



Hardcore Zen Strikes Again

Brad Warner

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In 2003 Brad Warner published his first book Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies and the Truth About Reality. This is not that book! Hardcore Zen was a groundbreaking look at Zen Buddhism through the eyes of a Western punk rocker living in Japan who became an ordained monk while working for a company that made cheap monster movies. In this new sequel, Hardcore Zen Strikes Again, Brad returns to his roots and provides a glimpse into some of his early writings that formed the basis for that book. These essays, mostly from a long-defunct website Brad produced in the early 2000s, form a snapshot of the genesis of Brad's first book. Brad has provided new introductions and afterwords to each essay as well as a complete chapter written for Hardcore Zen that did not make the final cut, plus an article about his experiences at the company he was working for when the book was written. Together they make an invaluable collection for anyone interested in Brad's writing as well as those interested in his unique way of presenting the timeless truths of Zen in a contemporary idiom.

Hardcore Zen Strikes Again Details

Date : Published May 13th 2012 by Cooperative Press

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Author : Brad Warner

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From Reader Review Hardcore Zen Strikes Again for online ebook

Joshua Allison says

You don't need to read this if you've read Hardcore Zen

A.J. Howells says

Read the full review (includes a lot more Zen ranting!) at The Books in My Life.

Hardcore Zen Strikes Again! (2012) is a grab-bag of a book. Published initially as an ebook via independent publisher Cooperative Press, its target audience is fans of the first book. That seems too obvious to state, but I mention it because you don't need to read that first book to understand or enjoy this one. I wouldn't recommend that order, though. Thrown in as a bonus is an essay written for a monster movie zine about Brad's time as American liaison at Tsuburaya Productions. Interesting, sure. But I'm not sure how much of Brad's core audience really cares about rubber-suited monsters, especially considering the multiple mentions of members of Buddhist communities looking upon this form of entertainment and Brad's association with it with disgust.

The majority of this volume consists of articles from Brad's former blog, Sit Down and Shut Up. Many of the essays were cut up and reassembled to form chapters in Hardcore Zen. Reading Hardcore Zen first and then this one provides insight into the writing process, and the nature of making the essays marketable. Reflectively embarrassed by much of the writing, Brad nevertheless defends his cocky, often seemingly-arrogant attitude, attributing it to the fact that he was writing these essays for himself. If he sounds angry, he's angry at Brad Warner. He is writing in order to understand his beliefs and actions and when read in this context, the tone of the writing shifts from being arrogant to being critical of his own actions. Know this and consider this passage:

"If you really want to change the world, you have to start with yourself. You have to look at your own action right here and right now. You are the only one you can ever change. And don't think it's going to be easy."
(55)

Also consider the fact that these are essays written before he considered an audience to be viable. As he states later in the book, "YOU DON'T EAT IN ORDER TO TAKE A SHIT" (123). These writings represent process without bearing the potential product in mind—very much aligned with a Zen philosophy.

The first lines of the first essay are "The truth doesn't fuck around. It doesn't care about your opinion. It doesn't care if you don't believe in it" (14). This brashness irons itself out as you continue reading, even when Brad states that he is angrily ranting about topics. To me, they don't feel like angry rants, they feel measured and reasoned for the most part, but this proves a larger point he makes in his writing. No experience can be experienced exactly the same way by two people when human thought is unreliable. Tone will never transmit to a reader as intended because we never really understood it in the first place. Experience is fleeting and ineffable. Try to grasp anything and you're in for a heap of disappointment.

Some ideas left unexpressed in Hardcore Zen are touched upon here, including this ineffable nature of reality. Zen writing is largely made up of generalities and contradictions because, again, all experience is subjectively unreliable, and yet in order to convey the essence of anything, humans must communicate with the only tool they have, dull as it can be: language. Also take into consideration the fact that nothing really

has an essence because everything is universal—meaning of the universe—and you’ve really got to write and write in order to make your point known. This sounds like hippy-drippy nonsense, but consider it on a basic scientific level, and you’ll scratch the surface of this truth. We are all cut from the same cloth. This is verifiable through common ancestry and evolutionary biology. Every action we take has an effect on us and those around us. We’re all in this together. As Brad says, “[t]he sickest most twisted psychotic sociopath lives inside you. Right next to him are Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Siddhartha” (47).

Yes, many of the same topics from Hardcore Zen are addressed, sometimes word-for-word. But when we study anything, we don’t intuitively grasp the concept without constant reinforcement. Reading this book is part of that process. The other half of the process is zazen, or Zen meditation, which Brad earnestly urges his readers to practice throughout all his books. Buddhism is a philosophy of action, yet so many books about Zen fail to address meditation. Zazen is the spine of any Brad Warner book. You can read his entire bibliography and really feel like you understand it, but unless you sit and face yourself, you’ll always be more delusional than is necessary.

Andrew Lenards says

I enjoyed this far more than I expected. An interesting journal into evolving writing style of Brad Warner. I appreciate that the person he is today is willing to acknowledge and honor the person he was when he wrote the original posts.

Bob says

Another good read. Not sure how much more I'll delve into this topic, by this writer, for a while. Need some escapism and also want to finish Spring Wind. But yeah, enjoyable.

Gabrielle says

3 and a half stars rounded up, because I'll definitely flip through this one again eventually.

« Hardcore Zen Strikes Again! » is a sort of follow-up/companion to Warner’s first book “Hardcore Zen”; it is a collection of essays and articles that were written before his book was published, when he was simply blogging about his Zen practice. Most of these were recycled or paraphrased in his book, so very little of it will be new to his readers, but as he says himself, some people are the type who buy a re-issue of a record they already have just for the bonus demo tracks. Well, I’ve done that a million times, and since this is the book equivalent of the bonus demo track of one of my favorite books, I wasn’t going to skip it!

I read it hot on the heels of a re-read of “Hardcore Zen” (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>), and it’s interesting to see the rawness of Warner’s writing, and how it evolved in later publications. It’s also interesting to read these essays and see what didn’t make it in the final book and why; each essay is framed by an intro and conclusion, to contextualize it. It’s really an insight into his writing process, and into the fact that he was originally writing more for himself than for any kind of audience. Brad Warner’s criticisms are aimed first and foremost at Brad Warner; his essays were originally his way of reminding himself that he needs to practice zazen, that he can only ever change himself, etc. The tone can seem arrogant, until you realize that this dude is harder on himself than he is on anyone else. One of the articles directly addressed the

issue of arrogance and why its not always a bad thing.

One of the point touched upon in this book that he didn't discuss in "Hardcore Zen" is the criticism he received from the Buddhist community, and I find that pretty fascinating: he calls out the inconsistencies in other schools of thought, sure, but he's also the first one to say "go see for yourself, maybe that works better for you!". A thing I have noticed when studying and practicing Zen, it's that you eventually can't help but notice how some systems are uselessly complicated – which accomplishes nothing except distracting the practitioner. It can be hard to refrain from annoyingly asking people why they are wasting their time with window-dressing, which does nothing but irritate everyone involved in the conversation. Maybe that's why people reacted strongly to his rants? Who knows...

I also have to say that I'm very happy with his super DIY approach: he couldn't find a website about Buddhism that he liked, so he made one himself. Punk is Zen, Zen is punk! His advice for writers is also very good and insightful. Not an essential read, but fans of "Hardcore Zen" will enjoy it, as will those who obsessively collect the re-issued albums!

Matthew Klinkovsky says

As usual

Everything that Warner does catches my eye. He wrote a book about why he writes and our was entertaining. I will always read his stuff.

Ramón says

Not as riveting as Warner's other books, but for a Warner fan or "disciple" it's recommended reading. Picks up some of the stories he's already told in the first book and expands on them, so it's nice to see how Warner's own practice has sharpened his wit, expanded his wisdom and deepened his knowledge since the time he wrote Hardcore Zen.

David says

This isn't essential reading - it's unashamedly one for the fans. If you're a fan of Brad, you'll know what to expect.

Sadly, there are a noticeable number of typos and errors which really should have been spotted. I know it's an e-book without a big publisher behind it, but they wouldn't be difficult to smooth out with some proofing.

Joe Visconti says

Not bad, but there is a lot of repeat material from hardcore zen

Will says

Decent.

"The Truth doesn't fuck around. It doesn't care about your opinions. It doesn't care if you don't believe in it. It doesn't give two shits what religion you are, what country you're from, what color your skin is, how rich or poor you are. None of what concerns you concerns it in the least. It is not open to negotiation. You either go along with it, or it will sweep you aside."

"But most of us don't believe in the reality we experience every moment of every day. That's why we're always trying to escape into religious beliefs, or into physical pleasures or into the kind of mindless zoned out state induced by video games and endless web surfing."

"We would say normal things to each other and to anyone we met and we'd behave in normal ways. This broke down in about half an hour."

Katy D says

I loved that he doesn't take himself too seriously. He paints the perfect picture of real zen, not the blissed out "Hollywood" version, as he calls it. He explains many Buddhist concepts so clearly and always with a sense of humor, which is refreshing.

Scott says

There's not much new material here, since this is a collection of early essays by Brad which eventually led to his first book. But it's still worth a read – his writing and thinking are as clear as they've ever been.
