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So, Chris Hemsworth,
what's it like being
Hollywood's most
objectified man?

'It's awkward at times'

**ME AND MY
65-YEAR-OLD
FLATMATE**

*By Lucy Holden
(aged 27½)*

**TERROR
ATTACK ON
THE 15.17
TO PARIS**

Voted sexiest man alive.



Followed on Instagram by millions of fans proposing marriage.



'I CAN'T JUST BE A PUPPET ANY MORE'

Thor brought him fame and fortune (he's worth \$60 million) but now **Chris Hemsworth** wants to be taken seriously. His next project is a post-9/11 war drama. Helena de Bertodano finds out what lies beneath the six-pack



Chris Hemsworth, 34, photographed by Patrik Giardino. Opposite: Hemsworth on his Instagram account

When I first met Chris Hemsworth nearly five years ago, he seemed uncertain of himself – almost painfully aware that his newfound fame could be snatched away. “There’s a million and one examples of guys who were *the guy* or *the girl* and then overnight you never hear from them again,” he said cautiously back then.

Cut to January 2018. Another film; another junket; another Hollywood hotel room. Same guy. Or is he? Physically, of course, he is as handsome as ever. Maybe more so – the extra years seem to have chiselled his looks. But his demeanour has changed. He enters the room with a certain swagger, looking sharp and confident in a suit, blue shirt (the hue of which precisely matches his eyes) and suede ankle boots. Back then he wore a T-shirt, jeans and Vans and sat ramrod straight with slicked-back hair, answering questions like a polite boy scout. Today he lolls on a sofa, nonchalant and assured, occasionally running his hands through his artfully spiked hair. “It’s less about proving anything now,” says Hemsworth about how he picks roles. “More about, ‘Am I going to enjoy the process?’ I used to feel I needed to tick that box or show I’m this kind of artist. Now I know what I can do.”

Unsurprisingly, our previous meeting seems to have made less of an impression on Hemsworth than it did on me. To his credit, he does not even pretend to remember. “That was way back!” he exclaims when I tell him. “James Hunt?” Yes, he was playing British racing driver Hunt in *Rush*, a performance that brought him to the attention of an audience beyond the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which had locked him in as the hammer-wielding, cape-swishing Norse deity Thor, the role for which he is still best known.

He is referring to more than just the passage of time since *Rush*. In the past five years, he has moved from Los Angeles back to his native Australia, acquired an extra two children and stashed at least a dozen more movies under his belt. Now 34, he is at the very pinnacle of Hollywood’s A-list: instantly recognisable wherever he goes, named Sexiest Man Alive in 2014 by *People* magazine. He has 13.5 million Instagram followers and – the ultimate celebrity honour – has hosted *Saturday Night Live* not once but twice. Last year, he earned \$31.5 million (£23 million), according to *Forbes*, and he has a reported net worth of \$60 million (£44 million). The day after we meet, he is pictured sitting next to Angelina Jolie at the Golden Globe awards.

His latest movie is *12 Strong*, a powerful war drama based on the top-secret incursion of a small band of American special forces soldiers deployed to Afghanistan shortly after 9/11.

In his new film, *12 Strong*, and, below, in *Thor: Ragnarok*, 2017



‘I REALISED I COULDN’T DO ANY HEROIC THINGS, BUT I COULD JUST PRETEND TO DO THEM’



Based on the book by Doug Stanton, it tells the true, extraordinary story of how these soldiers rode into battle on horseback, forming a close bond with an Afghan warlord also fighting the Taliban.

“If somebody had pitched it to me as a fictional story,” says Hemsworth, who plays Captain Mitch Nelson, the leader of the group, “I would have gone, ‘This is ridiculous. No one’s ever going to believe that.’”

Hemsworth’s Spanish actress wife, Elsa Pataky, 41, plays his wife in the film – the first time they have appeared on screen together. “We felt like we’d been rehearsing that performance for seven years,” jokes Hemsworth. (The couple met and married in 2010.) At the beginning of the film, we see them hearing of the attacks on the World Trade Center, followed by their emotional farewell as Hemsworth’s character departs for war. In some ways, Hemsworth says, it was harder to act with Pataky. “You’re a little self-conscious. We kept joking, saying, ‘If our chemistry sucks, what are people going to say?’”

The on-screen display of matrimonial harmony follows unsubstantiated rumours of friction in their marriage – perhaps the true sign of Hollywood superstardom. No celebrity marriage seems to be complete without an “unnamed” close friend suggesting there might be trouble in paradise, in this instance citing – somewhat absurdly – the fact that Pataky had taken their three children to

see her family in Spain “alone”. (Hemsworth was shooting a film at the time.) Then there was a photograph in which the couple were pictured having “a heated exchange” – but may just as easily have been discussing what to have for dinner.

Pataky herself responded to that one on Instagram, posting a picture of a stern-faced Hemsworth in one of his Tag Heuer ads and captioning the shot: “Don’t worry love, I would be mad too if some magazines keep trying to keep us apart,” adding the hashtags #dontrackunderpressure #seeyoutomorrow #loveyou. In Spanish she added, “Apparently you can’t be seen with any other woman, not even your agent” – a reference to a sighting of Hemsworth with “another woman”.

Hemsworth also tried to address the rumours lightheartedly via social media. “Looking for a new wife according to @womansdayaus and other misleading outlets! Honey you still love me right?!” he wrote on Instagram, tagging Pataky.

“I just try to ignore it,” he says. “I stay off the internet but occasionally someone says to me, ‘You might want to react to this one.’ Most of the time I’m like, ‘Why did you even tell me that? There’s nothing I can do about it. It just pisses me off.’”

He admits, however, that the long periods away from his young family are tough. “I want to be there more. My wife and I were talking the other day about how the years are flying by: our daughter [India Rose] is five and a half and the boys [twins called Tristan and Sasha] are three and a half. And however much time you do have together, it never seems like enough. It’s always exhausting, even when we have help with grandparents or a nanny.”

Sometimes he thinks he might have timed everything wrong: having his children just as he hit his stride on screen. “It all happened at once and I’ve thought about it and gone, ‘God, am I trying to do too much at once?’ There’s no regret by any means. It just comes out of wanting to be [at home] more.”

He has one more film to shoot in March – a thriller in Vancouver with Jeff Bridges – and then plans to take at least six months off. “I want to be able to take the kids to school. I may even be off all year. Maybe,” he continues, joking but with perhaps a hint of wistfulness, “it’s time to just cash in and check out and surf for the rest of my life.”

Originally he and Pataky agreed that neither of them would be away for more than two weeks at a time. “Then it became three weeks and then it was three and a half weeks. That was brutal. I’d be walking out of the door and [the kids] would start crying, ‘Don’t go!’ I just couldn’t handle it, so I’d be like, ‘I’ll bring you back a present.’ And they’re like, ‘Oh, OK.’ Their mood changes. Now every time I come back it’s not even like, ‘Hey, Dad,’



With his wife, Elsa Pataky, and, below, with his children

OF THE GOSSIP ABOUT HIS MARRIAGE, HE SAYS, ‘I TRY TO IGNORE IT. I STAY OFF THE INTERNET’



it’s just, ‘What did you get me?’ I see Elsa prepping them as I’m coming towards the door: ‘Make sure to tell him, ‘Hello, I love you,’ first.’ My daughter’s bottom lip starts to quiver and she’s like, ‘Present?’”

These days, he says, the children barely bat an eyelid when he leaves. “They become used to you being away, which is just as scary. They’re like, ‘Cool, see ya, Dad.’ One of my boys in particular starts to get naughty ...”

The day after we meet he posts a video on Instagram of his son Tristan shimmying up the fridge door, wrapping his toes around the handles like a monkey, to reach the chocolate hidden on the top.

His children, he says, are only moderately impressed that he is Thor. “One of my boys actually has a full Wonder Woman costume and the other day he came up to me and said, ‘I like Thor, Daddy, but Wonder Woman is stronger.’”

Hemsworth is one of those rare Hollywood celebrities who look even better off the screen than on it. Or, as he put it in his spoof American Express ad on *Saturday Night Live*, “At my audition they said, ‘Um, we’re looking for a Thor type – not actual Thor.’”

He is probably more objectified than any man on Earth. His Instagram account – every bit that of a Hollywood star, with snaps of private jets, yachts, the red carpet and, of course, competing to be the “best Australian” while dressed as a kangaroo with fellow Aussie star Margot Robbie – is riddled with proposals from his 13.5 million followers: “Marry me”; “Te amo”; “You are the hottest and most attractive man I have seen”; “If you ever get bored of Elsa ...”

One video of him, filmed on a smartphone, in which he is shirtless and the camera simply zooms in on his blue eyes, has been watched more than 8 million times and has more than 20,000 (mostly amorous) comments. Another, also filmed on a phone, of him in a tweed suit and open-collar white shirt responding to a “battle of the jams” challenge from Jack Black, has 5 million views; and yet another, of him riding a children’s quad bike, 4.1 million. Pictures of Hemsworth dressed as Thor on set with his son racked up 1.6 million likes; of him spraying on Hugo Boss cologne, 1.4 million and, of riding a horse in a tank top, 1 million.

“It is a bit uncomfortable and awkward at times,” he says of the emphasis on his looks.

So, Chris Hemsworth, do you ever wish you had been born ugly? He roars with laughter. “I’m well aware that I got Thor because I was a certain height and a certain look. I’m very thankful for it. So I wouldn’t change a thing in that sense. Chris Pratt said recently – and I highly agree with him – ‘It’s going to put my kid through college and look after my family so, hell, I’ll take my shirt off!’ If I felt like I’d got nothing else to offer, it would feel ➔

strange. But it's one small piece. If I couldn't deliver dialogue and work on a script and act, then [my looks] wouldn't mean anything."

In a quest for some privacy, he moved his family from their house in Santa Monica back to Australia in 2015, buying an 11-acre property in Byron Bay, where they have horses and donkeys. "It's a quiet little surf town. Everyone is really laid back. My kids don't ever wear shoes; mostly they run around naked. You couldn't get away with that here."

In part, he says, the move back was an attempt to recreate his own carefree childhood, growing up between Melbourne and a small Aboriginal community in the outback – where his father worked as a social-services counsellor. He and his two brothers (Liam and Luke, both actors too – Liam, of course, of *Hunger Games*/Miley Cyrus fame) were often left to their own devices. "We were rabid dogs sent out into the forest to forage for food," he jokes. "We were very physical, very competitive. We lived in the bush, not the suburbs – and we'd entertain ourselves by hurting each other. Or hurting ourselves."

He shows me a scar on the palm of his left hand, where he accidentally stabbed himself while trying to spear a fish. "I was seven years old. I remember walking into a shop and buying a big hunting knife with my pocket money. The sales guy was like, 'Be careful, kid.' And I was like, 'Yeah, mate, no worries.'" He took the knife snorkelling in a nearby swimming hole and as soon as he glimpsed what he thought was a fish, he gave it a hearty stab. "But it was actually my other hand."

After his older brother, Luke, got a part on the Australian soap opera *Neighbours*, Hemsworth followed him, first to *Neighbours* for a single episode, then establishing himself on rival soap *Home and Away*, where he spent three years. Determined to make it in Hollywood, he moved to Los Angeles in 2010. Despite quickly picking up a role in the crime thriller *Ca\$h*, he then spent months auditioning fruitlessly – and was on the point of returning to Australia when he landed the role of Thor, famously beating his brother Liam.

Even now, however, not everything Hemsworth touches turns to gold. The Ron Howard film *In the Heart of the Sea*, a drama based on the *Moby-Dick* story, and *Blackhat*, an action thriller, were box-office flops. "I never really loved the script," says Hemsworth of *Blackhat*. "I just really wanted to work with Michael Mann [the director]. I was so in awe of him and I was just like, 'Yes sir, where do you want me? Anything you want,' and I didn't have an opinion. But there was a lesson in it. By the time I started *Thor 3* [*Ragnarok*], I thought, 'I can't just be a puppet any more.'"

It is this that marks the biggest change in Hemsworth: the determination to assert



'I GET QUITE ANXIOUS NOW GOING OUT IN PUBLIC – SOMETHING COULD BE MISCONSTRUED'

himself when necessary, the recognition of his own worth. He no longer needs to hang around Hollywood waiting for roles; Hollywood comes to him. He even persuaded the Marvel team to shoot the latest film in Australia, just 45 minutes from his front door.

After seven years as Thor, he has finished the final *Avengers* movie. Is he relieved the contract is over? "Honestly, I'm not," he says. "Midway through, I was exhausted and wasn't happy with what I was doing." This was around the time I first met him. "But by *Thor 3* I had a voice in the process and was having the most fun I'd had on a set. When we wrapped a couple of days ago, I really felt, 'Oh no, we will never have this much fun again.'"

As he talks he twists a ring on his finger, pulling it on and off. Eventually it rolls away from him and slips down the back of a sofa cushion. He rummages around for it. "It's not the wedding ring," he laughingly points out – as if that might be interpreted as extreme carelessness. Retrieving it, he plants it firmly back on his finger.

Matt Damon, who has become a close friend of his, told Hemsworth the best way to avoid negative publicity was to be boring – at least ostensibly. "He told me not to go rolling out of clubs at 3am." At the same time, Hemsworth has a sharp sense of humour and clearly does not want to be perceived as dull. "It's more about being careful. Don't give them anything to rip apart. I get quite anxious now going out in public – something could be misconstrued."

Although fame now sits easily on his shoulders, he has not lost his essential decency and has noticeably better manners than many celebrities. When the PR asks if he wants coffee, he turns to me and asks if I would like

coffee too. I decline and he follows suit: "I think more coffee might tip me over." Then he asks if I am cold, and even though I say I am not, he gets up to close the door to the terrace behind my chair. I am reminded of *Thor* director Sir Kenneth Branagh's recent comment about the Hemsworth brothers. "Very well brought up young men, I would say ... We screen-tested five people [for *Thor*], and the two people who hung their clothes back up on the costume rail were the Hemsworth brothers."

And unlike most actors, who could be talking to a wall for all the interest they show in the person sitting in front of them, he makes a point of asking about my family. When he establishes that my husband is Australian and my children, like his, speak Spanish, he asks, "Does your husband speak Spanish? I speak *un poquito* – that's the only word I know. If I'm in one place long enough, I want to have proper lessons, but not tell Elsa I'm learning and then one day, when she's gossiping about me, I'll be like" – he clicks his fingers and winks – "I know what you're saying."

Hemsworth's performance in *I2 Strong* is one of his most assured yet. Doug Stanton, the author, who spent a lot of time on set, says, "Here's what Hemsworth does – it's a really hard part because he has to be totally physical and also mental. The real horse soldiers are unassuming; they look like really fit biology teachers. Chris, of course, is not unassuming because he has such presence – but he also has the sensibility to carry off brilliantly the whole relationship with Dostum [the Afghan general who becomes his friend and ally]."

In real life, says Hemsworth, he could never have become a soldier. "I always had the fantasy of all the heroic things I'd do – like being a police officer or a soldier or a doctor. And then I realised I couldn't do any of those things, but I could just pretend to do them." He chuckles. "And get paid better. And get awards for it and become narcissistic."

He is joking, of course. But is it hard to stop it all going to his head, with the constant adulation? "It's the opposite. I think you're so conscious about it not going to your head that you play it all down."

"Every time I come into LA I have this nostalgic rush, remembering where I had my first audition and hoping that one day I'd have a job and be in a movie. It's really a very pleasant, positive, nostalgic memory."

It sounds as though he was almost happier then? "The dream is almost better than the reality," he agrees. "There is a danger in getting what you dream for. You think it is going to fulfil whatever that thing inside you is yearning for. And then it doesn't." ■

I2 Strong opens on January 26