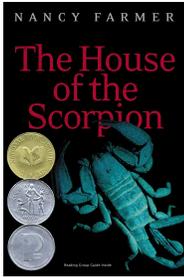


# Books by the Stack



## *The House of the Scorpion (Matteo Alacran Bk.1)* by Nancy Farmer

Matteo Alacrán was not born; he was harvested. His DNA came from El Patrón, lord of a country called Opium--a strip of poppy fields lying between the United States and what was once called Mexico. Matt's first cell split and divided inside a petri dish. Then he was placed in the womb of a cow, where he continued the miraculous journey from embryo to fetus to baby. He is a boy now, but most consider him a monster--except for El Patrón. El Patrón loves Matt as he loves himself, because Matt is himself. .

**Why you'll like it:** Intricately plotted. Engaging. Intense. Intriguing.

**About the Author:** Nancy Farmer grew up on the Arizona-Mexico border and lives with her family in Arizona. She has written three Newbery Honor books, several books for young children, as well as an adult novel.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Matteo Alacrán is the clone of El Patrón, the lord of the country called Opium, and lives in isolation until children playing in the poppy fields discover him. Why is he so eager to talk to the children, after he is warned against it? Why is Mariá especially attracted to Matt?
2. Describe Matt's relationship with Celia. Why is she the servant chosen to care for Matt? Celia snaps at Matt when he calls her mama. Then she says to him, "I love you more than anything in the world. Never forget that. But you were only loaned to me, mi vida." Why doesn't she explain the term loaned to Matt? Celia really believes that she is protecting Matt by keeping him locked in her cottage and ignorant about his identity. Debate whether this type of protection is indeed dangerous for him. How does Celia continue to protect Matt throughout his life on the Alacrán Estate?
3. After the children discover Matt, he is taken from Celia and imprisoned in a stall for six months with only straw for a bed. How might prison be considered a metaphor for his entire life? Who is the warden of his prison? Discuss the role of Mariá, Celia, and Tam Lin in helping him escape his prison.
4. Rosá describes El Patrón as a bandit. How has El Patrón stolen the lives of all those living on his estate? Which characters are his partners in evil? Debate whether they support him for the sake of their own survival. Explain what Tam Lin is trying to tell Matt when he says, "If you are kind and decent, you grow into a kind and decent man. If you're like El Patrón...just think about it." Considering that Matt is the clone of El Patrón, debate whether environment influences evil more than genetics.
5. El Patrón celebrates his 143rd birthday with a large party. Though Matt was "harvested," and doesn't really have a birthday, the celebration is for him as well, since he is El Patrón's clone. How does Matt imitate El Patrón's power when he demands a birthday kiss from Mariá? Discuss how El Patrón

encourages Matt's uncharacteristic behavior. Why is Mariá so humiliated by Matt's demand? How does Matt feel the crowd's disapproval?

**6.** El Viejo, El Patrón's grandson and the father of Mr. Alacrán, is a senile old man because he refused the fetal brain implants based on religious and moral grounds. Debate his position. Why does El Patrón consider Mr. Alacrán rude when he mentions El Viejo's religious beliefs? Celia is also a deeply religious person. How is this demonstrated throughout the novel?

**7.** At what point does Matt realize that Tom is dangerous? He remembers what Tam Lin had told him, "If you didn't know Tom well, you'd think he is an angel bringing you the keys to the pearly gates." How does Tom mislead Mariá? Discuss why Tom takes Matt and Mariá to see the screaming clones. How is this a turning point for Matt and Mariá's friendship? Why does Celia feel that Matt deserves the truth once he has seen the clones?

**8.** What gives Celia the courage to stand up to El Patrón and refuse to let Matt be used for a heart transplant? What does El Patrón mean when he says to Celia, "We make a fine pair of scorpions, don't we?" Explain why she is insulted by this comment.

**9.** How does Tam Lin know that Matt's future lies in finding the Convent of Santa Clara? Describe Matt's journey to the convent. What does he discover along the way? Discuss Esperanza's role in helping Matt gain his ultimate freedom -- to live as a human.

*(Questions issued by publisher)*

