



Young Filmmakers to Film Horror in Alton

by Brittany Kohler, Content Manager
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The Town of Monroeville



Alton is no stranger to the film industry. Its rich history and timeless architectural landscape make for a perfect environment for the set of a small Midwestern town with a whole lot of character.

Steel City, *She Loves Me Not*, and *The Coverup* are among the many movies that have been filmed in this very bend of the Mississippi River.

That is exactly why Kellie Marie McGhee and the team with Black Bat Productions of Los Angeles have decided to film their first pilot for a potential film network series right here in the heart of Alton.

McGhee's entire family is from Alton. As a military child, she spent many summers here with family members while her single mother was deployed – so, even though she never actually lived here, it was always the one place she could call home.



“Alton seemed like the ideal choice to film *The Town of Monroeville*,” said McGhee. “With its rich history and beautiful architecture, it’s surprising more major pictures haven’t been filmed here.”

The Town of Monroeville is an unpublished book series that McGhee began writing in high school. It has since become a passion and major goal in her life to turn it into a TV series. Her idea is to turn the four-book series into a four-season TV series.

“I really want *The Town of Monroeville* to have a long life,” said McGhee. “I love Alton, and I love this story. It makes sense that my passion project be filmed where I love to be.”

Horror stories and vampires are two strong and popular genres in both the film and television industries. TV shows are more commonly watched than a movie that gets watched and put on a shelf. McGhee and her team decided to merge the three popular ideas, horror, vampires and Television, as part of their effort to bring the series to a new light.

“While the story does include vampires, this is only a small part,” said McGhee. “We, the creators, feel that *The Town of Monroeville* is more about redemption. Our goal with this series is to give vampires back to the horror genre.”

Black Bat Productions was founded by three young women who recently graduated from the New York Film Academy in Los Angeles. The Three women are from different parts of the world and have formed a strong bond in the busy Los Angeles lifestyle, while planting their feet in the Hollywood standard of living. Since establishing Black Bat, *The Town of Monroeville* has been their main priority.

McGhee is the writer and director for Black Bat Productions. Her childhood lifestyle of moving and traveling the country enables her to have experience in the diverse societies of the U.S., and be able to appeal to a wide audience.

While attending architectural college in her native country, Singapore, Ma decided to boldly follow her true passion in filmmaking at the film academy in California. As the production company’s cinematographer, Ma’s creative passion and attention to detail truly showcases the personality of the projects.

The third and final founder of Black Bat Productions is Aya Long, the producer. Born in Australia, Long fits right in with the courageous approach toward a common dream they all share, success in the film industry.

With no relatives nearby, the three women formed a family of their own, Black Bat Productions.





In early August, McGhee and Ma spent a week in Alton scouting for locations and beginning to make production plans. Unlike McGhee, it was Ma's first visit to the Midwestern area, and she was taken back by the scenery that many locals here take for granted.

“The landscapes here are really something else,” said Ma. “When I arrived, the first thing I saw was rows and rows of cornfields whisking past the car window. I flipped out in enthusiasm and we ended up reworking a scene to incorporate the fields into the script, all before we even arrived to our first location.”

The purpose of the visit was to get a general feel for the area, to make sure Alton was indeed their spot for set. While here, they met with local artists and film enthusiasts for tips, guidance, advice and also merged to find a following.

Kellie and Ma formed many connections with people in Alton that are riveted about the team’s desire to film in their hometown. Almost everyone they encountered were eagerly resourceful and offered to contribute in any way they could.

They also scouted and met with several local business owners, locking in most of the desired locations for set production.

“Scouting, which usually is such a bore, was actually a lot of fun in Alton,” said McGhee. “I was shocked by the community's reaction to us wanting to film in their establishments.”

McGhee added that the local business owners willingly accepted their proposals, without feeling as though the team would be imposing on their business or looking at the situation as a money-making opportunity. The team expressed that the courteous responses made them very pleased and comfortable with the early planning process.

“The people we’ve approached in Alton have been so open-minded and gracious about letting us film in their establishments,” said Ma. “Because it is such a tight-knit community, there are far fewer people you have to talk to in order to get to the right person.”

During their stay, the team visited several local businesses that had the appearance and vibe they imagined for the set. The pilot episode requires several different kinds of locations, including a gas station, a grocery store, and a bar. Melleville Dairy, Schwegel’s Market and Cliffside Inn all agreed, without hesitation, to let the team film on their properties.

“The girls were very enthusiastic about filming in our store, you could tell they were excited to make their mark in the film industry,” said Kelley Laughlin, Schwegel family member and store employee.

The Schwegel family opened their market in Alton in 1936, and the tight-knit family has kept it running smoothly ever since.

“It’s exciting to have our store featured in a film,” said Monica Campbell, Schwegel’s Store Manager. “Our store definitely has the small-town neighborhood feel to it, which is perfect for what they are looking for. There was no hesitation in opening our doors to them.”

McGhee and Ma were very pleased with all the positive feedback they received from not only the local businesses, but the community as a whole.

“My favorite thing about doing business in Alton is how kind and accommodating everyone is,” said McGhee. “The people of this town aren’t jaded by filmmaking like all of Los Angeles. It’s something new, something fresh, and something exciting for the people to hear about. The response and support we’ve received thus far from the town has been exceptional and a breath of fresh air.”

Black Bat Productions is looking to begin filming the pilot episode in mid-February of 2015.

“We hope to and plan to have raised the money we need by February, so once the campaign has run its course, we would like to film as soon as possible,” said McGhee.

Because Black Bat Productions is based in Los Angeles, they intend to cast the main characters there; however, they do plan to cast other roles locally.

“As far as background actors and other minor characters, we would love to cast anyone in the Alton area who is interested in the pilot,” said McGhee. “Background actors are the unsung heroes of Hollywood, so casting them is just as important as any other role.”

“Everyone we met were so friendly and easy-going, we were able to meet a bunch of artists and creative individuals that are very interested in what we’re doing and eager to be involved,” said Ma. “I think it would be great for us to actually collaborate and incorporate the local talent and culture.”

Follow BlackBatProductions.com for further notices on local casting calls; specific details will be posted when the time comes closer to filming. The website and other resources will be used to get the word out that actors are needed for specific scenes. Anyone willing to be a part of the casting process is welcome.

Please visit indiegogo.com/projects/the-town-of-monroeville to follow the team’s campaign and/or to contribute to the production. The team is looking to raise \$30,000 to cover the cost of the entire making of the film.

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SEE CAMPAIGN VIDEO BELOW!!



From left to Right: Mary Ma, Kellie McGhee, and Aya Long at graduation from the New York Film Academy, L.A.