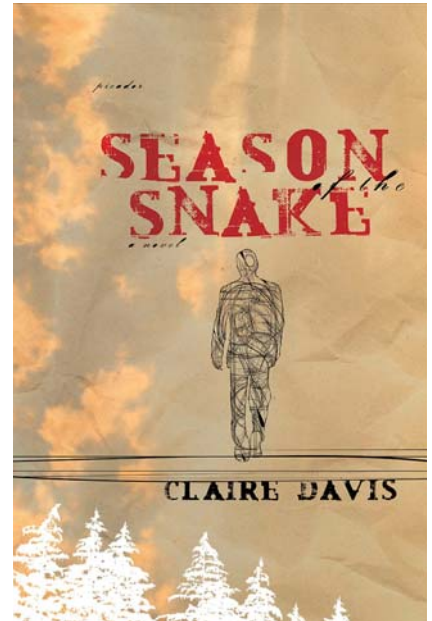


READING GROUP GUIDE

Season of the Snake

A Novel

by Claire Davis



ISBN: 0-312-42564-3

About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Season of the Snake* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this novel. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Season of the Snake*.

About the Book

When tragedy leaves her life in shambles, Nance flees her Wisconsin hometown and its reminders of grief, creating a new life in the West. She is a scientist, specializing in rattlesnakes and attrition rates in dens, believing that “you can overcome fear, control the level of risk by being prepared, by knowing your subject.” Now with a home in Lewiston, Idaho, overlooking the Snake River, and her marriage to Ned Able, a grade school principle, Nance finally feels at peace.

Then an unexpected visit from her wayward sister, Meredith, revives old family conflicts, and resurrects a secret life that has long lain dormant in Ned. While Nance and Meredith mend their relationship, Ned’s other nature begins to emerge, transforming him in ways that Nance denies,

until, with the help of her sister, she is made to see what lies beneath the skin. But neither can predict how far Ned will go to hide his past, or where his frightening memories will lead him.

“A gripping, gritty novel stuffed with piercing insights into the human condition . . . *Season of the Snake* provides the elusive double whammy of an action-packed plot with literary value.”

—*The Oregonian* (Portland)

“A suspenseful and heartbreaking meditation on the nature of fate, family, sex, death, and our individual misuses of love. Truly a thrilling novel.”

—Mark Spragg, author of *An Unfinished Life*

“Davis not only shows that she can beat the so-called sophomore jinx, but also branch out in new directions without jeopardizing her craft. . . . *Season of the Snake* is an impressive, if disturbing, work that promises more good things to come from a talented author.”

—*The Denver Post*

“A creepy page-turner . . . I read it almost straight through; there’s no denying its lurid grip on the imagination.”

—*The Seattle Times*

“Another powerful and suspenseful tale . . . Davis isn’t afraid to provoke some compelling questions about violence against women. . . . A chilling peek into the snake-charmer’s pit.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Like a coiled diamondback, Claire Davis’s *Season of the Snake* grabs your attention and doesn’t let go. The only time I put it down was to get up and lock the doors.”

—Judy Blunt, author of *Breaking Clean*

“Vivid scenery and a tangible impression of ominous menace will appeal to fans of literary psychological suspense.”

—*Library Journal*

“Claire Davis’s new novel is a psychological thriller written with an almost Proustian sense of detail. It would not surprise me if *Season of the Snake* turns out to be this year’s *Mystic River*, that rare book that manages to be both a huge literary and popular success.”

—Steve Yarbrough, author of *Prisoners of War*

“Davis develops a carefully drawn accrual of texture and detail. . . . Compelling writing on the powerful bonds that constitute family.”

—*Booklist*

“In Claire Davis’s chilling new novel, predators wear the colors of their surroundings and only the undeceived survive. A tough, smart story given in uncommonly vibrant and muscular language. *Season of the Snake* reconfirms her place in the first rank of voices from the American West.”

—David Long, author of *The Falling Boy*

About the Author

Claire Davis is the author of *Winter Range*, winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Mountains and Plains Booksellers Award for Fiction in 2001. Her short fiction has been featured in *The Pushcart Prize* anthology and *Best American Short Stories*. She lives in Lewiston, Idaho, where she teaches writing at Lewis-Clark State College.

Discussion Questions

1. Following the death of Nance's first husband, the book flashes forward ten years. Nance has built a new life for herself, with a new house, home, and a new husband. Knowing Nance as you do, what do you think she has had to overcome in order to love someone again? Does she seem like a particularly trusting person to you?
2. Davis is a descriptive writer, one who gives great attention to the physical details of things. Do you find the physicality of this world aids in the experience of reading the book, or does it hinder it? Furthermore, is the quality of description a symbol for greater themes in the novel?
3. How do flaws define Davis's characters? How do these characters' personalities define the narrative?
4. Taking the previous question further, Davis's novel attempts to provide both the rewards of a fast-paced thriller and the more human, patient rewards of a literary novel. Is *Season of the Snake* then a novel of character or of plot? How do the boundaries between the two blur?
5. Why does Nance become a herpetologist? What does she get from working with snakes? What does this say about her person and, moreover, what do the reactions of others to her profession say about them?
6. How does suspicion work as an engine in the novel? Are the characters' suspicions believable? What does the slowness and care of Ned's descent say about him?
7. Snakes serve as metaphors throughout the novel—snake dens, the process of molting, fangs and venom, the nature of violence. When are these metaphors most keenly felt and/or most fully realized? How is the imagery used to build fear and tension in the story?
8. If Nance seems to be most comfortable in the natural world, then Ned seems largely town-bound, existing in bars, in houses, and in his school. What do these locales say about their characters, and do you feel that Davis is implying something about the presence of people versus the animals of the wild?
9. How does your impression of Nance change once you are aware of Ned's crimes?

10. Once Nance has been snakebitten, she seems to see the world anew. Why do you think this is? How does this occurrence lead to recognition of her husband's true character?

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