

Affleck returns to star form as actor-director in 'The Town'



The Town

Rated R

4 bagels out of 5

By Howie Nave

There's a lesson I would like to share with future filmmakers: if you can't star in a successful movie, try writing and directing one yourself. Maybe that's what Ben Affleck should have done a half dozen movies ago. I mean he directed (and co-wrote) 2007's "Gone Baby Gone" (receiving good reviews) but this time he has gone completely Eastwood staking out just about every aspect of movie writing, directing and starring in his latest adaptation, "The Town."

He brought home the Oscar for co-writing (along with friend/actor Matt Damon in 1997's "Good Will Hunting" so it just took a few crappy movies before taking matters into his own hands. And just like that movie, Affleck has kept this one close to home in the northern Boston neighborhood of Charlestown.

What works immediately in this movie (adapted from Chuck

Hogan's novel "Prince of Thieves") is the depth of its characters. From the opening scenes you find yourself absorbed into the setup of the story, the intense action and realize that some of the people on the good side of the law don't always equate to them being the good guys.

Ben Affleck plays Doug MacRay, a bank robber who is the son of a criminal following in his dad's footsteps. Doug's father (played briefly but exceptionally by Chris Cooper) had been in the family business until being convicted of killing his victims winding up in prison. Doug's close friend, Jem (played by Jeremy Renner from last year's Oscar winner "The Hurt Locker") shares a similar story to that of his friend. Doug's mother split when he was 6, so the backdrop is set up revealing how impossible it is to break the cycle of crime in this rough and tumble neighborhood of Boston.

Turns out Charlestown is a hotbed for turning out bank robbers and is rated No. 1 in the country. I bet the Charlestown Chamber of Commerce loves that honor, eh?

Although the original story took place in the '90s, the movie has been updated to take place in the present. What is so gripping is that someone who was raised in such an environment where it was easy to break the law wants to throw that away and make an attempt to go straight. But when you're in a tight-knit group that includes your friends who know your torrid past it's like a reverse peer pressure effect where it's comfortable in an odd way remaining where you are but knowing it's just a matter of time before the outcome could be devastating. I do have to say that I've never seen bank robbers make zombie apparel look so fashionable for committing their crimes. The nun look was kind of creepy too.



Ben
Affleck
and
Jeremy
Renner in
"The
Town."
Photo/Pro
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In one of his coolest roles ever, AMC's "Mad Men" lead character Jon Hamm easily slips into his role as that of FBI Agent Frawley who is a jerk. Not an overt one, but I found myself cheering for the bad guys here because deep down it's Affleck's character that ultimately is the good guy. Maybe that's because we see a side of him that is brought out when a hostage (Rebecca Hall) situation gets more personal than usual (and not just with Doug either).

Rounding out the impressive plot line are some impressive action sequences to balance out the human element. What would an action movie be without some explosive grinding steel in your face?

Kudos to Ben Affleck for tackling all his jobs behind the camera without sacrificing where it counts in front of the camera – playing it cool, subdued and not over-the-top.

"The Town" is rated R for strong violence, pervasive language, some sexuality and drug use with a running time of 2 hours and 5 minutes.

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.