

Exclusive: ‘Westworld’ Director Breaks Down That Shocking Episode 4 Twist

BY ADAM CHITWOOD APRIL 5, 2020



Spoilers for *Westworld* Season 3 Episode 4 abound in the following interview.

Directing [*Westworld*](#) Season 3 Episode 4, titled “The Mother of Exiles,” would be a significant challenge for any filmmaker. It not only re-introduces a key character for the first time this season in a severely damaged mental state, but also juggles multiple points of view at once, contains not one, not two, but three fight sequences, *and* ends with the season’s biggest twist reveal yet. Now imagine this is the first episode of television you’ve ever directed, and you’ll start to get a sense of how **Paul Cameron** was feeling when he took the helm of this episode.

Cameron has a history with *Westworld*. He’s a veteran cinematographer having shot films that range from *Collateral* to *Man on Fire* to *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, and he’s who *Westworld* co-creator **Jonathan Nolan** turned to when he was searching for a DP for the show’s pilot (which Nolan directed). Cameron helped create the visual language for the HBO sci-fi series, and he re-teamed with Nolan once again to serve as the DP on the Season 3 premiere, which served as a semi-reboot of the series as it revealed the “real world” for the first time.

When Cameron was asked to shoot the Season 3 premiere, Nolan and co-showrunner **Lisa Joy** also told him they’d like him to direct an episode this

season. Little did he know it'd turn out to be one of the show's most complicated episodes yet.

I recently had the chance to speak with Cameron over the phone about his work on the series, and while you can read [the first portion of our interview right here](#)—in which we discuss his work as a DP on the show and crafting the visual language for Season 3—now is when I get to share what he had to say about directing Episode 4.

During the course of our conversation, Cameron talked about juggling that big Dolores reveal with multiple characters at the same time, working with the actors to figure out how much of “Dolores” should factor into their performances, and crafting the fight scenes. Cameron also discussed working with **Ed Harris** on some very difficult William scenes, and bringing it full circle with the closing scene. It's an illuminating conversation that I'm sure *Westworld* fans will find intriguing, and learning what went into making the episode behind the scenes makes Cameron's work all the more impressive.

Check out the full interview below and [click here to read my full recap](#) of the episode.

How did you as the director go about juggling the idea that every host is Dolores while keeping that reveal under wraps until the end of the episode?

PAUL CAMERON: Yeah, I kind of knew the arc of the series a little bit, and one of the greater challenges in the episode is the reveal of Dolores and the multiple characters, and how we were going to handle that was no small feat. Having Tessa Thompson, Tommy Flanagan, and Hiroyuki Sanada all revealing themselves as Dolores in the episode, there was a lot of discussion of how we wanted it to feel, how we wanted it to converge.



Photo by John P. Johnson/HBO

I think we stuck to the script pretty well, and when we went to the edit I think the final tweak that Jonathan and I did was to try to tighten up the moment of the reveals between all the characters. Outside of that, we didn't change much, but it was a big question of like, what aspects of these characters actually have the aspects of the Dolores character? Are we revealing that, what is that, what's the sensitivity to it? I spoke with Jonathan at length to really simplify a couple of nuances with each character, to tonally make the reference to that character being Dolores during the reveal, but to keep it very subtle and not expand on that too much.

The interesting thing to me was not only directing it, but once the actors realized what the reveal was, I think they were all probably, outside of Tommy I guess because he's new to the series, but they were all very, very also challenged by, what is this reveal going to be? What was it going to be like? Am I playing her as a character, what parts of her character am I taking on? Where's this going to go down the road? Of course I knew where things were going down the road, but I couldn't reveal anything except for what pages they have at any given time. So, that was interesting.

The episode is book-ended with two really interesting William scenes. Talk about an acting powerhouse, and you've got that opening scene with Ed and Katja. What was it like working with Ed and Katja, and then also with Ed and Evan at the end, and figuring out what William's head space is like at this point in time? We're all in the dark as to is William real, is he a host? I think William is also trying to figure this out.

CAMERON: Ed, I think at the end of episode four, is still trying to figure it out as well. In conceptualizing the arc of the William character, specifically in this episode, it started with this reality of William is really trapped in this thing where he doesn't know whether he's real or not, and we're picking up in that moment. Actually the opening scene was much different in the script, and fortunately I pitched the version you see in the episode to Jordan Goldberg the writer.



Photo by John P. Johnson/HBO

I wanted this feel of William being much more unhinged, and really on the edge of complete psychosis where then he burst out of the water and he's upstairs in the bathroom where his wife died, and he rolls out of the water, and is kind of looking there at his daughter who he's killed, confronting him. I wanted to really amp that up. It was written originally a much different way, and I felt like, "Okay, let's make this a more cerebral experience," and then he goes to cut himself.

The thing is, Dolores is using William. She needs him to vote or give his proxy to make this power move on the money, and take over control of Delos. The purpose is to really keep William not knowing whether he's real or not, and then at the end it was just brilliant writing where we're in this insane asylum with William, and suddenly the Dolores from Westworld in her blue dress is coming out of the darkness, and sits next to him, and tells him basically welcome to the end of the game, which scared the shit out of William. Hopefully audience-wise, we feel like this is even going to go deeper with William cerebrally.

The interesting thing for me directing is, "Okay, so here's my first day of shooting and Ed's got a gun, and he's going to shoot up some grandfather clock, and mirrors," and then I realized having worked with Ed before and knowing him a little bit, I had no idea. He showed up that day, he was completely in character, he was completely out of his mind. He wanted to start shooting immediately. It was a very intense set for a few hours doing that whole opening with him shooting.

The scene in the bar with Maeve and Serac is also really great.

CAMERON: That was a location we scouted and I thought we were going to shoot for episode one with Jonathan. He said, "No, no, no, this would be great for your scene in four." On that location, which was one of the most gorgeous bars in the world, but suddenly I'm sitting there with two amazing actors, Vincent Cassel and



Photo by John P. Johnson/HBO

Thandie Newton in a pretty interesting competition scene where we need to reveal a lot about the Vincent Cassel character in a very short period of time.

Your episode is very exposition heavy, and I think it's a credit to you, and credit to the writing and the actors that it doesn't necessarily feel that way. To be making your television directing debut on this episode specifically is a huge challenge and you did a great job.

CAMERON: Oh thanks, I appreciate that. Yeah.

I also wanted to ask about the masquerade ball, which I think is a really great sequence. It mirrors Westworld in a really interesting way, and Dolores even comments on it as, “In Westworld, humans are getting away from their life to pay for pleasure, and here they’re putting on masks again, they’re paying for sex.” It just thematically I think is really interesting.

CAMERON: Yeah. Some things never change, do they? As you mentioned, that scene specifically when I read it, I felt like this is no different than the park really whatsoever. Quite honestly, it’s the Liam Dempsey character saying that he’s not into it, and meanwhile he’s responsible for helping create this park, and has been part of his world, and he’s obviously into prostitutes and parties. He kind of denies that this is his world.

And then like you said, Dolores walks in and says the world is no different out here. The challenge was it’s a very big scene and we only had two days in that location. I had limited time to do the entrance, the auction, the fight upstairs. I only had a couple days to do that, and I think we wanted massive scale too, and we wanted to be very elegant and tasteful, and the best kind of sex auction that you could imagine.

We also had a lot of more Westworld-type background imagery and stuff that I shot also that didn’t make the edit, but as characters pass through some of our imagery of naked people and costumes like we’ve seen before, but they’re all in masquerade costumes. It was all very much like the Westworld park and imagery that you’ve seen before.

And that fight sequence is fantastic. As is the one with Maeve as well. What were those like to put together?

CAMERON: Well, I think the challenging one in the auction is unfortunately we had to shoot the fight last to reduce the number of extras and whatnot, so I actually ended up shooting that in probably in about two and a half, three hours that whole fight sequence.



Photo by John P. Johnson/HBO

Having been a director of photography for many years, you look at the reality of

what shootings we got, how do we do this? I planned to do 12 setups, but I'm only going to do it in about four setups.

I also have the incredible experience working with an incredible camera operator, Chris Haarhoff. He's done a couple of seasons of *Westworld* now too, so he's brilliant, he's fast. We're able to get in there and just execute shots along with stunt coordinators, and just get through that, and try to make it dynamic with the limited time we had to shoot it.

You also shot Lisa Joy's feature film directing debut, is that right?

CAMERON: Yeah. I just finished that at end of January, a movie called *Reminiscent* directed by Lisa Joy. *Westworld* co-creator and co-showrunner and director. It's Lisa's first film, it's a Warner Brothers studio film with Hugh Jackman, Rebecca Ferguson. Incredible love story. Lisa really wrote a fantastic script here, and directed a beautiful movie. We shot it in New Orleans over four months.

I can't wait to see that. I'm excited for that one.

CAMERON: Yeah, that will be good. I think it'll be a good one, she did a really good job.

Westworld airs on HBO on Sundays.