

= Beside the Dying Fire =

" Beside the Dying Fire " is the thirteenth episode and second season finale of the post apocalyptic horror television series The Walking Dead ; it aired on AMC in the United States and Canada on March 18 , 2012 . The episode was written by creator Robert Kirkman and showrunner Glen Mazzara and directed by series regular Ernest Dickerson . In the episode , a huge horde of walkers invades the Greene farm , chasing Rick Grimes ( Andrew Lincoln ) and Hershel 's groups off the premises . Meanwhile , Andrea ( Laurie Holden ) is separated from the group , leaving her to fight off the same walkers that attacked Hershel 's farm .

Such themes as romance , death , and survival are prevalent throughout " Beside the Dying Fire " . It is seen as a turning point for the development of several characters on the show , and flashbacks to various previous revelations in the series . " Beside the Dying Fire " features the debut of protagonist Michonne , a character that has been prominently featured in the comics of the same name , and it introduces the Prison . Production for the episode transpired over approximately eight days .

" Beside the Dying Fire " attracted 9 million viewers and a 4 @. @ 7 rating in the 18 ? 49 demographic , according to Nielsen ratings . The episode amassed record ratings , thus becoming the highest @- @ rated cable program demographically of all time , an accolade that was previously held by " Nebraska . " " Beside the Dying Fire " became the most @- @ viewed cable telecast of the day , as well as the highest @- @ rated cable program of the week .

= = Plot = =

Following the trail of a helicopter overhead , a massive herd of walkers begins to form and migrates from the city to the countryside . They come to rest in the woods outside Hershel 's farm . The herd follows the sound of a gunshot and discover the survivors ' location .

Rick Grimes ( Andrew Lincoln ) and his son Carl ( Chandler Riggs ) return to the Greene farm , where Carl asks his father about the death of Shane Walsh ( Jon Bernthal ) , but before Rick is able to answer , he spots the large horde of walkers and the two flee to the barn . Daryl Dixon ( Norman Reedus ) and Glenn ( Steven Yeun ) report the death and reanimation of Randall ( Michael Zegen ) but also that he turned without being bit . Lori Grimes ( Sarah Wayne Callies ) begs Daryl to go out and search for Rick and Shane ? before he can however , the group spots the invading herd and are forced to mobilize .

The group rations their weapons and their vehicles with the objective to kill as many of the herd as they can , Hershel ( Scott Wilson ) intends to defend his land at the risk of his own life . Rick and Carl corral the walkers in the barn and set it ablaze . After spotting the fire , Jimmy ( James Allen McCune ) drives the RV near the barn and allows Rick and Carl to safely escape the burning barn , but he is killed when the walkers overrun the RV . Andrea ( Laurie Holden ) and Theodore " T @- @ Dog " Douglas ( IronE Singleton ) realize that their plan is not working , and decide to flee instead of fight . Lori and the other women flee the house , without Hershel who can 't be budged to leave his property . Along the way , Patricia ( Jane McNeill ) is killed and Carol Peletier ( Melissa McBride ) is cornered by the walkers . Lori and Beth Greene ( Emily Kinney ) are picked up by T @- @ Dog while Andrea leaves to help Carol escape her predicament . Rick escapes with Carl and convinces Hershel to abandon his land . Glenn and Maggie Greene ( Lauren Cohan ) flee the scene and Carol is ultimately rescued by Daryl . In the chaos , Andrea is the only survivor left behind , but she manages to escape the farm on foot . Fleeing to the woods , Andrea defends herself against the walkers until she runs out of ammunition . Exhausted and defenseless , she is miraculously saved by a mysterious hooded figure who has two armless walker pets and wields a katana .

The survivors eventually regroup and report their casualties ( Shane , Patricia , Jimmy witnessed as dead , and Andrea who is deemed to be a lost cause ) . They press on , avoiding the main roads , until one of the vehicles runs out of gas . Rick assures the group that they can start anew elsewhere . When Daryl questions why Randall turned even though he wasn 't bitten , Rick reveals what Dr. Edwin Jenner ( Noah Emmerich ) whispered in his ear : they are all infected carriers of the walker

pathogen . Rick 's held secret is met with apprehension from the group . Rick also confesses to Lori about the true events surrounding Shane 's death including Carl shooting the reanimated Shane . His lack of remorse in claiming he wanted Shane dead and that Carl shot his reanimated body leaves Lori visibly disturbed . Over time , the group 's faith in Rick dwindles with the exception of Daryl and Hershel who trust Rick 's judgment . A noise echoing in the distance places the group on high alert , but Rick does not allow anyone to investigate . Carol urges Rick to take action , causing Rick to snap , saying that he never asked that he be put in charge , and blurting out that he had killed Shane for their sake causing Carl to be upset . He dares anyone to leave the safety of the camp . When nobody leaves he issues a final warning : " If you 're staying , this isn 't a democracy anymore , " establishing his position as leader of the group . Afterwards it is shown that the group is unknowingly camped near a prison center .

= = Production = =

" Beside the Dying Fire " was directed by Ernest Dickerson and written by creator Robert Kirkman and showrunner Glen Mazzara . Mazzara teased the episode in a conference call with various journalists : " We 're proud of this finale , we 've been building to it all season , and we can 't wait for you to see it . [ ... ] There 's more bloodshed coming . They thought they were safe on this farm , they were wrong . [ ... ] We 're on a killing spree here . [ ... ] There are answers about the nature of the virus in the finale . [ ... ] I will guarantee people will watch this finale and want to know what comes next . People will have a lot of questions , but in a good way . "

The episode filmed for eight days . In one sequence , Carl Grimes sparks up a cigarette lighter and drops it onto a horde of walkers after Rick creates a diversion to distract the walkers . Greg Nicotero , the special effect director for The Walking Dead , used black panels to capture the elements of the fire ; this enabled them to edit the flames onto the walkers . To reduce the chances of getting burned , the stuntmen put on several layers of flame retardant suits . The first layer consisted of a dry Nomex undergarment ; this was followed by several layers of Nomex clothing that were gelled . Since the sequence was conducted on multiple occasions , the stuntmen were coated with gel containing cationic polymers . The last layer was a raincoat , which would separate the gel from the stuntmen 's clothing and allowed them to be engulfed in flames for several seconds without injury .

" Beside the Dying Fire " features the deaths of Patricia and Jimmy , who were both consumed by walkers . Alongside the deaths of the aforementioned characters , the episode 's script initially called for the deaths of Hershel , as well as Shane Walsh and Randall , both of whom had died in the previous installment . Since Kirkman felt that there was a lot of potential development in Hershel , his death was scrapped from the script . Although plans to write off the character commenced earlier in the season , Mazzara opined that his hypothetical death would have carried no emotional resonance . " The plan was always to whack Hershel , and I actually told Scott Wilson , ' Thanks for everything you 've done , but in the next script we 're going to kill off your character . ' We started writing that and it felt like Hershel 's death was playing as a plot device and we were getting no emotional resonance . It was just playing as a gratuitous death . This was one of those examples where we won 't play a shocking death for the sense of death ; we have to get something out of it . We got nothing out of it . If you look at the shot of Hershel looking back and seeing that barn burning and his farm completely lost to the zombies , that shot was well worth it because we see the farm was really a character and you can only see that through Hershel 's eyes . So it was the right call to keep him alive . "

The night on which " Beside the Dying Fire " was so cold , the editors had to digitally remove vapor expelled by the walkers .

This episode introduces the character Michonne , a protagonist in the comic series of the same name who is portrayed by Danai Gurira . Gurira was cast as part of the series a week before the broadcasting of " Beside the Dying Fire , " although rumors of introducing Michonne circulated months prior to the season finale . Kirkman admitted that he was a fan of her work in the HBO drama series Treme . Rutina Wesley , who played Tara Thornton in True Blood , was rumored to be considered for the role of Michonne , although Kirkman stated that she was never involved in the

auditioning process . " It was a lot of actresses . The True Blood actress , I don 't know that she was even available ; I think she 's still on True Blood . I don 't know where that rumor came from , but to my knowledge , she was never involved . "

In the conclusion of " Beside the Dying Fire , " a large prison is seen in the background hovering over the survivors ' temporary settlement . Bear McCreary composed a score for the sequence , which he thought would lay the groundworks for a future theme for the location . " There ? s something really powerful there that could become , sort of like a heartbeat @-@ like theme for this location , which is kind of similar to what I had in mind when I read the comics years ago when I first got there , " he asserted . " I had been thinking about it , there ? s so many great prison shows and movies and there are certain sounds you kind of associate with it , and I don ? t want to do that . But , we ? ll see . I mean it really depends on where they take the show . It ? s a little early to think about it , but I ? m definitely thinking about it anyway . "

= = Themes = =

" Beside the Dying Fire " is seen as a transitional stage for several characters in the series . The transformation of Rick Grimes to a dark character continues in the episode . He has changed from the person who wanted to save Merle ( in Season 1 ) and find Sophia ( first half of season 2 ) , to the person who is willing to abandon any hope of finding Andrea . Furthermore , Rick yells at his group for being unappreciative of his sacrifices as a leader . This backlash and hostility has been interpreted as a foreshadowing event for future development for The Walking Dead . " Rick is clearly in a much darker place now than he was at the start of the season , " concluded Entertainment Weekly writer Darren Franich . In a similar fashion , Lori Grimes is furious at Rick after he admits that he killed Shane Walsh . According to Kirkman , " it looks pretty clear that he has lost [ Lori and Carl ] by doing this " at the end of " Beside the Dying Fire . " In response to the interactions between Rick and Lori , he opined : " I think he feels that he has sacrificed for this group , and that sacrifice hasn ? t really been appreciated . His confession to Lori did not get the reaction that he had hoped . He thought she would be supportive . Instead , she reacts in a particular way that he feels is hatred and disgust . I think that ? s really affecting him . Let 's not forget : This is taking place hours after he murdered his best friend . So he is still reeling . He ? s trying to keep that a secret . He opens his heart to his wife , and it doesn ? t go well . So I think that he ? s just done with these people . I think he doesn ? t want to be the leader . As he says : If they don ? t like it , they ? re free to leave . "

The episode flashbacks to the previous developments of several storylines throughout the season , including the love triangle between Rick , Shane , and Lori . Mazzara iterated that upon hearing of her husband 's revelations , Lori was conflicted with several issues . " All of that is going through Lori 's mind . Rick murdered Shane and she did confess she had feelings for Shane . Her son was a part of it . They 're all infected . Is her baby infected ? We 're out on the road , where is she going to give birth ? What happens if the baby dies ? What happens if she dies ? All of these questions are going through her head . The thing that affects her most is that she played a role in Shane 's death . She put those two men at odds , she whispered in Rick 's ear and then she talked to Shane at the windmill . She realizes that this has been over her , and in a sense she has been an active participant in Shane 's death . So she can blame Rick for that , but she 's horrified by her own culpability . "

" Beside the Dying Fire " reminiscences to the first season finale , " TS @-@ 19 , " in which Rick reveals that everyone in the group is infected with the virus . Although Kirkman described his actions as " exhibiting good leadership skills , " Mazzara said that the group began to question Rick 's capabilities as a leader . " He presents them with a very pragmatic option : If you don 't like it , get the hell out and there are no takers . At the end of the finale , the true horror is Rick when he says , ' It ain 't a democracy anymore . ' That 's the true horror . "

Themes of social darwinism and survival are prevalent throughout " Beside the Dying Fire . " In the episode , Andrea is separated from the group and is forced to fend herself against the horde of walkers that invaded Hershel 's farm . Mazzara felt that separating Andrea from her group would be essential in exploring her character in @-@ depth , as he stated that she was viewed in the light of

other characters on The Walking Dead .

== Reception ==

== Ratings ==

" Beside the Dying Fire " was originally broadcast on March 18 , 2012 in the United States on AMC . Upon airing , the episode attained 9 million viewers and a 5 @. @ 8 household rating , indicating that 5 @. @ 8 % of all households who watched television viewed the episode . The episode attained a 4 @. @ 7 rating in the 18 ? 49 demographic , denoting 6 million viewers , while simultaneously acquiring 3 @. @ 2 million viewers in the 18 ? 34 demographic and 5 million in the 25 ? 54 demographic . " Beside the Dying Fire " subsequently became the highest @-@ rated cable telecast of all time demographically , amassing record ratings among adults and men between 18 and 54 ; this accolade was previously held by the second season episode " Nebraska . " Similarly , it outperformed all cable programming of the day as well as the week dated March 25 , obtaining significantly higher ratings than Swamp People on History and Jersey Shore on MTV . Total viewership and ratings for " Beside the Dying Fire " increased dramatically from the previous episode , " Better Angels , " which attracted 6 @. @ 89 million viewers and a 3 @. @ 6 rating amongst key adults in the 18 ? 49 group .

== Critical response ==

Rob Salem of Toronto Star said that " fans who have been complaining about this season ' s relative complacency [ ... ] finally got their gore and more when the farm was overrun by suddenly , strangely single @-@ minded walkers . " Pamela Mitchell of Houston Chronicle commented that " Beside the Dying Fire " was the most eventful episode of the season , while Digital Spy ' s Morgan Jeffery thought that " every single major character gets their moment to shine " ; " Epic , action @-@ packed , emotional ? ' Beside the Dying Fire ' is great television , " she concluded . TV Guide television critic Michael Logan affirmed that the season finale " was so scary and shock @-@ a @-@ minute outrageous that it nearly made our heads explode . " In his A ? review , Zach Handlen of The A.V. Club said that " Beside the Dying Fire " adequately accomplished what he was hoping for . He wrote , " We 're finally off Hershel ' s farm , in about the most definitive way imaginable : The barn has been burned , and the house itself is overrun by a herd of ' walkers ' . " New York ' s Starlee Kine adulated the installment , and asserted that it was comparable to episodes of The Walking Dead ' s first season . " It ? s just amazing how much smoother the plot holes go down when something is actually happening on this show . For the first time since last season , I felt engrossed enough to not be consumed with all the small things this show gets wrong . Up until this episode , the majority of this season has consisted exclusively of small things : petty dramas , misdirected stakes , so much stalling . I ? m not sure I can go so far as to say that it got everything right with this one , but at least it was entertaining and the nonstop action felt like content instead of just bookends . " Mark A. Perigard of the Boston Herald wrote that it was the closest the program " ever resembled the climax of a George Romero film . " Time journalist Nate Rawlings felt that " Beside the Dying Fire " sufficiently encompassed a climax for its storylines , adding that it left the audience anticipating for future installments of the series .

Last night ' s The Walking Dead season finale did that wonderfully , wrapping up several loose threads before pointing the compass directly at the heart of Season 3 . In a closing shot similar to that of this season ' s penultimate episode , the producers literally glanced over the horizon at a giant prison , which I ? m willing to bet elicited one of two reactions . If you ? ve read the graphic novels , you probably said , ? It ? s about damn time ! , ? whereas if you ? re a TWD novice , your take was probably some variation on ? What the f ? was that ? ? This is the balance the producers wanted to strike , and they did it brilliantly .

Gina McIntyre of Los Angeles Times said that the program delivered what she described as a "

blood bath , " and Aaron Rutzkoff of The Wall Street Journal further analyzed that the episode followed a dark and frenetic convention " with flare . " The Washington Post commentator Jen Chaney opined that " Beside the Dying Fire " evoked elements of various films of George Romero , as well as the historical epic film Gone with the Wind ( 1939 ) . Writing for Paste , Josh Jackson issued the episode an 8 @. @ 8 out of 10 rating , signifying a " commendable " rating . " ' Beside the Dying Fire ' wasted no time getting straight to the action , assuming a season ? s worth of character development was more than enough . " The Huffington Post 's Maureen Ryan echoed synonymous sentiments , ultimately declaring that the telecast was the best since the series ' pilot episode , " Days Gone Bye . " Ryan summated : " The first two acts of The Walking Dead Season 2 finale were full of excitement , honest to God suspense and characters who came up with pretty decent plans on the fly . When the braaaains finally hit the fan at Hershel Greene 's farm , my pulse quickened and I found myself wondering and even caring about the survival of characters who 'd done little more than irritate me for weeks . " Julia Rhodes from California Literary Review uttered that the show returned to form in " Beside the Dying Fire , " while Buddy TV writer Megan Cole summed up the episode as " intense . "

The character development of Andrea produced uniform praise among critics . Jackson felt that it served as the episode 's highlight , and further assessed that she emulated actress Linda Hamilton . " After a season of whining , there had to have been at least a few fans pulling for the walkers in her early scenes , but she quickly became Linda Hamilton @-@ badass , braining zombies with her foot , " he said . Likewise , Kine asserted that " the badass she has tried so hard to convince us all she is finally came across . " Ryan thought that Andrea 's struggle to survive was a strong way to build up the exodus of the group . She spoke of her scene with Michonne : " She 'd fought so hard to live that I wanted Andrea to fend off that final batch of walkers successfully . When it appeared she might not live , I was , quite rightly , on the edge of my seat . And the appearance of the caped figure ? towing two armless walkers , no less ? was as dramatic as could be . "

The gradual alteration of Rick was frequently mentioned in the critiques . Dan Hopper of Best Week Ever theorized that such a drastic transition was attributed by the death of his friend Shane . Halden proclaimed that the progression established a strong sense of direction for the character . " This is a definite direction . I ? m not sure if the show ? s going to make Rick an out @-@ and @-@ out monster , or if this is setting up some sort of redemptive arc for him in season three , but it ? s a strong choice . The Walking Dead has tried to make us value this group of people , as if together , they mean more than they do alone . That hasn ? t worked , so now it appears we ? re going to try trial by fire . " By the end of " Beside the Dying Fire , " Ryan concluded that " Rick is becoming the leader he should have been from the start , and he 's being clear and upfront about his goals and leadership style . "

Commentators were divided with the interactions between Rick and his wife Lori . Although Ryan reacted positively to Lincoln 's performance , she affirmed that the contradictory nature of Lori almost ruined the scene . Similarly , Kine criticized Callies ' facial expressions during the sequence . Jackson wrote , " If that was a challenge from the writers , though , Sarah Wayne Callies has to feel like they 're just messing with her at this point . Her character , Lori , basically tells Rick that Shane needs to be put down , and then treats him like a monster when he ? s forced to follow through with it . "