

Oh, George!

George Clooney is everywhere this month: he provides the voice of the title character in the animated screen adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, he's getting early Oscar buzz for his role as a commitment-phobic frequent flyer in *Up In The Air* and he is soon to be seen playing a military man who believes in psychic powers to fight wars in the wonderfully silly *The Men Who Stare At Goats*, released on March 4 in Australia.

Yet all that goes out the window when he shows up for our chat in a hotel in Toronto, Canada, with his right hand tightly wrapped in bandages. He garners concern – as well as wobbly knees – when he leans in for a friendly kiss on the cheek and a hug, wincing when his hand is caught in the middle.

"I wish I could tell you that Brad Pitt punched me, but the truth is more boring," 48-year-old George says, chuckling, looking fresh and casual in a long-sleeved white T-shirt over jeans. "I just slammed it in a car door – well, a minivan door – at my place in Italy."

Hollywood's most eligible bachelor is driving a minivan? Have no fear – the Oscar-winning actor, producer, director and all-round nice guy has not inherited or adopted a gaggle of kids. He just operates an open-door policy at his villa on Italy's Lake Como when it comes to friends dropping in. The only difference between George and the rest of us is that his friends include people such as Al Gore, Matt Damon, Robert De Niro and the late news anchor, Walter Cronkite.

So why don't we hate him? After 15 years of interviewing the actor, I still can't find a reason. >>>

*He's smart, he's funny
... and he's still single!
George Clooney reveals
all about life, past loves
and his latest pranks,
as he chats to JENNY
COONEY CARILLO.*



SAM JONES (P) SYNDICATION/HEADPRESS.

FIVE REASONS GEORGE MAKES US SWOON

1 He's available. Not only is the once-married playboy popular with women, he is just as likely to be dating an ordinary girl (waitress Sarah Larson and French law student Céline Balitran) as he is an actress (Kelly Preston, before John Travolta), or an Italian TV hostess (his current beau, Elisabetta Canalis). He brags that his longest relationship was with his pet pot-bellied pig Max, who lived with George for 18 years before he died in 2006.

2 He's funny. During the *Ocean's* movies, George's practical jokes were legendary, with his victims including Matt Damon, Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts. Once, he bought an ugly painting at a garage sale and gave it to one of his closest friends as a Christmas gift, saying he painted it himself. Only after several years of watching it hang on his friend's wall did George finally confess.

3 He's generous. He hosts friends and family at his Italian villa and often flies his not-so-rich friends to visit him on location, too. He'd hate you to know it, but when one of George's long-time assistants became chronically ill, he left her permanently on the payroll to take care of her. He's also generous when it comes to charitable donations and putting his name to work, addressing many issues facing the world today through events such as Rock For Darfur and organisations such as Cinema For Peace, Make Poverty History, United Way and The ONE Campaign.

4 He's smart. George has campaigned for Al Gore and Barack Obama, is a United Nations Messenger of Peace and an eloquent spokesperson on issues concerning the genocide in Darfur and democracy in Africa. Yet he won't run for office because, as he has said in other interviews, "I've slept with too many women and taken too many drugs!"

5 He's handsome. His hair may be going grey, but his sexy brown eyes would melt the Titanic iceberg with one dazzling smile and have helped him become one of only two people (the other was his friend, Brad Pitt) to be given *People* magazine's Sexiest Man Alive title twice – once in 1997 and then 2006.

"Part of my survival over the past 15 years or so, since ER came out, is that I still stand in line."

You're in a drama, a comedy and an animated film that are all out around the same time.

Are you sick of me yet?

Never! But talk about those choices and the different challenges.

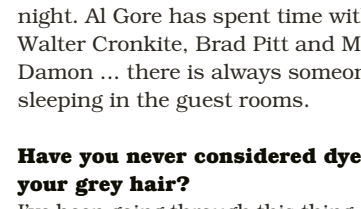
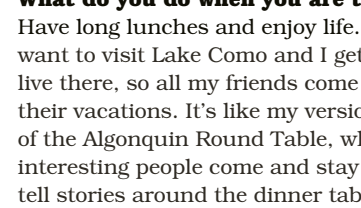
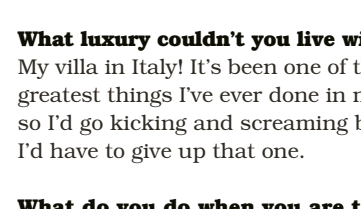
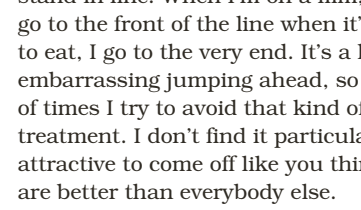
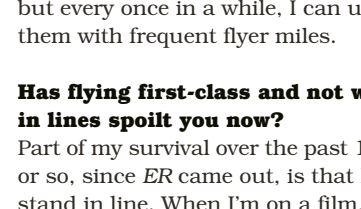
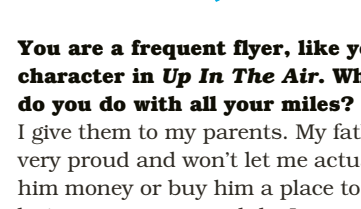
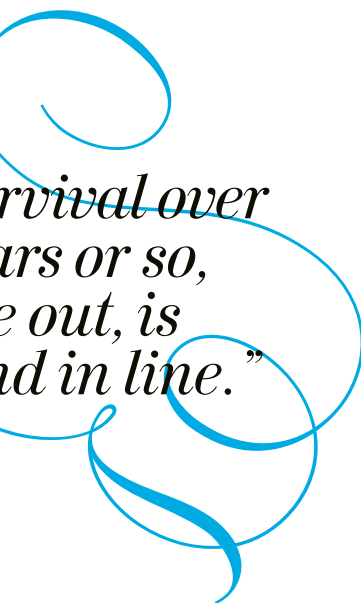
When actors are acting, your job is to do what the character requires, whatever the genre. Sometimes, like in *Up In The Air*, you understand the character can be close to home and that because of my whole persona, the audience is going to take that baggage on as well. Sometimes, like in *Men Who Stare At Goats*, I played it pretty straight and that's where the comedy comes from. With *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, I hadn't done an animated film before, but the voice work was taped outside, rolling around fields and in a barn and on a tin roof, so it was like being a kid, which is what we do as actors in general anyway.

Do you feel foxy or fantastic yourself?

I feel more like a goat now than a fox! [laughs] Literally, I was at dinner last night and I fell asleep – I nodded off at the table! It's Bill Murray who steals that movie and in *Men Who Stare At Goats*, it was Jeff Bridges and a goat! But I have three films out and all of them I can sit back and go, "I don't have anything to be embarrassed about", and that's rare.

Meryl Streep has said that the only way she could be your love interest is in animation.

The best thing about this movie is that because Meryl is involved, the calibre of the film immediately shoots up. It's fun to have her play Mrs. Fox to my Mr. Fox and, sadly, it's true that I don't often get to work with people like her.



I've been going through this thing of >>>

FRANK W. OCKENFELS 3/CPI-SYNDICATION/HEADPRESS.

GEORGE'S GIRLS

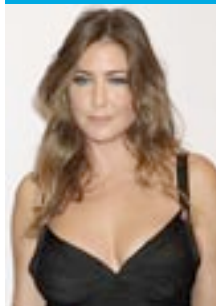
It appears the star is once bitten, twice shy in marriage, but his girlfriends must live in hope!



TALIA BALSAM, 50, married George in Las Vegas in 1989. The couple divorced in 1993. Talia is currently married to *Mad Men* star John Slattery (who plays Roger Sterling), with whom she has a child.



RENÉE ZELLWEGER George and Renée, 40, dated in 2000 soon after she split from Jim Carrey. The couple were said to have briefly renewed their relationship after co-starring in 2008's *Leatherheads*.



LISA SNOWDON, 38, British model and TV presenter, dated George on and off for five years, finally saying enough is enough in 2005. Friends say the brunette beauty tired of waiting for George to propose.



SARAH LARSON, 31, met George when she was working as a cocktail waitress in Las Vegas, embarking on an almost 12-month relationship, which saw her walk the red carpet by his side at the 2008 Oscars.



ELISABETTA CANALIS, 31, Italian model, actress and TV presenter. George recently went public with the romance at the Venice Film Festival while promoting his latest film, *Men Who Stare At Goats*.



For more photos of George visit www.aww.com.au

people thinking I was about 60 for such a long time that I'm kind of comfortable with getting older. But there were a couple of scenes, when I watched these movies, and thought, "Maybe I better start wearing make-up!"

I'm also complaining a lot about "my back hurts", "my elbow hurts", "my shoulder hurts" and it's like we're all plugging holes in the dyke trying to keep ourselves in one piece, but at least we're sitting around laughing about it.

Were you worried audiences would think you were playing yourself in *Up In The Air* because your character is so afraid of commitment?

I'm a grown-up and I knew the questions about my relationship choices would come up out of this film, and I'm well aware of the things that people will see as shortcomings in my life, but I'm unapologetic about them. I live my life the way I have and hope it works out.

Aren't you lonely sometimes?

I've been in some relationships where I have felt terribly alone. It doesn't always mean just because you're with someone that you're happy and complete. I don't think my experience is that different from anybody else's, but it's just amplified a little more in the world of the paparazzi and the tabloids.

You're famous for your pranks. What was the last one you pulled?

Matt Damon stayed at my house over the summer with his family. He'd put on a ton of weight to film *The Informant* and was getting rid of that weight, working out in the gym twice a day and watching what he eats, which is hard to do in Italy! I had the woman who does my clothes take in his pants an eighth-of-an-inch every day, so he would come home and put on his pants, and say, "I don't understand!" I didn't tell him about it the whole time he was there, but now he knows. I'm working on one for Brad Pitt, which I'll fill you in on when it comes off, but he got me last, so something evil has to be done.

You have always been very politically outspoken. Would you ever consider running for office?

No. Wouldn't it be better if I continued to just do the things that I think would help, as opposed to what Arnold [Schwarzenegger] is doing? He's a smart guy, talented and knows what he is doing. I disagree with him politically, in general, but he knows what he is doing and he's in hell in California. I think he'd probably like to be on the set of *Terminator* if he could choose, so I'm able to stand on the outside of the issues I care about and not straddle the line, which is an easier position to be in. ■

SAM JONES/CPI+SYNDICATION/HEADPRESS.GETTY IMAGES.