

Lifestyle

Super Mario: Nintendo's decades of star power



Japanese producer and video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.



US actor Jack Black attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening. —AFP photos



US actress Anya Taylor-Joy attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening.



US actor Charlie Day attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening at the Regal LA Live in Los Angeles.



US actor Chris Pratt attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening.



Canadian-US actor Seth Rogen attends Universal's "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" special screening.

Hollywood is having its second bash at sprinkling some movie magic on the "Super Mario Bros" video game franchise, three decades after the last attempt. The pint-sized plumber from Japanese game maker Nintendo has enjoyed 40 years of extraordinary popularity that has transformed the character into a truly global icon.

Nintendo owes a lot to its moustachioed hero, created by a young game designer called Shigeru Miyamoto initially as the protagonist in the "Donkey Kong" arcade game 1981. The firm had been struggling to crack the North American market and, according to some accounts, was on the verge of financial ruin.

With Kong, the Japanese studio finally succeeded in the United States — and invented the platform video game along the way. The hero was known as "Jumpman" until 1983 when he was given the name "Mario". Miyamoto then let him loose in his own "Super Mario Bros" game in 1985, where he was finally renamed "Super Mario".

Gaming icon

The main Super Mario games have since shifted more than 400 million units. And that does not account for wildly popular spinoffs like "Mario Kart" and "Mario Odyssey" or "Mario Golf" and "Mario Tennis". Mario's stratospheric success helped propel Nintendo to the pinnacle of the gaming world. Game designers have built a Mario universe with characters including his green-clad brother Luigi, turtle-demon nemesis Bowser, and friendly dragon-like sidekick Yoshi. The franchise has thrived through transitions from 2D to 3D and from consoles to smartphones with "Super Mario Run" and "Mario Kart Tour".

And retro-gamers are still willing to pay big



(From left) Michael Jelenic, Aaron Horvath, Jack Black, Chris Meledandri, CEO of Illumination, Seth Rogen, Shigeru Miyamoto attend a Special Screening of Universal Pictures' "The Super Mario Bros. Movie."

bucks for a slice of its history. A sealed Nintendo 64 cartridge of "Super Mario" sold for \$1.56 million in 2021, a record for a video game, according to Heritage Auctions in the US. "He is a pop culture icon known to everyone, young and

old," Morihiro Shigihara, a writer and former arcade manager, told AFP.

"The only other video game character with a claim to be more famous is Pikachu," he said, referencing the hero from the Pokemon franchise.

Global statesman

Japan's late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was not known for his comic flair. So he surprised the world by rocking up to the 2016 Olympics in Rio — the official handover ceremony for Tokyo 2020 — dressed as Mario. "I wanted to show Japan's soft power to the world with the help of Japanese characters," he told reporters afterwards. "I wasn't sure how the audience would react. But I received so many cheers." Mario was given perhaps an even stranger tribute by the authorities in the Spanish city of Zaragoza in 2010 when they named a new street Super Mario Bros Avenue. Though it is just around the corner from streets named after Space Invaders and Tetris.

Real-world empire

Nowadays, movie adaptations of video games are everywhere. Some, like "Resident Evil" and "Tomb Raider", have become bankable franchises. But Super Mario was there first with the 1993 movie "Super Mario Bros" starring Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper. But it bombed. Critics and audiences hated it.

Nevertheless, the wider Mario universe has expanded undeterred with the genial working-class hero getting toy tie-ins with Lego, watches made by Tag Heuer, and a backpack range from Eastpak. "Mario" theme parks are also popping up — first in Osaka in 2021, then Los Angeles last year, and a planned third "Super Mario World" in Florida. One of the attractions being considered is the ultimate tie-in, where the real world and Mario world finally meet — an augmented reality "Mario Kart" race around Bowser's castle. — AFP

'Dungeons & Dragons' finds

North America moviegoers are game

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves scorched the competition in North American theaters this weekend with an opening take estimated at \$38.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday.

The Paramount and eOne film, based on the popular role-playing game, also took in some \$33 million abroad, a key audience given its cost of \$150 million, said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

"Foreign is where 'Dungeons & Dragons' has to excel to be profitable and become a series," he said, adding that the film — a fantasy heist yarn starring Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez and Hugh Grant — "has the potential to generate sequels."

While toy- and game-based movies often struggle, next weekend's opening of "Super Mario Bros." is expected to be one of the year's biggest. And don't forget "Barbie," coming in July.

In second place this weekend was previous leader "John Wick: Chapter 4," at \$28.2 million. The Lionsgate action thriller, with Keanu Reeves in the title role, has drawn praise for elaborate stunts and choreography that have been called "spectacular" and "mind-boggling."

Horror flick "Scream VI" from Paramount and Spyglass Media placed third at \$5.3 million for the Friday-through-Sun-



day period. Its total domestic take of \$98.2 million has surpassed last year's "Scream," which earned \$81 million, Variety.com reported.

"His Only Son," a faith-based drama from Angel Studios, also opened at \$5.3 million — not bad for a movie made on a shoestring budget of \$250,000. It tells the Biblical story of God's directive to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

And in fifth place was United Artists'



boxing drama "Creed III," at \$5 million. Michael B. Jordan directs and plays the title character.

Rounding out the top 10 were:
"Shazam! Fury of the Gods" (\$4.7 million)
"A Thousand and One" (\$1.8 million)
"65" (\$1.6 million)
"Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" (\$1.2 million)
"Jesus Revolution" (\$1 million). — AFP

Safety coordinator on Baldwin film given suspended sentence

The safety coordinator on the Alec Baldwin film "Rust" was convicted Friday of unsafe handling of a firearm and sentenced to six months' probation for his part in the fatal on-set shooting of its cinematographer.

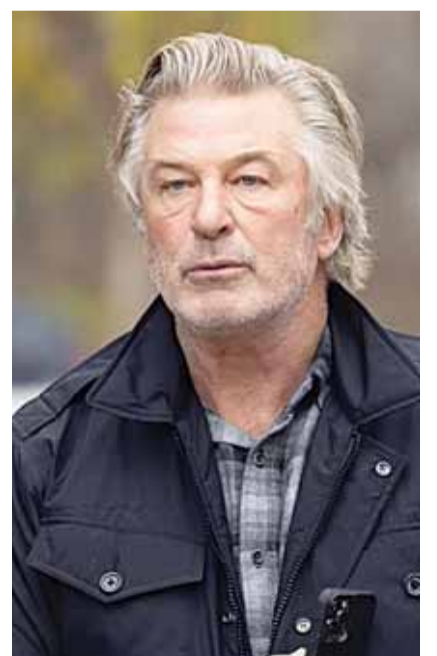
The verdict was the result of a plea deal and means Dave Halls, who was also assistant director of the low-budget Western, becomes the first conviction over the accident, for which Baldwin faces manslaughter charges. Halls handed Baldwin the loaded gun in October 2021 which ultimately discharged, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounding the film's director, Joel Souza.

Under the plea agreement, 63-year-old Halls will serve no jail time, but must complete six months of unsupervised probation. Halls had told Baldwin the gun was "cold" — industry speak for safe.

According to court filings, the film's armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed loaded the gun and handed it to Halls, who then checked the firearm to ensure that the bullets were "dummy" rounds — meaning they held no gunpowder.

Prosecutor Kari Morrissey, during the hearing Friday, described Halls as the "last line of defense" on the set, saying he failed to "check every round that was in the gun to confirm that it was a dummy round."

Both Baldwin — a co-producer and the lead actor — and Gutierrez-Reed, who was responsible for the weapons on set, face two alternative counts of voluntary man-



Alec Baldwin

slaughter. If found guilty, they face up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine. Baldwin, 64, has repeatedly said he was told by the crew that the gun was not loaded.

In accepting the deal on Friday, Halls agreed to testify in any future proceedings related to the matter. A weeks-long preliminary hearing is set to begin in early May for Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed. The accident sent shockwaves through Hollywood and led to calls for a total ban of real guns on set. Industry experts have said there are already stringent safety rules in place, but that they were ignored. — AFP