



Harsh Times

David Ayer

USA, 2005
English

119 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Harsh Times LLC**
Executive Producer: **Christian Bale**
Producer: **Andrea Sperling, David Ayer**
Screenplay: **David Ayer**
Cinematographer: **Steve Mason**
Editor: **Conrad Buff**
Production Designer: **Devorah Herbert**
Sound: **Piero Mura, George Simpson**
Music: **Graeme Revell**
Principal Cast: **Christian Bale, Freddy Rodríguez, Eva Longoria**

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David Ayer's crackling, intense screenplay for *Training Day* signalled the arrival of a major new talent. After a decade of post-modern tinkering within American genre films, here was a work overwhelming in its authenticity and depth of characterization – and it still really popped as an action movie. *Harsh Times* sees Ayer reach the next level.

Eschewing Hollywood gloss, he focuses on the terrifying, devastating self-destruction of a Gulf War veteran who is convinced he has a calling to protect his fellow Americans. Engaged to a poor young Mexican woman, Jim (Christian Bale) wants to join the LAPD and bring his paramour to live with him as a US citizen. Rejected by the force, he is given a surprising second chance when the Department of Homeland Security comes knocking.

Jim and his equally unemployed best friend Mike (Freddy Rodríguez of "Six Feet Under") joyride, smoke pot, find trouble and plan their glorious future. But the American Dream is further out of reach these days and their world inexorably collapses as Jim's war-prompted delusions and macho explosions scuttle their best-laid plans.

This is a courageous, angry film that asks difficult questions about what happens to soldiers after wars are through, about the arbitrary nature of law enforcement and about what it means to act like a man.

At this point we don't need further confirmation of Bale's immense talent but his performance here may mark a career best. This difficult, confrontational personality comes to represent all of the contradictions of young,

urban America and Bale forces us to see the world through Jim's eyes. Rodríguez and Eva Longoria – who plays Mike's girlfriend Sylvia – act as strong counterpoints and provide necessary grounding to Jim's intoxicating, if shocking, energy. Los Angeles itself plays a supporting role in the film, an amoral blank slate bearing witness to these soon-to-be-destroyed lives.

Ayer insists that *Harsh Times* "could not be told by a studio." He could not be more right.

■ **Noah Cowan**



David Ayer was born in Champaign, Illinois, and moved to Los Angeles as a teenager. He served in the United States Navy before writing such films as *U-571* (00), *The Fast and the Furious* (01), *Training Day* (01), *Dark Blue* (03) and *S.W.A.T.* (03). *Harsh Times* (05), which he also wrote, is his first film as director.

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