

Blood: Film Review

10/11/2012 by Stephen Dalton

The Bottom Line

Crime and punishment in small-town England.

Cast

Paul Bettany, Stephen Graham, Brian Cox, Mark Strong, Ben Crompton

Director

Nick Murphy



TV cop drama remake stars Paul Bettany and Stephen Graham as fraternal detectives wrestling with morality and murder.

Fresh from its world premiere at the London Film Festival, this superior British crime thriller takes place in a shabby English seaside town that has seen better days, but with a plot that addresses much bigger questions of crime and punishment, masculinity and family loyalty. It is faithfully based on *Conviction*, an acclaimed six-part BBC miniseries first broadcast in 2004, with an all-new cast stepping into the same character roles.

Directed by small-screen veteran **Nick Murphy**, *Blood* inevitably feels a little televisual at times. Some subplots and characters from the BBC original have been dropped or compressed, leading to some unavoidable loss of dramatic texture. The female characters, particularly, have largely been reduced to background figures on the big screen. But the racy plot, coupled to a solid tag team of heavyweight alpha-male actors, suggest decent box office potential both at home and abroad.

Paul Bettany and **Stephen Graham** co-star as Joe and Chrissie Fairburn, fraternal detectives investigating the grisly murder of a 12-year-old girl. Spurred on by their father Lenny (**Brian Cox**), a retired cop given to retelling half-true stories about how he used to dish out rough justice to criminals back in the day, the brothers decide one night to visit their own brand of righteous vengeance on the chief suspect in the killing – the weasly, smirking ex-con Buleigh (**Ben Crompton**).

But when another more likely perpetrator is caught, Joe and Chrissie fear being exposed as brutal vigilantes with as shaky a grasp on professional ethics as their father Lenny, whose memories are increasingly clouded by his creeping dementia. The brothers desperately try to cover their tracks, to the point of investigating their own crime. But senior detective Seymour (**Mark Strong**) clearly has growing suspicions about his hot-headed colleagues.

Visually, the film looks as moody and gloomy as the plot, with a stylishly washed-out color palette of grainy browns and rainy-day grays. Most interior scenes take place inside large wood-paneled offices and ancient, rambling, cluttered houses. This calculated aesthetic feels oddly retro and anachronistic for a contemporary drama, with a faintly 1970s sense of moral decline mirrored in urban decay. If this noir-ish family saga were a

US remake, it might resemble one of **James Gray's** brooding Manhattan melodramas about battling brothers, or **Clint Eastwood's** morally murky *Mystic River*.

A few dramatic details fail to convince. The 41-year-old Bettany seems a little too youthful to play a world-weary family man with a teenage daughter, while he and Graham must be the most physically mismatched screen brothers since **Arnold Schwarzenegger** and **Danny De Vito** in *Twins*. For pedantic British viewers, the geographical incongruity between Londoner Bettany, Liverpoolian Graham and Scotsman Cox all struggling with wobbly variations on the same London-centric "Estuary English" accent may also grate, especially considering the unnamed red-brick urban locale is clearly in northern England – actually the Wirral peninsula between Liverpool and North Wales.

But leaving aside the odd clunky detail and clumsy mis-step, *Blood* is a superior thriller about justice and damnation, more interested in the tortured consciences of its police anti-heroes than in the villains they apprehend. Though hardly the most original premise, it is handsomely shot, excitingly paced, and full of meaty performances that elevate a pot-boiler plot into a timeless moral fable.

Venue: London Film Festival

Production companies: BBC Films, IM Global, Neal Street Productions, Quickfire Films, Red Production Company

Cast: Paul Bettany, Stephen Graham, Brian Cox, Mark Strong, Ben Crompton

Director: Nick Murphy

Writer: Bill Gallagher

Producers: Pippa Harris, Nick Laws, Nicola Shindler

Cinematography: George Richmond

Editor: Victoria Boydell

Music: Daniel Pemberton

Sales company: BBC Films

Rating TBC, 95 minutes