

The Summer In Movies

by Glenn St-Germain

Summer is over, and with it, the summer movie season. The film companies seem to save their biggest releases for either the summer or Christmastime. Although this has been becoming less true of late, there is no doubt that summer is the season for movies.

This summer was the last summer of the 1980s, and history will likely remember the 80s as the decade of the sequel. This year, no less than nine movies were sequels or continuing adventures of people we have seen before, from the crew of the Enterprise to slashers like Freddy and Jason. If a formula works, why not re-use it? More often than not, however, sequels tend to be wasted efforts, failing to offer anything new while losing the qualities that made the original work.

The worst of these was *Ghostbusters 2*, which completely failed to recreate the chemistry that made it fun to watch, and made things worse by giving us the same plot as the first as well. Other dismal sequel offerings were *Star Trek V*, which suffered from a weak script and William Shatner's inept direction, and *Karate Kid III*, in which Ralph Macchio defends his karate title very predictably. On the other hand, Indiana Jones returned for a third film that was the ideal summer escapist film, as well as being better than his first two films.

For sheer overkill, Jason returned to the screen in *Friday the 13th, Part 8*, in which the series takes a major new direction: instead of hacking up kids in the woods, Jason hacks up kids in Manhattan (where he can blend into the populace...).

It's no secret that escapism is the major selling point for movies, with two major subtypes vying for the most box office: comedies and action-adventures. This year, comedies lost badly. There were several good action films, but only a few good comedies.

The best films of the action genre were the undersea thriller *The Abyss* and the return of Indiana Jones previously mentioned. *Lethal Weapon 2* proved to be no better or worse than the original (and also a lot of fun). And of course, *Batman* broke all records with its serious treatment of the Darknight Detective.



Ever dance with the devil in the pale moonlight?

Less adequate was the return of the king of the action set, James Bond. *Licence to Kill* was somewhat mediocre.

The comedies were, for the most part, average. The summer screwball comedy of years gone by (sunny locale and large cast of weirdos) was not present, for a change. However, families seemed to be popular, with the likes of *Parenthood*, *Uncle Buck*, and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (the latter having great special effects). And although *Dead Poet's Society* and *When Harry Met Sally* were top-notch efforts, there were some real losers such as *Turner and Hooch*, *Weekend at Bernie's* and *Rude Awakening*.

The weird comedy awards this year go to Australia's *Young Einstein*, sort of a surreal what-if-Einstein-were-Tasmanian, and *UHF*, which was alternatively stupid and hysterical.

People interested in serious drama had to make do with a few offerings, some of which were actually quite good. *Casualties of War* was a fairly decent Vietnam War story with strong performances by Sean Penn and Michael J. Fox. *Great Balls of Fire* had Dennis

Quaid in the lead role of the story of Jerry Lee Lewis's early days. *Lock Up* has Sylvester Stallone in a non-violent role which was rather uninspiring.

All in all, it was a great summer. The studios made more money than ever before, and there were some gems in the offering. Here are my picks for the best and worst five films of the summer:

The Best Five (alphabetically)

The Abyss: The salvage of a downed nuclear submarine is complicated by the presence of... something else down there... in



Deep-sea diving in *The Abyss*.

this riveting suspense thriller. Not just an underwater treatment of *Alien* as the previews suggest.

Batman: Jack Nicholson deserves an Oscar for his portrayal of The Joker, the psycho who matches wits with the Caped Crusader (surprisingly well-played by Michael Keaton) in this serious (ie. not camped-up like the old TV series) version of the comic book.

Dead Poets Society: Robin Williams as an unorthodox English teacher at a stuffy New England prep school in 1959, who creates havoc when he teaches the students to think for themselves.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade: The best Indy movie yet, with Sean Connery along for the ride as Indy's dad. This time, it's a quest for the Holy Grail, with the Nazis providing competition. Okay, it's campy formula stuff, but it's great campy formula.

When Harry Met Sally: Finally, after endless shallow sex comedies we get a mature, meaningful comedy about relationships. Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan as two friends trying not to fall in love with each other for fear of ruining their friendship.

The Worst Five (alphabetically)

Cyborg: Jean Claude Van Damme kicks several people in the head in this hokey post-apocalypse tale about an expedition to find a cure for a plague. The thin plot was bad enough, but the ending had people booing and throwing things at the screen.

Ghostbusters 2: The guys are back, with the same plot as their first outing: the Ghostbusters versus a malevolent entity from another dimension bent on world domination. Worse, nearly everyone involved onscreen seemed to limp through their performances.

Return of the Swamp Thing: The award-winning comic book makes another inept transition to the screen in this campy, over-acted, cliché-filled story featuring the struggle between the hero (looking like a walking compost heap) and a mad scientist (Louis Jourdan).

Uncle Buck: John Candy as a bumbling buffoon (as usual). This time, he gets to take care of his brother's kids, one of whom sounds like he's reading his lines from cue cards. Not very funny at all.

Weekend at Bernie's: A one-joke movie where the joke is tasteless: a couple of guys have to convince the Mob that their boss is still alive after he's assassinated by a hitman, so they drag his corpse around a beach resort like an overgrown marionette for the weekend.



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