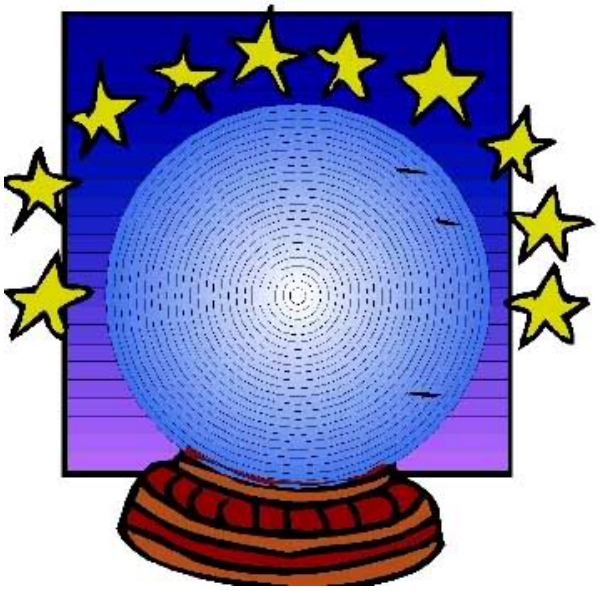
With March Madness on all weekend and the Cavs playing on Saturday and Sunday, Mitch calls this week's edition of The Crystal Ball an "exercise in futility", but he's being modest. We've got a couple interesting theater releases, the new Bond movie coming out on DVD, and some very interesting news and rumors ... including news on Stephen King's "It" coming to the silver screen, the "24" movie, and the latest projects for Sean Penn, Brad Pitt, and Natalie Portman.



I'm writing a column about what all to watch this weekend, when March Madness has kicked off.

File this away under: "Exercise in Futility"

News and Rumors

~ I have to say that this doesn't surprise me in the slightest. Due to the unexpected smash-hit status of "Taken", steps are already underway for creating a sequel. I certainly can't object to that...as long as it has a good script, and of course, as long as Liam Neeson is returned. And I certainly can't get through this blurb without expressing my sorrow for the untimely loss of Neeson's wife; Natasha Richardson. The thoughts of my radio co-host/wife Clarissa and myself go out to the family, especially the children who have lost their mother.

~ Sean Penn is in talks to star in "Cartel". Penn would play a man trying to protect himself and his son after his wife is murdered by Mexican drug lords. Given the recent headlines concerning the escalating violence in Mexico, sometimes spilling over into the U.S., this could be a very timely movie.

~ Two bits of information regarding "24". First is that for the movie that will be made for theatrical release following the series conclusion after next season; Kiefer Sutherland's desire is to film it in Europe. About time someone other than Americans get taken out by the terrorists before Jack stops them from destroying the country. The other news is that Indian star Anil Kapoor, who played the game show host in "Slumdog Millionaire", will be featured in Season 8, as an Indian counter-terrorist cop who teams up with Bauer. Teaming up with Jack? I immediately put his Odds of Survival at 100:1.

~ This one looks promising. "The Company Men" will star Kevin Costner, Tommy Lee Jones, and Ben Affleck. Affleck will play a Porsche driving corporate hotshot who gets laid off. Costner will play his blue collar brother-in-law, a drywall installer who gives him a construction job. Jones will play the senior partner in the firm, a man struggling with the greedy actions of his partners.

~ Brad Pitt and Natalie Portman will team up for a romantic comedy. It will focus on the four year relationship between a 40 something photographer and a late 20s New York Times columnist. Hopefully Natalie will have better chemistry with Brad than she did with Eric Bana in the awful "The Other Boleyn Girl".

~ Rumors have "Slumdog Millionaire" beauty Freida Pinto in line to be the next Bond Girl. That would definitely work for me.

Stupid Remakes and Sequels

~ There is rumored to be a Big Screen version of Stephen King's "It" in the works. Why? How could anyone think that a 1,000+ page book could be better served in a two hour movie than it was in an eight hour (six?) mini-series? Did they learn NOTHING from remaking "The Shining" with Steven Weber?

~ This might even be in the good news category. Hollywood is looking to do another "reboot" of an old/failed series. This one is interesting as it's a newer franchise, one that has stunk on both movies: the Fantastic Four. On one hand, this is good news, as the first two films truly were awful. The bad news is that it probably won't be any better than when they rebooted another one, and gave us Edward Norton as "The Incredible Hulk". Why don't they just boot this whole stupid idea to the curb?

~ A big screen movie about "MacGyver". Does it include where Jack Bauer and MacGyver are trapped in a cave together, and Jack makes a bomb out of Mac's body and gets himself out of there?

This week's new movie releases:

Duplicity

Starring: Julia Roberts, Clive Owen, Tom Wilkinson, Paul Giamatti

Plot: A pair of corporate spies who share a steamy past hook up to pull off the ultimate con job on their respective bosses.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Expect a very cerebral script, as this "romantic thriller" was penned and directed by Tony Gilroy, who was responsible for "Michael Clayton" and the three Bourne scripts. Very good early buzz about this one, and I'm looking forward to seeing it; for no other reason than the fact that Clive Owen never sucks (even if the movies he's in sometimes do...like "Elizabeth: The Golden Age"), and Julia Roberts hasn't had this big of a role since 2004's "Closer"...where she also starred opposite of Owen. I'll let you know what I think sometime next week (in between basketball games).

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I Love You, Man

Starring: Paul Rudd, Jason Segel, Rashida Jones

Plot: A friendless groom-to-be goes on a series of man-dates to find a Best Man. But his new B.F.F. puts a strain on his relationship with his fiancée.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This really looks like another mindless comedy from the Apatow Family Tree. However...here's the really interesting part. The movie is getting pretty decent reviews; but it's the FEMALE critics who are loving it, and the critics who are bashing it the most are almost all male. Go figure.

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Knowing
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Starring: Nicolas Cage, Rose Byrne, Chandler Canterbury

Plot: A man begins to suspect that his son has discovered an artifact that accurately predicts natural disasters and other catastrophes...including the upcoming End of the World.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: More Wild Hair from Nic! And another really crappy film choice from an actor who definitely Jumped the Shark after "Leaving Las Vegas". Last year, Cage did another sci-fi type thriller, "Next"...which totally tanked. Expect nothing less from this stinker either.

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New DVD Releases for Tuesday, March 24

***Twilight* -** (Note; I previewed this last week...but it doesn't come out until tomorrow...March 31...so I'll run it
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again, as it's a short week). Teenage girls everywhere will be in line at Wal-Mart on Tuesday to buy this one. A huge hit from last November, it's a PG version of "True Blood", with a bunch of vampires who look like high school students. The main focus is on the vampire Edward (Robert Pattinson) and his relationship with the mortal girl Bella (Kristen Stewart)

Quantum of Solace **-** Good, but not great follow up to the exceptional Bond Reboot "Casino Royale". This is the first Bond movie that is a continuation of another, as it picks up 30 minutes after "Casino Royale". Bond's anger and grief from the death of Vesper Lynd makes his a very grouchy boy for most of the movie, but don't let that turn you off. Great action bits, and Daniel Craig still totally nails the role

Bolt **-** John Travolta and Miley Cyrus are the two big names supplying vocal talents to this kids movie about a Hollywood dog who stars in a TV series as a superpowered dog...but is too dumb to realize that he actually has no powers. This doesn't stop him when he breaks out in the real world. No adult should really watch

this movie unless you're sitting right next to a child 10 years old or younger...but those of that age will love it.

Calendar Watch

Next week; *12 Rounds, The Haunting in Connecticut, Monsters Vs. Aliens*

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

State of Play - April 17 - Russell Crowe and Ben Affleck in a political thriller about reporter and his assistant looking to uncover the truth about a picture-perfect U.S. Congressman. Another Tony Gilroy script.

The Soloist - April 24 - Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr. as a street living mentally disturbed man who is also a virtuoso cellist. Downey Jr. plays the down and out reporter who discovers and befriends him.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine - May 1 - 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 - 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 - Tom Hanks and Ron Howard follow-up to "The DaVinci Code"

Terminator: Salvation - May 22 - Christian Bale as John Conner as the franchise moves into the apocalyptic future.

Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian - May 22 - This time, Ben Stiller's hapless security guard has to break into the Smithsonian Museum to rescue some of his peeps who've been shipped there by mistake. The biggest mistake is scheduling this movie on the same weekend as Terminator.

Up - May 29 - Pixar's latest movie certain to be an Oscar winner for "Best Animated Feature". This time, it's an old man who ties hundreds of balloons to his house so he can go on an adventure while staying home.

Land of the Lost - June 5 - Will Ferrell will now do his completely predictable mugging as a scientist

sucked into a space-time vortex into an alternate universe complete with dinosaurs. Based on the lame TV series.

The Taking of Pelham 123 - June 12 - Denzel Washington, John Travolta, and James Gandolfini in a remake of the classic 1974 film about a hijacked subway car.

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen: - June 26 - The next chapter of Robots In Disguise!

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

Bruno - July 10 - Sacha Baron Cohen attempts to recreate the magic he found in "Borat";

this time featuring his flamboyant Austrian fashion reporter character.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince - July 17 - The sixth of J.K. Rowling's seven books, setting the stage for the two part conclusion in 2010 and 2011.

G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra - August 7 - Every year, there is one big-budget movie that bombs. My prediction is that it will be this one.

Inglourious Basterds - August 21 - Quentin Tarantino directs Brad Pitt in this violent (of course) tale of a group of WWII commandos who conducted high-profile executions/terrorist acts against the Nazis in occupied France prior to D-Day.

Astro Boy - September 23 - They are really making

a full length animated feature about this Japanese Anime chestnut?

Shutter Island - October 2 - Martin Scorsese working once again with Leonardo DiCaprio in this mystery set in 1954.

The Wolf Man - November 6 - Benicio Del Toro and Anthony Hopkins in the retelling of the classic horror tale.

2012 - November 13 - Roland Emmerich's ("The Day After Tomorrow") tale of global cataclysm and the struggle of the survivors.

Nine - November 27 - Tim Burton's latest animated strangeness, with Elijah Wood and Jennifer Connelly voicing characters fighting aliens in a post

apocalyptic world.

The Lovely Bones - December 11 - 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).

Avatar - (unknown) - 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.

The Road - (unannounced 2009) - 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.

*Nottingham - (*unannounced 2010) - 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 Cate Blanchett as Maid Marion.

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. Mickey Rourke and Scarlett Johansson to co-star.

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.

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.

Spider-Man 4 - May 2011 - Tobey Maquire is back as the angst ridden arachnid powered hero.

Thor - June 2011 - Another Marvel superhero...but the Nordic God is about as bland personality-wise as Superman, so we'll see how it goes. Kevin Kidd (Rome) is said to be playing the title role.

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.

The Avengers - 2012 - Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, and Captain America open up a can of whoopass on bad guys everywhere.