

## Blu-Ray Review: Unnecessary ‘Brothers’ Remake Works on Own Terms

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- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [Brothers](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Jake Gyllenhaal](#) [5]
- [Jarhead](#) [6]
- [Jim Sheridan](#) [7]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [8]
- [Natalie Portman](#) [9]
- [Susanne Bier](#) [10]
- [Tobey Maguire](#) [11]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [12]

CHICAGO – Was there really any need to remake “Brothers,” the 2004 Danish drama directed by Susanne Bier? Not only was the film nearly flawless, but its riveting emotions and themes resonated on a universal level that transcended any cultural boundaries. Just because a war film is set in a different country or a different time period doesn’t mean the modern-day American soldier won’t be able to relate to it.

Subtitles are no longer a good enough reason for filmmakers to remake foreign films, since audiences are growing increasingly comfortable with reading while watching. Mainstream viewers’ multitasking eyes trained on the Internet had no problem drinking in “Slumdog Millionaire” or “Inglourious Basterds” (not to mention “Avatar”). But it is entirely to the credit of director Jim Sheridan and his uniformly strong cast that the 2009 American remake of “Brothers” works on its own terms. Bier’s film is far more visceral and gut-wrenching, but Sheridan’s quietly nuanced approach to the material has its own advantages.



Blu-Ray Rating: **3.5/5.0**

It was a rather ingenious move to cast Tobey Maguire and Jake Gyllenhaal as siblings, since both actors are often confused for each other. Maguire plays Capt. Sam Cahill, who barely begins his fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan before his helicopter is shot down. Sam’s grieving wife Grace (a miscast Natalie Portman) is comforted by his younger brother Tommy (Gyllenhaal), who’s just left prison and is struggling to rebuild his own life. But it’s quickly revealed to the viewer that Sam is not only alive, but being held as a prisoner of war by Al-Qaeda. As Tommy begins to fill the void left by his brother, Sam is forced to fight for his survival in ways that will leave him irrevocably scarred long after he returns home.



Tobey Maguire and Jake Gyllenhaal play siblings in Jim Sheridan’s Brothers.

*Photo credit: Lionsgate Home Entertainment*

The potential love triangle set up by this premise will be familiar to most contemporary viewers, particularly those who’ve seen Michael Bay’s godawful “Pearl Harbor.” Of course, “Brothers” is far more complex, and Sheridan once again proves his gift for mining the operatic qualities in intimate family drama. Some of the film’s climactic outbursts go over-the-top, with an uncharacteristically audacious Maguire swinging for the fences (his risk-taking is impressive, but he overplays his crucial final moments). Gyllenhaal is superb, as is the entire supporting cast. As he did in the sublime “In America,” Sheridan coaxes stunning performances from his young actors, particularly Bailee Madison as Sam’s older daughter. Though Sheridan refuses to politicize the material, the film effectively illustrates the toll of war on tormented soldiers whose survival is purely of a physical nature (it’s a worthy companion piece to Gyllenhaal’s own “Jarhead”).



Brothers was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on March 23rd, 2010.

Photo credit: Lionsgate Home Entertainment

“Brothers” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.4:1 aspect ratio), and includes some enlightening extras in which the filmmakers attempt to justify their reasons for remaking Bier’s film. In the 12-minute “Remade in the USA” featurette, the cast and crew discuss how they wanted the story to represent the experience of American soldiers serving in the current war. This allegedly allows the story to speak to a wider audience, since there are more Americans stationed in Afghanistan than there are Danes (this particular reasoning struck me as pure rubbish). But Sheridan makes a better argument, saying that Bier’s film is more about “illicit love,” centering on the wife caught in the middle, while his film surveys the events more from the male characters’ perspectives. The featurette also includes footage from the original film, as well as selections from an archival interview with Bier, that will hopefully motivate viewers to rent it.

Fans of the director will greatly appreciate the 15-minute featurette about Sheridan’s interest in telling stories that center on a family (often largely inspired by his own). Yet the real treat is Sheridan’s delightful audio commentary, in which he freely questions his own directorial choices throughout the picture. He admits that it was tough for audiences to accept that Maguire was Gyllenhaal’s older brother, since he seems inherently younger. Sheridan also talks about how he had to occasionally sacrifice stronger dramatic impact for the sake of probability. It’s especially fascinating to hear how he approached directing the child actors as if they were adults. The complexity of his directions for the ten-year-old Madison may seem staggering, but they certainly paid off in the finished film.

*‘Brothers’ is released by Lionsgate Home Entertainment and stars Tobey Maguire, Jake Gyllenhaal, Natalie Portman, Bailee Madison, Sam Shepard, Mare Winningham, Taylor Geare, Patrick Flueger, Carey Mulligan and Clifton Collins Jr. It was written by David Benioff and directed by Jim Sheridan. It was released on March 23rd, 2010. It is rated R.*



[13]

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[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brothers>

- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jake-gyllenhaal>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jarhead>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jim-sheridan>
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