

Fangs Bared: Where We Stand Now: Book Two

Brandon Pawlicki

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A zombie threat pales in comparison to the darkness that people inflict on each other in Fangs Bared, a harrowing postapocalyptic novel.

In Brandon Pawlicki's postapocalyptic novel *Fangs Bared*, a young woman becomes a power player in efforts to unite the remaining humans against a growing zombie threat.

Vallerie has endured much in the recent past. She and her brother were the sole survivors of a school shooting, she lost her job, and she was beaten into a coma. Upon awakening, she learned that a zombie outbreak was ravaging the world. Months later, she's evaded a militant organization, the Bastion, and survived repeated zombie attacks. Since the world as she knew it ended, she has joined a like-minded group of survivors who hope to rebuild.

The last time Vallerie encountered the Bastion, her brother was executed for being an accused traitor. The Bastion is hell-bent on rebuilding America through force, killing the undead and anyone their leader deems to be disloyal. Vallerie and her band of survivors are on a collision course with the Bastion as the remaining pockets of human society fall to zombies, join up with the Bastion, or die fighting each other.

Once the major players are introduced and the stakes are laid out, this apocalyptic series entry focuses on character development and expanding its world building. However, most of its context and exposition is filtered through Vallerie's thoughts alone. She's quick when conversing with her allies, including Graham, the leader of the survivors she found a home with. The book's shifts to other perspectives bring glimmers of further cast development, but Vallerie is by far the best fleshed out.

The undead are constructed in standard zombie terms. They feast on the living, must be met with swift reactions, and are otherwise easy to defend against. Vallerie and the survivors band together and develop a safe means of traveling for supplies. The Bastion threat upends their delicate balance of safety. And through Vallerie's eyes, the lines between right and wrong are blurred. She once believed in improving the quality of life of everyone she met, but faced with the undead and the unrelenting Bastion, she is forced either to adapt or to die.

The book's sensory details are sparse, but its violent acts are well detailed, including executions, zombie attacks, and chase sequences. This focus on violence rather than peace complements the Bastion's efforts to build a prosperous future through force. It's also a source of tension as the book builds toward the inevitable, but still harrowing, confrontation between Vallerie and the leader of the Bastion, with chapters switching between their two perspectives until Vallerie's growing rage implodes.

A zombie threat pales in comparison to the darkness that people inflict on each other in *Fangs Bared*, a postapocalyptic novel in which a broken woman fights to maintain her humanity.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November 29, 2022)

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