

Knives Out Review: Not Your Typical Whodunnit

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Who doesn't love a good murder mystery? Director **Rian Johnson's** latest film ***Knives Out*** has all the makings for a classic whodunnit tale: a rich old man found by his maid with his throat cut open, a feuding family with plenty of motives, a mansion that looks like it could be taken straight out of a Clue board game—secret passageways and all, and of course, a star-studded cast. **Daniel Craig** plays Benoit Blanc, a private investigator on the hunt for the answers to two questions: Did Harlan Thrombey (played by **Christopher Plummer**) really commit suicide? And who hired him to investigate?

Read further at your own risk, as these answers are about to be explored.

Unlike the typical whodunnit, viewers are told early on how Harlan really died, and it technically was a suicide. He did in fact slit his own throat, and only a week after removing his entire family from his will, leaving his estate and millions to his nurse, Marta. But why did he slit his throat? Well Marta accidentally gave him the wrong medication, and without the antidote to save him, he had only ten minutes to live. Thinking on his feet, he found a way to keep Marta from being blamed for his demise.

The film was almost meta in a way, as Harlan himself was the dramatic one. He made his millions writing murder mystery novels and publishing them through his own company. He would've been amused at the way his "suicide" was handled, with two cops and a private investigator interrogating his family and staff, scouring his absurd New England home for clues. It's as if he wrote his own murder.



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You can't help but root for Marta through the whole ordeal. Harlan left everything to her in his will, and even faked his own suicide in order to protect her, because his family is truly awful and Marta was the only good person in his life. Yet here's Blanc, hired by an unknown source who knows his death wasn't as straightforward as it seems.

Best part: Marta literally pukes every time she lies. She's like Pinocchio, but with vomit, which makes hiding her guilt more than a bit difficult.



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All these factors combined with a cast including **Chris Evans**, **Jamie Lee Curtis**, **Toni Collette**, and **13 Reasons Why's Katherine Langford** make for a very entertaining film. **Captain America** is a jerk, and **James Bond** has a ridiculous southern accent. It's funny and goofy, yet still smart and not without its fair share of twists and turns.

While we think we know how Harlan really died, something about the murder is still a puzzle, or like the game of Go he plays with Marta in the moments before his death. As Blanc says, "This case is like a donut with a hole in the middle."

Spoiler alert: Harlan's grandson Ransom (Evans) discovered that he changed his will, and knew the only way he'd ever see that fortune would be if Marta was found responsible for his grandfather's death. He switched the labels on the medications, so she actually gave him the right meds all along, and he didn't have to die. But if all went according to plan, the toxicology report would have shown that Marta unintentionally killed him, losing the inheritance by way of the "slayer rule."



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Perhaps the most satisfying piece to the puzzle is in the final few minutes of the film, as Ransom grabs a knife from his grandfather's throne of knives (*Game of Thrones* reference, much?) to murder Marta. Everything moves in slow motion as Marta tries to defend herself, the detectives move to save her, and Ransom lunges with the knife. Viewers are given just enough time to remember a throwaway line from Harlan before he slit his own throat, about how it's hard to distinguish the difference between the real knives and the prop ones. Ransom lies on top of Marta with the knife in her chest, removing it to reveal it was only a prop.

Sometimes the good guys win, and those are the stories the world needs more of.

In a big way, *Knives Out* is also social commentary on class conflict. Marta is the daughter of an illegal immigrant trying to protect her mother, and the Thrombeys all reassure her again and again that they'll take care of her. Yet every last one turns on her and threatens her and her mother the minute they learn she was given the inheritance. The wealthy Thrombey family thinks only of themselves—among them are a cheater, a thief, a mooch, and a “literal Nazi.” (Not to mention a murderer.) Meanwhile, Marta has been a good friend to Harlan and values doing the right thing above all else. Come on, she is physically incapable of lying.

She wins the game by not playing it on anyone else's terms. A theme of the film is that Marta is able to win because of her pure heart. Too often these days we're told to lie and cheat our way to the top, but *Knives Out* offers a much more heartfelt and uplifting

alternative.