

Despite Low Expectations, Dwayne Johnson's 'Snitch' Leaves You Pleasantly Surprised

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Dwayne Johnson doesn't just want to be The Rock. And perhaps he is more after all. Despite his professional wrestling fame, "Snitch" is Johnson's plea to be respected as a true, dramatic actor. He's doing it now just like Jackie Chan wanted to evolve beyond being just a funny karate man in the latest "The Karate Kid".

"I really thank Will Smith for giving me a chance to act in this film. For a long time, I've wanted to show audiences that I'm not a comedian and I'm not an action star. I'm a true actor. An actor can do everything – just like Robert De Niro. I want to be an Asian Robert De Niro," [Jackie Chan told HollywoodChicago.com](#) [17] in 2010 on "The Karate Kid" red carpet.



Dwayne Johnson stars in "Snitch".

Image credit: Steve Dietl, Summit Entertainment

Now Dwayne Johnson is trying to make the same kind of conversion. While he'll never be taken seriously in films like "The Scorpion King" or

"Journey 2: The Mysterious Island," "Snitch" is a promising peak inside the chops of what this beast of a man can be: perhaps an actually semi-decent actor.

While he's got no problem getting Hollywood work – Johnson has six feature films already in 2013 – "Snitch" throws him into the role of a vengeful, vigilante father. He attempts to take matters into his own hands when the law sleepily does nothing to rescue his imprisoned son.

While the script takes truly compelling material and turns it into often-weak dialogue that escalates down a path you can't buy into, four things make this film worth it. We have some surprisingly genuine moments by Dwayne Johnson, Barry Pepper steals the talent show as a supporting actor and we feel some authentic tension created by the film's most important decision of all.



Rafi Gavron stars in "Snitch".

Image credit: Steve Dietl, Summit Entertainment

That leads us to the fourth and most important redeeming savior in what could have created an otherwise forgotten February film: the choice to make a Herculean lead actor *not* into a Jason Bourne-esque badass fighter. Instead, he's a rather a normal – and sometimes even fragile – father who simply goes to ridiculous extremes to save his son (Rafi Gavron) from too long in jail or a prison death.

While the film's action sequences leave much to be desired and can't compare to today's much more blockbuster movies, the most refreshing part of them is that Johnson doesn't always win and sometimes you even feel nervous that he might get hurt. His character is given a rare humanity that you wouldn't expect and you can partially even believe.



Susan Sarandon (foreground) and Barry Pepper star in "Snitch".

Image credit: Steve Dietl, Summit Entertainment

Now Susan Sarandon, on the other hand, is the film's biggest mistake. Her role as the politician who calls all the shots could have been played by anyone. It's offensive that it was wasted by such an Oscar-winning star. Remove her and stick in Joan Allen like the Bourne movies always do. Then she could have quietly slid by in the role without any love or hate for it at all.

Now the Golden Globe-winning Barry Pepper shows up all actors in "Snitch" and reminds them how to get 'er done. Whenever the camera's on him and his impressive goatee that I now have on my bucket list, he's holding your attention. Jon Bernthal from TV's "The Walking Dead" shows some potential, too, as the ex-con who helps Johnson unrealistically dive into the underbelly of the drug cartel world.



Benjamin Bratt stars in "Snitch".

Image credit: Steve Dietl, Summit Entertainment

Now don't overanalyze the film's underlying message and how it drives from 0 to 60 in 112 minutes. If you do, you'll shoot so many holes in

this plot that it won't even have the paper left on which it was originally written.

Of course it's ridiculous that a good kid Skypes with his buddy and tries to decline a package of a serious quantity of drugs, but his doorbell rings and the box is just there. And then he immediately takes said package to his room, slices it open and a camera lies hidden underneath to nab him red handed. And then, of course, a swarm of DEA-type agents are at the house within seconds to promptly ship him off to prison.



Dwayne Johnson (left) and Barry Pepper star in "Snitch".
Image credit: Steve Dietl, Summit Entertainment

It's ludicrous for a first-time offender. I can't even discuss it further because it ruins the film. But based on real-life "mandatory sentencing" laws in the U.S., the kid gets prison for 10 to 20 years with no questions asked. That is, of course, unless he helps to snitch on some *real* drug lords in order to reduce his prison time. But because the child doesn't know any real Scarface, his dad – who works in construction – decides to use his big trucks to suddenly distribute drugs and find one.

Sure. We'd all do exactly that.

Once you suspend your belief in reality and view "Snitch" from a high ledge with low expectations, you'll find a not-too-terribly bad movie with some actual moments of acting aptitude, cinematic worth and time decently well spent. "Snitch" most certainly bests this month's action movies including "[A Good Day to Die Hard](#) [18]" and "[Bullet to the Head](#) [19]".

"Snitch" stars Dwayne Johnson, Susan Sarandon, Barry Pepper, Jon Bernthal, Benjamin Bratt, Michael Kenneth Williams, Rafi Gavron, Nadine Velazquez, JD Pardo, Melina Kanakaredes, Lela Loren, David Harbour, Harold Perrineau, Kyara Campos and James Allen McCune from writer and director Ric Roman Waugh and writer Justin Haythe. "Snitch," which has a running time of 112 minutes and opens on Feb. 22, 2013, is rated "PG-13" for drug content and sequences of violence.



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