

Dead cool

Life begins at 40, said Walter B. Pitkin. And after a chaotic ten years, **Ryan Reynolds** agrees; as Jan Janssen discovers

Ryan Reynolds is having a very good year. In fact, he's enjoying what he describes as the 'most rewarding' time in his entire life. Married to actress Blake Lively, the Canadian heartthrob has discovered the kind of happiness and well-being that he found frustratingly elusive in his twenties while chasing the Hollywood dream.

Now 41, Ryan has seen his fortunes amass in the wake of smash success *Deadpool*, the highest grossing R-rated film of all time. He personally lobbied 20th Century Fox for over a decade to make the film, and persisted in his faith even after studio executives kept slamming doors in his face. But when the slick, self-mocking action comedy finally saw the light of day in 2016, it surpassed even Reynolds's wildest expectations by earning \$800m at the worldwide box office. Had the film bombed, he might have been relegated to years of indie movie irrelevance, but he never doubted himself or the character's ability to connect with mass audiences.

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"It's proof that literally anything can happen in Hollywood," said Reynolds.

"I always believed in the character and, after a lot of false starts, it's very gratifying to see that it succeeded. It's one of those cases of a dream coming true. And after we finally got the green light to do it, I spent so much time and energy getting ready for it that my wife thought the line between Ryan and Wade (aka Deadpool) was getting thin and confused. I like to think of Deadpool as an alter-ego of mine!"

His trash-talking, foul-mouthed, angst-ridden, comic book outsider (suffering from terminal cancer no less) was an instant hit with audiences and immediately resurrected Reynolds

as an A-list star and restored some of his self-confidence after a string of movie flops. *Deadpool* was also one of the most profitable blockbusters in history – it was shot for a tidy \$60m, less than half the usual budget for such tentpole projects. As soon as the box-office results were tallied for the opening weekend, Fox greenlit the sequel, which is now scheduled to hit theatres in May.

In the process, Reynolds has become one of an elite group of actors to be blessed with his own personal superhero film franchise and the kind of industry clout and bankability that such status commands. Not only is he now guaranteed future paycheques in the \$15m range, *Deadpool* gives him the added satisfaction of playing a character whose wise-cracking, irreverent personality bears a fair resemblance to his own swaggering, sarcastic self.

"There was a lot about his sense of humour and way of looking at things that I related to," explains Reynolds.

"He doesn't take himself seriously and I've never been

Below: The Reynolds family enjoys Ryan's rise to stardom at Hollywood's Walk of Fame

someone to take myself seriously, either. That's been a side of me that I think has come through in many of the characters I've played and I knew exactly how I could take *Deadpool* in a very different kind of direction that you've ever seen any superhero take."

The film has also vindicated Reynold's unwavering commitment to the project and his unshakeable view that a self-loathing, cynical superhero would strike a chord with the public.

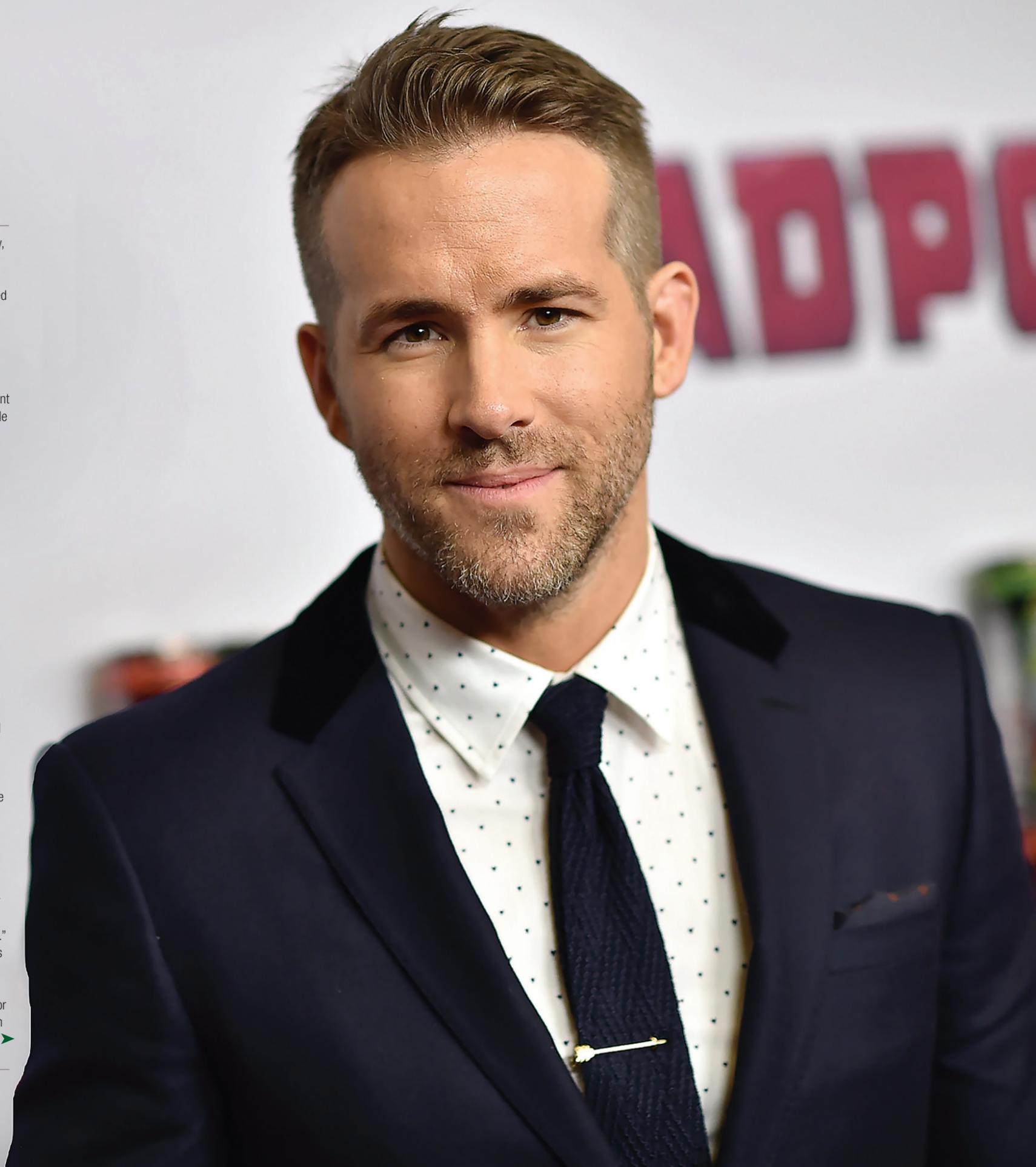
Another bonus for Reynolds was shooting both the original *Deadpool* and the upcoming sequel in his native Vancouver where he was able to reconnect with his family and many of his childhood friends.

"I might be declared *persona non grata* in the future because of all the traffic problems we've created in the city," smiles Reynolds.

In the meantime, he has appeared in last summer's *The Hitman's Bodyguard* which pulled in almost \$200m and confirmed that he has recaptured his draw card. Reynolds couldn't be more satisfied with the way things have fallen in place for him.

"I'm very happy to be where I am now. I didn't have that good a time in my 20s, but when I hit 29 I had an early mid-life crisis and then I started to make up for lost time and began having more fun. But my life now is very good."

Reynolds is quick to credit his wife Blake Lively for his renewed optimism and relief from the anxiety that has bedevilled him for much of his life. They first met on the set of *Green Lantern* (2011), ➤



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(Ryan's first venture into superhero territory), which was an unmitigated financial and critical disaster, and nearly torpedoed his career along with box-office flops; *Safe House*, *R.I.P.D.*, and *Mississippi Grind*.

Adding to his misery was the collapse of his marriage to actress Scarlett Johansson in 2010. Their turbulent three years together had left him an emotional wreck and Reynolds was desperately in need of a positive, uplifting presence in his life. Ryan and Blake became friends while shooting *Lantern* and she would even bake him cakes — cooking is one of her passions — on the set. Even though they didn't become romantically involved on set, they still sensed an attraction to each other.

It therefore came as little surprise to his close friends that Reynolds reached out to Lively to explore whether that initial spark was real.

Barely a year after his divorce from Johansson was final, Ryan and Blake were married, and in 2013 they relocated to the idyllic Westchester County town of Bedford in upstate New York. They still live there today with their two daughters, James, three, and Ines, who turns two in September.

"I'm just fine [as I am] being surrounded by oestrogen," admitted Reynolds.

Right: Reynolds and Lively at the 67th Annual Cannes Film Festival in 2014, eight months before James was born

"I grew up in a house full of testosterone: I'm the youngest of four boys, and my dad was a cop, and that's intense. For whatever reason, I always got along great with girls... I love having girls because I remember what it was like in my house growing up where us guys would destroy the house when our parents were out.

"My life is so much better now. Having a family means that you stop worrying about a lot of stupid things and you start focusing on the present. I remember how I used to get bored when people would show their baby pictures, and I wanted to jump out of the window after parents would show me baby photos on their phone displays."

"Since I've become a father now I'm the guy who can't stop taking photos of my kids and showing them to my friends. And when other people show me photos of their children I'm very open to that and I'll start asking questions about how they get their kids to go to sleep and different things about parenting."

Reynolds has also admitted that Lively has been a major calming influence in his world. He began suffering from anxiety as the youngest of four brothers growing up in Vancouver in a household that feel under the draconian discipline of his policeman father.

"[My] father was tough. He wasn't easy on anyone." Reynolds explained.

"And he wasn't easy on himself. I think the anxiety might have started there, trying to find ways to control others by trying to control myself. At the time, I never recognised that. I was just a twitchy kid."

As a teenager, Reynolds took to acting as a means of releasing tension and embarking on a different path from which his

father had set for him as a public servant. He earned his first acting gig as a teenage performer on the Nickelodeon series *Fifteen*.

"I was 13, and we got to do improv at school, and it really unlocked my imagination," recalled Reynolds.

"I discovered I loved to be adventurous and wild. My

household as a kid was a pretty stressful place and part of why I wanted to do it was to get out of the house. I was right at the age where I started to feel everything. I just felt like a skin-covered antenna. One day casting directors from Nickelodeon showed up and asked every high school drama teacher to send four drama students to audition. ➤





Above: Reynolds at the Hollywood Walk of Fame Star ceremony in December 2016
Below: World premiere of Green Lantern in 2011

"I wasn't picked, but I said, 'I'm going down [anyway].' So I took the bus, 45 minutes each way, down [to the cattle call] after school for three days until I was the last fellow standing, got hired, and I was soon on a plane to Florida [where the series was filmed]. The show paid something like \$200 a day, but I still kept my paper route for another two years."

After graduating high school, he spent six months studying at Kwantlen Polytechnic, a local community college, until he realised that he was wasting his time and needed to pursue acting dreams in Hollywood. Ryan knew that his father would be angry with him, so he drove all the way to Los Angeles without telling him what his real plans were.

"I was thinking of becoming a fireman," explained Reynolds.

"I had actually started studying for the entrance exam but then a friend told me that I didn't have a chance because the fire department had a mandate to hire women and visible minorities.

"Since I didn't qualify in either category and I was getting bored in college, one day I just thought I should drive down in my Jeep to L.A. and see what would happen,

I think I was also rebelling against my family profession [police officers]. It was either that or drive forklifts or work at Safeway. When I drove to California, I didn't even tell my boss at Safeway that I was leaving. I didn't tell my parents either, so they were shocked when they found out what I was doing and that I wasn't planning on coming back home."

At first he thought he would quickly take Hollywood by storm until he found himself competing against many similar good-looking actors who all shared the same ambition of becoming a star. Things definitely didn't get off to a good start. "I got my first taste of how life might be different from that in Canada the first day I arrived in L.A.," said Reynolds.

"I spent 26 hours driving from Vancouver down the coast and when I arrived, I parked my Jeep outside this seedy hotel in Los Angeles and took my bags to the room.

"One hour later I noticed that my Jeep was gone and I found it a few blocks down the road with the doors and the radio missing. So I spent the next four months driving around in L.A. without any doors on my car which is a huge pain when it's

raining. I would sometimes show up at auditions with my clothes soaking wet and hoping no one would notice too much. Eventually I got doors put on the Jeep."

The gamble paid off and Reynolds would gain traction as a rom-com heartthrob with appearances in *Definitely, Maybe*, *Chaos Theory*, [released in 2008] and *The Proposal* [2009]. The latter film saw him co-star opposite Sandra Bullock with whom he had a brief affair.

Indeed, Reynolds was regarded as one of Hollywood's most eligible bachelors in his late twenties and early thirties and was even named People Magazine's 'Sexiest Man of the Year' in 2010.

He wasn't necessarily a player, however. Ryan spent nearly five years in a relationship with pop star, and fellow Canadian, Alanis Morissette until they went separate ways in 2007.

Morissette was so taken with Reynolds that she even wrote a song that is generally believed to be a tribute to their romance – *Torch*, with its telling lyric, 'I miss your smell and your style.'

Today, Reynolds is one of Hollywood's authentic success stories. He never gave up on himself and, against all odds,

engineered his own screen comeback in the guise of a *Deadpool*, a highly conflicted anti-hero whose existential musings mirrored his own angst. For the time being at last, there are no clouds on his horizon. ■

