

## ‘Red Riding Trilogy’ Simultaneously Captivates, Infuriates

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 16, 2010 - 11:36am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Much ink has been spilled about how HBO is at the forefront of made-for-TV filmmaking in the world, a fact already demonstrated this year by the brilliant biopic “Temple Grandin” and the stellar WWII mini-series, “The Pacific.” Yet Britain’s Channel 4 deserves just as much attention and praise for producing the “Red Riding” trilogy, which has been routinely compared to HBO’s classic series, “The Wire.”

“Red Riding” originally aired in the U.K. last March, and has been currently playing across America in a limited theatrical release. With their convoluted plotting, brutal intensity, and combined running time of nearly five hours, these three crime thrillers are best seen separately. But moviegoers with the ability to schedule three trips to the theater are well advised to do so, since each “Red Riding” installment is cinematically lensed for a big-screen canvas.



Red Riding 1974

Photo credit: IFC Films

The trilogy is based on a quartet of novels by David Peace, which delved into the complex web of corruption surrounding the Yorkshire Ripper case in the 1970s and 80s. All three films are written by Tony Grisoni, who collaborated with director Terry Gilliam on two of his most divisive pictures, “Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas” and “Tideland.” For the most part, his adaptation is splendid at capturing the various protagonists’ paranoia as they search for a truth that often seems as elusive as Don Quixote’s “impossible dream” (oddly enough, Grisoni’s next project is Gilliam’s “The Man Who Killed Don Quixote”).

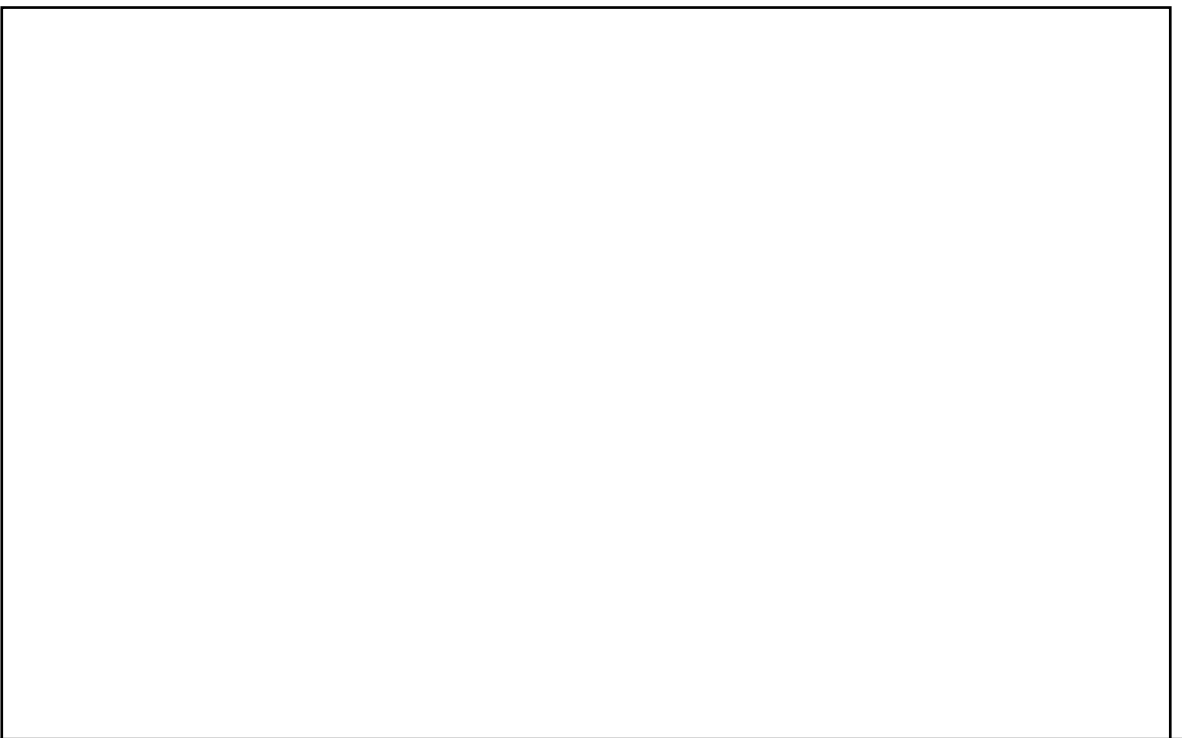


Red Riding Trilogy  
Photo credit: IFC Films

There are times when it seems like everyone on the West Yorkshire police force is harboring a terrible secret. The professional guise of their uniforms barely conceal the animalistic nature lurking within their power-hungry, money-grubbing souls, causing them to resemble wolves capable of devouring any young innocent. As in David Fincher’s “Zodiac,” the identity of the killer in “Red Riding” almost seems irrelevant in light of the head-swirling corruption that pervades the society in which he inhabits. A line assured to resonate in viewers’ heads is the repeated proclamation, “This is the North, where we do what we want!” The three films may vary in style, but the brooding tone remains consistent throughout.

The first part, directed by Julian Jarrold (“Brideshead Revisted”), is a riveting curtain-raiser, and gradually resembles an escalating nightmare. It takes place in 1974 and centers on a young Yorkshire Post journalist, Ed Dunford (the superb Andrew Garfield), who investigates the unsolved murder of three missing girls. He encounters several shady characters, including the businessman, John Dawson (Sean Bean), that bribed the local police so he could build a mall on land inhabited by nomads, whose community he freely torches.

One of the girls’ bodies is found on the property, with swan wings stitched to her back. As Dunford becomes drawn into an affair with a missing victims’ mother (an utterly heartbreaking Rebecca Hall), he enters an underworld from which few survivors ever return. The 16mm cinematography by Ron Hardy (“Boy A”) is often elegantly composed, allowing the reds to pop out in every frame, while Adrian Johnston’s mournful guitar music adds considerably to the mounting tension.





Red Riding 1980  
Photo credit: IFC Films

What makes the next installment a slight improvement is the tighter, tauter pacing maintained by director James Marsh ("Man on Wire"), who elicits some of the best performances from the sprawling ensemble. His chapter is set in 1980, as officer Pete Hunter (Paddy Considine) is brought in to assess the Ripper investigation, much to the chagrin of police chief Bill Molloy (Warren Clarke) and decidedly unstable cop Bob Craven (Sean Harris). Structurally, this film is no different from the previous one, save for the fact that it is set almost entirely within the decadent, profoundly hostile world of the West Yorkshire police. Cinematographer Igor Martinovic shoots on 35 mm film, while casting everything in steely blues and grays. The repeat appearance of two key characters generates much intrigue, and keeps expectations high for the final chapter.

Unfortunately, the third film is the most problematic of the bunch, though in some ways, it's also the most fascinating. Director Anand Tucker ("Hilary and Jackie") has the toughest task of the three filmmakers, since his story lacks a strong central protagonist, and consists largely of plot twists heaped upon plot revelations.

The viewer is asked to suddenly sympathize with one of the presumed villains, Maurice Jobson (an excellent David Morrissey), who begins to have a crisis of conscience, just as portly public solicitor John Piggott (Mark Addy) begins sniffing about the case, circa 1983. David Higgs's cinematography utilizes a Red One digital camera that brings the images added clarity and a conspicuous lack of film grains, but the multi-layered story is more confusing than ever. Thankfully, plot threads do start to come together toward the end, leading to a somewhat satisfying conclusion. There's a climactic shot set in a feather-strewn pigeon shed that's as poetic and unforgettable as the opening image of the girl with the stitched-on wings.

The "Red Riding" trilogy is not a masterpiece on par with "The Wire," but it is still a hell of a good thriller, guaranteed to get your blood pumping and your mind racing. It proves that HBO does not have a monopoly on great small screen filmmaking. Either catch it in theaters, or wait for it to arrive on Netflix. Just don't wait until the proposed American remake comes out...or worse, the inevitable TV spin-off, "CSI: Yorkshire."

*'The Red Riding Trilogy' stars Andrew Garfield, Paddy Considine, David Morrissey, Mark Addy, Peter Mullan, Warren Clarke, Jim Carter, Sean Harris, Maxine Peake, Robert Sheehan, Rebecca Hall, Eddie Marsan and Sean Bean. It was written by Tony Grisoni and directed by Julian Jarrold, James Marsh and Anand Tucker. It opened on March 12th at the Music Box. It is rated R.*



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