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## Tekst 13

# City A.M. film reviews

## MAGNUS

**Dir. Benjamin Ree**

Of all the sports in the world, competitive chess is not one that inspires Hollywood-style underdog stories. But this tale of the genesis of genius is, in its own way, as compelling as any blockbuster. Magnus Carlsen, as documented here by Benjamin Ree, is a Norwegian prodigy described as the Mozart of chess.



There are no artistic flourishes on display, with the style resolutely fly-on-the-wall, always content to watch events unfold, which feels like exactly the right approach. Even those unaware of Carlson or the world he has conquered will be fascinated by his story.

While coming across as a chess machine, Magnus Carlsen is not without his flaws. Seeing him succumb to nerves on the big stage creates an empathy as his career progresses, dispelling the cliché of the emotionless savant.

There are no tantrums, no controversy, you're simply witnessing a spectacularly gifted person reach his own personal mountaintop. As the Championship looms, the perfect antagonist is offered in defending champion Viswanathan Anand, who uses computer programmes to perfect his game, creating a Rocky-esque showdown of technology versus God-given skill.

Unassumingly captivating, *Magnus* is a film that forgoes any showmanship, and is all the better for it.

## ALLIED

**Dir. Robert Zemeckis**

There aren't many stars left who can be said to have that old-school Hollywood glamour, but two of them unite for this nostalgic World War 2 drama. Brad Pitt plays Canadian spy Max, who falls for a French agent (Marion Cotillard). The pair marry and move to London, raising a child and living a seemingly idyllic life. Max is then blindsided by an ultimatum from his employers, who tell him his wife is a double agent and he must kill her.

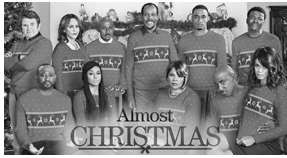


Clearly attempting to emulate 40s classics (the film even begins in Casablanca), director Robert Zemeckis just can't pull off the slow-burning tension required to keep this tale ticking over. There are occasional moments of genuine menace, such as Pitt being interrogated or having to commit murder in the shadows, but for the most part *Allied* is little more than a cold re-enactment of cinema's past.

Like an average cover version of a classic song, Zemeckis's drama makes all the right noises for a 40s war-time thriller, but it doesn't have any of the heart.

## ALMOST CHRISTMAS

Dir. David Talbert



The festive period practically demands dysfunctional family comedies, and this time it falls to Danny Glover to orchestrate the proceedings. He plays a widower keen to get his large family together for their first Christmas without his wife, but various issues threaten to derail the occasion.

For a story that's been told a thousand times, there's a sincerity to *Almost Christmas* that's endearing. Glover, perfectly cast as the patriarch (you're almost begging him to repeat his old *Lethal Weapon* catchphrase), oversees a family suffering from a roster of entirely relatable marital and career woes. The cast tuck in to a script that gives them just enough to work with, jam-packed with withering put-downs. It's enough to compensate for the frequently awkward slapstick and lingering taste of saccharine; if you can't enjoy a feel-good movie at this time of the year then what hope is there for any of us?

## YOUR NAME

Dir. Makoto Shinkai



*Your Name* is ridiculously, heartbreakingly beautiful. Every frame is filled with flourishes that amaze and delight; a sunbeam refracted in a tear-drop, motes of dust swimming in the morning light, the technicolour trail of a mysterious comet.

It's the latest film from the hip young gunslinger of Japanese animation, Makoto Shinkai, and it arrives in the UK having already broken records in its home country.

It follows two pubescent teenagers, country-girl Mitsuha and Tokyo urbanite Taki, who both start every day shedding silent tears over a dream they can't quite remember. Then one day Taki wakes up in Mitsuha's body, presenting him with the opportunity to learn what it's like being a teenage girl. Mitsuha, meanwhile, becomes Taki, giving her the chance to marvel at the big city, where she's always dreamed of escaping.

Though their memory of the other person is always hazy after they return to normal — they can't remember each other's names, for instance — they begin to communicate through scrawled messages, and an unconventional romance looks set to blossom. But what begins as a jaunty high-school rom-com gradually develops a darker, more existential tone, somehow linked to the comet lighting up the night sky.

*Your Name* is Shinkai's fifth feature, but it's the one that will cement him in the minds of western viewers as the heir to Miyazaki.

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