

One Magic Christmas/

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It's A Wonderful Life is a yuletide classic in which Jimmy Stewart's guardian angel lets him see what the world would have been like if he had never been born. Stewart finds out that he has made a difference in many of his friends' lives, and he regains the spirit of Christmas.

One Magic Christmas is a variation on that story, but it is mostly depressing and borders on being morbid. Mary Steenburgen stars as Ginny. Her husband has lost his job, and they are being kicked out of their house on the first of the year.

Still, he wants to spend what little money they have on presents for the children. Ginny tries to be more practical by refusing to let him throw away their money on some toys that will "fall apart in a few weeks."

As Ginny's spirits sink lower and lower, her guardian angel appears. His name is Gideon (Harry Dean Stanton), and he vows to help Ginny recapture the spirit of Christmas.

This is where *One Magic Christmas* takes a sadistic turn. How does Gideon help Ginny? Why, he tricks her (and the audience) into believing that she has lost her job, her husband has been shot in a holdup and her children have drowned in a car accident.

When Ginny finds out they're not dead, she's so relieved that she learns to love again. Isn't that sweet? If this is the only way someone can learn the true meaning of Christmas, I'd rather walk around grumbling "Bah, humbug!"

Overall, the complicated middle section makes this movie too confusing for children. And it's certainly too boring for adults. *One Magic Christmas* comes to us from Disney. But Walt is dead — which just goes to show that one man can make a difference, especially when it comes to making good movies.

Santa Claus: The Movie/

Oaks 6

Alexander and Ilya Salkind produced *Santa Claus: The Movie*. They also presented *Superman: The*

Movie (not very inventive with titles, are they?), and the two films are quite similar in structure. The first hour is spent retelling the legend of Santa Claus and the second hour follows him on his first adventure.

The first hour is by far the better half. The sets are fantastic. The familiar story brings out smiles of recognition, and the mood is quietly whimsical.

But when Patch the elf (Dudley Moore) ventures out into the world and leaves the North Pole, the mood is gone. The predictable story of how Patch is tricked by B.Z. (John Lithgow), the evil toymaker, follows its predictable path to the end.

Still, the acting is top-notch. Dudley Moore was born to play an elf and John Lithgow is fine as B.Z. As Santa Claus, veteran character-actor David Huddleston gives a smashing performance. He turns Claus into a real person without losing any of the magic.

For kids under 12, this is a terrific movie. To the producers' credit, this film has more of the Disney magic than Disney's latest entry, *One Magic Christmas*. Nonetheless, *Santa Claus: The Movie* is for children only.