



A Film by
Michael James Dean

ALREADY DEAD

Starring
DARREN RUSTON

16 Minutes
Camera: Shot on Canon 5D Mark 3

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ALREADY DEAD

SYNOPSIS

| ALREADY DEAD is a short documentary about recovering zombies. Fifteen years after a zombie outbreak (ZE Day) Zombies live among us, working 9-5 jobs, holidaying in Barbados and living "life" to the fullest. A documentary crew have been given exclusive access to a group of Zombie's day-to-day "lives". But have we truly come to accept Zombies or are we still living in 2001? ALREADY DEAD is a reflection of modern society and the prejudice that individuals struggle with each and every day.

ALREADY DEAD

Q&A with Writer and Director MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

What is Already Dead?

ALREADY DEAD is a short mockumentary exploring the lives of a small group of Zombies. Fifteen years on from an initial outbreak a documentary crew explore what life for them is like in 2016.

Where did you get the inspiration for the story?

Like many of my ideas they stem from an image, an article or a character. In this case it was a Zombie eating a bowl of brains. Initially intended as a comedy sketch the idea quickly evolved into a mockumentary with a deeper meaning, finally becoming what it is today.

Why this story?

I wanted to give my take on the Zombie genre. I've seen many different takes on the genre over the years, from the gruesome to the romantic and I wanted to explore what it would be like to see a set of zombies living their lives in our world.

Hatred and prejudice towards race, religion, sexuality and gender are all strong subjects in today's society. Thanks to the Internet it has become far easier for those to spread a message of hatred to the masses. Already Dead is about a group of individuals struggling to live in a world that is unable to accept them for more than what they can see, much like migrants today who are victimised because of the main stream media and misrepresented stereotypes.

I was watching the news and saw a story about a young Muslim girl who following the Paris shooting in 2015 said that she didn't want to leave her house for four days because she was scared of being violently attacked. It struck me that in 2016 and in a society that claims to be open and accepting someone was afraid to walk the streets of their own country for fear of being attacked because of the way they look. I soon realised the parallels between the character George I was developing and the people to deal with prejudice each and every day.

The film also touches on the idea of the undead being a disease one that the individuals have to maintain and battle with in their daily lives. I myself have experience first-hand how many forms of disease can destroy lives, both for the victim and others around them. Many of the themes are based on my personal interactions with alcoholism and the struggle that recovering alcoholics have to fight through each and every day. Much like those who are abused because of their race, religion, gender or sexuality; alcoholics are stereotyped as being drunks who could easily stop drinking if they wanted. However the reality of the situation is they are coping with a serious mental addiction.

Film is a powerful art form, whether it is to entertain or to educate the ability to engage someone for ten, fifteen minutes or even 2 hours. I think it's our responsibility as

filmmakers to push these subjects to the forefront of conversation and to get people engaging with subjects they may otherwise ignore.

As a society we have come along way, but we're still battling with prejudice towards race, sexuality, religion, illness and gender.

How was the shooting experience?

I love shooting in general, everyone is always full of energy and there is such a great atmosphere on set when a team comes together to push forward on a project.

The practicalities of filming were no different to my previous low budget films, constantly working against the cost of locations and cast and crew schedules. We filmed over five separate days in four different locations with a cast and crew of thirteen.

I make it a priority on my sets to ensure that everyone feels comfortable, that they are aware of exactly what they will be doing throughout the day. If you can assure your cast and crew that you're in control and that you trust them, the atmosphere on a set goes straight up. I ensure I work with people that are passionate about film and that are driven to create the best final product possible. In turn everyone is surrounded by people who are pushing each other to be the best they can be.

Comedy is always a difficult genre to create; there are so many pitfalls that can catch you out. Whether it is choosing the right cast, crew or staying true to your initial script when you have heard the jokes so many times that they are lost to you. You have to make sure you surround yourself with people who really understand the concept of the film. You have to make sure that the energy level is always high on set, you want people to be having fun because that will come across on camera and picking the right cast and crew is essential for that.

I had worked with my Director of Photography Jamie Montgomery on my first film and he had since worked on several projects. We had never had a chance to work together again. I was excited because not only is an extremely dedicated individual but also we had a great relationship and we had a shared vision for how we wanted the piece to look.

I couldn't tell you about the shooting experience without mentioning the talented Make Up Artists who worked on *Already Dead*, Nina Igbino and Elloise India Willett. From the get go I knew I had to find someone that would get the kind of Zombies we were looking to create. I knew if the makeup looked silly or it was under par my audience would instantly switch off.

There have been so many amazing make up jobs on so many different films and TV shows over the years and I wanted to create zombies that paid homage to that. The hardest part for the make up department was creating zombies that had enough of a decay that our audience could see that they were undead but at the same time we didn't want them to be too scary because I wanted them to sympathise with them.

Nina worked hard created the make up for George, we choose a purple colour for him and gave him a bloodless look while giving him boils and veins ass opposed to covering him with blood. In turn this made his appearance more appealing the viewer and gave

Darren Ruston far more movement in his face enabling him to push his performance forward.

Elloise worked on both Lynn and Jeff and for them I wanted something different. I wanted each Zombie to be at a slightly different stage of decay and to have small indications of what may have happened in their past so with Elloise I focused on blood, cuts and looking more at the Dawn of the Dead style zombies. Because Lynn and Jeff only appear in small scenes it enabled us to be a little more creative. The scenes are lead by their appearance and the narrative is punctuated by them being more decayed.

With any short film you are always pulling in a lot of favours and it is only if the people involved are truly passionate about the project that they will work with you to make a great film. I was lucky, I had a great team who came on set each and every day willing to do the best work they could and you can see that in every frame of the film.

Why a mockumentary?

I've always loved this style of filming making, from being obsessed as a teenager with THE OFFICE to enjoying more modern mockumentary shows like PARKS AND RECREATION.

With the endless options of streaming I find myself binge watching documentaries. I love the narrative of a documentary, so many times you can watch a film and the real human story is lost in all the cool shots and explosions. With a documentary you get to see honest emotion. Documentaries have taught me so much about writing including story development and good, quality dialogue. It's also great source creating truthful characters in your scripts.

The beauty that this particular style of filmmaking gives you is the sense of reality. It enables you to tell real human stories that an audience can relate to. The mockumentary style allowed me to push the film further than just funny images of a zombie at work. I was able to present a real world narrative but encapsulate it using an iconic genre that would make it more accessible to an audience than it may otherwise have been.

The style lends itself heavily to the comedy aspects of the film in much the same way as the drama. Inspiration comes from the world around us, from the people we meet and the day-to-day experiences we have. In a mockumentary you are almost forced to ensure that the scenes are dripping in truthful situations, they form the basis of every scene. In turn this basis of honesty and truth will carry you forward for scenes that may be somewhat more imaginative such as expecting an audience to accept a brain-eating zombie as a hard working and loving individual.

Overall the choice to create a mockumentary has given the raw and honest feel to the film I wanted. Each shot is not perfectly exposed or perfectly framed showing that these characters are broken and their views are twisted. The film could have been shot as a traditional narrative but it would have become too preachy and I think the audience wouldn't have accepted the characters and the situations as easily.

What did you shoot the film on and why?

We used the Canon 5D Mark 3 for all the filming. I've had the camera myself for little over 2 years and it is a true workhorse. It's simple to use and gives such a great image straight out of the camera. I've used it on everything from short commercials to short films. It doesn't pack the same image quality as the high-end cameras but with the budget we had I had to stick with what I could afford. In my opinion it's never about the camera you have it's about the person using it. You can have the best camera in the world but if you can't tell a story it doesn't matter.

For the most part I stuck with the 50 mm Standard F1.4 Lens, it's a favourite lens of mine like so many others and although it is at the very low end of the budget scale if you use it with the right lighting the image you can achieve is amazing. For *ALREADY DEAD* I wanted to keep our frame close and intimate; so there are very few wide shots throughout the film to ensure the audience feels they are a part of the characters lives.

When we did shoot wide we were using a 28 – 80mm EF Zoom Lens, again the low end but my DOP Jamie Montgomery knew his stuff and was able to get some great shots using natural light. We were really lucky in regards to this, we had a great few days with only one day being sunny and over exposing our shots, to counter act this we moved our locations around to get the best lighting. I was keen not to use too much studio lighting as I wanted to give the footage a natural feel and blasting my characters with lights just felt like over kill, plus I think Darren Ruston's make up would have just melted off.

And Post-Production?

I edited the film myself; I have built a great understanding of the editing process and pride myself on having a particular talent for it. I enjoy putting together the pieces of the movie and creating a narrative in the editing suite. Editing is all about feeling out a scene and using your instinct, I couldn't give you a clear cut answer as to when is a good place to cut or to what transition to use. For me I watch over and over and if something doesn't feel right I go back and I find out what it is. There are so many small things that can be distracting to a viewer whether it's a hand in the wrong place or someone's hair I like to ensure as much as possible I am paying attention to these small details because the moment your audience losses their attention you as an editor haven't done your job.

The extremely talented Thomas Vernau graded the film on Da Vinci Resolve. This was the first time I'd worked with him, when I originally started filmmaking I was wearing lots of different hats but as time moved on I slowly relinquished that control. I can't do everything and why would I want to? It's far more beneficial for your film to have the best people for each job.

It's always nerve-racking working with a new crewmember especially in post, because you sometimes you are mainly speaking over email. With Tom is was a great back and forth from the get go, he's extremely talented and knowledgeable about colour and I ensured that I gave him as much details and examples as possible to help create the look I wanted. He understood what I wanted to achieve with my narrative and translated that to the colour of the film. It's great when someone comes on board a project and just gets it.

For my visual effects I knew I wanted to keep it low key. I was aware that as a documentary I didn't want the effects to pull my audience out of the moment. With so

much natural surrounding and considering I'm already asking my viewer to accept Zombies getting the visual effects was a concern of mine. Having said this I am lucky enough to know an amazing visual effects artist Ricky J Payne who I work with on a regular basis. It never ceases to amaze me what he is able to do, I confess visual effects is not my strong point at all but myself and Ricky have a great relationship and I'm able to present my ideas and he can really run with it. I will always run through with him in Pre-Production what visual effects I need and ensure that when I'm on set he clarifies that he is able to achieve what I want in post. Through having him involved at each point it enables me to feel comfortable that we can get what we need once we have everything in the can. For this particular project Ricky used Adobe After Effects.

Working on the sound mix for the film was Filipe Pereira. I had met him on a previous project and was so impressed by his level of knowledge at such a young age, combine this with his passion, dedication, attitude, the speed and quality of his work; he truly was a diamond in the rough. Our main issue was traffic in London (as is always the case) and the questions directed to our Zombies off camera. We recorded sound on the Rode NTG 2 Mic through a Zoom H4N recorder which is a great set up for run and gun shoots but has it's negatives. With the Mic being directional and our emphasis being on the lead characters we picked up clean dialogue from them but were losing our interviewer, meaning we had to ADR some of the lines. I'm not a fan of ADR; I think if it can be avoided it should be. You never quite capture the same feel by recording in studio and trying to match the sound. We worked on an initial mix with studio ADR and it just didn't feel right. So we went to a space similar to the location we originally filmed in and tried to emulate the original recordings. It worked out great! The sound was matched perfectly and I was so happy with the final mix. Filipe has an amazing ear and he adds very small details that underpin a scene and drive the narrative forward.

Finally scoring the film was Ed Harris. A great composer who I had heard on a few short films a friend of mind had produced. I contacted him because he has worked in the horror genre previously and I wanted to see if I could take that style and incorporate it into *Already Dead*.

I worked with temporary tracks for my edit and kept these in place for Ed to work from and then allowed him to go away and bring his ideas to me. This was the first time I had worked with a composer and it was a refreshing experience to be able to have music custom made for my work. I was clear from the outset that I wanted the music to have less of a cinematic feel. I wanted to underscore certain moments while still feeling natural to the audience. We worked through the narrative story and used the music to follow our lead Zombie George taking our audience from an upbeat quirky Jazz style opening to a sad but hopeful ending. Ed was great to work with, each time I would list my notes for his work and he would work tirelessly to ensure each piece was working for the scene and me. I've been spoilt and now the idea of using temp tracks for my work scares me.

Did you intend *Already Dead* to make a statement?

Honestly no, it wasn't my intention to make any kind of statement. Initially I wanted to create a short film that would make people laugh and entertain them for 15 minutes. I formulated the character of George in my head and just wanted to bring him to life on screen.

But while I'm in the writing process I allow myself to be an open book and I take in everything around me as inspiration, if something affects me or sparks my inspiration I run with it. As I developed the script I was watching a lot of news stories involving racism and prejudice. What struck me the most about these stories was the strength of these individuals to wake up each morning and brush aside the abuse and just get on with it. They would keep their struggles inside so that they could face the day and enjoy their own life, placing a smile on their face before walking out into the world. I realised George was a perfect representation of this.

| The film is about exactly that, people who don't express their feelings openly. Each character is cocooned in their own world, afraid to express their true opinions to others | for fear of a backlash, which in turn leaves them depressed and d their problems unresolved.

I wanted to show people that there are two sides to every story and that judging someone because of the race, religion, gender or even background before getting to know them is a very shallow way of looking at the world.

| In today's society we've lost our sense of connection to one and other, which seems strange considering we've never been more connected. I never set out to create a film with a strong message but as a filmmaker you place your own views and opinions into your film, how strong they are is up to you.

How was the casting process?

Great! I've worked on several projects with Darren Ruston and he was instantly my first choice for the part of George. He has an amazing quality about him that makes him a very empathetic actor; it is easy for the audience to like him, which in turn means they want to root for him.

The supporting cast were all either people I had worked with or individuals I had wanted to work with for some time; Shelley Davenport is an amazing young actress who I had the pleasure of working alongside in Web Series CUPID, she brings a refreshing honesty to all her characters and even though her supporting role is small the image of her glassy eyed and impaled with a small Lego man will stick with me forever.

Each brought their own unique take on the script and the characters giving each of their characters a unique perspective on the world, Shelley Davenport, Darren Ruston and Luke Shaw all worked with me to create our own form of Zombie language that would enable our audience to form an understanding of the dialogue, they each chose individual accents and level of speech depending on their level of 'undead'.

Being a Writer and Director enables me to have the freedom to change the script while on set and choosing a cast that were able to improvise and adapt to the scenes was key. I would always allow for my actors to breathe and create in the scenes. In particular I worked with both Adam Diggle and Simon Bellars to create improvised dialogue, they both came with strong ideas of who their character was and I was able to throw unplanned questions at them and gain some golden unscripted dialogue. In fact many of Adam's lines end up in the final film. I think allowing my actors the freedom to explore creates such an interesting dynamic in the scenes and enables me to push them further.

Combine these with the amazing energy of Tony Cook who is a star in the making and an actor I was very lucky to get. In between working on his latest feature DARK ASCENSION he managed to fit in a days worth of filming for me. Finally Andrea Newland an amazingly dedicated actress full of creative ideas, funny as hell (even though her role comic) and highly experienced having worked in TV for many years. I have to admit I was blessed with my cast, each and every performance is amazing and it truly is an ensemble film.

With so many Zombie films out there, what makes Already Dead different?

I'm a huge fan of Zombie stories. Films and TV shows like THE WALKING DEAD, MAGGIE, EVIL DEAD, and SHAUN OF THE DEAD. These are all a brilliant example of the Zombie genre but I wanted to make my own version.

ALREADY DEAD is built around my own views, on society and my own experience of disease. I lost my father to cancer; my cousin to suicide and my sister is a recovering alcoholic each was inflicted with a form of disease that they couldn't control and they each struggled privately in their own way.

A lot of Zombie films recently deal with love. I wanted to create something that looked at the darker side of Zombies and society. This isn't a story about Zombies finding their way back to the living or being accepted into everyday life, it's about the ignorance of our society and the hatred that so many humans harbour.

The film relies heavily on the documentary style and the team and myself have created a naturalist film that touches on themes of depression, prejudice and illness. It's a human story, one that the audience can really relate to even if they haven't experienced the urge to eat a human brain.

Ultimately this is my take on the Zombie genre and by combining my ideas with the cast and crew I have assembled we have made a completely new story for people to enjoy. It's more than Zombies eating brains; it's a unique look at a much-loved monster.

With such strong themes how did you balance the drama and the comedy?

I've always enjoyed dry comedies, comedies that are matter of fact. I absolutely love IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN PHILEDELPHIA and LOUIE. Both shows deal with very taboo subjects and they do so in an intelligent way. Ensuring at each turn that when they do address a taboo subject it is matter of fact; it is honest and is their own opinion. I think when you work with comedy if you don't take a standpoint on the subject you are discussing then why are you even making the point?

When I watch comedies I won't always be laughing at the obvious jokes but instead I will enjoy the off cut or asides jokes; a quip dropped in at the end of a large monologue or duologue that shows the ridiculousness of a situation is an amazing tool. Characters that recognise the jokes within the scene and comment on are great devices for making an audience laugh and also making a subtle statement.

The biggest problem I had was the constant battle not to push it too far in terms of slapstick comedy, I didn't want the film to become "Carry On Zombies" I wanted to

ensure that the film came across as a serious documentary so I used certain jokes to lighten the mood enabling the viewer to digest the serious themes of the film while enjoying the comedy of it.

To ensure that the right balance was met was also about ensuring that the actors really understood the comedy and themes in the writing. So much of the film rests on their performances. If the actors push it too far it can really put off the audience but if they hold back, if they perform the characters as if they're real and that the problems they face are no different to ours then you can really play with the comedy and the drama.

It truly was a collaborative process between the actors and myself, picking and choosing when and where to find the laughs and drama. I think that process really shines through within the film, each actor portrays their characters with the exact sentimentality that's needed and never tips over the edge, what more could I ask for?

Comedy and misery go hand in hand. I suffer from depression myself and I deal with it every day. In social situations people would see a jolly individual, while at home I would be struggling with inner turmoil and this comes across in my work. I find it hard to have one without the other and even when my comedy is light hearted underneath usually bubbles sadness. If you can find the perfect balance between comedy and tragedy, on screen it is raw and honest. The team and myself found that balance and I hope my audience can enjoy that.

What have you learned from directing *Already Dead* that will translate into your future work?

I think any Director will tell you that they are constantly learning. You have to keep evolving because no shoot day, edit day or project is ever the same. Even when a problem arises and you have to change your initial plans it isn't a bad thing, it opens your eyes and makes you aware of what can go wrong so that you can assure it won't happen next time.

After changing our shooting schedule from **three** continuous days to **five** due to a change of location and a crewmembers schedule changing I had to create entirely new characters and scenes. I had four days to write and cast two new scenes to ensure I would fill out the desired run time and that the story would flow well.

I managed to get no sleep but created both Lynn and Jeff in those few days, I added Shelley Davenport, Tony Cook and Luke Shaw to the cast and we shot the scenes. Ultimately it helped to create a wider scope to the film and these scenes and the performances from the actors have become some of my favourite aspects of the film. Plus I never would have had Elloise create a small Lego man lodged into a Zombies neck and that would be nothing short of a tragedy.

If I hadn't experienced those issues I could have had a completely different film. In future I will keep my mind open to all possibilities and embrace the problems as they only make you a better filmmaker

What do you want people to gain from watching *Already Dead*?

Put bluntly, to be entertained. Some might laugh at the idea of a Zombie in the real world and others may get the deeper themes of the film.

I hope that by watching this film it will get some people thinking about themselves and the world around them. Film is a hugely powerful medium and comedy is a great tool to encourage open discussion about certain subjects that might be considered taboo. I hope *Already Dead* can encourage the viewer to explore these issues. Of course if you just want to laugh at Zombies and ignorant human that would be amazing too.

Ultimately I want the audience to sit down and enjoy 15 minutes with these characters, love or hate them. If afterwards they are smiling, laughing or discussing then I've done my job.

What is the plan for the future of film?

The film will begin its festival journey in 2016. Accompanying the film is a feature length version, which pushes the themes and the comedy of the short even further. We begin to see more of a global impact of the themes in the short. The short film will give people a taste of this much larger story.

While the film is travelling the world and picking up steam will actively be looking for investors and producers to bring the full feature to life and bring the world of *Already Dead* to a bigger audience, it's exciting!

But until then the team have done such a great job on the film. My hope is that each and every member gets recognition for the hard work and passion they put into the project and I can't wait for everyone to see it.

ALREADY DEAD

About the Cast

DARREN RUSTON/GEORGE

Darren trained at the Guildford School of Acting and has been a professional actor for nearly thirty years.

Theatre credits include: THE LESSON by Ionesco; HENRY V and HUCKLEBERRY FINN both directed by Joe Harmston; IPHIGENIA directed by Loveday Ingram; HOBSON'S CHOICE and THE STRIKE OF 1889 by Robert Hamilton.

Television credits: EASTENDERS (BBC), WYCLIFFE (ITV), CASUALTY (BBC) AND THE DETECTIVES (BBC).

Film credits: Glen in THE SHOUTING MEN, DARJEELING

Darren has also appeared in many commercials both in the UK and Internationally. He has most recently completed the web series CUPID in which he plays the title role and was NOMINATED for BEST COMEDIC ACTOR at the MIAMI WEB FEST 2015. He is a seasoned actor who brings a breathe of fresh air to each and every character he portrays. He has a large range and ensures that when he appears on stage or screens his performances is dripping with honesty and integrity.

ALREADY DEAD

Director's Biography

Michael James Dean / Writer & Director

Michael is an award winning Writer, Director and Actor from South London working in Film (Short and Feature), TV and Online content.

In 2013 Michael founded POSH DINOSAUR PRODUCTIONS creating new and original content for Film, TV and Online media. Since Michael launched the company, it has gone from strength to strength. Michael's first short film DARJEELING (2013) was selected for the Top Shorts Film Festival and the Los Angeles Cinefest. In 2015 Michael wrote, directed and starred in original comedy web series CUPID (2015). The series was an official selection at ten international festivals picking up four nominations including Best Comedic Writing (Miami Web Fest 2015), Promising UK Web Series (UK Web Fest 2015) and Winning Best Web Series (Digitalmation Awards May 2015). Currently ALREADY DEAD (2016), written and directed by Michael, is touring festivals in April 2016. The trailer has already won the Awardeo Trailer of the Week.

In 2016 Michael will be developing three feature scripts including a full-length version of ALREADY DEAD and Horror Feature A LONG WEEKEND alongside a Comedy Series for TV and two original Web Series concepts. Michael will also be starring in STALKER by Ricky J Payne.

Over the years Michael has developed a distinct style both on and off screen. He is a raw talent creating characters that are unique, exciting and entertaining. Michael continues to drive his career forward with a drive and passion to produce high quality work both in front and behind the camera.

ALREADY DEAD

Credits

POSH DINOSAUR PRODUCTIONS

Presents

A Film by

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

Directed by

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

CAST

George

Lynn

Jeff

David

Dr Bomar

Marcus

Freddie

Attacker

DARREN RUSTON

SHELLEY DAVENPROT

LUKE SHAW

TONY COOK

ANDREA NEWLAND

ADAM DIGGLE

SIMON BELLARS

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

Written by

Produced by

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

ABDUL CHOUDHURY

Cinematography

Script Supervisor

JAMIE MONTGOMERY

LUCY NOBLE

Make Up Artist (George)

Make Up Artist (Lynn, Jeff)

NINA IGBINO

ELLOISE INDIA WILLET

Edited by

Sound Designer/Dubbing Mixer

Colourist

VFX Supervisor

MICHAEL JAMES DEAN

FILIPE PERIERA

THOMAS VERNAU

RICKY J PAYNE

Score Composed by

Featuring Music from

ED HARRIS

OF COURSE NOT

“Opening Titles”

Written and Performed by Ed Harris

“Zombie Oath”

Written and Performed by Ed Harris

“Dead Good Zombies”

Written and Performed by Ed Harris

“Zombie Song”

Written and Performed by Of Course Not

The Filmmakers Would Like To Thank

Glynis Day
Sarah Day

Victoria Brunson
Invisible Darkness

Back Room Cinema

For my father Raymond and cousin Ryan, forever in my heart. I miss you both.

Filmed On Location in Croydon, London and Brixton, London

The incidents portrayed and the names herein are fictitious and any similarity to the name, character or history of any actual persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and unintentional

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