

Second-Guessing The 2020 Box Office Doomsayers

By [Michael Giltz](#) | February 25, 2020 7:44 pm PST

It's feast or famine when prognosticators look at box office prospects. In 2019, everyone saw a calendar year bursting with sure-fire billion dollar grosses like "Avengers: EndGame," "Frozen II," "Star Wars: The Rise Of Skywalker" and "Toy Story 4." They all but guaranteed movies would set an all-time global record. Never mind that the box office just *had* the highest grossing year of all time in 2018, Hollywood would do it again! And if it didn't, pundits would insist the year was a flop. Well, worldwide the box office *did* set an all-time record of USD \$42 billion. In North America, however, the box office fell a tad short and was "only" the second-highest grossing year of all time. In other words, disaster!

Now for 2020. People didn't see the dizzying array of slam dunks that was the murderer's row of 2019. So they predicted doom and gloom. And worldwide, it sure looks bleak. First, a misfire like "Doolittle" started the year off wrong. (Never mind that "Bad Boys For Life" over-performed and "Sonic The Hedgehog" scored.) Plus the complete shutdown of China's theatrical biz cost that market its biggest playdates of the year, sent the release schedule into chaos and all but guarantees the worldwide box office will not set a new record, (and caused us to revamp this piece prior to posting more than once). How can it with the second biggest market sitting on the sidelines for the first two months, if not longer?

But take a serious look at the movies — large and small — coming out in 2020. No one can claim the cupboard is bare, not with a straight face. Sure, some movies will flop and a few will get shuffled to 2021. A number will underperform and of course surprises will pop up out of nowhere. Who expected "Joker" to hit USD \$1 billion or a Korean thriller about inequality to score USD \$230 million and the Best Picture Oscar?

Here's a rundown of the movies we conservatively expect to score strongly at the box office, from major franchises like "Fast and Furious" to not one, not two but three Tom Hanks movies geared to adults right down to horror flicks like a rebooted "Candyman." They won't all hit USD \$500 million or more worldwide, of course. But we do believe the vast majority of these films will deliver audiences into theaters week after week throughout 2020.

And hey, if 2020 turns out to be only the third highest grossing year of all time in North America and doesn't top itself worldwide, well there's always 2021 and "Avatar 2." We think.

LIKELY USD \$900+ MILLION WORLDWIDE

- "F9" aka "Fast & Furious 9"
- "Minions: The Rise Of Gru"
- "No Time To Die" (James Bond)
- "Wonder Woman 1984"

LIKELY USD \$600+ MILLION WORLDWIDE

- "Black Widow"
- "Eternals"
- "Jungle Cruise"
- "Onward"
- "Soul"
- "Top Gun: Maverick"
- "Venom 2"

LIKELY USD \$300+ MILLION WORLDWIDE

- “Coming 2 America”
- “The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It”
- “The Croods 2”
- “Death On The Nile”
- “Dune”
- “Free Guy”
- “Ghostbusters: Afterlife”
- “Godzilla Vs. Kong”
- “In The Heights”
- “Morbis”
- “Mulan” (because China may not be a factor at the box office; otherwise \$600m+)
- “The One and Only Ivan”
- “Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway”
- “A Quiet Place II”
- “Raya and the Last Dragon”
- “Snake Eyes”
- “The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge On The Run”
- “Tenet”
- “The Tomorrow War”
- “Trolls World Tour”
- “West Side Story”
- “The Witches”

*** = we expect it to gross at least USD \$300m worldwide

MARCH 6



Onward ***

A Pixar original, in every sense of the word. Four of the last five Pixar films were sequels, but the fifth — “Coco” — grossed USD \$800 million worldwide. Onward is a new fantasy animated film and it stars Tom Holland, who knows how to draw attention on social media and will surely be a tireless promoter of this flick. Of course the Pixar name is its own best selling point and Disney muscle will make sure everyone in the world will hear about this one over the next three weeks. A film most movie-goers haven’t heard of is about to become their next must-see. True, we’ve got a better sense of what Pixar’s “Soul” is about and that doesn’t arrive until summer but never count the Disney machine out.

The Way Back

Ben Affleck stars in this low-key drama about an alcoholic has-been who turns his life around by coaching the high school basketball team he once gloried in. Inspirational. Gritty. Sports. Helmed by Gavin O’Connor, a hot property who teamed with Affleck on their low-budget action hit “The Accountant” (and its upcoming sequel) and has his own franchise with “The Green Hornet” down the road. If it gets good reviews and word of mouth, this is the sort of quiet film that can play for ages. Is it headed for \$300 million worldwide? Of course not. But it’s got a “Hoosiers” or “Rudy” vibe perfect for this time of year.

MARCH 10

A Quiet Place II ***

We’ve barely finished streaming the TV show “Jack Ryan” on Amazon and here’s John Krasinski back with his horror/sci-fi scarefest “A Quiet Place II.” That’s another way of saying that streaming isn’t the enemy of movie-going, anymore than broadcast TV and radio. Just two minutes ago Krasinski was the nice guy on “The Office.” Now thanks to movies and Amazon he’s a bad-ass action hero. “A Quiet Place” came out of nowhere to stun with USD \$340 million worldwide, turning him into an Everyman hero and a filmmaker to cheer on. Plus, they wisely repeated the early year scheduling of the first.

MARCH 13

Bloodshot

Another day, another comic book franchise. This one is based on the Valiant Comics series about a man who is assassinated, brought back to life as a super soldier and then goes on a revenge rampage once his memories come flooding back. Oh and it stars Vin Diesel. You gonna bet against Vin Diesel in a comic book movie? Of course, there’s a Valiant

Comics universe Sony hopes to launch, with a planned sequel, two movies based on “Harbinger” (the poor man’s “X-Men” featuring teens with mutant powers) and a big ole cross-over to tie them together.

The Hunt

A little controversy, a good trailer and a great cast (Hilary Swank, Emma Roberts) means Blumhouse has done it again. It’s red and blue staters versus one another in an over-the-top horror/action flick smartly pitched as “The Purge” meets polarization. Plus they are opening it early enough in an election year to play into the conversation without complaints of exploitation. The louder any bloggers and TV talking heads complain, the more it becomes a must-see low budget hit.

My Spy

Dave Bautista of “Guardians of the Galaxy” makes like Dwayne Johnson (or Arnold Schwarzenegger, if you’re older) and plays his tough guy persona for yucks in a low-brow family friendly flick. He’s a CIA agent blackmailed by a cute little kid into teaching her how to survive childhood. Needless to say, she teaches *him* and heartwarming antics ensue. Critics won’t even notice it, but just watch the popcorn sales.

MARCH 27



Mulan ***

Disney is soon going to run out of top-tier animated films they can reboot as live action films. But “Mulan” is ripe for the treatment more than most. It’s a shame the Chinese release is threatened by the health crisis. But an epic tale, a strong heroine and stirring battle scenes mean this will be huge everywhere else. And then they’ll have to tackle “The Emperor’s New Groove.”

APRIL 3

Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway ***

When no one was looking, the slapstick, live action spin on the beloved Beatrix Potter stories grossed USD \$350 million worldwide. With everyone back on board for this sequel (including tireless promoter James Corden), there’s every reason to believe they’ll do it all over again.

The New Mutants

Marvel. Okay, a troubled Marvel project, a much-delayed Marvel project, but still....

Hey, even "Dark Phoenix" grossed \$250 million! This has an X-Men vibe with teens dealing with mutant powers and adults who would turn that into a weapon for their own nefarious purposes. Toss in a horror film vibe, plenty of reshoots that actually made everyone happy and this could definitely surprise. And not in a "Fantastic Four" sort of way.

APRIL 10

No Time To Die ***

Bond. James Bond. Hit. Easy Hit. It has gravitas for the adults, Rami Malek for cineastes, Billie Eilish for the hip factor and a rough-hewn Bond for the fanboys. Bond is always money in the bank. But in recent years the British agent with a license to kill has transcended his dependable box office to become a blockbuster franchise. That's not going to stop with Daniel Craig's final outing. And whoever they choose next, just remember how dismayed fans were over the choice of Craig. Whether it's a woman or a person of color or a non-Brit, James Bond will be back.

APRIL 17

Trolls World Tour ***

The second in a franchise that grossed USD \$350 million worldwide the first time around (not to mention untold merchandise). Studios wisely program big budget flicks twelve months a year now. (It only took 100 years of begging from exhibitors to make them realize people want to see big movies in February and summer can begin in May and why treat August like an after-thought?) That makes it easier than ever to overlook the "singles" and "doubles" that exhibitors depend on to keep a steady flow of people headed to the movies. The first "Trolls" animated film made USD \$150m in North America and USD \$350m worldwide. Will it build on that, deliver those solid numbers again or prove a sequel to the USD \$125 million budgeted original was over-reach? That's something for Universal Pictures to ponder while theater-owners can rest assured they'll have a family friendly film on tap around Easter.

APRIL 24

Antebellum

It's a classy horror flick, with a "Get Out"-style premise and Janelle Monae ready for her close-up. We've no idea what to expect but the first trailer certainly intrigues.

Fatima

A religious film pegged to Easter, this one repeats the oft-told story of Fatima and the little girls who say they spoke with the Virgin Mary. Never count out faith-based films and this one is in the classic Hollywood mode with notable talent like Harvey Keitel and Goran Visnjic of "ER" on board. Also keep an eye out for "I Still Believe" in March (the origin story of a modern Christian music hit song turned standard).

MAY 1

Black Widow ***

Marvel. And unlike the quirky flick "The New Mutants," this one is officially part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Scarlett Johansson is joined by Florence Pugh of "Little Women" to reveal what Natasha Romanoff was up to between the flicks "Captain America: Civil War" and "Avengers: Infinity War." Apparently, it involves a tense family reunion and lots of action. Does this even count as the launch of a new franchise since Johansson has been such a welcome, constant presence in the MCU? With its gritty vibe, this looks to be another entry that stakes out its own territory, just as "Doctor Strange" and "Ant-Man" and "Captain America" each have their own style.

MAY 8

Legally Blonde 3

Reese Witherspoon returns to the franchise that super-charged her career. They made two movies and a Broadway musical and now they're back for more, adorable little dog presumably in tow. The first two films topped out at about USD \$150 million worldwide. But their popularity is much bigger than that and so is Witherspoon. Wisely, they waited long enough for

people to miss Elle Woods (it's been 17 years after all) but not so long that the ever-popular Witherspoon can't still pull it off. If the quality is there, this should be the biggest yet. If it's a rehash, it will still pull them in, just like the first two.



The Personal History of David Copperfield

One of the highlights of the Toronto Film Festival, this umpteenth adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel has it all. Savvy casting that modernizes the tale without betraying its roots, a young but familiar star in Dev Patel, great reviews and a story that's hugely entertaining. An Oscar hopeful opening in the summer, "David Copperfield" should be ideal counter-programming and play for ages.

Greyhound

Ok, here's where you can officially say, "Gee, 2020 sure has a lot of movies with big upside." True, it's not the fourth Avengers movie, but Tom Hanks in a WW II film about an Allied convoy stalked by Nazi U-boats? Tense. Exciting. Classy. This is a flick a lot of adults will want to see. Heck, it's a flick we want to see.

MAY 15



Scoob!

At one point, the animated character Scooby-Doo had the highest Q rating in the world. Literally no one was better known and more beloved. Give that dog a Scooby snack! And give us a new animated spin on the mutt and his mystery-solving pals Shaggy and the gang. It's kid friendly but easily skews older, boasts actors like Zac Efron and Mark Wahlberg jumping in the van (and the promotional circuit) and suddenly you've got a good alternative to Disney's cartoon juggernauts.

Spiral

A new spin on the horror franchise "Saw," this time with Chris Rock and Samuel L. Jackson in starring roles? A dependable moneymaker just got new juice.

The Woman In The Window

Amy Adams stars in this adaptation of the best-selling thriller about an agoraphobic woman who learns way too much about her neighbors. Director Joe Wright knows how to deliver adult-friendly entertainment, the very mid-range hits everyone wants to see more of from the studios. Yes, the summer season is front-loaded with female-centric fare like "Black Widow," "Legally Blonde 3" and "Wonder Woman" so ideally this would arrive in later June/July or August. But it's different enough from them to stand on its own, so we can work with it. Another dependable single or double, at least.

MAY 22

F9 aka Fast and Furious 9 ***

What more do you need? How about John Cena as the baddie? Vin Diesel, Charlize Theron, Michelle Rodriguez, Justin Lin directing and a presumably tension-free set means "Fast & Furious" is far from over. When even the perfunctory spin-off "Hobbes & Shaw" can gross USD \$760 million worldwide, there's no reason to expect any less from "F9," which is a LOT more likely to hit \$1 billion, just like "F7" and "F8."

The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge On The Run ***

Seriously, what took them so long? The first film made USD \$140 million and got great reviews. Since then the TV show continues on its plucky path, a film sequel doubled the box office of the first one, they turned the franchise into a Broadway musical and now, finally we've got "SB-SP3." Awesome counter-programming to "F9?" Not at all. Plenty of folk will want to check out both. You don't need to be a kid or even have a kid to enjoy a little rectangular good cheer. It's a pity they didn't put more room between this and "Scoob!," but both can flourish.

MAY 29

Artemis Fowl

The first Artemis Fowl book was pitched by its author as “Die Hard” with fairies. So this made-for-the-movies kid franchise launched in 2001 was destined for the silver screen. It’s a perennial favorite with boys who snapped up eight books, graphic novel adaptations and the like. Kenneth Branagh directs and he knows splashy. But Disney delayed it and added in 3-D in post. We assume they took the time to do it right, but that’s not a good sign. And kids hate those glasses! Still, the books have a huge draw though it’s more “Percy Jackson” than “Harry Potter.” The curiosity factor is high and if they deliver, the sky is the limit. A real wild card.

Irresistible

Jon Stewart delivers the sort of political comedy we expected from him all along. In “Irresistible,” Steve Carell is a Democratic operative who wants to road test messaging that can work in the heartland. And what better way to do it than helping crusty war veteran Chris Cooper kick some Republican ass in a race for mayor in a small Wisconsin town? Stewart wrote and directed while the all-star cast includes Rose Byrne, Topher Grace, Debra Messing, Natasha Lyonne and a lot of cows.

JUNE 5



Wonder Woman 1984 ***

“Birds of Prey” was made for a dime (ok, USD \$85 million to be exact) and will soon be profitable. “Aquaman” was huge. And “Wonder Woman” had all that and good reviews to boot. It grossed USD \$820 million worldwide, so thank goodness the sequel jumps in time and cannily keeps the sizzling chemistry between star Gal Gadot and eye candy Chris Pine intact. Will it top “Aquaman?” Maybe not, but it will match the original, at the very least. DC’s biggest success story should only get bigger.

JUNE 12

Candyman

A reboot of the cult hit “Candyman,” this time with red-hot Jordan Peele co-writing and co-producing as director Nia DaCosta looks ready to break out with her second feature. Like many of the best horror films, the original “Candyman” had something on its mind, namely race and class. It grossed a modest USD \$25 million, but spawned two sequels. Resting the series for 20

years, choosing Teyonah Parris of "Dear White People" to star, bringing back Tony Todd as the urban legend Candyman and Peele's decision to gentrify the neighborhood in which the story was set all point to this as another smart programmer.

JUNE 19

Soul ***

A Pixar original, with a trailer that teases a story with all the resonance and emotion of "Inside Out." It's great to see them delivering another fresh new story rather than ransacking past successes for sequels. And how easy it was to take such boldness for granted. Well, the cupboard is bare for Pixar after this. They have staked out release dates but haven't named a single new film for 2021 or beyond. What, nothing? Ok, we're ready for "Coco 2."

JUNE 26



Top Gun: Maverick ***

Ka-ching. It's still unclear to us if this is about the new generation of fighter pilots or about Maverick fighting a promotion so he can continue to make like Chuck Yeager and remain a test pilot. In either case, they've been beating the drum on this for ages and it's sure to open big and stay big. The original made USD \$350 million back... in 1986. That's USD \$800 million+ in today's money. "Top Gun: Maverick" would need to pass "Mission Impossible: Fallout" and become the highest grossing film of Cruise's career to hit USD \$800 million. But with July 4 weekend looming and Cruise being a bigger star than ever, he's sure to get much closer than the original.

In The Heights ***

Call us crazy, but this is one of the most exciting possibilities of the year. Mind you, it's hardly a complete roll of the dice. Lin-Manuel Miranda is one of the most recognizable and lauded talents in the world. "In The Heights" was a blockbuster, Tony-winning musical that is one of the 100 longest running Broadway shows in history and toured all over the world. Of course Miranda followed that with the even bigger hit "Hamilton." But everyone involved was savvy: they've held onto that show's film rights, guaranteeing the first chance for people to see a full-on movie adaptation of one of his shows is right here. "In The Heights" has heart and positivity, cross-generational appeal, great songs, a multi-ethnic cast that gives the huge Latin and Hispanic movie-going audience a chance to cheer on their own a la "Black Panther," a delightful trailer and a dash of discussion about inequality. And who doesn't fantasize about winning the lottery?

JULY 3

Minions: The Rise of Gru ***

Did you notice? The “Despicable Me” / “Minions” movies are as big as Marvel and “Star Wars.” They’ve been delivering one flick every two or so years a la the James Bond franchise back in the day and it’s worked like a charm. Long enough to make the return welcome; short enough so you won’t forget them. The launch of “Minions” in 2015 hit USD \$1.1 billion globally and then “Despicable Me 3” grossed another USD \$1 billion in 2017. Now it’s 2020 and they’re back. Anyone expecting anything less than USD \$800 million is a fool. Yet another great example of a huge but under-appreciated franchise ready to make 2020 a success.



Free Guy ***

Remember when Ryan Reynolds was the poor man’s...umm, Ryan Reynolds? He’s got a wise-guy appeal circa “Deadpool” and an everyman vibe thanks to all those years struggling to become the star he was meant to be. Now Reynolds has a new flick with a cool premise: his hero is a bland bank teller who realizes he’s just a character stuck in a brutally violent video game. Not just any character but an NPC (a non-player character) — one of the stock characters that a player can’t control with their joystick. That means he’s got some digital free will. And Reynolds starts to use it. High concept, huge action, the snarky Reynolds humor...yep, another hit.

JULY 10

Ghostbusters: Afterlife ***

With just one good movie to its credit, the “Ghostbusters” franchise sure enjoys a lot of goodwill. It’s spun off comic books, several animated TV shows, a bad sequel, a misfire of a reboot and now this slightly darker spin. Call it “Ghostbusters: The Next Generation” or “Ghostbusters: Stranger Things” or whatever you want. But they’ve got Bill Murray and much of the original cast popping in for cred, a fresh new crop of kids, the sense that stuff could actually get dangerous and undoubtedly lots of humor. With Jason Reitman in charge as co-writer and director, we are ready to have that Ray Parker Jr. jam stuck in our ears for months to come. If this does gross USD \$300 million as we expect, that will be the most yet for the franchise.

Purge 5

The fifth and “final” film in the dependable dystopian franchise. Will it really end, with each movie grossing more money than

the one before? And a TV series that just ended its second season? Not if the bean counters have anything to say about it. But wrapping up this iteration should keep "Purge" fresh enough to score another USD \$125 million or so.

JULY 17



Tenet ***

Christopher Nolan. We don't know any more about it than you do, but... Christopher Nolan. A mysterious, prestige project starring Robert Pattinson and John David Washington, with Kenneth Branagh and Michael Caine for the older folk. And again... did we mention Christopher Nolan is behind this one?

Bob's Burgers: The Movie

We're excited for this jump to the movies by a very popular but relatively unheralded TV cartoon. We also wish it weren't sandwiched between the release of "Minions" and "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" earlier in the month and "Jungle Cruise" one week later. Surely it was made on a dime with a good upside. But it would have been smarter to release it this winter or in August or September or October which each have just one or at most two family friendly releases. So tweak your schedule, Fox/Disney, and don't let this get lost in the shuffle.

JULY 24



Jungle Cruise ***

Dwayne Johnson is the most bankable star in the world right now. Combine him with Emily Blunt and killer IP that everyone knows and you've got a combination of "Romancing The Stone" with the hijinks of "Jumanji" that's a four quadrant monster. And if it's actually good? That doesn't always matter, but it could be the difference between big and really really big.

The French Dispatch

Did you notice? Critic favorite Wes Anderson stepped it up a notch with his most recent live action hit "The Grand Budapest Hotel." A consistent name brand a la Woody Allen, the whimsical writer-director hit a new worldwide high with that film's USD \$160 million worldwide gross. That's more than double his previous high. Toss in the usual bevy of actors ready to work on a dime — Saoirse Ronan, Timothee Chalamet, Elizabeth Moss, Bill Murray (natch) — and whether he settles back down or USD \$100m+ becomes the new normal, "The French Dispatch" is ideal for keeping adults and film buffs happy and going to the movies all year long.

JULY 31

Morbius ***

Another Marvel anti-hero a la "Venom," which made USD \$800 million worldwide. More importantly, another Marvel movie, even if it's via Sony instead of Disney. Jared Leto is joined by Michael Keaton, Jared Harris and Tyrese Gibson. (Not enough attention is paid to the excellent supporting casts that keep Marvel movies serious but fun. It takes a lot of talent to take this stuff with the gravitas they need.) We're used to expecting blockbusters from Disney's comic book characters. Now we can start to expect it from Sony as well.

Barb & Star Go To Vista Del Mar

The trailers are hilariously offbeat, we keep wondering if this is based on characters from "Saturday Night Live" and you have to go back to May 8 to find a pure female-driven film like this (not counting "Wonder Woman"). In short, this is a genuine unknown quantity co-written and starring Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo. It's also the only major female-driven film project for the rest of the year, though women will surely turn out for "Eternals," "West Side Story" and the like. So it's a welcome sign of diversity, a wacky comedy and one that should over-deliver. Everyone pays attention to the films grossing \$800 million

and more, but it's movies like this that keep the lights on for big segments of the movie-going audience and please theaters with 10 to 20 screens to fill.

AUGUST 7

Infinite

Actor Mark Wahlberg stars in a sci-fi tinged suspense directed by Antoine Fuqua. Wahlberg plays a man who discovers his hallucinations are actually glimpses of the past lives he's led. Wahlberg took his stardom to a whole new level with the "Transformers" films, so he's a bigger draw worldwide than ever before. But with details scarce and Fuqua yet to deliver a film that grossed USD \$300 million worldwide, we'll keep our expectations to solid rather than blockbuster. Still, it points to one of the strengths of the 2020 schedule. Every movie is not a pre-sold property you feel like you know inside and out even before you've watched the trailer. Countless films on this list may be based on comics or books or TV shows, but even there we're not sure what they'll be like in terms of tone and style. And that's a welcome change from 2019.

AUGUST 14

Malignant

Don't bet against director James Wan. He delivers hits every...single...time. From the "Saw" franchise to "The Conjuring" to "Insidious" to "Fast & Furious 7" and his biggest challenge ever: turning the punchline of an "Aquaman" movie into a billion dollar smash. Now he's turning his own graphic novel into a new flick. It's about a person with cancer discovering their tumor is actually an alien parasite that gives them superhuman powers to fight evil. The cast is young, rising talent; the budget unknown but on the low side; and the whole vibe is down and dirty. So maybe this is more "Saw" (USD \$100 million) than "The Conjuring" (USD \$300 million). Nonetheless, with Wan you know the film will deliver and his fans will be happy.

The One and Only Ivan ***

Ok, it's a Disney animated film, so that alone has you excited. But there's a lot more to get jazzed about. First, it's based on an award-winning novel by Katherine Applegate that's been a perennial bestseller since it was published in 2012. It tells the story of Ivan, a gorilla who lives in a cage at a Florida mall alongside an old elephant and a dog named Bob. None of them remember how they got there, but the arrival of an abused baby elephant snaps them out of their lethargy. (Yes, it will inspire more animal rights love than any films since "Bambi" and "Dumbo.") One more thing. It's directed by theater talent Thea Sharrock, a big name in the UK whose first movie ("Me Before You") grossed USD \$200 million worldwide on a USD \$20 million budget. Prestige, heart-warming, family friendly, a hugely gifted director just bursting out AND Disney muscle? USD \$300 million is the floor for this one, not the ceiling.

Escape Room 2

"Escape Room" was a devilishly clever little flick, combining the trendy phenom of escape rooms with the classic horror setting of young people trapped in a confined space. Oh and it grossed USD \$150 million worldwide. Again, most folk focus on the potential USD \$1 billion grossers but down and dirty success stories like this potential franchise are just as important. If it turns out they just got lucky the first time, we'll be glad to see it hit USD \$80 million anyway. Nickels and dimes to Disney, but it adds up...and horror fans love to eat popcorn on date night.

AUGUST 21



Bill & Ted Face the Music

Sure, the first two “Bill & Ted” flicks topped out at USD \$40 million. But that was centuries ago, Keanu Reeves is a much bigger star and the characters Bill and Ted have a zeitgeist-y vibe even thirty years later. Plus, they’ve scheduled it perfectly for maximum impact. Midnight screenings for years to come are just the icing on the cake.

AUGUST 28

The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard

The second of three big Ryan Reynolds movies. Sure, we wish the eight week gap between this and “Free Guy” was bigger. (The animated flick “The Croods 2” comes out in December; no problem there, thanks to a four month gap plus a family friendly animated flick being very different from two jokey action flicks.) Nonetheless, the redoubtable Samuel L. Jackson returns alongside Salma Hayek, with Antonio Banderas and Morgan Freeman joining the fun. The original was his first big follow-up to “Deadpool” and by “big” we mean big grosses of USD \$170 million from a small budget of just USD \$30 million. Undoubtedly everyone got more the second time around, but we just hope they spent more on the script. Still, it’s a no-brainer in every sense of the word.

SEPTEMBER 4

Monster Hunter

We almost named this one of the flicks that should gross USD \$300 million worldwide. On the downside, it’s based on a video game. On the plus side, it’s based on a very popular video game and director Paul W.S. Anderson has proven with “Resident Evil” he knows how to deliver in that cursed sub-genre of films. (And hey, “Sonic the Hedgehog” opened strong, didn’t it?) “Monster Hunter” blossomed from a Japanese video game hit with cult appeal to worldwide success via 2018’s blockbuster “Monster Hunter: World.” That makes this Milla Jovovich starrer well timed to capitalize on the 16 year old game’s surge in name recognition. The movie will be made on a dime, it will get terrible reviews and fanboys and fangirls won’t care. If it delivers the goods as far as gamers are concerned, this should click, with Japan and the rest of the world far more important to the bottom line than North America, just like the “Resident Evil” franchise.

SEPTEMBER 11

The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It ***

Eight movies in, “The Conjuring” franchise warms the cockles of our hearts as readily as it scares the bejeezus out of movie-

goers. "Annabelle" and "The Nun" and whatever "The Curse of La Llorna" was meant to be are films that sent this series into all sorts of nutty and profitable directions. But the team is returning to its satanic roots with "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It." Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga are back as the paranormal-investigating couple the Warrens, the story is based on real-life (uh-huh, whatever) and it's got the name brand juice of the original. After its opening week, this cinematic universe will immediately top USD \$2 billion worldwide and counting.

SEPTEMBER 18

The King's Man

A period prequel to the "Kingsman" spoof on James Bond, this doesn't have the lightning in a bottle breakout turn of Taron Egerton. However, it does have an all-star supporting cast led by Ralph Fiennes and a host of British talent. And relative newcomer Harris Dickinson hopes taller can work too in this story of a passionate young man ready to join the nascent Secret Service. The first two films each grossed USD \$400 million worldwide. But this is quite far afield of that modern day romp. Call it a dependable single with chances of being stretched to a double if things go right.

The Mitchells vs The Machines

Is this on your radar? Well, animated flicks from Sony are never on anyone's radar. But they have an impressive track record including everything from "Hotel Transylvania" to "Peter Rabbit" (sort of animated) to "The Smurfs" to "Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs." Oh and the Oscar-winning "Spiderman: Into The Spiderverse," a game-changer if ever there was one. So this unknown quantity marks a big chance for co-writers and co-directors Michael Rianda and Jeff Rowe. It's about time we recognize Sony delivers on a dime, just like Blue Sky did.

Without Remorse

Tom Clancy's thrillers are a staple of movies and tv and the character John Clark is second only to Jack Ryan in terms of popularity. It's a positive sign of the times that Michael B. Jordan will play Clark in this origin story, spelling out how he became the darker side of Ryan's do-gooder hero and one more likely to turn to violence. In the past, Clark has been played by Willem Dafoe and Liev Schreiber. Here Jordan makes the role his own in what could become a potent franchise. It all starts with the murder of his wife and John Clark's thirst for revenge that soon uncovers a much bigger conspiracy. Italian director Stefano Sollima delivered with the TV series "Gomorra" and the film "Sicario: Day of the Soldado" and could become a much bigger name with this one. Jodie Turner-Smith and Jamie Bell are along for the action.

SEPTEMBER 25

The Many Saints of Newark

Truth be told, we're not expecting big things from a prequel to the TV drama "The Sopranos," which ended in 2007. If this were coming out in 2010 instead of 2020, we'd be more excited. Yet why count it out? Surely it will bring adults into the theaters, just like "The Irishman" might have done, given a chance. And on the same release date we've got this and Aaron Sorkin's all-star period drama "The Trial Of The Chicago 7" and quirky Edgar Wright with "Last Night In Soho," a time-traveling fashion flick set in Swinging London. Buzz could build for any of them if a festival slot or industry screenings get people raving. Wright in particular has killer commercial instincts, so until we hear differently, we're going to remain pleasantly intrigued by the upside for all three. Consider this a placeholder for all the modestly budgeted dramas that pepper the schedule.

OCTOBER 2

Bios

Another Tom Hanks film (he's got three this year) and another potential breakout hit. It's directed by Miguel Sapochnik, who just finished executive producing one of the biggest TV shows of all time, "Game Of Thrones." It stars Hanks as a dying inventor and the last man on earth. He builds a robot (played by GoT's Caleb Landry Jones) to keep himself and his dog company as they journey across the U.S. Hanks has a WWII action film, a Western and this. He's not a lock for big grosses anymore, but he's a major star and any one or all three of them could easily score big. For this one, we say think "Cast Away," but with an adorable dog and a robot instead of a volleyball. Oh and Robert Zemeckis is on board as a producer.

Venom 2 ***

Tom Hardy is back as Venom and maybe this time we'll be able to understand the poor guy's dialogue. It doesn't seem to matter. The seeming trainwreck of the original somehow grossed USD \$850 million worldwide. This time, they dumped the original's director, hired Andy Serkis and followed through on the teaser ending by indeed making Woody Harrelson the villain this time around. Hey, if it seems like comic book movies are everywhere, well they are. But once upon a time every other movie was a Western and the Top 10 TV shows of that era... were also filled with Westerns. So this too shall pass... after another decade or so.

OCTOBER 9

Death On the Nile ***

Detective Hercule Poirot and his little gray cells are back for another big screen outing. Kenneth Branagh directed and starred in the all-star "Murder On The Orient Express" to about USD \$350 million worldwide. With another clutch of stars along for the cruise — Gal Gadot, Jennifer Saunders and Dawn French (which is AbFab indeed), Armie Hammer, Annette Bening and so on — do we expect any less this time out? No, we do not. Some day, that insanely baroque moustache will be donated to the Academy Museum, but hopefully not before plenty of sequels to this franchise.

The Witches ***

The Roald Dahl classic gets another big screen adaptation, this time with Anne Hathaway, Chris Rock and Octavia Spencer on board for some kiddie friendly chills. Oh and Robert Zemeckis wrote and directed. This is right in line with his holiday hits "A Christmas Carol" and "The Polar Express." Besides, Zemeckis is right up there when it comes to commercial fare. Plus, it's very well placed on the calendar with "The Mitchells Vs The Machines" out three weeks earlier and no other family competition to interfere with it from now through Halloween and right into mid-November.

OCTOBER 16

Halloween Kills

The 2018 reboot of "Halloween" was everything one could want. It captured the spirit of the original, washed away the memory of all those inferior sequels, showcased Jamie Lee Curtis, added in a clutch of top talent in supporting roles and scared the heck out of people. It also grossed USD \$250 million worldwide. With John Carpenter's blessing, director David Gordon Green and co-screenwriter and fanboy Danny McBride (!) are back with the first of two sequels. Given the critical acclaim their first stab elicited, this is a slam dunk.

Snake Eyes

Well, we'd call this "G.I. Joe: Snake Eyes" since it's the third in the G.I. Joe series. No, we haven't thought about that franchise very much. But the first two films both grossed more than USD \$300 million worldwide and this is an origin story about the enigmatic Snake Eyes. On the downside, the film doesn't include the stars of the first two, like Channing Tatum and Dwayne Johnson or even star power in supporting roles akin to Bruce Willis and Jonathan Pryce. A further worry: they've dumped the actor who played Snake Eyes the first two times around. On the other hand, the character won't be silent and wearing a mask for the whole movie because this is an origin story. With Henry Golding of "Crazy Rich Asians" stepping into the role, you can bet the film will draw in a lot more female fans than the first two. With all those variables, we don't know what to think either, but it's going to be a good test of Golding's potential star power.

OCTOBER 23

Everybody's Talking About Jamie

A smash hit musical in the UK, "Everybody's Talking About Jamie" is the story of a lad in Sheffield who dreams of becoming a drag queen. It's "Billy Elliot," but with the final goal being "RuPaul's Drag Race" rather than the Royal Ballet. The stage musical source material was a widely embraced hit in the UK, where it's still playing in the West End after almost four years. It sounds niche but it's got Disney muscle behind it so don't be surprised if this surprises.

NOVEMBER 6

Eternals ***

Another Marvel movie. Another new launch of a property most people have never heard about. But it worked with "Iron Man" and "Ant-Man" and "Guardians of the Galaxy" and...oh, you get the idea. The all-star cast includes Angelina Jolie, not one but two major players from "Game of Thrones" (Kit Harrington and Richard Madden), Salma Hayek, Gemma Chan and more. As a bonus, the director is Chloe Zhao, making a huge leap from the micro-indie film "The Rider" to one of the biggest movies around.

NOVEMBER 13

Clifford The Big Red Dog

A live-action spin on the adorable and very big canine, Clifford. The picture books are perennial favorites, the property has been an animated TV series and the family friendly flick includes people like John Cleese, Rosie Perez and Kenan Thompson in supporting roles to keep the adults engaged. Paramount has two family friendly films on its schedule this year: "SpongeBob" in May and this in time for Thanksgiving, so they'll have all the reason in the world to sell it right. That's one plus for films not Disney: their studios will be very focused on making them click.

Deep Water

When will Ben Affleck learn? This time, he's not dealing with a gone girl, he's dealing with an open marriage where Affleck is the prime suspect after all his wife's lovers keep dying off. Director Adrian Lyne is back in "Fatal Attraction" territory, it's based on a Patricia Highsmith novel and Ana De Armas will be the femme fatale wife, hot off her turn in the James Bond flick "No Time To Die."

NOVEMBER 20

Godzilla vs Kong ***

Ok, if you're Warner Bros., you might be nervous about this. You want the MonsterVerse franchise to hit and Godzilla and King Kong are key players in that. The first two films were pricey but successful... barely. Then "Godzilla: King of the Monsters" faltered badly and put the whole, elaborate, tie-every-film-into-the-next-one endeavor into question. But if you're an exhibitor, you don't know the budget and you DO know that the pairing of Godzilla and Kong will pack them in for a few weeks no matter what, because it's the kaiju version of "Batman Vs. Superman." Of course you want it to succeed for everyone involved. How else will we get to see Mothra, Rodan, Gamera and the rest, not to mention a cross-over with "Pacific Rim?"

NOVEMBER 25

King Richard

A very intriguing bio-pic with Oscar potential thanks to Will Smith and some likely real world controversy. The father of tennis superstars Serena and Venus Williams is the Richard of the title. He bucked tradition and the demands of the tennis industry by refusing to cash in on his brilliantly talented daughters. He coached them himself and resisted huge amounts of cash pushing them to go pro early and often. Instead, Richard Williams encouraged his daughters to pursue other interests, avoided the punishing sort of schedules that led to burnout for so many others and listened to the entire world telling him he was crazy and ruining their chances. Of course, they became two of the biggest pro athletes of all time, with Serena arguably a GOAT for both men and women's tennis. But this won't be an inspiring tale of real life heroes bucking the odds. Richard and his wife divorced amidst ugly rumours in the tennis world. He's been far less visible since then and suffered multiple strokes. So will the Williams sisters ignore the film or blast it? Will black audiences support Smith or see the movie as darkening one of their brightest successes? Can tennis overcome its box office curse? If it's good and the likely controversy is of the any-publicity-is-good-publicity sort then this could be a strong hit worldwide, where Smith is still a very bankable star (see "Aladdin" and "Suicide Squad"). All sorts of question marks as to how this plays out, but too promising to ignore.

Raya and the Last Dragon ***

When was the last time this happened? Disney has four animated films out in 2020 and none of them are sequels or part of a franchise or even obvious launch pads for a franchise. Only "The One and Only Ivan" has source material (in that case, an acclaimed children's book) while "Onward" and "Soul" and this one are entirely fresh. Of course, like "Frozen" they could spawn sequels but they're not designed for that. This one is almost entirely unknown but we're sure to be a lot more familiar

with the story being told once the release date nears. We do know Awkwafina voices a major character, it's powered by a young woman and the co-directors are getting their first big break. But it's Disney. Pixar has never made a movie that grossed less than USD \$300 million and Disney hasn't released an animated film grossing less than that in a decade. So Disney Animation equals big box office, always has and hopefully always will.

DECEMBER 18

Coming 2 America ***

This year has plenty of pre-sold movies, the sort of franchises and familiar properties that give studios and exhibitors a sense of security. But unlike 2019, many of these projects have been rested long enough to make you actually look forward to their return. "Legally Blonde," "Top Gun," "SpongeBob," "Candyman" and the like don't make you think, "Another one? Already?" That's especially true for the 30+ year gap between "Coming To America" and the cleverly titled sequel "Coming 2 America." Eddie Murphy has left grumpy middle age to become a beloved elder statesman and the film is bursting with great names like Leslie Jones, Tracy Morgan, James Earl Jones, Wesley Snipes and of course Arsenio Hall. The original was a huge hit, grossing USD \$288 million. But that was so long ago it's worth adjusting for inflation. In today's dollars, it grossed the equivalent of USD \$650 million. Topping the original will be a piece of cake. Immigrants: they get the job done.

Dune ***

Dozens of sci-fi novel bestsellers, comics, one cultish film disaster from the 1980s and two quite successful TV miniseries in 2000 and 2003 comprise the 50+ year old "Dune" franchise that began in 1965 with Frank Herbert's all-time classic original novel. Combine that potentially huge audience with director Denis Villeneuve ("Arrival") and star Timothée Chalamet and you've got a big holiday film. In the universe-building world that we live in, they're already launching a TV series spin-off. Weirdly, Villeneuve says this will be a two-part story but they didn't film both at once and no sequel is listed as in the works. You'd think it would be scheduled for the following Christmas a la "The Lord Of The Rings," especially since the novel is convoluted and the four hour+ miniseries from 2000 barely covered it all. But he who controls the spice controls the universe and Villeneuve controls the spice of this enduring franchise (see the source material for that reference). We hope to get addicted and that the sequel/part two can't come soon enough.

West Side Story ***

Director Steven Spielberg. One of the most popular musicals of all time. Hot young talent Ansel Elgort as Tony, newcomer Rachel Zegler in the star-is-born role of Maria and Rita Moreno along for the ride because who would be dumb enough not to give Moreno a role in this? Movie musicals that aren't animated can hardly be called a sure thing. But this is.

DECEMBER 23

The Croods 2 ***

The first tale of the cave-man family the Croods grossed USD \$500 million worldwide. The voice cast including Nicolas Cage, Catherine Keener, Emma Stone, Ryan Reynolds and Cloris Leachman is all back for another go-around. Can't miss.

Tom and Jerry

The eternal struggle between cat and mouse that is Hanna-Barbera's Tom & Jerry gets another stab at big screen glory with this combination of live action and animation. It's an origin story, with the mouse Jerry determined to drive off a new family moving into his home...until they adopt a stray cat named Tom to drive him off. Fine and good. But why did they have to schedule this on the same day as "The Croods 2?" Sure, it's the holidays and more than one family film can succeed. But with an entire month's gap between "Clifford The Big Red Dog" and these two bites of catnip for the kids, one of them should have plopped down in mid-December. And that should have been this.

DECEMBER 25

The Last Duel

This may be an Oscar hopeful platforming in December for a January of 2021 wide release. But it's a period drama directed by Ridley Scott. The screenplay is by Oscar winners Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. And Damon co-stars with Adam Driver as a prince forced by the king to duel with a neighbor he accuses of defiling the prince's wife. Based on a true story, the incident became famous as the last officially sanctioned duel in France.

News of the World

It's a big, big year for Tom Hanks. For a brief period he threatened to settle into eminence grise supporting roles. Now Hanks has three good films, nicely spaced apart, quite different in genre and style and all promising to deliver for adult audiences. This one is a western based on an acclaimed best-selling novel. Hanks plays Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd, a veteran of three wars including the just-ended Civil War. He spends his days traveling from town to town in Texas, reading out/performing the news of the day from newspapers he carries with him. A loner, Kidd reluctantly agrees to take a young orphan named Johanna 400 miles away to her remaining relatives after her immediate family is killed by a Native American tribe called the Kiowas. The only problem? Johanna has been raised by the Kiowas as one of their own, speaks no English and keeps trying to take off and rejoin them. Think "True Grit" in terms of watching a crusty old man be won over by a spirited child. Think Oscar.

The Tomorrow War ***

Another film not on anyone's radar but sure to be in high demand come Christmas Day. Chris Pratt of "Guardians of the Galaxy" gets all serious on us in this near-future sci-fi flick about alien invasions. To fight back, scientists on Earth figure out a way to draft soldiers... from the past. So you fight in Vietnam, die... and then get brought back to life so you can fight again? Gee, thanks! This is Pratt's debut as a producer and director Chris McKay's debut as a live action helmer after being a key player in "Robot Chicken" on TV and directing "The Lego Batman Movie" on film. The planets are aligned on this one.

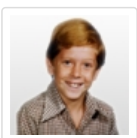
... AND THE SURPRISE HITS

Can you guess what we haven't included? A lot! Breakout films from festivals like Cannes and Venice that aren't even known yet. Indie films that will pop. Faith-based movies like "I Still Believe." Prestige pics that could take off, like Daniel Kaluuya in a biopic about the Black Panthers and Nicholas Hoult in a neo-Western by Taylor Sheridan. Documentaries that are proven (and long-running) winners on a modest scale. British and French and German and Spanish and Latin movies that audiences will want to see. Big budget Hollywood-style spectacles from China and India and Korea and Japan that are increasingly popular worldwide. So if you're based in Europe or Asia, you could easily add another 10 or 20 major films to this list. And if you're in North America, those international movies are increasingly bringing in audiences day and date pegged to their domestic releases.

So when someone disses movie-going and insists it's about to die out, remember this: movie-going is bigger than ever worldwide and has plenty of room to grow in China, India and Africa. In North America, movie-going is a mature business. But it's kept pace with inflation and population growth for five decades and counting. And that's with direct competition from the very same movies they promote, movies that are easier to see than ever thanks to cable, DVD, streaming, rentals, on demand and so on whether it's on a giant home screen or a mobile phone.

Exhibitors didn't maintain their audience against all that by default. They have dramatically improved the movie-going experience over the years with innovations like multiplexes, high quality picture and sound (thanks THX), big screen formats like IMAX, stadium seating, digital prints, reserved seating, monthly passes and more. So movie-going in North America probably won't explode ever again. But with persistence and creativity, it will remain hugely and consistently popular for decades to come. Any one year might be up or down from the year before, especially when a potential worldwide pandemic could throw off movie-going for months to come. But take the long view and you will see exhibitors delivering year after year as movie-going remains a great value that audiences appreciate.

And predictions are risky because you never, ever know where the next hit will come from.



Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is an award-winning writer who covers all areas of the entertainment industry as a critic, feature writer and analyst for print, TV, radio and podcasts. He has contributed extensively to Huffington Post, New York Post, New York Daily News and many other publications. Giltz is the co-host of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly entertainment news podcast.

Follow me

