

HOLLYWOOD

A Cool Summer

SUMMER HAS BEEN blockbuster time for three decades now. But this season of "Pirates" and "Transformers" has also become a season of Oscar contenders. There are already three possible best-actress nominees from films released since May—Julie Christie for "Away From Her," Angelina Jolie for "A Mighty Heart" and Marion Cotillard for "La Vie en Rose." Don Cheadle could score a best-actor nod for the just-released "Talk to Me." There are more competitors on the horizon, including Leonardo DiCaprio's global-warming doc, "The 11th Hour," and the refreshingly off-kilter "Rocket Science," both scheduled for



NOT JUST BLOCKBUSTER SEASON: A scene from 'La Vie en Rose'

August releases. In short, summer is the new fall.

"The business for independent film is so good right now," says Bob Berney, president of Picturehouse, which released this summer's "La Vie en Rose." "Even the multiplex-

es are playing these kinds of films now." Why? Since 2004, the number of movie tickets sold to teenagers has dropped by 82 million, presumably because today's teens have built entertainment empires in their bedrooms. Meanwhile, "there's

a generation of filmgoers who are coming back to the movies after staying away because they were raising families," says revered indie exec Bingham Ray. "Now the kids are in college, and the audience is coming back."

Just maybe not quite fast enough. With all these strong films vying for the adult dollar this season, not one has become a genuine sleeper sensation. Of the top six indie films this summer, only "Sicko" and the romantic comedy "Waitress" have grossed more than \$10 million domestically. Still, there are other benefits to releasing an Oscar-bait movie in summer. Film critics, starved for smart fare, may be more effusive than they would be at other times of the year. And a summer release means that the DVD will hit stores at the peak of Academy season.

—SEAN SMITH

BOOKS

An Unsecret Identity

IN 1954, PSYCHIATRIST Fredric Wertham, citing the bare, parted legs of Batman's ward, Robin, said comic books promoted homosexuality. Since then there have been questions about other characters in tights. But no guesses are needed for Thom Creed, the gay superhero in the young-adult fantasy novel "Hero," to be published by Disney's Hyperion next month. Creed even falls for another gay superhero.

The book, by "Chronicles of Narnia" executive producer Perry Moore, who is gay, has prominent supporters: Stan Lee, co-creator of "Spider-Man" and "The X-Men," and author Maurice Sendak lent blurbs; Lee wants to produce a movie version. "Hero" will surely take fire. The

American Library Association says last year's most frequently "challenged" children's books included four with gay characters. "Parents worry that a child who reads a book with a gay character or theme will be more likely to become gay," says Columbia University psychiatrist

Justin Richardson, co-author of the most-challenged book, "And Tango Makes Three."

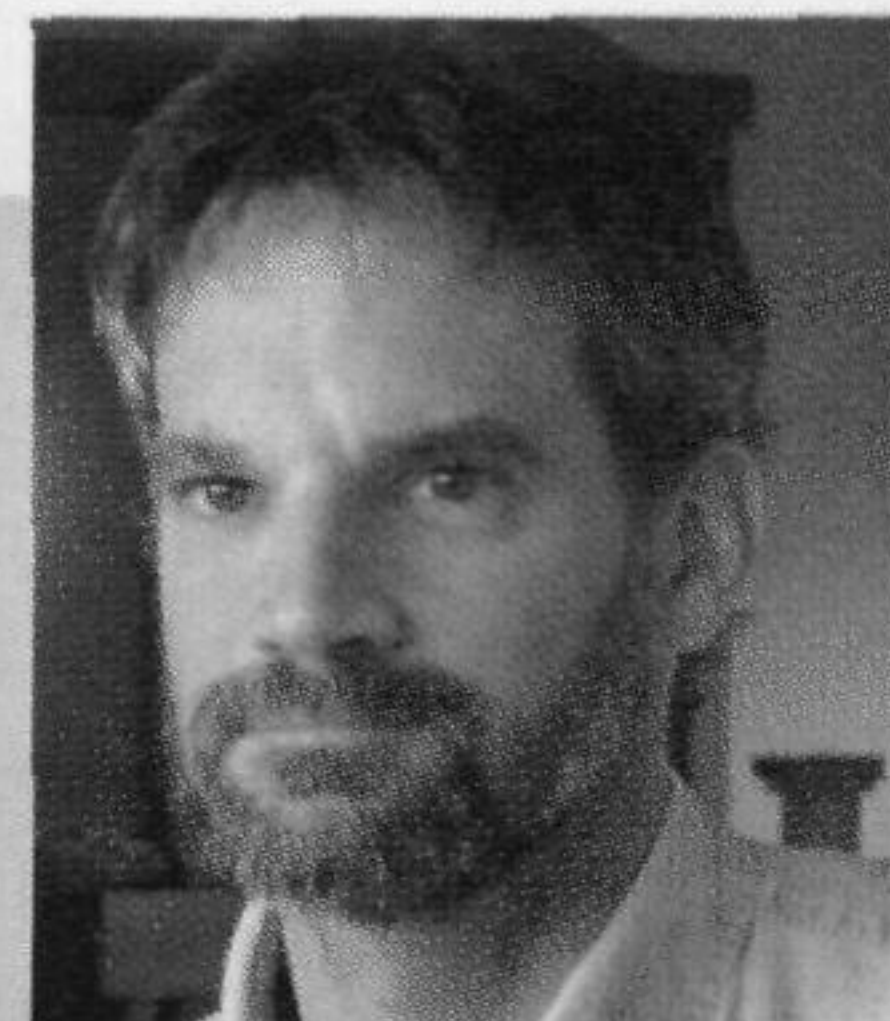
"Hero" is part of a kid-lit trend: gay characters with "more positive" stories, says the ALA's Erin Byrne. "It's not like, 'I'm a gay teenager, here's my miserable life.'" Gay characters have often met awful ends—like Marvel's Northstar, who was impaled and resurrected as a zombie assassin. In "Hero," Creed saves the world.

—KAREN SPRINGEN



A LIFE IN BOOKS

It isn't libelous to say that Jon Krakauer likes to get high. Before he was an acclaimed journalist, he was a revered rock climber, having challenged peaks like Mount Everest. Here are the books he revisits most often when he's closer to sea level.



MY FIVE MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS

- 1 **"The Dead Father"** by Donald Barthelme. A breathtakingly original meditation on the volatile bond between fathers and sons.
- 2 **"Against Love"** by Laura Kipnis. A provocative deconstruction of modern marriage presented with magnificent wit.
- 3 **"House"** by Tracy Kidder. The exquisitely written account of building a home. It made me yearn to become an accomplished writer.
- 4 **"The Journalist and the Murderer"** by Janet Malcolm. An exceedingly unflattering look at journalism's underbelly.
- 5 **"For the Time Being"** by Annie Dillard. The most engaging book I've encountered about the nature of evil and other great mysteries.

► **A Certified Important book you still haven't read:** "Principia Mathematica" by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell. I bet fewer than 5 percent of the people who claim to have read this actually have.

► **A classic that, upon rereading, disappointed:** "In Cold Blood" by Truman Capote. After I learned of his boast that he wrote all the dialogue from memory, much of it struck me as having been invented.



Read an excerpt from Krakauer's nonfiction book "Under the Banner of Heaven" at xtra.Newsweek.com