

MULTI-MEDIA REVIEWS

Glossary:

Nintendo DS: latest handheld Nintendo game system. It has a secondary touch screen, adding a greater interactive gaming experience.

Survival Horror: Video games where your only mission is to survive.

Slowdown: Occurs during game play, when too many things occur on screen at one time, resulting in the graphics slowing down or jumping.

FMV: 'Full Motion Video' – a video sequence you watch rather than play, often used to advance the plot.

NPC: 'Non-Playable Character' – any characters that are controlled by the computer rather than the player.

Survival Horror: The Good, the Bad and the Zombie

Eoin Murphy

What differentiates video games from movies is that they do away with the barrier placed between the participant and the action depicted onscreen. In other words, a video game puts the player squarely in the midst of the story. Your choices, rather than those of the author or director decide what happens next, whether you live to fight on to another level or end up as a mindless zombie scrabbling for brain matter.

This article is intended to welcome the non-initiated to the world of horror games and give you a taste of what's been missing in your life. The taste of raw human flesh...

Horror games have been around for almost as long as games consoles. The original of these games was Sweet Home, produced for the Famicom, the Japanese name for the Nintendo Entertainment System. The game tells the story of five people going to the mansion of dead artist Manyimas to take photos of her frescos. Unsurprisingly, the front door locks behind them and the five characters are soon being hunted down by Manyimas's ghost and a horde of monsters. Sweet Home was, unusually for a horror game, a Role Playing Game (RPG) with five characters controlled by the player, each with individual abilities. Resident Evil Producer/Director Shinji Mitami has acknowledged Sweet Home as one of the main influences on the game, with the mansion setting and puzzles. Soon after Sweet Home came Alone in the Dark, the original survival horror game published by Infogrames in 1992. The story followed intrepid adventurer Edward Carnby investigating the mysterious death of a millionaire and the dark secrets within his mansion. The game was heavily influenced by Lovecraftian horror, with the main characters

name a reference to John Carnby, a character in the Lovecraftian mythos story “Return of the Sorcerer” by Clarke Ashton Smith.

Alone in the Dark was recently made into a film by Uwe Boll the (sort of) champion of transferring video games to films. Starring Christian Slater as Carnby and Tara Reid as an archaeologist (you can tell because she’s wearing glasses) it’s surprisingly boring considering the plot consists mostly of shooting monsters and lingering shots of Tara Reid’s rear end.

After this early hit, the genre bumbled along, a minor distraction from the more popular platformers, beat ‘em ups and shoot ‘em ups that dominated the industry for the eighties and early nineties.

During this period the closest to a successful horror game was Doom, produced by Id Software studios. Doom followed the story of a Marine based on a Martian research facility that through experiments with teleportation has accidentally opened a doorway to Hell, with the armies of Satan spilling across the Martian landscape. The game itself had several novelties, being a first person shooter and having a large selection of enemies, where at this stage in the industry it was standard practise to face the same enemy model over and over again. Doom filled its gaming landscape with Zombies, Imps, Demons and HellKnights but to name a few. The sheer variety of weapons on hand was also a big selling point of the game, with the player able to utilise everything from a chainsaw to the BFG 9000 (That’s ‘Big F***ing Gun’ to those in the know). The horror elements of Doom centre around the players expectations of what was around the next corner, a part of the game that was helped along by the game soundtrack, which occasionally filled with the sounds of souls in agony and a demonic voice telling you it was going to rip your head off. Doom relied heavily upon ‘Jumpers’, whereby an enemy would appear from behind a moveable section of wall, causing the player to jump a mile in the air and let out a small scream. At least it did with me...

Following Doom, there were a few clone games, such as Quake (Alien Stroggs attempt to conquer the Earth) and Wolfenstein 3D (Nazi’s performing nightmarish experiments on humans whilst attempting to conquer the Earth).

The majority of these games were only available on PC, which only those who had jobs or generous parents were able to access. Whilst there were Consoles available at the time (the Sega Megadrive and the Nintendo Games System being the most popular) they were considered the domain of children, with games generally sticking to the formula of bright graphics and simplistic plots (collect coins, jump on enemies heads, rescue the princess).

This all changed when Sony produced the Playstation, a 32 bit console that redefined the market. Suddenly video games became more and more adult oriented (helped along by the fact that the original gamers, those of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 were now in their late teens and early twenties and still playing). With this reorientation of the videogame market, games began to take on a more adult nature, with the Princess replaced by a deadly virus and walking mushrooms becoming terrorists hell bent on destroying the world.

And this is where the Horror game market really came to life. In Japan, Games developer Capcom, the creators of classics like Streetfighter, produced BioHazard (released in the West as Resident Evil) the story of an evil corporation and a deadly virus that not only kills you, but brings you back from the dead. And that's only if you're lucky...

With the release of Resident Evil a rush of Horror games hit the market. A revamped version of Alone in the Dark appeared. Silent Hill was released, a game where players took over the role of a father searching for his daughter who's gone missing in the strangely deserted town of Silent Hill. Silent Hill is filled with nightmarish deviations of the human form, with the familiar humanoid shape twisted and contoured. The true star of the game is the town itself which warps beyond recognition at the sounding of a siren, the roads turning from tarmac to rust encrusted steel, covered with the remains of the town's butchered population.

Since this initial onslaught Horror games have been one of the most popular genres within the video game market, spawning countless spin off films, books and graphic novels.

Horror games have played an important role in the resurgence of Horror on the big screen, as can be seen by the explosion in the last few years of films based on games. To date films have been made of Silent Hill, Alone in the Dark, Resident Evil, Bloodrayne, Doom, House of the Dead and countless others, with the horror aspect of the games generally replaced by the horror of poor script writing, bad set pieces and worse acting than an Ed Wood Anniversary Special.

Of all of the games mentioned above, Resident Evil has had the most influence, with the game single handedly breathing life (or unlife) back into the zombie genre. Heavily influenced by George A Romero's Dead trilogy, Resident Evil brought movie-style production values to video games and exposed a new generation to the terror of zombies. Since Resident Evil's release in the 1990's there have a number of high profile zombie films, such as Land of the Dead (the latest zombie film by George A Romero), 28 Days Later (where Zombies are replaced by 'the infected') and the tongue in cheek Shaun of the Dead by Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg.

Despite the age of the series it is still going strong with Resident Evil 4 revitalising the series by doing away with zombies all together and instead replacing them with weapon wielding eastern European villagers with a dark secret. In addition Capcom have recently released Resident Evil: Deadly Silence, a relaunch of the original game on the Nintendo Dual Screen, which is reviewed in this section.

Eoin Murphy

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence
Game Publisher: Capcom
Number of Players: One
Format: Nintendo DS

The forests surrounding Raccoon city were a haven for hikers, holiday makers and kids running through their summer holidays. The first disappearances were put down to accidents and bear attacks, the bodies that were found showing signs of having been fed upon by carrion eaters. As the months went on the attacks grew worse, with reports of groups of cannibals descending upon people roaming the forest and indulging in savage attacks.

Raccoon City called in the S.T.A.R.S (Special Tactics and Rescue Service) to investigate. Bravo team were selected for the mission and sent in by helicopter. Within minutes of landing contact was lost, nothing returning from desperate attempts to contact them but radio static.

With the Secondary team missing in action, there was only one option left. Send in Alpha team. Led by Captain Wesker, who wears sunglasses even at night, the team arrives to find an abandoned STARS helicopter and a severed hand holding a standard issue pistol. This discovery is soon followed up by an attack by ravening mutant dogs and a mad dash to a supposedly abandoned mansion in the middle of a zombie infested forest. As ideas go, it isn't a great one.

And this is where the game begins, with players taking control of either Chris Redfield (strong jawed hero, quick with his pistol) or Jill Valentine (who despite being on official S.T.A.R.S. business still manages to keep a hold of her lock picks) as they try to solve the mystery of the zombie outbreak and survive to tell the tale.

The version of Resident Evil recently re-launched on the Nintendo DS is a direct port of the original, right down to the terrible voice acting and cringe worthy live action opening sequence. This dedication to the original game is part of the beauty of Resident Evil: Deadly Silence. Rather than go for a brand new story, Capcom has produced an exact copy of the original, bringing back fond memories of sitting in a darkened bedroom, joypad clutched in sweaty palms and eyes searching desperately for that ammo clip that may just save your life.

Deadly Silence has two game play modes; Classic and Rebirth.

The Classic mode provides gamers with a direct copy of the original game following the same linear pathway and puzzles. Rebirth mode is a revamped version of the game, making use of the unique features of the DS to add an extra level of interaction to the game experience. Every so often the game will slide into a first person perspective as the player is attacked and with a quick flick of a finger you can lash out at zombies, rabid crows and mutant dogs with your knife. Rebirth mode also offers a few additional puzzles, which whilst not adding much to the plot itself, do provide the odd extra health power up or valuable clip of ammunition.

The graphics on both modes of the game are slightly sharper on the DS than the Playstation, although not to the extent that you'll be shocked. A few welcome additions have been made to make the game play smoother, such as the ability to skip the loading sequences that occurred every time you opened a door in the original game, with the game jumping to first person and leaving the gamer clutching their joypad in frustration, especially during chase scenes. Thanks to Capcom's re-jigging of the DS version you can simply press the shoulder button and get back to the killing.

The most obvious influence on Resident Evil is that of George A Romero's iconic Living Dead trilogy. An abandoned home filled to the brim with zombies has been a mainstay of the zombie movie ever since Night of the Living Dead. However, on closer examination, other ideas filched from genre greats also become apparent. The mansion that forms the main setting of the game has been designed by a madman, who has filled the mansion with a variety of traps and puzzles, from roofs that descend unrepentantly to massive stone balls rolling down a corridor. Enemies encountered later in the game include the Hunters, monstrous reptiles that are vaguely reminiscent of the servants of Dagon from Lovecraftian horror and giant human eating plants, as in Little Shop of Horrors.

A running theme in the Resident Evil series, as in almost all zombie movies, is the fear of becoming infected; in this case the fear is of becoming exposed to the T-Virus. Throughout the game this dread is highlighted, with the player coming across the diaries of those who were present during the outbreak and who describe their slow, inexorable change into one of the living dead.

This fear of infection is a mainstay of human nature, with the fear of deformity or infection being a part of the species consciousness since we first climbed down from the trees. Like most mammals, the visceral human response to seeing someone who is obviously ill is to draw away from them, in the hope of not becoming infected as well. The idea of the modern zombie is of a creature that is a walking personification of illness. They're covered in wounds and leaking sores that don't heal, and they stink of rot. On top of this is the horror of the loss of identity, where those infected slowly lose their minds to become a mindless creature, operating on the lowest instinctual level, that of eating.

Resident Evil also confronts the fear of uncontrolled corporations, with Umbrella Corp using the outbreak as an excuse to test the effectiveness of the virus as a weapon. This is replicated in 28 Days Later, in which an Animal Rights group breaks into a research lab and accidentally unleashes the Rage virus onto an unsuspecting population.

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence is a good relaunch of a classic game, with enough extras to keep the player interested. It is a tad disappointing that Capcom did not create a new game specifically for the DS. It does however indicate that there is life in the Resident Evil series yet.

Game Rating:

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 7/10

Story: 8/10

Replay Value: 7/10

Overall Score: 7

Eoin Murphy

Dead Rising

Publisher: Capcom

Number of Players: One

Format: X-Box 360

Some people will do anything to get a Pulitzer. Travel to a war torn nation, interview serial killers who dress like clowns and take photos of Labradors in suits.

But charging into a zombie infested shopping mall? You have to wonder if it's really worth it...

Ace photojournalist Frank West has done just that, cadging a helicopter ride and getting dropped off on the roof of the Parkview Mall. He's there to investigate the military's mysterious quarantine of the town and earn a Pulitzer Prize for photojournalism.

After he gets into the mall, things naturally take a turn for the worst as he is confronted by hordes of zombies munching down on the occasional helpless shopper. Frank finds himself trapped inside for 72 hours, fending off zombie hordes and trying to rescue trapped survivors. Along the way he's also called upon to deal with, amongst other things, insane preachers attempting human sacrifices, escaped convicts with machine guns and a mysterious cult.

Again, for anyone who has ever heard of George A Romero, the starting point of Dead Rising seems surprising familiar and indeed the game consciously styles itself as the unofficial adaptation of his 1979 classic Dawn of the Dead, with the suburban location of American capitalism again overtaken by the ultimate consumers.

In many ways Dead Rising delivers exactly what a zombie fan wants. With up to 800 zombies on screen at a time it's a technically amazing game, helped along by the 3rd generation technology of the Xbox 360. The zombies shuffle and moan in flesh eating anticipation, reacting to the player whenever you get near them, with enough variation in the character models to ensure you don't get attacked by the same zombie over and over again.

Dead Rising takes a more tongue in cheek approach to the survival horror genre than other similar games such as The Suffering and Resident Evil. The ability to pick up almost any item in the Mall and hit a zombie with it is amazingly fun, especially the remarkably effective bowling ball with which you can quite happily spend hours cracking zombies in the head.

The game itself is somewhat limited in its missions, with only three main types – a plot quest, whereby you can move along the game's overarching plot, rescue missions in which you can earn experience points, and a strand in which you must stop psychopaths taking advantage of the chaos to indulge in a spot of mass murder. In addition to these elements is Frank's quest for a Pulitzer winning photograph, again acting as a booster for experience points with which to unlock new abilities and skills.

With no slowdown, high quality FMV sequences and more zombies than you can shake a severed head at, you would think Dead Rising had everything, and yet this reviewer found it strangely lacking. The story of Dead Rising is a tad passé, with an intrepid reporter caught up in a zombie apocalypse, an attractive female Federal agent also trapped in the chaos and a horde of zombies trying to eat your brain. Dead Rising brings nothing remotely new to the genre, preferring instead to hit every cliché that has appeared in any zombie film over the last 30 years.

Certain aspects of the game also add to the negative image portrayed of the horror genre, with players able to add to their experience points by taking 'Erotica' photos of non-playable characters, i.e. taking photographs of female characters in a compromising position. This harkens back to the days of appealing to the lowest common denominator of giving your female characters the largest chest possible and allowing the fourteen year old male player to zoom in on her animated bosom.

Most importantly however, as a fan of horror films and games, I've come to expect one important aspect of horror games to always hold true and that's they should occasionally be somewhat frightening. Dead Rising just isn't scary! Rather, it goes for an Evil Dead approach, relying upon humorous death scenes for zombies (including ramming a tap into their heads and turning it on) and over the top attacks to compensate for its lack of original plot and repetitive attacks. Whilst the game plot does expand in later sections, it does little to keep you interested in the long run, adding little replay value to the game.

The thought of being trapped inside a well stocked shopping centre during a zombie apocalypse is many a horror fan's dream come true, but Dead Rising fails to introduce the level of terror that is present in other survival horror games. Rather, Dead Rising seems to have picked out the high profile aspects of the genre but chooses to ignore what makes zombies such a figure of fear. The loss of identity and fear of contamination which we associate with the zombie is here replaced by brain parasites and bowling balls.

Resident Evil: Outbreak approaches the same genre more effectively, with a choice of characters, multiple endings and the very real threat of actually becoming a zombie yourself and turning on your team mates.

Dead Rising is still a fun game, and you could, fairly happily, spend hours racking up immense zombie kills with your favourite weapon, be it a broad sword or a shopping trolley. However, anyone expecting a game full of depth and genuine moments of terror would do better to spend their £50 on a copy of Resident: Evil Deadly Silence and a DVD collection of George Romero films, to see how this kind of thing should be done.

Game Rating:

Graphics: 9/10

Sound: 8/10

Story: 6/10

Replay Value: 6/10

Overall Score: 7

Eoin Murphy

Another Forty Whacks
The Borden Tragedy : A Memoir of the Infamous Double Murder at Fall River, Mass., 1892
by Rick Geary
ComicsLit, £6.00. ISBN: 1-561631892

Despite the fact that she was accused of killing only two people, one alleged American murderess has achieved a cultural pre-eminence denied all others. The case of Lizzie Borden has gripped the nation's interest since the crimes occurred in 1892. There were axe murders before Lizzie Borden, and there have been axe murders since: similarly, more than one child has suddenly and violently turned upon his or her parents. But the continuing resonance of the Borden murders is such that as Dorothy Dunbar, one commentator on the case has declared: "Lizzie isn't an example of nineteenth century murder; she is nineteenth century murder".

The Borden case has been the subject of dime novels, a play, an opera, a made-for-TV movie (starring Elizabeth Montgomery of Bewitched fame), many true crime investigations and several novels. There is a Lizzie Borden museum and bed and breakfast, an international Lizzie Borden society, and she has even been the subject of a college course. An entire industry keeps the memory of those terrible crimes alive for fun and profit. Borden has even briefly popped up in an episode of *The Simpsons*: surely the truest sign of cultural prominence in this age.

Now, as part of his macabre but compulsively readable "A Treasury of Victorian Murder" series, veteran comic book writer and artist Rick Geary has given us *The Borden Tragedy*, his own intricately drawn and intensively researched take on the murders. Presented to the reader as excerpts from the unpublished memoirs of "an unknown lady of Fall River, Massachusetts" who knew both a great deal about the case and about the dysfunctional Borden clan, the comic book serves as an intriguingly ambiguous primer on the events of that "grim and seething summer of 1892". Geary presents the known facts of the case in a clear, methodical manner, but unlike Alan Moore in the somewhat similar *From Hell* (a celebrated graphic-novel retelling of the Jack the Ripper case), he refrains from presenting us with any definitive solution to the mystery. The murderer is never drawn in full here, but rather depicted as a mysterious, axe-wielding shadow-figure.

The facts of the case, depicted by Geary in meticulous black-and white, almost wood-cut like drawings, briefly, are as follows. The brutal murder of Andrew Borden and his wife Abby took place in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1892. Fall River was a New England industrial town, latterly made prosperous by wealth emanating from mills staffed by badly paid immigrants. The Borden's were part of the local Yankee aristocracy, one of the areas most prominent local families. Andrew J. Borden, had, ironically enough, started his working life as an undertaker, but by the time of his death was a bank president worth over a quarter of a million dollars – about ten million in today's money. By all accounts, despite his wealth, he remained a thrifty, careful man who did not believe in expending his hard earned cash on what he deemed frivolous pursuits – a trait that may have proved fatal. Abby Borden was his second wife: his first, the mother of his two daughters, had died relatively young. His daughters were Emma, a quiet, home

loving, introverted woman who was in her forties at the time of the murders, and Lizzie, nine years younger, and a great deal more demanding.

From the outside, the Borden household seemed like “a portrait of New England home life in the 90s”: Andrew was the firm, benign patriarch whose word was law; Abby the passive, engaging stepmother, and Emma and Lizzie their loving, ladylike daughters. Bridget, their hardworking Irish maid, completed the family circle. Theirs was an apparently unremarkable picture of somewhat dour respectability and staid religiosity in the closing years of the nineteenth century, a fact highlighted by Geary, who, in introducing us to the family, tends to draw them head on, as though the Borden’s were posing for a portrait.

However, for all their apparent tranquillity, the Borden’s were really a house divided. The sisters resented their stepmother and constantly argued with their long-suffering father about money and property. Lizzie in particular felt that the family was living well below its means and dreamed of entertaining lavishly. She constantly badgered her father for money, requests that he by and large acceded to in the hopes of placating the forceful daughter, who, following a particularly vicious argument, had ceased to address Abby as ‘mother’ and thereafter coldly referred to her as ‘Mrs Borden’ (when Geary depicts this scene, he does so by providing us with a chilling close-up of Lizzie’s blank-looking eyes).

All was not well with the Bordens, but then again, many families have quarrelled without recourse to the axe. There was little reason to anticipate the terrible events of August the Fourth 1892, events that would transform the respectable, well thought of Lizzie Borden into a figure of mythic proportions whose alleged crimes still exert a gruesome fascination. On that fateful summer morning, a frantic Lizzie staggered into the kitchen and told Bridget “someone had killed father”. It was the most unlikely of crime scenes: the bloodiest of murders carried out in broad daylight: the victim bludgeoned to death whilst he slept on the living room sofa, his head so disfigured by blows that he was all but unrecognisable. That was terrible enough, but there was more to come: it was soon discovered that the unfortunate Abby had been dispatched in the same manner but that her death had occurred 90 minutes earlier. As was the case with Jack the Ripper’s last known victim, advances in technology meant that police officers were able to take an infamous photo of the crime scene: this allows Geary to render the gory aftermath of the murders in meticulous detail. As with Moore’s tale, the reader is relieved that events are depicted in Black-and-White rather than colour.

From the outset, the police suspected an inside job. Lizzie’s story simply didn’t add up. Her alibi for the morning of the murders was notably weak (although as Geary points out, in the days following the deaths, Lizzy was given large doses of Morphine to calm her nerves, which may have accounted her for her later narrative inconsistencies). What appeared to be the fatal axe was found hidden in the basement, having been recently scoured clean; Lizzie had lied and said that her famously reclusive stepmother had gone visiting that day, when she in fact lay dead in her bedroom. Perhaps most damning of all, Lizzie’s good friend Alice Russell had seen her burning a suspiciously stained blue dress in the stove the day after the murders – a dress just like the one she was said to have been wearing that day.

There was also the fact that Lizzie had tried to purchase a powerful poison at a local pharmacy earlier in the week – providing an explanation that even the chemist found wanting. And, if Lizzie’s story of

mysterious intruder were true, what kind of killer would murder a complete stranger, hide in an occupied house for 90 minutes, and then strike again? It simply didn't make any sense. After days of mounting speculation, Lizzie was arrested. The next day, the entire nation read the newspapers over their breakfast tables and asked themselves the same question – “How could a woman do such a thing?”

The Borden deaths became the first nationally prominent murder case in the United States. As Edward H. Porter, one of the first authors to examine the case, noted, “the crimes soon became the theme of universal comment, both in public and in private... they had about them that fascination of uncertainty, horrible though they were, which fixes the attention and holds it continually.” The wholly unexpected nature of the chief suspect was a key element in this popular fascination, for the accused was no “hatchet wielding maniac, but a church going, respectable Sunday school teacher, charged with parricide, the murder of one's parents”. This incongruity between the ladylike suspect and the violence of the crimes she was said to have committed would ultimately help Borden gain acquittal, as did the fact that the evidence linking her to the murders was almost entirely circumstantial. Lizzie soon attracted a host of powerful advocates, amongst them women's rights advocate Lucy Stone and her suffragettes. Lizzie's friends in the Women's Christian Temperance Union rallied to her cause as well. After all, they argued, how could a devout teetotaler commit such an act?

The trial got underway in June 1893. Support for Lizzie had steadily grown since her indictment. Sermons proclaiming her innocence began to outnumber those declaring her guilty. Though the prosecution was unable to include several key points in their argument – including Lizzie's visit to the pharmacy, and the axe found in the basement – the facts seemed damning (perhaps rather more so than Geary presents them here). But they didn't have a chance. The defence's argument is typified by their closing speech: “To find her guilty, you must believe she is a fiend. Gentlemen, does she look it?”

Though confronted with a suggestive case for her conviction, and the fact that no one else can be reasonably said to have done it, the jury nevertheless preferred to accept Borden for what she seemed to be: a pious spinster and loving daughter, who couldn't even contemplate murder, much less carry it out. The same domestic ideology that held that the proper role for a middle class woman was that of carer and homemaker, a moral guide to the men in her life, couldn't afford to acknowledge the disturbing implications raised by the fact that a well brought up young woman could so violently and unexpectedly violate the sanctity of the home and the authority of her parents.

In the aftermath of her acquittal, Lizzie was briefly the toast of the town. However, it didn't take long for most of her support to fade away. She had been acquitted largely on the grounds that she seemed a portrait of piety and domesticity – as the Boston Journal called it, “a woman of pure and noble life” but her conduct after the trial soon drew this into question. No longer a resentful heiress, Lizzie and her sister Emma were now women of considerable wealth, and Lizzie seemed determined to enjoy unfettered access to her father's money wealth. They bought a large house in a fashionable part of town; and Lizzie was able to indulge her taste for the high life, making frequent trips to Washington and Boston, and once throwing a lavish, weeklong party for her actor friends that scandalised Fall River and proved the final straw for her quiet sister. Though freed by the courts, Lizzie was convicted in the fickle arena of public opinion, and as the years progressed she became increasingly isolated.

Yet even after death, Borden's strange legacy endured. She is a genuine American legend – the Lady with the axe. As Lincoln puts it, “the Greeks had Clytemnestra, we have Lizzie”. She was even immortalised in the famous (though inaccurate) doggerel rhyme chanted by generations of American school children:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
Gave her mother forty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one

Supplemented by reproductions of contemporary press clippings and a copy of her original indictment for murder, Geary's retelling of the Borden case is a chilling, immensely readable summary of the facts of one of nineteenth-century America's most infamous crimes. He seems to refuse to come down firmly on one side or another as regards Lizzie's alleged guilt or innocence. Perhaps the most suggestive evidence of Geary's own opinion can actually be found on the back cover of the text, which highlights the remarkable parallels between her case and that of the similarly acquitted O.J. Simpson, over a hundred years later. As the blurb states, “whilst the jury returned a verdict of not guilty...No evidence, however, points to any other individual, and the defendant remains under a cloud of suspicion”. A century on, that cloud of suspicion remains as tantalisingly murky as ever.

Kelly Grant

The Walking Dead Volumes 1, 2 and 3: Days Gone Bye, Miles Behind Us and Safety Behind Bars

Writer: Robert Kirkman

Artists: Tony Moore (Volume 1), Charlie Adlard and Cliff Rathburn (Volumes 2 and 3),

Publisher: Image Comics

Zombies... Seems like you can go for years on end without hearing anything about them and suddenly they're everywhere...

The Walking Dead is described by its author, Robert Kirkman, as "The zombie movie that never ends." A fan of classic zombie movies, Kirkman takes the genre in a new direction by staying with his characters through thick and thin, not stopping when they seem to reach safety and can begin a new life, because, as with any true horror story, things can never be the same again, and neat endings don't exist. The Zombies are still out there, you still need food, and to cap it all off, that darn wife of yours is pregnant with your best friend's baby.

The Walking Dead begins in a similar vein to Danny Boyle's *Zombie*, ahem, I mean "Infected" movie *28 Days Later* (an opening itself copied from John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*) as Rick Grimes, an amiable small town cop, wakes up after being in a coma for a number of weeks following a shoot out with a deranged ex-con.

Rick wanders around a seemingly deserted hospital until he meets his first zombie, escaping death by the narrowest of margins. The story then follows Rick's desperate attempts to find his family and get them to safety, which are of course severely hampered by the zombie hordes that roam the landscape.

What differentiates *The Walking Dead* from other similarly themed stories is the way the zombies react to their new "life" situation. Many of them seem content to sit and wait for food to come to them. Only a small number of them roam the landscape, making the rural areas relatively safe to travel in, with Rick meeting up with the occasional group of survivors. Another interesting aspect of the story is the fact that the zombies are notably un-picky in their choice of food. So long as it's warm and wriggling, they'll eat it, unlike most films, where they'll happily ignore a field full of cows and spend the night trying to get into a house with only four or five skinny humans in it. One particularly gruesome moment that articulates this difference has Rick being ignored by a zombie horde in favour of his horse, which is graphically torn to pieces.

Unlike most other zombie tales, the story also does a good job of explaining just how the undead came to overrun civilisation so quickly, with the government herding survivors into the cities, attempting to save them from the undead but instead bringing the food source for miles around to just one place. For instance, we are told that the once thriving city of Atlanta has become a charnel house, with hundreds of thousands of walking dead in the city waiting quietly for their next meal.

The story heats up when Rick is reunited with his family, and the focus shifts from Rick's quest to the problems of the people who he now finds himself surrounded by. His wife is ecstatic to see him, his son

finally able to sleep, but his best friend, who took both of them under his wing whilst Rick was left behind in the hospital, is standoffish and quick to anger, his motives soon becoming suspect.

There are several stand-out moments in the first volume of *The Walking Dead*. Chief among them is the moment when Rick realises that zombies differentiate between the living and the dead by smell; a discovery which leads him to cover himself and another survivor in rotting flesh so that they can forage for weapons in the city, undetected.

The art in *The Walking Dead* is generally good, with the living depicting in strong pencil strokes and simple lines and the zombies full of detail, with flies and maggots a regular accompaniment to their torn and twisted features. The writing itself is realistic, Kirkman doing a good job of creating believable characters in an unreal situation by representing each one's reaction to the zombie apocalypse as different and interesting.

There are, of course, some clichés in the comic book, with, for example, the usual selection of characters hell bent on revenge against the zombies and the scenario of an older man shacking up with a much younger woman. Whilst this isn't truly noticeable early on in the series, in later volumes it becomes a bit much, with Rick's attempts to create a new society hampered by old prejudices and desires. The second and third volumes are often repetitive, with minor characters guaranteed to die gruesomely every 30 pages or so, a characteristic that reaches its lowest point when a Richard Laymonesque serial killer stalks the women and children of the group in an abandoned prison whilst calling "Come back here, you slut! It's time to take your medicine, you fucking whore!" Surely in a world where we've been exposed to Hannibal Lecter and Jeffery Dahmer for three decades it was possible to come up with a deranged madman who doesn't spend his time fantasising about killing all those whores and sluts out there?

Despite these problems, *The Walking Dead* is generally an interesting, readable contribution to the Zombie genre, if one that is somewhat let down in later volumes by an over reliance on clichés and cynical gore. However, for the sake of £10 (or €13) a volume, it's worth a look.

Eoin Murphy

I Was a Teenage Messiah

Chosen

Written by Mark Millar

Artwork by Peter Gross,

Dark Horse Books,

Mature Audience

For the first New Media review for *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, where better to start than with a story about the apparent second coming of Christ?

Jodie Christianson is an ordinary 12 year old boy growing up in the 1980s. He spends his time skipping school, smoking cigarettes and looking for fabled abandoned porn magazines with his school mates.

And then he gets crushed under a 40 ton truck.

Now for most 12 year olds that would be the end of the story, but for Jodie, who survives completely unscathed, it's just the beginning.

Chosen is a three part miniseries written by Mark Millar, the visionary behind the spectacular re-launch of Marvel's *The Avengers* in the form of *The Ultimates* (complete with alien fighting Captain America and wife-beating Giantman); with *Chosen* he gives the world the story of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The three-part miniseries itself is told as a flash back, with the future Jodie telling the tale of his awakening in an all-knowing manner, accompanied by the occasional glimpse of him in the present day, surrounded by aides and preparing for the biggest day of his life, his face permanently in shadow.

Throughout the story, Millar keeps the reader interested in the outcome, with Jodie slowly realising who he is in a typical 12 year old boy's fashion of taking advantage. A succession of particularly effective scenes show Jodie and his friends ineptly trying to re-enact the original miracles of Christ; he tries to turn water into wine (so they can all get drunk for free), returns sight to the blind (well, sort of – he restores 20/20 vision to a myopic boy called Markie) and feeds the five thousand (well, eight of his school friends) with three sesame seed buns.

It's not all comedic scenes of teenagers trying to take advantage of a clearly miraculous situation, however. A sense of foreboding enters the story when Father Tom O' Higgins, the local parish priest, is approached by a confused Jodie, who is desperately trying to find answers to his new found abilities. The faithless Fr. O' Higgins sends the boy away, denouncing his questions as typical teenage nonsense.

The priest is eventually confronted by his own lack of faith, as Jodie, again displaying his divine powers, reads O' Higgins mind and leaves him a shaking wreck.

The seemingly inevitable confrontation between priest and boy is mitigated by the running over of Angel, Fr. O'Higgins dog. In a replication of Christ's resurrection of Lazarus, Jodie marshals his power in the greatest display of his abilities to date.

The initial slow pace of the story is offset by the quickness with which it comes to a conclusion, deftly taking the unwary reader by surprise. The revelations contained on the final few pages leave you grinning in appreciation of Millar's nerve and will definitely encourage you to read the whole thing again.

With *Chosen*, Mark Millar yet again shows himself to be one of the top comic writers in the industry, here presenting us with a narrative told realistically and without any of the fan fare or preachiness that might be expected of a story which seems to depict the second coming of Christ (for examples of how other comic writers have handled this event, please see *Loaded Bible: Jesus vs. Vampires. No, Really. It actually exists.*)

The ending of the comic book is told in such an offhand and matter of fact way that it takes the reader a few minutes to in fact grasp the enormity of what has just been revealed – a sure indication of the cleverness and care with which the previous sections have been told.

The story itself is full of references to the decade it is set in, with *Empire Strikes Back* Posters on Jodie's bedroom walls and credulous comments on the great quality of video recorders.

One of the most effective parts of the miniseries as a whole is the truly excellent cover art, such as the cover which depicts Jodie crucified against a telegraph pole and the tongue-in-cheek depiction of Jesus on the cross with a decade appropriate "Frankie say Relax" T-shirt.

Peter Gross's art is consistently good throughout, with an exceptional use of colour, some prime examples being the washed out features of the local parish priest who has lost his faith in God and the depiction of Jodie as a grown man amongst his flock.

Well written and effectively drawn, *Chosen* is an excellent collected miniseries, one I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone wishing to take a look at the world of Jesus in the eighties. Devote fans of the similarly themed "Left Behind" series may take offence at some scenes, such as one which depicts the teenage messiah playing with himself as he watches the girl next door get ready for bed...

Eoin Murphy