any other, the story is told with alternative point-of-views from the cage's 6 residents. Through each perspective, we learn who they really are and the lives they left behind, which was a great way to understand how they were coping with what was happening, some with more difficulty than others. Moreover, it showed us how this captivity and the cage's manipulations were changing them - which was not for the better!

The pacing may be unhurried at first, but the plot and its secrets are unraveled in a way that glues you to its pages - the more you learn, the more engrossed you get. *The Cage* is not without its flaws, but it's a decent start to what could be a thrilling series!

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*An advance copy was provided by the publisher for review.*

For more of my reviews, visit my blog at Xpresso Reads

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### **Lola says**

Cora and the five other encaged teenagers – Lucky, Rok, Mali, Rolf and Leon – have to, in the human zoo they are confined in, conform to three rules before the twenty-first day of isolation from Earth had passed... or else they will be “removed”. The following directives were created by an extraterrestrial specie:

1. Decode the puzzles hidden inside their custody
2. Provide their body everything necessary in order to stay healthy
3. **Reproduce**

You know, I frankly think that this could have worked a little better if it were written for an adult/NA audience (if modifications). So much probably would have been explored in more dept. Shepherd's writing is noteworthy so, clearly, that wasn't where the problem resided. Is it really in the development of elements that the author's talent lost its visibility.

First, the characters barely paid attention to the actual “puzzles”. They were way more focused on a) finding a way out, b) sleeping with one another or c) simply wander around doing **NOTHING** at all. Why I believe that as an adult novel it might have ended differently (and in a good way) is that sex, procreation and assuring the continuation of the human specie was talked throughout the story but with carefulness *because YA*. But without that limitation, it could have offered the plot very important themes for us to read about and not leave the latter shallow and mostly brought from trivial manipulation. Even human nature as theme narrowly showed its face.

Second, the story was just so **forgettable**. The characters manifested no originality and, if one did – Mali – her role was so meagre that an attachment per se revealed being almost impossible or completely insignificant. The story flowed at a reasonably fast speed, which can never be a negative thing if the story itself needs it... or if **YOU** need it. I absolutely did. A slow-pacing would have periodically brought me to sleep.

Finally, if you want good romance or at least a heartfelt one, *The Cage* is not the answer to your longing. With a love-triangle between a human girl, a human boy and an alien, things couldn't have been more predictable. What bothered me most though was seeing how the narrator kept describing the love interests' appearance instead of their personality. I am tired of beauty being the first and second and third thing characters look at. What I personally long for right now is to read a story with two people that fall in love with one another – among other events in the plot – gradually and with realistic... and actually falling in love without making their aspect the starting point of it all.

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### **Jodi Meadows says**

I loved this one! It definitely made a 9-hour flight go by quickly.

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### **Karleigh.Reads says**

Rating - 3.5

Take a seat children, I have a story to tell.

I am going to try and do my review in a different format this time. Might be a little easier for me.

So I picked this book up a couple days before the release, I do believe my local bookstore was getting sick of me. I was honestly stocking the store for when they got their deliveries and asking if they had it in yet. *The Cage* was one of my highly anticipated books of 2015.

#### **The Good**

- Cassian or "The Caretaker" I loved him throughout this whole book. His character was awesome.
- The setting/cage was so interesting, how all those different areas all mixed in together and how they melded and bent to cause everyone to always end up where they started.
- the idea of the book was unique and interesting
- the writing was beautiful, I flew through this book.
- ah the romance that built between Cora and Cassian. So much swooning.

## - THAT TWIST, THAT GASP-TACULAR TWIST

Now the dreaded bad parts

- Everyone who had a POV in the book. Seriously, what the crap was Megan thinking with these characters. We have one very jealous, abusive type, one who sleeps with everyone and CORA OMG COULD YOU EVER LET CASSIAN SAY ANYTHING. I was so sick of the way that Cora would just CUT Cassian off every time he wanted to tell her the truth or anything. I wanted to slap her and be like CORA STFU AND LET THE MAN/ALIEN SPEAK DAMNIT!!!

- The escape plan or lack thereof. What was she going to do when she found the fail safe, really stupid Cora.

- Rolf and Nok, ridiculous. that is all

- REPRODUCE, if you have read this you know the ending WTF DID REPRODUCING HAVE TO DO WITH IT?!

- the puzzles and tokens, again what was the point?

- was the tundra not cold? A tiny summer dress and bare feet and not dying of hypothermia?

- WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG TO KISS?! Ok that is just something that made me upset haha

Overall I enjoyed the book, I did. I will be continuing on and I will probably be counting down the days too. I devoured this book and even with some tiny hiccups I couldn't stop reading it to figure out what was happening. I love Cassian.. need more Cassian. Can we have a book with Raffe from Angel Fall and Cassian.. Omg can I be in this book. \*swoon\*

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## **Sarah says**

(Source: I received a digital copy of this book for free on a read-to-review basis. Thanks to HarperCollins and Edelweiss.)

***“I also believe the infinity paradox is responsible for the headaches we’ve all been complaining about. Our minds can’t handle this much predictability.”***

In short - Ugh. Just ugh.

## **This review will contain spoilers from here on... and it won't be pretty.**

I didn't like any of the characters in this book. Cora was irritating. She's on an alien planet, in a 'cage' as she calls it, and she wants to escape. Well great! But where the heck do you think you're going to go? Do you have a spaceship hidden in your knickers that we don't know about? Know how to travel across space without one? Think the aliens might just leave you a map and some keys laying around or something? Come off it!

***“Tomorrow,” Lucky said. “We’ll divide into teams, and start our escape.”***

Then we had Nok, who took rule 3 – about procreating – very much to heart, and decided that she'd sleep with all three of the boys in her enclosure. Did she really not think they would find out? Did she not care which one ended up as the father of her baby? Obviously not. And then she claimed to love one of the boys! Really? Then why are you shagging his friend behind his back?

***“You said you loved me too.” He didn’t recognise the hard edge in his voice. “You lied.”***

Then we had the third girl, who was dead before the end of chapter 3. Lucky her, she obviously knew this book was going to be bad. Wish she'd warned me.

***“You ever done this before?” Cora asked.***

***“Pulled a dead body out of the ocean? Can’t say I have.”***

Then there were the boys, and I can't say I liked any of them either. Lucky though was possibly the worst. Not only had he previously let Cora go to a juvenile detention centre for a crime she didn't commit, he accepted payment to do it, let his mother's killer walk free, and was then surprised that Cora was shocked by this news! I mean I'm sorry, but when you tell a girl that you're the reason she went to Juvie, she's not going to want to sleep with you anymore. Oh, and not believing a word she says won't get you far either.

***“So I not only have to sleep with a guy I barely know, but he also happens to be the one who sent me to juvenile detention.”***

So, the storyline. The bore-me-to-death storyline. Where to start?

- Cora sees a comic with a date which is two years in the future from when she was last on Earth. Oh no! 2 years have passed! Er, did you consider that maybe the aliens think the date is slightly different to what is accepted on Earth? Just a thought!

***“Had they been gone from Earth for 2 years?”***

- These aliens want them to complete puzzles and they are given tokens for it. What was the point of this? I think they used the tokens to buy stuff, but even so, I didn't really see the point.

***“Ten tokens?” He blinked too fast. “That doesn’t make sense. If anything, the game I solved was harder, but I only got one.”***

- These kids are told that Earth is gone, and I can understand them wanting to see it with their own eyes, but even so, they're going nowhere!

**“Earth is gone.”**

- There was a maze. Not kidding. Darn Mazerunner all over again.

**“I think it’s a maze,” Lucky said.**

**“It can’t be a maze.”**

- They cured her asthma. Ugh. Really? Because it’s that simple? I don’t believe it.

**“I think whoever put us here cured my asthma.”**

- We get talk of ghosts. We get some human remains. I am still bored.

**“Yasmine’s ghost was here. He could feel her eyes.”**

Anyway, I’m sick of thinking about this book, and I don’t care that it ended on a freaking cliff-hanger. I have so had enough of this dross.

4 out of 10

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### **Karen says**

This review was done by **KissinBlueKaren**

**THE CAGE is such a unique story.** What would you do if you woke up in a fake reality with 5 strangers? Cora wakes up in the desert with no recollection of how she got there. She meets a boy there named Lucky and together they find 4 more strangers. One is dead. Together they find out that they are being watched everywhere they go. Soon they are introduced to their captors, a race called Kindred. There are three rules; solve the physical and mental puzzles (that are everywhere in their environment), maintain good health, and engage in procreation actives. They have 21 days before they get replaced. There is no escape. The Kindred have everything under control.

This story is told in each human’s point of view. In this story the main character is **Cora**, who comes from a privileged past, but who somehow ended up in Juvenile detention. Then there is **Lucky**, who knows Cora from earth, he might have something to do with how she got into trouble. There is another girl named **Nok**, whose physical attractiveness lead her into a life of sexual manipulation. **Rof**, the smart one. He was bullied a lot on earth and harbors a lot of resentment. Then **Leon**, whose strength and crappy family lead him into a life of crime. The Kindred have psychic abilities and their hope seemed to be that the group would learn them somehow. **Mali**, a human we meet later. She could be so much help to the group but she is such a weird girl that she keeps things to herself.

**The story really asks the question of who you can trust when you are surrounded by strangers.** I liked

how everyone was a suspect in a way. Yes, it was frustrating to see the group sort of implode and turn on each other, but that is reality sometimes. People just do what they want and think how they want and you can't control it. Even in a controlled environment.

I liked Cora. Honestly, I didn't buy everything about her backstory, but I liked her. I think her determination to get out of there was genuine. I did want her and Lucky to just hash it out and follow the rules, but I understood why she couldn't. Most of her idea for escape were ludicrous but I liked how the group agreed (at least at first) to try together to get out of there and go home. Lucky was probably my favorite character. He was my obvious pick for leader and I think if Cora would have just trusted him more they could have been happy. I felt bad for Nok, but I liked her and Rof together. Rof was an arrogant ass. I wish we would have seen more from Leon. He acted crazy, but I bet he really has things worked out. The alien species was a big mystery throughout the story. Cassius, a Kindred known as "the caretaker", was hard to figure out. **This thing between Cassius and Cora made me keep reading this story.**

I was so intrigued by the setting and world building. It was very well done. I liked how the environment kept changing so that the group would adapt. Although it really sucked for them. The environment had a city, desert, snow, woods, jungle and ocean. So it pretty much mimicked earth, but not in a way that makes sense. This world had my full attention and stretched my imagination. In contrast, we get to see how the Kindred live and how they use humans for entertainment. **I can't really say enough about how much I enjoyed the world building in this story.**

Admittedly, there were some flaws with this story. I didn't like how Cora was so secretive from the group. She had some really dumb ideas about escape, even after they realized they weren't even on earth anymore. Cassius liking Cora the most didn't make any sense to me. Also, the Kindred could read their thoughts and intentions, so how did they get anything past them. That was a giant plot hole that I had a hard time swallowing. But, this world and the set up were so amazing that I just decided to turn my brain off and go with it.

I will definitely be reading the sequel to this book, the book ended in a place where reading the next book is an inevitable certainty. Now that everything is set up I think (hope) things will just get better and bigger. **I give this book 4 stars for how I feel about it, but it is probably more of a 3 star read in reality. However, since this is MY review...**

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### **Beth says**

A brilliant, exciting tale of what it's like to be human, even when all hope is lost. Shepherd perfectly contrasts freedom and entrapment, humanity and alien nature, loss and love.

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### **Lindsay Cummings says**

Megan Shepherd can do no wrong.

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## Trina (Between Chapters) says

Rating may lower upon more reflection.

If you asked me what kind of sci-fi I like, this book would fit my criteria perfectly on paper. I LOVE stories about aliens discovering human emotions for the first time and learning what it means to be human. This story does that. But for whatever reason it hit a flat note for me.

I did enjoy that this wasn't an invasion story, but rather focused on why aliens would be interested in humans. But there was a focus on breeding that felt distasteful to me. There were mature topics being handled in what came off as juvenile ways. I didn't get a good feel for the secondary characters. I also think that I would have enjoyed this more if it were a standalone and we got the ending. There were repetitive scenes that could easily have been left out. As the first in a series, it definitely felt like build up.

I didn't like how often 'blind' was used as an insult. Phrases like 'was she blind?' 'she blindly trusted him,' 'they blindly went along with it,' etc, were very frequent.

**Audiobook review:** The narrator juggled multiple accents (the 6 main characters were from different countries) and voices excellently. I think she is very talented and made the listening experience enjoyable.

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## Alyssa says

\*\*\*Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog\*\*\*

The Cage by Megan Shepherd

Book One of The Cage series

Publisher: Balzer + Bray

Publication Date: May 26, 2015

Rating: 3 stars

Source: ARC sent by the publisher

Summary (from Goodreads):

The Maze Runner meets Scott Westerfeld in this gripping new series about teens held captive in a human zoo by an otherworldly race. From Megan Shepherd, the acclaimed author of The Madman's Daughter trilogy.

When Cora Mason wakes in a desert, she doesn't know where she is or who put her there. As she explores, she finds an impossible mix of environments—tundra next to desert, farm next to jungle, and a strangely empty town cobbled together from different cultures—all watched over by eerie black windows. And she isn't alone.

Four other teenagers have also been taken: a beautiful model, a tattooed smuggler, a secretive genius, and an army brat who seems to know too much about Cora's past. None of them have a clue as to what happened, and all of them have secrets. As the unlikely group struggles for leadership, they slowly start to trust each other. But when their mysterious jailer—a handsome young guard called Cassian—appears, they realize that

their captivity is more terrifying than they could ever imagine: Their captors aren't from Earth. And they have taken the five teenagers for an otherworldly zoo—where the exhibits are humans.

As a forbidden attraction develops between Cora and Cassian, she realizes that her best chance of escape might be in the arms of her own jailer—though that would mean leaving the others behind. Can Cora manage to save herself and her companions? And if so . . . what world lies beyond the walls of their cage?

What I Liked:

As I'm writing this review, I'm struggling to decide if I liked this book or not. It should be easy, right? To figure out if you (overall) felt positively towards a book, or negatively. I have no idea. I feel like I liked the science fiction, but could not connect with some of the characters, so I'm stuck. I have no idea how this review is going to go, so bear with me!

Cora and five other humans have been taken from their homes and plopped in a mysterious and unknown place. All of them wake up separately and have no idea how they got here or where they are. As they slowly find each other, they realize that they are in some sort of artificial environment - a cage. And one of the six of them is dead, though the five don't know how. They find out that they are being held by an advanced species that is not human. The Caretaker, Cassian, tells them the rules - live happily in this establishment, cooperate, and... procreate, by the end of twenty-one days. Cora refuses to believe that this is their new home - can she find a way out, without the help of the others?

We get to read from the perspectives of all five of the teenagers - Rolf, Nok, Cora, Lucky, and Leon. The sixth person (and third girl) is dead, from the beginning of the story. Each perspective is told in third person, which I actually really like. Too much first person in YA these days. I didn't like any of the teens' perspectives, to be honest (which is the biggest problem I had), but I kept reading.

I was intrigued from the start. To be honest, I didn't realize that this book is science fiction! I thought it was a medical thriller or something. But the cage is run by aliens, an advanced species that somewhat looks like humans - though not really. They're huge, with no irises or pupils, and mind powers. Like a sort of mind reading, for one. More like emotional reading, but you get what I'm saying. Cassian - the Caretaker - can feel exactly what the humans are feeling at all times, as can the other Mosca (I think that's what they're called? If I remember correctly).

The aliens want the humans to live in this establishment, peacefully and cooperatively, and procreate. Each one of them has been paired off - Cora and Lucky, Nok and Rolf, Leon and the dead girl (she wasn't supposed to die). Nok and Rolf hit it off pretty quickly. Leon is aggressive and doesn't get along with the group. Lucky actually knew Cora from before... there is a really dark past between them, though Cora has no idea. Lucky falls for Cora quickly, but Cora refuses to believe that that is what they are expected to do. She likes Lucky, but she doesn't want to love him or have sex with him (me either, no matter how cute he is. The situation is WEIRD).

I don't think I liked Cora, or any of the humans, to be honest. Maybe Mali, the replacement for Girl 3. I don't know if I liked Cassian, though he was interesting. He was very static, not a developing character, and he seemed flat to me. But I see why Shepherd has him as a leader type AND a love interest. Meh.

The romance - there's a love triangle brewing. Lucky is in love with Cora, though Cora does not seem to really have feelings for him. She DOES have feelings for Cassian (and vice versa, but he's their Caretaker... she wants to be as far from this place as possible. So I'm not sure how the romance will go.

Overall, I think the science fiction and the STORY were good... ish. The characters and I didn't really agree. But I'm interested in seeing where this series is going. It's a trilogy, which I find strange - how in the world is Shepherd going to stretch out this one?

#### What I Did Not Like:

Like I've been saying, I didn't really connect with any of the characters. I didn't like Cora. I get it, you don't want to stay in this freakish establishment. But I feel like she wasn't always rational. But then, I also understand that, because I don't know how rational I would be under the circumstances. Still, there was something that I really didn't like about Cora.

I definitely didn't like Nok or Rolf from the beginning. Both of them are odd characters from the start, and they evolve into sleazy people. Jeez, I wanted to punch both of them. Leon, not so much. I felt bad for him, more than anything else.

I wish Cassian were more of a three-dimensional person to me. He seemed one-dimensional and flat, and I feel like he had the potential to be a quietly villainous hero. I love forbidden romance between the villain and the female protagonist - but I feel like Cassian was too flat of a "villain", and a character in general.

The story progression is weird. We get a lot of information dumping about Cora's past and Lucky's past throughout the book, and to be honest, I skipped most of that. It didn't feel necessary, and it probably wasn't. I'm not sure what it was doing for the story or for the character development, but it wasn't doing anything for me.

The fighting and bickering REALLY detracted from the story. There is a point, not even halfway through the book, when everyone starts getting mad at Cora for no reason, and the fighting and verbal fighting gets ridiculous. I'm sure it's authentic (or maybe not, who knows) but I didn't like it. It REALLY made me mad, and I felt a lot of resentment towards certain characters and irritation towards the story. This goes on for most of the book. Ugh!

The ending is strange. It's predictable, down to the last page, for me. I'm curious as to how Shepherd is going to make this series a trilogy - I feel like it would be a good duology. Also I have a toooooon of questions, so I hope those will be answered in the next book(s).

#### Would I Recommend It:

Eh. No. It's not the most impressive science fiction novel. You all saw how meh I was about Shepherd's debut trilogy, right? Three stars all around? I feel like this series might end up along the same vein. At least the love triangle doesn't seem as idiotic as the love triangle in The Madman's Daughter trilogy. That needed to be cut out from page one. This POTENTIAL love triangle at least makes more sense (though I still don't like the idea of it).

#### Rating:

2.5 stars -> I guess I'm rounding up to 3 stars? 2.5 stars is a perfect rating for this book, but Goodreads, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble don't do half-star ratings. Ugh! 3 stars it is. What a struggle.

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## **Giselle says**

An Electronic Advanced Reader Copy was provided by the publisher via Edelweiss for review.

Cora wakes up in a desert, with no knowledge of who put her there. Thinking the impossible, she ventures out only to meet a boy her age. Both have no memories of how they got there. As they explore the area, certain things don't make any sense. How different parts are different seasons, how the town square is a mash-up of different cultures and how the other three people who are also locked up are also hiding secrets of their own.

I found Cora to be the most realistic viewpoint considering how accepting the other characters were of how they ended up being locked up in a cage. But what I didn't like was how she's always talking about how gorgeous Cassian is. And how attracted she is to him with no real control over how she felt. But maybe that's why she did fall for him? I just found their eyes to be creepy to be honest, having no pupils? EEPS. The other characters tended to annoy me, but their various viewpoints were very interesting. Megan Shepherd deals with a bit of their back-story and that was quite informative as well.

I found the concept quite interesting, and a little unique, having humans taken in as an experiment. Only for it to go wrong. The puzzles they had to solve in order to get prizes that they would otherwise receive at home was also a neat concept. What I didn't really fully understand were the various alien species. I wanted more about their world, and I wanted the teens to venture out and escape, but maybe that's for another book?

I liked the book and the writing, but the focus on romance was just okay for me. I'm still interested in reading the sequel just to see if any or all the characters will be going back home to earth.

An interesting take on the kidnapped-by-an-alien story-line, "The Cage" will have you thinking of all the twists and turns because you'll be guessing who the Warden really is.

**RATING 3/5**

## **QUOTES**

"Beauty had a way of masking something darker."

"When you lose fairness, you lose what makes us human."

"Sometimes mistakes are worth making."

"Humans. We were so cruel to each other, and to our planet."

"A smile can hide so much. A smile can hide a lie."

"It's a man's world. Controlling men is the only way to survive."

"Love wasn't just a combination of matching physical and personal criteria. It was something you couldn't put into words, just a certainty, a twist of fate, a spark."

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## Faye, la Patata says

**Gah, I'm not sure what to think about this book.** One one hand, I feel like it's definitely unique and refreshing, partaking on a sci-fi idea and molding it into something new. On the other hand, it had a lot of things that made me raise my eyebrow, want to bang my head on a wall, and gouge my eyes out.

**Let's get one thing straight, though: the writing is mad awesome.** It's been a while since I've read such beautiful writing that reads like a sweet harmony, as if reading it is like listening to angelic music. I have heard of the author's writing prowess in reviews of her previous series *The Madman's Daughter*, but now I am a firm believer. **The narration and how the words were connected and weaved to tell a story were enough to glue me to the pages, enough to make me suspend my disbelief** about a group of teens being chosen by super intelligent extraterrestrial aliens to procreate in a controlled, alien-made, human-like "habitat" in the middle of literal space-nowhere.

A.K.A. Zoo.

### **An alien zoo. In space. For humans.**

I know, I know; you're probably thinking, "Holy crapadoodle, that is kind of stretching it!" AND I WAS LIKE THAT AT FIRST, but after reading along and getting a taste of Shepherd's writing and how effectively she set up the atmosphere and the setting, it became really interesting and refreshing to the point that I kept reading just to find out what our band of unfortunate special teenagers will do to get out of their bizarre situation. The way the "habitat" was described - how it was a mash-up of different cultures and landscapes, how every direction always led back to the starting point, how their meals were a mix of different things (tuna with chocolate sauce? That's not even the least bit exciting!). It was just downright creepy. **And the fact that you have aliens with dark, black eyes and metallic bronze skin looking at you at well concealed viewing panels? CREEPIER.**

So, yes, big props to the writing and the atmosphere and how it made me want to check my windows in case there are aliens hiding behind that tree. I don't want to be abducted. NOT WHEN THERE ARE STILL SO MANY BOOKS TO READ.

Unfortunately, there were some things that made me raise an eyebrow. Let's talk about the romance. Heck, let's talk about that absolutely jarring love triangle: Cora, Lucky, and that mysterious alien who has admitted to watching her for a long time, Cassian. While I don't always find love triangles painful, this one was simply so... bizarre. First of all, it creeped me out that Cora kept saying Cassian had the most **beautiful** face she has ever seen (like an angel) despite the fact that 1.) he is an alien; 2.) he and his kind abducted her from her home planet and put her in an enclosure where they study every pixel of her; 3.) **THEY FUCKING ABDUCTED HER**; and 4.) **HE IS A MOTHERFUCKING GODDAMN ALIEN, CORA. AN ALIEN WHO TREAT Y'ALL LIKE YOU'RE A BUNCHA EXPERIMENTS TO BE PRODDED AND EXAMINED.**

**I mean, the fact that she just kept saying how he was so beautiful pissed me off.** I've generally had enough of love interests/potential love interests being beautiful. For me, it's not swoony at all. It's not

romantic. And it makes me more spooked out than anything else, because what are the chances of me finding an incredibly hot and beautiful alien (**who keeps looking at the MC's lips and can apparently speak bloody English AND GASP LOOKS LIKE A HUMAN WHAT ARE THE CHANCES EH**) or even just a beautiful man and falling in love with each other? Answer: zero to none.

**Unless I'm a YA heroine, apparently.**

I also had an issue with some characterization that happened among the captives. **While I applaud the diversity of the cast and the variety of their backgrounds, it really bothered me that their attitudes and personalities took a 180 degree somewhere in the middle of the book with very little transition.** It's like they became from hero to psycho in a blink of an eye. I did like how their surroundings were changing them for the worse, but I wasn't a fan of how it was done. Some twists are revealed - shocking twists at that - and they easily accept it without any question or resistant or disbelief (at least not explicitly shown). **I mean, if I were told that all of a sudden that books were suddenly banned and all libraries were burnt down, I wouldn't simply go, "Oh, okay. Well, that's life. Whoopdeedoo."** I would be **FREAKING. THE. FRACK. OUT.**

**I think the best aspect about this book was its philosophical aspect and how it encouraged deep and thought-provoking discussion and discernment.** The things that happen to our characters push and encourage us to think about our place in the world and what we do to our surroundings and to what we deem as "lesser species". We have animals locked up and bred in zoos and in captivity, and we often use animals as test subjects for medicine and other fields of scientific study, thinking it's for their good and for the betterment of everyone, but what happens when it's **us** in their shoes? What if someone does the same to us and uses the same reasons for doing so? What would we think of our captors, then? What would we think of ourselves once we finally get a dose of our own medicine? **It's really interesting, and I feel like this book will really make us question how we treat animals in captivity and if we are handling them right.**

**All in all, I feel mixed about this book.** There are so many good points, but the bad points weigh heavy upon me, too, and they did affect my reading experience somehow. But know this: I **will** read the sequel(s). The writing is enough to keep me going (it's so bloody beautiful) and I am interesting in knowing what's next. I would really appreciate it, though, if all mentions of romance are toned down a bit, because if I see a male love interest described as "beautiful" one more time, I might figuratively lose my shit.

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**Anne Goldschrift says**

Zugegeben, das Buch hat definitiv seine Schwächen und die Charaktere sind bis zum Schluss allesamt sehr unrealistisch und unsympathisch geblieben, aber die Geschichte hat mich echt gepackt und ich bin super gespannt, wie es weitergeht ?

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