

## Brighton Rock

The novelist Graham Greene was a man of his time, and he studied, appreciated, and lamented the new art form of his time: the movies. For heavens sakes, the fellow even wrote movie reviews in the late 1930's-early 1940's! Greene was also among those novelists most often translated to the screen, and he contributed some original screenplays himself. His vision is on screen anew in the latest adaptation of his 1938 novel "Brighton Rock." (it was earlier made into a 1947 English film classic, with Richard Attenborough in the lead and Greene writing the screenplay).

This is a dark and chilling crime story (one of what Greene called his "entertainments") and as crafted by writer/director Rowan Joffe and his solid cast, this latest version mostly delivers.

The story takes place in the famous seaside resort of Brighton and turns on the disturbing character of Pinkie Brown (Sam Riley), an ambitious young tough who belongs to one of the city's sleazier gangs. When his leader is killed by rival Fred (Sean Harris), Pinkie proves himself by taking brutal revenge, clubbing Fred to death with rocks. A young, naïve waitress at a resort hotel, Rose (Andrea Riseborough), inadvertently comes upon evidence that Pinkie is a killer, and he is forced into a feigned romance with her to keep her quiet.

Rose's jaded boss Ida Arnold (Helen Mirren) is a friend of Fred and comes to believe that Pinkie is responsible for his death. Pinkie, both consolidating his power and protecting his flank, bumps off another gang colleague Spicer (Phil Davis) and charms Rose with promises to marry. He then more or less "buys" Rose from her dissipated father. Ida's dogged investigations lead her to confirm Pinkie's guilt, and she goes for assistance to the leader of Pinkie's rival, Colleoni (Andrew Serkis). Rose, even though she learns of Pinkie's crimes, is besotted with him, and he agrees to marry her, but not before expressing his private disgust. The noose eventually closes around him, however, in a rainy night climax.

("Brighton Rock," by the way, is the name for a stick candy sold in the town, and it plays a part in one of the murders. It also figures in Greene's novel in a line signaling the ineradicable character of the town and some of its people: "It's like those sticks of rock: bite it all the way down, you'll still read Brighton.")

The young talent in "Brighton Rock" makes this thriller work. Sam Riley ("Control") is all coiled menace as Pinkie, a grim charmer with cool black clothes and piercing eyes. He is a raw fatalist, a believing Catholic who believes most in his faith's vision of the Hell he is already living. His manipulation of the vulnerable Rose is particularly unsettling, especially when, in a Brighton wharf recording booth, he coldly recites to a microphone exactly what he thinks of his "girlfriend."

Andrea Riseborough ("Happy-Go-Lucky") is a new talent to watch, if this film is any indicator. She makes the deluded Rose as much resilient as pitiful, as much hopeful as pathetic. She seems utterly authentic as any young woman who has ever fallen for a charismatic figure, as any kid with a dead-end life who sees a way out, even if she is led by a monster. She is trying resolutely to become a grown-up, and how Riseborough traces her psyche is the miracle of her performance.

Significant featured roles are in the hands of real pros. Helen Mirren offers the right mix of seen-it-all worldliness (her past is suitably checkered) with potent indignation at her friends' death. John Hurt plays Ida's long-time hanger-on, Phil Corkery, a man trying to be dapper well past his use-by date but doing it with crinkled flair. Veteran character actor Phil Davis shows off just the right seedy chops as Spicer.

One change Joffe (making his directing debut here) made was to bring the story into the year 1964 and to, thus, introduce the then-current gang challenges between the Mods and the Rockers in England. To highlight this, he stages a major riot scene between these two gang forces as a backdrop to one of the movie's action sequences. Yet, frankly, this updating adds little or nothing to the picture, other than wardrobe and car changes. It adds very little to Greene's blighted Brighton.

By the way, the latter, Brighton and its well-known high wharf look terrific in the film, especially in the spangled night scenes, where the carnival-like, touristy animation of the docks contrasts so strikingly with the malevolence of Pinkie and his breed. (*The film is not rated, but it contains scenes of violence and threats of violence; it runs 111 min.*)