

Prepare for “BATTLE”

Written by Allan Dart
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Mars needs Moms. Earth needs Marines—to stop the alien invasion that results in **BATTLE LOS ANGELES**. Directed by **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING**'s Jonathan Liebesman, **BATTLE** opens today from Columbia Pictures, and three of the film's stars/soldiers—Aaron Eckhart, **RESIDENT EVIL**'s Michelle Rodriguez and singer-turned-actor Ne-Yo—spoke about their experience making the SF-action flick.

FANGORIA: Tell us a little about the preproduction boot camp you actors had to undergo, and what was required of you to get into that Marine mindset.

AARON ECKHART: We did a boot camp for three weeks before shooting. We put up the tents, slept in the bunks, showered together and slept according to rank. The PFCs did the shit work, and I yelled at them a lot—and the lieutenant yelled at me!



MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ: **GIRLFIGHT** still remains the most physically demanding film I ever worked on, but this movie was the most intense actual shoot. The training was strenuous, but the three weeks of boot camp compared to four months of soot, ash, 100-degree Louisiana weather, the sun beating down on you, 30 pounds of gear, explosions everywhere... Every night would be a salt bath and blowing nasty snot rockets of black soot out of my nose. I had to wake up every day at 5 in the morning and drive to where the boys were stationed. At least I got to go home at 5 p.m. They didn't want me to stare at anyone's hairy balls, so they sent me home. But getting up every day at five, running for two miles, sit-ups, pushups—that's where I

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got my abs for MACHETE.

NE-YO: The boot camp was about looking the part physically. But it was also about building camaraderie between us. Our Marine sergeant kept nailing into our heads that you have to be willing to die for the man next to you. Much of our training involved depending on the guy next to you, and through that it created friendships, and we would hang out on and off set. The shoot was unreal. Aside from the weather and where we shot, that gear—I have a whole new respect for Marines. The helmet, boots, guns, vests—and mind you, everything of ours was fake, foam padding, except the guns, but the Marines’ stuff has metal plates. If our vest was 40 pounds, theirs is 70. They train you to feel like they’re invincible. They’re the first line of defense, so they have to have that mindset of, “I don’t care what I walk into now, it’s not tougher than me.”

ECKHART: The hard part was getting 12 actors to line up in a straight line on a daily basis! It was really about getting people to do things on a timely basis in the right manner. Marines have to look a certain way and say the right words and be ready and no backtalk. And to watch 12 actors transform into Marines was an interesting exercise.

FANG: What attracted you to this project?

ECKHART: I was ambivalent about doing an alien movie, because they have a certain stigma. But I talked to Jonathan about that and said, “If I’m going to do this movie, I’m going to be 100 percent USDA.” It’s as if Denzel [Washington] was going to do a movie. He’s the guy I look to in this sort of a movie, because you never question whether he takes it seriously or not. We’re up against aliens, and I wanted it to be real, like BLACK HAWK DOWN. I wanted to make a real movie, and I feel we did. From the second I put on the uniform, I was into it.

I didn’t feel like we were fighting an alien force, I felt we were fighting anybody who’s coming into LA. Everything was practical on the set, so it wasn’t like that car or that crashed helicopter or that smoke wasn’t there. We were shooting 20,000 rounds a day sometimes. At 3 in the morning, I had a 50-cal on a Humvee and was blasting hundreds of rounds. When you’re doing that, you can’t help but feel you’re in a war situation.

RODRIGUEZ: I wouldn’t have done the movie if I didn’t know what the aliens were going to look like. After doing something like AVATAR, you have to up the ante. I met up with Jonathan and

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asked him what his vision was, and what would separate this from every other alien-invasion film. Jonathan convinced me and showed me the short that got Sony to fund the movie. The perspective was first-person shooter. I was like, “This is BLACK HAWK DOWN.” I’d never seen an alien-invasion movie use that tactic before.



NE-YO: What attracted me most was being able to do something that was completely not me. I did STOMP THE YARD, which was R&B and dance, not much of a challenge there. And the role I played was basically me, I played myself. This film, when they explained the character—high-strung, conservative, really dorky glasses—the military calls them BCGs, birth control glasses... No woman in their right mind would have sex with you—“Why are you wearing those glasses?” One thing I learned about the music business is that change is very, very difficult. Once they learn that you do one thing well, they want you to stay right there. I hate when people ask me to recreate a moment. It was a moment. It happened. It’s done. Let’s create a new moment. That’s what I’m trying to do with this movie thing. So I imagine if this film does well, there will be a ton of action scripts coming my way, and I don’t see anything wrong with that, but I want to run the gamut. I want to play the paraplegic white ex-gymnast with the Mexican son—something that you completely don’t see coming!

FANG: If an alien invasion like the one in BATTLE: LOS ANGELES actually happened, would you be able to use your training and this experience to help fend off the attack?

ECKHART: I could teach the Marines how to act! No. I’m sure I’d be told to sit back and shut up. But in defense of actors being wussies, I remember on several occasions [during the shoot] where Marines said, “Damn, you work hard!” So that was a compliment. [While filming the scene] where the mothership was rising, I tried to get fancy and wanted to do an Air Jordan through a fireball, and I thought I’d run and jump off this concrete slab, but I landed on my head and arm, and heard my arm snap [he broke it]. But you can’t give the guys an excuse to stop, so I didn’t stop.

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RODRIGUEZ: I can't imagine a being that could travel at lightspeed and travel in and out of dimensions [wanting to simply attack us]. They would have to resonate at a higher frequency than humans. Humans are primal in their ways. I think violence is something that we make up, unless they have our DNA. If that's the case, why haven't they attacked before? But if there were aliens that did invade, I'd keep it low-key until I knew how to kill the suckers.

NE-YO: I would be under a table, crying. Were shit to hit the fan, don't look for me! “Ne-Yo, save us!” “No, I'm right here. Tell me when stuff stops exploding.”

FANG: Aaron is the only Method actor out of you three. What was that like?

NE-YO: I had heard about that form of acting, but I had never experienced it before. I didn't know that Aaron was a Method actor. So on set, he was playing Sergeant Nantz and I was Corporal Harris. Got it. Then at lunch, “Hey, Aaron, how you doing?” “Leave me alone.” “What's wrong with you?” And someone said, “No, no, no, he's in character.” I was like, “Damn it, someone tell me these things. I'm about to fight!” [*Laughs*] I personally couldn't do it, but I have the utmost respect for Aaron as an actor. But what if you're playing a serial killer? “You know what, honey? Listen, I love you, but you might want to go and stay at your mom's for a couple of months.” When we did the script reading, he was Aaron that day, and then after that, he was Sgt. Nantz. And he stayed that way until literally the day we wrapped.



ECKHART: A death in BATTLE LOS ANGELES is like a death in [his recent drama] RABBIT HOLE. People think it's nuts and a popcorn movie, but it's my job and they're equally important to me. [His DARK KNIGHT co-star] Heath Ledger was the epitome of that. He was brilliant to watch and see on set and in the makeup trailer. I was doing Harvey Dent and he was doing the

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Joker, trying to figure it out. If you said to Heath, “Hey, dude, this is a superhero movie. Why don’t you chill?” Well, you just wouldn’t say that to him, and that movie wouldn’t be as special if he did. We all have to strive to those standards.

FANG: Ne-Yo, you’ve never done a film of this size before and with this level of effects. What was it like acting in scenes with aliens to be added later?

NE-YO: I think I had the most trouble responding to stuff that wasn’t there. “Action! Aliens are running in front of you.” “Eehhh. Not feeling it. There’s nothing here. What am I afraid of?” Then they told me, “The more you play it up, the more we can put in there when we add the CGI. We can make the bullets just miss your head. So how much action you get on film depends on what you give us.” And seeing the final film, I now know what they meant. I get it. If I ever have to do this type of movie again, I would go ham!

FANG: Liebesman previously directed two horror films, the TEXAS CHAINSAW prequel and DARKNESS FALLS. Despite the targeted PG-13 rating, were you wondering how graphic he would go with the gore and violence?

RODRIGUEZ: Not at all, because there’s a limit to everything when you work on a big-budgeted film for a big studio, and you kind of know what’s not going to fly. Spielberg could get the studio to consider something gruesome, but Jonathan is a first-time director at this scale, and I knew they would draw the line at some point. But Jonathan did want everything to be visceral and auditory. There were always explosions going off and danger looming over us. He wanted everything to be real and as little greenscreen as possible. [For the alien dissection scene], he wanted to see the guts and goo and for us to feel it and stab it and touch it, and for it to move and vibrate. We had five people on set refreshing the K-Y Jelly. “It’s not gruesome enough. We need more goo!” At one point I was ready to throw up because it looked like real intestines and was starting to smell weird.

FANG: Michelle, we have to ask: How awesome was it working with Danny Trejo on MACHETE?

RODRIGUEZ: He’s the best. Danny went to the premiere of this movie with a shirt that had my character on it! I love him. He’s the sweetest, coolest guy ever, and you’d never think so

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because he has such an imposing demeanor. Throughout the years you've seen him as Prisoner #2, Bad Guy. It was great to see him shine. I love that he's working, and I love good people, and he's a good, real person. It's rare that you meet those type of people in the business. I don't know if it's just a rumor if there's going to be a part two. With Robert Rodriguez, it's very organic: One day he'll decide he wants to do it, and it's going to get done. It's all about timing and waiting to see what he does. Right now, I think he's working on SPY KIDS 20!

FANG: Speaking of sequels, what are the chances of there being another BATTLE LOS ANGELES?

ECKHART: I'm ready for the sequel. I wear khakis, keep my hair short and stay by the phone!



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