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# Four Boxes Explores the Danger From Within

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By Noah Stroehle

**"P**art of what scares us so much are the things we don't get to see," says Wyatt McDill, director of *Four Boxes*, one of the narrative features enjoying its world premiere at the 2009 SXSW Film Festival.

*Four Boxes* is not your average thriller but is instead a character-driven story of three friends grappling with turning thirty, set against the cluttered interior of suburban America. "This was a low budget production, so we didn't have the money to make changes to any of our locations," says Megan Huber, the producer of *Four Boxes*.

"We wanted to place the film in a real location that conveyed a real sense of isolation, where people communicate with each other electronically," McDill adds. "Where people don't know what's real anymore, and this all fits together on a suburban street."

This urban disorientation enables the use of several different genres, as the filmmakers mix comedy, drama and a touch of horror with the thriller elements. McDill and Huber consider *Four Boxes* to be a kind of "Rear Window on the Internet," with some uncanny similarities and marked differences. Whereas the Jimmy Stewart's L.B. Jefferies blurs ethical lines by actively spying on his neighbors because he's a professional photographer who is trained to watch, Justin Kirk's Trevor Grainger, Terryn Westbrook's Amber Croft and Sam Rosen's Rob Rankrus participate in the ethically questionable inverse.

The Internet affords them a window, or four of them, through which they can watch the unsuspecting subject. "After all," as Rankrus says in the film, "it's the Internet, who even knows if it's real."

"Web-based entertainment is much different than TV or film-based entertainment," McDill explains. "With the Internet, you are often not looking at the action whereas in TV and film, you are always looking at the action." McDill uses this "lack of action" to ratchet up the suspense.

One of the praises and criticisms of the infamous *The Blair Witch Project* was its facsimile to documentary film or "reality," and although *Four Boxes* by contrast has an unmistakable narrative treatment, both films are ultimately more concerned with the effects of fear on its main characters. *Four Boxes* is unique in that it explores the effects of fear and all its distorted offspring (suspicion, paranoia, jealousy ...) on the

relationships among the main characters within the confines of a safe and familiar setting. Is the danger lurking outside the dwelling, or is it inside on the laptop screen?

"These are people whose worst fear is finding out they are not special. But the web enables you to find that out ... Everyone's sitting on IKEA chairs all over the world, just going through life, it's gruesome," explains McDill.

Perhaps drawing upon this fear is what sets *Four Boxes* apart. McDill and Huber believe the difference was their cast and crew, and they become audibly warm and soft when asked about their production



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experience. McDill believes it was Huber's doing: "She provided us with the space to have fun and be ourselves."

McDill sums it up this way, "We wanted to make a movie that's real, and that you couldn't make better for a million dollars. Authentic is cheap." ■

## See the Film:

*Four Boxes* will have its World Premiere on Sunday, March 15 at 9:30pm at the Alamo Lamar. The film will also screen on Tuesday, March 17, at 4 pm at the Paramount Theatre, and on Friday, March 20, at 7pm at the Alamo Lamar.