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Have a laugh with Leo

His new movie may be his darkest yet. But Hollywood's most sought-after star says he's really just a "goofball."

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In a rare interview, **Leonardo DiCaprio** reveals the man behind the camera.

“I keep things light in my life.”

BY CRAIGH BARBOZA

We know that Leonardo DiCaprio is an electrifying actor, an ardent environmentalist and a supermodel magnet.

What hardly anyone outside his inner circle knows is perhaps the most surprising thing about him: DiCaprio can be quite juvenile. His idea of fun is to sit around with his buddies and make up ridiculous characters and then try to do their voices. “I’m actually an incredible goofball,” says DiCaprio, whose new film, *Shutter Island*, opens in two weeks. “I do imitations and joke around all day. I keep things light in my life.”

DiCaprio tilts his head, lifts his

eyebrows and puts on a small, “I know it’s hard to believe” type of smile that is supposed to convince me. It’s a Sunday afternoon in London, and he is stretched out in a plush hotel suite, sporting a dark suit, crisp dress shirt and sneakers. In person, DiCaprio is ruggedly handsome and tall (6 feet). He no longer looks like the pubescent romantic hero of *Titanic*. That epic on the water, released more than a decade ago, transformed “Leo” from an art-house actor into a phenomenon. Ever since, it seems he has been trying to prove himself. He needn’t argue the case anymore.

At 35, DiCaprio is one of the most acclaimed actors of his generation, a three-time Oscar nominee who has blockbuster hits and



a heavyweight collaborator in director Martin Scorsese.

If he does, as he says, keep things light, he has yet to show us that side of himself onscreen. His characters are, almost without exception, troubled or tortured: a state cop who infiltrates the mob (*The Departed*), a Rhodesian smuggler (*Blood Diamond*) and a demented recluse (*The Aviator*). Even in *Catch*

Me If You Can, a breezy caper directed by Steven Spielberg, DiCaprio found a way to add some anguish to his quick-witted con man.

“It’s never a conscious thing,” he says. “I just try to be a part of films that move people. A lot of times, those are the darker side of humanity, I suppose.”

Shutter Island could be his darkest to date. DiCaprio plays a U.S.



▲ **DYNAMIC DUO.** DiCaprio, at work on *Shutter Island* with director Martin Scorsese: "You have to have a really strong sense of humor in order to do these dark roles," says Scorsese of DiCaprio.

should watch this movie two times," DiCaprio suggests. "It's going to seem like one thing on the first go-round and something entirely different on the second."

DiCaprio says he wasn't fully prepared for the depths his character, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, had to go to. "There are sequences toward the end, some of the more hard-core weeks of filming I've ever had, where we kept pushing this character to places that are almost uncomfortable to witness," he says.

The word "emotion" comes up often when DiCaprio talks about his work. He sometimes says things like "the gravity of the character," or "until you've lived a portion of this person's life on set, moments in scripts can be passed by with a flick of the page."

But he's not always Mr. Dramatic. He can reel off his favorite YouTube clips and thinks the *Borat* and *Bruno* movies are "just out of the park, dude." He's also a reality TV junkie. "I find it the funniest and most entertaining stuff on TV," he says, cracking up. "We're so hilarious, when we don't even try to be."

DiCaprio, the son of an underground comics distributor; grew up in the Silver Lake section of Hollywood. "At a young age," he says, "I was exposed to, like, the most hardcore hippie subculture any young man would be subject to, with the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, *Zap* and *Weirdo* comics. You name it, I was reading it."

With the comic book craze in Hollywood, you'd think that DiCaprio's production company, Appian Way (which boasts about two dozen projects "in development"), might be adapting some of those buried classics from his childhood. But when I bring this up, he just laughs and says, "You know, that's a great idea. I might take it straight to the old production company." (We can talk about fees later, Leo.)

As a child, DiCaprio was a "big-time extrovert." He loved bagging contests, where a bunch of kids would sit in a circle insulting one another for hours to see who could get the most laughs. "That's how I really became an actor," he says.

Following his breakthrough role in 1993's *This Boy's Life*, DiCaprio had a choice: collect big money for a Disney movie about witches or pursue this other role he might not even get, as a mentally disabled teen in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. He chose the latter, a decision that paid off, with interest, when DiCaprio scored his first Oscar nomination. "There were a lot of people urging me to go in the other direction," he says.

When people in Hollywood talk about DiCaprio, they tend to gush, even the normally reserved. *Shutter Island* co-star Ben Kingsley says DiCaprio's performance in 1996's *Romeo & Juliet* "was the best Ro-

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What makes Leo laugh

People:

"**Sacha Baron Cohen** is ridiculous. He risks his life for a joke. When I saw him in *Bruno*, in shorts and a Hasidic black hat, running through the streets of Jerusalem, I couldn't stop laughing. I'm also a **Jim Carrey** fan. He's a genius. He can turn into creatures I've never seen."

Movies:

Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. "There are moments where [Allen] pushes the boundaries, but they're films about real people."



Leo has fun at Lakers games.

TV:

DiCaprio loves **reality TV** shows. "I don't know why TV didn't have [them] before, because you can't replicate real-life drama or the idiocy of the human race."

YouTube:

"I have a bunch of videos I watch. 'Good Day Mr. Kubrick' is this guy Brian Atene's audition tape for *Full Metal Jacket*. It's phenomenal." Other favorites include the "Kung Fu Auditions" series and "Jumping Lizard."

marshal investigating a mysterious disappearance at an eerie institution for the criminally insane. Digging for clues, he and his partner (Mark Ruffalo) uncover a disturbing secret just as a hurricane hits, trapping them on the remote island. The movie, based on a Dennis Lehane novel and directed by Scorsese, is a Gothic horror-style thriller with Hitchcockian twists. "People



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meo I've ever seen," which is saying something. Kingsley has been a member of the prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company since 1967.

These days, DiCaprio pretty much can pick what he wants to do next. He regularly turns down action movies and dramas, but, aside from his cameo in Woody Allen's 1998 satire *Celebrity*, he claims he has never been offered a comedy. He says he'd be "scared to try it."

This is just the kind of talk that makes DiCaprio's friends shake their heads. For years, the rapper-actor Q-Tip has encouraged his buddy to do *Saturday Night Live*. "I'm not trying to dis, but his comedic stuff [might be even better] than his dramatic stuff," Q-Tip says. "He has a great physical side to his comedy, and he can do cerebral, hilarious. When the world sees Leo

Leonardo's rise to fame



▲ 1989-90: He starred in the hit sitcom *Growing Pains* with Kirk Cameron, left, and Jeremy Miller.



◀ 1993: With Johnny Depp in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*



▼ 1997: In Oscar smash *Titanic* with Kate Winslet

do comedy, I think everybody's going to really see his genius."

Scorsese (who, remember, directed *The King of Comedy*) says:

"The thing is, you have to have a really strong sense of humor in order to do these dark roles. On *Shutter Island*, too, as tough as it was

to make, there were very funny moments between Leo, Mark and myself. Ask him about the rain."

When I do, DiCaprio chuckles. "It was insanity," he says. "At one point, I think I was singing Bob Dylan tunes. We had these giant rain machines going during one scene, and Mark and I couldn't hear a word we were saying. Not only that, we couldn't see because they had giant fans blowing stuff and trees falling on either side of us. It became almost like a slapstick routine."

Which makes you wonder, what kind of comedy would DiCaprio go for? When asked about it point-blank, he's stumped: "Peter Sellers had some great comedic roles. Those would've been amazing to try." And then it hits him. "Yeah, that's it: *Dr. Strangelove*," DiCaprio says. "Dark!" **W**