



## THE HURT LOCKER (Cert 15)

**Directed by:** Kathryn Bigelow

**Running time:** 126 minutes

**Cautions:** Scenes of bloodshed and strong language

### SUMMARY

Sergeant William James takes command of a bomb disposal unit in Iraq, replacing his by-the-book predecessor who was recently killed on duty. James is indifferent to danger, doing things the hard way and putting the lives of his men in danger. The film is a grittily realistic portrayal of modern 'asymmetric' warfare. A sniper could be at any window, any heap of rubbish could conceal a bomb, and no one can be trusted.

We're introduced to 'Beckham', a young Iraqi boy whom James befriends and with whom he plays football. The relationship leads him to take more risks when the booby-trapped body of a boy he believes to be Beckham is found – his judgement is skewed by his desire for revenge, and he comes close to disaster.

One of James's men is injured when, contrary to good military tactics, he leads them in a hunt for insurgents who have detonated a car bomb; another confesses that he can no longer cope with the strains of the job.

We see James at home on leave with his wife and son, but he is still thinking about returning. The last scene sees him starting another tour of duty.

### FIRST REACTIONS

- The writer Mark Boal spent time with embedded with a bomb disposal unit in Iraq. Some veterans of the war have picked him up on details they say

he's got wrong, but overall does the film ring true as a depiction of modern warfare?

- There's a great contrast between James and the other members of his team – he's cool, while they are nervous and keyed up. Is James braver than them, or is there something wrong with him?
- The psychiatrist who tries to help Eldrege, Colonel Cambridge, is well-meaning but ineffectual. Can you be a good soldier in a situation like the Iraq conflict – or any conflict – and still be a good person?
- The hurt locker is American slang for a period of intense, inescapable physical or mental pain. In the film, who's in the hurt locker?

### INTERACTIONS

- What makes some people able to deal with danger and the fear of death, while others can't? Do we all have a certain stock of courage that we're born with?
- The Iraqis in the film tend to have walk-on parts, without being portrayed as real, three-dimensional people; they're just aliens, speaking a foreign language and dressed in strange clothes. What is the director/writer trying to convey by this?
- **Read Ecclesiastes 4.1–4.** This book contains a very bleak view of life.
  - Does it reflect James's philosophy?
  - Does he believe in anything?
- **Read Judges 6.33–40, 7.16–25.** This is the first battle fought by Gideon, one of the greatest of the judges.
  - Does he come across as a natural fighter?

- What gives him the courage to do what he does?
- Compare him with Sgt James.
- **Read Judges 15.12–19** (Samson has antagonised the Philistines, and his own people are going to turn him in.)
  - What was Samson's attitude to war?
  - Does the prospect of death worry him?
  - Does he worry about killing?
  - Compare him with Sgt James, too – both adrenaline junkies?
- At the end of the film, James is talking to his baby son and says, 'As you get older, some of the things you love might not seem so special any more ... The older you get, the fewer things you really love; by the time you get to my age, it's only one or two things; with me I think it's only one.'
- Has the war done this to him? Or was he damaged anyway? What will happen when the war's over – will the marriage survive?

### CLIP TO DISCUSS

**Watch Chapter 8: 1.06.57–1.09.30.** *After the desert fire-fight, the team unwinds with beer and masculine horse-play.*

- Why does James say that he's divorced/separated (we find out later that he's still very much with his wife)?
- Sanborn finds a box under James's bed with old detonators and fuses. Why does he keep them - and why keep his wedding ring there?
- Why does Sanborn say 'It's all just shit from Radio Shack?'

- Try to imagine this scene with women instead of men as the participants. Would it be different? How?

### OTHER ANGLES

- Is war worth it?
- Read Micah 4.1–5. What does it tell us about war in God's purposes for humanity?

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