

Reel

BY COLLEEN RUSH

YOU WON'T SEE MANY NEW MUGS in this latest batch of celluloid offerings, but you will see some exciting new roles for the old faces. Those clever studio execs sure know how to shake up an audience. We've got Chevy Chase doing pratfalls, an earnest Chris O'Donnell, Jackie Chan as a martial arts expert and Chris Farley playing a bumbling idiot. Oops. There goes that theory.



Donnie Brasco

Columbia/TriStar

FBI agent Joe Pistone, alias Donnie Brasco, alias Johnny Depp, has a dilemma. His new undercover gig as a small-time jewel thief from Miami is all fun and stuff because he gets to infiltrate the Bonanno mob family. What he didn't anticipate was the friendship he'd forge with that lovable family hit man, "Lefty" (Al Pacino). Now he's torn between his life as an upstanding citizen, husband and dad and his friendship with a guy who kills people for a living. Tough choice.

Lost Highway

October Films

His Freakiness David Lynch serves up a healthy dose of identity crises and plot twists in his latest film venture. In *Lost Highway*, he takes old clichés (the tortured cuckold accused of his wife's murder, the temptress who cheats on her gangster boyfriend) and contorts them into two parallel stories with one-too-many connections. Bill Pullman (*Independence Day*) stars as the cuckold, and Patricia Arquette (*Ed Wood*) is both the cheating wife and the cheating temptress. But she's not the same person. Or is she? Good luck figuring this one out.

Jackie Chan's First Strike

New Line

Jackie Chan is punching out more movies than evildoers. In *First Strike*, Chan's sixth import to hit America, Chan portrays a Hong Kong police officer contracted by the CIA to retrieve a stolen nuclear warhead. Count on tons of stunts, that trademark Chan humor and a happy ending.



Star Wars: Special Editions

20th Century Fox

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, *Star Wars* dazzled a generation with its unprecedented special effects and clever projection of Western and medieval clichés onto a futuristic backdrop. Since, the series has remained unparalleled in the sci-fi genre. And with the recent popularity of shallow moneymakers like *Independence Day*, the time is right for creator George Lucas to remind us who's the man. Lucas has revamped each installment with digital sound, enhanced special effects and new footage. But will audiences pay \$7 to see movies that have been available on video for more than a decade? You bet your Ewoks.

In Love and War

New Line

From boy wonder to Hemingway? Chris O'Donnell shucks his batboy codpiece for a literary tweed, and Sandra Bullock goes Florence Nightingale in Richard Attenborough's epic story of the love affair between Ernest Hemingway (O'Donnell) and nurse Agnes Von Kurowsky (Bullock).



Dante's Peak

Universal

There she blows? Yes! *Dante's Peak* — the other volcano movie — opens in February after a protracted game of release-date chicken with Tommy Lee Jones' *Volcano* (which 20th Century Fox has pushed back to late summer). This action-adventure stars Linda Hamilton as the mayor of a small Pacific northwest town, Pierce Brosnan as the dashing volcanologist under pressure and one big-ass eruption.

Vegas Vacation

Warner Bros.

The Griswold family hits the road again. This time Pa Griswold (Chevy Chase) takes the fam to the mecca of cheese, that town we all love to hate, the place where lonely alcoholics go to meet hookers and die — Las Vegas! And no Vegas adventure is complete without those wacky guys, Siegfried & Roy, and the ever-cuddly Wayne Newton.



The Pest

Columbia/TriStar

It sounded like a sweet deal ... a cool million just to go on an island hunt. But factor in a fugitive scam artist named Pest and an eccentric riddler, and

you have a not-so-fun game of hunt the hunted. John Leguizamo (*Romeo and Juliet*) stars as Pestario "Pest" Vargas, the crafty guy with a bounty on his head and a million reasons to live.

When We Were Kings

Gramercy

Don't call it a comeback — call it good timing. In the wake of Muhammad Ali's emotional return to the limelight during last summer's Olympic opening ceremonies comes this documentary of the fight heard 'round the world. The film — 23 years in the making — follows the epic Foreman vs. Ali "Rumble in the Jungle" that took place in Zaire. Plus: bonus footage of Don King before the hair thing.



Beverly Hills Ninja

Columbia/TriStar

Here's a stretch: Chris Farley (*Tommy Boy*) plays a fat, clumsy loser with a side-kick who always gets him out of trouble. In *Ninja*, Farley is Haru, an orphan raised in Japan by a secret society of martial arts experts. In spite of his training, Haru can't perform even the simplest martial arts moves. When he accepts a dangerous mission on the mean streets of Beverly Hills, his ninja brother secretly follows to protect him from harm.



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Screen Saver

Hotel de Love

Australian writer Craig Rosenberg wasn't looking for a screenplay when he checked into a honeymoon hotel at Niagara Falls. In fact, he wasn't even on his honeymoon.

But when Rosenberg met the bitter hotel manager — who spun tale after tale of collapsed marriages and love gone awry — he walked away with fodder for *Hotel de Love*, a quirky romantic comedy about a young cynic who runs a kitschy honeymoon hotel.

"The manager [at Niagara Falls] hated everybody," says Rosenberg, who wrote and directed the movie. "We'd see all these couples, and he'd say, 'I'll give 'em two weeks.' So, I'm thinking, 'What more fun could I have with these tacky rooms and this deeply cynical hotel manager?'"

Rosenberg's hotel set offers big-time attractions like Niagara Smalls and gaudy theme rooms like the Garden of Eden.

"Niagara Smalls was just this little slope with artificial rocks and a water pump for the falls," Rosenberg says. "The crew started having these romantic picnics by it on the weekend."

All tackiness aside, the movie is a must-see for cynics and romantics alike. The story follows a motley crew of lovers — young, old, married, just-married — spending the weekend at the infamous hotel.

The Reel Deal

The People vs. Larry Flynt

"Why would anyone want to make a movie about this sleazoid?" was Woody Harrelson's first reaction when approached to play the title role in *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

Some moviegoers may feel the same. After all, a chronicle of America's premier spread-eagle pornographer is hardly family fare. But it does have all the makings of a good drama: A white-trash strip club owner creates a publishing empire, is paralyzed in an assassination attempt, loses his drug-addicted wife to AIDS and takes a landmark First Amendment case to the Supreme Court. "Larry Flynt is a devil with angels' wings," says Academy Award-winning director Milos Forman.

Forman prefers to hire actors who are similar in spirit and background to their characters. Still, the Czech native says he was unaware of Courtney Love's history when she auditioned for the role of Flynt's wife, Althea Leasure. "But I just loved her," Forman says. "Courtney has the courage to use her own experience in her acting."

For Love, living through this required she prove herself as (shudder) a team player. But she says surrendering control of her work was not entirely unpleasant.

"When you're having this guy moving you around and telling you what to do, it's a kind of sexy, weird thing," she says. "In order to trust him, you must believe he's using the best of you."

That trust might pay off for Love: Audiences are whispering "O-S-C-A-R."

By James Hibberd, Assistant Editor