Listen ... by now you already know that The Crystal Ball is a Friday night staple here at TCF, and that it's the best weekly entertainment column on the web. I want to use this space this week to once again thank Mitch for his endless devotion to cranking out amazing columns, movie reviews, and Sopranos and "24" recaps for the last 14 months. Mitch is The Man. And he's coming in from North Carolina for the DRAFT BASH next weekend at Panini's! Stop by and say hi!

Rather predictable results from the box office last week. “Disturbia” took over the #1 spot, “Perfect Strangers” did a little better than it should have based upon the level of suckitude of the script. And all of the other movies released are destined to quickly go away, including “Aqua Teen Hunger Force” which seriously underperformed.

The biggest thud came from the movie I slammed last week, “Slow Burn”. After sitting on the shelf since 2003, it was released to over 1,100 theaters…and made less than $1 million. In other words, most of those 1,100 theaters had crowds that resembled Cleveland Browns Stadium in the fourth quarter of most of the recent Steelers’ games.

Probably more of the same this week, as there is just a trickle of decent films coming out due to the pending onslaught of the Blockbusters, starting in two week with “Spider-Man 3”.

News & Rumors:

~ Speaking of Spider-Man, this looks like it will be the end of the series. At least for the foreseeable future. Director Sam Raimi is looking to take on the directing job on “The Hobbit” (I’m STILL going to be pissed if it isn’t Peter Jackson, although I think Raimi would still do OK). And now Kristen Dunst has come out and said that in no way would she appear in another Spider-Man movie if Raimi wasn’t directing. I think it would be a good time to let this series sit. And then they can come back in seven or eight years and have it be fresh again with a new cast.

~ Speaking once again of Spider-Man, Marvel is now working towards making a Broadway Musical of the webslinger. Yeah…that’s going to be just about as big of a “hit” as when they tried making a musical out of “Lord of the Rings”.

~ More comic book stuff. Edward Norton is rumored to be on board to play Dr. Bruce Banner in the next “Hulk” movie. OK…that works for me. The next movie is said to be less serious and more true to the comic book than the first flop from “star” director Ang Lee (who I consider one of the biggest peddlers of crap disguised as art in Hollywood).

~ Final comic book stuff…this one coming out in less than two months from the release date. Laurence Fishburne will be providing the voice of the CGI Silver Surfer in the upcoming Fantastic Four movie. That’s three for three this week with me agreeing upon decisions regarding movies based on comic books.

~ Another on the “must watch list for 2008”. Eric Bana will co-star with Rachel McAdams in “The Time Traveler’s Wife”, playing a librarian with a “time travel gene” that meets up with his love throughout numerous periods of her life.

~ The producers of “Crash” are teaming up to make a movie about the Whitewater “scandal”. After that, they’ll make a movie about Congressional Budget Hearings…and then one about some guy watching paint dry.

~ Willa Ford will play Anna Nicole Smith in an upcoming Indie film. Sigh…it will never end, will it?

This week's new releases:

A couple of decent looking films this week. And a couple of not so decent ones.

Fracture

Starring: Anthony Hopkins, Ryan Gosling, David Strathairn

Plot: An assistant district attorney matches wits with the man who tried to kill his wife and avoid prison through a series of technicalities

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Pretty decent buzz on this one as far as a popcorn thriller goes. Ryan Gosling is no Clarice Starling, but Sir Anthony is definitely utilizing his Hannibal Lecter creepiness to its fullest.

Hot Fuzz

Starring: Simon Pegg, Nick Frost

Plot: A top London cop is sent by his jealous colleagues to a small English town that has no crime. But he soon finds out there is more to this sleepy village than meets the eye.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: From the same people who brought you “Shaun of the Dead” comes this homage to cop buddy action/adventure flicks. Lots of good buzz about this one…if you can get past the British accents. For those of you that liked “Snatch”, this may be right down your alley.

In the Land of Women

Starring: Adam Brody, Kristen Stewart, Meg Ryan

Plot: Pathetic loser boy gets dumped by his girlfriend, and then runs off to Michigan to live with his ailing grandmother, where he meets a family of three women.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Imagine the above plot description for a movie you'd see at 4 PM on a Sunday afternoon on the WE Channel…and you pretty much would have this one down pat. If your wife or girlfriend forces you to go to this one, you can even the score later on by making her accompany you to "300".

Vacancy

Starring: Luke Wilson, Kate Beckinsale

Plot: Trapped inside of their room in a remote motel, a young couple learn that they have become the stars of a slasher film.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: An exception to the usual bevy of horror/thriller films, one that uses tension, dread, and an actual plot to elicit the chills rather than gore. No, you won't see me in line to go see it, but if you're a fan of the genre, you'll probably enjoy yourself (you sickos).

New DVD Releases on Tuesday, April 24th

Big week coming. Adjust your Netflix queue or you Blockbuster rental plans accordingly.

Night at the Museum – Yes, Ben Stiller sucks…and yes, this is a stupid movie. But evidently it's a very FUNNY stupid movie with some really good moments. The second highest grossing film of 2006, and one that I'll be watching to judge for myself

The Queen – Exceptional insight into the lives of the Royal Family and their reactions following the death of Princess Diana. Incredible acting from Helen Mirren that made the choice for Best Actress a foregone conclusion the moment the film was released.

Déjà Vu – Pretty decent action/adventure/sci-fi yarn with Denzel Washington trying to stop an attack that has already occurred.

Code Name: The Cleaner – Horrible, stupid, crappy Cedric the Entertainer movie that came out in the second week of January…and was out of the theaters about three weeks later.

Calendar Watch:

Next week is the NFL Draft weekend…so don't expect me to be spending any time at the theaters. However, I will be at the Big Draft Bash at Paninis …so stop by and say "hello"…or "you have crap for taste in movies"…or "you just aren't funny, and I hate 'The Sopranos'…"

Next week - *Next , The Invisible, Kicking It Old School, The Condemned*

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

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.