



The Gross: The Hits, The Flops: The Summer That Ate Hollywood

By Peter Bart

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The Gross is an all-access pass to the movers, shakers, and fakers who make Hollywood run. Tinseltown is an edgy place where risk-taking is a way of life—and the risks now run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Summertime, when the studios unfurl their most expensive and effects-laden "tent-pole pictures," has become the only season in which Hollywood makes money, and so, as this book illustrates, the summer season provides an ideal microcosm for scrutinizing the mega-budget-driven revolution that has forever changed the movie business. Bart interviews all the key players, including studio executives, producers, directors, and stars, to show how creativity and commerce hang in a dangerous balance in the new Hollywood.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In the summer of 1998, as far as Hollywood was concerned, nothing went the way it was supposed to. As Peter Bart recaps that season:

A cheaply made gross-out comedy generated twice the revenues of a Steven Spielberg high-concept adventure; two pricey asteroid films collided, yet neither suffered damage; Jim Carrey made a hit movie that didn't offer a single laugh; Eddie Murphy buried his hard edge long enough to make two successful, warm-and-cuddly family films; Harrison Ford made a love story playing opposite a self-avowed lesbian; and finally, defying the mythology of the "youth demos," two stars in their sixties, Robert Redford and Warren Beatty, enjoyed yet another warm moment in the sun.

Bart is a seasoned observer of the film industry both as studio executive (holding seats at Paramount and MGM/UA) and as the editor in chief of *Variety* and *Daily Variety*. His insider's perspective, and his ability to gain access to the major players in the business, serve him well here. *The Gross* is filled with juicy behind-the-scenes stories on how certain summer blockbusters got made and positioned for release--even though the book could strongly benefit from both an index, to make finding information on particular films easier, and information on its sources, to determine exactly how much of the story is Bart's original legwork and how much comes from the trades. Along the way, he sketches a grim portrait of an industry whose leaders have become increasingly frustrated with the high cost of filmmaking; even when they're making fun-filled romps like *The Mask of Zorro* and *Armageddon*, people at the studios don't seem to be enjoying themselves. Bart manages to cover almost every major summer release of '98 with enough detail to hold readers' interest, so while *The Gross* may not be the ultimate overview of the film business, it's a captivating snapshot of an industry in flux. --Ron Hogan

From Publishers Weekly

In 1969, William Goldman penned *The Season*, the quintessential insider's guide to the triumphs and failures of one Broadway season?but no author has since managed to do the same for Hollywood. Who better to attempt it than Bart, a former studio executive at Paramount, MGM/UA and Lorimar and currently editor-in-chief of *Variety*? Here Bart offers a savvy, gossipy, nuts-and-bolts look at the corporate machinations behind the summer films of 1998, a season of extravagant hype, box-office records and corporate disquiet that spotlighted what he calls the "dysfunctional economics of the movie industry." He divides his book into three sections: Genesis, a rundown of executives at the major studios and an outline of 11 hotly anticipated summer pictures, *Armageddon* to *The X-Files*; *The Reckoning*, a week-by-week listing of box office grosses for the 18 weeks of the summer season; and *The Fallout*, an assessment of why executives have grown increasingly wary of taking risks in a market dominated by blockbusters. Recounting how each film was put together and sold to the public, he relates chilling anecdotes of studio interference and moneymen making artistic decisions. As Bart shows little interest in the quality of these films, however, his book seems written primarily for the executives pulling the strings (for instance, the box office failure of *Godzilla* is largely attributed to a backlash against the mega-prerelease hype and rushed release date rather than the generic substance of the film). Whether or not the summer of 1998 marked a major turning point for Hollywood is debatable, but Bart has that rare bird's-eye view of the business that allows him to discern, even in this one fairly random crop of movies, the economic forces shaping American cinema.

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From Library Journal

In lively and instructive fashion, Variety's editor-in-chief examines a moviegoing season that seems like yesterday because it was. Via interviews with actors, directors, studio executives, producers, and writers, Bart traces the genesis, development, and marketing of, in particular, The Truman Show, Armageddon, Bulworth, Godzilla, There's Something About Mary, Lethal Weapon IV, The Mask of Zorro, Small Soldiers, Deep Impact, Saving Private Ryan, and Six Days, Seven Nights. We witness the success or failure of these and other films during 18 summer weeks and learn how special effects, star salaries, cooperative ventures, and merchandising deals compromise studio profits. Cinema students as well as casual moviegoers will question some of Bart's conclusions. As special effects movies are not a "distinct genre," and Anthony Hopkins and Antonio Banderas are major stars. And occasionally facts are wrong (e.g., Splendor in the Grass was released in 1961, not 1966). These caveats aside, The Gross is a fascinating inside look at filmmaking that leaves one wondering how anything cohesive is ever projected on the big screen. For public and academic libraries and performing arts collections. A Kim Holston, American Institute for Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters, Malvern, PA

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Users Review

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