

Cory Hardrict steps into “BATTLE: LOS ANGELES”

Written by Max Weinstein

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In the midst of the dime-a-dozen landscape of CGI-nuked sci-fi fare, alien invasion offerings of late have all too often ranged from animated to absurd to involuntarily laughable. So why on Earth do we keep coming back? Let's hash it out below with BATTLE: LOS ANGELES actor Cory Hardrict (GRAN TORINO, RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 4-5, DRIFTWOOD, etc.).

Here's one theory: that the balance between the humanity of full-scale battle and the timeless threat of the unknown has yet to be tapped and harnessed in a digital heavy industry. It's in part why TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING director Jonathan Liebesman's BATTLE: LOS ANGELES has many buzzing with optimism about its approach—a calculated take on military engagement on an apocalyptic stage. Fango spoke with the movie's Hardrict (and got some exclusive pics!) on the facets he explored in his first leading role as Corporal Lockett and translating the war-time experience under a sci-fi microscope.

Authenticity his fixation from square one, Hardrict began a self-imposed exercise regiment leading up to the audition for the project, which mirrored elements of some of his all-time favorite war films. “I went on a two month workout plan at home before the movie came about, just preparing myself for something good,” Hardrict says. “I got a military cut, I wanted to look like a marine. I had to go to four auditions, callback after callback after callback. That process is kind of strenuous, having to wait, sit back, look at the phone, but I had a good feeling about it because of the material. I've always been a fan of war films, always wanted to do a film like a SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, BLACK HAWK DOWN, and you get that. When you read the script, you get that. I love Will Smith, I idolize that guy, and I said, ‘Wow, I'd love to save the world someday...’ I AM LEGEND, INDEPENDENCE DAY—I was reading a script that had all those elements. It's the realism of war, and then you throw aliens in the mix, and I was like ‘Wow, I gotta jump on this.’ I studied my butt off, got some coaching. Everything up until that first audition I wanted to get right.”



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While the actor bows humbly before the material, getting things “just right” may have extended even beyond an initial script perusal; his own connection to the role reads as if written by fate, personal tragedies fueling onscreen triumph. “Corporal Jason Lockett had a history of family who were in the military, a dad and a brother,” he explains of his character. “My brother went to battle under Sergeant Nantz [played by THE DARK KNIGHT’s Aaron Eckhart], to serve under his orders. He ends up losing his life under his orders, so I’m in this knowing that. So I always have a grudge, not giving this guy a chance, knowing that he did this to my brother and I had something against him. My brother in real life was murdered two years ago, and I lost my mom to cancer, so it hit close to home, I had a lot to dig from. He’s very passionate. At the end of the day, Lockett’s a good guy, he would die for his men. He just wants to be loved by the corps and by the 25th battalion.”



The core of BATTLE: LOS ANGELES indeed lies in its corps; the film follows the urban combat of one marine platoon pitted against sky-bound onslaught, and Hardrict’s landing the role also meant landing roll call. “We had to go down to Louisiana and train for about a month,” the actor says. “We had a boot camp with real military advisors, staff sergeants, the whole nine, and they took us through the basic training they take the marines through. We slept outside in little mosquito tents, where your body fits in like a small coffin for two weeks. I mean, you’ve got rats, snakes, everything, just running outside in the woods. You felt like you were overseas or something.”

Facing the advancing otherworldly threat, Hardrict likens the cast’s physical and mental demands to be more a hazing than any typified studio procedure. “Of course it is a film, but shooting the movie, it never felt like its purpose was to entertain,” he says. “In the moment, it was painful! [Laughs] Guys dehydrated, swollen limbs, couple broken bones here and there, teeth knocked out, wounds, stitches. You’d see some guy on set laid out, doused in water, their faces laying out on the concrete, they can’t move for a second. Everyone made it through, they survived, they lived. No casualties on this set. Almost, but no casualties! [Laughs] They’re worn out from that scene and you see it. That’s what’s different and will hopefully resonate with people.”

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“Some of the guys come to my house, and we’ve got stories, like we were in a war,” he continues. “We just talk about it, like, ‘Wow, do you remember this?’ ‘Do you remember that?’ ‘Is your hand still jacked up, is your finger crooked?’ ‘How’s your ribs, dude? I remember when you had to go for your ribs...’ I had to go for my ribs, X-rays. But I loved every minute of it. We walked away like brothers and sisters. I know what those guys did, I know what I saw and I know what I was a part of.”

No secret is made of the clear distinction as to what fans should expect when Hardrict reflects on BATTLE: LOS ANGELES’ war sequences. “Our film—it’s a real movie. It’s real. This is not a green screen movie,” he says. “They built sets, they built towns that look like Venice, Santa Monica. On location, it was door-to-door combat. The tunnels were real, we shut down expressways in Shreveport. There’s the notion of defending America’s soil. No knock on these other films, but one film in particular...It’s no SKYLINE. This is not a fluff movie [*laughs*].”



Hardrict extends praise to helmer Liebesman for BATTLE’s insistence on bringing guerrilla realism to big-budget dark fantasy. “[Jonathan] knows what direction he wants to take, and everyone respected him. He’ll get in there and grab a weapon and show you, ‘This is how it needs to be done.’ He’ll throw his body into it. I can’t wait to do it with him again. We’ll see.”

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As for the extraterrestrial creatures themselves, Hardrict swears their design and on-screen presence to secrecy, but makes allusions to the factor he feels will amp up BATTLE: LOS ANGELES tenfold. “People who get on the blogs say, ‘You know what? I don’t want another alien invasion movie,’ or ‘Well, why LA?!’ But this is going on across the world. It’s going on everywhere. This battle just happens to be Los Angeles. At the moment, we’re just defending LA. But this is a worldwide thing, it’s going on in China, Tokyo, London...it’s happening.”

With BATTLE hitting theaters March 11 from Columbia Pictures, Hardrict looks toward seeing the world end a second time in THE DAY, a postapocalyptic war thriller he appears in with THE ORDER’s Shannyn Sossamon, LOST’s Dominic Monaghan and FROZEN’s Ashley Bell and Shawn Ashmore. The fit actor lost 15 pounds to essay the role of Henson, one of five friends and stricken with pneumonia during mankind’s fight for survival. “I gave up everything, whereas BATTLE I ate everything on set,” Hardrict laughs. “It’s great, it’s real, it’s gritty. I keep going back to that, but that’s what it is. I’m attracted to action and real projects.”

Stop back tomorrow for Hardrict’s recollections regarding his other war experiences: battling zombies in two RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD films!



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