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The Guide

Strangely compelling  
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BE afraid. Be very afraid. Because somewhere in Sydney International Airport lurks a customs officer doing a passable impersonation of Detective Bobby Goren from the Law & Order spin-off *Criminal Intent*.

How do we know? Well, from the man himself.

Because when Vincent D'Onofrio – who plays the idiosyncratic Detective Goren – jetted in to his former home town of Sydney last month he came face to face with his real-life imitator.

"When I was getting my luggage this (customs) officer came over to me and pulled me through the hundreds of people to get me through the line," D'Onofrio says.

"Then he said to me that he'd had a lot of drug hits this year because of my interrogation techniques. He was dead serious. I'm not kidding." So strange but true.

But with all of Det Goren's mannerisms – the "in-your-face" interrogation methods, the strange body contortions, the halting speech – surely this guy must be one of the most annoying customs officers in the world?

D'Onofrio agrees.

"How can you not agree? The guy (Det Goren) is very arrogant, self-centred. There's really not a lot to like about him."

And D'Onofrio's intense portrayal of Goren tends to divide audiences.

"Oh he's so annoying, and people have no problem saying it to me either," he says, recounting an unusual visit to Sydney deli.

"One cashier just hated my character and the other one loved my character and the two of them started arguing about it right in front of me. It was so great."

Known as an "actor's actor", D'Onofrio is willing to go as far as he can physically and mentally to breathe life into his character, from researching serial killers to putting on 32kg for his role as an unstable army recruit in *Full Metal Jacket*.

On *Criminal Intent*, D'Onofrio says he felt Det Goren's strange mannerisms were essential to make the character believable.

"I knew I had to get away with playing a very highly intelligent character (because he's) so highly intelligent that it's unrealistic. I knew I was going to have to do something different to get away with it," he says. "Hopefully, I'm not as annoying as

him."

Indeed, he is not.

Refreshingly candid, D'Onofrio even seems a tad goggle-eyed on the line from Sydney, where he's ensconced at Channel 10's head office.

"This Channel 10 here is unbelievable, unbelievable," he gushes over the phone.

"I'm in the office with a beautiful woman, I was picked up by a beautiful woman. I've been sitting in this office doing interviews and there have been so many women walking past.

"Channel 10 should be the most successful channel on television just because of the women they have working here."

For someone who was once married to Greta Scacchi and has surely spent much of his working life surrounded by stunners, D'Onofrio sounds like a loveable sucker for a pretty face.

After answering a quick question about the time he called Sydney home (he lived in Coogee with Scacchi and their daughter Layla for four years during the late 1980s and early '90s) D'Onofrio is again thrown by the sight of a female staffer.

"There's another one," he says. "And she's like from India or something. It's amazing. Sorry, what was the question again?"

While he may not always sound politically correct, D'Onofrio is certainly politically active.

An outspoken supporter of John Kerry's failed push for the presidency, there were actually rumours that the actor collapsed on the set of *Law & Order* when news of the defeat came through.

"I actually wished it was true because it was so dramatic," he laughs.

The truth is he was suffering exhaustion, collapsing more than once and undergoing a battery of medical tests to rule out more serious causes.

In an effort to lighten the load on D'Onofrio, Chris Noth (who played opposite Jerry Orbach in the original *Law & Order* and, of course, was Mr Big in *Sex and the City*) has been hired to star in alternate episodes of *Criminal Intent*.

D'Onofrio says he is overjoyed with the plan despite taking a hefty salary cut.

"I just couldn't do it any more and keep the integrity of the show up," D'Onofrio says.

He would have left the show if creator Dick Wolf had not come up with the novel plan to split the starring role.

And, whether you love or loathe Goren's strange little habits, it looks like we're in for even more strange behaviour from one of television's quirkiest cops.

D'Onofrio says starring in every second episode of the hit franchise will give him more time to prepare his character.

"The radar's going to be on Chris (Noth) not on me any more so I'm going to be able to get away with more stuff."

Stuff? "You'll see." he says.