



Monday, January 4, 2010

## 'Avatar' takes aim at 'Titanic,' 'Dark Knight'

"Avatar" crushed its rivals at the New Year holiday weekend boxoffice in North America and is poised to challenge "The Dark Knight" as the second-biggest movie ever, according to data released Sunday. Even "Titanic" could be threatened. When ticket-price inflation is included, that film had earned \$241 million after 17 days, according to tracking firm Box Office Mojo. After 17 days in cinemas across the United States and Canada, "Avatar" has earned \$352.1 million, placing it at No. 15 among all movies in terms of ticket sales. Fox, a unit of News Corp, forecast the film would end up in the \$500 million range. "This is like a freight train out of control," Fox distribution executive Bert Livingston said. "It just keeps on going." James Cameron's 3-D sci-fi epic earned \$68.3 million in the three days beginning Friday, setting a record for a film in its third weekend of release, distributor 20th Century Fox said. The old mark of \$45 million was set by "Spider-Man" in 2002. Cameron's 1997 drama "Titanic," the biggest film of all time before accounting for inflation, earned \$601 million, followed by 2008's "The Dark Knight" with \$533 million. "Star Wars" currently holds the No. 3 berth with \$461 million. "Avatar" is the tale of a disabled ex-Marine sent from Earth to infiltrate a race of 10-foot blue aliens and persuade them to let his employer mine their homeland for natural resources. It was reportedly the most expensive film ever made, with a budget of at least \$300 million.

## Luke Wilson, Diane Ladd join HBO pilot

Luke Wilson and Diane Ladd are set to star opposite Laura Dern in her HBO comedy pilot "Enlightened." Also cast in Mike White's single-camera pilot are Amy Hill as a regular and Charles Esten as a recurring. The project stars Dern as Amy, a self-destructive woman who after a meltdown has a spiritual awakening and becomes determined to live an enlightened life, creating havoc at home and work. In his first regular TV gig, Wilson will play Levi, Amy's unkempt ex-husband who has a drug problem. Dern's real life mom, Ladd, will play Amy's mother, who takes in her daughter as a house guest after her crisis. Hill will play the head of human resources at Amy's workplace. Esten will play Amy's boss and former lover who triggers her meltdown when he has her transferred. Wilson's only significant TV appearance was a recurring role on Fox's comedy "That '70s Show," in which he played the older brother of Ashton Kutcher's character. The CAA-repped Wilson next appears in the feature comedy "Death at a Funeral."

## Lucy Punch joins Kate Hudson film

Lucy Punch has been cast in the Film Department's "Earthbound," which begins shooting this month in Louisiana. Kate Hudson and Gael Garcia Bernal also star. Nicole Kassell ("The Woodsman") is directing a screenplay by Gren Wells about a woman (Hudson) who learns she has been stricken with cancer before meeting a new guy. Punch will play the woman's best friend and advertising agency co-worker. John Davis, Mark Gill, Robert Katz and Adam Schroeder are producing. Neil Sacker and Michael Goguen are executive producers. Punch, repped by ICM, Benderspink and United Agents in the U.K., next appears in the Universal comedy "Young Americans," scheduled for release this month; the Paramount-DreamWorks-Spyglass comedy

"Dinner for Schmucks" (July); and Woody Allen's "You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger" (fall). She also has had roles on CBS series "The Class" and in the films "Hot Fuzz" and "Ella Enchanted."

#### **'Southland' actor joining 'True Blood'**

"Southland" co-star Kevin Alejandro is staying in the South with another high-profile series gig, joining Alan Ball's vampire drama "True Blood." Alejandro, expected to appear in almost every episode of the HBO series' upcoming third season, will play Jesus, a Latino orderly who is taking care of Ruby Jean Reynolds (Alfre Woodard) at her care facility and becomes involved with her son, Lafayette (Nelsan Ellis). Alejandro continues to be attached as a regular to "Southland," which recently moved from NBC to TNT. Because of the cable network's plan to air the 13 produced episodes of the cop drama, starting Jan. 12, before making a decision whether to order a second season, Alejandro can accommodate "Blood" while keeping his obligation to "Southland." Alejandro, repped by Main Title and attorney Jason Hendler, co-starred on "Shark," "Drive," "Ugly Betty" and recently recurred on "Weeds." On "Blood," he joins such other new additions as Denis O'Hare, Marshall Allman, Theo Alexander, Grant Bowler, Joe Manganiello and Lindsay Pulsipher.

#### **Kim Raver joins 'Grey's Anatomy' full time**

Kim Raver is taking up permanent residence at Seattle Grace. Raver has been upped to a regular on ABC's "Grey's Anatomy" only two months after she joined the medical drama as a recurring character. The "Lipstick Jungle" star made her debut in the ninth episode of "Grey's" current sixth season, playing Teddy Altman, a new cardio surgeon brought in by her former Army colleague Owen (Kevin McKidd). She quickly stirred things up by professing her feelings for Owen, laying the groundwork for a love triangle with him and Christina (Sandra Oh).