

North of the Dead

Vince Salvatore

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Zombies prowl in North of the Dead, a novel in which human beings work to survive at any cost.

In Vince Salvatore's thrilling novel *North of the Dead*, a zombie outbreak in Canada forces an unlikely group to band together for survival.

Mick trudges to work on a dark, cold morning. When he switches on the lights, one of his waitresses springs out from the back and tries to rip into his flesh. Mike is forced to kill her; he flees and encounters more rage-filled cannibals.

All across Canada, on an otherwise peaceful winter morning, people are attacked and killed by similar abnormalities. In a dark twist of fate, those killed rise again to continue the spread of violence and death. Thus, a zombie plague spreads, forcing the survivors to gather together. Mick and others form an uneasy alliance, learning that the greatest threat isn't from the undead, but from other humans.

The novel starts off with the literal bang of Mick being attacked and forced on the run. A series of rapid-fire chapters are used to introduce the main cast before they gather into an impromptu home-base situation. Once they're together, the focus shifts from the undead to a violent division among the remaining humans. Little is known about the outside world; the intense focus on the Canadian survivors anchors the story.

The initially fast movement means that the characters and plot are underdeveloped upon introduction; little differentiates the healthy characters from one another, beyond that they are not zombies. Conversations between characters are undermined by repetitive phrases and indistinct voices, while raised voices and outbursts are signified through jarring capitalizations.

As the story evens out, though, Mick, his allies, and the zombies are fleshed out more. A horrific attack between rival survivors is an emotional addition that includes tidbits from their pasts, while a funeral scene—at a time when the survivors have little in the way of self-defense mechanisms, and an attack could occur at any second—helps to bring the community together and highlights the importance of their social connections.

Details like the bite of icy winds and the sounds of ominous footfalls help in setting scenes, instilling dread and tension. Still, the zombies fade into the background as the book progresses, and the mystery of how they came to be is unanswered. Instead, the survivors work to escape each other, and the novel comes full circle.

Zombies prowl in *North of the Dead*, a novel most focused on how human beings work to survive at any cost.

JOHN M. MURRAY (June 16, 2020)

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