Written by Dave Pace
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Perhaps the single best thing about THE WALKING DEAD is that it isn't a show about zombies, it's a show about human beings and how nightmarish circumstances test their humanity every day. One of the pleasures of the series is watching how these characters cope with the devastated world they've inherited, and arguably none have provided a more potent study of what happens to even the best of us in extreme circumstances than Andrew Lincoln as former lawman-turned-leader of a ragtag band of survivors, Rick Grimes.

A man who upheld law and order in his life before, each compromise of his values in the name of protecting the group pushes Rick closer and closer to something his former self would see as less than human. The tension between who he used to be and who he feels he needs to be in order to survive and it is taking its toll on the man and more and more, it becomes apparent that the real battle this season is brewing within Rick Grimes.

A man once hesitant to kill zombies has now had to kill his former partner and best friend at the conclusion of season two and as season three opens, we see a man changed by this trajectory he is on; a man much closer to darkness. It's death by a thousand cuts to his conscience as all the little compromises stack up and he edges closer and closer to psychosis.

I had a chance to join in on a conversation with Andrew Lincoln and the talk immediately turned to Rick and the moral challenges facing him this season, his ruthless treatment of the prisoners in episode two, the human cost of their survival and where his breaking point might be found.

Lincoln rolled up his sleeves and got down to business.

"I think his humanity is pretty intact but his ruthlessness, his decision making, has moved into a Shane point of view. There is an uncompromising nature that I think has happened over time to Rick. The other thing to bear in mind is that he is the most isolated, both in his group and in his relationship. I don't think he is in the most stable—certainly when I was playing it, I wanted it to

be this instantaneous, almost Pavlovian reaction to the situation. Certainly, in season one and season two, I don't think he would have been so quick to make that judgment call."

"That's one of the joys of playing Rick. The moral ambiguity of the show is the most interesting part for me—certainly as an actor—because in any other world, any other situation that wasn't Hell you wouldn't make these kinds of calls. You wouldn't be pushed into this corner to make these calls. The thing that dignifies him and helps to justify the situation is the fact that he always has their safety as a priority, so it becomes this sort of selfless act even though it's incredibly evil. His humanity is never fully taken away from him, although as we go through this season it diminishes and diminishes and that's all I will say."

When the talk shifted to the specifics of this week's episode, we were treated to more chilling insight into what was happening inside Rick Grimes as he ran off to chase down one of the escaped prisoners in a reckless move that could have spelled doom for him. Instead, it was a gruesome end for the prisoner as Rick callously leaves him to be fed upon by the shambling hordes.

"I think he's behaving, certainly there, in an incredibly irrational and reckless way. I wanted that to be the case. I wanted it to feel like he was almost like a serial killer running after his prey like AMERICAN PSYCHO. I think over the course of this season people start to doubt many things in Rick, but certainly his decision making as a leader is very much called into question."

How aware is Rick of his steady march to the brink of his own humanity? How heavy is the burden of his guilt and his fears about the growing doubts of his party? Certainly, the more he knows about his limits the better prepared he might be to see the line he may never be able to cross back from. If he can't see how close he is to self-destruction, then he just might be the

biggest threat the survivors have to contend with.

“I want, certainly over these episodes, to see this deterioration and maybe paranoia happening. He’s one of these people who is constantly beating himself up with this impossible decision making. He is aware of a certain unrest within the group and—it’s very difficult and I’m hesitating because I don’t want to give anything away that happens in the next few episodes but yes, I wanted to sow the seeds of doubt in the first two episodes. There is some decision making that is quickly irrational and choices that he makes that, like in a classic Greek tragedy, come back to haunt him. He is sort of coming apart but doing this very good impersonation of someone who is holding it together at the moment. I’m interested in seeing where his breaking point is.”

This is what fascinates about Rick Grimes; his grim walking of an ever-narrowing line, like Colonel Kurtz’s proverbial snail on a razor. In episode 302, we were reminded that everyone is infected, that there is a monster lurking in all the survivors that is waiting to be unleashed. There is a monster clawing its way out of Grimes right now and it remains to be seen if the man or the beast will prevail.

THE WALKING DEAD airs Sunday nights at 9 p.m. EDT. Are you a fan of the show? Stay tuned for details on FANGORIA’s Live Dead Blog where we will be commenting on the show live as it airs each week. Hosted by FANGORIA Editor-In-Chief Chris Alexander and joined by special guest panellists along with other Fango favorite contributors, the Live Dead Blog is a great way for fans to enjoy the show with us!