The version of *True Grit* which is now playing in our cinemas is a remake of a classic John Wayne film from 1969. I have never seen that earlier film, which is perhaps just as well as it allows me to review the new one based solely upon its own merits…which are considerable. It is also one of the few Westerns the modern film industry has given us in recent years. One can only hope that its success and widespread acclaim will convince Hollywood to revive the once-proud genre with more of its kind.

Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen, *True Grit* is the epic tale of 14-year-old Mattie Ross (Hailee Steinfeld) as she sets out to bring her father’s murderer to justice. Regardless of her youth, Mattie is as resourceful as she is strong-willed, and despite the dangers she knows she will face as she pursues the killer into Indian country, she refuses to consider surrender. But Mattie is smart enough to realize she will need help, and so she seeks out the roughest, most ruthless Marshall she can find: a grizzled, one-eyed gunslinger called Rooster Cogburn (Jeff Bridges). The unlikely pair is joined by a somewhat naïve Texas Ranger called LaBoeuf (Matt Damon), who wants to bring the fugitive in for his own reasons. But the trail is cold and fraught with danger, and before it’s all over even Mattie’s courage will be stretched to the breaking point.

*True Grit* has a lot going for it, especially the two leads. Hailee Steinfeld is a wonder as the indefatigable Mattie, and Jeff Bridges plays the eccentric Rooster Cogburn with obvious relish. Both are at times irascible, but you can’t help but hope they come through in the end. Both deserve Oscar nominations, and their onscreen chemistry is a joy to watch as their unlikely friendship evolves. The Coen brothers direct their film with a keen understanding of what a good Western should look and feel like, and the script is surprisingly witty. Though it never descends to slapstick, the dialogue is often hilarious in an understated, true-to-life fashion.

There are some flaws that keep *True Grit* from being a really great film. The ending is sadly weak and disappointing, and Damon’s LaBoeuf is largely superfluous. Still, *True Grit* is a mostly-solid Western odyssey like they don’t make ‘em anymore.