

'A Walk Among the Tombstones' Solidifies Desire for Liam Neeson to Be Your Dad

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – I don't know about your dad, but mine – love him as I do – isn't Jason Bourne, James Bond or Bryan Mills. At the age of 62, Liam Neeson somehow still kicks ass as Bryan Mills in "Taken" and fans everywhere love riding every minute of his butt-kicking thrill rides.

Denzel Washington, Daniel Craig and Matt Damon are certainly a close second for who your fantasy dad would be, but really the winner is Liam Neeson every time. And I don't just mean for those of us with daddy issues.



Liam Neeson in "A Walk Among the Tombstones".

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Liam would play baseball or My Little Pony with you, teach you wise life lessons, make you laugh and send you on your merry way in life. All the while, he'd be protecting you in the shadows if ever enemies find reason to harm you. He's scary to bad guys even without a gun as we all know from anyone who has been on the opposite end of the phone with him. He never gets hurt himself and he selflessly makes his life about you.

What more could we ask for in the perfect fantasy dad? In "A Walk Among the Tombstones," Liam is back yet again in the same exact role we've only seen him in recent years, but this time not to protect his own kid. Here he's the outside-of-the-law vigilante he usually is, but this time just for the paycheck. Of course, though, the job becomes more than just the money. He ends up being out to finish the dirty work someone else started.

What's most interesting about Liam Neeson always playing this same character lately is that the formula keeps working and you don't care. I feel much the same way about the Jason Bourne movies: they can keep making them – with or without Matt Damon – and I'll enjoy all of them. Likewise, Liam's "Taken" in 2008 followed up with "Taken 2" in 2012, he's got a gun again in 2014's "Non-Stop" and he will again with "Taken 3" in 2015.



Liam Neeson and Brian "Astro" Bradley in "A Walk Among the Tombstones".

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

But before he earned his current badass daddy branding, what I find most funny is that many audiences don't remember who Liam used to be. I've mentioned "Schindler's List" to quite a few "Liam Neeson fans" at his latest films. They've either never seen the movie or replied with: "Oh, yeah. Who was he in the movie?" (You know, he *was* Schindler.)

Produced by Danny DeVito and written and directed by Scott Frank ("Minority Report," "The Lookout"), "A Walk Among the Tombstones" teeters on being a passable thriller but would be nothing without Liam. The film does have some memorable supporting roles, too. Currently seen in the critically acclaimed thriller "The Guest," Dan Stevens is cast in a well-played role as a wealthy drug dealer who failed trying to pay off the criminals who kidnapped his wife.

So, our slow-burn noir of the sad cop versus the bad guys continues following psychopaths David Harbour and Adam David Thompson. Both play their roles as crazies should. Perhaps most telling of their madness – aside from their abductions and murders, of course – is how they treat each other. One decides to take a pee while the other is bleeding out. It's as if they're working as a team to do what they enjoy, but really they're in it for individual satisfaction.



Villains Adam David Thompson (left) and David Harbour in "A Walk Among the Tombstones".

Photo credit: Atsushi Nishijima, Universal Pictures

David Harbour's character is all about fear. He enjoys seeing his victims afraid and begging for mercy. Adam David Thompson is about the thrill of the kill and being as bad as he can be.

Brian "Astro" Bradley is the film's sleeper. True to Liam Neeson films, he always needs a friend and someone to parent. While this story doesn't directly have Liam rescuing his own child, Bradley plays a street-smart kid who Liam takes in, shows concern for and bestows wisdom to. While Bradley's character is used as a common plot device for Liam, he's nonetheless a welcome addition.

What's most frustrating about "A Walk Among the Tombstones," though, is it doesn't dare to be anything different or more than the traditional Liam Neeson formula. The film successfully builds suspense and patiently takes its time doing so, but it has nowhere to go other than where all of his other films end up. There aren't twists and turns you wouldn't expect and you don't end up feeling sorry for the characters you should.



Dan Stevens in "A Walk Among the Tombstones".

Photo credit: Atsushi Nishijima, Universal Pictures

You always have the feeling that Liam will be just fine, but instead of caring about if the kidnapped live or die, the only person I want to survive is Bradley's character. To teach him a life lesson through tough love, Liam shows him how to use a gun for his first time. Liam suggests that he'd might as well shoot himself now if that's the path he's going to go down.

All in all, "A Walk Among the Tombstones" isn't genre breaking nor will it stand out as one of the best films of the year. Even so, it'll keep you on the edge of your seat riding the same ride we've ridden with Liam Neeson before. For many of us, that's enough to make it worth it.

"A Walk Among the Tombstones" stars Liam Neeson, Dan Stevens, David Harbour, Maurice Compte, Laura Birn, Adam David Thompson, Kim Rosen, Eric Nelsen, Razane Jammal and Al Nazemian from writer and director Scott Frank based on the novel by Lawrence Block. It has a running time of 113 minutes and opened on Sept. 19, 2014. The film is rated "R" for strong violence, disturbing images, language and brief nudity.



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