The Walking Dead Review
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October 14th marked the return of AMC’s *The Walking Dead* in a third season, ushered in with high expectations from a fan base that has only grown over the past two years of its broadcasting. The premiere season in 2010 came at the tail end of a decade’s worth of zombie-based media: movies like *Dawn of the Dead*, *Shaun of the Dead*, the *Resident Evil* series, *Zombieland*, *I am Legend*, coupled with the *Resident Evil* video game series, *Call of Duty Nazi Zombie* modes, *Left 4 Dead*, *Dead Space*, and so on, all cumulating to make this classic monster a predominate element of pop culture. The setting of the show reflects the conventional premise, used a hundred times beforehand, of a sudden and inexplicable illness that overwhelms the global population, turning your average businessman into a brain-hungry fiend. From there, however, all standards for this genre are blown away.

The viewer enters the world of *The Walking Dead* following the perspective of Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln), an Atlanta police officer who wakes from a coma resulting from a gunshot wound prior to the outbreak. He stumbles out of an abandoned hospital dazed and ignorant of everything that had passed for several months. To his horror, once-familiar streets now meet his vision strewn with bodies and bullet casings. His first encounter with a “walker”, as the creatures are called in the show, the zombie ironically far from capable of sitting upright let alone walking. The zombie is but the torso of a half-decayed corpse: pale, bloodied, missing chunks of flesh enough to expose blackened ribs but nonetheless clawing its way towards Rick and dragging behind it femurs rendered clean of anything one might even attempt to call legs.

From this scene onward, similar uncompromising visual detail makes it apparent that this series has gone above and beyond proceeding films and even video games in its imaginative and explicit depictions of the zombie characters. Heavy makeup on countless extras seamlessly blend to leave not a single frame of zombies without convincing or grotesque appearances. When set loose on equally exquisite sets, these creatures succeed enormously in bringing a sense of infestation and danger to the shattered world that Rick must now endure. The attention given to the appearances of the living characters is no less impressive. In this unique format, the series takes full advantage of the longevity in which it is allowed to be filmed and meticulously increases the layers of grim and blood on the characters and their clothes. Rare moments of safety and stability often find the survivors in the presence of one shower or another and enable them to wash away the dirt and, to a degree, their fears of the omnipresent walkers. Even various cuts and scrapes characters obtain in the course of the plot reappear in the following episodes, and are seen to slowly heal. Such methodical portrayals reinforce the tensions of external danger and internal conflict within the group depending on how (or by whom) the wounds were inflicted. These injuries are further effective in offering viewers an underlying means by which they may immerse themselves in the progression of time from episode to episode, despite week-long intervals between.

Under the make-up, each actor of the primarily adult cast offer stunning performances in their respective roles. The English lead actor Andrew Lincoln sheds his British accent and seems to effortlessly project the southern tones of his Georgian character, weaving into his dialect convincing emotions that meet the viewers on a strong and personal level. Supporting actors follow their survival group leader in suit, and conform to the unique personalities of their individual characters. Particularly in the progression of season two, the differing attitudes of each group member become developed and deeply embedded enough to offer an even greater source
of conflict than the zombies surrounding them. An unspoken tension evolves between Rick and his former police partner Shane (Jon Bernthal) who engaged in a brief affair with Rick’s wife, Lori Grimes (Sarah Wayne Callies), while under the impression that Rick had died in the hospital. Despite his best intentions, Shane’s enduring interest in Lori and Grimes’s son Carl (Chandler Riggs) evoke struggles between his friendship with Rick and an adulterous passion for his friend’s wife.

The only trip-up in casting seems to be Carl, who often appears somewhat out of place on the set. The child actor is given comparatively little film time and even fewer lines, which are spoken without great fluency. He seems much more a symbolic character as an object of motivation for his parents and Shane than an integral part of the series, and to say the least, requires far more time for maturing as an actor. His inexperience coupled with written scenes where he silently acts out childish mischief evoke a bit of a cringe and expectations for trouble when Riggs is left alone on screen (luckily a rare occurrence). Regardless, most other actors take a strong stance in their roles and work well together to explore themes of community, individualism, loss, suffering, survival, religion, fate, love, family, the value of life, and the nature of what it means to be human, to name but a few.

Though thoroughly thought provoking with dramatic character development and philosophic composition, *The Walking Dead* will not leave the gore-addicts wanting. Dehumanization inherent in zombie portrayals couples with the modern desensitization to violent media to make it difficult to shock most audiences these days, yet episodes boldly broadcast blood chilling images of bodily destruction. This show is not for children, nor for the weak of stomach. Each episode carries in more mangled walkers to limp in front of a camera lens that does not shy away from close-ups. Viewers become witnesses to the vicious force of shovels, pick-axes, baseball bats, and knives when wielded as weapons against the human anatomy. Forgoing the occasional unnecessary squelching noises of brains and guts spilling from the rotting corpses, this show manifests an almost unparalleled accuracy in the application of violence. Bullets make holes rather than blow things up, bodies drop instead of go flying, and the general lack of constant slow motion explosions are a welcome relief to most other action-based media. Furthermore, characters who are supposed to know how to use weapons (like the police officers) for once actually appear trained in gun handling! The guns seem to be a set of characters unto themselves, as they notably require ammunition and maintenance just as much as the group needs food and rest. The guns have safety switches, loud signatures that attract attention, and a most beautifully, a limited bullet capacity. Weapon competence and the ability to manage these factors creates something of a hierarchy in the group while the issue of resources puts a significant strain upon the survivors. Each has a notable influence on the dynamics of their relations just as much as any rouge character or zombie, and goes to show how much consideration the producers put into every single element of the show.

Overall, little more can be said then that *The Walking Dead* sets a new standard of excellence not only for zombie media, but all peripheral categories of post-apocalyptical films, games, and televised series; living proof that its genre is not yet by any means close to dead.