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Quarantine #1: The Loners



Synopsis

"As original as *The Hunger Games*, set within the walls of a high school exactly like yours." - Kami Garcia, *New York Times* best-selling co-author of the *Beautiful Creatures* novels
It was just another ordinary day at McKinley High--until a massive explosion devastated the school. When loner David Thorpe tried to help his English teacher to safety, the teacher convulsed and died right in front of him. And that was just the beginning. A year later, McKinley has descended into chaos. All the students are infected with a virus that makes them deadly to adults. The school is under military quarantine. The teachers are gone. Violent gangs have formed based on high school social cliques. Without a gang, you're as good as dead. And David has no gang. It's just him and his little brother, Will, against the whole school.
In this frighteningly dark and captivating novel, a 2012 *Booklist* Editor's Choice, Lex Thomas locks readers inside a school where kids don't fight to be popular, they fight to stay alive. "Take Michael Grant's *Gone* and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, rattle them in a cage until they're ready to fight to the death, and you'll have something like this nightmarish debut... Thomas' whirlwind pace, painful details, simmering sexual content, and moments of truly shocking ultra-violence thrust this movie-ready high school thriller to the head of the class." - *Booklist* (starred review)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have very mixed feelings about this book... The premise is extremely good, and I found the way

the story played out very believable, but I struggled a bit with the execution and some of the content. Let me elaborate...I will first touch on the brilliant premise. This book was like a modern-day Lord of the Flies that takes place in a locked down school instead of on a deserted island. If something like what happened in this book happened in real life (all the grown-ups suddenly die and an entire HS has to be locked down by the government to prevent the spread of a deadly super-virus carried by only teens), I believe that the kids would behave almost exactly as they did here, and it is scary! Because this book is such an honest prediction, it is violent, gruesome, and utterly horrifying. While some of the kids cling to their morality, most of the others turn into vicious animals, and sadly, it's the most ruthless of the animals that come out on top most of the time. It's survival of the fittest at its most basic level. It's a harsh reality, in a fictional format, and this is where I struggle a bit with the content. I think there are a lot of kids who would read this book, expecting the standard YA dystopian fare, and get something far more raw and disturbing. The Hunger Games has nothing on this book as far as the things kids will do to other kids in the name of survival. What I found more disturbing than what they would do in the name of survival, is what some of the kids were willing to do in the name of power and control over others, and where books like The Hunger Games and Lord of the Flies leave a lot to imagination, this book does not. Some of the violence is described in such detail that several times I had to stop reading for a few minutes in order to get my bearings. Obviously, you can't have this type of character driven (someone has to commit the violence, right?) story without characters, and I think much of this book's strength is in them. The physical world they were living in was well built, but it was almost like it didn't matter because the characters were really the heart of it. I loved how each tribe- Nerds, Geeks, Varsity, Pretty Ones, Sluts, Skaters, Loners- was a character of its own volition. As far as individual characters go, there were many. David is a great character; he is very human, and while he does try to cling to his morality, he doesn't let it get in the way of his or his brother's survival. He wouldn't kill another person for power or control, but if it's kill or be killed, he doesn't hold back. I really liked him, and I found myself rooting for him the whole way. His brother, Will, on the other hand, is a total douche. I just wanted to grab him and shake him. He was self-absorbed and whiny, not ever really grateful for all his brother was doing to protect him. As for the many other characters that were part of the story, they all played extremely crucial parts, and I felt like they were all well drawn. Sam was an intriguing character, and it was interesting to be in his head from time to time, and Lucy was alright, but definitely not worth the many sacrifices made for her. Now for the things that bothered me... I did not like how the actual story was executed. It shifted from character to character, most of the time in a 3rd person narrative, but once in awhile, it would shift to 1st person. I don't know if that was

intentional or just poor writing, or perhaps it was just the result of being written by a two person writing team, and my copy being an editorial proof, but I found it confusing and frustrating at times. I also struggled a bit with the pacing; it was really good in the first third of the book, then it became repetitive and slow in the middle third. By the final third of the book, it did pick up, but I kind of felt like much of the middle third could have been left out altogether. Overall, I would say this is great read for the RIGHT reader, and in the end, that wasn't me. I enjoyed it, but there were just too many problems that I had a difficult time getting past, for me to give it a stellar rating. I think HS age boys will devour this book, and be ready for more at the end. Will I read the next book? Probably. I would like to know where the story goes, but if I'm honest, I would say that it won't be at the top of my reading pile.

My Rating: 3.5 stars

Grade Level Recommendation: This is a tough one. The violence is graphic, and horrible things like murder, rape, and torture take place. This is definitely not a book for someone who is sensitive to that type of thing. It is also definitely not a book for the younger end of the YA reading audience. I definitely wouldn't allow my middle schooler to read this, and I'm pretty liberal with her. I would say this book is for ages 15+ (grades 10 and up).

The first book in The Loners series, Quarantine, is a wild and explosive cocktail of scary, fun, and gore. Page after page, chapter after chapter, this book is made of action, tension and almost unbearable chaos of a world turned upside down by a deadly virus - a contagious, parasitic virus that thrives only in bodies of pubescent teenagers and destroys everyone - adults and children alike - in their path. Lex Hrabé and Thomas Voorhies (the two talented writers behind the pen name Lex Thomas) don't waste time on polite introductions, nor do they dwell on abstract descriptions. They get straight to the point, throwing the reader right into the centre of mind-popping action. You might want to consider attaching a seat-belt to your favourite reading-chair, cause the way these two tell the story is more intense than the scariest roller coaster ride you can imagine. All the events described in this book take place at McKinley High - a totally ordinary high school that's just unfortunate to be located near Mason Montgomery Technologies. MMT is a weapon manufacturer and there wouldn't be anything extraordinary about it if not for the illegal biological weapons they've been secretly testing on kidnapped teenagers. The first day of a new school year also happens to be the day when the government sends their troops to investigate the illegal activities at MMT. Long story short, something goes wrong, one of the infected teenagers escapes and makes his way to McKinley High. The government - in hopes of minimizing the casualties and getting everything under control - blows up half of the school. Needless to say, that doesn't help. The virus spreads all over the school in - literally - seconds, and in a blink of an eye all the students turn into walking

bio-bombs, lethal to everyone who comes in contact with them. And so the Quarantine begins. Cut off from the rest of the world, the infected students of McKinley High are now on their own and forced to fight in order to survive. Gangs form, tension raises, fights break out and the situation quickly escalates into a full-blown gang-war, with people who used to be your friends turning into your most deadly enemies. Friendship? Morality? Decency? Mutual support? Forget about it! Survival is all that matters. The good news is: as the puberty leaves the body, the virus disappears. The bad news? You then lose your immunity and within 24 hours you end up dead. Thankfully, the military set up an automated testing station, designed to scan the blood for an active virus and then release the virus-free students into the outside world. It's kind of like graduating from high school, only in this situation it's more like graduate or die trying. This book was... WOW, I don't even know where to begin! It was insanely intense, but not at all in a subtle-kind of way. More like in a right-in-your-face, what-the-hell-just-happened and I'm-never-going-back-to-high-school kind of way. It certainly isn't a book for the faint-hearted, there are scenes of violence and abuse. And I don't mean a fist fight or spitting someone in the face, either, I mean seriously cringe-worthy stuff. If I was watching a movie instead of reading a book, I would be hiding under a blanket and covering my ears. Lex Thomas did a really great job painting a very grim, disturbing vision of a society that broke under pressure and crumbled to pieces. People turning into savages, thievery, rapes, oppression, injustice, even murder - that's the new reality at McKinley High, and it's only getting worse with every passing day. I loved the idea of gangs - certain people sticking together, joining forces to fight for supplies at weekly food-drops organized by the government. And I thought it was a cool idea to have the kids dye their hair a gang-specific colour, though I'm not exactly sure if you can actually dye your hair using Kool Aid (and if you can - I'm never drinking that stuff again!). The main character, David, is an outcast. He doesn't belong to any gang, because no gang will take him in. He and his brother, Will, are forced to run and hide, to avoid run-ins with the Varsity (strongest gang made up from the members of the school's football team). And it wouldn't be all that impossible - there are many loners like them keeping to the shadows, surviving on scraps - if not for the simple fact that the Varsity's leader want's David dead, and he won't stop at anything to achieve that. The writing was very dynamic and I had so much fun reading this book. This novel has everything I like in YA horrors/thrillers: a mind-blowing creep factor, dynamic action, plenty of unexpected plot twists, and overwhelming intensity. It was a thoroughly gripping novel, and though at times I felt very disturbed by the horrid events and vividly painted scenes on its pages, I couldn't bring myself to put it down. For the most part of the story I was under the impression that the authors wrote it with a future movie adaptation in mind (this book already has a movie-deal!). The way the scenes played

out and how the story focused more on action than the characters' thoughts and feelings kind of made this book read more like a movie script than an actual YA novel. And it's not necessarily a bad thing, since there are so many angsty, thought-provoking YA dystopians, thrillers and post-apocalyptic novels already out there. I didn't really need another one, and I was grateful for this pure action-packed thrill ride. Any attempts at exploring the internal struggles of the characters and presenting the reader with their inner monologues, fears, worries and reflections on life would take away from the intensity and breath-taking quality of this book. That's not to say that this book is entirely free of all that. We do get a good glimpse at David's and Will's personalities, their past and their feelings, but it's done more through what they do than what the narrator tells us about their thoughts and feelings. It's more show than tell, and I liked it way better this way. Overall, this book really knocked my socks off. I had a blast reading it and can't believe I now have to wait till summer 2013 to find out what happens next! The cliffhanger ending - while totally fantastic and exciting - really killed me. I'm literally dying to read the next book and am so happy to have discovered this creeptastic new series! If - like me - you're into the scary and creepy, be sure to add this book to your reading pile, it's a real winner!

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