

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

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The Hot New A-List

WHICH ACTORS ARE LANDING
ALL THE ROLES AND WHY

THE GAME-CHANGING DEALS,
MONEY AND RISKS

Unstoppable's
Chris Pine

EXCLUSIVE

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Hollywood's A-List *Redefined*

Hollywood is banking on **Chris Pine** and a handful of other hot young actors (some you might not have heard of yet) as the old star system fades, power shifts and paydays aren't what they used to be

by **JAY A. FERNANDEZ**

Very few actors find themselves standing on the edge of major stardom. Chris Pine is now in that enviable, if precarious, position, and he's trying to take the native uncertainty in stride. With a huge hit last year in *Star Trek*, in which he made the iconic role of Capt. James T. Kirk his own, and the imminent release of the action flick *Unstoppable*, in which he stars opposite veteran A-lister Denzel Washington, Pine is determinedly realistic about it all.

"It's definitely a balance between having a concrete plan about where you want to go and a certain amount of letting go and knowing that you can't control everything," Pine says about his decision-making process. "Sometimes you just have to come-what-may and take whatever script comes down the pike that has at least a kernel of something challenging or interesting."

As the vaunted old guard has seen its grip on the power and paychecks loosen and the business of moviemaking has buckled and bent in recent years, the industry has been hard at work conspiring to create the next batch of A-Listers. Pine is one of a clutch of younger actors pushing — and being pushed — into more star-making terrain. Between now and the end of summer 2012, audiences will see Pine, Shia LaBeouf, Taylor Kitsch, Sam Worthington, Chris Hemsworth, Taylor Lautner, Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Renner and Ryan Reynolds holding up studio tentpoles — sometimes more than one.

"We need these kids — desperately," one studio producer says. "And there happens to be a crop of five or six of them that actually are filling the role."

Hollywood will always have its stars, but every so often the



MOST WANTED
"It's a balance between having a concrete plan and a certain amount of letting go," Chris Pine says of his career serendipity.

constellations change. And when (or if) these new guys reach movie-star Mount Olympus, it's likely to look a lot different than it did when Willis, Cruise and Carrey were stalking its halls. The go-go Reagan years prompted the swagger and success of guys like Bruce Willis, Eddie Murphy, Harrison Ford and Mel Gibson. Movies were greenlighted overnight based on their interest, and major studios were still independent enough to take calculated risks on the backs of the on-camera talent alone. Once Jim Carrey scored \$20 million from Sony to star in *The Cable Guy* in 1996, the star machine went into overdrive — some might say that was a watershed moment — and every new wannabe A-Lister was pointing to the other guy as proof that his own value was just as massive. The race to the VIP \$20 million/20 percent backend club was on, and guys like Washington, Will Smith, Tom Cruise and Adam Sandler chugged their way to the top.

But once the corporatization of the industry took root and vertically integrated companies turned movies into nothing more than line items on a gigantic spreadsheet, the bean counters started wondering why stars were getting so much money. And once the economy lost its footing, so did stars and their agents. But it's not just the financial contours that have changed, it's the whole way movies are selected, promoted and consumed — and the nature of the movie star is changing with it. The concept of the A-List itself could be in danger.

"How we're looking at movies and what are their values and how the different pieces connect is a whole different equation than it was five years ago," says producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura, who was production president at Warners from 1996-2002. "We have a shift going on where there's a whole new group of men that are attracting an audience that wasn't there 10-15 years ago."

The truth is that no one really understands the star system in Hollywood. There are hundreds of young, charming, good-looking actors scoring parts and making career inroads at any given time. But even with all the ambition and guidance and luck and careful plotting, no one can really say why Actor X breaks through to the A-list and Actor Y doesn't. The star-making algorithm is indecipherable, even as some actors mysteriously take on the cast of the inevitable.

LAST WEEKEND, PINE HAD JUST flown in from the Vancouver set of *This Means War* — a comedy McG is directing in which he fights with Tom Hardy for the heart of Reese Witherspoon — and he was driving to a friend's L.A.-area wedding. He would also spend a few days promoting

just a bit more power to say yes or no is very appealing and intoxicating."

As a moviegoing kid, Pine's acting models ran from Sean Penn to matinee tough guys Willis and Ford, but he says film wasn't a huge part of his life. Looking back, however, he notes how different the choices were for leading men in previous generations.

"Nowadays it's just a different world of moviemaking," he says. "Now you have *Star Trek* or *Thor* or *Iron Man*, and 30 years ago a studio film was *Ordinary People* or *Kramer vs. Kramer* or *All the President's Men*. So, yeah, the material that you're choosing from is different. You look at the Bruce Willis of 20 years ago — he's Bruce Willis with the 5 o'clock shadow battling Alan Rickman. The new action star is more [about] the world and the merchandising and all that."

It feels as if there's a war of attrition in the bargaining room, with studios waiting out agents.

Unstoppable, the Tony Scott-directed suspense film opening Nov. 12 in which he plays a rookie conductor trying to stop a runaway train full of toxic chemicals. Beyond that, Pine has a *Trek* sequel on the books and a lock on a reboot of the Tom Clancy-Jack Ryan franchise at Paramount. If stardom is a wild bet, then Pine has gotten himself some strong odds.

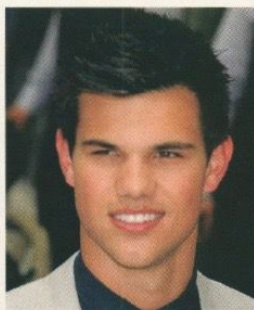
"I'm definitely not the first person in my position to feel the pull of having ever more opportunities and to have a certain amount of influence in an industry that I knew from the other side of having none — of being in an audition room and feeling like I was at the mercy of whether or not people liked me or what I look like," he says. "So now, to have

While citing admiration for Ryan Gosling's more character-driven choices, Pine expresses hope that with two potential franchises in his pocket, he can light out for more risky territory. "That is definitely the thinking," he says. "I look at Clooney or Matt Damon. Hopefully, being in movies that are more commercially minded allows you to pick stuff that maybe won't appeal to everybody but for whatever reason satisfies something in your soul that you need to say."

On that potential agenda are Alex Kurtzman's directorial debut, a small family drama set up at DreamWorks called *Welcome to People*, and an ensemble drama from debut filmmaker Jamie Linden called *Ten Year*. Unlike most of his peers, Pine also has been



The actors who are being brought up to the majors



Taylor Lautner, 18
REPS: WME, Management 360
NATIONALITY: American
BIGGEST HIT: *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (Summit): **\$300M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Parts 1 & 2* (Summit, Nov. 2011, Nov. 2012), *Stretch Armstrong* (Universal, 2013)



Bradley Cooper, 35
REPS: CAA
NATIONALITY: American
BIGGEST HIT: *The Hangover* (Warner Bros.): **\$277M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *The Hangover, Part II* (Warner Bros., May)



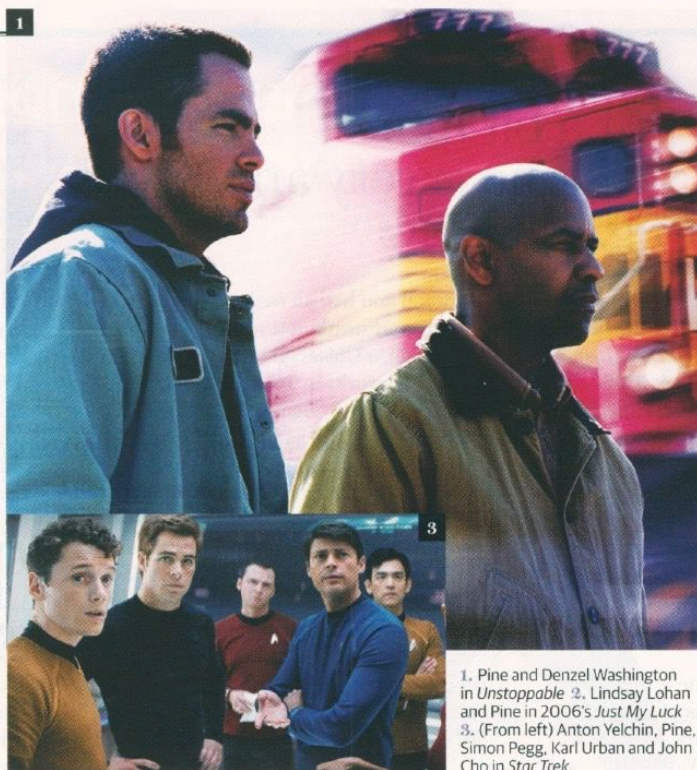
Chris Hemsworth, 27
REPS: IFA Talent Agency, ROAR
NATIONALITY: Australian
BIGGEST HIT: *Star Trek* (Paramount): **\$258M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Thor* (Marvel/Paramount, May), *The Avengers* (Marvel/Paramount, May 2012)

Career Building

sure to hit the boards regularly, in Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles this year and in Neil LaBute's *Fat Pig* and Beau Willimon's *Farragut North* at Westwood's Geffen Playhouse in 2007 and 2009, respectively. Pine takes acting seriously, and his need for a high profile in features has as much to do with maintaining a long, varied career as it does gratifying a movie star ego.

CRUISE (48), CARREY (48), RUSSELL Crowe (46), Mike Myers (47), Murphy (49) and Johnny Depp (47) — their talents notwithstanding — are aging, expensive stars with increasingly spotty records (though Depp is riding a wave of billion-dollar box-office blowouts). These guys cut their teeth in the profligate late '80s and rode the exploding DVD- and global audience-driven wave of celebrity and profits through the 1990s and into the Aughts. In that sense, the gigantic paychecks and generous profit sharing could be justified because everybody was swimming in it. Oh, how 2003!

With studios increasingly willing to put lesser-known names in giant franchise properties where the brand is the star — at the same time the overall economy is being squeezed — employers are looking for any excuse to let go of old-school salary deals. At the moment, it feels as if there's a war of attrition in the bargaining room, with studios waiting out agents desperate to maintain antiquated quotes until a new movie underperforms and the studio has every right to move on. Sometimes, in the case of *Spider-Man*'s Tobey Maguire being replaced by Andrew Garfield in a reboot of the franchise, the studio doesn't even wait. The new crop of



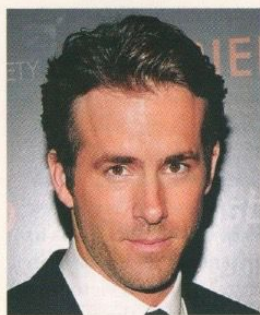
1. Pine and Denzel Washington in *Unstoppable* 2. Lindsay Lohan and Pine in 2006's *Just My Luck* 3. (From left) Anton Yelchin, Pine, Simon Pegg, Karl Urban and John Cho in *Star Trek*.

younger actors — who, most important, have yet to get used to inflated paydays and ridiculous perks — are being groomed to take their place. Some might even say they're being pushed into slots they're not quite ready for; some of these names, despite having been in only one real hit, are popping up on every casting wish list.

Cooper hit big with *The Hangover*, but that was an ensemble comedy that took everyone by surprise. Since then, however, he's turned up in the big-budget adaptation of *The A-Team* and become attached to a Disney baseball movie and a buddy-cop comedy with Reynolds. After a killer summer in 2009 with

X-Men Origins: Wolverine and *The Proposal*, Reynolds is up for a half-dozen studio movies, including the actioner *Safe House* with Washington at Universal. In a parallel to the way the music industry has evolved (or devolved), it's rare that artists have years and several albums to incubate a following. The moment you have a hit, you're everywhere. For every R.E.M. or Tom Cruise, there's now a Lady Gaga or Taylor Lautner that sucks up the limelight in an instant.

It's an unstable situation but one the studios seem ready to gamble on. Because many of these brand-driven projects have the promotional benefit of widespread



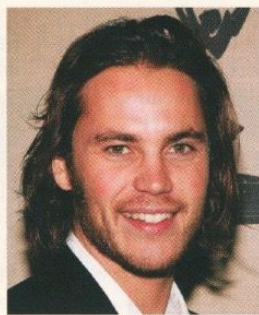
Ryan Reynolds, 33
REPS: CAA
NATIONALITY: Canadian
BIGGEST HIT: *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Fox): **\$180M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Green Lantern* (Warner Bros., June)



Jeremy Renner, 39
REPS: CAA, Untitled
NATIONALITY: American
BIGGEST HIT: *S.W.A.T.* (Columbia): **\$117M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol* (Paramount, Dec. 2011), *The Avengers* (Marvel/Par, May 2012)



Shia LaBeouf, 24
REPS: CAA
NATIONALITY: American
BIGGEST HIT: *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Paramount): **\$402M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (Paramount, July)



Taylor Kitsch, 29
REPS: WME, Untitled
NATIONALITY: Canadian
BIGGEST HIT: *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Fox): **\$180M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Battleship* (Universal, May 2012), *John Carter of Mars* (Disney, June 2012)



Sam Worthington, 34
REPS: CAA, Industry Entertainment
NATIONALITY: British
BIGGEST HIT: *Avatar* (Fox): **\$760M**
UPCOMING TENTPOLES: *Clash of the Titans 2* (Warner Bros., January 2012)

Domestic box office

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROBERT ZUCKERMAN/20TH CENTURY FOX/EVERETT COLLECTION; VITTORIO ZANINO/GETTY IMAGES; VINCE BUCCI/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREW H. WALKER/GETTY IMAGES; JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES; STEVE LOVEN/GETTY IMAGES; INDUSTRIAL LIGHT AND MAGIC/PARAMOUNT

To have just a bit more power to say yes or no is very appealing and intoxicating.” — CHRIS PINE

pre-awareness, A-List stars aren't necessary to sell them. Marvel, which is notoriously stingy with paychecks, has perfected this model. Hemsworth as Thor, Mark Ruffalo as the Hulk, Chris Evans as Captain America — these roles don't require global icons. You don't need Depp to star in Marvel's *Doctor Strange* (and they wouldn't pay him anyway). But they do require something of the old "movie-star quality" to work. As one industry player points out: Casting Pine as Jack Ryan is a stronger bet than casting Gosling. Talent aside, a certain universal appeal is still essential.

"What makes Chris so unique is that he plays the real, grounded drama of the piece, but he has that movie-star spark," says Fox production president Emma Watts. "He's one of those actors that can give you so much with a glance — it's *there*. That's what makes him such a great leading man."

PINE CLEARLY IS STRIVING TO MAINTAIN humility while being realistic about the ambitions required to succeed in Hollywood. Where the '80s-'90s model of the star trajectory involved placing great value on reaching the 20-20 club, the new economic landscape of the industry has forced a slightly different set of expectations.

"I guess there's some kind of validation there when they say, 'Now you're getting paid such-and-such,' and such-and-such is however much more than they paid you on the last one, and that says there's a certain respect for you in the industry that you're climbing ladders," Pine says. "But I don't know — at the end of the day, how much money do you need? I'm not trying to be holier-than-thou, which I'm not because I'm just as ego-based as the next person. But I would hope for myself that it always remains getting paid equal to what you think you're worth — and hopefully that's not inflated and ridiculous — and doing good work."

He catches himself and laughs. "I've done one movie that people have seen," he says self-deprecatingly. "I am at the nascent end of my career, so I don't know shit from Shinola."

Pine measures his thoughts and words carefully — he's not afraid to let a long pause hang in the air before he speaks — and when he does, his lines are peppered with such aw-shucks colloquialisms as "Let me see here ..." and "at the end of the day." Pine's director on *Trek*, J.J. Abrams, describes his appeal this way: "Chris was always willing to make a fool of himself — to be and appear uncool. He was therefore always the coolest guy onstage."

Pine grew up in Studio City and North

Hollywood and had an early inside vantage on acting and stardom through his father Robert Pine, a Universal contract player in the '60s who works in TV and film (*CHiPs*, *Independence Day*). He remembers visiting the set of *Quantum Leap* as a kid and seeing *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* at Grauman's. He went to school with Henry Winkler's daughter. But the acting life wasn't a huge draw at the time. "I never remember being star-struck as a kid," Pine says. "Except for the time that I met Mickey Mantle." (His dad, a huge Yankees fan, knew the booker for *The Pat Sajak Show*, and Pine met Mantle in the hallway at CBS Radford Studios before the Hall of Fame slugger went on camera.)

After a degree from Berkeley and a handful of TV guest spots, Pine's first real feature role was playing Anne Hathaway's romantic foil in Disney's *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement* in 2004. New Regency then paired him



Trickier terrain for Hollywood's go-to guys

Russell Crowe The 46-year-old Aussie has a spotty record since *Gladiator* 10 years ago.

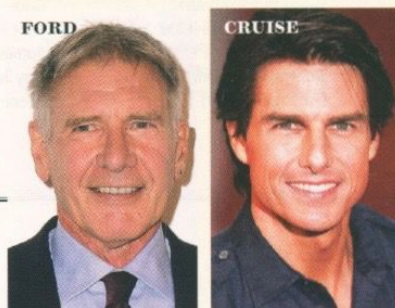
Tom Cruise At 48, he's had to restructure his deal for *Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol*.

Johnny Depp Never one for straight action, the 47-year-old is sticking to *Pirates*.

Harrison Ford The 68-year-old icon showed the miles on his tires in the fourth *Indiana Jones* film.

Will Smith A rare stumble with *Seven Pounds* sent the 42-year-old back to his *Men in Black* franchise.

Bruce Willis At 55, the aging veteran now has to throw punches with a knowing wink, as in *RED*.



with Lindsay Lohan in the ill-fated *Just My Luck* in 2006, and he appeared in Joe Carnahan's *Smokin' Aces* and indie fare like *Bottle Shock*. Along the way, he took on the less-successful feature projects *Confession* and *Small Town Saturday Night*, which went straight to DVD, and the unseen horror film *Carriers*. Meanwhile, he was auditioning unsuccessfully for starring roles in big studio guns such as *10,000 B.C.* and *Avatar*. But his break with *Trek* — at the time viewed as something of a risk given his lack of profile — gave Pine a chance to show true leading-man potential, with wit and sex appeal, charm and leadership, plus an unexpected sequence of physical comedy. A lot of industry people took notice.

THE MODERN DEFINITION OF A STAR is fuzzier than it's ever been, and getting fuzzier. Does the fact that *Terminator Salvation*, *Avatar* and *Clash of the Titans* made a combined \$3.6 billion worldwide make Worthington, who starred in all three, a star? Had Reynolds or Hemsworth been in those roles, would the movies have done appreciably worse — or better? "When *Battleship* opens big, is Taylor Kitsch a star?" one screenwriter muses. "I don't f---ing know."

At the same time, the massive promotional currency that comes with being cast as one of these international properties is a subtext of negotiations with agents. The \$50 million-\$70 million the studio is spending to promote the movie is also promoting the actor all over the world, so studios consider that potential career help part of the actor's compensation. The latest *Forbes* highest-paid actor list, which covers June 2009-June 2010, puts Depp at the top, with \$75 million. Ben Stiller (\$53 million), Tom Hanks (\$45 million), Sandler (\$40 million), Leonardo DiCaprio (\$28 million), Robert Downey Jr. (\$22 million), Cruise (\$22 million), Brad Pitt (\$20 million) and Clooney (\$19 million) fill out the top 10. Only DiCaprio is under 40 years of age, though the just-turned-40 Damon has been on recent top-earner lists. These ranks will dwindle. When a comparable list appears in five years with new names, the income will have dropped significantly or be derived from a broader portfolio that includes a clothing line, speaking fees and a cologne.

While the sky isn't exactly falling, it does hang a little lower now. So, where is the new ceiling? It's hard to say, but no one seems to think first-dollar backend is coming back in the way it used to exist. ("That's a victory that was won pretty unanimously by the studios," one writer-producer says. "Agents have lost that power struggle.") And while upfront fees can still get high, the days of \$20 million or \$25 million against major gross participation are over. Several sources say LaBeouf got close to \$20 million for the third *Transformers* film (plus some backend), and while Reynolds didn't score a huge paycheck on the upcoming Warner Bros. comic book adaptation *Green Lantern*, he immediately leveraged that big

casting to pocket something in the \$10 million range for the comedy *The Change-Up*, which he's filming for Universal. Meanwhile, Pine shrewdly signed on to *Unstoppable* opposite a star who's an extremely reliable draw, despite the fact that it was not a large payday. "The idea of working with Denzel Washington is what attracted him," Watts says. "The role was such, he goes head-to-head with him the whole movie. And he really does stand his ground." It also meant Pine's reps could parlay it into the bigger Jack Ryan deal at Paramount. And the *Trek* sequel set for summer 2012 will jump his salary again.

Several of these stars could eventually be swimming in the \$12 million-\$15 million pool, or even \$15 million-\$20 million if they string together hits in the way Cruise, Gibson or Smith did. Meanwhile, much of the old guard is becoming more flexible. "Nobody honors quotes anymore," is the oft-heard refrain. With megastars like Cruise (*Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol*) and Carrey (*Yes Man*) being forced to change their compensation structure, studios are also finding the courage to say no to stars like Murphy at their old quotes. (Murphy is coming off two gigantic bombs, and while one source says *Beverly Hills Cop 4* has not been made for lack of a great script, the truth is that, should the project go forward, Murphy would have to move off his old expectations, as some of his contemporaries have.)

Depending on the vehicle, an old-school star can still make top bank. What's gone is the expectation that this is a "quote" for all future deals. Those negotiations have become a case-by-case basis. (Angelina Jolie and Smith may be the only ones left in the 20-20 club consistently, and Washington has had to fight to maintain his status.) The industry mind-set is sluggishly being pulled toward a more incentive-based model. Instead of backend profit participation that begins at the first dollar of revenue, studios are

The A-List Directors

An elite group has a power bigger than almost any star

It's uncomfortably clear that the movie business is going through a painful contraction. And in the process, the power that used to flow through Hollywood's corridors has been draining steadily away.

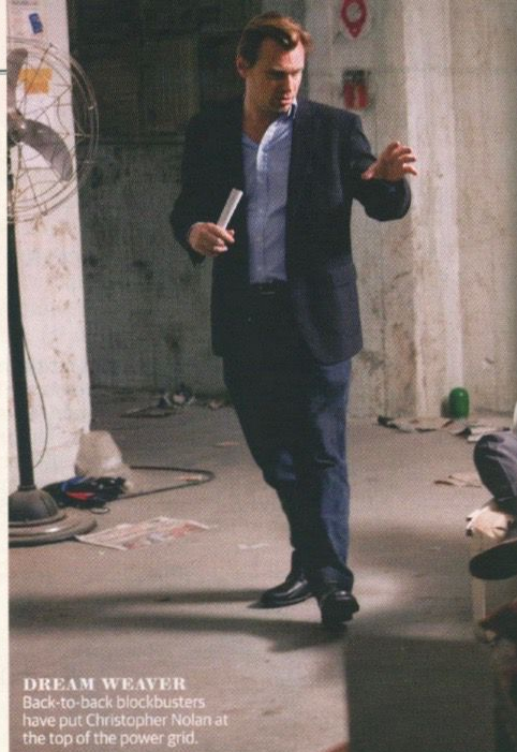
A-list actors, studio chiefs, high-on-testosterone producers and agents used to take up top spots on magazine power lists. But as studios have become small and not necessarily favored cogs in big corporate machines, they are making fewer movies, and their execs, who tend to come from the ranks of lawyers or marketers, are not exactly masters of their domains.

The big producers — Jerry Bruckheimer, Joel Silver, Scott Rudin, Brian Grazer — also are a challenged breed. And the notion of an agent amassing enough power to hold sway over the industry like Michael Ovitz did? Very 20th century.

But there is one elite group that has held on to power and perhaps even amassed more than ever. It's the exclusive club of power directors with a track record of big-event movies or reliably popular and far-less-costly comedies.

The list is a short one: Christopher Nolan, James Cameron, Steven Spielberg, Michael Bay, J.J. Abrams, Tim Burton and, with the right material, Peter Jackson and Judd Apatow.

"These directors are like the big stars now," one



DREAM WEAVER
Back-to-back blockbusters have put Christopher Nolan at the top of the power grid.

talent rep says. "They create these tentpoles, they're the ones people are willing to bet on. ... Having them [as clients] is better than having a big-shot actor."

A vivid example of their clout was the way that Nolan cast *Inception*, key sources say. The director offered the script to Brad Pitt but requested a response within 48 hours. When the star didn't commit, Nolan moved on to Will Smith. It's not hard to understand why the two biggest movie stars in the world might hesitate to commit to any major project, much less one as un-obvious as *Inception*. But when they didn't leap, Nolan moved on to Leonardo DiCaprio.

increasingly cutting "break-even deals" that cushion the blow if a movie tanks. For the new crop of stars, these deals will be more standard because they have no history of the fat gross the previous generation won. But one producer thinks the break-even model could break down again, and someone like LaBeouf — who has proved with *Disturbia* and *Eagle Eye* that he's successful without giant robots — could eventually ask for 10

percent of gross. "Once you establish the track record, it starts returning to the model we've been living with for the last 15 years," the producer says.

But stars' status as the industry's biggest earners is unlikely to be supplanted. "However the business changes, they're going to do proportionately as well in whatever the new business model is," di Bonaventura says. "It's shifting for producers and writers and directors, but [stars are] going to do proportionately just like their predecessors."

They'll just be doing it in a different way. The kinds of movies these new stars want to be in has shifted because of the cultural saturation of Hollywood — the multitude of platforms, DVD commentaries, behind-the-scenes access, consumption and exposure via the Web — not just for actors but for the public at large. Di Bonaventura believes that this plays a part in the decision-making process. "The calculus of 'I haven't seen that before' is really at a fever pitch," he says. "Because the audience has such a bank of knowledge, and movie stars are very cognizant of that now, the movie has to be fresh or represent a technological shift or have provocative material

BENICIO DEL TORO

Top Players Without Major Agencies

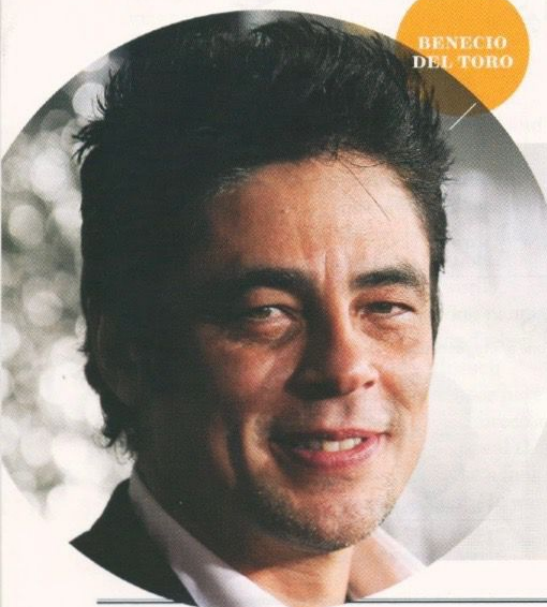
BENICIO DEL TORO
No agent

LEONARDO DICAPRIO
Represented by Jennifer Davison Killoran

RYAN GOSLING
Represented by IFA Talent Agency

CHRIS HEMSWORTH
Represented by IFA Talent Agency

CHRIS PINE
Represented by SDB Partners





"It's never couched as, 'Hey, I'm more important than you, therefore just say yes,'" says an executive with knowledge of the matter. "They invent kabuki reasons for why they need an answer, but [the stars] are getting jammed." Stars like Smith and Pitt "are used to having people wait a year or more" before they commit to a project, he continues. "They don't usually have to board a moving train."

With *The Dark Knight* and *Inception* under his belt, Nolan's at the top of the power grid. "In light of his last two movies, I'd probably greenlight anything of his," a former studio chief says.

—Kim Masters

When *Battleship* opens big, is Taylor Kitsch a star? I don't f---ing know."

— SCREENWRITER

that's moving the content forward."

The new batch of A-List directors is having an impact on stardom, as well. Super-successful filmmakers of tentpole movies — Jon Favreau, Christopher Nolan, Abrams — have the ability to anoint new stars simply by choosing them for major movies, even if the brand is really the lead (*Iron Man*, *Batman*, *Star Trek*). "The brands are not bad movies now, they're actually good movies," says one producer. "And they can make these guys into megastars fast." When James Cameron stuck Worthington in the center of *Avatar*, it was a giant endorsement, even if the movie

experience itself was the star. "All of a sudden you need to pay attention to: Who's the guy in the \$2 billion movie?" the producer says.

Agents are banking on this. They know that even if they take a lowball on a Marvel movie, for example, they can turn right around and use its blockbuster potential to upgrade their client's fee on the next casting. It's like courting foreign presales on a performance guarantee. One source says Lautner's reps asked for \$10 million against 10 percent for an indie movie after he had been cast in *Abduction* and *Stretch Armstrong* and David Ellison had offered him \$7.5 million for *Northern Lights*, which Lautner subsequently backed out of. (Lautner's *Twilight* buddy, Robert Pattinson, who also had a recurring role in the *Harry Potter* franchise, seems less interested in the A-List path.) And Ruffalo's reps have been shopping him at a higher quote ever since he took over Edward Norton's role as the Hulk in *The Avengers*.

But none of these new guys has yet reached a level of pop culture recognition to merit the classic: "Do you want to go see the new Ryan Reynolds/Bradley Cooper/Shia LaBeouf movie?" That's a trick Washington, Cruise and Crowe can still pull off. But when they no longer can, is it possible that no new names will take their place? The industry wants these new stars, badly, and if it has to goose the process, well, so be it. Says di Bonaventura: "I'm a pro-movie star guy. I believe that we as an audience want to connect with a human being. We want them and we need them."

THE ACTORS ANGLING for that stature face plenty of potential pitfalls, beyond even the external pressures of money and ambition and managing relationships with the studios, their reps, their inner goals. Navigating that future is tricky, and much of it is out of their control. It takes vigilance that comes naturally to some and not at all to others. In 2007, Pine chose the Kirk role in *Trek* over a juicy part opposite Clooney in Joe Carnahan's adaptation of James Ellroy's noir novel *White Jazz*, which subsequently fell apart. And he had serious discussions with future Disney production president Sean Bailey about taking on the lead role in the forthcoming *Tron: Legacy*, but Pine was canny enough to note that the circumstances weren't right.

"After *Star Trek*, I saw roles coming to me that involved a lot of greenscreen and science fiction," Pine says. "I knew *Tron* was going to be extraordinary. But all of these stories are about the same thing — the reluctant hero, the damaged young man that has to find direction in his life and usually has daddy issues and then manages to get out from underneath the shadow of his father to claim his own manhood. I love that story! We all love that story, because it's timeless. But I had just done that story."

After another pause, Pine tacks on one last observation. "And there's a scene where he rides up on a motorcycle," he says with a self-aware chuckle. "And I was like, 'I'm smart enough to know that if I do too much f---ing brooding on a motorcycle I'll screw myself out of a lot of work.'"

THR

The Economics of the A-List

First-dollar-gross deals for old-school talent meant they got a substantial cut of the studio's box-office receipts, regardless of the picture's performance. In the new deals, a break-even amount is established during negotiations so that the star's back-end participation only kicks in once the studio has recouped costs up to that break-even number. In exchange, the talent gets a higher percentage than he would have received in the old model.

For instance, if a star received 5 percent of first-dollar gross as part of his deal, he would get that money no matter how much revenue the movie made. A \$100 million movie that bombs out at \$50 million means the star gets \$2.5 million off the top while the studio hemorrhages money and everyone gets yelled at but the talent. If that same movie grosses \$200 million, the star gets \$10 million, and the studio makes some good cash (depending on how much it spent on promotion).

In the break-even model, the star has to wait until the studio collects its \$100 million in grosses first, but then he might get, say, 7.5 percent. So if the movie bombs, the studio still loses money, but it's not handing a bonus to the star for the pleasure. If the movie grosses \$200 million, however, the studio makes its money, and the star still gets a \$7.5 million bonus — not insubstantial but less than he would have made in the old model. But if the film crosses \$300 million, the star starts making more money than he would have in the old version.

For some, additional gross milestones escalate the after-break-even percentage for having given up the bonus on the downside. James Cameron apparently had a break-even deal on *Avatar*, but his backend participation after that break-even mark — which certainly was high — was astronomically higher than had he cut a deal in the old mold.

"Frankly, it's a really healthy place to be," one tentpole producer says. "If you're going to put your conviction and your career on the line, to be rewarded like that is great."

— Jay A. Fernandez