

HOW CLEAN, GREEN ATOMIC ENERGY WILL STOP GLOBAL WARMING

WIRED

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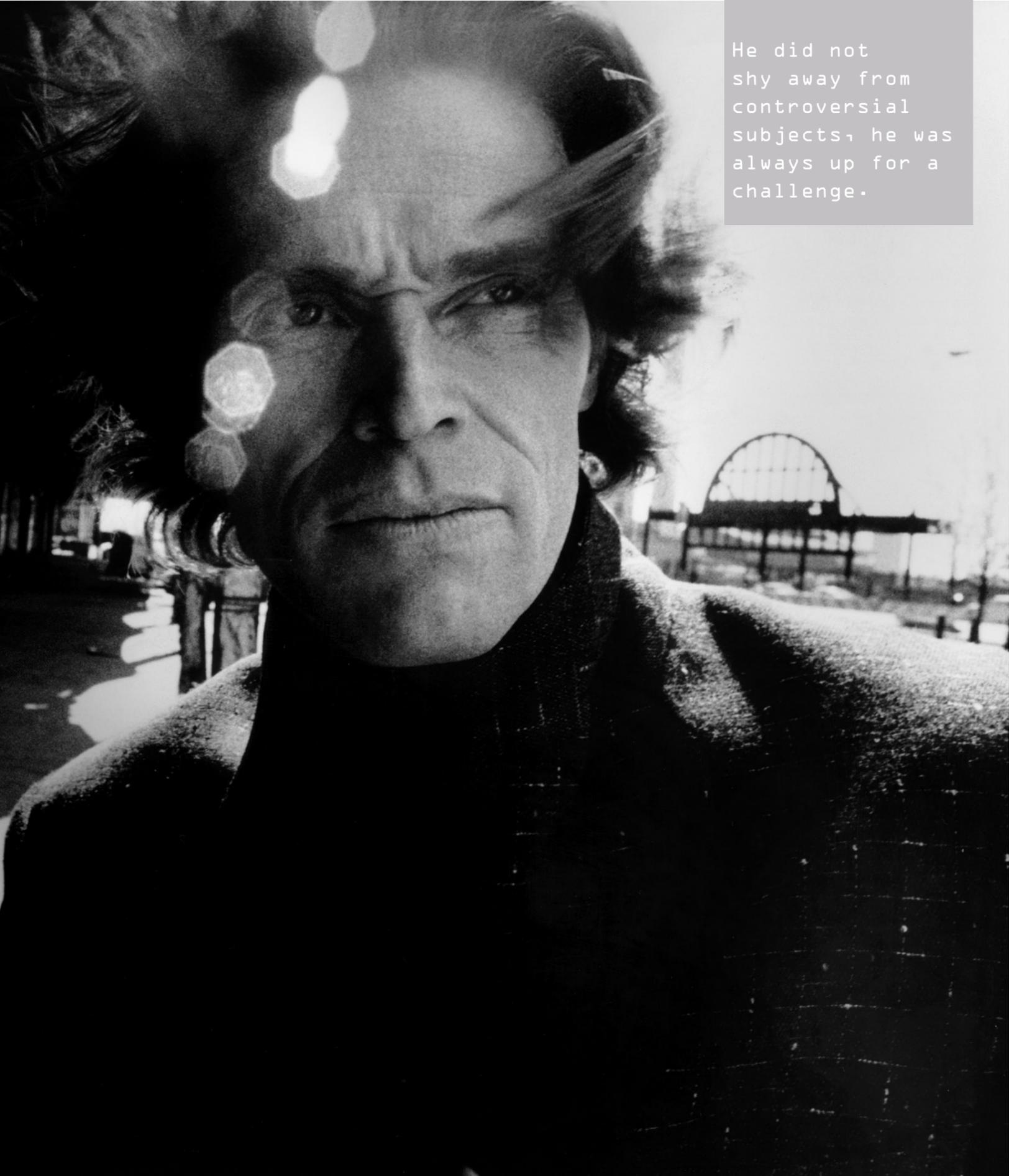
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Bad-ass villain & tormented Christ

By Dominic Wills for Tiscali Film & TV

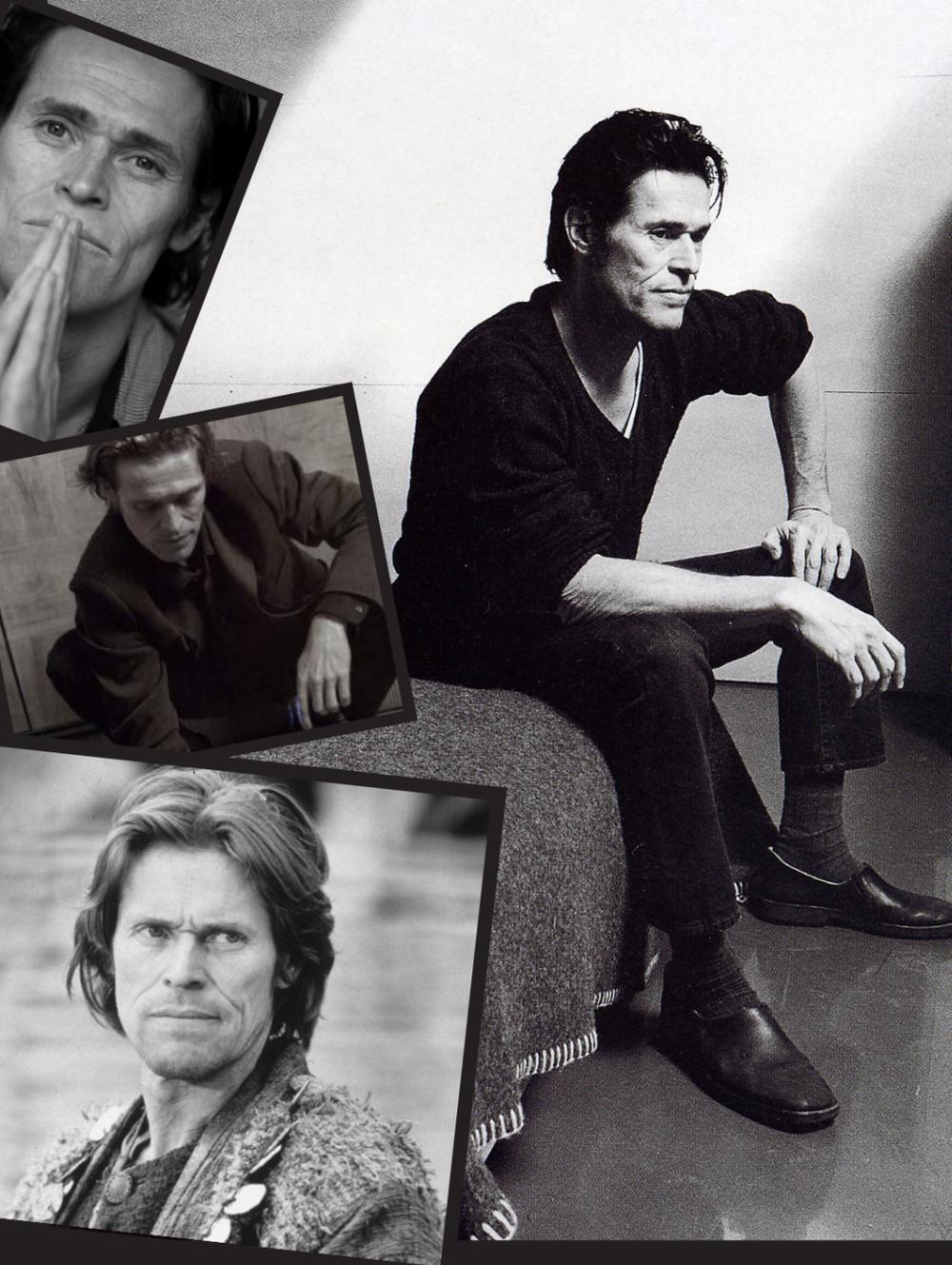
Willem Dafoe doesn't see himself as a 20-million-dollar man. He eschews the Hollywood limelight, jealously guards his privacy, and when he's not making films, lives to create notably odd characters in avant-garde theatre pieces. His roles over the years have been actors' dreams - drug dealers, soldiers, poets, even the Son of God - and audiences have come to trust that when they see Dafoe's name in the opening credits, they're in for something just a little different.

Having spent much of his working life in experimental theatre in New York, you could hardly call Willem Dafoe a money-grabber. Indeed, whenever he has a hit—and he has often been hot in Hollywood—he always chooses to return to the stage, or to some challenging indie production on the other side of the planet. So, no bread-head he. He refuses to talk

about himself other than as an actor, explaining time and time again that to do so would make it more difficult for people to accept him in character and thus spoil his films for them. He's said he wants to be "a blank slate," and to most of us, he is.

He was born William Dafoe on July 22, 1955, in Appleton, Wisconsin. His father, William, was

a surgeon, while his Boston-born mother was a nurse. Young William being second youngest of eight with five sisters and two brothers. Aside from his mother, who retained her East Coast accent, the rest, he says, had a touch of the Fargo about them. Attending Einstein Jr. High School in Appleton, he soon picked up the nickname Willem—it stuck.



As a kid, Dafoe has described himself as “dutiful, conscientious, and square” with no experience of the world at all. But, being the seventh of eight children, he was forced to battle for attention, becoming both a mimic and a practical joker. This, he says, was the genesis of acting for him:

“The impulse basically comes from a desire to act up, get attention.”

He did well at school, enrolling at the University of Wisconsin at 17, majoring in drama, but Willem found himself at odds with the theatre department, believing there was too much attitude and not enough talent. He left early, joining Wisconsin’s experimental Theatre X troupe

and, for the next four years, touring the USA and Europe.

At 22, it was time to step up. He moved to New York and into poverty. Willem joined another avant-garde troupe, the Performance Group, quickly making a name for himself. On arriving he overheard a terrible row between the group’s artistic director, Elizabeth LeCompte, and the founder, Richard Schechner, with LeCompte shouting “Get him out of my house!” “Tough broad,” Willem remembers thinking, “It was only later that I found out she was sexy as well”.

All was certainly not well at the Performance Group and, soon after Dafoe’s arrival, LeCompte walked out, taking Dafoe with her. He was to be

her leading man and, though 11 years her junior, her lover too. They did not marry, but remained a couple for 27 years, having one son, Jack, born in 1982. Together they formed the Wooster Group, a thoroughly non-commercial organization, dedicated to testing both the actors and the audience. Dafoe would return to the troupe throughout his career, appearing in such productions as *LSD*, *Just The High Points*, *The Road To Immortality*, *North Atlantic* and *To You, The Birdie!*, based on Racine’s *Phaedra*. He played the enraged ship’s stoker in *Eugene O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape on Broadway*, a production they took to Melbourne.

Despite his partner being the artistic director, Willem did not walk into lead roles with the Wooster group. His film career taking him away often, he found that the leads went to more faithful performers. Nevertheless, despite his often missing out on the prime parts,

many observers believe Dafoe to be a far finer actor on stage than on screen.

The first four years of his movie career were up and down. He made his debut in Michael Cimino’s studio-crushing *Heaven’s Gate*, but his part was lost in the fearsome editing process demanded by the producers. His first proper part was also his first lead, in *The Loveless* as the bad-ass leader of a biker gang.

In 1985, Willem began a run of roles very few actors can match starting with *To Live and Die In L.A.*, directed by William Friedkin. Here he played Rick Masters, a counterfeiter and an extremely dangerous man. Cool, together, stylish, rich and utterly ruthless, Dafoe’s Masters would change the face of movie villains. Next came another tremendous performance, as Sgt Elias in Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*. Here he was a pot-smoking Vietnam veteran, using his extraordinary experience and intuition to help young soldiers out in the jungle. Nominated for an Oscar, Dafoe was now incredibly hot in Hollywood and unsure of where to go next. “My choices were very odd,” he’s said. “I was frozen with indecision.”

Having just played an imitation of Christ, now he went for the real thing, in Martin Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*. With a script by Paul, this hugely respectful film dealt with the notion of Jesus as man and god. With the devil at work, Jesus is tempted to take up a normal life with Mary Magdalene, rather than face the awful fate that awaits him at Golgotha. And Willem, one of cinema’s most intense actors and finest waverers, exhibiting tortured doubt like few others.

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“To this day,” he said later “I can’t believe I was so brazen as to think I could pull off the Jesus role.”

Next came Alan Parker’s *Mississippi Burning*, where he played straight-up FBI Agent Ward, investigating the disappearance of some Civil Rights activists down south in 1964. After Saigon, where he and Gregory Hines played cops hunting for the murderer of a prostitute in Vietnam, came another serious challenge, when he took the role of Salamo Arouch in *Triumph of the Spirit*. Here he played a Greek Jew who’s sent to Auschwitz and, when he’s discovered to be a champion boxer, is forced to fight for the entertainment of the Nazis.

And then came another barn-storming performance, again for Oliver Stone, in *Born on the Fourth Of July*. Here Tom Cruise played real-life veteran Ron Kovic, crippled in Vietnam and feeling betrayed by his country. As he spirals down into bitter depression, he loses himself in drink, drugs and whores down in Mexico. His partner in crime, naturally, is Willem as another crazy, worm-swallowing paraplegic.

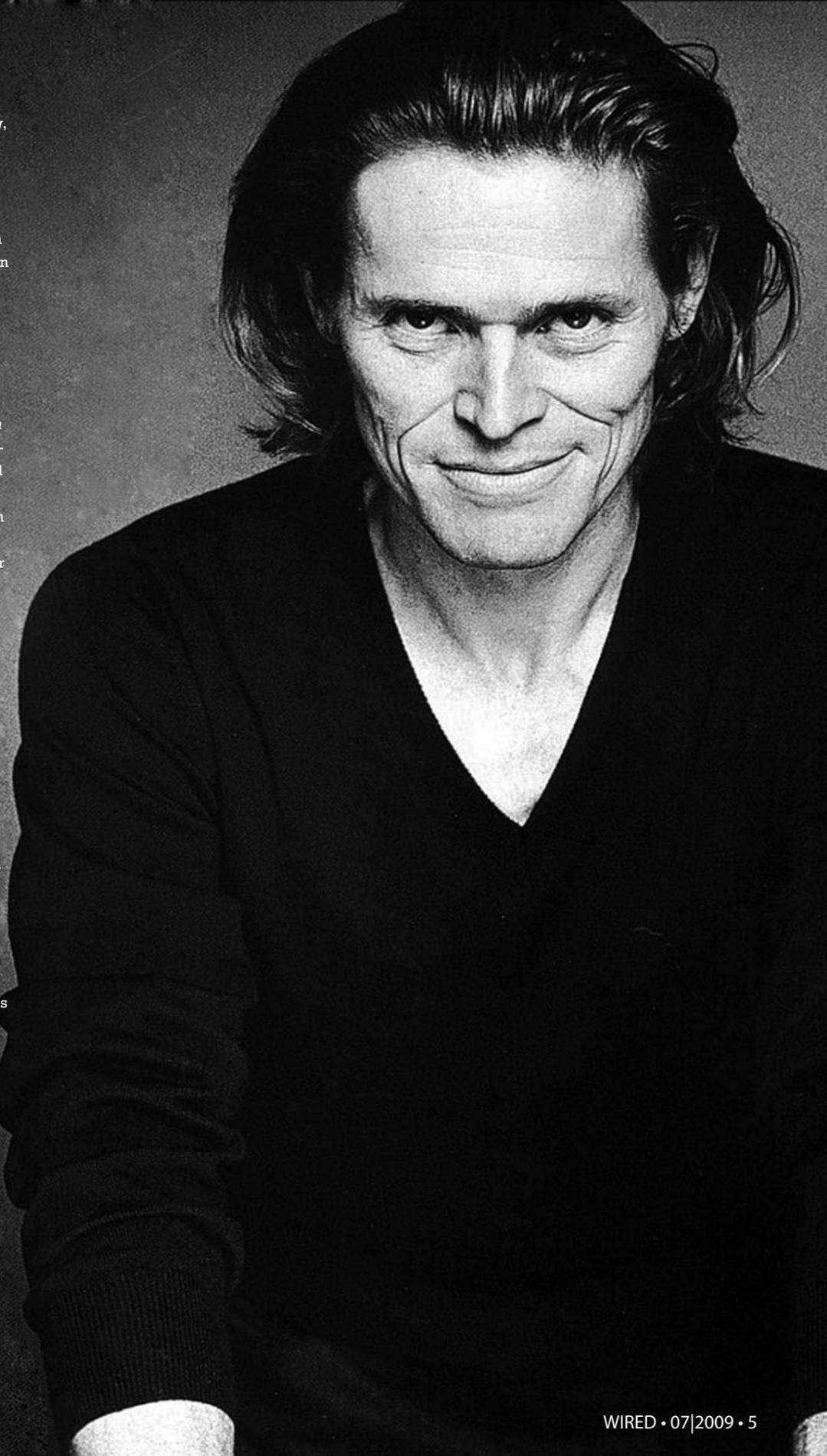
Incredibly, the memorable roles kept coming, and it’s to Dafoe’s eternal credit that he made them so memorable. He stood out as a malevolent guard in *Cry-Baby*, a vicious criminal with a repulsively lascivious nature in *Wild at Heart*, and a few smaller productions, where he continued to shine.

Willem faced his toughest professional challenge when attempting to survive his next movie, *Body of Evidence*, a Madonna vehicle doomed to failure. It was said that Dafoe was finished but, as he had no real ambition to be a superstar anyway, he would always find work.

Besides, as one of the great character actors of his day, capable of turning in cameos that improved movies ten-fold, Hollywood would come knocking soon.

And then came one of Dafoe’s finest roles, as TS Eliot in *Tom and Viv*. Gaunt, tired, he suffers terribly as his lover, his critic and his inspiration, gradually falls apart. Once again, the big projects came his way. In Anthony Minghella’s epic, *The English Patient*, he played a mystery man with no thumbs, who’s trying to discover the identity of a horribly burned pilot. A thief who shoots up morphine and spies for the British, he holds together this thrilling, old-school romance which won Best Picture at the Oscars in 1996, as *Platoon* had done ten years earlier.

1999 brought two more goodies. In David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ*, Dafoe was fabulous as the murderous Gas, a mechanic who performs





illegal operations on people's spines so they can plug into a new generation of video game. Then came *The Boondock Saints*, where twins are trying to knock out Boston's crime lords and Willem plays an FBI agent who's supposed to catch them, but kind of agrees with what they're doing.

2000 was great, too. He played Detective Kimball, hunting down Christian Bale in *American Psycho*. In *Animal Factory*, directed by his buddy Steve Buscemi, he played a long-time con who takes young Edward Furlong under his wing when he's jailed for marijuana. And then came another masterful performance and a second Oscar nomination for *Shadow of the Vampire*. This told the story of the filming of FW Murnau's classic *Nosferatu*, but with the twist that the film's star, Max Shreck, is actually a real vampire. For the part, Dafoe spent three hours a day having his make-up applied. There was a bull-cap, a head-piece, the teeth, the nose and acrylic paint and prosthetic adhesive all over his face, and those amazing fingernails. They could be a problem. "I was always looking for a caring assistant," recalled Dafoe later. "I had to plan my biological functions very carefully".

In *Spider-Man*, Willem starred as the schizoid arch-villain The Green Goblin, the psychotic alter ego of businessman Norman Osbourn. 2003 would see Willem in another blockbuster when he lent his voice to the monumental Pixar-pic *Finding Nemo* with Willem as a scar-faced Moorish Idol. The film would be a screaming financial success (almost as big as *Spider-Man*) and, come 2005, would be the biggest selling DVD ever, with 22 million copies sold.

Naturally, Dafoe would at the same time be delivering work with a far lower profile. His next release would be *The Reckoning* (actually made in 2001). Set in England in 1380, this film was a fascinating treatise on the power of art to reveal and communicate truth. Now more prolific than ever, Willem next delivered the gritty thriller

Control, directed by Tim Hunter, feted in the eighties for *River's Edge*. Ripley and *Control* were just two of six Dafoe releases in 2004. He ended 2004 with two minor roles in major productions: *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* and *The Aviator*, where Willem would briefly show his face as a private dick Leonardo DiCaprio's Howard Hughes hires to spy on Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy.

Among other movies Dafoe made in 2005, was the high profile *xXx: State Of The Union*, a sequel to the massive Vin Diesel hit, where Dafoe led a military splinter group attempting to bring down the government in Washington. There was also *Before It Had a Name*, a drama where a young widow would travel to her dead husband's second home to sort out his affairs only for tragedy to strike when she has an unexpected connection to the place's caretaker. It was a small movie but had a big impact on Dafoe's life as he co-wrote and co-starred with Giada Colagrande, an award-winning Italian director 20 years his junior. The relationship would cause him to leave his long-time partner, Elizabeth LeCompte.

In February, 2002, in his late forties, Willem Dafoe spent \$30,000 on a piece of work by artist Tom Fruin. It was a tapestry made from discarded baggies of heroin, cocaine and marijuana, collected from a local housing project, some of which still contained drugs. Controversy and art -- always together with Dafoe. Though yoga-practice has given him mighty discipline, he doesn't really want the responsibility of writing or directing, he wants to constantly be in the moment, to be "the thing itself", and is quite happy to be "an instrument" for his director, believing it frees him as an actor. Basically, he wants to be out there. "I don't think people want to see me as a regular guy," he's said.

"Besides, I'm a regular guy in real life. I guess I just want to be reckless in my work".

WILLEM DAFOE FILMOGRAPHY

Bean 2 (2007) (filming)
Anamorph (2007) (filming): Stan
The Walker (2007) (post-production)
Paris, je t'aime (2006): The cowboy - segment 'Place des Victoires'
Inside Man (2006): Captain John Darius
American Dreamz (2006): Chief of Staff
Ripley Under Ground (2005): Neil Murchison
Before It Had a Name (2005): Leslie
Manderlay (2005): Grace's Father
xXx: State of the Union (2005): Gen. George Octavius Deckert
The Aviator (2004): Roland Sweet
Control (2004): Dr. Michael Copeland
The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (2004): Klaus Daimler
Spider-Man 2 (2004): Green Goblin/Norman Osborn
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing (2004) (VG) (voice): Nikolai Diavolo
The Clearing (2004): Arnold Mack
Camel Cricket City (2003) (voice): Camel Cricket
Once Upon a Time in Mexico (2003): Barillo
The Reckoning (2003/I): Martin
Finding Nemo (2003) (voice): Gill
Auto Focus (2002): John Carpenter
Spider-Man (2002): Green Goblin/Norman Osborn
Spider-Man (2002) (VG) (voice): Green Goblin/Norman Osborn
Edges of the Lord (2001): Priest
Pavilion of Women (2001): Father Andre
Bullfighter (2000): Father Ramirez
Shadow of the Vampire (2000): Max Schreck
Animal Factory (2000): Earl Copen
American Psycho (2000): Det. Donald Kimball
The Boondock Saints (1999): Paul Smecker
eXistenZ (1999): Gas
New Rose Hotel (1998): X
Lulu on the Bridge (1998): Dr. Van Horn
Affliction (1997): Rolfe Whitehouse
Speed 2: Cruise Control (1997): John Geiger
"The Simpsons" - The Secret War of Lisa Simpson (1997) TV Episode (voice): The Commandant

The English Patient (1996): David Caravaggio
Basquiat (1996): The Electrician
The Night and the Moment (1995): The Writer
Victory (1995): Axel Heyst
Tom & Viv (1994): Tom Eliot
Clear and Present Danger (1994): John Clark
Faraway, So Close! (1993): Emit Flesti
Body of Evidence (1993): Frank Dulaney
Light Sleeper (1992): John LeTour
White Sands (1992): Deputy Sheriff Ray Dolezal
Flight of the Intruder (1991): Lt. Cmdr. Virgil 'Tiger' Cole
Wild at Heart (1990): Bobby Peru
Cry-Baby (1990): Hateful Guard at Maryland Training School for Boys
Born on the Fourth of July (1989): Charlie - Villa Dulce
Triumph of the Spirit (1989): Salamo Arouch
Mississippi Burning (1988): Agent Alan Ward
The Last Temptation of Christ (1988): Jesus
Off Limits (1988): Buck McGriff
Platoon (1986): Sgt. Elias Grodin
To Live and Die in L.A. (1985): Eric 'Rick' Masters
Streets of Fire (1984): Raven Shaddock, Bombers Leader
New York Nights (1984): Boyfriend
Roadhouse 66 (1984): Johnny Harte
The Hunger (1983): 2nd Phone Booth Youth
The Loveless (1982): Vance
Heaven's Gate (1980) (uncredited): Extra

