



War Bunny

Christopher St. John

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War Bunny is a postapocalyptic fantasy novel in which everyone has value and is worth fighting for.

In Christopher St. John's fantasy novel *War Bunny*, a rejected rabbit wants to remake the world so that everyone has a place in it.

In this future-set story, human beings went extinct; in their absence, woodland animals adapted human objects and ideas to their own needs. In this setting, Anastasia, a mentally ill rabbit, is banished from her warren. Her family expects her to succumb to the inevitable and be eaten—"Glorified"—by a predator, a "Blessed One." When Anastasia fights back instead, she becomes an object of adulation for some, and ignites outrage in others (including the leaders of her former warren). As the stakes rise, Anastasia and her friends decide how far they're willing to go, and what rules are worth breaking, in order to build their new world.

The world building is intricate and nuanced, with various clans forming alliances and battling for control of the dwindling resources—and over religious doctrine. The rabbits established a rigid, hierarchical society in which early death is expected, even celebrated. Anastasia and her growing circle of allies rebel against this truism, earning the ire of predators and prey. However, the conversations between the predators about their prey's incredible changes in behavior are repetitive.

Anastasia is a complex lead; she never aspired to be hero, and she is uncomfortable with the attention her actions bring. Her rebellion starts as a matter of instinct, after which she struggles to find balance between two extreme ideologies: some want to never fight the Blessed Ones again; some want to kill the predators. Her inner turmoil is compelling, as is the fact that she has many physical altercations with foxes and wolves. Her friends—including Freddie, a timid orphan, and Love Bug, an arrogant ladies' man—learn to reconcile their own differences, too, aiming to better serve their common goals. Meanwhile, Anastasia's mother is rendered as a chilling opponent: outwardly friendly, she has a shocking capacity for manipulation and cruelty. The book's disabled characters are described in questionable terms, though.

Anastasia's environment is developed with the awareness that even sheltering burrows and inviting, sunny fields can hide dangerous enemies. Here, there is no such thing as a safe place; all scenes have the potential to become life-or-death struggles. Yet despite its dark circumstances and brutal fight scenes, the book's ultimate message is one of hope. In defiance of the odds and generations of indoctrination, Anastasia and company overcome challenges and prepare themselves for more exciting, harrowing adventures to come.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (August 18, 2021)

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