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'BIG DADDY' DRIVES JUNE BOOM

Sony laffer's \$41 mil leads record B.O.

By ANDREW HINDES

The summer box office continued to sizzle over the weekend as Sony's "Big Daddy" brought home the bacon to the tune of \$41.2 million, according to studio estimates.

It was the second biggest comedy opening — behind "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me's" \$54.9 million on June 11 and the biggest nonsequel comedy bow ever.

"Daddy's" lofty debut, coupled with moderate dropoffs by top holdovers, was expected to push the overall weekend to \$132 million, topping the three-day June frame

record of \$130.3 million set just one week earlier. It was an improvement of 19% over the equivalent frame last year when Fox's "Dr. Dolittle" led the domestic B.O. to \$110.8 million.

Studio execs and theater owners are generally thrilled with the red-hot pace of the early summer, which, coupled with the jam-packed July and August release schedule, could make the summer of '99 a record moviegoing season. If the estimates hold, "Daddy" will have the fourth \$40 million-plus debut in the past two months. Before this year, only a dozen films had ever boasted

Top 10 chart, page 17

three-day openings above \$40 million.

Slipping into second place was Buena Vista's saphonore "Tarzan." Judging by its projected 31% drop, the jungle adventure now has a shot at becoming the Mouse House's first animated film to hit the \$200 million mark since 1994's "The Lion King."

"Tarzan" should have no problems buzzing past the \$159.3 million

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'DADDY' SANDLER'S BIGGEST BOW



Happy Gilmore
2/16/96

\$10.1

(38.8 time)

The increase in opening weekend box office for Adam Sandler's recent films has made him one of Hollywood's most bankable leading men. (Opening weekend grosses in millions.)

The Wedding Singer
2/13/98

21.9

(80.7)

The Waterboy
11/6/98

39.4

(160.6)

Big Daddy
6/25/99

41.2

(N/A)

Redford needs bogey man

By MICHAEL FLEMING

NEW YORK — Robert Redford has scratched himself from the starting role of golf pic "The Legend of Bagger Vance," and word is that Brad Pitt tops the list to replace him.

Redford remains the film's director and producer.

The \$70 million film, to be distributed domestically by Dream-

Works, is based on Steven Pressfield's 1995 novel about a local Georgia golfer and WWI hero named Rannulph Junah who competes against golf greats Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones in a 1931 tourney. The playing field is leveled as Junah, the role for which Pitt is now being eyed, receives advice and spiritual guidance



PITT

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'Mummy' team to tour 'World' with Warners

By MICHAEL FLEMING

NEW YORK — Warner Bros. is negotiating with the "Mummy" team of director Stephen Sommers and thesp Brendan Fraser for a remake of "Around the World in 80 Days," the 1956 Oscar winner from United Artists about a Victorian gentleman and his valet who try to travel the globe based on the Jules Verne classic.

WB has secured the title rights, and while Sommers and Fraser have been negotiating to reteam in a sequel of the "The Mummy," WB is looking to get the film into production by early next year.



Sommers



Fraser

Helmer Mike Todd's original film won five Oscars, including best picture, and is remembered for a dizzying array of star cameos. It's unclear whether the filmmakers behind the remake will follow that strategy, but a script has been written by Stan Chervin.

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Rockers Limp Bizkit are poised to bump the Backstreet Boys from atop the album charts.

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Scientists have celebs and the moral high ground, so why are they so defensive?

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Nick, MTV in toon with pix

By JOHN DEMPSEY

NEW YORK — For the first time, Nickelodeon and MTV will buy the first broadcast window of a theatrical movie, Nickelodeon with "The Rugrats Movie" and MTV with "Beavis & Butt-head Do America."

That's the word from Tom Freston, chairman and CEO of MTV Networks, who said the main reason Nick and MTV are breaking precedent and ponying up big bucks for a theatrical is that the Rugrats and

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GRAMMY STAPLES L.A. DEAL

By ADAM SANDLER

The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences is expected to announce Tuesday that the 2000 Grammy Awards will be held at the Staples Center near downtown Los Angeles.

NARAS had been expected to test the new venue for the kudo-cast's 42nd annual outing. The \$350 million Staples Center will open with a gala Oct. 15.

The Acad's move shifts the ceremony from the 5,000-seat Shrine, where it was held in February after a trio of years in Gotham, to the nearby 20,000-seat arena. In 1997, the Academy tested Gotham's 20,000-seat Madison Square Garden, but returned to the 6,000-seat Radio City Music Hall the following year.

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DGA backs pact, reups prexy Shea

By NICK MADIGAN

Hailing "real victories" in talks with producers and studios, leaders of the Directors Guild of America voted unanimously Saturday to recommend ratification of a new collective bargaining agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television Producers.

At the DGA's L.A. headquarters, national board members also re-elected Jack

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TW, Viacom may link book units

By MARTIN PEERS and OLIVER JONES

NEW YORK — Time Warner and Viacom are in discussions to merge their book publishing units, creating a joint venture encompassing Simon & Schuster, Warner Books and Little, Brown.

The negotiations reflect increasing consolidation among book publishers — a trend that is making life tougher for smaller players. Last year German media giant Bertelsmann, owner of Bantam Doubleday Dell, acquired Random

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Defenders of the faith should stand at ease

THE MOST MAIL *Daily Variety* has received this year about a single article has come in response to a story that the newspaper will never run. The subject was Scientology and its influence on Hollywood.

The story was in the process of being researched by our film editor, Dan Cox, who recently left the paper to accept a job as a literary agent without finishing the article.

In approaching his story, Cox was impressed by the fact that the Scientologists, who've been around since the 1950s, were getting more "public" about their faith: Witness the fact that John Travolta, a stalwart member, had agreed to star in a \$70 million production of "Battle-

Despite all their constructive causes, there's always been a certain acrimony between Scientologists and the media.

field Earth," based on the book by Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

Indeed, Travolta is just one of many high-profile Scientologists around, including Tom Cruise, Jenna Elfman, Kirstie Alley and director Milton Katse-

las, who teaches one of the town's best known acting classes.

Before deciding to switch careers, Cox also became intrigued by the fact that the Scientologists own at least four major buildings in Southern California, including an ornate, gothic Celebrity Center housed in a structure built by William Randolph Hearst; and a production complex that they operate in Hemet called the Golden Era Studios that makes promotional and educational movies. They even publish a magazine called *Celebrity*.

To be sure, Scientologists also run a drug rehabilitation program, a literacy campaign and other activities aimed at rehabilitating prison inmates.

Despite all their constructive causes, however, there's always been a certain acrimony between the media and Scientologists, stemming perhaps from their fervent proselytizing as well as from their obsession with their enemies.

THE BACK LOT

PETER BART

But even Cox was surprised when several emissaries of Scientology, upon learning of his research, started paying visits to him and to the newspaper urgently demanding an audience.

AND THEN CAME THE LETTERS, pouring forth from a variety of law firms. John Travolta did not decide to star in "Battlefield Earth" to advance the cause of Scientology, said one document. Scientology had no role whatsoever in Tom Cruise's courtship of Nicole Kidman, said another. The financing of "Battle-ship Earth" is in no way related to the Church of Scientology, said a third.

And then, of course, came the predictable dispatch from that ubiquitous attorney, Bert Fields, who decided to take time off from the Eisner-Katzenberg wars to issue a warning of his own.

"I have just heard that you intend to publish something to the effect that the Church of Scientology has used Nicole Kidman for promotional purposes without her approval," he wrote. "This is utterly false. Nicole has the greatest respect and admiration for the teachings of Scientology."

The problem with all these admonitions is that they're taking issue with an article that no one has published or even finished writing, and didn't contain any of the allegations that were being refuted.

FIELDS' CURIOUS MILITANCY on Scientology was first registered a year ago when he paid to reprint in *Variety* an ad signed by several top Hollywood names. The ad, signed by Dustin Hoffman, Goldie Hawn, Terry Semel and Fields, among others, was an open letter to the German chancellor protesting discrimination against Scientologists in Germany and compar-

ing their treatment to that of the Jews during World War II. (The comparison caused some ruffled feelings among many who felt that their case was overstated.)

Was this fusillade of legal letters really intended to clarify facts or to intimidate a reporter? In the past, certainly, the Scientologists have built up a reputation of being highly litigious. The net effect of their actions has been to increase suspicions rather than allay them. Why would any group be so militantly self-protective if it had nothing to hide?

Yet the Scientologists do a lot of good deeds, and people like John Travolta and Kirstie Alley testify with great persuasiveness that Scientology has aided them in meeting the demands of their daily lives. "You've got a religion and a group whose aims are a world without war, crime or insanity," Travolta told Cox. "They're doing everything they can to make that possible."

SCIENTOLOGISTS DENY that the church manipulates celebrities. They also refute the suspicions of outsiders about the manner in which Scientology members "audit" others with E-meters as they strive to rid themselves of "body thetans" so that they can become "clear."

"We don't use celebrities; celebrities are serviced," insists Marty Rathbun, director of the Religious Technology Center of the Church. "They are important people because they reach a lot of people. They set trends in society."

Hubbard's writings specifically targeted celebrities for recruitment. "Celebrities are well-guarded, well-barricaded, overworked, aloof quarry," he wrote some time ago. "If you bring one of them home, you will get a small plaque as your reward."

Well, the Church can boast many of them, so lots of plaques must have been distributed. In the case of Travolta, he'll even star in a movie that's based on the writings of The Founder. Given that kind of dedication, it would seem that the Scientologists could afford to lose some of their institutional suspicions.

Relax guys. No pernicious article will be sprung on you. Tell your lawyers to take the rest of the week off.