



DOUGLAS SMITH

Press Kit



ENCOUNTERS

'Big Little Lies' Star Surfs the Rockaways

Douglas Smith catches a wave, but his boxers stay in Queens.

By ALEXIS SOLOSKI

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It was a gray Thursday, with Kennedy Airport-bound jets shrieking overhead and skinny clouds spitting rain. Mr. Smith, 33, who plays a modern marine biologist on the second season of "Big Little Lies" and a 19th-century detective sergeant on "The Alienist," was stealing some much-needed surf time before flying back to Budapest, where "The Alienist" is shot.

A skin infection (cellulitis, the result of a scratched mosquito bite) had kept him out of the water for his last month at home in Los Angeles. And Budapest, which is "in a landlocked country in the Carpathian basin," as he described it, doesn't get a lot of groundswell.

"There are different kinds of waves there," he said. "Euro parties. Crowd surfing. Rave waves."

Mr. Smith, hair sun tipped, eyes sleepy, had arrived around 8:30 a.m. at Beach 69th Street, where there is a shipping container belonging to the New York Surf School, decorated with a mural of the A train riding a wave barrel.

Frank Cullen, the founder of the school, met him there and picked out a thick wet suit for him. "You're thin so you don't have as much body mass," Mr. Cullen said.

Mr. Smith stepped inside the shipping container and stripped down to his Banana Republic boxer briefs, before pulling on the borrowed wet suit. "I'm used to being naked under my wet suit, but I guess I'll wear underwear," he said.

Politely, dubiously, he accepted neoprene gloves and booties ("You people and your cold-weather surfing," he said), along with a bulky foam board that looked like a nine-foot ripe banana. Mr. Smith typically uses a short board. But the choppy waves slapping the Rockaways don't favor short boards. "I'm very much a beginner when it comes to this environment," he said.

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If Mr. Smith could have walked across the water (a dull green, like the dusty bottom of a beer bottle), the waves would barely reach his knees. He didn't mind. Larger waves scare him, he said: "My friends called me a wuss. Actually, they use a different word."

He placed the board to the shoreline and practiced popping up from his knees to his feet. Then he plunged in. "This is good for the immune system, a cold shock," he said,

padding out just past a jetty as foamy waves bounced him up and down.

Mr. Smith is not exactly a novice. Raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, he moved to Southern California as a teenager and learned to surf almost immediately — an attempt, he said, "to not be the dorky Canadian."

He used to wake up at 5 a.m. to dawn patrol before school, heading to the beach again in the afternoon. He still gets in the ocean pretty much every day, he said.

In "Big Little Lies," as Corey, the not-so-neurotypical aquarium scientist who befriends Jane (played by Shailene Woodley), he does his own surf stunts. Like Corey, he has used the ocean as "a place of release and a place of just wiping away bad things in my own life."

But the Atlantic was not cooperating. Waves dissipated before they reached him. Or picked him up only to crash him down. "It's a little funky out there," Mr. Cullen said, watching from the shoreline.

After about 10 minutes, Mr. Smith came out of the water to peel off the booties. "It's a weird feeling," he said apologetically, before heading back in. He could barely catch a break. Mr. Cullen watched as he plummeted from the board again. "He looked good as long as you could look good," he



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW WHITE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



said. "That's the way the wave is going to go."

Another 15 minutes passed and Mr. Smith came back in, this time to get a shorter board, like the kind he uses back home. "It might not be enough board, but I'd like to give it a shot," he said.

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The difference was immediate. Mr. Smith caught the waves more nimbly. He stood taller and rode longer. Mr. Cullen admired him from the shore. "He's like a real surfer,"

he said. "A surfer surfer." With a quick swivel of his hips, he turned his board into one frothy wave after the next, not seeming to feel the cold or notice the scream of the overhead jets. His hour rental nearly up, Mr. Smith dragged his board back to the beach and posed for hang-loose photos with Mr. Cullen and another instructor, Danny Nuñez.

Still in his wet suit, he hopped a ride to Boarders Surf Shop, about 20 blocks up the beach, where he had been promised a hot shower. He locked himself in a cabana, where he unzipped and unsuited. Wrapped

in a thin borrowed towel, he made his way to the shower.

"It should turn hot," Mr. Cullen told him. "It's warming," Mr. Smith said, though he didn't sound convinced. He braved it for a minute or two, then tried to dry himself with the thin towel ("a Sisyphean task," he said.)

He emerged in most of his street clothes and tipped his seeping boxers into a trash can, "a prisoner of war of the Rockaways," he said. Then he headed to a lunch of tacos and watermelon juice at the Rockaway Beach Surf Club. "I'm a little wet," he said, "but life moves on."

The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/21/style/big-little-lies-douglas-smith.html>

ENCOUNTERS

Douglas Smith, a Star of 'Big Little Lies,' Surfs in Queens

The 33-year-old actor makes a surfing detour to the Rockaways before filming "The Alienist" in Budapest.



Douglas Smith, an avid surfer, changed out of his wet suit in a cabana in the Rockaways section of Queens. CreditCreditAndrew White for The New York Times

By [Alexis Soloski](#)

June 21, 2019



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<https://www.bustle.com/p/big-little-lies-star-douglas-smith-takes-on-the-bustle-booth-17992580>

'Big Little Lies' Star Douglas Smith Takes On The Bustle Booth

By [DANA GETZ](#) | 2 months ago | **f**



When celebrities hang out with Bustle editors, we want to give them the chance to leave their mark. Literally. So we hand them a pen, a piece of paper, a few questions, and ask them to get creative. The rest is up to them. This time, [Big Little Lies star Douglas Smith](#) is leaving his mark in the Bustle Booth.

Meeting Douglas Smith is, in some ways, a lot like meeting his *Big Little Lies* character Corey Brockfield. He's far less socially awkward, but just as animated and unfiltered. In the roughly 20 minutes we spend together, he prattles on about how sad he is that *Game of Thrones* has ended, excitedly pulls up his Instagram to [play me the piano cover he recorded of *Big Little Lies*' theme song](#), and picks up, then puts down, then picks back up his cup of cold brew roughly a dozen times. He is a restless, endearing ball of energy with the kind of sustained gaze that makes you feel at once at ease and uncomfortable. He's also the first to acknowledge how "scarily similar" he is to Corey, a co-worker of Jane's (Shailene Woodley) and [speculated new love interest](#) who Smith describes as a laid-back guy without "an edit button."

"His story is that he was diagnosed with a million different things when he was a kid ... and then he went through his own mindfulness exploration and found a lot of peace with the ocean creatures and decided that was his passion," Smith says. "He just sort of marches to his own beat, as opposed to some of the other people that we see in the town of Monterey. They're these really successful and aggressively male dudes driving Teslas and conquering the world ... [Corey is] less ambitious, a little more zen."

Those are the qualities that made Smith gravitate toward Corey in the first place: he says growing up with a single mother enabled him to always be open with his emotions, and he brought that same sense of vulnerability to the role. "I wasn't raised with the archetypal, must-be-a-strong-hard-man idea," he explains. "I think that would be a bit different if I had a stoic marble man as a father."

As for Corey and Jane, Smith is sworn to secrecy about the exact nature of their relationship and how it develops, but teases that his character "raises a lot of questions" for Jane since she has both a complicated past and a young child she must introduce to a new, strange man. Most significantly for Smith, though, playing Corey helped to change his own perspective about how to respond to others' trauma.

"When someone shares something with you, [it's not about saying] the right thing, [but] just listening and being there and not trying to do anything more than that," he reflects. "Sometimes we feel obligated to help a person get over something. But maybe some things are too big to get over. Maybe just being there is enough."

After a tumultuous first season in Monterey, Jane could use someone who allows her to simply *be*.

Check out Smith's answers to our Bustle Booth questionnaire below.

BUSTLE BOOTH.



FEATURING

Douglas Smith

WHAT'S YOUR GO-TO COFFEE ORDER?

Cold Brew No Style

FAVORITE OVERUSED MOVIE QUOTE?

Winter is coming

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE CARTOON AS A KID?

Aladdin

DESCRIBE REALITY TV IN ONE WORD:

Yuck

WHAT UNSOLVED TV MYSTERY STILL HAUNTS YOU?

I sleep good
nothing
really

WHO IS YOUR CELEB IDOL?

Marc Maron

WHO WAS THE FIRST TV CHARACTER
YOU HAD A CRUSH ON?

Jennifer Love Hewitt

WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU WOULD
WANT PEOPLE TO SAY ABOUT YOU?

He wasn't that bad

WHAT'S THE SONG CURRENTLY STUCK
IN YOUR HEAD?

Air bus

DRAW 3 EMOJIS THAT DESCRIBE WHAT'S
NEXT ON YOUR SHOW:



one to watch

Big Little Lies Douglas Smith

The actor, 34, knew costars Shailene Woodley and Zoë Kravitz before joining season 2 of the HBO hit, but he had to “keep it together” when working with the rest of the Monterey Five. “I

had a poster of Nicole Kidman when I started acting,” says the *Big Love* alum. “I didn’t tell her that.”

—DANA ROSE FALCONE

Smith (with Woodley, inset) plays a young man with a cute smile and murky motives.



Big Littles Lies' Douglas Smith Says His On-Screen Relationship With Shailene Woodley 'Evolves'

The Canadian actor joined season 2 of the HBO series as a potentially shady aquarium employee who works with Shailene Woodley's character

By **Dana Rose Falcone** | June 21, 2019 01:27 PM

The Monterey Five are back, but season 2 of *Big Little Lies* also introduced some new faces in the California beach town. Among them is Douglas Smith, who plays Jane's (Shailene Woodley) slightly suspicious co-worker Corey Brockfield at the aquarium.

"You're not sure what his motives are," Smith, 33, tells PEOPLE in this week's issue, on stands now.

Even though Jane already rejected Corey's romantic advances (if you can call a "practice date" that) once this season, Smith says, "They continue to interact because of the nature of how they're both next to each other a lot. That sort of evolves in a way that I can't really say too much more about."

Smith admits it's been difficult to guard the secrets of *Big Little Lies'* second season, but he's picked up tips from Woodley about keeping his lips sealed.

"I just really like talking freely about what you worked on, so I'm not great at doing this kind of stuff," the actor says. "I've watched or listened to how Shay answers questions, and I'm really impressed with how good she is at weaving that line. My hat is off to her."



Shailene Woodley and Douglas Smith on *Big Little Lies*. PHOTO: HBO

The *Big Love* alum knew Woodley, 27, and costar Zoë Kravitz before he landed the role on the current HBO series – and suspects they helped him score the gig.

“I got an email for the casting director asking if I was interested. It was kind of weird. For such a big show, usually you have a really arduous audition process,” Smith says. “I knew Shailene beforehand. We almost worked together on a film a couple years ago that I ended up doing with Zoë instead. I think Shailene read the role and thought I was similar to the character. I think she told them that, but I’m not totally positive.”



PHOTO: MONICA SCHIPPER/FILMMAGIC

The Canada native also had familiarity with another one of the other Monterey moms: [Nicole Kidman](#).

“I actually had a poster of [Nicole Kidman](#) when I started getting into acting,” he says. “I was a really big fan of a lot of her work. I didn’t tell her that. I didn’t want to be weird. Just keep it together, stay cool. I was lucky enough to work with her a bit and she was very, very nice.”

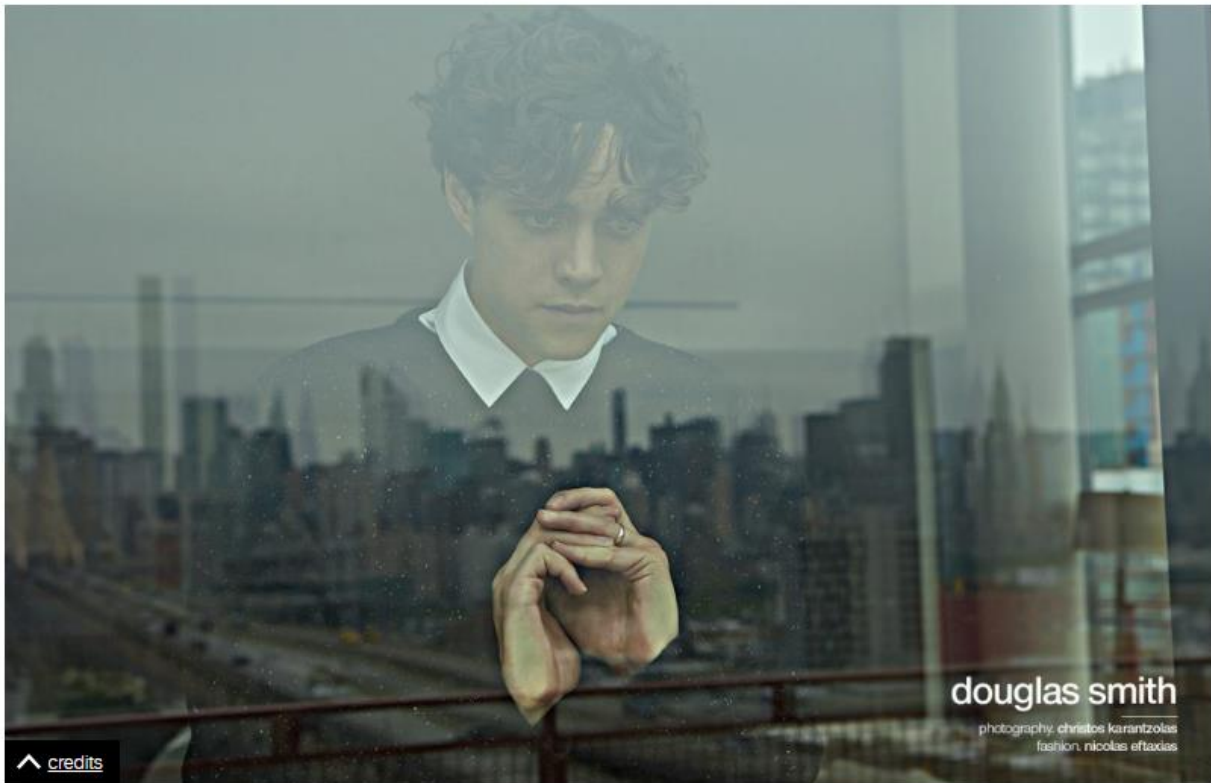
Smith transitioned from being a high school jock on the wrestling and cross-country running teams to “a cinema-obsessed kid” after seeing [Annette Bening](#) in *American Beauty*. From there, he started taking acting classes and decided to give himself one year after graduating high school to make it in Hollywood. That’s when Smith landed *Big Love* and “got off to the races,” he says.

- *For more on Douglas Smith, pick up the latest issue of PEOPLE, on stands now*

Schön!

<https://schoomagazine.com/interview-douglas-smith/>

interview | douglas smith



Douglas Smith is in a league of his own. Hailing from Toronto, Canada, the 34-year-old actor exudes unbridled enthusiasm anchored in humility and a steadfast immersion in the psychology of his craft — and his latest role on HBO’s critically acclaimed *Big Little Lies* is perhaps the perfect example.

Even before landing the coveted role, Smith had already carved an impressive career for himself. One that began with an appearance on *X-Files* back in 1996 and that includes a recurring role on HBO’s award-winning series *Big Love*. Whether on TNT’s sci-fi thriller *The Alienist* or as the newest addition to the Reese Witherspoon-led cast, he’ll have you tied to the screen.

On *Big Little Lies*, Smith portrays the role of Corey Brockfield, “an off-beat surfer, aspiring marine biologist” starring opposite Shailene Woodley’s Jane Chapman. Interestingly, it precisely this latest role — amidst the formidable female-led cast including the likes of Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Zoë Kravitz, and Laura Dern— that most diversifies Smith’s repertoire. Especially so for its parallels with his off-screen persona. Much like his character, Smith is an avid surfer and nature enthusiast.



credits



"I think [this character] is different in a way because it is so similar to who I am in real life. I don't often play a character so close to myself." Smith admits of Brockfield — whose sweet nature fans actually began to question following last week's episode, "Kill Me."

In spite of similarities — or lack thereof — according to Smith, however, the real prize in his portrayal was the talent with which he was aligned. "It was a wonderful experience to get the job, and then the actual reality of working day to day with people I admire so much was a real treat," he gushes while reflecting on his time filming the show. "I was sad when it finished." For now at least, Brockfield is still going strong with the *BLL* fandom, which means Smith still gets to reap on-screen what he sowed on set.

But he doesn't take his success lightly, nor does he take it for granted. The gilded trajectory of his career continues to surprise him, and any shadow of self-doubt is only matched by the consistent influx of dynamic roles. "I am always absolutely certain that I will never work again on another job," he says. "And then, inevitably it happens and the cycle of self-doubt starts all over again once the job finishes." Perhaps this kind of candour in humility is the secret sauce that continues to enhance his longevity — together with his now-relaxed approach to acting.



"When I was younger I was really obsessed with choosing a method of acting technique. I worked with a teacher who was a student of Stella Adler's when I was 17 and so for a while, I was all about that. Then I went to a class for a number of years that was taught by a student of Meisner. Then my older brother kept saying don't study acting it makes you worse!" Smith admits of how his methods have changed. "Anyways, over the years I have realized that the more I know, the less I know and I embrace the chaos of my own life and my steady gushing river of thoughts. I try to find a way into the role and to get my river of consciousness to flow into the character. If I am lucky that happens through a particular line of dialogue."

Smith might have little in common with most of the characters that he portrays but he delves into the psychology of each portrayal with an unwavering relentlessness in an effort to merge his psyche with that of the character. "I try to find a way into the role and get my river of consciousness to flow into the character," he humbly admits. This process of preparation is a kind of baptism that thrusts the actor into the subconscious mind of the character's personality.



^ credits



While detachment is typically unchallenging for Smith — “I know it is all pretend and we are playing characters. I am not one of those actors that can’t detach,” he admits — his most difficult subconscious separation came with the finale of *Big Love* back in 2011. In the series, he portrayed Ben Henrickson, an awkward adolescent who is as timid as he is rigid and clumsily struggles to find his footing within strict societal parameters. “In subtler ways, the role stays with you,” he admits. “If you walk a certain way or talk a certain way as the character for too long that can stick around for entirely too long after the job is finished. It sort of reminds me of that phrase my mother used to say when I would make ugly shapes with my face — ‘don’t turn your face into a weird shape because it might stay like that forever one day.’”

When the series ended, Smith’s subsequent challenge was in disconnecting Ben’s physical idiosyncrasies from his own. “It took me a long time to shake that off because I played him off and on for seven years...that took some work to lose his rigidness,” he explains when reflecting on the role. Still, Smith’s mastery of this immersion ultimately transformed his career as it projected his acting talent to a mainstream audience and added subsequent dynamic roles to his résumé. He regards his involvement with *Big Love* as the “turning point of [his] career;” and his character on *Big Little Lies* couldn’t be a more perfect follow-up.



photography: [Christos Karantzolas](#)
hair: [Nicolas Etaxias](#)
grooming: [Jessica Ortiz @ Forward Artists](#)
set design: [Mariano Rubin De Celis](#)
fashion assistant: [Sofia Michailidou](#)



'Big Little Lies' airs Sundays on HBO in the U.S. and Mondays on Sky Atlantic in the U.K.

This Schön! online exclusive has been produced by

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fashion assistant: [Sofia Michailidou](#)
words: [Constance Victory](#)

Gio

A VISUAL JOURNAL OF THE FINER THINGS

The Stylin' MR. SMITH

Best known for playing the son of a polygamist on HBO's *Big Love*, Canadian cutie Douglas Smith is returning to the premium cable network as a dreamy surfer dude in Season 2 of *Big Little Lies*. He's also reprising the role of detective Marcus Isaacson, which he created for TNT's 19th-century psychological thriller *The Alienist*, in the series' sequel, *The Angel of Darkness*, which is currently shooting in Budapest. Here, the actor proves that he has substance...and style!

PHOTOGRAPHY BY (JOHN RUSSO
STYLING BY (MARK HOLMES - ART DEPARTMENT LA
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<https://www.buildseries.com/video/5ced91a7b8bad37091afc9c6/>
<https://aolstudios.smugmug.com/2019-BUILD/Wm-Douglas-Smith-5-28-2019-jy/n-BP5KfM/>

DOUGLAS SMITH DISCUSSES THE SECOND SEASON OF HBO'S "BIG LITTLE LIES"

Season 2 of the darkly comedic drama, "Big Little Lies," continues to explore the malignancy of lies, the durability of friendships, the fragility of marriage and, of course, the vicious ferocity of sound parenting. Multiple characters are dealing with Perry's death, and the prospect of moving past a life-altering event. In short: Things could get messy. Douglas Smith visited BUILD to talk about the new season of the hit HBO series.





Big Little Lies star Douglas Smith on Corey and Jane's relationship

By [Maureen Lee Lenker](#) | June 23, 2019 at 10:01 PM EDT



PHOTO: JENNIFER CLASEN/HBO

Big Little Lies >>

TYPE TV Show

NETWORK [HBO](#)

GENRE [Drama](#)

Note: This story contains spoilers from episode 3 of Big Little Lies, 'The End of the World.'

Moving on is the name of the game on season 2 of *Big Little Lies* – and for Jane ([Shailene Woodley](#)), that means tentatively dipping her toes in the cold, cold Monterey Bay waters of romance again.

Coffee Shop Tom (Joseph Cross) has become just a faint, espresso-scented memory (where have you gone Coffee Shop Tom?!), and Jane finds herself drawn to her aquarium co-worker Corey (Douglas Smith). After all, if there's anything that working at an aquarium teaches you, it's that there are plenty of fish in the sea. Corey is a cute surfer, who seems like he might be on the spectrum (at least by Jane's estimation), but in spite of his abrupt approach to her at times, episode 3 finds them taking their flirtation to the next level.

They go on a date where Corey interrogates the waitress about their seafood sourcing – that is when we'd be texting our friends to call us with an "emergency" but apparently, Jane thinks it's cute. Walking the streets of Monterey, Jane confesses she has a son, and instead of sending Corey running for the bay, he immediately offers to meet Ziggy (Iain Armitage) and then gives the kid surf lessons. Jane is still struggling to overcome her trauma, resisting a kiss from Corey, but he tentatively breaks down her walls and by episode's end they're slow dancing in her driveway.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Monterey Five struggle to conceal their not-so-little lie. Jane is simultaneously intrigued and repulsed by Mary Louise (Meryl Streep), both craving the familial connection and horrified by Mary Louise's demand for a paternity test and victim-blaming behavior. Celeste (Nicole Kidman) continues to struggle to let go of Perry (Alexander Skarsgård), possibly even self-harming in an effort to rekindle the memories. Madeleine (Reese Witherspoon) desperately tries to save her marriage with Ed (Adam Scott), attending counseling with Celeste's maddeningly enigmatic therapist. But **Ed is still nursing the wound**, even lashing out by suggesting he might take refuge in Bonnie (Zoe Kravitz).

Oh, and Otter Bay is once again the center of a controversy courtesy of the show's Shakespearean second-grade mothers. Gordon's (Jeffrey Nordling) legal woes are temporarily set aside, while Renata (Laura Dern), the "Medusa of Monterey," eats Principal Nippal (P.J. Byrne) for breakfast after a lesson on climate change sends Amabella (Ivy George) to the hospital with an anxiety attack. And a school assembly brings Madeleine to the brink of a full-on emotional breakdown courtesy of a Muppets song.

While the ladies stew on the Lady Macbeth mess of their own making, we called up Douglas Smith to get the details on Corey's relationship with Jane – what fosters their connection, what surfing in Monterey is really like, and whether this pairing could lead to a "happy ending" of sorts. So, let's take a bite out of some locally sourced seafood, and slow dance our way to some answers (all to the tune of "The Rainbow Connection").

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: Corey is clearly very into Jane and a bit eager, volunteering to meet Ziggy immediately. Should we assume he's incredibly serious about her already if he already wants to meet her kid?

DOUGLAS SMITH: Yes, that's a very good assumption. I liked when I read that. That [this] was the way they were imagining this guy. You always cringe when a different response happens in a movie. You know the stereotypical, "Oh ok, catch you later." That's not what you want to read.

He clearly can tell something is going on with her – do you think he suspects trauma of the level she's experienced or where is his head at by the time they're slow dancing in her driveway?

Yes, he's very empathetic...He's somebody that has gone through therapy and had lots of diagnoses thrown his way, and I think he is more sensitive than the average guy you see running up to you on the beach with a surfboard in their hands.

Jane has already told us Corey is a bit weird, and that's definitely true. Even things like his obsession with the seafood sourcing are pretty intense. Should we and Jane trust him? Or might there be something darker in his own history?

Anything is possible. We're all these complicated humans that have the propensity for good and bad, and this show is really good at exploring that. And just like any of the other people in this world, you never know.

On the flip side of that, we rarely see women trying to date after trauma in film and television, because it is such a delicate thing. We see Corey trying to be respectful of that; is it something you think he's good at? Beyond that, is it powerful to be playing a character that is trying to set this example in a way?

Setting an example is a tricky thing because I don't think there's a clear thing to say when it comes to something as nuanced as this, but this is one particular situation and one particular set of people. But I will say I found that to be the most interesting aspect of when I first auditioned for the role. I got a bunch of scenes, and one of the scenes that was on that subject was instantly the thing that I found my brain ping to like a magnet. When it came to conversations with Shailene and [director] Andrea [Arnold] and our own private research and sharing, that was the thing that I feel dominated the most conversation.

There's this adorable surfing lesson – were you really surfing?

Yeah, that's me. I started surfing when I was younger, and it's always been a real therapy for me to get out there. That was a fun part of the job because I've never really gotten to do that in a job. But I live by the beach in Los Angeles, and I go in the water most days. I don't surf every day, some days I just go and swim and float on my back and just hit the reset button, but yeah, it's a big part of my life.

Was Iain Armitage really out there with you? Monterey is such an iconic setting, but you're really the only one who's been out there in the water thus far.

Yeah, he was really good. He was really, really brave. We played around in the water; it seemed like all day. He was wild and running up and down the beach. I remember they also had a hot tub; they basically rigged a makeshift hot-tub and had it set up right on the boardwalk there because the water is so cold. So, it was pretty nice. I sent a photo of that to my wife, and she was like, "This is your job, this is ridiculous. You're ridiculous."

Bonnie tells Jane that Corey needs to know who she is/her history. There's the rape on one level, but there's also this other secret. What's the likelihood she tells him either of those things or he somehow finds out about the big secret these five women are keeping?

That's a tough thing to be able to answer without breaking the rules...He's got a high EQ, an emotional intelligence. Whether Jane's able to get there is something that will remain to be seen.

Does Corey pose a threat to that secret getting out? With that emotional intelligence, might that lie be something he can't excuse?

He knows she's one of the Monterey Five, that's how he first comes up and addresses her on the beach. That's already out there. I don't think I can really say if the truth of that is too much for him to handle or not.

Corey is obsessed with the environment clearly, and the school is having some issues with discussions of climate change traumatizing the kids – could those two issues intersect down the line?

I don't really think you're barking up the right tree. It's an interesting theme. It's in all of our lives, and there's also a nice metaphor between the violence of the waves crashing on the rocks and the violence we as humans do to the earth and the violence we do to each other. I took it as a more metaphorical connection, but as a literal one, I didn't so much.

Mary Louise is being so cruel to Jane. Victim-blaming her and such – might Corey prove to be a line of defense in that case down the line? How dangerous might she be to Jane – we know she clearly is suspicious of her?

I love that scene. I'm not going to be able to say anything about that. But I can say that for me, I really loved watching the complexity that was there and just seeing how those two great actresses unpacked it. I remember reading it thinking it was interesting, but that was probably my favorite part of watching the episode.

Corey knows she's part of the Monterey Five. If things get serious, will Jane introduce Corey to her friends? What does that look like for him?

Yeah, there's a likelihood that she's going to be taking that next step, [and] maybe that's introducing him to other people in her life. Because she's now introduced him to Ziggy, so that's a reasonable expectation.

These women all have a lot going on, but is Corey the possibility of a "happy ending" of a sort for Jane? Or is that too much to hope for?

I don't know. I hope so. (Laughs). Are there happy endings in life? I think the show's a little more nuanced than just that simple happy ending.

Is there a scene you can't wait for audiences to see?

There's a few. There's a party I think in next week's [episode] – I'm looking forward to that. I'm really loving the Gordon and Renata stuff. I really like watching those actors do those scenes. Just the first episode with him with his train set, that cracks me up. It's sad; I know it's sad, but I don't know why, I find it really joyfully funny. There's something wrong with me. Is it *schadenfreude*?

Can you tease something for Corey and Jane in next week's episode or something overall?

I believe it's an important part of the healing process to try and explore a romantic relationship with somebody after you've been a victim of assault and to not let that keep you from enjoying those things and that aspect of your life. Zoe had a lot of wisdom when she was talking to Shailene on the beach about that, and that's as much as I can say.

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Big Little Lies' Douglas Smith Worked With Real Aquarium Employees to Play Jane's Fish-Loving Beau

By Jackson McHenry [@McHenryJD](#)



Photo: Dia Dipasupil/Getty Images

Among the generally terrible men who populate *Big Little Lies'* TV version of Monterey, one hope stands out awkwardly from the crowd: Corey Brockfield, Jane's co-worker turned love interest at her new job at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Played by Douglas Smith, Corey surfs, spouts random factoids about fish, and puts in the effort to bond with Jane's son, Ziggy, though he also has a tendency to step into her boundaries.

Smith himself has a lot in common with Corey: He's a chatty guy whose sentences double back on themselves, and he has also spent a lot of time surfing — though most of his knowledge about the ocean comes from shadowing employees at the real-life aquarium before shooting the show. In fact, one employee that season-two director Andrea Arnold told Smith to follow inspired much of Corey's character.

Talking with Vulture over the phone from Hungary, where he's filming the new limited series installment of *The Alienist*, Smith shared how he and Woodley approached their characters' relationship, Arnold's unique view of the casting process, and one frankly disturbing fact about sea otters he learned on the job.

Did you really have to learn about marine biology or work with people at the Monterey Bay Aquarium to play Corey?

So he works in the husbandry part of it; he's not a marine biologist. I got up there, and there was a particular employee Andrea wanted me to spend time with because he was a bit awkward and a bit obsessed with weird factoids, so I sort of shadowed him around a bit. He was really obsessed with some otters, their genetic diseases based on inbreeding, weird stuff like that. The weirdest things would just come out of his mouth. You've only seen a little bit of Corey, but that's in line with his sort of unedited stream of consciousness, stream of thought. Which is weird, but I think it's ultimately really honest and sincere.

I was interested in what Arnold's direction was like, given that she's new to the show this season. How did she first describe Corey to you?

The way the role came to me was through an audition. They said, "It's Shailene's love interest, co-worker guy, on the second season of *Big Little Lies*." I have a weird thing when I start to really connect with something; my body tightens up. It got me over my own nervousness and my own real-world shit. It got really quiet in the background, and all I was thinking about was the story and the people and the heartbreak.

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The audition went well enough that Andrea wanted to Skype me pretty soon after. We got on FaceTime and we talked and talked about a lot of things. Stuff that had to do with the exact scenes and the story, but then other things about where I came from in my own life. We talked about lots of music. I think that speaks to her humanistic approach to filmmaking and storytelling.

In this week's episode, Corey and Jane go out to dinner for the first time. How did you approach filming that scene?

In my memory of it, I didn't think we did any of the scenes how they were written, so much of it was improv. Then I actually saw it, and I was like, *You know, that was actually pretty similar to how it was written.* But I feel like we only did it once as it was written. I guess a lot of that improv was to get us to feel like we were walking and talking and doing stuff, and then she sort of sneakily only had us do the words that were going to be in the show, maybe once or twice.

I thought, *Is the writer going to be mad because I'm not saying his lines?*

Like when they're at lunch or dinner and they're talking about net-pen versus farm-raised fish — David [E. Kelley], the writer, is super into that. I think he has a fishery. [*He runs an aquaculture business.*] I actually had an easier way of understanding it talking to some of the aquarium workers who have an app on what fish is better to order because it's sustainably caught.

On the date, Corey tries to kiss Jane and she pulls away. The show frames him as a nice guy, as far as we know, with maybe some boundary issues, who isn't aware of her trauma. How did you and Shailene talk about their dynamic?

There's some other stuff that happens I think I'm probably not going to be at liberty to discuss, given the early half of the season that we've seen so far. But the research that I found interesting was — I don't want to say *partner*, because I think it's a bit of an overstatement to say he's her partner — there are some people who've documented their experience of being partnered with somebody who was a victim of sexual assault. [I talked] to Shai about some of the research she had done, not just on victims of sexual assault but on the partners of victims.

Just because somebody experiences something, it doesn't mean that is going to be Cory and Jane's experience, because we all deal with trauma in such different ways and we all get triggered by things in a different way. It all has to just feel true to her as Jane and then to me as this new person in her life. Cory is a fixater, and that's why he fixates on the things he fixates on within the aquarium. I think he kind of looks at her like a new fish, as weird as that may sound.

There's an exchange in the first episode this season when Corey asks Jane if she's on the spectrum, and he implies he may be on the spectrum. Did you think about what his diagnosis might be?

He's my age, and my experience was everyone was on Adderall and everybody was on Ritalin and everybody was OCD, and then everybody was on the spectrum. You get so much stress bundled up because your parents get divorced, and your eyes start twitching, and they ... I don't know. Maybe that's not everybody's experience. That's the experience that's pretty close to me, and it was already on the page with Corey. It's a weird sort of thing, acting these things.

According to your Instagram, you surf a lot, like Corey. I assume you were shooting all his surfing scenes on the show, like when he's teaching Ziggy?

Oh my God, it was so fun. I was talking to Jeffrey Nordling, the actor who plays Renata's husband. I was just like, "My last job, I was wearing a 19th-century suit in the summer in Hungary. All I was trying to do was not pass out from heatstroke. Here I am, working with this amazing director and this amazing actor, and wearing a wet suit and jumping around in the water with this sweet boy." I used to teach kids how to surf when I was in high school; I've always been a water person. I think it's a really healing place.

You're playing Shailene's love interest, or basically a sort of manic pixie dream boy —

That's a term I only recently learned about, *manic pixie dream girl!* When I saw the movie *Tully* and then heard NPR people talking about it.

Well, maybe it deserves to be retired as a term, but I was interested in what it's like to play the male version of that — a guy who appears and is quirky and fun but also secondary in a way to Shailene's larger arc.

You have to do reach-out to your writer and your director and your co-star who have a much larger part of bringing the thing to the screen, because you want to make sure you have the context. There was a lot of stuff that was told to me through the writing and throughout the other episodes. When I got the job, the day after, they sent me the first six scripts. That was really helpful in understanding what Liane [Moriarty] and David had thought of with the character, and Andrea. Then pretty soon I was talking to Shailene about it, and we sort of knew each other before working on it. We almost made a film together six years ago. It was always very, I think, a safe place to say your mind and say what was the deal.

You were in *Big Love* before this, playing the eldest son in a polygamist family, so you have a strong record for being in HBO shows with the word *big* in them.

Yeah! B and L next to each other.

I was curious if you've thought about how your perspective on your career has changed between the two shows.

I think when I was younger I felt like I had to announce myself as a certain kind of actor. Like, when I was 17, I started working with a teacher who was a student of Stella Adler. Then you actually get on sets, and you start working with actors, and you realize that it's less thinking about things and it's a lot of doing. You start to realize that it's much more of a craft where you just need to get reps in; it's more like it's a physical thing. You can overthink, anyways. My older brother [*Gregory Smith, best known for Everwood*] is now a TV director, and he would always say, "Don't study acting. It just makes you worse. Dah, dah, dah." I don't believe that. I went to [the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art] for the summer to do a Shakespeare workshop. I'm always like, *I need to learn more*. But I will say I turned 34 on Saturday, and I feel like I'm becoming more and more okay with the fact that the more I know, the more I understand that I know way less — and that's okay.

Of the things you learned from the guy you shadowed at the aquarium, did any facts about the work surprise you? I'm interested in life at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

There was the tidbit that's sort of in line with the show ... well, I don't know if it's in line with the show. He was really excited to tell me that the No. 1 cause of mortality in the wild otter is that, when the male and the female get together and procreate, their mating practice involves the male otter gripping the female's mouth with his mouth, and then they shake, and shake, and shake. Sometimes they're too violent, and they rip half of the female's face off and they bleed out and die. [*This is indeed a real thing.*] He told me this with a big smile on his face because he's so interested and excited to tell me. He didn't even think I would find that sad or really disturbing.

But yeah, the aquarium a beautiful place. The jellyfish area is probably my favorite of the aquarium. It's really dark and moody and blissful. It kind of feels like you could make a Sigur Rós music video there or something.

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