



Message Boards

Days of Our Lives

# Interview: Paul Telfer Reveals How He Almost Played EJ DiMera, Why He Loves Xander and Fan Reaction



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Image: Michael Mattes/Shutterstock

**Days of our Lives actor was offered a large sum of money to be on standby**

Paul Telfer (Xander Cook/Alexandros Kiriakis, *Days of our Lives*) is so good at being bad – at least, on camera. Fans have watched the Scottish transplant do some pretty reprehensible things (occasionally with his shirt off, so there have been benefits) on the show since 2015 – and yet they still can’t get enough of his wicked ways. Telfer – who

like everyone else is sheltering in place – spoke with Soaps.com about being lucky to hang out with his wife more often, his character's questionable mental state, and a new film where he makes Xander look like a pussycat. Mrrow!

**Soaps.com:** How are things in your household due to the quarantine?

**Paul Telfer:** My wife [actress Carmen Cusack] and I were in the middle of a long-distance relationship – she was preparing a show for Broadway – and the night before her preview, which was Friday the 13th [of March] I was set to fly straight from the set to be there for a couple of weeks. And then she got the news they weren't going to do her show [*Flying Over Sunset*] and she'd be home for the next month. I'm worried for vulnerable people, but it's selfishly nice to have my wife back.

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**Soaps.com:** You grew up in Scotland and eventually moved to the U.S. When you were young did you watch soaps like *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street*?

**Telfer:** My mum absolutely loved soap operas [in the UK]. I was always resistant to them – they're so depressing, about miserable working class people smoking in cafes, whereas American soap operas are so glamorous, about rich people throwing martinis in everyone's faces – but I got addicted by osmosis. I think if you're around a soap for any length of time you find the piece of it you lock into, and then you're bitten by the bug.

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**Soaps.com:** And then you ended up working on a soap, after all.

**Telfer:** Yeah, my agent called and said, "I know you don't want to do a soap opera, but *Days of our Lives* is offering a large sum of money to be on standby in case this actor can't make it" – he was sick. It was for the role of E.J. But fortunately, James Scott was well enough and I got paid even though they didn't use me. Best job I ever had. And I thought I was lucky – I'd given up trying to memorize all of those

pages [of the script]! But then they kept calling me back about joining the show, and I played this henchman character named Damon and I loved it. A month later, they said they were interested in bringing me on as a contract, and I assumed it'd be Damon again. I didn't want to play some boring romantic dude – I wanted an antagonistic character – so I thought, perfect. Then they gave me a contract for a totally different character, they cut my hair and that's it!

**Soaps.com:** But at least you're still playing a dark-hearted character in Xander.

**Telfer:** Xander is so much worse! Damon was a henchman, but Xander is *nuts*.

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**Soaps.com:** What do you love about playing a villain?

**Telfer:** It's a cliché to say they're meatier and better roles, but I enjoy it because of the strictures of daytime television – there are things you aren't allowed to show, but villains push up against standards and practices of whatever the rules are. Xander has access to his rage, and he's a very good liar. Those things make it fun to play. Beyond that, I just love shouting at everybody.

**Soaps.com:** But he seems to be on the road to reform these days, at least a little bit.

**Telfer:** It's all part of this transition into his becoming a goodie. I always play it so the audience doesn't know if he's sincere or not. It's so funny to see some of the audience saying, "He's so nice!" And others saying, "Women are too forgiving!" I was concerned with making him too soft too soon. I'd like to have a way for him to snap back. But it's also consistent with the character; he's a bit nutty and almost hysterical when you see him lose his temper. Right now I'm trying to make him do good things for bad reasons and bad things for good reasons. I want him to start occasionally doing heroic things that were occasionally decent, but they'd always be an effort for him.

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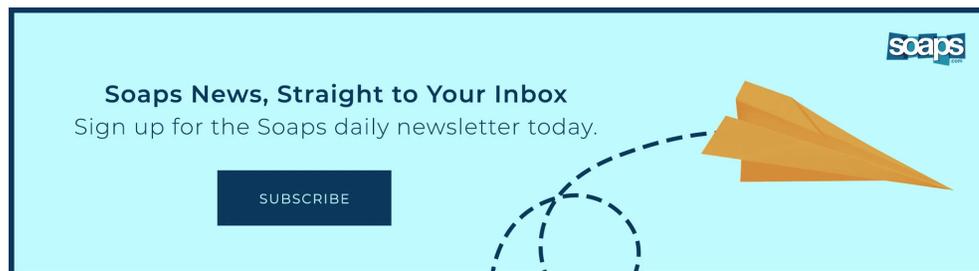
**Soaps.com:** You also co-wrote, produced and star in a new movie that recently got distribution, [Green Rush](#). And you're playing a pretty bad dude in that, too. Is it cathartic to play a villain all the time?

**Telfer:** I took it as a way to unleash all the bad guy potential I'd built up on *Days of our Lives*, but which I couldn't show on the program. The character I play in *Green Rush* is completely wild and also like a primal predator – but also funny and charming and weird and sexy. It felt like an original way to play a scary, physical villain. It's an extreme version of the colors and ideas I've been playing as Xander, but let loose on an R-rated platform.

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**Soaps.com:** How does being a baddie affect how fans approach you when they see you in public?

**Telfer:** It is getting harder to go to an airport in some of the more major markets for the show, because I get recognized a lot now. But it's funny because typically women will see me at the newsstand – and they'll sidle up to me and have a weird mix of a cheeky smile but also wag their finger at me, saying, "I know who you are!" They know I play a nasty, scary man but in real life I'm an affable, jolly person. So I think they're a bit thrown off with how goofy I am in real life. But also relieved that I'm not a scary, shouty villain.



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