

The first "WALKING DEAD" what if: Darabont's intended season premiere

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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Frank Darabont's abrupt departure from THE WALKING DEAD just begs for plenty of "what if's", and as one site learned, this season may have been different from the get-go.

[Ain't It Cool](#) , following up on this video of BEING HUMAN star Sam Witwer talking his involvement with a scrapped WALKING DEAD episode, reached out to THE MIST director who revealed his initial plans for the season two premiere (plans that were heavily in development) involved a flashback/side story with a team of soldiers dropped in Atlanta in the eye of the zombie storm.

{youtube}uCyjdBac6p4{/youtube}

Darabont writes, : "This was intended for use in the actual TV series. I wanted to kick off the 2nd season with the flashback episode Sam describes, which would have followed a squad of Army Rangers getting trapped in the city and trying to survive as Atlanta falls." □

"The idea was to do this with a very focused "you are there" documentary feel. Not going all shaky-cam, but still making it a bit rawer and grainier than the rest of the show. We'd start with a squad of maybe seven or eight soldiers being dropped into the city by chopper. They have map coordinates they need to get to; they've been told to report to a certain place to provide reinforcement. It's not a special mission, it's basically a housekeeping measure putting more boots on the ground to reinforce key intersections and installations throughout the city. And we follow this group from the moment the copter sets them down. All they have to do is travel maybe a dozen blocks, a simple journey, but what starts as a no-brainer scenario goes from "the city is being secured" to "holy shit, we've lost control, the world is ending." Our squad gets blocked at every turn and are soon just trying to survive. I wanted to do a really tense, character-driven ensemble story as communications break down, supply lines are lost, escape routes are cut off, morale falls apart, leadership unravels, mutinies heat up, etc. (Yes, this approach owes a spiritual debt to a number of great films, including Walter Hill's Southern Comfort.)"

"Along the way, I thought we could briefly dovetail this story with a few established characters from the show. Not to overdo that, mind you, because it could get silly and too coincidental if

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you load too much into that idea. But I thought it would be great to veer off on a quick narrative detour that brushes our soldiers briefly up against some people we know. Picture our squad arriving at a manned barricade where some civilians are being held back from leaving the city on shoot-to-kill orders to stop the spread of contagion, it's a panicked high-intensity scene, and in this crowd of desperate people we find Andrea and Amy. The barricade gunners panic, the civilians start to get mowed down by machine gun fire, and in this melee the girls get pulled to safety by some old guy they don't even know. It's Dale. He's nobody to them, just some guy who saw the opportunity to do the right thing and reacted in the moment. This would have been perhaps a minute or two of the episode, just a cool detour like the various outposts the soldiers encounter in Saving Private Ryan, but we would have witnessed the moment that Dale meets Andrea and Amy, seen where that relationship began. I also felt it would be a great way to get Emma Bell back into the series for a moment, because she was so wonderful and we were all so sorry that her character died and she had to leave the show. (Of course if this "brush with established characters" idea didn't work in the script stage, I'd have tossed it out. You try a lot of ideas like that as you go, see how they play. But I thought this one stood a pretty good chance of being engineered to work well.)"

"So the story follows these soldiers through hell as the city falls apart and the squad implodes, with Sam's soldier being the main character and the moral center of the group. He becomes the last survivor of the squad, and he finally gets to the map coordinates they've been trying to get to from the start: it's the barricade at the Atlanta courthouse intersection from the pilot where Rick later finds the tank. The soldier is still alive when he gets there, but he's been bitten. He's accomplished his "simple" mission, but he's gone through seven kinds of hell to do it (including being forced to frag his squad leader), and now he's dying. And he crawls off into the tank just to get off the street and under cover. As his fever builds and the poor guy starts to hallucinate, he pulls his last grenade and considers ending his life. He sets the grenade down on that shelf for a moment to reflect on all the shit and misery that brought him to this sad end-point of his life, and to dredge up the courage to pull the pin...but before he can act, the fever burns him out and he dies." □□

There's a good more to read, including "the kicker" and reveal of just who the lead soldier is. This was just one episode and it seems the story would've, in fact, picked back up into the arc we know from the first half of season two. We also don't know if it would've turned out better than the seriously good premiere that kicked off in October. However, does this mean it would've shortened the search for Sophia? Because then it's kind of sad it never came to fruition.