

the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is “soliciting innovative research proposals on the topic of a submersible aircraft.” The war industry has been trying to produce a viable flying submarine since World War II. The closest they’ve come to an operational specimen appeared in a 1960s TV series “Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea,” where its most useful function was to fly Admiral Nelson from the *Seaview* to his favorite girly bar in Bangkok.

Land forces don’t run up as large a bill as the sea and sky services, mostly because they are more manpower-intensive and less gizmo-oriented. They aren’t cheap, though. A recent report from the Army says that plans to increase its size will cost \$40 billion a year. A proportional cost of the plan to beef up the Marine Corps comes to \$16.5 billion annually. That’s over \$55 billion a year for the sake of having enough young bodies to continue the Iraq and Afghanistan fiascos indefinitely or engage in new fiascos just like them.

“Transformation” in the American way of war has come to embrace high-cost gadgetry and jabber-laden doctrine devoid of common sense. The latest slogan from the five-sided meme factory is “persistent conflict.” That’s like the “long war” only more persistent and conflicted—we continue in our war on terror even though all it accomplishes is the creation of more terrorists.

Strategists from Sun Tzu to the Red Baron tell us not to engage in battles we don’t know we can win, yet we aggressively seek battles that we know are unwinnable. The only meaningful way we can transform our military is to stop starting those wars. ■

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The Obama administration is using former officials as unofficial diplomats because it does not trust many of the State Department officers and ambassadors held over from the Bush years. The process of replacing the Bushies has been handicapped by a number of vetting blunders, meaning that senior positions have been filled without replacing the supporting officers who would normally develop and implement policies. One official called it a “bureaucracy gap” at the upper levels. This has resulted in the ad hoc solution of sending special emissaries on secret or not-so-secret missions, but critics are concerned that the practice sends out too many signals and blurs the lines of communication and accountability. Some of the emissaries report to the White House directly, circumventing the State Department, though Hillary Clinton reportedly approves of the arrangement, possibly because many of the ex-officials involved worked for her husband.

Two of the United States’ principal adversaries, Venezuela and Iran, are receiving particular attention. In February, former secretary of defense William Perry traveled to the Middle East as a private citizen but bearing several messages from the White House. Perry reportedly met Iranian officials in Dubai, which is where Iranians go to circumvent sanctions, drink, and carouse. He suggested that the Obama administration would be prepared to negotiate all outstanding issues but only after Iran’s June presidential elections. The implication was that the White House would like to see President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad replaced by someone less radioactive. Perry also proposed that the U.S. and Iran might have a common interest in working against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The proposal might seem somewhat bizarre, particularly as the Pentagon has been insisting that Iran is aiding the Afghan insurgency. But the reality is that Iran despises the Taliban, which has declared Shi’ite Muslims to be heretics and in 1997 killed 11 Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif. Tehran would not like to see them return to power. The response to Perry was warm enough to encourage Obama to speak directly to the Iranian people by video on March 20.

The president has also been feeling out Venezuela, but with little success. A senior State Department official who traveled to Venezuela in early February on a confidential mission was told by an aide to President Hugo Chavez that the “Bolivarian revolution” is on course and that the country’s economy will be irreversibly changed. Shortly thereafter, an American businessman with ties to the Venezuelan government visited the country on behalf of the White House. Chavez refused to meet him, sending one of his deputies instead. The underling railed against the United States, claiming that nothing had changed in Washington and that the CIA is still trying to overthrow Chavez. Venezuela is under intense pressure economically due to the collapse in oil prices. Chavez has reacted by confiscating property of multinational companies, particularly in the agricultural sector, blaming them for the inflation and shortages caused by his price controls. Shortly after the departure of the U.S. emissaries, he confiscated a rice-milling plant belonging to Minnesota’s Cargill and took over the land of a Coca-Cola distributorship.

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[Adventureland]

What I Did on My Summer Vacation

By Steve Sailer

MID-20TH-CENTURY American writers competed on their dust flaps to list the most jobs held. The more proletarian occupations an author enumerated, such as short-order cook, hod carrier, or lobsterman, the more legitimate was his assault on the Great American Novel.

Today, however, a generation of the well-educated has grown up assuming there are jobs Americans just won't do. "Adventureland," a witty, nostalgic love story is set in the summer of 1987, about the time when tuition started being inflated so high by competitive elitism and unskilled wages pounded so low by illegal immigration that "summer job" was increasingly replaced in the upper-middle-class vocabulary by "unpaid internship." (By now, a few parents are paying fashionable employers to let their kids make photocopies and fetch coffee.)

A new Oberlin graduate, James Brennan, has his costly Eurail Pass backpack tour canceled by his parents because his alcoholic father's executive career is wobbling. Suddenly needing a summer job to pay for tuition in the fall at the Columbia Journalism School, he finds that a résumé featuring his SAT scores and his Renaissance Studies major

doesn't compensate for his lack of any work experience. Nobody in Greater Pittsburgh, it turns out, needs a fresco restored. He winds up at the employer of last resort, the Adventureland amusement park.

Writer-director Greg Mottola, who helmed 2007's comedy hit "Superbad," explains the origin of his quasi-autobiographical film with an ingenuous snob-bishness that would have annoyed and amused John Steinbeck. "I was talking with a bunch of writer friends, and I was telling them these embarrassing stories about a summer in the '80s that I spent as a carnie working at an amusement park. ... It was the worst job I've ever had. ... I should have had a good job—I should have been a tutor or gone to Manhattan and been an intern at a magazine or something respectable—but no, I was working for minimum wage, handing out stuffed animals to drunk people."

Please note that Mottola isn't, personally, a jerk. Judging from "Adventureland," he's an insightful yet gentle observer. That's just the way people think nowadays.

For Mottola's alter ego, this dreaded "worst job in the world" laboring in a workplace where many employees lack four-digit SAT scores turns out to be the best summer of James's life. Played by Jesse Eisenberg, continuing his role in 2005's "The Squid and the Whale" as a romantic but overly verbal intellectual who can't help blurting out his innermost feelings at awkward moments, James is the first young male in recent movies who isn't in a particular rush to lose his virginity. He seems to share Freud's pride in the discreet passion of the bourgeoisie: "Why don't we fall in love with someone new every month? Because every breakup tears away a piece of our heart."

James's goofy charm catches the eye of two beauties working at the park. Em (Kristen Stewart of "Twilight") is a Jewish NYU student who, by sleeping with the amusement park's handsome but married electrician (Ryan Reynolds), is avenging herself on her lawyer father for remarrying after her mother's death. And Lisa P. (Margarita Levieva) is a Catholic working-class girl whose religion-dictated virginity enables her to date her many admirers without losing her heart to any.

Mottola, now 44, directed episodes of comedy godfather Judd Apatow's failed 2001 TV series "Undeclared." Until Apatow's 2005 breakthrough with "The 40 Year Old Virgin," Mottola's career was idling. (His press-kit biography concludes, "He hopes someday to have a better bio.") Like so many other underlings of Apatow, such as Seth Rogen and Jason Segel, he's done well when finally given a chance. The sudden success of Apatow's boys is reminiscent of the famous cohort of writers who graduated from Eton in 1920-22: George Orwell, Anthony Powell, Henry Green, Cyril Connolly, Harold Acton, and Ian Fleming. Were they that individually talented? Or did it help to know each other?

Without Apatow's oversight this time, Mottola's "Adventureland" is notably less vulgar than "Superbad," which Rogen and Evan Goldberg wrote. Mottola's new movie takes very seriously the dictum that love stories are most romantic before consummation. Granted, it's also less funny than "Superbad," but better overall. One caveat: like most indie films today, it's directed by a writer, so it's not the visual experience it could have been if it had been entrusted to a 1980s-style music-video idiot savant. ■

Rated R for language, nonstop marijuana use, and sexual references.