

## The Crystal Ball - Dec 7 Releases

Written by {ga=mitch}

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Mitch picked a good time to go on vacation last week, as there was just one new release of note, and it tanked at the box office. But starting next week, we get blockbuster releases every weekend as we head into the Christmas season. This week, "The Golden Compass" is the big (and controversial) theater release, and the latest "Pirates" movie releases on DVD. Mitch runs down all the week's releases, news, and rumors in The Crystal Ball.



I picked a good time to take a week off for vacation last week, as there was only one new movie that came out, "Alive", and it was anything but alive at the box office, failing to crack the top four for the week.

Only one new release coming out this week as well, but I expect a totally different reception for "The Golden Compass";

And then hold on to your hats, because unlike the Summer, when a new blockbuster comes out every weekend, at Christmas time this year we'll be seeing several big budget films being released on the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup>. "I Am Legend", "Sweeney Todd", "Charlie Wilson's War", and "National Treasure: Book of Secrets" will all be expected to draw well over \$100 million at the box office.

Lot's of changes to the "Calendar Watch" section, as studios

are starting to slot dates for next year's blockbusters. Looks to be another interesting Summer coming up

## News and Rumors

~ When I last reported something about the upcoming Terminator movie (tentatively now called &quot;Terminator Salvation: The Future Begins&quot;), the story was that John Conner was going to be a peripheral character, and the focus would be on new characters to be created. Scratch that. News is out this week that Christian Bale will be taking on the role of the charismatic leader in a new trilogy to start filming next March. In an [interview with EW](#), producers state that the tone will change to following Conner in his fight against the machines, but there will be a twist, a character (probably robotic) that is a bit more than the strictly good or evil cyborgs we've seen in the past. Ah-nuld the Governator may show up in a cameo, but don't hold your breath.

~ The writers strike has claimed another casualty. Earlier I have talked about the anticipated re-teaming of &quot;Fight Club&quot; stars Brad Pitt and Edward Norton in &quot;State of Play&quot;, a political thriller with Norton as a U.S. Congressman whose career is in jeopardy due to an investigation into the death of his mistress. Russell Crowe will now play the role of the journalist hot on the case. It will also star Helen Mirren, Rachel McAdams, and Robin Wright Penn.

~ Norton has another project coming right after "State of Play". He will have a dual role in "Leaves of Grass", a comedic thriller from actor/director Tim Blake Nelson ("O Brother, Where Art Thou"), portraying identical twins, one an Ivy League professor, and the other a pot-smoking career criminal.

~ Johnny Depp and director Michael Mann will team up for "Public Enemies", with the Sweeny Todd star set to portray infamous criminal John Dillinger. The story will focus on the start-up of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI force geared to stopping the notorious gangsters of the early 30s, which will also include Baby Face Nelson and Pretty Boy Floyd. No other casting has been announced.

~ Martin Scorsese will once again be working with Leonardo DiCaprio in "Shutter Island", a story set in 1954, telling the tale of U.S. Marshall Teddy Daniels as he investigates the disappearance of a murderess who escaped from a hospital for the criminally insane. No casting has been announced for the killer yet, but Michelle Williams has been cast as DiCaprio's wife.

~ Jake Gyllenhaal will reportedly play Joe Namath in a biopic of the football legend and noted sideline drunkard. No idea yet who'll play Suzy Kolber ("I want to kisssh you!")

## **This week's new movie release:**

### **The Golden Compass**

Starring: Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig, Dakota Blue Richards

Plot: In an alternate universe, a young woman journeys to the far North to save her best friend and other kidnapped children from terrible experiments by a mysterious organization.

[\*View Trailer\*](#)

The BeerBuzz: Sure to be a big hit, but will New Line get it's wish and have this grow into the mega successes seen by "Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter"? Early buzz is VERY mixed on this one, as it's said to be visually brilliant, but maybe a bit too much

to bite off for the first movie in a series. And then there is the controversy brewing over the "atheistic message" from author Phillip Pullman, although The Catholic League announced on Thursday that they don't see a problem with the movie. If you recall, there were also howls from the Religious Right about the evilness of LOTR and Mr. Potter...and how did those protests work out for them?

I'll let you know what I think early next week.

## **New DVD Releases**

Missed a few good ones that came out on Tuesday, so I'll talk about them in addition to the ones coming out on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**[Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End](#)** - Last of the first arc of movies featuring Captain Jack Sparrow. Among critics, I was in

the minority as I really enjoyed this film, and thought it tied things up nicely while still packing a boatload of adventure and twists. Probably could have stood to be about 30 minutes shorter, however. Bottom line: better than the second, not as good as the first.

**Superbad** - Another surprising gross humor hit featuring Seth Rogan (&quot;Knocked Up&quot;). The best way to describe it would be as a &quot;Porky's&quot; for this generation. If you liked &quot;American Pie&quot;, you'll probably want to own this one.

**The Nanny Diaries** - How did a cast with Scarlett Johansson, Paul Giamatti, and Laura Linney end up in a movie this bad? The concept was great, but the delivery was awful, as the people in charge of it couldn't decide

whether it was a screwball comedy, or a serious drama with some light moments. It ended up being neither.

**[The Bourne Ultimatum](#)** - Unlike "Pirates", this final part of a trilogy was universally acclaimed. Matt Damon is excellent in this role as a trained killer trying to remember his past, and director Paul Greengrass and writer Tony Gilroy give him a fantastic send off as Bourne goes back to New York to uncover all the dirty secrets.

**[Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix](#)** - This series keeps getting better and better as the kids in it grow both physically and as actors. It gets darker each time as well, and the series no longer resembles the cute little Chris Columbus fantasy we first saw in 2001. Daniel

Radcliffe is showing that he will be an actor of no small prestige for years to come.

**24: Season 6** - Just in case anyone missed the most frustratingly inconsistent season ever of one of the best shows on TV. Hopefully next season will be better (check out

[a preview here](#)

), so I can be a little less snarky in

[my recaps](#)

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## Calendar Watch

Next week: [\*I Am Legend\*](#), *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, *The Perfect Holiday*

Upcoming Biggies (click on the hyperlink to view the available trailers).

[\*National Treasure: Book of Secrets\*](#) -

December 21

st

- Follow-up to the hugely popular guilty pleasure &quot;National Treasure&quot; with Nick Cage back at his wacky best.

[\*P.S., I Love You\*](#) - December 21<sup>st</sup> -

Hillary Swank, Gerard Butler, and Harry Connick Jr. in an award contender about a widow who discovers love letters written by her recently deceased husband (Butler) that are meant to help her begin the next chapter of her life.

[Charlie Wilson's War](#) - December 21<sup>st</sup> -

Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, and Philip Seymour Hoffman in an Oscar contender about the charismatic and eccentric Texas Congressman who orchestrated the funding of the Afghans against the Soviet Union in the early 80s.

[Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street](#) - December 21<sup>st</sup> -

Tim Burton's adaptation of the macabre Steven Sondheim musical about a deranged barber bent on revenge (Johnny Depp) and the

meat pie baker that assists him (Helena Bonham Carter), who uses the bodies to make delicious snacks.

[Juno](#) - January (wide release) - Might be this year's "Little Miss Sunshine" charmer that ends up getting an Oscar nod. Ellen Page (Shadowcat from "X-Men 3") stars as a pregnant high school girl taking an unusual approach to making sure her child is cared for

properly.

[The Bucket List](#) - January 11<sup>th</sup> - Jack Nicholson as a corporate billionaire and Morgan Freeman as a mechanic. And odd couple, but they are both terminally ill men who escape from a cancer ward to take one last road trip.

[Cloverfield](#) - January 18<sup>th</sup> - You've seen the buzz

generating hand held camera trailer during "Transformers", and wondered what it's all about. We don't know yet, but we're thinking it should be fun.

[Rambo](#) - January 25<sup>th</sup> - John Rambo and a group of mercenaries go to Thailand. I was OK with the way Stallone handled "Rocky Balboa". I think all of

that goodwill he build up gets burned in this mess. The January release date pretty much assures a stinker.

[Vantage Point](#) - February 22  
nd

- Dennis Quaid, Forest Whitaker, and Matthew Fox in a political thriller/mystery showing five different points of view to an attempted

assassination of the  
President.

*The Other Boleyn Girl* -  
February 29  
th

- Natalie Portman as Anne  
Boleyn, Scarlett Johansson  
as her sister Mary, and  
Eric Bana as King Henry  
VIII. I expect this to blow

the tepid Showtime series  
&quot;The Tudors&quot;  
out of the English  
Channel...but since it's  
gotten pushed back to the  
waste-land of February  
releases, I don't have a  
good feeling about it.

[\*10,000 B.C.\*](#) - March 7<sup>th</sup> -  
Roland Emmerich, he of

&quot;The Day After Tomorrow&quot;, gets to unleash his big-budget vision of mammoth hunters in this film that is NOT a remake of &quot;One Million Years B.C.&quot; Bummer. I was hoping of a really good visual update to Rachel Welch in that fur bikini.

## *Horton Hears a Who* -

March 14

th

- Not content to have made Dr. Seuss spin in his grave with "How the Grinch Stole Christmas", Jim Carrey now takes on the voice of Horton the Elephant in this animated tale.

21. - March 28<sup>th</sup> -  
Swerb's favorite  
upcoming movie, the  
true tale of six MIT  
students that are  
trained by one of their  
professors (Kevin  
Spacey) in the art of  
card counting. They  
later take down Vegas  
casinos for millions.

# *Leatherheads* - April 4<sup>t</sup>

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- George Clooney and Renee Zellweger in an old fashioned screwball comedy set in 1925 about an aging football legend and the college hotshot he's drafted for his pro team both fighting for

the heart of an intrepid  
up-and-coming  
journalist.

[Iron Man](#) - May 2<sup>nd</sup> -

The latest  
mega-budgeted  
superhero flick.

Looks very promising,  
and the casting of  
Robert Downey, Jr.  
as the alcoholic  
billionaire who  
designs a supersuit.

*Speed Racer* - May

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Emile Hirsch,  
Matthew Fox, and  
Christina Ricci as  
Speed, Racer X, and  
Trixie in the  
Wachowski Brothers'  
(&quot;The  
Matrix&quot; trilogy)  
adaptation of the

really rotten 1960s  
Japanese anime.

*The Chronicles of*  
*Narnia: Prince*  
*Caspian* - May 16<sup>th</sup>  
- The same four  
kids from the first

movie return to  
Narnia... 1300 years  
after their last visit  
in that enchanted  
land's time frame, to  
help restore the  
throne to the rightful  
heir.

*Indiana Jones and  
the Kingdom of the  
Crystal Skull* - May  
23<sup>rd</sup> -

Spielberg and Ford  
team up one more  
time, with Cate  
Blanchett as the  
romantic interest,

and Shia LaBeouf  
(“Transformer  
s”) as Indy's  
son.

*The Incredible  
Hulk* - June 13<sup>th</sup> -

Looks to be much,  
much better than  
the Ang Lee  
stink-fest, with  
Edward Norton  
taking on the role  
of Bruce Banner.

*Get Smart* - June  
20<sup>th</sup> -  
Steve Carell,  
Anne Hathaway,  
and Alan Arkin  
take on the roles  
of Maxwell Smart,  
Agent 99 and The

Chief. As much as I hate movie adaptations of television shows, this one has potential.

*Wanted* - June  
27<sup>th</sup> -

Look for this to  
make a star out  
of James McAvoy  
(&quot;The Last  
King of  
Scotland&quot;)

as he plays a  
young man  
brought into a  
secret society of  
assassins by a  
hot, hot looking  
Angelina Jolie.  
Morgan Freeman

plays their boss.

## *The Dark Knight*

- July 19

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- Batman is

back, and this  
time he's  
tracking the  
Joker, played by  
Heath Ledger.  
Most likely the  
box office  
champion of

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