

IN REVIEW

Carrey outshines others in flawed 'Grinch'

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) - Director Ron Howard brings the classic tale "Dr. Seuss' How The Grinch Stole Christmas" (Universal) to the big screen with mixed results.

The original Dr. Seuss book and later the 1966 Chuck Jones cartoon adaptation of "How The Grinch Stole Christmas" are so wonderful, one wonders why filmmakers would want to touch the tale even with a 39-and-a-half-foot pole.

In the brightly decorated town of Whoville, the residents are busy with their yuletide preparations, which consist mainly of buying, buying and more buying. The Whos have caught the commercialism bug, all except for young Cindy Lou Who (Taylor Momsen), who thinks everyone is ker-bobbled over the shopping and all the hoopla and wonders what the true meaning of Christmas is.

Hoping to give the classic fable a more edgy feel, Howard went through eight scripts before Seuss' widow Audrey Geisel gave her approval. Seuss' original story is retold in the last third of the film, where viewers hear the familiar rhymes and see the mean-spirited Grinch disguise himself as Santa Claus, sneak into the town of Whoville on Christmas Eve and steal all the residents' presents.

The first two-thirds of the film psycho-analyze why the Grinch hates Christmas, coming up with a story of unrequited puppy love on a fateful Christmas Eve that sent the spurned Grinch to the top of Mount Crumpit to loathe the Whos and the yuletide holiday forevermore.

The film's message is that what really



Universal/CNS

Taylor Momsen and Jim Carrey star in a scene from "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas." The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

counts is caring for family, friends and neighbors, not the gifts or the glitter associated with Christmas. (It is ironic, though, that a film that takes a swipe at commercialism is offering so much tie-in merchandise, just in time for Christmas.)

Although the film's sentiment is certainly good, it is a secularized explanation that omits the real importance of Christmas, namely the commemoration of Christ's birth, which was stated more explicitly in the cartoon by the depiction of the East star in the sky.

Nearly unrecognizable under a well-crafted green mask and hand-dyed yak fur, Carrey offers a surprisingly good rendition of the Grinch, with glimpses of the familiar Carrey rubber face popping out every so often. The gravely voice he has created for the Grinch, a cross between a dopey Jimmy Stewart and a wrathful Sean Connery, adds a lively dimension to the character.

The pug-nosed, hair-lipped townsfolk dressed in their bright costumes and running anxiously around Whoville fade into the background, with none of the film's other stars making much of an impression. This includes Momsen, who shares no chemistry with Carrey and offers a wince-worthy little ditty in which the 8-year-old laments the passing of her carefree days.

Carrey gets to throw out numerous zippy one-liners (many aimed at chaperoning parents) with manic speed, but the film as a whole plays like a series of stretched-out skits clumsily strung together. And the elaborate and fanciful sets, with colorful stores and homes teetering perilously forward, appear dinky, like a poor man's "Wizard of Oz." The result is that Carrey takes in the viewer, even if the rest of the film does not.

Moviegoers can expect to see more of Dr. Seuss' books translated onto the big screen, as it seems production for "The Cat in the Hat" is already under way. As far as the Grinch goes, Carrey seems to have stolen more than just Christmas.

The humor in "Dr. Seuss' How The Grinch Stole Christmas" is tame enough for pre-teens to enjoy as well.

Because of some crass humor, including mild sexual innuendo, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

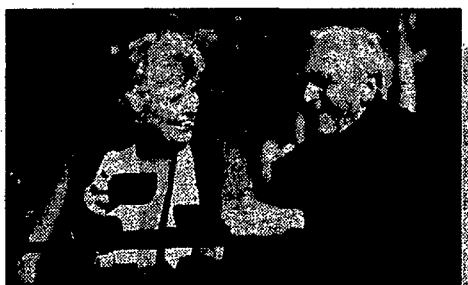
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