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The Making of Zombie Wars

by Aleksandar Hemon



About the Book

The seriously, seriously funny roller-coaster ride of sex and violence that Aleksandar Hemon has long promised

Script idea #142: Aliens undercover as cabbies abduct the fiancée of the main character, who has to find a way to a remote planet to save her. Title: Love Trek.

Script idea #185: Teenager discovers his girlfriend's beloved grandfather was a guard in a Nazi death camp. The boy's grandparents are survivors, but he's tantalizingly close to achieving deflowerment, so when a Nazi hunter arrives in town in pursuit of Grandpa, he has to distract him long enough to get laid. A riotous Holocaust comedy. Title: The Righteous Love.

Script idea #196: Rock star high out of his mind freaks out during a show, runs offstage, and is lost in streets crowded with his hallucinations. The teenage fan who finds him keeps the rock star for himself for the night. Mishaps and adventures follow. This one could be a musical: Singin' in the Brain.

Josh Levin is an aspiring screenwriter teaching ESL classes in Chicago. His laptop is full of ideas, but the only one to really take root is *Zombie Wars*. When Josh comes home to discover his landlord, an unhinged army vet, rifling through his dirty laundry, he decides to move in with his girlfriend, Kimmy. It's domestic bliss for a moment, but Josh becomes entangled with a student, a Bosnian woman named Ana, whose husband is jealous and violent. Disaster ensues, and as Josh's choices move from silly to profoundly absurd, THE MAKING OF ZOMBIE WARS takes on real consequence.

Discussion Guide

1. Which of Joshua?s script ideas would you like to see made into a movie? Why do you think he compulsively comes up with so many?

2. As the aspiring screenwriters gather at Graham?s and then go out drinking, how did you react to their creative approach? Did you agree with their observations about Hollywood and American politics? How would you answer Bega?s questions ?Why America now must have superheroes? Why can?t you just have normal heroes??

3. What does Spinoza mean to Joshua? Why does he refer less to Spinoza and more to God toward the second half of the book?

4. How did your impressions of Stagger shift throughout the novel? Are his actions different from Doug?s aim to provide Iraqis with capitalism ?starter kits??

5. How does the plot of *Zombie Wars* reflect Joshua?s fears and fantasies? What makes Major Klopstock different from the other heroes of battles with the undead? Who is Jack?

6. As an ESL teacher, Joshua learns about many aspects of many nationalities. What does he believe about his own place in the world? How does he see his Jewish identity? What does being American mean to him? How does he experience the ongoing invasion of Iraq?

7. What drives the characters in THE MAKING OF ZOMBIE WARS to seek continual intoxication, including intoxicating sex? Why is it difficult for them to cope with the real world?

8. Why is Joshua attracted to women he perceives as exotic? How would you explain his tendency to be passive?

9. Prolonging adolescence is a point of pride for Joshua. Would you say the same about Esko, Bega and Stagger? Are strong-arming and retaliation signs of juvenile weakness? Are there real adults in Joshua?s world?

10. When Joshua and Stagger try to rescue Alma, why does she resist? Do you think that rescuing Alma can in any way be compared to rescuing Iraq?

11. In the tragicomic Seder scene, what realities of the human experience does Aleksandar Hemon capture?

12. What do the novel?s final pages say about survival, and about good storytelling?

13. What makes the novel?s setting --- Chicago in the wake of America?s second invasion of Iraq --- an appropriate backdrop for Joshua?s dilemmas?

14. What is unique about Hemon?s approach to language and humor? Which scenes made you laugh? Did you experience some of that laughter as inappropriate? If so, why? How does THE MAKING OF ZOMBIE WARS enhance the compelling, often ironic images presented in Hemon?s previous fiction?

Author Bio

Aleksandar Hemon is the author of THE LAZARUS PROJECT, which was a finalist for the 2008 National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and three books of short stories: THE QUESTION OF BRUNO; NOWHERE MAN, which was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; and LOVE AND OBSTACLES. He was the recipient of a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship and a ?genius grant? from the MacArthur Foundation, and the 2020 Dos Passos Prize. He lives in Chicago.

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