

Find Your People. Then Book the Helicopter.

Scott Tinkham and Michael Woloson on Littermates, siblinghood, and the first-feature Hail Mary that landed them at Fantastic Fest.

Interview by Paul Salfen · Text by Christine Thompson · AMFM Magazine



Official poster for *Littermates*, a film by Scott Tinkham and Michael Woloson. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Paul Salfen caught Scott Tinkham and Michael Woloson in the week they treat like Christmas. Fantastic Fest was about to swallow Austin again — beer, barbecue, midnight movies, the whole carnival — and the pair were about to unveil *Littermates*, their first feature, to the exact crowd that lives for a film you cannot safely summarize.

They love Austin. They are South by Southwest people. One of them had never been to Fantastic Fest at all. Both sounded like filmmakers who had finally arrived at the party they had been building toward for years, and both kept stepping around landmines. Ask them what the movie is, and the logline itself starts to leak spoilers.

“It’s basically about two survivors of some kind of attack who both end up at this cottage in the English countryside where this strange man takes them in and bathes them, teaches them to speak, and forms this odd family with them,” Woloson said. Then the caution arrived on cue. “He insists that they cannot leave. It’s almost like every time we explain it to somebody, there are landmines everywhere. The mystery and spoilers are so baked into even a logline.”

That is the deal *Littermates* makes with an audience. Set against a mysterious war, Liam and Mel arrive bloodied and speechless at an isolated cottage. Chester, the enigmatic caretaker played by Oliver Woolf, feeds them, bathes them, and teaches them language again. Good behavior earns “nifties,” little tokens that can be cashed in for karaoke, hot-tub time, dance parties, favorite meals. Mel, played by Kaylee McGregor, keeps looking at the woods and the locked gate. Liam, played by Joey Bader — a roommate of the directors for eight years — is more willing to stay inside the rules. When curiosity pushes past Chester’s boundaries, the makeshift family starts to show its seams.

Tinkham and Woloson, who both grew up with siblings, built the whole machine around that strange, primal, often trivial bond. The directors’ note in the press kit calls it an unconventional coming-of-age story with a dystopian backdrop, darkly comic and still sincere, in the tonal neighborhood of Yorgos Lanthimos. Salfen’s conversation stayed on the human side of that equation: how a first feature actually gets made when the people making it are also the people living in the backyard outhouse.

SUMMER CAMP IN THE HILLS



The English countryside that doubled as set, housing, and detox. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Salfen asked the question every festival audience asks when a movie looks this lived-in: was it actually fun to make, or did it only look that way?

“The English countryside is just a delight to be in. It was kind of a detox,” one of them said. “I think we shot this entire film without shoes or socks on. We just ran around barefoot in the field making a movie. It was like summer camp. We just had the best time together. It was also hard, though. Very hard.”

Woloson reached for the same metaphor he has used a thousand times. They were all staying in the same house. He, Tinkham, and Bader bunked in an outhouse in the backyard — three beds side by side, a hard drive in the corner dumping footage, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory style. Tight. Intimate. Physically punishing.

“Looking back, that was one of the best few weeks of our lives,” he said. “I miss it. I want to do another one like that. I don’t think we’ll get the chance, but I want to do another film like that — intimate and intense and scrappy. It’s so fun.”

Salfen floated the obvious encore. There could always be *Littermates Two*. An anthology, even. They did not shut the door. The concept can travel. What they wanted more than a sequel, in that moment, was the feeling of the first one: a month in the hills, no socks, a camera package wrestled out of Panavision London, and a crew small enough to fit in one house.

We just ran around barefoot in the field making a movie. It was like summer camp.

— THE LITTERMATES SET

THE HELICOPTER, AND A DECADE OF FRIENDSHIP IN FRAME



On the English grass: a first feature built around three friends, one cottage, and a camera package. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Salfen asked for a set moment they still look back on and think, we actually did this. Woloson went straight to the sky.

“I was in the back seat of the helicopter with Joey and I had the camera,” he said. “There’s a huge camera, so I’m kind of struggling to keep it up to frame him. Scott’s in the front seat with the monitor. I was just looking through the frame, seeing Joey, who I’d been friends with for almost ten years. We all were roommates for eight years together. Us in the helicopter above

the countryside — I was just like, wow. This is very surreal, doing this altogether after all this time.”

Tinkham called the helicopter days insane in the best sense. A friend did them a massive favor. In a first feature, the two of them were directing three actors in a helicopter. The whole low-budget indie crew was stunned they had it at all. People took turns going up, just to see the English countryside from the air. Everybody kept asking the same question: can I get this right?

The script, Tinkham has written elsewhere, was reverse-engineered around the tools they already knew they wanted: a single location, three characters played by their closest friends, the hills, and that helicopter. Eight months of writing. The emotional engine never changed. Siblinghood first. Everything else could evolve around it.

Us in the helicopter above the countryside — I was just like, wow. This is very surreal, doing this altogether after all this time.

— MICHAEL WOLOSON

FIND YOUR TRIBE. THEN START.



Writer-director Scott Tinkham on location. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Fantastic Fest is thick with aspiring filmmakers who watch a movie like this and think, that is what I want to do. Salfen put the hard part on the table. Easier said than done. What would they tell someone trying to follow the same path?

“Find your people,” came the first answer. “Find your tribe of people that are like-minded as you, but also have complementing and conflicting ideas. Find people that share the same values as you and you can quite literally do anything. Find people that are really talented, that

can build you up, that are more talented than you in any aspect. And just like, beyond filmmaking, just become friends and you will start making films together.”

The second answer was blunter. Start.

They had talked about the feature for years. Tinkham had written versions of three different movies leading up to this one. It was always the feature, the feature, the feature. Then he handed Woloson a draft.

“I read it and I was like, this is it. Let’s do it,” Woloson said. “I started writing a schedule that night. I think the biggest thing for us was just to start doing it. Even if it’s not polished or necessarily ready yet — I don’t know that anything or anybody’s ever ready. Just getting started and beginning the process, and then not looking back once you go.”

Kaylee McGregor, who plays Mel and also produced, did not believe it was happening until they sent her booked flights to London. That was less than a month before cameras. There were a hundred moments that said no way. The workaround was unglamorous and daily.

“If you just keep doing one percent more every day on this film, you’re going to do it,” Tinkham said. “Messing with the schedule. Shot listing. Reaching out to Panavision out in London to see if we can get a sweet deal on a camera package. Little things start to add up, and then you get to a point of no return where you actually have to shoot the movie. Then you do it. Hail Mary. You just got to do it.”

If you just keep doing one percent more every day on this film, you’re going to do it. Then you get to a point of no return. Hail Mary. You just got to do it.

— SCOTT TINKHAM

YOU WILL MAKE THE FILM DURING YOUR PANIC ATTACKS



Co-director and cinematographer Michael Woloson. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Salfen has a signature question about mindset — the Hail Mary of putting yourself on a plane to another country and deciding the movie will happen anyway. What did each of them tell himself before it was go time, every day, knowing they could not just make this in the backyard?

Woloson laughed first. Great question. The zingers. Then he got honest. He was very anxious. What saved him was not a morning pep talk. It was the huddle at the end of each day: how do we improve tomorrow? Look back. Adjust. Go again.

Tinkham talked about the fear that comes with a first feature in a different country, with a lot of crew you have never worked with.

“The fear is always going to be there. The anxiety is going to be there,” he said. “But you will make the film during your panic attacks, during whatever it may be, during your crash-outs. The film will happen no matter what. You almost don’t have time to be scared or anxious. You just have to go, go, go. That fear stays there. And then you have a moment where you’re like, oh, that was a great scene. We got that scene. That was an awesome performance. And it snaps you out of all the scary thoughts.”

He named the turning point. After one of those great scenes, he decided he was done being scared of the thing. He was just having fun.

CALL YOUR BROTHER. CALL YOUR SISTER.



A burned photograph in the grass — the film's sibling engine, hiding in plain sight. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

Salfen pressed on what they hope people carry out of the theater besides a good time. Fantastic Fest Q&As can get lively. This movie is built for that.

“I hope they think about if they have siblings,” Tinkham said. “I hope they think about how strange siblinghood is, and growing up with somebody. I hope they call their brother or sister and tell them about the movie. And hopefully they watch it together.”

Woloson put a second pillar next to that one. Siblinghood is the engine. Sincerity is the thing he does not want buried under the wackiness.

“It’s a very wacky, strange movie in a lot of ways,” he said. “But I think there’s also this really sincere emotional core of it for the characters. And I think for us too. It’s been a labor of love. I know that’s a played-out phrase, but it really has been years of really hard work and love and friendship. I hope that comes through to people, and it reads as this very sincere effort in the end, on top of the fun. I hope it’s a fun time, obviously, and there’s a lot of bleakness to it too — but also evened out by absurdity and humor. So, what life is.”

That is the Littermates wager: a cottage that will not let you leave, a merit system for karaoke, a war humming at the edge of the frame, and two people who used to know each other trying to learn language again. The directors made it with the friends they already lived with. They shot it barefoot. They pointed a camera out of a helicopter they had no business being able to afford. Then they brought it to Austin in the week they love most.

Salfen asked what they were looking forward to most at the festival. Beer. Barbecue. Great movies. Friendship. All of it. He told them he would be at the screening. They told him to say hi. They would be cheering him on, too.

FIND LITTERMATES

Littermates screens as a special presentation at Fantastic Fest 2026 in Austin, with a conversation featuring the filmmakers and cast. Alamo Exclusives opens the film at more than 30 Alamo Drafthouse locations nationwide on November 6, 2026.

Written by Scott Tinkham. Co-directed by Scott Tinkham and Michael Woloson. Starring Joey Bader, Kaylee McGregor, Oliver Woolf, and Jack Redmayne. Score by Noa Margalit. Produced by Oliver Woolf, Michael Woloson, Scott Tinkham, and Kaylee McGregor. Executive produced by Haley Nicole Johnson (Under the Shell), Joey Bader, Al Baker, Jake Kuhn, and Noah Stratton-Twine.

Instagram: [@littermatesfilm](#)

Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, September 2026. Text by Christine Thompson.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.

Christine Thompson is Founder, Publisher, and Executive Editor of AMFM Magazine.