



'It's been my gift that I've played a lot of strong women. One day I'd like to prove I can play weak too. I want to do everything'

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SIMMON BAWETT; PHOTO EVERETT COLLECTION; MURRAY CLOSE/ONSGATE

NATALIE DORMER WARRIOR Princess

SHE CAN PLAY A SEDUCTRESS—AND ROCK A SHAVED HEAD. FROM *HUNGER GAMES* TO *GAME OF THRONES*, THE BRITISH ACTRESS IS WINNING THE GAME OF STARDOM

Natalie Dormer has always been game for a challenge. Yet when the British actress, 32, was asked to shave half her head for her role as Capitol-deserting filmmaker Cressida in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 1*, she had a bit of trepidation. “It was kind of a ‘gulp’ moment and took some courage,” she admits. “But there is some serious s--- happening out there in the world, so ultimately you have to look at it in perspective. Hair grows back.” By the time she heard the razor start buzzing, “I was kind of reconciled and excited by what it was going to look like. And Cressida is so good at her job. She kicks ass.”

So does Dormer. Legions of fans have already embraced her as the cunning Margaery Tyrell on HBO’s *Game of Thrones*. Now, with the *Hunger Games* franchise, she’s solidifying her status as Hollywood’s go-to woman for characters who are gorgeous, smart and maybe just a *little* bit manipulative. “It’s been extraordinary,” she says. “At Comic-Con, there were people dressed as my characters! The fans for both are so sweet and committed. It’s off the charts.”



Dormer has always been something of an overachiever. Growing up in Reading, England, she was head girl at the private Reading Blue Coat School; excelled at dance, netball and public speaking; and narrowly missed getting into Cambridge

to study history. Instead, she entered drama school, and six months after graduating landed a role opposite Heath Ledger in *Casanova*. After her breakthrough role as the doomed Anne Boleyn in Showtime’s bodice-ripping series *The Tudors*, she landed parts in *Rush* and *Captain America: The First Avenger* before joining *Game of Thrones*, in which her ambitious character is doing her damndest to marry into power, give or take a few funerals. *The Hunger Games* offered her a different kind of clout. “I learned to shoot a semiautomatic machine gun, and those are heavy,” she says. “Running around with them, you get fit!” Director Francis Lawrence says the actress was the perfect fit for Cressida: “Natalie had been on my radar for a while. She’s a strong, tough, smart girl.” Quietly engaged since 2011 to director Anthony Byrne, Dormer credits her yoga mat (“It goes with me everywhere”) and Skype with keeping her grounded. “My friends keep me sane,” she says, “and make me laugh on those tough, long days away from home.” Not that she’ll be able to close her laptop anytime soon. She’ll next lace up another corset to star in the BBC drama *The Woman in Red* and will battle zombies in the upcoming *Patient Zero*. Yet despite all her success, “what makes me really happy is a walk in the English countryside,” says the actress. “A nice sunset, that British countryside, it means I’m home.”

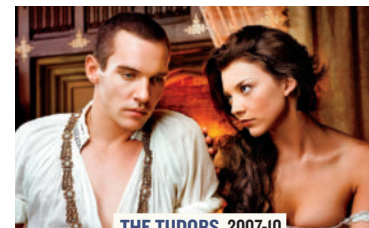
By Julie Jordan with Monique Jessen

HOW I GOT HERE



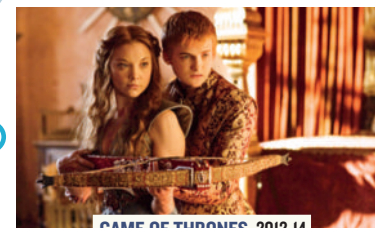
CASANOVA, 2005

Shooting her first movie with Heath Ledger in Italy, says Dormer, “turned me into a coffee and red wine snob!”



THE TUDORS, 2007-10

Dormer (as Anne Boleyn) says she enjoys portraying “courageous women who battle through their fears.”



GAME OF THRONES, 2012-14

“Keeping Margaery alive is the only challenge,” she says. “She’s still holding on by her fingernails to be queen.”



ELEMENTARY, 2013-14

“I like not having to put on a wig,” says the actress, who plays Sherlock Holmes’s lover/nemesis in the CBS series.

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY—PART I, 2014

Dormer says the shaved head and tattoo “was everything I wanted Cressida to look like.”

