



## Nick Prescott's Reviews

### **The Brave One**

Talent: Jodie Foster, Terrence Howard, Naveen Andrews, Mary Steenburgen, Nicky Katt, Jane Adams.

Director: Neil Jordan

Duration: 118 minutes

Classification: MA

We rate it: 2 stars.

There's arguably no film more disappointing than one that demonstrates just how intelligent and well made it can be, only to betray that intelligence by selling out to lowest-common-denominator elements in the end. *The Brave One* is, sadly, just such a film; it begins evocatively and develops intelligently, only to end preposterously. So near, as they say, and yet so far.

Jodie Foster (who, even here, is a joy to watch) plays Erica Bain, a New York radio artist whose life is as happy as could be imagined. She's secure in her work, loves the city in which she lives, and is deeply in love with the man whom she's soon to marry. Horrifying events intrude, however, when the two lovers go out one evening to walk their dog; they're set upon by a trio of vicious thugs who savagely beat them and leave them for dead. Bain wakes up in hospital three weeks later, only to discover that her fiancée has died of the injuries he sustained in the attack. Devastated and traumatised, Bain retreats to her apartment and buries herself in her work – but finds herself coming apart at the seams. Unable to shake the abiding terror the attack and bereavement have instilled in her, she decides to arm herself. She visits a shady gun store, buys a weapon off the books, and it's at that point that ideas of vengeance begin to obsess her.

Neil Jordan, a director who has shown himself capable of true brilliance in the past, has here double-crossed his audience terribly, by inviting it into an intelligent, provocative thriller and developing that thriller in intriguing, suspenseful and compelling fashion, only to undermine all of that intelligence and intrigue by constructing the most vacuous and hateful ending one could have imagined. The first three-quarters of this film is filled with palpable suspense, and generates immense sympathy for a woman who has been brutalised and damaged, and who struggles convincingly with her own harrowing, soul-destroying need for revenge. We see in Foster's face this horrifying dilemma as it develops in dark and twisted ways; as Bain becomes a Travis-Bickle-like creature of the night, prowling New York's dangerous places and gunning down pimps, robbers and muggers, we are made to feel her soul

disappearing under a layer of corrosive tarnish; we are made to lament the loss of the character's innocence. There's a scene near the conclusion where she tearfully presents herself at a police station, ready to turn herself in, only to be confronted by stifling bureaucracy and apathy; she leaves, unseen, too dispirited even to admit her own guilt. With powerful scenes like this peppering the movie, its vapid shoot-'em-up conclusion is well nigh unforgivable.

It's hard to reconcile the skill with which *The Brave One* has been made with its morally bankrupt final reel. There are dozens of recent films one could think of that have worn their violent hearts on their sleeves, and have succeeded on their own terms as a result. What's truly distasteful about Jordan's film is the fact that its innate cleverness has been channelled towards a conclusion that argues that vigilantism is what really smart people should help each other achieve. Give me *Die Hard* any day; action films like that play their own moral tales on a different level, and they're a lot more honest than *The Brave One* ever is.

Nick Prescott