

The Walking Dead Q&A: T-Dog on Survival and Whether We'll Ever See Him Again



By [Jen Trolio](#) Mar 11, 2012



We haven't seen much of *The Walking Dead's* [IronE Singleton](#) lately, given that Singleton's character, T-Dog, hasn't had much to do since recovering from that nasty wound he suffered in the Season 2 premiere. But I recently caught up with the actor, who you may also remember as Alton from *The Blind Side*, for what turned out to be an incredibly cheerful chat—seriously, the dude is so nice!—about survival, working with new *Walking Dead* showrunner Glen Mazzara, and whether we'll ever see T-Dog again. Here's what he had to say.

You're originally from Atlanta. What's it like to see your hometown through the eyes of a zombie apocalypse?

The word I use all the time is "surreal." The story I tell, me and [Laurie Holden](#), who plays Andrea on the show, we were shooting Season 1 at [the quarry](#), which is only about three minutes away from where I grew up. So we had to drive through the area where I grew up—not the neighborhood, because those buildings, that project, has been torn down—but driving through there, I just got kind of nostalgic, just thinking about all my experiences, where I was ducking and dodging bullets, leaving a party and trying to avoid a fight, or looking at somebody get shot, and it's like, "Now here I am, making a big-time Hollywood production," the contrast was so great, it moved me almost to tears.

Your personal backstory of growing up in the projects and losing your mother to HIV/AIDS definitely features "survival" as a theme. How does that parallel your experience on the show? Since T-Dog isn't a character from the comics, how much backstory have you given him without having a page to work off of?

I've given T-Dog my backstory. Like I do with most of my characters, I say, "How far back can I go with this character that I'm playing now, and how far into my life can I bring that character?" For one, it gives you less work to do, there isn't as much homework where you have to say, "What's his favorite color? What kind of ice cream does he like?" You have to do all of that stuff, and it takes a lot more time, especially if you're constantly working and playing different characters. So I say okay, what has my life been like? And basically, T-Dog's life's been like my life up through college, and then after college, T-Dog branches off and he goes and gets a job. He could be a blue collar or white collar worker, he didn't go down my path, the path of acting, but he just became an average guy, an everyman, going to work every day before the apocalypse hit. So that's how I play the character.

What kind of ice cream *does* T-Dog like?

T-Dog likes cookies n' cream. And then sometimes butter pecan. But it also depends on what kind of cake he's eating. You gotta have cake with your ice cream.

There's an old horror-movie trope that "the black guy always gets killed first." Are you surprised T-Dog has made it this far?

You know, a lot of black people, on Facebook and Twitter, they would contact me, I've had a few white people, Hispanics too, they say, "Wow, you're surviving? Normally the black guy's the first to go!" And I'm like, "Hey, you know, that's how God operates. You can't stop God's will. There may be detours here and there, but eventually, and inevitably, you can't help but get back on God's path." So it's a good thing to still be alive! Right now—we haven't seen the whole second half of the season yet, so I can't make any promises.

Speaking of the black guy getting killed first, as soon as we met T-Dog, all the way back in "Guts," Merle called him the N-word and beat him up on the roof of the department store. What kind of challenges did T-Dog, and you as an actor, face in that scene?

I think it was more challenging for T-Dog than it would be for me. I would've handcuffed him without hesitating, and because I'm a firm believer in karma, because I say that what goes around comes around, my thinking is like this: Say if I don't un-cuff Merle, I could possibly go downstairs inside the department store and get eaten by those zombies, just because I chose not to do something that my conscience told me to do. You don't leave a guy—I don't care how bad he beat you. That's on his karma. He has to deal with that. But for me it's like two wrongs don't make a right. I don't need the torture in my life of living with that.

We haven't seen much of T-Dog lately. Where's he been? What's next for him? [Ed. note: This interview took place *before* last week's shocking episode.]

I had a conversation with Glen Mazarra, our showrunner, we had a long chat in his office, and he basically apologized for not expounding on T-Dog's character, but I explained to him, I'm just happy to a part of this show. I mean, this is the biggest show in basic cable history! This show's *The Walking Dead*, based on the comic book *The Walking Dead* and all the characters from the comic book. I'm the only one who's not in the comic, and I understand that—you got to develop those characters first. There's a following for those characters. So Glen says we're gonna work our way through T-Dog—if T-Dog survives, of course—we'll find out more about his background, where he comes from, if he has a family, that type of stuff. He's on a spiritual journey, trying to figure out if he can make it through this post-apocalyptic world with his humanity intact. We'll see if that happens.

Last summer *The Walking Dead* went through a very well publicized showrunner shakeup; how did that affect the atmosphere on the set?

It didn't affect it much. You know, everyone dealt with it in their own personal way. We felt the energy, the energy was transferred a bit, but as far as talking about it, there wasn't much talk about it. They called us in to a meeting, the cast, and everybody came down, president and vice president of AMC, and [then-new showrunner] Glen, and just kinda put it out there, exactly what was going on, and after that, it was just business as usual: We have to put out a quality product, do our very best for our fans, continue to do work that they enjoy. So that was our focus. That's what we do, that's our job. So our job is not to get caught up in that situation.

How do think Glen is doing so far?

Glen's awesome. He's great. I love his energy, and just like, see Glen was Frank's righthand man, so when Frank moved out Glenn just moved right in—it was a natural progression, so to speak. He understood the rhythm of the show, he understood all the ins and outs of the show, so he just played it quite smoothly.

Let's talk about zombies for a second. How many has T-Dog killed? Does he have a favorite method?

T-Dog has the most kills, I think it stands at about 18,000. [laughs] You don't see the part before the Season 1 premiere—assuming we're counting off-screening kills? On-screen, maybe about two. Favorite method would be, I like the hammer, or something that can bash the head in instantly without getting too close. 'Cause I don't wanna call the other zombies. If I had a silencer I'd do a gun all day.

Should T-Dog's death someday come, would you rather see him get bitten and turn, or die without turning?

We gotta go with the latter on that. T-Dog does not want to turn, T-Dog just wants to go out kind of heroically, I don't think T-Dog wants to be a zombie. Uh-uh. T-Dog is gonna just keep on fighting until he goes down.

The Walking Dead airs Sundays at 9pm on AMC.