

BIG

Action hero, spiritual bro, environmental warrior, family guy, humble husband. The multiple personalities of Jason Momoa, the most modern male movie star on the planet, will surprise you >

BY MOLLY KNIGHT AND SCOTT HENDERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TURE LILLEGRAVEN

MOMOMA

ENERGY

ate on a Friday night, in the midst of what is becoming Australia's never-ending lockdown, my laptop fires up for a meeting with **Jason Momoa**. As the video call connects, Momoa appears in a radiant hotel suite – the light is fluorescent, the furniture all white and the walls are pristine. It's as if Hollywood's most easy-going star is zooming in from Heaven. And, as it turns out, he is. Well, his own version of it, at least.

Momoa is also in quarantine, locked in this room with his family ahead of an intense few days of filming *Aquaman 2* in London. His kids, Nakoa-Wolf (Wolfie) and Lola, can be heard playing ping pong in the other room to the unmistakable beats of Billie Eilish, and as he tells me almost immediately, he's relishing the quality time with them.

As the connection falters, then regenerates, I'm immediately hit with what has become known as Big Momoa Energy. As we all know after months on end of Zoom meetings and interviews, it's hard to appreciate somebody's essence through a computer screen. Tech issues, delays, poor lighting . . . they all make it hard to fully appraise a person. Not Momoa. He has an aura that penetrates even the bin fire that is 2021.

The man does not disappoint. Within seconds of appearing, Momoa throws his tousled mane into a man bun using his famous pink scrunchie ("It's mine, not Lola's," he says as a point of fact). With Guinness in hand (mine, not his), I'm one "Right on, man" from Momoa Bingo.

It's hard to unpack Momoa Energy on first impression. You'd think his larger-than-life positivity combined with his larger than make-believe presence would be the makings of said energy. But with the physicality of an in-person encounter removed, it's clear there's more to it.

Momoa is an enigma. An axe-wielding, Harley-obsessed, Guinness-guzzling, unkempt man mountain. But for all his affection for classic racers and vintage Harleys, and for all the brick-house physicality that would've made him an outstanding '80s action hero, Momoa has spent the past few years slowly revealing himself to be the most singular and surprising – the most modern, really – male movie star we've got. "I don't do incognito," he explains. "Here's this flamboyant Cadillac I've had since I was 22, because I love Elvis. Here's my top-hat collection, because I love top hats. Here's my ridiculous pink fur coat. I have a lot of weird things." Perhaps it's because he used to go antiquing "all the time" with his mum that he appreciates well-made items and durable designs. "I can look at a rusty spoon," he tells me, "and it defines who I am."

Go ahead and think of another action star, much less one who stands six-foot-four (193cm) with broad shoulders and

a barrel chest that make him seem much, much bigger, who speaks of spiritual communion with cutlery. Or who likes to reminisce about the last time he cried. Or who's in regular touch with his aumakua (Hawaiian for ancestral spirits). Or who hates going to the gym and says yoga is too hard. Go ahead and think, really. We'll wait. And while we wait, consider that Momoa would be the first to tell you that all of the tough-guy vibes you picked up from his Walk of Fame performances in *Game of Thrones* (as Khal Drogo) and *Conan the Barbarian* and *Aquaman* were just an act. Which makes sense, because he was acting. "I may look big and tough, but I'm not," he explains. "I'm nothing like Khal Drogo. I'm not even the king of my own house! I'm absolutely terrified of my wife."

With Momoa, we've got ourselves an altogether different type of star from all the Chrises and Ryans who serve up their own spins on wholesome, well-groomed, on-script masculinity. Spontaneous, humble, earnest and actually, honest-to-goodness-ly authentic, he's more like the charismatic spawn of The Rock and wee Timothée Chalamet, bulldozing outdated and restrictive modes of manliness and showing the rest of us how to embrace our full non-incognito selves. Now, at 42, after two decades of playing buff guys without a lot of brains, Momoa is getting his first taste of working on a prestige film with an acclaimed director and a metric tonne of Academy Award-winning and -nominated actors. The man is not done surprising us yet.

DUNE BUGGY

If it seems as though Jason Momoa is everywhere at the moment, it's because, well, he is. No matter your streaming platform of choice, Momoa is somewhere near the top of the 'trending' list. Season 2 of post-apocalyptic thriller *See* has just returned to Apple TV+, *Sweetest Girl* is the number one movie globally on Netflix, and the recently re-released *Justice League* still reigns supreme on Binge.

And if omnipresence is the goal, it's sure to be achieved upon the release of his latest project. The film is *Dune*, and it's the first instalment of the long-awaited adaptation of Frank Herbert's best-selling sci-fi novel. It's the type of film whose teaser trailer breaks the Internet, and it would've been the biggest movie of 2020 if COVID-19 hadn't pushed its release date to late 2021. For Momoa, there was no other option than to wait for cinemas to reopen before unleashing the interplanetary opus.

"I want to see films in the theatre. Like I'm never going to have a theatre in my house that is going to be on the level of what I want to see a proper film like this. I don't want to see *Avatar* in a home-screening theatre. I don't want to see *Star Wars* like that; I don't want to see *Aquaman* like that and I don't want to see *Dune* that way. There's just certain films I want to be immersed in. I love the communion of it. I love being there with the audience, feeding off of it and hearing it. You're feeling it with everyone."

Momoa plays Duncan Idaho, a swordmaster and mentor to the young protagonist Paul Atreides, played by none other than Chalamet. As Momoa and I talk over teas and Guinness (again, surprisingly the tea is his), he struggles to contain his excitement for the movie. He leans into the screen and his eyes light up, bouncing around in his seat while telling me all about his costars, from Chalamet ("he's like a little brother, and he's phenomenal in this") to Oscar Isaac ("he ended up being my man crush") to Josh Brolin ("the big brother I've always wanted") to Javier Bardem ("like a god to me"). He's like a high-schooler coming home after his first day at a new school, telling his parents all about his awesome new friends, each one cooler than the last.

"You know when you meet your heroes?" Yes, Mr Momoa sir, I can relate . . . "I met a bunch of them and they suck. And so when you meet someone you like and they don't suck, that's beyond beautiful."

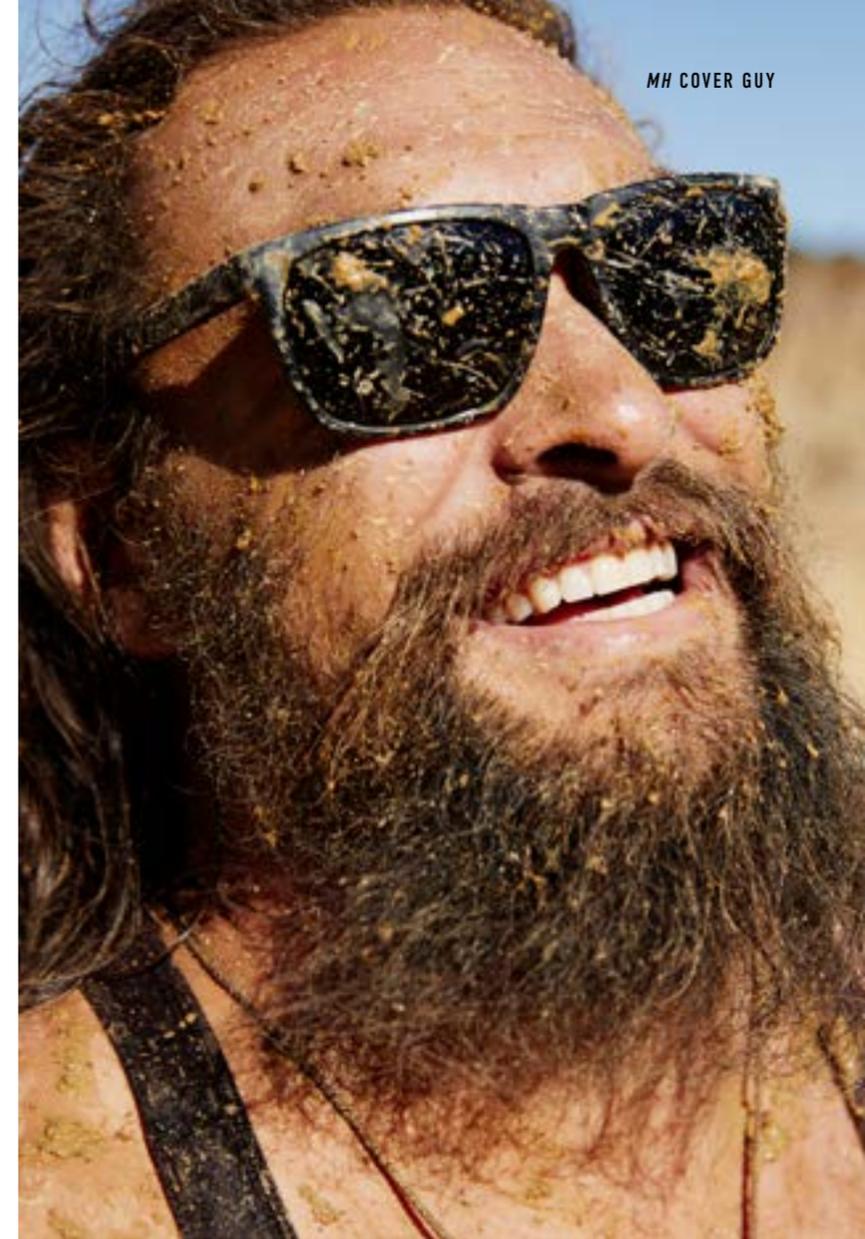
He counts director Denis Villeneuve, best known for bringing *Blade Runner 2049* to the screen in 2017, among those heroes. Villeneuve read the *Dune* series as a kid and considers making the film a lifelong dream. In an email to *Men's Health*, Villeneuve calls casting Momoa in the role a no-brainer. "Duncan Idaho is a true heroic knight figure, a proud, courageous, righteous and ruthless man, famous for his unmatched fighting skills. He's also a bit of a bohemian. I thought that Jason would be perfect to embody him. Like Duncan Idaho, Jason has an insane charisma that makes people gravitate around him. Jason is a force of nature. He's bigger than life."

Momoa says that signing up to portray Idaho in 2019 was such an honour – he was working on the first season of *See*, and was looking for something big – but that doesn't mean he wasn't scared shitless. "Knowing Denis picked me to play this role," Momoa says between sips of tea, "I've never been this nervous."

Despite starring in some of history's most popular, not to mention bankable, franchises (including a stint on *Baywatch*), Momoa insists roles like Idaho don't just fall in his lap. "I wish it was that cool and I could have done that. I worked my ass off to get *Game of Thrones*, and that kind of opened the door for *Aquaman*. So that kind of fell in, and then I think Denis heard through the grapevine and through some people that I might be someone that could play a role like Duncan Idaho."

He recalls that one of the first scenes he shot required him to share the screen with Oscar winner Bardem, aka the "god".

"We were sitting at this table, and the scene is all about Javier walking into the room. I've never seen someone strut into a room like such a boss. He just comes right up to this table and stares everybody down. He's glaring at everyone else but giving me a little bit of a twinkle, and I'm just giggling inside because I can't believe I'm at this table right now. So then he delivers his lines and just kills it. And right after that, Denis goes up to him and starts giving him notes. I'm shocked, like, What the hell could you possibly be giving him notes on? So I'm standing there absolutely terrified because I had to deliver all this sci-fi exposition, which is not my bag at all. And then I did it and I did not get any notes at all. I was so unbelievably happy I could have cried."



Momoa may have felt like, ahem, a fish out of water among this company, but his costars say he was crucial to the cast's on-set chemistry. "Jason inspires a group spirit to all around him," Chalamet later writes. "He is someone who brings a raw joy for filmmaking to the set every day. He's one of those enriching humans to be around for their joy of camaraderie, which is especially important to be around when you are starting out as an actor." Villeneuve felt it, too: "He has a very contagious positive attitude. You could feel the Momoa wave of energy coming in just as he was landing on set."

That's it, the Big Momoa Energy, something he first learned to harness and channel at a young age. He was born in Hawaii but raised as an only child by a single mother in Norwalk, Iowa. (His dad is a painter who still lives in Hawaii.) Momoa says that when he looks back on his childhood, he recalls there being not much to do in the small Midwestern town.

He whipped up his own adventures in dusty fields and developed a love for old, beautiful things on those antiquing trips with his mum. He played street hockey and discovered rock climbing. "Even though I work in Hollywood, I'm 100 per cent roots Midwest," he says. "I work hard and don't take anything for granted. I'm a big family guy." ▶

Above: Tank by Rick Owens; necklace by Weloha; sunglasses by Electric.
Previous page: Tank by Rick Owens; pants by MadeWorn x Jason; boots by Wesco; necklace by Weloha; sunglasses by Electric.

WOLFIE PACK

The importance of family was never bigger for Momoa than in 2020. “I was spoiled rotten,” he says of his time hunkering down with his wife and children. “It was amazing. Just loved up and being at home for six, seven months which has never happened since I was broke in the first part of my career and the babies were little. It was amazing just being at home and being with family. I really cherish that. I don’t want it to go back to the way it was. There’s a lot of stuff that has to change. So with this, hopefully there’s some positive change in the world.”

When he’s not on a film set, axe-wielding or riding old Harleys, he spends most of his days rock climbing or playing with Lola and Nakoa-Wolf, whom he calls Wolfie. “My wife is very sophisticated and smart and [our kids and I are] kind of like animals that need to be trained a little better,” he says. “I’m constantly a work in progress, and I’ve just been trying to get better as a father and a husband.”

This past year was as stressful and scary for him as it was for the rest of us, but the silver lining was that it kept him at home. There is no television in the house and his kids don’t have phones, so family play involves climbing on the two walls he had built, swimming, skateboarding, guitar playing, listening to records and hiking with their three dogs. “I can’t believe it – they love reading,” he says. “I’m like, ‘Stop reading! Get outside’. It’s insane.” While he has brought his family with him on shoots all over the world, Momoa says his kids are old enough that even though they still enjoy being with their dad, they don’t want to miss out on school and hanging with their friends.

“It’s the coolest experience because my son and my daughter were on set for *Justice League*. They were on set for *Aquaman*. And then just sitting next to them at the premiere, taking them and just being able to share that experience now for *Dune*. It’s really like prime age because, they may just be like, ‘Ugh, dad,’ later. But right now, they’re still definitely in it. They haven’t gotten to know the bad parts yet.”

When Momoa met wife Lisa Bonet in 2005, she was a single mum raising her teenage daughter, Zoë, with ex-husband Lenny Kravitz. Rather than being intimidated by the fact that the woman he was trying to woo used to be married to Lenny fucking Kravitz, Momoa became so close to him from the jump that they now refer to each other as ohana, or family. Momoa is also close to Zoë – he’s called her “zozo bear” on Instagram, and she’s referred to him as “papa bear”, and the whole thing is incredibly sweet. “I love her husband,” he says. “I love her dad. I hope and pray my daughter is that talented and loving and open and close to her family.”

Once Zoë started bringing boyfriends around the house, Kravitz played the whole thing super cool (no surprise there), while Momoa was the house worrier. “Lenny is way cooler than I am,” Momoa says. “I was baffled.” He says part of the reason he cried about Lola turning 13 was that he knows at some point she will start dating and he will inevitably freak out. “I’m not going to do well with it,” he says. “I’ll just hate it if she brings home some dipshit bad boy.” He’s hoping she’ll gravitate towards someone as devoted to her as he is to her mum. “I’m like, ‘If you find a man who treats you better than I [treat Bonet], good luck!’” A nice guy, in other words. A modern man. Someone like him.

AQUA-STAN

For all the smiles and broisms, don’t mistake the trademark Momoa joviality for weakness. The man is passionate. Fiercely. And when he believes in a just cause, he will defend it with a savagery that rivals his Atlantean alter-ego.

His most recent battle, alongside fans, was to encourage the release of Zack Snyder’s *Justice League*, aka the Snyder Cut.

Alongside co-stars Gal Gadot and Ray Fisher, Momoa was one of the loudest voices leading the charge for the release of the mythical Snyder Cut, an alternate version of the much-maligned 2017 Joss Whedon-helmed version. The rumoured version, locked away in the Warner Bros vault, was the iteration created by original director Zack Snyder before his departure from the production following the loss of his daughter. The rumours of a very different *Justice League* turned out to be true, and in a huge moment in popular culture, the film was re-released as a result of the immense pressure placed on the studio by fans and cast, restored



WORKOUT TUNES

Metallica, Pantera, Rage Against the Machine, Slayer. Those four are mandatory.

KARAOKE SONG

“Debra” by Beck.

HERO

Tom Waits – his lyrics, his composition and the sounds he makes.

FAVOURITE DESIGNER

I mostly wear work clothes, but if I have to wear something fancy, I go Tom Ford, straight out of the box, boom.

CHEAT MEAL

Hawaiian food: Kalua pig, lau lau, rice, poi, poke and Portuguese sausage, salad... the amount I eat is the cheat part.

FAMILY MEAL

Steak on the grill – pretty basic. My wife is an amazing cook, so she does most of it.

thanks to the power of the people. “Justice. There was justice,” says Momoa with a wry smile, acknowledging the restoration of the project he originally signed on to.

“I wouldn’t be Aquaman if it wasn’t for Zack, and so that vision is what I signed up for. And so I didn’t re-shoot one thing. That was all the stuff we shot. And now it’s just amazing that although there’s this massive tragedy that happened, I’m happy that my friend got to put out his art and I’m happy Warner Brothers let him put out his art and it all worked out.”

It was a risky move, speaking out against the studio that will hopefully keep him gainfully employed for any number of foreseeable *Aquaman* sequels, although an unsurprising one when you learn of his devotion to the fanbase. For him, the fight wasn’t an option – he was always going to side with the fans.

“When you play certain roles, you do it for the fan base. You do it for the fans. Like playing Conan, I didn’t do it for

the Arnold Schwarzenegger fans. I did it for the Robert E. Howard fans. I did it for what I fell in love with, with the books and what it was really meant to be. That’s what I signed up to do. And then obviously I’m going to follow through and finish my job, and bad things happen and we had to move this way, but I’m just really happy that it all got to come out, and hopefully the fans are happy and we have two of them [*Justice League* movies]. So, fantastic. And there’s a lot of great things from the first one, and there’s a lot of great things from the second one.”

Momoa’s passions and activism extend well beyond the big screen. He’s a heavy investor in green initiatives and environmental protection. Indeed, Momoa was interested in protecting the oceans long before he swam into Aquaman’s suit. He was studying to be a marine biologist at college before dropping out to become an actor and spending his early 20s drifting around Australia (“I would happily film movies there for the rest of my life”).

Above: Shirt by Napili, available at vintage-alo-ha-shirt.com; pants by Carhartt; boots by Wesco; necklace by Weloha; sunglasses by Electric; belt and scrunchie, Momoa’s own.

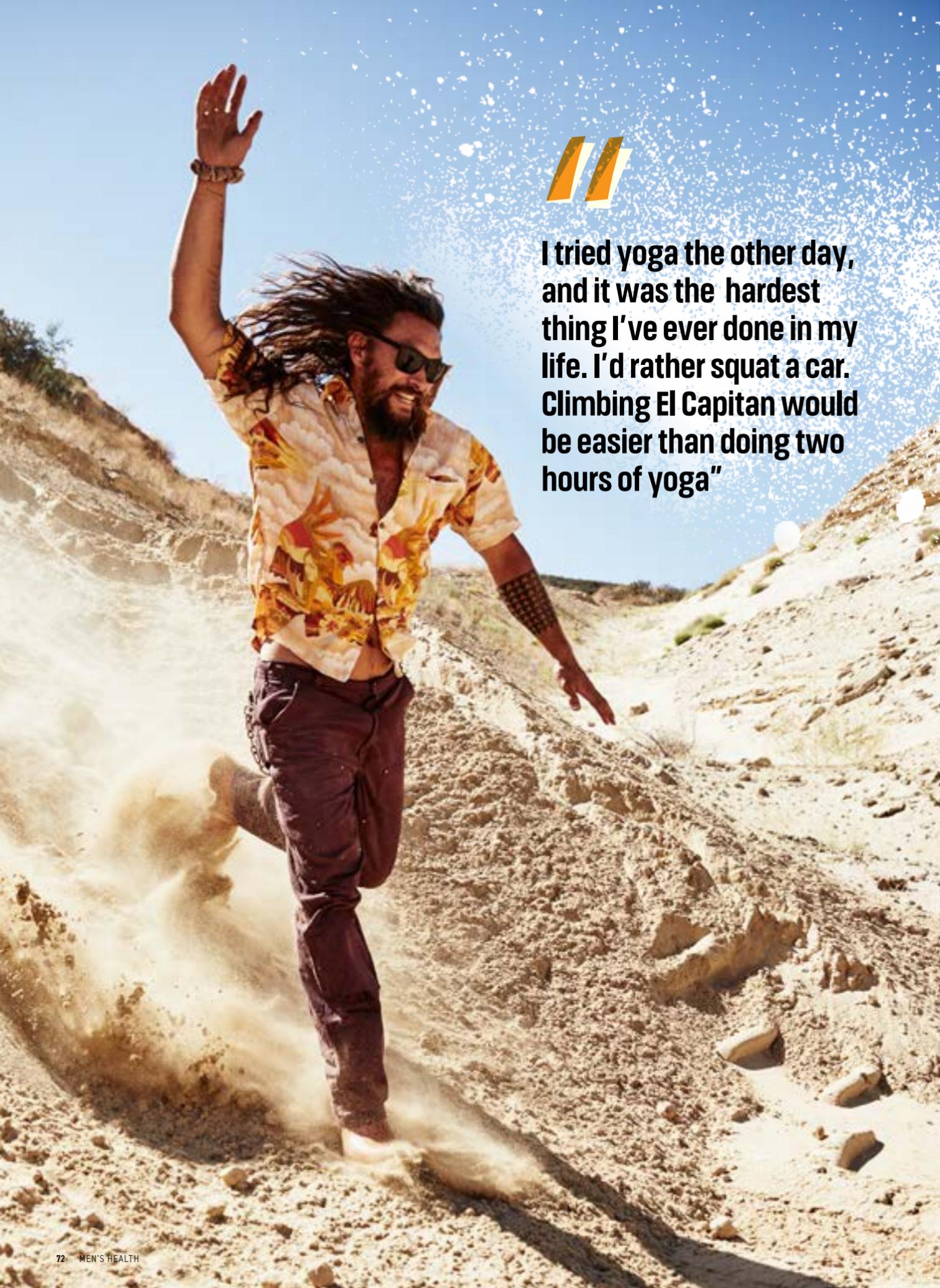
I’d like to go from being the best fan of Guinness to being just a really good fan of Guinness”

“There are so many massive issues happening that can’t be tolerated anymore, and I’m absolutely behind them. I’m looking forward to not going back to normal. I do believe we’ve hit a tipping point. We just need to keep fighting for it. For me, I’ve been on the forefront of trying to do a lot of things with climate change and environmental issues, and that’s all part of this, too. That’s kind of gone by the wayside for some people, but it hasn’t for me.”

He says one of his major goals for 2021 is to try to cut back on eating meat, for environmental reasons, which will be difficult because he really loves eating meat. Other vices he’s keen to crush? “I’d also like to go from being the best fan of Guinness to being just a really good fan of Guinness.”

GAIN OF THRONES

Looking at Momoa, you’d assume he must bust his gut in the gym to get the kind of build that makes him look every inch the DC superhero. You’d be wrong. “It’s just throwing stuff ▶



I tried yoga the other day, and it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I'd rather squat a car. Climbing El Capitan would be easier than doing two hours of yoga"

around outside," he says. "Hawaiians are big people. I rock climb a lot. Maybe I'm an ape. I love the way it feels. I like being upside down. I always loved climbing trees as a kid and swinging in the breeze. But lifting weights is challenging. Being in the gym is just kind of a killer for me. It feels kind of sterile, but I just started falling in love with kettlebells. It's just been super helpful for my shoulders and for my legs and core. And it's translated over to rock climbing and it's translated over to other sports."

Momoa's hardcore training for superhero roles has taken its toll, especially of late, as he lists his injuries: broken femur, surgery on both knees, a tear in the long head of his bicep and just "shoulders".

"It's tough because doing the whole superhero body thing... it's just a look, right? So it's not really functional. My body feels better doing kettlebells. I'm sure my body would feel better stretching and [doing] yoga and stuff like that, but I feel like kettlebells has been something that's really active. And I can do it, I can swing them around anywhere. I can be outside and just drop them down in the dirt. It just feels a little bit more savage doing that."

Bonet is big into Pilates and yoga, and she's been urging her husband to join her. "So I tried yoga the other day, and it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," he says. "I'd rather squat a car. Climbing El Capitan would be easier than doing two hours of yoga. I can't bend over anymore! My hamstrings are so tight. It's pathetic. I'm falling apart. I remember one time I was all yoked out for *Conan the Barbarian*, and I was in a yoga class with these older ladies and everyone was just holding their arms up and I was like, [screams] 'This is so hard!'"

The more Momoa makes fun of himself, the easier it is to envision him excelling in comedic roles, like John Cena or The Rock. So much of what made his performance in *Aquaman* entertaining was that he gave us a superhero who never took himself too seriously. After he shoots *Aquaman 2* (filming started

two days after we spoke), he will begin filming what he calls his "dream role". He won't tell me anything about the project, other than that he cowrote it and it will shoot in Hawaii. Oh, and he won't be playing a doctor or lawyer. ("I wouldn't hire me for those roles, either.") When he's done with his current projects, he says, he wants a chance to do comedy. "Romantic-comedy lead, the nerdy best friend, anything," he says. "I would love to do it, but so far nobody will hire me for it."

He's hoping that after *Dune*, different doors will open for him. He could live a more than comfortable life continuing to play the same characters over and over again, but comfort has never really been his thing.

"I don't chill. I'm completely neurotic in my head. I'm super ADHD and can't sit still, I'm a spaz. It just looks like I'm chill. I'm absolutely not chill. I'm pretty all over the place. And so I'm trying to learn how to not stress as much. And I know I have the same problems everybody has, and definitely when you get bigger there's just a lot more challenges. So I think I'm kind of going through the same thing everybody is. We all need help. We all need love. We all need hugs. We all need to be nice to each other, and it just does us no good to be assholes. Be You."

And with that, Momoa has unlocked the very essence of BME. I ask him to confirm if that is in fact the key to his happiness and continued success.

"Right on, man". Bingo. ■

Stay in Shape Without Weights!

*You don't need the weight room to build action-hero strength, and Jason Momoa is proof of that. His weight-room hate is legendary, which is why he built his *Dune* body far from the gym, relying on these real-world activities. They can be the perfect antidote to boring curls and bench presses, so give them a try*



PADDLEBOARDING

"As a Hawaiian, surfing is in his blood," says Kim Fardy, Momoa's friend and stunt double. Momoa likes to surf and paddleboard. The benefit is that paddleboarding challenges your balance and core strength while also serving as an "active recovery tool," says Fardy.



PRETZELING

One of Momoa's goals is to do more yoga and Pilates, which help with the flexibility he needs to do fight scenes. "I'm gonna call it extreme stretching," he says. "Like, 'All right, guys, there's the beer! Pick it up! Now reach over here and give that beer to your buddy!'"



ROCK CLIMBING

Momoa climbs as much as possible. Just 10-20 minutes of climbing or bouldering can fire up your forearm and back muscles, and your mind gets a workout, too. "It's the mental game," says Fardy, "of figuring out different problems to reach your goals."



BODYWEIGHT TRAINING

Why do bench presses and deadlifts when push-ups and bodyweight squats work just fine? "He can train anywhere," says Fardy, "even between takes on set without access to a gym." Try doing 100 push-ups between work calls and emails. Enjoy the burn.