

Scammed family inspires film

A Langley-raised actor turned film producer is hoping his tale of phone scams strikes a chord

BY MATTHEW CLAXTON, LANGLEY ADVANCE MAY 30, 2013



Actor and producer Sage Brocklebank grew up in Langley and is now competing for a million dollar movie production prize.

Photograph by: Submitted photo, for Langley Advance

A pair of real-life encounters with scam artists were the impetus for Langley-raised Sage Brocklebank's new movie project.

SCAM is a look at the con artists who phone up with offers too good to be true - they just need you to send them a processing fee to get things moving.

"We want to get inside the world of the scammers and understand them," said Brocklebank.

Brocklebank has long worked as an actor in the Lower Mainland, with a longtime recurring role as a police officer on *Psych* and a host of other work, from *Stargate* to *Smallville* to movies of the week.

He's also producing and doing plays in the Vancouver Fringe Festival.

It was after working on a Fringe production with two friends, Allen Morrison and Patrick Sabongui, that they learned of a contest to win a chance for funding a feature length movie.

After the success of their crime-themed Fringe play, the trio wanted to feature lawbreakers again.

Two weeks before the deadline to register for the contest, dubbed CineCoup, Morrison's grandfather was ripped off by a telephone scam.

While it was a horrible experience for the family, it did give the filmmakers an idea, one that got deeper when Brocklebank ran into an ex-phone scammer at a poker game.

The ex-con artist agreed to fill them in on the way scams were run out of Montreal in the 1990s.

For several years, that city was one of the hubs of phone scam activities for North America, with small gangs

of scam artists ripping off victims, many elderly, for hundreds, thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, you'll never get your money back," Brocklebank said.

There is a hierarchy to the phone scam world, Brocklebank learned.

The person who first makes the call and tells you you've won an amazing prize, or that a long-lost relative is leaving you an inheritance, is the opener.

Above or alongside him are others, including the runner, banker, and boss man.

If a victim seems to have a lot of money, the opener is supposed to turn the victim over to one of the higher ups. At most, the opener will see about 20 cents on the dollar of the cash the crooks extract from their target.

For their movie project, now titled SCAM, Brocklebank and his team decided to focus on an opener, a young man who has been lured in by the easy money to be made.

He gets in way over his head when he decides to poach a potential victim from his own employers and get all the money for himself. He foolishly approaches the man in person, is discovered, and finds himself receiving the brunt of a victim's anger.

For the CineCoup contest, the SCAM team has created a trailer and several scenes of the film.

CineCoup launches weekly challenges to the prospective film makers, and also ranks the participants with public feedback and online voting.

As of early May, SCAM had survived into the top 15 and was holding steady in third position, a showing that pleased Brocklebank.

If he doesn't win, you'll still have a chance to see SCAM at some point.

"I'll make this movie no matter what," he promised.

Winning the cash would help him find some well-known actors for the lead roles, in particular as the victim who turns the tables on the scam artist, he said.

In the meantime, as producer, Brocklebank is funding the work on trailers and early pro-uction for the contest.

"This is coming out of the bank of Sage," he joked.

Getting the pieces put together has been a great experience, he noted.

Everything is last minute, but he's working with people who will come out and help at a moment's notice.

"It's been really amazing," Brocklebank said.

You can vote for SCAM at [www. cinecoup.com](http://www.cinecoup.com).

mclaxton@langleyadvance.com

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A promotional poster for the movie project

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