



The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor

By Robert Kirkman, Jay Bonansinga

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Winner of the 2011 Diamond Gem Award for Trade Book of the Year

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Editorial Review

Review

“Zombie-apocalypse stories are perfect for miserable winter weather regardless, but for those obsessed with *The Walking Dead* (such as yours truly), this is essential reading. This is the epitome of a page-turner, and makes subway rides just breeze by. And, that end –woof.” ?REFINERY29

“An excellent companion to the *The Walking Dead* comic books. The story is enriched by the novel format, and the characterization of the series' most hated villain is something no fan will want to miss.”
?Examiner.com

“This book stands alone and is a compelling read for fans of the series or just fans of zombies. Watch out though, because once you get a taste of the particular Kirkman brand of zombie mayhem, catching up on past issues is just around the corner.” ?The Ossuary

“The story makes a great novel. You'll get sucked in and can easily visualize everything that is happening. It's simply a great read.” ?Comicvine.com

“It takes great advantage of the literary medium in a way that most tie-in books would not.”
?TVOverMind.com

“Not for the faint of heart, this book runs on pressure-cooker suspense, graphically described bloodshed, and dark acts of brutality...This riveting character study adds a new dimension to the oeuvre by fleshing out established characters and plot lines.” ?School Library Journal

About the Author

Robert Kirkman is best known for his work on *The Walking Dead* and *Invincible* for Image Comics and SKYBOUND. He is one of the five partners of Image Comics and is an executive producer and writer on AMC's critically acclaimed television series *The Walking Dead*.

Jay Bonansinga is a critically acclaimed horror novelist whose works include *Perfect Victim*, *Shattered*, *Twisted*, and *Frozen*. His debut novel, *The Black Mariah*, was a finalist for a Bram Stoker Award.

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ONE

It occurs to Brian Blake as he huddles in the musty darkness, the terror constricting his chest, the pain throbbing in his knees: If only he possessed a *second* pair of hands, he could cover his *own* ears, and maybe block out the noise of human heads being demolished. Sadly, the only hands Brian currently owns are busy right now, covering the tiny ears of a little girl in the closet next to him.

The seven-year-old keeps shuddering in his arms, jerking at the intermittent *THWACK-GAHHHH-THUMP* outside the closet. Then comes the silence, broken only by the sticky sound of boot steps on bloody tile, and

a flurry of angry whispers out in the vestibule.

Brian starts coughing again. He can't help it. For days he has been fighting this goddamn cold, a stubborn blight on his joints and sinuses that he cannot shake. It happens to him every fall, when the Georgia days start getting dank and gloomy. The dampness gets into his bones, saps his energy, and steals his breath. And now he feels the pounding stab of a fever with each cough.

Doubling over in another hacking, wheezing fit, he keeps his hands pressed down on little Penny's ears as he coughs. He knows the sound of his rasping is attracting all kinds of attention outside the closet door, out in the convolutions of the house, but there's nothing he can do about it. He sees tracings of light with each cough—like tiny filigrees of fireworks across his blind pupils.

The closet—barely four feet wide, and maybe three feet deep—is as dark as an inkwell, and it reeks of mothballs, mouse droppings, and old cedar. Plastic coat bags hang down in the darkness, brushing the sides of Brian's face. Brian's younger brother Philip told him it was okay to cough in the closet. In fact, Brian was free to cough his fucking head off—it would draw out the monsters—but Brian better not give his goddamn cold to Philip's little girl. If he did, Philip would crack *Brian's* head open.

The coughing fit passes.

Moments later, another pair of lumbering footsteps disturbs the silence outside the closet—another dead thing entering the kill zone. Brian squeezes his hands tighter against Penny's ears, and the child flinches at another rendition of Skull Splitting in D minor.

If asked to describe the racket outside the closet, Brian Blake would probably revert to his days as a failed music store entrepreneur and tell you that the head-cracking sounds are like a percussive symphony they might play in hell—like some trippy outtake from Edgard Varèse or a druggy drum solo from John Bonham—with repeating verses and choruses: the heavy breathing of humans ... the shambling footsteps of another moving corpse ... the whistle of an axe ... the *thunk* of steel sinking into flesh ...

... and finally, the big finale, the splat of moist, dead weight on the slimy parquet.

Another break in the action sends fever chills down Brian's spine. The silence closes in again. Eyes now adjusted to the darkness, Brian sees the first shimmer of thick arterial blood seeping under the bottom of the door. It looks like motor oil. He gently yanks his niece away from the spreading puddle, pulling her back against the boots and umbrellas along the back wall.

The hem of Penny Blake's little denim dress touches the blood. She quickly pulls the fabric away, and frantically rubs at the stain, as if the very absorption of the blood will infect her somehow.

Another convulsive coughing fit doubles Brian over. He fights it. He swallows the broken glass of a sore throat and pulls the little girl into a full-on embrace. He doesn't know what to do or say. He wants to help his niece. He wants to whisper something reassuring to her but cannot think of a single reassuring thing to whisper.

The girl's father would know what to say. Philip would know. He always knows what to say. Philip Blake is the guy who says the things that everybody else *wishes* they had said. He says what needs to be said, and he does what needs to be done. Like right now. He's out there with Bobby and Nick, doing what needs to be done ... while Brian hunkers here in the dark like a scared rabbit, wishing he knew what to say to his niece. Considering the fact that Brian Blake is the oldest of the two siblings, it's odd how Brian has always been the runt. Barely five feet seven in his boot heels, Brian Blake is a raw-boned scarecrow of a man scarcely able to fill out his black peg-leg jeans and torn Weezer T-shirt. A mousey goatee, macramé bracelets, and a thatch of dark Ichabod Crane hair complete the picture of a thirty-five-year-old Bohemian waif stuck in Peter Pan limbo, now kneeling in the mothball-scented gloom.

Brian sucks in a hoarse breath and looks down at the doe-eyed Penny, her mute, horrified face ghostly in the darkness of the closet. The child has always been a quiet little girl, with an almost porcelain complexion, like that of a china doll, which has given her face a rather ethereal cast. But since her mother's death she has turned even further inward, becoming more wan and stoic, to the point of appearing almost translucent, with tendrils of raven-black hair obscuring her huge eyes.

For the last three days, she has hardly said a word. Of course, they have been three *extraordinary* days—and

trauma works differently on children than it does on adults—but Brian is worried that Penny is perhaps slipping into some kind of shock.

“It’s gonna be okay, kiddo,” Brian whispers to her with a lame little cough as punctuation.

She says something without looking up at him. She mumbles it, staring down at the floor, a tear pearling on her dirty cheek.

“What was that, Pen?” Brian cradles her against him and wipes her tear.

She says something again, and again, and again, but not exactly to Brian. She says it more like a mantra, or a prayer, or an incantation: “*It’s never-ever going to be okay, never-ever-ever-ever-ever.*”

“Sshhhhh.” He holds her head, pressing it gently against the folds of his T-shirt. He feels the damp heat of her face against his ribs. He covers her ears again as he hears the *THWACK* of another axe blade outside the closet, smashing through the membrane of a scalp, into the hard shell of a skull, through the layers of dura, and into the pulpy gray gelatin of an occipital lobe.

It makes a smacking noise like a baseball bat hitting a wet softball—the ejaculate of blood like a mop head slapping the floor—followed by a ghostly, wet thud. Oddly, that’s the worst part for Brian: that hollow, moist thump of a body landing on expensive ceramic tile. The tile is custom made for the house, with elaborate inlay and Aztec designs. It’s a lovely house ... or at least, it once was.

Again the noises cease.

Again the horrible dripping silence follows. Brian stifles a cough, holding it in like a firecracker that’s about to pop, so he can better hear the minute changes in breathing outside the closet, the greasy footsteps shuffling through gore. But the place is dead silent now.

Brian feels the child seize up next to him—little Penny girding herself for another salvo of axe blows—but the silence stretches.

Inches away, the sound of a bolt clicking, and the closet doorknob turning, rashes Brian’s body with gooseflesh. The door swings open.

“Okay, we’re good.” The baritone voice, whiskey-cured and smoky, comes from a man peering down into the recesses of the closet. Eyes blinking at the darkness, face shimmering with sweat, flush with the exertion of zombie disposal, Philip Blake holds a glue-slick axe in his workman’s hand.

“You sure?” Brian utters.

Ignoring his brother, Philip gazes down at his daughter. “Everything’s okay, punkin, Daddy’s okay.”

“Are you *sure*?” Brian says with a cough.

Philip looks at his brother. “You mind covering your mouth, sport?”

Brian wheezes, “You sure it’s clear?”

“Punkin?” Philip Blake addresses his daughter tenderly, his faint Southern drawl belying the bright, feral embers of violence just now fading in his eyes. “I’m gonna need y’all to stay right there for a minute.

Awright? You stay right there until Daddy says it’s okay to come out. You understand?”

With a slight nod, the pale little girl gives him a feeble gesture of understanding.

“C’mon, sport,” Philip urges his older brother out of the shadows. “Gonna need your help with the cleanup.”

Brian struggles to his feet, pushing his way through the hanging overcoats.

He emerges from the closet and blinks at the harsh light of the vestibule. He stares and coughs and stares some more. For a brief moment, it looks as though the lavish entryway of the two-story Colonial, brightly lit by fancy copper chandeliers, is in the throes of being redecorated by a work crew afflicted by palsy. Great swaths of eggplant-purple spatters stain the teal green plaster walls. Rorschach patterns of black and crimson adorn the baseboards and moldings. Then the shapes on the floor register.

Six bodies lie akimbo in bloody heaps. Ages and genders are obscured by the wet carnage, the mottled, livid skin tones, and the misshapen skulls. The largest lies in a spreading pool of bile at the foot of the great circular staircase. Another one, perhaps the lady of the house, perhaps once a convivial hostess offering peach cobbler and Southern hospitality, is now splayed across the lovely white parquet floor in a contorted mess, a stringer of wormy gray matter flagging from her breached cranium.

Brian Blake feels his gorge rising, his throat involuntarily dilating.

“Okay, gentlemen, we got our work cut out for us,” Philip is saying, addressing his tw...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ira Knudsen:

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