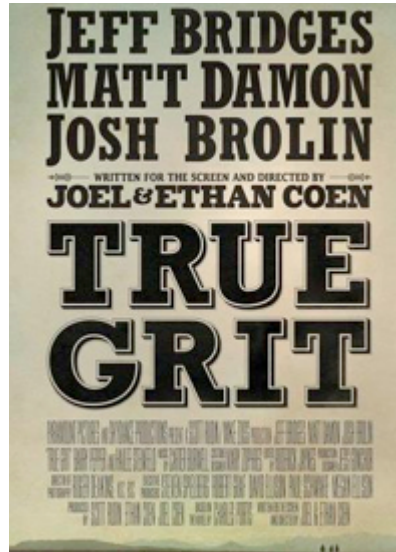




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on January 3, 2011

Coen Brothers' True Grit a Must See

True Grit is a classic western about a young 14-year old heroine named Mattie Ross (Hailee Steinfeld) who sets out to hunt down her father's killer and see that he is hung for murdering her father. She enlists the help of a grizzled U.S. Marshall by the name of Rooster Cogburn (Jeff Bridges), known for his drunkenness and shoot-'em-up style of justice. Ross insists that she accompany Cogburn as he voyages through "Indian Nation" to find the murderer, Tom Chaney (Josh Brolin), and despite Cogburn's best efforts, Mattie could not be dissuaded. Likewise, the two are joined by Texas Ranger LaBoeuf (Matt Damon) — a man who prides himself in adhering to the book of Texas Ranger justice. LaBoeuf was hired to track down Tom Chaney after he murdered a Texas Senator.



Neither LaBoeuf nor Rooster are thrilled at the notion of traveling in dangerous territory with a young girl. Additionally, Rooster is unsure of LaBoeuf's naïve, though well-intentioned, methods of law enforcement, and Mattie is concerned that LaBoeuf will return the captured Tom Chaney to Texas to be hung for the Senator's death, not her father's. LaBoeuf is rather displeased by Mattie's pistol mouth and views himself as a necessary role model bent on correcting Mattie's uncouth ways.

Needless to say, the vast differences of all three characters make them a highly comedic trio. The banter alone is enough to keep the audiences' attention from beginning to end. Mattie and Rooster cannot resist teasing LaBoeuf every chance they get for his failure to capture the "slow-witted Tom Chaney," despite the long manhunt. Meanwhile, Rooster and LaBoeuf really go at it at times, particularly after Rooster has had a few drinks. As a proud Texas Ranger, LaBoeuf is highly offended at Rooster's mockery. At one point he questions Rooster's decisions to belittle him in front of Mattie. To that, Rooster simply replied, "I think she's got you pretty well figured out."

In both the 1969 and 2010 versions of *True Grit*, the success of the films rests on characterization, likely because both are based on the book by Charles Portis. Portis' novel, *True Grit*, like the films, is narrated by spinster Mattie Ross who recalls the most adventurous time in her life: the manhunt for her father's murderer. It is debatably Mattie Ross who steals the show. Both the literary and cinematic Mattie have a gift for language and precocity. It is that very gift that manages to baffle LaBoeuf and Rooster, and ultimately engage the men's assistance in the first place. Mattie's character is enthralling as she is a far more mature 14-year old girl than most others and fails to allow femininity to keep her from carrying out business. She proves herself to both men nearly from the start and soon becomes like one of the guys.

The Coen Brothers indicate that Mattie's character was a leading inspiration in their endeavor to adapt



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the novel to the big screen. Ethan Coen explains, "She's a pill, but there is something deeply admirable about her in the book that we were drawn to." Joel Coen adds, "We didn't think we should mess around with what we thought was a very compelling story and character."

Likewise, both Rooster and LaBoeuf are endearing as they are unable to maintain a hard exterior when it comes to Mattie. Motivated by a chivalric desire to carry out justice, and to make some money, the two men ultimately fulfill their promises to each other and to Mattie, though not without obstacles. Their competitiveness with one another proves to be troublesome in their journey, but also makes for some lively hilarity.

True Grit's resolution is both emotional and realistic. LaBoeuf and Rooster continue on to embark on other adventures, and Mattie's character remains true to herself, even though that means a lifetime of spinsterhood. Above all, the film's conclusion highlights its significant themes of sacrifice, loyalty, self-actualization, and duty.

Jeff Bridges' performance would likely make John Wayne proud as his cool nonchalance at even the most terrifying moments is reminiscent of *The Duke*. Bridges artfully lives up to the role of a man who appears past his prime on the surface but embodies a whole lot of bravery, efficiency, and strength when put to the test. Damon hits the nail on the head once again with his superb abilities. He certainly plays a convincing stereotypical Texas man who believes nothing else holds a candle to his home state. But Hailee Steinfeld arguably steals the show. Though a young and relatively inexperienced actress, Steinfeld's eloquence and gumption ranks her among her co-actors in skill and likeability.

The Coen Brothers' *True Grit* proves that a film does not require too many cinematics, special effects, or unbelievable action scenes in order to be successful. All a good movie needs is a good story, engaging dialogue, and capable actors to coast to the top of the charts. The quality of *True Grit* has already landed it a number of reputable awards' nominations, including for the Screen Actors Guild. It is a must-see.



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