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SWORDFISH, ATLANTIS: THE LOST EMPIRE, and LARA CROFT, TOMB RAIDER

Within a four-day span, I sat through *Swordfish*, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, and *Lara Croft, Tomb Raider*

and have become convinced that they're all the same movie. True, one is a sleek action-thriller, one a Disney cartoon, and one inspired by a popular videogame, but consider:

- In *Swordfish*, our hero, Stanley (Hugh Jackman), goes looking for billions of dollars in hidden e-currency. He wants to find the money for mostly benevolent reasons – he's hoping to use his share of the dough to win custody of his estranged daughter – but his quest is hindered by an egomaniacal villain (John Travolta) and his assorted cronies, who have mercenary, and potentially evil, plans for the loot.

- In *Atlantis*, our hero, Milo (voiced by Michael J. Fox), goes looking for the sunken, presumably mythological continent. He wants to find Atlantis for mostly benevolent reasons – he's hoping to aid the stranded Atlantians and prove himself a true scientist – but his quest is hindered by an egomaniacal villain (voiced by James Garner) and his assorted cronies, who have mercenary, and potentially evil, plans for the discovery.

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• In *Tomb Raider*, our heroine, Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie), goes looking for the two halves of a mystical triangle. She wants to find them for mostly benevolent reasons – when combined, the halves are able to control time, which could reunite Lara with her departed father – but her quest is hindered by an egomaniacal villain (Iain Glen) and his assorted cronies, who have mercenary, and potentially evil, plans for the archeological findings.

Beyond their basic plotlines, these three features have other elements in common: All are ridiculous to the point of being incoherent, all are sadly mediocre, and all have built-in audiences that will guarantee them big bucks, at least for a few weeks. Do audiences no longer *care*

if movies make sense? I'm all for a little silliness at the cineplex, especially in a summertime Hollywood entertainment. But the problem with so many of our current blockbusters is that their silliness has reached epic proportions. Remember

Face/Off

, where John Travolta and Nicolas Cage upped the ante on their cat-and-mouse game by *surgically switching their faces*

? Nowadays, that movie looks like the pinnacle of common sense and restraint. Its plot might have been ludicrous, but at least it was

simple

; once you accepted the fact that, yes, we live in a world where people can surgically switch faces, you moved on.

In our current blockbuster-minded climate, however, filmmakers have apparently decided that audiences are better left *continuously* baffled, so they don't notice that the movies themselves aren't offering much.

Swordfish, for instance, is your standard techno-geek affair, with hackers moving their fingers quickly across a keyboard and the screen words "Access Denied" becoming "Access Granted" in record time. But as the box-office failure of many computer-themed movies proves, watching a guy type isn't the most kinetic of cinematic images, so the film is chock-full of

Mission: Impossible

-esque identity switching and

True Lies

-style super-stunts, neither of which makes any sense in the "realistic" universe the movie pretends to exist in. These added elements ensure that

Swordfish

is never dull, but there's a vast difference between not being bored and being entertained.

Incoherence Rules Summer Screens: "Swordfish," "Atlantis: The Lost Empire," and "Lara Croft, Tomb Raider"

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