

Alone on the Shield: A Novel

Kirk Landers

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The Canadian borderlands, and their lakes, rivers, and portages, are rendered with a journalistic eye for detail.

Kirk Landers's *Alone on the Shield* is an adventure story mixed with a love affair set deep in the Canadian wilderness. It speaks to midlife, twin urges to escape and to understand.

Gabe Pender's life is not going well. He has recently divorced and been fired, and he has a simmering well of anger left over from the Vietnam War. Yet his character is written with welcoming everyman qualities that peer deep into the soul of America's heartland.

Gabe has watched the rich get richer while his journalistic dreams flicker and die. His solution is to embark on a solo canoe trip into the northern boundary waters of Lake Superior and southern Canada, a land as dangerous and remote as Pender's own heart.

As his journey progresses, Pender decides to intentionally leave behind his past in the hopes of opening an uncertain future. As with all hero journeys, though, meeting the future means dealing with the past. His is shaped by anger, but also comes with the possibility of forgiveness and love.

Pender may start his trip alone, but he hopes to spend some of his adventure with his long-lost college flame, Annette. Annette is a compelling character in her own right, having also found and lost herself. The pair decide to reconnect in the wilderness, despite her reservations.

The story is written with a journalistic eye for detail. The Canadian borderlands, and their lakes, rivers, and portages, feel very real. Pender's days are filled with fish, paddles, and the threat of danger. He seeks escape from his past, but this hope is partially denied by the anger he carries inside him.

This is a searing portrait of a man suffering from depression, characterized by anger and occasional violence. The book effectively mirrors Pender's internal struggles with the outside forces of nature. The wilderness offers possibilities for transformation and redemption.

A compelling mixture of adventure and romance, *Alone on the Shield* is a tightly focused novel that deftly speaks to growing older and the struggle for understanding.

JEREMIAH ROOD (November/December 2017)

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