

COVER STORY

# MARVEL MAN

'IRON FIST' STAR FINN JONES LEAPS FROM LONDON OUTSIDER TO SUPERSTAR

STORY BY REED TUCKER  
PHOTOS BY VICTORIA STEVENS



**ABOVE:** Jacket, \$4,995; sweater, \$1495; and pants, \$695, all at [RalphLauren.com](http://RalphLauren.com)

**ON COVER:** Jacket, \$2,198; shirt, \$198; pants, \$348; and boots, \$748 all at [JohnVarvatos.com](http://JohnVarvatos.com)



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Shirt, \$770 at [Salvatore Ferragamo](http://SalvatoreFerragamo.com), 655 Fifth Ave.; Pants, price upon request at [Valentino](http://Valentino.com), 693 Fifth Ave. Shirt, \$280 at [Louis Vuitton](http://LouisVuitton.com), 1 E. 57th St.; Pants, \$690 at [Salvatore Ferragamo](http://SalvatoreFerragamo.com) Coat, \$2,950; shirt, \$550; pants, \$950, all at [Bottega Veneta](http://BottegaVeneta.com), 1-866-337-7242; Shoes, \$698 at [JohnVarvatos.com](http://JohnVarvatos.com)

**Fashion Editor:** Serena French  
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**F**INN Jones can't be sure if the memory is real or just a vivid, long-ago dream. In his recollection, he's a child, young enough to be riding in a stroller. His mother is pushing him and chatting with a neighbor when Jones stares up to the sky and sees something gliding through the clouds.

"Look," he tells his mother convincingly, "a pirate ship."  
She glances up, confused. "What pirate ship?" she asks. Then she shakes her head, turns to the neighbor and says, "That boy is going to make a fine actor one day."  
And with that, Jones' course was set.

"Ever since hearing that, I wondered what an actor was," Jones, 28, tells Alexa, relaxing in a Soho loft apartment during our Alexa cover shoot. "It just made an impression on me. From an early age, something was instilled in me to follow this path."  
That path has just delivered him to his first starring TV role, as Danny Rand in "Iron Fist," a new superhero series that premiered on Netflix last week. Playing the son of two wealthy New Yorkers, Jones learns kung fu in a mystical Asian city and then transforms into the Iron Fist, a super-powered martial arts master. It's the latest show in Marvel's TV universe, following the critically acclaimed "Daredevil," "Jessica Jones" and "Luke Cage." The part was one of the more sought-after roles in Hollywood, and landing it takes Jones' star to new heights.

Viewers may recognize him from another high-profile series: HBO's "Game of Thrones," where he played Loras Tyrell — the heir to Highgarden who was persecuted for his homosexuality and killed off last season.  
As incredible as it sounds, Jones was forced to support himself with odd jobs while appearing regularly on that global hit series. Until quite recently, he could be spotted working at a bar in the Shepherd's Bush hood of his native London.

"That's the way it goes for young actors," he says with a shrug. "You can be on the biggest show in the world and still have to pay the rent."  
Jones, who grew up in Croydon, a congested London suburb, spent the first two years of his life in foster care before being adopted. His mother is a caregiver for children, his father a private investigator — though Jones seems reluctant to spill more. "He's kind of top secret," he says mysteriously, before changing the subject.

As a boy, Jones was a good student and rarely got in trouble. But he often felt like an outsider, in part because he was adopted. "You never really feel like you fit in," he says. "I've always been a bit of a lost soul, and I think that goes back to me being adopted and not knowing my roots."

For Jones, like so many young misfits, the theater proved to be his salvation. Once he figured out that "actor" — the word he'd heard from his mother — meant a performer and not an acrobat (as he initially believed), he began attending classes at a local nonprofit theater workshop.

"It created a safe space for us to be silly and experimental and not give a s---t about what other people think," he tells Alexa. "And for an actor that's a really incredible tool that you must have."

He later attended a London drama school, but left early after landing an agent. A part on British soap opera "Hollyoaks" soon followed, and he began his work on the first season of "Game of Thrones" in 2011, but other acting work eluded him. He'd been auditioning twice a week for four or five years, and wondered if he'd ever land a big break. Then, on his final day filming "GoT," he got an email from his agent about "Iron Fist."

The character of Danny Rand appeals to Jones for reasons beyond the profile and paycheck — it resonates with his own background. As a 10-year-old, Rand was orphaned when a plane carrying him and his parents crashes in Asia. He's taken in by a secret order and taught to harness a mystical, chi-like power. Some years later, Rand returns to New York only to find that he's presumed dead and that his family's company has been taken over by an unscrupulous boss. Rand sets out to prove who he is and take back his life.

"The story is about identity," Jones says. "He's trying to figure out his place in the world. It harkens back to those times in my life when I was questioning what I wanted to do and what I wanted to be."

The actor continues to sort out his own place in the world. Last March, he moved to NYC, where "Iron Fist" is filmed. He's now living in what he calls his bachelor pad in Williamsburg.

"New York's just cooler," Jones says. "A lot of the vibe in London is being sucked dry because of the economic situation. It's very expensive and it gives you nothing back. New York still feels like there's stuff going on. People are struggling to create art. There's still a vibe."

Jones is also an amateur DJ and one of his favorite aspects of Gotham is the energetic music scene. "New York has a deep culture of house and dance music, and to be able to tap into that is my way of shutting off," Jones says. "I go to friends' parties and local spots around the area. Places I can go to, have a dance and forget about being an actor and the attention."

Shutting off is crucial — the actor has been working nearly nonstop for a year. He finished shooting "Iron Fist" and moved directly onto the "The Defenders" — an upcoming Marvel Netflix show (reportedly set to premiere this summer) that unites all of the previously introduced characters as one team.

The biggest challenge for a martial arts character is, of course, learning all the fight choreography. And unlike Daredevil, Iron Fist doesn't wear a mask, so there's nowhere to hide; Jones must perform everything himself.

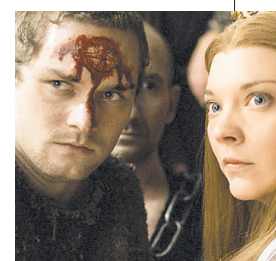
"I can throw a punch better than I ever could," Jones says with a laugh. "Because I've been fake-punching for so long, there's a part of me that wants to see what it would be like to really sock someone, but I'm not a violent person."

Jones has already been punching back in the press, blaming some lukewarm reviews of "Iron Fist" on the anti-Donald Trump sentiment. "I'm playing a white American billionaire superhero, at a time when the white American billionaire archetype is public enemy number one," he recently told Radio Times.

Aggrieved fans also cried foul when Jones, a white man, was cast as the lead. (In the Marvel comic upon which the series is based, the character is also white, but some comic book fans hoped this might be a chance for the franchise to cast its first Asian-American leading man.)

Jones recently quit Twitter (temporarily) after an online dust-up over the controversy — but his time on "Game of Thrones" prepared him for dealing with passionate fans.

"The comic book crowd are very intense," he says. "But I don't let that pressure change the way I perform the character — I don't get swallowed up by it, because it's a lot."  
Then, after a brief pause that lands somewhere between gratitude and resignation: "A lot."



**TOP:** Jones and Natalie Dormer as "Game of Thrones." **ABOVE:** Jones stars in Netflix's "Iron Fist." PHOTOS COURTESY OF HBO, NETFLIX