



From top clockwise: Bart and Lisa Simpson in *The Simpsons Movie* (Courtesy of Fox Broadcasting); Geoffrey Rush and Keira Knightley in *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (Courtesy of Disney Studios); Tobey Maguire in *Spider-Man 3* (Courtesy of Columbia Pictures).

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with special reporting by JOHN SCOTT LEWINSKI

“Svmer is icumen in / Lhude sing, cuccu!” Since the 14th century, British farm folk and city dwellers alike have greeted the brightest and gayest of seasons with these sprightly Middle English lyrics. For you non-Middle Englishmen out there, what they’re singing is “Summer has arrived / Loudly sing, Cuckoo!”

Some summers you have to be cuckoo to celebrate the season, as far as movie-going is concerned. This year, however, should be pretty good, especially for movie studios, fans of sequels, and adolescent spirits of all ages.

We already know that 2007 is going to be a banner year financially, with ticket prices up and a long string of pre-sold titles chomping at the bit. In terms of financial performance, few in the industry seem to doubt that *Pirates III*, *Spider-Man 3* and *Shrek the Third* (do you sense a pattern there?) will end up in the top three slots, but the order is anyone’s guess. And, of course, some of the question marks out there, like the long-awaited *Simpsons Movie* and *Transformers*, could throw a monkey wrench into all of that confident predicting.

This summer’s want-to-see is unprecedented. Aren’t you itching to know how Jack Sparrow will find his way out of the Kraken’s belly? Doesn’t the prospect of seeing Peter Parker go bad make you tingle? Now that Pacino is showing up in an *Ocean’s* caper, aren’t you dying to find out whether he’ll be Good, subtlety-acting *Godfather* Al or Bad-hair, over-acting *The Devil’s Advocate* Al?

Well, okay, maybe you’re not. But millions await the answers to these and other questions, and they will queue up in droves to satisfy their curiosity. For the first time in recorded history, popcorn may become an endangered resource.

But what about the summer from the screenwriting point of view? That’s what we intend to explore here. *Script* has spoken to some of those who have contributed to the writing of this year’s summer hopefuls and gotten their exclusive reactions to their craft

and to the hoopla. Regarding the sequels, we’ll catch you up on whence they came and where they’re going.

And because it’s the season when people are in great danger of getting burned, we’ll report on each film’s SPF—not Sun Protection Factor, but Script Performance Forecast. How important to each movie’s fate is the writing likely to be? When the dust clears, the reviews are in, and the picture is history, what credit or blame will accrue to the screenplay? For fun, we’ll go out on a limb and pre-assign the outcome. Four 🌟 is a prediction that the screenplay will take much if not most of the credit and/or responsibility for the picture’s fate; three 🌟 mean that it’ll be a major factor; two 🌟 mean that it’ll elicit some comment but not much; and one 🌟 means that the screenplay will have a negligible impact.

“Summer is icumen in,” sang Geoffrey Chaucer to his mates in that preternaturally jolly way he had. Of course, he could afford to be jolly; he didn’t have to write, or even see, a summer’s worth of movies. (It’s a funny idea, though. “’ere, Geoff old thing. Never ye mind about thot epic poem ye’ve got in yer head about Venus. We’ve doon *Venus* already and it dinna make a shilling. Give us *Canterbury Tales Part Two*, there’s a good lad, and sit back and count yer quid.”)

Let’s look at the lineup for 2007. Loudly sing, Cuckoo!

The Sequels

Given today’s budgets and the accompanying fears of financial risk, it’s no wonder that every summer is chockablock with retreads. This year is unique in its number of third-tries, as well as their relatively high profiles. Here are six of the biggest:

Evan Almighty

The Skinny: This sequel to Jim Carrey’s *Bruce Almighty* hits theaters on June 22.

What’s Familiar: God, in the person of Morgan Freeman. Hoped-for hijinks.

What’s New: A new star, Steve Carell (*The Office*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*), and a new premise: God asks Carell, a newly elected congressman, to build an ark because of a vengeful flood that he, or rather He, is sending to Earth. (Guess that flood bit rightly belongs under “What’s Familiar.”) The congressman’s family can’t decide whether Carell’s character is insane, undergoing a mid-life crisis, or really in touch with the Almighty. Of course, the idea of people thinking that a congressman is insane is the most familiar element of all.

The Inside Story: Four scribes came up with the story (Robert Florsheim, Josh Stolberg, Joel Cohen and Alec Sokolow), and two others (Steve Koren and Mark O’Keefe) created the original characters. Nevertheless, it’s clear that the writing muscle here will be Steve Oedekerk, who has a bunch of successful comedies under his belt, from *Ace Ventura* and the first *Almighty*, to *The Nutty Professor* and *Kung Pow: Enter the Fist*. (“Which I’ll have you know some of us loved,” he said defensively.)

SPF Rating: We’ll assign this one 🌟🌟🌟 on the grounds that unless the writing does something radically different from *Bruce Almighty* in terms of premise and hilarity, it’ll suffer a major “been there/seen that” backlash, and even with God’s presence in the cast, the movie won’t have a prayer. If it doesn’t work, fear not—*Kung Pow 2: Tongue of Fury* is already in development.

