



Catch 22

It's Northern Hemisphere summer, and that means an onslaught of blockbuster releases is coming our way. Sean Wilson previews the tentpole movies due for release

Across the theatrical and streaming spaces, filmmakers are looking to push the boundaries with high-concept, star-led action vehicles, based on the sort of existing IPs that command a huge and loyal fanbase. The concept of the tentpole is used to describe the seemingly cast-iron Hollywood production that will prop up the finances of the respective studio and bring in the green backs. Here's an essential round-up of some of the biggest movies headed your way.



THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER (8 JULY)

Back in 2017, singular writer-director Taika Waititi revived Marvel's moribund Thor series with a dash of eccentric humour and a vibrant, Flash Gordon-inspired colour palette.

Star Chris Hemsworth was evidently rejuvenated by Waititi's go-for-broke surrealism, and it's therefore exciting to mark the Hemsworth/Waititi reunion in this summer's *Thor: Love and Thunder*. The movie is the next chapter in Phase Four of the ongoing Marvel Cinematic Universe and will likely be one of the zaniest, most offbeat entries in the franchise so far. >

Above: Brad Pitt plays unlucky assassin Ladybug in *Bullet Train* Left: Ryan Gosling appears in thriller *The Gray Man* with Chris Evans, released on Netflix this July

With the titular Thor (Hemsworth) having cast his godly duties aside at the close of *Avengers: Endgame*, Natalie Portman's Jane Foster has filled the gap as the Mjolnir-wielding Mighty Thor. Tessa Thompson's Valkyrie asserts her role as the leader of the new Asgard and Christian Bale is set to chill as the vengeful Gorr the God Butcher. marvel.com/movies/thor-love-and-thunder

THE GRAY MAN (15 JULY)

Mark Greaney's best selling novel *The Gray Man* is the basis of this globe-trotting Netflix thriller, which assembles a heavyweight arsenal of talent on both sides of the camera.

Avengers: Endgame helmers Anthony and Joe Russo, aka the Russo brothers, bring us the story of an elite CIA mercenary, the titular 'gray man', who finds himself hunted by an equally dangerous adversary after stumbling across deadly agency secrets.

The blistering double-act of Ryan Gosling and Chris Evans (the latter reuniting with the Russos after several Marvel collaborations) is bound to

command the attention, with the former playing the hunted and the latter playing the hunter. There's support from an eye-catching ensemble including *Bridgerton's* Regé-Jean Page and *No Time To Die's* Ana de Armas. netflix.com/title/81160697

BULLET TRAIN (5 AUGUST)

Stunt co-ordinator turned filmmaker David Leitch has pushed the boundaries of action sequences in the likes of *Atomic Blonde*, starring Charlize Theron. He now fuses the bullet-strewn action of that movie with the blackly comic impulses of *Deadpool 2* for a manic and relentless tale of assassins attempting to outcompete each other on the titular Japanese bullet train.

The movie is adapted from the novel *Maria Beetle* by Kotaro Isaka. Brad Pitt plays professional hitman Ladybug who finds himself up against some fearsome competition, played by the likes of Brian Tyree Henry, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Joey King, Michael Shannon and Hiroyuki Sanada.

Just when the cast couldn't get any starrier, Sandra Bullock puts in an appearance



as Ladybug's handler, the aforementioned Maria Beetle. If that single-take stairwell fight in *Atomic Blonde* was anything to go by, then *Bullet Train* should be suitably spectacular. And it will be worth it to see Brad Pitt going full action man on us, something he's done only infrequently throughout his career. bullettrainmovie.com

Top: Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson is in superhero blockbuster *Black Adam*
Below: Chris Hemsworth stars in *Thor: Love and Thunder*

BLACK ADAM (21 OCTOBER)

Dwayne Johnson finally enters the realm of the superhero blockbuster in this long-awaited adaptation of the classic DC comic book. Considering Johnson's imposing physique and penchant for wry, self-deprecating humour, one wonders why it took so long.

Johnson plays the titular *Black Adam*, a super-powered antihero and sworn nemesis of Shazam. There were rumours that Johnson was going to appear in the initial Shazam movie, but ultimately, *Black Adam's* introduction comes courtesy of his own feature-length adventure.

The *Black Adam* movie is poised to cement more foundations within the DC Extended Universe. We're going to be introduced to the Justice Society of America as the likes of Noah Centineo's Atom Smasher and Pierce Brosnan's Doctor Fate make an appearance. It's directed by Jaume Collet-Serra who collaborated with Johnson on 2021 Disney adventure *Jungle Cruise*. amerbros.com/movies/black-adam ■

