

MAN ON A MISSION

As his career reaches new heights – his 4th ‘Mission: Impossible’ film out and a new ‘Star Trek’ in the offing – Simon Pegg aims to stay true to himself

BY SIMON BLAND
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“When you know Tom’s been running around on a broken ankle for 10 hours, you’d feel a bit like you were half arsing it if you didn’t submit yourself for everything,” said Simon Pegg, pondering the downside of having an action hero like Tom Cruise as your work buddy. “You know that whatever you do, Tom will be doing something 10 times worse.”

Pegg stars in “Mission: Impossible – Fallout,” playing gadget man Benji Dunn alongside Cruise as agent Ethan Hunt.

Production on “Fallout,” Pegg’s fourth “Mission Impossible” but the franchise’s sixth installment, was forced on hiatus after Cruise broke his ankle building-hopping while shooting one of the film’s chase sequences. Pegg insists it’s this commitment to realism that brings audiences back to “Mission Impossible.”

“With CGI, even though the spectacle has become more convincing than ever, we’re less inclined to believe it or be wowed by it,” Pegg said. “There’s a degree of detachment because you know it’s not happening, but the minute it becomes genuine, when you know that’s Tom Cruise flying the helicopter, leaping across gaps or riding those motorbikes, suddenly it reclaims that degree of: ‘Holy fuck! This is actually happening!’”

“I think people have forgotten that sensation a little bit. And Tom’s insistence to do it this way has reminded audiences of the thrill. It’s thrilling because it’s actually happening.”

Growing up in Gloucestershire, England, Pegg seemed destined for the stage. A stint at Warwick University saw him perform alongside David Walliams, and a string of roles in famous British comedies quickly followed. Revisit sketch show “Big Train,” Graham Linehan’s “Black Books” or Steve Coogan’s “I’m Alan Partridge,” and you’ll find Pegg’s

memorable early work. But it wasn’t until he co-created the slacker comedy “Spaced” with Jessica Hynes that things really kicked into gear.

The show became a cult hit, helping Pegg parlay a fledgling career on the small screen into a full-time gig on the big screen, spearheaded by a trio of features with his “Spaced” co-creators Nick Frost and director Edgar Wright. The 2004 Rom-zom-com “Shaun of the Dead” started things off, followed by 2007’s cop comedy “Hot Fuzz” and culminating with 2013’s sci-fi booze cruise “The World’s End.”

Cut to 2018, and the 48-year-old star now considers Steven Spielberg, JJ Abrams and the seemingly indestructible Cruise as his contemporaries.

As the “Mission” movies get bigger, it’s not just Ethan Hunt who’s in on the action.

“Benji’s a technician,” Pegg said. “He gets into trouble, but he generally doesn’t throw himself off things. Although for ‘Fallout,’ I had to learn to drive a speedboat, do underwater stuff and all the fight choreography, which I love. I have this backstory that Benji plays Fortnite with Ethan, and it’s the only place where he can beat him in a fight.”

It’s not just our world that Pegg has helped save lately. He has saved galaxies as the USS Enterprise’s Chief Engineer Scotty in three (soon to be four) “Star Trek” films. He also had a role in Spielberg’s 2018 hit, “Ready Player One” and a cameo in Abrams’ 2015 sequel, “Star Wars: The Force Awakens.” There are also constant rumors of reteaming with his Cornetto Trilogy colleagues.

“Mission III’ was my first Hollywood film,” he said, “and it’s meant that things have escalated for me globally.”

But with such a sudden career boost came unwanted side-effects. Last month, the actor revealed details of a hidden battle with alcoholism and depression that plagued most of his rise to fame and threatened to derail his career. Having come

through this dark time, Pegg is now able to welcome his successes and value his time spent out of the spotlight.

“I generally relish my downtime and tend not to leave the house when I get home. I live out in the countryside, and it’s just a nice place to retreat to. I watch films, play games with my kids, take the dogs for a walk and keep it all as real as possible.”

He even finds time for TV.

“I’m enjoying ‘Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse Gone Fishing,’” he said. “I think it’s one of the most affecting television programs ever made.”

Pegg’s also one of the few stars who opt to spend their spare time off social media.

“I didn’t like how available it made me. There were a few reasons why I quit: partly because I felt like if I’m a private person, why am I giving the world a means to talk to me? Also, I didn’t really like who it encouraged me to be.

“Social media makes you incredibly narcissistic. I see people who I know on social media, and I don’t like them on social media. It’s slightly false, too, because you’re essentially editing and redacting your own existence to make yourself look as good as possible. It engenders such ego-driven narcissism that it made me feel a bit icky, so I left.”

Back to work, and Pegg’s future looks set to continue its rocket pace. He recently set up production company Stolen Picture with friend and collaborator Frost, and once work on “Star Trek IV” wraps, Pegg plans to visit Finland to helm his first feature film.

“I’m a big believer in writing from a point of view of the truth, and obviously that means being very personal,” he said. “I think that’s the key to good comedy: not trying to appeal.

“When Jess and I wrote ‘Spaced,’ shows like ‘Game On’ and even ‘Friends’ didn’t speak to us, particularly the British shows. They were being