"Australia" and "Four Christmases" are the weekend's big box office releases. The newest "Chronicles of Narnia", "Step Brothers", and "X-Files: I Want To Believe" come out on DVD. A couple of very popular hour dramas got picked up for additional seasons. And there's new news on Marty Scorcese's latest project. Mitch delivers the straight skinny on all of these items in this week's Crystal Ball.

No matter how bad the movies are this weekend (and they aren't horrible, for the record)...

There is no way it could be worse than the three so-called NFL games we were subjected to yesterday.

Right now, I'm sure that in the fourth circle of hell, you'd be forced to watch the 2008 Lions taking on the 2008 Michigan Wolverines.

News and Rumors

~ I am still very much under the opinion that the major reason behind the poor quality of the movies seen so far in 2008 was the writers strike that didn't end until February. Well hold on to your popcorn bag,

because we may see more of the same in 2009, as the Screen Actors Guild appears poised to strike as well. It won't impact a lot of the big movies already in the can like "Watchmen", "Harry Potter", "Wolverine" and the like...but if it is a strike that last more than three months (like the Writers' Strike), expect a very poor batch of films normally considered Oscar worthy that would normally be coming out at the end of 2009. To say nothing of fouling up the television schedule for next fall.

~ Speaking of television...great news for two of the best series on TV. "Dexter" has received a commitment from Showtime for at least two more seasons. And "True Blood" was such a hit for HBO, that the second season will be coming back in the summer.

~ Another interesting project for Martin Scorsese. He is attached to the film "Silence", which will take him to uncharted territory; 17th century Japan, focusing on two Jesuit priests acting as missionaries during the Shogunate period, during which Christians were being heavily persecuted in that country. Given the success of "The Last Samurai" and of the continued high sales of the 1980s mini-series "Shogun", look for this to be a very high profile movie. It's currently rumored for a 2010 release, but as no casting has yet been announced, my guess would be more like 2011.

Stupid Remakes and Sequels

~ Tom Selleck, Steve Guttenberg, and Ted Danson are

re-teaming for another sequel to "Three Men and a Baby". I guess that given their ages now, the diapers will be Depends. In related news, Guttenberg is looking to revive the "Police Academy" franchise. I can't wait (huge eyeroll).

This week's new movie releases:

Australia

Starring: Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman

Plot: In pre-WWII Australia, an English aristocrat inherits a sprawling ranch, reluctantly partnering with a rugged stock-man to protect her property from a takeover plot, and from the effects of the bombing of nearby Darwin by Japanese forces

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Baz Lurhman is no stranger to controversy, and his films are quite often of the "love it or hate it" variety (see also; "Moulin Rouge"). This one is split right down the middle, with half the critics on Rottentomatoes going thumbs up, and half with the thumbs down. Two things about it are agreed upon by everyone; it's very long, and the cinematography is incredible. But is it really an Australian "Gone with the Wind"? That's a matter of opinion, and I'll give you mine in a few days.

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Four Christmases

Starring: Vince Vaughn, Reece Witherspoon, Robert Duval

Plot: A married couple runs out of excuses, and are forced to visit all four sets of their divorced parents over the Christmas holidays.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Vaughn didn't do too well with his last holiday film, "Fred Claus", but I expect a little better luck with this one, as it's not going to be confused with a children's flick. One thing they haven't been able to dodge is the stories that Witherspoon and Vaughn couldn't stand each other during the filming, and that tension has spilled over onto the movie itself.

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Transporter 3

Starring: Jason Statham

Plot: This time, Frank Martin has a bomb strapped to his wrist to make sure he delivers the kidnapped daughter of a Ukranian government official to Odessa.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Why? I mean, the first one was interesting, but a little stupid. The second was stupid, but a little interesting. This one? I'm not exactly expecting any new ground to be broken here...other than setting new marks in ridiculously ludicrous stunts.

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New DVD Releases for Tuesday, December 2nd

Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian - The second of the Chronicles of Narnia series, coming less than two years after the huge success of "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe". Unlike the Harry Potter series, the chapters don't move as smoothly

from one to another. In this case, the Pervese children return to Narnia 1000 years after their last visit. This gives the film a much different tone from the first, one that is much more serious. Still, this is a very good movie, and well worth the rental.

Step Brothers - We go from a very intellectual film featuring teens, to a completely moronic movie featuring middle aged losers acting like pre-teens. I'll admit to having "Talladega Nights" as one of my guilty pleasures, so I was expecting a lot better than this. But what we have is the same old song and dance from Will Ferrell; playing a complete idiot.

X-Files: I Want to Believe - I still cannot

give a proper opinion of this film, as I never watched the series or the first movie...consequently, I was completely lost and bored. On the other hand, my X-Files fanatic wife really enjoyed it. So there you go.

The Longshots - The "true" story of an eleven year old girl who became the first girl to ever play for a Pop Warner football team, coached here by Ice Cube. Pretty standard formula "sports/kids" movie that did pretty much nothing at the box office.

Calendar Watch

Next week:, *Punisher: War Zone,* *Cadillac Records*

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Noble Son

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

The Day the Earth Stood Still - December 12th - Keanu Reeves in a remake of the classic 1951 sci-fi film.

The Spirit - December 25th - Frank Miller's next comic book adaptation,

done in the same style as "Sin City".

Valkyrie - December 25th - Evidently some good editing has been performed on this film once destined for the scrap heap. Very positive buzz about Tom Cruise's performance as the German colonel who attempted to assassinate Hitler. We shall see.

Oscar Contenders - Movies that will have limited releases by the

end of the year, and if they are any good...you'll see them in January

Milk - Sean Penn as the first openly gay man elected to public office in San Francisco in 1977, only to be assassinated the following year.

Doubt - The principal (Meryl Streep) of a Catholic school in the Bronx grows suspicious of a priest

(Philip Seymour Hoffman) who might have molested a student.

Frost / Nixon - December 26th - Ron Howard's latest Oscar attempt, adapting the stage play of the disgraced president's attempt to re-habilitate his image on David Frost's TV show, and Frost's attempt to drag out the truth from Tricky Dick

The Wrestler - Mickey Rourke is

picking up early Oscar buzz in this character study of a professional wrestler nearing the end of his performing days.

Revolutionary Road - Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet as a young couple raising a family in a Connecticut suburb during the mid 1950s. Sam Mendes ("American Beauty") directs the "Titanic" stars in their on-screen reunion.

Defiance - Daniel Craig and Live Schreiber as Jewish brothers in WWII Russian, leading a band of refuges in striking back at the Germans. A major early Oscar contender

Blockbusters on the Distant Horizon (movies that would seem to be big hits...as soon as they get made or released).

The International - February 13, 2009 - Clive Owen and Naomi Watts in a thriller about an Interpol investigation of a world-wide bank funding murder and corruption. And you thought Wachovia was bad?

Watchmen - March 6, 2009 - The screen version of what is arguably graphic novelist Alan Moore's greatest work.

The Soloist - March 13, 2009 - Rober Downey Jr. and Jamie Foxx star about a talented musician who is now living on the streets.

The Road - Viggo Mortensen as a man walking with his son for months across a ravaged, post-apocalyptic landscape in search of civilization. Charlize Theron co-stars.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine - May 1, 2009 - Hugh Jackman goes it alone as the adamentium enhanced anti-hero. With Live Schreiber as Sabertooth, and Ryan Reynolds as Deadpool.

Star Trek - May 8, 2009 - J.J. Abrams and a young cast reboot the franchise, going back to Kirk and Spock's days at Starfleet Academy.

Angels and Demons - May 15, 2009 - Tom Hanks and Ron Howard follow-up to "The DaVinci Code"

Terminator 4 - May 22, 2009 - Christian Bale as John Conner as the franchise moves into the apocalyptic future.

Transformers 2 - June 26, 2009 - The next chapter of Robots In

Disguise!

Public Enemy - July 1, 2009 - Johnny Depp as John Dillinger. Co-staring Christian Bale, and directed by Michael Mann

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince - July 2009 - The sixth of J.K. Rowling's seven books, setting the stage for the two part conclusion in 2010 and 2011.

The Taking of Pelham 123- August 7, 2009 - Denzel Washington, John Travolta, and James Gandolfini in a remake of the classic 1974 film about a hijacked subway car.

Shutter Island - October, 2009 - Martin Scorsese working once again with Leonardo DiCaprio in this mystery set in 1954.

Nottingham - November, 2009 - Ridley Scot and Russell Crowe together again in a retelling of the Robin Hood legend, this time through the eyes of the Sheriff of Nottingham (Crowe). With Sienna Miller as Maid Marion.

Avatar - December 18, 2009 - James Cameron's sci-fi/CGI extravaganza. The C.I.A. should take lessons about secrecy from Cameron, as he's keeping info about this film very

much to himself at this time.

Iron Man 2 - May, 2010 - Right on the heels of the success of the first one, Marvel is quick to get Robert Downey Jr. back into his titanium suit.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader - May, 2010 - The series goes off in a bit of a different direction, as

those of you who love the books already know.

Thor - June 2010 - Another Marvel superhero...but the Nordic God is about as bland personality-wise as Superman, so we'll see how it goes.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I - 2010 - The start of the End for the boy wizard

and his battle against He-Who-Shall-not-Be-Named

Lincoln - 2010 - Steven Spielberg directs the biographical film of the 16th President (Liam Neeson)

The Hobbit - 2010 - Guillermo del Toro directs and Peter

Jackson will produce the prequel to "Lord of the Rings". Ian McKellen will return as Gandalf

Fantastic Voyage - 2010 - Roland Emmerich ("The Day After Tomorrow", "10,000 B.C.") remakes the classic 1967 movie about a miniaturized sub and crew operating on a scientist from inside his brain.

The Avengers - 2011 - Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, and Captain America open up a can of whoopass on bad guys everywhere.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II - 2011 - The end of the line for what will be beyond doubt the most profitable series in the history of film making.

The Hobbit 2 - 2011 - del Toro and Jackson again, this time covering the time between the end of Tolkien's book, "The Hobbit" and the start of LOTR.