

Crime Thriller 'Broken City' Fictionalizes its Crime Without Most of its Thrill

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Rife with corruption and injustice, the setting for “Broken City” could have been picked from a litter of U.S. metropolitans. Said star Mark Wahlberg in a recent red-carpet interview with HollywoodChicago.com, it’s not Chicago.

The Windy City most certainly isn’t “broken,” Wahlberg says, though he did highlight our issues with gang violence and the inner city – adding that he’s vehemently behind Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.



The mayor (Russell Crowe) threatens his wife (Catherine Zeta-Jones) for undermining his plans.

Image credit: Alan Markfield, 20th Century Fox

Instead, “Broken City” centers on New York City. Director Allen Hughes said in our Jan. 6, 2013 red-carpet interview – amid a mob of Chicago fans – that the backdrop of The Big Apple was chosen because it’s “modern-day Rome”.

He added: “It’s emblematic of the world and represents our capitol.” Hughes says he chose the project because it’s strongly “character and

narrative based". When asked about honest politicians and whether they exist, he paused silently and said: "That's why it's called politics."

While Hughes enjoys the characters and the narrative he spent \$35 million crafting into yet another crime thriller, moviegoers these days demand more than the everyday formula that used to work for this genre. A year ago, Wahlberg perplexed the peanut gallery by delivering an unexpectedly strong opening weekend with "Contraband".



Mark Wahlberg stars as private investigator Billy Taggart, who risks everything as he tries to uncover big-city corruption.

Image credit: Barry Wetcher SMPSP, 20th Century Fox

But not this time with "Broken City," which instead delivers two of the weekend's biggest disappointments along with Arnold Schwarzenegger's return to Hollywood in "The Last Stand". Instead, the new horror film "Mama" with Jessica Chastain significantly outperformed expectations.

This time, the box-office results tell an honest story about the quality of these films. HollywoodChicago.com rated "Mama" high at [4 out of 5](#) [18], "The Last Stand" mediocre at [3 out of 5](#) [18] and this review rates "Broken City" a let down at 2.5 out of 5.



The mayor (Russell Crowe, left) tries to strong arm private investigator Billy Taggart (Mark Wahlberg).

Image credit: Alan Markfield, 20th Century Fox

It's not because of cinematic goofs like the Wahlberg film's inability to write Hebrew. (In Jack Valliant's election headquarters [played by Barry Pepper], there's a poster with the Hebrew word for "Jewish". But it's written left to right instead of right to left as it should be.) It's because you're taken along what could be a compelling build, but it flames out before ever exploding and leaves you asking yourself: "That's it?"

While Russell Crowe plays a believably corrupt mayor, wife Catherine Zeta-Jones feels like she's in over her head and she's trying to be forced into a character that's actually interesting. At moments, she's made to make you believe she's as powerful as the mayor himself. At others, she's deathly afraid of him. She's the worst part of this film and her character could have been cut entirely.



Billy Taggart's (Mark Wahlberg) investigation leads him into danger, including an automobile "accident".

Image credit: Barry Wetcher SMPSP, 20th Century Fox

She's only here to push the film's plot forward through her apparent infidelity, which introduces the need for private investigator Mark Wahlberg. The "A"-lister and former Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch star tries to siphon the most he can out of a weak character, but it is two of the film's supporting characters who show the most promise.

Jeffrey Wright as police commissioner Carl Fairbanks offers the kind of true intrigue, authority and drama this film needs more of. Also, a name you've likely never heard before captivates in ways her much more "A"-list stars fail to. Alona Tal as Katy Bradshaw plays Wahlberg's strangely loyal assistant with an underlying love story that never materializes.



Mark Wahlberg in Chicago on Jan. 6, 2013 for the "Broken City" red carpet.

Image credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

While "Broken City" attempts to take us into the underbelly of a dirty city, its twists and turns are predictable and its plot devices are fatigued. No longer do tried-and-true tricks work. Rather, moviegoers now award filmmakers who take bold chances and show us what we've never seen before. But "Broken City" safely navigates shallow waters and floats by as a mediocre thriller without emerging as a standout crime film or a total flop.

Though the film attempts to richly deepen itself by being about more than merely infidelity, so does it forget to figure out what its "X" factor is. "Broken City" simply screams: "Hey, moviegoer. Gimme your 10 bucks. I'll give you some 'A'-list stars who run around a city to get paid a few million dollars each in exchange for delivering to you a subpar film based on a script that should never have been financed."

"Broken City" stars Mark Wahlberg, Russell Crowe, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Jeffrey Wright, Barry Pepper, Natalie Martinez, Alona Tal, Michael Beach, Kyle Chandler, James Ransone, Griffin Dunne, Britney Theriot, Luis Tolentino, Tony Bentley and Andrea Frankle from director Allen Hughes and writer Brian Tucker. The film, which has a running time of 109 minutes, opened on Jan. 18, 2013. It is rated "R" for pervasive language, some sexual content and violence.



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