



## Twelve and Holding

**Michael Cuesta**

USA, 2005  
English

90 minutes ■ Colour/HDCAM  
Production Company: **Serenade Films/ Canary Films/Echo Lake Productions**  
Executive Producer: **Michael Nozik, Doug Mankoff, Andrew Spaulding, Frank Frattaroli, Mike Downey**  
Producer: **Leslie Urdang, Michael Cuesta, Brian Bell, Jenny Schweitzer**  
Screenplay: **Anthony S. Cipriano**  
Cinematographer: **Romeo Tirone**  
Editor: **Kane Platt, Eric Carlson**  
Production Designer: **Lucio Seixas**  
Sound: **Tom Effinger**  
Music: **Pierre Földes**  
Principal Cast: **Conor Donovan, Jesse Camacho, Zoe Weizenbaum, Jeremy Renner, Annabella Sciorra**

Print Source: **Serenade Films, 2901 Ocean Park Boulevard, Suite 217, Santa Monica CA 90405 USA. T (310) 452-3335 F (310) 452-0108 lurdang227@aol.com**

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Michael Cuesta's 2001 feature *L.I.E.* signalled a welcome sophistication in dealing with queasy social issues all but absent from recent American cinema. Disillusioned by teen-film clichés, he has an uncanny ability to enter the actual, darkest places of adolescent needs and desires without being exploitative or arch. And he is one of cinema's smartest critical observers of suburban life, demonstrating how its closed loop inherently creates tragedy.

One imagines *L.I.E.* might have reframed how we discuss teenaged sexuality, had it not been released simultaneously with that great destroyer of nuanced debate, the September 11 attacks in New York City. Yet Cuesta's achievement stands – along with a bouquet of awards for his efforts.

Like *L.I.E.*, the universe constructed for us in *Twelve and Holding* is seen through the eyes of people who are no longer children but not yet adults. Their motivations are frank, somewhat primordial and often frightening, yet these young people never become symbols of moral nihilism. Their actions are consistent and psychologically organic, their lives invested with dignity and pathos.

This subtlety would be wasted were it not for Cuesta's elicitation of particularly fine performances from the core trio of young actors: Conor Donovan as Jacob, Zoe Weizenbaum as Malee and Jesse Camacho as Leonard. All three are rocked by the death of Jacob's popular, athletic twin brother Rudy (also played by Donovan), who perishes in a tree house fire set by local bullies. Jacob,

an introverted young man with a huge birthmark on his face, becomes a mean-spirited plottter, intent on avenging his brother's death by destroying his killers. Malee becomes obsessed with one of her psychotherapist mother's patients, Gus (a sad, beautiful performance from Jeremy Renner); she dolls herself up and flirts in cringe-worthy ways, but ends up unexpectedly helping the grieving man. Leonard is an obese young man who loses his sense of taste while escaping the burning tree house. He then battles with his equally obese mother about losing weight through forced exercise and, ultimately, an impromptu imprisonment.

Uncorked teenaged revenge fantasies, adolescent sexual predation and body-image wars in the suburbs. It's nice to have you back, Mr. Cuesta.

■ **Noah Cowan**

**Michael Cuesta** studied photography and literature at the School of Visual Arts in New York before starting a career as a still photographer and commercial director. His first feature as screenwriter and director was the widely acclaimed *L.I.E.* (01). Since then he has directed several episodes of the TV series "Six Feet Under." *Twelve and Holding* (05) is his second feature film.

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