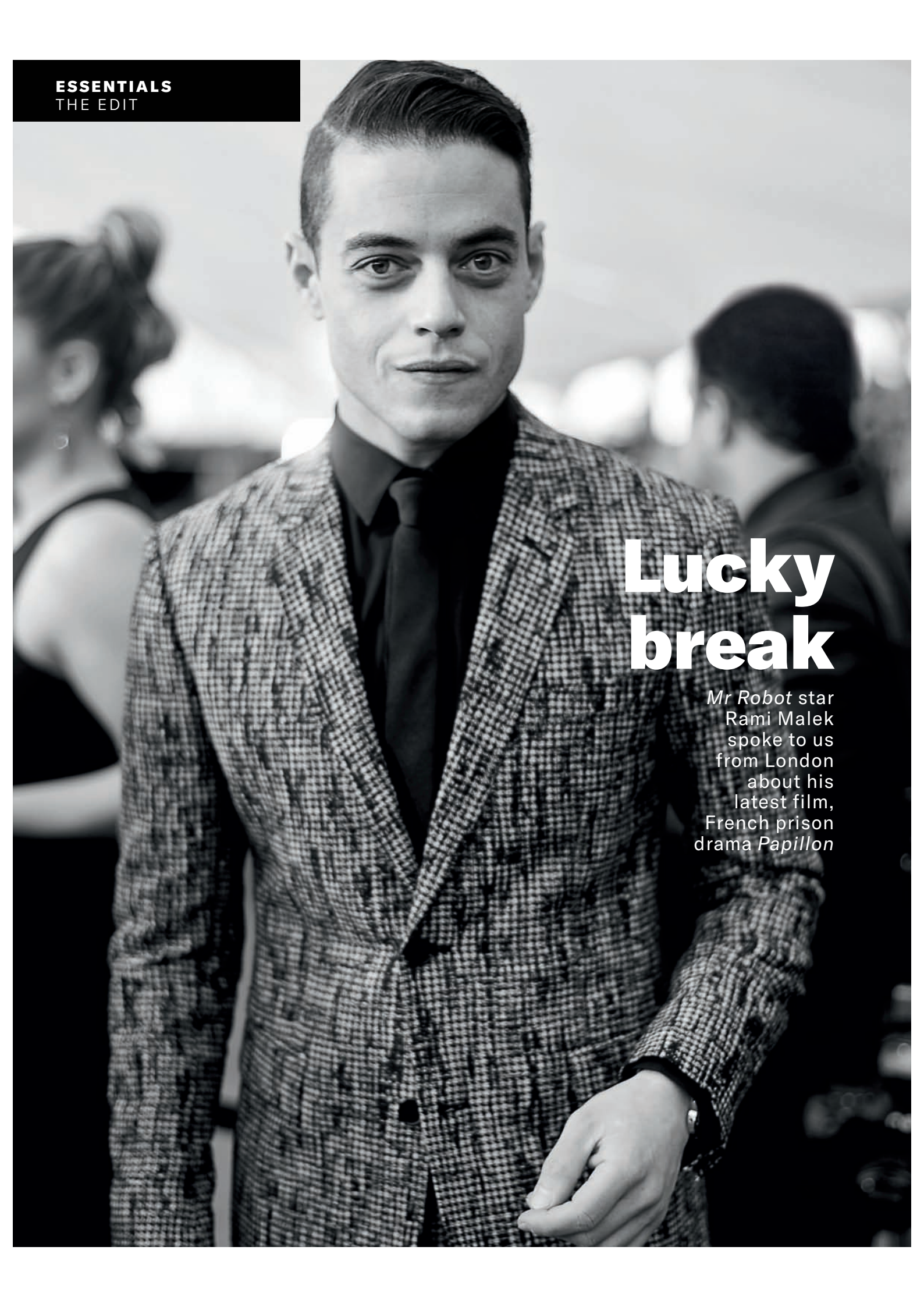


A black and white photograph of actor Rami Malek. He is wearing a dark, patterned double-breasted suit jacket over a dark shirt and a dark tie. He has short, dark hair styled back and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is blurred, showing other people in what appears to be a social setting.

ESSENTIALS
THE EDIT

Lucky break

Mr Robot star
Rami Malek
spoke to us
from London
about his
latest film,
French prison
drama *Papillon*



**Papillon hits
cinemas in
South Africa on
19 October**

• **PAPILLON, DIRECTED BY MICHAEL NOER AND BASED ON THE 1969 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL of the same name by French criminal-turned-memoirist Henri 'Papillon' Charrière, chronicles the wrongly convicted murderer's escape from a penal colony in Cayenne, French Guiana. In the remake of the 1973 film, Papillon (Charlie Hunnam) befriends an eccentric – and wealthy – fraudster Louis Degas (Rami Malek), promising him protection in exchange for financing his quest to freedom. The two inmates quickly form an unlikely bond in the harsh conditions of Devil's Island.**

GQ: What attracted you to this film?

Rami Malek: The indomitable spirit of human beings and how two characters can step off having an idea of who they are as men and be irrevocably changed by one another, as they are put through some of the most brutal situations that they could be thrust into – and that story of human connection, and how we band together to survive under very perilous circumstances.

GQ: It's obviously an older story, but it resonates quite well with what's going on in the world today.

RM: Very much so. It actually felt like a story that needed retelling. The privatisation of prisons all over the world is a dire, dire situation that needs to be addressed. And when you can look at something that's as entertaining as this film, and still dig deeply into a subject matter that needs to be put into the public discourse, that's something that as an actor I'd like to be a part of.

GQ: Did you know this story at all before getting involved in the project?

RM: I had read the book and I watched the film with my father when I was younger.

I remember the dream sequence in particular and being just so captivated and enthralled by it. And to have such an unusual thing happen, in what you thought was a very straightforward prison escape story, was something that I was enchanted by.

GQ: Were you nervous or intimidated taking on the role of Degas, and especially, following in the footsteps of Dustin Hoffman?

RM: Of course. I watched to see what he was doing that made him so excellent at his craft. So yeah, it lingers with you. But never trying to, I guess, weigh myself against him? It was something that I really did take into deep consideration, but I thought if the story was worth reimagining, it could still maybe resonate even more than it did then, and it was worth putting one's ego aside and throwing your hat into the ring.

GQ: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of getting into character for this specific role?

RM: The most challenging I think was the location. We were shooting in a way that wouldn't give you the feeling that you were

on a Hollywood filmset. It was created in Montenegro by people who I think were unaccustomed to working on filmsets, so everything felt like it was built to last. There was a prison built for this film. It was effectively a concrete structure that wasn't getting torn down within a few days of wrapping principal photography. And just being, you know, surrounded by hundreds of actors playing convicts day in and day out. It's obviously our job but the circumstances can be the heaviest aspect – just showing up and effectively being a prisoner for the day. Obviously, I take this with a grain of salt; I'm thoroughly aware that we're on a filmset but there's nothing glamorous about this one.

GQ: What was it like working opposite Charlie Hunnam? Had you two met before this film?

RM: Charlie and I did not know each other well, but I've respected him as an actor for a while now. I saw him in *The Lost City of Z* and he blew me away. I thought that was a fantastic film and he was just at the top of his game. Through our conversations and through our work, I knew I had a partner in crime who would be just totally dedicated to what he was doing. And that's Charlie. The perfect gentleman as well.

GQ: The chemistry between the two of you is great, almost convincing that you two have been lifelong friends.

RM: We became very close, almost inseparable.

GQ: What would you say you admire most about the bond between Papillon and Degas?

RM: What is remarkable about them is that they come from two walks of life – and here are two people you would never expect to be friends – and they are able to alter each other's perspectives so drastically, and better one another. And the relationship with Charlie reflected that. I think we both were exceedingly kind towards one another, but also plenty of times where we broke each other's balls, but it was always a wink and a nod. ❧- BERND FISCHER

“It actually felt like a story that needed retelling. The privatisation of prisons all over the world is a dire situation that needs to be addressed