

Greg Sestero's "The Disaster Artist"

by Ridley Tankersley

When Tommy Wiseau's 2003 feature film, *The Room* premiered in Los Angeles, it was met with laughter and incredulity on the part of its naïve audience, the majority of which had been paid by a P.R. agent to attend the screening.

Among the attendees were a few members of the crew, Greg Sestero, the untrained line producer, who also played the major role of Mark, and the rest of the slim eight member cast, including the movie's lead actor, executive producer, writer, and director, Mr. Tommy Wiseau himself. Production had taken two years to complete and cost over \$6 million— all of which came out of Wiseau's mysteriously never-ending pocket— only to gross a pathetic \$1,800 at the box office.

Tragically, however, the film is Wiseau's magnum opus. It's a story about his views on love, friendship, and betrayal; a rumination on the human condition. Despite pouring his heart and soul into the project through his strange perception-funnel of the world, the finished film is astoundingly bad.

It contains numerous plot holes and continuity errors due to Wiseau's seat-of-his-pants/out-of-his-mind directing style and, consequently, a frustrated and hopeless crew. It also exhibits many marvelously sub-amateur performances, several of which are played by competent actors hindered by a script composed of poorly thought-out stage directions and near-English dialogue like "You betray me! You not good! You just a chicken! Cheep cheep cheep cheep!" (Wiseau, who speaks with a thick, tough-to-place accent, will not reveal his true origin and claims to have grown up in New Orleans, though Eastern Europe is most likely.) The resulting 99-minute sequence of scenes is miraculously a movie.

Since its release, the cinematic train wreck has become a lovable cult classic, inspiring Rocky Horror style screenings at which audience re-enact scenes in costume as well as shout at the screen and throw plastic spoons (Google it).

Grateful for the attention, mocking or otherwise, Wiseau has welcomed *The Room's* quirky success and still appears at the majority of screenings across the country, always with his signature indoor sunglasses.

His optimism and honesty, which holds strong against constant mockery, is the main underlying theme of Greg Sestero's book, which cleverly interweaves stories

from production with ones recounting the saga of his strained relationship with Wiseau.

The Disaster Artist graciously extends some insider knowledge of Tommy's motives for *The Room's* thematic message including an intimate look into his secret background, lazy movie star lifestyle, and generally baffling personality.

Sestero is an essential part of the entire ordeal, having been lured into a fraught, intense friendship with Wiseau plagued by jealousy and manipulation. He describes the particularly stressful climax of their relationship which occurred during *The Room's* grueling production, when he reached the breaking point of his ability to tolerate the experience.

However, aided by Sestero's deep and unique understanding of Wiseau, the reader sees that the film came from the mind of a broken, misunderstood man. Too bad the movie stunk.