World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War

Jayme Sutton
is the chapter on technology, although it is a welcome discussion, given both TR’s fascination with new technology and the inherently high-tech nature of navies in general. Additionally, this chapter provides ammunition for a much larger argument about modern Americans and their fascination with technology.

However, the bulk of the book deals with the diplomatic-naval arguments mentioned. Hendrix makes an excellent case for his thesis that previous historians have paid too little attention to the intersection of naval and diplomatic trends of analysis. He employs a multidisciplinary approach that examines naval signals, logbooks, war plans, and other archival Department of the Navy records to render less opaque some of TR’s diplomatic actions and motivations.

Although this work is not a biography, it adds value to existing ones, especially Edmund Morris’s *Theodore Rex*, which focuses exclusively on his presidency. Theodore Roosevelt had many different personae, and it has not escaped historians that he was not only a historian but also a naval historian, par excellence. Neither has it escaped them that, along with A. T. Mahan and Stephen Luce, he is the father of the modern U.S. Navy. However, Hendrix makes a strong argument that TR’s naval persona was critical to understanding his use of power, especially in foreign relations.

The book’s minor weakness is its narrow, monographic scope. The chapters proceed in a generally chronological manner but maintain no extended narrative thread—the unifier, instead, is the topical theme. Hendrix may have missed an opportunity to make a larger statement about the relationship of the man to the institution and its importance to the United States under the entire Roosevelt “dynasty.” There is much peripheral evidence here about the institutional and organizational aspects of the Navy that made this reviewer long for more discussion. TR’s presidency was a time of profound change in the military establishment of the United States, a period that involved the Root reforms of the Army and the establishment of the General Board of the Navy, as a sort of proto-naval general staff. TR’s role in these critical early years of the General Board would have been worth exploring.

These are minor quibbles in an otherwise fine book that adds substantially to the understanding of an important aspect of the rise of the United States to great-power status and influence during Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency. I recommend this book for a broad audience, especially those interested in the development and execution of American foreign policy in the early twentieth century.

JOHN T. KUEHN
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas


“A breath of fresh air stormed into the Naval War College over the rotting flesh of the undead,” reads the first book-club selection of the President of the Naval War College. Without viliying another country or radicalizing any group, *World War Z’s* zombie
pandemic and ensuing global chaos are the vehicle transporting the reader straight into the potential realities of what can happen when the functionality and safety of our cultural norms, personal values, societal ethics, and governmental structures are stressed, overwhelmed, and broken.

A quick title scan of current military and national security professional reading lists suggests that there is something different about the selection; most are exclusively works of nonfiction, and none of them have the word “zombie” in their titles. However, one does not have to be a zombie fan to enjoy this book. Another consideration is that if any book passes the zealous scrutiny of a cultlike following of “zombie-o-philes” and the similarly exacting standards of the President of the Naval War College, this should spark your curiosity—if not an automatic “add” click for your personal military and national security reading list.

World War Z is a work of apocalyptic fiction set in modern times and told in a journalistic style. Man is the main character; the zombie simply provides the literary mechanism facilitating a journey into “total war.” The book opens and reads like, and brings about imagery combining, George Romero’s 1968 classic Night of the Living Dead, Quentin Tarantino’s often eclectic and avant-garde directing style, and Tom Clancy and Clive Cussler’s flair for globe-trotting storytelling. Attention to historical detail, geopolitical issues, and nuances of social and applied sciences makes it intriguing for most nonfiction and historical-fiction purists. Three years of research and the confirmation of all facts and assertions by a professional “fact-checker” enable readers to focus and to immerse themselves into the horrifying musings of what can happen when mankind faces annihilation.

The narrative travels beyond the brink of extinction and continues on a journey of choice, response, societal resilience, and recovery. These choices and actions allow one to go beyond contemplation and explore the potential preventive measures and solutions needed not only to survive but to win.

Are there any negatives about World War Z? There are, and readers can find their own likes and dislikes. One notable point is the physiological and biological improbabilities associated with the ability of zombies to exist and survive, but as with all science fiction, some bending of reality is to be expected. On occasion political biases creep into the writing where perhaps more neutral or nuanced references would have been more effective and less distracting. Those comments aside, World War Z is a great read.

The most telling local review of the book, here at the Naval War College, is the number of students and faculty who, as parents, have said they were going to share the book and read it again with their children as part of developing their understanding about the world, and people’s responsibilities to themselves and one another. Applying this metric, World War Z is a worthy choice for any reader, be they practitioners of national security or not.

LT. COL. JAYME SUTTON, U.S. ARMY
Naval War College