

2015

Ya Gotta Shoot 'Em in the Head: the Zombie Plague as the New Apocryphal Myth in Post 9/11 America

Ryan F. Neff
Cleveland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Recommended Citation

Neff, Ryan F., "Ya Gotta Shoot 'Em in the Head: the Zombie Plague as the New Apocryphal Myth in Post 9/11 America" (2015). *ETD Archive*. 526.

<https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/526>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Archive by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.

YA GOTTA SHOOT 'EM IN THE HEAD:
THE ZOMBIE PLAGUE AS THE NEW APOCRYPHAL MYTH IN POST 9/11
AMERICA

RYAN F NEFF

Bachelor of Specialized Studies

Ohio University

May 2004

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Dec 2015

We hereby approve this thesis

For

Ryan F Neff

Candidate for the Master of Arts in English

for the Department of English

And

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S

College of Graduate Studies by

Committee Chairperson, Dr. Jeff Karem

Dr. Julie Burrell

Dr. Jim Marino

Defense Date 08/17/15

DEDICATION

To my mother Corinne, who always inspired me to strive for the stars, and always encouraged me to read from the moment I learned how. Thanks Mom, I miss you and only wish you were here to see me now.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been the result of a long road, and it would not have been possible without the help of my first reader Jeff Karem, for his tireless enthusiasm, wit and humor and countless hours of helping this thesis evolve.

I also want to acknowledge my second reader Julie Burrell, who also has seen this project grow and evolve and for her dedication to helping this thesis evolve in the best way possible to reach this terminus.

It is also necessary to thank Sarah Lillie for her countless hours of reading and helping me keep my sanity while on the long road this thesis has taken. And I'm sure she thoroughly enjoyed the chance to correct my grammar along the way!

YA GOTTA SHOOT 'EM IN THE HEAD:
THE ZOMBIE PLAGUE AS THE NEW APOCRYPHAL MYTH IN POST 9/11

AMERICA

RYAN F NEFF

ABSTRACT

America, as a culture and a society, has embraced the zombie as the new apocryphal myth in a Post 9/11 culture as a subconscious coping mechanism to deal with fear and terror and to train itself for an eventual breakdown of society in an apocalyptic event. The Post 9/11 America has latched on both consciously and subconsciously to the figure of the zombie because it easily represents and embodies a wide range of fears to a wide range of people's anxieties in a terrorist filled global world.

This is examined by analyzing Robert Kirkman's comic series *The Walking Dead*, and Max Brooks' novels *World War Z* and *The Zombie Survival Guide* in context of the cultural themes present in the works which reflect American society in wake of the 9/11 attacks. Fear of the unknown and lurking dangers of terrorism is a direct parallel to the modern zombie narrative, as well as examining a heightened sense of paranoia and issues of trust of Americans when dealing with government, foreigners, and even their own neighbours, as illustrated by character interaction in the modern zombie narrative. A brief history of the modern zombie narrative also highlights the evolution of the Romero zombie in the late 60's to the current modern zombie of the post 9/11 generation, in terms of how the zombie myth/narrative has changed and what core elements have endured to keep this monster alive in society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Zombies Ate My Neighbors – The Beginning Of The End	5
III. The Rise Of Survival Horror – Zombie Gaming	10
IV. They’re Baaaaack! – Zombie Film Rises From The Grave	14
V. The Defining Moment Of A Generation – 9/11	17
VI. “We are the walking dead” – The Post 9/11 Plague	22
VII. Survival By The Numbers: The Reference Guide And World War Zed	33
VIII. The New Apocalyptic Landscape	40
IX. Conclusion	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	47
APPENDIX.....	51
LIST OF FIGURES	

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Run Jill! He’s insane!” – Barry Burton, encountering the first zombie in *Resident Evil*

Zombies. The undead have taken over modern life in America in the past decade, the plague of *The Walking Dead* has become like the subject itself: a viral contagion that has spread and infected all areas of modern life. One cannot throw the proverbial stick without hitting something of a zombie-like nature in America today.

Americans have embraced the zombie in the last decade, with the rising popularity of TV shows like *The Walking Dead*, an adaptation of the critically acclaimed comic series by Robert Kirkman and the movie adaptation of Max Brooks’ *World War Z*. Mash up novels are becoming more prevalent, with titles like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, *Alice in Zombieland* and *I am Scrooge: A Zombie Story for Christmas*. Video game franchise *Call of Duty* added a zombie mode to *Call of Duty: World at War* in which the player must survive against hordes of Nazi zombies. The mode was so popular it returned in *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*. The *Call of Duty* franchise is known for its military shooter setting, not for zombies or horror. Likewise the

Rockstar Games western, *Red Dead Redemption* also saw a downloadable content (DLC) campaign titled *Undead Nightmare*. Zombies are infecting everything from classic literature, to video games that are not known for horror settings, to mainstream television, to popular fiction.

What is it about the walking dead that has so enamored the public's attention? What does the zombie say about America as a nation? A society? A culture? In "Is Dead the New Alive?" Brooks Landon tackles the popularity of the zombie without any concrete answers, "Theories abound for the popularity of the zombie metaphor, and all of them are probably at least partially correct. What is harder to explain is why the metaphor does not seem to wear out its welcome" (Landon 8).

In a nation, as well as a world culture, filled to the brim with technology, connecting so many people together via social media, on the internet, smartphones, tablets, why are we, as a culture, so obsessed with a scenario that deprives us of all that technology? Why are we so enthralled with a post apocalyptic future where "modern" skills like IT and programming and professions like lawyer and administrative assistant would become useless in a world without a power grid and running water? Max Brooks highlights this in his novel, *World War Z*, "You should have seen some of the 'careers' listed on our first employment census; everyone was some version of an 'executive,' ...or a 'consultant,' all perfectly suited to the prewar world, but totally inadequate for the present crisis" (*World War Z*, 138).

It is my theory that America, as a culture and a society, has embraced the zombie as the new apocryphal myth in a Post 9/11 culture as a subconscious coping mechanism to deal with fear and terror and to train ourselves for an eventual breakdown of society in

an apocalyptic event. The zombie apocalypse has replaced nuclear armageddon as the dominating apocryphal myth for this generation, itself a direct response to the cultural shift in the United States after the events of 9/11. The zombie is a social and cultural barometer for anxiety in Post 9/11 America. The zombie is a monster that represents an empty “other” that can be filled with whatever meaning the narrator or reader wishes. The new modern Post 9/11 zombie reflects us, the people of a decaying interpersonal society that cannot keep itself safe from threats it cannot see.

The events of 9/11 have had a staggering effect on America and its citizens, causing levels of paranoia akin to the McCarthy era, if not even greater. It is this fear and paranoia that is crucial to why the zombie has gained such a stranglehold on American culture. The modern zombie narrative generally focuses on a small group of survivors, creating a “tribe” mentality, that is easily seen in Post 9/11 America, people have retreated into their own small tribes, immediate family and friends are the only ones trustworthy, everyone beyond that is seen as foreign and worthy of suspicion. The modern zombie narrative also highlights that even those within the tribe must be under surveillance as well, for signs of treachery or even worse, a hidden and unreported bite that would transform them into a zombie, putting the tribe at risk.

The modern zombie narrative also tends to highlight the concept that the zombie is never truly beaten, only escaped, or survived, never completely eradicated, a view that translates easily to terrorism, that one terrorist cell might be found and defeated, but there are always others that remain hidden. One terrorist plot may be foiled, or averted, but how many more are waiting to be unleashed?

Society and culture have embraced the zombie as the new apocryphal myth in a Post 9/11 culture because the zombie and the terrorist present the same fears and concerns, an enemy that is difficult to fight, and not one that most win against.

For this thesis, I will be exploring *The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman (I will be using the first 96 issues of the comic book), Max Brooks' *World War Z* and *The Zombie Survival Guide*, as these are considered to be the bible texts of the "modern zombie" and for their contribution to the evolution of the zombie myth and how they reflect American cultural fears in a Post 9/11 landscape, that it is not the monster (the zombie) who is monstrous, it is us, the American people.

When discussing *The Walking Dead*, the specific pages from the individual comic book issues have been included in Figures 1-11 in the appendix for ease of reference. Also, when referencing the phrases 'zombie myth' or 'zombie apocalypse' they are in the context of an extinction level event, where a zombie virus decimates the world population, and society, government, and civilization break down completely.

CHAPTER II

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS – THE BEGINNING OF THE END

“What's the matter, David? Never taken a shortcut before?” –Shaun, *Shaun of the Dead*

Historically, “modern” zombies are radically different than their origins in the West African and Haitian traditions. For purposes of this work, I will not explore the full evolution of the zombie, but rather focus on the rise and evolution of the “modern zombie” by briefly examining the decades of the 1980’s and 1990’s and the early 2000’s for their later comparison to the Post 9/11 zombie.

What we think of when we think of zombies today, are walking corpses, in varying stages of decay that have one purpose: to consume us. “This concept is key to understanding the ability of the zombie to instill fear; Those who should be dead and safely laid to rest have bucked the natural order of things and have returned from the grave” (Bishop 198). In his article “Raising the Dead” Kyle Bishop clearly indicates this. Zombies terrify us. They terrify us because they are us and are not us. They have indeed bucked the natural order and are still here. And they are hungry. Bishop quotes Peter Dendle from *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, “Romero liberated the zombie from the

shackles of a master, and invested his zombies not with a function...but a drive” (Bishop 200). The ‘master’ in the quote relates to the voodoo origins of the zombie in Haitian and West African traditions, where a voodoo priest would control the zombies. The modern zombie has no master, only a drive of hunger, to consume.

Zombies are not a traditional enemy, like the Nazis or drug dealers or bank robbers, they are a force of nature, and they have a drive to consume every living thing. This is what makes the zombie a monster that is indeed terrifying. The zombie is an “it”, not a he or she. It cannot be reasoned with, bartered with, or pleaded with. And unlike other monsters, in the zombie myth narrative, there is not just one, or a hundred, there are *millions*.

But perhaps the extra bit that makes zombies most dangerous is that they are not ‘just’ an enemy that wants to kill you, they are both, as Steven Pokornowski in the essay “Insecure Lives: Zombies, Global Health, and the Totalitarianism of Generalization” points out, *infected* and *infectious* (Pokornowski 229). This dual nature of the zombie is central to why people find them so terrifying. The zombie exists as incubator AND result. In the Romero fashion, if you are bitten by a zombie, then you will die and become one. This particular plot device of the zombie is utilized extensively in cultivating the human response in a narrative. The bitten character suddenly has a hanging death sentence over their head, a ticking time bomb hiding or exposed within their group of survivors.

In the essay “Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)” Jeffery Jerome Cohen posits that “Zombies are a kind of ultimate enemy, because they are so utterly inhuman...and yet we humans always turn out to be worse than the zombies we fight” (Cohen 406). This particular aspect is a core theme in Kirkman’s *The Walking Dead*, that

as deadly and terrifying an enemy as zombies are, it is the living that the main characters fear the most.

The first appearance in the mainstream media of the “modern” zombie was in George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968. The word “zombie” was never used within the film; it is a title later applied by fans. In fact, a large number of zombie narratives, both early and modern, fail to use the actual word “zombie” within their narrative. It has become a popular trope within the zombie genre, highlighted perhaps best in the film *Shaun of the Dead*, when Shaun and Ed are planning to leave their flat to go rescue Shaun’s mum and ex-girlfriend, Ed asks:

Ed: Are there any zombies out there?

Shaun: Don't say that!

Ed: What?

Shaun: That.

Ed: What?

Shaun: That. The zed word. Don't say it.

Ed: Why not?

Shaun: Because it's ridiculous!

Ed: All right... Are there any out there, though? (*Shaun of the Dead*)

But the characteristics are set forth within Romero’s film and would go on to become the gospel of the modern zombie. Reanimated corpses with only the barest motor skills, the slow shuffling walk, unintelligent but relentless behavior to consume the living, and the increased resistance to damage, resulting in the only way to fully destroy a zombie is to destroy the brain. The improved damage resistance is not so much an implication of superhuman-ness, but rather for the fact that a zombie does not process pain or need to concern itself with injury or blood loss.

And against this new terrifying enemy? The “everyman” (and everywoman) barricading themselves in a house just trying to survive until the dawn. This is really the main concept of the zombie genre, the “everyman”. Everyman is you, the barista at Starbucks, the soccer mom, etc. The ‘everyman’ is regular, average, ordinary people. The core crux of the zombie apocalypse is normal people put in extraordinary circumstances trying to survive. What lengths would they go to? How far can a person go to survive? The only alternative is to join the ranks of zombie. This is one of the great facets of the zombie narrative, on one side you have the everyman (or woman) against the horde of zombies, but yet whenever the zombies score a kill, the zombies do not just shrink the ranks of the living, they ADD to the ranks of the dead. Every time someone dies, that becomes a plus one to the enemy’s ranks. This infinite replicability within the “life” cycle of the zombie has always made it a unique monster, and indeed terrifying.

Romero would direct two more in his “Dead” series in 1978’s *Dawn of the Dead* and 1985’s *Day of the Dead*. It is during this time period, specifically the 1980’s and 1990’s where the zombie entered its “campy” phase, and the rules of the Romero zombie are often mishandled or changed entirely. This period saw the zombie being able to talk, having more complex motor skills, its diet shifting to only eating brains, and most notably zombies are a result of some form of nuclear radiation as the cause of the outbreak. Romero would return to the “Dead” series in 2005, but this is after the zombie had shed its campy phase and returned to more serious horror roots.

The original *Night of the Living Dead* has always carried with it an inherent sense of racial overtones, the main character a black man, who unceremoniously dies at the end of the film. Many critics over the years have made connections to the assassinations of

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Likewise Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* was considered by many to be a commentary on commercialism in America.

Throughout the mid 1980's and 1990's, the zombie films were relegated to the underground, and were mostly splatter fests of gore and violence. The Romero zombie was, as I mentioned earlier, subverted and changed dramatically, but the overall setting was fairly consistent: escape. Zombie films (and later video games) of this era were about escape. Escaping the immediate danger, returning to the civilized world, to just make it to the end of the nightmare, to find and be rescued, a short term traumatic experience characters underwent to make it to the other side, back to safety.

CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF SURVIVAL HORROR – ZOMBIE GAMING

"It was Raccoon City's last chance and my last chance... My last escape." –Jill Valentine,

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis

Zombies translate easily to video games. They can easily be the cannon fodder that fills most levels as low level enemies for players to mow down on their way to the end level boss. *Resident Evil* did not really change that formula, but rather amped up the difficulty. In the original game, (there has been one remake of the game, and a director's cut released) there are perhaps maybe 100 zombies in the entire game which averages perhaps 4 to 5 hours to complete. In another game, a player can easily mow down twice that number in a single level. The difference in *Resident Evil* is that it takes anywhere to 3-8 9mm bullets to kill a single zombie, and the limited ammo dwindles quickly after facing 3 or 4 zombies. Every shotgun shell is precious within the game because in true video game fashion, there are more difficult enemies as the player progresses into the game. So if you were to miss, or be caught reloading at the wrong time, the results could

be disastrous. The zombie became more than simple cannon fodder to be mowed through; it became a serious danger to the player.

This aspect of meager supplies puts the “survival” into “survival horror” - a concept most zombie myths would adopt in film, games and television in the years to come. This is the ‘RE effect’.

Resident Evil is an impressively expansive franchise, spanning a slew of video games produced by the Japanese game developer and publisher Capcom, and sold transnationally (at least twenty-three discrete releases at the time of this article is being written); seven novels by U.S. author S. D. Perry; five live action films (a sixth has been announced) produced by German, French, and American companies and filmed and released throughout the world; two CGI films produced in Japan and released on DVD in seven countries; two limited-run series of comics, produced by U.S. companies DC and Wildfire respectively; and several lines of action figures. (Pokornowski 222)

The franchise all spawned from the original game that changed the gaming landscape in 1996. Much like the game *Halo* would redefine the FPS (First person Shooter) in 2001, *Resident Evil* defined and set the bar for the horror experience to millions of gamers. The Sony Playstation was also an evolution for the gaming industry. It was the first mainstream console to use a disc-based format for games, and also amped up the processor from 16 bit to 32 bit, a large leap in graphics and content.

Resident Evil was immersive, it was new, and it was something gamers had never seen or experienced: terror. *Resident Evil* featured three dimensional characters rendered against high resolution backgrounds, enabling graphics that were cutting edge at that time, creating a much more real looking and immersive environment for the player. *Resident Evil* made the zombie terrifying again. This new direction of video gaming created the terror and fear and tension for the player and was tantamount to why *Resident Evil* is an integral part in the evolution of the zombie apocryphal myth. These concepts of fear and terror in a video game were new, fresh, and gamers ate it up.

Resident Evil was in many ways the precursor to the Post 9/11 zombie myth. While Romero's Dead films involved an unnamed or unexplored cause of the zombie outbreaks, *Resident Evil* was one of the first "modern" zombie examples of the viral contagion. The idea of viral contagion as source for an apocalypse is not exactly new, it was used by Richard Matheson in his novel *I Am Legend* in 1954. And while the monsters of Matheson's book were closer to vampires than zombies, the viral component is essentially the same. Romero himself admitted that he was inspired by the idea of a viral apocalypse in Matheson's novel in his writing of *Night of the Living Dead* (Cinemablend).

The viral component is not the only connection/parallel Romero and *Resident Evil* has. The first video game in the series puts its main characters trapped in a lone static location, much the same as *Night of the Living Dead*. The second game in the series *Resident Evil 2* shows the viral outbreak has overrun the Midwest town of Raccoon City, and the setting draws a vivid parallel to *Dawn of the Dead*, replacing the shopping mall

with a police station. And *Resident Evil* has always championed the ‘everyman’ hero, the vital component to the zombie myth pioneered by Romero.

Resident Evil is a vital component to the modern zombie apocryphal myth for two main reasons. The first is that *Resident Evil* brought the Romero zombie to the video game medium (and by extension a larger demographic) as it was meant to be, terrifying and deadly, spawning a new genre of game, survival horror. The second reason is that same generation ‘exposed’ in 1996 has now become young adults and full adults, reading *The Walking Dead* and *World War Z*, watching the TV show and yes, still playing *Resident Evil* games as well as many newer zombie game franchises that have spawned since the early 2000’s.

Resident Evil did not reinvent the zombie. It did however bring the Romero zombie to a whole new generation and demographic, it furthered the reach of the Romero-style zombie, kept it “alive” so it could continue to shuffle forward into the future. At a time when the zombie was forced underground, stripped of its serious and terrorizing nature, *Resident Evil* kept the Romero zombie alive and well, waiting for its chance to spread like a virus once more.

CHAPTER IV

THEY'RE BAAAAACK! – ZOMBIE FILM RISES FROM THE GRAVE

“He’s got an arm off!” –Shaun, *Shaun of the Dead*

Post 2001, the zombie film has made a resurgence, and there are too many to list, for their sheer number, and frankly, because most of them are plain awful. There are a few memorable titles worth mentioning in their contribution to the “modern zombie” for their continued popularity since their release or influence felt in subsequent releases.

The *Resident Evil* film franchise began with the eponymous film in 2002, staying semi true to the plot of the original game, *Resident Evil* was one of the first successful video game movies. (Nearly all video games made into movies are generally regarded as poor.) The subsequent sequels would deviate from the plot of their video game counterparts, but retain enough of the narrative points to be relative for fans old and new to the series. Notably, the *Resident Evil* film franchise did embrace the apocalyptic setting, letting the zombie take over the world, whereas the games did not, keeping the outbreaks to smaller, manageable outbreak scenarios.

Likewise in 2002, *28 Days Later* was released, which has always been something of a quandary to the zombie genre. This film features super fast zombies, which is primarily contrary to the Romero zombie (The *World War Z* film adaptation would feature the same) and within the narrative of *28 Days Later*, the zombies are not zombies in the traditional sense, because they are not dead. The viral contagion of the narrative turns people into cannibalistic predators, but they are not reanimated corpses, a result of a laboratory doing possibly illegal experiments on animals (namely monkeys).

2004 saw the release of *Shaun of the Dead*, a British horror comedy. Shaun, while not necessarily the first, was the first real success at the ZomCom, or Zombie Comedy. In 2009, America would have its most successful ZomCom in *Zombieland*.

Resident Evil would total five (a sixth is in production) live action films, two CGI animated features, and *28 Days Later* also saw a sequel in 2007. It seems that society cannot keep a good monster down for long.

With the resurgence of zombies in the movies, it also saw the rise of the undead in book and comic book as well. Issue #1 of *The Walking Dead* was released in 2003, just two years after the United States was changed forever. It saw a small first run of printing (it would be a few years before the boom in the franchise took over the world) and set a grim story. Rick Grimes, a small town sheriff in rural Georgia is injured in the line of duty and after waking from a coma finds the world has ended. *The Walking Dead* constantly asks the question, how far is too far? Time and time again, the characters in Kirkman's world are faced with making impossible choices for their individual survival, the group's survival, for humanity's survival.

Also in 2003, Max Brooks releases *The Zombie Survival Guide*. The book, a field manual, details how the average person can utilize everyday items to survive a zombie outbreak. Three years later, Brooks would release *World War Z*, a novel recounting the zombie war ten years earlier that ended the world through interviews recorded by the narrator detailing accounts from around the globe on how humanity prevailed and what the costs of survival were.

Post 9/11, the rules for the zombie narrative changed, it ceased becoming about escape and became about survival. Pre 9/11 zombie narratives were almost entirely about escaping the present danger to make it to eventual safety. Post 9/11, the narratives have become about surviving the end of the world due to a zombie apocalypse. These new narratives removed the eventual safety element from the narrative, to replace them with moments of wary unease between crises.

CHAPTER V

THE DEFINING MOMENT OF A GENERATION – 9/11

“This is now the United States of Zombieland. It's amazing how quickly things can go from bad to total shitstorm.” - Columbus, -Zombieland

September 11, 2001. The day that changed America forever. Again. Much like the previous generation asked the question, “Where were you when they shot JFK?” My generation asks, “Where were you when the towers fell?” But unlike the assassination of JFK, the events of 9/11 brought America into the world brotherhood of nations attacked by terrorism. It is a sad and solemn brotherhood, but one America was unused to, with the exception of hearing about it on the news, this was different, this was now here, at home, where we live, in “Murica”. Our home was now vulnerable, we as Americans did not feel safe anymore. The bad guys had gotten in and struck a blow that Americans did not know how to process, let alone understand.

Paranoia, tension, hidden threats everywhere. This was the new Post 9/11 America, where anyone could be a terrorist. “September 11, 2001 was dubbed ‘the day that changed America,’ and the change that America endured became synonymous with a

specific perception and response to perceived threats” (Lugo 244). The key word there is “perceived”. America was accustomed to a name and a face for the ‘bad guys’, America no longer had one. Some bearded man (that the CIA trained) in a cave on the other side of the world, and the military and the government simply could not find him. That was the only face to pin on the enemy.

America wanted to be safe, her people wanted to feel secure. “Security and protection became synonymous with containing threats – threats residing in uncertain places (“lurking in the shadows”) and potentially harming from within (“lingering among us”)” (Lugo 244).

The definition of “safe” changed after 9/11. ‘Threat Level’ became an almost daily term for most Americans. Paranoia reached levels akin to the McCarthy era of the 1950’s if not greater. Americans not only were suspect of their neighbors, but of their government as well. It is this enhanced and prolonged state of paranoia and suspicion that pervaded the American consciousness for the last decade and a half. “It is clear that the zombie holocausts vividly painted in movies and video games have tapped into a deep-seated anxiety about society, government, individual protection, and our increasing disconnectedness from subsistence skills” (Dendle 54). The central theme of the zombie holocaust has always focused on rag-tag groups of small survivors, and one can see the parallels between how people can focus on this myth even if it is only on a subconscious level in an America where deep down, the average person feels that they cannot wholly trust their leaders, their government, or even their neighbors.

From this mindset, it is not hard to follow it to a subset of this general cultural feeling that ‘wiping the slate clean’ may not even be an entirely bad thing.

In twenty-first century America – where the bold wilderness frontier that informed American mythic consciousness for four centuries has given way to increasingly centralized government amidst a suburban landscape now quilted with strip malls and Walmarts – there is ample room to romanticize a fresh world purged of ornament and vanity, in which the strong survive, and in which society must be rebuilt anew. (Dendle 54)

That quote from Peter Dendle in the article “The Zombie as a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety”, illustrates clearly how the events of 9/11 have helped shape the zombie myth into its current state, and how the zombie as a figure reflects the mindset of American culture. Dendle goes on to state “that the resurgence of zombie movie popularity in the early 2000’s has been linked with the events of September 11, 2001” (Dendle 54). It is not just movies however, it is every media known to man.

The popularity of the zombie I feel comes directly from this deep seated fear that has hung over America since the events of 9/11, the fear that the individual cannot rely on anyone other than themselves for survival. In all the zombie narratives, the government fails miserably in containing the zombie plague and that society and civilization falls apart in months, if not weeks. One could draw a parallel in this to failure by the government to stop the events of 9/11 from happening, hence all the conspiracy theories relating to the events of 9/11 about how the government let the attacks happen for a myriad of reasons, most absurd and highly improbable, but absurd and improbable is the nature of the conspiracy theory.

It is not difficult to see that the zombie is indeed a social and cultural barometer for anxiety in a Post 9/11 America. The zombie is the type of monster that is an empty “other” that can be filled with anything in terms of meaning. The new modern Post 9/11 zombie reflects us, the people of a decaying interpersonal society that cannot keep itself safe from threats it cannot see. The most obvious place this can be seen is in *The Walking Dead*, Figure 6, where Rick is speaking to his son Carl. Rick’s group of survivors has recently been decimated by an attack from a rival group that claimed the lives of Rick’s wife and infant daughter. Rick cautions his son, that they are never safe, they must always be on guard, and that no one around them is above suspicion. This is a clear and direct parallel to the levels of paranoia that exist in Post 9/11 America, the fear and paranoia about lurking terrorists, and unseen threats waiting to be unleashed on the public.

The terrorist robbed America of its sense of safety. Before 9/11, wars and bombings and “terror” happened in another country, on another continent, in another world. Post 9/11, threats are everywhere, foreigners that have quietly entered our country, homegrown terrorists who embrace this radical war against their own people.

The zombie apocalypse reflects these fears, highlighting a government that does not work to safeguard its own people when the world ends, a neighbor that when the rules of normal society are gone, would just as soon kill you for the meager things you have than to band together with you for the greater good of survival as a whole. The Post 9/11 zombie narrative tells you to keep a wary eye on the stranger, with one hand on your gun at all times.

This catastrophic event and the paranoia and fear it generated in the populace in the aftermath set the stage for the evolution of the zombie apocalypse to address these new cultural and societal fears in the American people, the new modern zombie was set and primed to become something entirely more than just a monster. It was set and primed to make us the monsters.

CHAPTER VI

“WE ARE *THE WALKING DEAD*” – THE POST 9/11 PLAGUE

“*[over the radio to Rick]* Hey, you. Dumbass. Hey, you in the tank. Cozy in there?” –

Glenn, *The Walking Dead*, Episode 1, “Days Gone Bye”

Robert Kirkman has stated, in the introduction of the first trade paperback of *The Walking Dead*, “To me the best zombie movies aren’t the splatter feasts of gore and violence with goofy characters and tongue in cheek antics. Good zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society...and our society’s station in the world” (Days Gone By i). Kirkman does this time and time again within *The Walking Dead*, placing his characters in the most horrific circumstances, forcing these characters to make impossible choices, to illuminate and explore what it means to be human while being the walking dead.

We are the walking dead.

As Rick Grimes exclaims in horror near the end of one trade paperback, it is we, not they, who are “the walking dead.” In the end, no matter what we do or how we live, we

too must die and come back and be just like them. Zombies
are our only possible future, our already actual present;
zombies inherit the earth. (Canavan 441)

Examining the panels in question in the quote (Figure 4), Rick's emotion is not horror, but one of rage. Rage at coming to the realization that is the focus of his speech, of just what he and his group have become, and the group's blindness towards that truth. Examining the prior panels (Figure 3), Rick's speech, especially the lines "We're among them – And when we finally give up we become them! We're living on borrowed time here. Every minute of our life is a minute we steal from them!" highlight that everything they do is for survival, that they are indeed savages because savagery is what they need to survive.

Rick's rage in this speech, directed at Tyreese and the others is derived from the group's blindness at their truth now, that the zombie virus exists within every person, that anyone who dies becomes a zombie, not just those that are bitten. (This was revealed to the characters when Julie revives as a zombie having died from a gunshot wound in issues #14-15, Rick's speech in Figures 3 and 4 take place in issue #24.) Rick is forcing the group to realize they are the walking dead, not the zombies at the fences of the prison, and that concepts of savagery and reestablishing the old world are meaningless in light of their truth as already dead. This is the dual nature that Pokornowski mentioned, Rick and his group are the walking dead, and they are the zombies already, just waiting for death to finish the transformation. While Rick's speech is happening, the reader is presented with panels showing close ups of the zombie hordes at the fences of the prison, further highlighting this dual nature of being alive and infected at the same time.

This is a very different group of survivors in Issue #24 than that in Issue #11 (Figure 2) when Rick and his group discover Hershel has a barn full of walkers (the term used within *The Walking Dead* for zombies) on his farm filled with Hershel's family and neighbours. Rick's group has been on the move since abandoning their camp outside Atlanta in issue #7, having lost members at the Atlanta camp and along the way before finding Hershel's farm after Carl (Rick's son) is accidentally shot by someone from Hershel's farm in a hunting accident.

Rick confronts Hershel about the danger, and an argument ensues over what they are dealing with. Rick states, "They're dead. Before they get back up – before they try to eat you – they die. You said you saw your son die...They're not sick people...they're dead." Hershel claims they could be recovering, they could still be people and that he does not "want to have blood on my hands if we find out these people are alive." On paper, the difference between Issue #11 and Issue #24 does not seem like a lot, it is when the comic book format is taken into account. The difference between these two issues for the reader is an entire calendar year.

The Walking Dead is a monthly ongoing narrative, and as such, is a very different narrative than *World War Z*, which has a finite beginning and end. *The Walking Dead* has no finite ending as of yet, having published issue #145 recently. While this thesis focuses on the first 96 issues, the fact that this is an ongoing narrative leads the narrative to be more of an episodic nature, and as such is divided into 'chapters' that encompass six issues per chapter. (A monthly comic book usually runs about 30 pages, so depending on publisher and advertisers the actual narrative may be anywhere from 21-30 pages of story.) *The Walking Dead's* chapters then take six months to complete, and only two

chapters per year. This publishing format tends to have narrative events build much slower than a novel format, and the reader must wait 30 days between each new section of the story.

The concept of “safety” is explored constantly within the narrative, and in a Post 9/11 America, “safety” is indeed a relative term. This idea is seen within the comic by giving the characters of the comic, namely Rick and his group, long periods of quiet “safety” between chaotic terrible zombie attacks. The term “safety” is used loosely, because even in these quiet moments within Kirkman’s narrative, there is always the possibility of danger from outside the group, or even within.

In Issue #54 (Figure 6) Rick tells Carl, “You are not safe Carl. No matter how many people are around- or how clear the area looks- no matter what anyone says, no matter what you think – you are not safe.” This comes from Rick after the group is decimated by the Governor’s attack on the prison in Issue #48, where the survivors had made their home since Issue #13. The attack on the prison also claimed the lives of Lori and the newborn baby, Judith. Rick has also been talking to Lori through an old rotary phone he has been carrying with him (Issue #51) since the escape from the prison.

While not explicitly stated until Issue #54 like this, the idea of not being safe is present throughout the entire narrative, it is not until the events at the prison that this idea is apparent to the characters themselves, that there is no real notion of safety to be had in this new world.

This is the core element of Kirkman’s narrative, that there is no safety. Survival is paramount; everything else is secondary and expendable. Canavan illustrates:

Countrymen do not band together in the zombie crisis, and the nation does not have the finest hour; instead, allegiances fragment into familial bands and patriarchal tribes, then fragment further from there. We can see this breakdown everywhere in *The Walking Dead*: Shane, Rick's best friend, must be killed not only because he has become dangerous, but because he covets Rick's wife. Later, Carl secretly murders another young boy who is behaving sociopathically on the grounds that he too is a threat to the group; we are led to believe this was the 'right thing' to do, 'because it needed to be done and no one else would' (#67 7). (Canavan 443)

It is Carl who kills Shane (Figure 1) because he is threatening Rick at gunpoint. Carl has secretly followed Shane and Rick into the woods, where Shane planned to murder Rick in the belief that Shane would then get Lori (Rick's wife) back.

It is also Carl who kills Ben (Figure 10) because Ben, even though only a child, is a danger to the group because of his sociopathic tendencies. Carl murders Ben when no one else will, because Carl realizes no one else will. These are only two of many instances where Rick's group does the "right thing" for the "safety of the group" that involves barbaric and brutal acts of violence. There seems to be a limit for the characters however, and the killing of a child seems to be it. In Issue #61, after the group finds that Ben has murdered his brother with the express purpose that he return as a zombie, the

discussion on what to do with the sociopathic child is discussed. Abraham advocates the child be killed (Figure 8),

If this kind of thing happened in the real world – before all this madness – he’d get what – twenty years of therapy? He’d be sent off to some kind of home for the rest of his life and even then they’d probably never fix him...none of us can help this boy. He’s simply a burden – a liability.

The rest of the group, especially Dale and Andrea (who are the de facto parents of the twins now after Donna died before reaching the prison and Allen who died at the prison) violently disagree and refuse killing Ben as an option. The group has been making their way towards Washington, D.C. following Abraham and his small group under the assumption that the government still functions and that safety is still a possibility.

All the characters featured on this page have looks of sorrow or horror on their faces, with the exception of Abraham, and the very last panel showing Carl with a look of determination matching Abraham. The discussion is interrupted by the appearance of father Gabriel, and as the narrative progresses, the reader is witness to Carl doing what no one else seemed capable of doing, in murdering Ben because he presented an ongoing danger to the group.

Within the context of the narrative, the majority of these events are justified and do indeed save the group, the difference is that in the beginning of the narrative Rick, in particular, (though other characters as well) had reservations about doing violence, and often spend much time afterwards lamenting what had to be done. As the series progresses this aspect of Rick’s personality does diminish, he still laments his dwindling

humanity, though these instances of lamentation become less frequent and further apart. Kirkman articulates this, “I want to explore how people deal with extreme situations and how these events CHANGE them” (Days Gone By i). This idea is seen clearly in the two humans that Carl kills. Carl kills Shane in self-defense of his father in Issue #6 (Figure 1) and tells Rick “It’s not the same as killing the dead ones Daddy.” When Carl kills Ben in Issue #61 he shows none of the tearful anguish he did when shooting Shane, in fact he keeps it a secret. It is not to say that any of the main characters become remorseless killing machines, they do all show regret and remorse of their barbaric acts, but like Rick, these lamentations become less and less frequent, while the intensity of their barbaric acts do seem to increase.

Rick Grimes is very much a tragic hero. Over the course of 96 issues, Rick Grimes a rural police officer husband and father, becomes a widow, loses a hand, loses many companions and friends along the way, kills the living and the dead, and by issue #96 is not the same character readers met in issue #1. Of course, any good narrative with complex characters must indeed change over the course of the narrative, but the changes Kirkman makes to Rick are indeed drastic and profound. In Issue #57 (Figure 7) after Rick, Carl, and Abraham are attacked on the road by a group of human bandits, Rick not only kills two of the assailants, he does so with his bare hands after they threaten to rape and kill Carl. After Carl has fallen asleep, Abraham tells Rick, “You don’t rip a man apart – hold his insides in your hand – you can’t go back to being dear old dad after that. You’re never the same. Not after what you did.” Rick responds, “You can fake it.”

Rick then says that this incident is not the first thing to chip away at his soul, and make him wonder if he (Rick) is still human. Within the narrative context, in the next

pages, Abraham tells Rick he has done something similar before he became a part of Rick's group. Rick is aware of how his humanity has declined, but he is unapologetic about what he has had to do to keep his family, and the group alive.

In the article "Battling monsters and becoming monstrous; Human devolution in *The Walking Dead*" Kyle Bishop states,

as Fredrich Nietzsche memorably writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Whoever battles with monsters had better see that it does not turn him into a monster," and this axiom has become the new standard for a number of post 9/11 zombie narratives. The so-called heroes of survival fiction must make difficult choices to ensure their continued existence, decisions that often mean protecting themselves and their allies at all cost. (Bishop 74)

This new standard is seen time and time again in *The Walking Dead*. Bishop further states, "rather than using zombie monster as a metaphor for human violence, then, Kirkman is baldly presenting the human as directly and unequivocally monstrous, a devolution that becomes more overt and shocking as *The Walking Dead's* narrative progresses" (Bishop 81).

In Issue #66 (Figures 9 and 10) Rick stands alone after the group has left the funeral pyre for Dale, and he hears someone approach. Rick assumes its Abraham, and Rick (in reference to what Rick and the group did to the cannibals that stalked them and took Dale's leg to eat) says

I see every bloody bit. Every broken bone. Every bashed skull. They did what they did, but we mutilated those people. Made the others watch...I just can't stop thinking...I don't think Carl could even look at me...not after what I've done. Not if he knew.

Rick then turns around to see Carl standing there, and after a moment of silence, Carl admits to killing Ben. It is here, that Carl finally shows anguish for his murder of Ben. This scene again cements the protagonists of *The Walking Dead* as having bits of their souls and humanity chipped away by the violent things they must all do to continue surviving. Rick is often seen dealing out frontier justice over the course of the narrative, a kind of abject necessity in the new apocalyptic landscape. In the absence of civilization, Rick and his group make their own laws about survival.

This brute survival plays directly into the Post 9/11 “us” or “them” mentality, the “tribe” mentality that if something is not part of the familial group, or benefits the group, then it is an enemy and should be eradicated or obliterated. This is seen in Issue #36 (Figure 5) when Rick tells his wife, Lori “I’d kill every single one of the people here if I thought it’s keep you safe...I find myself ranking them...just in case something happened and I had to choose...and I could kill any one of them at any moment for the right reasons.” At this point in the narrative, the group is at the prison, and fear an impending attack by the Governor with the residents of Woodbury, a town not far from the prison that the Governor runs like a brutal dictator. Rick had only recently escaped Woodbury, losing a hand to the Governor’s brutality.

Rick then asks Lori if that makes him evil, and Lori responds she does not know, and Rick also acknowledges that he does not either. For Rick, his “us”, his “tribe” is his family, Lori, Carl, and the baby Judith. Rick’s “them” is everyone else. While within the narrative, Rick never does sacrifice anyone in his group, but he himself acknowledges that he would if the need arose.

Once the group arrives and becomes heavily involved in the leadership of the community of Alexandria in Issue #69, a balance seems to be struck by Rick’s group between their violent savagery and struggling humanity. (The refuge is used by the group from Issue #70 until Issue #121 with its destruction, and then rebuilt in Issue #126.) The group, having exposed Eugene’s lie that he was not working for the government and just a high school science teacher, had been approached by scouts for Alexandria. The group gladly accepts (albeit cautiously) to join the town having nowhere else to go with Eugene’s lie about Washington, D. C. proving to be a false hope.

In Issue #90 (Figure 11) Rick and Andrea are talking, dealing with the catastrophic injury to Carl in the herd attack on Alexandria, Carl having been shot in the eye by a stray bullet from Douglas as he is taken down by zombies in the herd attack. When Rick tells Andrea that he has nothing left anymore, that he feels like he died a long time ago, Andrea responds to him “Have you forgotten? Death doesn’t affect people quite like it used to. Don’t you think it’s about time you came back to life?” They then kiss, and the chapter closes. Carl recovers from his injury with the loss of an eye, and Rick then takes charge of the group again and begins leading Alexandria to rebuilding and fortifying the refuge after the herd attack.

Issue #96 ends with a more hopeful Rick, believing that Alexandria holds the key to their long term survival. This marks a significant change in Rick, while not abandoning his savage nature; the narrative seems to feel more hopeful in the group's survival.

CHAPTER VII

SURVIVAL BY THE NUMBERS: THE REFERENCE GUIDE AND *WORLD WAR*

ZED

Rule #1 for surviving Zombieland? Cardio. – Columbus, Zombieland

Max Brooks is not responsible for one modern zombie bible text; he has in fact, written two. In 2003, *The Zombie Survival Guide* was published, and in 2006, *World War Z*. Both books could not be more dissimilar from each other, but can easily be read hand in hand with the other.

The Zombie Survival Guide, while not a traditional novel, and not a traditional narrative, is in fact a how-to manual for surviving a zombie apocalypse. First released in 2003, Max Brooks details in this manual everything anyone would need to know to survive in a zombie apocalypse.

It deserves mention here because of its popularity in a Post 9/11 world. With over a million copies in print, and a slot on the New York Times Bestseller list, Brooks' how-to manual presents many of the themes we have explored in this thesis. Lacking a narrative, but the themes are easily identifiable, the reliance on oneself, not just the

government or local police forces, be prepared, have a plan for defense, offense, and on the move.

In the film, *Zombieland*, the main character Columbus, makes reference to many rules he has invented to survive his zombie apocalypse, this is an easily identifiable parallel to the types of things outlined in Brooks' *Guide*. Like the Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared", this guide, in a slightly tongue-in-cheek way goes about detailing survival skills. These skills range from what weapons to choose, what places are best and most easily defended, things that do not require SEAL or Special Forces training, things that normal everyday people (the "everyman") can utilize and put to practical use in an emergency.

These types of survival skills can be easily transferrable to a terrorist attack or viral outbreak that does not cause the dead to return and attempt to eat the living, or any other apocalyptic event that might cause the collapse of modern society.

Max Brooks' *World War Z*, while as bleak and zombie ridden as *The Walking Dead*, has a slight difference in tone, one of hope. This is a different kind of hope than in *The Walking Dead*. For in Brooks' narrative, the zombie has all but been eradicated, and the entire world is in a state of recovery. "Unlike more nihilistic zombie stories, however, the zombie apocalypse depicted in Brooks' novel ends much more hopefully – the world as the survivors had known it has ended, but the zombies have not won" (Bond 188-189). *World War Z* is still very much a Post 9/11 zombie tale and the underlying terror and paranoia is still there, but the tone of hope begins from the first page, the entire narrative is a look back on a war that is over, and a war that was won by people uniting together to fight the zombie plague.

The novel's narrator, a United Nations Postwar Commission officer, has been compiling interviews omitted from the final draft of a report for the Postwar Commission. This 'oral history' of voices from interviews (the reader is only presented with these oral histories, not with the factual report mentioned) of a global mosaic recounts twenty plus years of the zombie war and the beginnings of the reconstruction effort.

The zombie virus was first encountered by a doctor in rural China. Like any good zombie narrative, its origins are not explicitly stated or revealed. "*World War Z* never explicitly describes the plague's etiology, beyond identifying it as virus spread solely through bodily fluids" (Bond 190). The narrative then bounces across the globe, though remaining chronologically, and then gives the reader snippets of the massive failures of governments (and a few successes) to defend, repel or extinguish the zombie plague.

In the chapter "Blame" the narrator is interviewing the former White House Chief of Staff about the government's prior knowledge of the zombie outbreak. The bold face is the narrator; the plain text is the former Chief of Staff.

So you never really tried to solve the problem.

Oh, c'mon. Can you ever "solve" poverty? Can you ever "solve" crime? Can you ever "solve" disease, unemployment, war, or any other societal herpes? Hell no. All you can hope for is to make them manageable enough to allow people to get on with their lives. (*World War Z*, 61)

The United States government, along with many other world governments had forewarning of the zombie plague, but did little or nothing to take it seriously or properly warn its citizens.

Within the *World War Z* narrative, governments (save Israel) either ignored the information or even once the problem grew to worldwide epidemic, failed to properly plan against the new enemy. In the chapter “The Great Panic” the narrator speaks to a former Army Infantry soldier about the Battle of Yonkers, which within the narrative, was the USA’s greatest military failure of the zombie war.

You know where they put us? Right down on the ground, right behind sandbags or in fighting holes. We wasted so much time, so much energy preparing these elaborate firing positions. Good ‘cover and concealment’ they told us. Cover and concealment? ‘Cover means physical protection, conventional protection, from small arms and artillery or air-dropped ordnance. That sound like the enemy we were going up against? (*World War Z*, 94)

The military failed to realize and plan for the enemy they were facing. The military planned and strategized for a war against a human enemy. Later in the same interview the infantryman clearly spells it out for the narrator, and by proxy, the reader.

But what if the enemy can’t be shocked and awed? Not just won’t, but biologically can’t! That’s what happened that day outside New York City, that’s the failure that almost lost us the whole damn war. The fact that we couldn’t

shock and awe Zack boomeranged right back in our faces and actually allowed Zack to shock and awe us! They're not afraid! No matter what we do, no matter how many we kill, they will never, ever be afraid! (*World War Z*, 104)

This sentiment and narrative thread runs through most of the novel that the zombie was an enemy no one was prepared for, and once engaged, human forces failed to modify and change tactics to combat it more effectively.

Later in the chapter "Total War", the narrator interviews General D'Ambrosia when the remnants of the United States were about to take the fight to the zombie from behind the Rockies where the survivors had fled.

For the first time in history, we faced an enemy that was actively waging total war. They had no limits of endurance. They would never negotiate, or surrender. They would fight until the very end, because unlike us, every single one of them, every second of every day, was devoted to consuming all life on Earth. That's the kind of enemy that was waiting for us beyond the Rockies. That's the kind of war we had to fight. (*World War Z*, 273)

While humanity fumbled, and nearly lost to the zombie, throughout the narrative, Brooks weaves in a mosaic of humanity that understands what they stood to lose against the zombie, and it is this narrative thread that keeps the tone of hope alive for the reader as opposed to the kind of hope seen in the later issues of *The Walking Dead*.

In the chapter, “Around the World, And Above” the narrator speaks with a merchant vessel captain who was present for the “Honolulu Conference” a post zombie war UN meeting of a sorts. The captain recalls a speech the American President made.

The living dead had taken more from us than land and loved ones. They’d robbed us of our confidence as the planet’s dominant life form. We were a shaken, broken species, driven to the edge of extinction and grateful only for a tomorrow with perhaps a little less suffering than today. (*World War Z*, 267)

Earlier in the novel, in the chapter, “Home Front USA”, the narrator speaks with a filmmaker whose inspirational films had been boosting public morale.

The truth was that no matter what we did, chances were that most of us, if not all of us, were never going to see the future. The truth was that were standing on what be the twilight of our species and that truth was freezing a hundred people to death every night. They needed something to keep them warm. So I lied. (*World War Z*, 166-167)

While these particular quotes are dire, they are recollections by characters at a time when victory had not been achieved, and at times within the narrative before hope was restored to humanity. This highlights a unique characteristic of *World War Z*, why did Brooks choose a retrospective approach to the narrative? I believe this approach removes the uncertainty of the characters’ survival within the narrative, so the reader can focus more

on the events that transpired, rather than the individual characters. Brooks is weaving a tale that is more about the events, than that of the individual characters. By removing the reader's concern over the individual character's fates, they can instead see the whole of the narrative.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPE

“So what do you think? Zombie kill of the week?” – Tallahassee, *Zombieland*

The Walking Dead and *World War Z* present us with two very different apocalypses, but at the same time, they are wholly similar. Kirkman presents a horrific outcome, where it is everyman for himself (or herself) in an all out war for singular survival (singular meaning individual or small group) while Brooks’ outcome is equally horrific, its central theme is more about seeing the last vestiges of humanity band together in a single unifying force. Kirkman’s narrative is of course on a much smaller scale, focusing on a few individuals, while Brooks paints a worldwide narrative.

But then how is it that both works are so popular, when they do paint very different narratives featuring the same monster? Author Jonathan Mayberry polled a Who’s Who of zombie writers on what makes the zombie so relevant and, for lack of a better word, vital in the modern era.

1) as Max Brooks put it, zombies “are a ‘safe’ way of exploring our apocalyptic anxieties”; 2) we now have a lot

of apocalyptic anxieties to explore; 3) we know what to do to solve the zombie problem, while terrorism, global warming, and economic disaster seem a lot tougher to solve; 4) the zombie is the Swiss Army Knife of monsters, offering a metaphor for almost any use; and 5) it's about time for a monster suited to the times, the long runs of Frankenstein's creature and Dracula having both suffered from over-use inflation (*Twilight* [2008]) and shelf life problems. (Landon 8)

These reasons do indeed seem to sum up the zombie's popularity. The zombie is very much a Swiss Army Knife type of monster, because it does fill whatever need arises, for the zombie is an empty shell to be filled with whatever anxieties the public has, because the public may be a large mass of people, those people are all still individuals, with individual anxieties and fears.

In this new zombie-filled landscape of a Post 9/11 world, perhaps the more relevant question is not "why now" but "why the zombie"? Looking at the zombie narrative from 20 years ago and comparing it to now, society is obsessed with not an undead monster, but a world devoid of civilization, filled with the monsters of our own creation, us. The zombie 'then' was a narrative about escaping the monster(s) to get back to safety. The zombie narrative 'now' shows us a world without the ability to escape to safety, because the world of safety is gone, and because of that, the potential for monstrosity within the living becomes the battleground.

This is the core fear that the zombie addresses in Post 9/11 America. At what point do we lose ourselves, at what point do we become the monster in order to win, to survive, to endure? When do we become worse than that which we are fighting?

Much like the Zack's from *World War Z*, the enemies of today are not a traditional enemy you can shock and awe, global warming is not an enemy that can be beaten, and it must be survived by adaptation and planning. Terrorist groups are not an army that can be beaten in a stand-up fight. Much like the zombie, as long as one terrorist survives, the cycle can be repeated again. This new enemy may be beaten, but can never be truly eradicated, the fear this threat creates, is always lurking because no one really knows without a doubt how many enemies remain.

Zombies will continue to thrill and terrorize us because things like terrorism and global warming will not just go away, or be easily defeated any time in our near futures. The zombie will be around for a long time to come because of how much the zombie has to show us about ourselves. Like Rick Grimes, we are the walking dead, not in the way in which we are dead and rotting and trying to eat the living, but because while all our technology and social networking is there, we are removing ourselves more and more from the person sitting next to us. The title sequence in *Shaun of the Dead* echoes this sentiment, following people doing their daily routines, slack expressions, indeed zombified by 'modern' life.

“Many zombie narratives appearing in the wake of 9/11 use allegory to address not only general fears of a post-apocalyptic future, but also the new cultural fears and anxieties associated with the threat of terrorism” (Bishop 76-77). And what are these fears that the zombie narratives address? That we are alone and we are not safe. We are

not safe, and we cannot rely on anyone but ourselves, or our family. But perhaps the most prevalent message the zombie narrative tells us is there is a cost of survival, and that cost may be high, it may well indeed be our own humanity.

The core theme of all the zombie narratives I have discussed here, and that of the zombie apocryphal myth, is to have a plan for when civilization and government collapses. What the narratives then go on to illustrate is where those plans might take us. They (the narratives) expose the limits we might have to go to keep surviving. “For Kirkman, the zombies aren’t metaphors for human failings; they are the catalyst that reveals the monstrous potential that has been exposed within us all” (Bishop 83). In *The Walking Dead*, and a large majority of zombie video games and movies, the real enemy to fear is not the zombie, but humans. A tagline for *The Walking Dead* TV series in seasons 2 and 3 was “Fight the Dead, Fear the Living”. This is an important component to the new zombie apocryphal myth: That people are as dangerous to themselves as an outside force.

The only thing reigning in humanity’s monstrous potential is society, civilization’s laws and order are all that bind in humans’ monstrosity. A look at the world news any evening will show just how fragile that reign is. The sheer amount of homegrown terrorist attacks, school shootings and racially motivated shootings in the past year or two alone highlight this clearly in America. The new apocryphal zombie strips away that reign to illustrate (and entertain) what happens when the world does indeed to go hell. And as *The Zombie Survival Guide* tells us, we must be ready.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

“But what I will say is this, [chuckling] it's not the end of the world.” – Ed, *Shaun of the Dead*

The zombie narrative, like any good science fiction, tries to teach us something about the world we do live in, by showing us the worlds we could live in. The zombie apocalypse shows us the potential of the human race in a bad situation (i.e. the end of the world) and that potential is bad, but perhaps with a silver lining. The zombie apocalypse illustrates how mankind could easily destroy itself (*The Walking Dead*) or how mankind could rise to the occasion and redeem ourselves (*World War Z*). The zombie apocalypse also shows us that we can plan ahead and be ready (*The Zombie Survival Guide*) for whatever might happen.

I postulate that the core issue, the central reason why the zombie apocalypse has taken over America, and indeed the world as well, is it illustrates how the modern world of terrorism and uncertainty leaves the individual feeling like they are alone, and that the individual cannot trust anyone, and that leaves room for the potential. And by ‘potential’

I mean that people might be starting to seriously ask themselves, “What would I do to survive?” “How far would I go to protect my family?” “If a man with a gun appeared, would I run and hide or fight?” The potential lurks in this new apocryphal myth, the potential of people for good or bad, for better or worse.

Kyle Bishop states,

The potential for human monstrosity, it appears, has always existed – but something has changed. These new stories manifest the world’s increased tolerance for interpersonal violence, potentially unethical political policies, and a “kill before they kill us” attitude. In a chilling reflection of post 9/11 U.S. military and political actions, such vicious protagonists are direct analogs not only for contemporary national leaders, but also for a complicit and bloodthirsty citizenry. (Bishop 83)

The zombie narrative exposes this potential monstrosity in its protagonists, and therefore in us all in this Post 9/11 world. Is the zombie apocalypse a social commentary on the world today? Of course it is. All good science fiction is a social commentary on the world it was written in.

Does this shift in the apocryphal myth signal a tipping point for society, illustrating society’s view of its own place within the context of civilization? I believe it does signify a change in attitude of people on their place within the world. What remains to be seen is how society deals with this new myth in the terms of people as a whole defining their fears (and therefore their place) in the society of today. Much like the two

different narratives Kirkman and Brooks present to readers, which way will society subconsciously choose to react given an extinction level event to this planet?

But what does the zombie apocalypse really mean to society? I suppose that is a bit like asking, what is the meaning of life? It varies from person to person. It may be simply fun for some, a cautionary tale for others, and a complete waste of time for some others.

For me, the zombie apocalypse will be as it has always been for me, a perverse sense of fun. Since the first time the title sequence ran on *Resident Evil*, zombies have been a source of creepy and terrorizing fun, an end of the world simulator for the *Choose Your Own Adventure* generation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 28 Days Later*. Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Ray Panthaki, Lisa I'Anson, Brendan Gleeson, Naomie Harris, Christopher Eccleston. Fox Searchlight, 2003. DVD.
- 28 Weeks Later*. Dir. Juan Carlos Fresnadillo. Perf. Jeremy Renner, Rose Byrne, Robert Carlyle. 20th Century Fox, 2007. DVD.
- Austin, Jane and Grahame-Smith, Seth. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance - Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem!*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009. Print.
- Bishop, Kyle W. "Battling monsters and becoming monstrous: Human devolution in The Walking Dead." *Monster culture in the 21st century : a reader*. Ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. 73-83. Print.
- Bishop, Kyle. "Raising the Dead: Unearthing the Nonliterary Origins of Zombie Cinema." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2006 Winter; 33 (4): 196-205. Print.
- Bloodsworth-Lugo, Mary K. and Lugo-Lugo, Carmen R. "The monster within: Post-9/11 narratives of threat and the U.S. shifting terrain of terror." *Monster culture in the 21st century: a reader*. Ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. 243-46. Print.
- Bond, Elson and Collins, Margo. "Off the page and into your brains!": New Millennium

- Zombies and the Scourge of Hopeful Apocalypses.” *Better off dead: the evolution of the zombie as post-human*. Ed. Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro. Fordham University Press: New York, 2011. 187-204. Print.
- Brooks, Max. *World War Z*. New York: Broadway, 2006. Print.
- Brooks, Max. *The Zombie Survival Guide*. New York: Broadway, 2006. Print.
- Call of Duty: World at War*. Treyarch. 2008. Video Game.
- Call of Duty: Black Ops*. Treyarch. 2010. Video Game.
- Call of Duty: Black Ops II*. Treyarch. 2012. Video Game.
- Canavan, Gerry. “‘We Are *The Walking Dead*’: Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative.” *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 2010 Fall; 51 (3): 431-53. Print.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. “Undead (a Zombie Oriented Ontology).” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 2012; 23 (3): 393-412. Print.
- Dawn of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. David Emge, Ken Foree, Scott H. Reiniger. Starz / Anchor Bay, 2004. DVD.
- Day of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joseph Pilato. Shout! Factory, 2013. DVD.
- “Days Gone Bye.” *The Walking Dead Season One*. Writ. Frank Darabont. AMC and Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2011. DVD.
- Dendle, Peter. “The Zombie as a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.” *Monsters and the monstrous: myths and metaphors of enduring evil*. Ed. Niall Scott. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 45-54. Print.
- Dendle, Peter. *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company,

2001. Print.
- Halo: Combat Evolved*. Microsoft Studios. 2001. Video Game.
- Kirkman, Robert. *The Walking Dead, Vol. 1: Days Gone Bye*. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2006. Print.
- Kirkman, Robert. *The Walking Dead Compendium One*. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2009. Print.
- Kirkman, Robert. *The Walking Dead Compendium Two*. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2012. Print.
- Landon, Brooks. "Is Dead the New Alive." *American Book Review*, 2013 Jan-Feb; 34 (2): 8. Print.
- Matheson, Richard. *I Am Legend*. New York: Tor Books, 1995. Print.
- Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Duane Jones, Judith O'Dea, Marilyn Eastman, and Karl Hardman. Weinstein Company, 2008. DVD.
- Packard, Edward. *The Cave of Time, Choose Your Own Adventure #1*. New York: Bantam, 1979. Print.
- Pokornowski, Steven. "Insecure Lives: Zombies, Global Health, and the Totalitarianism of Generalization." *Literature and Medicine*, 2013 Fall; 31 (2): 216-234. Print.
- Red Dead Redemption*. Rockstar Games. 2010. Video Game.
- Resident Evil*. Capcom, 1996. Video Game.
- Resident Evil 2*. Capcom, 1998. Video Game.
- Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. Capcom. 1999. Video Game.
- Roberts, Adam. *I Am Scrooge: A Zombie Story for Christmas*. London: Gollancz, 2011. Print.

Romero, George A. Interview by Mariana McConnell. "George A. Romero on Diary Of The Dead." *Cinemablend*. 14 Feb. 2008. Web.

Shaun of the Dead. Dir. Edgar Wright. Perf. Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Bill Nighy. Universal Studios, 2004. DVD.

Showalter, Gena. *Alice in Zombieland (White Rabbit Chronicles)*. Ontario: Harlequin Teen. 2013. Print.

World War Z. Dir. Marc Forster. Perf. Brad Pitt, Mireille Enos, Daniella Kertesz. Paramount, 2013. DVD.

Zombieland. Dir. Ruben Fleischer. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Woody Harrelson, Abigail Breslin. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010. DVD.

APPENDIX

This appendix uses the first publication issue numbers and approximate page numbers of those original Image Comics *Walking Dead* issues. The compendiums used in this thesis lack proper pagination, and extracting scans of the original issue pages for reference was deemed to be far easier for the reader.

Figure 1 - Issue 06, Page 23

Figure 2 - Issue 11, Page 06

Figure 3 - Issue 24, Page 19

Figure 4 - Issue 24, Pages 20-21

Figure 5 - Issue 36, Page 19

Figure 6 - Issue 54, Page 23

Figure 7 - Issue 57, Page 23

Figure 8 - Issue 61, Page 12

Figure 9 - Issue 66, Page 18

Figure 10 - Issue 66, Page 19

Figure 11 - Issue 90, Page 24

Figure 1



Figure 2

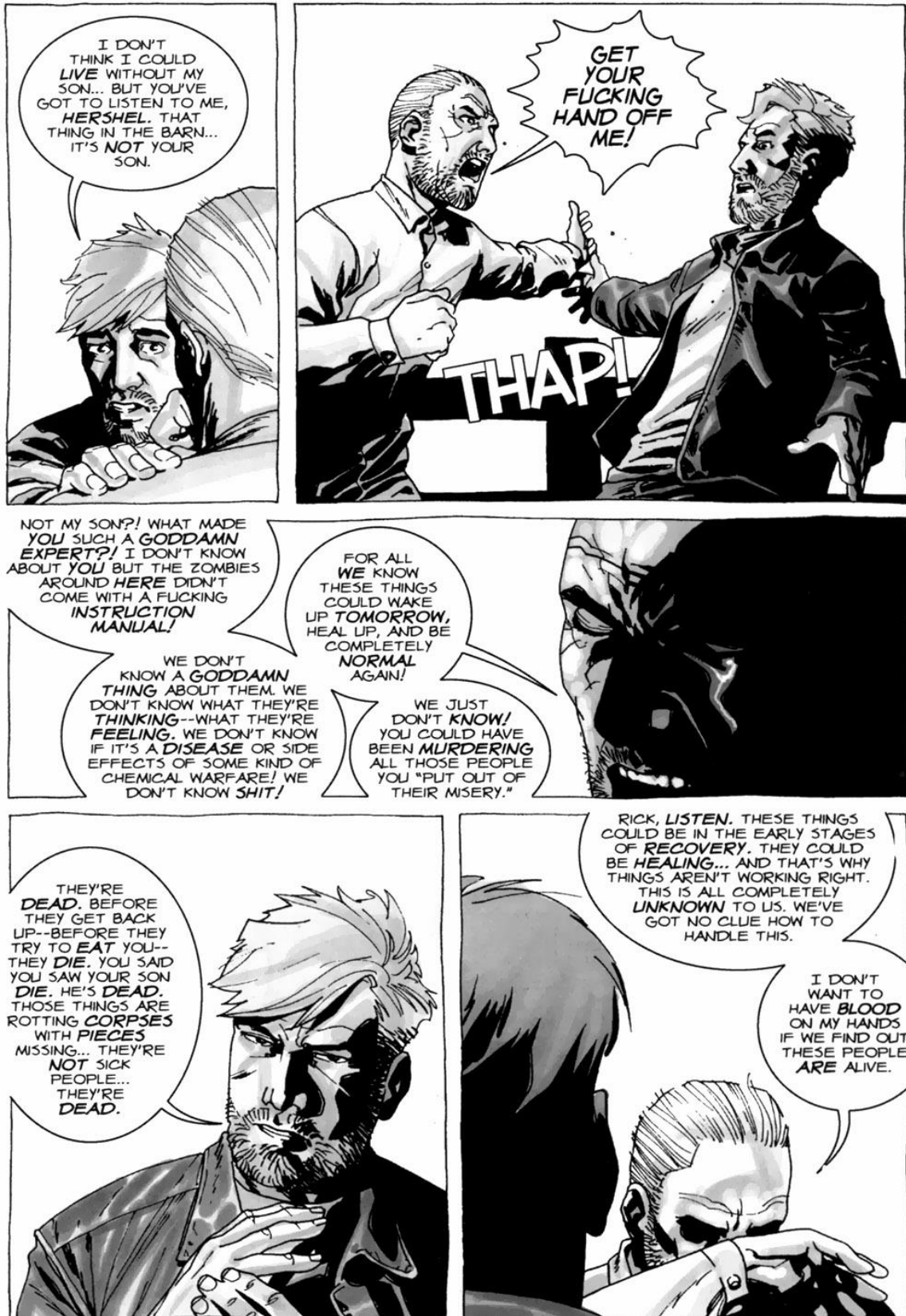


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

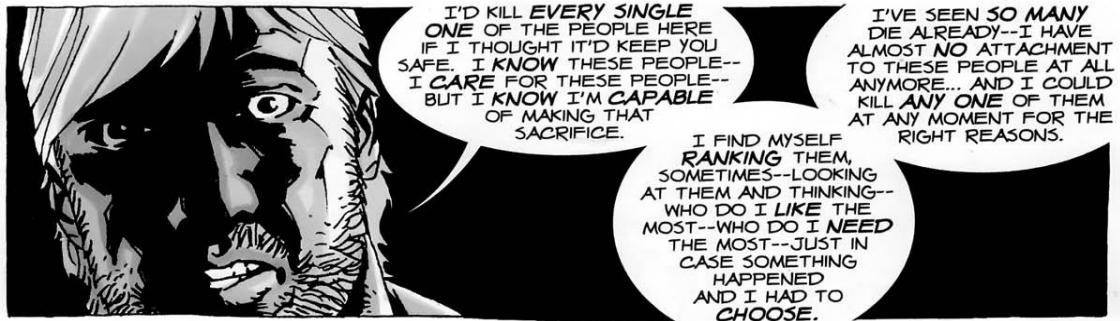
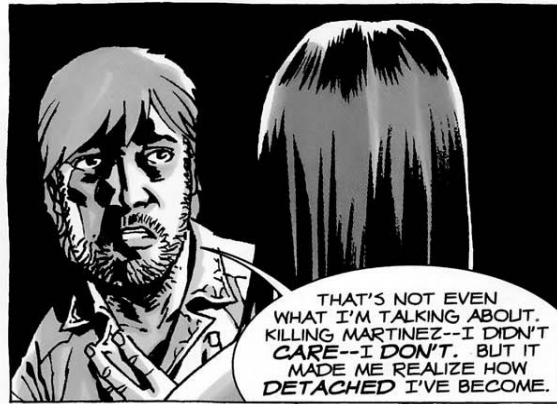


Figure 6

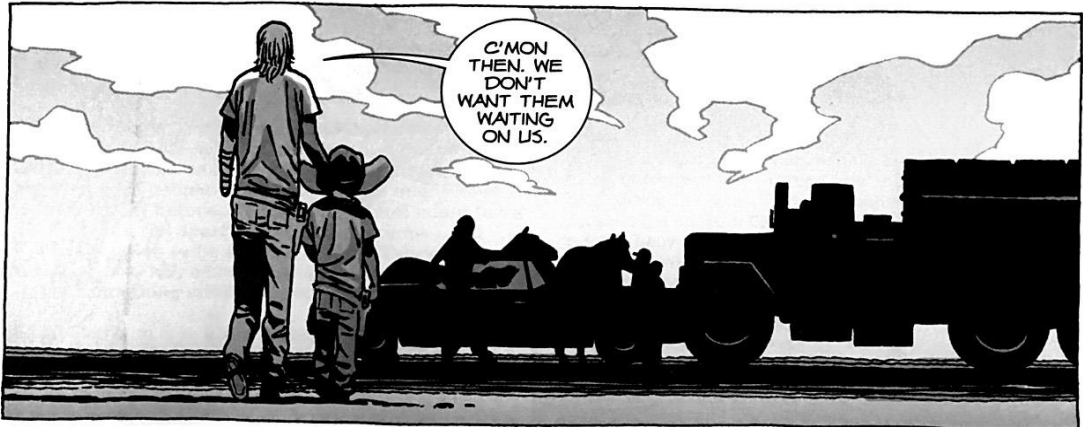


Figure 7

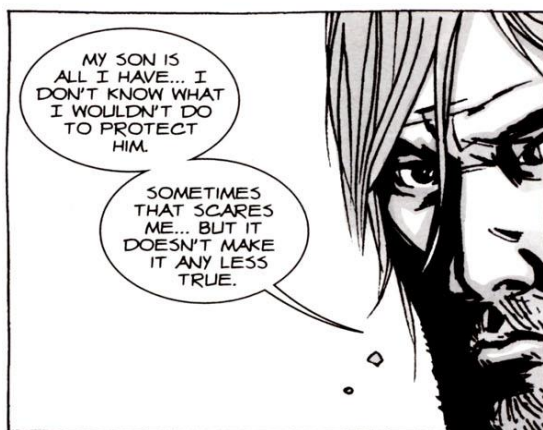
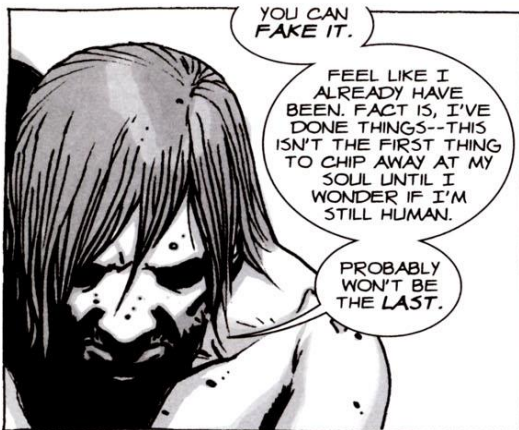
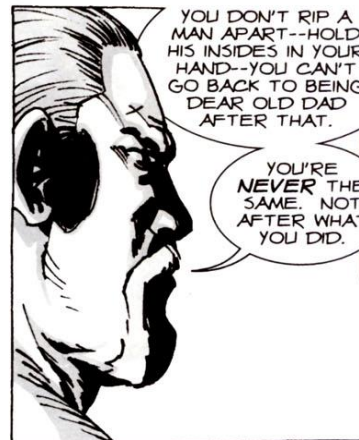
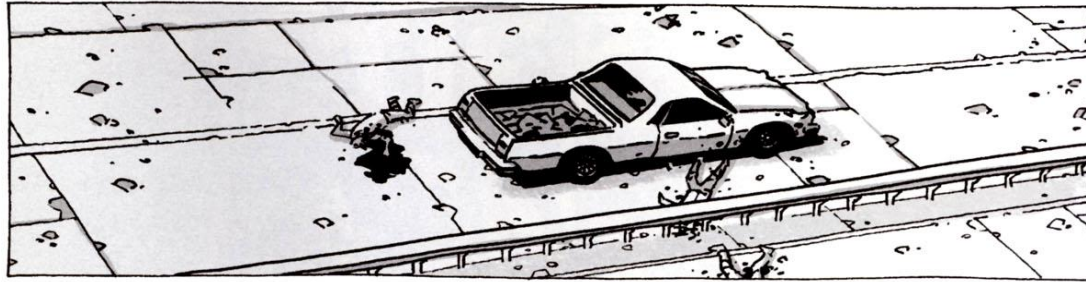


Figure 8

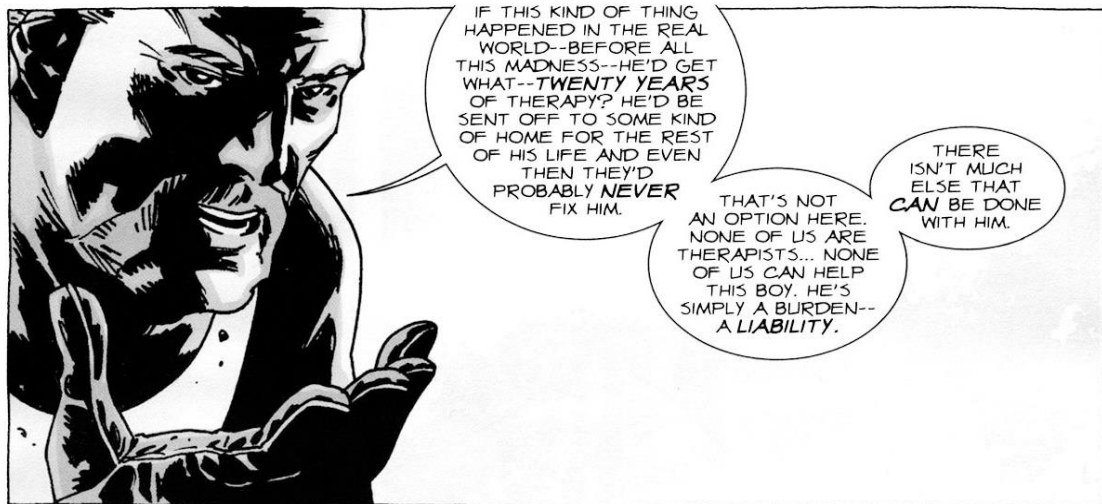


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

