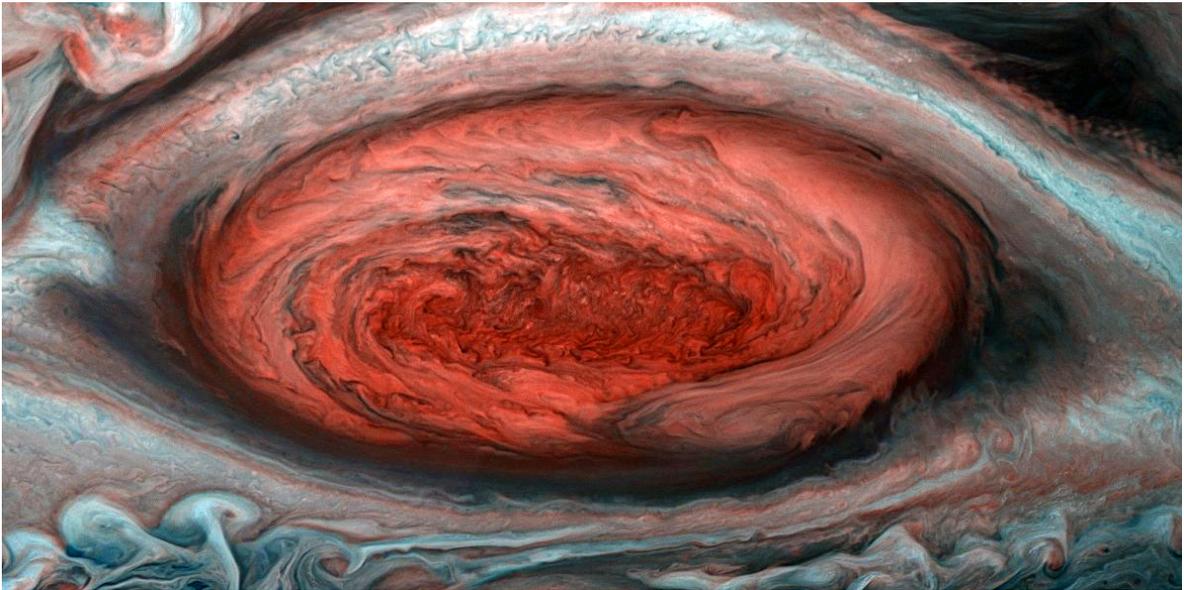


**DEAD SOULS**

[AKA "METAMORPHOSIS"]

**SYNOPSIS & PITCH**



[jeff@QuixoticArts.com](mailto:jeff@QuixoticArts.com)



**VITAL INFO**

**TITLE:** "Dead Souls"

**GENRE:** Apocalyptic Science Fiction

**RATING:** PG-13 for language

**PRODUCTION CO:** Quixotic Arts [www.QuixoticArts.com](http://www.QuixoticArts.com)

**WRITER/DIRECTOR:** Jeff Thelen

**LOGLINE:** "Dead Souls," a defunct rock group from the 1980s, gathers at the house of their leader to remember a founding member lost to murder-suicide. Over this single night, Juggernaut, a blood-red cyclone, is ravaging the entire eastern seaboard and spreading a deadly virus over the globe. Gradually, we learn that the world has changed significantly due to fears of the virus, and that very strange events hint that the end of days is upon us.

**SHOOTING SCHEDULE:** 8 days (principal photography)

**EST. PRODUCTION BUDGET:** 25k

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Bongo Zamyatin (50s).** Founder of the rock band "Dead Souls" in 1980 with his two brothers. Now a forgotten rock star suffering from terrible palsy, Bongo is seen at home in the opening with his wife **Sadie** (40) when state agents arrive to remove their two young boys because Bongo has refused to have them vaccinated from the global virus. We catch a glimpse in this scene of a very changed world, with hints of global autocratic rule and suggestions that everyone is on the edge of sanity. Murder and suicide follow.

**Boris Zamyatin (50s).** Boris is Bongo's younger brother. Boris is the ex-leader of the band and its driving creative force. His departure from the band years ago for a (failed) solo career caused the group to disintegrate, and friendships to sour. He is blamed by the others for the collapse of the band, and is portrayed by them as a selfish egotist. As the story picks up at his house, however, Boris is now weak and feeble. He is dying.

An implacable individualist, Boris is in fact starving himself out of the belief that all water has for years been "poisoned" by unknown forces in order to delude and control humanity.

Boris of course has refused to follow the law and become vaccinated against the viral storm, Juggernaut. He believes the vaccination, like the storm, is the final act in the "poisoning" of humanity--for what purposes is unclear.

Questions center throughout the story on Boris. Is he insane? Is he paranoid? A tin-foil conspiracist? Or one of the few to see through the veil?

**Maggie Zamyatin (50).** Maggie is Boris's wife. They married in their teens. She has worn hearing-aids all her life. A loving, doting woman, she is very worried about Boris' health and sanity.

After the recent death of the brother Bongo, Maggie invites the remaining members of the band for a weekend at their house, to remember Bongo and Sadie--but also as a kind of intervention to help persuade Boris to eat and drink and

return to good health. Maggie is highly emotional and at the end of her rope, fearing that Boris may soon die.

**Pierre Zamyatin (50s)**. Pierre is the middle brother. He is accompanied for the weekend by his young girlfriend, **Felicity**. Pierre is the weaker brother of the three, but also has a healthy sense of humor and skepticism. He and his brother Boris have been estranged for years, but in the death of Bongo they forge some moments of reconciliation. Pierre has a history of drug abuse and alcoholism, and still indulges in moderation.

Pierre stubbornly believes that Boris has gone insane, but he also cannot dispute Boris's evidence that the entire world has gone mad. Including Pierre himself.

This is hammered home when it is revealed that over the past year music has entirely vanished from the human experience. For whatever reason, *music now makes everyone physically sick and fearful*.

No one dares to speak about this *insane fact*, as if it were a topic too terrible to contemplate.

**Felicity (25)**. Pierre's girlfriend. Far too young for him, but Pierre's "rock star" persona has always attracted women of all ages. Felicity is young and beautiful and super intelligent. She is getting her PhD in molecular biology and interns at the World Health Organization. She was involved in the massive inoculation effort by the world government to have everyone vaccinated before the storm broke. She knows a lot about the storm and the virus, but holds her cards close to her vest. At the weekend gathering, she is an outsider by age and experience, and through much of the evening, she is shy and reserved, but observant. She finds in Boris a kindred spirit.

**Jake (50s)**. The fourth member of the band. He is a pleasant but weak man married to a domineering woman, **Anna**. Jake is just drifting through life now, years after the band broke up. The band's former drummer, Jake is not a creative force, but more or less lucked into the band and rode its coat-tails to success. He is a decent, thoughtful man, without the raging intensity of the brothers. He is hen-

pecked.

**Anna (50)**. Jake's wife. Anna grew up with the band during its heyday, and is jealous of the lead singer, Amy, with whom Jake had a long love affair. Anna is a doctor and a level-headed voice of science and reason.

Except that... Anna suffers (as she explains) from a rare psychological delusion wherein she believes she literally died five years before and is now a kind of ghost amongst the living. A disturbing confession that everyone seems to accept as normal.

**Amy (50s)**. The lead singer of the band during its glory years. Amy does not join the group for the weekend. It is discussed how she turned religious and become a born again Christian. At the last moment, she is seen driving to the house to join them, but crashes her car. She appears later inside the house, transfigured.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTES**

The script for this film was written specifically for extreme low budget. 90% of the film takes place on a single night in a single location, Boris' house.

As a consequence, the script is heavy with dialog, although I have sought to avoid stagey-ness and to emphasize the cinematic aspects.

Much of the story centers on Boris, his reasons for wanting to "starve himself," his seemingly paranoid conviction that everyone in the world has gone mad (except himself, of course).

Gradually, through the discussions among the characters, we learn that this world is not the same we are living in. Very strange things have only recently occurred, things that reinforce Boris's argument of a world gone mad.

### **In a World Gone Mad...**

World-wide, a plague of irrationality is spreading like wildfire. There has been an uptick of senseless violence. Bongo, the eldest brother, is one such victim of a murder-suicide, which prompts the band to gather for the weekend.

The United States, we learn, has been replaced by a global government; the Constitution suspended; guns outlawed; and, most significantly, a law passed to require every person "inoculated" against the coming viral storm, **Juggernaut**.

Similar in appearance to the Great Red Spot of Jupiter, this strange cyclone, brewing for months in the Arctic, is a blood-red powerhouse laden with a red pathogen. The storm is now careening across the globe, spreading death and destruction. On the night the film takes place, the storm strikes the eastern seaboard and, for much of the film, roars over Boris's house. Odd things obtain.

Another bizarre non-happening is the **strange death of music**. It seems that no one can any longer stand to listen to music. It's too painful and induces fear and panic.

Oddest of all, no one seems to be questioning any of this.

Except Boris, of course, who is convinced that something in

the water has brought about these changes. And so, rather than "live a lie," Boris has stopped eating and drinking (except for sips of vintage wine); as a consequence, he believes he can see what no one else can see, and *hear* what no one can hear.

### **Zero Budget**

How do you convey the Apocalypse in a no-budget film?

Through dialog and drama centered on one climatic night, in a single location, around a single group of people.

As much as I love films for their visual component, I think a dialog-heavy film would have appeal simply because it is so unusual (at least in Hollywood). *It is simply not done--* or rarely done, and can thereby be compelling--given good writing and better acting.

Many excellent films follow this dialog-centric approach:

"My Dinner with Andre" (1981) is a wholly dialog-driven film which is nonetheless a wonderful experience, not least because it is so unique.

"Key Largo" (1948) is a classic case of a one-location drama during a storm. Of course, there's also Bogart, Bacall, and Edward G. Robinson. But for the vast majority of the film, it's a chattering but suspenseful drama with hardly any movement or visuals.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" (1966) did not try to disguise its theatrical origin. The film eschews visuals for over-heated drama. Richard Burton and Liz Taylor help.

Finally, "Coherence" (2013) is a fairly recent no-budget sci-fi talky, in which eight characters struggle through a crisis in a single location. Its story and zero-budget origins partially inspired "Dead Souls."

And there are many others...

### **Make it Cinematic**

Naturally, I have tried to bring out a more **cinematic elements** without over-stretching our miniscule budget.

One thing I have done is to wrap the conversation in a wild atmosphere of red wind, red rain, and red lightning. As the debate goes on inside, the world without is a shrieking deluge of red death.

One difficulty will be how to present the unveiling of (**Spoiler Alert!**) the final metamorphosis of humanity. This will require some reworking and rethinking, and a little CGI.

### **Heavy, Man**

The tone and subject of the film are very serious, concerning change, the limits of rationality, aging, death, the Apocalypse--indeed, the end of the universe!

I have tried to leaven the gloom with sprightly dialog and humor and interesting characters. And several of the characters are round enough for good actors to bring them to life and make them shine.

### **The Bottom Line**

How marketable is this picture?

Recent years have seen a number of films with apocalyptic subjects and a few have done good business. Despite their essential doom and gloom, audiences are drawn to apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic films for their imaginative vision and ideas. For an overview, please see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalyptic\\_and\\_post-apocalyptic\\_fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalyptic_and_post-apocalyptic_fiction)

One recent example is the Syfy series "Childhood's End" (2015) based on Arthur C. Clarke's classic novel:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood%27s\\_End\\_\(miniseries\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood%27s_End_(miniseries))

Although vastly different, "Childhood's End" and "Dead Souls" have a few apocalyptic concepts in common, as well as a vision of the universe as overwhelmingly weird and terrifying.

Finally, one film that inspired "Dead Souls" was "Coherence" (2013) --a very small budget (50k) film with 8 characters undergoing a crisis in a single location. Well-written, but with very economic production values, the story and acting (and low budget) make the film a success.