

3 TOM
HARDY

➔ **RIGHT NOW, TOM HARDY IS WHAT** you'd call 'on it'. With a flurry of projects due in multiplexes over the next 18 months, the Hammersmith-born actor who used to twist himself into anxious, self-loathing, substance-abusing knots worrying where his next job was going to come from is, as he puts it, "in a very good place." ➔

THE BANE ATTRACTION

AFTER STEALING INCEPTION, TOM HARDY'S DREAMS ARE ABOUT TO COME TRUE. TOTAL FILM MEETS THE GUY WITH THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, MAD MAX AND A REESE WITHERSPOON ROMCOM ON HIS PLATE. WORDS **MATT MUELLER** PORTRAIT **COLIN BELL**

THE FUTURE 100

For starters, there's this month's tasty twosome: mixed martial-arts fight drama *Warrior* and a new version of John Le Carre's spy thriller *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (see 16). Then comes *The Wettest County In The World* (see 20) a Depression-era crime drama about bootleggers from *The Proposition*'s John Hillcoat and Nick Cave, followed by – of all things – *This Means War*, a romcom with Reese Witherspoon. And last but definitely not least, there will be *Mad Max: Fury Road* (locked in scheduling nightmares, but due to go into production in early 2012) and the role he's shooting as we speak: Bat-nemesis Bane in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*.

RECLINING ON THE SOFA OF A SOHO HOTEL suite, fiddling with an unlit cigar, as his upper-body muscles threaten to rip through his snug, long-sleeved shirt, Hardy's looking and acting like a player. There's a brash confidence (combined with a tangible sense of exhaustion – the guy's been working his nuts off lately) that's more noticeable than it was a year ago, when we first met the now 33-year-old actor in the presence of his best friend and personal trainer, an African-American ex-rabbi/Marine from the Bronx named Peanut. Then Hardy proved a mile-a-minute conversationalist, ripping through his new body-conscious training regime (his days of wine and crack pipes are long behind him) but still 'fessing up to a few addictions: coffee, cigarettes, sugar. "My naughty bits..."

A year later, the fags are history, the conversation less frantic, but the caffeine still needed. "One espresso coming up," says a publicist. As for that cigar, it's for his 'passion project' playing Al Capone in *Cicero* but, meanwhile, he's currently on "priority call" for *The Dark Knight Rises* and has been shooting scenes around the UK before heading off to the States. A relative newcomer in the Batman's rogues' gallery, Bane wasn't the villain on fanboy lips when Hardy's name first cropped up. He recalls Nolan phoning him up while he was shooting *This Means War* in Vancouver to sound him out about playing the chemically enhanced muscleman, and pressing him hard on whether he'd get frustrated acting behind a mask. "I remember saying, 'Hang on a minute. You're asking *me* to come round the world with *you*, playing a villain in a Batman movie, and the only downside is I have to wear a mask? Hmm, let me think. I'll get back to you... No, I'm fucking there, man! Anything you need.'"

The Brit filmmaker has promised a "new interpretation" for Bane – which we assume means something very far away from the inarticulate thug who cropped up in Joel Schumacher's *Batman & Robin* – but he hasn't clarified how far he'll deviate from the comic-book's vision of a freaky-strong, highly intelligent criminal mastermind who, at one point, broke the Gotham City crimefighter's spine. Put the question to Hardy and he suddenly resembles the Cheshire Cat. "Mmmm..." he grins, stroking his chin. "Good lead-in, but all I can say is that



Faces of Hardy: (side, top to bottom) as fighter Tom Conlon in *Warrior*; as British agent Ricki Tarr in *Tinker, Sailor, Soldier, Spy*; taking the title role in *Bronson*.



'SINCE I'VE STARTED BEING IN THE PRESENT, THE WORK HAS STARTED TO COME. MY FOCUS IS BEING THE BEST I CAN BE'

Chris has a plan up his sleeve that's not at all disappointing. And that is a *definite* choice that's watertight in every respect. I think Bane's fucking cool so I'm really excited to play him. It's not the guy in Joel Schumacher's film, but it shouldn't disappoint fanboys..."

WITH HEATH LEDGER'S JOKER STILL lingering large in people's minds, is Hardy feeling the pressure to match his lofty incarnation? "No, none at all," he insists. "Brilliant actor, brilliant work – that's it. I've

got a job to do. It's the same with *Mad Max* and Mel Gibson. I'm not here to engage in a competition with their talent. It's to play the character that I've been given."

As for Bane's creepy headgear, unveiled in a viral web campaign and compared by *Entertainment Weekly* to something that "wouldn't look out of place at a Slipknot concert", Hardy's loving it "on an esoteric level... Any time you put something over your face, you're going to adopt a personality and a physicality that has nothing to do with acting. It allows a performance to be



free. The only downside is you can't hear a fucking word anyone's saying." Hardy bursts into peals of laughter. "Batman can't hear me and he can't see me speaking so we sort of stand there looking at each other for a while. We've been doing hand signals! I put my thumbs up when I finish my lines or I wink. And he sort of wiggles his fingers out of shot and I go, 'OK, now I've got to run up and kick you in the bollocks.'"

Once, Elle Macpherson was 'The Body'. Now that nickname should go to Hardy, for encasing himself in such daunting musculature in what was a deliberate career move, sick of his sporadic, pre-*Bronson* jobs in unmemorable TV and film work. On the back of *Bronson* came *Inception*, and from *Inception* came the opening of the Hollywood floodgates – including *Warrior*. Hardy says he now has a reputation for being

a "character actor who's prepared to fuck his body up on very little wages!" In order to convince as *Warrior*'s mixed martial-arts champion, Hardy went on a no-carb, no-sugar diet that turned him "foul-tempered, belligerent and unreasonable." He winces in remembrance, "99 per cent of the job is imagining other people's insecurities, and that went right out the fucking window! I felt on edge all the time because I'm very sensitive and I hate pissing people off – but I fucked a lot of people off on *Warrior*."

DESPITE HIS EXTREME HUNGER AND resultant prickliness, Hardy insists he didn't get into any fights on *Warrior*. If you believe Shia LaBeouf in a new interview with *Details*, however, he and Hardy did scuffle on the set of *The Wettest County In The World* – and the skinny

Transformers star emerged the winner. If LaBeouf had told that story about Megan Fox, we might believe him, but we've seen Hardy in the flesh so we don't. Having turned his life around from his low years as "a fuck-up" and heading straight for the A-list, it's unlikely Hardy will feel overly bothered by LaBeouf's trash-talking. There's a steely new determination behind those eyes.

"I used to have one foot in the future and one foot in the past worrying about what didn't happen," he says. "Since I've started being in the present, the work has come. My focus now is being the best that I can be."

ETA | 16 SEPTEMBER *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*
23 SEPTEMBER *Warrior 2012 The Wettest County In The World, This Means War and The Dark Knight Rises.*

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