

# Fall films look shaky, but there may be hope

■ Chan, Spacey and Travolta head up some of the back-to-school movies.

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Welcome back from movie hell, students. Judging by the pictures showing at the \$1.75, summer is officially over.

It's no surprise most of the summer blockbusters are now featured only on the discount screens. And after one of the weakest summers in recent memory, the fall outlook seems about as dim as the summer. There are plenty of the weak filler movies studios dump into theaters in September and October, and the holiday blockbusters range from a few "can't miss" to mostly sickening.

Still, some good releases are worth checking out. Here's the lowdown so far — release dates are subject to change.

Aug. 28

**"Rush Hour"**  
New Line Cinema

The king of ass-kicking karate with a slapstick farce, Jackie Chan, teams up with motor-mouth Chris Tucker ("The Fifth Element"). Rumor has it Chan was dissatisfied with the film, one of the few of his made in Hollywood. Chan's biggest hits, "Rumble in the Bronx" and "Supercop," all were made and released overseas before they ever hit American shores. Hollywood may try to tone down Chan's rapid-fire action scenes in favor of Tucker's comic style. For Tucker fans, this will probably be a must-see. For Chan fans, this looks like a potential headache. \$\$

"54"

Miramax Studios

This year's "Boogie Nights," which was last year's "Pulp Fiction," "54" will mark the drama debut of Mike Myers in a major studio release. The film focuses on the legendary "54" club, in which sex, alcohol and drugs had free reign in the '60s and '70s. So far, the reaction to the film has been mixed. It could be another profound statement about life in the '70s (a la "Boogie Nights"), or it could be Myers playing Austin Powers again — only this time not for laughs. \$\$\$

Oct. 9

**"Holy Man"**  
Hollywood Pictures

Eddie Murphy and Jeff Goldblum star in this comedy/satire aimed at cable shopping channels. When the ratings of a shopping channel start to plummet, executives enlist the help of a spiritual guru to be its on-air personality. The film has the potential to be a great black comedy, but might end up another "The Distinguished Gentleman" instead. Released before the big holiday movies come out, this film has the chance to do some decent business on the heels of weak competition. \$\$

Oct. 16

**"Happiness"**  
Now Good Machine

Director Todd Solondz last gave us the disturbing, brilliant junior high drama, "Welcome to the Dollhouse."



In rural New Mexico on the eve of the 21st century, Jack Crow (James Woods, center) leads members of Team Crow, a contingent of mercenaries sent by the Vatican to destroy a nest of vampires, in the Columbia Pictures presentation "John Carpenter's Vampires," which premieres Oct. 30.

Now, he's bound to incite protesters in this film that confronts our era's new worst disease: pedophilia. The film hopes to give Lara Flynn Boyle ("Threesome") a decent role as one of three lustful sisters. This is the biggest test of what an audience can stomach in theaters since "Godzilla." \$\$\$

Oct. 30

**"John Carpenter's Vampires"**  
Columbia Pictures

Woo! Finally, a horror movie that's released near Halloween. Based on the John Steakley novel, "Vampire\$," this film puts James Woods in the much-coveted role of a vampire hunter, which has been reprised by such greats as Jason Patric, Anthony Hopkins and recently Wesley Snipes. Word of caution: It features a Baldwin brother (Daniel). John Carpenter is one of the most uneven directors for horror movies, ranging from heralded classics to outright bombs. Horror buffs, check it out. For the rest of us, wait for the video game. \$\$

Nov. 20

**"A Bug's Life"**  
Disney

Kevin Spacey is the voice of Hopper, the leader of a vicious group of grasshoppers. And these grasshoppers terrorize the heroic, lovable ants, who are forced to retaliate. This is from the same team that did "Toy Story," one of the better Disney movies to come out in

the past few years. And it will be cool to see Spacey do a role that allows him to get a bit wild. Seeing big ants on drinking glasses will allow Burger King or McDonald's to push this movie down our throats. \$\$\$

**"I Still Know What You Did Last Summer"**

Columbia  
Let's get it on! What better film to go against a sure-fire Disney smash than a teenage slasher film sequel? Man with a meat hook returns to terrorize the survivors of the last movie. Jennifer Love Hewett may not be enough to bring in the masses this time. True, it is the only major horror film of the holiday season, but many fans seriously burned by "Scream 2" will consider skipping this holiday flick. \$\$

Dec. 18

**"Prince of Egypt"**  
DreamWorks SKG

An ambitious, animated retelling of the story of Moses and the 10 Commandments, "Prince of Egypt" will no doubt lure in the masses caught up in the Christmas spirit. Even non-Christians should be lured in just for the jaw-dropping cast of characters. Along with Val Kilmer as the voice of Moses, "Prince of Egypt" boasts some of the most distinctive voices in Hollywood: Patrick Stewart, Danny Glover, Ralph Fiennes, Sandra Bullock and Michelle Pfeiffer. A huge cast and decent animation should make this movie the biggest

## The Cash Curve

- \$\$\$\$ — Well worth checking out, even if you forgot your student ID.
- \$\$\$ — Still good. Definitely worth a discount showing.
- \$\$ — Average. Now we're heading towards the \$1.75 theater. Even then, wait until you can rent it cheaper on video. Stay home, read a book or study instead.
- \$ — Avoid at all costs. Get active as well: Write the studio and grill them on why such tripe cost \$40 million.

threat to Disney's "Bug" flick. \$\$\$

**"You've Got Mail"**  
Warner Bros.

To '90s yuppies and people who are clamoring for the next date movie: Your crisis ends here. Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan are paired together again, this time as competing booksellers. They despise each other and everything their opposite character stands for. They do have one thing in common: They both have a secret sweethearts on the Internet. Yup, you guessed it, they are each other's secret squeeze. You may hate these sort of movies, but get ready for this movie to be topic of conversation from all your co-workers. It's likely to be one of the biggest box-office draws of the holiday season. \$\$\$

Dec. 22

**"My Favorite Martian"**  
Buena Vista

When the hell are they going to do a

big-budget movie of "Alf"? Buena Vista, apparently aching for punishment, releases this update of the old sitcom three days before Christmas. Will it spell box-office success? People will hopefully be starving for the more serious films by this time. Plus, kids will probably want to see the animated holiday releases. Look for this film to go to video quicker than "Mr. Magoo." \$

Dec. 25

**"The Thin Red Line"**  
Twentieth Century Fox

Almost a sure-fire Oscar contender for director Terrence Malick, who initially had a six-hour WWII epic on his hands. You can see why with the cast: John Travolta, John Cusack, Bill Pullman, Sean Penn and Nick Nolte among others. Audiences pulverized by "Saving Private Ryan," the other sure-fire Oscar bet, may not be willing to witness another heart-wrenching vision of WWII. \$\$\$\$

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