

COMIC CORNER: The Walking Dead

By Aakash Bakaya

For me, the backbone of any story or fictional universe is its characters. Be it fantasy, sci-fi or in this case - a zombie apocalypse. Create compelling and relatable characters and you've got me hooked for the long run. 'The Walking Dead' succeeds tremendously in this aspect because series creator Robert Kirkman does not shy away from showing the difficult stuff. The immediate reactions to the death of a loved one, the toll of loneliness and depression and making life-saving (and ending) decisions are just a few of the situations Kirkman puts his creations through. Most times they don't come back the same and other times they don't come back at all.

Rejuvenating the mythos

'The Walking Dead' comic series created by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore and published by Image Comics birthed the much loved 'Walking Dead' universe. Set right after an outbreak of a disease that brings the dead back to life, the story begins and subsequently follows our protagonist Rick Grimes, a police officer who awakens from a comatose state in an abandoned hospital and is left to fig-

ure out how to survive and find his family. It's your typical 'zombie-story' setting where the world has been destroyed by the outbreak and the few people still alive are doing whatever it takes to survive another day. Eventually Rick finds his family along with a group of survivors and his best friend and partner Shane who helped 'take care' of his wife and son during the outbreak.

This focus on larger group of survivors and the dynamic

way people either co-operate or combat one another is what sets this universe apart from other zombie mythos. From families and couples (both old and new) to vagabonds and make-shift communities, there are a lot of names and faces to keep track of. In most circumstances, this might have come off as a bit daunting to the reader but Kirkman's talented writing and superb story-telling abilities keep the plot tight and the characters memorable.

Creeping Death

It's a harsh, bleak world in the 'Walking Dead' universe, full of death, lunacy and danger. No one and no place lasts long enough and happiness hangs on nothing but temporary moments of respite. The dead are slow and stupid but a single misstep can easily end a life. It might sound like a surprise to most but zombie stories don't usually explore the devastating aspects of death. Romero's trilogies are more inclined towards social commentary while others lean closer to action/sci-fi tropes. In worlds literally surrounded by the living dead, most stories forget how those left alive have to deal with the simple fact they must go on living - either for themselves or for their loved ones.

Ironically, death is one of the beating hearts of the series. It comes suddenly and tragically to our main cast time and time again. After reading this series, you'll chuckle at those that say George RR Martin (author of the Song of Ice and Fire saga aka 'Game of Thrones') is a remorseless killing machine hell-bent on destroying his creations. Here, characters you've grown attached to can suddenly and brutally be murdered when you turn the page and it's a sucker punch to the gut every time that happens. Brains get smashed in, heads get chopped off and eyes are taken out of skulls with spoons, and none of this is done by zombies. When it comes to killing, the dead are pretty tame when compared to the living.

Death is also the only constant that remains in the world. Every major city and town has been destroyed by the undead and so survivors are left to band together to stay alive. It plagues the living both in a literal and emotional sense. Some entire issues focus solely on the toll it's taking on the living and the attempts to handle its ever lingering presence. The plots are condensed into arcs that switch up locations or bring in new faces. But no matter how far our main characters go, they can't escape the one rule that hasn't changed from the old world. That we either get busy living or we get busy dying.

