

Will Jon Hamm Save America?

by Joe Mulder

To a certain extent, America has gone soft. That's not good.

(now, we could sit here all day and debate whether or not the above statements are true and, if they're true, what the greater implications of those truths might be. But that wouldn't make for particularly breezy leisure reading, and that's really why we're all here. So, for now, for the purposes of what is to follow, let's just take those truths for granted)

Nowhere is American's newly-acquired doughiness more evident these days than at the movies. I began to notice a few years ago that, with Harrison Ford long since having grown out of the alpha male ass-kicking roles (watching him in 2006's *Firewall* was fun and all, but it felt rather like seeing Hulk Hogan regain the WWE title in 2002 at the age of 48; enjoyable for old time's sake, but you really didn't quite buy it), no American actors were really stepping forth to take his place. At all.

Sure, we have George Clooney, and he's every bit the manly movie star that Humphrey Bogart or Clark Gable were. But after The Cloon's (I call him "The Cloon") early action movies – *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Batman and Robin*, *The Peacemaker* – failed to turn him into an action star, he settled into roles where he'd be more likely to pay a big beefy guy to beat up his enemies while he stood nearby being handsome. And I'm not knocking Clooney; we'll always need stand-around-being-handsome guy, and he does it better than anyone. But he's not quite the ass-kicker we seek, and he's almost 50 besides.

And don't give me Matt Damon in the *Bourne* series; he's a fine, fine actor and those a some good movies, but that character is basically just a nerd who learned karate. Anybody Robert Mitchum ever played could have beaten the crap out of Jason Bourne without even noticing that he'd done it.

Even Will Smith, who started out promisingly with *Independence Day* and *Bad Boys* and who is the best we've done in quite a while, always has to have some "anti" in his heroes these days.

And sure, there's The Rock, and I'll admit it was a coup that we were able to fill the Arnold Schwarzenegger void with a home-grown replacement. But The Rock – as much as I love the guy – is basically a cartoon character, so he doesn't quite count. I'm talking about Americans who could kick butt while still playing actual guys... your Harrison Fords, your Burt Reynoldses, your Steve McQueens, even your Kurt Russells, for heaven's sake. Those guys are gone now, or at least too old for those parts. Are there any other American actors out there who could possibly fill their shoes?

I realized both the gravity and the extent of this problem with

the 2007 release of *3:10 to Yuma*, a Western about a Civil War-vet rancher charged with transporting a dangerous outlaw to the train that would take him to trial in Yuma. It goes without saying that the badass outlaw was played by Russell Crowe who, of course, is Australian. That no American actor since Harrison Ford could possibly have pulled off such a role went without saying, but I'll let that slide, since it's Russell Crowe. Christian Bale was cast as the good guy; that no American actor would be believable as the rancher who goes toe-to-toe with Crowe's Ben Wade was a problem.

Russell Crowe is a once-in-three-lifetimes tough guy movie star; if you need a rugged S.O.B. with serious acting chops you call Russell Crowe, I don't care if he's from Australia, Ireland or even, God forbid, France. But America should have been able to produce at least *one* actor who could match up with him, and she hasn't; instead, when it came time to cast *3:10 to Yuma's* grizzled, world-weary American Civil War vet father of a teenaged son, they said, "Get me a 32-year-old Welshman!" And it's not as though I necessarily blame them in that instance; which American actor could have played that part? Huh? Topher Grace? If Topher Grace had played Christian Bale's role, *3:10 to Yuma* would have been ten minutes long and would have had to have been rated NC-17 because of the things that Russell Crowe's character would have done to Topher Grace.

Another red flag was 2006's film adaptation of *Miami Vice*, which, if you'll remember, starred Ireland's Colin Ferrell as Sonny Crockett. You know what that means, don't you, folks? That's right: it means that in the last 20 years, America has not produced an actor who can fill the shoes of one Don Johnson.

What do we get instead? We get Gerard Butler (Scottish) in *300*. We get Jason Statham (English) in Jason Statham movies (the "Jason Statham movie" has, as far as I'm concerned, become its own genre). We get Hugh Jackman (Australian) as Wolverine. We get a Welshman and as Aussie as Batman and the Joker. Even "24's" Kiefer Sutherland is a London-born Canadian, for heaven's sake. That's right: Jack Bauer isn't even an American. This is how bad it's gotten, people.

Meanwhile, America produces nothing but goofballs and wieners. And while there's certainly a place for, say, Paul Rudd (and that place is in every movie, ever, because Paul Rudd is *awesome*), it would be nice if the likes of Steve Carell, Will Ferrell, Jack Black or Seth Rogen could take care of business once in a while. Wait, what's that? What's that you say? Seth Rogen showed some action chops in *Pineapple Express*, and he's even signed on to play the Green Hornet? Well, I guess you're right. That's an excellent point. But guess what: *he's Canadian!*

Hey, what about that old sitcom "Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place?" Didn't that feature both Ryan Reynolds and

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Nathan Fillion, two strapping men who can handle action as well as comedy? Couldn't they be the heirs to the Harrison Ford kick-ass American guy throne? Well, maybe, except for one thing: *both Canadian!*

Am I starting to convince you that this is a real problem?

In all seriousness – well, okay; in *some* seriousness – I do see the vanishing American cinematic manly man as symptomatic of a pervasive inferiority complex among the nation's "elite." I mean, you can only spend so long in a world in which America is perceived as corrupt, bloated, dumb and resource-hogging before you naturally come to assume that such a place is incapable of producing the sort of virile, dynamic man who could, for instance, command the Spartan forces at Thermopylae, or slash through Magneto's legion of bad guys with his adamantium claws. No, the paragon of American masculinity is now apparently Michael Cera.

(oh, by the way, I just checked, and, Michael Cera? *Canadian!*)

So, of course, when it comes time to cast the guy who knows how to get the job done, those in the movie business who make such decisions are inclined to look beyond our borders. As a result, a generation of American boys seem poised perhaps to come of age with no home-grown ass-kicking cinematic role model. And before you try to convince yourself that's no big deal, consider where we'd be today without the likes of John Wayne and Han Solo.

Huh? Yeah. I thought so.

So things look bleak, then. Until, finally, out in the distance, we see a ray of hope. And that ray of hope, dear reader(s?), comes in the person of St. Louis, Missouri's own Jon Hamm.

Jon Hamm, for those who don't know, plays Don Draper, the main character on AMC's "Mad Men," a show about New York advertising executives in the early 1960s. Jon Hamm is exactly who we're looking for. Jon Hamm is strapping, manly and 100% made in the U.S. of A. Jon Hamm is the cure for what ails us.

Jon Hamm's career is proceeding perfectly, too; industry types and people who rate how cool you are by what shows you watch go absolutely apeshit over "Mad Men," but the general public has remained resistant to its charms (the Season 2 finale fetched 1.75 viewers, less than half the number pulled in by, for example, a particularly low-rated episode of NBC's famously low-rated "Friday Night Lights"), so Jon Hamm is unlikely to emerge from "Mad Men" typecast in the popular culture at large as his character on the show. Therefore, Jon Hamm will be free to become America's next manly man movie star without the burden of his TV persona weighing him down.

Also, Jon Hamm is ridiculously handsome. He recently guest starred on "30 Rock," and Tina Fey's character described him accurately by saying that "he looks like a cartoon pilot." Not only that; he's manly. Not boyish. As opposed to someone like, say, Ben Affleck, who would probably still be getting carded now if he wasn't famous, Jon Hamm clearly could have walked into a liquor store at age 15, and if he'd been asked to show ID anyone looking on would have thought "that's weird; why are they carding that 36-year-old business executive-slash-mountain climber?" Meanwhile the likes of Josh Hartnett and Shia LaBeouf look as though they have to shave maybe twice a month.

As if all that weren't enough, Jon Hamm is apparently the world's greatest guy. According to interviews he's given, when he first moved to Hollywood he fell in with the likes of comedians Paul F. Tompkins and Sarah Silverman and continues to run with that same crowd now that he's one of the popular kids. Multiple sources report that he is a regular at Jimmy Kimmel's football Sunday parties, Kimmel's house on NFL afternoons being the absolute center of the Hollywood sarcastic nerd universe, in addition to being a place where your Daniel Craigs and your Eric Banas wouldn't be caught dead (their loss).

Also, Jon Hamm's appearances on "Saturday Night Live" and the aforementioned "30 Rock" prove that he can handle comedy as well as drama, a must for someone who will pick up where Harrison Ford left off.

In Jon Hamm we have finally found the next actor to play the guy who could kick anyone's ass *and* win the approval of anyone's mom. We have found the next great American manly man movie star. Now all we have to do is, you know, put him in a movie (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* doesn't count). Jon Hamm, you're our last best hope.

Will Jon Hamm save America?

He will if anybody can.
