

The Fury before the Fire

Bill Percy

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The small town thriller *The Fury before the Fire* follows a woman who fights to keep the peace in her town and in her life.

In Bill Percy's fifth installment of the Monastery Valley series, *The Fury before the Fire*, a deputy struggles to balance her personal and professional lives as she is thrust into a perilous leadership position.

It's the hottest summer on record in the small town of Monastery Valley, Montana, and tempers are flaring as high as the heat. A group of volatile and armed protesters have taken over federal land, and they refuse to leave until they see the land returned to the people of Montana. After an attack on the head sheriff at the hands of the protesters, Deputy Andi Pelton takes his place, sending her attempts at work-life balance crashing down.

Pelton leads the police force in resolving the standoff, but as the negotiations drag on, tension mounts, and the violence that Pelton struggles to keep at bay erupts. Amid the chaos, a wildfire breaks out, threatening the safety of protesters and citizens alike. As the danger of the fire and the protest circle closer, Pelton fights to stop them both before they destroy the people and the town that she loves.

The novel is packed from cover to cover with action, though the slow pace of the narrative does not match the energy of these events. Blow-by-blow accounts of each day are given, and nonessential information is shared in detail. The lack of urgency in the storytelling impedes the novel's impact; even the climactic events are conveyed in a too-casual manner.

Because the series as a whole centers on Monastery Valley and its citizens, the book leans on its characters to convey the town's sense of reality. But the cast is underdeveloped and so expansive that the people blend together, with few descriptions present to flesh them out. Many are constructed using small-town stereotypes: they are seen wearing Western garb and working ranching jobs. The conversations are unnatural, too—either filled with exaggerated slang and poor grammar, or too formal when it comes to the more educated townspeople.

Stronger is the novel's setting, which is established early on and with a solid sense of space. The book captures the isolated pasture where the protesters become quarantined, as well as the slopes of the mountains that the fire creeps up. While descriptions around these sites are plain and practical, they pair with vivid landscape imagery well. However, some of the word choices become stale as the same descriptions repeat.

Set in a small town plagued with troubles, the thriller *The Fury before the Fire* follows a woman who fights to keep the peace in her town and in her life.

MELISSA LANCE (September 14, 2021)

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