



BEN FALK

**ROBERT
DOWNEY JR**

**THE FALL AND RISE OF
THE COMEBACK KID**

Often hailed as the best actor of his generation, Robert Downey Jr has wowed recent audiences as superhero Iron Man and literary icon Sherlock Holmes. But these box office successes might never have happened had Downey Jr succumbed to the addictions that have plagued the majority of his adult life.

This detailed and authoritative account by journalist Ben Falk charts the ups and downs (and ups again) of one of modern-day Hollywood's greatest performers; from his quirky upbringing as the son of an underground filmmaker, through his struggles with substance abuse to Oscar nominations, movie franchises and the future beyond.

Starting his career with child performances in his father's independent films, Downey Jr's chaotic home life saw him travel coast to coast struggling to fit in until he found his calling in front of the camera, as well as happiness off-screen with future *Sex And The City* star Sarah Jessica Parker.

His turbulent twenties saw him portray a young addict in *Less Than Zero*, become an Academy Award-nominated leading man in *Chaplin* and get married for the first time.

And despite intermittent tussles with the law, he still managed to create indelible characters in movies as varied as *Natural Born Killers*, *Zodiac* and *Wonder Boys*.

But his self-proclaimed 'lizard brain' also drove him to drink copiously, as well as use heroin and crack. These issues led to him becoming a regular on *Court TV* and an inmate at two of California's toughest prisons, before finally turning his life around.

This revealing biography is the definitive story of one of Hollywood's most beloved and gifted icons and now, thankfully, a true comeback kid.

ROBERT DOWNEY JR

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Author's Note

'Robert Downey Jr is a genius.' It's a phrase I came across a lot during my research for this book. Most people were referring to his acting across more than 50 films and television shows. Others were talking about his singing, or his piano playing, or his poetry. Some even mentioned it in conjunction with his intellect, though while the following story will prove him to be an immensely intelligent individual, I have found no official certification to that end.

Having lived and worked in Hollywood myself, I can attest to the fact the word 'genius' is one that's bandied around a great deal in showbiz circles. Not just about Kubrick or Brando, but about the guy who came up with the marketing campaign for *Transformers*, or the Beverly Hills orthopaedist who does all the A-list stars. In other words, its frequent usage often renders it meaningless. As a cynical entertainment hack with more than a decade in the (posh hotel) trenches, the mere mention of the term immediately sends my hackles rocketing skywards.

But you know, having spent more time than one man is supposed to spend studying another man if he doesn't plan to ask him out on a date, the whole genius thing doesn't seem so farfetched when you're talking about Robert Downey Jr. To watch his transformation into a vivacious yuppie-turned-pathetic addict in *Less Than Zero*, his Oscar-nominated performance as Charlie Chaplin or more recently his laconic, charismatic turn as an industrialist-cum-superhero in *Iron Man*, it's no surprise that he's frequently tapped to play the more highly evolved on-screen characters.

Robert chose not to participate in this book. He was scheduled to write his own autobiography in 2006, even took the advance, but returned it two years later when his comic book caper became an international blockbuster and set his career onto an even more stratospheric path.

It makes sense, considering a great many young viewers of *Iron Man* don't know Robert's history – his peculiar upbringing, his struggle with drink and drugs, his tabloid-friendly tussles with the law and his trail of great performances in not-so-great films.

But for more long-held fans – and I count myself one wholeheartedly – it was precisely this history that endeared us to the actor. Not because we wished to revel in his misery, but because we were fascinated by his journey, how a man who could keep churning out brilliance on-camera could be imploding so spectacularly off it.

Many showbiz journalists like to pretend to themselves they know their subjects. That when an actor says hi and smiles at them, it is because they're mates, not simply because the film company has forced them to sit in a junket room and talk to a group of random people from all over the world in a bid to drum up publicity for their movie.

I am not Robert's friend or acquaintance. I have met him at various promotional functions, talked to him a couple of times during my job as a hack, but should I walk up to him on the street, he wouldn't have the faintest clue who I am. I'm not going to pretend I know exactly who Robert Downey Jr is. What I have attempted to do within these pages however, is get as close as I possibly can to finding out. The writing of this book has been as much of an exploration for me as I hope the reading is for you.

I've talked to former colleagues, old friends, even innocent bystanders who happened to come into his orbit. It's testament to the charm of the man that they all have something to say about him, even if the meeting took place more than 30 years ago. I've also covered pretty much all the films he has been in, but I have missed out some. Put it down to authorial licence – some I simply consider too insignificant an entry on his CV often because it was a tiny cameo, others I have missed out because I don't want the book to just