

Johnny Depp is Ghoulish in Mob Saga ‘Black Mass’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 17, 2015 - 4:51pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Black Mass” is a well crafted, if somewhat conventional crime tale. It won’t win any awards, but it’s entertaining enough. The story of real life Boston crime boss “Whitey” Bulger has no shortage of juicy details, and while the saga of this mob boss slash FBI turncoat falls short of greatness, Johnny Depp turns him into an otherworldly presence.

With slicked back thinning hair, speckled teeth, skin that looks like it was prepped by a mortuary, and blue contact lenses, Depp goes all out and plays Bulger as a black hearted ghoul. It’s not entirely possible to forget it’s Johnny Depp up there on screen, but he gives one of his better performances in recent years.



Johnny Depp as Whitey Bulger in ‘Black Mass’

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Joel Edgerton’s role isn’t as flashy as Depp’s, but he’s just as important. He plays an FBI agent who grew up a few doors down from the

Bulger family. And he's the one who convinces Bulger to turn state's evidence to help the feds take down a common enemy, the Italian mob. Edgerton is a man caught in his own moral quicksand. He values loyalty, but he also wants to be a big shot and make a name for himself. And those two values aren't always in harmony.

Edgerton is trying to play both sides, he wants to be a hero who also takes a cut for himself and does right by his friends, so he's taking bribes from Bulger while hogging the glory after a tip helps them take down the Italian mob in Boston. Bulger meanwhile is using the FBI to clean out his competition for him, and he gets to basically take over Boston with no one around to stop him. As Bulger's organization gets bigger, his last ties to normal family fade away and vanish, and Depp turns him into a man consumed by an endless capacity for evil. In some ways it's a little refreshing to see a pure villain without a tortured backstory – meant to humanize them – but it makes him less of a compelling character.

Benedict Cumberbatch, Kevin Bacon, Peter Saarsgard, Corey Stoll, and Adam Scott round out the cast and give fine performances all around. But the magic "X factor" that turns a good movie into a great one is missing, since there's no gut wrenching human center.



Joel Edgerton and Johnny Depp in 'Black Mass'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Other than sprinkling a few testimonies from low level Bulger associates into the action, Director Scott Cooper mostly plays it straight, chronicling Bulger's rise from small time hood to Ganglord in chronological order. Cooper's not trying to do imitation Martin Scorsese. If anything he's doing imitation Ben Affleck, trying to tap into the same Southie accents, gangs and themes of family and loyalty Affleck explored in "The Town."

The pieces for a great crime movie are here, Scorsese struck Oscar gold when he made "The Departed" after all. This may not please those fans looking for more realism in their crime sagas, but for what it is "Black Mass" is still a pretty good trip to the 'hood.

"Black Mass" opens everywhere on September 18th. Featuring Johnny Depp, Joel Edgerton, Kevin Bacon, Corey Stoll, Adam Scott, Peter Saarsgard and Benedict Cumberbatch. Screenplay adapted by Mark Mallouk and Jez Butterworth. Directed by Scott Cooper. Rated "R"



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By [SPIKE WALTERS](#) [22]

Contributor

HollywoodChicago.com

spike@hollywoodchicago.com [21]

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