



# The Affleck effect

The Academy Award-winning actor on his excitement at becoming the latest Caped Crusader, and why he believes in creating his own luck in life. By **Matthew Weiner**

If Hollywood made a film about Ben Affleck's career, critics would pan it for being too far-fetched. Having won his first Oscar at 25 his reputation collapsed under an avalanche of turkeys and a celebrity wedding that saw him rebranded as the back half of Bennifer. But now Ben Affleck is having the last laugh. Having won back the Academy's favour with *Argo* in 2013, he's set to be the new Caped Crusader in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* alongside Henry Cavill as The Man of Steel. The stage is set for a fascinating new era for the straight-talking Bostonian.

"It's so awesome. I'm so excited" says Affleck. "They called me up and said 'Do you want to do this?' And I thought 'I'm not 25 man, are you sure about this?'" At 42, he may be surprisingly old to be donning the cape for the first time but who could turn down this chance of a lifetime? He has of course got a tough act to follow after the unprecedented success

of Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy. Bale's Batman brought in US\$2.5 billion in ticket sales for Warner Bros over the course of three films. But Affleck has gone into this with his eyes wide open.

"I wouldn't have taken the part if I didn't trust my instincts in terms of the filmmaking. I think Chris Terrio [*Argo's* scriptwriter] wrote a terrific script. Zack's a great visual director. And there's an interesting take."

Of course Affleck has had some recent practice at facing public scrutiny in regards to his casting with best-selling novel-turned-film *Gone Girl*. But chick-lit fans are nothing compared to comic book fans in terms of protectiveness; within minutes of the Batman announcement the internet was fiercely divided over his involvement.

He's unfazed by his doubters though. "There are the Greek myths and these are the American myths. The American myths are these superheroes. People care about them a lot. And it's incumbent on you to do a good job and make it as excellent as you possibly can. At the end of the day, the movie is all that matters." And, as Warner Bros reminded him, some of the most surprising comic book castings have

been the greatest successes. Heath Ledger's Joker, anyone?

Critics and fans alike will be clamouring to draw comparisons between Affleck's Batman, Bale's Batman, Clooney's Batman, Keaton's Batman, Val Kilmer's Batman. (Well, maybe not Kilmer's.) But Affleck is hoping that under Snyder's direction the two of them can enter new and unexplored territory.

"For me, anger is so deeply buried and contained that when it does kind of come out, it comes out in stronger bursts" he says, seeing real similarities between himself and his onscreen counterpart. "I tend to be respectful, polite, get along, put up with, put up with, put up with... then, when it finally emerges, it's not something I have a ton of control over." Bale's Batman was always careful to control his emotion, so maybe this is where Affleck can make his mark on the character.

Despite being heralded today as one of Hollywood's brightest stars, Affleck's career has not been as straightforward as one would have presumed when he and Matt Damon became the youngest ever winners of the Academy Award for Best Writing with *Good Will Hunting* in 1998. After initial success, however, it took another 10 years for Hollywood, and the world, to take him seriously.

Affleck was born in 1972 in Berkeley, California. His family moved to Boston when he was ▶

**Pictured:** Affleck has brought his career back from the brink and is set for success once more

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two and, as the legend goes, by 10 he had met and become inseparable from Matt Damon. When the pair moved to Hollywood to try and make the big time, they were broke, regular couch-surfers, and living the dream.

"We rented this house on the beach in Venice and 800 people came and stayed with us and got drunk. Then we ran out of money

and had to get an apartment. It was like everything was exciting..." He reflects, "There's something really great and romantic about being poor and sleeping on couches."

But they didn't sit around waiting for their big break; they wrote a script and made it happen. After *Good Will Hunting*, Affleck landed lead roles in a series of blockbuster movies including *Armageddon* with

Bruce Willis and *Pearl Harbor* with Josh Hartnett.

Flash forward five years though and he was being hounded by the press having released a series of terrible movies. The infamous *Gigli* grossed only US\$7.2 million against a US\$75.6 million budget and has, to date, only got a one star rating on IMDB. "I should never have gone down that route or got sucked in to all the publicity" he explains. "I was typecast as myself."

So where did it all go so wrong? Every actor knows success is something to cherish; you never know how long it's going to last. But for Affleck the transition was brutal. An extremely high profile relationship with singer Jennifer Lopez (that coined one of the first, and worst, celebrity couple nicknames) led to a volatile relationship with the media: and as a result his public persona took a serious knock. He was over-exposed, and his career was coming apart at the seams.

"I was no longer in control of my life" says Affleck retrospectively. "I thought I wanted certain things, but



**Above: Affleck celebrating his directorial debut for *Argo***  
**Left: The new cast of the hotly anticipated *Batman v Superman* trilogy at Comic Con with director Zack Snyder**



I didn't. I got lost. I felt suffocated." And the constant tabloid scrutinising coverage, that too must have played its part? "Too many people weren't getting past what they read about me," he says thoughtfully. "That was damaging. So I took a break, went away for a while and let things calm down." ▶



**Above: Affleck and Damon started their careers together to great success**

**Below: Affleck enjoys family life with Jennifer Garner**

The break clearly did him a world of good. In 2012 Affleck made an extraordinary comeback as an actor/director, cleaning up with *Argo* at the BAFTAs, the Golden Globes and the Oscars. For someone who had spent years trying to build and then rebuild a serious career, this was quite a moment. His Oscar speech said it all.

"I was here 15 years ago or something and I had no idea what I was doing. I stood out here in front of you all and I was really just a kid. I never thought I would be back here." As with *Good Will Hunting*, when Affleck couldn't get the parts he wanted, he created them for himself. A man who makes his own luck.

It shouldn't be too hard for Affleck to find the material for his new role as the Caped Crusader. Like Wayne, Affleck is politically outspoken, and has battled with his own ever-changing public image. When asked about his own celebrity, he resigns himself. "It feels like being in a soap opera that you were unwittingly cast in and you

have no choice about it. I feel like fame is wasted on me." And the comparisons don't end there. When Bruce Wayne isn't moonlighting as a vigilante, he's famed for his fund-raising efforts. Affleck too is a passionate philanthropist.

One of his best achievements away from the silver screen was in founding the Eastern Congo Initiative, an advocacy and grant-making program. Since 2007 he has visited the Democratic Republic of Congo no less than seven times. "I think the more painful something is, the more you want to distance yourself from it" he says, speaking candidly. "I think the hard part is actually to let some of that go and to realise that when you see some of these images of people suffering in some way or another, to kind of remember that these are people who are in fact just in different circumstance than you are." Affleck isn't a man to just put his name to something. He's a do-er.

Fortunately for him, when it comes to family life, the Bruce Wayne comparison ends there. Affleck and his actress wife Jennifer Garner have been happily married since 2005 – although work can make things tricky. "It's hard because when you have children

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you balance your work and your family life," he explains. "I'm fortunate. I have a lot of means at my disposal where I'm able to do that more fluidly, but particularly for women it's hard."

They share a home in LA with their three children, Violet, Seraphina and Samuel. Affleck is a self-confessed Boston man, so Hollywood seems to be an odd choice: the town he has had a notorious love-hate relationship with for so long. "I think if only the unions weren't so strict in Boston, I'd set up shop there and make films

of a certain quality you don't see represented these days" he explains. Like most things for the unassuming family man, it comes down to both practicality and ambition. "I'm full of ideas and dreams," he adds.

So there's still fire in his belly, but the opportunities in front of Affleck will all hinge on the success of next year's *Batman v Superman*. If it flops, he could find a permanent position in the director's chair. Whatever, Affleck will take it in his stride. Age has mellowed him. "I have definitely noticed that I care less about certain things. Other actors are like, 'You can't do that' or 'You can't do this. This will position you in the wrong way.' That's not my thing. And obviously so, because you can see I don't craft or cultivate my career." Cultivated or not, Batman could be both the hero that Affleck deserves – and the one he needs – to take him to the next level. ■

