

The 31-year-old A-lister, who stars in **End of Watch**, can be spotted all over town—on a date, riding his bike, feeding parking meters for strangers—and yet his essence is nowhere to be found. Is he the smiling guy next door seen in so many paparazzi shots, the dark philosopher who buries himself deeper in each successive role, or simply a wily, charismatic chameleon? Take your pick.

**JAKE
GYLLENHAAL**

A

dozen Jake Gyllenhaals pass by me outside En, the mobbed Japanese bistro where the actor has booked us a table. Some of these doubles are brainy types, a Gyllenhaal staple since *Donnie Darko* launched him to indie stardom at 20 and most recently seen in the existential sci-fi thriller *Source Code*. Others mimic the hyper-fit versions of Body by Jake: the ripped Marine of *Jarhead*, the ex-con of *Brothers*, the pharma rep who showed so much ass in *Love and Other Drugs*. There's even a *Prince of Persia* Gyllenhaal, of the anime abs and shaggy hair. Granted, this is New York City's trendy lower West Village, where the good-looking go to dine on Friday nights. And part of Gyllenhaal's appeal has always been his Everyman-ness. Still, the sheer number of replicants is surprising.

Or maybe it's just me. As Gyllenhaal's body of work grows, he only gets harder to peg. A-lister, art-house thespian, indie king—he's simultaneously all and none of the above, a distinction that's kept him just shy of Leo/Brad one-name status. That's likely to change after this month's *End of Watch*, in which Gyllenhaal gives a performance, as a South Central L.A. cop, unprecedented in its pure exposure of the man. I actually extend a hand to greet a passing six-footer with the exact buzz cut and MMA-esque physique Gyllenhaal has in the film, until the man's glare tells me this will not be our *Brokeback Mountain* moment. It's almost a letdown when the genuine Gyllenhaal hops out of a cab—scruffy-bearded, in a blue work shirt, off-brand sneakers, and drab tan chinos that nullify any shot at a memorable first impression.

I understand the beard is for the role—roles, actually—in the movie he's currently filming in Toronto, *An Enemy*, in which he plays a nerdy history professor obsessed with a vain actor who's his double. But as we order a degustation menu, I start by asking him where the muscle-bound cop of *End of Watch* has gone. Gyllenhaal has been spending more time in New York recently, and gossip columns had the lifelong fitness nut leading spinning classes at SoulCycle and riding his bike to and from meetings, but—

"I haven't cycled in a long time," he preempts. "Ask me where I run."

"Where do—"

"I don't run anymore. Do I take care of my body and take conditioning seriously? Yes. But exercising regularly doesn't fit the energy of the character I'm playing now."

A beer arrives for him, half of it vanishing in the time it takes me to get the tape recorder going, and as the first three of our ten

Coat by Adam Kimmel. Shirt by Rx45RPM.
Jeans and boots, his own.
Styling by Mel Ottenberg for total Management.
Grooming by Losi For Martial Vivot Salon at the Wall Group.
Set Design by Rob Strauss Studio.
Production by Ruth Levy.
For store informatin, see page 157

delicate courses slowly arrive, Gyllenhaal's plates empty fast. A suspiciously large number of beautiful waitresses deliver the respective courses, glancing sideways at him as they linger over descriptions of each dish and continually align fresh sets of chopsticks. That's the only clue I'm sitting with a celebrity.

Gyllenhaal's essentially in character as we meet, though it will take me some time to understand that and what it means to him. Oblivious for now, I remind myself how long his day's been already: a full morning on-set in Toronto, then the flight back to New York, then a battery of meetings right up to our dinner. Tomorrow will be busier: auditioning aspirants for various parts in his American stage debut, *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet*, which opens Off Broadway this month, then a late flight back to Toronto for a full Sunday of shooting *An Enemy*.

It's still not entirely clear to me if he's playing both main characters in the film: the professor and his doppelgänger, the actor. "No," he says, "it's a movie about me meeting myself, but another actor's playing me." He delivers the line with such sincerity, I miss the sarcasm for a second—long enough for the ice to break with Gyllenhaal. Sarcasm normally induces discomfort and introduces distance, especially between people newly met. With Gyllenhaal it somehow does the opposite—he brings you in on the joke, puts you at ease. Is it because he's really that genuine and positive? Whatever the quality is, it's of increasing value to him.

"My whole life," he says, "I'd come to a scene and just ask for something real. I'd say, 'Please, just tell me what's going on. All the research, how your character picks up a fork, it'll all come when we know the truth.'" He's talking about a personal and professional evolution that accelerated during the months of his preproduction involvement in 2011's *Source Code*. The story—a soldier is enabled by technology to relive eight crucial minutes, over and over, until he gets it right and saves the world—resonated deeply with him. "Now the time's come to turn that on myself"—searching, over and over, for the truth—"and it's 'Game on.'"

End of Watch is the apotheosis of Gyllenhaal's quest—102 minutes of blood-soaked, adrenaline-producing drama propelled by the bond between his Officer Taylor and Taylor's partner, played by Michael C. Pena. The effortlessness of Gyllenhaal's acting has been obvious since *Donnie Darko*, but nothing is easy about Officer Taylor—or the film.

"I'd envisioned his cop as a locked-down, even-keel guy," says *End of Watch*'s director, David Ayer, who grew up around those cops in South Central. "And as the director, I'm supposed to be the one with the world map. Actors just see the road they're on. But as the shooting progressed, there were so many unexpected things he was giving—it's unbelievable." Gyllenhaal attributes some of that experimentation to the extreme preparation necessary for the film. "Five months, for a 22-day shoot," he recalls. "Three nights a week in ride-alongs with cops. Fight training every morning at a Kenbo Karate dojo, and I got the shit kicked out of me. Then the shooting range, shooting past each other's heads, with live ammo. There's a simulated fire in the movie, but Dave wanted us to feel what that's like, so he had us do a controlled burn."

"What's that?"

"That's a Saturday where me and Michael Pena drive down to Orange County, dress like firemen head-to-toe, and suddenly we're there just sitting in the middle of a burning building."

Cast and crew understood the commitment required for the