Mountain Climbing, Tom Hanks, and a Double Dose of Disney

From ‘Unbreakable’ to ‘Cast Away,’ A Crowded Holiday Film Season Awaits

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Could the traditional Oscar season be on its way out? Such would seem to be the case, particularly after taking a glance at this year’s Holiday film lineup. In past years, the months of November and December bring with them a veritable parade of Oscar hopefuls, and while studios usually have several family-friendly flicks and a few big-budget blockbusters lined up for the Yuletide season, rarely do these movies overshadow the more serious stuff. This year is a different story. From now until the end of December, a deluge of movies seemingly more suited for the summer will be hitting every week. The Holiday film season has never looked more crowded in terms of genre and studio sizzle. Oscar won’t be totally gone from picture through, with films like “Finding Forrester,” “Chocolat” and “All the Pretty Horses” all earmarked as potential Academy-Award material.

Here’s a sampling of what’s coming our way (as always, all release dates are subject to change).

Dr. Seuss’ How the Grinch Stole Christmas (opens today) Jim Carrey stars as the green-furred protagonist in this live-action version of Dr. Seuss’ now legendary Christmas tale directed by Ron Howard. Amazing Seussian visuals and Jim Carrey’s deliciously over-the-top turn as the Grinch give this film a lot of promise, but past experience has shown it’s risky to put a new, modern spin on an already beloved classic.

The 6th Day (opens today) Apparently unfazed by the bomb that was “End of Days,” Arnold Schwarzenegger returns in a decidedly more traditional project, a futuristic action flick that has Neumann back to his glory days (if that is what it can be called) of “The Running Man” and “Total Recall.” This time, the Austrian Oak plays a helicopter pilot in the near future who becomes an unwilling guinea pig in a cloning experiment headed by a nasty tycoon (Tom Goldwyn) and an unscrupulous scientist (Robert Duval). Roger Spottswode’s (“Tomorrow Never Dies”) directs.

Bounce (opens today) Romantic drama, starring Anthony Hopkins and Hollywood couple Ben Affleck and Gwyneth Paltrow, about a man who gives away his plane ticket to a hospital anxious to return home only to see the plane crash on the way back. The main character, a built-stricken, the man seeks out the widow of the deceased spouse, only to fall in love with her. Directed by Don Rosen (“The Opposite of Sex”).

Unbreakable (opens Nov. 22) “Sixth Sense” director M. Night Shyamalan attempts to work his magic again in this supernatural thriller starring Bruce Willis, who also starred in Shyamalan’s 1999 sleeper hit, and Samuel L. Jackson. Specific plot details are sparse, but the movie’s basic storyline deals with a man who somehow manages to survive a horrible train wreck that kills everyone else on the board, and through the experience discovers something profound about himself. Apart from that basic outline, Shyamalan’s lips are sealed.

Finding Forrester (opens Dec. 6) Gus Van Sant, director of “Good Will Hunting,” brings us another mentor-disciple story, this time between a reclusive novelist (Sean Connery) and a young college basketball player with a gift for writing. The surprise wins of “Good Will Hunting” at the 1998 Academy Awards (Best Original Screenplay and Best Supporting Actor) have not been forgotten, and, as a consequence, there is already talk of “Forrester” earning some gold statues next March.

Vertical Limit (opens Dec. 8) This action-adventure film stars Chris O’Donnell as an emotionally traumatized ex-mountain climber forced to don his gear again to save his sister (Robin Tunney), who is trapped 28,000 feet up in an ice fissure on K2. The trailers for this one look incredible, and with “Mask of Zorro” director Martin Campbell behind the camera, it definitely has the potential to be great. Let’s just hope it’s not “Chillagren” redux.

Proof of Life (opens Dec. 8) Russell Crowe, still riding high on the success of “Gladiator,” stars as a professional hostage negotiator hired by a distraught wife (Meg Ryan) to secure the release of her husband (David Morse) from a group of South American Guerrillas. This movie has already gained notoriety, not only as the impetus for Crowe and Ryan to pursue a now much-publicized relationship, but also for an on-location accident which claimed the life of Morse’s stand-in.

Dungeons and Dragons (opens Dec. 8) The immensely popular role-playing game, reincarnated numerous times and in numerous forms, gets the silver screen treatment in this CGI-heavy feature. Special effects and sets look impressive, but the dialogue sounds hammy and tepid. Jeremy Irons and Marlon Wayans star.

The Emperor’s New Groove (opens Dec. 15) Disney gets to beat us over the head twice this holiday season, first with “102 Dalmatians” on November 22nd, then with this animated comedy about an egotistical South American Emperor (voice of David Spade) turned into a Llama by a scheming administrator (David Cross) of a royal estate. The Emperor quickly voices a Llama herder who becomes the Emperor’s partner in his effort to reclaim the throne. An early version of this film under the title “Kingdom in the Sun” fooled us into thinking Disney corporate heads, and it was literally re-done from scratch in a period of weeks; not exactly a promising sign. Stig provides a duo of obligatory sappy tunes that Disney can use to get Academy members in the coming months.

What Women Want (opens Dec. 15) Mel Gibson playing an advertising executive blessed with psychic powers that would cover the ability to read women’s minds. It has the potential to be an absolute riot, particularly with Gibson in the starring role. Helen Hunt co-stars.

The Family Man (opens Dec. 15) This modern day “It’s a Wonderful Life” (despite the movie’s many characters, with Michael Douglas, Dennis Quaid, Don Cheadle, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Benicio Del Toro in starring roles).

All the Pretty Horses (opens Dec. 25) Matt Damon stars as one of two young men who journey to Mexico during the 1930s with dreams of becoming cowboys. Henry Thomas and Penelope Cruz co-star. This is a potential Oscar contender according to some, particularly with Billy Bob Thornton (“Sling Blade”) behind the camera.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (opens in December) Ang Lee’s martial arts epic has been the darling of many a film festival this year, most notably winning top honors at the Toronto Film Festival this past fall. Considering it’s a martial arts flick being hailed by critics as a masterpiece, and it has film scenes choreographed by the same guy responsible for “The Matrix’s” off-the-wall combat, this movie is definitely one to look out for this season.


Mock Trial at HC

Mock Trial: Giving... page 11 program has grown in both membership and success at an incredible rate. As winners of the 1999 Northeast Regional Championships, they received a bid to the National Championships, where they finished with a 2-2 record and earned a New School Award. This year the team is already preparing for the Yale Literary Invitational, where the three squads have qualified.

The purpose of Mock Trial is not to learn the actual technicalities of the laws that are applied in the courtroom, but rather the techniques that are used. Students gain experience in the process of arguing a case, from witness questioning to arguing objections. Learning these things allows the prospective lawyer to become comfortable with presenting an in-court presence before real-life justice is on the line.

The American Mock Trial Association offers intercollegiate Mock Trial competitions. Each year, the HC team sends squads to an invitational trial during the fall semester, and then a regional qualifier in the spring. The top 1/5 of the qualifiers in each regional tournament advance to the championship flight national tournament, while the remaining teams in the top third move on to the silver flight tournament. The top five teams from the silver flight receive invitations to continue on to the gold, or championship flight. The AMTA has about 300 member schools and runs the regional and national championships, as well as sanctioning a number of practice tournaments throughout the year.

The Holy Cross Mock Trial has earned a number of awards at the national tournaments since its creation in 1997, including several Best Attorney and Best Witness awards. The organization here is growing fast, and its members are hopeful for continuing success in the years to come. The group maintains a web page http://sterling.holycross.edu/department/law/mocktrial.htm if anyone seeks further formation.