

# One varied summer at the movies

by Glenn St-Germain

Summer is a time of year characterized by many things: hot sunny days, cold beer, vacations, sun, sand, surf . . . and movies. Movie companies save a large share of their output for the summer season, since this is one of the two times of year that movie attendance is high. (The other time is Christmas.)

This past summer was typical as far as film was concerned, even if the weather wasn't; the season featured a little bit of everything.

Comedy was by far the leader as far as motion picture type is concerned, with action-adventure movies in second place. Fantasy, science fiction, horror, and drama lost ground as far as sheer numbers are concerned.

The sequel was also well featured, with better than a half-dozen sequels in the offering: *Beverly Hills Cop II*, *House II*, *Nightmare on Elm Street III*, *Police Academy IV*, *Superman IV*, and *James Bond XVI (The Living Daylights, actually)*, to name a few.

As usual with sequels, they didn't fare as well as the originals. The most dismal failure of these was *Beverly Hills Cop II*, in that it almost completely failed to live up to the standards of its predecessor. As a comedy cop movie, on its own it wasn't bad. However, the only resemblance between the two films was the cast and locale. The wit and charm of the first was totally absent, to be replaced by humour that was often vulgar and not very funny.

The absolute worst as far as sequels are concerned was *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. The less said about it, the better. Suffice to say that *Superman V* is a distinct improbability.

The ultimate sequel (if you stretch the definition of sequel a bit) was *The Living Daylights*, the sixteenth James Bond film, starring Timothy Dalton, the fourth man to play 007 since *Dr. No* twenty-five years ago. This film was originally supposed to be Pierce Brosnan's until a contract dispute concerning his TV role as *Remington Steele* kept him away. Dalton performed excellently, as Bond went back to the basics. The smirky humour of the last few Roger Moore Bond films was gone, and Bond is driving an Astin-Martin once again.

Brosnan did make the big screen, however, in *The Fourth Protocol*, a fine adaptation of Frederick Forsythe's novel. Forsythe himself wrote the screenplay in this spy thriller about a British agent (Michael Caine) trying to stop a Russian agent (Brosnan) from constructing an atomic bomb near a U.S. air base. It's still in release and well worth a look; watch for Matt Frewer (a.k.a. Max Headroom) as an American jet pilot.

To name all the comedies would read like a giant roll call. However, a few stood out. *Spaceballs* was among the best of the crop, a Mel Brooks sendup of space movies. This was typical Brooks, alternating razor-sharp wit with low lowbrow humour and extremely funny throughout.

*Dragnet* had Dan Aykroyd as Sgt. Friday in a sort of update of the TV series (a sequel, perhaps?). *Inner Space* combined comedy with SF and action when a store clerk is accidentally injected with a miniaturized test pilot.

Other comedies were a little less great. *Can't Buy Me Love* was somewhat reminiscent of last year's *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* without

the charm and madcap pace; *Adventures in Babysitting* had the madcap pace but somehow lost control, although it gets points for being fun to watch. *Maid to Order* was thoroughly predictable, as a spoiled rich kid gets to live life on the other side of the tracks.

Totally wasted efforts included *Summer School*, with a miscast Mark Harmon as a summer school teacher in a film that tried to make light of adolescent problems, and *Back to the Beach*, heralding the return of Frankie and Annette into their native habitat of dumb summer beach surfing comedy movies.

On the serious side, the most serious movie of the summer in its tone was *The Untouchables*, a beautifully photographed gangster movie depicting the confrontation between Elliot Ness and Al Capone. This film was much more realistic (and violent) than the TV series of the fifties (another sequel?), although still essentially a work of fiction. Sean Connery as Malone did very well, as did Robert DeNiro as Capone himself.

*Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, outshone *Platoon* in the first of what appears to be a wave of Vietnam movies. (*Hamburger Hill*, anyone?)

Also worth note were *La Bamba*, a documentary about Richie Valens, a 17-year-old pop singer who died in the same air crash as Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper; *Working Girls*, Lizzie Borden's look at prostitution; and *No Way Out*, a standard spy thriller with some nicely done chases.



The combination award for this year goes to *Robocop*. A science-fiction film directed by Dutch filmmaker Paul Verhoeven, it was often hysterically funny, with lots of action. It also had a European touch (i.e., it lacked the standard Hollywood slickness), and it took a few good swipes at American society along the way.



### The Top Five (Alphabetically):

*Full Metal Jacket* — Stanley Kubrick's comeback film, a Vietnam war movie that focuses not so much on the war as what it does to the men who were sent there. A great psychological study, this one shows that Kubrick still has his magic of old.

*The Living Daylights* — Timothy Dalton makes his debut as James Bond: the fourth Bond in the sixteenth Bond film. The best Bond since *The Spy Who Loved Me*, this latest chapter in 007's adventures goes back to the basics, losing the tongue-in-cheek humour that marred the last few Roger Moore Bond films.

*Robocop* — A story about a half-man-half-machine police officer in a future Detroit. Alternately graphically violent and hysterically funny, the story ultimately emerges as a sci-fi thriller that has its cyborg hero trying to regain his lost humanity. There are also some wonderful jabs at the state of the world today, especially in the U.S.

*The Untouchables* — Visually magnificent, with superb performances throughout, it is the definitive 1980's gangster movie. Although as historically accurate as its TV show predecessor (i.e., not at all), and the summer's most violent film, it was well worth watching.

*Will Vinton's Festival of Claymation* — A look at the process using plasticine figurines in stop-motion animation by the man who perfected the process. This extremely enjoyable collection of shorts has a bit of everything: comedy, drama, and most of all, amazement.

### The Worst Five (Alphabetically):

*Back to the Beach* — Remember all those dumb beach movies of the sixties starring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello? This is a dumb beach movie of the eighties with Frankie and Annette. Part nostalgia piece, part self-parody, it is not enough of either to make it work, and ultimately silly.

*Benji the Hunted* — Further adventures of that loveable mutt as he protects orphaned cougar kittens from wolves. Really. Taking your kid to this one should be tantamount to child abuse.

*Born in East L.A.* — Cheech Marin (sans Tommy Chong) tries to milk more mileage from his sendup of the Bruce Springsteen hit by making it a movie. A Chicano gets deported by mistake and spends the next few reels trying to get back in. It was most trying on the audience, as the joke wears thin very quickly.

*Predator* — Arnold Schwarzenegger returns. This time, he's leader of a crack strike team. A space alien starts killing off his team (that's how aliens get their jollies) until it's Arnie vs. the alien. The alien is armed with a high-tech battlesuit complete with infra-red, lasers, a ray gun, a chameleon factor, and sharp claws. Arnie is armed with — himself. Give me a break.

*Superman IV* — As a comic collector, I almost hate to put this one here. Heck, *Superman II* is a favourite of mine. But bad overacting, an inane script, cheap special effects, corny dialogue, and more clichés than you can throw kryptonite at make this one the year's number one stinker. I'd say that it was too bad Chris Reeve got stuck with such trash, but he helped write it.



Annette and Frankie together again in *Back to the Beach*

This summer also featured the 3rd annual Princess Theatre International Film Festival, with some of the best cinema from around the world. Among the gems this summer were *Malcolm*, an Australian comedy about a mechanical genius; *Heavenly Pursuits*, also a comedy, about hysteria over purported miracles at a Scottish private school; *Will Vinton's Festival of Claymation*, a showcase of the technique of clay figurine animation; *Pouvoir Intime*, a Quebecois crime thriller (and the best Canadian film in years); and *Man Facing Southeast*, an Argentine comedy about a mental patient who may or may not be an extraterrestrial. Many of these films will be shown again in the months ahead.

All in all, the 1987 summer movies season was not too bad. Most of the movies were pure escapism, continuing the trend away from reality. A lot of it was fun. The majority of the films will eventually be forgotten.

Here are this reviewer's picks of the best and worst five of the summer: