

# THE MARKSMAN



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## **SYNOPSIS**

Hardened Arizona rancher Jim Hanson (Liam Neeson) simply wants to be left alone as he fends off eviction notices and tries to make a living on an isolated stretch of borderland. But everything changes when Hanson, an ex-Marine, witnesses 11-year-old migrant Miguel (Jacob Perez) fleeing with his mother Rosa (Teresa Ruiz) from drug cartel assassins led by the ruthless Mauricio (Juan Pablo Raba). After being caught in a shoot-out, an injured Rosa begs Jim to take her son to safety to her family in Chicago. Defying his stepdaughter Sarah (Katheryn Winnick), Jim sneaks Miguel out of the local U.S. Customs and Border Patrol station and together, they hit the road with the group of killers in pursuit. Jim and Miguel slowly begin to overcome their differences and begin to forge an unlikely friendship, while Mauricio and his fellow assassins blaze a cold-blooded trail, hot on their heels.

**107 Minutes | PG-13 | USA | English | Color**

## About the Production

When director Robert Lorenz met with Liam Neeson to discuss *The Marksman*, the Irish-born actor described the title character as being "Very Eastwoodian." True to the iconic Clint Eastwood persona, sharp-shooting rancher Jim Hanson is a taciturn loner doing the right thing with a minimum of fuss or fanfare. Lorenz appreciated the reference, having worked alongside Eastwood for two decades as a producer or assistant director on movies including *Million Dollar Baby*, *Mystic River* and *The Bridges of Madison County*. "Clint and I both have a similar approach to making movies," Lorenz says. "I work fast. I don't mess around. Liam was very receptive to that."

*The Marksman* started taking shape several months before the Neeson meeting, when Lorenz received a screenplay by Chris Charles and Danny Kravitz. entitled *The Minuteman*. "I really responded to their concept of a guy and this kid being pursued by the Cartel," he says. "It's a western, in a way, and it's also a road movie, which lent itself well to telling stories with pictures. I saw it as a great opportunity." Lorenz put his own spin on the material with a page one re-write. "I saw Liam's character as being representative of a lot of people in this country," he says. "At the beginning of the movie, Jim Hanson's kind of indifferent to the plight of these [Mexican immigrant] folks. He's got his own problems to deal with. But over the course of the story, Jim finds his salvation by helping someone else. That's the idea I was trying to convey in *The Marksman*."

That theme resonated for Neeson. He received the script on a Thursday and by Monday, he'd invited Lorenz to his New York home to share ideas about the project. "In New York, Liam told me that this [immigration] aspect of the story was an important part of what attracted him to *The Marksman*. But there's no agenda. We just want to tell a human story that cuts across all the different viewpoints and allows people to respond on an emotional level."

## A Worthy Cartel Adversary

Once Neeson agreed to star, in early 2019, Lorenz assembled the rest of the *Marksman* cast. Among his top priorities: finding an actor who could convey extreme menace in the role of Cartel assassin Maurico. "For this story to work you have to feel

like the villain is ruthless," Lorenz explains. "He can't just be *sort of* a bad guy. Mauricio creates tension and raises the stakes for Liam and Miguel's journey, so he's got to seem dangerous."

Colombian-born actor Juan Pablo Raba caught Lorenz' eye when he portrayed Pablo Escobar's Medellin Cartel business partner Gustavo Gaviria in Netflix series "Narcos." On the strength of that performance, Lorenz invited Raba to audition. "When Juan Pablo came in to read, he'd shaved all his hair off because that's how he thought his character would look," Lorenz recalls. "He was so scary delivering the dialogue that our casting directors literally jumped. That's when I decided he was definitely the guy to play Mauricio."

Like his character, Raba approached the job with laser focus. "My character doesn't have relationships with others," he says. "Maurico's more like a dog. He sees something, he doesn't think about it. And everything in the United States is new to him, so that makes a lot of noise in his head."

### **A Strong Woman, From Viking to Border Patrol**

Critics Choice Television Awards nominee Katheryn Winnick portrays Sarah, who directs the local Border Patrol office while navigating a somewhat strained relationship with her stepfather, Neeson's Jim Hanson. Winnick, born in Ukraine and raised in Canada, played a fierce Norse warrior in History Channel series "The Vikings." Her fierce portrayal made a strong impression on Lorenz. "Katheryn has a real strength to her, but at the same time, playing Sarah, she's very compassionate in the way she goes about her job," Lorenz says. Producer Warren Goz adds, "Katheryn brought more depth to the character of Sarah and shared some great ideas with Rob about the role."

For Winnick, getting the chance to make a movie with Neeson provided an indelible lesson in professionalism. "Liam's dedication to this movie blew me away," she says. "He came in on his day off to read lines, off-camera, for a phone call. His work ethic is amazing."

### **A Pint-Sized Co-Star: The Kid**

The character of scrappy 11-year-old orphan Miguel prompted an extensive search by casting directors Chelsea Bloch and Marisol Roncali, who evaluated hundreds of video auditions before narrowing down their recommendations to a pair of boys. "One kid was very polished, but I didn't see in him the rebellious quality I was looking for," Lorenz notes. "The other kid was Jacob Perez, who had very little acting experience. But Jacob had the look and the kind of attitude you can't teach." Lorenz sent the actors' videos to Neeson for feedback. "After Liam watched both auditions, he was adamant that Jacob was the right kid for the part."

### **The All-American Shoot**

During pre-production, Lorenz re-teamed with many of the craftspeople he'd previously worked with on Eastwood-directed movies. Neeson brought along his longtime stunt coordinator Mark Vanselow to choreograph the action sequences. And Lorenz, intent on capturing an epic perspective on the American landscape, enlisted British DP Mark Patten, whose stylish cinematography helped define the Tom Hardy series *Taboo* and Ridley Scott movie *The Martian*. Patten says, "Robert brings in so many cultural layers so we wanted the cinematography to capture the diversity of this country."

In September 2019, principal photography on *The Marksman* commenced in and around Albuquerque New Mexico. Filmmakers later re-located to the Cleveland, Ohio area as a stand-in for third-act destination Chicago, Illinois. Lorenz says, "This being in many ways a road movie, it was important for the audience to move from this kind of desolate stark landscape of the southwest to the lush green heartland of America. We want you to really feel that these characters are on an American journey."

Producers initially wanted to film first in Ohio, but Lorenz insisted on shooting in roughly chronological order. "I had this young actor without a lot of experience so it would have been much harder for me to get Jacob to do the emotional stuff at the end of the story right at the beginning of the shoot when he hasn't had the chance to experience what transpired story-wise before," Lorenz explains. "Therefore, we shot the film in order as much as possible."

During the 29-day shoot, Lorenz discovered that his brisk approach to directing inspired lively performances from rookie actor Perez. "I find that when you move fast people in the cast and crew feel energized and alive," Lorenz says. "If you get bogged down [by shooting too many takes], scenes become tiresome and boring, especially for a young kid like Jacob. I wanted to capture the performances as soon as possible, and Liam likes to work that way too. Get it on the first or second take, if possible, and move on."

In between the big action scenes, *The Marksman* includes several talking-and-driving sequences that dramatize Jim and Miguel's evolving relationship. Lorenz shot those exchanges inside a real pickup truck as it was towed across the desert landscape. One unintended consequence: Neeson and Jacob spent a lot of time in close quarters developing an off-camera rapport. Lorenz says, "While we'd be setting up all the rigging around them, Liam and Jacob were essentially locked inside the cab, talking, and that's where they really got to know each other. I'd listen in sometimes and at one point Liam rattled off all these movies he'd been in and Jacob hadn't heard of a single one. Then Liam mentions *Star Wars* and Jacob lit up: 'You were in *Star Wars*'?!"

As the shoot progressed, Jacob came to regard Neeson with considerable warmth. "It was cool being with this big movie star," Perez says. "Liam Neeson was like my grandpa." That off-screen relationship translated into a number of unscripted exchanges, Lorenz says. "One of my favorite moments in the movie happened in the cab of the pickup truck, where Jim and Miguel give each other a fist bump. That was totally improvised, and it looks so natural."

### **A Road Movie With Heart**

A riveting blend of character study, contemporary western, road movie and action thriller, *The Marksman* aims to stir audiences on a visceral level, Lorenz says. "I want people to be entertained first and foremost. My favorite films were intense action movies with realistic undertones, like *Bullitt* and *Heat*. And then I used westerns as a template. Beyond that, I want to impart this idea that Liam's character redeems himself by going through this transformation where he becomes less selfish and more selfless. I think we can all benefit from applying that to our lives, and that's the theme I was going for in *The Marksman*."

From Winnick's vantage point, *The Marksman* offers moviegoers an opportunity to immerse themselves in a timely American journey rich with possibility. "In a world filled with alienation and friction," she says, "*The Marksman* is ultimately a story of two very unlikely souls coming together and forming what you could call a family."

### **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

A three-time Academy Award nominee for producing, Robert Lorenz spent many years working alongside filmmaker Clint Eastwood on such films as *American Sniper*, *Gran Torino*, *Mystic River*, *Invictus*, *Changeling* and *Letters From Iwo Jima*, among others. He also executive produced the Oscar-winning Best Picture, *Million Dollar Baby*. Moving into the director's chair in 2012, Lorenz's first feature was the well-received *Trouble With The Curve*, starring Eastwood, Amy Adams, Justin Timberlake and John Goodman.

After the record-breaking success of *American Sniper*, Lorenz decided it was time to focus solely on writing and directing projects of his own. He started his own production company, Stonehouse Motion Pictures, where he has numerous features and television projects in development. *The Marksman* is the first film produced under this banner.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Lorenz studied film at the University of Iowa before moving to Los Angeles, where he now lives with his wife Melissa and their two children.