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# On-screen John Barrowman plays a **sex-mad alien** investigator. In real life he's from Glasgow.

John Barrowman has made the adult sci-fi series *Torchwood* a smash in Britain. On the eve of its U.S. arrival he talks marriage, making out with Cher, and emerging gay heroes.

John Barrowman is easing into his first coffee of the day and recalling a reporter's effusive—but loaded—compliments about his colorful Etro shirt. “I knew she wanted me to say it was flamboyant, but I thought, *I’m going to make you work for it*. Finally she got around to a question about my life. I said, ‘Oh, my God, you said *gay*! I’m so *proud* of you. It only took you 20 minutes!’ ” He leans back against the booth and laughs broadly, a hand on his stomach like he’s trying to restrain himself.

“I have no problem talking about it,” he rushes to clarify, as if it’s possible to miss the mischievous gleam in his eyes. “I’m proud of what I’ve done. I’m proud of who I am, and I’m proud to be gay. No qualms.”

Born in Scotland and raised in Illinois, Barrowman conquered London’s West End theaters before seducing television viewers as a sexually insatiable, swashbuckling traveler of space and time in the hugely successful 2005 revival of the cult BBC show *Doctor Who*. Now the United Kingdom’s biggest triple threat has returned stateside to give us a glimpse of the future: a 21st-century matinee idol who makes it all look easy.

Officially out since an interview in England’s *Gay Times*

magazine in 2004, Barrowman was in truth hardly ever in and has seemed incapable of keeping quiet about his sexuality since. One minute he's talking with starry eyes about his partner of 15 years, and in the next he rambles about his raunchy fantasies, frequently accompanying himself with a flailing, X-rated pantomime. And he does it all with the same easy elegance he brings to the character that's made him a household name in the United Kingdom.

Barrowman's Captain Jack Harkness is a charming cad who hails from a distant tomorrow but has stolen all his moves from the scruffy con men of our cinematic past. Both the character and the actor leave a kind of time-traveling *déjà vu* in their wake. To talk with Barrowman is to forget for a minute that we don't all already live in a time and place where macho leading roles are handed out to unrepentantly gay men without a single discussion as to how audiences might respond.

But that's exactly what happened when the executives in charge of reviving Britain's family-friendly drama *Doctor Who* set about casting Jack. "John is a very infectious person and actor," says Julie Gardner, who along with *Queer as Folk* creator Russell T. Davies serves as an executive producer for *Doctor Who*. "He has huge charisma."

Then, in an effort to expand the *Who* brand to a more mature, prime-time audience, Davies created *Torchwood*, a Jack-helmed spin-off that's more *X-Files* than *Star Trek*. Jack was given his own team of attractive alien investigators and sent out to save the world—or at least modern-day Cardiff, the bustling capital city of Wales. When not busy shooting at unidentified objects, he revels in his well-advertised "omni-sexuality," which largely involves trying to get into the pants of every man, woman, and creature who crosses his path. [See sidebar.]

Back on Planet Barrowman, it's normal to be inundated by kids in supermarkets seeking autographs on their Captain Jack action figures. The Royal Air Force even asked him to do a fly-by and pose for in-character photo ops. While such a request of an openly gay actor is unthinkable in the current climate of the U.S. military, the United Kingdom drafted a new code of conduct in 2000 allowing gay men and women to serve openly in its armed services. "That's why I said I'd do it." Out comes the wicked grin: "I'd like to think my pilot was gay. How many gay boys want to go in the cockpit? I did that!"

It's also practically a given that everyone who talks about either Barrowman or Captain Jack eventually uses the word *hero*. "A cheeky hero," Gardner says, laughing, "most definitely."

**B**arrowman's family relocated to Illinois when he was 8, right about the time he began to notice he was far more interested in boys than girls. In his new Midwestern life, Barrowman says, "If you were queer, there was something wrong with you." But he has little interest in dwelling on an angst-ridden coming-of-age story. "I had no angst, no anxiety," he insists.

"I think he had a harder time than I probably knew about," says his older sister, Carole Barrowman, recounting a story of John being bullied that she hadn't heard until she helped write his autobiography, due out in 2008.

"I played flute, do you know?" he points out dryly, his Ameri-

can accent peppered with British slang. "I was in choir. I wanted to be a cheerleader—I liked those tight pants, and you would get to go to competitions where there were other boys who were probably like me. But I never pushed that. I could have ostracized myself, but I loved the social aspect. I did make-out sessions with girls while in my head I was going, *What am I doing?*"

His male friends helped in their own way. "We'd be watching dirty movies, the other boys at one end of the sofa and me at the other, and everyone's giving it—" He mimes jerking himself off. "And I'm having a little look." He also nursed a serious crush on a close friend but never made a move. "I thought by just being gay you would get AIDS." He shakes his head angrily. "Stupid fucks—not us, *them* [for not teaching us about it]."

"And, OK," he admits, "people called me a fag, but I ignored it."

Escape came in the dubious form of a singing gig at Opryland USA, a now-defunct Nashville theme park, where he finally met other gay men. "I had my first kiss, and that was lovely," he remembers. "But I didn't do anything really full-on until I was in my 20s."

When he finally came out to his parents, he presented them with two options, he says: "One is that you turn your back on me, and I walk out this door. Or two, my life is going to be a journey, and I'm going to do, I hope, great things. And I want you to be a part of it."

"They actually said, 'We are a bit appalled that you would think we would turn our back on you.' And my dad said, 'I don't understand a lot of it yet, but I will.' And they have."

Behind every hero is a great man. According to Barrowman, Scott Gill, 44, has "a body like an Armani model and a cock like a donkey," a description that can't be news to Gill but might make the shy British architect uncomfortable. He prefers to stay out of the spotlight—so much so, in fact, that despite Barrowman's fame in the United Kingdom, this is the first interview he's ever given.

Across 5,000-odd miles and two weeks, Barrowman and Gill each tell me their love story, and like two guilty men in an interrogation, their fairy-tale versions match up almost perfectly.

"In 1993, I was doing my first straight play," Barrowman says, and winks. "You know, no singing or dancing." The play was *Rope* (the same adapted for film by Alfred Hitchcock), and a mutual friend dragged Gill to a performance.

"The lights went up and there's John and two other guys naked," Gill says. Barrowman was nude for seven minutes, and Gill recalls his stage presence, without a shred of irony, as being "like a lighthouse on a dark night." He remembers thinking, "*That's the guy I'd like to have a relationship with.*"

Their friend brought Gill backstage, where Barrowman was still getting changed. "I was pulling my pants up," Barrowman says, "but then again, he'd already seen it all. When I turned around and saw him, that was it. I just knew as soon as I looked at him: *That's the man I'm going to spend the rest of my life with.*"

The rest of their lives had to wait a while. Barrowman had dinner plans (with Sarah Brightman), and both men were somehow too nervous to call for a proper date. Gill says every time he caught Barrowman's new TV show, a series called *Live & Kicking*, he'd

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Previous page and this page: Black Wool coat with high collar and black V-neck sweater by **Bottega Venetta**. Black tuxedo pants by **Hugo Boss**. Black patent leather lace-ups by **Dolce & Gabbana**.

Burgundy cashmere V-neck  
sweater by **Hugo Boss**.  
Silver watch by **Tag Heuer**.



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think, "Shit, that means the guy's really out of my league now." Months later, Barrowman was test-driving a new Jaguar in London's Soho neighborhood and saw Gill on the street. This time he stopped to say hello. Gill wanted to know if the wheels were a gift from a sugar daddy; Barrowman wanted Gill to come see him in *Sunset Boulevard* that night.

They went out after, "to dinner with Cher," Gill says. "That was our first date. There were all these paparazzi taking pictures of him kissing Cher. But he went back to my place."

They promptly kicked their respective boyfriends to the curb and moved in together, completely opposite personalities be damned. "I'm like a pressure cooker that's always going," Barrowman says, "and Scott is so laid-back." Gill is the self-described "hand on John's shoulder," pulling him back from an excessive shopping spree, reminding him to eat, and looking after him when Barrowman's crashed out from a string of back-to-back shooting days and social commitments.

As he reads this, Gill may wish he had been in Los Angeles for Barrowman's description of his darkest fantasy, divulged with little prompting by this interviewer: "I have a fetish for leather that I've never lived out. I would like to be blindfolded and guided in a room, with everyone else in chaps, in harnesses and slings, and just—" He leans forward to intimate, "I'm a control freak. So I'd be taken out of my control zone."

He says he's never tried—"if anybody out there would like to arrange it, give me a ring"—and that if he asked, he thinks Gill would be willing. "But sometimes fantasies should remain fantasies. We are kind of conservative in that way."

Not like Republican-conservative, he says suddenly, noting that their relationship rules are fairly forgiving. "It's a decision of whether you let the little humps and bumps destroy everything," he says. "You may have a little wank somewhere, but it's not a relationship killer."

Last December they celebrated 15 years together with a civil partnership ceremony in Cardiff, which was attended by friends and family and stalked by tabloid photographers. They were on the evening news, and their wedding portraits made the cover of the U.K. magazine *OK!*

Gill was less than thrilled about all the attention. "But I enjoy the fact that John loves it so much," he says. "That makes it easier to tolerate. It's not my kind of thing at all. He does have an amazing energy, though. He comes off a stage and I fall in love with him all over again."

If there's a villain in this story, it's the low expectations TV executives have for their audiences, especially in the United States. Gill describes Barrowman's struggle to break through on American TV as a series of "false starts," but it's the polite phrasing of a sympathetic spouse.

His most notable American film role is beautifully played—a young actor who sings for and then seduces Kevin Kline's Cole Porter in *De-Lovely*—but hardly a major part, or a major stretch.

When Barrowman auditioned for *Will & Grace*, producers said he was "too straight" to be believable. But given the way Eric McCormack's heterosexuality provided an easy comfort zone—

especially in the wake of *Ellen*'s cancellation—it's not unimaginable that NBC was happy to dodge a double whammy of gay press.

When cast on CBS's short-lived *Central Park West*, Barrowman was told by the studio not to discuss his sexuality, even though show creator Darren Star is openly gay. Did he follow orders? "No," Barrowman says, shortly. "And you know, maybe it was detrimental to me, but I didn't care. Once you've been put in a position of either the limelight or authority, and you are an honest and truthful human being, you are political."

Even in the United Kingdom, "John had an agent before who was very unhappy about my ever appearing with him," Gill says. Since he signed with Gavin Barker, an openly gay manager—with whom Barrowman agreed he should casually mention Gill during the aforementioned *Gay Times* interview—his career has soared.

Maybe the combination of Barrowman's naughty wit and Captain Jack's shoot-'em-up sex appeal will be too much for America to resist. Already committed as a host or ice dancer or special guest star to a wildly varied array of British television shows, in addition to *Torchwood* and a multi-episode arc on the new season of *Doctor Who*, Barrowman had to turn down a U.S. feature film and the role of Rob Lowe's gay brother on ABC's *Brothers & Sisters*.

After all, a hero's journey isn't supposed to be easy—and for Barrowman, it was growing up gay that taught him exactly the kind of brave behavior Captain Jack embodies. "It makes us more compassionate," he says. "It's made us grow into stronger people. We are, yeah—" He pauses and then nods emphatically. "We are heroes. And I love that." ■

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## JACK OF ALL TRADES

**Jack** never quite manages to make it all the way to a bed, but he definitely gets more than his fair share of make-out action.

**On the first** season of the revived *Doctor Who*, when it looks like the universe is going to end (for real this time), Jack grabs Rose, his time-traveling companion, and kisses her goodbye. Then he turns to the Doctor (played by *Heroes*' Christopher Eccleston) and lays one on him in the exact same way.

**Torchwood** creator Russell T. Davies promised everyone on the show would get a same-sex kiss—and they did. Here's your viewing guide to five favorites. (If you'd rather be surprised, stop reading now.)

### Episode Highlights...

**DAY ONE:** Owen, the brilliant and arrogant team scientist, uses a mind-altering love potion to seduce a straight couple into coming back to his flat.

**GREEKS BEARING GIFTS:** Tech goddess Toshiko is given an ESP-enabling necklace, then spends most of the episode in bed with her alien sugar mama.

**THEY KEEP KILLING SUZIE:** Don't miss the sexually charged final five minutes, when Ianto (office manager-butter) cryptically convinces an exhausted Jack to send the others home because "there are a lot of things you can do with a stopwatch."

**CAPTAIN JACK HARKNESS:** Jack gets stuck in 1941 and is reluctant to leave the handsome American pilot with whom he shares a name—and a heartbreaker of a slow-dance smooch.

**END OF DAYS:** All hell breaks loose in the season finale, but when the world doesn't end (again), Jack and Ianto only have eyes for each other, diving into a triumphant action-movie kiss.