

TEN QUESTIONS WITH

SAM CLAFLIN

He's comfortable mixing with A-listers but says he'll always play second fiddle to strong women (and Alan Partridge)

Since finding fame in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *The Hunger Games* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Sam Claflin has gone on to play television roles as diverse as Oswald Mosley in *Peaky Blinders* and Billy Dunne, lead singer of a fictional 1970s rock band in *Daisy Jones & the Six*. Now the 39-year-old from Norwich stars as wrongly imprisoned Edmond Dantès in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a new eight-part French-Italian adaptation of the classic Alexandre Dumas novel about betrayal and revenge.

There are more than 50 screen versions of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Why do people keep returning to this story?

It has many life lessons, number one being that forgiveness is key. Learn to live in love, rather than hate. Edmond is an anti-hero – he's a bit like Tommy Shelby in *Peaky Blinders* – but he used to be a good man, and that makes it more harrowing that he's been led to these depths. There's a feeling that if he carries out this vengeance maybe he'll be fixed. But of course he won't be.

Would you seek revenge in a situation like his? Fortunately, I've never been through what he's been through. But you just don't know. Edmond is



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PERFECT HARMONY
Daisy (Riley Keough) and Billy (Sam Claflin) in *Daisy Jones & the Six*

grieving for his younger self, and people grieve in different ways. But I'm someone who avoids conflict at all costs. I keep away from people who have wronged me. I don't keep going back for more.

What was it like working with Jeremy Irons on the show? I mean, he's a legend. My introduction to him was as Scar in *The Lion King*, but I've since tuned into his other work. We'd been shooting for

four months in the heat when he joined us, and I was exhausted – I was at my wits' end – but he brought a new energy to it. He was like a fresh burst of light. I was fortunate to work with his son, Max, on *The Riot Club* [2014], and I've just finished a job with his wife, Sinéad Cusack. I'm working my way through the Ironses!

You were very young when you found success in blockbusters like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and

The Hunger Games. Did that take time to adjust to?

Yeah, I remember my first day in Hawaii, doing the table read for *Pirates* with Johnny Depp to my left and Penélope Cruz to my right, thinking, "What the hell just happened?" On my first trip to LA, my agent took me to this restaurant and said, "Has your life changed much?" and I was like, "No, no one knows who I am." Then Penélope and Javier Bardem walk in, going, "Hi Sam." And my agent was like, "No, your life hasn't changed – just two Oscar winners saying hello!" But I still have very low expectations of every job I do. I'm probably too humble for my own good sometimes.

You also had children quite young [a son and daughter from his six-year marriage to actress Laura Haddock]. Did that stop you from going off the deep end? I suppose I matured a lot quicker than some others. There are actors in their 50s who still live like they're in their 20s. But I was never a big party person. I think that's partly to do with being working class – I didn't have the money to flash on expensive VIP tables in nightclubs. My parents had kids very young, and I always just wanted to be a dad when I believed I'd met the right person.

You've said you spent your early career "playing second fiddle to strong female leads" like Jennifer Lawrence, Kristen Stewart and Emilia Clarke. That's probably not a bad thing for an actor, is it? Absolutely not. There was a time when white men were fronting pretty much every film, but my

experience from the get-go was working with female writers, directors and producers on films with strong female leads. I was always the romantic love interest. And that's still continuing. The amount of times I've been in a pub and a guy's gone, "I dunno who you are, but my girlfriend really likes you." I'm like, "OK... but why are you talking to me in the toilet?"

Is it true you didn't know much about music when you were cast in *Daisy Jones & the Six*? Yeah, the music producer said, "Do you know this song?" and started playing *Come Together*. I said, "That's Michael Jackson." Of course it was the flipping Beatles.

Well, you were only working with Elvis's granddaughter (Riley Keough), so no pressure... Exactly. I was so far removed from that world, and she was so deep in it – so deep that she'd sort of removed herself from it. She'd never sung or played an instrument either, so we were navigating that at the same time, which helped us build a chemistry.

But you did know who Elvis was? Yeah, I'd heard of Elvis. Elvis Costello, right?

The big question: who is Norwich's most famous son – you or Alan Partridge? Oh, Alan, every day. I think Delia Smith's up there too, and Stephen Fry. But no one can compete with Alan Partridge. He's the King of Norwich. **PAUL KIRKLEY**

The Count of Monte Cristo is on U and U&Drama from Saturday. See p36



SWEET REVENGE
Edmond Dantès (Sam Claflin) seeks to destroy the lives of those who falsely imprisoned him

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

find love on a reality dating show

Alex and Olivia Bowen were runners-up on series two of *Love Island* in 2016. They've now been married for six years and have a three-year-old son, with their second child on the way. As the dating show celebrates a decade since its successful reboot, 34-year-old Alex, from Wolverhampton, shares their love story.

JOB OFFER I actually didn't want to go on the show at first. I was working as a scaffolder and the production team messaged me about three times. One day it was raining, I was covered in mud, I was cold and wet and they messaged me at the right time.

A GOOD MATCH Olivia was in the villa from day one, but I entered later as a bombshell. I didn't watch the series beforehand, but my friends and family did. They said, "You'll like Olivia." I was shown as the one that messes things up at first and then finds love.



POWER COUPLE
Love Island alumni Alex and Olivia Bowen (inset, above) on the show in 2016

FAST FORWARD! There are no clocks on the walls. You're in a bubble so you're forced to talk to each other. The conversations you'd have six months down the line, you're having two days in. It's very weird. You don't see the cameras that much, except when you go out on a date, and then it feels like filming a scene.

LOVE FOR LIV I told Liv I loved her on the day of the final, but she didn't hear me! Two weeks later, she told me she loved me, and I let her think she said it first. I also didn't pack a suit for the final, so the production team had to get me one!

LIFE AFTER THE VILLA I gained 250,000 Instagram followers on the day of the final. I was told that I had six months to do well before the new cast was announced. Social media wasn't how it is now – you can say the wrong thing and get crucified. Liv and I didn't know what we were doing. The public thought I was just going to get rid of her as soon as we came out. We proved people wrong.

NO REWATCHES I've only watched clips of our series. I don't want to relive our arguments. That time shaped us as a couple. I'm not going to let our children watch until they're a certain age. We might never bring it up... unless they ask how we met! I watch the show now, and the contestants are very young. People go on to find love, but they also want to better their life and career. Going on *Love Island* was the best decision I ever made.

CHARLEY ROSS

The Love Island finale is on Monday at 9.00pm on ITV2