



TRADES

Friday, February 26, 2010

Ryan Reynolds, Nicolas Cage voice 'The Croods' for DWA

Ryan Reynolds and Nicolas Cage are taking the lead voice roles in the DreamWorks Animation feature "The Croods." Chris Sanders ("Lilo & Stitch") is directing a screenplay from Kirk DeMicco ("Space Chimps") and Monty Python icon John Cleese. In the story, an earthquake forces caveman Grug (Cage) and his family into the wider prehistoric world looking for a new home, a situation complicated when they encounter a mysterious nomad (Reynolds). As the stranger introduces the family to the concept of "tomorrow," it stirs conflict with Grug's reliance on tradition, especially when Grug's eldest daughter becomes smitten with more than the nomad's ideas. DWA and Aardman Animations originally announced the project at the 2005 Festival de Cannes. The film is set for release March 30, 2012; DWA also has "Madagascar 3" (May 25) and "The Guardians" (Nov. 2) set for release that year. All three will be in 3D.

Applegate, Milano getting 'Hall Pass'

Christina Applegate is the latest to join the Farrelly brothers comedy "Hall Pass," in production at New Line. Alyssa Milano, Larry Campbell and Vanessa Angel also have jumped aboard. The new cast members join Owen Wilson, Jason Sudeikis, Jenna Fischer, Amanda Bynes, Stephen Merchant, J.B. Smoove, Nicky Whelan and Derek Waters in the comedy, which began shooting Tuesday in Atlanta. The film centers on what happens when two husbands are given permission to go outside their marriages for guilt-free romantic liaisons for one week. Bobby and Peter Farrelly wrote the script with Pete Jones and Kevin Barnett and are producing with their Conundrum Entertainment partner Bradley Thomas.

Dennis Farina, John Ortiz join HBO pilot

Michael Mann has recruited pals Dennis Farina and John Ortiz to star in "Luck," the horse-racing drama pilot for HBO that he is mounting with David Milch. The project is described as a provocative look at the worlds of horse racing and gambling told through a diverse group of characters surrounding a racetrack. It centers on Ace Bernstein, who, after three years in prison, teams with Gus Economou (Farina), his longtime chauffeur and muscle, to craft a complex plan involving the track. They recruit Turo Escalante (Ortiz), a successful trainer with sordid reputation. Milch wrote the pilot, which Mann is directing. Both are executive producing with Carolyn Strauss and "The Sopranos" alum Henry Bronchtein.

Three 'ER' alums cast in pilots

David Lyons has landed the lead in NBC's drama pilot "The Cape," Shane West is set to star opposite Maggie Q in the CW's drama pilot "Nikita," and Laura Innes has joined NBC's drama pilot "The Event." "Cape" centers on Vince Faraday (Lyons), a former cop set up as a criminal who becomes a masked hero, The Cape, to clear his name and reunite with his son. Lyons played Simon Brenner on the final season of NBC's medical drama "ER." "Nikita" centers on Nikita (Maggie Q), who is being trained to replace the original assassin after she goes rogue. West, who played Ray Barnett on "ER," will play the

agent in charge of recruitment sent to bring in the rogue Nikita. On the conspiracy thriller "Event," Innes, who portrayed Kerry Weaver for 14 years on "ER," will play the mysterious inmates' leader at a secret facility.

Universal, MPCA go 'Rogue' with Broken Lizard

Universal is getting into the Broken Lizard comedy business, picking up "Rogue Scholars" and an untitled project from the comedy group. Motion Picture Corporation of America has partnered with Broken Lizard on the pictures and will co-finance both projects through its studio feature film investment fund. "Rogue" is being developed as a college comedy revolving around five unruly professors played by the members of Broken Lizard -- Jay Chandrasekhar, Kevin Heffernan, Steve Lemme, Paul Soter and Erik Stolhanske. The group also handles writing chores for their movies. Details for the second project are being kept under wraps. Both are in the script stage. Brad Krevoy, Mike Callaghan and Reuben Liber of MPCA will produce with Richard Perello of Broken Lizard Industries. Universal's Tracy Falco and Kiska Higgs will oversee the projects for the studio. Callaghan will oversee for MPCA. By putting Broken Lizard into their terrarium, Universal gets a couple of low-budget comedies that are good bets. Although the group's comedies, ranging from "Super Troopers" to "Beerfest," haven't drawn big numbers at the boxoffice, they have a solid fan base, tend to be profitable and perform well on DVD. The group recently finished a comedy tour that covered 40 cities and is doing a special for Comedy Central set to air in the fall. But MPCA, which has a history of producing comedies -- including the Farrelly brothers' "Dumb & Dumber" and "Kingpin" and Chris Farley's "Beverly Hills Ninja" -- said the plan with "Rogue" and the second project is to bring Broken Lizard to a broader audience.

Comcast-NBC Uni deal faces criticism

Representatives from the Independent Film & Television Alliance and the Communications Workers of America on Thursday sharply criticized the planned Comcast-NBC Universal deal. But there also were some light moments during the latest congressional hearing in Washington examining the merger: NBC Universal CEO Jeff Zucker was asked about a similarity between him and Bob Costas and the cost of a haircut. Testifying before the House Judiciary Committee, IFTA president and CEO Jean Prewitt called for strong conditions to protect diversity of programming and voices. If the deal goes through, "Comcast is able -- and apparently ready and willing -- to define a marketplace that is merely a closed system," effectively blocking out independent content from TV and digital delivery, she argued. "Now, as in the past, Congress and the regulatory agencies must make sure that a few media magnates do not determine what their fellow citizens can see and hear." Regulators' green light for media mergers during the past 15 years has promoted uniformity, particularly cutting down the quality of children's programming, Prewitt said. "The public loses when they are limited to 'major conglomerate brands' and cross-promotable programming produced by the gatekeepers -- and are not exposed to the diversity and breadth that independent programmers offer." When asked by a congressman if Comcast plans to shut out indies, Comcast chairman and CEO Brian Roberts replied: "That's definitely not the case." He said for his cable company's on-demand offers, his team has been seeking to strike as many content deals as possible. Zucker also argued that no matter what the source, "we need the best programming" available, because "we need to do better on NBC." Prewitt, though, said IFTA has learned that indies must often do deals with bigger studios to get access to sector biggies. CWA president Larry Cohen, whose union represents workers at both Comcast and NBC Uni, also laid into Roberts and Zucker. The proposed acquisition "likely will result in the loss of good jobs, the erosion of employee rights and undermine living standards in the communications and media industries," Cohen said. Roberts has said he expects no major layoffs. But Cohen argued that the debt on the companies' balance sheet after the deal will mean the venture will be financially weaker. "As a result, the new entity will be under intense pressure to cut costs and jobs," he said. "This is an all too familiar pattern in the media sector."