Film Close-Up: Clive Owen

by Joey_Berlin

From a very young age, while going to drama school in England and training in theater, it was always about the work for actor Clive Owen. While he continues to fly just below the celebrity radar, Owen, 42, makes a point of keeping his roles as varied as possible so his work stays challenging and he avoids getting typecast.

CLIVE OWEN - Clive Owen plays dangerous mystery man Mr. Smith in the thriller 'Shoot 'Em Up.' CNS Photo courtesy of James Dittiger. For perhaps the first time in his career though, Owen seems to be repeating himself on the big screen. He recently played a guy running around with a gun in one hand and a baby in the other, in the near-future science fiction film "Children of Men." And now he is doing it again in "Shoot 'Em Up." But the two films are hardly companion pieces.

"Shoot 'Em Up" is a gonzo action blowout with a huge body count. Owen plays a renegade special ops type, trying to save an infant from a bunch of thugs led by Paul Giamatti. As a one-man lethal killing machine, Owen protects the newborn while mowing down dozens of would-be assassins and hooking up with gorgeous Monica Bellucci, who co-stars as a prostitute recruited as the baby's wet nurse. Owen's next film could not be more different. He will play Sir Walter Raleigh in the period drama "Elizabeth: The Golden Age."

Q: What did you think when you read the script for "Shoot 'Em Up," a very violent and absurdly over-the-top action film? Were you slightly concerned?

A: The tone was very important. It was crazy and wild and irreverent. But when you sign on for a film like this, you have to commit. You've just got to go for it. Monica Bellucci and Paul Giamatti also thought that you just had to commit to this film. We added the scene early on where I kill a guy with a carrot straight through the neck. Well, that was genius. It says, "Guys, don't take this too seriously!" From the opening page of the script, you'd think this director was insane.

Q: While you were shooting the film, could you tell whether the tone was working or not?

A: That's from the director, he sets the tone. But it's hard to say some of these lines seriously. It's all a very silly gag.

Q: You and Monica Bellucci have a very unusual sex scene, with bullets whizzing past your heads. What was it like to film that?

A: Well, it's sex and violence! The perfect coming together! That was always one of the wittiest and wildest scenes in the movie. The reason I did this movie is because it is original, and that scene had never been done before. It was a very practical thing because it's a full-blown shoot out. There were physical challenges. It was very well rehearsed. It had to flow. The director made his own animations of the action sequences, and he animated the sex scene. Some of it was physically impossible!

Q: She is not just another actress, she also happens to be one of world's most beautiful women. Can you ever get used to working with someone like her?

A: She's an absolute top girl. She's beautiful and a great actress. But she's also a grounded, lovely person with a great sense of humor. She's one of the least demanding actresses, just a pleasure to work with.

Q: You have a reputation yourself of being very easy to work with. Do you try to be?

A: I don't try to aim for making a pleasant set, but I think the job of an actor is to give the director what they want. That makes me pleasant to work with. It's not an actor's medium, it's a director's medium. I'm there for them. When you sign on for a film like "Shoot 'Em Up," there's only one guy who can write and direct that. My job is to help him fulfill that mad, crazy vision. I don't struggle with directors. Before I even sign on, I meet them and then I decide if I'm going to go with their idea. I trust them and I don't try to do my own thing within the movie.

Q: So can you get along with directors that might have a difficult reputation?

A: I tend to get along with most directors. But listen, I've met with directors and decided I didn't want to work with them. I need to feel comfortable with that person. I've enjoyed all of the directors I've worked with.

Q: "Shoot 'Em Up" is fairly funny, in a grisly sort of way. But we never see you in many real comedies.

A: I'm never offered comedies! That's the truth. And when I'm offered them, they're usually not funny, so I don't do them.

Q: Will there be a "Shoot 'Em Up 2?"

A: We'll see how this one goes first. But I'm slightly worried. The script I've been given makes "Shoot 'Em Up" look like a children's cartoon. We'll never make it past the censors, that's how crazy the next one is!

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