



RAMS

ICELAND 93 MIN

GRÍMUR HÁKONARSON

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Even though they live in rural Iceland, thousands of miles from the Holy Land, and in a modern reality of computers and mechanized farm equipment, Gummi and Kiddi have a decidedly Old Testament vibe. It's not just the untended beards and the well-tended sheep. The two men, who live on neighboring farms in a quiet valley, are feuding brothers, locked in a sibling rivalry that recalls Jacob and Esau or Cain and Abel. The sources of the bad blood are never specified, but it trickles through *Rams*, Grímur Hákonarson's new film, like an icy stream.

Kiddi (Theodór Júlíusson) is larger, ruddier, drunker and luckier than Gummi (Sigurður Sigurjónsson), and maybe better at raising and breeding sheep. Neither brother seems to have any other family, but their isolation does not spark any desire for each other's company. When Gummi's best ram comes in second to Kiddi's at an annual contest for local breeders, it's clear that this is not his first such humiliation. His desire for revenge, which may be aided by something like divine intervention, gives this cleareyed and eccentric movie its plot.

Mr. Hákonarson's patient attention to the brothers' daily routines yields some low-key humor, and *Rams* is in some respects a familiar kind of Nordic comedy, deadpan and touched with melancholy, about stoical men with unusual jobs. There are simple, satisfying sight gags built around the clumsiness of farm machinery,

the absurdity of sheep and the indignities of advancing age and cold weather. But despite its affection for the quirks of its characters and their milieu, the film is most memorable for its gravity, for the almost tragic nobility it finds in sad and silly circumstances.

An outbreak of scrapie, an ovine affliction similar to mad cow disease, brings havoc to the valley. Flocks are slaughtered, livelihoods are wiped out and an ancient way of life is threatened with ruin. Mr. Hákonarson observes the grief and the fatalism that the epidemic provokes in Gummi and Kiddi's other neighbors, and at times *Rams* has the quiet specificity of a documentary. Government inspectors and veterinarians show up to monitor the killing of the animals and the cleaning of the barns, and their calm, implacable authority only increases the sense of helplessness and devastation.

As the crisis deepens, and as Gummi devises a devious, illegal response to it — one that will also settle scores once and for all with his brother — the film takes on a stark, elemental power. The landscape of snow and volcanic rock threatens to overwhelm the creatures that call it home, and the modern world recedes in the face of a primal story of kinship and survival. The last shot is especially hard to shake. Tender and poignant, it also has the haunting authority of an ancient stone carving, as if these brothers were ordinary flesh-and-blood creatures transformed into figures of myth.

A O Scott, *New York Times*

WRITERS: Grímur Hákonarson | **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Sturla Brandth Grøvlen | **MUSIC:** Atli Örvarsson
Gummi Sigurður Sigurjónsson | Kiddi Theodór Júlíusson | Katrin Charlotte Bøving | Runólfur Jón Benónýsson

VOTING FOR *The Assassin* A21 | B38 | C19 | D11 | E1 | Rating 68.6% | Attendance 90

Our next screening | **Victoria** | Tuesday 24 January 2017. 8.00pm

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