

# Breaking (film)

***Breaking*** is a 2022 American thriller drama film starring John Boyega as a Marine Corps veteran, Brian Brown-Easley, who is in financial trouble and robs a bank. It is written and directed by Abi Damaris Corbin and co-written by Kwame Kwei-Armah, based on the true story of Brown-Easley, detailed in the 2018 *Task & Purpose* article "They Didn't Have to Kill Him" by Aaron Gell. The film also stars Nicole Beharie, Selenis Leyva, Connie Britton, Jeffrey Donovan, and Michael Kenneth Williams.

The film premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival under its original title **892** on January 21, 2022, and was released in the United States by Bleecker Street on August 26, 2022. It received generally positive reviews from critics.

## Plot

Based on the 2017 real-life story of the late Brian Brown-Easley, a decorated Marine Corps veteran in dire financial straits resulting from systemic failure. Easley is concerned over the effects of this on his daughter, alongside the prospects of homelessness to the point of threatening to blow up a Wells Fargo bank unless he receives payment he is owed from the Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

## Background

*Breaking* is based on the news article titled, "‘They didn’t have to kill him’: The death of Lance Corporal Brian Easley" by Aaron Gell (<https://taskandpurpose.com/news/death-lance-corporal-brian-easley/>), which is about Brian Easley, played by actor John Boyega in the film. Easley was a 33-year-old U.S. Marine veteran who served in Kuwait and Iraq before being honorably discharged in 2005. Easley moved back in with his mom, who lived in Georgia. After moving back in with his mom, Easley met a woman named Jessica, with whom he formed a relationship, moved in with, and eventually married. In 2008, Jessica became pregnant with their daughter, whom they named Jayla. Eventually, Easley was diagnosed with mental health challenges as well as severe chronic back pain. Then, in 2011, Easley’s mother died. Her death began a period of time in which Easley bounced around between various housing situations that included

### Breaking



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Abi Damaris Corbin</u>
<b>Written by</b>	<u>Abi Damaris Corbin</u> <u>Kwame Kwei-Armah</u>
<b>Based on</b>	"They Didn't Have to Kill Him" by <u>Aaron Gell</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	<u>Salman Al-Rashid</u> <u>Sam Frohman</u> <u>Mackenzie Fargo</u> <u>Ashley Levinson</u> <u>Kevin Turen</u>
<b>Starring</b>	<u>John Boyega</u> <u>Nicole Beharie</u> <u>Selenis Leyva</u> <u>Connie Britton</u> <u>Jeffrey Donovan</u>

a Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) mental hospital and the inside of his car. Easley attempted to keep himself afloat through the monthly disability checks he received from the V.A. The checks were in the amount of \$892.<sup>[3]</sup>

In addition to the uncertainty of his living conditions and his mental health, Jessica said that Brian Easley was, at times, rarely around to help care for their daughter. At one point, Easley did buy a cellphone for his daughter, Jayla and used it to assist her with homework. Additionally, Easley called her just about every night and the two would pray together. In between everything, Easley attempted to get an education at Lincoln College of Technology. However, by July 3, 2017, financial difficulties had made it difficult for Easley to attend to his education. The VA had not yet given Easley his usual \$892 check, which led him to visit the VA's Regional Benefits Office for an appointment. There was an incident and Easley was handcuffed by police. The VA claimed that he had been belligerent and eventually the police released him from custody, but he did not get the money he usually got from the VA. He was scheduled to return three days later, but that never happened, and a few days later, everything changed.<sup>[4]</sup>

On the morning of July 7, 2017, Brian Easley walked into a Wells Fargo bank with what he claimed was a C-4 explosive in his backpack. He gave everyone in the bank, except two employees, time to evacuate the bank. In his desire to draw attention to his financially desperate situation, Easley, after calling 911, also called a local news station and explained his perspective to an editor. While on the call, he emphasized his financial struggles as well as his struggles to procure essentials like food and housing. Additionally, Easley said his goal was not to hurt anyone nor was it to rob the bank; he just wanted to get his usual \$892 check.<sup>[5]</sup>

After police and SWAT arrived on the scene, a crisis negotiator, Sgt. Andre Bates, called the bank and began talking with Brian Easley. Sgt. Bates attempted to relate to Easley by discussing their experiences as U.S. Marines. Sgt. Bates tried to appeal to what he saw as the humanity within Easley by telling him his life and honor were worth more than \$892. Eventually, Sgt. Bates convinced Easley to let one of the two remaining hostages go in exchange for a pack of cigarettes. This breakthrough gave Sgt. Bates confidence that the situation was heading in a positive direction. However, the breakthrough never fully materialized. In the early afternoon, confusion ensued when a gunshot was fired at Brian Easley, killing him and ending the standoff.<sup>[6]</sup>

Questions have been raised over why Easley was shot and killed by police. For some time, there was no public knowledge of Sgt. Bates' attempts to solve the situation peacefully. There have been suggestions and allusions that racial bias and bias against those with mental illness might have played a role in Easley being killed by police. While not excusing Brian's actions, his half-brother, Calvin Easley, has been quoted as saying, "they didn't have to kill him. He just wanted to get his story out."<sup>[7]</sup>

	<u>Michael Kenneth Williams</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>Doug Emmett</u>
<b>Edited by</b>	Chris Witt
<b>Music by</b>	<u>Michael Abels</u>
<b>Production companies</b>	Salmira Productions <u>Epic Magazine</u> Little Lamb UpperRoom Productions
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Bleecker Street</u>
<b>Release dates</b>	January 21, 2022 (Sundance) August 26, 2022 (United States)
<b>Running time</b>	103 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Box office</b>	\$2.8 million

## Cast

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- [John Boyega](#) as Lance Corporal Brian Brown-Easley
- [Michael Kenneth Williams](#) as Eli Bernard
- [Nicole Beharie](#) as Estel Valerie
- [Selenis Leyva](#) as Rosa Diaz
- [Connie Britton](#) as Lisa Larson
- [Jeffrey Donovan](#) as Major Riddick
- [Robb Derringer](#) as Chief Jack Quail
- [Olivia Washington](#) as Cassandra Easley
- [Elise Neal](#) as Juanita
- [London Covington](#) as Kiah Brown-Easley
- [Kim D'Armond](#) as 911 Wendy
- [Michelle Bernard](#) as Barricade Cop

## Production

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On March 2, 2021, it was announced that [Jonathan Majors](#) would star in the film, then titled *892*, as a Marine war veteran who suffers from mental scars, and his hard transition back to civilian life.<sup>[8]</sup> The screenplay was based on Aaron Gell's article "They Didn't Have to Kill Him", published on *Task & Purpose* on April 9, 2018.<sup>[9][10]</sup> On July 8, 2021, it was reported that [John Boyega](#) replaced Majors due to a scheduling conflict with *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*.<sup>[11]</sup> On August 30, 2021, it was confirmed that [Connie Britton](#) joined the cast.<sup>[12]</sup>

[Principal photography](#) began on July 6, 2021, and was scheduled to conclude on August 16, 2021, in [Los Angeles](#).<sup>[13]</sup>

## Release

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The film premiered at the [2022 Sundance Film Festival](#) on January 21, 2022, where the cast won the Special Jury Award for Ensemble Cast in the U.S. Dramatic Competition.<sup>[14]</sup> On February 1, 2022, [Bleecker Street](#) acquired the film's US distribution rights.<sup>[15][16]</sup> The film's title was later changed from *892* to *Breaking*, and it was set to be released on August 26, 2022.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

In the United States and Canada, *Breaking* was released alongside *The Invitation* and *Three Thousand Years of Longing*. The film debuted to \$985,921 from 902 theaters in its opening weekend.<sup>[18][19]</sup> It went on to gross \$2.8 million at the box office.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

### Critical response

On the [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 81% of 156 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.7/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Breaking* struggles to effectively convey its messages, but its noble intentions are well served by John Boyega's electrifying performance."<sup>[22]</sup>

Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 66 out of 100, based on 32 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.<sup>[23]</sup> Audiences polled by PostTrak gave the film a 55% overall positive score.<sup>[24]</sup>

Pete Hammond of *Deadline Hollywood* said, "Corbin is firmly in control behind the camera and with particular expert help with her editor Chris Witt. The British actor Boyega is superb in every aspect of the role, as is the commanding presence of the late Williams in what, sadly, is his final film role."<sup>[25]</sup>

Writing for *Variety*, Peter Debruge said, "This is not an act of documentary reenactment so much as a tense, speculative drama, imagining what this man must have gone through during those hours, and how his actions rippled out to affect others' lives."<sup>[9]</sup>

## Accolades

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- 2022 Sundance Film Festival: Special Jury Award for Ensemble Cast in the U.S. Dramatic Competition.<sup>[26]</sup>

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## External links

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- *Breaking* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12311620/>) at *IMDb*
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