



SHUT UP, WORLD! GARY BUSEY IS TALKING...

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'Corndog' Hargrave

Former cocaine enthusiast, pariah of interviewers, scourge of Meat Loaf and a Roman candle of randomness. Strap yourselves in and meet a true Hollywood original



Gary Busey has a bench. Located around the back of his Malibu home, it overlooks a stunning vista: the white sands of Zuma Beach below, the sparkling Pacific Ocean beyond. Each day, the 67-year-old lights a Cuban cigar, settles down on the seat and surveys the view. It's tranquil, peaceful, serene. Or it would be, if it weren't for one thing:

GARY BUSEY.

THE EYES OF A KITE HAWK ARE SO GOOD, THEY CAN TELL FROM 100 FEET IF A MOUSE IS MALE OR FEMALE," HE SAYS, LOOKING TO THE SKY. "NEXT TIME ONE DIES A NATURAL DEATH, LET

me have their eyes. I'll put them on my glasses, and I'll see through your clothes, honey...

"When pelicans are hot, they fly six inches above the water to cool their bodies," he observes, gazing at the sea. "Just don't let them fly over you. When they shit on you, it's like getting napalmed..."

"Hear that dog barking?" he asks, pointing at

the shore. "One time out on the coast I saw a '54 Chevy full of them. This one dog driving looked out at me. I said, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'Cruising for sticks,' and he took off. It's a true story."

Sat at Busey's feet — the bench, it seems, is a sacred perch reserved for its owner — *Empire* is enjoying a rare audience with the philosopher-star. He's summoned us here to the Zen-vibed spot he's dubbed "Pelican Point" ("The vibrations and frequency are detoxifying") to discuss his life and 41-year career. And fortunately, the visit to Chez Busey is proving

less terrifying than we'd feared. This is, after all, the man behind some of Hollywood's most memorable psychos, owner of a toothy grin and unsettling stare that over the years have put the jeebies up stars including Mel Gibson (*Lethal Weapon*), Wesley Snipes (*Drop Zone*), Johnny Depp (*Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*) and the Predator (*Predator 2*).

Just as legendary are his off-camera exploits. In the late '80s and early '90s, Busey earned a reputation as a hell-raising wild man, racking up a succession of arrests and drug citations. On one memorable evening during that period, he was preparing to tuck into a Scarface-sized pile of cocaine when his dog Chili began rolling in it — Busey spent 25 minutes snorting devil's dandruff out of his pet's fur. An even lower point came in 1995, when he suffered a near-fatal overdose of cocaine and GHB.

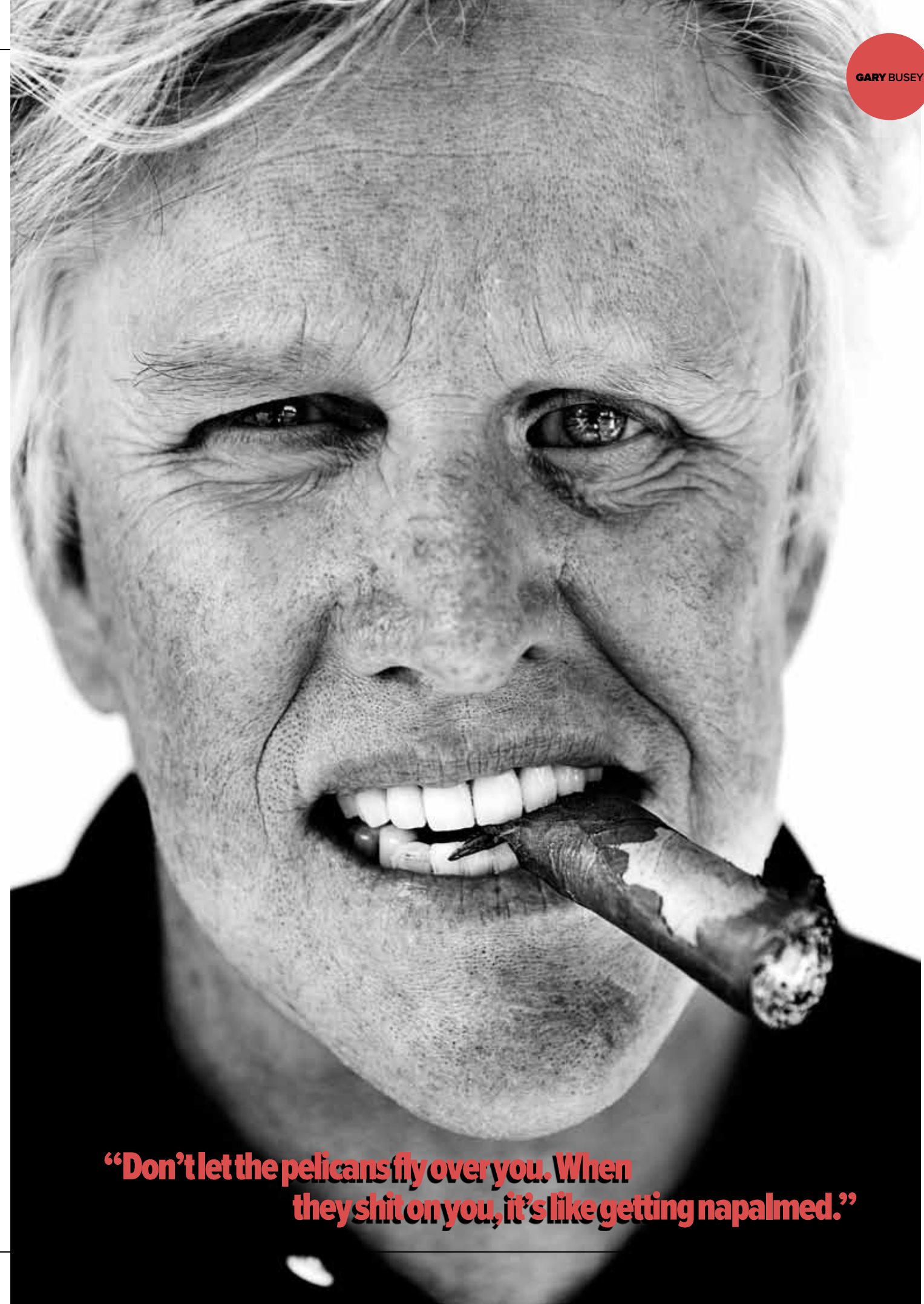
Those dark days are over: the new Busey spends his free time doting on his partner, actress/hypnotherapist Steffanie Sampson ("We've been together for 31 lifetimes"), and two year-old son Luke ("The energy of ten wolverines chasing a zebra"). Yet he's still as colourful a character as you'll find in show business: a primal force of nature, ready to do or say anything.

Exhibit A: the 2010 Oscars, where he gatecrashed Ryan Seacrest's red-carpet chat with Jennifer Garner and kissed Garner's neck. Exhibit B: his recent beef with Meat Loaf on the *US Celebrity Apprentice*. Exhibit C: an interview with *E!* where he threatened to rip out the reporter's endocrine system.

Empire isn't entirely sure what an endocrine system is, but we're pretty sure we want to keep ours. Fortunately, Busey proves to be in good humour. What we experience is less an interview, more an audience with a stand-up comedian from another planet. Relentlessly entertaining, he cracks jokes (see sidebar) and bounces wildly from topic to topic: the origin of the word 'cocktail', the rules of his party game Tickle Pee (you don't want to know), the fun you can have pointing a hairdryer at speeding cars...

Empire, meanwhile, is cast in the role of comedy foil, the target of a series of scorching Busey burns. "I'm going to do you a favour. I'm going to find the guy who did that to your hair." "If you put your brains in a bird, it would fly backwards." "I can't get over your T-shirt. Did you lose a bet?"

He's just bullshitting. After coining nicknames for *Empire's* reporter ("Buttplug") and photographer ("Corndog"), he re-sparks his cigar and grins. "I like your style. You know, I had a great time when I was in London. At Christmas, people really get into the spirit of red and green and stockings and birthday Jesus. And you guys don't have guns — you have sticks and dragons." >>



"Don't let the pelicans fly over you. When they shit on you, it's like getting napalmed."

THE ACTOR'S HOUSE IS A TREASURE TROVE OF BUSEYBILIA. POSTERS FOR HIS MOVIES HANG ON THE WALLS. IN THE GARAGE, NEAR A CARBOARD BOX MARKED 'GARY'S CHILDHOOD', RESIDES

the avant-garde cerise mural he painted for Entourage episode Busey And The Beach. On a desk in the family room sits a framed photograph of him with Bill Clinton, next to a large buck knife.

But most eye-catching of all, enjoying pride of place above the TV, is a blown-up shot of Busey with his arm around Tommy Lee Jones. Taken on the set of Under Siege, it sees the actors in the costumes they donned for one unforgettably weird sequence: a metal-studded leather jacket and rocker headband for Jones, full drag for Busey.

"I'd read a book about the USS Missouri," he explains. "When they crossed the Equator they had what is called 'Pollywog Day', where all the first-year sailors had to do unmentionable things, like walk on their knees to the conning tower, or blow bubbles in unfinished Jell-O in Morse code, making fun of their genitalia. And there was an executive officer who volunteered to be Queen of the Wogs. So I decided to dress as a woman. I took the idea to Steven Seagal, who was in a big bus he'd rented from a sheik, with a 15-foot fence around it. He said, 'Whose idea was this?' I said, 'Mine.' He said, 'Okay.' But the next day Warner Bros. called. They said, 'Gary, do not go psycho on us' — or psycho, you know what I mean. 'This is not a movie about you as a woman. This is a movie about martial arts with Steven Seagal.'"

But Gary Busey didn't get to be Gary Busey

by listening to people who aren't Gary Busey. "I had a 44DD stuffed, I had a Tina Turner wig and nothing was going to stop me," he recalls. "I did the scene twice, once as Commander Krill, the male, and once as Nancy, the female — I named her Nancy because her favourite song was Rocky Raccoon. And after the scene Tommy Lee Jones started laughing so hard he couldn't stand up. I didn't ask him why, but I knew it had something to do with me."

He butted heads with Seagal throughout the shoot. "Oh boy. He's insecure. This guy went overboard with the control master. And Erika Eleniak — the little girl who was in it — I had her under my wing. He was looking to add in a love scene so he could really get down and dirty. She said to me, 'What do I do?' And I said, 'How much time do you have when you're running from us to find a table, lay down and play plant-the-sausage?'"

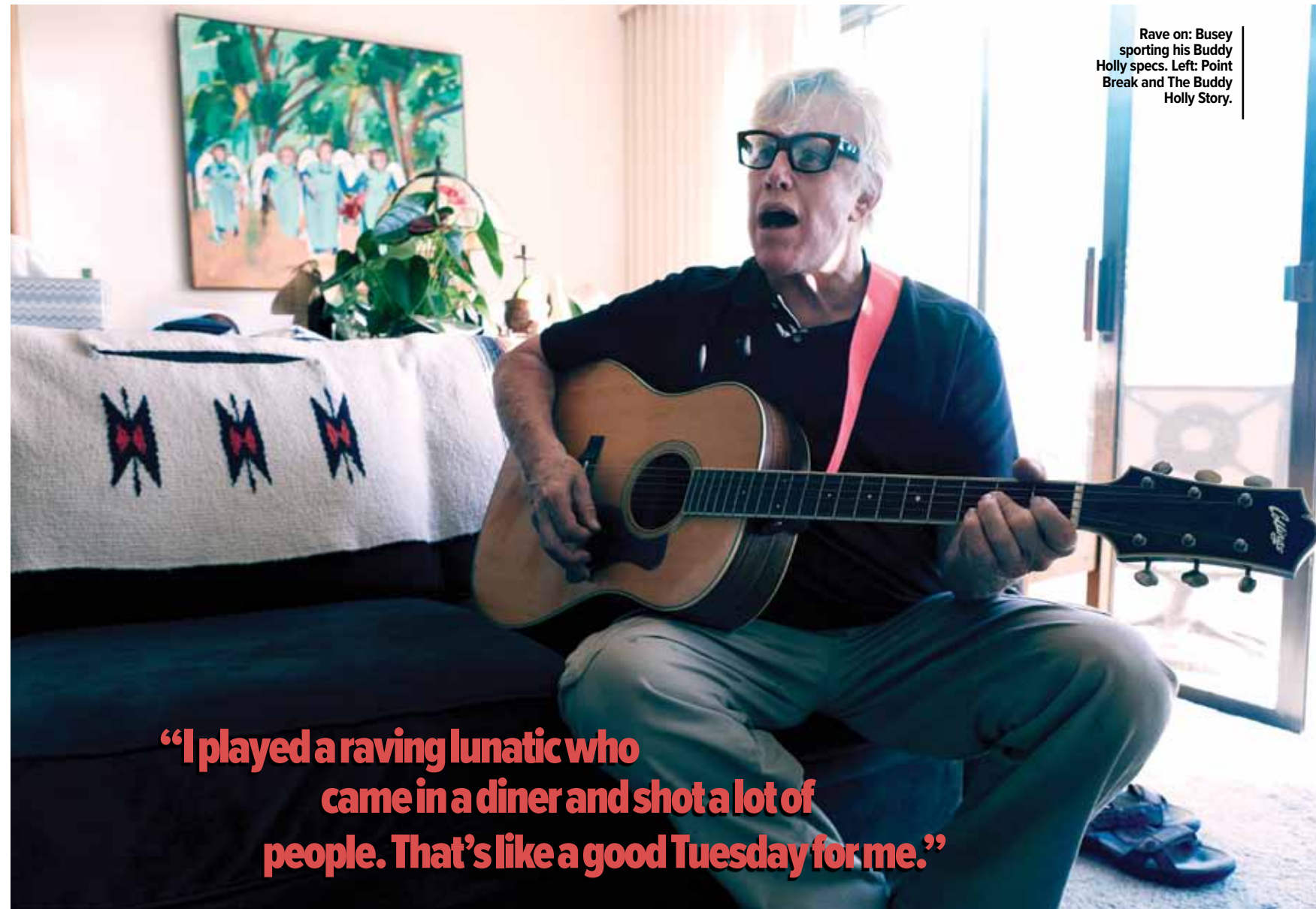
He has fonder memories of sparring with Keanu Reeves and Tom Cruise. "The idea of



a Point Break remake is horrible — it's like Dame Edna playing Mother Theresa — because that was a great movie," he says. "That scene where I'm in the car, telling Keanu to get me meatball sandwiches, and yell, 'Utah, get me TWO!' was improv. And I hear that a lot — people in airports all over the country go, 'Get me TWO!'" He burps happily. "For my big scene in The Firm, Sydney Pollack said, 'Gary, I want that Busey energy in here. Tom has some lines in this scene, but don't let them out. Keep him caught up in his own self.' And I did. I just rambled right through, talking about Elvis and truck drivers. That was good."

The Firm and Point Break are notable for casting Busey in a heroic role. He's more typically seen being a) sinister, b) insane, c) insanely sinister or d) sinisterly insane. Does he tire of playing the bad guy?

"I've played one bad guy," he fires back. "Mr. Joshua in Lethal Weapon. He's the only one. Commander Krill — he needed



Rave on: Busey sporting his Buddy Holly specs. Left: Point Break and The Buddy Holly Story.

"I played a raving lunatic who came in a diner and shot a lot of people. That's like a good Tuesday for me."

THE JOSHUA GENERATION

Profiled: Busey's greatest villain, and his most notable baddie peers



MR. JOSHUA
(*Lethal Weapon*, 1987)
Played by: Gary Busey
Masterplan: Smuggling heroin into the States
Best line: (*Pulling a woman from her car*) "Mind if I test-drive your Audi?"
Personal kills: Three: Michael Hunsaker and two cops.
Subsequent villainy: Commander Krill in Under Siege (1992)



HANS GRUBER
(*Die Hard*, 1988)
Played by: Alan Rickman
Masterplan: Robbery
Best line: "When Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer."
Personal kills: Two: Mr. Takagi and Harry Ellis.
Subsequent villainy: Sheriff of Nottingham in Robin Hood (1991); Severus Snape, Harry Potter



ERIC QUALEN
(*Cliffhanger*, 1993)
Played by: John Lithgow
Masterplan: Stealing \$100 million from the US Treasury.
Best line: "Kill a few people and you're a murderer. Kill a million and you're a conqueror. Go figure."
Personal kills: Two: a crew member and girlfriend Krystal.
Subsequent villainy: Lord Farquaad in Shrek (2001); Arthur Mitchell in Dexter



BENNETT (*Commando*, 1985)
Played by: Vernon Wells
Masterplan: Wearing a small chainmail vest, and installing a South American warlord.
Best line: "I'm not going to shoot you between the eyes; I'm going to shoot you between the balls!"
Personal kills: None!
Subsequent villainy: Mr. Igloe in Innerspace (1987); Ransik in Power Rangers



CHARLES RANE
(*Passenger 57*, 1992)
Played by: Bruce Payne
Masterplan: Escaping the FBI.
Best line: (*In response to, "You'll have to kill me first!"*) "Oh no, I'm going to kill you during."
Personal kills: Four: surgeon, pilot, passenger, henchman.
Subsequent villainy: The Warlock in Warlock III (1999); Jacob Kell in Highlander: Endgame (2000)



WILLIAM STRANNIX
(*Under Siege*, 1992)
Played by: Tommy Lee Jones
Masterplan: Theft and sale of nuclear weapons; revenge
Best line: "Governments will fall, anarchy will reign: it's a brave new world!"
Personal kills: Two: Commander Green, naval officer.
Subsequent villainy: Ryan Gaerity in Blown Away (1994); Two-Face in Batman Forever (1995)
Owen Williams

psychological evaluation, so he wasn't bad. I always build a back story for my characters, to get in the mood of it. And Mr. Joshua, he would walk through his grandmother's blood to get a postage stamp and never look at her. I had this look, here."

He removes his sunglasses and stares deep into *Empire's* soul. "It gave me the eyes of a shark, which has no life." He puts the shades back on and grins. "It's neat doing that."

He's remained prolific, but in the last decade has mostly appeared in straight-to-DVD films with titles such as G-Men From Hell, Welcome 2 Ibiza and Latin Dragon. Is he, we ask delicately, proud of everything he's made?

"I'm very honoured and proud to have been chosen to have been in all the movies I've made, yeah."

Even The Gingerdead Man?

"I've been to autograph shows and a lot of fans come up with Gingerdead Man posters. I've never seen it."

What's it about?

"I don't know. I've never seen it. Didn't you hear? Do you understand English?"

We thought you might have read the script...

"I played a raving lunatic who came in a diner and shot a lot of people. It's just what I do. That's like a good Tuesday for me."

WHEN HE WAS 14, GARY BUSEY WATCHED A BOY FUCK A COW. IT'S POSSIBLE THIS ANECDOTE IS FICTION — WITH BUSEY THERE'S USUALLY A SENSE

that he's winding you up — but he lingers on the story and packs it with detail. "The guy called me and said, 'We got a stump-chained cow. I'm going to show you what to do.' He put a rubber on his weenie and jammed it in there. Then the cow shit in his britches and the romance was over!"

It's one of several memories he shares from his childhood in Goose Creek, Texas. Part Cherokee Indian (his tribal name is Thundermoon), he's always felt an affinity with nature and once attempted to wrangle

a notoriously grouchy bronco bull named Elvis. "I was like an airborne missile seeking a tree to hold on to," Busey recalls. "Then I tried to rope him with a lariat, but he ran around slamming me into ant piles and fences and rocks."

He could have ended up a farmer, or a pro footballer. But he fell under cinema's spell at the age of six, when his mother took him to see Cecil B. DeMille's Samson And Delilah. "When it ended, I pointed at the screen and said, 'That's what I want to do.' She said, 'Be in the picture show?' I said, 'No, tell stories with light.'" To commemorate that life-changing day, he's given his new son Luke the middle name Samson.

Soon he was studying theatrical art in college, though his unorthodox approach to the craft was already in effect. "Method acting? Fuck no!" he explains. "I studied Stanislavsky, but then did the opposite. My teachers wanted me to drive a bus before playing a bus driver, but I told them, 'I don't have to. I'll just smell the rims of it, to see where it was before I got there.'" >>



Busey charges at our cameraman, armed with his Big Wednesday surfboard. Below right: Big Wednesday, Under Siege.

“I went to the other side, which is a supernatural, spiritual realm. There were big balls of light floating around.”

The Busey Method (“I don’t quit. When they yell cut, I just keep going”) paid off. After performing the last-ever death scene in TV serial Gunsmoke, and taking bit parts in Gumball Rally and A Star Is Born, in 1978 he scored two major lead roles. In *The Buddy Holly Story*, he would play the rock ’n’ roll pioneer himself. In *Big Wednesday*, he would portray a pro surfer, Leroy “The Masochist” Smith.

Both films see the actor in prime form: fully alive, ferociously committed. “I sang all the songs live. It was like Buddy entered me and I channelled his spirit,” says Busey of the first performance, which won him an Oscar nomination. *Big Wednesday*, meanwhile, instilled a life-long love of the ocean — and, believe it or not, Busey’s nickname for his penis.

“I’d never surfed before. I said to the director, ‘I play football. That’s a collision sport. Surfing is for sissy boys.’ Whoa! Four months later I was

on the island of Oahu, where the waves are 25 feet tall, and I quickly took it back. ‘This is not for sissy boys! I must admit I was *wroong!*!’”

So highly does Busey regard these films that he’s kept the key props — his yellow-and-black surfboard from *Wednesday*, his horn-rimmed specs from *Buddy* — and suggests bringing them out for our photoshoot. There’s a worrying moment when a sudden blast of wind blows the surfboard over, causing Busey to howl in anguish; fortunately, he doesn’t proceed to kill *Empire*’s grandmother and walk through her blood for a postage stamp.

In retrospect, that was Busey’s golden age. Aside from Nicolas Roeg’s *Insignificance*, in which he appeared as a Joe DiMaggio-alike baseball player in 1985, he was rarely again offered major parts in prestige dramas. Asked if he has any regrets, he says, “Just one — a movie called *Foolin’ Around*. It was a horrible

experience. I took it for the money after *The Buddy Holly Story* and while I was making it Irving Azoff came after me to do *Urban Cowboy*. If I’d done that, it would have been another nomination. I had that kind down, having grown up on horses and hayfields and cattle. Oh, man.”

GARY’S GAG-A-RAMA

Gary Busey: not a man overly concerned with political correctness

A CAREER BOOST CAME WITH 1987’S LETHAL WEAPON, WHICH HE JUST ABOUT STOLE FROM ITS STARS. BUT THEN DISASTER STRUCK. ON DECEMBER 4, 1988, HE CAME OFF HIS

Harley Davidson at 40 miles an hour, minus a helmet, and cracked his skull on a curb. He was rushed to Cedars-Sinai hospital, where he was given extensive brain surgery. Only Busey himself can describe what happened next.

“I quit living,” he says. “I went to the other side, which is a supernatural, spiritual realm. There were big balls of light floating all around and out of one the colour of mother of pearl came an androgynous voice. The light said, ‘You may come with us now, or go back to your body and continue — it’s your choice.’”

He chose life. “Four-and-a-half weeks later, I left hospital. Whoopi Goldberg said, ‘Gary, you should watch this movie I did, *Ghost*.’ And it starred Patrick Swayze, who I was doing my next movie with, so I thought, ‘Shit, I better go see it.’ The last reel of the film, when Patrick was over in the other realm and these balls of light



floated around him, that’s when I started crying. The credits go, the lights come up, the audience leave and my friend says, ‘Are you okay?’ I looked at her and said, ‘I’ve been there. I’ve been there.’ Then we went to get sushi.”

Busey has been talking for almost three hours straight, with only a sandwich for

refreshment (we resist the urge to yell, “Get me TWO!”). The afternoon sun has been intense and the star seeks refuge in his garage, where he lights a spliff. It is, he explains, medicinal marijuana, to counteract the effects of cancer surgery he had in 1997. “The brain surgery, the cancer, the cocaine overdose...” he muses. “The byline for your story should be, ‘Gary Busey: the man with the hardest head in show business.’”

Reliving his highs and lows — the surgeries; the plaudits; the battle against cocaine addiction, which he describes as “dancing to the band, but the music ain’t good” — would have sapped any mortal man of energy. Not Busey. “I have no reason to rest,” he declares. “There’s always something to see and do and poke and prod.” Before long he’s back on his feet, exchanging goose honks with his girlfriend and bellowing at the ocean through a megaphone.

Finally, one of his neighbours, a bald gentleman clad only in Speedos, comes out of his house to complain about the noise: “Gary, you’re disturbing the whole neighbourhood!”

There’s a chilly face-off. But just when we



think we’re about to see Busey have a good Tuesday, he lowers the megaphone.

“At another time I might have reacted differently,” he says. “I’m much more peaceful now. Peace is the way to be. And I’m talking about P-E-A-C-E, not what you’re talking about: your P-I-E-C-E.”

A S 2012 APPROACHES, THE BUSEY BUSINESS IS A-BOOMIN’. CONTINUING TO SEND UP HIS WILD-LOON IMAGE AFTER APPEARING IN THE LIKES OF THE SIMPSONS, SCRUBS AND

demented reality TV show *I’m With Busey*, he’ll next be seen in *Piranha 3DD*, answering the age-old question: if Gary Busey met a carnivorous fish, which would bite first? “I play a farmer. A cow explodes because of its farting ability and out of it come hundreds of piranha, raining down on me,” he teases. “You’ll see how I treat one of them.”

Also next year, he promises to release a book called *Buseyisms*, collating the hundreds of acronyms he’s created since 1999. “NASCAR” stands for Non-Athletic Sport Centred Around Rednecks. “Sober” is Son Of a Bitch, Everything’s Real. “Now”, the first ever Buseyism, translates as No Other Way. We ask him to come up with one for “*Empire*”. He’s silent for two minutes, then yells, “Every Moment Providing In Righteous Energy!”

On TV, he’ll appear in *Celebrity Wife Swap*, switching partners with Ted Haggard (“The guy they caught five years ago snorting meth off the back of a male prostitute,” says the man who once snorted coke off the back of a dog). He’s working on musical projects with Grammy-winners Dennis Morgan and T Bone Burnett. But most intriguing of all is the prospect of a solo stage show, which would set Busey loose on audiences around the world. “It’ll be called Gary Busey And His One-Woman Show,” he says, eyes gleaming. “I’m going to enter from up high stage left, swinging on a rope, covered in glistening stuff so everything that touches me sticks to me. Then I’ll land in a big pile of feathers, cover myself in them and say, ‘Now I am a bird.’”

On that note, it’s time for us to say goodbye. The sun is starting to set on Pelican Point and Busey wants to return to his bench. What he’ll see there, of course, is anyone’s guess.

“I’ve been thinking about this interview,” he says, fixing *Empire* with his gimlet stare one last time, “and I don’t remember much of it. Which is good.”

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Piranha 3DD is out in 2012.

“Do you know what the blonde said when she found out she was pregnant? ‘Wait a minute, are you sure it’s mine?’”

“WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU CROSS A PENIS WITH A POTATO? A DICK-TATER.”

“What do you call a blonde bimbo who’s standing on her head naked? A brunette with bad breath.”

“What do you get when you cross a Raggedy Ann doll with the Pillsbury Doughboy? A short, fat, ugly redhead with a yeast infection.”

“YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LEXUS CAR AND A PORCUPINE? IN A LEXUS THE PRICKS ARE ON THE INSIDE.”

“Why do men chase women they have no intention of marrying? The same reason a dog chases a car he has no intention of driving.”