

SUMMER MOVIES SLUG IT OUT

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The audience is always right. 1989 has turned out to be the highest grossing summer in movie history and before a single flick had been screened, people knew what to expect.

During the opening weekend of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* — which was the first blockbuster in a string of five — theater owners serenaded movie-goers with a string of upcoming releases. They applauded *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids* and hissed at *Karate Kid III*. But it was the mere mention of *Batman* that brought a roar of approval.

The Caped Crusader has clearly dominated North America's 23,000 screens. Opening in about 10 percent of them, *Batman* has swooped past \$200 million and is still going strong. It is already Warner Bros. biggest hit of all time, passing past champs *The Exorcist* and *Superman*. Once the receipts for all the bat-merchandise is added in, *Batman* could generate up to \$1 billion.

But it's far from alone in the money-making department. Director Tim Burton's slightly dark take on *Batman* is at the top of a very profitable heap of blockbusters. This summer's slate of movies has

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APPLAUSE HATES COLD, STALE, GREASY POPCORN

pushed Hollywood's take for the year to \$2.8 billion, which is \$300 million to \$400 million ahead of 1988, the biggest year of all time.

And there's no end in sight. Tom Hank's *Turner and Hooch* opened very strongly and *When Harry Met Sally ...* should gross a respectable \$50 million — a nice pay check for a low-key romantic comedy.

But the main event is still to come. *The Abyss* was delayed from its original opening because of the complex special effects involved in the underwater epic. James (*Aliens*, *The Terminator*) Cameron's movie finally will premiere on Wednesday. It remains the last and best chance for a great summer movie to emerge from a season that's generated a lot of money but little to get truly excited about.

Here for your perusal is a run-down of the winners and losers, both commercially and critically.

THE BLOCKBUSTERS

Batman — A blockbuster is generally considered to be a movie that has grossed over \$100 million, so this sequel in the making could count as two major hits. Though audiences have been ecstatic, it's not really satisfying. Keaton and Nicholson are wonderful, but the adult tone is marred by a dopey romance.

A big factor in the movie's success is the wildly popular soundtrack by Prince, which is lodged at number one on the *Billboard* album charts. Everyone benefited from it: Prince was given a commercial shot in the arm and *Batman* received the funkiest promotional trailer ever with the hit song "Batdance."

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade — Spielberg's magic touch continues with the third and final installment of the Indiana Jones trilogy. It has grossed about \$170 million in North America and will surely repeat that success overseas. Families came in droves to see the closest thing to a Saturday afternoon serial. While certainly entertaining, *Crusade* was neither as breathtakingly new as *Raiders* nor as scary as *The Temple of Doom*.

Lethal Weapon II — The chemistry between Mel Gibson and Danny Glover has made this sequel one of the few movies to gross more money than the hit that spawned it. The original *Weapon* made about \$70 million, but this will pass \$100 million soon — no thanks to the Philadelphia court system. A judge there has ordered jurors for an international money laundering trial to avoid the Warner Bros. release because it deals with the same topic and might prejudice them.

Where does such thinking end? Should jurors in a trial involving racism be barred from seeing *Do The Right Thing*? Is *Licence To Kill* detrimental to anyone trying to remain impartial in a drug case? Why not simplify the process? Ban from the courtroom anyone who saw and enjoyed *The Karate Kid III* and just assume everyone else is intelligent enough to separate fact from fiction.

Honey, I Shrank The Kids — Disney returned to its simple-minded idea of good, clean family fun and made \$100 million in the process. Rick
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Moranis had the pleasure of appearing in two really bad movies that made buckets of money (see *Ghostbusters II*). At least they had the good taste to tag on a cartoon at the beginning. Please, no one give them any bright ideas such as Bette Midler in *The Absent-minded Professorette* or *Herbie the Love Bug Goes to Toon Town*.

Ghostbusters II — No movie that grosses \$100 million can be termed a commercial bust, but this comes close. The original was one of the 10 biggest hits of all time, not to mention inventive, intelligent and a great comedy. But this is a picture-perfect example of why sequels are generally a bad idea. It's the same story and the same jokes but without the same appeal. The difficulty here is to not let *Ghostbusters II* dim your pleasure of the original. Remember, *Rocky* is still a great movie, too.

THE MAJOR HITS

Dead Poets Society —

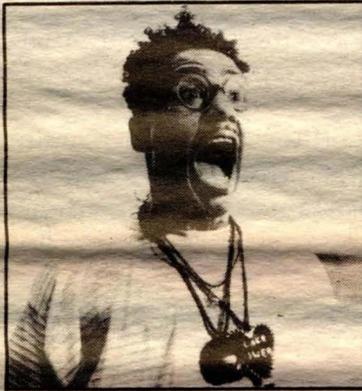
The most enjoyable movie of the summer, this nicely acted melodrama charmed everyone. Yes, the plot was manipulative, but the acting and direction were top-notch. Robin Williams solidified his position as a major star by, oddly enough, accepting what amounts to a secondary role.

Do The Right Thing —

Because of its small budget, this hilarious comedy by Spike Lee should be considered a major success even though it will only gross about \$20 million. Funny, sharp and aggressive, it marks a major step forward for Lee. One of the best of the year.

THE BOMBS

Karate Kid III — Here's a sad story: When Ralph Macchio was offered a starring role in the first *Karate Kid*, a clause in his contract forced



Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito)



WARNER BRO
Yahoo Serious, the body of the '90s.

him to agree to two sequels if Columbia Pictures wished to make them. Being an unknown actor, Macchio had to sign on the dotted line or throw away his shot at the big time.

Keep in mind, the original movie was a good film that any young actor would have killed to be in. So don't blame him for *Kid III*, which died quickly after a strong opening weekend. Its gross of \$30 million is a far cry from the \$110 million of *Karate Kid II*. Here's hoping Columbia paid through the nose to get it made.

Star Trek V: The Final Frontier — It might have passed as a decent episode of the series,

but as a major motion picture, this is slow, fitfully amusing and ends with a thud. It's the worst since the pretentious *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and will stall at \$50 million.

Licence To Kill — No Bond movie will ever lose money — they're a staple in foreign markets and have a guaranteed base of interest in the U.S. In Britain, *Licence* got off to the strongest start of any Bond flick yet. But here it will only pull in about \$30 million.

That's too bad, because Dalton is doing a good job of toughening up 007's tattered image after the silly, self-mocking tone of *View To A Kill*, etc.

No more cartoon violence for this anti-hero: when he kills someone in *Licence*, it's ugly.

Pink Cadillac — This Clint Eastwood vehicle died a quick and painful death at the box office. Even Eastwood fans didn't bother to show up. Is this really the same man who starred in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*?

Great Balls of Fire! — Probably the most significant failure of the summer, *Fire* was an artistic and commercial bomb. Mini-major Orion can ill-afford the bath it took on this movie. Dennis Quaid remains The-Movie-Star-Who-Has-Yet-To-Appear-In-A-Hit.