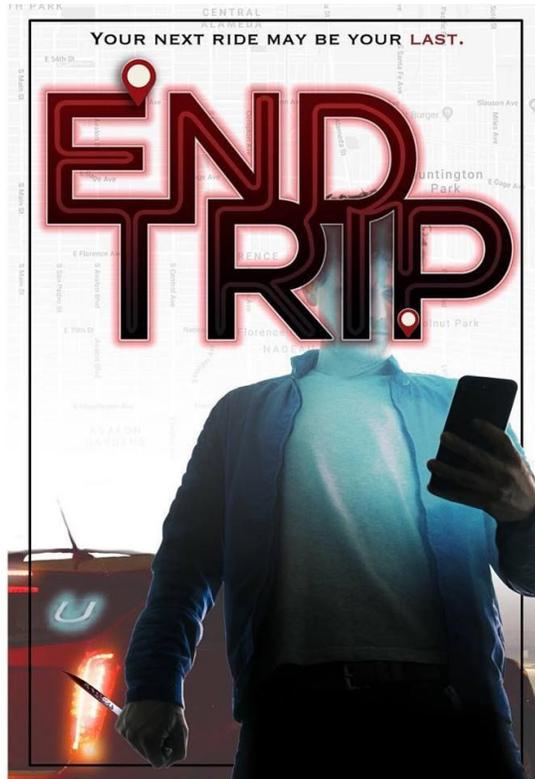


How a low budget film shot in New Orleans is having it's Premiere at the World Famous Mann's Chinese Theatre



New Orleans, commonly referred to as "Hollywood South" has been home to many studio films touting such superstars as Will Smith, Kathy Bates, Woody Harrelson, Jim Carrey, Tom Cruise, and the list could go on forever. However, what you may not know is New Orleans is also home to some budding and beginning filmmakers looking to make waves in the Industry.

Today we are asking some questions to two of the filmmakers of a movie shot completely local to the New Orleans area with an all local cast and crew. The movie, *End Trip*, is a psychological horror/thriller starring Dean J. West, Aaron Jay Rome and Ashley Lenz. While the three leads were producers on the film and Aaron also manned the helm of director and writer. Last but not least in the producer group is Michelle West who plays a supporting role as Megan. The film, *End Trip*.



Synopsis: On a calm night in an average city a hardworking URYDE driver, Brandon, picks up just another fare, Judd. Using interactions that blur the lines between the technological world and the physical one, Judd explains a messy breakup. Brandon offers an empathetic ear and a sympathetic heart to his new friend to help him pick up the pieces. Aggregated profiles, algorithms, links, likes and comments bring people closer. But how close is too close?



We are speaking with Aaron Jay Rome and Dean J. West about what it took to make this film, where it is now, and what we can expect in the near future from these talented filmmakers.

1. What made you two want to be filmmakers in the first place and is this the first film you have made?

Aaron - I just want to take a second to thank you for having us. Thank you! I've been interested in movies since I was a kid. Honestly, most of my earliest memories are watching films with my mom. All types of films.

And to your second question: actually no, this isn't my first film. I co-wrote/directed/produced/starred in a feature called *Go Crazy Go Mad* that just got released on iTunes and Amazon. That movie was a baptism by fire in a lot of ways. Ashley - who plays Steph in *End Trip* - and I wanted to see what it was like to self produce a movie for almost nothing. We set off to make a simple romantic comedy with a total of 12 people and \$2,000 from pre-production to finished film. We actually shot that whole movie in 5 days. We utilized everything we learned from *Go Crazy [Go Mad]* into *End Trip*, which we shot in 6 days. We were out to prove that you can make a quality movie for fractions of what a typical production would spend, not just in money, but time and resources. I think we've definitely succeeded.

Dean - I think for me it was a natural step. I started creating when I was really young. I started acting young as well, but in reality the actor eventually has to be a storyteller. It is at the core of what we are doing. We are creating truth based on the stories in our heads that come from the script. The actor doesn't really have as much control as one might think, obviously. A two minute scene is shot with about 30 minutes of footage and then edited down to what the director and editor want. I wanted a little bit more control and as an actor in 2018 if you are just waiting around for someone to give you a job your butt is going to start hurting. Which could be taken the wrong way. What I mean is that you will be sitting and waiting a lot.

As for part two of this question, no this is not our first feature film, I think you have to get out there and make a few things and learn from those mistakes. I think this is the first one that we were able to put all of that to use and have something that we are truly proud of!



2. Are you both from New Orleans originally?

Dean - I am originally from Lake Charles, LA. I moved to Los Angeles when I was 19. I found a fantastic coach, met some amazing people, got into enough trouble without going to jail, booked some roles as an actor and shot a few of my first shorts and feature films out there as a filmmaker as well. I actually met my wife in L.A., Michelle West, who is originally from Violet, LA. Random information, but her dad was the voice of Tulane for a long time, Ken Berthelot. Michelle was actually Miss Louisiana USA in 2008, so she is about as Louisiana as it can get! Her and I met in L.A. and when the industry started exploding here (New Orleans), we decided to move back and have been working pretty steadily as actors and filmmakers. I also run The Dean West Acting Studio which is based out of New Orleans.

Aaron- I'm from Fort Collins, Colorado, originally. I moved to L.A. when I was 20. I spent 5 years in Los Angeles, a bit lost on how to approach being an actor, but I spent 3 years behind the camera learning the ins and outs of indie filmmaking. After Dean and Michelle moved back to Louisiana, I began formulating a plan as to hit the ground running as an actor. Step one in that plan was to get into Dean's class and really hone my craft. In November of 2010 I moved to New Orleans, got in class and shortly after started auditioning for all the big projects that had set up shop in NoLa. The rest is history.

3. So you guys shot this as an ultra low budget, you guys both produced and acted in it, was that the original plan?

Dean - (both of them smiling) You want to take this?

Aaron - Ha, Sure. Well, I knew I wanted to direct the film. Wait, let me back up a bit. I drove for a couple rideshare companies for a little over 2 years. That's where this story came from, so as an actor, I naturally wrote the role for myself. But between wanting to direct the film, and wanting to make the film more marketable, I decided putting a name in the role would be more beneficial when it came to selling it. Dean and I began reaching out to actors we knew and some we didn't, searching for the perfect "Brandon". Eventually the decision was easy. We found an actor who was on a well known TV show, had a lead role in a \$50M grossing film summer of last year (2017), was looking to cut his teeth in leading feature roles, and last - and most importantly - loved the script and wanted the role. So we hired him.

Dean - I had a pretty good relationship with him, I coached him, and eventually worked with the whole cast of the show he was on as an onset guest coach.

Aaron - Right! So we felt really good about the choice. He'd text me constantly about the role, expressing his excitement - although we knew him personally, we went through his manager and a casting director to make sure everything was done by the books. Eventually the shoot started, which meant flying our lead actor out to New Orleans. Dean and I picked him up from

the airport, and on the way to the hotel he asked us if he could just stay with us at the house instead of the hotel. I remember him saying "we'll create a real synergy" ... "and bro-out while we make the movie." The next day he went to the gym and we started shooting later that night. The first couple days were all night shoots, so we ended up finishing the first night at about 6am, when we went home, had a celebratory drink and started dumping footage together. The *bro-ing out* was in full effect. Cut to the next day; I woke up early to get started for the day and noticed the door to the room our lead was staying in was slightly open, I assumed he went to the gym again. A few hours passed and we started ramping up for an early evening call time. Well, we hadn't heard from him yet, so Ashley started driving between where we were staying and the gym he had gone to the day before. Ashley was on the phone with Michelle when she feared the worst. She had Michelle go into the bedroom to see if his suitcase was there. We cracked the door open and sure enough; his wardrobe was laying out on the bed, the key to the house was laying on a nightstand near some deodorant Dean gave him, even his toothbrush was gone. I remember knowing, if you take your toothbrush with you, you're not coming back. And sure enough, that was January of 2017, we still haven't heard a word from the guy. Long story longer, I walked out and called our main investor to tell him what happened, and told him we had two options: 1) We could save the rest of the money we hadn't spent, and push the shoot or 2) I wrote the role for myself, I could put on the clothes, hop in the driver's seat and we could keep on rolling. He said "I think you'll be great". And here we are!

Dean - Thank god. For a lot of reasons, but, to be nice we can say that I knew Aaron and I opposite each other could entertain anyone for hours just being ourselves. So it was a blessing in disguise.



4. So Aaron where did the idea of End Trip come from?

Aaron - Like I mentioned before, it was an idea that zapped into my head one day after getting off a rideshare shift at about 3 AM. I wrote a short that basically served as a proof of concept that I sent over to Dean. A period of time went by and it still felt like a project I needed to pursue deeper. I always have ideas swimming through, but when they set up shop like *End Trip* did, I think I have to see them through to the end.

5. How were you guys able to make a thriller like this, and get your premiere at the Chinese Theatre for the budget you guys made this at?

Dean - A lot of ingenuity. I would say first, in creating the film we always think ahead of time about what we own how we can make use of it. Our locations were literally my car and my house, and we luckily didn't have to pay much for the other locations we were able to use. We also shot loosely based on the structure used by the Duplass brothers in the making of some of their films. Not to mention our main actors were our producers and we wore a lot of hats. AJ can fill you in from the starting point and he is also releasing something very soon for filmmakers that I will let him fill you in on.

Aaron - Yeah, ingenuity is definitely the name of the game here. I've listened to a lot of business and marketing podcasts from filmmakers and non-filmmakers alike. In setting up this movie, we did use everything we knew we had access to, and that didn't stop at actors, locations and props, but also in devising ways to get this film noticed. I think a lot of filmmakers think of interesting stories to tell, but not necessarily how to get the world to see them. Genre films are always a great way to find an audience, so I knew, on some level, just by making a horror or thriller film we'd have a base number of people interested. The other secret sauce in this process was casting actors that I knew could knock the roles out of the park. I see a lot of low budget horror movies that just can't find, in my opinion, great actors, so suspending disbelief becomes that much harder. I used some methods we came up with on *Go Crazy Go Mad* that warrant some pretty incredible performances without having to shoot the scene 35 times to "find it." In fact, most of the scenes had two takes, tops. I could talk at length about this process, and I actually have. What Dean was referring to is a course I created called *One Grand Film*. It's a step-by-step process for filmmakers to make a feature for \$1,000, and I cover everything from writing to gear to distribution. To answer your question I think it was making every dollar worth \$10 and capturing performances that would be festival worthy. Dances With Films remains to be one of the last top tier strongholds of truly *independent* film festivals. We've graciously accepted their offer of a world premiere, and they also represent a small number of festivals that screens at the Chinese Theaters.



6. Do you have anymore advice, besides some of those great tips you just gave to someone that wants to get started in the film industry.

Dean - So besides what we just spoke of and getting the course AJ is going to be launching, I would say, "start". Don't wait until you're out of school, or after you get this camera, or once you have worked on a few films. Just start making stories, it can be with your nephew, or little cousin as the star. It doesn't matter. Just start making stories with a great beginning, middle, and end. Get friends that are like minded and vibe on the same level, and find some mentors you look up to. See about getting on sets, even if it's working as an extra and just pay attention. Be creative and flexible and use the technology we have at our fingertips. Let's be honest your little nephew maybe able to edit it for you.

Aaron - Couldn't have said it better myself!

7. Is filmmaking harder or easier now a days?

Aaron - It's infinitely easier. Like Dean mentioned, technology is getting better and cheaper at a crazy rate. But it definitely comes with its challenges as well. With it being easier to make films, more of them are getting made, and it's more of a struggle to become truly unique. We were on a mission to be the first rideshare horror out there. It's rare to be the first to a good idea, but it's even more rare to be the first one to do it well. That's who we aim to be. Time will tell if we hit the bullseye or not, but I'm really happy with what we made.

Dean - I will only add that the question is usually answered by the filmmaker. I am a big fan of energy, and I coach actors with that in mind. I think Henry Ford nailed it on more levels than I have time to go into, but "*Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right.*"

8. Where can we see the film, or follow the journey?

Aaron - The movie's social media handles are all @endtripmovie, that's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. You can also find us at endtripmovie.com. My personal handle is just my full name spelled out, @aaronjayrome. If you live in the L.A. area, keep your eye out for our Dances With Films premiere, I think if we can pack the house they might give us a second screening! Also, I'll just toss this in at the end, here; we're an Official Selection at the Madrid International Film Festival and were also nominated for Best Feature Film and Best Director there! So if you're in Spain in July, come find us there too.

Dean - My personal social is @TheDeanwest and my acting studio social is @DwActingstudio, so feel free to follow and we are also for Best Film and Best Director for the Madrid International Film Festival.



9. What do you guys have coming up in the near future?

Aaron - We're kicking around a few ideas now. We definitely want to make another feature. But we're waiting for the right concept to grab us and shake us. Because these take 2+ years to do well, we don't want to make just any movie. The most important thing to me is making sure my next film is a distinct leap forward in all aspects. I'd really like to make studio films as well as indies in the future.

Dean - Like AJ said we have a few things in the pipeline. We have 3 that follow a similar feel that also stays in this Horror/Thriller genre, but like AJ was saying we are always open to change and if something else steps in that just makes sense, then we change the pace, lock on, and move forward. I think you can only be sure about one fact in life and that is everything is always changing!

