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The top 5 Hallmark movies that will get you in the holiday spirit

The hosts of "Deck the Hallmark" watch every Hallmark holiday film, and review them all.

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By Randee Dawn

You may think you're the Hallmark holiday movie slate's No. 1 fan. But have you met Brandon Gray, Daniel "Panda" Pandolph and Daniel Thompson?

Maybe not – unless you've been listening to "Deck the Hallmark," a podcast hosted by the three former teachers, in which they tackle every one of the dozens of holiday releases the channel premieres each season.



— The "Deck the Hallmark" podcast experts (from l.-r.): Brandon "Bran" Gray, Daniel "Panda" Pandolph, Daniel "Dan" Thompson Will Keown

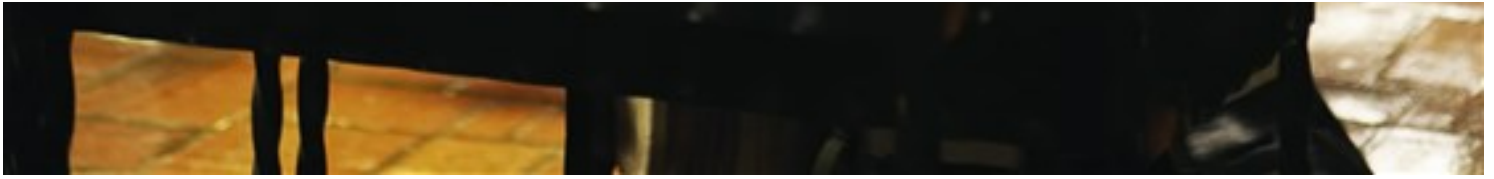
"Hallmark has gotten so good in capturing all the feelings, all the nostalgia around the holidays and putting them on screen," said Gray, who started the podcast in 2018 with Pandolph and Thompson. Over 250 episodes later, "Deck the Hallmark" has become a full-time job for all three of them, now armed with a book deal (out in 2021).

"People like myself long for the holidays all year, and there's nothing quite like being with family for the holidays, and Hallmark just captures it," said Gray, who added that he's "excited" that the channel is becoming more diverse with its casting and stories.

But which of Hallmark's films truly deserve a place on the mantelpiece? TODAY tracked Gray down ahead of the full holiday season to get the scoop on the best, brightest and most twinkly of all the Hallmark holiday films he's cozied up to!







— "Silver Bells" Erik Heinila / (C)Hallmark Entertainment via Everett Collection

"Silver Bells" (2005)

Heartwarming story: A woman living in New York connects with a young man who's run away from his dad, and when the father comes back a year later to sell his Christmas trees, he and the woman connect too.

Why it's on the nice list: "This is one of the first of these films I saw, in 2005," said Gray. "So it's an older one for Hallmark, and it's a little more dramatic. That's what I lean into. It's got all the right pieces – including a troubled kid – and it's what got me hooked on these movies."



— "The Most Wonderful Time of The Year" Hallmark via Crown Media

"The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" (2008)

Heartwarming story: Single mom Jen brings her business acumen to Christmas, but gets thrown for a loop when her uncle shows up with a stranger to their big holiday event.

Why it's on the nice list: "I try to watch this every year, because it makes me laugh," said Gray. "It's fun, it's wacky, and fast-paced. They made it right before they started making a ton of them every year, so the quality is a little higher."



— "The Mistletoe Promise" Ryan Plummer / (C)Hallmark Entertainment via Everett Collection

"The Mistletoe Promise" (2016)

Heartwarming story: Two strangers who aren't really into Christmas make a pact to avoid being lonely during the holidays, by spending time together. But then things start to shift....

Why it's on the nice list: "When I think of modern-day Hallmark with the formula and the tropes, this is the one that did it best and first," says Gray. "This is a movie I turn to and say, 'This is what Hallmark is.' It's a classic trope."



— "Holiday for Heroes" Robert Clark / (C)Hallmark Entertainment via Everett Collection

"Holiday for Heroes" (2019)

Heartwarming story: Two pen pals (a woman and a soldier) find they have lots in common in their letters. When he comes back stateside, though, their worlds collide in a romantic way.

Why it's on the nice list: "It's a sweet story where they make you feel like there's already a spark between them because of the letters, but once they meet in person it amplifies," says Gray.



— "Deliver By Christmas" Allister Foster / Crown Media via Hallmark

"Deliver by Christmas" (2020)

Heartwarming story: A baker and a widower hit it off initially, then end up finding a real connection through the phone when he calls her bakery to order ... but doesn't know it's the woman he just sparked with. When they meet again, it's as sweet as her pastries.

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Why it's on the nice list: "This is my favorite for now, it came out early this month," says Gray. "Think of it as like a 'P.S. I Love You' type movie for the holidays. Big fun."

Holly Robinson Peete discusses Hallmark film 'The Christmas Doctor'



Randee Dawn



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