Zombies Take Manhattan in Citywide Walking Dead Activations

The first rule of surviving an urban zombie apocalypse is to barricade yourself on the upper floors of a skyscraper. But here's the second rule: Zombies don't follow rules.

On Tuesday, ADWEEK was on hand to watch walkers run… uh, *walk* rampant at the top of the Empire State Building as part of a New York City takeover orchestrated by the big brains at AMC Networks. The multi-day campaign leads into the Season 2 premiere of The Walking Dead: Dead City on May 4 at 9 p.m.

One of several spin-offs to rise from the ashes of The Walking Dead mothership series—which went to its great reward in 2022—Dead City relocates fan favorites Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Lauren Cohan, and Lucille to the wasteland formerly known as Manhattan.

But before those pesky walkers showed up atop the Empire State, the show's cast and current franchise mastermind Scott M. Gimple took photos against the backdrop of a living, breathing Big Apple.

The Dead City cast on a zombie-free Empire State Building deck.*Courtesy AMC Networks*

And the Empire State Building wasn’t their only stop. Before pulling up to the high-rise that kept Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan up all night, the Walkers got their nosh on at a Penn Station-adjacent PopUp Bagels spot, and subsequent landmark visits included Radio City Music Hall and Citi Field ahead of the match-up between the Mets and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

“It’s beyond thrilling,” Gimple tells ADWEEK about the Tuesday takeover. “I grew up in New Jersey and kicked around the city as a kid, and there were things I saw that I’ve remembered my whole life.”

A walker scopes out Radio City.*Courtesy AMC Networks*

“Pardon me—which way to the Z train?” *Courtesy AMC Networks*
New York’s zombie invasion technically started on Sunday when Walkers showed up at the Brooklyn half-marathon to scare runners on.

The following evening, Morgan, Cohan, and Gimple screened the season premiere at a Rooftop Films event where Walkers wisely weren’t invited.

Walkers scare on runners in the Brooklyn Half Marathon.*Courtesy AMC Networks*

A marathon-goer issues an important warning.*Courtesy AMC Networks*

The Dead City NYC takeover comes months after the stars of Severance used Grand Central Station as a stage for the return of the AppleTV+ series—a stunt that ranks among the most genius marketing moves for any fan-facing show.

Gimple, for one, recognizes how that Severance activation raised the game. “Seeing stories you love come to life is jarring in the best way possible—it brings some magic to the world,” he notes. “Activations are becoming an art form in and of itself.”

Wait in line… if you dare.*Courtesy AMC Networks*

Meet a zombie with bagels on the brain.*Courtesy AMC Networks*
For Gimple, activations are “fan appreciation opportunities, first and foremost.”

“We wouldn’t have been here this long, doing all these things without the support of these incredible fans,” he said. “Kicking things off right is about creating moments for them.”

Cohan and Morgan at Citi Field *Courtesy AMC Networks*

Morgan wields Lucille at Citi Field *Courtesy AMC Networks*

Dead City’s Manhattan takeover culminated in a Paley Center screening and talkback on Wednesday before the cast dispersed to locations beyond the 10001 zip code. But Gimple already has a pitch for the next New York hot spot they can zombie-fy in a Season 3 activation.

“I think a horde of walkers collapsing on the ice at Rockefeller Center could be pretty epic,” he muses.

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