

EVANS ALMIGHTY

He's the straight-talking boy-next-door who landed not one, but two plum superhero parts at the height of comic-book mania. But, as CHRIS EVANS explains to JOE YOGERST, he's still no different from your average sports fan

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SWEATER: GUCCI

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T'S THE MORNING after the American Super Bowl and Chris Evans is feeling the pain. He's a tried-and-true Boston fan and his New England Patriots just got thumped by their most-hated rivals, the New York Giants. "Let's not even touch that one," he says to kick off our talk. "Yes, I'm in mourning. The sadness, the rage, the fury, the denial - it's more than I can handle." And Evans is dead serious. Because he still sees himself - despite his newfound success among both moviegoers and critics - as a suburban Boston blue-collar kid who lives and dies with his sports teams, rather than an emerging movie star.

What's even more remarkable is that Evans wants to keep things that way: at arm's length from all the razzle-dazzle in Hollywood. It's a delicate balancing act - starring in blockbuster films and keeping a low profile - but he's managed thus far. His name isn't a household one and his face doesn't grace the cover of every other tabloid rag. But that might be just a matter of time. Especially if the movies that he's already got lined up prove as successful around the world as last year's *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

Rarely has a fictional role so paralleled the life of the actor playing the part. In the movie, a skinny and under-confident Steve Rogers - denied entry into the US Army because of his age and health issues - undergoes special treatments in a rebirth capsule. He emerges as a muscular, self-assured superhero. It's almost as if Evans underwent the Vita-Ray treatment himself, because his personal transformation over the course of making and publicising the film has also been astonishing. As Evans is the first to admit, he went from camera-shy to poised and polished, from sidekick to leading man.

And it only took him 10 years, because that's how long Evans was bumming around Hollywood before he got his big break. After graduating from high school in the Massachusetts suburb of Sudbury, he decided to skip college in favour of acting dreams in L.A. Almost right off the bat he scored one of the leading roles in *Not Another Teen Movie*. But after that came three years of career doldrums when the jobs were few and far between, and not that meaty. Evans finally seemed to hit his stride in 2005, when he landed the role of Johnny Storm (the Human Torch) in the first of the *Fantastic Four* movies. That landed him the leading role opposite Dakota Fanning in a sci-fi thriller called *Push*. But then it was back to being the sidekick again...until *Captain America* came along.

Up next is *The Avengers* (scheduled for worldwide release in May) in which Evans will morph back into Captain America



SUIT, SHIRT AND TIE: VERSACE
SHOES: DOLCE & GABBANA

mode to save the world, alongside Robert Downey Jr, Samuel L Jackson, Scarlett Johansson and Jeremy Renner. Two more *Captain America* sequels are already in the works, and there's talk the series could stretch over the next decade. So as not to be typecast as a superhero, Evans is eagerly taking on other roles. Next year we'll see him as a cold-hearted Mafia assassin in *The Iceman*.

With so many potential blockbusters in the wings, it remains to be seen if Evans can continue to fly beneath the

throughout the years. I would kind of just split my time between sports and acting.

Did you feel like you had a natural talent for acting?

I come from a very theatrical family, just in the way we are and the way we speak. We're very dramatic, very over-the-top. So being on stage and being comfortable and making a fool of yourself – it felt natural. And I loved films. I was huge into movies growing up; still am. I absolutely love them. And so the more I did theatre the more I drew parallels between theatre and film and tried to incorporate more film acting on stage as I got older. And then realised this well – of potential and what you can do with acting – goes pretty deep, and I just started to explore it more.

Did you read a lot of comic books as a kid?

Oh God, no. I don't think I ever read one. Not one. I was much more into cartoons and things like that. Comic books were for smart kids and that wasn't me. I liked Bugs Bunny and Wile E Coyote. So it's kind of strange how things worked out.

Yet you ended up playing a few different superheroes and you have superheroes spread out over the next decade – if you want to go that route.

At this point I have no choice. It's just a matter of whether or not the movies are successful and if Marvel continues to make more. I'm contractually obligated.

Were you surprised by the success of Captain America?

I'm surprised by any movie *that is* successful. At this point I've made a lot of films. I've made about 20 movies and I'm probably

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radar. Especially when he's seen stepping out on the town with Diana Agron, Jessica Biel, Vida Guerra and other Hollywood beauties. But no matter how his own life pans out, Evans will continue to live and die by his beloved Patriots.

Did you play sports growing up in Boston?

Yeah, I played soccer growing up, until I was 14. Then in high school I wrestled and played lacrosse. Wrestling is pretty brutal. Anyone who wrestles knows those practices are rough. Using every muscle in your body. You are spent; you feel exhausted. But come lacrosse season, I had quite a bit of stamina.

But at the same time were you getting into theatre?

My older sister started doing the plays maybe in seventh, eighth grade. She looked like she was having a ball; they would give her candy after the performances and she was hanging out with all these kids, going to all these little parties. And I was just like...this looks like fun. This is just like playing a sport after school – she's got events and performances. It looked like she was having such a good time. So I gave it a shot when I was in sixth grade and just loved it. I loved the process of performing, the excitement of shows, and it just stuck in

proud of three. It's not easy making a good movie. All these people coming together. All these individual creative minds trying to cook one dish. It's hard to make it taste right, you know. So any time you have a quality film, it's a blessing. If it was easy to do, there would be a lot more of them. I can't tell you how many times I've left the [movie] theatre disappointed. So I certainly was surprised. But I wouldn't have signed on if I didn't have faith [in the project]. At the point of *Captain America* being offered to me, I had already made quite a few stinkers. I couldn't afford to make another one, let alone another one on that scale. If you make one that big and it fails, your days are numbered.

What surprised me most was its success outside of the United States. I think it made more money overseas – even though they changed the title in a couple of countries because they thought the name Captain America wouldn't go over well.

It worked. You know, it really did. The thing that worried me more than the name and the American element was it was being released a week after the biggest movie of all time – *Harry Potter* – just crushing things left and right. I just figured, man, this is dangerous. We might get swallowed up. We might not even take the weekend in America. But we did. We just got lucky and it worked out.

Captain America was a very physical role. How much of the stunt work did you do yourself?

Good question, tough to know. I didn't do much of the motorcycle-riding stuff. I'm not very capable. That enormous Harley – if you dump on that thing, you're breaking a leg. I did quite a bit, but I can't take anything away from my stuntmen – they were fantastic. But

there's some stuff they just won't let you do, it's too risky. But for the most part I always feel better putting the gloves on and just getting in the ring. If you want to have some control over the performance – no matter how subtle it may be within the context of a stunt – it's still something you want to have a say in. So I always try and do it myself.

Do you think your sports background helped?

Absolutely. It does take a good degree of coordination even just to throw a punch because it has to look like something natural.

Did you have to beef up for the part?

Oh my God, yes. I always try and keep in good shape, but they took me to a place that was bigger than I'd ever been. They flew out a trainer from London. I was filming in Boston at the time. There was a trainer there for three months and we would train every day for about two hours. Just big, heavy weights, trying to build mass basically for this one shot. The one shot when I came out of the [rebirth] capsule and it has to be Captain America. It has to look right and I have to look different from what came before.

Could you relate to the World War II setting or did you have to beef up on your history, too?

I don't think that element of history was required for what the character was going through. I don't think he had to know historical facts and dates. I had a basic understanding of World War II – no more or less than anyone else. Enough to get me through what Steve Rogers was going through.

And now you segue into The Avengers. How does Captain America get involved with these other dudes?

I'm not sure how much I can tell you. It's obviously modern-day. He's a little bit of a fish out of water and it's tricky for him to adjust to the new world. But S.H.I.E.L.D. comes calling, basically has a mission, and has come to get him back in the world. If there's anything that Steve [Rogers] does well, it's following orders, being a soldier, doing what's right. So he's willing to take on the mission. I think that's as much as I can tell you. Marvel will shoot me otherwise.



SUIT: SIMON SPURR
SHIRT: RALPH LAUREN
SHOES: MEZLAN



Your co-stars – Robert Downey Jr, Samuel L Jackson, Scarlett Johansson – those are some pretty heavy hitters.

Yes, I think they have a future. I think you could hear a lot about them. They could go some pretty good places.

It's not like you're a newbie. You've been doing this for more than 10 years. But these are the icons of Hollywood. Did it make you even a little bit nervous to be acting beside them?

They *are* legends. Every one of them is so talented and so experienced. It seemed like the perfect opportunity for me to just shut my mouth and open my eyes and try to learn a little bit. Because if you think you're equal with these guys, you are dead wrong. You can't just say, "I've been doing it for 10 years. I make movies too!" No, no, no. Not with these guys. They've been nominated for Academy Awards. They've had multiple career ups and downs. They're just knowledge. Pure knowledge. I just try and learn from them.

And after that comes The Iceman, which is totally different from anything you've done before. You play a real person, Mafia assassin Robert Pronge. Explain in a nutshell what your role is.

Richard Kuklinski was a hitman for various families and the mob, and I play another hitman. It's based on a book. Richard Kuklinski was on a hit at a hotel and he ran into a guy. He says in the book that you can always "smell your own." He could always smell a killer. So he ran into this guy and they both had a suspicious way about them. Kuklinski thought this guy was there to kill him. He was wary of the guy, but finally walked up to him and said, "Hey, are you here working? Are you here doing what I'm doing?" And it came out that they were both hitmen and they struck up a friendship. They traded war stories and educated each other essentially on how to kill more effectively. But within that world there are obviously going to be trust issues. These are bad men, so the relationship has its ups and downs.

How did you prepare for the role psychologically?

It was a lot of fun. It was different from anything I've done. You can't be on the nose. You can't think about being crazy, you can't think about being mean, because I don't think these men think they are. Kuklinski goes home and he has a wife

and children. To him, he's just doing a job. So you can't believe the obvious traits. You have to be, in your mind, irrational. It's a fun world to explore. I don't get to do that very often.

Director Joe Johnson said you were the perfect actor to play Captain America because you were a conflicted human playing a conflicted superhero. Do you agree with that assessment?

Sure, yeah. I think it was in terms of my initial apprehension in taking the job. It was a long process, this Captain America thing. At first they called just to have me audition, and I was so excited. They said, "Look, we're having a hard time finding a guy and we want you to read." And I said, "This is great, good

"[MY CO-STARS] ARE LEGENDS. EVERY ONE OF THEM IS SO TALENTED AND EXPERIENCED"

news." Then I thought about it. You process what they're asking – a six-picture deal. I was pretty happy with where my life was and I ended up saying, "No, thanks" for an audition. Which prompted them to ask why. And then it went from an audition to a test offer. And I said, "No, thanks" again.

What was the problem?

I struggle with press, with promoting films. Interviews, press conferences and things like that just stress me out. And I figured that this stage would be 10 times more than any other film I've made. It felt so daunting. I was truly intimidated by it. I just thought I could be doing this part for another 10 years if the movies do well and that's a lot to commit

to, and I'm really quite content where I am in my life. And I said no, one more time. And then they said, "All right, we're offering it to you." So I had to do some thinking and I ended up going for it. I guess whatever you're most scared of is what you should tackle.

Even though I was scared in the moment, I started seeing potential there. All I can say is, thank God I did it. I certainly

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wouldn't be talking to you right now. Oh gosh, what a foolish mistake that would've been. Not only was I extremely happy with how the film turned out, it was such a fantastic working experience. And by no means am I sick of portraying the character, and I'm still finding new and exciting things about him. I'm liking the character more and more each time and I've made such good relationships. Everything about it has been a positive. There has not been one negative, and thank God for my team and my family and friends for pushing me [into taking the role].

Did all the press surrounding the release of Captain America get you over your anxiety?

No. Initially, when I took the role, I called my manager and said, "I need a therapist." If I'm going to do this movie, I've got to talk to somebody. It wasn't like gigantic breakthroughs with crying and things like that. It's just talking and vocalising your opinions and not trying to jump some of these hurdles on your own. When you walk out of the room, you just feel better subconsciously knowing that you've made an effort, subconsciously knowing that you've done something to work on this. That alone really pays itself in full. I did that for about a month prior to going off filming, felt good about it and then the next piece of the puzzle that really enabled some stability during press was having a good film.

I started to realise, I think the main reason I struggle so much in press, is because I'm usually promoting a piece of shit. It's really difficult to find a flowery way to tell people to go see this movie, that your face is all over, that your name is all over, that you're endorsing. And then you begin to feel like a liar, like you're transparent. You feel undeserving and it makes the interview extremely uncomfortable, for me at least. I think that's why with *Captain America*, when I first saw the film, I loved it. I really, really did. I saw it and texted Joe [Johnson] and said, "Thank you so much for giving me something to be proud of." When you're proud of it, you want to talk about it. It made doing the press a lot easier.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

That's a good question. I have a dog. I spend a lot of time with him. A big, big, big animal. So I usually start the day doing something with him. He's getting a little bit older, which is tough, so I have to soak up all the good time. His name is East, like the direction. An American bulldog.

I heard he travels a lot with you.

He did, but unfortunately not any more. He's turning 11 in June. Three or four years ago he started getting seizures, which we got under control. Then he got cancer last year, but he kicked the cancer and he's in remission. He's a tough son of a bitch. That said, he's getting at the age now, not only would flying be really, really difficult for him, I think he's just looking for some consistency. Some familiarity. Typically, he'd be the guy that will go with me everywhere. He's been all over the country – at least eight movie sets. He's a tough dog, but I agree that he does like



SUIT, TIE AND POCKET SQUARE: CALVIN KLEIN
SHIRT: RAG & BONE
SHOES: DOLCE & GABBANA



just a little bit more stability. At the moment he's actually back in Boston with one of my friends.

With all the work you're doing, is there time for a significant other?

Well, you always make time. I just haven't found her.

You've been linked with a lot of different women in the past.

Yeah, you know, that happens. You go have lunch with someone and you're living together. It's almost comical. If you're out with a friend and someone takes a picture, it's like, "Well, I guess tomorrow we're 'dating.' " That's just the way it is.

How did you get involved with promoting the Gucci Guilty fragrance?

Dumb luck. Dumb, dumb luck. I was in Puerto Rico doing a film. My agent called and said, "Listen, Gucci is doing a campaign and they need a guy and a girl and apparently you're on some list that they have." To me, it's one of the greatest things in the world. Campaigns are just fantastic in my opinion. You're acting for very little time – a photo shoot, a couple commercials, couple of press appearances. It really isn't that difficult with a quality product. It's not like I'm doing an Axe Body Spray campaign or something. It's a quality brand. And they really take care of you. Not just financially, but they make sure you're dressed well. It's a great company to have a relationship with.

Did you actually work with Evan Rachel Wood?

Yes, whom I had never met. She's just the coolest chick on the block. She's incredibly young, which is amazing as her level of poise and maturity is off the charts. We hit it off immediately. I think we were both kind of dumbstruck that this came our way, because it was such a great gig.

You did an interview with The New York Times in which you asked yourself the question, "What's the endgame?" A year down the line, does the answer to that question seem any clearer than before?

It's still a little what I would have said then. The goal is not

to be a gigantic movie star. That's never been my goal. That's never been my endgame. My endgame is happiness. Which I know is a generic response and it can be loosely interpreted. Obviously security is very nice, financial security is fantastic. But more so than that, I just want the options. If you become too big a star certain doors open but other doors close. The doors that open usually have to do with financial security and luxury, but the doors that close tend to be in the world of privacy, and just normalcy. If you become too big, you can't take your kids to a ballgame at Fenway Park. You can't go walk around Disney World. Your kids will be affected by who you are. I can't tell you how many times I've seen celebrities dealing with something personal – personal or intimate or family related, something sad or tragic – and there's cameras in their fucking faces. It's crazy. Walking in or out of a hospital with the paparazzi. That to me is terrifying. My endgame is to be afforded the peace and anonymity to make whatever decision I want to make. I want some sort of normalcy.

Do you feel like you still have that normalcy now?

Yes, absolutely. That's why this movie has been so good. We really toed the line of accomplishing everything that we needed to accomplish in order to be considered a success. We are going to make a sequel. And no one is disappointed, I hope, in the film or choosing to cast me. But it's not like *Twilight* where there are 50 girls waiting outside my apartment and I'll never be alone again. It's not like that. I still have an incredible amount of independence and privacy, which is such a blessing. It really couldn't have worked out any better. ■