

# House of the Dragon': Paddy Considine Won't Watch Sunday's Episode

"I'm sure somebody will show me a photograph," he said, about his character's big moment on Sunday night. The actor discussed the inspiration and meaning for King Viserys's decline.

By Jennifer Vineyard

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*This interview includes spoilers for Sunday's episode of "House of the Dragon."*

The Iron Throne can be a cruel and uncomfortable seat. In the world of George R.R. Martin's books, it is thought to have a mind of its own, rejecting those unfit to rule with well-placed nicks.

In "Game of Thrones," this seat made from the blades of vanquished rivals was intimidating to behold, but it was not much of a threat to life or limb. "House of the Dragon" hews closer to Martin's vision and adds a new twist — the cuts that Viserys (Paddy Considine) suffers not only refuse to heal, but infect him with a particularly nasty strain of leprosy. His reign eats him alive.

"I always viewed the throne as a cursed property," Considine said on Monday morning. "It's made of the swords that people died on, and it has this strange power about it."

By Sunday night's episode, the eighth of the season, Viserys no longer looks like a proud Targaryen king — he more closely resembles the Phantom of the Opera (with that metal mask obscuring half his face) or the Crypt Keeper (with those gaping holes beneath it). (The startling effect was created with a blend of prosthetic makeup, visual effects and a body double.) Viserys lives a half-life under the influence of the pain-dulling (and mind-clouding) Westerosi morphine called milk of the poppy. Until, that is, he skips the meds for one last visit to the royal court, to defend the rights of his daughter and named heir, Rhaenyra (Emma D'Arcy), and to attend a family supper, where he urges the relatives to set aside their grievances.

Considine gives a grave and poignant performance as Viserys. Because of the show's out-of-order shooting schedule, the actor's earliest scenes required him to depict some of the later stages of Viserys's deterioration first — a physical transformation that was a closely guarded secret on set. (Security guards followed him around with view-blocking umbrellas.)

With his onscreen visage revealed to all but himself, Considine discussed the show's latest revelations in a phone conversation from London on Monday. These are edited excerpts from the conversation.

## Have you seen your death episode yet?

No, I haven't, and I'm not sure if I ever will. I haven't seen anything beyond Episode 2, really. Some people don't like to watch themselves, and I'm one of those people. It's debilitating. I tend to just stay away. I'm sure somebody will show me a photograph.

## At what point did you figure out what the king's stages of deterioration would look like?

Very early on, you're still forming the character, and I knew it was going to come to an end with some kind of transformation, so you're always looking for references for that. I happened to be watching a documentary about one of my favorite artists, Richard Hambleton [a Canadian conceptual artist who died in 2017], and watching his physical decline through cancer, addiction and scoliosis. I said to Miguel Sapochnik [an executive producer, and a showrunner for the first season], "This would be a good idea for where Viserys ends up." So I had somewhere in my head that I could map where I was going to get to.



Considine in "House of the Dragon" on Sunday. The king made a final appearance on the throne. Ollie Upton/HBO

The extremity — Viserys looking so emaciated, how it's so cancerous, this thing, that it eats into his face — that decision was made more than halfway into the shoot. So it went probably more extreme than I had originally imagined it would go.

I watched my dad die of cancer, and it was a very rapid demise. So it certainly made sense to me, and I think it was pretty shocking and effective. It becomes a physical manifestation of all the infighting and skulduggery, really. The mystery is why so many people crave the Iron Throne. It's not something Viserys craved; he just had a sense of duty. He knows the weight of being king, the weight of the responsibility, and the toll it can take.

From the minute of his wife's funeral, I think Viserys starts to die. It's a slow death. Nowhere in the story does Viserys ask the maesters to cure him, to stop this thing from eating him alive. I think he accepts it as part of the guilt of the decision he makes to put his wife through a terrible, horrible procedure. It's like people who surrender to illness. When they offer suggestions to cure him, he doesn't bother with it. He lets it consume him. He surrenders. That was my thing for him, anyway.

**In some ways, he let the leeches into his life — the maesters, the Hightowers. After this last moment in the throne room, do you wonder if Viserys made a mistake not giving the position of hand of the king to his brother Daemon instead?**

Absolutely not! [Laughs.] Daemon was a liability. It never would have worked. Viserys knew Daemon couldn't sit in Small Council meetings for 12 hours straight. He doesn't have the temperament. Even at the end, there aren't words in that relationship. Daemon helps him up there, and he puts the crown on his head, and that said everything that he's never said, without uttering a word. But that guy could never have been able to be Viserys's hand.

**Shouldn't he at least have told Daemon or others about the prophecy?**

No way, not at that time. That's something that we struggled with. There was a scene that was deleted after Aemma (Sian Brooke) died, where Viserys meets with Daemon and he tries to hint at this idea of prophecies and what the gods mean to him. He was trying to get some idea where Daemon's at with his beliefs, but the tone of the scene was never quite right. There's no way that Daemon would even connect to that — he'd laugh Viserys out of the room. He's not into dreamers or things like that.

**On his deathbed, Viserys mistakes Alicent (Olivia Cooke) for Rhaenyra, and reaffirms the prophecy to her. When she leaves, he seems to think he's speaking to someone else.**

The only suggestion [in the script] is that he doesn't quite know who he's talking to. I always had an idea in my head, whether it was useful to the story or not, that the last thing Viserys sees before he dies is the person who comes to collect him from this mortal life. When he dies, he sees Aemma, and he says, "My love."

I just kind of improvised that line, and reached out a little bit, because this to me is a tragic love story, in many ways. But I kept that private; I never actually disclosed that in the end. I just thought, "If they use it, they use it," and I hear it's made the cut, so I'm really grateful, because it ends that story quite beautifully. The narrative I had in my mind was that he never really gets over Aemma, that he's devastated for the rest of his life.



Considine behind the scenes of "House of the Dragon" with Milly Alcock, who played the younger version of Rhaenyra, and Miguel Sapochnik, a showrunner. Ollie Upton/HBO

**Do you think Viserys's feelings about Aemma affected how he treated his progeny with Alicent? Because he's barely involved with them.**

He gives up on them. He's so protective of Rhaenyra, and he's no fool — he knows that her [first three sons] are not Laenor Velaryon's children. He's just at a certain point in his life, with his new family, that he doesn't take much of an interest in his other children. And the kids even sussed that out, you know, the actors playing the kids. They said they thought I hated them! I was like, "Where have you had that from? I don't hate you." They meant Viserys, not Paddy.

I certainly didn't hate them, but I just had no time for them. That happens in families, doesn't it? He's there, but not there. Rhaenyra, she's the link to Aemma, and as far as he's concerned, she's his only child.

**Alicent appears to misinterpret Viserys's deathbed talk of prophecy, taking his reference to Aegon I to refer to their son Aegon II (now played by Tom Glynn-Carney), which could lead her to reassert his claim to the throne. What did you think of that moment, and what that prophecy amounts to, 200 years down the line?**

The fact that Alicent misinterprets it is horrific. What comes next would horrify Viserys. I mean, we have this knowledge of where this goes and the fact that [the prophecy] did come true. But the fact that it's misunderstood is an absolute disaster. Viserys would be turning in his grave.

**In behind-the-scenes footage on HBO Max, you were dancing in the throne room, twirling your dragon cane. You said you were “serving Targaryen realness.”**

I love “Drag Race.” There was something about dressing up in these flamboyant costumes that brought out my inner drag, having that lovely blond hair. I never got to dress in anything like that before, and it might never happen again. So you’ve got to enjoy it, haven’t you?

**If a later season of “House of the Dragon” were to do flashbacks to this period, would you consider coming back to play Viserys?**

I love him so much. I think he’s my favorite character I’ve ever played. But I would struggle with that. His story has been told. He made his impact. He was the peaceful king that everybody thought was a bore, and he brought some love and compassion to the show. I don’t know what more you could do with that. So I think this is the end.

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