



Gentleman actor

Having shed the Superman cape, classic British actor Henry Cavill is ready for the next chapter, writes *Harold von Kursk*, whatever that might look like

Henry Cavill is finally finding his stride again. Having spent the latter half of the past decade looking for roles that could make audiences forget his Superman screen persona, the handsome Brit is now enjoying the most productive period of his career.

This year, Cavill appeared on both the big and small screen. In September, he returned to the role of Sherlock Holmes in Season 2 of Netflix's hit series *Enola Holmes* opposite teen idol Millie Bobby Brown. And now he stars in Matthew Vaughn's romantic spy adventure, *Argylle*, the \$200 million blockbuster that is the most ambitious film project ever to launch from streaming giant AppleTV+.

Completing the trifecta, Cavill will also be shooting a third season of episodes of *The Witcher* (based on Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* books and video games), one of the most popular streaming series of all time.

A long-time gaming enthusiast who admitted to being obsessed with the Warhammer 40,000 game in his appearance last December on *The Graham Norton Show*, Cavill admits to feeling a special kinship to his hunkish *Witcher* character Geralt. Not only has the role earned him a new generation of female followers,

Left: 'Man of Steel' Henry Cavill attends the *Justice League* photocall at The College in London in 2017

it's also given Cavill a chance to indulge his fascination for magic and fantasy. "I feel very protective of Geralt and I want to continue developing and enriching him in every way possible," says Cavill.

"I feel like I'm his guardian in the sense of wanting to do justice to Sapkowski's work and the kind of magical world he has created." "I've long believed that sometimes signs appear in your life that seem magical. There are so many things that happen to us that are coincidences and can't be explained. And there are many beautiful moments that happen which have an almost magical quality. *The Witcher* is this magical fantasy world where you can revel in stories that explore different aspects of humanity from a place that exists outside the limitations of the real world."

Meanwhile, Cavill is also enjoying parallel streaming stardom as master sleuth Sherlock Holmes in *Enola Holmes*, Netflix's very different take on the Arthur Conan Doyle character.

The central conceit of the show is how Cavill's Holmes mentors his much younger sister Enola (*Stranger Things* star Brown), an aspiring 16-year-old private detective who shares Holmes' intense intellectual curiosity. But unlike all other adaptations of the classic Conan Doyle character, this series tries to soften Sherlock's imperious arrogance by exploring his relationship with Enola.

"For this story to work, we needed an emotional connection between Sherlock and Enola even though he's aloof to everyone else," explained Cavill.

"We also wanted to dive deep into Sherlock's past and why he and Enola are so similar. It was important to find a balance between the traditional, cold Sherlock and this more emotional one who feels this closeness with Enola."

Holmes purists will likely groan at how this series, set in London during the latter part of the Victorian Era, explores themes of white male privilege, class inequality, and diversity. Cavill, however, had no qualms over the series' woke subtext. "The fact that [Enola Holmes] is about diversity and equality was a bonus," said Cavill.

"Really, it was something that was wonderful to be a part of, and I really, really enjoyed being a part of that message, and the importance that it carries. When it came to reading the script, I felt, 'okay, this is absolutely a message that I stand behind. In the modern age, we are trying to normalise equality, [but] in the

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story of Enola Holmes, they're trying to make people realise that [equality] just doesn't exist at all. It's about raising awareness [and] it's wonderful to have that perspective and viewpoint."

Cavill comes across as jovial and easy-going yet underneath has a deeply reflective side. Born and raised in Jersey, he received an elite education at the prestigious Stowe School in Buckinghamshire. But his schoolboy years were often marred by the constant bullying he endured as an overweight youngster. "I grew up with the kind of complex that comes from being overweight and constantly teased," he recalled of his childhood.

"Like a lot of kids in school, I was one of those who didn't fit in. I was fat, and kids love to use that to pick on you and humiliate you because you're an easy target. I couldn't even begin to be able to tell you how many times I was called Fatty Cavill! You can either react very negatively to that and indulge in self-pity, or you use it as a motivating factor to be more self-reliant and determined to stand up for yourself. All the abuse that was aimed my way made me tougher and determined to prove myself."

Standing by him during those moments when he would often call home in tears were his parents. His father Colin served in the Royal Navy before becoming a successful stockbroker while his mother Marianne stayed at home to raise Henry and his four brothers.

Their encouragement helped foster a strong sense of identity within Henry that kept him from falling victim to the barrage of taunts fat kids routinely suffer in school. ➤



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“My parents were very supportive,” recalled Cavill. “They encouraged me to not let myself become a victim of that kind of treatment and instead have a healthy self-image and be very self-confident. That’s the kind of outlook that carried me through a lot of tough times when I wasn’t getting any parts and I had to take jobs as a barman in London to make ends meet. I would spend several months in L.A. auditioning for parts and then scrape together enough money to fly back to London to survive.”

Henry is the second youngest of five brothers: Piers, the eldest sibling, is a former army officer and tank commander, Nick is a major in the Royal Marines, Simon works in the financial industry, and Charlie, the youngest, is a marketing director.

Top: Henry Cavill arrives at *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* premiere at The Zigfield Theatre in New York Right: In the thick of the action with Alicia Vikander and Arnie Hammer in *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*

Henry was poised to join the army himself until the lure of acting proved too strong. It was while attending Stowe that Cavill became interested in theatre while also indulging his love of rugby

and a passion for Egyptology. “I remember having a lot of fun in a school play even before I entered Stowe,” Cavill recalled. “I remember being pleasantly surprised by the reaction of the

audience – it gave me this sense of pride in my performance. Even at a very young age, and I thought I had found my place in the world.

“After Stowe, I thought about joining the army and the choice for me was between these two things: military life, which was part of my family background, or life on the stage. In the end acting won me over. I was aware of the challenges of this profession, but I decided to try it anyway and I would say that things have turned out pretty well.”

His acting career began taking shape at age 17 when he played a small role in the 2002 remake of *The Count of Monte Cristo* starring Guy Pearce. ▶





Cavill then earned widespread popular acclaim in both his native England and America playing Charles Brandon in the highly popular Anglo-American series *The Tudors* opposite Jonathan Rhys Meyers.

His chiselled features and imposing 6'1" frame earned him sex symbol status and it was not long before Hollywood came calling. Cast as Superman in 2013's *Man of Steel*, Cavill knew at once that his life would never be the same again. He felt honoured to be inheriting a role first made famous by George Reeves in the TV series *Adventures of Superman* that ran for six seasons in the 50s and then by Christopher Reeve in four *Superman* films beginning in 1978. "*Superman* is the role that has changed my life, and it was a privilege for me to play such an icon of pop culture," Cavill said.

"It was a turning point in my career. It's a role with a precise meaning and context for so many people. Playing Superman was like being the keeper of something really important, something universal."

Cavill would play the *Man of Steel* in three stand-alone



Superman films as well as two *Justice League* spinoffs. In the middle of all this, he thought he had landed yet another potential film franchise when he starred as Napoleon Solo in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, Guy Ritchie's remake of the hit 1960s Cold War TV spy series that featured Robert Vaughn and David McCallum.

Cavill thrived on playing a debonair secret agent in tandem with his new partner, Ilya Kuryakin (Armie Hammer,

Top: Henry Cavill at the world premiere for *Justice League* at The Dolby Theatre, Hollywood, in 2017 Above: Cavill at the 88th Academy Awards

whose career has since imploded after revelations of a cannibalism fetish) a former KGB operative. Throw in a couple of highly talented and attractive actresses, Sweden's Alicia Vikander and Aussie native Elizabeth Debicki, and it seemed like a can't miss project for Warner Bros.

Sadly, critics loathed *U.N.C.L.E.* while audiences stayed away in droves, losing the studio an estimated \$80 million according to The Hollywood Reporter. It also put a major dent in Cavill's bankability as a leading man and it took five years until he started finding good projects like *The Witcher* to thrust him back in the spotlight.

Not that Cavill regrets his secret agent fling: "Napoleon was really fun to play. That's the joy of being an actor. You get to play these different roles, and then see yourself in these sort of imaginary characters."

Interestingly, Cavill is returning to the espionage game this Autumn in *Argylle*, playing 'the world's finest' spy who develops amnesia and is then tricked into believing he is a best-selling spy novelist. After his memories and lethal skills return, he seeks revenge. The film co-stars Samuel L. Jackson, Sam Rockwell, Bryce Dallas Howard, Bryan Cranston, and Catherine O'Hara. Director Matthew Vaughn (the director of the *Kingsman* films) describes his rocambolesque adventure romp as "a mixture of *Die Hard*, *Romancing the Stone*, and *Lethal Weapon*."

Vaughn is also so impressed with Cavill, he cast him in a supporting role in last December's *The King's Man*: "Henry Cavill, that man was born to play Bond. When you see how he is in *Argylle*, I was just like, 'Wow, this guy is everything you'd imagine Bond to have been, or be. ■"