

Son of Rambow

A review by Heather Craig

Most children have played war. In the front yard of the house where I grew up is a magnolia tree. If you know magnolia trees, you know that after they bloom, large seedpods drop to the ground. The shape of these seedpods was universally accepted by the neighborhood children as resembling grenades, even with a convenient stem to pop off, doubling as a pin. And so, literally armed with magnolia pods, I and my playmates acted out hours of imaginary scenarios involving grenades. A kid doesn't need a gun, toy or otherwise, to play war, and while I may cringe at the memory of those pre-antiwar days, there it is.

Son of Rambow is a sweet fable about friendship, childhood imagination, and the power of movies. Its main character, Will Proudfoot (Bill Milner), about 12 years old, is a naïve boy whose family belongs to the Brethren, a separatist religious community that only sometimes involves itself in the contemporary world. Modern novels and most forms of entertainment are forbidden, although public school is not. Shy Will escapes to the shed that belonged to his now-deceased father where he draws very talented pictures of monsters and other imaginary beings in his notebook. As most introverts do, he retreats into his imagination. And why not? In the real world he shares sleeping quarters with his snoring grandmother.

Will meets the school bully Lee Carter (Will Poulter) when he waits in the hall while his class watches a film, as he is not allowed to watch any movies. Lee, who has been ejected from a nearby class, throws a tennis ball at him and both boys are called to the headmaster's office. From this unlikely beginning best mates are born. I didn't like Lee much at all in the beginning as he is using Will, whether Will realizes it or not, but Lee did grow on me. Will accidentally sees Lee's bootleg copy of Sylvester Stallone's 1982 flick *Rambo : First Blood* about a Vietnam veteran commando gone wild in the Pacific Northwest, and he is completely enchanted with his first movie. It fires his imagination as nothing else has, and he agrees to secretly assist Lee in making a film for Lee to enter in a young filmmakers' contest. In Lee's film, Will portrays Rambo's son.

The best bits of this British film written and directed by Garth Jennings (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) involve the actual death defying filming of Lee's movie, at once hilarious and horrifying. In reality, most of their stunts would've resulted in broken bones at least. A subplot involving a French exchange student inexplicably being seen as très cool by the entire student body detracts from the main plot, but I enjoyed seeing the struggles of Will's mother (Jessica Hynes) between her faith and her son's needs.

Son of Rambow is an imperfect film, with a finale which could only happen in a movie. Nevertheless, I laughed out loud a few times, and I loved the child's mind changing mundane objects into implements of great drama and action. The film is not pro-war despite Will's initial inspiration, but a story about how a story can inspire young mimics. I've no doubt that Will and Lee would've known what to do with a magnolia seedpod.