

'The Grinch' delivers the holiday turkey

Written by Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 09 November 2018 06:34



Rating: « out of «««««

Running Time: 86 minutes

The Dr. Seuss book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* has been a children's mainstay on reading lists since its publication in 1957. For many, the iconic 1966 television version of the story, featuring the booming voice of Boris Karloff, will always be the perfect adaptation.

This week sees the release of a new animated feature that runs a full hour longer than the original treatment. But does all of the added material make for an improved version of *The Grinch* ?

With great certainty, the answer is no.

Narrated by Pharrell Williams, this adaptation follows the Grinch (Benedict Cumberbatch), who lives a lonely existence at the top of a mountain near Whoville.

The village below is an overly joyful and picturesque town that he periodically visits for supplies. After the locals decide to up their Christmas celebrations to a new level, the Grinch becomes determined to halt the proceedings by disguising himself as Santa and stealing literally everything holiday-related.

In the meantime, the young Cindy Lou Who (Cameron Seely) plans to meet Santa and ask for his help in cheering up her parent. The youngster worries about Donna Lou Who (Rashida

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Jones), her overextended single-mother who works long nights at what I'm guessing may be a hospital (it was bit noisy at the screening I attended).

The attempts to add plot details and modernize the tale in order to rationalize a feature-length running time are incredibly awkward.

After introducing Whoville as a joyous place, Donna Lou's vaguely presented back story begs several questions. What the heck is going on in Whoville after dark? Is a large segment of the population going senile? Or is there a drug problem in town?

Why does no one else in the village try to help the frazzled Donna Lou with her exhaustion issues? And if many of the residents are already aware of the Grinch, why would they be surprised to be burglarized on Christmas or show confusion as to who was responsible?

Much of the new material focuses on Cindy Lou and her friends devising a way to encounter Santa, along with the details about the Grinch attempting to come up with his elaborate heist plan (that ultimately becomes more simplified as the date approaches).

Sadly, very little of it is funny. A screaming, horned goat that appears now and again to cause problems for the title character and a training session to try and walk quietly in the snow do earn a chuckle, but almost nothing else does. Most of the gags involve the Grinch doing things like training for his mission in spandex pants or accidentally hurling himself into trees. These jokes land with a deafening thud.

And if this all sounds much tamer than the cartoon you remember, you'd be right. This Grinch does a couple of mean things, but isn't particularly malicious. In fact, he comes across as almost pleasant... and that's even early on in the movie. While planning the heist, he has a warm grin on his face and compliments his pet dog.

Later, a revelation about a reindeer recruited to help leads to a sweet and considerate decision on the part of... our antagonist. One understands the need to add a little more personality to the Grinch, but in the process they soften the character so much that there's nothing remotely witty

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or edgy about the tale.

Even his voice is higher pitched and less-than-threatening. It’s a completely bizarre and inappropriate choice.

As you might have guessed by this point, this title really didn’t work for me. Whoville itself is bright and colorful and the animation is often impressive, but there isn’t close to enough material here for a feature and the attempts to add elements are incongruous with the original story.

Of course, it will be reasonably entertaining to small children, but for all others, it is a bland and unnecessary effort. I’m about to come across as even meaner than *The Grinch* for the following comment, but this redo is a bit of a turkey.

Glenn Kay

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