

Mark Wahlberg Steals Unexpected Comedic Spotlight Amid ‘2 Guns’ Bromance

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on August 4, 2013 - 10:15am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – While you wouldn’t normally compare the new action/comedy “2 Guns” with the comedy “I Love You, Man,” really the only difference between what Mark Wahlberg and Denzel Washington are doing now versus what Paul Rudd and Jason Segel did in 2009 is that “2 Guns” uses crime as the means by which two grown men fall in love with one another.

Based on the Boom! Studios graphic novels by Steven Grant, “2 Guns” is an unexpected bromance with just enough action to give its original subject matter justice and the surprising discovery of comedy to make it an overall worthy film to see. Mark Wahlberg doesn’t only co-star in this film; he steals the show. Refreshingly, he does not just his gun but even more so with his mouth.



Denzel Washington (left) and Mark Wahlberg in “2 Guns”.

Image credit: Patti Perret, Universal Studios

Wahlberg executes the role of Michael “Stig” Stigman by simultaneously entertaining your eyes with action violence while making you laugh, too. He talks fast, delivers well-written one-liners and has just enough old-school comedy to keep your attention.

Now “2 Guns” does fall victim to predictable Hollywood formulas: the stock buddy cop setup, the bad guys who are trying to take them down, the hot girl who’s there just to be hot and help drive motivations, the crime (for which we can certainly appreciate it being across from the best donuts in town) and the resolution. Also, its pacing is inconsistent. The film starts strong and funny, but drags in the middle. Still, it finds a way to regain some steam through the end.

While it’s hard to envision how things could have been versus what they are, knowing what we know from past roles it’s fair to say that one of the greatest successes in “2 Guns” is its casting department – that is, except for the villains.



Paula Patton as DEA agent Deb Rees in “2 Guns”.

Image credit: Patti Perret, Universal Studios

The primary duo in “2 Guns” ended up exploiting the successful action/comedy chemistry discovered between Mark Wahlberg and Denzel Washington. Here you’ve married two very different stars with two markedly different acting styles in a way that works surprisingly well together. You always get the feeling that they hate one other, don’t trust one another but also have reason to keep ending up together.

Ultimately, you believe that they actually care to have one another’s back. Without their match, the film would have been a very different incarnation that would have been reduced to a mediocre and forgettable film. With them, we have something to enjoy and remember. Had things stayed as they were while in development, “2 Guns” would have had Vince Vaughn in Washington’s place and Owen Wilson playing Wahlberg’s role.

“2 Guns” director Baltasar Kormákur surely had strong influence here as he last directed Wahlberg on the set of “Contraband” just one year ago. Antoine Fuqua, who also directed Denzel Washington in the glorious “Training Day” and Mark Wahlberg in “Shooter,” was also considered to direct “2 Guns”.



Bill Paxton as CIA asset Earl in “2 Guns”.

Image credit: Patti Perret, Universal Studios

Now if Doug Liman took the helm – the director of Matt Damon’s “The Bourne Identity” films – “2 Guns” would have been a very different but also a psychologically more interesting beast. I’d pay to see Liman’s version. Thank you, Pierre Morel, for not trying to cash in your “The Transporter” successes with “2 Guns”. Finally, Martin Campbell would have made “2 Guns” all too much like the James Bond films we’ve already seen too many times.

While it’s easy to knock “2 Guns” for relying too much on the successful pairing of Wahlberg with Washington, that pairing nonetheless carries the film and makes it worth your time and money. And instead of the part pretty girl victim played by the smoldering Paula Patton (from the “Mission: Impossible” films and unfortunately “Jumping the Broom”), Ellen Pompeo and Marisa Tomei were considered – both of whom would have also been all wrong.

Now as for the villains, “2 Guns” got it all wrong. Bill Paxton – the star of HBO’s Mormon polygamy show “Big Love” – has none of what it takes to be the gritty, fear-causing criminal this role needed. We’ve seen successful villains in the past who’ve never raised their voice or energy when trying to be scary, but they’ve been able to pull that off because something about them actually gave the hairs on your arm reason to stand up.



Edward James Olmos as drug warlord Papi Greco in “2 Guns”.

Image credit: Patti Perret, Universal Studios

Paxton’s character is obsessed with getting his \$43 million back, but he fails to ever give you a reason why you should fear him. The same applies for James Marsden and Fred Ward. While sporting U.S. Navy uniforms, nothing’s dirty enough about them except for the fact that you’re given reason to believe they’re supposed to be bad.

Now Edward James Olmos as the drug warlord Papi Greco is on the right track. Something about him feels authentic and he is the only villain who’s doing something right. But overall, a film shouldn’t just try to tell us who’s supposed to be villainous. It should convince us they just are. Most of this film’s bad guys needed much more psychopathic and unpredictable qualities and much less trying to act angry.



James Marsden as Lt. Commander Quince in “2 Guns”.
Image credit: Patti Perret, Universal Studios

But all in all, Mark Wahlberg and Denzel Washington are the two guns who make this film worthwhile. A saving grace is still a saving grace no matter how much you criticize and blow holes in it. Instead of knocking the film for relying too heavily on its two co-stars, realize instead that it’s leading with its strength and that strength works.

“2 Guns” stars Mark Wahlberg, Denzel Washington, James Marsden, Bill Paxton, Paula Patton, Edward James Olmos, Evie Thompson, Robert John Burke, Patrick Fischler and Azure Parsons from director Baltasar Kormákur and writer Blake Masters based on the Boom! Studios graphic novels by Steven Grant. The film, which opened on Aug. 2, 2013 and has a running time of 109 minutes, is rated “R” for violence throughout, language and brief nudity.



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Source URL (retrieved on Mar 29 2024 - 5:49am):
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