

Take a look at me now

With his role in *The Walking Dead*, actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan is far removed from the romantic lead role he played to memorable effect in *Grey's Anatomy*. But, as Jeffrey tells Jenny Cooney Carrillo, he wouldn't want it any other way.

Jeffrey Dean Morgan joined the cast of *The Walking Dead* in the final 12 minutes of last season's finale, making an unforgettable entrance as the sadistic, tyrannical leader of the Saviours, Negan.

In his first scene he is chillingly surveying his 11 prisoners – Rick (Andrew Lincoln), Carl (Chandler Riggs), Daryl (Norman Reedus), Glenn (Steven Yeun), Michonne (Dani Gurira), Eugene (Josh McDermitt), Aaron (Ross Marquand), Sasha (Sonequa Martin-Green), Rosita (Christian Serratos), Abraham (Michael Cudlitz), and Maggie (Lauren Cohen) – before finally deciding who he will beat to death with his barbwire-covered baseball bat called Lucille.

"It's definitely something you've never seen me do before," the 50-year-old actor says proudly. "Through the years, I take more chances and try different things but what I found, in terms of pushing myself as an actor, this show is unlike anything else I've ever done before and an enormous amount of work, but also a surprising amount of fun."

While fans will despise Negan, it's hard not to be charmed by the actor who plays him and this explains why he has spent most of his career in romantic leading roles in film and TV.

He is perhaps best remembered for his role on *Grey's Anatomy*, playing doomed heart

transplant patient Denny Duquette, who was romantically involved with Izzy (Katherine Heigl).

Jeffrey also wooed Halle Berry in *Extant* and Julianna Margulies in *The Good Wife*.

He says he embraced the challenge of moving away from the romantic roles to play the sadistic ruler of a post-apocalyptic society.

"This is the first time I can honestly say there is really no trace of Jeff in the character," he admits.

"I have changed everything from the inflection of my voice to how I move and walk. So that for me as an actor has been the biggest transformation I have ever put myself through."

The affable actor also reveals how tough it was to arrive on the set outside Atlanta, Georgia to join a cast who had worked together for six seasons. He also knew he was playing a character who would kill one of them.

"It's a very tight family atmosphere on set so for me to come in and do what I was about to do, at first people kept their distance from me and a couple of people didn't even want to make eye contact with me," he says bluntly.

"The first couple of days were rough and emotional for everyone, but eventually we got through it and it just didn't matter that I was the bad guy, because we all became thick as thieves."

Jeffrey, who has a six-year-old son

with his actress wife Hilarie Burton (*One Tree Hill*), laughs when asked if he ever takes his work home.

"I am a dad so I can't bring Negan home or his mom would kill me," he laughs. "Fortunately, I have never been that kind of actor who has to be that method."

"I'm more likely to joke around on set and have fun but the second they say, 'We are rolling', I am ready to go."

Jeffrey grins sheepishly as he confides that he was surprisingly comfortable with inflicting torture on set as Negan.

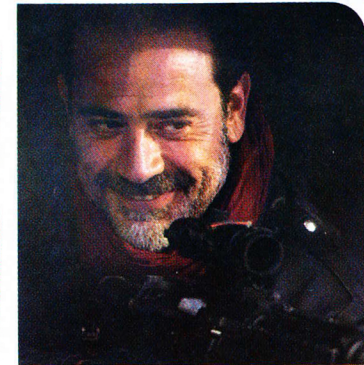
"I would wind myself up with fear and not sleep and stress out about playing the scene 900 times in my head but, for whatever reason, when I put on that leather jacket and I am holding Lucille and they're about to say 'Action',

this weird kind of calm falls over me and it's very surreal – which doesn't sound right at all because he's really bad."

Although he has plenty of fans who have followed him through previous projects, Jeffrey is bracing himself for the more rabid variety who follow this zombie drama.

"It will be a bit of a change from *Grey's Anatomy* fans," he chuckles.

"I do think this role is going to push them away a little bit and test some of my fandom, but at the same time I also think I'm going to get new fans – the crazy Negan people – so it'll be fun to find out what they all think of me after this."



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