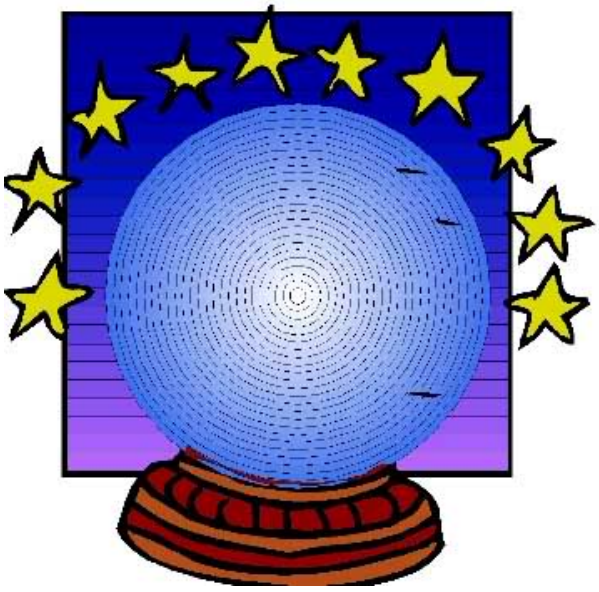
An uncharacteristicly weak holiday weekend for theater releases this weekend, with "Old Dogs" (starring Robin Williams and John Travolta) as the most notable release. The coming weeks have some biggies though, with the latest from Clint Eastwood ("Invictus") and James Cameron ("Avatar") highlighting the coming slate of releases. Further down the pike? A collaboration between Peter Jackson and Steven Spielberg, "Shrek 4", "Scream 4" ... and some other projects Mitch updates us on in this week's Crystal Ball.



It's a good thing that I'm now on vacation, and won't be back to my 'real' job until December 7th. If not for that, you might have to put up with a longer bitch session from me regarding Hollywood's idiotic methods of announcing "release dates" for serious movies I really want to see, only to pull the rug out from under me. Case in point; "The Road". As late as last week's column, it was still showing on Boxofficemojo as coming out on Nov. 25th in "wide release". So what happens? It's released to all of 111 theaters...none of them within 100 miles of where I live. Oh...and it's not showing anywhere in the Cleveland area either.

No idea when it'll come out in wide release...but I'll try to let everyone know once I find out.

Same thing will be happening for those of you looking forward to seeing Peter Jackson's "The Lovely Bones". That announced "December 11th" release date? Only if you're in LA or NY.

News and Rumors

~ Are the constant attempts to make a successful movie out of a video game finally going to show some results? You would wonder after all the failures such as "Doom" and "Max Payne"...but the stakes are being raised. Many of you have probably seen the trailer for " Prince of Persia " with Jake Gyllenhaal (really?). Now comes news that Brad Pitt may be starring in an adaptation of "Dark Void".

~ For die-hard comic book fans, there have been questions on whether or not "Thor" would also include Dr. Donald Blake, who was the Norse God's partially disabled alter-ego on Earth for awhile...a plot device I found rather stupid. Fear not...the good doctor will not be seen in the Kenneth Branagh film.

~ One last comic book movie blurb for now (I really try to limit these to two per week). Looks like the Superman franchise is on indefinite hold. This is due to a trio of causes; the poor performance of Bryan Singer's 2006 film, ongoing legal battles between Warner Brothers and the heirs of Siegel and Shuster (the creators of the character), and most importantly; the fact that they can't come up with a decent idea for a story. Hell...that didn't stop them when it came to "Superman

Returns".

~ News this week has Steven Spielberg completing filming on the Peter Jackson produced adaptation of "Tintin", staring Jamie Bell ("Defiance"). But don't be looking for the adaptation of the iconic comic strip anytime soon. They expect to take two years to complete all of the motion capture and CGI work to bring this film to life.

~ Just to prove that this column isn't all about big budget comic book adaptations or summer extravaganzas...I bring news of a film I'm immediately looking towards; the first film adaptation of a Tennessee Williams play in forty years. "The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond", one of Williams' lesser known works, wrapped filming. It's typical Williams fare; the story of an independent debutante in the 1920s who falls in love with someone from the wrong side of the tracks. Dallas Bryce Howard and Chris Evans ("Push", "Fantastic Four") will star.

~ Interesting. Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, the First Lady of France, and former actress, has reportedly agreed to take a role in Woody Allen's next film. As always, Woody will not release any news of the film until it's half-way through production. And only about 50 people will care.

Stupid Remakes and Sequels

~ This doesn't surprise me at all...a fourth Shrek movie. This one called "Shrek Forever After" (cute, eh?...ok...not really). The new character this time is said to be Rumplestiltskin. As long as we don't have to endure Justin Timberlake again, it may not be THAT horrible.

~ Wes Craven is rumored to be involved in "Scream 4". Not sure even he could help this franchise back to relevancy.

This week's new movie releases:

Old Dogs

Starring: Robin Williams, John Travolta, Seth Green

Plot: Ben (Williams) is a successful businessman whose

professional and personal life is altered when an old flame re-enteres his life -- with her two children (twins!) in tow. Finding himself temporarily in charge of their welfare, he enlists his best friend and colleague (Travolta) to co-parent.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: By the same people who brought you "Wild Hogs"...which was a movie that I turned off after an hour when I rented it. This is said to be just as bad. Horrible numbers from Rottentomatoes should tell you all you need to know (only 7% positive as of Friday morning). One last note; a higher ranking Disney executive is on record as trashing this movie; lamenting how badly it missed in appealing to women. 'Nuff said.

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Ninja Assassins
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Starring: Rain, Nick Yune, Naomie Harris

Plot: A rogue ninja comes to the aid of a Berlin-based Interpol agent who has linked the shadowy Ozunu Clan, a secret society of assassins who trained the ninja, to a series of murders. Most dangerous to them both is a former ally and the assassin leading the charge of Ozunu killers to Berlin.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: I was hoping for something positive from director James McTeigue, the man behind the underappreciated "V for Vendetta". But it looks like he's fallen for the same pitfall that awaits many martial arts movie directors; falling too in love with the fight sequences, at the expense of logic and plot development. Might be an OK rental to use for background noise while you're surfing the web.

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The Fantastic Mr. Fox (release nationwide)

Starring: The voices of George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Bill Murray.

Plot: Just as the mischievous Mr. Fox decides to settle down with his family, three nasty farmers scheme to take out his entire brood.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Highest rated movie of the week (OK...that doesn't take much). Wes Anderson doing an animated film (stop action)? The man behind "Rushmore" and "The Royal Tenenbaums"? Evidently so, and he's got an incredible lineup of voices to go with this movie fit for almost all ages. My choice for the best movie to see this weekend (when you're taking a break from the mall), clocking in at an astounding 92% positive on Rottentomatoes.

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New DVD Releases: Tuesday, December 1st

Terminator Salvation **-** I didn't much care for this McG mess that drives the Terminator franchise even further away from the greatness of the first two. After further consideration; it's even worse than I first described it. So much so that I'm now considering Christian Bale as the Most Overrated Actor in Hollywood.

Night at the Museum 2: Battle of the Smithsonian **-** I was surprised, given my normal dismissal of Ben Stiller as an actor, that I liked the first movie. Enough so that I'll give this one a chance, as it's nothing but more of the same...which still makes it a better choice than &quot;Terminator Salvation&quot;.
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Calendar Watch

Next week; *Brothers*, *Armored, Everybody's Fine*

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

Invictus - December 11 - Clint Eastwood directs a look at life of Nelson Mandela (Morgan Freeman) after the fall of apartheid in South Africa during his first term as president when campaigned to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup event as an opportunity to unite his countrymen.

Avatar - December 18 - James Cameron has spent years putting together this big budget, CGI heavy film about a strange, distant world and its inhabitants. Not getting a lot of love from the fanbois, though.

Up in the Air - December 25 George Clooney as a corporate-downsizing expert whose cherished life on the road is threatened just as he is on the cusp of reaching ten million frequent flyer miles and just after he's met the frequent-traveler woman of his dreams.

Nine - December 25 - Musical version of Fellini's classic *8 ½,* about a famous film director and all the women he deals with. With Daniel Day-Lewis, Penelope Cruz, Nicole Kidman, Kate Hudson, Sophia Loren, and Judi Dench.

Sherlock Holmes - December 25th - Guy Ritchie's interpretation of the famous sleuth, with Robert Downey, Jr. in the lead role

The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus - December 25 - A story-telling doctor's deal with the devil sends him scrambling to save his daughter on the eve of her 16th birthday. Terry Gilliam's wild tale is the last movie from Heath Ledger, who passed during shooting. In his place, Colin Farrel, Jude Law, and Johnny Depp all play the same character as Ledger, in a "Doctor Who" type manner.

The Lovely Bones - December 25 (limited, expanding ??) - 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.

The Book of Eli - January 15 - Denzel Washington as a lone man fighting his way across a post apocalyptic country in order to protect a sacred book that holds the secrets to saving humankind.

The Wolfman - February 12 - Lots of date changes for this remake of the classic horror tale, starring Benicio Del Torro and Anthony Hopkins. Let's hope that doesn't mean that this is a stinker.

Shutter Island - February 19 - Martin Scorsese working once again with Leonardo DiCaprio in this mystery set in 1954. Pushed back from 2009 due to marketing concerns...this still looks like an incredible movie.

Clash of the Titans - March 26 - Re-imaging of the campy Harry Hamlin sword-and-sandals film from the 80s. The trailer looks intriguing, at least