

Summer Movie Preview

Box office loaded for start of summer

BY BEN YARNELL
Reviewer

If you are like me, then chances are you are not sitting around right now wondering to yourself what you are going to do with all of your free time this summer. Between summer jobs, friends, summer jobs, family vacations — and did I mention summer jobs? — you are pretty locked up.

However, for those rare moments when you do actually have nothing to do, you are in luck.

First off, let me just say that, when it comes to movies, May kicks butt. No more, no less. For whatever reason, the studios have decided to front-load the season. Maybe they figure that summer jobs will have started up and their target audience finally will have disposable income again.

And it really does start off with a bang, with John Favreau's "Iron Man" on May 2. Now, I'm sure there are those out there who think the superhero genre is a little played out. And, mostly, I would agree. But this looks like a real contender for biggest grosser of the year. The casting of Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark/Iron Man is flat-out inspired, especially given the similarities both have when it comes to substance abuse. Plus, the effects look pretty sharp as well.

And if effects are what you are looking for, the following week will be right up your alley, when the Wachowskis, of "Matrix" fame, give their very flashy, very updated take on the '60s cartoon "Speed Racer" on May 9.

The week after that, Disney throws its hat into the ring when it presents the next in its line of "Narnia" flicks, "Prince Caspian," on May 16. If there was one big criticism I found from those who saw the first movie, it was that it was too light on action. And everything I've read on "Caspian" points toward remedying that problem in a big way.

Unfortunately for Disney and pretty much anyone else who plans on premiering

the next week, the top spot at the box office has been reserved for almost 20 years by a certain fedora-wearing, bullwhip-toting archaeologist. Of all the movies coming out in May, and probably the rest of the summer, "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," due May 22, is the most widely anticipated movie on the horizon. Box office numbers are almost guaranteed, if for no other reason than old fans will want to see if this "Indy" can stand up to the rest.

Granted, most of these so far have been very testosterone-infused. Well, the last offering of the month should bring more than enough estrogen when the ever-rumored "Sex and the City" movie finally makes it to the big screen. I don't really know much about this one, but all of the women I know who are fans cannot wait to see Carrie Bradshaw and her cohorts light up the screen.

Once June rolls around, things die down a little bit. Sure, there is "The Incredible Hulk" coming out June 13, but viewer, beware. The last attempt at this character was dull to say the least.

However, June 20 is the showdown of the comedy titans. In one corner, we have veteran Mike Myers in his first live-action film since 2003's appalling "The Cat in the Hat," with "The Love Guru." And in the other corner, we have the relative newcomer, Steve Carell, with the big-screen incarnation of the 1960s sitcom "Get Smart." My money is on Carell. With a supporting cast including Alan Arkin, Anne Hathaway and Bill Murray and excellent source material, "Smart" seems the likely winner. Plus, "Guru" just seems to smack of desperation from Myers.

For some reason, if Disney strikes out with "Prince Caspian," they've got a safe bet with the latest Pixar offering, "WALL*E," to round out June. I've seen only a few seconds which actually have dialogue, and it already looks to be more intelligent than most kids' movies out there. And because there won't have

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Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers Pictures



Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema

been a lot of kids' movies thus far, it's probably a lock. Go ahead and take the kid siblings or whomever you might be babysitting that week.

Then there is always the coveted Fourth of July cash and prizes. Probably the biggest contender for this treasure trove will be Will Smith's newest movie, "Hancock." For those who have either burned out on superhero movies after May or have been for even longer, this is the one to bring you back to the fold. The premise, an alcoholic superhero who has to get a PR agent to fix his poor public image, is something fresh and different. It might not be the biggest grosser of the year, but I forecast good things for this movie.

But if you were to force me to put my money down on what will be the biggest winner of the summer, it's got to be July 18's "The Dark Knight," the second in a revamped take on the Batman franchise. Director Chris Nolan has put together a stellar cast, created an appropriately dark and menacing tone and is being just true enough to the original material to keep the fan base happy while understanding what it takes to make a good script. Now take into account all of the added hype given the fact that this is one of the latest roles



Photo courtesy of Sony Pictures

Heath Ledger, above left, will play the Joker in "The Dark Knight," while Sarah Jessica Parker and Chris Noth, above right, return to star in the "Sex and the City" movie. Will Smith also hits up the big screen this summer starring in the movie, "Hancock."

fans will ever see from the late Heath Ledger, and it smells of box-office and all-in-all cinematic gold to me.

That's all I've got. The irony that I am previewing movies that I won't actually get to review for this paper because I am graduating is not lost on me. It's been fun

doing this. I always said there are just three things a reviewer does, when you boil it down: Watch a movie, tell others what you think about it and get paid. Here's to someday having that third part become a reality, and enjoy your feature presentation.

Harold and Kumar sequel lacks intelligent humor

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

"Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay" is a supremely stupid movie.

As a sequel to the equally silly "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle," this should come as a surprise to no one.

Like the previous film, "Guantanamo Bay" chronicles these two lovable stoners through a series of fairly unrelated sequences as they journey toward their goal: in this case, a wedding in Texas to receive a pardon from a friend in Homeland Security, as Harold and Kumar have, as the title suggests, escaped from Guantanamo Bay.

The film opens immediately where the previous one left off. Kumar (Kal Penn) convinces Harold (John Cho) to follow his would-be lover to Amsterdam. On the plane they are apprehended as terrorists when air marshals confuse Kumar's bong for a bomb.

The two are sent to Guantanamo Bay by an overzealous

government official played by an appropriately asinine Rob Corddry. After only a few minutes at the titular location, Harold and Kumar escape on a raft to Miami, and their journey begins in earnest.

From there, the movie becomes a series of five- to 10-minute segments as the two find themselves in numerous unlikely situations. They encounter an inbred Cyclops baby. They crash a KKK kegger. They meet Neil Patrick Harris of "Doogie Howser, M.D." fame, again. And, of course, they smoke a lot of weed — at one point with president George W. Bush himself.

These ridiculous scenes are funny and are luckily only infrequently broken up by a subplot involving Kumar's long-lost lover. A scene where he wins her back during a wedding ultimately falls flat because the light screenwriting never makes you connect with the characters.

Cho and Penn are very likable as Harold and Kumar, but the farcical nature of the stoner

comedy genre makes it nearly impossible to really become concerned with the fate of their love lives or friendship — you just want to laugh.

The same can be said for the script's stabs at political commentary. As you might guess, a movie with "Guantanamo Bay" in the title has its touchy moments.

Like its predecessor (which was heralded as one of the first major Hollywood releases with two leads of Asian descent), this film attempts to tackle complex issues of race in a humorous manner. Unlike its predecessor, however, the writers set their sights on the government, directly criticizing the United States' post-Sept. 11 policies.

Corddry's government official is a blowhard racist who uses the Bill of Rights as toilet paper. The film is offering social criticism, but only as far as it advances a joke. Like "Borat" before it, this movie is being heralded as a risk-taking comedic treatise on what is wrong (and right) about America.



Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema

The Harold and Kumar sequel picks up where the original left off and follows the pair through several unlikely encounters.

Unfortunately, it doesn't deserve such praise. Taking a stand against the Bush administration at this point in time is hardly surprising or adventurous. This is not "Dude Where's My Car" meets "Dr. Strangelove" as some critics

have attested. Let's be realistic — this still is a buddy stoner comedy.

That's not to say this is a bad movie. It's a shining example of what a stoner comedy can be, but for all of its ambition it doesn't transcend the genre.

If you haven't seen "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle," do. It's a superior film. If you already are a fan, go ahead and see this film. It'll make you laugh, even if it doesn't blow your mind with a nuanced political message.

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