

## Metaphor is Message in Violent ‘Killing Them Softly’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 30, 2012 - 1:50pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – If there ever was an industry that deserved a good metaphor bashing, it would be the financial sector. “Killing Them Softly” does a hit-over-the-head with the symbolism, but at the same time delivers a gritty and literate parable, featuring Brad Pitt, James Gandolfini and Ray Liotta.

“Killing Them Softly” has ultra violent moments, including an extended human beating and an artsy slow motion gunshot to the head. But mostly it’s guys sitting around in cars and diners – baptized by rainfall – musing on the power structure of life, while alternately getting burned or surviving within it. Meanwhile, the 4th quarter 2008 financial collapse is in the background, and it’s obvious the film wants to draw comparison between lawless criminal activity and government sanctioned criminal activity. This is effective, especially when assigning aspects of the financial industry to the actions of the small-time larceny portrayed in the characters. Either way, we’re all dead.

The film opens with Johnny Amato (Vincent Curatola) hiring a small time hood named Frankie (Scott McNairy) to pull off an audacious robbery. Frankie brings along Russell (Ben Mendelsohn) for the job, even though Johnny doesn’t trust Russell’s tendency toward incompetence. They are robbing a poker game run by Markie (Ray Liotta), and the kicker is because Markie once robbed his own poker game and admitted it, that this robbery will also be mistaken as an inside job.



Jackie (Brad Pitt) is the Fixer in ‘Killing Them Softly’  
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company



The successful heist is pulled off, and this sets off a series of events which involve Jackie (Brad Pitt) and Driver (Richard Jenkins). Jackie is a hit man who is coordinating the punishment of Markie, and Driver is the mouthpiece for the upper echelon of the criminal organization. They find out about the robbery scam, and suddenly a number of people need to be whacked. They bring in help in the form of another hit man named Mickey (James Gandolfini), but his erratic nature adds complications to the death sentences. It's Jackie to the "rescue," as he is charged with straightening it all out and dispensing the proper punishments.

The characters are distinct archetypes, and it doesn't take a literature professor to assign the various personas to the financial crisis going on in the background. Brad Pitt's Jackie is the ultimate fixer, but also had to do the dirty work for the shadowy organization, and they certainly will not be punished for doling out the sentences. Richard Jenkin's Driver is the perfect CEO, throwing money at the situation to mollify their circumstance, but having to answer to the "board of directors" above him. The insider job is obvious, and Ray Liotta as Markie was the perfect choice to represent the laughing man that steals what isn't his.

The distinction of the cast also makes the film enjoyable. Besides Liotta, who hasn't been seen for awhile, James Gandolfini was his "expletive deleted" best, portraying Mickey like a man gone insane, indulging in the excesses of human nature like a ravenous dog. There is a telling scene between he and Pitt, in which Mickey consumes four martinis while going over the plan, complaining when they don't come fast enough, even drinking Jackie's beer while he waits. The scenes between the two actors crackle with intensity and they have perfect chemistry (watch out, Angelina!).

The choices in films that Brad Pitt makes continue to solidify his reputation. His Jackie is a mass of tics and cynicism, the character really shines when commenting on the financial crisis unfolding on the radios and TVs scattered about the landscape. There is something to be said for the common cynic, even if his commonality involves the use of weaponry to get his point across. Richard Jenkins is the perfect tired bureaucrat next to Jackie, weary from the orders above him. The Driver keeps his hands clean, protecting the people who are doing more stealing than anyone who has a bullet directed at them. If that's not the metaphor for America, then hide behind your picket fence and vote Republican. Or Democrat.



Brad Pitt and Mickey (James Gandolfini) Make Plans Over Drinks in 'Killing Them Softly'  
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

The violence is over-the-top in "Killing Them Softly," including an extended beating sequence involving Ray Liotta. This becomes somewhat gratuitous and questionable in its necessity. Blame or praise Quentin Tarantino, because writer/director Andrew Dominik's stylish ballet of the slow motion bullet sequence evolved straight from QT's playbook. It's sickening, which may be the point, but it's not for the faint of heart.

It's easy to picture some of the players and directors of the financial crisis viewing this film and laughing like Ray Liotta, or most likely not getting it. Their feeling is most like that Chinese symbol for crisis – it also represents opportunity.

*"Killing Them Softly" opens everywhere on November 30th. Featuring Brad Pitt, James Gandolfini, Richard Jenkins, Ray Liotta, Sam Shepard, Scott McNairy, Ben Mendelsohn and Vincent Curatola. Screenplay adapted and directed by Andrew Dominik. Rated "R"*



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