

Movie Draft: *Out of Order*

by Joe Mulder

(*Out of Order* is one of four made-up films generated during PoopReading.com's recent [Movie Draft](#).)

Some movies are categorically of a type, yet somehow simultaneously transcend that type to become masterpieces. *The Wrestler* was, in this critic's opinion, a recent example of such a film: an absolute cinematic triumph that nonetheless resides squarely and comfortably within the conventions of its own genre. I would count *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* as another such movie, for example.

Out of Order, opening around the country this Friday, is not one of these films. It does belong, however, one rung down on the ladder, with other movies that break no new ground whatsoever but execute their chosen genre with entertaining precision, standing out as among the very best in conventional, mainstream Hollywood entertainment (think *The Rock*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, or *Major League*, to name three).

The plot of *Out of Order* is something like – to use an old, lazy shorthand – *Step Brothers* meets *Intolerable Cruelty*, an apt description given that Richard Jenkins, who appeared in both of those films, plays *Out of Order*'s prominent Los Angeles attorney and would-be politician. Mulling a United States Senate run just as his long-suffering wife (Meryl Streep, handling comedy as adeptly as she always does when given the chance) files for divorce, Jenkins wishes to dissolve the marriage as quickly and quietly as possible.

The machinations of the case, however, lead first Streep and then Jenkins to hire their own sons, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Brad Pitt, to represent them in the divorce. Throw in Melissa Leo as a judge who shares a secret with Jenkins that could destroy them both, and things are complicated even further. As is often the case in a wacky, madcap romp, the plot makes little real-life sense, but who wants to see a movie about a couple who go through a contentious divorce trial at which nothing particularly funny or interesting happens? Not this film critic, that's who.

The relative absurdity of the story matters little once the fun starts; Jenkins, as he proved in *Step Brothers*, plays dweeby upper-crust white guy coming unglued better than anybody, so his bravura comic performance comes as no surprise. Streep, as everyone knows by now, can do anything; she could play Ving Rhames playing Forest Whitaker in *The Michael Clarke Duncan Story* and make you believe she was the only performer on the planet for the part. Leo manages to play the straight man without getting lost in all the wackiness, to her great credit; after all, how can the wacky even be wacky unless it is contrasted with the staid, the professional and the uptight?

It is Pitt and Hoffman, however, as the brothers fighting for

Mom and Dad's approval, who really have the most fun. Pitt has proven his comedy chops time and again, from *True Romance* through *Burn After Reading*, but never has had the chance to run free throughout the entire length of a comedic feature. His performance actually makes you wonder if movies wouldn't have been a lot more fun over the past ten years if Brad Pitt actually looked like, say, Rob Schneider. I mean, you put Brad Pitt in Rob Schneider's body and, I swear, *The Hot Chick* becomes *Tootsie*.

(or course, then we don't get that "South Park" episode with all those Rob Schneider parody trailers, the one where eventually Trey Parker just says, "This summer, Rob Schneider der de-der de-derrrr." And I'm not sure I want to live in a world without that, so maybe everything's just as it should be. Plus, at the end of the day, I like Rob Schneider; I don't care)

The real treat, though, is Philip Seymour Hoffman as Brad Pitt's younger, schlubbier, less successful brother. Hoffman mines comedy from the situation without ever once making you think that he's pathetic or pitiable. The only downside is that Hoffman's sublime performance reminds us of how much comedy he *hasn't* done. No, he's off starring in *Gravitas McGee Bums Everyone the Hell Out*, and we're forced to subsist on his few scenes in *The Big Lebowski* and a couple of YouTube clips from *Along Came Polly* (search *Hoffman along came polly* on YouTube. Do it now). Somebody, somewhere, needs to give PSH his own *School of Rock*, his own *Anchorman*, his own *Big*. And maybe he's not interested in such a career path, but for the good of the country, somebody needs to sit him down and convince him. These are tough times; we need nothing more than to see Philip Seymour Hoffman in 2010's equivalent to *Liar Liar*.

In the end everything might not go perfectly for the characters in *Out of Order*, but for the audience – and especially for fans of Philip Seymour Hoffman – things turn out quite well indeed.

Out of Order is rated NC-17 for pervasive full-frontal nudity, graphic violence and repeated references to Satanism and the occult.
