

The Crystal Ball - Dec 21 Releases

Written by {ga=mitch}

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Great version of The Crystal Ball this week from Mitch. Nine new films release this week, with several of them generating some very nice buzz. Mitch takes a look at all of them and also hits on the box office explosion "I Am Legend" generated, earning more in its first weekend than "Return of the King". And in the news and rumors section, Mitch talks about the recent news that Peter Jackson will be producing TWO movies based on J.R.R. Tolkein's "The Hobbit", predecessor to "Lord of the Rings".



I almost didn't have time to get any movie watching in this week, as I've re-watched the Browns/Bills Snow Bowl on DVR at least three times already.

And to paraphrase the great BeetleJuice...It keeps getting better Every. Single. Time.

The mega success of "I Am Legend" took many experts by surprise. Who would have thought the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air would have a movie that broke the all-time December record by earning more in its first weekend than "The Return of the King"?

The bigger surprise was the fact that "Alvin and the Chipmunks" made \$44 million. Then again, last year's family friendly "Night at the Museum" raked in the cash, proving that there is a big market for family movies during the holiday season.

Biggest movie release weekend of the entire year coming up. More on that later.

No "Crystal Ball" next week as they don't release squat on the last Friday of the year. Instead, it is the much anticipated Year End Review.

News and Rumors

~ This one dwarfs all others. Peter Jackson and New Line Cinema have patched up their differences, and PJ will be producing TWO movies based on J.R.R. Tolkein's "The Hobbit", predecessor to "Lord of the Rings". Unfortunately, he won't be directing it, but don't think for a minute that he'll allow it to pale in comparison to his epic trilogy. On [the boards](#), Mr. MacPhisto speculates that the first movie would be the one to cover the book itself, and the second would be a bridge between the end of "The Hobbit", with Bilbo back at the Shire, and the start of LOTR. From your keyboard to Peter Jackson's ears, MacPhisto.

~ Brad Pitt is in talks to replace Heath Ledger in Terrence Mallick's latest drama "Tree of Life". No word whatsoever regarding what it's about or any other details. The reclusive eccentric Mallick, who once went 20 years between directing projects, will be looking to make a comeback from the God-Awful Colin Ferrel/Pochohontas flick "The New World".

~ The writers' strike is playing havoc with one particular big budget film. "State of Play" first had Russell Crowe replacing Brad Pitt due to other commitments. Now Ed Norton is having to drop out of the

political thriller. Reportedly, Ben Affleck will be replacing him. I thought only the 1970s Cleveland Indians could make that bad of a trade.

~ Ewan McGregor and Jim Carrey will be playing romantic leads in "I Love You Phillip Morris". The movie is about a married father named Russell who finds himself in prison for one too many cons. In there, he falls in love with his cell mate, named Phillip Morris. Russell's love for Morris motivates several escape attempts. This might be the stupidest concept for a movie I've heard this year. Jim Carrey's involvement clinches it.

This week's new movie releases:

As mentioned...there are a ton of them this week, five new ones out today, and several more to be released on Christmas Day.

National Treasure: Book of Secrets

Starring: Nicolas Cage, Diane Kruger, Justin Bartha

Plot: Benjamin Franklin Gates is treasure hunting again, this

time for a legendary Book of Secrets that can clear his great-great-grandfather from charges of being the man behind the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: The critics hated the first one...so they are certain to hate this one as well. But the consensus seems to be that for those people that really liked the first one (like my wife), they'll enjoy this one as well, even if it does bog down a bit in the middle. No estimated rating for this one...I'll be seeing it Christmas Eve.

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Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Starring: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Alan Rickman

Plot: A barber wrongfully exiled returns after 15 years, vowing vengeance upon the judge and henchman responsible.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: The critics love this...and I'll be reviewing it early next week. But I can already tell you this will not be for everyone. Forget the trailer...90% of this film is sung, not spoken, keeping much of Steven Sondheim's original, highly complex theatrical score. It is also very dark, even for a Tim Burton film...and bloody as hell. I can't wait.

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Charlie Wilson's War

Starring: Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, Phillip Seymour Hoffman

Plot: A playboy Texas Congressman, a feisty widow, and an underachieving non-descript CIA agent orchestrate the CIA's most successful covert op: the arming of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan during their war with the Soviet Union

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: All-stars in every aspect of this...the actors, the director (Mike Nichols) and the writer (Aaron Sorkin). Smart, clever, funny film with quite a bit of drama as well, it's a movie aimed squarely at adults who want something to make them think.

And it's another one I'll have reviewed in the next week or so.

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Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story

Starring: John C. Reilly, Jenna Fischer, David Krumholtz

Plot: A mockumentary of the life of fictional music legend Dewey Cox and his turbulent "Behind the Music"-like career

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Everything Judd Apatow ("Knocked Up", "Superbad",) touches lately turns to gold, so expectations are high for this as well. Reilly has always been a great sidekick, so it's good to see him get his shot at center stage. And Jack Black as Paul McCartney? Brilliantly stupid!

My estimated rating: Frank Ryan (3 footballs)

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P.S. I Love You

Starring: Hillary Swank, Gerard Butler

Plot: A widow finds love letters written by her recently deceased husband that are meant to help her begin the next chapter in her life.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: I would really like to have seen a good movie featuring the mega-talented Swank and the now-hot-as-fire "300" star Butler. It won't be this piece of gag inducing fluff.

My Estimated Rating: Jeff Garcia (1 football)

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Juno (Wide Release on December 25th)

Starring: Ellen Page, Michael Cera, J.K. Simmons

Plot: An offbeat 16 year old faces an unwanted pregnancy by making an unusual decision regarding her unborn child

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Hip comedy of the season, according to all reports. Ellen Page (Shadowcat in "X-Men 3") is said to be amazing in the Diablo Cody written/Jason Reitman directed film that is looking to be the "Little Miss Sunshine" of this year's awards season. Another one that I'll be reviewing shortly.

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Alien Vs. Predator: Requiem (December 25th)

Starring: Aliens, Predators, and humans to serve as body parts for them.

Plot: The two creepy races go at each other again, with humans in the way.

The BeerBuzz: They made a second one? Why? And what better way to celebrate the birth of our Savior than to watch monsters kill people in horrifying ways?

My Estimated Rating: Spergeon Wynn (zero footballs)

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The Great Debaters (December 25th)

Starring: Denzel Washington, Forest Whitaker, Kimberly Elise

Plot: In 1935, a professor at Wiley College in

Marshall, Texas leads his underdog team of debate students into a competition with Harvard University.

[*View Trailer*](#)

The BeerBuzz: Nothing Denzel touches can really be bad, so look for this to be one of those uplifting period pieces that everyone likes, but few consider great.

My Estimated Rating: Frank Ryan (3 Footballs)

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The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep (December 25th)

Starring: Ben Chaplin, Emily Watson, David Morrissey

Plot: A lonely boy discovers a mysterious egg that hatches a sea creature of Scottish legend.

[*View Trailer*](#)

The BeerBuzz: Another British family film that we've been seeing trailers of for the last

few months. Hopefully it will do better than "The Golden Compass" or "The Seeker". It shouldn't be hard. But remember the old Michael Myers line on SNL; "If it's not Scottish...it's CRAP!!";

My Estimated Rating: Kelly Holcomb (2 Footballs).

New DVD Releases on Tuesday, December 25th

Eastern Promises - Just nominated for Screen Actors Guild awards for best picture and best actor for Viggo Mortensen. Excellent film (3 1/2 footballs) from director David

Cronenberg ("History of Violence";) following a young midwife (Naomi Watts) as her search for the identity of a Russian woman who died in childbirth leads her into the heart of London's Russian Mafia. Terrific acting and script, but not for the squeamish.

The Kingdom - Another in the line of disappointing films about the wars in the Middle East. This one has Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Gardner and Chris Cooper as part of an FBI forensic team tracking down a bomber after an explosion kills

hundreds of Americans in Saudi Arabia. Good action film, but tends to try a little too hard to be politically sensitive.

Rush Hour 3 - Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker are at it again. Yawn.

The Heartbreak Kid - Another terrible Ben Stiller movie featuring a lot of dislikable people. Fortunately, this one tanked at the box office, so maybe it'll be awhile before we're submitted to another one.

Calendar Watch

Next week (January 4th) *One Missed Call*

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

[*The Bucket List*](#) - January 11th -

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 18th -

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 25th - 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 22nd - 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
"The Tudors"
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 7th -

Roland Emmerich, he of
"The Day After
Tomorrow", gets to
unleash his big-budget
vision of mammoth
hunters in this film that is
NOT a remake of
"One Million Years
B.C." 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. Suess 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.

Pride and Glory -

March 14

th

- Ed Norton and Colin Farrell in a tale of a multi-generational family of NYPD officers and an investigation of corruption that could tear the family apart.

21. - March 28th -

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 4th -

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 2nd -
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
9th -

Emile Hirsch,
Matthew Fox, and
Christina Ricci as
Speed, Racer X,
and Trixie in the
Wachowski
Brothers'

("The
Matrix" trilogy)
adaptation of the
really rotten 1960s
Japanese anime.

The Chronicles of

Narnia: Prince

Caspian - May 16th

- 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

rd

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

("Transformers") as Indy's son.

*The Incredible
Hulk* - June 13th -
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 th -

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 th -

Look for this to
make a star out
of James

McAvoy

("The Last
King of

Scotland")
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

th

- Batman is back, and this time he's tracking the Joker, played by Heath Ledger.

Most likely the
box office
champion of
2008.