

Indian saw-scaled viper

I'm one of the deadliest snakes in the world, but don't blame me. Blame the humans. Us lot kill about 5,000 two-leggers every year, and no other snake can match that. But it's not my fault, is it? I'd be happy if I never saw another human for as long as I live.

Monday

I spend my life trying to keep out of the way of humans but there are just so many of them here in India. They're everywhere. I'd prefer to keep my venom for the lizards and the frogs, but I'm always ready to bite any blundering human. It only takes a few drops to disrupt the blood-clotting system, cause haemorrhage and provoke kidney failure – and I have plenty to spare.

Tuesday

I'm 2ft long and inconspicuous, and I have no wish be trodden on or otherwise disturbed. So I give fair warning – and you'd be well advised to heed it. It happened today: a human stumbling round far too close, so I went into the routine. I formed an ever-shifting S-shape and rubbed my sharp-edged scales together. Ever spilled water on a hotplate? It sounds just like that and it means bugger off.

Wednesday

I mean that in the nicest possible way, of course. This snake is very dangerous: when you attack it, it has the cheek to defend itself. But I suppose I should add that I have a fairly wide-ranging view of what constitutes attack. I don't have a bad

temper, as humans so often say: I have a highly developed concept of personal space.

Thursday

Sometimes I get sick of talking about venom. Is that the only interesting thing about me? Look at the way I travel across loose ground, faster than most humans can run, in a way that looks like magic. It's called sidewinding: just two tiny bits of me in contact with the ground at any one moment. It's a kind of continuous leap that leaves behind a series of J-shaped tracks. Forget the venom and savour the miracle.

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Friday

I love the half-light and the pitch-black. I slept away the day as usual in my borrowed burrow and emerged into the twilight: hungry for a change, for serpentine appetites are slow. A scorpion filled the gap. Not my favourite, but good enough to keep me going. It amuses me, the way scorpions think themselves as fierce – until they meet a greater power. But that's true enough for us all, I thought, as I sidewound homewards under the first faint light in the sky.

Saturday

I looked back on that moment of danger earlier in the week: all my body in motion to create the ssss-shaped sizzle, all except my head



and neck, poised should my warning go unheeded. Call it the coiled-spring posture. I can strike so fast – well, want to see it again? A startled cry, running feet, and I was sinking back into the darkness in case he returned with a weapon. One thing's for sure: this world ain't big enough for the both of us.

Indian saw-scaled viper CV

Lifespan A dozen years

Eating habits Frogs, lizards, scorpions, centipedes

Hobbies Sidewinding

Sexual preferences Venomous ladies

As told to Simon Barnes