

Riveting, Must-See 'The Hurt Locker' is Flawless Filmmaking

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 9, 2009 - 10:26am

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Filmmaking simply doesn't get much more riveting than Kathryn Bigelow's incredible "The Hurt Locker," a cinematic experience unlike any other that you will have this year. Building and releasing tension better than her peers have in a long time, Bigelow has made not only the best Iraq War movie to date but the best film of 2009 at just over the halfway point.

With "The Hurt Locker," Bigelow takes viewers to the other side of the world to bring into relatable perspective a daily grind that most of us couldn't even imagine. The leads in "The Hurt Locker" are soldiers in Iraq who diffuse bombs for a living, often in range of sniper fire and often with materials and equipment tragically unable to protect them should something go wrong.



(Left to right) Jeremy Renner and Anthony Mackie star in The Hurt Locker.

Photo credit: Jonathan Olley

"The Hurt Locker" is a visceral, daring, adrenalin-pumping experience that brings a profession that would seem nearly impossible to identify with into relatable, genuine context. It could be your friend, your son, your neighbor, or even you thrown into the nightmare of "The Hurt Locker".



Jeremy Renner stars in *The Hurt Locker*.
 Photo credit: Courtesy of Summit Entertainment

The film opens with a shocking death (that I won't spoil) that allows Staff Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner of "The Unusuals") to join an expert group of bomb-diffusing soldiers in Iraq. The enemy often leaves a bomb in the middle of the road to kill passing troops. When someone sees something suspicious - wires sticking out of some garbage, metal where there should only be sand - they call in James, Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie), and Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty).

The fragile Eldridge typically works the perimeter (checking rooftops for snipers and other suspicious characters) while Sanborn stays in constant communication with James. Our crazy hero puts on a bomb suit and heads straight to the location to diffuse a bomb that could easily blow up a few city blocks if he makes one mistake.

Sanborn and Eldridge are relatively by-the-book guys but James is one card short of a full deck. It may sound cliched to say that he's reckless, but he undeniably puts his fellow soldiers in danger. The thing is that James also undeniably gets the job done. He's defused over 800 bombs by the time we meet him and he's out there doing the job that most people would consider cruel and unusual punishment.

"The Hurt Locker" uses a somewhat episodic structure (although I don't mean that as a criticism because it's an incredibly effective screenwriting decision) - linking together several of these men's most insane assignments, including a suicide bomber with second thoughts, a dead child turned into a human explosive, and an amazing sequence in the middle of the desert with a sniper attack that will make your skin crawl. It's a cliched, critical phrase, but this is truly edge-of-the-seat material.



(Left to right) Brian Geraghty and Guy Pearce star in *The Hurt Locker*.
 Photo credit: Jonathan Olley

I know what you're thinking. Most Iraq War movies to date have failed. The "soldier on the edge" thing was overdone decades ago. Trust me when I tell you that it has rarely, if ever, been done with such dramatic believability. Credit to the great Bigelow (who I expect will get an Oscar nomination for director for this work), but also credit Renner, who gives arguably the best performance of the year. (It's him or Sam Rockwell in "Moon". Don't make me choose until I see both films again.)

Renner is simply spectacular and the rest of the supporting cast is strong as well, but most of the praise for "The Hurt Locker" will fall at the feet of the great Kathryn Bigelow. On a directorial level, nothing comes close in 2009 to what she accomplishes here. She opens with a scene that builds tension better than any action blockbuster climax of the summer season and sets the tone that will drive the entire film. She turns up the tension and then releases it for a second before she starts turning the dial again. It's how she manages the pace of the film that make it a masterpiece.

But don't think that "The Hurt Locker" is all tension. There are beautiful moments of character development and levity, which, of course, make

the “action” scenes that much more believable and tense.

Life in a bomb disposal unit in the Middle East is probably not like anything that you or I could possibly understand, but “The Hurt Locker” believably takes us there. It throws us in the middle of the action, makes us sweat and cringe, and spits us out the other side. Don’t miss it.

'The Hurt Locker' stars Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Brian Geraghty, Evangeline Lilly, Ralph Fiennes, Guy Pearce, David Morse. It was written by Mark Boal and directed by Kathryn Bigelow. It opens in Chicago on July 10th, 2009. It is rated R.



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