

Movie Review: 'Gone Baby Gone'

by *David_Elliott*

Ben Affleck, who put some reviving luster on his faltering career as an actor with "Hollywoodland," has done a remarkable job directing "Gone Baby Gone."

And if any movie can still make a star, the film could do it for Affleck's younger brother, Casey. Often engagingly light in movies, Casey Affleck is lithely boyish but full of aspiring and forceful manliness as Patrick Kenzie, living the role fully.

'GONE BABY GONE' - Casey Affleck, Ed Harris, Michelle Monaghan and John Aston star in the crime drama 'Gone Baby Gone.' CNS Photo courtesy of Claire Folger. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.)

Patrick is from the meanest Boston streets and runs a new, private sleuth service with his lover, Angie. Michelle Monaghan plays her as something of a hovering shadow, her warmly human smile a steady beacon

of decency.

They take a case looking for a missing child, 4, in Patrick's home turf. The truly hard cases are the people, often vulgar and slummy and violent, including the girl's conniving, trashy mom (Amy Ryan, superb). The cops are involved, notably the savagely savvy Detective Bressant (Ed Harris, maybe more than superb) and his big, seen-it-all partner (John Ashton, also wonderful).

Both Afflecks make a strong brew of grinding tensions, chases, tantrums and fearful face-offs. Rough, good TV shows about cops, crooks and twisted families have created a wide taste for these urban Easterns, and this steady engrosser is less tribally brooding than "Mystic River" (Dennis Lehane was source novelist on both that and this film).

When you add Amy Madigan as a relative furious with disgust and Morgan Freeman as a top cop forged by pain into wisdom, how can you fail? The movie doesn't, but it also cooks some slush at the core - constant talk about vulnerable kids and the adorable girl in peril, even an abducted boy as a sort of echo effect.

The emotions are so real that they beg for motives less bound up in crime plot devices. Catholic symbolism weighs in frequently, the story forces confessional moments, and we can surmise that hard-tested Patrick may not wise up quite fast enough, that he might go with young, straight-arrow moralism rather than the more profound ethics of what needs to be done.

He makes a decision, and a hauntingly uneasy one. How you feel about it may shape your verdict on the film.

But there remains the quality of the cast and the sense that something gravely precious is at stake. And when it comes to making macho bravado bleed inwardly, as a life squeezed by bad options, Harris has that so wrapped that a fifth Oscar nomination seems a gimme.

A Miramax Films release. Director: Ben Affleck. Writers: Ben Affleck, Aaron Stockard. Cast: Casey Affleck, Morgan Freeman, Ed Harris, Michelle Monaghan, Amy Ryan, Amy Madigan. Running time: 1 hour, 54 minutes. Rated R. 3 stars.

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