

Nobody wins watching 'The War with Grandpa'

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

Running Time: 94 minutes

In the 1970s and 1980s, author Robert Kimmel Smith wrote popular children's books like *Chocolate Fever*

and

The Squeaky Wheel

that helped entertain a generation.

The War with Grandpa

is an adaptation of Smith's popular, award-winning 1984 novel about a very unusual conflict that arises between two members of the same family. While one can certainly understand the attraction to the well-regarded source material, this feature proves that sometimes a story works far better on the printed page than it does onscreen.

Peter (Oakes Fegley) is a suburban kid nervous about starting the sixth grade. However, the boy's concerns about middle school take a back seat after his mother (Uma Thurman) and father (Rob Riggle) announce that widowed grandfather Ed (Robert De Niro) will be moving in with the family. To make room for the new arrival, Peter is ordered out of his bedroom and is forced to take up residence in the attic. This news doesn't sit well with the protagonist, who sends a declaration of war to his gramps.

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Friends of the boy, as well as Ed's pals (played by Christopher Walken, Cheech Marin and Jane Seymour) encourage the pair to take measures and fight for their territory. The actions of the two stubborn parties lead to an escalating series of pranks that cause property destruction and collateral damage.

This film's central theme is a good one. The idea that there are no winners in battle, even if you are victorious, is admirable. And for a kid's movie, it boasts an incredible cast. As a result of the onscreen talent, the actors do manage to sell the odd moment here and there.

There is one creative prank involving Peter replacing Ed's shaving cream with an alternate substance, resulting in an uncomfortable shave. De Niro offers a grouchy comment or two that earn a chuckle and Walken ekes out some laughs with his entertaining posturing and advice about dealing with bratty kids. At one point he even notes to Ed, "Don't let them see your fear ... they feed on that!"

In fact, the performers are far too good for the material, especially when the attempts at humor are delivered so bluntly. Many of the jokes revolve around causing physical harm to Ed, whether he's slipping on marbles and landing with a thud, or plunging from a ladder while climbing to the roof. Peter even sets off his grandad's MedicAlert, unnecessarily sending emergency crews to the house. Other weird gags include Ed's pants continually falling off in front of his son-in-law.

Grandpa's friends are also forced to take part in the physical punishment, getting involved in a competitive dodgeball game with Peter and his pals. For the most part, these fine actors are left with little to do but bug their eyes out and take a pratfall.

Naturally, none of what is occurring makes any logical sense. Despite their agreement of no collateral damage, most of the pranks have the reverse effect (especially for the mother, who in any other universe would not only be furious, but would be arrested by police). Peter and his family also live in a very impressive home, making the boy's plight tougher to relate to. In order to make his situation seem difficult, the attic has a leaky roof and a rat wandering about.

But nothing is made of the potential infestation. Like all the other hardships faced in this movie,

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they are only used for the sake of an over-the-top joke before being quickly forgotten. Admittedly, it is harsh to critique the logic in a kid's film, but when so many elements stand out as incongruent, it means the film hasn't managed to successfully suspend disbelief.

The excellent cast members do their best, but the story here has been adapted in a harebrained manner. In fact, it seems ill-advised to try to deliver laughs using a series of slapstick physical gags reminiscent of a Looney Tunes cartoon, while attempting to deliver a message about war only causing suffering and heartache for all involved. This may have worked as a novel, but *The War with Grandpa* is a campaign with no winners.

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