

## Eli Roth talks “CABIN FEVER” Blu-ray, “LAST EXORCISM,” “FUNHOUSE” remake and more!

Written by Michael Gingold  
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It's probably safe to say that Eli Roth has never been busier than he is these days. He's celebrating the Lionsgate Blu-ray release of his breakout feature CABIN FEVER, in a director's cut that reflects his true vision; THE LAST EXORCISM, on which he was a producer, was recently picked up in a high-profile deal by the 'gate for theatrical release; he's got a batch of new movies in development with the EXORCISM team; and he's been hitting the awards circuit for Quentin Tarantino's INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, in which he has a co-starring role and which is up for eight Oscars on March 7.



Even with the flurry of fresh projects, Roth is “really excited” that CABIN FEVER is now out in hi-def, with six minutes of footage unseen during the film's theatrical release or on previous video versions. “It's safe to say that 15 years after writing the first draft, what I had in my head is now out there in the world,” he says. “This is the version that screened at the Toronto Film Festival in 2002 that sparked the bidding war, and that Lionsgate bought. Over the course of a year, it was tested and tested and recut, and I was a nightmare to deal with during the whole process. Let's just say that I learned how to behave over the course of that year. We joke about it now, because obviously I'm very friendly with everyone at Lionsgate, but I was unhappy with what got released. I mean, look, I was thrilled that my movie got out on over 2,000 screens—at the time, it was their biggest release—and I was happy I got a directing career from it, but it always frustrated me when I watched certain edits that I knew could've been better, and weren't done right.

“They promised me a director's cut on DVD, and that never happened; there were several regime changes,” he reveals, adding that there are no plans to release the new version on DVD. “Actually, my appearing in CABIN FEVER is one of the main reasons Quentin cast me in INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, and the success of BASTERDS was what sparked everyone to say, ‘Hey, let's get this director's-cut Blu-ray out now.’ I'm a Blu-ray enthusiast, and I'm happy it's only available in hi-def. That's the way I wanted the film to be seen and enjoyed, and the way prices are falling on that stuff, I believe everyone will have upgraded much sooner than people think. It's actually good that we waited, because we were able to retransfer everything from the original negatives and remaster the sound, and it looks and sounds better than it ever has.”

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It also comes with a brand new commentary by Roth and the cast. The previous DVD contained five different talk tracks by the filmmaker and his collaborators, but he notes that this latest discussion attacks the movie from a different perspective. “The original commentaries we did—which are not on the Blu-ray—are outdated now. Those were done before the movie was even released; we had sold the movie, but we didn’t know if it would be a hit, if it would bomb, whether fans would love it or hate it, and everyone in the cast has gone on to all kinds of different, interesting things. So I wanted to do a commentary where we looked back on the film, its success and the residual effects it has had on all our careers. We tried to not repeat the same stories, but everybody has had plenty of interesting life experiences since then, and it was fun to go back and watch the film from that point of view.”



The Blu-ray release additionally tied in with the DVDebut of CABIN FEVER 2: SPRING FEVER, which brings the flesheating virus to a high-school prom. Roth hand-picked Ti West to helm the sequel (which he still hasn’t seen) based on West’s first film THE ROOST, and has no regrets about handing his baby over to a new parent. “I wrote CABIN FEVER with Randy Pearlstein in 1995, it took six years to raise the money, we shot it in 2001 and it came out in theaters in September 2003, so by the time they started talking about doing a sequel, it had been with me for eight years,” Roth explains. “I was ready to move on, and I told them that. It was actually much easier for me to divorce myself entirely than stay tangentially involved. I felt that if I stayed on as an executive producer, I would start wanting to write it and then I’d want to direct it. I felt it was better to just leave it entirely and let someone else come up with something new.

“Randy came up with the great idea to set it at the prom,” Roth continues, “and I loved THE ROOST and thought Ti’s ideas and creativity and personality were perfect for it. I told him, ‘You should make something completely different from the first one. Don’t try to recreate what I did; do your own thing and just go crazy.’ If there’s one thing CABIN FEVER allows you to do, it’s to be experimental and weird, and I hear the sequel is a lot of fun.”

Roth was much more hands-on when it came to THE LAST EXORCISM, which filmed under the

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title COTTON and focuses on an evangelical minister named Cotton Marcus (Patrick Fabian), who has spent years duping his flock by staging exorcisms. Now down and out, he agrees to let a documentary crew shoot what he intends to be his last sham ritual, only to find himself confronting a real case of devilish possession. Daniel Stamm directed, and Roth produced the film with Strike Entertainment’s Marc Abraham, Thomas A. Bliss and Eric Newman; the latter came up with the initial concept, which was turned into a screenplay by the team of Huck Botko and Andrew Gurland.

“While we were shooting the movie,” Roth recalls, “we thought, ‘God, the perfect home for this would be Lionsgate,’ and it’s a new direction of horror for me. Daniel did a fantastic job directing it and Huck and Andrew wrote a great, scary screenplay, but the film is truly a psychological thriller. It’s not a gory, bloody movie, but the script really freaked me out just with its creepy scenes. I’m so happy with how it turned out, and Lionsgate is the perfect home for it. They’re going to make it a huge release, which we’re all ecstatic about. It’s going to introduce the world to some incredible talent, like Daniel and Patrick and [co-star] Ashley Bell.”



Roth notes that he provided most of his producer’s guidance during the pre- and postproduction of LAST EXORCISM. “When they were shooting, I kind of left Daniel alone,” he says. “I got more involved during the editing stage; there was a night of pickup shots I was involved in, and bringing in my composer [Nathan Barr] and just helping finesse certain scenes with Daniel. If there was a scene he was having trouble making work, that’s when I would step in. Daniel’s great; his first film, A NECESSARY DEATH, won at the AFI Fest and played South by Southwest. He made it for something like \$2,000, and it’s fantastic and really, really creepy. It’s about a guy who hires a documentary crew to film him committing suicide, and the crew really starts to like the guy. It’s very disturbing, and we knew he’d be great for LAST EXORCISM.”

Botko and Gurland win equally effusive praise, having impressed Roth with their own debut feature, the dark comedy MAIL ORDER WIFE. “You’ve got to see that movie; it’s one of the sickest, funniest films I’ve ever seen. If you watch it, you’ll totally get these guys and see why we love them. They have a new film at Sony coming out called STEWIE that’s supposed to be spectacular.” They’re also scripting a pair of further genre features for Roth and Strike: a thriller about the wages of infidelity called THE OTHER WOMAN, which they’ll also direct, and a remake of Tobe Hooper’s 1981 film THE FUNHOUSE. “Huck and Andrew just started working on THE FUNHOUSE; that’s way, way in the beginning stages,” Roth notes. “We want to shoot OTHER WOMAN in the spring and hopefully get FUNHOUSE going by the fall.”

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Speaking of reduxes, Roth will be seen this August in Alexandre Aja’s *PIRANHA 3D*, an in-name-only update of the 1978 Joe Dante cult favorite. “That was supposed to be a surprise,” Roth laughs of his cameo, “and then I saw I was in the trailer and was like, ‘There goes the surprise.’ I thought after *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS* that I wasn’t going to act again, and then Alex called and said, ‘I want you to host a wet T-shirt contest, and I’m going to put you on a raft with 20 girls and you’re going to hose them down.’ I thought, ‘OK, I can come out of retirement for this one, twist my arm!’ Alex is a great friend; it was 110 degrees and we all got scorched, but we had so much fun shooting it. I saw a cut of the movie with unfinished effects, and it’s unbelievable. Alex really outdid himself, and the spring-break attack is going to go down in history as one of the greatest setpieces in the history of horror films. It delivers on the gore and the scares—and that was just watching it in 2-D with unfinished effects.” Oh, and in case you were wondering, Roth was not involved in selecting the girls he wet down. “That was all Alex; I just showed up in a cheap visor and headset and worked the hose. I left it up to Alex’s taste, and he cast very wisely.”

Over the last couple of years, Roth has been developing a slew of other movies, including a feature-length expansion of his *THANKSGIVING* trailer from *GRINDHOUSE*, the alien thriller *ENDANGERED SPECIES* and a martial-arts actioner called *THE MAN WITH THE IRON FIST* with rapper/actor The RZA. Roth reports that the latter, another Strike project, is moving forward, but the others will have to wait until his schedule is a little clearer. “Between the sale of *LAST EXORCISM* and getting *OTHER WOMAN* running, and enjoying all these awards-season events, it’s just been hard to find time to write,” he says. “Everything requires my full attention, and that’s one thing I haven’t been able to give them while I’ve been in the throes of the *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS* honors. All that pretty much ends after the Oscars, so it’s over on March 8. I beat myself up a lot about not being focused to write, but I also don’t want to miss this.”

And he’s confident that *BASTERDS* could pull an upset on Academy Awards night. “You never know; there’s real talk that the film could steal Best Picture, and stranger things have happened. *SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE* took it from *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*. *THE HURT LOCKER* and *AVATAR* are great films, but *BASTERDS* could sneak in there too. A large bloc of the Oscar voters are actors, and actors love that movie. Anything can happen.” Indeed, *BASTERDS* nailed the top prize at the SAG Awards (where Roth mentioned *FANGORIA* in his acceptance speech!).

Once *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS*’ Academy Awards fate is determined, Roth isn’t sure when or if he and Tarantino will join forces again. “We never planned to work together, and yet we’ve done so four times now,” he notes. “Part of the fun is never planning it; something just comes

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up. If it happens again, I'd do it again in a heartbeat—I think anyone who's worked with Quentin would—but if it never happens again, I feel lucky to have done the projects we've collaborated on.”

Finally, there's the question of a third in his successful HOSTEL series—which he reveals may still go forward, but once again without his input. “Like with CABIN FEVER 2, I'm not involved in HOSTEL: PART III,” he says. “I was so consumed during the first two, I just felt I needed to move on to something else and make a clean break. I have heard rumors they're maybe going to do it as a direct-to-DVD release, but I honestly don't know what the latest is. A movie like HOSTEL: PART III is like a girlfriend where you've ended the relationship on very positive terms, and every now and then you speak and you hear about her dating someone else, but you don't check in because you've got a new girlfriend.

“It's a good time right now,” he concludes. “I'm always happiest when I'm busy, and I feel very lucky to be as busy as I am, and I'm excited about the stuff I've been doing with Eric and Mark. These are ideas and projects that we've been putting together for about two or three years, so to have everything kind of going at once is very satisfying.”

{comments on}