Film Review: Inauthentic ‘The Judge’ Guilty of a Stale Confrontation

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on October 11, 2014 - 6:20pm

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CHICAGO – Here comes “The Judge,” here comes “The Judge.” That 1960s catchphrase gets new meaning in the film featuring Robert Downey Jr. and veteran Robert Duvall, in a angry generational face-off that makes little sense and provides a stiff courtroom drama that felt like bad TV.



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

This is supposed to be a platform for two great film actors, Downey and Duvall, to troll for Oscar nominations in a familiar Daddy-doesn’t-love-me-because-he’s-an-angry-guy story. There is nothing authentic about the reasons regarding their disdain for each other, except the type of misunderstandings that could have cleared up with one phone call. The centerpiece courtroom sequence, in which Lawyer Downey must defend Judge Duvall, was the height of fall-into-place narrative convenience, and should never have gone to trial – but the prosecutor character played by Billy Bob Thornton (naturally) has it in for the arrogant Downey. It all concludes with a tacked-on hackneyed ending, with symbolic syrupy strings and hosannas.

Hank Palmer (Downey Jr.) is a slick Chicago lawyer, whose specialty is defending guilty people, and making them legally innocent. He gets a call that his mother has passed away, and travels to his small Indiana hometown to attend her funeral. There is tension there, as his father Joseph (Duvall) – the tough but beloved local judge – hasn’t forgiven Hank for a past transgression.

After several clashes involving the father and son during the mourning period, and run-ins with brothers Glen (Vincent D’Onofrio) and developmentally disabled Dale (Jeremy Strong), a mysterious dent in their father’s car causes alarm. The Judge doesn’t remember hitting anyone with the vehicle, but the evidence is clear. Hank will take the case, and at the same time woo a local ex-lover named Samantha (Vera Farmiga).

“The Judge” opens everywhere on October 10th. Featuring Robert Downey Jr., Robert Duvall, Vincent D’Onofrio, Vera Farmiga, Billy Bob Thornton, Jeremy Strong, Dax Shepard, Leighton Meester and Ken Howard. Screenplay by Nick Schenk and Bill Dubuque. Directed by David Dobkin. Rated “R”

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The Defender: Hank (Robert Downey Jr.) and Joseph (Robert Duvall) in ‘The Judge’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

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