

TV Review: AMC's 'The Walking Dead' Continues Network's Pattern of Creative Success

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 29, 2010 - 4:19pm

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CHICAGO – AMC has become a major player on the television scene thanks to the multiple awards won by “Mad Men” and “Breaking Bad.” As they expanded this year with “Rubicon” and this weekend’s “The Walking Dead,” the question was whether or not the pool would be diluted as it got bigger. With the involvement of director Frank Darabont and the highly-acclaimed source material, we had reason to hope that “The Walking Dead” would continue the network’s pattern of success. It has turned out even better than we could have hoped.



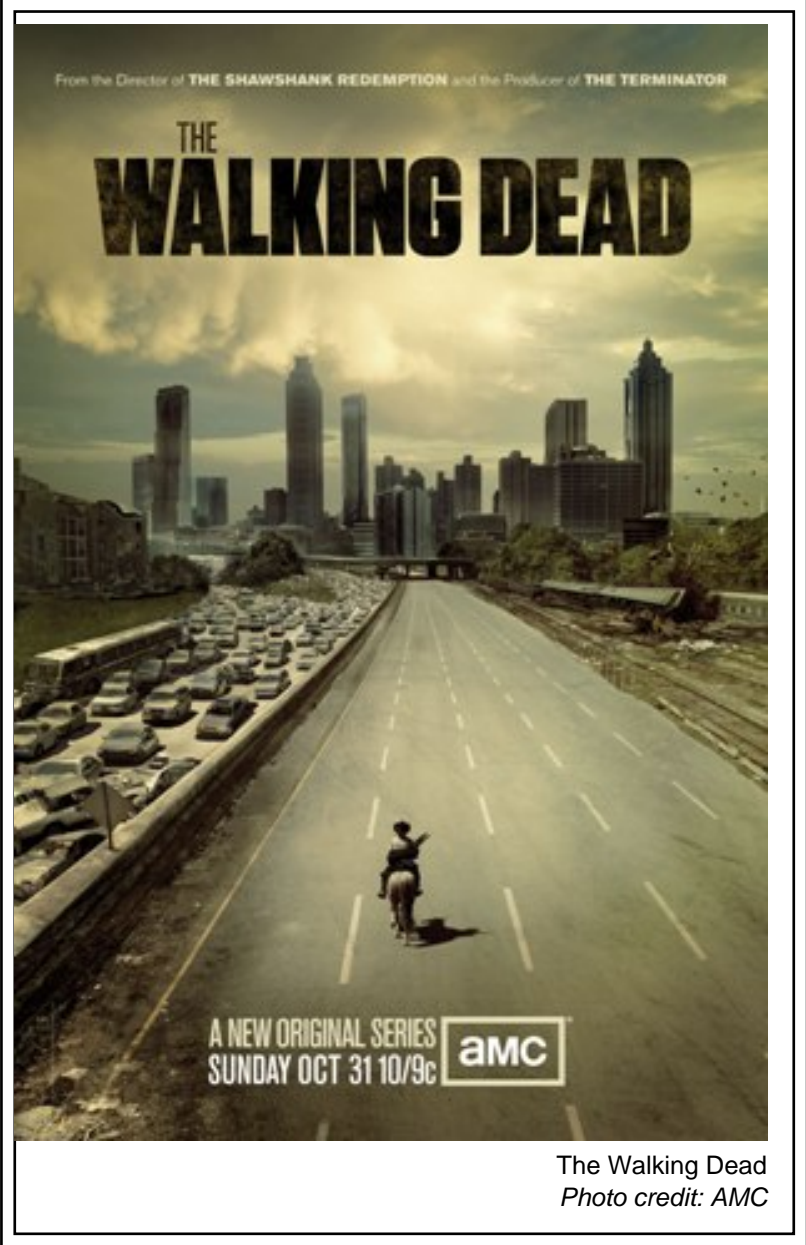
Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

“The Walking Dead” is based on a remarkable comic series by Robert Kirkman that plays off common themes and imagery of the zombie genre while also keeping the focus clearly on the characters and their drama. The title may refer to the cannibal undead that have now taken over the Earth or the small group of survivors learning what’s important and barely surviving themselves. It’s a fantastic series that you should read if you haven’t done so already.



The Walking Dead
Photo credit: AMC

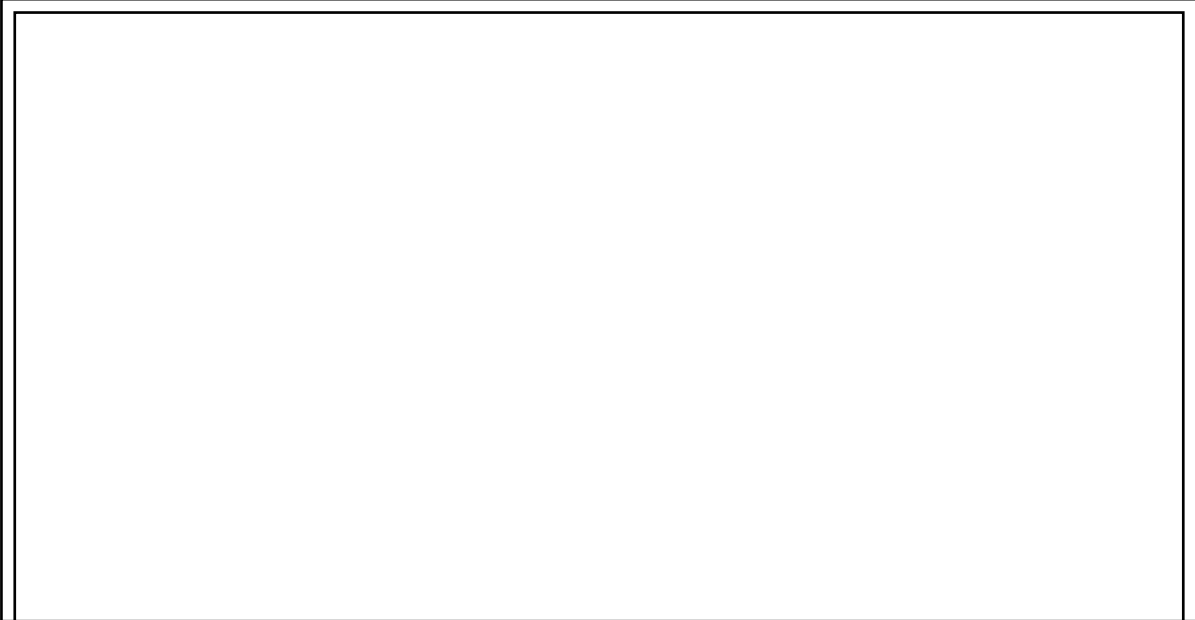
An over-done genre moving to the often-neutered wasteland of basic cable television with the potential to destroy a beloved source material? Sounds like a recipe for disaster. From the very opening scenes, you'll know that "The Walking Dead" is far from a disaster. With Frank Darabont's ("The Shawshank Redemption," "Stephen King's The Mist") restrained skill behind the camera, "The Walking Dead" feels more like a film than a TV show; not unlike "Mad Men" or the best programming on Showtime or HBO. AMC continues to surprise with their production values that look more like theatrical film than basic cable television.



The makeup effects in "The Walking Dead" are impressive but Darabont's amazing adaptation abilities along with the rest of the writing team is the key to the success of this show — they keep it about the living more than the dead. Andrew Lincoln gives a spectacular performance as Officer Rick Grimes, a man we meet after the zombie apocalypse as he shoots a zombie girl in the opening scene. The premiere episode then flashes back to a shoot-out with Rick and his partner Shane (Jon Bernthal) in which Officer Grimes is critically injured. Not unlike the opening act of "28 Days Later...", Rick wakes up in a hospital and realizes that things have gone very, very badly in the world outside. In a wonderful series of reveals, Rick makes his way out of the hospital and into a much-more-dangerous world.

Now is the time where it becomes difficult for a critic to even continue talking about "The Walking Dead" without serious spoiler warnings. The less you know about the plot arc of the first two episodes, the better. And those of you who know Kirkman's book by heart will be shocked at the pace that Darabont and his team are taking with the show. Typically, film races through fiction, as they regularly have to skip sections or alter others to get a story into a movie running time. That is NOT the case with "The Walking Dead." Darabont actually takes sections from the book that Kirkman sped through and expands on them instead of rushing by or cutting them altogether. If you've read the books, you'll be amazed at how little of them has been covered by the end of episode two.

And what's been expanded on is brilliant. The great Lennie James ("Jericho") co-stars as Morgan, a character protecting his son who we barely met in the book but made a significant impact. Darabont dedicates nearly half of the first 90-minute episode to this cameo-sized character and brilliantly expands his tragic arc. Those of you who have read the books will constantly marvel at how Darabont has dug deeper into them instead of merely using them as an outline. He's done what people who adapt from one medium to another should do: Created a companion piece that completely works on its own while also deepening its source.





The Walking Dead
Photo credit: AMC

Of course, those of you looking for intense zombie action on Halloween shouldn't be too turned away by all this talk of depth. Darabont clearly knows how to stage an action sequence and there are truly chilling moments on "The Walking Dead" premiere (and even more in the second episode, "Guts"). The show has been obviously inspired by works like "Dawn of the Dead," "28 Days Later..." "I Am Legend," and many more but it never feels overly derivative. Like Kirkman's series, it uses its inspirations instead of merely exploiting them.

Fans of intense drama like "Mad Men" or "Breaking Bad," may wonder how "The Walking Dead" fits on the schedule. The focus on character over action and a strong ensemble help, but it's the way in which Darabont and his team brilliantly make the saga of Officer Grimes and the other survivors universal that allows "The Walking Dead" to stand out. How do we handle tragedy? How do we live when the tools we're used to living with like gas and food have been taken away from us? And when our very survival is constantly threatened how do our morals change? "The Walking Dead" raises all of these questions and more.

It's been a rough month for horror fans with junk like "My Soul to Take" and "Saw 3D" filling up the multiplex. There hasn't been a truly notable horror property that plays to both the intellect and the gut this season (well, except for "Let Me In" but none of you saw that one). Who would have guessed that one of the best genre offerings would come from the network that once played nothing but old movies? AMC continues to surprise. And impress.

'The Walking Dead,' which airs on AMC, stars Andrew Lincoln, Jon Bernthal, Sarah Wayne Callies, Laurie Holden, Jeffrey DeMunn, Steven Yeun, Emma Bell, and Chandler Riggs. The premiere was written and directed by Frank Darabont and executive produced by Gale Anne Hurd. The series premiere airs on Sunday, Octover 31st, 2010 at 9PM CST.



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