



[Interview #36: James Dimelow](#)

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James Dimelow is a British playwright and screenwriter whose work includes *Consequence* and *Romance*. Based in East Anglia, he is currently working on a series of short films, whilst continuing to research and develop other forthcoming projects.

What or who inspired you to become a writer?

I have always wanted to write, and have never thought about doing anything else.

As both my Mother, and her Father, wrote for their respective local newspapers, I feel that I have inherited the family storytelling gene. The knock-on effect of repeatedly seeing my family in action, from quite an early age, allowed me to soon gain an understanding of the importance of being able to tell a good story on the page.

What writers have been most influential to your style and approach to writing?

Once I discovered that screenplays were sometimes published, I began to read as many of them as I possibly could.

For example, whenever a new Quentin Tarantino film hit screens, I would be in my element by meeting some mates at the cinema, before heading home to read the script, and listen to the recently-released soundtrack album.

It was soon after this I then started reading a great deal of other screenplays. These ranged from *The Third Man* – a personal favourite – to Dennis Potter and classic Doctor Who serials, and included almost everything else in between.

I even went so far as to purchase copies of scripts that weren't readily available – so that I could gain a deeper understanding of film – from companies selling them in the classified section of the popular movie magazines.



The Crying Game (1992) – Dir: Neil Jordan

One of the screenplays that had the most impact on me was Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*. I am still amazed at how subtly layered the storytelling is. Some of the foreshadowing in the dialogue is absolutely amazing – even after it becomes increasingly apparent where the story is heading.

Although they are filmmakers, and not necessary screenwriters, I have also been heavily influenced by the work of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Tim Burton. The latter's own highly-stylized Gothic vision of the world always seems to have resonated with me.

How did you find the transition from playwriting to screen? (Did it pose any unexpected challenges?)

From day one I always wanted to write for the screen. So far, at least, I feel that I have read far more screenplays than I have stage plays. That said, in terms of understanding how scene pacing and dialogue work, they have been both equally important to me.

In my younger years, whenever I was watching anything on screen, there was a constant desire to work out how it originally came across on the page. This then subsequently led to an ongoing quest to understand how filmmaking works.

I have recently enjoyed having the freedom to tell stories for the screen. You cannot really underestimate how liberating it is to be able to convey fast-moving action, by using short snappy scenes and minimal dialogue, in order to keep the plot moving.

The storytelling freedom I have found in screenplays is something that I have yet to see replicated in any other medium.

How do you go about developing your ideas and how do you find the scriptwriting process?

Whenever I have a fresh story idea, I always begin by having a quite an active brainstorming session.

During this initial brainstorming session, I write down my immediate thoughts, as and when they come into my head. Mentally this feels like I have just been handed a jigsaw puzzle, and then I have to figure out for myself how to piece everything together.

Right from the start, I usually know who the central characters are, and also what arcs they will be experiencing on their journey. After this I then start to mould the other key elements around the characters – with a certain amount of flexibility – whilst still keeping a focus on the central core of the

film. By following this trusted process, I am then able to create a credible world for the characters to inhabit and to explore.

I also like to research a lot. I thoroughly enjoy reading around numerous subjects, along with watching any film or TV series, which I feel can then feed into my latest project.

Sometimes my original creative thoughts are the ones that stick. Although, on a few occasions, I have changed certain crucial elements as I have gone along, in order to make the story more focused, and the unfolding action more enticing for audiences.

Do you believe zero budget filmmaking could be the 'fringe theatre' of film? In that sense, could zero budget filmmaking be celebrated as a workshop space for filmmakers to experiment and hone ideas?

There are so many talented directors out there, and the quality of a many zero budget films only serves to reflect this.

The Independent Film scene works extremely well as a constant breeding ground for new talent – both in front of and behind the camera – and it is vital that this continues.

It is inspiring for me to know that a film has been made with compassion, rather than the commercial need to produce a 'product' for a much larger company, which then compromises the filmmaker's original vision.

What advice would you give to struggling writers looking to gain more exposure for their work?

I would say to any struggling writer to use Social Media to their advantage.

By using Twitter – for example – it is now more straightforward to connect with other similarly-minded creatives. It is also a great way to discover what the latest developments are on the international Indie Film scene.

What motivates you as a writer?

I have always felt the need to tell a good story and to entertain people in this way.

Even though I have never wanted to perform, I have always appreciated the ability of actors to bring the best out of a script, and to offer a different perspective on the developing drama.

Knowing that actors have this skill means a lot to me. It's amazing how much you can learn simply by watching talented people, such as [Rowena Bentley](#), bring your words to life.

Is there anything you'd change in the film/theatre industries?

In my experience the difference between the film and theatre industries has been quiet stark.

Despite my repeated attempts to break into the theatre industry, it has sometimes felt like a closed shop. It now appears to me – as someone waiting in the wings – that your own personal success in this world is, seemingly, very dependent on who you know, rather than being a true reflection on any abilities that you may have as a writer.

By contrast, I have found the cinema community to be a much more friendly and welcoming place. Everyone I have encountered seems to be as equally enthusiastic about film as myself. As a lifelong film fan, I have taken great comfort in this fact, and this in turn, has then further enhanced my enjoyment of the screenwriting process.

What advice would you give to anyone starting out as a writer?

I would say to any novice writers to just follow your initial instincts.

Do not worry about writing for the market, and trying to suss out what stories you think will sell.

Just tell the tales you want to write, and to also have enough self-belief in your own natural skills and abilities.

What's next for James Dimelow?

I am currently writing my second full-length screenplay.

This zero budget screenplay is for a dark and deeply intimate domestic drama, which has been topped off with a very acidic and bittersweet punch.

My latest feature-length script offers a welcome contrast to the first, which was for a low budget action adventure, that followed in the classic tradition of great British Gothic cinema. Imagine the more fantastical elements of Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* mixed with the down-to-earth relatability – and fun tone – of Russell T Davies' era *Doctor Who*, but with a cool 80s retro horror vibe.



Sleepy Hollow (1999) – Dir: Tim Burton

I really enjoyed writing the above characters so much that I would like to return to them again at some point in the future.

In the meantime, I have written a couple of short films, both of which are quite atmospheric and intense, but in two totally different ways.

The first short film script was for a quite low-key ghost story, which focuses on loss, loneliness and depression, along with the importance of forging new friendships during troubled times. This story was partially inspired by my local walks during 2020's first lockdown, and the interesting interactions I witnessed happening around me.

Meanwhile my other short screenplay reads like an unrelenting fever dream. Due to the abstract nature of this original idea, I think it would work very well as an animation. Although it starts off as an ordinary and straightforward story, once everything comes crashing down, there is ultimately quite a sharp twist in the tale. This is something I would really love to see on the big screen one day.

There are numerous excellent anthology web series online – such as *THREE* (twitter.com/thr3series) – and it would be great to be given the opportunity to contribute to them.

Finally, I would also hope to work with my idols – Neil Jordan and Tim Burton – one day too. I very much doubt this will ever happen – but you never know!

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