

Harrigan

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Vince Woods
Certificate 15 97m 26s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Since the BBC broadcast *Life on Mars* in January 2006, the 1970s-set British crime thriller has become all but ubiquitous. David Peace's *Red Riding* was filmed in 2009, Ian Merrick's long-forgotten *The Black Panther* (1977) was disinterred in 2012, and *The Sweeney* was remade in the same year, alongside the reissuing of the original series on Blu-ray, offering a fetishistically tactile experience compared with the original ITV broadcasts.

So if Vince Woods's feature debut seems to be cynically clambering on to an already overloaded bandwagon, that's understandable but also a little unfair. Former detective Arthur McKenzie's script was actually written in the mid-1990s, based on his experiences in Newcastle upon Tyne and Hong Kong. McKenzie was on set to ensure that the period details were spot-on – particularly the logistical challenges of police work at a time (January 1974) of widespread social unrest, regular power cuts and no more sophisticated technology than a telephone and a police radio. Commendably, Woods resists milking easy laughs from the decade's surface trappings – so much so that occasional nudge-nudge moments (a domestic abuser burning his victim's bra, the kung-fu quips that greet Harrigan's colleague Lau) stick out like sore thumbs. Another cliché, though, is easier to excuse: there really are few things scarier than a jolly clown mask, especially when worn by a one-eyed psychopath.

The story of tough cop Barry Harrigan returning to his grim-up-north former patch to challenge crooks, hidebound colleagues and corrupt local politicians is decidedly familiar, and there are no real narrative surprises. However, Woods keeps it compulsively watchable thanks to well-chosen locations, James McAleer's Scope camerawork and a keen awareness of the situation's visual and dramatic potential. The police interrogation room is sometimes necessarily lit by oil lamps, the flickering shadows lending a decidedly gothic ambience that chimes well with the use



Street cleaner: Stephen Tompkinson

of *Treasure Island*-style 'black spot' messages later on. When Harrigan paints the outside of his newly reopened section house matt black, it becomes a forbiddingly monolithic fortress, with 'POLICE STATION OPEN' graffitied in blood-red letters (Woods admits that this was a conscious homage to Clint Eastwood's *High Plains Drifter*).

Stephen Tompkinson is wholly convincing as the greying, outwardly hard-as-nails Harrigan (beset by PTSD-style flashbacks to a traumatic time in Hong Kong), whose premature loss of his wife and daughter, to whom he still writes emotional letters, has made him particularly protective towards the other women in his life, such as his much abused colleague Bridie or burglary/rape victim Vicky – naturally, Harrigan's colleagues are crude sexists to a man. His sensitive resolution of a hostage situation involving seven-foot Ronnie (former basketball player Ian Whyte) pays dividends in the siege-driven climax. If the latter shamelessly steals from *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), John Carpenter in turn borrowed from *Rio Bravo* (1959), and it's not hard to imagine *Harrigan* being convincingly relocated to a Wyoming frontier town, lock, stock and still-smoking barrel. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Kirsty Bell
Vince Woods
Written by
Arthur McKenzie
Created by Arthur
McKenzie
Director of
Photography
James McAleer
Editor
Michael Pentney
Production Designer

Sarah Beaman

Original Score
Composed by
James Edward Barker
Sound Recordist
Stuart Wright
Costume Designer
Carmille Benda

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Production
Companies
Co-financed by Rivers

Capital Finance on
behalf of the Finance
for Business North
East Angel Fund
Executive Producers
Paul Rogers
Stephen Tompkinson
Robbie Elliott
Rivers Capital Limited
Mary Woods

Cast

Stephen
Tompkinson
Detective Sergeant
Barry Harrigan
Gillian Kearney
Bridie Wheland
Ronnie Fox
Cole
Darren Morfitt
Swift
Mark Stobart
Larson

Amy Manson
Vicky Frizzell
Maurice Reeves
Billy
Bill Fellows
Moss
Jamie Cho
Lau
Ian Whyte
Ronnie
John Bowler
Vincent Jenkins

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Tall Tree Distribution
Limited/High Fliers
Distribution

8,769 ft +0 frames

Northern England, January 1974. Detective Sergeant Barry Harrigan returns home after a Hong Kong secondment, and hears from his colleagues Billy (retired) and Frankie that the place has become a hell-hole, with Monkshire district residents tormented by Dunstan, Cole and their henchmen. After Dunstan threatens single mother Vicky and her flat is burgled by Cole's teenage sons, Harrigan promises a wholesale clean-up, despite his superior Larson's budget-driven objections. Cole and Dunstan order petty criminal Whopper to burgle local councillor Vince Jenkins, but he interrupts a Masonic meeting and is beaten up prior to his arrest. Dunstan rapes Vicky within earshot of her son Jason. When the hitherto gentle giant Ronnie kidnaps his baby son from his mother-

in-law and hides out in a church threatening to kill them both, Harrigan negotiates a solution. Jason is accidentally knocked down and killed by Cole's sons. Harrigan gives Vicky a guard dog. Cole and Dunstan kill Whopper. Billy's house is burgled, and he attacks Cole's sons before their arrest. Cole balls them, and kills Billy. Larson promises to support Harrigan if he can find more witnesses and evidence. The Monkshire section house is reopened, and Cole is arrested and held there. It is swiftly besieged by Dunstan's mob. Dunstan captures Harrigan's colleague Moss and threatens him with Billy's shotgun. Gambling that it's still loaded with blanks, Harrigan overpowers Dunstan, with the help of last-minute arrivals Ronnie, Vicky and her dog. Harrigan visits his wife and daughter's grave.