

# MAN OF ACTION

CLIVE STANDEN DISCUSSES PERFECTION, FATHERHOOD AND MODERN MASCULINITY

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“I’VE ALWAYS BEEN THAT PERSON WHERE YOU GIVE ME AN INCENTIVE AND I SUDDENLY GET TUNNEL VISION, AND I RIDE TOWARD THAT GOAL.”  
- CLIVE STANDEN

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“I DIDN’T  
WANT TO BE A  
HISTORIAN; I  
WANTED TO BE  
AN ACTOR.”  
- CLIVE  
STANDEN

ON THE SURFACE, CLIVE STANDEN IS WHAT YOU’D PICTURE AS THE DEFINITION OF MANLINESS. HE’S PLAYED WARRIORS, IS AN ATHLETIC CHAMPION AND DOES HIS OWN STUNTS. GET TO KNOW HIM A LITTLE BETTER AND YOU’LL FIND THAT BEYOND THE BICEPS AND THE BEARD IS A CARING FATHER OF THREE, AN AMBASSADOR FOR MARINE LIFE AND SOMEONE WHO LOVES SINGING ALONG TO MUMFORD & SONS.

IN OTHER WORDS, STANDEN REPRESENTS LESS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A “MAN’S MAN” AND MORE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN OF THE MODERN AGE.

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“THERE’S NOTHING  
WRONG WITH A  
MAN WHO CRIES  
AND EXPRESSES  
EMOTION.”  
- CLIVE STANDEN

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Already very active with Muay Thai boxing and professional stunt training, Standen’s acting career began in his teens, which was around the time his mother had decided to go back to school so she could teach drama therapy to children with Down Syndrome. “I was 16 and very impressionable...and I really looked up to my mum and all the [21-year-old drama students] she was working with,” he says before cracking a smile. “At the same time, there was also a girl I really liked...and that’s where it started.”

With the support of a mother and teachers who believed in him, Standen decided to take the idea of acting professionally more seriously. “I’ve always been that person where you give me an incentive and I suddenly get tunnel vision, and I ride toward that goal,” he explains.

From there, he decided to take classes to further his education on the subject but was disappointed by the amount of armchair knowledge the courses required. “I couldn’t just do theater, which was frustrating to me at the age of 16. I was like, ‘Why isn’t there a course that is practical to being an actor?’” Standen recalls. “A lot of the courses were all theory...and I had already read all the books that were on the syllabus. So I did a year of theater studies and [then] dropped out—I didn’t want to be a historian, I wanted to be an actor.”

Standen found his place in performing arts courses, which not only allowed him to practice his craft, but it also let him explore the more physical side to performing, and this is where he was able to tie in his knack for athletic training. “It all came in handy for the stunts I do now!” he says. “I’m a little insane and crazy and a bit of a lunatic when it comes to stunts.”

Needless to say, the combination of his acting and physical training fared well for him in his career. Best known for his role as Rollo in “Vikings” and Bryan Mills in the “Taken” TV series, Standen’s acting career has taken him around the world, through ancient and modern times alike. When he wasn’t sword fighting in Camelot or throwing axes in Kattegat, he was pulling off a heist in Rhode Island or getting hit by a car (then stealing said car). “It’s simply not true that you just walk into jobs,” Standen explains. “Usually you get cast for what your strength is. I’m a very physical actor; I have a very physical presence, and I got into acting to play numerous different characters—and characters that were far removed from myself.”

“I don’t actually like playing onto type,” he continues. “But usually, that one audition you get right at the beginning of your career is the one where people go, ‘I can just see him playing that role!’ I think I was thrown into the historical epics, the dramas that are more physical, and now I can branch out.”

His roles have all been very different characters to play, but there is something Standen loves about each of them: they are flawed. “I don’t think anyone’s perfect,” he says. “There’s something I hold on to and think about quite a lot: in Chuck Palahniuk’s ‘Fight Club’ (the book), the first time the main character sees Tyler Durden is on the beach, and he’s getting driftwood and shoving it in the sand...” The passage Standen’s referring to continues:

“What Tyler had created was the shadow of a giant hand. Only now the fingers were Nosferatu-long and the thumb was too short, but he said how at exactly four-thirty the hand was perfect. The giant shadow hand was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute Tyler had sat in the palm of a perfection he’d created himself.” (Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club).

“The point of that scene in the book is all you can expect from perfection is a moment, and if you look for anything more, you’re going to be disappointed,” Standen explains, “and I think human beings are the same. You can have many moments of perfection in any one day, but you have to look for them and appreciate them.”



## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

When he's not working, Standen is an acting ambassador for Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

## HE'S GOT THE BEAT

"I did a lot of contemporary dance training," Standen shares, "and I think it actually helps with the choreography of fighting and the sword play—you pick up the moves and your movement ability is so much better."

## PARENTAL GUIDANCE

"We have this little game around the dinner table now where I go, 'Say one good thing about your day and one bad thing about your day,'" says Standen, "and none of the other kids or anyone around are allowed to question that bad thing... It's about being readily available to communicate your feelings with the people you love."

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Some of Standen's favorite filming locations have been in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland and Tybee Island in Georgia.

## NICE HANDIWORK

Standen is a former international Muay Thai boxer, a fencing gold medalist and is ambidextrous with a sword.



**S** Standen never shies away from his characters' flaws. Instead, he embraces them, letting those imperfections add texture and humanity to the roles. Aside from being flawed, the roles throughout his career have all tended to be rough around the edges. Whether he's played the honorable knight, the battle-hungry viking or the vengeful ex-CIA operative, they can categorically be called men of violence. However, Standen's most recent role of Anthony Lavelle in "Council of Dads" is a change of pace.

"There seems to be a big thing about toxic masculinity," Standen says. "There's nothing wrong with a man who cries and expresses emotion. And I wanted Anthony to be a hugger, a kisser. He'd hold his heart on his sleeve: when he's angry, he's angry; when he's emotional, he's emotional, you know?"

Over the past few years, the term "toxic masculinity" has become an undeniable buzzword. The term not only challenges how our society sees men, but how our society shapes these men as well. It's an idea that's been around since the '80s, and it's just now catching on in the mainstream. While the current rhetoric may seem like it's mostly focused on calling out men for being

predatory or too aggressive, the term was originally created to question why our society raises our boys to feel shame for emotional expression, to utilize violence as an indicator of power and to be overtly self-reliant, among other points.

While his warrior-type roles haven't necessarily been poster boys for today's idea of healthy masculinity (presumably due to the time periods the stories are based in), Standen has attempted to bring a more relevant portrayal of modern masculinity to his present-day characters. But not everyone has been on board with it.

"I did have some time on 'Taken' [during] a very emotional scene...the scene felt very much like the scene in *Se7en* with Brad Pitt yelling, 'What's in the box? What's in the box?'" Standen shares. "And I played the scene really emotionally—I had tears in my eyes—and the director came up to me and went, 'Can we do another take? But can you stop the tears, because tough guys don't cry.'" Despite this note, Standen felt strongly about this scene and continued to deliver an emotional performance, but by the time production was finished, each one of Standen's tears had been edited out.

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“ANYONE CAN  
BE A FATHER,  
BUT IT TAKES A  
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In a stark contrast, Joan Rater and Tony Phelan, the producers of “Council of Dads,” were seeking the opposite from their actors. “One of the reasons I signed on [to ‘Council of Dads’] was Tony Phelan saying, ‘Let’s just stamp out this toxic masculinity,’” Standen says. “And I told him that story, and he said, ‘Well, you’re not going to get that from me.’”

The NBC show, which aired this past March, follows the Perrys, a family that has just lost father and husband Scott Perry to cancer. In his remaining months, Scott had created a Council of Dads to help take care of his five children after he’s gone—from driving lessons to words of wisdom. “It’s been really great to play a character that’s emotionally ready,” says Standen. “There’s a lot of violence and gratuity in the world right now... and ‘Council of Dads’ has a really positive message, and it’s full of joy...and optimism about moving on, and finding humor through grief, and it’s about who shows up. It really mirrors the modern family today, I think.”

Aside from its relevance, one reason Standen believes the show will resonate well with its audience is because he has seen the parallels between the story and his own real-life experiences firsthand. “‘Council of Dads’ works on so many levels, but what’s interesting to me, especially with my character, is the role of a father in our society,” Standen explains. “My dad left when I was eight years old, and I haven’t seen him since. I had an amazing man who stepped in and took over that role, and I don’t like calling my stepdad my stepfather—he’s my dad. Anyone can be a father, but it takes a strong man to be a dad.”

“‘Council of Dads’ is about a man who dies of cancer...but it doesn’t have to be about death; there are lots of families out there where dads just walk out, they leave or they’re away on business for very long periods of time,” Standen continues. “So on one hand, it’s about the role of single moms and how hard they work, but it’s also about how important the role of a father figure is.”

On-screen, Anthony Lavelle is a man without a family, whose superpower would be “the ability to talk to children on their level.” Standen describes his character as the “cool uncle” that kids can trust and talk to, but he’s still able to fill in as the strong male role model. “But what’s interesting is that he’s never had anyone love him,” Standen shares, “and he needs this family as much as they need him.”

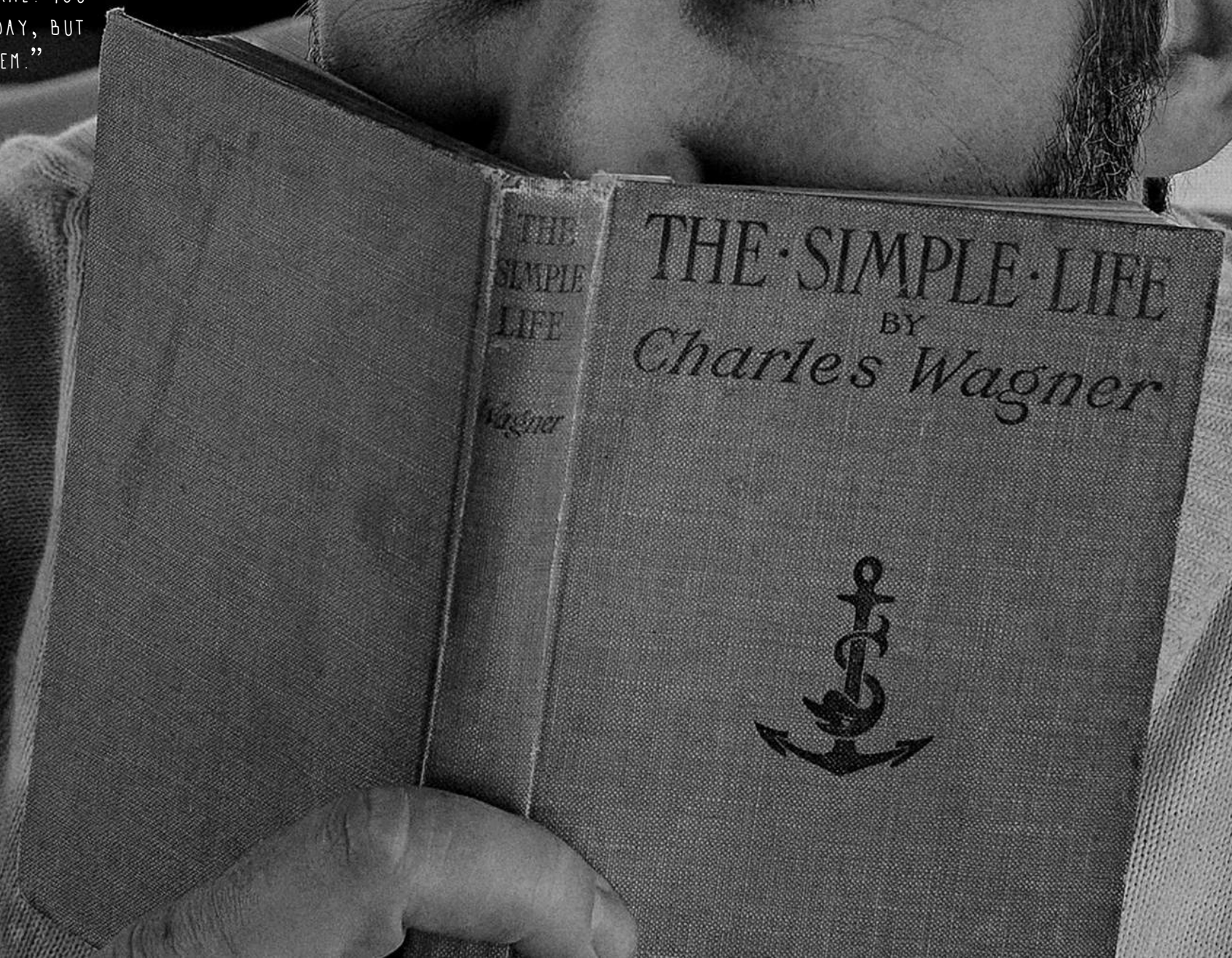
Another way that Anthony paralleled reality is that Standen plays the best friend of a man battling cancer, a role he has played in real life. “My best friend—best man at my wedding, best friend I have in my whole life—was diagnosed with cancer, and he was very, very ill,” Standen says. When he originally met with Rater and Phelan, who wanted him for the part of Anthony, Standen pitched himself to play the role of Scott Perry, who dies in the first episode. “I start crying in my interview with them, going ‘I’m not sure I can play this role because my best friend is dying of cancer, and I don’t want to be the guy on TV playing the best friend.’ And they said, ‘Well, maybe this is why you need to play this character.’”

This is a man who has fallen backwards off a three-story-high wall (on purpose), but the role of Anthony daunted him on a much deeper level. “Most of the roles I’ve played in my career have been far removed from me,” he explains. “It’s very hard for me to go, ‘This is me. I’m playing myself.’” But Standen remembered advice he had received in drama class: if you’re scared of a role, you should play it. Fortunately, Standen’s friend is now in remission. “He’s a lot better now,” he says, “but it was terrifying at the time.”

Standen’s hope for ‘Council of Dads’ is that it sparks real-time conversations within families and creates a platform where difficult, but important subjects can be broached. He believes that an open line of communication is key—not only to strong, inclusive families, but to raising the next generation as well. “It’s about communicating. There’s a lot of anxiety and depression and things that people are ashamed to talk about, and I think it’s important to vent by talking,” Standen notes.

“And again [it comes back] to who shows up...about loving yourself and living in the moment,” he says with a grin. “All you can expect from perfection is a moment—so live that moment!”

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