



DROP DEAD FRED

production notes

1989

New York based screenplay writers Tony Fingleton and Carlos Davis had met UK comedian Rik Mayall in London during Comic Relief. They'd loved to do a film together preserving Rik's qualities from his British hit tv show *The Young Ones*, but aimed at an international audience.

At that time Carlos and Tony were talking to a mutual friend Elizabeth Livingston who was writing a magazine story based on her little daughter's imaginary friend **Drop Dead Fred**. Fingleton's eldest daughter also had an imaginary friend when she was young. And hence the movie idea was born.

1990

The two writers brought the script with Rik Mayall attached to it to London based film company **Working Title** and found a willing ear. **Working Title** had at that point produced films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Wish You Were Here*. And later became the most successful European production company with films such as *Barton Fink*, *Four Weddings And A Funeral*, *Notting Hill*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Bridget Jones*, *Frost/Nixon*, *Theory of Everything* and many more.

Working Title principal partner Sarah Radclyffe brought in director **Ate de Jong**. He had directed several very successful films in Europe and just made the transition to the US, starting with an episode of top tv series **Miami Vice**, and feature film **Highway to Hell** (featuring Ben Stiller).

Drop Dead Fred was made on a budget just below \$ 6m, which would compare to a \$25m budget today.

Shooting period

Highway to Hell was still in post-production when shooting for **Drop Dead Fred** started in the summer of 1990. Most of the film was shot in Minneapolis. Major sets were built in Paisley Park Studio, owned by and home to music superstar Prince (who secretly roamed the sets at night to indulge in the many toys of the DDF imaginary friends)

After a bumpy start—the original cameraman was replaced after four days of shooting—shooting went smoothly for eight weeks with principal actors Rik Mayall, Phoebe Cates, Carrie Fisher and Marsha Mason. Local celebrities such as Eleanor Mondale (daughter of vice-president Mondale) joined the cast. Even the enormous amount of mosquitoes at night time locations couldn't break down the good spirits.



(Re) Edit

Shooting finished on schedule and within budget. Editing started.

A first cut was delivered and clocked just over two hours long. The film was cut back with some twenty minutes. One of the major scenes to be deleted was a scene shot at Paisley Park playing in Drop Dead Fred Land, the environment where all imaginary friends gather when they're not on assignment. The scene—thought to be lost—was recently found back and is now included in the extra's of the newly released Blu-Ray.

New Line was the distributor of **Drop Dead Fred** and tested the edited version of the film before release. Audiences responded well overall, but disliked the ending. The general feeling was that the character of Drop Dead Fred should not die. Though Fred doesn't literally die, a new ending was filmed to make sure Drop Dead Fred continues his mischief after he disappears from this story. New test audiences responded very well to the new ending.

Final Touches

Composer Rand Edelman, known for *Kindergarten Cop* and *Ghostbusters II*, made the music adding a new layer of fun to the movie.

Special animated credits were designed.



Release 1991

After completion of the movie New Line intended to release the film with 150 prints and supporting it with a \$1.5m PR budget which was at that time considered a huge release for an indie film. A test release was first rolled out in 3 US cities. The film had such a phenomenal response that New Line decided to release the film in over 900 prints and a \$6.5 PR budget.

The film became an instant success ending in the top of the US box office beating out many studio films for several weeks. The film sold to over 50 countries, being a number 1 hit in Australia and New Zealand.

Critical Response

First reviews were quite mixed. Many critics hated **Drop Dead Fred** with an unusual passion. The snottflicking, spitting, dog-poo rubbing and other mischievous acts were not appreciated at all. But above all the anarchistic mentality was considered, by many critics, as totally inappropriate for young children.

Fortunately other reviewers did see positive qualities and recognised the deeper psychological layers behind the fun and chaos. The film was soon used by psychologists in California and in other countries as a therapeutic tool.

The film slowly but surely gathered a loyal and dedicated fan base and appears more and more on peoples top favourite film list of all times. Now 25 years after its original release **Drop Dead Fred** has grown to be a genuine classic finding a total new audience today.

Ate de Jong: "It's a bliss to experience the continued appreciation Drop Dead Fred receives. We set out to make a fun film but were aware that the deeper layers of child abuse formed the true value of the movie. The film is a testament to the enormous talents of Rik Mayall and many others and it's truly humbling to notice the impact the film has had and still has, children and adults alike. May Drop Dead Fred live forever!

