

Joel Edgerton of *The Great Gatsby*



Best known stateside as the kindly father figure to young Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* prequels, Australian actor Joel Edgerton is set to make a bigger impression as blue-blooded bully Tom Buchanan in director Baz Luhrmann's adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. (See Film for our review.) Edgerton shares his insights into Tom's M.O., plus his own old-timey fascinations.

How did you approach playing this character?

I had to be careful not to look forward to it too much, because someone was finally allowing me to take a break from playing nice guys and really relish something a lot more interesting. Tom's an enjoyable character because he doesn't really care. I love that he's a sportsman and he engages in a battle of possession of his own wife, like it's a game.

It's easy to write him off as ruthless, but there are scenes in which you see his facade break—like when he thinks he's going to lose his wife, Daisy, and when he sees his mistress Myrtle's body.

Sometimes I think being an actor is like being a dog for a director; it's like they throw a stick, and you want to fetch it and bring it

back to them. You want a pat on the head for it. I wanted to give [Luhrmann] options, so we'd have conversations about what Tom actually feels. On one hand, you can interpret that Tom loves Myrtle. But I also think Tom is upset for himself when he doesn't have her. And he gets upset for himself when he thinks that Daisy doesn't love him. It's pretty much a selfish response.

In some ways, you could root that conflict and self-pity in insecurity. He comes from a wealthy background and has a beautiful wife, so what do you think makes him so insecure?

I have this theory that alpha males are actually *not* alpha males. They're actually very scared—particularly scared of competition from a lot of men. Deep down they are scared shitless of the challenge. To think that being a leader of a pack is without anxiety is quite naive, and I think that Tom has been handed that mantle of prominence.

The green light is a huge symbol in the story. One interpretation is that it's

something that's always out of reach. Is there something in your own life that represents a green light?

For Tom, I think the green light really is contentment and satisfaction. When you're constantly involved in domination, what you're really looking for is constant highs. And when he gets bored, things happen: He has affairs, causes damage and then moves on. I think I'm searching for just stillness and contentment too. Maybe that's why I think Tom looks for that—because I'm looking for it.

You also want to work on projects from the other side of the camera. If you were going to direct a period piece, what would you want to do?

I often put any project I write in a different decade just to roll the thought around in my head. There's a thriller I've written that I think would be nice to set in the '70s or '80s, just to take cell phones away from the movie. There's nothing like the piercing ring of an old-school telephone to really scare an audience.

—Sarah Bruning



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