

Gone Baby Gone

Actor Ben Affleck has had some hard knocks (and bad roles) in the last few years, but with his new film *Gone Baby Gone* he is concentrating on directing for the first time and pulls off a tight, decent crime story.

The film takes place in Boston, where local boy and private investigator Patrick (Casey Affleck, Ben's brother), along with his girlfriend Angie (Michele Monaghan), are asked to look into the disappearance of a four-year-old girl. The case is brought by the girl's aunt (Amy Madigan), because the irresponsible single mother (Amy Ryan) couldn't care less, and the cops involved, a top officer played by Morgan Freeman and a tightly-wound detective played by Ed Harris, seem overwrought.

The police investigation founders, and it turns out that Patrick is best able to tease out elements of the kidnapping because he's from the neighborhood. That neighborhood is the same as that in *Mystic River*, not surprising since the screenplay—co-written by Affleck—is based on a novel by Dennis Lehane, who also penned the earlier work.

Director Affleck gets his raw Boston mostly right, both in its harsh underworld and its floundering underclass, and his actors mostly reward him. Brother Casey, as the baby-faced, squeaky-voice PI, shows grit and smarts and is most believable as the denizen of this Boston locality, itself painted very effectively. The film's icons, Freeman and Harris, have their moments, but they also run up against some incongruous plot twists that weaken the finale. Most memorable, very memorable, among the supporting roles is Amy Ryan, portraying to a "T" the classic good-time party girl who was never made for motherhood. This is naturalistic acting of a high order.

The movie beautifully avoids an easy happy ending, remaining consistent—to the end—with the nature of its characters (*"Gone Baby Gone"* is rated "R" for violence and language.)

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