

Keshia East

Makeup Artist | Presenters & Brands

Men's Grooming

I go it's good vibes'

In just a year, Micheal Ward has risen from online model to leading man in the crime drama Blue Story, his follow-up to Top Boy. He still can't quite believe it – nor can his mum (who he still lives with). Sam Wolfson hears his story...

Photographs DAVID TITLOW
Fashion editor HELEN SEAMONS

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Micheal Ward

**'I'd love to do
some Marvel or
Star Wars stuff.
But I want to tell
important stories'**



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A STAR IN THE MAKING

Michael Ward made his name in gritty gang dramas. Tonight he takes the romantic lead in a landmark Steve McQueen film. He talks to Jonathan Dean about how black culture is portrayed on screen

A year ago this month police were called to the Star City cinema in Birmingham to break up a fight involving dozens of teenagers. *From 12* was on, but the riotous had nothing to do with that. The cinema was quiet. Rather, the critically acclaimed film *New Story*, about two friends on opposite sides of a London gang war, was showing and some viewers had brought along machines. Some police officers were left with minor injuries, six teens were arrested and, the next day, War — the chain that runs the Star City multiplex — cancelled all screenings of the film nationwide, only to be accused of racism and backstabbing. Michael Ward, the breakout young star of *New Story*, started crying when he found out that cinema had got the picture and pulled his film. "I was so confused,"

says the 24-year-old, shaking his head. "I know some policemen got injured, but still, how can you blame that on the film?" It has been a tumultuous few years for Ward. He had risen to prominence with a lead role in the third series of the television drama *Top Boy*. The London-based gangster show was on Channel 4 for two series before the Canadian rap superstar Drake bought the rights and popped it on Netflix, where Ward made his debut. It became the platform's best-watched show in the UK and a hit internationally. Suddenly Ward found himself rubbing shoulders with "most famous people" such as the American rapper Busta Rhymes, who knew who Ward was. "Top Boy put me in the same room as them," he gapes. "The recognition was crazy." Then in February he won the prestigious Rising Star award at the Brits and met the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Had they seen *New Story*? "They said they were going to try, but that it's so hard to watch stuff with the kids around. I was, like, 'Yeah. Do not watch it with the kids. It's not for them right now.'" Did the royals find any common ground with Ward, a state-school boy who was born in Jamaica and went to a primary in Hackney, east London — where *Top Boy* is set — before moving to Romford, in Essex, aged eight? "I don't know if she [Kate] knows about my journey," he replies. "But she knows it happened quickly and, for her, things got mad quickly as well. She was relating." Dressed in a black T-shirt and trousers and wearing sliders at a show in Hackney, just before the current lockdown, Ward is casual, chatty. He has a striking, lit-

PORTraits:
DEAN CHALKLEY

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