It's not even Memorial Day, and we have our first dud of the Blockbuster Season. I knew I was in trouble 30 minutes into this film when I caught myself thinking;

"I miss Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley".

Let's just sit back and analyze that thought for a moment. I found myself missing two actors/characters that totally annoyed me for the better part of three movies.

Why?

I guess it's because in the first three films, most of the time that they were on screen at the same time it meant that we **weren't** seeing Captain Jack Sparrow, which in my mind was the only reason to watch these films. Consequently; my line of thought was that having Jack get more screen time without the burden of the Elizabeth Swan/Will Turner love story would make a better film.

"Be careful what you wish for; for you may surely get it".

I wanted a movie with Captain Jack getting a much higher percentage of the screen time, and that's what they delivered for "On Stranger Tides". And it was not a case of addition by subtraction.

The movie didn't completely suck, and I'm sure it will make a pirate's share of booty, but for the most part it was dull, lazy, and uninspired. Almost as if everyone involved simply felt that as long as they rolled out Captain Jack, sword fights, supernatural creatures, chase scenes, double-entendres, and double crosses, then no one would care and the money would just come rolling in.

It's a common occurrence in sequels, especially once you get to ones with a number higher than "2" attached to them. They just seem to run out of ideas and just coast by with retreads from previous films. And that, in a nutshell, sums up "On Stranger Tides".

The plot was already spelled out at the conclusion of "At World's End". Jack was off to seek the elusive Fountain of Youth. But as the movie starts, he's back in London, trying to bust his first

mate Gibbs out of prison, screwing that part up, and then finding a way to escape from hundreds of bumbling British soldiers acting like the Keystone Cops while chasing him.

During his escape, he first runs into his father so that we can get another cute two minute cameo from Keith Richards, a scene that adds absolutely nothing to the film in general, but is good for one very large self deprecating laugh courtesy of the legend rocker/stoner. Leaving that scene, Jack runs across the mysterious Angelica, played with a decent amount of energy by Penelope Cruz. Angelica is recruiting a crew in the name of Captain Jack, and has quite a history with him…I guess. They seemed to be making that part up on the fly.

More chases, more sexual banter, more outrageous escapes, and we find Jack on the infamous ship Queen Anne's Revenge, piloted by none other than Blackbeard himself. The famous pirate has a need to find the Fountain of Youth himself, and he needs Jack to point out the location.

So if Jack knows the location, why isn't he now immortal? Evidently it's because you need more than just the Fountain…you also need two silver chalices from Ponce De Leon's ship, and the tear of a mermaid. And possibly also a lock of Steven Spielberg's hair and an eye-of-newt.

So the not-so-gallant crew goes about dealing with all of the dangers in getting to the fountain and finding the missing horcruxes…er…items, while also trying to keep ahead of Spanish soldiers also trying to find the Fountain, as well as Captain Barbossa (Geoffrey Rush), who is now captaining a privateer ship filled with British soldiers in pursuit of Blackbeard.

The plot is an absolute mess…so much so that I find myself reaching for the Tylenol just for thinking about it again four days after the fact. Now I'm not saying that the first movie had "Inception" level intelligence about it…but in comparison to this, "The Curse of the Black Pearl" was as logical as Mr. Spock.

This would include the cute romantic couple for this film; a captured young reverend named Philip and the captured mermaid that he falls in love with, whom he names Syrena. Played by Sam Claflin and Astrid Berges-Fisbey, they are appropriately attractive and utterly forgettable.

My hopes going into this film lied in the casting of Cruz and (mostly) Ian McShane as Blackbeard. I was anticipating McShane injecting the same dimensions of scoundrel-ness as he did in “Deadwood” as Al Swearengen. Alas, Blackbeard was a bore, a stock movie villain with no real complexity at all. Sadly, McShane was not even able to go over-the-top to make Blackbeard amusing, as Bill Nighy was able to accomplish in the second and third movies as Davy Jones.

For Johnny Depp; he really seemed to be mailing in his performance this time. There seemed to be scenes in which he tried, and several of them are quite amusing. But other times you can almost see in his eyes that he knows the scene is going to be lame, so he’s just going through the standard checklist of Captain Jack-isms.

The only thing really saving the movie from totally disaster is the fact that the action sequences are well shot, and fun to watch if you allow yourself to totally disengage your brain from any level of logic. As mentioned concerning Depp’s performances, there were some amusing parts in the film, and the scenery and effects are once again quite appealing.

Once again, they spend probably the last 10 minutes of the film setting up the next one. It will certainly be made, based upon the $250 million the movie took in overseas (plus the mildly disappointing $90 million from the US), but at this point I have little hope for the franchise as a whole. It’s eye candy, plain and simple…with the emphasis on “simple”.

But it could have been worse, I guess.

My Rating – Tim Couch (1 ½ footballs).

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie

Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent

Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good

Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good

Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK. Worth renting.

Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Meh. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots.

Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.

Derek Anderson: 1 Football. Piss-poor. Frustrating to the level of throwing objects at the screen

Mike Phipps: ½ Football. "We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?" level of suck beyond redemption.

Spergon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.