

A  
Reading  
Guide  
to

# SHARP AND DANGEROUS VIRTUES

A Novel by **MARTHA  
MOODY**

“Thought-provoking without being moralistic, *Sharp and Dangerous Virtues* is a suspenseful what-if that readers will continue to ponder long after they’ve put it down.” — *Booklist*

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## Limited Resources

An over-riding theme of *Sharp and Dangerous Virtues* is the issue of limited resources—water, food, and land. In creating the Grid, the American government takes a desperate measure in response to a desperate time. Can you imagine such a measure ever seeming justified? Would you blame the consequences of such a measure on the action taken, the desperate time itself, or the conditions leading to the desperate time? Does what caused a problem(s) matter?

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## Midwestern Virtues

In Chad’s lectures on local history, Chad contrasts typical Midwestern virtues such as friendliness and politeness with some of the virtues exhibited by the Wright brothers and other innovators—audacity, skepticism, and ambition. Do you think the inclusion of stories from Dayton’s past helps the novel? Could this novel be set somewhere else? How specific are its concerns to Ohio’s history, resources, and landscape?

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## The Gridians

Describe ways that the Gridians have been isolated by the country, and ways that they have isolated themselves. How do you think they view themselves and the outside world? What aspects of Grid life appeal to different characters in the novel? Although the Grid is an essential part of the novel, Moody presents the Gridians as characters only obliquely. Why do you think she does this? What larger points about an isolated society is Moody attempting to make?

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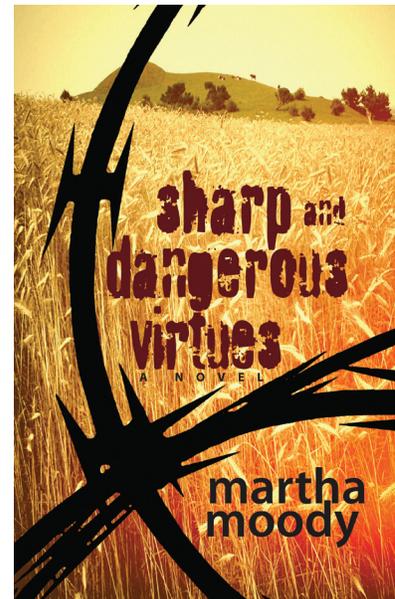
## Yearning

The novel has several characters for whom yearning—Lila for the life of a Gridian, Charles for the protection of his trees, Tuuro for an audience with Nenonene—leads to pain and even calamity. In what ways can yearning be dangerous? How is it possible for a person—or a community—to separate yearning from illusion?

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## Power

Lila at one point reflects that power “wasn’t just matter of position. Power was a matter of seizing it.” Do you think this is accurate? How do the characters in *Sharp and Dangerous Virtues* deal with their own power or lack of it?



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Stories of Rescue

Chad's mother likes the Bible story of Benjamin rescuing his little brother Joseph from death. What stories of rescue are in the novel? How does the idea of rescue relate to the idea of power? Does a rescuer or the rescued have an advantage?

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Randomness

Moody has said that midway through writing this novel—trying to echo the arbitrary nature of war—she had her sons remove from a paper bag the names of the characters who would survive. In this way she chose, like Diana for her baby, “no pre-selects, just a random child” and removed some of her own power in shaping the story. How are the dangers and benefits of randomness revealed in this novel? What do you think is the author's attitude toward randomness? What is your own attitude? Do you believe that “random” events really occur?

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Ordinary Lives

Much of the tension in *Sharp and Dangerous Virtues* arises from its presentation of the ordinary daily lives of its characters in contrast to the massive geo-political events occurring in their part of the world. What would you do if your community was threatened by war? Imagine yourself twenty years younger or twenty years older: would your response to this question be different?

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The Future

By the end of the book, the Midwest and the United States are irrevocably changed. Is this an ending you can accept? Why or why not? What do you think Moody got wrong about the future? What do you think she got right?

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Best Features

Chad, recalling the collection of shops and businesses in the strip mall of his youth in the early 2000's, thinks, Wasn't that special? All that divergent life, all those various dreams, under one long L-shaped roof? What is your vision of the best feature(s) of where you live now? Do you see this feature at risk?

### About the Author

Martha Moody is a novelist and physician from Dayton, Ohio, whose three previous books of fiction have sold close to 1 million copies. She is the author of *Best Friends*, *The Office of Desire*, and *Sometimes Mine*.



### About the Book

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### Ordering Information

To order, see your local bookstore or visit [OHIOSWALLOW.COM](http://OHIOSWALLOW.COM).

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