

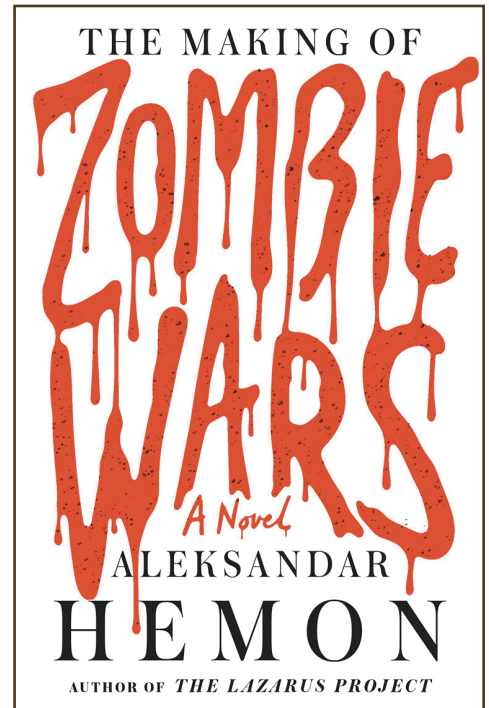
FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Reading Group Gold

The Making of Zombie Wars

A Novel

by Aleksandar Hemon



ISBN: 978-0-374-20341-2 / 320 pages

Just as Aleksandar Hemon's acclaimed books delve into a diverse range of human experiences, Joshua Levin—the aspiring screenwriter at the center of *The Making of Zombie Wars*—finds creative inspiration in all aspects of life, from pop culture to crazed passion. While his personal life is unraveling, Joshua's concept for a zombie movie takes root, flourishing in a fantastical realm of horror and hilarity. The real world he inhabits is marked by similar contrasts. His girlfriend, Kimmy, has a tempting stash of sex toys, but he's equally tempted to hook up with Ana, a Bosnian student in the ESL class he teaches. Ana is the more dangerous choice: she has a violent, jealous husband, though Joshua's well-intentioned landlord (an unhinged military vet) provides a special brand of bodyguard protection. Joshua's family offers no haven from the mayhem, but their charismatic take on everything from prostate cancer to parenting stokes his imagination.

We hope this guide will spark a memorable discussion as your reading group savors *The Making of Zombie Wars*.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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?

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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?



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aleksandar Hemon is the author of *The Lazarus Project*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award; *The Book of My Lives*, which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; and three other works of fiction, including *Nowhere Man*, which was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. He is a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a “Genius Grant” from the MacArthur Foundation. Born in Sarajevo in 1964, he lives in Chicago with his wife and their children. To learn more about Aleksandar Hemon, visit www.aleksandarhemon.com.

Guide written by Amy Clements