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STORY

Expect to get you block busted this summer [printable version] text size: [-] [+]

The Cuckoo's Nest

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Green, mean, racy and the other man of steel mark this year's crop of summer action flicks that movie critics are sure to find lacking.

Not me, I'm looking forward to all of them. I learned long ago, to have fun watching a movie, don't read the book and check your logic at the door.

With the release of the action flick "Forbidden Kingdom," the summer action blockbuster season is unofficially underway - and summer is still a long way off.

Historically, moviegoers dread the first four months of the year. Hollywood is usually recovering from its hangover of continuous summer and holiday high profile releases and takes a break.

I think Hollywood officials believe we are recovering, too, so they usually save the movies they feel will have limited appeal for the early months.

The first sign that actions flicks were underway was the recent release of the disappointing "10,000 B.C." This movie was more of an experiment and not meant to be a big money maker, and it did exactly what it was expected to do: nothing.

However, this week's release of "Forbidden Kingdom" is expected to drag in the big money. It did respectably over the weekend, taking in more than \$20 million, capturing the box office top spot. With martial-arts action stars Jet Li and Jackie Chan, it should have done better.

Martial arts films have come a long way since the bad English-dubbing days of Bruce Lee's "Fists of Fury."

During the last several years, martial-arts movies have attempted to improve, mostly because both Hong Kong and Hollywood figured out American audiences don't mind reading subtitles.

Besides, it wasn't the dialogue - which usually consisted of "I will kill you," over and over, that we went to hear. It was the fight scenes.

Enter the Wo.





Fight choreographer Yuen Wo Ping and director Ang Lee teamed up in 2000 to make the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

It was largely the success and critical acclaim of this film that gave martial arts movies a much-needed makeover.

So why did Hollywood forget that in "Forbidden Kingdom?"

This movie is a who's who of oriental martial-arts film stars with Li, Chan, Liu Yi Fei, Li Liu Xiao and Li Bingbing.

And Michael Angarano?

I guess Hollywood figured they needed a token white guy to draw a larger American audience. Too bad, this movie could have been just as good, if not better, with an Asian character playing the same role.

Still, the movie is good and highlights the transformation of martial-arts films.

"Forbidden Kingdom" is only the beginning of the action popcorn flicks due out this summer.

Kicking off the real action flicks will be the much-anticipated "Iron Man," on May 2, followed by the live-action adaptation of "Speed Racer" May 9.

Two movie sequels will follow, "The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian," May 16 and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," May 22.

Iron Man won't be the only Marvel superhero we see this year. In June, expect to see lots of green as the Hulk opens the 13th.

A week later, another former television show hits the big screen: "Get Smart." Hopefully, this movie doesn't miss its mark by [-] this much.

Usually, July 4 is the hot slot of the season, but this year, there has not been much movement toward this historical money spot since "Hancock" announced it would open July 2.

"Hancock," starring Wil Smith, is sort of the anti-hero with attitude movie, but should be a success.

Two more sequels smash onto the big screen in July: "Hellboy and the Golden Army" on the 11th and the most anticipated action movie of the year, D.C. Comics main man, "Batman, The Dark Knight," June 11.

The second installment of the "X-files" also returns the last week of June, as does "Wanted" starring Angelina Jolie.

Two final movies will finish off the summer action flicks. The first will be the critically acclaimed mummy series starring Brendan Fraser. This time the family travels to the orient in "The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor."

Finishing off the summer madness, not with a bang, but with a whimper, will be Vin Diesel in "Babylon A.D."

I have to wonder if Diesel actually changes his overdone moody character for this one.

I'm guessing not.

So stock up on popcorn and prepare to be - hopefully - amazed and amused.

Mirror writer Ralph Gibbs is a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst

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