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Captain Fantastic

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Captain Fantastic

Abstract

This is a film review of *Captain Fantastic* (2015) directed by Matt Ross.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.

Captain Fantastic
(2015)
Directed by Matt Ross



In the deep woods of the Pacific Northwest, we meet Ben (Viggo Mortensen), who is raising his six children away from the corruption of society. He and his wife, Leslie, chose the counter-culture life to escape the trappings of commercialization and capitalism and the discontentment that comes from living in big cities and grinding away at jobs. Ben is aware that “the powerful control the lives of the powerless” so they escape that life. Instead, they choose to raise their children in the forest so that they can commune with nature and also be physically and intellectually challenged. Although they have separated themselves from society, they are a microcosm of society; they have created rituals that lead to adulthood, rituals for death, and they have raised their children to be kind, sensitive, emotionally free, responsible and capable. But the children have been sheltered and do not know how to interact with the wider world.

Ben goes to the city occasionally to contact family and buy goods needed to live in the forest. This time Ben comes to the city to find out if his psychologically troubled wife is doing okay in a mental institution to which she was admitted. Ben finds out that he has been left to raise his children alone, as his wife has committed suicide.

This tragedy causes the family to leave their paradisiacal home in order to “rescue mom” and bring her home. But this leads them into the big cities to which they are unaccustomed and they cannot really understand the societal rules. Although they are respectful and intelligent, the children realize that there is more to life than physical and intellectual acumen.

Ben is forced to come to terms with what it means to be a father; his eldest son comes to question the life he’s been forced to live away from others. Both realize that they have made assumptions about life and choose different paths for themselves. Ben and his children find a happy balance in life, both in the city and in the country. Parenting is analyzed and dissected: the children of today have become caught up in technology and are rude. Ben’s children are super smart and strong but desire the interaction of others. *Captain Fantastic* does an excellent job of making us inspect how we are raising our next generation, and the mistakes that are being made. We have lost the spiritual connection to the land that Ben instilled in his children. And we have lost the ability to examine the lives we are currently living; working hard to buy things we perhaps do not need, in search of a happiness that cannot be found in commercial goods. We need to figure out how to “stick it to the man,” as Ben taught his kids.