

Hit films not saving studios

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood had its best holiday week in history, but ticket sales for 1991 were down, production costs soared and some studios stood on the brink.

The hits "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" and "The Silence of the Lambs" ended the year box-office rich but studio-poor. Even 4-week-old "Hook," with \$82 million in grosses, has yet to make a penny.

Due to the \$70 million film's complicated contract with director Steven Spielberg and stars Dustin Hoffman and Robin Williams, the pirate epic must gross about \$130 million at domestic theaters to be on track for the black. It has collected around \$82 million, of which TriStar Pictures has pocketed perhaps \$26 million.

For the first weekend of 1992, "Hook" made \$11.5 million. It was followed by "The Father of the Bride," \$9 million; "Beauty and the Beast," \$8.8 million; "The Prince of Tides," \$8.5 million; and "The Last Boy Scout," \$7.1 million.

Other top 10 films were "JFK," \$6.8 million; "Bugsy," \$5.4 million; "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country," \$4.7 million; "The

Addams Family," \$4.6 million; and "My Girl," \$3.8 million.

Final figures were not available for the Christmas-New Year's week, but it surpassed the holiday record of \$209.4 million set during the Fourth of July week in 1989.

For all of last year, North American theater owners sold an estimated \$4.85 billion in tickets, down about 3 percent from the \$5 billion for each of the last two years. Admissions were off more sharply, but returns were offset by higher ticket prices, as high as \$7.50 in some markets. Had it not been for the Christmas showing, the year-end returns would have been much worse.

"It's been a terrible year for movies," said Jon Avnet, director of the well-received "Fried Green Tomatoes." "People are sick of the junk that's been put out there."

Several high-profile films, released late in the year to be fresh in Oscar voters' minds, performed strongly. They included "The Prince of Tides," "Bugsy," "JFK," "Cape Fear" and, in limited release, "Fried Green Tomatoes" and "Grand Canyon."

The popularity of these critically

acclaimed titles suggested filmgoers were avoiding theaters not because of the recession but because there were so many lousy movies.

The industry is also being hurt by soaring production costs — an average of \$26.7 million per movie in 1991, up \$7.7 million in three years.

Carolco Pictures had the year's No. 1 hit in "Terminator 2," which grossed \$204.3 million, but the film cost a staggering \$95 million. Carolco is now on the verge of collapse and has laid off a fourth of its staff.

Orion Pictures stitched together \$130.7 million from "The Silence of the Lambs," good for third-best of the year. The studio is now in bankruptcy proceedings.

The year's top 10 films were "Terminator 2," starring Arnold Schwarzenegger; Kevin Costner's "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves"; "The Silence of the Lambs" starring Jodie Foster; "City Slickers," "Sleeping With the Enemy," "The Addams Family," "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze," "Backdraft" and "Hotshots!"

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