

# REVIEW



Developed by: **Saber Interactive**  
 Published by: **Focus Home Interactive**  
 Genre(s): **Survival Horror, Third Person Shooter**  
 Platform: **Microsoft, PC, Sony**  
 Cost: **\$59.99**  
 ESRB Rating: **MATURE**  
 Players: **2-4 Online**  
 Release date: **April 16, 2019**  
 Reviewed on: **XBox One**

7.3

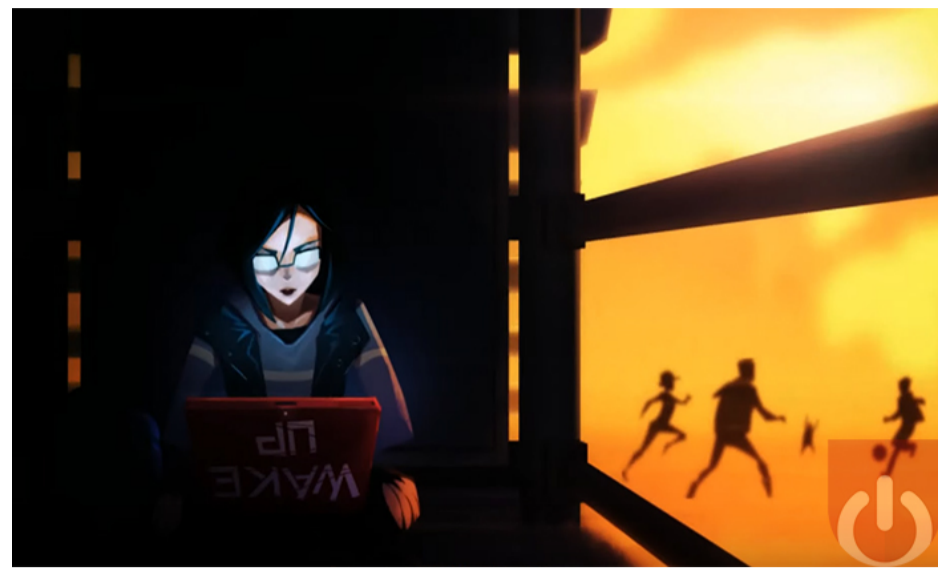
## WORLD WAR Z

WRITTEN BY: **KENNETH SEWARD JR.**

MAY 11, 2019

World War Z is an anomaly. Despite being based on a hit film/book, it struggles to offer a unique experience. Most of the notable gameplay mechanics are pulled from older games. By all accounts, WWZ should be terrible – a third-person shooter that feels as dated as its source materials. That's not the case here though. At least not entirely...

While thematically akin to the book, the game doesn't take place after the war was won; instead of listening to survivor's recount harrowing memories, players will experience these moments in real time. Because of this, the campaign's thin narrative is broken into episodes. Each one depicting a different group's journey through zombie infested locations over the span of three stages.



None of the characters were pulled from the book. That said, their backstories mirror key events. Take Bunko Tatsumi, for example. She was able to survive early on thanks to being disconnected from society and obsessed with finding the truth; despite her government's efforts to cover up what was happening around the globe, she was able to obtain classified information via the darker corners of the net. This allowed her to prepare/arm herself before everything came crashing down.

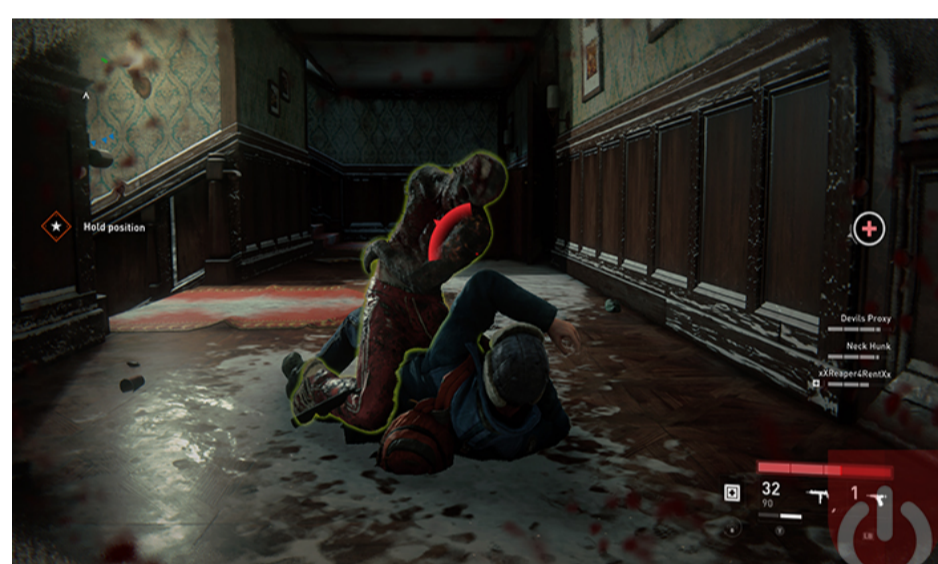
While Bunko Tatsumi's story isn't exactly like Kondo Tatsumi's – a character from the book with a similar background – it's still an interesting inclusion. There are other clever nods to the book, some of which are centered on adjacent happenings. The Battle of Yonkers is hinted at during the first episode for instance. This sort of thing won't mean much to players who are only familiar with the movie. It does help to establish WWZ's world though. This is especially true when combined with the lore developed for the game. The dialogue between characters, the dreadful environments, the hopelessness of each situation – all of it sells the horror of a zombie outbreak.

Though the scattered narrative works in loosely emulating the book, the zombies themselves are pulled right from the 2013 film. These undead enemies will sprint towards players once alerted. Certain sections will involve hundreds of them. As a sea of bodies, they'll climb over each other to reach higher ground or throw themselves off buildings in pursuit of their prey. The stampede of enemies rushing towards the player can be frightening at times, especially on the higher difficulties. Players will need to flood the horde with gunfire, explosive ordnance, and more in order to keep them a bay; tossing a grenade at a mountain of zombies will cause them to fall on each other. It's never enough though as packs of enemies will seemingly emerge from everywhere.



For the most part, WWZ does its best to be a decent licensed product. Unfortunately, it borrows so heavily from the Left 4 Dead series, that it loses much of what makes it special. Each stage consists of four characters (either player or AI controlled) moving from point A to B, while fighting off waves of enemies. There is a dynamic difficulty system that controls the game's AI based on how players are doing in a given level. Enemy placement, the location and number of health items, how often the special zombies spawn – the game changes various variables on the fly, making each session feel different from the last.

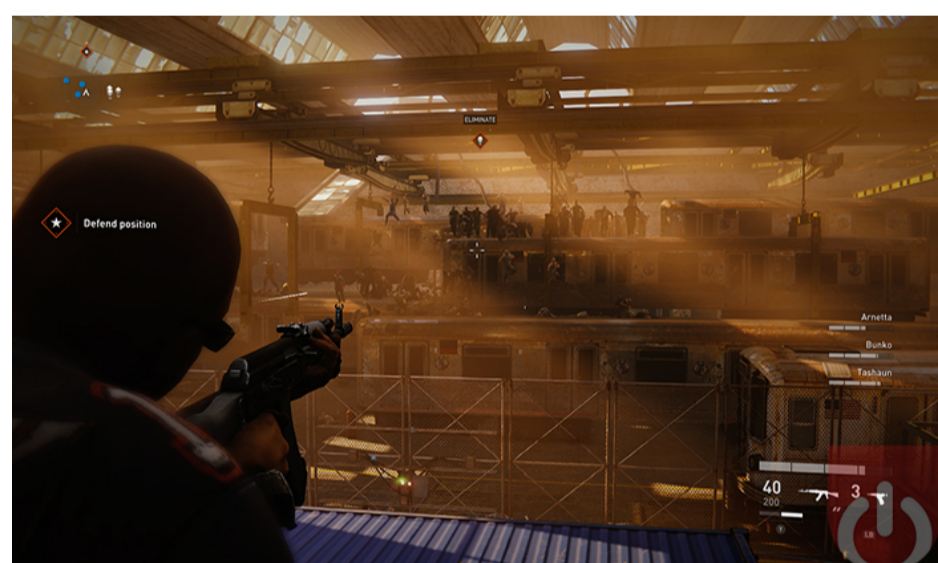
The special zombies found in each game sport different names but have nearly identical behaviors. WWZ's large, riot gear wearing Bulls replace Left 4 Dead 2's Chargers; they'll charge into players, grabbing the first person they hit before proceeding to repeatedly slam them into the ground. Instead of Boomers and Hunters, there are Gasbags and Lurkers. The Lurker will pin players to the ground as they slash at their bodies, requiring a teammate's help to get them off. The Gasbags will release toxic gas upon death, blinding and damaging players near their bodies.



There are other borrowed elements as well, all of which robs WWZ of its identity. What made the book great, besides being a collection of extremely well written stories, was its deep look at humanity from different points of view before, during and after the outbreak. The thing that made the movie great was the giant swarms of crazed zombies and their hive mind-like sensibilities. When it comes to the game, it only offers brief snippets of the larger world here and there. The lore helps to pull gamers in but there isn't enough to keep them invested. And while the game does feature the swarming zombies from the film, they aren't as chaotic as one would hope. They almost always come running in the same fashion, in predetermined areas on each map.

Instead of diving into the things that make WWZ cool, it seems like Saber Interactive tried to recreate Valve's hit series. They just barely succeed. The giant zombie swarms are frightful, sure. But they are also a predictable, overused element that's placed in certain locations to ape the final stand segments seen in the L4D titles. Worse still, WWZ lacks the level variation seen in that series. Some levels ended in last stands, some required players to race to an exit. Others featured a combination of the two. Despite having interesting environments to explore, most of WWZ's levels begin and end in the same way. Players will move through a level, solve a few light puzzles, then defend an area. Rinse and repeat.

It would be remiss of me to say that WWZ is just a L4D clone played in third person. It's more than that. The game functions as it should (sans a bug or two) and the shooting feels good. There are modern gameplay mechanics that help shake things up. Like WWZ's various guns, all of which can be leveled up before unlocking newer versions with better stats. Players can combine class-based skills to better their chances of survival; a Medic can heal teammates from a distance while the Slasher has increased melee damage and the ability to stun foes. And while the zombie hordes are predictable, they do present a challenge. Even with defensive items like turrets and electric fences, they can easily overwhelm a team if they aren't paying attention.



Borrowed elements, modern trappings – the most notable thing about WWZ is that it's still entertaining to play. Despite the similarities, the occasional bugs, and the predictable nature of the game's biggest gimmick, I still enjoyed myself. I'm not sure if it's because the borrowed bits of L4D's formula are solid or if WWZ offers just enough action to provide a good time. But jumping online and fighting through seemingly endless waves of zombies with friends is where it's at. The same can be said of the PvPvE options, where normal competitive modes are spruced up with the inclusion of zombies; fighting over control points in Domination can be exhilarating when at any moment, both teams can be swept up by a sea of zombies.

On paper it doesn't work. It shouldn't. Somehow it does though. As much as I'd like it to better resemble the book, to more accurately mirror the chaotic nature of the film, or to just be more than the sum of Left 4 Dead's parts, World War Z accomplishes its most important goal. And that's to entertain by way of explosive zombie action. It isn't the best it could have been. But it isn't horrible either.

**Gameplay: 7**

World War Z is fun to play. The basic running and gunning are surprisingly enough warrant an extended stay on your console/PC. That said, it could have been better though. Borrowing from Left 4 Dead robs it of its personality.

**Graphics: 7**

The game renders large amounts of zombies on screen without a hitch. Some of the characters and environments sport impressive details. Still, a lot of it looks washed out; the visuals fare better on a high-end PC.

**Sound: 7**

The voice work, music and sound effects are decent.

**Replay Value: 8**

WWZ is entertaining to play. And with the slight variations made during each playthrough, the multiple difficulties and PvPvE offerings, I can see people returning to this game every so often.

**Final Score: 7.3**

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