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Only Murders's Michael Cyril Creighton Thinks He's the Killer Every Season

By Devon Ivie

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“Listen, the character is a lot. There’s a façade there, and it’s obviously masking vulnerability and loneliness.” Photo: Patrick Harbron/Disney

Anyone would be lucky to have a friend like Howard Morris. As *Only Murders in the Building*'s fourth-most-important Arconia resident, he's tried to buddy up to his podcasting neighbors and join on their investigative high jinks — only to get brushed aside when Charles, Oliver, and Mabel get serious in their pursuit of a killer. The man in apartment 3C, played by Michael Cyril Creighton, sought companionship this season in the arms of L.E.S.T.R., the

wide-eyed robot replacement for murdered doorman Lester (Teddy Coluca), who promises loyalty and even comes with a makeover app for Howard to try out new beard styles. Their bond is short-lived, however: L.E.S.T.R.'s programming forces him to pledge fealty to billionaire Camila (Renée Zellweger) after she buys the Arconia to turn it into a casino.

But Charles takes pity on a mourning Howard and, during the building's "last supper" party, they have their first one-on-one conversation to date, with Howard admitting his jealousy of the *Only Murders* trio's unique bond. "I used to be the center of my mother's world and she died," he says. "Maybe I had invested a little too much in a robot that doesn't care about me. But it felt so good to have any kind of partner." Their conversation is both cathartic for Howard and a boon for the investigation: When Howard notices that a smudge mark in Charles's apartment looks similar to ones left by his mother's old motorized scooter, the gang realizes only the matriarch of the Caccimelio crime family could have left it. The trail of clues leads directly to pinning New York mayor Beau Tillman (Keegan-Michael Key) with Lester's murder — which, yeah, is just what the real New York City needs in the midst of our own nail-biting mayoral race. It's Howard, too, who challenges the Arconia Three in the season's final moments, as they discover the body of podcaster Cinda Canning (Tina Fey) and must determine whether she died on Arconia property or she's a few inches short of its front gate.

But let's not get too pedantic. Creighton was prepared for whatever the *Only Murders* writers' room could throw at him but refused to ask any questions about the season's story line. "I *really* don't want to know what's coming," he explains. "I like to solve it as I go."

There were a few times this season when I felt Howard was going down a path of no return, especially with his obsession with the doorman robot. Howard's sweet personality, too, tended to go a bit sour at times. I'm curious how these changes were described to you and how you kept faith in the character.

I took everything at face value and tried to make sense of it. I remember one day we were filming with the robot, and Jackie Hoffman turned to me and said, "What happened to my sweet Howard's personality today? He doesn't seem like my people anymore." And I was like, "I don't know. I think it'll pay off." Because I do trust the writers.

It did feel like a very different version of him for the first part of the season. His whole core is about wanting to belong and wanting to connect with people,

even though he's really clumsy about it, and in those first few episodes, he was really asserting his independence and turning to technology because of his loneliness. I knew that wasn't going to work out well for him.

Howard's conversation with Charles in the ninth episode was such a cathartic one for the both of them, with Howard admitting he "never found my people in this building, not like you did." How do you think he was perceived by his neighbors, and how has that changed over the past five seasons?

First off, that conversation was completely clarifying for me. I didn't know that Howard broke up with his boyfriend. I loved that relationship in the show, and I love Jason Veasey, the actor who plays him. It was surprising and upsetting, and it made sense to me why he was acting the way he was acting. Not only this season, but every single season leading up to this. Our showrunner, John Hoffman, always jokes that the writers know they can throw anything at me and I'll be game for it. But in that episode-nine script, it all finally made sense to me, and it was a really nice chance to see Howard grounded and real for a minute.

Listen, the character is a lot. There's a façade there, and it's obviously masking vulnerability and loneliness. That's how he copes. But I don't think up until this point we've seen him be this "real." I love that we got to hear him speak clearly. At first he was just seen as eccentric and needy and a gossip. His depth as a character has grown from season to season and sometimes from episode to episode. The trio has learned to appreciate him. He wants more than anything to be part of the trio, so that's why I knew it was all bravado when he was saying *I'm done with you three. I don't need you anymore! I have information!* I knew he was bluffing, but it was really nice to see him valued, because I feel like Howard is constantly trying to figure out what he's good at, and he hasn't yet. He's not good at much, and it turns out he's really good at being a fourth wheel. And he actually has a win at the end of this season, which feels so great. He's able to get validation from the trio. That's all he wants.

I like to think he has more talents than being a fourth wheel!

He's good at not giving up. He's good at being part of the yodel-shop group. Well, I don't know if he's a good yodeler, but I know he's a great team member. He's like a mascot. If given the chance, he'd be an excellent friend. He's learning that. And I'm sure he's a wonderful lover.

Beyond friendship with the trio, is his goal to host the podcast with them? Being there for Cinda Channing's death is a step in the right

direction if so.

That was also a nice surprise. We had such a wonderful Howard arc, and then he's there for the very last moment of the season. I was like, *Oh, his journey is definitely not over*. He wants more than anything to be part of that podcast. He wants to be "girls" with Mabel and has the skills to really help in that area. I just don't think they've given him a chance yet.

What did it mean for you to have Howard connect that big piece of evidence with the motorized scooter and solve part of the case?

It meant everything, because he's constantly trying and failing at different things. He tries to be a documentary filmmaker and he's not great at that. He tries to start his own podcast, which doesn't seem to get off the ground. To see him come up with some seriously helpful information and a great clue, and have it be connected to his mom — well, that whole story completely surprised me.

In what ways?

From seasons past, the little things he said about his mom weren't exactly great. The way she referred to his voice was "matronly and shrill" and she "never wanted to hear him act again." I thought their relationship was going to be really dark and not a story of acceptance, but rather rejection. We got that flashback episode earlier in the season, and we saw these little lovely moments with Howard and his mom, and it surpassed anything I could've imagined. I thought their relationship was so tender, complicated, and interesting, and we only saw maybe ten seconds. So much got clarified for me in those two short scenes. The fact that his loneliness is stemming from the loss of his mother and then his win in this episode is connected to his mother — it feels like a three-act play to me.

You've been scene partners with dogs, cats, and pigs. How much of an acting diva is L.E.S.T.R. compared to them?

I love animals. Animals are unpredictable, but they're really cute to be around and act with. In season four, the pig did pee on me, and in another season, the cat was sort of wild. The dogs were sweet, but they're all animals. They have eyes that you can look into, you can pet them, and they're soft. The robot has no comic timing. There's no comedic tracking. There's no eyeballs to look into. It is more of a challenge to act with a robot than it is with an animal. I made the most out of it, but to be clear, it was more challenging than the pig who peed on me.

Nathan Lane's character asks Howard, point blank, if he's fucking the robot. We never get an answer. How would you respond to

that?

I could say that a gentleman never tells, but there's definitely an intimacy, and that robot is helping open him up for other humans.

To that point, congratulations on being the first actor to effectively flirt using a starching machine as a conversational topic.

Yes, I don't think that's ever been done before. I'm a pioneer in that way.

Do you see a bright future for Howard and Vinnie after their meet-cute at the dry cleaner?

It was so unexpected. I love that actor, Evan Mulrooney. I didn't even realize he was on the show, because I had no scenes with him until the finale. I had been a fan of his Instagram persona for a very long time. But no, I didn't see that relationship coming. I was happy Howard got to put on his sluttiest cardigan and have a rebound moment. I don't know how it'll work out. I can't say since I never ask ahead. Do I think dating a dead mobster's dumb son is going to work out? Well, maybe not, but I'm willing to give it a try. Howard likes to try everything, even if he's not good at it. I hope we see more of them together.

How do you even determine a sluttiest cardigan?

We went through so many cardigans, and there was one point where I was wearing a sweater-vest with nothing under it, and I was like, *Absolutely not. We didn't need to see the arms.* But as soon as we saw that cardigan, it was absolutely what Howard would think is slutty. It's that little see-through, eyelet, white, and dainty number. I love that sweater.

There's currently a very public real-life battle among several billionaires about the right to build a casino in the heart of New York. Do you see the vision of having a casino in the city?

Not at all. If it did get built, I would not be allowed to go to it, because when you put me in front of a slot machine I become a possessed demon. I once went to a casino in Pittsburgh with my aunt and my mom, and you had to drag me out of there. If they do build one, I won't be going to it, because it'll ruin my life. We've got enough going on here. Let's have another nice Broadway theater. How about that?

How secure are you that Howard will never be a murderer or murdered at this point? I feel like your name was floated around a lot as a potential killer, but not anymore. It would be too heartbreaking.

People thought I was the killer for every season, and at the same time, I know

people would be very sad if I was gone. I'm in a very lucky position that the fan base is so loving toward Howard. But every season, I think it's possible I could be the killer or be killed. That's why I don't like to know what's going to happen, because I don't want to telegraph it. I also want to be surprised if that's going to happen. Oh, you know what? This season we filmed the final scene early, so I knew the outcome earlier, but up until episode five, I thought there was a possibility I was going to get killed. I do think that would be pretty heartbreaking for fans, but it would make a great mystery.

And in that case, you can get a ton of flashbacks or get the Paul Rudd stunt-double treatment.

Give me a doppelgänger. I don't think being killed is the worst thing on the show. Being a murderer would be worse, because then you're pretty much done. You don't really come back unless you're Amy Ryan.

The sixth season will officially move over to London. How would Howard fare in that fine city?

We would finally see the real Howard. He loves a jumper. He's going to go scone crazy. I can just see him walking around the Tate Modern, taking it all in. It would be a good thing for him. I mean, it's the home of the cozy murder mystery, in the very British sort of way. He would thrive.