Harrigan

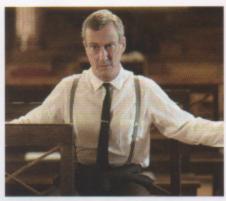
United Kingdom 2013 Director: Vince Woods Certificate 15 97m 26s

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. 6

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Kirsty Bell Vince Woods Written by Arthur McKerdie Created by Arthur McKerdie Director of Photography James McNieer Editor Michael Pentney Production Designer Sarah Beaman Original Score Composed by James Edward Barker Sound Recordist Stuart Wright Costume Designer Camille Benda

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Stephen Tompkinson Detective Sergeant Barry Harrigan Gillian Kearney Bridie Wheland Romnie Fox Cole Darren Morfitt Swift Mark Stobbart

Cast

Arry Manson Vicky Frizzell Maurice Rolives Billy Bill Fellows Moss Jamie Cho Lau Ian Whyte

John Bowler

Vincent Jenkins

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor TallTree Distribution Limited/High Filers 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 beseiged 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.