

Movieline

March 1994

special issue

YOUNG HOLLYWOOD

New heat

**STEPHEN DORFF,
BRENDAN
FRASER**

Smart mouths

**BEN STILLER,
DANIEL
WATERS,
THE HUGHES
TWINS**

**CHRISTIAN
SLATER,
DREW
BARRYMORE,
CHARLIE
SHEEN**

tell us their
dream roles

**WINONA
RYDER,
BRAD PITT,
KEANU REEVES**

Have we got roles for them!

Nicole
Kidman

"I would love to
play a sex kitten"

plus

**Pup star
horoscope**

**Who's dating
whom?**

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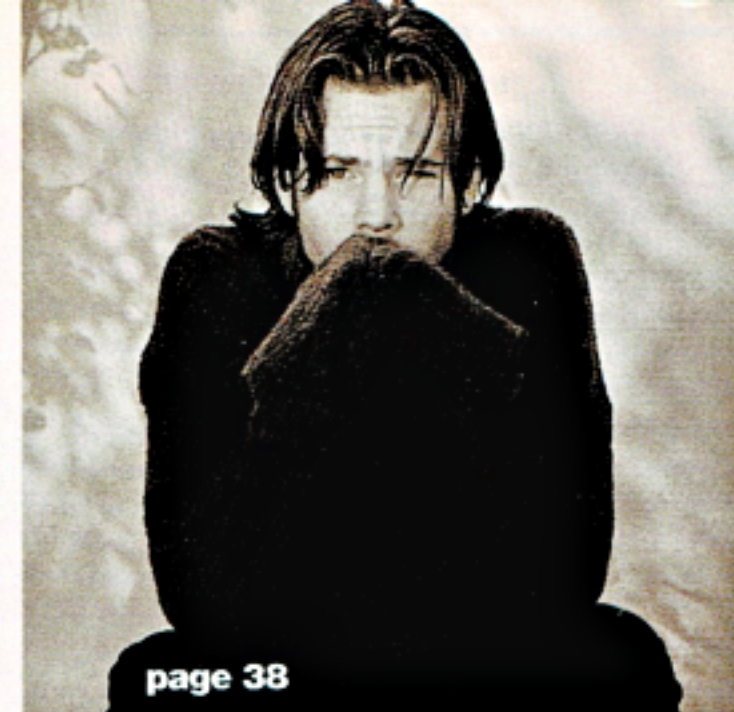
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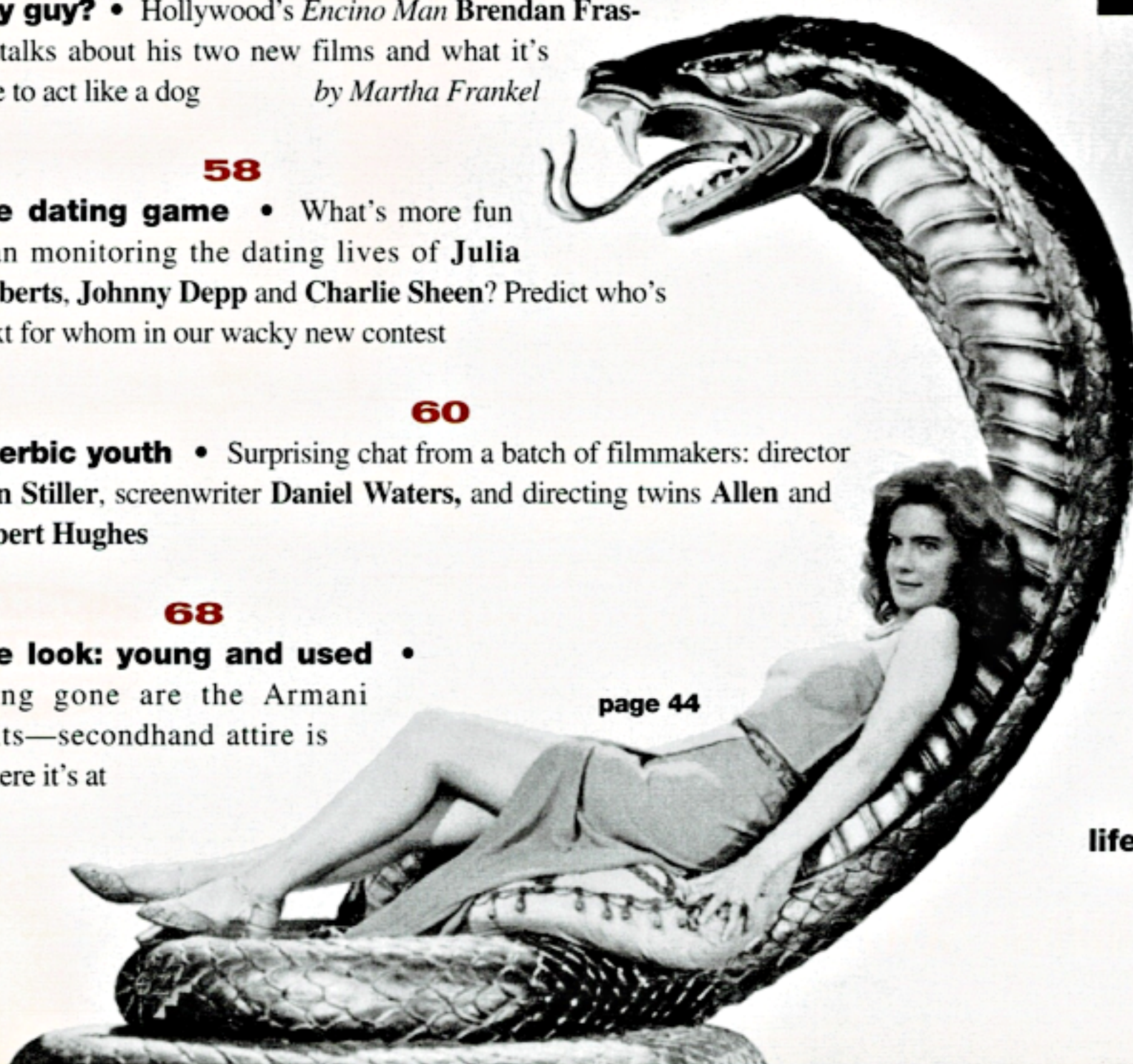
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b y M A R T H A F R A N K E L

shy

Brendan Fraser, who came on strong in *School Ties* and *Encino Man*, is

rumored to be retiring in person. Instead, he's something of a motor-mouth who manages the near impossible: he leaves our intrepid reporter struggling to get a word in.

I've been warned: Brendan Fraser is shy. Okay, I can handle shy. No, I'm told, this is more than shy, much more. The story goes that this guy once froze so badly on "The Arsenio Hall Show" that you could hear his knees knocking through his mike. He's apt to get so tongue-tied that he might not be able to look you in the eyes. Hey, I'm a big girl, a professional . . . I'll deal with it.

I've offered to meet Fraser any place in L.A.—say, his place, or my hotel—but he's chosen the living room of his publicist's house. All right, so he's shy: maybe he'll be comfortable and relaxed there. We pull up at the same time, and this is what I do: I walk over, head down, and mumble, "Hi, I'm Martha. I'm here to do the interview." I am staring at his shoes. Can't be more non-threatening than that, right?

Fraser puts out his hand. "How ya doing?" he says, forcing me to look up. He is staring me right in the eyes, calm as can be.

"I know you hate doing this . . ." I begin.

"No," he says, leading me inside. "I'm cool with this." Either Fraser has had some good therapy in the last year, or my sources were way off base. In

either case, the guy is trying hard to make me feel at ease. My face must be bright red. He probably thinks I'm out of my mind.

I look him over. Figuring I don't have to handle him with kid gloves, I say, "You're too tall for the movies."

"That was the joke when I worked with Sean [Astin] in *Encino Man*. The crew gave me his box, with his name on the side . . ."

guy

"To stand on?"

"Well, that was the theory. But I'm not *too* tall, just, well, tall."

"How tall?" I ask, seriously scrutinizing him.

"Six foot, two."

"I bet Tom Cruise will never work with you . . ."

"Never say never," he says with a wicked laugh.

The truth is, 25-year-old Fraser may be able to work with anyone he damn well pleases. On-screen in movies like *School Ties* he projects a manliness not often associated with his peers. He seems more grounded, more, well, grown up. He's no standard issue, Young Hollywood knockoff of James Dean. I tell him he reminds me of the young Gary Cooper. But that doesn't impress him—he's never seen

any of Coop's films.

"I'm a real pop-culture baby. My first job in films was a day on [Nancy Savoca's] *Dogfight*," he says, although I don't think I asked. "I was 'Sailor #1. I had one line, 'How'd you like to eat my shit, huh?' I tried saying it in every conceivable way. 'How'd *you* like to eat my shit, huh?' 'How'd you like to eat my shit, huh?' In the end, it was,

?



Hot Air: Brendan Fraser and Amy Locane in *Airheads*.

was, 'How'd you like to eat my shit, huh?' And that was my SAG card right there!" *Shy?*

Fraser went on to play Link, the lovable cave man in *Encino Man*. "I played him as an amalgamation of every dog I ever knew," he says, without a hint that he understands how weird this sounds. "My character wasn't much of an epicurean—he put everything he saw into his mouth. I thought that's the way a guy who had been frozen for all that time would act. A dog is available, and unselfconscious, and curious, and likes to put things in his mouth. Hey, it worked for me."

It worked for the thousands of kids who can recite that film line-for-line, too. After a childhood spent traveling around the world because his father worked for Canada's tourism office, Fraser studied acting in Seattle, then came to L.A. for an audition for graduate school. As fate would have it—anyway, this is how Fraser tells it—he forgot about furthering his education and opted for the movies.

I'm about to ask him something when he suddenly launches into a long reverie about *School Ties*, in which he played David Greene, loved and accepted at his prep school because of



going to play out all my twisted needs just to get them out.' I mean, c'mon, *get a therapist!* But, in a way, if you can do double duty to personalize the work so it benefits you and benefits the audience, then I don't think there's any harm in that. And I was able to let go of some things that really scorched me about being a school boy, about being in such a starched place, seeing so much hypocrisy. I know there were some wonderful things about prep school, and I know the people in my school don't want me saying anything bad about them, but on the other hand, there were things that should never

shot, going, 'Left, Brendan, right.' I'm kind of frightened by the places where you dance. Clubs and things, they remind me of the plains of hell. I'm not that square, I like to go out with friends and do things, but it's a rare occasion that'll find me in a club. That was one of the strong selling points of David Greene... he could throw a football *and* he could dance!"

Enough about David Greene. "What's your life like now?" I ask.

"I worked hard last year, doing *Airheads* [about three rockers who want to get their song on the radio] and *With Honors* [Alek Keshishian's film about a homeless man, played by Joe Pesci, whose life intersects with a group of Harvard students]. I haven't seen either of them yet, but I feel like they're both going to be good. I live in this rented loft in West L.A. The guy who built it went mad, and if you walk around the courtyard, there are catwalks and angles that make no sense, negative space, it's all enclosed and highly bizarre. Don't tell anyone where it is, please! I just got a computer, and I'm writing my thoughts. Does that sound too horrible? I make a mean pasta, but I have to go out for Thai food at least once a week. I'm watching lots of movies, trying to catch up on all the films of the people that I'm going to be working with. Like Albert Brooks. I can't believe I'm going to be working with him [in *The Scout*], the guy's a fucking genius. So I guess I lead a pretty boring life, but it suits me." At last, he pauses for a breath.

"Just one last thing," I say. "Since this piece is for a Young Hollywood issue, tell me what you think is wrong with Hollywood..."

"Wrong?" he asks, his voice rising at least two octaves.

"Well, then," I say, "what's *right* with it?"

"Honestly," he says apologetically, "I'm drawing a blank." It's the first moment since we sat down that he's been at a loss for words. What better way to end our interview?

Martha Frankel interviewed Jason Scott Lee for the Jan./Feb. Movieline.

I'm kind of frightened by the kinds of places where you dance. Clubs and things, they remind me of the plains of hell."

his great football arm, but also reviled because he happens to be a Jew. "I really wanted to do that film, because I felt that I understood that world, I knew what it was like to want to *belong* so desperately. I was an outsider because I was always the new kid, and because I was an actor—I *am* an actor, like it or not—and I wanted acceptance. I also wanted acceptance in this community, in Hollywood. Just as David Greene wanted so desperately to be a part of that society, that's the way I felt. The circumstances were so similar. I wanted to—well, not purge, but I felt like I could let loose some baggage.

"Not that the forum of actor/audience should be about psychodrama. It shouldn't be about, 'I'm here, and I'm

have gone down that did." At last he takes a deep breath, and laughs. "Did you say something?" he asks amiably.

"If I did, I can't remember," I say. But I figure I'd better say something before he starts another monologue, so I remark, "I did want to say that I noticed from your films that you're a great dancer..."

He cuts me off with a whoop. "No fucking way. I have two left feet."

"You're kidding," I tell him. "Because I'm usually a good judge of these things and you looked so natural. You dance in *Encino Man*, and more than once in *School Ties*..."

"The choreographer drummed it into my head. He was right out of eye-