Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time:
86 minutes

This title is currently available on Netflix.

This week sees the release of the animated feature *Scoob!* It is a reworking of the famous *Scoo by-Doo*
cartoon featuring a talking dog and his pals, who visiting haunted locales and solved mysteries involving supernatural characters. Alas, screening copies are not being made available to the press, which can sometimes be a signal that the studio doesn’t have a lot of confidence in the final product. Regardless, parents will be forced to shell out a $20 streaming fee in order to rent the flick (you can also purchase it for $25), without knowing exactly what they’re getting into.

That’s a steep asking price, so this reviewer decided to see what else might serve as solid, family-friendly entertainment. *A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon* is one movie that was recently released by Netflix. The Aardman production (which is also responsible for
Chicken Run, Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit
and
The Pirates! Band of Misfits
, among other films) was a success in Europe late last year and earned a BAFTA nomination

(the British equivalent of the Oscars). Unfortunately, Netflix decided to release it in North America with little fanfare. As such, it has been available for a couple of months, but many aren’t even aware of its existence. That’s too bad, because this is one example of an underpromoted movie being quite enjoyable, and families would be well advised to seek it out.

The movie is a sequel to the 2015 film *Shaun the Sheep Movie*, following the adventures of a curious and trouble-making sheep who lives on Mossy Bottom Farm. This time out, Shaun and the other barnyard residents come into contact with a UFO containing an alien. Shaun befriends the otherworldly visitor and quickly determines that the creature is lost. Of course, humans in the area also take note of strange occurrences in the town. Soon, hazmat-clad government agents are seen hunting the creature. Even the farm owner taking care of Shaun decides to get in on the buzz, creating his own UFO theme park on the property to earn some extra cash. As Shaun tries to help the alien get home, the various plotlines intersect, with all parties (and some extraterrestrial enthusiasts) coming into conflict on the estate.

For those unfamiliar with the original feature, it’s an exceptional piece of stop-motion animation, focusing on sight gags and physical humor. There is no dialogue and the jokes are derived from visual comedy, almost performed like an old silent comedy in the vein of Charlie Chaplin. That tradition is continued here, resulting in a low-key but warm and fuzzy feeling as the leads accidentally get themselves into trouble and stumble around, or are even misidentified as aliens (the farm’s watchdog is forced to dress as an alien to promote the theme park, and finds himself being pursued by authorities).

Material involving Shaun is entertaining, too, as he attempts to make contact with the alien without a common language. The otherworldly, vibrant purple, pink and turquoise visitor is far from scary and actually has cute, puppy dog-like features. This creature also possesses special abilities, allowing for some lively moments involving the levitation of pizzas, along with confused pigs and chicks. Actually, the movie gets a lot of mileage out of food-related humor, from a fracas in a grocery store, to one early witness to the alien arrival who must weigh whether it is worth abandoning a fresh, warm bag of chips in order to escape the potential alien threat.

Even the government agents chasing the alien provide merriment. This includes sight gags as the hazmat-clad workers go about their business, including eating meals, without ever taking off their uniforms. There’s also a funny sign board on display in the secret base involving how many UFO’s they have caught…the post eventually gets updated to gratifying effect. It all seems to get funnier and funnier as it progresses and jokes are revisited and updated. As with other Aardman features, the visuals are also top-notch, particularly during the climax which features the protagonists scrambling up a radio tower and embarking on a trip into space.

I wouldn’t say that this feature is quite as strong as the original film, but it is sweet, likable, and could easily have played at theaters in North America. It most certainly deserves more attention in this part of the world than it has received. And if viewers new to the experience enjoy the feature, there is also a TV series available on Netflix based around the character. In the end, *A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon*
ultimately delivers a fine and warm-hearted trip to the countryside…and beyond.

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