

## Summer 2001 Looks . . . Distressingly Familiar

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For the past five years, I've written an annual coming-attractions article, detailing 10 summer movies that I was most anticipating. With roughly 50 major releases scheduled for the next 12 weeks, does it say more about me, or the current state of Hollywood films, that this year I can only muster up proper enthusiasm for eight of them? Sure, everyone's curious about *Pearl Harbor*,

and most are at least vaguely interested in seeing what *Moulin Rouge*

is all about (both of which I'll analyze in the next issue of *The Reader*

). But most of this year's output looks either distressingly familiar (with sequels to *Dr. Dolittle*

,  
*American Pie*

,  
*Rush Hour*

, and  
*Scary Movie*

, none of which were very good in the first place) or... distressingly familiar. (Don't you feel like you've already seen

*Tomb Raider*

,  
*Swordfish*

, and  
*The Fast & The Furious*

merely by sitting through the trailers?) In any event, here are eight that could be more intriguing than our summer-movie norm ... even if a few of them, too, sound distressingly familiar.

**A.I. (June) - Even though the movie's trailers are too sickly sweet for words, I'm still looking forward to Steven Spielberg's latest, a futuristic tale about an android (Haley Joel Osment) who longs to be a real boy. Little else is known of the plot, which was going to be the late Stanley Kubrick's follow-up to *Eyes Wide Shut*, but the technical design looks marvelous, and in addition to the terrific Osment, the cast features Jude Law, Frances O'Connor, and William Hurt in the Gepetto role. Considering that Kubrick and Spielberg's sensibilities couldn't be more dissimilar, the results should be fascinating – if Spielberg can rein in his more maudlin instincts, that is.**

**AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS (July) - Get rid of the "s" at the end of the title and you have a pretty fair assessment of Julia Roberts' current status in our cinematic climate, and after the dreariness of *The Mexican*, it'll be a relief seeing her in an out-and-out comedy again. She plays the sister of a Hollywood starlet (Catherine Zeta-Jones) going through a messy divorce (from fellow performer John Cusack), and she and a host of others – including Hank Azaria, Billy Crystal, Alan Arkin, and Seth Green – get involved in the inevitable spin control. Probably not a flick that Tom and Nicole are planning to watch anytime soon. Directed by Joe Roth, there's an awful lot of comedic talent here, both onscreen and off (Crystal is also the film's co-screenwriter).**

***THE CURSE OF THE JADE SCORPION* (August)** - Quantity should never be mistaken for quality, but check out this stat: In the past 10 years, Woody Allen has directed 11 features, and while he might not have produced a classic like

***Manhattan***

or

***Hannah & Her Sisters***

, here's a sampling of what we did get:

***Husbands & Wives***

,  
***Manhattan Murder Mystery***

,  
***Bullets over Broadway***

,  
***Deconstructing Harry***

,  
***Sweet & Lowdown***

, and

***Small Time Crooks***

. Can you name another American director who has maintained such a level of excellence while remaining so prolific? His latest is a 1940s-era detective farce featuring Allen, Helen Hunt, Dan Aykroyd, Charlize Theron, and Wallace Shawn, and Lord knows it's bound to be a relief from (to borrow a phrase from Mr. Allen) the sub-mental state of most current comedies.

***JAY & SILENT BOB STRIKE BACK* (August)** - Quite possibly the summer movie I'm most anticipating. In what writer-director Kevin Smith promises is the last cinematic appearance of his lovably stoned slackers, Jason Mewes and Smith himself star in this Hollywood satire, which has the Miramax studio filming a movie about the title characters, much to their dismay. Sounds clever, but just imagine what self-referential fun

*this could be: Ben Affleck, Joey Lauren Adams, and Jason Lee all appear as themselves* *and*  
their

***Chasing Amy***

characters, Matt Damon shows up as Will Hunting, Jeff Anderson reprises his

***Clerks***

character, Randal, and even

***Mallrats***

' Shannen Doherty returns to Smith territory. Could be a hell of a party.

***JURASSIC PARK 3* (July)** - I know, I know ... it's gonna suck. Joe Johnston is replacing Spielberg in the director's seat, second sequels are almost always garbage, and let's face it, even under Spielberg's leadership, *The Lost World* was mostly crap. But like many, I still have a child's fascination with dinosaurs, and this film's previews are just exciting enough to make me hope for the best. Sam Neill and, briefly, Laura Dern reprise their original

***Jurassic Park***

characters, and they're joined by William H. Macy and Tea Leoni. We have lots of sequels to look forward to (if that's the right phrase) this summer, but this is the only one I'm even modestly awaiting.

**MADE** (July) - Those of us who are crazy about 1996's *Swingers* – and our numbers are legion – are really excited about this one: That comedy's stars, Jon Favreau (who wrote *Swingers* and serves as writer-director here) and Vince Vaughn, reunite for a comedy about two longtime pals, both semi-professional boxers, who get involved in a money-laundering scheme with Peter Falk, Famke Janssen, and Sean Combs. If Favreau provides even half the number of hysterically quotable lines he gave us the first time around, we should be in smart-banter paradise; hopefully he'll prove as capable a director as he is a screenwriter.

**PLANET OF THE APES** (July) - Apparently not a remake, but rather a new interpretation of the classic sci-fi flick, with Tim Burton directing and a cast led by Mark Wahlberg, Tim Roth, Helena Bonham-Carter, and Michael Clarke Duncan. Based on the previews, the make-up and costume design look pretty astonishing, and as long as he has a decent story to tell, Burton should be exactly the right person to give the material the humor and energy it requires. And no matter the results, we should remember that this project was initially earmarked for director Oliver Stone and star Arnold Schwarzenegger, so chances are it could have easily been worse.

**THE SCORE** (July) - A crime thriller starring Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro, and Edward Norton – how can anyone interested in acting *not* be looking forward to this one? While Norton has been doing consistently remarkable work, and De Niro (with the exception of his recent

15

*Minutes*

portrayal) has been giving terrific performances lately in movies that don't deserve him, I'm most interested in seeing what director Frank Oz gets out of Brando, who hasn't had a good role since his Don Corleone parody in 1990's

*The Freshman*

. With Angela Bassett featured in the supporting cast, there could be a *frightening*

level of acting intensity on display here. Let's hope it registers.