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# The Dead And The Gone



## Synopsis

Susan Beth Pfeffer's *Life as We Knew It* enthralled and devastated readers with its brutal but hopeful look at an apocalyptic event—an asteroid hitting the moon, setting off a tailspin of horrific climate changes. Now this harrowing companion novel examines the same events as they unfold in New York City, revealed through the eyes of seventeen-year-old Puerto Rican Alex Morales. When Alex's parents disappear in the aftermath of tidal waves, he must care for his two younger sisters, even as Manhattan becomes a deadly wasteland, and food and aid dwindle. With haunting themes of family, faith, personal change, and courage, this powerful novel explores how a young man takes on unimaginable responsibilities.

## Book Information

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Series: Last Survivors (Book 2)

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars See all reviews (255 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #38,560 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious > Christian #45 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Siblings #55 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > New Experiences

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

I had the privilege to get an advanced reading copy and here is my review. Last year I read *Life As We Knew It* by the same author of this wonderful book. You can find the review for that book here. I enjoyed *Life As We Knew It* so much that when I heard about there being a companion book I jumped with joy. Being a companion book also means you don't have to have read *Life As We Knew It* to know what is going on. *The Dead & the Gone* is a completely separate story. *The Dead &*

the *Gone* uses the same premise as *Life As We Knew It*, but takes place in a vastly different environment that creates some truly gruesome challenges for the main characters. Before we were in Pennsylvania away from large bodies of water, away from large cities, and away from practically all the major problems of an urban sprawl. *The Dead & the Gone*, however, is the exact opposite, taking place in New York City. An asteroid has struck the moon, pushing it into a closer orbit around the Earth and thrusting the Morales family into a grueling struggle for survival. With Alex's parents gone and presumed dead, he has to learn to take care of his younger sisters while keeping his faith in God. But New York City is not an easy place to live in when the electricity rarely works, fuel for stoves is in short supply, and a bitter winter caused by increased volcanic activity thrusts them into extreme cold, famine, and an epidemic. Once again I feel that Susan has done a fantastic job bringing forward a truly powerful and realistic story about survival. The only thing SF about this story, again, is the impact on the moon, but the world we're presented is a modern world. The strongest element in this companion novel is a religious element. In *Life As We Knew It* religion wasn't really a big deal, and in some ways it wasn't even part of the story. For *The Dead & the Gone* religion is practically everything. Alex is a catholic going to a catholic private school in a family of catholics. He's devout, his younger sister Bri is devout, and his youngest sister is religious, though not nearly as much as her siblings. This has to be stressed in my review because this story is partially a test of faith. How does one hold on to a belief in God when everything around you is falling apart and your prayers aren't being answered? When people start committing suicide or dying on the street and nobody bothers to pick them up and take them elsewhere for days, weeks, even months, how do you deal with that belief in God? Even though Alex never does lose his faith, he does battle with doubts and feelings that he feels may be sinful. He must do things that he wouldn't normally do and doesn't feel comfortable doing (such as taking the clothes and personal items off dead bodies in the street to barter for food or stealing from abandoned apartments to do the same). Alex is a strong character and a character you can't help looking up to. He's charged with taking care of his two sisters practically by himself. Unlike in *Life As We Knew It*, everything quickly turns to darkness as food becomes incredibly scarce and the bitter winters set in with no way to heat up an apartment that, by default, has no fireplace (I think the quickness of this was somewhat intentional to pull away from the longer feel of the previous book). He has to battle with the decisions he makes every day as he does everything he can just to keep his family alive. It's harsh, it's real, and it's frightening to imagine that anyone would have to go through this. Would any of us survive? There are some significant diversions beyond location from the previous book. In *The Dead & the Gone* we see the main character, Alex, get the flu, and have to follow him through the ordeal

since he is the central character and the only character whose mind we get into. Susan does a marvelous job presenting a twisted, delusional view through the eyes of someone stricken with illness. The prose becomes disorienting just as the character descends into a myriad of hallucinations and merging of reality and bizarre fantasy. The 'diary' format carries over from the previous book, but here things are split up by day, but the entries are not diary entries, but standard prose entries, which diverges somewhat from the really internal feel and presents more of the grim reality of a New York City fallen from grace. There are two flaws. The first is the ending, which does leave a little to be desired. Alex has such a hard time getting his sisters out of NYC, but in the end we're led to believe that they must have gotten out. I found myself actually questioning that. What if that plan hadn't worked? What if things failed? Could they be dead now? Perhaps that is what is wanted, and if so, good job, because I'm wondering. To be honest, though, this flaw wasn't that big of a deal. I still loved the book. The other flaw with the book is that for those that have read *Life As We Knew It*, there isn't a lot of surprise. You know what is going to happen with the moon, you know some of the things that will happen (food shortages, dead, and disease). Granted, some things are different and the way certain elements come into play differ from the first book, but they are the same in a lot of ways. The book, however, is still engaging and certainly a great read. Despite it being 'predictable' in the way I mentioned, it does leave twists and turns you wouldn't expect. People die suddenly and without warning; reliable sources of food suddenly dry up; and illness takes hold. Regardless, this is one of my favorite books of 2008 already. I fell in love with *Life As We Knew It* almost instantly, and it was the same here. This book is put together so well that I found myself on the edge of my metaphorical seat (I lay in bed and read). I regret to say that I had to put down the book at one point when something happened that upset me. I mean this in a good way though. Very few books get me so engaged that when someone dies or something bad happens it actually has an effect on me. I think part of me was just upset about what had happened, but I won't ruin that for you, because it would take away the surprise. The pacing is perfect and the dates on the different sections are a great marker of time to keep you in the know. I sincerely hope that Susan continues writing these quasi-SF stories, these real life stories with a slight SF twist.

This book is well-written, and I again enjoyed the overall story. I say "again," however, because this book is very similar to its predecessor, *Life As We Knew It*. I knew nothing about *The Dead & The Gone* other than that it is the second book in the *Last Survivors* series. When I began reading, I was surprised to discover that this book didn't pick up where *Life As We Knew It* left off, but instead went back

to the beginning and followed a completely different family in New York as they experienced the same struggles that occurred from the "shifting" of the moon. I will openly admit that I was a bit disappointed that I wouldn't be continuing on with Miranda's story. I enjoyed reading her thoughts and experiencing what she experienced along with her. When everything ended as well as it could (all things considered) I was hopeful that her journey would continue and things would just keep getting better. Or, at the very least, that things would continue to be difficult, but that we'd still be able to experience that journey along with her. So imagine my shock when the narrative changed and I was suddenly hearing about Alex Morales. It was a challenge to adjust to an entire new family, as I had felt like I was part of Miranda's family, having been with them from the start. Even more, it was challenging to start at the very beginning, right after the moon had been struck, knowing all the terrible things that were to come. Don't get me wrong, "The Dead & The Gone" was still very good. It was interesting to experience everything from a different perspective, in a different location, with different people and be able to compare their individual journeys. But I will admit (SPOILER ALERT) that the Morales' journey was even more trying and heartbreaking, in the end. Nevertheless, the entire concept upon which this series resides is extremely interesting, and I will most definitely continue reading the remaining books. On to the next one!

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