



A haunting love story, as heartfelt as it is horrific

DRACULA: A LOVE TALE
(Drama/Horror)

★★★★½

Cast: Caleb Landry Jones, Zoë Bleu, Christoph Waltz

Director: Luc Besson

Duration: 2 hr 90min

Language: English (A 18+)

Review in short

Dracula: A Love Tale is where horror meets eternal love. Luc Besson tells the story of a 15th-century prince (Caleb Landry Jones) cursed to live as a vampire after losing his wife, Elisabetha (Zoë Bleu). Spanning centuries, the film blends campy horror, blood, and gothic thrills with a deeply romantic core. Set against grand castles and historic Europe, it immerses viewers in a timeless, atmospheric tale. Christoph Waltz adds gravitas as a priest pursuing Dracula, while Jones' passionate performance



Should you watch it?

If you love tragic, timeless romance with a gothic twist, this is worth it. Horror fans may find it gentler than expected.

makes the prince's centuries-long quest for love compelling. The result is an unhinged, heartfelt vampire story that balances terror with romance.

— Ronak Kotecha



Knives Out revives its edge in a faith-riddled whodunnit

WAKE UP DEAD MAN: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY
(Mystery/Drama)

★★★★½

Cast: Daniel Craig, Josh O'Connor, Josh Brolin, Glenn Close, Mila Kunis, Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington, Andrew Scott

Director: Rian Johnson

Duration: 2 hr 24min

Language: English (UA 16+)

Streaming on: Netflix

Review in short

When firebrand preacher Monsignor Wicks (Josh Brolin) is found dead under mysterious circumstances in an isolated small-town church, detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) immediately senses foul play. From the monsignor's fiercely loyal congregation to newly arrived boxer-turned-priest Jud Duplency (Josh O'Connor), no one is above suspicion. The *Knives Out* franchise returns to form with this third instalment - darker, grittier, and more contemplative than its predecessors. Flashes of humour remain, but Rian Johnson scales back the levity to deliver a meditation on



Should you watch it?

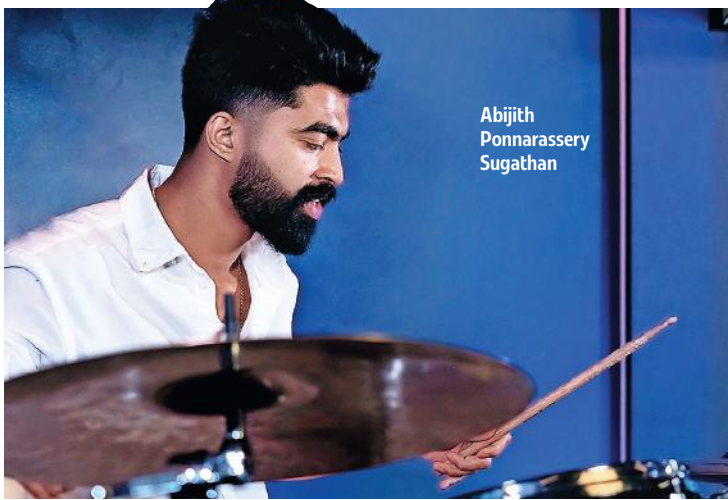
If you savour slow-burn, offbeat murder mysteries, this one is absolutely worth your time

the complexities of belief. Themes of tolerance, polarisation, and coexistence lend the mystery surprising depth.

Despite the ensemble cast, this atmospheric whodunnit unfolds largely around Josh O'Connor. *The Crown* and *Challengers* star delivers an earnest, compelling central performance, matched by Craig's stylishly eccentric Benoit Blanc. The murder's unraveling is clever, and the final twist genuinely unexpected, though the film takes a while to find its rhythm. A tighter pace could have elevated this slow-burn thriller further.

— Renuka Vyavahare

Music project provokes inquires on 'artistic integrity'



Abijith Ponnarassery Sugathan

Musician Abijith Ponnarassery Sugathan has launched Maanimec, a project he describes as one that "reimagines rhythm as a cultural bridge".

The teaser video showcases a mix of instruments — from Kerala's chenda and West African djembe to Cuban congas, Timbales, modern drum kits, rhythm pads, and even a Japanese DJ controller. "Unlike typical fusion that leans on melody or lyrics, this centres on beat and pulse, asking whether rhythm alone can convey cultural meaning," says Abijith, who hails from Thrissur and is now based in Loughton, UK.

He explains that the music is an "open-ended inquiry into cultural representation and artistic integrity". "It raises critical questions, such as whether ancient instruments can coexist with digital tools without losing authenticity and if blending multiple traditions risk cultural flattening or foster genuine dialogue," he says.

A three-day property expo in Kochi



File picture

The 36th CREDAI Kochi Property Expo, which is starting today, will feature a "specially curated selection of residential and commercial projects by leading builders of CREDAI Kochi", according to a spokesperson of the organisation. The expo will be inaugurated by Vishnuraj IAS, Director of State government's Department Industries & Commerce, they inform.

"The expo, brings together more than 150 projects under one roof. Special facilities have also been arranged for visitors to directly learn about home loan options from lead-

ing banks and to receive expert guidance," the spokesperson shares and adds, "It also supports the Indian Medical Association's Koode initiative, which aims to support the bedridden, homebound and lonely through the association's Arike project. It aims to connect the community with health-care and essential services." A discussion on the Koode project will be held at the expo centre on Saturday at 6pm.

Venue: Regional Sports Centre, Kadavanthra
Dates: December 19 to 21
Timings: 10am to 8pm

LEISURE

SUDOKU CHALLENGE

Level: Medium

8					9			
		9		2	6			4
		4	1					
9	3		6			7		
7								1
		2			7		4	8
					8	1		
5			3	6		8		
		3						5

HOW TO PLAY

Fill in the grid so that every horizontal row, every vertical column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9, without repeating the numbers in the same row, column or box. You can't change the digits already given in the grid. Every puzzle has one solution.

TIMES HITORI

1	2	2	3	2	4	2	1
1	4	2	5	8	6	3	7
1	1	1	8	8	2	3	5
4	3	1	6	9	7	5	2
2	2	5	3	6	9	2	3
6	5	2	9	6	1	7	1
1	8	6	1	7	5	2	9
5	7	5	2	8	3	1	4

8	5	5	7	3	5	4	6
4	5	1	6	7	6	5	2
2	5	7	1	5	4	6	8
5	6	2	4	3	7	6	3
2	7	5	5	1	7	2	7
1	6	6	6	4	3	5	7
7	8	4	6	2	3	3	7
8	4	5	2	3	5	7	1

Example

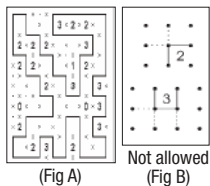
HOW TO PLAY

- A number may appear just once in each row or column. Eliminate repeat numbers by darkening cells. (see example)
- Darkened cells must never be adjacent in a row or column.
- Unmarked cells must create a single continuous area, undivided by darkened cells.
- Every time you darken a cell, you can automatically circle its vertical and horizontal neighbours, which means they cannot be eliminated.
- Any cell "sandwiched" between neighbours of the same value can be circled. (e.g. **6** **4** **6**)
- A "triple" is a special case of sandwich. Circle the centre cells, and darken the ends. (e.g. **6** **6** **6**)

LOOP THE LOOP

RULES

- Connect adjacent dots with vertical or horizontal lines, creating a single loop (Fig A).
- Crossovers or branches are not allowed (As shown by dotted lines in Fig B).
- Numbers in the puzzle indicate the number of lines that should surround it, while empty cells may be surrounded by any number of lines.
- You can't draw lines around zeroes.
- Each puzzle has just one unique solution.



Not allowed (Fig B)

	1				2	2	
3	2		2	2			
3	0		3			2	
2	2	2	2	2			
2		3	2	2			
2	1					2	
	2	2	3	1	2		

HOW TO BEGIN:

Example (Fig A) - Begin with the zero next to 3. Since no lines can be drawn around zero, mark crosses around it, as shown. Now there is a cross in one space around 3. So we know the three lines of 3 can only be drawn in the remaining three spaces. Next, these lines can only be extended in one direction each. Continue, using the same logic.

Hints: Keep eliminating possibilities by marking crosses in spaces between dots where a line isn't possible, i.e., if you have already completed required lines or where a line extension may create a branch or cause a deadend (Fig B).

THE DAILY CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9			10	11	12	
13					14					15		16			
17					18						19				
20					21		22				23				
			24			25		26		27					
28	29					30			31						
32					33			34	35			36	37	38	39
40						41							42		
43					44		45				46		47		
					48	49			50			51			
	52	53					54	55		56					
57							58		59		60				
63							64						61	62	
67													69		
70							71						72		

By Shannon Rapp & Will Eisenberg

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ACROSS

- Nobel winner Niels
- "Moon and Half Dome" photographer
- Starbucks seasonal drink with pie flavors, for short
- Specialty
- "Fraser" brother
- Pi follower
- Harvest
- Chain with Two Buck Chuck wine
- Flourless cake
- Unl - a bi-
- "Emmy in the Key of Code" author Lucido
- Airplane
- Central parking facility
- "All I Wanna Do" singer-songwriter
- Divisive feature of some racket sports?
- Try to win over
- Woven poncho
- 36 Mile, in Spain
- Sun Devils sch.
- Herbal infusion
- Time's Person of the Year in 2023
- Audio brand
- Former "Top Chef" host Lakshmi
- Be in debt
- Pro skater of the Pro Skater video game franchise
- Avian that plunges for prey, or what can be found in 14-, 28-, 52-, and 60-Across
- fresca
- Singer DiFranco
- Low-speed personal iPhone video

Thursdays Puzzle Solved

M	E	M	E	S	O	T	T	D	I	M	S
E	X	A	L	T	P	H	I	O	N	I	C
G	E	R	M	A	N	S	U	B	M	A	X
S	E	T	T	O	M	I	A	R	E	F	I
F	O	R	E	S	E	E	S	E	A	M	
O	B	O	E		I	N	T	E	R	E	B
R	E	P		S	U	N	B	E	A	R	D
D	Y	E		W	H	E	A	T		L	I
				L	E	A	H		O	H	I
M	E	A	N	B	U	S	I	N	E	S	S
A	C	D	C	H	I	D		R	A	T	S
C	O	D	A	S		M	E	S	S	Y	B
E	L	E	G	Y		B	A	A	N	I	E
I	R	E	S		A	L	T	O	G	D	E

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E	I	A	V	L					
L	N	P	A	K					
N	M	U	E	I					
O	R	T	Y	F	H				

SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters in the four word jumbles, one letter to each square/ circle, to make four ordinary words

HOW TO PLAY

Now arrange the letters in the circles to form the answer to the riddle or to fill in the missing word as indicated

___ is as evanescent as the morning dew or a flash of lightning. - Samuel Butler (5,4)

ARIES: The person you desire is turning attention elsewhere. Let them go and open up to the flock of people who secretly have their eyes on you. Watch your temper. Make an effort to adjust your thinking. **TAURUS:** There is a favorable romantic energy in the air for you right now. Get ready for positive networking contacts to pop up in your life. **GEMINI:** The bottom line is that you are the brightest star in the sky right now, and your partner is the luckiest person on the planet. Your creative energy and emotions will be enhanced, but with insecurity. It will be possible to follow your dreams if you have trust. **CANCER:** This time apart is paving the way for a wonderful reunion. You feel deeply for those who are less fortunate. Engaging in activities lends strength. **LEO:** You may choose to get out into the world and to grasp all to learn, but it can become negative and selfish. The energy of the day will require you to be more outgoing. Compromise will be needed, and you must initiate it. **VIRGO:** Today, you could feel a strong need to exercise and to take care of your body. You will need to find and draw your own conclusions with evidence before accepting others' notions. Colleagues may come to you with ideas for your

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you don't fall behind. **SCORPIO:** The key is to tune in to your own needs and share these needs openly and honestly with the one you love. It is an excellent time to focus on your overall health. You find expressive outlets through artistic and literary fields. Social activities are also extremely important. **SAGITTARIUS:** Developing and maintaining personal support systems is essential. You can help out others. Creative expression can alleviate pain felt from such times. **CAPRICORN:** There is a great deal of aggression on the horizon in your personal life today. **AQUARIUS:** Focus on being honest and up-front. Be vigilant about meeting your obligations and responsibilities. This day's romantic outlook is extremely strong for you. **PISCES:** You have a tendency to hold on to grudges more than you should. Others will see you as volatile, unpredictable, and as someone who cannot be trusted to solve problems in a reasonable manner. Take that as a warning.

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SPELLATHON

Today's Ratings: 02-average | 03-good | 04-outstanding

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, a letter can be used as many times as it appears in the puzzle. Each word must contain the central letter. There should be at least one seven letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed. British English Dictionary is used as reference.

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SOLUTIONS TO GAMES/PUZZLES

TIMES SUDOKU	LOOP THE LOOP	TIMES HITORI
SPELLATHON	SCRAMBLE	
Answer: Human life is as evanescent as the morning dew or a flash of lightning. - Samuel Butler	Answer: Alive, humane, trophy	