

Colin Farrell Can't Let Go in 'Dead Man Down'

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- [Colin Farrell](#) [2]
- [Dead Man Down](#) [3]
- [Dominic Cooper](#) [4]
- [F. Murray Abraham](#) [5]
- [FilmDistrict](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Isabelle Huppert](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [Noomi Rapace](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Terence Howard](#) [12]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Nothing like a high concept crime story to compliment “spring forward.” Colin Farrell plays the revenge card to the nth degree in the unusual and slowly paced “Dead Man Down,” and takes Noomi Rapace (of the Swedish “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”) along for the ride.

This is a crazy quilt of motivations, misdirections and negative circumstances, stirred together in a big pot of strange asides, watchdog symbolism and surprising casting. The is a glacially paced drama, told in scattered pieces, but it outpaces itself by delivering a different spin on gang and crime warfare. The engine of the whole situation, for example, is territorial acquisition of New York City real estate and the tragic series of events that this manipulation starts into motion. It is an absorbing story, not completely successful because of the pacing, but scoring points for allowing a peculiar narrative and a good screenplay to trump the usual gunplay (don't worry, there is plenty of that too).

The film begins with a monologue. An organized crime henchman named Darcy (Dominic Cooper) is talking to his colleague Victor (Colin Farrell) about the joys and responsibilities of new parenthood – while he holds the newborn in his hands. This unique kickstart is followed by a mystery within the crime gang. The leader is a snake called Alphonse (Terrence Howard), who is perplexed by a series of strange notes (the first one clutched in the hands of a dead lieutenant), and wants his team to rally to solve the enigma.



Dead Man Walking: Darcy (Dominic Cooper) and Victor (Colin Farrell) in 'Dead Man Down'

Photo credit: FilmDistrict

All the while during these events, Victor is being watched by a woman named Beatrice (Noomi Rapace) from across their apartment balconies. She has witnessed her neighbor killing a man, and this motivates her energy toward revenge. She proposes to Victor to kill a drunk driver that

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had injured her face in a car accident, leading to taunts of "monster" by the neighborhood kids. She will turn him in for the murder she witnessed unless he cooperates. In this new alliance and promise to Beatrice, Victor begins to reveal exactly who he is and why he must kill so indiscriminately.

This complex story landscape is sometimes hard to follow. It unfolds slowly, with the same mystery as a mob boss receiving cryptic notes. The key to all of it is going with the flow, connecting to the story as much as the criminal toughness and fire power. Essentially the film is about vulnerability, with seemingly everyone having some achilles heel – a new Dad, a face damaged beauty, a freaked-out tough guy – all getting their soft spots tweaked.

The casting is inspired as it is unpredictable. Noomi Rapace is an arresting presence, unafraid (as she proved with "Tattoo") to completely let her guard down. In what could have been a simple role as the car accident victim, becomes something much more sinister and believable in her hands – and she has to endure some really silly moments. Her story is the most intriguing in a sea of interest. French actress Isabelle Huppert ("Amour") does some scene stealing as Beatrice's mother, and F. Murray Abraham ("Amadeus") does a quick toss yet memorable turn as one of Victor's allies.

Colin Farrell plays the straight man in all of this, whose character is a proprietor of revenge that defines "taking it to the limit." His taciturn performance becomes a bit annoying, and there has to be a suspension of disbelief in following his story. Dominic Cooper gets credit for motivating his ambitious father persona. From the opening monologue to his follow-through detective work ("I'm Columbo"), what he finds out about Victor becomes both comic and betraying, and he performs both emotions remarkably.



Beatrice (Noomi Rapace) Wears White in 'Dead Man Down'
Photo credit: FilmDistrict

The turn off in the film is the pacing, way too slow in many parts. Danish director Niels Arden Oplev puts that Scandinavian deadness into the narrative elements, and it contributes to some of the confusion as in who is loyal to whom. It does pick up in the second half, as "detective" Darcy starts to unravel everything, and there is an absurd but original action sequence that becomes the final solution. Sticking with this film can be rewarding, but as an audience member patience is a virtue.

Colin Farrell's eyebrows are still amazing, the best in the business. If the actor really wants to go high concept, how about teaming him and his eyebrows as crime-fighting warriors trying to ride the urban jungle of unscrupulous bankers? As one Hollywood executive might say, "get out of my office."

"Dead Man Down" opens everywhere on March 8th. Featuring Colin Ferrell, Noomi Rapace, Terence Howard, Dominic Cooper, Isabelle Huppert and F. Murray Abraham. Screenplay by J.H. Wyman. Directed by Niels Arden Oplev. Rated "R"



[13]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dead-man-down>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dominic-cooper>
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