

# Broken City (2012)

Rated R. Our ratings: V -6; L -6; S/N -1. Running time: 1 hour 48 min.

*Their hands are skilled to do evil;  
the official and the judge ask for a bribe,  
and the powerful dictate what they desire;  
thus they pervert justice.\**

*4 The best of them is like a brier,  
the most upright of them a thorn hedge.  
Micah 6:3-4*

This tale of big city political corruption is the first film directed by Allen Hughes without his brother Albert. (The script by Brian Tucker seems a bit muddled at times, thanks to a very good cast, the film never lags in keeping our attention.) The Mayor tells Billy he has to remove him from the police force because of a shooting. (The two of us gave us Menace II Society and Dead Presidents.) Although the script by Brian Tucker seems a bit muddled at times, thanks to a very good cast, the film never lags in keeping our attention.

2012 20th Century Fox

Seven years after being removed from the NYPD Billy Taggart (Mark Wahlberg) for shooting a teenager, Mayor Hostetler (Russell Crowe) calls him to his office and asks him to find out with whom his wife Cathleen (Catherine Zeta-Jones) is sleeping. It's a job Billy cannot afford to refuse—\$25 K down, and \$25 K when the photos are delivered to the Mayor. From what we have seen of Billy's private detective agency he has barely been keeping his head above water, his lovely secretary Katy Bradshaw (Alona Tal) warding off bill collectors while Billy tries to shake down clients refusing to pay him.

Billy has been on the wagon all those years for the sake of his wife Natalie Barrow (Natalie Martinez), whose first move

is about to premiere. Billy is not comfortable tagging along to the gala opening and the following reception, which will require lots of small talk. He is even more uncomfortable when the film turns out to be a soft porn affair, and it appears that Natalie and her leading man had been more than just colleagues.

Hostetler is in a close race for re-election, his opponent being the reform-minded City Councilman Jack Valliant (Barry Pepper), the latter accusing the Mayor of sellin a city-owned housing project for far less than it's worth. We suppose that the Mayor wants to discover first the details of his wife's infidelity so as to be ready for it when reporters pick up on it. With the help of Katy, Billy manages to follow Cathleen through the city and out to a seaside residence where he photographs her with a man. The man turns out to be Paul Andrews (Kyle Chandler) the manager of Jack Valliant's campaign. Matters soon spin out of control, with Billy striving to do the right thing, even if it proves costly for himself. Along the way we gradually discover why Billy shot the teenager and also that he has a tie with the housing project that the Mayor is so interested in selling.

Although engrossing, the film is not up to the standards of Hugh's other films, the plot a bit contrived. Those wanting to see a film that really explore urban politics should watch he classic *The Last Hurrah*, *City of Hope*, or *City Hall*. Still, when Billy is faced with a difficult decision at the end, one that could mean his ruin, I wanted to cheer him on.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1. What did you think of he Mayor in the early part of the film? At what point did you begin to doubt him?
2. In the mayoral debate, who has the facts on hs side, Mayor Hostetler, or Jack Valliant? And yet who apparently wins the

debate? How is this another example of style and surface appearance over substance? What examples of this have you seen in real life politics?

3. How does Billy learn that appearances can be deceiving? What was Cathleen Hostetler actually engaged in?

4. What do you think of Billy's dilemma when the Mayor turns the tables on him? What do you think you would have done in his place?

5. How is Billy's act at the end a "taking up of the cross" ?