

'I'M NOT THAT NICE'



For years he's been Hollywood's go-to good guy, the ultimate romcom hero and boyfriend we all wish we had. Now Paul Rudd has been cast as a superhero with a dark side. As he prepares for the biggest role of his career, he talks Botox, bromance and breaking the internet with Helena de Bertodano





Teen idol *Clueless* with (centre) Alicia Silverstone (1995); *Romeo + Juliet* (1996); *The Cider House Rules* with Tobey Maguire (1999)

Paul Rudd looks barely a day older than he did when he burst on to the scene as Josh, the stepbrother turned love interest he played opposite Alicia Silverstone in *Clueless*. In the intervening two decades we've seen him sport a comedy moustache to play the arrogant, sex-obsessed field reporter Brian Fantana in the goofball classics *Anchorman* and *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues*; spawn the entire bromance genre with *I Love You, Man*, in which he played a fiancé in search of a best man for his upcoming wedding; and star as the object of affection in countless romcoms – all while, seemingly, remaining preserved in formaldehyde. Such is his face's preternaturally youthful appearance that, last year, when a photo of his high school yearbook appeared on the internet, it went viral, prompting suggestions Rudd might have had a bit of 'help'. 'My whole body is Botoxed,' he laughs when I ask his secret. 'I've done it all. Do you think this is my real hair?'

He's joking, of course. The 46-year-old is, famously, one of Hollywood's most loved funnymen (not to mention one of the best-looking), occupying a place in the heart of many a twenty- and thirty-something woman to whom he will always be the boyfriend they wished they had. To wit: the endless BuzzFeed lists devoted to him (Why Paul Rudd Is A Dream Come True For Every Man, Woman And Child; 15 Reasons Why We Love Paul Rudd; Proof That Paul Rudd Needs To Be Cloned By Scientists

Everywhere), the fan sites (such as Dear Paul Rudd, a Tumblr of life dilemmas fans would love Rudd to answer); and fans' curious habit of accosting him in the street and reciting his lines back to him: 'Slap the base' from *I Love You, Man*, he says, is the one he hears most. When, last year, a video emerged of what looked like Rudd taking down a homophobic bully who attempted to kick a man in a pink shirt at Dallas-Fort Worth airport, the internet went into meltdown: #paulruddsaveslives started trending on Twitter. He was quick to point out it wasn't him: 'It was surreal. The guy did such an amazing job jumping in there – he was so heroic that I almost didn't want to tell people it wasn't me. But I thought people would figure it out soon enough, not least that guy. But I wish I was him.' Still, it makes his starring role as a superhero (albeit a complicated one) in the new Marvel movie *Ant-Man* less of a surprise.

Rudd says he was delighted at the chance to act against his Mr Nice Guy type – he starts the movie as a criminal, a failure as a dad and a man not to be trusted, before metamorphosing into an Avenger: 'When I was cast, people went

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"Huhh?"" And anyway, he says, 'I'm not *that* nice – it's one of those things that reveals itself over time. You could talk to people who know me well, they could give you a laundry list.' He pauses. 'Except they probably wouldn't because they're petrified. They know what a vindictive son of a bitch I can be...'

This seems unlikely. When we meet at The London West Hollywood hotel where he is staying while promoting the Marvel juggernaut (he lives in Manhattan with his wife, former publicist Julie Yaeger, whom he met while promoting *Clueless* in New York, and their two children, Jack, nine, and daughter Darby, five), he is comically obliging. Confronted by a huge table with ten chairs around it, he plonks himself directly next to me – a touch awkward, but the only option that won't leave us sitting yards apart.

He's dressed in black jeans and a plaid shirt, smartened up with a preppy royal blue linen jacket. Since joining the Marvel universe, Rudd says his whole physique has changed: 'I worked out intensely for a year. I would do an hour and a half with a Parkour gymnast, cardio on my own and an hour with a trainer in weights. I was also eating a very specific diet and at very specific times of day. It was carb-less, no sugar, no alcohol, a lot of protein. It prompted a whole mental shift – everything was centred around health and fitness.' It sounds utterly joyless. 'Going out to dinner was a challenge,' he concedes. 'One thing I found out is that most restaurants have asparagus. I would find myself saying, "I have to do it for my job" – it made me feel a little bit less of a douchebag.'

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Funny guy *Knocked Up* with Katherine Heigl, Rogen and Leslie Mann (2007); *I Love You, Man* with Jason Segel (2009); *Saturday Night Live* with Paul McCartney (2010)



Screen and stage *Friends* (2004); *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* with Seth Rogen (2005); *Three Days of Rain* with Julia Roberts (2006)

Previously, Rudd's children hadn't seen any of his movies, but Jack accompanied him to the premiere of *Ant-Man*. 'It's the first thing I've ever done that he's legitimately jazzed about. He picked out a suit and a tie for the premiere – in Ant-Man colours, which just melted my heart.' Rudd's own upbringing was decidedly less starry. His father worked for Trans World Airlines, eventually becoming vice president, so the family moved around the States frequently. 'It just became the norm. I tended

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to romanticise every place I had just left. I think I used comedy as a mechanism: if I could make the other kids laugh, I wouldn't get beaten up or teased as much.' Still, he was happy. 'It used to worry me when I was starting off [as an actor] that I hadn't had a really dark past. I wondered if it meant that I wasn't going to be a very good actor.' He majored in theatre at the University of Kansas and later studied Jacobean drama at the British American Drama Academy in England. 'I really wanted to do the right thing so I could have a long career.'

Back in the States, he began getting television work and supporting roles in movies,

but his breakthrough was *Clueless*. At the time he was living in Los Angeles; perversely, just as his star was rising, he left for New York to immerse himself in a play, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. 'My agents were baffled by this decision but I was very clear in what I wanted to do.' What he wanted was to be taken seriously as an actor, so he has always interspersed the frothy comedy roles with the occasional serious one in period dramas such as 1999's *The Cider House Rules* (he plays Wally Worthington, a Second World War soldier) and the critically acclaimed *Three Days of Rain* on Broadway, opposite Julia Roberts and Bradley Cooper, in 2006, in which he took on two roles, as the highly strung son Walker and his father Ned. He also played Paris in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*.

But it was his performance as Fantana that sealed his fate as a predominantly comic actor. Since then he and the film's producer Judd Apatow have struck up a winning partnership. *Anchorman* was followed by *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (Rudd plays Steve Carell's goofball co-worker), *Knocked Up* (in which he plays a put-upon husband) and *This Is 40* (when he reprises the role of the put-upon husband, only this time with

added weariness). 'We all find the same things funny,' he says of the Apatow team of Carell, Seth Rogen and Jason Segel. 'And none of us sweat getting thrown off by improvisation.'

Rudd has slackened the diet a bit, but he is keeping in shape ahead of appearing as Ant-Man in the upcoming *Captain America: Civil War*. 'I just shot a scene with Captain America and Iron Man. In *Ant-Man* I felt I was in a bit of a bubble, but the other day I looked around and for the first time I could say, "I'm in the band."' He's evidently enjoyed breaking out of the type-casting as next up is an independent movie in which he plays a man taking care of a child with muscular dystrophy, called *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving* ('Great title, I know,' quips Rudd). Last week he was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

He doesn't like to plan his film choices too far ahead: 'There are times when it can be a little unsettling because you think, "Where's the next pay cheque going to come from?" because you need to pay the rent. I've never really sweated that too much. I do like the idea that tomorrow I might find out that I'm going to be doing something that is completely unknowable today. I think it forces you to live in the moment in a very good way.' **ES**

Ant-Man is out on 17 July



Right: with his wife Julie Yaeger at the premiere of *Ant-Man*

GEMMA LAMANA, ZADE ROSENTHAL, JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES



Leading man *This is 40* with Iris and Maude Apatow and Mann (2012); *Anchorman 2* with David Koechner, Will Ferrell and Steve Carell (2013); *Ant-Man* (2015)