

Interview with Writer / Director / Producer Sean Garrity

Why LUCID?

I was struck by the first draft of the script, that Jonas Chernick brought me, which was rife with issues surrounding sleep: sleep disorders, sleep imagery, dreams, all with a kind of liquid, dreamy tone. I'd never read anything like it, and I was immediately excited about the project.

And yet, both Jonas and yourself are credited as writers.

While I was reading the first draft, I imagined a different ending for it than what he had written, so he brought me on to write it. This is the ending the movie has now. We traded drafts back and forth for 6 years. The script went 17 drafts. I think we were both so in love with the puzzle of it, that we neglected to give it an emotional core, so it kept not working, until we started really focusing on the protagonist's emotional journey - at about draft 12. That took the script in a radically different direction. As is, we could probably produce the first draft as a totally different film, there's really nothing left but the character names.

How does this film grow out of your first feature, INERTIA?

While it's not the easiest movie to classify, I guess you'd call LUCID a psychological thriller. Usually films in this genre are heavy, self-important and border on horror. I wanted to make it light, like INERTIA, almost a comedy at times, and then dive into the really twisted stuff in the last act. So, I'm trying to do something new with LUCID. Also like INERTIA, LUCID is a character-driven film with very realistic, sometimes improvised dialogue. I really hate the overwritten style of dialogue most commercial films have. We added some really high-concept plot twists to that character-driven structure, to create a kind of genre-crossing hybrid. I feel like it's much more accomplished than INERTIA, and it looks like we had ten million dollars to make it, whereas INERTIA at times feels like we had ... less than that.

So, did you use improvisation in LUCID like you did on INERTIA?

Not in the same way. On INERTIA we completely improvised the rehearsals, crafted the script from them, then used that script for as a base for more improv on set. For LUCID, we had a script that we stuck to more or less, but in rehearsals, as the guys were lighting, we would often make stuff up and change the scene around. I was very lucky that all of my main actors were down with improvising now and then. The camera folks didn't like it very much, but I really love the results of a scene when the actors feel like they can change things to suit the moment, or when they're not quite sure what's going to happen next. It creates an energy and a spontaneity that spewing memorized lines can't touch.

You've always used no-name Winnipeg actors for your films, on LUCID, you had a chance to work with Canadian stars. What was that like?

Intimidating, at first. There's a weird imbalance with someone like Callum, for example, because he's such a great actor, and a really well-known great actor. When we first meet, he doesn't know me from Adam, but I feel like I've shared these very intimate moments with him, because I've seen FLOWER AND GARNET, HARD CORE LOGO and FALLING ANGELS. So, I had to kind of separate the guy in front of me, who's here to work on my movie, and these characters that I feel like I've been on journeys with, because I've seen and enjoyed his movies. Same with Lindy and Michelle. It was a real relief to discover that they're all no-ego actors, here to work hard and give their best for my little Winnipeg movie. All three of them were willing to collaborate creatively with me on set, and have added wonderful new dimensions to the characters that I never could have imagined.

How about Jonas Chernick? This is the third time you've made him the main character in one of your movies.

Jonas is the perfect actor to play Joel Rothman. He has a charisma and a sensitivity that makes you want to root for him, no matter what his character does. As the project developed, I really began to explore how bad we could make this guy, and still expect the audience to forgive him. The investors kept saying “what are you doing? The audience is going to hate Joel Rothman!” and I kept responding that they wouldn’t be able to, once he had Jonas Chernick’s face. It raises some questions that I find very interesting about what we look for in people in order to forgive them. I’ve known Jonas for so long – I carried the Chuppah at his wedding! We have a kind of shorthand on set, where we speak in half sentences, know exactly what the other person is saying, and he gives me just what I want. I know how far he can go, so I know when he can do a better take, and he *knows* I know. There’s a deep mutual trust between us – which took seven years to build - that has resulted in a fabulous performance by him in this film. It doesn’t hurt that he wrote the script with me either.

In addition to writing and directing, you also produced LUCID. Why did you do that?

Because I enjoy pain.

No seriously. Why did you do that?

At film school, and at the Winnipeg Film Group [Winnipeg’s film cooperative], I learned how to do it all myself. This is the way I learned how to make films: you get the idea, you write the script, you get the money, make the movie, edit it and then sell it. This is why I think of myself more as a filmmaker than a director. I have produced all my previous work myself, except for INERTIA. On LUCID, I convinced Jamie Brown of Frantic Films to produce it with me. I’m really glad I did, because Frantic helped a lot. Without them, I would have lost all my hair on this project.