

# World War C

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I love Max Brooks's novel 'World War Z'. It tells the story of a zombie outbreak through a series of fictional interviews conducted years later by a UN agent. The outbreak begins with a few isolated cases, before leading to global panic and catastrophic consequences, until eventually the zombie plague is defeated. The novel focuses on the social, economic and political implications of this disruptive fictional event, in which the zombie virus suddenly turns everything upside down. How do governments and citizens respond to this apocalyptic threat?

**“So if you're in a position with the power to influence things, I implore you: now is the moment to do more than simply tinker around the edges! We need to be bold. Our generation won't get a second chance to make a significant difference.”**

Until recently, 'disruption' was merely a marketing buzzword. Zombies were confined to PlayStation games. Then we went into lockdown, the borders were closed and doctors all over the world have been fighting hard to prevent our healthcare systems from collapsing. In Spain, ice rinks were converted into temporary morgues where the army piled up bodies, while populist politicians have struggled to control the narrative. COVID-19 is our collective zombie crisis.

### CORONAVIRUS MAKES SOCIETIES MEASURABLE LIKE NEVER BEFORE

New York, Paris, Cairo – wherever you look, there are similar scenes. The virus has acted as a worldwide stress test, laying bare the fragile, closely intermeshed network of our globalised society and economy. Different countries can be quantified by the numbers of dead and infected, like in some never-before-seen computer game. Whoever gets the high score ... loses. We can't tear our eyes away from these figures, and

have watched as one nation after another has succumbed to the virus and revealed the impact it has had. For countries, businesses, families and individuals, it's been a strange mix of normality and crisis, a constant emotional rollercoaster.

### DIGITALISATION WON'T WORK? OH YES IT WILL!

Any honest account of the crisis will have to acknowledge two facts. Firstly: countries and organisations that took digitalisation seriously from an early stage had an immeasurable advantage when it came to saving lives with contact tracing and remote working. Secondly: countries and institutions that prioritised education also had a highly effective weapon against the virus in the form of mature, responsible citizens and employees. Those who invested in resourceful, creative, proactive employees early on have reaped the benefits during the crisis. COVID-19 has shown us the limits of digitalisation, in both positive and negative respects. Not long ago, persuading employers to allow even the bare minimum of remote working was like getting blood from a stone. But now that we've been plunged into a new normal virtually overnight, the old arguments seem ridiculous. Things we were told would never work have turned out to work just fine.

### COVID-19 HASN'T JUST BROUGHT OUT THE WORST IN US, BUT ALSO THE BEST

Where has the 'system' held up best during a global crisis of this scale? An objective assessment would suggest it's functioned best where there are authentic leaders who understand the frustration, fear and helplessness of the people they're speaking to, who communicate with empathy, who give explanations based on facts and evidence, who admit when they don't (yet) know the answers and who empower citizens and authorities to take responsibility at local level. The system functions where people understand how it works, what consequences policies will have and what they need to do to protect themselves and their loved ones.

**IF A UN AGENT INTERVIEWED SOMEONE ABOUT OUR WORLD WAR C YEARS FROM NOW, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY?**

*"For a brief moment, the virus made us all equal. Although the disruption didn't radically transform our society and economy, it did give rise to a new generation of political and business leaders whose outlook was shaped by the experience of COVID-19. Just like the twentieth-century leaders shaped by the Great Depression and the world wars, they set out bold new visions for the future based on humanitarian ideals. Where the experience of disruption found fertile ground, humanity kept developing. In World War C, it wasn't the individual that counted. Confrontation gave way to cooperation. That was the secret. Stupidity and ignorance were exposed. We questioned our old ways of thinking, stopped for a moment and then began to do things differently. In the war against an indiscriminate threat, it was our humanity and our scientific knowledge that gave us the decisive advantage. We didn't attack, but peacefully defended ourselves. Wherever victims needed help, doctors and nurses reminded us what really matters in our society: science and facts, health and well-being, care and compassion, the bonds of family."*

**OUR GENERATION WON'T GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

So if you're in a position with the power to influence things, I implore you: now is the moment to do more than simply tinker around the edges! We need to be bold. Our generation won't get a second chance to make a significant difference. Whatever your mission may be – to take action on the environment, to build

a circular economy, to establish fairer and more humane practices in education, research, healthcare and development aid – don't let this zombie crisis pass by without taking advantage of the opportunity it presents us with. Let's make some big changes. For our friends and families. For our bodies and minds. Let's show what this generation is capable of.

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