

# Blazin' Review: The Boys Are Back



**Starring:** Clive Owen, Laura Fraser, Emma Booth, George MacKay

**Director:** Scott Hicks

**Writer(s):** Simon Carr, Allan Cubitt

**Cinematography:** Greig Fraser

**Original Score:** Hal Lindes

**Running Time:** 104 Mins.

**The Boys Are Back** skirts dangerously close to cheesy TV movie of the week territory, take the plot, single Dad tries to deal with the death of his wife whilst also trying to raise his young son much to the disapproval of his mother-in-law. When, just to make things even more emotionally heavy, the estranged older son returns to live with his father, sounds like something rife for the kind of melodramatic, over-acting seen at its worst by those who partake in the joys of the Hallmark channel. I mean just take a look at that poster (above), a poster that pretty much suggests we are in for a truly cringe-worthy, feel-good, weepie preceded by those dreaded words *inspired by a true story*. Alas, thanks to some sterling work by director Scott Hicks (**Shine**) and a solid, but warm, turn by Clive Owen it manages to largely transcend what I feared...

Opening with an anecdotal and rather cloying voiceover admittedly doesn't get us off to a good start, especially given Clive Owen is not a man known for his, shall we say, kindly and emotional roles (**Closer** aside), however it is in his turn that you can't help but succumb to heart-wrenching first 20 minutes. It's no spoiler to reveal that in this time we see briefly how Joe Warr (Owen) is recklessly (in some people's eyes) coping with his young son and the "burden" of single parent-hood and most saddening of all we

witness the brief scenes of happiness before the death of Joe's wife to a very severe case of cancer.

These are the setup scenes and the film does not linger on death and the more depressing attributes of this in a downbeat way, throughout the way Joe's youngest son, Artie, deals with his mother's death is poignant and more importantly realistic, helped no end by a very good performance by Nicholas McAululty. The scenes between father and son are at once believable and veer between humourous, the washing clothes system, and very sad in a subtle and not at all ham-fisted way. It is true to say that not alot happens but this is the joy of the film, taking its time to set up father and son and seeing Owen convey a "real" person with warmth is something of a treat, both artistically and emotionally, were we living in an ideal world he would garner awards buzz but as it is he resists playing Joe for heightened drama and rather emotional and most importantly that realistic edge which really hooks you.

The latter half of the film changes gear slightly and the introduction of joe's eldest son seems more a plot device to service the film pacing and story, rather than give the story any more depth. But as George Mackay's Harry begins as a rather sulky teenager he later opens up and the finale is played out well, despite still feeling a little too much of a stretch for something which started out rather low-key and strives for cheap shots at drama later on, this though can be overlooked in favour of the strong performances all round and the conviction with which the central trio perform.

Aside from performance Hicks is at home shooting in his native Australia where most of the story is set, the expected shots of open plains and sun-kissed beaches are all there, but they are shot in a non-travelogue way and make the drama feel more personal for being away from the hustle and bustle of the city, amidst the outback the emotion of both father and sons is laid beautifully bare set against a rather affecting and perfectly pitched score by Lindes, aided by the back catalogue of Sigur Ros's haunting music.

## VERDICT

**The Boys Are Back** is a film that teeters so close to TV movie melodrama avoids most of the pitfalls to become a truly moving tale of father and son. Despite losing its way a little towards the end in favour of dramatically clichéd events, the emotional wheel's never really come off thanks to Hick's solid direction and a brace of heart-warming turns.