

Propaganda of the Dead

Anarchist Lessons for the Zombie Apocalypse

Strangers In a Tangled Wilderness

November 17, 2013

Contents

Your Leaders Can't Protect You—But They Can Get You Eaten By the Undead	3
Lessons on Zombie Survival from the Anarchists	3
Warlords, Famine, Zombies—If You're Not Having Fun, You're Not Doing it Right . . .	5

I was in a med study when the zombie outbreak began. That's right, a master's degree in philosophy and the only way I could come up with to pay rent was to sell my still-living body to capitalist science. I know, I know... in retrospect I should have studied something useful, like small engine repair.

*Oh, and I wasn't just in any med study when the zombie outbreak began, I was in the med study **where** it began. The researchers were testing some kind of acne medication, looking to see if there were any adverse side effects when it was used on healthy adults. There were. Thanks, capitalist society, for pretty much ending the world.*

Your Leaders Can't Protect You—But They Can Get You Eaten By the Undead

So the world is being overrun by legions of zombies. Many of your friends, your co-workers, and likely much of your family has been infected with the lethal disease that ends brain functioning and causes its host to feast on the flesh of the still-living. Whole neighborhoods and cities and towns, vast geographic regions, have fallen before the slow onslaught of the shambling dead.

The government responded like it always has: by clinging to power rather than concerning itself the wellbeing of its citizens. The national guard shoots almost as many looters as it does zombies because, as its propaganda reads, *a nation without law is already dead*.

They are wrong. Many of us have known it for years, but it's never been more obvious: we do not need law to survive. We cannot rely on leaders to keep us safe. We, instead, must rely on one another.

No one here from Seattle is likely to forget CenturyLink Stadium. One hundred thousand people crammed together like cattle and guarded like prisoners. We're living in the apocalypse, and that's the kind of response government comes up with—centralized, cost-effective, and completely and utterly inadequate. The only people who made it out of CenturyLink still human are the ones who rioted and broke free half a day before the zombies fell on the place en masse.

Lessons on Zombie Survival from the Anarchists

Government is a centralization of power, and centralization has no role in this world anymore. Even if the horde of walkers hadn't shambled in through the gates of CenturyLink, everyone in that stadium was going to die. The centralization of people into areas of high density requires the routine importation of resources from elsewhere, and that simply isn't going to happen anymore.

There's one group of people that's been fighting against the very idea of government for a hundred and fifty years, however. There's one group of people that's been exploring alternative methods of organization that cannot be destroyed so easily, methods that allow for small bands to come together without centralizing power or access to resources. The anarchists.

What can those who want to survive, and indeed, beat back this demonic scourge, learn from those of us who have dedicated our lives to the abolition of domination? A lot, it turns out. We'll start with the situation as it is: there are a lot of isolated groups surviving as best they can out there, some with ten people, some with a thousand. We're holed up in schools or bunkers or shacks in the woods, getting what news we can off the shortwave, eating canned food and hunting cattle in the countryside or raiding supermarkets and the homes of the dead in urban areas. So how would anarchists organize this mess of us to survive?

Horizontalism: “Anarchist” is a word for someone who refuses domination, someone who doesn’t need a cop to tell them how to behave. And what anarchism boils down to is the realization that horizontal, consensual structures are preferable to hierarchical, imposed ones. As we’ve seen with the rapid dissolution of the United States, it’s pretty obvious that the breakdown of a chain of command is nasty business. We’ve no interest in replicating that problem. The only authority that anarchists respect is the temporary authority of leadership: when someone is dying of tetanus, listen to the doctor. When you get in a gunfight, listen to the gunfighter. The rest of the time, those doctors and gunfighters better be doing their best to spread the knowledge they have as best they can, because one bite on the arm and suddenly they’re on the wrong team.

Affinity Groups: If you’re alive enough to read this, you’ve probably already found yourself an affinity group. Anarchists do most of their work organized into small groups of between usually three and fifteen people. We like to work with people who complement our skills but generally have similar goals and processes.

Networked Resistance: Above the affinity group level, we work in networks both loose and formal. These are information-sharing and co-planning networks by which we can organize to defend ourselves. Within these networks, individual affinity groups might have their own specializations: hunter/killer teams who clear nearby neighborhoods of walkers so that the network might spread, for example, or hospital affinity groups that set up medical care within a reasonably safe location.

Communization: In a crisis, everyone’s either a natural communist or the kind of “hole-up-with-your-guns-and-you-don’t-have-any-friends” wingnut who gets killed pretty quick, whether by walkers or people who just really, really wish you’d share with them. Not all anarchists believe in full communism, and while surviving the apocalypse is certainly going to involve some pooling and re-allocation of resources, we’re not telling you that you should give up your t-shirt or your toothbrush—or your sidearm for that matter. Communization is about taking control of the means of survival as a group so that we can, you know, survive.

Mutual Aid: Anarchists believe in cooperation instead of competition as a basis for society, and these days of the Z-man are sure proving our point. Working together, we have a chance to fight back the seemingly endless onslaught of flesh-eaters. If we spend our time fighting amongst ourselves, we’re sure going to go down fast. But we’re no authoritarians, and we don’t believe in *forcing* people to work together either. And that’s what mutual aid is all about: mutual aid is when peers share amongst one another because they *want* to. It’s a really nice thing to be a part of, actually.

Also, to hell with money. What do we need with money?

Solidarity: The government—what’s left of it, anyway—claims that we all need to act as one *unified* entity, under their control, or we’ll all die. They’re half right. Well, one-third right. We all need to act together. But that doesn’t mean we need unity and it sure as hell doesn’t mean we need *them*. A single, centralized structure is as doomed as pockets of isolated resisters. Maybe more so. No, what we believe in is a network built on solidarity rather than unity. We believe that we should come to one another’s aid because if we don’t, then there’s no one to come to our aid and we’ll get picked off one by one. That doesn’t mean we need to share the same flag or the same country name or something remarkably banal like which person should be in charge of everyone else as if one person was better at making decisions for everyone.

Intersectionality: The struggle against zombies; government; and other warlords, racists, sexists, homophobes, etc. are all intersecting struggles. You might think feminism is kind of a moot

point when your dead parents are trying to claw their way through the boards you hastily nailed over the window, but you'd actually be wrong. You'd be wrong for two reasons. First, because you and your friends are still alive on the inside of that house and those of us who are alive tend to want to be treated with respect. The absence of law doesn't mean the absence of responsibility. And second, you'd be wrong because power dynamics *do* matter, and all forms of interpersonal oppression are interlinked. Racists are going to lose out pretty big when they realize they've decided half the US population is unfit to help them in their struggle to stay alive. Macho men make terrible leaders, what's more, and those that let themselves be subjugated by such people are a hell of a lot more likely to end up shambling around, vacant-eyed, trying to find someone to eat.

Looting: Back in the day, we used to call this "expropriation." More recently, we just call it looting. But here's the thing: if you need something and someone isn't using it, take it. It's particularly true now, but it's always been true. Remember when there used to be more empty homes than homeless people, and the police were just waiting around to arrest people for trying to stay somewhere warm? It's been kind of amazing watching people's understanding of property revert to common sense as soon as the spell of consumer culture was broken by a deathly contagion. Warehouse full of food? Get it. Pharmacy full of antibiotics? Take that shit. Hell, there's likely not anyone left alive who wouldn't take a flatscreen TV from a department store if they had the electricity to turn it on.

Justice: Maybe the only thing we anarchists like more than looting is sticking up for the little guy, and there's not much reason to distinguish between the KKK and the zombies when it comes down to where to put bullets. When we talk about taking what you can get, we don't mean "might makes right," not by a long shot. We're serious about this cooperation thing. We're serious about respecting people's autonomy. And we're serious about holding ourselves responsible for how we behave.

Warlords, Famine, Zombies—If You're Not Having Fun, You're Not Doing it Right

I'm not saying it's not hard. I'm not saying it's not horrible. And you know what? If we had aimed half the bullets we aim at walkers today at the corporate rulers who were hellbent on destroying the world just last year, the world might not have been destroyed.

We hear story after story of grief and loss, and my friends and I could tell as many as anyone. I watched one of my two best friends eviscerate the other one, and less than a week later I lost half my family to ghouls. I wake half my nights from nightmares and the other half from the heavy footfalls of the undead. I haven't taken a piss without a pistol in my hand since this began, and even if we win one day, I'll be haunted by these memories all my life.

And there's time to tell those stories of woe and death. There's time to grieve. But there's something to the fact that, well, sometimes stories of the apocalypse are stories of hope. We are sitting on a blank slate, and if aren't all transformed into the cannibal dead, we can make what we want of this world. So let's put down the zombies, burn their bodies, and move forward into a world worth living in.

Think of the stories we'll tell, if any of us make it to be old.

The zombie apocalypse isn't *all* bad. Now you have a socially-acceptable reason to shoot your boss.

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