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'Avengers' to break 'Avatar' all-time record this weekend: Disney

Marvel's "Avengers: Endgame" will become the highest-grossing film of all time this weekend, parent company Disney said in a statement Saturday. The smash hit was just \$500,000 behind the decade-old \$2,789.7 million record set by James Cameron's "Avatar" as of Friday, and "will close this gap by tomorrow," it said. The announcement was timed to coincide with the appearance of Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige at San Diego Comic-Con, the world's biggest pop culture fan convention, where he set out a packed schedule of new movies and television shows set in the "Marvel Cinematic Universe."

"I've just heard from our folks in Disney distribution that within a matter of days 'Avengers: Endgame' will be

the biggest film in history," said Feige. "You have to shout out to James Cameron who held that title for a long time. If you adjust for inflation he still holds the title, and he'll probably get the title again as soon as he puts out another movie." "But for right now today in Hall H, thanks to you, Avengers: Endgame is the biggest film of all time," Feige added to a loud ovation.

The Disney statement announcing the imminent record said the Avatar box office figure had been adjusted upward to reflect additional reissue grosses in overseas territories over the past several years. The figure for Endgame had also been altered by "reconciliation" of overseas grosses "as the film approaches the end of its run," the statement said. Both films are now owned by

Disney following its takeover of 21st Century Fox. Disney co-chairman Alan Horn thanked "fans around the world who lifted Avengers: Endgame to these historic heights." "Of course, even with the passage of a decade, the impact of James Cameron's Avatar remains as powerful as ever, and the astonishing achievements of both of these films are ongoing proof of the power of movies," he added. — AFP

President of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige (left) and US actress Scarlett Johansson speak on stage for the Marvel panel in Hall H of the Convention Center during Comic Con in San Diego, California. — AFP



Trump offers to guarantee bail for rapper ASAP Rocky

US President Donald Trump offered Saturday to guarantee the bail of rapper ASAP Rocky, detained in Sweden on suspicion of assault following a street brawl. Trump tweeted that he had spoken with Prime Minister Stefan Lofven, who he said gave assurances that the singer would be treated fairly. "Likewise, I assured him that ASAP was not a flight risk and offered to personally vouch for his bail, or an alternative," Trump wrote. There is no system of bail in Sweden.

Trump said he and Lofven had agreed to speak again over the next 48 hours. Lofven's spokesman Toni Eriksson described the 20-minute phone call as "friendly and respectful". The prime minister "made certain to emphasize the complete independence of the Swedish judicial system, prosecutors and courts," Eriksson said in an emailed statement. "He underlined that in Sweden everyone is equal before the law and that the government cannot and will not attempt to influence the legal proceedings." Follow-up conversations may take place, "but nothing has been booked or planned," he added.



In this file photo ASAP Rocky attends Rihanna's 4th Annual Diamond Ball at Cipriani Wall Street in New York City. — AFP

Fans, fellow artists and US Congress members have campaigned for the 30-year-old artist, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, to be freed since his arrest on July 3 following the fight on June 30. Prosecutors had faced a deadline on Friday to press charges or release the artist. They requested an extension to finish the probe, and the Stockholm District Court granted it, setting a new deadline of July 25.

Trump intervened after an appeal to him from rapper Kanye West and his wife Kim Kardashian. Mayer has claimed he was acting in self-defense after two young men harassed and followed him and his entourage. Three other people were arrested alongside Mayer and one of them-the rapper's bodyguard-was later released. Part of the incident was captured on amateur video published by entertainment outlet TMZ.

In the video, the rapper, who was in Stockholm for a concert, can be seen throwing one of the men into the street and then aiming several punches at him while he is down. But Mayers posted his own videos on Instagram showing the lead-up to the clash, in which the young man can be seen arguing with the rapper, who repeatedly asks the man and his friend to stop following them. One of the young men can also be seen hitting a member of the artist's entourage. — AFP

Emotional Patrick Stewart unveils new Star Trek

An emotional Patrick Stewart said he was "deliriously happy" to be returning to Star Trek a generation later, telling San Diego Comic-Con that "you cannot have too many franchises in a career." Stewart will reprise his fan-favorite role as Jean-Luc Picard in CBS's "Star Trek: Picard" after almost two decades, and presented unseen footage to a packed theater at the world's biggest pop culture fan convention. "We never know, do we, when our best moment will be—and that is now," he said.

His voice choking, Stewart described battling overwhelming emotions when shooting the final scenes of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" years ago, and how he had felt reluctant to return to the sci-fi franchise until meeting a writing team including Pulitzer-winning author—and now showrunner—Michael Chabon. "As soon as we began talking in the writers' room, that powerful emotion came surging



US actress Angelina Jolie arrives on stage. — AFP photos



US-Mexican actress Salma Hayek arrives onstage.



British actor Benedict Cumberbatch reacts on stage as the crowd sings Happy Birthday to him during the Marvel panel.



British actor Tom Hiddleston during the Marvel panel.



(From left) Florence Pugh, O. T. Fagbenle, Rachel Weisz and Scarlett Johansson speak at the Marvel Studios Panel.

STAR-STUDED MARVEL FILMS STORM COMIC-CON AS 'ENDGAME' CLAIMS RECORD

Marvel's all-conquering superheroes ripped through Comic-Con Saturday as the next batch of blockbuster movies were revealed to a hysterical crowd and Disney declared the wait for "Avengers: Endgame" to break the global box office record over Hollywood A-listers Angelina Jolie, Salma Hayek and Rachel Weisz will join the most lucrative franchise in film history, it was revealed in an announcement prompting a collective fan meltdown and ending frenzied speculation over the films' future. They appeared on stage in San Diego alongside Scarlett Johansson. Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman and others who will return in the upcoming—and sure to be multi-billion-grossing—movies.

"I can spend 90 minutes talking about what we've done or I can spend some time talking about what we're about to do," Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige told the world's largest pop-culture fan convention. Giant screens in Hall H revealed a timeline of films and television shows scheduled for the next two years including new outings for popular characters Thor, Black Widow, Doctor Strange and Loki.

Feige also confirmed sequels to "Black Panther," "Guardians of the Galaxy," and "Captain Marvel" without providing details. He finished the show—the most anticipated of the four-day event—by announcing that Oscar-winner Mahershala Ali will front a "Blade" reboot.

Record wait over?

The Marvel films have collectively grossed over \$22 billion at the global box office. Jolie and Hayek will front ensemble film "The Eternals" in November 2020. It will be

followed in February 2021 by "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," the first Marvel superhero film to be led by an Asian actor. Mega-budget shows to air on Disney+, the new streaming service from Marvel's parent company, include "Wandavision" starring Elizabeth Olsen, and Tom Hiddleston's "Loki."

Marvel's next round of new films kick off with Johansson's "Black Widow" in May. Disney simultaneously announced that the series' most successful film, Endgame, will become the highest-grossing movie of all time this weekend. It was just \$500,000 behind the \$2,789.7 million record set by James Cameron's "Avatar," and "will close this gap by tomorrow," it said. "You have to shout out to James Cameron who held that title for a long time," said Feige. "But for right now today in Hall H, thanks to you, Avengers: Endgame is the biggest film of all time." Both films are owned by Disney following its takeover of 21st Century Fox, and had their box office figures revised upwards due to new receipts data, it said.

'Tripping out'

Earlier, an emotional Patrick Stewart said he was "deliriously happy" to be returning to "Star Trek" a generation later, declaring that "you cannot have too many franchises in a career." British actor Stewart, 79, will reprise his fan-favorite role as Jean-Luc Picard in CBS's "Star Trek: Picard" after almost two decades.

His voice choking, Stewart said he had felt reluctant to return to the multi-billion-dollar sci-fi franchise until meeting a writing team including Pulitzer-winning author—and now showrunner—Michael Chabon. "As soon as we

began talking in the writers' room, that powerful emotion came surging back," he said.

The trailer revealed the surprise return of other popular characters including Data (Brent Spiner) and Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan). Unseen footage showed an age-worn, soul-searching Picard struggling to adjust to life back on Earth. Elsewhere, producers of The CW's "Batwoman" screened a pilot of the first superhero TV show led by an openly lesbian character. The pioneering show has stirred controversy in some of the internet's darker depths.

Star Ruby Rose missed the event due to ongoing filming, but executive Caroline Dries told a panel event that the studio was proud to promote diversity and representation. HBO revealed a trailer for season three of smash futuristic sci-fi Westworld, where the action has shifted from a Wild West-inspired theme park to one set under Nazi occupation. New cast member Aaron Paul said joining the show had been an "out of body" experience.

"I'm tripping out right now, I'm such a psychotic fan of Westworld," said the "Breaking Bad" actor, who plays a construction worker. TBS unveiled thriller "Snowpiercer" in which survivors circle a post-apocalyptic frozen Earth in a continuously rolling train. Based on a 2013 film and starring Oscar-winner Jennifer Connelly, the TV show depicts conflict between the train's starkly divided classes. Released in spring 2020, it has already been renewed for a second season. — AFP



Alex Kurtzman, Dominic Patten, Patrick Stewart, Isa Briones, and Santiago Cabrera speak at the "Enter The Star Trek Universe" Panel during 2019 Comic-Con International at San Diego Convention Center. — AFP

back. And it's still right here on this platform and it's not going to go away," he said.

The trailer revealed the surprise return of other popular characters including Data (Brent Spiner) and Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan) who then joined the cast and producers on stage. It showed an age-worn, soul-searching Picard living

back on Earth on his vineyard, and struggling to reacquaint. A mysterious young woman comes to him for help, before a few brief clips showing him seemingly back aboard a spaceship. Jonathan Del Arco and Jonathan Frakes will also return, it was announced.

Star Trek, a multi-billion-dollar cultural phenomenon

beloved by fans worldwide, turned 50 years old in 2016. "The Next Generation" ran from 1987 to 1994 with 178 episodes, and spawned several films, the last in 2002. The new show is not a direct sequel, and will be more character-driven, said executive producer Akiva Goldsman.

Stewart recalled how his children had explained to him what Star Trek was when he was first approached as a Shakespearean stage actor in the 1980s. "I'm deliriously happy that now I have four grandchildren who have the same attitude to what we're doing," he said, describing how his grandson Mason had begged to be allowed to see the trailer first. "That gave me great satisfaction." Addressing his decision to return after years of dismissing the possibility out of hand, the "X-Men" star said: "I knew that something very unusual was going to happen. I wanted to be a part of it."

"To imagine that something like this might go ahead and I wouldn't be there, would have been just too defeatist." The panel also featured footage from the upcoming third season of "Star Trek: Discovery," set a thousand years further into the future, and new light-hearted animated Trek comedy "Lower Decks" from Mike McMahan ("Rick and Morty"). "Picard" will be released in early 2020. — AFP