

Angel's Back: What's Next

Brenda G. Wright

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Angel's Back is the second in Brenda G. Wright's series about a powerful, revenge-seeking woman raised as an assassin within the treacherous underworld of illegal drugs and sex slavery. It picks up where *Angel: A Hustling Diva with a Twist* left off, back in Columbia during a lull in the action. In this second installment, Angel has a young adult daughter known as Baby Girl, who was raised to play a dual role: academic achiever and killer. Baby Girl is portrayed as a frightening combination of vulnerable and lethal, human and monstrous.

Haunted by the malevolent people she has murdered, Baby Girl combats persistent nightmares until she experiences a reprieve: "The spirits had stopped visiting Baby Girl; she hadn't seen any shadows in about three weeks. So she went on doing what she did on a normal basis: she would still stay up, studying half of the night. Baby Girl happened to be asleep again at the kitchen table when a big, beautiful bright light, with a floating angel appeared."

Like scenes from *The Godfather* or *Pulp Fiction*, Angel and Baby Girl embark on deadly escapades, murders, and undercover operations—bouncing from city to city with an extended stay in Chicago by the end of the tale. Their story awkwardly leaps fifteen years into the future in chapter thirty-one, which is not the end of the book but an introduction to Angel's son Ramon, a drug dealer who will likely play a larger role in Wright's series.

The gritty descriptions of torture, rape, and dismemberment are extremely graphic and brutally violent. At times, the work reads like a screenplay treatment: visual scenarios that lack dialogue and veer into an outline for a script. Fast-paced to the point of catapulting the reader, immersed in action with little emotion displayed, this intriguing story suffers from rapid-fire presentation and insufficient editing.

The book elicits gruesome fascination, featuring distinctive characters whose story would benefit from a structure that gives equal weight to narrative and dialogue, rather than favoring supersonic storytelling. The author's tendency to tell what has happened, rather than provide a sense of immediacy, has a distancing effect.

A riveting cover appropriate for the genre, as well as an attention-grabbing plot line, give the book—and the series itself—standout potential, which could be fulfilled with some editorial improvements. Not intended for the squeamish, *Angel's Back* will capture the interest of action-film aficionados, along with hardcore realists unafraid of blood and eager to observe the mafia in vivid, heart-pounding detail.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (November 7, 2012)

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