

Who are you calling ANGRY?

From *American Psycho* to *The Dark Knight*, **Christian Bale** has always preferred to let his performances do the talking. But *that* on-set meltdown has threatened to overshadow his on-screen endeavours. With *Terminator Salvation* hitting SM Premiere / HD this September, we track the highs and lows of the Welsh-born actor's career...

WORDS Matt Mueller

There's a strong case to argue that Christian Bale is the best actor in Hollywood who's never won an Oscar®, and an iron-clad one that he's certainly the finest actor never to be nominated. As one of Britain's biggest acting exports of the past 15 years and the generator of potent, indelible performances in films as varied as *American Psycho* and *Batman Begins*, that's a shocking state of affairs.

Sadly, it's not this injustice that has won Bale his biggest headlines, but rather his notorious rant on the set of *Terminator Salvation*, when he hurled obscenities at a crew member who ruined his concentration during a demanding scene. Leaked on to the internet, the furious shout-fest quickly went viral across the planet.

Don't mess with the Bale, clearly. But when it comes to Oscar® winners, history shows that it doesn't pay to mess with Hollywood either – the grandees at the Academy Awards® are notoriously allergic to scandal. No matter how

impressive the 36 year old continues to be on screen, it may be that the entire industry needs to love him again before he can get within touching distance of that little gold statuette...

BRIGHT STAR

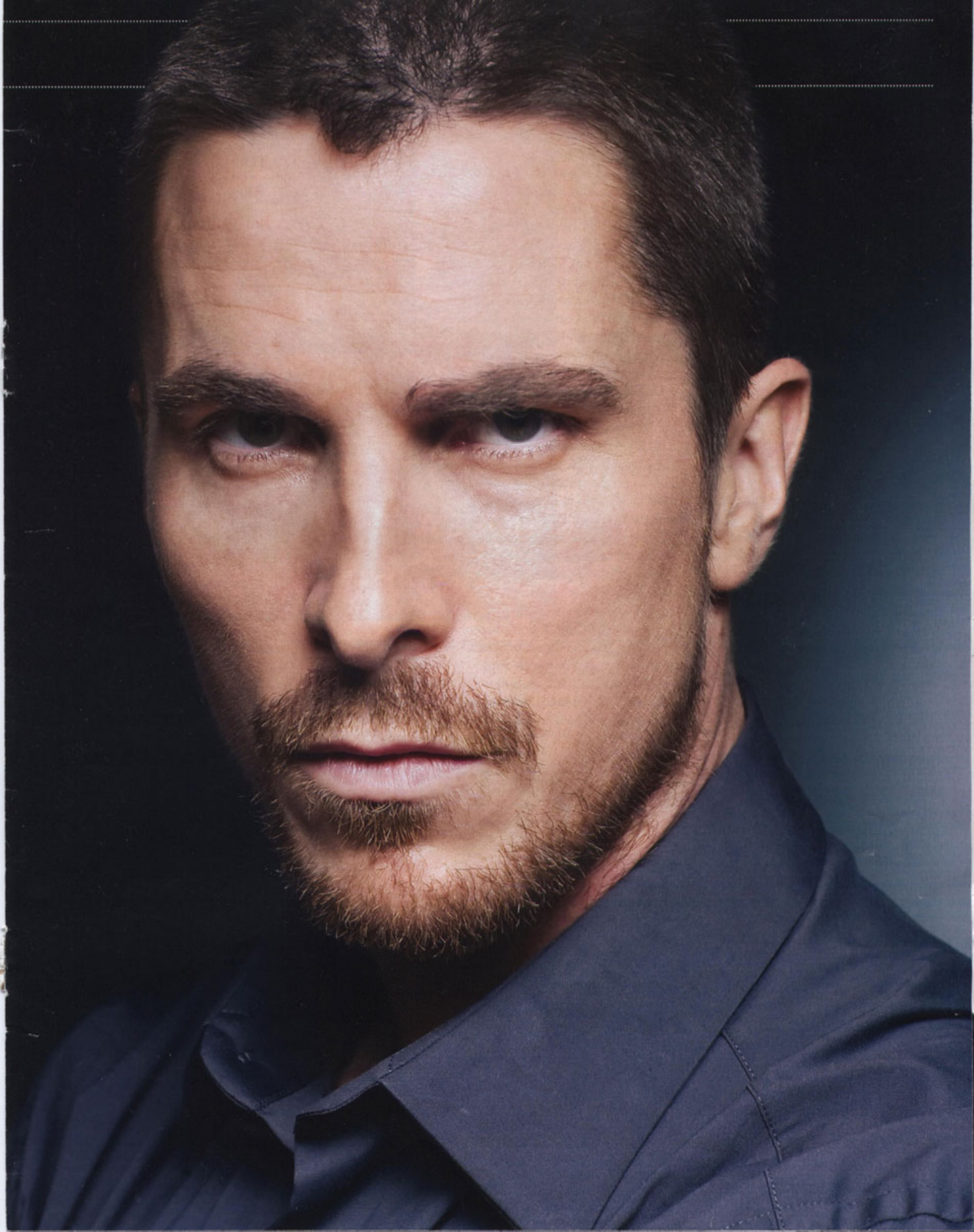
Born temperamental? Only his mother knows if he came out of the womb kicking and screaming. Christian Charles Philip Bale was born in Pembrokeshire, Wales, to a family steeped in showbiz: one grandfather was a magician, the other, John Wayne's stunt double; while his mother worked as a dancer and circus clown. Raised with three older sisters in Portugal, the US and England, the youthful Bale soon followed in his family's footsteps, moving swiftly from the West End stage to TV mini-series. He then made an auspicious big-screen debut when Steven Spielberg plucked him to star as a child internee in a World War Two prisoner camp in *Empire Of The Sun*. From there, Bale took roles in *Henry V*, *Little Women*, *Velvet Goldmine* and *The Portrait Of A Lady*.

In the early days of his career, Bale kept a low profile, refusing to hire a publicist and avoiding the paparazzi-baiting hangouts of his peers despite living in L.A. It was already clear that he did not always enjoy the attention that fame brought him. At 13, he stormed out of one press junket after answering journalists' questions by silently stabbing a pen into an orange.

"The more high profile I get, the less I can surprise people," he said in the mid-'90s. "Nobody has a clue who I am, so it's worked so far." But Bale's reserve held its own appeal. He was one of the first actors to develop a rabid internet fanbase. Baleheads (as they were known) were one of the web's original celebrity phenomenons, launching lobbying campaigns on his behalf (to no avail) to win roles in films like *Snow Falling On Cedars*.

Even without their help, Bale was carving his own idiosyncratic and increasingly successful path. In his most memorable roles, he's a forceful, compelling

PHOTOS: LARSEN & TALBERT/ICON INTERNATIONAL



presence who oozes brooding menace and emotion: think Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, Trevor Reznik in *The Machinist* and, of course, Bruce Wayne in *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* (showing as part of the 100 Million Dollar Week).

To portray *Psycho*'s yuppie serial killer he buffed up impressively and studied Wall Street bankers up close. For *The Machinist*'s disturbed insomniac he dropped 63 pounds, a tough feat he'd later repeat to play a Vietnam War POW in *Rescue Dawn* (a film in which he also ate live, wriggling maggots). As Bruce Wayne, he overcame his own concerns about appearing ridiculous, rather than menacing, in the Bat-suit by deciding to play the Caped Crusader as "a demonic beast". "I wanted to see Batman as an animal," he said. "When he dons that mask, that's when he channels his rage."

Approaching his profession extremely seriously, Bale brings characters to life through a ferocious intensity that's unparalleled in modern movies – so perhaps it's not all that surprising that nasty outbursts can occur...

FURY ROAD

When he was approached to help resurrect the *Terminator* franchise, Bale's first response was no – he didn't think much of the script. But when

director McG launched an all-out charm offensive he was swayed by the director's enthusiasm, even as he was apparently being advised he was "too good" for the franchise. That sealed it – Bale hates being told what to do. "I'm too good? I'm not a snob," he declared. "I really enjoy watching a good action movie. Who do you think I am?" In hindsight, perhaps he wishes he'd listened to them.

While *Terminator Salvation* delivers on its vision of a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by human-killing machines, Bale's gruff performance as freedom-fighting messiah John Connor was overshadowed by the rant heard around the world, which kicked off when cinematographer Shane Hurlbut walked in Bale's eye-line during a particularly emotional take. He responded with an ugly, profanity-laden meltdown, threatening, among other things, to walk off the film if Hurlbut wasn't fired. How viral did Bale's diatribe go? It was turned into a dance mix...

Although at first he blamed the leak for hurting "old-school movie magic," the ensuing fracas eventually forced Bale into an apology. "I don't believe in making excuses," he said. "It was unacceptable. I went too far. And I learned from it." Still, even his contrition was tempered by a touch of frostiness. Asked if he was worried



DIVERSE ROLES
As serial-killing yuppie Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (top) and child POW Jim in 1987's *Empire Of The Sun* (bottom).

people might think he was a jerk, he replied, "I don't feel like I have to explain, 'I'm not really like this, I'm a wonderful guy and I have a lovely smile and how can you not like me?'" But there's no question the incident dealt a blow to both his reputation and possibly even his drawing power: *Terminator Salvation* pulled in substantially less at the box office than its predecessor, *Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines*.

Although the audio recording leaked out in early 2009, the actual tirade took place in July 2008 – the same month, ironically, that the actor generated other unflattering headlines when, the night before *The Dark Knight*'s London premiere, his mother and sister accused him of assault and summoned the police to the Dorchester Hotel. For an actor who has always fought to be known for his work rather than his private life, the incident was especially difficult and he still refuses to talk about it publicly.

But for all these well-publicised travails, top-class directors remain hugely keen to work with Bale. One thing he's not short of is offers from some of the most



HE'S BATMAN
Bale pulled on the Batsuit in 2005 and hasn't looked back.

"I'm not even meant to be here today!"



SCREAM KINGS

Five great on-screen movie outbursts...



Walter Sobchak (John Goodman) The Big Lebowski

Military man Walter has a major freak out when a foot crosses the line in bowling, setting off a rant that ends with, "Smokey, this is not 'Nam. This is bowling. There are rules."

Sun 5 Sept at 10pm on SM Indie / HD



Neal Page (Steve Martin) Planes, Trains And Automobiles

Highly strung Neal finally loses it and goes on a tirade against a car rental clerk, which features the 'f word' an impressive 18 times in one minute! Don't push him...

Thurs 2 Sept at 9.45pm on SM Comedy / HD



Howard Beale (Peter Finch) Network

Oscar®-winner Finch's washed-up news anchorman cracks up on air, delivering a tormented tirade to his viewers that's become enshrined in movie history: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this any more!"



Gaylord 'Greg' Focker (Ben Stiller) Meet The Parents

Unwilling to part with his bag after an earlier lost luggage incident, Greg unleashes his paranoid fury on a stewardess, requesting that she shut her piehole. What a charmer...

Fri 3 Sept at 8pm on SM Modern Greats / HD



Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) Pulp Fiction

"And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger..." Sam Jackson's Jheri-curl'd hitman gets totally Biblical on a posse of drug-dealing college twits who dared cross his boss.

forgive any transgression eventually – as long as you keep making money for them. Maybe, just maybe, there is an *Oscar*® in Christian Bale's future...

Terminator Salvation is showing from Fri 3 Sept at 8pm on SM Premiere / HD; The Terminator and Terminator 2: Judgment Day double bill is showing on Fri 3 at 3.40pm and 10pm on Sci-Fi & Horror / HD; The Dark Knight is showing from Mon 6 Sept at 10pm on Showcase / HD as part of the 100 Million Dollar Week



DARK TIMES
At *The Dark Knight* premiere in July 2008 – the day after he was accused of assault.



FUTURE SOLDIER
Bale as the saviour of mankind, John Connor, in *Terminator Salvation*.

'I'M NOT A SNOB. I REALLY ENJOY WATCHING A GOOD ACTION MOVIE'

impressive filmmakers working today. Since *Salvation*, Bale has gone on to star as FBI agent Melvin Purvis in Michael Mann's *Public Enemies*, recently wrapped on David O Russell's boxing biopic *The Fighter* and will hook up for a second time with reclusive legend Terrence Malick on an untitled romantic drama.

BACK TO THE BATCAVE

And, of course, Bale intends to don the rubber suit again for a third outing with master storyteller Christopher Nolan. "Christian is the ultimate embodiment of Bruce Wayne," Nolan said prior to shooting *Batman Begins*. "He has exactly the right balance of darkness and light."

With *Batman 3*'s script in the creative furnace as we speak, there's no indication which of the comic book's cavalcade of colourful villains Nolan plans to pit against Bale's cowed superhero, but topping Heath Ledger's Joker will be no mean feat. The late actor definitely gave Bale a run for his money in *The Dark Knight*, but it also worked in Christian's favour, giving him a worthy nemesis and making the second *Batman* instalment

one of the most dynamic blockbusters of the new millennium.

In fact, it's Bale's willingness to share top billing with (and sometimes even take a back seat to) Hollywood's other alpha males that not only distinguishes him from many of his leading-man contemporaries but also points to a savvy intellect at work. Besides Ledger, he's been happy to give up poster space to Johnny Depp, Hugh Jackman, Sam Worthington and Russell Crowe. By nearly always opting for the less flashy role, Bale has demonstrated that it's not his ego driving his career. "I don't make movies for anybody but myself," he vouches. "I enjoy making all sorts and I don't really care if it's a low-budget movie or if it's a big-budget movie. A good story is a good story."

Now a settled and devoted family man, living with his wife and young daughter in LA, Bale's career is not only far from over, his ingrained modesty and willingness to take career risks should continue to serve him in good stead. One hopes that the days of leaked net rants are over, not least because Hollywood is prepared to