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Short List

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ISSUE 82 / 28 MAY 2009

BATTLE READY

We interrupt Christian Bale's day with a few probing questions - and live to tell the tale



"Insult my pet
hamster again and
you're mince meat"

MAN ON

Christian Bale's focus has fast made him an action hero for our times. *ShortList's* Tiffany Rose spends an intense half hour with the most driven man in Hollywood

There's no question, Christian Bale was born to act. With a knack for adopting other accents at the flip of a switch, the 35-year-old actor is quite the chameleon for morphing into any character he sets his mind to. He lost 63lb to play an emaciated insomniac in *The Machinist*; he bulked up for *The Dark Knight*; and it wasn't just a tanning bed that helped him embody a psychopathic yuppie in *American Psycho*.

Not content to let a summer pass without a leading-man role, Bale's now tooling up for *Terminator Salvation*. Set in post-apocalyptic 2018, he plays John Connor, the man fated to lead the human resistance against Skynet and its army of Terminators.

For our interview, the modest Bale is surprisingly jovial and chatty, opting to keep his intense hot-blooded persona strictly for his cinematic performances – much to our relief.

What made you decide to take on the Terminator role? It's quite a different film for you...

Well, I really liked the original *Terminator* and I liked the second one a great deal too, but I didn't like the third one, which I thought was very spoofy. So I said no to taking on the role at first and I immediately told McG [the director]: "Well, there isn't really any point."

So what swayed you into taking over the role of John Connor?

McG flew to England where I was shooting [*The Dark Knight*], and we met for half an hour. He was probably on the best behaviour he's ever been on in his life! We discussed his ideas and I liked the notion of the kind

McG asked you to read a couple of books in preparation for this role. One was *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and the other was *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K Dick. What did this bring to your character?

Well, I never read *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. I just told him I did. *The Road* is just fantastic. I read it in one night up in a log cabin in Wisconsin when I was meant to be working on some other project and got called off for the night. It's one of the best books I've ever read, and in that environment, it was just wonderful. What did it bring? I don't know. Hopefully something, but I can't put my finger on it.

Have you talked to Arnie about the movie?

I bumped into him in a car park and we spoke about it a little bit. At that time, he hadn't seen it. The producers have a relationship with him, though. We chatted briefly about what we were up to with the new one and he was curious about it. And rightly so, this is his thing [laughs]. Who the hell are we? Who the hell do we think we are?

Did he give you any advice?

No, but he was very excited with a healthy amount of scepticism. Like: "What are you doing? Are you doing the right thing?"

When you play a dark character, do you feel that sometimes you can become too much of that character yourself?

Not really, because I am still able to recognise the ridiculousness of it all and it gives me the ability just to step away from it, but also truly enjoy it and embrace it while I'm in it.

A M I S S I O N

of rebirth of this mythology and the story of the birth of Connor as the Resistance leader, set in a time the other movies had not been set. It wasn't the same old one-track focus of the villain constantly pursuing the nightmare of someone who is unstoppable. I appreciated exactly what he was striving for, but it wasn't on the page.

We're told you met McG in your local pub...

Well, he's changed the story to being in a pub. I actually didn't want to get drunk at the time so we met in some sort of Hare Krishna café. I don't know how he made it into a pub, but that's his prerogative.

What was McG's vision for the film?

Not only did he want to reinvent the mythology, but he also wanted to reinvent himself. He had a strong desire to make a very different movie from anything that had been done before – I think to prove that to himself and to others, he has a lot of fight in him. I mean, a guy who keeps on calling himself McG must have a lot of fight in him, you know?

Do you think your passion makes you a better actor?

Yeah, you are naturally going to give more to anything you are passionate about.

So is acting a passion or a job for you?

Well, hopefully it's a passion; unfortunately sometimes it becomes a job if you are not working with people who inspire your passion. But for me, regardless of who I end up working with, even if I feel they don't have passion about the project, I will maintain it for myself because I don't want to waste my time. Every time you sign on to something, it's a big commitment. So for me, it's absolutely a passion. Just sometimes you can see that it's not going to come good. And at those moments you need to decide: "OK, what am I going to do? Do I sit back and not bother?" I just can't do that. For me, I dig in more and recognise the limits of what I can change, but try to change whatever I can.

Is being famous a downside to your job?

The more movies you do, the less ability you have to just be that character. It doesn't matter how private a person you are, you accumulate some amount of baggage. So that's a downside to fame. With Sam Worthington, I had approval over who would play his role. There were lots of names given out and his name was not

"Regardless of who I work with, I maintain



What do you mean you changed your mind about wearing fancy dress?

Ghost train: unreliable

unknown, then they are just the character, that's it, you don't see anything else. But the catch-22 is if you don't have that recognition, then you don't get movies made. Nobody will stick money into the movie. And that's what I was fighting throughout my career. Directors would say they wanted me for something, and the financiers would say, "No way is he going to be in our movie!" I find those movies much easier

Let's talk about the weapons training. Did you use live ammunition or blanks?
 We had a military advisor who was on set every single day. Man, I was amazed at how much they trusted me with live ammunition! After training, we put it into practice by all of us standing in a row breaking into doors using live ammunition. So, there's me behind them and I'm like: "Wow, I'm just an actor and they're happy for me to use live rounds?" It was fantastic. Obviously on set, you don't risk anything like that and even with the blanks there is a distance you must maintain from the barrel. There have been appalling tragedies that have happened on movie sets, even with blanks.

Do you treat your body as a temple or a tool? Do you ever get warnings from your doctor?
 I just don't ask him! I suppose of the two, a tool. It's

"It's not a physical thing when you're doing any transformation. It's all about the mental"

to get made now that I have a certain amount of recognition with my work.

You're an intense actor. How do you psyche yourself up to play your character's emotions each day?

It depends on the day. You know, sometimes, you [want] to get yourself going, and other times you don't need that. I'm very aware of what mood I'm in. Sometimes you're just hanging out and shooting the sh*t beforehand, and bang, you just go and do it. Other times, you've got to take yourself away a little bit, because you know things aren't going to happen on that day. I've never had any one hard, fast rule or technique.

Did you perform many of your own stunts in this film?
 I knew the stunt co-ordinator, Tom [Struthers], very well. He worked on *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. He knows I can do a reasonable amount and I like to do that. But, look, if it's getting hurled 100ft across

just a belief I can do it and I'm not going to be affected by it. It's a great discipline which I think helps with the mental discipline. It really is a mental thing: it's not a physical thing when you're doing any transformation. It's all about the mental.

What happened to your finger [his index finger is all bandaged up]?
 I chopped it off on a motorcycle. For fun, of course.

Terminator Salvation is at cinemas nationwide from 3 June

GET MORE BALE NOW AT SHORTLIST.COM
 Is your mean and moody method-actor fix somehow not sated just yet? Fear not. Head to ShortList.com for an action-packed Terminator Salvation photo gallery starring Bale, plus ShortList's countdown of the most dramatic film transformations

The key influences on Terminator Salvation

Apparently, it wasn't just Arnie...

The Road

Cormac McCarthy's stunning, yet bleak novel about a father and son's perilous journey through a post-apocalyptic America was a major influence on the tone of *Terminator Salvation*. Director McG gave copies of McCarthy's masterpiece to each of his cast members, in the hope that they would better understand the existential detachment felt when trudging through a ravaged wasteland with only a shopping trolley for company.



Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

Who'd have thought that a kids' film starring Dick van Dyke would ever serve as an influence on a dystopian sci-fi blockbuster? But that's exactly what happened in the case of *Terminator Salvation*. The film features a grim machine called the Harvester, which captures humans by plucking them from the ground using a giant metal hand before tossing them into an internal holding pen. The concept of the Harvester was partly inspired by the Child Catcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Fact: the Child Catcher is far more terrifying than any number of Terminators.



Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?

Philip K Dick's sci-fi novel, which was the source material for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, features androids that are virtually indistinguishable from humans. As with *The Road*, McG gave copies of Dick's book to Christian Bale and other cast members. One of the main characters in *Terminator Salvation* is Marcus Wright (played by Australian actor Sam Worthington, who is hotly tipped to join the A-list this year), a Resistance soldier who (spoiler alert!) thinks he's human but is discovered to be an especially powerful model of Terminator cyborg.



Children Of Men

Alfonso Cuarón's cult 2006 sci-fi movie, which is set in a world where the human race inexplicably becomes infertile, was uppermost in McG's mind when filming *Terminator Salvation*. "This is different because the first two Terminators were present day," he said. "This is post-Judgment Day. So it is indeed a whole new idea. I wanted it to have that *Children Of Men* cautionary component of 'this is what could happen'. The whole movie is designed to be a thinly veiled cautionary tale of [how], if we don't get our act together, this is

