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Jake Gyllenhaal
Watching a man die changed my life

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Bromance on the real streets of LA

JAKE Gyllenhaal saw a man die from a gunshot wound on his first day of work on gritty cop thriller *End Of Watch*. The 31-year-old was on a 12-hour ride-along with LAPD officers when the murder happened. He had another five months of them to go.

'I was feeling all gung-ho and my adrenalin was going the whole time but I didn't know we would run into that,' says the actor. 'I thought: "I'm just an actor, what am I getting myself into?"'

Gyllenhaal says the experience was a turning point. 'I grew up in a part of LA that is nothing like the south-east side of town, yet it's only a mile and a half away,' he says. 'Seeing real violence up close without it being fictionalised by media coverage was definitely an awakening.'

'But I got to see a side of LA that is not just a world of violence and gangsters and police, it's a culture that's about family and loyalty. Most

Jake Gyllenhaal tells *Matt Mueller* that seeing real violence while preparing *End Of Watch* has opened his eyes to people's stories

of the people who live there are incredible and having that perspective changed me.'

Gyllenhaal has pumped up his physique and toughened up his mind to convince as characters before, most notably as the marine grunt in Sam Mendes's *Jarhead*. But his role as an officer patrolling the mean streets of south-central LA with beat partner Michael Peña might be his most hard-boiled yet.

The thriller comes steeped in authenticity thanks to the approach of south-central-born writer/director David Ayer, who explored this territory with *Training Day* and *Harsh*

Times. As well as the ride-alongs, Gyllenhaal and Peña's preparation involved sparring sessions at a dojo in Echo Park 'with 14 to 20-year-old kids who just don't give a s***', as well as tactical and weapons training.

'We wanted it to be hyper-real with as little fiction in the behaviour as possible,' says Gyllenhaal. 'We wanted it to be a presentation of character, as opposed to a representation.'

The realities these LAPD officers face keep their on-screen



Hard tale: Jake Gyllenhaal worked with LAPD officers for five months to prepare for his role in *End Of Watch*

partners (played by Anna Kendrick and Natalie Martinez) on tenterhooks every time they leave the house.

But while there are plenty of nerve-jangling police procedural moments, it is the bromantic buddy relationship at its core that makes *End Of Watch* hum. And you can't help but feel the women are mainly there to ward off any suggestion that the boys in blue might take the next turn to *Brokeback Mountain*: their squabbling banter in the patrol car is the heart of the film, enhanced by the fact that Gyllenhaal's character records everything on his new HD camera, giving the film a vibe that Ayer refers to as 'YouTube meets *Training Day*'.

GYLLENHAAL tells me that shooting on a super-low \$7million (£4.3million) budget meant making the film around south-central neighbourhoods was a guerrilla experience. A police helicopter that appears in a sequence where he and Peña pursue a suspect through dark

alleyways was nothing to do with the film, explains the actor, it just hovered into frame as it attended a real crime scene a block away.

'We only had 22 days, so we were always running and gunning,' says Gyllenhaal. 'Spending all those months together beforehand made all the scenes in the car so easy.'

Gyllenhaal and Peña didn't hit it off initially, something he attributes to the fact they come from wildly different backgrounds. Gyllenhaal was born into the film industry (his father, Stephen, is a director and his mother, Naomi, is a producer/screenwriter), while Peña's upbringing was more akin to the Chicago version of south-central LA.

'Sometimes me being so open, it does create a scepticism,' admits Gyllenhaal. 'Some people go: "Is he for real?" That was definitely there with us. But we started to realise that two was one in this case, and that was the only thing that was going to make this movie rise above every other cop-genre movie you see.'

The two became close pals, extending their friendship beyond the re-

hearsal space, with the in-shape Gyllenhaal dragging his chubbier co-star on marathon jogging sessions to get him in shape.

Peña claims that, while he was stuck eating a diet of 'grass and rocks', Gyllenhaal teased him with double lattes and frozen yoghurts. 'I'd be like: "Dude, how can you eat that?"' Peña says. 'And he'd say: "Nom, nom, nom... I'm ripped."'

Gyllenhaal laughs at the recollection, insisting it's not entirely true.

However, it's not all smooth sailing for the actor who got his big break in cult classic *Donnie Darko*.

While he mostly manages to keep his private life private, despite dating the likes of Reese Witherspoon and Kirsten Dunst, his break-up with country crooner Taylor Swift last year was chronicled in her pithily titled anthem *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together*. And *Nailed*, his political satire with I Heart Huckabees writer/director David O Russell, collapsed when the financing for it fell apart. That must have been frustrating for him?

'It's weird that a movie you make doesn't come out,' sighs Gyllenhaal. 'But I'm just an actor. It's other people's jobs to put the movie together and sell it. I did my job and maybe one day somebody else will put that movie out. Unlikely, though.'

Gyllenhaal is next appearing in *An Enemy*, an adaptation of a José Saramago novel, in which he plays dual roles as a man seeking out his doppelganger after spotting him in a film. It will be, he promises, 'a real head-f***'.

It may not have required five months' of immersion in LA copland but Gyllenhaal insists it fits into his new ethos of immersing himself in reality. 'What we do in this profession can often be absurd,' he says. 'So now I'm much more interested in learning about real people's stories and trying to portray those.'

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Close friends: Anna Kendrick, left, and Natalie Martinez play Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Peña's worried wives

ALL CHANGE MORE EXTREME MOVIE TRANSFORMATIONS



Robert De Niro

De Niro trained so hard to play boxer Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull* that he won two real bouts. Director Martin Scorsese then gave his crew four months paid leave while De Niro gained 27kg to play LaMotta's older, fatter incarnation.



Natalie Portman

Portman prepared for a year to play a prima ballerina in *Black Swan*. The vegan actress's meals consisted mostly of almonds and carrots, and she would work out for up to 16 hours a day. It's amazing she didn't try to eat her Oscar.



Christian Bale

Bale dropped 29kg for *The Machinist* by existing on a diet of coffee, cigarettes and an apple a day. Then he had just six months to bulk up and play Batman. 'I couldn't do one push-up on the day,' he recalls. 'All the muscles were gone.'



50 Cent

To play an American football player with cancer, rapper/actor 50 Cent dropped from 97kg to 73kg via a strict liquid diet and running three hours a day on a treadmill. Shame the film, *All Things Fall Apart*, sucked. **Larushka Ivan-Zadeh**