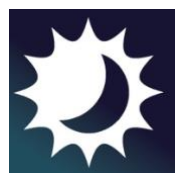


READING GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS

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About the book

Hannah Bird has just arrived in Thailand. Disoriented and out of her depth, she meets Deven, a fierce and gutsy Australian expat who sweeps her into thrilling adventures rescuing elephants.

As they head deeper and deeper into the fraught world of elephant tourism, their lives become tangled in ways Hannah never imagined. But how far will they go to save a life?

Hannah is about to make a critical decision from which there will be no turning back, with shattering consequences.

The Breaking is an extraordinary debut. Sharply observed and richly vivid, it is an intensely moving story about the magnetic bond between two young women and the enduring cost of animal exploitation. It is at once devastating and exhilarating, and ultimately transformative.

About the author

Irma Gold is an award-winning author and editor. *The Breaking* is her debut novel. It won the NSW Writer's Centre Varuna Fellowship Award and received development funding from artsACT and CAPO. She is also the author of a short fiction collection, *Two Steps Forward* (Affirm Press), and her short fiction has been widely published in places like *Meanjin*, *Island*, *Westerly* and *Review of Australian Fiction*. She has published three children's books, with two more due out in 2021 and 2022. Irma works as a freelance editor and for a decade was Convener of Editing at the University of Canberra. She is Ambassador for the ACT Chief Minister's Reading Challenge and Ambassador for the Save Elephant Foundation. She is also co-host of the writing podcast, *Secrets from the Green Room*.

Praise for *The Breaking*

'A heart-stopping, unforgettable read. *The Breaking* will blow your mind. You have been warned.' — Angela Savage

'Evocative and urgent, *The Breaking* shows Gold's talent and heart.' — Kate Mildenhall

'Bold, passionate and fierce. Moving, urgent and compassionate. A plea against powerlessness and indifference. I loved every minute.' — Karen Viggers

'Sensual and hyper-dangerous, Gold's take on human love and animal cruelty is a real tour de force.' — John Clanchy

For discussion

The Breaking explores the complexity and ethics of animal rights. Hannah and Deven respond differently when they witness the confronting scene of a calf being put through the *phajaan*. How might you have responded if you had been there? In what way has reading this book changed the way you feel about the use of animals in the tourism industry?

Deven says, 'I guess we're all running, in a way. Us farang.' What are the two women running from, and what do they have to learn from each other?

'The thing is, when it's someone you love,' she said slowly, her words sounding as if they were being pushed out through a sieve. 'When they leave, it's a killer. Like, actual hell.' How does Deven's idea about love shape her choices? And how does this underlying belief affect her relationship with Hannah?

Consider the developing relationship between the two women. What holds Hannah back?

'I was alone, and I knew then that I was always going to be alone. It was just me.' How do you think this experience at the age of seven shapes Deven's choices in the book?

Does Deven's relationship with elephants change over the course of the book? What about Hannah?

Animals and humans can develop special bonds. In what way does Yuthakon help Deven?

When Hannah comes across Yuthakon's owner in the forest she says, 'I had imagined him differently, the owner, a picture of evil. But he was just a man, with a family.' How does the book explore the complexities of elephant tourism?

Deven asks Hannah to help her release Yuthakon back into the wild. She says: 'Yuth shouldn't be someone's asset. He's not a fucking house, or a car. He's a living creature, like us. And he's young still, he's got maybe fifty years ahead of him. Fifty years of being chained in that fucking jungle by himself, going insane.' How do you think you would act in Hannah's situation? Would you make different choices? And, in the end, do you think her choices are justified?

'Life is dangerous. If you play it safe, you might as well be dead.' Consider this statement by Deven. Do you agree? How does this theme play out in the book?

Before COVID-19, 40 million tourists visited Thailand each year. What responsibility do tourists have when engaging with another country and its culture? Has this book made you re-examine any past experiences as a traveller?

Discuss the book's final scene. Do you think Hannah and Deven have a future together? What do you think happens after the book ends?

For fun

Share some of your most memorable travel experiences.

Who would you cast in a film or stage adaptation of *The Breaking*?

Can you think of other books that feature elephants?

