

## American remake of 2016 Swedish comedy/drama 'A Man Called Ove' falls short

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
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Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 126 minutes

In 2016, the little Swedish comedy/drama *A Man Called Ove* came out of the blue and surprised critics. Based on a novel by Fredrik Backman, the simple tale of a grouchy, suicidal old man rediscovering his humanity became a massive hit in its homeland and earned Oscar nominations for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Make-Up Effects.

Now, the story has been reinterpreted for North American audiences. If you are not familiar with the original, *A Man Called Otto* is genial and warm-hearted. But somehow, it feels bland and pales in comparison to the 2016 version.

The story follows extremely unpleasant senior Otto Anderson (Tom Hanks). He makes morning rounds in his residential street in Pittsburgh, complaining about and staring down locals who do not follow neighborhood rules. Otto also plans on killing himself in the coming days.

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But the frustrated man finds his attempts thwarted by bad timing. And despite his attempts to keep everyone at arm's length, an encounter with new neighbor Marisol (Mariana Treviño) and her family sends his plan into turmoil. She continually asks for help and engages the annoyed protagonist in conversation, slowly wearing him down. This is all interspersed with flashbacks of a young Otto (Truman Hanks) and his experiences with wife Sonya (Rachel Keller). As the senior finds himself pulled into the lives of those around him, his bleak outlook begins to change.

The original film managed to charm by avoiding overt sentimentality and focusing on the gradual and subtle changes of the title character. While this adaptation does follow many elements closely, it is less subtle in its execution. A nasty real estate developer (Mike Berbiglia) trying to tear the neighborhood down is emphasized and serves as a direct foil for the lead. In fact, this movie makes great efforts from the start to emphasize that viewers like Otto even when his behavior is brusque.

Additionally, flashbacks are delivered in a more dramatic tone in this version and the sadder story elements are played in too grandiose a manner (with a swelling score) to milk a bigger emotional reaction. It works reasonably well, but the tactic adds artifice to the lead's transformation and ultimately blunts its climatic impact.

At least the cast are charismatic enough to keep our attention. Nothing in the story will surprise viewers, but there are a few amusing moments thanks to the efforts of the central performers.

Entertaining scenes include a couple of Otto's interrupted suicide attempts, as well as some gruff responses and confrontational exchanges between himself and those who get on his nerves (like power company representatives and a cashier at a hardware store). An interaction with a clown also delivers a chuckle. And, of course, the lead's interactions with new, overly talkative neighbor Marisol contain some enjoyable back-and-forth jabs.

Still, the end product doesn't wow or make much of a lasting impression. If you haven't seen *A Man Called Ove*, then it is probably wiser to attempt to track down that version of the story. It didn't overplay the drama, yet still managed to feel substantial and pull on the heartstrings.

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*A Man Called Otto* seems earnest and is capably made, but the film is far from awards-caliber material. This effort may satisfy fans of the star or those completely unfamiliar with the novel or Swedish feature, but the film feels routine and traditional in its delivery of the source book.

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