



LAWLESS

Reviewed by
Daniel May

Simply put, *Lawless* is the best film I have seen this year. John Hillcoat, the director of *The Proposition* (2005) and *The Road* (2009), is famed for his tales of men who go to extreme measures to guarantee their survival. The same can be said of *Lawless* (based loosely on Matt Bondurant's gritty novel, *The Wettest County in the World*), a Prohibition-era account of three very different but loyal brothers who do a stable trade distilling and selling illegal moonshine whiskey in and around rural Franklin County, Virginia.

The oldest Bondurant brother Forrest (Tom Hardy) is the brawny yet passive, knitwear loving leader of the brotherhood; the middle brother Howard (Jason Clarke) is the muscle who is seemingly happy enough to drink away the businesses profits; and younger brother Jack (Shia LaBeouf), whom the film centres on, is the receptive and decidedly ambitious one.

With the law on their side and benefiting from a reputation as local legends, things are ticking along nicely for the Bondurant brothers and their bootlegging business. But the times, as they say, are a-changin' when sinister federal agent Charlie Rakes (Guy Pearce) makes his hostile entrance. Rakes, with his crisp suits and dubious hair cut, is sent to 'investigate' the illegal trading of alcohol in Franklin County, but when Forrest refuses Rakes illicit terms of protection which would allow the Bondurant brothers to keep trading illegally, an insulted Rakes starts to play dirty.

What ensues is a violent and lethal cat and mouse game between the Bondurant boys and the authorities they used to have on their side. As the Bondurant's business continues to get bigger (due in part to their newly established association with Chicago mobster Floyd Banner) Rakes mission to take them down gets dirtier and dirtier.

What makes this feature such a triumph, is not only the finely crafted narrative, but the superbly selected cast. Tom Hardy is great as the brooding Forrest and has gone one step further in confirming himself as one of the best actors operating in Hollywood today. Shia LaBeouf and Jason Clarke are perfect as the other brothers, as are the beautiful Jessica Chastain and Mia Wasikowska as Forrest's and Jack's love interests.

Unfortunately, I felt a bit robbed that Gary Oldman's gun-toting mobster Floyd Banner only makes a small number of brief appearances. His car chase and Tommy gun shoot-out scene was for me one of the best in the film. Stand out performance, however, is by the hugely unrated Australian actor Guy Pearce as the psychotic and ultra creepy Charlie Rakes.

While the feature doesn't hide from explicit violence and brutish bloodshed, which you may find hard to stomach (slit throats, face-breaking, tarring and feathering, to name but a few examples), there is a lighter side to *Lawless* with its nonchalant humour in its handling of these bootleggers and their escapades.

LIBERAL ARTS

Reviewed by
Sam Leonard

Liberal Arts is a witty and bittersweet cross-generational comedy-drama that sees writer/director Josh Radnor play Jesse, a university admissions officer living in New York who, at 35, is jaded in both his career and his personal life as a long-term relationship comes to an end.

While often funny and gently poking fun at youth's obsession with self and significance, *Liberal Arts* is ultimately an elegy to the raw passions of such halcyon days, perfectly capturing the tension between the untainted ideas and visions we had at that age, and the very different realities and compromises of adult life.



Liberal Arts is at once a love letter to a liberal arts education and a recognition of its limits. It posits that books and the academic mind-set can be simultaneously a liberation and a kind of prison, that an over-developed mind paired with a disengaged heart can bring one more anxiety than joy.

'Liberal Arts' screens at Cinema City from 5th October

If you are like me and enjoy the crime and gangster film genre you will be completely absorbed by every aspect of this feature; from the violence, humour and fine acting right through to the virtuoso plots and imperious score. Yes, what the Bondurant brothers are doing is illegal and morally wrong, but you will quickly find yourself rooting for them to succeed against the dishonest and crooked federal system (Robin Hood and John Dillinger style). Masterpiece is a word used far to freely when describing films, but I cannot conjure up another word that summarises *Lawless* any better.

Lawless screens at Cinema City throughout September

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