"Fred Claus" (starring Vince Vaughn and Paul Giamatti) and "Lions for Lambs" (a film about the investigation of two Army Rangers left behind enemy lines in Afghanistan) are the two big releases at the theater this weekend. "Shrek the Third" is the most notable new DVD release. And in this week's Crystal Ball, Mitch previews all the weeks new releases for all of us out there that like a good flick and need some help finding something good to watch.

Another movie about the Iraq/Afghanistan War is coming out today.

And it's going to bomb at the box office.

Just like "The Kingdom", just like "In the Valley of Elah", just like "Rendition", just like "A Mighty Heart", and just like "Home of the Brave".

Why? In some cases (Rendition and Home of the Brave), it's mostly due to the fact that the movies suck. But that doesn't always mean box office bomb...or else Ben Stiller and Adam Sandler would be out of work (wishful thinking).

No, the main reason these movies are tanking is that the public just doesn't want to deal with an issue that is still so close to the heart, and still so confusing. It has

nothing to do with politics. If it did, these would be huge successes given the current polls showing support of the Iraq war down around the same percentage as those that think Britney Spears is a good mother.

It's also not a repudiation of "liberal Hollywood values", as Rush Limbaugh and his ilk would proclaim. Far Right Talk Radio hated and derided "The Day After Tomorrow" as "liberal propaganda", and the public responded by making it the seventh highest grossing movie of 2004, at $186 million.

There is precedent in this rejection. There were no successful movies about the Vietnam War until 1978's run of excellent films, such as "The Deer Hunter", "Coming Home", "The Boys in Company C", and "Go Tell the Spartans". That's five years after the Paris Peace Accords.

The only exceptions could be considered Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughter House Five" in 1972, a box office flop, and "M*A*S*H", which was set in the Korean War, but was acknowledge as a protest to the absurdity of the Vietnam War by its makers.

People will go to see movies with controversial subjects. But they don't like getting beat over the head about a subject that is still being played out...one that is still so confusing and polarizing to most people over what the best course of action will be.

Therefore, don't expect any truly great movies coming out regarding the entire War on Terror until several years after the fact.

News and Rumors

~ Mark Wahlberg is staying busy. As soon as he gets done filming Peter Jackson's "The Lovely Bones", it's off to play the title role in "Max Payne", another movie adaptation of a video game. Max is a "screw the rules" cop who is haunted by the tragic loss of his family, investigating a series of mysterious murders. I'm not exactly thinking "Oscar" here.

~ Good News! Another Football Movie! Bad News! It's staring Josh Hartnett. The Wooden One will star as a college football phenom in "End Zone", with Sam Rockwell as the school's excitable publicist. Yet to be cast is the teacher of international terrorism and mass destruction, who sees Hartnett as the perfect soldier/student. I'm smelling a Spergeon Wynn here.

~ Hayden Christensen will star in "Beast of Bataan", about the trial of Masahura Homma, the Japanese general who was implicated in the infamous Bataan Death March. Christensen will be playing Homma's lawyer. Willem Dafoe and William Hurt are in talks to appear, and the part of Homma is being offered to Koji Yakusho, who played the father of the young deaf girl in "Babel". I'm still not sure that it's legal to mention the words "acting" and "Hayden Christensen" in the same sentence.

~And we complete our sad commentary of future films, where absolutely nothing I'm reporting on will be worth watching with this: Not content to have TWO movies out this fall that parrot Charles Bronson's 1974 classic "Death Wish" (that would be "The Brave One", and "Death Sentence" for those of you keeping score)...nope, that's not good enough. So here comes the remake, and it will be starring Sylvester Stalone. Bring your own HGH.

~ Sorry to disappoint you, but the writers' strike will not influence this column. The only chance of any strike affecting this would be if the makers of Jaegermeister walked off the job.

This week's new movie releases:

Fred Claus

Starring: Vince Vaughn, Paul Giamatti, Elizabeth Banks

Plot: Santa's little-known brother, embittered by living in the famous man's shadow, is forced to move back to the North Pole

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Another campy "Christmas" PG-semi-naughty comedy that will end up cleaning up at the box office. Looks stupidly fun, although I prefer my skewering of Christmas to come in the form of Billy Bob Thornton.

My Estimated Rating: Kelly Holcomb (2 footballs).

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Lions for Lambs

Starring: Tom Cruise, Meryl Streep, and Robert Redford

Plot: A senator, a journalist, and a college professor are drawn into an investigation of two Army Rangers left behind enemy lines in Afghanistan.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Talk, talk, talk, pontificate, speechify, talk some more, scream from the soapbox, blah, blah, blah. Redford is a great actor and incredible director. Streep is one of the greatest actresses of all time. And Tom Cruise is still a couch jumping lunatic. Even given all of that, this looks to be a really boring movie. I guess we'll have to wait a few more years for this generation's &quot;Deer Hunter&quot;.
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My Estimated Rating: Tim Couch (1 ½ footballs)

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P2

Starring: Rachel Nichols, Wes Bentley

Plot: On Christmas Eve, a driven career woman finds herself targeted by a sadistic security guard who traps her in her company's parking garage.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Another &quot;serial killer/pervert tortures a young, successful woman because he hates women&quot; flick. How original! And it stars a girl whose best assets were manufactured by Dow silicone, and a guy whose once rising star from playing the creepy video kid in &quot;American Beauty&quot; has now been eroded to this crap.
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My Estimated Rating: Mike Phipps (½ football)

New DVD Releases on Tuesday, November 13th

Shrek the Third **-** Stale, lame, and boring are the three best words for this money-grubbing sequel to what was originally one of the best animations I have ever seen. Michael Myers and Cameron Diaz just seem to be going through the motions, and even Eddie Murphy and Antonio Banderas can't bail them out. Then you add in Justin Timberlake as the teenaged King Arthur, and it just goes straight into the toilet.

Amazing Grace - True story of the English politician William Wilberforce, as he maneuvered his way through Parliament in the 19th century, endeavoring to end the British transatlantic slave trade. Well received British film staring Ioan Gruffudd, looking much more at

ease here than he does as Reed Richards in the campy (and mediocre) Fantastic Four movies.

This is England - A troubled, fatherless boy growing up in 1983 ends up befriending a group of skinheads. Supposedly a very well done story that never relies on stereotypes or pat answers. My opinion is that if you enjoyed watching Elijah Wood in "Green Street Hooligans", you might want to check this out as well.

Calendar Watch

Next week: *Beowulf, Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium, Love in the Time of Cholera*

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

Hitman - November 21st - Deadwood's Timothy Oliphant follows up his portrayal as the chief villain in "Live Free or Die Hard" in this action/adventure film where he play...what else...a hitman. Look for it to be in the same vein as "The Transporter", and a hit (heh...I kill me).

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 Daniel Craig star (their second collaboration this year, let's hope it's better than "The Invasion"), along with Sam Elliot and Eva Green.

Atonement - December 7th - Artsy British film with Keira Knightley and James McAvoy, about a 13 year old girl who changes several lives when she accuses her older sister's lover of a crime he did not commit.

I Am Legend - December 14th - Will Smith in what is basically a

remake of the Chuck Heston apocalyptic film "The Omega Man".

National Treasure: Book of Secrets - December 21st - Follow-up to the hugely popular guilty pleasure "National Treasure" with Nick Cage back at his wacky best.

P.S., I Love You - December

21st - 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 25th

- 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.

The Bucket List - Decembe

r 25 th -

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.

Sweeny Todd: The

Demon Barber of Fleet Street - Limited release in December - 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.

Untitled J.J. Abrams Project - 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.

The Other Boleyn Girl - February 29th

- 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.

21. - March 21st - 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.