
The power of oral history revealed through fictional anecdotes in World War Z

World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War is a book written by Max Brooks in 2006. It is a sequel of his 2003 book, The Zombie Survival Guide. The book is represented like a collection of anecdotes, rather than narrative. Brooks is in the role of an agent of the United Nations postwar commission. His report was published a decade after ten-year Zombie War.

There are a lot of monsters around, both imaginary and not. Zombie still remains the scariest one. Even the term “monster” could seem mild if rendering it to this crumbling, feeble, flesh-eating ghoul. However, zombies do not actually exist. It is just a product of one’s imagination. Brooks takes this image as a metaphor to say that people are not prepared to such kind of a war. The plague spreads in leaps and bounds. It becomes clear that there are no safe places in the world. It is also easily to understand that modern tactics of warfare are not effective. People cannot fight zombies as long as the cerebrum of monsters is intact. Even with the head cut off these monsters keep snapping and infecting everybody. Uninfected people, even the best warriors, cannot effectively defeat zombies; the number of “infected” people increases not even from day to day, but from minute to minute.

When zombies attack people, the monsters reveal no fight or flight reaction to danger. If there is risk as identified by the humans who stayed alive and unbiten, they related that zombies show no recognition of it. Zombies have no wish to protect these monsters or to be responsible for zombies as species. Victims turned survivors in one moment and consider zombies as inexorable, horrible, dreadful mass of “walking dead”. Brooks gives a perfect image of how each segment of society withstands zombies. For example, a group of extra-rich people makes out a reality show of this war, demonstrating it to less-rich as the world is being demolished. In their turn, these ordinary people turned warriors, activists, and, finally, survivors. People have too little information to kill a zombie effectively. Unfortunately, in most cases government in any country is inactive. It is an inexcusable omission, which leads to losses of so many lives and, thus, to enormous increasing of the number of zombies. With the help of such situation Brooks depicts really well how the lack of imagination and improvement of a government in one place, the evasiveness of a government in another one, add the exploitation along with the whole mankind’s motivation to believe without any questions. The book is a kind of recipe for a booming zombie pandemic and consequent zombie war – zombies are winners and people are losers.

However, there are survivals among these losers. Their stories look really realistic. It is easy to explain by all scary times and people’s real worries of them. Zombie War is a way to deal with such problems as famine, disease, chaos in the streets, etc. All these problems are around people in their usual life routine. However, until any of them touches a person, he will never think about it as something disastrous. The survivors continue to lose everything, but still try to resist. The number of victims remains unknown. Ironically, lots of them are made by people, not zombies. In their “coalition” against “monsters” people face different social problems. People themselves become “monsters”, metaphorically speaking. People in temperate regions managed to unite into one family without clear knowledge about the ways of survival. Starvation was the reason they surrendered.

Not all the stories in the book are just cynical bummers. There are plenty of courageous, inventive, and persistent survivors. For example, Japanese beggar who regains his honor by becoming a plague for the undead; a female air force officer parachuted into zombie land with the prodding heard on her radio, which could hardly exist; a Navy diver details the torments of fighting with swarms of underwater monsters who were able, because of being zombie, to walk across the ocean floors. There is also a great contribution made by our four-legged friends against these walking dead.

Throughout the novel people show physical and mental constraints needed to fight with zombies. Author emphasizes that zombies permit people to cope with their own nervousness about the end of the world. Brooks perfectly expresses a deep fear of zombies people have:

“They scare me more than any other fictional creature out there because they break all the rules....Zombies don't act like a predator; they act like a virus, and that is a core of my terror.”

The book shows perfectly that zombies act just like a catalyst for problems of society. People were not challenged only by walking dead; the things were in decay long before these creatures appeared and provided an immediate real crisis. The attitude politicians have towards this zombie war is perfectly shown in the interview with former White House chief of staff Grover Garison. He gives a mere chance to survive with the help of antidote, Phalanx, but it is just a suggestion. War reveals real faces. Zombies appeared to be an instrument to show all fears, doubts and thought. Monster is litmus to any person. Only few people are able to survive. What is more interesting; these people should not be politicians, soldiers or even sportsmen. Zombies are not fastidious eaters. Meat is the only thing they think about humans.

One of the themes raised in the book is survival. It is especially focused on policy transformations developed to prepare Americans to survive in fight against zombies and recreate the country. There is a lot of information about people and their survival, but zombies and their origin is not still discussed. The zombies Brooks described in his work are caused by a form of contagious pathogen. There is no known cure or vaccine, spread with the help of body fluids, usually after being bitten. Only people could be infected by zombies. It could be explained by fear that wild animals have after seeing a zombie. After a bite a person has fever, weakness, and then comatose phase comes. After the end of this coma “reincarnation” comes. Unfortunately, this is not Resurrection we see in the Bible, but becoming a zombie. The main task for any zombie is to find a victim. This “godsend” causes chain reaction and the number of infected people extremely grows. These neogenic zombie gangs continue moaning and stalking their victims until they eat greedily the quarry, lose its track, or killed.

Zombies do not need sleep, food, or any other supply that is why people should be beware day and night. They “keep to a diet” of fresh human meat, which does not satisfy their hunger, it is just an instinct. People in cold regions have mere hope that zombies can freeze in winter. However, this preservation lasts till spring and these monsters continue their search for victims. Even after years of being frozen zombies can stay alive, if the climate allows. Each part of the world tries to find any possible way to resist. Geographers try to find the best region to weaken these monsters.

Survival is not the only one theme raised in the book. Brooks also describes social commentary, fear, and uncertainty with the help of interviews. Zombies serve as a link between these problems nowadays. Today there are a lot of monsters, living in our heads. If comparing with

zombies created by Brooks, they could seem even more frightening. The nearer the Doomsday is, the more unbelievable theories are made. Zombies still embody the greatest fears we have. First, it could be us. Even aliens invasion seems less feasible than becoming a zombie. Zombies represent the ultimate sacrilege of a human corpse. For religious people this problem could seem even greater than transformation into a zombie. A zombie rash is a worst-case scenario to happen. People feel more prepared for the Big Bang or Asteroid coming to the Earth, than for this continuous survival with mere chances to overcome it. Media speculates too much on the mechanism behind zombification; all the theories are intellectually stimulating. All these theories make zombies more conceivable and, thus, more terrifying. The greatest problem is some interesting survival possibilities made up by ideas of a zombie invasion. Brooks is only one among thousands of authors, who propose these theories. Building a bunker is still the most popular way to survive from all the monsters or natural disasters.

Zombies have already appeared in many fictional genres: from horror novels people used to, to post-apocalyptic works, even romance and mystery of paranormal activity. There are lots of lists, made both by amateurs and professionals. A lot of people feel even keen to zombies after Walking Dead series appeared. Somebody might find these monsters even cute, and these people might really want to become such a creature. Unfortunately, these monsters, Brooks perfectly describes, have no feelings, except extreme greed and need to find their next victim. They do not even consider it like a victim. Any human is just a piece of fresh running meat for these monsters. Surely, there are still a lot of people, who are too scared of zombies. Brooks does not focus on zombies, but on people's struggle and willing to survive. The world "struggle" is not the kind of fight people have already got used to. There are no wars described that is why horror is mostly felt through the know-how descriptions.

There are a lot of books, films, and video games about zombies. World War Z is not an exception. In summer, 2013, Brad Pitt will show his heroic struggle in 3D. The plot of Brooks' book became a script for this movie. If comparing to other movies, it is not a horror, but an action. The same words could be said about the book. We could compare it with the novel I Am Legend written by Richard Matheson in 1954. Its plot has also become a script for the movie of the same name, starring Will Smith. That is the first feature books have in common. However, if we see groups of survivors in World War Z, in I am Legend there is only one man who stays alive. Brooks' zombies do not affect animals, in Matheson's work a character loses his only friend, a dog, after it is infected. There are numerous ways to kill these monsters. Monsters created by Brooks need to lose their cerebrum, Matheson proposes a stake in the heart. Zombie hysteria causes World War Z, the character of I Am Legend fights against consequences of the war.

Even if a person managed to survive this almost unstoppable army, more problems are possible to appear. If you do not die in a zombie's clutches, famine, thirst, and fear mixed with depression can fight you. World War Z is a kind of scenario for the zombie plague, this fight "zombies versus humans" is really terrifying. When zombies hit, people die, then "reincarnate" and new zombies are ready just for going to take other humans. While reading, one question takes one's mind: do zombies exist now? Probably, Brooks' story can make somebody begin to think that this virus can generate real life zombies and everybody has to be ready. However, nobody knows for sure. That is why, like it is said in one of numerous Zombie comedies, Zombieland, "You've got to enjoy the little things".