

FREE FIRE (2017)

- Released by April 21st 2017
- 1 hour 30 minutes
- \$7,000,000 budget
- Ben Wheatley directed
- Rated R for strong violence, pervasive language, sexual references and drug use
- Film4 Productions, BFI, Rock Films, Protagonist Pictures, Studio Canal UK
- Produced by Mark Albela, Patricia L. Glaser, Kirk Kerkorian, Anthony Mandekic

QUICK THOUGHTS:

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- In October 2014, Olivia Wilde, Luke Evans, Armie Hammer, Cillian Murphy, and Michael Smiley joined the cast of the film, with Ben Wheatley directing from a screenplay he wrote with Amy Jump
- Wheatley and Andy Starke will produce under their Rook Films banner. Film4 Productions will produce and finance the film
- In April 2015, Brie Larson joined the cast of the film, replacing Wilde who had to drop out due to a schedule conflict
- “I started getting the idea as I was reading a transcript online about this horrible shootout in Miami in the '80s,” says Wheatley, 45, clad in Comic-Con dress-casual and enjoying a pint during a recent stop in Boston. “It was between the FBI and armed robbers, very close quarters, and it went on for ages — 30, 40 minutes. The transcript was a forensic report, but it read like a story, it was so full of drama.
- “I wanted to make a film that was a bit realistic about that kind of experience,” continues the director, a veteran of commercials who made his feature debut with the microbudgeted 2009 crime entry “Down Terrace.” “This certainly isn't a documentary, but from what I've read, unless you're a Navy SEAL or something and you're in firefights all day long, you're understandably terrified, and people are really bad shots. That never seems to happen to movie heroes — they blast everyone, even from miles away.”
- Q: I noticed that Martin Scorsese has a credit as an Executive Producer? What sort of input did he have during filming?
 - He initially looked through the script and his production company sent back notes but there wasn't that much to go on to be honest. He really helps when casting as actors see his name and jump at the opportunity. His name opens a lot of doors! Toward the end of the process we sent him an edit and we talked to him about how he felt about it. He's gentle and supportive but basically, his name helped secure us a lot of financing and it will also help to sell the film. His name attached to anything is a massive endorsement.
 - It's all well and good using his name to help finance a film but at the end of the day, I still had to show him the finished version and that was terrifying. As far as I'm concerned, he's the greatest living film maker. If he says something negative it's soul destroying but overall, he liked it so I was lucky.

WRITING (Amy Jump & Ben Wheatley)

- Free Fire was inspired by the real-life transcripts of a 1980s FBI shootout in Miami that went terribly wrong. Wheatley had never seen a film that focused specifically on one massive gunfight the way the FBI report described, which piqued his interest.
- “Amy Jump who is the co-writer on this film and had the sole writer credit on High-Rise and A Field in England, also happens to be my wife. So there’s that. The way that we write together is different on every film. When I had written the screenplay for this one, it was a very miserable film about people bleeding to death, it was probably going to be unwatchable. Amy re-wrote it, made it a lot funnier and put a lot more pathos in to it.”
- “When we shot the film, we had some really good improvisers like Michael Smiley, Armie Hammer and Sharlto Copley on the cast and they started to bring their own stuff to it. Amy would look at what we had shot every day and would then re-write the script for the next day.”
- “The way we work is this; I write something and then Amy re-writes it and makes it much better, I don’t get a say in it. She’s a lot better at writing than I am, if she’s the last person to work on the script then we’ll be fine. It’s been a bruising journey to get to this point where I’m not having a massive hissy-fit when the script comes back and none of the lines I had written are in it.”
- Wheatley described games such as Counter Strike as a source of inspiration for the film

STORY/TOPICS

- Setup
- Comparisons - Reservoir Dogs, Lock Stock 2 Smoking Barrels
- Fav character
- Ending
- Action
- Nihilism? - <http://illinoistimes.com/article-18579-free-fire-a-slick-exercise-in-nihilism.html>

CAST:

- Sharlto Copley as Vernon
 - “The last scene we filmed was Sharlto Copley on fire, that wasn’t done with CG, he really did that himself! He’d been talked into it by the stunt coordinators and I got worried that he would seriously hurt himself. It was due to happen half way through filming but luckily I was able to schedule that for the last day so if he did seriously hurt himself, it wouldn’t affect the movie!” - Ben
 - Luke Evans was cast as Vernon but dropped out due to schedule conflicts with Beauty and the Beast (2017)
- Armie Hammer as Ord
 - Armie Hammer said that police appeared on set during the second day of shooting following calls of concern from members of the public in nearby shops having heard gun shots.
- Brie Larson as Justine
 - “Yes, a learning curve in not being scared of them and just kind of trusting. It’s a very odd thing that someone tapes a little explosive onto your body and then five minutes later they’re like, “All right, on the count of three this thing’s going to explode.” And you’re like, “Really? How do I know it’s going to explode the right way?” It’s just a lesson in trust, and no one got hurt. Everything was fine, but it took me a little bit to get comfortable with that concept of there are just explosions everywhere.” - Brie

- On creating a backstory: Yeah. No, I do. First of all, I just find it fun. I just think it's a fun thing to think about. It's like why someone chose the job that they have, or why they're doing what they're doing. For me, it quiets a certain part of my brain that will always wonder unless I answer that question... And then because this film, the way Ben works is it'll be one take scripted, one take improv. One take scripted, one take improv. And everything sort of blends together, and you kind of have to know who your character is or at least have some sort of structure in order to be able to go off of the script.
- "There's a reason why I was the only woman in this movie; it was part of the metaphor," the 27-year-old actress says. "I would love to do more films with more women always, because that's my favorite thing. But this, from the personal side, all the guys were gentlemen. They were all engaged or married or have kids, and so I was just like everybody's little sister. It was a dream experience, really."
- Cillian Murphy as Chris
- Jack Reynor as Harry
- Babou Ceesay as Martin
- Enzo Cilenti as Bernie
- Sam Riley as Stevo
- Michael Smiley as Frank
- Noah Taylor as Gordon
- Patrick Bergin as Howie
- Tom Davis as Leary
- Mark Monero as Jimmy

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- Sara Dee features in Free Fire and all previous Ben Wheatley movies he's directed for cinema release. She plays the telephone voice.

DIRECTING (Ben Wheatley)

- "Once you get any actor in front of the camera, it sort of acts as a leveller and so all actors become equal. I've been lucky in that everyone I've worked with has been really nice and they've had no heirs and graces about them. With Brie, we were able to work with her just after she had finished on Room. Nobody had seen it at that point and so she wasn't 'Academy Award Winner Brie Larson' which works well for us as it looks like we've managed to cast her after she won the Oscar but we made this film two years ago so nobody really knew who she was back then. She was really sweet though, until a week before we started to shoot she still thought we were filming in Boston. She didn't realise we she was going to be in Brighton for six weeks!"
- "Wheatley, who had to make sure every shot, both from a gun and captured by his camera, happened in sync. To do that, he drew 1,700 storyboards, built a physical model of the warehouse he planned to film in, and even created a 3-D simulation of the space in Minecraft (using a Blade Runner texture pack) to get every shot right. "We could share that amongst all the people who working on it, and all walk around inside it together," Wheatley says. "That was really useful."
- More than anything, the Minecraft renderings helped the director determine what size space he would need to film in and what kind of objects he would need to put in it to give his characters proper cover. Because each Minecraft block is the equivalent of a cubic meter, he could calculate how much floor space he needed, as well as the size of the

containers, walls, etc. he'd need his various shooters to hide behind. Designing in Minecraft's 3-D space also helped him figure out what each character's line of sight would need to be, which in turn determined—whether they could conceivably hit their target or not.

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Laurie Rose)

- Laurie Rose is known for his work on High-Rise (2015), London Spy (2015) and Peaky Blinders (2013)
- Principal photography on the film began on 8 June 2015 in Brighton, Sussex
- Production concluded on 17 July 2015
- “The timing of the film was one of the biggest challenges. We wanted to keep the continuity of the clothing and the wounds so the actors could keep themselves in that head space and not have to think about what it was they were shooting... There a couple of scenes that we had to jiggle around a bit, film separately out of chronological order and cut in separately but we were able to film the majority of it in order.” - Ben
- “It was incredibly difficult to film as the majority are of the cast are all in the same room at the same time for most of the film. We had to track and map every gunshot and every bullet hole for continuation so it made sense to do as much of it as possible in order.” - Ben
- “We shot in an old newsprint warehouse in Brighton. The paper is still based right next door to where we were filming. It took them three weeks for them to realise we were making a film there which doesn't suggest to me that they're a team of crack reporters! It was the Argus in Brighton and while we were shooting thousands of rounds in the building next door to them, one of their headlines read 'Buddhist monk rescues abused lobster from restaurant' and nothing was mentioned about the warzone next door to them. They didn't ever contact us to see what was going on yet people were contacting us from up the road to say that they could hear the gunfire.”
- “We wanted it to appear reasonably realistic in terms of how many shots they fired. Obviously, the characters are paranoid enough as people that they go in with enough bullets to reload a few times. The only person who fucked it was Sam Riley, he fired the gun far too many times. The amount of times he fired the gun would have meant that his character would've needed a rucksack to carry all his ammo. Actors like Michael Smiley made a note of how many bullets their gun would hold and would make sure not to just fire it like they were a cowboy. To answer your question, I think we fired around seven thousand rounds in just over six weeks. Obviously, they're not all in the film. We also used around five hundred pyrotechnics. They were all practical effects too, a lot of the time now it's just actors waggling guns around and then CG flashes are added in post-production but I wasn't having any of that.”
- Once the whole thing was plotted out, Wheatley and his team were able to scout a location for their shoot(-out): an old factory in Brighton. Wheatley then made blueprints of the space along with his production designer, Paki Smith, that helped dictate where each actor had to go in each scene. (The director likens it to plotting out plays in a game of Madden.) He broke the hour-plus shoot-out into eight segments that represented about 10 minutes of the final film and created a blueprint for each. The blueprints not only described each actor's location and/or destination, but also allowed the crew to follow and film them—and gave the visual-effects team a map for the location of each “pyro” (the small devices that explode during filming to give the appearance of a bullet hitting something).

COSTUME/WARDROBE

- “One costume...actually that’s not true, we had two. One was the one I wore most of the time and another one that was a size or two bigger so that I could wear pads or things under it if I was falling to the ground or doing a stunt. As time went on it just got dirtier and more blown up.” - Brie
- “Yeah, we did. I think for me the main thing was ... What’s funny about Justine is that usually with the clothes it’s a way of telling you who a person is, and I think that with Justine it’s actually a way of telling her who she’s not. I think that she doesn’t have any money at all, or very little money at that, and doesn’t have nice clothes. And she maybe stole, or borrowed, or saved up to have this one kind of mildly cool outfit, but it’s still trying to blend in. It’s nothing that’s too overtly flashy because her whole motive is to allow all these men to feel like they’re the most important and the coolest in the room. So it’s not about her. She’s not trying to compete with them. She doesn’t want to be in the line of fire of that competition. She just wants to be fanning that, so she can play all of them and sneak away.” - Brie
- Shot in generally chronological order at a warehouse in Brighton, England, for six weeks, the “Free Fire” production gave each actor one set of ’70s fashions that got gradually torn up — and bloodier — as the firefight wore on. Larson chose to wear high-heeled boots over Justine’s designer jeans, and quickly regretted it.

EDITING (Amy Jump & Ben Wheatley)

SOUND/MUSIC (Ben Salisbury & Geoff Barrow)

- Geoff Barrow was born on December 9, 1971 in Walton-In-Gordano, North Somerset, England - known for Lord of War, Wild, Fantastic 4, Columbiana
- Ben Salisbury - Long established as one of the leading composers of brilliant contemporary orchestral scores for major BBC natural history programmes, including three David Attenborough series, Ben is now bringing his impressive cinematic style to drama productions. A classically trained pianist since the age of five, he has composed the music for more than 40 wildlife productions, including David Attenborough’s Life In The Undergrowth, Life of Mammals and the 2008 series Life In Cold Blood. Other credits include The Nature Of Britain, Congo and the Making Waves strand of 8 'behind the scenes' programmes that accompanied The Blue Planet series.

PROMOTION

- In February 2015, it was announced that StudioCanal, and Sony Pictures Worldwide Acquisitions had acquired distribution rights to the film in United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, Scandinavia, and Spain, respectively
- In November 2015, it was announced that Alchemy had acquired United States distribution rights to the film
- However, on 10 March 2016, in the wake of rumors of Alchemy's financial troubles, distribution of the film was acquired by A24
- The film had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, and served as the closing night film of the London Film Festival on 16 October 2016

BOX OFFICE

- In the United States and Canada, *Free Fire* opened alongside *The Promise*, *Born in China*, *Unforgettable* and *Phoenix Forgotten*, and is projected to gross around \$3 million from 1,070 theaters in its opening weekend
- According to Boxofficemojo, it placed at number 17 in its opening weekend, taking in only \$994,430
- To date, the film has made 2.2 million

RECEPTION

- IMDB: 7.2
- RT: 67% Tatometer, 67% Audience
- The site's critical consensus reads, "*Free Fire* aims squarely for genre thrills, and hits its target repeatedly and with great gusto – albeit with something less than pure cinematic grace."

SEQUEL/LEGACY

FINAL THOUGHTS