

# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

## *Equalizer* Greater Than Rivals With \$35 Million Domestic Bow

By Pamela McClintock

**T**HE *EQUALIZER* REINFORCED Denzel Washington's popularity at the North American box office, opening to an estimated \$35 million from 3,236 theaters and marking the third-best opening of his career. It's also the top September opening for an R-rated pic.

Sony's \$55 million action thriller was more muted abroad, earning \$17.8 million from 62 markets. Generally speaking, Washington's movies do the majority of their business in the U.S. Instead, Fox's holdover *The Maze Runner* won the overseas race, taking in another \$27.5 million from 62 territories for an early worldwide total of \$149 million.

*Equalizer*, reuniting Washington with *Training Day* director Antoine Fuqua, is based on the 1980s TV series created by Michael Sloan and Richard Lindheim and skewed older in North America, with 65 percent of ticket buyers over the age of 30. Audiences gave the movie an A-



*The Equalizer* marks the third-best opening of Denzel Washington's career, behind *American Gangster* and *Safe House*.

CinemaScore, in line with strong reviews. *Equalizer* played more evenly than expected gender-wise, with males making up 52 percent of the audience.

"[Washington]'s one of the few actors on the planet that really appeals to every-

one," said Sony distribution chief Rory Bruer. "And he and Antoine just bring out the best in each other."

Heading into the weekend, Sony was conservative in its projections, suggest-

SEE PAGE 3

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FROM PAGE 1

ing a bow in the \$25 million-\$30 million range. It's no surprise, considering how volatile the domestic box office has been in recent months. Still, the studio was so keen on *Equalizer*'s prospects following its premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival that it was already developing a sequel. Sony made the film with Village Roadshow and LStar Capital.

Washington's top debut of all time is 2007's *American Gangster* (\$43.6 million), followed by *Safe House* (\$40.2 million) in 2012. Rival studios have *Equalizer* slightly lower than \$35 million, but as long as it comes in north of \$32 million when final numbers are released today, it will remain Washington's third-best domestic launch. And the pic marks a career best for Fuqua (*Training Day* debuted to \$22.6 million in 2001).

*Equalizer* benefited from playing in Imax theaters and large-format screens, the preferred venue for males. It also features Eminem's new single, "Guts Over Fear," featuring Sia.

The R-rated film stars Washington as Robert McCall, a former member of the special forces who is now leading a quiet life. But when he meets a young girl (Chloe Grace Moretz) under the control of ultraviolent Russian gangsters, he can't stand idly by and comes out of his self-imposed retirement to do battle on the streets of Boston.

Sony marketing chief Dwight Caines waged an aggressive digital effort for *Equalizer*, as well as holding tastemaker screenings in 15 major cities with the help of sports stars such as Michael Strahan, Dwight Howard and Tiger Woods, as well as the NFL's Chicago Bears and the San Francisco 49ers.

*Equalizer* took a big bite out of Liam Neeson's action movie *A Walk Among the Tombstones*, which tumbled 67 percent in its second weekend to \$4.1 million for a domestic total of \$20.9 million. The pic placed No. 7.

Focus Features' 3D family offering *The Boxtrolls* was the weekend's other new nationwide entry, earning a hearty

THIS WEEK	MOVIE/DISTRIBUTOR	3-DAY GROSS (IN MIL)	PERCENT CHANGE	# OF THEATERS	PER-THEATER AVERAGE	CUME TO DATE
1	<b>The Equalizer</b> (SONY)	\$35.0	—	3,236	\$10,816	\$35.0
2	<b>The Maze Runner</b> (FOX)	17.5	-46	3,638	4,810	58.0
3	<b>The Boxtrolls</b> (FOCUS)	17.3	—	3,464	4,980	17.3
4	<b>This Is Where I Leave You</b> (WARNER BROS.)	7.0	-39	2,868	2,444	22.6
5	<b>Dolphin Tale 2</b> (WARNER BROS.)	4.8	-45	3,376	1,432	33.7
6	<b>No Good Deed</b> (SONY)	4.6	-53	2,130	2,160	46.6
7	<b>A Walk Among the Tombstones</b> (UNIVERSAL)	4.2	-67	2,714	1,560	20.9
8	<b>Guardians of the Galaxy</b> (DISNEY)	3.8	-28	2,451	1,546	319.2
9	<b>Let's Be Cops</b> (FOX)	1.5	-44	1,534	988	79.6
9	<b>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</b> (PARAMOUNT)	1.5	-45	1,585	915	187.2

RENTRAK

\$17.3 million, the best showing for Oregon-based animation house Laika, not accounting for inflation. Its two previous releases, which also went through Focus, were 2009's *Coraline* (\$16.8 million) and 2012's *ParaNorman* (\$14.1 million).

Overseas, where the pic rolled out early in several countries, *Boxtrolls* earned another \$5.1 million from 16 markets for a foreign total of \$17.7 million and early global cume of \$35 million.

*Boxtrolls*, which earned a B+ CinemaScore, narrowly lost the No. 2 spot at the North American box office to holdover *Maze Runner*, which earned \$17.5 million in its second weekend for a pleasing domestic gross of \$58 million (its foreign cume stands at \$91 million).

Directed by Anthony Stacchi and Graham Annable, *Boxtrolls*' star-studded voice cast includes Ben Kingsley, Isaac Hempstead Wright, Elle Fanning, Dee Bradley Baker, Steve Blum, Toni Collette, Jared Harris, Nick Frost, Richard Ayoade, Tracy Morgan and Simon Pegg.

The film features a boy named Eggs, who has been raised by a community of quirky, mischievous creatures living in a cavernous home beneath the streets of Cheesebridge. When the town's villain, Archibald Snatcher, comes up with a plot to get rid of the Boxtrolls, Eggs decides to venture aboveground to save the day.

Shawn Levy's adult-skewing dramedy *This Is Where I Leave You* came in No. 4 in its second weekend, falling 39 percent to \$7 million from 2,868 theaters for a \$22.6 million cume. Fellow Warner Bros. release *Dolphin Tale 2* took the No. 5 spot in its third weekend with an estimated \$4.8 million from 3,376 locations for a gross of \$33.7 million.

## COMBINED EFFORT BOOSTS TWINS AT SPECIALTY B.O.

By Pamela McClintock

KRISTEN WIIG AND BILL HADER'S dramedy *The Skeleton Twins* rocketed up the domestic box office chart in its third weekend, placing No. 11 as it successfully expanded from 49 to 385 theaters.

The critically acclaimed pic, directed by Craig Johnson, took in an impressive \$1.3 million for a cume of \$2.4 million (last weekend, it placed No. 19). Roadside Attractions and Lionsgate acquired the film following its world premiere in January at Sundance.

The movie follows estranged twins who try to repair their relationship after both cheating death on the same day. Luke Wilson and Ty Burrell co-star.

"A big part of the film's success is due

SEE PAGE 4

FROM PAGE 3

to the fact that Bill and Kristen, as well as Luke and Ty, gave big support on the PR front. They did literally 20 or more talk show appearances between them, in addition to a ton of regional and online press,” said Roadside co-president Howard Cohen, adding that great reviews are likewise motivating people.

*Twins*, posting a theater average of \$3,278, will continue expanding in the coming weeks.

Among new offerings, British dramedy *Pride* opened to \$84,791 from six theaters for a location average of \$14,132, the second-best of the weekend. Directed by Matthew Warchus and starring Bill Nighy, the pic, which played at both the Cannes and Toronto film festivals this year, is based on the true story of lesbian and gay activists who helped raise money during the U.K. miners’ strike in 1984.

CBS Films is handling *Pride* in the U.S. and strategically opened the film in San Francisco in addition to New York and Los Angeles, the traditional launching pads for specialty titles.

The film earned an A CinemaScore, with males making up 54 percent of the audience. A full 97 percent of moviegoers were over the age of 25. CBS will open *Pride* in additional markets Oct. 10.

New faith-based offering *The Song* from Samuel Goldwyn Films struggled in its debut, grossing \$600,000 from 340 theaters for a location average of \$1,765.

## DICAPRIO TO ADAPT WOLF FOR BIG SCREEN

By Borys Kit

JUST DAYS AFTER A SEVEN-FIGURE book deal was made for *American Wolf*, Hollywood is now also trapping the *canis lupus* murder mystery.

Leonardo DiCaprio and his Appian Way production banner are partnering with Kevin McCormick’s Langley Park to pick up film rights to the book proposal by Nate Blakeslee.

The book generated plenty of interest

on both the publishing side and film side, with New Regency and Robert Zemeckis’ ImageMovers also in on the bidding.



DiCaprio

McCormick, who spearheaded the hunt for the rights, is the Warner Bros.-based producer of *Gangster Squad* who recently wrapped indie coming-of-age pic *Ashby*. He will produce with

DiCaprio and Appian’s Jennifer Killoran.

*Wolf* tells the story of O-Six, who was regarded by some as the world’s most famous wild animal. The female alpha wolf was collared and tracked by researchers at Yellowstone National Park, gaining a huge following among scientists and the public as well. She was shot by a hunter in 2012 just outside the park’s boundaries, an act that caused howls around the country (she even got an obituary in *The New York Times*) despite it being legal — wolves were scaled back from endangered species’ lists, so there were new population-control measures in place.

Blakeslee, a senior editor at *Texas Monthly*, focused on O-Six (named after the year she was born) and the impact she had on the humans around her, as well as the wolf watchers and nature aficionados who symbolized the conservation movement’s success, and the hunter, a vilified man who remains unnamed to this day.

Blakeslee already has made some Hollywood in-roads. He wrote *Tulia: Race, Cocaine, and Corruption in a Small Texas Town*, a book that was set at Lionsgate with Halle Berry attached to star.

U.S. book rights for *Wolf* were nabbed preemptively by Crown as well as by Knopf Canada. Justin Manask at Office for Literary Adaptation struck the film deal on behalf of David Patterson at Foundry.

## SONY BUYS FEMALE-LED SCI-FI SPEC SCRIPT EDEN

By Borys Kit

SONY PICTURES HAS GIVEN THE sleepy spec market a jolt with its latest acquisition.

The studio has picked up *The Eden Project*, a sci-fi spec from The Black List writer Christina Hodson. Tobey Maguire will produce via his Material production banner alongside Matthew Plouffe.



Maguire

Sony is keeping the plot details for *Eden* guarded by a serpent, but it is a sci-fi action film centered around two female characters. The script also is intended to be the first of a conceived trilogy.

Sources say the deal for the spec was in the \$750,000 range.

Columbia Pictures president Hannah Minghella orchestrated the deal for the studio in a competitive situation and will oversee the project.

*Eden* reteams the studio with the production company with which it is in preproduction on YA adaptation *The 5th Wave*. The movie is due to start shooting next month and will star Chloe Moretz and Liev Schreiber.

It is also the second major deal for Material in recent weeks, as it follows the sale of chess drama *Pawn Sacrifice* to newfangled distributor Bleeker Street. The movie, which stars Maguire and was directed by Ed Zwick, is coming off a high-profile premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Hodson is known for two scripts that landed on The Black List two years in a row. *Shut In*, a psychological thriller, was on the list in 2012 and picked up by David Linde’s Lava Bear. The following year, her creepy script *Seed* landed on the list and is now being produced by Temple Hill and Peter Safran.

The former development executive also has erotic thriller *Unforgettable* set up at Warner Bros., with Denise DiNovi producing and Amma Asante (*Belle*) attached to direct.

Hodson is represented by CAA, Tobin Babst at Kaplan/Perrone and Ziffren, Brittenham; Material is represented by WME’s Warren Zavala and Sarah Self as well as Gretchen Rush of Hansen, Jacobson. **THR**

## MAZE RUNNER SEQUEL TAPS GILLEN AS VILLAIN

By Borys Kit

AIDAN GILLEN, WHO PORTRAYS *GAME OF Thrones* character Littlefinger, will play the villain in *Maze Runner: Scorch Trials*, Fox's just-announced sequel to *The Maze Runner*.



*Maze Runner* is an adaptation of the first installment of the James

Dashner YA trilogy. The movie, directed by Wes Ball, topped last weekend's box office with a solid \$32.5 million.

*Maze Runner* also grossed \$37.6 million from 50 foreign markets for a worldwide cume of \$81.5 million (it began rolling out in several territories last weekend). The film has yet to open in 27 markets, including nine of the top 15.

Ball is back for the sequel as are the producers, Temple Hill Entertainment and the Gotham Group. Lead Dylan O'Brien will also return.

The story picks up — spoiler alert — after our teen heroes escape the deadly maze and are now on the run on an Earth that is ravaged by solar flares.

Gillen will play Janson, who becomes the main antagonist in the *Maze Runner* books. He is also referred to as Rat-Man.

The pic is due to begin shooting at the end of October.

Gillen, an Irish actor with plenty of credits in the U.K. film and TV scene, also played a CIA operative in the opening sequence of 2008's *The Dark Knight*. He is repped by Greene and Associates, Independent Talent Group and the Coronel Group.

## MAGICAL GIRL TOPS SAN SEBASTIAN FEST

By Pamela Rolfe

MADRID — Spaniard Carlos Vermut's much-anticipated second feature *Magical Girl* walked away with the Golden

Shell for best film Saturday at the 62nd San Sebastian International Film Festival.

"Those who know my cinema know I like the characters more than the storylines, so I want to thank the person that has accompanied me," Vermut said, acknowledging his girlfriend. "I make films with love."

Official jury chairman Fernando Bovaira called the young talent, who also won best director honors, "an unsettling voice" before announcing the festival's top prize for the film about a single father's search to buy a gift for his dying daughter that traps him in a dark tale.

Helmer Cedric Kahn's *Wild Life* from France earned a special mention from the official jury.

Paprika Steen from Bille August's family drama *Silent Heart* snagged the Silver Shell for best actress and thanked all directors for still making films "for actresses my age," while Javier Gutierrez, from the Spanish film that impressed critics and audiences alike, Alberto Rodriguez's *Marshland*, landed the best actor nod for his role as an aging detective investigating a murder.

Director Michael Roskam thanked the jury in the name of Dennis Lehane, who won screenwriting honors for *The Drop*.

Damian Szifron's *Wild Tales*, the Argentine box-office sensation which wowed audiences in San Sebastian, won the audience award for best European film, while Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado's *The Salt of the Earth* also took home an audience award.

Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov's *The Lesson* walked away with the coveted Kutxa New Directors Award, which comes with a €50,000 (\$67,000) cash prize. Jury chair Nicole Brenez said, in these tight times, the jury was happy "to give the money from a bank to a film that celebrates a bank robbery."

And Alonso Ruizpalacios' *Guerros* picked up the Horizons Award, which gives \$45,000 to the winner to be divided between the filmmaker and the movie's Spanish distributor.

## CAGE'S OUTCAST PULLED FROM RELEASE IN CHINA

By Clifford Coonan

BEIJING — *Outcast*, a 12th-century war romance starring Nicolas Cage and Hayden Christensen and directed by Nick Powell, was pulled from wide release in China just hours before it was to begin screening.

Australian-U.S. firm Arclight Films was one of the main companies involved in the project, and a rep said Friday they were puzzled as to why distributor Yunnan Film Group called off the day-and-date release at the last minute.

"We have no idea why it was pulled," said producer Mike Gabrawy, who was in Beijing for the opening. "We were advised in the middle of the night and locked down to an Asian day-and-date. All our strategies are up in the air, and we are trying to get to the bottom of this."

The movie was poised for a wide release in China, but YFG told Arclight that it was not going ahead. It wasn't immediately clear if the movie would be released in China at a future date.

Based on a screenplay by James Dormer (who penned episodes of British TV series *Spooks* and *Strike Back*), *Outcast* revolves around two jaded crusaders who wander off towards the East, finally arriving in western China, where they become entangled in romance and antagonism with local royalty.

The movie includes violent scenes, which is potentially one reason it was held up, although full script approval is required in China ahead of releases.

"We don't know if it's a censorship issue," said Gabrawy. "This is the single most important territory for this, and we are trying to get to the bottom of this."

*Outcast* was made in English but qualified as an official co-production under the guidelines stipulated by China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, with Yunnan providing more than half of the undisclosed budget. **VH1R**

# Lifetime's *Devious Maids* Gets Season 3 Renewal

By Philiana Ng

*DEVIOUS MAIDS* WILL CONTINUE TO serve Lifetime.

Two months after its sophomore season ended, the A+E Networks' female-skewing cable channel has renewed the primetime soap from creator Marc Cherry for a 13-episode third season set to begin in 2015.



Cherry

Cherry will continue to serve as showrunner, splitting duties with executive producers Ric Schwartzlander and Brian Tanen, who has been with the show since the beginning. Schwartzlander comes from *The Soul Man* and *Cougar Town*.

Viewership for the most recent season, which wrapped July 13, averaged 1.8 million viewers per week in same-day ratings, down slightly from its freshman run. The series, from ABC Studios, continues to be the No. 1 basic cable program during its 10 p.m. Sunday time period among women.

"We are thrilled to be bringing *Devious Maids* back for another season," said Rob Sharenow, executive vp and G.M. of Lifetime. "Marc Cherry has created a uniquely twisted world that blends his comic wit

with devilishly ingenious characters and plot twists."

*Devious Maids* centers on a group of maids (Ana Ortiz, Dania Ramirez, Roselyn Sanchez, Edy Ganem and Judy Reyes) bonded by their jobs, struggles and employers' "upstairs-downstairs" universe.

Susan Lucci, Rebecca Wisocky, Tom Irwin, Mariana Klaveno, Grant Show, Matt Cedeno, Melinda Page Hamilton, Drew Van Acker, Brianna Brown and Brett Cullen co-star in the series. Eva Longoria, an executive producer, made her directorial debut on the season-two premiere.

Inspired by telenovela *Ellas son la Alegria del Hogar*, *Devious Maids* landed at Lifetime with a series order in June 2012 after ABC developed and passed on the project.

Lifetime's scripted portfolio includes *Witches of East End*, *The Lottery* and the forthcoming *Un-Real*.

## SCANDAL'S BANS SELLS DRAMA THRILLER TO ABC

By Lesley Goldberg

ABC IS BACK IN BUSINESS WITH Jenna Bans.

The *Scandal* writer and co-executive producer has sold a political drama thriller to the network, *The Hollywood Reporter* has learned.

The untitled project follows the return of a politician's young son who was presumed dead after disappearing more than a decade earlier, sending shockwaves through their tight-knit community. But as the mysterious young man is welcomed back into his family, suspicions emerge.



Bans

Bans will pen the script and executive produce the ABC Studios and Mandeville Productions drama alongside the company's David Hoberman, Todd Lieberman and Laurie Zaks.

Bans and Mandeville are both under overall deals at ABC Studios. The untitled drama marks Bans' first project under her new pact with the studio and reunites her with Mandeville, which produced last year's Jennifer Carpenter drama pilot *Sea of Fire*.

Bans has a long history with ABC dating back to *Desperate Housewives*. Following a nearly 50-episode run on the Marc Cherry drama, she moved to Shondaland with gigs on *Private Practice* and *Grey's Anatomy* before bowing her own Shonda Rhimes/Betsy Beers-produced drama, *Off the Map*, which ran for one season. Bans is repped by UTA and Morris Yorn; Mandeville is also with UTA. **THR**

GLEE THE WALKING DEAD SURVIVOR THE BIG BANG THEORY GREY'S ANATOMY AMERICAN DOLL THE VOICE MAD MEN GAME OF THRONES SCANDAL ARROW NEW GIRL THE VAMPIRE DIARIES GLEE THE WALKING DEAD SURVIVOR THE BIG BANG THEORY GREY'S ANATOMY AMERICAN DOLL THE VOICE MAD MEN GAME OF THRONES SCANDAL ARROW NEW GIRL THE VAMPIRE DIARIES

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# Analysts: What SoftBank's Takeover Would Mean for D'Works Animation

By Georg Szalai and Gavin J. Blair

JAPANESE TELECOMMUNICATIONS giant SoftBank's possible takeover of DreamWorks Animation would give the company ownership of content, which it has been craving to further feed its telecom businesses in Japan and the U.S. The \$3.4 billion bid was first revealed on Saturday by *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Last year, the company made an unsolicited \$3.5 billion bid for Vivendi's Universal Music Group.



Katzenberg

While that was a premium of at least \$2 billion compared to what analysts' estimated the music giant was worth, Vivendi rejected the offer.

Analysts at the time had different takes on over whether SoftBank could benefit from major synergies in that deal. While the growth of mobile music consumption encouraged some, others expressed concern that music competitors may not license their content to SoftBank.

As for the DreamWorks Animation bid, its \$3.4 billion price tag would only be a small fraction of the approximately \$30 billion spent by SoftBank on acquisitions last year, including the \$21.6 billion purchase of U.S. telecom giant Sprint. It compares with the \$1.9 billion market value that DWA had on Friday.

"It would be a good time to buy as [DWA's] valuation is fairly low at the moment," said Gerhard Fasol, CEO of boutique consultancy Eurotechnology-Japan, and a close observer of SoftBank, in highlighting the opportunistic timing of the bid.

"It makes sense in terms of SoftBank wanting to acquire more content, and they have already got game companies Supercell and Gung Ho," added Fasol. "They should be able to improve mobile

distribution for DreamWorks, as well as through Yahoo Japan, and maybe even Alibaba. There's synergy there."

SoftBank is the largest shareholder in Alibaba, owning a stake of more than 30 percent in the Chinese e-commerce company that had a record IPO last week. Softbank began with a \$20 million investment back in 2000. Its stake is now worth more than \$50 billion. SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son has said he has no intention of selling the stake, saying he thinks it's only the beginning for Alibaba.

Industry observers said the SoftBank and Alibaba relationship would further help DreamWorks Animation with its push into China and broader Asia.

"DWA is one of a few smaller companies with a substantial portfolio of IP that is well connected in the global media landscape," Janney Montgomery Scott analyst Tony Wible said earlier this year in a report. "We believe Chinese firms could look to DWA as a means to export media and build up their local film industry ... Furthermore, there is a penchant for animated content in the region (10 percent of China's box office)."

Beyond games featuring DWA characters, SoftBank could also offer DWA video content to its mobile subscribers, according to one investment banker not involved in the deal talks.

For DreamWorks Animation, the deal would provide further financial firepower at a time when it has been trying to diversify its business amid disappointing box-office results.

"A sale has made sense for awhile given the company's struggles producing hits and growth," said Steve Birenberg of Northlake Capital Management. "I suppose it is interesting in that it is not a traditional buyer. I've thought DWA and [Lionsgate] might be sold for some time and the possibility of a foreign

or digital company being the buyer was intriguing. SoftBank is both. Would a company like Google or Yahoo or Alibaba be interested in a studio as well? I guess this is endorsement of the value of content even in a world where content distribution/viewing is fragmenting."

Cowen analyst Doug Creutz, who has a "market perform" rating and \$21 price target on DWA's stock, recently summarized his take on the state of the studio: "Concerns about the company's recent film performance and overall trends in box office, coupled with question marks about the future payoff for current investments, leave us unenthusiastic about DWA shares."

He added: "DWA is a difficult company to value at present due to the enormous degree of earnings leverage there is around feature film performance. Two of the company's last three films have performed poorly at the box office; if this is representative of future performance, then shares appear significantly overvalued at current levels. However, if film performance reverts back to levels more typical of 2008-2011, then shares appear attractively valued given the company's recent progress in lowering per film production costs and developing a television production revenue stream."

One industry observer on Sunday said DWA management, led by CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg, would want a clear price premium in any takeover. A price tag of \$3.4 billion would be a significant premium.

Two Wall Street sources said Sunday that they had seen Chinese online or tech giants as possible suitors for DWA.

Softbank and its CEO have a reputation for being business mavericks in Japan with a style more mindful of U.S. than Japanese executives.

FROM PAGE 7

In 2010, Son famously outlined a 300-year plan that included the goal of investing in 5,000 companies by 2040, the year that marked only the end of the first 30 years of the period covered by the plan.

In another sign of Son's ambition, Sprint was the largest overseas takeover in Japanese corporate history. According to past reports, Son and his team introduced constant sales updates to improve the performance of the Sprint sales team.

In stark contrast to the risk-averse nature of much of corporate Japan, Son, who *Forbes* magazine this year called Japan's richest man with an estimated net worth of \$22.3 billion, is famed for a willingness to take the big gamble and barely flinch when it goes wrong. SoftBank invested heavily in new ventures during the late-1990s dotcom bubble, and when that burst, the company's share price plunged by more than 95 percent. That is reported to have reduced Son's personal net worth by around \$75 billion, by some estimates the largest-ever decrease in wealth for an individual.



Son

Son's nerve was unshaken, and SoftBank currently holds stakes in 1,300 companies, almost all of them linked in some way to the Internet.

"Son has the Midas touch — well, not everything he touches turns to gold, but a lot of it does," said Fasol. "It's a very sophisticated venture capital approach, whereby some fail and some turn out spectacularly well, like Alibaba."

If there is one story that encapsulates Son, nicknamed Masa, it would be the time he sat down with Steve Jobs in 2005 and convinced the Apple founder to grant him exclusive rights to sell the iPhone in Japan. What makes the episode truly remarkable is that there was no iPhone in existence — Apple wouldn't officially announce it until 2007 — no imported cell-phone had ever succeeded in Japan, and Son had no mobile carrier through which to sell it.

Much to Jobs' amusement, Son said that he showed him a hand-drawn sketch of what he thought an iPhone should like — only to be informed that Apple already had a design. Son left the meeting with a verbal promise that he would get the Japanese rights to the iPhone provided he had a mobile carrier by the time it was released.

The \$15.6 billion takeover of Vodafone Japan's struggling operations in 2006 — a move criticized as excessively risky by many analysts at the time — gave Son a carrier, and SoftBank's exclusivity on the iPhone between 2008 and 2011 helped make it the fastest growing network in Japan after years of underperformance as Vodafone.

The grandchild of Korean immigrants, Son attended high school and college in the U.S., giving him a global perspective rare in Japanese executives. He founded SoftBank in 1981 as a software distribution business, getting a major break in 1996 when he established Yahoo Japan as a joint venture with Yahoo. Under Son's shrewd management, Japan is one of the major global markets where Yahoo leads Google as the primary search engine; SoftBank's investment in Yahoo's U.S. parent company is also reported to have netted a profit of around \$2.5 billion.

"Son is a genius. I don't think there is anyone else who is on his level in Japan," said Fasol. "He creates an incredible atmosphere in the company and has some exceptional people around him. His personal style is the DNA of the company."

*Paul Bond contributed to this report.*

## MARVEL, KIRBY ESTATE SETTLE RIGHTS DISPUTE

By Eriq Gardner

NEW YORK — On Friday, Marvel ended a long and bitter feud with the estate of comic-book legend Jack Kirby, announcing a settlement just days before the U.S. Supreme Court had scheduled a conference to discuss whether to take up a case

with potentially billions on the line.

"Marvel and the family of Jack Kirby have amicably resolved their legal disputes and are looking forward to advancing their shared goal of honoring Mr. Kirby's significant role in Marvel's history," read a joint statement from Marvel and the Kirby family.

The settlement, which will surely please shareholders of Marvel parent Disney as much as it will disappoint many others in the entertainment industry, brings an end to a contentious lawsuit that started after Kirby's family, represented by attorney Marc Toberoff, began sending termination notices to Marvel and its licensees Sony, Fox and Universal over such superhero characters as Spider-Man, X-Men, Captain America, Iron Man, Incredible Hulk and others. Marvel sought a declaration that the termination notices were invalid.

The case never got to trial after a judge — and later the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals — determined that when Kirby was doing most of his work in the 1950s and 1960s with colleagues such as Stan Lee in a working environment dubbed the "Marvel method," he had contributed his materials as a "work made for hire." As such, Marvel was considered the statutory author, and Kirby (and his heirs) never had any termination rights under the 1976 Copyright Act.

The lawsuit seemed like it was headed toward a historical footnote when all of a sudden, the Kirby estate's attempt to get high-court review gathered steam. Most petitions for cert are denied, but after some respected intellectual property veterans weighed in with amicus briefs, the Supreme Court ordered Marvel to respond. The studio eventually did just that, but the hot dispute also was commanding the attention of both Hollywood labor guilds as well as the respected lawyer who founded *Scotusblog*, who signed on to represent the Kirby side.

Why the dispute was being closely watched went beyond whether Kirby could grab back a share of iconic charac-

FROM PAGE 8

ters. It even went beyond whether Marvel would have full control over profits from these characters as it launched new *Avengers* movies.

As those supporting Kirby's drive to the Supreme Court would tell it, the case represented the balance of power between creative contributors on one side and studios who manage production and distribute works on the other. It dealt with how to interpret who is an "employer" under the 1909 Copyright Act — before copyright law got amended — and whether courts should go broad by adopting the "instance and expense" test and fitting all commissioned works under the umbrella, or whether the courts should go narrow, potentially allowing other iconic works like James Bond to be terminated.

The appellant believed that Congress created the termination provisions in the 1970s as a bargain — to allow authors and their heirs to enjoy the fruits of the latter part of the newly extended copyright term. Without wide birth, however, the terminators, who often signed away rights when they were in the early stages of their careers, would never get to exploit such rights.

On the other hand, Marvel told the high court that this case was a poor vehicle to explore such issues.

The case now ends, and hopefully, the terms of the agreement are told at a later date. Surely Kirby's estate got something (money, promise of credits or the return of original art). Meanwhile, the Hollywood unions and IP observers who hoped for some legal clarity will have to wait for the next superhero involved in an epic struggle that only the nine justices of the Supreme Court can solve.

## BRAVO TAKES OVER RSP'S SHAHS, DROPS EDITORS

By Jonathan Handel

THE LATEST TWIST IN THE *SHAHS of Sunset* labor dispute occurred Friday,

as Ryan Seacrest Productions said it could no longer work with the editors who had been picketing, and Bravo took over the production. A Bravo spokesperson said that "no decision" had been made on whether to replace the striking workers, but sources told *The Hollywood Reporter* that the network has decided to replace the editors.

"Bravo controls the rights to *Shahs of Sunset* and as a result, makes all final decisions regarding production and budgetary matters," said a Ryan Seacrest Productions spokesperson in a statement. "RSP has deferred to the network's decision for Bravo to assume all remaining production duties on *Shahs of Sunset*. RSP will be unable to continue working with the editors that were previously engaged on this production."

Bravo acknowledged the takeover in a statement to *THR*. "Bravo is assuming control of production of season four of *Shahs of Sunset* from Ryan Seacrest Productions." The network added, "No other decisions have been made about the show," including as to whether to replace the striking workers.

Sources told *THR* that a decision had been made and that the striking editors would not be rehired. That drew condemnation from the union seeking to represent the editors, IATSE's Motion Picture Editors Guild.

"The right to organize, including the right to strike, is enshrined in federal law," said the guild in a statement. "It is an egregious violation of the law for any employer to discharge or otherwise retaliate against employees for exercising their right to organize. The Editors Guild and IATSE will aggressively defend the rights of our membership against all such violations."

Meanwhile, RSP's statement included what does sound like a farewell: "We appreciate the passion, commitment and contributions these editors made to the fourth season of *Shahs of Sunset*, and we're extremely proud of the show and applaud all the great work that the cast, producers and crew have made to date."

## TURNER LAING TO LEAD MERGED TV PROD'N GROUP

By Georg Szalai and Scott Roxborough

FORMER BSKYB CONTENT EXECUTIVE

Sophie Turner Laing will run the company to be formed by the combination

of 21st Century Fox's Shine Group, Endemol and Core Media as CEO, the companies said Sunday.

The former managing director of content for U.K. pay-TV giant BSkyB will lead what will be the world's largest independent TV producer.

Rupert Murdoch's Fox and investment firm Apollo Global Management, which controls Endemol and Core, have appointed the well-connected executive, according to a source who confirmed a report by the *Financial Times*.

Endemol has been run by CEO Just Spee, while Shine's CEO is Alex Mahon. Her chair is Murdoch's daughter Elisabeth. Spee and Mahon will remain on board during a transition period. Murdoch's potential role at the combined company wasn't immediately clear.

"Pending the parties finalizing an agreement to form a joint venture comprised of Endemol, Shine Group and Core Media Group, the venture partners today confirmed that Sophie Turner Laing, former managing director of content at BSkyB, would become the new venture's CEO," the companies said Sunday in a statement.

It continued: "Just Spee, the current Endemol CEO, and Alex Mahon, CEO of Shine Group, would remain with their respective companies following the close of the transaction, working with Ms. Laing on the transition and integration of the business operations. There can be no assurance that the proposed transaction will be finalized or completed."

Turner Laing resigned earlier this year from BSkyB after 11 years at the company, in which Fox owns a 39 percent stake. **THR**



Turner Laing

**ROBERT PLANT**

By Frank Scheck

NEW YORK — Most veteran music acts are content to rest on the strength of their back catalogs. Not so the ever artistically restless 66-year-old Robert Plant, whose post-Led Zeppelin career has been marked by vital musical excursions ranging far and wide, including, most successfully, American roots music. His latest release, *lullaby and...The Ceaseless Roar*, recorded with his band Sensational Space Shifters, is one of his most audacious experiments yet, a nearly unclassifiable mélange of folk, blues, electronica and dub featuring influences ranging from Celtic to African. Supporting the album with a tour that included two shows at the Brooklyn Academy of Music — part of a series of concerts marking the 50th anniversary of his new label, Nonesuch Records — Plant and company delivered a galvanizing show featuring a generous selection of Led Zeppelin classics.

It was the sort of night seemingly designed to test the knees of aging fans. Like clockwork, they'd rise to their feet every time they recognized the opening riff to a Led Zep song, only to plop down again whenever a new song was played. It's a credit to the canny arrangements that the set list blended together seamlessly.

Although he doesn't quite howl with the old ferocity, Plant delivered haunt-



Robert Plant revisits his past while staying in the moment.

ingly ethereal vocals in which he still managed to hit every high note. Despite his steadfast refusal to reunite for a tour with his former band, he delivered the old songs with an energized passion that belied their vintage status. Most were instantly recognizable, save for a dramatically reworked, instrumental version of "Black Dog."

Among the highlights culled from the new release were the hymn-like "Lullaby," the album's first single about which Plant cheekily declared, "I think Dick Clark's playing it every day"; the bluesy "Turn It Up"; and show closer "Little Maggie," the 1940s era bluegrass standard, here reworked with African grooves spotlighting Gambian band member Juldeh Camara on ritti, a one-stringed fiddle.

Plant paid tribute to his blues influences with several covers, including

Howlin' Wolf's "No Place to Go"; Bukka White's "Fixin' to Die," featuring stuttering vocals and a rockabilly-style guitar solo; and such Led Zep staples as "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" and "Nobody's Fault But Mine."

Yes, Jimmy Page's blistering guitar work was missed at times. But the band — also including Justin Adams, John Baggott, Billy Fuller, Dave Smith and Liam "Skin" Tyson — infused the music with complex atmospherics featuring such instruments as banjo, African bendir and djembe drums and swirling keyboards and loops.

The biggest responses were naturally accorded to Led Zep classics like "Thank You," "Going to California" and an impassioned "Whole Lotta Love," the latter bookended by snippets of "Poor Tom" and Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?"

That the show featured more Led Zeppelin songs than selections from the new album signaled that, for all his musical adventurousness, Plant is a savvy enough showman to give the people what they want. It almost inspired hope that he'll someday rejoin his former bandmates for a tour that would inevitably rewrite box-office history.

Plant will be performing Oct. 7 at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles.

**Venue:** *Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York (Saturday, Sept. 27).*

PAUL FAVILETTI

**THR BLOG**

**earshot**

WHAT MUSIC PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT

From *THR's* Music Editor, Shirley Halperin.

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