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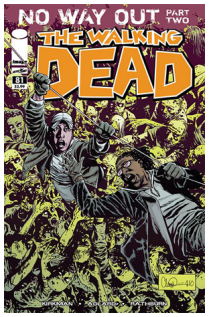
THE WALKING DEAD #81 (Image Comics) strives to be a compelling character drama, as well as a horror survival tale. The last thread of humanity struggles to survive in a zombie apocalypse even while hope is diminishing. Escape never appears to be an option when there is nowhere else to run. At its best, this issue captures genuine suspense into an unbelievably over-the-top situation.

The residents of a gated community wrestle with the realization that they are absolutely trapped. If the inhabitants leave their fortified residence, the horde of zombies will most likely kill them. If they continue to stay inside, their minds will go mad with claustrophobia. With so many new faces in this community, police officer Rick Grimes wonders if he can actually protect any of them from the herd of roamers.




To construct the wall, I-beams were planted straight through the ground. Because cement is running low, dirt became a necessary substitute to hold the beams together. Rick questions how long the walls will actually continue to stand. With the army of the dead crowding over their walls, the barricade will eventually break down.

Andrea is lost in the wild with very little supplies. With food and water scarce, she might not last through the night. Rick and the other survivors realize time is short to save their longtime friend. In order to rescue her, though, they will have to climb over the wall and avoid the horde of zombies. Even if they return with Andrea, the rescue team still needs to distract the roamers away from the wall.

Glenn reluctantly steps up and bravely leads the group to find Andrea. With a mountain-climbing rope and hook in place, the team starts their mission at a sluggish pace. The tightrope gradually sinks under pressure from their combined weight. If they do not hurry, the rope is going to snap and they will fall into the pit of zombies.

Creator and author Robert Kirkman keeps his characters at the center, focusing on their emotional relationships. Rick is caught in the middle between a new love, just as Morgan is. After the horrors these men have been through, they question whether happiness is a possibility. In a few short pages, the storyline conveys interesting parallelism between them. These protagonists share the same situation, but make very different choices.

As penciler and inker, Charlie Adlard’s artwork sets the mood and tone right from the first page. When Adlard lets loose on the zombie carnage, the sequences are hard-hitting, even brutal at times, and unexpected. Saving the best for last, the tightrope sequence is the highlight of this issue. The cinematic panels keep the suspense running at full speed. Everything that can go wrong actually does and it gets much, much worse!

THE WALKING DEAD #81 nails all the right parts—the terror and emotions—of a great zombie story. Even after 80 issues, the WALKING DEAD hasn’t lost any steam, which is a major accomplishment to the storytelling and art. This is the perfect opportunity for new readers to see how this comic book inspired the hit TV show!

{jcomments on}