

Ed Norton, Robert De Niro Misfire in Pretentious ‘Stone’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 15, 2010 - 2:01pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Ed Norton and Robert De Niro used to be two of the most consistent actors alive, both with streaks of amazing, Oscar-nominated films that guarantee them places in the history books. Sadly, their reunion in the overcooked “Stone” presents merely a shadow of what these talented stars used to deliver.

John Curran’s film, which opened the 46th Chicago International Film Festival last week, starts as a pretty-traditional thriller, a borderline noir that promises something not unlike other modern takes on the timeless genre in the way they often present a femme fatale taking down a family man. It’s criticism not spoiler to say that “Stone” is not that movie. It is not a film of twists and turns; double-crosses and revelations.

In fact, “Stone” looks like it’s going one way and slowly turns to go another. While I absolutely admire the willingness to defy expectations and play with genre conventions, “Stone” proves that if you’re going to do something different just make sure you do *something*. “Stone” starts interesting, gets better, and then simply sits there until it ends with a whimper instead of a much-needed bang.



Stone

Photo credit: Overture Pictures

The title refers to the nickname of Gerald Creeson (Edward Norton), a man up for parole and desperate to get out for a couple of reasons: One, he seems honestly ready to start his life over again and, two, any heterosexual male would want to get back to his wife Lucetta (Milla Jovovich) as quickly as conceivably possible. Stone pulls Jack Mabry (Robert De Niro) as his parole officer, a bitter, angry man who seems

beaten down by a life spent listening almost solely to religious radio and moments of silence with a wife (Frances Conroy) who we know has been miserable for decades.

To ensure that Jack will give Stone a positive parole recommendation, the convict instructs his wife to get closer to the gruff veteran. Lucetta is a free spirit, a woman who has been sleeping with men since her husband has been in prison and has no reservations about bedding Jack to do what needs to be done. But Jack is torn. He's a man confronted with the fact that he may not be the kind of soul who should sit in judgment of anyone. And as Jack makes bad decisions on the outside, Stone seems to be making good ones on the inside; turning to religion and realizing that the common speeches about being a better man that he was ready to give to the parole board could actually be true.

The basic concept of "Stone" – how the spectrum of "good" and "bad" isn't nearly black-and-white – is a cinematically-timeless one. We've seen hundreds of stories about good men who make big mistakes and even about bad men who find ways back to the side of the light. So what does "Stone" bring to the conversation? Is it a thriller? A character drama? A mystery?



Stone

Photo credit: Overture Pictures

None of the above. The problem is that "Stone" never develops a personality. Norton and De Niro aren't bad, but these are not particularly-challenging roles for actors who can deliver more well-rounded characters than Angus MacLachlan's script gives them here. The dialogue scenes between the two never feel genuine. They are the over-written product of a script that thinks it's "saying something" instead of merely writing interesting characters and allowing the themes to come organically from them. Everything about "Stone" feels forced.

And that would be fine if the force was pushing us to an entertaining final act. Thrillers often feel forced; it's a natural byproduct of the genre. But "Stone" doesn't want to be a pure thriller. It's not suspenseful. And so the lack of believable characters reduces the whole thing to an exercise in pretension.

Perhaps the only surprise about "Stone" is that the best performance in the piece and essentially the sole reason to see it is not courtesy of one of its Oscar-nominated stars but the lovely Jovovich. She imbues Lucetta with a fire, passion, and unpredictability that make her the most interesting thing on camera in every scene she's in. She steals the entire movie. It wasn't that long ago that no one could steal a movie from De Niro or Norton.

'Stone' stars Edward Norton, Robert De Niro, Milla Jovovich, and Frances Conroy. It was written by Angus MacLachlan and directed by John Curran. It opens on October 15th, 2010. It is rated R. [Read our interview here](#) [12] with "Stone" star Edward Norton and director John Curran.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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