

# Film - The Boys Are Back

Reviews, By [Movieboy2](#), 12th November, 2009

Hands up if you fancy Clive Owen? Not even just a little bit? He's got a lot riding on this movie, at least in the eyes of Aussie audiences, who have been primed for something rather special by way of a clever and appealing trailer and huge pics of Clive gazing soulfully out from cinema lobbies and the backs of buses across the nation.

Yep, the hype machine has been in full throttle for this flick. So how does it measure up?

Loosely based on a memoir by a UK journalist, it tells the story of Joe Warr, a big-shot sports writer whose wife dies suddenly leaving him to care for their 6-year-old son Artie. To complicate matters, Harry, a 14-year-old son from Joe's previous marriage turns up from the UK, just in time for a series of dramas to be inflicted on this dysfunctional boys-only household.

I'll be honest and admit that I was gleefully rubbing my hands in anticipation of a good old-fashioned weepfest. The aforementioned trailer has made me go wet round the eyes more than once and I fully expected to wallow in a bit of three-hankie male-bonding. Sad to report, this is an oddly unmoving little film. Not bad by any stretch, but surprisingly ordinary, considering the material.

Directed by Scott Hicks, he's trumpeted on all the posters as the "acclaimed director of *Shine*". Well, yes. But his recent output hasn't been anywhere near as good as that, including the flat adaptation of Stephen *King's Hearts in Atlantis* and then 2007's *No Reservations*, the so-so cookery rom-com with Catherine Zeta-Jones. And this movie is not dissimilar to the Zeta-Jones picture – a safe vehicle for a major star, designed to appeal to the masses and leave everyone feeling warm and fuzzy. Ker-ching!

Am I being a bit hard? A debate rages currently about Aussie films being generally maudlin and depressive, so many will be pleased to see this story with its silver lining intact. And yes, these 100 minutes are quite sweet and cockle-warming...but it has to be said, they are also fairly shallow and insubstantial.

There are some funny moments and sure, the death of Joe's wife in the early portion of the film will generate a few snuffles from the audience, but things then get too cosy far too quickly for my liking.

There's one really great moment that Clive's agent will doubtless be adding to his showreel. He's on the phone to his son in the UK, his face in close-up and suddenly he swallows a huge silent sob. It's a glimpse of such recognisable emotion that it's like a punch in the stomach, but it's unfortunately the only moment of its kind here and nothing else comes close.

Mostly shot in South Australia, it all looks very pretty. This is Hicks' home-territory and he enjoys showing it off, with numerous shots of cars speeding through the attractive landscape in front of a perfect sunset.

Performances are fine on the whole. Emma Booth, from last year's *Clubland*, turns up as a neighbour and parent from Artie's school and her burgeoning relationship with Joe is handled in an appropriately low-key way.

A lot obviously rests on the shoulders of the kids and they just about pull it off, although I personally found Artie's characterisation to be maddening. He's so naughty and brattish in places that I found it hard not to will his father to just pack up and run for the hills!



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Music is used effectively, in the form of a score by Hal Lindes of Dire Straits and a couple of lovely songs from the Sigur Ros back-catalogue which genuinely lift the scenes in which they feature.

But overall, this is Clive's film. He's appealing and ruffled and, my goodness, it's so nice to see him not playing a complete bastard for a change. His charismatic presence and twinkly gorgeousness go a very long way towards rescuing this from complete ordinariness – he's the reason many people will go and see this and he works hard to give us a good time.

Cautiously recommended then – just lower your expectations a notch before you take your seat.

***The Boys Are Back* is screening nationally.**