

= World War Z =

World War Z : An Oral History of the Zombie War (2006) is an apocalyptic horror novel by Max Brooks . The novel is a collection of individual accounts narrated by an agent of the United Nations Postwar Commission , following the devastating global conflict against the zombie plague . Other passages record a decade @-@ long desperate struggle , as experienced by people of various nationalities . The personal accounts also describe the resulting social , political , religious , and environmental changes .

World War Z is a follow @-@ up to Brooks ' " survival manual " The Zombie Survival Guide (2003) , but its tone is much more serious . It was inspired by The Good War : An Oral History of World War Two (1984) by Studs Terkel , and by the zombie films of George A. Romero . Brooks used World War Z to comment on government ineptitude and American isolationism , while also examining survivalism and uncertainty . The novel was a commercial hit and was praised by most critics .

Its audiobook version , performed by a full cast including Alan Alda , Mark Hamill , and John Turturro , won an Audie Award in 2007 . A film inspired by the novel , directed by Marc Forster and starring Brad Pitt , was released in 2013 .

= = Plot = =

The story is told in the form of a series of interviews conducted by the narrator , Max Brooks , an agent of the United Nations Postwar Commission . Although the exact origin of the plague is unknown , a young boy from a village in China is identified as the plague 's official patient zero . The boy 's case marks the point where the Chinese government begins to take measures to cover up the disease , including generating a crisis with Taiwan to mask their activities . Nevertheless , the plague still manages to spread to various nations by human trafficking , refugees and the black market organ trade . Initially , these nations were able to cover up their smaller outbreaks , until a much larger outbreak in South Africa brings the plague to public attention .

As the infection spreads , Israel abandons the Palestinian territories and initiates a nationwide quarantine , closing its borders to everyone except uninfected Jews and Palestinians . Its military then puts down an ultra @-@ Orthodox uprising , which is later referred to as an Israeli civil war . The United States does little to prepare because it is overconfident in its ability to suppress any threat . Although special forces teams contain initial outbreaks , a widespread effort never starts : the nation is deprived of political will by " brushfire wars " , and a widely distributed and marketed placebo vaccine creates a false sense of security .

As many more areas around the globe fall to infection , a period known as the " Great Panic " begins . Pakistan and Iran destroy each other in a nuclear war , after the Iranian government attempts to stem the flow of refugees fleeing through Pakistan into Iran . After zombies overrun New York City , the U.S. military sets up a high @-@ profile defense in the nearby city of Yonkers . The " Battle of Yonkers " is a disaster ; modern weapons and tactics prove ineffective against zombies , as the enemy has no self @-@ preservation instincts and can only be stopped if shot through the head . The unprepared and demoralized soldiers are routed on live television . Other countries suffer similarly disastrous defeats , and human civilization teeters on the brink of destruction .

In South Africa , the government adopts a contingency plan drafted by apartheid @-@ era intelligence consultant Paul Redeker . It calls for the establishment of small sanctuaries , leaving large groups of survivors abandoned in special zones in order to distract the undead and allowing those within the main safe zone time to regroup and recuperate . Governments worldwide assume similar plans or relocate the populace to safer foreign territory , such as the attempted complete evacuation of the Japanese archipelago to Kamchatka . Because zombies freeze solid in severe cold , many civilians in North America flee to the wildernesses of northern Canada and the Arctic , where eleven million people die of starvation and hypothermia . It is implied that some turn to cannibalism to survive ; further interviews from other sources imply that cannibalism occurred in areas of the United States where food shortages occurred . The three remaining astronauts in the International Space Station survive the war by salvaging supplies from the abandoned Chinese

space station and maintain some military and civilian satellites using an orbital fuel station . A surviving member of the ISS crew describes " mega " swarms of zombies on the American Great Plains and Central Asia , and how the crisis affected Earth 's atmosphere .

The U.S. eventually establishes safe zones west of the Rocky Mountains and spends much of the next decade eradicating zombies in that region . All aspects of civilian life are devoted to supporting the war effort against the pandemic . Much of it resembles total war strategies : rationing of fuel and food , cultivation of private gardens , and civilian neighborhood patrols . The U.S. government also initiates a " Re @-@ education Act " to train the civilian population for the war effort and restore order ; the people with skills such as carpentry and construction find themselves more valuable than people with managerial skills .

Seven years after the outbreak began , a conference is held off the coast of Honolulu , aboard the USS Saratoga , where most of the world 's leaders argue that they can outlast the zombie plague if they stay in their safe zones . The U.S. President , however , argues for going on the offensive . Determined to lead by example , the U.S. military reinvents itself to meet the specific strategic requirements of fighting the undead : using semi @-@ automatic , high @-@ power rifles and volley firing , focusing on head shots and slow , steady rates of fire (a tactic " re @-@ invented " by the Indian Army during the Great Panic) ; and devising a multipurpose hand tool , the " Lobotomizer " or " Lobo " (described as a combination of a shovel and a battle axe) , for close @-@ quarters combat . The military , backed by a resurgent American wartime economy , began the three @-@ year @-@ long process of retaking the contiguous United States from both the undead as well as groups of hostile human survivors . Prewar military tactics and equipment are mentioned as being employed to deal with sometimes well @-@ armed and organized human criminal or rebel opposition .

Ten years after the official end of the zombie war , millions of zombies are still active , mainly on the ocean floor or on snow line islands . A democratic Cuba has become the world 's most thriving economy . Following a civil war that saw use of nuclear weapons , China has become a democracy and is now known as the " Chinese Federation " . Tibet is freed from Chinese rule and hosts Lhasa , the world 's most populated city . Following a religious revolution and the revival of Russian orthodoxy , Russia is now an expansionist theocracy known as the Holy Russian Empire . Owing to the fact that many young Russians either became zombies , were infected with HIV , or died due to drugs , the government has initiated a " breeding " program , with the remaining fertile women implied to be coercively impregnated to raise the birthrate . North Korea is completely empty , with the entire population presumed to have disappeared into underground bunkers .

The situation in the British Isles is not entirely clear in the novel , although Ireland may have escaped the worst of the outbreak . Members of the British Royal Family had fled to Ireland and the Isle of Man , following the military retreat to the Antonine Wall , and now exports oil from a reserve under Windsor Castle where the Queen held out for the war 's duration , refusing to flee with her relatives . The Papacy established a wartime refuge in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Armagh . In France , the Palace of Versailles was the site of a massacre and has been burned to the ground ; military losses were particularly high while clearing the catacombs underneath Paris because the catacombs housed nearly a quarter of a million refugees during the early stages of the war , all of whom became zombies . Iceland has been completely depopulated and remains the world 's most heavily infested country .

The Israelis and Palestinians have made peace , and the former occupied territories have been renamed " Unified Palestine " . Mexico is now known as " Aztlán " . Several countries are described as having revised borders due to the " dumping " of convicts into infected zones ; these convicts rose to command " powerful fiefdoms " that later became independent states . A so @-@ called " Pacific Continent " appears to encompass previously uninhabited islands as well as ships rendered immobile due to lack of fuel . For unknown reasons , the Saudi Royal Family destroyed the oil fields in Saudi Arabia .

The United Nations fields a large military force to eliminate the remaining zombies from overrun areas , defeat hordes that surface from the ocean floor , and kill frozen zombies before they unfreeze . It is stated that previously eradicated diseases have made a comeback and that global

life expectancy is greatly reduced as the world starts over from where it began .

= = Development = =

Brooks designed *World War Z* to follow the " laws " set up in his earlier work , *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) , and explained that the guide may exist in the novel 's fictional universe . The zombies of *The Zombie Survival Guide* are human bodies reanimated by an incurable virus (*Solanum*) , devoid of intelligence , desirous solely of consuming living flesh , and cannot be killed unless the brain is destroyed . Decomposition will eventually set in , but this process takes longer than for an uninfected body and can be slowed by effects such as freezing . Although zombies do not tire and are as strong as the humans they infect , they are slow @-@ moving and incapable of planning or cooperation in their attacks . Zombies usually reveal their presence by moaning .

Brooks discussed the cultural influences on the novel . He claimed inspiration from " *The Good War* " : *An Oral History of World War Two* (1984) by Studs Terkel , stating : " [Terkel 's book is] an oral history of World War II . I read it when I was a teenager and it 's sat with me ever since . When I sat down to write *World War Z : An Oral History of the Zombie War* , I wanted it to be in the vein of an oral history . " Brooks also cited renowned zombie film director George A. Romero as an influence and criticized *The Return of the Living Dead* films : " They cheapen zombies , make them silly and campy . They 've done for the living dead what the old *Batman* TV show did for *The Dark Knight* . " Brooks acknowledged making several references to popular culture in the novel , including one to alien robot franchise *Transformers* , but declined to identify the others so that readers could discover them independently .

Brooks conducted copious research while writing *World War Z*. The technology , politics , economics , culture , and military tactics were based on a variety of reference books and consultations with expert sources . Brooks also cites the U.S. Army as a reference on firearm statistics .

= = Analysis = =

= = = Social commentary = = =

Reviewers have noted that Brooks uses *World War Z* as a platform to criticize government ineptitude , corporate corruption , and human short @-@ sightedness . At one point in the book , a Palestinian refugee living in Kuwait refuses to believe the dead are rising , fearing it is a trick by Israel . Many American characters blame the United States ' inability to counter the zombie threat on low confidence in their government due to conflicts in the Middle East .

Brooks shows his particular dislike of government bureaucracy . For example , one character in the novel tries to justify lying about the zombie outbreak to avoid widespread panic , while at the same time failing to develop a solution for fear of arousing public ire . He has also criticized American isolationism :

= = = Themes = = =

= = = = Survivalism = = = =

Survivalism and disaster preparation are prevalent themes in the novel . Several interviews , especially those from the United States , focus on policy changes designed to train the surviving Americans to fight the zombies and rebuild the country . For example , when cities were made to be as efficient as possible in order to fight the zombies , the plumber could hold a higher status than the former C.E.O. ; when the ultra @-@ rich hid in their homes , which had been turned into fortified compounds , they were overwhelmed by others trying to get in , leading to mass slaughter .

Throughout the novel , characters demonstrate the physical and mental requirements needed to survive a disaster . Brooks described the large amount of research needed to find optimal methods for fighting a worldwide zombie outbreak . He also pointed out that Americans like the zombie genre because they believe they can survive anything with the right tools and talent .

= = = = Fear and uncertainty = = = =

Brooks considers the theme of uncertainty central to the zombie genre . He believes that zombies allow people to deal with their own anxiety about the end of the world . Brooks has expressed a deep fear of zombies :

This mindlessness is connected to the context in which Brooks was writing . He declared : " at this point we 're pretty much living in an irrational time " , full of human suffering and lacking reason or logic . When asked in a subsequent interview about how he would compare terrorists with zombies , Brooks said :

= = Reception = =

Reviews for the novel have been generally positive . Gilbert Cruz of Entertainment Weekly gave the novel an " A " rating , commenting that the novel shared with great zombie stories the use of a central metaphor , describing it as " an addictively readable oral history . " Steven H. Silver identified Brooks ' international focus as the novel 's greatest strength and commented favorably on Brooks ' ability to create an appreciation for the work needed to combat a global zombie outbreak . Silver 's only complaint was with " Good @-@ Byes " ? the final chapter ? in which characters get a chance to give a final closing statement . Silver felt that it was not always apparent who the sundry , undifferentiated characters were . The Eagle described the book as being " unlike any other zombie tale " as it is " sufficiently terrifying for most readers , and not always in a blood @-@ and @-@ guts way , either . " Keith Phipps of The A.V. Club stated that the format of the novel makes it difficult for it to develop momentum , but found the novel 's individual episodes gripping . Patrick Daily of the Chicago Reader said the novel transcends the " silliness " of The Zombie Survival Guide by " touching on deeper , more somber aspects of the human condition . " In his review for Time Out Chicago , Pete Coco declared that " [b] ending horror to the form of alternative history would have been novel in and of itself . Doing so in the mode of Studs Terkel might constitute brilliance . "

Ron Currie Jr. named World War Z one of his favorite apocalyptic novels and praised Brooks for illustrating " the tacit agreement between writer and reader that is essential to the success of stories about the end of the world ... [both] agree to pretend that this is not fiction , that in fact the horrific tales of a war between humans and zombies are based in reality . " Drew Taylor of the Fairfield County Weekly credited World War Z with making zombies more popular in mainstream society .

The hardcover version of World War Z spent four weeks on the New York Times Best Seller list , peaking at number nine . By November 2011 , according to Publishers Weekly , World War Z had sold one million copies in all formats .

= = Audiobook = =

Random House published an abridged audiobook in 2007 , directed by John Mc Elroy and produced by Dan Zitt , with sound editing by Charles De Montebello . The book is read by Brooks but includes other actors taking on the roles of the many individual characters who are interviewed in the novel . Brooks ' previous career in voice acting and voice @-@ over work meant he could recommend a large number of the cast members .

On May 14 , 2013 , Random House Audio released a lengthier audiobook titled World War Z : The Complete Edition (Movie Tie @-@ in Edition) : An Oral History of the Zombie War . It contains the entirety of the original , abridged audiobook , as well as new recordings of each missing segment . A separate , additional audiobook containing only the new recordings not found in the original audiobook was released simultaneously as World War Z : The Lost Files : A Companion to the

Abridged Edition .

== Cast ==

* Unabridged edition

== Reception ==

In her review of the audiobook for *Strange Horizons* , Siobhan Carroll called the story " gripping " and found the listening experience evocative of Orson Welles 's famous radio narration of *The War of the Worlds* (broadcast October 30 , 1938) . Carroll had mixed opinions on the voice acting , commending it as " solid and understated , mercifully free of ' special effects ' and ' scenery chewing ' overall " , but lamenting what she perceived as undue cheeriness on the part of Max Brooks and inauthenticity in Steve Park 's Chinese accent . Publishers Weekly also criticized Brooks ' narration , but found that the rest of the " all @-@ star cast deliver their parts with such fervor and intensity that listeners cannot help but empathize with these characters " . In an article in *Slate* concerning the mistakes producers make on publishing audiobooks , Nate DiMeo used *World War Z* as an example of dramatizations whose full casts contributed to making them " great listens " and described the book as a " smarter @-@ than @-@ it @-@ has @-@ any @-@ right @-@ to @-@ be zombie novel " . The *World War Z* audiobook won the 2007 Audie Award for Multi @-@ Voiced Performance and was nominated for Audiobook of the Year .

== Film adaptation ==

In June 2006 , Paramount Studios secured the film rights for *World War Z* for Brad Pitt 's production company , Plan B Entertainment , to produce . The screenplay was written by J. Michael Straczynski , with Marc Forster directing and Pitt starring as the main character , UN employee Gerry Lane . Despite being the draft that got the film green @-@ lit , Straczynski 's script was tossed aside , so that production , which was to begin at the start of 2009 , was delayed while the script was completely re @-@ written by Matthew Michael Carnahan to set the film in the present , leaving behind much of the book 's premise to make it more of an action film . In a 2012 interview , Brooks claimed the film now had nothing in common with the novel other than the title . Filming commenced mid @-@ 2011 , and the film was released in June 2013 .