


[Print Page](#)

Fright night: ""Roulette" makes its Montana premiere on Halloween night

By Nancy Kimball
The Daily Inter Lake

Five people, seemingly unacquainted, terrifyingly linked.

Five people, seemingly unacquainted, terrifyingly linked.

One gun, one bullet.

Four rounds in a session of Russian roulette -- or was it five?

One year later, a bloodthirsty specter extracts a horrific price for a night of reckless fun at a booze- and drug-laced party.

It all adds up to a new film by Whitefish native Adam Pitman, an edgy stab at putting the scary back into scary flicks without the backing of moneyed Hollywood.



Photo by Craig Moore/The Daily Inter Lake
Adam Pitman, 26, of Whitefish explains some of the inner workings of his first movie, "Roulette." Pitman teamed up with a few local friends, his college roommate and some Hollywood friends to produce the horror film, which makes its Montana premiere Oct. 31 at the O'Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish.

But when intellectual capital is your stock in trade, a mere \$500 can set a fertile scene for creativity.

Pitman and his co-producer, David Blair, will prove it on Halloween night.

It's an eerily appropriate evening to premiere "Roulette" (5 and 7:30 p.m., O'Shaughnessy Center, Whitefish), a top-drawer indie horror film that ushers them into the world of filmmaking.

"We love adventure," the 1998 Whitefish High School graduate said of the team he formed with high school buddies Adam Stilwell and Ed Wrzesien, Flathead Valley sound engineer Toby Scott -- who has produced every Bruce Springsteen album for the past 25 years -- a few Los Angeles friends, and Blair, his college roommate at the University of Idaho in Moscow.

"This whole thing has been an adventure. It's one of the hardest things I've ever done."

Knowing now how much work it entailed, would he do it all over again?

"Absolutely," Pitman said.

In fact, he's planning on it.

Badfritter Films -- the creative team of Pitman, Blair, Stilwell and Scott -- already is gearing up for a new creature thriller. Pitman has the script in hand, as well as promises of financial backing well beyond their \$500 bottom line for "Roulette," which was funded by Whitefish friends Richard and Carol Atkinson.

Although Pitman's schooling was in theater arts, with no classroom training in filmmaking, he took to it without missing a beat after a year of dead-end extra roles and a rescinded offer for the lead in a Seattle film.

"In L.A.," he said, the adage really is true: "It's not who you know, but who knows you."

He called Blair to let him know they had to do their own film. Blair was on board immediately.

They called Stilwell, then in Connecticut learning guitar and taking some classes. He took the next train home.

"Our brains are like-minded," Pitman said. "We just spitball around and pretty soon we'll have it. We all know what we want and what it should look like."

Forming that vision didn't take long.

"We all like Russian roulette and we all like ghosts," as part of the language of scary cinema, he said, "so we combined them."

Script in hand, they mustered a small group of friends, several volunteering 200 or 300 hours of their own time to act in and shoot the film.

"It was everyone who just believed in the project. Everyone was so kind. It's not about making money," Pitman said.

It was about making a psychologically compelling horror film.

And the roulette scene was pivotal.

"We said, OK, there's going to be no script," he said, a bold move toward realism. "So we set the gun in the middle of the table and all five of us sat around it and said, 'Let's play Russian roulette.'"

They filmed entirely in north Hollywood, inside and outside, with a camera small enough to go unnoticed by all but the most observant security officers who then booted them off the property.

Seven months after filming started, sound design began. Every footstep, all dialog, the score and music tracks from 20 independent bands, including The Vines from Australia, were added post-production.

But, Pitman admitted, the first soundtrack was a disaster. Their original sound engineer's goals and methods differed drastically from Pitman's and Blair's so, after they parted ways, Pitman's quickly learned sound skills took over. After two weeks of working through the night and two crashed computers, they finally realized they were at a standstill.

By then it was August, and time for Pitman to return to Montana for his brother's wedding.

Back in Whitefish, his mom introduced him to a theater friend who was well-acquainted with Scott's legendary sound-engineering talents. Scott took a listen, liked what he heard -- without ever watching the movie -- and took over all the sound work in mid-September.

Scott offered up his time for two weeks.

"He told me, 'Adam, I'm here for one reason. You want to hear a sound. I'm here to put it there.'"

After their earlier struggle, that was music to Pitman's ears. Blair and Stilwell headed for Montana, and by Pitman's 26th birthday on Sept. 29, it was a wrap.

Four more months and \$500 later, the boys are proud of their work.

"This film is a stepping stone," he said. "I love the quality."

The team of twenty-something actors, film buffs and music/techie whizzes share a common passion to fight against Hollywood's extinction-by-dilution of the horror genre.

"Roulette" was one big learning experience for the first-time filmmakers.

While not beholden to the dictates of a big studio -- the friends put out the movie under their own BlairPitman Production Co. -- they had to make do with materials at hand.

They did just fine:

- A camera rigged to fishing line followed an aerial shot.
- A friend hiding behind a door swung it open while another hidden friend switched on a light as the "ghost" taunted its victim.
- A Ziplock baggie let them use their cheap one-chip mini digital video camera for an underwater shot.
- An under-car shot came from a driver wheeling, with dead-sure aim, over a camera perched directly on the pavement.

Despite the low budget, the film brought high praise from one fan thrilled with the prospect of home-grown cinematic horror returning from Japan, where horror filmmaking has migrated in recent years.

"We got mail that said, 'Thank you so much for breathing life into the rotting corpse that is horror,'" Pitman said.

It was a gratifying response for the team of actors and behind-the-scenes talent.

They also got a big affirmation when "Roulette" was named one of the 10 official selections for The Fargo Fantasy Festival, held this past weekend in North Dakota. The film showed on Friday, Oct. 21.

Although their next film is planned as a creature-thriller, Pitman sees the natural humor in the group giving rise to some pretty good comedy flicks in the future. But, with Peter Jackson ("Dead Alive"), Sam Raimi ("Evil Dead" and "The Gift") and Darren Aronofsky ("Requiem for a Dream") as strong influences in Pitman's taste for horror film, there are bound to be one or two of those pop up, as well.

Although Carolyn and Doug Pitman -- Carolyn is executive director of Whitefish Theatre Co., headquartered in the O'Shaughnessy Center -- are proud of their son's drive and accomplishment, his mother is dismayed at the subject and genre of her son's first work.

As a result, the younger Pitman wants to be very clear on one thing:

BlairPitman Production Co. is paying rent to the O'Shaughnessy Center for Monday night's premiere. The theater company and the hall have no connection with the production, other than providing a facility for the

1 hour, 44 minute film.

Two shows are planned, at 5 and 7:30 p.m. Admission is \$6 at the door. "Roulette" is rated R, for violence, language and mature content -- so nobody under 17 will be admitted.

The entire Badfritter Films creative team will be on hand.

Reporter Nancy Kimball can be reached at 758-4483 or by e-mail at nkimball@dailyinterlake.com.