

# a capsule look at the summer films



Extraterrestrial horrors warrant some discussion.

at relationships in a comic vein, also starring Michael Caine.

For all-out weirdness, *Morons From Outer Space* came from England. A satire of the class system in England, this tale of four vacationers from another planet crashed in the theatres. The lowbrow satiric humour was lost to audiences that didn't live in the system the film was criticizing.

*Short Circuit* is a good candidate for the year's funniest comedy, with its mechanical star upstaging the humans. *Three Men and a Cradle* was an enjoyable comedy from France (where it won a Best Picture award) about three swinging bachelors who are stuck with caring for an infant.

*Big Trouble in Little China* was the most difficult movie to classify, combining comedy, comic-book adventure, fantasy, and martial arts into a very strange (and also enjoyable) films.

Dramas also had their day. *Mona Lisa* and *Heartburn* received rave reviews al-

though doing poorly at the box office. *Manhunter* and *Out of Bounds* offered mystery thrills.

On a serious note, *Smooth Talk* was disappointing in an attempt to tell the tale of a teenage girl's rite of passage. *Trouble In Mind* was perhaps the weirdest drama, in a surreal, almost existentialist tale of life in the seedy side of a city.

For high-tech glorification of the American Dream, *Top Gun* performed nicely, adding to the list of American Hollywood pseudo-propaganda that includes *Red Dawn* and *Iron Eagle*. The flip side of the coin was graphically depicted in *Mixed Blood*, Paul Morrissey's dark satire concerning drug wars in Manhattan's lower east side. The movie was banned in Ontario for its violence.

Foreign films also made a strong appearance in Edmonton. The Princess Theatre's International Film Festival featured a few dozen films from around the world, a few of which had subsequent commercial

releases. These included *Letter to Brezhnev*, *28 Up*, and *Salvador*. *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is still running after more than a year.

All in all, films of the summer of 1986 have continued the trend towards movies as a form of escapism. The highs and lows of the summer were more memorable than those of the previous year, at least.

Here are this reviewer's picks of the best and worst five movies of the summer of 1986.

**The Best Five** (alphabetically):

***Flight of the Navigator***: The best film the Disney group has come up with in a few years; this enjoyable piece of light science fiction is the story of a 12-year-old boy who disappears one night, reappearing eight years later without having aged, and not realizing eight years have passed. What follows is an enjoyable film involving an alien spacecraft, time travel, and the culture shock of eight years gone by.

***Labyrinth***: George Lucas teamed up with Jim Henson to create a magical fantasy about a teenage girl's attempt to rescue her baby brother from the clutches of the malevolent Goblin King (David Bowie). All she has to do is go to the castle and get him. The catch: she has thirteen hours to navigate the Labyrinth that lies between her and the castle. Jim Henson's muppet creations work wonders.

***Short Circuit***: an experimental army robot armed with a laser beam somehow gains self-awareness, and decides it doesn't want to kill. It runs away, the army chases, and the result is hilarious. The star, Number Five, upstages the human characters (who seem a little wooden by comparison), but the film is still lots of fun.

***Subway***: This French film was featured at the Princess International Film Festival. Although (unfortunately) not released commercially, this new-wave comedy was superb. The story involves the adventures of a man in the bizarre underground world in the tunnels behind the Paris Metro.

***Trouble in Mind***: Kris Kristofferson plays an ex-cop ex-con who returns home to Rain City, in the sleazy section of town. With ulterior motives, he helps out a young couple in trouble. The couple just arrived from the

sticks. She's naive, and he's become a criminal. This surreal film went largely unnoticed. Difficult to understand, this one had some great moments, including Divine in a straight role as a mob kingpin, and the ridiculous and ultrastrange transformation of Keith Carradine from country-boy hick into spaced-out city criminal.

**The Worst Five** (alphabetically):

***Howard the Duck***: George Lucas took the hero of a strange, satirical comic book about an intelligent duck from another dimension and turned it into an inane tale of an intelligent duck from outer space. Not only did the film have none of the satirical bite of the comic book, but the movie Howard, unlike his fowl-tempered comic-book counterpart, was a nice guy. At least the effects to make Howard come to life worked ... sort of ...

***Invaders from Mars***: The original was a B-movie made in 1953, with two-dimensional acting, a low budget, and more cliches than you can aim a death-ray at. The 1986 remake remained faithful to the original and fell flat on its face. As a serious SF film, *Invaders* was very bad in that it took itself too seriously. The surprise ending was obvious several minutes before it happened, and the Martians were laughable in that they looked like giant, mutated, slimy Muppets.

***One Crazy Summer***: This hopefully will be the last of the mindless, plotless, humourless summer beach party comedies. At least Frankie and Annette had some class.

***Pirates***: Roman Polanski spent a bundle to recreate a Spanish galeon for his pirate epic. The sets were incredible, the cinematography was superb, and the performance of Walter Matthau as the pirate Captain Red was terrific. The plot, however, was nonexistent. Polanski should have spent some money on the script.

***Smooth Talk***: This is the exact opposite of all those horny-teenager comedies that were in vogue a few years ago. This is supposedly a serious movie about growing up. However, Treat Williams comes off as just plain silly as a wolf lusting after Laura Dern in a slow-moving, confusing, drippy, almost plotless film. Yawn.

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