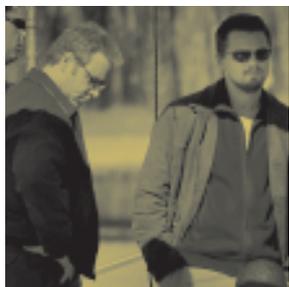


★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BATTLE OF THE HEAVYWEIGHTS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



**RUSSELL & LEONARDO
CROWE & DICAPRIO**

★ ★ ★ ★ **VERSUS** ★ ★ ★ ★



**GEORGE & BRAD
CLOONEY & PITT**

★ ★ ★ ★ **VERSUS** ★ ★ ★ ★



**ROBERT & AL
DE NIRO PACINO**

**LAYDEEEZ AND GENTLEMEN... THIS AUTUMN'S
MAIN EVENT: A THREE-WAY TAG-TEAM BOUT OF
A-LIST THESPIAN FISTICUFFS. WHICH DOUBLE-
BILL WILL BAG THE BOX-OFFICE BELT AND
WHO'LL BE LEFT QUIVERING ON THE CANVAS?**



WORDS **MATT MUELLER**

RUSSELL CROWE & LEONARDO DICAPRIO



ACTING CHOPS

Crowe appeared to be going a bit flabby and self-satisfied after *A Good Year* but 3:10 *To Yuma* saw him limber up his uppercut, while *American Gangster* put the sting back in that brawny, blue-collar-everyman right-hook (“It’s like getting in there with a heavyweight,” mused Denzel Washington, possibly with this feature in mind. “You just let it rip and see what happens”). As for DiCaprio, his accents strayed in *Blood Diamond* and *The Departed* but at least he rose above Scorsese’s dreary *Aviator* to prove his eternal boy-man visage can pack a potent punch in intense, grimacing man’s-man roles. **8/10**

BOX OFFICE

With its \$150m budget, *The Aviator* was too bloated to ever turn a profit, but *Diamond* and *Departed* made 2006 a career year for DiCaprio (combined total: \$461m), restoring his hard-fought box office lustre. Ditto *Gangster* for Crowe, which eased his fading clout by racking up \$266m globally

and healing the injuries inflicted by three box office flops running (*Cinderella Man*, *A Good Year*, 3:10 *To Yuma*). **7/10**

AWARDS POTENTIAL

While Leo is growing in gong stature (two of his three Oscar nominations have come since 2005) Crowe’s Oscar champ days are on the ropes. The backlash against that Bafta poetry tantrum sucked the wind out of his sails and Hollywood no longer regards him as their box office gladiator. So no more Meryl-style gets-a-nod-for-turning-up (his last Academy Award nomination came in 2002). Unless, that is, he KOs with an *Insider*-style, transformative depth charge... **6/10**

TABLOID VISIBILITY

Crowe’s always had a shade of hooligan chic about him – it’s a big part of what made his macho brusqueness so briefly fashionable after years of pretty-boy leading men. But while public outrage forced him to say sorry over Poetrygate and Phonegate (when he chucked a

handset at a hotel clerk), the contrition was clearly gun-to-head. Outside of dating a string of gorgeous models, the only flak DiCaprio gets these days is from crabby green-sceptics who smirk at his campaigns to save polar bears and stop global warming. **7/10**

CHEMISTRY

“I turn up on the set, I know my dialogue, I have a good idea of my character and I want the other bloke I’m working with to be ready in the same way,” says Crowe. Take that, Leo... *Body Of Lies* is actually the second screen pairing for the duo after *The Quick And The Dead*, made when DiCaprio was 18 and (according to Crowe) a virgin. Even though the trailer for Ridley Scott’s *Body Of Lies* resembles an uninspiring *Spy Game*, it looks like DiCaprio, playing a CIA puppet, has an effective channel for his character’s anger and exasperation in Crowe’s creepy and irritating covert-ops organiser. **8/10**

Body Of Lies opens on 10 October and will be reviewed next issue.

36/50



GEORGE CLOONEY & BRAD PITT

ACTING CHOPS

Clooney landed a shock acting Oscar for chubbing up as *Syriana*’s conflicted CIA agent, then breezed with Pitt through the superfluous *Ocean’s Thirteen* before coming back at us, fists flying, with the forceful *Michael Clayton*. Pitt reluctantly embraced his himbo persona in blond-god roles like Achilles in *Troy* and Mr Smith in *Mr And Mrs Smith*, but only so he’d be allowed to stretch himself, impressing in both *The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford* and *Babel* last year. **7/10**

BOX OFFICE

Michael Clayton was a critical darling and made double its \$25m budget but Clooney’s still reeling after his latest pet project *Leatherheads* (a screwball comedy set during the early days of American football) was offhandedly shunned the world over. Is Mr Cool’s movie acumen getting shaky? Pitt, meanwhile, always struggles to convert his golden-boy currency into bums on seats. *Jesse James* was assassinated

(a meagre \$15m worldwide) and even the third *Ocean* pairing was down \$60m on its predecessor’s \$363m global haul. “Those films are done,” confirmed Clooney, redundantly. **6/10**

AWARDS POTENTIAL

Clooney’s always hunting challenging fare with awards-bells attached – especially when he can direct (“Acting, as I’ve proved time and time again, is not my greatest forte,” he demurs). And having received only one Oscar nom in his entire career (a supporting nod for *Twelve Monkeys*), Pitt’s hardly a gong-show dead-cert either. Although he did nearly land with Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel* and has another title shot coming in David Fincher’s *The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button*. But buffooning it up in *Burn After Reading* is the sort of (float like a) butterfly role that won’t trouble voters. **2/10**

TABLOID VISIBILITY

The smoothie actors hog the headlines with their global-saviour earnestness:

saving Darfur, Myanmar, New Orleans, the environment and the planet in that order. And if that doesn’t work, Clooney has his serial dating antics to keep him rooted in Planet Celebrity while, as the hairy half of Brangelina, Pitt’s the current World Tabloid Heavyweight Champ. His every move is monitored in extreme paparazzi close-up. **10/10**

CHEMISTRY

“I survive best around good material,” says Clooney. Question is, do they get it in *Burn After Reading*? After three *Ocean*’s bouts, these guys are dashing, playful – and coasting in the Coen brothers’ caper-romp, which casts Clooney as a gurning assassin and Brad as king of “a league of morons” (as John Malkovich brands him). But Pitt’s ageing sun-king aura and Clooney’s salt-and-pepper cool are as pleasing together as an ice-cold beer and a hot summer night. **7/10**

Burn After Reading opens on 17 October and will be reviewed next issue.

32/50





ROBERT DE NIRO & AL PACINO



ACTING CHOPS

With 14 Oscar noms and three statuettes between them, these veteran sluggers are rock-solid royalty. But every legend has his day and, entering their dotage (Pacino's 68, De Niro's 64), no one could deny their high-octane emoting mojo has been frittered away. Pacino's last great performance came in *The Insider* (1999) while De Niro's was *Jackie Brown* (1997). But never count the great men out from landing one last killer blow... **7/10**

BOX OFFICE

"The worse the script is, the more money you're offered," said Pacino, who judging by shameless pay cheque trash like *88 Minutes* and *Two For The Money* must be raking it in. But is it any surprise he's haemorrhaging pulling power? *Minutes* crawled to a \$17m US gross on a \$30m budget. De Niro's diversion into comedy has reaped capital (*Meet The Fockers* is No 54 in the list of 100 biggest moneymakers ever). But it also taints his efforts to get anyone to take him seriously again: *The*

Good Shepherd fizzled out at \$99m globally. The pension-time twosome really need some better management to steer them clear of scraps they can't win. **4/10**

AWARDS POTENTIAL

If Pacino can win his only Best Actor Oscar for *Scent Of A Woman* ("Hoo-haaa!"), then nothing is impossible. Familiarity definitely doesn't breed contempt when it comes to doling out statuettes, with both Pacino and De Niro's names always guaranteeing respect, if nothing else. But consider this: De Niro's last Oscar nomination came 16 years ago for *Cape Fear*, while Pacino's arrived one year later with his *Scent*-ed triumph. **5/10**

TABLOID VISIBILITY

These old stallions can still generate their share of ink, especially De Niro courtesy of his fondness for dark-skinned models and young actresses. When a French judge tried to link him to a Parisian prostitute ring, he threatened

to never set foot in the country again. Pacino's column inches are more family oriented: he had his wrists slapped for defying a court order banning him from talking about his twins with ex-partner Beverly D'Angelo. Former taskmaster Coppola has slagged them both off for being too rich and resting on their laurels. Er... pot, kettle, black? **5/10**

CHEMISTRY

Pitting the pair opposite each other in *Heat* generated explosive results, whereas *Kill* is wheeling two punch-drunk hands out in the twilights of their careers for a deflating exhibition match. From one tantalisingly brief sequence in a modern crime classic to sharing too much screen time in a cliché-stricken genre flick as grumpy old cops on one last job before they retire... "I did it to work with Bob again," says Pacino. Nothing to do with the pay cheque, then? **4/10**

The Fall opens on 26 September and will be reviewed next issue.

25/50



AND IF THEY ACTUALLY HAD A FIGHT?

You've gotta hand it to those old duckers and divers De Niro and Pacino – they may be sagging and lacking all the right moves but they still land some pounding punches into Clooney's midriff and Pitt's bronzed six-pack. But their fortysomething opponents can take the punishment – they're younger, fitter and make more money than the oldies.

Angered by the baying crowd's chants of "Girly-men!", Pitt and Clooney show off some nifty, sophisticated tag-team moves, sending quick jabs into the old-timers' wrinkled jowls. Clooney flashes his freshly bleached pearly whites to temporarily blind De Niro, flattening him on the mat and eliciting his surrender while

letting out a triumphant mocking cry of "Stardust!!!" As De Niro lies moaning "It is what it is...", Pitt's razor-sharp cheekbones apply the finishing touches to Pacino for daring to vampirically steal some of his lustre in *Ocean's Thirteen*. Next up: Crowe's beefy, blue-collar bruiser and DiCaprio's scowling child-man, who aren't about to let these pretty boys walk off with the title just yet...

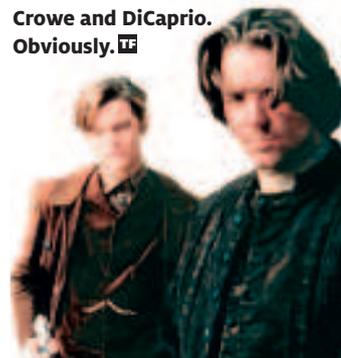
Clooney prances around the ring, smiling for the cameras, spouting self-deprecating soundbites and drinking quick swigs of Nespresso, stupidly leaving himself open to a full-frontal assault from Crowe's incredibly large head, swollen to lethal size by rampant, acting-god egomania. But

Crowe's inflated sense of self clouds his judgment and leaves him vulnerable to counterattack, allowing a sneaky, wiry Pitt to save his partner from annihilation in Crowe's meaty paws with a slam-dunk move from behind, knocking the *Gladiator* star to the floor with an auditorium-shaking jolt.

But just as it looks like Clooney and Pitt have achieved a dramatic underdog victory, DiCaprio – who's been sulking in the corner, perfecting his furrowed brow in a hand mirror – channels all his furious, man-boy anger into a vicious counterattack, knee-capping Clooney with his *Syriana* Oscar while braying, "I'm the real actor here!" Crowe turns the

tables on Pitt with a deft but underhanded move, whispering in his ear that *People* magazine has just named Suri Cruise 'The World's Most Beautiful A-List-Baby'. Pitt is left in a sobbing heap as the ref holds our winners' hands aloft.

AND THE WINNER IS...
Crowe and DiCaprio. Obviously. **10**



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