

# Siren

**Director:** Andrew Mandapat

**Writer:** Andrew Mandapat

**Producers:** Chris Lieber, Debra Mitchell

**Starring:** Gregory Pedemonte, Sarah Korda, Stephanie Lytle, John Mercer

**MPAA Rating:**NR

read my **spoiler disclaimer**

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written by **Anthony Selbitschka**

I have mixed emotions about Film Noir. Its style is intoxicatingly powerful and hip, but its nihilism often alienates me from the plot. Usually the stories are so devoid of any form of goodness that I find myself not caring about what happens to all the “bad guys” and double-crossers.

“Siren” is an independent, low-budget short film that pays homage to Film Noir, reaping the benefits from its genre’s style, but also suffering a bit from the genre’s insistence on darkness and seediness.

Writer/Director Andrew Mandapat has mastered Noir’s witty dialogue, punchy editing, and crafty camera angles as “Siren” is a success in all these elements—especially considering the limitations that come with low-budget filmmaking. Mandapat starts his film with the classically gruff narrative from his main character, “I did something wrong... once.” We see our anti-hero, Ned (Gregory Pedemonte) slouching in a chair, grasping at a fresh bullet-wound. Ned’s narration continues, telling us how he got in this pickle—and how the dead woman in the background

got hers too. The rest of the film is Ned's story of love, betrayal, double-crossing, and more betrayal and double-crossing that leads us back to his getting shot. Ned's tale involves two dames, a private dick, a bank robbery, some poison and gunshots, and lots of deception. I won't tell any details—so not to ruin the film—but I will say that the plot is efficient, tight, and it works well for the Noir tribute.

Where "Siren" shines is in its style. Shot entirely in black and white, "Siren" offers the harsh contrasts in picture to serve as a counterpart to the slippery, sly plot and theme. Mandapat also manages to use some nice trickery with framing and off-kilter camera angles while never crossing the line to the overt, obtrusive, "Hey! Look at me!" types of gimmickry. For example, during dialogue scenes we get a tight close up of Ned's mug—focusing on his furled brow and nervous reactions—while in the far background we see his partner, Charlie (Sarah Korda), doing most of the talking. We also get treated to nicely edited slow-mo images of cigarette smoke, shot glasses, and smoking guns. After Ned commits a crime we see him filmed against vertical bars of banister rods and window frames—perhaps suggesting becoming imprisoned by his crime. Not only is "Siren" a tribute to Noir, it actually adds some new stylistic tricks to enjoy.

As far as acting goes, well, you get what you pay for. The actors are all adequate, but they sometimes mis-deliver some of Mandapat's lines, putting emphasis on wrong words here and there (furious over getting thrown a few bills for payment, private eye Kanesworth (John A. Mercer) asks, "What *is* this?" instead of "What is *this*?" It's subtle, but noticeable.) The acting is like a good backup quarterback, it doesn't make any plays, but it doesn't throw the game either. These hiccups are noticeable, but again, considering the budget and independence of the film, wiggle-room must be given here.



The plot is written with great efficiency and wit. Every line is essential for advancing the plot and the dialogue is not only entertaining, but it also lets us in on the character's mindsets and motivations. Where the film peters out, though, is in its nihilistic theme. Again, I understand this is a feature of Film Noir, but when you have a bad guy killing a bad guy to double-cross another bad guy, by the end of the film I had a hard time

caring who got theirs. This is probably why Noir turned to the Private Eye—to offer some justice to offset the evil. Obviously, this is a personal preference and I think I am in the minority here, considering the success of the genre as a whole or more recently, “Pulp Fiction.” Overall, the film works well, but the lack of any characters to root for leaves the finale a bit flat.

According to the press sheet, “Siren” is an abbreviated version of a feature-length script while there are plans to produce the full-length version someday. I think that Mandapat has proven himself to be quite capable of making an original take on an old, beloved genre with superb writing and directing. I am excited to see what he can do with a feature-length script and a budget to match. For information, trailers, etc: [www.bajapossemovies.com](http://www.bajapossemovies.com)

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