

TV GUIDE

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April 30-May 6, 1983
50¢

The Real Powers in Hollywood

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Tom Selleck

What's Worrying TV's Sexiest Detective?



TV BROADCAST AND CABLE LISTINGS/APRIL 30-MAY 6 1983

What could possibly be bothering Tom Selleck?

(TELE)

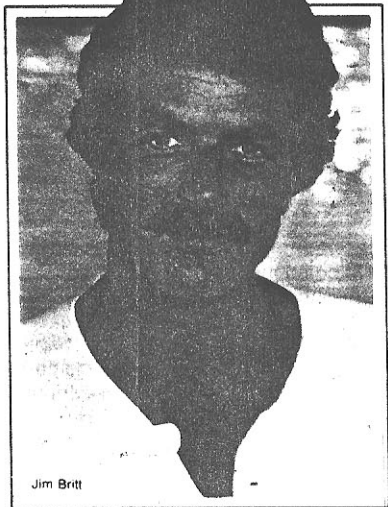
Ethics. Women. Fans. Stress. His image. In short, the star of 'Magnum, P.I.' finds a lot to worry about

By Louise Farr

Under a threatening sky and the relentless gaze of tourists, Tom Selleck sits beside a tennis court at an Oahu resort hotel, one of the locations for Magnum, P.I., and brushes his famous mustache. The Magnum crew has been

racing against the weather to complete a scene. And now, between takes, Selleck is huddled with his agent, Bettye McCartt, beneath a striped umbrella, seemingly oblivious to the rain that sends crew and onlookers scurrying. Then the sky turns black and wind rattles the coconut palms. Selleck and McCartt sprint off, followed by a bearded islander someone has pointed out as his bodyguard.

Earlier, the bodyguard had suggested that a TV GUIDE reporter waiting to interview Selleck should at least say "hello" to him as long as she's there. "I'm tied up," Selleck says to his bodyguard now. "He's tied up," says the bodyguard, taking off after Selleck, his eyes darting left



and right as hardy, rain-soaked female fans point zoom lenses at the star's re-treating back.

A couple of days later, after some tough calls from a CBS publicist, Tom Selleck appears in a Honolulu hotel room. Wearing khaki shorts and a plaid shirt, and worried about his bloodshot eyes, he disarmingly explains that just because an actor acquires buffers in the form of PR people and a bodyguard (really just "a good friend" who

handles security on the set), that doesn't mean the actor has begun to believe his own notices. All it means, says Selleck, is that a guy has to have buffers to get his work done.

"No matter how I feel or how I look, there's going to be 10 pages [of script] for me. It kind of assaults you every morning," he says. "I keep thinking about 'All That Jazz,' where Roy Scheider's standing in front of the mirror putting in his eye drops and taking some kind of an upper, and it's *show time*. I mean, nobody made me do this for a living, you know. But to say that it hasn't been an adjustment would be lying."

As Selleck rambles on in his ado- →

lescent Wally Cleaver voice ("It's become part of the character. But you haven't seen me do Vic Virile yet"), he seems—well—endearing. So what accounted for his evasive action beside the tennis court? Wariness, says Selleck. "Burt talks to everyone," explains Bettye McCartt. "Clint has this invisible shield around him. All Tom's doing is trying to figure out his own way."

When Selleck arrived on the scene in 1980 with *Magnum, P.I.*, after a dozen or so years as an actor known more for his Salem ads and Chaz commercials than for his string of unsold pilots and minor movie roles, it seemed to a delighted press and public as if someone had dipped into a market-research bag and emerged with the essential qualities for the 1980s' ideal man: 6-feet-4, 200 pounds, strong-jawed—yet vulnerable.

But Selleck, whose face adorns millions of posters, not to mention *Magnum* night-shirts ("Spend the night with . . . prime time's sexiest private eye," burbles an ad), seems a little puzzled at being turned into a sex object. And he insists that the raunchy notes he receives from female fans are "not always that flattering. There's a lot of innuendo. Which is fine. But what do you do about it? They're in love with this guy up on TV. But *he* doesn't go to the bathroom. And *he* doesn't wake up in the morning with bloodshot eyes."

"That's one of the things he's learned to use," says Bettye McCartt of her client's diffidence about his appearance. "It's one of the reasons men like him."

For Selleck, who just a few years ago was knocking on producers' doors begging for a job, work has become all-pervading. "I hate that," he says. "I don't believe in eating and sleeping and working. People say, 'He's consumed by his career.' Well, I'm not so sure his career didn't consume him."

But in a business littered with the bodies of once "hot" stars, he has to take advantage of the moment. And how to take advantage of it is what seems to be bothering Selleck, who is aware of careers ruined by overexposure, or by the public's turning on the heroes they've

helped to create if those heroes become full of themselves or start to appear ungrateful. Griping about loss of privacy from tourists who follow him on location and gather outside his home, Selleck quips: "Tell 'em I live on Maui. Tell 'em I drive a Corvette." But then he takes it back. His appeal is based just as much on the nice guy behind the nice-guy image as it is on his handsome, rumped charm as an actor. So he has to keep on being nice even when he doesn't feel like it. "It seems so predictable," he says. "Actor gets series. Actor gets successful. Actor starts talking about the misery of no private life. And most anybody out there would like to know what it feels like."

"It's a double-edged sword," says *Magnum's* executive producer, Don Bellisario. "All actors want it or they wouldn't be actors. But I've seen him over the years get more harassed by public pressure."

Everyone else on the *Magnum* set will step forward to say his or her piece about how decent and upstanding and hard-working Tom is. How he takes on everyone's problems—cast and crew alike—puts on a happy face, but carries the problems home with him. He cares about *Magnum* scripts and disdains violence, they say. He's the actor who eats with the crew and is just one of the guys. Unlike some stars, who try to control the set, "this guy," says a propman, "he just does his acting."

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But Selleck does more than just that. He takes home a small share of the show's profits—and has a large say in how the show is made. Last fall, he unexpectedly shut down production for one day to fly to Los Angeles for a meeting at Universal Studios. He felt, he explains, that his "input" was being usurped. "Not intentionally, not conspiratorially," but because of distance. He was so worried that the press would think he was becoming temperamental that he turned over his estimated \$50,000 salary for the episode to cover the shutdown cost.

Everyone requests that this not "be blown out of proportion." But everyone →

looks stricken when it is discussed. Gradually a story emerges. Selleck and Bellisario mention Selleck's absence during hiatus meetings—he was filming his movie "High Road to China" in Yugoslavia. Other production-team members mention Selleck's disappointment with scripts and Bellisario's difficulty delegating authority in Hawaii (he's also producing *Tales of the Gold Monkey* in Los Angeles). Time and money have been lost trying to reach Bellisario to make creative decisions. Now a computer link between his office in Los Angeles and the set in Hawaii enables script changes to be instantly relayed. And one of the show's three staff writers is always on hand to consult with Selleck during preproduction.

"Tom's a very strong businessman," says Bettye McCartt, who wonders if it's all right to say that, then decides that it's a compliment. "It was difficult for him to see a day lost to production."

"I didn't say, 'This script is junk and I won't do it,'" says Selleck, who insists Bellisario has always been accessible to him. "There was no war. I said, 'I'm not here for more money. I don't want to get out of the show. And I don't want you turning this into a war between me and Don.' Then we talked about what we could do to make things run more smoothly."

"I think the problem's resolved," says Charles Floyd Johnson, who has replaced Douglas Green as Hawaii producer, "in that Don's going to leave *wherever* he is at any time [if he's needed on *Magnum*]."

A fine warm mist settles on foliage and actors at a jungle location. Mosquitoes nip. Tom Selleck perches on top of a 7-foot ladder hoping it'll fall and he'll get some time off. He's waving a Village Voice think-piece that elevates *Magnum* to the realm of popular culture. Heady, intellectual stuff. Other critics have found Selleck and his costars John Hillerman, Roger Mosley and Larry Manetti irresistible. They haven't been as enthusiastic about the show's plots and dialogue. Selleck is crowing. "He likes us. He thinks we're curing cancer. He likes *me*."

"Everybody seems to feel that Tom's a

much better actor than he gives himself credit for," says Don Bellisario. "But he's getting confidence, I think."

On the way to the lunch truck, Selleck warns crew members: "Watch out, TV GUIDE's in the car." They're passing around a skin magazine. "I don't go for that dirty stuff." Now he's poking fun at his good-guy image, his need to appear stable. He's already mentioned that his favorite magazine is William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review*.

His least favorite this week is the *National Enquirer*. After chronicling the breakup of his marriage to model Jacquelyn Ray—they were divorced this year—the tabloids have found him the perfect subject for their sizzling-romance stories. The *Enquirer* has linked him to Victoria Principal, whom he says he's never met. Another story claims he has been drinking and partying and "dating a bevy of beautiful island girls." "That's just not Tom," says John Hillerman. "He's a very conservative man."

Later, in Los Angeles, Selleck's publicist, Esmé Chandlee, will fume over another publication's linking him to a string of actresses. "It's so *embarrassing*," says Chandlee, who claims that Selleck's only "romance" since *Magnum* has been with Mimi Rogers, one of his co-stars in a TV-movie, "Divorce Wars: A Love Story."

"Contrary to what the tabloids say, I don't get a chance to date that much," says Selleck, looking wounded. He finds women defensive, he says. One told him she didn't want to be "another notch on his bedpost." But he worries about the same thing. "I don't want to be anybody's mascot," he says. "So I don't know about social relationships at the moment. I've kind of gotten to the point where I figure, well, just work hard for a few years."

In February, Selleck announced a lawsuit against the *National Enquirer* asking for more than \$36 million in damages resulting from not only the stories linking him to Principal and partying but a third story that quoted "a close friend" as saying Selleck threatened to kill an artist who drew a poster showing him with hairy chest bared and zipper at half mast. →

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"It's not just a case of depicting him as a bad person," says Selleck's lawyer, Jay Lavly. "It's whether he can tolerate a publication making fiction about him."

"I care because it's a pain in the neck," says Selleck at lunch, staring at his paper plate of soggy food. "If people say, 'Tom, they do that to everybody,' to me that doesn't make it right. I want to learn to handle it. But I don't want it to change my standards, because I think this business can do that to you."

Is Tom Selleck suggesting that even he might be corruptible?

"Power corrupts," he says matter-of-factly. "I think absolute power corrupts absolutely. And I have a lot of power. [The cast and crew of *Magnum*] can't work if I don't show up. But I don't do that. Yet. And if I do it, I hope it would be for a valid reason."

As he speaks, it becomes clear that Selleck is trying to find his own way. "It's very hard to take any action constructively and not do something that isn't basically

a way to get even or self-destruct. There's a tremendous tendency when you get kicked around—or you feel you get kicked around—to try to get even. But getting even doesn't really accomplish much. So I try to sit back."

Who's kicking Selleck around? Is he talking about his long hours? The shut-down? Public pressure?

"Everybody gets kicked around," he says. Then he laughs. "That's in my bad moments," he adds. Then he heads for his motor home to take a nap.

Later that afternoon, the company moves to a Coast Guard station to shoot interiors. Time gets short. A member of the Coast Guard flushes the toilet, ruining a take. Then actress Jean Bruce Scott loses her voice. She regains it and completes the scene perfectly, but blushes afterward. "I was fine until *he* walked in," she says.

Tom Selleck looks at her reassuringly. "Are you still nervous?" he asks. "There's nothing to be nervous about. Just remember—everybody's watching." **END**