

# FABIEN

WORDS BY CHLOE HARVEY

*Self-confessed Game of Thrones fan, Fabien Frankel joins the mythical heights of Westeros, embracing the fast-paced energy of life on set.*

"I'm screenshooting us," Fabien Frankel smiles as he prepares to send the said screenshot of our call to a mutual friend (I was surprised too). "I've been so disorganised," he continues, "I just got into San Diego yesterday. There's so much going on." The "on" in question was, of course, the whirlwind of premiere and panels that come with starring in the anticipatedly awaited *Game of Thrones* sequel: HBO's *House of the Dragon*. But between our unexpected mutual acquaintances and attempting to pass the hotel artwork behind him off as his own, it's obvious that the actor has a far sunnier disposition than Ser Criston Cole, the dark and brooding knight he plays on screen.

Premiering this August, with billboards and fanfare littered across the globe, *House of the Dragon* hit our screens to rave reviews, promising to launch many cast members – including Fabien Frankel – into stardom. Before the chainmail and sword-brandishing, the London-born actor was best known for his debut in BBC's *The Serpent* and appearing alongside *Game of Thrones* superstar, Emilia Clarke, in *Last Christmas*. Speaking with a clear passion for his craft – not to mention his family – Frankel discusses set life and, somewhat surprisingly, *Love Island* as the world returns to Westeros once more.

**CHLOE HARVEY** Was acting in your sights from an early age?

**FABIEN FRANKEL** I think it's one of those things where you don't really think of it as a profession. But then I started taking it more seriously and it became 'oh, maybe I could actually make a living off this.'

**CH** Was it an instinct for you, like playing make-believe as a kid?

**FF** There's definitely a bit of that. Yeah! You're always trying to be like James Bond, Batman, or Spider-Man. When you realise you can't be the actual versions of those characters, you realise the next best thing is "I'll be an actor and I can pretend."

**CH** Other than Spider-Man and James Bond, were there any real actors that you looked up to?

**FF** Not when I was a kid, but loads now. Where to even start? I was obsessed with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Modern actors...I guess I love Willem Dafoe. Michael Fassbender and Florence Pugh are also amazing. My list is endless.

**CH** Great to hear Elizabeth Taylor made the list.

**FF** People always ask me what's the best performance I've seen on the screen. I'd say Taylor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is my favourite, maybe ever. I remember hearing an interview with Ed Norton and he said that when the scenes finished, he was amazed the set was still standing. She had that power.

**CH** Moving to your performances, what was the first that made you stand back and think 'wow, I actually might have something here?'

**FF** Oh god...I still don't know if I've done a performance that has given me that feeling. I did a play called *The Three Sisters* at drama school and remember loving it. I found Shakespeare and classical theatre alienating. I often didn't understand them. I felt like the kids who'd been to uni got it better than I did. Whereas when I did *The Three Sisters*, I completely got it.

**CH** *House of the Dragon* has certainly created a buzz. Were you part of the original *Game of Thrones* hype?

**FF** Oh, I was all about it. I was big into the hype during those last two seasons. It felt like you were a part of something. I'm not sure how to explain it...it's a bit like *Love*

*Island*. Y'know how you'd hear your mates chat about *Love Island*? Even though I've only watched one season I remember being like 'I'm so invested in these people's lives.' I was so invested in Chris and Kem's lives. It was like they were my friends. I'd be like 'can't believe that she would do that to Chris.' So it's a bit like that. Gives you something to talk about, y'know?

**CH** Both shows are renowned for having some insane twists as well.

**FF** I quite like that we've come up with a comparison between *Love Island* and *Game of Thrones*. I'm gonna push that boat out for a while.

**CH** Did being a fan add any pressure to your performance in *House of the Dragon*?

**FF** Definitely. You want to make the fans happy. I think *Game of Thrones* did an amazing job at that, just consistently delivering. Following up with a sequel or prequel to something so well established, you feel going into it, 'how are we going to live up to the expectation that this show initially delivered?'

**CH** Can you tell us a bit more about your character, Ser Criston Cole, and how you feel about him?

**FF** Ser Criston Cole is a knight from a lowborn house who somehow becomes part of the very complex Targaryen world. And I feel about him... I mean, I love him.

**CH** You love him? That's good to know.

**FF** Quite a controversial thing to say. Anyway, whatever. I'll stick to it.

**CH** Your character also has skill with a sword. I'm guessing that came with a lot of training?

**FF** Yeah, loads. I worked with some amazing choreographers – the best in the game. And a guy called Rowley, who was the head of stunts on the original *Game of Thrones*. His team teaches you to use every weapon you'll come across in the show.

**CH** That sounds intense.

**FF** I loved it. It was intense in a good way. It was like 'I'm being faced with a sword with spikes on it and if it hits me in the wrong place, I'm going to be in a tremendous amount of pain,' rather than being like 'oh shit, I don't want to do this.'

**CH** What draws you to a script?

**FF** It's just the way that it's written. A bad script is evident quite often – it doesn't take a lot of reading to realise a script is bad. A good script – you can't stop. It's kind of one of them, y'know?

**CH** When you know, you know?

**FF** When you know, you know. It's like a good date. When it's a good date you and you're like 'I'm definitely gonna go if she'd go on another date with me,' that's what it's like. I can't not read this next page.

**CH** How do you wind down after a tough day on set?

**FF** A gin and tonic or a nice glass of wine. I'll watch something. We were watching *Succession* while we were filming, and everyone would be like 'have you seen the new episode?' Mate, gin and tonic and *Succession*. That'll do it.

**CH** When are you at your happiest?

**FF** Gin and tonic and *Succession*? No, no, no. When I'm with my mates and my family.

**CH** What's been a highlight of your career so far?

**FF** Obviously [*House of the Dragon*] is up there. My first ever job was amazing. It was a pilot called *NYPD Blue*. It never ended up getting picked up to series, but I got to train with the NYPD in New York. Ride alongs, learning how to arrest people and interviewing undercover cops. That whole experience was surreal.

**CH** Between the sword-fighting and police training you sound like an actor who likes to get stuck in.

**FF** You would think I would have cut out some actual skills, but I can tell you now, I've completely forgotten how to arrest someone.

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# FRANKEL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLIE GRAY

FASHION BY ADELE CANY



ABOVE:  
FULL LOOK - ALEXANDER McQUEEN

PRODUCTION Charlie Gray POST-PRODUCTION by Mammoth Retouch GROOMER Mark Francome Painter

LEFT:  
FULL LOOK - MOSCHINO