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## Review

### Star Ratings Explained

- ★★★★★ Classic
- ★★★★☆ Excellent
- ★★★☆☆ Good
- ★★☆☆☆ Fair
- ★☆☆☆☆ Tragic

## Romulus, My Father (M)



### Plot

In rural Victoria in the early 1960s, Rai Gaita watches helpless as his immigrant mother and fathers's relationship implodes.

### Empire Review

Sure to be a favourite at this year's AFIs, **Romulus, My Father** is a deceptive directorial debut from actor Richard Roxburgh. Deceptive in the sense that for the first half, this adaptation of Raymond Gaita's memoir appears to meander. There's classy cinematography, rich period detail and fine performances, but not much in the way of story.

But Roxburgh and scriptwriter Nick Drake are biding their time and putting hooks into us so that when events turn tragic – and bad things pile up in the second hour like a freeway accident – the effect is wrenching. Walking away from **Romulus, My Father** is to marvel that little Rai Gaita not only survived his childhood sane but went on to become one of the world's most respected moralists and philosophers.

That the film works so well is largely due to his superb characterisation as a child. Props to Roxburgh for getting such a remarkable performance from 10-year-old Kodi Smit-McPhee; but the suspicion is also that this kid's a natural. He never asks for our sympathy (a crime of which mawkish little Freddie Highmore and even Dakota Fanning are sometimes guilty) and thus we're always on his side: admiring of his resilience, wishing that the adults around him could get their shit together. That they can't is, of course, where the increasing drama of **Romulus, My Father** lies.

As the title character, Bana expertly conveys a stalwart, contained man slowly but surely coming apart at the seams. The main source of his frustration is Christina – love of his life, bane of his existence – and Franka Potente is brilliant as this complex firebrand. We sense that she's as much ahead of her time as she is mentally ill and we ache as her lust for freedom and undiagnosed post-natal depression pave the way for her self destruction.

Less haunted is the gentle Hora, who can provide Rai with some shelter from his parents' stormy on-again, off-again relationship. In this role, Marton Csokas reminds us that he's a gifted and very likeable actor when not chewing scenery to keep himself amused in schlock like **Aeon Flux** and **xXx**.

### Film Details

#### Rating

M

#### Cast

Eric Bana  
Franka Potente  
Marton Csokas.

#### Directors

Richard Roxburgh.

#### Screenwriters

Nick Drake.

#### Running Time

104 minutes

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Through **Romulus, My Father** – a film whose sometimes burnished cinematography is tempered by the fact that there's nary a surface or piece of clothing that isn't dirty, stained, frayed or faded – we're reminded of how harsh Australia was for migrants, women, the working classes, the mentally ill – and kids. That little Rai made it, love for his dad intact, provides the film's uplift.

**Verdict**

A moving slice-of-life character study



Reviewer:

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