Clarion Review

Thriller

Gray Wolves and White Doves
John D. Balian
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Readers who are familiar with the long history of snarled and often fatal relationships among Turks, Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians will be able to navigate this debut novel with a minimum amount of difficulty. An awareness of the Armenian Genocide that saw the Ottoman Empire kill more than a million Armenians during World War I will be helpful, too. Familiarity with this background, though not absolutely essential, will facilitate the reader's grasp of the book's intricate story, which unfolds between 1967 and 1978. Knowledge of geography will also come in handy, since the action, and there's lots of it, takes place in Anatolia, Syria, Istanbul, Jerusalem, New York, San Francisco, Beirut, the Sinai Peninsula, Tel Aviv, Paris, Santa Barbara, Bavaria, Berlin, Denmark, and Sweden.

The powerful thread that stitches together the story of *Gray Wolves and White Doves* is the hostile relationship between Turks and Armenians. Adding to the intrigue is the rivalry among members of each group, which is intensified by internal factional divisions. Born in Anatolia, Turkey, in 1962, Armenian Jonah Ibelinian is the central character in the narrative. He has a series of perilous adventures that begin with the killing of his mother by Turkish soldiers when he is just five years old. His difficult family relationships and the widespread dispersal of his brothers and sisters reflect the consequences of persecution. The description of Jonah's education in the Armenian quarter of Jerusalem enables the author to describe the unique characteristics of a little-known enclave just inside the Jaffa Gate of the Old City.

The protagonist's determination to study medicine in America helps to reveal the autobiographical nature of this story, reinforcing the belief that, at some level, all fiction has its roots in the life story of its author. A graduate of the Tufts University School of Medicine, Balian was born in Anatolia, Turkey, and lived in several Middle Eastern and European countries before settling in the United States, a path also taken by his protagonist, Jonah

Ibelinian. The author's experiences as a youngster also parallel those of his lead character. Today, the author plays a leadership role in several Armenian organizations.

The continuing involvement of the United States in the Middle East, along with recent developments there, make this book a timely contribution to the reader's understanding of complex relationships between nations.

Morton I. Teicher