If you're familiar with Graham Reznick's work for Glass Eye Pix—and we're not talking his debut feature I CAN SEE YOU or mindbending short, THE VIEWER, but his day job of exceptional sound design on films like THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL—you can easily get excited about his participation in the company's quality on-line throwback to old-fashioned radio dramas, TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE. A spooky series of audio horror tales premiering each Tuesday since this past October, TALES has showcased some of the genre's most outstanding talents, among them J.T. Petty, Simon Rumley and even Glass Eye head Larry Fessenden. Reznick's "The Grandfather" airs today, and its creator spoke to Fango about the recording the episode, its origins and why it may circumvent expectations.

"The Grandfather" stars Angus Scrimm (PHANTASM, I SELL THE DEAD) as the titular elder who's being visited by his daughter and her family. But it proves to be a fateful day, and nothing will be the same afterward.

FANGORIA: How did it TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE come to you?

GRAHAM REZNICK: Larry and Glenn [McQuaid, producer of the series with Fessenden and director of I SELL THE DEAD] mentioned it to me in probably April or May. They asked a group of us to submit pitches for stories, I submitted a bunch and they picked "The Grandfather." I wrote my script in July, and just because I happened to be going to LA where Angus was, we rushed showing it to him and getting him cast. We recorded his parts separately, like three months ahead of everybody else in late July, early August. So the first part happened really quickly, and then I didn't do anything with it for like six months, because I was so busy on other stuff.

FANG: Because of your sound design work, your TALES entry is an exciting prospect. Is there anything you did on your episode that you think not many others tried, or were you relatively restrained?

REZNICK: It's interesting—I pitched five ideas to Larry and Glenn, and the majority were very focused on like, "Here's an idea that would allow me to do really crazy stuff with sound design." There was one that involved the radio and one that involved phone calls, and another that involved all this crazy science-fiction stuff, but the one they picked was this almost literary piece about a grandfather being visited by his family and a sort of terrible secret being revealed. The plan for that was always to be completely dialogue-heavy and just people talking to each other, and I didn't have a clue as to what I would do with its audio design. Usually, sound does factor in to some degree in my ideas; this one, not so much. The challenge was to come up with the narrative first and the sound, or the stylization, second. Generally, the stylization comes hand in hand with the idea for me. So it was fun stepping out of that comfort zone and focusing only on the story, the emotions and the dialogue and letting the audio inform it or enhance it, rather than tell the story.

I knew that most of the other TALES would be dabbling in sound and telling stories in a way that you are kind of limited on screen. Most of the time, people use visuals to tell stories on screen, and sound becomes secondary. Just because of being a sound designer *and* a director, I typically try to use audio as narratively as I can on screen, so it's kind of ironic that I ended up making a radio play where sound isn't as important. However, once I honed in on the idea of doing a story about a grandfather, the first person who came to mind was Angus Scrimm, because his voice is amazing, we've done a bunch of movies with him—I SELL THE DEAD and AUTOMATONS and SATAN HATES YOU—and working with him and his voice is always such a pleasure. I wanted to give that to people for a half an hour, just hearing Angus talk. So in a weird way, that was the biggest sound consideration: just luxuriating in a particular voice or a personality that's expressed through sound, and that's something that sort of sets it apart from some of the others.

But some of those do have some great use of voiceover. J.T. Petty's has Amy Seimetz [of BITTER FEAST] who does a really lovely one—it takes up most of the piece—and Larry's has

James LeGros [from FEAST and THE LAST WINTER] doing a really great job. It's just a different use, because voiceover is like being told a story, whereas when you're actually in a scene with someone acting something out, you're with them. They're just different ways of telling stories. The fact that I wasn't necessarily considering sound as a storytelling tool is the thing that sets mine apart.

FANG: Did you do much in the way of research, or even just listening to classic radio dramas? What did you have to do to prepare yourself for the limitations of this medium?

REZNICK: Actually, I used to love listening to radio plays and considered, in college, making a couple in the noir style, but I never really got around to it. I used to love listening to THE SHADOW and other old-time programs. They broadcasted them on AM when I was a kid, so I did grow up with it.

For my own personal one, because I knew a lot of people would jump at the chance to do a retro-vibe, I tried to do something a little bit different, and my initial plan didn't really pan out because of scheduling and everybody's locations. I wanted to shoot it and record it like we were actually making a movie: block the scenes with the actors in the actual locations. That's why I picked a very simple setting: a house and then outside of it. I thought, "We'll do it at Larry's house upstate; he's got a back yard, a porch, the kitchen, and we'll actually walk with the actors in that space and it'll sound like we're just hearing something unfold. We'll actually be in a space with an action or activity unfolding, and it's not like we're hearing four actors lined up in a studio with a guy doing sound effects in the background, hitting a cowbell or whatever—that's what your typical radio play would be. That's a grand tradition, and I wanted to try something different. That didn't happen [*laughs*].

In the end, I took that approach to the mixing, so everyone is in their own special place and all the sound effects were actually locked on a location and recorded with a stereo mic, so they do have the feel of being created in a real environment vs. stuff in a studio and I believe that's something you don't really hear in old radio plays. Because everyone has newer and better technology, we don't have the limitations of listening to a tiny little speaker, gathered around. And then we used stereo, because everyone's primarily listening to these on headphones—you could listen on speakers, it'll sound great, but everyone listens to podcasts during commutes on the subway or whatever, so unlike music or movies, audio drama has headphones higher on the priority list of ways people are going to enjoy them. That means you can play with stereo more, you can play with the 3-D space of the audio and the dimensional environment created for the listener and for the actors. You can feel like you're there with them if you close your eyes. Old radio plays didn't have that capability, so that was really fun to take the narrative

concepts of those and put them in new technology and jump a step beyond.

FANG: What was the genesis of "The Grandfather"?

REZNICK: It's tied into a couple of real-life things. One of my grandfathers was in a nursing home from the time I was very little, and I never really knew him before that, after he'd had a stroke. So I liked the idea of family possibly seeing their grandfather figure one last time before something cataclysmic happens.

FANG: You kind of leave a clear explanation a little out of reach; there's a feeling that what's going on is related to some sort of mythology or legend. Were you inspired by anything in particular, or was it an original thought?

REZNICK: It isn't tied to anything in particular, but I wanted it to feel like within the world of the story, the characters are referencing something that's out of reach for listeners. Similar to I CAN SEE YOU, there's a sense of occultism running through it, and it should feel like the characters believe in that power, but to the audience it's obscure; we can only sense the effect it has on these people. We don't have our own baggage coming to it. If you put a pentagram in a movie, everybody's got their own view of that, either "Satanists, oh, OK" or, "Satanists, awesome!" But if you put an occult symbol in a movie that the audience doesn't recognize, it's, "Whoa, that's weird." And you know, people bring baggage to symbols or whatever already, but at least you're cutting out specific baggage they might have, positive or negative, about a particular type of occult image. So when you create a legend in a radio narrative that isn't tied to anything in the real world, you can more easily buy into the fact that the characters are responding to it rather than going, "Well, I don't believe in that devil stuff," or whatever.

FANG: When you create something like that, do you have all the elements and answers in your mind and decide what to leave out, what to play with in terms of what's vague and what's

abstract, or do you not even know 100 percent yourself?

REZNICK: I typically want to make sure I understand every angle I can, especially because, just from a practicality standpoint, you don't want people to ask you questions you can't answer. Even if you decide not to answer them, you just don't want to not have the answers, and that especially comes into play when you're working with the cast. Each actor in "The Grandfather" was directed slightly differently, because they all have different points of view. They're all seeing reality in a different way. Everyone's sharing a space and interacting there, but the way they're each seeing that space is very different at different times. And you know, that's how life is. Everybody sees the world completely differently. So it's interesting to play that up in a narrative environment.

FANG: How long did it take to edit and get everything in place?

REZNICK: We recorded Angus in a couple of hours, and he just nailed it right away. It was written for him, in his voice, and he really just got it. Two passes of recording, and I mostly used the second take after we'd been warmed up. Everyone else was a little tougher; Matt Huffman, who was cast as James, had injured his legs and was only available at particular times, and Kate Sheil, who plays the mom, was also only available at particular times. We had to run around and record everybody separately, so unlike some of the other plays where everybody was in the room together reading next to each other, I had this giant wild card to pull off: "Oh my God, how is this all going to match up and cut together?" I was surprised it came together so well. I did expect all of the actors to be very good, but I had never done that—I'd never recorded everyone separately, like a cartoon where they have Chevy Chase one day and three weeks later they record Jerry Seinfeld and put them all together and have BEE MOVIE or something.

This was a totally new learning experience for me, and it was one of the hardest things I've had to edit, because you pick a line reading and then you have to cycle through every other take and match them up and make sure it's perfect, because there's always a feeling in the back of your head: "Oh, well, Matt's line here is great, but what if I changed Angus' line right before that, that might give it a different meaning." So just from a technical standpoint, I've never had such a laborious time cutting something together. But that's not to say it wasn't incredibly fun. It was so great sitting there with headphones on and just being in that world. I put all the ambiences in first, cutting together the bird audio and the sound of the grill going and so on, and it was literally like cutting together a true virtual environment in a way that you don't feel when you're cutting picture. There, you're looking at something that's locked down, but when you put on headphones and close your eyes, you can just transport yourself there. It's really

kind of interesting, almost like you're in some sort of weird MINORITY REPORT world where you're reaching around and grabbing and creating. It's a very different way of approaching an edit. It's cool.

You can listen to and download "The Grandfather" and all of the other episodes at the TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE official website .

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