

Gangster gunning for Oscar glory

Daniel Stewart thinks there's plenty to Crowe about Ridley Scott's new movie.

December for a lot of people is when the dreaded colds, flu and fevers begin to arise as winter sets in. With the 80th Academy Awards coming up in February and the nominations in January, Oscar fever is beginning to rear its glamorous head too and one film to be released that might show symptoms is Ridley Scott's *American Gangster*.

Starring Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe, two of today's acting heavyweights who have both already won the little golden man. The film tells the story of Frank Lucas, (Washington), who went from being the quiet driver of one of New York's leading crime bosses, to building his own empire by ruling the city's drug trade.

Russell Crowe plays Richie Roberts, the type of police detective which the phrase, "an honest cop" was coined for. When Richie finds a bag of one million unmarked dollars, he turns the money in, demonstrating how whiter than white this character truly is. Being close to what actually happens on the streets of New York he can tell the power has shifted from the established mafia families.

Based on a true story being set with the backdrop of gritty 70s New York, gives this movie more of an edge of attitude. Both of the film's stars are on fine form. Washington acquired Lucas' Southern accent, and Crowe practiced to match Roberts's manner of speaking and body language, requesting tape recordings of Roberts to assist in his preparation. The film also stars another Oscar winner Cuba Gooding Jr as a rival drug kingpin. This is Russell Crowe's third movie with Ridley Scott after *Gladiator* and *A Good Year*. It is also Russell's second movie with Denzel Washington after 1995's *Virtuosity*.

Another factor that makes this movie appealing is the real-life roles have been reversed. Denzel Washington, one of the Hollywood's most charismatic stars, is seen as one of the movie industry's most well-respected stars and an all-round nice guy. Though when he does bad he does it well. Anyone who has seen *Training Day* will know this and how "King Kong ain't got nothing on him" as he so politely put it. Russell Crowe playing a straight-lace cop will be interesting since his last memorable performance in real life was tattooing a telephone to some poor hotel receptionist's head.

Ridley Scott might well be in contention for best director award which he has never won, considering he has made classics, such as *Alien* and *Gladiator*. The only thing that could hinder the movie's chances is that it has to follow up to last year's big mob winner, *The Departed*. The movie takes the best elements of movies such as *Godfather* and *Scarface* without seeming like a cheap rip off. With stiff competition from *Atonement* and *Michael Clayton*, the Oscars are already heating up and don't be surprised if Russell or Denzel add another statuette to their mantelpieces.

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This story was written by Daniel Stewart, 19, from Headliners in Belfast

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