

## ‘The Gambler’ is a Sure Bet for the Holiday Weekend

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 25, 2014 - 8:52am

- [Addict](#) [2]
- [Brie Larson](#) [3]
- [College](#) [4]
- [Gambling](#) [5]
- [Gaming](#) [6]
- [George Kennedy](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [James Caan](#) [9]
- [Jessica Lange](#) [10]
- [John Goodman](#) [11]
- [Literature](#) [12]
- [Mark Wahlberg](#) [13]
- [Michael Kenneth Williams](#) [14]
- [Movie Review](#) [15]
- [Paramount Pictures](#) [16]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [17]
- [Rupert Wyatt](#) [18]
- [The Gambler](#) [19]



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Gritty, funky and quote-worthy, this re-imagining of “The Gambler” – from a 1970s source film – is one of Mark Wahlberg’s best performances. His addicted-to-gaming soul has roots in other frustrations, and the actor is willing to communicate the whole range of emotions.

Director Rupert Wyatt, working from an adaptation from writer William Monahan, creates a parallel symbolic universe to the American dream, and the tragedy that occurs when waking up the next morning. Wahlberg’s character of “The Gambler” is complex and deep – his secret identity is as a adjunct professor of literature. This personality, which drove him to write his first book, is also responsible for his gambling addict side, and feeds his ability to walk away from both victory and losses without an indication of reactive feeling. The film is a broad, rich bite of tension, great acting and a John Goodman who in effect steals the picture. This is a perfect adult story alternative to the kiddies begging for “Annie.”

Jim (Wahlberg) is up to his eyeballs in debt, from several monetary sources that expect him to payoff during his intense bouts of gambling. Jim has no strategy, he simply bets the limit, rakes in the gold, and puts it right back on the table. This has nearly destroyed his mother Roberta (Jessica Lange), who can’t help but keep helping him.



Jim (Mark Wahlberg) and Amy (Brie Larson) Place Their Bets in ‘The Gambler’

*Photo credit: Paramount Pictures*

His other life is as a writer and literature professor. He got middling reviews for his first book, but finds a new purpose in that literature when he discovers that one of his students, Amy (Brie Larson), is a prodigy. His interest in her re-adjusts a bit of his gaming life, but he’s still in for large sums to Neville (Michael Kenneth Williams) and the enigmatic gangster/philosopher Frank (John Goodman).

All the decisions that Wahlberg and director Wyatt made in building the character paid dividends. The journey to feeling something – anything – is driven by intense bets and a devil-may-care slow suicide to paying them back. Wahlberg and Lange are electric in their scenes together, and Lange keeps proving her worth as a character actor, beyond her early years as an ingenue. After seeing her performance, even the old reading-from-a-phone-book compliment would apply.

And then there is Goodman. Stripped to the waist in most scenes – he and Jim meet in a sauna – he exposes both his girth and the darker elements of what makes America tick, and it’s closer to Gambler Jim than a Founding Father, according to Frank. Goodman knows how to deliver those larger than life characters, with a full immersion into the persona that has crawled from whatever dark place he has been assigned.

Another beautiful piece of cat-and-mouse is between Jim and his student Amy. We first see Amy as a glammed-up cocktail waitress at the private gaming club that the Gambler frequents, but her look as a student is make-up free, and she seems smaller and less attractive there. This is Larson inventing a character of interest, where in other hands might have been less distinct. Larson is an actor that owns the screen.



Jim and Roberta (Jessica Lange) Have a Family Reunion in 'The Gambler'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The ending has a couple of climaxes to it, both based on a path the Gambler must tread. It's the type of film where the cut-to-black that signals the end could come at any time during the last pulse pounding half hour. The way that Wyatt uses the director's tools is stunning, and enhances the story in ways that signal a major new talent in the film landscape.

This is a perfect film for a Christmas Day choice or the day after Xmas, or the long weekend towards the next holiday. It's like putting a hot record album on a turntable – you become as fascinated by the turning platter as you are the sounds emanating from the needle.

*"The Gambler" opens everywhere on December 25th. Featuring Mark Wahlberg, Jessica Lange, Brie Larson, John Goodman, Michael Kenneth Williams and George Kennedy. Screenplay adapted by William Monahan. Directed by Rupert Wyatt. Rated "R"*



[Read an interview with director Rupert Wyatt from Nick Allen.](#) [20]



[21]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [22]

Writer, Editorial Coordinator

HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [21]

© 2014 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 11:23pm):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/24911/the-gambler-is-a-sure-bet-for-the-holiday-weekend>

#### Links:

[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>

[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/addict>

[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brie-larson>

[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/college>

[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/gambling>

[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/gaming>

[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/george-kennedy>

[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>

[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/james-caan>

[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jessica-lange>

[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/john-goodman>

[12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/literature>

[13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/mark-wahlberg>

[14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/michael-kenneth-williams>



[15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>  
[16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/paramount-pictures>  
[17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>  
[18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ruPERT-wyatt>  
[19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-gambler>  
[20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/24931/interview-director-ruPERT-wyatt-bets-on-mark-wahlberg-in-the-gambler>  
[21] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>  
[22] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>