

A bigot, a raging boss, a complicit wife: Every 'Rudolph' character, ranked

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Sure, the 1964 "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" movie is a classic, but let's take a closer look at the characters.

By Jeremy Kohler, jkolher@post-dispatch.com

18. Santa: 0.5/10.0



RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER - A misfit reindeer and his friends look for a place that will accept them. (NBCUniversal)

NBCUniversal

It is time for change. There is a total loss of institutional control in Christmastown, and it starts at the top. Old Kris Kringle is not fit to lead Christmas activities. The board should schedule an emergency meeting, develop a succession plan, remove him as soon as practical and install Yukon Cornelius as interim Santa while it does an international search. Christmastown has no room for this lazy, petulant, arrogant fool who thinks he can cancel Christmas.

17. Coach Comet: 1.0/10.0



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One of the worst characters in literature. Our first introduction is when he tells the yearlings that “Even though I’m your instructor, I wanna be your pal, right? Right.” Just answers his own question. They don’t want to be his friend, but he runs the whole program.

Comet represents the worst in youth sports, a coach who keeps taking parents’ money and putting ideas in their heads that their kids are special when they are no such thing. Fact is, Santa only has eight reindeer on his team, and none of them are going anywhere, especially him. The chance of making the big-time is minuscule, but he’ll have these families investing in videos for recruiters anyway. It’s the biggest lie in “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.”

At least he does not make people wonder about whether he’s a total bigot. “From now on, gang, we won’t let Rudolph join in any reindeer games. Right? Right.”

16. Clarice’s dad: 2.3/10.0

Surely drove Clarice’s mom away years ago. You just know this guy is going to Clarice’s gynecologist appointments with her. Won’t even let her look at Rudolph. It’s just not right.

15. Head elf: 2.5/10.0

If Christmastown hired an HR director to run seminars on diversity and harassment, a lot of its problems could have been avoided. Head elf is not a bad guy; he’s just clinging to old-fashioned ideas about the workplace. Like, you should work all the time and be grateful you have a job. He doesn’t hate Hermey’s dentistry; he just doesn’t see yet how he needs it. He does show that he is capable of change, finally

allowing Hermey to hang a shingle at the end. But let's be blunt: Head elf is a nightmare boss, unable to contain his rage toward his underlings, and he needs to get an early package.

14. Donner: 2.9/10.0

Mistakes were made. As a member of Santa's team, Donner lived the good life among the elite. He married into a good family. His pretty wife bore him a son with raw talent for sports. For a shining moment, everything was fine. But Donner was nowhere near retirement, and Comet was already holding tryouts.

Donner would love to put every resource into helping his son be the best that ever lived. Private lessons, personal trainers, weekends traveling out of state with the team because there are no teams good enough to play in town. There is just one thing.

Santa makes it clear on the day of Rudolph's birth that the red nose will have to go "if he wants to make the sleigh team someday." What would you do? You know what Donner did. "Don't worry about your nose, son," he tells Rudolph as he plugs it with a black thing. "Just get out there and do your stuff. Remember, you're my little buck."

13. Fireball: 3.0/10

“You can be my buddy,” he tells Rudolph before the reindeer games. Moments later: “G-g-get away from me!” Big nope.

12. Charlie in the box: 4.4/10

Soooooooo (checks notes) your disability is that (checks again) your name is Charlie?

11. Misfit toys (all but Charlie): 4.5/10

It's hard to judge the elves' failed science experiments. But they just seem too complacent on the island. And buying into King Moonracer's philosophy that a toy needs to be loved by a child. Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.

10. Bumble: 4.6/10.0

An abominable has to eat. Bumble knew that if he just hung around the outskirts of Christmastown, he could pick off the elves and reindeer escaping the regime, and no one would be the wiser. Circle of life.

He lost his teeth in a game of wits, but did he give up? No, Bumbles bounce back.

9. King Moonracer: 4.8/10.0

Lots and lots of questions here.

Yes, this benevolent king grants asylum to misfit refugee toys. And, as soon as he gets the chance, he tries to resettle them into homes with children. But he insists the toys cannot be happy on the island, which honestly looks pretty nice. Why are the toys littered all over the icy beach? Can't he let them into his nice big house? Plus, he has wings. Why can't he fly and find Santa himself?

8. Elves: 4.9/10.0

A mix of good and bad here. The elves do literally all the work for Christmas, and they fill the town with much-needed joy and music. They do not seem to have elf rights, and they are subject to Head Elf's tantrums. They jeer Hermey, but it's because they fear he will bring trouble from management they don't need.

But before you feel too bad for the elves, remember they deliberately experimented on toys and threw them away, even though they could clearly think and feel.

7. Mrs. Donner: 6.8/10.0



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NBCUniversal

Not much to say about Rudolph's mom. She's a mom. She was a good athlete herself, in her day, although no one took girls' sports too seriously. Signed her firstborn son up for youth sports good and early. She seemed fine with the thing on the nose, probably having read that recruiters are not high on red noses. There is a lot of misinformation out there, and some parents take this stuff too seriously and realize too late that it's about having fun. She realized her mistake and went looking for him, almost dying in Bumble's cave. From that brief scene, we know she became like a mother to Clarice. We never learn about what happened to Clarice's real mother, but we can only guess from her dad's crazy overprotection of her that Clarice is all he has left.

6. Mrs. Claus: 7.0/10

She props up her husband so many times, she should get to fly the sled. Her character shines through as she praises the elves' rendition of "We Are Santa's Elves" despite the weak tenor section and her husband's indifference. It is troubling that a woman with her power did not do more to improve working conditions for the elves. But she is living with a weather-obsessed headcase who won't even eat her home cooking.

5. Rudolph: 7.6/10.0



Rudolph (front) in "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"

Courtesy of Classic Media

Classic Media

Say it with me: It's not Rudolph's fault. He's a child victim. You can't blame him for fleeing a place where he was not protected, to live out his adolescence in the wilderness like Alexander Supertramp.

But you can blame him for laughing his ass off with the other yearlings when Dasher's little boy can't get off the ground in the "take-off" game. You can blame him for turning his back on love. Rudolph believes he is ugly, and because of that, he is ugly. His penchant for abandoning friends keeps putting them in harm's way.

It's tragic that of all people, the self-proclaimed "king of jing-a-ling" is the one to make him see his value. Rudolph's triumph ends systemic discrimination in Christmastown, and as such, the good far outweighs the bad.

4. Sam the Snowman: 8.5/10.0

Some artful storytelling here, even if we are left to wonder about the narrator's reliability. While Sam doesn't seem to appear in the events of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, it's clear he had access to every character for what had to be hours of interviews. He weaves those stories into a believable and harrowing narrative. He does not sugarcoat the facts, revealing every horror of Christmastown with a plain delivery that stays this side of jolly.

But is this history or propaganda? Is this simply what the new regime in Christmastown wants us to know? I could have used a bit more back story on how the place became such a hateful cesspool and what role Sam might have played. Remember: He is not a young snowman. His own igloos probably have a few skeletons.

3. Hermey: 9.7/10.0



Hermey and Rudolph in "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"

Courtesy of Classic Media

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There is a scene about 35 minutes into the story where Rudolph tells Yukon and Hermey he is too dangerous for them to be seen with. But his friends aren't having it. Hermey says: "It's settled, then," clicks off the light and is sawing wood in 0.6 seconds. This is an elf in full.

You think his arc is about staying true to himself. But no. It's about staying true to his friends. By the end of the story, he's on all fours luring a monster out of his cave with pig squeals and scrubbing in for an emergency tooth extraction. What?

One quibble: He leaves the elf choir tenor section high and dry by skipping rehearsal, provoking a rage-storm by Head Elf. It was the one time where Hermey left his friends in peril. Hermey is one of the story's three pillars, but the dropoff is steep

from here.

2. Yukon Cornelius: 9.8/10.0

In a better life, Mrs. Claus would have married this lonesome, grizzled prospector with a heart of silver and gold instead of the depressed wretch who enforces the sick, sexist and discriminatory culture of Christmastown.

Yukon Cornelius is a mighty force for good in Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. He could have tied Clarise for the top spot except for two instances of excessive whipping of his sled puppies. These are minor quibbles.



This self-confident badass was quite comfortable alone in the tundra before he embraced life in society, redeeming basically everyone through extraordinary feats of strength, cunning and kindness. You can bet when Mrs. Claus cooks for him he will eat it and get as fat as she wants him to be. Nobody likes a skinny Yukon, especially not Yukon.

Yukon Cornelius (left) with Hermey, Rudolph, Sam the Snowman and Santa in "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"
Courtesy of Classic Media

1. Clarice: 10.0/10.0

What Rudolph was really thinking when Clarice sang "There's Always Tomorrow."

This video is made for satirical purposes only and constitutes fair use. It is not for purposes of commercial sale. Please buy a DVD of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer or, if you want to do proper justice to a classic, buy an old VHS copy that has the "Fame and Fortune" song where it belongs.

Hello, Clarice! The doe next door is the only flawless character in Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Brave, loyal and unjaded by the dystopia of Christmastown, Clarice picks Rudolph out of the crowd of preening young Turks at Coach Comet's first practice and makes a lifetime commitment with a single bat of an insanely long eyelash.

When the black thing falls off Rudolph's nose, exposing Donner's ruse, she doesn't hear jeers. She sees potential, reassuring her man in song "there's always tomorrow for dreams to come true." Where did this optimism come from? She keeps the home fires lit when Rudolph skulks away in shame, then risks her life to search for him, nearly getting eaten alive by Bumble. Does Rudolph deserve this kind of love? Does anyone?

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devices.

NORAD is focusing its formidable tracking systems on Santa Claus and his reindeer as they make their annual flight delivering presents to children around the world.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command, which is responsible for protecting the skies over the US and Canada, has activated its official Santa Tracker.

You can follow his sleigh on the **NORAD Tracks Santa website** and there are apps available for iOS and Android



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RIO LINDA, Calif. — Santa found himself a little more tied up than usual this time of year.