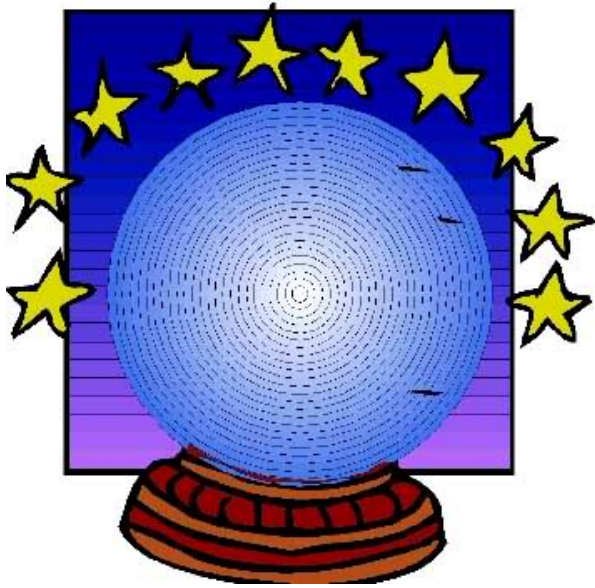


Crystal Ball - December Releases

Written by {ga=mitch}

Friday, December 03 2010 8:21 PM - Last Updated Saturday, December 04 2010 3:24 AM



That was a pretty underwhelming November. I really expected more. We did have a couple of major impacts; “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1” of course, as well as some minor successes such as “Megamind”, “Unstoppable” and probably “Tangled”. But that was about it; which is unusual for a November. Lots of misses last month; “The Next Three Days”, “Love and Other Drugs”, “Morning Glory”, and “Skyline” all had big expectations...and small box office results.

But now it’s December, and the big guns are ready to come out.

Just not this week; with the only new film coming out being the martial arts/western “The Warrior’s Way”. And it’s only being released on 1,600 theaters. In other words; another week of Harry Potter dominating the box office.

December also means that all of the movies vying for Oscar consideration will be released. The problem for audiences is that most of them will be in limited release until after the new year...so unless you live in NY or LA, you won’t be able to see them this month. Unless the studio changes its mind...you just can never tell, and it drives me NUTS trying to write this preview column without having a clue if/when certain movies will be available.

NOTE: The “Calendar Watch” section is missing this month. Once we get to January, we’ll start listing the anticipated blockbusters of 2011. But for now, let’s wrap up 2010.

Mini-Review – “The Girl Who Played with Fire” and “The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest”
– The first of these films is out on dvd now, and the last of the trilogy is playing in small art houses around the country...and I was lucky enough to catch it this week. Unlike the amazing “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”, you can’t truly separate these two films, as “Fire” ends with a cliffhanger that picks right back up at the start of “Hornet’s Nest”. The movies once again follow the most fascinating character I’ve seen for years, the goth hacker Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace), as she deals with the repercussions from her actions from “Dragon Tattoo” as well as events from her past.

Michael Nyqvist once again plays the erstwhile investigative reporter **Mikael Blomkvist**. In “Fire”, he is investigating the murder of two of his own freelance reporters who were about to complete an expose of the sex-trade in Sweden. In “Hornet’s Nest”, he spends the entire time trying to assist Lisbeth in her efforts to clear her name.

Many people have read the books, and those who love them will probably enjoy the movies as well, as they are closer to the books than the first film. For the rest, it’s hard to get into plot without giving things away, so I won’t. But while the plots are extraordinarily well written thrillers that are so stylishly done that you don’t even care about the plot holes they sometimes fly over...it’s still the characters and the actors that make this trilogy so great.

You have to deal with subtitles, so be aware (unless you chose the dubbed version on dvd). One other thing; European films don’t pander to the ADHD tendencies of many American movie watchers. You need to pay attention. If so, you will be rewarded with a great movie. If not; you’ll be lost.

My rating for “The Girl Who Played with Fire” – 3 footballs. For “The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest” – 3 ½ footballs.

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Mini-Review – “Winter’s Bone” – Look for this film to be a dark horse contender for “Best Picture”. It is an amazingly simple film about a 17 year old girl named Ree Dolly, played by the remarkable newcomer Jennifer Lawrence, in the worst backwoods of the Missouri Ozarks. Dirt poor, she cares for her 8 and 6 year old brother and sister, as her mother is an invalid, mentally checked out after years of abuse, and her father is a convict out on bail, but now missing.

She is informed by the sheriff that if he does not show up, Ree and her family will lose their farm and will be put out alone. So she gears herself up to find him, coming in conflict with her Deliverance type klan of cousins; none of whom are willing to help her, and are out and out hostile to her efforts to pry into their world.

The performances make this movie, led by the courageous performance of Jennifer Lawrence. Remember her name: You’ll be hearing it in the near future. Stellar performances are also given by non-actor Dale Dickey as the scary matriarch of the Arkansas Ozark Dolly clan...a woman with a strange way of showing compassion, as well as an unexpectedly strong performance from John Hawkes as Ree’s uncle. Hawkes is best known as the passive Sol Starr from “Deadwood”, but he is anything but passive in this film, playing a meth addicted hothead who reluctantly helps his niece in tracking down either his brother’s location...or his grave.

Stark and honest in its portrayal of a culture in America that many don’t want to acknowledge; this is a level of poverty shown that we usually don’t see. It’s a disturbing movie, but one that can give hope as well, as embodied by the perseverance and sacrifice for family shown by the main character.

My rating - 3 ½ footballs.

December new movie releases

Movies I’m Anticipating

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Black Swan

December 3 - Limited

Starring: Natalie Portman, Mila Kunis, Vincent Cassel

Plot : While vying for the coveted lead roles in a production of Swan Lake, a veteran ballerina enters into a twisted friendship with a promising new dancer that threatens to consume her.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Major anticipation for this film from Darren Aronofsky, the man who gave us such mind benders as “Pi” and “Requiem for a Dream”. He also gave us “The Fountain”, so there is that risk as well. The trailer looks intriguing, and Portman is getting major buzz as a frontrunner for this year’s Best Actress Oscar. I’m hoping that it’s showing in my area next week...but who knows...it could be January before all of us unwashed masses not living in NY/LA get a chance to see it.

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### The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Trader

#### December 10

Starring: Ben Barnes, Skandar Keynes, Georgie Henley

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Plot : Lucy and Edmund Pevensie return to Narnia with their cousin Eustace where they meet up with Prince Caspian for a trip across the sea aboard the royal ship The Dawn Treader. Along the way they encounter dragons, dwarves, merfolk, and a band of lost warriors before reaching the edge of the world .

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: The series changes studios to Fox, which reportedly will lead to better visual effects. Will it make a difference? Audiences weren't as drawn to Prince Caspian as they were to The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, so it may drop off even more for this one. For some reason, I really enjoyed the first two in spite of myself, so as a movie fan, I'll want to see this. The critic in me may disagree.

~~~~~

The Tourist

December 10

Starring: Johnny Depp, Angelina Jolie, Paul Bettany

Plot : A man travels to Venice to recover from a recent break-up, though he soon finds himself engaged by the beautiful and mysterious Elise -- who happens to be an Interpol agent with a dangerous connection to a fugitive criminal.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Nice pairing of exotic superstars in this film. The entire movie strikes me as an

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attempt to go back to the days when Alfred Hitchcock ruled this film genre. The buzz is high on this one, as are my expectations.

~~~~~

### **The Fighter**

#### **December 17 (wide expansion)**

Starring: Mark Wahlberg, Christian Bale, Amy Adams

Plot: A look at the early years of boxer "Irish" Micky Ward and his brother Dick Eklund, who helped him train to become a pro fighter.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: As a sports fan, what's not to love about this one? The previews look great, and the cast is stellar.

~~~~~

Tron Legacy

December 17

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Starring: Jeff Bridges, Garret Hedlund, Olivia Wilde

Plot: When Sam investigates a signal sent from his father's old arcade, he's pulled into the digital world where his dad, Kevin Flynn, has been trapped for 20 years. With father and son reunited, they team up with the warrior Quorra on a life-or-death journey across the cyber universe Kevin created.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: THE movie of the year for the Ultimate Geeks. They even bring back Bruce Boxleitner from the original. Now I will admit that I never saw the original TRON until about two years ago...and was totally unimpressed. But that was then, and this is now, and given the current state of CGI, I'm willing to go in with an open mind. Gotta say that the visuals look great, especially how they've managed to make the evil Jeff Bridges character 25 years younger than the real one.

~~~~~

## True Grit

**December 22**

Starring: Jeff Bridges, Matt Damon, Hailee Steinfeld

Plot : A young girl recruits a tough U.S. Marshall to track down the man who killed her father.

[View Trailer](#)

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The BeerBuzz: Ballsy move from the Coen Brothers in remaking this iconic John Wayne film. Supposedly it's closer to the novel than the Duke's version, but we shall see. All in all, a heck of a two week period for Bridges with this and Tron Legacy.

~~~~~

Movies That Might Be OK

How Do You Know

December 17

Starring: Reese Witherspoon, Paul Rudd, Owen Wilson, Jack Nicholson

Plot : Feeling a bit past her prime at 27, a former athlete finds herself in the middle of a love triangle, as a corporate guy in crisis competes with Lisa's current, baseball-playing beau.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: It's from James Brooks, who does know a thing or two about these types of comedies ("Broadcast News", "As Good as It Gets"). But he also gave us "Spanglish". If Reese Witherspoon can recapture some of the magic that made her so good in "Legally Blonde" and "Sweet Home Alabama" and if Brooks is on his game, this may be watchable.

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### Gulliver's Travels

#### December 22

Starring: Reese Witherspoon, Paul Rudd, Owen Wilson, Jack Nicholson

Plot : A Shipwrecked travel writer finds himself transported to an island in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle, where he's a giant among the natives, the Lilliputians. Initially taken prisoner, Gulliver becomes a favorite of the court and schemes for a way in which the Lilliputians can outwith their rivals, the Blefuscutians.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Not a great deal of buzz for this one yet...which may not be a good sign. Jack Black's not had a lot of luck lately in lead roles, so we'll have to see. I'm just afraid that this one will be as stupid as "Year One".

### Movies That Aren't Worth Wasting Your Time

#### The Warrior's Way

#### December 3

Starring: Dong-gun Jang, Kate Bosworth, Geoffrey Rush

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Plot : A warrior-assassin is forced to hide in a small town in the American Badlands after refusing a mission.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: No idea who Dong-gun Jang is, or why I should spend \$10 at the multiplex to watch what looks to be a very generic kung-fu movie. I do like one bit in the trailer...Geoffrey Rush saying "Ninjas. Damn." And that's the highlight of this film, which was completed in 2008, but only now making its way to the theaters.

~~~~~

I Love You, Phillip Morris

December 10 (expansion)

Starring: Jim Carrey, Ewan McGregor, Leslie Mann

Plot : On his second go-round behind bars, a scam artist commits the ultimate con in order to break out and win back the heart of a convict with whom he fell in love during his first prison sentence.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: There has been critical praise for this...but I'm just seeing this as a major flop. Carrey is said to be great, which would indeed be a big come back for him, but a gay prison love story just doesn't seem to be the type of film that's going to find an accepting audience.

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### **The Tempest**

#### **December 17 (Limited Expansion)**

Starring: Helen Mirren, Felicity Jones, Djimon Hounsou

Plot : A power grab finds Prospera, the rightful Duchess of Milan, exiled to a remote island with her young daughter, Miranda. Asserting influence over the island, Prospera develops a new enemy: the slave Caliban, who looks to raise a rebellion against his foe.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: I can't believe I'm throwing a Shakespeare adaptation into the garbage heap, especially given that Helen Mirren is starring in it, but this thing is being trashed by everyone as a complete mess. It doesn't help that director Julie Taymor's last attempt at a Shakespeare adaptation was the awful "Titus". Skip it.

~~~~~

Yogi Bear

December 22

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Starring: the voices of Dan Akroyd and Justin Timberlake, with Tom Cavanaugh getting the short end of the stick and having to have his actually face shown.

Plot : A documentary filmmaker travels to Jellystone Park to shoot a project and soon crosses paths with Yogi Bear and his sidekick Boo-Boo.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: And I thought nothing could be worse than a live action film of The Flintstones. From the trailers, it looks like I was wrong. Remember all those good things I said about Justin Timberlake's acting from "The Social Network"? I take them all back due to his involvement in this.

~~~~~

## Little Fockers

### December 22

Starring: Ben Stiller, Teri Polo, Robert De Niro

Plot : The Focker and the Byrnes families brace themselves for the arrival of a baby.

[View Trailer](#)

The BeerBuzz: Why does Ben Stiller insist on continuing to annoy me by appearing on screen?

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And why does Robert De Niro continue to drag his legacy in the mud by doing crap movies like this? I'm interested in seeing how much Dustin Hoffman is actually in this; as at one time he dropped out because he hated the script so much (from the looks of it, he and Babs Streisand are only going to be in it for a few minutes each).

~~~~~

New DVD/Pay-Per-View Releases

As mentioned in previous columns, these dates are when the movies are released to be purchased as DVDs, or released for DirecTV/Cable/Dish Network Pay-Per-Views. The actual release to Netflix or Blockbuster may be as much as 28 days later.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice – Nov. 30 – They slipped this in earlier than expected, which is why I didn't mention it last month. Very disappointing "big budget" movie for Disney and Nicolas Cage. I personally didn't think it was terrible...but given the hype, it's no big deal.

The Twilight Saga: Eclipse – Dec. 4 – Go to Walmart tonight at midnight and you can be one of the first to have this! I personally think being at Walmart at midnight is much scarier than any group of vampires. For the movie...more of the same from the first two; although there is more action in this one...which still doesn't make up for all the wimpy vampires.

[Inception](#) – Dec. 7 – This is the one to buy this month; my selection (so far) as the best movie of the year.

Shrek Forever After – Dec. 7 - This is supposed to be the last of the series. One can only hope, as they should have quit after the second one.

[The A-Team](#) – Dec. 14 ☐ – It’s been a good year for mindless, testosterone driven entertainment with “The Expendables”, “Unstoppable”, and this. ☐ I didn’t like the TV series, but Liam Neeson makes this movie work.

Despicable Me – Dec. 14 ☐ – Surprising hit of the summer, and the highest grossing animation from 2010 not named “Toy Story” .

Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole – Dec. 14 ☐ - A little too obscure of an animation for most people...although I have it on authority from my daughter that their six year old loved it.

Nanny McPhee Returns – Dec. 14 ☐ – Another kids film coming out the week before Christmas (what a shock). ☐ Well reviewed, and a must see for those families that enjoyed the first Nanny McPhee movie.

The Other Guys – Dec. 14 ☐ - I’m going to have to see if I can get over my hatred of Will Ferrell enough to rent this flick. ☐ Got to admit that Mark Wahlberg looks to be funny.

[The Town](#) – Dec. 17 ☐ – Another of my top films of the year, and a certain purchase from me. ☐ Ben Affleck has proven that no matter what else has happened in his career, he is a hell of a director.

Devil – Dec. 21 ☐ – M. Night Shyamalan didn’t direct this one...he only wrote it. ☐ Doesn’t matter, as anything M. Night touches is crap.

Easy A – Dec. 21 ☐ – Well reviewed high school film with Emma Stone as a girl who enjoys the attention she gets when she fabricates a rumor about her slutiness.

Salt – Dec. 21 ☐ – Action/adventure with Angelina Jolie as a CIA agent who may or may not be a Russian spy.

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Step Up 3-D– Dec. 21 □ – If you watched and enjoyed the first two...I don't want to know you.

Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps – Dec. 21 – Major disappointment from Oliver Stone.