Marvel Studios and Disney are looking at another post-Avengers victory with Captain America: The Winter Soldier, which has a strong shot of crossing $90 million in its North American debut this weekend and claiming the top April opening of all time. Some even wonder whether it could near $100 million.

Anything above $80 million or $85 million would be a rousing number for the sequel. Like the first Thor, Captain America: The First Avenger launched to roughly $65 million domestically in July 2011. But the wild success of 2012’s The Avengers has seen the fortunes rise for the Iron Man and Thor franchises (Thor: The Dark World opened to $85.7 million in November). The same is expected for Winter Soldier, particularly since the new pic has been receiving stellar reviews.

To date, Universal’s Fast Five, which opened in 2011, sports the top April bow of all time ($86.2 million), not accounting for inflation.

Last weekend, Winter Soldier opened to a dazzling $75.2 million from 32 overseas markets — an 88 percent gain over the $40 million earned in the same suite of offshore territories by the first superhero pic in 2011.
The UCFTI Expo is the only conference that brings together top U.S. and Chinese executives, creatives, producers, marketers, and service vendors from the world’s two leading TV and film markets to collaborate, and develop partnerships. Gain access and insights available nowhere else in the world.
the pic’s worldwide gross could approach $250 million by Sunday. Through Tuesday, its foreign cume stood at $87.4 million.

Featuring Chris Evans once again in the lead role, as well as *Avengers* stars Scarlett Johansson and Samuel L. Jackson, *Winter Soldier* picks up two years after *Avengers* left off. Captain America and Black Widow (Johansson) discover that there is a secret conspiracy within S.H.I.E.L.D and fight to stop it, along with The Falcon, played by Anthony Mackie. (Some critics have described the pic as an intriguing espionage tale, versus never-ending action). Sebastian Stan plays the villainous Winter Soldier.

Brothers Anthony and Joe Russo directed *Winter Soldier* and have already signed on to head up the third installment in the *Captain America* series. Marvel and Disney are so high on the untitled threequel that they are sticking to a May 6, 2016, release date, even though that’s when the untitled Superman/Batman tentpole is slated to open.

Box-office observers believe *Winter Soldier* has several advantages over the original *Captain America*, which took in a solid $370.6 million worldwide. The first film was a period piece, while the follow-up is set in modern day.

No other movie dares to open opposite *Winter Soldier* in North America this weekend. Among holdovers, the big question will be how well Darren Aronofsky’s biblical epic *Noah* holds up.

The pic will adapt the *ESPN The Magazine* article “The Match Maker: Bobby Riggs, The Mafia and The Battle of the Sexes,” penned by Don Van Natta Jr. The story told of the infamous conflict between Riggs, a tennis champ past his prime who came out of retirement to challenge women’s tennis player King in a 1973 game that became known as The Battle of the Sexes.

More than 50 million Americans tuned in to watch King beat Riggs and win the $100,000 prize. It was later postulated that Riggs lost on purpose in order to erase some gambling debts.

Chernin Entertainment picked up the rights to the piece last year and has been developing it since.

Peter Chernin and Jenno Topping will produce via Chernin Entertainment, along with Ferrell and Adam McKay via their Gary Sanchez banner.

Chernin Entertainment senior vp David Ready and Gary Sanchez’s Jessica Elbaum will also produce.

Ferrell last starred in *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* and voiced the villain Lord Business in *The Lego Movie*. Conrad last wrote *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and is prepping to direct a John Belushi biopic starring Emile Hirsch.

Chernin just began production on *Spy*, the new Paul Feig film starring Melissa McCarthy, and will unleash the much buzzed-about *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* this summer.

Ferrell is represented by CAA and Mosaic; Conrad is represented by CAA and the Collective.

Hunter was most recently seen in the Lifetime/History miniseries *Bonnie & Clyde*, Mulvey appeared in *300: Rise of an Empire* and Okamoto appeared in *The Wolverine*. All three actors will play characters newly created for the film.

The trio join Henry Cavill, reprising his *Man of Steel* role as Superman/Clark Kent, Ben Affleck as Batman/Bruce Wayne and Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman/Diana Prince. The studio’s announcement follows the casting of Jesse Eisenberg as Lex Luthor and Jeremy Irons as Alfred.

Amy Adams, Laurence Fishburne and Diane Lane, who co-starred in the 2013 original, are also returning.

**DISTAFF THREESOME JOINS JURASSIC WORLD**

*Jurassic World* is bringing up the XX chromosome quotient for the tentpole by adding three more ladies to the cast.

Judy Greer has closed a deal to join the cast of the newest installment of Universal’s rampaging dinosaurs movie series. Also boarding the movie are Katie McGrath and Lauren Lapkus.

The cast already includes Bryce Dallas Howard as a corporate scientist who works at the park, while Chris Pratt is a dino wrangler with a cowboy attitude.

Other actors on the pic’s roll call are Nick Robinson, Ty Simpkins, Jake Johnson, Ifran Khan, Vincent D’Onofrio and B.D. Wong.

Details for the characters were not revealed, but the trio will nicely balance out what so far has been a male-skewing cast (Velociraptors apparently like both kinds of meat). Universal has scheduled for a June 12, 2015, release.

Colin Trevorrow is directing the film, which is being produced by Frank Marshall and Pat Crowley. Steven Spielberg is executive producing.

Trevorrow wrote the screenplay with Derek Connolly (the two were behind
He stumbles across a box of unpublished who is grieving over the death of his son. Gomez and Laurence Fishburne.

Felicity Huffman, Jamie Chung, Selena val, stars Billy Crudup, Anton Yelchin, in January at the Sundance Film Festival with Paramount Home Media Distribution’s VOD release.

By Rebecca Ford

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MacGrath currently co-stars on NBC’s Dracula, and had roles on the BBC’s Merlin and Showtime’s The Tudors. She’s repped by Luber Roklin Entertainment.

Lapkus, who will next appear in the Adam Sandler comedy Blended, co-stars on Netflix’s hit series Orange Is the New Black. She’s repped by Odenkirk Provissiero Entertainment.

SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS AND Paramount Home Media Distribution have teamed up to acquire U.S. rights to Rudderless, William H. Macy’s directorial debut.

Samuel Goldwyn will handle theatrical distribution day-and-date with Paramount Home Media Distribution’s VOD release.

The pic, which had its world premiere in January at the Sundance Film Festival, stars Billy Crudup, Anton Yelchin, Felicity Huffman, Jamie Chung, Selena Gomez and Laurence Fishburne.

The story follows a man (Crudup) who is grieving over the death of his son. He stumbles across a box of unpublished music from his former life, and decides to form a small band which experiences local success and ultimately changes his life.

United Pictures president Keith Kjarland and Brad Greiner produced in association with Aaron L. Gilbert’s Bron Studios. The deal was negotiated by Unified Pictures president Keith Kjarland and Brad Greiner produced in association with Aaron L. Gilbert’s Bron Studios. The deal was negotiated by

Paramount Home Media Distribution, WME Global and Peter Goldwyn, senior vp of Samuel Goldwyn Films, with Radiant Films handling international.

Paramount will also handle other U.S. ancillary platforms and all distribution in Canada, the U.K., Russia and certain territories in Asia.

INDIE PIC CARRION ROAD CASTS LEGUIZAMO, OTHERS

By Tatiana Siegel

JOHN LEGUIZAMO, LYNN COLLINS and Jim Belushi have boarded Atlas Independent’s The Man on Carrion Road.

The film, directed by Gonzalo Lopez-Gallego, will star Patrick Wilson and Ian McShane. The story chronicles a botched Mexican cartel deal in the back roads of a border town. The town’s new sheriff (Wilson) must team up with the retired lawman (McShane) to investigate the source of the deal in order to stop a mysterious cartel butcher (Leguizamo) and his systematic brutalization of the town’s residents. Nils Lyew wrote the screenplay.

William Green, Aaron Ginsburg and Andy Horwitz of Atlas Independent will produce. MICA Entertainment is financing, with Relativity International selling the film overseas. Production is scheduled to begin April 14.

Carrion Road marks the fifth film that Atlas Independent has produced since its inception in 2012. The company is a division of Charles Raven’s Atlas Entertainment.

Leguizamo most recently performed his one-man show on HBO special John Leguizamo’s Ghetto Klown. He also will appear alongside Uma Thurman, Jesse Eisenberg and Kristen Stewart in upcoming action-comedy film American Ultra, directed by Nina Nourizadeh.

Collins’ credits include John Carter, in X-Men Origins: Wolverine and HBO vampire series True Blood. She recently wrapped production on action-thriller Lost in the Sun opposite Josh Duhamel.

Belushi is best known for his role on long-running sitcom According to Jim. He is currently in postproduction on three new pic projects including North of Hell, Undrafted and A Change of Heart.

Leguizamo is repped by UTA, Silver Lining Entertainment and Sloane, Offer, Weber and Dern; Collins is handled by Paradigm and Untitled; and Belushi is repped by ICM Talent and Brillstein Entertainment.

BRIDGES TO HEADLINE 2014 LEBOWSKI FEST

By Debbie Emery

JEFF BRIDGES & THE ABIDERS WILL be the headline act at the 2014 Lebowski Fest, according to the event’s organizers.

The star of 1998’s The Big Lebowski will perform at the April 25 event honoring the cult comedy, to be held at the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles.

Bridges, who is known for his musical talents as much as his acting, will play with his band for fans of the film, as they “drink White Russians, throw some rocks and party with an array of Dudes, Walters and Maudes,” organizers said in a statement.

Hosted by Live Nation, the Lebowski Fest is a two-day event that started in 2002 in Louisville, Ky., and has since been held in New York; Los Angeles; Chicago; Las Vegas; Austin, Texas; Milwaukee; Seattle; and also in cities overseas.

Along with the performance by “The Dude” himself, the festival will feature film memorabilia, music from the Kyle Gass Band, special guests and a screening of the movie followed by a signature bowling party.

Bridges played a country singer in 2009 pic Crazy Heart, and signed a recording contract in 2011 with Blue Note Records/EMI Music Group.
Letterman Set to Retire From CBS’ Late Show in 2015

By Lesley Goldberg and Lacey Rose

The late-night space is poised for another shake-up.

After more than 20 years at CBS, David Letterman announced his retirement as host of the network’s Late Show With David Letterman during Thursday night’s broadcast. His final show will come in 2015, when his current contract expires.

Word of Letterman’s departure first surfaced when one-time R.E.M. bassist Mike Mills, who was playing with musical guest Joseph Arthur on the show, relayed the news on Twitter.

“The man who owns this network — Leslie Moonves — he and I have had a relationship for years and years and years, and we have had this conversation in the past, and we agreed that we would work together on this circumstance and the timing of this circumstance,” Letterman told his studio audience during Thursday’s Late Show taping. “And I phoned him just before the program, and I said ‘Leslie, it’s been great, you’ve been great, and the network has been great, but I’m retiring.’”

He added to a standing ovation in the Ed Sullivan Theater: “We don’t have the timetable for this precisely down. I think it will be at least a year or so, but sometime in the not too distant future — 2015, for the love of God, in fact — Paul and I will be wrapping things up.”

In a statement, Moonves noted: “When Dave decided on a one-year extension for his most recent contract, we knew this day was getting closer, but that doesn’t make the moment any less poignant for us. For 21 years, David Letterman has graced our network’s air in late night with wit, gravitas and brilliance unique in the history of our medium. During that time, Dave has given television audiences thousands of hours of comedic entertainment, the sharpest interviews in late night and brilliant moments of candor and perspective around national events. He’s also managed to keep many celebrities, politicians and executives on their toes — including me. There is only one David Letterman.”

The news comes as Letterman recently surpassed Johnny Carson as the longest-running host in late-night TV history when factoring in his time with CBS’ Late Show and his 11-year tenure with NBC on Late Night With David Letterman.

Despite long-gestating rumors about Letterman’s future, the host inked a new two-year deal in late 2013.

“Les [Moonves] and I had a lengthy discussion, and we both agreed that I needed a little more time to fully run the show into the ground,” he quipped in a statement at that time, with Moonves adding: “There is only one Dave, and we are extremely proud that he continues to call CBS home.” Moonves had long suggested that Letterman would have the platform as long as he wanted it.

Letterman’s exit will provide yet another jolt to a tumultuous landscape, which underwent a massive transformation earlier this year with Jimmy Fallon replacing long-time fixture Jay Leno as the host of The Tonight Show. Seth Meyers took over for Fallon on Late Night in late February, exiting from his role with NBC’s Saturday Night Live. Given a hefty marketing spend and increased attention, Fallon’s arrival has catapulted The Tonight Show over rivals Late Show and ABC’s Jimmy Kimmel Live among the key adults 18-49 demographic.

Since NBC’s shakeup in February, Letterman has been averaging 2.69 million viewers — trailing behind younger, more YouTube-friendly rival Fallon (5.2 million) but just topping Kimmel (2.64 million). Both NBC and ABC’s shows top Late Show in the adults 18-49 demo, though all are up year-over-year during the increased competition.

Amid the renewed late-night wars, Letterman seemed to up his booking game, recently nabbing Lady Gaga for a rare performance and guests including Lindsay Lohan and former president Jimmy Carter.

Letterman produces the show through his Worldwide Pants production company, which is also behind his timeslot companion The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson. The banner has also produced scripted fare including CBS’ Everybody Loves Raymond.

Discovery Channel Unveils 2014-15 Slate

By Lesley Goldberg

Discovery Channel is looking to live events (high-wire master Nik Wallenda), reliable performers (Gold Rush) and a slate of seven new series to continue its momentum into the 2014-15 season.

The cable network on Thursday unveiled an ambitious slate featuring 15 series renewals and seven new shows as well as a handful of natural history and automotive-themed programming in addition to its first-ever scripted series
Discovery will also return with its annual Shark Week festivities, marking cable’s longest-running summertime ritual. The cabler will also stick with its Motor Mondays programming block, expanding it to 52 weeks a year.

Live events — including awards shows — have become increasingly valuable to broadcast and cable networks in an era of increased competition and DVRs. Discovery’s live broadcast of Wallenda’s Grand Canyon walk broke network records in June, collecting 13 million viewers and topping its December telecast of Felix Baumgartner’s record-breaking skydive from the stratosphere.

“Chicago is home to the first skyscraper live event and has played host to countless world events, and this will be one for the history books,” said Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. “We are thrilled Nik Wallenda has chosen our great city with its iconic skyline as the site of his next walk.”

Discovery’s push into original scripted programming with The West comes after the network found modest ratings and critical success with its three-night, six-hour mini series Klondike earlier this year. The network marks the latest cabler to join the ranks of those entering the original scripted series programming space.

Discovery’s new series and specials.

ANIMAL PLANET ORDERS FIRST SCRIPTED ENTRY

By Lesley Goldberg

ANIMAL PLANET IS JOINING THE ranks of cable networks launching into scripted territory.

During its upfront presentation Thursday in New York, the cabler announced that Martin Sheen (The West Wing) will star in its first scripted effort, Revenge of the Whale, a two-hour TV movie based on the story that inspired Moby Dick.

Sheen will portray Thomas Nickerson, who tells a story about his life as a cabin boy on the ill-fated voyage of the whaling ship The Essex. The movie is a co-production with the BBC and reimagines what happened when the most hunted sea creature finally turned on its killers and fought back.

Cable networks have increasingly looked to more short-form fare as a way of testing the waters of pricey original scripted fare. Discovery recently premiered its first foray into scripted programming with miniseries Klondike, while History broke ratings records with miniseries The Bible to launch its first original drama series Vikings.

In addition to Whale, Animal Planet also announced its 2014-15 upfront slate, which included six new series, nine specials, the returns of Holiday Best Fest, Monster Week and The Puppy Bowl programming blocks as well as 11 series.

Returning for additional seasons are: America’s Cutest, Finding Bigfoot, Gator Boys, Ice Cold Gold, My Cat From Hell, North Woods Law, Pit Bulls & Parolees, River Monsters, Tanked, Too Cute and Treehouse Masters.

New series include: Deadly Islands, Ice Lake Rebels, Pool Master, Redwood Kings, Rocky Mountain Bounty Hunters and Tiny Terror.

The slate announcement comes as Animal Planet is fresh off its best year ever. The cabler finished 2013 ranking as the No. 16 network for men.

“We always are exploring new stories that both entertain and challenge how we view the natural world and our place in it,” said Animal Planet and TLC Group president Marjorie Kaplan. “Whether captivating audiences season after season with the network’s most-watched series River Monsters, killing it with cuteness with our most buzzed-about, most successful Puppy Bowl ever or delving deep into our humanity with powerful series like Pit Bulls & Parolees, Animal Planet remains committed to offering provocative, entertaining programming while shedding even more light on important global issues.”
By Eriq Gardner
NEW YORK — The best match this Sunday at Wrestlemania 30 might not be Daniel Bryan vs. Triple H, but rather WWE chief executive Vince McMahon against 100 John Does.

McMahon is now being called a visionary media mogul for the WWE’s cutting-edge launch in February of a new streaming network. Meanwhile, another move by the pro wrestling outfit has sparked a legal battle that could impact the future of live entertainment.

On March 26, the WWE filed a lawsuit against various anonymous defendants charged with bootlegging unauthorized merchandise at Wrestlemania. The WWE attempted to keep much of it hush-hush with a joint motion to seal.

Such strong-arm legal tactics aren’t uncommon. In the last few years, concert promoters around the nation have increasingly stopped by courtrooms in advance of big music events to get restraining orders and the unfettered ability to seize unlicensed goods. The WWE itself has successfully attained such powers in the past decade in advance of showcase events in New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Texas, Georgia and New Jersey. Not this time.

On Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Helen Berrigan issued an extraordinary ruling that stood up to the WWE’s attempt to control the five miles surrounding the Superdome in New Orleans.

“The problem with plaintiff’s request is apparent once one recalls that the order it requests is not directed against a single named, identified, or even described person — all the defendants are John Does, and plaintiff provides no particular information about the identity of any of them,” she wrote. “At best, plaintiff defines defendants almost tautologically: Defendants are anyone who would be a proper defendant within broad geographic and temporal limits.”

The judge expressed some sympathy for the possibility that people will show up at Wrestlemania and cannibalize the WWE’s merchandise sales — expected to be at least $19 million, according to WWE’s court papers — but she nonetheless denied the requested seizure orders. As the judge asked, “Does due process allow the court to deputize a plaintiff to determine which goods are seizable, all while cloaking plaintiff in the protection of a judicial order?”

The ruling has the potential of jarring others in the entertainment industry. Berrigan made note of those who have shared the WWE’s situation, including “the NFL, NBA, NASCAR and touring musicians.” In past years, the Superdome has hosted events including the Super Bowl, College Football Championship, the Final Four and an attendance-breaking concert by Beyonce.

Why the decision could be of importance is that the judge has certified her order for an interlocutory appeal at the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals to address the WWE’s request. On Wednesday, the WWE filed a motion for reconsideration.

In the meantime, the WWE has been denied use of elbows in its ongoing fight with bootleggers alleged to be infringing its trademarks. The company reported in court papers that past judicial orders have empowered it to seize goods including some 6,000 counterfeit T-shirts as well as DVDs, action figures and posterboards at previous Wrestlemania events.
CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

By Todd McCarthy

CAPTAIN AMERICA MAY NOT FLEX as much box-office muscle as his Marvel stablemates Iron Man and Thor, but there’s a steadfast band of fans who pledge allegiance to Captain America: The First Avenger as possibly the best of all the Marvel superhero films — other than The Avengers. These true-blue enthusiasts will not be disappointed in this second entry in the series, which takes the bold (for Marvel) step of reducing CG spectacle in favor of reviving the pleasures of old-school action, surprising character development and intriguing suspense.

Notable for having induced Robert Redford to take a (significant) role in the sort of blockbuster franchise that he has studiously avoided throughout his career, the movie actually uses an important aspect of the veteran star’s iconography as stylistic inspiration, that being the ethos surrounding Sydney Pollack’s 1975 Redford-starring espionage thriller Three Days of the Condor. And like its hero, at least one of the story’s villains also has his roots in a real historical conflict, one of the factors that provides the cartoon-based characters with a bit more resonance and real-world weight than is the norm.

When last seen in his own pic, in 2011, Captain America, aka U.S. Army officer Steve Rogers, had just dispatched the malignant Nazi offshoot Hydra, only to then be frozen in ice. With his splendid physique looking none the worse some 70 years later, Rogers (Chris Evans) has some amusing cultural adjustments to make, but his natural instinct to remain an analog rather than digital kind of guy corresponds nicely with the appealing throwback nature of this outing.

This is not to say that the film is devoid of major hardware. The big event on the boards for SHIELD is the imminent launch of three giant “helicarrier” gun ships that can stay aloft indefinitely and are so loaded with weapons that they promise to render all previous modes of warfare obsolete. Eyeing the progress from their D.C. highrise offices are director Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) and Redford’s Alexander Pierce, a SHIELD luminary who also heads the World Security Council.

From the start, screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, who wrote the first Captain America adventure, resourcefully shuffle the dramatic deck, connecting important dots from before (the presumed demise of Hydra, Rogers visiting his 1940s flame played by Hayley Atwell, now a bedridden invalid), developing the enjoyable relationship between Rogers and Scarlett Johansson’s Natasha Romanoff, introducing doubts about the true allegiances of certain SHIELD officers and gradually building to the full emergence of Captain America’s new nemesis, the Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan).

Featuring these and other opponents of sometimes-obscure identity is more than enough to keep The Winter Soldier brimming with vehicular chases, surprise attacks, shootouts, fistfights, miraculous rescues and surprising demises.

For sheer plotting and audience involvement, this is a notch above any of the other Avengers-feeding Marvel entries, the one that feels most like a real movie rather than a production line of ooh-and-ahh moments for fanboys.

Evans and Johansson exhibit very good onscreen chemistry, and their banter is charged with a fun flirtatiousness. Anthony Mackie flies aboard in the new, sometimes-goofy role of a former paratrooper who, upon donning a giant pair of wings, becomes The Falcon, able to swoop around dramatically when not struggling with the mechanics of his rig. Stan’s Winter Soldier, outfitted with a devastating metal left arm, proves a well-matched, and equally good-looking, antagonist for his old friend.

But from a dramatic point of view, the greatest interest lies with Jackson and Redford, two great veterans whose presence lends weight to the fantastical proceedings and whose characters take some interesting twists and turns before it’s all over. Their roles are hardly demanding or multidimensional, but both actors seems invested in what they’re doing and are fun to watch in this context.

Opens: Today (Disney).
Production: Marvel Studios.
Directors: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo.
Rated PG-13, 136 minutes.