World War Z

- Max Brooks (1972-)
- Son of Mel Brooks
- Television writer
- Variety of Zombie publications
- World War Z a bestseller; movie in works
- Alternative history
- Form of fiction that speculates on turning points in history
- What if?
- Philip K. Dick’s The Man in the High Castle (1962), steampunk
Oral history

- Recording of individual voices to preserve historical record
- Popularized by folklorists
- Huge growth since 1970s
- Portable recording equipment
- Distrust of official narratives
- Voice of common people
- Problems:
  - Lack of coherence, narrative
  - Bias through selection
- Shaped around wars:
  - hostilities
  - training
  - combat
  - return to peace
- *World War Z* an alternate oral history
- “voices” from fictional war
Zombies

• From Haiti
• Syncretic religion Vodou / Voodoo
• Dead reanimated as slaves
• UBC prof. Wade Davis’ The Serpent and the Rainbow (1985)
• William Seabrook (1884-1945) popularized: The Magic Island (1929)
• U.S. military in Haiti
• Play, then movie: White Zombie (1932)
  • http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCzhaQuXmbU
• Zombies of Mora Tau (1957)
  • contagion
  • Night of the Living Dead, George Romero (1968)
• Cannibalism and contagion
• Inspiration: I Am Legend
• Poor initial reviews
• Inadvertently political & subversive
  • http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gUKvmOEGCU
Spread of zombies

• Romero sequels:
  * *Dawn of the Dead*, *Day of the Dead*, *Land of the Dead*, *Diary of the Dead*, *Survival of the Dead*

• Remakes, imitations, and new zombie films: over 200

• Zombie books:

![Image](image-url)
More zombies....

Graphic novels:

Games:
Even more…

Television

Public events
Why the popularity?

• 1920-30s: exoticism and occult
• 1960s: space, racial worries
• 2000s?
• Zombies: mindless, slow, infectious
dangerous in mass numbers
can be your relatives
• 1) Infection
  • SARS, avian flu, HIV/AIDS
  • Virus phobia
• 2) Disconnect
  • Alienated, isolated people
  • Plugged-in, non-communicating
• 3) Mass polarization
  • Us vs them
  • Breakdown of dialogue
• 4) Overwhelming nature of contemporary life
  • Communication
  • Schedules
Introduction

• Fictional background to “history”
• United Nation’s Postwar Commission Report
• Alternate history: VA and VC day (2)
• “resurgent economy and universal health care” (2)
• 3 pretext of narrator neutrality
• “a book of memories”
• Early fiction presented as true
• Robinson Crusoe, etc.
• Even fantastic works: Gulliver’s Travels
Pretext of verisimilitude

- Devices:
  - apparently random voices
  - geographic variety
  - age/occupation variety
  - prefatory material before interviews
  - personal experiences of war
- First: initial outbreak, “patient zero”
- Chongqing, Federation of China
- Dr. Kwang Jingshu -- fictional
  - medical doctor as authority figure
  - war veteran (10)
- Reallocation of 1.24m residents
- Dachang – fictional
- So WWZ begins just after 2006
- 10ff superstition vs medical science vs government response
- Why China?
- American fear; population; secrecy
- Arrest of Jingshu (11)
Politics

• Second entry: Tibet
• Conflict with China
• “world’s most populous city” (12)
• Celebration of *free election*
• People smuggling
  • economic refugees replaced by plague refugees
• Flight 575
• Economic corruption (16)
• Refusal to release loved ones
• Third entry: first *Western* perspective
  • Canadian!
  • now in a monastery
  • battle scene investigated
  • zombie attack not substantiated (20)
• Fourth: medical explanations
  • *viral infection*
• black market organs from China (27) in Brazil
No real explanation

- Where is the virus from?
- *Night of the Living Dead*: space?
- Government lies: rabies
- More politics:
  - China/Tibet, Israel/Palestine
  - 32ff Israeli spy Jurgen Warmbrunn
  - hears stories: golem (33)
  - information gathering (35)
  - *Warmbrunn- Knight Report*
  - ignored, too incredible, too Israeli
  - 36ff “Zionist lie”
- Israeli retreat from West Bank
Collapse of politics

- 41 infection line
- 43 into war: preconceptions vs new reality
- 44 ironic ending
- Blame and denial
- 73 feral girl’s story
- a “recording”
- 79 little Russian girl
- authoritarian reprisal
- 82 decimation
- The Great Panic
- 68-9 cars as death traps (The Road)
- Comparison to Russia
- Collapse of American society 63ff
- Suburban smugness shattered
- New suburbs of safety 64
- Slightly altered world . . .
- Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) – Das Unheimliche, the uncanny
Masahiro Mori’s uncanny valley
Chaos vs novel structure

- Series of accounts shaped by war
- “Random” witnesses and geography
- Characters repeat:
  - 335 Kwang Jingshu
  - 54 Breck Scott – entrepreneur – 337
  - 76ff Maria Zhuganovna, 329
- Patterns emerge:
  - 1) Oppressed isolated countries triumph
    - Tibet
    - Cuba 228ff (230)
  - 266 zombies as justice
  - 2) Need for adaptation
    - weapons
    - techniques
  - 3) Reversal of social order
    - 83ff reality TV compound
    - 140ff uselessness of professions
  - 4) emergence of heroes
    - unconventional
Heroes

- 233ff Captain Chen
- rejects government decrees
- attacks his own country 254
- Tomanga Ijiro 216ff
- blinded in WW2, marginalization (218)
- “kami” (222)
- conversion of Kondo Tatsumi, “otaku”
- “Hikikomori”
- Captain Christine Eliopolis
- WW2 “behind the lines” story
- failure of air force
- “Mets”
- Terry Know, astronaut (255ff)
- witness: Three Gorges Dam (261)
- Todd Wainto, American infantryman
- “grunt” 94
- General Raj-Singh
- self-sacrifice, 134ff
- Paul Redeker, rational evil? 109
Military turning points

- Battle of Yonkers, 92ff
- parallels Vietnam conflict
- Tet Offensive (1968)
- “Charlie” becomes “Zach”
- incompetence of leaders (94)
- media displays (95)
- reliance on technology
- 103-4 failure
- Battle of Hope, 273ff
- abandon technology (274)
- *psychological* fitness (275)
Everyday American as hero

- Versus zombies
- loss of individuality
- herd instinct
- Americans as consumers
- identity defined by purchases
- subversion marketed
- no opportunities for distinction
- Mass media vs. individual experience:
  - Radio Free Earth, 194ff
  - Roy Elliot films, 159ff
- Revisionist histories:
  - underwater battles 298ff
  - underground battles 309ff
  - dog battles 282ff
- The whole point of oral history
- Last voice: Todd Wainto
- Song “I was only nineteen”
- Vietnam War
Summary

- Popularity of zombie apocalypse scenarios:
  - reaction to deadening, isolating culture
  - eagerness for “alive” moments
  - desire to escape conformity
  - desire to escape consumerism
- Combines with fear of
  - infection
  - invasion
  - disconnection
  - sense of being overwhelmed
  - the uncanny