

Ben Barnes

Comic Villain and Gold Digger

Samantha Orr

Originating from Wimbledon, London, Ben Barnes' first experience in the fine arts began at an all-boys school where he developed an undeniable passion for drama and music that, over time, sprouted into a successful acting career. You know him as Prince Caspian in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or as Logan Delos from the exceedingly successful HBO series *Westworld*. Among many other roles, Barnes certainly has made his mark on both big and small screens alike.



Tan-and-cream jacket: ATTILIANO. Black shirt: PURISH BRAND. Grey denim: STATE DENIM. Boots: PURISH BRAND X THE NORTH FACE. "EARTH'S CORE":



In his most recent work, Barnes personifies the antagonistic Marvel character, Billy Russo, also known as the villainous Jigsaw, in the Netflix series *The Punisher*. Barnes enjoys the dimensions of complexity when playing a supervillain especially through his character's physical and mental metamorphosis. "Billy Russo is not a character like the Joker where everyone already has an idea of what he should be. So, I felt quite free to really develop who he is," explains Barnes. "In the first season, he is somewhat of a d*ck. He's this Burberry, three-piece-suit-wearing character who cares about money, hair products, and reviews he would get in the bedroom. But at the end of the first season, his face gets destroyed. I get to start fresh with his character — like a rebirth."

As in any comic-to-screen debut, original hard-copy fans will sometimes dispute the digital presentation of a story and characters. However, the 37-year-old actor attributes the overwhelmingly positive reviews from both fans and critics to his commitment to maintaining his character's integrity to be consistent with the comic books. "What I like about what Netflix has done with the Marvel show is, they really did their best to draw the characters off the pages of the comic books and put them on the screen as real as they can be without upsetting the comic-book fans," he affirms.

In addition to working with Netflix, Barnes has also returned to the U.K. to film the highly anticipated drama, *Gold Digger*. "It's amazing to be back in England! I hadn't been able to

film back home in like ten years! It's really great because I get to use my own accent again on a set, which actually felt a bit awkward at first, but it's interesting to go and play a character where I can use more of myself and my own attributes," shares Barnes who is playing Benjamin Golding, a thirtysomething-year-old copywriter who falls into a relationship with an older woman, Julia Day (Julia Ormond). Throughout the series, Golding's true intentions are questioned as their steamy romance progresses despite a considerable age difference. Barnes says he has enjoyed his role in a series that depicts a romantic relationship in such a different light. "What I really love about *Gold Digger* is that it is an older woman and a younger man, and in cinema and TV, that's something we only get to see the other way around. For example, in action films, we sometimes see an older man with a beautiful and much younger woman, and nobody even bats an eye at that relationship," he says of the social importance of the BBC One drama on how it opposes ageism in the media. "It's always good to show things from a different angle and perspective. Just like a lot of good stories in life, *Gold Digger* throws a mirror up to humanity. When the viewers are watching, there will be judgments made about my character and his intentions. The audience really becomes part of it. It poses interesting questions that are absolutely worthwhile."

Photographer & Videographer: Nelson Blanton (nelsonblanton.com)
Stylist: Andrew Philip Nguyen
Men's Grooming: Phoebe Dawson
Editor: Eiko Watanabe
Special thanks to Amber Thayer (@amberthayer - amberthayer.com) & The Henry (@thehenryrestaurant - thehenryrestaurant.com)