

The Santa Clause 2 kicks off season's holiday movies

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Tim Allen insisted *The Santa Clause 2* start off with an opening sequence big enough to really suck people in.

So, Allen had lunch with Jerry Bruckheimer, best known for producing phenomenal action scenes in such movies as *Enemy of the State* and *Black Hawk Down*, and asked for advice.

The result is a C-130 cargo plane flying over the North Pole, detecting Christmas music, and threatening to expose the location of Santa's workshop. Fearing they're being detected, the elves go to "Elfon 3" effectively transforming their North Pole workshop from fairy tale-esque buildings out of the board game Candy Land to something out of a Tom Clancy novel — filled with high-tech gadgetry — until the danger is past.

Allen and Michael Lembeck, directing his first feature film, made *The Santa Clause 2* one of those rare movies where the sequel is better than its (1994) original.

THE STORY

Allen, a former Birmingham



Tim Allen as Santa Claus confers with elves in the film, *The Santa Clause 2*, opening Friday nationwide.

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resident, reprises his role as Scott Calvin, who reluctantly inherits the mantle of Santa Claus, after knocking him off his roof in the first film. Scott quickly discovers another clause to his contract: The "Mrs. Clause." If he doesn't get married by Christmas Eve, he loses his magical abilities that make him the current incarnation of St. Nick. To make matters worse, his son Charlie (Deconstructing Harry's Eric Lloyd, also reprising his role) is on the naughty list.

Scott has no choice but to leave the North Pole in the hands of his right-hand elves, Bernard (David Krumholtz, *The Mexican*) and Curtis (Spencer Breslin, *The Kid*), who inadvertently create an insane Santa substitute, also

played by Allen. Not only does he have to find a wife and straighten out his kid, he also has to return to the North Pole before the ersatz Claus puts coal in everyone's stockings on Christmas Eve.

Scott, along with his ex-wife Laura and her husband Neil (Wendy Crewson and Judge Reinhold reprising their roles), meet with Charlie's principal, Carol Newman (Elizabeth Mitchell, *Frequency*). At first, Scott and Carol mince words, but eventually, reluctantly find themselves falling in love.

Mitchell, with her knife-edged cheekbones, luminous blue eyes, honey-blond hair, and model good looks, proves that she's just an accomplished actress and not just another

pretty face, stealing the show as Allen's love interest, transforming from a skeptic to a believer.

There are many small, good scenes in this movie. When Santa fixes a problem one of the elves is having with a toy, he responds, "That's why they give me the big belly."

Another scene that is well done is the annual holiday conference where Santa meets with other mythical figures, including Cupid, the Sandman, the Tooth Fairy, Mother Nature and Father Time.

The scene that really makes the movie is the faculty Christmas party where Carol's fellow educators are given vintage toys like "Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots." I can't reveal too much more without spoiling it, but many people who grew up

with these toys will appreciate this scene.

SANTA SUPERHERO?

If there's anything wrong with this movie, it's two things. The first is Scott's showdown with the Santa impostor as they battle on the sleigh pulled by the reindeer over the North Pole.

It's just so hard to picture Santa Claus as an action hero.

The other is the movie's abrupt ending. I really hoped to see Mitchell in makeup as an older woman, but viewers must sit through the credits to see her age.

The Santa Clause 2 is rated PG (some language, mild violence), and opens Friday, Nov. 1, nationwide.

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