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## **.An Interview with Adam Protextor, Director of *Dropping Evil***

by [Mike Haberfelner](#)

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**Your film *Dropping Evil* - in a few words, what is it about?**

The plot itself is about a group of high school kids who accidentally end up in a horror movie where they're the monsters. But really, it's a movie about intrigue. It's a movie about building ideas, giving hints, and how that relates to your audience. It's about genre expectations.

**How did the project come into being in the first place? And how did you and your writer Louis Doerge, and what was your collaboration like?**

Louis and I met at an amazing video store called *That's Rentertainment* in Iowa City, where we both worked. We would spend our shifts together talking about our favorite films, showing each other new material, and basically getting excited about the idea of making something. So we decided to get off our butts and actually do it. We started with a half-hour version of *Dropping Evil*. It was an old idea of Louis' where he'd wanted to make a horror film exploring the idea that both the heavy and the victims perceived each other as the villains; an experiment in perspective. We made a messy punk-rock short out of that idea (a movie that's still incredibly near and dear to us), which eventually evolved into the feature.

**What can you tell us about the writing process as such, and was it always the plan to morph the movie from pure slasher into something else gradually, or did you just make it up as you went along?**

The idea was to start with the pretense that this was a slasher film and to gradually reveal a grander and more sinister world motivating and driving it. There was a lot of material shot for potential sequels that unfortunately we didn't end up using, which pushed it into more of an experimental direction. So I can see completely how it may look as if things were being made up as they went along upon first viewing, but it's really a matter of editing. The short films on the disc follow up on specific characters' arcs and fill in some gaps, but we chose to leave the larger explanations... unexplained. The idea that Louis once noted was an ethos rooted in Japanese horror cinema -- Americans may crave explanation and rationality, but what's wrong with building ideological suspense simply for the sake of seeing how battered it leaves your characters and intrigues your audience? We chose to abandon all hope for a closed economy narrative in favor of a more impressionist experience.

**Church-backed (?) conspiracies, cyborgs, mutants, sinister experiments, and whatnot. Honestly, could you yourself make total sense of it?**

Again, this is funny, because it does make total sense to us. We know exactly how all these pieces fit together. In the original scripts, every element was explained. But when it came down to it, our grandiose plan couldn't be executed with our resources. We had the choice to edit together a sensical but mediocre film, or to switch gears entirely and go for broke in creating the most interesting thing we could. The idea was always to create a film that walked equally in the worlds of horror and art-house, and so some parts are going to make very clear sense, some parts will need to be inferred, and some parts are up for interpretation. Personally, I'm happy it turned out that way. I think it's a far better representation of the values we

went into the project with. If we explained everything, we would've been shooting to be simply a low-budget genre knock-off instead of delving into the messiness of what interested us about those genres in the first place.

- **With *Dropping Evil* being a horror/sci-fi hybrid - genres you are at all actually fond of, and some of your genre favourites?**

Louis and I think of ourselves as cinematic omnivores. We wanted to blend a lot of our loves into one, and we're both excited to move on to more specific focuses in the future now that we've done it. Of course we love horror films, but the problem with that genre lately (as Louis and I once discussed during filming) seems to be that the only people interested in making horror movies are horror fans. When people look to the great horror films of the past they're referencing films by writers and directors that worked in and understood *all* genres (Polanski, Kubrick, Wise, etc.). Now you have a lot of horror fanboys competing for who can get the most tits and blood and Tarantino one-liners in their flick. So we approached this film as horror fans, certainly, but there's as much Cassavetes as Raimi in there.

- ***Dropping Evil* ends with a trailer for a sequel starring Fred Williamson. And while I suspect this was not to be taken wholly seriously, could you be persuaded to actually make this movie (provided everything else falls into place of course)?**

That footage is from a longer sequence included in one of the short films on the DVD, but *Dropping Evil 2*... who knows?

- **With the likes of Armin Shimerman, Tiffany Shepis [[Tiffany Shepis interview - click here](#)], Felissa Rose, Edwin Neal and Fred Williamson, *Dropping Evil* stars quite a few well-respected genre stars - so how did you get them, what made them perfect for their roles, and what was your collaboration like?**

It was a snowball effect, really. Louie was able to track down Tiffany and Felissa, who attached themselves because they dug the script. Then he sent a "this'll never happen but why not try" email to Fred's agent, and voilà, the next day I was on the phone with her discussing the terms of casting him. We flew to LA, shot with Fred and Felissa, who were amazing, and then flew Tiffany into Iowa a few months later (she was also fantastic). We were then able to attract Ed due to the fact that we'd already shot scenes with reputable actors he'd worked with before, so Ed flew into Iowa as well and we had a wonderful time with him. Armin wasn't cast until the next year actually, after we'd waited another Winter out. We'd saved the CEO scenes for last, and being maybe the two biggest *Buffy*-fans in the world, decided to go for broke again and cast one of our favorite character actors from the show. Miraculously, it worked out. Louis and I really can't say enough good things about all of these actors -- they were completely professional, kind, and happy people to be around, and it was a breath of fresh air to work with them amidst a chaotic low-budget production schedule.

- **What can you tell us about the rest of your cast?**

They're awesome people. Zachary Lint, aka Coolzey, was actually someone Louis and I knew from working in the independent music scene in Iowa City. Coolzey's an indie rapper and I'd done a few shows with him, and Louis and I knew that the energy he brought to stage would work really well with a idiosyncratic character like Nancy. Tom Taylor (Mike) was an absolute pro who worked his ass off and put himself through the ringer for us -- he did all of his own stunts with gusto and energy, completely embodied his character in every single scene we shot, no matter how small, and always made his fellow actors feel at home. I'm not sure I've ever worked with such a dynamic and physical actor. Rachel Howell (Samantha) was just perfect casting as far as I'm concerned -- she brought this incredible punk energy with a sweet interior that made Samantha feel like someone we'd all known and had a crush on since high school. And Cassandra Powell (Becky) gave us her absolute all -- she pulled off this amazing transformation from nerd to villain and ALWAYS stayed Becky. Sadly, we don't get to see a lot of that in *Dropping Evil* itself, but the short on the DVD *Becky's the Boss* gives you a taste of the depth of her character arc and performance. Truly an emotional roller-coaster that she rode and rode amazingly. Basically, I love our cast. We worked together for years and they all gave us so much emotionally, physically, time-wise, everything. We couldn't have worked with better people.

- **How did you approach your story from a directorial point of view?**

I would sit down with the script, often with Louis, and read through many many many times. I'd set myself up a rough storyboard (stricter for action sequences), and we'd shoot to the storyboard and then spend the rest of the time just rolling and rolling. I did all the camera myself, and many times I shot with actors just me and them. So it was very important to have

one-on-one time with actors before and during shoots, and to just spend time talking about what was going on. We always wanted this world to feel like its own existence, and these characters to feel like real people who we'd just stumbled upon at a significant time in their life. So there was a lot of just talking about who these characters WERE, separate from plot. Louis of course had a vision as well and we were very collaborative when it came to that aspect. The actual shooting though was a combination of planning and on-the-spot inspiration. I'd estimate we shot every scene an average of 6-8 times before we called it. I felt my role as a director was a facilitator. I generally knew what I wanted the scene to look like, but we all discovered what the scene would *feel* like together.

**What can you tell us about the actual shoot and the on-set atmosphere?**

-  Oftentimes it was jokes flying around and everyone laughing just hanging out. Sometimes it was incredibly stressful and rushed, like when we lost an exterior location due to -20 degree windchill the weekend Tiffany was shooting and had to rearrange our entire shooting schedule into one day on the fly. But overall, everyone knew what boat we were in, and we were in it together. You're gonna have your easy days and you're gonna have your hard days, but as long as everyone's on the same page you're gonna be fine.

**What can you tell us about critical and audience reception of your movie so far?**

-  It's been good. Some people have loved it, some people have hated it, and that's what we expected. We never thought we were making a movie for everyone. We took a risk in combining two extremely disparate worlds (horror and art-house), and so for some people it's too arty and for some people it's too gory. But the thing is, that makes us very happy, is that the general critic's reception of it seems to *get* it. What I mean to say is that despite our low-budget and obvious set-backs with money and production value, critics see what we set out to do. They see the ideas and they see the energy we threw into it. I was terrified nobody would understand it at all, but it turns out that people get it and actually *appreciate* what we tried to create. So we're feeling very happy with it.

**Let's go back to the beginnings of your careers: What got you into moviemaking in the first place, and did you receive any formal education on the subject?**

-  Louis and I both studied Cinema and Comparative Literature, as the major was once called, at the University of Iowa. The UI doesn't have a very great film *production* program for narrative features, but it has one of the best film *theory* programs in the US. Louis and I had been shooting and making home movies since high school though, so we didn't mind. We knew how to work a camera and how to structure a script. We always thought that learning how to analyze a film's parts, understand theory and watching as much as possible was the best way to learn how to make movies. I think we both wanted to be filmmakers for as long as we can remember. For me, the moment was trying to make monster movies with my dad's VHS-camcorder when I was 8. My mom helped make the fake blood. I suppose you can blame that on *Goosebumps* books.

**What can you tell us about your filmwork prior to *Dropping Evil*?**

Personally, I'd made a lot of little shorts with friends. A horror series called *The Fine Art of Being Cautious* that I made with my friend Will in high school was essentially just us experimenting with how to make things scary and how to make cool gore effects. Those were so incredibly fun to do. A short film called *God Hates Fags* I made with my friend Niki in 2004 when we were high school seniors was a documentary on the Westboro Baptist Church after they came to Iowa City to protest a local production of *The Laramie Project*. We road-tripped to Topeka and interviewed them and did our best to remain neutral and apolitical as filmmakers, which was a challenge.

**Any future projects you'd like to talk about?**

-  Louis and I cannot wait for the chance to work together again, but that's all I'll say for now.

**How would you describe yourself as filmmaker?**

-  That's a tough question. Omnivorous.

**Writers, filmmakers, whatever else who inspire you?**

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In regards to this film, I was inspired a lot by Cassavetes, Raimi, Woo, Greengrass, and Godard. But really, inspired by so many million things in music and films and everything it's impossible to hammer down a concrete list.

- **Your/your movie's website, Facebook, whatever else?**

- [facebook.com/DroppingEvil](https://www.facebook.com/DroppingEvil)

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