EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

A Hundred Percent Hail Mary

Screenwriter Drew Goddard talks with Paul Salfen as Project Hail Mary, his adaptation of Andy Weir's novel, returns to theaters December 11 in IMAX and select 70mm.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Official theatrical poster for Project Hail Mary. The key art lists the original theatrical date of March 20, 2026, and the line "Filmed for IMAX."

Amazon MGM Studios is sending *Project Hail Mary* back to the big screen. On December 11, the film returns to theaters in the United States and Canada, including IMAX and select 70mm engagements, with a new official trailer built around a simple invitation: some stories stay with you long after the credits roll. Tickets are already on sale. Amazon MGM Studios announced the return on November 18, calling the picture one of the year's top-grossing films, and the box-office ledger backs the scale. After opening in the United States on March 20, 2026, *Project Hail Mary* has grossed more than $685 million worldwide, including about $344 million domestically, with an $80.5 million opening weekend. It reached MGM+ on June 18 and Prime Video on July 3. Now the studio is asking audiences to leave the house for it again.

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Academy Award winners for *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, directed the film from a screenplay by Drew Goddard, adapted from Andy Weir's New York Times best-selling novel. Ryan Gosling stars as Ryland Grace, a science teacher who wakes up on a spaceship light years from home with no memory of who he is or how he got there.

As the official synopsis has it, Grace has to solve the riddle of a mysterious substance that is causing the sun to die out, and save everything on Earth from extinction, with an unexpected friendship meaning he may not have to do it alone. Sandra Hüller, James Ortiz, Lionel Boyce, Ken Leung, Milana Vayntrub, and Priya Kansara complete the principal cast. The running time is 2 hours and 36 minutes. The rating is PG-13, for some thematic material and suggestive references. The original one-sheet already carried the line “Filmed for IMAX.” The December return puts that large-format ambition back in front of paying crowds, this time with select 70mm dates in the mix.

When Paul Salfen reached Goddard for AMFM Magazine, the screenwriter did not sound like a man taking a victory lap. He sounded like someone still a little stunned that the work exists at all.

“You’re not going to hear me complain,” Goddard said. “I’m very, very grateful for all of the things I got to work on. And this one is, as you say, incredibly special.”

He was just as plain about why a second life in theaters matters. “Really excited for the rerelease,” he said. “It’s a special movie to see with an audience. So we’re happy people get another chance to do that.”

That is the news hook, and it is also the point. *Project Hail Mary* was built to be shared in the dark, with strangers, on the largest screen available. Goddard has spent a career writing stories in which people have to invent their way out of impossible rooms. This one, he told Salfen, was personal.

A HUNDRED PERCENT HAIL MARY

Goddard is not a first-time visitor to Weir’s particular blend of science, humor, and human stubbornness. He wrote the screenplay for *The Martian*, Ridley Scott’s 2015 adaptation of Weir’s first novel, and earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 88th Oscars. Before that he had already moved from television into features the hard way, writing *Cloverfield* and then writing and directing *The Cabin in the Woods* and *Bad Times at the El Royale*. He created and executive produced Marvel’s *Daredevil* for Netflix, and his television résumé runs back through *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Alias*, *Lost*, and *The Good Place*. *Project Hail Mary* is the second time he has been handed a Weir novel and asked to turn a lonely scientific problem into a movie people will sit with for more than two hours.

Salfen, who co-hosts a radio show with former Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Drew Pearson, asked Goddard for his own Hail Mary: the moment in his life or career when he had to go for it, and it worked. Goddard did not reach for a premiere, a deal, or a set. He reached for a couch.

“I moved to California,” he said. “Didn’t know anybody in the industry. Just drove. Slept on my uncle’s couch and started calling studios and saying, I’ll do anything. I’ll do any job. And one of those worked, and they hired me to be a production assistant. Every job has sort of stemmed from that, which, you know, when I look back, it was 100 percent Hail Mary.”

The Cowboys detail was not a throwaway, at least not for him. Goddard grew up in New Mexico, where, he said, the closest thing to a home team was Dallas. Pearson was his father’s favorite receiver. “My dad’s gonna be so happy to hear this,” he told Salfen, and later asked him to pass along his best “for all the joy he brought my household.” It was a five-minute conversation with a long memory attached to it.

> *“When I look back, it was 100 percent Hail Mary.”*

The through-line is not luck as magic. It is luck as a decision made without a net. A young writer sleeps on a relative’s couch, calls every studio that will pick up, and takes the first job that answers. Years later he is watching one of the most famous actors of his generation say pages drawn from another writer’s book, in a movie the studio is now putting back into IMAX. Goddard does not present that arc as destiny. He presents it as work that started with a yes.

THE JOY IN SELFLESSNESS

Salfen told him the film had layers, and that it had made them cry. Then he asked the question that actually matters once the trailers and the grosses are on the table: what about the story touched Goddard so much?

“I think at its core, it was a story about the power of empathy, the power of compassion. The joy in selflessness,” Goddard said. “We have a character that is terrified at the beginning of the movie, and at the end he has found joy in helping others. That is the arc of the movie in its big picture. And I thought that was a message that I wanted to see on the screen right now. To be fair, that’s a message I want to see on screen all the time, but it really resonated, in today’s world, and I thought it was told in such a thrilling way that it really spoke to me.”

He did not leave it in the abstract. “My mom’s a teacher. She’s been teaching in New Mexico for 50 years. The idea of teachers saving the world felt, you know, very, very personal. There’s a lot of stuff in there. But at its core, Andy’s humanist message really resonated with me.”

That is the emotional architecture under the space hardware. Grace is not introduced as a polished hero. He is a teacher, scared, trying to remember who he is, and the film’s bet, in Goddard’s telling, is that the important change is not only scientific. It is moral. Terror gives way to the joy of helping someone else. Weir’s humanism is the thing Goddard says he was trying to protect.



Official artwork from the Amazon MGM Studios announcement of Project Hail Mary’s return to theaters December 11.

Gosling is the vessel for that arc, and Goddard still sounds slightly disbelieving that the pairing happened. Salfen suggested the set must have felt like a dream. Goddard did not dodge the sentiment.

“I still don’t know that I’ve woken up from the dream, Paul, at the end of the day,” he said. “Watching Ryan Gosling say your words on a daily basis, there’s no thing better. There’s no higher level of screenwriting than Ryan Gosling. And so I was just very conscious every day to be grateful that I got to do this.”

It is a craftsman’s kind of awe. Not a plot point. Not a piece of awards-season language. Just a writer standing on a stage he once called his way onto as a production assistant, listening to an actor lift the work, and refusing to get used to it.

> *“There’s no higher level of screenwriting than Ryan Gosling.”*

Salfen floated the internet’s favorite leftover question: IMDb, he noted, had suggested a sequel might be in the works. Goddard would not bless the rumor, and he would not kill the hope either. “I don’t know if that’s correct,” he said. “It’s really up to Andy, where Andy Weir wants to write another book. We’re all in, but I don’t know if that’s true.” The door, in other words, stays with the novelist. The screenwriter is not going to get ahead of him.

EMBRACE THE GRIND

People look at a résumé like Goddard's, Salfen said, and want the job. What would he tell them? The answer was not a shortcut, and it was not a speech about talent.

"I think the most important advice, the thing that has kept me going every day, is you have to love what you do," Goddard said. "That doesn't mean it's not hard. That doesn't mean there's not a grind. Any sort of profession is going to have the grind part of it and the joy part of it. And the real trick is to embrace the grind and find joy within that part too, so that whether it's with screenwriting, it's write pages every day and be happy about it. Be grateful that you get to do that, even if it doesn't lead immediately to your goal. Trust that each step along the way is going to be making you better at what you do."

Salfen pressed on the days when the words will not come, when a writer is just sitting there looking at the cursor. Goddard did not offer a productivity hack. He offered a warning.

"I think one of the biggest detriments to success in any field is fear of failure," he said. "I think it's really important to allow yourself to fail. So sometimes you're going to write a bad scene, sometimes you're going to write a bad script. Sometimes you're going to have days where it doesn't work. Don't internalize that that means you don't know what you're doing. That's part of this. Failure is actually a wonderful thing because your subconscious is always working on how do I get better? How do I get better? And failure is, certainly with art in particular, failure is part of it. You can't avoid it, so don't internalize it. It's about you. Trust that it's part of the process."

> *"I think one of the biggest detriments to success in any field is fear of failure."*

Heard next to the re-release, the advice is less self-help than method. A film that spent the spring packing theaters, spent the summer on streaming, and is now being invited back into IMAX and 70mm did not arrive by avoiding the grind. It arrived the way Goddard's career did: pages, a first job, a willingness to be bad on the way to being better, and a story he believed was worth putting on a screen.

Salfen signed off the way AMFM signs off when the work has already traveled farther than a five-minute window can hold: congratulations, we are proud of you, we are rooting for you, we can't wait to see your next Hail Mary. Goddard sent his best to Pearson, and then thanked Salfen "for all the joy you brought me in these five minutes." The gratitude, again, was the point.

On December 11, the movie goes back where he said it belongs, with an audience, on a screen big enough for a teacher to try to save the world.

FIND PROJECT HAIL MARY

Returns to theaters: December 11, 2026, in the United States and Canada, in IMAX and select 70mm (and in all formats, per the official trailer).

Tickets: amazon.com/salp/projecthailmary

New official trailer: Project Hail Mary | Returning To Theaters, from Amazon MGM Studios

Official site: projecthailmary.com

Original U.S. release: March 20, 2026, from Amazon MGM Studios

Box office: More than $685 million worldwide, including about $344 million in the United States and Canada (Box Office Mojo figures as of the re-release announcement).

The film: Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller. Screenplay by Drew Goddard. Based on the novel by Andy Weir. An Amazon MGM Studios presentation of a Pascal Pictures, Open Invite Films / Waypoint Entertainment / Lord Miller production. Produced by Amy Pascal, Ryan Gosling, Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, Aditya Sood, Rachel O'Connor, and Andy Weir. Starring Ryan Gosling, with Sandra Hüller, James Ortiz, Lionel Boyce, Ken Leung, Milana Vayntrub, and Priya Kansara. Running time: 2 hours 36 minutes. Rated PG-13 for some thematic material and suggestive references.

Project Hail Mary also streamed on MGM+ beginning June 18, 2026, and on Prime Video beginning July 3, 2026.

Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.