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Clarion Review ★★★★★ **JUVENILE FICTION**

Lone Wolf

Robin Mason
Tricklewood Press (Apr 1, 2016)
Softcover $15.99 (348pp)
978-0-9948371-2-7

Human nature, animal instincts, predator, and prey all converge as the hunters become the hunted.

The forest comes alive through the eyes of one very special twelve-year-old in *Lone Wolf*, the second book in a series from Robin Mason set amid the rivers, mountains, and enchanted woods of Oregon. Human nature, animal instincts, predator, and prey all converge as the hunters become the hunted in this installment of the Oldenglen Chronicles.

Still adjusting to his family's move from England to America and to his newfound secret life as Jax the Wolf, Jackson begins his career at Bear Creek Valley Middle School without much enthusiasm. After gaining powers from the Gladestone, a mystical red granite pillar hidden in the glen, Jax is now a boy with all the heightened senses and instincts of the *canis lupis*, able to speak with wild animals. When a gang of bullies threatens to unleash his inner wolf and invade his home, Jax must learn to accept and harness his dual nature while once again defending Oldenglen.

The title might refer to a lone wolf, but Jax has an array of colorful sidekicks, allies, and adversaries, both of the two- and four-legged variety, not to mention winged, antlered, fanged, and furry, and while his best friend Sarah makes an appearance, the emphasis is on Jax's fears and internal struggles. When Sarah notes that it's "not easy being a wolf," Jackson rejoins, "Not easy being a human sometimes"—certainly not when confronted by a group of bullies, nicknamed "The Wolf Pack" and led by Noah and his aptly named friend, Hunter.

Lone Wolf does an admirable job of highlighting the wonders and harsher realities of nature, including wolves in particular as both predators and protectors. The bullies themselves are a bit over-the-top, though their disturbed stalking and physical and verbal abuse are seemingly forgotten by the conclusion.

A variety of entertaining British slang peppers Jax's speech and internal monologues, from well-known phrases like "bloke" and "blimey" to the more obscure "banjaxed" and "billy-o," although this usage seems forced at times, particularly when Jax feels the need to rephrase or elaborate on his word choice. The numerous animals of Oldenglen each have distinct speech patterns as well that facilitate recognition, cleverly giving them distinct personalities with just a few choice words, as with Hoot the owl's penchant for SHOUTY capitals, and Rhubarb the bullfrog's run-on love of the "applegrannyapple."

Middle-grade students will relate to Jax's angst as he tries to understand, accept himself, and become comfortable in his own skin while standing up to the mean kids, all while unintentionally impressing the middle-school ladies with his vast knowledge of ornithology. Fans of Erin Hunter's *Warriors* series who enjoy talking animals and a focus on nature will want to explore the Oldenglen Chronicles with Jax and Sarah.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (May 18, 2016)

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