

MUSIC & MOVIES



Moderator Chris Hardwick, foreground right, takes a selfie with from left, Ben Affleck, Ezra Miller, Gal Gadot, and Ray Fisher at the Warner Bros "Justice League" panel on day three of Comic-Con International in San Diego. — AP photos



Ben Affleck speaks at the Warner Bros "Justice League" panel on day three of Comic-Con International.



Moderator Chris Hardwick, left, speaks as Jason Momoa holds his Aquaman trident on stage at the Warner Bros "Justice League" panel on day three of Comic-Con International.

Ben Affleck to fans: I'm still Batman, despite rumors

Ben Affleck is still Batman. The actor shot down rumors that he would be hanging up his cape for the stand-alone Batman film, even though he recently ceded directing responsibilities. Speaking to a crowd of about 6,500 fans at San Diego Comic-Con, Affleck unequivocally assured the crowd that he is still starring in "The Batman."

On Friday, the trade publication The Hollywood Reporter published a report that Warner Bros. was working on plans to "usher out Affleck's Batman gracefully" and suggested that it might happen before "The Batman." The report threatened to overshadow Warner Bros.' flashy Hall H presentation on Saturday, which was focused on hyping the studio's big superhero mashup film "Justice League," which hits theaters in

November. "Let me be very clear. I am the luckiest guy in the world. Batman is the coolest part in any universe, DC or Marvel," Affleck said. He wanted to knock down the idea that he wasn't committed to the character, even though he won't be directing.

Affleck praised director Matt Reeves' vision and said he would "be an ape on the ground for Matt Reeves." Reeves recently directed "War for the Planet of the Apes." With the cloud lifted, Affleck and his fellow "Justice League" stars Gal Gadot, Jason Momoa, Ezra Miller and Ray Fisher were left to talk about the upcoming film, which has had its own fair share of upheaval recently when director Zack Snyder exited for personal reasons and Joss Whedon took over the reshoots and

completion of the film. Neither Snyder nor Whedon were at Comic-Con, although Snyder tweeted Friday that he was sending his best to the "Justice League" team.

The footage focused heavily on Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, who emerged as the clear favorite of the fans in the audience who screamed at every shot of the Amazonian warrior. "Wonder Woman" recently became the highest grossing of the four DC Extended Universe films. Another person missing from the panel was Superman star Henry Cavill. When a young fan asked the actors if he'll show up in the film, Gadot reassured him. "We can't say much but if you love Superman you're going to be very, very happy," she said.

Warner Bros. also teased a bit of "Aquaman," out Dec. 2018,

starring Momoa in the title role. A snippet of footage from the James Wan-directed film, showed fishermen who are quite surprised when something under the water catches on to the hook and starts dragging the boat along. They look underwater to see a fleet of giant ships coasting under the surface. Momoa also teased that Ocean Master would be the film's main villain, though he laughed that he would likely get in trouble for it. The studio didn't go past the 2018 slate of films, however. If Batman and Wonder Woman weren't enough, Marvel Studios is primed to take center stage in Hall H on Saturday evening.—AP

SPIELBERG DEBUTS 'READY PLAYER ONE' FOOTAGE AT COMIC-CON

Thousands of fans were treated to a first look at Steven Spielberg's hotly anticipated sci-fi adventure "Ready Player One" at San Diego Comic-Con on Saturday. Starring Tye Sheridan, the movie is based on a 2011 novel about a teenager on a treasure hunt in a virtual reality game, in a world torn by an energy crisis. Footage for the action adventure debuted during Warner Bros' presentation, showing Sheridan as teenage gamer Wade Watts, who finds himself inside VR Oasis.

The preview opened in a futuristic trailer park in Columbus, Ohio where Wade lives, as he puts on the Oasis headset and gloves and is transported into its VR world. "I was born in 2025, but I wish I'd grown up in the 1980s, like all my heroes," he says. Wade is seen going toe-to-toe with Freddy Krueger, standing beside the Iron Giant and racing the DeLorean from "Back to the Future" as he weaves to avoid huge wrecking balls. Spielberg received a huge ovation as he hit the stage in the 6,500-capacity Hall H alongside Ernest Cline, who wrote the novel.

The filmmaker described the book as "the most amazing flash-forward and flash-

back at the same time about a decade I was very involved in, the 1980s." He added that he thought they were going to need "a younger director" to helm the project, despite his own movies featuring heavily. "I grew up watching this man's movies and studying them," said Cline. Spielberg said he had relished directing a sci-fi about the "dystopian" world people would be living in 30 years in the future 2045.

"People are leaving the country and all of a sudden virtual reality gives you a choice, gives you another world to exist in," he said. "And you can do anything in that world—anything you can possibly imagine." He called the universe he created for the movie a "future that is awaiting all of us whether we like it or not." "This movie is going to expose so many people to the concept of virtual reality, and I think it's going to change the speed of adoption," Cline added. Ready Player One opens in the United States on March 30, 2018. — AFP



Justin Theroux and Dave Franco, stars of The LEGO NINJAGO Movie, make an appearance at the LEGO booth at Comic-Con International in San Diego, California. — AP photos



Aurora Ortiz, dressed as Batgirl, poses for a portrait on day three of Comic-Con International on Saturday.

Comic-Con goes wild for 'Black Panther' at Marvel panel

"Black Panther" stole the show Saturday night at Marvel Studios' Comic-Con presentation, outshining the Ant-Man, Thor and even the ultimate Avengers team-up, "Infinity War." Fans went wild for the exclusive sneak peek at the upcoming superhero pic, featuring star Chadwick Boseman T'Challa intercepting a sketchy vibranium trade between Andy Serkis' Klaw and Martin Freeman's Everett. Set in an elegant, Japanese-inspired casino, the deal goes haywire and T'Challa and his security detail (Lupita Nyong'o and Danai Gurira) jump to action in their evening gowns to retrieve the precious goods.

The clip was followed by the trailer for the film from "Creed" director Ryan Coogler and the 6,500 souls in the audience erupted into deafening cheers at the sight of T'Challa morphing into the Black Panther suit. The film finds T'Challa returning to his home of Wakanda after the death of his father, the king. "He's still mourning his father's death. It's a transition period that gets interrupted, and he's struggling with the type of king he wants to be," said Boseman. Coogler, Boseman, Nyong'o, Gurira, Serkis and more of the cast were on hand in

San Diego to talk about the film, out Feb. 16, 2019.

Nyong'o described her character as a spy who goes undercover to report back to Wakanda about what is going on in the rest of the world. "Wakanda is an isolated nation," Nyong'o said. "The world does not need to know what's going on in Wakanda." Coogler said he'd always had a fondness for comic books, and found "Black Panther" at a pivotal moment. "I grew up as black kid in the Bay Area and grew up with comic books and it didn't matter what color the superheroes were. I read X-Men, I read Spider-Man," Coogler said. Then he started looking for a character that looked like him and he stumbled on Black Panther.

The goddess of death

Marvel Studios also teased its third "Thor" film, "Thor: Ragnarok," which has quite a different and more irreverent tone from previous installments, and hits theaters in November. "I've played this character five times," Chris Hemsworth told the audience. "Me, personally, I got a little bored and thought we've got to try something a little different... Push the envelope, take it to another level!"

So, they cut his hair, take his hammer away and pit him against Jeff Goldblum and Cate Blanchett. When Blanchett's Hela, the goddess of death, invades Asgard, Thor finds himself on the run and under the control of Goldblum's Grandmaster on Sakaar where he is pitted against the Hulk in a Gladiator tournament. In this film, the Hulk refuses to turn back into Bruce Banner, but he is learning to speak, albeit slowly. "He has the vocabulary of a two year old," Mark Ruffalo said. Marvel also unveiled the "Avengers: Infinity War" footage that the studio had previously shown to audiences at the Disney fan convention, D23, and made a few announcements regarding upcoming films: Michelle Pfeiffer will play Evangeline Lilly's character's mom Janet van Dyne in the "Ant-Man" sequel "Ant-Man and the Wasp" and "Captain Marvel," Marvel's first female-driven superhero movie, will be set in the 1990s. As Marvel Studios head Kevin Feige described it: It's so long ago that Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury will have two eyes. — AP



Director Steven Spielberg (left) and writer Ernest Cline attend the Warner Bros. Pictures Presentation during Comic-Con International 2017 at San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California. — AFP

Film director Emir Kusturica visits Moscow-annexed Crimea

Aclaimed Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica yesterday arrived in the Crimean peninsula annexed by Russia from Ukraine to give a concert with his No Smoking Orchestra group. The two-time winner of the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or is set to give a concert in Crimea's Black Sea resort of Yalta. On arrival in the regional capital of Simferopol, he told journalists that "I know Yalta has wonderful scenery and nice girls," Russia's RIA Novosti state news agency reported.

Kusturica last year received a state honor called the Order of Friendship from Russian President Vladimir Putin in a ceremony at the Kremlin, while Russia and Serbia have close cultural ties. Earlier this month Kusturica praised Putin's "gentle nature" in an interview with state-funded RT network, saying that the Kremlin strongman had made the country proud of its history and culture. The director's visit to Crimea defied a clampdown by Ukraine on arts figures who have visited the Black Sea peninsula since Moscow's 2014 annexation.

Ukraine has strict rules on visiting Crimea that only allow visits with permission from Kiev and via certain entry points. Those who fly into Crimea by plane from Moscow as Kusturica did face a ban on entry to Ukraine. Ukraine's security service has said it has issued travel bans on some 140 Russian arts figures over visits to



Emir Kusturica

Crimea or expressing support for Russia's annexation of the peninsula. A music festival in Crimea in August is set to feature German techno band Scooter—massively popular in the ex-Soviet Union in the 1990s—and Russian rock band Leningrad, according to its website. Kusturica told Russian news site Gazeta.ru this month that he is set to make a film based on themes from Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, which will be shot in China. — AFP

Michelle Pfeiffer joins 'Ant-Man and the Wasp'



Michelle Pfeiffer is joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Marvel Studios announced Saturday at Comic-Con that Pfeiffer has been cast in the "Ant-Man" sequel "Ant-Man and the Wasp" as Janet van Dyne, who is Hank Pym's missing wife.

Pfeiffer will be starring alongside returning Ant-Man actors Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly and Michael Douglas in the film. Marvel Studios head Kevin Feige also announced that Randall Park and Laurence Fishburne were joining the sequel. "Ant-Man and the Wasp" will be directed by Peyton Reed and hits theaters on July 6, 2018. — AP

Michel Franco and Edgar Wright on Venice film panel

Filmmakers Michel Franco and Edgar Wright and actress Rebecca Hall will sit on the jury at the 74th Venice Film Festival, organizers said yesterday. Also among the panelists at one of the most prestigious events in the film calendar will be Hungarian director Ildiko Enyedi, Australian critic David Stratton and Taiwan-born filmmaker Yonfan. Organizers had already announced that the festival, which opens on August 30, will kick off with Oscar-winning US director Alexander Payne's latest movie "Downsizing," and that compatriot Annette Bening will head the Mostra jury.

Mexican-born Franco is best known for his feature length drama "After Lucia", which was nominated for the best foreign language film Oscar in 2012. British filmmaker Wright has worked on several comedies including "Shaun of the Dead" and "Hot Fuzz" starring Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, as well as science fiction offering "The World's End" with Martin Freeman. British actress Rebecca Hall has worked with director megastars Christopher Nolan, Steven Spielberg and Woody Allen and appeared alongside Ben Affleck in 2010's "The Town". — AFP