Zombie Fallout 2: A Plague Upon Your Family by Mark Tufo

If you haven’t read part one of the Zombie Fallout series, click here to read a review.

Welcome to Month of the Living Dead! A month-long look at novels that feature my favorite form of the undead: zombies. When I was eleven, my dad introduced me to my first zombie movie with Return of the Living Dead...and I couldn’t sleep for a week (I was a weaker child back then). When I was twelve, he gave me an unedited copy of the script for the original Dawn of the Dead just before I sat down to watch said film with him...and afterwards I was bitten and forever infected with a love of the walking dead. So, over the next few weeks, in celebration of the shamblers, I shall be hosting a veritable festival of my favorite festering flesh-feasting forays. Or, perhaps just some zombie stories I’ve read recently. So run to your local abandoned farmhouse or shopping mall, board up the windows, pull some trucks up to the gates and ready your machine guns, because this is going to be a long, intense month! And I hope we all survive to see another day without the dead.

Some of you may recall that some time ago (read: back in June), I had reviewed a self-published zombie novel called Zombie Fallout. It wasn’t the best thing I’ve ever read involving zombies, but it also wasn’t the worst – and as I recall it was the only novel that I read in an entire night. If I could equate Zombie Fallout to anything else, it would have to be the first Michael Bay Transformers movie: it was silly, had a ridiculous arsenal, plenty of action, and human characters you felt no connection with but by God did you love the set pieces! That being said, if Zombie Fallout is Transformers, then Zombie Fallout Part Two: A Plague Upon Your Family is sadly in line with Revenge of the Fallen.

One of the most serious offenses in the novel starts off in the very beginning: where we get exposition on Eliza. In my review for Zombie Fallout, I had mentioned that Eliza was one of the most mysterious – and therefore threatening – villains I had the pleasure of reading about. We knew nothing about Eliza and how she came to be; if she was an advanced zombie or something more terrifying. While I expected there would be some answers to my questions, what I never expected was how we open up with a three-part prologue that delves into her entire back-story, thus we lose most of the mystique and impact that would have come from learning these things about her over time. Yes, we would have learned about her past eventually, but to have her exposition rushed at us before the novel even opens up just feels like poor pacing. It’s like if you ordered a three-course meal and got your entre before the appetizers were even ready. What makes this even more glaring for me is that Eliza is referenced throughout the whole novel, but her presence is a bit of an issue.

The story proper starts immediately after the events in Zombie Fallout, where our heroes are being picked up by the survivors of Little Turtle. From here, the main drive of the story for Michael is that he wants to put as much distance between himself and Eliza as possible, as well as trying to find his remaining family. The other survivors wish to find their own families as well, which causes some contention within the group as they struggle over where to go next. It is here that we also meet up with a new character: BT. When we’re introduced to the new big
guy, he’s loud, obnoxious and constantly threatening that he and Mike will one day have it out. In other words, he’s the exact same as every other character with speaking lines. Oddly enough, BT is introduced to the audience after the events that brought him in contact with the group, which was a bit odd to me. The circumstances could have made for some interesting scenes and allowed for a more natural explanation for his attitude towards Michael Talbot aside from the general machismo thing that goes on between them.

From here on the plot becomes a long road trip marked with occasional stops that turn into hold-outs against the undead wherever they go. While these moments can be a bit tense and the action is well-described, they’re unfortunately broken up with constant detractions and analogies that go on for far too long, thereby eliminating much of the visceral impact. These distractions spill out into the rest of the narrative as well, which led to moments that were a struggle to make through. Most of the dialogue involves Michael making a comment or decision that infuriates everyone (especially his wife) or everyone (especially his wife) telling him that he’s the one to make a decision...and then berating him for his choices. Really?

The tone of the novel shifts at a constant pace from light-hearted humor and frat-boy style jokes to intense combat which is a testament to the author’s career as a Marine. It gives the whole piece a disjointed feel and could be distracting in its own right. Perhaps the shifts are Michael’s way of coping with the situation, especially as it becomes more desperate with every passing day, but it does little to pull the reader in. There are times where one would imagine the author was either trying to make a dark comedy or something in line with *Shaun of the Dead*, but it doesn’t have the same impact.

That being said, some of the jokes do work, and there is a rather elaborate anecdote that was one of the funniest parts of the entire series as of this point. As before, the fights are tense, especially the climactic Helm’s Deep-type battle at the end of the book, but other than that, there is sadly not that much to go off about here. Many of the characters are irritating, the overall tone is split in a jagged pattern and there’s a rather unhealthy fixation with bowel movements and bodily functions.

In defense of the book, the Talbot family does become stronger as everyone undergoes plot arcs that are meant to strengthen their relationships and establish their roles both in and out of the group. The story is very much one of their survival and continued unity in the face of an increasingly hostile world and powers much bigger than them. The Talbots are as far from a functional and sane family as one can get, which works for the story and gives a depth of realism. Most of the tension in the family revolves around Josh and his affliction, which is something we’ve seen in countless zombie tales to date. Albeit this one does have a rather fresh twist, which makes me wonder more as to the amount and methods of control Eliza employs on the undead.

In all, *A Plague Upon Your Family* is very much a “middle” book – while it gives the characters reason to continue on and that very reason is one most of us may have in a zombie-infested world, the narrative and characters bring much of it down. I’ve seen on Amazon that this book has rave reviews, so maybe I’ve totally missed something in here. I would also like to point out that I have absolutely nothing against the writer, Mark Tufo. In fact I hope he continues to write
because I see that there is plenty of potential in this world he’s making. Also, there’s an event that occurred around the one-third mark of the book that had me shaking my head in utter confusion and disappointment.

If you’ve read *Zombie Fallout* and enjoyed it, then you wouldn’t be remiss to pick up a copy of *A Plague Upon Your Family*. I applaud what Mark Tufo is doing with this series, but there’s just something about it that irks me in all the wrong ways. Still, I do have the third part and I’ll likely be picking up anything else of his if I can.

And that, my friends, is part one of Month of the Living Dead. We’ve filled the tubs, hoarded all the cans, and taken stock of all our ammunition. Join us next week as we explore something a bit different.

**Scores**

**Heroes**: Don’t really know what to make of them here. – 2.5/5

**Villains**: Eliza’s back-story is pretty interesting, but the execution brings it down. The zombies remain a huge threat. – 3/5

**Narrative**: Frantic, split between comical and dark, but the action is described well. – 3/5

**Plot**: On the road again! Sing it with me, Shrek! It’s nice to see the cast try to do the natural thing and look for loved ones. – 4/5

**Science/Magic**: Bit of a mystery with this one in regard to Tommy still, though Eliza is a bit more concrete now. – 4/5

**World**: It’s nice to see other locations, wasteland and otherwise. – 4/5

**Overall**: 3.5/5