



# The Forest of Hands and Teeth

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

An infection has raged through the world, leaving a clear division in the human race between the uninfected survivors and the Unconsecrated, the living dead whose minds have been consumed and who seek only to consume others.

Mary's village has survived the infection under the care of the Sisterhood of nuns and the Guardians who work to control and protect the safety of the inhabitants. The fence surrounding the village keeps the Unconsecrated at bay but existence is fragile and tenuous and most villagers are content to follow the dictates of their protectors.

However, Mary remains unsatisfied by this suffocating and secretive existence and as its flaws are revealed to her she struggles against the emotional and psychological ties which bind her to this place of apparent safety. Then the Unconsecrated break free and Mary and her immediate family are forced to flee to search for security somewhere else beyond the world of the Unconsecrated, the Forest of Hands and Teeth.

The intensity of the story stems from its sole narrator, Mary and the claustrophobic situation in which she finds herself. The emotional conflict which she endures when her betrothal fails and she finds herself overwhelmingly in love with her former fiancée's brother is poignantly told and the daily life of the village is movingly and vividly portrayed.

The narrative sets a cheerless scene and the careful and often compassionate crafting of the living dead adds to the horror of the situation which Mary finds herself in. However, one of the great strengths of the book is its ability to make clear the resilience and determination of the human spirit, not only to survive but to search for those dreams which make existence whole. Mary realises her dream ? at a terrible cost ? and it is from this that the hope in the book springs.

Still, there are flaws ? key questions about the Sisterhood and the history of the infection, for example, are unanswered and this weakens the narrative. In addition, Ryan's style leans too heavily on clauses used as sentences which give an awkward feel to otherwise effective prose. These criticisms aside, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* is an assured debut in the cross-over market with the seeds sown for a sequel.

Running Order:

5

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