

Snakes of St. Augustine

Ginger Pinholster

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Sensual and involving, Snakes of St. Augustine follows multiple people's searches for a missing man.

Ginger Pinholster's winding novel *Snakes of St. Augustine* is about a search for a family member amid a world of snakes, drugs, and poverty.

Gethin is missing, and with him some snakes. His sister Serena and girlfriend Rocky file a report with the St. Augustine police, hoping they will find him before he starts using drugs again or is killed in another way. Others assist in looking for Gethin, including Jazz, a math class acquaintance who wants to impress Serena, and Fletch, a grieving officer and veteran who's motivated to find his late wife's friend's snakes. They all set off into the muggy Florida landscape, weaving careful lines between meth addicts and creepy uncles, searching for Gethin with determination. Other issues plague them too: they try to pay bills, and they come to the realization that their relationships are haunted by mental illnesses.

Even as it oscillates between its six points of view, the story maintains cohesion. Emotions run high, and people's individual motivations for finding Gethin vary: some worry for his safety; some want to catch his probable companion, homeless, snake-thieving Chelsea. Still, the narrative switches are seamless; as perspectives shift, the plot picks up from where it left off. Even Gethin's and Jazz's thoughts, which include instances of rambling and speediness, are easy to keep up with.

The settings are a grounding force amid the book's chaotic events. This is true even when Serena travels hundreds of miles to find Gethin: each new location is still addressed in a natural way, integrated into the story as important. This includes sites like a homeless encampment where Chelsea is known, but also cities including Daytona Beach, where Gethin may have been left behind with the dehydrating snakes. The latter is made to contrast with St. Augustine, where a serpentarium and Serena's house are centered, but where dangers still exist. And the smells of people and places permeate each scene, resulting in immersion. Still, the cast's histories are somewhat rushed through beyond their roles in the search for Gethin. While what they want herein is clear, the sense of who they are outside of these humid, panicked summer circumstances is underdefined.

In the heart-filled novel *Snakes of St. Augustine*, a few Floridians search for a missing man and contemplate the next best steps in their own lives.

ADDISSYN HOUSE (July 10, 2023)

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