



[The Road](#) reviewed by [Dave Porter](#)

The Road came swathed in such adulatory praise, it leaves the ordinary cinemagoer in a difficult position: if everyone says it's good, then it must be. Right?

Well, only half right on this occasion. Author Cormac McCarthy – on whose book the film is predicated – is renowned for his grimy portrayals of cowboy life on the US-Mexican borders. The swathe of colour he draws his characters and places produces breathtaking literature.

With The Road, he took a different bent. Here is a dystopian vision of a world in some post-apocalypse collapse, with humans striving to survive in a denuded environment where cold is the dominant feature. Food has all but disappeared and gangs of marauding cannibals patrol what's left of the country. An unnamed man and his son are the protagonists, pushing their pitiful belongings towards a mythical coast in an attempt to reach what they persuade themselves will be a promised land.

Along the way, they narrowly escape being trapped by cannibals, find an abandoned house with a subterranean stash of tinned food and show uncharacteristic kindness to an old traveller of the road, uncharacteristic at least for the dad. The relationship between the teenage boy and his father is beautifully played out. In his desire to protect the boy, the father comes as close to the cannibals as it is possible to get, at several points contemplating killing the boy should it come to that.

The film has the feel of the 70s classic, Warriors, where again there is a battle to reach the sea against gangs. And this is where the film's problems lie. What should have been an imprint of human relations in a world without meaning or hope almost becomes a ghoulish film with suspense battling with empathy. You're so taken up with whether the son and father are going to survive, the suspense clouds all other reactions. Certainly in Warriors, there is greater comment on the baseness of the human condition than there is in The Road.

Here, the Hobbesian extreme of life as nasty, brutish and short is almost revelled in rather than wondered at.

Dave Porter