

Want to Feel Good About Being Old? See *Red 2*

By
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A few months ago in an occupational therapy group where I was learning how to walk after surgery to remove a tumor from inside my spine, we chatted while exercising with very, very, very light weights. I was asked what my favorite movie is. Bergman's films immediately came to mind as did Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and *8 1/2*. Oh, and Bunuel's *Exterminating Angel* and *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. And *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*. What's *New Pussycat?* and *Being There* with Peter Sellers -- great howlers! And *ET*, a great tear jerker!

Many, many more wonderful films flitted through my mind's eye, when it suddenly struck me that my favorite movie at that moment was *RED*. Not *Reds* -- that wonderful Warren Beatty film about the building of the Soviet Union on propaganda put into the mouth of John Reed, an American idealist -- but *RED*, which stands for "Retired Extremely Dangerous." *RED* and, as of last week, *RED 2* are now number one on my list of the best movies of all time.

I guess that blows my reputation as an intellectual -- assuming I have one. But these movies buoyed the self-esteem of this old man, who can't walk far without a cane, much more than whatever reputation I have for intellect and erudition does.

Think of it! A bunch of old, retired spies played by Bruce Willis, John Malkovich and Helen Mirren become targets of young CIA, MI-5 and former KGB assassins, whom they proceed to outsmart, elude, beat up and -- when necessary -- kill. I love it!

What wonderful fantasies for me -- and apparently for a lot of other old folks. My wife and I arrived a bit early at the movie so that I could slowly climb the stairs and get a good seat on an aisle, just in case a call of nature could not be resisted in the middle of the movie. We watched the theatre fill with people, almost all of whom were between the ages of 60 to 85. A number of them hobbled on canes like me. Some just moved a bit slowly. Others were -- as they say about able-bodied old people -- spry.

Once the film started and the first fight scene unfolded on the screen, you could feel the energy level and the happiness of the audience rise. Screw the young with their muscled arms, six pack abs and their drive to get ahead by any means necessary! Attack me, young men or women, and you're dead. I love it!

Just to leave you with a bit of suspense, the primary villain of the film is also old and also smart and also intent on triumphing over the young. Who wins in the end? Either way, old age is the winner.

Should I feel guilty about loving all the violence? Come on, it's all in good fun. No moral conflict about killing here. Vicariously, we old folks triumph over evil and youth. It is just, heroic, and -- you better believe it -- energizing. think we all hobbled a bit less when we left the theatre (although peeing took as long as usual, I'm sorry to report.)

In addition to the satisfaction of the victory of old age, I was very happy to realize that we older adults have apparently become a market demographic. If *Red 2*, and I hope then another sequel--*Red 3*--are not proof enough that Hollywood wants our buying power, consider that the coming attractions included a movie that will be out in the fall called *Last Vegas*. It's about four old guys, one of whom is soon getting married, who go to Las Vegas for a lengthy, and smut filled, bachelor party. Looks like their adventures will rival those of similar films that get made for young people facing marriage for the first time, with lots of sex for old folks, I hope. I am definitely not going to miss it, even if I have to go with a walker or a wheelchair.

I think that our time has come in Hollywood, and more and more movies will be made celebrating the refusal of Baby Boomers to slip politely into the crevices reserved for the old in our society.

Whatever the long-term, if you're old and not feeling so good about it, watch *RED* on TV, where it seems to be playing all the time, and then pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and -- if it's still playing -- go see *RED 2* in a movie theater, which is likely to be filled with old people like yourself. (We are not alone.) I guarantee it will make you feel a lot better about the possibilities of old age.

(Michael Friedman is a co-author of [*The Diagnostic Manual of Mishegas*](#).)

