

Interview: Oscar Winner Timothy Hutton, Gina Bellman on TNT's New 'Leverage' Series

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CHICAGO – After hearing [comical interpretations](#) [19] of leverage from HollywoodChicago.com readers – including “taking someone’s pet hostage,” “having goons, paying them well and feeding them well” and a “push-up bra” – Academy Award-winning actor Timothy Hutton jumped into his “Leverage” character and said it’s just one matter-of-fact word: “power”.



Academy Award-winning actor Timothy Hutton is photographed in Chicago on Dec. 2, 2008 in this exclusive HollywoodChicago.com portrait for the TV series "Leverage," which premiered on TNT on Dec. 7, 2008.

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"I say at the end of the first episode: 'You've just had this terrible thing happen to you. You're going through a hard time. But don't worry. We're here. *We provide leverage*,' a mellow Hutton said in a Chicago interview with HollywoodChicago.com critic Adam Fendelman about the new TNT series. "In our show, leverage can mean a lot of things, but really it comes down to power."

Hutton added with more specificity: "It's the strategic application of power to gain a favorable result. That could go right in Webster's Dictionary."

But does Hutton – who has made a career out of supporting roles and won such an Oscar for 1980's "Ordinary People" from director Robert Redford – have the star power to lead a TV series in the way Kyra Sedgwick is *the* closer in TV's "The Closer"? That's the bet by series directors Dean Devlin and Jonathan Frakes (who played William T. Riker in "Star Trek: The Next Generation").

Hutton himself doesn't think he was necessarily the one man for the job, though, since the inception of the series. He feels he evolved into the role over time.



The "Leverage" team from left to right:

Aldis Hodge, Beth Riesgraf, Timothy Hutton, Gina Bellman and Christian Kane.

Photo credit: TNT

"As time went on, we (referring to himself and "Leverage" star Gina Bellman) eventually fit. I don't know that either one of us was the immediate likely person," Hutton said. "I am happy they asked us because it's a really great script. Once this team comes together, we get to do so many different things to carry out the con or sting operation. That's very appealing to all of us."

All the while, Hutton's Nathan Ford character is experiencing his own character evolution and inner conflict. He initially disowns the concept of being a criminal – like his "Ocean's Eleven"-like teammates – and views himself in a very different light from the rest.

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"My character bristles at [the concept of being a thief] because he's working with people he investigated, arrested or tracked. [Gina Bellman's character] even shoots me with a pistol," Hutton said. "Is it fun being a thief? My character feels: 'There's me and then there's you guys. We're doing this for the greater good, but don't lump me in with you.' As the season goes on, though, he more and more overtly enjoys part of what they do."

While every episode is predictably just another con job, Bellman said in the HollywoodChicago.com interview that the series holds audience interest through the diversity of each journey and the relationships between "The A-Team"-like criminals.



Actress Gina Bellman is photographed in Chicago on Dec. 2, 2008 in this exclusive HollywoodChicago.com portrait for the TV series "Leverage," which premiered on TNT on Dec. 7, 2008.

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"While the show is a self-contained story in every episode, it is about the relationships of these characters and their journey. For the four of us – the criminals – we've always walked alone. We're are very skilled at our expert fields. We all have different reasons for being a thief," Bellman said.

She added: "My character is very aesthetic. She's into the paintings and sculptures. Beth Riesgraf's character is an orphan. She's looking for financial security and a high. But what becomes evident over the series is they've never belonged. They've always been outsiders. They've never been in a group or depended on anyone. For us, it's a period of taming and coming together."



Gina Bellman (left) and Beth Riesgraf in TNT's "Leverage".
Photo credit: TNT

Bellman continued: "As for Tim's character, he's been the straight guy with responsibilities and a strong moral code. Then he gets to explore all the bells and whistles we've been enjoying for the past 10 years. Over the series, you'll see a lot of character development. We're pretty satisfied with that by the end of the series."

Bellman's character is introduced in the first "Leverage" episode, which is called "The Nigerian Job," as a dichotomy who's a character within a character. One's a terrible actress – a live-theatre version who "isn't really on her stage" – and another is one of the best in the world, according to Hutton's character, when she's in criminal mode.

"It's fun for me because I come from a comedic background. I get to marry all the comedic stuff I'm comfortable with to more challenging stuff for me, which is the relationship and drama stuff," Bellman said. "But it is very intimidating being a bad actress in front of contemporaries. You have to go out on that diving board, jump off and leave your ego at the door."

Bellman added: "Our producer and creator believe all these characters are a force to be reckoned with on their own, but as a team, they could provide a service – if it really existed today – people would be queuing up for."

As for how Hutton captured his Hollywood leverage and got to where he's at today, he describes his acting inception from the ninth grade as one that hadn't crossed his mind any time prior.

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"I was in the theatre department in school [only] because I had to take some elective classes. My sister was in theatre and she seemed to be enjoying it. Theatre was right next to the music department. I was a drummer and piano player. Theatre just seemed natural. But when I was in high school, I had no interest in pursuing it as a career. It was just a class to take," Hutton said.

Bellman then interjected: "Hot girls, too." Hutton responded with some of Bellman's energy: "Absolutely. Everyone always says that, but it's true." This interviewer then interjected: "Good food, too." Hutton concurred.

He continued about his career evolution: "I got asked to do a play that an agent was at and the agent recommended me for a TV movie. The TV movie paid a few thousand dollars. I had no money. It was fantastic and fun. But even after filming 'Ordinary People,' I wasn't convinced that this was what I was going to be doing. I never watched movies when I was young."

By contrast, Bellman started in the business young.



Christian Kane (center) in TNT's "Leverage".

Photo credit: TNT

"I was a teenage actor, but for me, it was pure escapism. I didn't really examine the idea of being an actor until much later," Bellman said. "I was raised in New Zealand and got bullied when I came to England for having a foreign accent. I went to elocution lessons and then drama lessons. I grew up in wide-open spaces in New Zealand, and when I moved to England, I lived in the suburbs and felt very trapped and caged."

She added: "Acting for me was all about joining the circus and getting away. I really wanted to join the circus, travel, see the world and get away from the suburbs. That was my motivation. My parents weren't initially very supportive."

As for the show's timing and how it'll compete with the sea of TV while scoring for itself a second season, Bellman pegs the allure as real-world therapy and topics that hit home.

"It's perfectly suited to what's going on right now. Some of the episodes are very domestic. They're dealing with issues people can relate to and may have been personally affected by such as losing their home, health insurance claims or the one that touched me very much was about a child adoption agency," Bellman said. "There are also more fantastical issues that are topical in the news and you're not going to be able to relate to."


While "fun" isn't exactly Hutton's middle name, it is Bellman's calling card and pleasure chest.

"We're bringing a different dimension to this," she said. "We're not taking ourselves too seriously. We're camping it up and playing lots of characters. We're doing funny voices, stunts, explosions and car chases. It's hopefully going to address the feeling people are feeling right

now about being exploited or disappointed in a way that's humorous, relaxed, refreshing and tongue in cheek."

She added: "You mentioned 'The A-Team' and I have a funness for that type of drama from the 1970s. That whole 'Charlie's Angels' era was fun. Our show is very modern and contemporary, but we've adopted that kind of fun element that a lot of drama shows these days have been lacking."

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Hutton interjected: "It has a lot of high-tech elements to it, but also a lot of low-tech when we have to go to plan 'B'. Those are the parts in the show that are the most fun. It's when the perfect scenario doesn't go right and we have to go back to the old-fashioned way of breaking in somewhere."

Hutton also says the show hits home with today's economy and the U.S. recession.

"Another thing that makes the show topical right now is that a lot of people are struggling. We're in service for a very select group of people – not necessarily the masses – and people will watch us and get a vicarious thrill of seeing some of these snakes get chopped up."

"Leverage" stars Oscar winner Timothy Hutton, Gina Bellman, Christian Kane, Aldis Hodge, Beth Riesgraf, Mark Sheppard, Andrew J. Lee, Ron Auguste and Drew Powell. The series, which is directed by Dean Devlin and Jonathan Frakes (William T. Riker in "Star Trek: The Next Generation"), aired its debut episode on Dec. 7, 2008 on TNT at 9 p.m. CST.



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