

= Aaron Eckhart =

Aaron Edward Eckhart ( born March 12 , 1968 ) is an American film and stage actor .

Born in California , he moved to the United Kingdom at the age of 13 , when his father relocated the family . Several years later , he began his acting career by performing in school plays , before moving to Sydney , Australia for his high school senior year . He left high school without graduating , but earned a diploma through an adult education course , and graduated from Brigham Young University , Utah in 1994 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in film . For much of the mid @-@ 1990s , he lived in New York City as a struggling , unemployed actor . As an undergraduate at Brigham Young , Eckhart met director and writer Neil LaBute , who cast him in several of his own original plays . Five years later Eckhart made a debut as an unctuous , sociopathic ladies ' man in LaBute 's black comedy film , In the Company of Men ( 1997 ) . Under LaBute 's guidance he worked in the director 's films , Your Friends & Neighbors ( 1998 ) , Nurse Betty ( 2000 ) , and Possession ( 2002 ) .

Eckhart gained wide recognition as George in Steven Soderbergh 's critically acclaimed film , Erin Brockovich ( 2000 ) , and in 2006 received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor for his portrayal of Nick Naylor in Thank You for Smoking . Another mainstream breakout occurred in 2008 when he starred in the blockbuster Batman film The Dark Knight as District Attorney Harvey Dent . Other key roles include The Pledge ( 2001 ) , The Core ( 2003 ) , Rabbit Hole ( 2010 ) and Olympus Has Fallen ( 2013 ) .

= = Early life = =

Eckhart was born on March 12 , 1968 in Cupertino , California , the son of Mary Martha Eckhart ( née Lawrence ) , a writer , artist , and poet , and James Conrad Eckhart , a computer executive . He is the youngest of three brothers . His father was of German ( including German @-@ Russian ) descent , while his mother was of English , Scottish , German and Scotch @-@ Irish ancestry . He was raised as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints ( LDS Church ) , and served a two @-@ year LDS mission in France and Switzerland .

Eckhart 's family relocated to England in 1981 , following his father 's job in information technology . The family resided in Ripley Surrey , South East England , then moved onto Walton @-@ on @-@ Thames , later moving to Cobham . While living in England , Eckhart attended American Community School , now known as ACS International Schools , where he was first introduced to acting , starring in a school production as Charlie Brown . In 1985 he moved to Sydney , where he attended American International School of Sydney for his high school senior year ; he further developed his acting skills in productions like Waiting for Godot , where he admits that he gave a " terrible " performance . In the autumn of his senior year Eckhart left the school in order to take a job working at the Warringah Mall movie theater . He eventually earned his diploma through an adult education course . This also allowed Eckhart time to enjoy a year of surfing in Hawaii and the coastal waters of France as well as skiing in the Alps . In 1988 , Eckhart returned to the United States and enrolled as a film major at Brigham Young University ? Hawaii , but later transferred to Brigham Young University ( BYU ) in Provo , Utah . He graduated in 1994 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree .

= = Career = =

= = = Early work = = =

While at Brigham Young University , Eckhart appeared in the Mormon @-@ themed film , Godly Sorrow , and the role marked Eckhart 's professional debut . At this time he met director / writer Neil LaBute , who cast him in several of his own original plays . After graduating from BYU , Eckhart moved to New York City , acquired an agent , and took various occasional jobs , including bartending , bus driving , and construction work . His first television roles were in commercials . In

1994 he appeared as an extra on the television drama series , Beverly Hills , 90210 . Eckhart followed this small part with roles in documentary re @-@ enactments ( Ancient Secrets of the Bible : Samson ) , made @-@ for @-@ television movies , and short @-@ lived programs like Aliens in the Family .

In 1997 Eckhart was approached by Neil LaBute to star in a film adaptation of LaBute 's stage play , In the Company of Men . He played a frustrated white @-@ collar worker who planned to woo a deaf office worker , gain her affections , then suddenly dump her . The film , his first feature to reach theaters , was critically well received , with Desson Howe of The Washington Post reporting that Eckhart is the " movie 's most malignant presence " and that he " is in chilling command as a sort of satanic prince in shirtsleeves " . In the Company of Men was a critical success , winning Best First Film at the 63rd annual New York Film Critics Circle Award . His performance won him the Independent Spirit Award in the category of Best Debut Performance . The film was ranked as one of " The 25 Most Dangerous Movies " by Premiere magazine .

The following year Eckhart starred in another LaBute feature , Your Friends & Neighbors ( 1998 ) , as Barry , a sexually frustrated husband in a dysfunctional marriage . For the role Eckhart was required to gain weight . In 1999 he starred opposite Elisabeth Shue in Molly , a romantic comedy @-@ drama in which he played the self @-@ absorbed brother of an autistic woman who was cured by surgery . Eckhart also starred that year as a football coach , an offensive coordinator in Oliver Stone 's Any Given Sunday .

= = = Critical success = = =

Eckhart first gained wide exposure in 2000 as George , a pony tailed , goateed biker , in Steven Soderbergh 's drama , Erin Brockovich . The film was met with reasonable reviews , and was a box office success , earning \$ 256 million worldwide . His performance was well received by critics ; Entertainment Weekly 's Owen Gleiberman , wrote that Eckhart " may be playing a bit of an ideal [ ... ] but he makes goodness as palpable as he did yuppie evil in ' In the Company of Men ' . " In an August 2004 interview , Eckhart claimed that he had not worked for nearly a year before he was cast in the movie . " I felt like I sort of was getting away from what I wanted to do as an actor . [ ... ] I had nine months off , but it wasn 't a vacation . Sure , I didn 't earn any money for nine months , but every day I was reading scripts , I was producing my own material , I was taking meetings , I was working on my craft . "

Following the release of Erin Brockovich , Eckhart co @-@ starred with Renée Zellweger in LaBute 's Nurse Betty ( 2000 ) . He next appeared in Sean Penn 's mystery feature The Pledge ( 2001 ) , in which he played a young detective partnered with a veteran detective , played by Jack Nicholson . The movie received generally favorable reviews , but it did not fare particularly well at the box office . The following year , he collaborated with LaBute in a film adaptation of the Man Booker Prize @-@ winning novel Possession ( 2002 ) . In 2003 , Eckhart co @-@ starred with Hilary Swank in The Core , a film about a geophysicist who tries to detonate a nuclear device in order to save the world from destruction . The film was critically and financially unsuccessful . Also in 2003 , he appeared in The Missing , in which he played Cate Blanchett 's lover , and in the action @-@ thriller Paycheck opposite Ben Affleck . Paycheck , based on a short story by science fiction writer Philip K. Dick , garnered generally negative reception . Film critic Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times gave the film two stars ( out of four ) , saying that he " enjoyed the movie " but felt that it " exploits [ Dick 's story ] for its action and plot potential , but never really develops it . "

The following year , away from film , Eckhart guest starred in two episodes of NBC 's comedy sitcom Frasier , where he played a boyfriend of Charlotte , Dr. Frasier Crane 's love interest . His next film role was in E. Elias Merhige 's thriller Suspect Zero , a movie about an FBI agent who tracks down a killer who murders serial killers . Upon release , the movie received broadly negative reviews . Despite the reception , Eckhart 's performance was favored by critics ; Newsday wrote that Eckhart was a " classically handsome leading man ... but Merhige demands of him complexity and anguish . " Suspect Zero was a box office disappointment , earning \$ 11 million worldwide . Also in 2004 , Eckhart starred on the London stage , opposite Julia Stiles , in David Mamet 's Oleanna at

the Garrick Theatre . The drama ran until mid 2004 . For this performance , Eckhart received favorable critical reviews . In 2005 , returning to film , Eckhart appeared in *Neverwas* as a therapist who takes a job at a rundown mental hospital that once treated his father ( Nick Nolte ) . The feature was never given a full theatrical release , eventually being released straight to DVD in 2007 .

== = Worldwide recognition == =

Eckhart 's next project was *Thank You for Smoking* , in which he played Nick Naylor , a tobacco lobbyist whose firm researched the link between smoking cigarettes and lung cancer . Eckhart said that he felt challenged playing the role : " You have to say these words that are crazy , and yet do it with a smile on your face and have the audience like you . At one point , I 'm doing a talk show with a kid who 's dying of cancer , and he 's going through chemotherapy and the whole thing , and I spin it so the anti smoking people are the bad guys and I 'm the good guy , and I 'm this guy 's best friend . I mean , it 's whacked out . " The film was screened at a special presentation at the 30th annual Toronto International Film Festival in 2005 . It had a limited release in March 2006 and was released worldwide the following month . For his performance , Eckhart received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor in a Motion Picture Musical or Comedy . A contributor of *USA Today* wrote that he gave a " standout , whip smart performance " citing that as Nick Naylor he kept him " likable even in his cynicism . " In the *Seattle Post -Intelligencer* review of the film , it was reported that " Under his chummy but compassionless smile " Eckhart radiated charm and " Naylor 's true joys : manipulating arguments , steering debate , cooking words . "

In this same year , he starred with Helena Bonham Carter in *Conversations with Other Women* ( 2006 ) . While promoting this film , Eckhart revealed that he wishes not to be typecast or repeat himself , saying he does not want to play any more villains . He appeared in the 2006 film noir *The Black Dahlia* ? based on a real 1947 crime ? as Sergeant Leland " Lee " Blanchard , a detective investigating the murder of Elizabeth Short , later dubbed the " Black Dahlia " . The film premiered at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival . Reception for the movie was mixed , but many critics enjoyed Eckhart 's performance ; *Time Out* magazine praised Eckhart and co -star Hilary Swank for their performances , writing " ... both [ are ] great in their secondary roles . "

Internationally viewed as a sex symbol , he was named one of *People* magazine 's 100 Most Beautiful People in 2006 . The following year , Eckhart was invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences . He starred in *No Reservations* ( 2007 ) , a remake of the 2001 German romantic comedy , *Mostly Martha* . He starred opposite Catherine Zeta -Jones as an up and coming hotshot chef . The film was met with mixed reviews and was unfavorably compared to the original film . Eckhart starred in the 2008 comedy *Meet Bill* , in which he played the eponymous character , a sad executive working at his father 's bank . He gained 30 pounds and donned a fat suit for the role .

Also in 2008 , Eckhart portrayed the comic book character , Harvey Dent , in Christopher Nolan 's *The Dark Knight* , the sequel to the 2005 film *Batman Begins* . Nolan 's decision to cast Eckhart was based on his portrayal of corrupt characters in the films *In the Company of Men* , *The Black Dahlia* , and *Thank You For Smoking* . He noted in his depiction of the character that " [ he ] is still true to himself . He 's a crime fighter , he 's not killing good people . He 's not a bad guy , not purely " , while admitting " I 'm interested in good guys gone wrong . " *The Dark Knight* was a big financial and critical success , setting a new opening weekend box office record for North America . With revenue of \$ 1 billion worldwide , it became the fourth highest grossing film of all time , and the highest grossing film of Eckhart 's career . Roger Ebert opined that Eckhart did an " especially good job " as his character in the feature , while *Premiere* magazine also enjoyed his performance , noting that he " makes you believe in his ill fated ambition ... of morphing into the conniving Two -Face . "

Following the success of *The Dark Knight* , Eckhart next appeared in Alan Ball 's *Towelhead* ( 2008 ) , an adaption of the Alicia Erian novel of the same name , in which he played a Gulf War Army reservist who sexually abuses his 13 year old Arab American neighbor . The film was screened under the name *Nothing is Private* at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival .

When he was first approached for the role , Eckhart revealed that he did not want to play a " pedophile " . When asked about the sex scenes , Eckhart said : " Those were difficult times .... The way I did it was to really trust Alan . It was in the words . I really trusted Summer [ Bishil ] , and I tried to get her to trust me , to build a relationship when we were doing physical scenes . We 'd really rehearse them mechanically , and I 'd say , ' OK , I 'm going to put my hand here , I 'm going to do this . ' ... I think I found it more difficult . " Towelhead was critically and financially unsuccessful .

He next co -@-@ starred with Jennifer Aniston in the romantic drama , Love Happens , released in September 2009 , as a motivational speaker coming to terms with his own grief . The movie received ambivalent reviews , with a contributor of the Orlando Sentinel reporting that Eckhart plays " broken " for the whole movie . The following year he starred alongside Nicole Kidman in Rabbit Hole ( 2010 ) , an adaption of David Lindsay @-@ Abaire 's 2005 drama of the same name . The feature premiered at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival . In 2011 , Eckhart starred in Jonathan Liebesman 's science fiction film Battle : Los Angeles , in which he portrayed a combat veteran Marine platoon sergeant . The film was set in modern @-@ day Los Angeles during a global alien invasion , and followed a platoon of U.S. Marines who are joined by an Air Force special operations sergeant and some Army infantry soldiers in combat operations against the alien enemy . He appeared alongside Johnny Depp , Richard Jenkins , and Amber Heard in Hunter S. Thompson 's novel adaptation The Rum Diary , directed by Bruce Robinson . In the film , Eckhart played Sanderson , a wealthy landowner , who believes everything has a price and introduces Paul Kemp ( Depp ) to a different standard of living . He recently appeared as the U.S. President who has taken hostage in the 2013 action thriller Olympus Has Fallen .

= = Personal life = =

Eckhart once was engaged to actress Emily Cline whom he met during filming of In the Company of Men , but they separated in 1998 . He always has been reluctant in speaking about his relationships in interviews . Eckhart dated country music songwriter and member of SHeDAISY , Kristyn Osborn , from 2006 ? 2007 . He appeared in the group 's video for their single , " I 'm Taking the Wheel " .

In various interviews Eckhart has talked about his beliefs , his way of life , and his future career ambitions . Talking to Entertainment Weekly regarding his Mormon faith , he revealed : " I 'm sure people think I 'm a Mormon , but I don 't know that I 'm a Mormon anymore , you know ? To be honest , to be perfectly clear , I 'd be a hypocrite if I did say that I was , just because I haven 't lived that lifestyle for so many years . " In other interviews he has divulged that , through hypnosis , he quit drinking , smoking , and partying , and that in his spare time , he enjoys photography . In an interview with Parade magazine , Eckhart revealed that before he discovered acting , he wanted to become a songwriter .

= = Filmography = =