The Crystal Ball is our regular Friday night piece here at The Cleveland Fan. In it, Mitch previews all the new theater releases, DVD releases, Hollywood news and rumors, and future release dates of big projects. This week, there's a bevy of theater releases, headlined by *Perfect Stranger*
, starring Halle Berry and Bruce Willis.

Years from now, “Grindhouse” will be the case study to show how a good movie can get screwed over by terrible marketing. The Robert Rodriguez/Quentin Tarantino double bill got trounced at the box office last weekend, despite predictions from all the experts that it would be the #1 movie. So what happened?

1. Bad weekend to open – Families go to movies over the Easter weekend, and they don’t want to see horror flicks.
2. But those pagans who do want to see a horror flick (read also; teenaged boys) chose the more standard one, “The Reaping”, knowing what they’d be getting, a big old gory scare, rather than “art” disguised as a horror movie.
3. Tired butt syndrome. The movie is three hours and eleven minutes long. If I’m going to sit for that long, there better be some hobbits, elves, and wizards involved. And during a holiday weekend, that’s a lot to be asking of your audience.
4. Confusion reigned. The studio really didn’t do a good enough job in letting people know it was two movies. I know most people reading this understood that, since I talked about it all the time, but it didn’t get through to the masses.

I can really relate to the third point. I had truly hoped to make it to the theater to watch it, but I simply did not have that much time available. Hopefully, this week will be easier, and I’ll get the review in. However, it is now being reported that the studio may go ahead and split up the two movies, add 10 -15 more minutes of footage onto each, and push them out as their own entity.

Smart move, but a little too late.

News & Rumors:

~ The Weinstein group looks to be putting together a bomb in the making; ripping off parts of "Crash" with the movie "Crossing Over", which is to be an ensemble piece concerning various immigrants attempting to achieve legal status in L.A. Harrison Ford and Ray Liotta have signed on for smaller parts…not a good sign. But getting Sean Penn to agree to be in it has been their one correct move.

~ On a much better note, Denzel Washington and Forrest Whitaker will team up for "The Great Debaters". Another "inspired by a true story" film, Washington will play a debate coach who successfully preps a debate team from a small college in Texas into challenging Harvard's championship squad in the 1930s. Whitaker will portray the father of one of Washington's charges.

~ Latest comic book heroes to be made into feature length films? Metal Men and Green Arrow. OK, I'll admit that as a kid and teenager, I really like Green Arrow…sort of a cross between Batman and Robin Hood, and they later added a lot of good social commentary, unusual for a comic book of that time. But I just don't see how this will appeal to mainstream movie goers.

~ Larry the Cable Guy is to star in a new movie call "Witless Protection". Yeah, because "LTCG: Health Inspector" just rocked the box office.

~ Pop Quiz: who are you more sick of hearing about; Sanjaya or Don Imus? Answer? BOTH

~ RIP Kurt Vonnegut…the literary world has lost a giant.

This week's new releases:

Not much relief coming for "Grindhouse" as SEVEN films go into wide release this week, a couple of them that have been sitting on the shelf for over a year…and a few others that need to sit a few more years.

Perfect Stranger

Starring: Halle Berry, Bruce Willis, Giovanni Ribisi

Plot: A journalist goes undercover as a temp to ferret out a big shot businessman as the killer of her best friend

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: I had hopes for this one, but it's looking more and more like this is just a high dollar variation of a movie you can see any day on the Lifetime Channel or on We. Bruce does a by-the-books evil villain as a cross between Gordon Gekko and Hans Gruber without the accent. Halle just does the things you expect in this movie; looks hot and does stupid things

that put her into even more danger.

Disturbia

Starring: Shia LaBeouf, David Morse, Carrie-Anne Moss

Plot: A teen living under house arrest becomes convinced his next-door neighbor is a serial killer

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Obviously a teen version of Hitchcock's classic "Rear Window", substituting an ankle bracelet for Jimmy Stewart's wheelchair. I think this will be a rather good stylistic thriller that will appeal to more than just the younger audience, as David Morse is one of the best there is at portraying quiet and intelligent nastiness.

Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters

Starring: A floating drink, a container of fries, and a meatball.

Plot: You're kidding, right?

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: I've never before included another critic's comments in my reviews or this column, but I think this one from Ed Gonzalez of “Slant” magazine pretty much sums it up far better than I.
"A second viewing with a joint in hand awaits to determine if its fierce comic bombardment

means it's either the worst movie ever made or an act of movie-film revolution"
. Now substitute a fifth of Cuervo for "joint" and that may be more attuned to my tastes, but you get the general gist of it. If you've liked the TV show, you might like the movie. If you've never seen the Adult Swim cartoon (like me), you'll undoubtedly share Mr. Gonzalez's viewpoint.

Redline

Starring: Nathan Phillips, Nadia Bjorlin, Eddie Griffin

Plot: Just watch "The Fast and the Furious" again, and you'll know

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: The only thing noteworthy about this movie was the headlines generated when Eddie Griffin totaled the producer's million dollar Ferrari, which the producer stupidly allowed to be driven at high speeds around a race track. Here's a hint from anyone who has ever watched cars running around a track at 100+ mph…they can crash…so if you insist upon having it out there for filming, you might want to consider putting a professional driver behind the wheel instead of the man from the Miller Lite Square Table. Man Law! Other than that, nothing here worth seeing, as even "Tokyo Drift" was miles ahead of this lame movie.

Pathfinder: The Legend of the Ghost Warrior

Starring: Karl Urban, Clancy Brown

Plot: A Viking boy is left behind after his clan nearly wipes out a Native American tribe. Adopted by the tribe, he later becomes their savior when the Vikings return

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Being that Karl Urban kicked total ass as Eomer in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, I was really wanting to see this…last Summer, when it was supposed to come out. The fact that it got pushed to fall…then winter…then spring makes me think something's not quite that good with this movie. Even the trailer looks lame.

Slow Burn

Starring: Ray Liotta, Jolene Blalock, LL Cool J

Plot: An assistant district attorney goes after a gangland kingpin, making a mess for her boss to clean up as he's running for mayor

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: OK, here is all you need to know about this film: It was **filmed in 2003** and has been sitting on a shelf ever since. Called a rip-off of "The Usual Suspects" it's the second stinky Ray Liotta film we've had a theaters this year ("Smokin' Aces" being the other)

The Hoax

Starring: Richard Gere, Alfred Molina, Hope Davis

Plot: The story of Clifford Irving, who in 1971 perpetrated the greatest scam ever seen in the publishing business, putting out an autobiography of recluse Howard Hughes…that was a complete fabrication.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This had a limited release last week and is now expanding nation-wide. Very well reviewed, interesting study of Irving's desperate attempt for fame, and how everyone eagerly bought into a lie that became harder and harder for Irving to keep a lid on. Evidently the real Clifford Irving is ticked off on how he's portrayed…which to me is a good sign, as Gere comes up with his best work since "Chicago" (and no singing or tap dancing this time).

New DVD Releases on Tuesday, April 17th

The Last King of Scotland – I saw this movie, although I didn't have an opportunity to review it, as Swerb was busy posting all the films nominated for Best Picture that week. Fantastic job by Oscar Winner Forrest Whitaker as the deranged dictator Idi Amin, and admirable work by James MacAvoy as the Scottish doctor ensnared by his charisma, and then trapped by his madness. Not an easy film to watch, and not always completely logical as it mixes facts with fiction, but still a 3 football film in my eyes.

Freedom Writers – By the books "Naïve, WASP female teacher gets inner city children to realize their potential" movie.

Smokin’ Aces – By far, the worst movie I've seen in the past three years. You've been warned.

Notes on a Scandal – Well received character study with Judy Dench shining in a non-typical role for her as an older teacher blackmailing a younger college (Cate Blanchet).

Calendar Watch:

Next week - *Fracture* , *In the Land of Women, Vacancy, Hot Fuzz*

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

Next – April 27th – Nic Cage in a sci-fi flick about a man with the ability to see into the future and therefore change it. Also starring Julianne Moore and Jessica Biel.

Spider-Man 3 – May 4th - The webslinger versus Venom, Sandman, and Harry Osborne picking up his father's GoblinGear.

Lucky You – May 4th – Long delayed film centered around the World Series of Poker with Eric Bana and Drew Barrymore. Unlucky them...they're opening the same weekend as Spider-Man

Shrek the Third – May 18th – Shrek & Donkey…together again. This time with the jolly green Scottish ogre trying to push off the king's crown onto a young Arthur.

Pirates of the Caribbean: At the World’s End – May 25th - Captain Jack goes for the hat trick.

Ocean’s Thirteen – June 8th – Ellen Barkin replaces Julia Roberts and Catherine Zeta-Jones in this edition. Talk about a "Brian Giles for Ricardo Rincon" level trade. Al Pacino in a role sure to induce his characteristic overacting won't help either. Will someone please stick a fork in this franchise?

Fantastic Four: The Rise of the Silver Surfer – June 15th – This time the quartet go up against the Silver Surfer and the return of Dr. Doom. Please be better than the first one! (the trailer does look awesome).

Evan Almighty – June 22nd – Steve Carell's Evan Baxter from "Bruce Almighty" is now a Congressman chosen by God (Morgan Freeman) to receive His powers. A reported budget of over $200 million on this will either make it this year's "DaVinci Code" (big budget, big box office) or this year's "Poseidon".

Live Free or Die Hard – June 29th - John McClane strikes again (probably with his walker).

Transformers – July 6th – Michael Bay (hack, spit) tries to spin a former children's cartoon into an "Independence Day" type Armageddon movie. As much as I hate to admit it…the teaser trailer looks good.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix – July 13th – These movies keep getting darker and better as they go. Voldemort (aka “relative of Art Modell”) is back and targeting Harry and his friends for some nasty payback.

1408 – July 13th – John Cusack as a famed debunker of paranormal activities encountering real terror in this adaptation of a Steven King tale. Saw the trailer the other day, and it nearly scared the crap out of me.

Hairspray – July 20th – John Travolta in drag. There are some things I really don’t need to see.

The Simpsons Movie – July 27th - ummmm…beeeerrrrrr

The Bourne Ultimatum – August 3rd - Superspy Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) is back and looking for his roots.

Underdog – August 3rd – Combination of animation and live action. Let’s hope it’s more “George of the Jungle” than “Scooby-Doo”.

The Invasion – August 17th – Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig in a sci-fi flick about an alien epidemic.

Shoot ‘em Up – September 7th – Clive Owen and Monica Bellucci protecting a baby from

sinister Paul Giamatti. I was so there anyway, and then I found out that in one scene Owen and Bullucci are having sex while in a shoot out. Totally Awesome!

Eastern Promises – September 14th – Naomi Watts as a London midwife drawn into the Russian Mob, headed by Viggo Mortensen.

The Kingdom – September 28th – Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, and Jennifer Garner in a story about an American team sent into the Middle East to investigate a terrorist attack on Americans in Riyadh.

3:12 to Yuma – October 5th – Russell Crowe and Christian Bale in a remake of a classic Western with Bale as a farmer volunteering to escort a criminal (Crowe) to Yuma by train, with a battle of wits ensuing.

The Golden Age – October 5th – Cate Blanchett and Clive Owen in a follow up of the award winning “Elizabeth”.

American Gangster – November 2nd – Denzel Washington as a heroin kingpin from the Vietnam War era (he smuggled it back in the body bags of dead soldiers) and Russell Crowe as the investigator on his trail.

Lions for Lambs – November 9th – Robert Redford directs himself, Tom Cruise (yeck) and Meryl Streep in this political thriller.

Beowulf – November 16th - Robert Zemeckis gets all medieval on us with a motion capture

(like “Polar Express”) adaptation of the epic poem.

His Dark Materials: The Golden Compass – December 7th – Major, major push from the studios for this big budget fantasy...designed to be the first of a franchise. Nicole Kidman and Paul Bettany star.