

"DEAD AIR"

A short screenplay

by

Steven JC Johnson

FIRST DRAFT
8th SEPTEMBER, 2010

COPYRIGHT © STEVEN JC JOHNSON 2010.
THIS SCREENPLAY MAY NOT BE USED
OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE EXPRESS
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR

FADE IN:

INT. CENTRAL LONDON TV NEWS STATION - STUDIO - DAY

We are in a small television studio. Three large, mounted cameras are pointing at a MALE NEWSREADER and a FEMALE NEWSREADER. Behind them is a curved wall upon which are projected images of devastation from around London.

In the deep shadows at the back of the studio, a SECURITY GUARD stands with arms folded. He is TOM DEBNEY, middle-aged, balding, yet physically imposing. Beside him stands a YOUNG WOMAN holding a clipboard.

We CUT to a shot of the news report currently underway.

MALE NEWSREADER

The staggering events in London continue to shock the world, two days after they began.

FEMALE NEWSREADER

What began as a small outbreak of influenza has rapidly brought the city to a standstill and troops onto the streets.

The young woman leans towards Tom.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't know why we're still here. Both Sky News and the BBC evacuated their studios yesterday.

TOM

We're thirty floors up. I guess the boss thinks we'll be safe until the army clears things up.

The young woman snorts.

YOUNG WOMAN

Clear things up? He's not here, is he? Have you looked out of the window, Tom? (he shakes his head) Well go and take a look. Go on. We need to be far, far away from here.

Tom looks down at her and she shoos him off. He smiles and creeps out of the studio.

INT. CENTRAL LONDON TV NEWS STATION - CORRIDOR - DAY

Tom emerges from the studio into a dim corridor, all of its windows coated with thick, black paint. He waits until the studio door quietly clicks shut and he moves to one of the windows furthest away from his position.

He opens the window a crack and peers out. Far below, he can see rooftops and a couple of streets. All is quiet and nobody is moving. No people. No cars or buses.

TOM

(to himself)

What's she on about? There's nothing goin' on down there.

He sniffs and we see a wispy cloud of smoke drift by the window. Tom pushes the window fully open and we see the London skyline in flames. Helicopters and jets cross the sky in the distance and muffled explosions erupt from between the capital's myriad buildings.

TOM

Fuck me!

The CRACK of gunfire below has him looking down, leaning out of the window. We see a squad of six soldiers opening fire on a shuffling mob, slowly moving down the street towards them.

Bullets rip into the zombies and Tom smiles as many of them fall. His smile fades as another crowd runs SCREECHING out of an alley and falls upon the soldiers, tearing them apart.

When they are done with the soldiers, the creatures begin pouring into the TV station's building, leaving behind a glistening, crimson smear where the soldiers had once been.

TOM

Jesus Christ!

He runs back towards the studio, leaving the window wide open. He pulls open the door and sunlight floods into the dark room beyond.

INT. CENTRAL LONDON TV NEWS STATION - STUDIO - DAY

The young woman rushes over to Tom and quickly pulls the door closed, glaring at the security guard sternly. She speaks to him in hushed tones.

YOUNG WOMAN

Bloody hell, Tom! You know we're on air!

TOM

(loudly)

Fuck the news, Sarah! We've got to get out of here! The zombies are in the building!

SARAH

(quietly, angrily)

Keep your voice down! I thought you said we were safe up here. Sealed off from the rest of the building.

Tom looks around, almost panicking.

TOM

Yeah, I suppose. We set the lifts to stop at the floor below and the stairwells are locked. (pause) But I just saw hundreds of them tearing some soldiers apart.

A MAN, wearing headphones walks up to them, angry.

MAN

For fuck's sake, Tom. We're on the air. Keep it down! Sarah, you're the floor manager. Manage!

Tom glares at him as Sarah looks on uncomfortably.

TOM

Are you out of your mind, Nigel? Have you seen what's going on out there?

NIGEL

We have a job to do. The public needs to know what's happening out there. We have...

A SCREAM comes from across the studio and they all turn to see the female newsreader holding her hands to her mouth. On the screen behind, a news crew is being attacked by zombies, their camera still rolling.

The male newsreader tries to remain calm as the live feed continues to play. Blood spurts onto the camera and we hear the screeching and groaning of the zombies as they begin feeding on the unfortunate news team.

MALE NEWSREADER

This is live footage from, I believe, close to Tower Bridge. Is that correct? Yes. Our camera crew were, er, sent to get pictures of what is going on in London. (pause) Do we have to keep watching this?

He looks off camera.

MALE NEWSREADER (CONT.)

Really. Those are people out there. Kill the feed.

The footage keeps playing, the fallen camera somehow landing on the ground the right way up. Half a human body is dragged across the screen, entrails squelching behind.

FEMALE NEWSREADER

Turn it off, for God's sake!

Nigel talks into his headset microphone.

NIGEL

Barry? Barry! Kill the live OB feed. Barry? (looks to Tom) They're not answering.

Tom looks to the studio door, terrified.

TOM

Fuck! They got up here. How the hell did they get up here?

SARAH

Tom, don't you think you should go and check on the gallery?

TOM

Fuck that! I'm not leaving this room! We should barricade the doors.

He rushes across to the studio doors and pulls out some plastic cable ties from his pocket. He fastens several through the door handles and pulls them tight, securing the doors.

NIGEL

What about Barry and Michelle and the gallery? (pause) Tom!

Nigel follows Tom's gaze and sees the three cameramen have their cameras trained on them. The newsreaders are also watching what is going on, ignoring the now still autocue.

NIGEL

What are you doing? Keep those cameras on the talent!

CAMERAMAN #1

I don't think so, Nigel. They've got nothing to read and I think the feed is still going out live from this camera.

Tom rushes to the camera and stares into the lens.

TOM

If the army or police or anyone can see this, we need help. The zombies are in our building. It's Canary Wharf. We have women here. We're trapped on the thirtieth floor.

In the background, the live feed from the outside broadcast crew is still playing on the screens behind the newsreaders. The female newsreader is staring into space. The male newsreader is looking to Nigel.

NIGEL

Christ! Get the camera back on John. John, go to your sheets. Read the fucking sport or something.

The male newsreader, JOHN, holds up some sheets of paper.

JOHN

We've done all this already.

NIGEL

Then read it all again! Anything. You're a fucking newsreader, for Christ's sake. Get that camera on him now!

The camera turns on John, who looks around, unsure and scared.

JOHN

As, er, you have probably, er, seen, we appear to be trapped inside our studio in London. Our security guard has pleaded for assistance and we can only hope that some arrives soon. (pause) Amanda?

He looks over at the female newsreader, AMANDA.

AMANDA

What?

JOHN

Do you have anything to add?

AMANDA

Yes. Actually, yes, I do. (looks straight at camera) Billy, mummy is okay. Take care of our baby, George. I'm sorry I'm not there, but our glorious editor, the mighty Mr Eastman, decided we should stay on the air, safe in our castle in the sky. (pause) He's probably dead now. Good. I'm glad.

JOHN

Amanda, please.

Behind Tom, there is a loud HAMMERING on the studio doors. Sarah screams and clutches her clipboard tightly, as though it will protect her.

Tom rushes to the doors and listens. The hammering stops.

TOM

Is anybody out there? Hello?

There is a long pause and then the HAMMERING starts again. Tom steps back.

NIGEL

You think it's them? The zombies?

The camera has turned on them once more. Behind the newsreaders, the OB camera has finally died and all we can see is static.

TOM

I think so.

Tom unclips a long nightstick from his belt and holds it ready. He approaches the door once more and presses his ear to it.

TOM

Hello?

MAN'S VOICE

(O.S. behind door)

Tom! Is that you? Let us in! Please!

SARAH

Jesus, that's Barry! Open the door,
Tom.

Tom pulls a penknife from his pocket and opens it up. His hand hovers over the cable ties.

TOM

What if there are zombies out there?

BARRY

(O.S. behind door)

Open the bloody door!

Tom flicks the knife and the plastic strips fall to the carpet. The door bursts open and BARRY and a middle-aged woman fall inside the studio. Tom looks out of the door, sees nobody else outside and quickly closes it, securing it shut with cable ties again.

Barry and the woman are on their hands and knees, panting. The woman has a blood seeping from a wound on her forehead.

SARAH

Michelle, let me look at that.

She helps the woman up and guides her to one side, where a first aid kit is affixed to a wall. As she helps the woman, Nigel stands over Barry.

NIGEL

What the hell are you doing here? We
have a show to run.

Barry looks up and begins chuckling. He stands up and smiles at Nigel.

BARRY

A show? A show, Nigel? We barely made it out of the gallery! Those fucking things are everywhere! And you're worrying about the show? Are you insane?

Barry notices the cameras trained on him and the others.

BARRY (CONT.)

You might as well not bother, guys. The feed isn't going out any more.

The cameramen step away from their machines and John and Amanda sit back in their chairs, relaxing for the first time.

NIGEL

What do you mean, the feed's not going out?

BARRY

The government took over all the bands, Nigel. Right before we got out. (he looks at the others) Have any of you managed to get a message out? Does anybody know we're here? Haven't any of you got a mobile phone or something?

TOM

None of us have phones, Barry. They're not allowed in the studio. I thought I'd got a message out, but if you say the feed is dead...

A scream interrupts him. They look across at Sarah, who is standing over Michelle, her hands to her mouth. Tom rushes over.

SARAH

I think she's dead! She was okay a minute ago and then she just flopped down and stopped breathing.

TOM

We have to tie her up and put her in the green room.

SARAH

Why? She's dead, Tom.

TOM

Is she?

Tom produces some more cable ties and fastens them around Michelle's hands and feet, tying them together. He gestures to Barry and the two men carry Michelle's body away, towards a small door on the opposite side of the studio.

SARAH

Nobody knows we're here, do they?

She turns to look at Nigel and he shakes his head.

SARAH (CONT.)

Then we're fucked. This plague could be all over the place by now. Everywhere. (she looks directly into camera) This is it. The end.

FADE OUT.

THE END

FIRST DRAFT
8th SEPTEMBER, 2010

COPYRIGHT © STEVEN JC JOHNSON 2010.
THIS SCREENPLAY MAY NOT BE USED
OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE EXPRESS
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR