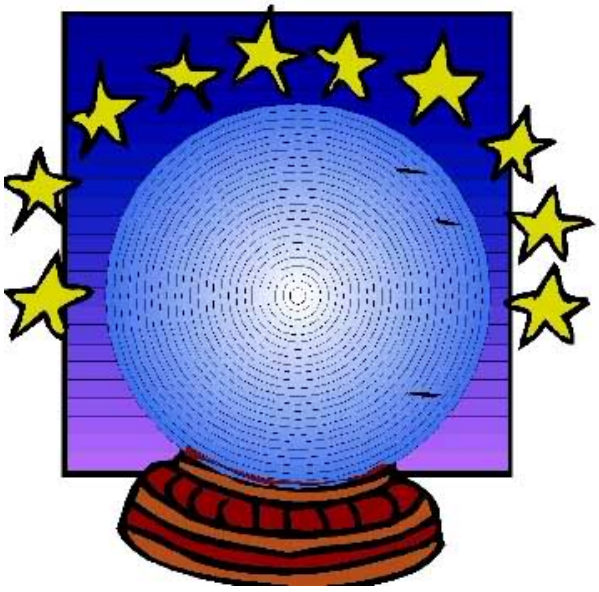
The drought is over, and it's turned into a deluge, with more movies being released this weekend than you often see during an entire month. There's pretty much something for everyone, and Mitch is going to be seeing nearly all of them, reviewing a slew of movies for our readers over the course of the next several weeks. After what most people have felt was a weak year in 2008 with films, the year ends with a bang. Mitch previews all the new movie releases in this week's Crystal Ball.



The drought is over, and it's turned into a deluge, with more movies being released this weekend than you often see during an entire month. There's pretty much something for everyone, and I'll be reporting on what I see as we continue through the holidays.

The other side of so many movies coming out this week is that there are no new releases next weekend. So, as has been our tradition, the Crystal Ball will be replaced next week by my look back at the (mostly crappy) year that was 2008.

News and Rumors

~ I expect we'll see more stories like this in the next year or so. Walt Disney Pictures has pulled out of funding the next Chronicles of Narnia movie, "The Voyage of the Dawn Treader". That doesn't mean that this film won't be made, as "Prince Caspian" still

performed very well overseas, just not at the same level seen for "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe". But expect less funding than Disney would have given, and therefore more emphasis on story and less on special effects. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

~ "Juno" star Ellen Page continues to impress with her maturity for a 21 year old in regards to her choices of roles. The actress has been tapped to play a lesbian in a new film based on a true story about Laurel Hester, a terminally ill New Jersey police officer who fought for pension benefits for her partner while battling lung cancer. Page will portray Hester's partner Stacie in the film.

~ The upcoming adaptation of the Marvel comic "Thor" has been mentioned here numerous times, last when it was reported that Kevin McKidd ("Rome") was favored for the role of the Norse god/Superhero. But there has been some official news; Kenneth Branagh will be the director. Unconventional choice, but then again, Jon Favreau was an unconventional choice to be at the helm for "Iron Man".

Stupid Remakes and Sequels

~ Some good news for once in this section. The producers behind an attempt to remake the classic horror film "Rosemary's Baby" have scrapped their effort. Surprisingly, the decision was made because they felt "they couldn't find a fresh angle to approach the story". Dropping a movie due to the fact that they know it would

suck? Unheard of!

~ "On the other hand, plans are in the works for another "Judge Dredd" movie. Hopefully without Sly Stallone (although that hasn't been ruled out), but I'm still not seeing any way that this wouldn't be crap.

This week's new movie releases:

The Spirit

Starring: Gabriel Macht, Samuel L. Jackson, Scarlett Johansson

Plot: A rookie cop returns from the dead to fight crime from the shadows of Central City.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This one is not getting the same love as its cinematic cousins "Sin City" and "300",

and it might just be because this is creator Frank Miller's first attempt to be the sole director of one of these stylish graphic novels. The comic book lovers may enjoy it, but it's questionable whether or not this can reach beyond that demographic.

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The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

Starring: Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Tilda Swinton

Plot: Benjamin Button was born old, and ages backwards, making challenges of life such as creating friendships, find a job, and falling in love.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This one's getting all of the buzz this week. You have the incredible star power of Pitt and Blanchett, along with the involvement of director David Fincher, who did pretty well

when he last worked with Pitt in a little movie called "Fight Club". This is a very long movie, at nearly three hours, but it will definitely be a contender come Oscar time.

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Valkyrie

Starring: Tom Cruise, Kenneth Branagh, Tom Wilkinson

Plot: Near the end of WWII, Claus von Stauffenberg leads a group of fellow German colonels in an attempt to assassinate Hitler.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This one looks like it will be another "Australia", with the critics split on whether they love it or hate it. So far, it's running 62% positive on Rottentomatoes, but the ones that are negative REALLY hate it. A lot of it comes down to being disgusted in the British and

American actors, especially Cruise, not using German accents. I'll have to judge for myself, as I was OK with Sean Connery using his normal Scottish accent when portraying a Russian submarine captain in "The Hunt for Red October", but at the same time, I disliked Kevin Costner's inability to use an English accent in "Robin Hood; Prince of Thieves".

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Marley & Me

Starring: Owen Wilson, Jennifer Aniston, and an adorably bad Yellow Labrador Retriever.

Plot: An impossibly cute, but impossible to live with Yellow Lab named Marley teaches newlywed owners a thing or two about patience and parenthood.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This one is a true 50-50 split on Rottentomatoes. The buzz is that it's a very good family film, but not aimed as much at the little kids as "Bedtime Stories". Dog lovers everywhere are crowing about the movie, however...so I get the feeling I'm going to like it.

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Bedtime Stories

Starring: Adam Sandler, Keri Russel, Courteney Cox

Plot: Somehow, the lavish bedtime stories that a hotel handyman tells his niece and nephew start to magically come true.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Adam Sandler steps away from his normal naughty comedies featuring lots of double-entendres and bodily function gags to a Disney kids' movie. And it doesn't seem to

work, but that won't stop this from being the top grossing movie of the week. Bottom line...it's pretty boring, especially with Sandler being able to fall back on his normal sophomoric sex jokes.

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Doubt

Starring: Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams

Plot: In 1964, a strict, demanding nun confronts a priest after suspecting him of abusing a student.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Unbelievable cast delivers the unbelievable performances you would hope to see from this level of talent. The movie is a contender for Oscar season, although it is getting a few complaints about some problems with the narrative.

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New DVD Releases

Eagle Eye - Shia LeBeouf continues to show that he is a certified box office draw with this suspense thriller about a mysterious group manipulating people to commit crimes as a diversion for something else sinister to be attempted. The plot and circumstances are borderline stupidly impossible, but the cast sells it well, and the special effects are mind-blowing. Worth putting on the rental list.

The Duchess - Keira Knightley plays the 18th century aristocrat Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, a woman who compensated for her loveless marriage by becoming infamous for her extravagant political and personal life. If this sounds a bit like Princess Diana, the coincidence is that Georgiana was a distant relative.

Ghost Town - British funnyman Ricky Gervais

plays a man who has an interesting side effect from having his heart stop for seven minutes on the operating table; he can see and talk to dead people. But no horror movie, or "Sixth Sense" suspense here, it's all played for yucks, especially with his best ghost friend, a tuxedo wearing Greg Kinnear, who wants Gervais to convince his ex-wife to drop the loser she's currently dating.

Calendar Watch

Next week:, Not a thing. Next day for new releases is January 9, 2009

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.