

Robert Downey Jr: How Iron man started his career by playing a dog

Captain America: Civil War" opens on May 6, marking Robert Downey Jr's sixth appearance as Tony Stark/Iron Man. The character has been good to Downey (who celebrates his 51st birthday on Monday). Last August, Forbes announced that he had earned an estimated \$80 million that year, his third consecutive year as the world's highest-paid actor. Audiences love success stories, but Downey's saga seems too far-fetched, even by Hollywood standards. He went from being a promising young actor to an unemployable outcast. But then he rebounded to become a mega-star, respected by the same peers who once shunned him. It's a tale of redemption and financial rewards, but it's also a tale of artistry. Because even at the lowest ebb, nobody doubted his talent.

At age 5, he made his film debut, billed as Bob Downey in the 1970 "Pound," directed by his father, Robert Downey Sr, who was coming off the success of counterculture fave "Putney Swope." In "Pound," all the actors played dogs in an animal shelter; it was sort of like "Cats," a decade before Andrew Lloyd Webber. In a review on Aug 19, 1970, Variety's Richard Gold called it an "unfunny allegory." He added, "The film's one funny sequence has nothing to do with anything: everybody just twiddles around in ballet costumes to a cheerfully obscene rock tune." The critic didn't like it, but his damnation makes the film sound pretty interesting.

Truly remarkable

As with most actors, Downey found work wherever he could: He appeared in his father's "Greaser's Palace," John Sayles' 1983 film "Baby It's You," the New York stage musical "American Passion," and the 1985 gangs-in-school melodrama "Tuff Turf," starring James Spader. In that last work, Variety reviewer Ray Loynd said, "Robert Downey is a fresh surprise in a nice sidekick role." That same year, he appeared in John Hughes' "Weird Science" and became a cast regular on "Saturday Night Live." He continued to work, but a big breakthrough came in 1992, when he starred in the title role of "Chaplin."

Richard Attenborough, on Aug 17, 1992, said the actor's performance was "miraculous, one of the most staggering performances I've seen in decades." It's standard procedure for a director to hype the star, but when audiences saw it, many of them agreed. Variety praised Downey's work as "truly remarkable," saying Chaplin's unique abilities as an actor, dancer, mime and athlete would seem impossible to duplicate, "but Downey proves otherwise." Jodie Foster asked Variety, "Could anybody else in the world have given that performance? Robert is someone who is extremely brilliant but who is suffering because he's almost too smart."

Personal projects

Despite the admiration, Downey, Stephen Rea, Denzel Washington and Clint Eastwood all lost out on the best actor Oscar to Al Pacino for "Scent of a Woman." From 1996-2001, the actor experienced drug arrests, a high-profile firing (from TV series "Ally McBeal"), tabloid rumors and industry rejection because his track record meant a film couldn't get a completion bond. In 2003, Mel Gibson paid the insurance for "The Singing Detective," which started his career rebound; Downey underwent a personal rehab, crediting such factors as his wife Susan, meditation and 12-step programs. (He stayed clean and was pardoned by Governor Jerry Brown in 2015.)

His comeback was cemented in 2008, when he starred in the hugely successful "Iron Man," and earned another Oscar nom that year for "Tropic Thunder." His "Sherlock Holmes" bowed in 2009 and, while continuing to work in the Marvel universe, he starred in more personal projects, like "The Judge" (2014). When receiving the 2011 American Cinematheque award, Downey said: "Sooner or later, if you pull the one-armed bandit enough, you're going to come up with gold bars. And now it just feels, at least for a little while here, that the machine is fixed ... I definitely had plenty of years of self-imposed purgatory, but I'm hot for the next 18



months or so. I'm coming up on 50 and I want to do more. And the franchise I could stay in love with indefinitely is 'Sherlock Holmes.' For more showbiz history, visit VarietyUltimate.com, which has every issue of Variety from 1906 to the present. — Reuters



Will Ferrell to star in North Pole expedition movie

Will Ferrell is attached to star in a comedy based on the true story of a successful 1968 expedition to the North Pole with Temple Hill producing for Sony. The project is based on Guy Lawson's article in the New York Times Magazine titled "An Insurance Salesman and a Doctor Walk Into a Bar, and End Up at the North Pole: The Story of an Accidentally Pioneering Expedition." The story follows a ragtag group of six middle-aged men from Minnesota who spontaneously decide over a beer to mount a snowmobile expedition to the North Pole. The team manages to overcome a daunting array of obstacles to make the first undisputed expedition ever to reach the North Pole.

No director or writer is attached. Jonathan Kadin will oversee the film for the studio. The article begins, "The twin-prop plane swung low, tilting its wings and heading north, only to circle back and swoop down over the men again. It was March 7, 1968, and the members of the Plaisted Polar Expedition looked up at the plane in bewilderment. They were trying to travel to the North Pole by snowmobile-in what they believed to be the first expedition to the North Pole carried out on motorized machines, but what in reality may very well have been the first to reach the North Pole at all. Barely an hour into the trek, it wasn't going well.

Having just left base camp, the six men stood atop a 40-foot-high wall of ice at the edge of the Arctic Ocean and looked at what lay ahead: stretching over the horizon, an unending moonscape of ice boulders, crevices and pack ice contorted by vast floes whose constant motion created steep pressure ridges and black stretches of open water known as leads." Ferrell last starred in "Daddy's Home" and "Zoolander 2." Temple Hill produced "The Fault in Our Stars" and the Maze Runner and Twilight franchises. Temple Hill teamed with Ferrell in the 2010 comedy-drama "Everything Must Go." The news was first reported by Deadline Hollywood. — Reuters

'Batman v Superman' flies high at top of box office



Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" leaped to the top of the box office for a second straight week, although with greatly diminished ticket sales, industry figures showed Monday. The blockbuster Warner Brothers movie, which pits two iconic superheroes against one other, earned \$51.3 million in its second weekend, according to estimates from industry tracker Exhibitor Relations. The film had raked in a whopping \$166 million during its debut weekend despite a number of negative reviews. Starring Ben Affleck as Batman and Henry Cavill in the role of Superman, the characters' first big-screen pairing sets up the coming "Justice League" and "Wonder Woman" movies.

The stellar cast also features former Miss Israel Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman, Jesse Eisenberg as the eccentric villain Lex Luthor and Amy Adams as Superman's love interest Lois Lane. Animated Disney film "Zootopia," about an intrepid rabbit police officer who works with a fox to solve a crime in the Zootopia animal kingdom, came in second for a second week, earning \$19.3 million. The com-

edy sequel "My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2," which reunites the main cast from the 2002 sleeper hit of the same name, landed third with \$11.2 million.

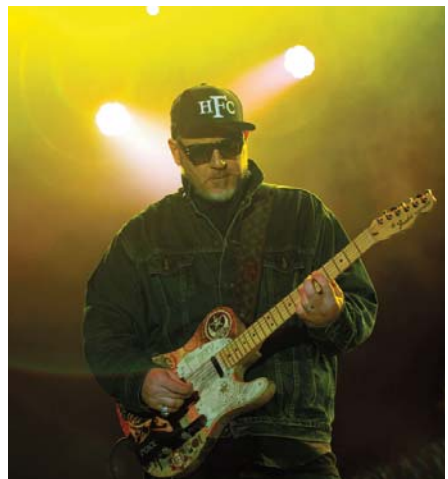
Debuting in fourth place was another sequel, "God's Not Dead 2," which follows a public school teacher who answers a student's question about Jesus and finds herself in hot water with the law. It raked in \$7.6 million. Fifth came "Miracles from Heaven," a drama about a young girl suffering from a rare digestive disorder who finds herself miraculously cured. The movie took in \$7.3 million.

Rounding out the rest of the top 10 were:

- *"The Divergent Series: Allegiant" (\$5.8 million)
- *"10 Cloverfield Lane" (\$4.6 million)
- *"Meet the Blacks" (\$4.1 million)
- *"Eye in the Sky" (\$4 million)
- *"Deadpool" (\$3.5 million)—AFP

Everlast latest artist to tell Trump to stop using song

The rapper Everlast has become the latest musician to voice anger at Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump's use of a song, demanding that he stop playing "Jump Around" at rallies.



This file photo shows House Of Pain band's US singer Everlast performing on stage on the second day of the 23rd Eurockeeennes music festival in Belfort, eastern France on July 2, 2011.—AFP

In a series of acerbic social media posts late Monday, Everlast said that his lawyers had informed Trump that he does not have the right to play the 1992 hit by the rapper's for-

mer band House of Pain. "I would love to meet you and smack that comb-over right off your scalp," he wrote on Instagram in one of his less profane statements, describing Trump as "ignorant" and "racist."

Everlast, whose real name is Erik Schrody, also took to Trump's favorite medium, Twitter, to lash out at the candidate's defenders. Since the song's initial success, "Jump Around" has become a staple in US pop culture and is frequently played to excite crowds at sporting events. Trump's rallies have been repeatedly marred by violence, with supporters of the right-wing populist angered by protesters. Everlast is only the latest artist to butt heads with Trump, who has stirred controversy by describing Mexican immigrants as rapists and urging a ban on entry by all foreign Muslims.

Neil Young and R.E.M.—both known for their left-wing politics—earlier voiced outrage when Trump played their respective hits "Rockin' in the Free World" and "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)." British superstar Adele has also asked Trump not to use her music, although she made a more polite request, saying that she has not given permission to any candidate. Everlast was one of the early successful white rappers and House of Pain was associated with Irish American culture, with the video for "Jump Around" shot at New York's St Patrick's Day parade. After going solo, Everlast has branched out musically into a blues rock sound and has converted to Islam. — AFP



'The Huntsman: Winter's War'

Spare a thought for Snow White: So casually has she been written out of "The Huntsman: Winter's War" that even Queen Ravenna's all-knowing mirror, when called upon to name the fairest of them all, omits her as a contender. Vague excuses are made for her absence from a film that awkwardly positions itself as both prequel and sequel to the Goth-lite derring-do of 2012's "Snow White and the Huntsman," though perhaps Snow skimmed Evan Spiliotopoulos and Craig Mazin's perfunctory script and reasonably decided she couldn't be bothered. In her (and Kristen Stewart's) place, a Katniss Everdeen-styled Jessica Chastain steps into the breach, fighting for good alongside Chris Hemsworth's eponymous hero this time against two wicked-queen combatants in Charlize Theron and Emily Blunt, whose glittery sisterly feud would have made for an adequate spinoff vehicle on its own.

Even their doubled-up diva-tude, however, can't ignite a rhythmically flat, seemingly committee-helmed franchise outing that never decides on its dramatic center. "There is another story—one you have not yet seen," a po-faced (and excessively employed) narrator informs viewers at the outset of "The Huntsman: Winter's War." He's speaking somewhat optimistically, it turns out, since Spiliotopoulos and Mazin's hastily cobbled-together mythos cribbs liberally from existing fairy-tale lore, with a not-inconsiderable side scoop of Disney's ubiquitous smash "Frozen." What the narrator doesn't tell us is precisely which story he's referring to: At least two are jostling for space here, each one stepping conspicuously around the events of the previous film, though not maintaining complete continuity with it. (The intermediate backstory of Chastain's virtuous warrior Sara, for example, appears to shift at least once in the course of the new pic's screenplay alone.)

Royal palp

"The Huntsman's" opening act, chronologically preceding the timeline of "Snow White" by a couple of decades, is dedicated to matters of queenly corruption, reintroducing Theron's vixenish Ravenna as she adds another royal scalp to her growing list of kills, via a black magic-abetted chess match. She assumes power as her pure-hearted younger sister, Freya (Blunt), looks on; professing to have no political or supernatural aspirations, Freya instead dreams of courtly bliss with the young Duke (Colin Morgan) whose

child she is to bear. When her plan is foiled in grisly fashion, however, her witchy powers—chiefly, a touch of frost markedly similar to Queen Elsa's—belatedly emerge. She defects to her own wintry Ice Queendom, fostering her own army and banning human affection from her domain: "Love is nothing more than a fairy tale," she hisses, coolly oblivious to her own generic surroundings.

Among the child soldiers she rears are prodigious huntspeople Eric and Sara, who eventually take the strapping, mutually amorous forms of Hemsworth and Chastain. Their romance prompts an arctic intervention from Freya; Eric is banished, believing Sara dead. It's here that the tale of "Snow White and the Huntsman" slots in its entirety, necessitating an ungainly timeline leap of seven years: War is indistinctly looming, reigning monarch Snow White is indistinctly indisposed, and the vanquished Ravenna's missing mirror is now a vital quarry sought by Snow White's and Freya's palaces alike. Huntsman Eric is enlisted to retrieve it for the former, as faces from the past are resurrected along the way.

Voluble chemistry

It's a straightforward enough quest, though the doom-laden stakes attached to it aren't most urgently felt. As if anticipating auds' lack of investment in Eric's rather colorless presence, much of his ostensible screen time is given over to the "Lord of the Rings"-aping comic relief of sidekick dwarves Nion (Nick Frost, returning from the previous film) and Gryff (Rob Brydon, providing his patented Welsh-neurotic shtick). It's a dynamic that itself doesn't quite click until Sheridan Smith, as assertive she-dwarf Bromwyn, arrives on the scene. Regrettably dispensable to the larger narrative, Smith (whose firecracker skills are already familiar to British TV auds) nonetheless proves the liveliest element in these dull proceedings. She certainly has more voluble chemistry with Hemsworth than a muted, uncertainly Scots-accented Chastain-formidable in medieval archery chic, but otherwise (not unlike Stewart before her) finding little to grapple with in a character strictly shaped with the Hollywood screenwriter's favored tough-cookie cutter. The silly-stern sportsmanship she brought to last year's "Crimson Peak" would have been most welcome here.—Reuters

'Gary Numan: Android in La La Land'

The eponymous pioneering Brit synthpop star moves across the Atlantic and stages a comeback in "Gary Numan: Android in La La Land." This portrait doesn't provide much of a career overview, let alone fill in the blanks for those who wonder just what he's been up to in the 30 years or more since he was last significantly in the public spotlight. But if Steve Red and Rob Alexander's documentary feature sometimes seems too transparently a glorified promo for a recent album/tour, its subject is winningly candid and guilelessly charming—a far cry from his cold, "android"-like original persona, which was at

music a la Kraftwerk, though he says he wasn't aware of them or other predecessors until later. While his label was initially dubious about the shift, the immediately resulting albums ("Replicas," "The Pleasure Principle") and singles ("Are Friends Electric?," "Cars") were international smashes. The elaborate futuristic atmosphere of his live shows, his "robotic" movements and emotionally remote demeanor were, he says, not just artistic decisions but also ways of coping with various mood and behavioral problems related to the Asperger syndrome he wasn't diagnosed with until fairly late.

activities of the last many years—a missed opportunity, since for anyone but dedicated fans, his post-"Cars" history is pretty much a blank.

Instead, the focus here is primarily on his gearing up to make 2013's "Splinter (Songs From a Broken Mind)," an album he sees as crucial to extending his career. In the end, it turns out to be his bestselling and best-reviewed effort in decades. But its creation is fraught with anxiety (not unusual for him, one gleans), particularly since he simultaneously moves with wife Gemma and their three young daughters from England to an imposing residential castle in Los Angeles. Gemma is a bustling, many-hair-colored husband wrangler in the Sharon Osbourne mold, accustomed to minding the store for her grateful, somewhat neurotic spouse.

But the most endearing character here is Numan himself, who these days performs in simple T-shirt and jeans (a big change from days of yore), and seems equally unpretentious in what appears a very sweet temperament. Numan is genuinely surprised and touched when latter-day stars like Trent Reznor cite him as an influence, let alone invite him on stage to access their large fanbases. It's hard to believe this lovable bloke ever had a communication-ending rift with his parents. But then, "Android in La La Land" may well be less than a full-disclosure tell-all, despite its seemingly unfiltered portrait. The film is slickly packaged, with audio aspects naturally first-rate. — Reuters



least partly taken up as a cover for his Asperger-related performing anxiety. The polished pic will primarily access fans old and new via home-format sales.

Numan (nee Gary Webb) started Tubeway Army as a London teengager in the late 1970s, getting them signed to a major label during punk's first wave. But a chance encounter with a studio synthesizer enraptured him and turned his focus toward electronic

But his stay atop the charts was relatively brief, and the stage spectaculars' escalating costs gradually put him in the red; such business-side difficulties triggered an eventual falling out with his father-manager. (The finances must have gotten worked out, however, since the houses we see Numan and family living in are quite luxurious.) He kept making records and touring, but the film delivers scant insight into his creative