

# BOOK CLUB NOTES

## *The Windy Season*, Sam Carmody (Allen & Unwin)

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### SUMMARY

A young fisherman goes missing in the WA coastal town of Stark. His younger brother, Paul, searches first online, and then in person, taking his brother's place on a boat skippered by their troubled cousin. It's not long before Paul realises just how much trouble he might now be in. With so much open water and so many thousands of kilometres of uninhabited coastline, it seems sharks are the least of Paul's problems.

'Comparison with that other West Australian literary darling, Tim Winton, is unavoidable, but in terms of writing about the enchantment and danger of open water, and of the types of sharks in ocean and on land, Carmody can certainly hold his own.'

– Thuy On, *The Australian*

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writer and musician Sam Carmody grew up along the rural central coast of Western Australia. His non-fiction has appeared in *The Griffith Review*, and ABC's *The Drum*, and his short fiction has been published in *The Review of Australian Fiction*. Carmody's debut novel, *The Windy Season*, was shortlisted for the 2014 Vogel Award and was published by Allen & Unwin in August 2016. He currently lives in Darwin and teaches writing at The Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education, Charles Darwin University.

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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- As a reader, what do you make of Paul as a protagonist? Given that he has only recently arrived in a new community, do you think his behavior is meek or appropriate to the situation? Should Paul be more aggressive in trying to trace the whereabouts of his missing brother?

- Western Australian author David Whish-Wilson described Carmody's debut as a crime thriller with a real sense of menace. Would you describe the book as a crime thriller, or is it closer to a different genre? Is it possible for books to straddle many different genres at one time?
- In *The Windy Season*, we are introduced to Stark, a fictional coastal town in the north of Western Australia. Why would Carmody fictionalise this setting? Is the need for such a technique more relevant for a regional writer than one who grew up in a larger city, such as Perth?
- Could this particular novel have taken place in any Western Australian northern coastal town, or does it feel aligned, or similar to a particular town in Western Australia that you've previously encountered, despite its fictional origins?
- Carmody uses clipped, gritty dialogue and the subtlety of what remains unsaid to build characters with "the casual menace of pack animals". How effectively drawn were the town's less pleasant characters?
- There's a brutality to many of the characters that populate *The Windy Season*. Can this brutality be attributed to the challenges of the environment in which they live? How does one hold on to one's humanity in challenging conditions?
- A dual storyline is told via a second narrator: this occasional first-person voice reveals a story of bikie gang life, organised crime, drugs and murders and adds to the sense of creeping menace. The novel's resolution comes when the two stories intersect. How unexpected and satisfying did you find the book's ending?
- In addition to being an author, Sam Carmody is also a musician, with the EP 'Battle Plans' released by his band, Warning Birds in 2013. If given the task, what would be your musical soundtrack for *The Windy Season*, and why?
- At the age of seventeen Paul heads north to trace his brother Elliot's footsteps. Would you let your son or daughter make a similar trip?

- In her review of *The Windy Season*, *The Australian's* Thuy On claims that 'Comparison with that other West Australian literary darling, Tim Winton, is unavoidable.' Do you feel this is true, or is Carmody's work original enough to stand on its own merits?
- Discuss the pace at which the story unfolds. Should literary fiction be allowed more time to build suspense compared to other genres such as thrillers and love stories?
- *The Windy Season* was shortlisted for the 2014 Australian/Vogel's Literary Award. Looking at the finished project, what do you think made the book stand out from other submitted entries? What would you list as its strengths were you judging it for a literary prize?
- Sam Carmody said when speaking to RTR FM's Peter Barr, that 'you can go nuts while writing when friends are getting jobs and houses, while you're stuck at a laptop.' Do you think Carmody was referring to writing being an underpaid profession? Are writers sufficiently valued in today's society?

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#### **IF YOU LIKED THIS BOOK, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...**

*Road Story* by Julianne Van Loon, Allen and Unwin, 2005

*Dirt Music* by Tim Winton, Picador, 2001

*The Sound* by Sarah Drummond, Fremantle Press, 2016

*Wake in Fright* by Kenneth Cook, Text Publishing, 2012 (Text Classics)