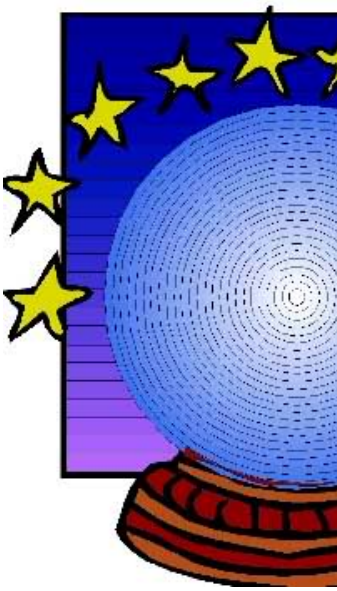
As there typically is each year on the week before Christmas, we have a slew of theater releases today. "Seven Pounds" with Will Smith, "Yes Man" starring Jim Carrey, and the animated film "The Tale of Despereaux" are the most notable of the lot. Mitch previews all these films, fills us in on the new DVD releases, and also brings our readers up to speed on all the latest Hollywood news and rumors in this week's edition of The Crystal Ball.



Remember last week when I said things would get better at the theater?

I lied.

At least for this week. I still am holding out hope that at least ONE of the 50 or so films being released on Christmas Day might actually be worth watching.

(Please!)

News and Rumors

~ Stupidest rumor of the week. That beacon of journalistic integrity, London's infamous gossip rag The Sun, stated this week that in the next Batman movie, Eddie Murphy would be playing the Riddler, Shia LeBeouf would be Robin, and Rachel Weisz would be Catwoman.

Interesting (and stupid), but 100% wrong.

First and foremost, as reported here earlier, Christian Bale is on record as saying that if the producers ever bring Robin into the franchise...he's gone.

On top of that, director Christopher Nolan hasn't even signed the paperwork yet making it official that he'd be directing, so any talk of casting is just B.S. guessing at this point.

~ Tim Robbins is said to be director Jon Favreau's choice to play the father of Tony Stark in the upcoming "Iron Man 2" movie. Obviously, it'll be in flashbacks as the elder Stark had been dead for some time when it came to the first movie.

Though small, the role is said to be pivotal as it sets up plot point for the "Captain America" and "The Avengers" films.

~ Remember a couple of weeks ago when I was joking about wishing "Entourage" was true when they had Martin Scorsese talking about making a modernization of "The Great Gatsby"? Turns out there was SOME truth to it. Hollywood is looking at remaking the old F. Scott Fitzgerald classic, but it's Aussie director Baz Luhrmann ("Australia") who is being reported as the man to be in charge of the project.

~ This would be an interesting pairing. Harrison Ford and Rachel McAdams will co-star in the comedy "Morning Glory". Ford will play an old school news anchor who quits in disgust of the tabloid mentality of today's new reporting.

He then accepts a position on a morning talk-show, only to be paired up with his old rival.

Stupid Remakes and Sequels

~ Remember the last time they made a movie of the old comic book "The Phantom"? Thought not...but to edjemukate you, it was a total stinker staring Billy Zane. So if at first you don't succeed, remake, remake again!

This time, it's rumored to star little known Australian Sam Worthington.

But he won't be "little known" by the time it comes out, as Worthington will get all kinds of notice playing the crucial role opposite Christian Bale in the upcoming "Terminator: Salvation".

~ "Tron 2". I. Just. Can't. Take. It.

~ "Blade" writer Stephen Norrington will be the writer and director of a remake of "The Crow". Some things should just stay where they are.

This week's new movie releases:

Seven Pounds

Starring: Will Smith, Roxanne Dawson, Woody Harrelson

Plot: An IRS agent close to suicide finds a reason to live by trying to help random people.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: On the heels of the success of Smith's "The Pursuit of Happyness" comes another Christmas time weep-fest. Unfortunately, this doesn't have as good of a script. Still, when it comes to Will Smith and the box office, expect big numbers on this one.

Just bring lots of tissues to the theater.

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Yes Man

Starring: Jim Carrey, Zooey Deschanel

Plot: For no good reason, a man chooses to become overly agreeable for an entire year.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: I think the only difference between this and "Liar, Liar" is that there is no child's magic curse making Carrey's character be wacky. Props for including one of my favorite quirky actresses, Zooey Deschanel, as the love interest.

Early buzz is that this should have been titled "OK Man".

And that ringing endorsement puts it at the top of the list for this week.

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The Tale of Despereaux

Starring: the voices of Matthew Broderick, Emma Watson, and Dustin Hoffman

Plot: A mouse who refuses to be like normal mice and scared of everything befriends a princess and helps rescue her from a kidnapping plot.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: The third rodent animation in the past two years. Is it more "Ratatouille" or more "Flushed Away"?

The buzz is not good, putting it more in line with the Hugh Jackman stinker.

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New DVD Releases

Burn After Reading **-** One of perhaps three movies that have been released between September to now that I would actually recommend. The Cohen Brothers followed up their ultra-serious "No Country For Old Men" by combining the slapstick seen in "O Brother, Where Art Thou", along with the black humor seen in "Fargo" in creating this extremely amusing tale of a bunch of bad people.

It's not that they're evil...it's just that they are selfish and stupid, while being completely interesting.

Brad Pitt and George Clooney are both magnificent, even if they are only onscreen together for one horrific moment.

Rent it.

House Bunny - Anna Ferris plays a Playboy Playmate kicked out of Heff's mansion, so she decides to set up residence in a sorority, and proceeds to slut up the nerds living there, or something to that extent. In truth, this movie is better than it sounds (one would only hope).

Death Race - And this one isn't better than it sounds. Mindless stupidity, violence, gore, and bad acting. On the other hand, it made Stephen King's Top 10 of 2008 list that he wrote for Entertainment Weekly, so it does have that going for it. Which is gross.

Traitor - I had intended to get out to the theater to see this one, but other crap got in the way, so it's vaulted right to the top of my Netflix Queue. Don Cheadle, who I don't think has ever put in a bad performance, plays a CIA trained undercover agent who is being tracked by the FBI as a possible terrorist. Gre

at supporting cast with Jeff Daniels, Neal McDonough, and Guy Pearce.

The Women - Run away! Run away! There is not even a single male listed in the cast of this entire movie. Estrogen run amok with Meg Ryan, Annette Bening, Eva Mendes, Debra Messing, Bette Midler, Candace Bergen, Carrie Fisher, and Jada Pinkett Smith waging war on each other and the entire male species.

Calendar Watch

Next week:, *The Spirit* , *Valkyrie* , *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* , *Doubt* , *Bedtime Stories, Marley and Me*

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

Gran Torino - January 9 - Clint Eastwood, in what he says will be his last acting role, as a man dealing with gang violence and prejudice in his own way.

The Reader - January 9 - Kate Winslet and Ralph Fiennes in a period drama about a woman on trial for war-crimes in post WWII Germany.

Frost / Nixon - January (unannounced) - 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 - January (unannounced) - 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 - January (unannounced) -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 - January 16 - 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

Taken - January 30th - Liam Neeson goes against type as a former special ops leader hot on the trail of slave traders who abducted his daughter.

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.

Duplicity - March 20, 2009 - Clive Owen again, this time teaming with Julia Roberts as corporate spies looking to pull a con job of their own. Directed by Tony Gilroy ("Michael Clayton").

The Lovely Bones - March 27, 2009 - Peter Jackson's latest, about the ghost of a young, murdered girl watching over her family and friends' reactions to the event.

Mark Wahlberg and Rachel Weisz star.

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

The Road - (unannounced release date) - 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: Salvation - 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

2012 - July 10, 2009 - Roland Emmerich's ("The Day After Tomorrow") tale of global cataclysm and the struggle of the surviviors.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince - July 17, 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.