It's Halloween weekend, and naturally, the top release this weekend is a horror flick as "Saw III" hits the silver screen tonight at the theaters. In addition, there are a number of solid films still doing well at the box office, including "Flags Of Our Fathers", "The Prestige", and "The Departed". As he does each Friday, Mitch checks in to preview all the new releases at the theater and on DVD in "The Crystal Ball".

A bit of a surprise at the box office last week, as “The Prestige” debuted as the #1 movie, bringing in more money than the more highly touted “Flags of Our Fathers”, which came in third (“The Departed” was second).

I heard a rather interesting rationale (spin) about that. “The Prestige” is the type of movie that is geared to a younger crowd than “Flags of Our Fathers”, and younger people tend to go to see a movie the first weekend it is released while older people tend to wait a few weeks so that they aren’t battling the larger crowds. Using that line of thought, “Flags of Our Fathers” should stay in the Top Ten longer than “The Prestige”.

I’m not sure where I fall in with those demographics, as I tend to see a movie I plan to review Monday after work (and before Monday Night Football). Now that’s a routine I keep up only during football season, as I’m too busy drinking and watching football all day Saturday and Sunday to get to a theater.

For this week, only two new movies in widespread release, and they couldn’t be further apart in content or targeted audiences.

News & Rumors:

~ I'll have more to say about this one next week, but news is out that 20th Century Fox is pulling back its release of the Sacha Baron Cohen satire "Borat: Cultural Learnings Of America For Make Great Benefit Glorious Nation Of Kazakhstan" to only about 700 theaters, as it is bombing big time with test audiences. No shit, Sherlock. From what I've seen of this film from the trailers, not even my uber-abrasive, cynically smart-assed alter ego "dawgsofwar" from the board posting world of The Orange and Brown Report would find the smug ridiculing of "average" Americans by the British comedian to be that amusing.

~ In the category of "Announced new movie that will either be award worthy or suck rotten eggs", this week's nominee is "Battle In Seattle", starring Charlize Theron, Woody Harrelson, Ray Liotta, and Andre Benjamin. My early prediction will have to lean towards the giant sucking sound for two reasons. First, who really wants to watch a movie about the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle? Second, the film is being written and directed by Charlize's worthless boyfriend, Stuart Townsend…not a good sign. And speaking of Stewie…let's all give thanks once again to the genius of Peter Jackson for realizing two weeks into shooting that Townsend sucks, and replacing him with Viggo Mortensen for the role of Aragorn in "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

~ Marilyn Manson is reported to be in line to play the lead in a remake of the cult classic "Rocky Horror Picture Show". There is nothing I can write that could possibly be as funny as the mental image of The Strange One as Dr. Frank N. Furter.

~ Peter O'Toole is my hero. The story has finally been released that the actor was going to walk out of the Oscars in 2003 BEFORE he received his lifetime achievement award because the place didn't allow alcohol, and he really, really wanted a drink. A panicky flunky rushed out and smuggled back in a bottle of vodka for the living legend, and all lived sloshfully ever after.

~ Wesley Snipes?...there is a Richard Hatch on line 3, asking about a bit role in your next movie, "Blade IV: The IRS Bites Back".

This week's new releases:

Title: **Saw III**

Starring: Tobin Bell, Shawnee Smith, Angus Macfadyen

Plot: Jigsaw is back, and this time he's using an apprentice to torture Robert the Bruce (Macfadyen) while he's healing up from Saw II

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This is going to make a killing at the box office this Halloween weekend (ouch). If you watched the first two, you'll probably want to watch this one as well, but like the third X-Men blew chunks once creative genius Bryan Singer left, expect a major quality fall off for this one. Gregg Hoffman, the producer of the first two who was the driving force behind their success, passed away shortly after Saw II opened.

Title: **Catch A Fire**

Starring: Derek Luke, Tim Robbins, Bonnie Mbuli

Plot: Set in South Africa during Apartheid, a man falsely arrested for a terrorist act joins the anti-Apartheid movement after his release, tracked by the police officer who was once his advocate.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: This will be Focus Film's yearly attempt for major awards. I expect that it won't do much more business than other films about the problems on the African continent, such as "Hotel Rwanda", and it's unlikely that it will be vying for Best Picture with any of the big names. But the early buzz indicates that award nominations may be coming for great performances from Robbins, Luke and Mbuli.

Title: **Babel (Limited release; nationwide release TBD, probably late December/early January)**

Starring: Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett

Plot: The lives of six families across the world are impacted when two young boys in Morocco decide to find out how far a bullet will travel.

View Trailer

The BeerBuzz: Combination of “Traffic”, “Syriana”, and “Crash” in regards to a possibly confusing multiple plot line with an impressive ensemble cast. Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu has already proven his talent in these types of movies with the haunting “21 Grams”, so here’s to hoping it’s a good one.

New DVD Releases on Tuesday, October 31st

Unusual as there is only one film being released this week to DVD that had seen any time on the big screen.

Mission Impossible III (Monday, Oct. 30th) – The LAST (hoorah!) Mission Impossible movie with The Scientology Lunatic formerly known as Tom Cruise (Brad Pitt is reported to be the next head of the IMF). For the movie itself…lots of things go boom…Philip Seymour Hoffman chews up scenery as if he’s Al Pacino playing Satan…Logic shoots himself in dismay.

Calendar Watch:

Next week: “*The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause”,” Borat”, “Flushed Away”*

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

A Good Year : November 10th - Ridley Scott's latest with a kinder, gentler Russell Crowe and a plot line revolving around a vineyard. Crowe and booze…always an interesting combination.

Stranger Than Fiction – November 10th – Will Ferrell tries to replicate Jim Carrey's success in the break-from-comedy surrealistic drama in which he plays a man who hears the voice of an author in his head as she contemplates how to kill him off, thinking he is only a fictional character. Strange indeed.

Casino Royale : November 17th - Daniel Craig in his first appearance as 007. Good early buzz on this one.

The Fountain : November 22nd – Hugh Jackman as a 16th Century Conquistador who finds the real fountain of youth and spends 1000 years searching for a way to save his love. I like the concept, but the early buzz is that it's going to bomb big time.

Déjà Vu : November 22nd – Denzel Washington in a Tony Scott time travel adventure.

Apocalypto : December 8th – Mel Gibson's latest controversial movie filmed entirely in a dead language, this one focusing on the decline and fall of the Mayan Civilization.

Blood Diamond – December 15th – Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Connelly, and Djimon Hounsou have various reasons to search for a priceless diamond in Sierra Leone.

Eragon – December 15th – Swords and Dragon fantasy with Jeremy Irons. The inner geek in me is looking forward to it. But then again…lame attempts to rip off Tolkien will totally draw my wrath.

Rocky Balboa – December 22nd – I'll admit it…the trailer makes it look much better than Rocky IV or Rocky V.

The Good Shepherd – December 22nd – Robert Di Niro directs Matt Damon, Angelina Jolie and himself in a tale of the early years of the CIA.

We Are Marshall – December 22nd – Another uplifting movie with football as the backdrop…this one about the attempts to rebuild the Marshall football program after the tragic 1970 airline crash that killed 75 players, coaches, and staff.

Dreamgirls – December 25th – Big budget adaptation of the Broadway musical with Beyonce, Jamie Foxx and Eddie Murphy.

The Good German – December 25th –Oscar contender from Stephen Soderberg starring George Clooney, Cate Blanchett, and Tobey Maguire in post WWII Berlin.

2007 Attempts at Blockbusters (most dates are nothing more than educated guesses at this point).

Children of Men – New release date for the futuristic Clive Owen and Julianna Moore film about a world where women can no longer get pregnant, dooming mankind. (January)

Zodiac – Jake Gyllenhaal and Robert Downey, Jr star in the tale of the Bay Area serial killer (January)

Ghost Rider – Nicholas Cage turns into a motorcycle riding superhero with a flaming skeleton head. (February)

Reign Over Me – First major fictional piece dealing with the effects of 9/11 on the families, starring Adam Sandler (against type) and Don Cheadle (March)

300 – Frank Miller adaptation of the Frank Miller graphic novel about 300 Spartans defending Greece from the entire frickin' Persian Empire. Filmed in the same style as "Sin City". (March)

Grind House – Two one-hour short horror stories, one from Robert Rodriguez, the other from Quentin Tarantino. (April)

Spider-Man 3 – The webslinger versus Venom and Sandman. (May)

Shrek the Third – Justin Timberlake as young King Arthur. Gulp (May)

Pirates of the Caribbean: At the World's End – Captain Jack goes for the hat trick (May)

Ocean's Thirteen – Will someone please stick a fork in this franchise? (June)

Fantastic Four: The Rise of the Silver Surfer – No way does this film get completed by this date (June)

Live Free or Die Hard – John McClane strikes again (probably with his walker) (June)

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix – My wife and daughter will be there the first day (July)