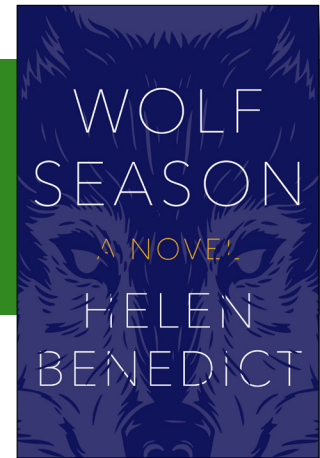




Wolf Season

A novel by Helen Benedict

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“No one writes with more authority or cool-eyed compassion about the experience of women in war both on and off the battlefield than Helen Benedict. . . . *Wolf Season* is more than a novel for our times; it should be required reading.”

—**Elissa Schappell**, author of *Use Me* and *Blueprints for Building Better Girls*

“Fierce and vivid and full of hope. . . . This is not a novel that allows you to walk away unchanged.” —**Cara Hoffman**, author of *Be Safe I Love You* and *Running*

INTRODUCTION

After a hurricane devastates a small town in upstate New York, the lives of three women and their young children are irrevocably changed. Rin, an Iraq War veteran, tries to protect her blind daughter and the three wolves under her care. Naema, a widowed doctor who fled Iraq with her wounded son, faces life-threatening injuries and confusion about her feelings for Louis, a veteran and widower harboring his own secrets and guilt. Beth, who is raising a troubled son, waits out her marine husband's deployment in Afghanistan, equally afraid of him coming home and of him never returning at all. As they struggle to maintain their humanity and find hope, their war-torn lives collide in a way that will affect their entire community.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, I became determined to explore the effects of war on the human heart. I began by listening to dozens of veterans, both women and men, as well as to Iraqi refugees who had fled to the United States. All these people were eager to tell their stories, to be heard, but sometimes, during our interviews, they would fall silent, hands shaking, eyes filling with tears. This moved me profoundly and led me to understand that the true story of war lay within those very silences: the private, internal world that has always been the territory of fiction.

Three years of this research led me to write *The Lonely Soldier*, a book about women at war, and then *Sand Queen*, a novel set in Iraq. Now here is *Wolf Season*, a novel about how war affects not only those who are caught up in it but those who love them: the children, parents, and partners. The result is a story that attempts to reflect what I found in the silences and tears of soldiers and in the lonely eyes of Iraqi refugees: the story of what war does to the soul and the courage of those who are struggling to survive it.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. This book explores the long-reaching effects of war, not only on those directly engaged in it but on those close to them. How are the three mothers in the novel—Rin, Naema, and Beth—affected by war, and how does it affect their children, Juney, Tariq, and Flanner?
2. *Wolf Season* opens with an approaching hurricane. What is the fallout from the storm on each character? What is the effect of opening the novel with such an event?



3. Wolves have long been symbols in folktales and literature all over the world, from ancient myths, such as those of Native peoples in America, to the European story of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Sometimes wolves stand for nobility and courage, sometimes evil, sometimes threat. What do you think the wolves represent for Rin and Juney or Naema and Beth, and how do those symbols evolve throughout the novel? What did the wolves represent to you?
4. After we meet Naema, the Iraqi doctor, we do not see her again for a few chapters. What effect does this have on the way Naema’s history and character are revealed? How does the author use her absence to develop the other characters?
5. Louis, one of the veterans in the novel, is something of an enigma. What makes him so guarded and private? Why does Beth make him so uncomfortable?
6. What pulls Louis and Naema to befriend each other despite the differences in their backgrounds?
7. What did *Wolf Season* make you think about war and how it affects people’s hearts and morals?
8. What does the novel reveal about how men and women experience war and military service? Are the experiences of women soldiers different than those of men? What could the small community in this novel have done to better support the families struggling with the aftermath of war and the deployment of their loved ones?
9. How does this novel portray the refugee experience and the process of immigrating to America? Would any of the issues Naema’s family faced have been different if she had immigrated to a larger city?
10. How do Tariq and Juney cope with their disabilities? How do those conditions affect the relationships between them and the other characters, particularly Rin and Naema?
11. How would you describe Tariq, Juney, and Flanner? In what ways have their parents influenced them? In thinking over what happens to them in the novel, why do they react differently to the circumstances they face?
12. What do you imagine will happen to Rin and Juney after the end of the novel? What choices are available to Rin? What do you think she should choose?
13. What do you think the author is trying to convey in the novel’s final scene with the wolves?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Benedict, a professor at Columbia University, writes frequently about justice, women, soldiers, and war. She is the author of seven novels, including *Sand Queen*, a *Publishers Weekly* “Best Contemporary War Novel.” A recipient of the Ida B. Wells Award for Bravery in Journalism and the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism, Benedict is also the author of five works of nonfiction and the play *The Lonely Soldier Monologues: Women at War in Iraq*. She lives in New York. Visit her website at www.helenbenedict.com.

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