



IN BRUGES

Autumn
Season
2008

Martin McDonagh, UK/Belgium 1hr 47mins



Colin Farrell raises eyebrows, belly laughs and sympathy in Martin McDonagh's debut feature. Loneliness and atonement are familiar themes for the hit-man flick (See *The Matador*, *The Bourne Trilogy*), but Farrell's assured performance lifts this one above the routine, the consequences of his career choice pushing him fitfully towards an inevitable meltdown. Some might consider opting for high-calibre drama over whiz-bang action a risky venture, but McDonagh ensures that his film packs enough emotional ammunition to make it a sure-fire hit.

The film hits most of its targets dead on. Farrell's performance in particular is revelatory, and when his interplay with Gleeson's character is in the sights, the mix of comedy and pathos consistently find their mark. **BBC.co.uk/films**

Peter Bradshaw's Guardian review:

Here are four words I never thought I'd write, not since his career seemed to wilt with pure embarrassment under his blond wig and shorty tunic in Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, Colin Farrell is back. Despite appearing in films by some heavy-hitters (Malick, Mann, Allen) he'd been off-radar for a bit and the celeb-o-meter was cooling. It looked as if the great man might have to return from Hollywood like Napoleon from Moscow, with snow on his boots and egg on his face. He may have been growling and sulking in his trailer while the world's media swooned over James McAvoy. Who knows? But make no mistake: Farrell has brought his A-game to this cracking little comedy-noir written and directed by Martin McDonagh. He is absolutely superb: moody and funny, lethally sexy, sometimes heartbreakingly sad and vulnerable like a little boy. He radiates the star-quality that once made him the world's It Boy, and will do again. He and Brendan Gleeson, who is also excellent, play Ray and Ken, a couple of Dublin hitmen who have been ordered by their paymaster Harry (Ralph Fiennes) to lie low and await instructions - in Bruges. Their orders are simply to wander around and admire the lovely medieval architecture - in Bruges. Instead of a flashy hotel, they have been booked into one twin room in a chintzy B&B - in Bruges. For quite a lot of the time, the film shows these two moody tough guys having to mill aimlessly about, stupefied and exasperated beyond endurance by the simple, appalling fact that they are in Bruges. The city itself becomes a continuous, mute running gag, and as Ray and Ken snap at each other, McDonagh's whip-smart dialogue hints at Beckett, Tarantino, even Greene. It soon becomes clear that their presence in this epicentre of northern European dullness has something to do with an earlier, catastrophically botched job and a terrible anguish that Ray is carrying in his heart.

Martin McDonagh, an Oscar-winner for his short film *Six-Shooter* and already an accomplished and acclaimed stage dramatist with plays such as *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, makes it all look very easy. Just by resentfully mooching about, his leading males are hilarious, tense, scary. And when the eruptions come, they are stunningly plausible. Farrell's tension and paranoia finally uncoil when an American-sounding man complains about cigarette smoke coming from his table at a restaurant. The ensuing punch-up actually gives a clue as to why a screenwriter should want to set a film in Bruges. It's because Belgium is one of those rare countries where smoking is still not banned in public places. Soon, all hardboiled thrillers will be called things like *Gangs of Liege*, *To Live and Die in Antwerp* or *Sexual Perversity in Mons*.

Theatre audiences have long relished McDonagh's brilliant combinations of the bizarre, macabre and tragicomic and it is very exhilarating to see him transfer this talent to the screen, and provide lip-smackingly satisfying roles for his actors. When Ray and Ken finally conclude that Bruges is not a shithole, after all, but a lovely city, secluded and unspoilt because it is marooned in the shithole country of Belgium, this mournful epiphany is hilariously rude and yet strangely moving. *In Bruges* will be a huge awards-magnet, and soon the silverware will be hitting it with a clang. Farrell personally deserves all the plaudits. And for McDonagh, it is the beginning of a remarkable new career direction.