

In 'Gone Baby Gone' Directorial Debut, Ben Affleck Matures Into Polished Auteur

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on October 19, 2007 - 2:01pm

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CHICAGO – It wasn't that long ago when Ben Affleck was an unknown. Fortune eventually smiled upon him and along came quality performances in independents and an Academy Award for screenwriting.



Ben Affleck (left) and brother Casey Affleck on Oct. 10, 2007 at the Chicago International Film Festival premiere of "Gone Baby Gone".

Photo by Adam Fendelman of HollywoodChicago.com

Then came "Armageddon," "Pearl Harbor" and a series of nauseating tabloid stories involving something called "Bennifer". Affleck's public image as either a true filmmaker or a hack is riding heavily on his directorial debut of "Gone Baby Gone".

Without fail, he falls easily into the category of true talent. Following the path that fellow actor-turned-director Clint Eastwood did with "Mystic River," Affleck elevated a crime thriller by author Dennis Lehane to the big screen.

Unlike directors and actors like Eastwood, Spike Lee, Woody Allen and even close friend Kevin Smith, Affleck resided solely behind the camera and instead cast brother Casey Affleck in the film's principal role.



Casey Affleck in "Gone Baby Gone".

Photo courtesy of IMDb

Most people will watch "Gone Baby Gone" to see if Ben Affleck is capable in the director's chair. Moreover, he declares his rightful place as an auteur with his own artistic vision and storytelling ability.

Simplifying the complex maze of corruption that is LeHane's fourth novel in a series on Boston detectives, "Gone Baby Gone" follows Patrick Kenzie's (Casey Affleck) private investigation into the disappearance of an adorable, 4-year-old girl from a white-trash addict (Amy Ryan).

She won't be winning the mother-of-the-year award any time soon. Kenzie gets cooperation from the Boston Police Department and plays an outsider who only can rely on help from his partner and girlfriend (played remarkably by Michelle Monaghan).

As LeHane's characters are adapted beautifully for the screen by Ben Affleck and co-writer Aaron Stockard, there are bottomless depths of emotional turmoil to every person in this picture.



Ben Affleck directing "Gone Baby Gone".

The loss of an innocent girl and Ryan's portrayal of the crackhead mom you both love and hate make you want to throw things at the screen for such despicable human behavior. Ed Harris plays a local detective and masterfully devours all of his scenes.

Morgan Freeman plays the chief of police just like you think Morgan Freeman would play a police chief.

More than just showing promise, Affleck's directorial debut promises great things for his future as a filmmaker. More than just your typical detective mystery flick, the film leaves many unanswered ethical questions.

More than so "Mystic River," "Gone Baby Gone" is a heart-wrenching thriller of people you love to watch but would never want to meet in real life.

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Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 24 2024 - 1:50am*): <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/2007/10/in-gone-baby-gone-directorial-debut-ben.html>

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