

Steven Soderbergh's 'The Informant!' Puts Matt Damon on a Wire

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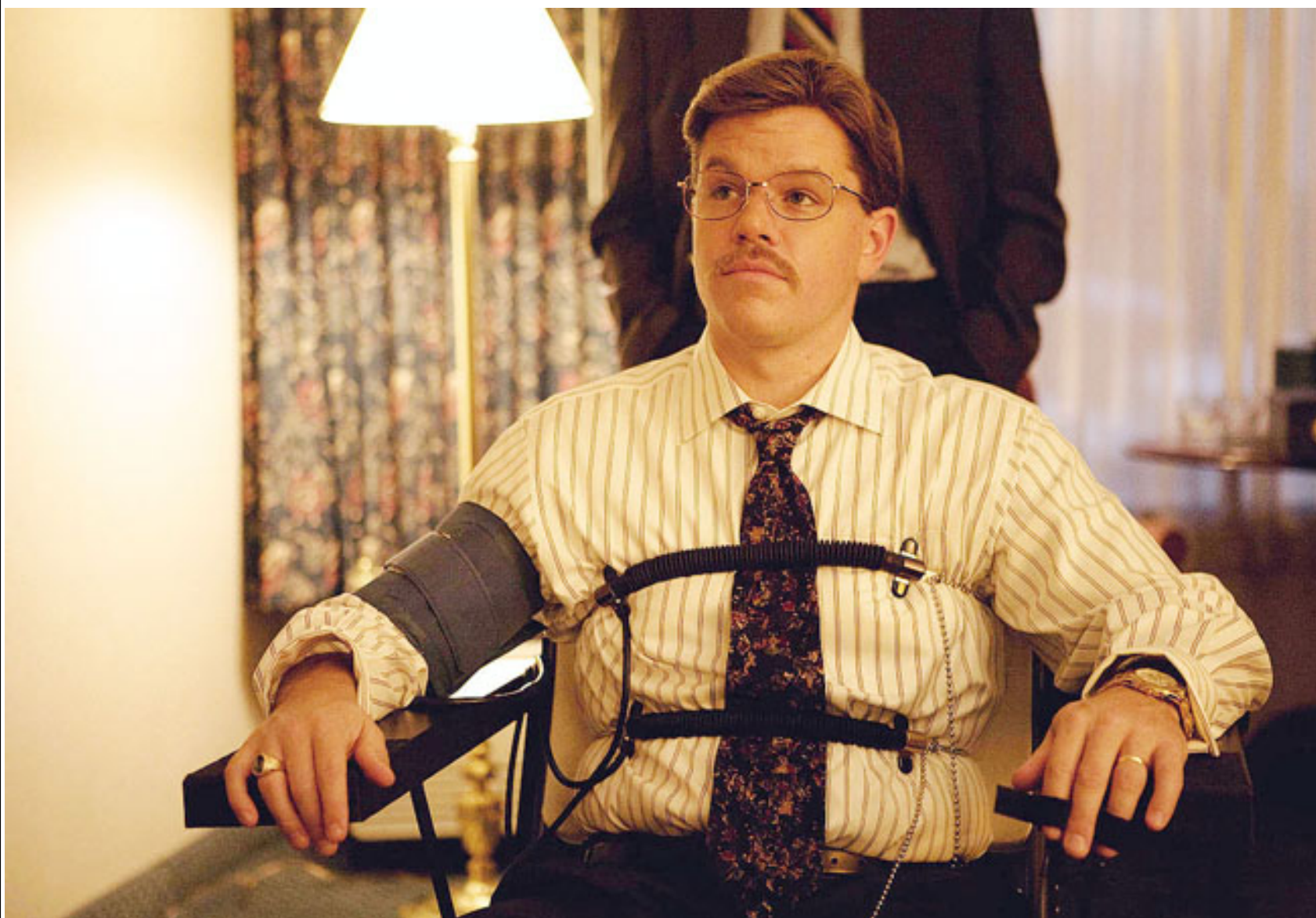
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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Behind every great fortune lies a great crime, as the saying goes. In director Steven Soderbergh's "The Informant!," he and Matt Damon carve out a satire where the "crime" becomes entangled with the larger issues of "justice."

In this based-on-fact scenario, Damon plays Mark Whitacre, who famously cooperated in the 1990s with the FBI as a whistle blowing insider to the Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) price fixing scandal. As a high-level executive at ADM, Whitacre was privy to meetings – many that he set up – where the price of a basic food ingredient was fixed through international skullduggery.



The Whole Truth: Matt Damon as Mark Whitacre in 'The Informant!'
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As the pressure builds and the FBI (as portrayed through agents played by Scott Bakula and Joel McHale) needs more evidence, the

increasingly erratic Whitacre begins to unravel in unpredictable ways. The closer they all get to breaking the price fixing case, the more apparent it becomes that Whitacre will assure that his backside will be protected, either through passing misinformation or his own scandalous behavior.

This is a comedy, and a quite funny one at that. When the deadly human sin of greed starts to emerge, Damon's bloated character responds with a variety of tics and self delusions, classically illustrated by director Soderbergh with a basic narration track that exposes Whitacre's unbalanced sanity.

His random thoughts include (as voiced by Damon) what if there was a TV show about a guy who splits into two and calls himself, and spends the rest of the hour chasing down the other?

Scott Burn's screenplay contains other absurd gems, especially in context with the playground antics of the price fixers. And it does expose the FBI and the federal lawyers as callous, when the stress to convict the fixers becomes more important than protecting the clearly overmatched Whitacre.



The FBI: Scott Bakula and Joel McHale as agents with Matt Damon in 'The Informant!'

Photo credit: Copyright © Warner Bros. Pictures, All Rights Reserved

The Soderbergh touch is also felt in the sly satire. The title graphics and Marvin Hamlisch score are both rooted in the 1970s anti-hero movies, so much so that a colleague wondered if Hamlisch was in on the joke.

The background casting winks at the camera as well several times, as Thomas F. Wilson (Biff from "Back to the Future"), Patton Oswalt and other familiar comedians have cameos as straight-laced authority figures and co-workers.

Where *The Informant!* doesn't work as well is in the languid story pacing and superfluous nature of Damon's character. In the film's eagerness to indict everyone, the moral of the ending is driven home again and again, and even the expected where-are-they-now graphics as an epilogue seems extracurricular.

But in the current debate on reform in big business, a good old fashion satire where we meet the enemy, and they are us, is all the more appropriate as the real American Dream continues unwinding in the post millennium.

"The Informant!" opens everywhere September 18th and features Matt Damon, Scott Bakula, Joel McHale, Melanie Lynskey, Patton Oswalt and Thomas F. Wilson, directed by Steven Soderbergh



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