

Edited by
Andrew Collins

Tom Hardy was a job from East Sheen – but muscles turned him into Hollywood’s most wanted Brit

IT’S BEEN A long and rocky road for Tom Hardy to get to where he is today. But right now, what ambitious young actor wouldn’t want to trade places with him? This month sees the arrival in cinemas of the 34-year-old’s first headlining role in a major Hollywood production, the mixed martial arts drama *Warrior*. The release comes hot on the heels of Hardy’s turn in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, in which he stars alongside such British luminaries as Gary Oldman, Colin Firth and John Hurt. On the horizon are big roles in other big movies, including the villain in the latest Batman film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, as well as *This Means War*, a romantic comedy with Reese Witherspoon. “When you’ve done a rom-com, all that’s left to do is a really dodgy advert for a fragrance with your shirt off,” Hardy tells me, “then you know you’ve arrived.”

We meet in a suite at the Soho Hotel in London. To call him a big, burly beefcake of a man seems like an insult to the impressively sculpted body that he must spend many hours knocking into shape. He also has a scalp-exposing crop and an unlit cigar dangling from his puffy lips. The former is for the benefit of director Christopher Nolan, for whom he is playing the masked, chemically enhanced super-villain Bane. The latter is practice for a huge studio franchise built around the life and times of someone Hardy labels “an iconic legend in America”. He won’t say who, but a few weeks later the announcement comes that he’s to play Al Capone in *Cicero*.

HARDY HAD HIS first crack at stardom over ten years ago, when he landed a small role in the TV mini-series *Band of Brothers*, swiftly followed by the movies *Black Hawk Down* and 2002’s *Star Trek: Nemesis*. Despite this initial flurry, his ascent stalled, in part because of personal troubles that followed him from his somewhat wayward adolescence.

Hardy grew up in East Sheen and went to private schools, but ended up a middle-class teen delinquent, being expelled from Reeds boarding school for theft, and arrested for joyriding and firearm possession at the age of 15.

According to Hardy, he suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder and low self-esteem and, after succumbing to self-destructive impulses, he slipped into crack and alcohol addiction in his early 20s. Not only did he wreck his first marriage,

Rebel without a shirt

but he ended up in hospital after one brutal binge. Rehab and years of cognitive therapy have helped him wrestle his demons into submission.

Now he claims to be “all about my son” – three-year-old Louis, from his relationship with ex-girlfriend Rachael Speed (he’s currently engaged to Charlotte Riley whom he met while playing Heathcliff to her Cathy in the 2009 TV

“If I can change my body and hit a few people, then they’ll take me seriously”

adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*). Sober since 2003, he even has a therapeutic mantra he’s fond of repeating: “Today is a good day because...” Today’s reasons are: “my son is healthy and I’m fulfilling my ambition to portray as many characters as I can before I become not-so hot.”

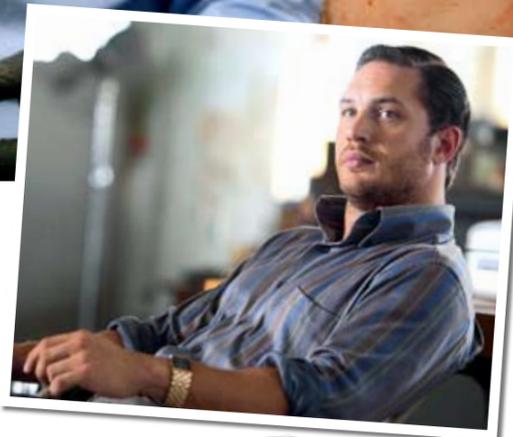
And it did take a long time and a lot of hard work for Hardy to become hot, despite working constantly in film, theatre and television. His TV appearances include *The Virgin Queen*, *Oliver*

Twist and *Stuart: a Life Backwards*, the BBC drama for which he received a Bafta nomination. But only when Hardy made the conscious decision to pack on the muscle did things really take off. “I wanted to establish myself as someone you would take notice of,” he explains. “I’m not a natural comedian, nor am I a Hugh Grant white-collar type. I fall into the category of being good at slightly dysfunctional, erratic personality disorders and I thought, ‘If I can change my body to meet that, do a variety of accents and hit a few people on screen, then maybe people might take me seriously.’”

It worked. First came *Bronson* (2008), an independent film in which he played notorious British convict Charles Bronson. His acclaimed performance led directly to Christopher Nolan hiring him for *Inception*, which in turn helped



BRAWN AND BRAINS
Tom Hardy with Joel Edgerton in *Warrior* (above), as the no-nonsense Eames in *Inception* (left) and opposite Colin Firth in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (below)



him to win the Bafta Rising Star Award earlier this year.

His role in *Warrior* sees him play a cage fighter who battles demons in and out of the ring. “Animals were hurt during the making of this movie,” chuckles Hardy, admitting that the strict diet he went on to convince as a lean, mean fighting machine made him foul-tempered and unpleasant to be around. “I made a lot of people very angry. It was a pure chemical imbalance. It was like, ‘I’m so sorry, I’m just so starving.’”

Hardy cracks wise and delivers smart answers in his stream-of-consciousness style, but hurt seems never far from the surface. Ask why things are going so right for him now and he’s blunt in his reply: “F***-up is the mother of all necessity. Passion can create and destroy. Being an addict, a lot of my behaviour in the past was symptomatic of the fact that I’m pre-wired to f*** stuff up if it doesn’t go right for me. I had to take on the responsibility to mother and father myself properly, and that’s had a knock-on effect. Now that I’m actively taking care of myself, the right doors are opening up... And today is a good day.” *Matt Mueller*



Barry Norman **My movies**

Spielberg doesn’t make bad movies – but I thought he was smarter than this...

War of the Worlds
Wednesday 10.00pm **BBC3**



Generally speaking, it’s not a great idea to remake films, especially when, as here, the 1953 original was pretty good. OK, it might have been even better but so what? Been there, done that, now move on. Which is why I’m surprised Steven Spielberg went for such a venture. I thought he was smarter than that.

This is not to say that his is a bad movie. Spielberg doesn’t make bad movies. It has been described as the flip-side of his other tales of alien invasion, *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and in a way that’s what it is. Here the aliens (very possibly Martians, the cinema’s traditional aliens of choice) are in no way benign; they’re intent on taking over Earth by devastation and violence.

Apparently they’d been planning this operation for a million years, having thoughtfully planted mysterious machines below the Earth’s surface, which machines – now activated by lightning bolts and each controlled by an alien – burst to the surface and start blasting everything in sight.

Why they are doing this is never made clear. What’s the point, after all, in laying waste a planet that, for whatever murky reasons, you wish to occupy? It just means there’s unnecessary mess to clean up when the invasion is over.



FACES OF FEAR
Tom Cruise and daughter Dakota Fanning have nowhere to run from the alien invaders

Spielberg, whose strength lies in presenting small human drama against a greater background, adapts HG Wells’s story to focus on divorced blue-collar worker Tom Cruise and his children, Dakota Fanning and Justin Chatwin. The invasion happens on the weekend when it’s Cruise’s turn to look after the kids and the ensuing action centres on his desperate attempts to save himself and them from destruction while all around are perishing.

Finding salvation is not easy. You should see the havoc these aliens create – crashed planes, streets erupting, buildings toppling, a speeding train with all its carriages ablaze, people fleeing in panic. Even the aliens aren’t immune because their machines are mounted – serious design fault, this – on tripods, which means that if you destroy one leg the whole thing falls over.

This is not, in truth, one of Spielberg’s best films. It lacks the flair and wonder that he brought to *ET* and *Close Encounters* but it is nevertheless cleverly made with a satisfying amount of tension and fear and startling effects to look at.

Why, though, did he make it at all? Maybe he was smarter than I gave him credit for; maybe he felt that such a movie at such a time, aimed primarily at American audiences still raw and bleeding from a very different alien invasion on 9/11, would remind them to stay alert, because dreadful things can happen when you least expect them.

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