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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In this uncertain time of disease and social distancing, owl in space's new existential sci-fi adventure 'Living Things' explores finding meaning in the isolation of pandemic.



At the start of its film festival run, Living Things has already been selected to premiere at the 'London Sci-Fi Film Festival 2020'. However, given the film's relevance to the global outbreak of COVID-19, the director Tom Cozens has chosen to premiere the film online for viewers in self-isolation, which aired on YouTube on 5th April 2020 to a glowing reception:

"This is a brilliant new film made by a talented group of creatives...the prophetic theme of humanity's search for meaning in the context of a pandemic couldn't be more relevant-Check it out."

Amy Orr-Ewing (Author & Public Speaker)

"This is such a fascinating and beautifully made short film. It really got me thinking and reflecting. This work registers owlinspace as a smart and savvy new talent".

Tom Price (Film Critic)

Starring actor David Gyasi (Interstellar, TROY: Fall of a City), and ambitiously filmed at an elevation of 4000m in the peaks of the Swiss and Italian Alps, the film's production visualises an equally ambitious story following the 'Pilgrim's Progress' of an isolated and traumatised man who chooses to face deadly storms and the demons of his past in order to find other life.

Contact: Tom Cozens | tom@owlinspace.com | +447876278325
Electronic Press Kit, Full Film & Trailer At: owlinspace.com/livingthings

OWLinspace PRESENTS

Living Things

‘An existential sci-fi adventure about finding meaning in the isolation of pandemic’

Lead Actor | **David Gyasi** (Interstellar, Troy, Cloud Atlas)

Director & Writer | **Tom Cozens**

Produced by | **owlinspace™**

Logline

When a pandemic leaves a traumatised man isolated, he chooses to face deadly storms and the demons of his past in order to find other life.

Theme

Finding meaning in the isolation of pandemic. This film resonates with many of the issues faced by those in isolation in the wake of COVID-19.

Synopsis

‘Living Things’ explores a not so far off world in which a pandemic, released during a climate disaster, kills off the majority of life. Elijah is (perhaps the only one) immune to this virus and finds himself alone as a child. The only hope he has of seeing other people is the mysterious ‘beacon’; but after getting lost in a storm trying to reach it, he resigns himself to a life of isolation in a hut.

Elijah tries to create meaning for himself by attempting to grow plants. When these attempts fail he increasingly sees his life-giving immunity as a cruel joke. As his mind deteriorates, he starts to experience psychosis, eventually having an episode in which he hears himself as a child, reminding him of the hope for the beacon he once had. Leaving his life of safety behind, spurred on by the quiet hope of his childhood, Elijah once again faces the storm, discovering that his miraculous immunity was perhaps a reflection of the divine within himself.

Director’s Statement

We are meaning makers; driven by a desire to have a reason to exist. As organised religion is deconstructed and postmodern relativism is widely adopted, I sought through ‘Living Things’ to explore how we construct meaning in our own lives.

Whilst parallels can be drawn between the pandemic narrative in Living Things and the threat of Coronavirus, this film resonates most strongly with the very current theme of social isolation. The narrative puts the main character Elijah in isolation: a situation which forces him to go on a ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ towards meaning; and the surroundings of hut, beacon, textbook, plants and mountains reflect the inner working of Elijah’s quest to find significance.

My hope is that in this dark time, ‘Living Things’ might bring hope to those in isolation.

FAQs

Q: Why did you make Living Things?

A: Loneliness is something I'm familiar with. Even when I'm in a room with people I know well, I can start to feel it. What some are calling the loneliness pandemic is only becoming more prevalent as we face social isolation in the wake of COVID-19. Tarkovsky talks of isolation as something which is positive because it forces us to face ourselves. I think intimacy with others is clearly a fundamental part of finding significance in our lives. But I think, whilst isolation can be lonely, it is also a space in which we find intimacy. Both with ourselves and the wholly other. I wanted to tell a story about that.

Q: What was it like to climb to 4000m elevation with a film crew?

A: At 4000m the crew and actors were really struggling with the altitude. For many of them it was their first time going above British mountain heights of say 900m! It took us about 3 times longer than I had planned to get to the location, Gobba di Rollin on the Breithorn, and by the time we were down, I had carried one of the actors on my shoulders for at least a kilometre. Our safety guide seemed calm, but afterwards admitted he was *slightly* concerned.

Q: How do you shoot on a mountain like the Breithorn?

A: Whilst we filmed that money shot overlooking the alps, a number of things went wrong in quick succession. The high wind speed made it almost impossible for me to direct, I had to move right next to each team member to shout in their ears. The winds were so strong in fact that our DoP lost some gear which flew away, even though we'd brought protective covers for his entire rig! Our actors kept on slipping because the wind was blowing the snow off the glacier leaving it just bare ice. We had to dig them little foot holds for grip. Finally, one of the actors got too cold and we ended up having to bring him down quickly. In the process our safety guide broke one of his ski skins because the terrain was so rough. The shot made the film, but it was easily the most difficult shoot I've ever directed. In the end we made it down safely and I can honestly say that was the best hot chocolate and Toblerone I've ever had.

Q: Who are your influences?

A: I'm inspired by the works of existential philosophers like Kierkegaard and Otto, or filmmakers like Tarkovsky, Malick & Kubrick who frequently explored the subject of loneliness. A more recent influence was James Gray's *Ad Astra*. *Living Things* was originally written as a film with no dialogue, but, just like most of Malick's films, *Ad Astra* showed me how powerful voiceover can be in guiding the audience's attention. I think the visual identity of the movie takes a lot of influence from Kubrick's *Space Odyssey 2001*. His minimalist framing, use of colour, and allegorical story telling influenced decisions like creating the contrast between the isolation of Elijah's hut and the warmth of the beacon.

Q: Was the theme of isolation chosen because of COVID-19?

A: Whilst it seems perfectly timed with Coronavirus, this is actually a theme I've been passionate about for years, going all the way back to the founding of my production company owlinspace. The original idea came from a book called 'Idea of the Holy' by the philosopher Rudolf Otto. It explores how we can have experiences like isolation, that invoke a paradoxical mix of emotions in us: those of

both fear and fascination. Our search for meaning is often underpinned by transcendent experiences of this nature, and I wanted to explore them.

Q: What does the film mean?

A: Before making films I studied engineering and philosophy, which sparked my interest in the ways that technology transforms us, particularly the way in which tech has shifted from providing for our basic needs, to self-actualisation. We can now create meaning and significance in our lives in a wealth of new ways. But in this film I wanted to question whether ‘created meanings’ are truly satisfying. When everything is stripped away, friends, comfort, technology, I think it becomes clear that we yearn for a meaning beyond our own creation. But the question is, what do we do with that? Do we believe that meaning can be found? Or must we settle for grasping little moments of meaning within an otherwise meaningless world?

Q: What’s it like shooting with an actor like David Gyasi?

A: David is so humble and put in every effort to make the entire crew feel valued. He’s also an incredible actor. He managed to draw the line really well between having his head in the story and allowing us to be flexible in the difficult filming conditions. After seeing him in Interstellar, I remember thinking he played the isolated scientist part so well, which made him perfect for this part. But it was a tough ask: a film without words required him to convey emotion solely through his movements, but I was super pleased with how he managed to understand the character and bring Elijah to life.

Q: How did you get an actor like David to star in your film?

A: I showed him the script and asked him with coffee and biscuits. My Producer Rachel Brier had met him at an event months before and put me in touch. After seeing the idea he felt it resonated and so he agreed to jump on board. I think getting to work with his son was quite a unique opportunity so that added to the appeal.

Q: What was it like working with a father-son acting team?

A: The dynamic they had together was brilliant. David (the father) was constantly encouraging Nathaniel to give his all, and I think there was something particularly special about their bond, which came through in the film. Whilst in the film Nathaniel is a younger version of David, there is some ambiguity as to the exact relationship between these two characters. To me I wanted them to feel distinct and the same. In Act 3 I wanted the synthesis of the old and new self to feel like two separate people wrestling to work out how they can co-exist. A father-son duo depicted this perfectly.

Q: What did you learn about filmmaking?

A: Firstly, a lot of things are possible. Working with an amazing team, and bringing in the right talent, meant that we were able to think really big with this project, even on our limited budget. But, secondly, it’s really hard to make a good film. Understanding the process of going from idea to distribution has given me so much more respect for good writers, directors, producers, actors and all those that work with them to bring an idea to life. Thirdly, it brought out a lot of perfectionist tendencies in me. Finally saying those words “it’s finished” is so difficult. Then again, if Ridley Scott had left Bladerunner at the theatrical release, we would never have had the “Final Cut” which is infinitely better!

Cast & Crew

Tom Cozens (Writer & Director)



Growing up in the London suburbs, with a love for existential cinema and electronic music, Tom found inspiration for his early films in the every day lives of those around him. At 26, Tom started working for the BBC amongst other production companies, in production and directorial roles, where he developed content connecting technology with existentialism, eventually starting his own production company 'owlinspace'.

Since its foundation, Tom and his team have created more than 50 short films ranging from minidocs to drama shorts. Pursuing his love of existential filmmaking, Tom hopes to create features which explore loneliness, suffering and our pull towards the divine.

Rachel Brier (Producer)



Having worked on previous documentary productions with owlinspace, Producer, Rachel, drew on her previous training in drama, and her experience in event management, leadership and creative entrepreneurship to produce her first short film.

Tom Dennis (Director of Photography)



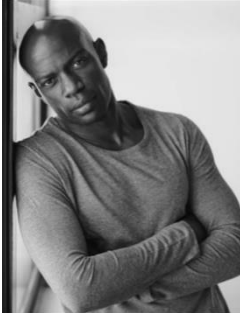
A cinematographer with over 10 years' experience, Tom Dennis has worked behind the camera on a range of TV dramas including *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators* and *Doctors* as well as short films: *Break (2015)*, *Plaster (2012)* and *One Nine Three (2019)*.

Nick Brier (Editor & Sound Engineer)



Passionate about making film that not only engages the audience but inspires them to grapple and explore questions of existence and meaning. Nick's background is in studio engineering and music production, he is experienced in film editing and composition for short form film and documentaries.

David Gyasi (Lead Actor - Elijah)



David is an actor and producer, known for his roles in films such as *Interstellar* (2014), *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (2019) as well as TV series like *Troy: Fall of a City* and *Carnival Row*.

Nathaniel Gyasi (Actor – Young Elijah)



Film Specifications

Length	12:26
Resolution	DCI 4K
Shooting Location	Zermatt Switzerland
Budget	£15,000