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FILM STORIES

A portrait of Emily Blunt, looking slightly to the right of the camera. She has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a dark red turtleneck sweater and gold earrings. Her hands are resting on her chest.

Emily Blunt

*Oppenheimer,
quantum physics,
and a very practical film*

+

Christopher Nolan

*"It's what the
audience thinks
that trumps everything"*



The Making of *Snowgood*

Producer Neill McKenzie and director Leigh Tarrant on making a feature-length sequel to Tarrant's own short film

The origins of *The Presence Of Snowgood* lie within a short film – *A Curious Tale* – released in 2021. A classic ghost story set in the heart of the Sussex countryside, it was based on a novella by MR James, and tells the story of a valuable, legendary Saxon crown sought by those who should not find it, and the deadly consequences that ensued.

Neill McKenzie Writer and producer

When Leigh Tarrant, the director, asked me to write a sequel to his last film (that I actually appeared in), little did I realise what was entailed when he asked if I would also like to produce it ‘Oh, and by the way, let’s make it a full length feature film!’

A few (more) grey hairs later, and I think we’re about there.

The sequel, due for release in December of this year, has taken the story forward a year, where we find ourselves in the same deadly village whose residents alive and dead will stop at nothing to protect what they feel should belong to them. The film is more of a psychological/supernatural thriller than a full blown horror, with the aim being to take viewers on a journey with a mixture of Hammer Horror meets *The Wicker Man* but with a more modern feel. There’s none of the graphic violence one often sees, as we preferred using the power of suggestion and suspense, with one or two grizzly scenes thrown in for good measure. This delivers, I hope, an overall spine tingling experience.

The film opens with an historical explanation of how the legend came to be, followed by a dramatic depiction of what became of one of these legendary crowns. We’re then hurled into the mid 1980’s and introduced to

our main protagonist, a retired detective who’s been hired to investigate the disappearances of two men who vanished the year before. Various characters appear who all have something to hide as our detective attempts to unravel a web of deceit, greed and fear while supernatural elements lead to his own unravelling.

I very much wanted to keep this story as fast moving as possible, but at the same time allow Leigh to use the magic of cinematography to add mood and the overall chill to the film, which he did so well with his first film. We wanted some bad weather for some of the atmospheric outdoor scenes, and weren’t disappointed with what we got. Perhaps we should have been shooting *Noah’s Ark 2!* Good old British weather.

I was also responsible for casting and selected many people who I’ve acted with before mainly on stage (including panto!), but also in film. All the cast, apart from the celebrity appearance of the wonderful Caroline Munro and also Sarah Maur Ward, the rest are either from am dram, or younger actors who hope to become professional. Using local talent and filming in fabulous local locations such as Arlington and Peacehaven in Sussex and Bewl Water in Kent really helps to wave the flag for the small independent filmmaking



Neill (right) going over the script with two of *Snowgood's* young actors



Leigh Tarrant on a soggy shoot

“I wanted to create a bleak, disturbing atmosphere, a ‘film noir’ look, a ghost story with tension, pace and style”

industry, which is what both myself and Leigh hope to achieve, especially as Leigh’s tried and tested crew are also local.

Leigh Tarrant
Director

The filming process proved enjoyable, with the usual challenges. The sweeping shores of the Sussex coast, along with various woodland areas, a local churchyard and carefully chosen interiors proved adequate for our filming needs.

Many of the scenes were shot using a film crew of around ten at any given time. Three cameramen, sound technician, makeup artist, continuity, along with other various crew members all helping as required. We wanted to use local aspiring filmmakers from the very young through to the more experienced.

Local composer Jeff Crampton was given the task of completing the film’s music score. A newly written piece for the film’s main theme, something orchestral and melodic in keeping with a typical ghostly film style. Some

added eerie string arrangements, disturbing chants and numerous other short passages of music were also written that could be textured into the final cut. Jeff’s work has once again proven outstanding and complements all the visuals in the style, which is so vitally important for any fine feature.

In post production, I gathered each scene, logged each piece, and also gathered together my library of sound effects, enhanced by the film’s music score which really added a mood for each scene. Grade is important too. For example, a particular grainy whitewash grade is used for the ghost scenes.

I wanted to create a bleak, disturbing atmosphere, a ‘film noir’ look, a ghost story with tension, pace and style. I hope the viewer will feel they’ve been on a journey into the creepy world of a local East Sussex community in the fictitious town of Snowgood, never knowing who is who, and whom exactly to trust. Lots of twists and turns.

After an initial cinema release on the independent circuit in

the UK, we are hoping to get the film seen in as many countries as possible, with a view to launching the film across streaming services and regional TV. We’re hoping that the movie is well received and appreciated for the art of filmmaking and to show just what can be achieved on a limited budget.

A last thought

We both hope you’ll get a chance to see this film when released in early December. If local to the Hailsham area, tickets will be on sale from the Hailsham Pavilion sometime in November, for the 9th December premiere. All proceeds from the tickets sold will be donated to a charity called Family Matters, which *The Presence Of Snowgood* is proudly supporting. [f5](#)

Follow [@ThePresenceOfSnowgood](#) on Instagram and Facebook for more info. Support via [crowdfunder.co.uk](#) and social shares can help get the film out to as large an audience as possible.