

A.I.

Anticipating the end of the summer movie season (2001), I can only lament that, as often happens, the major Hollywood studios show so little creative imagination. On screens now, or coming soon are multiple examples of moviedom's financial safety net, the sequel: *Jurassic Park III* (without Steven Spielberg directing this time), a new *Planet of the Apes* (really on another planet this time), *Dr. Dolittle 2*, *Scary Movie 2*, *Rush Hour 2*, and *American Pie 2*. In a similar, if slightly different category, comes the major re-release, this time Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

With so much recycling, what can we expect outside the hype machine?

There has already been at least one major studio release--A.I., made by the same Steven Spielberg (channeling the late Stanley Kubrick), whose origins, ambition, and grand style merit at least some comment (it's a picture people ask me about, too).

A.I (standing in for "artificial intelligence") is a striking--and sweepingly derivative--opus. It tells of a robot boy David (Haley Joel Osment) who is programmed with the taint of human love. In a near future, the polar ice caps have melted, and the oceans have drowned all coastal cities. Withdrawn to the interior sites, humans create realistic robots to serve them. David is the first robot child to have real feelings, especially for his "mother," Monica Swinton (Francis O'Connor). He is a substitute for her real son, who was frozen after he contracted an incurable disease. When the real son is cured and returns home, the Swintons, reluctantly, send David off to survive on its own. He is eventually befriended by another robot, Gigolo Joe (Jude Law) and sets off to find a new family and a new mother. An

An intriguing and, at times, befuddling mix of influences--Pinocchio, Grimm's Fairy Tales, along with sundry reminders of several of Kubrick's and Spielberg's other films--A.I. is a grand pastiche, which may miss profundity but excels in creating some striking worlds. Among the most effective of the latter are an unsettling but absolutely convincing junkyard of discarded robots, a triumph of special effects put at the service of sympathetic storytelling. The young Master Osment, too, with unblinking gaze, buffed face, and practiced laugh, is uncanny; he makes you believe in the sweet humanoid.

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