

## Todd Lincoln: Ambition Before “APPARITION”

Written by Bob Martin  
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Writer/director Todd Lincoln sees his first feature, the supernatural horror film *THE APPARITION*, open nationwide from Warner Bros. this Friday, August 24. It's the latest and most significant step in Lincoln's journey through the fright realm, which has encompassed some of the genre's biggest and smallest names and once saw him working *DUSK TILL DAWN*.

Lincoln's career in the movies had long been in formation. A childhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma may not seem the usual incubation chamber for a budding filmmaker, but he recalls myriad influences that “bent the twig.” “My mom was one of the heads of Theatre Tulsa—she helped stage a production of *DRACULA* that I saw when I was young, and my dad was sports anchor for the local ABC affiliate, and ran his own production company that produced sports programming for ESPN,” he says. “I grew up watching my dad on TV every night and being with him in TV stations, control rooms, remote live shoots and TV trucks—I was around tons of film and video equipment, cameramen and directors. Francis Ford Coppola's *THE OUTSIDERS* and *RUMBLE FISH* were both shot in and around my neighborhood in Tulsa; so were UHF with ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic and *TEX* with Matt Dillon. As I grew up, filmmaking was not some remote thing happening far outside the world I knew.”



The house in which Lincoln was raised has a legacy as a historical haunted house of old Tulsa, which helped foment his budding love for scary stuff. “In first grade, I'd to go to the library and check out books on ghosts, UFOs, Bigfoot, Loch Ness, crystal skulls, etc.,” he remembers. “And I had a series of cool heavy-metal babysitters who would sneak their friends over and drink beer while they sat me in front of late-night horror movies. I remember being scared to death seeing films like *HALLOWEEN*, *PSYCHO*, *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*, *FREAKS* and *THE THING* for the first time. My friends and I collected Halloween masks, Stephen King books, EC Comics reprints, *FANGORIA*, *GOREZONE*, *STARLOG*, all of that.

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“Once I made a bet with my dad that if my school baseball team won the playoffs, he would take me to see FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VII: THE NEW BLOOD. We won, and he kept his promise. Throughout the movie, he kept screaming and putting his hands over his eyes, completely embarrassing me in front of an older teenage audience. My mom was more hardcore—she worked in the art department for what are recognized as the first made-for-video horror movies—BLOOD CULT, THE RIPPER and REVENGE—all shot in Tulsa and directed by Christopher Lewis for the local video distributor VCI Entertainment. My mom would drive to different butcher shops to pick up animal intestines and any other dead animal parts she could find to use for these movies. I remember being taken to visit the BLOOD CULT set one night when they were shooting a sex-and-death scene at a high school. I saw an actress take off all her clothes, get killed and covered in blood; I was instantly sold, this was for me!

“I suppose being exposed to all these things at a young age helped make filmmaking feel possible and within reach. It wasn’t until I started doing this for a living that I realized just how damn hard it is. My family didn’t own a video camera when I was very young, and I didn’t have much interest in shooting anything until I was a teenager. Then I started getting out of writing essays in high school by talking the teachers into letting me make short Hi-8 videos instead. These videos got a big response from the class, and I went from getting C’s on papers to getting A’s for my videos.

“Besides horror movies, I grew up loving movies like STAR WARS, JAWS, E.T., INDIANA JONES, BACK TO THE FUTURE, GREMLINS. Those were the kinds of movies I wanted to make, but they seemed a little too grand and outside the realm of possibility for someone trying to get into the field. It was the independent filmmakers who made it seem possible for me to become a director. My high school was pretty progressive; we had a video class, and the teacher introduced us to some very interesting work. The video artists and avant-garde filmmakers we studied made it look like anyone could do this. Our teacher even showed us new works by Sadie Benning [a teen artist who dropped out of high school to pursue videography], and on my own, I got into directors like Richard Linklater, Jim Jarmusch, Robert Altman, David Lynch and Jean-Luc Godard. I’d go dig for rare movies at video stores, libraries, thrift stores—devoured and studied as much as possible. I love all genres and styles, but tackling a horror film can be a great foundation for any filmmaker—it allows you to work a lot of different muscles and get a visceral reaction from the audience.”

Lincoln was able to land production-assistant jobs on local independent features and documentaries while still in high school, and the summer after his junior year, he attended a USC Short Film Summer Workshop in LA, where he made his first Super-8 and 16mm movies. During his senior year, he spotted an early mention in FANGORIA that Robert Rodriguez and

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Quentin Tarantino were collaborating on FROM DUSK TILL DAWN. “I tracked down the production office’s number in a trade magazine, and started calling them,” Lincoln says. “I sent in my résumé, then kept bugging them until they said to come on out. The morning after high-school graduation, I packed up my car, drove out to LA and started working as a PA.”



FROM DUSK TILL DAWN was a one-of-a-kind opportunity for the youngster. The film was shot non-union, specifically for the purpose of allowing the crew to work as a team, with individual jobs continuously changing according to each day’s need. “It was definitely the kind of production where everyone wore many hats,” Lincoln, who’s credited as a PA in visual FX, explains. “I got a chance to work in every department conceivable—from the production office to the costume department, to craft service, to the art department, to visual FX, to creature FX, to set PA work. Some days I’d be stirring vampire blood for KNB to put on the nude vampire women, and I’d get a couple of hours’ sleep on a stunt pad with my clothes covered in blood.

“Once,” he continues, “the KNB guys handed me a flashlight and a styrofoam cup and told me to go into the attic and collect as many dead cockroaches as possible; I filled three cups. Another time I was sent to downtown LA to pick up a big load of dry ice. There was so much dry ice that it smoked up my whole car, and I had to roll the windows down—it was pouring out of the windows as I drove down the freeway, and everyone was honking at me, trying to communicate that there was something wrong!”

Lincoln’s enthusiasm helped him take on the grueling work schedule, but the sun of the California desert nearly did him in nevertheless. “I remember when we were on location in Barstow, shooting the exterior shots of the Titty Twister, it was 135 degrees, and my shoes started to melt and bubble up from walking around on the desert floor. It wasn’t in the budget for me to sleep in a regular motel room, so that night I had to sleep in an ultra-refrigerated room where they stored the film. Even though I wrapped myself in sound blankets, I still ended up shaking all night and catching a cold. I continued to work, though, and in postproduction I

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even got to observe Rodriguez editing for a while. All in all, it was a huge learning experience.”

Lincoln enrolled in the University of Southern California the following fall, and kept crewing on independent films while shooting his own shorts. “There was a brief time when I worked for Troma, going around LA putting up movie posters and promotional materials. Instead of paying me, they gave me free Troma movies on VHS, so I had every Troma movie ever!”

At USC, Lincoln took as many film classes as possible, yet was rejected by the film school four times; after two years, he left and put his saved tuition money into more short movie productions, which started gaining acceptance and notice on the festival circuit. “The awards and press I received from that helped me to get representation for commercial and music video work, and eventually feature representation.”

After several years of developing a new version of THE FLY for Fox Searchlight and a film adaptation of the popular horror comic HACK/SLASH for Rogue Pictures, Lincoln had the chance to pitch a haunted-house concept to Silver Pictures—and immediately thought of “The Philip Experiment.” This series of events took place in the early 1970s, and involved mathematician/paranormalist Dr. A.R.G. Owen’s attempts, with the help of a group of fellow researchers, to prove that a spectral being could be conjured up via the invention of a fictional backstory for one “Philip Aylesworth” and a series of seances. Lincoln had discovered this story on the Internet some years before, complete with a video of the original participants that can still be found on YouTube today. It struck Lincoln that this could provide the stepping-off place for an entirely different kind of haunting in a horror film—and the result was THE APPARITION.

*For Lincoln’s in-depth comments on THE APPARITION, pick up FANGORIA #316, on sale now.*