

Jason Segel, Ed Helms in Inconsistent 'Jeff, Who Lives at Home'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 16, 2012 - 1:29pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Writer/directors Jay and Mark Duplass clearly love their characters. Whether it's the awkward man-child at the center of "Cyrus" or the title character in their new dramedy "Jeff, Who Lives at Home," there's a charming affection for these people. I really enjoyed spending time with the quartet of well-drawn, well-acted people in "Jeff," which makes the fact that their story is less-structured and sloppier than it should be to be effective all the more frustrating. I SO want to love "Jeff, Who Lives at Home," but this dude is too often stuck in the creative basement.

The four characters at the center of "Jeff, Who Lives at Home" are the title slacker (Jason Segel), his brother Pat (Ed Helms), his sister-in-law Linda (Judy Greer), and his mother Sharon (Susan Sarandon). "Jeff" is essentially about how it might not always be a bad idea to let the unseen, fate-destined flow of the universe to guide you. We live in a world that's so defined by structures, labels, etc. that we sometimes lose sight of things like instinct and destiny. And the fact is that those traits are often seen as crutches of the lazy – successful people plan, slackers go with the flow – but is that true? Can the flow show you things you wouldn't have otherwise seen and even impact the world?



Jeff, Who Lives at Home

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

If it sounds like a deep subject for a character-driven dramedy, don't worry. The Duplass brothers don't hit their themes too strongly, focusing on the people in their film without underlined moral lessons. However, the film could have used a bit more underlining. It often feels about as

meandering as its central character. I like that the Duplass brothers don't overly concern themselves with structure and pace but it can lead to a final product that feels too meandering for its own good. "Jeff, Who Lives at Home" gets a bit repetitive and a bit lost (in no small part due to a shift in focus to Helms' miscast character) in the second act and so the surprisingly emotional final one doesn't connect in the way it should. It's a near-miss.

Jeff lives in his mother's basement. He doesn't seem to do much while he's there. As if often the case with people who have too much time on their hands, his mind starts to wander to the riddles of the universe. What if a wrong number isn't a wrong number? What if the universe is trying to tell him something? He decides to follow some potentially destiny-laden leads and, surprisingly, ends up crossing paths with his brother Pat, who's in the middle of a crisis of his own with his wife Linda. Pat bought a ridiculous sports car without consulting her and is basically a pretty big dick. When Pat and Jeff stumble upon Linda looking like she might be engaging in infidelity – a meal and a trip to a hotel – it appears once again like the universe may have led Jeff to the right place at the right time. Is it all leading up to something even greater?



Jeff, Who Lives at Home

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Segel is perfectly cast in "Jeff," never playing the title character as too much of a slacker. He could have gone too far in the "McConaughey" direction, playing Jeff like a comedy stoner but he always keeps him grounded. Greer is simply stellar in everything she does and I wish the movie had more of her. Sarandon's part may be smaller but she gets some sweet, interesting scenes with a co-worker named Carol (Rae Dawn Chong). Then there's Ed Helms. I've liked him before but he just doesn't work here. I don't buy his brother or husband chemistry with Segel or Greer and it's a fault of both his and the Duplass brothers that this character is so remarkably unlikable. It's almost as if he carried too much of that negative "Hangover" energy from that misanthropic series to this film.

But Helms is only one of the problems here. Writing a film about the complexities of fate and destiny is difficult enough but this one meanders too much and, ultimately, feels both episodic and much longer than its 80-minute running time. A like many of the performances in "Jeff, Who Lives at Home" and the concept that less structure might do the soul some good but the filmmakers don't quite pull it off. It's a minor misstep in a career of some very, very talented people. Much like most of Jeff's days in the basement, it will be easy to forget.

"Jeff, Who Lives at Home" stars Jason Segel, Ed Helms, Susan Sarandon, Judy Greer, and Rae Dawn Chong. It was written and directed by Jay & Mark Duplass. It was released on March 16th, 2012.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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