

An End: Where We Stand Now: Book One | Special Edition

Brandon Pawlicki

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Morality and faith anchor a young woman in a world overflowing with zombies and power-hungry humans in the unsettling horror novel An End.

In Brandon Pawlicki's horror novel *An End*, a woman awakens from a coma into a zombie apocalypse that challenges her rigid morals.

Vallerie and her boyfriend find solace in Wiccan rituals—until a school shooting interrupts a protective ceremony they're performing. Vallerie and her brother survive the shooting, but her life spirals downward despite her best efforts at maintaining normalcy. She struggles to keep a job; she deals with anxiety and nightmares. Later, she faces a vicious attack from someone who holds her responsible for the school massacre; the event leaves her in a coma.

The horrors of the school shooting foreshadow the zombie-led difficulties awaiting Vallerie after she emerges from her coma. Her brother and a friend usher her from immediate danger, but she learns that civilization as she knew it has crumbled—and that her brother is being pursued by a vindictive military force as well.

Zombies and soldiers aside, Vallerie also contends with her weakening faith and traumatic past. Her once steadfast moral code is undermined by the methods that are required of her if she is to protect herself and her allies. Indeed, the mortal threats that she faces become secondary to her own personal growth.

The book maintains a consistent pace when it's focusing on the three leads and their interactions with each other in the present. However, its momentum is compromised by its occasional deviations to focus on details from Vallerie's life before the apocalypse; these forays become redundant. And while Vallerie is an engaging heroine who is prone to deliver well-developed reflections and flashbacks, the book's focus on her perspective is limiting. Even when she encounters other survivors who could be allies, they express the hope that the zombie threat will die out on its own, limiting their contributions.

The book's three central heroes are well fleshed out, though their opponents are developed in more superficial terms: what's most known about them is their drive to grow in power and punish those who stand in the way of that goal. Still, following Vallerie through this world is an unforgettable experience, and the story ends with the tantalizing potential for future adventures. This special edition volume includes intriguing author commentary regarding the story's origins and development.

The unsettling horror novel *An End* is set in a world overflowing with zombies and power-hungry humans, among whom a young woman is anchored by her morality and faith.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 11, 2023)

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