

## Tom Hanks Guides Intense ‘Captain Phillips’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 10, 2013 - 4:36pm

- [Barkhad Abdi](#) [2]
- [Captain Phillips](#) [3]
- [Film Review](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Paul Greengrass](#) [6]
- [Tom Hanks](#) [7]
- [United 93](#) [8]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Captain Richard Phillips (Tom Hanks) leaves his wife Andrea (Catherine Keener) for yet another journey captaining a cargo ship off the coast of Africa. Shortly thereafter, a Somali boy named Muse (Barkhad Abdi) heads into the same waters on a collision course with the Maersk Alabama. “Captain Phillips” captures the intensity of what happens when desperation meets commerce and it does so with the relentless style director Paul Greengrass brought to critical and commercial hits like “United 93” and “The Bourne Supremacy.” Led by Tom Hanks’ best performance in over a decade (which is perfectly matched by newcomer Abdi), “Captain Phillips” is a harrowing crowdpleaser, the kind of film that sends viewers back into the real world a little exhausted but satisfied.

If you sense a little bit of hesitation to levy the same praise at “Captain Phillips” as some other critics in words like “crowdpleaser” and “satisfied,” you’re not mistaken. “Captain Phillips” is a film that’s well worth seeing. It’s well-made, well-acted, and well-executed. And yet it never rises above its intensity for this viewer. In fact, as the film crests the 90-mark mark and still has more than 40 to go and Mr. Greengrass turns up the score and amplifies the degree of camera shaking, I actually found myself less interested in where this journey was going. As stomach-churning as it was, I’ve seen “United 93” more than once to admire the filmmaking craft within it. “Captain Phillips” is a trip worth taking that I’ll probably never take again.



Captain Phillips

*Photo credit: Sony Pictures*

Screenwriter Billy Ray lays down an undercurrent of the ever-changing times with an awkward conversation between Phillips and his wife on the way to the airport about how their son will have difficulty finding work. Of course, Phillips Jr. has it easier than the Somali village in which young men vie to be chosen to be the lucky ones to steal, threaten, and maybe even kill. Fending off the defenses drilled into the crew of the Alabama, a group of young Somali men led by the gaunt, terrifying Muse actually make it to the bridge and a battle of wills begins between

Phillips and the men holding him at gunpoint.

It's a simple tale in terms of narrative and so the artistic success of "Captain Phillips" comes down almost entirely to its execution. As I mentioned, there's a bit of social commentary in Ray's introduction and some of the dialogue later in the film, but this is primarily a physical experience as Phillips' life becomes increasingly at risk and Muse's desperation reaches an irrational peak. Consequently, the performances in the two roles are essential to the overall impact. Hanks sheds a lot of the acting crutches he's used in recent years to give a genuine, heartfelt performance. He doesn't overplay the intensity of the situation, balancing the leadership of a man who has been chosen to captain a cargo ship through pirate-filled waters while also capturing the fear inherent in the situation. He's great and he's matched by a mesmerizing turn by Abdi, who could have been little more than over-the-top villain but turns in a genuine, complex performance.



Captain Phillips

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

As good as Hanks and Abdi are in "Captain Phillips," the film is undeniably a different experience than it would be were it not directed by Paul Greengrass. The man knows how to turn the screws of intense drama, finding ways to release and amplify tension for over two hours. Having said that, there's not enough character or commentary here to justify over 130 minutes of running time. I think there's an incredibly taut, tense version of "Phillips" that runs 20 minutes shorter. What's here is fine, sometimes great, I just felt that there was too much of it, especially after the lean intensity machine that was "Gravity."

Even with my reservations, "Captain Phillips" is an undeniably satisfying film that transcends that faint praise with a mesmerizing bit of acting by Hanks late in the movie. He breaks through all of the artifice of filmmaking tools like amplified score or shaky camerawork. When the trip is over, what I'll remember most is the quiver in Phillips' voice and the desperation in Muse's eyes. Once again, Greengrass finds the humanity in unimaginable intensity.

*"Captain Phillips" stars Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi. It was written by Billy Ray and directed by Paul Greengrass. It opens on October 11, 2013.*



[9]

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