

The 10 Most Anticipated Movies of Early 2009

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 6, 2009 - 7:58pm

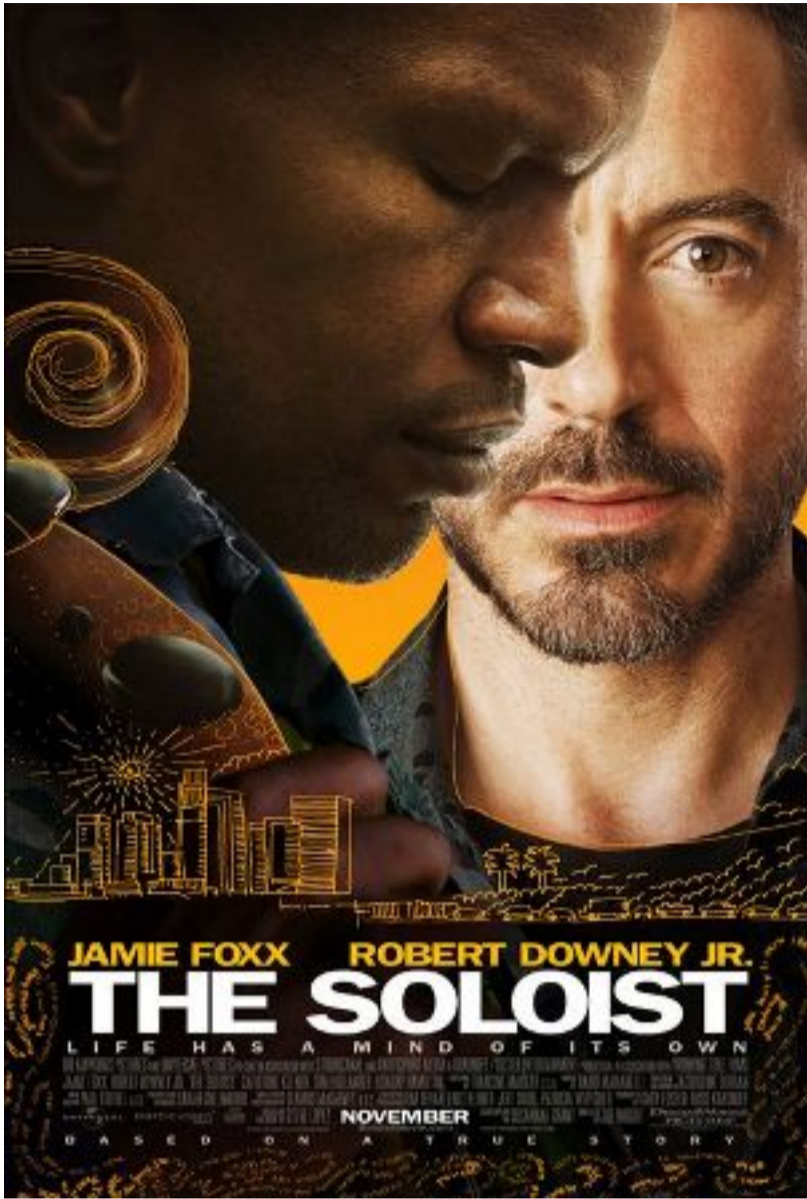
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CHICAGO – Believe it or not, there *are* movies worth marking your calendar for between Oscar season and the big summer blockbusters of 2009.

Over the next few months, the buzz for films like “X-Men Origins: Wolverine,” “Star Trek,” “Angels & Demons,” “Terminator: Salvation,” “Night at the Museum 2,” “Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs,” “Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen,” “Public Enemies,” “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,” “New Moon,” and Pixar’s “Up” is going to become absolutely deafening, but there are well over a hundred flicks hitting the multiplex before those box office juggernauts take center stage and, believe it or not, a handful are actually worth your time.

The first third of 2008 produced quality films in “Cloverfield,” “In Bruges,” “The Visitor,” “George A. Romero’s Diary of the Dead,” “Snow Angels,” “Redbelt,” and “Paranoid Park”. Which, granted, was not an overwhelming display of memorable filmmaking, but the point is that even in a weak season like the one we were about to start at this point last year, there were still a few gems. So, the question is - what will the early season gems be in 2009?

Looking into our movie-loving crystal ball, we’ve tried to target the ten films from January to April 2009 that we might conceivably still be talking about twelve months from now. While we recognize that there are audiences out there with countdown clocks for the release of “Jonas Brothers: The 3-D Concert Experience” and “Hannah Montana: The Movie,” we are *not* members of that audience. And movies like “Crank 2: High Voltage”, “The Pink Panther 2,” and “The Fast and Furious” clearly have loyal fan followings but, if those sequels are even halfway decent, we’ll be surprised and satisfied. No, the idea was to try and find the 5-star films based on pedigree, plot, previews, potential, and assuming that a certain legal battle surrounding “Watchmen” goes the way that we think it will. So, without further ado...



The Soloist, from Paramount Pictures, opens on April 24th, 2009.

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

10. "The Soloist"

Release Date: April 24th

Cast: Robert Downey Jr., Jamie Foxx, Catherine Keener, Stephen Root, and Tom Hollander

Writer: Susannah Grant

Director: Joe Wright

Plot: The comeback kid of 2008, Robert Downey Jr., plays Steve Lopez, an LA Times journalist who discovers a former classical music prodigy living on the streets. Based on the true story, "The Soloist" details Lopez's attempts at bringing the talented musician, played by Jamie Foxx, back to his feet.

Reason To Get Excited: Hanging onto the top ten by its dirty fingernails, "The Soloist" would have ranked a lot higher on this list if it hadn't been bumped from the 2008 Oscar season for undisclosed reasons. That's usually a bad sign. In fact, nearly everyone involved with making this drama seems to be distancing themselves from it, with Downey getting more press for his work on "Sherlock Holmes" and barely anyone talking about "The Soloist". But there's too much potential in that cast, the Oscar-nominated writer of "Erin Brokovich," and the talented director of "Pride and Prejudice" and "Atonement" to completely dismiss this project sight unseen. Even the gorgeous score on the official site hints at a project that definitely should work. Yes, this could be the misstep in the Downey comeback and Foxx hasn't really been stellar since he won his Oscar, but we're not ready to give up on "The Soloist" yet.



The International, from Sony Pictures, opens on February 13th, 2009.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

9. "The International"

Release Date: February 13th

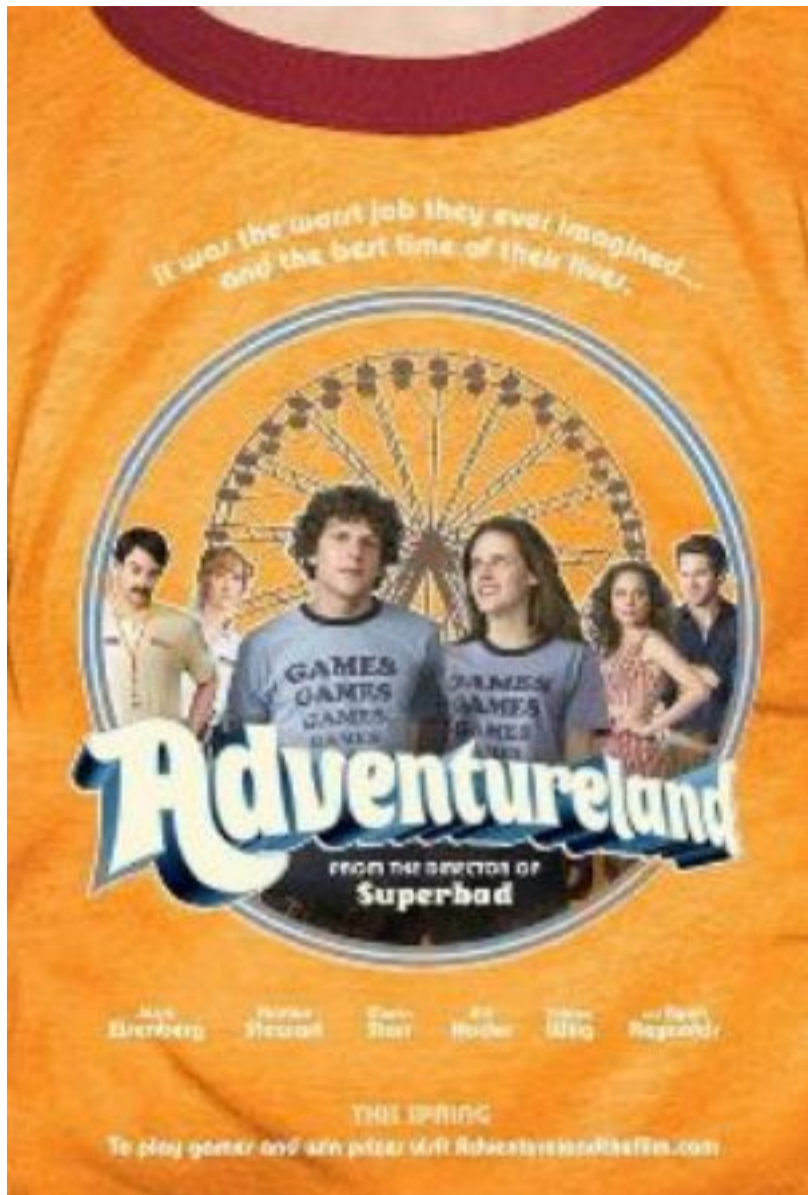
Cast: Clive Owen, Naomi Watts, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Ulrich Thomasen, Jack McGee, and Brian F. O'Byrne

Writer: Eric Singer

Director: Tom Tykwer

Plot: Clive Owen plays an Interpol agent working with a Manhattan Assistant District Attorney (Naomi Watts) in an effort to bring down one of the world's most powerful banks. International espionage, worldwide cover-ups, and war-profiteering serve as the backdrop for what could be the action thriller of the winter.

Reason To Get Excited: Three words - Tykwer, Watts, Owen. The director of "Run Lola Run" and the stars of "Children of Men" and "Eastern Promises". These names should give everyone reason to get excited. Why not higher on the list? Well, the preview looks a little goofy and early February is not often known for stellar action. Case in point - this weekend last year saw the release of the horrible "Jumper". It seems unlikely that Owen, Watts, and Tykwer would make something that disposable with "The International," but we'll keep our fingers crossed that this will be the perfect Valentine's Day alternative to "He's Just Not That Into You" that we think it will be.



Adventureland, from Miramax Films, opens on March 27th, 2009.

Photo credit: Miramax Films

8. "Adventureland"

Release Date: March 27th

Cast: Jesse Eisenberg, Kristen Stewart, Martin Starr, Bill Hader, Kristen Wiig, Margarita Levieva, and Ryan Reynolds

Writer/Director: Greg Mottola

Plot: In the summer of 1987, a recent college grad (Jesse Eisenberg) takes a useless job at a local amusement park as he prepares for the real world.

Reason To Get Excited: Most people still think that Judd Apatow directed "Superbad," but it was actually the talented Greg Mottola who helmed that hilarious flick and his comic follow-up looks like it has a similar charm. Eisenberg was great in "The Squid and the Whale," Kristen Stewart has always hinted at potential better than the movies she chooses, and Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig are currently the most talented male and female comedian on "Saturday Night Live". There are several promising comedies in early 2009, but "Adventureland" is one of the most appealing.



Anna Faris as Brandi and Seth Rogen as Ronnie in Warner Bros. Pictures' and Legendary Pictures' comedy "Observe and Report," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

Photo credit: Peter Sorel

7. "Observe and Report"

Release Date: April 10th

Cast: Anna Faris, Seth Rogen, Ray Liotta, Patton Oswalt, and Michael Pena

Writer/Director: Jody Hill

Plot: Rogen plays the bi-polar mall security guard Ronnie Barnhardt, who's called in to stop a flasher from destroying his mall, but he needs

the help of a surly detective, played by the often-funny and usually surly Ray Liotta. Also, the great Patton Oswalt plays a character named "Cinnabon Man". 'Nuff said.

Reason To Get Excited: Seth Rogen and Anna Faris are two of the most reliably effective comedians working today. Don't get me wrong. Faris has made some BAD career choices. But the same can't be said for Rogen, who gave two of the best performances of his career last year in "Pineapple Express" and "Zack and Miri Make a Porno". And the great concept sounds like "Paul Blart: Mall Cop," but, you know, funny. We're choosing to ignore that writer/director Jody Hill made the buzzed-about, though ultimately disappointing "The Foot Fist Way". Everyone needs to start somewhere.



Monsters vs. Aliens, from DreamWorks Pictures, opens on March 27th, 2009.

Photo credit: DreamWorks Pictures

6. "Monsters vs. Aliens 3D"

Release Date: March 27th

Voice Cast: Reese Witherspoon, Seth Rogen, Hugh Laurie, Paul Rudd, Kiefer Sutherland, Rainn Wilson, Will Arnett, and Stephen Colbert

Writer: Credits TBD

Director: Rob Letterman & Conrad Vernon

Plot: It's all there in the title. It turns out the government has been keeping a secret prison, where they lock up all the world's straight-out-of-a-B-movie monsters. When aliens attack the planet Earth, the monsters, including the newest member of the team, a woman recently turned into a giant, are the only ones who can save the day - Dirty Dozen-style, only, you know... for kids! And it's all in 3D!

Reason To Get Excited: This one is a little unfair because we've seen part of it and, well, it looked pretty good. Some of the humor in the twenty minutes or so that Jeffrey Katzenberg showed HollywoodChicago at the end of 2008 (read more [here](#) [17]) fell a little flat, but trust us when we tell you that this could be a real visual marvel, a massive step forward in the technology of 3D movies. And even if the dialogue isn't perfect, the voice cast delivering it includes the brilliantly cast Rogen, Witherspoon, Laurie, Sutherland, and Arnett. Oh, and did we mention that Stephen Colbert plays the President? Genius.



Duplicity, from Universal Pictures, opens on March 20th, 2009.

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

5. "Duplicity"

Release Date: March 20th

Cast: Julia Roberts, Clive Owen, Paul Giamatti, and Tom Wilkinson

Writer/Director: Tony Gilroy

Plot: Roberts and Owens play corporate spies with a steamy past. The two spooks hook up to pull the greatest con ever on their respective bosses.

Reason To Get Excited: The last time Tony Gilroy and Tom Wilkinson's name were on a movie together it spawned "Michael Clayton". Roberts has left us cold lately, but the idea of Owen, Giamatti, and Wilkinson spitting out Gilroy's barbs of dialogue is more than enough to have us intrigued by "Duplicity".



Coraline, from Focus Features, opens on February 6th, 2009.

Photo credit: Focus Features

4. "Coraline"

Release Date: February 6th

Voice Cast: Dakota Fanning, Ian McShane, Teri Hatcher, Keith David, Jennifer Saunders, and Dawn French

Writer/Director: Henry Selick

Plot: Based on Neil Gaiman's Hugo Award-winning novel, "Coraline" tells the story of a girl who finds a door in her family's new home which leads her to a fascinating alternate reality. Everything on the other side of the door is similar to Coraline's "real life" but with a magical, fantastical edge. And, of course, there's a bit of darkness and danger too. Coraline learns the hard way that there really is no place like home.

Reason To Get Excited: "A Nightmare Before Christmas" is one of the best animated movies ever made (if you count stop-motion as "animation"). And most people still think Tim Burton directed it. He didn't. It was a talented man named Henry Selick who brought Tim's childhood drawings to life, and it's his general refusal to bow down to the traditional stereotypes of the kids movie has us totally pumped for "Coraline". We don't know about you but our favorite authors growing up - Roald Dahl, Shel Silverstein, even some Dr. Seuss - came with a twisted edge that you don't see that often in children's entertainment any more. This could be an early frontrunner for best animated film of 2009.



Sydney Fife (Jason Segel, center left) bonds with Peter Klaven (Paul Rudd, center right) who has befriended him in his search for a best man for his upcoming wedding to Zooley (Rashida Jones, lower right) in the comedy.

Photo credit: Scott Garfield

3. "I Love You, Man"

Release Date: March 20th

Cast: Paul Rudd, Jason Segel, Rashida Jones, Jon Favreau, Andy Samberg, Jaime Pressly, and Carla Gallo

Writer/Director: John Hamburg

Plot: Paul Rudd plays a guy with a problem - he's getting married and he doesn't have any friends. Who's going to be his best man? He decides to throw a contest to find just the right guy but he becomes too close to his new B.F.F., threatening to break apart the relationship with his fiancée. How can a guy maintain a new best friend and a new wife?

Reason To Get Excited: This one has two reasons - Paul Rudd and Jason Segel. There's something about the combination of Rudd's sarcastic, smooth brand of humor and Segel's typically gawky, awkward comic sensibility that sounds like a perfect fit. And the concept is comic gold. This easily has the most potential to be the "Forgetting Sarah Marshall" of early 2009 and it's not just because it has the same star. We swear it's not, man.



D.C. reporter Cal McCaffrey (RUSSELL CROWE) questions U.S. Congressman Stephen Collins (BEN AFFLECK) in a blistering political thriller about a rising congressman and an investigative journalist embroiled in a case of seemingly unrelated, brutal murders.

Photo credit: Copyright: © 2008 Universal Studios.

2. "State of Play"

Release Date: April 17th

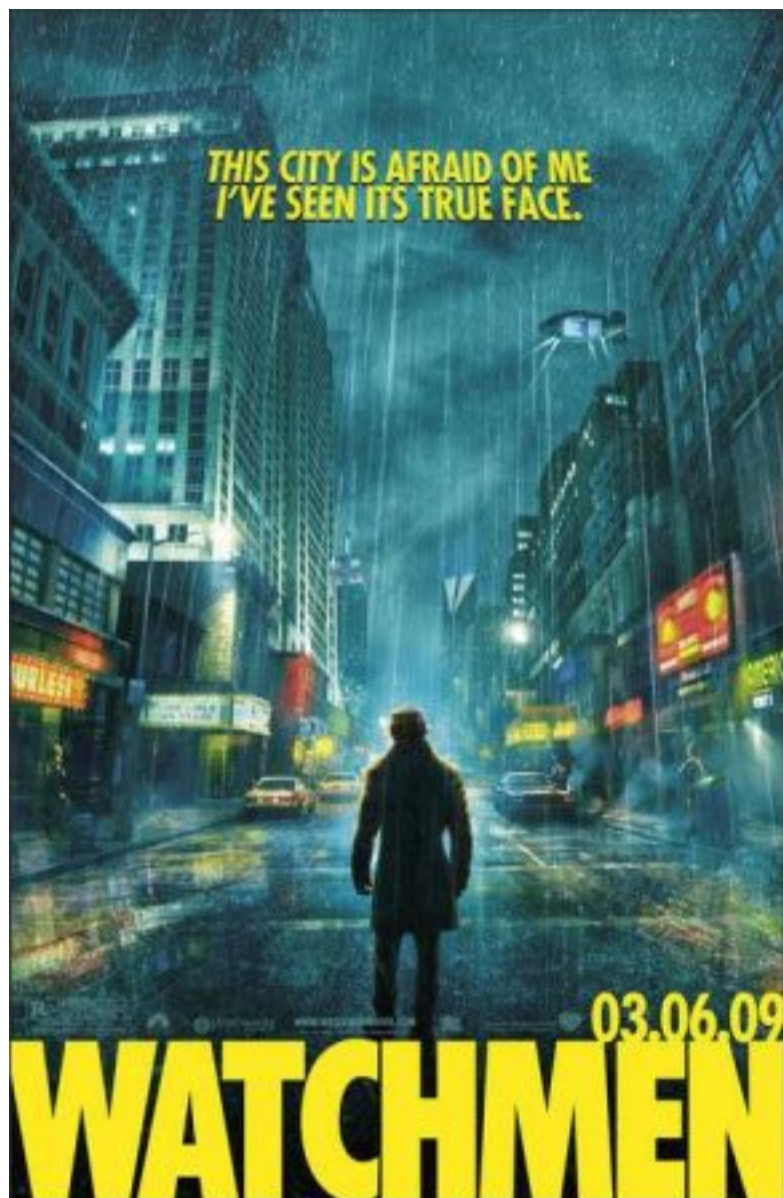
Cast: Russell Crowe, Ben Affleck, Rachel McAdams, Jason Bateman, Robin Wright Penn, Helen Mirren, Viola Davis, and Jeff Daniels

Writers: Matthew Michael Carnahan and Tony Gilroy

Director: Kevin Macdonald

Plot: A reporter tries to unravel the complex story behind the death of a Congressman. There's a LOT more to it than that, but, trust us, you don't want to be spoiled.

Reason To Get Excited: Watch the BBC original mini-series on which this is based, which just happens to be one of the best things to air on television in the history of the medium. The original "State of Play" - with stellar performances by James MacAvoy, David Morrissey, Bill Nighy, and Kelly MacDonald - is an amazing dissection of the intersecting paths of journalism and politics and is SO full of potential for movie greatness. Now, it was undeniably more interesting when Brad Pitt and Edward Norton were doing it pre-strike, but Crowe and Affleck are certainly interesting actors and that supporting cast is remarkable. With script work by Gilroy and direction from the man who directed Forest Whitaker to his Oscar performance in "The Last King of Scotland," "State of Play" could be one of the few films from the first third of 2009 with true Oscar season potential.



Watchmen opens on March 6th, 2009.

Photo credit: Warner Brothers

1. "Watchmen"

Release Date: March 6th

Cast: Carla Gugino, Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Malin Akerman, Patrick Wilson, Billy Crudup, Jackie Earle Haley, and Matthew Goode

Writers: David Hayter and Alex Tse

Director: Zack Snyder

Plot: Do you live under a rock? Go read the book.

Reason To Get Excited: Call us cock-eyed optimists, but we think the Fox/WB legal battle is going to allow for our most anticipated flick of 2009 (forget the first half, we're talking the whole thing) to still come out. The beloved graphic novel that most fans never thought would make it to the big screen is finally on the horizon even if the powers-that-be clearly have something against Alan Moore. Ignoring all the behind-the-scenes battles, "Watchmen" looks amazing, as if all the time between the publishing of one of the most important works of fiction of the last quarter-century and 2009 was what it took to accurately bring this project to life. No one was more pessimistic about seeing a faithful adaptation of "Watchmen" than we were... until we saw that preview. It's hilarious that the internet backlash has begun before the movie has even come out with some lamenting casting decisions and constant posts of "it doesn't look THAT good." Yes, haters, it does look THAT good. Now, let's just hope we don't have to include it in our Summer Preview too.



[18]

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