

Reel

BY WILL LEITCH

THE SUMMER MOVIE SEASON OF sound and fury, as usual signifying nothing, has passed, and now Hollywood downshifts into Thoughtful, Serious mode. Less explosions, more *feeling*. Well, at least that's what's supposed to happen. But we'll see. So what's on the celluloid platter this September? Lukewarm John Grisham, wacky gay comedies, DreamWorks' movie debut, a paranoid Ewan McGregor, foreign directors going Hollywood and a whole lotta Sean Penn.



L.A. Confidential

Warner Bros.

Good-looking guys with fedoras and crew cuts smoke and wear those greasy T-shirts while chasing down the bad guys. Yep, another warmed-over ode to film noir. But beware. "It's a city of corruption, double-dealing and dangerous passions." Straight from the press release, by the way. If that wildly original and fiercely creative description doesn't make you want to see the film, nothing will.

Fire Down Below

Warner Bros.

You may not have noticed, but Steven Seagal (*Executive Decision*) isn't much of an action star anymore. He no longer jumps around and kicks people. Instead, he and his love handles lazily await the bad guys to come to them, and then he punches them once and sends them flying 30 feet. Look for more of the same here.



Kicked in the Head

October Films

Yet another crime thriller/comedy with young, idealistic innocents being corrupted. Relative unknown Kevin Corrigan searches for himself while pumping into shady characters played by Linda Fiorentino, James Woods, Lili Taylor and Michael Rapaport. Like *Pulp Fiction*: Hip, taut and scary! Like *Pulp Fiction*!

The Gingerbread Man

Polygram

It has to do with lawyers, and most people who have seen it haven't liked it. We must be in John Grisham territory. Indeed, everybody's favorite hack author wrote this original screenplay about a divorced lawyer (Kenneth Branagh, *Hamlet*) who gets himself in way over his head when he helps his lover's father leave a psychiatric hospital. Robert Altman (*Short Cuts*), who would appear to be above John Grisham adaptations, directs this odd production.

Hoodlum

MGM/UA

Andy Garcia (*Night Falls on Manhattan*) and Tim Roth (*Gridlock'd*) are mean prohibition gangsters, and Laurence Fishburne (*Event Horizon*) is the nicer gangster who tries to reel them in. Full of Tommy guns, big-band music and flappers.



She's So Lovely

Miramax

Nick Cassavetes directs his father's script, a comedy/drama about a man (Sean Penn, *Dead Man Walking*) who is thrown in jail for killing a man who was attempting to hurt his wife (played by the real-life Mrs. Penn, Robin Wright, *Moll Flanders*). When Penn is released from jail, he finds his wife has fallen in love with another man (John Travolta, *Face/Off*) who's also a pretty nice guy. Romantic travails ensue.

In and Out

Paramount

Remember when Tom Hanks outed his high school English teacher at the Oscars a few years back? Here's a whole film based on that premise. Kevin Kline (*Fierce Creatures*) is the teacher, Matt Dillon (*Albino Alligator*) is the Oscar winner and Joan Cusack (*Grosse Pointe Blank*) is the woman Kline is to marry in three days. Will there be matrimonial bliss for the Indiana couple, or will Kline be forced to move to Hawaii for such pleasures?

The Edge

20th Century Fox



A billionaire (Anthony Hopkins, *Nixon*) is married to a supermodel (Elle Macpherson, *Batman & Robin*) but is paranoid that she's sleeping with her fashion photographer (Alec Baldwin, *Ghosts of Mississippi*). Looking at Anthony Hopkins, can you blame him? Things get oh-so-crazy when the two men are stranded in the Alaskan wilderness together, battling killer bears and each other. David Mamet scripted, but will his style mesh with director Lee Tamahori's (*Mulholland Falls*)?

Nightwatch

Miramax

Young Obi-Wan Ewan McGregor (*Trainspotting*), whose prolific movie output lately is turning him into the Michael Caine of the '90s, makes his big American movie debut in this thriller co-starring Nick Nolte (*Mother Night*). McGregor is a night watchman at a morgue who realizes he's being framed by a serial killer. He has to solve the case, clear his name and shoot up by dawn.



The End of Violence

MGM/UA

Wim Wenders goes Hollywood, literally. The *Wings of Desire* director crafts this satire/drama about those people who bounce in and out of the movie business, every day coming oh-so-close to stardom, then losing sight. Bill Pullman (*Independence Day*) and Andie MacDowell (*Michael*) are a producer and his actress wife so caught up in their own worlds that they barely notice when he's kidnapped.

The Peacemaker

DreamWorks SKG

The first big movie from DreamWorks, this thriller stars George Clooney (*Batman & Robin*) as a nuclear bomb expert (would you ever want to actually meet a nuclear bomb expert?). Nicole Kidman (no accent this time) is his willful helper and inevitable love interest. Clooney is trying to stop terrorists from blowing up half the country. Isn't this the plot of every movie these days?

The Myth of Fingerprints

Sony Classics

Well, George Clooney has found his fair share of success on the big screen, so why shouldn't fellow *ER* hunk Noah Wyle give it a shot? He goes the art house route in this ensemble drama concerning a dysfunctional extended family that tries to survive a get-together. It remains to be seen if Wyle's starring debut will succeed or whether it will need 30 cc's of lidocaine and a CLEAR! sharp shock to the heart. Stat!



The Game

Polygram

Nick (Michael Douglas, *The Ghost and the Darkness*) is a successful businessman who's invited by his less successful brother (Sean Penn again, this time as a bad guy) to join in an adventure game. Turns out, the game is anything but fun, and Nick realizes his bro's out to get him. *Seven* director David Fincher, who's now working with George Lucas on the new *Star Wars* films, helms this one.

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The Reel Deal

Dark Empire

New Line Cinema

Richard O'Brien is ready to do the Time Warp again. The British actor/writer/musician/cult icon, famous in the States for writing and starring as "Riff-Raff" in the insanely popular camp hit *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, returns to U.S. screens in October with the futuristic *Dark Empire*.

Although the film stars William Hurt, Jennifer Connelly and Kiefer Sutherland, it's O'Brien who shines. As Mr. Hand, O'Brien is a gothic alien conducting mind experiments on unwitting earthlings, and he's evil, coldly cunning and — because O'Brien plays him — really weird.

Weird pretty much describes O'Brien's career. His peak was, of course, *Rocky Horror* in 1975, which continues to inspire crazed fans across the country. Is its success entirely owed to the fact that it combines Susan Sarandon, Meat Loaf and Tim Curry in dominatrix wear. "I think the film works on two levels: on the immediate, ephemeral kind of toe-tapping camp kind of level and on a subliminal, mythic, fairy tale level," O'Brien says. "I think that's really why it's gone on so long."

As if his career wasn't odd enough, his next film part is a small role in *Spice*, the Spice Girls movie. "They say if you're not working these days, you're dead," O'Brien says. "Well, I'm not dead."

Screen Saver

Gravesend

Manga Entertainment

Millions of film nerds across the country probably want Sal Stabile dead.

Not because he's a bad guy (he's not), but because he's what they all wish to be. He's 22 years old. He pals around with Oliver Stone and Steven Spielberg. He signed a two-picture deal with DreamWorks SKG. And he's preparing his debut film, *Gravesend*, for its nationwide release this September.

Pure luck? Don't count on it. Stabile worked damn hard to be this lucky.

"I've been to hell and back with this [movie]," Stabile says. "This wasn't luck. I worked 24 hours a day, every single day, for three years to make this movie. I lost friends, my social life, my girlfriend and lots of money on this. Very few people realize it's all about stamina. This movie was my dream."

Gravesend, a dark crime and morality tale about four white kids growing up in a rough part of Brooklyn, made its debut as a work in progress at the Hamptons Film Festival. A trio of producers dug the film and gave him some cash for reshooting and post-production work.

Once the film was completed, Stabile and his agents were able to exhibit it for a few high-profile directors, including Stone, who then agreed to serve as the film's presenter. Spielberg offered the two-picture deal, Stabile took it and another Hollywood legend was born.

"Millions of people want to have what I have, to be doing what I'm doing," says Stabile, who's in preproduction for his next film, *Dancing with Angels*. "I'm not going to take this for granted."

