

DEAD@17: ROUGH CUT

"Fight to Live"

written by David Hopkins

illustrated by Sean Stephens

David: Hello, I'm David. Let's get right to it. Here's the original brainstorming I did for this story. I sent it to Josh for approval.

Centers on Jake and Raddemer, story takes place during issues one and two. These two agents sit behind a tree, off somewhere, waiting for Malachi, the Angel of God, to resurrect Nara. The two agents talk about the past. Cue flashback: an anecdote from Raddemer and Jack's past together in the Protectorate. Then, end flash back. Nara goes unconscious after her resurrection. Jake and Raddemer leave the zombie-ass-kickin' axe by her side. Raddemer stays in Darlington Hills to keep watch over her. Jake goes to the outskirts of town to wait for them, and contact the Protectorate if anything goes wrong. This story follows Jake. As he waits alone, the zombies attack him.

He's completely outnumbering (as established in issue 2). Jake, being the bad-ass agent he is, pulls his gun and puts up one hell of a fight. The story ends here, and it could work in eight pages.

Josh liked it, but suggested a few helpful changes. As you can tell, the final version of "Fight to Live" makes the cemetery scene less cluttered, and doesn't include Malachi.

Sean: Hello my name Sean Stephens, artist on "Fight to Live". I got the gig by winning Page32.net's Dead@17 art contest. Viper asked to see my portfolio and the rest was history. David Hopkins wrote a script that was chock full of action, and I loved the way the theme of survival played throughout the story. I've never done one of these before, but in the spirit of "Fight to Live", let's have some fun!

David: "Fight to Live." I'm so bad at titles. In this case, "Fight to Live" is from a song by the punk band Bouncing Souls. The song has nothing to do with zombies.

NOTES:

Agent Jake died at the end of Dead@17 #2. He was outnumbered by a large group of zombies. This story follows that last stand and the events leading up to it. It touches on the resurrection of Nara and a brief anecdote from the earlier days of the Protectorate. Jake is a tough old man who's seen many strange things in his life.

David: Sean is familiar with the Dead@17 story, so these notes are somewhat unnecessary. I included the notes to point him in the right direction. We pulled from Josh's story... a lot. I wanted to make sure the timing of events and continuity was perfect.

PAGE ONE

1 - Evening. Cemetery (reference Dead@17 #1 pgs. 6-7). Straight ahead shot of two Protectorate agents *Jake Sullivan*, on the left, and *Noel Raddemer*, on the right, stand in front of Nara's tombstone, looking intently at it. Noel holds the axe (from D@17 #1) at waist level, in both hands.

JAKE: Are you sure? I hope she's who you're looking for.

NOEL: Trust me. It's her.

David: For the record, I am the person who gave Jake the last name "Sullivan." He didn't have a last name in the original series. I'm glad to see Jason Burns used the last name in his Rough Cut story "Dead Air". (Actually, I had no idea anyone else was using Jake in their story. He had a busy night. If you're keeping count, Agent Sullivan fired five shots in "Dead Air" and two shots in "Fight to Live".) And where did the name "Sullivan" come from? Michael O'Sullivan in *Road to Perdition*. Another bad ass.

Sean: In this panel, Dave told me to reference the cemetery shots from the first issue. It was funny, because it was sold out so fast in my comic book store, I couldn't get a copy. However, I had all the rest of the issues so I asked Josh for some scans of the first issue stuff. Viper was so nice they mailed me one for free. Thanks guys!

David: The axe. Why does everyone love this axe? It made a brief appearance in issue 1 of the original series... and that's it. But everyone loves that freakin' axe. So yeah, the axe shows up in "Fight to Live". And guess what? It's Noel that left it for her. Personally, I think the teenager-with-axe fetish originates from a cultural fascination with Lizzie Borden who on August 4, 1892 brutally hacked her mother and father to bits with an axe.

2 - Close on Jake. A doubtful look on his face.

JAKE: Here of all places?

Sean: The first up close up appearance of Jake Sullivan. The man, the myth, the legend, the dead. LOL!

3 - Close on Noel, a half-smile.

Sean: Noel Raddemer. Long time friend of Jake as you can see in the second issue of Dead@17.

David: In hindsight, I should've moved the line "Have faith, Jake" to this panel, and then begin with "These battles are fought..." on panel 4. In my opinion, Noel looks a little creepy just smiling.

4 – Side angle, the two agents in front of the tombstone.

NOEL: Have faith, Jake. These battles are fought in the most unlikely locales.

And Darlington Hills is not a safe place tonight.

David: "Not a safe place tonight." A bit of blatant foreshadowing, don't you think?

Sean: I wanted to make sure to get their entire bodies in this shot so I could further establish their surrounding environment.

5 - Close up on Nara's tombstone:

IN LOVING MEMORY
NARA LEIGH KILDAY
JULY 5, 1986 - AUG. 12, 2003
"AN ANGEL DEPARTED"

Sean: This was another issue 1 reference.

David: Sean even got the cracks on the tombstone to match the ones Josh did in the original series. That's impressive.

PAGE TWO

1 - Jake notices the axe in Noel's hands.

JAKE: I remember that axe. I can't believe you still have it.

NOEL: It was our first mission together.

Sean: Ah, the axe. Nara's favorite. I thought it was funny that Dave told the origin of the axe as if it were a character in the story. So I gave it a real nice close up.

David: As I said, everyone digs the axe! Thank you Sean for the close-up. This panel is intended as a transition to the '80s flashback. However, it feels a little forced to me.

2 - Flashback, the '80s. A menacing solitary zombie (we'll call him "Zombie Joe") emerges through a doorway holding an axe. Note: Since it's the '80s, I envision Zombie Joe dressed like "Duckie" from the movie *Pretty In Pink*, but whatever works best.

CAPTION - JAKE: Mission? If you could call it that.

The zombies usually roam in large groups. That one must've gotten lost or something.

ZOMBIE JOE: AAAAarrgggghhhh!!!!

David: What would the '80s be without legendary filmmaker John Hughes? *Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles, Weird Science, Some Kind of Wonderful*, and of course, *Pretty in Pink*. My wife loves all these teen flicks, but especially *Pretty in Pink*. We've watched that film over and over and over again. And so, as a special treat for Melissa, I put Ducky in this story... and blew his head off.

Sean: Ducky! Otherwise known as John Cryer. Dave informed me that this flashback section was to take place in the 80's. He had an idea to have a zombie that resembled Ducky from *Pretty in Pink* to capture the feeling of the 80's. I looked for some images of Ducky online. He wore a funny hat in them all. Unfortunately, my rendition of Ducky ended up looking like a magician! Go figure. If I had to do it again, I would have drawn his 80's hairdo instead.

3 - Zombie Joe stops, all by his lonesome. A younger Jake and Noel, plus two other agents, face the creature. The agents wear their traditional black suits and ties. They are not the least bit threatened by this zombie.

CAPTION - JAKE: But there he was, sadly outnumbered.

ZOMBIE JOE: Uh.

Sean: This is a funny scene showing that the zombie made a grave mistake entering this room. I decided to put a female agent and a guy with sword on his back in there for flavor. I was inspired by Josh when he had an agent with a sword in issue 4 of *Dead@17*.

4 - Same shot. Zombie Joe sheepishly turns around and attempts to walk off.

CAPTION - JAKE: And then, you remember? The mindless son of a bitch turns around, like we didn't see him!

ZOMBIE JOE (quietly): ooooohhh.

David: **There's a nice parallel between Zombie Joe (i.e. Ducky) being outnumbered here and then Agent Sullivan being outnumbered at the end of the story. Was it intentional? Yep. However, while the tone with Ducky is clearly humorous, Sullivan's end is no laughing matter. I think any good story should have an emotional range-- funny moments, serious moments, exciting moments and so on.**

5 - The four agents with their guns drawn and ready to fire.

David: **Sean does a great job here. Do not mess with these agents. Right?**

PAGE THREE

1- Close on Zombie Joe. His head explodes from the mass of gunfire.

SFX: BLAM!
 BLAM!
 BLAM!
 BLAM!

Sean: **Goodbye Ducky.**

David: **Goodbye Ducky.**

2 - The agents watch Zombie Joe (without a head) fall over.

CAPTION - JAKE: I almost felt sorry for the thing.

Sean: **At least he lost that ridiculous hat!**

David: **Ha, ha, good one.**

3 - Flashback ends. Noel holds the axe, looking at it, remembering.

NOEL: Tonight may be Nara's first mission. After all these years, I'll know soon enough.

4 - Jake places a comforting hand on Noel's shoulder.

JAKE: Didn't think you'd be the sentimental fatherly type.

NOEL: I'm not.

JAKE: You know, my own daughter is pregnant. I'll be a grandfather. Finally happened: I'm old.

NOEL: Thinking about retirement?

David: Kudos to Greg Gatlin for fitting all this text into that small panel. He did the lettering for all of *Dead@17: Rough Cut*. I try to keep dialogue to a minimum. I figure this is *visual* storytelling. However, I really like the exchange between Noel and Jake. It helps to establish Jake's character, and we empathize more with him at the end.

5 – Close on Jake's face. He fought the good fight for a long time. We see the experience in his troubled eyes.

JAKE: No, some jobs you don't retire from.

David: This line is important. Yet again, more foreshadowing.

6 – Move further from the agents. Get a good view of the surrounding cemetery grounds.

JAKE: We all set?

NOEL: Yeah.

JAKE: I'll head to the checkpoint. Meet me there. If I don't see you by morning, I'm contacting the Protectorate for back up.

Sean: The last shot of the cemetery, and beginning of the end of Jake's journey.

David: Honestly, I wasn't expecting an aerial view of the cemetery. I imagined a ground shot, further back. BUT-- this is so much better. Sean rocks. The silhouettes of the characters are perfect (contrast to the two silhouetted zombies on panel 2 of the following page?), and the view through the trees makes for a nice transition to the forest scene on the next page.

SFX: BLAM!

ZOMBIE #1: Uuuuuuhhh...

David: At this point, the panel descriptions got really difficult. I simply had to number the zombies. I like how zombie #1 is holding on to Jake throughout four panels. All the while, Jake keeps fighting, taking out two other zombies.

Sean: It's Jake still going at it, Equilibrium style ala Christian Bale! That movie made like two dollars in box office, but I thought it was great. It's actually a smart action movie if you ever get the chance to watch it. Might as well not rent it because it's probably on Showtime right now!

PAGE FIVE

1 - Jake (with zombie #1 still holding onto him) shoots yet another zombie (#3) at point blank range.

SFX: BLAM!

2 – Zombie #3 does not fall. Instead, it knocks the gun out of Jake's hand with one downward slap. And zombie #1, holding onto Jake, tears at Jake's face.

ZOMBIE #3: Rrrrrrrrr!

SFX: wack!

Sean: Jake unfortunately lost his trusty gun. Here we see how Jake got that bite on his face that we see in issue 2 of Dead@17.

3 - Close up on the face of Nara, dimly lit. Eyes closed. Pitch black background.

Sean: Nara's first appearance in the story. I used the same shot in panel 5 by copying and pasting it in Photoshop. I erased the eyes and redrew them open on a separate piece of paper, scanned them in and popped them on. Viola!

4 – Zombie #1 is still holding on, but Jake forcefully brings up his left elbow and effectively breaks the zombie's neck.

SFX: CRACK!

Sean: Stone Cold Jake does his stunner.

David: **Ha, ha, ha!**

5 - Close up on the face of Nara, dimly lit. Eyes opened! Pitch black background.

David: **Film-making 101. This is a classic example of Eisenstein's use of montage. By cutting between Jake killing the zombie and Nara waking up, it subtly creates the feeling that Nara is connected to these events on an unconscious level. Pretty deep, huh? That's college tuition well spent.**

6 - Jake, with both hands, pulls at the zombie #1's head (the one with the broken neck). The head tears from the neck.

SFX: rip!

7 - Jake hits the zombie #3, in front of him, with the zombie #1's head.

SFX: WACK!

Sean: **This is Dave's idea. It kind of reminded me of Mortal Kombat. Jake definitely got his flawless victory! Anyway, it was really fun to draw.**

David: **Notice how Sean doesn't want anyone to think it was his idea? In fact, it was my very first idea for the script. I thought, "I really want the agent to rip off a zombie's head and then beat another zombie with the severed head." See, kiddos? Dreams really do come true.**

PAGE SIX

1 - Close on Jake. He is regaining his breath. Blood pours down his face. He is focused and determined.

JAKE: Come on. Who's next?

2 - Jake stands on the road. A crowd of zombies approach. Jake holds his arms out, inviting them forward.

JAKE: That's right. I'm ready.

Sean: **Jake was starting to get tired at this point; however he still invited the fight.**

David: I love how Sean draws these zombies creeping out of the forest. With each page, we see more and more zombies-- building up to the end of this story.

3 - Nara's glowing body lifted, floating, out of the grave. Body arched back. (reference Blood of Saints #1, pg. 1, panel 1) She's wearing her white button-up shirt, loosened black tie, and plaid mini-skirt.

Sean: Nara's awakening. Dave really liked this one. I believe Dave wanted continuity with *Blood of Saints* and how Violet rose from the ground as a visual tie to the series. I really wanted to do it justice.

David: Nara's resurrection is central to the entire Dead@17 universe, and I'm very happy we got the opportunity to reveal it. I think it's the emotional climax of this story. Hopefully, we did it justice. I like how on page five the resurrection starts off quiet (Nara's opens her eyes) and then it immediately, on page six, erupts into this awesome force. Sean gives Nara's resurrection such power and energy. He also makes good use of the wide panel.

4 - Zombie #5 dives at Jake's waist, wrapping its arms around Jake's midsection. Jake tries to fight him off.

David: This panel is an incredible follow up to the energy in panel 3. The story moves between Nara and Jake, and excitement builds with both.

5 - This zombie (#5) tackles Jake. As other zombies, also diving forward, are about to pile onto the fallen agent. This does not look good.

ZOMBIE #5: Rrrrrrrrr!

Sean: If you look closely at panel 2 of this page, you can see that the Zombie that's running up to Jake on the extreme right is the one that tackled Jake in panel 4. He's the tiny zombie with the short sleeves.

David: Things are not looking good for Jake.

6 - Closer on Nara. Body still glowing. Nara is wide-eyed and gasping for air.

David: The excitement builds, until... turn the page...

PAGE SEVEN

1 - Jake emerges from the pile of zombies, badly injured but still fighting every inch of the way. Some of the zombies are still holding onto him.

JAKE: Not tonight! Not now!

David: ...oh my god... Jake is on his feet again, fighting against impossible odds! He's totally "Leon" at this point.

Sean: The zombie bash. Jake's not going out without a fight. I thought it was hilarious that he went through all this only to meet his demise when Elijah decided it was time to grab the steering wheel from Noel! These kids and their rock music! LOL

David: Don't remind me. Yes, Jake got hit by a car. *However*, he was already in critical condition before the car incident. Those remaining zombies would've finished him off. Just a theory, though.

But speaking of Elijah. He's a prick. Josh, why haven't you killed him off?

2 - Jake swings his fist and knocks one of the zombies (#6) off of him.

JAKE: I'm going to be a grandfather soon. Did you know that? Huh?

David: The whole grandfather thing was inspired by the fact that my wife was pregnant during the time I was writing this story. Our daughter is now three months old.

3 - Nara's on the ground, waking up again. She sees the axe in front of her, stuck in the ground. (reference Dead@17 #2, pg.6, panel 7)

Sean: Another recreation from issue 2. I wanted to be as accurate as possible with this panel for all the continuity buffs out there.

David: We did use a lot of reference panels from the original series. I thought it was important to use those images to tie the stories together.

4 - Jake flips a zombie (#7) off of him and into an oncoming zombie (#8).

JAKE: Old Jake Sullivan. A grandfather. Imagine that?

David: That's quite a throw. Judo?

Sean: By this time, Jake achieved superhuman status. I didn't know

anything about Jake in terms combat. I wondered if the Viper crew thought I was going too far by making Jake become a martial arts wonder. But they seemed not to mind.

5 - Nara reaches for the axe.

Sean: Ladies and Gentlemen, she has the axe.

David: (Teenager-with-axe fetish)

6 - A zombie (#9) jumps at Jake, choking him.

JAKE: Urgh.

PAGE EIGHT

1 - Jake brings the palm of his hand up and forces this zombie #9's head back like a pez dispenser-- another broken neck.

SFX: Craaack!

JAKE: And you know what?

Sean: My most outrageous panel yet. Jake apparently studied with Bruce Lee to learn martial arts. Or maybe Van Damme. Maybe that's what he's been up to while not doing straight to video flicks that premiere on the USA network! How the mighty have fallen. BloodSport still rules though. Just kidding! Maybe.

David: You know you love *BloodSport*. You watch it every night. That and *Pretty in Pink*.

2 - Nara, standing up, clutches the axe in both hands-- holding it up. Nara has a look of deep concern on her face. (reference Dead@ 17 #2, pg.7, panel 1)

Sean: Yet another recreation.

David: This panel acts as a nice transition between moments with Jack. We get the sense that as one life ends, another begins. Nara takes the axe as an indication of her willingness to continue Jake's fight. And during issues two and three, she *literally* finishes what he started.

Hopefully, readers notice a theme emerging. Josh has made it a consistent theme throughout the Dead@17 story-- life is a daily battle. It's about not giving up in the face of impossible odds. Fight to Live.

3 - Jake struggles to stay standing, his head down. He barely has the energy to fight much longer.

JAKE: I never--

Sean: Jake is actually bigger than he is supposed to be in this panel. Maybe he's larger than life, maybe its an artistic choice like recently when Joe Quesada decided to draw Daredevil huge in *Daredevil:Father*, or maybe I just tried cover up a ton of background! You decide.

David: No comment.

4 - Pull back. We see a horde of zombies beginning to encircle Jake. He is ready for one last fight.

JAKE: I never found out if it was a boy or a girl.

Sean: Seriously now, Jake's in peril. I tried to use silhouettes to create a horror mood, to convey a feeling of being totally surrounded. Rather than take the anal approach of drawing every single zombie, I felt it would be more artistic to wrap Jake up in a collage of terror.

David: The silhouettes work really well here. The zoom out works too. As we move back, we see more and more and more zombies, which makes it seem all the more overwhelming. Like the last scene in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. As the characters walk away defeated, the camera slowly reveals an unbelievable number of birds. In this case, we're replacing birds with zombies. Love Hitchcock.

This last line from Jack lets the reader know that he's given up. He's accepted he's not going to survive this battle. Initially, I thought about placing this line on the very last panel. However, I'm glad I didn't. The silence in panel 5 sets a better mood.

5 - Pull back further. Even more zombies (as many as you can squeeze into the panel) surround Jake. This panel really needs to emphasize how absolutely hopeless the situation is.

David: For everyone who immediately turned the page to see what happened next, I consider it a victory!

Sean: Zoom out of panel four. There is no way he could survive this. It's a graphic use of blacks that I'm really proud of. I thought it was a nice way to centralize Jake in his final moments. Now watch out for that car!

David: How sad. Hit by a car. Elijah better stay away from me. If I ever get the chance to write him, that character is D-E-A-D!

Agreed. The use of black creates an incredible visual.

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Sean: I had great a time working with Dave. His enthusiasm really inspired me to try to create the best art I could. I would like to thank David and the entire Viper crew for making me part of Rough Cut. I also like to thank those at Page32.net for holding the art contest in which my entry caught the attention of Viper and deadatseventeen.com letting me go on and talk about the making of Fight to Live. Hopefully, it was somewhat informative, if not entirely silly! You can catch more of my art at www.areazeroworld.com

Later.

David: The script was written with the intention of allowing Sean to shine as an illustrator. I tried my best to play to his strengths. And not only did he create some incredible action sequences, but he also proved to be equally skilled at illustrating those quiet moments-- like the ones in the cemetery. I enjoyed working with Sean, and wish him all the best with Area Zero. Thank you. Also, thank you Josh, Greg, Jessie, and Jim for all your hard work. For those of you that read the entire commentary, I'm impressed. If you're interested in other projects I'm working on, you can visit www.antiherocomics.com

We're done.