

December movie preview

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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This week sees the release of two movies with genre film elements. *Violent Night* from Universal Pictures features David Harbour as Santa Claus. When Saint Nick encounters mercenaries on his holiday rounds, he decides to put them on his naughty list and wipe them out.

The other movie coming out is *Darby and the Dead* from 20th Century Films. It involves a teen who develops the ability to see ghosts and decides to counsel them. This title is geared towards young audiences and will be available to stream on Hulu.

Unfortunately, this reviewer wasn't able to screen them in time. Still, this creates an opportunity to take a peek at some other titles arriving this month.

Dec. 9 sees the arrival of *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*, which will be streaming on Netflix. This is an animated take on the famous story with a decidedly darker and more adult tone than the Disney versions. Gregory Mann, Ewan McGregor, David Bradley, Tilda Swinton, Cate Blanchett, Finn Wolfhard and Christoph Waltz are just a few of the names providing voices in the feature.

Spoiler Alert is a drama/comedy from Focus Features starring Jim Parsons and Ben Aldridge about two men who fall in love and then have to deal with complications after one of them falls ill with AIDS.

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Empire of Light from Searchlight Pictures will be opening in limited markets the same week, hoping to expand to areas like Gallup over the coming weeks. It's a drama from director Sam Mendes (*American Beauty*, *Skyfall*, 1917). The story involves a British cinema manager struggling with mental health issues. She and a new employee become friends and use the movies to try and inspire each other through tough times. It stars Olivia Colman, Michael Ward and Colin Firth.

On Dec. 16, a sequel to one of the all-time biggest box office hits finally reaches cinemas. It took 13 years to make, but *Avatar: The Way of Water* picks up with the same characters after the events of the first film. A familiar enemy returns to Pandora and threatens lead Jake Scully and his family, who now live near a fantastical ocean. Like the original, this film will be available to view in 3-D.

The following week gets off to an early start. On Dec. 21, Universal Pictures will release *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, another in this line of animated family films.

In this chapter, the title character discovers that he has used up all but one of his nine lives. He heads off to find a mythical treasure that can restore his ability to cheat death. Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Florence Pugh, John Mulaney, Ray Winstone, Olivia Colman and Da'Vine Joy Randolph provide voices for the feature.

Just two days later, Paramount is debuting *Babylon* at cinemas. This feature stars Margot Robbie and Brad Pitt and is said to trace the rise and fall of various performers living in excess during the early days of Hollywood. The film is written and directed by Oscar-winner Damien Chazelle (*La La Land*).

If you missed the one-week exclusive run of *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* at movie theaters last week, the film will be debuting on Netflix on Dec. 23. Daniel Craig once again plays detective Benoit Blanc, who investigates a new series of murders. Once again, the cast is huge and includes Edward Norton, Kate Hudson, Dave Bautista, Janelle Monáe, Leslie Odom Jr., Ethan Hawke, Hugh Grant, Natasha Lyonne and many more.

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Additionally, Tristar is releasing *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* on the same weekend. It's a biopic of musical artist Whitney Houston and features Naomi Ackie in the role of the iconic singing legend.

The British film *Living* is building up a lot of positive buzz for awards season and the title will open in New York and L.A. on the same date from Sony Pictures Classics. It's another movie that will make its way to other markets like this one over the following few weeks.

And on Dec. 25, Sony is presenting *A Man Called Otto* with Tom Hanks in limited markets before it opens wider across the country. It's a remake of the Swedish film

A Man Called Ove

and follows an ill-tempered and suicidal senior who accidentally befriends a young girl and her family who live nearby. The original is quite charming and one hopes that this English-language redo manages to be just as funny and ingratiating.

Of course, other Oscar contenders may also be squeezed into the month (and Academy Award contender *Women Talking* is scheduled to arrive in cinemas on Jan. 2.). There may also be some release date shuffling, but this should give you some idea of what to expect movie-wise over the next few weeks.

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