



BY MIRIAM RINN
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MOVIE REVIEW

The highest-grossing local film ever in New Zealand, the coming-of-age comedy “Boy” manages to deal with some pretty gritty subject matter and still remain extraordinarily sweet and funny. A lot of the credit must go to the wonderful child actors, James Rolleston as Boy and Te Alho Aho Eketone-Whitu as his younger brother Rocky, neither of whom evinces a false moment, and to writer/director/actor Taika Waititi, who plays the boys’ father, El Alamein. The multi-talented Waititi wrote and directed episodes of HBO’s “Flight of the Conchords” as well as another New Zealand feature film, “Eagle vs. Shark.” He also played Tom Kalmaku in “The Green Lantern.”

The year is 1984, and 11-year-old Boy is wild for Michael Jackson. The singer/dancer’s pictures are all over his room, and Boy practices the signature dance moves from “Thriller” in his spare time. Boy lives with his little brother and a horde of cousins with his grandmother in a ramshackle house on Waihou Bay, New Zealand. When Gram drives off at the beginning of the film to go to a funeral, she leaves Boy in charge of the other children. He may seem young for so much responsibility, but that isn’t an issue in Boy’s world. The Maori community depicted is filled with children of all ages, with hardly any adults in sight, and the kids seem to do just fine on their own. They have the countryside and the sea to explore, and the business of growing up to tend to.

To Boy’s astonishment and delight, his absent father appears suddenly with two pals. Although Boy has tried to convince himself and his friends that his father is abroad doing something exciting, on some level he knows that Alamein’s been in prison. When he arrives, Alamein seems as surprised to see Boy as his son is to see him. Waititi plays Alamein as a

taller version of Boy rather than as a grown man. He's as given to day-dreaming and pretending that he's a big shot as any pre-pubescent boy.

Alamein has returned with his two buddies to dig up the money that he went to prison for stealing, but he can't quite remember where he buried it. In between digging holes all over the yard, he entertains his sons with fantastic stories about the gang he founded in prison: it consists of himself--the leader of course--and his two friends. These three resemble the Three Stooges more than the Crips, and there are a lot of funny moments between them.

It's obvious from early on that Alamein will disappoint Boy, but that doesn't cast much of a shadow on the mood of the film. The poverty in the area is stark, children aren't getting the care and attention most of us believe they need, and disaster seems to lurk around each corner. Yet, the tone that Waititi establishes is warm and sweet and loving. Semi-autobiographical, the script never feels sorry for the characters in the film nor condescends to them. Although Boy is supremely disadvantaged from a certain perspective, he's clearly a resilient, capable lad with an abundance of inner resources.

Waititi, who is half Maori and half Jewish, grew up in the area and filmed in what was his grandmother's house. He incorporates many different elements, including animation, music, dance, and film clips, which gives the movie a high-spiritedness and freshness, and incidentally, makes it appropriate for kids. Aside from a few vulgarities, "Boy" is a charming family movie.

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