

## WAR (2007)

Release Date: August 24, 2007

Studio: Lionsgate

Director: Philip G. Atwell

Screenwriter: Gregory J. Bradley, Lee Anthony Smith

Starring: Andrea Roth, Devon Aoki, Jason Statham, Jet Li, John Lone, Kane Kosugi, Kennedy Lauren Montano, Luis Guzman, Mark Cheng, Mathew St. Patrick, Nadine Velazquez, Ryo Ishibashi, Saul Rubinek, Terry Chen

Genre: Action, Thriller

MPAA Rating: R (for sequences of strong bloody violence, sexuality/nudity and language)

Official Website: [Lionsgate.com/War](http://Lionsgate.com/War)

### About The Production

Set amidst the violence of America's Asian underworld, Lionsgate's WAR is a high-adrenaline action thriller that examines just how far one man is prepared to go to avenge the death of his best friend. Crawford is a fallen FBI agent who is bent on revenge, and the man he wants is Rogue – a killer with a hidden agenda and no loyalties, a ruthless, shadowy assassin who seems to materialize at will, wreak havoc in a few silent seconds, and then disappear again like a ghost...

WAR screenwriters Lee Anthony Smith and Gregory J. Bradley had been long time Jet Li fans and disciples of the Asian-influenced action genre when they created the role of Rogue, and they did so expressly to accommodate their screen idol. Many screenwriters write scripts with particular stars in mind, but in this case, producer Jim Thompson actually managed to get Smith's and Bradley's script to Li, who signed on to play Rogue.

"It's one of those rare occasions where the writers had a vision, they had one guy in mind, and we actually made it happen," says Thompson. "We got it to the guy that it was intended for, and the movie actually happened with him in the part, which is rare."

An international film star and world-renowned martial arts master, Jet Li first gained notoriety in Asia as a martial arts competitor. His remarkable success in the field led to his first starring role in Chang Hsin Yen's 1979 film, THE SHAOLIN TEMPLE, which instantly turned Li into a martial arts screen star in Asia. The ensuing years have brought him a worldwide following with the release of such films as FEARLESS, UNLEASHED, HERO, and THE ONE.

Steven Chasman, who represents Li and acts as one of WAR's producers, says he was surprised by Li's strong endorsement of the WAR's script. "When I first read it I didn't think Jet would be interested because the character is really the antithesis of almost everything he's ever played in a movie. But to my surprise he responded enthusiastically."

"I've never played this kind of character before," agrees Li. "I don't know whether he's good or bad. I only know this character, who is very violent, has a reason for doing what he does."

A devout Buddhist, Li often seeks projects that reflect his philosophical ideals about violence. He admits that he sometimes struggled with Rogue's particular brand of ruthless vengeance. "Even though I don't agree with what this guy does, I had to commit to it," he says. "When I went to the set, I had to forget

I'm Jet Li first and be in that world. Then I'd go back home and think, 'Oh, why am I doing this?' I'd have to remind myself that the character is not me. It's somebody else."

With Li on board for the title role, the producers turned their attention to casting Rogue's nemesis, John Crawford, the police officer who risks everything to exact revenge. "John Crawford is pretty much the driving force of the story," explains director Philip Atwell. "He's an FBI agent who, in a sense, has kind of gone rogue himself. And he's enlisted himself to find the killer who took out his best friend and his best friend's family."

The part of Crawford called for an actor who could handle extreme physical set pieces as well as intense, emotional scenes; with his bulldog intensity and strong onscreen presence, Jason Statham, known for films like CRANK and THE TRANSPORTER, was the ideal candidate. Says Chasman, "He's a great actor who also brings a lot more dimensions to the role than just the physicality. He's got it all."

Statham signed up immediately for the project, eager to work with Li again after appearing alongside him in 2001's THE ONE. "I never got to fight him on that movie," he laughs. "Working with Jet Li and doing something with a much deeper storyline, a bit more of a meaningful character for me to play and to actually come head to head with Jet and bash it out was something I was deprived of previously."

Statham also reacted strongly to the multi-layered role of Crawford. "Crawford becomes obsessed with seeking revenge on Rogue, trying to right the wrong that has happened even though it's quite possibly out of his control," explains the actor. "In the end, he actually gets to accept what happened to his friend while exorcising a few of his own demons."

For both stars, the process of working together was uniquely rewarding. Says Statham, "Li was just great to act with. You just look at his eyes and you've got a great, real connection."

"He's a great actor," says Li of his co-star, smiling. "He's much better than me."

With the stars in place, the producers approached Philip G. Atwell to helm the project. Known for his music videos for rap stars Eminem and 50 Cent, Atwell's eye for stylish, edgy visuals was considered a perfect fit for the raw intensity of WAR. States Chasman, "Philip seems to really have his finger on the pulse of the audience."

Production for WAR took place in Vancouver, where Atwell gathered a talented, international ensemble cast, including John Lone (YEAR OF THE DRAGON, THE LAST EMPORER), Terry Chen (ALMOST FAMOUS, SNAKES ON A PLANE), Luis Guzman (PUNCH DRUNK LOVE, TRAFFIC, THE SALTON SEA), Nadine Velazquez (MY NAME IS EARL, BIKER BOYZ) and Devon Aoki (SIN CITY).

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Atwell's most significant decision was to steer the script away from the florid, slick visuals epitomized by the MATRIX films. "We still have a bit of a comic book style," he explains. "But the idea was to make a hard-core aggressive movie – as though these things could happen in real life. I didn't want the audience to say, 'Well, wait, how did he climb up the wall like that?' Stuntmen want to flip four times more than they really need to. And for certain films I think that's great, but for WAR it was important to keep it grounded."

Cory Yuen, arguably the world's best known stunt choreographer and a director in his own right (THE TRANSPORTER, D.O.A.), teamed up with Li, Statham and Atwell to create WAR's realistic fight sequences and impressive stunts. "As much as Jet is a legend as an onscreen performer, Cory is a legend as far as putting these fights together," says producer Christopher Petzel. "There are one or two household names in the world as far as action choreography and Cory is one of them."

"Jet Li is a martial artist," says Yuen. "His moves are traditional martial arts yet cool. Jason's style is more powerful and not martial arts or kung fu style. The styles are so different, which is why I think the audience will like to see a fight between two of them. That's why we're worked out the special fight at the end of the movie which is the climactic action fight sequence."

Atwell also enlisted cinematographer Pierre Morel, who had worked with both Li and Statham on UNLEASHED and THE TRANSPORTER, to facilitate his vision. Atwell's less-is-more philosophy also set the tone for special effects artists Jason Ward and Ryan Nicholson of Vancouver's Flesh and Fantasy Makeup Effects.

"When you watch movies and you see a guy get shot and a big blood pack goes off – well, that's not how it happens in reality," says Atwell. "I think there's more of an impact to show how it really happens and have the actors respond in a real way. That'll be as painful as seeing a big blood spurt shoot across the screen." To ensure that the action scenes were as authentic as possible, Atwell also put his cast through special weapons training sessions and police recruit boot camps. Says Sung Kang, who plays Jade Squad sniper, Goi, "We learned how to hold a gun properly, how to enter a building, how to cover the rear unit, basically what a SWAT team's procedures are in terms of staking out, holding the weapon, or firing the weapon."

Despite all of this attention to detail, Li maintains that "in action movies the most important thing is the story, not the fighting." Statham agrees, and hopes that viewers will become invested in Crawford's hunt for Rogue. "Action for the sake of action doesn't carry much weight," says Statham. "WAR is a thinking man's action movie. The audience is going to be on the edge of their seats thinking, 'Are they going to get this guy? Is justice ever going to come? Is this Rogue going to pay for all these wrongdoings?' And then when they finally find out, they'll be taken totally by surprise."