

Television

The Lair Opens Its Third Thrilling Season

By Gary Kramer

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Model turned actor Steve Hirschi and his literally killer looks arrive at The Lair for the here! TV show's third thrilling season, starting Friday September 4.

The openly gay Hirschi plays Athan, a seductive heartthrob with a horrible secret—he's a Gorgon who can turn lovers to stone just by looking at them. Athan turns up on The Lair's island to find the cure for his condition, and tries not to fall in love. Of course, this is difficult as he moves in with the lonely Tim (Johnny Hazzard) who pines for him.

The actor, who comes from a stage background, found working with Hazzard on the series to be an easy transition. "The director told us to go with our own chemistry," Hirschi explains over the phone from Los Angeles. The guys' connection is palpable. When Athan closely examines Tim's tattoos, the scene bristles with sexual tension. Of course, Athan's curse makes the longed for romance difficult. Viewers will just have to watch to see if, when, and how it happens.



Hirschi does acknowledge that there was some tension (not of the sexual variety) when he first started working with Hazzard. But this was because Athan sports a pair of sunglasses to protect his character's eyes. "The sunglasses were blacked out, and I was completely blind. My first scene with Johnny, I knocked over a glass because I couldn't see," Hirschi recalls with a laugh.

The actor admits that like Athan, he too, wears sunglasses at night, but colored, tinted ones that give him an enigmatic air. "Tall, dark, mysterious, and handsome are my qualities," he admits, "I like to keep people guessing so they want to continue getting to know me."

And viewers of the series will want to get to know Hirschi. He has a very compelling presence on screen, and not just because his buff body is frequently seen in the buff. A health nut, Hirschi keeps fit by participating in all kinds of strenuous outdoor exercises—from rollerblading and kayaking to swimming, and mountain climbing.

"I'm not the kind of guy who cuddles and reads," he explains. "I don't drink. I wake up and go running, or take a spinning class. Waking up with a hangover didn't mesh with my fitness regime. I love the adrenaline of endorphins. Downers are not my style."

Keeping his body in shape is important for Hirschi, and something he learned during his days as a model. He started posing when he was 17, and worked in the fashion industry for ten years. He traveled the world, and spent months at a time in Europe.

As a model, Hirschi learned how to "act" with his eyes—"selling" clothes from Target as if they were Versace. This ability he developed enhances his performance on The Lair, as Athan's eyes are the key to his character. What is more, most of the threads from the actor's wardrobe—such as a Valentino jacket from his runway days—are clothes Athan sports on the show.

Yet for all the fabulous duds Hirschi wears, the actor does do a fair number of nude and sex scenes. He reveals that he finds nudity "freeing." He notes that his time modeling in Europe influenced his perspective, "To Europeans, the naked body is artistic and beautiful, not something to be ashamed of. We have such body issues in America. That's the mentality I have about nudity. It's artistic, natural." That said, the actor didn't wander around the ancient ruins of Greece in the nude as he does on the show.

Hirschi also welcomes performing gay sex scenes, which seem de rigueur in The Lair. However, one erotic coupling, set in the back of a car, proved challenging only because of the cramped space, and the pressure to find the right camera angles. "Getting with another guy in a love scene, I can be uninhibited, and explore it without having to feel something I'm not. I can [have sex on camera] with women, but that's acting," Hirschi says with a candor that is refreshing.

Choosing to be an out actor was also an important decision for the performer. He discussed it with his manager before taking the role of Athan, but he claims that "being in the entertainment industry is my passion, and I wasn't going to live being closed doors." Recognizing that the industry is changing, and that openly gay actors can have fruitful careers, Hirschi mulled over working in the mainstream and hiding who he was. He kept his sexuality a secret in the beginning of his career, but working in theatre prompted him to live and work openly and honestly. "I decided that I have to be a masculine, positive model—not a flamboyant gay guy," Hirschi exclaims. "I am trying to break the queen stereotype. Masculinity is sexy!"

Athan was a gay role the actor wanted to play, but one gets the sense that being out now may also be Hirschi's response to growing up gay in what he describes as, "a very Christian neighborhood, [where gays] were condemned and damned."

Hirschi describes Athan as, "A lost soul, out of place with society," and the actor appears to be drawn to The Lair's mysterious vampires and monsters.

He appreciates the fact that he gets to be one of the bad guys on the show, noting, "I like playing in the underworld of misfits who don't play to the normal standards."

The occult elements of The Lair also allow Hirschi to indulge his inner demon, especially when Athan takes off his sunglasses and transforms into a Gorgon with a head full of snakes. Hirschi seems to relish this part of his work on the show most of all. "It's done with lots of special effects—there are strings attached to all the snakes. It took two days of makeup and three people to hold all the special effects in place."

Despite the time it takes for makeup and special effects, the sexy actor is particularly enjoys becoming a hideous beast. He says, "It's fun to play ugly."

With the pressure of always looking perfect for lighting angles, it's great to let go."