

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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