

## **We Own the Night**

The tale of two brothers on either side of the law, *We Own the Night* is set in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach in 1988. One stolid brother, Joseph (Mark Wahlberg) is following in the family tradition of being a cop, while the second, wayward Bobby (Joaquin Phoenix), chooses the high life over law enforcement.

*We Own the Night* (the phrase comes from a motto on the badges of the NYPD) is the third taut New York story writer/director James Gray has made in the last ten years (*Little Odessa* and *The Yards* were the others), and he fills it with the tough world of cops and the tawdry world of night clubs and drug dealing.

The two brothers' very different worlds inevitably intersect, and Bobby is asked to cooperate with Joseph in providing information on the Russian mob. That's when the tension kicks in. Gray is adept at sketching these worlds and in creating a sense of menace (aided by some solid understated acting from some of his villains). One especially finger-biting scene has a terrified Bobby in a drug den wearing a recording device, a scene which just wears you out.

As effective as parts of *We Own the Night* are, however, be warned it is very violent and at times hard to follow as the plot takes several curlicues. Phoenix here fully displays his troubled soul persona, and it fits his character well; Wahlberg—so good in *The Yards* several years ago—is given less to do and his performance veers toward the wooden. Robert Duvall adds both folksiness and gravity as Burt, the venerable captain of police who is the boys' father.

At times, I thought Gray was trying to create his own version of the great New York cop film *Prince of the City* (1979) made by Sidney Lumet, but I have to admit he falls short of that goal.

(*The film is rated "R," 117 mins.*)

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