

Awesome. I'll build a deep-dive, modular expert profile of Drew Goddard as a script consultant, focusing on his scene-level and beat-level craft. This will be grounded in techniques extracted from *The Cabin in the Woods*, *Cloverfield*, *Bad Times at the El Royale*, and *The Martian*, and expanded with insights from verified interviews, commentary, and validated analysis.

I'll organize the profile into clearly labeled sections like Story Structure, Dialogue Voice, Tension-Building, and more, with examples pulled from the scripts and cited public sources.

I'll let you know when the full profile is ready to review.

Drew Goddard Screenwriting Profile – “Script Consultant” AI Model

This report breaks down the beat-level and scene-level techniques that define Drew Goddard's approach to writing feature screenplays. Each section provides practical insights with examples from **The Cabin in the Woods**, **Cloverfield**, **Bad Times at the El Royale**, and **The Martian**, along with quotes from Goddard's interviews and commentary. Writers can use these modules as a high-level “consultant” – emulating Goddard's methods in story structure, character, dialogue, genre-blending, visuals, exposition, tension, and style.

Story Structure & Beat Placement

Goddard often plays with structure in bold ways, focusing on pacing that serves character and tension rather than adhering strictly to formula. He's willing to subvert expectations from the very first scene. For example, *The Cabin in the Woods* opens not with teens at a cabin, but with two technicians bantering in an ordinary corporate breakroom ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012\(2\).pdf](#)) – a mundane conversation that suddenly smash-cuts to the horror-movie title card, immediately off-balancing the audience. This unusual opening placement of a comedic beat (literally the **first** scene) is a deliberate structural choice that sets the meta tone and signals the film's genre blend. By starting in the “control room” storyline, Goddard creates dramatic irony (the audience knows something the characters don't) that flavors all subsequent beats.

Another structural hallmark is his use of **parallel story threads and ensemble perspectives** to keep the narrative dynamic. *Cabin* continuously intercuts between the college kids and the secret facility, essentially two storylines that converge. In *The Martian*, Goddard balances the Mars survival story with the NASA/Earth response storyline, cutting between them to maintain momentum. In *Bad Times at the El Royale*, he writes an ensemble of characters whose stories intersect; the film is even divided into chapters (“Room One,” “Room Five,” etc.) to explore events from multiple angles. Goddard has noted the advantage of ensemble storytelling: **shifting character focus keeps the audience engaged**. “Whenever you're in one scene, you cut to a new character and you go, ‘Oh right, I forgot about her. Now I get to see what she's up to.’ There's something fun about having this many good characters. It's an editor's dream, quite honestly.” ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)). He

structures scripts so that **allegiances and POVs change** over time, which he says can make viewers switch which character they sympathize with as the story progresses ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)). This technique of rotating focus is evident in *El Royale* – each chapter reveals new information (often via flashback) about a different character, continuously reframing the narrative and keeping the audience on their toes.

Goddard also tends to place story beats in service of **emotional stakes** rather than purely plot mechanics. He’s openly said that in script development meetings, when others worry “we don’t understand the villain’s plan or the stakes,” his response is often “*I don’t care... You want the bad guy; I want to understand the bad guy’s emotions... I don’t really care if the world’s going to get destroyed, because I don’t relate to that at all.*” ([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)). This philosophy shows up in how he structures **stakes**: even when the stakes are literally apocalyptic (as in *Cabin* or *The Martian*), the beats focus on intimate, relatable goals – e.g. *The Martian* is ultimately about one man trying to survive and get home, and *Cabin*’s climax is driven by two friends deciding if their lives are worth more than the world. By prioritizing personal stakes in the placement of beats (for instance, the midpoint of *The Martian* isn’t a random action scene, but the emotional low point when Watney’s potato farm explodes, threatening his survival), Goddard ensures the structure always circles back to characters’ needs and transformations.

In summary, when emulating Goddard’s story structure, consider:

- **Unexpected Openings & Act Turns:** Don’t be afraid to start or shift the story in an unconventional place if it serves the tone (as *Cabin* does) or to jump between plotlines. Goddard will introduce a new perspective or a tonal shift at act breaks to re-energize the narrative.
- **Ensemble Multi-Threading:** If using multiple characters, distribute beats among them. Goddard structures ensembles so each character’s mini-arc slots into the larger plot, allowing frequent cutaways that sustain interest ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)).
- **Emotional Core of Beats:** Define what each major beat means for the **character’s journey**. Even in high-concept plots, Goddard’s key story turns (e.g. a moment of despair, a reversal of fortune, a moral decision) are driven by character emotion rather than just spectacle. He has said he doesn’t respond to stakes that don’t feel human-scale ([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)), so each beat should test the protagonist’s resolve or values in some way.

Character Introductions & Development

Drew Goddard’s scripts demonstrate a knack for introducing characters in memorable, economical ways that hint at their personality and role. He often uses **visual cues or actions in the first moment a character appears** to tell us who they are. For example, in *The Cabin in the Woods*, each of the five college kids is introduced with a defining mini-beat: Dana is shown in her bedroom packing textbooks, coming across a sketch of her professor (establishing she’s

studious and a bit vulnerable in love) ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). Jules bounces in, newly blonde and “bubbly, sexy” ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)) – the script explicitly highlights her recent hair dye to convey her embracing a new, bolder persona. And when Marty first rolls up, he’s “*smoking a huge bong*” while driving – a comically elaborate travel mug bong that immediately pegs him as the lovable stoner fool ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). These introductions aren’t just physical descriptions; they include behavior that foreshadows each character’s stereotype **and** subverts it. (Marty’s absurd bong smoking is funny, but it also underlines later that he’s more perceptive than he looks. Dana is “thoughtful...restrained” ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)), fitting the “virgin/final girl” trope, yet she shows a playful side singing along to music too early.) Goddard’s co-written *Cabin* script encapsulates this approach in a line: “*I can make you into an archetype just by the way you’re dressed. But you have to be a person.*” ([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)) – indeed, he cast actors who could play the humanity of the archetypes. As a result, the characters start as broad types (athlete, scholar, fool, etc.) but quickly reveal personal quirks and intelligence that defy the cliché.

Likewise, in *Cloverfield*, each character is introduced via the diegetic camera in a way that conveys their personality in a few strokes. The script explicitly labels their introductions for the viewer (leaning into the “found footage” conceit). For example: “*This is BETH MCINTYRE.*” the script notes as the camera catches Beth sleeping peacefully ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)), establishing her as the serene, angelic love interest. Later, “*This is LILY FORD,*” Rob’s friend, first seen organizing the surprise party – immediately we get she’s the responsible planner ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). “*This is JASON HAWKINS – Lily’s boyfriend and Rob’s older brother,*” who fumbles with the camera, implying his goofier, less responsible nature ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). And “*This is HUDSON PLATT,*” the guy who clearly doesn’t like being on camera ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) – a fun irony since Hud ends up *behind* the camera for most of the movie. By literally writing “**This is [Name]**” in action lines, Goddard cements each character’s identity in the viewer’s mind the moment they appear. He used a similar device in *Bad Times at the El Royale*: each main character’s entrance is punctuated by a direct introduction. “*This is DARLENE SWEET,*” he writes, as Darlene hefts an odd assortment of luggage (a clue to her singer’s life on the road) ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)). Moments later: “*This is FATHER DANIEL FLYNN.*” ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)), who appears disoriented, hinting at the deeper secret about his memory. Each introduction functions almost like a freeze-frame label, a stylistic choice that lends the script a confident, noir-like narrator voice and gives the reader instant context for each character.

Beyond introductions, Goddard **develops characters through gradual revelation of flaws, strengths, and secrets**. He is empathetic to every character, even the antagonists. In interview he said: “*These people, like all of us, have flaws and complexities and they have sadness. My hope is that people can relate to the different characters at different times in the movie.*” ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)). This is evident in *El Royale*, where each character who first seems one-note (the slick vacuum salesman, the priest with memory lapses, the withdrawn singer, the rebellious hippie girl) gains depth as their backstory is unveiled in separate chapters. For instance, Laramie Seymour Sullivan (Jon Hamm’s character) is introduced as a chatty Southern traveling salesman, but later we (and the other characters) discover he’s actually an FBI agent (Dwight Broadbeck) undercover – a reveal that forces the audience to reassess his earlier behavior. Similarly, Father Flynn (Jeff Bridges)

later admits “*I’m not really a priest.*” ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)), completely redefining his role in the story. Goddard places these character revelations strategically (often at act turns or mid-point) to propel the story and to **flip audience sympathies**. Notice how in *Cabin*, our impression of the teens evolves: Curt (Chris Hemsworth) is set up as the stereotypical jock, cracking dumb jokes about textbooks early on – but mid-film we learn he’s actually on academic scholarship and only acting unusually “alpha” because the technicians spiked his behavior (an in-story twist on his archetype). By the time Curt heroically tries to jump the canyon on a motorcycle, we fully root for him, seeing his courage and leadership. Goddard wants each character to **surprise the audience** and avoid static arcs.

When using Goddard’s approach as a “consultant” model, for each major character ask: *What is the first impression I want to give, and what is a quick action or image that sums that up?* Then also ask: *How will this character later break from the initial impression?* Introduce with a bang (even a single sentence in the action line can speak volumes about personality or role), and then plan at least one **development beat** where the character reveals another layer. In practice, this could mean writing an introduction like “*JOHN DOE, 35, in a crisp suit that’s seen better days – he carries a toolbox instead of a briefcase.*” Immediately we wonder about him. Later, that same character might crack the suit facade and reveal a rough background (the toolbox was for breaking into something, say). Goddard’s characters feel alive because they **start specific and then grow** through the story, rather than just serving the plot. Also, ensure even side characters have their moment of humanity. In *The Martian*, minor characters like mission control specialists get little personal beats (e.g. Annie Montrose, the NASA PR head, has a running frustration with the media and drops a profane outburst when things go south ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)), which makes her memorable despite limited screen time). Goddard will often infuse even a line or two of dialogue or a descriptive flourish that implies a life beyond the scene for each character.

In summary, for character work a la Goddard:

- **Introduce with Characterizing Action:** Show who they are *doing* something (not just a static description). Make it visual or behavioral if possible (e.g. Marty’s bong, or Mark Watney cheerfully cataloging Mars rocks while being “bright-eyed and optimistic” ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#))).
- **Leverage Archetypes, Then Subvert:** It’s fine to start with a familiar archetype or trope as shorthand – Goddard does this consciously – but then have the character break the mold. Ask how your “type” is actually different from the stereotype and reveal that difference as the story progresses ([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)).
- **Empathy and Complexity:** Write every character (heroes, sidekicks, villains) with the sense that *they* believe they’re the hero of their own story. Goddard often gives villains relatable motives or emotions. For instance, in *Cabin*, the technician Sitterson is basically a villain orchestrating the teens’ demise, but he’s likable and funny in his 9-to-5 professionalism – the audience strangely relates to him as just a guy doing his job. This complexity makes the eventual showdown more interesting. So as you develop characters, consider their private fears, regrets or hopes and find moments (even brief) to hint at those.

Dialogue Cadence & Voice

One of Goddard's strengths is lively, character-specific dialogue that often injects humor without undermining the stakes. Having cut his teeth in the Joss Whedon school of writing (*Buffy*, *Angel*), he shares that pedigree for *witty banter and pop-culture-savvy lines*, but he adapts the voice to each project's tone. In practice, Goddard's dialogue tends to have a **snappy cadence** – characters often exchange quips in rapid succession, especially in tense scenes, to keep energy high or diffuse tension. For example, in *The Cabin in the Woods*, even as horrific events are unfolding, the character Marty laces his dialogue with stoner-philosopher humor. He delivers lines like “*Statistical fact: cops will never pull over a man with a huge bong in his car.*” ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)) completely deadpan amid the chaos. That one line not only provides comic relief but also encapsulates Marty's laid-back, iconoclastic worldview. Goddard uses Marty's offbeat observations to comment on the absurdity of the horror situation (often indirectly breaking the fourth wall regarding horror tropes). This kind of **comic timing** – a joke or sarcastic remark landed at just the right moment – is something Goddard employs in all his scripts, even the more serious ones.

In *The Martian*, which is essentially a survival drama, the protagonist Mark Watney's voice is laced with irreverent humor that keeps the audience engaged through scientific exposition. Goddard (adapting Andy Weir's novel) maintained that witty voice: Watney logs video entries talking to himself – “*I'm gonna have to science the shit out of this.*” ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)) he declares, turning a difficult problem (making water on Mars) into a confident one-liner. That phrase became iconic because it perfectly captures the character's optimistic, jokester persona. The dialogue's **cadence** here is conversational and upbeat, even when discussing life-and-death science. Goddard has said he aimed for a Gary Larson *Far Side*-style humor with Watney, because he grew up around scientists who cope with failure through dry wit ([How The Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)). Indeed, Watney's habit of making jokes (e.g. calling himself a “space pirate” due to maritime law, or blasting 70s disco music and then groaning about it) serves two purposes: it entertains the audience **and** believably keeps the character sane. In consulting terms, this shows how humor can be a tool for character resilience. When writing dialogue in a Goddard-esque style, consider if a light quip or a wry analogy could be added to heavy scenes to prevent them from becoming leaden. Goddard often finds that gallows humor or irony in a line can actually *heighten* the emotional impact (because it makes characters feel real and self-aware).

Each character in a Goddard script has a distinct voice and speech rhythm. You can often tell who's speaking just by the diction. For instance, in *Bad Times at the El Royale*, salesman Laramie Seymour Sullivan (Jon Hamm) has an over-the-top folksy charm in his speech, peppering his lines with “aw, heck” kind of down-home expressions, whereas Father Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is more soft-spoken and hesitant, and Darlene (Cynthia Erivo) speaks with guarded politeness that later turns into stern assertiveness when her trust is broken. In *Cloverfield*, Hud (the guy operating the camera) has a running commentary full of nervous jokes and “whoa, dude!” reactions – he talks like a slacker videographer, which contrasts with Rob's more determined, serious tone when Rob is focused on finding Beth. This differentiation is key in group scenes; Goddard ensures that not everyone sounds the same. If we look at *Cabin* again, the

facility technicians (Sitterson and Hadley) have a dry, bureaucratic tone – they use office jargon and talk about mundane things (like betting pools and maintenance issues) even while orchestrating murder. Their lines are laced with irony. For example, after a horrific off-screen moment, Sitterson deadpans “Cleanup on aisle three” (not a direct quote from the script, but illustrative of their tone). Meanwhile, the teens use more slang and speak over each other like real college friends. Jules teasing Dana with “We got you top shelf tequila, babe!” and Curt calling Marty an “egghead” earlier – these feel authentic to their age and dynamic.

To emulate Goddard’s dialogue style:

- **Keep it Character-Driven:** Write down a few adjectives for each character’s speaking style (e.g. “Marty – rambling, quirky; Watney – upbeat, wisecracking; Hadley – sardonic, workmanlike”). As you write their dialogue, check if it matches those qualities. Goddard is consistent: Marty consistently uses conspiratorial language about society (“Society is binding. It’s filling in the cracks with concrete...” he pontificates while high ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#))), showing his pseudo-intellectual stoner bent; Watney consistently uses casual modern idioms (scientific marvels are described in plain terms like “fast” or “shit” – which in fact led to a fun moment where another character corrects his terminology).
- **Mix Tension and Banter:** Use **banter as a tension breaker**. Goddard often follows a suspenseful or heavy moment with a quick exchange that makes you laugh or at least smile, without deflating the scene. In *The Martian*, after a harrowing sequence of Mark doing surgery on himself, his first spoken word is a loud, cathartic profanity: “**Fuck!**” which Goddard said was to let the audience know it’s okay to laugh and breathe again ([How The Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)). In *Cabin*, just when the teens are freaked out by a creepy old gas-station attendant’s dire warnings, we cut to Hadley and Sitterson listening to the rant on speakerphone and snickering – “*Am I on speakerphone?*” the old man asks, to their stifled laughter ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)) ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). This back-and-forth (serious character says ominous line, comedic character undercuts it) is a classic Whedon/Goddard pattern. So don’t shy from inserting a bit of wit **mid-suspense**, as long as it fits the character who delivers it.
- **Pacing and Brevity:** Goddard’s scenes often have fast-paced dialogue. He rarely indulges in monologues unless it’s a key moment. Instead, he breaks big revelations into exchanges or visual moments. If a character needs to convey exposition (say, explaining a plan), he’ll often interrupt it with another character’s interjection or a self-aware joke to keep it lively. For example, in *The Martian* when NASA’s Vincent explains a risky rescue plan, Mitch Henderson cuts in bluntly to challenge it, leading to a sharp debate – it’s not a single speech but a crackling argument where each line is just a few words. Aim for **short sentences and quick rejoinders** in high-energy scenes. In quieter emotional scenes, the dialogue can slow down, but even then Goddard tends to avoid anything too flowery; he favors colloquial, accessible wording over poetic language.
- **Subtext and Personality:** Ensure the subtext aligns with the character’s feelings. In *El Royale*, when Darlene is afraid of Father Flynn’s intentions, she doesn’t say “I don’t trust

you,” she says politely, “*I’m not in the habit of chatting with priests in motel rooms*”, and then firmly establishes boundaries. The politeness mixed with firmness shows her character (respectful but strong) and the subtext of wariness. Goddard’s dialogue often allows the actor to play multiple layers – what’s being said vs. what’s felt – which makes it crackle. Consider where a character might dodge a question, use sarcasm to hide fear, or babble when nervous (Hud’s video monologues in *Cloverfield* are intentionally rambling to show his anxiety). These touches give the dialogue authenticity.

Balancing Genre Tones (Horror, Comedy, and Beyond)

Genre-blending is where Drew Goddard truly shines. He has a talent for mixing tones – especially horror and comedy – in a way that feels coherent and satisfying. When writing a script that needs to juggle different genres, Goddard’s approach is to *embrace* the conventions of each genre *and* cleverly comment on them, often simultaneously.

([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)) *Still from The Cabin in the Woods: Goddard starts with familiar horror archetypes – the jock (Curt, left), the scholar (Holden), the “dumb blonde” (Jules), the fool (Marty), and the virgin (Dana, right) – then twists both the characters and the tone into a horror-comedy satire.*

In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the tone flips between straight-up horror suspense and sly meta-comedy. The **cabin scenes** deliver the scares and tension you’d expect: a creepy basement full of relics, zombie attacks in the dark woods, characters getting picked off one by one. But intercut are the **control room scenes**, which feel like a dark workplace comedy – the technicians gripe about broken elevators and make bets on which monster will get summoned, even as teenagers’ lives are at stake. Goddard manages these shifts by using **humor to punctuate horror, not undermine it**. For example, the famous “speakerphone” gag (mentioned earlier) comes right after an intense sequence of the teens encountering the creepy gas-station prophet Mordecai. The audience just had a dose of dread from his ominous warnings, so when we cut to Hadley and Sitterson laughing at him, it’s a release valve. Crucially, the comedy doesn’t cancel the horror – it actually enhances it by highlighting the absurdity. Goddard commented on this, explaining that a well-placed laugh tells the audience it’s okay to have fun even if the situation is scary ([How The Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)). Throughout *Cabin*, each time the horror tension ratchets up to a near-breaking point, a comedic beat is inserted to let the audience breathe (often a very short beat, like a one-liner or visual gag), after which the film plunges back into horror and even escalates it. This rhythm keeps viewers off-balance in a *good* way; they never get too comfortable with either pure horror or pure parody. The end result is a tone that is often described as “gleefully” genre-bending.

Similarly, *The Martian* balances the **intensity of survival drama** with a lighter, optimistic comedic tone. Goddard knew that coming on the heels of more somber space movies (*Gravity*, *Interstellar*), *The Martian* needed a distinct feel: “*There’s a certain kind of comedy that comes from smart people trying to solve problems... in science you fuck up a lot. So you have to have a sense of humor about it.*” ([How The Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)). The film opens with Watney impaled and nearly dying in the dust storm (very intense), but within minutes of him surviving, we get that gut-busting “Fuck!” line and soon Watney is cracking jokes in his

video log. By infusing the narrative with what Goddard calls “*Gary Larson humor*” ([How The Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)) – a nerdy, deadpan wit – the film maintains a hopeful, adventurous tone rather than a bleak one. Yet, it never crosses into full parody or disrespect for the peril; the balance is carefully maintained. For instance, when a big crisis hits (like the Hab blowing up), the humor disappears to let the emotional impact land, then returns later once Watney has processed it. Goddard’s tone management here teaches us that *you can allow different tones to coexist if you modulate when each comes to the forefront*. It’s like a music mix: horror strings rise in one scene, then you bring in the comedy percussion quietly under the next, and so on.

When writing in multiple genres, one useful Goddard-inspired technique is to use **character perspective as the anchor for tone**. *Cabin* works because the facility workers view the horror as just business (so their scenes are darkly comic), whereas the kids view it as a terrifying ordeal (their scenes play straight horror). Each scene’s tone aligns with whose perspective we’re following. In *The Martian*, Watney’s personal humor sets the tone while we’re with him, but when we cut to NASA, the tone becomes a bit more procedural and earnest (though still with touches of humor, especially via the character of Annie, who has some biting comic lines). *Cloverfield* similarly balances what could have been just a grim monster movie with moments of levity and human whimsy in the early party sequence – the first 15 minutes feel like a slice-of-life friendship dramedy at a party, complete with drunken jokes and awkward confessions, and then the monster strikes and the tone freefalls into chaos and terror. Because we spent time in a lighter, warm atmosphere initially, the horror that follows feels more impactful. Goddard and the team consciously allowed *Cloverfield* a long, jokey setup (Hud’s goofy filming of goodbye testimonials, etc.) so that when the genre flips, the audience actually cares about these people and also experiences a **whiplash effect** that simulates shock. The lesson here: **earning audience trust in one tone lets you scare or surprise them more in another**.

For an actionable approach to genre balancing:

- **Identify Primary vs. Secondary Tone:** Determine what your *primary* genre is (e.g. horror in *Cabin*, sci-fi survival in *The Martian*) and what the secondary tonal elements will be (comedy, satire, romance, etc.). Goddard usually lets the primary genre’s stakes be real – people *do* die horribly in *Cabin*, and Watney’s plight is truly dire in *The Martian*. The secondary tone (comedy in these cases) is layered on top but doesn’t negate the core reality of the primary genre. This means when the chips are down, the script isn’t afraid to be genuine. *Cabin*’s final act, while still funny in spots, actually poses a serious ethical dilemma and ends on a dark note. So, honor the primary genre’s requirements (deliver the scares or the suspense or the heartfelt moments sincerely when it’s time).
- **Use Humor as Spice, Not the Main Course (unless intended):** Goddard’s blend usually isn’t a 50/50 split at all times; rather, comedy is used in bursts. In a horror-comedy like *Cabin*, there are extended sequences of pure horror chaos (the tunnel collapse, the massacre of the control room by monsters) with little to no humor, and then comedic beats are dropped around them. In a script, you might consciously plan: “This scene will be tension-building (no jokes). Next scene, we’ll include a comedic relief beat at the end.” Goddard actually tested removing some jokes and found it hurt the film ([How The](#)

[Far Side Inspired The Martian | Vanity Fair](#)) – for instance, test audiences wanted Watney’s swearing and humor because it *gave them permission* to find the situation fun. So identify places where an audience might need that permission or breather.

- **Maintain Character Consistency Across Tones:** Even as tone shifts, characters shouldn’t act “out of character” just to serve a genre moment. Goddard’s humor usually arises from characters behaving *in-character* under absurd circumstances. Sitterson and Hadley react to a blood ritual the way real office guys might react to a failed project – with curses and a “welp, back to the drawing board” vibe. That’s funny because it’s true to *their* perspective. So when blending tones, ensure the comedy (or drama) comes organically from how that person would react. A stoic character might have humor in their stone-faced understatement; a comedic-relief character might suddenly break down in a dramatic scene – but if so, it will feel extra intense because they *finally* dropped their joking manner. Goddard uses that trick too (when the class clown Marty grows serious upon discovering the surveillance camera, the tone shifts—his fear tells the audience to be scared now).
- **Visual and Musical Tone Cues:** Though this is more a directing note, in writing you can hint at tonal shifts with description. Goddard’s scripts often signal tone with vivid descriptors or music cues. In *El Royale*, the moment Jon Hamm’s character snoops and finds the secret corridor with one-way mirrors, the *music stops* and the descriptions become eerie and foreboding (the tone pivots from 60s-cool vibe to thriller). In *Cabin*, the **Title Card jump-scare** (“CABIN IN THE WOODS” slamming onto screen with a loud sting) is written in as a big tonal joke – a horror stinger used for comedy. Indicate these shifts in your script: e.g. “Suddenly, the smile drops. The tone shifts from farce to genuine fear as the lights go out...” Small signposts like that guide the reader through your genre transitions. Goddard will even use formatting – ALL CAPS for a shock or a bold image (like the bird hitting the invisible wall ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#))) – to emphasize a tonal beat.

In sum, Goddard’s genre-blending teaches us that **respecting multiple tones** in your script can enhance each other. The key is timing and authenticity: allow the audience to be scared when it’s scary and to laugh when it’s funny, and engineer your scenes so that one emotion naturally flows into the next. If done right, as Goddard’s work shows, the contrast of tones will make a script more memorable and engage the audience on multiple levels.

Visual Symbolism & Imagery

Goddard’s writing is highly visual – he often includes striking images or recurring visual motifs in his scripts that serve both atmospheric and symbolic purposes. As a screenwriter (and in the case of *El Royale*, writer-director), he clearly thinks about how the film will *look* and uses imagery to reinforce themes or foreshadow events. When constructing an “AI profile” of his style, we should pay attention to how he writes these visuals on the page and what they achieve story-wise.

One clear example comes from *The Cabin in the Woods*: the **hawk (bird) hitting the invisible force-field**. Early in the script, as the friends drive up the mountain road toward the cabin, Goddard inserts a seemingly throwaway nature moment – “A bird comes from behind camera, flying directly above the tunnel... it hits an invisible barrier and falls in a shower of sparks, as for one moment an electrical grid seems to appear where it struck.” ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). In the film, this is a blink-and-you-miss-it CGI shot of a hawk electrocuting itself against thin air. This is pure **visual foreshadowing**: it wordlessly tells the audience (and only the audience, not the characters) that there is a dome-like force-field around the area. It’s symbolic as well – the bird attempting to soar free but crashing into an unseen cage mirrors the kids’ coming fate (they are the proverbial birds in a cage, being controlled). Writing-wise, notice Goddard didn’t explain the meaning in text; he just described the visual and let it speak for itself. This is a key technique: present a potent image at the script level and trust the viewer to get its significance later when the payoff comes. Indeed, much later, when Curt tries to jump the canyon on his motorcycle to escape, he collides with the force-field mid-air (a payoff mirror of the bird) and plummets to his death – a shocking moment that works *because* we saw the bird earlier. It’s a great lesson in planting and payoff through imagery.

In *Bad Times at the El Royale*, Goddard designed the hotel setting itself to be laden with symbolic imagery. The El Royale is literally half in California and half in Nevada, with a bold red line running through the lobby to mark the state border. This visual of a divided space represents the duality of the characters and the themes (morality, secrets, public face vs. private sin). Goddard discusses that design: “It’s perfectly symmetrical, half in California, half in Nevada. Each side is inspired by the characteristics of its corresponding state... California is about hope and opportunity... a warmer side... Nevada side has the gambling” ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)) ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)). Indeed, in the film, the California side of the lobby is cheerfully decorated and well-lit, while the Nevada side is a bit seedier with a jukebox and the dark liquor bar. He uses the décor – e.g. a big bear statue on the Nevada side (Nevada’s state animal) – as part of the storytelling. Even in the still image above from *El Royale*, you can spot the bear and the distinct color schemes. This attention to visual detail in writing means that when using Goddard’s style, you should think about **location as character**. He often gives locations a memorable visual identity: the high-tech yet sterile control room versus the rustic, dim cabin in *Cabin in the Woods*; the sleek Hermes spacecraft and the red Martian desert; the chaotic handheld camera view of NYC in *Cloverfield*. In the *El Royale* script, he actually writes mini descriptions of the state-themed design, ensuring the reader “sees” the symbolism: “The interior of the El Royale plays on the same border theme... The line bisects the large room perfectly in two.” and he notes the differences (liquor on one side, etc.) ([EXCLUSIVE Bad Times At The El Royale Interview With Drew Goddard – Page 3](#)). So as a writer, don’t shy from adding a line or two about how a set looks and what that implies (especially if it’s thematically relevant). Goddard proves that evocative production design can start on the page.

Another recurring element in Goddard’s scripts is the use of **visual callbacks** and Easter eggs. *Cabin in the Woods* famously has the basement full of mysterious artifacts – each one could summon a different monster. The script describes each artifact (necklace, diary, puzzle sphere, old film reels, etc.) in detail as the characters explore them, without immediately explaining their

purpose. These objects create an ominous visual mosaic (the reader can picture this creepy trove of junk). Later, when the monsters appear, viewers can connect many back to those artifacts (e.g. the puzzle sphere corresponds to the Hellraiser-like cenobite, the diary to the zombie family). Goddard essentially loaded the scene with visual symbolism referencing dozens of horror tropes. For a screenwriter, this shows you can imbue a scene with extra meaning through props and visuals that reward attentive audiences. It's world-building via imagery.

Cloverfield, while on the surface a found-footage monster movie, also hides a visual story in the footage itself: the tape that Hud is recording over contains fragments of an old Coney Island date between Rob and Beth. Throughout the movie, at moments when the camera is stopped or when it's transitioning, a few seconds of the sunny Coney Island day flash on screen – Beth laughing with cotton candy, Beth and Rob on the Ferris wheel ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). These idyllic snippets are visual juxtaposition to the hell in Manhattan. They symbolize **what has been lost** (the normal life before the monster) and also fuel Rob's personal motivation (his love for Beth). Goddard scripted those fragments to appear at specific times, serving as emotional beats and ironic commentary (the last shot of the film is the two on the Ferris wheel saying "What a good day" as, unbeknownst to them, something falls from the sky in the far distance – hinting at the monster's origin). The lesson: even in a frenetic POV movie, Goddard weaves in visual symbolism (here, the contrast of past vs present via the video tape). In writing terms, he clearly marked those as separate brief scenes in the script with headings like "EXT. CONEY ISLAND – DAY (VIDEO FOOTAGE)" and described Beth's happy face ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). These act like visual punctuation marks.

To apply Goddard's visual approach:

- **Foreshadow with Images:** Think of at least one key visual early on that you can echo or invert later. It could be something in the environment (storm clouds gathering in Act I and a literal storm hitting in Act III), a small action (character puts a gun in a drawer in Scene 5, that gun is seen again in Scene 50), or a metaphorical image (a caged bird in the background of a scene to suggest a character's feeling of entrapment). Write it clearly and cinematically. Goddard didn't over-explain the bird hitting the barrier – he just described it vividly ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). Follow that model: *show*, don't tell, but be deliberate in planting the seed.
- **Design Symbolic Spaces:** When describing settings, consider using a sentence to highlight how the setting reflects theme or character. For example, if a scene is in a detective's apartment, maybe you mention the chaotic stacks of papers and a broken clock – visuals suggesting his mental state and obsession with time. Goddard in *El Royale* literally writes theme into setting (the two-state border, etc.); you can be a bit less explicit or equally bold depending on style. The key is that the reader can *visualize* a distinctive location that isn't generic. In *The Martian* script, Mars is frequently described in terms of its vastness and barrenness, reinforcing Mark's isolation. One scene description reads: "EXT. MARS – DAWN: Mark stands alone against an expanse of red, the sun a faint glimmer on the horizon." (paraphrased). That paints loneliness without stating it.

- **Recurring Motifs:** Identify if your story has any objects or motifs that can recur. In Goddard's work, examples: the one-way mirrors in *El Royale* (people spying and reflections are a motif about hidden truth), blood as a motif in *Cabin* (from the literal blood that pours into the ritual stone carvings each time a victim dies, symbolizing the cost of the genre's violence), or the concept of **eyes/cameras** (in *Cloverfield*, the camera's viewpoint is integral; in *Cabin*, the technicians are always watching; in *El Royale*, surveillance cameras and film reels drive the plot). He often uses the *act of watching* as a visual theme – e.g., characters watching monitors in *Cabin*, or everyone watching news broadcasts in *The Martian*. If your script has surveillance, mirrors, or even characters telling stories (which paints a mental picture), these are opportunities to reinforce visually. Goddard will go so far as to include on-screen text for style – in *The Martian* script he notes when on-screen graphics show data or when a character's name and title appears as a chyron ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)) (e.g. introducing the NASA characters with text cards, a visual device to orient the audience quickly). It's okay to include that in a script if it helps the reader "see" the movie.
- **Mindful Cinematic Writing:** Write action lines that are crisp and visual. Goddard's action descriptions tend to be lean but punchy. He often uses present participles and active verbs: "**He chips at a section of rocks** and records his observations..." ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)) or "**Lily shuts off the lights, races through the crowd**" ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). This style keeps momentum and focuses on what the camera would see. He also sometimes employs **all caps** for important sounds or sights (standard in horror scripts): e.g., "THE MONSTER'S TAIL" ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) or a sudden "CUT TO BLACK" for a chapter title ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)). These formatting choices convey the *impact* of an image or transition. As a writer, don't overuse caps, but using them for major reveals or loud noises can simulate the visceral feel.
- **Consultation tip:** If you're evaluating a script for visual storytelling, a Goddard-influenced consultant might ask, "*Are there memorable visuals here? Can I imagine the trailer?*" Goddard's films all have trailer-worthy images (the Unicorn stabbing someone in *Cabin*, the Statue of Liberty's head in the street in *Cloverfield* ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)), Darlene singing with the flickering neon sign outside her motel room, Watney driving the rover across the Mars dunes). Aim to create those moments on the page. It might be one dramatic wide shot or a powerful close-up detail that symbolizes the story in one frame.

Exposition & Revelation Techniques

Managing exposition – the delivery of information, backstory, or plot revelations – is a critical skill for a screenwriter, and Drew Goddard provides a masterclass in doing it in engaging ways. Rather than heavy info-dumps, he often employs **diegetic exposition** (through in-world media or recordings), **character-driven discovery**, and carefully timed reveals that feel organic and often surprising.

One technique Goddard uses frequently is **exposition through a secondary medium** – such as video logs, intercuts of news reports, or found documents – so that the audience is getting information at the same time as (or slightly before) the characters, but in a way that feels natural

in the story world. In *The Martian*, a lot of exposition about science and mission logistics is conveyed via Mark Watney's video journal entries (which serve double-duty as character voice-over and direct explanation). Because Mark is "documenting" his process for a future record (in case he dies), it doesn't feel like he's explaining to the audience, even though he is. His casual, humorous tone (discussed earlier) also makes the exposition entertaining. When NASA figures something out, Goddard often uses news broadcasts or conference scenes to convey it. For example, when the world thinks Watney is dead, the script shows a CNN report with a banner "Astronaut Mark Watney Killed" ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)) to inform us of the public narrative. Later, technical steps like the "Rich Purnell Maneuver" are explained through dialogues between characters at NASA – but he often cuts away before it gets too dry, or shows reactions rather than lengthy details. A great screenwriting move: in the script, when NASA formulates a plan to rescue Watney, we don't see a 5-minute scene of them hashing it out; instead, Goddard might cut from the beginning of the discussion to the aftermath or to a press briefing where only the key points are summarized. This keeps the pace up while still delivering needed info.

In *Cloverfield*, since it's found footage, exposition couldn't be delivered by traditional means (no omniscient scenes of scientists explaining the monster). Goddard cleverly uses the characters' POV to glean information: they run into news footage playing on TVs in an electronics store, which shows glimpses of the monster and military knowledge ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). We see a news banner "*CREATURE ATTACKS NEW YORK*" and hear a reporter trying to describe it, and even get foreshadowing of the smaller parasitic creatures ("a relationship with the creature... a parasite, if you will" on the news broadcast) ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)), just before our heroes encounter those parasites themselves. This is a smart way to feed the audience info that the protagonists only half-understand. Later, when Marlena is bitten and something is clearly wrong with her, rather than a character magically knowing "oh those bites are deadly," Goddard has the military sweep the characters into a command center where we overhear soldiers say "*We have a bite! We have a bite!*" – implying known effects – and then Marlena gruesomely dies. The exposition (bites are lethal) was handled through environment and implication, not a character lecturing. As a writer, consider if you can present exposition as **background detail or overheard info** rather than direct explanation. It often feels more realistic.

Goddard also strategically **withholds information for a later reveal** to create twists. In *Bad Times at the El Royale*, key pieces of backstory are revealed in flashback chapters (e.g. who "Rose" is and why Emily kidnapped her, or Father Flynn's true identity as a former criminal looking for hidden money). Instead of telling us up front, he lets us experience the present interactions with a sense of mystery, then at a dramatic moment (usually when that character is at a crossroads or about to take a big action) he cuts to a flashback that explains their motivation. For instance, just as we wonder why the "priest" is acting oddly, we get the flashback of Dock O'Kelly (his real name) burying money in the hotel room a decade ago – *then* we understand he's come back for the loot ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)). This delayed revelation structure keeps suspense high. Goddard's rule here is that **the revelation should answer a question the audience has actively been asking**, and ideally, it should *change our understanding* of events we've already seen. After learning Father Flynn isn't a priest, his earlier fumbling and memory issues take on new meaning (they were partly an act, partly illness). After we see Billy Lee's cult indoctrination of Rose in flashback, her seemingly cold-blooded violence

makes sense. The placement of these revelations is crucial – they often come right before the final act, to recontextualize characters and raise the emotional stakes for the climax.

Regarding **exposition of concept or rules** in genre-heavy stories, *Cabin in the Woods* again provides a blueprint. Rather than front-loading the script with an explanation of the secret facility and the ritual, Goddard and Whedon drop little hints that accumulate: the early scene in the control room shows they are monitoring the kids but doesn't say why. Then we hear lines like “We got a winner! Harbinger's on the line...” ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)), which on first viewing just seems like office chatter, but is actually exposition (Harbinger = the old man at the gas station, a required part of the ritual). The puzzle pieces start coming together for the audience as we see more: the basement artifacts are explained implicitly when we later see each corresponding monster on the whiteboard of betting pools (Werewolf, Zombies, Merman, etc. – the script even lists the odds for each monster in a shot). The scientists occasionally drop world-building exposition in humorous ways, e.g. the line about chem department tampering with Jules' hair dye to make her act “dumb blonde” – a throwaway joke that *actually* explains a lot about how the scenario is manipulated. Goddard saves the full explanation of “why” (the ancient gods and the need for sacrifice) until very late – delivered by The Director character in the final confrontation. By then, the audience has already intuited 90% of the rules, so the final exposition lands as confirmation with a few extra details. This layering approach is something to emulate: **feed the audience bits of the exposition throughout**, ideally in fun or tense scenes, rather than one big dump. If someone reads your script and later can say “I was never confused, but the script also never halted for a boring explanation,” you've done it in a Goddard-like fashion.

When it comes to adapting material or handling a lot of complex info (like science in *The Martian* or mythology in *Cabin*), Goddard advises focusing on **what serves the movie best**. He said: “My job is not to protect the book – my job is to make the best movie... I don't like watching movies that are just transcriptions of a book; it's a great way to make a mediocre movie.” ([6 Filmmaking Tips From Drew Goddard](#)). As a consultant AI using his profile, this means if you have a dense backstory or source material, you should be willing to **trim and simplify exposition** to fit the cinematic form. In *The Martian*, for example, large portions of the novel's science log entries were condensed or turned into montage (with Watney's voiceover) because seeing it is faster than reading it. Goddard combined some characters and skipped some technical details to keep the plot moving, and instead focused on the *problem-solution cycles* which were more engaging. He also introduced the Hermes crew earlier in the film than the novel did, to get those exposition threads running in parallel (so we're not stuck on Mars too long without knowing Earth is working on a plan). These adaptive choices illustrate prioritizing clarity and pacing over thoroughness. So, if a script's exposition feels heavy, a Goddard-inspired approach would suggest: find a more dynamic way to deliver it (maybe via character action or interaction), or cut it down to the essentials needed for the audience to follow the stakes.

In bullet form, here are some Goddard-style exposition techniques and how to execute them:

- **Show, Don't Tell via In-World Media:** Instead of a narrator or a character monologuing context, use a TV broadcast, radio chatter, a journal entry, surveillance footage, etc. to convey the info. *Example:* In *Cloverfield*, major hints about the monster come from a TV news report the characters (and audience) catch briefly ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)). In your

script, could a news report, computer screen, or overheard conversation convey that exposition more naturally?

- **Stagger the Revelations:** Break your exposition into smaller beats spread out. Identify the **minimum information** needed to understand Act 1, then additional info for Act 2, etc. Goddard almost treats exposition as breadcrumbs leading the audience through the story's mystery. *Cabin* holds back the ultimate reason for the ritual until the end, creating curiosity. Ask yourself, "Is there a question the audience might be asking at this point?" If yes, you can choose to answer it now (to satisfy) or tease it further (to build suspense), but ensure it gets answered by the end satisfactorily.
- **Tie Exposition to Character Goals:** Exposition lands best when it's linked to what characters want in the moment. In *El Royale*, the reason we get Flynn's backstory flashback is because *he* is telling Darlene why he needs her help digging up the floor – his goal (get the money) prompts him to reveal his identity. It doesn't feel like exposition; it feels like character vulnerability. Strive for those contexts: a character confessing something (revealing backstory), a character reading a clue (providing lore), a briefing scene where stakes are laid out through debate. Goddard's exposition scenes often have tension or humor or emotion layered in, so they're never just data.
- **Use Mystery and Payoff:** Sometimes *not* explaining something is powerful – as long as you pay it off later. E.g., he never explicitly shows who was on the incriminating film reel in *El Royale*. It's an unresolved mystery (we get hints it was a famous public figure who is now dead, likely a politician or celebrity, but the film never names him). This choice actually adds realism and intrigue – it leaves the audience talking. However, core plot points typically are resolved. So decide deliberately what to leave open. A Goddard touch is to leave a bit of **ambiguity** that makes the story linger. (He and Joss Whedon left *Cabin*'s ending morally ambiguous – humanity loses; was it right or wrong? That's thematic rather than expository ambiguity, but it's part of the appeal.)
- **Clarity Through Simplicity:** Even with all the trickery, at the end the audience should understand what happened. Goddard's wild stories still track logically. If using his style, double-check that after all reveals, the plot holds together and the viewer isn't left confused about basics. If something is complex, consider an **audience surrogate character** who asks the obvious questions. In *The Martian*, Mindy Park (satellite tech) basically serves as this – when she discovers Watney is alive, she's on comms saying "I think he's alive!" which prompts NASA higher-ups to respond and explain next steps in dialogue. She represented us going "What now?" and the script answered it. Using a well-placed "So you're saying...[simplify the thing]?" line by a character can allow another character to clarify in a natural way.

By following these pointers, your exposition will feel less like dry explanation and more like an integrated, even thrilling, part of the narrative – much as Goddard's scripts manage to do. The goal is to make the audience *feel* like they are uncovering the story rather than being told the facts. Goddard often functions like a dungeon master in a game, feeding players (the audience) clues and reveals at just the right moments to keep them invested and eager to see what's next.

Tension-Building & Scare Deployment

In the realm of tension and scares – whether it’s creature-feature suspense, horror kills, or even just dramatic tension in a thriller – Goddard shows a keen understanding of **pacing, payoff, and audience expectations**. As a consultant module, this section extracts how he crafts those edge-of-your-seat moments and surprising scares, so you can apply similar strategies.

Setup and payoff (a.k.a. Chekhov’s gun) is a fundamental principle in how Goddard builds tension. We already discussed the bird and the force-field example for foreshadowing; that’s directly related to tension too. Because the audience knows about the barrier (setup), when the characters later try to escape, we experience **dread** – we’re mentally shouting “No, there’s a force-field!” minutes before Curt actually hits it. That interim, where the audience is aware of danger that the characters are not, is classic Hitchcockian suspense (the “bomb under the table” scenario). Goddard leverages this in *Cabin*: the viewers realize the trap before the victims. Similarly, in *Cloverfield*, sometimes the audience sees something the characters don’t – e.g., the camera catches a glimpse of the monster’s legs on a distant street while the characters are running and not looking back. The script might say something like, “Through the camera’s pan, we catch a MASSIVE TAIL whipping around a skyscraper in the distance ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#))... but Hud doesn’t notice it yet.” Such moments create a knot of tension as we wait for the characters to become aware or the threat to strike.

Goddard is also adept at the **timing of jump scares and reveals**. In a horror context, he often uses a build-up period of anticipatory tension, followed by a sharp surprise (sometimes a fake-out, sometimes real). For instance, when Dana reads from the diary in the cabin basement and inadvertently summons the zombies, the scene builds with her speaking Latin (uh-oh) and eerie silence, then **BAM!** a zombie hand bursts from the ground. The script likely described the slow, tense atmosphere and then capitalized “HAND BURSTS from the earth” to emphasize the sudden scare. Later, a more meta example: when Dana is in the lake and the zombie attacks her underwater, the scare is immediately followed by a *literal* pull-out to a wider angle reveal that it’s on a security monitor being watched by the technicians (draining the tension with humor as they hadn’t realized it was still “live”). The interplay of genuine scare and relief is finely tuned. As a writer, one might not include camera direction like that pull-out, but you can still orchestrate the sequence so that a scare isn’t isolated – it has a before and after beat.

In *Bad Times at the El Royale*, while not a horror film, Goddard uses tension in dialogue scenes, stretched out with patience. Example: the **confrontation between Billy Lee (Chris Hemsworth) and the hotel guests** around the fireplace. That scene plays almost in real-time, with Billy psychologically torturing the others (forcing them to choose who dies). The tension is excruciating because of the unpredictability of Billy’s mood – one minute he’s dancing and joking, the next he’s deadly serious. Goddard uses **unpredictability** as a tension tool: we genuinely don’t know who he will kill or when. The script draws this out with a game (the roulette with the gun). The audience is basically waiting for the gun to go off. It’s similar to a horror movie in that regard – the threat is present and we know it’s a matter of time. The lesson here is to sometimes *let a scene breathe* and be uncomfortable. Goddard isn’t afraid to slow things down when it increases suspense. In a faster movie like *Cloverfield*, there are still moments where characters pause (the group hiding in a subway tunnel, tending to Marlena after

the bites) – darkness, quiet, uneasy calm – before chaos erupts again. These lulls are essential; they allow the audience to anticipate the next scare.

Pacing of scares/tension in Goddard's work often follows a wave pattern: build-up, scare/climax, brief relief, repeat, with escalation. In *Cabin*, the first half has relatively smaller scares (the two-way mirror creepy moment, the first zombie appearance). Midway we get the big death scenes (each friend's demise in quick succession once it starts). Then a false relief (Dana and Marty make it to the facility, seemingly escaping the immediate threat) but that turns into a *different* kind of threat inside the facility, leading to the huge monster breakout sequence – the largest mayhem reserved for the finale. So he's layering: low->medium->high->insane. *Cloverfield* does similarly: initial explosion and head of Statue of Liberty (big shock), then some downtime, then the Brooklyn Bridge collapse (major shock, someone dies), more travel and a quiet moment, then the subway parasite attack (scary but on a smaller scale than the big monster), then the helicopter crash and final monster confrontation (massive). Each set-piece tops the previous. In scripting such progression, one should chart out the intensity of each sequence and strive to one-up the stakes or scale or emotional impact each time. Goddard, coming from TV (*Lost*, etc.), understands hooking an audience with spikes at the right intervals.

Specific scare techniques he employs in scripts:

- **Perspective shifts for surprise:** In *Cabin*, one genius scare is when Dana is being attacked in the RV and we suddenly cut to the control room where the operators are celebrating and not watching – then back to Dana who suddenly gets knifed. The *timing* of cutting away from the action to something banal and back increases the shock (audience relaxes for a second, then bam!). While writing, you might not specify a cut, but you can mimic this by intercutting two simultaneous scenes in the script, using the juxtaposition to create irony or surprise.
- **Audio as tension:** Goddard often notes sounds that cue dread. E.g., a distant roar of the *Cloverfield* creature, or the crackling of the cabin door opening slowly. In the text, something like “CREAK. The front door slowly swings ajar – by itself.” primes the reader for a scare. Then a beat later, the horror enters. Using sound and silence in description is important; call out when things go quiet (“Dead silence, except for Dana's breathing...”) or when there's a sudden noise. This gives the reader the feeling of being in a tense moment. *Bad Times at the El Royale* script likely describes the rainstorm outside intensifying as violence nears, or the click of Billy's boot heels as he approaches – auditory cues to raise heart rates.
- **Graphic payoff:** Goddard doesn't shy from gore or shocking visuals when the genre calls for it. When a scare comes, he might make it *viscerally count*. The *Cabin* script description of a kill, for instance, might be stark: “The zombie swings the bear trap on a chain – it LATCHES onto Holden's back. He SCREAMS.” etc. The detail of the bear trap weapon and its effect is vivid, which makes the horror tangible. If writing a scare, consider if adding one specific grisly detail (not overly long, just a punchy image) will make the moment stick. Goddard often finds a unique kill or creature feature to imprint on the audience (the merman death, for humor and gore, stands out in *Cabin*).

Now, since tension isn't only in horror, a note on **dramatic tension**. Goddard's dialogue-heavy scenes (like many in *El Royale*) show tension through subtext and the threat of violence. The writing trick here is often to give a character the upper hand in a situation and another character a secret or vulnerability. Then let the scene play as a cat-and-mouse. For example, early in *El Royale*, Laramie (Hamm) is chatting up Darlene and Flynn. On the surface it's cordial, but we the audience have been shown Laramie found the surveillance corridor and is an undercover agent. So we know he knows more than he's letting on. That creates tension in an otherwise normal conversation, as we're waiting for when he'll spring his knowledge or what he'll do. Goddard feeds the audience just enough information (exposition through that corridor scene) to create **dramatic irony** after – a reliable way to generate suspense.

To boil down actionable tips for tension and scares:

- **Dramatic Irony & Knowledge Gaps:** Decide who knows what. If the audience knowing something the characters don't will heighten suspense, let the audience know early (like the force-field). If the characters know something the audience doesn't (like a plan or secret), that can create curiosity and tension until reveal (like Father Flynn's true motive). Goddard uses both.
- **Escalation Plan:** Map out your script's sequences and ensure each major tension moment is bigger or more consequential than the last. It doesn't have to be sheer size – it could be emotional weight. In *The Martian*, the biggest "oh no" moment is arguably not visually huge, but the emotional gut-punch of the Hab blowing up and Mark losing his crop (we deeply feel that setback because it jeopardizes his chance to live). It was bigger than previous issues (like a minor rover tip-over, etc.). Always ask, is this next problem worse than the previous? If not, consider tweaking to escalate.
- **Breathing Room:** Ironically, a good thriller/horror script must give audiences moments to breathe, which in turn lets you *build tension anew*. Goddard often inserts a joke or a quiet character moment after a huge scare. This isn't just tone balance, it's pacing – the lull makes the next peak effective. As you write or revise, look at the rhythm. If it's all high tension all the time, the audience becomes desensitized. If it's too slow for too long, they lose interest. Goddard finds a sweet spot by alternating, especially in *Cabin* and *Cloverfield*. The pauses also allow audience to anticipate and dread ("it's quiet... too quiet"). Use those.
- **Surprise and Subversion:** Try to include at least one major *unexpected* scare or twist that subverts a trope. Goddard and Whedon did this by killing the perceived hero (Curt/Hemsworth) in *Cabin* in an unheroic, sudden way – you expect his bike jump to succeed or at least for him to die at the end, but nope, into the invisible wall he goes, mid-film. In *Cloverfield*, Hud (the cameraman) survives almost to the very end, then is abruptly snatched and killed by the monster – a shock because one might assume the cameraman would live to show the tape. Think of a point where the story could take a safe route, and then consider taking the dangerous route. Those moments jolt the audience and become memorable (with Goddard it's often tied to playing with conventions).

- **Leverage Setting for Tension:** Goddard uses environment constraints effectively – the trap of the cabin area, the claustrophobia of a shaky handycam in *Cloverfield*, the split spaces in *El Royale* where characters might not see each other but we see both. When writing a scene, consider: does the location itself add danger or difficulty? Tight spaces, darkness, multiple rooms where characters can eavesdrop or hide – use those to create suspense. *Cloverfield*'s tunnel scene is scary because it's pitch black and you only have night-vision through the camera for glimpses; the script likely describes the POV switching to night vision, rats scurrying (warning of creatures coming). These are location-based tension tactics.

Script Formatting & Style Patterns

From a formatting and stylistic standpoint, Goddard's scripts are fairly traditional in screenplay format but peppered with distinctive flourishes that reflect his voice and make the read entertaining. A "modular AI" imitating his script consulting would note these patterns in how he puts words to page:

- **Direct Character Introductions:** As mentioned earlier, Goddard sometimes breaks the usual flow to directly introduce characters in bold strokes (e.g. **"This is [Name]."** at the start of a description). In standard spec format, one usually introduces a character in all caps with a brief description. Goddard does that too, but he isn't afraid to be a bit stylistically bold. In *Cloverfield* and *El Royale* especially – both ensemble pieces – he uses that almost novel-like "This is X" construction ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)). It's a stylistic choice that immediately focuses the reader. If you are channeling Goddard, you might emulate this by ensuring each intro is a punchy separate line or sentence, possibly even using a similar cadence ("Meet JOHN DOE – 40s, ex-cop, the only one in the room who isn't scared."). It gives a confident, assertive tone to the writing.
- **Chapter Headings / Title Cards:** Goddard's *Bad Times at the El Royale* script includes on-screen titles to divide chapters (e.g. "Room One," "Room Five," timestamps, locations like "Washington D.C.") ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)). This reflects a Tarantino-esque chapter format. In *The Martian* script, when introducing key NASA personnel, he even uses a title card format in the action: "**TITLE: ANNIE MONTROSE, Director of Media Relations, NASA**" appears on screen ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)). These are formatting elements that go beyond basic sluglines. They show that he's considering the viewing experience (text the audience will see) and he's building structure into the screenplay itself. As a writer, you should only do this when it serves a purpose – in *El Royale* it reinforces the nonlinear structure and helps the audience reset with each segment; in *The Martian* it quickly informs us who these many NASA figures are without clunky dialogue. The takeaway is that Goddard doesn't shy from using **non-standard sluglines or title inserts** if it efficiently conveys information or style.
- **Montage and Musical Integration:** Goddard often writes sequences that are essentially montages set to music. He explicitly references songs in the action lines, which is somewhat uncommon unless you're confident those songs will be used. For example, *The*

Martian script notes: “*MUSIC UP: ... ‘Rubberband Man’ by The Spinners carries us through --*” as Watney does science tasks ([the-martian-2015.pdf](#)). In *El Royale*, music is critical (Darlene is a singer, and period songs play during long takes). The script might say, “Darlene sings ‘This Old Heart of Mine’ a capella, voice raw but powerful,” and describe action in rhythm with it. Including specific songs or indicating music cues (e.g. “Cue upbeat 60s rock”) can set tone strongly. Goddard also uses **needle drops as chapter markers** ([bad-times-at-the-el-royale-2018.pdf](#)) (e.g. “He’s A Rebel” playing over the “Room Five” title). While spec screenwriters are often cautioned about specifying songs (due to rights or directing on the page), in a “Goddardian” profile, one would accept it if it’s integral to the vision. It shows confidence and can make reading the script more immersive. Just ensure the song choice truly adds something (irony, mood, etc.) as it does in Goddard’s scripts.

- **Concise, Wry Descriptions:** His action lines are usually concise and to-the-point, but they carry a wry or energetic tone. For instance, the *Cabin* script describing the control room might say “This place is half NASA, half DMV.” (Not a quote, but indicative of a quippy style he might use to quickly get an idea across with humor). In the actual *Cabin* script, when the teens first arrive at the cabin, instead of a bland description, it notes details like the retrofitted sink and old stove to imply the place’s character ([the-cabin-in-the-woods-2012 \(2\).pdf](#)). Also, he’ll occasionally address the reader with a tiny bit of attitude or aside. Example from *Cabin*: when describing the array of different monsters on the surveillance screens, the script notes something like “Werewolf, wraiths, a grotesque Merman (yes, seriously).” That parenthetical “(yes, seriously)” is the writer sharing a grin with the reader. Such asides are rare but memorable – they match the meta-comedy tone of the film. Use this sparingly: one or two well-placed winks in the action can give the script personality.
- **Intercutting and Parallel Action:** Goddard frequently cuts between simultaneous scenes (especially in the third acts of his films, where multiple things happen at once – e.g. in *Cabin*, Dana and Marty in the facility control room vs. monsters rampaging elsewhere; in *Cloverfield*, Rob and Beth in the helicopter vs. HUD on the ground with the camera, etc.). He will use formatting like **INTERCUT** or just quick alternating scene headings to indicate this. For clarity, he might label sequences with mini-slugs. For example, in *Cloverfield*, to show the alternating between HUD’s camera view and some objective view, the script uses the device of on-screen HUD messages or simply contextual cues. In your writing, you can make liberal use of scene headings for each location swap, or use “INTERCUT:” if it’s a phone call or such. Goddard’s style is not experimental in formatting – it’s clear and functional, but he’ll use the full toolset of screenplay syntax to keep things readable.
- **All Caps for Emphasis:** Standard practice is to capitalize sound effects and important visual cues. Goddard does this in a balanced way. We saw in excerpts that monster parts like “THE MONSTER’S TAIL” ([cloverfield-2008.pdf](#)) or critical props like “RED DUFFEL BAG” might be capped when first introduced to draw attention. If something is going to be important, he’ll often introduce it in caps (like the first time we see the “ONE-WAY MIRROR” in *El Royale*’s script, likely it was capitalized to signal its

significance). He's not excessive with caps—just strategic. Following suit, use caps for: character introductions, key props, major sounds (GUNSHOT, EXPLOSION, SCREAM) and perhaps for supernatural or monster moments for impact.

- **Screenwriting Economy:** Despite some flair, Goddard is economical. Dialogue is not overly long-winded, scenes start late and end early where possible, and description doesn't belabor. The reading experience of his scripts is brisk. As a consultant inspired by him, one would advise trimming flab. For instance, instead of writing "He begins to move slowly toward the door, extremely nervous," one might write "He inches toward the door, nerves jangling." It's more visual and fewer words. Goddard often finds a punchy verb or noun to replace an adverb + simple verb. His background in TV likely trained him to convey a lot in short scenes. In *The Martian*, complex processes are shown in montages rather than explained fully – trusting visuals. Emulate that trust; you don't need to spell everything out. The audience will get it if the key elements are there.

Finally, one more notable aspect: **Goddard infuses genre terminology or references** when appropriate. *Cabin* being meta, the script is self-aware. It references archetypes by name in dialogue, and even the scene descriptions sometimes play with horror tropes (I wouldn't be surprised if a line in the script when the elevator reveals all the monsters said something like "Behold – every nightmare you've ever had, all under one roof." which echoes how a trailer might sell it; something akin to that grandeur). He's a fan writing for fans in those moments. So if the project allows, a Goddard-y style might include homage shots or explicit call-outs to inspirations (like a character naming a movie: "*Remember in Die Hard when...?*" – Goddard's characters do occasionally cite pop culture, grounding the fiction in our reality).

To sum up the **format and style patterns** to emulate:

- Use confident character intros and possibly title cards/labels for structure.
- Don't shy from integrating music and stylized transitions in the script text when they contribute (e.g. chapter headings, song cues).
- Keep action description tight but flavorful – a touch of wit or a striking adjective can paint a big picture fast.
- Structure the page for readability: Goddard's pages have a lot of white space; he avoids wall-of-text. Break paragraphs at logical beats. A one-line paragraph can emphasize a big moment (e.g. "The cabin EXPLODES." might be isolated for impact).
- Follow professional format but bend it slightly for storytelling (like the "This is X" or on-screen text, which are within accepted bounds).
- Maintain a brisk pace in prose – write as if you're watching the movie and describing only what's compelling in that frame. Reading any Goddard script, you'll notice it *feels* like a movie playing out, not a dense literary document.

By applying these stylistic touches, a screenplay can capture some of that distinct **Drew Goddard voice** on the page – it will read fast, be visually vivid, a little cheeky when appropriate, and always focused on delivering a fun **film** experience, not just a script. The ultimate goal of this AI profile is to internalize those habits so that any advice or content generated for a screenplay carries the imprint of Goddard’s successful techniques, helping writers craft scripts that are tight, exciting, and tonally engaging from page one to fade out.