



GROUPCHAT

a Dan Brownlie film

INDEX

Synopsis

A daring production

How was it possible?

Director vision and extended world view

FX artist

The cast

Exploring immersive sets part one

Exploring immersive sets part two

Immersive advertising

Production team

Final words

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Logline:

A grieving game master's new online role-playing adventure spirals into a deadly reality, trapping players in a supernatural fight for survival.

Synopsis:

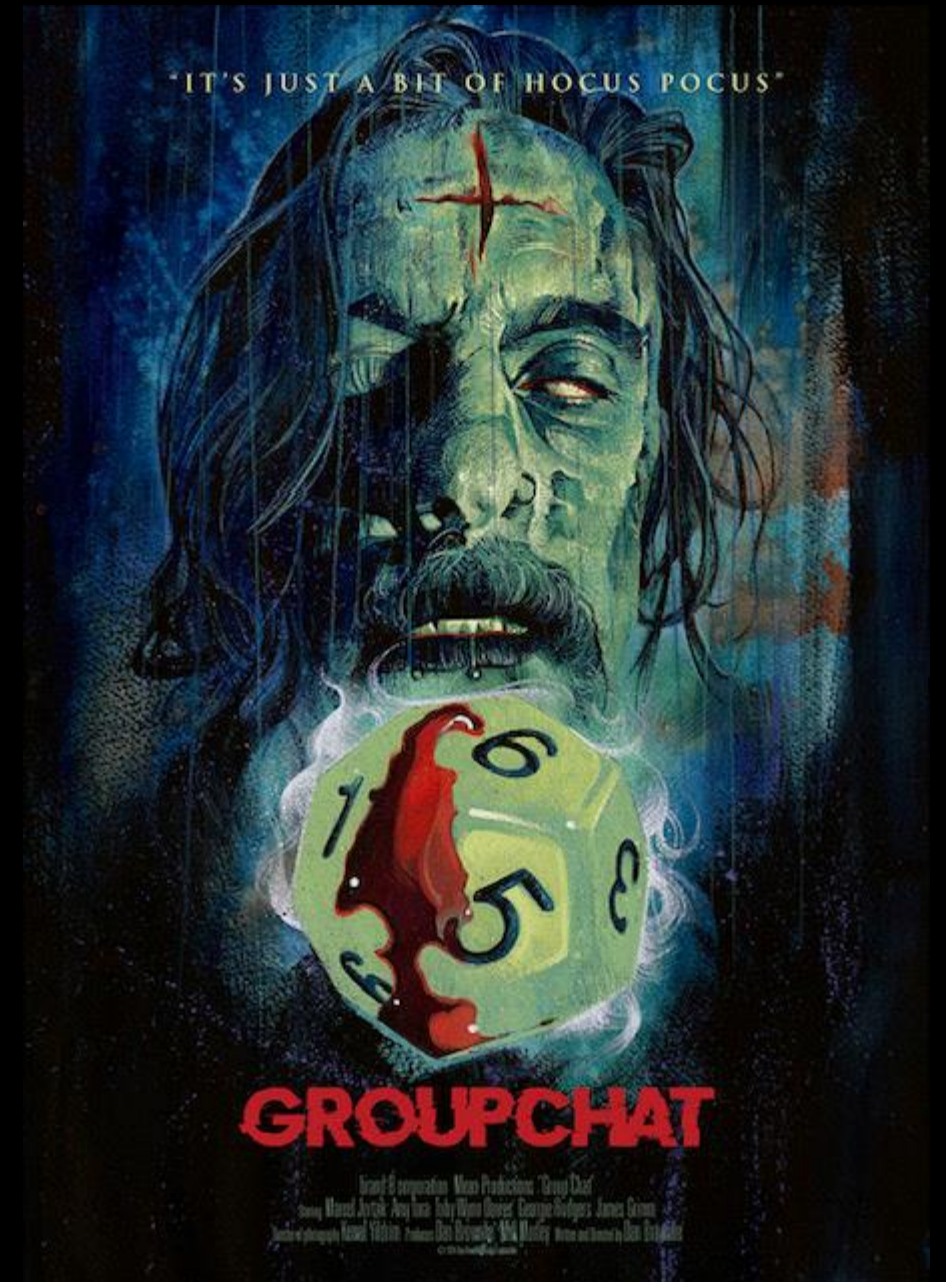
After months of absence, Games Master Dean has come back with a brand-new online campaign. Full of twists, turns, adventure and a few special ingredients to make the gameplay more immersive. He has invited his usual crew of Rob (character name Poxus the Vile), Marcus (character name Thorthog the Mad, half orc) and Laurie (Deloris Ironjaw the adventurer). Dean's right-hand man can't make it this time so there is a last-minute stand in. Cassie (character name Belualith the Conjurer).

Though Cassie is new to the game she has a in-depth knowledge of witchcraft as she is a practicing witch. As the game starts and the dice start to roll, not everything is at it seems. Dean is not himself as he reveals that his absence has been to his grieving of the loss of his dad, his behaviour is put down to grief, but Cassie is not so sure. As spells are cast, and the action become a bit more real, what started as a fun game to deal with grief and reunite with friends, turns into a bloody fight for survival.

Who will survive, and what will be left of them? In this online game of witches, orcs, the undead and betrayal.

Tagline:

"It's just a bit of Hocus Pocus"



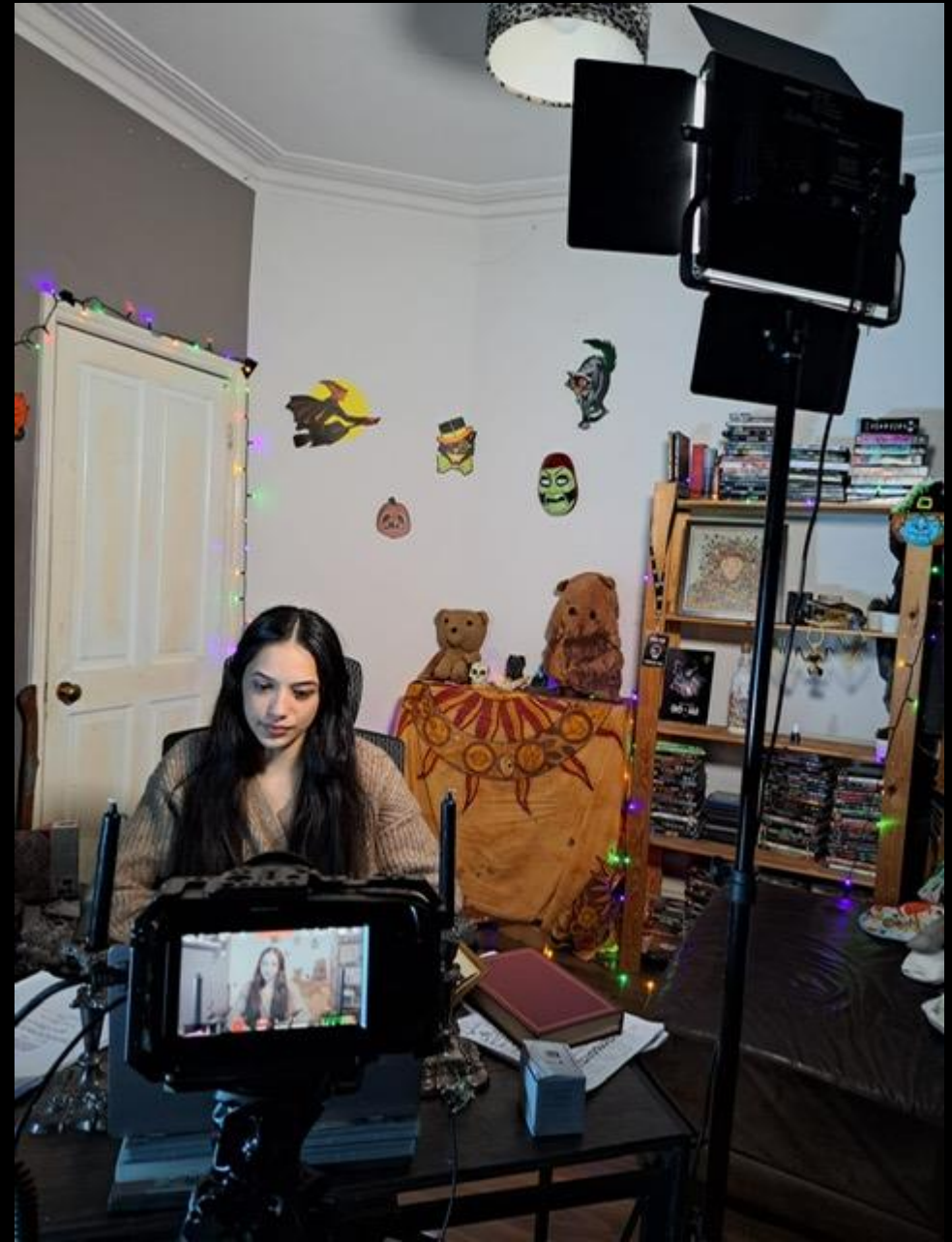
GroupChat was a daring production. But great things come from those who take risks. The premise of this shoot was to make it as real as possible, with five actors performing in real time with each other spread over what looks like five separate locations. Takes were long and the actors were given freedom to improvise and take risks. The golden rule was 'STAY IN CHARACTER'. If you miss a line. Stay in character. If someone else stumbles on a line. Stay in character. If someone does something different, or something unexpected happens. Stay in character.

With this in mind, actors were given individual directions that were not privy to the others, freedom to explore their character and environment and certain props were rigged to fly off shelves at inopportune moments. Sometimes halfway through a large part of dialogue. What this created was a living, breathing, evolving shoot, where characters evolved, bonded and created real feeling for those involved.



How was this possible?

Shot over four days. We found a group of amazing actors with theatrical training. So twenty-minute takes were not only feasible, but allowed them to fully immerse into their characters and situations. So, we set up in a location in east London, five actors were situated around the house with a laptop in front of them and a black magic just above the laptop camera to record them and were all mic'ed up so they could hear each other. Each could react in real time to the other actors on the shoot. Someone may react to something happening in the background of another's actors set that the actor themselves may not be aware of.



Director vision and extended world view

This was a very personal piece. Much like the character in the film, the script was written as a way to deal with my own fathers passing. But that was just the kick off point. I wanted to tackle racism, gender politics, partner violence, misogyny and a culture of online predators and sexual violence. But I did not want it to be overt. The themes are there, and are easy to see, but it is all guised in a game of mythic horror and subterfuge. This way the film can be seen as a fun screen-life horror. But can also easily be read with its many underline themes, as I used many metaphors and horror-based situations to explore themes that I feel passionate about tackling.

Part of my vision of this film was to have an extended universe logic. Where the world of roleplay is based once existed. Though subtly mentioned in the first act. There is the suggestion that orcs and goblins once roamed the earth. But humans being humans wiped them out. This meant that witches exist. Magic exists. But witches are women with power. A situation much belittled by the misogynistic powers than run the world. This opens up the world to be able to have spells cast that have more drastic and devastating effects than the modern forms of magic that exist in our world today.



FX ARTIST

Horror is always best when partnered with a practical FX, and for this film we wanted someone amazing.

So we hired in Rebecca Wheeler. Best known for her work on Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom (2023)

Boiling Point (2021)

Jeepers Creepers: Reborn (2022) and

The School of Good and Evil (2022)

Rebecca brought all our FX to life.

But not only that, we had a mortician on standby for technical advice, so we can say we have a mortician approved zombie.



Elevator pitch

“Host (2020) meets Dungeons & Dragons”

As Pablo Picasso said, “Bad artists copy, great artists steal”.

With this in mind it was not possible to just do a screen life horror film. I needed to evolve and add more twists to the format to make it more immersive. One of the way we did this was to break up the three act structure with interrupted, unskippable ad breaks that appear after the first and second act of the film. But we didn’t stop there. Like any great horror there are a few twists and surprises along the way. I could write them down here, but we need something left to keep you on your toes.



The Cast

For a project like this we needed strong ensemble cast of characters, and we were delighted with who we got.

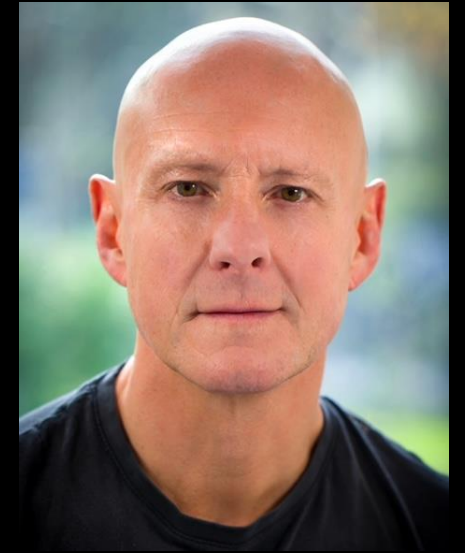
Making their feature film debuts are, Marcel Jortzik (Dean) and James Grimm (Rob). Who are joined by Amy Tara (Cassie) best known for her roles in the upcoming 'Assassins Guild' and 'Dream'.

Toby Wynn-Davies (Marcus) best known for his work in the Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey franchise and Georgie Rodgers (Laurie) who is best known for 'The Criminal Network' (2023) and scream queen alumni Debbie Rochon.

Each actor blew us away with their auditions, not only with the understanding of the character, but what I was saying with the piece as a whole.

We worked with these actors along with acting coach Jennifer Jones to create a natural flow of conversation and direction.

The power and passion these people brought to the screen was incredible and we cannot wait to show it to the world.



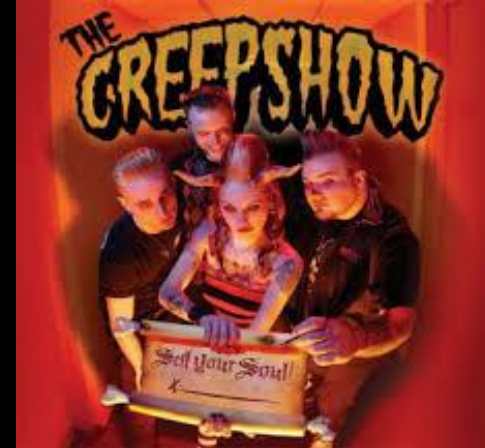
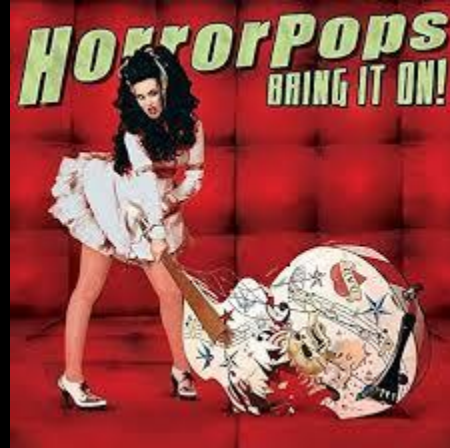
Exploring immersive set's part one.

Due to the nature of our shoot, we shot sequentially (with a day for fx pick up shots) so I wanted to have the location match the mood for each day.

For this I experimented with smells and sounds. For Day one when the characters were all friends, I had a more uplifting music playing as the cast came in, set up and got ready. So I started with the HorrorPops. On the Second day as the script was getting more sinister, I put on The Creepshow and on the last day where it was full on I played such bands as Cheap Perfume, The Menstrual Cramps and Dream Nails.

Much like the music I wanted to play with scents too. As this is low key set on Halloween I used a pumpkin spice scented candle to give the house a sweet positive smell for day one. Day two when it was turning I used that along with a Halloween Horror Nights candle that smells like the event. And on the third day used just the Halloween Horror Nights candle to set the mood.

I did not tell anyone I was doing this. Just set it all up the subtly change the mood for each day.

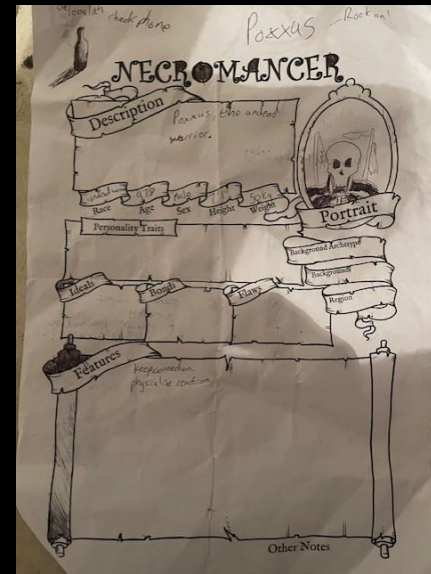
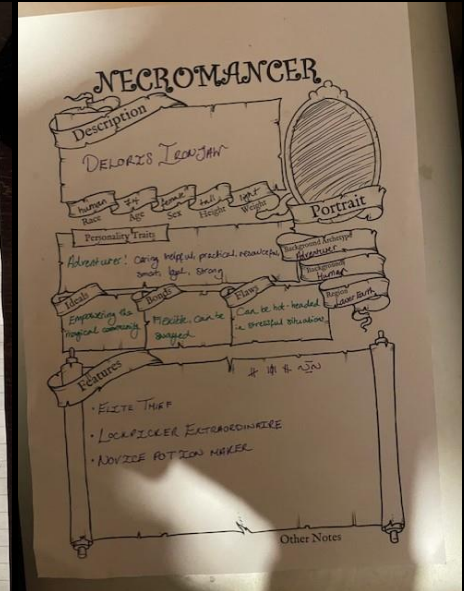
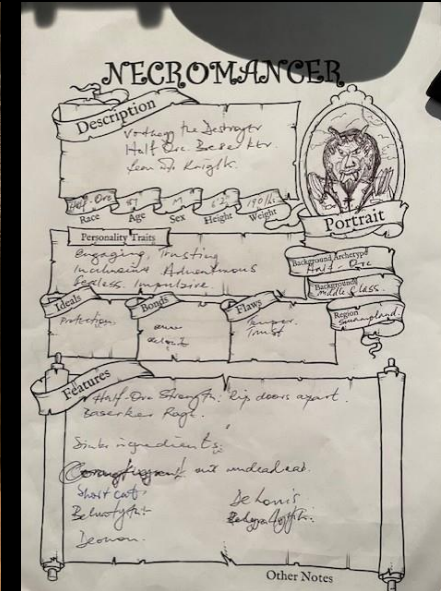
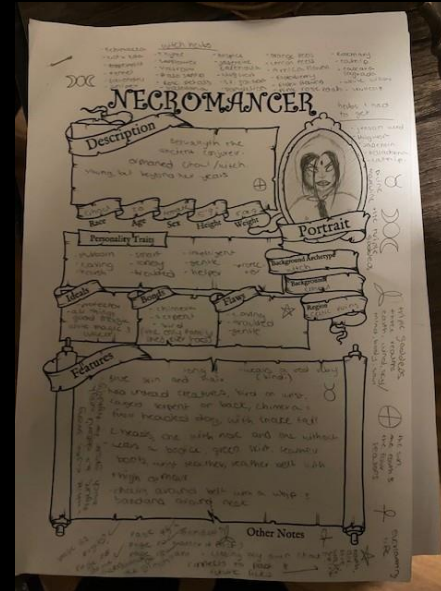


Exploring immersive sets part two.

To get the actors into character we explored ways of making the characters theirs. For our audition process instead of sending out script inserts. I wrote a short piece that was the events of the film from that character's point of view along with a backstory of the character. This meant that instead of just learning lines we got to see their interpretation of the character so we could match it with other actors and see who worked best together.

I also gave each character a role play character sheet to fill in as if they were playing the game in real life. These were not to be seen on screen but gave the actors a sense of ownership over their character in the film. This also allowed them to have a sheet to make notes on if they needed prompts in the long takes.

The cast also had a fully interactable set with props that they could use at their disposal. I gave very little direction on what props to use and just let them loose. This way what they chose was organic to them and their performance.



Immersive advertising

As part of our advertising campaign, we have set up a website to act as a site advertising the in-universe game of Necromancer as if it is a real game NecromancerSaga.com (that will be live March 24th 8pm GMT).

Though some of the links will be about some in game characters, which reflect the characters in the film, and create a sense that this is in fact a website for a new role play game. We will also have a link that takes people to the teaser trailer to give people a glimpse into what is really going on.

We have also set up an Instagram page (@necromancergame) that also acts like this is a new role play game.

This page has a plan to slowly introduce some of the film's characters and gradually show our hand as the film gets more well known and starts its festival run.

But the games don't stop there. We have several different trailers that were shot to suggest different people as the villain. This way people won't actually know what's going on and who's the real villain until they watch the film.



Story

Characters Monsters



The production team.

The production team for this project was made up of writer/director/producer Dan Brownlie and producer/1st AD Mel Morley.

Dan Brownlie: a found footage horror junkie who though is best known cinematically best known for 'The Tombs' (2019) now streaming on Shudder UK and the one man documentary on the UK Haunt Scene 'UK Hunters' (2019).

Has also had experience in creating immersive events like the ScareCon Scare award nominated Escape London Halloween special.

Combining the love of immersive events and horror cinema, found footage is a natural combination for his passion and talents in horror entertainment.

Mel Morley: best known for 'Walking Against the Rain' (2022), 'Black Mass' (2020) and 'Super Unit' (2019), Mel's love for the genre is only matched by her strong work ethic and passion for cinema itself. Being a force in the independent horror scene, having strong ties with such groups as the Independent Horror Society she is quickly becoming the one to watch.

Together this team worked seamlessly to create a film experience that is bound to make its mark in the horror scene.



As a director/producer, I can honestly say I have never worked with such an amazing cast and crew. The passion and drive showed by all involved made a very challenging shoot so much more enjoyable.

Shooting a feature film, no matter the way of doing it, in four days was a challenge. But the challenge was a lot easier to overcome when you have an amazing cast and crew at your disposal.

Next step is the festival circuit where we hope to show this piece of passionate creative project.

