

# Rolling Stone

## COACHELLA DIARY

BY DONALD FAGEN

'GAME OF  
THRONES'

JOAN  
JETT

DAVE  
GROHL

BLUR

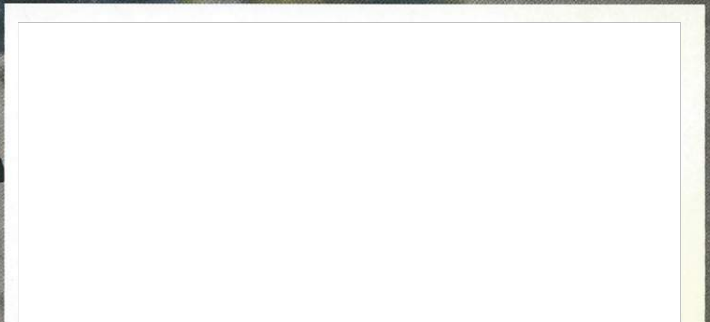
—  
**HE'S  
GOT HEART!  
HE'S GOT SOUL!  
AND HE'S VERY,  
VERY ANGRY!**

# THE HULK

THE COSMIC  
ODYSSEY OF  
**GEORGE  
CLINTON**

THE WAR  
ON WOMEN

**GOP** OPENS  
A NEW FRONT





## INCREDIBLE HULK

**T**HE HULK WAS BORN IN 1962, five years before Ruffalo. He was one of the very first Marvel Comics heroes of the Sixties, and bears the mark of the monster comics Lee and Kirby were pumping out just before returning to superheroes with the Fantastic Four. "I was getting tired of the normal superheroes," says Stan Lee, now 92. "My publisher said, 'What kind of new hero can we come

sect"), and transformed from Banner at sunset instead of from anger. His first comic-book series was canceled after just six issues, and it's likely no coincidence that Marvel's next characters – Thor, Spider-Man – were more traditional costumed superheroes. Soon, a hole in Marvel's schedule opened up, so Lee and Kirby threw together a super-team called the Avengers, and briefly had the Hulk join. "The Avengers were thrown into the breach at the last second," says former Marvel editor-in-chief

Herb Trimpe. ("What took ya so long to repeat it?" Lee asks.)

But the Hulk's real mainstream moment came with the Bixby-Ferrigno TV show, helmed by executive producer Kenneth Johnson, who had previously created *The Bionic Woman*, and later, *V*. Johnson had never even heard of the Hulk when he picked him from a list of available Marvel characters (rejecting Captain America and the Human Torch, among others). But after flipping through an issue, he came up with the "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry" line, as well as the phrase "hulking out." Johnson originally wanted the Hulk to be red, rather than green – he saw it as a more naturally angry color – and his first choice to play the character was *Pumping Iron* star Arnold Schwarzenegger, who instead recommended his friend Ferrigno.

The mood of TV's Hulk was often downright melancholy. As the tragic Dr. David Banner (Johnson thought the lack of alliteration was more adult), Bixby was a hitchhiking exile, trapped in the darkness on the edge of town, unable to do much good with all of his might. It was the superheroic equivalent of Jimmy Carter's malaise speech, leavened by campy gems like the time the Hulk had to land a plane.

Throughout the show's run, the Hulk never spoke. Ferrigno was hearing-impaired and, Johnson notes, "had 14 years of speech therapy, but it was all in Brooklyn. And do we really need him to say, 'Hulk smash?' It's like, hello, duh!" The show lasted five seasons, hinting at potential in Marvel's characters that would take the movies more than 20 years to unlock.



### ANGER MANAGEMENT

Whedon directing Jeremy Renner (above) on the set. "The Hulk's a power fantasy," Whedon says. "The idea that when somebody hurts me, I become enormous and don't have to listen to my better angels." Ruffalo transforming (right). "Mark spent the first week of filming telling me it's not too late to recast," Whedon recalls.



up with?' and I said, 'How about a good monster?' and he thought I was crazy. But I remembered Jekyll and Hyde, and the Frankenstein movie with Boris Karloff where it always seemed that the monster was really the good guy. So I thought, 'Why not get a monster who really doesn't want to cause any harm, but has to in self-defense, 'cause people are always attacking him?'"

Lee and Kirby had actually created a monstrous superhero just the year before – the Fantastic Four's orange-rock-covered Thing, who was that team's most popular character. Initially, some fans saw the Hulk as a lame rip-off of the Thing, and Lee and Kirby heavily reworked the character as they went along: He was, at first, gray-colored, spoke in full sentences ("Get out of my way, in-

and historian Roy Thomas (who co-created both Ultron and the Vision). "They used pretty much whoever was lying around."

Hulk took years to find his definitive shape and character. It wasn't until 1967 that he articulated his *raison d'être*: "Hulk smash." "I thought after a while that a guy who looked like the Hulk wouldn't exactly sound like Laurence Olivier," says Lee. Hulk didn't get his own comic book again until 1968. But Sixties college kids, in particular, warmed to the idea of a misunderstood, persecuted, unconventionally groomed antihero who spent much of his time pummeling the U.S. Army. By 1971, the Hulk was enough of a countercultural icon to appear in an illustration on the cover of *ROLLING STONE* drawn by longtime Marvel artist



LIKE BRUCE BANNER HIMSELF, Ruffalo was somewhat reluctant to join *The Avengers*. Whedon and Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige both say he was their first choice for the Hulk, at least once it became clear that they wouldn't be continuing with Ed Norton, star of 2008's *The Incredible Hulk*. Ruffalo didn't like the idea of signing on while Whedon was still writing the screenplay, and more to the point, "I was scared, a little bit," he adds over lunch at a West Village coffeehouse not far from his Manhattan home. He was impressed with Robert Downey Jr.'s left-field Tony Stark, which "opened the way for this kind of indie character-actor approach, totally off the radar



# ALL-AMERICAN MONSTER

(1) Stan Lee and Jack Kirby introduced the Hulk in 1962. (2) In the 1970s, Lou Ferrigno's TV portrayal brought the character to the mainstream. (3) The primitive CGI in Ang Lee's 2003 *Hulk* gave the creature a Shrek-with-a-glandular-condition look; the film tanked. (4) The comic is still published today, over 50 years since Hulk's debut.



of what you would consider to be your classic movie star. And I thought, 'Can I do that? Can I be as clever and charming and facile?' It was like, 'Downey!' – you know?"

But as Ruffalo recalls, Downey told him, "Come on, don't worry. I got you. We're going to be OK." The Banner-Stark scenes became highlights: "Watching the science brothers, as we call them, is such a delight," says Whedon, "because probably everyone's favorite romance in the Marvel Universe is Tony and Banner."

Ruffalo and Whedon worked together to figure out their approach to the character, which led them both right back to the old TV show. "The first thing we both said right away is, 'It's all Bill Bixby,'" says Whedon. "Because even

though Bixby was focused on curing himself, every week he's somehow gotta help someone. Mark is like, 'That's who I want to be, I want to be the guy that went off helping people.' So Banner's made his peace with the Hulk, and then the *Avengers* mess that up, because that's what they do."

Ruffalo was improbably insecure on the set of both movies. "Mark spent the first week of both films coming up to me after each take going, 'It's not too late to recast,'" says Whedon, laughing. "He's saying, 'I know you've got Joaquin Phoenix on the phone.'...I think Mark is maybe the best living American film actor, and part of that is for a reason that makes it harder for him in these movies: He's incapable of an untruth. He just always *is* the person he's playing.

It's dazzling. I can see why he would go, 'Stepping into this is going to be hard,' and to make him more insecure, we put him in ridiculous motion-capture pajamas standing on a platform in front of everybody with balls all over him, and a tiara made of balls, and then we're like, 'OK. Now be the Hulk.'

In the Seventies, all it took for Lou Ferrigno to become the Hulk was hours worth of body-paint application (and re-application, after it rubbed off on everything around him – including, in one memorable case, the fur of a real bear he had to wrestle). But for the Hulks of the 21st century, technology was a problem. The Ang Lee Hulk looked like Shrek with a glandular condition; the Hulk in the 2008 Ed Norton movie was more tolerably real, but still not quite convincing – and you never felt he had anything to do with Norton. Both movies underperformed, although Whedon also points to near-unavoidable structural problems. "The Hulk is really hard to build a movie around," he says. "He's kind of a hero and kind of a Universal monster, like he's a werewolf. It's the job of the hero to try and stop the reason you came to see the movie from showing up, and structurally that's a hard job."

"On the other films," says Marvel's Feige, who is perhaps the most super-empowered comic-book fan in the world, "we were thinking, 'This actor is this actor, but the Hulk is the Hulk.'" But thanks to ever-advancing motion-capture technology, Ruffalo became the first actor ever to get to play both Bruce Banner and the Hulk.

For the first *Avengers* movie, however, the process was deeply unnatural: Ruffalo would have to act out the Hulk's movements and facial expressions in separate sessions. "That was frustrating for me," says Ruffalo, who ended up writing what Whedon calls "a very eloquent letter" to the Industrial Light and Magic animators on the first film, telling them, "You have to be the Hulk too, you have to create him in ways that I can't."

This time, Ruffalo got to use his face and body together, and was able to see real-time, lag-free video of himself moving in the Hulk's body. He also worked with mo-cap master Andy Serkis – whose portrayals of Gollum and the *Planet of the Apes* simian Caesar were so revelatory that they sparked Oscars talk – to perfect his technique. "It becomes a kind of puppetry," says Ruffalo. "Eventually, you internalize it. I know how the Hulk moves now; I know what it's like to have all that weight on my body and how that body moves with these huge lungs that are filling." [Cont. on 68]



[Cont. from 45] In *Age of Ultron*, the Hulk accesses emotions beyond rage – he has some tender, borderline-flirty interactions with Johansson’s Black Widow, and there’s a striking moment when he snaps out of a tantrum and seems horrified by the destruction he caused. “All these questions started to come up while we were working on this one,” says Ruffalo, “because now, Hulk is doing some acting. He’s not just raging. He’s transitioning in and out of Banner, and that has its own inner life to it. We haven’t even started to get into who the Hulk really is, what makes him tick. What is he fighting? What is he struggling against? What is he afraid of? We’re only scratching the surface of it. Where we can go in the future with it is going to be incredible.”

Marvel has laid out the next few years of its projects, and there’s no solo Hulk movie among them. That said, both Ruffalo and the studio are cautiously interested. “We’ve announced movies for the foreseeable future, and Hulk is a part of a number of them,” says Feige. “But I would be curious to see what a solo Ruffalo movie would be.”

“If I’m still alive,” says Ruffalo, “and they don’t mind a gray-haired or white-haired Hulk, I could be in this universe for another 10 or 15 years.”

**J**OSS WHEDON IS WALKING TO lunch, looking a little dazed, on Disney’s campuslike studio lot in Burbank, where Mickey Mouse statues abound. Though he lives not far away with his wife and children, he’s spent the past three months holed up in a house on the lot, working nonstop on finishing *Age of Ultron*. It’s a month before release, and he just locked the movie a couple of days ago. “It was the hardest job I’ve ever done,” he says, walking by a bungalow with a small sign that reads, simply, PIXAR. “I’m just starting to ease back into some semblance of humanity.”

Whedon, balding with hazel eyes and a reddish beard, script-doctored movies like *Toy Story* and *Speed* before helming *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, along with several of the kind of failed TV shows that prompt write-in campaigns, plus the excellent but money-losing sci-fi film *Serenity*. He is a veteran of years of bruising fights with network execs and studio heads, including batted-aside pitches for projects like Batman and Wonder Woman. There is, perhaps, no greater sign of the loser-now-will-be-later-to-win ascendance of geek culture than his radically changed status: Thanks to *The Avengers*, Whedon is one of the most bankable directors in the world. Disney wanted him to do the third movie, too, but he’s already rejected that. “It would set me for life,” says Whedon, who’s taking his

daughter to see the live-action *Cinderella* later today. “And that life would be about five years long.”

Whedon is intent on trying to embed art, or at least personality, into the mass spectacle of the franchise. “There’s some weird choices in this movie,” he says. “I just wanted to make it as complex and interesting as possible and get inside these guys’ heads. At the same time, you know, ‘Oh, look, they’re fighting. Oh, look, the bad guy is threatening the world!’ There’s a huge climax. It’s not like I don’t follow the rhythms of an action film, but yeah, it’s different.” He offers a bit of Hulk dialect: “So, me nervous.”

Whedon gets out so little that he has trouble gauging his newfound power, though he took note when “a really famous actor” spontaneously struck up a conversation with him on a recent flight. He wants to dream up some characters and stories from scratch again: “It’s been over five years since I created something,” he says. “I feel like I need a different challenge than ‘Oh, my God, that’s huge.’”

After years of frustration, it’s not clear

**Whedon says this is his last *Avengers* movie. “It would set me for life,” he says, “but that life would be five years long.”**

if the success will ever make it past his skin. A few months after the first *Avengers* movie came out, he realized where he got the “I’m always angry” idea: “I thought, ‘This feels psychologically true, like somebody could be like that,’” he says. “And then about four months after the movie came out, something happened and I just lost my \_\_\_\_ I was like, ‘Oh! It’s about me!’ – which I do a lot. It’s so pathetic to me that we made the entire film, and it had been in theaters for several months before I realized who I was talking about.”

Growing up in New York in the Seventies, Whedon was repeatedly mugged. So he doesn’t have to look far to understand the appeal of the Hulk. “It’s a power fantasy about a powerless person,” he says. “I remember a friend writing me this beautiful e-mail about his son who’s on the autism spectrum and has anger issues, seeing the Hulk and being like, ‘Oh, he’s going to help his friends.’ Like, the idea that my out-of-control self, the thing in me that is primal, is ultimately a good thing. As a kid, I had these fantasies: ‘What if every time somebody picked on me or mugged me or hit me, I became this insanely powerful thing right in front

of them, and they were all terrified and wished that they hadn’t?’”

Marvel, too, is adjusting to its current clout, while grappling with accusations that the sudden dominance of superhero movies is, more or less, ruining Hollywood. “Well, I will say we’re in good company if you look through the decades of people who’ve been accused of that,” says Feige. “*Star Wars* ruined Hollywood; Steven Spielberg ruined Hollywood. I’ll be in that company every day of the week for the rest of my life and be very happy and proud of it. I haven’t been involved in a movie that’s been nominated for an Independent Spirit award, but I imagine those people put all their blood, sweat and tears and sleepless nights into their movies. That’s exactly what we do over here every single day.”

Whedon smiles. “But they don’t have the Hulk,” he interjects.

Feige laughs. “They don’t have the Hulk,” he repeats. “But I think it’s the same.”

“The Hulk *wants* to do more independent stuff,” Whedon adds. “You know, it’s just his agent...”

**W**HEN MARK RUFFALO PLAYED a Marine in a film, he nearly tried to join the Marines. After *Foxcatcher*, he nearly tried to be a senior-league wrestler. And after playing a superhero, he helped lead a successful movement to ban fracking in New York state (if you really want him to Hulk out, just mention the Koch brothers).

Ruffalo’s unabashedly left-leaning activism goes well beyond the usual bounds of movie-star do-goodism, and he protests perhaps a bit too much when he’s asked about running for office. “Conventional wisdom says, ‘Hey, shut up. You don’t want people to dislike you, or, you don’t want to hurt your finances,’” he says. “But, like, does everything come down to finances in our lives? It comes down to values: Are you who you say you are?”

Ruffalo says his activism is driven more by hope than frustration. “I’ve really mellowed over the years,” he says. “Anger has a lot to do with control and fear. So when we can’t control something, then anger comes quickly. Loss, not getting the job, rejection, money issues – all of these things that I was struggling with that made me angry forced me to have to find another way. If your only tool is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail. I had to broaden my toolbox. Sure, I get angry now, but it’s not outside of my control.”

But Ruffalo also has enough Hulk in him to recognize that, as John Lydon sang, “Anger is an energy.” “Just like every other emotion,” Ruffalo says. “There’s a lot of interesting things to learn from it. It is energy. And it accomplishes something. We need it.”