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Crash

Germany/USA/Australia 2004

Director: Paul Haggis

With Sandra Bullock,
Don Cheadle, Matt Dillon,
Jennifer Esposito

Certificate 15 112m 22s

Best known as a writer and co-producer on Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning *Million Dollar Baby*, Paul Haggis now directs his own screenplay *Crash*. While he is no stranger to multi-character drama thanks to his work on such TV shows as *thirtysomething* and *L.A. Law*, the film's narrative structure – weaving almost a dozen threads into a 36-hour timeframe – remains an ambitious undertaking for a first-time director. What's more, Haggis tackles head-on the subject of racial tension, whose exploration in mainstream US cinema rarely stretches beyond the lighthearted parameters of the buddy movie.

It's disappointing, then, that this LA story is more *Grand Canyon* than *Short Cuts*, tending towards the melodramatic worthiness of the former rather than the freewheeling tragicomic subtleties of the latter. Haggis has set out to paint an unflinchingly 'true' portrait of modern metropolitan life, but his approach is too programmatic and contrived to convince. We are so aware of his authorial presence pulling the strings that it's a struggle to engage fully with the characters. And while the film touches on a range of concerns, including gun violence, healthcare and familial discord, the issue of race dominates the agenda to such a degree that the drama ends up looking somewhat monochromatic. That no scene seems able to pass without some racially motivated clash puts a heavy strain on credibility.

At its best, the film – with its dense plotting, polished production values and talented ensemble cast – has the mildly addictive quality of an expensive soap opera, and there are a number of

arresting moments. Despite her predictably sentimental redemption at the end of the movie, it's initially startling to see the typically congenial Sandra Bullock (the film's biggest star, though her screen time is minor) play the kind of hateful, angry figure she does here; her casting against type is perhaps emblematic of Haggis' quest to challenge audiences' assumptions. There's also a notable insight into the racial politics of mass entertainment when a TV producer complains that one of his show's actors has started talking "less black". But then there are the self-consciously 'big' moments that find Haggis at his most manipulative. With its title hinting at the characters' most common mode of interaction, *Crash* swerves into a grisly pile-up of ironies and coincidences in its second half. Two pay-offs stand out for their heavy-handedness. First, there's a scene where Matt Dillon's racist cop saves from a burning car the black woman he had earlier molested; then there's the confrontation between Persian shopkeeper Farhad and Mexican locksmith Daniel, which sees the latter's five-year-old daughter accidentally shot by what turns out to be a blank round. The histrionic use of music and slow motion in both these scenes only amplifies the sense of overkill.

The most involving strand centres on black detective Graham (Don Cheadle), who juggles a murder investigation overshadowed by institutional politics with family problems concerning his junkie mother and criminal brother. While his opening voiceover designates him as *Crash*'s pivotal character, Cheadle's quietly dignified performance never seeks to steal the spotlight. He gets one of the script's few funny lines – "I can't talk right now, I'm having sex with a white woman" – as well as its most affecting moment, when he allows his reproachful mother to believe it was his dead brother rather than him who brought her groceries. Unfortunately, it's this kind of understated poignancy that Haggis' well-intentioned but overbearing movie traffics in far too rarely. **Matthew Leyland**



Head on: Thandie Newton, Matt Dillon

CREDITS

Director

Paul Haggis

Producers

Mark R. Harris
Bobby Moresco
Paul Haggis
Cathy Schulman
Don Cheadle
Bob Yari

Screenplay

Paul Haggis
Bobby Moresco

Story

Paul Haggis

Director of Photography

J. Michael Muro

Editor

Hughes Winborne
Production Designer
Laurence Bennett
Music/Music Performer/Arranger/Producer
Mark Isham

©ApolloProScreen
GmbH & Co.
Filmproduktion KG
Production Companies

Bob Yari Productions
and DEJ Productions
present a BlackFriar's
Bridge and Harris
Company production
An ApolloProScreen
production

A Bull's Eye
Entertainment pro-
duction
In association with
Arclight Films
International Pty Ltd.

A film by Paul Haggis
Executive Producers
Jan Korbelen
Marina Grasic
Andrew Reimer
Tom Nunan

Co-producers
Betsy Danbury
Sarah Halley Finn
Randi Hiller

Associate Producer
Dana Maksimovic
Production Supervisors
Mads Hansen
ApolloProScreen:
Kai Schuermann

Production Accountant
Tanoa Parks
Unit Production Manager
Betsy Danbury
Location Manager
Jennifer W. Dunne

Post-production Supervisor
Brad Arensman
Assistant Directors
1st: Scott Cameron
2nd: Simone Farber
Script Supervisor
Jay Mason

Casting
Sarah Halley Finn
Randi Hiller
2nd Unit Director of Photography
Dana Gonzales
Aerial Unit Director of Photography
Dylan Goss

Camera Operator
Dana Gonzales
Gaffer
Dayton Nietert
Visual Effects
Luma Pictures, Inc.
Special Effects Co-ordinator
Ron Trost
Special Effects Foreman
Scott M. Austin

Art Director
Brandee Dell'Aringa
Set Decorator
Linda Sutton-Doll
Property Master
Scott Ambrose
Construction Co-ordinator
John W. Jergensen
Costume Designer
Linda Bass
Wardrobe Supervisor
Gail Just
Department Head Make-up
Ben Nye Jr
Key Make-up
Michelle Vittone-McNeil
Department Head Hairstylists
Bunny Parker
Kerry Mendenhall
Kimberly Spiteri
Key Hairstylist
Theraesa Rivers
Hairstylist
RaMona Fleetwood
Title Design
mOcean
End Title Graphics
J. Kathryn Landholt
Digital Intermediate
iO Film
Music Supervisor
Richard Glasser
Music Recorded/Mixed by
Stephen Krause
Soundtrack
City of Angel –

CAST

Supervisor

Brad Arensman

Assistant Directors

1st: Scott Cameron

2nd: Simone Farber

Script Supervisor

Jay Mason

Casting

Sarah Halley Finn

Randi Hiller

2nd Unit Director of Photography

Dana Gonzales

Aerial Unit Director of Photography

Dylan Goss

Camera Operator

Dana Gonzales

Gaffer

Dayton Nietert

Visual Effects

Luma Pictures, Inc.

Special Effects Co-ordinator

Ron Trost

Special Effects Foreman

Scott M. Austin

Art Director

Brandee Dell'Aringa

Set Decorator

Linda Sutton-Doll

Property Master

Scott Ambrose

Construction Co-ordinator

John W. Jergensen

Costume Designer

Linda Bass

Wardrobe Supervisor

Gail Just

Department Head Make-up

Ben Nye Jr

Key Make-up

Michelle Vittone-McNeil

Department Head Hairstylists

Bunny Parker

Kerry Mendenhall

Kimberly Spiteri

Key Hairstylist

Theraesa Rivers

Hairstylist

RaMona Fleetwood

Title Design

mOcean

End Title Graphics

J. Kathryn Landholt

Digital Intermediate

iO Film

Music Supervisor

Richard Glasser

Music Recorded/Mixed by

Stephen Krause

Soundtrack

City of Angel –

Sungsoo Kim; *God*

Rest Ye Merry

Gentlemen (trad); *In*

the Deep – Bird York;

Maybe Tomorrow –

Stereophonics;

Redemption – Mark

Isham; *Swinging*

Doors; *Whiskey Town*

by – Moot Davis; *El*

llamar de pasión –

Shani; *Gonna Buy Me*

a Rope; *Jingle Bells*

(trad); *Problems* –

Move.meant;

Str8upndown –

Move.meant; *We*

Wish You a Merry

Christmas (trad)

Sound Mixer

Richard Van Dyke

Re-recording Mixers

Marc David Fishman

Rick Ash

Adam Jenkins

Supervising Sound Editor

Sandy Gendler

Stunt Co-ordinator

Gary Wayton

CAST

Sandra Bullock

Jean Cabot

Don Cheadle

Graham Walters

Matt Dillon

Officer Ryan

Jennifer Esposito

Ria

William Fichtner

Flanagan

Brendan Fraser

Rick

Terrence Howard

Cameron

Chris 'Ludacris'

Bridges

Anthony

Thandie Newton

Christine

Ryan Phillippe

Officer Thomas Hanson

Larenz Tate

Peter

Nona Gaye

Karen

Michael Peña

Daniel

Loretta Devine

Shaniqua

Shaun Toub

Farhad

Beverly Todd

Graham's mother

Keith David

Lieutenant Dixon

Karina Arroyave

Elizabeth

Dato Bakhtadze

Lucien

Art Chudabal

Ken Ho

Sean Cory

motorcycle co

Tony Danza

Fred

Ime N. Etuk

Georgie

Eddie Fernan

Officer Gomez

Howard Fong

store owner

Billy Gallo

Officer Hill

Ken Garito

Bruce

Octavio Góm

Hispanic pass

James Haggi

Lara's friend

Sylvia Kelegia

Nurse Hodges

Daniel Dae Ki

Park

Bruce Kirby

Pop Ryan

Jayden Lund

security guard

Jack McGee

gun store ovr

Amanda Mor

1st assistant c

Martin Norse

Conklin

Joe Ordaz

Hispanic drive

Greg Joung F

Choi

Yomi Perry

Maria

Alexis Rhee

Kim Lee

Ashlyn Sanci

Lara

Molly Schaff

woman at loc

Paul E. Short

Officer Stone

Marina Sirtis

Shereen

Bahar Soom

Dorri

Allan Steele

paramedic

Kate Super

receptionist

Glenn Tarant

country DJ

Kathleen Yor

Officer Johns

■ **SYNOPSIS** Present-day Los Angeles, December. Arriving at the scene of a road-side death, LAPD detective Graham and his partner/lover Ria are involved in a traffic accident. The film flashes back to the previous day and follows several intersecting plotlines.

District attorney Rick and his wife Jean (both white) are car-jacked at gunpoint