

Jeffrey Combs talks “WOULD YOU RATHER”

Written by Vivienne Vaughn
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Cult-movie maven Jeffrey Combs enters genre territory once more in David Guy Levy’s psychological horror-thriller, *WOULD YOU RATHER*. Opening in select theaters and available on-demand tomorrow from IFC films, and screening for free in New York tonight (see details [here](#)), the film casts Combs as Shepard Lambrick, a calculating, sadistic aristocrat who puts a sinister, unique spin on the eponymous popular party game.

Fango got some exclusive words with Combs about *WOULD YOU RATHER*, which co-stars *PROM NIGHT*’s Brittany Snow, *C.H.U.D.*’s John Heard and *SMASH CUT*’s Sasha Grey.

FANGORIA: How did you come to be a part of *WOULD YOU RATHER*?

JEFFREY COMBS: *WOULD YOU RATHER* came out of the woodwork in a way, although through a fortuitous route. One of my oldest and best friends I’ve known since high school, his son’s best friend happened to be one of the associate producers for [the movie] as it was getting put together. They were looking for someone to play Shepard Lambrick, and he brought up my name. I had a meeting with the director, David Guy Levy, and we were off to the races.



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FANG: What were your initial thoughts when you read the script?

COMBS: I thought it was really finely crafted: Taut, motivated, nothing that didn't progress one point to another. I really don't like unjustified jumps in plot, and found it this be an intense and linear narrative with many interesting characters. And little did I know that it would be cast so well! I'm not speaking for myself, but the rest of the cast is just terrific. Everybody manifests their character to the fullest and brought their A game to the film. It was a labor of love for all of us.

FANG: How was it working with your co-stars? The film has a very diverse cast.

COMBS: Since the '70s, I've admired [Heard's] work and think he's one of our best, so I was thrilled to be in a movie with him. I didn't know anyone else, but I quickly grew to appreciate everybody's abilities. When you cast a movie, it's like putting together a band, and there were no weak players here. My favorite part [of shooting] was the camaraderie and joy of working with these great actors. And David did a great job directing us; he couldn't have been better.

Brittany is such a terrific actress with incredible validity, honesty and heart. She is the heart and soul of this movie, whereas I have no heart or soul! She is the absolute flip side of [Lambrick]. You have to have somebody you really, really care about in a movie, and she personified that so perfectly. Anytime you watch a movie like this, you ask, “What would I do in this situation?” And I think everybody can relate to her quiet hysteria as she realizes what a bad situation she's in.

FANG: How would you describe Lambrick, and what are your thoughts on him?

COMBS: He is a sadistic son of a bitch, but he doesn't see himself that way. The power he wields is something that he has inherited—he doesn't know any better. He is just one in a long line of Lambricks who have passed this along. He's doing it to his son, his father did it to him and his grandfather did it to his father, and so on and so on. It's a pervasive sickness. The Lambricks lack any empathy for other people; they've been so privileged for so long that they just don't know any better. They've been taught this from the cradle. It's just the way it is. This

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is amusing to them. They don't see people as people; they are just our playthings, our toys. It's sociopathic. These people don't care. They have everything, and they're so bored and empty inside that it takes this much for them to feel anything.

There's a strange sort of ethic about it, too. Lambrick says at the end, "We keep our word. We follow through; you win, therefore we fulfilled our contract." In his mind, it's a business thing. They have integrity and follow through. It's a clever examination of the dichotomy we've been dealing with in our own society. It's an exaggerated parable of the 99 percent vs. the .001 percent.

FANG: What were your thoughts after you first saw the film?

COMBS: It was even more than I expected. This movie is shot in such a way that it's almost voyeuristic, and it plays for the eye really well. It has a real pedigree to it. It has class, despite its really disturbing theme; it's shot beautifully.

FANG: Was the role of Lambrick something you felt challenged by?

COMBS: Oh, definitely. The hardest part was to resist the temptation to find a justification for his actions, because I think it's far more chilling and disturbing that there is none, and I believe that was the intent of the script: You'll never know. And when you think of true evil in the world, either from an individual or an institution, you never know. You're powerless to ever understand why it is they do what they do, and that makes the film even more powerful. It's pretty delicious theatricality. If, at the end, the audience is really disturbed by my character, then I did my job.