

Decades in the making, Weinstein's fall comes swiftly



In this March 2, 2014 file photo, Harvey Weinstein arrives at the Oscars in Los Angeles. — AP/AFP photos



In this March 18, 2014, file photo, Ashley Judd arrives at the world premiere of "Divergent" at the Westwood Regency Village Theater in Los Angeles.

The allegations against Harvey Weinstein spanned three decades. His downfall came in three days. That was all it took to topple one of Hollywood's most high-profile and sharp-elbowed moguls - a combative power player who, like few ever have, regularly dominated the Academy Awards. But it was the all-powerful Weinstein who was ousted Sunday night from the company he co-founded and that bears his name. Following a devastating New York Times expose that detailed years of sexual harassment allegations against Weinstein, the Weinstein Co co-chairman was unceremoniously fired by his brother, Bob, and three other directors on the film company's board.

"In light of new information about misconduct by Harvey Weinstein that has emerged in the past few days, the directors of The Weinstein Company ... have determined, and have informed Harvey Weinstein, that his employment with The Weinstein Company is terminated, effective immediately," the company board said in a statement Sunday night. For a domineering studio head long known for intervening in the edit room, this is very likely the final cut. His career in Hollywood, many in the industry believe, is finished.

'Open secret'

Of course, it took much longer than three days for Weinstein's fall. The reporting took months, and followed years of previous efforts by other journalists to nail down details of the behavior that was roundly considered "an open secret" in Hollywood. And it took years for the alleged victims, including actress Ashley Judd, to work up the courage to go on the record. Not everyone was applauding the firing for its swiftness.

Actress Lena Dunham tweeted Sunday night, "Easy to think Weinstein company took swift action but this has actually been the slowest action because they always always knew." Weinstein had previously taken an indefinite leave of absence following a New York Times expose chronicling decades of allegations of sexual harassment by the Oscar winner. The board on Friday endorsed that decision and

announced an investigation into the allegations, saying it would determine the co-chairman's future with the company.

But The Weinstein Co board went further on Sunday, firing the executive who has always been its primary operator, public face and studio chief. Under his leadership, the company has been a dominant force at the Oscars, including the rare feat of winning back-to-back best picture Academy Awards with "The King's Speech" and "The Artist." In recent years, however, Weinstein's status has diminished because of money shortages, disappointing box-office returns and executive departures.

Business as usual

The company has attempted to continue with business as usual, including a promotional event Sunday night for its 2017 awards hopeful, the indie hit thriller "Wind River." While it has a handful of films scheduled for release in the coming months, much of the company's business has recently angled toward television, producing shows like "Project Runway." An attorney for Weinstein didn't immediately return messages Sunday. But Weinstein will surely be heard from soon.

On Thursday he issued a lengthy statement that acknowledged causing "a lot of pain." He also asked for "a second chance." But Weinstein and his lawyers also criticized The New York Times' report in statements and interviews, and vowed an aggressive response. The New York Times said it was "confident in the accuracy of our reporting." The Times article chronicled sexual harassment settlements Weinstein made with actresses and former employees at both The Weinstein Co. and Weinstein's former company, Miramax.

Weinstein made his name with Miramax, the company he founded with his brother in 1979. They sold it to Disney in 1993 for \$60 million. The company was a fixture of the 1990s independent film movement, launching the careers of filmmakers Quentin Tarantino, Kevin Smith and Steven Soderbergh, and winning best picture with "Shakespeare in Love" and "The English Patient."

The allegations triggered cascading chaos at the Weinstein Co. A third of the all-male board has stepped



This file photo taken on May 16, 2016 shows US producer Harvey Weinstein and his wife British fashion designer and actress Georgina Chapman arriving for the screening of the film "Hands of Stone" at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.

down since Thursday. The prominent attorney Lisa Bloom, daughter of well-known Los Angeles women's rights attorney Gloria Allred, on Saturday withdrew from representing Weinstein, as did another adviser, Lanny Davis. A spokesperson for The Weinstein Co declined to provide further details on the firing. Messages left for attorney John Keirman, who had been appointed to lead an investigation, weren't immediately returned Sunday. — AP

Speedboat fetches \$75K at Kennedy-era memorabilia auction

A mahogany speedboat that belonged to John F. Kennedy sold for \$75,000, and a flight suit that belonged to CIA operative Francis Gary Powers sold for \$2,750 Saturday at a New York auction of Kennedy-era memorabilia. The sale at Guernsey's included a wide array of Camelot-era lots, including documents, photos, stationery and even inscribed sterling silver baby toothbrushes.

A rocking chair that Kennedy used in the White House, specially made for him because of a back injury, sold for \$30,000. A second rocking chair used by both Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, who served after Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, sold for \$10,000. Among the more romantic items was the 17-foot (5-meter) speedboat, a 1961 Century Resorter. Kennedy used the vessel when he was at home in Hyannis, Massachusetts.

The nautical history starts with family patriarch Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., who had a boat named "Tenovus," a reference to the number of Kennedy family members at the time: ten of us." Later, when he won the speedboat in a church raffle, it got the name "Restofus," a nod to the "rest of us" in the expanding family. That became JFK's personal boat. After the nation's 35th president died, the boat went to his brother, Edward M. Kennedy, and then to other owners.

A blue bathing suit that belonged to first lady Jacqueline Kennedy sold for \$1,800, and two pairs of swimming trunks owned by President Kennedy sold for \$3,500 and \$1,800. The core of the sale came from the collections of Henry Hirschy, who was a Navy aide in the White House during the Kennedy administration; Mary Gallagher, who was Jacqueline Kennedy's personal secretary, and Powers. In one of the landmark episodes of the Cold War, Powers was captured in the Soviet Union after his spy plane was shot down in 1960. The US initially tried to cover it up, inventing a story about a NASA weather plane going off course, and was embarrassed when the Soviets produced Powers alive. — AP



In this undated file photo provided by Guernsey's, is John F. Kennedy's speedboat, Restofus. — AP



Blade Runner 2049 pulls in older guys but few others

"Blade Runner 2049" had the pedigree, the stars and the stellar reviews. But even though the highly touted sequel had seemingly everything going for it, something didn't click with audiences. The big-budget, handsomely crafted sequel to the 1982 sci-fi classic opened surprisingly weak at the North American box office. According to studio estimates Sunday, "2049" grossed \$31.5 million, a poor start for a movie that cost at least \$150 million to make. The problem "Blade Runner 2049" ran into is clear from opening-weekend data. The audience was overwhelmingly male (71 percent) and over the age of 25 (86 percent). The movie, starring Ryan Gosling and Harrison Ford, simply failed to pull in moviegoers beyond fans of the 1982 original.

The opening was a blow most of all to Alcon Entertainment, the production company that split the film's cost with Sony Pictures. Warner Bros., which released the original and maintained rights for any follow-ups, distributed domestically. Sony released the film internationally, where it performed better with \$50.2 million in overseas ticket sales over the weekend.

The 20-year-old Alcon, backed by FedEx founder Fred Smith, has been behind some notable successes with Warner Bros. ("The Blind Side," "Prisoners.") But its blockbuster ambitions - which include flops like "Point Break" and "Transcendence" - have gone rockier. Co-founder Andrew

Kosove previously called the ambitious "Blade Runner 2049" "a chips-in-the-center-of-the-table exercise."

And Alcon - a 45 employee company - seemingly did everything right, turning in a glowingly reviewed film, directed by the sought-after Denis Villeneuve ("Arrival") and produced by Ridley Scott (who directed the original.) Audiences liked the movie, too, giving it an A- CinemaScore. Representatives for Alcon Entertainment didn't respond to messages Sunday. "I'm disappointed we didn't have a larger result this weekend on behalf of the owners of the film, Alcon," said Jeff Goldstein, president of domestic distribution for Warner Bros. "We had bigger expectations for the weekend. The tracking and the advance sales indicated that there would be a stronger number."

'Intellectually charged'

The Kate Winslet-Idris Elba adventure romance "The Mountain Between Us" debuted in second place with \$10.1 million. The 20th Century Fox film, which cost \$35 million to make, chronicles the budding affection between two strangers whose charter plane crash lands in the mountains. The horror hit "It" followed in third place with \$9.7 million in its fifth week. The Stephen King adaptation has made \$603.7 million worldwide.

"My Little Pony: The Movie" opened with \$8.8 million for

Lionsgate. But even it managed broader gender appeal than "Blade Runner 2049." It drew a 59 percent female audience. But most were wondering what went wrong with "Blade Runner 2049." Working against it was a lengthy 163-minute runtime. (Villeneuve attempted to lessen the blow by promoting the credit-less runtime of 152 minutes.) Alcon took the lead on the marketing, which went to great lengths to keep much of the film mysterious.

"It's an intellectually charged, apocalyptic sci-fi story. It's not a 'Close Encounters,' it's not 'Star Wars.' It's a challenging film. To me, those are the best type of films," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst at comScore. "But does it make it the most commercial? No." "It was creatively and thematically perfectly executed," Dergarabedian said. "But it didn't play to the numbers everyone thought."

In a way, that makes "Blade Runner 2049" the perfect heir to the original film. It, too, was a box-office disappointment. Though a cult would gradually emerge over the years, propelled partly by a DVD release of a more acclaimed director's cut, "Blade Runner" in 1982 debuted with \$6.2 million - or about \$16 million in 2017 dollars. So "2049" can claim one thing many recent sequels can't: Better box office than the original. — AP

Robert Plant radiantly returns with rootsy, achy CD

Robert Plant, "Carry Fire" (Nonesuch/Warner Bros.) One of the weirder chapters in rock history happened in 2014. That's when Led Zeppelin won a Grammy for best rock album for a seven-year-old concert recording while the band's former frontman Robert Plant somehow didn't even scrounge up a nomination for easily one of the best albums of the year.

Three years later, let's hope the future doesn't again get overshadowed by the past. The 11-track "Carry Fire" finds Plant backed by his talented band, the Sensational Space Shifters, and thrillingly exploring the same fascinating terrain of rootsy folk and achy blues. If 2014's "lullaby and... The Ceaseless Roar" seemed very personal and soaked in heart-break, the new album has Plant in a somewhat happier place and looking to the horizon, perhaps becoming more political.

"New World" is a bitter look at the way we treat immigrants. "Carving Up the World Again" mocks border walls and "Bones of a Saint" coolly dispatches religious fervor. He pushes deeper than ever into Middle Eastern sounds with the outstanding oud-filled title track, an exhilarating multicultural triumph. Of course, no one does love like Plant - mature, earthy and world-weary. Here, he seems to have found a new spark -

"Lay down in sweet surrender/ Your love so warm and tender," he sings in the opening song. On another, the standout "A Way With Words," he sings: "Coming from the cold/ Reaching for your sweet embrace."

As with his last album, there are coy nods to his past, like the title of the first song, the strummy anthem "May Queen," which Zeppelin fans will instantly recognize from "Stairway to Heaven." He sings about "dancing days" here, which is also the title of a song on 1973's "Houses of the Holy." There's an intimacy to Plant's weathered voice throughout, so intimate in fact that it sometimes feels as if we're intruding on a very personal moment. He's also using more modern technology to create an album that seamlessly mixes cello, bendir and Moog synthesizer, backed by the accomplished musicians John Baggott, Justin Adams, Dave Smith and Liam "Skin" Tyson.

If anyone still needs proof of the skills on offer here, look no further than the cover of Ersel Hickey's "Bluebirds Over the Mountain," a rockabilly ditty from the '50s of no special importance. Plant and his band - joined by Chrissie Hynde - give it a dark synth texture and menacing guitar, making it closer to a David Bowie tune. — AP

