

Zack is back

Mirth and mayhem in cottage country

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Pick up a newspaper today and you'd better be prepared to be depressed. From the war in the Middle East to global warming to pet-food recalls, most of the time the real world just ain't that much fun to read about.

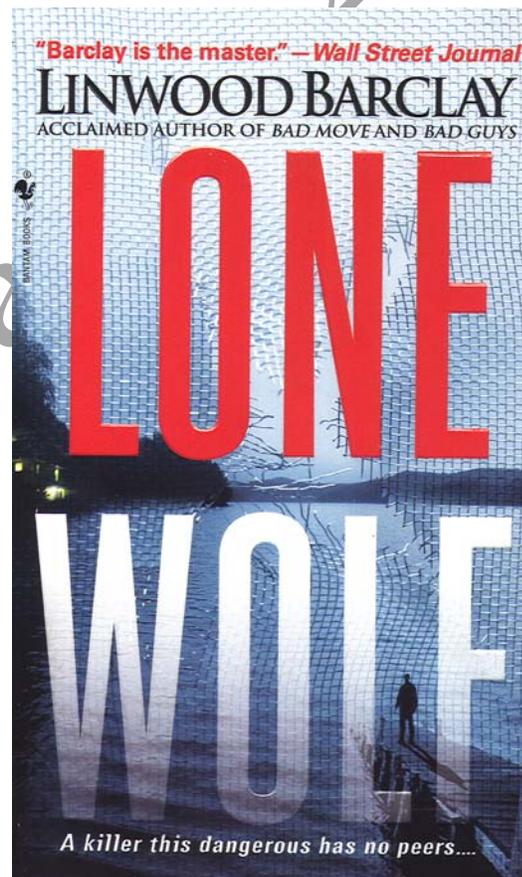
Thankfully, there are a few wonderfully twisted souls out there who can see the lighter side of a train wreck, and entering their zany, insane world can provoke a healthy chuckle and restore a sense of perspective. This week's pick has been nominated for an Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime Novel of 2006, and confirms that, whatever it's dark side, the world is an unfailingly entertaining place if we are prepared to look at it that way. Clearly it is not an accurate depiction of life, but that's what makes it fiction. Then again, after reading about some of these characters and events, you might be forgiven for wondering just how close to the truth the author comes....

Linwood Barclay

A lifestyle columnist at the Toronto Star, Linwood Barclay is an accomplished Canadian humourist and social satirist whose books include *Father Knows Zilch: a guide for dumbfounded dads* and *Mike Harris Made Me Eat My Dog. Bad Move*, his debut novel featuring the bumbling amateur sleuth Zack Walker, was reviewed in these pages in November of 2005; it was followed by the equally funny *Bad Guys*. *Lone Wolf*

is the third novel in the Zack Walker series, with more to come.

Linwood lives with his wife and two teenaged children in Burlington, Ontario, which perhaps explains his need to periodically escape from reality.



Lone Wolf

(Bantam Dell/Random House, 2006)

When a mutilated corpse is found at his father's fishing camp, Toronto columnist Zack Walker travels to cottage country to view the remains. The local autho-

rities chalk it up to a bear attack, but Zack isn't so sure. While investigating the death he tries to breach a long-standing gulf with his father, and discovers secrets about his family's past. He also runs afoul of the Wickens family, who have rented a house from his father nearby. Alarmed by their eccentric habits (they have two pit bulls named Gristle and Bone, and a photo of the Oklahoma City Bomber on their living-room wall). When there is another death and a large quantity of fertilizer goes missing Zack decides it is time for action. He calls in a friend, a black, gay private investigator from the big city, to help rescue the idyllic village from the clutches of a madman. What happens next stretches credulity — until one reflects on events in the real world.

A dark comedy

Linwood Barclay is a skilled observer of the human scene, with a writer's eye for a captivating turn of phrase. I defy the reader to consider the opening lines of *Lone Wolf* and not want to read on:

"Trixie Snelling seemed to be working up to something over lunch this particular Tuesday, and really just killing time talking about scouring costume stores to find forehead ridges to please a client who liked to be dominated by a Klingon, but she never got to it because I had to take a call on my cell that my father had been eaten by a bear."

With an engaging protagonist, off-the-wall characters, and a plot lifted from the headlines, *Lone Wolf* is vintage Linwood Barclay humour, a dark comedy on our increasingly fractured society. Packed with twists and sub-plots galore, it will leave you simultaneously laughing out

loud and scratching your head at the quirkiness of the human race.

Stone Rain, the fourth novel in the Zack Walker series, is scheduled to be released next month.

Postscript: over the course of his past three novels Linwood has been steadily maturing as a writer, polishing his style, adding depth to his characters and new subtleties to his plots, and in September he will offer his readers a serious change of pace. *No Time for Goodbye* is a suburban thriller centering on a woman whose entire family disappeared without a trace when she was in high school; now, twenty-five years later, married and with a family herself, she's beginning to notice signs connected with her family, and people around her are questioning her sanity—or worse, her involvement. Rights to *No Time For Goodbye* have already been sold in North America, the U.K., Germany, Italy, France, Holland, Israel and Russia.

Jim Napier can be reached at
jim.napier52@gmail.com