

## The Undead President

**Todd Richardson**

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*The Walking Dead meets House of Cards in this entertaining, tongue-in-cheek thriller.*

A stealth infestation of malicious, intelligent zombies pervades the White House—and, soon, the world—in Todd Richardson's *The Undead President*. Can the holdouts among the living halt the advance of the undead before it's too late?

Following an assassination attempt, President Holden is a changed man. His demeanor flat and his skin gray, he's the very image of a living corpse—which, of course, is exactly what he really is. Following the experimental medical treatment that resuscitated him, the president is possessed by a new vision for the world: one where the walking dead are in charge. It's up to Grace Livy, new White House correspondent, to save humankind from a fate that is literally worse than death.

Though the plot meanders from domestic terrorists to Haiti, it consistently delivers the action necessary for the survival of a zombie novel and the intrigue that keeps a political thriller entertaining. In a sense, the story doesn't matter too much; the president is a zombie and that's fun enough. Several strong side stories add depth, and a variety of viewpoints keep the narrative fresh even as the antagonist himself decays.

*The Undead President* succeeds in part by augmenting the horror of death beyond what most zombie stories manage. A regular zombie constitutes simply a walking body; these zombies are mental entities as well. Repeated description of the zombies as "tired" implies a forced march back to the land of the living and a chilling slavery of the soul. The transformation of various White House personnel into line-toeing yes-men with no personalities of their own is not unlike the mysterious process that transforms sincere real-life politicians into staunch (and arguably zombie-like) party supporters. Though the general theme of the book can be taken as tongue-in-cheek, the content is serious in tone.

Strong characterization contributes to the plot's overall tension. The development of all of the characters helps to make the stakes feel high, a critical strength in a book whose villain is intent upon refining death into an effective removal of personality.

Stylistically, the novel is usually immersive and easy to read. Occasional run-on sentences and other minor punctuation issues mar the otherwise well-edited text. Meaning is never unclear, though, and most thriller fans will probably forgive this otherwise entertaining book a few comma sins.

New and original zombie stories are hard to find, but this one delivers a fresh take on the genre. If the AMC show *The Walking Dead* and Netflix's *House of Cards* were to combine and produce a new piece of media, it would probably look something like *The Undead President*. This novel is ideal for fans of both genres.

ANNA CALL (August 4, 2015)

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