

Sucker Punch

A Hong Kong bullet ballet with Hollywood gloss set on Britain's mean streets, **WELCOME TO THE PUNCH**, Eran Creevy's unexpected follow-up to **Shifty**, is a rare example of UK action cinema successfully living up to the Hollywood standard whilst setting its own says Timothy E. RAW, who also interviews writer-director Evan Creevy about the film.

A Hong Kong bullet ballet for Britain's mean streets, the urban grit of Eran Creevy's **Welcome to the Punch** goes down easy thanks to Ed Wild's cinematography, buffing and waxing Canary Wharf's skyscrapers till they gleam, a slick sheen of Hollywood gloss evident even in the shadows of the docklands. Shifting away from the micro-budget miserablism of **Shifty**, Creevy's visually confident follow-up, is an LA night in London that looks every inch the blockbuster.

A kinetic opening chase sequence finds obsessed detective Max Lewinsky (James McAvoy) hot on the trail of master criminal Jacob Sternwood (Mark Strong). After taking a bullet to the knee and letting him escape, Max is left disabled and disillusioned, haunted by the crim he couldn't cuff. Years later, Sternwood is suddenly forced out of hiding when his son is hospitalized following a botched heist. Given a second chance of revenge and redemption, Max will stop at nothing to finally put his old nemesis behind bars.



If the film takes liberal influences from the neo-noir stylings of Michael Mann and the hyper visual framing of Tony Scott (brother Ridley is executive producer), the twisty-turny plot of two lions on opposing side of the law finds inspiration in Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's **Infernal Affairs** trilogy. The set-up may be simple but the overcomplicated plotting tends to smother the characters. As Max zeroes in on Sternwood, they're caught up in a conspiracy reaching all the way up to the top brass of Scotland Yard. Whisperings of thinly sketched names and barely glimpsed faces fail to register, the growing mutual respect between cop and robber more compelling than the machinations of corruption, clumsily recapped at gunpoint during the final showdown.

All credit to Creevy for attempting to bring intrigue and depth to an otherwise nuts 'n' bolts actioner, but the breathless pace often makes it hard to appreciate his ambitiously convoluted network of ornery alliances.

A disrespected loner within his department, scraggly bearded James McAvoy is all self-loathing and sunken-eyed intensity as Max. Consumed by his vendetta, he chases Sternwood through permanently gritted teeth. Proportionally ill-fitted to be an action hero, McAvoy mans up more convincingly than he did in Timur Bekmambetov's **Wanted** with a tough nut East End accent and all the right pistol poses, though his fight scenes with the physically imposing Mark Strong strain credibility. Strong can do pared-down no-nonsense hard men in his sleep and he excels here, ruthless yet ruminative, a fully formed not-so-bad guy, in it for the love of his son. As Max's partner, Andrea Riseborough is perhaps a touch too ethereal to play a beat copper and in a weirdly truncated role, she's also victim to the attendant misogyny of this kind of boy's own gun waving. It's a shame, as Riseborough and McAvoy have definite chemistry and one wonders if there wasn't an earlier cut featuring more scenes of their not entirely professional relationship.



Welcome to the Punch

UK / USA 2013

100 mins

director

Eran Creevy

producers

Rory Aitken

Brian

Kavanaugh-Jones

Ben Pugh

screenplay

Eran Creevy

cinematography

Ed Wild

editing

Chris Gill

music

Harry Escott

production design

Crispian Sallis

starring

James McAvoy

Mark Strong

David Morrissey

Andrea Riseborough

Jason Flemyng

Peter Mullan

Daniel Mays

Johnny Harris

distributor

Momentum Pictures

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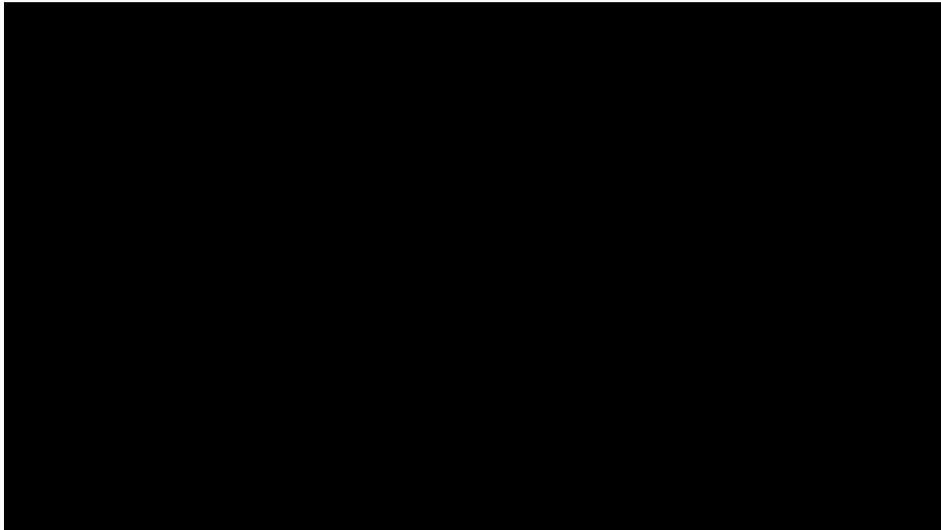
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While **Punch** doesn't shy away from dispensing untold rounds of ammunition, it's not the kind of Saturday night bullet banger that requires switching your brain off either. Rather than mindlessly emulating the slow motion poetic violence of John Woo, Creevy playfully sends it up, staging a pivotal shoot out amidst the chintz and china clutter of an old nan's home. A filmmaker clearly in love with genre and wanting to take it new places, this is a rare example of UK action cinema successfully living up to the Hollywood standard whilst setting its own. With bigger production values, superior action sequences – and crucially – much better actors than scores of domestic run of the mill guns n' geezers flicks, we're curious to see if **Punch** can give it some wallop internationally when it opens soon in many of the major foreign markets.

*For our US readers, **Welcome to the Punch** is released March 27th via IFC.*

In a bumper 25 minute interview with Timothy E.RAW, writer-director Eran Creevy talks about the new wave of UK action cinema, the importance of great sound design in an action film, working with Ridley Scott and much, much more.

The video has been optimised to be watched full-screen at 720p, which can be accessed in the toolbar below the video. Due to its length, the video has been split into two parts, but joined to play continuously as a playlist. There may be a brief pause while the second video loads.



My thanks to David Cummins and Ben Gardiner at Substance PR, Kate Willoughby at eOne Momentum for providing clips and Eran Creevy for being so generous with his time.