

**K**it Harington's hair is tied back and damp. This is almost news as Harington – who plays Jon Snow, the hero-in-waiting on HBO's brilliant, ruthless, fantasy serial *Game Of Thrones* – has important hair: a curly, mid-length INXS wet look, as required by his role. On this overcast Venice Beach afternoon in Los Angeles, Harington is fresh from having a dip in the Pacific Ocean with photographer Terry Richardson. "I was more than up for it," the 26-year-old Londoner says. "I love going into the sea. I do it in England where it's three times as cold. I've got a horrible habit of skinny-dipping when I'm slightly drunk." He is reserved with a quiet, wild streak and about to fully inherit the spotlight of a premium cable phenomenon, as required by his role.

*Game Of Thrones* is the award-winning adaptation of *A Song Of Ice And Fire*, the yet-to-be-completed *New York Times* best-selling series by writer George RR Martin, who's known for his thick braces, Greek fisherman's cap and Napoleon Dynamite eyewear. Premiering its third series on 1 April, *Thrones* is infectious the way cable programming must be. It is an elaborately plotted, partially naked, remarkably elegant, quasi-medieval epic chronicling the battles and decadent politicking for the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms Of Westeros – a prickly seat made of a thousand surrendered swords, now available from the HBO store for \$30,000. After a year as runner-up, *Game Of Thrones* has the distinction of being the No.1 most stolen television show of 2012, with 4.28 million illegal downloads, 80 percent from outside America.

Martin's inventions, as expressed by series co-creators David Benioff and DB Weiss, are attention-catching. They include a cunning gay eunuch; an oddly touching ceremonial heart-eating; giant mystical "direwolves" with names like Grey Wind, Nymeria and Ghost; an androgynous giantess warrior named Brienne of Tarth; a gadget called a "moon door", which is like a moon roof but set in the ground in front of your throne; and Tyrion Lannister, the diminutive royal "imp" masterfully played by Peter Dinklage. There is "twincest", when twins make on-camera doggy love, and "sexposition", when a fully clothed brothel owner delivers a heady monologue while naked whores pleasure each other. There is no term yet for tender body hair shaving between a lank-haired master swordsman and a bearded royal cub.

The fashion angle is cloaks: pristine regal cloaks; cloaks bitten by the fierce winter winds of the Frostfang Mountains; and cloaks such as the one worn under the skeletal 'rattleshirt' armour of the Lord Of Bones – a "wildling" warrior leader and style outlier worthy of any fashion collaboration. Perhaps Dover Street Market will heart the Lord Of Bones?

"You wouldn't be able to turn something like *Thrones* into a film, it's too big. It has to be TV," Harington says of the fantastic sprawl, lavishly shot on location in Northern Ireland, Malta, Iceland and Croatia with the largest cast in television. "It's a very exciting medium – high-budget TV – and *Thrones* is great to be involved with because it has the highest budget." For the evolved television viewer

## Watch the throne

***Kit Harington: Game of Thrones' handsome, hard, hero***



TV · Kit Harington

seeking grander emotional payoffs, the ideal catharsis now comes from investing not only time but effort. *Thrones* is notoriously demanding, requiring unwavering diligence to keep up with its criss-crossing storylines and lineages. It owes *Lost* for the audience's new tolerance – and desire – for unwieldy continuity. “You really can't dip in and out of this show. You invest a bit of your life,” Harington says. “I wasn't a fan of fantasy, I wasn't a fan of knowing the different houses. I bought into it. And if I bought into it, lots of other people will.”

*Game Of Thrones* has been good to Harington, who is visiting Los Angeles for post-production work on *The Seventh Son*, the second feature of his young career, in which he plays an 18th-century demon hunter apprentice alongside Jeff Bridges and Julianne Moore. While in town, he will also record a part for the *How To Train Your Dragon* sequel. He is signed to star as a slave-turned-gladiator in director Paul WS Anderson's period disaster movie *Pompeii* and is generally well-suited to fashion editorial, which is not his fault. Harington is taking his place alongside Robert Pattinson, Andrew Garfield and Alden Ehrenreich as one of Hollywood's leading black skinny-jeaned outsider heroes.

Christopher Catesby “Kit” Harington grew up in Worcester in a close-knit family with a trail of hereditary titles. “There are some brilliant bits,” he

begins, before politely pulling back. “I could bore you silly with it, but I'm not going to.” He easily admits to being something of a naughty teen. “I think I got 50 detentions one year. I was a rebellious little s\*\*\*, one of those annoying little teenagers who fights against any authority,” he explains and laughs. “I wasn't too bad. I didn't get expelled. I drifted between groups and found that I was just a drama student who liked dressing in black.”

A resolution to become an actor transformed Harington's life, beginning with admission to London's Central School of Speech and Drama. “I was pretty ferocious about applying for drama school,” he says. “And because I got into this good drama school, it was like, ‘I'm privileged to be here so I'm going to work my f\*\*\*ing ass off.’ You quickly find that you have no choice but to be disciplined.” Harington was 22 when he took the starring role of Albert Narracott in the acclaimed play *War Horse* at London's National Theatre and then at the New London Theatre in the West End. “I went into the dream role on the Olivier stage as a theatre school graduate, which is unheard of. It was one of the best years of my life,” he says. “Exhausting.” He then went right to work on *Game Of Thrones*.

“Theatre is a huge love for me and that's where I want to return to as often as I can, but I love TV. Some of my favourite things out there are TV projects,” he says. “I remember I had a black eye on my first *Thrones* audition – I don't know why, maybe I got into a fight or something, I can't remember. But I remember loving it, learning ►

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► it, doing it and knowing I had done a good job. And then I had two or three more auditions. And all through it I was like, 'I don't know, some auditions you walk in and you f\*\*\* it up.' You know it was never yours from the start. But other parts, like this one, I went, 'I know I'm right for that. I know I'm that person.'"

Like his character in *Game Of Thrones*, Jon Snow, Harington can brood competently. "I sometimes go through different stages when I become darker and more introverted," he says. "Snow laughs less, but then he has less reason to." Snow is literally a b\*\*\*\*\* – something strangers are quite comfortable reminding Harington of in public spaces. "It happens every now and again, but I'm used to it now," he says. "It's an odd label to have but it's quite an interesting part of who he is." As far as we know, Snow is the son of Eddard Stark, head of House Stark, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North – played with weathered nobility by Sean Bean – and a mother whose identity has yet to be revealed. "Snow could be nobody or he could be meant for greater things. I'd love to know," Harington says about a character so well-intentioned that he once chose to remain a virgin rather than risk bringing another b\*\*\*\*\* into the world. "He's done bad things, but he is not out for himself. This show is all about the want for power and he's one of the few people who is not looking for it. He may end up having power thrust upon him, but he's not doing over people to get it."

Snow's story begins when he joins the Night's Watch, a military order of last-chance outcasts who commit their lives to defending a 300 mile-long ice wall called The Wall; the structure separates the Seven Kingdoms of the south from the mysterious

constantly hearing that this guy's got something. This guy's going to be something," Harington says.

While the first series translated its source material to the screen more or less word for word, the second series kept fans of the books on their toes. "There's always controversy, but George oversees everything and has to give his green light," Harington says of Martin, who is on board as an executive producer and even wrote "Blackwater", the pivotal lead-up episode to the series-two finale. Snow's arc received a consequential adjustment when he became much more culpable for crucial deaths in the series than in print. "That was a big change and some people were upset. But I think it's playing the long game with what he has to do. You don't know who he really is. You don't know whether he's going to stay true to the Night's Watch or side with the wildlings. And I don't know if he does, either. And that's the third series."

According to details that have leaked for months, the third series of *Game Of Thrones* promises to be enormous. Its ten episodes will cover the first half of the lengthy *A Storm Of Swords* book – which is the third novel in the series – with the second half to follow in the next series. The episodes will be super-sized, with several extra minutes added to each to total almost a full additional show. More than a dozen new characters will be introduced, including fan favourites Mance Rayder, known as the "King Beyond The Wall," young Stark loyalists Jojen and Meera Reed,

## 'You wouldn't be able to turn something like Thrones

dark forces of the Far North that have lurked at the edges of the series since its first moments. As it turns out, *Thrones* is infected with zombies, a clever genre mash-up that Harington refers to as "horror fantasy". So while the southern states continue their bickering, Snow is on the front-lines as an undead army – led by ancient, unpretty "white walkers" – amasses to kill and unkill them all.

There are also dragons, it should be noted, as no discussion of *Game Of Thrones* should go without mention of Snow's analogue in the Far South, Daenerys Targaryen – the Queen Of Dragons – played by Emilia Clarke. A young princess who manifests great personal and political power after being traded by her brother to a smoky-eyed Dothraki warlord with a professional wrestler's build (played by the actor Jason Momoa, who is partnered in real life to Lisa Bonet), Daenerys looks like an airbrushed painting on the side of a hesh's van – no more so than when she emerges from a funeral pyre dressed in only newborn baby dragons.

Snow is obviously crucial to *Game Of Thrones* while actually doing quite little so far. "If you did a line count for me I'd probably have the least because I just go, 'No. Yes. Maybe.' Brood," Harington says. "It's that Steve McQueen thing and I love that about him, that he doesn't speak unless necessary." At first glance, his characterisation of Snow might seem like just a greyscale Legolas, but the deliberate slow-burn performance begins to flare with the second-series introduction of Ygritte, a wildling woman and fan favourite played by Rose Leslie of *Downton Abbey*. "Even from the first episode, there's something different about Jon Snow. And whether it's people telling him there's something different or his father saying, 'I'll tell you who you are,' or all of these different commanders, these paternal patriarchal figures who look at him and say, 'That guy's got talent,' you're

and the Queen Of Thorns, to be played by Diana Rigg, plus cameos from Coldplay drummer Will Champion and Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody. A series of HBO-approved craft beers will launch on the day of the premiere, starting with "Iron Throne Blonde Ale" inspired by the show's terrifying golden-haired boy king Joffrey Baratheon.

But why is *Thrones* exploding like green wildfire and not *Rome*, *The Tudors*, *The Borgias* or any of the other cable dramas that came before it? It helps that the talented cast is so dignified that even the most vile characters demand respect, like Cersei Lannister, a queen colder than a cold Portia de Rossi. And yet, for a show with so much routine cruelty, *Game Of Thrones* is curiously, deeply optimistic. At its core is the simple promise of a return to magic. "Something in this world has stirred or changed that's not been seen for thousands of years but has always been – like myth or fantasy in our world," Harington says. "It's the idea that it actually, finally comes back and that it was all truth. I love that you see the characters within the show come to terms with their world turning into a mythical world. The big thing in series three is that those elements get even more prominent. It started in a normal fantasy world, there's not much magic there, and slowly you get direwolves and white walkers and then the dragons are hatched and before you know it, you've invested in a show with a whole load of magic in it."

While waiting to discover the next unknown, a deeply human adventure in a still-habitable world is welcome, particularly a story built on personal promise and hope. "What boy doesn't secretly wish for hidden powers to lift him out of his dull life and into a special one," says Harington, with more authority than most. **Q&A**

*Series three of Game Of Thrones airs on Sky Atlantic on 1 April.*





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