

Captain Fantastic – Review

Viggo Mortenson has **excelled** in a number of father figure roles over the years. Most explicitly in John Hillcoat's bleak (though not entirely without hope) Cormac McCarthy adaptation *The Road* (2009), but also in films like David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005) and **arguably** in his **breakout** performance as Aragorn in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), in which he **portrayed** the eventual King of Gondor - a parental figure to hobbits, elves and the **denizens** of all Middle Earth.

Captain Fantastic, then, is an ideal **showcase** for his talents. The actor plays Ben Cash, a strong-willed, anti-establishment father of six, who has taken his family 'off the **grid**' to live in the forests of America's Pacific Northwest. Under his strict, occasionally **affectionate** tutelage, the children learn to **hunt**, climb and engage in all sorts of outdoor pursuits - they are as fit and disciplined as elite athletes - while also **forsaking** Christmas in favour of 'Noam Chomsky Day', which they celebrate in honour of the great left-wing thinker. ("You would prefer to celebrate a magical fictitious **elf** instead of a living humanitarian who's done so much to promote human rights and understanding?" he tells his son Rellian in a key exchange.)



It's an **unconventional** existence - not to mention one **fraught** with danger - and one that is thrown into **doubt** soon after the film opens on the death of the children's mother, Ben's beloved wife Leslie, who commits suicide after a long battle with clinical depression. Leslie's father (a superb Frank Langella) has no doubt that Ben is to blame, and so the family's long drive to the **funeral** becomes a battle of wills between the captain fantastic, the unhappy Rellian and members of his extended family, who argue against the **lifestyle** he has adopted for his family.

As mentioned, Mortenson is a perfect fit: **gruff**, bold and at times decidedly **unsympathetic**. The casting in general is exceptional, and it's easy to imagine the film making far less impact without the **extraordinary** group of young and child actors who comprise the Cash family. As it stands, though, *Captain Fantastic* is both funny and provocative, asking profound questions regards **grief**, the nature of **freedom** in modern society, and what it is to be a husband and a father - or a child or teenager - finding your place in the world.