

Trailer Tracking, Super Bowl Edition: 'John Carter,' 'The Avengers,' 'Battleship,' 'GI Joe 2: Retaliation'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 8, 2012 - 11:45am

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CHICAGO – Aside from the whole football thing, Superbowl Sunday has always been known as the launch-pad for some of the best commercials in the world and Hollywood has traditionally used the event as the launch-pad for the annual marketing blitzes for their best, brightest, and most expensive films of the year. (Although, in years' past, Hollywood has debated just how cost-effective these high-priced Superbowl ads really are.)

So, how did the 2012 Superbowl movie ads stack up? There were definitely some hits and misses. "The Lorax" and "The Dictator" teasers were entertaining, but there was nothing substantially new in either commercial – it was just recycled footage from earlier trailers. ("The Lorax" seemingly wants to get as much mileage as possible from its "THAT's a woman?" joke, "The Dictator" just lobbed in an easy "I bought NBC" gag.) That, more or less, only left four films that debuted any significant footage - "John Carter," "The Avengers," "Battleship," and "GI Joe 2: Retaliation."

How did the new trailers stack up? We'll give you the play-by-play and... insert clichéd football metaphor here. Basically, we'll tell you what we liked and what we didn't, what worked and what flopped. Enjoy.

Movie: "John Carter"

Best Part of the Trailer: There are some fantastic visual landscapes on display.

Worst Part of the Trailer: While fantastic, those landscapes just aren't that interesting.

OUR TAKE: I've been holding off on this, but here goes - I have finally reached the moment where I'm comfortable admitting that I am very, very nervous about "John Carter".

But how did we get here? "John Carter" should be a slam-dunk. It's, essentially, the first live-action Pixar film (yes, I know it's "technically" under the Disney banner, but c'mon); it's an epic space adventure based on a classic work of pulp fiction; and it's directed by Andrew Stanton, the card-carrying genius behind "Finding Nemo" and "WALL-E." Andrew Stanton directing a "John Carter" movie should be as much of a no-brainer as Brad Bird directing a "Mission: Impossible" movie. It should be as close to a sure thing as Hollywood can get.

So, with all that in mind, why does it feel like the world just doesn't really give a damn about "John Carter"? Who is to blame for this growing sense of apathy about what, in theory, should be a very cool movie?

At the moment, it's easiest to blame whoever has been handling the marketing for "John Carter" so far, particularly whoever was responsible for the first trailers. The initial trailers and even this new "extended Superbowl teaser" are just ridiculously inert. They're just not exciting at all. And, granted, lots of exciting things are apparently happening in these trailers – battles and gladiatorial contests and a whole lot of jumping, jumping, jumping – and yet, when you watch them, it's like drinking a glass of warm milk. My pace barely quickens and I quickly realize that not even the most rock-opera-ed version of Zeppelin's "Kashmir" around is enough to get me into a movie theatre these days.

So what's wrong with these "John Carter" trailers? First off, they all seem to place this huge value on the import and power of the name "John Carter", which... is a huge mistake. 90% of the viewing public has no awareness of literary pulp heroes of the 1910s, so announcing that "hey, everyone, they finally made a John Carter movie!" means almost nothing to a large bulk of the world. The Superbowl trailer spends half its running time pulling back into this huge mosaic of images spelling out "John Carter", as if they're revealing a secret or announcing something shocking, and it's just not the case. When the title is revealed, I think most people are just sitting back and giving the most natural

response imaginable – “Well, who’s John Carter?” And what REALLY annoys me about the Disney marketing team is that they’re COMPLETELY FAILING to address that question.

WHO IS John Carter? THAT is what the trailers should be telling us at this point. The “JC” trailers have been extremely focused on showing us scenes of rich visual lushness and... I hate to say it, but they’re not landing. People aren’t that impressed. They look GREAT, but they’re nothing groundbreaking and more than one person has commented to me about how much the gladiator scenes remind them of the Geonosis gladiator scenes in “Star Wars: Attack of the Clones”. (This Superbowl teaser also includes a moment of Carter hijacking a huge gun to shoot down a spaceship with huge sails that looks remarkably like Luke Skywalker blowing up Jabba’s sail barge in “Return of the Jedi”.) I hate admitting this, but the imagery in “John Carter”, so far, is not convincing audiences that this is an event movie worth seeing. So, why – why, why, why – has Disney not changed tactics and begun promoting the STORY of “John Carter”? Why are they not answering that question – “Who is John Carter?”

Because I think they could get some traction there. Taking a quick poll of my non-fanboy-ish friends and family, I’ve found that a big portion of them are just stymied about what the heck the movie is about. All they’ve seen are a big helping of very expensive, very disparate images and a gladiator fight right out of “Attack of the Clones”. The word “confusing” came up more than once. Heck, maybe if you actually explained why Carter can jump around like a Mario Brother – I’ve heard it’s a reaction to Mars’ lighter gravitational forces... not that they’ve said anything about it in the trailers – you might draw some more people in or convince them that, in theory, this movie is a much, much grander and more thoughtful production than something like “The Chronicles of Riddick”. Or maybe, since the movie is named after its lead character, if you ever gave Taylor Kitsch more than two lines of dialogue per trailer, you might even get some people interested in why this John guy was considered charismatic enough to warrant his own movie in the first place.

Put the albino ape away, Disney. If you don’t start forcibly TELLING people why they should give a damn about who John Carter is and why his story is worth seeing, I have a bad feeling that “John Carter” is going to be Disney’s biggest sci-fi misfire since “The Black Hole”.

TRAILER OUTLOOK: Not great. Lots of expensive toys on display, but I don’t really want to play with any of them.

Movie: “The Avengers”

Best Parts of the Trailer: Hulk smash!; nice shots of the Avengers assembling; some very decent superhero smackdown FX; palpable sense of fun

Worst Parts of the Trailer: Chris Hemsworth’s hair looked WAY better in the “Thor” movie; when it reminded us that it isn’t May yet...

OUR TAKE: My number one concern when they announced that they were going to do a live-action “Avengers” movie was that, due to the crush of characters and Marvel Studios’ notoriously tight purse strings, that we’d be rewarded with two hours of superheroes bickering while almost never using their superpowers. And that’s not what I wanted. Heck, that’s not what anyone wants from an “Avengers” movie. If I’m going to see a movie with Captain America, the Hulk, Thor, and Iron Man, I want to see them hovering, jumping, repulsing, and smashing in almost every scene they’re in. I feared that most of the movie would be quippy exposition scenes and we’d get maybe one action scene per story act. The lack of Hulk screentime in the earlier teasers slightly reinforced that fear, although, to be fair, you can’t expect teaser trailers to give away ALL the big surprises (or to even have all of the requisite FX done yet).

But I’m pleased to say that the extended “Avengers” Superbowl trailer... it’s as if writer/director Joss Whedon was speaking directly to me, telling me, “Dear lord, calm down, nerd boy. You’re worrying about nothing.”

“The Avengers” teaser was, easily, my favorite clip to come out of this year’s Superbowl. It just looks like fun. It’s everything that the “John Carter” trailer is not. Granted, that’s not entirely fair. The world at large already knows who Captain America and his pals are (thanks to decades of popularity and some big recent movies of their own), so we already have a connection to the characters. They don’t need to be introduced in the way that John Carter needs to be introduced. But, that being said, “The Avengers” teaser is littered with moments where I found myself either holding my breath, grinning like a madman, or rewinding the video, so I could slow it down frame by frame. This is a trailer that knows how to take something as overdone as the idea of “superhero movie” and repackage it in a way that really feels like something new.

The trailer does a very skillful job at balancing a lot of moving parts. It opens on a solemn note with Samuel L. Jackson telling us that the “world has changed” and that they’re “hopelessly outgunned”... which is perfect. If you’re going to assemble a murderer’s row of superheroes for one big adventure, the occasion SHOULD be dire and filled with pomp and circumstance. (Although that melodramatic tone is perhaps undercut by, one of my favorite parts of the trailer, the cute Asian extra in explicably wearing bunny ears that you can see running from explosions at the 0:05 second mark.) And then, after a series of establishing shots for the characters, Sam’s Nick Fury tells us “It’s time” and we suddenly get what we came for – big-time action and, most importantly, footage we haven’t seen before. And “The Avengers” team definitely delivered on both accounts.

We get a glimpse of Loki’s army of henchmen falling from the sky to wreck havoc in New York (theories are still swirling around the web regarding their true identity). We get shots of the team fighting TOGETHER, which is the whole reason the movie was made in the first place. We see Iron Man, not just flying, but fighting, and fighting hard. (His assent into the enemy forces at the 0:35 mark reminds me of the epic final flight sequence in Whedon’s “Serenity” for some reason.) We even get some unexpected treasures, like the shot of Jeremy Renner’s Hawkeye lining up a shot while plunging off a building, which amazingly makes him look just as cool as the guys with actual superpowers. And the final “Avengers Assembling” moment at the 0:44 second mark... again, THAT shot is why the movie was made in the first place and it’s a beautiful little piece of iconography that just sells the movie as an experience in 3 seconds flat. And it’s even capped off with a pretty solid Tony Stark quip (reminding you that this is going to be a decidedly more cheeky experience than “Dark Knight Rises”) and the first really

fantastic shot of the Hulk losing his mind on some enemy warplanes.

This is a teaser that actually knows how to tease and it's a credit to "The Avengers" team that, in one minute of footage, they found a way to sum up the appeal of the movie without giving the whole thing away for free.

TRAILER OUTLOOK: Squeee. Seriously. That looks like so much more fun than trying to decipher what Tom Hardy is saying through a respirator mask for three hours.

Movie: "Battleship"

Best Part of the Trailer: Isn't it kind of cool that something this bat-**** crazy actually exists?

Worst Parts of the Trailer: The fact that the filmmakers seem intent on claiming that this is an original film and not just a Glee-style "mash-up" of previous terrible action movies; the idea that some studio actually bought the pitch "Gambit and Rihanna Save the World!"; That no one ever utters the phrase "J-7, mother-****er!"

OUR TAKE: WOW.

Just... wow. Where... wow... where to begin? I have a lot of respect for Peter Berg as a filmmaker, so there's this tough little space, deep down inside of my brain, that is convinced that SOMEHOW "Battleship" will turn out to be the surprisingly fun sleeper hit of the summer. But that little nugget of defiance shrinks exponentially any time I actually see any footage from "Battleship".

Honestly, what the hell was that? The "Battleship" Superbowl trailer is such a schizophrenic mess that it's hard to not feel like you're being Punk'd while watching it. What is this movie?? It opens with a scene of a circular robot wheel running amok on a freeway, which I'm pretty sure is just unused footage from "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen" (it doesn't help that the trailer IMMEDIATELY declares to its audience that this film comes Hasbro, the company that also owns the "Transformers"). We then get Michael Bay-esque shots of projectiles slamming into a city, destroying it, as a voice-over (that I'm pretty sure was lifted directly from "Deep Impact") tells us, "We're looking at an extinction level event." Then there are these mecha-suited aliens that are right out of "Halo" and a force-field dome situation that reeks of Stephen King's "Under the Dome" and... sigh... how the HELL does this have ANYTHING to do with a peg-game about sinking battleships?!

They barely even feature the sea battle aspect of the film until the 0:40 second mark of the 1:00 trailer and then it's just a big collage of explosions, more scenes of action taking place nowhere near the water, and people screaming "FIRE EVERYTHING!" It's a big bloody mess. And, again, man, Taylor Kitsch, I loved you in "Friday Night Lights" and I'm sorry about my "John Carter" gripes, but you don't even have the brand awareness of a Shia LaBeouf. You are still an unproven commodity in the film world, so the idea that audiences should be thrilled that you're the "inside man" who's going to save humanity – with pop star Rihanna as your Doc Holliday – how are we not supposed to laugh at that? This whole film looks like someone took the contents of Michael Bay's office and sent it over to the "Will It Blend" guys on YouTube. All that the trailers for "Battleship" have told us so far is that this is a film with no sense of identity. Wait, strike that, this is a film with FIFTEEN different senses of identity and none of them particularly play nicely with each other.

Maybe Peter Berg can pull it off. I'd LOVE to be wrong on this one. But, man, the trailers for "Battleship" just keep getting progressively funnier and funnier, and for all of the wrong reasons.

TRAILER OUTLOOK: AMAZING... until I realized that it wasn't a "Funny or Die" parody. Then I got sad. VERY sad...

Movie: "GI Joe 2: Retaliation"

Best Parts of the Trailer: The opening Jay-Z line is pretty killer; Cobra Commander looks MUCH better than he did in the first "GI Joe" movie

Worst Parts of the Trailer: Only major new trailer without an expanded version online; way too many ninjas; can't yet tell if Bruce Willis' presence in this movie is cool or campy

OUR TAKE: This was a short one compared to the other three trailers – clocking in at only 0:31 seconds – so there's not as much to praise or gripe about.

Upon first glance, it seems interesting that director John M. Chu is abandoning so many elements from Stephen Sommers' 2009 "GI Joe" flick. Granted, Sommers' "Rise of Cobra" didn't exactly set the world on fire, but it was, apparently, successful enough to warrant a sequel, so it's a little odd that the franchise has made the decision to reinvent itself so drastically in "GI Joe 2: Retaliation". Aside from Snake Eyes, Storm Shadow, and the bumper sticker-friendly Cobra insignia, almost no other recognizable elements from "Rise of Cobra" show up in the "Retaliation" teaser. Which may or be a good thing.

What does Chu give us to gawk at in the "GI Joe 2" trailer? A whole lot of ninja moments – Snake Eyes' apprentice Jinx apparently has a large role. We see the Cobra Commander finally actually looking like the Cobra Commander (Joseph Gordon-Levitt's proto-Commander costume in "Rise of Cobra" was HORRIBLE), and we see big Cobra banners flying at the White House, which seemingly pays off the "Zartan impersonating the American president" storyline from "Rise" – a subplot that had almost NOTHING to do with the rest of the movie except for

setting up sequel fodder. And, perhaps most notably, we get Dwayne Johnson once again revisiting his new role as an action movie franchise late-comer/revitalizer (he pulled the same duty on "Fast Five" and the upcoming "Journey 2"). Johnson's scenes look fun – his opening Jay-Z quote sets a nice tone – but it does feel a little awkward that the GI Joe franchise needed to do such a major revamp after only one movie.

And the final Bruce Willis tag? Willis' most recent action roles – in "Red" and "Cop Out" – have all been fairly precious, fairly jokey, and fairly self-aware in tone. So, when Bruce shows up at the end of the "GI Joe 2" teaser, my knee-jerk reaction is to smile and smirk. Which, again, may or may not be a good thing. If Willis' role is to garner some laughs and make me smile, he can do that in his sleep. But, if I'm supposed to regard him as the same level of action bad-ass as Dwayne Johnson or Ray Park... eh, those days have passed.

The Superbowl teaser is well put together, but I just haven't seen enough of "GI Joe 2: Retaliation" yet to decide whether or not the franchise reboot is working. In the next trailer, I'd like to see a little bit more bridging material to show me how "Retaliation" evolved out of "Rise of the Cobra" because, right now, the transition seems a little too fast and furious. (See what I did there?)

TRAILER OUTLOOK: There's some promise here, but we need to see more footage before we openly declare "Yo Joe!"

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