

Chapter 333: Venice Premiere and the Emmys

“Yes, Sam, I spoke to them. Stardust can have the distribution rights to I, Tonya, but you need to lock down the deal before the premiere in Toronto. Trust me, once people see the film, everyone there will want it. There will be a bidding war.”

I stood beside the docks in Venice with my phone pressed to my ear, watching boats move along the canal in front of me.

Sam, the head of Stardust Studios, was on the other end of the call. We were discussing the domestic and international distribution rights for Margot’s new film, which was scheduled to premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival the following week.

Netflix was interested. So were Annapurna, CBS Films, Aviron, and several smaller distributors hoping to acquire something that might become an awards contender.

If Sam waited until after the premiere, he would find himself trapped in a bidding war.

“I’ll have it done within two days,” Sam promised.

“Good.”

There was a short silence.

“Now, Daniel, I know we haven’t spoken properly in almost two months, but I have to ask again.”

I already knew what was coming.

“The Incredibles 2.”

I sighed.

“Sam, I just gave you the treatment for the Nemo sequel.”

“I’m not rushing you. I’m only asking you to keep it in mind.”

“You ask me to keep it in mind every time we speak.”

“Because it is one of the most successful films we have ever made.”

“I’ll have something for you by next February. All right?”

“Next February?”

“Yes.”

"I can work with that."

"And also..."

I closed my eyes.

"Toy Story."

"Sam..."

"I'm just reminding you, okay? Some films can go beyond three. Maybe we can make a fourth, fifth, or even sixth."

Six!!

"The audience wants another one," Sam added.

I looked out across the water.

"Maybe in five years. We can do something involving an evil tablet, an iPad, or some other piece of technology that makes the toys think children no longer need them. I don't know."

There was a pause.

"That is all I wanted."

From the boat waiting nearby, Robert Downey Jr. leaned over the railing.

"Hey! Are we going or what?"

He pointed impatiently at his watch.

His wife, Susan, stood nearby speaking with Margot, while several members of the cast and their partners had already found seats inside the boat.

"I have to go, Sam."

"Good luck at the premiere, Daniel."

I ended the call and walked back towards the boat.

Robert spread his arms.

"What took so long?"

"Bob, you are not driving."

Everyone aboard laughed.

Robert placed a hand over his chest.

“Why would you assume I wanted to drive?”

“Because of last night.”

“Last night was fun, though.”

“Last night was illegal. We have a premiere tomorrow.”

“It was only slightly illegal. Just a little bit. I mean, even Roberto here agrees I could do it.”

I looked at the driver, who shook his head.

“You nearly hit a water taxi, Bob.”

“It moved out of the way, didn’t it?”

Robert grinned as I stepped aboard.

I nodded to the driver, and the boat pulled away from the dock.

The Usual Suspects would have its international premiere at the Venice Film Festival. It was scheduled to screen on the second day as part of the out-of-competition selection.

The following morning would begin with a private screening for the press. Early in the afternoon, the cast and I would attend the official photocall and press conference. That evening came the red carpet, followed by the premiere screening inside the Sala Grande. Afterwards, there would be a cast dinner and a party that would almost certainly last until morning.

I had gone to considerable lengths to protect the film’s ending. I had no illusions about keeping the twist hidden forever, but I wanted audiences to have at least a few days after the film’s theatrical release before the internet ruined it for everyone.

The original film in my old world had enjoyed one important advantage. It had been released before social media. There had been no Twitter threads posting the ending before the opening weekend was over. No YouTube thumbnails revealing the twist with a bright red arrow pointing at the guilty character. No accounts racing to spoil the film simply because outrage and attention were profitable.

I had to treat the ending like a state secret. I even considered interfering with TikTok’s algorithm to keep posts about the twist in The Usual Suspects from being seen for a while after the film came out. However, the CEO of Chrysos reminded me of my own warnings about the slippery slope of abusing the power that came with owning a massive social media empire.

The next three months were going to be exhausting for both Margot and me.

First came The Usual Suspects, followed almost immediately by the Toronto premiere of I, Tonya. After that, we had the release and promotional tour for Suicide Squad, along with preparations for Ready or Not.

Then, at the end of the year, came the wedding.

So, yes, the next few months were going to be very busy.

Still, it would all be worth it. This was going to be an incredible year for Margot's career. She was already one of the most recognisable actresses in the industry, but Suicide Squad would push her to another level entirely. Her Harley Quinn had gone viral months before the film's release. The trailers and promotional material had spread across the internet with almost absurd speed.

For now, however, I needed to focus on tomorrow.

The test screenings for The Usual Suspects had been excellent. Audiences had responded exactly as I had hoped, and every report I had received suggested that the film would succeed.

None of that stopped me from feeling nervous.

I felt this way before every release. Well, every non-DCU release, at least.

All I could do was hope they liked it.

The boat carried us along the Grand Canal towards the Gritti Palace, where we were staying. Venice drifted past beneath the evening light, and I knew it would look even more beautiful the following morning.

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@Variety

Daniel Adler's The Usual Suspects receives a standing ovation following its premiere at the Venice Film Festival.

The cast reacts inside the Sala Grande.

[VIDEO ATTACHED]

The video began inside the Sala Grande at the Venice Film Festival, moments after the final credits disappeared from the screen.

Applause spread across the theatre almost at once, beginning with scattered claps before building into a full standing ovation. Audience members rose throughout the room as photographers and cameras turned towards the cast seated together.

Robert Downey Jr. was the first to stand.

He looked around the room with a stunned smile, seemingly struggling to process the reaction and he briefly lowered his head before turning towards Daniel Adler and pulling him into a tight hug.

Daniel laughed and hugged him back while the applause continued around them.

Robert held on for several seconds. When they finally separated, he wiped beneath one eye, pointed towards Daniel, and began clapping above his head.

Daniel immediately pointed back at him.

The exchange made Robert laugh, though he still appeared visibly emotional.

Daniel then turned towards the audience and bowed, pressing one hand against his chest before bowing again towards the rest of the cast.

Tom Hardy laughed and applauded beside LaKeith Stanfield. Michael Peña pulled Paul Dano into a hug. Alfred Molina smiled broadly as John David Washington leaned over and said something that made him laugh.

The ovation continued as Robert placed an arm around Daniel's shoulders. Daniel said something into his ear that made him laugh again, and the two turned towards the audience together.

Replies:

@CinBack

I cannot wait to see this movie. That cast is ridiculous.

@Destalist

These Venice standing ovations are not as impressive as people make them sound. Almost every major premiere gets one. It does not automatically mean the movie is special.

↳ **@AdlerSnen**

Can you shut up and let us enjoy something for five minutes?

↳ **@RDJtral**

Exactly.

↳ **@Destalist**

I am not saying the movie is bad. I am saying applause at a festival is not a review.

↳ **@AdlerSnen**

Nobody said it was. We are celebrating the moment.

@mariseonel

RDJ looked genuinely emotional. The world needs to remember that he is not just Iron Man. This is his real comeback.

↳ **@Warfender**

Iron Man was his comeback. This will probably be great too, but there is no need to put down the MCU.

↳ **@mariseonel**

Superhero movies are empty spectacle. Adler and RDJ helped make them respectable, but serious films like this are where actors truly prove themselves.

↳ **@Warfender**

That is incredibly pretentious. Robert gave a great performance as Tony Stark, especially in Civil War.

↳ **@mariseonel**

Standing in front of green screens and making jokes is not the same as acting in a real film with substance.

↳ **@Warfender**

Reducing every superhero performance to green screens and jokes tells me you did not watch the films.

@ERwatchNow

Robert Downey Jr. is coming for that Oscar. The man has Infinity War, this movie, and the second part of Infinity War coming afterwards. He is operating on another level right now.

@Eilance

So this is why Daniel and RDJ had all those photos together in Venice that made it look as though they were on a secret romantic getaway.

↳ **@Echiveats**

There are already around ninety AO3 stories pairing them.

↳ **@Serooen**

Those photos really did make it look like they were having one.

@Rothamstions

Why the fuck is the Riddler there?

@VeFTalk

Early reactions from people leaving the Sala Grande are calling *The Usual Suspects* one of the best crime films of the decade. Apparently, Paul Dano is extraordinary, RDJ. gives one of the best performances of his career, and the ending has everyone arguing in the lobby.

One week later, Los Angeles

I was seated in the front row at the Emmys.

Margot was not with me that evening, so I had arrived alone. The Netflix section stretched across several rows, filled with actors, writers, directors, producers, and executives from the network's nominated shows.

Game of Thrones had received twenty-three nominations, while *Constantine* had received twelve.

Thirty-five nominations between two shows I had helped create.

I had been nominated for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series for "Blackwater," the episode I had written for *Game of Thrones* Season 2. Winning would bring me another step closer to the PEGOT.

I already had the Oscar.

That left the Pulitzer, Emmy, Grammy, and Tony.

The Pulitzer would probably be the hardest of the remaining four. A Grammy was possible if I became involved in an album. The Tony would require me to finally give Broadway more attention.

One award at a time.

Game of Thrones had already won eleven Emmys during the Creative Arts ceremony the previous week. Another few victories during the main broadcast would break some kind of record. I was sure of it. Constantine had won for its visual effects, which was well deserved.

I was also reasonably certain Matt Ryan would win Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. He was seated directly behind me in the second row, talking quietly with his partner as the ceremony prepared to begin.

Michael Che and Colin Hanks were hosting.

They were halfway through their opening monologue when my attention drifted. Award ceremonies involved a remarkable amount of waiting, applause, and pretending to care.

Then I heard my name.

"Daniel Adler," Michael Che said.

I looked towards the stage as my face appeared on the enormous screen behind them.

Che stared at me with exaggerated confusion.

"What are you doing here, man?"

The audience laughed.

I smiled and spread my hands.

Colin Hanks looked towards me.

"The Oscars are still about six months away."

More laughter followed.

Che shook his head sympathetically.

"Are you comfortable down there, Daniel? I know this isn't the big league you're used to."

"I'll survive," I called back.

Hanks looked offended as he turned towards the audience.

"He got tired of taking all the Oscars, so now he has come to take awards from us television people."

The camera remained on me as I laughed.

The monologue continued for several more minutes before the ceremony properly began.

The first major victory for Game of Thrones came with Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series.

Viola Davis walked onto the stage to present the award. After a brief introduction, the nominees appeared on the screen behind her.

“Peter Dinklage, Game of Thrones.”

Peter’s face appeared as a clip of Tyrion played.

“Joseph Fiennes, The Handmaid’s Tale.”

“Mandy Patinkin, Homeland.”

“Matt Smith, The Crown.”

“David Harbour, Stranger Things.”

Viola opened the envelope.

“And the Emmy goes to...”

She smiled.

“Peter Dinklage, Game of Thrones.”

The entire Netflix section rose.

I stood and applauded as Peter embraced the people seated around him. He made his way down the row, stopping when he reached me.

I leaned down and hugged him.

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

“You earned it.”

Peter nodded before continuing towards the stage.

He accepted the Emmy from Viola and delivered a short, heartfelt speech thanking his family, the cast, Netflix, and everyone involved in the series. He also thanked me for trusting him with Tyrion, though the applause drowned out part of what he said afterwards.

The night had begun well.

The next major category was Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series.

That one was mine.

Or potentially mine.

Phoebe Waller-Bridge walked onto the stage to present the award. She smiled towards the audience before introducing the nominees.

“The Americans, ‘START.’ Written by Joel Fields and Joe Weisberg.”

“The Crown, ‘Mystery Man.’ Written by Peter Morgan.”

“Game of Thrones, ‘Blackwater.’ Written by Daniel Adler.”

My face appeared on the screen.

“The Handmaid’s Tale, ‘June.’ Written by Bruce Miller.”

“And Stranger Things. Written by the Duffer Brothers.”

The clips ended.

Phoebe opened the envelope.

I leaned back in my chair and waited.

“And the Emmy goes to...”

She looked towards the front row.

“Daniel Adler, for Game of Thrones.”

The applause began almost immediately.

I stood as the Netflix section erupted around me. Matt Ryan leaned forward from behind and slapped me on the shoulder while Peter, Emilia, Kit, Lena, and the others rose to their feet.

I made my way to the stage, where Phoebe handed me the Emmy.

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

I had expected it to be heavier than an Oscar, but it was not.

I approached the microphone and looked across the theatre.

“This is an incredible honour,” I began. “Thank you to the Television Academy and to everyone who voted for an episode involving several thousand men attempting to murder one another over the ugliest throne ever created.”

The audience laughed.

I thanked the cast and crew, followed by Cal and Elias, before finally bringing the speech to an end within the time the producers had given me.

Peter raised his glass from the audience.

“I also want to thank the viewers. You gave this strange, violent fantasy story a chance, and none of this would have been possible without you.”

I lifted the Emmy slightly.

“Thank you.”

I stepped away from the microphone and walked off the stage with the Emmy in my hand.

The show continued, and Game of Thrones soon earned another victory when Cal and Elias won Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series.

The win brought Game of Thrones to fourteen Emmys.

What came next, however, was easily my favourite moment of the night.

Bryan Cranston walked onto the stage to present Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series.

The nominees appeared on the screen behind him as he read them aloud.

“Matthew Rhys, The Americans, as Philip Jennings.”

“Jason Bateman, Ozark, as Marty Byrde.”

“Sterling K. Brown, This Is Us, as Randall Pearson.”

“Ed Harris, Westworld, as William, the Man in Black.”

“Milo Ventimiglia, This Is Us, as Jack Pearson.”

“And Matt Ryan, Constantine, as John Constantine.”

The camera cut to Matt.

He smiled politely, but I could see the tension in his face.

Bryan opened the envelope.

“And the Emmy goes to...”

He paused.

“Matt Ryan, Constantine.”

“Yes!”

I turned around immediately.

Matt remained seated, staring at the stage as though he had misheard the announcement.

“Let’s go, Matt,” I said.

That finally brought him back. He stood, and I reached over the seats to pull him into a hug. The showrunner and several members of the Constantine cast rose around him, shouting and applauding.

Matt looked completely overwhelmed.

“You did it,” I told him.

He shook his head.

“I don’t believe it.”

“You should probably start believing it before they give the award to someone else.”

That made him laugh.

He made his way towards the stage, where Bryan handed him the Emmy.

Matt stood behind the microphone for several seconds, still staring at the statue.

“I genuinely did not prepare anything,” he admitted.

The audience laughed.

“I was convinced the other Matt here... Matthew Rhys was going to win.”

The camera cut to Matthew Rhys, who smiled at him.

Matt thanked Netflix, the writers, the producers, and the entire crew before turning his attention towards me.

“And Daniel, who apparently remembered me from a video game he played and cast me almost immediately. This has changed my life in ways you cannot even imagine. Thank you.”

I applauded along with everyone else.

The ceremony continued, but the final award was the one everyone had been waiting for.

Outstanding Drama Series.

The nominees were introduced one by one as clips appeared on the screen.

The Americans.

The Crown.

Game of Thrones.

The Handmaid’s Tale.

Stranger Things.

This Is Us.

Westworld.

“And the Emmy goes to...”

The pause seemed to last forever.

“Game of Thrones.”

The Netflix section erupted.

I stood as Cal, Elias, Peter, Emilia, Kit, Lena, Nikolaj, and the rest of the cast and production team began embracing one another.

It was the fifteenth Emmy for the series that year and the perfect way to end the ceremony.

We made our way onto the stage together, filling nearly all the available space. Some members of the cast were laughing, while others appeared close to tears.

Cal and Elias joined me at the microphone as the presenter handed us the Emmy.

I looked out across the theatre.

“This has been a fairly good night.”

The audience laughed.

I delivered a short speech and quickly brought it to an end when the producers signalled that our time was running out.

I lifted the Emmy slightly.

“Thank you to everyone at Netflix and to all our viewers. We promise not to kill too many people next season.”

The music began, signalling that our time was over.

We walked off the stage together, and the show came to an end.

I had won my first Emmy and taken another step towards the PEGOT.

The Grammy might be next.

I would probably need a little help from Joanna for that.