



Full look ALIAS COSTUME RENTAL

# ELIAS KACAVAS

It's 11 AM. Elias Kacavas is sitting in front of a computer screen in his New York apartment bedroom where he lives with three roommates and his dog Winnie, who popped in later to say hello. The spring sunlight of Manhattan glints through the window and in this quiet moment, it's easy to forget that Kacavas is coming off the back of *Euphoria* - one of HBO's most successful shows that hooked the eyes of 16 million viewers this year, forming an intense part of culture and conversations both on and offline. Team Cassie or team Maddy?

In his TV debut, Elias Kacavas plays a high school aged Cal Jacobs, the show's threatening father figure (played by screen veteran Eric Dane) best known for leading a double life of perfect families and secret sex tapes. To get young Cal right, Kacavas made sure to study. "The first step was to watch everything [Dane] did in season one, to see what kind of alpha male he is. Even down to how he walks." He continues, "after I got my notes, I brought my own emotions to the character. I tried to bring a sense of that vulnerability, sensibility and that internal conflict to my scenes."

To act wasn't always the plan for Kacavas, either. His studious streak comes from his time at Manchester Central High School, New Hampshire. "Oh, I'm glad we get to clear this up," he jokes. "Because some article out there said I went to West. I did not go to West High School. I went to Manchester Central. Bleed green baby!" Looking to make some "extra bucks," Kacavas started auditioning for small roles, eventually scoring a commercial alongside Mark Wahlberg. "And then I got into American University for pre-med but fell out with the idea of doing organic chemistry. I have always had a passion for acting. The seed started because I would always do accents and impressions for my parents." Little did he know back then, life would come full circle when *Euphoria* director, Sam Levinson, would ask him to show Zendaya those impressions on set. "So yeah, I opted out of college, took a gap year, and once I was in New York, I sort of found my way." Kacavas eventually settled into the acting programme at NYU, where he would film two to three times a week.

Full disclosure, Kacavas gets around 15 minutes of screentime in *Euphoria*. But no one can deny the screentime packs a punch. Young Cal's storyline follows a typical high school heartthrob and star wrestler. Cal's got the talent. He's got the girl, the best friend. Except it turns out he's in love with his best friend? Then his girlfriend gets pregnant. It's a heartbreaking whirlwind of an opening sequence. And in such a short space of time, Kacavas manages to channel an impressive range of emotions. The budding on-screen romance between young Cal and his best friend Derek (Henry Eikenberry) echoes the real-life bromance forged between the actors last year. With COVID restrictions on high, Kacavas admits LA would have been "extremely lonely" without Eikenberry. In a real-life meet-cute, Kacavas remembers spotting a "kid with this great head of hair" while waiting for a COVID test in Warner Studios. "I'm like 'Are you working on Euphoria by any chance?' and he goes 'Yeah, I play some sort of guest star role.' And I'm like, 'Me too! Are you playing Derek?' And he goes 'Yeah... Are you the kid I kiss?'" The rest was history.

On-screen, Cal and Derek get up to the sort of shenanigans high school kids are known for: partying, skinny-dipping, girl talk. Kacavas confesses his time as a senior wasn't as wild: "I was an athlete; I was in a bunch of clubs after school." It makes sense, then, that Kacavas performed his wrestling stunts in the show. Over a gruelling seven-hour day with an Olympic wrestler for a trainer, Kacavas just kept pushing. "I seriously

must have burned like 4000 calories that day." That nose bleed you see on-screen, by the way? Real. Kacavas explains Cal and Derek's relationship is a "complicated love story," climaxing in a beautiful, lovelorn dance scene illuminated softly by a disco ball. In the background, a jukebox blasts the right-person-wrong-time anthem: 'Never Tear Us Apart' by INXS. "It's a defining period of exclamation to the story," Kacavas comments, adding that their chemistry-fuelled dancing was entirely improvised.

At NYU, Kacavas used his relationship with a friend to shape his *Euphoria* role. "It took him a while to come out because he was so worried about what everyone would think," he reflects. "He came out recently, and his life's been so much better. Our friendship has even deepened because there's no longer a secret between us, you know?" If there's a moral to take from young Cal's story, it's to "be true to yourself." Kacavas adds that "if the people around you love you, they'll love you no matter what. You should never be afraid to live who you are."

It's no secret that *Euphoria* is infamous for its sex scenes. Starring alongside Rebecca Louise, who plays his on-screen girlfriend and eventual wife, the actor can't help but let out a laugh as he recalls a particularly graphic oral sex scene, "she's practically sitting on my face. It's a lot!" Thanks to the show's intimacy coordinator (Mam Smith), Louise and Kacavas formed a trusting relationship - so the sex scenes were nothing to worry about. Instead, Kacavas discovered the pressure was on when the cameras rolled for that phone call. That life-changing phone call where your high school girlfriend tells you she's pregnant. "We did, I want to say, ten takes, which took maybe 45 minutes to an hour. I was just in a dark, sad place, pulling this parallel from my life that would match Cal's. It was very nerve-wracking," he admits. "But we did it. Sam [Levinson] made me feel comfortable and pulled a great performance out of me."

Giving some humanity to one of *Euphoria*'s most disliked characters is no small feat, and Kacavas knows it. Before shooting, Kacavas dissected his character with one of his teachers. "She pointed out that I was fortunate enough to play the likeable version of Cal," he explains. "You don't have to play him when he's all screwed up." But what he cites as one of the best nights of his life occurred when he was invited to watch Eric Dane perform on set. He was brought across to find Dane already waiting for him. "He just gets up and in his deep, bellowing voice goes: 'Is that Young Cal right there?'" - there's that knock for impressions - "And I'm like 'Yes sir' and I get to shake his hand. He tells me how good he thinks my work is. And you know, the pitfalls of LA in the business," it's hard not to smile with Kacavas as he remembers this amazing moment. "I called my mom as soon as it was over. It was like two in the morning at that point." He grins, "I was sky-high. I was on cloud nine after talking to Eric."

It looks like Kacavas might stay on cloud nine for a little longer too. His next project is HBO's eagerly anticipated *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* (premiering Summer 2022), where he plays Greg, a character who's worlds away from young Cal, "the only similarity they share is a letterman jacket." Without giving too much away, Kacavas has enjoyed playing a character that's a bit more light-hearted. "I'd love to get back into some pretty serious drama," he adds, "you know, really flex the acting muscles."



LEFT: Full look TOM FORD. THIS PAGE: T-shirt TARDIO VINTAGE; Trainers DIESEL; Underwear THE PRODUCT. Grooming by MELISSA DEZARATE at KALPANA; Photo assistant MAX TARDIO; Video/Photo Assistant WILSON MACIATO; Fashion assistants JOSH MOOIWEER, KELSEY LOGAN, HEATHER BLAIR