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MOVIE REVIEW

The Fighter (2010)

Reviewed by [Owen Gleiberman](#) | Dec 24, 2010

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EW's GRADE

A-

DETAILS
 Release Date: Dec 10, 2010;
 With: [Christian Bale](#) and [Mark Wahlberg](#)

In the films of recent years that have taken place in and around Boston, the location isn't just a setting, a row-house look, or an occasion for showy *pahk the cah* accents. It's a state of mind. And in no recent movie has that state of mind been more colorful, more blood-tie pungent, more *tribal* than it is in **The Fighter**. A true-life rise-of-the-underdog boxing saga, directed with volatile handheld immediacy by David O. Russell (*Three Kings*), it's set in Lowell, Mass., the working-class Beantown satellite city that, if anything, incarnates the proudly parochial, macho Irish Catholic essence of Boston more purely than Boston does.

The central figure, Micky Ward (Mark Wahlberg), is an up-and-coming welterweight who is being groomed to become the next "pride of Lowell." The original pride of Lowell is his older half brother, Dicky Eklund (Christian Bale), a local boxing legend-turned-layabout who cemented his 15 minutes of glory back in the '80s when he knocked down Sugar Ray Leonard in the middle of a headline bout. But did he really knock him down, or did Sugar Ray just trip? That very confusion is presented as the epitome of Lowell, a city of tough, bruised underdog egos who are forever fighting for



Image credit: Jojo Whilden
BROTHER BOTHER Mark Wahlberg and Christian Bale seek glory in *The Fighter*

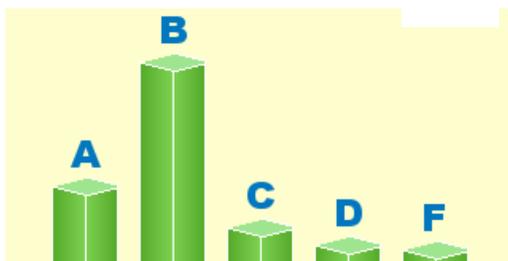
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Critical Mass
 How other reviewers grade this film **94** REVIEWS



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their status. When Micky, muscular and ambitious, a little shy but determined, goes down to the gym to spar with his retired bro, who has been training him for this moment ever since Micky was a kid, he seems to have everything going for him. In reality, though, he has everything hanging over him: the mythical status of his brother; the expectations of his feisty, clinging family — his domineering manager mother, Alice (Melissa Leo), and half a dozen frowzy, big-haired sisters; and the mystique of Lowell itself. To complicate matters, Dicky, once a hero, has devolved into a fractious, motormouthed crack addict who hides his addiction behind a brashness that's a half step from craziness. He comes on as Micky's ally but may, in fact, be his greatest liability. Can Micky cut him loose to become the champion he was meant to be?

That's the question that drives *The Fighter*, and part of what makes the movie such a satisfying, emotionally rounded tale of pugilistic passion *and* family psychodrama is that the answer isn't as simple as it looks. Wahlberg, doing his soft-spoken/explosive sensitive-bruiser thing, is perfect as the young man who must consider dropping his dysfunctional clan to triumph in the ring. And Bale, cadaverous and google-eyed, with a jack-o'-lantern grin and an energy so manic it borders on the obscene, finally takes the compulsion toward Method eccentricity that's been driving him for close to a decade and makes it pay off. His Dicky is that rare thing: a wing nut with soul and a touch of tragedy, too. Melissa Leo, in a glue-spray bouffant, is vital as the kind of boxing-world stage mother who could kill a kid with love, and Amy Adams, as the bartender who becomes Micky's girlfriend, has a spot-on tough-chick allure. There's a certain predictability to *The Fighter*, yet that's part of the appeal of the fight genre. This one, as thoughtful as it is rousing, scores a TKO. **A-**

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m1 | Wed 12/8/10 04:26 PM

The entire cast looks amazing. Looking forward!!!

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Monday, December 27th



'True Grit'

The Coen brothers lassoed Matt Damon and Jeff Bridges to star in this Western about a teenage girl (newcomer Hailee Steinfeld) on a mission to avenge her dead father.

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ziggy | Wed 12/8/10 04:38 PM

Great, thorough review. Thanks! I will definitely be seeing this.

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oscar | Wed 12/8/10 04:51 PM

I was hoping for a great review because I really want to see this and seriously Mark Wahlberg can use a hit.

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JLC | Wed 12/8/10 05:05 PM

I must be missing something. "Up-and-coming" welterweight Micky (Wahlberg) is 39 years old. His "older half brother Dicky" (Bale) is 36.

I could get over the disparity in ages, but up-and-coming boxers aren't pushing 40. They had better be really good to get over that suspension of disbelief problem.

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gb | Wed 12/8/10 05:55 PM

my boy bo clearly from south boston trained wahlberg for this movie. he plays a police office....a muscular one...lol. if u watch the fighter preview....christian bale punches him in the face.

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aol@aol.com | Wed 12/8/10 06:16 PM

Sounds like "Invincible II". Pass.

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DTO | Wed 12/8/10 08:04 PM

This is the movie I've been waiting for months to see since I saw a preview for it when I saw THE TOWN, and I just found out that it's not opening wide until NEXT week. Oh well. I wasn't in that big a hurry to see TRON anyway. It looked from the trailer like it would either be a new classic or totally cornball, so I'm very glad the review is good. Wahlberg can be very good, and Bale is a very good actor who should have an Oscar someday, but BATMAN and AMERICAN PSYCHO aren't exactly cuddly characters.

[Add reply](#)

octopus | Thu 12/9/10 01:21 AM

Love it! Perfect response to a stupid comment.

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Jeff | Thu 12/9/10 07:46 AM

...um, not only did Dickie Eklund NOT knock down Ray Leonard, but it was NOT a title fight. Ray was an up and coming future great and Dickie was a local brawler lucky to get the fight. Dickie was floored by Ray's punches 3 times and soundly thrashed. losing a decision. Dickie did trip/push Ray down late in the fight (NOT a knockdown) and while Ray was on the mat, Dickie did the singularly most DISRESPECTFUL thing a fighter can do to another fighter, he purposefully stepped OVER the body of his downed opponent, showing no class whatsoever!

[Read replies \(2\)](#) [Add reply](#)

Predictable? | Thu 12/9/10 10:06 AM

Kind of cracks me up that the reviewer called this movie "predictable." It's based on a real story. I should hope that it would be predictable.

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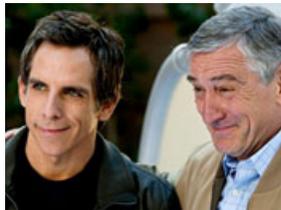
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