

# *World War Z*



- Max Brooks (1972-)
- Son of Mel Brooks
- Television writer
- *Zombie Survival Guide* (2003)
- 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

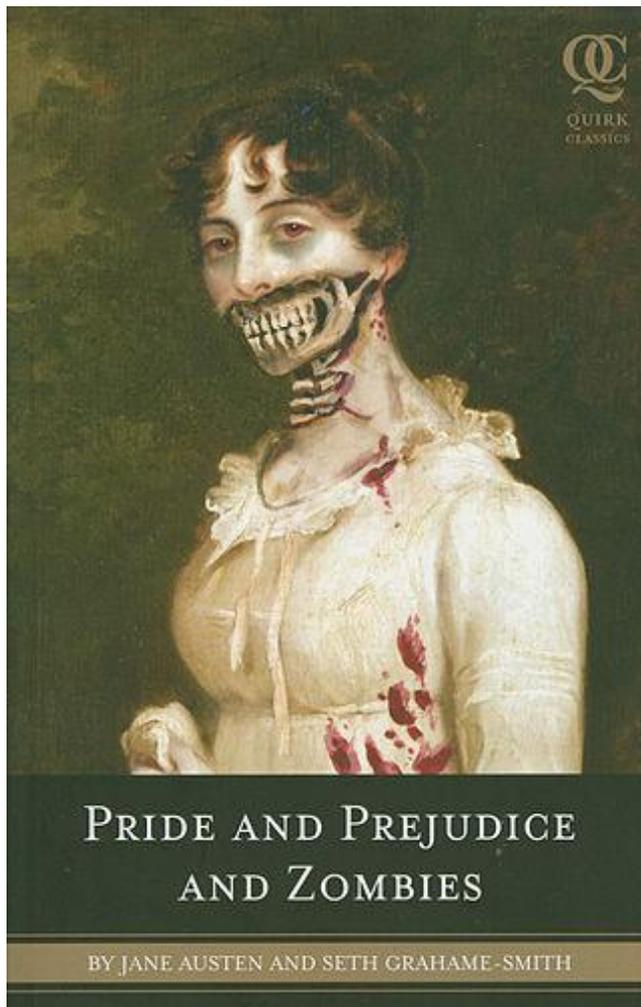
- Recording of individual voices to preserve historical record
- Popularized by folklorists
- Huge growth since 1970s
  - Portable recording equipment
  - Distrust of official narratives
  - Voice of common people
- Mark Baker, *Nam* (1981)
- Studs Terkel, *The Good War* (1985)
- Problems:
  - Lack of 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:



More zombies....

Graphic novels:



Games:



Even more...

## Television



## Public events

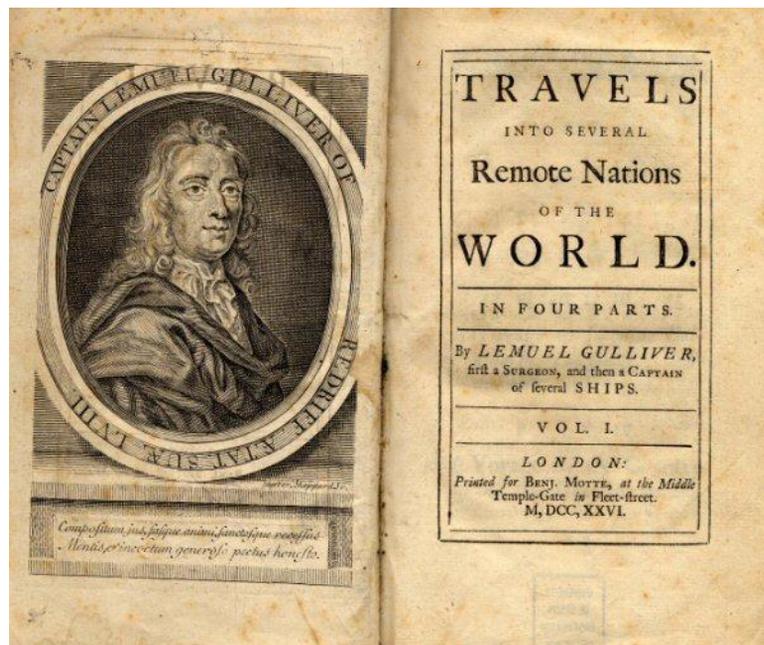


## Why the popularity?

- 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)
- Three Gorges Dam – real (2006)
- 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

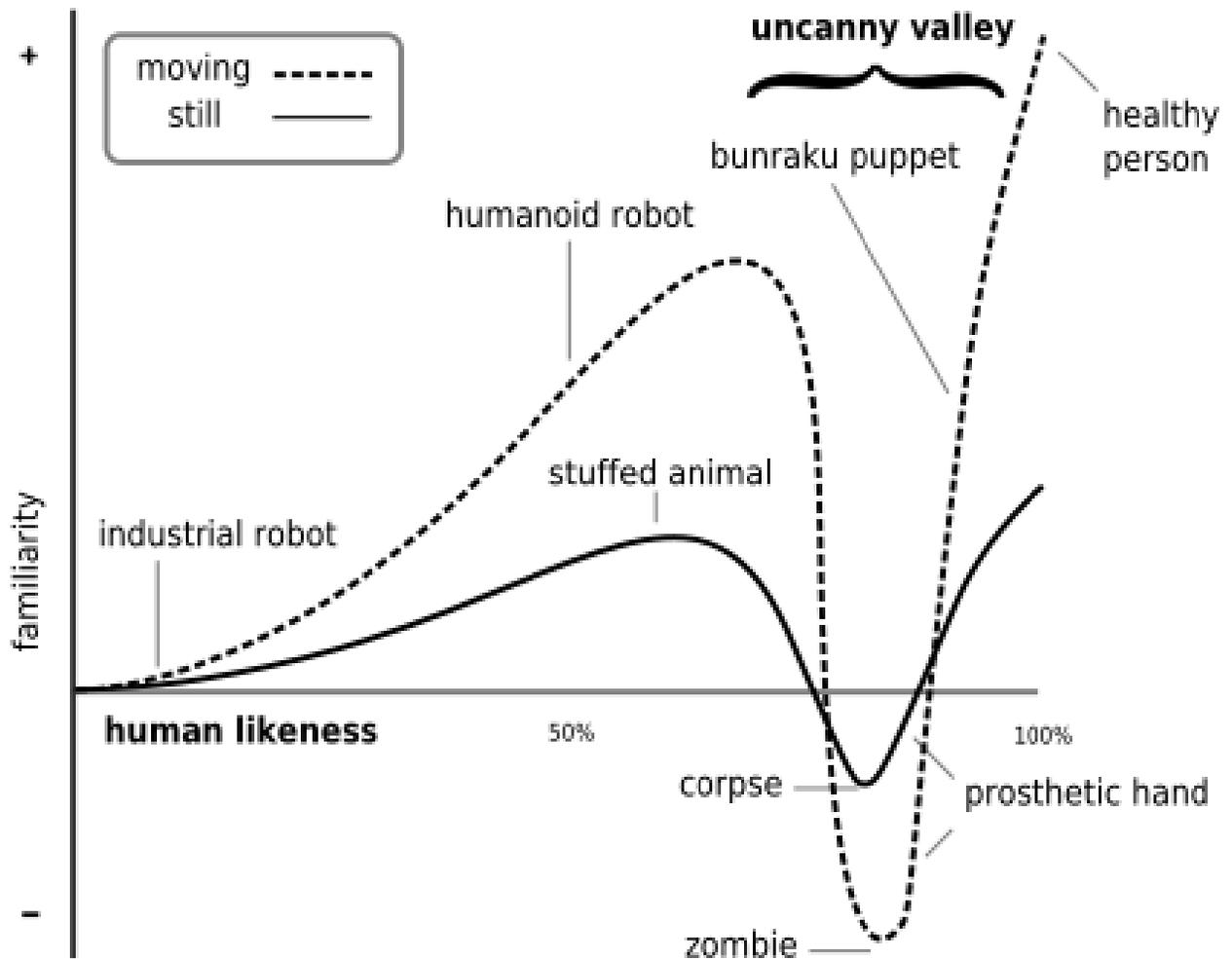
- Where is the virus from?
- *Night of the Living Dead*: space?
- Government lies: rabies
- *More* politics:
- China/Tibet, Israel/Palestine
- 32ff Israeli spy Jurgen Warmbrunn
- hears stories: golem (33)
- information gathering (35)
- *Warmbrunn- Knight Report*
- ignored, too incredible, too Israeli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

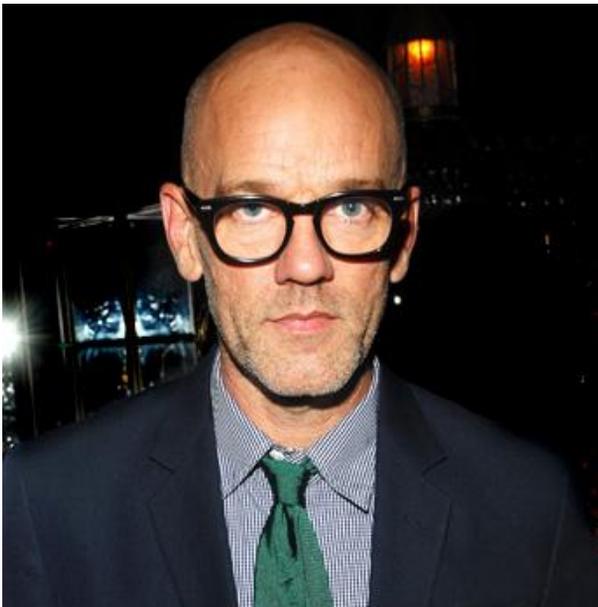
- Series of accounts shaped by war
- “Random” witnesses and geography
- Characters repeat:
  - 335 Kwang Jingshu
  - 54 Breck Scott – entrepreneur – 337
  - 76ff Maria Zhuganova, 329
- Patterns emerge:
  - 1) Oppressed isolated countries triumph
    - Tibet
    - Cuba 228ff (230)
    - 266 zombies as 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 Waito, 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