

“GREYSTONE PARK”: Stone Cold Fear

Written by Michael Gingold
Monday, 08 October 2012 13:34



Veteran director Oliver Stone took his first jaunts in the feature realm with the horror films SEIZURE and THE HAND, so it only follows that his son Sean do the same. The second-generation Stone spoke with Fango about his new paranormal chiller GREYSTONE PARK.

Arriving on DVD and Blu-ray Tuesday, October 16 from ARC Entertainment and XLerator Media (and also playing that night at 10 p.m. at New York City's Times Square), GREYSTONE PARK is a documentary-style trip into an abandoned and haunted mental hospital, with Stone, co-scripter Alexander Wraith and friend/co-star Antonella Lentini playing variations on their real selves and featuring cameos by Oliver Stone and FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN's Monique van Vooren. As Sean Stone (who previously appeared in a number of his dad's movies, shot video documentaries about ALEXANDER and others and directed the sci-fi short SINGULARITY) explains, there was a little more personal motivation behind this project than usual in the vérité horror subgenre...



FANGORIA: What was the inspiration behind GREYSTONE PARK?

SEAN STONE: The inspiration was a real experience. As you see in the film's opening, Alex Wraith, myself and my father were at dinner one night, and Alex was telling us ghost stories about this famous old hospital in New Jersey, Greystone Park, which he had been exploring for

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the past few years. He was so fed up with coming out of those experiences and telling these stories, and people would laugh and say, “You’re full of shit. You’re making it up.” So he started taking a video camera with him, and he showed me some of the footage before we went in, and it looked like a pretty spooky place. I was fascinated to go inside and check it out for myself; I don’t know why, but I’ve always been attracted to the dark side, exploring and trying to figure out what’s going on. Are there spirits, or is it just imagination playing you? That fundamental curiosity is what got me to go inside, and the experiences we had, from the first time to many others later, all went into the script.

FANG: So everything in the screenplay was stuff that really happened to you?

STONE: Well, the first time we wrote the script right after we came out of Greystone. It was a very interesting few days in October 2009: On the 12th, I met with Alex for the first time with my father, and he told us stories about Greystone. On October 13, we went exploring, and very much like in the movie, we went to his house, and [Wraith] lives like we’re going to war at any minute; he’s a true explorer at heart. He showed us the video, and then we proceeded to go there, and he seemed lost, he didn’t have a driver’s license and we had to break in. We really went through all this stuff, and ultimately had an interesting journey. We found a door and managed to escape, and the next day I said, “What happened to us last night was so amazing that I have to write it down.” So on the 14th, one day after this happened, I started writing the script.

The final draft materialized over a six-month period, because within three or four days, I had written the first version based on that one time we’d gone in. Then we kept going back, and we’d have more and more ghost experiences, run-ins with demon possession, with laughs and screams in places where we couldn’t see where they were coming from, shadow attacks, things like that. That was the basis of compiling a much richer story, and by the time we filmed it, we had a complete narrative I could justify and stand behind.

FANG: Once you started shooting, how much of the movie was improvisation?

STONE: Honestly, 80 percent of what you see in the film is based on something that really happened to us at some point. Then, because we wanted to use real haunted places, we shot at Letchworth Village in New York, an abandoned mental hospital, at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens, Snug Harbor in Staten Island and Linda Vista Hospital in LA. We hit all these cool locations, and though we’d have a script, we would go through a scene and next

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thing you know, the lights would turn on by themselves, or Antonella and Alex would react to something and jump and start running, and I'd just keep the camera rolling as they started talking about a shadow they saw. Obviously, there was a basic blueprint, but we did improvise when certain things went down.



FANG: Your father started his career in independent horror; did you take any cues from him, or did he consult in any way on this project, other than his appearance in the early scenes?

STONE: No, because I don't think he quite got the story we were going for early on. Honestly, until he saw the film completed, I don't believe he had any expectations about it and didn't expect us to finish it. But when he saw the first cut, he was quite scared, actually. He had a very positive reaction to the movie. It wasn't a relationship where we were discussing the script or talking about techniques. He really stepped back from everything.

FANG: That story he tells about “Crazy Kate” from your childhood—is that something he actually told you when you were younger?

STONE: Yeah, that was true, and I think in a way it makes you wonder, “Is that real, or is he making it up to scare his son?” And that was ultimately my motive for making the movie: “Are these ghost stories that people tell us real? Can I trust this perspective? Can I trust Alex when he said he saw what looks like Crazy Kate inside the hospital?” It's the same way with the audience; they're having to figure out, “Am I also seeing these shadows, or am I going crazy?” It's a very subjective reality that you go into when you start viewing paranormal phenomena. I've never seen that done in a film, but it's a very interesting analysis: Seeing paranormal phenomena is very similar to going mad. And when we went into that hospital, it was like we almost became those patients. We inherited that same experience of insanity, and a part of ourselves might have stayed behind there. That's what ghosts are: lingering energy that stays

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after you leave, and I think some part of me stayed behind.

FANG: Were you inspired by other found-footage horror films, or did you set out to make this one different?

STONE: Well, we started conceiving GREYSTONE PARK before PARANORMAL ACTIVITY came out. [That first incident] happened on October 12-13, and PARANORMAL ACTIVITY came out right before that Halloween, a few weeks later. At that point, we had no idea found footage would be such a craze. I wanted to keep the intention of a documentary. I never said, “This is footage we found and the filmmakers are dead.” This was based on our experiences. I think END OF WATCH does a similar thing, where they’re shooting it in reality-style and the camera is on the cops, but at the same time, it’s on the outside as well. We wanted this to feel more cinematic than found footage, but still have that handheld feeling.

FANG: Are Wraith and Lentini actors outside of this movie, or just friends of yours?



STONE: Well, they’re both. Alex was in a film called ROYAL KILL with one of the WWE divas, Pat Morita and Eric Roberts that got Lionsgate distribution, and he’s been acting for years in other things. He was in WALL STREET: MONEY NEVER SLEEPS, but his scene was ultimately cut. He was my co-writer, and I felt he had done enough to do the role and play himself. Antonella was a young actress out of NYU, and she has been in other features, including a couple of indie films that’ll hopefully come out soon. I’d known her for a long time, and when I was first going to go to Greystone, I called her to come with us. I always had this feeling that she knew about the paranormal. She has this young-Christina-Ricci-in-THE-ADDAMS-FAMILY energy about her, like she could sense the paranormal and see ghosts. She later told me that she has had real experiences with the shadows, so it was interesting that she really fit the role and that she was an actress.

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FANG: It's interesting to see Monique van Vooren back on screen after so many years. Is she a family friend also?

STONE: Yeah, she is. She's an old friend of my grandmother, going back to her Warhol days.

FANG: Directors who've made other movies of this type have said that they shot enough footage for several films. Did you shoot a lot of stuff that never wound up in the final cut?

STONE: I think we cut about 10 minutes out of the final version. We didn't shoot excessively. We did have a scene where we find Satanists hiding in the hospital, but it didn't quite work, so we cut it. Also, there was a scene where Antonella and I escape and make it outside the hospital, but then we have to go back to get Alex. There were a few deleted scenes like that, but we didn't shoot just to shoot. All the scenes were scripted, and then, as I said, things would happen to us and we would improvise based on our surroundings. I think in the end, we must have shot close to 30-40 hours. You're probably right, I could have made another film out of it, but it wasn't crazy. We had to make choices to keep the integrity of the story. This was not the kind of movie where we'd just let the camera roll and roll and roll. I guess I had the feeling, from hanging around my father's sets and making my short film, that I don't like letting the cameras roll without some kind of purpose.

FANG: Do you have any further horror films in the works?

STONE: I do; Alex and I have written another script based on other experiences we had while making the film—demonic experiences and whatnot—but this one's a horror/comedy, and we don't want to [direct] it. We'd like to produce it, so we're working on packaging it.

FANG: Do you want to continue with documentary-style features, or move on to more traditional narratives?

STONE: Oh yeah, my next film will be a traditional narrative. We're aiming to do a martial-arts

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comedy, ENTER THE FISTS. It's a throwback to the '70s/'80s-style action movies.