

Gold Rush
Bruno Bernard
photographed
Marilyn Monroe
in 1946.



FEATURES

32

No More Mr. Nice Guy

Sure, Paul Rudd is still Hollywood's most affable everyman. It's just sometimes ... he really wishes he weren't. **By Lacey Rose**
Photographed by Beau Grealy

42

The Man Who Invented Marilyn

OK, she invented herself. But it was photographer Bruno Bernard who wolf-whistled the teenaged Norma Jeane Dougherty in the street and first put her on magazine covers. His diaries and photos, from a new book by his grandson, capture the birth of a Hollywood legend, who would have turned 100 this year.

By Joshua John Miller

52

The Lost Boys

Once the world's highest-paid male model, Hoyt Richards gave every penny to a social-ite cult leader who claimed to be an alien and preyed on the young and beautiful. A new HBO doc tells only half the story.

By Seth Abramovitch

58

'We're All Here Because of Each Other'

Quinta Brunson, Lisa Kudrow and four more of the funniest women on TV (or anywhere) swap stories of unnerving feedback, unnecessary labels and what is perhaps the strangest case of mistaken celebrity identity ever told.

By Mikey O'Connell

Photographed by Beau Grealy

66

'This Is Serious Shit, Man'

Harrison Ford is best known for playing death-defying action heroes, but he's garnering some of the highest praise in his career for his portrayal of a doctor with Parkinson's on *Shrinking*.

By Scott Feinberg

Photographed by Beau Grealy

70

No Superheroes? No Problem

Marvel's *Wonder Man* has more in common with a premium cable dramedy than its Disney+ counterparts (down to a stand-alone episode starring Josh Gad). But its outsized success with critics and fans was far from a sure thing.

By Brian Davids





SEZANNIE TENNER/MARVEL

WHAT A MARVEL

No Superheroes? No Problem

Marvel's *Wonder Man* has more in common with a premium cable dramedy than its Disney+ counterparts (down to a stand-alone episode starring Josh Gad). But its outsized success with critics and fans was far from a sure thing **BY BRIAN DAVIDS**

Wonder Man's timing couldn't have been worse. The streaming bubble burst during its development, triggering an internal reevaluation by Marvel Studios. Even after narrowly withstanding Wall Street's market correction, it was halted by the 2023 WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes midway through the season, with no guarantee that it would resume. After all, the shock of HBO Max shelving its *Batgirl* movie for a tax write-off was still in the air, and pop culture was busy writing the superhero genre's obituary after a string of box office underperformers from both Marvel and DC.

"*Wonder Man* was definitely a vulnerable project. We were one of the last projects in the door when there was this mandate from Disney for Marvel to crank out as much as possible," says co-creator and showrunner Andrew Guest.

Fellow co-creator and director of episodes one and two, Destin Daniel Cretton, credits Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige and the rest of the

company's brass for defending the now-aply titled series during unprecedented times. "This show has many lives. There was a lot of behind-the-scenes drama. It definitely would've gotten canceled at another studio," adds Cretton, who's in post on July's *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*.

One of the many other reasons Guest was so worried about *Wonder Man*'s future was that it was a creative risk for Marvel. It's not a series about a superhero who's also a struggling actor. It's a series about a struggling actor whose secret superpowers are the bane of his existence. In other words, it's about characters, not spectacle.

VFX supervisor John Haley estimates that *Wonder Man*, out of the half dozen MCU series he's worked on, has roughly "half as many" VFX shots.

The story of Simon Williams, aka Wonder Man, actually begins with Ben Kingsley's Trevor Slattery. On the 2020 set of *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, Cretton and his producer Jonathan Schwartz spitballed a spinoff series that would chronicle the disgraced

Man About Town Yahya Abdul-Mateen II (with director Stella Meghie) was hesitant to take on the lead role of *Wonder Man*, insisting that he speak with Marvel boss Kevin Feige before saying yes. "The call showed that I took it seriously," says the star, who plays an actor trying to hide his superpowers.

thespian's attempt to restart his career following global condemnation for playing the part of the terrorist The Mandarin in real life.

Cretton's art department went as far as designing a mock poster with the title of *Trevor Goes to Hollywood*, but Marvel already was developing the Hollywood-centric *Wonder Man*, leading to a creative fusion between the two.

Inspired by *Midnight Cowboy*, Guest then pitched his winning take involving an unlikely friendship between two lonely, narcissistic actors during their shared pursuit of career-making and career-saving roles in a *Wonder Man* movie. With Kingsley attached first, Cretton championed casting Yahya Abdul-Mateen II as Simon.

The two had met for a general well before *Wonder Man*, but seeing Abdul-Mateen's versatile performance in Broadway's *Topdog/Underdog* cemented the idea for Cretton. He then got Guest and Marvel execs on board, only for Abdul-Mateen himself to be the lone holdout.

Surprisingly, his tenure as *Aquaman* villain Black Manta in the tumultuous DC Extended Universe had no bearing on his cautious approach to accepting a Marvel role.

The New Orleans native compares his decision-making process to having only one dollar to spend in the MCU and wanting to use it wisely. That meant requesting a call with Feige — a move his reps warned could make him seem high-maintenance — much like Simon in episode one, when he's fired from *American Horror Story* for nitpicking his one scene as a day player. "I had the audacity to say, 'No, I need to speak to the top,'" recalls Abdul-Mateen.

Needless to say, the call went well. "Kevin was completely game. I told him I wanted to be a human and funny — and he said that's why they wanted me," says Abdul-Mateen.



1 Co-creator and director Destin Daniel Cretton (right) took inspiration from his early days as a struggling filmmaker living in Echo Park for the show.
2 The series has significantly fewer action sequences and visual effects than a typical Marvel show, instead favoring monologues and character moments.
3 Cretton and Ben Kingsley (left) met when they worked together on *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*.
4 The show shot at real L.A. landmarks, including the Fox Westwood Village Theatre.
5 The Clark Street Diner in Hollywood hosts a clandestine meeting in the show between Trevor and Agent Cleary (played by Arian Moayed).



Abdul-Mateen would next find out that Kingsley has his own scrupulous process for sizing up his collaborators. After accepting the role, Abdul-Mateen extended an overture to build a rapport offscreen in service of their onscreen relationship, but much to his surprise, Kingsley rebuffed the offer.

Kingsley said he would prepare independently, indicating that their time to discover each

other would come on set. And if Abdul-Mateen required any script changes, he needed to address them right away, before Kingsley memorized them.

"By him being so independent in his preparation, it put a chip on my shoulder," says Abdul-Mateen, who first gained his scene partner's respect by showing up to their episode one table read completely off-book. "So I'm actually glad how things

played out. We both formed our own road maps and shared them with each other on the day," he says.

The stakes of the series are less rooted in whether Simon and Trevor will land lead roles in *Wonder Man* (yes, it's meta) and more about whether Simon's volatile powers that can cause explosions will derail his entire life. The added rub is that Trevor, as part of an unfulfilled prison sentence, is reluctantly working on behalf of the Department of Damage Control (DODC) to gather evidence against Simon.

It's now illegal for superhumans to act on movie sets after a tragic incident years earlier involving DeMarr "Doorman" Davis (Byron Bowers) and a fictional version of Josh Gad.

Inspired by the anthology



IT DEFINITELY WOULD'VE GOTTEN CANCELED AT ANOTHER STUDIO.

CO-CREATOR DESTIN DANIEL CRETTON, ON OVERCOMING STRIKE DELAYS AND THE STREAMING BUBBLE BURST





episodes of *Atlanta* and Guest's former show, *Community*, episode four, "Doorman," flashes back to tell the cautionary tale of how DeMarr became a super-powered doorway. Shortly after coming into contact with a mysterious black goo, DeMarr, through his newfound ability to function as a human portal, provided safe passage for Gad and others during a nightclub fire.

Hollywood quickly turned DeMarr into an overnight sensation. Then, as his 15 minutes of fame began to run out and his powers destabilized from heavy drinking, DeMarr accidentally trapped Gad inside him during a movie stunt gone wrong.

When approached about playing a heightened, bizarre version of himself, Gad was flattered by what he calls his "strangest" casting opportunity

to date. But fearing he would exclude himself from playing a proper MCU character, he, too, asked to have his own chat with Feige before signing on the dotted line. "Kevin kindly lied to me through his teeth and said, 'We will definitely make sure you play another character,'" Gad jokes. "Maybe he'll call me in 50 years to do my version of the Robert Redford-Harrison Ford late-stage bureaucrat role."

From the 30,000-foot view, *Wonder Man* is a tribute to dreamers, particularly those who come to Los Angeles to doggedly pursue their greater ambitions. Thus, L.A. became the only option for shooting the show, and Marvel and the *Wonder Man* team were determined to make it happen with or without a tax credit. The show shot at a number of



L.A. landmarks, including the TCL Chinese Theatre and the Hollywood Walk of Fame, but it made a greater point of capturing plenty of local favorites and lesser photographed areas.

After Simon and Trevor's first audition for *Wonder Man*, they go for drinks at the now-closed Taix, Echo Park's 99-year-old French restaurant that Guest and Cretton frequented during their early careers.

Cretton also revisited some of the same neighborhoods where he shot his first two indie features, *I Am Not a Hipster* and *Short Term 12*. Even the set for Simon's modest apartment on Lexington Avenue evoked Cretton's humble beginnings. "I could almost smell the mildew of my first apartment in Echo Park, back when I was surviving off of 99-cent burritos and Top Ramen," he says.

Simon and Trevor end up landing lead roles in *Wonder Man*, but when Trevor is later forced to come clean about his informant arrangement with

the DODC, Simon, fueled by heartbreak and rage, proceeds to blow up an entire *Wonder Man* soundstage, a sequence that Haley considers to be the season's pièce de résistance given the intricate teamwork across multiple departments. The season ends with Simon breaking Trevor out of prison for taking the fall for him.

The response to Marvel's most unconventional series has been so resoundingly positive that Disney has ordered a second season, a rarity for Marvel shows. Guest says season two will reckon with Simon and Trevor's legal standing without abandoning their charming dynamic as actors-in-arms. "Simon makes a real friend for the first time in his life. Moving forward, that is going to be more important to him as a person than any dream role," says Guest. As for whether Abdul-Mateen got his dollar's worth from *Wonder Man*, he responds emphatically: "Heck yeah, man." **VIBR**