Directed by Donald Petrie.

GRUMPY OLD MEN

Written by Mark Steven Johnson.

John Gustafson (Jack Lemmon) and Max Goldman (Walter Matthau) try to do in Grumpy Old Men. The climate alone in the Minnesota setting is enough to make anyone permanently perjurious, but John and Max seem impervious to the snow, frozen only by each other's presence. When the vivacious, sensual widow Ariel Truax (Ann-Margret) moves into their neighborhood, the two old men trigger off a chain of events that is both funny and shallow, and would have failed miserably without the chemistry of Lemmon and Matthau.

Lemmon and Matthau shine in Grumpy Old Men. Only one thing can make friends hate each other as much as neighbors John Gustafson (Jack Lemmon) and Max Goldman (Walter Matthau) try to do in Grumpy Old Men. The climate alone in the Minnesota setting is enough to make anyone permanently perjurious, but John and Max seem impervious to the snow, frozen only by each other's presence. When the vivacious, sensual widow Ariel Truax (Ann-Margret) moves into their neighborhood, the two old men trigger off a chain of events that is both funny and shallow, and would have failed miserably without the chemistry of Lemmon and Matthau.

Unfortunately, the entire substance of the film lies in these antics. Half the movie passes before the secret source of John's and Max's animosity is revealed. The characters are funny but shallow, and would have failed miserably without the chemistry of Lemmon and Matthau filling the roles. The tidbits presented of Ariel's background never adequately explain her flamboyant behavior. She is a gratuitous romantic plot twist and unwitting neighborhood antagonist. John, and that revelation excuses all of the movie's other shortcomings.

This is no masterpiece of screen literature, but it does not pretend to be. It is simply entertainment, and with two classic comedic antagonists leading the cast, every acerbic barb scores a direct hit on the funny bone.