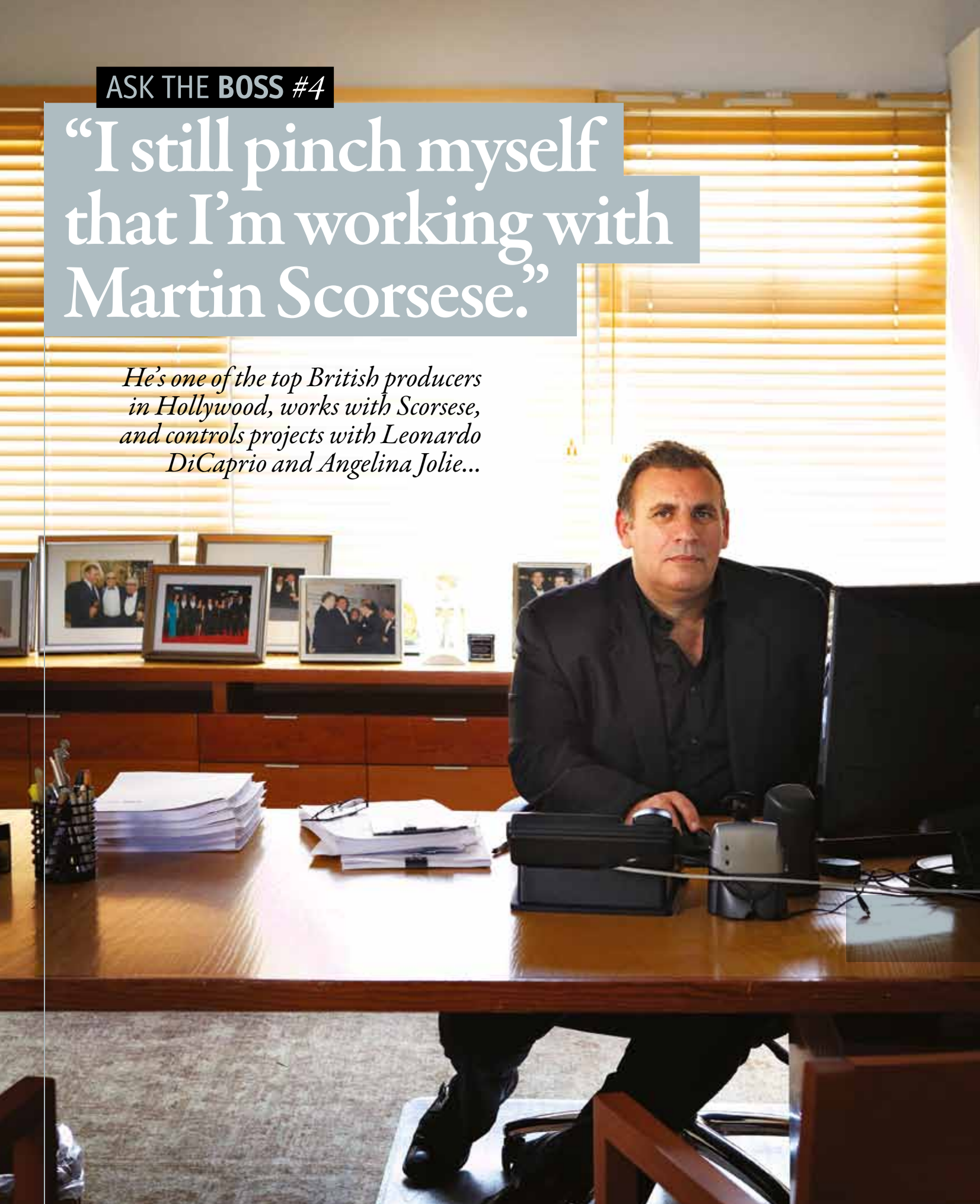


# “I still pinch myself that I’m working with Martin Scorsese.”

*He’s one of the top British producers in Hollywood, works with Scorsese, and controls projects with Leonardo DiCaprio and Angelina Jolie...*



**G**RAHAM KING LOOKS LIKE HE HASN'T SLEPT. PROBABLY BECAUSE HE HASN'T, MUCH... HE CROSSES THE ATLANTIC LIKE YOU CROSS THE STREET, BACK AND FORTH FROM HIS LOS ANGELES BASE TO London, where he is shooting *Hugo Cabret*, his fourth collaboration with Martin Scorsese (their third, *The Departed*, snared both big Oscars). King might look a little grizzled, but he's not lacking in energy. This London-raised, California-living Brit has blitzed Hollywood, forging strong working relationships with everyone from “Marty” to Mel Gibson (*Edge Of Darkness*), Ben Affleck (*The Town*), Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp (*The Tourist* — and several upcoming projects). His company, GK Films, is making its first foray into animation, with the Gore Verbinski-directed comedy *Rango*, while 2011 will also see the release of Depp-starring Hunter S. Thompson adaptation *The Rum Diary*. **EMPIRE** sat down with him at Shepperton Studios, where he spared a generous amount of time away from Scorsese to answer your questions. In person he's a smart, likable, no-BS kind of character. It almost makes you forgive him for being a Chelsea fan.

*How did you go about getting to Hollywood?*  
Edward Gardiner, via email  
I think sometimes one gets lucky in life, and other times you have to push a door open.

My mother moved out there and she kept pushing me to go out to California (back in the early 1980s it was pretty depressing being over in the UK). Thankfully, I took her advice. I was 17 back then. I got a student visa and landed a temp job at 20th Century Fox, which was supposed to be for three weeks during the summer. I met this guy from North London and he took me under his wing. I ended up staying over there six-and-a-half years. I learnt the business: distribution, production. That's how I got started.

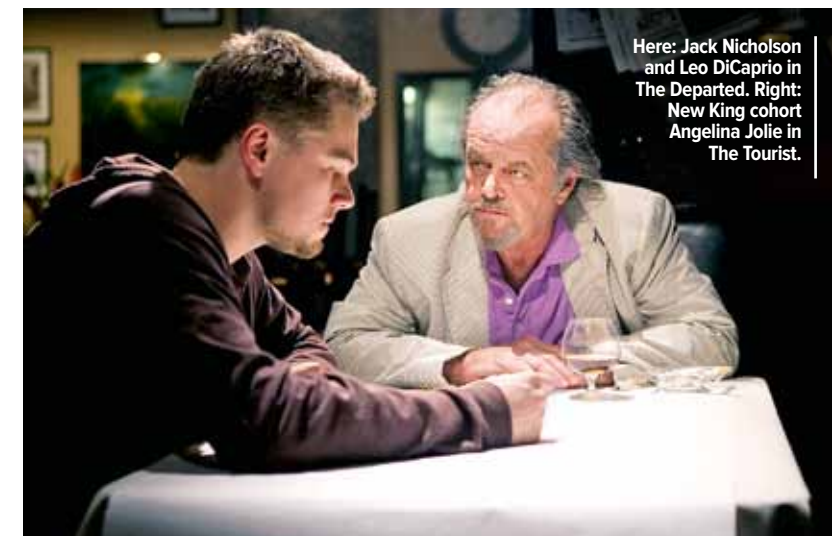
*What advice would you give to other aspiring British filmmakers who long to make it over in America?*

Mal Cambell, via email  
Persevere. Whether you're a director, producer, or you want to be an actor. Get out there and really bang on doors. It truly can happen if you work hard at it. And it does take luck. I remember sitting in a bar one night in LA and I was talking to this guy from Wales: it was Catherine Zeta-Jones' brother. Four months later, Catherine and I were doing *Traffic* together and she had a little production deal with my company. It just happens.

*What do you miss about England?*

Rory George, Durham  
I don't really miss much because I'm here so much. I'm here with *Hugo Cabret* and next year I'm making two movies here: *Dark Shadows*, with Tim Burton, and hopefully the Freddie Mercury story, which I'm really excited about, with Sacha Baron Cohen playing Freddie.

*What is your opinion on the state of the British film industry? Do you think the Film*



Here: Jack Nicholson and Leo DiCaprio in *The Departed*. Right: New King cohort Angelina Jolie in *The Tourist*.

*Council closing will make any difference?*

Dave C, via email  
Although I'm English I'm producing in Hollywood, so I'm seeing it in a different light. I don't think the Film Council is going to have an effect on the industry here, as far as coming in to shoot in the UK — it's all about the [tax] rebate and the crew. We do have the best crews in the world. One day my goal is to move back to the UK and work in the British film industry because I feel we have the best crews, the best writers, the best actors, the best directors, but they all live in Hollywood. Why do they live in Hollywood?

at some point in his career, to do a movie that's more of a family adventure film. And this just seemed written for Martin Scorsese to direct. It's not just a kids' movie — it's a tribute to cinema. There's no-one in this world who cares for film like Martin Scorsese.

*Mel Gibson is a fine actor/director whose talent has been overshadowed by his personal life. Would you work with him again?*

Noelle, via email  
Absolutely: 100 per cent. I think he's one of the most talented actors and directors we have. In

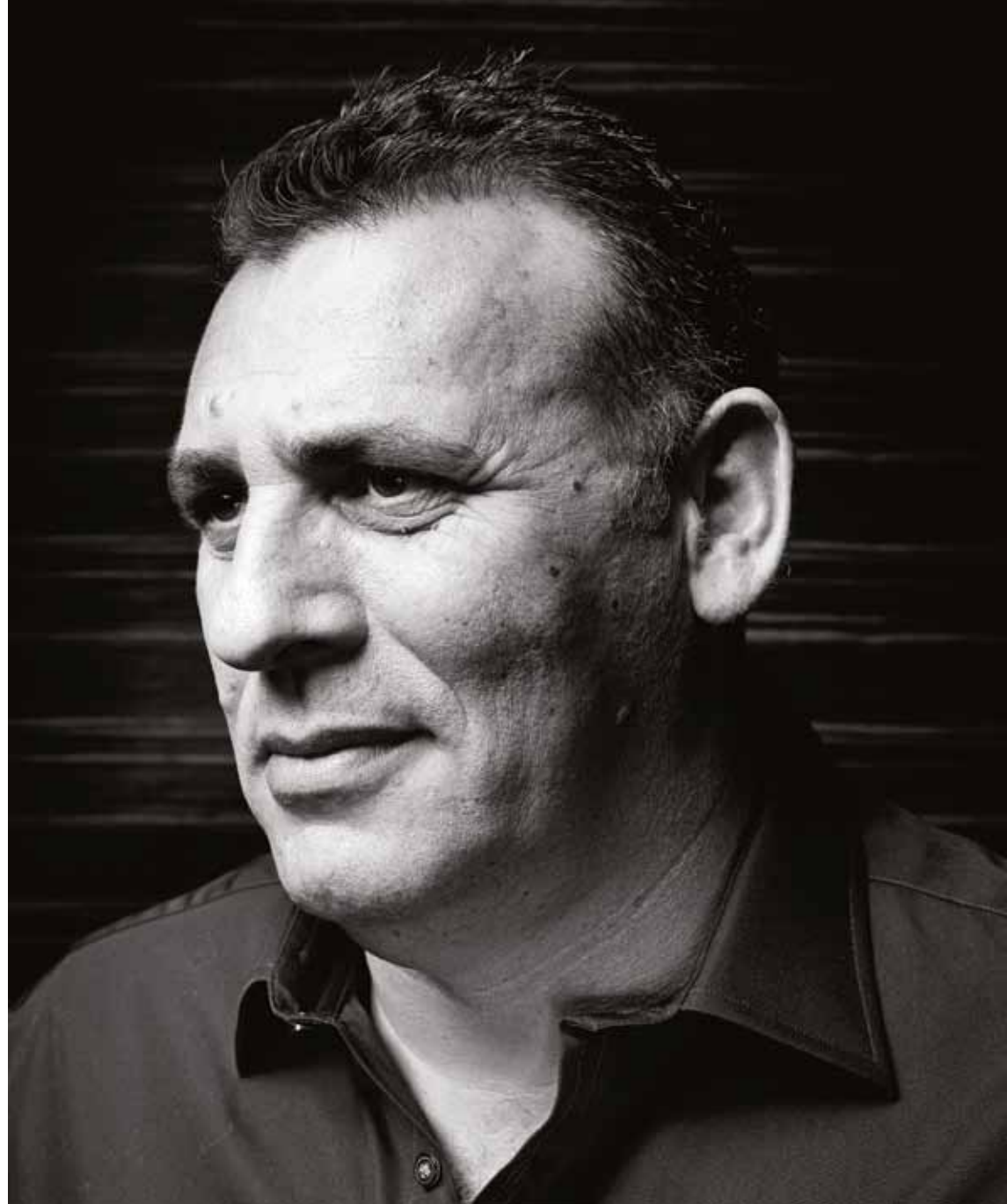
fact, if we're talking about my favourite movies in the last five years: *Apocalypse* is definitely up there. Definitely. That to me is like *GoodFellas* — not genre-wise, but the fact I've seen that movie about 50 times. I think Mel is tremendously gifted. Quite honestly I don't care about his personal life. I care about him as a person. He's a really talented guy. I'd work with him in a second.

*You're going into distribution with your company FilmDistrict. Is that about money or control or both?*

Charlie Thomas, *Stoke-On-Trent Power!* (Laughs) No: I think it's a bit of both. I think there's a real opportunity in the US right now for a new company to start up with the kind of people I've brought in around me: Peter Schlessel and Bob Berney. They are really smart at what they do. Whenever I get into business with someone, whether it's Johnny Depp, Martin Scorsese or Peter and Bob, it's about the chemistry. If you don't have the chemistry it's like being in a bad relationship — it's never gonna work. For me it's an avenue of controlling the movies I make right through to the consumer. Because no matter what I do now on *The Tourist* or *The Town* or *The Aviator*, you're always in the hands of the studio. And I love the studios, but to be able to control from the start right through to the end — that's the ultimate goal. Then there is only me to blame.

*You're one of the few 'name' producers. Do you think producers are underrated?*

Rachel, Fulham  
I'm not sure if producers are underrated. I do feel they're very low down on the totem pole. It's a really tough job, producing a feature film, no matter what the budget level is, because you're



Clockwise from top left: Catherine Zeta-Jones in *Traffic*, DiCaprio in *The Aviator* and Ben Affleck in 2010's *The Town*.

*You are producing Angelina Jolie's debut as writer/director — what is it about? And what makes you think she can pull it off?*

Stephan Durkin, Newton Abbott  
Well she *has* pulled it off. We just wrapped. She's amazing. I'm gonna let her tell the world what it's about. It's currently untitled. All I can say is she called me up one day and said, "I'm not asking you to get involved or help finance but I've written something I wanna direct, would you read it?" I read it and I loved it. Loved it, loved it. Boy, does she know what she's doing. I went to the set a few weeks ago and she's in total command. You would never believe she was a first-time film director. She's got Brad doing photos on set, as the unit photographer. Her kids are there. I met her through *The Tourist*. My plan is now to do with Angie what I did with Leo and Marty and Johnny and work with her over and over again, if I can. She's really, really smart.

*Do you prefer working with people you are familiar with, or is it just chance that they seem to pitch ideas you're interested in?*

Max Funcheon-Dinnen, via email  
I think it's a bit of both. Hollywood is a town based on relationships and trust. Like I said before, there's got to be chemistry. Leo, Johnny and all these guys — I love the way they work. Although they're big movie stars they're really down-to-earth people. I couldn't work with them if they weren't. There are people in Hollywood I couldn't work with, obviously I'm not going to name them... But these guys, it's in their blood. We can sit down and look each other in the eye and be honest. Which is what it's all about with me: about being upfront and honest. So, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. With these guys it's amazing to work with them over and over again. I didn't really realise it until someone said to me, "You know you're doing five movies with Johnny Depp in the next two years?" It is a job to me.

“Leo, Johnny, all these guys — I love the way they work.

With these people, it really is in their blood.”

dealing with so many different aspects of the film. Putting out fires — and there's so many fires to put out. You're really the guy driving the process of filmmaking, then when the film comes out it's the actors, the studios and the directors that get all the kudos. I'm not saying I'd like it any other way. I've been lucky enough to be on that stage and pick up that big award. I felt like I didn't deserve it, being just a producer. All I can say is, thank God Martin Scorsese won that night! Because for me it's all about the director: always. I think if I could recreate history, Best Picture would go to producer and director — I think that's how



King today (above), and here with his Oscar for *The Departed*: “Thank God Martin Scorsese won that night too.”

it should be. For a producer to win an award and the director not, for the same movie, I think it's the worst. I had that situation on *The Aviator*. The BAFTA and the Golden Globe, I won and Marty didn't. And I will go on record to say Martin Scorsese has made my career. There's no question about it. What he's taught me and what he brings me... That means so much. And, of course, every actor wants to be in a Scorsese film. It's the easiest thing for a producer to do, cast a Martin Scorsese film. And so what he's done to help me without even knowing, by just working with him, is incredible. I owe everything to this man. He's still, for me, the greatest director that ever lived. I still pinch myself that I'm working with him.

*On a scale of one to ten, how mad was Jack Nicholson on The Departed?*

Jon Dale, Bournemouth  
Mad? I don't know if he's mad. He's a bloody genius. His character was mad, so he plays his character. He's one of these guys that loves to get his teeth into his character. He's as smart as they come and... he's Jack! It was very surreal for me being on set, sitting next to Scorsese and watching Nicholson — with Matt Damon and Leo DiCaprio. It doesn't get any better than that. It's one of the hardest movies I've had to produce. Jack was Jack. He is the king. There's not much you can say about him. I loved working with him and for him to be the one to hand me the Oscar that night... It was a very surreal moment.

*I recently saw The Town, which was excellent. Will you be working with Ben Affleck again, particularly with him directing?*

Jake Bailey, via email  
I'd love to. I was really, really impressed by him. I was pretty vocal about him not playing the role as well as directing, because of the size of the movie. But he knew exactly what he wanted. I watched the first cut and I said, "You found the right director." His performance is amazing. Also, Sue Kroll of Warner did an amazing job — one of the best jobs I've seen anyone do — of positioning and marketing that movie. She's one of the best. I'm really proud of that film and really proud of Ben. What a job.

I get up; I go to work. I work 19 hours a day. I don't look at that side of it. Well, very rarely. It's like when you get a surreal moment, like... I'm going to Buckingham Palace tomorrow. I'm lucky enough to get the OBE. And it's a really weird thing. It's like an out-of-body experience. I don't think I deserve or warrant one for making movies. I don't look at it that way. It is work. We roll our sleeves up: it's bloody hard work making a movie. No matter what part of the movie. It's long hours, it's tedious and it's not glamorous being on the set. You're making a movie. You're working. So it's great that we all come together that way.

**Rango is out on March 4 and will be reviewed in the next issue.**

To pose your questions to other studio bosses, be sure to check out [empireonline.com](http://empireonline.com)