

'Fatman' is a bizarre feature

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

Running Time: 100 minutes

This film became available on demand and on digital platforms Nov. 17.

The 1988 film *Scrooged* is a popular modern adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, featuring Bill Murray as a nasty TV executive. Early on in the feature, there's a trailer for an action movie called

The Night the Reindeer Died

, featuring Santa Claus and actor Lee Majors toting machine guns in order to fend off psychos invading the North Pole. It's a hilarious comedic bit and one that may have in part inspired the new movie

Fatman

, which possesses a similarly outrageous plotline.

The story begins with Saint Nicholas aka Chris (Mel Gibson) still living in the North Pole with wife Ruth (Marianne Jean-Baptiste) and continuing to make sure that all good children receive toys for the holidays. However, the once jolly icon has become grizzled and bitter as his naughty list continues to grow with each passing year. In fact, it is revealed that his operation is now running at a deficit, forcing Chris to take on extra work for the U.S. government. Things get even worse for the holiday hero when young Billy Wenan (Chance Hurstfield) decides to take

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extreme actions after receiving a lump of coal under his tree.

Irate at the slight, the sociopathic child hires an assassin called the Skinny Man (Walton Goggins) to go to the North Pole, find Chris and execute him.

Considering the general silliness of the concept and the fact that this is a low-budget genre picture, it's remarkable how great a cast the moviemakers have managed to rope in. They certainly do their best to make the most of the material and all of the performers bring an unexpected somberness to the proceedings. Gibson takes his Santa role with complete earnestness, behaving in a sad and dispirited manner, carrying the weight of a world that seemingly has left kindness behind. Jean-Baptiste does all she can to perk his spirits up, but also feels the pressure and financial strain mounting.

Goggins has the most fun as the Skinny Man. He also has personal issues with Chris in relation to his own childhood. Most of the story involves him interrogating sources as he makes his way closer and closer to his target. While some of his threatening interactions are entertaining, the quietest moments are often the funniest.

There's a great series of shots depicting the stone-faced killer silently and unemotionally driving his car north as joyous Christmas carols play on the radio. Sometimes it's the simplest things that result in the biggest laughs.

While the cast is doing its darndest to suspend disbelief, the straight-laced approach to the material does cause a few tonal issues. While the actors should be commended for taking on their parts as if they were performing Shakespeare, a lighter touch with the material would have ultimately benefitted this production. There is a heaviness in tone that makes it all seem like a slog at times. An extra joke or wink at the audience here or there would most certainly have added zip to the proceedings.

This is also a story in which Chris and his enemies are separated for the majority of the running time. One wishes that there had been more personal interaction and conflict between them. Instead, they only really come to blows in the final act. While the money may not have been available to deliver more action, there could have been some fun interplay between the two memorable leads had they been forced together earlier (perhaps even at the midway point).

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Extending and exploring their personal conflict and attempts to outwit each other on the battlefield would have perked things up considerably.

This is clearly a small film that at times doesn't feel like it's making the most of its over-the-top conceit. Yet this reviewer will give it some props for creating charismatic and distinctive characters. On the whole, *Fatman* doesn't completely work and would have benefitted from exaggerated moments like those in the 1988 fake trailer noted at the beginning of the review. Still, at least it's an eccentric and unique effort that might provide the odd chuckle to those looking for holiday entertainment with a significantly darker edge.

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