

Hey, Tom Arnold might not be so bad

'True Lies' shows Roseanne's ex is more than a parasite

By John Anderson
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NEW YORK — Say, "I'm looking for Tom Arnold," and someone's bound to ask you why. So we bypass the front desk of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, navigate its fashionably refrigerated corridors and head straight for what we think is Arnold's room. We knock. David Cassidy answers the door.

"You're David Cassidy," we say.

"Yes, I am," he says. "But I'm in the middle of a phone interview . . ."

"We were looking for Tom Arnold," we say.

"Why?" he asks.

We explain. But then we stop. We listen. There are voices.

"That's him!" Cassidy says, pointing to the room across the hall. "Watch this."

Cassidy knocks, the door swings open, and there, in a makeup chair, sits the shirtless Tom Arnold. A famous tattoo peeks over the backrest.

"David! Come on in!"

"Can't, Tom! I'm doing an interview. And yours is here right now."

"Be with you in a minute, buddy," Arnold tells his beloved press, just before the door swings closed. Cassidy retreats. The hallway, drained of its brief frisson, assumes an eerie silence.

Close encounters of the third-rate? Tom Arnold staring into the abyss? Cassidy, one-time gland-throb, had a white-hot TV career a few millennia ago. Now, he's pushing his autobiography, about life as a Partridge. Arnold, 38, who's been a ubiquitous media presence ever since he and "future ex-wife" Roseanne became the couple most likely to offend, might look at Cassidy and see the future. And Cassidy was popular.

But when you look at Tom Arnold's career, it's clear he's doing it all in reverse:

Create a public image that's basically parasitic, marry the world's most successful and abrasive television star, impose yourself on her show as a writer and producer, get matching tattoos, double-moon a World Series crowd and propose a three-way marriage with Kim Silva, your 24-year-old female assistant. At this point, when your wife files for divorce — twice — the public says, "Yesss!!"

You become Letterman fodder, and your own sitcom — your second — does a swan dive. And it's already so far down the Nielsen chart, there isn't any splash.

Thanks, Arnie

By the time your name appears among the credits for your biggest project ever — the Arnold Schwarzenegger-Jamie Lee Curtis blockbuster *True Lies* — the crowd at the screening boos.

What happens next? You turn out to be really funny. Self-deprecatingly funny. The lone human comedy in a high-tech cartoon. Your character, Gig, the very divorced and goofy partner to Schwarzenegger's bottled-in-Bond Harry Tasker, turns out to be a delightful foil to Arnold's dour Weltanschauung. Every review mentions your performance because no one can believe it. Hey, did you see Tom Arnold? Yeah, maybe he's not such a bad guy after all. . . .

"It's weird," Arnold says when he finally sits down to talk, referring to *True Lies*, not Cassidy ("Rosie had David Cassidy sheets," he confides, "which kinda dates him, huh?").

But back to our movie.

"Y'know it couldn't have come at a better time (the phones start ringing; he goes around the room unplugging them). Timing is everything. Yeah, there's a lot of changes in my personal life and my professional life. I'm getting divorced, I'm going to be doing movies, and I'm not going to be doing television."

Not prime-time television, perhaps. But later that day, he will turn Sue Simmons upside down on New York's *Live at Five*. And as part of his whirlwind promotion of *True Lies*, he's served his time on the daily *Regis and Kathie Lee* therapy session that very morning.

"It was fun, it went pretty smooth," says Arnold, dressed in a flannel shirt, jeans and a post-shower coif. "I wring my hands a lot, though. I was told later I wringed my hands a lot. See, I have nervous tics. Y'know, like my leg's shaking now?"

Arnold is twitchy, distracted, pleased with the response to his *True Lies* performance but perhaps a little bit unnerved at being out there on his

own. His fame, up to now, has been about his Moe Howard-as-Svengali role in the Roseanne psychodrama. But now he has to deal with bona fide credibility. He's coping.

'This is what I like'

"A lot of times when I was getting slammed — and I got slammed right up until this movie came out, with people saying, 'Oh, his 15 minutes are done, he's got no talent, he's done, he's the least talented person in show business, he ought to go back to Iowa and work in a packing plant' — that hurt," Arnold said. "It's hard not to read those things and not feel bad."

"But I just kept saying to myself, 'This is what I like doing, and I'm gonna do it as well as I can, and

ignore that stuff.' 'Cause you gotta ignore it. I had so much against me, so much grief, that having this movie and this performance was perfect. You couldn't write it any better. And now it's something nobody can take away from me. I'm happy, I did it, and whatever happens now is a bonus."

Regarding Roseanne, Arnold said he couldn't discuss the various accusations that have flown, the \$100,000 a month in alimony he reportedly is seeking or anything else in his pending case.

"I'm not going to be able to comment on anything about the divorce," he said. "I will say that, as far as my future ex-wife goes, I loved her, and I'm sorry it didn't work out."