

Movie Draft: *Son of Oklahoma*

by Jameson Simmons

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

Hollywood producers: must we? Just because it's the last six weeks of the calendar year, where is it written that the rest of us must endure your ponderous attempts to slip a hollow, pointless film in under the wire and nab an award nomination or two? Shouldn't the box office results speak for themselves? In recent years, self-important political snoozefests like *Electoral College Dropout* and *The Filibuster Militia* have been imposed on an innocent filmgoing public, and said public has stayed away in droves. When is enough enough?

Not yet, apparently, because here comes *Son of Oklahoma* (debuting in New York and L.A. December 20; opening wide May 8). Buoyed by an impressive cast of powerhouse actors (Josh Brolin and Sean Penn as hometown brothers) and Hollywood heavyweights (Angelina Jolie dreadfully miscast as a wine-room entrepreneur), *Son of Oklahoma* nonetheless fails to achieve much in its choppy exploration of prairie politics, sexual tension, and familial intrigue.

Brolin is steadfast yet directionless as Jason McCoy, a small-town assemblyman making a bid for the U.S. Senate. He's exactly the sort of hero you'd expect Hollywood to dangle in front of award juries: resolute, rough-edged, and eloquent, yet not without his vulnerabilities. He can wax poetic about the seasonal dust storms blowing new ideas in from the East (when discussing nothing more significant than Jolie's liquor license application) but at home he's as confused as anyone else about where his town and his values fit in this modern world. While at home, he's also clashing with his wife Evelyn (a criminally overused Marisa Tomei) who met him at Yale and has begun to regret leaving her tony Manhattan upbringing behind to follow him back to the Sooner State. The way she harangues him, it isn't hard to sympathize when he starts spending more nights with Janelle Moore (Jolie) at her new wine bar. Moore's an Okie by birth and McCoy starts to see things in her that he misses in Evelyn. Change is a novelty, the film seems to say; stick to what works and marry your mother or you'll be sorry.

Just as things are starting to heat up in that typically predictable way that they do, the film takes a hard left and dives into an examination of national partisan politics and how they filter into the lives of rural constituents and voters. The DNC dispatches Darcy Washington, a brassy, fast-talking K Street hack (Viola Davis), to oversee McCoy's campaign – she clashes with just about everyone, especially McCoy, whose defeated shrugs as she introduces talking points and sound bites into his homespun stump speeches become so repetitive it seems like Brolin is trying to work a kink out of his neck. We're meant to see this as a clash between insider, gamebook politics and the simple goals of

local people to look out for each other. But the premise rings hollow, because McCoy's politics are all over the map – betraying a hesitation on the part of the filmmakers to take any stand for fear of alienating a potential demographic. He's hunted since his youth, but he supports the Assault Weapons Ban; he opposes muddying the Constitution with language prohibiting gay marriage, but the film takes every opportunity to show him squirming in the company of the town's few homosexuals; he's in favor of Medicare, but also in favor of euthanizing the elderly.

But before we can reach the merciful end of yet another fictional campaign season, we've still got to get past McCoy's brother, Braxton (Penn), a farmer from across the state who stumbles back into his younger brother's life at a time least expedient to his political aspirations. He gets drunk at a fundraiser and professes his love for his sister-in-law Evelyn then casts aspersions about Jason's relationship with Janelle Moore. (Even when Hollywood is celebrating the simple nobility of rural values, it still has to look down its nose. Every farmer on the big screen is destined to be a drunkard.) Moments between Moore and the McCoy brothers suggest there's more afoot than fraternal jealousy and love triangles – that's right, a family secret and last-minute twist just in case you forgot you were watching a movie (and a relatively sloppy one). Where the film succeeds is in its tender exploration of the fractured relationship between the brothers. Penn rises to the occasion, as he so rarely does, delivering a nuanced and spare performance. Watching him with Brolin, decades of hurt and regret are palpable in the air between them. But most of this is squandered, because when the final twist is unfurled and the dark secret of the McCoy brothers comes to light, it's a deeply unsatisfying moment. I won't spoil it here, but suffice it to say that this film's tone and politics do not gel with a "skeleton-in-the-closet" reveal that involves a YouTube clip and a coffin full of counterfeit twenties.

Son of Oklahoma will almost certainly win a cinematography award for its achingly beautiful shots of prairie vistas, composed by – who else? – Roger Deakins. Its producers clearly hope to win your consideration for the actors and script as well, but it would take a lean year indeed for these to rise to the top of anyone's list. Stories with meaning will always be welcome additions to the cinematic marketplace; but this is little more than a story *about* meaning, and as such it deserves to be forgotten as quickly as it surely will be.

Son of Oklahoma is rated PG-13 for fleeting nudity (not Jolie, sorry) and multiple inexplicable anti-Semitic non-sequiturs, plus a suggestive scene between a bloodhound and a feeder pig.