



The Brave One

Jodie Foster and Terrence Howard star in a film written by Bruce A. Taylor and Roderick Taylor and directed by Neil Jordan.

By Josef Woodard

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It was not much of a stretch to accept Kevin Bacon transforming from relatively mild-mannered everyman to violence-spewing vengeance-seeker in the recent revenge flick *Death Sentence*. With Jodie Foster, who takes that same transformative trip in *The Brave One*, the effect is more startling, partly because her role as the aggrieved lover and victim who turns into a vigilante killing machine is more plausible, and partly because Foster gives the role such a scary lucidity. Her acting alone is worth the price of admission to a film which strives for depth and meaning, but too often finds itself bogged down by clichés.

And then there is the fact that Foster's grimly determined femme fatale is a she, and when she wastes bad guys we're inspired to feel that righteous adrenaline rush in a different way than usual.

From the beginning, the film's comparisons to *Taxi Driver* materialize. Foster plays a tough, ruminating radio personality whose opening monologue about life in NYC reminds us of Travis Bickle's (Robert De Niro) internalized rants. Composer Dario Marianelli's score often aspires to the elegant orchestral brooding of *Taxi Driver*, and there's even a scene in which a young prostitute is rescued from ruin. In Scorsese's urban classic, the teenaged Foster played the inspiration for the morality-warrior Bickle. It's not always a flattering point of reference, given that Scorsese found aesthetic richness and texture on the mean streets, whereas here, director Neil Jordan can't seem to find the artful subtext in the material.

Still, *The Brave One* has a lot going for it. At its best, it's an intriguingly cyclical tale in which a pursuer (Terrence Howard) tracks a vigilante who, in turn, is on the trail of her elusive quarry, as well as her pursuer. It's a funny mirror inversion game in the script's narrative plotting, engaging us on an intellectual level. That is, when we're not being programmed to cheer on the human waste removal project at the heart of this and all other revenge flicks.