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## Arts & Ents

# True tale of bootlegging brothers



Thu, 20 Sept 2012  
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Lawless (18) Review rating \*\*\* Politicians have silly ideas sometimes and possibly the silliest was in 1920 when the US government decided that all alcoholic drink should be made illegal. As is the way of things, when people have a thirst and some idiot says you can't quench it with your favourite tippie, other people are not slow in seeing a chance for profit. This started the era of Prohibition, when illegal booze made the fortunes of such colourful characters as Al Capone and Frank Nitti and spawned a flock of stick-up artists, bank robbers, killers, con-men and other lowlifes. In the depths of rural Virginia, the kind of place where banjos play all through the day, the three Bondurant brothers are brewing hooch so fine it could peel the bark off a tree. The true story of the brothers, Lawless, is

based on a book by one of their descendants, and is, as the title of the film suggests, one of how the law and its application is a matter of negotiation. The brothers are challenged by a local politician who brings in a special deputy to enforce the "law" – which involves paying off the politician from the huge profits in the trade. But the Bondurant boys, being stubborn, decline this kind offer and various examples of lawless bloodletting ensue, involving cutting off certain bits, torture and lots and lots of shooting. Meanwhile, one of the brothers is trying to get sweet with a preacher's daughter and grow up at the same time. The brothers, played by Shia LaBeouf, Tom Hardy and Jason Clarke, face off against Special Deputy Rakes, played by Guy Pearce, while Gary Oldman turns in a nice cameo as local hard man Floyd Banner. Despite its '18' rating, and the violent episodes, director John Hillcoat (The Road), brings a lyrical nostalgia to the tale of how the Wild West survived in the backwoods well into the 20th century. It's an interesting tale of America in the Depression showing that, when the chips are down, people will do just about anything to survive. The acting is fine, although the dialogue, with definite hillbilly accents, is a problem sometimes. But it's some of the atmospheric settings that make it a little gem – especially the depictions of the formidable religion that can run through the heart of the community. And if you can stand the violence, which is, strangely, not much more than the average '15' film, then this is an absorbing movie, simple and elegant in its structure, and worth watching.

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