

TV Review: Clever, Fun ‘Toy Story of Terror’ Makes ABC Debut

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 16, 2013 - 9:00am

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CHICAGO – Was “Toy Story 3” the last great Pixar production? With the modest critical reaction to “Cars 2,” “Brave,” and “Monsters University,” it seems an entirely defensible position to take. In fact, one could easily argue that “Small Fry,” the “Toy Story” short that premiered with “The Muppets,” and “Partysaurus Rex,” which played with “Finding Nemo 3D,” should be considered higher on the Pixar hierarchy than “Cars 2” and maybe even “Brave.” And so Pixar’s first TV special comes at a unique time in the company’s legacy. Will viewers see this as further cashing-in by a studio accused of giving up creative spark for commercial prospects? Or will they embrace a return to Pixar characters that actually work? I hope it’s the latter. “Toy Story of Terror,” premiering tonight on ABC, is clever, fun, and way more enjoyable than nearly anything that has aired on network TV this new season.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

The toys that have become such an important part of the pop culture fabric, including Woody (Tom Hanks), Buzz (Tim Allen), Jessie (Joan Cusack), and Mr. Potato Head (Don Rickles), are on a road trip with their new owner, Bonnie. They’re in the trunk, watching scary movies on the way, which sends Jessie into a state of paranoia. Yes, Jessie is the lead of “Terror,” a great choice for a character who helped make “Toy Story 2” and didn’t quite have enough to do in “Toy Story 3.” Jessie rules.



Toy Story of Terror
Photo credit: ABC

When the gang gets to a roadside motel with Bonnie and her mom, they’re immediately set upon by an unusual creature in the shadows that keeps reducing the size of the group. Of course, Jessie is the last cowgirl standing. With the help of a great new character, Combat Carl (Carl Weathers), can Jessie save her friends? And what snagged ‘em in the first place?

Toy Story of Terror
Photo credit: ABC

“Toy Story of Terror” fits snugly in the lineage of the films in that it’s a story that again features the the toy gang having to work together to save one another. The “Toy Story” films all feature the same plot thematically — the group gets separated from Andy, and each other, and have to work as a team to reunite. “Terror” fits that model, putting Jessie in the lead spot typically occupied by Woody. I love Jessie and it was a very smart decision to put her in the spotlight here, working through her fears in a way that kids will be able to relate to.

“Toy Story of Terror” probably would have been even stronger as a short film around 10-15 minutes as it doesn’t quite have enough story for a full 22-minutes episode. You know that non-stop rhythm from “Hawaiian Vacation” and “Small Fry”? It’s a little slower here, although every line delivered by Carl Weathers is comedy gold.

With ABC and Pixar sharing ownership, “Toy Story of Terror” is unlikely to be the last crossover special on the small screen. We can expect “Nemo,” “Monsters U,” and another “Toy Story” short somewhere down the road. (And, sadly, probably “Cars” too). Eventually, it will be impossible to deny that the lack of brand new ideas have dragged Pixar down from their creative peak in the '00s. But don’t believe those who tell you this is evidence of that decline. It’s a fun, holiday diversion that gives Pixar fans characters they miss, probably even more so given the films that followed their final adventure.

“Toy Story of Terror” stars Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack, Carl Weathers, Timothy Dalton, Wallace Shawn, Kristen Schaal, and Don Rickles. It premieres on ABC on Wednesday, October 16, 2013 at 7pm CST.



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 20 2024 - 9:44am):

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