

The Whale lands with an emotional splash

By Dan Jensen

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Knowing he has little time left, a morbidly obese man tries to right the wrongs of his life and reconnect with his estranged teenage daughter. Digital editor [Dan Jensen](#) shares his thoughts on the triumphant return of Brendan Fraser.

ACTOR [Brendan Fraser](#) recently took a five-year hiatus from his profession due to personal reasons but recently made a comeback in a few films no one really heard of. However, with [The Whale](#), Fraser has reminded the world why he was sorely missed.

Directed by [Darren Aranofsky](#) and written by [Samuel D Hunter](#), based on his play of the same name, *The Whale* tells the story of Charlie, a morbidly obese man desperately doing what he can to redeem the mistakes of his past in the precious time he has left. Reconnecting with his estranged daughter, Ellie ([Sadie Sink](#)), who berates Charlie at every opportunity for walking out on her life to

be with another man, his tragic past is unravelled through the process of healing.

Aranofsky has perfected the art of capturing dark, stirring emotions in his films ([Requiem for a Dream](#), [Black Swan](#) and [Mother!](#) spring to mind) and there are moments in *The Whale* that border on the disturbing. The character of Charlie evokes deep sympathy from the audience, his condition being the result of trying to cope with an immense tragedy. But through Hunter's brilliant writing, we know Charlie is a beautiful and kind human being, a victim of circumstance. Which makes it extremely tough to watch him destroy himself. At times, this film makes the act of eating look dreadful.

The casting of Brendan Fraser was a genius stroke, being that he is one of the true Hollywood "nice guys". It's easy to become attached to any character he plays. And his performance in this proves that he's come a really long way since [Encino Man](#). Having already won the Critics' Choice Award and the Screen Actors Guild Award for the role, he's a heavy contender (no pun intended) for this year's Oscar for Best Actor.

The Whale is also nominated for the Oscar for Best Makeup and it will be tough to beat. The transformation of Fraser into the 275 kg Charlie is phenomenal and the artistry here is flawless. It's easy to initially be repulsed by what we see, but once we get to know the character and find out what led him to this point in his life, it doesn't take long before we sympathise with his plight and feel a deep

sadness as he obliterates himself through binge eating. It's a classic case of judging a book by its cover and is quite thought-provoking.

The film is crafted perfectly in its translation from stage to screen. Presented in a 4:3 aspect ratio (a square picture), it gives the feeling of confinement and claustrophobia similar to what the reclusive Charlie suffers daily. The entire film is set in one house and is driven mainly by four characters, including Charlie's only real friend, Liz ([Hong Chau](#), who is also Oscar-nominated), along with Thomas ([Ty Simpkins](#)), a missionary whose path crosses with Charlie and Ellie through either fate or divine intervention. But it's the type of story that doesn't need to go outside the walls of Charlie's house and achieves a great deal with its limited space.

The score by [Rob Simonsen](#) needs to be mentioned here, as it provides a perfect musical accompaniment to the drama unfolding on screen. There are moments where Fraser's performance reaches emotional peaks and hearing such a moving score behind them is enough to make even the most hardened moviegoer's eyes damp. It's not surprising that *The Whale* is a tear-jerker, largely thanks to Simonsen's moving composition.

While the film explores themes of religion, abandonment, guilt and remorse, at its core, it's a story about redemption and the importance of understanding, of seeing things from another's perspective. The character of Charlie is gay but lived his life denying his own sexuality, resulting in a failed marriage and a daughter he is trying to connect with. While it's easy for the characters to punish Charlie for his mistakes, the viewer is reminded that sometimes following one's heart leads to difficult decisions. We've all been there. It's life at its most painful.

The Whale is an absolute must-see film, achieving greatness with the most minimal of

elements. See it for the artistic wizardry, see it for the emotionally-stirring performances or see it to make you grateful for the blessings in your own life. Whatever the reason, just make sure you see it.



The Whale is now showing in cinemas across Australia.

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