

## Together in a Broken World

**Paul Michael Winters**

NineStar Press (May 21, 2024)

Softcover (380pp)

978-1-64890-737-1

Two boys survive the world's end while fighting for their growing romance in Paul Michael Winters's post-apocalyptic novel *Together in a Broken World*.

Following global collapse, most of the population is either dead or zombified. The disease can spread in manners as simple as a scratch. In this world, eighteen-year-old Aiden delivers vials that may lead to a cure.

After an ambush, Aiden escapes to a remote town. There, he meets seventeen-year-old Zach, whose ingenuity keeps him alive. When Zach, who is desperate to rejoin his family in Seattle, learns that Seattle is also Aiden's final destination, the boys team up. Though thrown together by chance, they become akin to a determined found family.

Despite their complex mutual attraction for each other, there are obstacles: Aiden believes that harm will come to those who are close to him; Zach is afraid of abandonment. The book alternates between the boy's perspectives to explore the effects of trauma on survivors, which are exacerbated in a world where you must kill or be killed. Indeed, the context of abject loss forms the basis of Aiden and Zach's burgeoning romance, which is marked by a continual push-pull dynamic.

Still, the boys' chemistry fluctuates. In the book's more magnetic moments, they profess feeling an innate pull toward one other; they find intimacy and a moment of normalcy while bunkering down with a salvaged copy of *Star Wars*. But when he first encounters Aiden, Zach tells him to "drop your pants" as a security measure, looking for hidden weapons; it's an awkward moment in a book otherwise marked by more natural romantic tension.

In the action-filled novel *Together in a Broken World*, two boys find love with each other in a post-apocalyptic landscape.

ISABELLA ZHOU (May / June 2024)

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