

# Exclusive Interview: Could 'Fear the Walking Dead' star Mercedes Mason be the next Carol?

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carol/  
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Let's be real, everyone loves zombies. If the world's ending, I'm pretty sure a good portion of us want to go out in a gutsy glory- wielding machetes, slinging guns and toting around... a water filtration system? Yes, this is an actual thing *Fear the Walking Dead* star Mercedes Mason insists on bringing if the apocalypse were to ever happen in real life. A nerdy, yet totally logical response and damn, we're definitely thinking we'd want her to join our survival team.

Mason, who plays Ofelia Salazar, a sheltered and

emotionally stunted young woman whose family dynamic is not ideal for prospering in a dire situation like

a zombie apocalypse, is among the stars to set sail on an epic journey of outliving a mass epidemic that has destroyed Los Angeles. And quite possibly the world. Though the group doesn't know exactly what's going on at this point, just that a mysterious flu has quarantined their gritty city, and the only way out is through a seemingly safe passage with a shifty survivor named Victor Strand (Colman Domingo). Now on the yacht, these strangers are being bombarded by 'the infected,' and it's pretty clear that their fight will not only be against the undead, but each other as well. What happens when the world goes to hell and you're forced to work with people you don't know? Can you trust your neighbors, your family, the people sharing close quarters with you? When humanity is still in tact, do your chances of survival decline? Questions these characters, and the audience will continue to ask themselves throughout the season.

Ultimately, Mason's character is observant, cautious and calculated. Which leads me to believe she'll grow into a much more prominent role as Season 2 progresses. Could *Fear's* unlikely member be the next Carol? Oh man, we hope so! And on the heels of *The Walking Dead* companion series already being renewed for a season three, I was elated to chat with the talented (and hilarious) actress about her growth on the hit AMC series. Not to mention, Mason's weird cousin twice removed, adopting co-star Alycia Debnam-Carey's fans from *The 100*, epic dance parties on the set of the show, and most importantly: Nutella.

Full speed ahead!

**MCKENZIE MORRELL: Alright, so let's ease you into the hard-hitting stuff with something simple... when you first got this role, how did you connect with Ofelia. Were there any similarities to your personality in real life?**

**MERCEDES MASON:** *Absolutely. When I first read the pilot, they're so secretive and so tight lipped about what we were actually going to be doing so they gave me sort of a fake character, if you will. And when I asked more specifics they told me once I got the role, I think it was between me and one other girl, they'd give us a bit more details. And at that point I had read sort of this fake stuff about Ofelia prior and then they really made her real to me. It's uncanny, actually how similar she and I are. Both kids of immigrant parents, really protective of them, it's a whole different experience once you grow up in a country that's not your own and your parents don't speak the language very well. You find yourself being really protective of them. My parents are super old school so it was, you know, no boys, no dating, just school. It's a very sheltered thing. I connected with her so much. I feel so bad for her because I can't even imagine what I would have done if I had lost my mom and figured out my dad was a complete lie. Not to mention, the world's falling apart.*

**Right? And Ofelia's relationship with her father in Season 1 was a bit rebellious and strained towards the end there, what can we expect from that dynamic moving forward throughout the season? They're in close quarters so eventually they're gonna have to talk to each other.**

*Yeah. I think she's sort of growing up very quickly, which is silly because she's not a child, but emotionally she's sort of been kept a child. But as we start figuring out she's sort of lead these two different lives, and she sort of had these secrets that her family didn't know about and I think she's at this precipice of 'I don't have to lie anymore, my dad has been lying my whole life.' She can now be more truth to who she is. She's really angry with him, she's trying to figure out who she can trust on that boat. Which, if you notice in the first episode, she's not only hurt because of the gunshot wound, she's lost her mom, she's sort of more of an observer just making sure she watches people before she dives in and creates any sort of a relationship with anyone.*

**Now in your second season, do you feel like Ofelia is better equipped to deal with what's about to unfold on *Fear the Walking Dead*?**

*I think we'll get to that, for sure. We're still at a point where we're trying to help strangers, we're hoping to find a safe harbor somewhere, which is why we're on the boat. It's very Hitchcockian in the sense that our audience members know a lot more than our characters do. Our audience knows that the whole world is falling apart, but we don't quite know that yet. We're still struggling to find some sort of safety, and when you think that maybe all of this will blow over, morality is still very much in tact. I think once we start discovering that 'no, in fact, this is going to hell and a handbasket' [laughs] it's definitely going to change a lot of people, some of us more quickly than others. Obviously Daniel [Rubén Blades] and Nick, in a strange way, simply because of his addictions prior. Being able to survive in that world and get his fix, if you will, that's quite a bit of survival right there. You'll start to discover a lot of things about characters, that all of us sort of had our own secret that either will help us or hurt us in the long run for survival.*

**Oooh!**

*I know!*

**From the premiere, I can already see a friendship developing between your character and Frank Dillane's. How hard is it to build a bond with someone while the world is ending?**

*I cannot think of a more difficult thing. I think the reason Nick and Ofelia are sort of bonding and getting along right now is that they're quite similar, in the sense that they were a bit sheltered. Him because of his drug addiction, he was almost stunted in growth and emotionally, and her because of her parents. They sort of have a beautifully innocent view of the world, and I think they see that in each other. We're sort of falling between ages as well, I think Nick and Ofelia are the closest in age, and then next with Alicia. Where Chris is really young and everybody else is a lot older. I think you're naturally pulled together because you experience and understand the world similarly when you're of the same generation. But again, Ofelia has literally known these people maybe two weeks. How do you trust somebody in two weeks? Maybe situations are amped because the world is falling and apart and there's reanimated corpses trying to eat you [laughs] but still, I think it's a long process in the making.*

**Right, that seems super terrifying. The relationships that these characters develop are going to be pretty vital to their survival, because if you don't trust someone, you can't make things work. We saw Alicia made a bad but vulnerable judgement call in the premiere—**

*Yeah, but out of the goodness of her heart. She didn't for a moment anticipate that something horrible could be happening. In theory, she may have brought somebody else that could have resources and help us, sometimes there really is safety in numbers. So she may or may not have done something horrendously wrong, but we'll have to wait to see that. And by we, I mean you guys, because I totally know. [Laughs]*

**I know, you totally have all the spoilers, and aren't going to give anything away! I know that fans are drawn to the friendship between your character and Nick and also Ofelia and Alicia. With that said, can we anticipate her potentially getting the closest with the Clark siblings?**

*I imagine so, absolutely, like I said, as soon as you are close in age I think you understand each other better. You sort of, it seems silly, but even listening to the same music, having the same social references, you end up bonding a lot more with people who are in the same mental capacity as yourself. I don't know how she would relate to Strand, because for one, her father told her that he doesn't trust him at all, and he's completely furious and quiet and hasn't said a word to Ofelia. I don't know how she would relate to Madison, because she's never been a mother, she doesn't know what it's like to have that sort of mama bear vibe to take care of her kids. And there's really no connection between Travis and Ofelia. So, I think she absolutely will bond with the Clark's and if nothing else with Chris as well simply because they're so much still in the same boat. Both of them lost their mother's, and having difficulties, if you will, with their father's. I think there will be a bit of bonding there as well.*

**Oh definitely. And obviously, being on the sister show of *The Walking Dead* must be awesome, but daunting at the same time- do you ever feel pressure to live up to the zombie hype?**

*You know, I think maybe there was a little bit of that when we first started Season 1, but they've been so accepting of us and so supportive and so lovely, especially because we're not taking over the other show, we're just sort of companion shows. Since then, I don't think there's been any fear. Especially with all the love and support we get on social media, they're so wonderful. And especially for me, because I as an avid watcher of *The Walking Dead*, still am, I think I'm maybe the only one in our cast, so for me, I feel I wouldn't be upset if another show came along, as a fan, so I can't imagine why anybody would.*

**So true! Being a fan of *The Walking Dead*, if you could grab and plop one of those characters into your universe to help you guys out... who would you choose?**

*[Laughs] I've always sort of been stuck between Daryl and Carol. One, because I think Ofelia sort of, hopefully, is going to go the Carol route, where when we meet them they're both quite meek and like a little bit of a mouse, and then we all know Carol becomes a lioness. I mean, she's*

*incredible. And then Daryl, just because he's so resourceful. That guy can't be killed [laughs]. He always swings back, so I think it would be pretty amazing to have one of the two of them.*

**We hope he can't be killed! We'll see when the show comes back.**

*Yeah! Don't say it, oh my God! It's this generation's version of the Soprano ending.*

**Yup! Yup. There were a lot of people upset about that ending, myself included, but, we will see how that plays out. So, the fans seem to want to know the strangest things about you, one of those things is if you'll be doing any swimming this season? [laughs]**

*We're still sort of halfway through, I would imagine, since we're on the boat, at some point Ofelia will fall in the water. She is still dealing with her gunshot wound, and healing that. It might become quite dire if she does. But, thus far, I haven't had the water experience. And from what I hear from my fellow cast members it is frigid. And I'm one of those people who when it's cold, my brain just stops working. I mean, one hundred percent, will drown because I just stop. There's no fight for survival, there's no fight or flight, it's just 'we should just go to sleep now.' It's awful.*

[Laughs]

**[Laughs] That sounds like a liability, so hopefully they keep you out of the water. The million dollar question, how long would you survive in the zombie apocalypse?**

*[Laughs] That actually is an interesting question, that I've been thinking about a lot. First, if I could bring one item, and this is going to sound so nerdy, because you'd want to hear that you want a sword or something crazy, you need like a water filtration system. You know, the ones you go camping with? But you could pump ocean water and make it safe enough to drink, because at the end of the day, humans can only survive like two days without water and like 20 days without food. So if we don't have clean water, which I imagine, who's going to be carrying bottles around? That stuff is going to go so quickly. I'd definitely want one of those hand pump [laughs] water filtration systems. Then also something really sharp. I imagine I would survive quite well, until, here's the problem, it would get to the point where humanity would crumble and then, ya know, if you have nothing to live for then... ehh. I'm not going to live anymore.*

**You're going to drink the dirty water. I mean, what would happen if the zombie apocalypse started while you were at Coachella?**

**[Laughs]**

*At Coachella? [Laughs] Oh my God, I would be totally screwed because I would probably be so drunk, I would stand up and I would try to dance with the infected. I would be the first to get bitten. And I would be, again, completely useless. But if I do manage to keep my wits about me, I*

*imagine, I would try to steal somebody's fifth wheeler and stock up on as much food and water and just leave humanity behind. Like don't even try to save anybody else, just pedal to the metal. Go home and try and save my pets.*

**Whoever is going with you to Coachella is in for a rude awakening. Lesson of the day: don't go with Mercedes to Coachella [laughs]. And now, you're in a unique position because in addition to having fans of your own you have inherited all of the Lexa fans from *The 100*.**

*I know, they're incredible! They're so incredible. I think because of my friendship with Alycia, she and I goof off consistently, and we're constantly together so I think that because now she's no longer on *The 100*, they've come over and gladly! I love all of them, they're literally the cutest, most adorable people, I wanna bite all their little faces. And they're so positive too, I'll get these tweets just saying 'hey, good morning. I love you, have a good day.' How sweet is that?*

**That's good! That you're getting the positive feedback and nobody is being rude to you. I did bite my tongue when you tweeted something about Jason and everyone thought it was some insider dig-**

*Oh, my. Do you and half of them just pop into my mind, so these weird sort of ideas come into my head and because some of my fans have now started calling me 'mom,' every once in awhile I'll joke around and say something very mom like, like 'don't forget to do your homework, eat your vegetables.' You know, whatever. This one girl, she's been pretty consistent, she's super sweet, she's pretty young, I think, and she tweeted me something like 'mom, I have homework to do' or 'give me advice' about something. You get a barrage of tweets and can't get to everybody, but finally I was able to respond and said something like 'hey, make sure you do your homework, brush your teeth,' I can't remember what I said. And you know, 'don't talk to Jason, that boy's trouble.' I was thinking there was a kid in high school named Jason and my mom was like 'don't hang out with that boy, nope I don't like him.' It was genuinely a random name that I picked out and the fans latched on. And here's what made it better, I was like 'guys, honestly, I had no idea that this was happening, I almost picked the name Bob.' Which was even crazier because of all the names in the world, I'm telling you it was like kismet somehow, because the irony is I really do believe in the LGBT movement. I've been a huge advocate of gay rights and it bothers me that in film and TV for some reason our gay cohorts are always the first to get killed off.*

*Ironically, I don't ever want to throw anybody under the bus, I don't know who this Jason Rothenberg is, I don't know who Bob [Morley] is, I don't know these people. So I don't ever want to throw anybody under the bus, that was not the intention. But, the movement I appreciate, I appreciate that people are standing up for the fellow gay and lesbian and trans characters and the whole movement is beautiful. And like *The Trevor Project*, that's now raise well over one hundred grand.*

**I know, that is just crazy. Alycia's reaction to that was just so genuine and heartfelt that her character's death could spark something so massive and shed light on a much bigger issue. I think something good has come out of it. Just when you tweeted that, I was like 'oh no, this poor girl has no idea what is even going on, and I hope she doesn't get hate.' [Laughs]**

*[Laughs] Yeah, I stumbled into it, and I kept seeing tweets and I was like just 'what's happening? What?' And if you're not aware of what was happening, I just felt like I was thrown in the deep end and I had no idea. As soon as I figured it out, I understood their sentiment and I absolutely appreciate that.*

**Oh, of course, you guys have a lot of fun behind the scenes. Your co- star Lorenzo Henrie called you and Alycia Debnam-Carey out and said that you break into random dancing during shooting. Do you guys have a go-to song? More importantly- is there video evidence. [Laughs]**

*There is video evidence somewhere, I will never release something without the expressed opinions and acceptance of my fellow actors. I'll post all the silly things about myself, but again, once you post something it's out there forever and I would never post anything without permission. And Alycia is a little bit more private than I am, so I absolutely respect that. So last season, our go-to song was "Worth It" by Fifth Harmony. This season it's 'work, work, work, work, work' by our very own Rhi Rhi. [Laughs] So yeah, we will break into song. I do have the emotional capacity of, I would say, a four or five year old who's on a sugar high. I can't sit still for more than a minute and I think I've roped in a few of my fellow castmates into being just as silly. We have a blast. It's so much fun when people visit our set, they're like 'you guys are literally laughing the entire time, and then you have these serious moments.'*

**Ironically enough, I must have been channeling you, because today in the office, I did a dubsplash to "Work."**

*Yes! Video proof or it didn't happen.*

**Alright, I will send it to you if you really wanna see it. [Laughs]**

*Yes, yes, yes. I really want to see it!*

**Obviously, I would kick myself if I didn't mention your weird cousin twice removed-**

*[Laughs] First of all, she's in the trunk right now because she cannot be trusted. She'll stick her head out the window like a dog because she wants fresh air. And she just keeps trying to jump out, so we had to just put her in the trunk. Oh, and here's the best part, if we ever stop at a gas*

*station, she tends to drink the gasoline calling it like Power Juice and we can't figure out where she gets this stuff so we've locked her in, put a bottle of water in the trunk, and we'll let her loose in Coachella at some point.*

**[Laughs] And I don't know whether to laugh or call the cops.**

*[Laughs] I'm going to have the police officers show up at my house like 'hi, we hear you're keeping somebody in the trunk.'*

**And they're drinking gas? What's going on? [Laughs] Where did that whacky idea stem from, were you just like one day 'I'm going to do something random, and see how it goes?**

*Here's the craziest thing... social media is such a wonderful outlet for the best of my insanity. I've sort of been like this crazy person since I was a kid, and we didn't have social media to express myself. And now, it's mostly for my own entertainment, I don't know how people latched on to 'weird cousin' but it's sort of grown into this phenomenon and of course, most of the videos I do are just to make me laugh. You can ask my husband, I laugh more at them [laughs] than most other people. So I just create them for me, and possibly my mom, who dies laughing at them as well, and somehow people latched on. And I'm so excited, not only do I have an outlet, but people aren't mocking me [laughs].*

*That's the whole idea in life, McKenzie. I just want to do stuff so I don't get mocked. That seems like a good way to go about life.*

**That's definitely a good way to go about life. And I think sometimes she's my spirit animal, also I totally approve of it. And I'm telling you, we need to make it into a web series. I am coming out to LA in July and I'm going to make this thing happen. Even if I need to produce it, it's going to happen. [Laughs]**

*Yes! Oh my God, do not tease me. I will have mockups, and storyboarding. There will be outfits. Weird cousin will be fed real food so that she has the energy to keep up with our demands.*

**[Laughs] I am super serious, so just be ready, we are making it happen.**

*Yes! Yes! I wanna do it. Honestly, I want to do it. I keep trying to tell my castmates, I know that at some point, Frank and I- our work schedules are so different, but Frank has shown interest. So I have a video I am going to do with him with weird cousin. I think at some point I'll do one with Colman as well. They're coming! It's just a matter of finding time to do them.*

**Right? Well, we are ready for them. And we're making this web series happen so start storyboarding. In other news, I sort of pride myself off of not being an ordinary interviewer, I like to throw in my signature question- about donuts. If you could**

## **build the perfect donut based on your personality, what would it be?**

*Oooh. It's going to sound disgusting, but it would be a regular donut. It has to be warm. Sort of like an outer shell of a donut, if you could scrape out the innards and then just fill it with Nutella and cake batter. It would be a heart attack waiting to happen.*

## **All the best things are.**

*Most people would have some sort of legitimate, adult answer, I'm like ohhh Nutella and fluff. Oh! Marshmallow fluff, that's what you've got to put on top.*

## **I might make this!**

*I actually tried once, and you can kind of do it. If you buy a regular donut, you cut a little snippet and you can scoop out some of the innards and squeeze in Nutella. Oh, it's so good.*

## **Now I'm hungry [laughs]. I guess to wrap up, what can we expect from Ofelia's arc this season? Will we get to see her kicking some zombie ass?**

*Yes. I think it's inevitable that she'll definitely get to kick some ass because the zombie numbers are growing. We are going to try and keep finding safe harbor, so we're going to get off the boat. And sadly, our crew will see a lot of zombies coming at us. I think as you continue to see the relationship grow and progress negatively- I can't think of the word right now because I'm heading to Coachella and that's all I can think about right now, and also you said Nutella so I'm useless. But, as her relationship with her father starts degrading you'll see that she's going to start going off to spread her wings and see what she's capable of. I think we'll see a lot of growth with her, again, once you have the burden of wanting to be the perfect daughter off your shoulders, it sort of frees you to make decisions that you would have made independently of your parents. I think that's sort of where she's at, and absolutely, she's a smart girl, she's choosing to observe right now initially, just to see who she can trust and that says a lot about the volume of her character.*

***Fear The Walking Dead* airs Sundays at 9/8c on AMC**

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