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‘Fear the Walking Dead’: Ruben Blades Previews Season Finale

Kimberly Potts
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He’s a Grammy-winning musician, an attorney with a degree in international law from Harvard, and he served as the Minister of Tourism in his beloved birth country of Panama from 2004-09. And actor Ruben Blades is also a comic book collector who took time out of his Renaissance man schedule this summer to play on a key role in *The Walking Dead* companion series, *Fear the Walking Dead*. The backstory for his Daniel Salazar, a downtown Los Angeles barber whose shop Travis Manawa took refuge in during the early apocalypse riots in episode two, had unfolded in dribs and drabs until “Cobalt,” the penultimate Season 1 entry that revealed Daniel’s shocking history of war torture... being on *both* sides of it.

Blades, 67, talked to Yahoo TV about why he signed on to play Daniel, the real world events he drew on to create the complex character, his hopes for Season 2, and a big preview of what to expect in Sunday’s Season 1 finale.

How did the role come about for you?

I received a phone call from one of the producers and writers and they asked me if I would consider being a part of it. They sent me the pilot to look at so that I would have an idea of who I would be working with and how things would be developing. It was basically an act of blind faith, because I didn’t really know much about my character. [Although] I didn’t really get a long explanation regarding my character, I did realize immediately that it would be someone, a character that I have never played before because of (the show’s) complexity. I’ve always been curious to see how things would develop in a medium like theater or television in terms of expanding the character, as opposed to film, where you just have a one-time chance to try to present

the complexities of a character on screen.

What did you think when you found out about Daniel's background and how it was going to unfold throughout the season?

It didn't surprise me. Every single work needs to have these types of twists to make it interesting. I like the idea of playing, like I said, a character I've never played before. I like the idea of trying to understand situations that I'm not physically familiar with. I am familiar with what happened El Salvador. I paid a lot of attention to what was happening there in the '70s and '80s. I could relate to that situation, those scenarios, because I knew of them. There was a lot that I could draw from to, not just play the part, but understand the backstory. It is very possible that the group that trained Daniel were the same people that trained the soldiers, because the U.S. had a tremendous involvement in El Salvador at the time. I understood Daniel could have known what the drill was because he had been trained by the same people. They use the same book. I had a lot to draw from also to explain why Daniel left [El Salvador]. I think he left at some point because ... for instance, when they killed [\[Archbishop Oscar Romero\]](#) ... I was trying to figure out why did Daniel leave, and I think he left because he couldn't take it anymore, what was going on. So, I try to play Daniel as, nothing is good, nothing is bad.

As far as Adams goes, the soldier [Daniel was interrogating in "Cobalt"], when I was working my position, what he had on was not a uniform anymore. It was more a costume, because everything has collapsed. There's no army anymore. There's no moral, there's no book, there's nothing. This is "save yourself." This is chaos. For Daniel, the most important thing was his wife. To try to help his wife and help his daughter, so he's not looking at somebody who's representing authority. He's just looking at someone in a situation where there is no authority. It's the same sort of background that I would imagine happened at some point in El Salvador, when he says that he had to do these things to survive. Basically, he had been tortured himself at one point. Then he was given the choice, which would you'd rather be, the person extracting the information or the person sitting on the chair?

You are a huge comic book collector, including *The Walking Dead* comics?

Yes.

Did that make it more exciting to be a part of *FTWD*? You are a part of creating this specific, unique part of *TWD* on TV.

I like the notion of science fiction. I did an episode of [The X-Files](#), and I worked on the film *Predator II*, and that's it. That was my connection with that type of genre. To be a part of something like this was exciting for me from that perspective. I collect comic books ... *Weird Fantasy*. I collect *Weird Science*. All those EC Comics books. I've been very interested in the genre for a long time. *The Walking Dead* is an institution, basically.

You mentioned how this is so different from a movie where you know the definitive ending from the beginning. Does that allow you more of a hand in shaping who Daniel is?

In a show like *The Walking Dead*, there is such investment in terms of the fans; there are blogs and there are talk shows and there's just all of this reaction. People really, really become involved in the show. I would imagine writers, also, are influenced by the fans. I would imagine at the end of this season of *Fear the Walking Dead*, they'll have polls like, "What character did you like?" and "What character didn't you like?" and "Who should be bitten and where and how and when?" Then AMC or the writers are going to start looking at what's being said and then they are going to start going places. For instance, there were a lot of people, I feel, that felt disappointed [in] Daniel's background, because he was becoming sort of the person that was acting for the audience as a proxy, basically, by being alert and being on top of things and whatnot. Whereas other characters, maybe, are considered not to be as sharp. Now that you know the background, will that have an effect on how people see him and judge him or like him? That in itself is going to have an influence on how the writers are going to make a decision on the future of Daniel. What I can do now, having done six episodes, and knowing more about the character, I would certainly hope that I would have more input, more opportunity to suggest situations pertaining to Daniel's character.

You said people might look at Daniel differently now. We know that's true with Ofelia. He told Adams she is the one pure thing in his life, and he was visibly heartbroken, when he was talking to Madison, about the fact that Ofelia knows

the truth now...

Now that you mention that, I thought it was very interesting and very astute in terms of the writing. When Daniel is breaking down and he asks for sympathy, basically, from Madison, Madison delivers the coldest, coldest, coldest of responses. She just asked, "Did we get the answers we needed?" She doesn't even say, "Don't worry. She's going to be fine." That was, I thought, as cold as the torture. [Madison] is a tough cookie.



Why do you think she reacted that way? We have not seen her to be an uncaring person.

No. I think she was just being practical in the sense of, she had made a tremendous investment by allowing herself to be dragged into this. Was it justified for her to have done what she did? That was very, very important, I think, for her ... was this worth it? The damning of my soul, was that worth it? "I'm not right now interested in your problem and your pain. I'm more interested in my son. Was this worth it?" At this point, she's just business. I also think she didn't want to get that close emotionally to someone that is, someone she doesn't really understand that well or trust. It's really interesting... in the next episode, there's going to be firsts.

What else can you tease about the finale? When "Cobalt" ended, Daniel had just proven that Adams was telling the truth about this auditorium full of people, and what's waiting on the other side of those doors. He's right outside them now.

He has an idea of what is inside, because one of the things that really was one of the most shocking revelations by Adams was that (the soldiers) had no time to differentiate between those infected and those who were not infected. They just corralled everyone and put them in there. We shot a lot of stuff. I remember that Daniel was horrified by what these people had done, because it also brought memories back. Like he said, "the good people are the first to die." It's not in the cut that was [aired], but [we filmed] Daniel asking if they put children in there, too, and Adams said yes. They put everybody in there, so Daniel already has an understanding of what he's going to find on the other side.

What he's doing right now is he's creating a plan to create the type of opportunity for them to do something, given the fact that Travis has been very passive at this point. Travis is changing gradually, but he's still sort of holding on to the notion that there's some order. That the army represents some form of order. Whereas Madison has already given up on that, from the moment

they took Nick. Right now, the thing is to figure out how to rescue the people [the military] has taken.

Will this be a more action-packed episode than some of the previous episodes have been?

It will, because of the fact that there's no tomorrow at this time, so they have to move, and they have to do whatever is necessary to produce the freedom, the liberation, of their loved ones and get out of Dodge.

They know what's going to happen. That's another horrible thing, that Cobalt thing. This was something that was clear when Adams explains that they put everybody in that amphitheater, the infected and the non-infected. Also by what Madison saw (outside the safe zone), that some people who had been shot were clearly not infected. All of these things point out to Daniel that they are all going to be left to die, basically. There's nothing to lose at this point. They have to get out. But he will never, ever, ever leave without his wife and his daughter. Madison will never leave without Nick. So ... there. There's going to be a lot of movement. There's going to be a lot of action.

How will Daniel repair his relationship with Ofelia now?

I'm a songwriter. I wrote once a line that says, "It's never too late to be happy." I believe that. I think there's always, not just the hope, but there's always the possibility of people growing and understanding the motivations of our dear ones. There's no perfect family, ever. The only perfect family I ever saw was *Father Knows Best* in the '50s. Every family has problems and everybody ... you don't choose your family, you choose your friends. You got to deal with what you have. When everything collapses, when everything ends, the possibility for something better arises. For Daniel, there is an opportunity for redemption. It's the ultimate Communion. It's the ultimate blessing, the fact that he can actually reinvent himself and redeem whatever he feels is something that tortures him.

You have a great new album, *Son De Panama*, that's nominated for Album of the Year at the Latin Grammys in November. You already have millions of fans of your music, and multiple Grammys and Latin Grammys, but have you gotten any sense that some new people have found your music since seeing you on *Fear the Walking Dead*?

That's very interesting ... I have no idea. I really don't, because I don't really follow stuff like that. I put the album out, and I hope for the best. I do the best I can. And I don't have a staff. I don't have a manager. I don't have assistants. I do know one thing: the show is broadcast in more than 90 countries, and that is a mountain of people that are watching the show, and maybe will be surprised to know that I pretend to sing. Maybe, just maybe, someone will be interested in listening to what we're doing. Especially now in the Kardashian-filled times that we live in, the more people that know who you are, the more power that seems to have in terms of attention towards whatever it is that you do. Whether it is worthwhile or not. So we'll see. I'm excited to see if that all happens. Maybe instead of selling 10 albums, I'll sell 12.

If people are diving into your music for the first time, which one song on the new album would you point them towards?

Some of them are more complex than others, but I would say "Eyes of a Blue Dog," or "Ojos de Perro Azul," which is something that I did based on the [Gabriel Garcia Marquez short story](#). Also, there's another song called "Cain" ... those two songs are good.

The Fear the Walking Dead Season 1 finale airs Oct. 4 at 9 p.m. on AMC