

Child star. Two-time Best Actress winner. Filmmaker. And now, 35 years after *Taxi Driver*, **Jodie Foster** directs and stars in a contentious comedy drama starring Mad Mel Gibson as a suicidal man who communicates through a hand puppet. “I love people’s faces when they say, ‘What’s the name of your movie?’ and I say, ‘The Beaver.’”

Towards the end of *The Beaver*, Jodie Foster’s intimately played drama about a depressed man who copes with the world by interacting via a ratty hand puppet, the tormented family at the film’s heart ride a rollercoaster with joyful abandon. It’s an apt metaphor that applies as easily to Foster’s own momentous life as it does to *The Beaver*’s nutty Black clan, who have had to learn how to embrace life’s desperate downs as well as its euphoric ups.

Spin the peaks and troughs of her career into a theme-park rollercoaster experience and the G forces might rip your head off: a mother-ruled childhood as Coppertone babe, Disney sprite and *Taxi Driver*’s child hooker; the unlucky celebrity obsession of a failed presidential assassin, who watched her career slide into oblivion while sharpening her mind at Yale; the mind-bogglingly unlikely comeback as a two-time Oscar victor who used her *Silence Of The Lambs* success to try comedy, corsets and backwoods tongue-twisting with diminishing returns; the re-upping as Hollywood’s modern-day female warrior, with clenched jaw and steely resolve to strike fear into the heart of any old domestic, airborne or Central Park goon; and the directorial career that enjoyed early, modest success before being plagued by stillborn projects and wounded stars, as when

Russell Crowe limped off her long-gestating circus love story *Flora Plum* two weeks before shooting.

The Beaver should have changed Foster’s behind-camera luck. Not just a one-time topper on Hollywood’s Black List of the best unproduced screenplays but a smart, fascinating, darkly comic drama that would play to her strengths, star hot young things Anton Yelchin and Jennifer Lawrence and wrangle Mel Gibson on his own comeback trail for a moving, afflicted role that had Oscar stamped on it. Only for Gibson to go and royally fuck the release of his loyal, longtime friend’s film when an ugly, raging tirade against ex-girlfriend Oksana Grigorieva went public. With Foster finding her third outing as a director well and truly skinned before its public unveiling, *Total Film* expects to come face to face with the angriest woman in Hollywood when we journey to meet her at LA’s Four Seasons.

What we get instead is an actress whose grin and mood are easily a match for her rollercoaster-romping *Beaver* family. Sporting black slacks and a shimmering grey satin blouse under a fitted black jacket, with heart-shaped earrings, simple make-up and a hearing aid in her left ear, Foster strides forward to grip *Total Film*’s hand as we enter the suite and joshes like an old friend while various minders usher us out onto the patio to escape the room’s ridiculously Arctic conditions. “It’ll be fine for you – you’re from England. You guys wear bikinis in this kind of weather,” jokes Foster, who

may be the only natural-looking 48 year old left in Hollywood (she looks incredible but if she’s had surgery, we can’t tell). “We should order a nice pot of tea to make you feel more at home.”

Warm, smiling, effusively friendly – this full-on charm offensive could feel like an attempt to disperse the Gibsonian cloud hovering over *The Beaver*. But, in fact, there’s no doubt that Jodie Foster, version 2011, differs from the Foster we last encountered in Paris in 2005. She seems more laid-back than the slightly stiff actress who greeted us back then in a buttoned-up blouse and smarty-pants specs. Her private life is still strictly no-go, but at one point Foster hints rather movingly at personal repercussions resulting from her turn in *The Brave One*.

Leaning forward with her arms resting on the glass-top table and her hands clasped together, Foster plants her steady gaze in *Total Film*’s direction, ready, willing and supremely able to talk up an articulate storm about Gibson, *The Beaver* and an illustrious career...

How are you feeling about *The Beaver* now that it’s about to be unleashed on the world?

It’s been a long haul. It’s such a long haul as a director, it’s so many different feelings that go into it and it’s hard to erase all the difficulties and all the drama, but I’m really proud of it. I love the film. I know it’s a strange movie and it has an odd tone to it but I love that and I embrace that and I felt like that was the point. >>

JODIE FOSTER



What did you respond to in the script?

So many things. What touched me was the entire dramatic narrative which, for whatever reason, was not what other people saw. A lot of people glossed over that part and thought it was a quirky comedy but that wasn't how I saw it at all.

[SPOILER ALERT!] Jennifer Lawrence told us when she spoke to you during the editing process, you said the film was turning out darker than expected...

I always thought it would [*laughs*]. You know, a guy saws his arm off. In a way, you have to work backwards. If you want the film to be moving and if you want to have a sense of what clinical depression feels like, then you have to honour that throughout the film. So we had to go back and tame the comedic aspects.

It seems astonishing that this is your first film as a director in 16 years, although *Flora Plum* had a big hand in that. Is that the film that got away?

It is but, you know, we shut down two weeks before shooting and I put it back together twice after that. I can honestly say I feel like I've made that movie. I don't think it will ever happen now.

But you've been itching to get back behind the camera?

Definitely, and for a long time. I feel like I have to engineer things differently so that I don't take another 16 years to direct a movie. It's been hard finding something and it's been hard getting stuff off the ground. I make personal movies and those are hard to get off the ground, especially now.

Was there anything personal in terms of you wanting to explore depression on the big screen?

Definitely. There isn't anybody that hasn't had some run-in with it themselves or in their family. Depression is not so very different from ruminating deeply and there are people – myself included – that are engineered to think about hard things over and over again. It's part of what makes us



Old pals: director/star Foster with co-star Mel Gibson on set of *The Beaver*.



'I'm not defending Mel's behaviour. But when you love somebody and they're struggling, you don't run away'

excellent as artists, you know? It makes a great writer. The process of going over things again and again is joyful but also incredibly painful and very solitary, very lonely making.

Did you and Mel try different iterations of the puppet's voice before settling on Ray Winstone?

[*Laughs*] Yeah! It's funny you say Ray Winstone because Mel did a movie [*Edge Of Darkness*] with Ray and he kept calling him during the shoot and saying, "How would I say this?" It was very specifically Ray Winstone, and sort of Michael Caine on speed... I'd love to take credit for Mel's performance but he was amazing from day one.

Do you feel you have a definable aesthetic?

It depends on the movie. I'm not one of those [*directors*] where I say, "I only want it to be blue."

But I like films that are lean, meticulously planned and witty, but where I can go back and erase all the seams. The progression of the visuals in this movie is phenomenally calculated but hopefully by the time the audience sees it, they're not paying attention.

Did you always like the title?

Loved the title. My friends were always saying, "So you're going to change the title, right?" And I'd say, "Absolutely not!" I love people's faces when they say, "What's the name of your movie?" and I say, "*The Beaver*." It's irreverent and I think you have to have an irreverent spirit to enjoy the film. It's not for everybody. It's challenging.

Speaking of challenging – Mel's obviously a great friend but isn't it difficult to keep standing by him?

How much courage does it take given it could smudge your own rep?

I don't think it takes any courage. I mean, there are two separate parts of the story. One is, it's a tremendous performance and I will forever be grateful for that and for what an incredibly, unusually beloved professional he is. He is the most loved actor I've ever worked with on anything. Mel and Chow-Yun Fat – he's the other one. I really love Chow-Yun Fat! Mel's a great communicator but he's not all full of himself and he's not self-indulgent. In terms of his own personal struggles, I can't defend his behaviour, I'm not defending his behaviour. He has to defend his own behaviour. We all take the consequences of the things that we do. But when you love somebody and they're struggling, you don't run in the opposite direction. Who would run?

Hasn't it put pressure on your friendship, though?

Absolutely not. It's a difficult situation, it's very hard for him. And I suppose if it wasn't hard for him, he would be Charlie Sheen. Which he's not. [*Laughs*] I'm thrilled that I got to make a movie that I love – whether people see it or don't is really very secondary to me. That weighs on him a lot more than on me.

But hasn't the film been severely affected? Won't people's perceptions be coloured by his outbursts?

Five star turns

Foster's export-quality performances...

Of course. We did change the release date three times so that right there has already affected the film. Would I have liked it to come out for his Oscar consideration? Absolutely. It's incredibly hard on him – so much so that it's impossible for him to talk about it.

Did you change anything in the film to protect Mel?

[Shakes head emphatically] I mean we did reshoots and the last day of reshoots for him was the worst possible day we could have chosen... But he finished that day gloriously, he did two amazing takes, both of which are stunning and in the movie, and he got on the plane and left and that was that. No, I didn't change anything. There was nothing to change. It's been difficult for marketing to figure out how they're supposed to present the movie. I don't envy them.

Do you feel like it's entirely on your shoulders now that Mel can't sell the film?

Oh, he definitely can but, look, maybe I'm just kidding myself but I think when you feel like you did the right thing, you don't feel as affected by the outcome. This was the movie I was hoping I would have and it was a long process getting it there. How can I not be grateful for that?

As an actor, have you consciously stepped away from the screen recently or is it just harder to find roles?

It's always hard and, you know, I've been working for 45 years so you naturally slow down when you get older and you have children and you've done a lot of things. The thing that interests me the most now is working with great directors, standing behind their shoulders and going, "Wow, why did he do it that way?" and being able to serve them. That's the thing that's keeping me in there. You know, Spike Lee and David Fincher and Neil Jordan... Really, the last 15 movies that I've done have all been about that.

Do you think a film like *Taxi Driver* would ever get made these days?

That's a good question... I think it could 'cos it was made for less than a million dollars but the way it was released would be very different. At that time, they put that movie out in two theatres and let it grow and it was in the theatre for close to a year. We don't have that anymore. But the whole digital revolution that's happening means that, in the next three years, film is going to be in a very different place and movies like *Taxi Driver* will be made way more often. Yes, we're going to have to get used to the fact that the *only* movies that are going to be in theatres are event films that I'm gonna pay 50 bucks for me and my kids to go see. But the \$100m romantic comedy shot in Encino is going to be playing in exactly the same screen as the \$100,000 version of *Taxi Driver* and one of them's really good...

You're talkin' 'bout a revolution...

I think so. It's going to reward entrepreneurs, because places like Amazon and iTunes are gonna be our new distribution outlets. They don't want 10 executives paid bloated salaries to tell somebody their third act is shit.

When young actresses are interviewed, your name invariably comes up as an influence...

[Laughs] That's nice. I don't see myself as much of a role model but I've had a really long career >>

#1



TAXI DRIVER (1976)

★★★★★ Foster was already a child-actress workhorse when Scorsese cast her as Iris, the 12-year-old prostitute befriended by De Niro's scary cabbie Travis Bickle – and only then because Mariel Hemingway, Linda Blair and Melanie Griffith had said no. Unsentimental and brimming with attitude, Foster's Iris is wise beyond her years. The actress still sees *Taxi Driver* as "the best thing that ever happened to me. And it didn't turn me into a weirdo."

#2



THE ACCUSED (1988)

★★★★ Foster nabbed the first of two Oscars for her gutsy, gritty portrayal of a working-class waitress gang-raped in a bar as drunken onlookers cheer (based on a true event), then finds herself painted as a "low-class bimbo" at the hands of the criminal-justice system. Foster was convinced she'd blown it: "I thought I was just terrible. I thought, 'This is it, this is the end.'" Instead, she was vindicated on the Oscar podium, revitalising her faltering career.

#3



THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)

★★★★★ Jonathan Demme boasted he was the first director to allow Foster to express her fierce intellect on screen ("In every other movie she's made, she had to dumb down...") and her turn as FBI trainee Clarice Starling – a beguiling avenger of misogynistic depravity helped along by Anthony Hopkins' Hannibal Lecter – was lauded with Oscar No. 2. "The best way to reverse stereotypes in movies," Foster declared, "is to get out there and be better than everyone."

#4



CONTACT (1997)

★★★ *Entertainment Weekly* dubbed Robert Zemeckis' esoteric sci-fi drama "a \$90m event movie for intellectuals". The actress' rigorous intelligence made her a perfect fit for Dr Ellie Arroway, a maverick astronomer whose obsessive search for ETs takes her on a trippy voyage to meet not little green men but a blurry beach bum who looks like her dead father. Not all fun and games, but the Zemeckis/Foster pairing is nonetheless a strong one.

#5



PANIC ROOM (2002)

★★★★ "I do dark dramas. I do them well," says Foster, who proved herself as Hollywood's go-to tough gal in David Fincher's home-invasion thriller. She was an 11th hour substitute for the injured Nicole Kidman, but Fincher had no regrets – gaining added resonance by pitting Foster's resourcefulness against a trio of brutal male intruders. "It's more political," he says. "She's spent 35 years making choices that define her as a woman and define women in film."

and that's the hardest thing for young actors. My mom always said, "Look, by the time you're 18, your career will be over." And then she'd say, "By the time you're 26, your career will be over." And then it was, "By the time you're 40, your career will be over." I managed to stay alive, I guess. My mom's not saying much anymore.

What do you make now of the fearless girl who unzipped Robert De Niro's pants? Does it shock you?

Not at all! I just feel incredibly lucky. To have come from making Disney movies to working with the greatest director that America's ever had, except for maybe Frank Capra – how amazing is that? No, I just felt really lucky to be there and I have to hand it to my mom because she was really forward thinking. She was a great cinephile. She made me watch *Mean Streets* at 10 years old way before I ever worked with Scorsese. Perhaps it was a vicarious thrill that she got through me but she wanted to be respected and she wanted me to be respected; she wasn't interested in me being a pig-tailed, model-type actress, she wanted me to be up there with Robert De Niro.

At what age will you let your sons watch *Taxi Driver*?

Oh, they're so not ready. They were not interested in ever seeing my movies. I'd pull the videos out and they would just be like, "Argghhhh!" Up until

time with that at 25. Since then I've understood that it was good that I could only play that but at the time, I thought, "What's wrong with me that I can't do what everybody else wants me to?"

How do you think *The Silence Of The Lambs* holds up? Have all the parodies robbed it of its menace?

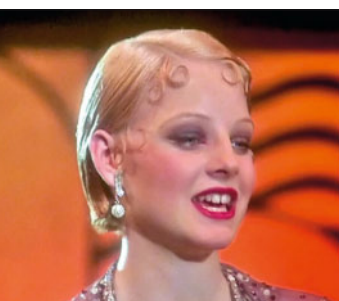
Oh no, I love it. It's a great movie. I think it's a great homage when something enters into the consciousness that way.

When *Total Film* interviewed you in 2005, you said you liked *Red Dragon* and *Manhunter* but didn't want to comment on *Hannibal* even though you'd seen it. Would you care to comment now?

It's just different, you know, and there were all sorts of reasons that Jonathan Demme was uncomfortable making that movie and Dino De Laurentiis and Ridley Scott weren't. And I think all those reasons are still on screen and each of them is incredibly happy about the decision that they made – Jonathan's really happy with the decision he made and Ridley's really pleased with the decision that he made.

Wasn't it strange watching another actress inhabit the role that in many ways defined your career?

It was interesting to see what her idea was of where Clarice would be – who was Clarice going to be 10 years from now? And it wasn't just



'My mum wasn't interested in me being a model-type actress. She wanted me to be up there with De Niro'

this year, they'd only seen *Nim's Island* and *Bugsy Malone*. I showed them *Contact* a couple of weeks ago and they started becoming interested, so maybe they're ready to see my movies!

You've talked before about feeling convinced that you'd blown your career with your performance in *The Accused* – until the Academy changed your mind.

Well, there was that but also, that film had a hard path. The first cut didn't work and they got a brand new editor in and went back to the printed takes. So it was a tough movie to get right and even my performance was tough to get right. I was 25 years old and there was something I was ashamed of, something I didn't quite understand, about my unconscious choices. I was drawn to portraying her in a way that was uncomfortable and uncharming and not sympathetic, she wasn't the kind of girl that I'm used to and I had a hard

interesting to see Julianne's idea but also the writer's idea – I was like, [*gobsmacked*] "Really?!" It's not where I thought she would be.

Where do you keep your Oscars?

I kept them in the bathroom but they started getting corroded so they're in a trophy case now.

Oscars corrode?

Yeah, the little bottoms... They get all green and humidity eats away at them.

Do they mean as much to you now as they did when you first won them?

The things themselves don't. It's just the idea of it, being a part of something that was such a huge part of my childhood. But, I don't know, the Oscars feel different now. Maybe it's because I'm older or because there are so few films that I feel are life-changing now. I don't get everybody to come round to my house anymore to watch them.

You've never been afraid to have long career gaps – but have any of those hiatus' come because you found it hard to shake off a character?

I think you get affected by the subject of the last movie and how much blood went into it. You're ready when you're ready. You know when you're ready because you find something and you fall in love with it and you know you're not ready when you can't find anything to fall in love with... Of all the movies I've had a hard time casting off, *The Brave One* was the hardest to walk away from.

Why was that?

[*Long pause*] I think it switched a light bulb off in my head that made me evolve differently personally and then I just didn't want to... go back.

Can you talk more about that?

I don't really understand it. I think it was the character. I think there was something so true

Lifeline

19 November 1962

Alicia Christian Foster is born. She goes by the nickname of 'Jodie'.



1965

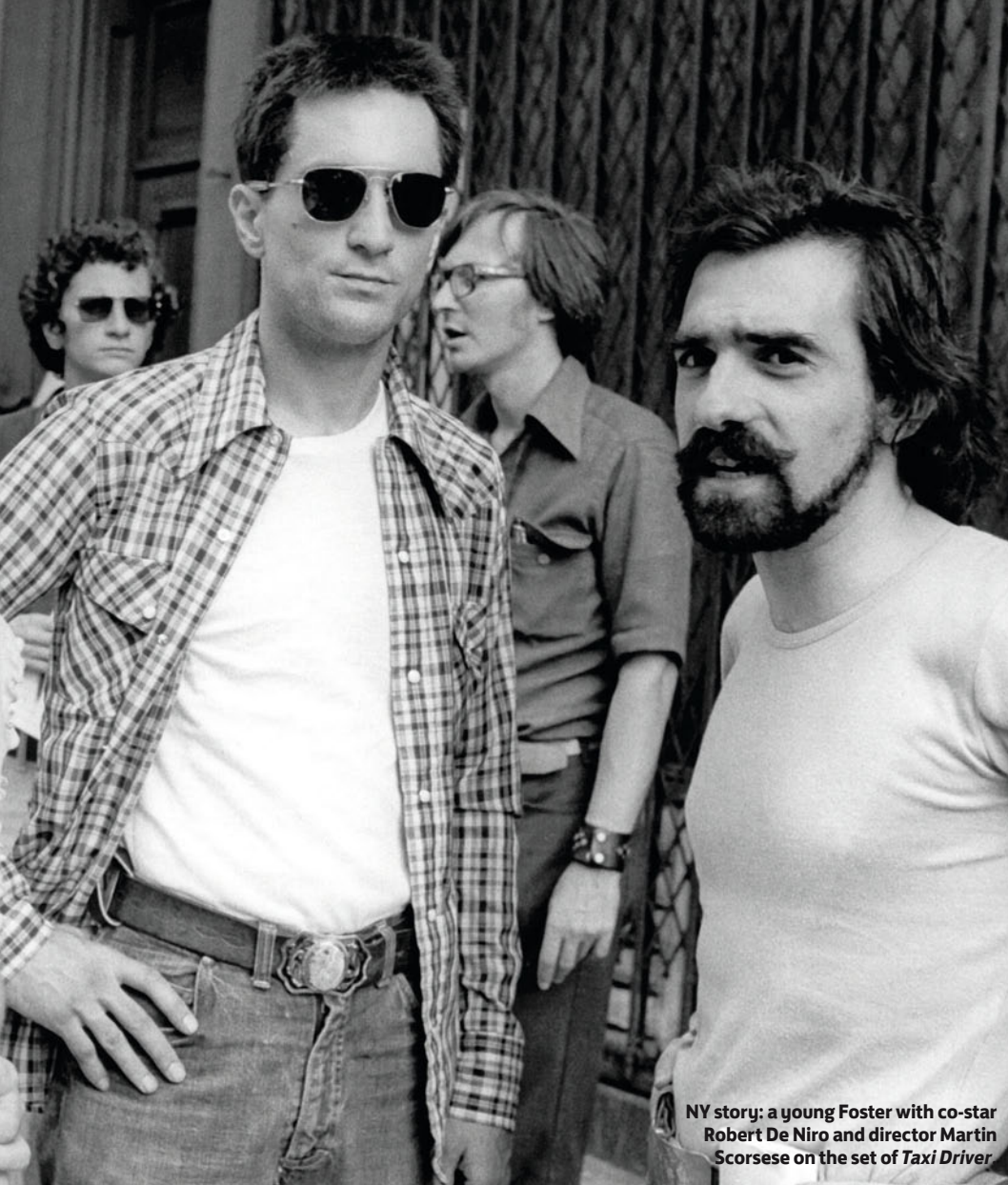
Begins her career age 3 as 'the Coppertone girl' in TV ads.



1976

Makes *Bugsy Malone*, *Freaky Friday* and *Taxi Driver*. Oscar-nommed for *Taxi Driver*.





NY story: a young Foster with co-star Robert De Niro and director Martin Scorsese on the set of *Taxi Driver*

that I had never really explored before and it made me never want to go back to, uh... the easy path. It's a hard path [voice catching in throat]... and it's not easily understandable by other people. I guess that was it – being OK with having your performances not be that understandable. I just don't think people got it but there was such a shift in terms of what I learned on that movie. I said to my agent, "Be prepared for me to make a lot of movies that people aren't gonna like [laughs]."

How do you approach acting now – do you wait for filmmakers to get in contact or do you go after the roles you want?

It's a combination of all things. I don't have a company anymore [Foster folded Egg Productions in 2001] so I don't develop scripts for me as an actor and I never will again. I'm not that good at it, I'm better at developing other people's movies. So

that's done. Mostly what I'm working on is trying to find a movie to direct and if something happens as an actor, then I'm open to that but I'm much more focused on directing now.

How was it working with Roman Polanski on his adaptation of *God Of Carnage*?

It was OK. It was short, the whole shoot was only six weeks. The cast was amazing. Kate Winslet – love her – Christoph Waltz, John C Reilly... I think we all fell madly in love with each other.

Did you feel you had to be at the top of your game?

When I first walked in, I was a little intimidated, because all of them have done some type of theatre before and I haven't done *any*. They all felt much more on top of it than I did [laughs]. But we all helped each other. It was a strange set. There were a lot of things we had to do ourselves, like continuity... Kate was always doing everybody's

collars and making sure that everybody had the right thing in the right place. Nobody spoke English on the movie practically so we had to tell each other what lines we blew.

Does your character inflict the carnage or have the carnage inflicted on her?

[Laughs] Good question – a little bit of both. I don't have to throw up. The only thing that actually happens in the movie is that Kate throws up. So they built a blue suit for her that had like a pipe because he wanted it to be real chunks of apple and stuff, he wanted it to be thick... that was a lot of laughs, Kate in a blue suit with just her hands sticking out because he wanted her to be able to go like this [puts her hands in front of her mouth].

And you're doing *Elysium* with Neill Blomkamp...

I only have three weeks work on that. I play sort of the head of a country, but that country is a different planet.

According to the *LA Times*, you're planning to direct your own sci-fi thriller...

I am?! Maybe I did say that. But I'm not [laughs].

You told them you were developing a script.

Oh, OK... Yeah, there was a flirtation there for about a second. Wow, I can't believe I said that to the *LA Times*. That was dumb.

Total Film was pumped by the idea of a sci-fi thriller directed by Jodie Foster.

I'd *love* to do a sci-fi thriller but I really don't know what I'll do next. It's hard. I'm not one of those people that can develop a movie while I'm doing something else. Personal films are hard. You sort of have to download yourself onto every one of the scripts.

Do you think you'll branch out into other genres, or stick to stories strongly focused on family dynamics?

I don't think the two have to be divorced from each other. *The Silence Of The Lambs* has family dynamics and *Panic Room* does and with all of those movies, I would think about how I would make them while we were shooting. As I always say, my version of *Panic Room* would be a 25-day shoot and cost about \$150,000.

Are you driven by the same things that fuelled you 15, 20 years ago or have the goalposts changed?

Yeah, they change all the time. Hopefully you evolve as a person and who you were when you were 10 or 12 or 20, hopefully that changes over time. I do feel proud that there's a signature to what I do. Even as an actor, there's a signature and the pattern shows itself to me as well as it does to other people. And, you know, you change but you're still etching from the same paradigm. It's still the same person in there trying to get out, trying to figure it all out... **TF**

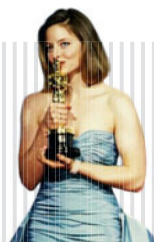
The Beaver opens on 17 June and is reviewed on page 54. For more features go to totalfilm.com



30 March 1981
John Hinckley Jr shoots President Ronald Reagan to impress Yale student Foster.



1988
Wins an Oscar for her gritty role as a rape victim in *The Accused*.



1991
Wins second Oscar for *The Silence Of The Lambs*. Makes directorial debut with *Little Man Tate*.



2010
Directs/stars with *Maverick* co-star Mel Gibson in *The Beaver*.