

He's a Not-So-Mean-One in Remake of 'The Grinch'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 9, 2018 - 9:38am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – They should have left well enough alone, didn't anybody learn anything from the trainwreck of the Jim Carrey live-action-as-The-Grinch? Apparently not. A more kid friendly and modern animated version of "The Grinch" opens six weeks before Christmas, and already I want to return it.

It's isn't bad bad, it's just ho-hum and lazy storytelling. It starts with the inevitable, and by this time bordering-on-satire hip hop version of "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" by Tyler the Creator... because we all know that the kiddie target audience need hip hop 24/7. And then we hear the voice of new Grinch, and it sounds exactly like a Brit doing an American accent (stretch out those vowels!). It would have been much cooler if Benedict Cumberbatch has just done his natural voice. Oh well ("Ben, baby, we need this to stay an American film!"). At least it had a decent emotional connection at the end, but really in a source story of redemption how could they mess that up? It's a clean one, Mr. Grinch.

Telling the main narrative seems silly, so it's best to talk about the changes. Backstory, backstory, backstory and added characters sum it up. The Grinch (voice of Cumberbatch) lives on a mountaintop outside of Whoville with his dog Max, and dreads the coming of Christmas. Yes, his heart is too small, but that's because he was abandoned as a child (gasp, never saw that one coming).



The Title Character (voice by Benedict Cumberbatch) and Max in "The Grinch"

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

In his attempt to “keep Christmas from coming” his concocts an elaborate plan to steal all the merriment. A plush-toy-potential reindeer named Fred is added in, as well as a “best friend” named Bricklebaum (Kenan Thompson) and additional family for Cindy-Lou Who (Cameron Seely, with Mom voiced by Rashida Jones). The whole thing is narrated by Pharrell Williams, an odd choice, and the rest you pretty much know.

Both Grinch films, the 2000 live action movie and this current animated incarnation (beautifully rendered, by the way, by the same studio that brought you “Despicable Me”) stretch the original half hour cartoon/short story book into 90 minutes of padding, and in both cases the extra stuff is super unnecessary, except to make it 90 minutes. When animator Chuck Jones produced his immortal cartoon in 1966 he nailed it, and even with millions of dollars of budgets, two films tries and hack screenwriters galore, all that has been attempted to make it “better” has failed.

The character of the Grinch is lesser in this version, the production wanted to backstory him with Freudian analysis (thus “justifying” his Grinchiness, so he’s “not so mean”). And what is it with accents in films this year? First, we had to suffer through Bradley Cooper imitating (badly) Sam Elliott in “A Star is Born” and now it’s Cumberbatch doing his American accent (and you know he spend months “perfecting” it, which probably made him the worst pub companion during that period). The original 1966 voice was Boris Karloff. BRITISH! Man, Cumber’s accent is annoying the whole way through.



Fred the Reindeer is Ready for His Toy Marketing in “The Grinch”

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

But what saves the film from the scrapheap, and makes it better than the live action version, was the connection to the original (Dr. Seussian) emotions in the story of redemption. In all iterations of the story, the Grinch is only trying to stave off his Grinchiness, and no backstory explanation is necessary. And when Christmas comes despite his thievery, he learns there are other possibilities in life. That was well handled in this version, and the final party sequence is appropriately emotional. Yule love it!

Messing with the song “You’re a Mean One...” was also a bit annoying, but whatevs. I would have preferred the lead singer of the band Disturbed to take that on (the kids would have run screaming from the theater, heh heh heh). At least the weird “Bar Room Door Ray” song stayed intact, sung by the Whovillians. You can go home again, sometimes.

“The Grinch” opens everywhere on November 9th. Featuring the voices of Benedict Cumberbatch, Rashida Jones, Angela Lansbury, Kenan Thompson and Pharrell Williams. Screenplay adapted by Tommy Swerdlow and Michael Lesieur. Directed by Yarrow Cheney and Scott Mosier. Rated “PG”



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