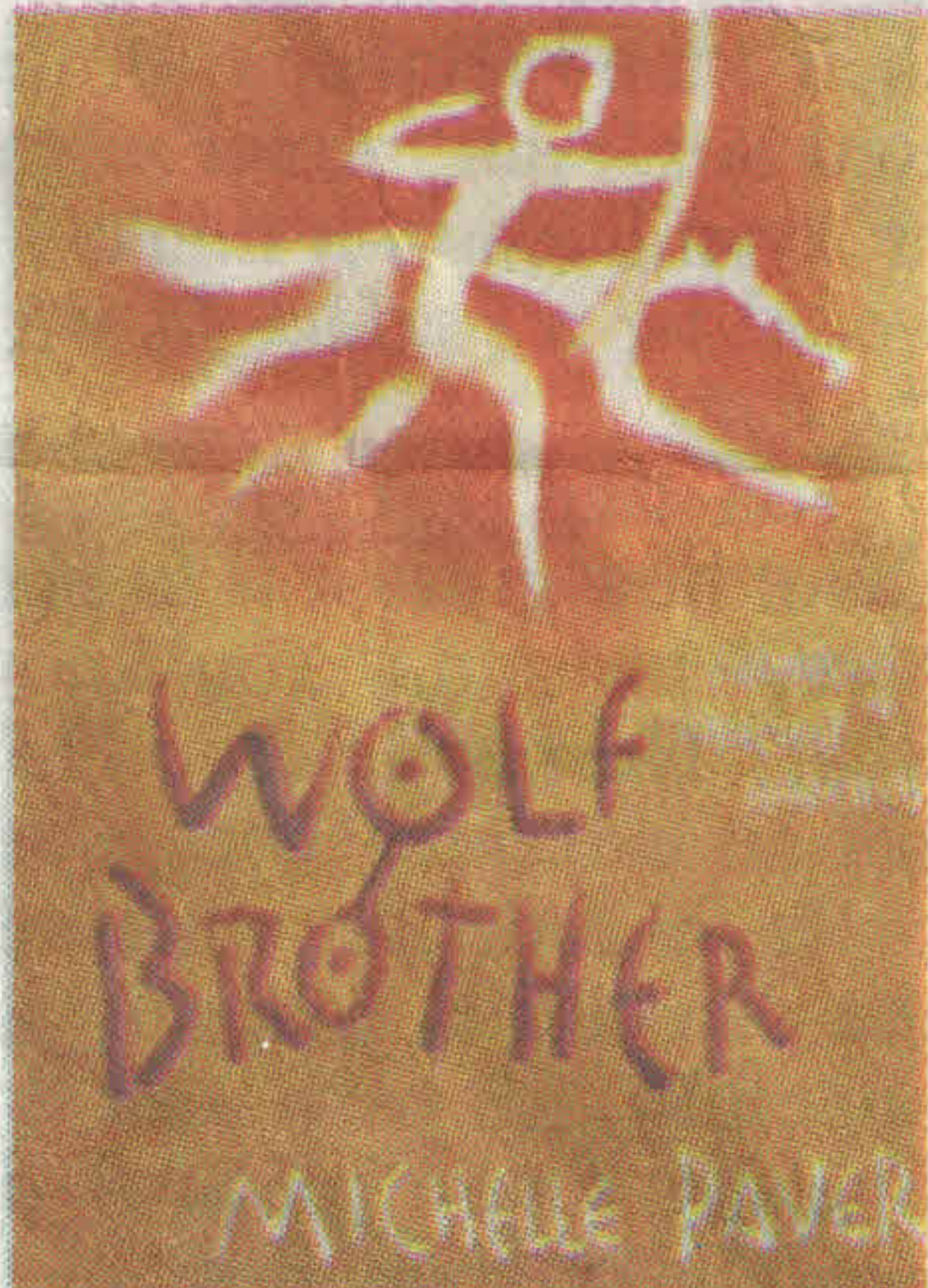




## The Village School's Children's Book of the Month



**'Wolf Brother'** by Michelle Paver

Reviewed by George Bennett (above), 4th-6th teacher

Wolf Brother is set in the forests of northern Europe six thousand years ago, but author Michelle Paver has imagined a wholly credible society in which rival hunter-gatherer tribes share a strong mystical sense of the world around them. Into this tribal world steps twelve-year-old Torak, a boy who was raised outside the tribes by his outcast father, for reasons that begin to emerge in this book, and are fully revealed in later volumes of the six-book series.

Paver drew on surviving traditions of Native Americans, Inuit and Japanese to develop a well-constructed mystical framework that underpins the action of the book. And there is plenty of action, in a fast-moving plot that still leaves time for the characters and their relationships to grow.

Wolf Brother starts briskly, and the pace never lets up. The action begins just after Torak's father has been killed by a huge bear, which we later learn is possessed by a demon, leaving Torak to fend for himself in the dangerous forest. He soon discovers and rescues a starving wolf cub, which attaches itself to Torak and eventually becomes his 'wolf brother'.

Torak finds he can communicate with 'Wolf', for reasons that seem quite plausible, and this communication is very well thought-out. For example, Torak is not able to talk to Wolf about what will happen, since wolves have no way of describing the future. It's just one of the many details in the book that ring true, even though it is set in an imagined pre-history.

Torak has been well trained in survival skills, but he also comes to see that Wolf is the guide that his father foretold before he died. Between them, Torak and Wolf become a formidable team as they set out to avenge the death of Torak's father, and battle with the powers that launched the demonic bear into the forest world.

Torak soon stumbles into his father's former tribe, and begins to learn some of his family history from the tribal leader who accepts him. At the same time, some of the older boys gang up against him, so that Torak soon finds himself in an unequal duel, in which he has to use his natural cunning against the superior strength of his challenger.

As Torak resumes his search for the great bear he is also helped by Renn, a girl who's introduced into the story quite naturally, without the feeling that some children's books have of forcing a boy and girl together just to appeal to a wider audience. Renn remains a strong female character throughout the series, as she, Torak and Wolf learn to rely on each other, and appreciate their different skills.

The narrative is sometimes seen through the eyes of Wolf, who only gradually realize that 'Tall Tailless', as he calls Torak, is not a wolf himself. Wolf's perspective makes us see the forest and its inhabitants in a different way, and gives an extra dimension to the reader's picture of this ancient world.

Wolf Brother was first published ten years ago, but it remains in print, while the final book in the series appeared in 2011. Wolf Brother will make a perfect gift for 5th-8th graders, and has been popular with both girls and boys in the Village School's 4th-6th-grade class. But if you buy this first book, you'd better be ready to get the rest; your children (and you) will be hooked.

Wolf Brother, along with all the Village School's recommended books, is available at Bruce's Browser in uptown Athol.