

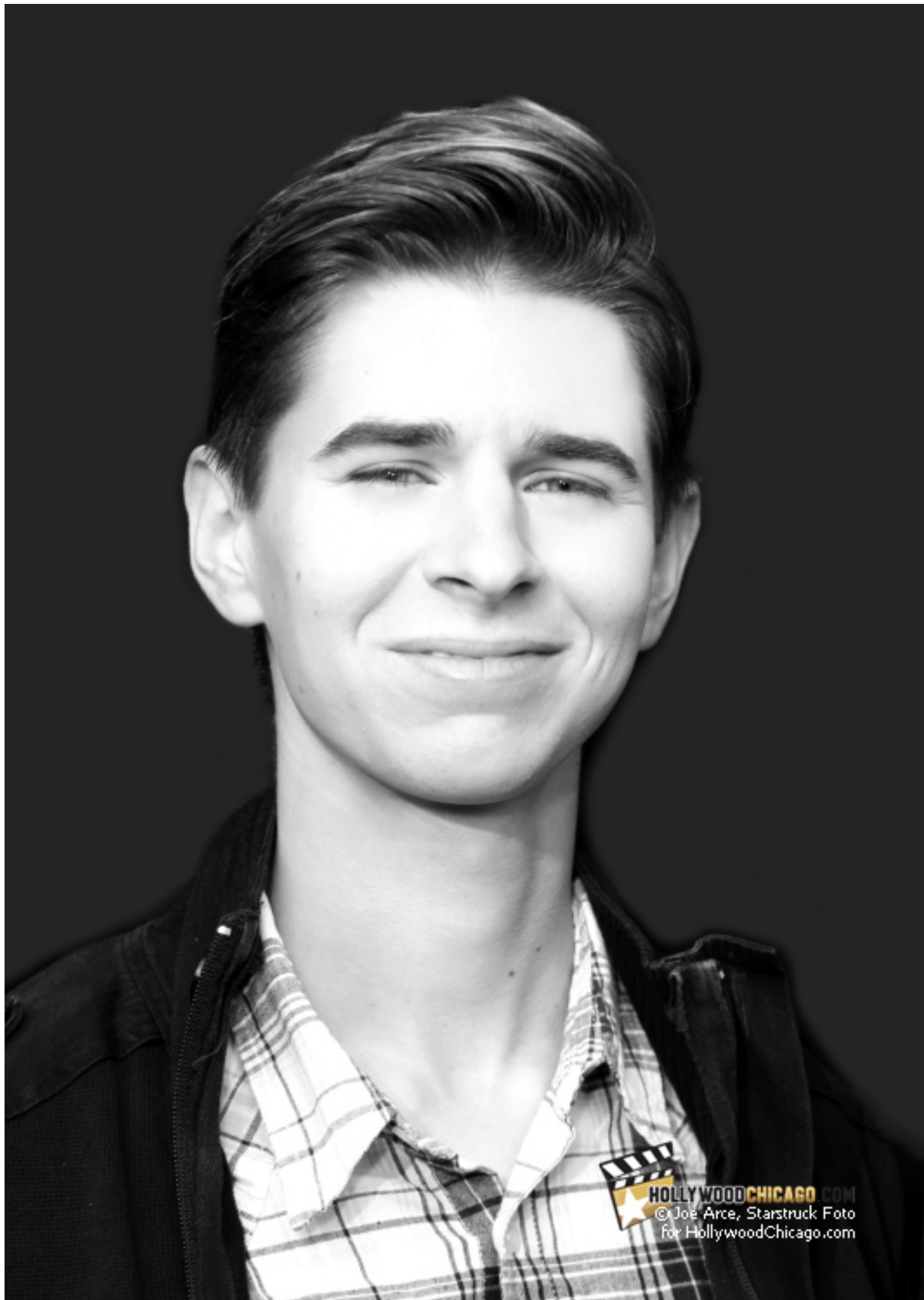
## Interview: Directors Chris Lofing, Travis Cluff Swing on ‘The Gallows’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 8, 2015 - 7:10pm

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CHICAGO – Horror films have many players, but few contenders. Writer/directors Chris Lofing and Travis Cluff debut with “The Gallows,” a “found footage” movie about a force that haunts a typical American high school, complete with familiar student types, and touches on the mysteries of unresolved events and their backlash.

In 1993, a student named Charlie Grimmille is killed performing a hangman’s act in the school play called “The Gallows.” Twenty years after this event, the school resurrects the failed production in an attempt to honor the memory of Charlie. When a group of four students break into the school and onto the play’s set after hours, a series of unexpected situations start to occur, for which there is no escape. Lofing and Cluff go “old school” in this overt and psychological horror movie, and the result is a chilling fright fest, containing the “presence” of unseen forces.



Chris Lofing of 'The Gallows' in Chicago, July 2nd, 2015, at the Music Box Theatre

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

Chris Lofing and Travis Cluff started Tremendum Pictures – a California based film, TV, commercial, viral marketing and production company – in 2011. After producing several short films, their first feature is "The Gallows." They recently screened the film in Chicago at the Music Box Theatre, and talked to HollywoodChicago.com about it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What were the top three past horror film influences for this film, and what elements from those three did you want as the same feeling we have in 'The Gallows'?

**Travis Cluff:** 'The Nightmare on Elm Street' movies, clump them together, remakes like 'The Ring,' and the found footage genre like the 'Paranormal Activity' films. What is cool about them, especially the Freddy Krueger films, is that it's about the iconic villain, and it's specific as to pinpointing him – that is scary. And in 'The Ring' it was about the tone, very creepy and disturbing. Regarding the Paranormal films, you can't see the villain, you don't know what is after you. What we don't know is very scary, and we can't outrun something we can't see. We liked all those elements, and tried to merge them in the film.

**Chris Lofing:** I would add 'The Blair Witch Project' and John Carpenter's 'Halloween.' We really liked the drawn-out, suspenseful moments. There is a big build-up to the scares and seeing Michael Myers for the first time.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** We live in an age where we can be filmed anywhere at anytime. How do you think 'The Gallows' differs from previous 'found footage' movie within this context?

**Cluff:** It's kind of like an assignment for our characters. They have to take a mandatory elective to graduate. They take drama, thinking it would be easy, and the main character Ryan uses the camera to get out of everything else. He doesn't want to do anything else except document the event of the play. He get carried away with it, and records things he doesn't want to and shouldn't do, and gets too deep into the adventure. It's about taking an assignment too far.

**Lofing:** With our film, we captured something special with both the setting and the characters, that we haven't seen in a scary movie in a long time. It's something we can all relate to – we all know high school and it's 'characters, and the strength of the story will separate it from other 'found footage' movies.

**Cluff:** We liken the setting and characters to John Hughes movies, like 'Ferris Bueller's Day Off' and 'The Breakfast Club.' You care about those types of characters.



Travis Cluff of 'The Gallows' in Chicago, July 2nd, 2015, at the Music Box Theatre

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** At what point in the production process did you get the most buy-in from your young cast, how did you communicate specifically what you wanted from them as far as the performances?

**Lofing:** Before we did our casting, we shot an experimental trailer, for 250 bucks and some help from the folks in Fresno [California]. The trailer came out well, even though the film had a different title. We used the trailer to get investors. After we cast the film, we showed the trailer to the actors. They were all impressed with the quality of the trailer and the idea. It was that point that we had them, and they were sold on the concept.



**Cluff:** Here is an interesting thing. When we showed the cast the trailer, and they were kind of blown away. At that point we gave them two options. They could work on the film for a day rate – 100 bucks a day – or we'd give a percentage of whatever backend comes out of it, and they all would work for free. They all took the backend. But when they were done filming, when each person wrapped their part, we paid them the day rate anyway. It was about the commitment, and we got it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You use the high school sort of like the ship in 'The Poseidon Adventure,' as in the characters are trying to find a way out. What fascinated you as filmmakers about the environs of the high school you used, and the stage auditorium that was your primary setting?

**Cluff:** The sayings in the film are true...every theater has its ghosts, and every school has its spirit. I was surprised on how little that had been played into over the years. High school is scary at any point of the day, but especially when you're trapped there late at night.

**Lofing:** We filmed at several schools, and the stage we used was a veteran's association, a stage where they do ceremonies and swearings-in. The nooks and crannies were all a part of it, and it's the most haunted place in all of Fresno. It was over a hundred years old.

Also what is cool about 'theater' as a concept, is that there are so many superstitions associated with it. Don't say 'The Scottish Play' or say 'break a leg.' That was something we wanted to play into as well, along with the high school setting.



Neckties Required For the New Film 'The Gallows'

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Is the play-within-the-film 'The Gallows' a fiction that was created expressly for the screenplay? What origin did you give the play, as to when it was written and who the main characters are? How much of it did you flesh out for the actual scenes of the production?

**Lofing:** Yes, we created it, but we kind of want it to live on its own mystery. We wanted it to take place in a Renaissance or medieval era, and we really focused on the origin being somebody in a high school drama department writing specifically for high schoolers to perform.

**Cluff:** Since then we've explored the option that anyone from any era actually writing it, because there were so many ways to go with it. In terms of the story of the play, we wanted it to be a nobleman and a peasant woman, and the nobleman is trying to be something that he's not, to gain her affection. It's has a life-imitates-art kind of feel, because the story in the play is the same as what is happening to the kids in the present tense.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** As filmmakers, if you were to have any screenplay in the history of film or television fall onto your desk, for you to film, which would it be and why?

**Lofing:** This is the first thing that comes to mind, that I love the script for the first 'Back to the Future.' It's so clever and fun, and Bob Zemeckis did the best job possible, but I'd love to work with that script.

**Cluff:** I really like 'Braveheart.' The story behind someone working outside the system, like we did to get this film made. William Wallace fought for his freedom, and took on the King. The whole story is about freedom and independent, it's the story of the indie film spirit. I love that, and I'd love to take something like that film on.

*"The Gallows" opens everywhere on July 10th. Featuring Reese Mishler, Pfiefer Brown, Ryan Shooes, Cassidy Gifford and Travis Cluff.*

Written and directed by Travis Cluff and Chris Lofing. Rated “R”



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