

The only thing we
have to fear



When one thinks of the things that could kill them in a zombie apocalypse, their minds will likely go to disease, starvation, or obviously, zombie. However, there are means of death less talked about yet just as deadly. For example, pharmaceutical drug companies and dishonest politicians. In his novel, *World War Z*, Max Brooks, through interviews with survivors around the globe, paints a picture of an entire zombie apocalypse. This includes the origin of the outbreak, how it was allowed to spread, the panic, and the recovery. In addition to describing the terrifying undead, the stories are centered around humans and the consequences of their actions on themselves and the people around them. Both positive and negative characteristics are displayed, but this essay will focus on the traits of fear, ignorance, and selfishness, and how they contributed to the worsening of the apocalypse. The novel has no main character, only the narrator, so the traits are truly represented by unique people and situations from around the world. By using instances of human character flaws, Max Brooks conveys that often times in a disaster scenario, people are their own worst enemy.

The first characteristic Brooks uses to worsen human's situation is fear. It is widely known that fear is a large inhibitor of human progress. People will settle for monotony rather than make a leap in pursuit of something great. In that pattern, Brooks (the narrator is unidentified so he will be referenced as Brooks), interviews Doctor Breckinridge Scott: " We never lied, you understand? They told us it was rabies, so we made a vaccine for rabies... It wasn't even the idea of safety anymore, it was the idea of the idea of safety" (57). He invented a prescription rabies drug, Phalanx, and it claimed to stop the zombie infection, referred to as " African Rabies," however all it did was

create a false blanket of security. Since Americans desired to not fear the infection, they used Phalanx as means to put the crisis out of mind. The fake pill led to little concern from the citizens, so the government felt no pressure to act. That is, until zombies were crawling onto shores and into homes. When the zombies landed in America, the military staged a large-scale offensive in Manhattan called the Battle of Yonkers, trying to restore hope back into the country. Todd Wainio, a veteran of the battle, spoke to why America lost: “ Every time some jerkoff couldn’t control his mouth, Land Warrior made sure the rest of us heard it... Panic’s even more infectious than the Z Germ and the wonders of Land Warrior allowed that germ to become airborne” (101). The Land Warrior, a high-tech military communications device, allowed every soldier to hear every other soldier’s fear, which was more damaging than any zombie could have been. This, for the same reason one shouldn’t yell fire in a crowded room. Once the sounds of fear got into one man’s ear, they all might panic, and a panicked soldier is highly ineffective, whereas the zombies could never be scared. The military officers were largely responsible for their soldier’s fear in the battle, which cost many lives. One of Brook’s interviewees was a soldier after the immediate invasion when the country was reclaiming its land from the zombies, and he talks about what posed the most danger to the men: “ Each squad was issued pamphlets with the ‘ Threat Pyramid’... Zack (zombie) at the bottom, then F-critters, ferals, quislings, and finally LaMOEs” (320). Quislings are humans that due to the extreme mental trauma caused by fear, believe they are a zombie. Since they have the mind of a zombie and a body of a human, they were very dangerous to soldiers. LaMOEs are survivors of the zombie invasion, typically the only ones left in their area. The issue is that these

individuals feel abandoned by the military and government, and have no desire to be helped by the new government. The months of fear and stress of what they had gone through is so damaging to their psyche that they react violently to the soldiers who come to rescue them. A man armed with weapons and a long time fighting off zombies and psychological torture was an enormous threat to soldiers who, in an effort to reclaim their home, were only equipped to kill a basic zombie. Thus, both human's actions as a consequence of fear, and their body's physical limitations of handling fear proved to be more dangerous than the zombies, and cost many lives.

Additionally, Brooks uses ignorance as a large killer of people in the face of a zombie apocalypse. One of the first matters the book touches upon is how the outbreak could have been stopped before it ran out of control. The Warrbrum-Knight Report was a comprehensive plan written by Israeli scientists for countries to plan for the zombie's arrival; however, politicians willingly ignored the report out of ignorance of the outbreak's severity. Had the report been given the time of day by one major country, the outbreak could have been significantly more contained. However, it wasn't, and it undoubtedly cost billions of lives. Brooks interviewed a girl who's family "avoided" the apocalypse by heading far north into Canada into a communal living situation: " But once the dead were frozen, how were you going to survive the winter?' ' Good question. I don't think most people thought that far ahead. Maybe they figured that the ' authorities' would rescue us or they could just pack up and head home"(126). The people in that camp thought they were the smart ones, getting out of the infected areas first, but in the end, it was the ignorance that killed most of them, not the zombies. The girl

gives examples of many poor survival techniques used by the people, as well as an ignorant optimism that left them entirely unprepared for the unforgiving winter. The people in that camp proved to be the bane of their own existence. It is phrased best by a survivor: " Lies and superstition, misinformation, disinformation... Ignorance killed billions of people. Ignorance caused the Zombie War" (194). Whether it's the American public being willingly ignorant of the " African Rabies" outbreak going on in the third world, or normal people being thrown into a life or death scenario, completely without an understanding of basic survival techniques, humans were often their own worst enemy in the apocalypse.

Lastly, Brooks uses selfishness as a large contributor to the downfall of human society. In one of the first interviews he conducts, Brooks finds the doctor who treated " Patient Zero." Patient Zero was a Chinese boy who became infected, then turned into a zombie and his family waited days to call for medical help, in which time he infected others. Since he was infected while looting, his family selfishly hid his disease for fear of punishment. A disastrous decision, as he infected the first batch of people in a ring of disaster that spread all over the globe. In regards to China, a former American government official explains, " It was deception, a fake out. The PRC (People's Republic of China) knew they were already our number one surveillance target. They knew they could never hide the existence of their nationwide ' Health and Safety' sweeps... Instead of lying about the sweeps themselves, they just lied about what they were sweeping for" (47). It is made clear that China was well aware of the infection spreading around the country at a rapid rate. The troubling part, however, is that they covered up

the crisis. They did this, presumably, because if other countries found out there was a disease killing thousands a day, all trade with China would stop, harming the economy. However, hindsight is always 20/20, and the Chinese's incredibly selfish decision to cover up the zombie epidemic proved more detrimental to the world's economy than any trade embargo could ever be. In the world of "World War Z," America had just finished a long and bloody war. It is established that the government knew about the zombies, however, to stop outbreaks from spreading to America, it would require a massive military undertaking, "the likes of which hadn't been seen since the darkest days of the Second World War" (52). In an interview, the same government official says that the President did not want to undergo another full-scale war because the American people were "tired." Sure, nobody wants to go to war, but it ended up costing the number of lives lost in World War II many times over. It's a question of choosing exhaustion, or death, one that Americans happily made. Between politicians fearing repercussion in their careers and citizens not wanting to send their tax dollars overseas, America's decision to not go to war against the zombie plague proved to be selfish and extremely detrimental to their own civilization.

Once more, Brooks often times, by displaying flaws in human character, shows how in catastrophic situations, people's worst enemies can often be themselves. Negative character traits he exposes include fear, which was caused by the Land Warrior and led to the Phalanx pill and human threats worse than zombies. Also, ignorance, which cost lives when people were ill-equipped to survive the apocalypse, as well as the costly rejection of the Warrbrum-Knight Report. Lastly, selfishness by the Chinese and American

governments and people, whom undeniably did not take enough action to stop the spread of infection. All of these traits and the actions they caused proved to be more detrimental to human survival than the zombies themselves. As seen later in the book, the species was able to adapt to the threat of the zombies very quickly, as America reclaimed the entire country within a decade, the most challenging threat being LaMOE's and disease instead of the actual zombies. The fact is that human flaws were a greater issue than the actual zombies. Perhaps this is why the human species was able to regroup and reform civilization at an impressive rate. Once humans learn from their mistakes, and adapt themselves to the threat, the zombies became a mere annoyance, and the challenge becomes dealing with the mistakes of their own past.