

Movie Review: ‘Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch’

NEW YORK — Somewhere Theodor Geisel may be spinning in his grave over the latest treatment of one of his most famous character creations, “Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch” (Universal). If so, he’s only revolving gently.

Geisel, who died in 1991, wrote his children’s story, “How the Grinch Stole Christmas!” in 1957. Hollywood has served up multiple adaptations of the classic tale. But the most memorable version remains the 1966 CBS cartoon special helmed by Chuck Jones and featuring the voice of Boris Karloff as the lead.

Now directors Scott Mosier and Yarrow Cheney present an extravagant animated big-screen take. Like a giant piece of sticky taffy, the original 69-page storybook has been stretched and twisted in all directions by screenwriters Michael LeSieur and Tommy Swerdlow, with new characters and subplots, and a backstory that casts the eponymous grump in a sympathetic light.

Bah humbug? Not really. Purists will fret and insist that less is truly more, but parents will be delighted. “Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch” is perfectly acceptable holiday fare for all ages, an amusing and entertaining romp with eye-popping visuals and Geisel’s core lesson about the redemptive power of kindness and forgiveness intact.

The bare bones of the original story remain in place, narrated by Pharrell Williams. The Grinch (voice of Benedict Cumberbatch) is a fuzzy green creature who lives high above the hamlet of Who-ville in a cave on Mount Crumpet, with his loyal dog, Max, by this side. With a heart “two sizes too small,” he wants nothing more than peace and quiet and to be left alone.

In this version, though, the Grinch is no recluse. He travels down the mountain to do his shopping at “Who Foods Market” (one of a plethora of puns) and frighten every child he encounters, including Cindy-Lou Who (voice of Cameron Seely).

Cindy-Lou is no longer “no more than two,” as Geisel cast her. Now she’s a rambunctious pre-teen with a posse of friends, who devise a scheme to trap Santa Claus on Christmas Eve.

The Grinch has other plans, determined to put a halt to the incessant joy and goodness of the Whos by masquerading as Santa and stealing every Christmas present, tree and decoration in sight.

Without spoiling an ending that surely everyone knows, someone will eventually discover that “Maybe Christmas doesn’t come from a store,” a heart will grow three times larger, and a “roast beast” will be carved.

Viewers of faith will be delighted by the singing of two classic carols, “Silent Night” and “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” The latter’s verse, “Remember Christ our Savior/Was born on Christmas Day,” is repeated twice, a rare Hollywood reminder that, amid the commercial trappings on display, the true meaning of the holiday should not be overlooked.

The film contains mild cartoonish action. The Catholic News Service classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

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