

Quintessa Swindell is in their prime

The star of Apple TV+'s latest show talks hacking, non-binary rep and queerness onscreen **BY ELLA GAUCI**

Hunched over a laptop, Quintessa Swindell is busy stopping world-altering information from getting into the wrong people's hands. As they tap away furiously, it's entirely believable to a viewer that Quintessa knows how to hack a highly advanced computer system. However, when I ask them about those hacking scenes, sat in their hotel room in Claridge's on a rainy Wednesday evening, they burst out laughing. "Those scenes are the fucking worst!" It turns out it's not quite so easy to pretend you know how to hack.

Starring as computer whiz Taylah in Apple TV+'s new show *Prime Target*, Quintessa is adding yet another impressive title to their portfolio. Also starring *One Day's* Leo Woodall, *Prime Target* follows a genius mathematician on the verge of a breakthrough. However, it becomes quickly apparent that there are quite a few people who want to have his work destroyed. It's up to Taylah, an NSA agent, to save him – and humanity – from impending destruction.

Having starred in beloved LGBTQIA show *Trinkets*, as well as huge blockbusters like DC's *Black Adam*, Quintessa has become a very visible, very impressive non-binary icon for many. When not on screen, it's likely that you've seen Quintessa donning couture looks or sitting on the front row of fashion weeks. In short, they're *very cool*.

Despite their star status – and the fact that I'm their last interview of the day – Quintessa exudes warmth when I enter the room. Wearing an effortlessly chic pantsuit, they excitedly whip out their Spotify to show me the song which helped them get into character for *Prime Target*. I promise I'll listen to *Brother Wolf*, *Sister Moon* by The Cult on my way home. It's evident from the get-go

that *Prime Target* is a show which has captured Quintessa's imagination.

While *Prime Target* is largely about prime numbers and the way they could completely alter our world, the show is also imbued with queerness throughout. Quintessa shares that they had been waiting for director Brady Hood to reveal that their character Taylah was also queer. However, no such announcement came. Instead, Leo Woodall, who plays a math genius, was given the queer storyline. "I was like 'Taylah doesn't get any action!' That's crazy," Quintessa laughs.

Despite not being able to get it on in the show, Quintessa admires the way queerness was handled in *Prime Target*. "I thought it was nice that they didn't throw it at you. For me, I love that about the show," they explain. "I love in television and film when there is a massive spotlight on queerness but I also love when it's subtle and not super obvious. It takes away the 'oddy' of it. It's just regular people, regular things and regular situations."

Quintessa is quick to bring up Netflix's trans musical *Emilia Pérez* as an example of a queer film they loved watching. As a non-binary actor, Quintessa admits that they are

frustrated by the current representation they've seen in other films. "I've said no to multiple projects because it was so stereotypical," Quintessa laments. "When it comes to queerness there's a strange perception of queerness that is deemed as universal."

As someone who identifies as trans masc, Quintessa wants to see more diverse non-binary stories. They've had enough of the shaved-head, bleached eyebrows rep that we often see on screen. While there is still a lot of work to be done, Quintessa gushes about how wonderful it was to work on *Prime Target's* set with other trans people. "We're everywhere!" they say excitedly.

While Quintessa may seem like the pinnacle of cool now, they struggled to fit in during their teenage years. Raised by a single father, film was a vital outlet for them to express who they were. Quintessa admits that their acting coach became more of a therapist to them. They recall with a smile the acting exercises they used to do. "I know how it changed my life and made me more in my body and more present. It drew up emotions I didn't know I had in me." I ask what their younger self would think, being able to see the heights they've reached now. "I would see myself and say, 'I fucking told you!' Every feeling I had was right."

Even if you don't understand the maths or code happening onscreen in *Prime Target*, Quintessa hopes audiences can take away something even bigger. "I would love for people who watch the show to think about how to show up for themselves or for the people around them, and how can you be accountable in your actions and how you stick up for others." They add, "And be curious about the current state of tech." **D**

Watch *Prime Target* on Apple TV+ now.

Photo: Apple TV+

"I love when there is a massive spotlight on queerness, but I also love when it's subtle and not super obvious"



Extra Digital Content
More info on p3