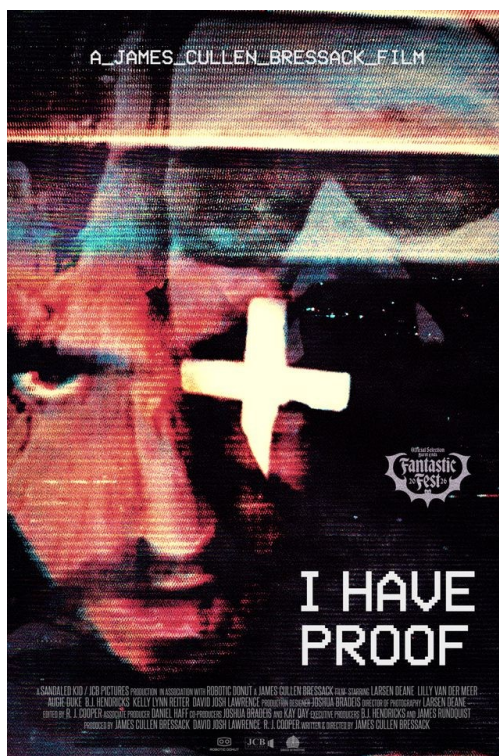


## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# They Knew It Worked When Two People Threw Up

James Cullen Bressack, Larsen Deane, Lilly Van der Meer, and B.J. Hendricks on *I Have Proof*, a VHS horror made like a backyard movie, then carried into Fantastic Fest.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Official key art for *I Have Proof*. Courtesy of Sandaled Kid / JCB Pictures / Robotic Donut.

Fantastic Fest is the week Paul Salfen treats like Christmas, and the room on the other end of this one already knew the feeling. James Cullen Bressack had wanted a movie in the festival since he was eighteen. He did not get in then. Fifteen years later he is back in Austin with *I Have Proof*, a 77-minute horror picture he wrote and directed, and the first horror title he has brought to the festival. Larsen Deane, who leads the film and shot it, Lilly Van der Meer, and B.J. Hendricks were with him, still a little giddy from karaoke between interviews and from a movie that, as Salfen put it, just keeps getting crazier as it goes along.

The logline is almost a dare. Alex has proof. He needs you to see it. *I Have Proof* is a psychological descent where reality is never quite what it seems. The conversation in Austin stayed on that side of the line. Nobody spoiled the tapes. They talked about how the thing got made, and about the particular joy of making people sick.

## THE ROOM HE WANTED AT EIGHTEEN

Bressack made his first movie at eighteen, with Fantastic Fest as the target. The rejection did not retire the idea. “I did not get in then, but it took fifteen years,” he said. “I got my first movie into Fantastic Fest, *The Workout*, a couple years ago, and then I’m back for the third time with *I Have Proof*. It’s the first time I’ve got a horror movie in the festival, which I really think — this is the best audience in the world for horror.”

*The Workout*, which played the festival in 2024 and reached theaters the following year, was an action movie. This one is not. Salfen had already clocked the affection in the footage: the joy it was made with, and a true love

of horror that does not always survive contact with a real set. Plenty of people grow up thinking a movie set is the dream, then get there and reconsider. This one, he said, looked like a blast.

*“This is the best audience in the world for horror.”*

— JAMES CULLEN BRESSACK

## A KID IN THE BACKYARD, WITH A BUDGET

It was. Bressack has directed bigger movies, the kind with Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis, and Jean-Claude Van Damme on the call sheet. *I Have Proof* was a deliberate walk back the other way: grungy, a crew of about five, the director and the actors, and a little VHS camcorder.

“It felt like I was a kid again, making movies in my backyard with Play-Doh and little action figures,” he said. “It was the most excited I’ve been on a set in a very long time.” High school again, he added, except this time they were doing it with friends and they actually had a budget, and they actually knew how a movie works. “We actually have knowledge of how these things work now, and it made it really enjoyable. Super fun.”

Deane was living inside that bargain from both sides of the lens. He plays Alex and he was the director of photography, which meant the performance and the frame were the same job. The film is short on dialogue. Almost everything the audience is meant to read has to be read off the picture.

“It became such a fun challenge as an actor to have that switch in my mind,” Deane said. “Okay, this is more Alex-centric. This is more, I’m filming this, and I have to make sure everything’s in focus, and we’re getting the shots that we need, and we can read what we want the audience to read.” Visual storytelling instead of the traditional dialogue, he said, made it “a really fun, immersive experience as a performer.”



The VHS smear is the point. Landscape key art, Fantastic Fest 2026. Courtesy of the filmmakers.

## IF THEY'RE THROWING UP, IT'S WORKING

Salfen asked if there was a day on set when someone looked around and was simply glad they had done it this way. Bressack warned that his answer was “really fucked up to say.” There was a scene that made two people throw up. When it happened, he was glad.

“I know it was good because people were throwing up,” he said. “And I was like, that’s great. That’s fantastic.”

Deane was one of them. “If anything, I was really in the role,” he said, and he sounded pleased about it. He has other scenes that brought him joy, and he would not name them. “I don’t want to spoil anything.” That restraint held for the whole conversation. The pleasure was in the making, not in walking the audience through the evidence before they had seen it.

*“I know it was good because people were throwing up. And I was like, that’s great.”*

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## MOTHER’S DAY, LATEX GLOVES

Some of the shoot did not even look like a shoot, which was the idea. All four of them got to film in a beloved Los Angeles bar they closed down for the scene. The bar, they noted, was going out of business at the end of the month. Elsewhere, Deane was the man with the camcorder, following a woman through ordinary public space while dressed, by his own account, like a creep: a black latex glove, a beat-to-shit hoodie, the general appearance of someone you do not want filming you through a grated fence.

One man in a parking lot started to yell. Deane took it as a passing grade. “Surprisingly, he was the only one that said something. So I was like, okay, you’re a good Samaritan. This was a test and you passed.” A grocery store was less vigilant. Shoppers let the camera wander. A security guard did check in, just to be sure they were not up to something. They told him they were shooting a Mother’s Day video. It was a week before Mother’s Day.

“That sounds great,” Salfen said. The cover story held. “Meanwhile, I say this with my latex gloves on and overgrown hair and everything, and he just completely buys it,” Deane said. “He didn’t ask any more questions after that.”

## SAY YES, AND BE KIND

Salfen turned it toward the people in the festival who are still trying to be next year’s surprise. Bressack’s advice was the one he had already road-tested on himself.

“Believe in yourself. Believe in your story. You are the unique choice of making a movie. Tell something that’s true to you, and you don’t have to have a budget. Go out there and just make something.” He hopes *I Have Proof* is the proof. “I didn’t even think about money for this. I thought about, how do I tell this story? Let me get a group of people that are engaged and wanting to tell this story with me, and let’s just make it. If you can dedicate yourself to your art and go for it, the sky’s the limit.”

*“You are the unique choice of making a movie. Tell something that’s true to you.”*

— JAMES CULLEN BRESSACK

From the cast side, the counsel got shorter. Don’t stop. Say yes more. Don’t be afraid. “YOLO,” somebody offered, and nobody walked it back. The longer version was about joy, especially for a newer actor walking into an industry that can feel daunting. Put in the hours, find the love of the craft, and you find the people who have

that same love. “That’s what we did on this project. We all love what we do, and it was an opportunity for us to make something that was going to be fun. Finding the joy and finding the love is so important.”

Bressack agreed, then widened it past the set. What stories do you actually need to tell, and is the way through acting, writing, directing, or something else? Pursue that until you have had the experience. And do not assume you know which room is the one that matters.

He had the receipts. Deane had acted in a movie Bressack executive produced a few years ago. He is now the lead. Van der Meer had worked on a film with a friend of his, got recommended, and ended up here. Hendricks and Bressack had worked together early in Bressack’s career, drifted, and reconnected years later to start making movies together again. “Working with people and connecting is how movies get made, and you don’t know who you’re going to meet on what project that might lead to something else. So be kind to the people you work with. For sure.”

Salfen sent them back into the festival with the usual Austin blessings: beer, barbecue, great movies, and karaoke in the very room they were sitting in. They were already doing it between interviews. He wanted the set list. They wanted the audience.

*I Have Proof* had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest on September 21, 2026, at 5 p.m. CT in Austin. Sandaled Kid, JCB Pictures, and Robotic Donut produced. Deane leads, with Van der Meer, Augie Duke, Hendricks, Kelly Lynn Reiter, and David Josh Lawrence. As of this writing, a distributor had not been announced. The unsuspecting audience Bressack was excited to unveil it to is still mostly unsuspecting. That, from the sound of the set, is how they like it.

## FIND I HAVE PROOF

World premiere: Fantastic Fest, September 21, 2026, 5 p.m. CT, Austin. Horror. 77 minutes. Not yet rated.

Written and directed by James Cullen Bressack. Starring Larsen Deane, Lilly Van der Meer, Augie Duke, B.J. Hendricks, Kelly Lynn Reiter, and David Josh Lawrence.

Production companies: Sandaled Kid / JCB Pictures / Robotic Donut. Director of photography: Larsen Deane.

Distribution: not announced as of early October 2026. Watch the filmmakers for the next screening.

Instagram: @jamescullenb · @grand\_larseney · @lillyvandermeer

*Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, October 2026.*

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