

Interview: British Cult Star Simon Pegg is Fish Out of Water in ‘How to Lose Friends & Alienate People’

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on October 3, 2008 - 2:14am

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CHICAGO – Simon Pegg (the British cult hero of “Shaun of the Dead” and “Hot Fuzz”) was welcomed to a Chicago hotel where his press event was taking place with personalized water bottles that sported his face.

The star of the new film “How to Lose Friends & Alienate People” cradled the customized gift as if it were an Oscar trophy. He delightedly mocked the honor. It is good to be the king.

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed him from there in a free-wheeling forum about his rise to stardom, his coming to America and why everyone wants to join the Simon Pegg cult.



Megan Fox in “How to Lose Friends & Alienate People”.

Photo credit: MGM

“How to Lose Friends & Alienate People” is based on a memoir by British journalist Toby Young. It’s about his experiences coming to New York City to write for *Vanity Fair* magazine and legendary editor Graydon Carter. Pegg plays a fictionalized version of the author named Sidney Young while Jeff Bridges plays Carter as Clayton Harding.

“Toby Young – unlike the character – is fine. He’s not a complete idiot,” Pegg said.

“He just has a work ethic that doesn’t care what other people think. He employs that and makes a lot of enemies by being tenacious. Toby couldn’t understand Graydon Carter who had started *Spy* magazine. He was known for working for *Vanity Fair*, which was a magazine that

celebrates what he was satirizing in *Spy*.”

Sidney is a fish out of water in America. He takes his British tabloid style to the extreme in trying to adapt to the more languid and worshipful American celebrity press scene. He disappoints Clayton, angers his co-worker, Alison (Kirsten Dunst), and slobbers over a starlet (Megan Fox) that the magazine is pursuing.



“How to Lose Friends & Alienate People” star Simon Pegg (left) in Chicago on Aug. 27, 2008 with Patrick McDonald.

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

“Megan is mind-bogglingly beautiful. When she walks into a room, you almost have to look away,” Pegg said with a laugh.

He quickly added: “But she is really capable. The telling night was the pool scene where her character, Sophie, seems more than her two-dimensional character. When [director Robert Weide] called ‘cut’ during that scene, there was a palpable sense among the crew that she really can act.”

Pegg’s fish-out-of-water performance in the film is somewhat similar to his first experiences in America and especially with doing publicity for “Shaun of the Dead”.

When I was doing the extensive publicity tour for ‘Shaun of the Dead,’” Pegg said, “I suddenly realized I am a foreigner. [Because] we speak the same language, I think sometimes we think we’re from the same place. As you go deeper in the heartland, you realize we’re not. It’s fascinating.”



Megan Fox in “How to Lose Friends & Alienate People”.

Photo credit: MGM

Pegg also described the conflict between his goofy Sidney character and the more complex Clayton Harding character as played by Jeff Bridges.

“In the film, Clayton always has a matchbook. That matchbook represents Sidney,” Pegg related. “He expects Sidney to be the fired-up guy he was and still wants to be. But Sidney isn’t that guy. Sidney’s just an idiot.”

Pegg is a well-liked and sought-after actor mostly because of his very popular “Shaun of the Dead” and “Hot Fuzz” films. The man himself commented on the cult of Simon Pegg.

“I’m trying to get as many followers as possible,” he said mockingly. “Seriously, what’s great is that you realize the film industry now is populated with film fans and people who appreciate the medium. I didn’t know what to quite make of it. I’m very pleased I’ve done something that has engendered that type of reaction.”

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It was this kind of admiration that propelled Pegg into another plum par: the role of Scotty in the upcoming Enterprise prequel “Star Trek” from director J.J. Abrams.

“I am a fan of the first ‘Star Trek,’ but I specifically stayed away from trying to do James Doohan (the original Scotty),” Pegg said. “We were all trying to be those characters and not the actors. So I concentrated on playing Montgomery Scott. ‘Star Trek’ is about the story.”

When asked about “Shaun of the Dead” and Pegg’s relationship to the original “zombie master” (George Romero), the question was asked: “Are you and Romero part of a secret government advisory committee in case of the uprising of the undead?”

“Yes. We are,” Pegg deadpanned. “I can’t say anything more. It’s all about getting people used to the idea so we all know what to do.”

“How to Lose Friends & Alienate People,” which opened on Oct. 3, 2008, features Simon Pegg, Megan Fox, Jeff Bridges, Kirsten Dunst, Gillian Anderson, Thandie Newton and Max Minghella.



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 3:52pm):
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