

Saturday, April 26th, 2014 | Posted by [Matthew Sorrento](#)

Life *After the Dark*: An Interview with George Blagden



By **Tom Ue.**

George Blagden made his film debut in the independent feature *After the Dark* (2013, directed by [John Huddles](#)), formerly *The Philosophers*, opposite Rhys Wakefield, Sophie Lowe, James D'Arcy, and Darryl Sabara; he started shooting the same month he

graduated from the prestigious Guildhall Drama School, which he attended on a full scholarship. Last year he appeared in Universal's *Les Misérables* as Grantaire, with director Tom Hooper. He also appeared in Warner Bros' *Wrath of the Titans*. Blagden recently wrapped Season 2 of Michael Hirst's hit TV series *Vikings* for the History Channel.

After the Dark tells the story of a group of twenty-one philosophy seniors who had to choose, in a hypothetical situation, which ten of them would seek refuge underground and repopulate the human race in the event of a nuclear apocalypse. The film raises and leaves us with questions about existentialism, discrimination, and exclusionism. The following interview was completed by email with responses received on 18 February 2014.

Tom Ue: Congratulations on this fascinating film! Your credits include Grantaire



from *Les Misérables* (2012), which is quite a jump from Andy in *After the Dark*. Do you identify yourself more as a musician or as an actor?

George Blagden: I'm an actor. I have always loved music and always will, and even at one point thought I would pursue it more seriously than acting. But I've discovered I really love how music can facilitate performance for an actor. That's why *Les Misérables* was a dream job for

me, because it allowed me to be creative in more than one way.

TU: What attracted you to the role of Andy?

GB: To be completely honest, it wasn't so much the role as it was the concept of John's script. When I auditioned, John was clear in explaining that he wanted a group of actors that would all work well together, and that once he had his cast set, he would try to find which role would suit which actor. Andy seemed like the right fit with the other cast he had assembled. Getting the dynamic right in a large ensemble piece like this is really important, which I think John really succeeded in doing.

TU: This is quite a trying role in which you get to die three times – and to be eaten once! Tell us about it.

GB: Well, how many parts that I play am I going to have the opportunity to be summarised with that sentence?! Seriously though, the psychology of John's script was quite amazing to discover when reading it for the first time. What would *actually* happen if you were stuck inside a bunker for a year with a group of your peers? Would you resort to Cannibalism? Would you fall in love? Would you commit murder? John was clear in displaying this human survival psychology without sugar-coating it, which was very exciting to engage with as an actor.

TU: Does Toby the poet, who is one of the first to be killed, have it better?

GB: Well, that's the point of the thought experiment, isn't it? Everyone will have a different opinion. I'm a survivalist, so I would opt for the bunker every time!

TU: Was there a point when you hoped for a better or different life for Andy?

GB: I think when he discovered that he suffered from fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, it was a particularly low point...! I think I really hoped for him to have had some disease-curing gene that they could tap into to help save everyone: he could have had his hero moment, alas.

TU: Would you have voted for Andy if you were one of the other characters?

GB: Of course! Silly question really, yes, he's an electrician, but what you didn't know is he's an awesome cook!

TU: The film, to some extent, endorses Petra's choice to let the group live out the rest of their lives relatively happily while criticizing Mr Zimit's, which forces the selection of students based on utility. With whom do you side with more?

GB: I think I side with Petra. I have discovered in the last year or so that happiness is the most important thing in life. Life is short, and particularly appears to be for the people living in this bunker, so why not be happy whilst living out your days?

TU: This debate about who gets to live is replicated to interesting effects on the film's [Facebook page](#), and Andy received many votes from readers. How do you feel about their responses?

GB: I think it's great that so many people have engaged with what John set out to do with his script: to create a philosophical debate about human survival and who is more worthy to survive. And because it is so bold in its approach, it is inevitable to have so many different opinions from different people. I think it's fantastic that social media content is replicating John's script and can't think of another film I've seen recently that has managed to achieve that.

TU: Tell us about shooting in Indonesia.

GB: It was incredible. Everything you see in the film in terms of locations is real. We really were inside the crater of an active volcano, Mount Bromo. We really were in the ruins of the temples at Prambanan. We really were on a deserted island off the coast of



Sumatra. I remember James saying to me very early on in the shoot, "Well, that's it mate. It's downhill from here." He meant I had ruined any other location I would ever work on because of Indonesia's staggeringly breathtaking landscape. I was so incredibly lucky to be able to travel there to work at that time of my life.

TU: On television, you are now playing the Anglo-Saxon monk Athelstan in *Vikings* (2013 –). Tell us about this experience and about your character.

GB: It's my first television show, and I couldn't be happier working on it. It is extremely epic and, like *After The Dark*, is a form of pure escapism. It's great fun being part of a show that includes characters that you've always wanted to be from when you were 8 years old. In Season 1, Athelstan is an Anglo-Saxon monk who is captured by the Vikings and taken back to Scandinavia to be a slave. His character development and arc is such a gift for an actor to sink his teeth into and he could not be more different when you see him in Season 2 at the end of this month.

TU: Do you prefer working on films or television?

GB: I have loved working on both television and film, and I feel very lucky that I've had the opportunity to do both. There is something about episodic television which you can't possibly match in film, which is the ongoing drama of a character over the course 10/15/20 hours. When working on a film, you are given your script with a beginning, middle, and end, and the challenge is to accurately portray that character's journey through those anchor points. With *Vikings*, we're given the scripts for episodes about a couple of weeks before we start shooting them. So you have no idea what will be happening to your character in two episodes from now. In a way, it can be a much more organic way of working because it means that you really have to be comfortable with who this character is, and react accordingly to the incredible situations that Michael Hirst creates. Had I known at the start of Season 1 what happens to Athelstan at the end of Season 2, I'm not sure that my performance would have been the same. It's interesting.

TU: Have you developed any survival tactics having braved a Viking raid and having lived through an apocalypse three times?

GB: You'd hope so, wouldn't you?! Honestly, I wish we'd had a Bunker Survival Camp on *After The Dark* before shooting....we may have lasted a bit longer...!

TU: What is next for Athelstan?

GB: You will never see it coming. I've said before in interviews that Athelstan goes through more changes over the course of two seasons than Walter White! You'll have to watch it later this month.

TU: What is next for you after this secession of outsider characters?

GB: I'm currently filming a Western/Werewolf mash-up genre movie called *Blood Moon*, which is *such* good fun. Again, I've found myself playing a character that I've always wanted to play from the age of 8: a cowboy. I play Deputy Marshal Jake Norman, who is more of the inside man this time and who is helped by the outsider, this enigmatic gunslinger called Calhoun. Together, they are faced with the prospect of taking down this beast that only appears in the night of a blood red moon.

TU: Do you hope for another opportunity to show off your musical skills?

GB: I would love to do a musical in London soon. I've auditioned for *Once* a couple of times but scheduling has always gotten in the way. It is a dream job of mine I think, and would love to have the opportunity to do it at some point.

Tom Ue writes for *Film International*. His edited collection *World Film Locations: Toronto* was published by Intellect in April 2014, and he is presently writing a book about the White Messiah in contemporary films. Ue is Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellow and Canadian Centennial Scholar in the Department of English Language and Literature at University College London.

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