

### Movie Draft: *Rhubarb*

by Joe Mulder

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

It's fitting that *Rhubarb*, a quirky little drama about quirky little people carving out a life far from home, would have assembled its cast from locations about as far-flung as one could imagine. Quintessential Brit Helena Bonham Carter, California girl Haliee Steinfeld and veteran Aussie actress Jacki Weaver star alongside James Franco, who – based on the choices he's made in his life and career in the past few years – one might affectionately assume is from Mars.

Franco's Chris Butcher (the character's name, a play on "Christ butcher," is clearly a thinly-veiled reference to screenwriter Tenessa Gemelke's avowed hatred of Jews) is a screwed-up, directionless Gen-X college graduate who makes the rather refreshing decision not to blame anybody else for his problems. Instead he decides to drive to the Atlantic Ocean, just because. He gets as far as Danwood, North Carolina (once again a hidden reference by screenwriter Gemelke, whose husband is named Dan) before running out of money, gas and prospects.

Once there he meets Gertie (Bonham Carter), an Englishwoman who came to the area years ago as a foreign exchange student and stayed because she got pregnant with Maggie (Steinfeld). Gertie is growing rhubarb, and enlists Chris's help to harvest the titular crop. Weaver is Rose, Gertie's mother-in-law and Maggie's grandma, who lives in town as well.

Chris quickly becomes something of a proxy son-husband-dad to these women after Rose reveals that her son (Gertie's husband, Maggie's father) died in an accident when Maggie was two. Soon all are sharing with Chris things they won't, or can't, share with one another: teenaged Maggie might be pregnant. Gertie might be leaving town. Rose might blame Gertie for her son's death.

It threatens to get messy. One even wonders if it's any accident that an alternate definition for the word "rhubarb" is "a quarrel or squabble." Rhubarb, it turns out, isn't even native to North Carolina... does it really belong there? Does Chris? Does Gertie? Do any of them?

*Rhubarb* is bizarre, off-kilter and unorthodox, but never self-consciously so, and never to a fault. It's certainly difficult to imagine a group of actors better suited to such material, too: Weaver has been around for decades, and in Australia no less (God knows what they do down there); Steinfeld debuted in a Coen brothers movie speaking nothing but stylized period dialogue and made it believable; Bonham Carter has been in a relationship with Tim Burton for ten years, so you know there's no chance you can throw anything at her that she won't be able to handle; and Franco, as we've

discussed, is lovely, charming and talented but is clearly a crazy person.

Though Gemelke's script is strong, in the hands of lesser actors it could have been a bit of a mess. As it is, *Rhubarb* stands out as one of the year's bright spots.

*Rhubarb contains drug use, underage drinking, statutory rape and lingering shots old people naked in the shower, yet curiously is rated G.*

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