

Problem Child 2

US : 1991 : dir. Brian Levant : UIP / Universal / Imagine Entertainment : 91 min
 prod: Robert Simonds : scr: Scott Alexander & Larry Karaszewski : dir.ph.: Peter Smokler
Michael Oliver; Ivyann Schwan [sic]
 John Ritter; Jack Warden; Laraine Newman; Amy Yasbeck; Gilbert Gottfried; Paul Wilson;
 Charlene Tilton; James Tolkan; Martha Quinn

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ € Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5567	2½	8	2	1,629	- - - - -	No	Unseen

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"The sequel no-one asked for has Ritter adopting a second demon-child, this one female and hell-bent to give her stepbrother a run for his money. Any parent who lets an impressionable child watch this stuff ought to have his or her head examined!¹ Followed by a 1995 TV movie sequel. *½ "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"If you have a fondness for "adult" comedies that delight in the disgusting, there could be something here for you. For most tastes, though, this is an unbelievably bad sequel to a gruesome original, a flatulent farce about an awful child who blows up his teacher in the toilet, accelerates a merry-go-round to a crazy rate and makes everybody sick, and swaps medical cards on a woman he doesn't like so that she'll have plastic surgery to make her nose bigger.

You may say that all this [is] surreal, but this is a nasty, thoroughly ill-natured film that makes "PORKY'S" look like a comedy classic. There are jokes about the bowel movements of dogs, and any other bodily function the writers can think of. One step forward has been made, though: instead of a custard pie fight, the characters have a pizza fight. Boy actor Michael Oliver gives another dreadful, camera-hogging performance.

Rock Bottom"

¹ Not necessarily in that order...

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"At times this poor version of a sitcom seems written by five-year olds for five-year olds, so much so that one suspects its script was finger-painted.

The plot has Ben (John Ritter) and Junior (Michael Oliver) moving to a new town of cloying divorcees, as Junior grapples with his fear of losing his adopted dad by reverting to various revolting if not terribly funny habits.

A second "problem child", a little girl (Ivyann Schwan, from "PARENTHOOD"), eventually teams up with Junior to try to bring his lonely dad together with her sheepish mom (Amy Yasbeck).

The most depressing aspect of the film stems from seeing Ritter and Laraine Newman, playing a rich femme fatale with her own desires on Ben [sic], struggling against such fastidiously inane material. Oliver remains an annoying child actor who mugs constantly.

Pic also suffers from a cheap look all the way around, including jokes using a stuffed dog that's supposed to be a real dog and an obviously styrofoam rock."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"John Ritter and Michael Oliver return as Ben Healy and his devilish adopted son Junior in this sequel. Too bad the writers had to heap projectile vomiting and giant mounds of dog

faeces on the audience. Rated "PG-13" for mild profanity and scatological humour. ** "

Empire (?) review:

"Having disposed of his wife at the end of part one of this sorry saga, Ben Healey (Ritter) and his adopted son, the diabolically-inclined Junior (Oliver), uproot to Mortville - "divorce capital of the world" - where the elder Healey's presence is greeted with lustful appreciation by the legions of single women beating a path to his door. Among them is Laraine Newman as La Wanda Dumore, a veteran of six husbands who has Ben down as number seven. Ben's affections, however, lie with Junior's bespectacled school nurse Annie (Yasbeck) who refuses to reciprocate on account of her mopet daughter *[sic]* Trixie, a brat of such monstrous hideousness that even Junior may have found his match.

You can pretty much guess the rest, as Ben, desperate for a new mum for his charge, agrees to step down the aisle with La Wanda, and Trixie and Junior team up to matchmake with the obligatory destructive consequences. No seam of bad taste is left unmined as the screenwriters sink to impossibly low depths in the pursuit of **anything** vaguely resembling a laugh, the jokes coming in categories clearly marked "turd", "fart", "dead dog", "bodily fluid" and "food fight", although the nadir has to be a chucking-up sequence at the local funfair that puts even the legendary barf scene in "**STAND BY ME**" to shame. You have been warned. * "

- Mark Salisbury

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times reviews:

"If you find lavatorial humour a must you will be well served by this execrable film². Continuing where the only marginally better original film left off, with the return of John Ritter as the hapless Pa and Michael Oliver as his devilish adopted son, this is a cinematic disaster zone. Edited *[sic]* for language and content. * "

² Which was nonetheless bought by the BBC - at license-payers' expense - for Christmas broadcast.

"...Those then are the *[Christmas]* films to watch, which leaves us with those to avoid, the duds, the turkeys - though so to describe them is a foul slur on a noble bird. Inevitably there is much mediocrity on offer, but those which transcend mere mediocrity and plunge into the unspeakable include the nasty "**PROBLEM CHILD 2**", the utterly brain dead "**CARRY ON COLUMBUS**" and the equally witless "**SANTA CLAUS**". See them if you must but don't say I didn't warn you."

"Ben Healey escapes the devastation wreaked by his adopted son, Junior, and relocates in the small, homely town of Mortville, where women outnumber men by ten to one. Ben soon finds himself the centre of unwanted female attention, and Junior has women problems of his own."

"Sequel to the 1990 hit³ about a beleaguered single father and his troublesome adopted boy."

"A mischievous boy and a devious girl team up to cause havoc for their parents."

"John Ritter and rotten-to-the-core kid in crude, rude, defiantly unfunny slapstick trash. Also starring Amy Yasbeck. * "

What's On TV review:

"Michael Oliver reprises his 1990 role as Junior, the ever-smiling kid who takes a delight in making mischief. Here, his practical jokes include a merry-go-round which he speeds up so that everyone aboard throws up over each other and a salad with a nasty hidden ingredient. Apart from the fact that it isn't funny, what's most annoying about this unpalatable rubbish is the complete lack of parental control shown by his screen dad, John Ritter. Not once does he even tell the tyke off for sundry misdemeanours which see him playing with fire, electrical wiring and even dynamite. As with the first movie, the screen-writers deserve a smacking. 3 "

"Comedy sequel. An adopted son does his best to stop his father from re-marrying when they move to a new town."

Daily Mirror note:

³ **Liar!**

“John Ritter takes his hellish adopted son to a new town and finds romance with a similarly afflicted lady – she’s got the devil’s daughter.

Crude, rude, defiantly unfunny slapstick trash.
* ”

No further information currently available. Why insult the public once when you can do it twice? Hollywood will wring a sequel out of anything, as we know, but this one seems to have been run off the factory floor before the box office receipts were in on the first film. It’s certainly unusual to see a child actor being singled out for criticism as much as Michael Oliver here. When the “**HOME ALONE**” sequel hit the screens a year later, it was producer John Hughes who caught the brickbats, not Macaulay Culkin.

Kiddly-widdlies interfering with their parent’s marital schemes is a very old chestnut, giving us such titles as “**AND SO THEY WERE MARRIED**” (36), “**THE COURTSHIP OF EDDIE’S FATHER**” (63), “**BATTLE OF THE VILLA FIORITA**” (65) and many more. This one attempts to freshen up the theme by dousing it in ordure and a mean-spirited vein of humour which is the lowbrow equivalent of *schadenfreude*. But it is tempting to read something more significant in all of these latterday brat-a-thons – “**HOME ALONE**”, “**PROBLEM CHILD**”, “**DENNIS THE MENACE**”.

When the People’s Republic of China attempted to wrest control of its own spiralling population by imposing the single-child family through statute, and penalising parents who had subsequent children, one of the unlooked-for social consequences was that China became a nation where the child was king. Every family lavished all its pride and attention on a single child, creating many a mini-despot in the process. The post-feminist West has also installed the child on a pedestal of worship, for different political reasons, but the nett result in behavioural terms has been the same. In the West too, the child is king. The Juniors of the world are not social aberrations then, they reveal in extreme terms the folly of venerating childhood, as though children are not imbued with all the same vices and character defects as the rest of us.

Child worship – as typified in the UK by the annual institution of the “Children in Need” fundraising telethon – is no more than a recapitulation of the Victorian construct of the child as “pure and innocent”. Women who appoint themselves advocates for children, although they believe themselves to be socially progressive, are more often social reactionaries, harking back to a myth of childhood from a century before. It’s probably flattering “**PROBLEM CHILD 2**” to impute any such social agenda to it, but it remains a valid deconstruction to read such messages there. Children can be revolting, antisocial little people, and it doesn’t do us any harm at all to remember that.

See the 1990 original, and subject index under **BRATS / SPOILT CHILDREN, COMEDY, MATCHMAKERS / MATCHBREAKERS, MOVING HOME** and **ORPHANS / ADOPTION**.