



The Harlem Hellfighters

By Max Brooks

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From bestselling author Max Brooks, the riveting story of the highly decorated, barrier-breaking, historic black regiment—the Harlem Hellfighters

In 1919, the 369th infantry regiment marched home triumphantly from World War I. They had spent more time in combat than any other American unit, never losing a foot of ground to the enemy, or a man to capture, and winning countless decorations. Though they returned as heroes, this African American unit faced tremendous discrimination, even from their own government. The Harlem Hellfighters, as the Germans called them, fought courageously on—and off—the battlefield to make Europe, and America, safe for democracy.

In *THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS*, bestselling author Max Brooks and acclaimed illustrator Caanan White bring this history to life. From the enlistment lines in Harlem to the training camp at Spartanburg, South Carolina, to the trenches in France, they tell the heroic story of the 369th in an action-packed and powerful tale of honor and heart.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: Essay by Max Brooks (adapted from the author's note within *The Harlem Hellfighters*)

I first learned of the Harlem Hellfighters from an Anglo-Rhodesian named Michael Furmanovsky when I was 11. Michael was working for my parents while getting his MFA in history from UCLA. He taught me about the British Empire, the Falklands War, Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and a host of other topics not covered in my fifth-grade western civilization class. Of all his after-school lessons, the one that left the deepest impression was the story of a unit of American soldiers who weren't allowed to fight for their country because of the color of their skin. To a white, privileged kid growing up on the west side of L.A. in the 1980s, that kind of prejudice was just inconceivable. When I confessed that I didn't know about them, he assured me that I wasn't alone.

Ten years later I was an exchange student at the University of the Virgin Islands. The experience brought me back into the orbit of the Hellfighters when, while walking through an old cemetery, I noticed some graves from 1918. I wondered if they might be casualties of the Great War, maybe even members of the 369th. I decided to ask my professor of Virgin Islands history. He was an African-American from the mainland, and to call him passionate would be a laughable understatement. With his beard and spectacles and flaring dashiki, he would rail against the historical crimes committed by white men of Europe and North America. Most heinous was the erasure of black accomplishments by white historians. Colonization, he would tell us, begins with the mind, and the best (or worst) way to colonize a people is to bury their past. "There were no black soldiers in World War I." That was his dismissive answer to my question about the graves from 1918. When I started to argue, even bringing up the name "Harlem Hellfighters," he assured me that I must have been confused with the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II. I was shocked. Here was a scholar, a crusader, a thoughtful, driven man who'd made it his life's mission to trumpet the glory of Africa and her diaspora, and HE didn't know about the Harlem Hellfighters. I wish I could say that I decided then and there to write their story, but that would have to wait for nearly another decade.

In the late 1990s, I was living back in L.A., just out of graduate school and trying to make a living as a writer. My decision to tackle the story of the Hellfighters came after watching two TNT made-for-TV movies about the Tuskegee Airmen and the Buffalo soldiers. I thought TNT might be interested in a story about World War I's black heroes, especially after A&E's successful *Lost Battalion* movie. I started collecting books about the subject (the most influential was and still is *From Harlem to the Rhine* by Arthur Little), and a year and several dozen drafts later, I pitched my screenplay to the TNT Network. They passed. So did everyone else.

Things changed when I sent my script to actor/director LeVar Burton. "There are actually more than a couple Harlem Hellfighters scripts floating around Hollywood," he told me during our meeting, "but yours comes closest to the truth." He agreed that the subject matter would be difficult to sell to studios, but that by no means should that deter me. "I don't have the power right now to make this movie," he said, "but I'm not going to give up, and you shouldn't either." Thank you, Mr. Burton.

Five years and what seemed like a lifetime later, an unexpected opportunity opened up in the world of comic books. In 2006, I began collaborating with Avatar Press on a graphic companion to my first book, *The*

Zombie Survival Guide. I learned very quickly how different comic book writing was from prose, but how similar it could be to movie scripts. I also realized that comics presented a forum for telling very visual stories without the cumbersome budget of movies or television. It seemed the ideal medium for telling the story of the Harlem Hellfighters. It's now been close to six years since I began working with William Christensen of Avatar Press and the amazingly talented artist Caanan White. And now it's time to share this heroic regiment's story of courage, honor, and heart with you. I hope that you are as captivated by it as I have been.

From [Booklist](#)

Brooks (World War Z, 2006) makes a U-turn from zombies with this fictionalized account of the famous all-black 369th Infantry. The opening scene of a trench bomb sets the stage for the whole book: endless, grimacing faces and buckets of gore, mostly in the form of exploded bodies splattering across the page. This intro also betrays the book's chief concern: simply telling the story of WWI combat, albeit from an unusual point of view. As a result, the plot is fuzzy and the characters suitably enjoyable placeholders. We follow our diverse bunch from enlistment to training to the hell of France, where they fight through inhumane conditions with the utmost valor, and for what? Prejudice and humiliation at every turn. "They would rather see white Germans," says one soldier, "instead of black Americans march in triumph up Fifth Avenue." White's appropriately cluttered art has the horrific shock value of EC Comics classics like Frontline Combat and Two-Fisted Tales, and the whole thing comes off as resolutely Tarantinoesque. The movie version should be along any second now. --Daniel Kraus

Review

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"Writer Max Brooks and illustrator Caanan White hew closely to the true tale of the 369th Infantry Regiment...The horrors of war and the outrages of racism are vividly conveyed in a swift and suspenseful tale." —*U-T San Diego*

"Shattering...A visceral evocation of the horrors of trench warfare...A sharp reminder that venerating volunteer troops for their service is an ideal that has not always been a reality." —*Washington Post*

"[One] of the most powerful books I've read so far this year...This is a stunning work of historical recovery and a very *graphic* graphic novel: bodies explode, rats feed on corpses, men are strafed and gassed. It's not pretty, but the "in your face" style of *The Harlem Hellfighters* is suited to dramatizing a crucial part of American history that hasn't been thrust forcefully enough into our collective faces." —*NPR, Fresh Air*

"Stunning... Like the regiment of African American soldiers it depicts, *Harlem Hellfighters* can't be stereotyped or pigeon holed. It might not be your typical history book, but it packs one hell of a punch." —*Newsweek*

"A splashy, fun, gripping number, and an intriguing look at an oft-ignored footnote in the history books." —*New York Daily News*

"Moral complexity is just one of the novel's many achievements. Dialogue and imagery are often richly juxtaposed... White's illustrations render the grisly and graphic details of trench warfare with haunting immediacy... The sharp lines and shadowy depths of his sketches are absorbing and Brooks' words are equally evocative. The dialogue is bleak, funny, and efficient... [Brooks'] careful research doesn't sap the story of its speed and strength." —*Christian Science Monitor*

“Shines a literary klieg light on a woefully overlooked chapter of World War I...Bolstering Brooks’s storytelling muscle is the high-contrast black-and-white art of gifted Caanan White, whose graphic grit evokes Joe Kubert and ‘Sgt. Rock’... A powerful comic that may do more than any previous work to illuminate the heroism of the 369th.” —***Washington Post***

“*The Harlem Hellfighters* brings to life a long forgotten piece of American history. Bravo, Max Brooks, bravo.” —**Spike Lee**

“An utterly fresh and shocking blend of storytelling and graphic art that takes us back to the global conflagration at the dawn of the last century and the heroic and outsized role brave African American soldiers played in turning the tide for the Allies. In an injustice oft repeated throughout our history, the heroic feats of the ‘Harlem Hellfighters’ were not just forgotten but deliberately suppressed by a nation eager to accept the Black man’s sacrifice but terrified to give him the slightest credit for it. Denied the ability to even defend themselves back home, the Hellfighters tear up the Western Front and terrify the Germans, facing down machine guns, rats, and poison gas with stoic relentlessness and deflected fury. White’s illustrations explode off the page and Brooks’ storytelling brings gripping action and anger to every page.” —**Tom Reiss, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Black Count***

“Brooks’s text seethes with rage at the soldiers’ mistreatment, but he insists that even the racists who saw them in action would have respected their accomplishments. Like the text, White’s b&w art is intensely furious, emphasizing the war’s chaotic horror. Reading the book is a painful, memorable experience.” —***Publishers Weekly***

“*The Harlem Hellfighters* is perhaps the first graphic novel taking as its theme a major episode in African American History, the heroic performance of black men in combat during World War I. Brilliantly dramatized by Max Brooks—author of such national bestsellers as *World War Z* and *The Zombie Survival Guide*—and stunningly illustrated by Caanan White, one of our foremost African-American comic book illustrators, the novel tells the gripping story of the often overlooked black men who served their country in combat against enemy forces during ‘the Great War.’ The Harlem Hellfighters served in combat longer than any other American unit, losing neither men nor ground, even as they fought entrenched racism within the U.S. military. Brooks and White tell a thrilling saga of noble perseverance, individual valor and sacrifice and collective triumph, showing how combat abroad in war contributed to the larger quest for civil rights at home. Informed by judicious historical research and vividly illustrated storytelling, this book itself is an historical “first,” and is a major contribution to our understanding of Black History.” —**Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University**

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Linda Davis:

What do you ponder on book? It is just for students since they're still students or the idea for all people in the world, the particular best subject for that? Only you can be answered for that concern above. Every person has distinct personality and hobby for every single other. Don't to be forced someone or something that they don't need do that. You must know how great and also important the book *The Harlem Hellfighters*. All type of book would you see on many resources. You can look for the internet solutions or other social media.

Carol Pyles:

The e-book untitled The Harlem Hellfighters is the reserve that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the reserve content that will be shown to you. The language that publisher use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The author was did a lot of investigation when write the book, and so the information that they share to your account is absolutely accurate. You also will get the e-book of The Harlem Hellfighters from the publisher to make you considerably more enjoy free time.

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