



Where the Woods End

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In a forest filled with treacherous beasts, the thing to be most afraid of is closer than you think in this middle grade horror fantasy.

Kestrel, a young huntress, lives in a seemingly endless forest crawling with dangerous beasts. But the most dangerous beasts of all are the Grabbers—beings that are born when you are and stalk you throughout your life, waiting for the perfect moment to snatch and eat you. No one has ever defeated their Grabber once attacked, and those that die from accidents or other creatures are considered "lucky." Kestrel has been tasked by her mother, a powerful and controlling spell-caster, to hunt down the Grabbers in an effort to protect their village in the forest. Accompanied by Pippit, a hilariously bloodthirsty weasel, she hones her skills as she searches for a way out of the forest--and away from the judgmental villagers who despise her. But her own Grabber is creeping ever closer, and nothing in this forest is what it seems... including her mother's true motivations.

Where the Woods End Details

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Author : Charlotte Salter

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From Reader Review Where the Woods End for online ebook

Melki says

Nothing to fear but everything here . . .

Dark, scary forests are a staple of most fairy tales, but the woods in this book are horrifying beyond belief: basically *everything* from the forest floor to the tree tops can KILL you.

The endless forest was dark as the back of a wolf's throat, and it was filled with countless horrors.

Twelve-year-old Kestrel knows the ways of the forest, and the terrors that lurk behind every tree. She is a huntress, forever on the lookout for grabbers - **nightmarish monsters that stalk one person throughout their life, building their bodies bit by bit until they resemble their victim's greatest fear.**

The forest is alive, and the grabbers are its terrible appetite.

This was a creepy and compelling story. Though aimed at a middle grade audience, it should be recommended for more mature readers. Salter's novel goes to some really dark places.

Jenna (JenTheLibrarian) says

What in the world did I just read?

This was just not for me. I enjoyed the first third of the book but then it just unraveled into something really strange, and not in a good way imo.

Some scenes dragged on unnecessarily while others (the important, character-revealing ones!) were glossed over. I was left with more questions than answers unfortunately.

In the end, I appreciated the whole message surrounding fear (I'm trying to keep it vague so as to avoid spoilers), but man, this was so dark and pretty disturbing for a middle grade book. I'd recommend it to mature readers only.

Darcy Roar says

Super creepy & intense. The premise is quite interesting, but the execution is a little too painful for my tastes, like I know it's a horror novel but the emotional abuse just takes it to a place I can't deal with. I'm betting younger teens interested in horror stories would love this book though (I find I glossed over lots of things as a kid that horrify me now)! Very interesting world with a good, non-preachy, idea to hold onto at the end.

Sam says

4.5 stars rounded up

Leslie says

After reading the jacket copy, I thought this book was going to be more quaint than it was. If I'd noticed whether the author was American or not (she's not), I would've been better prepared. Young Readers Writers from other countries tend to be less afraid of frightening their audience.

The "tinge of humor" is less about fart jokes and more for those who appreciate the macabre; which I very much do. The novel also favors those who appreciate gross-out humor: it is definitely gory and gross.

The "dangerous beasts" are deadly serious. The Grabbers build their bodies from found objects, to include carrion. They are relentless and their goal is to kill their victim. When Kestrel kills, she sling-shots, stabs, uses her limbs if she needs to; it's undeniably physical. Salter is so successful with her descriptions, I could hear bones break and crunch. Pippit is bloodthirsty—and adorable; like when Smeagol tries to reject Gollum in LOTR. If you have a weak stomach a weasel with a human digit in his mouth is the least of your worries.

Where the Woods End offers a lesson in fearmongering—and fear itself.

That Kestrel has to keep her skills sharp is not a fantasy hero's demonstration that they are capable of handling what is to come; what is to come has already arrived. And Kestrel's need to survive in order to get out of the forest is crucial—that tension in the novel is as relentless as the grabbers. The forest is a true source of terror, with marvelous little places of dark invention that Kestrel explores in order to divine an exit. The villagers are grotesque and would send anyone packing, but it is Kestrel's mother who gives the Grabber a run for its money. She is evil. She is no Disney Princess evil step-mother, but something much, much more. She and that dog of hers are vicious. She realizes for the reader and Kestrel the truest definition of a monster.

And then there is Grandmos. Grandmos is Kestrel's late paternal grandmother, the best huntress in the forest, who trained Kestrel to fight monsters. She, of all the adults in the novel, is the most complicated. She is a source of affection, guilt, and terror for Kestrel. Her tactics are familiar to any adults who've read/seen assassin's backstories. Salter doesn't try to condone what she's done, but neither does Kestrel survive without that training. Salter just holds the reader, and Kestrel, on the edge of uncertainty of what to do about Grandmos—which generates fear/anxiety.

What compels you and keeps the gore and violence and creeps from all being too much in Where the Woods End is Kestrel. She isn't infallible, but she is determined, resourceful, and angry. And Kestrel maintains her youth—she's on the cusp of change; her relationship with Finn hints at familiar middle-school angst—but she needs to be allowed her hope, resilience, and her ability to look away from difficult things...at least, until that inevitable confrontation with her own Grabber. You hold your breath every time she's knocked down in hopes she'll get up and resist. This breath-holding is to prepare you for that end scene when you're lung capacity may be tested.

The pacing also helps with the nausea and dread in the novel. Salter doesn't linger too long, keeping the eye and the mind shifting as it collects its own bits and pieces of the forest and its villagers. There isn't a lot of time to process certain losses (which will frustrate character-driven readers). The race against time joins the anxiety for escape, and they collide with a marvelous revelation. If I laughed when I reached Chapter 17, it was in delight, because my eyes were also wide with horror and revulsion.

The horror was properly difficult as the kinds of violence and abuse Kestrel is surviving is hard to stomach;

the fairy tale world helped. As I told a friend, Where the Woods End is one of the darkest middle grades I've read in a long while. And I found it entertaining, and thought-provoking. I love Kestrel and Pippit. And Salter has the kind of imagination and craftsmanship I admire in a storyteller.

Recommended for readers of adventure, of horror: think Priestly, Black, Hahn, or Auxier. For readers of fairy tales, particularly those written by authors outside of the American sensibility.

<https://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/2...>

Aida says

??? ?? ?? ??? ??? ??????!

Armina says

Hashtag if Tim burton wrote a book. :))
Enjoyable. Very!

Tiffany says

AAAAAAHHHHHHH

This book was awesome! The number of allusions to other things I've read, whether intentional or a product of my own mind-web, was staggering. Gleefully staggering, since that's my favorite reader-y thing: the way stuff connects. In this one middle grade novel I was reminded of Baba Yaga, Harry Potter, the dead hands and gore crows in Garth Nix's Abhorsen trilogy, Howl's Moving Castle, the daemons in Pullman's "The Golden Compass"... *happy screech*

I found one criticism with the whole thing, which is more of a plot hole than a problem: if the creepy swamp thing wanted eyes, why didn't it just steal them from all the animals that wandered into the salt marsh and died? Endless supply. But I understand that the story could not have moved forward if that had happened. I was fine with it.

And there's one little editorial snag wherein Salter says something and then repeats herself almost exactly (needlessly) in the next paragraph, but it's small compared to the enormous WOW of this book.

I hope this makes the short list for best middle grade fiction this year. I'd vote for it.

Elna says

[Not the part about facing your fears head on and acknowledging them without letting them dictate your life, which is a good, if general lesson, but the resolution with Kestrel's mother and grandmother (totally unrelated sidenote: *what* kind of name is Grandmos?? Maybe it's from a certain part of the world

Lilyn G. | Sci-Fi & Scary says

I was on the library waiting list for what felt like ever for ‘Where the Woods End’. The cover looked amazing, and the synopsis had me wiggling in my chair. I was so happy when it finally came in; so, naturally, I was sure I was going to be disappointed. I mean, how often does a book live up to your expectations, right?

I buddy-read this book with Jess from Storytime in the Stacks. She was dead on about a lot of stuff that happened/was going to happen. I was mostly wrong. I like being mostly wrong. It means a book has defied the expectations set by the hundreds I’ve read before. It hits my happy spots. With that being said, there were at least two twists in the book that took us both by surprise. (Including the big one at the end.)

‘Where the Woods End’ has a great opening. It sets the tone for the rest of the book. The characters are a mixed bag. My favorite character was the weasel, Pippet. I want Pippet. I would love him and hug him and call him...Pippet. (Because Pippet is almost a good of a name as Pigwidgeon.) He was the perfect light (but brave) touch to act as a balance to the darkness that pervades the rest of the book.

There is a lot of darkness to this book. Enough so that if you have a particularly sensitive child I probably wouldn’t recommend it. Charlotte Salter does a great job of making you feel the claustrophobia of the trees looming around you, and that sense of impending doom. The forest is a great representation of the myriad fears that surround us, especially if we’re already prone to being anxious. And, ultimately, ‘Where the Woods End’ is about conquering those fears.

However, pretty much the only problem that I had with the book involves the conquering of fears. I think I understand what message the author was trying to send. However, when I thought about it for any length of time, I was uncomfortable with how it was actually expressed. For those who don’t want even a mild spoiler, we’ll leave it there.

‘Where the Woods End’ is a fast-paced, adventure-filled read. It has great imagery and lots of intrigue. It has lots of spooky/mildly disturbing moments without ever actually being scary. The author does a great job of keeping things age-appropriate. I recommend it – but at the same time do recommend you be prepared to have a discussion about conquering fears with your kids. Its a great book to discuss at the end.

Pam says

This was a great book. It is written for middle graders, but I think it would be enjoyed by all. Kestrel fights monsters that live in the never-ending forest that surrounds her village. The forest never ends, but as long as you don’t venture into the forest your relatively safe. What you do have to be afraid of is your Grabber. Kestrel is looking for her Granmos’ Grabber. If she kills it her mother will let her leave and find a way out of the forest. Kestrel has so much more to learn to make this happen.

Katrin von Martin says

I haven’t read much middle grade fiction in recent years, but I decided to pick up “Where the Woods End”

by Charlotte Salter because the back of book blurb teased a somewhat whimsical, yet potentially terrifying story and, well, I liked the cover (I can be really shallow with my book choices sometimes). Without having any experience in this genre since I was a lot younger, I went into the story with an open mind and cautious optimism, intrigued at the prospect of a horror novel made to appeal to younger readers and looking forward to the more fun elements often found in middle grade fiction. This novel ended up being one of the most pleasant, unexpected reading surprises that I've had in a while. Spoilers follow.

Twelve-year-old Kestrel lives in an endless forest inhabited by all sorts of dangerous beasts. Despite her young age, she's a capable hunter, often braving the forest at her witch-mother's request to track down the feared grabbers. Grabbers pose a unique threat to the village: they target one specific person, stealing their things and learning their greatest fears until the grabber can take the form of what the person is most afraid of, at which point it attacks, dragging its victim into the woods and devouring them. The attacks on Kestrel's village are becoming more frequent and her mother is sending her out more often than before. Still haunted by the memories of her grandmother, the woman who both lovingly trained and simultaneously frightened Kestrel before being dragged off by her own grabber, Kestrel begins to question the motivations of her often-cruel mother...and when Kestrel realizes that her grabber has started to hunt for her, her need to break her mother's hold over her and try to escape the forest becomes even more dire. With Pippit, a bloodthirsty weasel and her only reliable friend, by her side, she faces the terrifying unknowns of the forest, hoping to find the answers she seeks before it's too late.

So...wow, there's a lot that happens in this book. I was impressed by how much was crammed into 300 pages, yet the story doesn't feel rushed or bloated in the slightest. Instead, it skips along at a reliable pace, Kestrel's stubborn determination to find a way out driving us forward through this adventure while her flashbacks and sojourns back to the village giving us the necessary background to understand her complicated relationship with both her mother and late-grandmother. There's absolutely no time wasted, every step that Kestrel takes contributes something to the story. Additionally, Slater's writing can be pretty quippy and snappy, which adds a level of amusement to an otherwise dark tale that feels very appropriate when told through the perspective of a twelve-year-old. I flew through this novel, not because it was simple or too easy (which had been one of my concerns with picking up a middle grade work), but because it's just so darn enthralling that I had a hard time convincing myself to put it down.

Salter also has a natural skill for dropping hints without revealing the twist until just the right moment. I've come across authors that keep the questions in their stories burning for so long that they essentially smoke out their answers before they intend to, but that's not the case at all here. I was really impressed with how well-crafted this story is. There were times when I was reading, especially toward the beginning, where I thought that parts of the plot felt episodic (which I was more than ok with since they showed us more of the forest and its inhabitants), but ultimately, they ended up tying into much bigger reveals. Kestrel's own ability to convince herself of things assists in this: when her belongings start to go missing, for example, she tells herself that it's the local kids stealing them and we're content to believe her...even though we can connect the dots and figure out, as she herself does, that her grabber is following her and that, like the villagers, she was desperately trying to convince herself that that wasn't the case. It's actually a very poignant depiction of how we process fear, especially that which relates to our own death. The identity of Kestrel's mother is exceptionally well done: the pieces are all there, the doubt is left to simmer, everything is in place, yet when Kestrel figures it out, it's still a satisfying surprise well worth the time spent to get to the bottom of it. Every twist and turn on this ride is well-crafted, and the pieces of the story relate back to each other beautifully to make them so.

My biggest curiosity going into this book was how the horror elements would be handled. Due to its intended audience, I knew that the story wouldn't be able to rely on gore and shock scenery to convey terror, so I wondered what elements would be drawn in to send chills down the reader's spine. Let me tell you, Salter does not disappoint. She crafts the atmosphere of the novel well, bringing the forest to life not only through the fearsome creatures that live within it, but by making it seem like a participating character in and of itself.

The forest is alive, creeping and shifting around Kestrel and the villagers, stripping them of hope and plunging them into the depths of their greatest fears. Additionally, the monsters that Salter has created are delightfully spooky and gruesome and her descriptions conjure some truly goosebump-raising images. The creativity put into the settings, monsters, and obstacles is apparent. It isn't just the writing that encourages an air of tense mystery and suspense; the portrayal of Kestrel's own fear and her stubborn attempts to ignore and later overcome it are very relatable and add an element of realism to this fantastical setting.

What I appreciated the most is that Salter doesn't talk down to her audience. Make no mistake, while the horror here is very age appropriate and relies more on atmosphere and a touch of whimsy than gore, the story pulls no punches. There are some genuinely dark moments in this book: people die horrible deaths, Kestrel's mother's obvious abuse of her is often painful to read and experience, the forest is unforgiving of what or who wanders into its traps, the pervasive sense of hopelessness and fear is strong...this is a novel that has confidence in what its readers can handle, and I would have appreciated that quite a bit when I was in the target age range.

This just leaves me with the ending to touch on. It's a very open sort of conclusion, but that's not a bad thing. At the end of the day, this is a story about Kestrel facing her fears and freeing herself from what really had her trapped (her mother), leaving her free to pursue her next obstacle (leaving the forest). I like that the mystery of the forest isn't concluded and there's still a sense of unknown to the very end— it's more interesting to wonder than it is to have everything laid out for us. It's a very bittersweet sort of finale; her goodbyes to Pippit and Finn are heartbreaking and though there is hope that she'll get out of the forest, Kestrel understands that her newfound understanding with her grabber is tenuous and will fall apart if she lets her fear take hold of her again. I think it's the perfect ending for a novel with so many spooky, dark themes: optimistic but still swathed in mystery.

Kestrel makes for an enjoyable main character. She's clever and cunning, capable and determined, realistic yet optimistic...and she has to be all of these things because her life has been fraught with trauma and turmoil. I think it's easy to be skeptical of the idea of a twelve-year-old taking on ferocious beasts like grabbers with little more than a sharpened spoon, a slingshot, a vicious weasel, and whatever ideas she can come up with, but the methods she uses are so fitting to her character and rely more on her smarts than her brawn that it's easy to suspend your disbelief and just enjoy the story. Ultimately, it's Kestrel's determination and drive that stops the book from dipping into the realm of "too dark," as her hopefulness is both contagious and endearing, forcing the reader forward when everyone else in the story has given up. She isn't, however, simply a strong-willed, stubborn hunter; she also has a more vulnerable side, especially where her family is concerned. Despite how terrible her mother is to her, there's a part of Kestrel that still cares for her and balks at the idea of harming her; her memories of her grandmother are a complex mix of being deathly afraid of the woman who trained her (using some often-odd methods) and sorely missing her grandma, one of the few people who genuinely cared about her; the villagers hate her, and she's also not terribly fond of them, yet she continues to risk her life for the village because it's what she thinks is right. This all makes her very realistic and relatable, both as a character and as a young girl. She's charmingly bullheaded, yet full of heart, and that's just the sort of main character this story needs.

The other characters strike that perfect balance of just-slightly-over-the-top while still having more than a touch of realism. Kestrel's mother is absolutely terrifying, more so, in my opinion, than any of the grabbers or other forest-dwelling creatures – she's definitely the real villain of this story. Granmos is intriguing from what we see of her through Kestrel's dreams and flashbacks: a hard, strong-willed woman with a certain fear of her past who wants to prepare her granddaughter for the horrors of the forest (and at home). Pippit, Kestrel's weasel, is a lot of fun and adds an element of humour when it's needed – he's also always there to help Kestrel out of a sticky situation, being the friend she always needs. The central cast is rather small, which means that each character has the time to be developed and fleshed out, and they're certainly an interesting bunch!

My single criticism of “Where the Woods End” comes in the form of some of the secondary characters, specifically the other children of the village and Finn, Kestrel’s tree-dwelling friend. Kestrel is something of an outsider in her village; the villagers all despise her for the things that her mother does, which makes a lot of sense given that Kestrel’s mother inflicts a lot of turmoil on the villagers. While I understand why the adults largely avoid Kestrel, I didn’t quite get why the kids delight in tormenting her with such a zeal. They think she’s weird, which is fine and dandy, but their cruelty seems a little unwarranted and often felt like it was included solely to emphasize how ostracized Kestrel is. On that same note, I didn’t see why Finn randomly allied himself with the village kids for a large portion of the book. He’s portrayed as being a good friend to Kestrel, yet he has no problem blowing her off to hang out with Hannah and the other kids? It felt like a convenient way to, again, leave Kestrel without friends when she desperately needed some. With Finn, there are hints that he might be growing up and is simply no longer interested in the “game” of finding a way out of the forest, but it’s all so sudden that it doesn’t feel developed.

Overall, “Where the Woods End” is the perfect blend of horror, whimsy, and fun. The story is exciting and well-crafted with plenty of twists and turns; the themes are dark and poignant, yet still very age appropriate; the scary elements are delightfully chilling; and Kestrel is a wonderfully determined, stubborn main character that you can’t help but root for. The issues with some of the side characters aside, this is easily a 4.5 read for me, bumped up to 5 because it was such an enjoyable experience.

Rachel says

"Nothing to fear but everything here..." This blurb from the back of the book, sums up the content of Where the Woods End pretty nicely. Everything in this woods, from the mundane fungus on the ground, to the witch that lives in the lake, and even the people themselves are dangerous. And yet, the young Kestrel has always navigated this environment with determination. She has to. For the only way to escape is to fulfill the bargain she made with her mother, and to find the exit somewhere in its depths. While working towards her goal, Kestrel begins to uncover the dark secrets of her past, as well as the truth behind the people eating monsters known as grabbers. Even though many creatures try to eat her, she doesn't fear them, rather it is something much closer to home that truly scares her. Salter pairs a dark atmosphere with a psychologically driven narrative to tell a fantastic story about a girl who must understand and accept her fears, and overcome loss, in order to survive. This is told in a rich language, with a brave voice; Kestrel's attitude is what keeps this book from treading into the realm of horror. Everything unfolds at a steady pace, and while the shape of Kestrel's fear will come as no surprise, there are a few other twists that readers won't necessarily expect. For fans of dark fantasy with a Grimm's fairytale type feel, Where the Woods End is a great middle grade choice.

Tory says

3.5 stars. WOW, was this gruesome and scary for a kids' book! I definitely would not have been able to handle this as a middle-year reader. Yowza! The mother was SO horrifying but Pippit was the cutest dang little friend. I wanted more Pippit. There wasn't anything particularly wrong with this book; I just didn't fall in love with it. SCARY STUFF! I would almost want to classify this as YA based on the scary content, but the story on the whole did feel more middle-years-y.

Roe says

3.5 stars. Where the Woods End sounded like a great book to get me in the mood for October, and it didn't disappoint. I only gave it 3.5 stars, due to some quibbles I'll get to, but this actually really good! I loved how Salter sprinkled in clues without dumbing it down and making it too obvious, and I was pleased that my early theory came true. This was actually surprisingly gruesome, and it made it stand out from other MG books — it knows what kind of book it is and doesn't hold back.

I did have some issues. The villagers were filled with such a blatant hatred for Kestrel that it was kind of ridiculous. A character notes that Kestrel would "never be hurt by her mother" (totally not true, by the way), which would insinuate that they believed that her mother cared about her to some degree. Wouldn't it make sense to not harass the malicious village witch's daughter, then? They were kind of all flat and I was disappointed that Hannah was given no character development at all. Generally, most of the side characters were incredibly two dimensional. The end also felt kind of weak and rushed.

On a more positive note, I want to mention my adoration of Pippit, Kestrel's bloodthirsty weasel. He was such a fun character and gave a much needed lightness to this book.

Overall, go into this book for its intricately woven plotline, spookiness, and a great villain, but not for strength in side characters or a strong ending.
