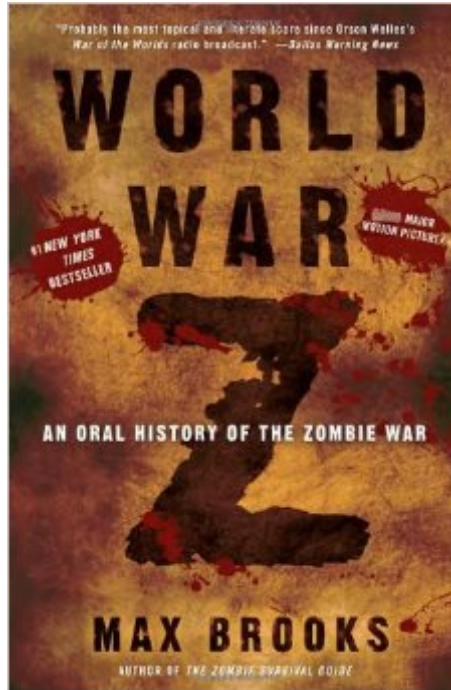


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# World War Z: An Oral History Of The Zombie War



## Synopsis

“The end was near.” “Voices from the Zombie War” The Zombie War came unthinkable close to eradicating humanity. Max Brooks, driven by the urgency of preserving the acid-etched first-hand experiences of the survivors from those apocalyptic years, traveled across the United States of America and throughout the world, from decimated cities that once teemed with upwards of thirty million souls to the most remote and inhospitable areas of the planet. He recorded the testimony of men, women, and sometimes children who came face-to-face with the living, or at least the undead, hell of that dreadful time. World War Z is the result. Never before have we had access to a document that so powerfully conveys the depth of fear and horror, and also the ineradicable spirit of resistance, that gripped human society through the plague years. Ranging from the now infamous village of New Dachang in the United Federation of China, where the epidemiological trail began with the twelve-year-old Patient Zero, to the unnamed northern forests where untold numbers sought a terrible and temporary refuge in the cold, to the United States of Southern Africa, where the Redeker Plan provided hope for humanity at an unspeakable price, to the west-of-the-Rockies redoubt where the North American tide finally started to turn, this invaluable chronicle reflects the full scope and duration of the Zombie War. Most of all, the book captures with haunting immediacy the human dimension of this epochal event. Facing the often raw and vivid nature of these personal accounts requires a degree of courage on the part of the reader, but the effort is invaluable because, as Mr. Brooks says in his introduction, “By excluding the human factor, aren’t we risking the kind of personal detachment from history that may, heaven forbid, lead us one day to repeat it? And in the end, isn’t the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as ‘the living dead’?”

•Note: Some of the numerical and factual material contained in this edition was previously published under the auspices of the United Nations Postwar Commission. Eyewitness reports from the first truly global war I found “Patient Zero” behind the locked door of an abandoned apartment across town. . . . His wrists and feet were bound with plastic packing twine. Although he’d rubbed off the skin around his bonds, there was no blood. There was also no blood on his other wounds. . . . He was writhing like an animal; a gag muffled his growls. At first the villagers tried to hold me back. They warned me not to touch him, that he was “cursed.” I shrugged them off and reached for my mask and gloves. The boy’s skin was . . . cold and gray . . . I could find neither his heartbeat nor his pulse.”

• “Dr. Kwang Jingshu, Greater Chongqing, United Federation of China” “Shock and Awe”? Perfect name. . . . But what if the enemy can’t be shocked and awed? Not just won’t, but biologically can’t! That’s what happened that day outside New York City, that’s the failure that almost

lost us the whole damn war. The fact that we couldn't shock and awe Zack boomeranged right back in our faces and actually allowed Zack to shock and awe us! They're not afraid! No matter what we do, no matter how many we kill, they will never, ever be afraid!"

• "Todd Wainio, former U.S. Army infantryman and veteran of the Battle of Yonkers

• Two hundred million zombies. Who can even visualize that type of number, let alone combat it? . . . For the first time in history, we faced an enemy that was actively waging total war. They had no limits of endurance. They would never negotiate, never surrender. They would fight until the very end because, unlike us, every single one of them, every second of every day, was devoted to consuming all life on Earth."

• "General Travis D'Ambrosia, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe

### Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was one of many who heard about Max Brooks' satirical guide book *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. Being a huge fan of George A. Romero's *Dead* series of films and just the zombie subgenre in general, I was intrigued by the release of this guidebook. From the first page to the last I was impressed, entertained, and hooked on Brooks' serio-comic take on how to survive a zombie outbreak. One section of the book which really caught my interest and has remained a favorite to reread over and over was the final one which details the so-called "historical" instances of past zombie outbreaks throughout history. From as far back as Ancient Egypt and Rome up to the late 1990's. My only gripe about that section of the book was that it was all-too-brief. I felt that it could've been made longer and even would've made for a fine book on its

own. Maybe I wasn't the only one to have wished for such a thing to happen for it seems that Brooks himself might have thought the same thing. His latest book in his trip through the zombie genre is titled *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* and it takes the final chapter of his previous book and expands on it. But instead of using past "historical events" to tell his story Brooks goes into the near future to describe what would happen if the zombies ever did bring the human race to the brink of extinction and how humans finally learned how to fight back and take back the world. *World War Z* is a fictional account of a worldwide outbreak of the living dead in the near future and judging from some of the descriptions of places and events in the beginning of the book it won't be too far in the future. *WWZ* is done in an interview-style format with each chapter consisting of first-person interviews of individuals who lived through the *Zombie War* from its initial outbreak to its final battles and mop-up operations. The sampling of survivors interviewed range from soldiers who fought the losing battles in the early going of the war when lack of information, outdated tactics, and illogical reactions to the zombie outbreak contributed to humanity almost losing the war. These soldier survivors explain how humanity became its own worst enemy when it came to protecting its own and combatting the growing ranks of the zombies. Some of the mistakes were unavailable as information on how to combat the zombies were far and few and even then most were unreliable. Some mistakes on the other hand many today would consider as unconscionable as war-profiteers and those willing to put keep a hold on their own power would sacrifice their own people to keep it so. There's also regular people who survived the war and who made great contributions during the dark days when humanity were pushed into isolated and fortified pockets of resistance as everywhere around them the zombie army grew exponentially. Some of these people were just children when the outbreak first began as rumors and unsubstantiated news reports. It's the words of those children now adults that show how war and conflict really takes the biggest toll on the smallest and helpless. One could substitute the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, The Balkans and even Africa in lieu of Brooks zombie war and this book would still resonate. There's a particular entry of how children left to their own devices to try and survive alone in the wild with zombies all around have turned feral to the point that their capacity to learn and develop into adulthood has become stunted or even halted permanently. Brooks' novel also puts in little veiled references to the events occurring now in the real world. There's mention of the unpopular war in the Persian Gulf as having a detrimental effect on the morale of troops once they returned home and how this helped make the initial fight to stem the tide of the zombies a losing proposition from the outset. There's also mention of Iran as having acquired a nuclear arsenal and how this leads to an incident early in the Great Panic of the zombie outbreak that speaks volume of what could happen if unstable states acquire

weapons of mass destruction. Brooks' also gives a prescient look into a near future where the US and Europe stop being the economic superpowers of the world and step aside for the economic juggernaut that is China and India. All these inferences of today's geopolitical and economical events mirrors what might just come into fruition. The interview format really gives the book a sense of realism despite the outrageous and fantastical nature of the book. As I read the book I was reminded of Stephen A. Ambrose's books on the men and women who fought during World War 2. Ambrose also used interviews and personal accounts to make up the bulk of his books like in *Citizen Soldiers* and *Band of Brothers*. Having a personal take on the events gave his books more emotional impact and really brought the emotions of the conflict to those who never experienced it. The same could be said about Max Brooks' *World War Z*. Even though it's fictional thru and thru it still made the reader think of how such an event, if it ever came to pass, could be so tragic, disheartening but in the end uplifting as it once again shows that humanity could still pull itself together through all its petty misunderstandings to survive. On a more stylistic point, Brooks' novel shares some similarities to Theodore Judson's sci-fi epic *Fitzpatrick's War*. Judson's book also tries to chronicle a future war which was shaped by religious and ideological forces. Where Judson goes way into the future of an alternate Earth, Brooks smartly stays to a more foreseeable future that readers of his book would most likely see happen; hopefully a much brighter and less-zombified one. Brooks' decision to forgo the usual linear and narrative style for this book also allowed him a certain bit of freedom to introduce one-shot characters in addition to those who appear regularly. In a more traditional novel such one-shot characters would seem useless and even unnecessary, but in this interview format it makes more sense since it's really just a collection of personalities trying to describe their own take of the Zombie War they lived through. Some people I know who have read advance reader's copies of the book (I was lucky enough to procure an ARC copy myself months in advance) have said that there's little or no talk of love and relationships in *World War Z*. I for one was glad that Brooks didn't try to force certain "interviews" where it talks of survivors finding love and relationships during the outbreak, through the war and all the way to the mop-up. This book chronicles tales of survival and horror. As much as a tale of love would've been a change of pace to all the death and horror in the interviews it would've been too drastic a change of pace. I would think that the last thing that most people would have in their minds when trying to survive day-to-day, if not hour-to-hour would be to stop for a moment and have sex, cuddle or other less-than survival behaviors. All in all, Max Brooks' *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* takes a serious look at a fictional and fantastical premise and event with a serious eye. The book manages to be tragic and terrifyingly so about how the world governments today could fail when confronted by

such a horror of tremendous proportions. Unlike his funnier first book on the zombie subject, *World War Z* shows the flaws and failings of humanity and how it almost led to its extinction, but it also shows humanity's stubbornness in the face of total annihilation and how it could come together in cooperation to not just survive but take back the world. In times of extreme adversity man can be brought to his knees but also show his resilience. A great novel and one that deserves reading from not just fans of the horror and zombie subgenre, but those who enjoy taking a peek into what could be, no matter how outrageous.

Other reviewers are correct that Brooks approaches the problem posed by a zombie issue as a problem to be solved within the structure of modern global politics. In my opinion, the approach of focusing on the response to the zombie plague is more sophisticated and more timely than making an allegory of the zombies themselves. It was Romero who took the voodoo myth of the reanimated corpse and popularized an idea of the zombie as a vessel for a communicable plague. He identified a fundamental anxiety and created new monster in response to modern anxieties. However, his use of the zombies as a critique of consumer culture isn't as fresh an observation as it might have been in the 70s, which is the most pertinent criticism of the recent "*Dawn of the Dead*" remake. To the modern audience, the idea of zombies carries undercurrents of AIDS, biological warfare, and terrorism, and Brooks is one of the first to recognize and tap into that in an intelligent way. He's taken a specialized, genre subject and elevated it here to something that is literary. And while there will certainly be some who will be disappointed not to find the pages filled with endless descriptions of severed limbs and smashed brains, Brooks lays on enough of the biological details to keep the subject from becoming abstract, while keeping his focus aimed on something more significant. As Brooks envisions it, the zombie plague encompasses the threat of terrorism and global war, natural catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina or the devastating tsunami, and global disease scares like avian flu and SARS. There are two outcomes of a story about a zombie plague; either it consumes and annihilates humanity, or it is contained by the organized action of something like a government. As a domestic political parable, Brooks doesn't throw any hard punches. He envisions America triumphing over the zombies under a national unity government of both parties, with Colin Powell and Howard Dean as president and vice president respectively. Powell and Dean are not named but are clearly identified, with Dean providing a narrative, in which he is identified as a "whacko" retired to Burlington, Vermont. He makes allusion to his rising political star and subsequent "meltdown," and mentions the president's military training and Jamaican relatives. I also think some readers may have misinterpreted the narratives about Israel. As I understood Brooks's narrative, in his "near

future" Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from the West Bank behind a security barrier and the Palestinians had declared statehood in the territories. Brooks sees Israel as being the first nation to directly address the zombie outbreak by declaring a national quarantine, effectively made possible by the much-criticized barriers. Certainly Brooks's imagining of these events has a political undercurrent, but I'd see it as a center-right. While early in the book, a showy exertion of American military technology proves useless against the inexorable tide of the undead, but later on, it is the American military that adapts and develops the techniques to defeat the zombies. Some may find it politically offensive that Brooks approaches the zombies as a problem simultaneously emerging globally, and paints the response to the problem from the perspective of people from various countries. However, the approach to emerging problems like communicable disease, terrorism and climate change as global has been broadly accepted by all but the most polar extremes of the political spectrum. Several of the ideas are legitimately controversial. Brooks envisions Russia organizing as a sort of neo-Tsarist theocracy, and China pushing back the zombie tide only after a civil war which removes its establishment. Nuclear exchange occurs between Iran and Pakistan, emerging from a dispute over refugees from the plague, and Brooks explains this from the perspective of an Iranian diplomat who wryly suggests that traditional enemies have the diplomatic mechanisms necessary to prevent nuclear war, while traditional allies would not be able to communicate in a dispute growing from a crisis. The policy, implemented globally, which saves humanity is also disturbing, and Brooks treats it as such. Formulated by a calculating, almost sociopathic former policy-maker from apartheid South Africa, the plan calls for the abandonment of large swaths of the uninfected population to serve as bait to distract the zombies, while the military establishment and necessary personnel retreated to and secured defensible "safe zones." Perhaps Brooks's most radical position is the notion that the trappings of modern society must be abandoned in this kind of crisis. Professionals from the modern American service economy are re-trained by their former plumbers and housekeepers to perform the kind of tasks necessary in the wake of the zombie induced economic crash. The military abandons its high-tech weaponry and communications mechanisms in favor of single-shot rifles, revolutionary-era firing formations, highly trained dogs, and multipurpose shovels called Lobotomizers that can be used like axes to decapitate zombies. In Europe, refugees ride out the zombie plague by holing up in old castles and fighting off the undead with medieval weapons pilfered from museums. A brilliant Indian general fights off the zombies by positioning his soldiers in a square formation reminiscent of the ancient Greek phalanx. Ultimately, Brooks, whose previous book explored a similar theme and managed to achieve humor by taking the hypothetical problem extremely seriously, invites audiences to really treat the idea of zombies

seriously by approaching them realistically, both as a military problem and a political crisis.

Like several other reviewers, I read and enjoyed Max Brooks' 'Zombie Survival Guide', but I was skeptical as to whether he could strike gold twice in a row. Much to my satisfaction, the answer was yes. World War Z isn't so much a novel as it is a collection of very personal recollections of people who have lived through - literally - hell on earth. In a way, it reminded me of news footage of these walls you see where, during a civil war, or natural disaster, people go and leave notes for loved ones, hoping someone, anyone, will see them. Every time I see something like that, it strikes me as hopeless and desperate, but at the same time noble and uplifting. In short, what makes us human. This book gave me the same reaction. I preordered it from , received it this morning, and finished it about an hour ago. I wish I'd rationed it out a bit, because I didn't want that feeling to end - the feeling of reading the accounts of some of the bravest souls who (n)ever walked the earth. The only other book I've read that comes close to this in 'feel' is Warday, by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka. But even that is too one-sided; the authors' own opinions and views are clearly dominant. In World War Z, each individual vignette is unique and special; from Tibetan smugglers to dirigible pilots to ex-politicians, each 'interview' has its own distinct voice. In closing, I'd just like to say that while George Romero may be the father of the 'zombie genre', Max Brooks may well exceed him. Blasphemy? Nope. Just my opinion. One that is hopefully shared by millions of others. PS: Here's hoping they don't butcher it when they make the movie! :D

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