

## DISCUSSION GUIDE | THE CARETAKER TRILOGY by David Klass

In David Klass's **CARETAKER TRILOGY**, the earth is facing an environmental meltdown that threatens the very existence of human life: pollution, the destruction of the ozone layer, hunted-out jungles, the draining of marine life in rivers and lakes, the depletion of rain forests, the destruction of coral reefs, the alteration of climate patterns, the genetic manipulation of organisms.

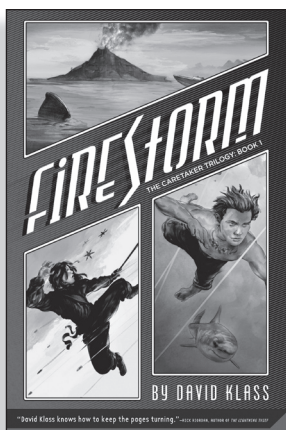
One thousand years into the future, on the eve of the destruction of the human species, groups from all over the earth merge to form the Caretakers movement in a global effort to save the planet. But not all believe in the cause. There is an evil army that seeks power and profit in the destruction of the environment.

Jack Danielson, heir to the movement's founder, but living in the present time, is reluctantly recruited to fight and destroy those evil forces. Throughout the novels of the Caretaker Trilogy, he questions his role as a Caretaker and searches for his connection to the leader of the Dann People, his birth father.

As readers, you will question not only Jack's role and responsibility for our planet but also your own, as you experience the dangers and prospects of the present and future worlds David Klass has created.

This reading group guide offers discussion questions for each book and for the trilogy as a whole.

### About FIRESTORM: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 1



**W**ho is Jack Danielson? Don't ask him. He doesn't know. In fact, throughout *Firestorm*, he's trying to figure that out. And, as the reader, so are you; it is a central question in the novel.

Beyond the identity issue, *Firestorm* is about other issues as well. It's about environmental crisis. It's about good versus evil—a universal struggle. It's about sexual coming-of-age. And it's about trust. What's more, it is a great adventure, filled with events and incidents, wrapped in a fantasy. It's a visual treat that is impossible to read without seeing the places, the people, and the scenes before you.

## Discussion Questions for FIRESTORM: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 1

1. Gisco: *It's not that I'm from the future. It's that we're from the future . . . We were both born almost a thousand years from now.*

Jack: "I know that what Gisco just said must be true . . . I just never admitted it to myself before . . . I AM OF THEIR PLACE AND TIME! I am of them . . . I come from a future that is blank to me, yet the only thing I know is a present that I am not truly a part of . . . My parents are dead. And they weren't really my parents. All my friends are gone. I have nothing tying me to anything." [pp. 81–82]

Teens often feel confused about who they are; they feel that they don't belong in the time and place they are in. In *Firestorm* that is certainly true for Jack. In his case, it goes further than a feeling. Jack *is* from a different time and place; he truly doesn't know who he is.

Talk about your own feelings as an outsider. Does Jack ever act out or articulate how you feel? Cite examples. How do you fit in with your friends, parents, teachers, and other adults?

2. "I just rushed for three hundred and forty yards. New school record. New league record. Not a bad day's work . . . A man walks by our table . . . Then he turns his head and looks. Right at me . . . I see his eyeballs roll around in his head . . . Something flashes. Like a flashbulb. Or a computer scanner. A sudden burst of white light that turns silvery. Then the light is gone and I blink and he's gone, too." [p. 4]

A single act by Jack exposes him to the perils from which his family had tried to protect him. Why do you suppose he defied their wish for him not to excel, not to stand out? Why did he want to become the hero of the game?

3. Gisco tells Jack his pursuers are able to anticipate his moves by profiling him. You can profile him, too. Based on what you've read, create a psychological profile of Jack. Cite passages from the novel that help you come to your conclusions. Continue to add details as you read other books in the trilogy. Compare your profile with those of other people in your reading group. What characteristics did you all identify? What were the points of difference?
4. *Firestorm* is a fantasy and has many aspects that define the genre, including time travel, the struggle between good and evil, a quest, and a prophecy.
  - What is the prophecy in *Firestorm*? In most fantasies the prophecy both sets the stage and moves the story into the future. It often serves as the motivation for the main character's quest. How is the prophecy different in *Firestorm*?
  - There are actually two interrelated quests in *Firestorm*. What are they?
  - Compare *Firestorm* to other fantasies you have read or seen in movies or on television. How does *Firestorm* hold up?
5. It is clear that David Klass lays blame for the environmental disaster that befouled the world on economic and political forces that profited from the destruction of the environment. He must have had real institutions and people in mind. What or who do you think they are? What or who do you see as the polluters and profiteers placing their own self-interests above the welfare of the planet?
6. David Klass writes about the Turning Point—that point in time when the earth's environment can only fall into irreversible disaster. Is this Turning Point just a plot device in the novel, or is it a reality

for our planet? People debate this issue on the front pages of newspapers all the time. Where do you stand? Do you believe that there is a point of no return? Research the subject to see what others have written for and against the idea. Present your arguments to your group and debate the issue.

7. In *Firestorm*, David Klass questions the reliability of the institutions entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the earth's natural resources. How did the system break down? Do you see any parallels with present-day situations?
8. Throughout the novel there are many references to literature Jack has read in school. He thinks about the second stanza of the poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade," by Alfred Lord Tennyson. [pp. 70–71] Read the entire poem with your group and discuss why Jack thought of it and how it relates to his situation.

Literature is very important to Jack. Keep a running list of the literary references Jack makes in the book. As you read the other books in the series, expand your list. One of Jack's references might intrigue you enough to read the book or poem noted. Think about Jack's taste in literature; do you and Jack agree on what makes a memorable book?

9. What remains unresolved in the novel is the true nature of *Firestorm* and its origins. What do you think?

### About WHIRLWIND: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 2



Six months after his quest for *Firestorm*, Jack's life is in shambles. Nothing is normal. He wonders: Is *this* the Turning Point? Can we save the earth? Do our lives have meaning, or is it all for nothing? If there is a God, why did he or she let things get so messed up?

In the second book of the Caretaker Trilogy, Jack returns home to see his girlfriend, P.J., and discovers that she is missing. Jack and his dog, Gisco, set off in search of her, and once more Jack must face the Dark Army bent on destroying him *and* one of Earth's precious environments: the Amazon rain forest.

You'll find this adventure, fantasy, and cautionary tale filled with subjects that beg for conversation. The questions that follow are designed to point to some of the topics you'll want to explore with your reading group.

### Discussion Questions for WHIRLWIND: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 2

1. In *Whirlwind*, David Klass introduces a new villain, the Dark Lord, who comes back to the present to deforest the Amazon as part of his master plan to rule the earth in the future. This plot raises real issues about the health of the rain forests and the threats to indigenous peoples.

If you have also read *Firestorm*, you know that corrupt officials within the United Nations sold vital information about the oceans that, in the wrong hands, would destroy the oceanic environment the officials were supposed to protect. In *Whirlwind*, the author implicates another culprit. Who is it? What can be done to reverse the destruction of the rain forest? What organizations are committed to improving conditions?

2. Trapped on a mountain with no way out, Jack is trying to come up with a plan. “Then, suddenly and incongruously, I hear a woman’s soft voice, singing . . . Somehow I know that I’m hearing my mother’s voice for the first time. It’s a sweet and melodic voice, but its true beauty comes from a deep reservoir of personal anguish.” [p. 99]

Jack has been angry with his birth parents from the moment he discovered they’d sent him away. At this moment, he realizes that they must have had reasons, and even considers that his mother’s giving him up might be viewed as “selfless and heroic.”

Adopted children may have conflicting feelings about their birth parents and their adoptive parents. Do you have any friends who are adopted? Are they curious about the circumstances their birth parents were in? Have they met their birth parents? Do they know stories about them? Are they angry? Discuss adoption from the point of view of the child and the two sets of parents.

3. When Jack insists on bringing Mudinho, a young boy who is the victim of drug smugglers, along on his quest to find P.J., Gisco admonishes him:  
*It was foolish and reckless to bring him, Jack. Now we’re responsible for him, and it’s going to slow us down and endanger our mission . . . It’s just one life . . . Millions of people are suffering horribly and depending on us. Your duty is to the many, Jack, and not to the few, and especially not to the one.*

Jack replies: “How can saving a kid’s life not be moral? . . . Saving the life of one person is just as important as saving the entire world.” [p. 105]

What do you think? Is one life as important as the lives of many? Do you think David Klass meant for you to take Gisco’s statement at face value, or is there another meaning to it?

4. In prison, Ernesto says to Jack: “Colonel Aranha knows exactly what he’s doing. To break a man’s spirit, force him to kill what he loves most.” [p. 139] Discuss where and when that practice has been employed throughout history.
5. The brutality of warfare in *Whirlwind* is both shocking and real: “I keep flashing back to the young soldier I stabbed. I recall the shock in his eyes, his desperate attempts to repair the damage my blade inflicted, and then how quickly he toppled and bled out.” [p. 272]

“I press forward, leading the final charge. Blood runs down my nose and cheeks, into my mouth. I feel its heat and taste its salty tang and it stirs me to a new level of savagery. This is pure blood rage. Punches and kicks don’t faze me. I will not be denied.” [p. 280]

Discuss the “inevitability” of war in relation to *Whirlwind*, to history, and to the present day. Do you think war is a necessary evil in the context of this novel? Look back into history: was war the only way to resolve conflict? Think about the many wars going on throughout the world today. Are we still at a point where warfare is the only answer, or do we have alternatives to violence?

6. Kidah tells Jack: “It was your destiny and you have to find a way to accept it . . . You can let the weight crush you, or you can accept it.” [p. 252]

The question of free will and predetermination has been debated by scholars and philosophers for centuries. Prophecy and destiny are often aspects of fantasy novels, as they are in *Whirlwind*. Discuss the question of free will and predetermination with your book group. Where do you all stand on the issues of fate, destiny, and choice?

7. The triangle between Jack, P.J., and Eko is never more evident than in the encounter between P.J.

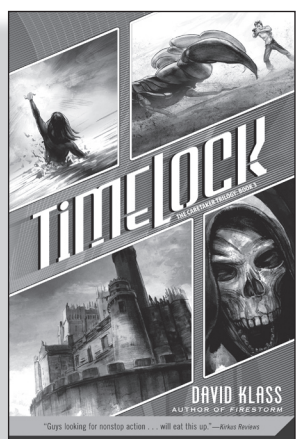
and Eko at the end of *Whirlwind*.

As Eko cuts down P.J. from her chains, P.J. utters a weak thank-you and adds: "I know who you are . . . And I know what you want."

Not to be outdone, Eko responds, as she leaps out of a window, "You can have him back for now, but in the end he is destined to be mine." [p. 291]

Compare these two women who are vying for Jack's attention. Who is the better mate for Jack? Even though Eko claims that she is destined to be with Jack, shouldn't what he wants count? Have you or has someone you know been in a similar situation? How was it resolved?

8. At the end of *Whirlwind*, the Dark Lord escapes. We are left with the question: how will he strike again? Discuss what you think will happen next.



### About TIMELOCK: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 3

At the end of *Whirlwind*, Jack tries to break the link between himself and the future by throwing his father's watch into the Amazon. Now, all he wants is to fit into the present and lead a normal life with P.J. But wanting something and having it are two different things. He doesn't fit into P.J.'s life as a college student. And he is totally paranoid about the people around him. Everyone is a suspect. Anyone could be someone, or something, from the future looking to destroy him.

In this final book of the Caretaker Trilogy, Jack faces new dangers and an old enemy; the planet is threatened by a polar-ice-cap meltdown; and the question of where Jack ultimately belongs reaches a climax.

### Discussion Questions for TIMELOCK: THE CARETAKER TRILOGY, BOOK 3

1. Where does he belong, in the present or the future? That is the conundrum for Jack Danielson, aka Jair Dann. His feelings waver throughout *TimeLock*. As you read the book, keep track of the things he says and thinks that help him make his decision. Which choice would you have made?
2. *It's disappearing . . . melting at an accelerating rate for the past few decades . . . Even if the Dark Lord hadn't decided to lend a hand, the Arctic Ocean would have been completely free of ice in a few decades.* [p. 181]
  - Gisco delineates a doomsday scenario with the melting of the polar ice cap due to global warming. Have you been keeping up with the issue of climate change in newspapers, books, TV programs, and school? Is Gisco's fatalism universally accepted by the scientific and political communities? Can the polar ice cap really disappear?
  - It has been said that the Arctic is global warming's "canary in the coal mine." Discuss the meaning of this phrase.

An excellent resource for you to use when formulating your opinions is the Natural Resources Defense Council. You can access their Web site at: [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)

3. "Beacon of Hope, you're the one who needs to help us," the bald florist says.

I look back at the florist. Shake my head, “No.”

“Yes,” he insists. “Terrible things have happened. There’s no time to lose.”

“NO!” I scream . . . “Find someone else. I’m out of here.” [pp. 14–15]

Jack is conscripted against his will and sent to the future to continue fighting the Dark Army. There he encounters an array of odd creatures that have evolved over the millennium: Gorms, wurfles, giant nematodes, glagour, and giant scorpions, to name a few. Creatures like these populate science fiction. How are these creatures like others you have come across in books and movies such as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*? Which creature is the most disturbing?

4. Jack is open to a family reconciliation, but when his father asks Jack to trust him, Jack says: “Why should I? . . . You’ve never been a father to me.” [p. 149]

Then his mother implores, “Come over here and join us. Let us be a family this last time.”

Jack yells to his parents, “*No, I won’t join you . . . We’ve never been a family, so why start now? . . . I’ll die as I lived, alone . . . I’ll never forgive you.*” [p. 153]

Even in the face of danger and certain death, Jack refuses to cut his parents any slack. In the end, he joins them out of necessity. Do you think his anger is justified? How does he finally resolve his feelings?

5. “The King of Dann is dead. Long live the King . . . Destiny, Jair . . . Destiny . . . and duty.” [p. 229] Jack’s father’s dying words reiterate the burden children of royalty have to bear—destiny and duty. For Jack’s father, there was never a choice. What choice did Jack have? Often, children are expected to follow in their parents’ footsteps or to live out their parents’ dreams. Talk about this family imperative in your own life.
6. To prevent the Dark Army from returning to the present, Kidah will lock time. He tells Jack, “The past will feed into the future in a one-way stream, as it was meant to do.” [p. 235] This return to the normal progression of time assumes that people in the present and succeeding generations will make the correct decisions about the environment. What evidence is there to support that view?
7. *Timelock* closes the Caretaker Trilogy, but not the story of Jack and Eko. What do you think will happen next?

### Culminating Discussion Questions

In the Caretaker Trilogy, a prophecy is fulfilled, a young man is tested, sacrifices are made, and planet Earth is saved from ecological destruction. As readers, we are challenged to take notice and ask ourselves: what are we prepared to sacrifice in the fight to protect and preserve our planet?

These are interesting ideas to ponder, and David Klass has given us plenty of room to consider them.

1. In *Firestorm*, Jack was confused about who he was and where he belonged in time and place. In the beginning of *Whirlwind*, he is not confused, he just wants to be left alone and fit into society. And in *Timelock*, he eventually must decide whether to follow his heart and be with P.J. in the present, or follow his fate and be with Eko and return to the future. Is there a right or wrong answer?
2. Dogs and their masters are mainstays in literature: Argos and Odysseus, Nana and the Darling children, Sounder and the boy, Toto and Dorothy, Old Yeller and Travis, Lassie and Joe, and Skip



and Willie, to name a few. Their relationships are based on emotional bonds and a special kind of communication. Gisco and Jack are different, however. How? Talk about their relationship. What role does Gisco play in the trilogy? Take your discussion a little further. Do you think it is possible that dogs really have the ability to telepathically communicate with humans?

3. Have each member of your reading group pick the moment in the trilogy that he or she finds the most exciting. Debate your choices.
4. The *Caretaker Trilogy* books read like a movie script. They are very visual, graphic, and fast-paced. You hear characters' voices when they speak.

Storyboards are used by filmmakers to map out scenes. They resemble graphic novels. Pick scenes from each book and create a four to eight-panel storyboard for each scene. Consider the following scenes: in *Firestorm*, when Jack and Gisco are imprisoned and escape; in *Whirlwind*, when Jack leads the final assault on the Dark Lord's fortress or when Jack battles the Dark Lord as he attempts to save P.J.; and in *Timelock*, where Jack, now married to Eko, is still bereft with anger and regret.

Then cast the novels for the movies. First, select professional actors and actresses to play the roles—including the voice of Gisco. Then cast them again using friends and classmates. Pick music to fill in the background and set the mood.

Finally, if you have the equipment available, make a 60-second trailer to advertise the movie. If not, devise a poster and print-ad campaign.

5. In 1970, the noted cartoonist Walt Kelly coined a phrase for an Earth Day poster which then became a catchphrase for the environmental movement. His character Pogo, surveying the swamp he lives in, laments, "We have met the enemy and he is us." What did Kelly mean by that phrase? How does it relate to the theme of *The Caretaker Trilogy*? Is it still true today? You can view the poster at [www.igopogo.com/we\\_have\\_met.htm](http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm). Create your own poster to honor Pogo's words.
6. Having the ability to go back in history to correct misdeeds or prevent disasters sounds like an extraordinary power to enact noble deeds. The people of Pompeii could have escaped annihilation if warned of Vesuvius's eruption; Hitler could have been stopped and the Holocaust prevented; and victims of present-day tsunamis could have been spared. We could list hundreds of reasons to change past events. And yet many people believe that there is one compelling reason not to: history is meant to follow its own course. What do you think? Do we have the right to meddle with history? Is Dargon right in urging Jack to destroy Firestorm, or does the ultimate survival of the planet trump his reasoning?
7. From a scientific point of view, time travel presents a dilemma. Any change to the present by any entity from the future would upset the equilibrium of the universe. This is one of the paradoxes of time travel. If you traveled back in time and killed your grandfather, then you would cease to exist in the future and could not therefore travel back in time to kill him. Yet some scientists still believe that time travel is possible. What do you believe?
8. Many of us believe that the problems threatening the survival of the planet are so enormous that as individuals we can do nothing. In *Firestorm*, Jack echoes a different sentiment: "I can't control the whole world, but I can do one very specific thing to prevent the atrocity that's about to happen." [p. 215] This is also the belief of the Dannites: small acts do make a difference. Identify one thing you can do to make a difference. Talk about it with your friends. Then act on it.

9. In the Caretaker Trilogy, David Klass has focused on three threatened biomes: the ocean, the Amazon rain forest, and the Arctic. What other biomes have you studied that are in crisis? What are the root causes? What efforts are going on to preserve the biomes? What part are you playing?
10. Throughout the Caretaker Trilogy, lives are risked and sometimes lost in the noble fight to defeat the Dark Army. Discuss how you feel about sacrificing oneself for a greater cause.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CARETAKER TRILOGY VISIT:**

**[www.thecaretakertrilogy.com](http://www.thecaretakertrilogy.com)**

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DAVID KLASS** is the acclaimed author of many young adult novels, including *DARK ANGEL*, which *Publishers Weekly* called “gripping,” and *YOU DON’T KNOW ME*, which *School Library Journal*, in a starred review, found “rewarding and important.” Mr. Klass is also a Hollywood screenwriter, having written more than twenty-five screenplays, including *KISS THE GIRLS*, starring Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd; *WALKING TALL*, starring The Rock; and *DESPERATE MEASURES*, starring Michael Keaton and Andy Garcia. He lives in New York City with his family.

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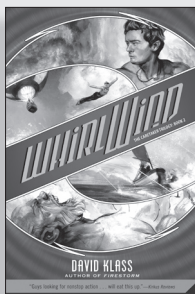


**FIRESTORM:  
THE CARETAKER TRILOGY,  
BOOK 1**

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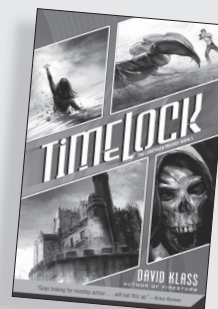


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THE CARETAKER TRILOGY,  
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