

EXCL Excerpt: "THE WALKING DEAD: THE ROAD TO WOODBURY"

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Wednesday, 05 December 2012 13:04



As zombies invade all manner of pop culture, so does THE WALKING DEAD tighten its death grip across media. A comic that's since spawned a phenomenon of a television series and one of this year's most acclaimed video games, THE WALKING DEAD has also expanded to literature where creator Robert Kirkman has been filling us in on The Governor's early days. The latest, THE ROAD TO WOODBURY, finds the fascinating, fear-inducing tyrant entangled in a survivor skirmish prior to the hell unleashed by Rick & co. FANGORIA is happy to present this exclusive excerpt from THE WALKING DEAD: THE ROAD TO WOODBURY below.

In THE ROAD TO WOODBURY (available now from Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press), the afraid, hungry and barely alive Lilly and her band of survivors are saved by the walled-in community. Despite Lilly's initial hesitations about Woodbury, her vote to keep moving is outnumbered by the others in her group. And as she considers the grim alternative of solitude, Lilly finds no choice but to rely on the residents of Woodbury for refuge and thus, accept their mysterious leader – The Governor – as her own. Her suspicions about Woodbury and The Governor soon come to fruition and ultimately, Lilly and a band of rebels devise a plot to take over The Governor's reign – and in doing so, open up a Pandora's box of mayhem, destruction, and irrevocable consequences.

Special excerpt from THE WALKING DEAD: THE ROAD TO WOODBURY by Robert Kirkman and Jay Bonansinga

The behavior patterns of the walkers continue to baffle and enthrall the deeper thinkers among Woodbury's inhabitants. Some believe the undead move as bees in a hive, driven by something far more complex than mere hunger. Some theories involve invisible pheromone-like signals passing among zombies, producing behaviors that depend upon the chemical makeup of their prey. Others believe in dog-whistle sensory responses above and beyond mere attraction to sound or smell or movement. No single hypothesis has stuck, but most of Woodbury's residents feel certain about one aspect of zombie behavior: the advent of a herd of any size is to be dreaded and feared and treated with respect. Herds tend to grow spontaneously and take on troubling ramifications. A herd – even a small one, like the cluster of dead forming at this very moment north of town, drawn by the noise of the gladiatorial match the previous night – can overturn a truck, snap fence posts like kindling, or topple even the

highest wall.

For the last twenty-four hours Martinez has been marshalling forces in order to suppress the imminent attack. Guards posted on crows' nests at the northwest and northeast corners of the wall have been keeping tabs on the progress of the flock, which first began to morph into a herd about a mile away. The guards have been sending word down the chain of command that the size of the herd has grown from a dozen or so to nearly fifty, and the pack has been moving in a lumbering zig-zag through the trees along Jones Mill Road, covering the distance between the deep woods and the outskirts of town at a speed of about two hundred yards an hour, growing in number as they come. It has taken them fifteen hours to close the distance to four hundred yards.

Now some of them begin to emerge from the leading edge of the forest, shambling out into the open fields bordering the woods and the town. They look like broken toys in the hazy, distant twilight, like wind-up soldiers bumping into each other, running on the fumes of malfunctioning engines, their blackened mouths contracting and expanding like irises. Even at this distance the rising moon reflects off their milky eyes in shimmering coins of light.

Martinez has three Browning 50-caliber machine guns – courtesy of the ransacked National Guard depot – placed at key junctures along the wall. One sits on the bonnet of a backhoe at the west corner of the wall. Another one is situated on top of a cherry picker at the east corner. The third is positioned on the roof of a semi-trailer on the edge of the construction site. Each of the three machine guns already has an operator in place, each man equipped with a headset.

Long gleaming bandoleers of incendiary armor-piercing tracer bullets dangle from the stock of each weapon, with extras in steel boxes sitting nearby.

Other guards take positions along the wall – on ladders and bulldozer scoops – armed with semi-automatics and long-range sniper rifles loaded with 7.62-millimeter slugs that will penetrate drywall or sheet metal. These men do not wear headsets, but each know to watch for hand signals from Martinez, who positions himself at the top of a crane gantry in the center of the post office parking lot with a two-way. Two enormous klieg lights -- scavenged from the town theater -- are wired up to the generator chugging in the shadows of the post office loading dock.

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A voice crackles on Martinez's radio: "Martinez, you there?"

Martinez thumbs the TALK button. "Copy that, Chief, go ahead."

"Bob and I are on our way up there, gonna need to harvest some fresh meet."

Martinez frowns, his brow furrowing under his bandana. "Fresh meat?"

The voice sizzles through the tiny speaker: "How much time we got before all the fun and games start?"

Martinez gazes out at the darkening horizon, the closest zombies still about three hundred and fifty yards away. He thumbs the switch. "Probably won't be within head-shot range for these fellas for another hour, maybe a little less than that."

"Good," says the voice. "We'll be there in five minutes."



Bob follows the Governor down Main Street toward a wagon train of semi-trucks parked in a semi-circle outside the looted Menards home and garden center. The Governor walks briskly

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through the wintry evening air, a bounce to his step, his boot heels clicking on the paving stones. "Times like these," the Governor comments to Bob as they march along, "must feel like you're back in the shit in Afghanistan."

"Yes sir, I have to admit it does sometimes. I remember one time I got a call to drive down to the front, pick up some marines coming off their watch. It was nighttime, cold as a well diggers ass, just like this. Air raid sirens screaming, everybody hopped up for a firefight. Drove the APC down to this godforsaken trench in the sand, and what do I find? Bunch of whores from the local village giving out blow jobs to the grunts."

"No shit."

"I shit you not." Bob shakes his head in dismay as he walks alongside the Governor. "Right in the middle of an air raid. So I tell them to can it and get in before I leave them there. One of the whores gets in the APC with the men, and I'm like, what the hell. Whatever. Just get me out of this fucking place."

"Understandable."

"So I take off with the gal still going at it in the back of APC. But you'll never guess what happened then."

"Don't keep me in suspense, Bob," the Governor says with a grin.

"All of a sudden I hear a crash in the back, and I realize that bitch is an insurgent, and she brought an IED in with her, set it off in the cargo bay." Bob shakes his head again. "Firewall protected me, but it was a mess. Took off one of the boys' legs."

"Un-fucking-believable," the Governor marvels as he approaches the circle of eighteen-wheelers. Full darkness has fallen, and light from a torch illuminates the side of a

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Piggly Wiggly truck on which a grinning pig leers down at them in the dim light. "Hold that thought a second, Bob." The Governor pounds his fist on the trailer. "Travis! You in there? Hey! Anybody home?"

In a cloud of cigar smoke, the rear door springs up on rusty hinges. A heavy-set black man sticks his head out of the cargo hold. "Hey, Boss... what can I do you for?"

"Take one of the empty trailers down to the north wall, on the double. We'll meet you there with further instructions. Got that?"

"Got it, Boss."

The black man hops off the rear rail and vanishes around the side of the truck. The Governor takes a deep breath and then leads Bob around the circle of trucks, and then north along a side road toward the barricade. "Pretty goddamn amazing what a man will do for nookie," the Governor muses as they stride along the dirt road.

"Ain't it?"

"These girls you came in with, Bob, Lilly and... what's-her-name?"

"Megan?"

"That's the one. That little thing's a firecracker. Am I right?"

Bob wipes his mouth. "Yeah, she's a cute little gal."

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"Kinda flirty... but hey. Who am I to judge?" Another lascivious grin. "We do what we do to get by. Am I right, Bob?"

"Right as rain." Bob walks along for a moment. "Just between you and me... I'm kinda sweet on her."

The Governor looks at the older man with an odd mixture of surprise and pity. "This Megan gal? Well that's great, Bob. No shame in that."

Bob looks down as he walks. "Love to spend the night with her just once." Bob's voice goes soft. "Just once." He looks up at the Governor. "But, hell... I know that's just a pipe dream."

Philip cocks his head at the older man. "Maybe not, Bob... maybe not."

Before Bob can muster a response a series of explosive clanging noises go off ahead of them. Brilliant sunbursts from the klieg lights suddenly tear open seams in the distant darkness from opposite corners of the wall, the silver beams sweeping out across the adjacent fields and tree lines, illuminating the oncoming horde of walking corpses.

The Governor leads Bob across the post office lot to the crane gantry, on which Martinez now prepares to give the order to open fire.

"Hold your fire, Martinez!" The Governor's booming voice gets everybody's attention.

Martinez gazes nervously down at the two men. "You sure about this, Chief?"

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The rumble of a Kenworth cab rises up behind the Governor, accompanied by the telltale beeping noises of a semi moving in reverse. Bob glances over his shoulder and sees an eighteen-wheeler backing into position by the north gate. Exhaust vapors pulse from the truck's vertical stack, and Travis leans out the driver's side window, chewing a cigar and wrestling the steering wheel.

"Gimme your walkie!" The Governor gestures at Martinez, who is already descending the metal ladder affixed to the side of the crane. Bob watches all this from a respectable distance behind the Governor. Something about all this mysterious business makes the older man uneasy.

Outside the wall the meandering herd of zombies closes the distance to two hundred yards.

Martinez reaches the bottom of the ladder and hands over the two-way. The Governor thumbs the switch and barks into the mouthpiece. "Stevens! Can you hear me? You got your radio on?"

After a beat of crackling static the doctor's voice replies, "Yes I hear you and I don't appreciate –"

"Shut up for a second. I want you to bring that tub-of-lard guardsman, Stinson, to the north wall."

The voice crackles: "Stinson is still recovering, the man has lost a lot of blood in your little –"

"Don't fucking argue with me, Stevens... JUST FUCKING DO IT NOW!"

The Governor clicks the radio off and throws it back to Martinez.

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"Open the gate!" the Governor shouts at two workmen, who stand nearby with pick axes and anxious expressions, awaiting orders.

The two workmen look at each other.

"You heard me!" the Governor bellows. "Open the goddamn gate!"

The workmen follow orders, throwing the bolt at one end of the gate. The gate swings open, letting in a gust of cold, rancid wind.

"You ask me, we're pushing our luck with this routine," Martinez mutters under his breath, slamming an ammo magazine into his assault rifle.

The Governor ignores the comment and hollers, "Travis! Back it into position!"

The truck shudders and beeps and rattles backward into the opening.

"Now put the ramp down!"

Bob watches, completely vexed by the proceedings, as Travis hops out of his cab with a grunt and marches around behind the truck. He throws open the vertical door and lowers the ramp to the pavement.

In the glare of spotlights the zombie contingent approaches to within a hundred yards.

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Shuffling footsteps draw Bob's attention back over his shoulder.

From the shadowy center of town, in the flicker of burning trash barrels, Doctor Stevens emerges with his arm around the wounded guardsman, who hobbles along with the lethargic gait of a sleepwalker.

"Watch this, Bob," the Governor says, throwing a glance over his shoulder at the older man, and then, with a wink, the Governor adds, "Beats the hell outta the Middle East."