

Alex McCracken's Top Three Summer Movies

This summer I found myself extremely strapped for cash, as I'm sure most can relate. So I had to go all "Consumer Reports" on any movie I planned on seeing least I find myself out of eight bucks and two hours I'd never get back.

For what it's worth, you should track these down at a dollar theater.

Super 8

I was actually really looking forward to this, secretly hoping that J.J. Abrams would direct a better coming of age caper than Spielberg ever did. It's not like I don't appreciate Spielberg, but I'd like to think that Abrams could take his older material and reinvent it in a more interesting way.

Well, that didn't happen. Abrams probably spent more time worrying what the old guard thought of the project than take any narrative risks with its overly familiar story tropes.

But that gripe aside, it was a blast. The younger actors were expertly cast, and Elle Fanning just might lap her older sister a few years down the road when they finally duel over best actress.

The special effects are effective and restrained. Aside from the train crash all other worldly events take place just off screen, giving the alien presence a mystique more akin to "Jaws" than to "Cloverfield" (Thank Christ).

I'd really like to see what people think of this movie a decade down the line. I think kids that grow up with it will connect with it more than I ever could and in that regard I wonder who will be remembered as the better producer/ director, Spielberg or Abrams? Before you answer that, check the top billing of all the Transformers flicks. . .

"Super 8" is a rock solid Goonies-esque thriller that entertains as well as it manipulates. That is to say, its pathos is in the right place. Science fiction with a heart is rare enough as it is, which puts the film in very exclusive and illustrious company.

Deathly Hallows Pt. 2

There was no way my sister was going to let me miss this one, whether I had wanted to see it or not. I was mildly disappointed with the first part of the finale last December. I still enjoyed the movie, but steeled myself for a minor letdown. So to my surprise, the critical community lit up a week or two before release with glowing praise. As of right now it has the highest tomato-meter of any Potter flick to date. I was willing to be impressed.

The special effects department went nuts realizing this would most likely be the last time to pull out this particular bag of tricks, so those of you who are fans of neon lava-lightning and plumes of ink-smoke could not possibly be disappointed with what was on display. They are an absolute lock for a technical Oscar.

As for the acting, I thought Radcliffe in the lead role really brought it this time. He seemed to be doing more with expressions and carried a humongous mantle of guilt like a pro. Everyone else did their part. Maggie Smith in particular used her limited spotlight to maximum effect. I was disappointed that Broadbent and Thompson only showed up for what were literally 10-second cameos, though it speaks volumes to their respect for the franchise and the Potter fans themselves, so good for them.

But everyone knows this movie belongs to one man: Alan Rickman. His last scene is a show stopper and if I ever choose to see it again his performance will be the reason.

It was a fitting conclusion to an admirably consistent film series. Fans may have their favorites and their least favorites but there isn't a single film that is, for lack of a better word, "bad." There were eight of these movies and each is not only worthwhile by itself, but collectively are greater than the sum of their parts. This franchise wasn't just lightning in a bottle—it was magic.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes

When I heard this was in the pipeline a couple of years ago, I thought it sounded interesting. When I saw the cast list a year after that I was impressed. When I saw the trailer four months ago, I practically choked on a Milk Dud, I was laughing so hard.

It looked ridiculous, apes singlehandedly eviscerating humanity with brain gas and spears. . . there would be no middle ground with material like this. Either those involved with the project knew exactly what they were doing, or they didn't. Fortunately, they did.

Let's get this out of the way, Andy Serkis will not get a Oscar nomination for his role as Caesar, and that breaks my tiny black heart. I cared more for his motion captured chimpanzee than any protagonist in any film I've seen in the last three years. It's nuanced, realistic, and has just the right pinch of unpredictable menace.

John Lithgow also has a decent part as James Franco's father and live-in Alzheimer's patient. Unfortunately, all the other humans play second banana to the thirty some-odd CGI apes—a disturbing number of which are better developed characters than they have any right to be.

And that's where this film puts itself apart from other high budget sci-fi fare. It uses its special effects to make identifiable characters that weren't remotely possible 12 years ago. It's maddening how rare that kind of direction is.

I never expected to walk out of this movie thinking "that made sense." Hell, I never expected to walk out of that movie at all. It's a major turning point for special effects. Ten years from now we will all probably be jaded off seeing the eyes of a human being staring back at us from the body of a chimp. And I'm ok with that. I was both entertained and enthralled.



Come out to the Spiers Gallery in Sims Art Building Friday, September 2nd, at 5:30 p.m. for the opening of "Parallel Explorations," an exhibition that will include painting by Gayle Paul, ceramics by Rob Pulleyn and assemblage by Joyce Blunk.

Refreshments will be provided. Come out and enjoy the show, the food and the atmosphere.

with your peers!