



INTERVIEWS

'OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL' EXCLUSIVE SET PHOTOS AND INTERVIEW WITH JEFF HOWARD

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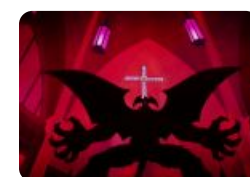
There isn't much new horror hitting the big screen this Halloween season, but one movie many fans are looking forward to is **Universal's** *Ouija: Origin of Evil*. The follow-up to 2014's surprise box-office hit *Ouija* takes place in 1965 Los Angeles (so it's more of a prequel than a sequel), where a "widowed mother and her two daughters add a new stunt to bolster their séance scam business and unwittingly invite authentic evil into their home. When the youngest daughter is overtaken by the merciless spirit, this small family confronts unthinkable fears to save her and send her possessor back to the other side."

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Premiere Dates For 2017'S



Ouija: Origin of Evil opens Friday, this time with writer-director Mike Flanagan (*Oculus*, *Hush*) at the helm. Once again, Flanagan is collaborating with *Oculus* and *Before I Wake* co-writer Jeff Howard. **GeekFeed** caught up with Howard recently who shares some exclusive set photos and talks about writing, collaborating with Flanagan, the current state of horror, as well as the latest on *Before I Wake* and the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* reboot.



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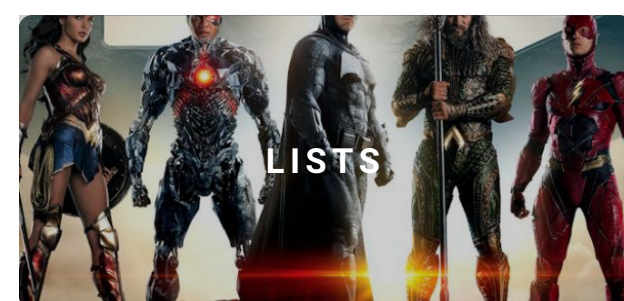
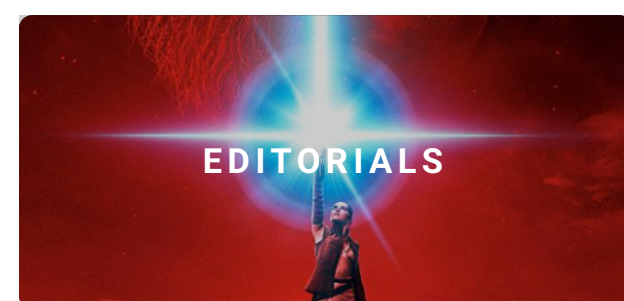
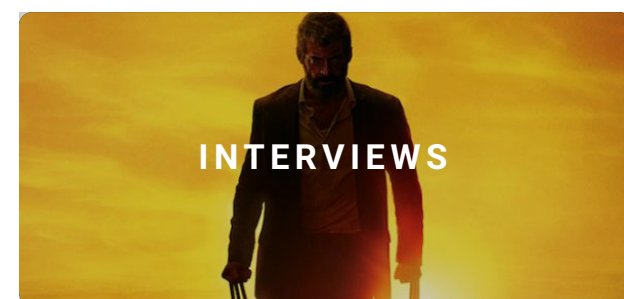
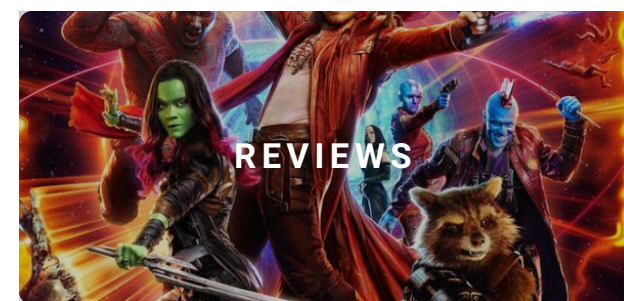
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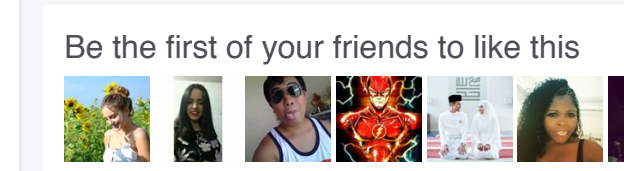
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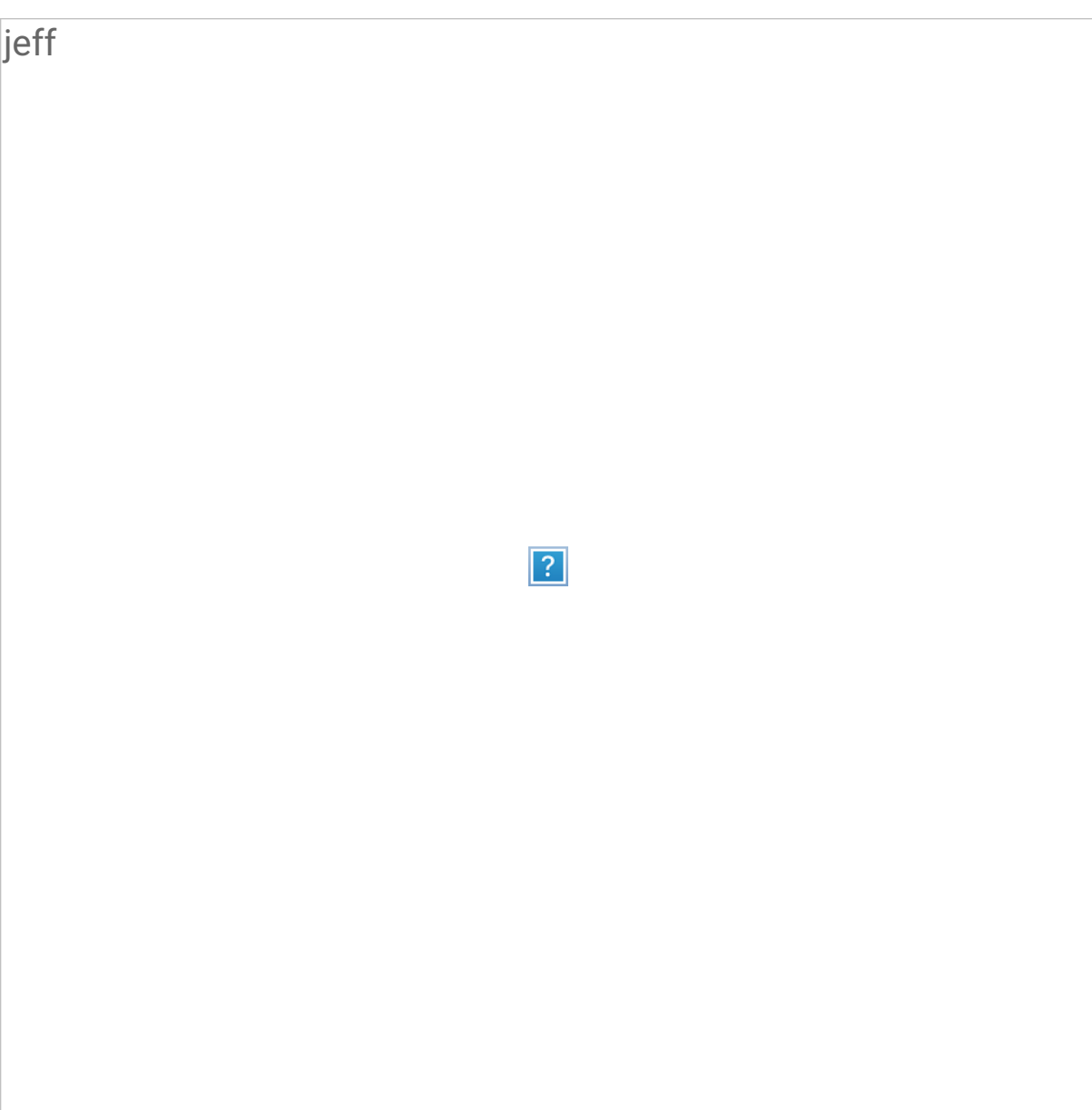
GeekFeed: When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

Jeff Howard: Really early on, my mother taught me to read when I was supposedly way too young to know how, and I read the encyclopedia like it was a novel. I fell in love with comic books as a kid, and started writing and drawing my own, but I never learned how to draw girls for some reason, so I switched over to wanting to be just a writer. The only other thing I ever wanted to be was a detective, and I think I approach every story now as though it were an amateur detective movie.

GeekFeed: What drew you to the horror genre? Who were your early influences – directors, actors, writers?

Jeff Howard: Mike Flanagan drew me to horror. When we met, I had done a comedy screenplay for Neal Moritz, and a biopic screenplay for Ron Howard and Brian Grazer, but never anything scary. We started hatching ideas, and it became clear immediately that he was a horror genius. So I think my background in true stuff and background in comedy come into play to keep the stories very human. We also had a lot of books at home when I was a kid, and *The Shining* always sat there, looking genuinely too scary to be read. I did pick up *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins, and it's still my secret passion to adapt that into a modern scary movie. I loved *An American Werewolf in London* as a kid, watched it over and over, it's the only horror-comedy I believe truly works.





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GeekFeed: You’ve partnered with Mike Flanagan on several projects so far including the fantastic and terrifying *Oculus*. You have more projects together planned. How did you two meet?

Jeff Howard: Mike Flanagan and I went to the same college in Maryland a few years apart, and after I started selling screenplays we were introduced by a mutual friend. At first, he was very much against anything relating to “the system” and wanted to keep pursuing making small movies with his friends. But we kept in touch, and a couple of years later he changed his mind, decided selling movies for money to studios wasn’t such a bad idea, and we started working together. What was odd was, we were then met with several years of complete indifference from the industry. I had been doing well beforehand, but thought the stuff I was working on was subpar, getting watered down. When Flanagan and I started working together, the material immediately got much better. It was reinvigorating. But nobody else seemed to care! It was only when he went off and made *Absentia* that everybody noticed.

GeekFeed: What is it like working with Mike?

Jeff Howard: Mike Flanagan writes like an editor and edits like a writer, and in between directs. When we did *Oculus*, there were some sequences in the second half of the movie where he was a man possessed, pacing around while I typed, and I could tell he was watching a finished, edited movie in his mind. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that only a few people alive can keep the entire details of a movie production in their head all at once, and Flanagan is one of those people.

In the early days, we would sequester ourselves in a rental for a week, start up on a Monday and try like crazy to finish by Friday. And that was fun, two guys locked in a room for about eight hours a day, then completely passing out after. We did *Oculus*, *Somnia* (aka *Before I Wake*) and another script called *Scare Dares* that way. Now, we tend to grab sessions on the phone when he’s driving places, or in an edit room, or on a set. Flanagan maintains a schedule as a writer, director, editor and most of all as a husband, father and father-to-be that I’ve never seen anyone else achieve. A directing career comes with so many levels of responsibility and so many people dependant upon you, that I try to make the portion of his life devoted to writing as painless and fun as possible. Mostly, we sit and talk and laugh and have fun, and all the typing comes later and in a big burst.



GeekFeed: 2014's *Ouija* was a surprise box-office hit making \$103 million worldwide from a reported budget of just \$5 million. It makes sense that **Universal** and **Blumhouse** wanted to do a sequel. You and Mike have co-written the follow-up film, *Ouija: Origin of Evil* which opens in theaters October 21st. The story is set in 1965 so it's a prequel, of sorts. Tell us a little about the movie, and why you decided to take the sequel in a completely different direction.

Jeff Howard: Stiles White and Juliet Snowden did a great job of setting up a world and a mythology that we were able to have some fun with. We got to know Jason Blum and **Blumhouse** from *Oculus*, and he's the most supportive producer you could ask for in the business. He works with Brad Fuller and Drew Form from **Platinum Dunes** on these movies, so we got to know them and they turned out to be the warmest, sweetest, most gung ho guys you could imagine. They asked us to write, and the idea of going back into the past and the mythology hinted at in the first movie came up, and that idea opened up a great seed. What if the movie took place in the second half of the 1960s, and the story and characters would be very true to the time, but the movie's look and feel and even packaging would also be equally vintage.

We always start with the people in the movies and worry about what goes horribly wrong with them later. So this time we wanted to tell a story familiar to today, a single mom with two kids doing her best to try and keep her head above water. And in our story, that single mom runs a perhaps less than authentic psychic readings business from her home. Her older daughter introduces the Ouija board into

“the act” and they get some unexpected results which at first seem miraculous and later turn ugly.

GeekFeed: Did you ever play the Hasbro board game, *Ouija* growing up?

Jeff Howard: I grew up in Baltimore, and there’s a lot of hometown pride in stuff that comes from there. So we all knew about the *Ouija* board, and it was impossible to avoid in high school. I always believe with things like supernatural board games or high school, you usually get out of it what you put in. We used to go to construction sites late at night and hatch scary movie ideas with titles like “Mini Golf Massacre.” I lived right around the corner from Edgar Allan Poe’s grave for a few years, too, and that’s a creepy place day or night.

GeekFeed: You’re also co-writing Sony’s reboot of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. In a podcast interview back in June, Mike said, “It’s a whole new deal. We’re not interested in doing the same thing again...” What can you tell us about your adaptation of Lois Duncan’s 1973 book?

Jeff Howard: Well. We didn’t do an adaptation of Lois Duncan’s 1973 book, nor of the previous movie, as Flanagan mentioned back in June. When they asked us to come in and pitch a take, we pitched something that we thought would be a tight, serious, gripping thriller that would tell a totally new story but do it completely within the context of the original themes and ensemble nature of *IKWYDLS*. It had to literally be deserving of the title “I Know What You Did Last Summer” without being a retread. I find it difficult to believe anyone wants to walk into a theater in 2017 and see a duplicate of the original. And can imagine the internet reactions if they did, “we’ve been ripped off”, “we’ve seen this before!”

GeekFeed: Sony says the film is a “[high priority](#)”. Is everything still on track for a 2017 release date? Any casting news to share?

Jeff Howard: We haven’t heard anything yet, I imagine they will start with a director first. It’s not hard to imagine Sony playing it slightly cautious right now, but it’s in the hands of Neal Moritz, who knows how to get his movies made and how to make them successful. From the very first meeting, Neal was hands-on about where the story would go and the moral framework we would work within. He is a lot of fun to work for, he literally gets involved in the day to day details of the script process, and we are doing it again on another thriller.

GeekFeed: Jennifer Love Hewitt has said she would be “[interested](#)” in making an appearance. Any plans to bring some of the original cast back?

Jeff Howard: I wish co-writers had some say in these matters, but I can tell you there’s an amazing part for a beautiful, savvy, career woman in her mid-30s in the movie. If I was casting, I’d have to put her at the top of the list.

GeekFeed: Any word on a new release date for *Before I Wake*?



Jeff Howard: No. No. No. Sadly no. This is definitely becoming a Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown situation, and just like my hero Charlie Brown, I fall for it every time. The situation has become such a nuisance because, as the Nerdist pointed out in their review, the movie is great. Flanagan did a great job. Trevor Macy showed an extreme set of balls to will the movie into existence. The Newton Brothers and Danny Elfman, amazing. Kate Bosworth, Thomas Jane, Annabeth Gish, and future Oscar winner Jacob Tremblay, all excellent. The movie is emotional, it's a fantasy, it's something that people don't see every day, and everybody who worked on it did it way more for love than for anything else, from top to bottom. I hope that it finds a format soon where everyone can just watch it and enjoy it without the pressures of "does this movie suck because it was constantly delayed, because we all know that's the only reason movies sit on the shelf."

GeekFeed: John Carpenter weighed in on the current state of horror over the summer and said he feels it's gotten stagnant. He said, "Horror is due for a new beginning. It's due for a resurgence. They have to change it. We have to change it up." Do you agree?

Jeff Howard: Everything is that way, and it's cyclical. The moment anything gets to be too "corporate rock" a bunch of great punk bands come along. Someone will figure out some new format or new way of telling scary stories, and that'll become the rage for a while. Chances are the important thing is to stick to what you love. You can't tell your brain which stories to come up with or not, or when, but you can make them the most true, the most realistic, the most human that you can and they will probably

play well despite whatever's in fashion at the moment.

'Ouija: Origin of Evil'



GeekFeed: What do you feel are the key elements in any great horror film?

Jeff Howard: In general, it's providing that moment when you're sitting in a theatre and realize you are utterly tense, your blood is pumping and you feel like you're right there in the movie in real danger. If a scary movie makes you feel that, it's doing its job. Rob Cohen taught me that the best movies fulfill the promise of the movie to the audience, and that is fulfilling the promise you make to a horror audience.

For us, we try to start with people that you care about. Regular, normal people you get attached to. And then right at the moment you like them the most, you start taking things away from them. You play with them like food, you torture them slowly, you put them through things you hope never ever happen to you or your loved ones. Most of the bad horror films forget the first part, and follow some sort of beat sheet of scares. Or they consciously or unconsciously write down to the audience. We keep trying to write movies where for the first 30 or 40 minutes you can forget the genre you're watching and you're just wrapped up in some people.

GeekFeed: What directors/films coming up are you most excited about?

Jeff Howard: I'm excited to see Akiva Goldsman's scary movie, because he's got a career I really admire and he's an awesome writer and producer. Adam Robitel and his writing partner Gavin Heffernan are great guys, psyched to see what he does with his *Insidious*. Nate Parker and *Birth of a Nation* partially

for selfish reasons, *Queen of Katwe*, *Girl on the Train*, *Doctor Strange* looks incredible. I've been watching *Sing Street* at home way more than you would think possible.

GeekFeed: After *I Know What You Did Last Summer* what do you have coming up next?

Jeff Howard: Flanagan is prepping *Gerald's Game*, a script we wrote a couple of years ago but took a long time to get going because... well if you read the book you know why. Our plans are to reunite with our friends at Hasbro, with Neal Moritz and **Blumhouse** for things which I'm sure will be announced by people above my pay grade when the time is right. I wrote a family dramedy with a big comedy hook that I'm shopping around that strangely has a topic baked into it that people are as nervous to touch as they were with *Gerald*. Together, we would love to write a family movie and a docudrama. And we have an excellent series in us, very ready for that.

GeekFeed: What will you be watching on Halloween?

Jeff Howard: This feels like a *Young Frankenstein* year to me!

Ouija: Origin of Evil arrives in theaters October 21st from **Universal Pictures**. Henry Thomas (*Betrayal*), Annalise Basso (*Oculus*), Elizabeth Reaser ("True Detective"), Lulu Wilson (*Deliver Us from Evil*), Parker Mack (MTV's "Faking It"), Sam Anderson, Kate Siegel (*Demon Legacy*), and Doug Jones (*Hellboy*, "Fear Itself") star. The film is produced by **Platinum Dunes** partners Michael Bay, Brad Fuller, and Andrew Form (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Purge* series, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) and **Blumhouse Productions'** Jason Blum (*The Purge* and *Insidious* series) alongside **Hasbro's** Brian Goldner (*Transformers* and *G.I. Joe* series) and Stephen Davis (*Ouija*).

*Exclusive Ouija: Origin of Evil set photos courtesy Jeff Howard; Other images courtesy **Universal Pictures & Relativity Media***

Words by Marena Bronson

#JEFF HOWARD



POSTED BY

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Journalist, writer and life-long nerd. Movies are my passion, and I live and breathe all things geek - especially Batman. In my spare time you may find me hanging upside down - like a bat but not really. (I've been working on picking up some circus skills). Feel free to chat about any of these things with me on Twitter: @marenabronson



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⌚ Posted On August 3, 2017  [Mike Bedard](#)

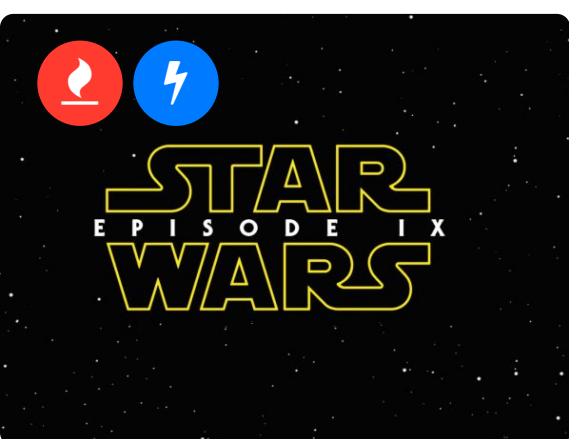
A lot of anime is coming to the streaming service.



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⌚ Posted On August 2, 2017  [Brianna Reeves](#)

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