
A full-page photograph of Deadpool in his iconic red and black suit. He is holding a handgun in both hands, aiming it towards the camera. The background is a black and white halftone pattern with some white splatters. A yellow speech bubble is positioned in the upper right quadrant.

**NO FICTIONAL CHARACTER
HAS EVER HIJACKED AN EMPIRE
FEATURE. BEFORE HERE. BEFORE
NOW. BEFORE THE KING.
YOU'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER
YOUR FIRST TIME.**

A full-page photograph of Deadpool in his iconic red and black suit. He is holding a handgun in both hands, aiming it towards the camera. The background is a black and white halftone pattern with some white splatters. A yellow speech bubble is positioned in the lower left quadrant.

**DON'T TURN
THE PAGE YET! REVEL IN THE
GLORY THAT IS MY CINEMATIC
RETURN! MOUTH: UNSEWN. MIND:
UNHINGED. WOMEN AND CHILDREN:
UNSAFE. TO BLAME:
UNCLE KEVIN.**

Deadpool,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
July 23, 2015.

REGENERATION

HOW RYAN REYNOLDS FELL IN LOVE WITH,
ALMOST KILLED, THEN RESCUED A FANBOY
FAVOURITE X-MEN UNIVERSE CHARACTER:
THE UBER-VIOLENT, ULTRA-IRREVERENT

DEADPOOL

WORDS
OWEN WILLIAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY
ART STREIBER



Deadpool (Ryan Reynolds) with Negasonic Teenage Warhead (Brianna Hildebrand). Nerds! Note her New Mutants uniform.



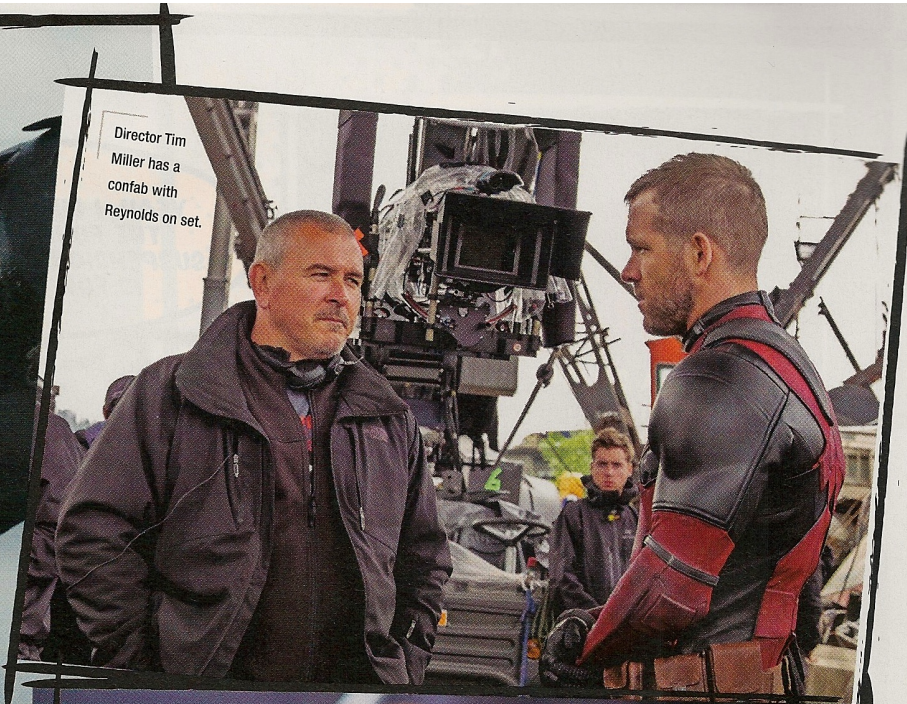
YAN REYNOLDS WAS TAKING

a break from filming in Vancouver, Canada, when to his surprise a studio executive handed him a pile of comic books. Reynolds was in the middle of shooting a bloody, action-packed Marvel Comics adaptation in which he played a cocky, profane, sword-wielding hero. The comic series through which he was now flicking was also a Marvel product. Its protagonist? A cocky, profane sword-wielding hero. "Seeing as you're essentially playing this guy anyway," said the exec, who had spotted the similarities, "maybe you should play him for real."

It was 2004, the movie was the Wesley Snipes-fronted *Blade: Trinity*, Reynolds' character vampire-hunter Hannibal King, and the series in his hands was titled *Deadpool*. The actor took in the character's striking red-and-black suit and mask, his aptitude for colourful, inventive violence, his intriguing, fourth wall-breaking

self-awareness as a comic-book character and a knack for one-liners that matched Reynolds' own (he had for *Blade: Trinity* just improvised the immortal diss, "cock-juggling thundercut").

Deadpool, aka Wade Wilson, had been presented to Reynolds in terms of his similarities to Hannibal King. But what really excited Reynolds were the differences — to both *Blade: Trinity*'s motormouth and, indeed, any other superhero. "I pored through the comics and realised that this character occupies a space in the comic-book universe that nobody else does," says Reynolds now. "I still feel that way." Specifically, he says, it's the "gallows humour", the self-reflexiveness of the character and the chance to do something in the genre that isn't "just for kids" that appeals. "There are moments where we really just venture into the heart of darkness and stay there for a few beats," he explains, "but then it also has this very humorous undertone. We can go places



Director Tim Miller has a confab with Reynolds on set.



T. J. Miller as Weasel, Deadpool's sidekick. Is he the joker, or is he the ace of spades?

UKRAINIAN STUNT DOUBLE! CAN'T RISK THE LIGAMENTS. NOT MINE. RYAN'S. HE'S MOVIE-STAR WEAK AT THE JOINTS.

and do things with this that you couldn't do with any other superhero property."

Eleven years later, and *Empire* has found Reynolds once more in Vancouver, Canada shooting a bloody, action-packed Marvel Comics adaptation. Except this time, he is both the star and a producer. And he's playing the right character. We are in Riverview Hospital, a former mental-health facility that has, over the years, played host to such productions as *The X-Files*, *Jennifer's Body* and *Watchmen* and is now standing in for a sleazy Mexican clinic which provides phony cures for cancer patients. Blood has been spread thickly over the tiled floor. It pools around generously scattered scraps of raw chicken, which have spewed from a kicked-over bucket (the patients, you see, have been led to believe these are their just-removed tumours).



Reynolds' Wade Wilson hasn't yet fully transformed into the "Regenerating Degenerate" Deadpool, so is decked only in a grubby grey hoodie over a yellow T-shirt, with baggy brown trousers and scuffed sneakers. His hair is patchy, the result of Wade's terminal illness, which the former special forces operative is desperate to cure. Having just realised his "Cancer World Tour" has led him down yet another blind alley, he's angrily launched himself at the clinic's head quack (Mexican actor Luis Javier, in shabby medical scrubs and sporting a greasy ponytail with a comb-over), and the two have embarked on an unapologetically vicious, unchoreographed brawl. They writhe on the oozy floor, slipping around in the copious stage-blood and poultry chunks. It is hard to believe this scene, with all its grue and brutality, will appear in a movie that is officially considered to be the eighth in 20th Century Fox's

X-Men franchise. For Reynolds, it's hard to believe it's happening at all. "I had just about mentally divorced the idea of ever doing this movie," the exhausted, dripping star tells *Empire* after picking himself up. "But I always knew what I wanted to do here." Put simply, he wanted *Deadpool* done right. After all, he had already experienced what it was like to do Deadpool wrong.

THIS MOVIE IS A UNIQUE cinematic rescue mission. Ryan Reynolds has been Wade Wilson before, appearing in a supporting role in 2009 misfire *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, the first and best-forgotten solo outing for Hugh Jackman's clawed mutant anti-hero.

Given he's the so-called "Merc With A Mouth", Deadpool's transformation into a Frankengoon with his mouth glued shut confused and incensed fans familiar with the character. Not least >



YEAH, I LIKE TO BREAK THE FOURTH WALL. SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF IS FOR PUSSIES.

I DESERVE AN OSCAR FOR ACTING OPPOSITE COLOSSUS, WHO'S ACTUALLY A CANADIAN GUY IN MOCAP PJS AND A TENNIS BALL FOR A HAT.

Negasonic and Deadpool with Andre Tricoteux's Colossus. Colossus appeared in *X2*, *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* and *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, but was then played by Daniel Cudmore.

Reynolds himself. After that initial, fateful encounter with the comics five years earlier, he'd set about developing a Deadpool movie at studio New Line, to no avail. So when 20th Century Fox had offered him the role in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, he was at first understandably hesitant. Though, ultimately, he reasoned that it was impossible to refuse. "Basically I was given the opportunity to step in and play Deadpool in that capacity or not play him at all," he says.

So he jumped in, and was excited to do so, the "fluid situation" of a writers' strike even necessitating that he pen all his own dialogue, making Wade the film's strongest support character until an ill-conceived plot twist shut him up. "I knew the character; I knew how he would talk and move," he explains, "but the closed-up mouth thing was an addition that happened as we ventured further down the road, and obviously I don't write the cheques. Sometimes

studio politics can interfere with fanboy dreams, including my own."

Deadpool, then, is not simply a reboot or a reimagining of the character: it's an actor correcting a past misfire. Such second chances are already an unlikely opportunity. But it's made even more extraordinary by the fact that, in the spirit of the source material, it has been conceived as an R-rated film in a traditionally PG-13 genre; a film that will also, in embracing the character's fourth wall-smashing, take meta-swipes at costumed mutants while somehow also embracing them. It has not been easy.

"The problem was finding a way to deliver a *Deadpool* script that could be digested and understood by the studio," says Reynolds. "Selling Fox on an *X-Men* property that works so far outside the normal experience you have with an *X-Men* character was tough."

It didn't hurt that he could at least point to great source material. Created

by Fabian Nicieza and Rob Liefeld for *X-Men* spin-off *The New Mutants* in 1991, Deadpool had quickly proved a hit with appreciators of Marvel's mutant titles. Like evergreen favourite Wolverine, he's an amoral lone wolf with an accelerated healing factor, which makes him basically invincible (he once re-grew his head after a decapitation, and one story arc revealed he's still alive 800 years in the future). A preternatural martial artist, tactician, swordsman and marksman, he submitted himself to the Weapon X process — the secret military super-soldier programme that also gave Wolverine his adamantium skeleton and claws — as a last-chance treatment for his incurable cancer. Unfortunately, the surgery also regenerated the corrupted cells, meaning his body is constantly at war with itself, he's turned insane, and he's stuck with the scarring that makes him look, as Reynolds quips in the *Deadpool* trailer, like "a testicle with teeth".



In the short space of time between the *Wolverine* movie's pre-release anticipation and its vitriolic post-release critical reaction, there was some interest within Fox in developing *Deadpool* as kind of a spin-off to the spin-off. But as the *X-Men* franchise stalled and regrouped, to be eventually rebooted by Matthew Vaughn's '60s-set *X-Men: First Class* in 2011, Reynolds was left to fly the tattered red-and-black flag alone. His tenacity undiminished, he gradually got together a team of conspirators during a tortuous development process.

Writing partners Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick came aboard as early as 2009. The geeky-yet-businesslike pair had most recently written the razor-sharp horror-comedy *Zombieland*, and were also known for co-creating Spike TV's comic faux-reality series *The Joe Schmo Show*.

"(Then Fox executive) Drew Crevello invited us to pitch a *Deadpool* story,"

Reese recalls. "We loved the character and really wanted the job, but we felt that we'd seen enough superhero origin stories, even at that point. We just dove in with *Deadpool* having an adventure, ignoring where he came from, and Ryan really liked our take. But he also felt that it was important to back up a little."

Over the next few months, Reynolds and his writers thrashed out the basics of the chaotic story, structuring it as a "fractured narrative" which interweaves *Deadpool*'s beginnings with a present-day revenge story.

"Originally our feeling was that cancer wasn't something we wanted to touch in a superhero movie," says Wernick. "Ryan's instinct, which was actually dead on, was that's exactly who *Deadpool* is and why his attitude is so dark and flippant. That really set the framework for making something that was kind of the anti-superhero movie: about a character who is flawed, who

BEYOND THE WALL

DEADPOOL ENTERS A LONG TRADITION OF AUDIENCE-ADDRESSING CINEMA. HERE ARE FIVE OF OUR FAVOURITE TO-CAMERA WINKS...



WAYNE'S WORLD (1992)

After Wayne (Mike Myers, above) and Garth's (Dana Carvey) basement cable show is picked up by a big network, exec Benjamin Oliver (Rob Lowe) insists they include product placement. Cue Wayne mugging wildly to camera showcasing a range of tasty comestibles. "Pepsi, it's the taste of a new generation!" (* Ask the old generation)

BLAZING SADDLES (1974)

Pondering his diabolical plans, Harvey Korman's racist State Attorney Hedy Lamarr ("HEDLEY!") becomes aware of the camera. "If I could find a sheriff who so offends the citizens of Rock Ridge that his very appearance would drive them out of town... But where would I find such a man? Why am I asking you?"

FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF (1986)

John Hughes' teen classic gleefully smashes the fourth wall from the very start with Ferris' (Matthew Broderick) instructions to the audience on skipping school. "The key to faking out the parents is the clammy hands. It's a good non-specific symptom."

GOODFELLAS (1990)

In a vintage Scorsese final *coup de cinéma* gangster Henry Hill (Ray Liotta), who has been providing a voiceover for most of the movie, climbs off the witness stand and finally addresses the cinema audience directly.

FUNNY GAMES (1997)

Michael Haneke's searing critique of violence relies on making the audience complicit in the crimes of his two young psychos (Arno Frisch, Frank Giering), starting with a perfectly judged glance to camera as one sets about slaughtering the victim family's dog. **ADAM SMITH**

ABSOLUTE SUPERPOWER

THE DEAD POOL IS A 1988 CLINT EASTWOOD MOVIE. SO WE IMAGINE HOW OTHER CLINT TITLES MIGHT BE REIMAGINED AS COMIC BOOKS

ILLUSTRATIONS JOHN ROYLE



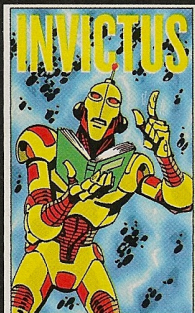
FIREFOX

The Volcanic Vermin!
ORIGIN STORY: After rooting through a radioactive bin, unassuming urban vermin Scrangus incredibly gained sentience, the power to turn himself into living fox-flame, and the ability to browse the web at will.



TIGHTROPE

The High-Wire Crimefighter!
ORIGIN STORY: After accidentally taking a radioactive travel-sickness pill, meek New York barista Eleanor Elminster gained a superhuman sense of balance. Cat burglars beware!



INVICTUS

The Unconquerable Soul!
ORIGIN STORY: Created by baleful Professor Maniako to destroy humanity, this indestructible automaton discovered the poetry of William Ernest Henley, declared, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul," and turned to the side of good.



MILLION DOLLAR BABY

He Was Born Ready!
ORIGIN STORY: Super-smart mutant Alfie Chubkins is only 13 months old. But after playing the markets, he's become an evil-smiting trillionaire who wears a giant killer teddy-bear suit. Which changes his nappy when he shits himself. **DAN JOLIN**

THIS GUY CASUALLY BROUGHT UP GREEN LANTERN. I'M CASUALLY TURNING HIM INTO THE CONSISTENCY OF MARMALADE.



ONLY EIGHT PAGES? HOLD ON, DID STAR WARS GET MORE? GET MY AGENT. NOT LIKE, ON THE PHONE. GET HIM.

kills people for a living, who has cancer and then gets saved by this mutation introduced by Ajax (*the film's antagonist, played by Ed Skrein*), but is horribly scarred in the process. It set the tone for a fresh new take on the genre."

Crevello was also responsible for introducing Reynolds to Tim Miller in 2011. The fiftysomething first-time director may seem like a late-starter, but he's been a significant name in visual effects and animation circles since the mid-'90s, through his co-ownership of the renowned VFX studio Blur. His short film *Gopher Broke* was nominated for an Oscar in 2005, and he personally oversaw the stunning title sequence for David Fincher's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*.

"Drew had seen and liked my work and wanted to work with me," Miller tells us. "He said as a first-time director he probably couldn't get me anything big, but they had this other thing... Coincidentally I had already read the script because it had been leaked online, so I knew it was fucking awesome. I was a fan already."

Crevello has since moved on to become Senior Vice President of movie production at Warner Bros., but he remains an uncredited "angel on *Deadpool's* shoulder", in Reese's words. Other benefactors include Fincher and James Cameron (with whom Miller worked on *Avatar*), who both read the *Deadpool* screenplay and put in a good word or two at Fox along the way.

Having immediately hit it off with Reynolds, Miller's next job was to prove himself to the studio. The application process saw Miller and Reynolds working on an entirely CG test reel (for which Reynolds provided motion capture): a proof of concept presenting a bullet-spraying action sequence that, remounted in live action, remains almost shot-for-shot intact in the final film. It wasn't intended for public viewing, but someone leaked the test reel online during the summer of 2014, to a blast of audience approval and a sudden scramble of new activity. Nobody admits responsibility: "Rhett and I actually discussed it but we don't have the technological savvy," laughs Wernick.

"That test footage is absolutely the reason I got to come back," Reynolds states. "When it leaked I just saw it online like everybody else, and I was like, 'Wow, where did that come from after all this time?' The studio finally saw what

they had and that there was a massive appetite for the character and his sensibilities. And they saw it was me up there, so they thought they might as well brush me off and put me in the red tights."

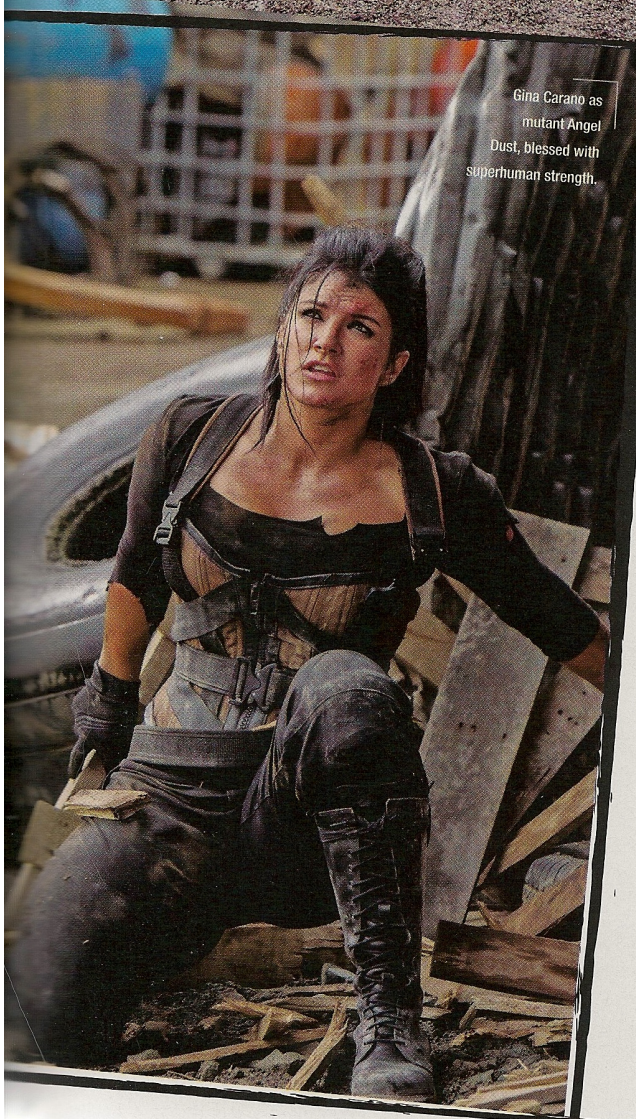
DURING ALL THESE YEARS with *Deadpool*, Ryan Reynolds has become so close to his character that many of his crew and co-stars insist that he simply is Wade Wilson. "He's a natural comic and wise-ass," says T. J. Miller, who plays *Deadpool's* sidekick, Weasel. "Really silly, quick and bizarre."

On set, Reynolds' ownership of the role, at least, is obvious. Far from putting his feet up between takes, he's deep in the creative process with his director and writers. "Tim, Rhett, Paul and I are all there moving the creative ball down the field," he says. "It's all about being on that team together."

Today's scene is a case in point, with the set-up to Reynolds and Javier's floor-gore scrap taking shape as *Empire* watches. Wilson's cancer-cure odyssey has brought him to this dubious clinic in Guadalajara, where he lurks in a crumbling doorway until he rumbles the scam and reveals his presence to Javier's dodgy doc. As originally written and shot, Javier



Deadpool is famed for having the gift of the gab, but his way with words is far from his only weapon.



Gina Carano as mutant Angel Dust, blessed with superhuman strength.

attacks Reynolds on sight. But Reynolds is uncomfortable with the doctor's motivation, and as work on the scene progresses, it's rejigged so that Wilson provokes the subsequent scrap.

Tim Miller may joke that the writers have done nothing but play *Angry Birds* during the shoot, but having them always to hand is clearly valuable. They divide their time between the live set and a freezing room around a corner, with a lone video monitor and a broken window.

"Your article should be about the mistreatment of writers in Hollywood," chuckles Wernick.

"I need new writers," growls Miller, striding past. "This thing is like a fucking Mexican soap opera."

One of the major difficulties in corralling *Deadpool's* chaos, all agree, has been where to draw the line, particularly in the case of the character's signature tic: the way he knows he's a character in a comic book and speaks to the reader.

"Does he now know he's a comic-book character in a comic-book movie?" Miller asks us, rhetorically. "Does he know that Ryan Reynolds is playing him, and that Ryan Reynolds also played Green Lantern? It's a big rabbit hole, and we explore it pretty deep." He says the one rule he did impose and abide by was that *Deadpool* is only self-referential after his power-imbuing surgery. "Deadpool breaks the fourth wall. Wade Wilson never does."

The grimness of today's scene notwithstanding, there's a palpable sense of excitement buzzing throughout the set. Reese and Wernick say they're feeling a similar vibe of something special being in motion to that they felt on *Zombieland*. Miller says it's the best first experience as a director that he could possibly have imagined, despite joking that his management style is "exposed vulnerability, with all these seasoned technical pros being really very generous about me not knowing what the fuck I'm doing."

Reynolds, meanwhile, continues to pinch himself. "We got to make the film! It's a shoestring budget for this type of movie; not at all the money you'd expect from the *X-Men* franchise. But we got to make it the way we wanted to make it."

Having waited this long, he's now in it for the duration. If you needed any further evidence of his commitment, there's also the fact that he has to sit through four hours of make-up to bury his leading-man looks under *Deadpool's* grotesque scars (when they're not buried under the mask, which will be CGI-enhanced in the finished film). "It's worth it; I'm not complaining," he smiles. "Once you're in it you just make the process enjoyable." Just as well, since he'll have to go through that process many more times if future *Deadpool* movies materialise.

A sequel has yet to be announced, but there is speculation that the summer 2017 release date originally earmarked by Fox for a follow-up to Josh Trank's unloved *Fantastic Four* may now be filled by a *Deadpool 2*. Beyond that, Reese and Miller think there's a likelihood that Wade Wilson will find himself appearing elsewhere in the X-movie universe. It's hard to imagine how he'd belong there in its current form, but with Hugh Jackman retiring as Wolverine after his next solo outing, and the trilogy begun by *X-Men: First Class* concluding in 2016 with *Apocalypse*, all bets for the future of the X-franchise are currently off.

"This film certainly works within the context of the *X-Men* universe," Reynolds teases, "but it doesn't necessarily include the sensibilities of an *X-Men* movie. It's like taking an *X-Men* character, pumping him full of LSD and then releasing him back into that fold." Where Wilson fits (or doesn't) in the wider series is something he says *Deadpool* actually touches on, "in our own very brief, glib way..."

After 11 years, it seems, we're still only at the beginning. ■

DEADPOOL IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 4 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

Ryan Reynolds,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
July 23, 2015.



HERO FOR HIRE

FROM WANNABE COMEDY-BIT-
PARTER TO COMIC BOOK-MOVIE
STAR AND PRODUCER... EVEN
RYAN REYNOLDS
ISN'T SURE HOW IT HAPPENED

WORDS
OWEN WILLIAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY
ART STREIBER

MY CAREER DIDN'T exactly pan out the way I'd imagined," says Ryan Reynolds. Normally you'd

expect an admission like this to preface a tale of disappointment and recrimination. Yet with Reynolds it's quite the opposite. He's more surprised than anybody at a 25-year career trajectory that's led to him taking the position of star (and producer) of what promises to be one of the boldest, craziest blockbusters of 2016. "When I moved to LA when I was 18 years old," he says, "I genuinely just wanted to play the wacky next-door neighbour on a sitcom."

It has, in his own words, been a "weird road". Born into a crowded household in Vancouver on October 23, 1976, Reynolds was the youngest of four brothers. His father was a food wholesaler and his mother worked in retail; it's not like there's any showbiz in his blood. It all feels a long way from where he is now. And yet *Deadpool*, thanks to its set location, sees him back on his old Vancouver stomping ground. He still calls it home — although he now also shares a pad in New York with his wife, Blake Lively, and their one year-old daughter — and it's from here that he catches up with *Empire* for an engaging but determinedly self-effacing chat which happens towards the end of post-production on *Deadpool*.

"I wasn't particularly interested in acting," he says of his initial, successful try-out for the Canadian teen soap *Hillside*. "The show had come to town and done a cattle call and I just went along. I thought it was a great way to get out of the house." It kept him occupied for two-and-a-half years, despite barely paying: "I'm not kidding, I literally still had a paper route at the same time. I used to get my brother to cover for me if I was on set."

Roles in higher-profile shows followed (he died before the opening titles in a third-season *X-File* and played a couple of separate parts in different seasons of *The Outer Limits*), but he puts this down to Canada's small pool of acting talent. "Those were the local shows that were shot in Vancouver or Alberta. It wasn't a matter of *if* I was going to do those shows; it was just *when* they ran out of other actors. If you're an actor in Vancouver you eventually get the call."

As he emerged from adolescence he went to college "for a second", and drove a forklift truck as the acting dried up. Then, on a whim, along with fellow Vancouver actor Chris William Martin, he decided to pack his bags and head for Los Angeles. "Ideally I had the idea of >

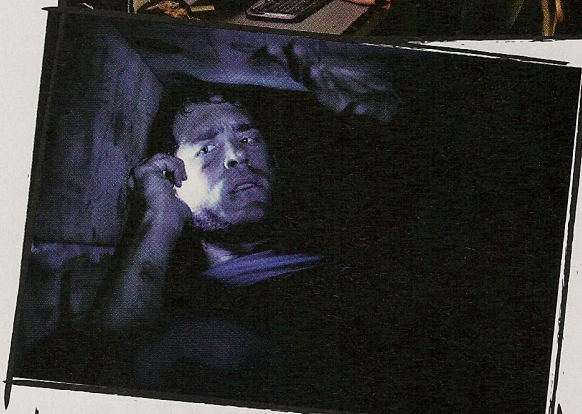
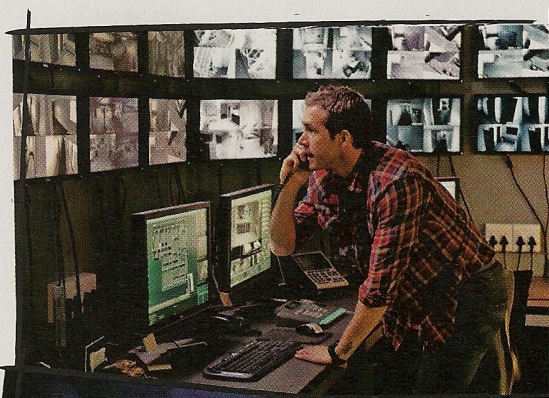
joining (*legendary improv troupe*) The Groundlings,” he reveals, but says he didn’t have the necessary comic “reflexes” and anyway, he was out of money and needed a more reliable gig. “I begged an agent to send me out on five auditions, swearing to God I’d get one of them,” he says. “Somehow I made good on that.”

THE PART REYNOLDS landed as as pretty-boy med-student Michael ‘Berg’ Bergen for four seasons of the ABC sitcom *Two Guys, A Girl And A Pizza Place*, which opened the door to roles in comedy movies of varying quality, and eventual success with the title role of the jackass-with-a-heart-of-gold in National Lampoon’s gross-out comedy *Van Wilder: Party Liaison*. But instead of this beginning a string of frattish comedies (Reynolds didn’t even star in either *Van Wilder* sequel), his comedic spark won him the role of quippy vampire killer Hannibal King in *Blade: Trinity*.

It was here his transformation into an action star began: not just because *Blade* indirectly led to *Deadpool*, but also because of the three-month gym regime that first chiselled Reynolds’ already slim physique into a lean and muscular shape. There was also the fact that, intentionally or not, he upstaged leading man Wesley Snipes, much to the star’s annoyance, if reports are to be believed. Which, Reynolds insist, they shouldn’t. “Contrary to what people like to say in the media it was amazing working with Wesley,” he says, before adding mischievously, “He embodied every fibre of that character...”

Once again, though, Reynolds defied expectation. Freshly buffed, he could have carried Hannibal’s guns and blades into any number of big-budget action vehicles... but he didn’t want to. “I refused so many leading-man parts,” he says, “because I was still always looking for that eccentric next-door neighbour.” In action terms, only *Deadpool* kept his attention — superheroes don’t get much more eccentric — and retreated into quirkier projects and ensemble casts, with the likes of *Smokin’ Aces* and *Fireflies In The Garden*. Until, that is, director Martin Campbell came knocking, looking for someone to front up Warner Bros.’ mega-budget summer tentpole *Green Lantern*.

For most actors, taking the lead in something of that scale would have been a no-brainer. But Reynolds paused for thought. In many ways *Green Lantern* is the anti-*Deadpool*: clean-cut, cosmic and optimistic in the way that the heroes of Marvel-rival DC often tended to be. And green, of course, rather than red. Yet the



Top to bottom: As CIA agent Matt Weston in 2012’s *Safe House*; Rodrigo Cortés’ acclaimed *Buried* (2010); Comic-book movie #1, *Green Lantern* (2011); His first turn at *Deadpool* in 2009’s *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

years of “cyclical studio hell” with his pet project had taken their toll, and besides, he was flattered. Then, of course, it flopped, grossing only \$220 million worldwide against a \$200-million production budget.

“That’s the only time I’ve traversed into that mega-budget territory,” he reflects now, “and it was a slightly terrifying place to be. You really need a visionary behind a movie like that, but it was the classic studio story: ‘We have a poster, but we don’t have a script or know

what we want; let’s start shooting!’”

It was, he says, “frustrating”, but the clarity of hindsight doesn’t make him wish he’d turned it down. He met his wife on that production plus, he insists, “It afforded me a lot of opportunities.” Reynolds is seemingly bulletproof when it comes to box-office disappointments. It’s not that he hasn’t had them. It’s just that by the time the numbers come in he’s already onto the next thing, which is as likely to be something leftfield as mainstream, such as 2015’s *The Voices*, in which he plays an accidentally murderous stalker with a menagerie of talking pets. He’s also played believably against a string of heavyweight co-stars, displaying seemingly zero ego about other names appearing above his own in the cast. “Are you kidding?” he laughs. “I love it when the responsibility’s on someone else’s ass!”

THE PRESSURE OF THE A-list is hardly something Reynolds covets. It’s this, in many ways, which makes him the perfect *Deadpool* — it makes him fearless. It’s telling that one of his favourite movies is Rodrigo Cortés’ *Buried*, which takes place entirely inside a box and has a (non-voice-only) cast of one: Reynolds. “We felt like explorers in a way,” he says of that film. “We were doing something that was basically impossible and people had exactly zero expectations for it. And we did something pretty amazing.” It was quite an achievement: an ‘inaction movie’ that managed to draw maximum thrills from its restricted set-up.

But don’t try and get him to draw a pattern from his choices. “Roles are roles,” shrugs Reynolds. “I don’t have a design for my career at all. I imagine that would just be incredibly frustrating! My choices are typically character-driven parts where you’re not requiring an audience to specifically love or hate you, and you’re getting an opportunity to do a little bit more and have a little bit more fun.”

He brushes off *Empire*’s suggestion that he’s a character actor operating at the level of a lead. “When you do a lot of different things, people sometimes confuse ‘character actor’ with just ‘actor’.” He has a point. He isn’t a performer who disappears into a role. There’s an extent to which he’s always Ryan Reynolds.

And for the immediate future that is the only role he has planned, in a domestic setting in Queensland, Australia, holding the baby while Lively shoots Jaime Collet-Serra’s shark thriller *The Shallows*. “It’s a great part,” he chuckles. “I play the nanny.” The wacky nanny next door? “Exactly.” ■

