

Cougar Claw - DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Cougar Claw opens with Jack McGregor pedaling through the early-morning darkness, heading toward his mountain biking trail in a remote section of the Minnesota River Valley. During his ride, how does what he senses, encounters, and thinks presage his murder in the Minnesota woods?
2. Approximately one year earlier, Sam Rivers and his wolf dog, Gray, were investigating a cougar–calf predation on Mable Swenson’s cattle ranch. In what ways is Sam’s review of that predation different from, or similar to, the cougar–human predation in the Minnesota River Valley?
3. Sam Rivers’s understanding of cougar behavior causes him to question how the victim, Jack McGregor, died. What are some of Sam’s ethological findings that do not support the idea that Jack’s death was the result of a cougar attack?
4. As Sam begins to investigate Jack’s death, he learns of the pending sale of Jack’s business for approximately \$50 million. For some, that kind of financial windfall could be a motive for committing murder. Are there others who may have different motives for seeing Jack dead?
5. Sheriff Rusty Benson and other law enforcement officers are certain Jack was killed by a cougar. In addition to clear cougar signs, there is DNA evidence supporting their perspective. Are there any reasons Sheriff Benson’s willingness to accept that conclusion could be considered a rush to judgment? What are some of the sheriff’s motives for making this an open-and-shut case?
6. In what ways do reporter Diane Talbott’s research efforts help Sam’s investigation?
7. A few different relationships are described in the novel. How is Sam’s relationship with Diane different from Jack and Carla’s marriage? Does Sam’s relationship with Diane contribute to his understanding of what may have happened in the Minnesota woods?
8. Sheriff Benson refuses to follow the investigation wherever it leads. Moreover, at numerous times he tries to impede Sam’s probe into what may have occurred. Based on the preceding, Sam could have been much more critical of the sheriff than he was. Do you think the way he handled the sheriff was correct? Why, or why not?
9. At the end of the novel, Sam gets a call from Carla. How do you feel about that phone call, their conversation, and what it might presage for Sam’s future? As a reader, how do you feel about Carla?
10. Author Tom Clancy said: “The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.” Do you think the end of the novel violates Clancy’s maxim? Why, or why not?

