



Aftertime

Sophie Littlefield

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Awakening in a bleak landscape as scarred as her body, Cass Dollar vaguely recalls surviving something terrible. Having no idea how many weeks have passed, she slowly realizes the horrifying truth: Ruthie has vanished.

And with her, nearly all of civilization.

Where once-lush hills carried cars and commerce, the roads today see only cannibalistic Beaters -- people turned hungry for human flesh by a government experiment gone wrong.

In a broken, barren California, Cass will undergo a harrowing quest to get Ruthie back. Few people trust an outsider, let alone a woman who became a zombie and somehow turned back, but she finds help from an enigmatic outlaw, Smoke. Smoke is her savior, and her safety.

For the Beaters are out there.

And the humans grip at survival with their trigger fingers. Especially when they learn that she and Ruthie have become the most feared, and desired, of weapons in a brave new world....

Aftertime Details

Date : Published February 22nd 2011 by Luna

ISBN : 9780373803361

Author : Sophie Littlefield

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Horror, Zombies, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Young Adult

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From Reader Review Aftertime for online ebook

Brandi says

This book is horrible. The synopsis says this is an arresting novel and I will never understand how this is so. The characters are barely developed, the explanation of events is not explained in a logical way, the author goes to such lengths in the descriptions that I skipped whole paragraphs, and the relationship that was supposed to be center to the story (mother/daughter) is merely filler for the "love" story. The whole thing made me angry knowing that I spent money on it.

I don't even think somebody looking for a book to read as filler between actual GOOD releases will want to waste their time on this. That was why I bought it. I was recovering from surgery and just wanted something to enjoy while passing the time that didn't make me want to weep, or think any deep thoughts (haha). I stopped 81% through the book because I just couldn't make myself suffer through it anymore.

This is clearly a review in which I rant far more than I bother to really discuss the novel I should be reviewing. I find that I have not been very good at reviewing lately, and I'm starting to think it is because I feel like I have been bogged down by crappy books.

My advise: Don't waste your time or money on this.

Michelle, the Bookshelf Stalker Queen of the Undead says

Made the Best Badass Zombie book list...

<http://badassbookreviews.com/the-best...>

I love horror books with lots of gore. I love zombie books. I love romance books. I love dystopian books. If you can put all my "love" into one book, I'm a really, really happy girl.

I'm a happy girl.

This book had it all and the author managed to put it all together quite effectively. The story starts simple enough. Cass wakes up and goes on a search for her daughter. There are zombies everywhere and something really big has happened to the world around Cass. Right from the beginning of the story, I was wondering:

- Why did Cass's back look like it was used as a cutting board?
- Why is the world so screwed up? Terrorism, aliens, natural disaster, wtf happened?
- What happened to Cass's daughter?
- Why aren't the Zombie's going after Cass?
- What's with the blue veggies?

We gain more information (and all my questions were answered) as Cass begins her journey to find her daughter.

What I loved-

The gore is very gory. The description of the zombies eating the flesh of the other zombies is perfect (along with all the graphic, gory details about the zombies throughout the book). Ok, I'm not a sadist but if I'm going to read a zombie book, I want my zombies to act like zombies. In this book, they definitely do.

I also enjoyed how the author slowly made the readers aware of what was going on. You had to pay attention. If you missed a paragraph or two, you missed important clues to why the world was so messed up.

What I did not like-

I did not like how Smoke was dropped into the story. He just seemed so unbelievable that frankly, in the world of zombies eating zombies, he was more unbelievable. He did grow on me and later on you do learn more about him. However, I think my real problem is Cass succumbing to him so quickly. She didn't seem the type.

Pacing-

The pacing was all over the place especially at the beginning.

Overall-

I really enjoyed the book. I think this book will appeal to so many readers because it crosses over so many genres.

Alisha says

Rating: 4.5 (*June 2011 Note: Really, it's a 5 star and favorite book. I just don't like changing ratings after I've posted the review; should've given the rating more thought before finalizing, but oh, well!*)

Quick Take: *This book had my pulse racing for much of the time I spent reading it. The lush visuals, the emotions, the mystery and (of course) the high chill-factor made this an absolutely wonderful read. I was so spooked and unnerved, but absolutely could not tear my eyes from the page.*

Review:

So, this book has an official blurb and all, but really I think the story as a whole somewhat defies brief description. The best that one can do is to describe the beginning, which is intentionally disorienting; the protagonist herself can barely gather her wits about her enough to make coherent thoughts, and even has a chunk of time missing from her memory. What's immediately clear is that the world--at least from the protagonist's perspective--is different; something hugely substantial has happened, and the desolate landscape is almost unrecognizable.

From the moment Cassie began describing her surroundings and checkered memories, I was hooked. She's a very emotionally (and physically!) damaged individual, and spends a lot of time thinking about her failings. Her main source of guilt is the fact that she does not know the whereabouts of her two-year-old daughter, Ruthie. This in fact becomes the main driver of the story; Cassie will stop at nothing to find her child. Politics related to a post-apocalyptic environment? The fate of the world? Not the focus here; it's barely even addressed, actually. This book is all about the emotions, motivations, and perseverance of the main character. Most other characters are unimportant, save for the contributions they make to Cassie's journey; in this way,

this book is very much an odyssey in the vein of...well, The Odyssey. ^_^

What's also found in spades is horror. The imagery used in this book ranges from violent and gory to chilling and quietly moving. Yes, there are zombies here, called Beaters. Indeed, there is much flesh being rent from bones. ...and yes, it all freaked the living daylight out of me. I contemplated putting the book down in a fit of whimpiness, but found it was difficult to do so; Littlefield really manages to draw the reader in with her descriptions, including the intensely grotesque ones.

The pacing of this book feels effortless; as in any good odyssey, there are moments of high-tension punctuated with some emotion and personal development. Cassie is sympathetic, and her internal struggles resonated easily. There is a romantic element in this book, though it by no means overtakes the story. I found that it was developed in a believable and understandable fashion; I appreciated that it wasn't overly sweet and dramatic, which might not have fit in with the tone and focus of the book.

So. If you decide to read this book, what can you expect? You'll find a fair amount of gore, violence and human desperation. You'll also find a vast physical and emotional journey that is both touching and haunting. This book will be the first in a series, though I'm not clear on how many books there will be in total or whether it will continue its focus on Cassie. Regarding the latter, I sure hope she remains the protagonist; I'm hooked on her personal story and will gladly freak myself out on flesh-hungry zombies to find out how she fares.

Update (Feb. 24): I've been informed that *Aftertime* is first in a *three* book series. The second book is entitled *Rebirth* and is scheduled to be released on July 26; the third book, *Horizon*, will be released on January 31, 2012; and a short story called *Survivors* comes out this July (and for a time will be available for FREE). All of them will feature Cass and her gang (Smoke, Dor, etc.). Wonderful, exciting news, in my opinion!!! ^__^

Wendy Darling says

2.5 stars. Meh. Maybe I've read too many great zombie novels recently.

This particular story takes place following the catastrophic fallout from biological warfare and genetic engineering, when survivors are trying to rebuild civilization. Cass Dollar wakes up alone in the wild foothills of California, missing inconvenient chunks of her memory as well as of her flesh. She immediately takes up with various different people on the quest to find her missing daughter Ruthie, a difficult task since it's now *Aftertime*, and the world is riddled with zombies.

I liked the idea of a mother searching for her child in the middle of chaos, so I was looking forward to reading *Aftertime* quite a bit. I found that I had a very hard time getting invested in this story, however, as something about the writing just seemed a little off to me. The narrative was all too frequently sidetracked by long, intrusive flashbacks that interrupted the flow of the action, and sometimes the timeline flips back and forth somewhat randomly even within a single chapter. Reading just the first 10 pages will give interested readers an idea of what the rest of the novel is like.

Cass herself is supposed to be something of an anti-hero, since the various info dumps tell us that she was abused in the past, she used to sleep with a lot of men, she used to be a drinker, etc., etc. What the flashbacks don't really tell us is what made her change or why she's a more sympathetic individual now. (view spoiler)

There's also an implied familiarity in the way that Cass is portrayed before we've had a chance to get to know her that I found a little confusing and rather off-putting. Many of her words or actions are overly descriptive ("Cold alarm traveled up Cass' spine") or portrayed as if they're very significant (she sucks in her breath, etc.), but since we've just been introduced to her, it's hard for readers to determine whether she's easily shocked or moved and whether we should feel the same on her behalf. Even as the story continued, however, I'm not sure we get to know Cass very well; we're told quite a lot about her past, but she never really reveals much of her present character until the climax of the book.

Call me hard-hearted, but I also wasn't all that moved by Cass' mission to find her daughter, either. Finding your daughter is crucial in theory, of course, but the way Ruthie is referred to in the book and the lack of regularity and determination with which Cass thinks of her makes Ruthie seem somewhat incidental. There's far more attention focused on Cass' instantaneous attraction to the male lead Smoke (who is a typical mysterious-and-handsome-hero-with-a-past-type), and I thought the excessive amount of time spent on this was extremely distracting in this kind of a story. As noted in the very long discussions in my status updates, their relationship wasn't even all that compelling. Aside from the suddenness with which their relationship kicked in, the ickiness of their unwashed, grimy hook-up scenes are pretty painful to read about, considering that Cass also has oozing open wounds on her back while they're happening. Not to mention the fact that they're both pretty filthy as well.

While I wasn't overly wowed by the set-up for the apocalypse and its aftermath--or by any of the fairly unmemorable characters--I did like the visceral descriptions of some of the bitey zombie bits. The idea of an infected person turning his head to bite down and rip away strips of flesh from his own forearm is a pretty great visual, and there's also some exciting stuff towards the end involving a very, very bad punishment for a disobedient nun and one scene where Cass finally decides to take matters into her own hands. But even that is ruined by the anti-climatic (view spoiler)

There are a lot of unanswered questions at the end of *Aftertime*, including why Cass' zombie-inflicted wounds have healed, so I'll probably read the sequel to find out what happens. But it will not be with nearly the same amount of enthusiasm or interest as I would have hoped.

Much, much better zombie apocalypse novels to devour:

The Reapers Are the Angels
Feed
Deadline
Warm Bodies

Hannah (PSIloveThatBook) says

MORE? MORE! @ P.S. I love that book!

THE WORLD: So I must admit I am not very familiar with post apocalyptic world besides what we see in

movies. Frankly I actually love this kind of setting but I didn't know many books that use it. Fortunately I got lucky because this book has exactly the type of post apocalyptic world I love most. Additionally it has zombies which are actually here called as Beaters. Okay they not really Zombies, they don't eat your brain, instead they eat your flesh but not muscle. Which I think is even worse because these Beaters catch you and drag you to their layers where they slowly chew your body and you are pretty much alive all this time because they start with you back and shoulders and then only in the end they starts moving to your face and considering that they eat only meat and nothing else your organs are pretty functional. So yeah horrible. I have no idea why Goodreads claim this is a YA book because it is so not! Anyways so we have Beaters and the world went down the hole but aside we also have these bad people who just pretty much are their for a Profite and they are called the Rebuilders, sorta let's create a functional society lies but in reality you either join us or we kill you. And this is not all, there are people who try to survive on their own, people who create this sort of shelter and so on. Also back to the Beaters, so they started as zombies but over time they are starting to form gangs and plan their attacks. Jup, scary as hell.

CHARACTERS: Our main character is names Cassie and she is the most flawed character I have ever met. Basically she is twenty something but her life has been a total disaster. Basically she was abused by her stepdad and her mom never really cared, she became an alcoholic over time, had a lot of random sex till one day she got knocked up but eventually her new baby Ruthie was taken away by social workers because Cassie could not provide and with her drinking problems and what not she was just a mess. This story really starts with Cassie trying to find Ruthie in all this mess, when the outbreak of Beaters started she got her girl back but then they got attacked in one of the shelters and Beaters took Cassie away but ended up not eating her flesh completely so she has these terrible scars on her back and she didn't get infected which is rare but yeah now she is on her way to find her daughter. Basically in one sentence I absolutely love Cassie. She is this terrible terrible woman who really did not lead her life well but she wants her daughter to have a better life and now with Beaters out there she is the only one who can protect her so Cass really does everything she can and cannot to find her missing baby girl. Okay next to Cassie we get introduced to Smoke, just a nickname, but he is this fighter who actually is not a fighter. Does that make sense? Hard to explain without spoiling. But all in all Smoke is cool, he doesn't judge and he helps Cassie which is all I need from him. There are of course many other characters, after all it is post apocalypse and everybody is just trying to survive...

LOVE: Cassie and Smoke develop relationship over time but I think most strongest love in this book is Cassie's love for her daughter. It is incredible what mother can do.

PLUS: I know this is a book and that this is post apocalyptic style but this story for some reason is very believable. I mean I loved everything about it but really sometimes while working alone I would look over my shoulder thanks to the creeps these Beaters give me.

MINUS: Cannot really think of anything. The religious cult maybe it was not bad but it as not exactly unique also.

OVERALL: Love love love the series. Already started book two and book three is on my TBR as well. Cannot wait to know more!

MORE? MORE! @ P.S. I love that book!

Katy says

This book just wasn't for me, which is sad because I love pretty much all dystopian. It had potential, but it was SO dull! It took me several days to read it - which is highly unusual for me - and even after taking a weeklong break from it to read some really good books, I came back to it to find my feelings hadn't changed.

I can't really put my finger on it, but I had a hard time staying focused on the book. I guess it wasn't just one thing but a bunch of different little things basically subpar to me. There wasn't as much action as I thought there was going to be, and when there was, I just wasn't into it.

And I felt the characters were kind of flat. I know Cass went through a hard time, but I didn't really sympathize with her. I wanted to say it's because Littlefield had set her life in Before to be so demeaning, portraying her as a slutty alcoholic. But that wasn't the reason either. I just didn't connect with her as I wanted to. And I felt her relationship with Smoke was just odd. They had chemistry, but I never felt the chemistry. Even the two sex scenes were kind of weird to me.

And the zombie concept wasn't anything special. But I find them a bit nauseating, the way they tore off strips of flesh - and only flesh - to eat and left their victims die a long, slow painful death.

I don't think I ripped this book up because it wasn't bad. It was just... uninteresting. I'm just a little disappointed because I really wanted to like this book, and I gave it so many chances to surprise me and grow on me, but it never did.

Kt says

Cass woke up brutally scarred with no memory of where she is, only having the horrifying thought that her daughter is missing. In a land mostly barren she makes her way back to where she last saw Ruthie. Her journey is long and hard as the landscape isn't the only obstacle. A government plant turned hoards of people into mindless flesh eaters called Beaters. In the last stretch towards home, she meets up with the mysterious Smoke. He quickly becomes her only chance at surviving to find her daughter as she realizes the Beaters aren't the only threat. It's the other survivors that are much worse, and if they find out what she really is, they won't hesitate to eliminate her.

This book was a very original take on the idea of Zombies. What I loved most about it was while the threat of the Beaters was very real, that wasn't the only thing standing in Cass's way. In fact, the people were probably more dangerous as the Beaters were at least predictable. Suspensions run very high, and almost everyone is joining one faction or another, and always questioning each other's alliances. I imagine this was probably a pretty accurate look at what could happen in the event of such a major fallout. It is in most people's nature to join together and be led. It is just unfortunate that the majority of the leadership figures turn out to be corrupt in nature.

Cass is probably the strongest, yet most broken character I have ever read about. Her past has huge skeletons in it, and her coping methods made her a serious addict. However, she never once flounders in her determination to find her daughter. The obstacles she faces are absolutely stifling, making it amazing that she is able to continue on at all. Perhaps her "changed" nature did give her some help, but in the end it all came down to her iron clad will and perseverance. She is so afraid to care for anyone, and give her past this is

completely understandable. However, her fear didn't stop her from showing compassion towards others, especially Smoke. Try as she might to just block him out, she quickly realizes that she actually cares for him. This story was as much about Cass's character growth as it was her journey to find her daughter, making it an absolutely incredible read.

The pacing of this book was excellent, as it more than kept my attention, yet didn't overwhelm. The last few pages of the book took off like a firecracker making me very unsure of how things would end. While it was a satisfying ending, I couldn't help but wonder at the abruptness of it, as I had originally thought this was a stand alone novel. I absolutely love these characters, so I was extremely happy to find out that *Aftertime* is in fact the start of a series. Make sure to check this book out, it will completely suck you in right from the start and make you really believe in a mother's love overcoming all obstacles; even the Apocalypse.

Vinaya says

BEST. BOOK. EVER.

Most of the people who follow my reviews regularly know by now that I'm a HUGE fan of Sophie Littlefield's work. Yes, I've read all of one book of hers, but sometimes you just *know* when an author has hit the jackpot in the talent pool. *Banished* is one of the most exciting YA books I've come across this year, and now I have another Littlefield gem to add to my collection, *Aftertime*.

I've been lucky enough to read some very interesting dystopian fiction in the YA category recently. The *Hunger Games* just blew my mind, and I'm hoping that Megan McCafferty's *Bumped* enjoys the success it richly deserves when it releases next month. But *Aftertime* is my first foray into adult dystopian fiction in recent years. The feel of an adult dystopian is very different; the writing is grittier, the atmosphere is harsher, and the characterisations are more explicit. And boy, does Sophie Littlefield shine in this genre!

Aftertime is based in a world gone to pieces. Bioterrorist attacks resulted in the first wave of destruction, with crops and domesticated animals being wiped out by bioviruses. The government then comes up with a lab-engineered crop, commonly called kaysev, that is intended to provide all the nutrition a human body needs to survive. At this point, the world is already struggling under the yoke of famine, plague and riots. Kaysev adds a new factor to the equation, the Beaters. When the kaysev seeds were airdropped over the entire country, a new strain mutated in California, called the blueleaf. The blueleaf initially causes people who consume it to become feverish and delusional; however, they eventually morph into unco-ordinated, flesh-eating cannibals with no hint of humanity left in them. Yes, *Aftertime* is a zombie apocalypse novel, but unlike a lot of books in this sub-genre that just make me want to laugh, this book is handled intelligently, in a way that sends cold shivers down my spine.

Cass wakes up in a field in the Sierra foothills with chunks of flesh missing from all over her body. She has no memory of how she got there, and her only aim is to get back to her town and find her daughter. On her way, she meets and hooks up with a tough, mysterious survivor, Smoke. Together, they set out in search of Cass's daughter, braving all the dangers of this new and unrecognizable world.

Littlefield gives no quarter when it comes to painting Cass's character. There is no prettying-up and white-washing her into a kick-ass zombie fighter with iron-plated armor. Cass is a recovering alcoholic, a victim of

sexual abuse, desperately fighting to stay sane and stay on the wagon. She has found, and still tries to find, numbness and forgetfulness in the arms of a variety of faceless men. She loves her daughter, and feels she has failed her, but she acknowledges that there was a time when feeding her addiction was more important than her child. There are times when she is tempted to give it all up and end her life rather than fight one more day. And despite it all, she emerges as a sympathetic, believable and very *real* person with an inner core of strength and goodness.

Smoke is an interesting character, although he takes a backseat to Cass's inner struggles. She tries over and over again to pigeonhole him, but he refuses to stay pigeonholed. Littlefield reveals little about him; he has a mysterious past that will probably be revealed in subsequent books, but for now, he plays a strong supporting role in Cass's desperate search. The romance between these two is a carefully-constructed thing. Neither of them are the type to fall desperately in love, but eventually, Cass's resistance is worn down by Smoke's unflinching patience and generosity. She comes to care for him, as he does for her, but there are still no dramatics or over-the-top emotional outpourings. Throughout the book, you can sense the subtle undertones of attraction and affection, but these are not the kind of people to fall headlong into love.

The world building is beautiful. Although the Beaters are chilling and fascinating, they are not the only players in this dystopia. They are only one of the factors. More important is the exploration of how human beings react in a world gone wrong. There are the aggressive, militant Rebuilders trying to carve an empire through sheer force, by bullying the weak and the scared. There are the squatters, the loners who live alone and refuse to leave their homes, staring death and destruction in the face with defiance. There are the scattered communities of survivors, banding together and trying to help each other out, the first people to give Cass a feeling of hope and belonging in a long, long time. Then there are the free traders, using capitalism as a commercially-successful way to provide scared and desperate people with the oblivion they need. And, of course, the Convent, a group of religious zealots with cruel and unusual ways of effecting their doctrine. Although each of these groups is scary and soul-sucking in their own way, there are little messages of hope and triumph of the human spirit in all of them. People who overcome their fear to display their humanity and help Cass, or speak out against the atrocities being perpetrated under the guise of providing succor.

I think one of the most heart-rending plotlines, for me personally, is the separation of mother and child. Sophie Littlefield plays on this emotion beautifully, leaving me praying with each turn of the plot that Cass will find her daughter NOW, find her safe and sound. She does a beautiful job focusing the reader's sympathy on this broken, troubled woman on a quest to redeem herself by finding her child. Littlefield deserves a standing ovation, and I'm looking forward to her next book with great anticipation! Do NOT miss this one!

NOTE: This book was provided to me by the publishers via Net Galley. This review is not influenced by any monetary or other considerations.

All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review courtesy of All Things Urban Fantasy

I'm unabashedly obsessed with the new AMC show *The Walking Dead* about the zombie apocalypse and the few remaining human's struggle for survival. It's shocking, and heartbreaking, and so beyond words awesome that my love for zombies has reached an all new high. I can't get enough. Which is why I'm

geeking out of my mind after reading AFTERTIME because I felt almost the same way reading it as I do watching The Walking Dead: Captivated.

The story follows Cass, a young mother and recovering addict, as she searches desperately for her daughter mere months after the mysterious infection set in and turned most of the population into ravenous, cannibalistic zombies. Her only companion is a reclusive man known simply as Smoke. He agrees for his own reasons to help Cass and together they brave a world that is barely recognizable anymore. Zombies carry off children to feast on in their nests, power hungry men seize what little society is left and begin Rebuilding it to suit themselves, cults thrive, oblivion is sought after by anyone sane enough to know what's happening on the streets each night. The horror is unimaginable.

This is the world the Cass wakes up in. Alone and nearly skinned. Desperate to find her daughter, terrified of what she can't remember, and fiercely determined to survive. She's like Terminator's Sarah Connor and Downside Ghost's Chess Putnam rolled into one. A deeply damaged woman with a seedy drug and alcohol hazed past full of dark alleys and strange beds. She's clawed her way out of addiction and has only one care in the world: her daughter.

The story is epic in scope. We get a real sense of the entire world ending and waking up to a nightmarish reality that few could have imagined. We never leave the POV of Cass, yet the people she encounters, both friend and foe, add their own piece to the Aftertime world. The dialogue in the first half of the book is understandably scant, but the story itself is startling and unputdownable from beginning to end.

AFTERTIME is hands down the best zombie book I've read all year. Hide your wife, hide your kids, and hide your husbands 'cause they eating everybody out here. Seriously. No word on the sequel yet, but AFTERTIME is the start of a planned series. So please go buy this book when you can. I have to know what happens next.

Sexual Content: Two graphic sex scenes

Tamara says

I'm not sure how I feel about this.

AH says

4.5 stars

A little disclaimer here – I am not a fan of zombie books. I do not actively seek them out. I'm squeamish. I tend to shy away from undead creatures that are afflicted with rotting body parts. (Why is it that their teeth seem to never fall out?) Zombies are not, and never could be, as seductive as vampires. Zombies just don't have the muscular physique of the average were. Zombies just aren't attractive – and definitely not sexy.

Imagine my surprise when I decided that I liked this book. Yes, it does have that Eww!!! Factor, but I could live with that. The story drew me in.

Aftertime takes place in California some time after wars, bioterrorism, plagues, nuclear bombs and other nastiness. The author doesn't really go into too much detail aside from the world's food sources were destroyed by bioterrorism. The population needed to eat something so a plant called Kaysev was developed. The unfortunate souls who ate the blue Kaysev plant soon became infected with some sort of Zombism and those zombies are now called Beaters. They run around all over the place terrorizing the humans that remain.

Government is gone. Lawlessness gives rise to all sorts of fringe groups and new types of societies. You have your survivalists, the loners that refuse to leave their highly fortified homes. The Rebuilders are a scary militia group. The Resistance is a secretive group made up of regular people who want to live in peace. There is also a quasi-religious cult with some pretty freaky customs.

I liked the main characters, Cass and Smoke. Both characters are flawed, bringing a lot of baggage from their lives before. Cass was a real survivor. Her background is a little sad. Abused as a teen, she suffered from addiction problems which resulted in the loss of custody of her child. Throughout the entire book, Cass remained focused on reuniting with her daughter. In her previous life, Cass was an outsider – she had few friends. I was surprised how easily she made friends and supporters in the aftertime.

Smoke's character was a little more mysterious. I loved how he took Cass under his wing, protecting her on her quest to find Ruthie. He is a natural leader. I hope that we get to learn more about him in the next book.

One of the things that struck me about this book is its message of hope. Even though the situation seemed dire, there were signs of hope – a small sequoia seedling showing that the earth was healing itself. Some people were developing immunity to the zombie infection, another sign of hope.

The series continues with a novella – Survivors and the next book Rebirth.

Check out my review on Badass Book Reviews.

Update: May 23, 2012 - Aftertime is now on the Badass Book Reviews' Best Zombie Book List. Check it out!

Ian says

Thank you Sophie Littlefield!

You are an awesome writer.

Yes it's a part of a series...and yes I've put it on my "stand alone" shelf...and I'm going to say, thank you Sophie Littlefield a second time because I can do that.

Laura Lulu says

Eh, 3.5 stars. I liked it, I loved the world building, I like Cass, I feel her pain, but I think I might have liked her more, and felt her pain a bit more personally if it had been written in 1st person, rather than third.

But what really kept me from giving it 4 stars was Smoke. I *wanted* to like him, I'm always a sucker for the stoic martyr hero, but he just felt so one-dimensional--I'm hoping he gets waaaaay more fleshed out in the second book. Which I'm starting now. So I did like it, but I didn't love it.

Crowinator says

Maybe 3.5 stars for the rushed ending.

This book surprised me by making me remember how squeamish I can be. I love horror, and I particularly love zombies, but it's usually only movies that succeed at grossing me out (no *Saw*-style torture porn for me!); books, for whatever reason, and however viscerally the violence is described, often don't have the same punch. Not so, *Aftertime*. The zombies in this post-apocalyptic, introspective thriller, about a woman who inexplicably survives a zombie attack and is now searching for her missing toddler, are repulsive and genuinely scary. That's because they don't just gnaw on people in vague ways, like in so many zombie novels – they carry their victims to their nest and keep them alive for days while they strip off flesh in ribbons and eat.

I honestly cannot think of anything more horrible than being alive for that.

Not only that, but the zombies, as they grow ill and turn, start out on themselves, stripping the flesh off their arms and other places they can reach. Some of the descriptions of what they've done to their own lips were enough to make me skim over certain passages. I haven't had to skim through sections in a zombie novel in a while, so I applaud Littlefield for actually going there and making me uncomfortable. The zombies' lingering memories of being human and their pack mentality is also an interesting angle to work with; descriptions of them trying to ride bicycles, or load things in wheelbarrows and push them around, or "affectionately" nipping each other's flesh, makes them pathetic as well as disturbing.

I used the word "introspective" earlier, and I think despite the gore and zombie danger, this novel is mostly about Cass's emotional inner journey. Before she can be the kind of mother she wants for her daughter, she has to come to term with her own weaknesses – her self-loathing that manifests itself in destructive promiscuity and alcoholism, resulting from childhood sexual abuse. Being fully aware of one's flaws doesn't mean one can always control or overcome them, so Cass's narrative shows a realistic amount of backsliding, rationalizations, and occasional self-pity. She has to consciously choose every day to keep fighting her poor impulses instead of taking the easy way out, and that rings true (though it can be tedious at times to rehash over and over and over). Her focus on her daughter and her pride in not giving up keep her sympathetic.

I'm not sure what to make of Smoke, the strong, mysterious good guy who decides, for reasons I can't fathom, to help Cass out. Maybe he's one of those guys who always does the right thing, no matter what, but there are hints that he wasn't always that kind of guy. He belongs in a old-timey Western as the grizzled but young sheriff who takes the law into his own hands, his rifle at the ready, sitting on a ridge watching over the land, the setting sun at his back. (You know, like the hero in Joan Wilder's romance novels in *Romancing the Stone*.) As such, he's not super realistic for me yet. One of the things that annoyed me most about this novel is we never learn anything about him by the end; as the second most major character, I would have liked more development.

Their romance, at the moment, seems too convenient for me, like the whole point of it is to give Cass a vehicle for healing (and who knows what Smoke's motivation is?), but so far Littlefield hasn't made it too

easy for them to connect, so I'm willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. I had a little trouble getting into the sex scenes because I was distracted by real-world concerns, namely that Cass is often mentioning how dirty and smelly and tore up she is and how she can't quite clean herself properly because of her injuries, and then the injuries on her back were always described in such graphic detail that I wondered how she could possibly handle such energetic sex. Seriously, it sounds like flesh is hanging off her back throughout the whole story. I think that is just me being stupidly nitpicky, though, but it did pull me out of the story. Maybe I need to read more adult fiction – you just don't get this kind of sex in YA and that's 80% of what I read.

As for the world-building, it's intentionally vague at first, with details doled out sparingly, so you have to pay attention to put the whole picture together. I was perplexed about the kaysev and the blueleaf for quite a long time, but it all comes together well. What I liked about Littlefield's set-up, if I have got it sorted out right, is that the zombies are an accidental byproduct of an already long-deteriorating world, and not the actual sole cause of the apocalyptic breakdown of society. Things had already gone to shit, and then the zombies happened. Figuring out how widespread the zombies are – Are they just in California? Is the state actually quarantined? Which rumors are true? – will be one of those elements I hope to learn more about in the second book.

The ending, after Cass infiltrates the creepy cult Convent to retrieve her daughter, happens too fast and a little too conveniently, but it made for some great scary scenes (and one totally gross scene that I did have to skip the details). My major complaint with this book is it just kind of ends, and I wanted a little more closure to their time at the Convent. Still, it's a great set-up for the next in the series and I'm looking forward to reading it.

Torzilla says

If I had to describe AFTERTIME in one word, it would be: meh.

I actually thought that this was going to be a YA initially. Not entirely sure why I got the YA-vibe from the cover, but you can imagine my shock when a sexytime scene came at about the 120 page mark (I think it was around there).

Let's start from the beginning, though. This was the first book I read following my month of not reading for pleasure by the end of the college semester. I was anticipating a great read, particularly because of all the praise Littlefield's new series has received thus far. Go figure I would be the one to disagree with the public, once again.

AFTERTIME starts off well enough. The back story and world building was excellent and the imagery made me nauseous because it was so descriptive and painted such a vivid picture in my mind. I was excited about this story and about this world because of the strong start. And while I was somewhat iffy about Cass' character--primarily who she was and why I should like her--I was willing to overlook the bad to continue reading about such a rich world.

...Then shit hit the fan and my enjoyment dissipated. When Cass meets some people who are holing out in a school, I began to notice that, while the descriptions and back story were great, the character interactions were not. They're a bit too wishy-washy for my tastes and never really give me a good sense of who these people are. Why should I care that they survived? Hell, why do I care that Cass survived?

A mother searching for her daughter after the apocalypse... great concept, and if it had been executed well, it would have probably been a great tearjerker too. Alas, there are more flashbacks and less Cass reflecting on finding her daughter. When Smoke suddenly becomes the focus of Cass' desires (and I still have *no idea why*), it seems as if Ruthie takes a backseat to Smoke. And of course our leading man was the typical broody, mysterious "hero." He seemed to be moodier than normal on the moody hero scale... which I wouldn't have minded, had he been a bit more three dimensional.

Even with all of these weaknesses popping up, I still intended on continuing AFTERTIME, but by Christmas, it was clear I did not want to read this story anymore. Unfortunately, Cass turned into a bipolar wuss. She went from being somewhat of a likeable character into a cry baby the second someone sent her the stink eye. Her reactions, her wanting to cry at every moment, her stupidity... all of this is what ultimately made me give up on the book.

So poor characterization, the hero is not well fleshed out, the romance is sudden and rushed (with no real reason showing why the two are attracted to each other), and Cass is borderline TSTL by the time I stopped reading. Maybe she progressed further, and if she did, then I am happy I stopped reading this novel. If she cleaned up her act, then my loss.

I hate to sound harsh, but there are plenty of other adult novels out there that explore the zombieapocalypse way better than AFTERTIME did. I would recommend checking those out before you do this one. If, however, Littlefield's novel has been on your radar like it was mine, it can't hurt to give it a shot, anyway. After all, it's just cynical old me going against the majority.
