



# Danny Ramirez Lifts Off with 'Falcon and the Winter Soldier'

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The actor behind Marvel's Joaquín Torres also has 'Top Gun: Maverick' coming up, and may someday add filmmaker to his resume: "If it gets to this privileged place, I better know what positive impact I want to make."

The past few years have been full of larger-than-life moments for Danny Ramirez.

The actor learned to fly a fighter jet for his upcoming role in *Top Gun: Maverick*. He had conversations with Tom Cruise on the deck of an aircraft carrier, nothing but empty ocean in sight. And he jetted across the globe with Anthony Mackie to share scenes with the leading man of Marvel's [Falcon and the Winter Soldier](#).

These are experiences Ramirez never could have imagined growing up in Miami as kid who rarely saw himself represented onscreen. Perhaps that's why it's none of these big moments, but a memory with no glitz or glamour, that causes Ramirez to sound awestruck, and perhaps a little emotional, as he recounts it.

On March 19, the actor made his [debut on Falcon and the Winter Soldier](#), the Disney+ series that the streaming service says was its most-watched premiere ever. The episode introduced Ramirez to a portion of Disney+'s 100 million-plus subscribers, many of whom connected with the actor's earnest, heroic performance as Joaquín Torres, a member of the Air Force and ally to Mackie's Sam Wilson.

As soon as the episode hit, Ramirez was flooded with social media messages of gratitude from Latinx audiences. Messages in Spanish, messages from Honduras, from Mexico — even one from a second cousin in Colombia whose young son couldn't believe there was a Marvel character who looked like him, much less one he was related to.

"It's so much more resounding and impactful than I could have possibly imagined," says the Chicago-born Ramirez, whose mother is Mexican and whose father is Colombian.

If you talk to people who work with Ramirez, you'll hear the same things again and again. The actor has range. He can be funny. He can be heartbreaking. He can be a man of action. You'll also hear that he's a genuine fan of the projects he's involved in. When he and I first Zoomed several months ago, Ramirez was wearing a *Top Gun* t-shirt (totally unintentional — he likes to wear free stuff from productions).

For Mackie, Ramirez's bright-eyed view brought him back to his own early Marvel days.

"I saw in his face what my face must have looked like my first day on *Captain America: Winter Soldier*. The amount of excitement," says Mackie. "Every beat, every opportunity he was given, he jumped on it, like a consummate professional. All of those early days, just soaking it all in like a sponge."

Ramirez once had dreams of playing professional soccer, a pursuit that taught him to practice the little things, to do something over and over until it was perfect. That ethos served him well when he shifted to acting at New York University.



'Falcon and the Winter Soldier' actor Danny Ramirez | Courtesy of Lindsey Byrnes



Danny Ramirez plays Fanboy in 'Top Gun: Maverick' | Paramount Pictures, Skydance and Jerry Bruckheimer Films



Courtesy of Lindsey Byrnes





Courtesy of Marvel Studios

After appearing in the 2018, Russo Bros.-backed movie *Assassination Nation* and moving to Los Angeles, Ramirez booked a small role on the breakout Netflix comedy *On My Block* as Mario Martinez, the older brother of Ruby (Jason Genao), one of the show's high school protagonists. He auditioned with a heartbreaking, funny monologue from the pilot about how high school is an opportunity for reinvention. He showed a range rare in a young actor, and he was offered the part on the spot.

"Being a Latino actor, he fills a void," says *On My Block* co-creator Eddie Gonzales of Ramirez going on to even bigger projects. "Being Hispanic myself, I'm proud, not just because we know him, but because there's a void that needs to be filled — and he can do it."

The response to *On My Block*, which centers on Latinx and Black teens, showed Ramirez the power of representation.

Not long after *On My Block*, Ramirez booked his biggest role to date in *Top Gun: Maverick* as a pilot with the call-sign Fanboy. Like the rest of the core cast, he became a real-life pilot, working his way up to flying an F/A-18 Hornet.

"Danny's talent and work ethic are going to take him very far," says *Top Gun: Maverick* director Joseph Kosinski. "The only time I saw his enthusiastic smile fade was after pulling a series of stomach-churning, high-G maneuvers on our first day of aerial photography. Only after filming was complete did I find out he had a fear of flying. I couldn't be more proud of what he and the rest of the cast were able to accomplish on this film."

Then [Marvel came calling](#). It was a journey that began as such journeys do: shrouded in mystery.

Casting director Sarah Finn invited Ramirez to her office, where he performed a scene, with no information on the project or the character he was reading for. Marvel seemed pleased, and they asked if he had any other ways he could try the reading. He did one more. Then another. Then another. He was getting the same feeling he had auditioning for *On My Block*.

"It was one of those where, based on their look, 'Oh, there might be something here,' " Ramirez recalls thinking.

He left and went about his day, telling himself not to get too excited. Then something unusual happened. Rather than waiting in suspense for weeks, Ramirez heard back from his agents almost immediately. Marvel liked him.

He met director [Kari Skogland](#) at Marvel's Burbank headquarters and the two began shaping the character. Ramirez's real-life enthusiasm helped inform Joaquín, a man who can't quite believe he's working with an Avenger.

"I think even as a person, he was a little bit fanning out with the Anthony and the Sebastian (Stan) of it," Skogland says. "He legitimately was pinching himself that he was part of the project. That came through."

For Ramirez, working with a larger-than-life star like Cruise on *Top Gun* also influenced how Joaquín would feel working with Sam Wilson.

"When I really responded to the role, one of the first things I latched onto was, 'OK, it's the Falcon!'" Ramirez says. "I learned a lot from Tom. It would be these moments.

'That's Tom Cruise!' It'd almost be disingenuous to not acknowledge the amazing presence of this person that saved the universe."

While no one on *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* will comment on the future of Ramirez's Joaquín Torres, comic book fans know the [character is noteworthy](#), eventually becoming The Falcon in his own right.

Head writer Malcolm Spellman, who assembled a nearly all-Black writer's room for *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* and has earned praise for its [portrayal of the Black experience](#), notes including a prominent Latinx character was important to him.

"I feel a special kinship for brown people. We grow up in the same neighborhoods, we deal with very similar issues," says Spellman. "When we had the chance to use this character, I was very, very excited. It's an image I feel is very important to promote, which is Black and brown folk, working together."

There's an ambitious sequence in episode one of *Falcon in the Winter Soldier* in which Sam Wilson is trouble, caught in an aerial battle. Luckily, he has his colleague Torres is on the ground, helping guide things. What viewers didn't see was a deleted moment in which Torres texts GIFS of the Falcon to Sam in the heat of battle. That was another moment partially informed by Ramirez, who has a group text with his *Top Gun* castmates.

Says the actor with a laugh: "To Miles (Teller), whenever he makes a point or he says something dumb or I say something dumb, I just send him a GIF of his own face in *Whiplash*. To Lewis Pullman, I send a GIF of him in *Bad Time at the El Royale*. To Monica (Barbaro) I have a plethora, because she did all these shows."

Mackie appreciated the levity Ramirez brought, but also the commitment. When the coronavirus pandemic shut down the show's Prague shoot in March 2020, the actor had been preparing hard for a scene.

"He was so distraught because he had done all the work and was so ready to shoot this scene," recalls Mackie. "He was just ready to act the scene out in the hotel lobby, just so he could get it out of his system."

With *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* wrapping up its season on April 23 and *Top Gun: Maverick* set for Nov. 19, Ramirez is entering a turning point in his young career. He wants to be prepared for what's next.

During the ten months Ramirez spent on *Top Gun: Maverick*, he'd show up to set on his days off and hover behind cinematographer Claudio Miranda or pick the brain of director Kosinski or editor Eddie Hamilton. Eventually came Christopher McQuarrie, Cruise's *Mission: Impossible* writer-director who also worked on the *Maverick* script. He gave the young actor a list of his favorite 130 films to study.

"At that point it was just like, 'game on.' Any question," recalls Ramirez. "He had his iPad. 'Alright, well that question I could answer with this scene here from *Lawrence of Arabia*.' And he'd pull it up."

At a barbeque, *On My Block* co-creator Jeremy Haft remembers Ramirez peppering him with filmmaking questions, too.

"He was so intellectually curious," recalls Haft. "'How is writing a script for a feature different from writing a script for TV? How is TV production different than feature production? If you were going to do this, would you try this?'"

All the questions are for a reason. Ramirez recently formed the production shingle Pinstripes with Thomas Culliver and Niv Gafny, two friends from NYU. They are taking meetings on the Ramirez-penned screenplay, *Baton*. It's a first-generation family drama set in Miami, sort of a heightened version of Ramirez's life. The script centers on two siblings reeling from the death of their mother. (In real life, Ramirez's mother is alive and well.) One sibling is more altruistic, like their late mother, the other is more individualistic, looking out for himself as he pursues the American dream.

The script came partially out of questions Ramirez has grappled with. Ramirez's mother, a child psychologist, volunteered to go to a detention center at the height of former President Trump's family separation policy to offer comfort to children who had none.

"I was like, 'How are you my mom? You are the nicest human being in the world,'" Ramirez recalls thinking. "At the same time, I was pursuing what seems to be a very individual pursuit in acting, which contrasted so much with it."

The response to *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* may offer an answer to the question of if acting can be in service to others. Those who study representation in the media would say it's more impactful than actors might realize.

Latinx people represent 17 percent of the U.S. population, but according to UCLA's most recent Hollywood Diversity Report, Latinx actors share of lead acting roles was just 6.6 percent on scripted broadcast shows, 5.5 percent in cable and 4.0 percent in digital in 2018–19.

Chon Noriega, a UCLA professor of film, television and digital media, argues that dehumanizing policies, such as family separation, are easier to enact in a society in which Latinx people are dramatically underrepresented on screen.

"A lot of the excitement had to do with the introduction of a new character, Joaquín Torres, and the sense that he would evolve into the next superhero," says Noriega of Ramirez's *Falcon* debut. "But there's another reason for the excitement. Often, Latino characters that appear in sci-fi, fantasy, and action films are the first ones killed. So this series starts by signaling hope that Joaquín is here to stay, and the actor, too."

Those who work with Ramirez feel he is here to stay and is destined for even bigger things.

"He's going to blow up," says Spellman. "It's not because he's doing big stuff, it's because everybody — Marvel execs, creatives, filmmakers like me, and fans — are all having the exact same reaction. ... He is one of those people who feels inevitable."

While some Marvel actors have had luck parlaying their higher profiles into passion projects, Ramirez does not take such a future as fait accompli. Still, he wants to be ready.

Says Ramirez: "If it gets to this privileged place, I better know what positive impact I want to make."