



Only God Forgives

ONLY GOD FORGIVES

Oedipus Rising

Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn
Starring Ryan Gosling, Kristin Scott Thomas, Vithaya Pansringarm, Gordon Brown, Tom Burke

Greek tragedy looms large over the characters of *Only God Forgives*, as does the ever-present threat of extreme violence and divine justice. Bringing his increasingly surreal and painterly aesthetic to the seedy underbelly of Bangkok, director, Nicolas Winding Refn, renders a gorgeously shot and arguably baffling portrait of a boy, his overbearing mother and their conflict with a local deity.

Julian (*Gosling*) runs a Thai boxing club with his older brother Billy (*Burke*) which is a front for a drug smuggling ring run by their monstrous mother (a terrifying *Kristin Scott Thomas*). When Billy rapes and murders a 16 year-old girl, police chief Chang (*Pansringarm*) takes it upon himself to exact a kind of divine justice upon him resulting in his death. It falls on Julian to seek revenge for his brother, but it appears he may not be quite up to the task.

For those expecting another *Drive*, this new collaboration between Refn and Gosling will come as a surprise. Like their previous work there is Gosling's trademark blank stare, lingering moments punctuated by sudden bursts of extremely graphic violence and a beautifully haunting score by Cliff Martinez. Gone is any semblance of a classic narrative

structure, with thematic overtones being the order of the day. Throughout this dark landscape of evocative and stunningly photographed tableaux (*by the ever-talented Larry Smith*) only a sense can be gleaned of the overall story here; knowledge of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* will serve one well.

Avoiding narrative coalescence for a more surreal, and quite Lynchian, dynamic Refn places his film within the realm of a waking nightmare; the audience seems to be placed within Julian's state of mind as he comes to terms with who he is and how he reconciles that with the expectations of his mother. This positions Julian as a passive character struggling against the desire to become aggressive, like his brother. This plays in contrast to the character of Chang, played to icy perfection by Pansringarm, who appears to have found calm within the same aggression, to the point where he transcends all morality to become somewhat of a divine arbiter, possibly even God Himself.

Only God Forgives is another powerhouse effort from Refn, who is without doubt one of cinema's great stylists (*the film's dedication to Alejandro Jodorowsky speaks volumes*) but his Scandinavian sensibilities promise that his films will always be an acquired taste. This film will be a challenge for some (*possibly even for Refn fans*) but that is what great cinema does; it challenges, it confronts and doesn't let anyone off the hook easily, not its characters and especially not its audiences. This is uncompromising, visceral filmmaking at its finest.

_ LIAM DUNN