

World War Z (Max Brooks)

Zombies, zombies, zombies. If this hadn't been a book club book I'd not have gone anywhere near a zombie book. It is not a novel in the traditional sense. It consists of a long sequence of short narratives, each involving different dramatis personae in different countries. Initially one expects the disparate opening episodes to give way to a connected storyline involving a settled set of characters. But, no. Eventually you realise the whole book is like this. It serves to illustrate the crucial role of character in a novel; at least, in a novel of the traditional kind. Unfortunately it does so by failing to have any. Many people appear, aggregated over all the disjoint episodes. But there is not a single character upon which the reader's emotional connection can take anchor. As a result I found it dull. I rather had to force myself to finish it, and it left no lasting impression.

I have been persuaded that it did, in fact, have a beginning, a middle, and an end. So there is a story there. Nevertheless, the book came across to me as being a mere collection of possibilities for a screen play. I'm told it was not written with this in mind, though it was subsequently filmed. If no screen play was in the author's mind in it's writing, why adopt the disjointed, episodic structure? One answer might be that the author felt that this was necessary to gain the worldwide scope of the action. But I am reminded of a computer game in which each level or zone is soon completed, and the player is ready to move on to the next - which will present a new appearance each time. Are we seeing the novel give way in structure to game-format? Shoot me, please. Or is the episodic structure pandering to the limited attention span of the new millennials?

