

# PACK



# LEADER

Everyone wants a piece of Taron Egerton

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**"I'M NOT INTO REPEATING MYSELF – HE SAYS, TALKING TO A JOURNALIST ABOUT THE KINGSMAN SEQUEL..."**

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Taron Egerton is approximately 90 per cent of the way through the story behind his brand new bag – an expansive, *expensive*-looking thing in a rich, regal shade of purple – when he briefly clasps his hands to either side of his mouth, resembling the horrified emoji. "How many people will be bored now?" he wonders, before his hands retreat to his lap, looking at the dictaphone between us, willing it to answer him like an enchanted mirror.

Egerton seems self-conscious that said bag ("surprisingly spacious," he proudly declares) isn't the most exciting thing for a young, handsome actor to be talking about. But I insist that as long as he's excited by the prospect of a new weekend bag, we might as well know what's so good about it. Besides, the truth is the life of a movie star can be so relentlessly boring – talking about the same thing for months on end, working in unglamorous locations, weird fans – that sometimes it's nice to know that successful, rich people get a bit giddy at the thought of new luggage. Egerton leans in and lowers his voice. "You can unclip the sides and it becomes more *voluminous*," he tells me. Phwoar. "I know," he says, folding his arms and leaning back, raising his eyebrows suggestively. "I *live* out of that bag. I can fit loads in there."

This all happens several weeks before we cajole the 27-year-old actor into a room with no less than five pedigree dogs, some lean and mottled, some muscular, one so badly behaved it essentially gets sent to the naughty step. Over the course of the afternoon he develops a deep-rooted, lupine bond with his pack of mismatched mutts; cradling them, playing with them, seeming nonplussed when one playfully clamps its

jaws uncomfortably close to his inner thigh.

Before that, though, we meet in the middle of summer, while London is still hot and sticky, on the sort of afternoon where tarmac fumes seem to spiral up from the pavements. But despite the muggy, sluggish heat in the air, Egerton is whip-fast and on fire; he makes fun of one of his answers before I get the chance to. He pats his belly like a bongo while regaling me with tales of pizza-related debauchery, even though we both know that under his T-shirt, said stomach is taut, toned and liable to cause injury should anyone try bouncing a penny off it. "How much should I be demystifying?" he wonders, when asked how he got into shape, before concluding he "can't really be bothered" keeping up appearances and talking through his ab-clenchingly tough regime.

Proudly, he reveals he hasn't even had a celebrity feud yet. Too nice, isn't he. But he only says this after confessing that he sets out to make a new friend every time he joins a film project. There's always a new friend to be made. Who was his new friend when he joined *Kingsman*? "Colin," (he means Firth). "I seek his company outside of work, I think the world



of him, I text him and ask how he's doing." Firth, I suggest, seems like the kind of man who doesn't reply to texts because his phone is switched off and chucked in a drawer somewhere. How long does it take Firth to reply to texts? "Umm, I suppose it depends if his phone's next to him," Egerton says, earnestly. "Or it'd take longer if he's doing his tie."

## SUITED AND BOOTED

Egerton won't stop fiddling with the curtains. The sun is streaming through the huge window next to us and, rather than have us bask in the heat like two lazy hounds, he's up and tugging the thing along inch by inch to block out the light. "Flipping heck," he mutters, in a delicate Welsh lilt, losing a 'g' and an 'h' so it almost sounds like one word. That was extremely Welsh, I tell him, which makes him grin. I ask him to pronounce the name of his hometown – the famous one with about 60 letters in it. He looks at me. Clears his throat. "*Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch*." It sounds like someone coughing while playing the flute.

In person he's broader and stockier than you might expect. He has a baseball cap fixed tightly to his head, which he occasionally twists left and right when he's thinking. He looks a bit like a prefect on an afternoon off; athletic, square-jawed, boyish. We are talking about his looks, and the kind of work they allow him to do; the good-natured everyman, the protagonist, the hero. "They say a movie is only as good as its villains. I think that's often true. But I'm always playing good guys," he admits. "I'm aware of it, it's something I'd like to do long-term. Not just play a baddie, but someone more morally ambiguous, someone far less sympathetic."

Though there have been exceptions to the rule (chief among them: psychotic homosexual 'Mad Teddy' alongside Tom Hardy in *Legend*), he's nailed playing the everyman, and he seems to relish in it, too. Although getting hooked on Aziz Ansari's *Master Of None* has given him pause. "Those scenes where [Ansari's character] is told to do an Indian accent? I found it funny, but it made me think; I'm the epitome of an actor who walks into a room and has the upper

hand just because I'm a mid-twenties Caucasian male. How frustrating must the industry be for a person of colour..."

Packed with frenetic, pulpy action scenes and happy to poke fun at itself, 2014's *Kingsman: The Secret Service* ended up feeling like a modern alternative to the gruff and brooding Bond franchise; laddy but curiously camp, too. Egerton played protagonist Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin, a chav who inherits a place at a clandestine organisation that protects the world from supervillains.

While Egerton and I sit in (partial) darkness, director Matthew Vaughn is still meticulously editing *Kingsman's* sequel, *The Golden Circle*. It sees the extreme Britishness of the first film paired with an American sensibility, as Eggsy teams up with the Statesmen, the US branch of the agency, to take on Poppy, Julianne Moore's psychotic criminal mastermind who grinds her enemies into burger meat. Jeff Bridges, Channing Tatum and Pedro Pascal flesh out the cast, with their Americanisms dialled up to 11. Think Kentucky bourbon, 10-gallon hats and fighting bad guys with *actual lassos*.

## FIGHT CLUB

If the first film was Eggsy discovering the world of the Kingsmen, this one is about him figuring out how to balance his two lives. "He's not very comfortable," says Egerton. "There's this constant idea that no matter how much you accomplish, you still always behave as if you're not quite fitting in. But he's growing."

Egerton is watching me make the less-clever-than-it-sounds observation that this sounds a lot like his own ascent as an actor. He's done the big blockbuster: he's arrived. Now he has to prove he has proper staying power. Where does he go from here? "I'm not into repeating myself, really, breadth is important." Pause. Dramatic eyeroll. Before I can speak up he's beaten me to it, "He says, talking to a journalist about the *Kingsman* sequel!" – followed by a big hoot of a laugh.

*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* opens with a violent fistfight between Egerton's character and a henchman that takes place within the confines of a black cab as it speeds through the streets of London. ➔

➔ “Ed [Holcroft] punched me full-on in the nose at one point, which I was really p\*ssed off about, because it had been a long day,” he says, scrunching his face. “I mean, I don’t want to demystify the thing too much” – there’s that word again – “but you know in those screen punches, it’s all very much to do with angles to *make it look...*” – I am nodding, I hope he knows I didn’t think that the film fights are real – “Ed didn’t grasp that. Everyone [re]watched it several times, my nose sort of going smash and wobble,” he mimes it, slow-mo, making a dubby *wub wub wub* noise as he slowly arches his head away from me, face twisted in agony. “It was tough. Ed’s a very, very close friend but you know what, people think that was a fake cab, or we used tricks, but no.” Pause. “A real cab.”

## VIEW TO A THRILL

Egerton is looking down at the floor, one ankle pneumatically jiggling on the spot. “It’s weird, because it’s almost like I’ve walked off the street into this *other* person’s existence.” Things have got more serious. He says that the ridiculousness of his life now is a bit overwhelming. He gets recognised when he goes out, “not in a massively hindering way, I don’t feel inhibited. I try to be more careful about how many pints I have down the pub... maybe. But it’s not like I have anxiety stepping out in Oxford Street.” He twists the peak of his cap back and forth.

I ask about drama school – he spent three years at the esteemed Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Rada). Given the role it plays as an incubator of success in the industry, did he not, you know, ever consider – *even to himself* – that this kind of success might occur? He thinks about it.

“They can’t prepare you for this, not really,” he says. “Of course I *considered* it, but it’s not something you can plan. Your degree of control over your situation is limiting, because it’s completely circumstantial.” He talks about directors and people he’d love to work with – Nolan, Scorsese – but stops himself before I can reply and says, “It’s just a list of clichés, isn’t it?”

The misconception is that if you train at Rada – and if you land a couple of plummy roles before you hit

your late twenties – you’re set for life. But Egerton makes acting sound like navigating a hedge maze, one whose routes keep growing over and shape-shifting before you can pass through them.

“I don’t want to overthink anything,” he insists, with a sort of firmness to his voice. “Acting is relatively instinctive – obviously you know life isn’t about the end result, but the journey” – he does

air quotes to communicate that yes, this is a very ‘pretentious actor’ thing to say – “I do things that, at the end, I hope will make me happy.”

OK, so forget which auteurs he wants to work with, because, snore – what does Taron Egerton *actually* want? What’s going to make him happy? “Hmm, well I don’t think of a ‘career chronology’ as a way to be happy, it’s things like having the freedom to do this, and the freedom to feel good about what I’ve done. I don’t want to feel like I didn’t

do something because I was scared, and I don’t want to do something purely because it pays the most dollars. Being able to make those decisions is what would make me happy.”

Twenty million dollars wouldn’t hurt, though, would it. “But then what do I spend it on!” he says, mock-howling. “I’m sure I could think of something, but I just want to be at peace with decisions.

So far, I have been.”



*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* is at cinemas from 20 September

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