

The Runaway: Escape or Curse? ft. Ben Bandera

The novel *The Runaway*, written by author and YouTuber Ben Bandera, is not just an engaging crime thriller but also a deep reflection on the effects of toxicity, abuse, and cycles of violence passed down through generations. In this interview, we aim to explore the author's intentions, the creative process behind the story, and the message he hopes to convey to readers.

1. ***The Runaway* is a crime thriller that goes beyond entertainment, addressing deep themes like abuse and toxic relationships. What inspired you to tell this story?**

Well, having been around the world a lot, and seen people in great distress, it showed me how much damage people can do to each other – and also, tragically, how some people then end up damaging other people by perpetuating the cycle, seeing themselves as getting revenge on the world, or simply because they need an outlet to vent...and it turns out to be a very destructive outlet. And I think we really need to break that cycle of abusers who create other abusers.

2. **The protagonist believes he has left his troubled past behind, yet he continues the same cycle of abuse and cruelty. How did you shape his psychology, and what were your sources of inspiration?**

Well, having met a lot of damaged people who have been hurt, then become the hurters, I imagined what one of those people would look like if they ended up becoming very powerful – and ended up slipping into the cycle of creating new abusers, in a sense, without even realizing it. For example, not continuing the abusive behavior physically, but continuing it mentally, by teaching another person – such as their child – that it's okay to harm people in various ways, because the world is cruel and bitter and people are out to get you. And then that child, in turn, becomes a tormentor. Maybe mentally but not physically. Maybe physically but not mentally. Or both.

3. **Your novel serves as a warning about how pain and violence can be passed down through generations. Do you think it's possible to break these cycles? If so, how?**

I think so, by a combination of compassion and tough love. Compassion in the sense that you empathize with what a person has been through – but if they start acting toxic, you tell them very bluntly that it's wrong, that it's immoral and it will just make them into what they supposedly hate.

4. **The title *The Runaway* suggests escape, yet the protagonist never truly seems free from his past. How did you choose this title, and what does it represent to you?**

To me, the title represents a certain tragedy of the human condition. That a person can physically separate themselves from a situation or place – run away, fly away, sneak off somewhere – but often never actually end up leaving that place at all, because they've taken baggage and damage with them that they're not truly aware of, then hoisted it on another person.

5. What is the main message you want readers to take away from *The Runaway*? Is there something you hope will change in people after reading your book?

I think something that disturbs me about this generation is that we're fascinated with criminals and transgressive people. I think we live in a world ruled by evil, cruel people, where we're either stuck in a nine to five drudgery or suffering in some way, so we ourselves get hateful toward the world, and we get sympathetic toward bad boys and anti-heroes – people who shake up what it means to be normal, people who say f the system, people who take what they want whenever they want – but we don't see that this is the opposite extreme; that you can oppose the system and the way the world is without wanting to burn the whole world down. And that these 'bad boys' and bad girls may be charming, attractive, sophisticated and even empathetic at times, but at the end of the day, they can be every bit as brutal as the people they claim to hate.

Through *The Runaway*, the author prompts us to reflect on difficult yet essential themes, raising uncomfortable questions and offering a perspective on the importance of breaking cycles of abuse. A book that leaves a mark and is sure to spark discussion.

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