



Mutated

Joe McKinney

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They Outnumber The Living. . .

25 to 1. Those are the odds of being struck down--and resurrected--by the savage plague that's sweeping the country, forcing survivors to band together against the dead.

They're Growing Stronger. . .

Even among the living, there is dissention. A new leader known as the Red Man has risen up and taken charge--and he's nearly as dangerous as the hungry dead. Some, like Bob Richardson and his friends, strike out on their own. Because if the men with guns don't get them, the zombies will.

They're Getting Smarter. . .

Fleeing the cities, Richardson and his crew find sanctuary in an abandoned farm. But their stronghold may not be strong enough. Something strange and terrifying is happening to the undead. They're banding together. Working as a group. Hungering for a common goal: human flesh. And lots of it.

Mutated Details

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Author : Joe McKinney

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From Reader Review Mutated for online ebook

Jordan Anderson says

Excuse the horribly bad pun here, but the zombie genre is dead, and as much as it pains me to write a (slightly) negative review on a Joe McKinney book, the truth, as they say, is in the details.

I was underwhelmed with McKinney's newest zombie novel. Actually, I was disappointed. Reading this one, you would never know he was the one and same author of the fantastic "Apocalypse of the Dead" and it's pseudo-sequel "Flesh Eaters". The characters in "Mutated" are the same, and there are some questions answered that were presented in previous installments, but gone is the creativity and love for the genre. The story is unoriginal and weak. The action is sub-par, and the conclusion was, to me at least, way too quickly wrapped up. "Mutated" comes off as a quick write, a fast way for McKinney to cash in on a horror genre that is on it's last legs.

The other problem with this book rests on the the publisher's shoulders. I don't know what is going on over at Pinnacle, but the production value has really gone down the crapper. Not only is this book cheaply made and bound, someone needs a new set of glasses, or a new typesetter all together; the typos and misspellings were about as bad as a self-produced e-book. And speaking of the typeset, I have never seen a printed novel with a such a horrible font. I'm not kidding when I say that the words would literally float their way around the pages, almost like a turn of the century type writer.

Fingers crossed that "Mutated" is just a fluke in the otherwise great "Dead World" series of Joe McKinney.

Megan says

I had issues with this book like some of the other reviewers did. While the book itself was not bad there was something off about it. McKinney's writing style has changed dramatically. Some of the content was explicit which was surprising as his previous books were not graphic it was almost as if he did not write the book. The book was rather long compared to the previous books as well. Not his best work.

Joe Robles says

I had been waiting a long time for this book to come out. I was not disappointed. The last book ended on a kind of hopeful note (they had found a vaccine thanks to the guy who was immune). I say kind of in that the compound was overrun and tons of people were left dead. However, that was years ago, as this book starts. Things haven't gotten any better, in fact they seem to have gotten worse. The kid who holds the key to the zombie vaccine is near death himself and has no idea what to do with thumb drive that holds data. Also, the Zombies have advanced to a stage where they seem a little smarter. They are able to use other zombies as bait or to fake being slower than they actually are. There is even one alpha zombie (the Red Man) who can control other zombies. The survivors seem to have set up a few pockets of humanity, but they seem to be on the ropes.

I don't want to go too into the plot because it would be too easy to spoil things. I do have to say this book is

very good. I've always liked that Joe McKinney seems to have a Joss Whedon like ability to allow his characters to be killed if it advances the plot. No one is safe. Which is as it should be in a story about the Zombie Apocalypse, you would live in mortal danger every second of every day.

Speaking of pop culture geeks, I thought there was one scene at the market that reminded me of Obi-Wan and Luke chartering of the Millennium Falcon in Star Wars: New Hope. Come to think of it, there's kind of a scene where they rescue a "rebel princess" that can handle herself just fine. You could probably make other comparisons (as I am doing in my head).

I'm a huge fan of this series and hope Mr. McKinney hasn't run out of stories to tell yet.

Jason Bradley Thompson says

The plot: it's been years since America was overrun with slow-ish, rotting (but technically living: in one scene a zombie is strangled to death) zombies. Now, in addition to the survivors' zombie problems, there's the "Red Man," a mutant... or perhaps *mutant super-zombie?? Da da da dum!* with human intelligence and the ability to psychically command the zombie hordes. Can the survivors evade the Red Man and his armies of zombies & human soldiers long enough to find a cure for the disease?

That's the summary, but the 'plot' consists of a bunch of intercut scenes of characters scavenging in the ruins, fighting zombies, running from the Red Man, and looking for the MacGuffin of the cure. The book would be over in 10 pages if the characters didn't keep running past one another and missing one another in the woods. The dialogue mostly consists of the good guys asking one another "Where is the MacGuffin?" "Nah man, I haven't seen it"; or the Red Man capturing the good guys and torturing them while asking "WHERE IS THE MACGUFFIN?" and the good guys answering "I'LL NEVER TELL YOU, RED MAN!! NEVER!!!"

There's never any sense of threat or urgency from the zombies, even though some are fast & smart; human civilization has apparently collapsed but there's still a local farmer's market. One character is somehow still able to charge his laptop. The Red Man is a boring villain, whose motivations are more like some skeezy creep from high school than a cannibal world-conquerer. His human henchmen are two-dimensional mooks, and the good guys kill them as casually as they kill the zombies. I wasn't attached to any of the good guys either. There's a fair number of tough female characters, but there's also a few scenes of women threatened with sexual peril (implied, but there), and there's some sexist and/or just stupid lines about how women are different from men, which other reviewers have quoted. Oh, and as for the ending: (view spoiler)

I have to 'fess up that I haven't read the other books in the series, and Brian Keene gave props to the first book, "Dead City," but this one was so dull I ended up just skimming the last 50 pages.

Brian Clopper says

Solid continuation of the two previous books. Zombie action works and the river setting adds a fresh backdrop to the battles. Not so sure an electronic tablet would weather the zombie apocalypse. I found that to be a stretch.

Robert Gamboa says

Definitely a spin on what I was expecting, but it ties the series together well. As modern zombie enthusiasts are finding more and more experiences with advanced and mutated zombies, McKinney delivers a good conclusion. It breaks away from the traditional zombie lines and moves into a new world order.

Trike says

I'm just going to come out and say it: I think this book was ghostwritten.

It doesn't feel like McKinney's other books in any way. The language is repetitive and full of errors, the characters are one-dimensional, the intelligence level of Nate The Immune Guy veers wildly all over the place, from a stupor-like idiocy to eloquent rhapsodies, and the characters are incredibly difficult to injure or kill... until it comes to time to injure or kill them for no apparent reason.

The other option is that McKinney is starting that long slide into dementia, as we saw with Agatha Christie, as her writing became simpler and her plots broken.

Here we have a character straight out of a Stephen King novel, the Red Man, who somehow has psychic control over all the zombies everywhere. (Which is actually a key aspect of other, better zombie novels, such as *Monster Island* by David Wellington.) One of the (horribly-written) main characters, reporter Ben Richardson, actually lampshades this by exclaiming, "That's not consistent with this world!" But drawing a big red arrow over the problem **without answering the question** is amateur-hour fan-fiction.

Then there's the issue of Ben's iPad, which he's been carrying around recording interviews on for 8 years. Again, this is lampshaded when someone looks at it and marvels that Ben somehow found a way to charge this device in a world without electricity. Well? **How did he do that?!** I mean, you're only looking through his knapsack, which contains everything he owns. Surely the answer is in there.

Nope.

The problem is simple: you can't lampshade something badly, because that just raises more questions. People often use the terms "lampshading" and "red flag" interchangeably, but I distinguish between the two.

In a story -- novel, movie, play, TV series, whatever -- that is self-aware and has meta-commentary on both the real world and the fictional world we're presented with, you can lampshade away, because the audience is already there for the comedy and in tune with the silliness. A great example occurs in the Disney movie *The Emperor's New Groove* where, after a lengthy chase sequence, the bad guys (chasers) beat the good guys (chasees) back to the secret lab and one of them asks, "Wait a minute! How did you get here first?" And one of the bad guy pulls a chart out and shows their paths, remarking, "I don't know. Logically it makes no sense."

That kind of lampshading in that type of movie is fine. Here, in this book, it goes from lampshading to red flagging. It completely throws you out of the story.

Typically audiences will go for one or two big "buy-ins" on a story. Your armor protects you from harm?

Okay Iron Man, I'll buy that... even when you fall out of the sky and slam into concrete at 100 miles per hour, which should've turned you into paste. But once you start heaping more and more impossible things onto the character, audiences lose their willing suspension of disbelief.

To sell the Big Impossibility, you need to get the Little Realities correct.

In *Mutated* we're already buying into a pretty big gimme with a zombie novel. Pushing us into the idea that zombies are evolving -- or mutating, as the title suggests -- and there are different stages of the zombie virus which results in different kinds of zombies, including regaining some limited cognition and becoming fast-moving again (after decaying and being damaged plus diseased for nearly a decade) is another pretty big demand on our willing suspension of disbelief. But I think most people will go with that. Until you pile on with the ridiculous Red Man and his psychic powers, and the magical iPad, and the temporary invulnerability of characters... now you've broken my WSoD.

There are lots of other things about this book which are just dumb. The hyper-competent character of Niki Booth, for example. She's supposed to meet with Dr. Fisher at sunset at some small town in three days so they can... what? I have no idea. Sylvia claims Niki knows of a cure, but Niki never says that. Nate is the guy who is both immune to the virus AND has the flash drive containing the government's vaccine formula on it, and Niki didn't even know about his existence until more than 5/6ths of the way through the book. And how were Niki and Dr. Fisher arranging this meet-up? Did they, too, have working iPads whose Facetime apps still worked just fine? (Well, no, since Dr. Fisher enjoys seeing an iPad again after so long. Maybe they had Android phones?)

The fact that these are things we're just supposed to accept because it's a zombie novel (which is my guess as to the rationale here) is spurious. We've seen time and time again that people reject this stuff, so why is it being tried here?

I dunno. I see a lot of 4- and 5-star ratings for this book, which proves H.L. Mencken was probably right: "No one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public."

Sarah says

Having read (& thoroughly enjoyed) the first three in this series, as well as short story *The Crossing*, I eagerly started this instalment. Sadly though I was let down from the start, I absolutely loved the first three but this fell flat for me. The story itself is ok I guess, but the descriptive technique completely different from the other books. I felt like it had been written by a different person. I just couldn't get into it. I think especially loosing *Flesh Eaters* which is superb, this had a lot to live up to and sadly didn't hit the mark.

Meran says

Ben Richardson, the chronicler of this zombie plague, opens this novel, #4 (or 5?) in the *Dead World* series. Before 3 pgs have gone by we're given some concrete facts on zombie biology, handsome very decent writing. Ben is in North St. Louis, pretty much DEAD center of the US (LOL). This book picks up about 2 yrs [which is 8 years after initial outbreaks in Houston) after Book 2, referencing cult leader Jasper in Montana and Ed Moore.

New major leader of the zombies, called Red Man... top half of whom is painted red, bald bullet shaped head, no shoes, zombies STOP around him. Ben is watching, "being the camera", as this unfolds. The man is something VERY new, actually speaks to and controls even the Stage III zombies -- a mutation? A new species of human? His real name: Loren Skaggs. Who may just be a Stage VI zombie, something not seen before.

This book is definitely written well, better than the 3 before it.

Nate Royal is back too. He closed out Book II. I wish the incidents of everyone calling him an idiot wasn't so overdone.

This book is similar to Jonathan Maberry's Joe Ledger books -- hard on women (his are all "very attractive" or "ugly and mannish, with bad attitude" [and not the good kind either]). I wish they'd been more like Maberry's Tommy Imura series -- sympathetic and human. At least the chapters are longer and have reasons for breaking, like change of venues or POV, unlike Maberry.

Nitpicks: pg 67- "a little plump, a little pale for his taste"... really? Women don't read your novels? Start judging the males...; 110-about a 20 yr old girl- "A little thick around the middle, but nice." Description of the men are never presented in a sexual manner. One more instance of this and it'll get a dude book designation. ; 148- the girl had a nice shape, even in the military type pants; DUDEBOOKS; pg 162 and now a crack about Sylvia being a little heavier when Ben first met her. DUDE! QUIT! UNNEEDED! Does it really add anything except anti-female imaging? Because models are so important in the zombie plague apocalypses; Nitpick #2- It's customary to explain TLIs when written (how's it feel? ;)) - what are BDUs, for example? A lot of us have no idea beyond "military clothing" - Body Defense Uniforms? pg 173 In the market there is no descriptions of the men, but there are old heavyset women; and there are many more of these statements, all against women. The only derogatory things about guys are age related. This is new to this book. The previous ones didn't describe woman's attractiveness or body weight.

And yet, at other times, he describes a woman worthy of the title of Warrior and respect. His observations are not presented together, not even in the same chapter -- and much of both "slap and tickle" are about the same woman. Did someone suggest this change of attitude? If so, that person should be fired for the ill advice. Nitpick #7?: It's been 8 yrs and still there's plenty of fuel and ammunition. At the rate it's being used?

He really likes the name Eddie,... he's used it several times, 3 characters.. With all the names out there, most authors try mightily to not name people the same name. Saves on confusion.

Errors: 226-He feed the throttle = fed; 256- River water had got into his mouth. =had gotten; 306- water rising steadily. ...Rain was falling steadily... -within two sentences of each other.- repetitive.

Amanda says

Man this book has some bad reviews. Glad I read it before reading them or I may have missed out. Character development was a little lacking (as has been stated) but this book spans VERY LITTLE time. What do you expect out of characters within a matter of days? There was plenty of growth between books in my opinion. Nate, Ben and Sylvia had definitely grown and changed since the second book. As well they should--8 years

have passed since we left them behind at the grasslands.

I enjoyed this book for what it was: a terrifying romp through a dead world. I recommend reading the other dead world books first. The story is complete unto itself but it may give you more of an appreciation for this story and where the author is coming from.

Kudos to the author. And also screw him for getting me hooked--I want more! :-P

Kathy Taylor says

Book 4 of the Dead City series was quite slow in several places. There is action at times but not as much as we have seen previously.

One of the things I really wish authors would do is make notes of the descriptions of their characters, including injuries, when they have a series with multiple characters. The author forgot an injury described in a previous book. It was a knee injury. Somehow in this book he has an ankle injury. No. Just no.

Aside from the reduced action, there is the abrupt ending. No answers, just questions now. Again, no. Hence the 3 star rating.

Henri Moreaux says

Whilst not quite as good as the first two books in the series Mutated is still an entertaining read.

This time around the protagonists are on a mission to find a doctor who claims to have a way to treat the necrosis filovirus. An adventure across post apocalypse texas ensues.

Anja Braun says

This book was a huge disappointment so much so that I really just wanted to stop reading it..The only thing that kept me reading it was I had begged my hubbie to get it for me..Unfortunately this was regretted by page 12..I give this book a 2 because quite frankly it was sloppily done..There are just too many typos and the same phrase over and over be the roving camera..It drove me crazy..I agree with the other reviewers How did he keep a Ipad charged really? This shall be my last book from this author..I do enjoy a good Zombie book but sadly this wasn't one..

Peter Giglio says

MUTATED delivers pulse-pounding action with precision, intelligence, and most importantly, heart. McKinney proves once again that he understands the power of the zombie subgenre better than any other writer. Highly recommended.

Nick says

This is the last book in the Dead World series and brings the zombie story to an end. I enjoyed the first three books, Dead City, Apocalypse of the Dead and Flesh Eaters and was looking forward to reading the final chapter.

This book is set 8 years after the initial outbreak which is a long time for a zombie outbreak. This raises questions such as what would have happened to the zombies after this length of time? What about the survivors? Would there be anyone, including zombies, left? The book attempts to answer these questions but does not quite provide believable answers.

There are 4 stages of zombies now with stage 3 having evolved to the point where they show human characteristics. The lead zombie is a stage 4, named the Red Man, who can control all zombies telepathically. I liked the Red Man, who is basically human with some zombie characteristics, and his army of zombies who are taking over control of all survivors. This book takes forward the idea of zombies and adds new elements.

However, while the 8 years has given the zombies this time to evolve not much has changed for the survivors. It reads like the zombie outbreak has just happened. There is plenty of ammunition, petrol and working vehicles. The biggest issue is that of an Ipad. How is this working after 8 years? How does it get charged? I like ambiguous endings in books and I don't expect all the answers but this did not make sense. I can believe in evolved zombies but not the Ipad.

There is plenty of gore and action as the story progresses with some nasty and brutal horror inflicted by the Red Man. An enjoyable zombie read which concludes the series.

Overall, I have enjoyed the Dead World books. A great zombie outbreak story.

Krycek says

There are a lot of zombie books out these days. While I like zombies, sometimes I think this is too much of a good thing. We see a lot of uninspired, lackluster stories. That's what I found in *Mutated*. Don't get me wrong-- if you are jonesing for a zombie fix this'll get you by, but I doubt that it will leave you with any lasting impressions.

The prose was okay most of the time, but I think the editors were asleep at the wheel. I don't mind a couple of typos here and there-- and there were a couple here and there. Not a big deal. One thing I *can't stand*, though, is stuff like this: "But then it donned on him." (p. 234) No, I think you mean it *dawned* on him. *Dawned*. Stuff like this drives me up the wall. Even if the writer goofed up in the draft, shouldn't the editor have picked up on it?

Okay, that is a personal pet peeve of mine, and maybe not that serious. It only happened once. Other, more significant, issues prevented this from breaking the two star barrier:

--It seems like McKinney has a really narrow view of how both men and women think and behave. It's almost like he's an alien who has based the behavior of men and women on cliches he's seen in movies and TV. Like, not once but *twice* Niki Booth, one of the female good-guys, tried using her "feminine wiles" on her captors and both times it almost works. I mean, it works both times to a degree because, apparently, we men have no defenses against the sight of boobs. Ben Richardson, another protagon, makes the profound observation that women:

...saw the world differently from men. They weren't pragmatists. Yes, they had reason. But it wasn't the same kind of reason that men had. When they thought about a problem, they didn't think in a straight line, from problem to solution. Their way of thinking made countless loops and diversions on its way to a conclusion. They seemed to thrive on subtext and implied meaning, the kind of thing that men just didn't have time or patience for. Richardson found the whole thing really aggravating.

Yeah. Girls are dumb. Huh, huh. (of course, I'm being sarcastic).

Later on this view is "countered" by another character, Hinton, saying that women are "idiots" because they put up with us stupid men and it's a wonder how all women aren't lesbians.

Okaaay.

Niki Booth seems pretty direct when she deals with zombies in hand-to-hand combat. She's good at that. Just so happens that she gets off on it, though, as character-with-the-key-to-the-cure Nate observes:

...it almost looked like she was enjoying the fight. Really, really enjoying it. Like the girls in the porno movies he used to watch.

Lesson: women are ditzy bubble-brains, but fighting with zombies gets them off.

Makes sense, right? (Again, feel my sarcasm).

--I didn't care for how the zombies were referred to alternately as "zombie," "man" or "woman," and their corresponding pronouns. I get that they are not really undead, but are infected with a virus, but sticking to "zombie" and "it" would have been a lot smoother for me.

--And speaking of zombies, we kind of get by now that zombies are really gross, so we don't need a run down of all the scars, boils, scabs, rotten bits, oozing bits and odors for each zombie. Halfway through the book I think we are well aware that this is *de rigueur* for zombies. It gets old and after a while it's like, "So what?" Likewise, play-by-plays of each fight are less than exciting.

--I liked the idea of The Red Man as a "zombie king" who could control other zombies. That was pretty cool and creepy, but as a character I had a hard time believing that this former stoner meth-head could lead an army of zombies as well as a bunch of mercenaries. I get that he was an asshole, but really what was his motivation? What was his point? And what the fuck was up with the red paint? I felt like Loren Skaggs checked the box for "Evil Mastermind Asshole," but that was all.

--How the hell did Richardson keep his damn iPad charged?

Overall, the whole thing felt disjointed and incoherent. The plot seemed propelled by just stumbling over upon itself until the end. For that matter, the book could have (should have) been about 150 pages shorter. I was not impressed. By the time I got to the end of the story I could have cared less about how it turned out.

As I said, if you're in desperate need of a zombie fix, this will tide you over, but really there is very little substance here to make it more than a mediocre casual read. I haven't read any of McKinney's other stuff and this title doesn't make me want to rush for them.

Paul E. Morph says

[the zombies start to regain their intellect if they survive long enough and more and more 'stage III' zombies are being encountered by the uninfected survivors... Zombies that are smart enough to set traps for their prey and use the unintel

Ebony Irby says

His female voices sound like an old prospector.

Hayat says

Joe Mckinney's Dead World series are one of the best zombie apocalypse books out there and each book is even better than the last. I picked up the first book Dead City on a whim and almost quit reading due to lack of interesting characters coupled with a simplistic plot. It seemed to be similar to many other zombie horror books I've read but I decided to give the series a chance and I'm glad I did.

The second and third books in the Dead World series were even better. Each book had a new central character, a new setting, more complex plot and looks at the Apocalypse from a different angle. I love the strong yet realistic female characters here, the multiple POV, the variety of other characters and how they are connected, the well paced plot and heart pounding action and general atmosphere evoked by by the authors writing style. I can't wait to reread this series in the future and discover more of Mr Mckinney's books.

Chad Ervin says

I was very disappointed in this book. I have loved the first three books in the series, and I understand that all authors have books that are not up to par with the rest of their work, but c'mon. The dialogue was stilted, there are gaping plot holes (I'm looking at you, magical iPad that still works in a world devoid of electricity), and the characters are insufferably resilient to the zombies until they fray your last nerve, at which point, mercifully, they die. I really think that this book would have been better presented as the old "Fun with Dick and Jane" primers they used to teach first graders how to read. A possible excerpt could go, "See Nate. See Nate run. Oops! Nate fell down. Stop whining and get up, Nate!"
